

# Legends of the Jade Moon

Book 1

## Liquid Sky

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## C.E. Dorsett

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## PART ONE: THE CHILD OF CENTURIES

## CHAPTER ONE: ECHO OF LOSS

The great temple of the Holy Ennead, on Al-Benu where it all began, was full of friends and strangers. Ianus was stunned. So many people came for his day of Ascension, but his adopted father was a very popular predicant in Shiloh. They must have come for him. Standing quietly in the narthex, he straightened his white robes nervously. He closed his fox brown eyes, and recited his prayers. His chestnut skin paled, when he heard his cue to enter the nave.

As he walked slowly down the center aisle, Ianus scanned the crowd for his adopted parents. They were sitting in the front row, smiling. Maya, his mother, waved at him. Her cinnamon eyes shimmered with tears of pride.

The spicy, sweet smell of the altar incense wafted down from the dais and filled the room with otherworldly warmth. Ianus' footsteps resounded off the marble floor. Sterile echoes broke through the sound of his breath. So many people sat quietly staring at him. Ianus gulped; he could see in their eyes how much they expected from him. The tender touch of the incense that only a moment ago invited him into the heart of the mystery now only numbed him. He felt caged in. He wanted to run. Even the familiar bas-reliefs carved into the granite oppressed him. The legends were remote; today, they lacked grace. Taking a deep breath, Ianus tried to let the scent of the incense relax him, but the great responsibilities he would soon carry weighed heavily on his mind. After today, he would be an adult in the eyes of his community, and a guardian of another's life. Stopping before the dais, he bowed to the altar.

"Ianus Akeru!" The green robed predicant behind the altar cried out. The oversized, leathery wings of the tiny dragon-like Ceeri hanging onto his back opened. "You have come to this place through many trials and tribulations, and may I say a few more than most." A whisper flashed like lightning across the congregation. "Do you come to this place willingly, knowing the consequences of the choice you make today?"

Ianus smiled at the predicant behind the altar. He wished that his father could have performed the rite, but that was forbidden. Family members were not allowed to officiate the ascension ceremony. At least his good friend Aashen could initiate him. "I do." He pronounced confidently.

Looking down at the golden laver on the altar, Ianus blanched at the sight of his own boyish face looking back at him. Beyond the mirror-like surface of the water, he

watched with trembling lips as the silvery black Sukallin churned in the water. He could still hear Aashen speaking, but no one had ever fully explained the ramifications of sharing his body with another sentient life. He agreed to the merger because it was tradition. Every Shedu on his eighteenth birthday would enter the temple to be entrusted with a Sukallin, to repay their debt to their original hosts who were now extinct. Those who refused this honor, the Lamassu, were seen as weak, or even unstable. He wondered if he would share its memories of the countless other hosts with whom it had shared its life. For the first time, he was afraid of losing himself.

Aashen walked around the altar, and laid his palm on Ianus' brow. "My child, may your life be long, and full of joy and wisdom. Today you open your heart to another, may your life together be filled with peace." Aashen took hold of Ianus' hand, "On this day, we entrust you, Ianus Akeru, novitiate of the House of the Jade Moon, with Osanna, this great and noble Sukallin."

Ianus turned to face the golden laver, pushing back his robe from his right arm. Cautiously, he submerged his forearm into the laver. The fluid Sukallin felt like seaweed against his skin. He struggled to keep his arm submerged. Pain, like a thousand needles, cut through his skin. The Sukallin constricted around his hand. An icy cold shock ripped through his fingers. Slowly, the hematite—colored ooze crawled up the black skin of Ianus' arm. Rivulets of blood dripped into the water. Ianus fought off a shiver as the Sukallin merged into the flesh on his arm, seeping between the cells leaving only a discolored mark in its wake. Ianus smiled. "That wasn't so bad," he thought.

Suddenly, the world spun around; his vision blurred. The warmth fled from his body; his chest collapsed. He steadied himself as the room went black. Softly, in the periphery of his vision, a cold light illuminated a field that stretched out before him.

"Where's the temple?" He thought, desperate to catch his breath. The light grew brighter. Ianus staggered backward as a great stone tower appeared out of nowhere... out of nothing.

Something white glistened at the base of the tower. Ianus was drawn to the strange white shadow. Closer and closer, step-by-step, he approached the tower until the image became clear. It was a white dragon! Larger than any Ceeri he had ever seen before. The beast was sleeping.

"It sleeps, blissfully ignorant of the world around it." A soft feminine voice whispered in his ears. "Look on it well boy, for your time has come. Ihy's time is passing."

"No!" Ianus screamed, "My Father's time is now! He is strong and healthy."

"He stood by and did nothing at the foul deeds of his children!" The voice interrupted.

"What are you talking about? I am his only child, and I'm adopted. Who are you talking about?"

A sudden gust of wind shoved Ianus to the ground. He looked over his shoulder. A titanic, red dragon rose from the ground. Its blood red scales glistened in the light. Savage teeth overlapped in its maw, as smoke billowed from the corner of its mouth. It hovered over Ianus' head. Calmly, it surveyed the tower. With a great burst of speed, it lunged forward. The white dragon stirred. The red pulled back.

"What's going on?" Ianus shouted. "Why are you showing this to me?"

Silence.

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