

# Book Excerpt

## The Guardian of the Golden House



### Chapter 1 Entangled

If you are reading this papyrus, then I know my friends have succeeded. They have completed the dangerous journey to your world. It's then a great relief to know that I won't be forgotten there. That was never going to be a problem here. Here, I'm famous.

But first, I must make it clear: what follows in the pages below *is* the truth. The whole truth and nothing else. By Horus and the Two Lands as my witness, I swear it. I say that—the Oracle's Oath—because I know just how unbelievable my story is.

My name is Alexander. It used to be Alexander Cheval, but that changed after what I learned in Egypt. No, not that Egypt, the country that began in 1922. And not Ancient Egypt, I didn't go back in time. But the *real* Egypt. I get why everyone rolls their eyes when I say that. How could an almost thirteen-year-old who has never been to a museum and has painfully ordinary parents travel between dimensions?

I better start at the beginning. My story really began one summer, it was a typical day in Coach's summer school class—boring. Deadly boring. I want to be clear: I *wasn't* in summer school because I was a troublemaker. And no, I hadn't failed a class. All I did was miss six weeks the past term. Usually, nobody noticed. I was basically a ghost. Then some new teacher started asking why I was on her class roster. Who takes attendance anyway? Apparently, my explanation

about staying home to translate Ancient Egyptian stele rubbings I found in a digging diary was no excuse.

I was powerless, so there I was two days before the Unlucky Days, seven days from the safety of the New Year, listening to Coach drone on. I had learned to tune his voice out. I never had heard anything I didn't already know. It was much better to read and learn something new.

“Who was the first Pharaoh of Egypt?”

*Narmer who united the two lands upper and lower Egypt.*

“Who knows the origin of the word adobe?”

*It's from the Middle Egyptian word dbt which translates to mud brick.*

“Who knows why people used to eat mummies?”

Wait, who's asking those questions? It took me a moment to realize that it wasn't all in my head. It wouldn't be the first time I drifted off into a cloud of random Egyptian facts in the middle of class.

“Come discover the answers to these questions and more at my new, once in a lifetime, exhibit on Ancient Egypt,” an unfamiliar voice boomed over the intercom. “Not responsible for sudden learning, fascination with the dead, or obsession with golden objects...see you Thursday!”

“FIELD TRIP!” The class, in what sounded like perfect unison, shouted.

Normally, I would have been excited to hear news like this. But something bothered me. An exhibit suddenly appearing in Rainsville? Really, *Rainsville*? That just didn't seem right.

Rainsville was a high desert town, remote, desolate, if not nearly deserted. The single road in and out of town, at least that's what it used to be, was more craters and potholes than road. It was a town totally marooned, completely forgotten. It was Boringsville.

Somehow, an exhibit catalog landed on my desk. I really don't remember how. I was too distracted trying to unravel why any Egyptologist would choose Rainsville to notice. Looking


around, no one else had one. I shrugged. Most likely, they were immediately thrown away. I couldn't imagine anyone else finding it interesting.

On the cover of the catalog was a golden statue of Horus, but no words. Inside, the first page was crisp white with a line of gold text. BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, I WANT YOU IN MY TOMB.

I thought it was catchy, maybe even clever, but also really odd. I mean, it was hardly academic. But what I found inside—well, that was pretty amazing.

The two days before the exhibit, I spent every second of it reading and re-reading the catalog. It was fascinating. There were amulets and *ushabti* from tombs and temples I always dreamed of visiting. And also from tombs and temples I had never heard of. I had read Dr. Longmeadow's *Complete History of Ancient Egypt*. All thirteen volumes. What else is there to do in Rainsville? And still, I didn't recognize some of the Pharaohs or cities named. That really made me curious. I began making a list organized under three headers—QUESTIONS, RESEARCH, and MUST SEE.

The exhibit catalog also included a few surprises that can be difficult to explain without sounding like I had lost my mind. I hadn't.

It began one morning when I had turned to page thirty-three. The page featured an image of an Egyptian boy, a single finger raised to his lips. An excellent specimen of the secret society called the Children of Horus, but otherwise ordinary. Then I saw the caption: ALEXANDER BEWARE THE UNLUCKY DAYS. On either side was the hieroglyph of a horned viper  (Don't be fooled into thinking this is some cute-looking slug. This venomous snake that literally hides in the sand was so fearsome that some Egyptians refused to draw it in case magic could bring it to life.)

At first, I understood this to mean Alexander the Great. That wasn't me. And the Unlucky Days, well, that's easy. It was basically a gap in the calendar. But every Egyptian feared those five days. Most legends said it was the one time the goddess Sekhmet and the god Set would set out to annihilate humankind. Or at least harm as many people as they could. Beware indeed! Egyptians had all sorts of rituals to protect themselves during the Unlucky Days.

But then I noticed two pinhead-sized droplets, one gold and one red, under the figure's sealed lips that looked glossy like wet paint. I rubbed my thumb over both—big mistake—at first, they felt thick and grainy, like seedy jam. And then warm and warmer until my thumb felt like it might burst into flame.

Before I knew what had happened, I saw two ants, one red and one gold, impossibly small but unmistakably ants with jointed antennae, clear diamond droplet eyes, and a thorax round and smooth as a marble.

Stunned, I couldn't move. The ants crawled on my finger, then with each step grew and grew, until by the time they reached my knuckle, they were the size of an earbud, shiny and strange. I wanted to scream, to run, to do something other than be ant food. My whole body seemed to stop working, I couldn't do anything. Both ants reared their heads back wildly; antennae outstretched, jagged mandibles flexed wide, then, in a snap, clamped down into my soft skin. "Ow..." I muttered. Then everything went black.

"Hello, Alexander. I'm glad to finally meet you," a jarring yet familiar voice called out. A rhythm was noticeable in the gentle dialect, different from how I spoke or how anyone I knew spoke, but the voice was uncanny. The voice sounded just like *me*.

I don't know if my eyes were open or closed, but from somewhere, a boy appeared. He stood obscured by misty shadows, but I could still make out his hazel eyes, the angular bridge of his

nose, and the auburn hair parted but still tussled. At first, I was confused and thought I was looking at my reflection. But slowly, I noticed the boy's clothes, a kilt and tunic—*Egyptian*. I opened my mouth to say something, but no words came out. The boy waved. I looked down to my sides, still half-expecting I was the one waving, but no, both my hands were firmly at my hips. A lump round as a boulder caught in my throat.

“Who are you? Where am I?” Sputtering, I tried to focus, to study the boy's face for some small differences, but everything seemed to spin. I stumbled, feeling weak, like my legs had been running a marathon. My eyes throbbed from staring and from the glaring strange lights.

The boy stood quietly for a moment, seeming to wait for me to say something more before laughing. It was playful and brief, but I was sure I must be blushing and was happy for the shadows.

“Don't you see?” The boy walked closer. The sound of gritty sand grinding on stone filled the room. If the place could be called a room. There really was no word for the space where we were meeting.

“Wait, are you me?” As I walked closer, the only differences I could detect were his clothes and mannerisms. The boy held himself with his chin elegantly lifted, arms fluidly gesturing. Comfortable, confident, totally in control. I never felt like that.

“No, I'm Alexstar, your twin brother. But we're much more than twins. We're entangled, and our entanglement allows us to meet and speak in our minds.”

“That's impossible...I don't understand —”

“—It can be difficult to explain. What I've been told is that while true twins share chromosomes, entangled twins like us share every atom and those atoms are linked. Some say an accident of physics, something that only happens to photons, that I can't say.” Alexstar spoke like a

weatherman plodding through another predictable forecast, just rattling off facts. Not sounding impressed by what he had to say, not even boastful or confused. But what he said would be bizarre if he didn't make it seem so ordinary. Like, it was obvious. Everything was obvious to him.

“Twin brother? Entangled? Linked? No, no, that must be some sort of joke. I’ve been drugged—that’s what’s really happening. You’re just a hallucination.” An awkward giggle squirmed out from my lips. Surely, I would know if I had a brother, especially a twin.

Alexstar sighed dramatically, making me question if he was underwhelmed by my imagination or maybe unimpressed by my intelligence. “Hallucinations?” He finally said, arching one eyebrow.

“Plausible, right?” I stretched the words as long as I could, hoping more time would make them somehow more convincing. Alexstar’s face said otherwise.

“That’s one of the reasons you have to come here *as soon as possible*,” Alexstar motioned excitedly behind him. “So they can show you, us, what we can do. Much of it they say is unknown, and much more is legend, but they say the possibilities are extraordinary, even godlike.” His voice, by now, was half-angry, rippling with an urgency that rushed the words together.

“Godlike? You mean powers like some sort of superhero?” A secret twin was hard enough to believe, but a secret superhero twin, that was too much.

“Don't you fear being touched and seeing into people’s minds?”

“How...that happens to you too?” I had never heard anyone else talk about experiencing this—Alexstar had to be real.

“Yes, of course we're entangled and they say we can do much more.”

“You keep saying *they*.” I stood straight and looked into the Alexstar’s eyes, frustrated by the evasive answers. He took a step backward. “Who are you talking about?” Confidence grew out of doubt as I found my bearings, pressing the words, forming them into a demand.

Alexstar’s face shifted, sheepish. Turning, he tried to hide his reaction. “I’m not supposed to say. Not until you pick a side.” Two fingers pinched at the edge of his tunic, tugging mindlessly. The fabric bounced, sending the faint smell of cedar into the air.

“What sides? None of this makes any sense.” My spurt of confidence continued. I crept closer and closer until we stood barely a breath apart. So close I could now make out every detail. A dew glistening on Alexstar’s face reflected the colors flying by, his hair bleached amber by the sun, the quiver of muscles in his biceps visible as he gestured. I caught his eyes, suddenly aware of my envious staring, and quickly looked down. This is how I should be. A jealous thought crossed my mind.

“But it must. You’ll soon see it all makes sense when you get here. You’re coming to Egypt, aren’t you?”