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On the Worship of the Most Holy Lord Sárku

An address given by Jadhak hiChna'él of the Clan of the Ebon Blade, Eleventh Circle scholar priest of the Lord Sárku, upon the inauguration of First Circle acolytes in the Temple at Tléku, Thayu'ri Isle, and as translated by David Chatterjee

Hail to you all, newly-honoured priests, and welcome to our sacred Chamber of Glittering Night. You have made the first brave step on a long and dangerous journey, and I salute you in the name of Our Lord. May the masked demons of the Inner Paths of Ko'áar guard your steps! May you not be swayed by the Thirteen Temptations, nor by the Twenty-Six Fears! Each of you is blessed by the Dark Hand of Despair, and if only you pray to Him for the strength to serve Him as He demands, you cannot falter.

All the formal rituals of your election to this most exalted of priesthoods are now over. Try to relax. Your new robes will be uncomfortable at first, and your face paint seems strange on your skin, does it not? Sit back, take a sip—I know you must be thirsty after the Calling of the Names of Glory. Now before you join the other priests as celebrants for the first time in the Mourning for the Eternal Arch of Death, I want to spend a few moments talking to you as a fellow traveller on your new journey. I want to point out a few of the obscure signposts you will come across, to which perhaps you had not really paid attention until now.

The worship of the Dread One of the Blackest Deeps is old within our land. But it is an honour sought by a very few, and rejected—feared even—by most of our fellows. Why is this? Is the Lord of Worms to be feared? Why do we bow before Him in ecstasy if He is so terrible? Are we to be feared? Do we don these robes in search of power, do you—now that you wear them for the first time—feel a frisson of excitement knowing that you are someone who will engender shudders in the streets of our fair city as you go about your new business? Does it make you feel important? Ask yourselves. These questions are vital to your new lives.

It is not shameful to face the truth about yourself. It is dishonourable to hide from it; to avoid testing yourself for fear of failure; to see your flaws and yet lack the courage to challenge and defeat them.

The Lord Sárku—may His Name be revered for all time—is our guide, through this life and far beyond. He is our God, and we must worship Him. But how, when we are nothing to Him? What can we do that might remotely do honour to His name? Can a Dri-ant praise his supernal glories? Can a field of yáfa? Can a mountain or an ocean wave sing of His excellence?

Chá, a mountain cannot even be aware of His devastating reality. But can you? Ferrugá, do you tell me that you, a lowly acolyte, truly understand the nature of the Gods? Of course not! The first commandment of any priest is inevitably this: to know himself; to understand the true and eternal character of existence; to purify himself; to see clearly, so that he might then slowly begin to perceive what it is to worship his God.

So what is the "true and eternal character" of an individual? His passions, his *pedhétl*, the Enemy that drives him from his chosen path into fruitless meanderings, that dissipates into the raw power Between the Planes upon his death? Is this really his innermost nature? Or his dreaming shadow-self, his *chusétl*, that flits across the Planes and vanishes like mist at death? His *balétl*, his spirit-soul that is merely tarrying awhile with this sentient being and then passes on to unknowable destinations beyond the Isles of the Excellent Dead, that gradually forgets the person of whom it once was a part? Surely these are superficial aspects.

Then what of his physical body, his *bákte*, made of the same stuff as chlén and drí, that falls away and rots? Perhaps this latter, since with great arts we can preserve and reinvigorate the *bákte*; and the veneration of the processes of decay and resurrection is a large part of what the outsider perceives the worship of the Dark Lord of Undead to entail.

But *the flesh itself is nothing*—this is the vital first lesson in understanding oneself. The conscious mind, the intellect, the alert and true-perceiving eye, this fifth and final facet of a sentient agent, his *hlákme*, this is the key to self-awareness and to understanding the path towards piety and godliness. How can it be otherwise? The *hlákme* is the one aspect of the individual that survives death and remains a distinct part of the individual. With the guidance of the Dark Lord we can return it from its dreamless sleep in the tomb—still linked to the *bákte*, not dissolved nor forgetful—to alertness and awareness and eternal freedom from the pettiness of living shackled to the dreaming, angry, wandering selves. With our mind finally clear from the veils we create around ourselves, we are finally able to begin truly to understand the magnificence that is the Lord Sárku, and to give praise to Him until the inevitable Triumph of Chaos.

What then is the aim of the devout worshipper? To train his intellect, to see clearly and calmly the falsehood of the shadows that flutter across his mind—love, hate, ambition—so that he might more nearly approach an understanding of his God, both before and after his death.

So should we fear death? No! It brings us closer to our destination. We are alive for a handful of years cast into the night like grains of dná Is not then our death far more important than our life? And who can guide us in death? You "know" the answer, but you do not understand. Listen to the singers in your clanhouses! Listen to the recitations in your temple! How many times have you heard the Lament to the Wheel of Black? and yet do you grasp what it tells you? The Lord Belkhánu cannot help you: he is merely the courier for the spirit-soul that once was a part of you but now has nothing further to give you. The Grey Lord could do nothing but watch as the early Gods fought; and in His weakness He could become merely the Knower of Life. Then the mighty Lord Sárku was become incarnate—and took His place opposite and beyond Thúmis as *the Knower of Death!* Sárku is the Guide into Darkness, the One who sees the skein of destiny of every entity on all the Planes, who holds in His Hand the futures of all of us! The Lament to the Wheel of Black even tells us that Lord Sárku alone was capable of defeating the treachery of the Doomed Prince on Dórmoron Plain—how could it be otherwise, when only Our Lord holds the pathways of life and death?—who else could see Ksáru's Doom?—who else could confine a God?

If all this is clear, then why are we feared? The outsider sees our emblems of decay, the icons of Siyenágga the Wanderer of Tombs; Zaídza the Princess of the Liquescent Mould; Ku'ún the Corpse-Lord. He pays no heed to others of Our Master's Aspects: Chkorángtla the Shining Pool of Envisionment; Tsapka'á the Devastating Wind that strips away the cowardly lies and self-deceptions we array around ourselves; Gonnqéssha, the Torch of Night who leads us into the Paradises of the Tomb.

Those who gape and shudder and turn away are like the rabble crowds of a hirilakte arena screaming for blood and violence. They enjoy being aroused by sickening passions being inflicted between strangers. But what about the true warrior who finds himself fighting for his life? Should he be full of lust and rage? No! rather, he must learn through years of dedication to train not just his body but his mind, to control his emotions, to view his opponent and the imminence of death calmly so that he might fight sharply and precisely and honourably without fear of failure or of shaming himself, his ancestors, and his teachers.

We—you—are in an identical position. Ignore those who avoid you, pity those who nerve themselves to approach you out of excited fear, be patient with those who seek to understand. In the end, all of these people will meet our Dread Lord: as will you. Honour Him and your Church and your clan, and you can look forward to that meeting with joy. A glorious future awaits you.

But do not think it will be easy. The facets of worship of Lord Sárku that so fascinate outsiders are real, and they serve a purpose. Death, decay, the corruption of the flesh, all this must be faced. You can have no comprehension of what awaits you, and if I were to tell you what is involved in the rituals of the Ravening Angel of Despair or the High Surrender to Excrescence you would run screaming from this room. How can we understand what comes beyond the Black Curtain without staring into it until it falls back under the blazing force of our will?

But—as with the warrior—the aim is not to run shrieking into the arms of horror, but to train our mind to strong, calm contemplation, to be able to focus without being distracted by our own passions or those of others. To look ahead to whatever may befall us without fear, disgust, excitement, or fury. How can we perceive the true glory of Eternal Chaos that our Lord promises when we ourselves are awash with dreams and shadows and falsehoods? How can we play our small part in serving His plans? It would be unnatural if you were not apprehensive and fearful along the way: when a young warrior faces his first naked blade in training, and later his first hostile enemy, will he not blanch? If such things excited him the way they excite his audience in the arena, would we not think him sick of mind and unfit to fight?

To see clearly and not to flinch! What could be more honourable? But this takes so many years of courage and faith: I hope and pray that all of you will hold to the path and neither turn nor fall. Indeed, I myself am only a little further along. We must help and support one another through the arduous times ahead.

Enough! your initiations have been long, and I cannot explain all the Mysteries of the Dark to tired young priests in a single kirén! Let us move down to the Shattered Steps of the Opening Tomb for your first ceremony as full clergy. None of you have yet seen this part of the temple: I shall show the way.

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