



1. Sadie's Point of View

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With everyone at breakfast, the mansion was strangely silent. Five levels of balconies faced the Great Room, so normally the place was bustling with noise and activity; but I remembered how empty it had felt when Carter and I first arrived last Christmas.

The Great Room still had many of the same touches: the massive statue of Thoth in the middle, Amos's collection of weapons and jazz instruments along the wall, the snakeskin rug in front of the garage-size fireplace. But you could tell that twenty young magicians lived here now as well. An assortment of remote controls, wands, iPads, snack food wrappers, and shabti figurines littered the coffee table. Someone with big feet—probably Julian —had left his muddy trainers on the stairs. And one of our hoodlums —I assumed Felix —had magically converted the fireplace into an Antarctic wonderland, complete with snow and a live penguin. Felix does love penguins.

Magical mops and brooms sped about the house, trying to clean up. I had to duck to avoid getting dusted. For some



reason, the dusters think my hair is a maintenance issue.

[No comments from you, Carter.]

As I expected, everyone was gathered on the veranda, which served as our dining area and albino crocodile habitat. Philip of Macedonia splashed around happily in his pool, jumping for bacon strips whenever a trainee tossed him one. The morning was cold and rainy, but the fire in the terrace's magic braziers kept us toasty.

I grabbed a pain au chocolat and a cup of tea from the buffet table and sat down. Then I realized the others weren't eating. They were staring at me.

At the head of the table, Amos and Bast both looked grim. Across from me, Carter hadn't touched his plate of waffles, which was very unlike him. To my right, Jaz's chair was empty. (Amos had told me she was still in the infirmary, no change.) To my left sat Walt, looking quite good as usual, but I did my best to ignore him.

The other trainees seemed to be in various states of shock. They were a motley assortment of all ages from all over the world. A handful were older than Carter and me—old enough for university, in fact—which was nice for chaperoning the younger ones, but always made me feel a bit uncomfortable when I tried to act as their teacher. The others were mostly between ten and fifteen. Felix was just nine. There was Julian from Boston, Alyssa from Carolina, Sean from Dublin, and Cleo from Rio de Janeiro (yes, I know, Cleo from Rio, but I'm not making it up!). The only thing we



all had in common —the blood of the pharaohs. All of us were descended from Egypt's royal lines, which gave us a natural capacity for magic and hosting the power of the gods.

The only one who didn't seem affected by the grim mood was Khufu. For reasons we never quite understood, our baboon eats only foods that end in -o. Recently he had discovered Jell-O, which he regarded as a miracle substance. I suppose the capital O made everything taste better. Now he would eat almost anything encased in gelatin —fruit, nuts, bugs, small animals. At the moment he had his face buried in a quivering red mountain of breakfast and was making rude noises as he excavated for grapes.

Everyone else watched me, as if waiting for an explanation.

"Morning," I muttered. "Lovely day. Penguin in the fire-place, if anyone's interested."

"Sadie," Amos said gently, "tell everyone what you told me."

I sipped some tea to settle my nerves. Then I tried not to sound terrified as I described my visit to the Hall of Ages.

When I was done, the only sounds were the fires crackling in the braziers and Philip of Macedonia splashing in his pool.

Finally nine-year-old Felix asked what was on everyone's mind: "So we're all going to die, then?"



"No." Amos sat forward. "Absolutely not. Children, I know I've just arrived. I've hardly met most of you, but I promise we'll do everything we can to keep you safe. This house is layered with magic protection. You have a major goddess on your side" —he gestured to Bast, who was opening a can of Fancy Feast Tuna Supreme with her fingernails—"and the Kane family to protect you. Carter and Sadie are more powerful than you might realize, and I've battled Michel Desjardins before, if it comes to that."

Given all the trouble we'd had last Christmas, Amos's speech seemed a tad optimistic, but the trainees looked relieved.

"If it comes to that?" Alyssa asked. "It sounds pretty certain they'll attack us."

Amos knitted his brow. "Perhaps, but it troubles me that Desjardins would agree to such a foolish move. Apophis is the real enemy, and Desjardins knows it. He should realize he needs all the help he can get. Unless..." He didn't finish the sentence. Whatever he was thinking, it apparently troubled him greatly. "At any rate, if Desjardins decides to come after us, he will plan carefully. He knows this mansion will not fall easily. He can't afford to be embarrassed by the Kane family again. He'll study the problem, consider his options, and gather his forces. It would take several days for him to prepare —time he should be using to stop Apophis."

Walt raised an index finger. I don't know what it is about him, but he has a sort of gravity that draws the group's attention when he's about to speak. Even Khufu looked up



from his Jell-O.

"If Desjardins does attack us," Walt said, "he'll be well prepared, with magicians who are a lot more experienced than we are. Can he get through our defenses?"

Amos gazed at the sliding glass doors, possibly remembering the last time our defenses had been breached. The results hadn't been good.

"We must make sure it doesn't come to that," he said. "Desjardins knows what we're attempting, and that we only have five days —well, four days, now. According to Sadie's vision, Desjardins is aware of our plan and will try to prevent it out of some misguided belief that we are working for the forces of Chaos. But if we succeed, we'll have bargaining power to make Desjardins back off."

Cleo raised her hand. "Um ... We don't know the plan. Four days to do what?"

Amos gestured at Carter, inviting him to explain. That was fine with me. Honestly I found the plan a bit crazy.

My brother sat up. I must give him credit. Over the last few months, he'd made progress at resembling a normal teenager. After six years of homeschooling and traveling with Dad, Carter had been hopelessly out of touch. He'd dressed like a junior executive, in crisp white shirts and slacks. Now at least he'd learned to wear jeans and T-shirts and the occasional hoodie. He'd let his hair grow out in a curly mess —which looked much better. If he kept on



improving, the boy might even get a date some day.

[What? Don't poke me. It was a compliment!]

"We're going to wake the god Ra," Carter said, as if it was as easy as getting a snack from the fridge.

The trainees glanced at one another. Carter wasn't known for his sense of humor, but they must've wondered if he was joking.

"You mean the sun god," Felix said. "The old king of the gods."

Carter nodded. "You all know the story. Thousands of years ago, Ra got senile and retreated into the heavens, leaving Osiris in charge. Then Osiris got overthrown by Set. Then Horus defeated Set and became pharaoh. Then—"

I coughed. "Short version, please."

Carter gave me a cross look. "The point is, Ra was the first and most powerful king of the gods. We believe Ra is still alive. He's just asleep somewhere deep in the Duat. If we can wake him—"

"But if he retired because he was senile," Walt said, "wouldn't that mean he's really, really senile now?"

I'd asked the same thing when Carter first told me his idea. The last thing we needed was an all-powerful god who couldn't remember his own name, smelled like old people,



and drooled in his sleep. And how could an immortal being get senile in the first place? No one had given me a satisfactory answer.

Amos and Carter looked at Bast, which made sense, as she was the only Egyptian god present.

She frowned at her uneaten Fancy Feast. “Ra is the god of the sun. In olden times, he aged as the day aged, then sailed through the Duat on his boat each night and was reborn with the sunrise each morning.”

“But the sun isn’t reborn,” I put in. “It’s just the rotation of the earth—”

“Sadie,” Bast warned.

Right, right. Myth and science were both true —simply different versions of the same reality, blah, blah. I’d heard that lecture a hundred times, and I didn’t want to hear it again.

Bast pointed at the scroll, which I’d set next to my teacup. “When Ra stopped making his nightly journey, the cycle was broken, and Ra faded into permanent twilight—at least, so we think. He meant to sleep forever. But if you could find him in the Duat—and that’s a big if—it’s possible he might be brought back and reborn with the right magic. The Book of Ra describes how this might be done. Ra’s priests created the book in ancient times and kept it secret, dividing it into three parts, to be used only if the world was ending.”

“If ... the world was ending?” Cleo asked. “You mean Apophis



"If ... the world was ending?" Cleo asked. "You mean Apophis is really going to ... to swallow the sun?"

Walt looked at me. "Is that possible? In your story about the Red Pyramid, you said Apophis was behind Set's plan to destroy North America. He was trying to cause so much chaos that he could break out of his prison."

I shivered, remembering the apparition that had appeared in the sky over Washington, D.C. —a writhing giant snake.

"Apophis is the real problem," I agreed. "We stopped him once, but his prison is weakening. If he manages to escape—"

"He will," Carter said. "In four days. Unless we stop him. And then he'll destroy civilization —everything humans have built since the dawn of Egypt."

That put a chill over breakfast table.