

*Dr. Steven Carning, with his team of graduate students makes the discovery of a lifetime under the Great Sphinx. A hall of knowledge, left behind by an ancient civilization lost to time. Steven translate these works, looking into a window over 13,000 years old. A world of pre-ancient cities and societies comes to light, unseen for eons.*

## **The Chronicles of Atlantis: The Age of Immortals**

by Chris Paras

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THE CHRONICLES OF  
ATLANTIS

THE AGE OF



IMMORTALS

CHRIS PARAS

SECOND EDITION

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## Prologue

15,000 BCE, North-Central Europe

Ashen smoke and burning wood saturated the air. Deerskins and bear carcasses hung motionless across tree branches as Atlas walked towards the central huts of the village. The pungent odor of tanned animal hides reminded the tired explorer he was home. The middle-aged traveler slept late this morning, waking with the sun already half way to its zenith. His arrival to the village the previous night marked his return after almost two sun cycles away from his home. He remembered his daughter a little girl, with long hair and a bright smile. Upon his return he found her a young woman ready for her own homestead. To his pleasure his wife still remembered him, allowing him to express his nuptial passions after such a long trip.

*How much time lost?*

Atlas' thick bear hide leggings and footwear cracked the cold twigs and dry leaves under his feet. He knew the cold was coming, but the ferocity of the northern ice's arrival was worse than he expected. Before his expedition in search of a new home for his tribe, the stinging cool temperatures began. Now, Atlas returned to find dreadfully few of his people out and about, the consequences of the rapidly changing climate. Walking past thatch huts and hay covered dwellings the common theme

was dry, dead crops in front of most homesteads. Now he understood the importance of his mission; that was not necessarily the case those many moons and suns ago.

The path to the central huts of the lords of the village opened up into a central *agora*. In the past this *agora* was teeming with villagers and guests. Ranging from hunters with meats and skins, to travelers from far off lands introducing foreign foods, activity was never scant in the center of the village. Now, all Atlas witnessed was a couple of children playing in the dirt. He walked up to the two innocents behind a veil of smoke coming from nearby burning husk and kindle. Their faces were half covered in dirt, and their bellies were swollen. Tears emerged when he noticed the children were not playing with the dirt... they were eating it.

"Terrible, I know", stated a man's voice from his side. Atlas turned and to his pleasure he saw an old friend.

"Pelops! How are you brother!" Atlas gave the younger man a fraternal hug, and continued, "So you have returned as well. I was unsure if your journey to the south had completed. I take it you are walking to greet lords Zeus and Poseidon?"

"Yes brother. I arrived the day before last." Atlas could not help but notice his colleague's bleak face and wet eyes.

"Pelops, is all well?"

The younger man could not speak. Tears just continued to flow from tired and dirty eyes into his thick and flea infested beard. After some breaths he was able to speak, "I just came from the mountain side Atlas."

Atlas' eyes widened. One went to the mountain side for one reason only, to bury their dead. "Who?"

Raising his dreary face, Pelops spoke, "My woman and infant son. The boy did not even see a full sun! Curse Gia for bringing this northern ice to us! Curse her!"

"I am truly sorry for your loss brother. How fares your older son and daughter," compassionately replied the older traveler.

"They are as well as can be old friend." Pelops took a few more deep breaths. Standing tall he wiped his face and straightened up his straps of twined vine holding a satchel made of pig's stomach across his back. "Let us move. The lords await our report. Hopefully with my discovery we can leave this wretched and accursed place!"

"So, you had success in the south?" asked a curious Atlas.

"Aye brother, my expedition did make a discovery. There are lands to the south, after the end of the eastern branch of the Great River. It is mostly an outcropping of mountains leading into open sea. The climate is very fair but dry. The seas are blue and clear. There is a point where a scant

land bridge leads into a large island. The region before the land bridge carries valleys good for crops, and the entry area of the land bridge is ideal for strategic placement of the village. This may be our new home brother. What of your travels to the west?"

"I too have found a land brother. I travelled as far west as to the open seas where I am convinced monsters and gods lurk. There was open water as far as one can see Pelops. Truly a site to see! Following the shoreline, I came upon vast waterfalls. Entire mountain ranges pouring like rivers from this large sea into a land basin. In the distance, fairly visible to the naked eye was a large island. With the help of a local tribe of fisherman I built a simple boat and travelled to the island." Atlas pouted his chest a bit as the entrance to the central huts was approaching.

A curious Pelops asked, "I am sure the fisherman had already examined this island no? They probably served as useful guides."

Atlas smiled, "No brother. They never approached the island in their seafaring. They claimed demons from the sky approach the island and feared their wrath if they attempted to explore the island."

"Demons from the sky? Come now..." scoffed Pelops.

Atlas raised his hands and turned his lips, "I am merely a messenger brother. The day I made for

the island the fisherman warned me if I were to see lights in the sky that was a foreboding to their arrival. I acknowledged their warning and made my short voyage. What I found was magnificent. A large island teeming with life! The island is structured as a set of rings, with satellite islands surrounding its shoreline. The land was rich with vegetation and the climate was pristine!"

The two endowed explorers finally reached their destination. The large wooden doors to the royal sanctuary were rattled with cracks. Pushing the doors open Atlas felt the thick vines maintaining their integrity would not hold. Once inside, the more pleasant odor of burning leaves of chamomile and mountain tea struck both men. The large homestead was dark. Even the dirt on the ground seemed darker than it should be. Far ahead two seats were the focus of the room. To the side a third seat stayed eerily empty, a constant reminder of the fallen third royal brother, lord Hades. Two long bearded men sat in the respective seats. One with a few grey hairs starting to infiltrate his beard had an infant daughter in his lap. With Atlas entering the abode, the bearded lord placed the child in the arms of a tired woman to his side, and stood to greet the explorers, "Welcome my brothers! It is good to have you back in the fold!"

Atlas was the first to bow, "Greetings lord Zeus. It is good to be home."

With Atlas' head low, he saw Zeus step up and place a consoling hand on his partner, "I grieve for your loss brother. We have all lost this past season. This is why your charge, was so paramount for our people."

"Gratitude my lord", replied a solemn Pelops.

From the back of the room, heavy steps were heard, and creaking wood announced the standing of Poseidon. The middle son of the former lord Cronos finally spoke, "Very well then. Brothers, tell us, what have you found on your travels? Have you found a new home to save our people?"

## Chapter 1

Egypt, modern day

STANDING ON A LOW SCAFFOLD at the side of the Great Sphinx, Dr. Steven Carning put his hand on the ancient monument. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply through his nose. The Sahara sun burned his face and heated his slim, marathon runner's physique. Standing before the half-man, half-lion had been Steven's dream since he began studying archaeology, and now he was here. Finally.

He gazed at the ridges under the sphinx's eyes. The cracks were visible on its chest and inner legs; thousands of years of sand, grit, and heat showed on the stone. The flaws were evident, and they all told a story.

*What do you have to tell me?*

Steven looked around at his newly arrived team of graduate students, each eager for the day's adventures. George, Leo, and Derrick. An amalgamation of completely different characters and personalities, they were each very talented in their respective disciplines. He'd seen to that before he accepted them for this crucial dig.

"See this?" Steven pointed to longitudinal grooves on the side of the monument.

"Yep, Dr. C. Damage through time," replied George Moreland. He was tall, broad, and good-looking. He had gained some weight since Steven

had last interviewed him stateside, and now had the build of a football player who'd been off the field for a couple years. And he was bright. Damned bright.

"Not just time, George, but water. These grooves here, this is water damage, indicating the sphinx has been here for a very, very long time," Steven replied.

"Water damage in the Sahara? Come on!" George sounded surprised. He glanced at the other two graduate students standing around Steven in a semicircle. The desert wind blew dust into their faces. Everyone squinted at once, their faces crunched against the elements.

"Yes, water," Steven countered. "It's postulated that this entire region was a lush, productive land over ten thousand years ago. There were agricultural fields, trees, water sources; everything needed for human civilization. Desertification began more recently."

"How is that possible?" Leo Michaels asked. He was a handsome young man, with glossy, black hair and interesting facial features. Steven saw a hint of Native American in his eyes and Mediterranean in his olive skin. Leo bounced a bit on his heels, always enthusiastic and ambitious. "I mean, we've all read the theories and journal articles about the sphinx as a structure being much older than traditional historians believe."

George leaned forward. "Dr. Carning is one of the biggest supporters of pre-diluvian theory. He's working on his book about it, and this dig is part of that research."

"Pre-diluvian theory proposes that human settlement and civilization in this area is much, much older than anything earlier historians were capable of time-dating. With technology and better dig techniques, we can find things never before possible," Steven answered. He stepped down off the scaffolding, onto a short ladder, and into a small dig pit. He and the students traversed the site at the base of the sphinx. The wind blew dust everywhere, relentlessly, even in a trench dug taller than their heads. Steven stopped at a small tent in the trench to gather the students together. He tugged up his hoodie with the university logo and still felt grit land beneath his bandana.

"Look, none of us are Indiana Jones. We're scientists; no one is going to shoot at us, chase us down with horses or tanks, and we're not going to 'save the world' from some ancient evil. What I hope we will do here is find solid evidence of pre-ancient history. Human civilization is older than standard history presents, and we are going to prove it. The gods of mythology had to have come from somewhere—"

"Dr. C, you don't really believe all that crap, do you? Zeus? Poseidon? Hippolyta?" George waved a gritty hand. "That's stuff for special effects in

movies. Good for Spielberg or Lucas, but real archaeologists? Come on!"

Steven gazed at them evenly. Graduate students were chosen for their experience in fieldwork, their passion for discovery, and their intellect, not their beliefs. He looked back to George. "I'm glad you're questioning me; always ask questions. Lack of questioning presumes you have all the answers, and, George, I know you're not *that* arrogant."

George shook his shaggy hair as the others laughed. "Well, I'm pretty arrogant."

"Remember this lesson: never be satisfied. Once you are, your intellect is destroyed. You're dead. However, answer me this. George, you've read some of the dissertations by some of the most revered archaeologists in the world regarding recently discovered underwater cities, such as the Yonaguni Monument in Japan, Dwarka off the coast of India, and the newly discovered underwater city next to Cuba?"

"Yes, I have, boss. It's a long plane ride over here." George smiled and got smiles from everyone in return.

"Good. Now, based on those reports, either our ancestors had submarines and underwater gear," Derrick Peming snorted at the comment, and Steven nodded, "or more likely, these cities and monuments were built when the sea levels were lower; much lower, given the distance of these monuments from the modern shoreline."

“All right, I can buy that, Dr. C. That’s not necessarily a farfetched theory.”

“That’s great, George, we’re on the same page, but riddle me this. How long ago were the sea levels that low, allowing the shoreline to be that far out?” Steven snagged another bandana from his pocket and wiped his face. Even in the shade of the tent, the heat made them sweat.

The group remained silent for a bit, brows furrowed, even George.

“Let me tell you,” Steven turned and trudged on through the trench. He was always surprised by the variety of colors in the sand. It was more intricate than simple, with light brown, dark brown, dark green, specked with grains of white. They walked on through the dig. “Over 13,000 years ago was the epoch of the last ice age. So, if these structures were once on land during this epoch, that would indicate human civilization is much, much older than mainstream archaeology and history believe it to be. Is that not so? Also, the story of the Great Flood has always intrigued me. It is consistent in every major ancient culture around the world, from the ancient Meso-American civilizations, the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, India, and famously, in the Bible. Why? Why would all these different cultures, separated by enormous distances, have the same basic story about a civilization-ending flood? There must be some

relationship with the end or melting of the last ice age and these unknown, older civilizations. “

“If evidence supports a flood theory, then that could tie into some of the evolutionary theory that biologists are working on,” Derrick finally chimed in. He was more often quiet in groups, Steven had found, but his sharp mind was always working. He was ambitious as well.

“Exactly right,” Steven said. “The ancient Greeks called this previous age the Age of Gold. An age when man was perfect, and gods ruled the earth. The Sumerians have a parallel story of a previous age of the gods. They called these gods the Annunaki, who created hybrid men called the Adamu. These gods were said to be roaming the Earth during this pre-ancient time, and to have enslaved man.”

Derrick chimed in again, eager, apparently trying to show off. “Didn’t the ancient Egyptians have the famous ‘kings list,’ Dr. C.? A list of their gods who were supposedly the first pharaohs?”

“That’s right, Derrick,” Steven answered with a touch of distaste; it was annoying that Derrick liked showing up his colleagues. Steven preferred that the team work together without rivalry, but that was probably impossible. You couldn’t choose brilliant, questing minds and expect their owners not to have goals and ambitions of their own.

They climbed out of the trench surrounding the sphinx and trudged to the main tents where the

crew leaders and Steven spent much of their days. Scruffy folding tables were laid out, covered with dig equipment, blueprints, scrawled notes, old computers, a dirty Mr. Coffee machine, and empty coffee cups. The foursome poured some coffee and sprawled at the various tables, sipping and sweating.

George grinned and shook his head. "You're like a kid in a candy store here. All of this digging and site work, you're having too much fun." He leaned over and punched Steven lightly on the arm. "You should be paying the foundation for this, not the other way around."

"Archaeology is fun," Steven admitted. He drained his cup and stood, back to professor mode, as if in a classroom once more. "Now, back to our pre-diluvian theory discussion. I'm convinced that many of the myths we learned as children and many of the ancient religions that existed in the past, and still exist today, are not just coincidence. We've inherited the history of this pre-diluvian world through oral tradition and mythology, and these stories probably have foundations in some reality. The stories of Zeus and Heracles told in the agora of Pericles' Athens were probably very different from the events they were originally based on. Of course, they ended up being manipulated and altered through time, as all oral traditions are." Steven smoothed out one of the frayed blueprints.

"Your critics don't think so. The last *Journal of World Archaeology and Social Comment* had Levin's article; he refutes everything you're looking for." George bent over to re-tie a bootlace, his belly showing over his belt. Derrick fidgeted, and Leo sat back, eyebrows raised. The grad students were uncomfortable with the talk of Professor Levin and his well-known feud with Steven.

"His mind-set is too narrow," Steven said as he frowned. Levin seemed to hate his guts and had shown it at the last conference where they both gave papers. "You've got to look beyond the obvious and *feel* for the logical, what's beyond logical—" They heard the sound of running, and then a disheveled, heavyset man scrambled around the corner. Dust kicked up around all of them, and George waved a hand, coughing.

"Shane, what is it?" Steven asked.

"Dr. Carning, we found something!" Shane Daggert, the crew leader, barreled into the tent. His dirty blond hair was truly dirty now, filled with sand. He had tanned and thickened skin from the sun, having spent most of his career as a dig supervisor. Above his hazel eyes a three-inch scar cut across his forehead, a dig accident years ago. His thick wristbands were a smart way to keep sweat off of delicate dig findings.

"It may be a room," Shane said as he gasped for air and put one hand on his substantial chest.

Steven looked him over, mind whirling. "What's the evidence?"

"A small fall-through and a hollow sound. The wall seems to have been deliberately hidden," Shane said in a heavy exhale of breath as he smiled with satisfaction. "Plus, the sonography of course."

Steven nodded and held back his own smile. He turned to his three students. "Well, team, it looks like your school days are over; time to suit up. Derrick grab your laptop with the satellite geography program to translate the sonography report. Leo, bring your tablet and, being that you're the youngest one here, make sure you don't undercut any of the material and context. We do not need false data."

"Yes, sir," Leo replied anxiously. He frowned and bit his lip.

"George, with me. Let's go!" Steven felt his pulse speed up, and he consciously held back his excitement. To put his critics to rest, and to be able to finally report to his sponsors after three months some success on the dig! So close after all these years!

The foursome scrambled after Shane, dodging ladders and workers clad in coverings and turbans that billowed, past small excavators and tents. When they arrived at the sphinx's right paw, an enclosed tent reinforced with dual layers of fabric had been set up in an attempt to keep the dust out. Derrick connected his laptop to the sonography

machine, both wrapped in clear vinyl to protect the delicate mechanisms.

Shane pointed to the laptop's screen. "Here are what we think are the borders of the room. It seems to extend over three hundred feet here and here," his thick fingers flicked around, "then narrowing down to here. Almost six thousand square feet from what we can tell." He nodded to Steven and George and let loose with a smile, something cold and triumphant in his gaze. Steven felt an unexplained touch of unease.

Shane gazed at the computer screen intently. "It's big, so whatever is down there is probably important as well."

A clatter at the entrance forced the group's attention from the computer screen to the tent flap.

Even in a desert, bombarded by wind, sand, and the harsh sun, she was still beautiful. One could imagine Cleopatra's beauty when looking at her. Jet-black hair was worn coiled and pinned up. Olive skin indicated her Portuguese lineage, and she seemed to constantly try hiding her perfect figure under loose camo-fatigues. George and Derrick both raised their eyebrows, Leo bounced on the balls of his feet, and Shane straightened up to stand tall. Lee-Ann Brimm stepped into the circle of men, somehow sinuous, even while dusty.

"I just received this e-mail from Director Hull." She waved a printout. "The sponsor wants a report, and they want it now!"

“Not right this second, Lee-Ann,” Steven said. “Here, meet George, Leo, and Derrick, the new dig team, my students that just arrived from the States.” He did quick introductions between them. “Lee-Ann has been working with me for the past year on campus and has been on site here almost two months, so she knows her way around. She’s my first assistant for this expedition, and she’ll be giving you the layout and the schedules.”

Steven kept his eyes on the screen deliberately, trying not to think about the night before last. Their fumbling kiss, the curve of her hips beneath his fingers ... He pushed his mind to focus on the dig. “Lee-Ann, I’ll catch up with you later in the day. You can e-mail them and tell them we’ve had a breakthrough.”

“On what?” she asked excitedly.

“Just tell them we’ll have something exciting to report on later.”

“Ok. Let me run to reply and I will be back quick to help with the dig.” With a quick nod to the men, Lee-Ann turned and left the tent.

They spent the rest of the day digging, the crews meticulously bringing in equipment as needed for heavy work, hand-digging done by Shane’s experienced crew for more delicate operations. But Steven and his graduate group couldn’t stop themselves from getting in the fray as well, and Steven found George an asset. Despite his bulk and large frame, he was surprisingly careful

when brushing away thousands of years of dirt and sand.

Just after four in the afternoon, Steven found a stairwell going down approximately two stories. It was sandy but clear, and after a quick sonograph to establish its safety, they all trooped down.

At the base of the stairs stood an odd door. Steven's fingers outlined the entryway with reverence. The group ran their hands over the crystalline material. The door was clear yet thick, almost like a glass block but much less transparent. Beyond the door, they could only discern darkness.

"This would be a sidewall of the sphinx," he said. "But what is this made of? It's almost like it's floating."

George shook his head. "I've never seen anything like this."

"Me neither," Steven said. "It reminds me of the questionable crystal skulls of Central and South America."

The door was perfectly circular, with a rim inside the outer edge.

Leo ran a finger around the rim and bent close to the door. "They're so small, but they look like bulls' heads. See the intimation of the nose and these here, as the horns?"

They took turns peering closely at the images.

"Bulls..." Steven breathed.

An image below the rim appeared to be gold, injected and shaped inside the crystalline

substance. They all stared at it, curious and puzzled.

"Wait a minute." Lee-Ann deliberately stepped away from the door, her gaze steady on the image. "Ah, yes! Come back here. I think it's meant to be viewed from a distance. It looks almost like a three-dimensional map of Earth." Lee-Ann pointed. "But it seems distorted, different from modern-day maps."

"Right, right." George stepped back next to her, and his mouth opened. "Yes! The Atlantic Ocean is smaller than the present day. The Nile River is running from southwest to northeast, cutting across the northern corner of modern-day Chad, continuing into the Sudan, and branching to the Suez." He moved back to the door, and his fingers traced the map outline with care.

Steven stepped up and pointed as well. "And here, the Mediterranean Sea looks more like a great lake, and the Strait of Gibraltar is more defined. And are these waterfalls? See here, where the Indian sub-continent should be, there is this tremendous landmass, with islands and inroads of great rivers. And it spans southward, almost reaching modern-day Australia."

"Neat," Leo said. "Do you think this may have been what they thought their world looked like?"

The intricate detail of this door, the craftsmanship of the crystal, and the darkness

beyond amazed Steven. Within him, his intellect and curiosity churned.

*What was beyond this door? What would the room reveal?*

With his heart pounding, he felt drops of sweat on the back of his neck. He felt he had discovered something, and he was literally knocking on the door. Dirty fingers played on the crystal doorway, feeling its coolness and mystery beneath his hand.

## Chapter 2

Egypt, modern day

AT FIRST LOOK, Steven thought there was no way of opening the door. He felt all around it, with fingers coarse from sand. No hinges, no doorjamb, certainly no knob. George, Derrick, Leo, and Lee-Ann each did the same, their brows furrowed.

"What's the point of a door you can't open?" Derrick asked with irritation.

"Ah, hang on, we'll get it," Steven replied. When he stepped back from the door, he noticed a faint blue line showing on a block underneath the circular door. It seemed to emanate from something under the door itself. Steven tried pushing spots like a button and then tried to move the block under the door, pressing harder, softer, toward the front, then the back. Nothing had any effect. He did notice wherever he touched this blue line, the color faded and then reappeared when he removed his fingers. He sat back on his haunches for a moment, and then as ideas often come for no logical reason, he ran his index and middle finger across the blue line in one straight motion. He heard mechanisms churning, the throaty grind of gears, and the groan of stone walls moving.

The door opened.

Steven took a deep breath and glanced at the others. George and Derrick's faces were flushed with excitement, while Leo looked just lost in

amazement. Lee-Ann's face was smooth and calm. She raised her eyebrows and gave him a soft smile of encouragement.

"All right, team," he said and flicked on his flashlight. "Let's go."

Behind the door, stairs led down. Steven tested the first few steps with care, and finding them intact, he stepped down more quickly. The air was stale and dry, musty with age. Twelve steps down, his flashlight revealed a large room, filled with rows upon rows upon rows of shelves; dozens of them, extending beyond the flashlight's reach.

"Oh my God, it is *Raiders of the Lost Ark!*" George's voice was quiet.

Steven turned back to the group. "Let's get the temporary lights set up so we can take a look."

George scrambled about, deftly setting up the portable lighting system. In minutes, four bright spotlights shone through the dimness of the underground room. The team stood near the entrance for several moments, mouths agape.

"Wow," Derrick said. "This is...I mean, wow."

"Wow is right," Steven said, gazing at the room in awe. "This is an amazing discovery. Imagine the knowledge locked in these items."

He shone his flashlight up and down and began walking among the shelved rows. They were filled with books and scrolls, models of what appeared to be complex machinery and tools. Every three or four rows, the shelves held a crystal skull at both

ends, of different colors and hues. Some skulls were large, some were small, and others had certain features enhanced, such as a forehead or the eye sockets.

Beyond the shelves, hung on the walls, were more maps composed of the crystalline substance that resembled what they had found on the door. These maps were larger and more detailed. Raised sections seemed to show mountain ranges with narrow crevices for rivers.

Steven stepped over to the wall and raised a hand over one. "Look, this looks like the continent of Africa, the continents of North and South America, and a large island off the coast of Morocco, extending as far north as Spain."

"And this," Lee Ann pointed out, "this looks to be a large land mass south of what's now India."

George and Derrick began examining the wall maps as well, and they all absorbed the room's import in silence. The three-dimensional carvings were all in the crystalline substance, with colors or dye injected into the carvings to provide contrast. Steven was struck by the resemblance to modern-day mapping technique: the use of scale, which seemed in order; the colors of blue, green, brown, and tan to denote water, forests, and desert, all seemingly accurate as to climate and geographic region.

As they worked their way further into the room, they found its center. There were two stands

in a ring on the floor, both nearly a half meter tall and almost as wide, and each held a book. The book covers were of the same crystalline material but darker, as if black smoke floated in the crystal. Symbols were engraved on the covers. One showed  $\text{C}\overline{\text{O}}\text{R}\text{a}\approx\text{m}$ ; the other showed  $\text{C}\overline{\text{O}}\text{R}\text{ }\text{+}\text{D}\text{ }\text{+}\text{A}$ .

"Oh my God, look at these!" Steven whispered. He snagged a pair of gloves from a pocket and tugged them on eagerly. The team stepped closer, and he felt Lee-Ann's breath behind him. He carefully opened one of the books and found beautifully written pages, pages that initially he thought were papyrus, but they seemed to have been processed with an oil, perhaps to prevent degradation over time. The pages were filled with maps, drawings of buildings, portraits, symbols, and lettering. Each book held nearly one thousand pages.

Steven paged through with care, scarcely daring to breathe on them.

"I don't know this language," he said. "Any of you recognize this?"

George, Derrick, Leo, and Lee-Ann stepped closer. George pointed to a line. "This resembles early Phoenician and cuneiform, but it's not exact to the time period. I'd have to cross-reference this with my files. I can do that tonight when I get online and can pull from my textbooks on my tablet."

"We can send video as well and see if the language department back in the States can give us some input," Lee-Ann spoke up. "It may be a new language, one we haven't seen before." She pointed and shook her head. "See here, this J-type symbol? It resembles the Phoenician letter for L, and this circle with an X in it resembles the Phoenician T, but these drawings above? I have no idea what they are or what they mean. That doesn't quite fit together."

"We'll need a team of translators, for sure," Steven said. "For now, though, let's get the teams in here and start cataloguing. Lee-Ann, you lead the team on the scrollwork in these books. Derrick, your dissertation was on maps; you take on the wall maps. George and Leo, you manage the documentation of everything. Standard procedures for all projects; you know what to do. We need to keep this organized and the original artifacts intact. I don't want the integrity of the dig or the findings to come into question. Ever."

Steven took a deep breath and gazed about the room, and then he looked at each of them in turn. They all looked excited, eager, and anxious to start exploration. "Go!"

ΨΨΨ

The next few days were a flurry of work. Steven spent most of his days in the newfound room, jumping between supervising the team and eagerly

exploring the room on his own. The students and site diggers combed through the room, taking samples of all kinds. Lee-Ann and a team of technicians worked on the scrolls, carefully unrolling them, scanning and photographing them from all angles, and then trying translations. Derrick did the same with the maps on the walls, using sonographs, heat-seeking cameras, and other technology to help him sift through knowledge thousands of years old.

One afternoon, Steven took a breather and found George in the main tent. "Want some tea?" he asked and opened the mini-fridge in the corner.

George raised a Mountain Dew. "I'm good." He nodded at the laptop. "Look at this, boss; see what you think."

Steven wiped his face with the cold bottle of tea he had taken and moved around next to George. A gust of wind blew around more grit, and they both reached to wipe off the vinyl covering the computer.

"This is some data about the crystalline samples. We know they're not crystal as we know it." George scrolled through several screens and pointed here, then there, keeping up a steady stream of complex explanation. Steven was no chemist, but he could tell the crystallography was different. George went on for a bit, and most of what he said went over Steven's head.

"Wait." Steven held up a grimy hand; he'd been digging beneath the bookstands in the library room. "You're saying this isn't a substance found on earth? Then what is it?"

George shrugged and looked abashed. "We haven't done a full analysis yet; the samples haven't reached the lab in New York. But based on what I can pull up from here, it doesn't look like anything seen before. It looks like crystal, but it's not. It acts like glass, but it's not. It's strong, like metal, but it's not. We're not sure what it is. Yet."

"Good work so far, George." Steven said. "Just keep going."

"Any progress on the translations?" George took a huge gulp of Mountain Dew and burped.

Steven smiled. "Glad you're enjoying your caffeine fix there." They sat at the crew table covered with dirty plates and utensils, leftover cereal from breakfast, and tea glasses. Steven cleared his usual space and settled into his stool with a groan. "The translations. Slow going, too slow for my taste."

"You said it might be a new language?"

"Yes, I think it is. We've been sending video and scans back to the labs, but even New York hasn't made much progress. They even asked the ancient linguistics department at Yale, which is one of the best in the world, to take a look. Nothing significant has come as of yet. Well, they're 83 percent sure that they've got sun and moon figured out." Steven

gave a brief smile. "That's something anyway. But it's just so frustrating!"

"It is that," George agreed.

"A new language! Unlike anything we've ever seen. Imagine what Yale or U of Chicago will say! I just feel we're on the precipice of a huge discovery." Steven slapped his hand on the table, and the liquids shook. "Someone wrote these books. Who? How long ago? What do the books say? Did the same people also create the chamber? What kind of civilization can create something like this?"

"Questions like that are why we're here." George slurped up the last of his drink and rose, stretching. "Back to the data, Doc. Catch you at dinner?"

Steven nodded absently, his mind back on the book, those thick pages, the symbols on them.

*What could it all mean?*

ΨΨΨ

Steven didn't make it to dinner that night or to breakfast the next day. He worked obsessively on the books, printing out the scans of the pages, trying different codes and combinations. For the next few days, he rose at six and collapsed into his bed at midnight, feverishly working on the translations.

Lee-Ann stopped by more than once, leaning over him, letting her shirt front brush over his

sleeves. He usually moved away, quickly tamping down the memories of their afternoon together at her apartment so many months ago.

"How goes it?" she asked.

Steven shook his head and scrubbed at his sweaty face. "I think I'm making some progress, but it's tricky." He rose to move away from her. "Tea?"

Lee-Ann pulled up the coiled rope of hair from her neck. "Only if it's iced," she replied with a small smile. She eased closer, and Steven swallowed as he fixed their drinks.

*I never should have seen her that night. This could be a problem.*

He managed to make small talk and kept an uncomfortable gaze on her as she stepped smoothly around his tent. After some awkward moments, he decided to just be direct. "This feels wrong, Lee. I don't think we should see each other this way."

Lee-Ann's gaze narrowed, something unsettling and flat in her eyes. "We're both adults, Steven. Surely we can make this work."

He stepped behind the small table made of milk crates, away from her. "I prefer we keep this professional."

"Whatever you say." But her small smile was sensuous and enticing. The tent flap whisked behind her as she left.

ΨΨΨ

Later that evening, while in his tent working on the books, Steven heard a shuffle in the sand and a peculiar cough. He glanced at the clock: 2:00 a.m. Steven raised his head for a moment, listening, and then shrugged it away.

*Probably Leo or George.*

He bent over his makeshift desk, eyes gritty and tired.

The tent flap snapped open.

"Hello, Steven," said a voice in an odd and heavy accent.

Startled, he turned around and saw a man dressed in black robes to his ankles, with a dark turban on his head.

The figure spoke again. "Do not be afraid. I am Father Alexios from the monastery of Saint Catherine, in the Sinai Desert." The man was tall and thin, his robes flapping around his narrow frame. His eyes were deep and intense.

"Alexios?" Steven rose from his work, curious and nervous at once. "Why do I know that name?"

"I am honored that you may have heard of our order. Ours is the first documented monastery in history. We have been protecting this site and others for almost two thousand years. We inherited this responsibility from the priests of Ra at Memphis, when Christianity became the dominant faith of the Roman Empire."

Alexios bent his head briefly and pulled out a bundle from beneath his robes. "It seems the Lord has finally allowed the world to learn of its true past. I was sent to help you provide the truth to the world and prepare the way. We have been watching over this for a very, very long time." With that, he dropped a group of scrolls onto the desk in front of Steven.

The scrolls were made of papyrus with two gold circular latches around each, maintaining their integrity. Steven grabbed for them in a second. They were still damp, almost greasy. Somehow, these documents were maintained throughout the ages with some sort of treatment. His hands trembled.

"May I?" he asked Father Alexios.

The father nodded gravely.

Steven opened up the scrolls and felt an unbidden grin on his face. It was the language of the books, and directly under each sentence was a sentence in ancient Phoenician, some of which he recognized instantly. Beneath each line was the same sentence in cuneiform, and underneath that the same sentence in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs.

"It's a Rosetta Stone!" Steven gulped and gazed up at the father.

"One that the monks of St. Catherine's have been copying for millennia. The Roman emperor Justinian the first, commissioned our monastery to be built, with the intent of inheriting and

protecting the scrolls from their previous guardians, the priests of Memphis and Alexandria. These are the keys to humankind's past. We were entrusted with these scrolls and ordered to provide them when the world was ready."

"This is astonishing," Steven whispered. The pages felt almost warm beneath his fingers, and he stroked the papyrus in awe. The translations! The knowledge!

"I see that you can offer the care they deserve," Alexios said. The peculiar cough sounded again, and then the distinct *whuff* of an irritated camel. "My ride." Alexios bowed his head once more.

Steven bent over the scrolls, eyes wide, his pulse hammering in his veins. When he looked up moments later, Father Alexios was gone.

ΨΨΨ

With the new key in hand from Father Alexios, Steven could not stop working. He translated letter for letter, word for word, phrase for phrase. He worked through the night and following day, stopping only for needed bathroom breaks or a drink of water.

A single day became two, and two days became four. Steven had completely lost the presence of time. A week later, Lee-Ann stuck her head inside his tent and wrinkled her nose. "What are you doing and why aren't you showering?"

Steven tore his gaze from the books and his fevered scrawling. He blinked. "Oh, uh? What?" He scratched his face and realized he hadn't shaved for several days.

"And when was the last time you ate anything? We haven't seen you at meals for three days." Lee-Ann stepped inside, and the tent flap closed behind her. Her steps were smooth as she glided closer. "What is that?"

Steven bristled for some reason, questioning his judgment. But perhaps that was normal after taking over the translation. He instinctively closed the scrolls and rose to block Lee-Ann's view. "I think I've made some progress; some of the symbols are coming clear."

Lee-Ann peered around him. "Are those new scrolls?"

"Uh, not really. It's something ... different."

"Did you send them to New York?" Lee-Ann's dark eyes were flat, almost cold.

"Ah, not yet. I, uh, just got them."

"Really?" Lee-Ann stepped closer and tapped Steven on the chest. Her hand lingered, just for a moment. "You need to take a break, and for god's sake, please take a shower."

"Sure." He nodded. "In a while. I just want to finish this next page."

"Today!"

"I will—today. I promise."

"And we need your input down at the dig. George has some questions, and I'm sure Derrick will too. As far as Leo goes, well, he's still a bit of a rookie."

"Sure. See you later." And Steven turned back to his desk eagerly.

ΨΨΨ

He did take a break later that afternoon, but only after tucking away the translation scrolls into a backpack and carrying them with him. He didn't want to leave them in his tent. After stopping down at the dig and giving the team direction as needed, he hit the makeshift shower stalls, enjoying the water heated by the sun, feeling the grit and sweat wash away. While there, he couldn't help remembering his encounter with Lee-Ann in New York City from a few months back. They had a meeting set up to discuss the dig and her potential job, and he'd gone upstairs to knock on her door. It was unlocked, a surprise, even in the high-end building with the security of a doorman. It wasn't the type of place he expected to find a graduate student. Steven entered, partly out of concern, partly out of curiosity.

He found Lee-Ann in an elegantly appointed bathroom, coming out of the shower, half-naked, with only her hips partially covered by a towel. Lee-Ann seemed surprised and quickly covered herself. Steven, just as quickly, apologized and ran

out of the apartment. They met downstairs a few minutes later and both laughed about it. Steven suspected then that Lee-Ann was attracted to him and wondered if the whole episode was staged.

His thoughts quickly returned to the present. He was so close to the discovery of a lifetime—of a millennium—he could feel it. His thirst for understanding was endless. After all his years—a near decade—of work, he could prove that he wasn't crazy, that pre-diluvian theory was correct. And in his gut, he felt that what he might find could indeed change mankind forever. He dried and re-dressed, picked up his backpack, and then jogged back to his tent.



After another lost week in endless work, he finally deciphered the language. He was right; it did seem to be a precursor language to Phoenician, which consequently also made it a precursor to ancient Greek. When he translated the cover of the first book, at first, he didn't believe he could be correct. So, he tried again, and again, each time with different postulations of language, and the result was always the same.

He wiped quickly at the tears that filled his eyes. With disbelief and faith at the same time, he wrote the words on a simple piece of white paper:

*A Testament to Dias and Heracles: The Great Princes of Atlantis ...*

*From the writings of Daedalus, Chief natural science advisor,*

*Before I take the time now in my old age to sit and write the accounts that follow, I must confess that the sadness in my heart is only surpassed by the misery in my soul. The generation that lives now cannot understand the loss of beauty and majesty they endure. They live in darkness, and yet they are blind to it.*

*All I hear these days from our youth are mere words. "I heard there used to be ..." "My grandfather told me of ..." "There once was a place ..."*

*The great ones foretold what would happen to the world after the cataclysm, and I am at least thankful that they were not present to see the exact devastation that human ingenuity has suffered. For myself, the pain is tenfold in my soul because I was there. I was there to see the majestic towers overlooking the great western sea. I have seen man obtain amazing knowledge and understanding of the universe he lives in. I have seen truly noble leaders, who would rather sacrifice their own lives rather than give up a drop of freedom and liberty their people possess. I was there at the pinnacle of their accomplishment, and I was there at their nadir of despair. I have seen the gods of the old and the Great War that initiated the end of everything good.*

*In an age when the world had centers of enlightenment, one stood out amongst them all. One place, which when its name was whispered inspired*

*nothing but hope and joy in the ears that listened. A place where an individual stood for the many, and many stood for an individual. Saying the name brings a tear to my eye, and with great despondence, I must say it ...*

*Atlantis, A place where humanity was elevated in body and in soul.*

Steven kept reading, his mind filling with images and words as his gaze raced over the pages that followed.

*The true story of Atlantis...*

## Chapter 3

Poseidenia, Atlantis

"WELCOME, PRINCES DIAS AND HERACLES!" The head priest of Poseidon, Ladeomon, gave a respectful bow to the two brothers striding into the outdoor temple. His long, white cloak billowed in the cool ocean breeze. "What a lovely day for a coronation!"

"Indeed," Dias agreed, and gazed calmly about the temple of Poseidon at the base of Mount Atlas. Poseidon's tomb rested at the top of the mountain, and the wind from the ocean swept across the stone and rock of the building. It was a bright day in early fall, and the sunlight reflected off the princes' heavy jewelry: Dias adorned with a heavy ring of orichalcum, his younger brother Heracles, with bracelets of the same stone on each wrist. The burnish of golden-red metal gleamed as if lit from within.

"A fine day," Heracles spoke in a deep voice that fit his immense physique. He strode next to Dias, not precisely at his shoulder, but neither behind him. Dias was always aware of where his brother stood, both literally and figuratively.

The priest and the princes strolled through the gathering crowd, heading up the stairs toward the main stage. The people parted respectfully before them with careful nods and bows; some whispering, Dias noticed as they passed. He also noticed those loyal to Lord Cadiz and the house of

Aries in the roped-off guest of honor section. They whispered among themselves, eyes downcast between sharp glances at the brothers.

"I see our detractors have arrived," Dias sighed. He unconsciously fingered his sword, always at his side.

"Of course," Heracles agreed. "The carrion feeders will always show their feathers at a party; they hope for the leftovers. At least Lord Cadiz himself stayed home."

Though Heracles was the younger prince, twenty-two years of age, he was larger than Dias, about two meters in height with a very muscular build and wide shoulder span. Dark blue eyes stood out and his short brown hair was brushed down toward his forehead. Today he wore a brown vest-shirt with red trim that perfectly fit his form. On the bottom, he wore a traditional, formal loin skirt of rich brown and red linen, down to his ankles. His wristbands gleamed magnificently in the sun. Cast in platinum, with orichalcum at the center, each sat directly over the top of his wrists, augmenting his substantial physical prowess.

The priest led them through the crowd and then up the stairs onto the stage. There Lord Xiphos dictated positions and managed the spectacle, pointing here and there, directing other servants. Xiphos served as the lord chamberlain of the royal household. The chamberlain served King Atlas, father of the great princes, and now

continued his role for the sons of Atlas. Taller than most men, he had peppered, long hair and a bald spot on his scalp. Dias had grown used to Xiphos's changing appearance over the years and nodded to the chamberlain.

A glance over the enormous crowd caused Dias to fidget with his orichalcum ring.

"Stop that, Your Highness," murmured Xiphos in a paternalistic tone.

Dias looked back at the chamberlain and gave a quiet smile in acceptance of his error. Once belonging to their father, after his death twelve years earlier, Dias inherited the ring and wore it on state occasions, but it never seemed to rest easy on his hand.

The older brother, at age twenty-eight, Dias' fit physique and shoulder girth, were appreciated. He was just less than two meters tall and had bright, clear blue eyes and dirty blond hair worn in a random, wavy style. A mustache and thin beard on his chin completed his masculine looks.

For the coronation ceremony, he wore an ivory, sleeveless shirt with purple trim and a matching skirt. The platinum-based ring he wore, honed engraved images of bulls' heads and horns on the outside of the band, leading to the large orichalcum stone in its center.

Dias and Heracles had taken their father's death those years ago quite hard. Once he was gone, their mother, Demeter, took the role of queen

mother and regent. Two moons ago, the queen mother had passed away due to fever and infection of the lungs, thus leading to the formal coronation of the princes now.

Priest Ladeomon and the brothers of thunder, as they were often called, stood at center stage. The only sound was the caw of seabirds wheeling overhead.

Ladeomon advanced through the ceremony quickly, leading the prayers to Poseidon and Zeus, asking for their blessings. Finally, he held up both arms and raised them to the blue sky above. "Lord Poseidon, I call upon you, with your brother Zeus, to send us your grace on this great day. Today, in front of your holy nation, Lord Poseidon, we crown the next generation of your sons to lead this nation to further greatness. May your blessings see that our nation, the greatest nation on Gia, finds further greatness so the generations to come may never forget the name Atlantis. May you grant these men wisdom, patience, strength, fortitude of character, and morality to lead your great people."

He then turned to the younger prince. Ladeomon picked up a trident, clearly ancient, with the marks of time and use dug into the metal. It was said to have been the trident of Poseidon himself. He placed the trident on Heracles's right shoulder.

"Heracles, son of Atlas, I hereby entitle thee *prinkipon ki megan strategon Atlantidon*, prince

and grand commander of Atlantis. May you defend us for peace and prosperity.” He then carefully laid down the trident and reached up to place the crown on Heracles’s head, rising on his toes to reach. He set the ruby bull’s head above the bridge of the tall prince’s nose. Its gold band gleamed in the sun, and the rubies reflected back red light, like blood.

Heracles flushed a bit with that; only Dias noticed his brother’s excitement. Now it was his turn. Ladeomon again picked up the ancient trident and placed it on Dias’s right shoulder.

“Dias, son of Atlas, I hereby entitle thee *megan prinkipon ki archontan Atlantidon*, crown prince and lord of all Atlantis and her territories. May you lead us into peace and prosperity.” The crown was then set on Dias’s head, heavy and wide, and he felt it rest just so against his skull. His crown was also gold and purple, a bit larger than Heracles’s, and had a ruby with two adjoining emeralds as the center stones.

“I present to you, Atlantida, your *prinkipes!*” Ladeomon bowed and then raised his arms to the heavens, and the crowd below cheered and whistled and waved their arms. The noise echoed around the temple’s walls, and Dias raised his face to the sun, feeling its warmth, praying for its solid strength in the days to come.

ΨΨΨ

The slight burn on the side of his tongue irritated Heracles.

*Damn tea!*

"You were warned highness. The tea was too fresh to be poured", admonished the old chamberlain.

"Oh, hush now Xiphos!" Heracles clapped back, gently nudging the chamberlain. The duo continued walking, appreciating the serenity of the large arches and simple walls.

"I have not been to this side of the palace since I was a child. I forgot even its presence!" commented Heracles.

"Tis true highness. This is an older wing of the palace. King Atlas added the current wing we all reside in upon his coronation. I remember his words, 'Xiphos, I wish to move away from the blood and the past'. He was a sharp man."

"Aye, he was", was the quiet response Heracles gave. Even now, the mention of his father's name stung his heart, "... and he despised spilling of blood, especially innocent blood. Anyhow, I see we have arrived... I think?" The archaic halls led into an open square course. In the middle of this course were two lines of young men and women; their ages ranged from near toddlers to reaching the throws of adulthood. The lines were disciplined and ordered.

*I like that!*

In front of this congregation stood his brother. Tall and confident, covered in a simple ivory robe, Dias continued speaking to the group. "Brothers and sisters, session was good today. You must continue your practice and focus. Many of you are maturing in the use of your humors. Continue this, and remember, there is never enough training and focus. Whatever energy you put in is the energy you shall receive. Such is the law of the cosmos. This is a lifestyle brothers and sisters, not a way to pass your time. Thank you!" With that Dias gave short clap and bow, and the students returned the reverence.

Slight dust and small rocks flew as the congregation scattered. Some remained and continued talking. Others practiced some motions on their own. Heracles noticed two in a corner, a boy with a seemingly older girl. They stood in front of one another, and perched their hands against each other, and just stood there, motionless. "Brother, it is nice for you to join us!" proclaimed Dias as he gave Heracles a quick hug.

"Dias, what is all of this." the strong man asked, perplexed.

Dias gave a warm smile, and Heracles could not help but notice how the sun's rays complimented his brother's demeanor so well. "Herac... it is my turn now. I have been blessed with humors, and training in how to use them. There are many among us who have the same humors and are

unaware and undisciplined with them. It is my turn to return the favor to the cosmos. As I did with you!"

Heracles could not help but giggle, "Yes you did brother. You managed to tame a savage!"

Dias stepped back, "You were not a savage brother! Just *obscure!*" and he gave his younger brother a smack on the cheek.

"What are the two youths in the corner doing Dias?" asked Xiphos.

"Well my lord, they are practicing in how not to use their humors."

Both Heracles and Xiphos clenched their lips, and the strong man spoke, "Not using? I thought the intention of these sessions is to learn how to use one's humors?"

"Aye brother but answer me this. When does one become stronger... holding the heavy stone and dropping it, or holding on to it as long as one can and resisting the urge to drop it?"

Heracles rubbed his chin and turned his face smiling. "Oh Dias, I remember that exercise too well. You had me do it for days on end! But you are right. Mental strength must forerun physical strength."

"Exactly brother! And then each time you hold the stone..." and Heracles interjected, finishing Dias thoughts, "... the stone is easier to hold and control".

"Pray the gods, what am I to do with the both you!" exclaimed Xiphos, and the three men laughed, starting to walk back to the main wing of the palace. Entering the shaded hallways took away the sharp sun and gave the trio some reprieve on their near burnt faces. A nearby water station called out to the trio. Dias stepped up and touched a faint red light emanating from the side of the square stone block. Moments later water flowed seamlessly from a clean, oval whole in the wall adjacent. Nearby clay cups allowed the collection of the clear refreshment. "Ah, that was good and needed!" Dias stated, as he continued, "Apologies I missed the morning summary with the royal guard. Any news my lord?"

Xiphos was still quenching his thirst when he finally answered, "No significant news my lord, except we have some intelligence that lord Chrisna has recently arrived at the western territories. His intentions are unknown."

"Has he..." replied Dias with narrowing eyes.

His brother was not as subtle, "Damn Lemurians! If he is looking to start a conflict..."

Dias placed a quieting hand on his large shoulder, "Herac, we have no evidence of this. Let time and fact dictate, not passions brother." Heracles just grunted as he took another sip of water.

As the trio continued, they entered the main wing of palace from the ancient hallway with

slightly disoriented eyes. The enormous main hall, with clean white marble ceilings and a large statue of Poseidon standing tall, holding his trident in the air as the focal point of the room was a bit stimulating for anyone to see. With a quick reorientation of their bearings, the brothers heard fast footsteps from the stairs. Turning, Heracles saw a royal page scramble up to them, breathless. "Your Highnesses, Prince Horus of Keb has arrived! Something seems terribly wrong!"

Dias and Heracles nodded and strode quickly through the palace. Horus, the son of Osiris, the pharaoh of Keb, was a long-time ally to the princes; younger than them and not a skilled politician, but goodhearted at his core.

At the palace entrance, they found stable hands taking away a breathless stallion, and Horus himself bent over, his hands on his knees, long hair damp and straggling over his face. He breathed hard.

Dias moved close. "Horus, my friend, what brings you here without notice? Is something wrong?"

Horus looked up, his face sweaty and his light brown eyes red from weeping. He gasped out the words, clearly in shock and pain. "Set! It was Set!"

"Your uncle?" Dias asked. "What has happened? Is he ill?"

Horus grasped Dias's arm to steady himself, his gaze imploring and sad. "Oh, he is not ill, friend of mine. Set has killed my father! He killed Osiris!"

## Chapter 4

Poseidenia, Atlantis

HORUS was quickly escorted to Dias's private quarters. "Bring in some tea and a meal," Dias ordered. He strode to his supply of a fig-based liquor and poured a heavy cup. He felt Horus needed the shock of a liquid punch to the chest.

"Here, my friend. Drink." He handed the cup to Horus, who drank it gratefully with shaking hands. When he finished, he handed the cup back to Dias then buried his face in his hands, his slender build shaking.

"Oh, my father!" he cried.

Dias nodded to Heracles, who poured another cup of mead. He gave it to Horus with a quiet word. "Just tell us when you are able." Dias spoke gently. Though Horus was known as the Hawk Prince, leading flying troops in battle, there was nothing of the deadly raptor about him now. Now he merely looked young—and heartbroken.

Horus sobbed for a moment and then wiped his face. "I am sorry, my friends. But the attack was so sudden, so horrific..."

His youth showed as his face fell, and his eyes teared up once more. His twentieth year of life had not fully come, and now he had to cope with the murder of his family. Dias wondered how the young man would handle it.

Horus rose and paced the room. "That viper, Set!"

Dias sat in his work chair, the horsehide smooth beneath him. "Our father, Atlas, had a great reverence for Osiris; for his nobility, his good will, and his love of progress. Osiris will be missed. Losing him almost feels like losing a piece of our father all over again." Dias continued with a sad smile. "Set has long been envious of Osiris. That was clear to us soon after your father was named ruler."

"Envious! The man is insane!" Horus went on to tell them about Set's malicious ways, always trying to undermine Osiris's rule. "Soon after my father rose to the throne of Keb, he introduced a new form of fermentation, allowing Kebians to produce an alcohol with gas emanating from the drink. The new drink was called *heket*, beer. It was safer and lasted longer than the older beverages produced, and the people enjoyed it. When Set heard of the praise that Osiris received with his innovation, he was infused with envy and rage. He managed to poison an entire batch of *heket* going to the palace at a time when many pilgrims came to pay homage to my father. Luckily it was caught in time, and no one consumed the poisoned drink." Horus held his temples and shook his head, clearly trying to control his tears.

"It was awful," Horus said. "After the murder of my father, my mother Osiris was next on his

horrific retinue. She was captured and hung from a tree of the bank of Nile River for all to see. I then received word that Set had both of my parents' bodies dismembered and sent to the four corners of Gia. Lord Toth, my father's head advisor smuggled me out of the palace and gave me two horses to run. He was captured soon thereafter. I've been running for days, and I had to leave the second horse some distance from here." Horus took several deep breaths, clearly attempting to control his emotions. He gazed at the princes. "I had nowhere to turn for help and justice, and thus I come to you, my friends, for help and protection."

"Of course, Horus, of course. You are welcome here, and we will do all we can to bring Set to justice," Dias said. "This brings new trouble to our lands, my brother."

Heracles nodded gravely. "New trouble, indeed. That Set is a viper, truly."

Dias nodded. "Then we will have to watch carefully for snakes in the garden."

ΨΨΨ

Two days later, Dias and Heracles strode into the meeting room for a regular Grand Council meeting. Next to Heracles strode Nemeas, his companion lion. The elegant feline was not a pet exactly, nor a guard, but a helper. His tail twitched a meter above the tiled floors.

The large windows were partly curtained against the sunlight, and the long, oval table was set with elegant water cups and pitchers painted with images of the sun, moon, and stars. The floors were smooth and glossy and painted with images of the ocean and various lands.

At one end of the table, Lord Cadiz whispered vehemently to his son, Lord Censo. "Son be cautious with your words at this meeting. We may finally have cause to bring the downfall of these false princes and bring an end to their sham. Our family has been on this council since the beginning of Atlantis, and ours was the greatest dynasty to ever sit on the bull throne! Do not forget that! Stay focused on the task at hand and remain composed." The dark-haired patriarch glared at the brothers entering, vehemence and aggression in his gaze. Censo nodded obsequiously, always willing to go along with his patriarch. "Yes, Father."

Dias overheard just a bit of their whispers and gave them a stern glance as he entered the room. They quieted immediately. The other council members stopped milling about and went to their seats. Dias made his way to the north end of the elegant table and picked up the small gavel that rested there. Heracles moved to stand beside him. "I call this meeting of the Grand Council to order!"

"Lord Xiphos, please review any new correspondence for the council," Dias ordered. The lord chamberlain did so quickly and efficiently.

When he was finished, Dias nodded. "Thank you. Let's move on to new business right away. I would like to discuss the new—"

A murmur of protest sounded about the room. Whispers rose and then quieted. Next to Dias, Heracles fidgeted.

Dias frowned. "Is there an issue to resolve before—"

Lord Cadiz sat up straight in his chair and raised his hand gracefully toward the windows. "What of the rumors that Osiris and his queen have been assassinated? Should we not address that issue first?" Cadiz gazed steadily at Dias. "My king," he said with a small head nod. Just enough.

"Yes, the issue of Osiris and Horus," Lord Censo added. "What are we to do with Horus? What if he has led Set directly here? What if Set wishes to use the asylum granted Horus as a reason for belligerence against us or our territories?" Cadiz sat rigidly in his chair and let his hand brush against his son's. Censo looked down at the table.

"How do you know that Set has anything to do with Osiris' and Isis' murder?" Dias glared at Censo and Cadiz.

*How, indeed?*

Censo and Cadiz were silent, faces glowering and dark. The men around the table gazed back and forth at the two pairs of men.

"How do you know of Set? Answer me, Censo!" Dias let his voice rise, showing just a touch of irritation.

"I ... I do not *know*, my king. It is only rumors, of course. Rumors." Censo kept his gaze down, fingers fumbling with his water cup.

"I know nothing of granting prince Horus asylum. However, *if it were requested it would gladly be granted*. Let us not make policy or govern our people based on rumors, shall we?" Dias nodded to Heracles. "Besides, my brother is the *megan strategon*; if there is action to be taken, Heracles and his generals will investigate and inform me of what needs to be done. The council governs this kingdom's domestic and foreign policies only when I ask. Is that clear?"

"Clear, Megan Prinkipon," Cadiz replied. He glanced briefly at Censo and then across the table at his brother-in-law, Lord Diaphon of the Orange Islands, who twitched his nose.

The trio's interest diverging from his own disturbed Dias, but it enraged Heracles, who was more fighter than philosopher. "We should do away with them all," he had once said to Dias in a fit of anger.

Dias managed the disturbance, and the meeting proceeded. As the meeting broke up, Heracles stood next to Dias, glaring at Cadiz and Censo as they left the room. "We must watch those two. I do not trust them," he said. Beside him, Nemeas

yawned, his ivory canines gleaming, he then lied down with a sigh.

Dias nodded. "I agree. Ever since we inherited the bull thrones, Cadiz has not stopped trying to undermine our position."

"The man is obsessed with the past," Heracles noted while pouring a glass of wine diluted with water, for refreshment.

"The Arian era was one of the darkest periods in our history," Dias said with guilt in his heart. "The Arian dynasty conquered and dominated the entire Mesogian region for centuries. Their love of war was uncanny. Could you believe a coalition of Kebians and our own cousins, the Hellenes, were required to defeat the last king Aries, at the battle of Pelasgia? And did he stop there? No! Aries decided to go west, which led to the most destructive war, likely in all of history, the war with Lemuria. Now I have to deal with his half-witted and arrogant grandson!" Dias slapped the front of a chair and sent it flying against the wall.

Nemeas jumped up in alarm and then grunted.

Heracles petted the lion's head and took a step back to let his brother take a breath. "I know this is an especially important issue for you brother," Heracles offered. He was not as opposed to fighting and war as Dias, and his comfort as a military leader was clear—to Dias and the Grand Council members.

Dias turned back to him. "We will remain loyal to our ancestors, Herac. We must. Just because Atlantis was blessed with security and development does not mean we have the right to intervene or force our ways on other developing tribes or nations without their consent. No, we will keep our grandfather's and father's position on this, not only out of loyalty to blood, but also because it is right and just."

Heracles put one large and muscular arm on his brother's shoulder. "Whatever you decide, I am always with you, big brother. If you order me to fight, I will do so. If you order me to hold back from fighting, I will do so. You would make father proud."

"We both would, Herac," Dias replied with a brotherly hug of affection, calling Heracles by his short name, one they had used since childhood. "Do me this favor? Just remove Cadiz from court. His placement is my last concern. Send him to the western front for the time being, somewhere far away to distance him from court. We have enough concerns than to deal with his nonsense."

"It will be arranged, brother, of course," replied Heracles, with a concerned look.

Dias pulled away and walked toward to the door. "I require a short furlough brother."

Heracles sank into a chair, gently pulling on Nemeas' smooth mane, "As you wish brother."

Dias strode out of the meeting room, through the palace hallways, and toward the back of the palace complex to his garden of tranquility. The garden was planted by his own hand, with various flowers and trees from all over the world; roses, magnolias, sunflowers, and water lilies flourished in the temperate climate. Jasmine was predominant all over the garden for beauty and scent.

He had also planted small trees, such as mini-cherry and peach trees, that embraced corners and pathways. Rocks and volcanic stone were scattered throughout the garden to serve as air filters, and they added a rich burgundy hue to the range of colors. His favorite plant was a cherry-blossom he had imported from the western continent, with low-hanging branches and fragrant blossoms. His bench, made of bedrock, was right underneath this tree.

In addition to the variety of plants, Dias had also imported birds and small animals. In front of his bench, a large, manmade pond vibrated with tropical fish. Orange, cream, yellow, and blue darts of color greeted him as fish came up to nip at the blossoms in the water. He heard the rustle of small mice scurrying away from him as he strode the mulched pathways. Going back to nature helped Dias focus his mind and his body.

The bedrock was a bit rough with this seating. The *megan prinkipon* took a few deep breaths,

trying to remove his frustrations with each exhalation. An old trick he learned as a youngster. He then looked down and picked up a smooth piece of slate, broken off to the side of the pond. Holding it in his palm, his eyes began a mild glow. The smooth stone slowly rose from the prince's hand and began floating. Dias gave a very short turn of his neck, and the stone began rotating. The orichalcum stone in his ring shone a low green hue. The natural properties of the sought-after stone... magnifying an individual's humors, and Atlantis was blessed with a plethora of the element. With each turn of the slate, he felt his tensions melting away. Many men would delve into drink, violence or women when overwhelmed. Dias preferred to immerse himself in his talents. Serenity finally entered his mind, leading his eyes to slowly return to normal, and his ring to power down. Soon thereafter the smooth stone fell back to the ground.

Dias gazed around the garden and let his thoughts ramble. The pond burbled away pleasantly, and birdcalls surrounded him. He lifted his face to the sun, feeling its warmth on his skin. A soft rustle behind him stood out from the natural sounds of his garden. The sound was not human, and almost not natural. He lowered his head in recognition of this old sound. The too familiar appearance of the shadowed apparition that followed still made some of Dias' hair stand on end.

*Again. Once more.*

The same apparition had haunted the prince since the passing of his father and had an unearthly tendency to appear at times of significant emotional turmoil.

It appeared as a man, tall, attractive, well built with jet-black hair and hazel eyes as clear as the sea. He wore all black robes, and his image always looked a bit fuzzy to Dias. He was not a dream, yet not a living person. More substantial than the weak shades of sleep, yet not as corporeal as one with a body.

The apparition looked up at the statue of Poseidon that loomed over the garden and smirked. "Interesting. Your kind is getting closer but still has some ways to go." He quickly turned his burning gaze to Dias. "Do not forget what you have to do."

"Your visits always end with the same words! What do I have to do?" Dias asked. The ghostly messenger gave a soft smile and then shimmered and disappeared.

"Am I doing something wrong? Am I missing something?" he kept asking himself. It did cross his mind that this apparition might simply be a visual reminder of his imperfections, an image representing his insecurities as a leader.

The birds and flowers offered no answer. The plants remained silent, and the fish in the pond had no input. Dias sighed and kept thinking.

ΨΨΨ

Storming from the council meeting, Cadiz could no help himself pacing up and down the small hallway. The thick council room doors slammed shut behind the Arian trio, forcing a frustrating smack against the wall by the old nobleman.

*Fools! All fools!*

He then turned to his quiet son. He stalked up to his face, Censo's eyelashes touching his father's forehead as he blinked. "What did I advise prior to the start of the meeting?"

Censo mumbled, "You advised to be cautious with showing our intelligence regarding Horus father. My apologies."

"Apologies! Apologies you say! Fool!" he screamed as he smacked Censo across his chubby face. "I warned you! We were not to fully confront the pretenders without confirming Horus' presence. Now, the brothers can move the kebian and none would the wiser!"

"Come now brother. The situation may not have transpired as you initially planned, but seeds of doubt were likely planted in some of the council member's minds. That in itself maintains a certain value," commented a calmer Diaphon, ever the collected politician.

Cadiz raised his head to his brother-in-law, stepping to the wall. "Maybe you are right Diaphon. The problem also lies in me. Every sun that rises

which still has those impudent fools on my throne, I become intolerably more impatient!"

"Patience brother... all in due course. Perhaps this is as good a time as any to tell you. Maybe the news will lighten your heart," stated Diaphon.

"What is it?" Cadiz asked still disgruntled.

"Korin is with child. We received confirmation this morning."

Cadiz stepped off the wall and touted his chest a bit, giving Diaphon a short hug. "That is welcome news. More Arian blood for the fold! Keep my sister well cared for my lord!"

"Of course, brother."

Short steps approaching interrupted the trio.

"Apologies my lords. I carry correspondence from my lord Heracles." The groomsmen bowed and placed a small scroll in the elder lord's hand, quickly stepping away.

Cadiz cracked the seal with disgust.

*Correspondence from a big donkey!*

His eyes raced left to right, reading the short message with impunity. A short smile soon emerged.

"What is it father? What does Heracles order?" Censo spoke with curiosity.

Cadiz turned to his son, rolling the scroll back in his hands. He started walking in circles smacking his head with the scroll over and over again. He stopped suddenly in his celestial like motion.

"I leave for the western continent in the morrow," stated Cadiz, with a new found calm.

"The western continent? That is absurd. For what purpose?" demanded Censo.

"No need to worry son. Purpose is what you make it. The fates have smiled on us. They may have granted another opportunity for the Arians to regain the bull thrown... and have dominion over everything again!" Censo and Diaphon remained stunned with silence. The only sound now appreciated was the crackling of a very large and old candle on the wall. Its bubbling wax and gritty carbon popped a few more times before the trio left the hallway.

ΨΨΨ

HERACLES SAT IN the meeting room with Nemeas dozing by the fireplace, his tail softly twitching.

As a child, Heracles had been amazing. Strong, fearless, and definitely stubborn, his playmates quickly learned that his temper was short. He rarely lost a fight, and he enjoyed the challenge of battle, even those on the playgrounds of his childhood.

When he was only sixteen years old, he once walked a path that took him through a very dense part of the forest, far from the palace. Little there was developed, other than some small stone cottages for hunters and their families. On this day,

Heracles heard women screaming, and he sped to the noise.

When he arrived, he saw a young lion stalking a woman and her daughter, their backs against the stone wall of their cottage, their eyes wide. The feline moved closer still, broad pads silent on the ground as it moved ever closer; its light mane twitching with every step.

Heracles yelled at the big cat and caught its attention. Battle was imminent. Heracles ran forward, the lion followed suite and ran towards Heracles growling, lunging at the young prince's throat. The two met in midair, tumbling and turning, falling to the ground. They slammed about in the dirt, leaves swirling about as the cat gripped for purchase against the earth. The cat roared in rage, so loudly that the women covered their ears as they watched the fight.

The young prince grabbed the lion by the throat and lifted up the beast, slamming it against the stone wall. The cat tried swinging its long claws at the prince, but it was futile. Despite the wounds that flowed on his arms where the big cat struck him, Heracles's grip was unbreakable.

Heracles looked deep into the golden eyes of the great cat. The lion gazed back, licked its lips, and understood who was the master, and who was the servant. It struggled against Heracles no more, and Heracles released his grip. The lion fell to the

ground, licked at its injuries, and then looked up at his new lord.

"The two of you are well? No injuries?" Heracles asked the woman and her daughter.

They nodded silently.

"Go home, then. You will be safe." The women nodded and scurried away, whispering.

He continued down the path, now with the great cat as a companion. Six years later, the cat was always by his side with no leash, only loyalty; a tawny companion, and a reminder of who was in charge on the battlefield.

Heracles waited this day for Perseus, their paternal first cousin and Heracles's second-in-command of the Atlantean military. Perseus strode into Heracles's meeting room with a genial air, a man of medium height and wide shoulders. He was a good-looking, young man with skin lighter than most, contrasting with his dark hair and eyes. Skilled in hand-to-hand combat, Perseus was a great warrior and a trusted aide to the brothers.

Heracles grinned at the younger man. "Good day to you, my cousin!" They clasped arms briefly, Perseus gazing up at Heracles with respect and awe. Since childhood, Perseus had emulated his cousins, and had wanted to make them proud of his loyalty, actions, and accomplishment. The brothers of thunder knew this and treated him as a valued aide.

"Sir." Perseus nodded briefly. "Good day to you, as well."

Heracles pointed to the map sprawled out on the table in front of them. "I need your help, Perseus—your warrior's skill and your ability to lead men. Lord Cadiz is once more causing trouble to our kingdom."

"Lord Cadiz remains a thorn in your side, yes?"

"His attitude toward Europa continues to cause controversy. He is deliberately raising discord in the capital, contradicting Dias's policies. I have sent him to manage the Atlantean forces on the western continent ..."

"But?" Perseus traced the map along the western side.

"But I do not trust him. I would like to send you there to watch over Cadiz. You are to meet with Phoebus, the Icarus."

"Lord Daedalus' son," asked Perseus.

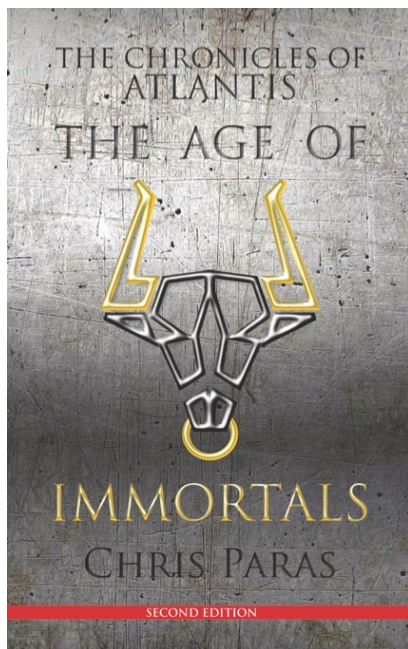
"Aye cousin. He is currently stationed on the western front. He is a good soldier, and more importantly, he is loyal to Atlantis. He will guide you. Arrangements have been made for your trip, and you can report back to me as needed. Dias thinks sending Cadiz away from the capital is good strategy; I am not so sure."

"Understood, cousin. I shall leave immediately."

Heracles watched Perseus stride out of the room. Though confident of his cousin's loyalty and skills, his distrust of Cadiz was stronger. Perhaps

having him out of Poseidenia was not the best choice, but it was a choice that had already been made.

Quiet, Heracles gazed out the window at the beautiful city below. Dozens of carriages wound through the cobblestone streets, people called to one another, and children chased chickens down the alleys. Nemeas padded over and sat next to him, bumping his huge head against Heracles's waist. "Yes, my old friend," Heracles said, and patted the lion's scruffy head. "It is not a skill I am best at, but yes, we will wait."



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