

## Season of Inundation

By Sheila Paulson

### North Africa, 1942

The desert sun beat down on Tully Pettigrew's unprotected head with a savage patience. When the jeep had spun out and tipped, he'd gone one way and his helmet had gone the other. Damn, who'd have thought Dietrich was good enough to shoot out one of the tires? The only lucky break was that the German was on foot, too, stranded, separated from his men.

Hitch wheeled the other jeep around in a sharp turn that sent a wide arc of sand slewing out from his tires. Moves like that would have made any moonshine runner back home proud. Beyond the overturned jeep, Moffitt staggered unsteadily to his feet, one hand to his head, his other arm dangling uselessly. Looked like he was hurt. Tully gestured at Hitch to go after the Englishman first and then drew his pistol to be ready if Dietrich came for him before Troy and Hitch could reach him. The smoke from the burning half-track rose up like a beacon for any stray Germans lurking around with the destruction of the Rat Patrol in mind. But Dietrich had vanished.

Tully had seen enough of the crafty German captain to know his disappearance was a bad sign. On foot, separated from his troops, he'd go to ground, but where could he go in a place like this where there was nothing but rolling dunes? Off to the left, a ridge of jagged rock jutted out of the sand like a U-boat breaking out of the ocean caught at the top of its thrust, but it was too far away for Dietrich to have reached it yet. Tully hadn't lost consciousness when he'd been pitched out of the jeep, so he knew he had kept track of time.

Hitch stopped beside Moffitt and jumped out to haul him into the jeep while Troy manned the fifty. They were sitting ducks for a sniper--but Dietrich wasn't the type to take potshots from ambush unless he was forced to by circumstances. He was out here alone, without water. He wouldn't want to be captured, but could he depend on his men to follow the smoke signal and pick him up before the heat of the day took its toll on him?

Tully snagged a canteen out of the overturned jeep and slung the strap over his neck, then, .45 in hand, he headed for the nearest ridge. Only place Dietrich could have gone.

Troy saw him. "Watch it, Tully," he yelled.

"Just gonna check, Sarge," he called back and jerked his thumb toward the top of the ridge. He didn't like giving Dietrich a warning, but he didn't think the German would shoot him out of hand now that the battle was over. Might try to ambush him or take him hostage, but Tully was ready for that. All he wanted was to scope out the lay of the land. From the way Hitch was working on it, Moffitt's arm might be broken. That gave Tully a couple of minutes, just to be sure. He waved in the direction he intended to go, and Troy swung the fifty around to offer him cover.

Careful not to present too obvious a target at the top of the ridge, Tully

flung himself down on his stomach, wiggled the last few feet to the top, and peered over the rim of the dune. The dune ran down smoothly to a small valley, the sand dimpled in the middle, and then up the other side to a series of smaller dunes that gradually blended into rocky outcrops. There was no trace of Dietrich. Had he ducked behind the burning half-track? No, he had been cut off from it, hadn't he?

Tully squinted down at the little valley. The wind wasn't strong enough to have erased footprints this quickly, was it? He thought he saw some marks in the sand, as if someone had rolled down the hill. Lying near the center of the hollow was a small dark object. Familiar.

It looked like a Luger.

Dietrich wouldn't abandon his weapon. Tully grimaced and scratched his head, rolling the matchstick back and forth between his lips. Dietrich wouldn't be stupid enough to leave his Luger to bait a trap, not unless he had run out of clips for it. Even if he had, there was nowhere for him to hide down there, unless he'd buried himself in the sand.

Tully wiggled back a few feet. "Sarge! I see Dietrich's Luger. I'm going after it."

Troy pulled his attention back from the further ridge. "You see Dietrich?"

"Nope. Just the weapon. Nowhere for him to hide, either."

"There better not be. Get it fast. I don't want you out of my sight for more than thirty seconds." He stood guard on the fifty while Hitch attended to Moffitt's arm.

"Got it."

Tully crept up to the lip of the dune and peered over again. The Luger lay where it had been and no one had disturbed the sand in his brief absence. He chewed on the matchstick. Weird mystery. Probably it would be safer not to explore, but if he could secure the Luger, at least it would mean that Dietrich was unarmed.

Tully slithered down the slope, sand spurting out under his feet to create mini-avalanches. Nothing else moved. He couldn't feel any eyes on him, either. The weird sense that he was being watched, the sense he'd honed running 'shine back home, lay sleeping. This was just an empty little hollow, no one here but him.

So why did the hairs lift on the back of his neck?

He scooped up the Luger. Had to be Dietrich's. Too much coincidence otherwise, and the shifting desert sands would have covered it long ago if it had been left here from a previous battle.

As his fingers closed around the weapon, the sands beneath his feet shifted, slipped.

Vanished.

He felt the ground open up beneath his feet.

No, even as he fell, he realized the hole had been there all along, just nearly invisible because of the weird angle of the slightly jutting stone. The sand had

bunched up against it, but his weight pulled him sideways and down. Down under the lip of stone, down into darkness.

As he fell, the stone gave his head a healthy clip and chopped off his yell. Sand poured down with him, drifting, sliding, packing up against the stone to block the opening again. He thought he heard the click of stone hitting stone, sealing him in.

By the time Tully hit the stone pavement below, he had lost all interest in the situation. His head throbbed so fiercely he could scarcely see the flaming torch held aloft over him that illuminated the looming shapes of bird-faced and jackal-headed gods, or the man who loomed above him, gripping the torch in his hand.

All around him, the firelight glinted off the gold of towering walls. Then they ran together into a universal golden nothing, and he spiraled down into darkness.

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"Damn it, I said thirty seconds," Troy gritted out. "Hitch, get up there to the top of the dune and see what's taking him so long."

Hitch tucked away the first aid kit and gave Moffitt's sling one final tug before he stepped back and drew his .45. "Right, Sarge."

"Be careful, Hitch." Moffitt's voice was laced with pain, but his face was all buttoned up; that British stiff-upper-lip thing he was so good at.

Hitch nodded, then he hurried up the dune in Tully's tracks, conscious of the two sergeants' eyes on his back. Dietrich must have been there after all, maybe wiggled down into the sand for camouflage. Wouldn't put it past the German--he was sneaky. Hitch tucked his bubble gum into his cheek so he wouldn't crack it and create a warning, then he went flat and eeled his way the last few feet to the top of the dune.

Son of a bitch! There was nothing down there, just a hollowed-out little valley. No trace of Tully, no sign of the weapon he'd gone to retrieve. No evidence of Dietrich lurking and gloating. Just the marks in the sand of Tully's descent and then--nothing. Weirdest thing he'd ever seen. No tracks went up the other side, either, but at the bottom of the valley, the sand lay smooth and unbroken.

It was as if Tully had been snatched up in midair.

Hitch slid below the top of the dune and sat up. "Sarge, you're not gonna believe this," he called out. *Or like it, either.*

Leaving the injured Moffitt in the passenger seat, Troy hopped behind the wheel and drove closer. Then he jumped out, .45 in hand. "Wait there, Moffitt." He passed a pistol to the Brit. Good thing it was his left arm that was broken, if one of them had to be; he could still hold it. Troy started up the side of the dune. "What do you see?"

"He's not there, Sarge. Nowhere for him to go, either."

Troy slanted him a suspicious frown. "Oh, come on, Hitch, people don't just disappear without a trace."

"Have a look. I never saw anything like it."

The two men crept back to the top of the dune and peered down into the valley. It hadn't changed in the last few minutes. Tully hadn't mysteriously returned, and there was no trace of Dietrich or any Germans. The sand lay smooth and unbroken beyond the broken off line of footprints Tully had left behind.

"Damn it," Troy muttered under his breath, then he heaved a frustrated sigh and raised his voice. "Tully!" The sound of his cry ran around the dunes and echoed back to him faintly once.

No one answered.

Troy muttered a profanity, then he tightened his grip on his pistol and tried again. "Dietrich! Give it up. You haven't got a prayer out here alone without water."

That didn't win him an answer, either.

"Where'd they go, Sarge?" Hitch didn't like weird things like this. The desert might have its own mysteries, but it didn't usually gobble people up in the middle of a clear blue day.

Troy shrugged. "Come on," he said. He drew his sidearm and led the way down into the valley, sand slithering out from beneath his feet as he went. Hitch fell in beside him.

The sand had shifted to cover Tully's footsteps. Maybe there'd been an eddy of wind at the bottom of the valley, but that didn't mean it would have blown every footprint away. It was like a giant bird had swooped over and snatched Tully--and maybe Dietrich, too, since Tully had claimed to see his abandoned weapon.

"Think they fell down a well, Sarge?" Hitch asked, remembering the time the Rats had banded together with Dietrich to rescue a child from an old well.

"Good an answer as any. Watch where you step, Hitch. If there's a sinkhole here I don't want the rest of us to fall into it. Moffitt won't be able to haul us out with that broken arm."

They circled the area cautiously. "Tully!" Troy kept his voice low. There was no sense of presence out here in the Sahara, no prickle on the back of Hitch's neck. He'd come to trust that sensation when it prodded him, to learn his senses had subconsciously picked up warnings, but this time he didn't feel it. No Arab tribesmen lurking just over the far dune; they'd never have covered all their tracks in the few minutes before Hitch had gone to investigate. He tried to imagine camel-mounted Arabs with giant brooms sweeping away the markings of their passage--and failed to picture it.

Troy finally worked his way down to the bottom of the valley. "I'm gonna try something," he said. "If there's a hole, maybe it's narrow; it'd have to be for the sand to cover it up. A man standing up might fall." He stretched himself out flat on the sand. "Stay back. If I start to slither through, grab my feet."

"Sure, Sarge." Hitch positioned himself behind Troy, who stretched out carefully with his arms and dug his fingers into the sand, groping around for openings.

"Anything, Sarge?" The urge to chew his bubble gum was strong, but he

kept it tucked away. The slightest sound might warn him of trouble.

"Damn!" Troy's face twisted.

"Sarge?"

"There's rocks under here." He brushed back sand to reveal a rocky slab of stone. "I can buy a well, but not a well with a lid that closes automatically." He dug in another space and uncovered more stone. A third spot uncovered more, worn flat and smooth by the action of the ever-shifting sands. Troy pushed and prodded it, but it was as solid as a mountain.

With a muttered curse, Troy sat up and ran his eyes around the high ridges. Nothing moved but the wind, gently stirring the sands. "Where the hell is he?" he demanded.

"What're we gonna do, Sarge? Not leave him here?"

"Leave him *where*?" Troy muttered. "Damn it, we need to get Moffitt back to an aid station." He rolled his eyes at the sun. "Getting late. We need to move soon." He caught himself and muttered something extremely profane. "The half-track."

All that smoke, sending a warning beacon back to the rest of Dietrich's men. Depended on how far away Dietrich's base was, whether a patrol was out, whether anybody had seen the smoke. Retreat was the safest course, but that meant leaving Tully wherever he was. Staying meant risking three lives, with an injured man. Hitch didn't know if the overturned jeep could be righted or whether or not it could run if it was. But running with both jeeps meant no one to man either fifty. Moffitt couldn't do it with a broken arm, so that meant unless they abandoned a jeep, Hitch would have to drive one and Troy the other. They'd have to hope they could outrun any Germans they encountered because they couldn't run and fight.

This was crazy. Tully couldn't have just disappeared. Maybe the stones had shifted after he fell. Hitch scuffed at them with his boot. There had to be an answer. He just couldn't think.

"Want me to take the jeep and have a look?" Hitch volunteered.

"Yeah, but we'll all go. Circle around, get the lay of the land, then come back here. If there hasn't been any trace of Germans by then, I want to take another look around. People don't just vanish without a trace. I don't intend to leave Tully out here, not if I can help it."

They cast one last glance at the mysterious little hollow, then they climbed the hill together to tell Moffitt what had happened.

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### Georgetown Institute, Spring, 1986

The arrival of Doctor Juliana Moorhouse in Jonathan's office shouldn't have heralded trouble, but lately MacKensie had learned to recognize that particular expression on her face. He could tell at a glance when she had come on anthropology department business or when her arrival denoted a new foray into the realm of the supernatural. A more reluctant 'follower' of unexplained

phenomena could not be found than Jonathan MacKensie, but since Moorhouse held the power to approve his grants, he couldn't refuse to serve as chairman of Georgetown's Unexplained Phenomena Unit. Blackmail, pure and simple, but grants to study the possibility of a bicameral brain in Australopithecus and its quasi-contemporary hominids didn't exactly grow on trees.

The middle-aged woman carried a cardboard box tucked under one arm the way she might bear a handbag. The carton went ill with her expensive suit and string of perfectly matched pearls, but Jonathan had seen her handle the oddest items from shrunken heads to human bones with great aplomb when dressed more formally than this. Today, her grip indicated a certain reluctance to touch it, mingled with the excitement of risk. Yes, it was a paranormal instance, all right. Jonathan could only be glad that Doctor Moorhouse disapproved so heartily of his shadow-chasing partner, Edgar Benedek, that she had most likely made no attempt to summon him. That didn't mean Benedek wouldn't show up in hot pursuit in the next five minutes. The tabloid reporter could smell a mysterious development five states away. If Benedek's paper, *The National Register*, weren't based in Manhattan, Jonathan would probably get no teaching done at all. Benny would pop in every five minutes expecting Jonathan to drop everything and race out to Utah to look for the ghost of Julius Caesar--and why on Earth had Moorhouse bought into *that* little excursion?

"Doctor Moorhouse. How nice."

The tepid greeting made her arch an eyebrow. "You need to work on your delivery, MacKensie. One would almost think you weren't pleased to see me."

"Of course I am, Doctor Moorhouse. I'm always pleased to see you, but these midterm papers must be graded--"

"The papers will wait." She plopped the box on top of them. "We'll not wait for Doctor...." Her voice trailed off as she opened the box. It was perhaps twelve inches by twelve inches by three inches. In spite of his resolve to avoid Moorhouse's new project, Jonathan couldn't resist looking at the item that lay revealed when she removed the lid.

It was a triangle, three joined slabs each about an inch wide, with what looked like hieroglyphic designs along each side. It looked like it was made of metal, probably old copper to judge from the greenish color, even if Jonathan vaguely remembered that copper had not been common in ancient Egypt. Although Jonathan was not an archaeologist, he had taken classes in the subject as part of his anthropology degree and sometimes taught an intro to archaeology class with field work involving introducing classes to digs. He was by no means an expert in Egyptology, but he recognized a cartouche on one side of the square, the designation of a pharaoh, an ellipse that contained the name of one of Egypt's kings. He couldn't read hieroglyphs well enough to identify which king it was.

"Egyptian," he said in surprise. "Why bring it to me? Shouldn't it go to the Archaeology department?"

"It's been in our museum's Egyptian section since the start of the spring term," Doctor Moorhouse replied. Very carefully, she did not touch the item. "It is

believed to represent the seasons of the Egyptian calendar, of which there were three. Another piece of the artifact is missing; if you were to turn it over, you could see where something had been designed to interlock with this."

"It represents the calendar?" That didn't sound particularly paranormal, thank goodness. Jonathan didn't let his relief show, though. Doctor Moorhouse had hardly produced the artifact so she could lecture him about Egyptian calendars.

"The three seasons of ancient Egypt were *akhet*, the inundation, when the waters of the Nile rose to fertilize the land, *peret*, when the land emerged from the floodwaters, and *shemu*, the time of harvest."

"That's all very interesting, Doctor Moorhouse, but these papers...." He made a futile gesture at the buried student essays.

She frowned. "This artifact has been studied ever since it was donated to our collection. It is priceless. It makes reference to the Book of Thoth."

Jonathan had vaguely heard the term, but he couldn't remember it specifically. "The Book of Thoth?"

"The Book of Thoth was a compilation of papyrus documents, forty-two of them, that the god Thoth had supposedly dictated. He is the god of scribes, the inventor of writing—and, incidentally, the calendar." She nodded at the triangular artifact. "The books dealt with astronomy and astrology, religious traditions, medicine and philosophy. The documents were never recovered, and only references to them have been discovered in other papyri."

"And you think this artifact could lead to the Book of Thoth? Tomb robbers wouldn't take precautions with papyri, and many tombs were plundered in antiquity. Even if one could locate an undiscovered tomb, exposure to the air might turn them into dust unless a skilled team were on hand to insure preservation. Even the most modern preservation methods might not manage to save them all." He knew some ancient papyri had survived, but it was fragile and called for special treatment. Careless handling could destroy what had survived for countless centuries.

"True, if the only preservation were on papyri."

He stared at her, intrigued in spite of his intentions and the fact that it had nothing to do with his own field. To discover copies of the Book of Thoth would be a stellar archaeological achievement. "What, then? The text carved in hieroglyphs on the walls of an undiscovered temple or tomb?" A find like that would probably be the most exciting event in Egyptian archaeology since Carter's discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun.

"I want you to pick up the artifact, MacKensie. Hold it firmly in both hands, and close your eyes."

He didn't want to touch it. An air about it consciously repelled. If it were a guardian of the Book of Thoth, it might prefer to retain the secrets it had concealed for several millennia. Why should Moorhouse bring it here? Why not turn the Institute's most gifted linguists loose on it? Was the missing portion Moorhouse mentioned essential to the translation?

His department chair was not a woman you could refuse, however. Jonathan

heaved a sigh and picked up the artifact. Strange, the way his hands seemed to know exactly where to grip it, the way his fingers curled around the cool metal, avoiding the ridges along the back where the missing piece would fit.

He closed his eyes.

*"Lord of heavens, beautiful of night,  
We offer you our homage."*

The chant was uttered in a language no modern human had ever heard correctly pronounced, but Jonathan understood it as if it were English. His office swirled away to be replaced by a vast, torchlit chamber, the walls crammed with gleaming golden panels of hieroglyphs, so very many of them. Elaborate statues, decorated with gold and gemstones and draped with fine linen, stood here and there about the room. Priests wearing masks to represent the gods marched down the center of the chamber, clad in linen shirts and kilts, their sandaled feet whispering against the paving stones. There was the jackal's head of Anubis, a crocodile mask to represent Sobek, and many more. Thoth's ibis mask adorned the leading priest, who bore before him the artifact Jonathan held, with the missing piece firmly in place. It was a circle that fit into the ridges, so that it could move round and round.

The leading priest, the Thoth priest, with a man at his side dressed in the simple skirt of a vizier, stopped in front of the nearest wall. Everyone behind him fell into place, and the chanting resumed.

Although Jonathan could see the ancient priests, they gave no indication that they could see him. Instead they moved as if to walk right through him, and Jonathan gave a startled yelp and opened his eyes.

At once the vision was replaced by the eager, grinning face of Edgar Benedek, who hovered expectantly at Doctor Moorhouse's side. Benedek snatched the artifact from Jonathan's hands and dumped it on the desk. Automatically, he rubbed his own hands on his gaudy print shirt as if the touch had contaminated him. He also edged his body between Jonathan and the artifact and planted his feet. Jonathan had the feeling it would take brute force to get to the artifact again.

"Thought you were gonna disappear on us, Jon-boy," he crowed. "What's that you've got there? Looks like a part of the Calendar of the Gods to me."

Moorhouse gave an exasperated snort. "Benedek, what are you talking about?" she demanded, although Jonathan had a feeling she knew very well to what Benedek referred.

He grinned at her. He had the most shameless grin, and he sprang it on Moorhouse whenever he got the chance. "Come on, Doctor M, you're chairman--excuse me, *chairperson*--of the Anthro department. You know about the Calendar of the Gods. Ancient talisman that controls the fate of the universe."

"The fate of the *universe*?" Jonathan blurted involuntarily, then he bit down on his lip to silence himself. The last thing he wanted to do was to buy into one of Benedek's wild theories. It never did to encourage Benedek, who would persist in the face of major opposition, let alone hesitant encouragement.

Benedek pasted on a shameless expression. "Would I kid you, JJ?"

"Whenever possible," Jonathan replied automatically.

"I have heard of the Calendar of the Gods, MacKensie," Moorhouse cut in, and her reluctance to give Benedek credence rang in her voice. "It's known in myth and legend as an artifact that was said to have been created in antiquity and, if it were ever divided, it would have to be reunited to prevent the seasons of the world from coming to an end."

Jonathan grimaced. "And just when is this supposed to happen?"

"Nobody knows," Benny replied. "Except that if it's separated, when the time comes, the artifact itself will seek completion."

"How?" asked Jonathan skeptically. He didn't care for such far-fetched tales; they were usually invented out of whole cloth by sensation seekers, the way the gullible had believed in the Mummy's Curse after the discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamun.

"Through visions," Benny said alarmingly. "It's said those who handle the artifact will see visions of ancient rituals."

"You're making that up," Jonathan muttered uneasily.

"It's a fact. You didn't see yourself just now. You looked like you were about to turn transparent. The disappearing prof. Am I right, Doctor M?"

"Much as it grieves me to agree with anything Benedek says, there was a rather faint suggestion of transparency about you just now, MacKensie."

"So, did you see anything mystical when you were holding the Calendar, JJ?" Benedek prodded hopelessly. He waggled his eyebrows in encouragement.

"It was most likely my imagination," Jonathan insisted.

"Bingo. You *did* see something. Tell all."

"Yes, MacKensie, what did you see?" Moorhouse hovered closer, her face alight with fascination.

Jonathan hesitated. Did he want to encourage their shared delusion? Did he even want to admit that he had seen something, heard something? It had felt so real.

Before he could confess that there had indeed been a vision, the door to his office burst open and two old men walked in, one taller and leaner than the other carrying a briefcase tucked under his arm. The shorter man had a relaxed, easygoing, laid-back posture, but it was belied by the concern on his face. He was a member of the archaeology department; Jonathan knew him by sight even if he couldn't immediately recall the man's name. He'd exchanged a few words with Jonathan here and there, at department meetings and Institute functions. "Doctor Moorhouse, you retrieved the artifact? MacKensie, I've been meaning to tell you--"

His voice broke off and he stared at Benedek in utter shock. The color left his face as he studied Jonathan and Benedek standing side by side.

The taller man focused deep brown eyes on Jonathan, then moved past him to study Benedek. "You!" He had a lean face, thick grey hair and a bushy mustache that was still mostly brown. Jonathan thought he was probably in his sixties. Both of them were, but they both looked fit and healthy. And, abruptly, very interested.

Benedek's eyebrows shot up, but he struck a pose. "Me," he conceded. "The one, the only, Edgar Benedek."

"What is this, Doctor?" Moorhouse asked the shorter man. "And who is your friend?"

"I'll explain in a moment," he replied, then he turned to Jonathan and Benny. "It's a good thing you're both here," he proclaimed. "I knew about Doctor MacKensie, of course, since I've seen you at department meetings. When I realized Doctor Moorhouse had brought you the artifact, I hurried over as soon as I could. Thank God Mister Benedek is here. You're just in time to save the world."

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### North Africa, 1942

"Private Pettigrew? Wake up."

Tully didn't want to open his eyes. He recognized that voice and knew that if he looked up, he'd see Captain Dietrich looming over him. Maybe Dietrich didn't have his Luger, but he might have other means of restraining Tully. He wasn't tied now; he couldn't feel any bonds on his wrists or ankles. He wasn't sure if that was good or bad. So Pettigrew lay unmoving, listening, trying to tell what else was going on. No warmth of sunlight touched his face. He was still trapped. The faint crackle of a small fire reminded him there had been a flaming torch before.

Time to check it out. He squinted at Dietrich. Yep, there he was, sitting cross-legged near Tully. No trace of a weapon in his hand. He'd propped two torches against a stone container, a tomb or sarcophagus like the ones Moffitt knew about, and a third one lay braced in the arms of a towering statue. The dancing light cast its glow and its shadows on the golden walls full of ancient Egyptian writing, and statues like the one that obligingly held the torch loomed out of the darkness here and there. The room was huge.

Gigantic jars at least waist-high lined up against one wall, and a raised platform that made Tully think of ancient altars rested against the opposite one. The sarcophagus stood out in the middle of the chamber, made out of some black stone like basalt. It had carvings on it of stylized Egyptian figures, and a shelf in front of it held a row of those canopic jars Tully had read about in Moffitt's father's book. No expert in Egyptology, Tully only knew enough to make wild guesses about the chamber.

But the speculation would have to wait. He opened his eyes the rest of the way and faced Dietrich without enthusiasm. "I take it we're stuck in here?"

"Unfortunately yes. I have been unable to find an opening. Perhaps the sands drifted over it and buried it long ago."

"We landed here. Troy will find us."

"He hasn't yet. You have been unconscious perhaps five minutes. You struck your head on that protrusion when you fell." He pointed to the statue that held the torch. "I believe it represents Anubis, the Lord of the Afterlife."

Tully grimaced. That was all they needed. He sat up carefully. "Is this a lost

tomb?"

"So it would appear. My interest in archaeology is mild, my knowledge less than comprehensive. However, this appears to be an undiscovered tomb. Or at least a chamber in which a sarcophagus resides."

"Yeah." Tully frowned at it. "Didn't they used to bury all kinds of things with the important people: food and jewels and things?" He didn't see any jewels lurking around, although several boxes might have contained them. The room seemed fairly empty for an unlooted tomb, but what did he know? Not enough. He'd like to know more, but anything else would have to wait until after the war--assuming he could get out of here. Troy would figure he must have fallen into a hole. He glanced at the ceiling. The stones must have closed up again. There was no visible opening overhead. Maybe Troy couldn't find it.

Nah, Troy wouldn't quit. He'd have Tully's footprints to go by; they'd lead right to the spot. Unless more of Dietrich's men had shown up in response to the smoke of the burning half-track and Troy had decided to run and come back later. Moffitt was injured, and Tully's jeep might be out of commission. Maybe they'd needed to take off. But he'd be back. Troy didn't abandon his people.

Dietrich had retrieved his Luger, and it was snapped into its holster. It must have fallen through the roof with Tully. He checked for his own pistol, but it had disappeared. Typical Dietrich. Nobody could say the guy wasn't sharp. At least he wasn't waving his weapon at Tully.

"I do not know that this is a typical tomb," Dietrich replied. "Nor does it matter. We must band together, Private, to escape from this place, or else it will become *our* tomb."

Tully pondered that. He wished he still had his matchstick to chew to aid his concentration. "Yeah," he conceded warily. He didn't trust Dietrich as far as he could throw him. The proposed deal was on the table only because Dietrich needed him. Once they escaped, it would be business as usual. He had to figure out how to get the upper hand before then.

Dietrich accepted Tully's concession, probably for exactly what it was worth. There was grudging--and temporary--trust in his eyes, trust for the situation only. "We must search this place."

Tully had that much trust for Dietrich, too. The guy had captured the Rats together and singly more than once. He'd do it again in a heartbeat, relying on his people coming to look for him, probably once they saw the plume of smoke from the half-track. But he'd also expect Troy, Hitch, and Moffitt to be waiting. He'd expect their concern for Tully to put them into jeopardy. He was probably counting on it.

Tully had been in tight spots before, here in North Africa, too many times to count. Been in them back home, too, running 'shine. But Dietrich was smarter and more persistent than any revenue collector Tully had ever encountered. Tully could outwit one of them without raising a sweat. Outwitting Dietrich was a lot harder.

He dug in his pocket for a fresh matchstick, conscious of Dietrich stiffening to alertness at the movement. When he realized what Tully sought, he didn't shut

the attention away. He just hauled it into place. "Can you stand?"

Tully pushed himself up. His head ached but not so badly as to suggest he'd given himself a concussion on the Anubis statue. He wasn't dizzy and he wasn't seeing two Dietrichs--one was bad enough. "Yeah," he conceded with a wave of his hand to his left. "I'll head this way." He gestured past the statue to where the room opened out into shadows. It looked like the place was bigger than he'd thought at first. They might be looking at something nearly as long as a football field here, although it was narrower.

Dietrich measured Tully's proposed route with his eyes and decided to let him go for it. They moved in different directions, peeking behind statues and huge urns, seeking a secret way out. Hadn't Moffitt once said these tombs had concealed entrances? They'd be hidden, to keep tomb robbers out, but they wouldn't need to be hidden from the inside, would they? Out here in the Sahara, he and Moffitt spent a lot of time together in their jeep, and, since Tully wasn't a talky kind of man, Moffitt sometimes filled the long hours with archaeology. He was a good teacher; the things he said sank in and stuck with Tully. The ancient stuff fascinated him a lot more than he'd ever let on. He wasn't the kind of man who gushed over what excited him. He'd leave that kind of attitude to Hitch, who fell in love three or four times a week and repeatedly bored his friends with raptures over his new fancy. Instead, Tully absorbed the things that Moffitt told him and learned from them. Maybe one day, when the war was over, he'd go back to school, see about getting a fancy degree. He'd be the first one in his family to go to college. 'Doctor' Pettigrew had a great ring to it. If that ever happened, he'd have to track down his three teammates and tell them all about it.

"Might be secret openings," he called to Dietrich. The German was the enemy, but finding a way out of this place didn't betray his country. Out here in the desert, it was easier to get down to essentials. Life or death, that's what it amounted to. He might have to shoot at Dietrich when this was over, or guide his jeep close enough for Moffitt to use the fifty against him or lob a grenade, but none of that was personal. You had to shut off the personal in war, had to or go crazy. But there were times you could turn it back on, and this was one of them.

"I am aware of that," Dietrich called back. He craned his neck to peer over a row of tall urns. "You have learned of ancient tombs from Sergeant Moffitt?"

Tully chewed on his matchstick while he considered the question. No hidden traps there. Dietrich knew Moffitt studied ancient stuff. "Yeah, a little," he conceded. "Not enough to find the way out."

"Nor do I know enough."

"Might have to wait for Troy," Tully offered.

"Or my own men."

Tully shook his head. "They won't know where to look for you."

"Did Sergeant Troy see you vanish?"

Old Dietrich had a way of going to the heart of a problem. Tully shook his head. "Nah, but he knew where I was."

Dietrich was silent, probably thinking it was better to be a prisoner than

dead. Prisoners sometimes escaped; but dead men never did. He moved a little further on.

Tully smiled to himself. Even if Troy had to take off to avoid a German patrol, he'd come back. Dietrich might be armed, but the odds were all in Tully's favor.

Something metallic clanged against his boot toe and he bent to pick it up. Weird device. It had two parts that moved in his hand. The sturdy part, the one that didn't rotate, was a triangle, about the size of the one hanging on the barn back home that Pa used to ring to call him home for dinner. This one was ancient Egyptian with those hieroglyphic carvings on it. Attached to the back of it was a circular part, its curving edges reaching out past the three planes of the triangle. It moved loosely within its mounting, but not so loosely as to make Tully think it would fall apart.

"What is it you have there, Private?" Dietrich had come right up behind him.

"Don't know," Tully admitted. It wasn't a weapon, anyway. He could belt Dietrich with it, but there was no point. It wouldn't get them out of here. "Artifact, I guess."

Dietrich stretched out his hand for it, and Tully had to resist the childish urge to put it behind his back. It was a...a curiosity, no more. They could take a minute or two to look at it. When he was out of here, Tully could give it to Moffitt, or at least tell him about it and find out what it was for. In that moment, he realized that he cared what it was for. It was different, it was unique, and he felt the birth of archaeological fervor stir inside him.

Dietrich handled it carefully. His interest wasn't as great as Tully's, but it was not an ignorant interest, either. He weighed it in his hands, rotated the circle with a movement of his finger, and shook his head. "Intriguing. I have seen nothing like this before. But since it does not appear to be a map to a secret doorway...."

"Yeah." Tully took it back to put aside, and the metallic object came apart between them, leaving Dietrich holding the circle while he clutched the triangle.

The minute the artifact separated, the entire room changed.

People swarmed into the chamber from a doorway that hadn't been there moments earlier, people in weird costumes, wearing masks over their heads in the shape of birds and animals. Tully recognized some of them from the illustrations in Moffitt's father's book. Ancient Egyptian gods. Anubis. Thoth, Horus, Sobek, Isis, Hathor. Surrounding them were two rows of men, obviously servants, bearing torches to illuminate the chamber. What was really weird was that, in spite of the light, the place was as gloomy as before--as if the light weren't real. Tully chomped down on his matchstick so hard it snapped in two.

Dietrich's Luger sprang into his hand. "What is this? What trick...." His voice trailed off when he realized, as Tully had, that the newcomers couldn't see them.

"Ghosts?" Tully offered with reluctant superstition.

Dietrich cast him one startled, impatient glance, then he shook his head. "No. It is more of an...image of something that happened here before."

"The Curse of the Pharaohs?" Tully knew Moffitt would scoff at that, but what was this? A hallucination? A mirage?

"I do not believe in ghosts."

Tully wasn't sure if he did or not. He was seeing *something*. He and Dietrich both saw it, if the shock on the German's face was any indication. Maybe it had something to do with the thing they each held a part of. Maybe breaking it apart had triggered the weird vision.

"We see it," he said simply.

"But *what* do we see?"

Tully studied the figures. They were chanting in an unknown language. Ancient Egyptian. Tully had never learned it; but then neither had anybody else. They could read the hieroglyphs, but Moffitt said they had to guess how the words were pronounced. He'd explained all that one boring day when they were playing watchdog for a convoy, mile after endless mile shepherding supplies through to a remote outpost. Tully had let most of it flow over him without sinking in. Moffitt had been new to the team then, and Tully wasn't yet sure he was interested. Now, he called some of it back.

"Ritual," he offered, feeling in his pocket for a fresh matchstick. "That one in the lead is Thoth."

Then it got weirder yet, because all of a sudden, he could *understand* what they were saying.

*"Lord of heavens, beautiful of night,  
We offer you our homage."*

Dietrich jerked. He got it, too. He muttered under his breath, "I do not speak this language."

"Me, neither," Tully admitted.

They exchanged a doubtful glance of unexpected companionship, then turned back to watch the procession.

The priest in the lead--Tully was sure it was a priest--wore the mask of Thoth. Which god was that? He'd seen statues and figurines once in a marketplace in Cairo, all nicely labeled for the tourists, all junk claiming to be three thousand years old. Thoth, that was the god of writing, wasn't it? Wisdom and learning? Something like that, anyway. He struggled to remember more, but he'd have to ask Moffitt later. Right now it was enough to watch the subsidiary priests mass behind him, lined up in rows, the different gods indicated by the headpieces the priests wore. Besides the torch-bearing servants, only one or two other guys were there without masks, and one of them wore a weird skirt thing that draped from his chest to below his knees, with straps like suspenders over the shoulders. The guys with the animal headdresses all wore white linen and sandals, similar enough that it might be a kind of uniform, the way a Catholic priest wore robes to celebrate mass.

They all bunched up in front of a statue of Thoth that towered above them. It was still in the same place in the present day; Tully could see the worn statue through the mask of the gleaming new one with its fresh paint.

Then the Thoth-priest did something that caught the instant attention of Tully and Dietrich. He held out his hands and one of the servants, a guy in a basic kilt, offered the priest a tray that held the artifact Tully had discovered. It was intact, not separate as it was now, and it gleamed with newness. The color was different, too, but then copper will tarnish, and Tully guessed it was probably made of copper.

"The circle of eternity, the calendar of the gods," chanted the Thoth priest, his voice muffled by the headpiece he wore. "While the seasons turn, while Upper and Lower Egypt are one, so shall the gods rule. Silent Being, Lord of Heavens, guide us, protect us."

"Evidently a ritual," Dietrich murmured. If any of the almost-transparent people heard him, they didn't show it.

"But let the circle of time separate from the seasons of the calendar, and we shall lose your protection."

That had a bad ring to it. Tully glanced down at the triangle artifact in his hand and then over to the circle Dietrich held. They'd just separated them. It didn't mean trouble, did it?

Nah, it couldn't. It was just primitive superstition.

Then why did the hair stir on the back of his neck? Why did Dietrich's fingers close around the circle so tightly that it shimmered in the torchlight?

That was when Tully realized that they were not the only observers to the ancient ritual. On the other side of the chamber, two men stood side by side, both of them grasping something. No, they each held in their hands what looked like the same artifacts Tully and Dietrich held. Their clothes didn't look Egyptian, either. It was modern, but not quite like anything Tully had ever seen before. The taller of the two men had long hair that parted in the middle and trailed down over his shirt collar in the back. He wore a suit, but the cut of it didn't seem quite normal. He held a triangle device exactly like Tully's.

The man beside him was dressed extremely eccentrically. He wore a short-sleeved shirt with vivid patterns in it in colors that appeared to Tully's eye to clash wildly, and denim Levis. He was shorter and more slender than the other man, but he appeared full of energy, and his eyes were wide with a combination of awe and excitement. He had the circle, identical to the one in Dietrich's hand. As Tully watched, he nudged his companion with his elbow. "So what do you think of this, buds?" he asked.

It was only when Dietrich made a curt sound of disbelief that Tully realized he had heard the question--and that it had been spoken in American English.

"What is this?" Dietrich demanded.

At the question, the two men looked past the chanting priests and saw them. But how could civilians find themselves in the middle of a war zone? They weren't even dressed like archaeologists.

"I see them," said the taller man, and his accent wasn't quite American, yet not quite as British as Moffitt's either, somewhere midway in between.

"Come on, Jon-boy," urged the print shirt. Without letting go of his circle, he

dragged 'Jon-boy' around the priests, who didn't seem to see them, either, in a wide circle that caught momentarily as if they had walked into an invisible object and needed to change direction, and came right up to the two.

"Hey," he said. "Greetings from April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1986. I'm Edgar Benedek, you can call me Benny, Edgar's for the press." He ran the words together as if it were a standard introduction. "My pal with the wide eyes here is our official skeptic, Doctor Jonathan MacKensie. His old man won a Nobel Prize--well, he'll win it a couple of decades from now. Can't tell you when, shouldn't have told you that." He drew back a step when he realized he was looking right down the barrel of Dietrich's Luger. "Uh, let's not shoot the nice journalist, Captain Dietrich. And whatever you do, don't put the circle down, not if you want to survive."

"You know my name?" Dietrich's hand tightened on the Luger. He ignored the threat. Unarmed men didn't alarm him. He was too used to combat for that.

"You and Tully Pettigrew," Doctor MacKensie said quickly. "We were told we would see you here."

"Who told you that?" Tully asked blankly.

"Someone with your interests at heart." He cast a glance at Benedek. "You do realize we are probably hallucinating, Benedek."

Tully reached out a cautious hand to Benedek, who was closest. What he was afraid of actually happened. His hand passed right through the journalist's arm.

"Shoot!" Tully muttered and jerked back involuntarily. "What the *heck* was that?" Dietrich's eyes widened and his mouth fell open. Even in the shock of the moment, Tully stored up Dietrich's astonishment in his memory to relate to Troy when this was over.

"That's because we aren't really here," Benedek explained. "It's the artifact that ties us together because we're holding it in our time. We're not even in North Africa." He nudged his friend with his elbow. "Explain *this*, Jon-boy."

"We were psyched to expect them," MacKensie said promptly. "What else?" But his eyes were huge as he stared around the tomb. "This is simply incredible," he breathed. "Look at the priests."

"Priests? They gonna go 'Dominus vobiscum' at us any second?" Benny asked lightly.

"Who are you men, and how do you know my name?" Dietrich persisted, unimpressed with Benedek's frivolity. He hadn't holstered his Luger, although his quick study of the two men must have shown them to be unarmed. Tully wasn't sure they didn't have concealed weapons, though. Nobody wandered around a war zone without any, or around the desert without water, but then they said they weren't really here. That was just crazy. Maybe he was delirious.

"Whoa. I'm transparent. Yo, Jonny, you can see right through me."

"Which is nothing new," MacKensie bantered.

"You claim to be from the future. What trick is this?" Dietrich's eyes were heavy with suspicion. He probably thought that this was some elaborate charade, staged by the allies.

"It's no trick, Hauptmann Dietrich." That was MacKensie, the one whose behavior seemed more normal. "I am as doubtful as you are, but I can't refute the evidence of my eyes, unless the artifact is capable of producing hallucinations."

"Come on, buds, the same hallucination for all four of us?" scoffed Benedek. He turned to Dietrich and toned down his quips. "You see, we were sent here. Shall I tell 'em, Jonny, or do you want to do the honors?"

MacKensie's eyes still lingered on the endless walls of hieroglyphics. "The Book of Thoth," he breathed. "Could it be...."

"Hey, I heard of that." Tully was startled into speaking. Moffitt had referred to the Book, said it was a collection of papyrus rolls full of ancient knowledge and that it was a great pity it had been lost with the ages. "I don't see any scrolls, unless they're in the urns, though."

Dietrich shot a startled glance in Tully's direction. "You are no archaeologist," he began, then he corrected himself. "Yet you drive for one. Perhaps you have actually learned...." He let that go as if he realized it didn't matter and studied the walls with interest. "This would be a valuable archaeological find?"

MacKensie looked at him sharply. "Extremely. Yet, gold can be melted down. To destroy these walls to fund a war would be a crime against humanity." He eyed Dietrich sternly, yet without condemnation, almost as if he already knew him.

Dietrich didn't know *him*, though. "What are you saying, Doctor MacKensie?"

MacKensie exchanged a questioning glance with Benedek, then looked past them as if seeking something neither Tully nor the German could see. He frowned. "That you will not sacrifice this tomb to Hitler's ambition, no matter your love for the Fatherland. What we have here may benefit all of mankind."

Dietrich's eyes filled with suspicion. "You do not know me. You know nothing of my motives."

"I know very little," Jonathan admitted, facing him, man to man. "Yet the little I do know indicates you are a man of integrity."

"He did recognize you, Dietrich," Tully pointed out. "They called you by name. They knew who I was, too." He shivered. "Are we famous in the future?" The second he asked the question, he felt foolish for voicing it. This was so weird that he'd let himself drift with it. Seeing the priests in the background going on with their ritual, even while he and Dietrich talked to the two civilians who claimed to be from the future, was just too strange. He was probably still unconscious and this was a dream, with all the background filled in from the times he'd listened to Moffitt ramble out there in the jeep. He sneaked a pinch of his arm to see if he could feel it. Yup. He *was* awake, even if this was crazy.

"How do you know us?" Dietrich persisted. Never gave up on anything, Dietrich.

Jonathan MacKensie smiled uneasily. "Because you sent us here," he insisted. It seemed a crazy claim, but maybe he thought it was the only way to convince them.

"We sent you here? I? Or Private Pettigrew?"

"Both of you," Benny said with a grin. "Course you were a lot more geriatric then."

"This *is* a trick." Dietrich backed up a step. It sent him right through the lead priest, the Thoth one, who shuddered, stopped dead in his tracks, and looked around uneasily.

"The God attends," he said in the ancient language all of them could understand.

"I don't think you should have done that, Cap," Benedek said.

"Why not? What did I do?" Dietrich stared at the priest's towering mask. "He cannot see me."

"He holds the artifact, the intact artifact." Jonathan shivered. His face held stubborn denial and uneasy acceptance at the same time. "I believe that, possibly, he can."

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### Georgetown Institute, Spring 1986

"You're Doctor Pettigrew, aren't you?" Jonathan stared at the bushy-haired professor in the tweed pants and sweater who stood before him. "I talked to you at the last department meeting about cultural drift."

"Never mind cultural drift now, son. This is more important. What you're holding there, you and your friend Benedek, is the Calendar of the Gods. A long-lost artifact, referred to in only three sources, it claims to hold the fate of the universe."

"See, what'd I tell you, JJ?" Benny gave him a nudge and a shameless grin.

"You know of this artifact?" the craggy-faced man demanded. His eyes scanned Benedek's weird attire and he winced. He was fluent in English, but his accent was German.

"Sure, read all about it." Benny grinned. "It's big in occult circles. You can buy little replicas of it in all the best spook shops." He nodded at the triangular artifact. "'Course the replicas are complete; they've got the attached Wheel of Time, not just the representation of the seasons. We're gonna need that part, too, aren't we, to put the world back on track?"

"How does he know of this?" the tall man asked Pettigrew.

"I've heard of him. He's a spook chaser," the older professor replied. "A Ghostbuster wannabe. He probably reads books of occult legends as bedtime stories. Doctor Moorhouse, gentlemen, this is Hans Dietrich. I knew him during the war when we spent a lot of time taking pot-shots at each other out in North Africa."

Jonathan frowned. "But what does all this have to do with the artifact?" he demanded.

Pettigrew grinned wryly. "Back in the war, I was just a private who drove a jeep. Barely finished high school, never gave a thought to college, not till I met Sergeant Jack Moffitt, the man whose jeep I drove. We were part of a long-range desert group."

"Jack Moffitt?" Jonathan echoed. "You can't mean Professor Moffitt, the eminent Egyptologist?"

"Yep. Was hoping he'd be able to be here when this all came together, even though he insisted the stories were only legends. But he's still en route from England. It was more urgent that Dietrich be here."

"*What* stories?" Jonathan demanded.

It was Dietrich who responded. "The legends that if the two sections of the artifact were ever separated that it would put in motion a process that would bring about the end of the world."

Jonathan wouldn't have suspected the German of being a doomsayer; he didn't look the type. Benedek jumped onto the bandwagon for every weird theory that drove past his door. Occasionally, he was even right. This time, after witnessing the ritual, Jonathan had to suspect that he was either hallucinating or that the artifact did possess power. He didn't like the idea. Surely he had fantasized that vista of ancient Egypt. Moorhouse had spoken of the Book of Thoth, and his imagination had done the rest. Yet the artifact had been united in his vision.

"The end of the world!" he scoffed, but the edge of doubt that crept into his voice must be audible to all of them. He added uneasily, "How long has it been separated?"

"Dietrich and I did it accidentally, in 1942," Pettigrew insisted. "We fell into the temple, and it sealed us in."

"In searching for an alternate exit, we discovered the artifact, and it came apart in our hands." Dietrich's mouth quirked wryly. "At the time, we were enemy soldiers, not inclined to share a united purpose, except, in that case, our survival. We did not realize the artifact could be dangerous."

"But dangerous *how*?" Jonathan wailed. "That was forty-four years ago, and the world hasn't ended. If it didn't end with the atomic bombs falling on Hiroshima and Nagasaki several years after the separation, what makes you assume that it will ever do so?"

"Clue number one, Jon-boy," Benedek jumped in, a big grin on his face. "The artifact is granting visions. It's seeking completion."

"Visions? Then I'm not the only one?"

Moorhouse stepped in. "No, MacKensie. I brought the artifact to you when I realized several museum workers who had handled it had witnessed glimpses of an ancient ritual. I realized when the visions began what I had, and of course I contacted Professor Pettigrew, who had donated the artifact to the museum when he came to Georgetown. That's when he sent for Herr Dietrich. He insisted that I had to wait until today to make the contact with you, although he wouldn't explain why."

"One of those museum workers put in a call to me," Benedek admitted with a grin. "Turns out he's a fan of my books, especially *Myths of the Pyramids: The Pharaoh's Curse and Other Legends*."

Pettigrew winced. "That book's full of superstition, son."

Benny wagged his finger at him. "Ah-ah-ah, Prof, you'd probably have thought the Calendar of the Gods was a myth if you hadn't seen it separate. You had visions back there in WWII, didn't you? Saw the same ancient ceremony Jack just did? Both of you? That's why you bought into all this."

"You can't know that," Dietrich offered doubtfully.

"Sure I can. It's what I do. The artifact's giving us the past in Technicolor, and that's a major warning. It's seeking its other half and if it doesn't get it, time itself will fall apart. Just think. No time. Everybody everywhere stops dead and starts growing cobwebs out of their ears. The Earth stops revolving around the sun, the planets fall out of alignment, presto, the end of the universe. And here I am with library books due next week."

"It's only a legend, Benedek," Jonathan insisted. "The fate of the universe can't depend on something like this coming apart in the war. That's ludicrous."

"You saw the artifact at work. You know it's got power," Moorhouse insisted. "Professor, I wish you would explain."

"After the war, I went to college and studied archaeology," Pettigrew reported. "I'd just listened to Moffitt so much out in the desert that I got interested. I remembered that time in the tomb with Dietrich and the way history had come alive in front of our eyes. I wanted to believe it was a hallucination caused by a blow to the head, but Dietrich saw it, too."

"And I was never unconscious," the German added. "We found the artifact, we accidentally severed it, and we saw a vision." He eyed Jonathan and Benedek uneasily. "You two gentlemen were in it."

Jonathan blinked. "You mean when I was having my vision, it was the same as yours, and you could see me?"

"We could see both of you," Tully admitted. "Jonathan, when I came to Georgetown for a conference several years ago and saw you for the first time, I realized you were the man I'd seen in the war. I didn't want to believe it, but I couldn't deny it. I was quite relieved, for the day was coming when you came from the future to the tomb. I had always thought that it would simply happen, but this gave me a chance to nudge fate a bit." He smiled. "So I joined the staff at Georgetown and donated my portion of artifact to the museum here. But I didn't know Mister Benedek; I had never seen him before, although I'd heard of him by name and reputation. I didn't know he was the same man who had stood beside you in the vision. I did investigate you, Jonathan, looking for your partner in the past, and I discovered Mister Benedek was the other 'time traveler'. I couldn't orchestrate his presence here today, not completely, but I did talk to the museum workers, and I planted a small suggestion that perhaps they had something worthy of the *National Register*." He produced a wicked grin that took years off his face. "Maybe it would all have happened without my intervention, but I wanted to be as sure as possible."

Benedek grinned, unoffended at this evidence of manipulation. "Hey, I'm gonna get to see Ancient Egypt. There's gonna be a great book in this. I bet I can clean up on the pre-pub serial rights."

Jonathan shivered. "You mean I have to experience that again?" He didn't even like admitting it had happened. Although it had been fascinating, it was not a process he would like to repeat. Would it even work?

"Both of you appeared to us," Dietrich said. "You spoke to us. You told us you came from the future, and you told us the date. Today's date."

"Spoke to you? Whoa! Check it out. Talk about long-distance communication. A hot-line to the past."

"If we are to speak to you, wouldn't we warn you about separating the artifact, if it's supposed to be so dangerous?" Jonathan asked.

"You did," Dietrich agreed.

"Didn't you believe us? Or--you were on the other side. Did you suspect us because of that?"

The German frowned. "I had suspicions, naturally, but I did not see how the experience could have been falsified. I was not blind to reason, gentlemen. In any case, we had already separated the artifact by the time you appeared to us."

"Dietrich was a good guy, at least as good as you could expect out there," Tully agreed. "Sure, he tried to blow us up and capture us; it was his job. But he didn't do it unreasonably. When we were trapped in the site, we teamed up together to survive. He wouldn't have blown you off because you weren't German. It wasn't his way."

"Didn't we tell you to stick the pieces back together?" Benny persisted. "All that time in the past, and we *waste* it?"

Pettigrew frowned. "We can't tell you what you said to us or we might invalidate it, except that you did tell us the date, and in order for us to gather here today, that must take place. Theories of time are multiple, varied--and unproven. But I think the best thing to do is simply to make it possible for you to return to the temple and go from there. Dietrich?"

The tall man opened his briefcase and produced the other half of the copper artifact. "I kept it, after the war," he explained and held it out to Benedek.

"But surely we told you that the artifact must be reunited?" Jonathan burst out. "That would surely be the whole point of Benedek and myself sharing a vision of the past."

Benedek curled his fingers around the circle and nudged Jonathan with an elbow to pick up the triangle. "Come on, JJ. You're the scientist. Pass up a chance to see history live? Where's that scientific curiosity? Let's do it."

Tully frowned. "Yes, you told us that, Doctor MacKensie," he admitted. "But the artifact refused. We couldn't get it back together, no matter how hard we tried--and have tried periodically ever since."

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### North Africa, 1942

The German patrol couldn't have missed the smoke from the burning half-track. Hitch spotted them easily, when they were still a long distance off. When he

slithered down the dune and reported it to Troy, the sergeant muttered a curse. He wasn't getting anywhere with the stones beneath his feet except to see that they might be paving stones and not bedrock. What he couldn't imagine was that the stones had opened up, swallowed Tully, and maybe Dietrich, and then slid together again. Unless the two men had landed just so on a weighted stone, but that was crazy. Troy had been all over the bottom of the valley, and all he had uncovered was neatly fitted stones. None of them had moved so much as an inch under his weight.

"It conceals an archaeological site." Broken arm in a sling, face tight with pain, Moffitt, eased himself out of the jeep that they had driven as close as Troy had decided was safe and stood beside Troy. "Those are worked stones. They look old, not some local well. It's too extensive for that."

"You can't tell how extensive it is. I've only uncovered a few square feet." Troy wasn't sure why he wanted to insist on that, but he did.

"I recognize the look of it. We'll have to mark the position, Troy, and see that someone investigates it after the war."

"After the *war!*" Troy exploded. "Tully might be down there under that right now. I'm not gonna wait till after the war to find him. Did the ancient Egyptians rig booby traps?"

"Certainly in their tombs, to prevent theft." Moffitt's face tightened in concentration. "I wouldn't have expected a site here, so far from the Nile. Unless there was an oasis here in antiquity; there were several well-known ones that the Egyptians had contact with, but I don't recall any in this location. The only other reason I can think of for a site so far out other than that would be for concealment. A secret location. I don't remember anything like that in my reading and research, unless some wealthy noble wanted to guarantee that his tomb wouldn't be plundered. I don't believe it would be the burial site of a pharaoh, even if there are a few unaccounted for."

"Nothing that can tell us how Tully might have disappeared?" When Moffitt shook his head, Troy knelt and put his mouth near the largest crack in the stones. There was no gap there; sand filled the cracks. But it was possible sound would carry. "Tully! If you can hear me, give me a sign."

Both men froze, listening. There was no response, nothing but the scuffle of sand from Hitch's hasty slide down the sand. "Sarge, Jerries coming. A couple of miles off."

Troy stared at the ridge overhead then down to the bared stones at his feet. "Help me cover this up again," he said urgently. "We won't leave them any clues."

He and Hitch bent hastily to sweep the sand together with their hands. Moffitt tried to help by kicking sand in their direction. When they were done, they scuffled over it. The jeep tracks couldn't be cleared so easily and the last thing Troy wanted to do was drive across the paving stones in case they gave beneath the vehicle's weight and crashed them who knows how far down. They'd have to circle around and come back after the Germans left again. He'd seen a ridge to the south that might offer concealment. Unless the Germans set up camp here, Troy

meant to return. He wasn't prepared to leave one of his men out here in the Sahara, trapped or not, and he sure as hell wasn't about to give him to the Germans. If they found Tully, Troy needed to know it so they could stage a rescue.

Reluctantly, he turned from the site, and he and Hitch helped Moffitt into the jeep. Then they were speeding up the rise and over, away from the approaching patrol. The Germans would find their overturned jeep and think they'd made a getaway in the one that was left. They might think Dietrich was a prisoner, or they could assume he'd been in the half track. Troy hoped they weren't too tenacious.

*We'll be back*, Troy thought to his missing man. *Hang on, Tully, we'll be back.*

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The Thoth priest turned his eyes about the chamber and came to linger on the four men who stood before him, four men out of the distant reaches of his future. Tully shivered to think how long ago it had been that this masked priest had really stood in this place. Thousands of years had passed between his life and the lives of the four who witnessed him from two separate points in the Twentieth Century. Troy and Hitch would never believe a word of it. Moffitt might, if Tully described the place with enough detail to be convincing, but he had a sudden urge for silence and secrecy. If he got out of this place alive--and MacKensie and Benedek were saying he did--then it might be better to keep it mum until he ran into the two men in the future. Not that he had the gift of the gab to begin with. Better to hold his peace.

Benedek was the one to break the silence. "You can see us?" he asked.

The priest frowned. Then he put up his hand to gesture back the torch-bearers and the lesser priests. When they had retreated to the far side of the chamber, the man raised one hand and lifted aside the huge mask without releasing the artifact. He passed the headpiece to the guy in the plain skirt and suspenders to hold, then he lifted dark eyes to stare at the upstarts. His hair was thick and black and bound in elaborate braids with golden beads on the ends of them. He had a beak of a nose, and his face was proud and arrogant, yet intrigued by the sight of them. Worst of all, there was a great and terrible fear in his eyes that he controlled with a fierce effort of will. Tully knew the sight of stubbornness when he saw it--after all, he'd been around Sam Troy a long time. But this guy's stubbornness could out-mule the most stubborn mule Tully had ever run into back home. He looked like the kind of man you'd definitely want for an ally, not an enemy.

"I do not know you, nor do I recognize your garb. You are not here, nor are you solid, but you are not gods. You speak to me in alien tongues that I do not recognize, not my own tongue, not the words of the Hittites or men of Kush. Yet still I know what it is you say."

"We hear you speaking our own tongue as well," Dietrich put in. "We do not understand how this is possible." He looked awed and shaken, pulled abruptly out

of his military mindset into a state of shock. The Luger was still in his hand, but maybe the priest wouldn't figure it was a weapon.

"You have cursed fate," the priest told them.

"By separating the Calendar of the Gods?" Benny asked. "They didn't know what they were doing."

The priest studied the artifacts the four held. "Two of each. How is this possible?"

"It's hard to explain," Jonathan said hastily. "There's really only one of each, but we come from different times. Far in your future, but for us only forty-four years apart. We are trying to set right what was done in error."

"No matter how it was done, if the wheel was parted from the seasons, time will cease unless you can restore it. For many dynasties have we guarded and protected the Calendar of the Gods, here in this hidden temple. Only the priests have known its whereabouts. Those who guide us here must remain here forever or forfeit their lives. Their eternity will be guaranteed with rich burials, but they cannot return to their lives, for one careless word could destroy the future."

"Then it's for real?" Tully asked. "This triangle thing and the circle? We shouldn't have separated them?"

The priest gave a snort. "You should not be here. I see into the future since I, too, bear the Calendar. It is the season of inundation, the time when the floods come, and you have unleashed a flood of destruction on the future." He held up the hand that didn't clutch the artifact. "Intent matters not. I see a view of this temple in your world, dusty and long-abandoned. The Upper and Lower Kingdoms may have ceased, so far in the future as you claim to be, and none may serve the old gods, but the power of the Calendar and of time perseveres."

"But can't we restore it?" MacKensie asked. "Can't these two put it back together?"

The priest eyed them stubbornly. "There is a way. But it will not be easy."

Tully scratched his head. If there was a way, then why did his future self have to tell MacKensie and Benedek to come back here and warn them? It would have been all fixed and they wouldn't have needed to, if the priest had answers.

"Tell us," Dietrich urged.

"You are forty-four years apart? The Calendar has been apart for these forty-four years? Should it stay apart fifty time will cease and the world will end."

Tully saw Dietrich's skepticism. MacKensie looked doubtful, too, although the fact that he was here must make him wonder a little. If only this was just a nice, safe hallucination that Tully would wake up from to find Troy and the others fussing over him--or more likely yelling at him for getting into trouble. He didn't think that was going to happen, though. This might be the stuff that nightmares were made of, but there were too many details and it was too...orderly. Everything was weird, but it was weird in a practical order. It made the desert war look simple. It was simple. In and out on raids, the jeep to handle, Dietrich to overcome. This crazy stuff about mystical Calendars that could stop time had to be a nightmare. But it was too real. It looked real, it felt real, it even smelled real,

dry and dusty and musty from centuries of concealment.

Only Benedek looked like he believed a word of it. He elbowed his way past Dietrich, practically *through* him. Tully stored up the memory of the Captain's disgruntlement to regale Troy and the others with. "So we've got five more years to put it back together? What's to stop them just clicking it back now?"

The priest frowned. "Repairing the damage is not so easy. You have offended the gods. Thoth, the creator of the calendar, looks at you with disfavor."

"Uh, what's that mean?" Tully asked. "We didn't mean to make this Thoth guy mad."

Jonathan spoke hastily. "These walls...." He waved a hand at all the hieroglyphics. "These show the text of the Book of Thoth?"

"You know of the book of the god?" The priest's expression turned benevolent. "Perhaps there is hope for you yet. The answer is here." He gestured at the walls just as MacKensie had.

Jonathan's face fell. "This is a lost temple. It was never uncovered."

"Yet you are here." The priest's eyes narrowed. He looked like he suspected they were conning him. He frowned. "You are not here in reality?"

"No, neither of us is." MacKensie pointed to himself and Benedek.

"We're on another continent, one unknown in your time. These two are here, forty-four years before us. We are here because their future selves knew of what happened today, when three times meet, and warned us, and the Calendar of the Gods brought us here, just as it allows us all to see each other, but I am standing in my own office with their older selves."

Tully and Dietrich exchanged doubtful glances. "Can they see us?" Tully asked.

"No," Jonathan replied. "But they can hear Benedek and me. At least I think they can. We can't hear them. I'm hoping that what they hear will help to reunite the portions of the artifact."

"Artifact?" the priest echoed hotly. "It is a sacred relic. Do not so demean it."

"Relaxovision. He didn't mean any disrespect," Benedek said quickly. "He never does. Tell us what to do to put things right. That's what Jonny and I are here for."

The priest weighed and measured them with his eyes. Tully had a feeling that it would all come down to the ancient Egyptian's judgment of MacKensie's character, whether or not the world would end or time would stop. Scary thought, when he didn't know enough about the guy to make even an uneducated guess about his ethics. It wasn't as if he were in danger, safe in his office wherever it was, except in danger from the possible end of the world.

Dietrich's face was hard and stubborn. "You would condemn the entire world for an action done unintentionally?" he asked.

"I would have information. You two men who broke the Calendar, I see you. I see strange garb, similar yet slightly different, although not as different as the other two. As my garb represents a priest of Thoth, your garb represents position and rank." He raised the hand that didn't hold the intact artifact. "Or is this not

true in the future?"

"Not always," Dietrich replied. "But I wear the uniform of my country's military, just as Private Pettigrew wears the garb of his."

"They are not the same. Are you at war with each other?" The priest was quick.

"We are," Dietrich replied. "But we were trapped in this temple together."

The priest's face held surprise. "Yet you did not kill each other?"

Tully saw where the questions were going. "Nope, no need to," he said quickly. "Dietrich's a man of honor. He doesn't kill needlessly. When we're out of here, out in the desert, in battle, we have to try. But down here, we're just two guys who want to survive." He didn't usually ramble on, but the words needed to be said. "Tomorrow, if we get out of here, we might have to shoot at each other again, but not in here."

"Because you sense it is a holy place?" persisted the priest.

Tully wanted to lie and say yes, but he had a feeling lying would be a bad idea, so he shook his head. Then he remembered something Moffitt had once said in the jeep about different cultures and their signals. A headshake might not mean the same thing to somebody from the time of the mummies as it did to Tully. "No, we thought it was pretty special, but we didn't know it was holy. There's no water in here, and we don't know how to get out."

"We formed a truce until such time as we could escape this place and rejoin our comrades," Dietrich agreed.

The dark eyes seemed to see right into their souls. Tully shivered involuntarily although it was not cold in the buried temple. "So," he said unhelpfully and turned to Jonathan and Benny. "Why have you come?"

"To find what was done wrong and to put it right," Jonathan said. "Professor Pettigrew said we could learn answers here."

"You called him 'Private Pettigrew,'" the priest accused Dietrich.

"That was his military rank," the German said quickly. "A professor is a man of learning. Perhaps after the war, he studied and became a...master of lore."

"Me?" Tully said doubtfully. "A professor?" He stared at MacKensie in awe. Hitch would laugh his head off at the thought of Tully turning into a prof after the war. He wanted to ask if he were an archaeologist, but that might rank right up there with mentioning 'artifacts'. It would sure remind the priest that his civilization bit the dust a lot of years ago.

"We can't tell you more than that," Jonathan said hastily. "I should perhaps have avoided even that. You did tell us things today, but for you they were many years old and necessarily vague. Your other selves couldn't return--there would have been too many of you in this moment. But there are answers here, and that's why I'm here."

"To venture into the memories of the past is dangerous," the priest told him. "Do you understand this?"

Jonathan stood up to him. "As dangerous as the ending of time? What else could I have done?" His mouth quirked and he gave Benedek a sidelong glance.

"Knew you'd come around to believing, buds," Benedek said with a grin.

"This doesn't make everything you believe real," MacKensie countered as if it were a long-standing argument. "By the law of averages, you're sure to get one right every now and then. Sir," he addressed the priest. "Will you tell us how to put this accident right?"

The priest studied Jonathan thoughtfully, then measured Benedek. He winced, as if he found Benedek's unusual garb repugnant. Tully wasn't sure he liked it himself, but it was a lot better than the guy in the skirt and suspenders. Tastes changed, after all.

He thought of something. "If you tell us how to right it now, why is it that we didn't put the Calendar back together now? Why did men from the future have to come here to tell us how to fix it? If we fix it, they wouldn't need to come."

Jonathan winced slightly. Maybe that was a bad question, but it was one Tully wanted an answer to. If the people from the future had to come to save them, they wouldn't come if Tully and Dietrich didn't need saving. And if they didn't need saving, then MacKensie and Benedek wouldn't have come. Was that even *possible*? It sounded really crazy to Tully.

The priest must have understood the dilemma. "You lack the knowledge to fix it," he said. "Who among you can read the writing of my people?"

He got four blank stares. "I can recognize one or two symbols," Jonathan admitted. "Mostly the signs of royalty inscribed in a cartouche. King...." He let his voice trail off. "I don't know which Dynasty you come from. I shouldn't mention any names."

"Nor should I inquire how many dynasties will pass before our time comes to an end," the priest replied. He and MacKensie sounded like they understood each other pretty well.

"We don't want to change history," Benedek agreed. "That would be a real baddy. If we screw up here, we might even cease to exist. Not you," he said hastily to the priest. "This is the present for you. But all of us."

"Benedek," Jonathan chided. He sounded like he didn't want to give the priest ideas.

Tully realized that was a good precaution. All the priest and his buddies had to do was build a trap that would fall in on Tully and Dietrich, and that would change history all right. But it might keep them from separating the Calendar. Only he was *here*, and they'd done it. Maybe history couldn't be changed. Maybe only the future could be changed.

He and Dietrich *were* in the priest's future. The priests could mess with them without harming their own present.

The German turned and caught Tully's eye, and Pettigrew could see that Dietrich shared some of his speculation. In that moment, he felt a real bond with Dietrich, one that wouldn't go away even if he had to try to kill him once they got out of here. If Dietrich was there, in the future, it might mean they'd failed, but Tully didn't have any guarantees history was carved in stone like these walls. All he knew was that, for the moment, he and Dietrich were united. Knowing the

Captain, that alliance wouldn't last past rescue, but it existed now.

"You have broken the Calendar of the Gods, and that has happened," the priest replied. "To reunite it physically is not enough. There is a ritual. We prepared for this eventuality many dynasties past. Thoth himself instructed us." He waved a hand at the walls. "The answer lies there."

Tully squinted at the spot. Rows of hieroglyphics filled one small panel. It was only designs to Tully, and there was no way he could memorize all of it to translate later. He might get a few of the symbols, but not more, and he had an idea it would be bad to remember it wrong.

"Take a rubbing," Jonathan urged.

"Rubbing?" Tully echoed doubtfully.

"I have heard of this process," Dietrich admitted. "Put paper over it and rub it with a pencil. The markings will come through and we will be able to translate them later." He frowned. "I have no paper, only a letter from my mother. It is too small."

Tully had a letter from his own ma in his pocket. Hard to imagine somebody like Dietrich actually having a mother who sent him letters that he treasured. Probably censored pretty heavily, but still in her handwriting, maybe even smelling of her perfume, the way Tully's mother's letters always did. Even if they put the two letters together, they wouldn't have enough space for that panel that was about a yard wide and a couple of feet high.

Jonathan and Benedek couldn't take a rubbing. They weren't physically here.

"I've got it," Benedek crowed. "Jonny and I will copy it. Write it down." He pulled out a small notebook and a pen. "Yo, Jonny. You start there. I'll start here. Race you."

"Of course." MacKensie slapped his pockets in search of a notebook. When he found a very small one and a pen--weird looking pen, something from the future with a transparent case around a center of darker ink--he smiled triumphantly. "You should be able to read it in the future, Professor."

Dietrich arched an eyebrow at the title, and Tully produced a smug grin. "We have to hold onto these parts," he said to Dietrich. "Even in spite of the war."

"I had planned on it, Private. It will not be easy."

Tully had already realized that. One side had to lose the war. If both of them were there in the future with their parts, it must mean they succeeded in keeping the calendar parts--and survived the war. It didn't say anything about which side won.

"Whatever you do, don't let go of the circle, Benedek."

"Come on, JJ, how am I supposed to write if I don't let go?"

"Perhaps it must simply touch flesh," Dietrich suggested.

Benedek frowned, then he put the circle over his head. It was just large enough to fit, although it scraped his ears on the way down. He hitched at his collar to keep the circle against his skin.

The triangle wouldn't fit over MacKensie's head, and he could hardly wear it like a crown; it might fall off, and he might not be able to appear here again. The

priest watched consideringly as Jonathan took off his sports jacket, held it out randomly to someone Tully couldn't see--it vanished when he let go of it--and then rolled up his left sleeve. He hung the triangle on his arm like a huge, dangling bracelet, and then started to copy industriously. The tip of his tongue protruded from the corner of his mouth to help him concentrate. Tully did that sometimes--although a bitten tongue had proved quickly that it wasn't safe when he was driving the jeep.

Dietrich nodded him aside to allow the two men from the future a chance to work. He turned to the priest. "This ritual--it will allow the portions of the Calendar to reunite?"

The priest's face was hesitant. "Only with sincerity," he replied. "Thoth is not your god and you cannot falsify belief. But you must respect him."

Tully wasn't sure at first if he could manage that. Respect a pagan idol? Then he looked around the room, at the golden walls inscribed with unknown text, at the torchbearers who stood at the far side of the room waiting in awe while the Thoth priest conferred with invisible beings, at the other priests in their fanciful headdresses. Yeah, there was a lot to respect in the ancient culture. It was all so weird to him, and he was only just beginning to understand how impressive it had been. Their civilization had lasted for thousands of years; his own had only been going for a little over a hundred and fifty. Everything fell eventually but those worn pyramids standing out in the desert like sentinels after all those centuries had made Tully stare in awe. The ancient Egyptians had left *something* behind, a touch of grandeur and mystery he could barely understand. But as he stood there facing a guy who had lived thousands of years ago, he *wanted* to understand.

He nodded. "Yep, guess I can do that."

Dietrich inclined his head. "You are part of perhaps the most imposing civilization since the world began. That is worthy of respect. Thoth is not my god; my god did not appear for many centuries after your time. But a god of wisdom is worthy of respect. Yes, I agree also."

The priest inclined his head.

Benedek glanced up from his scribing. "Hey, your holiness. You say time is gonna fail if we don't do this. Shouldn't we see signs of the collapse of time already?"

Tully had wondered that, too. If they had only five years left in the future before the world fell apart, there ought to be evidence of it.

Dietrich's posture stiffened, and he listened hard.

"Would you know the signs, you men of an unenlightened future? Armies at ready? Worlds in conflict? Threats from dangerous peoples who see no value in life beyond their own?"

Jonathan copied a symbol on the wall. "These things are always there," he said without looking up. "You had them in your time, too, and they existed before Dietrich and Pettigrew separated the Calendar."

The priest inclined his head. "True. And they will continue, even when it is reunited. But unless it is reunited, any one of them could worsen to a fate that will

destroy the earth."

Dietrich's brow lowered. "That could happen no matter what we do." There was a cynical twist to his mouth, but Tully figured if he had to serve a guy like Hitler when he didn't believe in the Nazi movement--and all the Rats were convinced he didn't--he was bound to be cynical.

"You speak truth," agreed the priest. "But you will avert a permanent crisis. There may be others unrelated to the calendar. I offer you no certainties. But you will save the fate of time, at least for the moment."

"That's worth it, isn't it?" Tully asked. He didn't ask it of MacKensie and Benedek who labored to copy the ancient text. Instead he looked right at Dietrich. He hadn't had that much to do with the German face to face since they'd first encountered him, probably less than any of the others, but he'd had enough to get a measure of the man, to know that he was deadly and dangerous, but at the same time a decent man underneath. Tully's pappy said you could always recognize a decent man, long as you were one yourself, and you could tell how far you could trust him.

Dietrich's answer didn't let him down. "We can only fight for what we believe in," he admitted. There was more to his words than appeared on the surface, and Tully chewed them over in his mind the way he'd chew on his matchstick. Dietrich fought for his country, for Germany, not for the Nazis. But he also fought for ideals, for honor and truth.

Tully grinned at him to show that he understood. "Yup," he agreed.

Satisfied with each other, they shared a brief smile, then they turned to watch the copying.

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"Sarge, they're going away." Hitch lay on his belly on a stony ridge, squinting out between a couple of rocks at the sight of the distant German patrol. They might choose to follow the tracks of Troy's jeep, but they didn't seem interested. Hitch figured the burned-out half track's fire had been dead long enough that they'd have expected the Rat Patrol to be far away. They might not know who had been in the battle; just that they'd been forced to abandon a jeep. Most of the long range desert groups were British, and the American jeep might give away their identity, but they hadn't had a chance to set the other jeep upright when they fled. The axle had been bent anyway. They'd stripped it of supplies, weapons, and fuel before they retreated. It wouldn't do the Jerries any good.

Troy lay beside him in the sand, field glasses to his eyes. "They'd probably figure with one jeep short we'd make for our lines as fast as we could go. Unless they think we've got Dietrich they probably won't follow us. But they might not be from his base. They might have another mission." He grimaced. "We've got to get back and haul Tully out of whatever snake hole he fell into."

"Think we can dig our way in, Sarge?" Hitch popped his bubble gum.

"We'll have to. It's getting late. We need to get Moffitt back to a field

hospital, too. I think his arm's set right, but I want a doc to look at it as soon as possible to make sure."

Hitch glanced over at the jeep. Moffitt sat in the passenger seat, pistol in hand, head cocked to listen to the sound of the retreating engines. Under his desert tan, he was too pale. He wouldn't complain of the pain of his arm, part British stiff upper lip and part the nature of the man. He'd just carry on without complaint. Hitch didn't drive him, so he didn't know him quite as well as Tully did, but he knew enough to appreciate Sergeant Moffitt's courage. "Yeah," he agreed.

When the Jerry patrol vanished beyond a series of ridges and the sound of their engines faded--sound carried a hell of a long way in the desert--Troy nodded and they scooted down the dune to the jeep. Moffitt looked a question. "They're gone?"

"Yeah, but they might think we're still here and hang around."

"They didn't follow our tracks," Hitch pointed out. He'd been halfway prepared to make a run for it if the Germans had come in their direction.

"They're on a mission of their own, no time to track us down when for all they know we headed for our lines hell bent for leather," Troy argued. "Ordinarily I'd want to know what they're up to, but until we get Tully, we're not leaving."

"Yeah, tough to take 'em on with only one jeep anyway," Hitch put in. He tucked his bubble gum into his cheek and climbed behind the wheel.

There were German tire marks through the valley where they'd lost Tully, but no footprints. The sand had shifted slightly due to the drive-through, but the paving stones were barely exposed, not enough for the Germans to think they were anything but bedrock. Hitch stopped short of them, and he and Troy scrambled out of the jeep and went to uncover them again. It only took a few minutes to reclaim their lost ground, enough to make it clear that these were fitted, hand-worked stones.

Troy ran his fingers around the edges of the stone in the center of the valley, the low point. He pressed hard. The stone shifted fractionally. Maybe the German *Kubelwagen* had loosened it.

"Careful, Sarge," Hitch cautioned. "We don't want to fall in after him. We won't get him out if we're down there with him." He didn't want to think about how far Tully might have fallen. If it was too far, it wouldn't matter if they found him or Dietrich. They'd stage a rescue anyway, but they might have to copy the Germans who had just left and put him to rest under the sand. In spite of the scorching heat of the sun that beat down on his exposed neck and his back, Hitch shivered.

"We need a pry bar," Troy said flatly. Moffitt passed him a tool one-handed, and Troy bent to attack the stone.

"Careful, Sarge. It might be rigged."

Troy's head came up, and his eyes narrowed. "Rigged? You think it's a trap?"

"Not for us," Hitch replied. "But whoever built it might have made it that way. If it's ancient, you know, like one of Moffitt's tombs, they had booby traps."

Moffitt heard. "Yes, but the last thing they would have wanted was to design

one to put someone *into* a hidden tomb."

Troy was still frowning. "Yeah, and that would mean it worked for Dietrich and Tully and then stopped working. Maybe it's just jammed." He worked the edge of the pry bar into the ridge between two stones and heaved.

The stone made a clicking sound and shifted neatly to reveal a hole that opened into darkness.

Troy took an involuntarily step backward. "Son of a bitch," he muttered, then he went down on his hands and knees and carefully worked his way up to it. Hitch dropped beside him and approached it from the other side.

"We need the rope, Jack," Troy said in an undertone. Then he raised his voice. "Tully!"

The daylight sun was too bright to allow them to see easily into the darkness. Hitch leaned closer and peered in past Troy. Was that torchlight? He could see movement down there--and hear urgent voices.

Voices?

"Sarge, Dietrich's down there, too," he muttered in an undertone.

Troy's weapon leaped into his hand. "Tully?" he called again.

"Not yet, Sarge," came Tully's voice out of the dark hole. "We need a few more minutes."

That was the last thing Hitch had expected. He and Troy exchanged a doubtful glance, and Troy's knuckles whitened as his hand tightened on his .45.

"What the hell do you mean? Dietrich down there?"

"I am here, Sergeant Troy." Dietrich's voice, all right. He hesitated, then added, "I am willing to surrender to you, but you must not interrupt."

"Interrupt *what*?" Troy exploded.

Hitch could see the two men down below through the shadows. The torchlight danced and flickered, illuminating a small patch of a vast room. There was a huge statue not far away, Egyptian, all right. Moffitt would have had a field day, if he'd been up to it. Each man held something, not weapons. Dietrich had his Luger but it was in its holster. Instead he clutched a metal circle while Tully had a coppery triangle in his hand. Some weird artifacts?

"Just a sec, Sarge," Tully urged. "They have to finish the copying. It's important." He glanced up at the two men who hovered overhead. "It's okay," he reassured them. "Dietrich doesn't have the drop on me. I'll explain when you haul me out of here. Get the rope."

Troy made an impatient, frustrated gesture to Hitch. "Get the rope," he echoed tightly. He didn't like it, and Hitch didn't blame him. Had the two men both hit their heads? They were acting crazy.

He jumped up long enough to grab the coil of rope from Moffitt and start to unwind it. When he was flat on his belly again to squint into the narrow hole, neither Tully nor Dietrich had moved. They stood side by side staring at one of the walls. In the light of the torch that lay in the arms of the giant statue, Hitch could see that the walls looked like they were made of gold and all carved with those hieroglyphics Moffitt liked so much. A major archaeological find, that's what it was.

Tully was kind of interested in things like this--he'd read Moffitt's old man's book, after all. Hitch wouldn't have expected Dietrich to like archaeology, at least not in the middle of a war when face to face with one of the Rat Patrol, but there was something about the way they stood side by side that suggested they'd made a truce for the duration. Okay, that wasn't out of character for old Dietrich. But calmly surrendering to Troy without a shot being fired sure was.

Still, they were miles from any water, and it wasn't the Germans who had found him but Troy. Dietrich was a realist. He'd hope he could manage to escape or be a part of a prisoner transfer. And even if he wasn't, if he was sent to a POW camp back in the US or Canada, it beat dying of thirst miles from his lines.

"How much longer, MacKensie?" Dietrich asked.

Troy muttered, "Son of a bitch," and poked his head into the hole. "Who else is down there?"

"Nobody, Sarge," Tully replied. "Not really. I'll explain when we get out of here."

"You got that right," Troy muttered under his breath. Hitch wouldn't want to be Tully right now.

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"Rescue," Benedek muttered. He tucked his notebook in his pocket. "Wish I thought my camera would take a picture of this."

"Are you finished, Benedek?" MacKensie kept on scribbling.

"Yeah." The journalist whipped out an Instamatic and aimed it at Tully and Dietrich. He was pretty sure when he had it developed, it would only show Jon-boy's office, but it was worth a shot. Maybe the artifact he wore around his neck would affect the picture. It was a long-shot, but if it worked, there might be a Pulitzer with his name on it. "You?"

"Nearly. Two more minutes." Jonathan copied industriously, pausing only to push the hair back from his eyes. JJ could never refuse to accept this one. This was one unexplained phenomenon that he couldn't make excuses about and offer up 'rational' explanations for. No mass hallucination could make this less than real.

Weird that there was a rescue going on. He could see the priests and he could see the two soldiers, but he couldn't see the guys up top who were yelling down to Tully, or hear them, either. He called one of them 'Sarge' so it was probably one of the guys in his squad, but Benny couldn't see them at all. Well, Tully and Dietrich couldn't see their geezer doubles or Jonny's office, either, so that was logical. There were a couple of books that told about temporal shifts like this. It wasn't time travel, not the usual stuff, but the artifacts were the link. All three separate times represented had possessed them. If any of them let go, they'd be out of the link and might not be able to get it back in.

The priest watched them, his dark eyes inscrutable. Benny would have liked to interview him and write it up for the *Register*, but that wasn't in the cards. Time was running out. He made shoing motions with his hands to urge Jonathan to

write faster. Look at him. He was practically quivering with excitement. Benny made a note to remember that particular expression on his face. He loved it when Jack got caught up in the thrill of the chase on one of their cases. It didn't happen often, but it could happen. Gave Benny hope that JJ's mind wasn't nailed up tight to keep out new ideas. If he kept working on it, he'd get his buds away from clam chowder and PBS and into mud wrestling and UFO chasing.

Nah, never happen. Besides, even though he'd never admit it in a million years, he liked his Jonny just the way he was.

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"There is a problem, Private Pettigrew."

Tully glanced at Dietrich. Up above, the sarge had uncoiled a rope. It slithered down into the temple. Neither the men from the future nor the priest spotted it, but Dietrich eyed it uneasily.

"What problem?" he asked. He could see Troy up above squinting down into the temple, but they were talking too softly for him to hear.

"Prisoners of war are not allowed to retain possessions," Dietrich reminded him. "When I am returned to your headquarters, the circle will be removed. Yet they claim I possess it in the future. How is this possible?"

Tully's mouth dropped open. "Yeah," he said. Troy sure wouldn't let him hold onto the circle; it would be a good weapon to hit somebody over the head with. Once they were out of here, it would be Dietrich's duty to escape, and he'd do it, if he had half a chance. Tully didn't want him using the circle to attack one of his teammates.

The moment of truce slithered away as if it had never existed, and he and Dietrich eyed each other uneasily. As if the mood had communicated itself to the others, Jonathan lifted his head and stared at them doubtfully.

The priest moved closer. "You must preserve the Calendar," he urged. "It is vital."

Jonathan scribbled one last symbol in his notebook, then he tucked it into his pocket. "You could hold it for him, until after the war," he said to Tully.

Dietrich's fingers tightened possessively on the artifact.

A bad moment. Tully bit down on his matchstick and spared one doubtful glance above at the simmering Troy, who looked ready to slide down the rope and take matters into his own hands.

"And upon this rests our hope for the future," the priest said grimly.

Jonathan took two quick steps closer. "You must work it out," he said. "You did the first time. I'm not sure how."

"This *is* the first time for us, Doctor MacKensie," Dietrich reminded him. "It is possible that your presence here has altered what must be."

"Nah, never happen," Benny said glibly. "Because your future selves knew us. This is the way it always happened. So fix it. Maybe there's a war on, but this is bigger than war. This is about your common humanity."

"Tully, move, damn it," Troy bellowed overhead.

Jonathan shot Benedek a glance full of respect and appreciation, raised his eyes briefly to the ceiling, then stepped closer. "I don't know how you resolved this. They--you--didn't tell me. But for a while, you put the war aside. Can't you do that now?"

Dietrich hesitated. He and Tully stood for a long moment, staring at each other. All the built-in suspicion the war created struggled inside each of them. Tully knew he wasn't a philosophical guy, but there had to be an answer. All this was maybe meant to happen. So he and Dietrich had to figure it out in the next second or two, or Troy would be down here to haul them up by the scruffs of their necks.

"I give you my word I will not use the artifact to attack you or your comrades," Dietrich said. "I make no other promises."

Tully took a deep breath. If Dietrich could do it, so could he. "If you give it to me, I'll send it to you after the war," he promised.

They locked eyes. Tully took a deep breath. The priest made a sound of approval and Benedek did a crazy war dance of triumph. MacKensie only smiled.

Then fate, or the war, took matters in hand. Overhead, Hitch yelled a warning. "Sarge, they're coming back!"

"Tully, get up here right now," Troy bellowed.

"My men." Dietrich's face lit with relief. He and Tully held their gaze for one second longer, then Dietrich urged him to the rope. "Go. Take your portion. I shall keep my own."

It was the only thing to do. Tully tucked the circle into the front of his jacket--and everything vanished. The priest and his men popped out of existence as if they had never been there, and the two men from the future disappeared without a trace, leaving only himself and Dietrich, and Troy at the other end of the rope.

Tully grabbed for it, worked his way up the rope as fast as he could.

"They must have circled around. Figured we were here," Troy said as Hitch flung himself behind the wheel. Moffitt, his face tight with pain, had Troy's usual seat, and Troy took the fifty, which left Tully to grab on any old way he could. No time to haul Dietrich out and take him prisoner. Just as well.

The Germans must have figured Dietrich was still here somewhere because the patrol didn't follow them. Instead they made for the bottom of the valley and the narrow opening in the sand. Hitch headed toward their lines as fast as they could go, while Tully held on securely with one hand. The other reached up to touch the concealed artifact tucked into his shirt. It had really happened. Weird and crazy, but it had really happened.

Someday, in the future, he was going to be a *professor*.

When they finally got out of range and Hitch stopped so Troy could blow up at him, Tully found that he couldn't stop smiling.

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Georgetown Institute, Spring 1986

Jonathan unhooked the triangle from his arm and set it on his desk. "That was simply amazing." He turned to the two older men who must have watched with fascination, remembering what had happened forty-four years earlier. "Incredible."

"You copied the ritual," Professor Pettigrew said. "You got it all down, son?"

"Yes, sir. Between the two of us, we copied it all."

"It got a little hairy at the end there," Pettigrew reminded him. "I never was sure if you'd actually finished or not."

"Nor was I," Dietrich agreed.

Jonathan stared at the two men, who had been enemies out there in a harsh war, yet who had found a few moments of common cause in the midst of it all. Maybe that was what it was all about, reaching across the barriers of culture and custom to find the shared humanity they all possessed. He was glad he had been a part of it.

"I don't read hieroglyphics," he admitted. "I might recognize the cartouche of a major pharaoh, but no more. It's not my field. I doubt Benedek reads it, either."

"Nope, never studied mummy-speak," Benny admitted. "But I betcha Tully does. Right, Prof?" He grinned at Pettigrew.

"Yes, I read it," Tully admitted. "Pronouncing it is somewhat different; I can't be sure we pronounce it as they did at the time of the Thoth Priest."

"I'm fascinated by the entire experience." Doctor Moorhouse glittered with eagerness. "You actually spoke to an ancient Egyptian?"

"He was talking ancient mummy," Benedek told her. "We just heard it in English, I think. Whoa. I had a mind-link with a mummy." His eyes gleamed and Jonathan could imagine the headlines he was visualizing.

"Hardly a mummy, Benedek."

"Chill, Jack. Mummies sell papers."

"The notes, Doctor MacKensie," Dietrich urged. He looked amused at Benny's journalistic fervor as he would never have been in the temple.

"Here." Jonathan offered his notebook to Pettigrew, and Benny did the same. "I copied the top portion of the inscription and Benedek's follows mine. Can you read it?"

Tully took the books and glanced at the scribbled hieroglyphs. "It's like reaching across history," he said. "I saw you write this forty-four years ago, and here it is, brand new. A part of me always wondered...until I came to Georgetown and saw you at that staff meeting."

Jonathan realized that he had never explained to Tully and Dietrich where he and Benny had come from. They'd mentioned the year and that they'd seen the two soldiers' future selves, but they had given no clues to explain how Tully might one day track them down. Maybe it was meant to happen that way, that fate had brought Tully to Georgetown. Jonathan wasn't much for fate; it went along with

the weirdnesses that Benedek revealed in. But there had been the hand of fate over all of this from the beginning. Maybe it was better this way, that it had simply happened here and now.

"Serendipity," Benny caroled triumphantly. That's what it is." He removed his artifact necklace and held it out to Dietrich. "Here you go, Herr Hauptmann. Time to save the world."

Dietrich received it naturally. His fingers curled around the copper circle. "We have met periodically after the war and tried to reunite the pieces," he said. "After Pettigrew learned to read hieroglyphs, he researched various rituals. None of them worked."

"What of the temple?" Jonathan demanded eagerly. "If the Book of Thoth was actually carved on those walls, it would be as great a discovery as the tomb of Tutankhamun. Yet, I don't remember any mention of it."

"No one ever found it," Tully admitted reluctantly. "Moffitt was crazy to find it. We marked the position as best we could on a map, and he went back after the war. Got a dig funded. I went along; I was in college then, studying archaeology. We went all over the area, but the sands shift a lot out there in the desert. We never found it."

"I, too, tried to arrange an excursion to seek it out," Dietrich admitted. "It was some years after the war before I could manage it. I am no archaeologist, but I described the site to various German archaeologists. They were intrigued. I did not tell them of our experience, but a description of the temple was sufficient to arouse their interest. We never found it, either."

Jonathan's eyes were wide. "So it's still out there." He was an anthropologist rather than archaeologist--he wouldn't be the man to excavate the temple. But he hated to think that a find of such magnitude might lie out there waiting to be discovered, buried under no more than a foot or two of sand. Of course the way the sands shifted in the desert, it could be more like fifteen or twenty feet of sand.

Tully nodded. "I always hoped I'd find it one day. Maybe there's still a chance."

"Perhaps if the Calendar is made whole...." Dietrich urged.

"Yeah. The ritual." Tully squinted at the notebook jottings. Jonathan suddenly remembered the young soldier he had seen in the tomb, a matchstick protruding from his lips. He'd found a dream in that underground chamber and followed it, but the dream had been born earlier when he'd listened to Doctor Moffitt out there in the desert as they patrolled the wasteland seeking out the enemy. Dreams were born in odd places sometimes.

"Okay, Dietrich, let's do it. Benedek, would you hold these for me? I need to have the triangle in my hand."

Benny took the notebooks and held them up. Jonathan had a sudden vision of the Thoth priest reading a ritual while one of his underlings held a scroll for him. That vision blurred before Jonathan's eyes, almost more real than his imagination, then it faded as Tully began to chant words in a strange language.

Moorhouse crowded closer, her eyes wide with fascination. Jonathan could

almost see the ancient torchlight glinting off her glasses, just as he could almost visualize the two young soldiers when he looked at the present day Tully and Dietrich. He knew it was no vision, only his imagination, but Benedek's face was eager and alight. Maybe his imagination was seeing visions, too.

Benedek's eyes lifted, sought Jonathan's. He beamed like a kid at a birthday party, then he turned to stare at the two portions of the artifact.

They were glowing.

Benny gave a yelp of triumph, but he didn't say anything else. He just nodded his head at the two ancient pieces of copper as Dietrich took a step closer. The ancient words rang out--there was almost an echo to Tully's voice as he read them. Moorhouse hovered, alight with eagerness. Jonathan felt a thrill run through him as great as he would have felt if he'd uncovered a new species in a dig in the Olduvai Gorge.

"Now," said Tully in English, and held out the triangle.

Dietrich brought the circle to meet it and they clicked together as easily as a key fitting in a lock.

There was a strange mental thumping sensation as if the entire Institute had picked itself up and then slammed itself down again. For an instant, the room darkened and torchlight came up around them, dim and flickering. Across the millennia, the Thoth priest stood watching them, face concealed by the ibis mask. In that instant, Jonathan could sense the approval in the concealed dark eyes. Beside him, Benedek sucked in his breath in astonishment, and for once held his tongue. Dietrich muttered something in German. If Moorhouse saw it, she gave no sign; her eyes lingered on the conjoined artifact. Maybe she felt the power, but she didn't see the vision; she hadn't been there in that moment when three separate times linked.

*It is well.* The words of the Thoth priest were not spoken aloud, but Jonathan heard them in his head. He knew from the way Benny jerked, Tully's head came up, and Dietrich nodded in quiet satisfaction, that they had heard it, too.

The torchlight faded, the room returned to normal with the spring sunlight tracing a path across the corner of Jonathan's desk, and the weight of millennia faded away to leave the four men and one woman standing in a modern April afternoon.

Tully said several more words in Egyptian, then he gestured for Benedek to lower the notebooks. "Son of a gun, we did it," he cried.

Dietrich's face held quiet satisfaction. "Yes, Private Pettigrew, we did."

Benny spun around. "Whoa, that was great. I've got it all on tape." He whipped a tiny tape recorder out of his pocket.

"But no pictures," Jonathan reminded him.

Benny's face fell. "Well, I got the ones in the temple, but I bet they won't come out."

"Temple?" Moorhouse's eyes sharpened. "MacKensie, you will tell me every detail of what just happened here."

That's right, she'd only have heard Jonathan and Benedek's part of the

trans-time conversation, and she wouldn't have seen any of it. Jonathan remembered the gleaming golden walls full of hieroglyphs--the Book of Thoth, buried out there under the North African sand--and wished with all his heart that they could uncover it and make it available to the world. Then he looked at the artifact, complete and reunited, held by two old men who had separated it when they were young. Sometimes, what was made wrong could be put right. This time, it had.

Even if the temple was lost forever, Jonathan felt good.

Tully looked almost like the young private in the temple, he was so delighted. He spun the circle and it moved smoothly, time traveling in its proper path. "Who'd have ever thought it," he said with a grin. "Hey, Dietrich, wait till you find out what I've got laid on for tonight."

Dietrich eyed him with a wary suspicion that wasn't a leftover from their being on opposite sides during the war but simply a knowledge of the other man. "Shall I regret this?" he asked, but there was amusement in his voice.

"Hope not, even though you're gonna be outnumbered." He clapped Dietrich on the shoulder. "When you said you were flying over, I made a few phone calls. Tonight's a reunion dinner. Troy said he was looking forward to seeing you again. Hitch is here anyway; he's in Congress, if you can believe it. And Moffitt's plane gets in an hour from now. I thought we could head over to the airport and pick him up."

Dietrich hesitated, then he smiled. "It will be good to see them again," he admitted. "Especially with no bullets flying."

Tully beamed. "Thought you'd feel that way." He gathered in the Calendar of the Gods and presented it to Doctor Moorhouse. "Here you go, Juliana. It can return to the museum now."

She received it dubiously, her fingers gentle and reverent. "With considerable security, I should imagine, Professor."

"Well," said Tully laconically, "I'd recommend it." He gave a crooked, country-boy grin and led Dietrich out of Jonathan's office.

Benny smiled in echo. "I can't wait to write this up. Mindlinks to mummies, the fate of the universe in our hands. Jon-boy, we're heroes."

Jonathan didn't feel like a hero, but he smiled back anyway. A part of him would have liked to trail along to the war reunion, but it was better they met on their own terms. Yet he felt an urge to celebrate, too. "Buy you dinner?" he offered.

Benedek's smile widened. "You're on," he agreed. "But only if I pick the restaurant."

Jonathan hesitated. He could imagine some of the weird, esoteric places Benedek favored. Peculiar food, peculiar people. Benedek was a pretty peculiar individual himself.

But he'd stood at Jonathan's side in the ancient temple and helped to restore time to its proper track.

Maybe, just this once, weird food wouldn't be so bad.

"Agreed," he said, and was rewarded by the delight that lit his best friend's face.