

CHAPTER 2
THE CHAMBERS - 1999

Spell 31

Get back! Retreat! Get back you dangerous one!
Do not come against me, do not live by magic;
may I not have to tell this name of yours to the Great God
who sent you; 'Messenger is the name of one
and Bedty is the name of the other.

With four teams working, together with three qualified personnel leading each team, the pace is in top gear. The place is humming. The four descending stairways have been completely excavated and cleared and they have discovered that they do lead into chambers that have been sealed off and probably later filled in. Six very beautiful black stone effigies of Amam, three on each side accompanied each stairwell on the north and southern steps. Only four in the east and western stairwells, but it appears that there should have been six as on the right hand side two of the buttresses have been left unoccupied. All these stone statues are all crouched, like the famous Sphinx of Gîza, and their back hindquarters are definitely those representing a hippo's. This is not only unusual for Ammut who is usually seen standing but the archaeologists are still confused over the style of the statues, which is unprecedented in Egypt's history. They are now sure that this whole site is Egyptian where the hieroglyphics are just visible in relief on the facades of the vertical walls at the bottom of each stairwell. All the specialists concur that this site is of religious significance from the very fact that all the construction seems to be out of stone and not brick. And comparing this alleged period with some of the mastaba construction at Saqqarah gives weight to their sketchy hypothesis. Very small statuettes have been unearthed - charms or amulets known as Wedja, were left behind to keep evil spirits at bay. These are typically Egyptian and many of them are effigies of Horus. With their tiny Falcon like heads Horus is the destroyer of evil forces.

From what could be deciphered from the hieroglyphs is that this is not a tomb, but a place to be kept secret. Out of sight away from the curious eyes of the Pharaoh, now that he is the true son of Amen-Ra, as well of out of sight of the people and tribes he ruled. Out of harms way, and out of reach for those who succumb to the calls of temptation, they could all live far away in tranquillity.

From the hieroglyphics it has also been established that this site belongs to the Old Kingdom. At a guess it's presumed to be from the period during or just after Pharaoh Khoufou in the fourth dynasty, famous for his Great Pyramid as well as being recognised as being the first manifestation born as the son of Ra. There is reference to him, but more recent indications tend to suggest the site is late fifth or sixth dynasty

that falls between the years 2465 – 2150 BC. But nothing is sure and there are still mountains of speculation and hypotheses to test as well as translations of what little remains of the relief carvings. One thing they are all sure about is that the site has some religious significance. The construction is out of cut stone similar to that at the site of Saqqara. At this time it was only the temples and tombs that were cut out of stone. Almost all other construction was done in clay and mud brick.

All the specialists more or less concur that these sculptures are strongly influenced by Asia Minor, the third Akkad Empire of Mesopotamia that would become part of Hittite, to be more exact, which is a little too far off from this region. The Hittite is known today as Turkey. But this hypothesis relies on the accuracy of the dating of the site. One mistake can snowball into a multiple of misconstrued notions, thus they are all treading carefully with 'could be' and 'may be' being the big players at the moment. The experts are also considering another landfall that is now referred to as Greece as another 'influence' alternative. Hal's observation of some weeks ago proved to be correct. All the discs worn by the twenty stone statues of Amem had the same type of crescent cut line tending to support the supposition that it is a representation of the moon and not that of the Sun. The supporting horns in this case are presumed to be an element from the divine mother, Hathor, but is still an element of debate as she is directly related to the sun, which has left nothing but subjective reflections. It is most probably nothing more complicated than being the horn's of Hathor holding the discs representing the moon in its place after all the moon was perceived as the night's sun.

Mona's team has marked out the large square of thirty-four and one half metres by thirty-four and one half metres of what now appears to be a buried inverted pyramid. They have unearthed a number of foundation deposits in the sandy earth of the four-corners. Tiny hand carved models of typical working tools is typical of the Egyptian's traditions. The main construction appears to be a step pyramid that has been quarried out of the solid rock ground pointing to the centre of the earth. This is the initial discovery that Gad and Hal had confirmed with the Magnetometry analysis. If this is some sort of quarry for stone it is very badly situated. To transport the cut rock from here up the Nile is one hell of a boat ride of about three hundred and thirty odd kilometres. Not that the Egyptians weren't capable as they were extremely resourceful when it came to matters of construction as they have already proved beyond all doubt but this hypothesis is very sketchy. And how did they get the roof over it if it is indeed a roof. On the surface not one demarcation has been found to confirm that this upside down pyramid really exists, other than four well camouflaged drains that run into the depths of this structure that have been discovered by the Egyptian workers who are used to this sort of excavation. These hidden Drains, obscured by cleverly placed natural pieces of rock, seem to run down the four-corners to the apex of this inverted pyramid some estimated eighteen metres deep thanks to the charts provided by Hal and Todd.

It was decided by Doctor Pittaloup to bring in the 'Peanuts Crew' to explore these drains. This crew's strange name came about because the leader of this particular team is Charley Brown, Todd's half

brother, who is married to Lucy Schulz. She works together with her husband following him and his crew to whatever – whenever. And to reinforce the joke they had nicknamed their computer freak, Abraham Everwitz, Linus being the intellectual and Ron Dainward they called ‘P-P’ (Pig Pen) or Slob, which he is. The final member is Sandra and of course they called her Peppermint or Patty. It is a perfect fit for Sandra as she continually sucks on Tic-Tacs all day long. If any of the team would be changed no doubt they would inherit the nickname of the replaced member. It is a tight crew and they have achieved a worldwide reputation in Exploration Robotics. Obviously they have named all their robots, from the very first generation to their latest models, ‘Snoopy’. Unfortunately it would be a couple of weeks before they could turn up on this site due to other commitments.

In the mean time the present teams will continue to work on the four encircling structures. Part of the task force is made up of Nubian folk, just as in the days long gone, as they are renowned for their hard work. They are more reliable than the Arab folk, and their distinguishing coffee coloured features set them apart from the others. Their traditional Galabias are more colourful than those of the north and speaking with them you can still pick up faint echoes of resentment. Resentment that resonates all the way back down the Nile back to the giant effigies of Ramses II at Abu Simbel. Stigmatised by the impropriety of the Pharaonic Empire the Nubian people have not forgotten. Nubia was a rich source for gold and red Granite and Egypt made sure that they were never short of supplies.

It’s time to break down one of the sealed off entrances at the foot of these strange steps into nowhere that appear already very impressive. The thirty-three sand coloured limestone steps that lead down into the sealed off chambers measure seventeen point two metres square. A total of two-hundred and ninety-six square-meters per chamber with the floor depth at seven metres twenty-six centimetres. There may have been two floors here.

Prying out the first stone of the sealed entrance that points north proved to be the most difficult, as it so often is. Both Doctors are present for this major event. The Gad stands off to the side with Hal who is beaming with enthusiasm. Stone by stone they opened the entrance. Behind the stone seal is another bewildering layer that is still blocking the entrance. Uncertainty ripples throughout the labourers. They throw worried glances at their boss Professor Abdel-Khaled who steps forward to inspect what had now become exposed after centuries of being buried.

Carefully he probes and picks trying to loosen one of these strange clay vessels. He turns to Jacques saying,

“Bastet”

“Are you positive?”

“Well it looks very much like it.”

“What is Bastet – other than what I call Todd on a bad day,” asks Gad.

Smiling Jacques replies,

“Cats. Mummified cats, to be a little more precise. But I will have to disagree with you. Bastet on a good day and Sekhmet on a bad one!”

“Why would you pile up a litter of dead cats. And why mummify them?” Hal asked.

“The messengers. These are the messengers that carry the true word to the world here after. Cats sacrificed and mummified become the Goddess Bastet the daughter of Re and goddess of love and birth. What is important is the fact that they are here. It tends to indicate that we are entering a tomb. Bastet is a part of the burial ritual.”

Professor Abdel-Khaled carefully slid out the first of many similar clay urns. The cover seal is already badly damaged thus picking away the little that is left he could slid out the contents. Turning towards the others smiling you could easily recognise that it is a mummified cat with a badly worn wooden mask of a Bastet and tatty stained crumbling remnants of bandaging, due to the lid being broken. This indeed is a pile of mummified cats.

“Don’t look so surprised Hal this was common practice. At the beginning of the twentieth century the English Archaeologists unearthed so many mummified cats that after sending them back to your homeland, England, they pulverised most of them using the dust as fertiliser.”

“You’re joking of course!”

“No I am not. It is a fact my dear friend.”

“He’s right Hal, and from one of the sites from the third dynasty, about two-thousand six-hundred and eighty-six, we dug up around five-hundred thousand mummified Ibis in sealed earthenware pots – very similar to what we have here.”

“That’s astronomical Professor!”

“Yes, indeed!”

A total of three hundred and thirty mummified cats were numbered and registered before being layed out into individual trays The best preserved are those that lay under the stone mantle of the entrance with a remnant of Maât carved into the stone. With her wings spread out horizontally in relief she portrays truth and justice, protecting what lay beneath her feet – the messengers. Here the hand-painted wooden masks are in an excellent state of preservation where the ornamentation is still visible and unusually elaborate. Most of the masks are in tact because the clay urns have remained perfectly sealed. The masks are absolutely beautifully crafted and extremely colourful. Everyone working here has passed by to sneak a look in awe at these recent discoveries. Doctor Pittaloup is concerned with these crafted objects because normally the Egyptians did not go to all the trouble of placing sophisticated masks over mummified cats. Jacques and Mahmoud are extremely curious why so much effort had been made. What could be so important way out here?

The presence of Bastet again supports the idea that these are indeed tombs even though all other information, like the hieroglyphics seem to contradict the fact. Both Jacques and Mahmoud are perplexed even though Mahmoud has difficulties and refuses to admit it.

Scooping up the last of the golden sand, which had filled most of the empty spaces, mixed with the orange clay urn fragments (as some had crumbled over the centuries) and the greyish dust of the decaying mummified cats, the space is clear. This is the final task before attacking the second sealing wall of the deep-stoned entrance. Again there are no clues as to what lies beyond this wall.

Carefully the stones are removed only to reveal another stone this time inside the chamber. It appears that the two doctor's reasons to believe that these chambers were filled-in, is actually plausible. Suddenly, as they are removing the final bottom layer blocking the entrance, they discover the bones of a human hand. A little disturbed by this discovery Mahmoud sweeps away the remaining dust and sand with light wisps of his brush.

"No mummification here!"

Sweeping under the large stone it became evident that the hand is badly fractured and the Radius and Ulna are crushed.

"Personally Jacques, I think this person has been literally been squashed to death by this fallen block of rock."

"Accident or premeditated monsieur?" Pittaloup asks perplexed.

"Your guess is as good as mine Jacques. I think we are going to excavate from the top. I felt that it was filled in so lets start at the top and work down."

"We are going to need heavier machinery."

Clearing the drift sand away from the top area where the chamber had caved in they discover some strange significant facts. During the manual labours of the Egyptian workers whose bare torsos glistened in the sun from their sweat glands having to work overtime they define the edge of a chamber that was not dug underground but cut out of the stone shelf. However this outer stone rim has an inward slope of fifteen degrees. There are also a number of grooves in the rock as if cut with the purpose of accommodating round wooden poles of about twenty centimetres diameter. The stones in the middle are obviously large blocks of two metres long, one-metre sections in height and width.

"I think these grooves served as slots to construct a temporary type of roof over what might be some sort of residence. What do you think Corinne?"

Doctor Corinne Cummings has joined the two other scientists as the leader of one of the other four groups who are working on the other chambers. With her black tight curly hair tied back, army green shirt with rolled up sleeves and pockets that look very full over each breast she hooks her thumbs into the pockets

of her knee high shorts and thinks before answering. Her heavy boots and thick socks kill any thoughts of seduction.

"I'm not sure Doctors. I have never seen anything like this before. Maybe Mona can help!"

Doctor Mona del Giocondo, an Egyptian Archaeologist, has also joined up with this small group of specialists. Even though Egyptian, with her maiden name of Salem, she married into an Italian family that was rumoured to have descendants that went as far back as the Roman Empire. Roman soldiers who never returned to their homeland who had become remnants from an invasion that would eventually watch the downfall of the Great Egyptian Empire - a turbulent time for all with the coming of Jesus Christ and his one god philosophy who had no time for Pagans. Mona knew that her husband's family had not been there that long, but surprisingly it did go back some five hundred years where her ancestral family had fled the Sforza political regime of Milano, sharing the same fate as the Medici families in the northern part of Italy. As fabric merchants the Giocondo family had opted to try their fortune in Alexandria. Victims of a planned conspiracy, against the wealthy and powerful families in Florence's flourishing economy, they decided to move as life was beginning to turn sour.

Mona is extremely good at her job and very professional. She stays clear of Mahmoud who tends to resent the fact that she became Christian dropping her Islamic beliefs. This was no big deal for her, but her boss saw it as defiance and treason, but it is all too late, Mona had already proved her worth to the Egyptian Institute of Archaeology before she had gotten herself married to a Roman Catholic. Mahmoud spat at the news and their relationship shrank into the decaying threads of a forgotten blood stained Coptic shroud.

Mona arrives just to catch Corinne's answer. Corinne continues sheepishly.

"And, well when we started the same work over yonder we discovered exactly the same grooves. It could be to support the structure for a roof. But why are these ruins spaced out around the central structure and not grouped together? It's as if their geometric position holds some significance." Corinne says scrapping a simplified plan view with her heavy boot in the sandy limestone shelf.

"I too would like to know the answers to that one as well. Do you have anything to add Mona?"

Mona threw an uncomfortable glance at Mahmoud before shaking her head saying,

"No not really."

"Good, well let's get on with it shall we?"

Jacques said wiping the beads of sweat from his forehead before they ran into his eyes that would sting like hell.

"I don't know how you guys can stay out in this heat so long!"

Mahmoud does not acknowledge Jacques last comment and goes straight to the point, ignoring the presence of the two women. Mona doesn't notice being so accustomed to Mahmoud's rudeness, anyway she had joined this merry group with the intention of catching up with Corinne, whom she wants to discuss

some of their most recent discoveries. They both turn their backs to the men and move off. The further they distance themselves between them and Mahmoud the more relaxing their conversation becomes.

Mahmoud is adamant.

“I think we could reconstruct what was here. I think these large blocks formed a wall around the edge as if they were the foundations of something they abandoned. Look here this block has two grooves as well that match the grooves on the rim. But they match the exterior not the interior so I’m inclined to think they were for something else.

Jacques walks over to the rim again measuring the distance between two of the grooves then the space between the next one. Measuring the grooves in the block corresponded almost identically to his second measurement.

“Well the stones were certainly placed around the edge. This pretty much confirms that.” He said showing the correlation between the two measurements.

The coming of sunset is always a relief for the occidentals working on the site. It is here they begin to live what they term ‘a way of life’. As the sun disappears together with the long shadows that seep into the darkening sand the crews start to disappear from the site back to their respective camps. The locals live mainly in tents, quite close to their military kin who are also sharing the luxury of similar accommodation. Fires are soon lit that will light up the area till early hours of the morning serving to cook meals and provide warmth during the cutting chill of the evening air. The workers mix well with the army soldiers, as often there are family members somewhere down the ranks. The Army is a two-year compulsory part of growing-up and becoming a man in Egypt, depending on your professional skills. Relaxing smoking apple tobacco through water pipes and drinking mint tea with pine nuts or swilling on local wine, only permitted for the Christian soldiers, while picking over some tender dates would fill in the early hours of the evening. The familiar sounds of friendly Arabic music with flutes and the soft tapping of drums would waft about in the air warming the hearts of all those sharing the camp. Some had bought out small radios, but the reception is so bad they find themselves creating their own entertainment. These cool nights is a time when all the specialists group together and share their plans and discoveries – helping one another to build a coherent picture of this extraordinary archaeological discovery.

The group has grown some over the last month. The original Ajex crew of nine has now grown to sixteen, not counting the worker and the military forces. The two specialists and their assistants Marilyn, Mona, Corinne and Brian are the six new major players. One more has just been added. Ihab arrived with his large machines a few days ago. Fortunately they can all still fit into one of the container offices that has been transformed into a conference room. Karim prepares bottles of chilled Stella and Meister beer and bottled cold water for their meetings. He adds small bowls of nuts, seeds and dates that they can all chew on while they discuss their progress. A little later he will bring Turkish Coffee and a huge hot pot of tea. Things are still not clear on the historical events comprehension so thus, as not to waste time on useless

speculation, they tend to plan the next moves of how to dig up the past rather than put together a convincing story. This will hopefully fall into place at a later date.

The Hydraulic Shovel has successfully and carefully removed most of the stones and rubble from the most northern pit. Having a construction engineer, Ihab Yehia, as part of the team is a great asset. Together with the two Doctors, Mahmoud and Jacques, they are able to establish that these pits were filled in on purpose. The large stones had been stacked three high around the perimeter of the building. These had then been pushed into these excavations that were once inhabited, but when? They had found remnants of wooden beams that had formed an open type roof that was more than likely covered with the branches of date palms. Obviously they had not been intended to be permanent dwellings otherwise they would have used stone slabs to cover the roof. No slabs of this sort had been discovered thus far. Many cutout holes, in the four surrounding walls, made it evident that there were two levels. Under the shade of the palm covered roof lay a wooden floor on the first level. Ceramic bricks blackened by soot indicated the presence some sort of a chimney. Some fragments of clay pots have been found suggesting the presence of wine and Olive oil. But they had not reached the bottom yet. Many of the large stones had been placed back to what is considered as being their original positions giving a very impressive picture that is still very obscure. The layer containing evil doings is yet to be uncovered.

The chat around the table tonight is more to do with what they are anticipating to uncover tomorrow when the work will begin at the first signs of dawn. The mystery of what they have really stumbled upon is no clearer than it had been over a month ago. They all share the disappointment that the chambers had been filled with rubble and stone, which has no doubt destroyed vital information about the site. There is little hope that the remaining three chambers will reveal anything different as they all suffered the same fate.

Sharon in her normal curious mood pops into the mobile conference room. Full of leisure smoke floating on the currents of the air conditioner. Sharon spots Gad down the far end of the trailer chatting to Jacques.

“Hey baby how they hanging?”

“Fine thanks, and yours honey?”

“I’ll just hang on to the ones I got. Hi Doc.”

“Bon soir, Sharon. Did you just fly in?” Asks Doctor Pittaloup while taking another drag on his non-filtered maize paper cigarette.

“Yep and I just flew a perfect triangle.”

“I’m sorry Sharon I don’t understand.” Jacques wheezed through his nicotine stained teeth.

“A perfect triangle – well as the crow flies as they say. From here to Cairo to Alexandria back to here is a perfect triangle – well almost.”

“Excuse me.” Jacques raised his voice. “Ladies and gentlemen it has just been brought to my attention that we may have discovered a vital piece of information by one of our Helicopter pilots.” Sharon blushes.

Weaving amongst his colleagues back to the centre of the table he stubs out his cigarette and slides the surveyors map out from under the piles of notes and papers to be able to illustrate and plot the trajectories.

“Look at this we have a triangle where old Memphis or Saqqara forms the apex, Alexandria the right corner and this place is the left vector. Is this just a coincidence? It does follow the form of the delta!”

A short silence was soon smothered by a host of chitchat bouncing back and forth like a whizzing Superball bouncing off the walls of this metal container.

Suddenly Jacques eyes are drawn into the map where he noted for the second time the coordinates of this dig. He had already noted them in his official report but thought nothing of them other than a normal expression of the site's location. He may be a heavy smoker but it has not dulled his wits.

Having to raise his voice again because of the babbling bees he asks, “Corinne, how many steps did you say for each chamber.” The small crowd calms down instantaneously.

“Well on the northern dig there are thirty three as with the southern site. On the east and western we have thirty one.”

“Thankyou Corinne.”

“Gees sounds like a damned compass” Sharon whispers to Gad but Mahmoud caught the tidbit while taking another puff on his short cigar and running one hand through the few grey strands of hair left on his almost baldhead.

“Could you say that again please Miss Shaw?” Mahmoud asked too politely.

“I said it sounds like a compass.”

Hal cleared his throat from dusty phlegm and blurted out. “The magnetic fields!”

“That is correct Hal. It seems we have a giant compass. And if we look at our preliminary drawings you will quickly observe that our four chambers are pointing to all the major cardinal points.

“Yes but there are magnetic fields in those chambers as well and that doesn't fit.”

“Hal what would happen if you set four magnets up around a compass?”

“Well the compass would be useless stuck on the same spot not knowing which way to turn.”

“If it is supposed to be a compass it would be one they didn't want to work. This doesn't make much sense at all. So far we don't know how much the Old Kingdom Egyptian's knew about magnetic fields. They had experience with astronomy as we have discovered in the research on the Great Pyramids but using a magnetised needle to navigate – this is a little far fetched.”

Jacques places the drawing on the map and lined it up as well as he could because of the difference in scale so that their sketch faces north.

“Well it doesn't line up exactly with north and south it a few degrees out so maybe they were partly guessing.”

“ I don't think they were guessing.” Said Mona looking directly at Jacques. “Just south of the site on this ridge here,” She points out on the map spread out over the table. “We have located a stone arc. One of the local shepherds has been using it for his sheep. At first I though it was nothing of interest until I noticed a number of unusual markings on the stone, typical of those mapping the movement of the stars. I have

spoken with Corinne on this and we both concur that it's an ancient plotter the Egyptian's used to map north. But what we do not understand is that they seemed to have ignored the data by a few degrees."

"Or choosing an alternative." Said Gad, laying his Swiss knife on the table equipped with a tiny compass.

"Look the northern site points directly to magnetic north."

"He has a point Jacques. Obviously they knew exactly what they were doing." Mahmoud replies still scratching his balding head like the barb of a prickle aggravating his concentration. The thorn is that Mona and Corinne had not spoken to him about their discovery before this meeting.

Brian offers up what he knows. Lanky mister goody good Brian is a tall skinny fellow that could have easily doubled for Mister Bean, but more in the vein of the 'Black Adder'. Although American, Brian has spent most of his professional career in Egypt. He considers himself to be Mahmoud's right hand man and Mahmoud is happy to let Brian think it.

"In the work I was involved with in Alexandria we discovered they knew about magnetic material as they had planed to suspend a statue of a Pharaoh's sister using magnetism in a small bell-roof temple. Unfortunately they never got it to work but a group of German scientists did a study on the theory and discovered that it is feasible. But this concept was devised three or four hundred years BC not two and a half thousand."

"At least we have a start. This tells us that the Egyptians had notions about magnetic fields at least three hundred BC. It's not a lot but a beginning." Mahmoud said still impressed with Gad's quick reflex on the magnetic north observation, adding; "But there remains a strong contradiction to this triangular hypothesis. Alexandria didn't exist if our site is in fact part of the Old Kingdom."

"As strange as it may seem they have discovered a series of statues and a marker type obelisk from the sixth dynasty near Alexandria that no one has been able to explain. Doctor Choron presumed they had been moved from their original location and placed there, but the reasons for this have never been explained."

"Brian do you think we could get some photo's of these objects as soon as possible?"

"Of course." Brian replies with that 'lick my arse' sort of smile.

Marilyn, as with Corinne, have not spoken at all and stay pretty much distant to all these so-called wonderful discoveries, but Marilyn is taking notes for her short bloated boss. Her distance and lack of participation is not because she isn't interested, but she has been directed by her overpowering boss to shut-up and not interfere. This is more than just a social issue surfacing about a woman's status in the Islamic faith, it has more to do with jealousy and who is the present heir of Egyptian Archaeology including who is actually running this show and eventually the whole charade. Marilyn has already discovered a few interesting things, which Professor Abdel-Khaled consequently either contradicted or shrugged off as being not relevant. Of course she has noticed, in their evening meetings, her boss would present her ideas together with Corrine's and Mona's as his own and tonight is no exception. She had specifically asked Mahmoud to bring in some equipment to do some close ariel-photography using the helicopters. He shrugged it off replying that the satellite images will suffice. The satellite images are fine, but as they are

not really spying here, but operating overtly, this was not really an issue. But part of Mahmoud's perverse sense did not quite see this exploration as it really is.

"Miss Shaw did you bring in the camera I asked for?"

"Yes I did. I flew it in from Cairo today."

"Good, then tomorrow we can get started with some ariel-shots of this area including Mona's sheep shelter." He adds sarcastically.

"Of course." '*Anything you say your royal hyn-arse*' Sharon added in her mind. Sharon has begun to suspect that this short stocky Prof is a bit of a manipulative macho prick, but like most of them they are hard to catch out in their perverse games. Sharon threw a glance at Marilyn and they both shared a short but friendly smile as though they instinctively knew something the others did not. Todd is grinning as well, but he hadn't stop smiling since he discovered Marilyn's butt. Spotting Todd grinning Sharon gave a tiny poke with her teasing tongue directed straight at him while she could not hold back the image that Marilyn now has three dogs at her heels.

Jacques is still preoccupied with his original line of thought while lighting up yet another Française cigarette.

"Brian what are our figures on mummified cats?"

"One thousand two-hundred and eighty stuffed pussies." Everyone laughs catching the innuendo, except Mahmoud who rarely cracks a grin unless it's his own joke.

"And the break down of that figure?"

Brian immediately threw out the figures, throwing glances to Mona and Corinne, knowing what Jacques is insinuating.

"Three hundred and thirty in the north and south and three hundred and ten in the east and west."

"Yes, exactly Brian. Three hundred and thirty stuffed cats, as you put it, and thirty-three steps. Three statues each side of the stairs. On the other hand we have three hundred and ten cats, with thirty-one steps and three plus one statues, all in place. Now look at the map coordinates." Everyone leans forward trying to get a peek onto the map. Jacques's pencil rests on the exact point.

"Thirty three degrees longitude and thirty one degrees latitude - coincidence? I don't think so."

A few jaws drop open with the realisation that the whole place they are standing on seems to be very a well calculated scheme where no one had been able to figure out the big picture yet. One major problem is that latitude is a mapping grid from Copernic back to Pythagorus 480 BC but did not get properly put into place until 1736 by John Harrisson with the establishment of Greenwich Mean Time, which makes all this seem like some sort of prank. And even if Pythagoras, who spent twenty-two years of his life in Egypt (ironically treated by the Egyptians as an unwanted tourist from Greece) does not solve the establishing of longitude; it provokes a drawn out debate on a celestial or clock solutions that occurred some two thousand years later.

"This is one for Van Doonigan!" Hal said between puffs on his pipe, and they all laughed heartily. Even Mahmoud cracks a smirk while correcting Hal; "Erich von Däniken is his name."

Everyone is very enthusiastic with these revelations although scepticism reigns, but the harsh day's work is starting to appear on their quotidian masks. The crowd begins to disperse to the continual chatting about these great revelations but it is going to be a very early start in the morning. As usual there are those who hang on.

As Mahmoud leaves the unit the two dogs jump to attention expecting Marilyn to follow. In their disappointment they growl under their breaths. "Crazy damn dogs." Mahmoud said staring them down and then flicks the lit butt of his cigar at them.

"Well, as you said Doctor one new discovery can shake your stack of cards."

"That's right my friends, I am bewildered by these revelations. But on the other hand amused."

"Why do you say that Doc?" asks Gad.

"Well Gad the Ancient Egyptians were very fond of games and riddles in their philosophy. If my mind serves me well I can recite part of the Heliopolitan Creation Myth, and it *starts Nuk pu kheper em Khepera. Kheper na kheper kheperu; kheper kheperu neb ... err.*"

"Kheper asht kheperu nu kheperu em kheperu nu mesa, em kheperu nu mesa sen."

"Well, well merci Marilyn, I am impressed."

"Merci Doctor."

"OK guys, but what does that all mean?" Tom asks with an air of frustration.

"Marilyn, I'll give you the honour."

"Merci. Translated into vulgar English it goes something like this. *'It came into being as the one who comes into being, coming into being as all things which came into being.'*"

"A syllogism."

"A What, doctor?" Gad asks curiously.

"It's philosopher's logic." The doctor says smiling.

"What is? What was. What was? What is: There is nothing new under the sun."

"Tout affair Gad. Where did you pick that up from?"

"Oh it's just a little epigram I picked up from Ecclesiastes. I remember reading it somewhere."

*"Wow! Love it!" Says Hal with a broad grin ticking over the 'Life Is Useless' parable.

"How true nothing is new. But it's not only substance and the riddle Hal, it's also the way in which it is written. It's a giant pun. The description of creation is based on the pun of the divine name of Khepera (Khepri). You all remember don't you? Khepri is the scarab beetle that is a divine form of Ra. So it's not only a riddle but a play on words, adding another dimension to this poetic myth."

"Too much!" Sharon says not being able to hold back. "This takes me back to the old white rails days!"

"Cool Dude!" Gad says grinning.

"I know, it's all a bit of a blast from the past. But the Egyptians loved these sorts of word games where some of them are quite impressive and sophisticated. They not only used the pun of the word but the

pictorial in the form of the hieroglyphs to reinforce the literal meaning as well as associating it to an event they wished to express.”

“Hang on there, I’d like an example so I can get my teeth around this one.” Hal says looking at Marilyn who appears amused by all of this.

“Maybe I can help you Hal!” Marilyn continues, following Jacques path.

“Perhaps one of the most simple illustrations of this is how the Egyptians wrote the name of the God Ptah.”

“Who’s Ptah, just out of interest?” Tom couldn’t help himself and had to interject.

“Ptah is one of three Gods that form the Triad of Hikaptah, or more commonly known by the Greeks as Memphis. He is the God of creation and all good things.”

“I thought Ra was the God of creation!” Gad says with a frown, while Jacques smiles blowing out a puff of smoke together with a chesty cough, as he still feels off colour.

“He is as well, but his role is to pilot the solar boat and be chief of the Great Ennead. Lord of Heaven and earth. I’m sorry, please continue Marilyn.” Jacques replies squashing another butt into the full ashtray.

“Ptah was the Lord of Maat and of the year, patron of artists and artisans who worked with metal and stone. He was the keeper of time and he married Sekhmet the second member of the Triad.”

“Yes I remember her. She’s that feline cat woman that makes me fantasise about Nastesia Kinsky.” Tom says eagerly.

“Hoorah for boobies! I tend to dribble over Michelle Pfiffer.”

“Are you a Batman freak, Todd?”

“OK lads knock it off let Marilyn finish.”

“Yes let me finish. The Triad of Hikaptah consisted of three Gods, Ptah, Sekhmet and their son Nefertem, who was replaced by Imhotep. Imhotep was the great architect of the step pyramid for the Pharaoh Djoser. This is happening around two-thousand six-hundred and fifty years before Christ in the Third Dynasty.”

“What’s this, a mortal as a God!”

“Yes, but only in his immortal form after his death. He was considered the son of Ptah, which tends to make us think that Imhotep was a mortal manifestation of Nefertem. But the point we were originally trying to illustrate was the riddle linked with Ptah’s written name. There are different ways of writing his name. One particular way is to use the symbol for ‘sky’ representing the ‘p’. The symbol for the ‘earth’, ‘ta’ and taking a picture of ‘*Heh*’, with up raised arms, who symbolically stands for ‘h’ stuck between the two other symbols. Now, one of Ptah’s responsibilities was to separate the sky from the earth. By placing the symbol of ‘*Heh*’ in the middle, he uplifts the sky and the earth he treads down with his feet, thus one obtains the phonetic spelling of the divine Ptah as well a small story of one of his tasks.”

“That is truly amazing!” Hal said, running out a few mental pictures of the astronomical possibilities this concept provokes.

“Oui, the written word for the Egyptians made it exist and the spoken word made it concrete. You have to remember that many of the Egyptian people back then could neither read nor write, which is why the

spoken word is extremely important. The hieroglyphs are the means that would create tradition and a continuum.”

“Can you be a little more coherent Doctor?”

“Hmm, let me see! The form is Symbol, and the symbol is the word. And, as the sage predicted, at the end of a long night, only the word remains: *‘A man has disappeared, his body is dust, his forefathers have returned to the earth; but the word returns him to life by the mouth of he who reads. The word is better than a house of stone, the doors of the western abode; the word is stronger than a fortress, or any army ready for combat.’* All those who have measured the strength of the word shall remain, beyond the stones, on humanity’s lips because the word, the guarantor of existence, is, for them, more powerful than a pyramid.”

“The pen is mightier than the sword.”

“Exactament!” Jacques says contently.

“In the beginning was the word and the word is with God.”

“Oui, tre-bien Gad. You fellows catch on quick!”

They continued to chat on for a while. Jacques draws up another ‘picture’ type image using the word ‘duat’ meaning ‘the realm of the dead’, where the hieroglyph of a mummy wrapped in the coils of a serpent again illustrating the phonetic sense as well as being a description of the entrance into the afterworld.

The fires metamorphose into glowing scarlet red coals that seem to be breathing in tune with the light breeze, while the night air is cold with a cutting edge. The barren landscape has turned from molten gold into a black icy cesspool – a petroleum speculators’ dream. Silence has enveloped the site or has it?

Gad sits straight up in his bed. He has broken out in a cold sweat while his mind wanders over the nightmare that is far too fresh in his memory. Covering his face he thinks he can still hear the screams of the people being squashed under the falling stones. These crushed bodies lay still in bloody pools and torn flesh squashed under these huge cut rocks. The hand is still twitching from what was once a living man where the last electrical impulses are fading with his battery ‘flat-lining’. The twitch seemed to be desperately beckoning him to run for his life. Suddenly the hand turned pitch black as if infected by some ugly disease before it began to move inside a black-sea of bugs and insects all rolling over each other in ecstatic bliss.

He looks across to where Sharon lays worried he may have disturbed her. She is lightly snoring with her pupils dancing under her eyelids. *‘I hope her dreams are better than mine’* Gad thinks to himself. No one sleeps particularly well this night.

Diesel fumes spew into the air as the Hydraulic Shovel’s motor breaks the silence of the dawning day. Ihab Yehia’s workers have already harnessed another large stone and are ready to go.

Marilyn's two dogs sit on the edge of the Heli-pad keeping a close eye on Sharon and their master.

Finalising the cables from the digital camera to the Laptop will only take a few more minutes. Sharon is happy to be working with Marilyn. Sharon's busy confirming her suspicions about Marilyn's prick of a boss.

"This is your idea isn't it Marilyn?"

"Yes." She replied timidly.

"Well fuck him hey!" And they both giggled.

"You are extremely beautiful when you smile. You should do that more often."

"Thank you, I would like to but with my boss it is quite difficult. Marilyn's French accent is quite strong but adds to her natural charm. "Oh, and I'd really like to thank you for flying in my bicycle yesterday."

"That's OK: I couldn't miss it. There was this poor Arab man standing with it, holding it as though it had some sort of disease. I doubt he has ever tried to ride one."

"That's Shaba alright. He's a funny one, but always helpful."

"Let's get this show on the road then. I'm really happy we're working together on this."

"Me too." Marilyn said slightly blushing.

"I'm surprised that Todd is not out here sniffing your butt"

"I'm sorry I don't understand!"

"You know hanging around. He is often hanging around."

"Yes I know and he is interesting to talk to. I quite like him."

"I'm pleased. Shit I spoke too soon – here he comes."

"Hi guys can I come for the ride."

"Only if you sit in the back and help Marilyn."

Todd is beaming at the thought.

"Don't pester her either – I said help her."

Once the Helicopter's rotor blades had started to pick up time the two dogs understood they would not be invited to join in the fun so they run off to find better things to play with. The morning is young and the two bitches are full of optimistic energy. They both jump up and sit on the piled stones after they had finished with sniffing around some fresh Sheep dung. A shepherd is still allowed to run his sheep on the higher ground atop of the ridge away from this snake invested low land. The sheep have become an important source of fresh meat to feed the growing number of crews' members. The meat has to be fresh and the animal has to have its throat cut. The dogs are now content to watch the Hydraulic Shovel in action. Jacques and Mahmoud have both arrived and are standing to the side. Cleo starts barking looking down into this six-metre deep pit. Then Patra joins in.

"Damn dogs." Mahmoud picks up a small stone and throws it at the dogs where they shy away for a second or two before starting in again. Lucky for the dogs Mahmoud is a very poor shot.

A sudden cry from below causes Mahmoud to snap his attention to below losing his interest in the dogs instantaneously.

"Eda wat?" He shouts in Arabic.

"Bones! Lots of bones."

All the workers have stopped and the Shovel went into an even idle. Taking the stairs both Jacques and Mahmoud go down into the pit. Another stone has already been harnessed ready to be pulled out. "Take this up" Jacques said signalling the driver of the Shovel. The cables are attached to the shovel's long hydraulic arm. The stone moves and then it disappears into the air. Bones and more bones come to light. The more stone and rubble they move the more they become shocked that they are in the midst of a massive grave.

The helicopter can be heard flying over above. Mahmoud looks up for a second, happy that Marilyn is off busy elsewhere and out of the way. Jacques and Mahmoud start to pick over the remains.

"Crushed. They were all crushed to death."

"I don't think this was an accident. I think we will discover the same in the other three chambers."

"Do you think that it was some sort of sacrifice?"

"Could well have been Jacques – could well have been, but for the moment the reason eludes me. These walls of stones were levered and pushed into this pit of hell killing all those trapped down here. This is a slaughter house."

Some of the more professional helpers are bought in to sift through the remains and piece together what they could, as well as trying not to disturb the ground with their clumsy big feet. Again plastic trays are bought in to remove these remains and try to put together a story of what had happened exactly. The workers, including Mona, Corinne and Brian, now wore gloves, paper suits and masks uncovering some of the still buried skeletons in the hope they will minimise contamination of the relics with the hope of discovering who, where from and when from DNA analysis they intend to have done. Some of the freshly uncovered bones are bagged immediately and placed into the tray with what they consider as the rest of that skeleton's remains. The sealed bags of bone will be sent off to Sander's Bay in Canada. Doctor Eldon Molto from the University of Lakehead will do the DNA analysis on these samples.

Jacques has moved away into an area where most of the human bones have been removed. He's picking over what is left of this bizarre holocaust. He's scooping some strange material into a bag for analysis not really having the slightest notion of what this stuff could be. The pieces of black coal and quantity of ash made him think that they certainly needed the fire. Scratching around he discovers metal tools and a thick walled stone vessel with a lip, a 'crauset'. The kind you would expect to find in pouring molten metal. Remnants of other wooden handled tools appear sporadically while dusting away layer upon layer of invading sand and dust that was formed from the natural decay. Ceramic fragments and other broken daily utensils are coming to the surface, but many have been badly damaged and bent and deformed from this cave-in. 'A very heavy shower', as Hal had been heard to mention.

Suddenly Jacques stood up and looked around him and said to himself,

“Workshop – this is a workshop of some kind. They were building things here. Maybe working metal.” He said it as though the answers had been with him all along. “But why? Why out here? It doesn’t make any sense.” Looking over towards Mahmoud he decides not to bother to sing out as he could see his colleague is very busy giving instructions to those that Mahmoud had classified as incompetent.

“Well he promises things and then when the time comes he conveniently forgets that he promised anything denying everything making me look foolish as if I was plagued with some sort of schizophrenia.” Marilyn said into her little microphone. She has settled for an earplug in place of the clumsy looking headphones that would mess up her hair. But she had forgotten how noisy these helicopters really are. “The guy is just an arsehole Marilyn keep away from him.” Sharon says with the experienced women’s tone, as she has known quite a few in her day, while steadying the chopper.

“Well at the Museum it’s OK because I have my own office and he tends to leave me alone. He gives me all the shitty assignments that he can’t be bothered to touch anyway and doesn’t even bother to find out if anything interesting has come out of them. But I love my work. Can you steady it here?”

“Gotcha.”

After taking a few shots, including Mona’s circle, that appears so pristine from up here, Marilyn looks up. Doing so she mentally catches something.

“Sharon can you swing us to your left slightly.” The chopper moves as though it’s following Marilyn’s voice commands.

“Well I’ll be damned.”

“What’s up?” Todd asks looking in the same direction as Marilyn, but could not see anything out of the ordinary.

“Look at the vegetation.”

“What about it. It’s like that everywhere out here – quite scarce!”

“Look at the way it has grown.”

“Sorry not with you girl.”

“Do you see it Sharon?”

“Nothing out of the ordinary other than there appears to be one sporadic line of it.”

“Yes indeed. Look all the outcrops appear to be lined up.”

“So What. That’s no big deal.”

“Oh yes it is. We may have discovered an underground canal.”

“What sort of canal?”

“A water canal. The Egyptians built underground canals near oasis to help with water catchment.”

Sharon can we follow it please and I would like to photograph the whole thing if possible?”

“No probs. And if this is anything important I won’t let your boss take the credit I’ll make sure of that.”

“You’re very kind but you don’t know my boss as well as I do. Don’t bother yourself or you may discover you don’t have a job any more. He can be very mean and very persuasive.”

Don't worry sister I can look out for myself." Sharon replies swinging the helicopter around slightly lining her self up with the vegetation then follows the 'green brick road'.

Mahmoud spots the helicopter heading off. "Joy riding again as if they have nothing better to do." He mumbles under his breath. He glances over at the dogs that remain at this dig, but they are now lying in the shade of the wall of piled stone. They are still awake and alert looking down at Mahmoud and his crew as if they know something that he did not. Mahmoud is angry for allowing these stupid Jackals intimidate him. 'Yalla ya hara', he thought to himself.

Cleo and Patra are now sitting in the rear compartment enjoying a new view of clouds of dust. Marilyn and Sharon are heading out into the desert off road out of Mahmoud's way. A few days have passed since they surveyed the area with digital camera images allowing Marilyn to study the prints of the 'green brick road', which Mahmoud has no time for. Sharon is navigating. Marilyn has pinpointed two areas that she would like to explore. This is Sharon's day off, but stuck out here what do you do with your spare-time, in this desert, and so she decided to help Marilyn.

The dogs are happy to run around exploring and sniffing out trouble like sniffing at sheep droppings or toying and barking at an innocent looking scorpion. The dogs instinctively know that the scorpion's sting is trouble but out of the lack of other things to play with this will have to do. Marilyn walks directly over to the low bush vegetation then follows the line She comes upon a decent sized rock that she is determined to move. Backing up the cruiser Sharon ties a thick nylon rope that they have brought with them around the girth of the obstacle attaching the other end to the tow bar. Not wasting time Marilyn drops the clutch and the stone easily slides out of its nesting place to reveal a small rectangular shaft.

"Wow look at this. This is great."

"Is this what you have been looking for? Sharon asks looking down into the pitch-dark rectangular hole.

"Just as I expected. This is a shaft mined out by the Egyptian workers during the construction of this canal. This is really a canal – I can't believe it! These shafts would be used as a type of ventilation system – you know air vents, and also used as a means to evacuate the rock and rubble they had dug out. We should be able to locate many more quite easily. Quick I have to get my camera!"

It is not a canal but it's a very old passageway, as they will eventually discover. But they never discover the junction of a second passage way leading to the Temple of Seth near the sea. The sea has claimed part of this Temple since a very long time and many great things remain hidden and buried in the sand sleeping quietly waiting patiently for a waking call.

Sharon is happy for Marilyn who is now busy trying to keep her dogs back from this new discovery seeing they have lost interest in the confused scorpion. Getting them to sit behind her is quite an achievement. Sharon releases the large rock from being tied up as they are going to use the rope to go down the shaft.

This is the original reason why it was bought along in the first place or at least this is what Marilyn had hoped to use it for.

Backing up the Toyota again they left the rope attached to the tow bar. Sharon drops the other end down the narrow shaft. Taking two emergency lamps they had lifted out of the mobile offices they climb into their make shift harnesses that Sharon has put together from spare security belts from her chopper. They've salvaged the nylon rope, some carabineers and pitons, a couple of helmets and gloves from the AJEX material depot at the main site. The dogs are looking a little nervous watching their master dressing up in this weird gear.

"You know what the worst part of this is?"

"Tell me Marilyn before it's too late."

"Well apart from the worry the roof may cave in, you have to worry about snakes."

"What's news, its home away from home. Snakes! I hate snakes."

"I noticed, but unfortunately they love places like this."

"OK, what sort of snakes?"

"All sorts from small vipers to large Cobras – this is Egypt after-all."

"Tell me! Can't we take one of the dogs with us?"

"No, we'll have enough to worry about than trying to find a lost dog that has gone leaping ahead down a long canal sniffing out trouble."

Sharon looks a little worried. She hates anything that slithers including people like Mahmoud.

"Come on Sharon, I though your one that could hold her own?"

"I am, but snakes I didn't mention that I enjoyed disturbing creepy crawly beasts. It's bad enough trying to keep out of their way back on the base!"

"Oh come on it's not that bad."

"You're a brave girl."

One after the other they disappear down the shaft that is about three metres deep.

"Hey I'm six foot under and feel good about it. Well a little spooked, but OK."

Marilyn smiles while shinning her light onto the walls of the canal. They both venture down the tunnel a few metres.

"Gee this is really exciting. Here hold my lamp." Fumbling around she managed a few good photos'.

Sharon profits to get a better look at things when the flash ticks off a short well-lit snippet of information.

"Oh shit!"

"What is it?"

"Just a Cobra. Keep perfectly still."

"Just a Cobra! Well I'm not intending to run, not down here."

Sharon feels the thing slither over her boot. The sensation went all the way up her spine and finished on her nose that begins to itch.

“God I hate snakes.” She said under her breath that has become quite shallow and tight. A one-hour minute passed.

“Do we have to do this?”

“Well I do but your welcome to quit if you like.”

“No I ain’t going nowhere alone down here.” She replies scratching her nose.

Suddenly the dogs begin to bark. The noise is almost deafening as this canal is like an echo chamber, where the sound just happily bounces off the cut stone walls.

“I think the Cobra just passed by the shaft. Cleo got a whiff off it.”

“Gees don’t those dogs know that sound can set off avalanches and cave-ins for Christ sake.”

“Well Sharon you’ll be happy to know that I’ve seen enough we can quit.”

“Hey that’s the best news I’ve heard since setting foot down here. One small step for man but a bloody giant leap in my case – out of here. Next time remind me to wash my helicopter or do some sewing on my day off.”

“Do you sew?”

“Are you kidding. The only needle I can thread is the one Gad’s wearing.”

Sharon is obviously happy to be topside. Marilyn really laughed at this joke because of the French expression ‘enfilér’, but she doubts Sharon knows about this, but there again.

“Hey did you hear the one about the two guys travelling out in the desert?”

“No.”

“Well one of them needed to take a crap. He found a great spot near a fallen tree where he could wedge his arse in one of the dry forked branches. Just as he was choking one a startled snake slipped out from under the tree and bit our dear friend on his limp member.”

“Ouch!” Marilyn cries out thinking it was probably very painful.

“He shouts out to his friend to use the radio and call a Doctor via the police to find out what to do. His friend calls, and then sings out to ask him if he’d seen the snake. He replies; “Yeah I did”. “What did it look like?” “Well it’s black with red on its belly.” The Doctor told the man on the radio that it’s a very venomous snake and that he would have to suck the wound of his friend will die. His friend called out; “Hey what did the Doctor say?” “He says you’re going to die.””

Marilyn laughs shaking her head. She wonders where Sharon gets all this ‘corny’ stuff.

“Well I hang out with a bunch of guys and well they just see me as one of them.”

Closing the dogs into the back they are both relieved to be back in the cruiser heading on.

The canal heads straight towards the small village of Rummanah Biral Abd.

“I don’t think we will have to go down another shaft – well not today.”

“That’s comforting – once in a day is more than enough.”

“And I don’t think that this tunnel is a water canal but a passage.”

“Ouu, secret tunnel stuff hey! Love it!”

“I enjoy your imagination Sharon!”

Sharon just smiles happy she can share this moment with Marilyn.

As they approached the small town Marilyn suddenly thought about the local people.

"I think it would be good if you put your turban on."

"I thought the Egyptians are not all that strict when it came to wearing veils."

"Well they're not, but out here let's not take things for granted. If we can avoid offending these people we have already made the way open for good communication. Don't you agree?"

"Putting it like that – yes I do. And I thought you were just a pretty face."

"Well we have both been pleasantly surprised."

Starting her wrapping process Sharon couldn't help herself. "Aren't we an Arab's dream?"

"What do you mean?"

"A Toyota Land Cruiser full of bitches!" And they both laugh while Cleo and Patra are busy watching the clouds of dust swirling around outside the back window oblivious to what lay in the future that is swelling up out of the past.

CHAPTER 3
THE TOMBS - 1999

Spell 33

*O Rerek-snake, take yourself off, for Geb protects me;
Get up, for you have eaten a mouse, which Re detests,
And you have chewed the bones of a putrid cat.*

The bottom of the North Chamber has been completely cleaned out. It was agreed upon that the lower level of this construction was used for working metal. But the puzzling part is that it appears to have been used for the production and use of silver. This is confirmed by the samples taken by Jacques Pittaloup, during his discovery that it was obviously a workshop. The samples turned out to be slag with traces of silver and lead. But again this left the archaeologists perplexed as most of the silver at this time came from the mines in Asia Minor on islands in the Aegean Sea. The earliest known large-size mines are those of Cappadocia in eastern Anatolia. The Egyptians preferred to use gold, as a metal, because of its availability down the Nile and its facility to work and craft plus it did not tarnish as badly as silver. But the Egyptians did consider Silver as a very precious metal. This discovery did reinforce one hypothesis that the statues of Ammut may have well been influenced by the northerners.

Remnants of stone and clay moulds have been found that indicate the craftsmen were using casting techniques to produce multiples of what ever they had built. They have not yet been able to piece together these smashed or crushed recipients to figure out what exactly it was they were casting. One complete wind bellow was found hiding under one of the stones. It had escaped from being crushed. It is eighty centimetres long looking like a wind musical instrument. Fragments of another twelve have been discovered in the cleaning up. They would blow into one end of these instruments concentrating the air onto the hot coals to produce the maximum heat possible.

The crew have finally boxed the twenty-eight corpses with the possibility of five or six more due to unrelated fragments. Doctor Pittaloup is convinced that there are most probably five extras, as it would make a total of thirty-three bodies that tally with the other 'coincidental' statistics.

They are intending to reconstruct what they could but decided to clear the whole floor first as they have still not been able to discover what is creating this bizarre magnetic field.

Tom is out busy preparing his electrode plates. This time Assad and Hatem are a little more attentive.

Mahmoud is nervously waiting close by. He wants to know if this goes further or stops.

Dragging the plates over this stone floor Tom keeps his eyes glued to his portable liquid crystal screen. He has made a makeshift carton protector around the screen so he can read it easily keeping it protected from direct sunlight where it becomes impossible to read anything at all.

“Well.” Says Mahmoud getting impatient.

“Nothing mate – nothing at all.” Tom has pleasure disappointing this pretentious prick.

“Are you positive.” He snaps.

“There is something – Nah, it’s nothing” Tom is almost laughing watching Mahmoud’s face light up and then go dull like a kid was playing with a rheostat on a light switch watching a pulsating light bulb.

“Doc I’m so sorry. I couldn’t help myself. To tell you the truth you will be happy to know that there is something else below this level. It’s not very big. I’d estimate around one metre by one. And I think there is a stairway or ramp leading up in this direction.”

“Now you are kidding me – no?”

“No, this time I’m serious.” Tom replies, watching Mahmoud light up like an Arab who has just struck oil.

“This is great news - beyond all my expectations. This may well be a tomb.”

Mahmoud wastes no time following the direction Tom has indicated. Reaching the northern wall he kneels down and removes his brush from his back pocket. He sweeps and pushes the little remaining sand around looking for a clue. Then it appears. A long lost joint carved into the stone floor as if it were a tight fitting tile.

“Tom, quickly go and get the others. And could you tell the man working the Hydraulic Shovel over on the eastern chamber we need it over here immediately. Oh and by the way we will need some metal bars.”

Tom left Assad to pack up and told Hatem to go over to the Shovel while he himself went off looking for Doctor Pittaloup. He passes the tent where Marilyn is busy with the inventory and so he let her in on the news. He could have saved Hatem a trip because Jacques is also busy on the eastern chamber. Hatem is not wasting time as he had other workers go off to get metal crowbars and they are all to meet in the north. The news travels like a friendly virus where most came down with a bad case of curiosity.

Mahmoud has already cleared the demarcation of the whole joint by the time the Hydraulic Shovel arrived. The stone is about two metres wide by one metre long. Mahmoud’s face is now wearing a permanent grin, as he is absolutely sure that this is a tomb and will be intact – undisturbed by tomb-raiders. This will be as great if not greater than the discovery of Toutankhamon’s tomb by Howard Carter in 1922. He is anticipating fame and glory like that of Carter and at the same time rejecting the shallow thought of the stupid malediction theory that plagued the media after the sudden death of Lord Carnarvon – Carter’s sponsor. His hands are wet with perspiration from the excitement building up in side him.

The workers arrive with metal levering bars. Gad, Sharon, Todd and Tom came trotting down the thirty-three steps. Marilyn with her dogs walks quickly with Doctor Pittaloup, but as they too took the steps the

two dogs broke out of the ranks running around to the northern wall looking down into the pit at Professor Abdel-Khaled. They both growl and whin under their breaths in solitude. Whining for Marilyn who is just stepping into the arena and growling for the dislikes for her boss. Tom has his camera with him and takes a couple of magnificent pictures of the two Doberman dogs sitting side by side as if they are statues that have come to life still protecting the ancient realm. One shot in particular is very impressive where both the dogs are growling showing their sharp teeth, that are normally hidden under their wet jowls, with their eyes glowing bright red that had obviously caught the flash, even though Tom is pretty sure that he didn't use it.

The men push the flat metal tips of their bars into the groove. This is such a special moment that no one whispers a word. Not even the faintest of sound cut into this extraordinary silence. The heavy breathing breaks the silence as the men's muscles take the strain and start to lever this giant floor stone. Moving it out from its tight, wedged in resting-place. Now the roar of the mechanical shovel rudely interrupts the magic of the moment. The teeth of the dipper bucket catch the raised edge of the stone. Carefully the wedged-in bucket lifts the stone till the workers can slide round bars across the now exposed opening in the floor. As the stone moves higher the men directly behind those in front moved in and placed their bars a little deeper. With the bucket removed, the bars are now taking the full strain. The first crew remove their bars and wait for the stone to move forward.

As the first gap appears with the effort of the dipper bucket, a puff of dust and a strange odour of very stale air escaped the pit. You had to be close to smell it. It smells bad, very bad. Mahmoud being the closest to the workers pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket and covers his nose – just in case, as he has a sudden vision of some evil disease that is going to choke him to death.

They continue to remove the cover until the third crew can slide metal pipes under the stone bridging the hole underneath. Using the same sort of methods as the Egyptians used, five thousand years ago, to put the cover in place. They could now roll the stone on the bars and out of the way. As one bar is freed of the weight of the stone it would be removed from the back and placed out in front of the stone's intended passage.

The door has been opened but to what?

It seems they had all been holding their breaths for hours but now the entrance is exposed no one really dared to go forward except Mahmoud. He peers down the narrow stair well into the pitch darkness.

Something moves inside this black pit. It retracts from the light leaving small snail type trails.

Startled Mahmoud thinks, "What was that?" But before he can actually ask the question it disappears and the black veil seeps into a vision of splendour.

This place has not seen the rays of light for thousands of years. It's absolutely extraordinary.

“Amazing. Absolutely amazing!”

Doctor Pittaloup moves forward peering down below.

“Exquisite!”

Both doctors have forgotten about the ugly odours.

All the wall murals and decorations are in pristine condition. The colours are dazzling as if they had been painted yesterday. Strange stains appear on the mantle, that had supported the cover stone, that they think is dried blood. Human blood that had seeped into the joints from all the crushed bodies above.

Thousands of small snail type trails cover the walls and stairs as though something had once grown here. Now only very faint remnants of this root type network remain. Other than this it appears unscathed. Two crouching Jackals are guarding the closed entrance at the bottom of the stair well. With a Maglight torch they could see the golden reflections from the inner ears and neck ornaments of these black beasts, but their eyes created a ripple of unrest. The black pupils are lost in sea of blood. The pure white had been turned like that of a virgin. The dogs’ red tongues are hanging from their growling mouths while their tails have curled up metamorphosing into a pair of red eyed cobras that rest in a strike position atop of the Jackals’ heads between their exaggerated ears. Anubis is the god of the underworld and the master of embalming the dead. This has to be a tomb. And if this is a tomb then may be there are four of them altogether, counting the other chambers.

“Stop.” Cried Mahmoud before the scores of on-lookers crept forward in the hope of catching a glimpse.

“Before we go any further I want a temporary open tent rigged up over these stairs to protect the walls from direct sunlight and permanent damage. Quickly men! Ibrahim, I want your team to build a solid metal cover with a secure door and I want it installed before nightfall.”

“OK boss.” He replied almost pouting because he would miss out on being one of the first members down the stairs. A couple of men dashed to the depot knowing that if they were to rig up the tent they would have a first hand glimpse of what lay at the bottom of the stairs.

“Gad can your team move in an electrical generator and set up some flood lights to keep this area well lit at night. Plus we are going need the electricity to install lights as we go deeper into this wonderful discovery.”

Gad threw a look to Todd who understood immediately.

“Marilyn can you go and get the Army Captain as this will have to be guarded night and day.”

Doctor Pittaloup just nods his head in approval. Fortunately this discovery is set in a seven metre deep pit that makes it easy to secure. With the stones piled up three high around most of the excavation makes the wall another three metres to contend with and so the only real access was via the thirty-three steps. With one guard posted down at this strategic point and another three guards topside would be well enough to protect the fort.

Cleo’s and Patra’s eyes are still glowing red and together they have gone far away in their tiny minds but no one has noticed. Statue like they are reflections of what lay crouched at the bottom of these stairs.

Marilyn has noticed immediately that the dogs have not followed her on her bicycle ride to find the Captain. She felt there is something out of place. Maybe just a silly feeling of being abandoned as often in the afternoon heat the bitches leave her alone so they can doze lazily in the shade.

With the open entrance now in the shade Jacques follows Mahmoud down the steps. It's more than spectacular. Everything is so well preserved. There are these two wonderful wooden effigies of Anubis and the walls covered with drawings and inscriptions that will be easy to read. Unfortunately the chamber here below is again sealed off. It has become obvious is that it is a 'False Door'. Because of the inscriptions, on these stones, it will be a while before they can create a small opening to see if anything lies beyond this barrier although they may be able to use the vent. Because it is a false door normally it leads nowhere other to a small chamber of offerings – hence the name.

Jacques is already busy reading the inscription on the sidewall that holds them back. Mumbling he is trying desperately to fathom out some meaning. Mahmoud is also busy running his hands over the hieroglyphs making sure his fingers did not touch the delicate work.

"The protectors of evil!"

"Is that what you make of it Mahmoud?"

"Well something of that nature."

"Curious, It has nothing to do with Anubis out here. Normally Anubis is found inside the tomb to ensure the safe passage into the next world."

"You know we had the same discussion when we discovered the Amam effigies on the stairs. All those that should be in the tomb are outside as if they don't want to protect what's inside but the opposite - to protect outside from what's inside! This would correspond to what is this inscription implies."

"I don't think it would be wise to say anything to the workers about this. They will most probably think this whole place is cursed and refuse to work." Mahmoud said smiling.

"I agree, but you must admit the whole thing is very curious and reading these symbols doesn't make one feel terribly comfortable. I have no time generally about silly superstitions, but still I'm well aware of some pretty strange phenomena, which is often inexplicable."

"Come on now Jacques. Like what for instance?"

"While working in Australia in the mid north I'd heard of 'bone pointing' by the tribe's medicine-man in the local Aboriginal community. A weird tradition that continues to play a role in their lives: Even now days. One of the local medical Doctors told me how he watched Aboriginal men and women curl up and die because of the 'bone' and there was nothing he could do about it. Nothing!"

"Yes but this is psycho-semantic. This sort of hypnotic suggestion can be seen in the Voodoo cults and devil worshippers' practices. The mind is a powerful tool you know."

"I agree. Sometimes too powerful."

"What were you doing in Australia, a bit out of your field?"

"Oh, I was working on the relationship between the Australian and ancient Egyptian boomerangs."

“Hey you guys down there. Doc Pittaloup it’s me Charlie Brown. We’ve just arrived. The team are still unloading the chopper. Wow - just look at this stuff. Gees-us this is one hell of a find. Bet you guys are as happy as pigs in shit, hey?”

“Charlie good to see you. We weren’t expecting you till tomorrow!”

“Well we could pack it up earlier so we didn’t waste any time getting here.”

“I can see that. Err Charlie this is Professor Abdel-Khaled.”

“Pleased to meet you again Professor.”

“Call me Mahmoud please.”

“OK, pleased to meet you again Mahmoud. You guys intend coming up for air or do you wish to join the underworld?”

“We’ll be up in a minute Charlie.” Jacques replied looking around as though he had lost something.

Both the Doctors are overwhelmed and hypnotised by these beautiful decorated walls on each side of the stairs leading down to the false door. Most of the two walls had been washed over with a blue grey pigment either to represent night or enable the other colours, such as the white, to really punch out by contrast. Closest to the false door, on either side stood Sekhmet, the goddess with a lion’s head, dressed in a tight white robe with a male erection. Above her is the moon and stars. She is looking at those who descend the stairs. In front of Sekhmet are three drawings of Khonsu, Amun’s and Mut’s son, also facing the opening to the stairwell. Khonsu is depicted here, not as a boy or hawk headed like Horus, but as a Baboon manifestation carrying the moon on its head. Khonsu describes the passage of the moon and, as a young boy, is reputed as being a wanderer. He was also used in the ritual of the exorcism of evil spirits. What is unusual here is that Khonsu is holding a mirror that is usually depicted in scenes of woman beautifying them selves. Underneath the three Baboons is what appears to be an interpretation of the raging flames of evil and darkness. And above the three apes are the eight gods of ‘Hermopdis Ocdoad’. Four of the gods are with the heads of Toads and the remaining with heads of serpents. The two coloured ones represent Keku and Kekut, the couple that created the Tenebrae; again darkness and evil echo in this pit of ill fate.

Each side is almost identical except for the two effigies near the beginning of the stairs. On one side is Amun and on the other is Mut, Khonsu’s parents. On the first glimpse we see the eye of Wedjat, but in fact it is the left eye of Ra and not the right eye of Horus. This left eye represents the moon. The hieroglyphs, in relief, are beautifully ornate with the use of white gypsum yellow and red ochres. Touches of a copper blue oxide, green from copper wollastonite and charcoal black melt into the sea of darkness that forms the backdrop of this spectacle. These are typical colours found on an Ancient Egyptians’ palettes. White has the symbolic meaning of silver. Blue symbolises the sky and the body of celestial divinities. Yellow is precious gold and thus God’s flesh. Red is either fire or blood and green is regeneration.

Professor Mahmoud Abdel-Khaled took great pride in his ease to read the hieroglyphs and he says the words out aloud:

'Khonsu son born of Amun and Mut together with the powerful one Sekhmet protect everything from darkness and evil.'

And the vertical band reads:

'Be not of them to descend into the evil of the north as I eat them together with terror to taste evil and spew out everything good.' Referring to words presumably being spoken by Sekhmet, as these hieroglyphs are either side of the figure. The words ring loud and true, but the warning is not heeded because superstition is for those who believe and for those who don't have faith. It will be eventually regretted.

Here there is also some ambiguity. A game the Egyptians enjoyed. The figure standing with a lion head and a erect penis is thought to be Sekhmet, but could also be Tefnut, the daughter of Ra. Sekhmet is related to aggressive conduct capable of destroying man. Tefnut, who wears a serpent wrapped around a solar disc on her head, is associated to the moon. On this wall both meanings are insinuated. Is this a representation of Tefnut's power with the moon or the violence of Sekhmet? Or is it both in one!

The 'False Door' is just as impressive as the two stairwell walls. Divided into three stepped in sections it is also covered with elaborate design and inscriptions. Keku and Keket are standing and facing each other on each side of the outer face of the door. Larger than life it is extremely rare to see such importance given to two of the eight gods responsible for creation. The hieroglyphs mention their names where there seems to be unrest due to these meddling pair that brought evil and injustice into the realm of Egypt towing with it the disease of the soul. It continues stating that selfishness and greed lodged in the heart provokes the abuse of political power. The gods are outraged by the crimes committed against man in the name of Ra and his son the Pharaoh. It appears that even the Pharaoh himself is vulnerable to these evil forces thus serious actions had to be taken to prevent evil from prevailing over the good in man.

Mahmoud smiles over the idealistic and over simplified, to the point of being naive, version of the malevolent attitudes of the rulers. What ever steps they had taken doesn't appear to have worked out as the same treacherous game is still being played out to this very day. Their attempts at prevention seem to have been in vein. But the weirdest thing of all is that the third step inwards of this 'false door' has been sealed up with fine slabs of stone. For the ancient Egyptians, a door was not only a way in, but also a way out, and these two opposing forces were very important to them. But by blocking the door the question arises: are they trying to prevent something from leaving or getting in, or both? The stone is decorated with a large scarab with its wings unfolded holding a sphere. The Professor pronounced the name Khepri, but the Doctor is not as confident. The scarab in this case is a typical Rhinoceros species (*Octipodem ne Excites*) and not the common dung beetle type. Carefully removing the thin slab of stone concealing this strange representation of a door they discover it is set into the wall up side down. The round cut stone,

representing the rolled up piece of weaved mat that is normally above the door-way, acting as a drape for covering the door, is found, for some unknown reason, down near the ground. Jacques is impressed with the detail of the carved weave of a mat. It reminds him of the false door in the underground mortuary of Djoser's step pyramid. Very few have seen this magnificent tomb. One false door was made up of small blue ceramic pieces portraying the woven rolled mat. Mahmoud and Jacques just looked at each other not asking the obvious question, and then they both shrugged to each other acknowledging that neither of them had the tiniest clue of what to answer. A small wooden box lay against the inner part of the false door atop of the round stone.

Jacques carefully lifted the box out, but it disintegrates in front of their eyes. Wood-worm had eaten it out leaving a powdery residue and a few untouched fragments. Jacques immediately drops to his knees not wanting to damage the contents. The attached cloth is untouched but badly stained. It might be blood. Removing the binding he can now unfold the cloth. Both the men almost jump when revealing a most magnificent object. The sculpture is identical to the scarab carved on the stone. Except here the black tarnished silver scarab is holding a gold disc, while its eyes twinkle catching the light on the polished red stone and it grasps a large red polished stone at the end of its abdomen as if hatching it. It has not seen the light of day since it had been placed here.

"Fantastic!"

"Wonderful, absolutely gorgeous!"

Jacques wraps the object up again and tucks it carefully under his arm inside his vest.

Mahmoud and Jacques surface like tired divers out of a magic sea of tropical images.

Jacques reaches for his handkerchief with his free hand and blows his nose making a triumphant trumpet call. He didn't notice the black skiddy he has left behind on his virgin white cotton cloth like a brown squealer on his clean undies. His mind is far away stuck on the burning red glass eyes of this fantastic beetle, and he forgot to look at his handkerchief – a rare occasion as we always look; don't we!

Mahmoud starts in verbally abusing his workers whom for some reason are all looking totally incompetent (more than usual). He wants that protective door rigged up in minutes. His hand is clenched into a tight fist, which he is more than willing to lash out into the realm of physical violence. Seth tries to explain that they could not build the cover over the place where the good Professor had been working, as they would have cast nasty shadows and noisy echoes but Mahmoud has no time for pitiful excuses. The Professor continuing his shouting discards Seth's despondent pleas with a 'buzz off' wave of his upper hand.

Jacques turns looking at Mahmoud doing his 'Charlie' surprised at the length of Mahmoud's out-burst and his particularly short fuse that appears to be burning shorter by the minute. Shaking his head he continues up the thirty-three steps with the feeling that he is coming down with something. He feels a headache creeping up on him, but he is going to try and out run it by palming a couple of aspirin. He might have had too much sun earlier in the afternoon.

Since the two Doctors had arrived, both been running this excavation site, it became obvious that the workers preferred to consult with Jacques instead of Mahmoud who tends to lose his temper a little too quickly. Jacques is a stranger in these lands where humility is part of his nature to the point of being very precautious in the way he crosses the thresh-hold into a realm that is not his own. Out of respect his pride gives way to being humble trying to reach out and understand. Mahmoud, on the other hand, is Egyptian and by his birth right and his inherent Egyptian culture will not flex or bend in his decision making. He is bigoted, arrogant and rude together with his fiery temperament, which makes working with him very difficult. He is mostly liked by those who share together the same scrupulous behaviour as him where they all thrive in political power games of who is the better of the best. Brian adores his boss, but his personal ambitions do not fog his judgment when he is obliged to bow down to Mahmoud, knowing he himself is right and his boss is not. Calculated compromise that will serve his ambitions in the long run.

Mahmoud is tired of Jacques lack of authority and lax discipline, especially his attitude towards the workers who all appear to be more busy chasing the flies than removing plastic buckets full of sand. He wished he could get rid of Jacques and is secretly hoping that this bug, Pittaloup has caught, will turn into something much more serious that will take him off the board. Bitter jealousy is starting to eat into Mahmoud's soul, but is it only this? He did notice the black stuff when he blew his nose, but he considered it as nothing more than dust he had inhaled when they disturbed it while reading the hieroglyphs – no big deal.

The night air is still – very still. Cleo and Patra sat patiently outside the conference room once again returning to what appears as their normal routine but inside part of them has turned. Marilyn is happy to see her two dogs waiting by the conference unit. The Northern site is lit up as though it was still washed in daylight. One military guard is posted down at the bottom of the stairs, in the company of the six statues of Ammut. Two guards stay around the top rim with a clear view of the pit below. No intruder could get in or out without being noticed. The entrance to the presumed tomb is secure with a metal hood and a door with a padlock and chain. Quite crude in its construction, but it will do the job.

Mahmoud is leading the group discussions once again while Jacques has gone a little quiet due to his on coming flu. Now that the Charlie Brown crew have settled in it is a matter of bringing them up to speed on what the others have discovered thus far. A decision would have to be made concerning what Snoopy is going to tackle first; would it be beyond the up side down 'false door' or would they go straight into the major middle construction that has been left on hold?

It is Snoopy's job to discover some of the deeper hidden secrets. Snoopy X is a small robot who loves to crawl into tight spots. Very much like Endoscopic Surgery, Snoopy is equipped with a powerful miniature Video digital camera, two powerful adjustable Halogen lamps encased in the electrical motors' bright red carrosserie either side, which drive the two mini rubber triangulated tracks. Set in around the main body is

another set of halogen lamps that throw out a ring of light. His size allows him to travel down a large drainpipe like that of an artery revealing the darkest of secrets in the beyond. Snoopy, the dog cartoon character, has been painted onto the back section of the body of this unique robot adding a ludicrous flavour to this very professional and expensive piece of equipment. Previous models of Snoopy have been busy in Egypt on other occasions. Once he was used in exploring some of the narrow shafts in the great pyramids of Giza.

Todd is happy to see his half brother arrive. Being the younger of the two he looks up to him and admires what he has achieved. Earlier this afternoon he couldn't help himself; he confides in Charlie his love for Marilyn that is seriously becoming an obsession. Charlie never takes his brother seriously as he falls in and out of love like Elizabeth Taylor.

The happy buzz of the small gathering is warm welcoming to the Peanuts crew. On the surface it appears that everyone gets on well and the work would go smoothly without too much trouble. First impressions can be so deceptive. After Mahmoud's introduction of the new members to the present leaders of the crews he starts in on some of the more recent discoveries trying to weave them into what they already knew. This time they had a set of new drawings and plans of what they had established thus far.

The Hydraulic Shovel had the last of the stones to remove from the western chamber. Three of the four had been completely cleared. It had become obvious that some sort of human sacrifice had been made, but for what reason it is still not clear. Once more it also became obvious that the numbers of lives taken in each chamber corresponded to the number of steps down into each of them. The same precautions had been taken allowing uncontaminated bone fragments to be sent off to Canada for analysis. Some of the result would be revealed this eventful evening.

The conference room walls are now decorated with a number of impressive Ariel photographs of the site thanks to Marilyn, who had omitted to show her other shots on the canal. The pinned up photos are accompanied by a number of drawings of different statues and artefacts discovered.

The drawings are quite elaborate renderings that have been done by Tom during his spare time. Tom is very gifted and everybody enjoys the presence of these drawings. These vibrant illustrations help them all to feel that progress is being made, which is excellent for moral. Plans of the site have already been drawn up that gives them the possibility to plot every new discovery and place it correctly to help with the perception of the overall picture.

Doctor Pittaloup, although not feeling well, is using his calculator working with some conversions on the measurements written on the new up to date plans. Jacques is still playing with numbers being disturbed by the earlier revelation that appears far fetched. Suddenly he cut into the conversation.

"I'm particularly disturbed about numbers again!"

“What are you getting at Jacques,” Mahmoud says, wishing that his ‘dear’ partner was packed away in bed.

“Well the Egyptians considered the number four as stable, balanced and all to do with good things. But here we are dealing with the re-occurring number of three. Unrest, out of balance and harmony, distrust and evil doings – It’s as simple as two is company but three is an evil crowd.”

“Number four is also present. There are four chambers and the inverted pyramid, if that’s what it is - it has four sides.”

“Yes I agree and if we have four tombs this would prove to be extremely stable.” Brian said, happy that he could side with Mahmoud.

“I am aware of this, but have you looked at the plan and dimensions of all the constructions.”

“To be honest Jacques my interest has not really been in measurements.” Mahmoud replies with a slight veil of sarcasm.

Brian has to help by adding a little shit to the pile. “Well there is nothing extraordinary with the figures if you ask me.” He said confidently knowing that Mahmoud is now his ally.

“Well of course not Brian because the measurements are in metres and centimetres. If you want an accurate picture you have to convert them into measurements of the Ancient Egyptians.” Now it’s Jacques’s turn to add some sarcasm to the pot, “You’d have to agree?” Normally Jacques would have never added wood to the burning fire, but as he felt just horrible it just slipped out. Brian, embarrassed, did not reply but has turned bright red. Jacques continues,

“If my calculations are correct the north and south chambers are seventeen point three six metres. This makes the extraordinary number of thirty-three point three Royal Cubits. And looking at the east and west we have thirty-one Royal Cubits length and width. Impressed? Well I am. The steps in all four are forty-four centimetres wide by twenty-two centimetres deep. This is equivalent to six Palms wide and three Palms deep. Impressed? I am! The main construction measures thirty-four point eight metres in length and the same for the width. That is sixty-six point six Royal Cubits. I think I can comfortably rest my case that the number three seems to be a dominant factor. Do you not agree Mahmoud?”

Mahmoud is fuming inside hating ‘skinny’ Jacques for this.

“Yes I suppose you have a point, but it doesn’t prove anything. It’s totally subjective.”

“Well maybe, but it helps us understand a little. We have seen that the inscriptions, that we read together this afternoon, had all sorts of insinuations about evil and darkness. Later in history we are given that the numeric value given to the Devil is six-six-six. Is it again just coincidence that this figure appears as the dimensions of the inverted pyramid? And by the way I’m convinced it is an inverted pyramid.”

The small gathering didn’t like what Jacques has just insinuated because it raises a number of issues that swim in the murky pool of superstition and bad omens. Mahmoud is quick off the mark to nip the potential trouble in the bud.

“I agree with Jacques but we have to remember we are dealing with a culture that believed in a number of fantastic notions when it came to their deepest religious doctrines. And I must add that I do not want to

hear one whisper outside of this room about the devil or evil doings as it will upset my people and none of us can afford the luxury of wasting time over this type of nonsense.”

“Doctor Pittaloup why are you so sure that it is an upside down pyramid?” Gad asks cautiously sensing the tension building between the two specialists.

“Because once we discovered this inverted ‘false door’ it struck me that looking at these drawings we are also looking at an inverted Mastaba.”

“What’s a Mastaba?” asked Tom innocently.

“A wanker!” Todd said jokingly.

Mahmoud throws Tom and Todd a humiliating expression of ‘you idiots’. Jacques catches the indignant look and proceeds to explain.

“A Mastaba is a tomb that is like a small pyramid with its top cut off. They became fashionable during the third dynasty together with mummification. A Mastaba has a ‘false door’ on one of the sides usually the south end of the eastern side that often leads into a corridor that arrives at a second false door at the other end of the eastern side. This leads to a small chamber of offerings to the gods to help with the passage into the after life. Often a shaft from the top of the Mastaba drops down quite deep into the earth to the burial chamber. Perhaps the best known mastaba is Pharaoh Khoufou’s mother’s tomb. Famous because the Pharaoh Cheops had his mother, Queen Hetep-heres, moved from Saqqara to a Mastaba near his great pyramid in Giza because he was worried about grave robbers. The strange thing was when they discovered this tomb, not that long ago actually, everything was still in there but the sarcophagus was empty. Experts think that the mummy had been stolen before her tomb had even been moved, but those responsible for the shifting didn’t have the courage to tell the Pharaoh the bad news. And, well, what we have here is an upside down Mastaba. The inverted closed ‘false door’ is the clue and possibly the other-side of this door is a small chamber of offerings. There is most probably a shaft that will lead down to a tomb because I doubt they could work out a way of suspending a tomb in the air, therefore it would have gone down into the earth as usual. But I cannot work out why they have done this trick of upside-down; it’s unprecedented.”

“It reminds me of the Egyptian Tarot. The third card stands for instability and the sixth truth and secrets. The six is also the sign of Virgo, an earth sign, and the fourth day of creation representing the element of night. Significance changes for the cards if they are upside-down. A little like the twelfth Tarot Lamed. This is the hanged man representing sacrifice. What is interesting in this case is the card’s relationship to ‘The Mystic Cross’. The cross has polarity like a compass and it insinuates the ‘unavoidable law of sacrifice’. And all this wonderful information is hidden in the cards that were handed down from the Ancient Egyptians to the Persians as a gambling game. That’s the reason why they still exist today. My point is, that if Doctor Pittaloup is right about the frequency of the numbers three and six together with what was discovered today with the relief drawings we can start to look at other references that may give us a better understanding of what we are dealing with here.”

"Thankyou Corinne. All this tends to support the hypothesis that this whole place is related to the moon, the night and the dark side. Maybe this whole construction was to keep evil well away from where they lived along the Nile. It would certainly account for this site being so far from anything."

"I don't think we should jump to conclusions Jacques. I think the four tombs are going to reveal much more." Mahmoud said with an air of dismissing Jacques's theory.

"Well where do we start?" asked Charlie, already excited about what lies ahead.

"Can we do two things at once?"

"Err, it depends on what you had in mind Mahmoud."

"I think we need to know as soon as possible where we stand with the major construction on this site. On the other hand it would be silly to stop our work on the exterior chambers. So we need to know quite urgently what lies on the other side of the 'false door'."

"I think my team can accommodate the two projects simultaneously without too much difficulty."

"Excellent!"

"Well this is mainly because we can use just a probe camera on the 'false door' while Snoopy can attack the more challenging of the two tasks at hand."

"That's a very good idea," interjected Jacques, "because the 'false door,' being what it is, has a vent on the top, which in this case is on the bottom, thus a probe camera would be a perfect solution."

They are all so excited that they wish they could get started this very instant.

"Now where do we stand with the other Chambers? Brian!"

"We have discovered similar stone covers as the one you removed today in the south and eastern sites. No doubt we will find the same in the western chamber once it has been fully cleared."

"And where do we stand there? Mona..."

"Two days at the maximum and we will have finished with a clear run at what lies beneath Professor."

"Excellent. Ibrahim can you construct three more covers as the one you did this afternoon?"

"This is not a problem Professor."

"Good and can you make them a little better. What I saw this evening is not what I would consider professional."

"I'm sorry Professor but we do not have the materials on hand to do better on such short notice. I have already ordered the materials we will need. They will arrive tomorrow. We will replace the temporary cover in good time with something more substantial and in consequence to their required function."

"Well I'm happy to hear that Ibrahim. Now for some 'updates' on the latest reports. It has been established that the southern and eastern chambers were also used as workshops. Since the Northern was used for metal work, it is now thought that the south chamber was used for stone work. Remnants of red and black granite, the same used for the statues of Ammut, were discovered together with tools associated to this craft. We think that the eastern chamber was used for woodwork and the western site for ceramics. As for the reasons we are left speculating for the moment."

The group are showing signs of restlessness, as this is not really new news. But suddenly Mahmoud has all of their attention.

“The first results have come back from Canada. We have established from the DNA patterns that some of the people in the northern chamber came from the north. They are not Egyptian, but possibly Anatolian or Babylonian. The fact that we discovered the slag heaps of silver production we could safely assume the prior has priority over the later.”

Now the room is buzzing again with enthusiasm. This is a vital piece of information making it clear that the Egyptians were not in this alone. But it did raise other questions, of whether the northerners were here of their own choice, or did the Egyptians enslave them and why were they sacrificed? Jacques has something else to add even though he knew he should be in bed.

“Brian handed me the documentation that Doctor Choron had put together on the a type of marker they discovered over near Alexandria. He dated the site to the sixth dynasty during the reign of Pharaoh Teti. The hieroglyphs make reference to the lost city of Ra, Iunu, which it states that it forms the apex of the triad of the three. As the site near Alexandria is obviously dedicated to Horus, due to the number of statues and his name being present, it’s possible that this site, the third vector of the triangle as well as representing the third member of the triad, is dedicated to Seth. And it’s no wonder that it is stuck out here! Seth represented the evil in the realm of the Gods.”

“Yes, yes Jacques it’s worthy of some consideration.” Mahmoud said in a brushing off sort of tone.

Mahmoud hated Jacques’s insistence that that the place is loaded with evil contributes.

“Well by the number of Joe Blakes running around that makes sense!” Tom adds.

“Joe Blakes?” Mahmoud inquires.

“Snakes. Tom means the snakes.” Hal says to calm Mahmoud’s puzzled expression.

“Oh the snakes, yes that’s another problem we should try and get rid of!” He makes it sound as if Tom is also a problem to be dealt with. This is his sneaky intention. How he enjoys to provoke paranoia.

Outside the two dogs’ look innocently into the night. They both lick their blood stained jowls, almost in unison. They have been out during the meeting getting up to mischief – evil mischief.

Marilyn is shocked when she discovers the state her dogs are in. Panicked she urges them out of sight of the other folk leaving the unit. While insisting that they move she keeps asking them what they have done, but obviously her repeated question is in vein. She did not like what she has seen, and she is not going to say anything to anyone out of the fear that Mahmoud, if he gets wind of it, would ask her to get rid of the dogs before any real trouble starts. And she doesn’t want to be the first one to light a fire especially after what Doctor Pittaloup had just insinuated this very evening.