

Children of the Aten

A Novel by
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PRÉCIS: A gamesome attempt to recreate some of the individuals who aided, or were suborned by, the singularly presumptuous Amenhotep IV or Akhenaten, as he came to be called, the 18th Dynasty Pharaoh who championed the worship of sun disc, the Aten. Akhenaten's mother, Tiye, plays a key role in the story, as does Akhenaten's Best Wife, Nefertiti. How the Akhenaten court came into being as a singular unexampled community and managed to replace a teaming pantheon with a single sterile deity, the Aten — and thrived for the better part of 18 years — is the focus of the book. A highly speculative but pithy tale for the adventurous reader!

Sample Pages follow. Download options at end of Sample Pages.

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ONE

The burning hissing sand had stilled for a time and the lagging caravan moved on amidst a cloud of winged ants spangling the sunlight. The camel wranglers' nasal neighs keened the air as they rushed about to keep the royal entourage moving. Their

livelihood depended on it, thus the haggling with their sometimes ornery camels, in this baked landscape mirage mirrored.

As the aging but ever restless Ay passed the forlorn and nearly deserted Amarna site beneath its famous elevated gap, the mountain riven by Ra's golden rays, the memories were ignited once again, memories seared by the sun itself: the two luminous gods, golden apparitions at the Window of Appearances, sometimes with their alert children, the hushed crowds awed yet grateful for their manifest presence and the visceral celebrations it indexed; the slow moving column of Aten priests reciting cantos after the lector's proclamations, their stately measure matching the labored pace of the distant stone movers; the joshing in a group of primed courtiers that derided the few dour Amun priests as another beneficent feast day loomed in The Great Temple at Per Aten; the scurrying urchins who picked up after the celebrants, and the scraggly field laborers who paused in their sweat and sore red eyes to dumbly look on. The redolence of incense and hair shiny with ambergris and jasmine in garden terraces later at dusk, framed by gilded columns, dappled ivory dust screens and supple feline furniture, the numinous cats themselves noisy in a dry wadi bed; the relaxed chatter of the new leisured class luxuriating in their newly ratified semi-divinity. And above all, the lingering sense of wonder that such scenes ever transpired, and that one might conspire to remember amidst the ever whispering veils of sand — that such a wondrous and bewitched city existed, to sojourn a

canny, heedful Premier Best Wife who framed a chosen self. It was a time. Like no other. A time that kept him from himself. And the daunting present.

If her reflection in a royal lake once shimmered as a late sun nimbus, her memory now lingered as a Pythia, a pale perched presence etched by a voice, a voice about to break, rasp and fade as the embittered nay sayers gathered. The gate mouths and poets would have their say of course, but gossip and metaphor alone cannot re-assemble or erase a goddess — for that you need a magi, a Toth or an Isis — in a willful mood. Her very presence became a harbinger of fond words and letters, special dedications, intricate games, involuted intrigue, sprightly music, arresting art, and bold opportunistic courtiers with exceptionally stylish consorts, ever patient in the unrelenting heat and inflamed sand for a word or gesture. Her element was the slaked green munificence of the Nile, which Akhenaten tried so valiantly to recreate in the pools at Amarna, with their teeming reflections from the luxuriant bird-rife gardens, the beauty and fullness of it then nearly eclipsing the late sudden fall...for an insomniac like him.

“We shall continue to the Fayoum oasis?” The Chancellor, who rode in an adjacent caravan, was ‘sharing’ his ennui.

Ay nodded...the ensuing voice of the marshal a shrill predatory cry. Yes, continue, before the memories lapsed. The smell of rotting sun bricks, which the farmers scavenged as fertilizer, would soon sour the sweeter memories.

“You look a little miffed. When you pass this place.”

Again Ay nodded, foiling a dismissive shrug. “The alien smell.”

“The end of things. The rank dust.”

For most, the essential story began with Egypt’s Queen Tiye and the younger Lady Asya who both came from comparatively humble backgrounds — neither of royal lineage — and apparently remained fast easy confidantes. Some curmudgeons even cast them as lovers, as tribades. It was said that Amenhotep III sought out his pretty resourceful but common Best Wife as an early rebuke of the snooty Amun priesthood and welcomed, or at least not cavilled, at her select petite noblesse ladies-in-waiting. Certainly the younger Asya was a strong robust presence and constant companion. But it was their close words and timely stratagems that most officials and courtiers strove to learn and assess, for Tiye was the de facto ruler after old Amenhotep slipped into a tippler’s dotage, the onset of which the same curmudgeons said Tiye adroitly facilitated. Invariably the two women spoke in animated whispers, politics the corpus they assayed as embalmers. He had overheard many of the words — as Tiye intended he should. Words which always returned and haunted when his entourage, in his extensive travels, would pass and leave the Amarna ruins. The city so swiftly built to honour the ancient sun disc, the Aten. The city and its patron now all but lost to the court chroniclers, but not his ghost-ridden memory. Asya was Tiye’s prompter and confidante then. Their close exchanges the pyretic brawling wind sometimes erased, stymieing the many spies. He shut the curtains in his caravan

against a resurgent gust and closed his eyes. Such telling words live on, lingering as a tonic and rarified clairvoyance. The late activities of the Prince often served as a preamble to their exchanges.