

Tales of the Eternals Chapter 7 Kingdom of the Pharaoh

A large sandstone boulder stands on a high dune. Huge waves of sand stretch into the blue horizon in one direction. In the other is a short stretch of desert ending on the banks of a wide river, bordered by lush greenery, in complete contrast to the arid desert. From the boulder, Altallo and Shern'aath step out and regard their surroundings. The sun shines brightly down from the cloudless sky and the sand shimmers in the heat.

Shern'aath seems interested.

"At least its not cold this time." he says happily, looking around.

"Look over there," says Altallo pointing down a hill to a flat area of stone tiles between two rocky outcrops, a wadi. "I wonder what's over there."

They slide down the dune they're on towards the depression. Closer up they see buildings built into the rocks; elegant archways boarded by statues, avenues of columns with shaded areas behind with seats and a sealed doorway. The walls are covered in strange symbols and pictures of people; humans, jackals, crocodiles, lizards, cats, elephants, lions, rams, rhinoceroses and gazelle. They are all drawn in a similar style, flat and facing one direction with stiff limbs and stylised eyes and faces. Altallo walks up to a statue made black stone of two people sat beside each other, a man and a woman. The man was strong looking and wore a pleated kilt and a striped crown. The woman had her arms around his waist lovingly. Both had calm faces.

Shern'aath wanders around a columned alcove, examining the doorway. On the stone sealing it is a strange symbol; an oval with some hieroglyphs in the centre.

"Wonder what these things are." he says out loud.

Altallo joins him at the door and touches the markings.

"They're writing! Words that stay," he adds to Shern'aath "I wonder what he says. Lets have a look round and see if we can find anything else that can help us."

Leaving the wadi, they make their way close to the river banks. Shern'aath stared surprised at the lush vegetation of papyrus, palm trees and all sorts of other plants.

As they round a tributary in the river an impressive sight meets their eyes. Across the river was a huge city, with buildings covered in white paint. Nearby is a construction site which looked almost complete, with smooth pillars covered in pictures and a pavilion with a statue of a lion headed woman. A small gang of workers were carving the last few pillars with stone tools, guided by a man wearing a red striped head-cloth who was holding a papyrus paper.

"What are they doing?" asks Shern'aath, looking impressed.

"Lets go ask." Altallo replies, briskly walking up to the site.

"Remember to try keeping it as smooth as you can and don't break it!" the foreman was calling to workers who were chipping at a large stone creating a new pillar "We've already lost six, this is one of the last!"

The workers looked up from their pillar as a strange pair of creatures approach. One of them looked human, but was speaking in a strange rolling tongue, next to him was a beast, a green scaly thing.

The foreman turns to see what had startled them. His eyes, which had black paint on the lids widened and he starts to run away.

"Flee!" He cries and the workers follow suit, the stone they were working on falls and cracks.

"Oh, we've scared them!" Altallo says, looking downhearted.

"They made a right mess." Shern'aath grunts, indicating the wrecked stone.

"These must be some clever people." Altallo says thoughtfully, wandering through the temple, a magnificent and yet very simple structure; the pillars formed an avenue to a large stone square structure containing the statue. The statue of the lion headed woman, who was standing proud, holding a staff and a strange symbol. "I think we should go to that city over there, who knows what we'll find there."

"You go, I don't want to be stared and yelled at." Shern'aath replies grumpily.

"Are you sure?" asks Altallo looking nervous.

"Yes, why you scared of going by yourself?"

Altallo didn't answer, but cast a furtive glance to the city, feeling tiny compared to it. Shern'aath pats him on the shoulder.

"Go on, you can mix yourself better than I can," he says happily "You don't want some grumpy raptor tagging along."

That managed to get a laugh out of Altallo.

After helping Shern'aath back into the ship, Altallo now finds himself outside the city gate, with a steady stream of travellers walking in and out. Most wore white pleated kilts, Altallo guessed they were locals, but others, presumably travellers from faraway, had different and more colourful clothes. Nobody paid Altallo much attention and he was able to mingle with the crowd with no trouble but he could not understand their speech.

At the gates are two guards, wearing long kilts, padded armour and blue striped head-cloths and holding spears and shields stand vigil. One is a slim pale yellow lizard and the other a bulky glossy purple scarab beetle.

Altallo notices them and an idea springs into his head. Walking past the scarab beetle he puts a hand on the beetle's wing carapace, scanning him. The beetle gives convulsive shudder and goes cross eyed, his mandibles twitching.

"Are you feeling well Paser?" asks the lizard sounding concerned.

"Just a bit dizzy," says the scarab called Paser, "I think I need to sit down."

Altallo hovered close, looking rather guiltily at the Paser.

"Can I help in anyway?" he asks.

The two guards look down at Altallo, who barely reached their chests in height.

"Ah don't worry about me little friend." Paser says, smiling down at Altallo.

The lizard meanwhile looks curiously at him.

"You don't look Egyptian, where do you come from?"

"I...I come from far away," Altallo replies uncertainly, having no idea what an 'Egyptian' is. "And are you Egyptians?"

The two glanced at each other, the lizard looking questioningly. Paser merely shrugs his shoulders.

"How long have you been travelling? You are in this very Egypt, kingdom of the might Pharaohs-" the lizard begins

"Fed by the might river Nile and oldest of all the lands. The Egyptians are the people who live in its boundaries." Paser interrupts.

"I was going to say that!" the lizard says angrily.

"You'd take too long Hakor," Paser replies, rolling his eyes and grinning at Altallo "Besides you're usually wary around foreign visitors. They don't want to see your grumpy mug."

Hakor is about to reply, but Altallo clears his throat.

"Is there anywhere in this city that you recommend visiting?" he asks

"There is the City of the gods, the largest temple in Memphis. Its a testament to great noble Pharaoh's wisdom and might and the glory of our pantheon and-"

"You're rambling again Harkor," says Paser, pulling a face.

"Where do I find this temple?" Altallo asks loudly.

"Its just down this main street," Paser says, pointing "You'll notice it easily enough."

"Thank you." Altallo says smiling and he leaves the bickering guards.

The street is wide and spacious. Houses run along either side, with walled gardens and some with ponds. All of them had a round stove outside with the delicious smell of fresh bread wafting in the air. Children ran up and down the street, chasing each other or else throwing small colourful balls full of rattles, while the older Egyptians chatted happily. As Altallo walks past an alleyway, he hears raised voices.

"I told you they were real! A thing that looked like a boy and this creature with it!" a man says, looking harassed and with a jolt, Altallo recognised the foreman at the construction site.

"Nonsense!" cries an enormous hippo, who Altallo guessed was the foreman's leader. "Probably just visiting merchants. You act like you never seen one."

"No sir, it really was something else," says another worker "It was like no lizard I had ever seen! We should try and find it and this creature disguising itself as a boy."

As the hippo replies, Altallo darts away, not wanting to be seen.

Reaching the end of the street, Altallo sees a giant rectangular building with a long sweeping staircase and large doors decorated with a scarab beetle, bordered by two narrow pyramids. Altallo looks around; the place seemed deserted, with no one nearby except for the edges of streets.

Inside, the temple is vast and impressive; the walls are covered with elaborate paintings and a pair of sphinx statues tower imposingly. The floor is smooth stone and there is no ceiling, instead there is a skylight. Like the streets outside, it appears empty, but Altallo hears voices coming from deeper in the temple.

In a large room, ringed by looming statues of gods are three people. One, a young human girl walks slowly and deliberately around the statues, holding an incense burner; a cup full of smoking pellets in a handle shaped like a hand. She wears long white robes, a necklace of green and a gold coloured belt. She is very beautiful, with olive skin, long black braided hair and brown almond eyes. She seemed to be having trouble moving, the long dress tugged at her ankles and she kept getting confused.

The other two people, a slim bodied cat with sleek auburn fur with black patterns and a large crocodile with dark green scales watch her. They both wear plain white clothes.

"Go to Amun-Ra next, no no that way!" the crocodile calls to her in a deep, rumbling voice.

The girl spins round to another statue...and falls down.

The crocodile puts a hand to his face and shakes his head. The cat rushes over to the girl and helps her up.

"Lets leave it for today, Kiya," she says. Her voice is

Kiya lifts herself off the floor, but her eyes roved to Altallo who had peered nervously into the room. Her eyes widen.

"Oh Ramos, we have a visitor!" the cat says, her ears swivelling in Altallo's direction.

As Ramos and the cat walk over to meet Altallo, Kiya saunters away.

She rushes down the temple stairs and away to a courtyard at the back of the temple. She paces, feeling embarrassed.

Just as she is about to leave, the person she saw in the temple rushes out to meet her. To Kiya, he was slightly alarming. His face was wild with red brown hair and freckles, his clothes were dusty and unkempt and he was barefooted. She shuffles awkwardly as he approaches.

"Are you alright?" he asks her and she was startled to hear his kind voice.

"I'm....I'm perfectly alright," Kiya replies, attempting to sound imperious, "A priestess of the City of the gods is always perfect, on form and willing to protect the gods."

"Seemed like you slipped." he says in a matter of fact voice.

Kiya riled up at once. Who did he think he was talking to?

"I am a priestess and should be spoken to with respect and dignity," she says haughtily "You're just an ignorant savage from the wilds, look at you! Filthy!"

And with that she sweeps past him without a backwards glance.

After a distance in an alleyway, she stops and looks back, starting to feel guilty. She sighs and continues through a maze of tight streets. At a junction she hears voices. Creeping closer she hears the voices are male.

"-if you want even a shred of gold," says one of them in a threatening snarl "You and you colleague will meet with me at the tomb tonight!"

"But sir, it is punishable by death!" replies the other, much deeper and Kiya imagined a huge powerful person "They would impale us! And the spirit of the deceased Pharaoh would haunt us in the Hall of Truth."

"If you believe that then you're a poorer fool than I thought despite your strength. Do you even want to be a tomb robber?"

Kiya stifles a gasp. She backs away, then when she was sure she had a whole street distancing her from the robbers, she ran as fast as she could.

Ending up outside the temple again, she slows down to catch her breath. Thinking wildly, she dashes up the stairs and back inside where Ramos and the cat are making offerings of food to a gilded shrine decorated with a woman her arms covered in feathers and outstretched as though she were about to fly.

"Ramos, Neferure," she gasps "Tomb robbers!"

"What?" asks Ramos looking up "What are talking about Kiya?"

"There were two tomb robbers out there," Kiya shouts "They were planning to plunder a tomb!"

There was a pause and then Ramos, stroking his scaly chin, says;

"Kiya, you're letting your imagination run away with you."

"I am not-"

"Ramos is right," adds Neferure, "Tomb robbers wouldn't speak so loudly. And even if there were any the medjay would arrest them. You have nothing to worry about."

"But-"

"Go and rest Kiya," Neferure says in a calming purr, patting Kiya on the shoulder "It's been a busy day for you here. Remember you will need to wake early for your practices and erm-"

She glances at Ramos who coughs.

"-improve your performance." she says turning back to Kiya.

Kiya sadly makes her way out of the temple. But then, she remembers the stranger. Perking up again, she runs off to find him.