

THE GODS WHO ARE REJECTED

THE 64 TESTAMENTS OF COLONEL KRILL — Vol. 0, No. 1

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A lone British soldier crouched beside the stone entrance of the great temple and eased his head around the edge of the towering pillars that flanked the entrance that led deeper into the unknown temple. He wiped his brow on his once crisp red jacket sleeve but only managed to smear the dirt and sweat.

Seeing nothing in the darkness, he crept forward on his knees. The well-worn floor was smooth, like polished marble, and the soldier's hand slipped as the sweat on his palms made purchase on the floor nearly impossible. Still, he crept forward by inches.

A wind, hot and dry, blew into the massive entrance like a great beast inhaling and the soldier shuddered. He glanced back over his shoulder and could just make out his troop on the edge of the dark jungle, hidden among the trees and heavy underbrush. Only Colonel Krill stood in the open, his bright red jacket almost shining in the moonlight. The young flag bearer stood next to the Colonel.

The soldier could feel his commander's glare, heard the barked orders echo in his mind, and turned once more to his mission.

Deeper into the darkness, he crawled.

At first, the only sound was his own shuffling across the stone floor. His Lee Enfield mk3 rasped across the uneven stone floor as he dragged it with him.

At the end of the short hallway that formed the entrance to the great stone temple deep in the Indian jungle, another hallway crossed the first. It extended left and right. The soldier hesitated, debating which way to turn. Then, to the right, he could see a faint light. A flicker of a candle, perhaps.

And with it, not a sound but the pulsating beat of air. Soft at first, barely felt.

Then, as the man crawled further down the ever lightening hallway, it grew stronger. It was regular, rhythmic. Like a man's heartbeat.

Sounds, strange and confused, reached his ears just as he reached the next corner and then ...

AAARARRGH!

A scream exploded from the hallway in front of him like a fist punching an opponent. It fairly knocked the soldier backwards.

It came again, louder, longer.

AAARARAGAGHHH!

The soldier backed against the far wall, away from the sound. He glanced behind him, back towards the dark entrance. The faint glow of the moonlight barely gave the great doorway outline in the darkness.

Then he wiped the sweat from his brow again and cradled his Enfield in his arms, finger on the trigger. He eased himself to his feet and stepped forward towards the sound.

It was almost constant now; a long wail of a man in severe pain and terrible fear.

As he crept forward, his hard soled boots clicking on the smooth stone floor, he heard, between the breaths of the screaming man, the rhythmic banging of what he now understood to be animal skin drums. At least he hoped they were skinned with animals.

Other voices joined the drums, calling in some unknown tongue. The voices rose and fell in a regular rhythm. A pray or ceremonial chant.

The soldier found himself in an alcove above a large room. A short wall, perhaps three feet tall, stood at the lip of the alcove. He could crouch below it and peer over it. Torches burned above him on the wall, but their flickering flames were no match for the roaring fires on the floor in the main chamber.

It was risky, he knew, but it was darker where he crouched and he could peer over the short wall without being seen.

But what he saw below was more terrible than he could have imagined.

The room was massive, its floor about 20 feet below his alcove. The ceiling unseen in a mist of darkness above. Most of the floor was flat, polished rock like the hallways.

Here, maybe one hundred or so dark skinned men dressed only in dirty white loincloths, knelt before a raised stone platform. Their bodies undulated as they chanted.

They rose up; they sank back down. Again and again.

The chant echoed off of the hard stone walls and joined the drums — the soldier could see they were skinned with animal hides — played by more men in white robes.

On the raised platform was a stone dias, a small altar-like edifice. On it lay a man, naked and screaming. His wail was long and mournful, like the funeral cries of professional wailers. But this sound came from the man's soul as it cried out for mercy. Mercy that would not come.

He was unbound but seemed held to the stone dias by an unseen force.

Already, the man's chest was flayed open and the soldier could see the still beating heart. Somehow, there was no blood except for what flowed inside.

Behind the dias stood a man but not a man. He was nearly seven feet tall, completely bald but with three white stripes painted horizontally across his forehead and a large red dot in the center.

The man, presumably the high priest, was bare chested and wore only a white lungi sarong.

In his hands, held high above his head, he held a katar dagger. Even from this distance, the soldier could see it was made of steel, but with ornate gold trim. A ceremonial knife. And it dripped with blood.

The high priest chanted in time with the supplicants below him. But his voice was deeper and carried over their shrill screams. Then, he turned and faced the giant stone statue behind him.

The enormous statue dominated the chamber, rising up from behind the platform so that the top of its head was lost in the mist. Its eyes, large rubies, seemed to stare directly at the soldier and he instinctively recoiled into the bare shadows of his alcove.

Then, the chanting stopped. Even the echoes ceased.

The soldier dared peer over the short stone wall again and saw the high priest prostrate before the great stone god. Smoke drifted out of its nostrils and mouth, then a flame erupted from within the monstrous stone idol and enveloped the still moaning man on the stone dias.

As the flames consumed him, the man's screams changed pitch, growing higher and louder. Then he was silent. Finally dead.

None of the supplicants nor the high priest moved. The only sound was the crackling of the fire and the hissing of the flesh as it burned.

The soldier didn't move either. His eyes were transfixed on the burning corpse.

Then the smell of burning flesh reached him and he turned and retched. Below him, the crowd of supplicants leapt to their feet with cheers of jubilation.

The soldier wiped the spittle from his mouth, glanced once more at the charred remains of the man on the stone dias and ran towards the jungle outside.

At the feet of his commander, the soldier sucked down water from a canteen handed to him. He didn't hear the voice at first.

"Dammit, man!" came the sharp voice a second time. "Report!"

The soldier blinked and looked up. He poured the remaining water over his head and sighed.

"It was inhuman, sir."

Colonel Krill stood at the low wall of the upper alcove looking over the worship chamber below. He stroked his great walrus mustache as his cold eyes watched the events below. Beside him, and a little behind, the young flag bearer stood, the flagpole wet in his hand.

Next to him, spread out along the short wall, twenty of his troop of one hundred soldiers, dressed in their red long coats, white breeches, and caps stood ready for his command, their Enfield rifles primed and aimed at the throng below.

The line in front knelt, rifles braced on the top of the wall. Behind them, a line of soldiers with rifles braced against their shoulders, aimed at the throng of worshipers below. More soldiers waited in the hallway behind. They waited for the command to fire.

Yet their commander simply stood and watched.

On the stone platform, the high priest, aided by several of the robed drummers, presumably other priests, scooped the last of the ashes of the dead man from the stone dias into a clay bowl. He lifted the bowl over his head and mumbled something unheard then turned to the great stone idol behind him.

Smoke still swirled out of its nostrils and mouth.

The high priest waved the clay bowl of ashes before the idol as the other priests picked up and waved other bowls of ashes. Seven men in total, the high priest and six of his subordinates chanted. Unlike before, however, the chants were soft, like prayers in a solemn cathedral.

As the high priest stepped forward towards the idol and knelt, setting his clay bowl in front of the idol, Colonel Krill's eye narrowed. His right hand shifted on the pommel of his sword and his left hand flicked off the cover over his Webley pistol.

He drew his sword and held it high.

"On my command," he said in a steady voice that, although even and intended only for his men, shattered the silence.

Below him, the high priest whipped his head around and looked upward towards the voice. His eyes burned and for a moment there seemed to be fear but it vanished as quickly as it came, to be replaced by a smile.

As the supplicants turned, some panicked and started to run, but the high priest called out a single word and the men stopped. They turned and faced the troop of red-coated soldiers above them and waited.

"Send these bloody heathen to meet their god!"

Colonel Krill slashed the air with his sword and was answered with the retort of twenty Enfield mk3 rifles exploding. The air was choked with smoke and the crashing of the rifles

echoed off of the hard stone walls. Yet there were no screams of fear or pain from the throng of dark skinned men.

“Second line. Fire!” came the command.

Again, the sticcatto retort filled the massive chamber as the line of standing soldiers fired.

The command repeated. More shots echoed as the gunpowder exploded and bullets ricocheted off the walls and polished stone floor.

On the stone platform, the six priests stood in place behind the high priest who watched the gathering of standing men grow smaller as they fell to the gunfire.

Then he laughed, a sound that seemed to envelope the sounds of the rifles. Around him, the smoke from the rifles drifted and swirled.

Again and again, the sound of the rifles, the yell to “Fire!”, but still silence for the dying men.

Then, rifle fire stopped.

Below, the bloodied bodies of the dark skinned men in their loincloths lay broken. Most were dead but many still lived. Wounded, bleeding, the living pulled themselves from beneath the bodies of the dead.

On the stone platform, four of the priests lay dead. Another leaned against the stone dias, his leg bleeding from a bullet wound.

The high priest still stood his ground. Blood oozed from a wound on his shoulder but he gave it as much attention as a mosquito bite. Instead he raised his arms above his head and cried out.

“Ras-kal mas killa maeh.”

None of the priests or remaining supplicants moved but starred with empty faces at those that brought death. First, the priests, then the supplicants repeated the chant of the high priest.

“Ras-kal mas killa maeh. Ras-kal mas killa maeh.”

They chanted, unmoving, their voices rising louder and louder.

Colonel Krill’s men looked at the gathering below, then at their commander. He sniffed once and said, “Fix bayonets. Charge.”

With a scream that tried to envelop the chants, the troop rushed down the far stairs toward the chanting men; Krill at the front and the young flag bearer nearly crushed by the rush of red coated soldiers in the narrow staircase.

Their hard boots banged on the stone stairs and they rushed headlong into the still unmoving throng of dark skinned men who seemed blind to the attack and continued to chant as soldiers stabbed and slashed with bayonets.

The first group of men in loincloths fell, their bodies bleeding from bayonet wounds. The rest stood their ground and continued the chant.

“Ras-kal mas killa maeh.”

The chant echoed in the chamber, its cacophony constant despite the increasing dead. At the head of the column of soldiers, Colonel Krill slashed and cut down men as he pushed through to the steps that led to the stone platform.

As he ascended, steps away from the high priest, the entire chamber shook. Small stones and dust fell from the ceiling, smoke swirled about the men, and from high above came the sound of rushing wind.

With the force of a hurricane and the sound of a steam train whistle, it swooped down and whirled like a desert sandstorm, stirring dust and blinding the soldiers.

The mist separated into smaller swirls and wrapped around the individual bodies of the slain dark skinned men.

The soldiers backed away, and watched the dust and mist swirl around the dead. They glanced at each other; some reaching out to steady themselves against their mates.

At back of the column, still halfway down the staircase that led from the alcove to the main chamber floor, the flag bearer huddled against the wall but steadfastly held the troop's flag.

Seeing the swirl and hearing the howl of the wind, the flag carrier paled. His hands shook and the flagpole slipped. At the last moment, the boy gathered his wits and kept the flag from touching the ground.

Then the chamber shook again, this time accompanied by a flash of pure white light. The boy turned and fled up the stairs.

In the chamber, the mist swirling about the dead bodies lifted them up. The bodies, torn and broken by rifle ball and bayonet, hovered a few feet above the ground, held by some unseen hand.

On the platform, Colonel Krill kicked a clay pot with his heavy boot, shattering it and sending a cloud of human dust towards the idol. He stepped past it and raised his sword to cut down the bare chested high priest.

As he brought his sword down, the idol belched fire and smoke and the force knocked Krill into the dias. He rolled across it but lost his footing on the other side. He tumbled off the platform and landed on his back. Still, he held onto his sword.

He pulled himself to his feet, catching his wind again.

Behind him, screams and boots banging on the hard stone floor. His men in a panic as the dead bodies started to move forward.

The dead supplicants shook and howled as their bodies rose and reached out for the men who had killed them.

Three of the soldiers, near the rear of the troop, reached the steps but their way was blocked as the mist and smoke gave way to disembodied figures of the dead worshipers.

The apparitions rose up from the dust and swirled around the three men, wrapping them in mist like a spider wraps a fly. The men struggled and screamed but their voices were choked as they were cocooned. The mist seemed to eat into their flesh, stripping it from their bones but leaving their tattered uniforms nearly intact.

On the chamber floor, another group of soldiers were cornered by a line of undead worshipers stalking towards them. The men rammed and slashed with bayonets but the bodies of the dead absorbed the attack and the ghoul-like figures soon overwhelmed the soldiers, crushing them against the wall.

Colonel Krill, his eyes wide, glanced toward the stairs, then around the chamber. His men screamed, their bodies torn by dead hands and flesh melted by the strange mist.

He uttered a curse and stepped to the aid of his men, but above him, the laugh of the high priest filtered through the screams. Krill turned and saw the giant priest, his eyes turned white, standing before the enormous stone idol.

He pointed his Webley at the laughing priest and fired. The bullet hit dead center and knocked the priest backwards against the idol.

Krill bounded up the steps to finish off the priest but the man turned his face to his attacker and rose to his feet. The wound in his chest seemed to vanish.

"What is the name of God ... ?"

"Your god has no power here, British," said the high priest in an even tone. His accent was heavy, but tinged with a British accent. An educated man.

"Your god has no power here," he continued. "Only the gods who are rejected have domain in this place. You came to destroy, to tear down what you do not understand. But instead, you have awoken the aka mainyu, the seven gods."

"Seven gods, my arse!" bellowed the British Army Colonel as he stepped forward and raised his sword to slash the man before him.

But the high priest raised his arm and a force hit Krill and knocked him back a pace. It held him like irons shackling him to a prison wall.

"I am Mobedan Mobed. The high priest of the gods who are rejected, leader of the usij, master of the darkness. I place upon you a curse for all time ... you shall walk this earth a broken man, unable to die, unable to truly live.

"You shall serve as a vessel through which the gods who are rejected, the great and powerful aka mainyu, shall rise and break free from their prison. Through you, they shall

emerge from the darkness, from their realm of nightmares, and take their rightful place as the true gods.

“And to feed the gods as they awaken, your men shall be drawn into the darkness beyond, their souls to nourish and give strength once again.”

Then, he clapped his hands together and the bones of Colonel Krill’s men, laying broken and scattered across the chamber’s polished stone floor began to shake. They banged on the hard stone, then skittered across, drawn into a tornado that whirled and rippled with thunder and flashes of lightning.

The whirlwind of bones, of dead men’s souls still screaming for mercy, was sucked into the mouth of the great stone idol.

And there was silence.

Colonel Krill was still held by the unseen force, but struggled and cursed. Every epithet and foul word in the English language escaped his mouth as he fought the invisible shackles.

Mobedan Mobed, the high priest, dropped his arms and with them, Krill fell to the ground. But without hesitation, he was again on his feet and rushed the towering priest.

With a cross slash of his sword, Krill reaved the priest’s abdomen. And smiled.

But the priest was uninjured. Krill’s sword, like the bayonets of his men moments before, passed through the priest’s body like it was mist.

Mobedan Mobed again raised his arm; this time the invisible force hit Krill like a fist, sending him once more into and over the dias.

He heard the soft sobbing before he felt the hot burning sun on his back. Colonel Krill tried to move but every part of his body ached. Finally, he rolled halfway over onto his back and opened his eyes.

He shut them again as the piercing sun burned into them.

He tried again, this time with his hand shading his eyes.

He was outside the temple, at the edge of the jungle. A few feet away, the young flag bearer, still holding the troop flag aloft, sat with his head buried in his knees. He was crying.

“There is no damned crying in the army, boy,” Krill tried to say with authority, but it came out as barely a squeak.

His mouth was dry and his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He fumbled for his canteen and let the water splash over his face, some of it finding its way into his mouth.

Once again, he uttered a word to the boy.

“Settle, lad. No need for tears now.”

The boy looked up. Brown streaks ran down his pale white face. He sniffed, wiping his runny nose on his sleeve.

“I thought you were all dead, sir,” whispered the boy. “I ran away. I ... “

He started to cry again. Colonel Krill pushed himself to his feet and took a stride towards the boy. He knelt and patted the boy’s damp hair.

“You protected the flag, young Boxley. Duty done. Gather your things, let us find our way out of this mad jungle.”

He helped the boy to his feet and saw a small stone elephant carving in the dust next to the boy. He picked it up and handed it to Boxley.

The boy said, “I found it, sir. Inside the temple.”

“Spoils of war, lad. Maybe someday it will bring you luck.”

With that, the Colonel strode off into the jungle and the boy stuffed the statuette into his satchel and hurried after his commander still clutching the troop flag.

THE END