

## Tales of the Eternals Chapter 8: The Tomb

Altallo had found himself in a shady side street. He was sitting on a stool facing a game table with blue and white coloured glass pieces. His opponent, a large ram, had just made his move and was rubbing his chin thoughtfully. Around them are other people watching them with interest; an elderly hippo leaning on a staff, a white ibis and a jackal.

"What a dreadful thing to say!" the jackal says to Altallo sadly.

"I don't know why she called me a savage," Altallo says, moving a blue piece on the board. "I didn't do anything rude to her."

"She sounds very prideful," the hippo wheezes "All the young ones at the temples are always like that, too absorbed by the dreams of serving the gods."

"You don't think I'm a savage do you?" Altallo asks nervously.

"Not at all!" the hippo replies happily

"Your clothes are dignified," the ibis says, examining his headdress "If messy," he whispers to the jackal who nods gravely.

"And you're great at senet for a beginner." says the ram who had just finished another move with the white piece.

Just as Altallo is about to make his next move, someone rushes up to him.

"Kiya! What happened?"

Kiya looked exhausted and was breathing heavily.

"I need your help." she gasps, slumping onto a nearby stool. "Ah. I never ran so fast in all my life."

"What do you want?" Altallo asks rather coldly, as she extravagantly puts her feet on the table, knocking over the senet board.

"There's no need for that sort of tone, little boy," Kiya sniffs at him "Anyway, I require your assistance, I have just overheard two people who seem to be planning to rob a tomb."

Altallo tilts his head and cocks an eyebrow.

"What's so special about this tomb?"

Kiya huffs in anger and crosses her arms.

"You really are woefully ignorant. What do they do where you come from? Bang rocks on their heads?" she sneers.

"Leave him alone." the jackal growls, putting her clawed hand on Altallo's shoulder.

"Fine, I'll explain," Kiya huffs again "A tomb is the final resting place for a Pharaoh, that's a god among men, he is Horus reborn and will be Osiris in the afterlife."

Seeing Altallo looking even more confused she rolls her eyes.

"Bottom line, the tomb is a place where a dead Pharaoh is lain to rest and is filled with treasures for his journey to the afterlife. There I've been nice to him, are you happy now?" she snorts to the hippo who was giving her a steely look.

"It's a start." he replies tersely

"And so I need your help to stop these tomb robbers," Kiya finishes, sounding as though she had just ran a race.

"I still don't understand, but I will help you. Just please don't call me a savage." Altallo replies after a pause.

"Fine fine, I won't," Kiya says, grabbing Altallo's arm and marching him away. "Just get moving!"

"Thank you for the game!" Altallo calls back to the others, who wave back to him.

Kiya takes Altallo to a bustling market full of colourful canopied stalls and mud-brick buildings. Traders call out to passers by hoping to entice new customers. She pauses by a small store with racks of sandals

"Right, first things first, you need some sandals. Don't want you looking like a savage-, I mean don't want you to hurt your feet."

As Kiya is examining the sandals, Altallo is distracted by a nearby stall selling fabrics. A customer, a woman with large hooped earrings passes a few small silver metal pieces to the stall owner, a squat gold scarab. What a strange thing to do, Altallo thought to himself.

"What about these ones?" Kiya asks him, showing him a pair of simple papyrus sandals.

Altallo looks at them, and then selects another pair; these ones decorated with bright yellow and red patterns. Kiya pulls a face. "Those don't look cheap."

"I hope you have the money to pay for those." a voice growls from inside the shop. Its owner, a murky brown crocodile, emerges. Despite several infant crocodiles clambering on his back or sleeping in his arms, he is an intimidating sight

"Oh...well of course I have money. A priestess is always prepared!" Kiya replies indignantly, patting her robes. A look of shock flashes across her face and then she adopts a hasty smile. "Haha, give us a second please."

She snatches the sandals of Altallo, puts them back onto the display and marches Altallo out of the store, the crocodile glaring at them through narrowed eyes.

"I can't believe I left my money behind!" Kiya gasps, exasperated.

"I thought you said a priestess is always-"

"Yes yes I know what I said!" she snarls "Well I usually don't go out to the market. A priestess shouldn't really be out with the commoners." she gives an exaggerated shudder, as if a spider had crawled down her neck.

"Well I'm going to try something." says Altallo and walks back to the shoe shop.

"Be my guest!" Kiya calls after him.

Altallo sidles in front of the crocodile, placing the sandals on the desk counter.

"Four silver coils if you please." the crocodile grunts.

"I don't have any silver, but will this do?" Altallo drops several colourful gem stones onto the counter. The crocodile stares in wonder at the gems, before he smiles wide.

"Thank you my fine traveller!" He cries out, "Please, please visit again soon and my Horus guide and protect you!"

Kiya then leads Altallo to a deserted alleyway to let him put on his new sandals on. Altallo was looking very happy with them on.

"Where did you get those gems?" Kiya asks him

"They're from my home. They're everywhere where I come from. I just carry them around as a sort of reminder of home."

Kiya is surprised by this and she looks rather sympathetic for a moment, then shakes herself.

"Come on now, we can't waste any more time. Those grave robbers will be near the burial grounds soon."

Later they board a small raft (the owner being paid some of Altallo's gems) and set out up the river. Kiya is struggling with the oars.

"Ugh! These stupid things! This is the work of peasants!"

Altallo takes the oars from Kiya and starts rowing smoothly. Kiya purses her lips and crosses her arms. "Showoff!" she sniffs.

"Why are you so rude?" Altallo asks her.

"I'm a priestess." she replies, sitting up straight and lifting her nose to the air. "Obviously superior to those underlings. Who would speak to the gods? Without people like me the whole of Egypt would be in ruin."

She pauses and then sighs. "To tell the truth I really shouldn't be doing this you know. I can't leave

the temple city, I could be expelled. A priestess must never mingle among the commoners. We are their link to the gods and should be respected.”

Altallo was barely listening and beginning to look irritated.

“-and of course we priests and priestesses have to prepare Pharaohs for their journeys to the afterlife and guard their tombs. Though I don't really like the idea of cutting up bodies.” Kiya shudders. “Oh stop over here.”

Altallo jerks from his stupor. It is now dusk and the sun was starting to set on the horizon.

“You idiot, we're going to miss our stop!” Kiya snaps at him, pointing to some tall papyrus.

Reacting quickly, Altallo steers the raft to the side of the thicket. The prow of another, much larger raft can be just seen poking out between the papyrus stems.

“Someone has beaten us here!”

Altallo jumps off the boat. He notices several sets of footprints in the mud heading out into the desert.

“They're going in that direction, to the burial grounds,” he points out. “And looks like they're a mixed bunch! There's huge prints and tiny ones!”

Kiya meanwhile was distracted by a cloud of dust on the horizon. Her eyes widen in shock and she grabs Altallo.

“Get down!” she hisses, pushing him back into the reeds. A few moments later, a chariot rushes pulled by two horses with two soldiers, armed with spears, axes and large wooden shields, and a driver on board. As the chariot races past them and into the desert, Kiya peeks out.

“They're gone.”

“Who were they?” asks Altallo, pulling bits of reed from his headdress.

“Medjay, the Pharaoh's law enforcement,” Kiya replies, looking terrified “We best keep out of sight from them. They're tasked with guarding tombs and I really don't want to find myself impaled.”

“Impaled!” Altallo mouths shocked, a hand over his middle. They start to follow the chariot tracks and footprints into the desert.

“Oh do hurry up!” Kiya snaps at Altallo. Altallo had stopped to study some desert plants.

Reluctantly, he abandons them and follows after her.

At first Kiya leads the way with confident strides, Altallo lagging behind. But soon, they find themselves surrounded by a sea of sand; the lush banks of the river hidden behind a dune. Altallo has overtaken Kiya, who looks utterly exhausted. She slumps down on a nearby rock and sighs, looking up at the twilight sky.

“Those chariots make it look so much easier!”

Altallo clambers up the next dune and is greeted by an amazing sight; three huge triangular mountains in the valley below, with several other, smaller mountains surrounding it.

Excited, he tumbles down the dune to where Kiya was sitting.

“Come over here and see these mountains!”

Kiya rolls her eyes and reluctantly climbs the dune.

“Pyramids, tombs of the old Pharaohs. Hold on!” she grabs Altallo's leg, just as he was about to stroll down the dune. “Look closer. See those fires?”

Altallo looks more closer. Dotted around the pyramids are small specks of orange light.

“Medjay?” he asks, Kiya nods.

From the desert, a squad of ten chariots appear and roll up to the pyramids. The medjay stationed around the and move to greet the charioteers.

“Now is our chance, hurry while they're distracted!” Altallo whispers to Kiya before sliding down the dune.

“Wait up!” Kiya hisses, following.

Altallo reaches a corner of the nearest pyramid. Closer up it seemed even larger; a towering structure of plain, but polished white stone.

"Amazing." Altallo says to himself "I wonder how they built this."

Kiya stumbles after him, grumbling and shaking sand off her clothes.

"Stupid sand's going to take forever to wash out--"

"Shh, listen!" Altallo whispers, pressing a finger and pointing to the other side of the pyramid.

Voices could be heard on the other side.

"-I can guarantee you a fair share of the profit." a woman's voice says, sounding almost flirtatious.

"I'm still wary about this," replies a deeper male voice "If we are caught--"

The man's argument was cut short by the jangle of metal. When he next speaks, his tone changes to one of careful optimism.

"Well, its just one tomb I suppose."

"If we are successful, you will gain a share of the profit." the woman says, clearly irritated. The man chuckles and Altallo could imagine him smirking with glee.

"May the gods show mercy on you." the man replies.

Hearing his footsteps coming in their direction, Kiya and Altallo dive behind a nearby slab of stone. Peeking around from their stone, they could see the man; tall, muscular and hard faced, wearing an elaborate white and red head-cloth.

"That's the medjay captain!" Kiya whispers.

As soon as he leaves, Altallo and Kiya dart out from their hiding place, just in time to see a part of the pyramid's wall close.

"A secret door!" Kiya gasps "I didn't think pyramids had these."

"This one obviously has though." Altallo replies, running his hands across the stones. "Aha! Look at this one."

He pushes at a stone which wobbles and then sinks inward. A part of the outer wall slides open, revealing a dark chamber beyond. Altallo and Kiya slip in, just as the door slid closed again, causing the tunnel to become pitch black. Kiya couldn't see anything in and stumbles into something that felt like a human body.

"Ah-ha! There we go!" Altallo says behind her, igniting a torch and light fill the chamber.

Kiya suddenly finds herself face to face with a snarling jackal face. She jumps back and gasps.

Altallo rushes forward and clamps a hand over her mouth. He then holds the torch higher. The snarling jackal head is just part of a statue, a tall figurine holding a gilded staff, his body made from black wood with gold-plaster clothing. It and another similar statue, this one is a ram, standing guard.

Beyond the statues is a corridor, its walls covered in bright hieroglyphs. There were more statues, these ones made of stone of all manner of colours and depicting a proud, confident looking man wearing a crown. Some of the statues had him sitting on a throne holding a crook and flail crossed across his chest or standing next to a woman, with her arms lovingly around his body. The torch casts flickering shadows across the statues and the hieroglyphs, making them shimmer eerily.

Kiya shivers, but then feels Altallo's hand on hers. Looking up she sees Altallo smiling softly.

"Don't be scared." he says, leading her onwards down the passage.

As they pass another statue Altallo looks at it, frowning slightly.

"I just noticed, all these statues are of the same person."

"That is Pepi the Second, the last Pharaoh of the Old Kingdom," Kiya says, examining the cartouche on one of the statues. "He ruled for so long that all his heirs died and the kingdom was lost after he died."

Flickering light emanates from the entrance to the next chamber. Altallo and Kiya creep along the side of the wall until they are at the edge the archway. Altallo hurtles into the next chamber, torch at the ready, but it is deserted. Kiya appears next to him, looking amazed.

The chamber is massive and crammed with an assortment of objects; urns, boxes with jewellery spilling from them, furniture, more statues, model boats, buildings and people and an amazing throne decorated with animals. And everywhere was the glint of gold. The light comes from a number of small square candles placed on the floor in the very centre of the room.

Kiya spots the entrance to the next chamber and crosses the room carefully. Behind her she hears a clinking noise and spots Altallo picking up a piece of jewellery in the shape of an eye.

"Put that back!" she hisses angrily at him.

Altallo hastily puts it back and scurries over to Kiya. The girl looks back at the treasure trove, a puzzled look across her face.

"That's strange. Why would tomb raiders leave all this gold alone?"

"Maybe they don't want it? After all its a weak metal," Altallo says, "We barely use it."

Before Kiya can reply, both she and Altallo become aware of voices and scraping noises from the next chamber. Peering down the corridor they could see four people at the very end. Two are dressed in white robes with hoods drawn up. The other pair include a giant elephant and a smaller scorpion, who were cutting away at a vast stone slab. One of the robed figures taps his foot irritably.

"Can't you work any faster?!" he snaps to the elephant, who twitches.

"Its heavy you know," the elephant replies tersely, "Unless if you want to have a go."

"That's the man I saw earlier; he must be the leader!" Kiya whispers. "Oh if only we could do something."

"We could get those medjay." Altallo suggests

"No they'd arrest us on sight. Well I think we should...wait, have they stopped?"

The sounds of the slab being moved had stopped. Altallo gulps and tentatively peeks around the corner.

"Well well well, what do we have here?" a voice sneers from above his head. The white hooded man looms over him. Altallo yelps in panic, pushing Kiya back towards the treasure trove.

"Go and get help!" he shouts to her, before two strong arms seize him and lift him off the ground; the elephant had him in a vice like grip.

Kiya stumbles out of the tunnel, only to find her way blocked by the scorpion who advances on her, snapping his claws threateningly. Kiya backs away from him, straight into the second hooded figure who grabs her.

"I have the girl!" she shrieks back to her partner.

"Tie her up with the other one."

Kiya and Altallo are lead or carried off back into the passage, then thrown onto the floor where the hooded woman ties their arms together. The hooded man joins her with the elephant and scorpion hovering close by.

"So," he says looking down at them. Both he and the woman pull a bronze dagger from beneath their robes; the woman presses her dagger against Altallo's throat, the man presses his into Kiya's

"You thought you could follow us like a couple of scavenging vultures? Well you will never leave this tomb alive. You peasants!" he barks at the elephant and scorpion and gestures to the slab "Get that door open. We will dispose of our little vultures later."