

To Xena, our much-missed cat. – S.D.

For Maria and Raquel and special thanks to
Ventura and Cairo Comix. – N.T.

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MYTHS, MUMMIES AND MAGIC IN ANCIENT EGYPT

BY

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WHO WERE THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS?

The ancient Egyptians lived thousands of years ago along the banks of the River Nile in North Africa. They were very clever people, skilled in maths, medicine, art and astronomy. Ancient Egypt was ruled by kings and queens called pharaohs, who the Egyptians believed were representatives of the gods themselves. This ancient civilisation left behind many clues about their way of life, from giant temples and pyramids to statues, paintings and picture writings called hieroglyphs. These writings include some of the oldest and most exciting stories ever told – fantastical tales of gods, goddesses, magic, monsters and pharaohs. We call these epic stories the ancient Egyptian myths.

Beneath the scorching desert sands of Egypt lie ancient tombs whose walls are covered in paintings. These glorious pictures provide us with information about everyday life in Ancient Egypt, and about the people who told and retold the myths in this book.



The ancient Egyptians were very hard workers. Many were farmers, working in fields along the banks of the River Nile and looking after their livestock. Once a year, while their fields were flooded with water from the Nile, the farmers worked on special projects for their pharaohs, building glorious pyramids and temples in their honour.

At home, the ancient Egyptians enjoyed relaxing with their families. They kept cats and dogs in their houses and gave them names, just like we do. They ate, drank, danced, played board games, listened to music and told each other stories. One of the most important stories the ancient Egyptians told was about how the world was first created...



THE CREATION STORY

A creation myth is a story about how the world began. Ancient civilisations had all sorts of weird and wonderful creation myths, and the Egyptians had four of them! This is the oldest (and craziest) story.

In the beginning, there was nothing but watery darkness called the Nu. Floating in the Nu were the seeds of everything that would one day exist.



The moment Atum dragged himself out of the Nu, he became the sun god Re. Although, confusingly enough, he was also still Atum.



As Re wept, something extraordinary happened. Each one of his tears became a human being!



Re took charge. He positioned Nut high above everything...



Also floating in the Nu was Atum, Lord of the Universe.



Re sneezed, and out of his mouth came Shu (the god of the air) and Tefnut (the goddess of the rain).



Out of the Nu rose an astounding mound, the first signs of Earth.



Tefnut and Shu went off exploring, but Re felt very lonely without his children. When they finally returned, he began to weep.



Tefnut and Shu created two gods of their own: Geb (the god of the earth) and Nut (the goddess of the sky). Geb and Nut were very affectionate. They spent most of their time cuddling each other, which Re strongly disapproved of.



Geb and Nut had four children: two gods, Osiris and Seth, and two goddesses, Isis and Nephthys.



But as Re got older, the humans got mean. They started doing evil deeds...



...and they made fun of Re for being old and weak.



Re was furious with the humans. With one terrible glance, he created Sekhmet the Destroyer, the fiercest goddess you can imagine. Humans had been created out of Re's eye, and now he would use the power of his eye to destroy them.



Sekhmet rampaged throughout the land, killing the humans and drinking their blood. Re's heart was filled with pity, but he was powerless to stop the rage of Sekhmet. Suddenly, he had an idea.



Sekhmet the Destroyer came to a field of blood, and drank it all up in a horrible frenzy. Except it wasn't blood at all - it was beer! Almost at once, Sekhmet began to feel tired of her rampage.



Re decided he was too old for these shenanigans. With a sigh of relief, he ascended into the heavens and left the younger gods to rule on Earth.



MEET THE GODS

The ancient Egyptians believed in over a thousand different gods and goddesses, which were often shown as humans with animal features. It was believed the gods controlled every aspect of life, from the movement of the Sun across the sky to the flooding of the River Nile. Here are some of the many gods and goddesses you will meet in this book.



RE was the god of the Sun. He was associated with the creation of the world. Other creator gods who were worshipped in ancient Egyptian religion included PTAH ('Lord of Eternity') and NEITH ('Mother of the gods').

Ibis-headed THOTH was the god of wisdom and writing. He was also occasionally depicted as a dog-headed baboon.



Cat-headed BASTET was one of Re's daughters. She was a fierce warrior goddess.



AMON was the god of the air, and his name means 'the hidden one.' He was usually represented as a man wearing a crown with two vertical plumes.



ANUBIS was the jackal-headed god of mummification and the afterlife. His most important job was to weigh the heart of people who had recently died, to decide if they were worthy to enter the afterlife.

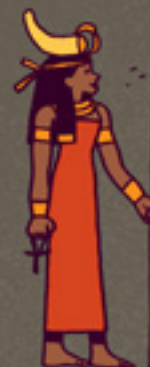


MAAT was the goddess of harmony and justice. On her crown, she wore a single ostrich feather. This feather was used for a very special purpose...



NUT was the goddess of the sky. She was usually depicted as a woman bent over Earth with her head in the west and feet in the east.

OSIRIS was the ruler of the world of the dead. The Egyptians believed that those who had lived good lives would be rewarded by joining Osiris in the afterlife.



Depicted as a falcon or as a man with a falcon's head, HORUS was god of the sky and was associated with war and hunting.

Scorpion goddess SERKET was known for being skilled in magic and healing.



GEB was the god of the Earth. He was also the god of fertility and farming.



ISIS was the goddess of healing. As the wife of Osiris, she was also one of the main deities concerned with rites for the dead.



SETH was the god of chaos and was associated with violence and storms. He was often depicted as a human with the head of an animal. But we can't figure out what animal he's supposed to be! He's usually shown with a long snout and long ears.

Crocodile god SOBEK was the god of strength. He used his razor-sharp teeth to protect the people of Ancient Egypt.



It was believed that the flood god HAPI was responsible for causing the Nile to flood every year.



SETH AND OSIRIS



Osiris was the grandson of Re, the god of the Sun. He was clever and extremely kind.



When Osiris became king of Egypt, he ruled fairly and wisely. He taught the people of Egypt how to grow barley and grapes, and how to make things out of copper.



Osiris loved to travel. He went all over the world, singing songs and making friends.



Whenever Osiris went off travelling, Queen Isis ruled Egypt in his place. She taught people how to make barley into bread and grapes into wine.



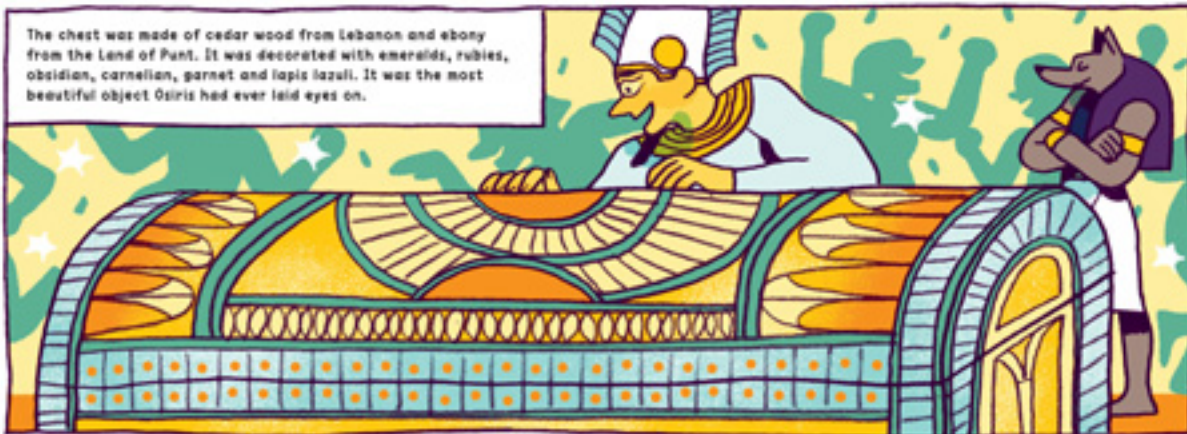
One night, Osiris's brother Seth threw a party in honour of Osiris. The palace was full of guests, musicians, dancers, jugglers and fire-breathers.



Isis went to bed at midnight, but Seth persuaded Osiris to stay for one last game. Seth clicked his fingers and six servants entered, carrying a beautiful chest.



The chest was made of cedar wood from Lebanon and ebony from the Land of Punt. It was decorated with emeralds, rubies, obsidian, carnelian, garnet and lapis lazuli. It was the most beautiful object Osiris had ever laid eyes on.



Seth proposed a challenge. The exquisite chest would be awarded to whoever who could fit inside it most perfectly! One by one, the guests climbed into the chest and tried to lie down.



After many failed attempts, Osiris decided to have a go himself. He lay down in the chest and it fitted him perfectly.



Seth had always been jealous of Osiris's power and popularity. He laughed triumphantly as his servants nailed down the lid of the coffin and filled the cracks with molten lead, so Osiris could not escape. His evil plan had worked!

SETH'S EVIL PLAN TO TAKE THE THRONE...

1. Sneak into Osiris's bedroom at night and measure him from top to toe, shoulder to shoulder, and ear to ear while he is sleeping.



2. Pay the finest craftsmen in the land to make a jewelled chest the exact size of Osiris.



3. Recruit 72 evil helpers to help trick Osiris.



4. Buy balloons, cake, sweetsies, a hammer, nails and molten lead.



5. PARTY TIME!



Seth's servants carried Osiris's coffin to the River Nile and threw it in. It drifted down the river, bobbing and whirling, emeralds and rubies glinting in the sun.



Through the mouth of the Nile and out into the sea, the coffin journeyed on, buffeted by wind and tossed by waves, until it came to rest beside a tamarisk tree in the Kingdom of Byblos.



Years passed, and the tree grew taller, enfolding Osiris's coffin in its trunk.



One day, King Malcander of Byblos heard his servants admiring a mighty tamarisk. He ordered them to fell the tree and install it as a pillar in his palace. The coffin's epic journey had reached its end.



Queen Isis was beside herself when she heard what Seth had done. She transformed into a bird and flew the length and breadth of Egypt, searching for Osiris's coffin. She wanted to give her husband a proper funeral, so that his spirit could pass into the Land of the Dead.



After countless years of searching, Isis heard a rumour that the coffin was inside a pillar in the palace of Byblos, in Syria.



Far away in the city of Byblos, King Malcander and Queen Astarte were very pleased with the new renovations to their palace. They had no idea what was hidden inside one of the pillars in the throne room. One day, Queen Astarte sent the servant girls to the river to wash the royal clothes.



When they returned, the servant girls looked strikingly different. No one in the kingdom had ever thought to braid their hair before!



The queen was jealous of the servant girls, so she sent for the old woman to come and braid her hair, too.

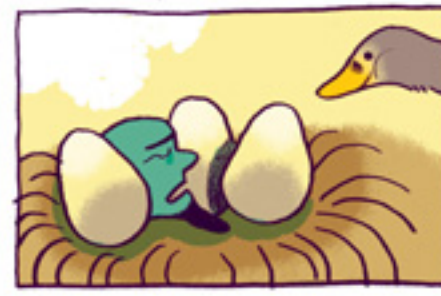
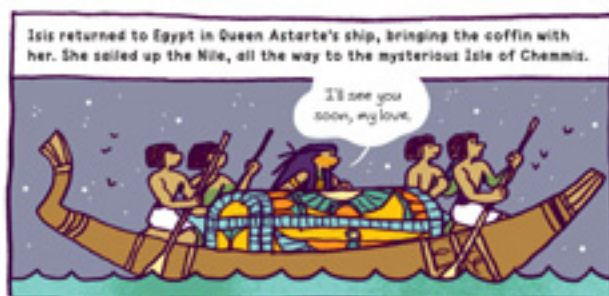


The queen went to show the King her new hairdo. As soon as she was out of sight, the old woman transformed into a bird. It was Isis! She took off around the throne room, searching for her husband's coffin.



When Isis found it, she let out a shriek so loud that it shook the whole palace.





As for the baby, Horus, his own story was about to begin...

