

Shifting Sands

by Pamela McCaughey (2001)

based on the series "UFO" (1969-71)

created by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson, and Reg Hill

With Research From:

"Fingerprints of the Gods" by Graham Hancock

"The Orion Mystery" by Adrian Gilbert and Robert Bauval

"Secrets of the Sphinx" by Andrew Raymond

Warning: no adult situations, a few naughty words

CHAPTER ONE

October 31st, 2002 - in the Valley of the Kings...

Beatrice Millar looked up from where she was digging, and pushed the strands of blonde hair out of her blue eyes. Her sense of history had never been more alive than in this place - the fabled Valley of the Kings. Her team was one of the first non-Egyptian archeological groups to be granted a concession since the days of Howard Carter, of King Tut fame. It was grueling work - exposed to the harsh desert sunlight - back-breaking labour for what seemed such a small return. But, the experience Beatrice was getting was invaluable, and would move her closer to getting her Ph.D in Egyptology.

The team had turned up some interesting minor artifacts, but so far nothing special. Many archeologists felt that the Valley of the Kings was "tapped out" - that most of what was there, hidden in the sand and the rock formations, had already been discovered. But, just as Howard Carter dismissed this notion in 1922, so had Beatrice's team coordinator, Dr. L. A. Knoke. He was not alone. The Egyptian government, and their own Egyptologists, believed that there was still much more out there, just waiting for some hard-working, lucky archeologist to find them. Dr. Knoke, from Berlin, had been a curator at one of the most important antiquity museums in Germany, and had liaised for many years with the Egyptologists at the British Museum in London. Some of his funding had come directly from British sources, as well as German.

The desert sun had darkened Beatrice's normally pale Scottish skin, even though she'd been using a strong SPF. Her hair was blonder, closer to platinum, after all her exposure to the powerful rays of the Egyptian sun. She had left Scotland in the winter to come here - what a change from the cold dampness of Dumfrieshire to the blistering heat of the Valley of the Kings! She adored Dr. Knoke - he was like a second father - and being chosen to come on this dig was a dream come true for her. Beatrice respected and admired Dr. Knoke's expertise and knowledge - he was one of the world's foremost Egyptologists.

She resumed her careful digging. She was armed with an arsenal of small hand held spades, a pocket full of tiny brushes for working around artifacts stuck in the sand, a pair of plastic surgical gloves and a magnifying glass. The team was hot on the trail of what might prove to be a previously unknown grave. Beatrice was one of many diggers, archeologists and workers on the site. She was working to unearth a small piece of something made of ancient pottery. It was covered with incised markings, and whatever decoration had been on it

originally, seemed to have been worn off. A few more digs and brushings, and she'd be able to take it out of the sand entirely to look at it.

* * *

An hour later, Beatrice had worked the small clay box out of the sand. It was sitting in her palm. She looked it over with her magnifying glass carefully. Although she was fairly expert in Egyptian hieroglyphs and even their cursive writing, these markings didn't make much sense to her. The groove around the entire box suggested it could be opened. She carefully jiggled the top and it came off in one piece.

Inside the pottery box was a small stone scarab beetle. It was fabricated of gold and lapis lazuli, and the craftsmanship was superb. She was transfixed for a moment, marveling over its beauty and its elegance. How old was it? she wondered. Beatrice turned it over to look at the bottom. The flat gold was incised with the same symbols as she'd just seen on the clay box. But, they were unfamiliar to her eyes, and she couldn't read them.

Such a find was definitely worthy of being taken directly to Dr. Knoke. She put the scarab back in its box, dusted herself off, and headed back to the base camp.

* * *

"This is a lovely little piece, Beatrice," Dr. Knoke was looking at the scarab closely with a jeweller's loupe, "Fine work too."

"I'm afraid I don't understand the inscriptions on either the box or the bottom of the scarab."

"Hmmmmmm...yes, a little unusual. Maybe we should consult Monsieur Champollion's notes on the various symbols."

"I know the scarab was sacred to the ancient Egyptians - they viewed the beetle's activity of pushing dung balls around as being similar to the god Ra pushing the sun in the sky."

"The image of the scarab is repeated constantly throughout their work - their jewelry, their statuary, their papyrus. It was a powerful religious icon for them," Dr. Knoke was minutely examining the symbols on the lapis beetle's bottom, "This symbol here, for instance, shows the scarab with what looks like the sun, but there's an odd symbol inside the circle of the sun."

"It couldn't just be a flaw in the gold made by the craftsman?" Beatrice asked.

"I don't think so. It looks like it was made purposely. And, see this mark here?" Dr. Knoke used a small dental tool to point it out, "It's an ankh, with something else attached to it. Very unusual."

"The ankh is the symbol for eternal life - and usually only used in connection with the gods, isn't it?"

"You do see the ankh used in jewelry, but most often held in the hands of the gods in tomb art and such. This symbol attached to the ankh looks like the symbol for the human heart."

"Well, I know the Egyptians believed the every person's heart was judged at death - and that judgment determined whether they would experience the afterlife or have their souls gobbled up by some monster."

"All true, but I've never seen these two symbols together, nor have I seen that symbol inside the sun sign. This will require more study, I think."

* * *

November 5th, 2002

Several days passed. The team had the opportunity to examine the scarab beetle and its

box. Nobody was sure what the mixture of symbols meant. The cartouche on the box, which have identified the scarab as belonging to a particular person, had been worn off. Was it a burial item, or had it simply been dropped in the sands of the Valley of the Kings and lost for centuries?

The next week yielded another find. Some of the diggers unearthed what appeared to be a stone hatch in the sand. They brushed around it until they could see it all, although the flat stone had no symbols or markings. Was it the entrance to an underground storage location?

Dr. Knoke came down to the site to see it, "Have you tried to lift it up yet?" he asked.

Beatrice shook her head, "No - we wanted to wait for you."

The German Egyptologist motioned for the diggers - it took five men to move the stone off to the side. Below was a small stairwell, carved out of the bedrock. And, at the bottom was a sealed door!

The diggers and the Egyptologists stood in silence. They had hoped to find something, but was it a grave? And, was it untouched, or had it already been plundered by tomb robbers in antiquity? What would they find inside?

Beatrice followed Dr. Knoke down the short stairs. They looked at the door seals together. Like those on the famous King Tut grave, this door was sealed with clay seals. In fact, the incised symbols looked remarkably like those they'd seen on the bottom of the scarab beetle.

"See the ankh with the human heart?" Dr. Knoke traced his finger over the symbols, "Just like on the scarab."

"I found the scarab not too far from here."

Knoke nodded, "Perhaps they are related after all. I think before we open this thing, we should contact the Egyptian government. They'll want to send some of their people over to be here when we break the seals."

* * *

November 13th, 2002

More than once, Beatrice had cursed the wheels of bureaucracy which turned so slowly! Dr. Knoke had indeed contacted the Egyptian government right away, but it was an interminably long week before they were able to send out a representative of their own officialdom. Dr Zahi Hawass, one of Egypt's own top archeologists, and the Director General of Giza and Saqqara, was at a conference, so they had to find someone else to take his place.

Dr. Omar Abdullah was a handsome young Egyptian in his thirties. Beatrice privately thought he resembled Omar Sharif, the famous star of such films as "Dr. Zhivago" and "Lawrence of Arabia." His credentials were impeccable, and he would oversee the opening up of the team's "find."

Early in the morning, the team, Dr. Abdullah, Dr. Knoke, Beatrice and a crew of diggers all trekked out to the site. They had video and digital cameras, digging equipment - the works.

After they had been photographed and videotaped, and had plaster casts made of them, the seals on the door were carefully broken by Dr. Abdullah and Dr. Knoke. The diggers slowly urged the long-sealed door ajar, and this enabled the Egyptologists to squeeze through inside.

A rush of hot stale air hit the archeologists as they they peered into the darkness of the inner chamber. They were wearing small breathing units, special gloves for handling any artifacts they found, and carrying powerful flashlights. Unlike the opening of King Tut's tomb by Howard Carter and his partner Lord Carnarvon in 1922, there was no "glint of gold" visible

in the dim light.

They eased their way inside and shone their lights around the chamber. There, against the far wall, was a large stone sarcophagus, with a smoothly finished off stone lid. It looked like some sort of marble. Above the sarcophagus were the tomb paintings which were de rigor in most ancient Egyptian grave sites. Dr. Knoke and Dr. Abdullah went immediately to look at the stone sarcophagus, while Beatrice examined the drawings on the wall.

Most tombs had a multiplicity of grave goods stashed inside. In this tomb there was only the sarcophagus and a small wooden box. Drs. Knoke and Abdullah concentrated their flashlights on the sarcophagus first, studying the symbols incised into the stone.

"Look at this...there are more of those scarabs with the strange sun symbol," Dr. Knoke showed Dr. Abdullah.

Beatrice noticed that the same motif was repeated in the wall art, "And, the scarabs are here as well!" She indicated the fresh, colorful tomb paintings. The figure of a female goddess, painted in green, was depicted seated on a throne, with a plethora of adoring Egyptian people lined up before her, and platters of human organs laid out in front of her dais, as though in tribute! Hearts, livers, lungs, and other internal organs were drawn in surprising detail on the wall. Above the goddess' head were a series of scarabs, all of them holding aloft the sun sign with the strange symbol encased in the circle of the sun, and in her hand she held the ankh with the human heart symbol. The Egyptologists moved their flashlights up to the wall and stood with Beatrice, examining the artwork. Bright turquoises, reds, greens and whites glowed on the wall, as though they had just been painted yesterday.

"Have you seen anything like this before?" Dr. Knoke asked the younger Dr. Abdullah.

"This is indeed unusual," Dr. Abdullah leaned forward and read some of the hieroglyphics, "If I've translated these symbols and the cartouches correctly, the occupant of this tomb IS a goddess herself!"

* * *

November 24th, 2002, Great Britain

General Ed Straker sat across the table from his Omega Corporation commander. He and Paul Foster were enjoying a rare opportunity to have dinner and discuss things. They had reservations at Straker's favourite Indian restaurant. The meal started off with hot steaming bowls of daal soup and fresh chapatis.

"How's Omega's bottom line this year?" Straker asked between sips of soup.

"This last quarter has really picked up. We're nowhere near the strength of Microsoft, but we're definitely holding our own. There are quite a few new items in development which will be unveiled sometime in early 2003. The Corporation is planning to promote them heavily. We're moving away from games towards business and educational software, although games will always be a component part of what we produce," Foster replied, "Our last quarter report will be available at the end of December for you."

"Any problems with your shareholders?"

"As you know, we've avoided private investors. It's all government think-tank funded, pretty much. It's been the safest way to conduct all our business," Foster knew Straker couldn't help but catch that last inference to Omega's real work. His cell-phone beeped, "Excuse me, Ed," Foster answered it, "Yes, Foster!...really? Sounds interesting. Can you forward what you've got to my laptop e-mail? Thanks, Lew."

"Anything wrong?" Straker asked as Foster re-pocketed his cell.

"No. Lew says one of our Middle Eastern operatives forwarded some material on an

unusual new discovery in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt."

"We're not in the business of archeology, Paul," Straker smiled, indulgently.

"I'll check my e-mail later. If it proves to be anything important, I'll forward it to you."

* * *

Foster opened his laptop and pulled up his e-mail. There were some photographic attachments with the report. He read the text, and then opened the pictures. It wasn't so much that he was interested in ancient history. But one of the notations had caught his attention. This latest find in Egypt was a small tomb, reputed to be that of a goddess. And her mummified body had been laid to rest with a box of canopic jars, not unlike other burials in the Valley of the Kings. But, in this box, there were eight canopic jars instead of the usual four, and a series of x-rays and MRIs conducted at a Cairo University had produced information to the effect that the female body contained two hearts! Tomb art depicted this goddess as accepting human organs as tribute from the Egyptian people.

He knew the ancient Mayans and Aztecs practiced human sacrifice. That was a well-known documented fact uncovered by the dedicated archeologists who studied those societies. And, he was aware the Egyptians, and even the Romans, performed animal sacrifices eons ago. But, he'd never heard of the Egyptians sacrificing humans before. Foster e-mailed Lew Waterman, Omega's second in command back, and asked for a direct e-mail contact to the Middle Eastern agent who'd provided the original material. He was curious. Why would a body, even a so-called goddess' body, contain not one, but two hearts? And why the extra canopic jars? The old "red flag" had been raised in Foster's mind.

It was well past three am when Foster shut down his laptop. He'd spent several hours calling up information on the ancient Egyptian religion over the Omega Net system. So far, he'd seen nothing that suggested human sacrifice had ever been a worship factor in their many cults. And, this new find in the Valley of the Kings was definitely one of a kind - no other archeologists claimed to have found an actual "goddess." Oddly enough, this discovery had come almost 80 years to the day from Howard Carter's fabled King Tut find.

Foster turned out the light with the intention of getting more information before sending anything about this to Straker.

* * *

November 26th, 2002

"Paul, are you sure this isn't a wild goose chase? Or do you just want a Middle Eastern vacation?" Straker asked, a slight teasing tone in his voice.

"Look, just give me a week to find out if I'm right. I'll take Leslie and Little with me. They're well versed in alien technology. If it's just some crazy Egyptian burial, you can laugh at me all you want."

"A week, no more. I want Leslie back in the Big Apple working on that alien propulsion core project. It's been two years plus since we got hold of that thing, and we're still no closer to tapping its secrets."

"Great, I'll get them on the next flight over here, and then we'll leave for Cairo."

"How are you going to manage for a cover? You're going to stick out like a sore thumb in the desert - the three of you!"

"Don't worry - Dr. Abdullah is our operative over there - he's been on this project almost from the beginning."

* * *

November 28th, 2002, Cairo, Egypt

The airport terminal was beautifully air-conditioned, but the three Omega men were not prepared for the blistering heat outside. Fortunately, they'd had the foresight to dress in heat-reflective white suits. Dr. Abdullah left the Valley of the Kings long enough to come to the city and meet them, so he could brief them on the recent find and provide them with the cover they'd be using for the mission. They would be observers from the United Nations' division for historic preservation.

"The mummy itself is still at the University of Cairo. It is going to be carefully studied. There has been a new policy in recent years to avoid unwrapping mummies found because there's always some risk of damage occurring. Besides, with the MRI technology we have at our disposal today, we can see inside the mummy wrappings without resorting to opening it up," Dr. Abdullah explained in the privacy of Paul's hotel room. Leslie and Little were sitting in too.

"I take it the double hearts were found through the MRIs taken of the mummy," Pete Little commented, "Have you been able to look at the contents of the canopic jars yet?"

"They're due to be scanned this week. Normally, mummies were buried with four canopic jars - one for each of the internal organs the Egyptians removed and preserved for separate burial. The lungs, the liver, the intestines and the stomach. With this mummy, there were eight canopic jars - two of each. Whether they actually hold double organs will be proven when the jars are examined."

"What's your interpretation of the tomb art? The report seems very clear that the hieroglyphics state the mummy is supposed to be an actual goddess. Isn't that a little peculiar?"

"Well, the pharaohs themselves were said to be gods, or born of the gods, but in this case, the hieroglyphics clearly state that the person inside the sarcophagus IS a goddess. Not just a euphemism for born of the gods, but an actual goddess herself. The artwork inside the tomb shows this goddess painted green, which is typical of Egyptian art when they wanted to show a deity, accepting tribute from the people in the form of human organs. And, some of the symbols used in the tomb art is unusual - for instance, we've seen a repeating hieroglyph of a sacred scarab bug pushing the symbol of the sun, but the sun has an odd figure inside its circle, and the ankh symbols all have human heart hieroglyphs attached to them."

"Is there any chance we'll be able to obtain a sample of DNA from the mummy?" Allan Leslie asked.

"That's part of why I felt it was so important that Omega get involved in this situation. I want to get a DNA sample to our labs before the university researchers can, because I am convinced this is no ordinary mummy. I think what we're dealing with here is of alien origin. And, if it is, Omega is going to have to take possession of it."

* * *

November 30th, 2002

Dr. Abdullah introduced the three Omega men as UN historic observers. They had the paperwork to "prove" it, so the staff at the university welcomed them into their facilities. There they were permitted to see the computer-generated MRI readouts on the mummy's linen-encased body.

"What are those dark spots we see all over the body readouts?" Leslie asked, pointing to one on the screen.

"Those are magical amulets," explained Beatrice Millar, "We see those wrapped up in just about every mummy found. They're meant to protect the dead from evil spells and to help them get into the afterlife."

"Are those two hearts?" Foster indicated another area on the screen.

"Yes. We thought that was odd, too. We don't know if she was wrapped accidentally with an extra heart, or if it was some sort of physical anomaly. Sometimes the embalmers had several bodies being worked on at the same time, but since this mummy is purported to be a goddess, and therefore a person of very high status, it's odd that such a mistake could have gotten made." Beatrice had accompanied Dr. Abdullah with the mummy and the canopic jars to Cairo while Dr. Knoke stayed on site, working at the tomb.

"Will you open the canopic jars?" Little wanted to know.

"They're slated for MRIs tomorrow. Depending on what we find on the films, we may open them. Protecting the contents is uppermost in our minds, of course. They've been buried, undisturbed for several thousand years. We need to carbon date the materials, but because they've been contained in the perfect desert burial atmosphere all this time, some deterioration is possible. As you can see, we have the mummy itself in a climate controlled vault, while we show you the MRIs."

Foster knew getting in to obtain a DNA sample would be an after-hours matter, so he simply said, "We'd appreciate it if you could forward your complete set of reports to us to return to the UN with. I understand Dr. Knoke is still on-site in the Valley of the Kings."

"Yes, he's taking detailed photos of the tomb, examining the artwork. It's a peculiar tomb because other than the canopic jars, there are no grave goods. Almost all Egyptian tombs of any importance have grave goods, shabtis, preserved food items, etcetera. This one doesn't. It's as though the tomb was prepared very quickly," Beatrice smiled, "Perhaps if this lady really was a goddess, she didn't need anything for the afterlife!"

Dr. Abdullah, in his capacity as greeter to the UN representatives, took his three charges to the famed Cairo Museum, so they could feast their eyes on all the solid gold goodies Howard Carter had found in the tomb of King Tut in 1922. They were amazed at the state of preservation of some of the oldest mummies there, such as King Rameses II.

"If a mummy as old as King Rameses, here, could be kept in that good a state, what about our mystery lady back at the university?" Leslie queried.

"My guess is that our goddess is in as fine a state of preservation. Which means we should be able to get some good tissue samples for DNA testing," Dr. Abdullah replied, nonchalantly, "I do have some suggestions on that."

Foster nodded, and said sotto voce, "We'll need access to that facility Omar. If you could get us in there tonight, we could get our samples and have them analyzed in a short time."

"I'm in and out of there all the time. I also made a point of leaving one of my notebooks behind when we were in there earlier today - good excuse to go back. But, might I suggest that just one of you should come with me...?"

"Little, you go with him, get the tissue samples, and we'll get you out on a late flight to the labs in Britain," Foster ordered.

* * *

Later on that night...

Dr. Abdullah had no problems utilizing his pass card to get back into the research facility at the university. It wasn't a tight security area. Archeological study was not one that prompted much in the way of theft or vandalism. Getting Pete Little in with him was a simple matter. No one questioned them. The security guards on duty simply looked at Dr. Abdullah's ID and then they passed through to the pass card area.

Once they were into the mummy storage area, it was a quick process to bring up the

computer records with Dr. Abdullah's own code and find the right vault for the "goddess." Little had come prepared with several sealable tubes stashed inside his jacket lining, and the good doctor was able to provide tweezers and plastic gloves and masks from the facility's equipment compartments. They made their way inside the climate controlled vault room, and pulled out the morgue-like sliding slab with their mystery mummy.

They did not want to cause any kind of damage to the mummy, but in their quest for usable tissue samples, a tiny incision between several layers of linen wrappings had to be made. Dr. Abdullah, with the skilled precision of a practiced surgeon, made a tiny opening in the toe area, so he could carefully snip off a toenail. Then, they moved up to the hands, which were wrapped separately and crossed over the mummy's chest. It took another minute or two before Dr. Abdullah was able to get into one of the fingers for cellular material - he snipped off a fingernail. The samples were well-sealed in their unbreakable plastic tubes, and Little and Dr. Abdullah left the lab.

* * *

December 4th, 2002, Valley of the Kings...

Pete Little returned to Cairo after dropping off his tissue samples at the SHADO/Omega labs in Great Britain. He was eager to accompany Foster and Leslie out to the site where the 'goddess' mummy had been discovered.

"The trip out the Valley of the Kings is nowhere nearly as difficult as it once was," Dr. Abdullah commented as they drove out in a comfortable university-owned SUV, "In Howard Carter's day, most people made the journey on camels!"

"I shouldn't imagine that was a very comfortable way to travel," Foster grinned, and patted his own posterior.

"Yeah, I don't think I could get behind that idea at all!" Leslie joked from the back seat.

"I'll introduce you to our site coordinator, Dr. Knoke. He's one of Europe's foremost Egyptologists. It's rare that my government ever grants concessions to non-Egyptians, but Dr. Knoke comes with quite a pedigree in the discipline, and his papers are now required reading at many universities. He's a veteran of many digs run by Dr. Hawass, Egypt's best man in archeology. If there was ever an Egyptologist who deserved a spectacular find, it's Dr. Knoke. Pity it just happened to be this one!"

They arrived at the site base camp while it was still light. With them, they carried extra supplies for the camp, some extra tents, and their personal gear. Foster, Leslie and Little were very accustomed to camping out, although none of them had done so in a desert environment. Some of the diggers were assigned to erect their four-man tent before leaving for the night.

After handshakes and introductions all around, Dr. Knoke invited Dr. Abdullah and his guests to share the evening meal. It was a simple one, very Egyptian in content, and washed down post-prandially with some German schnapps and Marsala wine.

"I keep a small liquor cabinet, gentlemen, because I don't believe in leaving behind the accouterments of civilization. But, I must warn you that liquor is not a good thing to abuse in the desert. Alcohol has a dehydrating effect on the human body that doesn't need to be helped along in this environment. I only use it medicinally, of course," Dr. Knoke smiled as he poured for his guests. He helped himself to a generous glass of Marsala and sat back, "Tell me, what areas of historic study do you all come from?"

Foster was ready for this question, "We represent our countries on the committee for historical preservation. I'm from Great Britain, Little and Leslie are from Canada."

Dr. Knoke nodded, "Have you studied much Egyptology?"

"My speciality is more in the way of Neolithic studies," Foster was using his cover to the max, "I've done a number of digs and research on the Stonehenge site back home."

"I've been there - fantastic monument! And, you, Dr. Leslie?"

The silver-haired Canadian cleared his throat, "I'm involved in underwater archeology."

"Oh really? What was your last assignment?"

"I dove with Dr. MacInnis on the War of 1812-14 shipwrecks in the Great Lakes a few years ago. I've been with the UN since then."

"What about you, Dr. Little?"

"I was working on the excavations at the Fortress Louisburg in Nova Scotia until I became a UN representative."

"Quite an eclectic group you are! But have any of you done desert digs before? Nein? Well, you're in for a new experience in the morning! I'm sure Dr. Abdullah has filled you in on our find here of course. We're very excited about it. It's very unusual. Did you meet my assistant Beatrice Millar while you were at the university in Cairo?"

"She showed us the MRI reports on the mummy while we were there," supplied Little.

"A fine young scholar. After this dig, I intend to recommend her for her final thesis. I know she'll be writing it on this discovery. A very lucky break for both of us!"

* * *

December 5th, 2002

Even though they were up just before dawn, the heaviness in the air held the promise of the extreme heat they would experience later in the day, when the sun was at its zenith. Dressed in sun-reflective whites again, the Omega men followed Drs. Knoke and Abdullah out to the tomb site for their first look-see at a real dig.

They climbed down the small staircase, dug out of the bedrock, and crept into the underground tomb. All were equipped with breathing apparatus, surgical gloves, and flashlights.

"As you can see, this tomb looks as though it was prepared very quickly. There is some tomb art on the walls, but not as much as we've found in other tombs. The sarcophagus is very simple, and there were no grave goods besides the box with the canopic jars," Dr. Abdullah led them over to the main set of drawings above the sarcophagus."

"The cartouches inscribed on the walls and on the lid of the sarcophagus refer to "She Who Is The Sky-Queen," Dr. Knoke leaned up and traced an inscription with his forefinger, "And, this reads as 'we give her our hearts.' That may be connected to the ankh symbols with the human heart symbol attached, but the detailed drawings clearly show hearts, liver, lungs, kidneys, as being offered in homage. It's all very peculiar, because the ancient Egyptians, as far as we know, did not practice any kind of human sacrifice. What kind of goddess would have demanded human organs as part of her cult worship? She is shown without an animal head, and most of the Egyptian deities had animal heads."

Foster and his men were paying strict attention to everything Dr. Knoke was explaining. He didn't know it, but the more he talked, the more convinced the Omegas were of the mummy's alien origin.

"It looks as though you have quite a bit to research with this discovery," Foster commented, "Are you planning any more excavations?"

"Our concession is only for this particular dig, although we may be able to convince the Egyptian government," Dr. Knoke nodded graciously towards Dr. Abdullah, "That this might be only the beginning of what could be even more new finds in this area."

* * *

Foster's cell phone bleeped. He grabbed it out of his pocket, "Foster, here."

Little and Leslie had been packing their bags for the return trip to Cairo, and looked up expectantly as Foster listened to the speaker at the other end.

"Well?" Little queried, as Foster folded his cell.

"It's confirmed - that mummy is an alien. Our orders are to find a way to remove it from the university lab and get it back to Britain."

CHAPTER TWO

December 6, 2002 - Cairo...

The three Omega operatives met in Foster's hotel room to discuss plans for stealing the alien mummy. They were looking over a schematic on Paul's laptop of the university building where the mummy was being currently housed.

"How do we can get past the security guards, Pete?"

"According to Dr. Abdullah, they rotate in eight hour shifts, and there's a shift change at midnight. There's also a service elevator the research labs use to bring in stuff, so if I go in between the changing of the guards, up the stairwell, I can send the elevator down for you. It's on the back side of the building and only sporadically checked by the guards because of its technical inaccessibility."

"You gonna need a key to operate the elevator?" Leslie asked.

"From the ground floor, yeah. From inside the labs, no. The lab entrance has a numerical code lock on the front door, and I memorized it the night Omar took me in for the DNA samples. The idea is that the elevator can only be operated from inside the labs - and you have to have the code to send it up or down. You two will have to be there at that back elevator door with the rented vehicle we discussed earlier. If any of us get questioned during this job, we can show them our fake papers giving us permission to remove the mummy for research purposes to the Cairo city hospital."

"And, from there, we'll take the mummy right to the airport and get it shipped off to London on the special SHADO transport they're going to have waiting for us. We'll be connecting at a small airstrip outside Cairo," Paul added, "I've purposely left Dr. Abdullah out of the loop on this job because if he really doesn't know what happened to the mummy, he'll be able to make that claim a lot more honestly to his government when the shit hits the fan."

"What about the girl - what's 'er name? - Beatrice?" Leslie wanted to know.

"Neither she nor Dr. Knoke should be any problem. Knoke is still out in the Valley of the Kings on the dig site, and Miss Millar was supposed to be rejoining him out there after she was finished researching the mummy here at the university facility. You heard her say they weren't planning on unwrapping the mummy if it wasn't necessary, and Omar said they hadn't opened the canopic jars up yet. Since they don't know what they really have at this point, the fact this mummy is an alien won't get leaked to the press, even accidentally. We get this thing back to the labs and the whole incident goes down as a peculiar theft to the rest of the world."

* * *

Pete Little eased his way into the university facility's front foyer. As he predicted, the two security guards trading shifts were too busy chatting to notice him slipping inside to the stairs. He made his way silently up the three flights, and padded out of the exit on the third floor to the lab complex where the mummy was lying in wait for them. Utilizing the entrance code he'd memorized several days earlier, Little got through the front door and moved quietly inside the darkened lab area. Once his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, he picked his way around the furniture to the morgue, where he'd be able to access the service elevator - Leslie and Foster would be waiting for him there. He sent the elevator down to them.

Within a minute's time, Little watched the elevator go down, open its doors, and come back up. When it opened in the morgue, Foster got out.

"I left Leslie downstairs with the vehicle," Foster whispered, "I think we can manage together."

Little nodded, "Let's get the mummy loaded onto a gurney. We can take out the canopic jars at the same time." He pulled out a small flashlight, so they could see which morgue compartment to open, and Foster moved the morgue gurney into position.

"Just what do you think you're doing, gentlemen?"

Both Omega agents blinked as the upper light went on. They looked towards the morgue door, their eyes slitted against the unexpected brightness. Standing there was Dr. Omar Abdullah, and he was pointing a powerful handgun their way!

"I think you two have drastically overstepped your bounds on this mission."

Foster spoke up, "We're operating on direct orders from HQ, Omar."

"Then, why didn't you take the trouble to inform me? Why all this cloak-and-dagger? Wouldn't it have been much easier to obtain my assistance?"

"Since you're going to have to answer to the authorities for this, we felt it was better for you to be completely innocent of our involvement. If you really didn't know what happened here, you'd tell a more convincing story."

Dr. Abdullah motioned the two Omega agents away from the mummy's morgue spot with his weapon, "So you just thought you'd leave me holding the bag - is that how you say it? Holding the bag?"

"Look, just let us do what we have to do, we'll get out of here, and that's the end of it," Little suggested.

"But, it's not that easy," the doctor smiled strangely, "You see, I know what you're planning to do. It was remarkably easy to bug your hotel rooms. And, because you thought I was one of you, you never even bothered to check, did you? You're going to steal the mummy and the canopic jars and send them back to England. And, I know why!"

"We're all on the same side, Omar," Foster started to say.

"Oh, are we, really? Once maybe, we were, but not now. I knew you'd have your uses. Like sending that DNA sample back to Britain. Once the results came back, I knew you'd make your move, and that's when I'd have to make mine."

"What are you talking about?" Little was getting pissed with all the double talk.

"The mummy. The goddess in there," Abdullah indicated the morgue drawer with his handgun, "She's not human, she's not even divine. She's one of them. And, they want her back!"

"Who's they?" Foster asked cautiously, but he was beginning to have a very bad feeling about all this...

Dr. Abdullah used the gun to gesture the two men away from the morgue drawer, "The race of people who sent her here 3000 years ago. They thought she was lost to them forever. Turns out her adoring human worshipers simply put her away for safekeeping. Along with her alien technology."

"What alien technology? All there was in that tomb was the mummy and the canopic jars." Little reminded him.

"The humans placed her technology in the safest place possible - in her wrappings. Like a neat little alien package - just waiting to be rediscovered."

Foster snapped a quick glance at Little, "Omar - or are you really Omar?"

"Omar is here, but I control everything," Dr. Abdullah's voice changed - it became deeper, more resonant, strange, "I thought about killing him, but he's of much more use to me alive. You gentlemen, on the other hand, are of NO use to me alive now. So, you see, it will be necessary for me to..."

The weapon Dr. Abdullah was raising to fire on Foster and Little flew out of his hand as the morgue door opened suddenly and Beatrice Millar barreled in and knocked him off his feet, "What's going on in here?"

Little threw himself across the floor in time to nab the fallen handgun, and Foster made the dash to grab Abdullah himself. The two men went crashing to the floor, while Beatrice stared at them in stunned silence - her hands to her mouth, stifling a scream.

"Thanks - you just saved our asses," Little reassured Beatrice, as he got up with the gun. Foster subdued Abdullah, and knocked him out with an expert karate chop to the neck.

"That should keep him out of our way for a bit," Foster puffed as he got up. He looked at Beatrice, "Have you got something we could use to tie him up?" as though his request was nothing out of the norm.

Beatrice nodded silently, her eyes still fixed on the now unconscious Dr. Abdullah.

Foster looked over at Little, "I thought you said there'd be nobody here at this hour?"

"Normally there wouldn't be...," Little turned to Beatrice, "How did you get in here?"

"Uh...I used the special code...I often come in here at night...I've been looking at the MRI's of the mummy...looking at the amulets inside the wrappings. The guard downstairs said Dr. Abdullah had come in, and I thought that was unusual...," Beatrice stammered, "Why would Dr. Abdullah threaten you? What were you all doing in here?"

Foster's mind fabricated a quick lie, "We found out Dr. Abdullah had orders to remove the mummy and take over the dig site from the Egyptian government. Apparently, they were planning to announce the discovery to the world and take credit for it themselves, rather than explaining you people were responsible for it. We were trying to stop him."

"Why would they do that? They were the ones who gave us the concession for the Valley of the Kings - they gave us permission to work there!"

"Well, I guess the importance of this find must have clouded their judgment," Foster added, "They couldn't resist taking credit for such a discovery."

Beatrice was digesting this information slowly, "I guess he really wasn't what we thought he was, after all..."

"Now that's an understatement," Little commented sotto voce.

"What do we do now? Do we report him to the authorities?" Beatrice asked.

"We can't report him to the Egyptian authorities - that's who he's working for!" Foster told her, "We'll have to find another way to deal with this," he took her by the arm and said quietly, "If you let us take the mummy, it can be protected by the United Nations and returned to you and Dr. Knoke when all the furor is over."

"Where would you take it? I mean...this mummy is a one of kind discovery..."

Sister, you don't know the half of it, Foster was thinking to himself, but he said, "If you help us, we can remove the mummy to a safe place. We can have someone with a vehicle here to take it out within minutes."

"On one condition. You have to let me go with you," Beatrice told him.

"We can't do that. It's not possible."

"I have to see that the mummy is protected. She's special."

"Yes, of course, she's special..."

"You don't understand!" Beatrice was on the verge of tears, "I just got the DNA report e-mailed to me tonight from the hospital lab - she's not... human!"

Little shot Foster a startled look. Foster shook Beatrice's arm, "What do you mean she's not human? How would you know a thing like that?"

"The lab at the hospital - I told them to put a rush on the DNA testing for me! The lab supervisor just e-mailed me the results about an hour ago - that's why I came up here tonight - to have another look at her..."

"The lab supervisor? Who else knows this?" Foster was suddenly faced with an unexpected situation.

"Well, j-just the lab supervisor - he did the tests himself - he...he said he didn't want to trust such a delicate operation to anyone else on his staff..."

Little looked again at Foster, and rolled his eyes, "This means a trip into the hospital, doesn't it?"

Foster nodded at Beatrice, "You're going to help us get this mummy and the canopic jars out of here. And, then - you're going to get us into that hospital - we've got to get those reports out of there - wipe any computer memories clean - there can't be anything that points to this goddess as being anything other than a 3000 year old mummy!"

* * *

With the mummy and its canopic jars safely packed into the rented vehicle, the Omega agents and Beatrice piled in, with the intention of transporting them to the waiting plane at the airstrip. They'd left Dr. Abdullah tied up inside the service elevator, where they figured it might take a few days for him to be found. In the meantime, the mummy and they would be long gone.

"I want you two to take the mummy and the jars to the airstrip," Foster ordered Leslie and Little quietly, so Beatrice couldn't hear him talking, "I'll deal with Little Miss Nosy here, and her friend at the hospital lab."

Leslie whispered, "We can have the plane wait for you - how long'll it take at the lab?"

"I don't know," Foster shook his head, "Depending on how co-operative she is, it could be a quick job, or it could be a few hours. I don't even know if the technician she got the e-mail from is still at the lab. All I can do is destroy the DNA test evidence and remove all the documentation. If she and the technician try to release anything to the public, they won't have any evidence to back them up - they'll look like hoaxers. I don't think either one of them will want to risk their reputations in their respective fields for that!"

Foster had Leslie and Little drop them off a block from the hospital on their way out to the airstrip "Where's your laptop computer right now?" has asked her.

"It's in my hotel room. Why?"

"Because once we're done with the lab, we're going to have to download your computer and destroy it."

"What? But, you can't - I've got all my data stored in there - vital information about the dig, the mummy - everything! You're asking me to throw away months of documentation on my work, and on Dr. Knoke's work! How can I write my thesis without that information?"

"You won't be writing a thesis - at least on this discovery," Foster told her grimly.

"You're not with the UN, are you?" Beatrice asked, faintly.

Foster shot her an exasperated look, "What led you to that conclusion?"

"Are you guys with the FBI? Is this some sort of X-Files thing?"

Foster ignored her last question to pose some of his own, "What floor is the lab on? How can we get up there without raising any trouble?"

"It's in the basement. I can sign us in at the front door. I can say we're going down to see Dr. Anwar. He's on the night shift a lot. he did the DNA testing at night when there were fewer technicians around. That's why I got the e-mail from him so late."

Foster nodded, "If he's there, I want you to do everything I say. We're going to get into the lab and clean things up - do you understand me?"

Beatrice stopped dead, 100 feet from at the front door of the hospital, her hands on her hips, "I don't understand this - the mummy's discovery will answer so many questions for so many disciplines - archeology, evolutionists, scientists - the very fact that this mummy is of --"

Foster silenced her with a hand over her mouth, "Don't you realize there are people who will kill for this information?" he took her by the arm and dragged her back into the shrubbery decorating the hospital's front lawn, "The less you know, the safer you are. Don't ask any more questions, and don't cause me any more trouble! Just do as I say and I'll protect you!" he hissed at her, "Do you understand me?" Beatrice nodded, Foster's big hand still firmly positioned on her mouth, "Good girl. Remember, no trouble!"

* * *

Beatrice signed herself and "Doctor Foster" into the hospital lab. They rode the elevator down and got out on the basement floor where the lab was situated.

"Remember, just do as I say, and we'll be out of here in no time," Foster warned Beatrice again.

As it turned out, Dr. Anwar had left for a meal break, according to one of the other technicians. However, in an effort to be helpful, he did point out Dr. Anwar's office, so they could wait there for him to come back.

Foster spied Dr. Anwar's laptop sitting on his desk, as soon as they entered the office, "Close the door," he instructed Beatrice, "I want to check this computer for data on the DNA testing." He tried to get into the hard drive, but it required a specific password to get in, and Foster didn't have time to fuss with it, "I'll just take the whole thing," he commented, "There's probably a back up disc for some of his work. I'll bet he doesn't just have his data in one place - at least I wouldn't - start looking for his backups will you?"

Beatrice and Foster searched the office, looking in every drawer, every cupboard. Foster even got down and looked under the office furniture in case the disc had been taped to the underside of the desk. They spent a full 30 minutes and didn't find the back-up.

"Maybe he's been carrying the back-up with him. It's pretty explosive information - not the kind of thing you'd just leave lying about for anyone to find...," Foster mused, "I guess we'll have to wait until Dr. Anwar gets back. Where would the DNA samples be in the lab?"

"I don't know - I've only been here once - the night I brought the samples in to him personally. I didn't want to send them over by delivery - I was afraid to let go of them."

"What was his take on all this?"

"He was pretty shocked when he e-mailed me. We both agreed to keep quiet until we could do subsequent testing. That's another reason why I went back to the university facility to see the mummy."

Dr. Anwar returned a few minutes later. He was carrying a cup of coffee and a sandwich container - his late night luncheon.

"Beatrice! What are you doing here?" he asked - then he saw Foster sitting there too, "It's rather late for a social visit, isn't it?"

"Sit down, Dr. Anwar," Foster's voice meant business. He pulled a small but deadly looking handgun out of his jacket pocket, "Just do as I say and there won't be any trouble."

The lab tech stared at Beatrice, "What is this? Where's my computer?" he noticed the empty spot on his desk where his laptop had once been plugged in.

"I believe you're in possession of some rather sensitive information - DNA information.

Ms. Millar here assures me that you'll hand it over without any questions. I've taken the liberty of appropriating your laptop, but I'm sure you have this same information on a back-up disc stored somewhere safe. We'll need that back-up, and we'll also need your notes and the mummy samples you used."

Dr. Anwar looked shocked, "Beatrice, I asked you to keep this matter private until I could do more samples and confirm my findings!"

"I didn't have to tell him - he knew already...," Beatrice said, her voice quiet, "Doctor, he said people would kill for this information, and in order to protect both you and me, we should hand over all we know...all our documentation."

"Do you realize what you're asking me to give up? If this testing is genuine, if that mummy in there really is of alien origin - think of what this could mean! For both of us! It could make our reputations in both our disciplines!"

"And, holding onto this material could cost us our lives!" Beatrice's desperation and fear were mounting.

"Why should I believe you?" it was clear Dr. Anwar had been daydreaming of the fame he'd enjoy as the discoverer of alien DNA, "Maybe... you just want all the glory for yourself?"

"I don't want glory, I just want to *live!*"

Foster aimed the gun at Dr. Anwar, "We can do this the easy way, or we can do it over your dead body - what's it going to be?"

* * *

There were two technicians working in the basement laboratory when Dr. Anwar took Beatrice and Foster inside with him. He nodded politely to the others, and led the way to his own work station.

"I have some notes here, and the DNA test samples are stored in the fridge," he said quietly.

"Let's get the samples first," Foster instructed him, "Just act like you're giving us a tour or something."

When Dr. Anwar extracted several containers from the refrigeration unit, Beatrice confirmed what he'd written on them to keep them separated from the other test materials inside. Foster placed them inside his jacket in small velcro sealed pockets. They went back out to the lab, picked up the notebook, and returned to Dr. Anwar's office.

"Where's the back up disc?" Foster asked, in a voice that brooked no nonsense.

"I...I was afraid to leave the information in my laptop, so I've been carrying it around myself..." Foster was certain Dr. Anwar was going to cry as he opened his lab coat and handed over the disc.

"I'll take them both with me - no point in taking any chances, " Foster's expression was grim. he got up and pulled Beatrice along with him by the arm, "I hate using draconian means, Doctor, but you should pay very strict attention to what I'm about to say," he placed the business end of his weapon against the lab technician's temple, "This information carries death with it. Your life won't be worth a plugged nickel, as the Americans like to say, if you talk. I can guarantee we'll find you no matter where you go, or where you try to hide. Just keep quiet, and don't even think about calling the police!"

* * *

The next job would be to get Beatrice's laptop. They hailed a cab right outside the hospital and sped off to her hotel. They sat quietly in the back of the vehicle, but Beatrice knew that weapon was in Foster's pocket and she was suitably impressed by his performance

at the lab.

Once they got inside Beatrice's room, Foster had no trouble locating her computer. It was still sitting on her desk, open to the files she had on the mummy project. He sat down, plugged the two laptops together and started transferring files.

"What are you doing?" Beatrice asked, alarmed.

"I'm downloading everything from Dr. Anwar's computer onto yours. Then I'm going to dispose of his and have just one to carry around with me," Foster was in the process of deleting files from Dr. Anwar's laptop. Then, he pulled out a small instrument package from his inside jacket pocket, and extracted a small gadget, which he plugged into Dr. Anwar's computer.

"What's that thing?"

"It's a virus uploader. If anyone tampers with it to get information out of this laptop, they'll just end up downloading the virus to their own computers. It's killed everything inside," he replaced the instrument back into his pocket, "Do you have a briefcase I can use?" Beatrice handed hers over, and Foster slipped the laptop inside, along with Dr. Anwar's back-up disc and locked it, before sitting it on the floor.

There was a soft knock on the door. Foster whipped around and pulled out his weapon, "Get behind the bed!" he whispered to Beatrice. She did as she was told. Foster laid himself against the wall so that he'd be behind the door when it opened. There was a second knock. He nodded for her to answer.

"Uh...yes? Who is it?" She asked, her voice quavering.

"Housekeeping, miss!" came the voice outside the door.

Foster grimaced - he knew as well as she did that housekeeping did not bother the hotel occupants at 5:30 am - it had to be trouble! Readying his weapon, Foster nodded for Beatrice to speak again.

"Come in!" she called from behind the bed.

With lightning speed, Foster grabbed the intruder's arm as soon as he got past the door. He threw the man on the floor and slammed the door shut - it was Dr. Abdullah! And, he was armed!

"Put the gun down!" Foster hissed.

Abdullah dropped his silencer weapon and sat up, "I should have killed you when I had the chance!"

"What do you want here?" Foster demanded, as he kicked Abdullah's gun under the bed. He walked over to the desk and held up Dr. Anwar's laptop - "Is this it?" He dangled it tantalizingly close to the man on the floor. He could see Abdullah eying it anxiously.

"What have you done with the mummy?" Abdullah spoke in that unearthly voice Foster had heard him use in the morgue.

"That's no longer your concern," Foster told him, then repeated, "What do you want here? You want the girl? You want her?" He indicated a shaken Beatrice, who was still half crouched behind the bed, cowering.

"You're both a threat to my mission," the alien voice spoke through Abdullah.

"You can kill us, but that's not going to help you find the mummy. No. There's some other reason you dropped in here, isn't there? Beatrice, what else could this camel shit want from you? Have you got anything in this room attached to the mummy? An amulet? Something from the tomb itself?"

The blonde girl arose from her spot behind the bed, "I've... got the lapis scarab I found out at the dig site. Dr. Knoke let me bring it here to have it looked at by some expert metallurgists.

I hadn't got round to it as yet....," she went to her suitcase, pulled out the small wooden box, and handed it to Foster.

Abdullah watched her every move. His eyes widened at the sight of the semi-precious stone scarab. Foster took it out of the box with one hand by flipping the cover off and neatly catching the beetle with his nimble fingers. He looked it over, all the while keeping his weapon trained on Abdullah, "Maybe this is what our friend wants."

"It's no good to you," Abdullah's voice was calm, but strange.

Foster was still holding the scarab, slowly caressing it with his fingers, as he watched Dr. Abdullah on the floor, "But, it must be good for something, or else you wouldn't want it so badly!" He said thoughtfully.

Abdullah suddenly lunged at Foster with a knife, throwing him off-balance. Foster heard a soft plop, and watched, stunned, as Abdullah fell back to the floor in what appeared to be some sort of weird slow motion. A red stain began to appear on the front of his shirt. He moved his eyes from Abdullah lying on the hotel room floor up to a terrified Beatrice - standing there holding a gun.

"What the hell...?" Foster dashed across the room just in time to grab the fainting Beatrice. The gun with its silencer fell out of her hands - Foster recognized it as the one he'd taken from Abdullah and kicked under the bed - obviously Beatrice had retrieved it and hidden it in her pocket while she was cowering in fear. Not such a dumb bunny after all!

He lowered her to the bed and pocketed the gun himself, as well as the scarab. Then, he got a cool wet face cloth from the lavatory and placed it on her forehead. He had to sidestep the now dead Dr. Abdullah every time he moved.

Beatrice started to come around as Foster gently slapped her face, "Come on....," he said quietly, "We haven't got time for this now!"

"Uh...what happened?" she tried to sit up, holding the cold compress to her face.

"You saved my life - again," Foster smiled, "I had no idea you were such a good shot." Beatrice followed his gaze down to the floor and stared at Dr. Abdullah's body.

"My God! I killed a man!" Beatrice gasped.

Foster pressed her back down onto the bed, "Look, I know this seems awful, right now. It *is* awful - having to take a life. But, it was him or us. And, frankly, I'm just as glad you chose us. If it makes you feel any better, Dr. Abdullah was...no longer *himself* ...he was working for the forces of evil. He didn't have any control over what he was doing."

"You mean he was...brainwashed or something? Like in the '*Manchurian Candidate*'?" Beatrice asked, wide-eyed.

"Yes...something like that," Foster decided it was easier to let Beatrice accept that idea than tell her the truth - that an alien intelligence had taken over Dr. Abdullah's body!

"Now what do I do? I killed him...my fingerprints will be all over the murder weapon!" Realization of the seriousness of her situation was setting in - Foster watched her blue eyes mist over with tears.

"You've been watching too many episodes of '*Cracker*', my dear....," Foster sighed. He couldn't just leave her behind to take the heat for the death of a man controlled by aliens, "You'll have to come with me. But, we have to hurry. Time is of the essence. I don't know how long the others held the plane for us, and we have to get out of here before somebody reports hearing the gunshot, even though the gun had a silencer. I'll take the chance and call them on my cell phone."

* * *

Before they left Beatrice's hotel room, they wrapped Dr. Abdullah's body in a sheet and stashed him under the bed. There was little they could do about the blood stain on the carpet. Foster wiped their prints off the virus-destroyed laptop, the door handles and the bathroom fixtures. Not that it was going to help all that much - the room was registered to Beatrice. She'd be the first on the police list of suspects.

Foster used his cell phone and was chagrined to discover the SHADO transport had been ordered to leave two hours earlier - Straker was demanding delivery of the mummy. He explained their circumstances briefly to Leslie, who told Foster he'd have two commercial plane tickets ready and waiting for them at the airport outside Cairo in Heliopolis.

"What about my passport?" Beatrice asked anxiously, packing her suitcase.

"Take it. I've got a credit card we can use to rent a vehicle."

Foster rented them a car, using his UN alter-ego Omega credit card and an international drivers' license. They got a small Jeep brand vehicle and Foster took the wheel. He headed out to Cairo's International Airport. It was a lengthy trip - the airport was located at Heliopolis, about 25 km outside the main city. On the way out, Foster instructed Beatrice to act as unassumingly as possible. They would pick up their tickets, proceed to the gates, and get on board the British Airways flight to London.

One of their important considerations was to ditch the two guns they were carrying. They'd never make it through airport security scanning with them. Foster wanted no trouble on this last leg of the mission. The frustration of not being able to get back with the others had to be put aside. He rubbed the weapons clean of fingerprints and deposited them in a garbage dumpster before they arrived at the airport. They had to wait in the airport a little over an hour before they could board their flight out. Beatrice was understandably jumpy and nervous. Every security guard frightened her. It was on both their minds that Dr. Abdullah's body could be discovered at any time - even though they'd posted the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the outside of the hotel door. Someone must have heard the gunshot and reported it. Beatrice had no trouble imagining every person who walked by could be a plain clothes police officer, coming to arrest her. She buried her nose in the women's magazine Foster purchased for her and tried to calm her mind.

When the announcement to board their flight came over the PA system, Foster took Beatrice by the arm and walked her to the gates as nonchalantly as if they were heading off on a well-deserved vacation. He smiled at her and chatted innocently about going to the Tower of London, and visiting other sights of interest. She couldn't believe he could put on such a performance, when she felt as though she was about to jump out of her own skin! Nonetheless, she followed his lead, and nodded and smiled inanely - her mind awl with a thousand fears. The flight attendants looked at their passports, compared photos and directed them to their seats.

"Nice of Leslie to book us first class tickets," Foster smiled as he assisted Beatrice into the window seat. He'd taken the aisle seat so he could move about if necessary. He hoped there would be no trouble on this flight, but he was a long-term survivor of Murphy's Law, and wasn't in the habit of relaxing his guard. However, he was able to look relaxed when the occasion called for it. "Relax," Foster whispered to Beatrice, "We'll be in the air soon."

They put on their seat belts and listened to the flight attendant prattle on with her preflight shpeile about the location of the exit doors in case of an emergency, and how to get the oxygen masks down, etcetera. As the aircraft started to taxi down the runway, Beatrice grasped Foster's hand, closed her eyes and started a deep breathing technique beside him.

"What are you doing?" Foster asked her, frowning.

"I'm trying to relax and you're interrupting my breathing exercise," Beatrice replied, tightening her grip on Foster's fingers.

Foster rolled his eyes, "You're..."

"Afraid of flying, yes!" she finished for him.

"Any other little phobias you might like to mention while we're at it?"

"Uh huh...why haven't we taken off yet? Is there something wrong with our plane?"

Foster leaned in towards Beatrice and her window. She was right. Instead of taking off, their airliner was actually turning around and heading back to the tarmac!

CHAPTER THREE

December 7th, 2002 - Cairo airport...

"Ohhhh, sheee-iiit!" Foster whispered in frustration, as he watched the airport get closer and closer from the plane's window.

"Why aren't we taking off?" Beatrice's frightened voice was urgent, and she was squeezing Foster's hand even more tightly.

"I don't know...but it can't be good...", his mind was racing - were they turning back to the airport because the police had discovered Abdullah's body and wanted them off that plane? This situation was getting out of hand..., "OK, this is what we're going to do. When they order us to disembark, you and I are going to be in the washrooms. There's over one hundred people on this flight - all different nationalities - it's going to take a few minutes to unload everyone. If they're really checking for us, they'll have to look all the passengers over, check their passports, shit like that. As soon as everyone's off, we'll have to get off the plane and get out of here. Fast."

"What can we do? We left the car keys at the rental desk."

"I don't know yet, the first thing is to elude the police - if that's what this is all about - which we don't even know yet. But, we can't take chances. We're just going to have to get out and I'll call Leslie to let him know we had to jump the flight."

"This is crazy - maybe I should just give myself up," Beatrice whispered back.

For a moment, Foster agreed with her - it would be easier for *him* if she gave herself up, and he didn't have to worry about dragging her around with him. He could just hop a jet and get out of there. But, she knew too much, even without knowing exactly what it was she knew! If the police questioned her, she'd spill her guts, and then the authorities would be able to tie Abdullah's murder into the whole issue of the mummy's disappearance very quickly. Too quickly. And, what was he going to do with her when he got her back to Britain? He made his decision.

The flight attendants were speaking now over the public address system, assuring the passengers that there was no need for concern, that the plane was merely being detained for security purposes and they'd soon be on their way. As the aircraft taxied up to the passenger loading corridor, Foster and Beatrice slipped silently into the lavatories and locked the doors.

Foster poked his head out of the bathroom about ten minutes later. The passenger area was empty - even the flight attendants were nowhere in sight. He moved out, down the center aisle, and peeked out the entrance of the plane, but he could see airport security guards, wearing their white arm bands, too closely for comfort, and the exiting passengers were lined up so a group of men in police uniforms could interrogate them all. This was not good. He withdrew back inside the passenger compartment and looked out the windows at the area surrounding the airport.

Even if he got off the plane, where the hell were they going to go? They could slip out onto the tarmac and climb the fence surrounding the airport, but where would they go from there? Could they somehow slip off the plane into the airport and grab a taxi to somewhere? Heliopolis was home to at least one major hotel - could they put up there to avoid the authorities?

He stuck his head in the cockpit as he turned back to the washroom area. He noticed one of the officers had left his jacket and airline cap with its British Airways insignia sitting on his seat. An idea crossed Foster's mind...

He grabbed up the hat and coat. He didn't have a tie on, but maybe he could squeak by. The jacket just barely fit, as Foster had a broader chest measurement than the captain, obviously. He went back to where Beatrice was holed up in the ladies' lavatory and knocked softly on the door.

"Beatrice, it's me - I think I can get us out of here..."

* * *

Beatrice managed to straighten her hair up in the lavatory mirror. She didn't have any make-up, but if they could just get off the plane and head out the front door - it was risky - and daring. But, what other choices did they have? Foster shouldered the strap of the briefcase containing the laptop, and he deposited the lapis scarab in the outside pocket.

When they got to the end of the loading gate, they made a sharp turn to their right, and headed quickly for the front entrance of the airport. Foster's gambit with the airline cap and jacket meant they were paid little attention by the people milling about in the terminal building. They stepped outside to the taxi area and walked up to one marked "Moevenpick Casino Hotel."

"Excuse me, we just got in from London," Foster said in his best British accent, "We have reservations at the Moevenpick."

The driver reached back and opened the rear passenger door, "We offer complimentary transportation to and from the hotel for those with reservations. Where's your luggage?"

Foster laughed convincingly, "Would you believe we made the flight but our luggage didn't? I hope there's a shop close to the hotel!"

Beatrice preceded Foster into the taxi, and they pulled away from the curb, just as the uniform-clad policemen were exiting. They didn't pay any attention to the hotel cab as it headed out of the airport parking lot.

The Moevenpick Hotel and Casino was a modern, five-star facility, located on the Cairo International Airport Road. The two fugitives went to the front desk and Foster used his credit card, which if course was not registered to Paul Foster, to secure them a room.

As soon as they got inside the room, Foster used his cell phone, "Yes, it's me. We're at the Moevenpick Hotel in Heliopolis. Couldn't stay on the plane - they unloaded everyone looking for us. I'll tell you later how we got out of there! Look, we need another way out of this place. Can you set us up with something else? They've got the airport crawling with police and security. What about by rail or by sea?" He was pacing about the room, drawing the drapes, checking things out, "At this point I don't care if it's a garbage scow - just get us the hell out of this country! Ummmm...yes, well, I can manage that. Just a minute," Foster turned to Beatrice, who was sitting on the bed watching and listening to him, "Do you suffer from mal de mer?"

"What's that?" she asked.

"Seasickness!"

"Ah...well, I can't swim a stroke..."

"I'll take that as a no...", he went back to speaking to his cell phone, "Al, just get us something we can sneak out on. It doesn't have to be the QE II. A cargo ship is fine - leaving from where? I'd rather not have to take the train - it's too easy for them to canvass all the train terminals looking for us...yes, we can get there - I'll rent a car - or a camel - we can make it to Alexandria. When does it leave?"

Beatrice was looking up expectantly as Foster folded his cell phone shut, "What happens now?"

"For now, we stay put. But, if we want to make that cargo ship, we have to be in

Alexandria by 6:00 am tomorrow morning. We can get off at their first port of call and get a flight out to Heathrow. Let's order some room service and get a bit of shut-eye. We've got a long day ahead of us!"

* * *

December 8th, 2002 - On the road to Alexandria...

Foster tried to make it seem nothing out of the ordinary when he and Beatrice presented themselves at the car rental desk at 4:00 am. The noise from the hotel's casino was still quite audible - a melange of human voices, music, and slot machines. If the man at the desk thought their request so early in the morning was peculiar, he didn't say so. He simply had them fill out the necessary forms, Foster used his credit card, and the keys were handed over. Foster asked for an SUV, so they could take the highway quickly.

They were at least cleaner than when they'd signed in several hours before. Both had showered, eaten, and Paul had made a very quick trip to the small hotel shop which sold such necessities such as men's and ladies' extra undies, toothbrushes and toothpaste. They'd had a few hours sleep too, so at least they didn't look the part of fugitives from the law.

"Why do you think Dr. Abdullah wanted that stone scarab?" Foster asked, as he drove the SUV at top speed towards Alexandria.

Beatrice removed the lapis piece from the briefcase and looked it over, "It's probably worth a good bit of money on the black market - it's a very finely crafted piece. Private collectors pay scads of money for this type of item. There's been a lively market for antiquities for several hundred years. But, as a historical artifact, its worth is incalculable. A piece like this belongs in a museum."

"I doubt very much Abdullah wanted it for the black market or a museum," Foster thought aloud, knowing the alien intelligence controlling the late Egyptologist wouldn't have been much interested in human currency, "There must be something else special about it."

"Dr. Knoke looked it over very carefully when I first found it. He noted the odd hieroglyphics, but that was it."

"What do the hieroglyphics on it say?"

"We give her our hearts - that's on the top of the scarab - but I don't understand the glyphs on the bottom very well."

"What's on the bottom? I looked at it, but I don't read ancient Egyptian! It's all Greek to me, I'm afraid!" he grinned.

"The markings on the bottom allude to a literal giving of the hearts - it's not a euphemism for worship or adoration - at least that's what Dr. Knoke said. And one of the glyphs indicates the goddess comes from the stars."

Knowing the aliens were possibly engaging in the traffic of human body organs even 3000 years ago was something of a surprise Foster - this discovery was proof that the aliens - wherever they were from - had been coming to planet Earth for thousands of years - not just decades as they'd originally thought. And, they'd found a way to coerce a less sophisticated human society to willingly hand over body organs as part of a religious cult!

"You mean, the worshipers of this cult committed human sacrifice?"

"That's what we didn't understand. The ancient Egyptians sometimes sacrificed totemic animals to their various gods, but not humans. Not that we know of. Other cultures around the world are known for human sacrifice - for instance the Mayans of the Yucatan Peninsula. They performed ceremonies in which the victims had their hearts ripped, still beating, from their bodies - as messages to the gods. But, Dr. Knoke felt the glyphs meant more than that,

and the artwork in the mummy's tomb suggested hearts, as well as other body organs, were consecrated to this supposed goddess."

"So there's no religious precedent for this in Egyptian history."

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Had you done any scientific dating procedures on the mummy or the scarab?"

"We didn't have time. Now that your people have possession of the mummy, what will they do with it?"

"They're probably doing all the pertinent analyses as we speak. I can assure you, they're very thorough."

"Will they ever give it back?"

Foster considered for a moment before he answered her, "I rather doubt it. Its very existence is proof of some very important theories. And, like all discoveries of this type, it opens up a whole new list of questions." He had to keep her thinking the mummy had been appropriated for archeological reasons. There was no need for Beatrice to think otherwise.

"You're not really an archeologist, are you?" she said, matter of factly.

"What makes you say that?"

"Most real archeologists don't carry around guns, or steal mummies."

"Oh, I'm a regular Indiana Jones," Foster smiled, "I just don't carry a whip or wear a fedora."

"And, you're not really with the United Nations?"

"Let's say I'm an international trouble-shooter. I take care of...certain situations. In secret, as much as possible."

"Have you ever killed anyone?" Beatrice's voice was very soft.

"It's happened," Foster said quietly, staring out the windshield. He knew where this conversation was going, and he didn't want to get into it.

"Even if I get out of Egypt, even if I don't face the law, I'll still know I killed someone."

"Without trying to minimize the seriousness of Abdullah's death, we do have some serious circumstances of our own right now which need to be resolved. You killed Abdullah protecting me. But, we have to get on that ship and get out of Egypt. And, I'm taking you with me in an effort to protect you. Let's just leave it there for the time being."

* * *

Alexandria was an ancient city. It was the fabled first century AD Egyptian capital in which Queen Cleopatra took her own life, after the suicide of her lover Marc Antony. It too was experiencing new archeological interest after divers had begun underwater exploration in the waters just off Alexandria's port, searching for the famous queen's palace and temple complex. A city of four million inhabitants, Alexandria was a bustling, modern metropolis, and Egypt's primary port on the Mediterranean.

Foster and Beatrice dropped off their rented SUV, and took a taxi to the dockside, where they would find the ship which would take them back to Britain. They'd been booked on a work-a-day cargo ship, not a luxury liner - that much was evident. The ship had several ports of call, the first one being Tel-Aviv, in Israel.

Beatrice wrinkled her nose at the potent scents of the dockside. Fish, petrol, salt water, rotten fruit. It was all there in the busy port. Once aboard the ship, they didn't have much time to wait until they sailed out of Alexandria's harbour, and headed for the Israeli capital.

They were standing on deck, looking back at Egypt when Foster said, "Beatrice, Al made arrangements for us to get off in Tel-Aviv and fly out of there via a private jet. We'll go direct

to London."

"What happens once we get to London? Are you...going to give me up to the authorities?"

"No. Certainly not. We'll work something out. You might not be able to go back to Egypt, but I'm sure there are other sites around the world where an archeologist would find work."

Beatrice surprised him by suddenly throwing her arms about his neck, "Paul, I'm just so *scared!*"

Foster slowly put his arms around her - she was shaking with exhaustion and fear, "Look, once we get back to Britain, things will be better. You'll be able to put this whole episode behind you and get on with your life."

When she looked up at him, Foster saw something dangerously akin to passion in her blue eyes. He was aware of the dynamics between them in terms of their flight from all the trouble they'd just been through. But, Beatrice was young, impressionable, and he was a mature man, not about to take advantage of her distressed mental condition. He unwound her arms from his neck as politely as possible, "You're tired, you should go below and try to get some rest. We'll have a long flight from Tel-Aviv to London."

* * *

The moist dark silence of Foster's room was stirred by the bed covers moving. He sat up quickly, alert to everything. He could feel a body beside him, and ever vigilant, he reached out in the blackness and grabbed something soft.

"It's just me," he heard Beatrice whisper.

He relaxed slightly, "What are you doing in here? Shit, I thought..."

"I didn't mean to startle you - I just couldn't sleep."

Foster could feel her curling up against him under the light bed sheets, "Beatrice, I really don't think..."

She cut his words off with a kiss.

Without wishing to appear cruel, Foster knew he had to diffuse the situation, "We've had a pretty rough time of it, I know, but whatever it is you think you're feeling right now, it isn't about us, okay? You're just feeling scared and that's natural. But, doing this is not going to make things any better. It's just going to complicate the situation."

Beatrice laid her head on his shoulder in the darkness, "Can't I just stay here with you?"

Sighing, Foster said, "On one condition - you give up this silly romantic nonsense. Be a good girl now," he admonished her.

"You make me feel...safe, I guess."

"Well, I won't feel safe until we're back in England, so let's get some sleep. We have to disembark at Tel-Aviv and get our flight out."

Beatrice sat up, "Paul, why did you and your men have to steal the goddess mummy?"

"Go to sleep. We'll discuss this in the morning if we have to."

CHAPTER FOUR

December 9th, 2002

Early morning found them getting ready to leave the freighter in Tel-Aviv. They hired a taxi to take them from the port area out to a private charter airfield, where a plane was waiting for them - this time not a commercial flight - but an un-logged SHADAIR craft. Foster wanted no more chances taken with getting home.

They boarded right away, and were in the air shortly thereafter. Foster plugged in the laptop he'd brought with him and accessed some top secret communiques. He received orders on how to handle Beatrice and her accidental involvement with the mission to secure the mummy. Both SHADO and Omega officials wanted to ease her out of the whole thing, without having to go the route of any kind of mental tampering if possible. It would be better for all around if she thought this business was the work of the United Nations, and not some covert organization. Foster had orders to install her at a secure travelers' hostel owned and operated by the Omega Corporation, and Omega had already arranged for Dr. Knoke and the people in Egypt to believe she had returned to Scotland hurriedly, before the death of Dr. Abdullah, due to a family crisis back home. That way the police would no longer be looking for her in connection with his death and her standing with her archeological mentor could be retained. She would, within a month or so, be able to return to her work in Egypt, unscathed, and hopefully none the wiser.

Beatrice slept most of the way back to London. She was exhausted. Foster looked over at her, lying on one of the couches in the passenger compartment - dead to the world. He didn't know her exact age, but from her looks and character, assumed she was in her mid-20's. She made a rather fetching picture on the couch - her long blonde hair spread out, her fair skin. He smiled ruefully. The "old" Paul Foster would have taken Beatrice up on her sexual invitation. The mature Paul Foster had become much more protective of himself and of his life. And, after more than twenty years with SHADO and Omega, he had a different view of getting involved with people on any level.

* * *

December 10th, 2002 - Back in Jolly Olde England...

The Lion's Gate Inn was located in a quiet district of London. Foster made sure Beatrice was checked in, given her room, and had some food sent up from room service.

"What happens next?" Beatrice asked him anxiously.

"Well, I promised we'd take care of you and we will. The Egyptian police no longer think you had anything to do with Dr. Abdullah's death, so you'll be free to return to that country. And, we contacted Dr. Knoke - he thinks you left to handle a family crisis at home in Scotland. He'll be expecting you back to pick up your work with him again shortly," Foster noted the relief on Beatrice's young face, "We've secured first class air tickets for your return to Egypt, and you'll be provided with some fresh clothes and luggage for the trip. Your stay here is also prepaid and you can dine or take advantage of the Inn's services free of charge for the next week."

Beatrice was sitting on the bed. She looked up at Foster, "Will you be staying here too, Paul?"

"No, I have to return to my work."

"What about the goddess mummy? How will I explain to Dr. Knoke that she's been taken and we'll never get her back?"

"That's all been taken care of. Dr. Knoke received some communications from our people explaining the situation. But, he is free to continue working his concession in the Valley of the Kings until the deadline is up. If Howard Carter was right, there should be plenty of 'finds' left there for smart archeologists to discover!"

"You never have told me why your people took her away in the first place," her voice sounded sulky, like a child's, "If she was an alien being, that's important scientific news."

"The UN has decided that she should be carefully examined and preserved - she's not the property of whichever archeologist found her - she is a historic treasure which belongs to the whole world. I'm sure when the reports and studies are finished, they'll be released to the press," Foster knew that last statement was a bald-faced lie, but Beatrice wouldn't know it.

"Where is the mummy now?"

"At a special lab, being examined. She'll receive the utmost in scientific and archeological care, believe me!"

"Is the lab here in London? Can I visit her and see the work being carried out?"

"No. It's a high-security lab."

"Do you have access to that lab?"

"I suppose, yes. But, I have other work to do, and I won't be going."

"What happened to the lapis scarab beetle?"

"I still have it."

"Are you going to give it back?"

Foster felt a red flag go up in his head, "As an artifact, it belongs with the mummy."

"I'm the one who found it first," her voice was sounding distinctly peevish, "You should give it back to me. I can't see what good the scarab would be to your people. Our team should get some reward for finding the mummy."

"I'm sorry, Beatrice, but I have to turn the scarab over to the lab, as well."

Beatrice moved with such speed, Foster could barely credit his own eyes with the reality of the situation. Gone was the insecure little girl. Instead, a purposeful young woman was standing over him, aiming a high-powered handgun at his head, her voice strangely distorted, "You will take me to that lab immediately. And, you will hand over the scarab to me!"

* * *

Foster stared at her. Beatrice still looked normal, but he knew that somehow, at some point in this whole situation, she'd been taken over by alien intelligence. Just how and when it had happened, he couldn't figure out. He'd never seen it coming. And, where had she obtained the weapon? Had she taken it off the SHADAir plane? There was a weapons cache on each aircraft...He knew he had to buy enough time for him to disarm and neutralize her as a threat, not just to himself, but SHADO security. He had to stop her from compromising the whole operation. And, he didn't particularly want to end up dead, either.

"You're going to go downstairs and rent a car for us, just like in Egypt. I'm going with you, so... no funny stuff," Beatrice used the gun to gesture Foster out of his chair and over to the door.

"Beatrice, I don't think you really want to do this..." he started to say.

The gun came back up towards his head, "Just do as I say, or I'll blow your head off." The words came out quietly, and as matter of factly, as if Beatrice had been suggesting which restaurant they dine in.

"If you kill me, you'll never get to the labs."

"Get moving. Now."

* * *

...on the road to the secret SHADO labs...

Fifteen minutes later, Foster and Beatrice were on their way out of London in a rented car, with Foster behind the wheel, the gun held at chest height. Beatrice had retrieved the lapis lazuli scarab from Foster's briefcase, and was carrying it in her pocket now. Foster was curious - why was that little ornamental artifact so important to the aliens? Dr. Abdullah had wanted it too, and Beatrice had killed him. But, now, Foster wondered if killing the doctor had really been to protect his life, or to prevent Abdullah from getting his hands on the scarab. Both Beatrice and Dr. Abdullah were alien-controlled - but why would the aliens work against each other? It would have been so much simpler if Beatrice had joined forces with Abdullah - they could have killed Foster and taken the scarab.

"What's so important about the scarab, Beatrice?" Foster asked, keeping his eyes on the road. He was purposely driving below the required highway speed and was planning on taking a very long, circuitous route to the labs to buy some time for himself.

"That is not necessary for you to know."

"Why did you kill Dr. Abdullah? It would have been easier for you to kill me and go with him."

"The scarab was not for him."

"Then who's it for?"

"Her."

"Which her?"

"That is not necessary for you to know."

"Do you mean the mummy? The goddess?"

"Just drive."

Foster wasn't through interrogating her, but he knew he had to tread lightly. He didn't want to piss her off too much, "Why do you need to see the mummy?"

"She has the power."

"Power? She's been dead for three thousand years!"

Beatrice pointed the pistol more closely at him, "You don't understand."

"Then, make me understand. Tell me why the mummy is so important."

"You couldn't understand."

"Why? Because this is some alien thing?"

"The power is in her. I only know that."

"The aliens are using you, Beatrice. They don't care about you, or me, or the whole human race. They want something very badly - so badly they're willing to sacrifice us all to get it. Do you really want to serve their evil purposes?"

"I have no choice. I must get to the mummy. Before it's too late. It may already be too late."

"How could it be too late? Too late for what?"

"You will stop asking questions now."

"You're a smart girl. You know you're being used. You can fight it. You can say 'I won't do it.' You can refuse."

"I don't want to refuse. I want to know. To see for myself."

"That's the archeologist in you talking," Foster suggested, "Part of you is still conscious of everything that you're doing. They haven't taken you over completely - you can still shake them off."

"Just drive."

* * *

It was late in the evening when they finally arrived at the secret SHADO lab. Foster had wasted a great deal of time, driving about in circles, but Beatrice finally realized what he was up to and threatened again to blast him if he didn't immediately head for the lab. He opted to obey her, in the hopes he could get some help from the security people at the lab.

Beatrice told him to park outside the lab complex, and they would walk in. She was still wielding the pistol.

"You have special clearance to enter this installation?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You will take me inside, and you will help me find the goddess mummy."

"What can you possibly do once you do get to her? You'll never get back out. The security people will stop you, even if I can't. You can't hope to remove the mummy itself!"

"I don't have to. She has the power."

Foster was getting pissed off. He was no closer to getting any real answers from Beatrice, even though he approached the questions from different angles. He hoped that once they were inside the lab complex, he'd be able to alert the security people and then they could interrogate her in earnest. And her constant comment, "She has the power," didn't make any sense at all. How could a 3000 year old, dead alien mummy have any kind of power?

"We're not going through the front entrance - there must be another service entrance we can access," Beatrice informed him.

"I don't have a security card to get into the service entrance."

"Is there an intercom system to the outside?"

"Yes...", Foster reluctantly admitted.

"Then, you will take me to it and we will get inside that way," she motioned him forward with the gun.

* * *

Foster managed to convince the technician who answered the intercom that he required access to the building. He showed his security pass to the closed-circuit television camera, while Beatrice stepped out of camera range, but kept her weapon leveled at him. Usually such scientific facilities had credit-card style entrance passages instead of CCTV, or fingerprint reading gadgetry - Foster was surprised.

Beatrice pocketed her pistol before they entered the door, but kept it trained on Foster through her jacket. The security guards inside did request Foster to give his SHADO security card, as he hoped they would, and they did a voice print and a fingerprint test on him as well. When they looked at Beatrice and asked for her ID, she smiled very sweetly and said, in a normal non-alienized voice, that she was Foster's guest from Egypt - there to work on the mummy brought out a few days earlier. For some reason, the guards didn't question this. Foster was on the verge of breaking Beatrice's cover, when he saw she had re-pocketed the lapis scarab. Was the scarab some sort of ancient alien device? Why hadn't the guards stopped her dead in her tracks and refused her entry? There was more to this than met the eye. Foster himself had handled the scarab but he felt no traces of alien intrusion in his psyche. He realized it was now up to him to play this whole charade out and discover what the mummy and the lapis scarab meant to the aliens.

* * *

"Well, Doctor, this is certainly one of the most unusual finds SHADO has ever been

involved in," Straker commented, "I simply would not have credited it had I not seen it myself! A three thousand year old alien - with her innards intact, and spares kept in these canopic jars to boot! And, she doesn't look at day over twenty - not like a standard Egyptian mummy at all - she looks natural - like she might wake up at any second."

Dr. Raychaudhuri, like Straker, was wearing a special lab suit, "She seems to have been 'packaged' intact, as though was she expecting to be sent back to her home planet. She's even wearing the thick inner eye coverings we've seen on aliens for the last 30 years or so. But, the linen bandage wrappings, and the amulets, seem purely ancient Egyptian, fashioned from three thousand year old materials. I sent some of them and samples of the linen for dating. Why she's in such a natural state, I can't even begin to guess until we do more tests. Egyptian mummies almost always have the lungs, stomach, intestines and liver removed, and the brain destroyed and removed. In this specimen, the brain is intact, as are those organs."

"What do you think could have happened? Why did she end up buried in the desert of Egypt instead of going home?"

"To speculate would be useless, without any kind of documentation, and as far as we know, none was found in her tomb. No papyrus. Not much in the way of inscriptions on the sarcophagus or her coffin. Leslie and Little photographed everything they couldn't take with them. The only artifact missing appears to be a lapis lazuli scarab beetle - the mate of it was found inside the mummy's wrappings - it's made of carnelian. Foster is supposed to be bringing the lapis scarab back with him for analysis."

"Speaking of which, his flight came in earlier today. I haven't heard from him yet," Straker peeled off his rubber gloves, "Do you mind if I use your phone, Doctor?"

"Not at all."

Straker had just gone out the door and picked up the phone receiver, when Foster walked into the anteroom for the lab, accompanied by Beatrice.

"Paul, we were just talking about you...," Straker's voice trailed off as he saw Beatrice, "Who's your friend...?" The lab was totally out of bounds for visitors and guests, and Straker knew that only too well.

Beatrice pulled the weapon out of her jacket pocket, "I will see the mummy now." She leveled it at both Straker and Foster.

"Houston, we have a problem...," Foster looked at Straker.

* * *

Straker stared at Beatrice, "Who are you?"

"My name is not important. You will take me to see the mummy."

"You don't have clearance."

"But, you do."

"How the hell did she get in here?" Straker demanded of Foster.

"I take full responsibility for this, Ed. The aliens have control of her - I'm not sure how it happened. But, she wants to see the mummy, and as you can see, she has a rather compelling reason for getting me to do as she wants," Foster nodded towards her pistol, "She seems to be rather single minded about this mummy business - she says the mummy has 'power.'"

"Power? The alien mummy is dead! I just saw her for myself!" Straker exploded.

Beatrice pointed the gun now at Straker alone, "You will take me to the mummy."

"What do you want with the mummy? Why do you want to see her?"

"She has the power."

Foster rolled his eyes at Straker, "That's all I can get out of her, Ed. I was actually hoping

we might get more answers if we gave her access to the mummy."

"You could have given me a heads-up on this, y'know, Paul," Straker's expression was grim.

"It wasn't possible. I didn't realize she was under alien control until a couple of hours ago. I drove around in circles and stalled about getting here, hoping I could talk her out of it, but no dice."

Straker addressed the waiting Beatrice, "You realize the mummy has been thoroughly examined. We took the linen wrappings off already."

Beatrice stared at him, "What did you do with her amulets?"

"Some of them were sent out for carbon dating. Some of them are still here."

"Is the carnelian scarab still here? The scarab placed over her heart?" Straker was searching his memory from the info session he'd just had with Dr. Raychaudhuri.

"I...think so...is that amulet important?"

"Just take me to her."

It was obvious they weren't going to get any further with her - she answered questions with questions.

"You'll need a special suit to go into the lab," Straker told her.

Beatrice shook her head, "No tricks. Just take me to the mummy."

Straker shrugged and held open the lab door.

"You two go first. And, remember, I have a gun."

* * *

Foster and Straker passed through the lab door. As Beatrice came in behind them, Dr. Raychaudhuri's voice said, "That's far enough!" and she placed the business end of her own pistol against Beatrice's neck.

The two men turned and grabbed Beatrice together, disarming and holding her immobile.

Straker's voice was full of relief, "Doctor, you're a wonder!"

"I heard what was going on," the Bengali exobiologist threw Straker some spare linen bandages from the mummy, "You can tie her up with these for the moment."

In only a few seconds, Foster and Straker had Beatrice secured to a chair. She hadn't reacted much. Foster reached into her pocket and removed the lapis lazuli scarab beetle, "I think I'll just take this back," he told Beatrice. He looked at it and then handed it over to Dr. Raychaudhuri, "This amulet seems to be the cause of a lot of trouble."

Like Foster, Dr. Raychaudhuri scrutinized the scarab, "It doesn't look much different from the other scarab I removed from the mummy's wrappings. Except the other one is made of carnelian." She laid it down on the table beside the other.

Beatrice started to squirm in her seat, but the other three were busily examining the two scarabs.

"The hieroglyphics on the carnelian scarab are actually a little different, I think," Noted Dr. Raychaudhuri, "See these here?" she had turned over both scarabs and was running her fingers down them to show Foster and Straker, "I'm not an expert in ancient Egyptian, but they both have the same figures, and then the texts diverge at the bottom of each beetle."

"We give her our hearts - that's what Beatrice said was on the top of the lapis scarab text - but she couldn't - or perhaps wouldn't - translate the markings on the bottom for me. All she would say was that the figures on the bottom suggested an actual handing over of living hearts - not a euphemism for worship or adoration. Apparently one of the glyphs says the goddess comes from the stars," Foster explained.

"If memory serves me right, the ancient Egyptians did not commit human sacrifice," Straker commented.

"They didn't," Foster looked back at Beatrice who stilled her struggles against being bound in the chair for a moment, "But, I think this mummy is evidence of an alien-inspired cult - one which demanded the sacrifice of humans to their worship. And, the aliens took the organs for themselves!"

"How in the name of all that's holy did the aliens convince the cult members to sacrifice their own people?"

Beatrice's alien voice rang out, "We were gods! We came down from the stars and saved the Egyptians! We gave them life! We taught them everything!"

The three at the examining table swung around to stare at the young alien-possessed woman. Foster walked over and leaned down to her, "What do you mean you taught them *everything*?"

Beatrice looked up at him defiantly, "Everything. Everything they were. Everything they became. Their culture, their religion, their art - everything. For thousands of years we guided them! And, they turned against us. We asked so little in return - and then they refused to give us what we wanted - what we needed!"

Straker shook his head, "And, I thought all that talk about aliens in ancient Egypt was bull shit."

"What are the scarabs for, Beatrice? Why do the aliens want them? Why does the mummy have power?" Foster was nose to nose with her.

She looked away from Foster, "They're not for you."

"Bull shit, Beatrice!" Foster got in her face even more, "You're going to tell us what's so important about those scarabs. I give the orders here now!"

With lightening speed, Beatrice's now unbound hands came out from around the back of her chair - she grabbed Foster by the throat in a death-like vise grip, "No, you *don't*!"

Straker made a grab for her, but Beatrice threw him back against the far wall with a seemingly superhuman feat of strength. He slid down the wall to the tiled floor, stunned.

Foster was choking, gurgling, as Beatrice's fingers tightened on his throat. With an ease that belied her delicate human skeleton, she lifted the struggling Foster off the floor, staring up at him with a fixed hatred in her blue eyes, "I'll give the orders here!" And, she threw him too against the wall. He fell to the tiles, gasping for air. Beatrice advanced on Dr. Raychaudhuri, "You will give me the scarabs - NOW!"

The doctor picked the scarabs up off the table in one hand, the other hand in her pocket, "Here! Catch!" As Beatrice scrambled to catch the airborne scarabs, Dr. Raychaudhuri closed with her, and jammed a hydraulic syringe into her chest. Beatrice looked down in shock as she saw the Doctor's hand with the instrument. It took a moment or two, until finally the drug took effect and Beatrice sank to the floor, the scarabs still clutched tightly in her hands.

Foster and Straker were finally on their feet, "I'll call Security!" Straker puffed, out of breath.

Dr. Raychaudhuri knelt down and checked Beatrice's vitals, "She's alive - just barely!"

* * *

December 11th, 2002

Beatrice was safely ensconced in a special SHADO medical bed, complete with restraining straps. Dr. Jackson had taken on her case as soon as she was admitted to the medical ward, and Dr. Raychaudhuri had filled him in.

Straker and Foster convened a meeting in Straker's office to discuss the situation, and had asked Leslie, Little and Raychaudhuri to attend. They were going to need everyone Beatrice had come in contact with. Alec Freeman was also involved, to give him a briefing on the matter.

"Dr. Raychaudhuri, how is the patient?" Straker asked.

"She's holding her own. The drugs have worn off, and Dr. Jackson is running a battery of tests. They're keeping her restrained. While she was under the alien control, she had superhuman strength. I've never seen the like before, but Dr. Jackson told me SHADO had to deal with several alien-induced "Psychobombs" back in the 1980's. I'm hoping to receive some preliminary reports within the hour."

"Is she still under alien control?"

"We're not certain one way or the other yet - hence the restraints. She could easily injure herself or someone else."

"What has the lab come up with on those scarabs?" Foster queried.

Leslie spoke up, punching buttons on his laptop, "First thing we did was scan the scarabs. They're not just Egyptian artifacts. They're a pair of alien devices. The outside of the scarabs are covered with gold and lapis and carnelian, but inside, they're crammed full of extraterrestrial gadgetry."

"Any idea what they're for?" Freeman said, as he sipped his coffee.

"From the internal configurations, we think they work together somehow. We're not just sure how as yet," Little supplied, "Because we don't understand their possible interaction, we may transfer them to one of our more isolated installations before trying to determine their actual use. The lapis scarab was found outside the actual tomb in Egypt, the carnelian scarab was found by Dr. Raychaudhuri in the course of unwrapping the mummy. Scarab beetles were an important religious icon for the ancient Egyptians, and from the archeological research we've done, the beetle amulets were placed over the mummy's heart during the wrapping process."

"Beatrice kept saying saying the mummy had the power, but we couldn't get anything out of her about the scarabs - except she wanted them both!" Foster commented.

"The mummy is intact," Dr. Raychaudhuri answered, "She has all her internal organs, two hearts, and her brain. The eight canopic jars found with her carry mummified organs, Egyptian-style. As General Straker saw in our lab, the mummy is not typical of other mummies found in Egypt. The body is still very normal looking in appearance - as though she just died a moment ago. From the tests we've done so far, there has been no deterioration of her organs at all. This is basically impossible - not only for ancient Egyptian mummification means, but for 21st century medical practices. We do not have the medical technology to maintain that kind of naturalness - not even the bodies of Vladimir Lenin and Eva Peron could claim to be this well preserved!"

Everyone at the table was quiet for a moment, digesting this last tidbit of information.

Freeman asked the question that had been on everyone's mind, "How did an alien woman get left on planet earth three thousand years ago, and what was she doing here in the first place?"

"If Beatrice's ravings are to be believed, the aliens were coming here and using the naivete of the ancient Egyptians for over a thousand years - giving them low-grade technology and conning them into sacrificing their own people to satisfy the aliens' need for human organs," Foster replied, "It would explain a lot of questions scientists and archeologists have

had about older civilizations here on our planet."

"Yeah, but I never read anything about the Egyptians doing human sacrifice," Leslie cut in, "Just the Mayans and Aztecs of Middle and South America."

"What if the aliens moved on to fresher territory when the Egyptians refused to continue the cult? Maybe they didn't leave the planet, just the continent," Dr. Raychaudhuri suggested, "Human sacrifice to the so-called gods continued for hundreds of years in other societies, even in my own country - India. And, there are odd similarities - such as the pyramid shape used in both the Egyptian and the Mezo-American civilizations. Archeologists have been pondering that question for years."

Foster was thoughtful, his chin resting on his fist, "Well, Beatrice did mention something about the Egyptians turning against the aliens. Are you saying the aliens simply uprooted themselves and their operation and transferred it to South America? Or some other less-advanced society here on Earth?"

Dr. Raychaudhuri shook her head, "I am merely speculating. I have no historical or scientific proof to back these theories up. But, it is fascinating, to say the least."

Little shifted in his chair, "Didn't the Spanish Conquistadors put an end to the practice of human sacrifice among the Aztecs and the other tribes they encountered when they came to the New World?"

"Yes. Human sacrifice for religious purposes was still very much a part of the Mezo-American psyche by the 1400's. The Spanish invaders brought priests with them, who began the wholesale work of converting those tribes from their pagan religion to Christianity," the Doctor added.

"But, since the aliens would have been more technologically advanced than the Spaniards, why didn't they just take them over too?" Freeman wanted to know.

"What was happening in these cultures at that time?" Straker asked.

Raychaudhuri lifted an eyebrow, "The Spanish brought with them many diseases. The natives they didn't kill outright in their wars of invasion, they killed insidiously with new illnesses the natives had never encountered before - smallpox, measles - which seriously weakened the remaining native population or eradicated vast portions of it. We know a number of Mezo-American cities were evacuated and left to become part of the landscape - archeologists have been excavating places like Chichen Itza for years. Maybe the aliens just pulled out and decided to wait for a better time to come back here."

"Or maybe, the aliens discovered, as a result of the Spaniards, that not all humans were as primitive and easily controlled as the ancient Egyptians or Mezo-Americans," Little suggested.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this whole discussion is never going to be fully answered - we're not archeologists," Straker interjected, "Our job is to find out how those scarabs are utilized, and to learn as much as possible about that mummy lying in Mitali's lab. And, why the aliens have taken control of two human beings so far to get at them!"

* * *

December 12, 2002

Straker wanted the opportunity to interrogate Beatrice more fully after some of her tests. There were too many questions only she could answer - if she was still under alien control. It seemed that Beatrice's alien persona knew a great deal about the aliens' Earth operations in ancient times. But, it was information about the purpose of the scarabs and the reasons she wanted access to the mummy that were uppermost in everyone's minds.

SHADO's commanding officer went with Foster to see Beatrice in her infirmary room. Dr.

Jackson would be part of the interrogation team, and he brought along a video cam and a tray full of drugs. Beatrice was sitting up in bed, still held in restraints. An IV drip had been installed in her right arm, and there was a heart monitor attached to her chest.

"I'm not going to help you. I won't tell you anything," Beatrice said, her voice defiant.

"You won't have a choice in the matter, my dear," Jackson smiled unpleasantly, "At the risk of sounding like a movie cliché, we really *do* have ways of making you talk."

Foster leaned over Beatrice - he tried to appeal to that part of her which was still human, "Beatrice, I know you're still in there. I know you'd prefer to help us solve this mystery, even if it's just for your own curiosity. You're an archeologist, after all. Just talk to us. Tell us what we want to know. Fight this...alien thing...that has taken you over."

Big tears slid down Beatrice's face, "I can't..." she whispered.

Straker nodded to Jackson, who filled a syringe and injected a drug solution into Beatrice's IV tube, "This should have an effect, General, but because of the alien control, I can't say exactly how long we'll have to wait."

Beatrice closed her blue eyes. About ten minutes later, her breathing changed. It became softer, less laboured. Dr. Jackson set the video cam on pause so he could start recording the moment she began speaking.

Sitting down beside her bed, Straker spoke quietly, "Beatrice...can you hear me...?"

She looked as though she were drowsing, but her mouth opened slowly, "Yeeeeesssss..."

Foster and Straker shot each other quick looks, "Where are you, Beatrice?"

"I'm...I don't know...I feel funny..."

"We'd like to ask you some questions."

Beatrice's mouth moved in a strange smile, "Where's Paul?"

"I'm right here, Beatrice," Foster leaned forward again and took her hand in his.

"What are the scarabs for?" Straker asked, his voice lowered.

She was silent, her fingers moving back and forth on Paul's hand.

"Why are the scarabs so important to the aliens?" Straker changed the words of his query.

"They give her the power..." she replied softly.

"Her?"

"The Goddess..."

"You mean the mummy..."

"Yesssss..."

Foster spoke up, "You told me earlier she had the power - what kind of power?"

"The scarabs..."

Straker's mouth pinched in frustration, "But, what kind of power do the scarabs have?"

"They're...for passage."

Foster looked up at Straker, who said, sotto voce, "What the hell does she mean by 'passage'?"

"Passage to where?" Foster asked gently.

Beatrice smiled again, "Passage to the stars - home."

* * *

Straker's mouth dropped, "Where is home?"

"In the stars..."

"Where in the stars?"

"You can get there from Giza...you go to Giza first..."

"What has Giza got to do with the alien home world?" Straker queried, puzzled,

"Giza...the Giza we know in Egypt?"

"The Great Pyramid of Khufu...", Beatrice replied softly, "The scarabs will do the rest...just point them in the right direction...put them in the passageways..."

"What do the scarabs do, Beatrice?" Straker was getting fed up with how the girl spoke in circles and riddles, "How do the scarabs provide passage to the alien home world?"

"They work together..."

"Where is the alien home world?"

"I told you...in the stars..."

"Where in the stars? What part of the galaxy?"

"The pyramid...Khufu's Pyramid knows...", the girl's voice was almost inaudible now.

"General, I don't like her vital signs! She's going into cardiac arrest!" Jackson sprang to Beatrice's bed and grabbed her...

* * *

"Is she alright?" Foster asked.

Jackson nodded, "For now, anyway. We just about lost her. I'm not sure why. The drug shouldn't have been the cause, but since she's under alien domination, perhaps there is a contravention we didn't know about."

Straker patted Jackson on the back, "Good work, Doug. We finally got some information out of her - even if the answers she gave us opened up more questions!"

"I'll keep you posted on her condition, General," Jackson went back into Beatrice's infirmary room to check on her.

Straker and Foster moved off down the corridor, "This is just getting weirder as we go along, Paul. Giza. She intimated that Giza was the jumping off point for the alien home world, and the scarabs would provide 'passage.' What does that mean?"

"Leslie said in our briefing that the scarabs were crammed with some kind of alien technology inside - and that they obviously were meant to be put together somehow. Maybe we should just take them to the Great Pyramid at Giza and find out!"

"I guess we better get the research department working on the Giza site - we'll need to know as much as possible before we get there."

"I can take care of this mission, Ed."

Straker shook his silver head, "Oh no, you don't! I'm going with you this time! If this whole thing leads to the whereabouts of the alien home world - I'm going to be right there to see it for myself!"

CHAPTER FIVE

December 14, 2002

Foster and Straker sat down with Leslie and Little at the briefing table, "Alright, gentlemen, what have you got for us?"

Leslie nodded and used a special mouse to illuminate a large computer screen on the wall. The first image was an overhead schematic of the pyramid site at Giza, "Here's where we're headed. It's a short ride out from Cairo by car. There's three pyramids on the site, all dated to about 2,550 B.C. and later. All were built by three pharaohs of the Forth Dynasty. Most modern archeologists have them pegged as tombs, but there's been a lot of conjecture about the pyramids having a different use altogether, especially since no mummified kings' bodies were ever found inside them."

Little spoke up next, as Leslie flicked his mouse to the next illustration, an interior photo of one of the pyramids, "This picture is from the inside of Khufu's Pyramid, the largest of the three, and the first to be constructed on the site. Those dark spots on the walls are the exits for two narrow shafts which were built into the pyramid. Researchers have found the shafts have blockages part of the way up inside, but archeological astronomers have calculated that the shafts are aimed at a specific place in the sky - as it was in ancient times. These may be the 'passageways' Beatrice mentioned."

Foster sipped his coffee, "Where are the shafts aimed?"

"The constellations of Draco - and Orion."

Straker's voice came out softly, "Jesus."

Foster let out a long whistle, "So the alien home world could be somewhere in Orion!"

The other men stared as Straker put his hands over his face. His shoulders were shaking.

"Ed? Are you ok?" Foster leaned over and put a comforting hand on the General's shoulder.

"...I never saw it...I never even saw it...", Straker muttered, his voice hoarse with unshed tears.

"Saw what?" Little wanted to know.

Straker looked up, his large blue eyes swimming, "Kovac! She named her alien baby Orion!"

* * *

The other three men were stunned into silence for a moment. They knew Straker had been at the epicenter of the Kovac episode two years ago. And, they were only three of the very few who'd been privy to the whole matter.

Tina Kovac was a Canadian astronaut whose NASA space shuttle had been destroyed in a shoot-out between alien forces and SHADO. The world thought Kovac and her crew were dead - lost in the shuttle. The truth was, they'd been secretly recruited for SHADO, because they'd seen too much that day in space.

Straker had made Kovac his special project at the time. She reminded him somewhat of himself - opinionated, hard-driving - and full of remorse over putting her career ahead of her spouse and her children. Her geographical expertise was needed for a SHADO mission to flush out an underwater alien beach-head base in Canada, and in the process, the aliens captured her and impregnated her with a half-human, half alien fetus.

Kovac gave birth to the hybrid child in SHADO's top secret British installation, but something went wrong after the birth. She became paranoid; afraid the SHADO people were

going to harm her child because of his alienness. Dr. Jackson was certain there was some sort of unusual psychic bond between Kovac and her alien progeny - but before he could conduct the tests which would prove his theory - Kovac took the child and escaped back to Canada. She returned to the location of the former alien base - as though she were following some sort of homing beacon - and despite SHADO and Omega attempts to prevent it - left on an alien ship with her child. That child's name was Orion.

Now, SHADO had come into possession of ancient alien technology and information which suggested the constellation of Orion was where the alien home world could be located. It was the information SHADO and Omega had been working towards for the last thirty years or so.

Straker straightened up in his chair, "Gentlemen, we have some very serious work to do. How soon can you three be ready to fly to Egypt?"

Leslie looked down at his watch, "Gimme an hour - I'll have everything we need collected - and a SHADAIR flight booked for us."

"Right, then. Let's get on it," Foster instructed, as they all rose from their seats.

* * *

December 15, 2002

It hadn't been an easy thing to get government permission to go out to Giza without the usual tourist activity. Finally, the Egyptian agency in charge of Giza granted them permission to go at night, when the site was quiet and closed down from the day traffic. They were masquerading as a documentary film crew.

While it was true they wanted to videotape whatever took place in the Great Pyramid, that was a secondary concern. They still had to get rid of the Egyptian officials who insisted on accompanying them to Giza. Understandably, the Egyptian government considered the pyramid site to be not only sacred, as a historical location, but it provided an enormous source of tourism revenue. For a number of reasons, they were very protective of the pyramids.

The SHADO team met three archeologists from the Egyptian government at a parking lot at the site. It was already planned that Little would serve as the photojournalist who would engage the archeologists in a series of interviews outside, using the Great Pyramid as a backdrop, and therefore keep them suitably occupied, while Leslie, Straker and Foster went inside to investigate Beatrice's alien-induced claims. They had no idea how much time they would have inside, until the archeologists started getting restless with Little's endless questions, or suspicious of the three inside alone for so long.

"I'd like to film you right here," Little said to the three archeologists, "I'll just set up my lights, so we can have some good illumination, and the pyramids in the background will look super. Maybe what we can do, is I can ask each one of you to address certain aspects of the necropolis site, here, and then I'll film your comments. That way I can get you all in, and we can get some good footage of the outside area. In fact, would it be possible to have at least one of you climb up a few feet onto the outside blocks and look down at me as you speak for the camera?"

Flattered to be filmed for a documentary, the archeologists seemed very accommodating. They were eagerly listening to Little outline the different comments he wanted them to address. Meanwhile, Straker, Foster and Leslie said they were going to scout around inside the pyramid for some "good interior shots."

Inside the Great Pyramid, electric lights shone brightly, making it easier for the three SHADO men to walk the distance from the outside entrance into the Grand Gallery and then

the King's Chamber.

"My God, how did such a technologically backward civilization build something like this?" Foster was looking around at everything.

"If Beatrice was telling us the truth, they may have had help," Straker replied, his own eyes darting all over the place.

Leslie had his video camera at the ready, and he was carrying the alien scarabs, wrapped carefully, in his camera case. He opened a compartment and took out the scarabs, "Let's see if we can put these things into the shaft openings."

Foster came over and took the lapis scarab from Leslie, "According to our research," Leslie pointed to first one shaft, then the other, "The northern shaft here points 32 degrees towards Alpha Draconis, in the constellation of Draco, and the southern shaft over there points 45 degrees to Al Nitak, in the Orion constellation."

Straker nodded, "Well, gentlemen, let's test this theory out, shall we?"

Leslie handed his video cam over to Straker, and he and Foster went first to the northern shaft.

"There's a tiny indentation mark here at the bottom of the shaft," Leslie commented, placing the carnelian scarab into it, "And, it fits perfectly."

Together, the men walked to the southern shaft, and placed the lapis scarab into a similar indentation. Nothing happened. They waited in silence for many minutes. Finally, Straker took the video cam down off his shoulder, "I guess this means we're back to square one." His voice was quiet and his expression one of resignation.

"Shhhhh!" Leslie silenced him abruptly, "What's that?"

A low humming had begun. It thrummed with increasing intensity, while the SHADO men listened, and looked about for some sign.

Suddenly, pale ribbons of light poured out of the pyramid shafts and joined in a spot in the centre of the King's Chamber floor!

Straker, Foster and Leslie were transfixed - stunned by the appearance of the alien light show. They cautiously walked around the lights, watching, videotaping.

"What the hell is it?" Straker asked, looking at Leslie, "Is it anything like what you found in the Yukon last year?"

Leslie shook his head, "That was a time portal. Whatever this is, it doesn't have an aperture to show us what's on the other side of the light. The portal we found was controlled by a special piece of equipment, hooked to the alien ship's propulsion unit. All we did here was to put the scarabs in the shafts. No idea what the power source could be."

"Is it powered from this end or the 'other end'?" Straker asked.

Leslie shook his head, "I'd say they're being powered from this end, but when this thing worked, thousands of years ago, there must have been an end point to it."

"Give it your best shot, Al."

"It could be somewhere in the constellation of Orion. But exactly where in Orion - I can't even speculate. The shafts are pointed at two different stars, one in Orion and one in Draco. I don't have the equipment here to triangulate a location. Outer space is a big place. Plus, the original locations have moved over several thousand years. The stars are no longer located exactly in their original spot in the heavens as they were when the pyramid was originally constructed."

"So, can we shut this thing down from our end? I mean, we've got to be able to get those scarabs back out of here somehow. Little won't be able to stall those nosy government

archeologists much longer," Foster reminded them.

"No other way to find out except....," Leslie shrugged. He and Foster carefully skirted the beams of light, until they were beside the shaft openings, "Let's try it together and see if we can just 'turn them off' by taking them out of the indentations."

At the same moment, Foster and Leslie reached in and snatched the scarabs out of their spots inside the shafts. There was a soft hissing sound, and the light beams disappeared. Leslie retrieved the lapis scarab from Foster and returned them to the pocket in his camera case.

Straker went over to the northern shaft and placed his hand inside the indentation where the scarab had been resting, "It's actually warm in here."

Leslie checked the southern shaft, "This one is too. In fact the scarab itself is warm..."

"What the hell did we just see?" Foster wondered aloud.

Chewing his thumb, as he always did when he was nervous, Leslie said, "I've got a theory..."

Straker nodded, "We won't laugh no matter how improbable it is."

"I think we just saw one end of a transporter device."

Foster grinned, "Al, you've been watching too much Star Trek."

"No, seriously - think about it. Beatrice said the shafts and the scarabs together would provide passage 'home' - wherever home is. But if this technology really is three thousand years old, the other end of the transporter may have been lost, or destroyed, or rendered unusable without the earth end keys."

"The Earth end keys have been lost for several millennia and that's why the aliens were so intent on getting the scarabs back!" Straker supplied.

"Right! It wasn't the mummy herself they wanted, but the carnelian scarab - the mate to the lapis beetle! The mummy was just incidental 'cause that's where the other scarab was - in her wrappings - and the transporter couldn't be operated from here without both scarabs!" Leslie added.

The three men were quiet for a moment, each considering in their own minds the ramifications of the aliens getting their hands on the scarabs.

"Here's another theory," Leslie said, "If the aliens lost these scarabs thousands of years ago - and they couldn't operate the transporter, and the discovery of the goddess mummy meant they could get them back - they could start using the transporter again."

"What would they send through the transporter?"

"Anything they wanted or needed. People, equipment - whatever. Beatrice said the aliens 'made' the Egyptians - made them what they were - gave them their culture, their religion - all that stuff. And, if the aliens cultivated a cult of human sacrifice, they'd have to have some means of gettin' the organs back to the home world for immediate use. Think about it for a minute - would the aliens risk themselves and their technology all these years - coming to Earth in spacecraft - if they had an easier, safer way of gettin' here? We don't know how long it takes the alien ships to get here from Orion, but I can bet it's a long-distance trip, even with their superior propulsion units."

Foster shook his head, "No matter how many years I've been in this business, something always ends up surfacing about the aliens that blows my mind."

A small beep brought the discussion to a close. Straker looked down at his pager-cell-phone, "That's Little - I'll bet those archeologists are on their way in here."

* * *

"I hope you gentlemen were able to get some useful footage," one of the archeologists

smiled, as they joined the SHADO men inside the King's Chamber.

"Yes," Straker smiled back, "I think we've got what we came for."

"We'd very much like a copy of your documentary when it's finished. For our families, you know. They'll be excited to hear we're going to be in a film about Giza."

"Mr. Little took down your addresses and e-mail sites so we can keep you apprised of our progress on the film," Foster commented.

"Well, if we're finished up, I'd like to get back to Cairo. It's late and we have an early day tomorrow," Straker told them. The archeologists didn't have to know the SHADO team was bugging out asap.

"You won't have to worry about tomorrow," the head archeologist's voice sounded strange, *alien!* "You're not going anywhere."

Straker was about to argue the point when he saw the man take a handgun out of his jacket pocket, "It was so nice of you to do all our work for us," he said, backed up now by the other two men, who also produced weapons.

"What's this all about?" Straker demanded, "I'll see to it that you all lose your jobs for this! Threatening a film crew..."

"Uh...Ed...I don't think they're working for the Egyptian government any more....," Foster suggested, quietly.

For a moment Straker was incredulous, then he rolled his eyes, "Shit!"

"We'll take those scarabs from you. You won't be needing them anymore."

* * *

"What scarabs?" Straker tried to look ignorant. The other SHADO men stared down at the floor.

"Which of you has them? Hand them over - now!" the archeologist's alien voice demanded.

"Look, we're just film-makers. We don't know what you're talking about," Straker replied.

"Those scarabs belong to us!"

"Who's us?"

The archeologist stared at Leslie, "We designed them. We built this place. For thousands of years we ruled here. And, we ruled well. The Egyptians served us. Then they rebelled. They turned their backs on us. And, for thousands of years, the scarabs were lost. Now the time has come to take back what is ours!"

"And, you think we're just gonna roll over and let you do what you want?" Leslie sneered.

"No, Mr. Leslie, you're going to die!" the archeologist raised his weapon and fired. Leslie went down immediately, landing on the hard stone floor. "Give me the scarabs!"

Foster leaned down over Leslie. He appeared to be checking his vitals, then he looked up at Straker and shook his head. Straker gritted his teeth against the anger, "You bastards! He didn't have them!"

The archeologist turned his weapon towards Straker, "Then, who does?"

"I do!" Straker snarled.

"Take them out slowly and put them on the floor! Then back away."

Straker knelt down as directed and fumbled in his jacket pocket, watching Foster and Little out of the corner of his eye. As he bent down and laid one of his knees on the stone floor, he glimpsed the two of them, and Leslie - open fire on the three alien-controlled men!!

Bullets ricocheted off the ancient stone walls, as the SHADO men and the alien-controlled humans fired repeatedly. In moments it was over, and the erstwhile archeologists

lay dead on the floor. Foster and Little went over to remove their weapons and make certain they were dead. It wasn't entirely unexpected that the aliens would make a last ditch effort to secure the scarabs for themselves, but the SHADO men had reason once again to regret the violence and death that came about as a result of the alien intervention.

"Nice to see you're still with us, Mr. Leslie," Straker huffed, getting up.

Leslie grinned like a naughty schoolboy, "Yeah, those lightweight vests are great!"

Straker looked around at the dead Egyptian archeologists, with something akin to anguish in his face, "Let's get the hell out of here!"

* * *

December 18, 2002

"How's Miss Millar?" Straker asked Dr. Jackson.

"She's not well. In fact, we really don't know what effect the alien mind control has had on her. She's not going to be able to resume her normal life for some time, I'm afraid."

Straker pursed his lips. Another life ruined by the aliens, as well as Dr. Abdullah and the three archeologists in Egypt. He hated the fact he'd gotten so cavalier about death, "Do what you can for her. She was just a pawn for the aliens, like the others in this case."

"Once we can determine the amount of damage in her brain caused by the alien interference, we'll be able to decide if any of our amnesia drugs will help her recovery. We obviously don't want her to remember any of this business."

"No, of course not."

"General Foster has been visiting her. She seems very attached to him."

"Yes, I know. They went through a lot together in Egypt. Paul thinks it's just a bit of hero worship. Please keep me posted on her condition."

That was Jackson's cue to exit Straker's office.

The intercom buzzed and Straker answered. Time for a major briefing.

* * *

Straker sat down at the head of the long table. Ranged along either sides were Freeman, Foster, Little and Leslie, along with Dr. Raychaudhuri at the far end.

"Well, I hope we can finally put some of the information we've gotten to some good use," Straker commented.

"We ran a lot of our collected stuff through the computers," Leslie started, "Looking for some correlation among all the astronomical data. We came across something so interesting we looked a little further into it. The Pyramids in Giza aren't the only ones sited to copy the belt of Orion. There are three pyramids at Teotihuacan in Mexico which are laid out in exactly the same formation! And, there's been some research pointing to Al Nitak as a prime meridian marker for the Great Pyramid at Giza and the Quetzalcoatl Pyramid in Mexico. Both pyramids originally correlated positionally with Al Nitak. We've never known how to find the alien home world because we didn't know where to look. No starting point before. Well, one of the Great Pyramid shafts points to this star group in the Orion constellation, Al Nitak. I'd bet real money on that one as the alien home system. There's a buncha stars in Orion, Al Nitak included, that have planets of their own."

Foster broke in, "Any Earth-like planets?"

"Too far away to tell for sure. But, we know the aliens are coming here from a dying civilization. Al Nitak's a triple group, with three separate stars, designated A, B and C. There could be plenty of habitable, civilized planets circling any one of those three. We know the aliens can't breathe our atmosphere - they need their suits and their green liquid - and their

ships explode within 48 hours on the surface, unless they're under water - so their home world may not be completely Earth-like."

Straker was sitting quietly, reflectively. He nodded for Leslie to continue.

"Another possibility is HR 1988 Orionis, half way between Al Nitak and Betelgeuse. It's a subgiant, which means it's either used up its internal hydrogen fuel or is startin' to do that. It's a much bigger sun than ours, and a lot cooler in temperature, too," Leslie punched up something on his laptop screen, "If you open that graphic I sent you, you'll see that it's about 138 lights year away from us and shows up on space photos pretty good. Now, research says this star has several planets. But, I figure Al Nitak should be our prime target."

"So, what can we do about this information, Al?" Foster asked.

"I think we should start concentratin' our astronomical division on that area of space and turn up the volume on the SETI Project. Get them to start listenin' in on Al Nitak for us. We don't have to tell them *why*."

"One hundred and thirty eight light years away..." Straker intoned slowly, "No wonder the aliens wanted those scarabs back so badly. Think of the time and effort that transportation device must have saved them thousands of years ago!"

"And," added Little, "If the pyramids in Mexico correspond to Al Nitak as a prime meridian, and are laid out like the belt of Orion, that suggests the aliens transferred their base of operations to Mezo-America at some point, as we hypothesized earlier."

"Shit," Leslie said quietly, "What if there's another set of transporter keys floating around somewhere? What if the pyramids in Mezo-America had their own earth keys!"

Foster's face fell, "After all the trouble we had keeping these 'keys' away from the aliens, it's almost too painful to contemplate the existence of even more 'keys.'"

"I guess we'll have to give our contacts in Chile, and Peru, and Mexico a heads-up on this, and get them to do some investigation into Mezo-American artifacts. What if there's 'keys' from those pyramids just sitting in some museum somewhere?" Leslie chewed his thumb nervously.

Freeman shook his head, "This is just too incredible to contemplate. In all these years, I never considered the aliens as having any previous contact with planet Earth. I just assumed they 'discovered' we were humanoid and went from there because they were desperate. But, to think they may actually have had a hand in human development - and exploited us for thousands of years under the guise of ancient religions - it's just too mind-boggling!"

"The aliens might have 'discovered' us centuries ago and decided we were worth their involvement, because we're humanoids too, and because Earth is rich in all kinds of natural resources. Even thousands of years ago, it would've been possible to mine on this planet in remote places, and pass those operations off as the 'doings of gods' to primitive man," Little suggested, "Leslie and I will be starting a research project this week, into profiling just what type of planet the aliens may come from, and Dr. Raychaudhuri will be helping us with the alien physiology aspects. We should be able to produce a report for you in a few weeks. The propulsion core project is still on-going, and we'll be pointing the SHADO telescopes at Al Nitak for as close a look-see as we can get."

Straker spoke softly, almost as though he was talking to himself, "I can't believe this was all in front of my face two years ago and I didn't see it..."

Freeman knew Straker was still hung up on the Kovac scenario. He cleared his throat, "Look, folks, why don't we reconvene here tomorrow and we'll finish off then? I'll e-mail you all with a time." Foster stopped and put a hand on Straker's shoulder, then filed out quietly

with the others.

"OK, Ed. Spill it."

Straker looked up, his big blue eyes sad, "I've waited almost thirty years to find out where those bastards were coming from, Alec. I lost my wife, my son, my private life - all of it given up in the search for...what? For a planet somewhere in the Orion constellation? To discover the aliens have been using humans for thousands of years? To find out the carnage and suffering was actually worse than we ever knew? To learn the aliens have been raping this planet since the days of the Pharaohs?" He shook his head, "I guess it's just so anti-climactic. And, then Kovac! I think that was one my biggest mistakes of the last ten years! I got *involved*, Alec - I *never* get involved!" his fist came down on the briefing table.

"Look, you're human. It could happen to anyone."

"But, I'm not just anyone! I can't afford to be in this job! I have to have my shit together. We had a half-human, half alien child in our possession, and we lost him, Alec! Why? Because I couldn't see the forest for the trees! Kovac must have been under the aliens' influence from the moment she conceived that baby, and I never even thought about it. I couldn't even be honest with myself about how involved I was. I stayed away from her when I should have been watching her for any sign of trouble!"

"Ed, you have a huge organization to run - you couldn't concern yourself with one lone individual," Freeman said.

"That's just it, Alec! I didn't! I expected everyone else to take care of it for me. And how did they manage it? We lost her - and the baby!"

"She went with the aliens of her own free will. We didn't lose her. She made that decision herself, Ed."

"But, maybe she wouldn't have made that decision if I'd been on top of things! If I'd showed her..." Straker stopped short.

"...What?"

"Alright, ok. I'll admit it - but it goes no further than this room, Alec - I loved her."

"I know."

"What do you mean you know?"

"I wasn't the only one who knew, Ed. Paul and Doug Jackson suspected, too."

"Damn."

"After Kovac left with the aliens, you pretty much kept to yourself for months. You weren't the same old Ed Straker. We knew why. And, it was more than just losing a half-alien baby."

"She was...a lot like me, Alec. At first I thought it was just narcissism on my part. You know, you meet someone with the same attitudes and drives - and regrets. When she went missing, my God, I went crazy! I knew if she was dead it was my fault for forcing her to go back to Canada when she wasn't ready. I've sent people to their deaths before - I know how that feels. But, this was different. I felt like I'd just killed part of myself. I hadn't felt that way since Johnnie died. And, that's a long time ago."

Freeman nodded; he remembered the intensity of Straker's suffering when Johnnie died as the result of a car-pedestrian accident in 1981. Since that time, Straker had pretty much lived for his work.

"When she survived the aliens, when she came home and found out she was pregnant - I remember this awful flash of jealousy. All I could think about was who she could have slept with. I was almost relieved when the DNA came up as alien," Straker lowered his head, "I was

with her the day the baby was born, you know."

"I remember that. You sounded just like a new father!"

"I thought I was going to go out of my mind when she disappeared. I couldn't even imagine why she left. Then we learned later how she'd been so affected by the aliens. Jackson even figured the birth of the baby may have triggered some sort of sub-conscious cue to go back to Canada in order to hook up with the aliens. They wanted her and that baby back. I told Paul and Al Leslie we had to have that kid back no matter what. But, I wanted her back too. Maybe even more than the kid. Now *there's* a confession no SHADO man should make!"

Freeman waited silently as Straker went on, "After Kovac and the baby left with the aliens, I didn't know what to do. I put up the portrait she did up in my office. I even asked Joan Harrington to give me Kovac's kitten. I guess I wanted whatever was left of her for myself," Straker grinned mirthlessly, "Y'know, Alec, that damn cat sleeps every night on my bed with me."

"If all our research is correct, we may find the aliens' home world. It might even be possible to find out what happened to Kovac some day. We've learned a lot more in this one month about where the aliens may come from than we've been able to discover in almost 30 years of fighting them. Maybe you and I will be retired by the time SHADO can send ships to that star system, but those who follow us will carry on," Freeman suggested.

"I just can't believe I didn't see all of this when Kovac named her baby Orion. I should have known. It all makes so much sense now. The aliens must have had so much influence over her that she knew they were from the Orion constellation. Think what she might have been able to tell us - maybe she knew the exact location of their home world!"

"How are we going to protect the scarabs? I can bet the aliens won't stop now trying to get them back - not when the scarabs are so important to them."

Straker nodded, "We'll be keeping them here, in deepest security. In fact, nobody except the people who were in this room will know where they're kept. The very thought of the aliens being able to reopen that transporter is frightening. Think what they could do to this planet if they could bring through whole armies and all their technology!"

Freeman shuddered, "The stuff of nightmares, that is."

"Exactly, Alec. That's why SHADO never sleeps."

* * *

EPILOGUE

Straker arranged for the alien scarabs to be placed deep within the SHADO installation in strictest secrecy and security. They would be stored in a series of sealed containers, and a security detail assigned which would rotate every 24 hours to prevent the aliens from seeking to grab one of the guards. Their security code name was "The Gates of Hell," and the only reason they were being kept at all was in case they could prove to be a marker to point the way to the alien home world in some fashion. As Leslie had suggested, research was going into high gear to examine as many Mezo-American artifacts and sites as possible. Straker shuddered every time he thought about the idea of more earth 'keys' just waiting to be discovered in some dusty museum storeroom. Could they stay one jump ahead of the aliens in this matter? Would the aliens be hunting relentlessly, as only they could, to find another set of earth 'keys', now that they'd lost the Egyptian ones?

Beatrice Millar was kept in SHADO Medical for several months, during which she was examined, analyzed and then given the amnesia drug to prepare her for entry back into the real world. Straker was very concerned that she might again become a pawn for the aliens if she returned to Egypt, but, it was vital that she resume something of a normal life to conceal what had actually happened to her.

Leslie, Little and Dr. Raychaudhuri formulated a detailed report, profiling the possible alien home world, and with research, posited several "candidates" in the Al Nitak star cluster. There was also a renewed urgency in the propulsion core project.

Straker took himself home the night he completed reading the final report on Al Nitak. As always, he used his 'Smart House' phone cues to turn on the interior lights, before entering. He walked in the side door, and found Cleo-Catra, the Siamese, waiting for him. She always knew when the lights went on, that Straker would be arriving home soon. The cat wound herself around his ankles, as ever, looking for attention. Usually, Straker would simply feed her and sack out with some paperwork. Tonight he bent down and picked her up into his arms. Cleo purred loudly, as he petted her and kissed the top of her head, "You miss her, too?" he asked the Siamese, blue eyes staring into blue eyes.

THE END