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CRADLE OF DEATH



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Cradle of Death

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i. Prologue: Egypt, 1937

The wind careened across the high top of the wadi. Sand sifted down the age-worn sandstone cliffs, hissing and curling down the ragged wall of fallen boulders and dust-choked scree. The light in Rashid's lantern flickered as a gust whipped across the steps cut in the ancient bedrock and rattled through the narrow passageway into the tomb with a low moan. Rashid muttered something that Duncan chose not to listen to. He narrowed his eyes against the curl of dust and glanced up at the lowering sky. There was a sandstorm coming. You could taste it on the wind. It was near – perhaps only twenty minutes before it hit the edge of the wadi. The air had turned cold. Duncan felt the sweat on his back turn clammy, sticking his dusty shirt to his skin. He shivered and flashed his electric torch down into the tiny antechamber, the yellow light turned sickly by the dust in the air. The beam created shifting, living shadows of the deeply-carved hieroglyphs and staring figures.

Electric light and lantern glow pooled at the far end of the antechamber, mellowing the sharp edges of tumbled and collapsed stone. Mehmet and Abdullah strained at a thick wooden pole, its end buried behind a massive slab of cracked limestone. Professor Icarus Phaide's shadow towered over them, his thin shadowy arms flapping and grasping as he urged them onward in their task, "Push! Push! Put your back into it, men!"

The rock shifted slightly, and a thin trickle of cobbles clattered down the pile of debris. The ancient rockfall completely blocked the far end of the antechamber. Even in antiquity, tomb robbers had forsaken the antechamber and its collapsed inner wall for easier pickings elsewhere. As his team cleared the sand out of the entrance way and unearthed the rock fall, the possibility of an undisturbed inner chamber electrified Phaide. He was driving the men too hard, Duncan decided.

"Professor!" Duncan called. Phaide didn't even turn, determined and single-minded in his job as taskmaster.

"Push! Push!"

Mehmet and Abdullah strained, sweat trickling down their brows, their wiry hands twisting on the wooden pole.

"Professor!" Duncan shouted, bending and climbing down into the cleared antechamber, his electric light flickering over the workmen.

Phaide glanced at the surveyor. His thin, angled face twisted into the familiar, supercilious snarl.

"What is it, Moon?" the Egyptologist snapped, the tails of his frock coat flapping as he turned the bulls-eye of his lantern on the young man. Duncan glanced over at the two other archaeologists in the pool of shadow behind Phaide. Teddy Wyndham looked up at the Surveyor blankly, his spectacle lenses glowing like two little moons against his perpetually sweating, ruddy face. In front of him, Steven Dalglish's scarred chin twisted into a scowl. Neither of them said a word, but stared scornfully at the surveyor.

"There's a sandstorm coming, Professor," Duncan informed his employer curtly. "Twenty minutes – maybe less – before it hits the wadi. We need to close the bulkhead and secure the tomb against the sand," Duncan finished. The bulkhead was a thick door of wooden planks. Without it, the air-borne sand would smother the tomb right up to its ceiling.

"What we need," Phaide retorted, "Is to gain access to the inner chamber. This could be the discovery of a lifetime, Moon." Phaide's grey eyes flashed. "I've come too far to turn back now!"

Duncan opened his mouth to reply, but the howl of the rising wind cut across his retort. Phaide whipped his attention back to the two workmen.

“Push! Harder, you worthless rats! I’m paying you to push! Push!” Phaide roared. Teddy and Steven moved closer to their master, eyes fixed once more on the huge slab of limestone and the quivering lever.

The wooden pole creaked. Duncan shook his head. He needed to get Rashid to help him get the bulkhead in place. It was clear Phaide would work right up until the last possible minute.

There was a crack, a grinding sound of sliding stone, and a throaty, weighty rumble as the massive slab of limestone tumbled with a crash down the rubble incline. Mehmet and Abdullah were sent tumbling as they lost their footing, their wooden lever banging and clattering down the rubble slope in their wake. The huge piece of fallen ceiling they had been levering slid down the rockfall to thud against the stone floor of the antechamber. Dust billowed up as it pulled a whole section of the wall along with it. Duncan coughed, covering his mouth with his neckerchief. He blinked soft, salty lime dust from his eyes. Phaide’s lantern light was flashing through the sand.

“Light, Moon! Bring your light!” he cried, his voice thick with excitement. Despite himself, Duncan scrambled forward, his gaze fixed on the rectangle of pitch blackness exposed by the fall of the stone – a passage; the inner chamber!

He swung his torch. Twin heads appeared. Hawk-headed guardians, carved into the wall on either side of the passageway. Paint flecked their faces. A gleam of gold inlaid around their eyes. Over the lintel, a deeply-carved solar orb, hung with uraei and mounted between outstretched wings picked out in inlaid stone. The paint on the orb was glossy and red, like blood. Protected by the rockfall from the ravages of sand and thieves, the paint was as bright as it had been the day it was painted. And between the hawk-heads, beneath the orb, a passageway leading down into the darkness. Rubble blocked the lower two-thirds, but there was still enough space to shine a light – or to squeeze through.

Duncan scrambled up the diminished apron of rubble as the glow of Phaide’s lantern bobbed and disappeared through the gap and into the passage.

“Professor!” Duncan shouted frantically. “The bulkhead!” Phaide’s dismissive, scornful reply faded away into the darkness. Duncan bellowed orders at Mehmet and Abdullah, calling in Arabic for Rashid and the second lantern. The two workmen scooted past the lantern-boy to secure the bulkhead. Duncan’s heart beat faster as he topped the ridge of fallen rubble and let himself through the gap into the passageway beyond. The tomb’s inner chamber – blocked by the rockfall, and undisturbed since the priests sealed the entrance to the tomb in ancient times. He grabbed Rashid’s lantern and helped the boy through the gap.

Beyond the rubble, the passageway became a flight of steps descending into the darkness. The eyes of gods and strange guardian creatures marched down into the shadows, their faces twisting and eyes glinting in the lantern light. Below Duncan and Rashid, the Professor’s torchlight danced and wove. Duncan clattered down the steps in Phaide’s wake, Rashid nervously following. The walls of the passageway were cracked and splintered – damaged by whatever unsettling had brought down the ceiling.

“Professor?” called Duncan. It wasn’t safe down here without something to support the ceiling. They needed heavy wooden supports in place before they went any further – and they had to get out soon in any case. The sandstorm was still coming. Something creaked.

“Professor?” Duncan called again. The human eyes of animal-headed deities stared out from the walls, following the surveyor’s hesitant footsteps. The steps ended, and the

passageway stepped to either side and became a doorway, framing a staring Phaide. And beyond...

There was a sound like an explosion – a tearing, ripping sound like nothing Duncan had ever heard before. The three of them turned as one, all three screaming in terror as a collapsing stone engulfed them at the same time.

The stairway crumbled, splintering outwards into a burst of shattered limestone flecked with paint and inlaid gold. Rock as sharp as knifeblades tore through Rashid, followed by boulders the size of dining tables pounding him to a smear of blood and bone in seconds. His lantern flew out of his pulped hand, the fuel reservoir igniting as the copper and glass were crushed. The oil exploded, blowing out in a cloud of flame towards Duncan and Phaide. The surveyor was thrown forward into the Professor, rock smashing through the back of his skull, shattering bone and smearing hair and grey cerebral matter across the floor.

The ball of flame from the lantern billowed ahead of the cascade of crashing stone, searing the back of Duncan's corpse and flaring around the Professor. Phaide's scream was blasted from his lungs as enflamed oil engulfed him. Splinters of stone flashed around his legs and chest, slicing and stabbing. A hail of boulders slammed into the Professor's burning body, propelling it through the doorway and out into the chamber beyond.

The rockfall subsided. The passageway had been obliterated, choked by forty metres of fallen limestone. Phaide's burning clothing flickered and smouldered. He was still alive. Hands shattered and burned black, clutching the stone floor. A face almost unrecognisable as still human, charred and flayed of flesh, raised itself shuddering from the dusty rock. Pain unlike any pain imaginable tore at Phaide. His mind shrieked – and then a blood red glow seeped out of the walls of the inner chamber and roared over him. And Phaide, with the final pocket of air left in his near-carbonised lungs, screamed and screamed and screamed.

ii. *Death Shall Wait in the Shadows... Cairo, February 1938*

*Allah u Akbar, Allah u Akbar!
Ash-hadu al-la Ilaha ill Allah!*

The echo of the voice drifted across the orange sky, its cry caught and answered by a dozen smaller voices. Silver listened, entranced. The cry went out again.

*Ash-hadu anna Muhammadan Rasulullaah!
Hayya la-s-saleah - Hayya la-s-saleah!*

The voice cried in earnest, the keening call rising and falling over the city as the littler voices answered. The heartbeat of a city.

“The muezzin’s *azan* – the Call to Prayer – hearing that, you can’t be anywhere but Cairo,” the Doctor murmured to Silver, leaning back against the edge of the marble fountain. Silver turned slowly on the spot, shuffling her feet in a circle on the cobbles. Reflected sunlight from the sparkling fountain played around her. The well-watered beds and lawns of the gardens spun around her, mottled by the gold dusk of approaching evening. Cars tooted softly beyond the hedges and the herbaceous borders, their mechanical cries lost in the chorus of muezzin voices.

“I’ve never heard anything like it,” she said. The sunset glinted overhead, turning the flight of some startled pigeons into a brief shower of amber flecks against the lapis blue of the sky. “It’s so... exotic.” The word seemed dull in comparison to the oriental cry spinning out from the city’s minarets.

“That’s the real sound of Cairo.” The Doctor frowned, sunlight catching on his crumpled temples. “By your time, most *azan* were pre-recorded, blasted out over loudspeakers instead of really being called.” He shuddered. “Progress, I suppose.” He stared out at the circular panorama spreading away from the Gardens: the skyline of the Old City. “I don’t know if anyone’s ever counted the number of mosques in Cairo,” the Doctor wondered idly, “Of course, you’re not seeing it at its best,” he continued. “Come in the twelfth century and watch Salah el-Din –“

Silver shook her head, laughing. “No history lesson – we’re on holiday!”

“I thought you *wanted* a history lesson,” the Doctor coughed.

“A proper one – you promised. One with a tour guide and everything,” Silver insisted, guarding her eyes from a shaft of sunlight and staring up at the Doctor.

“So I did. Indeed I did,” the Doctor replied, raising his hands in a mollifying gesture. “Cairo, 1938. Rooms at Shepheard’s Hotel and tickets on a Cook’s tour down the Nile aboard the *Queen Nitocris*.” He smiled. “It is, after all, the only way to see nineteen thirties Egypt.” He stepped lightly down off the marble dais around the ornate, statue-encrusted fountain and headed off down one of the cobbled paths, Silver at his heels.

“I’m more interested in ancient Egypt,” Silver reminded him.

“Of course,” the Doctor nodded. “Who wouldn’t be? Temples, Obelisks, Sphinxes –“

“And not forgetting Pyramids,” Silver finished. “Centres of Earth power, great focuses of spiritual energy, aligned to Orion and the sacred ley-geometry of the stars, descendants of the secret alien pyramids of Atlantis, Lemuria and Mu...”

The Doctor skidded to a halt, his face dark. “What rubbish! What do you -?”

Silver burst out laughing, a snort of uncontained amusement. The Doctor stopped in mid outburst, scowled, then let the corners of his mouth twitch.

Silver wiped her eyes “Your face!” The Doctor ‘humphed’, but his lips still smiled. “You make it too easy, Doctor, you really do...” Silver chuckled.

“I thought for a moment you were serious...” the Doctor grumbled good-naturedly.

“Don’t worry, Doctor,” Silver smirked, taking his arm. “I’ll behave.”

“At least you had the good grace to dress appropriately.”

Silver stuck out her tongue and grimaced at her ‘appropriate’ ensemble.

“The white shirt I can cope with – but these pants?” She flapped at the baggy thighs.

“Trousers,” the Doctor insisted firmly. “Riding trousers. Jodhpurs. You should really be wearing a skirt – and a hat.”

“No hat,” Silver frowned. “No way. Cool vintage sunglasses, though,” she confessed, flipping the round smoked lenses up and down on their hinges. “And at least I took the green out of my hair,” she said wickedly, shaking her dark curls.

The Doctor rolled his eyes. “I suppose that’s something.” His only concession to the climate was to substitute a linen jacket for his usual darker weave and slip on some hardy-looking desert boots. Silver thought that underneath the white straw Panama he looked every inch the Egyptologist on expedition. They reached the end of the path, and the edge of the Gardens. Two wide boulevards lead away from the Gardens.

“Which way?” Silver frowned. “In fact, I haven’t even asked – where are we going?”

“Shepherd’s,” the Doctor replied. “Shepherd’s Hotel – centre of European life in Cairo. Unofficial residence of the British embassy. *The* place to stay in Cairo. Nationalists burn it down in about twenty years time, but right now it’s just about at its prime. Agatha Christie’s probably sitting in there right now, penning *Death on the Nile*.”

“Alright, alright – I guess I should have known I wouldn’t get away without some kind of history lesson. But which way?”

The Doctor frowned. “Sharia Mehmet and the Mosque of Ibn Tulun that way... Kasr El Dubara and the Great Nile Bridge that way... the Post Office at our backs, so...” he strode across the road, threading his way through the traffic, clearly lost. Laughing, Silver dodged after him.

* * * * *

Lucy Elizabeth Moon scowled, giving the thin bureaucrat the hardest, most severe stare she could manage. It seemed to do little good. The scrawny face remained utterly impassive.

“Well,” she said at last, when she could stare no longer. “In that case would you please be so kind as to inform the Assistant Director that I am still lodging at Shepherd’s, and that I will continue to make every effort to obtain an interview with him at the earliest possible opportunity.” She threw down yet another pasteboard card with her name onto the green leather surface of the desk. The be-suited man bowed slightly, his red fez nodding as he collected the card. With one final venomous look, Lucy turned on her heels and stomped out of the reception office and into the gallery.

The bell was ringing. A white-uniformed guard at the corner of the gallery indicated the exit. Closing time. Lucy looked around the darkened space. The sightless stares of the mightiest Kings of ancient Egypt gazed out through the gallery, stone faces smiling secret smiles, fractured limbs and broken stubs of feet and arms collected together as if in some bizarre mortuary. The faded paint on coffins and sarcophagi still glinted in the dimming light. Silence settled through the Museum, enshrouding its ancient treasures in a cool, timeless cocoon. It was as if the bureaucracy of the Museum had borrowed something of that stillness, that implacable, empty timelessness. Four times she had visited the Museum offices – and four times the Assistant Director had given no indication that he was prepared

to see her. It was rudeness on a scale Lucy had never encountered before. But something picked at the back of her mind – was it more than just rudeness.

Sighing, she tucked a loose strand of her blond bob behind her ear and meekly followed the directions of the guard, heading out of the gallery and down the stairs, making her way to the exit with the last trickle of other visitors. Out in the Museum’s forecourt she watched the line of taxis inching along the kerb. She felt at a loss as to what to do now. She didn’t feel like wending her way back to the hotel; not quite yet. She let her feet take charge, and wandered off down the winding street past the railway tracks and away to the long, steel span of the Great Nile Bridge. Cars rumbled across it, and twin pedestrian footways churned with busy crowds, passing from the eastern bank of the ancient river to the west. Lucy leaned against the railing, kicking her toes on the stone and watching the slow sails of fishing boats drift underneath.

She scowled, suddenly angry. Why wouldn’t Namin see her? Did the Assistant Director have something to hide? And if so, what did that mean for Duncan? The passing bustle of people heading off home at the end of the working day suddenly gave her an idea. A new determination flared in Lucy, and she turned against the tide of the crowd, retracing her footsteps towards the Museum. Surely Namin would be leaving the Museum soon. She would wait until he appeared, and corner him. Then he would have to tell her about the expedition – and about Duncan.

* * * * *

Behind the heavy oak doors of his office, Hamid Namin clicked off the electric lamp on his desk and struck a match. The phosphorus glow wavered as he touched the tip to a candle in a slender alabaster lamp. Shadows leapt and climbed amongst the dark wooden panels. Antiquities glowed in its light, crowded onto shelves, mounted in display cabinets, laid out on tables, spilling out of open packing crates. The faint sound of cars drifted in under the frame of an ill-closed window. The echo of life from the dusty evening outside the Museum was an alien sound amidst the ancient relics clustered around the office. The candle flickered as its tiny flame steadied and grew.

Namin lifted away the match and blew it out. He smiled. His mouth was the mouth of a deceiver – wide, thin lipped, framed by a fastidiously-trimmed goatee. He blinked slowly, heavy-lidded eyes focusing on the dark shadow of an upright stone sarcophagus at the back of the room. He replaced the box of matches in the inside pocket of his frock coat and straightened the black-lined lapels carefully. He ran a hand across his blocky, bald skull as he removed his dark red fez and set it on the desk to one side of the alabaster lamp. He folded his arms across his chest, the wine-coloured jewel set into the heavy pharonic ring on his left hand pulsing with its own, inner power.

His cruel, thin lips parted and his eyes sunk closed as he began to chant in an ancient – impossibly ancient and alien – tongue.

“Set-imakh, ka ana-anakh, ma’at ana-anakh, tut khosi per-djed. Bismi n-tun-hudh. Set-wakadh, Set-djabh, Set-kha neb ka’a...”

Namin let the vision of his Master fill him. He saw again the Master’s power, watched again in his memory the collapsed tomb opening *from within*; watched again as the rubble melted and flowed; watched as the door of the Hall of Immortality was restored; watched again as the Master’s creatures brought forth treasure after treasure for him, Hamid Namin, to take custody of. Namin let the vision of power fill him.

The wavering glow from the alabaster lamp began to fade, as if the shadows themselves were growing in strength. And from within the shadows crawled out a blood-red

glow, a deep, dark stain that matched the pulse of the ring on Namin's hand. The Assistant Director dropped to his knees, obeising himself flat on the Persian carpet as the glow strengthened. A voice hissed from the glow – an echoing, distant voice dripping with darkness.

“I hear you, my servant...,” the voice intoned.

“Master – servant of the Great Ones!” Namin chanted. “Hear me! They have come!”

“They are in the city?” the voice replied.

“At last, Master,” Namin confirmed. “They lodge within the city.”

The voice chuckled, a dry, pleasure-less sound of malice.

“Then prepare your army, Namin. Summon the host. Let them descend on my enemies,” the voice hissed in the shadows.

“Master!” Namin pleaded, lifting his face from the carpet, his eyes pale, entreating. “One more...,” he whispered, licking his lips. His fingers stole to the outline of a blade hidden beneath his frock coats lapel. He traced the edge of the blade beneath the crisp folds – a gold blade, a death blade. His mouth twitched unpleasantly. His eyes flickered with blood and cruelty. “Please, Master...,” Namin entreated, his voice quivering with anticipation.

The disembodied voice seemed to hesitate in its pause. Then another low, sadistic chuckle. “Very well...,” the voice echoed over Namin's little hiss of pleasure. “One more, my servant. One more...”

From outside in the Museum grounds, slipping under the window frame, came the squeak and rumble of a gardener's cart...

* * * * *

“You're lost,” Silver sighed. The Doctor didn't reply. “Admit it – you're lost,” she repeated with a smile. The Doctor's only response was a frown.

“Well, I don't really care, to be honest,” Silver said, happily surveying the tangle of little streets and the broad shimmer of the river beyond. There was something magical even about being lost in Cairo. The city had a fairytale quality that just wouldn't go away.

They'd wandered through the Old City, through the tangled warren of the ancient *souk*, wrapped in a haze of a thousand unfamiliar smells and sounds, harried by a buzzing, scurrying crowd. Now, just out of reach, the Nile bled past the jumble of dusty houses, a ribbon of orange sunset amidst the gathering darkness swallowing up the details of the city.

In the water floated a lone *felukah*, triangular sail a wing of sun-bleached white against the reflected sunset. Along the river banks flickered the lights of fishing boats and over it arched the proud curves of several wide bridges. A train hooted behind them, smoke and steam billowing above as it trundled through the muddle of streets and alleyways.

Silver bent to stroke the back of a somewhat ragged cat that purred around her boots. She peered up and down the banks of the river, through the web of electrical cables and past the jutting angles of pan-tiled roofs hung with laundry and draped with eccentric awnings. In the distance, lit up by fine iron streetlights loomed a large neo-classical building, a towering seated Pharaoh on guard in its wide, gardened forecourt.

“What's that?” Silver asked, pointing. The cat rubbed its cheek happily against her outstretched hand. The Doctor followed her finger, and his eyes sparkled and the frown melted away.

“Aha! The very place!” he chuckled. “The Egyptian Museum!” He half-turned to Silver as he led the way down a crooked alley. “I knew exactly where I was, you know,” he insisted archly. Silver smiled knowingly. She danced around the cat.

Iron railings circled the Museum, enclosing grounds littered with the remnants of a mighty, vanished civilisation. Thickly-carved Roman sarcophagi, lumps of Crusader and Islamic architecture, and the flowering lotus capitols of Pharonic columns lay in regular rows bordered by carefully-clipped grass and trimmed shrubbery.

Behind the sculptural fragments, the pinkish stone of the Museum glowed amber in the final echoes of the sunset. They joined the main street around the building, thrust into a bustle of pedestrians and the thunder of cars and carts once more. The bustle of people pressed around Silver, rushing to and fro outside the main gates of the Museum. As the throng pushed at her, she suddenly became aware that the crowd was not moving – it was milling, gathering. Voices around her became angry and argumentative. Men pushed unpleasantly. She grabbed for the Doctor’s arm, but met only the hot press of the crowd.

The area around the main gate was a wide paved area. Silver saw a truck parked on one side of the paving, soldiers in desert khaki uniforms and broad-rimmed helmets clambering out of it, rifles held warningly in their arms. Behind the gate stood a trio of soldiers in slightly more ornamental uniforms and red fezzes, heavy black batons swinging in their hands. Beyond them, pulling away from one of the doors of the Museum, a white van with a red cross painted on it: an ambulance.

As it neared the gates and the trio of fez-wearing soldiers pulled at the iron grills, the crowd surged, some communal anger pushing them forward. The soldiers with the guns moved up to meet the crowd, and their commander in a peaked cap bellowed at the crowd in English to disperse. The fez-wearing guards ran alongside the ambulance, their batons swinging up and down at the crowd. The shouting became a roar, and the gun-wielding soldiers joined the skirmish.

Silver felt herself being dragged forward into the melee – then someone grabbed her arms hard and pulled her, kicking and shouting, through the crowd. She looked around wildly, and caught a glimpse of the Doctor’s worried face hovering over the mob – but she was moving in the opposite direction. Behind her, the woman pulled at her arms and urged Silver to follow.

The soldiers’ batons broke into the crowd around them. The Doctor shouted, his voice lost in the confusion. Silver veered away from the batons, and the woman behind her pulled her into the shadows.

* * * * *

“I can do no more than apologise, Herr Raucher,” the young man in the Police Captain’s uniform said again.

“Colonel Raucher,” the sharp-featured man in the torn white suit snarled. “SS Colonel Raucher, Captain Reynolds. Special Representative to the Third Reich’s consular representative.”

“Colonel Raucher,” the Captain corrected himself. The Doctor thought he detected a thin sigh escaping from Reynold’s lips. “I know who you are sir, and I apologise –“

“Your apology is both empty and meaningless,” Raucher spat. “The police had no right to detain me – no right whatsoever.”

“It was for your own safety...,” Reynolds attempted, but the German was in no mood to entertain his explanations. Colonel Raucher fiddled with the flaps of torn linen at his shoulder and rubbed uselessly at the oily mark running along the expensive double-breast. A corporal suddenly appeared at the door to Reynold’s office.

“Sir,” he reported, much to Reynold’s evident relief, “The car from the German embassy has arrived.”

Raucher stormed out of the station without a single word of parting, his foul mood swirling away after him. Reynolds rubbed the bridge of his nose and puffed his cheeks.

“Well I’m grateful for your assistance at any rate, Captain,” the Doctor said pleasantly, setting down the glass of sugary tea that had been brought for him. The atmosphere in the tiny Military Police office cleared with Raucher’s departure. It was still a stuffy little wooden box crammed full of filing cabinets and boxes of miscellaneous paperwork, but it seemed less oppressive with the German out of the room. On the far wall there was a small framed photograph of Reynolds and a group of other officers in Indian Service uniforms posing over a shot tiger. Apart from that, the office was utterly anonymous. The Doctor rolled up his Panama hat tightly and popped it into the inside pocket of his jacket.

Reynolds nodded gratefully. “My apology extends to you, of course, Doctor,” he insisted, settling himself in the worn leather chair behind his desk. The Doctor shrugged the apology aside. “The mood of the crowd was uglier than I anticipated,” Reynolds continued, “And I think that had we remained, we would simply have provoked them further. They were angry about the murder, of course, but their anger would have turned into something more political had we stayed, I think.”

“Murder?” the Doctor interjected, raising an eyebrow.

The Captain nodded. He was a young man, the Doctor thought – younger than he might have expected for such a rank. His auburn curls were unruly even under the strict clip of a military haircut, and his chin was raspy with a day’s beard. His uniform needed a press, his boots were scuffed. He looked tired, the Doctor decided.

“Fifteen in as many days,” Reynolds said, pulling a heavy tumbler and an almost-empty bottle of Cleopatra Whisky out of his desk drawer. He raised the bottle questioningly at the Doctor, who shook his head.

“The most recent tonight?” the Doctor pressed. Reynolds poured himself a modest measure and hissed a little soda into the glass from a siphon on the table behind him. He leaned heavily on his desk, playing with an engraved silver lighter and a pasteboard box of *Nile Rose* cigarettes.

“It’s not the murders so much,” he said, his brow furrowing, “Although that does bother people, I’m sure. No, it’s what’s been happening to the bodies afterwards.”

“Afterwards?”

Reynolds grimaced. “They’ve vanished.”

“Stolen, presumably,” the Doctor suggested. “Bodysnatchers?”

“That’s what we first assumed,” Reynolds agreed, rolling his whisky and soda around in his glass. “But all fifteen have been killed the same way – a single stab wound to the heart with a double-edged blade. Clean, efficient, quick. Then within hours, the bodies are gone.” He sipped at his whisky. “It took us a week to pick up the pattern.” He shrugged. “The Egyptian police are not the most... efficient at spotting these things. But despite our help in the investigation, the killings have continued.”

“And the thefts,” the Doctor noted, darkly.

Reynolds finished his whisky. “I’m afraid we might have some kind of dangerous lunatic on our hands. Some sort of psychotic killer with an unhealthy obsession with dead bodies.”

“Possible,” the Doctor murmured. He looked up. “Would you object if I had a look at the most recent victim? I have some experience in this sort of thing.”

The young man glanced up from his empty whisky glass. His instinct was to reject the Doctor’s offer – to tell him to mind his own business and keep his nose out of military

police matters. But there was something in the Doctor's voice – some edge to his offer that made Reynolds pause... and then acquiesce.

"I don't see why not," he said, carefully. "Any help you could give us would be welcome."

"Is the body here?"

Reynolds shook his head. "We've no morgue here in the station. No, I sent the body to the Belgian Hospice in Al Muski. The Father there is a friend, and he often does us favours. One of our chaps is with him, just to keep an eye on the body. I'll send you over in a car," he offered.

"And you will keep an eye out for Silver, won't you?" the Doctor reminded the Captain, concern edging into his request.

"Of course," Reynolds assured him. "I sent two men back to see if they could find her the moment you mentioned she'd gone missing in the melee. You say she was with another European woman?"

The Doctor nodded. "I saw them briefly, just as the ambulance was passing. I don't know who the woman was, though."

Reynolds smiled. "Don't worry, Doctor. My chaps will find them both. They may well have taken shelter in the Museum. I wouldn't be surprised if a message to that effect doesn't come from the Director while you're at the hospice."

* * * * *

The Long Gallery was as silent and still as a tomb. Not a sound penetrated the marble hall. Blocks lifted from temple walls, carved and painted with processions of gods and men, Pharaohs and servants lined the room. Eyes picked out in ochre and gold gazed down on the pair sheltering in the corner of the grand hall.

"It must be safe to go out now," Silver whispered. "The Doctor will be worried about me."

Her companion shook her head. "I can't go out – I've got to find the Assistant Director."

Silver eyed her through the gloom. "Why?"

The woman – girl; she must have been about the same age as Silver – drew herself up to her full height. She was tall and slender, with reddish-blond hair cut in a carefully stylish bob and large grey eyes surrounded by long, dark lashes. Her cheeks were English rose pink, but her chin had a Celtic sharpness to it and a determined, even fierce, set to the line of her jaw. She was dressed much as Silver suspected the Doctor thought she should be dressed: plain-looking dress and cardigan, sensible shoes - and a hat. She even had a handbag clutched in her gloved hands. When she spoke, her accent had a faint trace of an Irish burr, polished smooth under schoolroom-correct English. She pulled out a small golden locket that hung at her throat on a fine chain. She opened the locket and showed Silver a small photograph of a young man with untidy fair hair and bright, friendly eyes.

"I came to find out about my brother," the girl said quietly. "Duncan's an archaeologist. I need to find out what's happened to him."

"Why? What's happened to him – I mean, I know you don't know what's happened to him," Silver corrected herself in a hurried whisper. "But why are you worried about him?"

"He was supposed to meet me here in Cairo. He was going to show me the sights – take me on a tour of the Nile. But I haven't had a letter from him since before Christmas. No one seems to know what's happened to Professor Phaide's expedition, so I need to speak to the Assistant Director here at the Museum – he should know."

“Why didn’t you come in the daytime?” Silver wondered.

Lucy flashed her a withering glance. “I did, several times. But the Assistant Director – a man called Hamid Namin – has so far refused to see me. I wanted to catch him when he left the Museum this evening, but got caught up in the unpleasantness outside.”

Unpleasantness? It had seemed like a full-scale riot was about to kick off, Silver thought. The soldiers certainly looked like they meant business. “Is this Hamid Namin still in the Museum?” she asked Lucy. The girl nodded, the determined look flickering in her eyes once more.

“He must be. I haven’t seen him leave. He’ll be in his office. Are you coming?” she whispered to Silver before setting off across the marble expanse of the Long Gallery.

“I suppose I am,” muttered Silver to herself, half wondering why she and the Doctor couldn’t ever have a normal holiday. “I’m Rachael, by the way,” she hissed as they rounded an upright sarcophagus. “My friends call me Silver.”

“Lucy,” the girl whispered back over her shoulder. “Lucy Elizabeth Moon. Pleased to meet you.”

They crept up the wide flight of stairs and up to a long corridor roped in shadows. Tall, thin statuary lined the walls, interspersed with display cabinets heavy in pots, coins and fragments of ancient jewellery. One end of the passage opened up onto a mezzanine above the Long Gallery; a tall pair of double doors governed the other end of the corridor. The doors were ajar, and a thin sliver of lamplight crept between the heavy oak leaves.

“His light’s still on,” hissed Lucy. “We may be in luck.” She led the way down the corridor. Silver paused, her ears catching a sound. Something shifted somewhere behind them. Something stealthy. The empty eyes of the statues stared blankly down at the women. Silver shivered. A jackal-headed statue on one side of the corridor and a lion-headed one on the other seemed to be watching her. A musty, long-forgotten smell permeated the Museum – the smell of tombs and graves and dead places. The place was giving her the creeps, Silver thought. She turned and hurried after Lucy as the shadows at the top of the stairs twitched and shambled closer behind her...

* * * * *

The little Belgian friar crossed the courtyard in a quick shuffle, his halo of white hair playing around his round head like a hovering cloud. A simple Coptic cross dangled at his neck.

“From Captain Reynolds? A Doctor? A pleasure,” the friar beamed through a sparse beard. “Please – this way.” The arm of the drab brown robe flapped as he gestured for the Doctor to follow him across the uneven paving of the cramped courtyard. With the heavy wooden door shut, the idling of the police car vanished into the general hum of the Al Muski. Here, behind tall stone walls hefted by Crusader engineers, the buzz of the city was nothing more than a distant murmur. Tiny windows pierced the tall square of buildings, peering down from underneath a wavering, uneven roofline to the courtyard below. Each glowing window was barred with ancient, pitted iron tracery. The friar hobbled over the warped pavement towards a small, low arch that led into a dimly-lit passage.

“I am Brother Alois,” the friar introduced himself as he lead the way along the passage. “It is good that you have come to see the body – yes, very good,” he said half to himself. “A terrible business, Doctor – terrible. What evil things this city sometimes harbours. Yes, yes – evil things.”

“You mean the murders?” the Doctor asked, bending to avoid cracking his head on the passage’s low ceiling.

“And, worse, the stealing of the bodies,” Brother Alois nodded. “Such evil, Doctor – yes, such evil.”

“Could they have been sold to a university, perhaps – for dissection?”

“Ah!” Brother Alois’ rheumy eyes blinked. “A Cairene Burke and Hare, perhaps?” He smiled a thin, unhappy smile. “Perhaps – yes, a distinct possibility, perhaps.” He nodded, mumbling to himself as he pushed at a metal door that creaked on sandy hinges. Light spilled out into the corridor. Beyond the metal door was a small hospital ward. Nurses in long white gowns and pleated caps drifted from bed to bed, each berth shrouded by a veil of muslin. Fans spun slowly in the high ceiling. Several brown-robed monks ministered to shapes behind the muslin veils. The tang of morphine hung in the air. Brother Alois led the way past the beds and through a windowed wooden door to another corridor. One of Reynold’s men sat by the door, a smouldering cigarette between his lips. Behind him, the corridor turned outwards to another courtyard. The soldier stood up as the pair emerged from the ward. Brother Alois nodded to him and the soldier shuffled out of the way, stubbing out his cigarette. The friar turned to the Doctor with a sorrowful expression on his round face.

“We are a hospice, Doctor. These poor souls –“ he glanced back at the ward behind them. “Their time left on this Earth is short. We ease their pain and suffering, or...,” his humped shoulders shrugged under the brown robe, “At least we try...” He shuffled on down the corridor, past the soldier. A nurse passed them, a tray covered in a blood-stained cloth in her hands. More blood spattered her robe. Her face was hidden behind her pleated cap and mask, but the Doctor caught a glimpse of dark, tired eyes behind the wimple. As the nurse vanished down the corridor, Brother Alois sighed pausing under a low-watt bulb in a metal shade. His eyes were tired too; his face stretched. The friar indicated another thick metal door, its dull paint peeling to reveal bone-grey steel.

“Our morgue,” he said simply, pushing at the door. The Doctor followed the friar inside. Brother Alois switched on an overhead light. The room was small and chilly. Blocks of ice rested on cooling trays against the far wall. Three metal morgue trolleys took up most of the space. Two trolleys were empty; the third was draped with a long sheet covering a body-shaped hump.

“We don’t have much call to use this,” the friar confessed. “It is a tradition in Egypt to bury the body quickly, even among the Christian communities. But from time to time Captain Reynolds has called on us to make use of this facility.” Brother Alois gave a thin smile. “He even pays for the ice.”

The Doctor pulled back the sheet. The man on the trolley was a portly Egyptian, about forty-five, with a jowly face and thin nose. He sported a poorly-trimmed, somewhat bushy moustache. He wore a rough, undyed cotton *jelabiyah* trimmed with a home-worked embroidered hem. The cotton was smudged with dirt and stained green in places from cut grass. The man’s hands were heavy, thickly-callused and ingrained with soil. The wound that had killed him was plainly visible – a sharp, clean cut through the chest of the cotton garment, the blush of blood now caked and dried. The Doctor pulled a magnifying glass from inside his jacket pocket and examined the wound carefully. Then he played the glass over the man’s hands.

“He was a gardener?” inquired the Doctor.

Brother Alois nodded. “At the Museum – as were all the other men.”

“They were all gardeners from the Museum?” asked the Doctor curiously.

“No, no,” the friar shook his head, “But it was well known that they were all workers at the Museum – or worked near the Museum. There was a street-sweeper, one of the

caretakers, a driver, and..." Brother Alois' voice trailed off, his face lost in a fuddled frown. "I forget what the others did," he confessed.

"But they all worked in or near the Museum?" the Doctor pressed. "You're certain of that?"

Alois nodded firmly.

"Strange that Captain Reynolds didn't mention this to me," said the Doctor thoughtfully.

"Perhaps he didn't know," injected the friar.

"Not a very thorough policeman if he didn't," surmised the Doctor.

"Whoever ever said military police were thorough?" The friar said, only half joking.

"Hmmm... I suppose you have a point." The Doctor stood up slowly and tapped the rim of the magnifying glass against his chin. Brother Alois watched him as a supplicant might watch an Oracle.

"And the wounds," the Doctor continued. "Were they all like this one?"

The elderly friar shrugged. "I can't say for sure – I didn't see any of the other bodies. But from what Captain Reynolds told me, they were, yes: all identical to this one."

"How very interesting..." the Doctor murmured, his eyes narrowing. He pursed his lips.

"Why?" the friar asked, mystified.

"Because," the Doctor said, his voice a little distant as he puzzled through his discovery. "The position of the wound would indicate that it was self-inflicted."

The friar's eyes opened wide.

The Doctor nodded. "I don't think there's any doubt," he said. "What's more, there are traces of his own blood around his right thumb and forefinger – exactly where you would expect to find them if this man had plunged the dagger into his own heart." The Doctor positioned the magnifying glass against the breast of his coat, demonstrating the thrust. "If the blow had been a murderous one, you might have expected the victim to clutch at the wound, and there would be blood all over the palms, but there isn't."

"*Sacre cour!*" the little friar swore softly, forgetting himself. "But... but why?"

Now it was the Doctor's turn to shrug. "That, Brother Alois, cannot be answered by an examination of the dead body. But fifteen people do not, in my experience, commit suicide over the course of a fortnight without there being some common cause or reason. I must find out from Captain Reynolds what exactly links these men – and whether that link can be the cause of their deaths." The Doctor popped the magnifying glass back into his jacket and straightened his cuffs. Brother Alois blinked up at him, his face pale with the shock.

"And now what?"

The Doctor smiled. "All mysteries have an answer, Brother Alois – all earthly mysteries, at any rate." The friar nodded, biting at his bottom lip. The Doctor considered. This wasn't something he could tackle on his own. He needed help. He needed to get a message to Captain Reynolds.

"I don't suppose you have anything so worldly as a telephone?"

* * * * *

The office was as musty as the gallery. Dark wooden panelling lined the walls, rising into shelves and display cabinets that climbed up to the moulded plaster ceiling. High windows with iron grilles let in a faint streetlight glow from outside. A single electric light burned on the leather-topped desk that dominated the far end of the room. Behind the desk, a chair, a

fireplace with a portrait of King George VI hanging in the gloom above it, and a dark sarcophagus set upright against the wall, the details of the face picked out from the black paint with inlaid gold. Wooden crates were stacked against the near wall of the office, shrouding the doorway. The crates spilled sand and straw packing out onto the Persian carpet. A small French-style writing table sat in the crook of the room between the crates and the desk. Papers from the desk spilled over onto the small table, crowding around a series of smaller wooden boxes and a collection of notebooks and examination devices. There was no one in the room. Lucy sighed, her shoulders slumping as she surveyed the empty office.

“Well,” she said quietly, determined not to be defeatist. “Perhaps I can leave him a message.” She set her bag, gloves and hat on the desk and rummaged around for a pen. Silver poked her head in the half-open crates. Artefacts covered with painted and carved hieroglyphs nestled in amongst the straw, each one secured with a paper label on a string. Silver pulled out a small figure of a baboon-headed person, its hands crowded with swords and sceptres, a nest of horned and feathered crowns on its head. The creature’s carved and painted mouth twisted in a snarl, betraying the animal in the god. The tag dangled over Silver’s wrist. She studied it, a frown creeping across her face.

“Just a minute, Lucy,” she said, turning with the statuette in her hand. “You said a name before – Professor someone-or-other. The person whose expedition your brother was on. What was it?”

Lucy looked at the statuette in Silver’s hand. “Phaide – Doctor Icarus Phaide. Why?”

Silver turned the figurine into the light from the desk lamp. She thrust the label into Lucy’s hands.

Phaide. Wadi el-Kut. 1937/212-a

“Phaide!” Lucy gasped. “Wadi el-Kut! This must come from Phaide’s dig!”

Silver glanced down at the artefact, which was in fact an escritoire covered with other artefacts. “There are more here – look.” The table was cluttered with antiquities – an oddly-shaped sort of sceptre carved from some kind of stone and covered in hieroglyphs; a gold medallion with a blood red crystal at its centre; an earthenware jar with a metal scorpion crouched on the lid. Each one bore an accession label – each label marked as having come from Phaide’s excavation.

“And look at this.” Silver moved some of the objects to one side, exposing an accession register. The ledger confirmed it – the objects had, indeed, come from Phaide’s dig. Silver flipped back through the pages. Lucy followed the turning pages. Objects from Phaide’s expedition had been coming to the Museum since the turn of the year.

“There’s no question then,” Silver concluded. “The ledger confirms it: someone here at the Museum has definitely had contact with the expedition,” Silver said. “And not just recently – but regularly over the past few months.”

“But why would the Assistant Director refuse to tell me that?” Lucy tried to fit the new facts together. Her puzzled voice trailed off.

“Listen,” Silver said insistently, grabbing the girl firmly by the arm. “Mysterious excavations, missing archaeologists and sinister Assistant Directors? I know someone who would be more than delighted to get involved. But you and I are probably in way over our heads right now. So I suggest we –”

“You suggest... what?” came a smooth, cultured voice from the doorway.

“I knew this would happen...,” muttered Silver, turning around to face the voice and the inevitable gun pointed in their direction.

* * * * *

“Excellent! Thank you, Sergeant,” the Doctor replied down the phone before settling it back in its cradle. Brother Alois looked up across the bare desk. “He’s on his way, apparently,” the Doctor explained. “With a message for me, it seems.”

Brother Alois nodded, absently. He sat in a simple wooden chair in the sparsely-furnished office, clutching his Coptic cross between his gnarled hands. “Suicides? Stolen bodies?” he murmured almost to himself, his voice scratchy with confusion. “What can it all mean?” He looked up again at the Doctor.

The Doctor frowned and stuffed his hands into the pockets of his trousers, leaned back slightly on his heels and pursed his lips, his eyes greyed with thought. “I think Reynolds may hold the answer – although he probably doesn’t realise it,” the Doctor suggested. “Something links all these dead men together. The Museum? Someone at the Museum? Perhaps –“

A scream ripped through the cloister, sending the gathered doves flapping and clattering into the dark rectangle of sky overhead. The terrified sound echoed around the stone pillars, a wail of indescribable horror. Brother Alois leapt to his feet, his hands clutching at the cross at his neck. The Doctor was already on the move, long legs throwing him out of the little office and back towards the hospital ward.

The ward was in uproar. Monks and nurses scuttled around dropped trays, their eyes wide; patients moaned and thrashed on their beds. The scream now joined by gunfire: one, two, three, four, five, six shots. The Doctor pushed through the tired wooden doors and burst out into the corridor. The soldier once on guard stood, back to the corridor’s stone wall, the rifle shaking in his hands pointed out into the darkened courtyard beyond. His eyes were wide in his pale, sweating face.

“What happened?” snapped the Doctor, scanning the corridor. The metal door to the morgue stood ajar. The soldier shook, silent. Snap. Snap. Snap. His finger pulled again and again at the rifle’s trigger, the hammer falling on an empty chamber.

Leaving the terrified Private, the Doctor bounded out into the courtyard. His eyes scanned the darkness. The courtyard opened up onto half a dozen small alleyways. A dog barked in the night. Small patches of lamplight glowed here and there. The Doctor raced from one dark hollow to another, the heels of his boots clacking loudly against the cobbles. He smelled something: the odour of death; the honey, cabbage-y smell of decay, of rancid flesh and rotting organs. He stared down one of the dark alleyways.

The dog barked again – and then whined, the sound vanishing as the cur raced away. A shadow moved. A shambling silhouette peeled away from a stone wall and stood, haloed by a quivering window-square of lamplight. It croaked, and blinked, its eyes suffused with a deep, blood-red phosphorescence. A sensation like an electric charge saturated the air: a diffuse energy lingering in the evening darkness. The phenomenon was known to the Doctor, he couldn’t place it but he recognised it. Then the shadow lurched away, soaking into the night, dissolving into the maze of crooked streets and tangled alleys.

The Doctor bit his lip. He needed answers – not a street-fight. Almost snarling, he turned and raced back to the stupefied soldier. He grabbed the man’s shoulder, feeling panic-stiff muscles through the khaki fatigues.

“Smartly, Man!” the Doctor barked, his voice taking on a parade-ground edge. “What happened?”

The soldier whimpered, a thin string of saliva peeling from his quivering, blood-drained lips. His eyes flickered back towards the morgue door, then out again into the courtyard. “It... it...,” the pale lips stuttered.

“It what?” the Doctor prompted, his voice now low and even.

The soldier blinked. “It... walked...,” he whispered, his rifle slowly dropping, his shoulders sagging against the stone.

* * * * *

“Why are you here?” hissed Namin, his eyes narrowing. The gun pointed at the two women twitched in his hand. Silver licked her lips, nervously glancing over at Lucy, who took a half-step backwards towards the desk, her raised hands shaking.

“Mr. Namin – we meant no harm. We... I needed to know about my brother.”

Namin chuckled. “Mr. Duncan Moon – yes?”

A gasp caught in Lucy’s throat. “You know him?”

Namin’s chuckle faded away and his face twisted into a sneer. “You are too curious. You have a saying in your language, do you not – about cats and curiosity?” He chuckled again, his laughter flat and unpleasant. “We say something similar, but appropriately, it is about women.” His sneer returned, pulling at his beard. “Either way, the end result is the same. You wish to know of your brother, Ms. Moon?” Namin raised his other hand, the heavy jewel on the thick ring pulsed with ripples of blood-red energy. “Perhaps you would like to join him...”

The door opened behind Namin, and a thick scent hissed into the room – a stench worse than sewers: the foulness of the mortuary and the tomb. Shapes – things, lurched in from the corridor. The two girls stared, convinced at first that these were people. No – they had been people. Once. Now twisted, broken, bent, rotting – they stumbled in through the doors. Their skin was sickly green and blue with death, their faces blistered with corruption. They stank of rot and putrescence. Tottering forward, their clothes hung in stinking rags. Tongues lolled black and livid from purpled lips, fingers riddled with decay reached, grasped and clenched. Their faces roved, eyes blazing with a dark, bloody phosphorescence – a miasmatic energy that seemed to chain them to Namin’s exultant, laughing command.

“Kill them!” Namin screamed, his exhortation split by maniacal laughter as the walking corpses stumbled remorselessly forward. The pulsing light of his ring lit his face as if he stood above a holy brazier, its crimson wash curling the shadows around him into a daemon’s cloak.

“Kill them!” he roared, as the dead mouths began to croak and groan in anticipation. Silver and Lucy screamed, pushing themselves back against the desk, pulling back uselessly from the circle of rotting talons closing in on them.

“Kill them!”

iii. Behold the Master

Hardly salubrious, the Doctor thought, stepping out of the taxi into the pool of amber light spilling from the half-open doors of the Bosphore Casino. The streets surrounding the Casino were dark and secretive. Few lights burned; the sweet hint of opium drifted from a *ghurza* tucked away in the gloomy shadows of a nearby alley. The weathered plaster of the Casino's mock-Egyptian façade rose up from the street in an ironic tribute to the ancients, a jumble of Pharaonic motifs picked out in lurid, but now faded, paint. The lop-sided faces of Ramesside princesses gazed mutely down on the parked taxi from either side of the bronze doors, their beckoning hands filled with plaster gaming chips. A poster in a sphinx-crowded frame advertised the dubious entertainment of Sahar Gazawi and her troupe of dancers. The Doctor paid the bored taxi driver and hurried up the shallow flight of steps to the doors. A sombre door attendant in red coat and black fez bowed perfunctorily as the Doctor slipped into the Casino.

It was hardly, the Doctor thought as he waved aside the coat-check girl and a fez-wearing seller who offered him a pack of White Nile cigarettes, the place where one might expect to find three such eminent Egyptologists. Captain Reynolds indicated that his men had traced the European woman at the disturbance in front of the Museum to Shepherd's. Her name was Ms. Lucy Moon, and she had made a dinner appointment to meet three eminent Egyptologists at the hotel – an appointment she had not kept. With no sign of Silver or Ms. Moon at the Hotel, the Doctor tried to pay a call on the Egyptologists – but they had come here, to the infamous Bosphore Casino. Leaving a note for Silver in his wake, the Doctor followed. It was the only lead he had.

The interior décor of the Casino was no better than the exterior. Warped copies of scenes from both temple and tomb had been press-ganged into service, filling walls, ceilings and even the carpeted floor underfoot with a semi-parodic cacophony of Egyptian fragments. Egyptomania gone mad, indeed. The Casino was long and dark, arranged on two levels, both half a flight away from the pillared entrance hall. Set on sturdy, gilded lotus-headed columns, a gallery extended around three sides of the Casino, studded with Roulette wheels and Baccarat Chemin-de-Fer tables around which a motley crowd of louche, decadent Cairenes lapped as if a sea of ennui against a shore of boredom. Dusty chandeliers in the form of torches flickered against the stucco faces of gods and goddesses, the light pooling around the baize gaming tables to make flickering masks of the painted faces of the gamblers and the guests. Down below, the main floor of the Casino was set out with an arc of small tables interspersed with potted ferns and miniature palm-trees. The tables were all occupied: merchants, officers, dilettantes, adventurers, gamblers, drinkers – the same motley assemblage as hovered around the gaming tables upstairs; the human flotsam and jetsam of an era full enough of lost souls and wanderers. The tables encircled a softly-lit tongue of staging extending outwards into the hall from an elaborate proscenium arch. The stage-front was twinned hawk-headed Atlases bearing a winged plaster sun from which draped piles of dusty velvet curtain. The arc and tongue of staging was graced, on one side, by an Egyptian-style dance band pulling a reedy, jazzy version of a sand-dance; and on the tongue by a veil-draped, sloe-eyed Lebanese dancer gyrating ample waist and thigh in a sultry, inexpert belly-dance. Faded scarlet *burko*, *antaree* and *shintiyam* of barely-modest translucent Persian silk twirled in complex fractals through the smoke and the dim light.

The Doctor frowned and with a gesture, questioned an attendant waiter. The red-coated man listened and then pointed discreetly to a table set at the edge of the stage. The Doctor smiled and followed his direction, trotting down the shallow flight of carpeted steps

to the main floor and weaving in and out of the potted palms to the twirl and twang of the dance band.

Three men sat at the table. Pale chins betrayed them newly-shaven after weeks in the glare of desert sun. They sat almost a little uneasily in freshly-laundered and pressed clothing – more used, perhaps, to dusty shirts and eternally sand-filled boots. They were clearly enjoying the fruits of civilisation: a drink at each elbow, a plate of *meze*, cigarettes and cheroots smoking away, laughter and easy conversation, the occasional appreciative clap or ‘huzzah’ with the rest of the watching crowd as the olive-skinned girl on the stage spun and posed.

There was a slim-faced man in a blue linen suit. He was tall, with a prominent Adam’s apple and eyes almost blurred by the thickness of his spectacles. His fair hair was drawn back limply from his tall forehead. He seemed at once both nervy and passive, as if part of his attention were permanently elsewhere.

Sitting beside him, a thick-featured man, with a muscled neck, square jaw and a scar on his upper lip barely hidden by a dark moustache. His eyes were sharp, hard – quick and calculating even through several stiff whiskeys. He reminded the Doctor of gunslingers of a century earlier: that same opportunist and adventuring spirit, used to danger – used to looking after number one. This man’s jacket was draped over the back of his chair, and his tie hung loosened at his neck.

The third looked up as the Doctor approached. A model of British academic aristocracy: clear eyed, still ruddy-cheeked despite his age, silver hair and moustache carelessly brushed. He was lighting an elderly, smoke-blackened meerschaum pipe, flicking strands of oily Persian *tumbak* from the front of his hacking jacket as he waved out a match.

“Professors Piper, Clemenceau and McQuarrie?” the Doctor asked inquiringly as he approached the table. The man with the dark moustache narrowed his eyes.

“Mister McQuarrie only,” he said, his accent heavily American. He downed his glass of whiskey and looked the Doctor over carefully. “But who wants to know?”

“I’m on an errand from Captain Reynolds of the British Resident Police,” the Doctor said, pulling up an empty chair and seating himself at the table, blocking the trio’s view of the undulating dancer. “I came to ask you some questions about Ms. Lucy Elizabeth Moon.”

“Miss Moon?” queried the silver-haired Piper, blowing a puff of smoke out across the table. “Where did she get to this evening, hum?” he grumbled.

The thin man’s Adam’s apple bobbed. “She is, erm, okay? We had expected to meet her for dinner,” he explained in French-accented English.

The Doctor gave the barest of shrugs. “Captain Reynolds is searching for her now – I wanted to ask you, however, what her business was at the Museum.”

The three exchanged glances, and Piper sighed, laying down his meerschaum and pursing his lips. He folded his hands on the table and fixed the Doctor a grumpy look.

“She wanted to ask us what we knew of her brother – and of Phaide...,”

* * * * *

It was a sound like a gong – or the crashing cord of a church organ. It’s note rose in a crescendo from the shadows, drowning out Namin’s hymn of death, flattening the girls’ screams, muting the decay-thick gurgling of the approaching corpses. Namin’s face whitened, contorting in panic. The ring on his finger flickered, and the pulse changed pitch and intensity. The walking corpses juddered to a halt, and then were jerked backwards, as if grabbed by some unseen hand. Namin stared at the dark bulk of the black sarcophagus

dominating the rear of his office. On either side of the upright coffin, alabaster lamps on bronze stands began to glow – not with wick-light from within, but from some effluence of energy seeping out of the sarcophagus itself. The air felt charged with power. Static flashed around the coffin. A dead, dull sensation like a magnetic blanket suffocated the room. A voice hissed from the sarcophagus, echoing like the very voice of a god.

“What is this?” the voice demanded. The air around the coffin quivered, as if in a heat haze. “You dare to disobey my instructions?”

Namin whimpered, his voice almost beyond words. He stretched out his hands towards Silver and Lucy. “Please, Lord – for your Host!” His eyes implored.

The voice from the sarcophagus hissed with displeasure. “I told you one more, Namin – one. Your blood-lust is unacceptable; it has delayed my vengeance.” The voice rose in pitch; the heat-haze around the sarcophagus trembled. A strange, energy-rich darkness crept through the study. Namin suddenly choked, immobile, his eyes bulging, his lips twitching, his chest gasping for air.

“You are my servant, Namin. You exist only because I *allow* you to exist. Your thoughts are *my* thoughts, your deeds *my* deeds! I am the pulse of blood in your veins, the breath of air in your lungs, your mind, your *soul!*” Namin’s face contorted, his eyelids drooping shut, flecks of foam speckled his lips. “I give you my power of life and death and you waste it on petty sadism!” The voice hissed, and the invisible hold on Namin’s throat suddenly snapped. The Director sank to his knees, coughing and sobbing for air, his hands at his collar. Ragged breaths rattled in his chest, he sank forward, his face buried in the carpet.

“Please, Lord – forgive me!” Namin grovelled in abject abasement, his hands outstretched, pleading now for his life.

The displeased voice seemed to turn, as if regarding the trembling girls backed against the wooden desk. Silver felt a charge of energy, a shock of power creep around her, raising the hairs on the back of her neck and creeping like an itch under her skin. The energy hissed and crackled between her and Lucy.

“The child... the Silver Child... Wait. There is... something...,” the voice whispered.

Silver felt the energy cloud around her head, a dull oppressive sensation like the gloom that accompanies a thunderstorm. She felt fingers force their way into her skull. She gasped, closing her eyes, clutching at her temples as the tendrils of force violated the sanctuary of her mind, searching, probing, feeling. Images swirled across Silver’s vision, memories pulled from deep in her past. Nothing was clear, the strange insinuating force seemed to blur and smudge them to impressions, shades. The images were horrifying – but Silver could see no details. They were terrible and cruel – but Silver felt rather than saw it. The energy seemed to recoil from the images, to twitch and shudder. Silver shivered in response.

“*Adonai...*,” the voice echoed, choking. “*Barukh ata Adonai...*” Silver’s numb lips echoed the voice, the unfamiliar sounds alien on her tongue. The energy dissipated, and Silver snapped away, her face pale. A wave of nausea swept through her. She wilted, her knees loose. Lucy grabbed and steadied her. The energy turned its attention back to Namin.

“They shall come to me, in time,” the voice echoed, strangely shaken. “Secure them within the Museum and dispatch the host immediately - without delay!”

Namin clambered to his feet, shoving Silver and Lucy before him in the direction of a thick door at the side of the study, half-hidden by a stack of wooden crates. He fumbled for a dark iron key and, unlocking the door, pushed the girls through, key clattering in the lock as he secured it again.

In the darkness, Lucy and Silver sagged against stacks of paperwork, the strange energy of the study dampened by the heavy oak door. Namin's voice and the disembodied echo were muffled to near-silence. Even the stench of the decaying revenants faded. Lucy and Silver stared at each other through the shadows, their eyes wide. Lucy wiped streaky tears from her cheeks with the sleeve of her cardigan and pushed damp strands of blond hair from her eyes. She looked up into the face of her new companion, her fellow-prisoner. Silver's face was set hard; Lucy thought she looked like a soldier – it gave her, strangely, some comfort. Lucy let her eyes drift around the tiny room. Shelves of folders and bound files, cabinets overflowing with loose-leafed binders, ledgers and forms. High up near the ceiling, two barred windows let in a faint glimmer of moonlight.

“Now what?” Lucy whispered.

* * * * *

“Giza, 1904,” Piper recounted, eyes lost in memories of the past. “We were young, then, Icarus Phaide and I, fresh from the lecture halls of Leiden. He was something of a genius. It was a time of geniuses: Wolsey, Carter, Scarman, Phaide...; they were spoken of in the same breath. He approached the Antiquities Directorate with an audacious request – to excavate within the very plateau of Giza itself, in the shadow of the greatest of Egypt's monuments: within the shade of the Great Pyramid, under the ancient gaze of the Sphinx.” Piper sighed, shaking his head. “He was young, Phaide, and no one expected the Directorate to grant him his permit, but –” Piper smiled. “They did. Confounding all expectations, Phaide obtained his permit, and began his excavations. They were...,” Piper frowned, searching for an appropriate term, “Magnificent. Truly magnificent.” He scratched another match to life and puffed away at his meerschaum. Thick smoke blanketed the table. Piper sighed again and regarded the lit end of his pipe as he continued. “But times change – the world around us changed. In 1931 a new head of German archaeology was dispatched to Cairo, a man whose background was as much political as it was academic: Raucher.”

The Doctor frowned. “Raucher? Colonel Raucher?”

Piper nodded, puffing on his pipe. “At first just Doctor Raucher of the *Ahnenerbe*, but now – yes - Colonel Raucher. He is of a new breed of German – idealistic, political, obsessed with ideas of nation and race. He came determined to glorify his homeland's new Reich, and he came with money. Within two years, the Museum's Directorate had new cars, gold watches, and accounts at Saville Row – all gifts from Raucher. It was only a matter of time before the Director announced a ‘reassessment’ of permits issued to foreign archaeologists. And it came as no surprise that during the reassessment, a majority of the choicest sites were re-assigned to the German concession. Among them, of course, Phaide's excavation at Giza.” Piper shook his head, puffing away at his pipe.

Clemenceau, the thin French archaeologist, picked up the story. “Raucher made no secret of the fact that he despised Phaide, vilified him for his background and his heritage. Half-Jew, half-Slav –” Clemenceau's Gallic shrug spoke volumes. “The Colonel told him his services were no longer required within weeks of taking over the concession. Phaide protested, but to deaf ears. Not only were the Directorate now happily in Raucher's pockets, the tide of political opinion generally had swung in favour of Germany's new Chancellor and the stability and affluence he was establishing in the heart of Europe. Paris, Leiden, Rome – nowhere was interested in Phaide's tale of injustice. He was hounded from Europe; Raucher made sure of that. Eventually Phaide travelled to New York, where he obtained money and backing to buy an obscure permit through the Turkish Consulate. A year ago he

returned to Egypt, much to Raucher's disgust, and let it be known that he was in a position to hire staff for an expedition to the Wadi el-Kut, deep in the western desert." Clemenceau flicked his gaze to each of his companions. "But few would work with Phaide now: Raucher had become too well known in Egypt, and too well feared. He managed to hire three inexperienced archaeologists in London: Teddy Wyndam, Steven Dalglish – and Duncan Moon, a surveyor who had worked for the British in Palestine; Ms. Moon's brother. Last Autumn they arrived in Cairo while Raucher was back in Berlin, gathered their equipment, made their preparations and set off for the western deserts."

"And what then?" asked the Doctor.

McQuarrie shook his head. "All quiet. When we began our new season out at Giza in November, no one seemed to know anything about Phaide. Someone at the Museum said that they'd had some contact with him – crates of artefacts shipped back for examination by the Assistant Director, but he didn't seem to know much about it. Next we heard anything about the expedition was this morning, when we came back to Shepheard's and found Ms. Moon's note waiting for us." The American pulled a folded piece of paper out of his shirt pocket and handed it to the Doctor.

Dear Sirs,

My brother, Mr. Duncan Moon, was engaged as surveyor several months ago by a Professor Icarus Phaide to accompany him on an archaeological expedition to the Western Desert. I have been unable to contact my brother, despite prior arrangements made to meet in Cairo. I have also been unable to arrange an interview with Dr. Hamid Namin, Assistant Director at the Cairo Museum to enquire as to the official status of the Phaide expedition. I was wondering if you, as former colleagues of Professor Phaide, were in contact with the expedition.

I understand from the German Consulate that you plan to arrive in Cairo later today. As I, too, am staying at Shepheard's, I wonder if it might be convenient to meet there at dinner-time this evening. I would be grateful for any information you might have concerning my brother's whereabouts.

Yours,

Ms. Lucy Elizabeth Moon

The Doctor frowned at the piece of paper, handing it back to McQuarrie. There was a burst of applause around the hall as the belly-dancer spun to a graceless conclusion. The dance band launched into a spirited rendition of a stomp, and the young Gazawi was joined by a troupe in silk costumes cavorting around a papier-mâché Sphinx wheeled out through the velvet curtains.

"Colleagues?" the Doctor murmured. "Former colleagues?" He looked around at the trio. "You worked with Phaide – you worked with him at Giza." His frown flattened as he suddenly understood. "You still work there – but now with Raucher."

Piper shifted uncomfortably in his chair, his embarrassment palpable. "You have to understand, Doctor –"

"Oh I think I understand all too well," the Doctor snapped, coldly.

Clemenceau leaned his thin face forward. "It was the only way we could continue to work on the Project," he insisted. "We had spent years – decades – on our work, our research. Raucher controlled everything. We had no choice. Phaide was a colleague, yes – a

friend, even, perhaps. But also a Slav, a Jew... And on a German excavation...," this time Clemenceau's shrug was chilling.

The Doctor stood up, disgust curling his lip. "Good evening, Gentlemen," he said quietly.

"Just a sec, Doctor," McQuarrie barked, half-standing, "Don't judge –"

"Ah – the enigmatic Herr Doktor Smith," came the cold, elegant, and half-familiar voice of Colonel Raucher. The three Egyptologists stood up respectfully at the sudden appearance of their Director. The Doctor found himself face to face with a man suited in crisp, white linen with a party badge prominently displayed on one lapel. Behind Raucher stood two men in black double-breasted suits, their faces unpleasantly impassive. Raucher smiled and indicated the Doctor's just-vacated seat.

"Please," he purred. "Sit down, Herr Doktor. It seems suddenly that we have more in common than just a chance meeting in a Police Station..."

* * * * *

"They've gone," Silver whispered, tucking her dark hair behind her ear and pressing it harder up against the door. "Yeah, they've gone."

"Are you sure?" Lucy whispered back, her round face pale with worry.

Silver wrinkled up her nose. "Well, I can't smell them any more...," she quipped. Pulling away from the door, she looked around the dark room. "We've got to get out of here – and quickly, before they come back and someone changes their mind about letting their pet zombies loose on us."

"Zombies?" Lucy shook her head, her lip quivering in panic. "Oh Silver, what's happening? What were those... those things?"

Silver glanced at her new companion, her face grim. "I have a sneaking suspicion they were just what they looked like: walking corpses, the undead, Evil Dead-type zombies."

"But... but... how?"

Silver shrugged. "In my experience, it's better to ask questions later – particularly where zombies are concerned. Right now, we've got to get out of here before old Anton LeVey out there decides to do another Shaun of the Dead re-enactment."

Lucy's soft face twisted in puzzlement. "I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about."

"Never mind, never mind. Pardon the anachronisms," muttered Silver. "Just –," she sighed. This all seemed so *normal* to her. It was hard to imagine herself in Lucy's shoes – seeing all this kind of thing for the first time. "Just... don't worry. I know someone who loves this kind of thing. He'll have answers – he always does. She patted Lucy awkwardly on the shoulder, then stepped back, hands on hips, sizing up the door. She thumped the oak panel with her fist and winced. "Important thing is we're never going to be able to bash that thing down." She glanced over her shoulder at Lucy.

"Don't suppose you can pick locks?"

Lucy looked blankly back at her.

"No," Silver sighed. "Silly question." She glanced up at the barred window. "Which just leaves –" She started to drag a cabinet across the room to beneath the iron grille. "Give me a hand with this, will you?"

Together they shoved the metal filing cabinet over the bare floorboards until it sat underneath the window. Kicking out drawers to act as steps, Silver scrambled up to the top

of the cabinet. She grabbed the iron frame and jerked it sharply. It shifted slightly on dusty hinges. Looking down into Lucy's upturned face, Silver grinned.

"We're in luck!" Silver jerked the frame again. "It'll move – and there's a ledge outside."

"A ledge?" squeaked Lucy.

"Have a look around – see if you can find something to help lever open this window," Silver grunted, jerking at the dust-bound frame once more.

Lucy looked around, shrugging helplessly. "I don't see anything," she responded plaintively.

Silver rolled her eyes. "There must be something," she grimaced, grinding her palms into the sharp edges rusty frame. "Crowbar? Wooden stake? Baseball bat? Sonic Lance?"

"What?"

Silver scowled. "Nothing – nothing. Just... just have a look around, will you?"

Lucy bit her lip – then spotted something at the back of the small room. Next to a soot-caked coal grate: a poker. She grabbed it and handed it up to Silver.

"What about this?"

Silver took the poker, her grin returning. "Perfect."

* * * * *

"I prefer to stand," the Doctor said stiffly, his eyes narrowed.

"Very well," Raucher smiled faintly, seating himself at the table. The three Egyptologists shuffled back into their own chairs, none of them meeting the Doctor's eye.

Raucher snapped his fingers, and a waiter appeared with a drink. Raucher rolled the liqueur around in the tumbler, clinking the cubes of ice.

"Tell me, Herr Doktor?," he asked carefully, "What do you know of Professor Icarus Phaide?"

The Doctor watched Raucher evenly. "Only what his former colleagues here have told me," he replied.

Raucher's thin smile was humourless. "The man is a degenerate and a fraud," he said slowly, emphasising each insulting syllable. "He is a plagiarist, a liar, a thief, and a moral sewer-dog. I managed to remove him from this country once – this time I may be forced to devise a more... permanent solution."

The Doctor said nothing.

The SS Colonel drank his *kummel* in one healthy draught, setting the glass back down on the table and staring up at the Doctor. Raucher leaned back easily in his chair.

"And what is your interest in him and his work?" Raucher demanded.

"That," the Doctor returned, "Is really none of your business. Someone with more polished manners would know better than to ask."

"You British," Raucher snarled, his cheeks colouring, "Your time is finished. You, like Phaide, represent nothing more than the dead hand of the past, choking the present. We are the future, Doktor – the German Reich, the German *volk*. You would do well to remember that when you are choosing your friends." He looked around at the three Egyptologists. "The future belongs to us, now. We have seized that right by the power of will alone: the will of the *volk*, the will of the *Fuehrer*. I am a representative of that will, Doktor." Raucher settled back again in his chair. "A will bound in steel and iron. I may be Professor, yes – but I am Colonel, now, too. I have returned to show Egypt and Africa the true power of that iron will. The day after tomorrow, Doktor, I will direct a series of tank manoeuvres on the western bank of the Nile for the Egyptian Monarchy and

representatives of the various North African powers. It will be a show of strength, a show of will – a show of the future, watched across the world.” Raucher stood up slowly, so that his eyes locked with the Doctor’s. The Doctor’s gaze didn’t waver for a moment.

“But I warn you, Doktor,” Raucher said quietly, “Creatures like Phaide have no part in that future. You have a choice now. Choose your future carefully, Herr Doktor, because –

“

Raucher paused. The hairs on the back of his neck stood upright. A strange charge filled the air. The Doctor glanced around. Then –

On stage, the dancing troupe paused, nervously looking to one another as the unexpected light-show materialised on the extension. At the front of the troupe, Sahar still pirouetted, but her kohl-circled eyes flicked to the lights, confusion apparent on her face. The charge of energy in the air was palpable: an uncomfortable, oppressive blanket of electricity that made skin crawl and skulls ache. The lights were rainbow-hued, cast outwards from an unseen centre to form a whorl of black, distorted, measureless space. Blobs of colour streaked across the whorl – red, green, blue, purple: a rainbow of energy. The whorl grew stronger, more substantial, and the coloured energy streaks heavier and more solid.

On stage, the dancing troupe retreated behind the papier-mâché sphinx. Out in front, her skin glistening in the lights, Sahar Gazawi spun to a slow stop, her thin silk veils rippling in a breeze that hissed outwards from the lights. All around the casino, talk and gaming ceased as everyone watched the energy whorl.

Piper, Clemenceau and McQuarrie got slowly to their feet, their eyes fixed on the apparition. It exuded a strange, fascination, locking their gaze into the kaleidoscope of lights. Raucher’s face glowed, as if he was staring at something of unimaginable beauty. The Doctor drew in a sharp breath. He recognised the energy now – but that gave him little comfort.

Suddenly, something occupied the whorl. Shapes. Humanoid shapes. Tiny figures - a dozen of them, crowded together and growing larger, as if the whorl were a tunnel, and the figures shooting along it at speed. The figures grew larger, simultaneously visible from every angle. They stooped. They shuffled. Their limbs and heads hung unnaturally. Their eyes – their eyes glowed a dark, phosphorescent red, smoking with some dark, unholy power. Then, as they came even closer, a smell – the sharp funk of rotten fruit, the cabbage-y stink of decay.

Raucher wrinkled his nose, his eyes fixed on the figures. “Was ist...?” The smell of death percolated into the casino.

The figures were almost life-sized now. The Doctor could make out clothing, facial features: there were Museum guards, couriers, drivers – and even the gardener from the Hospice. Their skin was a mottled blue-green, broken by cuts and splits from which no blood dripped. They stood like corpses, yet moved –

They moved. The whorl of lights dimmed, and suddenly the dozen creatures were on the stage extension, their red eyes glowing fiercely, their broken and rotten limbs outstretched, their dead mouths gibbering and moaning. Someone screamed, and then panic rushed through the casino like a tidal wave. The creatures scanned the room, and then fixed on the small group of Egyptologists standing in silent, unmoving shock at their table next to the stage. The undead things flowed from the stage, half-falling, half-leaping down from the wooden boards. They swarmed towards the table.

Raucher cried out as two of the things lurched towards him. One of them caught him a blow from its taloned hands. Rotting fingers raked over the left side of his face, opening a bloody slash from his brow. Raucher screamed. His two dark-suited henchmen drew their

Mausers and opened fire. Bullets tore into the dead flesh, spattering pustulous yellow ichor across the table. The creature shuddered, but kept moving, the bullets shaking its body but not diverting it. Raucher picked up a chair and swung it at a second corpse, striking it full across its decayed face. There was a crunch and a snap as the spine was broken by the impact of the blow, and the creature fell backwards, its limbs suddenly limp and immobile.

Three of the undead made a lunge for Piper, closest to the stage. His pale, shocked face formed a scream as four unnaturally strong arms grabbed him, holding him fast. The third undead creature drew back its long, decayed arm and then drove it straight into Piper's chest. Decayed bone splintered and shattered as the arm plunged deep into the Egyptologist's belly, spraying out a gout of blood and bile. Piper's scream vanished into a gurgle. Blood frothed out of his mouth. He slumped back as the zombies dropped him against the table, his corpse spreading a crimson stain over the green baize top.

Shouting a warning to the remaining Egyptologists, the Doctor leapt into action and charged into the melee. McQuarrie, a wordless bellow on his lips, pulled a revolver from his jacket and unloaded six bullets into the face of a lurching corpse. The skull exploded, sticky remnants of brain matter flying across the end of the stage. The decapitated body quivered, then crumpled to the ground. As two more corpses reached for him, McQuarrie swung the empty revolver like a club.

Raucher scrambled past tables, hand over his bleeding face, pushing his way towards the main doors and joining the frantic, fleeing crowd as they ran screaming for the exit. Raucher's two henchmen stood their ground, firing bursts into the advancing line of zombies to no avail. Their shots plunged into bellies and through limbs, tearing apart decaying flesh and rotting organs, but nothing stopped the undead advance. The zombies dived on them, and their Mausers fell silent. The table lamps in the main hall were toppled, smashed – an electrical line shorted and started a fire. The casino became like something out of a psychedelic nightmare. The undead things roared triumphantly in the flickering darkness.

Clemenceau now fled, struggling to get past their table and the caltrops of the upturned chair-legs. In the darkened casino, under the growing amber flicker of the spreading fire, his long legs quickly became entangled in the chairs. There was a hiss of energy, and a hand reached up and grabbed him. Clemenceau looked down. It was Piper's hand. But Piper's eyes now glowed a deep, dark red. Clemenceau screamed. The dead Egyptologist leapt up from the table, his blood-stained mouth twisted into a hunting howl, his hands clawing at Clemenceau's face. Four other creatures pounced, descending on the Frenchman in a cloud of tearing hands.

The Doctor jumped, boots colliding into the back of the two creatures grabbing at McQuarrie. He heard the sickening sound of a breaking spine from underfoot, then rolled to one side as the two creatures fell against the side of the stage. McQuarrie bounded up from their grasp, pulling a bowie knife from behind his belt and lashing out with the sharp blade. The sweep of steel caught the second creature across the throat, and the decayed head leapt up from rotting vertebrae, spinning as it rolled, dead-eyed, over the stage.

McQuarrie grinned, looking at the Doctor as if to say "That wasn't so hard, was it?". The Doctor tried to shout a warning. Two hands rose up from the zombie with the broken back, squirming on the floor, arms wrapped themselves around McQuarrie's legs. McQuarrie tried to kick, but two more creatures rose up from the melee behind him and grabbed his throat and chest.

The Doctor seized a chair and smashed it against the head of the zombie on the floor. The chair snapped, the creature shuddered and its grip lessened. McQuarrie let out a choking scream of pain as one of the creatures clamped its jaw onto his shoulder, the bite

drawing a thick stream of blood. The Doctor jabbed the remains of the chair forward, like a double-pointed spear, poking savagely at the creature's head. He looked away as something crunched, and the zombie flailed backwards, half a chair buried in its skull.

Shots. Gunfire in the darkness. Smoke filled the Casino, flames racing up dust-dry timber and bursting against the plaster ceiling. People shouted over the screaming. A zombie reared up at the Doctor, its red eyes flashing in the firelight – then the rattle of rifle bullets and the creature vanished in splinters of decayed bone and skin. Out of chaos came slowly a battlefield silence and stillness. The crowds had fled the casino, and under the flickering roar of the spreading flames, the Doctor could make out the advancing forms of Captain Reynolds and one of his patrols. The zombies lay still and immobile amidst smashed chairs and broken tables. Stumbling back, the Doctor slumped against the edge of the stage. He absent-mindedly wiped his brow with a paisley handkerchief, surveying the carnage from the attack. Amidst the rotting corpses and the shattered furniture lay the newly-killed bodies of the Egyptologists; heads, limbs, torsos ripped apart by the savage fury of the zombies. There could be no question now, the Doctor thought, no question at all as to who was behind this...

“Doctor!”

Stepping over a twisted zombie corpse, Captain Reynolds appeared out of the gloom, an incredulous look on his face. “What the hell is that?”

There was a rush of cold air as a fire crew arrived, their hoses blasting water into the conflagration.

“Death...,” the Doctor murmured.

* * * * *

The Museum statue park was, quite literally, a maze. The dead gaze of pharaohs, gods, emperors and kings followed the two girls through the darkness, fragments of limbs piled up next to tombs, sarcophagi and column capitals. There were no lights, and the avenues quickly became a jumble of stone and shadows. They left the carefully laid out lines of antiquities behind and became lost in a dumping ground for what Silver could only imagine were left-over bits and pieces gathered from a hundred different excavations. Fingers, noses, toes, corners, chunks – lumps bigger than cars, fragments no bigger than a fist. It was a mess. It was also impossible to find the way out. Suddenly, they emerged into an open area. In front of them reared a pharaonic torso, shoulders and head surrounded by a rickety tower of scaffolding. The ancient king's benign gaze stared out across the yard, his body slowly being assembled by restorers. The yard was empty save for a small wooden hut next to the scaffolding – and behind the hut, through a small gate in the fence, a car-parking area leading to the rear gate of the Museum – beyond which, the noisy rumble of Cairo.

“The way out – finally!” whispered Lucy. They trotted across the yard, under the munificent gaze of the half-complete Pharaoh.

“Just a minute,” warned Silver, whose spidery-senses were tingling. “Let's make sure there aren't any –”

The door to the little wooden hut flew open, and two startled khaki-clad soldiers emerged. They took in the blood-stained fork and the gore-smeared poker and raised their antiquated Enfield rifles.

“- Guards,” finished Silver, lamely.

The shorter, fatter of the pair shouted something incomprehensible even to Silver and ran forward. The taller, thinner guard hesitated, either unsure about the politics of

rushing Western women, or the wisdom of rushing armed opponents. Silver lunged forward, catching the rifle's rusty bayonet between the tines of her fork and twisted. The guard's inept charge faltered, and his momentum carried him over in a tumble into the dust, his grimy red fez rolling from his fat head.

"Run!" Silver shouted to Lucy, backing away and circling the second guard. The scaffolding-shrouded Pharaoh was now behind them. The thinner guard edged around Silver warily, licking his lips nervously and glancing over at his cursing colleague, now scrabbling across the yard to recover his own rifle. Behind Silver, Lucy ran, through the gate and into the motor pool beyond. Silver shouted and jabbed forward with her fork. The thinner guard leapt back, nervously. The fat guard scrambled to his feet and charged again with a shout, wounded pride urging him on. Silver swiped at him with his(?) her) fork, but he was prepared and Silver overbalanced falling to one side as he avoided her parry. She crashed into the scaffolding, which wobbled precariously. The fork spun out of her grasp. She kicked up to her feet as the rifle descended. The guard was swinging it like a club, not jabbing with the bayonet. The blow caught Silver square on her back, and she tumbled forward, slamming into yet another wooden scaffolding pole. The scaffolding creaked and wood snapped. The guards shouted warnings and threw themselves backwards as the whole tower of poles and beams came toppling down with an ear-splitting crash. Dazed, Silver tottered back, out of the way of the collapse, then ran through the gate and into the motor pool yard.

"Silver!" Lucy pointed. There were more guards now, running across the yard to close the gate. Not quite thinking straight, Silver grabbed Lucy's hand and raced towards a line of vehicles – one in particular catching her eye. She bundled Lucy on the back of the Norton courier bike and jumped on the starter. The motor rumbled into life and Silver twisted the throttle, gunning the engine. Lucy shrieked.

"Hang on, Lucy – hang on!" Silver felt the girl's hands grasp at her waist. Hunching her shoulders, Silver released the brake and the bike leapt forward. They roared across the yard, past the shouting guards, through the closing iron gates and out into the Cairo traffic.

* * * * *

"Come on, Captain," the Doctor murmured as the guards at the front gate ran towards their beckoning commander. "Let's take advantage of their absence, shall we?"

Captain Reynolds frowned as he followed the Doctor across the road. "I'm not entirely happy with this, Doctor. Shouldn't we make an appointment with the Director? Do this properly?"

"Appointments are for dentists," scoffed the Doctor, leaning through the gate and opening the latch from the inside. "We've no time to waste, Captain. Whatever stalks this city is no longer content to simply hide in the shadows. We're not just dealing with a dozen murders – we're dealing with something far worse than that."

Reynolds said nothing. He couldn't explain it, of course – walking corpses? Killing Egyptologists? It made no sense to him, but he could tell the Doctor knew far more than he was saying.

"We should have at least waited for my men to finish at the Casino," he grumbled, following the Doctor through the gate.

The Doctor shushed him and ran towards the neo-classical porch of the Museum's front entrance. The door was locked. The Doctor produced a complicated tangle of bent wires from his pocket and shot a grin at Reynolds.

"French picklock – never fails. Belonged to Marie Antoinette, poor thing..."

Reynolds scowled. “This is no time for jokes, Doctor.” The Doctor fiddled the wires into the lock, which clicked. He pushed the heavy metal door open a crack.

“After you, Captain,” the Doctor whispered, pocketing the pick-lock.

They crept through the darkened galleries, between fragments of ancient, vanished worlds. Reynolds watched the Doctor pause at sarcophagi and mummies, frowning at labels as if something were wrong with them. He scowled; more secrets. They passed through into the main Long Gallery. Ornate stone staircases lead up to the mezzanine level. The Doctor paused by a towering granite god, looking up past the beetle head and its plethora of carven crowns at the shadowed upper level, his lips pursed, rubbing the back of his neck. Reynolds halted behind him – and suddenly felt what the Doctor was feeling: a strange energy creeping up his spine. He unclipped his revolver from its holster, the weapon a reassuring weight in his hand.

“What is it, Doctor?” Reynolds hissed, cricking his neck. “I can feel it – like ants crawling under my skin.”

The Doctor nodded. “Psionic wave degradation. Creates low-level interference with bio-voltaic signals at a cellular level. That’s what gives you that feeling that your skin’s crawling,” he whispered.

Reynolds blinked, unsure whether what the Doctor had said was actually an explanation. “I see,” he said slowly.

“I’m sure you don’t,” murmured the Doctor, with a smile, “But it’s an encouraging sign that you’re trying to.”

The Captain frowned. Was that been an insult?

“The thing I don’t quite see is *why?*” the Doctor muttered, his eyes hooded and grey. “I can see how, I think I can guess who – but *why?* Is it professional, political...?” He let the question hang, his tall brow furrowed in thought. “Both could be the reason, I suppose, but –” he shook his head, frowning, “No. Neither seem convincing. I can’t help but feel there’s a...,” he paused, searching for the right word, as if unfamiliar with the concepts he was outlining. And then – a look, as if recalling a memory closer to home. “...Deeper reason,” he murmured.

Reynolds shook his head. He had no idea what the Doctor was talking about. The Doctor’s train of thought was secret, hidden from him. He frowned. “Listen, Doctor,” he said quietly, “I’m finding your reasoning a little difficult to follow. Where exactly are you going with this?”

The Doctor blinked, as if coming out of a trance, flashed Reynolds a brief, grim smile and pointed up the stairs. “There: the Assistant Director’s office. Dr. Hamid Namin. He was the person Ms. Moon was trying to see. Let’s go and pay him a visit, shall we?”

Reynolds followed the Doctor across the broad marble expanse of the main hall, past statues of beetles and cats and vultures with outstretched wings. A hundred carved and painted eyes seemed to follow their passage, as if a power from across the millennia were watching them. They made their way up the stairs to a long corridor roped in shadows. Tall, thin statuary lined the walls, interspersed with display cabinets heavy in pots, coins and fragments of ancient jewellery. One end of the passage opened up onto a mezzanine above the Long Gallery; a tall pair of double doors governed the other end of the corridor. The doors were ajar, and a thin sliver of lamplight crept between the heavy oak leaves.

“Someone keeps late office hours,” murmured the Doctor. He led the way down the corridor. Reynolds paused, his ears catching a sound. Something shifted somewhere behind them. Something stealthy. The empty eyes of the statues stared blankly down at them. Reynolds shivered. A jackal-headed statue on one side of the corridor and a lion-headed one on the other seemed to be watching him. A musty, long-forgotten smell permeated the

Museum – the smell of tombs and graves and dead places. The hall was giving him the creeps. He turned and hurried after the Doctor as the shadows at the top of the stairs twitched and shambled closer behind him...

The office was as musty as the gallery. The Doctor frowned at the crates and the dark sarcophagus set upright against the wall. There was no one in the office, although an alabaster lamp glittered with a tiny flame on the desk. The Doctor made for the sarcophagus, running his fingers down the elaborately gilded hieroglyphs traced into its dark stone. He leaned close, putting his ear to the stone and tapped it gently, as if looking for a resonance. His face cleared, as if he had just confirmed a theory. Rubbing his hands together and looking pleased with himself, he turned his attention to the broad leather blotter of the desk and the papers, ledgers and files spread across it and the desk's surface.

"Right," the Doctor said, "Let's see what we can learn from Mr. Namin's cubicle, shall we?" He glanced at the alabaster lamp. "Eighteenth dynasty – not particularly interesting." He ran his long fingers through the splash of paperwork. "Hmm. Accession ledgers – oh!" He picked out a series of entries. "Showing that artefacts from Phaide's excavation have been arriving recently, brought in by..." he peered at the spidery handwriting. "By truck from the Wadi el-Kut. Hmm..."

Reynolds leaned on the desk, peering at the ledger. "And who or what is Phaide?"

"Missing Egyptologist," grinned the Doctor. "Do keep up, Captain." His eye scanned the ledgers, the objects scattered among them. "What an unusual mix of objects – early dynastic sceptre here, twentieth dynasty ushabti there. All from the same tomb? How very, very odd. I wonder..." He rummaged among the forms and notes. He stopped at a newspaper clipping from the Egyptian Times. A small item, but with a photograph.

Phaide Expedition Departs Cairo

The Doctor studied the photo. Four European men and a small group of Arab workers gathered around a Landrover. The man in the front was obviously Professor Phaide: tall, thin-featured, piercing eyes and a hawk-like nose, he stared out towards the camera defiantly. The other three were identified in the caption: the tubby one was called Wyndham, the solemn, Celtic-featured man on the right Dalglish, and the bright-eyed, blonde chap on the left Moon.

"Moon...", the Doctor muttered. "I wonder if –"

"Just a minute, Doctor," Reynolds exclaimed suddenly, grasping at a bit of paper drifting from the Doctor's search. "Look at this!" He thrust the hand-written piece of foolscap into the Doctor's hands.

Dear Assistant Director,

Once again, I have arrived at your office in hopes of an interview to establish the whereabouts and condition of the expedition lead by Professor Icarus Phaide, and the fortune of my brother, Mr. Duncan Moon, the expedition's surveyor. Despite your disinclination to see me, I remain hopeful that –

"- and it breaks off," observed Reynolds.

"Helpfully, she's timed and dated it – very organised," muttered the Doctor. "Less than an hour ago."

Reynolds raised an eyebrow. "Just before the Casino was attacked," he calculated.

The Doctor held up the note. "So what have you done with her, then?" He asked. "And what have you done with Silver?"

"Eh?" Reynolds spluttered. "I haven't done anything with –"

“I wasn’t talking to you,” the Doctor said, quietly, staring past the Captain towards the office door. Reynolds followed the Doctor’s angry gaze.

A man in a dark frock coat, high collar and fez stood in the open doorway, a pistol in his hand, an unpleasant, oriental sneer on his round face. With his slitted eyes and sharply-trimmed beard, he looked the very image of the devil himself, Reynolds thought. Behind the man stood a grey-skinned shape, its eyes burning with red coals. Reynolds whipped his revolver up, but the Doctor jerked it out of his hand and laid it, butt-forward, on the desk. The Captain opened his mouth to protest, but the Doctor’s mute anger silenced him even before he opened his mouth.

“Well?” the Doctor repeated, his eyes fixed on the man in the fez. “Where are they?”

The man in the fez smiled a cruel, thin smile. “Your enterprising friends?” he grinned. “They were here, yes – but my guards...” He shrugged.

The Doctor’s mouth twitched in a little half-smile. “They escaped, you mean.” His shoulders relaxed. “Good old Silver,” he said softly.

The man in the fez jerked the gun. “It is no matter. They will be recovered. There is no corner of the city dark enough for them to hide for long.”

The Doctor refused to be baited. “Tell me, Assistant Director Namin, where is Phaide? Where is the man behind all this?”

Namin smiled thinly. “He watches, Doctor. He watches this city, his eyes on his enemies, planning his revenge.”

“We saw,” the Doctor acknowledged grimly. “The assault on the Casino – we were there.”

Namin nodded, lighting trees of alabaster lamps around the black sarcophagus. “The Host – proof of the power my Master wields.”

“A power you direct, is that it?” the Doctor pressed. “But you don’t control it yourself, do you – he does?” He waved his hands at the artefacts gathered in the office. “Whatever Phaide found, it’s not here – it didn’t get shipped back to Cairo, then? It’s still out there, isn’t it – still in the Wadi el-Kut where Phaide found it?”

The alabaster lamps glowed crimson. Namin smiled at the Doctor without replying. He raised his hands in a gesture of supplication towards the sarcophagus, the red jewelled ring pulsing with inner fire. He began to chant.

“Set-imakh, ka ana-ankh, ma’at ana-ankh, tut khosi per-djed. Bismi n-tun-hudh. Set-wakadh, Set-djabh, Set-kha neb ka’a...”

The candlelight glow from the alabaster lamp faded, as the darkness in the office gathered, deepening and growing. From the heart of the shadows, pulsing out from the sarcophagus, a blood-red light, a stain of power and energy that dug into the back of the mind.

Reynolds grabbed the Doctor’s arm, his eyes darting towards the revolver sitting on the desk. “We could take them, Doctor – him and the walking corpse. We could make a break for it?”

The Doctor scowled at the Captain, shushing him to keep quiet. “Are you mad?” he hissed. “Just when we’re about to get some answers?”

The Assistant Director dropped to his knees, flattened himself on the Persian carpet as the glow strengthened. A voice hissed from the glow – an echoing, distant voice dripping with darkness and death.

“Speak – servant (of the servant?) of the Great Ones...,” it echoed.

“Master! I have brought him before you!”

“Ah...,” the voice sighed. “I can sense him.” The energy in the room coiled, writhed, pressed its magnetic edge against the Doctor’s skull. Reynolds saw his companion wince, and felt the strange pressure in his own mind.

“Yes...,” the voice sighed. “So old... so very old indeed. So much travelling, so much sorrow... He is unlike anything else on this world... Send him to me, Namin,” the voice commanded.

Namin scrambled to his feet as a deep, organ note resonated from the sarcophagus, rising in pitch and intensity to become a pulsing, swirling sound of power. The front of the stone block began to fade away to a kaleidoscope of radiating colour in a sea of blackness. Impossibly, a whorl of energy – a vortex tumbled into the depths of the ancient stone catafalque. Namin raised his hand, the ring pulsing with a new, darker power. Something gripped the Doctor and Reynolds, forcing them forwards, step by step, towards the sarcophagus. The Captain tried to resist, shouting and cursing, but the power of Namin’s ring dragged him on. Then the whorl of energy seemed to rise and engulf them, sucking them down into a blackness that seemed older and darker than time itself.

iv. The Army of Death

The bath was deep, hot and exactly the kind of old-world luxury Silver felt was desperately needed. A goodly handful of bath salts stored below the antiquated brass boiler had created a pillow of fragrant bubbles, rich with the scents of Jasmine and Frankincense. Silver let the bubbles curl around, piling them up in front of her and puffing them childishly off her chest, floating clumps of foam drifting up lazily into the steam rising towards the ornate, plastered ceiling. She sank gratefully into the water, letting her arms dangle over the rolled edge of the enamelled tub as the hot water soaked away the charnel stink from the Museum. Silver's back ached where the guards had hit her; her arms ached from piloting the bike through the Cairene streets; frankly, her head ached from the day's chaos. She sighed through the bubbles, images juddering through her head like old-fashioned newsreel footage: the mob outside the Museum, the discovery of Phaide's antiquities, Namin and his walking dead, the fight in the statuary yard, the disturbing violation of her mind by the voice from the Sarcophagus... It all pressed in on her. She sighed through the bubbles, foam cascading down the length of the bath. Here, up to her neck in hot water, the bruises and bashings of the day slowly melting out of her, it all seemed okay – just another day at the office. But how was Lucy coping, she wondered? How did someone like her cope with killer zombies and murderous Museum Directors? Silver dipped even lower into the bath water, her bubble blowing becoming a burbling in the scented water. Welcome to my world, Lucy, she thought, wryly.

At least the Doctor – well, Silver assumed it was him – had managed to reserve a room for her at Shephard's (and pay for it as well, she hoped). That had been one problem taken care of. Wrapped in a slight cotton hotel dressing gown she padded from the bathroom into the suite's sitting room and re-read the note that had been waiting for her when she arrived. The Doctor's elegant handwriting was unmistakable; the note itself read like an old-style telegram: short, concise and to the point.

Silver,

Investigating murder at the Museum. Keep your eyes open. Stay with Ms. Moon.

And then a flurry of pen-strokes at the bottom that might have read "Doctor" or might have read something else. Silver smiled at the folded piece of paper; it was just so... *him*; the new him, that was. She smiled at that, too. She left the note on a marble-topped side table and swung open the balcony doors, letting the night sounds of Cairo waft gently into the room through the rippling folds of the muslin curtains. Below the balcony, lay the palms and roses of the Ezbekiyeh Gardens. In the streets beyond, the rumble of cars and lorries had faded, and the last cries of the night call to prayer echoed across the darkened silhouette of the city and the diamond ripple of the Nile. The thinnest, palest sliver of a crescent moon hung like a silver sickle in the star-flecked sky, its pale wash picking out the edges of domes and the slender skeletons of minaret and tower.

Suddenly sobered by the view, Silver pulled the robe a little tighter around her. It was no longer just exotic; she knew now that something dark and unholy crept through the city's shadowed alleys and lamp-lit streets. She glanced back at the note on the table and wondered what the Doctor was doing.

* * * * *

The blackness parted. Reynolds tried to stand upright, then realised he wasn't entirely sure which way was up anymore. He felt sick, and utterly disorientated. Lamplight flickered around him, reflected on fractured surfaces glinting with fragmentary colour. The air was stale, heavy with dust and the stench of elder things. Reynolds steadied himself as a wave of dizziness swept over him. He felt someone grab at his elbow and shoulder, righting him.

"Take it easy, Captain – breathe deeply," came a low, calming voice. The Doctor. Images and awareness seemed to tumble into Reynold's head. The Museum; the office; the Assistant Director; the voice; the Sarcophagus – the Sarcophagus! And the indescribable vortex of light, energy and darkness that had swallowed them up.

"What – what happened?" Reynolds choked, his voice as weak as his legs.

"Spatio-temporal hyperlink," the Doctor said, although once again Reynolds had no idea whether what the Doctor was saying was actually an explanation or not. "Ancient technology – ancient, ancient..." he murmured. "Ancient and forgotten... almost."

Reynolds blinked and looked around him. Something had happened to the Assistant Director's office. The wooden panelling was gone – instead the walls were painted, carved limestone. Lines of stiff-armed figures marched across the walls, columns of hieroglyphs rising up to a low, vaulted ceiling studded with a carved and painted starscape. Animal-headed deities gazed out from niches, hands gripping strange sceptres, brows crowned with snakes and suns.

"What happened to the office?" Reynolds whispered.

"Nothing happened to the office, Captain," said the Doctor carefully. "But something happened to us – we've travelled. That whorl of energy in the sarcophagus, think of it as a tunnel. We were transported along it, and now we're here – wherever here is," he finished, looking around the chamber. There was a doorway at the far end, a flicker of torchlight shining between the carved jambs.

Reynolds shook his head. "Tunnel? Travel? I – I don't understand."

"Come on," the Doctor said, indicating the doorway. "I have a feeling someone is waiting to meet us..." He led the way, passing between scorpion-headed guardian figures that stared mutely out of the stone. The Doctor peered at the carving and traced a finger across a weathered hieroglyph.

"Look at the style of these inscriptions, Reynolds," the Doctor whispered, pointing to a series of glyphs. "This antechamber must date back to the first dynasties of the Pharaohs," he muttered, "If not before." They passed through the doorway, flickering light washed over them as they entered a larger space. More stone figures ranged around the walls, supporting the high vault of a ceiling studded with stars and painted constellatory beasts, objects and deities. The figures here were thinner, with exaggerated, elfin features wide hips and pronounced bellies. Lamps in tall carved alabaster holders shed a flickering light through the chamber. On either side ran rows of statues hung with dust, circular pits punched into the floor between their feet. At the far end the chamber widened into a vast, cavernous space into which the lamplight plunged and disappeared. Spotlighted in the distance, a structure of gold containing a blossom of a new kind of light – red, punctuated with shots of amber. Something else – something dark – lurked in the light.

"Amarna period," the Doctor pointed out, "Almost two and a half millennia later!" He shook his head in wonder. "This centre must have been active for generations."

Reynolds stared at the unnerving pantheon of statues and the vast cavern beyond. The Doctor could read the place like a history book; to Reynolds it was just as much a mystery as the whole 'travel tunnel' thing.

"But I don't understand, Doctor," Reynolds protested, "Where exactly are we?"

The Doctor smiled. “At a rough guess I’d say somewhere very close to the Wadi el-Kut.” He turned to the empty cavern and raised his voice. “Am I right? Of course I am!”

There was a hiss, and a voice echoed through the cavern. “Of course you are, Doctor!”

The Doctor loped towards the golden structure at the far end of the cavern. As they came closer, Reynolds could see the structure more clearly. It was entirely formed of gold, with a dais, reached by low steps, on which had been placed a pyramid of red and amber crystal, taller than two men. Within, burned a fire of amber and blood light. The pyramid was surrounded by upright golden stela, each flickering with lights on the outward face. A strangely-shaped golden throne sat in front of the pyramid, and around the dais were ranged thin, golden columns, each in the shape of an animal-headed god. The entire construction was set on a jutting finger of stone that pointed up and out, over some natural fissure in the cavern. Beyond the fissure, the cavern continued, enshrouded in shadow.

The voice came from a patch of blackness that rested upon the golden throne. It rose, a tall figure robed in black, a hood and blank, glassy-faced helmet obscuring its face. The robe was decorated with red striping, the helmet with obscure sigilia and glyphs. It radiated darkness – and power. Some echo of the red and amber light boiling in the heart of the crystal pyramid burned behind the blank-faced helmet, but the figure seemed frail and broken – damaged.

The Doctor neared the pyramid construction, and bowed curtly to the black-robed figure.

“I believe I have the honour of addressing Professor Icarus Phaide?” he inquired. Reynolds stared in disbelief at the dark, god-like figure. A chuckle hissed from the blank-faced helmet.

“Welcome, Doctor – welcome to the Hall of Immortality, the chamber of the Life-Cradle, the last gift of the Osirans!”

* * * * *

Silver woke sprawled across her bed, arms and legs splayed out to inhabit every corner, the sheets wrapped in a knot around her middle and her face buried squashed in a pillow. For a few slow seconds she had no idea why she was awake; it took her a few more long, confused seconds to realise that Lucy had come into the room through the adjoining door and was rabbiting away about something. The curtains had been flung wide, and the bright light of mid-morning filled the room. Silver slowly rolled over, made half an attempt to disentangle herself from the sheets and then flopped back against the pillows, her face screwed up in an exhausted series of yawns.

Lucy had stopped talking. Silver blinked slowly and tried to piece together what the girl had been saying, but realised she hadn’t really heard a word Lucy had been saying. Lucy looked at her expectantly. Silver blinked again and nodded sleepily.

“Uh, yeah – sure... whatever...,” she mumbled, running a hand through her tangled hair and wondering if they had coffee in the 1930s. Of course they did – didn’t they?

“Excellent. I knew you’d say yes,” Lucy beamed. She looked at her watch. “They’re still serving breakfast on the terrace. Why don’t you get up, wash and dress and I’ll meet you there in an hour.” She smiled a big smile as she headed for the door. “I had the *saffragi* do your laundry, by the way.” She paused, hand resting on the door. “And thank you again, Silver,” she said as she slipped through it. Silver realised with sudden clarity that Lucy had looked... different. She also realised that she had no idea what she’d just said yes to...

* * * * *

And that was how, Silver reflected, she had come to be jolting through the desert in the cab of a Landrover that had seen better days, with a back full of supplies and equipment and a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach. *Stay with Ms. Moon*, the Doctor's note had read. Well, that's what she was doing, right? Silver sighed and wrestled again with the linen-printed map that seemed to try and fold itself up every time Silver wanted to read it. She looked out the cab window. They had crossed over the Nile and were heading through the fields and mudbrick villages beyond the river, past *fellahin* tending the black, immortal soil of the Nile. They headed West, away from the life-giving river, into the desert, towards the Wadi el-Kut.

Silver glanced over at Lucy. There was no mistaking it – she did look different. It wasn't just that she had substituted white shirt, riding trousers and chukka boots for the sun-dress of the day before. No, she looked less obviously different, like she had made her mind up about something. Out of the light, patterned sun-dress she looked, well, more confident, Silver supposed. Her slim build and figure took on a serious, sharpened edge somehow. There was a light in her eyes that hadn't been there the previous night either: something harder replacing the fear and confusion Silver had seen earlier. There was no doubt about it, Silver sighed, Lucy was different this morning. Would the frightened girl of yesterday evening have hired a jeep and decided to head out into the desert to search for her brother by herself? No. Silver wasn't actually sure it was a very sensible idea. However: *Stay with Ms. Moon*, the Doctor had said – and so stay with her Silver would. But as the desolate wasteland of the western deserts loomed closer on the horizon, Silver wasn't entirely convinced that following the Doctor's advice had been such a good idea either.

* * * * *

The weathered stone fort at the edge of the desert had once housed a regiment of Royal Camel Corps. Now a new banner fluttered on the flagpole over the main gate: a crooked cross in a white circle on a red field.

The SS officer handed Raucher the telegram.

"From your description, Sir, it can only be them."

Raucher took the message. "Ms. Moon – and the Doctor's female companion, Silverstein," Raucher spat the final syllables. "Heading towards the Wadi el-Kut. How very interesting..." He turned to the assembled cadre of officers behind him. All were clad in freshly-ironed desert fatigues, buttons gleaming, leather gloves newly-polished. Raucher cast his one good eye over the pair of pre-production Panzer tanks waiting behind the fort walls. They had unloaded them from the German freighter and were now readying them for their three-day field manoeuvres. He rubbed the raw scars around his eye and fingered the new bandage absentmindedly. He handed the telegram back.

"We depart for our manoeuvres tomorrow at dawn," Raucher reminded his officers. His sallow cheeks twitched in what might have been a cruel grin. "And we have now a new destination: the Wadi el-Kut..."

* * * * *

Phaide descended the golden steps of the dais, each footstep seeming unsteady, painful.

"I can sense your lack of surprise, Doctor," the glassy face of the helmet chuckled once more.

The Doctor smiled faintly and gave a little half-shrug. “I recognised the bio-maestic signature almost immediately. It didn’t take much detective work to connect it to you.”

Phaide stretched out black-robed arms and black-gloved hands. “I have learned so much in the past three months, Doctor – more than I ever imagined was possible. This chamber, the Cradle... such secrets, Doctor: powers I thought forever beyond the grasp of mankind.”

“Surely you must have suspected?” the Doctor asked. “Few Egyptologists get this far without at least some suspicion of the existence of an earlier cultural precedent.”

Phaide nodded. “Most are crackpots – theories about Atlantis, Lemuria, or Mu-Thulan.” He waved one black glove dismissively. “But there were a few who approached the subject with greater scientific rigor: Webster, Laurentis and Scarman were my guides. They suspected, as you suggest, an early, sophisticated cultural model which the Early Dynastic Egyptians copied. Little did they suspect!” Phaide laughed, a croaking sound echoing through the cavern.

“How much do you know, then?” the Doctor asked, curious.

The black helmet face fixed on the Doctor. “Everything,” Phaide said simply. He looked over his shoulder at the glowing pyramid. “Everything,” he whispered, a thin edge of triumph in his voice. “The Life-Cradle contains a complete Sethian battlefield datacore, intended to repair the mind as well as the body of Osiran warriors. Within the core is a complete strategic history of the Great Conflict, and full referential to all Osiran cultural, social, economic, biological and technological lifeways. I know everything about the Osirans, Doctor – everything. More than even you, perhaps, Lord of Time?”

“Perhaps.”

The Doctor rocked back on his heels, hands in his pockets. “I’m intrigued. I thought the Army of Horus destroyed every Sethian artefact that survived the Conflict. How was this one overlooked?”

“Accident? Chance? Fortune?” Phaide shrugged and chuckled. “After all, even the Osirans were only human... What are antiquities but fragments of the past which have casually escaped the shipwreck of history?”

“You’re misquoting Francis Bacon,” the Doctor observed dryly.

“What’s the use of a good quotation if you can’t change it?” Phaide countered.

“I’ll remember that,” the Doctor muttered. Reynolds glanced at the Doctor, wondering what points were being scored in this conversational fencing match. Phaide regarded the pyramid and its golden construction.

“The awareness of the Cradle’s datacore after the end of the Conflict is patchy. After that final battle it sank into the desert, forgotten and lost, but not for long. Some centuries later the priests of Djoser discovered the Cradle and built the first temple here in the Wadi. Over the long centuries, Pharaoh after Pharaoh came and bathed in its power, and each one ordered new constructions to enlarge the Hall of Immortality.”

“But at some point the secret was lost?”

Phaide nodded. “Sometime in the nineteenth Dynasty, after the chaos of the Heretic Pharaoh Akhenaten, the priests of the Hall of Immortality decided their secret was too powerful to be shared with the increasingly fractured Royal house of Egypt. They withdrew to the Wadi and protected the Hall with a great fortress on the cliffs above the tomb, becoming a race of warrior-monks bound to protect the Cradle. Successive Pharaohs launched mighty assaults against the fortress, but the priests crushed every attack. But when the Meroitic Pharaohs came north from their dark Empire below the cataracts, they brought with them Roman war engines, levelling the fortress and causing a rockfall that

sealed the tomb. The knowledge of the secret died, and the Hall of Immortality was forgotten.”

“Until you found it,” the Doctor finished.

Phaide stood still, seemingly lost in memory. When he spoke, his echoing voice was small and low. “My skin burned, my body bled life – my soul bled hope. The pain was overwhelming. Behind me, the rockfall had crushed everyone else in the party: Moon, Stevens, Dalglish – even Rashid, Rashid the little lantern boy, his body pulped by the collapse... I was caught in the blast of an exploding lantern, and the flames consumed me. I tumbled forward, out of the entrance passage, burning, burning... And then –“

Phaide reached up with his black-gloved hands and pulled back the folds of his hood. At a touch from his fingertips to the sigils at the side of the helmet, it folded away to nothing, revealing his shattered skull. Reynolds recoiled in horror. The Doctor’s lips thinned. Hairless, puckering flesh flaked and peeled from ash-grey bone. Two eyes, boiled white and blind, gazed fiercely out of a face that could hardly still be called that. The muscles of one cheek were completely burned away, revealing cracked teeth and scorched jaw. And yet the dead, charred flesh lived. Phaide raised tentative fingers to the peeling, blistered flesh.

“I live,” Phaide whispered. “I live!” he shouted, his dead jaw moving, his stone-white eyes blazing. “I live!” he whispered once more.

“The Cradle?” the Doctor prompted.

“As I burned, the power of the Cradle sought me out,” Phaide confirmed. “Obeying ancient programming routines that had lain dormant for centuries, it initiated repair protocols and activated full cellular regeneration. The power of the Cradle spread through me, more painful than the fire. I was burned for a second time in its flame, bathed in the energy from another world. I was... reborn. When I recovered my senses, the Cradle sensed what it interpreted as gaps in my memory, and guided me to its datacore... and I began to learn.”

The pale eyes sunken into the shattered, charred skull regarded the Doctor. “The regeneration is far from complete, but I now have a far more important use for the Cradle.”

“Ah, yes,” the Doctor frowned. “We saw at the Casino.” He tutted, shaking his head like a disappointed schoolmaster. “Revenge, no matter how technologically sophisticated, is always so petty...”

“Petty!?” Phaide hissed. His thin frame shook. He whirled to face the Doctor, his hands at his riven, blackened face. “Do you imagine I have suffered all this for something petty? Do you think for one moment I would have borne pain almost beyond endurance for the sake of simple revenge?” He threw back his head and howled. “Revenge!” His howl turned into a choking death-rattle in his undead throat. His black-gloved hands fumbled at the collar of his robe and the glass-faced helmet swirled up out of the neckpiece, solidifying around the burnt skin and fire-cracked bone. Phaide gasped, slumping. The Doctor and Reynolds watched as he limped up the steps of the dais and collapsed into the organic curves of the throne.

“You’ve halted your regeneration cycle at a crucial stage,” the Doctor observed quietly. “Why? When the cycle is complete, you’ll be whole again – no, more than whole.”

“Yes,” Phaide gasped, his voice echoing again through the helmet. “The strength and agility of ten ordinary men – the full physical prowess of the Osirans. It would take months of generative exposure in the Cradle, but yes – I could be rebuilt.”

“Then I don’t understand,” the Doctor asked again. “Why stop? Why divert the Cradle’s power to a minor act of revenge against your former colleagues.”

Phaide chuckled, a low, unpleasant sound. “You wear our form, Doctor, but you are even more alien to us than the Osirians. You travel at the expense of your heart, Doctor. Do you really find it so difficult to fathom my motives, to understand my dreams and desires? Of course you do – how could it be otherwise? You travel, you visit, you walk among us – but you do not live as we do, trapped by history, ignorant of that unknown country into which we all must inexorably journey.”

“The Future?”

“Indeed, Doctor – the Future.” Phaide waved his hand at the golden stelaes surrounding the Cradle. “The datacore is a strategic tool, designed for war, engineered for a conflict that raged across the Universe and echoed down the very corridors of time itself. But I do not need its predictive computations to understand what the future now holds.” Phaide struggled to his feet. “Do you think that because I am an archaeologist, I dwell only in the past? Do you imagine that because my world is the world of rituals and monuments, of tombs and Pharaohs and ancient temples, that I do not understand the politics of the present? Do you suppose that because I am a scholar, an academic, a man who values reason and intellect above all else that I cannot feel, that I cannot love, that I cannot mourn?”

The Doctor raised his hands placatingly, “Professor Phaide, I think I understand –“

“How can you?” Phaide roared. “How can you, Doctor? To know the brutality of man you must first *be* a man! To understand the full horror of suffering you must first suffer! Piper, Clemenceau, McQuarrie – they are fleas, their betrayal a humiliation, yes, but a thing of the moment, of the past.”

“But Raucher?...”

Phaide sank back into the Cradle’s throne. “Yes... Raucher. He is a thing of the future. I can see that future, Doctor. I could see it in the eyes of my former colleagues when Raucher dismissed me from the Giza project. I could see it in newspaper articles and in radio broadcasts across Europe as I wandered, looking in vain for support. I heard it on the lips of Museum Directors and University Bursars as I faced rejection after rejection. I could see that future coming, Doctor – a future in a noose drawn ever tighter around my people’s neck.”

“This is 1938, Phaide – there is much about the future you cannot predict,” warned the Doctor. “It is not all darkness.”

The black mask stared down at the Doctor. “In the future, they will teach children about it in school. They will show photographs of bodies stacked like felled timbers, rooms filled with shaven hair, chests filled with plundered gold teeth. There will be railways built for the express purpose of transporting those who are to be exterminated. There will be ovens and showers, gas and fire, bullets and knives and garrottes. There will be hatred beyond hatred, horror beyond horror. They will call it the Holocaust.”

“How do you know?” whispered the Doctor.

“I saw it in your companion’s mind,” Phaide said quietly. “A vision of Hell, trapped in the tiny mind of an adolescent girl. Such horror. Such evil. I will not let it happen...”

The Doctor took a step towards the dais. “Phaide, listen to me. From that horror, a new world is born. From that evil, goodness eventually flowers. From each act of hatred comes a thousand acts of peace and hope. You cannot –“

“I will not let it happen.” Phaide repeated.

“You –“

“I WILL NOT LET IT HAPPEN!” Phaide roared, rising to his feet. The pyramid behind him boiled with suppressed energy. Static arced around the containment pillars,

streaks of lightning that split the air and flickered down into the chasm behind the Cradle. Captain Reynolds cowered as a bolt sizzled down the length of the chamber.

“What the hell is he talking about?” Reynolds barked, staring at the dark figure silhouetted against the blazing blood-light of the pyramid.

The Doctor shook his head. “He is talking about changing the future.”

“I am talking about saving it,” Phaide retorted. He gestured, and the cavern behind the Cradle was lit up by a ghostly phosphorescence.

The Doctor and Reynolds gasped.

“Behold,” Phaide said quietly. “The World’s Salvation: the Army of Death...”

Row after row, stretching back into the distance. Rank upon rank, filling the cavern. Hundreds? Thousands? In the pale phosphorescent glow, the Doctor and Reynolds could not count – but they didn’t need to. The files of corpses regarded the two humans with crimson eyes, the energy of the Cradle animating dry, desiccated bone and twisted, paper-like flesh. The Doctor could see five thousand years of conflict in Phaide’s army. There were swordsmen of the First Dynasty, their bronze *khepesh* crumbling and corroded but still wickedly curved; there were Hyksos warriors, invaders of the First Intermediate Period, collapsed faces still flecked with clumps of beard; there were Archers from the Regiment of the Sun, the Palace Guard of the Ramesside Pharaohs, undead war-dogs crouched at their heels; Greeks bearing the seal of Alexander on their battered, chipped breastplates; Romans gathered beneath the standards of their eagles; Arab and Libyan irregulars in flaking robes, desiccated hawks and falcons on rotting leather jesses at their shoulders; Ottoman Jannisaries and Infantry troops of the last Sultan, their rifles rusted and bent. An Army of the Dead, raised from the sands of the Wadi, filled with the Cradle’s energy and Phaide’s will. Bodies of dust and death, skulls filled with sand, bones like dry twigs, flesh like rotten linen – but they would never stop, never tire, never cease once ordered into battle. They were a legion of doom; no human army would be able to stand against. Every cemetery would become a recruiting ground, each battle death would simply swell their ranks. This army would march across the globe if so commanded, wiping out anything sent to stop them.

“This is madness,” the Doctor whispered. Reynolds stared at the army in horror.

“No,” Phaide retorted, his voice strong with purpose and clear with vision. “This is sanity. Piper, Clemenceau, McQuarrie – revenge yes, but through their deaths I tested my powers – and they grow with each passing sunrise, Doctor. I can destroy those who have betrayed me. Now I can destroy those who would betray the future. This army will march, Doctor – march across Africa, across Palestine, across Europe, wiping Evil from the map. They shall drive the forces of darkness into the sea, they shall dash them against the rocks. They will leave nothing but dust in their wake – dust... and Peace.”

“Peace? This isn’t the way, Phaide!” the Doctor pleaded.

“Not your way, perhaps, Doctor,” Phaide replied, sadly. “But you are nothing more than a peripatetic wanderer, without home, without cause. What do you do with all your powers? Nothing more than maintain the status quo; preserve the Universe as you imagine it always has been.”

“The Universe is shaped –“

“The Universe is shaped by the powerful, Doctor,” Phaide snapped. “The Osirans shaped the Universe. They were as gods; I shall follow in their footsteps.”

“But you can’t –“

“Enough!” Phaide roared, his voice echoing through the chamber. The entire Army behind him twitched, flexing ancient, dried muscles, fingers curling around broken, rusted weapons. “Your time is past, Doctor. It is time for you to join my Army. Kill them.”

Phaide's order was directed behind them. Three corpses staggered across the flagstones towards the Doctor and Reynolds. Battered and broken, their shattered arms and legs knitted together by the energy of the Cradle, they stumbled forward. The Doctor recognised their broken features from the photograph in Namin's office: Duncan Moon, Teddy Wyndham and Steven Dalglish – the last remnants of Phaide's fellow archaeologists, their bodies now nothing more than fodder for his insane army.

“Kill them!” Phaide ordered.

“Kill them!”

* * * * *

The expedition's camp hadn't been particularly easy to find, but they'd followed the faint tracks of other vehicles in the sand until they reached the tents. The square of canvas tents slumped, half-choked by drifted sand. No one was about; no one had been inside the tents for at least a month or more, Silver realised as she brought the Landrover to a halt near the square. Lucy stumbled through the sand and peered, wide-eyed into every tent, faint hope gleaming clearly in her eyes. But the tents were empty. Sand had drifted in, smothering camp beds and tables and makeshift living arrangements. The camp was abandoned.

Silver lit a lantern, holding it near the ground just beyond the tents. She knelt and looked across the rocky sand under the lamplight.

“Hey,” she said to Lucy as the girl returned from her examination of the tents. “Look at this – you can see more detail in the tracks here. Shallower ones, then deeper ones crossing over the lighter ones. The shallow ones are coming into the Wadi, the deeper ones going out. Those'll be the tracks Namin made getting the antiquities out of here, back to his office. They're pretty recent, too – wind hasn't blown them away. That means he was here –

Silver looked up. Lucy stood, face in her hands, silent sobs jerking her slim shoulders. Silver sighed, concern creasing her brow.

“Oh, hey, I'm sorry,” she said, standing up and patting Lucy awkwardly on the shoulder. Lucy's silent sobs found voice.

“Where is he, Silver?” she cried, tears streaming down her small, round face. “I thought –” she looked around the remains of the camp, something fading from her eyes. “I thought – maybe, when we got here, he'd be...” She sobbed again. “What's happened to him?”

Silver put her arms around the shorter girl and hugged her, letting Lucy's head fall onto her shoulder. She held her until the sobs subsided.

“We'll find him,” Silver said, earnestly, holding Lucy by the shoulders and looking her straight in the eye. She brushed away the tears with one end of her new scarf. “Whatever's happened to him, we'll find him – I know we will.”

Just how they were going to do that, Silver didn't have a clue. She grimaced at the horrifically clichéd line she'd just spouted – she was pretty sure she'd just quoted an episode of *Enterprise*. But she meant it – they would find him. Or at the very least they'd have a damn good search.

* * * * *

Reynolds peered around the splintered corner of the stone wall. The long, dark passage behind them was silent. The terrible limping shuffle had vanished. Slowly Reynolds holstered his pistol. Obviously, they had out-run the trio of zombies, losing them in the

maze of tunnels and galleries off the cavern. The tunnels lead down, into the depths of the bedrock. They had descended five, six, seven long flights of steps. It was warm, close and oppressive in the deep, stale darkness.

“I think we’ve lost them, Doctor,” Reynolds said happily.

Beside him in the near-dark, his face framed by the light from some sort of continuously burning match, the Doctor scowled.

“We haven’t lost them – Phaide’s playing with us. Testing us, I think.”

Reynolds refused to be disheartened. “Never mind, Doctor: where there’s life, there’s hope, as they say.”

“Why does everyone keep stealing my best lines?” the Doctor muttered peevishly. He sighed and shook his head. “We’ve got to keep looking,” he insisted. “This way, I think.”

Captain Reynolds had no idea what the Doctor might be looking for. He followed behind as the Doctor led the way further down the dark passage, deeper into the living rock.

“Did Phaide mean what he said – about changing the future?” Reynolds asked as they passed a series of niches in which crouched statues with the heads of snakes clutched a series of wickedly curved blades. Their eyes glinted hungrily in the match-light. “Can he really do that?”

The Doctor didn’t immediately reply. Then, “What do you think, Captain? Do you think he could change the future?”

Reynolds considered. “If you had asked me that question this morning, I would have said you were off your rocker. Now, however, I’m not so sure...”

The Doctor grinned. “A man with an open mind – I like that.”

Reynolds shrugged. They crossed a junction and entered a low gallery supported by jackal-headed columns. The floor was cracked and uneven. They picked their way among the rubble.

“I served in India, Doctor. I saw a lot of strange things there – things that made me realise I didn’t know it all.”

“More things in Heaven and on Earth, eh?”

“Now who’s stealing quotations?” Reynolds chided. He frowned. “The world’s a big place. No one can see or know it all.” He considered. “I imagine the Universe is an even bigger place,” he said, the irony only partly intentional.

The Doctor barked a *hah* of laughter. “You’re an unusual man, Reynolds,” he stopped and turned to regard the Captain. “You should have a chat with Silver when this is all over and done.”

He peered around the end of the gallery. Four passages led away into the darkness. He held up the match and moved it around in front of first one dark rectangle and then another. The little undying flame fluttered.

“This way,” the Doctor confirmed.

“A breeze?” Reynolds asked.

The Doctor shook his head. “Space-time distortion.”

Reynolds rolled his eyes. Obviously in the Doctor’s universe there was an unlimited supply of incomprehensible answers. He followed down the passage the Doctor had selected, past a frieze of scorpion goddesses and columns of spidery hieroglyphs. The passage dipped, descended a set of stairs, and then opened up into a large, near-circular chamber. The walls were covered in a pantheon of painted and carved figures and studded by deep bas-relief figures in long robes and crowns that covered their faces in blank masks. The far end of the chamber was open to some dark, empty space beyond. The Doctor crossed to the opening.

“Ah-ha: thought so.”

Reynolds peered through the gap. There was a fissure beyond. The opening in the chamber's far wall gave access to a natural fissure running through the rock. He could just make out the far side of the well-like crevasse; up above and down below, the walls of cracked and splintered stone vanished into darkness. There was a strange distortion in the middle of the space, like a ribbon of barely-perceptible glass running up and down into the empty, black space.

The Doctor searched on the floor. He found a scrap of rubble and cocked his arm.

"Watch this, Captain."

He chucked the stone with a flick of his elbow. The stone flew into the fissure – then zoomed back towards the Doctor with exactly the same force. Reynolds ducked as the pebble whipped past where his head would have been and clattered against the other wall of the chamber.

"A Flipback ribbon!" the Doctor exclaimed happily.

"Are you going to start explaining this using words that actually make sense?" Reynolds asked patiently.

"The Life Cradle isn't the only piece of Osiran technology down here. The space-time tunnel inductor is rooted here in this artificial ribbon of folded space-time, gathering energy from the refracted Planck potential stored in the fold. The fold is generated somewhere up there –" the Doctor pointed up into the darkness of the fissure, "And extends down through this fault in the bedrock, probably to a natural basalt seam or something similar acting as a gravity sink." The Doctor gestured around the chamber. "A tunnel can then be projected from the ribbon using an isolinear system and a psychonic link." He shook his head disapprovingly, "Typically over-complicated Osiran technology. We used to make these kinds of folds at the Academy – flipback ribbons, we used to call them. Used to use them to cheat at Brockian U-Cricket," he chuckled.

"Obviously not," the Captain scowled.

"Never mind, never mind," the Doctor waved, scanning the glyphs carved on the wall. "What we need now is the – ah..." He pressed a series of the symbols, and the chamber was suddenly illuminated by a series of lights. In front of each carved figure materialised a shimmering slab of solid red light, hovering mid-way between the floor and the low ceiling. More symbols crawled and glided across the surface of the light-slab.

"Excellent," said the Doctor, extinguishing the match. "Isolinear controls for the ribbon." He rubbed his hands together and strode towards the light-slabs. "Let's see what we can do with these, eh?"

* * * * *

Reynolds studied the painted scenes while the Doctor passed his hands in front of the glowing light-slabs. Panel after panel of carved star-scapes, each cluster of points matched to a mythical monster or floating figure: constellations, Reynolds guessed. In between the stars drifted huge shapes: pyramids, orbs, obelisks. Each was crowned with the attributes of various Egyptian animals: snakes, vulture wings, falcon talons clutching sceptres and rods of authority. Each shape seemed to be pouring streams of symbols from their assorted sceptres, and those streams of symbols intersected with other large shapes like multi-towered buildings. Reynolds had no idea what they meant. Below these shapes stretched a great parade of Pharaonic-styled figures with non-human heads. But where Reynolds had seen before heads of jackals, hawks and cats, these heads were the heads of mythical creatures: half-pig, half-snake; half-wolf half-squid; half-locust, half-bat. They marched like an army across the bottom of the painted frieze. Reynolds didn't like the look of them at all.

“These pictures, Doctor,” he asked at last, “What on earth do they show?”

“Not on Earth,” the Doctor said, scribbling calculations in a small moleskin notebook. “Not any more. They came, had their Great Conflict, and fortunately left – not willingly, I have to say. You’re looking at the Osirans, Captain, one of the Universe’s seemingly interminable number of races of smart-alek bullies.”

Reynolds raised his eyebrow. “Bullies?”

The Doctor frowned at his calculations and turned the page angrily, starting all over again. “Bullies with cerebral cortexes like spiral staircases. A race and culture as devious, paranoid, cunning and sly as they were intelligent. They conquered vast tracts of the Phaestor Galaxy before mankind was even a puddle of multi-cellular slime. By the time humanity knew what the stars were, virtually every single one of them would have returned home to the Osiran host.”

“Are they still out there?”

The Doctor shrugged. “Very much past their prime, I’m glad to say. Their Great Conflict really did spell the end of their golden age. They never recovered from the war. A handful are still out there among the stars, yes, but hiding – creeping around in the shadows; the stuff of nightmares to younger space faring races like the Suul and the Chelonians. But the age of the Osirans is long past.”

Reynolds shook his head. “It all sounds like... fantasy to me, Doctor.”

The Doctor snapped his notebook shut and pocketed it. “Best not to let it bother you too much, Captain. Phaide is the real issue at hand – and the question of how to stop him.” He made one final pass over the light-slab, rearranging a handful of glowing glyphs.

The Captain indicated the slabs. “Can you stop Phaide with these... lights?” Reynolds asked.

“No,” said the Doctor, shifting the flow of glyphs on one light-slab with intricate finger-tip touches, “But, although I am loathe to admit it, Captain. I am going to need help.” He looked up from the red glow. “Phaide’s undead army isn’t a joke – you saw what effective killing machines they were at the Casino. I have to stop him, Captain, and that might mean having to take some fairly drastic measures.”

“Such as what?”

“Such as overloading the Cradle, or using the fold here to create a time-loop to seal Phaide in forever.” The Doctor crossed to another light-slab and manipulated more of the glyphs. “And while your help has been invaluable, Captain, I cannot ask you to risk your life any further.”

“My life has always been held in the balance, Doctor,” Reynolds said with unexpected grimness. “I’m a soldier, remember?”

The Doctor nodded. “I understand, but this is not your battle, Captain. Phaide has become far more than a simple human foe. As the planet’s resident non-human, he really becomes my problem, not yours.”

“Non-human?...”

“Does that surprise you?” the Doctor asked.

Reynolds sighed, then grinned. “No, I suppose not – I should have expected it. Maybe I did...”

The Doctor straightened up. “You have been a worthy ally, Captain,” he said, extending his hand to shake Reynolds’.

“Then let me stay,” Reynolds pleaded.

“No. I will generate a tunnel to Cairo. Return to your life, Captain – you are needed there. You have a part to play in the great weave of history, and I want you to return to it.”

Leave me to deal with Phaide and his madness.” His fingertips flickered over the light-slab’s meta-glyphs.

There was a sudden organ-note crescendo, a pulsing heart-beat note that became a throbbing squeeze at the temples. Reynolds felt a deep, migraine ache pushing into his skull. The chamber flickered with a sparking of static around one of the stone figures. The helmeted face and crossed arms faded, replaced with a mummiform outline of darkness filled with a streaking, tumbling kaleidoscope of lights. The Doctor indicated the tunnel.

“Please, Captain.”

Reynolds looked at the black, energy-filled nothingness. He straightened up; he had made up his mind. Professor Icarus Phaide was a murderer. Above and beyond the incomprehensible charges the Doctor had levelled, Reynolds knew Phaide was responsible for the deaths of twelve innocent Cairenes and the premeditated killing of three unsuspecting Egyptologists. The evidence – despite the strangeness which Reynolds could neither classify nor understand – was clear, as was the Captain’s duty. Leave the Doctor to deal with the linear-whatsits and the psycho-whatevers. Reynolds *would* go to Cairo as the Doctor wanted, yes – but he would return. He would return with his men and place Professor Icarus Phaide under arrest for murder. That much, at least, Reynolds could do.

“Goodbye, then, Doctor,” Reynolds said. “*Allah yisallimak*. Until we meet again.”

The Doctor nodded. Reynolds walked to the entrance of the tunnel, paused, took a deep breath and stepped into the rainbow lights streaking through the impossible blackness. He was subsumed into the depths of the void, a minuscule spark of life rapidly disappearing over an alien horizon. The vanishing figure saluted – and was gone. The Doctor waited until the meta-glyphs read the tunnel clear, then sighed and made some adjustments to the scrolling symbols on the light-slab. The spectrum-swirl of energy faded. The stone façade of the statue rematerialised. The Doctor looked around the chamber and then out at the fissure and the barely-visible ribbon of space-time distortion. Now: to Phaide.

Unrolling his Panama hat from his inside pocket, he nestled it on his head, stepped through the opening at the back of the chamber out into the darkness of the fissure, and disappeared into the ribbon.

* * * * *

Next to the Cradle, Phaide cocked his helmeted head to one side, as if listening to a distant tremor of sound. Casually, a chuckle echoing through the black mask, he raised one gloved hand in an imperious gesture. The note changed tone. Phaide’s metallic chuckle deepened.

* * * * *

Silver woke with a start, the dream vanishing like mist. For a brief few seconds she tried to recall it – images of pain and death and terror all rendered in historical black and white. They had seemed impersonally familiar, like something welling up from a shared past. It was no good. The dream vanished. Silver blinked. It was light – and hot. She glanced at the camp bed next to her. It was empty; Lucy must be up already. They’d slept in the expedition tents and had agreed to wait until morning to start their search. Silver hoped Lucy was making some coffee. She yawned and kicked her legs over the edge of the camp bed, dangling her toes in the sand. She checked her boots for scorpions (See? She had learned something from Hollywood after all), poured some water to wash in, and trudged out of the tent to see what Lucy was up to.

Lucy was nowhere to be found. And the Landrover was gone.

“Damn!” Silver swore. She knew exactly what had happened. It had obviously been too much of a temptation – to go looking for her brother by herself. She probably left at first light. Silver scowled. She wasn’t angry at Lucy so much, just the situation in general. She didn’t blame her at all, poor kid must be in a right state. Silver sighed and rummaged around in the stuff left over from the expedition. She found someone’s hat and a sand-scarred leather jacket, shoved some left-over bread and a large metal water flask into a satchel and set off after the Landrover tracks. She didn’t even bother looking for Phaide’s journal with the map – Lucy would have that, of course. Silver nestled the white scarf around her neck as the sun beat down on her back and the sweat started to trickle down the cleft of her spine. She took a swig of water that was already starting to go warm and brackish and scowled again. This was almost definitely going to be one of those days...

* * * * *

Captain Reynolds staggered. Had he arrived? It was dark, wherever he was. One of the back streets in the Old City? He put out his hand. Nothing. He stretched out with the toe of his boot, feeling sandy stone beneath his feet. He suddenly remembered his lighter and rummaged in his pocket for it.

A clink of metal, and a pale flame fluttered in the lighter’s metal cage.

Reynolds looked around him in horror.

“This isn’t Cairo...,” he whispered, wondering how many bullets he had left in his revolver and knowing they wouldn’t be enough.

v. Last of the Osirans

The Wadi's cliffs were sheer, jagged walls of stone rising up to the bright sky. Down at the base they became a tumbled spill of broken rock, boulders scattered like tumbled dice, half-choked by sand and the occasional scrubby plant. Silver had clambered up to almost the foot of the cliff, hauling herself over huge boulders. Even in the partial shade of the cliff, it wasn't any cooler than it was down below. Silver mopped her sweat-drenched brow and panted in the heat. It was hot – frikkin' hot. How did anyone manage to do anything in heat like this? She sipped her water. There wasn't a whole lot left – she should have brought a lot more. Her feet were baked in her boots; the sand underfoot was like the top of a stove. In fact, just standing still was like being toasted under a grill. The analogy reminded Silver how hungry she was, and she tore off a chunk of the bread she had brought with her. It, too, was already going hard and stale in the heat. She ate it anyway.

She'd found the Landrover, – parked about half a mile back under a lone date palm. No Lucy, of course. She must have gone on ahead on foot. It was almost impossible to follow Lucy's footsteps through the rock, particularly in the sun; and without the map, Silver had no choice but to search everywhere. She had no real idea what she was looking for. What would the tomb look like? A hole in the ground? A hole in the rock of the cliff-face? Would there be a pyramid or a temple or something on top of it? Silver wished not for the first time that the Doctor was around. She choked down the last scrap of stale bread and took a final, mouth-wetting sip of water. She looked around the rocky wasteland. This was rapidly turning into a bit of a mess. Next time she'd obey that golden rule: *Don't Wander Off*. It wasn't her fault they got split up by the Museum, Silver knew, but next time she'd stick closer to the Doctor. This was definitely a whole lot less fun by herself. She kicked angrily at a lump of stone and it clattered off down amongst the rubble, landing with a *clang* somewhere below.

Clang?

Silver frowned. Metal?

She half-skidded, half-clambered down the jumbled rock. As sweaty as her hands were in the gloves she'd found in the jacket pocket, they saved her hands from ending up like steak tartar on the blade-sharp edges of the boulders. She slid down an apron of sand and pebbles and came to a halt next to a line of squared-off stones – no, not just stones: blocks. Masonry. A wall. Silver chuckled – temple? Check. Pyramid? Check. She should have been an Egyptologist. The complex had seen better days, of course, and everything was tumbled and collapsed, hardly distinguishable from the surrounding rubble and scree. But here was the temple – or at least the meter-and-a-half height of its walls, carvings and inscriptions still visible, deeply etched by shadow. And there was the pyramid – at the far end of the temple, a core of collapsed stonework, but still with the sharply carved angles at its corners. A sun-symbol draped with rearing cobras, its falcon talons clutching a bundle of sceptres kept watch from near the apex of the pyramid. The complex had been buried at some point in the ancient past by rockfall from the Wadi cliffs, but clearly Phaide and his team had excavated most of it away. Wooden shoring held back accumulated sand and rocky debris from the complex, and in the middle of it, a wooden bulkhead door opened to reveal a set of cut steps descending into darkness.

Silver laughed. She'd found it – fantastic. “Lucy!” she shouted. Her voice echoed off the Wadi cliffs. “Lucy?” No answer. Silver wiped sweat off her brow and thinned her lips. Don't tell me she's gone *into* the tomb, she thought. She climbed over the wooden shoring

and let herself down into the diggings, stepping gingerly over the temple walls and past a gleaming stack of metal ammunition boxes. The stone Silver had kicked lay on one lid.

Silver frowned. The boxes looked awfully clean. In fact, they looked like they had been stacked there recently. She crossed over to the bulkhead door.

“Lucy?” Nothing.

Silver descended, step by careful step, into the darkness. She pulled a metal torch from her leather bag and swung the beam around. The steps led down into a pillared hall. At some point a portion of the ceiling had collapsed, filling the hall with rubble and partly blocking a doorway at the rear of the chamber. But the rubble had been cleared away, propped up by a strange organic expression of stone – like a wave of stalactites. The steps and passage beyond the doorway, too had been supported by this new blossoming of stone that seemed to have flowed and set around the original shattered walls and crumbled ceiling. But at the bottom of the stairs, the organic flow moulded into a portal framing an organic door. Silver thumped it. Stone. Solid. No way through there. She sighed. She assumed Lucy would have come to the tomb, would have –

Silver flicked her torch beam. Something glinted on the stone floor – something gold. Silver picked up the locket on its golden chain. The front was ajar: a tiny picture of Duncan Moon.

Lucy! She had been here...

She whirled around as some movie-honed sixth sense kicked into action. She was no longer alone. Silver gulped. Six machine guns bore down on her; six machine guns wielded by six soldiers in khaki uniforms and fatigue caps; six soldiers whose red, black and white armbands completed the Indiana Jones parallel.

Silver raised her hands slowly as the Nazis closed in on her.

* * * * *

The roar of diesel engines filled the Wadi. The armoured machines rolled forwards, tracks spitting sand, clawing into rock and stone. The tanks manoeuvred their way up the centre of the Wadi, their turrets moving slowly from side to side, as if the machines themselves were alive – robot travel machines, each one containing a living, bubbling lump of hate.

Around the tomb complex, the operation continued. The explosive was unloaded from the ammunition crates, and Nazi soldiers carried it carefully down into the darkness. Raucher stroked his eye patch and the raw scars around it unconsciously. He smiled coldly, turning his leather gloves over in one hand and carefully wiping a fleck of spittle from the corner of a seam. Silver brought up her head defiantly, a lock of dark hair falling over the livid patch blooming on her cheek. The Nazi soldiers who held her tightened their grip on her arms. The rope around her wrists creaked and twisted.

“Didn’t you hear me?” she growled, running her tongue around the inside of her cheek. “I said I don’t know. I don’t know him – I don’t even really know what he does. Do you want me to make up something, Colonel Clink?”

“You will address me as *Herr Doktor Standartenführer der Waffen-SS* Raucher, Consular representative to the Khedive, Director of the Giza Plateau Excavation Project, Secretary-General of the *Ahnenerbe Afrika* –“ Raucher paused, considering. “Perhaps it would be better if you were to simply address me as ‘Sir’,” he finished.

Then he turned, striking Silver again across the face with his gloves. Silver yelped, then bit her lip, trying not to give Raucher the satisfaction of knowing he was hurting her. The mark on her cheek was now bruising into a raw welt. Raucher smiled thinly.

“I am used to asking questions such as these only once. For you – as an American – I will make a generous exception and give you your traditional ‘three strikes’. So, I ask a second time: Where is Phaide? Where is Ms. Moon? Why can we not gain access through the door to the inner chamber of the tomb? Is that where Phaide is hiding?”

Silver gritted her teeth. “I told you once, now I’m telling you again: I don’t know!”

Raucher snapped the gloves a third time. The skin split, drawing blood down Silver’s chin. She held back her cry, grunting as she sucked breath back into her lungs. Raucher pursed his thin lips and the corner of his mouth twitched. He frowned, watching Silver slowly raise her head, the obstinate look still colouring her eyes. Raucher reached out and adjusted the crumpled, gaping collar of her white shirt, a gesture finely calculated to be both intimate and unpleasant.

“You are an intelligent woman – I am sure you realise that this is all quite unnecessary. Sooner or later we will find Phaide. Understand that I will do so either with your help or without it. The choice is yours. Answer my questions and you will be released; refuse, and...” Raucher let the threat hang.

Silver twisted her bruised lip into a sneer and spat back a stream of invective. Raucher winced at the language. He whipped the gloves across Silver’s face once more, cutting through the final syllables of “Nazi scumbag”. Silver’s head rocked. She tasted blood. The rope bit into her wrists. The troopers holding her upright dug their nails into her shoulders.

Raucher leaned close to Silver’s battered face, his voice cruelly indifferent. “I am wasting my time, am I not, *Liebchen*? It is of no consequence. You are fit now only for the desert. You have seen death in the desert? No, I imagine not. To die maddened by thirst is not an easy death, nor a quick one. Still, it is what you have chosen. The sands of the West shall be your grave. Your bones will whiten and crumble to dust under the sun. You will die forgotten and alone – no, not entirely alone.” He snapped his fingers. “You will have some company in your final moments, at least. Another who tried my patience too far.” A pair of Nazi soldiers dragged another captive into the centre of the temple complex. His face was broken and bleeding. Silver stared – it was Hamid Namin. He mumbled incomprehensibly through split lips.

“You’re an animal, Raucher,” Silver spat.

The Colonel held up a hand. “Enough.” He turned to an adjutant. “Take them both up into the sands and leave them there.”

The Adjutant nodded – then blinked, his face suddenly a mask of confusion. Raucher frowned.

“Well?”

The Adjutant stuttered, gesturing feebly. Raucher turned around. Silver and Namin were suddenly gone – the soldiers holding them left grasping nothing but a fading spectrum of energy particles in the air.

* * * * *

The desert is a sea of death. Storms swallow the weak and the dunes bury them, filling their lungs, choking them, suffocating them. What the desert does not consume, sun and wind bleach and mummify. Not all that perishes in the sand walks on two legs. Other things also vanish into the endless heat and dust; Phaide found them, commanded them, raised them from their charnel silence to foul half-life.

In the fluttering glow of the lighter, Reynolds watched the darkness quiver and twitch as the light of the flame moved over scarred hide and mangy fur, tattered feather

and paper-dry skin. Things that clicked and clattered – things that would have hopped and scuttled, crawled, clambered and slithered had they not stood with unnatural stillness. Only the glow of their red pinpoint eyes, smoking in the shadows, betrayed them other than husks. The eyes turned as a mass to regard the Captain. The lighter gave only a glimpse – but that was enough.

The animal dead crowded the pit. Deathless jackals and hollow-eyed crocodiles sat still and silent in the darkness. Ragged vultures and skull-headed hawks perched unmoving on outcrops of cracked stone. Ibises, swallows, Nile crows and Hoopoes crowded in beady-eyed flocks. Scores of bats and desiccated desert-dwelling vermin: mice, rats, shrews, voles, polecats, ichneumon, weasels and sand-badgers crouched in every nook and cranny. Bloated, water-eaten lizards, turtles, frogs and toads culled from dead oases squatted on the rocky floor of the pit. Dry knots of shrivelled and skeletal snakes coiled in the sand: cobras, asps, vipers and adders, dead mouths still coated with dusty venom. And around them all, a seething, unholy swarm of every kind of insect, arthropod and arachnid, wing-cases crushed and cracked, chitin split and pocked – undead scorpions, centipedes, spiders, scarab beetles, flies, wasps, gnats and fleas.

A grotesque menagerie of corpse-beasts; a death-Ark, pulled from the sand by the power of the Cradle. The zombie creatures would rend and tear him to death within seconds, before he had even a chance to cry out. But they sat, as silent and unmoving as if they were stuffed, watching him with their coal-like eyes. He hardly dared look around in case –

“Are we dead, too?” a voice whispered. “Is this Hell?”

A human voice. A pale face peered out of the shadows behind Reynolds. A fine-featured, young girl with short bobbed blond hair framing large, frightened eyes almost unable to contemplate the full horror of her situation.

Reynolds swallowed, trying to keep his voice steady. “Captain James M. Reynolds, Ma’am,” he replied softly. “Anglo-Egyptian Police. And you are -?”

“Lucy Elizabeth Moon,” the young woman replied. Her terrified face wavered in the guttering flame as she crept closer. “Where are we? What has happened to us, Captain? Can this horror possibly be real – or have we descended into nightmare or madness?”

“Madness?” Reynolds repeated. “No. This is real, and you and I are sane enough. But there is madness in this, for certain. Our only hope,” he looked up, trying to make out the boundaries of the pit. “Is that the Doctor can realise a cure.”

“The Doctor?”

“Aye.”

Lucy shivered. Reynolds put an arm around her as the corpse-creatures seemed to close in around them.

“I don’t know if a Doctor will be enough, Captain. I almost think we need a magician.”

* * * * *

The Doctor appeared with a slight *pop* out of nowhere, hanging in mid-air beside the Cradle. He stepped lightly from the terminus of the ribbon to the golden dais. The organic throne was empty; Phaide was nowhere to be seen. The cavern was silent. The Army of Death, hidden in the darkness, remained absolutely and totally still – not a murmur, not a breath, not an idle movement. The pyramid’s bloody glow and slow pulse was the only sign of life. The Doctor circled the Cradle, examining the stelae carefully, his eyes on the pyramid and its light. The quality of the light seemed different, somehow, as if the churning

energies within it were boiling in new, more elaborate patterns. He could feel the power of the Cradle all around – the psychonic vectors aligned to Phaide’s mental control. This close to the pyramid, the bio-maestic field crackled all around, a static charge that clung to the skin.

“Hour by hour, minute by minute,” came a voice behind the Doctor, “My grasp of its powers and my understanding of how to control them grows.” The Doctor turned to face Phaide. He hung in the air, suspended over the open area of the cavern floor. His black robe rippled as he moved forward, the black mask parting to reveal his shattered, burned skull. He held in his hand a long staff topped with a *djed* pillar: the ancient symbol of power and strength. He rolled the staff in his palm.

“The complex contains many Osiran artefacts,” he mused, drifting closer to the pyramid. “Relics of that final battlefield hidden here by the ancient priesthoods. I have studied them, Doctor, and have learned to use them – all of them.” He spun the staff, turning the *djed* towards the Doctor. The end of the rod blazed with energy, and a lightning bolt of iridescent green plasma coiled out from the symbol, ensnaring the Doctor. He cried out as the power arced through him, his face twisting in pain. The green aura flickered and leapt like St. Elmo’s fire across the fissure beyond the pyramid, flashing against the red eyes of the waiting Army of Death. Their dead, impassive faces watched the Doctor writhe in the coruscating energy field.

“Including the fold, Doctor!” He hissed. “Through it I can generate space-time tunnels and manipulate energy, gravity and matter. As with the Cradle, my mind is one with the control mechanisms. Your pathetic attempt to release your companion from the Tomb I sensed instantly.” The power streaming from the *djed* ceased, and the Doctor fell forward, toppling from the dais and collapsing in a heap on the dusty cavern floor.

“See!” Phaide roared, sweeping his hands apart. The Doctor jerked across towards the dark side of the chamber, borne by Phaide’s power. Pits sunk into the floor gaped. The Doctor struggled to raise himself up to his knees, staring into one of the deep circular shadows.

“Doctor!” Two voices called up in unison.

“The enterprising Ms. Moon and the adventurous Captain Reynolds,” Phaide laughed. “Plucked by my hand.” Phaide drew closer to the Doctor. “But look at what else I have gathered from the desert sands...”

The corpse-beasts moved closer, hemming Reynolds and Lucy closer in against the wall of the pit. The Doctor struggled to his feet.

“Release them, Phaide...,” he gasped, forcing the pain aside. “You have no reason to wish them harm. Let them go...”

Phaide chuckled, a dry, hollow sound. He stroked the *djed* staff. “Are we to strike a bargain, then, Doctor?”

The Doctor looked up at Phaide carefully. “What can you possibly want from me?”

“Your co-operation, Doctor,” the dark figure said grimly. “You are knowledgeable; you are dangerous. I was mistaken to command your death – but I want you to understand that I hold that ultimate power absolutely.” Phaide descended to the Doctor’s level. “Instead of conflict, I offer you a truce. This is not your world, this is mine. I speak now not for a single culture, but for the entire human race. There is an evil growing on the horizon that must be stopped. Its bile will poison generations with hatred, scarring this planet and its history forever. I can excise that evil – cut it out like a cancer. I have that power.”

The Doctor shook his head. Phaide snarled.

“What else would you have me do? Stay my hand and by my inaction acquiesce to the deaths of millions? What god could be so cruel? What greater good could be worth so

bloody a price? I will not be such a god, Doctor; I choose a better future than the one I have seen. I can create the path that leads from darkness to light. My Army shall use Death to build Life, war to levy peace, the limbs of Purgatory to sow a new Eden. I ask you to make the same choice, Doctor: to choose between *your* version of the future and mine, to choose between Nuremberg and Jerusalem, between Belsen and Zion. Choose to stand with me Doctor or I will sweep you and your dark future aside.”

The Doctor looked pained, his eyes full of deep, time-weary sorrow. “That’s not a choice I can make, Phaide,” he replied.

“No?” the dark figure questioned. “You think not? Your companion’s mind is, however, very clear, Doctor. This is a choice you make constantly. The Orchyd, the Gisb, the Mortrexly or the Centox, the Theriomorph dying as you found your own Silver bullet. Choice after choice – how many centuries of such choices, Doctor?” Phaide’s mind crept out, fingering the edges of the Doctor’s memories. The Doctor kicked the mental probe away fiercely.

“Ah – just a glimpse is enough to see that I am right: Adric plunging towards the silhouette of the Earth, the world of the Nestene Consciousness burning like a star, the last of the Jaggaroth, the Cave of Skulls, the Tomb of the Cybermen, the incubation chambers on Skaro... Do not mock me, Doctor. How many times you have made this choice. How many times have you chosen life over death, darkness over light?” Phaide’s dead eyes burned angrily. “What right do you have to make that choice and yet deny it to others? By what authority do you stand and *forbid* me to act as you act?” Psychonic talons gripped the Doctor, dragging him up from the chamber floor.

“My choice is to defend this world’s future, not shape it..” he choked.

“Semantics, Doctor!” Phaide snarled dismissively. His eyes narrowed. “Perhaps you do not understand the true nature of my argument,” he suggested. They floated towards the centre of the cavern. “We speak of choices, of the Future, of Good and Evil, Life and Death, Light and Dark – but we speak of abstracts. Even your past actions are shrouded in myth, decisions masked, their consequences blunted in your memories by the passing of the centuries. Really, we should speak in terms of lives, not Life; deaths, not Death... We should speak of pain and sorrow, fear and terror, of blindness and broken limbs, of spilled blood and shattered souls. Or do even these ‘human’ terms lack consequence for you?” Phaide’s mental grip on the Doctor was released, and he fell to the cavern floor. Phaide opened his arms wide.

“Perhaps I should give them a human face...”

The air rippled. Silver appeared from a kaleidoscope burst in front of the Doctor. She staggered, blood trickling from her chin, her hands twisted and roped behind her back. She raised her battered face to look at the Doctor.

“Look at her, Doctor,” Phaide whispered. “This is Evil; this is Darkness – a young girl shackled and beaten, an innocent bystander threatened and bullied until she bleeds. Is there a Greater Good here? Is this the future you are so desperate to protect? Is this the choice you are unwilling to make?”

Silver blinked, not really understanding what was going on. The Doctor got to his feet, trembling.

“You don’t have to do this, Phaide, I understand –“

“No,” Phaide’s voice rumbled through the cavern. “I don’t think you really *do* understand, Doctor. See – see what I can do...”

The air clicked with a static charge. The bio-maestic field grew in strength around Silver. The tear on her cheek knitted and healed, the welt of the bruise vanishing without a trace. The rope around her wrists parted and fell to the stone floor.

“See? This is my future, Doctor.” Phaide gestured to Silver, who touched her smooth, unbroken cheek. “Would you deny her that?”

The Doctor looked at Silver, an infinite sadness reflected in his grey eyes. He stared at the girl who had killed him and given him life, who trusted him now with everything. And he knew, even before he spoke, that she knew exactly what he was going to say.

“I have to,” the Doctor whispered.

Phaide’s staff roared. A bolt of plasma swept the Doctor and Silver across the chamber, smashing them against the feet of a stone statue. The cavern rumbled. The pyramid flared.

“Then I dismiss you, Doctor. Be warned: since you will not stand with me, you stand against me.” Phaide raised his helmet and gripped his *djed* staff. “Come, then, Raucher – enter the Hall of Immortality!”

The Army of Death hissed and clicked into motion. Decayed feet marched. Glowing bridges of energy flared into life across the fissure. The battalions of the undead filed across, ancient and decrepit weapons flashing in the light of the Cradle. Skulls grinned, bones glinted. Phaide’s hellish legion crossed the chamber as the organic door at the rear of the cavern slid open to admit Raucher’s troops.

* * * * *

Silver groaned and rolled over on her stomach, letting her face sink onto the cold stone. Her shoulder was killing her where she had landed on it. The guy with the green laser-blaster thing hadn’t done her any favours by healing her face only to twist her shoulder out. She screwed up her eyes, trying not to let the pounding in her head get to her. The air was filled with shouts and screams and the bark and rattle of gunfire. Silver thought it was probably best to keep her head down – but someone kept calling her name. She blinked her eyes open and pulled her chin up off the cavern floor. She was lying just in front of a large circular pit cut into the floor of the cavern, the legs of a humanoid statue rising up behind it. Something that stank like a dead skunk was rattling and scraping in the pit. Silver peered into it. Not something – *something’s*. Dead animals scratched and scabbled up the sides of the pit, clawing, biting, flapping their way up. A swarm of smashed, crushed undead bugs fizzled past Silver’s face. Zombie bugs?

“Silver!”

“Lucy! Where –?” Then Silver saw where Lucy was. She was about halfway up the side of the pit, her fingers dug desperately into the rock. There was a guy with her, pushing her up ahead of him – a military-looking guy. Below the pair, the corpse-creatures were right behind them, red eyes glowing like little coals in the darkness of the pit. Two crocodiles, their bony jaws clicking and snapping, closed in on the military guy’s boots.

“Hang on!” Silver shouted, fumbling for her leather satchel. Damn – where the hell was it?

“Is this what you’re looking for?” the Doctor called, tossing the satchel across the stone. Silver grinned.

“It’s all a matter of timing, Doctor!” She shouted back. The Doctor scrambled to his feet.

“Get them out of there and then get out of the tomb!” he cried.

Silver didn’t think she needed to be told twice. “What about -?” But the Doctor had vanished into the turmoil of dead and living bodies that had exploded out from the tomb doorway. Nazi machine guns chattered; ancient zombie soldiers swung swords and spears. The dead could not be killed a second time. As each Nazi fell, it rose up to join the ranks of

the zombies, falling on the living like rabid beasts. Above the carnage and the slaughter, the black-robed figure with the staff shrieked a maddened, insane peal of laughter.

“ – You?” Silver finished, but the Doctor was gone.

“Silver!” Lucy cried.

Silver uncoiled the length of rope from its loop on the satchel. She lashed it around the stone leg of the statue behind the pit gripped it in her gloved hands and tossed the other end towards Lucy and the military guy.

“Catch!”

The military guy grabbed the twist of rope, looping it around his wrist. He grabbed Lucy by the waist and hauled himself up.

“The rope, Lucy – grab the rope!” Silver shouted. A coil of snakes, little more than venomous tubes of bones, shimmied up the cliff beside the girl. Silver grabbed for a handful of rubble, hurling lumps of stone at the creatures. Her missiles clattered against the pit wall, dislodging one of the snakes. A second raised its mummified hood to strike. Lucy grabbed the rope above the military guy, swinging up out of the range of the snake. The pair clambered hand over hand up the rope. Something flapped in the pit, dead wings beating rotting, flaking feathers. A vulture, its head no more than a skull, scabbled up with a sudden burst of speed. It leaped, raking its talons along the military guy’s back and digging into his neck. Silver yelled and hefted a chunk of sandstone. She took aim and hurled it down. It struck the undead bird on the spine, cracking it in two. The rear of the bird splintered apart and tumbled down into the mass of creatures below. The upper portion flapped and shook. The military guy jabbed out with his elbow, catching the thing on the beak. Its neck snapped and it ceased flapping, falling down into the darkness.

Lucy’s fingers clawed at the edge of the pit. Silver caught her hands and pulled, heaving the girl up over the edge of the pit. She collapsed into a heap by the feet of the statue. Silver extended a hand to the military guy. He gripped her arms as she pulled him over the edge.

The trio crouched for a few seconds, panting to get their breath back.

“The Doctor said to get out of here,” Silver gulped. She jerked her thumb towards the pit. “Those things will be up here in a second.”

“The Doctor?” Reynolds puffed. “He’s here?”

“Was,” Silver said, quickly untying the rope. She bundled it into the satchel and helped Lucy to her feet. “Glad I found you,” she grinned.

Lucy smiled, abashed. She blushed under the dust. “I shouldn’t have gone out on my own – I know,” she said.

“We should go,” Reynolds hissed, watching the edge of the pit. They ran across the chamber, their backs to the cavern wall, skirting the slaughter.

“There?!” Silver pointed at the organic doorway of fused new stone.

“Yes,” confirmed Reynolds. “That’s the way out. It should lead up the steps to the antechamber and the outer hall beyond,” said Reynolds.

* * * * *

They crept from the shadow of one statue to another. The battle in the centre of the cavern was becoming a massacre. Silver kept having to turn her head away from the melee. Nazi troopers advanced, but were swallowed up by the Army of the Dead. Arms, legs, heads – the zombies tore and cut and shredded without distinction. And every Nazi slain rose up once more, red fire in its eyes, to turn on those who still lived.

Gunfire chattered, spraying the ground and wall around them with ricocheting bullets. Lucy screamed, and Reynolds pulled her to safety behind a giant stone leg. Silver dove forward, her hands over her head. The melee spilled towards them. The rank smell of dead, moving bodies swamped them. Silver rolled. Hands grabbed for her – stale, desiccated, splintered hands. She whirled around. A zombie in a burnt, shredded *jelabiyeh* had her in its stinking grasp. The creature's broken mouth parted in a silent roar, eyes glowing in what remained of its skull. Silver shouted and pulled against its grip, trying to jerk her arms free. The zombie hauled her to her feet. Silver kicked and struggled. Then something exploded beside her head and she toppled over once more.

Dazed, she looked up and saw Reynolds firing bullet after bullet into the face of the creature that had grabbed her. The rotting head exploded, shattering into a noisome spray of bile and fragments of mouldering bone. The thing collapsed; but more stood behind it. The Captain shouted at Silver, her eardrums still booming from the shots. Lucy and Reynolds hauled her up as three other zombies closed in. Silver shook her head to clear the ringing from her ears. She heard Lucy shout, and turned to look.

“Duncan!!”

No..., thought Silver. But the horror was complete. The trio of walking dead who faced them now: Wyndham, Dalglish... and Duncan Moon. Duncan's face was split and gaping. His brow was crushed, his jaw fractured and dangling – but it was still recognisably him. His arms hung as if his shoulders were broken; his legs shuffled as if the joints were smashed. His red eyes smoked with red phosphorescence. His gaping mouth roved. The thing that had been Lucy Moon's brother gurgled and lurched, hands scrabbling, grasping for the living things that he had been commanded to destroy.

“Duncan!!” Lucy shrieked.

Silver and Reynolds grabbed her as she started forward, pulling her out of the reach of the thing. Silver heard herself shout, imploring Lucy to come with them, telling them that her brother was long dead, that the thing that stood in front of them was nothing more than an animated corpse.

Lucy screamed and screamed. She screamed as another blast of gunfire rattled through the cavern, bullets slicing wildly through the cavern. She screamed as the wave of battle rolled over them, living and not-living grappling in the endless contortions of death. She screamed and sobbed as Silver and Reynolds dragged her out through the door and away, knowing that nothing could be done: her search was over - her brother was dead.

* * * * *

Raucher advanced, the pistol raised high, pointed straight at Phaide. Behind him, the noise of the battle was subsiding. The end had come. Phaide rested back against the throne and chuckled.

“You cannot hurt me now, Raucher. Your power means nothing here.”

Raucher yelled a wordless cry of hate. He pulled the trigger again and again, pumping bullet after bullet out towards the throne. The bullets streaked towards Phaide – then stopped. He flicked his finger dismissively and they dropped to the ground with little metal chimes. Phaide's chuckle deepened.

Raucher lowered the empty gun, his arm trembling.

“What... what have you become?” he whispered.

Phaide regarded the SS Colonel with contempt. “I have become a god, Raucher – I have become the Future.”

“No...”

Phaide raised the helmet. His scarred, shattered face stared out at Raucher. “In death I have found Life; in desperation I have found Hope; in the grave I have found Revenge. You are the first, Raucher – the first of your kind to feel the full force of my hatred. The end is now, Colonel... finally.” He moved his hand.

Ping. Ping. Ping. Raucher stared in horror, suddenly paralysed, gripped by some unseen force. The pins had ejected from the grenades strapped to his belt. They fell to the ground at his feet. He flicked his eyes down towards his belt. Ping. Ping. Two more pins. He wanted to shout, to scream, but the force held his throat. He stared, counting the seconds.

Something stumbled towards the throne. It shambled on broken legs, its face twisted in pain. The lips of the dead man moved – moved independently, without a command. Phaide turned to regard it, a sudden frown passing across his pale, burned eyes.

“Moon? What -?”

The dead body of Duncan Moon shuffled closer, a thin protest on its lips. *Free... free...*

Phaide snarled, and in that instant, the paralysis holding the colonel flickered. Raucher leapt. Phaide screamed. The grenades exploded. The cavern shuddered and rocked. Raucher’s body was obliterated in a blossom of flame that boiled outwards across the floor. The blast tore fragments of stone from the ceiling. The Doctor staggered to his feet. Through the smoke and the fire he could see Phaide stumbling backwards, unharmed within a psychonic bubble. The chamber shook. A massive slab of stone peeled from the ceiling, crashing down onto the skull of one monumental sculpture. The thin face twisted and cracked, splitting in half and crashing against its own chest. Arms, legs, torso cascaded downwards in a hail of dust and rubble. The fragments speared the floor of the cavern, sending shockwaves through the rock. The Doctor was thrown back to the ground. Great cracks sheared through the cavern. The pyramid on its golden dais trembled. The edges of the fissure splintered, huge fragments of stone tumbling into the chasm. They hit the fold, their kinetic potential reversed, and they spun back outwards. The boulders smashed into the sides of the cavern and the fissure. The golden dais began to slide. Columns twisted and snapped, locking mechanisms failed. The ruby and amber pyramid rolled over, breaking free of cables and conduits and crashing down into the fissure. It hit the fold, and the bio-maestic field was reversed. A flower of darkness blossomed in the chasm, rushing outwards like a wave of dark flame. Where the cradle had brought life, it brought death. The army in the cavern crumpled as the energy within now burned through them. True death consumed Phaide’s creatures. Anti-maestic energy ripped through them, incinerating bone and flesh to nothing more than dust.

The Doctor crawled through the rubble. Stone crashed around him as the cavern continued to collapse. Phaide’s twisted, shrivelled body lay against a fallen statue head. His burned skull lay back against the unseeing stone eyes. Some spark of life still glowed inside him. He gasped, breath hot and final in his lungs. The Doctor touched the dying Phaide’s throat gingerly. There was nothing he could do for him; the anti-maestic energy had burned through Phaide as it had burned through his undead army. Touched by the power of the Cradle, all its healing was reversed. He lay against the fragments of the statue, dying. He turned his dead eyes towards the Doctor.

“I... could have been... a god...,” he whispered. The Doctor said nothing. He winced as a crash reverberated around what was left of the cavern. He had no way of escaping. It was only a matter of time before he was crushed by falling rubble. He and Phaide would share a tomb.

“Perhaps...,” murmured the Doctor.

Phaide's eyes flicked towards the fissure. The fold's space-time distortion was still visible against the collapsing rock.

"I... I still have the power..." Phaide coughed, his voice growing fainter and fainter. "To make... the future... a better place..."

He raised his hand.

* * * * *

The Wadi floor shook – a deep, distant rumble from beneath their feet. Reynolds looked unhappily up at the cliff wall.

"We should move away," he said. "This could trigger a rockfall." He put his arm around Lucy's shoulders. Her face was drawn and pale, her eyes still rimmed with tears.

Silver put her hand up to her bruised face. A thin line of blood trickled from the re-opened split across her cheekbone.

"Doctor..." she whispered, watching the smoke and dust rise from what remained of the tomb. The final stones of the pyramid temple slid and collapsed, piling up over the buried entrance. Lucy took her by the hand. There was nothing either of them could say to each other. It was over. The only thing they could do now was live. The three of them clambered down through the rubble, minds too numb to think much further than the next footstep. Silver wiped her brow as they climbed. The sun was still high and hot. She missed her hat.

A cough. Someone familiar clearing their throat. The Doctor suddenly appeared in front of them, stepping out from behind a jumble of fallen boulders.

"Doctor!" Reynolds shouted, leaping forward and grinning, shaking his hand in a fraternal grip. The Doctor smiled thinly. He looked so very tired, Silver thought, as if something dark and terrible had washed through him, draining something more than just energy.

"What's happened? What happened to all the zombies? Where's Phaide?" Reynolds asked. "What happened to you? How did you get out?"

The Doctor looked back at the rubble where the entrance to the tomb had once been. "Phaide and Raucher killed each other. The Cradle fell into the flipback fold and sent out a wave of Anti-maesic energy that reversed the Cradle's effects." He frowned and stretched out a gentle finger to touch Silver's bruised cheek. "The cavern has been destroyed. Phaide must have used the fold to generate a last space-time tunnel and send me out of the cavern."

He reached under his arm and pulled out Silver's fedora. It was a little battered, a little scarred. "I managed to save your hat," the Doctor said, handing it to Silver. A tiny ghost of a smile pulled at one corner of his mouth. "I know how much you like hats."

Silver took it and blew dust from the crown, settling it firmly on her head and snapping the brim to a jaunty angle.

"Thanks," she said quietly. "I think maybe you're right – I think I do like them now." She looked up at the Doctor. "Funny how people change like that, isn't it?"

The Doctor nodded, and looked away. He pulled his own rolled-up Panama out of the inside pocket of his jacket and squinted up at the bright sun as he put it on. "We should probably get a move on," he said. "I think it's going to be a long walk to anywhere from here."

There was a crash of stone on stone from behind them. The last shock-waves from the collapsing cavern had dislodged a section of rock from the Wadi cliffs, tearing down a vast section of the canyon, burying the tomb entrance in hundreds upon hundreds of tonnes

of rubble. Lucy turned away, not wanting to watch her brother's final burial. Reynolds tightened his grip on her shoulders, pulling her tear-stained face to his shoulder.

The Doctor watched the dustcloud rise from the collapse long after the rock had settled, almost as if he were expecting to see something more. Finally he turned away and followed the others down the rocky slope.

Silver caught the sleeve of his linen jacket as he passed.

"Doctor –" she began, a hint of something painful at the back of her eyes. Then she looked away. "I just wanted to tell you that – that I understand, that's all." She turned and continued her climb down the rubble.

The Doctor watched her go, and hoped she didn't.

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

CRADLE OF DEATH

JOHN GORDON



Cairo, 1938.

A time of change.

Politics and murder have made the citizens of this ancient city nervous.

But perhaps something else stalks the narrow streets?

In the deserts beyond the city, an ambitious archaeologist has opened up the inner chamber of a long-lost tomb, unleashing... something.

On a quest for a dead woman's brother, and on the trail of an inhuman murderer, Silver and the Doctor discover a plot for revenge with the power to reshape history.

But is changing history always such a bad thing?



This is another in a series of original fan authored
Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project
featuring the ninth Doctor as played by Anton Robbins

