



The Shabti

Megaera C. Lorenz

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A former confidence man confronts a haunted ancient Egyptian artifact while running from his past in Megaera C. Lorenz's novel *The Shabti*.

Dashiel, a former fraudulent medium, makes a meager living holding shows revealing his former trade's tricks. After one show, a professor, Hermann, enlists Dashiel's help investigating an afterlife figurine's supernatural properties. As their relationship blossoms, Dashiel's past catches up to him in the unhinged form of Porphyrio, his ex-lover and partner.

Despite its familiar occult framework, the novel is distinguished by its characterizations. Hermann is endearing—quiet, unassuming, and wholesome. His affection for Egyptology is genuine, and his restrained reactions to the shabti's purported mischief are matter-of-fact. At one point, based on the customary offerings of ancient Egyptians to the dead, he offers the shabti a polite note of inquiry and a Danish pastry in an attempt to placate its rage. And he treats Dashiel with unconditional support and patience as the former learns to open up.

Even so, it's Dashiel who steals the show. Beneath his glossy and charming street smarts, he is a morally gray trickster who is weighed down by his own regrets. His guilt and fears manifest in the form of a vengeful ex. Because he's destitute, though, he still resorts to defrauding innocents of their money to afford meals or the next train out of town. Nonetheless, his dogged persistence in resisting his previous large-scale frauds, which were motivated by greed and his determination to protect those he cares about (including Hermann), make him a winning hero. He and Hermann develop immediate chemistry that flowers into a tender, loving relationship worth celebrating.

In the supernatural mystery novel *The Shabti*, a former fraudster faces off against malevolent ancient Egyptian forces and the ghosts of his own past.

ISABELLA ZHOU (May / June 2024)

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