

Day 4

Bristol

Tuesday 20th September 1842

Wa-Set

4 (Pharmuthi). Peret. XVII. 6 Thutmose I

“We stand here prepared to do the work of my majesty and yours, King of Upper and Lower Egypt upon the Horus-throne of the living, without his like forever: Mighty Bull of Horus, and beloved of Ma-at; Favourite of the Two Goddesses, shining in the Serpent-diadem and Great in Strength; Goodly in Years, Golden Horus Making Hearts Live; Son of Ra, Aakheperkare, living forever, and ever. I, Ineni, Royal Chief Architect for the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Superintendent of the Royal Buildings, Overseer of the Workmen in the Karnak Treasuries, Overseer of the Workmen of the King (Thoth is Born), Chief of the Necropolis, Superintendent of the Granaries, Chief Overseer of the Scribes at Karnak, Beloved of the Golden Horus, He Who Does Right by the Lord of the Two Lands, Gentleman of the Bedchamber, Ove”

Worker X: [Snorts]

Worker Y: [Grinning] Maaaaaaan... You can really feel those Capital Letters!

Worker X: Palpable!

Worker Y: [Loftily] Lister of Lists...

Worker X: [Haughtily] Namer of the Nyoom’rus Names...

Worker Y: Chief Humble Evacuater of the Favoured Bowels...

Workers X & Y: [Muffled giggling]

Worker Z: [Amid the suppressed sounds of reluctant laughter, betrayed wholly by the facial muscles] Could you shut the fuck up? I don’t wanna become part of the foundations of the next gods-damned pylon we have to add to this place.

“tinue these works, which, to the glory of Amun-Ra, whose hidden power informs all things, our King has commissioned with the golden plunder of the Land of Kush and unending tribute from the peoples settled between the old limits of our lands and the mysterious breadth of the Inverted Waters.”

Worker Y: [Exaggerated, silent gasp] Gods... he actually paused!

Worker X: High Speaker of the Winding Sentence, he whose words flow with...

Worker Y: ...whose Mighty Words flow with a force and life to rival the course of Iteru!

Worker Z: [Simultaneously kicks the left heel of Worker Y and slaps, with the back of his right hand, the upper arm of Worker X, making contact just above the triceps] Shut. Up.

“As tribute to this temple, the Most Select of Places, built to the glory of Amun-Ra, made greater by our majesty, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, without his like forever, I, helped in this endeavour through prayer and tribute to Thoth, He who is like the Ibis, Lord of the Divine Body, Voice of Ra, Reckoner of Time and Seasons, Scribe of the Company of the Gods, to whom I proclaimed *I am thy writing palette, let not my words be less than that which the glorious work of the Gods and the King demand*, have composed a poem, which you shall now hear.”

Workers X, Y, & Z: [Stunned pause of delighted disbelief]

Worker X: Oh...

Worker Y: My...

Worker Z: Gods...

[Ineni’s breast, o’erlaid with plated collar, rises in the shadow of the feathered fan, held still by the man behind him. One hand on the hip beneath his pleated kilt; the other raised aloft before him: the architect now reads aloud his poem]

"Aakheperkare,
shining in the Serpent-diadem,
whose border rests upon
the far crest of the world,
its ends within the void of Horus,
his majesty, then said:
'Now, you shall oversee
my great works, you
in whom I place my trust,
my excellent designs
for the glory of our
holy triad;
their Lord Of All, the one
whose hidden power e'er
informs all things, a king's
guardian and guide,
a sovereign o'er sovereigns,
Amun-Ra.'

Now, endowing me with
labourers, his majesty
accorded me the chance
to earn, for wisdom, praise.
I brought together
all his majesty had gained
in tribute:
fresh cedar-wood from Lebanon;
reams of Asian copper;
offerings of electrum
and gold."

[Here, the architect, the poet, the poet-architect, gives a look over his shoulder (left or right) upon the Temple of Karnak. The audience, the workers, the list'ning-labourers, wait silently, having begun to become sincerely enrapt in the verse and its wonderful delivery]

"This, your temple,
the most select of places!
Let sekhem and sesheshet
sing in beat-procession,
ringing through these
'glyphed papyrus-reeds!
Of beautiful white limestone,
these pylons guard the way;
magnificent, th'flagstaffs
herald the Aten!

Then his majesty, the
Golden Horus, said:
'All has been done, in
accord with my command.
Look:

in em'rald, lapis,
 ox-blood, gold, all
 brill'yant coloured writing
 'gainst the white proclaims
 (Posterity will hear it!) of
 my works, our songs, our prayers!
 Now, his majesty, whose
 heart was happy at
 the temple's progress,
 commanded me to
 continue this honourable task.

 Sistra sweeping swathes
 across the jingle-jangle morning;
 veneration vibrating
 atop the beaten drums!
 These coloured-sounds of
 hue-lit waves awash
 upon this sanctum
 of Khonsu, consort Mut,
 and Amun-Ra!"

[Ineni: exuent. Workers mutter, shuffle. Overseers call out. Crowd disperses to their separate tasks and labour]

Workers X, Y, & Z: *[Gentle pause of silent, face-expressed, contemplation]*

Worker Z: Not...

Worker Y: Too...

Worker X: Bad. Sort of a... song of Ipet-isu.

Workers X & Y: *[Exuent]*

Worker Z: *[Slows to a stop, having noticed something. Now the only player left, approaches a pile of discarded rubble. Lifts a chunk and places atop the pile, crouching to put eyeline at same height. With left hand, touches and traces crudely composed hieroglyphs, in hue-scraps of reddened-green 'n blue-streaked gold. Smiles. Dissolves into a blank line-break]*

"But how... could a language die?"

She ceased in her caressing of the symbols into sand, proud yet pained at how they lay ephem'ral.

The woman, knelt amongst the linen that she moved 'n mended, tilted o'er her head, her tan eyes keeping handward.

"Well, Shu may sweep across the land and will away the grooves you practice in vulnerable ground. But even in the rock and on the painted walls – inscriptions carved; reliefs rendered in all their colour – there hides the threat of oblivion. What you've written rests behind a seal."

"But you've told me what they mean." She brushes – light – three fingers through her formed, imperfect hand.

"And if you forgot, and I were gone?"

Balanced on her haunches, her heels above the ground, her hands hung limp between her bended knees, the girl-child kept her verdant eyes locked – thoughtful – on her writing, comprehending their incomprehensibility.

In the pregnant pause gestates an understanding.

"There is no way to protect what I've created."

The woman: "Nor that brought to life by others."

The event horizons of their irides, melanined in magellanic clouds, fall infinitely on into their soul-dark apertures.

Deep-em'rald, azure-laced;

teak, torn by oxblood wisps.

Two paths curve t'ward an empty cradle.

"Where'd you find me?"

Our man in England's south-west city-port laughed at his strewn-out friend.

"You don't recall that?"

He does not.

"You don't recall our trav'ling back?"

No, he doesn't. And so he asks:

"Speaking of *back*: where are we now?"

"A city, b'yond a glacial gorge, floating on a muddy Nile."

"Ohhh do" (The stretching, strewn-out man contorts his brow 'n forehead.) "piss off with that. Ta."

Flicking out into the haze-held sky a smoked-through cigarette, his lungs dispersing air turned into laughter by the vocal cords, he told his friend – e'en while he groaned – that he would paint for him the view "and from that you will know just where we are. You ready?!"

No, he isn't.

"First, I'll sketch the scene! A pencil's lead along the haze-held sky and I give the rise 'n fall of the horizon... Softly jagged, the line portrays the wooded hills... Okay! Now to settle in the settlement. Between the new-placed border to the sky and our as-yet empty foreground, we'll be needing blocks! Towers of the old cathedral... smaller blocks with their tiled peaks, triangular, and their sentry-tower chimneys – these are legion – and the cut-outs of their attic windows... Unpeaked blocks of greater size for the edges of our as-yet empty foreground. Window cut-outs... Okay, good enough! Say... as an artist, would you have started with the foreground? Only... I realise now I'll be sketching over some of what I've placed! No matter. The land and the sky need their heartbeat, so I'll shape upon the page the river! Here, the edges of the dockyard reach a bridging line to touch the edges opposite... Now, some hulls. Some hulking; some gentle. Weightful, waiting bodies. Small... medium... See, these are now beginning to break into my blocks! Well, it's only going to get worse... As if our own industrial, English Calvary, let's fill our middle-third with crosses! These are the masts, of course. You got that, I take it? Okay then! Colour! Kuller... hmmm. Question: as, again, an artist, which you are and I am not, should I, perhaps, have already painted the background? Or some other part? Regardless – onward. I have to add the paint. Okay... I will need... some white, some blue... green... definitely this: the black!... brown... I'll make the greys 'n shades of blue... red, but I'll muddy it... Let's go with that. Right! Over the foreground I'll throw black 'n rusty bars of iron rail, 'mongst grey 'n muddy gravelled dirt beside the dull-red of a tiled roof! B'yond this, I'll lay across a river-blue and muddy it with ev'ry colour, broken by the black of shapes that sit beneath the wood-hues of the masts above! Tangling turns of grey-brown web with folded wings of white awash with borders blue as the late morn' sky o'er-spills across the scene! The crest of the horizon's turning green and crashing down toward the houses, where grey-black red-grey brown-black pigments flush throughout the cityscape!"

Having since sat upright, with his spine against a table leg, the man blinking away his hangover raised eyebrows at the patient silence.

"Are youuuuuuu done?"

A snort of laughter 'n a drink of coffee, black.

Scene III

Wirdpleigh 'Tween Sips Of Coffee

Black coffee snorts

– derisive –

at the evening chill.

tank-a

Tin touches stone: replaced's the cup

upon the slab adjacent as I/he/you/we look/looked at the
preening cormorants on the metal shelf.

"Two cormorants on a crane."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"Ah. Yes."

"You see?"

"Yes."

"Crane!"

"'Tis a bird."

"And?"

"'Tis a big, metal machine."

"Double meaning."

"Triple."

"Triple?!"

"'Tis a verb."

"Shit! 'Tis."

"So, to take your comment and improve: Two cormorants crane their necks... on.. a crane..."

"A vast improvement!"

brrrbrenkk

The tin cup scrapes the surface stone 'n carries coffee he-ward.

Trenched, turning timber, gnarled 'n knotted, bolted, nailed, a-worn by wet 'n windy weath'ring
roughly cauterising marrow, narrow Niles not spilling over 'long the valleyed vale – unvertical;
"Avast!" the axe-fall blade, abrupt, demanded death-industrial: it called, it failed, found its fortune
to be laid upon the wharfway stone – a boneyard, 'boreal, the brown of lumber 'breast the plated
steel.

They sat their weary bottoms on the wood.

"Wot wee angin round fore?" said Worker A.

"Thuh big boss man." said Worker C.

"Big lit-ul boss man." said Worker B.

"Wotz ee want? Uh bigger boat?" said Worker A.

"Puh-apz uh sphinx upon thuh bough 'n sturrrn." said Worker B.

"Doant nokim too much." said Worker C.

"Yess yess. Juss taykin thuh piss." said Worker B.

"Speekin uh piss... Fyool ikskyooz mee..." said Worker A.

"Too layt." said Worker C and Worker B in tandem.

"Aaahshhhhit." said Worker A.

"Too layt furr that 'n awl, too." said Worker B.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel brought his cigar to his mouth and smoked it.

Now, here you have a choice. Either you can look up a picture of him, or you can read the thousand-word description I have supplied below. You won't need to do both, so skip ahead to the following paragraph, beginning '*From out of...*', if you choose to find a picture. Conversely, read on if you are unable to get your mind's-eye Brunel from a photograph, or if you simply prefer the labourious approach of turning abstract symbols into light.

His shoulder-width apart he placed his beat, unpolished boots – a broad rest-stance to fix his frame upon the Earth. 'Bove heels of hardened leather, lit by th'waning waves of evening's fire, adorned with coal-dust, crease black-trouser hems. Laying b'low his ankles, th'hems hid one-third of his boots before continuing to crease their faded way up to his knees, both locked in place – though as he speaks he'll let his weight fall more 'n more onto one side (you choose: the left or right) – and nearly nestled in the open reaches of the coattails crash-careening 'gainst his legs within the sudden gust of late-September wind. Moving with their weight – waist-held beneath bent-elbow arms – they fall to rest abreast his trousered thighs and fold their tattered wings inward. Unbuttoned buttonlessness: lie the patch-flaps of the pockets pressed in faded threads upon a black less faded. Seams, seeming sewn in haste-repairs, retreat along the jacket, gently out of view, as looms the waistcoat's edges, etching out a border broken by the presence of the hands, in coal-kept white, that remain placed within the trouser-topping pouches. Their knuckles – gnarled – not fully hid nor 'vealed, the back of th'hands show sheets of skin all sketched in wear; the hair leaned left; the hair leaned right. Greyed, grubby cuffs of shirt-sleeve fabric fringe the cuffs of coat-sleeve creases, as the ashen dead of the cigar's end tumble past. Pendulously hangs his pocket watch on a dark-brown string. Straying never far, the clockwork cognisance reflects, in stainless silver-coated metal, glints of westward-gliding light, revealing – deep – the distant past, e'en as tomorrow germinates to journey b'yond today into time immemor'yul. Buttons binding, by their thread-connection bringing, closely knit, the otherwise separate front ends of the foldful fabric, Brunel's loosely fitting waistcoat, in its depths-of-ocean navy hue, 's'lifted by the presence of his wrists. Grappling, clawing, grabbing: clung to the outmost reaches of the slitted holes (hair-breadth's the fatal slip-through seam-sealed sudden – swift – 'n silent fall), precariously placed, those binding buttons – three – traverse – emergent – taut-thread longing lengths to lose, if necess'ry, their candle-life to holding – Hold! – those sep'rate ends 'n folds – Hou'vast! – steadfastly firm f'r'eternity, this fabric of the universe in captured light 'n time-dried, mind-led ink. A gorge against a cummerbund: the waistcoat black – unbridged – now forms a split in glacial time 'n turns, each side, its wide'ning way. The valley voyage, vast it grows as th'cliffs cry on divergent, 'veals now further white, worn undergarb across a breast a-beating. The jacket folds; the waistcoat wanders. The creases crack; the shoulders steepen. Seams that circle shoulder socket sections stream 'n sleep between the grad'yul rise of stocky breadth that hunches slightly forward. Rolling back, as if th'were nagged by th'words of this narration, Brunel brings all of his posture into line (this does not last). He lifts his right-side hand and takes the cigar from his mouth; spits upon the plank of wood that rots off to his left; flicks the end-poised ash from off the flame-fed fiery crown; he puts the cigar back between his molars. The aged 'n cured tobacco leaves, aroma slow-fermented, seared sudden singeing glow of glowering magma, breathed volcanic, as grabbed 'n grasping oxygen, frenetic flame-fuel feed, flits hurricanely through cylindric mass of melded matter. Above the cummerbund 'n waistcoat folds 'n jacket wings, breeze-buffered, a knot of deep, dark navy – neatsome in its rough-hewn way – gathers up stiff, stoic collar 'bout the stoic, stiff-held neck, bow-tieing b'neath the bare, unbearded chin. O'er rounded jawline, just as high as th'rows of hidden teeth, that upturned collar cradles 'round the head that's framed by hat 'n hair. From collar-end to collar-end – that space between the hard-hem edges; above the bow (off-centre);

in th'shadow of the lower lip – the curved 'n foetal-fused mandible front, that fixes fast the jawbones, ossified sits solemnly 'neath clean-shaved skin. Lips lined – tobacco traces – with black stumps of razored hair: around the edges of his mouth his clean-shaved skin gives o'er to stubble. The young yet yearning corners crease in frownsome fretting, fraught with thoughts he's thinking: on the fires that soon will drive the steamship westward; thoughts on the bridging of the bridgeless Avon gorge. Astride each side burn whiskers, briary-bristling black 'n thick, through chain unbroken of the ecotone between his face 'n hair – here hold the edges of a forest deep, its depths in skull-curve roots securing, fast, its sprawling canopy that grasps among the wind. But for the brim of the stovepipe hat his hair would face no fencing; t'would reach its spreading sprawl in all direction, height unbound. From out beneath this contained mass of untamed grass: his ears, their lobes lain flat against the side of his slowly turning head. It scans the scores of layb'ring eyes who've worked to build his wonders, now sitting standing squatting knelt on the dockyard at the day's far end. The bony-cartilaginousness of his nose protrudes, its structure strong 'n noticeable, broad'ning 'bout the nostrils. It sits above his lips, beneath his brow, right in the middle, wrinkling as a fly flits, sits, 'n flies off on again. Bright, brooding bullet-points of black break 'pon th'event horizons whence from sea of still, ceramic white spill cascades coloured brown. Set in their sockets, engineering eyes that see in perfect shapes shift vision's voyage 'cross the visage of the dark'ning, deep'ning eve. His brow above his broodsome eyes – half-furrowed 'n half-resting – betrayed, beneath a smudge of coal hand-painted 'pon his face, the threaded thoughts that weave their wond'ring way about the world he wanders, pond'ring the geometry of nature. His eyebrows – bushly bristling – bring their baseline quickly upward as the man quite close beside him hits – with gentle force – his arm. Brunel (Isambard Kingdom) brings his head 'round to acknowledge that he knows it's time to speak to all the workers waiting there. Atop his head: a silk top hat, woven from hatter's plush, placates the strands of hair that seek to 'scape from out the bord'ring brim. He readies.

From out of shadow's shade a cormorant – its wingspan spread – shuffles its feet and finds its footing on the slow, unanchored drift.

His cigar he took and held.

“Good job today, men.”