

If you see a crystal skull at a garage sale and you think to yourself, “Gee, this’ll make a nifty paperweight,” so you buy it for ten bucks and take it home and find yourself gazing into its eye sockets for hours at a time for no good reason, don’t be surprised if strange things begin to happen, especially on the night of the full moon. It’s quite possible your mind will be sucked out of your own bony skull and enter the crystal one, where it will be flung across the astral plane, piercing the mystic veil enshrouding the ancient past and plunging you into the fabled kingdom of Atlantis.

That’s exactly what happened to me not long ago – except I think I ended up in ALT-lantis, since it was a little bit different than the one Plato and Cayce talked about. But wherever I was, it was cool. Picture, if you will, the throne room, where tapestries of faerie cloth graced amber-paneled walls, and marble columns soared up to ceilings adorned with pictures of chuckling cherubs and brooding gods, painted by the finest artists of the ancient world. Picture the chairs, made of burnished orichalcum, and the tables, carved from monstrous diamonds and emeralds. And reposing in those chairs were the silk-clad butts of finely coifed courtiers. And there, in the center, seated on a throne fashioned from the fused skulls of Greek philosophers, sat Atlas himself, ruler of the greatest nation the world has ever known!

Picture the banquet table, piled high with rare and succulent...

On second thought, don’t picture any of that, because just as I was getting accustomed to my glorious and splendid surroundings, my spirit was unceremoniously yanked away and sucked a thousand miles south to another palace in another Atlantean city, the residence of Elasippus, who was also a king, but not *the* king, and ruled a fiefdom, not the whole shebang. And right after I got there, another visitor arrived at the palace, a flesh-and-blood visitor who scurried into the throne room and prostrated herself before the dais – accidentally, because the marble floor was slicker than she thought and she’d worn the wrong slippers, the kind with little traction for stopping on marble floors, so she fell on her face, banging her chin and knocking herself cold.

Elasippus sat before her on his throne – made of peasant skulls, I might add, and not a philosopher among them, Greek or otherwise – and he tried not to smile at her pratfall, and when she regained consciousness he said somberly, “You may rise.”

And the young woman rose to her knees, rubbing her bruised chin. “You summoned me, oh mighty king, and I am here. How may I serve you?”

The king’s eyes flitted over her light-gray robe, which clung to every curve of her shapely body, and a rude thought darted through his head. But he had not summoned her to the palace to serve him in that manner. Perhaps later, when the crisis was over.

He held up a piece of parchment. “Do you know what this is, Priestess Shuretra?”

“Yes, your majesty, it’s a piece of parchment.”

“Obviously. I’m referring to the drawing *on* the parchment.”

“Oh. It’s a pitchfork, your majesty.”

“Wrong. It’s a trident.”

“Oh.”

“This drawing is part of an incident report written up by one of my soldiers five days ago. A portion of this trident has been stolen.”

“Part of it?”

“The tip of the middle tine.”

“The tip of the middle what?”

King Elasippus sighed. “A tine. A trident has three pointy things at the top. Each one of those pointy things is called a tine.”

“So why don’t they call it a tri-tine instead of a tri-dent?”

“Because ... um ... never mind. It doesn’t matter. Try to focus on the issue at hand.”

“Yes, your majesty. Would you mind telling me why someone would want to steal the tip of a trident tine?”

“It’s made of solid gold. Worth about thirty thousand sovereigns on the metals exchange if it were melted down.”

“I don’t understand. Why would someone make a trident of solid ... merciful gods! You don’t mean *His* trident, do you?”

“Yes. The one from Poseidon’s statue.”

“There are lots of Poseidon statues in Atlantis, your majesty. Which one specifically are you referring to?”

Sigh. “Which one do you think?”

“The statue in Capital City where he’s riding in a chariot pulled by six winged horses?”

“No, not that one.”

“You mean the really, really, really tall statue out in our harbor?”

“That’s the one.”

“That’s a helluva big trident.”

“Indeed.”

“But the statue is over a thousand feet high. How could anyone get up there to steal anything?”

“They rode on a dragon.”

“Oh. That sounds rather risky.”

“It would have been positively lethal if the sea god had spotted them. Fortunately for the thieves – and us – Poseidon is on holiday in Lemuria and hasn’t been keeping close tabs on Atlantis of late. At least that’s what his priests say. But the situation is critical. As you may be aware, there’s been a rash of temple burglaries recently, throughout Atlantis. The thieves have stolen bowls, grabbed goblets, stripped statues and copped candlesticks. The hunger for precious metals has reached epidemic proportions.”

Shuretra nodded. “I fear that much of the populace has lost the awe and reverence they once felt for the gods. They think Poseidon and the Others have forgotten mankind, and the priests are delusional charlatans who speak for no one but themselves.”

“Well I can’t afford to take that view. High Priest Serpafo tells me Poseidon visited him in a dream just before He departed for Lemuria, and He issued a dire warning about these thefts – and that was before this trident business, which is the most brazen incident to date. Serpafo might be imagining things – he does like to hit the sauce on a regular basis – but what if he’s right?”

“You are wise, your majesty. It’s never a good idea to defy or defile the gods. Fortunately, my own temple has been spared from these desecrations, since all our holy objects are made of wood. That’s the nice thing about belonging to an obscure order worshiping a minor god like Fanajeba. When you can’t afford the fancy schmancy doodads like the major temples, you’re rarely targeted by thieves.”

“How fortunate for you. But if Poseidon gets pissed off and lashes out, no one in Atlantis will be safe. And this latest incident couldn’t have come at a worse time. The centennial of the statue’s erection will soon be here, and the sea god is bound to look in on the festivities. He never could resist a blowout – especially one involving erections. It’s imperative the trident be restored before the celebration begins.”

“Can’t the temple just replace the missing tine tip with a new one?”

"I suggested that to High Priest Serpafo, but he said the temple couldn't afford it. I offered to pay for it out of the royal coffers, but he thinks Poseidon will want the trident restored to its original, pristine condition."

"Shouldn't that be pronounced pris-TYNE condition?"

"This is no time for word games, priestess."

"Sorry. How can I help?"

"Isn't Fanajeba the god of shadows and secrets and hidden things?"

"Yes, your majesty. He's half brother of Jana, who handles all that for the Romans, while Fanajeba is in charge of the Atlantis region."

"And you're one of His high priestesses, are you not?"

"Well ... I haven't earned my High Priestess designation yet. I'm just a Fair to Middling Priestess at the moment."

"But your Supreme Mother tells me you're the most gifted scryoress in Elasippiapolis, and if anyone can find that missing tine tip – and the loathsome thieves who took it – you can."

"I'm honored she has so much faith in me. But I'm not at my best right now. My scrying abilities take a hit during certain phases of the lunar cycle, and my visions become even more fragmented and fleeting than normal. Besides, isn't catching criminals a job for your soldiers?"

"My soldiers are scouring the city at this very moment..."

"Well there's your trouble. I must admit Elasippiapolis needs a good cleaning, but they should drop that and concentrate on finding the thief..."

"That's what I meant, priestess. They're scouring the city looking for the thief."

"Oh."

"But without much luck. Some of my men are crack investigators – meaning they round up the usual petty thieves and footpads and crack their heads until they confess. But this time we need to find the person who actually committed the crime, someone who can tell us where the tine is hidden or who he sold it to. That isn't a job for soldiers. I need someone with vision. Someone who can part the veil of mystery and pierce the curtain of deceit and shine a light into the shadowy recesses of man's evil soul."

"I'm quite flattered, your majesty. But there are many scryoresses with more experience than I."

"Yes, at the Fanajeban temple in Capital City. And I'll be damned if I'll send for one of them. The minute I do that, Atlas will hear about it and he'll wonder what kind of slipshod fiefdom I'm running down here and why I need to borrow priestesses from the capital city to bail me out. He'll never let me hear the end of it. No, this has to be handled locally."

Shuretra bowed low. "Very well, your majesty, I accept the assignment. I shall serve you well."

"See that you do."

The king rose from his throne. "I shall assign a phalanx of soldiers to assist you."

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I'd prefer only one. I get nervous when I try to do my scrying stuff with a bunch of unbelievers looking on, and most soldiers seem to be unbelievers. I think one soldier will suffice."

"Very well then. I shall ask the captain of the guards to recommend a suitable man. Someone with an open mind, high intellect, healthy curiosity, dogged determination and courage."

"Uh ... how about that fellow who fetched me from the temple? My intuition tells me he'd be perfect for the job."

“Very well. I shall summon him.”

The king clapped his hands. The two guards standing by the door sprang forward.

“Yes, your majesty?” they said as one.

“Summon the soldier who brought the priestess to the palace.”

The soldiers saluted and scurried out the door. A minute later they returned with a third soldier in tow, and Shuretra’s violet eyes lit up as she beheld him once more. Yes, he was the perfect man for the job. He might or might not have an open mind, high intellect, healthy curiosity, dogged determination or courage. But he was cute as a button. And hotter than hell.