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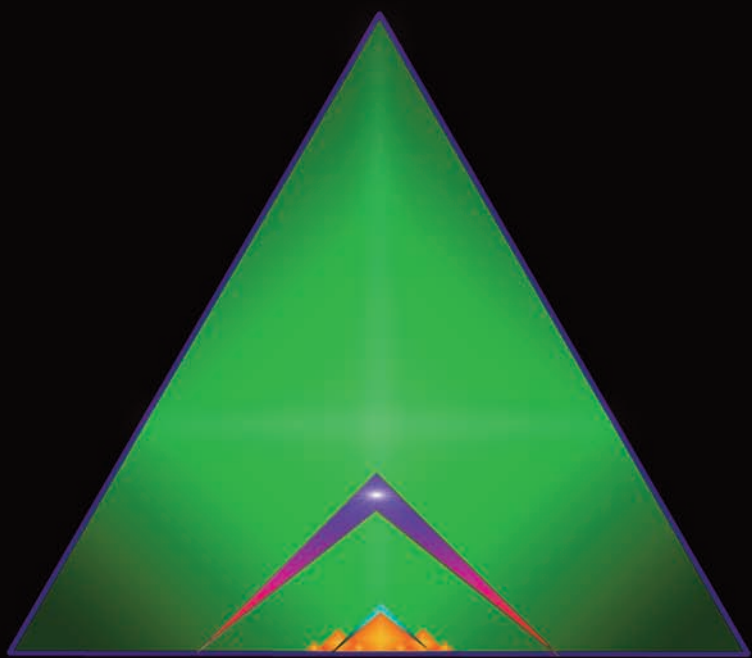
Quest for the Emerald Tablets: The Secret of Alchemist Gold

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Quest for the Emerald Tablets

The Secret of Alchemist Gold



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Prologue

Egypt

The stillness of the night filled the temple grounds as the last of the tourists made their way down the stone steps to the cruise boat docked at the shore. Walking by himself through the dark peristyle into the sanctuary, Namid Mershaki could enjoy the solitude of the moment. He told stories to the tourists each day, bringing the glories of his ancestors back to life. But tour guides rarely had personal time with the old gods.

Deeply carved hieroglyphs seemed to dance in the dim glow of the shifting shadows. He gazed at the zigzag sign for water poured out from a high jar onto a basket laden with food. He placed his hands onto the black diorite offering table which once held a gold statue of the god himself.

The crocodile god ruled this part of the Nile and became an object of worship in the temple. On the inner wall Sobek stared down at him, mouth closed, teeth spilling over his elongated snout. His human body stood erect, a lapis and turquoise collar set in gold at his neck, a white linen kilt on his lower body, the crown of Amun on his head. One hand held the ankh, symbol of eternal life.

Strolling out onto the softly lit pavement, Namid went into the adjoining shrine that held the remains of the god. He looked through the glass at the rigid black mummies of three crocodiles, and involuntarily shivered at the ugly sight that so enthralled the tourists. He stepped out into the night air. Black silhouettes waved their branches in the breeze. In the distance lay the cruise ship, lit up and festive for returning guests.

At the front of the temple he stopped to take in a part of the structure that had fallen into the river. He stared down at the water, black and still, and thought he saw something move on the shore. Climbing down in the dark, his foot slipped on the damp grass. He sprawled on the ground. Deciding his visibility was no better than his judgment, he rose, turned to climb back up, then stopped in his tracks. His eyes must be playing tricks.

Sobek himself had come off the wall and stood before him. His crocodile head was on the body of a human, one hand holding the symbol of eternal life. The eyes blazed red, the teeth gleamed white, and the sun disc crown sat firmly on his head. Around his neck rested the lapis and turquoise collar set in gold. He wore a short white linen kilt, and gold sandals.

Namid closed his eyes against this divine delusion, but when he opened them, the evil thing remained. Before he could run or shout, the human was upon him, pushing him toward the river. He saw something in the water ripple across the surface, the black scaled reptile moving swiftly toward him. The huge snout opened, teeth flashing as it neared the shore.

“No!” screamed the guide, struggling with all his strength. He knew this was no god that restrained him. “Please. Don’t do this!”

“You have offended the god!” snarled Sobek, the human representation of the god.

“Why?” screamed Namid, unable to resist the superhuman strength holding his arms, terrified by the menacing sight of the croc in the river closing in on him. “What have I done?”

Sobek had one arm around Namid’s neck, the other shoved against his back. “The will of the old gods must be obeyed!”

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As the croc edged closer, they both watched the black gaping mouth widen to show huge teeth and heard the death hiss rumble out of the dark daunting throat.

“No! Let me go!” Namid pleaded, trying to break free.

“The god demands payment!” screamed the human Sobek.

He threw the guide with such force Namid fell into the shallows. He raked the water, struggling to get out. Just as he rose, the croc lunged, clamping the massive jaws into his arm. He struggled, but had no chance. The beast rolled over, thrashed him into the deep, ripping the arm from his body.

Somehow, Namid got to the surface, shrieked in pain and terror, as he watched the creature toss the arm, then devour it in one swallow.

He grabbed his gushing shoulder, bringing his legs up to repel the monster. Violent waves splashed over him, conspiring with the beast to hold his body down. The jaws of death widened to expose their jagged blades. His boot struck the lower jaw, its momentum jerking forward just as the croc clamped onto his foot.

He screamed, clawing at the huge snout with his only hand, feeling his life force drain into the murky water, consumed in one massive swallow. He felt the rolling once again, the beast dragging him underwater, drowning him for the final kill.

Sobek, the god, turned and walked back to his temple.

Blackness covered the tour guide as the Nile became his grave.

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