

Atem's Crown

Torch-lit, cobweb-filled, sandstone hallways. The stench of decay and the sound of running water. Bad signs all around.

Cobwebs meant spiders. Spiders meant other insects. Not good.

The smell of decay and rot; a very bad sign indeed.

Worst was the distant sound of water. A guarantee of erosion and decay and corruption.

Why me? Why did I always end up with these shitty ruins?

Other adventurous archaeologists made headlines with their discoveries; relics from Ancient Maya, prehistoric tools found in Central African dig-sites, language tablets from the long-dead Indus peoples, ceremonial daggers found in Britain that dated back to before the Roman Empire wiped out Celtic Druidism. Huge finds, lauded and praised the world over.

And me? I always got the short end of the stick.

Last year, I'd delved into the Amazon – searching for mythical city whose name was lost to time. A sacred, impossible place that was believed to contain the Golden Skull of Minathalik. Legend had it that the old tribal queen had commanded that, upon her death, her skull was to be coated in gold; its eyes filled with giant rubies. Her throne room, it was claimed, was filled with unimaginable treasures; with her Golden Skull sitting upon her old throne. Waiting to be claimed.

I spent years doing the research, connecting the dots. I *found* the lost city. Explored through it, avoiding booby-traps and dangerous beasts and ancient trials. I got all the way to that fabled throne room! And you wanna know what I found there?

Nothing.

Fucking *nothing*.

The throne room was *empty*.

Years of my life wasted on an empty, lifeless room. No gold, no Skull, no nothing. Just dust and rocks and a stain on the floor from where a wooden chair had rotted away millennia ago.

Months traversing through the Amazon, weeks spend narrowly avoiding my own death at the hands of ancient traps, and *nothing* to show for it. I couldn't even prove that the city existed! Satellite images didn't show it, and all my photos and evidence went up in flames after a jaguar attack.

Before that, I'd failed to find the lost city of Atlantis. And before that, I'd discovered where an ancient artefact could be located two days after *someone else* found it themselves. I was on a plane to that very place when I'd heard the news that *she'd* beaten me to it.

Rene d'Marlo. The bane of my existence.

Even now, she was camped just a few miles away from me; both of us in different ruins of old Mesopotamia.

She'd already found half a dozen one-of-a-kind relics at her site. *She'd* already made headlines and fortunes from her discoveries.

And me? I'd found sweet fuck all.

So here I was, wandering through decaying, empty ruins while Rene launched herself to greater heights of fame and fortune. Just my fucking luck.

The throne room of God-King Atem felt annoyingly familiar to me.

It was empty.

Sandstone walls on all four sides, a sandstone floor and ceiling. Electrical lamps were dotted about to give the drab, hollow place some light. On one end of the throne room was the entrance, on the other was a raised platform with a crumbled sandstone

throne.

No piles of gold, no trinkets. Nothing.

Atem, for all that he might've claimed himself a mortal god during his life, certainly didn't have the kind of wealth one would expect of a divine.

Sighing, resigned to this adventure's failure, I climbed onto the raised platform.

Might as well examine the crumbled throne before calling it quits.

I shone my flashlight at it, circled the sandstone rocks and slabs. No carvings or markings, no words engraved or anything of the sort. Just plain, boring sandstone. Nothing remarkable in the slightest. Not even-

A glint.

Underneath the rubble, something reflecting light. Something metal and yellow. No, not yellow. Gold.

My heart hopped, hope blossomed in my chest.

Carefully, I lowered the flashlight and began moving the fragments of the broken sandstone throne.

It was hard, slow work. Moving that much weight while trying my best to avoid damaging whatever was buried beneath it all. One chunk at a time, little by little.

Until finally, there it was.

A thin golden band.

An ancient crown.

Finally! Fucking *finally*! I'd actually *found* something!

I hiked the distance between the two camps, hand on my leather bag all the while. Inside was Atem's Crown. My prize. And, before me, a small campsite.

Unlike me, Rene didn't work alone.

A small team of explorers wandered around the camp; experts in languages and history, a security officer or two, a lawyer.

No wonder the bitch always found the best artefacts. With ten times the manpower I had, it'd be surprising if she *wasn't* constantly one-upping me. But not today. Today, *I* had the big find. The trophy.

Time to rub her face in it.

As I walked through the camp, several pairs of eyes followed me. Some with curiosity, others with snide amusement. They all knew who I was, all knew my history of failure. Some of the assholes even had a little snickering laugh at my expense. I ignored them, eyes intent on Rene D'Marlo's tent; a large multi-roomed monstrosity that was almost house-sized in its splendour.

I stepped inside, eyes roaming the tables covered in artefacts and maps and notes.

Rene was standing over one of the tables, staring intently at some document in front of her. She didn't even notice as I walked up to her, a smug grin on my face.

"Found anything important yet?" I asked, sneering down my nose at the bitch who'd made me look bad at my job for so long.

Dark hair tied back in a tight braid, full lips and piercing blue eyes. Wearing a tank-top that looked two sizes too small for her voluminous bust and combat trousers that must've been designed to show off her round ass. Her body was more the type of thing one would expect on a pornstar, not an archaeologist. How many of her 'finds', I wondered, actually belonged to someone else? With a face like hers, a body like that, it wouldn't have surprised me if she'd convinced lesser men to give her their finds in exchange for certain 'benefits'.

Rene glanced up, saw it was me standing in front of her. She raised an eyebrow.

"Everything we find is important," Rene said, eyes drifting back down to her work. "From the smallest rock to the grandest trinkets. Every item we discover provides useful information for-

"I've uncovered a *crown*," I smirked at the bitch. "Gold and ancient and flawless. God-King Atem's Crown itself."

A tiny smile crept onto the woman's face. Again, her eyes rose to meet mine.

"I'm glad for you," she said – somehow managing to make her mockery sound earnest. "I know how much you've wanted it; to find something big. Regardless of what anyone else might say, you've earned this. A crown, huh? That's amazing. Well done."

My eyes narrowed at her.

Bitch.

She thought she was so much better than me!

Without thinking, I reached into my leather bag, pulled out the crown and flaunted it in front of her.

Rene's eyebrows shot up.

"Not to tell you how to do your job or anything," she said diplomatically, "but you should probably put that somewhere safe. Wouldn't want it to get damaged or–"

"It's with me," I shrugged, planting the crown atop my head. "Ergo, it's safe."

Rene's eyes bulged. Her mouth hung open for a moment.

Then, slowly, she nodded her head.

"Yes," she said, voice softer and dreamier than it'd been before. "It's safe with you."

The thin crown vibrated on my head.

"Damned right it is. If you were smart, you'd hand over all your discoveries to me for protection. Leaving them out in the open like this," I gestured to the tabletops covered in ancient artefacts, "is asking for trouble."

"Yes," Rene breathed, eyes wide with adoration, "take them all. They're yours."

I stared hard into the woman's eyes, searching for the deception. The punchline. She couldn't be *serious* about me taking all her finds, that was for sure. But... Why was she looking at me like that?

The crown hummed.

And I felt it. The power contained within the golden metal.

Just a wisp of the item's potential.

My eyes shot open.

It couldn't be...

"Rene," I said, feeling the crown thrum. "Take your top off."

Without hesitation, her hands shot to her tank top. She pulled it up over her head, tossed it aside. She smiled at me, eyes filled with an adoration and love that couldn't be rivalled.

Disbelieving, I raised my hands, brushed my fingertips against the warm surface of God-King Atem's Crown.

A smile spread my lips.

"On your knees," I commanded Rene D'Marlo. "Put those whore lips of yours to good use."

She obeyed without question.

Flashing lights all around me. A red carpet, barricades on either side. Security guards holding back my adoring fans, keeping the paparazzi and news reporters at bay. All around me, shouting voices vying for my attention.

I strode the carpet, smiling and waving at the crowd.

A world-famous celebrity for my countless discoveries. A genius archaeologist who'd uncovered treasures of civilisations long gone, a brilliant man who never failed. Ever since my loyal, dedicated team and I uncovered the Mesopotamian haul, I'd been the face of archaeology around the world. Every major discovery since then had been mine to make, or so people were led to believe.

Easy to claim the victories of others when they were more than willing – with the

help of a little Crown – to step aside for you.

Wealth. Fame. Prestige. Power.

Everything I'd ever wanted and more.

I strode to my limousine with my head held high.

As I approached, my sexy chauffeur opened the back-seat door for me. Inside three more beauties waited for me. Rene was one, another was a world-class model, the third a Hollywood actress.

I turned to wave one last time at the crowd that adored me so much then, smiling, slipped into my limo where the three babes were waiting.

The moment the door was closed and the limo began to move, they pounced on me. One locking lips with mine, another tearing at my clothes to kiss my chest, the third unbuttoning my pants – hungry for the hard rod underneath.

In the mess of naked bodies, I slipped my leather bag off my shoulder and set it aside.

News reporters and online blogs claimed I always had that bag on me because I always wanted to be ready for the next adventure. That it was a sign of my love and dedication to my craft. I was, in their eyes, a hero who explored the world and uncovered its mysteries. The truth, of course, was much simpler.

I took that bag everywhere I went in order to keep its contents close to hand at all times.

Atem's Crown.

Two pairs of lips pressed to my cock; the model and the actress sharing the duty of fellating it. Rene, on the other hand, pushed herself to my chest, pressed her lips to mine. Hungry for my approval, there was nothing the former archaeologist wouldn't do for me now.

I leaned back in my seat, closed my eyes, enjoyed the sensation of the three sexiest women I'd ever encountered doing all they possibly could to please and satisfy me.

Their King.

And, when it came time to sink my cock into their cunts, they all knew exactly who I'd start out with.

The other two lifted Rene up, each one gripping onto one of her legs. Smiling dreamily, they lowered Rene onto my cock – made sure to impale her fully upon it. I simply sat back, let them take care of it all.

When Rene started to bounce, the other girls played with her body, and with each other; putting on a nice show for me to watch.

This was the life I'd always wanted.

Success. Fame. Women.

What more was there that I could possibly desire?

On the limo's seat beside me, in my leather bag, the God-King's Crown hummed.