

I listened to your suggestions. I contacted a friend of a friend over at Columbia who studies linguistics. I scraped the paint off the door frames until the script was in clear view, engraved into each door into a layer of fiber on wood. After sending the photos and waiting a few days, I got a call from the linguist friend, Brian. He said the script itself was a variant of Demotic script of ancient, Graeco-Roman Egypt, post-hieroglyphic but BC. He said it seemed likely that an enthusiast of the supernatural had desecrated the artifacts in order to create the door frames. He then explained what he was able to translate.

The text itself was originally written on ancient papyrus before being engraved through into the door frame, and it described the banishing of a chaotic serpent Apep, apparently a common ritual. Brian explained that this particular script was an old spell intended to banish Apep and other exiles to a different plane of existence, a place occasionally mistaken for the underworld, and one that supposedly overlapped ours in connecting points. He described it as a land of outcasts, a land with no name and no gods, one that was filled with chaos without much other description, as if the author didn't understand it fully.

I shook my head, staring at the glyphs of ancient ritualistic magic, and questions about the person who created the strange doors grew. I headed to the internet, reading about the discovery of the "Greek Magical Papyri" from around 30 BC, and a missing set of collected spells that presumably had been missing. It was reported as surfacing in 1903, but before the British Museum was able to acquire it, it again vanished, likely into the hands of a private collector abroad. I felt the script with my fingers and once again, horrible imagery swarmed in my head. I yanked my hand away as the visions in my mind grew dark and violent.

Curiosity built and my heart pounded in my chest. I'd always craved the unknown, the mysterious and the spiritual, although they were absent in my life. I consider myself an agnostic, but I lean more towards atheism, regardless of how much I wanted to believe in something else. These strange doors were something some man or woman in the 1920's, surely long dead, had built, but they began to fill that gap. This strange discovery had created a bridge straight over and beyond that empty space within me, and though terrifying, it was enthralling.

I removed the ornate, brass key, feeling its weight in my sweaty palm as I approached the bathroom door. These locks all toggled from either side of the doors, and I stood at the open frame, pulling shut the old, heavy wood and I stared down at the lock plate as my heartbeat quickened. I inserted the key and twisted it right, rotating the key until hearing the *click* of an additional unlocked state. I removed the brass key and watched in amazement as golden sunlight poured through the keyhole, warming the thigh of my pant leg. I crouched down and peered into the hole, squinting from the light and amazed at what I saw.

Through the door grew where my bathroom should be was a lush forest with a mossy floor filled with mammoth, gnarled trees. Patches of grass basked in the warm light and swayed from a gentle breeze. It was extraordinary, like some land out of time, and I slowly turned the doorknob and opened the door to the enormous, secret woods. The trees were at least three times the

height of any I'd ever seen, reaching upward to a sky I soon realized was covered in stalactites inside of a massive, cavern. The sunlight shone through small holes on the ceiling of the interior, and I looked down to my feet on the wood apartment floor that stopped abruptly at the threshold, continuing to hilly moss and sprouting plants where bathroom floor tiles should have ended in walls.

I extended a socked foot through and stepped down on the springy moss, warming my foot in the scattered beams of light, and walked in cautious steps into the lush, green space. I turned back to see the open door to my modest apartment, swinging out from the base of a giant tree. It was magical and serene, and it only took a second to realize what was off: there were no birds. I thought of Brian's words about the translation, about how this place was not meant for either Gods or mankind, but banishment, and I froze a few paces in as I listened to the cracking twigs of something moving.

I stood calm and still as I observed some forms about 50 meters out, walking behind a thick overlap of the gnarled and knotted yet surreally large trees. Soon, I saw their heads emerge, deer heads but hairless and flesh-colored. They looked peaceful and sniffed at the ground as they walked, and soon emerged from behind their cover. Their bodies were long and thin, lean muscles bulged from arms and legs that looked like those of a human though stretched out into the shape of very large deer. It was a pair of them, and they walked closer, sniffing the air and ground.

My brain screamed danger, but my legs refused to obey. I could do nothing but watch. They looked so curious, like I was, and I readied for a charging of those hands where hooves should normally be, yet none came. They just walked closer and closer and I held my ground until only one stayed back and one approached, and as it did I could make out its features clearly. It's head, like the body, was as if a human head had reformed its shape to fit the mold of a deer's, but twice the size. The flat nostrils stretched wide as it sniffed at my pant leg then my hand, which I extended slightly.

They were so strange yet so incredible, creatures from another world. My phone vibrated, and I marveled at the fact I got cell service in this impossible place before remembering my apartment was directly behind me. I removed the phone to read a message from Brian, explaining the script continued with more passages including mentioning curses and that some of the script was in other languages, such as a form of ancient Latin. I felt the shadow obscure the light on my face before I looked up to see the deer-man thing standing on its hind legs, looming over me. It stood four feet above me, far more dangerous and intimidating than I could have envisioned.

It looked much more like a thin, giant man then, and my hairs stood on end as it huffed foul, damp breath that rippled my hair as it examined me with eyeless sockets. I was no longer safe in paradise, I was in a hostile land with a creature that could rip my limbs from their sockets as easy as a boiled drumstick from a chicken thigh. The musky scent of the creature stung my

nose as it opened its wide jaws to reveal jagged, flat teeth that looked nearly human. It inhaled deeply, nearly breathing my hair into its jaws from powerful lungs, and then its head approached fast as a loud, wet wind steamed onto my face. I was flecked with damp spray from a terrifying, yet harmless sneeze.

The enormous beast dropped down to its long, human hands with a thud and ambled slowly back over to its mate before they loped away deeper into the forest cave together, leaving my heart drumming and my body shaking. I walked on quivering legs back into the dim apartment and shut the door before locking it with nervous hands. I collapsed onto the apartment floor and tried to even my breathing, knowing how close to death I had likely been.

It took hours of tea and calming videos before I could fall asleep last night. Those massive jaws as that thing stood over me kept flashing in my head. It looked so similar to the jackal-headed god Anubis from the drawings I'd seen, and other half-human, half-beasts of ancient Egyptian mythology. I began to wonder if those things were somehow descendants of the ones that inspired the Egyptian gods, or if gods themselves had truly existed to some extent. All I knew was that it was impossibly real, and both beautiful and terrifying.

I woke to a faint trotting from inside the walls of my room. It took my ears a few seconds to distinguish two sources as they galloped together over my ceiling and down the wall then onto the floor in a dimension so near yet outside of our own. They seemed to trample the same spot as if to say hi, and it nearly made me smile...but then I heard it. Inside of my apartment a door unlocked with a click and then opened with a slow creak. The sound of two bare feet stomped towards my bedroom, stopping just outside the closed door. I can smell sulfur and rot as something wheezes on the other side of the door, which I can't recall locking.