

TIME AND TIDE
—Khajiiti M&M—

Gather 'round the fire, little cubs. Warm your tails.
Perk up your ears, for some words don't bear repeating.
A question: Who can say whether the moons predict
The tides or the tides predict the moons? Can cubs say?
This one cannot, but he knows they are always in
Alignment, except for, of course, when they are not.
Hermorah knows such things, and seeks out deep secrets.
Na'kani, a clan mother of Ne Quin-al tribe,
Learned secrets-keeper of the Time Cat, Alkosh,
Taken under dark moons by Pa'alatiin cult to
Tides devoted; away'd to shallow Topal Sea,
For monstrous Lord craved hidden knowledge of Dragon.
Fastened to rough-hewn coral pillar by seaside,
Ritual began—no malice found, only sure
Need to gift Master with knowings so dearly bought.
At tidal ebb, summon invoked, continued 'til
Sea-soaked, sand-laden head rear'd mighty, vast, above
Tender cats of mortal furs. Leonine in shape,
With tangled mane, long seaweed foam, and cavernous
Maw, coral-fanged, opened wide. Yet god's eyes held more.

Lines 1-7: A Khajiiti elder beckons to his cubs, bidding them to join him by the campfire, where they may warm themselves against the desert's chilly night air. He poses to them a question about the nature of the moons and the tides, and admits even he is unable to answer except to note, in true Khajiiti fashion, that they're always aligned except when they aren't. He cautions them that Hermorah might know, and begins the bittersweet tale.

Lines 8-15: Na'kani was a clan mother of a desert tribe in Ne Quin-al, and she was renowned for her knowledge of the secrets of Alkosh. Sadly, she was abducted by cultists, who had traveled far from Pa'alatiin, and they were devoted to the worship of Hermorah. Their Lord, always craving secret knowledge, had bidden them take her and bring her to the shore of the Topal Sea, for he desired to know more of the Dragon. She was bound to a ceremonial column, and the ritual began, but the cultists bore her no outright malice; they cared only to give their Lord his wish.

Lines 16-20: As the tide reached its lowest point, the summoning reached its peak, and Hermorah appeared: a great feline head of soaking sand, with a mane of dripping seaweed and teeth of coral. Yet it was the god's eyes that most strongly captured Na'kani's attention.

Fear to Na'kani: no shallow pools of golden
Light, but twin clusters of myriad eyestalks—like
Mudcrabs'—flail'd and blink'd, ever-searching for sunken
Treasures, secrets lost, forgotten lore. Espied clan
Mother caught in cultic net. Sensing Draconic
Pearls by him unclaimed, frothing spray. Wider still
Opened mouth, surged forth from ravenous gullet deep
Pincered boneless limbs, tentacles lurking, seeking,
Wrapp'd, coil'd, clutch'd poor Na'kani, claws dug into
Fur, began to drink dry unto wither wise one.
Hope waning, but hark! Dawn, and Time stood still—chance given!
Spake then Na'kani blest sunlit words of Alkosh,
Searing flame, cat alight, leapt her lips to his maw!
Burning mother! Tides, no love of light and flame
In inky depths, dark and wet, all plots foiled,
Unleash'd gutt'ral roar, crashing, wave did extinguish
Purging fire, unwitting cats drowned, save one:
Na'kani smiled at the last, leal for all Time.
Cooling breeze o'er wave-tops soared, uplifted true cat
By Winds, into bright Sun, to warm sugared Llesw'er.

Lines 21-31: Hermorah's eyes struck the clan mother with fear, for they were not gilded, as some monikers indicated, but consisted of hundreds of crab-like eyestalks, constantly flailing and blinking in the moonlight, as if eternally searching. The god fixed his gaze upon Na'kani, and, sensing within her the knowledge he so dearly desired, began to in anticipation foam at the mouth, which he opened yet wider. From his throat sprang numerous tentacles, with pincers on the tips, which seized the captive, and he began to drain her dry. Hope was failing, but, at the last, faint sunlight dawned, and a chance for victory arrived!

Lines 32-40: Na'kani incanted a secret spell, magic of Alkosh, which lit her aflame! The fire immediately surged into Hermorah's jaws, and he, a being of the briny dank and dark, his machinations foiled, bellowed. A tidal wave was summoned that extinguished the Aetherial flame, able to purge from him the pages he'd acquired since the lunar cycles had been set, lest he lose all, and drowned the foolish cultists. Na'kani alone was left alive, charred and barely breathing, bound still to the ceremonial pillar. The clan mother was pleased, and smiled her last, for she had kept safe the secrets of Alkosh. A cool breeze of Khenarhti embraced her soul, and carried her over the crests into the sun, to frolic in the warm dunes of sweet Llesw'er.