

The Gods of Nubia

Asmina could feel her blood mixed in with the sand around her abdomen. It was still warm to the touch. The grit of the sand disguised the amount of blood flowing from her wound. She twisted her head to find the edge of the ravine. She knew if she could reach it, pull herself over the edge she might be able to escape the beast that dug its claws into her. She could hear its wings flapping overhead. It wouldn't be long now. She had to hurry. Asmina clawed at the ground in a feeble attempt to pull her mangled body away from harm. As the screech of the beast drew near, she knew her time had run out. In act of desperation she decided to die, to disappear. She became motionless, stilled her breath and dared her heart to stop beating. In this state she was able to mimic her surroundings, giving her skin and clothing the texture of the sand beneath her.

The griffin plunged down on the ground near Asmina. Its large, sharp talons dug into the sand with the intensity of a steam shovel, jostling her body and filling her with terror. The griffin clawed at the Earth in a desperate attempt to find Asmina. It let out a large screech sending up a cloud of dust. It then stood quietly with one ear toward the ground as if listening for a sound, any sound. Asmina found herself growing weak from lack of oxygen. Her body began a slight vibration as she fought to maintain her breathless state. She took in a short breath to feed her burning lungs and the dust in the air caused her to sneeze. The griffin lunged in the direction of the sound, which sent Asmina scrambling for the ravine to escape her attacker.

Asmina threw herself over the edge of the ravine and began sliding down its steep wall. The griffin flew into the ravine, intercepting Asmina with one of its talons. Asmina shrieked in pain as the grip on her leg cracked a bone. Dirt covered her face and began to fill her lungs as she fought for air. Her vision was completely obscured by the fur and feathers of the creature's large body. She pulled her dagger from its sheath and stabbed the griffin in the leg causing it to release her. As she fell, the griffin flew at her, in an endeavor to grasp her tumbling body in its giant beak. After one miss it swerved to take another swipe at her. Asmina resigned to accept her fate. Either the griffin would kill her or she would die on the rocks below. She cried at the thought that the Nubian people would suffer due to her failure to complete her mission.

As she looked toward the stars, Asmina became startled by a giant fireball above her. She covered her eyes with an arm to prevent being blinded by the brightness of the griffin's body

being engulfed in flames. Her decent slowed and she could feel a pair of arms embracing her.
“Mashi, what are you doing here?”

Mashshouda smiled down at Asmina, settling her gently on the ground. In his world they were lovers. They belonged to the Mulungu people, who lived in a world which existed in a separate dimension from Earth. The Mulungu people created the first humans and became instrumental in spreading the seed of human beings to habitable planets across the universe. When the Mulungu placed humans on Earth, Mashshouda and Asmina were assigned as their caretakers. Humans settled in the land of Nubia, meaning black people, before migrating to every part of the globe. Asmina saw the birthplace of the first humans as sacred and desired to maintain its habitability.

The persistent drought in the area made the land uninhabitable. Asmina could hear the tribes people calling out for help during their prayers. Unable to continue to ignore their suffering, Asmina materialized on Earth to examine the cause of the drought.

“Asmina, I came to save you. You know you shouldn’t be here,” said Mashshouda. “No matter how noble your cause, you are breaking with our traditions. What you have planned will probably not have a lasting effect anyway. Now be still while I heal your wounds.”

Asmina writhed in pain as Mashshouda held his scepter over her body, letting its healing power envelope her.

“Thanks for saving me Mashi, but there is something you need to know before passing judgement on my presence here. Now that I have had time to investigate the area I agree something major needs to be done here. I had planned to increase the rain and place new vegetation in the area. However, I discovered a spell had been placed here to cause the springs to dry up and prevent the rain. When I tried to reverse the spell, a griffin showed up and attacked me. Explain how a griffin could show up here of all places?”

“It sounds like the work of Apedemak. You are too weak to fight him. I suggest we take this matter to Queen Sekhmet and let her resolve it. If she hears about your attempt to intercede in the region’s natural evolution, she could strip you of your powers and restrict you to our world.”

“Speaking of which, I need to retrieve my scepter.” Asmina held her hand out and began to turn slowly as she mentally searched for her scepter. After a moment she could feel its vibration

and called it to her. “That’s better. If the griffin had not struck it from my grasp I would not have needed your help.”

“But it did and now it’s time to return home,” Mashshouda insisted.

“I’ll relent, but we must address this straight away. There is something more insidious happening here than a mere drought. I am no longer able to communicate with the tribal priests. They are our connection to this world, providing the ability to warn us of events before they turn into life-threatening catastrophes.”

“That gives us even more reason to seek out the guidance and aid of Queen Sekhmet. Let us be off.”

Asmina nodded her head and raised her scepter to open a portal to her home world. Mashshouda did the same. As the portal opened they were both hit with a blast of unknown origin that tossed them across the desert floor. Through the portal stepped Apedemak, a tall being with the head of a lion.

“How dare you interrupt my work. Your pacifist ideas of peace and tranquility made these people weak. It is only through conquest can great civilizations be built.”

“It is not your place to dictate what happens here,” Mashshouda said, picking himself up off the ground. “This is our domain. Go back to your galaxy creation.”

“I am a warrior and I will not be relegated to infrastructure. I alone should be the voice of the priests.”

“You were the voice and thousands of people died as a result,” said Asmina. “Death and destruction is no way to create a thriving civilization.”

“Progress requires sacrifice.”

“If that is true then let Queen Sekhmet rule on that. Move aside and let us return,” Asmina demanded.

“When the queen sees how Nubia has become a wasteland she will return power to me.”

“Not if we explain how it happened.”

“You won’t be explaining anything to anyone. I think I’ll take your scepters and leave you here to contemplate the folly of your ways.” Apedemak raised his scepter to attack the pair, but they vanished before he could act.

“Mashi, where are we?” asked Asmina.

“We are in the center of a pyramid on the island of Atlantis,” Mashshouda replied smiling.

“Apedemak won’t think to look for us here.”

“Great, but how does being at the bottom of the ocean help us return home or get a message to our queen? As soon as we use our powers, Apedemak will notice and come after us.”

“I believe that this pyramid has one of the few remaining alters to Queen Sekhmet. If we can find it and make a sacrifice she will be compelled to recognize it. When she arrives, you can tell her your story. Let’s split up and look for it.”

Mashshouda and Asmina took separate paths from their location and began to explore the pyramid. It was an enormous structure with many chambers. Most were easily accessible via connected passages. Some had hidden entries that took time to discover. Asmina eventually found an alter with an image of Queen Sekhmet wearing a headdress with an image of the sun and a uraeus.

“Mashi! Come quickly. I found it.”

Mashshouda appeared after a moment and marveled at the ornate alter. “We need to add light here and clean this place up if we want to have a proper sacrifice.”

The pair raised their scepters and lit the large cressets on each side of the altar. The light revealed a vast chamber filled with golden sculptures, tapestry and other ancient artifacts. Hieroglyphics covered the walls, though the colors were faded and dingy. Asmina used the power from her scepter to restore the walls and other artifacts. Mashshouda brought fresh air into the chamber to make it livable for the guests they had planned on inviting.

“Now all we need is a sacrifice,” said Mashshouda.

Asmina used her ability to remotely monitor Earth to track down a couple she knew with a sickly child. She waited for them to perform their evening prayers before transporting them to the pyramid chamber she and Mashshouda had prepared.

“Fear not,” Mashshouda stated, in an attempt to calm the couple. The mother lifted her son from the floor of the chamber and held him tightly to her bosom.

“Why are we here?” asked her husband. He knelt before Mashshouda, recognizing his sacred robes. “I hope we have not displeased you Holy One.”

“Be assured that we brought you here to help you,” said Asmina. “We will restore your family to good health and ensure that you thrive in a fully restored Nubia. To do this we need you to make a sacrifice of your son to Queen Sekhmet.”

“But how will killing my son make him healthy?” asked the mother.

“Your son will only experience a temporary loss of life before being restored to perfect health. Please place him on the alter and use this dagger to complete the ceremony.”

Asmina handed the father a golden dagger, which she found near the alter. The mother placed her son on the alter and knelt before it. The baby cried and thrashed after being set down. The father placed his left hand under his son’s head and raised the dagger in his right hand in preparation to pierce his son’s heart. Several moments passed and he did not move.

“Why do you hesitate?” asked Mashshouda.

“Why indeed?” boomed the voice of Apedemak at the rear of the chamber.

Asmina and Mashshouda spun around to see him leering at them.

“Did you really think you could transport humans to this holy lair without me noticing? I placed them in a state of suspended animation while I deal with you two. I feel it will serve as a bit of irony that you spend the rest of your days in this tomb dedicated to our beloved queen.”

Asmina and Mashshouda raised their scepters in unison to combat the interloper, but he quickly ripped the objects from their grasp before they could act.

“I’m not foolish enough to let you surprise me twice in one day. I’ll be taking your scepters back with me. Don’t worry about that family. I’ll let them know that you were rebels looking to

overthrow our queen and I arrived in the nick of time to save them and their child from your treachery. Any last words before I leave you in your golden tomb?"

"I have a few choice words for you Apedemak." Queen Sekhmet appeared at the altar, flooding the room with light radiating from her body. Apedemak, Asmina and Mashshouda knelt before their queen. She removed the spell on the family and placed her hand on the baby's chest. "No sacrifice is necessary today. Your son's sickness is healed." The child's parents knelt in the presence of the queen.

"I will return you to your village. Your son will grow to be a healthy and strong protector of your family. Know that your commitment to your faith will not go unrewarded."

Queen Sekhmet returned the family to their village and cast her eyes upon Asmina. "I respect your enthusiasm Asmina, though your methods are a bit unorthodox. I would have given you permission to investigate the conditions in Nubia. I am not completely against planetary intervention when many lives are at stake. I am against my subjects thinking they can dole out punishment of their own accord," she said, shifting her focus to Apedemak.

"Your majesty, I was merely attempting to defend your honor," said Apedemak.

Queen Sekhmet let out a loud belly laugh before pounding her staff into the ground. "Do you really think I need your help to defend my honor?" She interrupted his attempt to respond and continued her rebuke of his actions. "First you invade this planet, that is not under your purview, and lay waste to the holy land of Nubia. Then you attack my loyal subjects and plan to entomb them in one of my holy sanctuaries. The irony is that you thought it would go unnoticed."

"Forgive me my queen." Apedemak looked up at the queen with fear on his face. His lips quivered as if he wanted to speak, but dare not.

"I forgive you, but this transgression will not go unpunished. Since you believe this is a suitable place to leave someone you can spend the next one hundred years here without your powers."

"My queen these weaklings are undermining your vision of developing strong civilizations."

"I was really hoping for a bit more contrition on your part. Maybe a thousand years would improve your attitude."

“No my queen, I spoke too harshly. I ask Asmina and Mashshouda for their forgiveness and beg that you accept my humblest apologies.” Apedemak grabbed at the edge of Queen Sekhmet’s robe and gently kissed it. “I would happily spend a hundred years here praising your name and brilliant leadership.”

“Enough of your groveling,” the queen said, pulling her robe from Apedemak’s grip. “Asmina and Mashshouda take your scepters and go. Apedemak spend your time here reflecting on your bad behavior. We’ll speak about your future once your sentence is up.”

Queen Sekhmet left leaving Apedemak alone with his thoughts. Asmina brought life back to Nubia and returned home to keep a watchful eye over her territory.