To Xena, our much-missed cat. – S.D.

For Maria and Raquel and special thanks to
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# MYTHS, MUMMIES AND MAGIC IN ANCIENT EGYPT

BY

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B P P

# 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.

Barley seed
Telephone seed
Bee seed
Sunflower seed
Tiger seed
Television seed

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

A beautiful sight, I'm happy tonight, floating in a watery wonderland...

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

A magical mound! I'll call it 'dry ground'.

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

Hi Atum, I'm Re.

Hi Re, I'm Atum.

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

Atishoo!

No, it's 'Tefnut' and 'Shu'.

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

Got a tissue?

IT'S 'TEFNUT' AND 'SHU'.

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

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.

Ahem! Hello?

Right, that's it!

I'm separating you two!

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

You stay up there!

...and added Shu, the god of the air, between them both.

...Geb low to the Earth...



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

Waaaaah!

In the meantime, Re carried on creating. He made gods, goddesses, animals, plants, and a marvellous river called the Nile. He ruled on Earth as king of all creation, and for a while, everything was perfect.

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

KICK ME!

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

Re's candles cost more than his birthday cake!

When you're Re, every day is a weak day!

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.

Take this to the humans!

Dear Humans,
Sorry about Sekhmet. She does tend to bite when she's excited. If you want to stop her, you need to brew seven thousand jars of bright red beer.
love, Re x

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.

I've been a bad kitty.

Sorry, humans! I love you, really.

I don't feel too good.

I'm going to take a nap, now.

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.

Goodbye, Grandpa!

We'll miss you!

Now the fun can REALLY begin...

# 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').

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.

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

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....

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Purr Purr Purr

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.

My cat is going to love this!

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

Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream.

If you see a crocodile, don't forget to scream!

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.

Not too bad - but perhaps wash your feet next time...

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.

More wine, brother?

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.

Oof, it's heavy!

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.

The chest is mine!

I think you mean COFFIN!

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, sweeties, 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.

Byblos? Are you sure?

As sure as eggs are eggs!



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!

Who did this to you?

An old woman down by the river!

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

Going anywhere nice on your holidays?

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.

AIEEEEEEE!

GIVE ME THIS PILLAR - NOW!

King Malcander called for the workmen who had installed the pillar to come and uninstall it. They split the pillar with an axe, and there stood the coffin of Osiris.

Isis returned to Egypt in Queen Astarte's ship, bringing the coffin with her. She sailed up the Nile, all the way to the mysterious Isle of Chemmis.

I'll see you soon, my love.

Isis hoped with all her heart that Osiris might still be alive... He was not.

Isis hid the coffin in the reeds and went off to fetch her sister Nephthys, so they could perform the funeral rituals which would allow Osiris to pass into the afterlife.

Unfortunately Seth was on the same island that day hunting wild boar.

He soon discovered the coffin.

OSIRIS?

Are you haunting me?

Fearing that Isis might try to bring Osiris back to life, Seth chopped his body into fourteen pieces and hid them all over Egypt.

Take THAT!

When Isis returned to the island, Osiris's body was gone.

Not again!



The sisters flew all over Egypt, searching for Osiris's body parts.

After a few weeks, they had found all of Osiris's body parts, except for one part, which had fallen into the Nile and been eaten by a blowfish...

I don't feel so good.

Anubis, God of the Dead, helped Isis to reassemble her husband and embalm his body.

Then Isis used her powerful magic to revive him.

Did I win? Did I win? Did I fit inside the chest?

Osiris was alive again, but only just – and only for long enough to see the birth of his son, Horus.

Osiris! It's your turn to change his nappy!

I can't, sorry. I'm... still mostly dead.

So Osiris shuffled off to the afterlife, where he ruled over the dead.

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