

LEGACY

©Robert Wakefield 2007

ISBN 978-1-4303-2453-9

LEGACY

The Old Man of the Sea

The Atlantic sky hung deeply azure and almost completely cloudless apart from the frail thin wisps that had outlined the splendour of this hot glorious afternoon. The surface of the ocean shimmered with sparkles of light exploded upon the crashing spume and vaporising within the surf of the waves. The crash of the Ocean echoed out melodiously intensifying the brilliance of the suns might. The angled bow of the yacht held steady as it glided upon the wash as if it were a floating entity sailing above the turbid sea. The Atlantic's vastness now encompassed every horizon. They had sailed out previously that day upon the dawn tide and ventured into the depths of the blue yonder, faraway from the shantytown harbour of Cape Verde. Along with the many Fishing boats which had raised anchor on that glorious morn they had set out to a chorus of gulls many hours previously.

Jack Quinn lowered the crescent peak of his baseball cap as he shielded out the strong rays emanating from above. Under his cap the light brown hair had faded to a golden blonde mane and his body had manifested a bronze sheen after a month here on his prolonged and overdue vacation. Quinn a middle-aged executive in the Commercial Insurance business had formed his own business going into partnership five years previously. He and his partner Paul Collins had slaved away those years building up a proven relationship and reliability with their clients. They had built up reputations that were second to none in their field and managed to out compete most of their direct competitors on virtually every lucrative deal. The cutting edge business though with its long arduous hours and its fair share of stress related burdens had taken its toil upon Jack. The business now established with regular contracts and finance flowing in. It had been an enjoyable enterprise but Jack was exhausted, totally and utterly exhausted by the last five years of intense toiling.

He had chartered the yacht for that day as he escaped the throngs of humanity and he reeled in the tranquillity of his private and leisurely cruise. Pondering upon the laminated wooden deck he realised this very moment had become the highlight of the entire vacation. He gazed dreamily into the blue nothingness that stretched forever in all cardinal directions. He felt good about himself again, he almost felt alive as the years of embedded pressure and hidden anxiety dissolved into the endless scenery evaporating upon the crash of every surf. His traumas were related to occupation and emotional commitments caused by becoming too involved and dedicated in his occupational life. Dealing with other peoples turmoil's and inheriting their own burdens in the Accident Liability Suits in which he personally managed for his Company.

At thirty-five he knew in his heart that he should have been married or at least attached with a partner. He had a self-possessive laid back approach to his bachelor life as was inherent by his confident demeanour. In retrospect within though, he yearned for someone to share those precious moments in his life, the celebrations he had rejoiced with a bottle of Scotch in his solitary confinement of his lonely existence.. His commitment to his work had become his bride and with it solitude within had manifested, and moulded him. This friendless existence he had learned to draw strength from when the rigors of life had took a turn for the worse. Cooped up in his fluorescent-lit office from dawn until dusk, fifty-two weeks a year in the last five years with only the buzz of the telephone on most days linking him to the outside world. Jack had matured into the complete recluse and an idyllic bachelor from his portrayed character but deep in the swirling fires of his soul he knew this charisma, this protecting shroud had become a haunting charade as he ran away from humanity safe in his world of loathing and self-pity.

The suns huge ball seemed gigantic as it sat upon the shelf of the horizon and a light wind steadily turned into a breeze as the early evening air began to emerge.

“We must head back now Signor,” beckoned the boatswain from the foredeck

Jack just nodded his response still staring fixatedly into the nothingness all around and adjusting his shades to protect his eyes from the sunlight that now bore face on. Iniatially he deemed a speck of dirt had corrupted his

vision lodged on the plastic lens but upon readjusting them he caught sight of the bobbing silhouette again.

“Ship ahoy,” he retorted pointing out into the suns waning direction for the boatswain benefit.

“You want to check it out signor,” the boatswain replied in heavy rhetoric knowing how prevalent the local fishermen were in this area.

“If that’s fine by you,” Jack acknowledged steely eyed absorbed in childlike fascination as if the discovery of another vessel here under his blue heaven was something unheard of-something surreal.

The forty-foot yacht christened `**Enchanted Beauty**` changed her easterly heading to come about for a collision course with the unknown craft.

Slowly the obscure spectre formed shape with its rounded edges coming into clarity it could be discerned as some type of canoe. As they drew closer they couldn’t make out any signs of life above the deck. It was only upon coming alongside Jack noticed an unconscious grey haired man huddled in the well of the boat.

“There’s someone onboard,” Jack announced readying himself as he had stridden over the guardrail to drop himself inside the stricken vessel.

“Be careful Signor,” the boatswain warned knowing well that trickery and piracy were also not so uncommon in these waters and many elusive methods had been used to gain entry to board another ship.

Launching himself from the side he splashed into the salty swell of the Atlantic, which took his breath away as his back, crashed into the water driving the air from his lungs and winding his right side. He gained his composure treading water as he noted the vessel had been crudely hewn from a hollowed out tree trunk and grabbing hold of it’s buoyant side he now wondered if it would capsize as he applied his body weight. He pulled up with his biceps throbbing and luckily his assumption had been misjudged as the canoe only buckled slightly. Scrambling his legs aboard he took a few deep breaths to gather his composure before coming to the aid of its captain. The old man attired in rags of brown dishevelled cloth lay like a mottled blanket on the timber floor.

“Hey old un, hey you in there,” Jack coaxed shaking him gently on the arm as an aroma of compost gave from his body.

The old mans eyes opened momentarily and they had a gleam of that of a wise bird and they focused intently upon the stranger above him. With

some excitement he lunged forward unexpectedly as his calloused hands took a firm hold on the soaking front of Jacks polo shirt, which almost lost him his precarious balance on this moving arena.

“Aalyn AA Al lyn AaAaa.” The wise bird mouthed nonsensically through brown rotted gums and Jack raised the palms of his hands in an attempt to ease his concerns.

“I don’t understand fella, no comprehendi, you want water or something,” Jack blurted out into the mad gazing stare as the old man clung to his shirt. Jack cupped his own hands portraying a drinking motion as it occurred to him that this guy may have been at sea for some considerable time and may be suffering from delusions. The Old Man let his mottled fingers loosen on Jacks top and slunk back onto the deck of the canoe.

“Aaa ll yy nn aa,” he sighed rattling out the same incoherent phrase.

Jack scoured his surrounds for the Yacht as the old man ripped a leather cord from around his threadbare neck. He reached forward and placed an object into Quinn’s palm and closed the stranger’s fingers upon it. Jacks mind though was urgently fixed upon there preservation and upon sighting the flowing white sails of the Enchanted Beauty he began waving to the Spanish boatswain hoping his dialect may help the situation.

The Enchanted Beauty, which had been circling around, made haste in its turn as its captain set course for the man signalling upon the canoe.

“Crazy English,” he cursed turning the wheel.

Jack watched the bow manoeuvring and contented himself that his message had been understood and then he twisted in horror to witness the old Man crouching up about to plunge himself over the side. His thin body fell grey head first sweeping in a pendulum motion and hitting the water with an almighty crash. He went straight under and downwards as his feeble arms clung onto a heavy object presumably used in anchoring his death dive. Quinn didn’t hesitate but followed immediately after without any thought he plunged into the old mans wake. Swimming hard in a vertical descent he glimpsed the rags blurring away in turmoil of oxygen generated bubbles as the old man emptied his lungs to fall even faster into the abyss. Jack felt his own lungs wheezing and saw the bubbles fading into the depths and faraway from his grasp. The salt water stung his eyes as he peered below and then all he could visualize was a pale mist all around him.

On board the Enchanted Lady the Boatswain only concern had been for his paying passenger who he looked upon with respect and scorn as he surveyed him regaining himself from the shock of the affair. After scrambling aboard the yacht he had collapsed upon the timber deck with exhaustion and lay there for sometime regaining his equanimity.

“Are you Okay Signor,” the boatswain shouted from the helm for the umpteenth time but eventually he got a reaction as the man lifted his arm in response and started to come upon his feet in a slow meticulous fashion. “I don’t get it, I just don’t get it and he just went over the side, why?” Quinn kept repeating his questions in his mind as he tried to fathom what exactly had just occurred through his dazed mind.

“He may have come out here to die Signor, who knows?” The boatswain added his own theory then got to his second and most apparent concern. “I do not think we need bother notifying the Polzei over this Signor, you know how it is for me, theyll just this use this as an excuse to give me a hard time. They have no love for my kind here,” Jack knew what he was trying to imply as a foreign entrepreneur in West Africa he earned a comfortable living from the tourist trade, whilst the locals struggled to find any gainful employment and Carlos had secretly become hated and despised. Jack had heard the odd jealous quirk on the harbour front when he had chartered the boat from the local fisherman and knew his Spanish boatswain survived in a world of envy and unpopularity.

“Okay Carlos it never happened. You have my word,” Jack responded as the shock of that day had unnerved him and he wanted to erase the memory also as quick as his senses would allow.

Later, as the flickers of false light illuminated the coastline and the moon glowed immense over the dark night air, Jack was in a far better mood to reflect. Strolling the deck breathing in the cool sea mist he pocketed his hands casually. His left hand felt the cold texture of the item that the old man had forced into palm. He remembered securing it there instinctively before his own dive and had forgotten about until now with all the hysteria that had preceeded. He fetched out the leather pouch the size of a cigarette packet and it puzzled him what the old man had desperately wanted to bequeath him. Almost in spiritual awe Jack looked up to the heavens for guidance glistening majestically before looking upon the item in his open palm. The leather had darkened to almost black with damp and the

corrosive nature of the sea spray .It had a small string that secured the bag and he placed his finger in the aperture and pulled the laces open and felt a smooth object within the pouch. He tipped the pouch upside down and an object fell into his waiting hand. He leaned forward expectantly to examine the find it was a piece of quartz crystal carved in the form of a woman's figurine with her arms outstretched towards the heavens. He scrutinised the delicately etched features in the moonlight and made out that she adorned a crescent moon as a headband with three stars emblazoned upon it. Jack entranced by the beauty of the statuette he turned it with his fingers upon its obverse where he noted carved letters crudely etched into the hardened quartz. The strange symbols appeared mystical and magical to Jack even though he could not discern there meaning but he knew one layman's fact that this article appeared to be very old.

Upon the shelf of the shallow horizon Refaat screwed his eyes tightly to stare under the fiery orb of the sun and protect his retinas from it's overbearing glare. A false dusk had arisen and a dark ominous cloud had begun to descend upon the plateaux of the Sahara. The Shepherd boy had witnessed this phenomenon before and his primary concern would be to get his goats corralled as quickly as he could. He placed two fingers in his mouth and gave forth a shrill whistle as the scattered flock responded, rounding them up upon his calls. He coaxed them through the gate into the timber-framed pen and hoped the flimsy makeshift structure rotten with age would be able to withstand the coming onslaught. The last of the herd had entered the enclosure as he glanced instinctively over his shoulder as he felt the first gusts of the humid wind.

Staring into the face of this hurtling mass as if a plague of angry locusts in biblical proportions were churning up the land. He had done all he could for his Goats and now it was his turn to protect himself. He sought refuge within the jagged outcrops of rock at the base of the plateaux as the first waft of the black storm came racing by. Covering himself under his sleeping mat he nestled down until the sandstorm had abated.

The Sandstorm that had rippled across the deserts expanse and had turned daylight into the denizens of night instantaneously had silently quelled. Refaat a young boy of eleven years had taken shelter under his blanket

between the rocky mounds and he had lay there as the ferocious Kazi had erupted above him. Even though his haven had been relatively secure at least a foot of sand had weighed down upon him. He lifted the cloth, which took strenuous force to gain his freedom, and the full glory of the day was a welcoming sight upon his eyes.

Refaat a shepherd boy tendering his families flock had good sense to corral the herd and glancing over he witnessed the animal's knee deep in the dry earth although shaken and unhurt by Mother Nature's wrath. "Allah Akbar," he mouthed his prayer of thanks for there survival. He sauntered over and loosed the wicker gate from its cord and then gently coaxed out his herd. He sent them out onto the slopes as they could gain surer footing and once again scour for barren clumps of pasture. "Musha Musha," he called and clapped his hands forcing the goats to vacate the sanctuary as he watched them gleefully jumping through the heavy fine sand that had gathered.

The herd finally settled back into there ageless routine and Refaat opened his flask and took a long draught of the refreshment his mother had packed for him. Then inspecting the sheltered valley he immediately became aware that the storm had swept away part of the rocky landscape and where once had stood a jagged facia there was now a smooth edged line of masonry jutting out quite alien to the natural rough mountains outline. He went over to study this strange phenomenon awed with adolescent curiosity and as he drew closer his intrigue became more intense as to what might lay there. Feeling the smoothness of the sandstone with the palm of his hand brushing carefully over the carved blocks. He followed the line of the edifice for another six feet and then came back to the core stone of the rocky plateaux. He stood there making patterns with his finger on the sandstone and then his heart leapt as he heard the cracking straining screech, but to his horror he had no time to step back as the ground beneath gave way and he plummeted into the bowels of the earth.

Refaat had fallen ten feet before the wind had been knocked from his body as he collided onto the hard stone floor. He had bit his lip and the metallic taste of blood made his mouth fill with salvia. Light trickled in from the hole his body had made and glanced around adjusting to the darkness in his wake. Something glinted nearby a few feet to his left side and Refaat leaned cautiously out towards it. His imagination by this time

had run wild and a foreboding fear chilled him to the root of his spine. He conjured awakening demons emanating in the black fog of this chamber and as soon as his hand grabbed a hold on the object he scrambled hastily onto his feet. Even to his uneducated eyes he knew what he held now as it hit the light was made of gold.

“Allah Akbar,” he wheezed in disbelief at the foot long figurine and then in the shadows beyond he saw a life size statue of a Goddess with her breasts unashamedly unfurled and he swore it made a guttural sound.

Stuffing the treasure into his jezebel he started to climb back and out of the hole in panic. As soon as he reached the summit he started to run, as he had never ran before back to his village with beads of fear crenulated upon his brow to tell them what he had uncovered. Negotiating the steep incline of the ridge the picturesque vision of the mud brick shanties encompassing the life-giving oasis came into his welcoming sight. Wadi El Nil a closed off enclave of rural society which had housed families here from well before the first millennia. Refaat entering the village tried first to locate the white skinned well-spoken Khawaga who he had become friendly with and whom he knew would be most interested in his find. Further more he concluded he would have adequate bakeesh to procure the treasure from him.

Doctor Henry Armitage an eminent English Archaeologist and an honoured member of the Royal Society of Egyptology had recently been granted a licence from the Egyptian Antiquities department to carry out a fieldwork study of the western desert outposts and for three long months he had been stationed at Wadi El Nil cataloguing a series of rock drawing left behind by Ancient travellers upon the caravan routes and in unhistorical rhetoric various forms of graffiti that had been left behind by Napoleonic French soldiers who had been garrisoned here. Henry personally had become fascinated and obsessed by a particular cultures hallmark known collectively as the Boat People. They had left behind matchstick caricatures of their existence and strong modern evidence pointed out that they had predated the Egyptian Pharonic Dynasties and may be a key to the puzzle of the early origins of man. These strange nomadic people who had painted women in dancing poses and who had dragged a huge high prowed reed boats across the girth of the great desert

held many mysteries with there strange markings a legacy to be viewed for all eternity.

The Boat Peoples art had been discovered at several sights in the region but their true origins and history were veiled in mystery and this intrigued Henry to his very professional soul. He was in the process of hand sketching a high prowed vessel with a plume headed figure upon its deck who gave out a timekeeping chant as a team of a hundred men dragged the ship with ropes .Henry pictured the spectacle clearly in his mind. The colours of the dyes used were still visible if a little faded and eroded with age, but with great loving care he got a good copy of it's original intended form. He made a charcoal outline of the high Prow of the boat as the sudden noise made him curse as it distracted him.

“Doctor, Doctor come see, come see,” came the excited tones of Refaat as he ran towards him holding something under his cloak.

The bellowing roar of traffic reverberated within the bowels of this cosmopolitan City and like an ugly breath the veils of smog rose invisibly into the grey scudded clouds above. In contrast to the umbrella-wielding commuters the man attired in a tweed jacket and arrogantly braving the chill with no overcoat had a deep tanned complexion from recent ventures in warmer climates. Although he could feel the drafts of wind pass straight through him as they curled their icy tail around his bones. Jack had not had the time to fully acclimatize back into his native environment and his mind still dreamily focused across the white-coated surfs in the midst of the Atlantic.

Outside the brown granite building artificially aged by carbon monoxide and acid rain it had a bearing almost as noble and antiquated as the wealth of its stores. The Manchester Museum situated upon Oxford road only a few short strides from the academic and university complexes of this industrious city.

The gloss varnished doors swung open smoothly upon their brass polished hinges as the man with the bronze skin tone entered and approached the information kiosk. A man donning a full white snowy beard and with rosy overbearing friendly features acknowledged him.

“Morning Sir, would you care to purchase a guide,” the attendant had said with his eyes upon the glossy paged brochure, which helped raise funds for the museums upkeep.

“Yes ill take one, although im afraid im not here to tour. I have a prearranged appointment with Professor Armitage as discussed with his secretary,” Quinn made his affairs known and handed over the five pound note for the guide.

“If you’d care to take a seat there, ill get hold of the professor for you,” at that the attendant picked up his phone on the desk behind him.

The leather-studded chair perched in an alcove in the entranceway had a comfortable yet businesslike like feel. Quinn glanced into the main building visualising the avenues of shining glass display cabinets that reflected the radiance of the florescent strip lighting. Then within this gleaming corridor ethereal and elegant a lady shrouded in a pure white lab technicians jacket approached through the haze with her high heels tapping out her step in an urgent yet steady fashion.

“Mister Quinn I presume,” she enquired firmly although her deep alluring eyes held Jacks mezmerisation and the flowing locks of chestnut brown a shade lighter than her eyes hung comely yet angelic stopping to rest on the collar of her coat.

“Yes—hello—I’m Jack—Jack Quinn,” he struggled to form the words on his tongue and standing offered her his hand in greeting.

She took a firm grip on his fingers and squeezed hard and shook his hand firmly with the strength of a man but before he reacted to her caress he had found his voice.

“So shall we proceed to Professor Armitages office,” he suggested not wishing to be fobbed off and expecting the worse with his secretary sent to placate him.

“I’m Professor Armitage--- Anne Armitage,”she snapped but added a wry smile in the form of a cunning fox.

“Forgive my stupidity, I had envisaged an geriatric old man with unkempt grey hair,” he blushed with humour at his own ignorance.

“No need for apologies it hasn’t been the first time and certainly not the last that a hypothesis has been barraged at my gender in this profession,” she lambasted then side stepped the issue moving onto other things.” My secretary wasn’t exactly forthcoming on how the museum may assist

you,” she had said with more than mild curiosity scrutinising the smartly dressed gentleman and admiring his physique.

They made their way through the glass avenues crammed with exhibits of mankind’s progression since the dawn of time. Trinkets of history formed from metal, fabric, bone, wood and earth. Forged from fire or carved with lost skills. Pieces of Potsherds, crude knives sharpened in bone, tin cooking tools and elaborately ornate cloths bringing back a trapped moment of a forgotten time. All this swum in Quinn’s mind and even the gold and ivory ornaments didn’t hold any desire compared to the exhibit in his pocket that this museum did not yet own.

In her office a small compact room on the third floor of the building he had been requested to sit on the opposite side of an oak panelled desk with a green leather top. He examined the picturesque prints of Monet adorning the magnolia walls and the tidy array of paperwork on her in/out trays upon the desk before her. He assumed she had an orderly nature and the warmth of the Monet gave him a sense of the serenity of her life. He glanced from the neatly arranged papers to catch her own fleeting look as she stared into his whirlpool eyes. Her lenses of her horn-rimmed glasses had magnified her hazel pupils and they sparkled as if diamonds reflecting that healthy sheen of contentment she held within.

“So Mister Quinn, what is the reason for you asking an appointment with the museums scientific and analytic curator.” She used her full title with her arms folded in a guarded and business styled gesture after he had requested privacy in the entranceway to discuss his purpose further. “You’ll have to bear with me on this Professor,” Jack reassured before reiterating his recent journey to the West African coast and as his story focused on the third world poverty he had encountered first hand and the good heart of the noble people there, he noticed she had started to warm to his personality. She giggled at his quirky remarks as he reminisced of hailing a cab to find him self diving inside a police car as his ineptitude had landed him in hot water for a short moment. Although after explaining to the Polzei who drove around in battered green and white Renaults his mistake was soon rectified with a quick bribe to regain his freedom again.

Then as his tale progressed and he described vividly the motion of the waves and the dreamy voyage of the boat he witnessed her eyes floating away with the African breeze. He got to the encounter with small boat

stranded in the Ocean and knew by the way she lent slightly forward and her mouth curled minutely changing her expression that she had a sensitive and delicate nature.

“Marvellous,” she remarked sitting back as he paused, bringing her polished nails to her face with embarrassment of how this man had lifted her soul. As he carried on his adventure and described the old man in his decrepit and dishevelled condition and the ultimate nature of his death, her shoulders slunk into despair and a solitary tear appeared in the corner of her left eye.

“Are you okay,” Jack consoled becoming concerned that he was violating her frail disposition.

“No im fine, but tell me what has your story got to do with your visit here to the museum,” Anne needed to regain her respectability after the turmoil of emotions that this stranger had instilled in her.

“Please let me finish,” he cut her off. Thrown off track for the moment and he waited politely until she nodded her compliance as her imagination floated off again upon a dreamy sea with this bronze skinned man as she held his head in remorse aboard the deck of the Enchanted Beauty.

The sparkle in the moonlight, the glimmer of quartz in his hand as his heart ached with a compassionate smile thanking the old man for his bequest. Snapping out of the visual fantasy the smiling stranger held the crystal figurine before her very eyes and it radiated a vibrancy of colours in its opaque form.

“He bequeathed this to me, this legacy that holds the key to his life and the reason, I presume----for his death. I need you to help me, to learn more for my own sanities sake and the heavy burden on my conscience. I feel kind of responsible for his demise and the whole episode whirrs in my head keeping me awake at night. Im begging you Professor please help me,” Jacks pleas were genuine and the secret hidden nightmares that had left him bolt upright at night had been confessed to a passionate ear.

“Let me examine it please,” She stated not knowing how to answer his passion without stripping down her guard and giving herself to him. She took the crystal from his palm in compromise to her emotional state and felt a surge of the sensual fervour that strangely drove through her immortal body.

With a huge magnifying glass that had been lying on the side of the desktop, her hazel eye engorged bright and alluring that propelled Jack's attention straight to its eddy. Fidgeting nervously at his unwanted but unthreatening attentions she twisted the crystal over from side to side inspecting every millimetre of the carefully carved sculpture. It was now Jack's turn to pay heed to her with mutual fascination.

"I don't recognise these symbols at all, their design is of the cuneiform genre but hieroglyphic prose is used to elevate some points of interest. The quartz is very pure and unblemished no air pockets or discolourisation. The craftsmanship is of an excellent quality it must of taken hundreds of years to carve this piece so intricately. If this is as ancient as the crude cuneiform symbols suggest then it would be a highly prized and scholarly possession, subject to much study and debate. The quartz has been polished perfectly using fine sand to give it that smooth clear finish and it is a mystery to academics how this ancient technique had been fully achieved. I've never come across epigraphs so ornate and yet obscure it is a most peculiar and a most fascinating find," she concluded upon her primary deductions.

"How about the symbols, do they mean anything," Jack stabbed in the dark wanting her to bring this figure to life before him and unfold its mystic and secret history.

"They definitely have a meaning in the way the script and symbols are ordered but what that meaning is, I cannot tell you as epigraphy is not one of my strongest fields," She huffed out in her own disappointment and in sympathy to Quinn who she sensed yearned so much for knowledge on this arcane sculpture.

"So were stumped then, your telling me," he said almost matter of factly hiding his bitter gall at running into a dead end.

"Mmm," Murmuring sweetly in thought as she racked her mind for an answer to their enigma, a solution that she cunningly contrived would bring about not too much attention yet again would earn her the credit if this relic turned out to be an important and scholarly find.

"Well Mister Quinn not exactly bowled out more to the tune of rained off. My brother Henry is a prominent Archaeologist and furthermore one of the finest minds in the field of epigraphy. This is far more Henry's realm than mine and by chance he's flying back from Luxor a week on Friday."

she explained her solution to Jack who seemed placated and reassured by her suggestion.

“Could I take it into my safekeeping until then,” Anne stated boldly as her tapered nails curled around the torso of the figurine.

“I’m not so sure about that, I know it might sound a little bizarre although this grizzly memento of mine has kind of become my prized possession and I like to keep it close at heart,” The crystal had took him with an uncanny obsession and by keeping it from her charms it guaranteed an excuse for him to meet her again.

“Would you mind then if I took a digital photograph? I give you my oath I will not display or go public without your express permission. It just means I can work on those symbols for you. You do want to know what they represent,” she used her own charms with her red glossed smiles and fluttering eye lashes that made him grin back almost moronic and idyllically.

“Yeah why not,” he replied in a what the hell manner as he had no other possibilities to aid him solve this puzzle.

He gazed upon the line of her stockings and her sultry step as her comely pose moved in feminine gesticulation upon her high-heeled shoes. He measured the pear shaped incline of her waistline against the narrow curve above her slim hips and the pert crescents of her shapely behind as she lent over her workstation. Her long glistening nails carefully positioned the figurine on the A4 paper to form a blank and clear background. She clicked the camera attached to a stand above the object and captured the still impression. She continued this process as she took further stills at various angles and close ups of the crude symbolic scripture.

“She is very beautiful,” Anne spoke her thoughts aloud gazing into the face of the moon goddess before handing her back to her rightful owner. Jack caught her thin fingers for a brief moment and caressed them as the cold quartz came into his grasp.

“But not as beautiful as you are,” his words came from him without any prompt as he spoke out straight from his heart.

“Thank you Mister Quinn,” she announced sternly withdrawing her hand away however her cheeks were flushed showing her mixed emotions.

“Will that be all,” she added abruptly becoming defensive.

“I’m sorry for that just now. Not my words but my timing I couldn’t help telling you how I feel,” he tried to justify his remark but one sentence kept repeating in his thoughts. She is so beautiful.

“I accept your apology, but a gentleman which you certainly are not should be proper and polite when addressing a Lady. My grandfathers words of wisdom to protect me from unscrupulous sorts as yourself,” Anne became prim and gracious as she teased him, which gave her sedulous pleasure.

“May then I ask Madam for her Grandfathers forgiveness and how one of such unscrupulous status may gain your attentions without causing offence,” Jack pursued her game with his added hint of his own sarcasm. “You may Sir, you may hand over to this Lady your contact number,” there faces broke from the serious façade into giggling laughter but it soon died away as Anne caught a glimpse of her wrist watch and her lips instantly reformed into a straight mouthed line.

“Mister Quinn I have spent far too long in your company and must leave as I’m already overdue for a lecture in the University theatre,” Anne explained rapidly as she had absent mindedly lost track of reality in Quinn’s company and had a prior speaking engagement to her second year history graduates on the timescales of Sumerian pottery and she knew it was a key part of there examination course.

Jack drew out his business card and held it out expectantly as he noticed her distress grabbing folders hastily from the desk.

“Don’t forget to let me know when your brother returns or if you’d like call me anytime, your really good company,” he managed to point out in the turmoil as she piled her stack of papers under her arms readying herself to rush away in urgency.

“Ill consider your offer Mister Quinn, now please you’ll have to excuse me. Ive less than three minutes to get over to the theatre,” she informed him snatching his card from his clutches as she rushed passed comically off balance with the burden of her workload piled up upon her prostrate arms. He watched her high heels echoing away down the corridor in a half jogging walk and people ducking out her way as she rocketed through the interior of the museum.

“Bye for now,” Jack mouthed into her vanishing slipstream as he pocketed his hands in his pleated trousers and sauntered casually from the professors office.

The light flickered in amongst the shadows making the veils of blackness dance around in the encroaching sphere of the torches beam. Waves of dust particles were illuminated in a shimmering frenzy in the dead rank atmosphere and mingled eerily in this place that had lay buried for thousands of earthly years. Armitage had to cough deeply with a guttural bark to clear his constricted lungs from the sharp filaments that cut the soft fabric of his throat on every breath. Instantaneously after spluttering up moisture to quell his affliction the flying debris dried the delicate lining of his throat again. He let out another crescendo as his lungs barked with a loud chorus of bravado that hid the fear pumping through the course of his veins and the drips of cold dread filled moisture that streaked down the length of his spine. The torch encircled the chamber once again in a quick deliberate sweep checking warily for anything untoward or unexpected as Armitage had an overawed sense of foreboding with premonitions of terror haunting the recesses of his sober psyche.

“Stop this nonsense. Good God Man get a grip,” he chastised out aloud trying to calm the shadows of dread. His coherent reasoning couldn’t relate or configure these uneasy sensations that spooked him as he had ventured into many tombs prior to this and only the excited emotions of discovery had walked by his side in the past.

He had the urge to breath deeply as the lifeless air stifled and intoxicated his life’s blood. His heart raced double speed with thundering palpitations of anxiety shooting through his mortal being as if the skeletal hand of death caressed the essence of his very soul.

“Calm down you bloody fool”, he cajoled his flaxen spirit back to a functioning form as the trembling in his hands subsided momentarily. It took him a good few seconds before he had regained a semblance of his usual coherence and courage to persist. His palms had a cold clammy texture clinging onto the rubber sheaf of the night-light in a slimy grip and ice-cold necklace of sweat raced more prominently down his spine.

Panting like a cornered cougar with his fear induced perspiration streaming profusely as it drooled from every stoma of his heavysset body. “Good heavens,” he proclaimed gasping into the muggy air as he bungled into a vein of dusty cobwebs that clung to his sodden frame and then he froze rigidly. He eavesdropped a resonate drone coming from further in the tomb that echoed in the cavity of his ears.

“Good heavens _____ eavens,” his voice bounced around hollowly in the gloom.

Focusing the torch beam into his path and alighting up the far reaches of this chamber, which glowed in an orange aura as the sandstone absorbed the lustre of the artificial beacons, yellow brilliance. His steps measured and deliberate as he made his way onwards in the semi darkness with his footfalls tapping out an echo of his approach. His pupils were wide with both terror and affixation as he ventured deeper into lost void of this timeless tomb. A tomb he had considered might hold vast riches as others had unveiled or more importantly some hidden reference to his studies that would gain him credibility upon the learned stage of the world. He envisaged his portfolio crammed full of lecture tours to an audience of all the most notable universities and then a picturesque Mansion house set upon the greenbelt landscapes of his beloved English countryside as his avarice for hidden gold and fame consumed his daydreaming mind. He hadn’t consensually realised that his pace had quickened to a more erratic step with his thoughts conjuring glory in a heady mist of his conceited desire and worldly contempt.

The sudden crash brought him stirring back into the abyss of reality as his knee smashed into an unseen obstruction and the torch flung from his slimy grasp as it spiralled into the murky space like an epileptic Catherine wheel. The spinning light show ended abruptly as the lens and bulb shattered with a crunching thud as it exploded upon contact with the hard earthen floor.

Darkness consumed totally encroaching his vicinity and Armitage slunk his head in a symbolic gesture of the overpowering dread that had returned with renewed vigour. His knee ached sharply and his booted foot pressed against the sandstone block that had accounted for his fall. He sat nursing his injured limb as he glanced on all sides circumspectly at the nothingness and the complete loss of bearing that now had him trapped.

His breathing rattled unsteadily and the necklace of icy cold perspiration clung to his sodden shirt like a second skin upon his back. His senses picked up the dank musty taints of decomposition that sickened his stomach and choked his nostrils. His ears honed into the unearthly silence trying to find any source of unreserved sound in this crypt that lay buried beneath the sands.

She gazed upon the black aged rocks pointed sharply like fangs that had emerged from the depths of the ocean floor hidden since the dawn of time and then with utter satisfaction watched them disappear again under a crescendo of white waters as the almighty sea broke against these ancient sentinels. She had the Eagles view of this marvel from her view point upon the cliff. The heavens above hung grey and ominous in the foreboding twilight as the sun sank under the mantle of the earth's womb and the cloak of night slowly stretched its encompassing wings. The girl stood from her makeshift boulder chair from which she had witnessed the wonders of nature for some considerable time and she stretched fully her stiff limbs as she was buffeted by the northerly wind that brushed her linen garment tightly against her young firm body. "Alyнна," a voice called above the rushing wind, bounding in the sonorous air as it came from the bearing of the ledge above.

Alyнна steadily climbed the stone steps in the cliff face heading in the direction of the beckoning voice.

"Alyнна," the voice boomed again but this time drowning out with the vibration of the crashing waves below.

"Carouso, Im over here," she responded as her footfalls rested upon the soft agriculture earth on the precipice of the cliffs.

A young male dashed across the crop fields wading through the rich golden heads of barley and halted a few yards before her wake.

"Thank the Gods, Ive found you. Our Mother beckons for you." Carouso her half brother had spoken. He had a deep olive sheen to his skin tone, typical of Mediterranean men and his locks woven in tight curls were pure black. Whereas Alyнна had silk golden hair that flowed down her back and her complexion had a far fairer pallor. The definite visible signature that their fathers had been from different breeds. Alyнна had caught the

urgency in her brothers voice and her gentle pace had increased to a steady trot now her strides lengthened again as she made pace with his own.

Psychos a settlement upon the western shore of the Minoan state an outpost far from the more grandiose capitol of Knossos with its red and black mosaics and it's labyrinth structure. The seat for the Kings of the royal house of Minos and courtyard to the Lords, Nobleman and Generals of the State. Here at Psychos only drifters, renegades and misfits roamed it's dank and dark hovels. Some through choice some through necessity and others through banishment as Psychos symbolised a place of shame. Bawdy singing came from the taverns and Harlots plied their trade upon the dangerous streets.

Alynnas home, a common abode on the edge of the settlement had stone slabs as lintel walls with a stone mantel roof following the Neolithic building design of their ancestors. Heavy draped hides of animal skin that sheltered out the cold night air covered the windows and the hollow of the door. The square drapes of fabric brushed aside and burning torches mounted upon the walls sent reflections of luminance shimmering around the shadows with the glimmer of their flames.

"Mother you summoned for me," Alyнна acknowledged the grey-headed crone sat upon a stool in the corner of the abode.

"Yes my child, as you well know I'm becoming old and tired. But your time has arrived for me to reveal to you my child your true inheritance," the grey haired crones eyes shone with malevolence at her speech and her prominent pock marked nose emphasized her every word as she had spoken.

Her scrawny fingers rubbed together in hidden glee and her thin calloused lips broke into a cruel smile. Then a cacophony of coughing spurts crammed with streams of phlegm spluttered from her blackened mouth as her diseased ridden lungs sang out the cancerous tones that ate her away from within.

The night as black and empty as Alyнна had ever known as she followed her Mothers hunchbacked frame that clung eagerly upon a wicker basket she had brought along as they walked into the depths of the wilderness. The air rich with the scent of the orange groves, acacias and the distinctive aroma of the tamarind trees as they walked into the wilds. In this uninhabited void, mountainous and barren, yet fruitful with lush forests in

its extremities and alive with strange wild beings that roamed these desolate haunts.

“Where we going Mother,” Alynna whispered with trepidation as the darkness seemed to close in on all sides.

“Never you mind my sweet, just purse your lips in silence and be patient my child as I have had to be for all those long and enlightening years,” the old crone held a perverse secretive pleasure at her goading which showed in her unsettled demeanour. They carried on further into the heart of the wilderness; faraway from the well-used tracks and neither uttered a sound along the route as only in the darkness and in the whistle of the wind Alynna found companionship. They passed an outcrop of huge rock pillars on either side of the track, colossus as if they stood rigid as stone guardians. Monoliths with a v shaped cleft hewn through the centre of the hard stone as if an axe from the heaven had parted them and they formed a natural passage to beyond. The giant pedestals of rock made Alynna shiver as she passed through their hub and they reminded her of the Giant Talos that protected the sanctuaries to the Gods. On the other side of the colossus hidden from prying eyes a heavy foliated woody dell and it was here in this woodland where the old woman finally came to a standstill.

“Here we are my child,” she cackled hauntingly in the midst of this secret enclave as she laid down the basket on the stony ground.

“Here, where, why here?” Alynna asked with a shudder of cold icy fear running through her shoulders and making them tremble involuntary.

The old woman placed her thin hands under the crag of a flat stone topped boulder and it gave off a sharp grating sound as it shifted backwards. Alynna stood back locked with adrenaline freezing her muscles into a solid mass.

“Help me my child,” the old woman beckoned with her voice rasping in a strained snarl and Alynna stepped cautiously forward to stare down into the abyss that was being uncovered below the stone, which stopped her dead in her tracks again.

“Come on child, help me budge this accursed thing,” her mothers voice hailed burdened with the anguish of her toiling.

Alynna took a hold on the heavy slab and with all her strength it flew forwards with a grinding screech. Escaping both their grasps and exploding loudly as it thundered upon the earth. Beneath them a perfect

circle had been uncovered and within a total darkness that mirages the depth of it's coarse.

"Down there," the old crone giggled almost timidly before continuing. "Down there my child is the greatest of all secrets, the most wondrous of all things," the old woman's features had scrunched up with a hideous toothless smile that highlighted the hundreds of grainy lines in her tired archaic features.

Uncovering the cloth that served as a lid of the basket she began to unwind the coil of strong hemp and proceeded to feed it into the bowels of the earth.

"Tie this well girl," the mother instructed as Alynna took the end of the length of rope and fastened it around the girth of a nearby orange tree.

"Right girl it's time, down you go," the old woman suddenly stated pointing her twisted index finger into the void and Alynna felt the breath of dread entering her lungs.

"What for mother, what is down there," Alynna's hoarse throat broke with rebuttal as she glared at this craggy old witch who scorned gleefully back at her anguishes.

"You'll see, you'll see now come on time is of the essence as the ripening moon will awaken you into your life journey my child," the old crone whittled on in reply as Alynna stood dumbfounded.

Alynna had always been obedient to her mothers wishes having never known her father and at the age of fourteen when she should have been readying herself to join the religious festivities and court a future husband, she instead had become a virtual slave to her mothers every whim and had no opportunity to do anything for herself. Her day began before the dawn had arisen her call to cook and clean with her only haven coming with the dying embers of dusk when she found a moment to admire the crashing waves with intensity as she settled upon her cliff top perch. Thankful for an end to another laborious day.

"Mother I can't do this thing in which you ask. I can't. Can't go down there it's dark and dangerous," for the first time in her entire life she had defied and protested her mothers command.

The old woman's hand moved with lightening speed ripping across her fleshy cheek and the force of the blow brought the young girl onto her knees.

“How dare you child defy me,” she rasped like an adder, “youll do as I say and you’ll do as I bid as long as I am alive. Now take hold of this and down you go or I swear to you ill sell you too the first drifter that darkens our door,” her mothers words stung her bitterly and the threat of being sold to some lecherous old man made her hairs stand on the back of her neck. Hurting inside with fear and anxiety she took hold of the line more through blind loyalty than the weight of her threat.

“What is down there,” Alynna tried a last bid to discover what she had become embroiled in.

“You’ll see,” was her mother’s stony response once again. Alynna had succumbed to the terror in her mind and having no options as she looked into the abyss at this black pit that fell into the earth, her stomach churned unnaturally.

“May the Gods protect me,” she mouthed as sat upon the edge with her white naked legs dangling into the darkness.

“Go on child, lets get this done,” the mother goaded.

Holding the rope firmly she twisted her body around it’s hold and her legs dropped with her feet searching frantically for a secure foothold. The sides were solid rock with only a scarce few jagged edges protruding out and her bare sandaled feet eventually managed to gain prominence upon one of the uneven ledges. Slowly she dropped downwards one foot after another searching for leverage upon the rock face as she slunk further into the funnel. Each time her free foot dangled in midair her heart lost a beat and as she found a foothold she exhaled with relief.

“Call to me child when you reach the bottom,” her mothers croaking voice echoed down the shaft and Alynna could only make out her grey shadow in the moonlit circle above.

“If there is a bottom,” Alynna remarked to herself, consumed with renewed dread as the narrow funnel began to shrink upon her shoulders as they scraped upon the rough sides. Alynna used the walls for purchase and slid down with fairly remarkable speed, but now she halted abruptly as her legs kicked out erratically for support as the guiding walls became completely smooth faced.

“Mother,” she screamed at her predicament traumatised at the prospect of becoming trapped and feeling completely helpless as her feet dangled in mid air.

“What’s wrong Child,” her mother’s wispy tones bounced off the rock towards her.

“Mother I can’t go on, I’m completely trapped. I can’t get down there. Pull me back up. Please Mother pull me back up.” Alynna had lost all sense of confidence and she screamed wildly as only a pit of utter terror consumed her self-being.

“Child you get down there right now or by the Gods ill sever this rope and you’ll never see the light of day again if you disobey me,” Her Mothers vicious threat had took on a cruel tone and her words resonated within this claustrophobic cavity as they seemed to echo mockingly at her plight. Alynna broke down into tears of absolute devastation.

After a bout of sobbing she took a deep determined breath and entwined her nimble legs around the coarse feel of the rope. She slid down for a few seconds and felt the skin on her hands burn as they scarred red raw. Her face contorted with the pain but she gritted her teeth to its biting sting. She took another breath of courage and slid down again and as she decelerated her descent the pain on her hands grew sharper. Changing the grip of her legs to take her weight as her hands scorched and throbbed with discomfort. Sliding again she screamed intensely as the soft flesh of her inner thighs ripped away brutally as it took the strain of the friction. She started sobbing all over again in desperation and every few feet of progress brought on a fresh bout of agony-induced tears. Alynna had no inkling of how far down this hole she had travelled and it dawned upon her that the further she went the less body strength would remain in her. She then realised that her resources were spent and she no longer possessed the will or vigour to rescale the rope.

“You can do this,” she sobbed away her qualms and she wiped the streaming tears from her cheeks upon her taught shoulders.

Letting her body rake against the rough texture of the hemp again and again. Until her hands were a soggy crimson mess and she could sense the clammy blood from her legs by there slimy hold on the lifeline. She could smell her own seared flesh in this confined airless funnel and with awesome resistance her body had to endure the trauma she placed upon herself. Then as the strain became almost unbearable her face contorted in anguish and hidden torment she began submitting herself to the blackness that closed around her like a comforting blanket. She focused on an end to

her torments and into this sweet oblivion. Floating and drifting away as the earth spun dizzily around and around. She laughed insanely and saw whirlpools of light before her very eyes. Moments later she awoke with a start by the sudden jolt of impacting upon the hard ground. She lay deliberately still for long moments as the shockwaves reverberated through her exhausted and confused mind. She could taste the salty texture of blood on her lips and her body seemed to be a dumb receptacle completely devoid of any sensation. She gazed around the darkness as if in a surreal dream and having regained enough composure and will to inspect her wounds. Leaning down to touch her inner thighs she recoiled curling deliberately into a ball and winced as the searing fires from her hands and thighs were reawakened.

“Mother can you here me,” Alynna let out a full lunged wail for help into the funnels progression.

“Stand clear,” Alynna just made out the distant response like a whisper upon the wind.

A streak of daylight appeared creeping straight through the cut in the shaft and with a roaring whipping tumult it grew brighter and fiercer. The alighted torch hit the ground with an explosion of sparks dispersing twinkles of hot embers at her feet. Alynna's eyes focused upon the grey illuminated walls in her midst and picking up the wooden stave of fire, shone it about her. Glancing instinctively above as she caught an ever so slight movement in the corner of her eye to witness the dancing line of hemp recoiling itself back up towards the surface.

“Mother, Mother you cant do this, you cant leave me down here,” Alynna screamed into the funnel which was ten foot above her head as her lifeline drifted further and further away.

“Mother,” she called again anxiously.

“Mother if your there answer me,” again she called out in distress.

“Find your destiny child as I had to find mine,” her mothers voice came back hauntingly and Alynna called her mother again and again.

“Mother please don't abandon me here, Mother, Mother please,” but she received no further reply. Then she descried a noise that made her freeze in terror. She made out the grating sound. The scraping of stone upon stone as the heavy slab was reseated back into its place. She screamed

uncontrollably as she grasped that she was being entombed alive under the ground

Luxor Hospital lay just north of the Antiquities Museum upon En Nil Street a continuation of the Corniche the waterfront road of the ancient city of Thebes which ran upon the east bank of the Nile. Outside the flat roofed civil administration building Jack noticed the restoration work on the crumbling mud brick walls and the rickety wooden framed scaffold supporting parts of the main structure. Jack pondered whether it would be safe or not to proceed within and he also wondered why he had come here to Egypt on such a whim. He recollected phoning the Manchester Museum upon that damp and dismal Friday morning and the attendant he visualised with the snowy beard informing him that Professor Armitage was unobtainable and that's all he could divulge. So Jack being Jack had sauntered into the Museum later that morning and in confrontational mood had quizzed the attendant further.

"Surely to god you must know where she is," he had stated raising his tone and then the charming voice had answered from behind.

"May I be of assistance Sir? Hugo Crane at your service," Jack swivelled around at the unexpected interruption to be faced by a tall slim gentleman attired in a white safari suit. He had a hooked nose in the manner of a bird of prey and under that a thin wispy moustache. He lent on a black cane with a silver top engraved elaborately even though he didn't appear to have any noticeable disabilities.

"I'm trying to locate Professor Armitage," he admitted begrudgingly to this stranger.

"So are you a friend of Anne's or just an acquaintance," Hugo probed him further.

"Both I suppose, listen can you help or not," Jack lambasted at being quizzed.

"Do you know her Brother Henry," he casually suggested carrying on his subtle interrogation.

"Yes the archaeologist," Jack lied.

"Well it would seem my dear fellow that Henry has had some sort of relapse in jolly Arab land and Anne has gone over to tend to him," Crane smiled through his thin lips as he spoke in a charming old English fashion.

“When did she go,”?

“This Morning I’ve been informed,”

“Thanks for the info,” Jack cut him short with his mind racing.

“One moment Sir may I enquire your name I don’t give details out to anyone you know,” Crane asked as a mere afterthought.

“Jack Quinn, thanks again cheerio,” Jack stated heading for his car and the Airport.

At the terminal in Ringway Airport he had discovered the only scheduled flight to Luxor that day was not due to that very afternoon. He couldn’t think of anything else but his need to see her once again and he searched the general passenger lounges for her. Without any qualms and after a fruitless search he got out his credit card and purchased a ticket.

“She may need me,” he consoled his doubts with upon this foolhardy venture and after going into the departure lounge beyond the Customs and excise check point and passport control he found her sipping lemonade at the bar.

Six hours later he stood in the land of the Pharaohs on that very same day that had started dank and wet and ended sunny and aridly dry. Once within the interior walls of the hospital were bleak and bare and in retrospect Jack couldn’t fathom why all State buildings the world over chose a heavy drab coating of magnolia to splash upon the walls and wondered if a global conspiracy to market this colour had once been sanctioned by nefarious forces.

“This way,” Anne pointed reading the Arabic notices and bringing Jack back from his daydreaming mind still jet lagged and puzzled at why he had come here.

The corridors were intricately narrow however the deep lustre of the highly polished floors gave them an artificial depth. Jacks brogues gave off a clicking cadence upon the hard surface and Anne’s high heels snapped out her urgency as they filtered through the labyrinth passages of the Hospital design.

When they had first breached the main entrance throngs of waiting locals seeking medical attention were crammed into the lobby and they had to be fought through. More patients had over spilled and were packed in the passageways, crammed upon the few inadequate benches and the place

filled with noise of babies crying and the heckle from others harassing medical staff to expedite some attention.

“Another flu epidemic happens every holiday season and it hits them quite hard,” Anne reported knowledgeably overhearing pieces of muted information above the general furor. The drones of mumbled and frustrated impatience that had ruptured the air soon died to a hum as they progressed further into the interior. These corridors were virtually deserted besides the odd white coated figure crossing their path or the brief glimpse of a nurse and an overladen orderly who they had to press against the walls for as he brushed passed with a ten foot high trolley stacked full of laundry supplies.

They halted before the private room with the double one etched in the centre of the glass door pane.

“Here it is eleven,” Jack commented in mild triumph at finding their goal. Anne paused at the curtained shrouded glass aperture and Quinn waited respectfully for her to make the first move as he deemed it was her right entirely. It was Anne’s own flesh and blood within and he squeezed her hand reassuringly as her polished nails caressed the door handle with anticipation as it creaked open upon its rusty metallic hinges. The coolness of the air conditioning hit them as the door widened with the draft of the refreshing breeze giving stark relief in contrast to the sweltering humid confines in the rest of this humid place.

“Hello Anne,” a haughty gruff voice weakened by illness greeted them as a portly man propped himself up on two enormous pillows to greet them. His broad shoulders slunk back into the feather comforters as if an invisible seatbelt had thwarted his movement a signature of the fever still wracking his constitution. His brown shoulder length hair hung unnaturally as his neck fell back into the supportive position and his general demeanour was of disarray. He looked unkempt, unshaven and to affirm this traces of spilt food still clung to a greying beard he had acquired whilst cooped up here. His gentle crystal blue eyes smiled from within at seeing Anne without having to form the words on his lips and his hands lifted an inch from the bed to acknowledge her in welcome.

“Oh Henry I’ve been worried sick about you,” Anne had said coming out of the trance of visualizing the state of her brother’s condition. She dashed

forward with her fingers touching her lips in gesture to the overwhelming concern that had hit her.

“Are you well? Are you okay,” she struggled for words bringing her hands down to rest in his.

“Sis I’m fine honestly they treat me like I was in the Ritz,” Henry remarked as his mouth had broken into a more jovial slant.

They chatted wildly for a few moments about trivial things with Anne’s chin doing most of the wagging telling him of the anxiety of hearing the news of his mishap over the telephone from the British Embassy and how organising travel arrangements had been a dreadful trauma at such short notice. Having to reschedule her lectures and appointments and getting them covered by other colleagues . Then as she took a breather Henrys eyes had strayed beyond her brunette locks to the shadow still standing at the doorway. Anne caught his eyes sharpening, his features frown and the general drift of his vision.

“Oh forgive my silliness please, this is Mister Quinn. He has took it upon himself to be my guardian and travelling companion here in Egypt and he has been dying to meet you Henry,” filling in the gaps as quickly as she could muster she noticed Henrys frown had not receded or softened.

“Actually it’s Jack, Jack Quinn and I’m here mainly here to do a spot of Antique recognition with the aid of your skills,” Jack added a hint of sarcasm at the end of his words not quite approving of Henrys fixed Leonine stare.

“An antiques dealer you seem more the gold digging sort to me Sir,” Henry baited his quarry he had a protective nature towards his baby sister and in a red faced retort he wanting this argument to progress and find the calibre of this man who had befriended his kin.

Anne couldn’t help but smirk at there boyish mannerisms in which they acquainted one another although she knew it would be prudent to break the hammers fall before the anvil sparked too much.

“Now children,” Anne chastised them both in her best school mistress tone.” Henry Mister Quinn is here as my guest and I would like you treat him as such,” she had added as her brother huffed and gruffed to her request.

Jack stood in the awkward silence that proceeded not looking the invalided man in the eyes but scanning the cramped room for a point of fixation.

“Henry Mister Quinn has brought along an interesting artefact and he would like your evaluation and valid opinion on.” Anne tried to break the ice between them both on a mutual subject but as her point of Quinns reason to be here sunk in Henrys face turned crimson.

“The bloody effrontery of the man using my sisters good nature to further his own ends with his gold digging schemes,” Henry stopped abruptly fighting for breath and bit his lip under his gasps to stem back another flow of curses.

“Nonsense Henry, Jack is a fine decent Gentleman, You have no right to treat him this way .You crusty old braggart with your over inflated opinions at times I am a woman now and quite astute at picking my own friends with or without your judgments, thank you very much,” Anne came to Jacks rescue and Henrys anger seemed to ease as he realised how upset his sister had become.

“Jack is it,” he said without thinking as the surge of temper had not yet abated.” Hogwash the mans a rogue. I know a scoundrel when I see a scoundrel and just why has he come here this Captain Morgan to evaluate how much treasure he can steal from this sacred land of the Pharaohs tomb robber is that your game Sir,” Henry ranted in his pompous overbearing way trying to surmise every rogue reason he could muster. He had no inkling of Jacks purpose but hated to be proved wrong. He had opted to attack with a charade of insults as his best defence and a gross unwillingness to be helpful in any way.

Jack casually cupped his hand in his trouser pocket and from within pulled out the crystal statuette and with a well-practised flick of the wrist sent it spiralling into his insulter’s direction. The statuette spun delicately in midair and the quartz shimmered with many vibrant colours as it reflections of the rooms light. It landed bluntly upon the blue linen bed cover in-between the pyramid mounds of Henrys legs. Henry glared upon it stopping his verbal attacks instantaneously and as if in slow motion he lent forward and picked it up in an effeminate and tender motion. Holding it with care between his finger and thumb he brought closer to his focusing point for his fastidious scrutiny. As his pupils narrowed intently locked

upon the defined curves of the figurine and the petite features lovingly crafted of the Moon Goddess his face took on a turn of anguish and his hands shook in an uncontrollable frenzy. The figurine slipped from his grasp spinning and tumbling back upon the bedspread and his mouth opened agape in paranoid horror.

“Oh my God it can’t be,” he screamed repeatedly and Anne dived forward folding her arms around his bulk in a comforting grip to help control his panic.

“What’s wrong Henry, what’s wrong? For heavens sake what has got into you,” Anne reeled off her desperation as she hugged him tighter experiencing his wild shaking. His hoarse breaths had become rasps and her head leaning upon his surging chest made out the grating sea of his grinding lungs.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean this,” Jack murmured feeling hapless and lost in the situation not knowing whether to leave the room or stay put.

“It’s her, it’s the Devil she’s coming for me. Oh God please protect me,” Henry had started rambling again in a feverish madness as his eyes remained hard upon the quartz artefact.

Moments later a buxom olive skinned nurse barged through the door nearly knocking Jack off his feet as she had been aroused by Henry’s screams emanating from within the room.

“You’ll have to leave. Visiting is over. Shoo you must go until Mister Armitage is fully recovered,” she began scolding Jack with her arms waving for him to vacate the room. She glanced over to her patient’s deteriorated condition and her first priority was his for welfare.

“Can’t we stay a few moments longer,” Anne pleaded still clinging to her brother. Although the nurse marched over and with strong arms soon broke her grip.

“No I must terminate your visit now for the sake of my patient’s health. So quickly say your farewells as you can he see he needs to rest,” the Nurse made her position clear and her presence had also brought calm to Henry’s hysteria.

“Well come again tomorrow Henry,” Anne stated but Henry didn’t respond to his sister’s voice. His eyes just gazed ahead upon the blank magnolia wall with his mouth slightly agape in a demented gesture that had robbed his mind of present day reality.

Jack took a pace forward and bashfully scooped up the figurine from the bed whilst in unison his other arm hooked under Anne's as he escorted her to the door.

"Don't worry he's in good hands," Jack meant referring to the nurses air of authority as she closed the door behind them.

In the sultry confines of the passageway Anne broke down into a fit of heavy tears and Jack instinctively held her close in to his chest.

"It's all right it'll be all right," he consoled her with

"Its not all right did you see the state he was in," she blubbered out before breaking into a fresh torrent of tears.

"Listen he's going to be okay, hes had a nasty shock by the look of things and his system needs time to readjust to things, that's all he needs to do,"

Jack added his condolences with optimism trying brighten her sorrow.

"How the hell do you know that and what do you care. Hes my brother, my only brother you don't even know anything about him," her rage followed with a tirade of emotion.

"Your right I don't know him, I don't know shit about a lot of things, but I know you and your strong and I do care about you and anyone whose connected to you. I care for you very much," he let out his inner feelings stung by the attack and the hurt she was experiencing.

"Oh Jack I'm so sorry, I shouldn't of said those horrible things," but before any more words could flow from her lips they had been placed upon by his, they kissed deeply and passionately as if a hunger had consumed them both. Their embrace took on a firmer hold as they reassured each other. Then their grip parted and they gazed dreamily into each other's eyes.

"Jack you know Henry was right about one thing," she whispered in the narrow corridor.

"You are a rogue, but a loveable one," and they both smiled as the emotions had been freed momentarily and they found freedom in the love they had for each other in that moment of time.

Slime coated palms gripped the stem of the torch with both hands holding onto the guiding fire for dear life in the depths of this unseeing world. Staring intently yet vacantly into the amber glow of

the beacon and observing the shimmers of flame that reflected all around her. Alynna had sat upon the hard earth for a seemingly endless length of time in utter distress and despair as her fears destroyed the frail edge of sanity she still possessed. Many times in her dark thoughts she had construed the black snake recoiling it's way back down and she had waited with wonderment and on baited breath only to discover a vanishing line of steam from her perspiring air filtering away into the cone of the funnel. She had utterly persuaded herself that her mother would soon return and have a change of heart and even though she couldn't fathom the madness that had consumed the old witch to abandon her here, she still believed the love they had both shared would finally free her from this nightmare.

Eventually her fear-ridden conclusion had ripened and the fragile bond of hope she had clung too had been torn asunder. The dawning of her most acute horror of the fate that had been bestowed upon her by her cruel hearted kin. She realised sat here sobbing and pondering upon her anxiety only heightened her desperation and ultimately would drive her to the brink of complete despair. Alynna dragged her tortured limbs to come upon her feet as she bent her stiffened legs towards her slowly the tenderness of her thighs had come back to life and even the rope burns on her hands smarted as they pushed her off the cavern floor. Raising herself and fighting the excruciating pain of cramp as her bruised muscles were forced into momentum.

"Were up girl, come on aagh.yes were up,"Alynna coaxed her aching body with bravado as she stood proud and tall with the lantern in her hands-A Goddess emerging from the depths of the deep.

Illuminating the cavern roof there hung like dragons teeth the sharp points of the fossilised stalagmites which made Alynna slouch as if they were about to close down upon her. On closer inspection she saw flecks of white calcium had solidified upon their natural formation and made them appear lumpy as if infected with a plague of ulcerous boils. The stalagmites though shone as water had penetrated them and Alynna placed her parched tongue onto the calcium boils and felt the cold liquid trickle into her throat. The torchlight lowered and the dank walls held back her wide eyed stare of apprehension at the total emptiness and the only sound a very low audible drip of moisture hitting the cavern floor that magnified

a thousand times in the complete silence. Following the run of bare rock fascias the very shadows came to life as the flame of the torch awoke the spectres of the eternal darkness which filled Alynna with uncertainty and her heart lost a beat. Brushing through the awakening black mists Alynna half expecting an ogre of some hideous description to appear and devour her now trapped within his lair as fairytales mixed with the demons in her mind. After a few minutes she felt that she must have circumnavigated the cave only to discover another mass of black stone leading into the eerie half lit distance. Then upon a curving arc a fissure in the structure of the rock wall broke the clarity of the solidness of the prison in her surrounds. The mouth of the opening only an arms width across and when Alynna forced the torch unto the breach it reflected no background of rock. Pushing her arm in further it went all the way to her shoulder without an end. Brewing up the courage she stepped into the rough edged opening and her hopes were raised by the sense that there may be some way out of this dungeon. Every step she took with care and precaution as the floor in this narrow corridor was very uneven and sharp knife like stones were prevalent obstacles to be avoided in her sandaled feet. Stumbling only the once upon a nub of rock her face smashed into the sidewall. Her mind blanked with the impact and her lip split with blood pouring profusely onto her chin, furthermore the torch had been knocked from her grasp and flew ahead of her into the unknown.

Half stunned and in shock with the impact on her face and now the impenetrable overwhelming darkness engulfed her in this narrow passage. Within her mortal spirit she felt the last drains of her resolve evaporating and she sobbed in despair. She made out the amber glow of the torch still alight ahead of her where it had been dropped and she crawled desperately towards her salvation.

“Be brave girl be brave,” she coaxed upon her raw courage again and her flaxen spirit responded dragging her way cautiously towards the dim glow that gave her hope in this unseeing hell.

She reached out and holding the stick of fire again and the relief that she experienced in her very soul was ecstatic and overwrought her anguishes and through bloodied lips she afforded herself a smile. Then her attention quickly changed to where the torch had come to rest and turning in a pirouette her eyes mesmerised by the wondrous things in her midst. She

stood inside another large cavern and upon the walls were marble plinths with holders for torches that already sat there in place. Alighting the wall-mounted torches eagerly the room slowly took on a whole new bearing as the black walls soon shone like gold with the many fires that burned. Crashing into something upon the ground her own guiding light ventured to the floor and before her were baskets crammed with bread, fruit and many other necessary things to survive. A trickling sound caught her attention wandering towards its gentle tune and she stood before the far wall still shrouded with gloom. Grabbing an alighted torch she took it to the disturbing trickling cadence and a natural spring sung out sweet notes for the cavern wall. Alynna immediately quenched her burning thirst in the cool calming water and bathed the blood from her crusty lips.

She felt a shrill of excitement as she readied herself to rummage through the baskets with an inquisitive fervour and then shining as if a huge diamond a religious awe gripped her as she was drew inexplicably towards the object lying upon the flat base of a tall fluted pedestal. It scared her as hairs rose upon the back of her neck and the back of her hands. It seemed to be alive almost breathing and hissing with her name

“Alynna, Alynna,” repeating in her minds ears, She conjured up enough courage to side step around this archaic entity brushing past hesitantly to a heavy curtain beyond that had the outline of many objects folded in the drop of it’s fabric. Shaking away the dust and grime from the curtains which made her cough roughly with the clouds of debris that swept around her. She swept the curtain aside to create a further heavy cloud as it fell from its hangings into a heap upon the cavern floor. Her eyes smarted awaiting the air to settle and the clouds of dust slowly drifted to the floor. Before her were many pillars waist high of clay bricks and upon close scrutiny she made out the inscriptions carved into them and the writing as old as the earth. The first language of all men taught to her by her mother from an early age and engraved now in the composition of her mind. Then she realised they weren’t pillars but stacks upon stacks of clay tablets with more writings than she could of ever dreamed.

“Pillars of knowledge,” she giggled copying the old crones incantation in her alleviated state as she recalled her love of reading the cuneiform words that had been firmly fostered into her upbringing.

An abrupt noise brought Alynna to her senses, a familiar noise that she had prayed for during these long drawn out hours. The scraping came again as the coffin lid of the boulder began to shift from it's housing. Running through the fissure and along the corridor back into the first cavern and her heart lifted as a ring of daylight could be discerned alighting a circle upon the cavern floor. Stopping in the circle of light and staring above initially the sunlight hurt her vision. Then something emerged the black snake coiling its way back down the funnel.

"Hello, who's there. Hello hell oooo can you hear meeee," Alynna shouted into the sonorous formation of the funnel as her words were given more amplification in the hollow channel.

"Alynna it's me Carouso, stand clear while I get this down," her brother's voice reassured her and Alynna stood to one side as a basket on the end of the rope was lowered carefully onto the ground.

Alynna took no heed of the delivery and immediately returned into the shaft of light to communicate further.

"Carouso thank the Gods you found me now get me out of this awful place," she pleaded holding the black snake with a white knuckled grip that had dropped the basket.

"Alynna untie the rope," Carouso suddenly ordered.

Alynna obediently bent down and unfastened the knot on the handles of the wicker container.

"It's clear now Carouso to pull me up." she informed getting back to her firm hold upon the rope.

"Alynna let go," he shouted down with a trace of vehemence in his tone.

"Carouso get me out of here, by the Gods you're my own brother, my own flesh please I beg you get me out of here," she begged and pleaded through the funnel at his change in character.

"Alynna I cant. You here me I cant. Your there for good reason. In the basket there's more flax for the torches, fresh bread and fruit, now let go," the very words hummed in Alynna's head and her concealed frustration boiled into anger, which had reached its precipice.

"Carouso you son of a Babylon whore, you treacherous pig who whines to that bitch of a mother of ours. If a mother could do this to her own daughter what dare she have in store for you," Alynna let her pent up emotions pour out as she clung for dear life to the rope. Then as her

temper increased she started to lift her body up its length and made taught her limbs to aid her climb.

“Alynnna let go. Alynnna let go I say,” Carouso cursed through strained lips as her weight was brought upon him.

Alynnna silenced to his demands as not wanting to waste any strength away from her climb. Then the rope began to swing and desperately Alynnna scrambled up with more haste.

“Carouso get me out of here, I beg you. I beg you,” she pleaded as the rope moved in a shift of a pendulum motion.

Carousos arms bulged with tight muscular force as he used all his might to sway the weight on the line of hemp from side to side. His veins rose prominently upon his forehead with the mounting strain and his mouth filled with salvia as if he were maddened like a rabid dog. Alynnnas light frame took to a full swing and began banging into the smooth rock sides. At first the bumps held no vigour but as the momentum increased her shoulders bruised as they buffeted against the hard walls. Then her breath exited her body as the blows became more remorseless. Carousos back ached with balls of hard tense muscle starved of oxygen and his shoulders throbbed as he felt as if his arms were being pulled from their sockets.

“Alynnna give up this nonsense, you cannot win,” Carouso groaned out through gritted teeth.

Alynnna clenched her own teeth inspired by his straining rasps as her own back jarred as it collided with a painful jolt and her spine received the full brunt of the impact and her lungs expelled out all there contents upon contact. As the rope swivelled back into the centre she managed to muster her resources once again.

“Carouso you’ll have to kill me before I let go of this roooo,” her words ended abruptly as she hit the wall again and her face crunched into the cold stone. Her grip slipped and as she tried to halt her downward progression they raked upon the coarse rope again. This time the pain was too much to withstand and she let go with despair. Hitting the ground upon her front her nose smashed into the floor and legs twisted brutally.

Looking around through a blurred haze she abruptly managed to regain her stunned senses. Searching madly for the rope with her arms groping in the dark only to decry the dreaded grate emanating from above as the coffin lid resealed again.

“Carouso, Carrrruuuussoooooo, you cant leave me down here. Carrrousoooo,”Crumbling to her bloodied knees as the waves of knotted tears rushed over her and the total desperation of her state of affairs finally dawned.

The echoing wails chanted through the serenity of dawn as the seven pillars of Allah were broadcast from tannoy systems on the apex of every mosque tower. The call to prayer aroused the populace of the Nile and six more times that day the buzzing of electrical speakers would resound upon the Muslim faithful. To Jack’s western ears the crackling electronic drone had aroused him and the Arabic tones from the loud hailers seemed unfamiliar and somewhat obtrusive, however desecrating the Islamic cadence held his fascination and went to reaffirm his pleasure of being here in the heart of North Africa. He respected their customs and beliefs although this practice of the indistinguishable blaring prayer to his unorthodox ears bemused his own self-convictions. The preaching of the Koran had disturbed his tranquil thoughts as he sipped coffee with a drop of a whiskey upon the balcony of the Isis Hotel. The call to prayer had ended as abruptly as it had begun and Jacks attentions strayed once again towards the street below where horse drawn calishes cantered by and the constant horn beeping of the traffic as tourist buses and blue and white taxis fought for prominence upon the road. The law of the jungle seemed to the rule the highway as horns blared with no one having the concept of actually giving way. This was the round the bend concept of the Middle East where nothing at first seemed straightforward but within the mayhem a certain pattern formed. Jack had not as yet seen any traffic accidents or road rage the scourge of the UK motorist it all appeared so natural yet so chaotic to his naïve viewpoints.

A shabbily dressed peasant led his oxen through the crowds and amongst the traffic with his young son following at the bullocks rear. The boy comforted a bamboo rod on his shoulder ready to encourage the bull along if it suddenly became reluctant or stubborn by the hubbub of the western stylised civilization it had encroached upon on Luxors Main Street. Tourists browsing in jewellery bazaars stopped to watch the oxen canter past in the surreal contrast to the bright lights and neon glare of the

cosmopolitan area. Jack observed this vain contrast of culture as a striped suited Egyptian businessmen passed by traditional jezebel clothed labourers and in they're midst the pale skinned holiday makers in their bright tee shirts with logo's that had no significance at all in this land. Jack allowed himself to smirk as he made out the novice tourists being harressed, heckled and bombarded by the street traders as they passed by there stalls which invaded their deep sense of western diplomacy and as embarrassed tourists tried to shake off the unwanted sales pitches with the Arab salesman clinging to them like leeches with the smell and allure of the dollar hanging upon these foreigners like a bad stenth. This was Egypt a unique mix of absolute poverty a society of peasants in the playground of the wealthy western world.

On every corner olive clad soldiers and white uniformed police officers controlled an underlying fragile struggle within this society of the has and has not of this land. Smartly attired Egyptian merchants were amongst the privileged few that haughtily passed by with degradation there poverty stricken brethren in a mix that only gelled through thousands of years of rich heritage, a strong sense of belonging to this historic land with it's fundamental religious roots.

"You can come back in now," Anne's voice drew Jack away from his thoughts as he stood to brush through the mosquito net curtain and re-enter the hotel room from the humid balcony. He strode with a casual sweep of his legs in his white slacks as his hands rested comfortably in the lining of his pockets and then he stopped dead in his tracks as if buffeting into a brick wall as Anne appeared gracefully from the bathroom door. She stood magnificent and sultry in a red lace satin bodice with black stockings and suspenders portraying the streamline length of her long shapely legs. Her auburn hair glistened with a wetness that had been neatly tied back enhancing the womanly curves of her cheekbones and the gloss dusk of dark cherry lipstick that made her mouth pout with perfection. A black-feathered boa rested scantily upon the length of her shoulders with the tails covering the ripeness of her petite breasts like a sleeping python wanting to be thrown from her body. Her elegant slim line forearms were clad in black lace elbow length gloves and Jacks gaze in suspended animation followed her right arm where the hand came to rest upon the sexy curve of

her hip. Her left hand raised and a protruded finger beckoned him to explore and draw closer.

Jacks feet however were not as hot as his mind as they glued in disbelief upon the terra firma with his mind swirling with his cool composure collapsing as he fell into the dreamlike spell of the temptress in his midst. His senses aroused his feet glided him towards her as if in a heavenly dream and as they came together their arms instinctively wrapped around one another swallowing their bodies into one as they kissed with passion and wanting force.

“You look absolutely splendid,” he whispered as his mouth touched her ear.

Moment’s later their clothes were strewn together in a heap on the bedroom floor and the icing of this cake was the feather boa lying lame by the side. In the afternoon humidity of the North African temperate climate there naked skin perspiring with heat and the stormy passion that had totally overcame them as there feelings for each other had finally exploded. Her yearning cries and deep needing moans reached a crescendo as they rolled together upon a sea of deep, meaningful and fulfilling love.

The heat given off by the clipper type lighter could be felt on Jacks lips as he lit the Cleopatra cigarette a local brand that tasted very good. He inhaled deeply still out of breath from their lovemaking and exhaled with a sigh of relief watching the swirls of smoke form into ethereal spirals within the dank room and he captured the moment as he knew he would cherish it for the rest of his years.

“Jack would you mind if I ask you something,” Anne had spoken propped up with the pillows with the sheet lifted above her breasts as she returned into her usual shy and retiring persona.

“Depends what it is,” he replied teasingly with the warmth of there feeling burning through the midday heat.” only joking darling you know you can ask me whatever you like,” Jack now felt that pain for the first time in his shallow life. Jack had fallen in love and the tobacco had an unusual content flavour as warmth had gripped his soul.

“It’s about Henry, not about us,”

“Ohh,” Jack said half disappointed wanting to talk of his love and outpouring feelings for her.

“I’m concerned about him Jack and I want to know exactly what happened to him out there,” Anne’s sense of guilt at seeing her own brother in that dreadful state had coaxed her into a determination to find answers to the doubts that haunted her. If there was any solution that would help speed Henry’s recovery she needed to discover it and find the root of his problems as hastily as possible.

“What you want me to do Darling,” he responded tenderly and sincerely knowing his life was now entwined with hers.

“I want you to go out there,” Anne paused, “go out to that Wadi where he was working and find out anything you can about his accident. I’ll remain by his side Jack while you’re gone, I need to give him the support he needs that’s the least I can do,” She emphasized her guilt within her words and Jack surmised that himself and Henry had not exactly seen eye to eye and a brief isolation from each other may be a good therapy for them both.

“If that’s what you want, I’m the man for the job. Jack Quinn investigator fire fraud and accidents should be just right for my expertise Darling,” He cajoled sucking in more nicotine realising he would miss her like crazy and his heart sank contemplating their temporary separation.

“Thank you Jack,” Anne hugged him lovingly resting her head upon his broad shoulder.

An envelope of mist swirled through the harshness of the dank air and the hoarse lining of the man’s throat had dried bare and parched through inhaling the bitter intoxicating fumes. His diaphragm rattled trying to make a guttural utterance but his vocal chords had seized and frozen no sound would pass from his sealed lips. His reddened eyes stung in the acrid veil and through his hazy vision he tried to familiarise himself in this alien environment. His ears pricked with the same instinctive reaction as a hunted animal as he made out the rhythmic drone that magnified his blurred awareness. The carpet of smoke gradually faded into a fine mist and a strong taint of balm incense hung heavily in the thick putrid air.

A glowing sphere of fire roared into vigorous life and other fireballs ignited in its wake as torches were lit in every direction. Then movement as silhouetted forms of spectral human figures emanated from amongst the shadows as the chamber enlightened brilliantly. The silhouettes shone as if

upon fire themselves as the glimmer of gold jewellery adorned upon their oiled bodies captured the essence within the crimson licks of flame mirrored upon them. He could make out the distinctive shapes of the bouffant headdress wigs as favoured in style by the Ancient Egyptians as vanity drew significance within their ordered society. The shadows seemed to dance captivatingly and the oiled bodies gleamed like glass in motion with the heady tone of incantations filling the room. In serpentine writhes they moved dreamlike and ghostly to the religious music that had a trance like effect and a narcotic hold upon them.

A gong resounded deep and booming from the depths of this mystical place and the paralysed man spectated in awe and fascination as the shadowy silhouettes danced into an ordered circular assembly around him. An explosion of blinding light illuminated the far rounded walls of the chamber and upon a stele the statuette of the snake Goddess Meretsegar glared upon him with her serpentine eyes penetrating the recesses of his very soul. The watcher noticing the sudden cessation of activity smirked to himself as his demented thoughts rested upon the aptly named Snake Goddesses apparition. "she who covets silence," Then the blinding darkness of pre existence fell again as the deadly stillness that had overcome the chamber emphasised the cosmic fear that consumed this place as if the Devil himself had laid his cloak upon the Earth and all life had ceased to exist. He tried now to move his arms as dread had shuddered through his soul and his limbs were glued and bemused by all that occurred around him. Strangely his arms and legs were paralysed and his mouth taut as if only his mind and eyes belonged to him alone.

The gloom of the abysmal darkness waned as torches were relighted and the silhouettes reformed their shadowy shapes in an awaiting semicircle encompassing his position. He noted the black haired phyles were all bare breasted and their nubile bodies pronounced pert erect nipples as an electricity of expectation and superstition reigned. They bowed profusely in unison and as they grovelled at the floor and the Man saw the figure they were exalting. A Golden haired woman in full bloom of youth and beauty stood before them. Draped in a linen cloak of ruby red that covered the profile of her shoulders but within the covers of the cloak she was completely naked. Her breasts nestled covertly around the fold of the cloaks fabric and below her glistening oiled stomach a gold diadem hung

above her womanly triangle displayed with obscenity. Her immense and mesmerising beauty had transfixed the watcher into a delusional trance. Spellbound he gaped upon the softness of her red ochre cheeks, the prominence of her high cheekbones and the contrasting green malachite and black galena that immortalised the allure of her cerulean blue eyes.

The Priestess lifted her arms aloft as her golden hair stirred in a graceful ceremonial manner and the cloak slipped revealingly off her shoulders falling to the ground with the pear shaped projection of her aroused perfectly formed breasts. The deep resonating chant resumed as the phyles continued their well-rehearsed mantra and the chant grew steadily louder into an orchestra of frenzied voices in a charged aura.

“Kalum balum maum taum, kalum balum maum taum,” the Mantra intensified as incense fumigated the pungent air bringing the heady atmosphere of hysteria to new heights. The dancing phyles moved in an eerie mist of half-light and perfumed incense. Ghostly spectres motioning in a death like trance to the claustrophobic sounds that seemed to draw you into an awakening of the darkness that coverts in the silence of his soul. The golden haired priestess dominated the cadence from her central position of supreme authority and her naked body swooned in tune with her followers in gesticulation.

Four huge lion paws carved in stone were the foundation plinths of the sacrificial altar, which was decorated elaborately and inscribed with cuneiform hieroglyphics. The depth of the inscriptions swallowed the flickers of light within them, as the black spells written upon the altar became dark figments within its designs. Upon the stone slab seated upon the altar ornate carved panels were marked around the rectangular edges and channels engraved upon its length. The nymphs parted in two as a bearded haggard man shackled in chains was brought through their centre. His eyes wide held in them sheer terror in which the watcher had no need to have it spelled out to him the amount of dread for that same dread languished within him also. His arms were as sticks just skeletal bone and the rake of his ribs were prominent through gross malnutrition. Four of the nymphomaniac Phyles dragged the poor soul forwards in staggering paces by leashes of leather wrapped around his taut throat. Their oiled bodies rippled with feminine delight by the force of effort they implied as they dragged him along reluctantly. The other Phyles swooned erotically in

motion arcing their backs as their fingers writhed in a teasing gesture with their hands reaching towards the stars. The watcher mesmerised with fear and stimulation by the flowing exhibition of naked womanly bodies and the ambience of growing expectation made his heart race like a caged wild beast.

The captive had been forced to lie upon the stone slab of the altar as the nimble nymphs held him down as his hands and feet were lashed to the four corners. After the last tie had secured him the four Phyles stood at each corner ceremoniously to make way as their Priestess approached the altar. On her jewelled diadem worn around the bareness of her waist hung a stiletto dagger with a glaring head of a bull carved into its black ivory hilt. She drew the blade and lifted it up in one concise motion and instantaneously the nymphs stopped their dancing as they waited expectantly for the next phase of the ritual. The Priestess held the dagger aloft in some morbid teasing exhibition of deaths awaiting glory and the chanting minions increased the volume of their prayers in response. Holding the captive's bound right wrist a Phyle began gently stroking it in a careful meticulous touch and then without warning the Priestess plunged down the bull headed knife slicing through the segments of flesh and vein. Blood trickled into the ornate panels flowing along the woven groves of the channel and descending into a river flowing upon the slab altar. The blood coarsing through the channels and running along the groves to emanate from an outlet at the base where the blood dripped into a stone coffer.

The Priestess lent across her captive's body seductively with her brown nipples brushed upon the flatness of his chest. Her mouth opened in an exclamation of orgasm as her hand caresses under the mans loincloth. She drew the knife back sharply again severing his left wrist as she held a tight grip upon his last erection. The panels to the left now gorged with blood and the splashing drips became more prominent as they dropped into the collecting basin. A low moan ushered from the nymphs as they fondled their own breasts and others ran their hands suggestively between their legs.

The Golden haired Priestess had her midriff caked in blood from her captives spurting veins. She rubbed the crimson ointment into her flesh and her eyes rolled back in morbid ectasy. Her right hand still clutched

upon her captives penis as she felt his very last moments of arousal whilst her left hand holding the bull knife sawed the blade into his throat and he squealed for the first time but only a gurgling noise gave forth as blood rushed into his drowning lungs. Lying there with his body cavorting in the very throws of death spasms whilst the nymphs groaned under the aura of sexual insinuations. The Priestess held aloft her right hand and displayed the creamy paste of the dead mans semen coated upon her fingers and the nymphs moaned out in orgasm.

The watchers eyes bulged horrified and nauseous by this macabre act and transfixed by trauma or hallucination he did not know. He stared wide-eyed upon the proceeding ceremony with abject horror. The Nymphs took turns in lustrations by bathing in the freshly topped up sink of the dead mans still warm blood. They were all systematically oiled in the thick red dye of existence and they splashed each other almost playfully as if they relished this whole affair. The vision of the Nymphs engaged in flirtatious dance of erotica and the red water raining over everything made the watcher feel as if he were on a hellish narcotic induced trip, which gave him a sickening sensation that churned through his whole abdomen. His mind swam in a swirling haze as he became lost in the tide of continuing events with the gyration of the Nymphs slim waists as they sprayed themselves in the red ochre as they swooned to the Devils beat. Then his eyes would automatically return to the lifeless pale body upon the slab the victim of this grotesque ritual sacrifice. The Watchers mind swooned again and a dizzy light-headedness overcame him consumed by his conflicting sense of outrage and emotion. He caught something flash by his eyes through the comatose trauma and then he felt the cold steel touch his own skin. His throat tightened as the blade pressed into his Adams apple and he became aware of the still wet blood upon its edge. He rolled back his head to lesson the choking pressure and above him she stood gazing into his wide terror filled eyes. The green malachite had mixed with the crimson tar that had smeared upon her cheeks and her blue eyes gazed in disassociated madness.

“Please don’t kill me, please don’t kill me, I don’t want to die,” he repeated in his mind and he heard his own voice pleading out as a swimming sensation overwhelmed him again. He could make out the curve of her lips forming into a cruel smile.

“You’ll soon be mine,” the Priestess mouthed as her pupils enlarged and he could feel the cold steel cutting into the girth of his throat.

“No no no no no no no noooooo,” he screamed out as his body trembled and he rolled bashing his head into the wooden cabinet. Henry opened his eyes to see the hospital room in his midst. His body was soaked through with perspiration and he couldn’t move as the bed sheets had wrapped around like a mummy with all the tossing and turning he had done throughout the dream. -But Henry wasn’t convinced that it had been a dream....

A SHE-DEVILS APPRENTICESHIP

Undoubtedly the Aegean Island of Thera in ancient times must have been the envy of all other civilised centres upon the earth. The vast wealth that this Kingdom has amassed with the power of the gigantic fleet that had a trading empire, which stretched to all four corners of the known world. This was the supremacy of the Minoan civilization. Their King Minos ruled from his elaborate palace at Knossos on mainland Crete. Upon Thera her smaller sister isle with its plush olive groves, fertile soil that gave life to so many exotic fruits and a

purpose built wooden harbour that brought to this isle all the rich spices and treasures you could ever want for. The Therans dwelled in white washed two storey abodes that were clean and spacious beyond there era. They were governed and legislated over by a powerful and law-abiding culture, which had its origins firmly, rooted in mainland tradition. A bailiff usually a cousin of the King held the seat of administration and was the overseer of the shipping manifests, which took a Kings tax from every ship laden with cargo that dropped anchor within the harbour. Even with this tax trading was still a profitable venture and the odd pirate vessel that they smuggling in their water was soon hunted down and destroyed by the merciless Minoanion fleet. The Minoanions trading arm stretched well beyond the fabled Pillars of Hercules into the lands of the Druid Kings, into and beyond the heartlands of the olive skinned Macedonians onto the glorious courts of the Great Pharaohs and hyskos kings. Their wooden galleys were streamlined and could broach the seas wrath with ease as they handled cargoes of Cyprus wood, wine oil, ceramics, textiles, purple dye, weapons and incense from the land of Punt. They transported goods, which had already been caravanned across great deserts, through hazardous mountain passes or strange unheard of lands where only the adventurous few knew their secret course into beyond. The Minoanions had all the power and monopoly of the Mediterranean that they had protected and cherished over the centuries making them the richest and finest race upon the known earth.

Upon the dusk of the Theran sacred Sabbath of manhood they made sacrifice to the Gods with animal slaughter and incense to appease the bull headed demons. Upon the twilight of the morrow their young brave men would test their courage skill and devotion by facing the living image of the demon upon the floor of the arena. Rampant black tanned beasts, which had exposed gazing blood red eyes, especially trained to tear men to the ground and gouge them upon their sharpened horns. Bull leaping and Bull snaring had been apart of ritual since days gone by with the significance of bringing the Demons under the control of mortal man. The religious festivals origins and significance though had become overshadowed and now resembled more of a sport where prayers were spoken for the boldest and strongest athletes and not to the deities the festival had originally been chosen to honour. The young athletes had to

vault the fearsome animals and this was deemed as a sign of nobility according to how showman like the performance and then the bull catchers would lasso the beasts at the end of the day. A killing frenzy preceded which culminated in a lavish festival of beer drinking and banqueting to honour the athletes and the souls of the departed demons. The bravest warrior of the day had the honour of dinning upon the prime bulls testicles a delicacy and highly prized reward.

As the dawn light broke through with the ripe fruits in the orange groves shining in the fresh morning dew and the barley stalks swaying gently in motion to the breeze. The Therans rose with renewed spiritual awe in their hearts upon the morn of the great festival. Aremis had not the rejuvenated spirit or awe in his own heart that the others possessed. His awe made his guts quiver as having the birthright of noble blood and upon the year of his eighteenth day on this earth his day of manhood laid before him. The true bloodline of their elite class could be traced back to Zeus himself the principle Bull God, however the only blood in Aremis mind was his own as he envisaged the horns of the beast puncturing through his flesh due to the miss timing of his leap. He descried the crowd roaring in triumph at the Bulls cull and he shivered involuntary as he brushed back his sandy hair in a vain attempt to shadow the turmoil of fear within him.

It had been many years since the Therans had been at war with the last major campaign against the Macedonians had gone into the annuls of their history. The only outlet to test the character of their young males had been through the nostalgia of the bull-leaping tournament. Aremis had been keen to show his friends and family that he was not a coward or neither a boy anymore and he had volunteered for the honour of being one of the jumpers. He knew if he had not done so it would of brought shame upon his household but upon that fine morning his stomach disagreed with his decision as it churned as if a lead ball were inside it .His young body trembled as if a ghoulish wind had blown upon him as he contemplated the forthcoming dual with the red eyed monster.

The proceedings had begun and the entire population had assembled upon the festival field in excited anticipation of the coming events. A wooden fenced off area housed the soul of the prime beast snorting wildly awaiting the first challenger to cross it's yet unblooded horns. The Therans had dressed for the occasion attired in gaily-coloured fabrics in

recognition to the formality and entertainment the tournament would bring. They waved pennants of many elaborate patterns and designs with some brandishing the family colours of their athlete they had come to support whilst others represented guilds or ships flags it didn't really matter what they waved as the only real spectacle was to be seen in the arena. A great roar drowned the peaceful sunrise air as the first athlete hurled the timber corral and ran like the wind across the ring. The great black bullock charged along the sand coated arena with steam drooling from its mouth and flaming nostrils. The loin-clothed athlete timed his run as the bull came headlong. The mighty black head was within his grasp as he leapt and cart wheeled upon the back of the black beast. The horns raised in an angry frustrated aura where the athlete's body had once been moments before. His sandaled foot gained purchase on the rump as he came full circle and he propelled himself in midair adding a somersault to his repertoire of tricks. As he landed to the raucous cheers of the crowd he soon scrambled over the coral fence and threw himself into safety through rapturous applause and cheers from the spectators. Even the usually stone faced Kings bailiff Acukla cheered sat upon his raised podium with others from the leading Noble families and high ranking Priests who were official organisers of this religious event. Ackula had the appointment of supreme judge by decree of his position of authority and it would be his task to weigh each mans performance to find an outright champion by the fall of the day.

Aremis watched the Priests fastidiously upon the platform as they burnt scented wood in copper pots as they helped to appease the anger of their Bull God. He prayed himself for salvation under his shallow breaths as the crowds roars drowned out his words as another athlete had entered the arena. He gazed at the bony finger with dread as the brown robed figure of the High Priest stretched his arm in the direction of his thumping chest indicating that it would be his turn to prove his manlihood next. He bowed politely and customary in submission to the request and took a deep bout of air to well the lead ball of anxiety pulsating within him. He heard the thunderous rapture as the other athlete left the killing ground intact and with immense self-control placed his hands and feet upon the timber coral wall anticipating his entrance. The last protective shield in-between his death or glory he surmised before vaulting his muscular frame over the

timber barrier, which lifted his short skirt to the delight of the ladies who had come to watch. Dust rose up as his feet disturbed the ruddy brown earth and the crowd howled and whistled out there encouragement. The red eyes held no sentiment in its glare as the Bull stood at the far side of the arena and Aremis concentrated his own gaze upon the fearsome empty pupils of the black devil in his wake. The ogle of the bulls glare held within an unleashed and untamed fury by the torment of the previous jumpers. The very fire of hell lay dormant in its eyes with a threatening and profane stare given emphasis from the bulging sockets of its unfeeling fold.

The two gladiators one delivered from the womb of woman and the other moulded in the form of their Demon God. They measured each other as they both mused upon who would make the first move. The crowd hushed on baited wings of silence as they became entranced by the mental dual taking place between the contestants in the Arena. Man and beast, Animal or man the eyes maddened and breathing heavily they both eyed one another with respect and disdain.

“That man has no fear to look into the very soul of Zeus,” Ackula whispered with admiration into the High Priests ear.

“The anger of Zeus will fall upon us if we as mortals have no respect for his awesome authority,” The Priest ticked him off not believing it wise or prudent to infuriate their patron Gods wrath.

Aremis did not know what his body would do when the charge finally came as his heart pumped so violently within his mortal shell. He considered clamouring back out of the arena but the silent crowd would turn hostile and a thousand accusing eyes would lay shame upon his cowardly escape forever. His pressure pump pulsated faster as if his hearts muscle were trying to break out of his chest cavity and it drove large injections of fear ridden adrenaline through his physique. The bull snorted loudly with disdain and drafts of salvia filled steam clouded the dulcet air. Its right hoof scuffled the brown earth impatiently as rivulets of perspiration exploded upon the skin of Aremis. He caught the sudden shift of the deadpan eyes as they only blinked momentarily but Aremis read his foes mind and saw in them the concentration of the bulls expectant move. The crowd dared not breathe as they were rooted to the spot by this clash

of souls and then their hearts stopped beating as they heard the thunder of hooves rippling across the arena.

The crowd let their feelings vent their raucous cheers as Aremis felt his body lock-frozen by sheer terror as the huge black devils head drew rapidly closer to his vicinity. His lips started to tremble with no will of his own and his fingers clenched into tight-balled fists. He could experience the very earth move and descried the thundering hooves even above the hearkening and erratic drowning screams and hazy rebuffs of the crowd's chants rising tumultuous tempo. The bull was almost upon him and he still stood rigid legged with his muscles tightened in a torpid seizure of his own dread. In his dreary state of mind he made out a shadow lengthening as it carved its course like lightning within his mind. Almost magically the shadow spread in-between himself and the demon and then unexplainably the bull toppled and slid clumsily upon its left side and then disappeared into the dark abyss. Aremis felt the ground shake as if buffeted by a giant hammer and the whole world reverberated to its fall. Aremis lost his footing also as the brown earth folded upwards into a vertical tower and he felt himself rising but as the mountain grew too steep it flung him tumbling down its slope. The terror and induced state of shock cleared in his mind as he rolled on the earth to be replaced by disbelief as he caught sight of the mighty crowd scattering in every direction with a fraught and desperate panic. The horizon of the shadow drew upon him as chunks of green pastoral tundra were being swallowed whole and vanishing away beneath the earth. He descried the almighty cry of the bull Gods displeasure as rocks and debris were hurtled high into the heavens by some invisible giant. His sacred land was being eaten away by their Gods dissatisfaction and with immense hungry belches ushered forth from his ravenous appetite. Murderous pieces of stone filled rain fell back down to the ground and the atmosphere saturated with sulphurous steam.

Aremis got to his feet in one stealthy move and immediately started to run as the black void came upon him with a lightening speed and the tumbling death filled rain chased his fleeing trail across the breadth of the plateaux. He caught sound of the squelching emissions of pulping human flesh of those unfortunates who had already been ingested into the bowels of the deep. Crushed and mangled by the jaws of the earth and their bodies squashed by the moving rocks in the deep. A grisly decapitated head of a

brown bearded man had been smashed like a melon by the force of a falling boulder from the sky, which had broke his body into pieces. Mangled arms and legs joined in the hail of deadly debris as the void spewed out it's macabre morsels as if troubling upon digesting it's meal to form a crimson broth that cluttered in the brimstone sky. Aremis with his athletic prowess now moved quickly overtaking most of the younger and older people as they fled for their lives. His pace quickened as he heard in dread the haunting cries of death over his shoulder as the earth devoured those in his wake. He abruptly stopped dead in his tracks and his face swelled into an ashen grimace as the blood drained away leaving him with a ghostly pallor. Ahead he could make out the ear-splitting crash and tumble of the void ripping up the earth and behind he still caught the penetrating screams from the merciless hail of death. Aremis realised that he was trapped and doomed as the quake closed in on him all around. The tumultuous explosions that darkened the very authority of the once blue sky were suddenly upon him. He waited bravely without any fear for his world to go dark as the mouth in the earth opened and took him deep into his bowels.

Alyna placed her palm upon the rock and again her hand trembled as she felt the vibration confirming her fears. The shuddering movement within her underground prison chamber had her perplexed as the walls of her tomb shivered and sprinkles of fine dust were distributed into the dank air. The dust however soon changed to splinters of stone and then **BOOM!** As pieces of rock the size of a fist came raining down and bounced echoing out explosions as they collided upon the solid floor. She gazed around her, as her chest fixated with fear as the downpour of boulders became more predominant crashing down and cracking as she winced upon the sounds as they continued smashing upon contact with the earth. She took hold of her precious shining entity that had kept her company through these lonely years and ran from her subterranean study into the narrow passage just moments before the whole ceiling came crashing to the floor. She screamed with shock as she felt the force of the tumbling masonry and within the tunnel she was thrown from side to side as the walls moved in a rolling motion as they soaked up the blastforce. A cloud of thick debris smothered the clarity of the frail atmosphere as the filthy air and dust of the collapsed chamber swamped the passageway. The veil of smog

extinguished the few still burning torches with its mighty whoosh of overwhelming mass.

Ahead of her still lay a sanctuary of light in the other chamber, but she stumbled as she groped out at nothing in the total blackness. Her palms stopped her fall as they scraped upon the rough floor and the skin peeled off as if it were paper. A rumbling crescendo, which resembled a walloping drum, gained momentum and came rushing towards her deafened ears. Alynna scrambled onto her feet and ran on blindly as the quickening might of Babel licked upon her heels. She veered off to the left as she broached the open chamber and entered the dim limelight world where the few burning torches had manifested, just as gallons of gushing water ruptured through the passageway, frothing and spewing in a thick salty broth of turbid motion. The chamber trembled with a violent shudder and the stalagmites chattered like cold teeth. The walls moved as if they could breath and then imploded as huge chunks of granite and earth toppled into the murky soup beneath. Alynna waist deep in the brine of chocolate grimy water could feel the strong current swishing her around and making her unsteady as she tried to find firm ground beneath her feet. The soup bounced from wall to wall, the cavern it's bowl as it rolled from brim to brim. Alynna felt a cold clammy grip closing on her neck and the ensuing darkness fell again as the last of the torches had its flame soaked away. Alynna had only once previously experienced such horror and that had been many years earlier when her Mother had first condemned her to this tomb. Over that time she had grown hard and unemotional. Becoming strong from isolation and her fastidious studies of the clay tablets had kept her spirit preoccupied. She had learnt from the shinning entity that she had first abhorred and now she had grown to cherish it's dark desires which had enthralled her with The secret knowledge she had gleamed from the black magical rites etched upon the tablets. Alynna had also acquired unorthodox traits to her once innocent and carefree character, traits that one-day she would learn to harness with inhuman vigour and brutality. Constantly she had conversed with the precious entity and together they had meticulously planned out the way of her future course. Alynna had the strength of hatred running within her veins and she could hate with a vengeance like no other could a seething unnatural hate that came from the evil pyres burning within her tarnished spirit. She now had power a

corrupting soul destroying power and furthermore she had the will, which she would strive to use it for her own ends.

She didn't want her dreams to end now and die unrewarded in this dark hell and then her newfound well of hate came over her and within her soul she found the energy to keep going. She held the entity in her hands and began to speak in a black archaic language that had become her main tongue.

“Ach Aranornar del cotakker,”(I call upon you Master). She had mouthed out the mantra that she had studied astutely from the clay stones.

“Ach Aranornar del cotakker,”the archaic tongue she beamed summoned up the dark spirits whom she had grown to love and worship through her readings.

The whole cavern shook with an unholy violent tremor and the walls cracked into mosaic patterns, which left deep opening fissures.

“Ach Aranornar del cotakker,”she said the incantation out loud again as salt water burned upon her lips by the rising water in the cavern.

The tremors continued with renewed voracity at her summoning words and a gurgling fury erupted in her midst.

“Ach Aranornar,”she managed to say as Alynna's feet were swept from beneath her and sucked her into the heart of a circling eddy that had appeared around her. The water God pulled her into his domain to his bosom and his presence made her pass away into oblivion as she floated under his comforting waves.

The black out faded and Alynna realised the surging water had eased to a fluent passive calm. She experienced herself slowly rising but her lungs were consumed with the burning desire to breathe. Her feet accelerated her ascent as the last vestiges of her remaining strength were brought into play. Her lungs were imploding with an urgent fury with oxygen starvation and her mind numbed again as she felt a death cradling begin to take a hold upon her. The blast of the breaking surf took her by surprise and her lungs rasped in the air with ecstatic frenzy.

In-between the bobbing of the waves she could make out the silhouette of the land, catching glimpses of uprooted trees and flattened settlements. The realisation of witnessing the total destruction and devastation hurt her heart but she knew at long last that she was finally free. Which ever God had sanctioned this carnage had also granted her liberty and for that she

would be eternally grateful. To her east lay Thera and in that direction the sky had turned black with wisps of acrid smoke drifting above her. The sulphurous fumes of fire and brimstone choked her exhausted respiratory systems and her legs were like lead weights in the belly of the sea. Amongst the huge black Theran clouds she could discern storms of fire and they seemed to close in with the clouds that hung aloft. Then she descried the awful hissing and popping sounds as fire smashed into the water with plumes of steam ending in their wake.

The deadly hail of volcanic rock fireballs came down abundantly in a raging storm and Alynna caught more explosions upon the land as she reached the foothold of the beach. Firestorms had broken loose from the burning flares aftermath igniting upon impact and alighting anything still capable of combustion. A Hell had descended upon the Earth as the Gods wrecked havoc and punished their creations that had destroyed the trust placed upon them Alynna surmised as her mind cleared being upon solid ground her anxiety of drowning in a watery grave had been erased. Her anxiety now rested heavenwards as her eyes constantly strayed above upon each of the whistling bombs fall and they're landing with a popping finality.

The tumbled down blocks of solid granite gave her a measure of the Gods Anger as his once mighty temple now lay in rack and ruin. The immense blocks had taken one hundred strong men to set into place with rollers, ropes and sand filled pits and the Gods had smitten their labours with one swoop of their arm. The huge slabs were spread about scattered as if pebbles upon a beach. Amongst the Temple ruins Alynna was pleasantly rewarded by the much missed and cherished noise. The sweet resonance of human voices. There huddled in the ruins were the survivors of the surrounding settlement as they sheltered in what remained of this once most holy sanctuary.

Jack had breakfasted on cheese bread and eggs, early that morning, whilst Anne had slept through skipping a morning meal to catch up on the lethargy that jet lag had caused her and left her thoroughly exhausted. At 05.30AM the sky still had a coal black ambience with an invisible moon outlined in the dark mask and the morning air hung in a cold chill laden mist. The taxi had arrived as earlier prearranged and the

turban headed driver awaited him outside the foyer of the hotels reception. The driver waved and smiled as he caught sight of Jack to get his attention as he excited the Isis Hotel.

“You English,” the driver questioned in an excited and friendly tone.

“Yes that’s right,” Quinn responded with a cursory smile.

“Very good English very nice,” the driver stated beckoning Jack to sit in the blue and white Mercedes.

“My name Mickey, you know Mickey Mouse,” the driver introduced himself from behind the wheel with his chosen tourist name and cupped his hands around his ears to emphasize his pseudonym.

“Hi my names Jack,” Quinn responded trying to break his lips upwards at this ungodly hour with the alcohol from the previous night still numbing his thoughts.

“We go now to Wadi En Nil,” the Driver motioned with a pointing hand to the windshield.

“Yes we go now,” Jack mimicked his broken English accent to ease the conversation.

A few miles down the Corniche outside the Democratic building the bureaucratic centre of the Towns Administration a distinctive blue Ford pickup truck had been awaiting their arrival. The blue shirts of the Egyptian peacemakers cradled their AK47 assault rifles in their laps as they sat upon the tailboard of the vehicle. They were known locally as the `Keepers of the Places`. The reason for this epithet came from the fact that the Egyptian Government under President Mubarak had appointed a Police Force for the protection of tourists from the growing threat of Militant Terrorism plaguing the country. The need arose in the early nineties in the height of Egypt’s holiday season over eighty German tourists were massacred at the Temple of Hatshepsut in the Valley of the Kings by machine gun wielding fundamentalists trying to gain infamous publicity to further their cause. The basic origins of insurrection had stemmed from the concept that Egypt is made up of two major ethnic groups. One is the Coptic Christian population that trace their roots back to the Pharaohs of old and then the other the Muslim faction which had come into Egypt through periodic Arab invasions that had started to arrive in the first part of the last Millennium. A divided Nation of two religious

foundations and with other problems stemming from the neighbouring Middle Eastern Nations it was a hotbed and breeding ground for radicals.

Since that dreadful day with the massacre at the Temple a Special Police Force had been assembled and assigned to the security of foreigners and to protect Egypt's lucrative tourist industry from falling into rack and ruin like the Ancient citadels Westerners had come to gawp in awe upon. If they lost this lucrative revenue of industry it could have the detrimental effect of destabilizing the regime as the countries economy depended upon the vast amounts of capitol brought into Egypt by tourism alone. It also help to sustain local economies such as street traders, memorabilia vendors and local shops providing many forms of needed employment. Basically without tourism the country would in effect have been faced with a void of it's people to employ with no product or revenue to actually achieve this. So the tourist Police were the main equation from keeping its people from absolute poverty and starvation and thus were highly respected by both the local population and the casual tourist.

The Police Force had two branches the blue shirts as mentioned and the white shirts that were fairly well educated and had learned to converse in other languages. They were responsible for security within the Hotels and maintaining entrances to the countries vast heritage site. They acted more like friendly guides promoting the industry they protected. Whereas the blue shirts acted more in the demeanour as a fast reaction military force always mobile and always packing heavy calibre automatic weapons. They hid in the shadows more or less under canopies away from the Main access ways but close to the tombs, temples and other popular visiting places. They did not converse readily with the Tourists as their white shirted did brethren for they mainly spoke only Arab. They did not man control points or other contact zones, which was left solely to their lightly armed and more friendlier white shirted colleagues.

The senior ranking Officer adorned raybans covering his eyes and his broad bushy moustache twitched slightly as he gestured to them to follow his signalling arm. Mickey followed the instruction immediately getting into the slipstream of the Ford as the other policeman slipped off the tailboard and made his way to the passenger window.

“Papers,” the Officer announced matter of factly.

Jack produced his travel permit and passport for inspection and the Officer leafed through the documents meticulously coming across the folded wad of notes carefully tucked into the passport.

“Okay keep up with us,” he said pocketing the money and almost tossing back his papers with disdain as he turned and headed for the pick up truck.

“Service with a smile,” Jack rebuked to Mickey

“It’s not you English it’s Wadi El Nil how you say very humdrum place to be,” the Driver picked out one of his few cherished English words.

Any visitor wanting to venture beyond the safe haven of Luxor and the Valley of the Kings away from the protective gauntlet of the Tourist police jurisdiction and Egypt being Egypt Jack had to bribe his way dearly for this privilege. Driving upon the Egyptian highway was an experience, which had no set rules, and the only code on the highway was somewhat chaotic with no real concept of giving way or driving restrictions. Only honking of the horn the loudest gained any prominence and that applied to hapless pedestrians who had no right of way at all. Luckily at this early hour Jack could sit back and relax a little as the roads lay still and almost empty.

They crossed the Luxor Bridge with the Horus Falcon statuettes standing nobly on guard as they headed into the depths of the West bank. On either side of the great life-sustaining river the fields were lush with the brown stalked crops of barley and the green corn fields ripe with harvests of sugar cane. Jack noticed the occasional farmer in the pastures and children tending to their flocks of goat and oxen. Then to his delight he spotted a camel working hard ploughing the irrigated land and then more working in the fields as plain to see as a tractor upon an English meadow. They passed by many sun baked mud brick dwellings with straw ventilating roofs and Jack got a measure for the first time of the real poverty in this country.

Scrutinizing the Driver as he honked upon the horn at careless pedestrians strolling into there path he made out Mickey’s smiling dusky brown features having no road rage inherent as European drivers cursed there way upon the hughway. He could sense the straightforward tranquilly and nobleness that these Egyptian people seemed to possess. An inner peace he surmised not burdened by the heavy demands of dog eats dog modern living and having no pressure to compete in a corruptive social structure.

Jack knew the E80 pounds that he was paying him would only just buy a good novel in the UK and he also knew he was paying over the odds for the journey but that money would keep his family in food for a month and that's why he smiled so profusely glad to earn a living and escape the harsh impoverishments of North Africa.

The brown red-rock of the Valley of the Kings seemed oppressive and yet magnificent by its towering grandeur as the sun rose from beyond its summit and settle upon the plateaux of the earth. The Ancient Egyptians believed that the Goddess Nakt swallowed the sun every evening and then upon the dawn gave birth to it once again. Jack knew that the day was being delivered but what he'd discover within its duration he had no idea.

The sun had reached its epoch when Jack was brought abruptly back to life by the jolting thump of the vehicles suspension. He shook his head trying to gain some bearing and through his heavy sleep laden eyes realised they had branched off the main road and cantered upon a little used if bumpy desert track.

"You have good sleep," Mickey announced smiling from ear to ear.

"Yeah just fine," Jack lied stiff as a board with his body aching with cramp from his uncomfortable slumbering position.

"Wadi En Nil five kilometres now," the driver informed him pointing into the dust trail of the leading blue fords direction.

"Thank you," he acknowledged searching for the bottle of Bareka mineral water in the pocket of his rucksack to relieve the slushiness and humidity that the journey had caused.

Wadi En Nil an outpost upon the fringes of the great North African Desert where a small farming community had sprung up around the confines of the life giving oasis. An island of greenery upon a vast lifeless sea of sand. It had been at this place where Henry had been assigned to photographing and recording for prosperity the Ancient writings etched into the sandstone rock faces of the encompassing Wadi. Centuries ago the oasis lay upon the path of the great caravan trading routes and travellers throughout the ages had left their mark here for others to ponder upon. It also happened have been reputed to be one of the Pharaohs most profitable gold mines and the slave work force that sifted the sand for the precious metal had left there own ominous inscriptions in the midst of their lives of torment and apathy.

The Police Escort halted outside the most prodigious mud dwelling that the Wadi could offer a small coffee shop with a group of Arab males smoking Sheesah as the aroma of honey tobacco hung upon the air. The Mercedes crunched to standstill as the tyres locked for grip upon the loose stone soil, which left deep, tread marks to their rear. The heat of the day hit Jack like a punch as he left the air-conditioned confines of the Mercedes and his cramped muscles ached with sheer relief as blood flowed back into his dead numbed limbs. That tingling anguish as nerve ends abruptly came back online as thousands of tiny oxygen starved blood vessels sent stabbing pains throughout his extremities. He stood uncomfortably as compacted muscle had strained his spine as he stretched out his taught stiff frame. He perceived that his driver had remained within the vehicle but hypothesized that even their limited rapport may still hold advantage to further his quest.

“Mickey fancy coming along for a stroll,” he inquired at the drivers window sneaking a casual glimpse towards the parked Ford as he had informed the Police supervisor when booking the transport that he wished to travel here for the purpose of taking photographs of the relics and already the Olympus hung suspiciously unused around his neck.

“Mickey fine stay here, no sun, sun no good,” he responded defensively. “Listen I could really do with your help,” Jack whispered furtively and undiplomatically knowing he was in command being the mans paycheck. “Okay Mickey helps you, Mickey good man. You need Mickey help, Mickey say okay,” he replied rather to loud for Jacks nervous demeanour but the Egyptian taxi driver knew through his honest faced outbursts that more bakeesh would come from this favour.

Jack then tried to illiterate why he had come here the best way he could with the language barrier in-between them but first he directed the driver out of the car and out of earshot of there protectors who already sipped Turkish coffee and sucked upon the sheesah pipes enjoying the tranquillity of the day.

“My friend came here to take pictures,” Jack held the camera high and made clicking sounds.

“Ah see photographs,” Mickey responded with a broad smile.

“My friend he had accident,” Jack spoke again then paused to see if it had sank in.

“Acci de anti,” Mickey’s smile lowered to a bemused stare and told Jack his message had not been understood so embarrassingly he fell into a pretend tumble and hit his own head with the flat of his hand.

“Comprendo Accident,” Jack announced after his performance.

“Yes Mickey see hurt ooouucch no good,” the Arab replied retaining his broad grin.

“I need to find out, how accident happened,” Jack slapped his forehead again to emphasize the troubling word “Happened here to my friend,” Jack relayed the gist of his message however Mickey’s beguiled smile held his still dumb founded concept of the plan.

They started their investigation at the base of the oasis in amongst the acacia groves and date yielding palm trees. The Olympus snapped periodically for the benefit of Jack’s cover story as he knew what he was up to wasn’t exactly illegal but he didn’t want deporting in discovering it wasn’t either. Besides Anne had asked him to do this and he loved her and was not going to be the man who would let her down. A black robed and veiled Arab woman busied herself with the day’s laundry as washing piled upon a metal tray crammed with her family’s costumes lay upon the desert lakes bank. The metal tray doubled as a scrubbing board and neat mounds of soaked bundles were lined up alongside it. She turned instinctively as the strangers approached and smiled tersely before carrying on with her chores.

“Ask her,” Jack prodded expectantly eager to get to grips with the mystery.

Mickey gawped back at the request with resignation however Jack’s stern gaze and the thought of lucre made his eyes stray heavenwards in forgiving him his transgressions. He stepped forward meekly in a gait of hesitation.

“Masa al kheir,” he wished her good day in the traditional Arabic way.

“Mahaba,” she responded conservatively as her eyes never strayed from her chores as she politely welcomed the visitors to her town.

Jack took a pace back as a long and animated conversation broke out with Mickey and the Washerwoman. Voices lowered to a whisper and then rose to a shout as the dialogue reached new lows and new heights. Jack a pure observer but instigator to the proceedings stood bemused as they conversed in a language he could not fathom and he imagined how

Mickey must feel when he tried to carry his own dialect over to him. At one point he became quite concerned as the woman abandoned her laundry and got to her feet with the time honoured hands on hips poise the universal feminine stance when there antagonism had been unleashed. Her veil concealed her expression but the visible eyes carried a measure of venom and then the banter reached a more reasonable tone and Jack could relax once more.

“Shukran,” Mickey ended there tête-à-tête as they both exchanged a customary thanks.

“So what was all that about,” Jack enquired anxiously as they were barely out of hearing range as he had become appalled and yet intrigued by the indiscernible discussion.

“Women they are like camels, you have to let them spit at you before you can take a ride,” Mickey surmised the proceedings with an excellent use of his minimal English for Jack to get his gist.

“Why what happened,” Jack queried further wanting detail of every word that he had colourfully observed.

“Arab women are obedient to their men, how you say! Not allow to talk to other men. I told her that her husband has a tamed pig, only grunt when he say grunt and get fat by her hard work,” Mickey appeared self confided by the statement but Jack was visibly shocked by his revelations.

“I see you have a way with the ladies in these parts,” Jack cajoled but his irony went over his companions head.” but did you find anything out,” he returned to their more pressing business.

“Yes the old pig told me that a Khawaga. You!” Mickey underlined by gesturing to Jack with his finger.” Was found walking wildly in the desert beyond those hills. She also said that she had seen the Khawaga before and had talked with a shepherd boy before accidenti,” Mickey chewed his mouth upon his last word.

“Excellent where can we find this boy,” Jack applauded the information he had acquired.

“In the hills over there tending to his goats,” Jack tightened the straps on his rucksack as he visualised the slope and how far they were going to have to romp.

A furnace could only be the logical comparison to where heat this intense could thrive so furiously crossed Quinn’s mind as they traipsed up the

strength sapping incline of the mountain path and the exertion began to take its strain. His cotton shirt had become a soaking rag where his bodies saturated fluids had clung upon his clothing and his feet boiled mercilessly within the cauldrons of his leather boots. Mickey a native of this arduous land took to the pace with an easy stride with his white headdress shielding his scalp from the sun's might. His jezebel costume light and airy letting the tiny flouts of wind refresh him and his sandaled feet totally ventilated. They slumbered onwards to the heights and there only compensation was the atmosphere grew lighter as they traversed further up the scorching track. Jack had heard it first but made no comment as his head buzzed with over exertion. Then it came again the distinctive bleat of a goat and a chorus of many bleating chords soon joined the singular beat. As they reached the crest the grazing flock could be seen nibbling upon the sparse dried roots of this barren pasture. Their fleecy coats were of many colours black, tan, mottled white and grey with goats being heavy set, which seemed unnatural in this harsh terrain. Quinn scanned the horizon for their shepherd however he was nowhere to be seen.

“Reffeeetttt,” Jack heckled with his hands cupping his mouth allowing the sound to travel as he called out the Shepherd boy’s name, which Mickey had managed to reveal in his conversation at the oasis.

The bleating grew more erratic as the goats worried and some of the flock scampered quickly away from the direction of the disturbance. A Shammeel covered head materialised from an outcrop of sheered rock.

“Hey, hey,” the boy yelled appearing extremely perturbed by their presence.

“Are you Refeet,” Jack blared again as more goats started to fret from the outbursts invading their peaceful vale.

“Be quiet Baffoon,” the Boy retorted in vain as the herd had already begun to scatter in every direction.

“Look, Look what you’ve done” the Boy bellowed as he tried to restrain a solitary goat from joining the melee.

“Mickey that way, ill go this way,” Jack ordered spurring into action realising the damage he had brought about causing a mini stampede.

Scampering with hands and feet crawling upon the earth Quinn raced along the slopes of the precipice trying to overtake the head of the nimble footed goats. In the opposite direction Mickey scuffed his sandaled feet

upon the hard terrain trying to round up the herd from the otherside. Refeet walked calmly into the centre of the open ground and with two sharp shrill whistles the goats stopped dead in their tracks and were turning about before the piercing echo had time to fade. The two intruders halted also and watched in astonishment as the pied piper sauntered back his flock to tender.

Caked all over in a fine white powdery dust with his throat pulsating as he breathed in and out with an arid passion. Jack collapsed to the ground and lay there motionless steadying his thumping heart. He tried to relieve the throbbing beat that rocked in his forehead from the punishing heat. Refeet had herded this flock since he was a fledgling of a child. He had mastered every skill of nursing, comforting and communicating with his beasts. He knew each of them affectionately by name; he knew their individual traits and the strengths and weaknesses, the make of their very character. He had taught them to walk by his side when he walked and he had schooled them to run when he ran. The same principle applied now, their shepherd had not run and by drawing their attention to his stand they knew there was no danger to be faced. This teenage boy with bright bushy eyebrows and a slim noble face held the wisdom of his forefathers trade within his very blood. His skills passed down through the generations-this art of mastery over these domicile beasts.

He strode now over the stony terrain with a straight-backed proud arrogance with his shepherds crook humbly displayed in his right hand. He stood before the panting blonde haired Khawaga that had disturbed his slumber.

“What do you want here oh `scarer of my goats`,”he demanded in a confident tone.

“I apologise for worrying your flock, but I urgently need your assistance if you are the shepherd boy Refeet,”Jack humbled their host and excused his intrusion.

“I am Refeet,”the Boy said boldly holding out his arm for Jack to stand.

“If you have come to talk, then lets do it under the shade of my hide,” the boy motioned turning with a leisurely pace as Jack dusted himself off by beating his shirt.

Quinn tailed his way behind the Boys stride towards the outcrop of rock where he had first appeared upon their thunderous arrival. A black sheet of

canvas had been draped over the crowns in between two ridges of rock forming a bridging canopy over a shady hide. They sat upon the cool earth beneath the makeshift mastaba as Mickey entered in their wake and found a place to rest leaning against the smooth edge of sandstone rock.

“Tea,” the Boy offered unexpectedly.

“Not for me thanks, I just came here to talk,” Jack replied rather bluntly but when he caught the glare of fire within the boys eyes he changed his tract.” Yes go on tea would be nice,” as he abruptly recalled that refusing an Arab persons hospitality was to them a grave insult and an offer of kindness rebuked was an offence of there code of traditional custom.

Refeet kindled a little tin burner over a nest of dry grass and placed purple leaves into the soon steaming pot of water. A few moments later he poured out three glasses of the hot beverage known as Karcador.

“Sugar,” he asked breaking the veil of silence that had fallen as Jack had sat intrigued with his mind floating back to tales of Arabian Knights watching the kindling fire upon golden desert earth.

“Yes,” they both replied as the boy dropped lumps of raw sugar into the purple fermentation. Then the gently tingling cadence of a metal teaspoon stirring in the sweet syrup into a dissolving frenzy. Refeet carefully handed over the glasses of hot tea and they thanked him for his hospitality.

“Shukran”

“Now how can I help you,” the Shepherd boy announced with a civilised air.

Jack had begun to relax into the spirit of this encounter as he sipped the bittersweet fruit drink a few times before answering.

“I’m here as my business concerns Henry- Henry Armitage I have been informed by the villagers that you knew him whilst he was working here,” Jack got to the point in a straightforward manner.

“Yes I know this man. Doctor Armitage he was.... I mean he is a very good man,” Jack had noted the boy’s hesitation and sprung out his next question without giving Refeet a chance to muster his replies.

“You just said he was a good man, what do you mean by that,” the interrogating repose had took the shepherd off guard.

“Just the terrible way he was found out here.... How is Doctor Armitage now,” the shepherd boy had been flummoxed but had time to regain his

composure and Jack a hungry and experienced fraud investigator couldn't help but notice these aspects.

"He's recovering," Jack replied matter of factly "Listen Kid I'm over here in your country with the Doctor's sister who's pretty cut up by the state he is in. Im here to find out what really happened to Henry and try to help him over this some way. If you knew him like you say then you must surely want to try and help him," Jack tried the honest approach with a touch of the guilt factor salted in between.

Refeet stared longingly into his glass of clear tea for salvation with an empty unemotional expression masking his thoughts before he decided his thought-provoked response.

"Yes I want to help you but all I know is the place in the desert where he was found," Jack had detected a subtle hint of concern within the boys remark.

"Was there anything unusual, anything that comes to mind over this.... anything anything at all," Jack forwarded his pleas trying to get another telling reply.

"No..I'm not quite sure. I can't help you. I can't help you anymore," the boy's answers were becoming more and more erratic as a hidden anxiety had taken hold upon him.

"YOU. You know something Kid don't you. I can tell a mile and Ive not come all the way out here in the middle of this god dam oven to go back empty handed do you hear me," Jack's frail temper had begun to flare but not unintentionally.

"I know nothing more, you must finish your tea and be gone. I have work that needs to be done," with that the Shepherd got to his feet and brushed passed them out of the shelter.

"Well what a bloody waste of time," Jack roared out in frustration throwing the last drops of his karcador into the fire.

"That boy my friend is as scared as his goats when your voice booms," Mickey had made the comment chastising Jack for the harsh way he had treated their host.

"I wonder, I just bloody wonder," Jack pondered out aloud as he got to his feet and chased after the shadow of the boy.

As he came alongside he placed his arm over the shepherd boys shoulder fatherly and turned him around. His noble features were smothered with

streaky lines of fresh tears and the reddened eyes held in them a glimmer of his torment.

“Hey Kids whatever’s the matter. It’s okay Henrys a strong man he’ll pull through I swear it to you,” Jacks heart sank for the boy and the guilt racked his innards at being the instigator of his distress hitting upon him so hard.

“You. You don’t understand. It was. It was my fault he got hurt,” the boy sobbed out uncontrollably.

“Why kid what did you do,” he asked with intrigue knowing he was on the threshold of revelation.

Sparkling ripples of splendour shone upon the surface of the Sacred Lake with a forest of encompassing palms which reflected there distinctive umbrellious shadow upon it’s make. The glowing lanterns of Karnack Temple burned predominately and efficaciously giving this spiritual centre at the heart of the Egyptian capitol of Thebes a wondrous and magical aura that beheld you with its glorious splendour. A labyrinth of Temple complexes had been erected here to the Gods Amon, Khonso and Montu the triad and principle deities of the ruling Pharaoh. Great towering pylons reached up into the sky alongside gold inlaid obelisks, which had been highly, and skilfully decorated with etched hieroglyphs that glittered in the false noon of twilight. The huge kiosks of Taherka these mushroom headed columns held an influential presence in the main courtyard amongst the many lifelike statues which dwarfed the magnificence of the other glories towering above still held there own immense beauty and power as they mirrored the very images of the Gods and Pharaohs whose hallowed feet had brushed the sand upon this very earth.

Alynnna stared into the purple haze of the twilight as it mirrored upon the sheen of the water as she reflected back upon the day she had landed here in the Black Land. Loaded aboard the galley with the other refugees of Crete by Phoenician Pirates to be sold to the slave traders in the City of Memphis. The subterranean volcanic eruption that had swallowed the island of Thera under the waves for eternity and the resulting tsunami that had driven the almighty tidal waves that had washed over her homeland and destroyed the Minoanion Civilisation forever. The survivors had

inherited a wrecked and tarnished homeland with bodies to bury and the task of rebuilding from the ruins. Others not so fortunate had been placed into bondage preyed upon by the unscrupulous Merchants and would live out the rest of their days in slavery. Alynna watched the women and children weeping upon the deck although she had no fear for her own spirit, which had been freed and sat upon the slave trader in a swarm of human misery in certainty that destiny, was guiding her hand.

She had found herself here in Thebes after many years of servitude and being used as her Masters whore she had finally found a sanctuary where she felt secure and where she found the fortitude to carry out her ambitious deeds. Swirling her finger in the Sacred Lakes clear water and forming a miniature whirlpool the hated face of that fat oppressive Merchant Attikula came horribly back into her minds view to haunt her thoughts. Attikula a rich silk trader who had earn` t his fortunes upon the caravan roads had an unnatural taste for sweet young girls and had purchased Alynna at the auction upon her first day of arrival in Egypt from the Memphis slave market. His repulsive mannerisms and appalling body odour had made her wretch after every time he had took her. Alynna had managed to fight him off on the odd occasion but this brute enjoyed the contest and even though his face bled with scratch marks he still grimaced a cruel sadistic smile when Alynna lost and had to succumb to his fat body pressing against her own.

She yearned for her precious shiny idol in those long dark days and in her dreams it came to her glowing with a distant energy although she felt it's warmth within her. The Captain of the Phoenician Pirate ship Mendokca a bald headed tyrant with a muscular physique heavily decorated with tattoos had took her precious from her upon her captivity on the beaches of Crete.

“And what do we have here my sweet,” he had said through his grotesquely scarred features as he took her life and soul away from her.

Then she smiled into the tranquil pool as she remembered the dream, the dream when her precious had come to her in the night telling her to be ready as she had a vision of the pirate galley docking at the port of Memphis again. The next morning she had gathered the herbs and made her preparations. Slipping away from the house before Attikula had arisen and disappearing into the shadows of the torch lit streets. Along the wharf

side many taverns had sprung prospering from sailors spending there gold upon drinking and whoring. In the dawn bodies littered the sand pavements with inebriated seamen sleeping off the strong barley beers and Alynna crept past the comatose sailors to hide in the reed banks of the Nile. Once there in the greenery of her hideout her mind focused upon the one ship predominant in the harbour alongside the other feluccas and small cargo ships-The Shark. She sat there all day amongst the bristling reeds communicating with her precious who lay onboard in the bowels of the ship. As darkness fell she watched the sailors making their way back to the taverns to fill their bellies with the thick barley brew and take their turn with the local harlots who plied their trade without care as the crime of sin had not yet been discovered. Alynna's head rose as the bald headed tyrant sauntered down the gangplank and around his waist she saw her orb tied upon his belt. She followed him discreetly in her hooded vestment and noticed the tavern name `the Crocodile` which he had chosen to enter. Carefully and a little reluctantly she entered the cramped confines as drunken sailors fell about her already unsteady upon their legs and others drowned the air boisterously as they sang crude and bawdy songs.

Her eyes scanned the room and they soon found Mendokca seated at a table gambling in a game of dogs and jackals. They moved the marble pieces around the rectangular board set upon four animal legs each trying to outwit the other. Two leather purses were upon the table as the wager and the stakes seemed overly rich in this poor man's domain. A crowd of sailors each encouraging their own Captain gathered around the gameboard. The game of the fifty-eight holes consisted of ten ivory pawns five with dog's heads and five with jackal's heads. They threw coins to move the pawns up the length of a colourful palm tree and each pawn that reached the date branches was removed from the board. The first player to rid himself of all pawns won the game. The throws of the coins depicted moves, one head-one move. Two heads-two moves. Three heads-three moves. Three tails-five and a free move. The game was not going well for Mendokca the felucca captain Lashos had four of the dogs off the board and had thrown another three tails. Mendokca thumped the table with both fists as his shrewd opponent made the winning move. Then with a blind rage he stood drawing his curved sword. His opponent also stood drawing his own cutlass to the challenge and Alynna took her opportunity and

decided to make her own move. Pushing her way through the circle of onlookers who awaited the dual to position herself behind the broad framed shoulders of the pirate.

Mendokca a very bad loser with a murderous lust in his eyes slashed his blade first trying to sever his opponent's sword arm. His opponent Lashos of equal strength and dexterity pulled away from the thrust as the swoosh of air brushed past and he immediately countered with a jabbing strike that hit Mendokca in the ribs. The blade had split the skin and bruised the bone on his left side however it only infuriated the pirate further who took to wildly hacking away at Lashos with rage. Alynna watched the fight with trepidation with her concerns resting upon her precious who jostled about upon his belt with every lunge. The two men hammered at each other across the floor of the tavern and the crowd hooked around them in a blood lust. Alynna made her play emptying her phial into the mug of beer without gaining any unwanted attention. Mendokcas opponent collapsed and with his already bloodied blade he stabbed it into his heart. Lashos convulsed and blood soaked into his clothing and a sucking noise gave forth as Mendokca released his blade to be cheered by the onlookers as victor of the duel. Mendokca made his way back to the gaming table and picked up his prize money and then took hold of his mug of beer. He gulped down the beverage and threw the pot upon the floor.

"More ale." He yelled in his bitter tone as a serving girl came running over.

At first he felt queasy so he sat upon the stool putting it down to the exertion of the duel and then his head began to swim. He tumbled backwards from the stool and lay still upon the timber floor. A white froth gelled on his lips and his face had turned to a pallor of ivory. He lay there in a spasm as the people crowded around and this unexpected spectacle.

"Stand clear I'm a physician," Alynna interrupted bending to his aid.

She examined his chest placing her ear upon it and then tracing his pulse before turning to the occupants of the tavern who had all gathered around to plunder his prize money if he be truly dead.

"He has the plague," Alynna announced as they begun stampeding for the doors with the news of this dreaded malady.

Alynna reclaimed her precious and the prize money before turning to the squirming man at her knees.

“You stole my precious, so ive stole your soul,” and with that she placed the orb before his forehead. Mendokca tried to scream through his poisoned lungs as the orb glowed momentarily in a blue incandescence as his life force drained away.

On approaching the Merchants villa Attikula could be discerned from a distance upon a balcony and by his prancing posture Alynna knew that he was in a rage. She entered the courtyard and his voice boomed from above.

“Where have you been,” he yelled out accusingly.

“None of your business you fat oppressive pig,” she yelled back which took him by surprise.

“You need teaching manners my girl,” he snarled with the sadistic grin returning to his features.

Alynna entered the kitchen and could already hear his heavy footfalls drawing near.

“You harlot,” he roared suddenly appearing in the doorway and slapping Alynna hard across the face. She reeled back with the blow and could taste blood running into her mouth and placing her tongue on her lip discovered it was torn. Attikulas fat body approached her now enjoying the distress in her eyes and he grabbed Alynna by the hair as she screamed and struggled but his grip was too firm. He dragged her back into the kitchen as clay pots fell and smashed on the solid ground and the aroma of baking bread filtered from the hot stone oven. He took her roughly from behind pushing her against a bench and lifting up her dress. His tunic around his ankles displaying his portly behind as Alynna screamed and spat in disgust as usual he thought. His bulk and strength had her pinned to the bench with his little hard penis prodding into her as her body shook with every thrust. Attikula had her in the submissive position his winning pose however Alynna could draw strength from another source the orb. She dropped flat to the floor, which forced his top half forward, and his face hit the bench smashing his nose and knocking him senseless for an instant. She drew her nails into his throat and brought his face down upon the hot stones of the oven. His skin sizzled as it touched the mantel and Alynna held him there until his body went limp after he had tried in vain to break her grasp. She loosened her hold satisfied and placed her arms by her sides as her shoulders rose up in the stance of a panther as she regained her strength.

Then abruptly he turned upon her as his consciousness returned, his nose had melted away and the right side of his face had no skin left upon it but a black charred mass of oozing flesh.

“Ill kill you for this you bitch,” he crowed as he lunged at her.

His hands closed upon her throat but this time she managed to break his grip and regain her own upon his neck. With all her might she pushed his head back down towards the stove and saw the fear in his glazed and tarnished eye as he edged closer to the heat. She called upon her Gods to let vent the power of hatred and she felt it coursing throughout her veins. His eyes visually whimpered as the hot hearth came towards him again and he made a snivelling sound as he realised he had no strength within him. Her arms ached as he finally gave and hot putrid steam rose as his face cooked upon the stones. She kept his head there as Attikula tried once again to lift his frame as his hands found purchase on the flat ridges of stones but the searing heat whipped the flesh away from them to the bone. The pain made him pass away into oblivion as his eyeballs dissolved into a gooey gel and the orb glowed in its blue eminence as it gained another soul. Alynna held him there until the flesh had charred beyond any recognition and then she backed away as a trembling fit took hold upon her as she realised she had killed for the first time, not just once but twice in the same day.

Alynna had to flee Memphis as killing your owner was a capitol offence and for many months she wandered aimlessly through Pharaohs land until she came to a place called Edfu. She stopped to gaze upon the benevolent shadow of a stone falcon who lorded down upon her as she stood in her rags the only possessions she had left on this earth.

“Horus God of Kings I beseech thee to forgive me,” she prayed from her mortal soul and a nearby Priest had witnessed the touching scene.

“You seem distressed flower, may the Gods truly listen and grant you mercy,” Khunitep introduced himself with and from that day became her mentor and instructed her in Egyptian sacred rites and practice. Alynna soon became a devout and eager pupil under Khuniteps studious wings.

The Nile flooded and receded with the annual inundation and Khunitep had been granted his long awaited appointment he had yearned for as the High Priest of Thebes and Alynna had travelled with him to this grand and wondrous City. Whilst Khunitep overseer of the Temples carried out his

Royal and religious duties Alynna's abilities were soon noticed by the Priesthood with her unusual spiritual skills and skill as an adept physician curing many worshippers of the populace with her vast knowledge of herbs and potions. They gave her an apothecary to produce her magical potions and blessed her name to Isis as she found remedies for many ills. She had memorised the wisdom gleaned from her years reading the clay tablets and the Ancient magic had helped her gain some status in the land of Gold.

Her sleeping quarters were rudimentary but adequate and she treasured her timber bed with pride. It had cost her dear using the last of the money from the dead pirates prize money having the most skilled carpenter in Thebes who had the honour of working upon the Pharaohs everlasting tomb. He had charged her royally as well but the loss of finance had been well rewarded with the extra comfort it offered her. She lived amongst the other Priests in their sandstone cells which lay upon the edge of the Sacred Lake with the Temple complexes mirrored upon its furthest side.

Her day began punctually as Nut gave birth to Ra and the almighty orb awoke the black Land from its slumber. Then attending the ritual bathe in the revered lake, which cleansed the holy dignitaries as they washed their shaved bodies and heads. After this she ate her morning meal of maize bread and fruit and then the Priests would make their way to their stations in the Temple sanctums, however Alynna had the unusual privilege of working alone. The Priesthood had become accustomed to her uneasiness whilst working in the presence of others, due to her years of isolation and her solitary nature had not as yet found the strength for her to converse freely. They found her a chore to suit her special abilities in a place where privacy could be gained. The stone roofed apothecary set back behind the Priests quarters and away from the hubbub at the centre of Karnack where worshippers flocked and Priests made offerings amidst market places and street traders who gathered around the holy sanctuary. Alynna's work station held quietness away from the usual noises of the day. The interior walls were bare and grey surrounded by storage jars and baskets of many ingredients. Common herbs, spices, and vats of barley, which had over spilled the container and littered the mud floor. Crocodile teeth, Ibez horns and a Cobras poisonous sac were amongst some of her exquisite possessions housed under the roof of this shack. Items both commonplace

and rare, which Alynna had managed to procure by sending out servants to purchase, forage and scavenge on her behest. Alynna could be persuasive and held an almost hypnotic gaze as her eyes could form into the slits of a Cobra. Her male servants adored her for her immense beauty she possessed and her female servants of the Temple worshipped her for the hidden power that lurked within her.

At this time of year when the annual flooding of the Nile was monitored and registered upon the Nilometer and the people awaited for the registered mark fearing or rejoicing the result. This year however the Nilometer held promise and the water line high confirming the harvests would be plentiful and the granaries refilled. Beer and wine would be of plenty and the people would have reason to cheer and rejoice away from the fear of famine. The Egyptians were contented and they adored their just and beloved Pharaoh Horemheb. Pharaoh though had held on to his authority through a police state after the recent anarchy of previous reigns he had asserted upon himself the task that the double headed crown of upper and lower Egypt would be secured together for eternity under the mighty Ra. Civil War, rebellion, Royal blood feuds would rack this land no more and the iron rod that Pharaoh had laid upon his peoples back had managed to placate them. The people though in these harsh days had seen their nation prospering once again and they praised Horemhebs name for giving them back the greatness their Ancestors had created. Horemhebs sages had envisaged evil omens and if he should let his strong hold upon the reins slip then Egypt was in danger of being no more. His devout followers had absolved him of his occasional brutality and harsh regimes as long as the Black Land stayed superior and mighty.

The Pharaohs court a splendidous pilloried myriad of passageways and courtyards all crafted ornately by his fine stonemasons adorned with elaborate coloured frescoes and carefully sculptured idols of the Gods were at their most impressive in this house of the King. Horemheb had decreed the customary and Ancient religion would flourish once again and the heretic believers of other faiths in particular his predecessors belief in the Aten to be swept and vanquished from his land. The Aten cult devised by the heretic Pharaoh Akhenhaten that had avowed and worshipped a single entity of the Sun God Aten and forsaken the Horus Gods and the way of Ra. Horemheb upon coming to power had ordered the Temples of

this faith to be smashed down and the cartouches of Akhenaten etched from every orifice wiping his blasphemy out of all of Egypt's long history. The great pretenders false religion had also made the Aten Priests wealthy and they held an enormous emphasis still upon the people. Horemheb had them all rounded up and in the marketplace at Thebes the people and the Gods watched the Aten Priests one at a time boil in oil for their sins upon their blasphemy to the true religion. At this Horemheb had declared that he alone now appointed the Priesthood and he scoured the land searching for men who had gained merit from their spiritual endeavours.

Khunitep had come to Pharaohs attention through his spies who told the King of this great spiritual figure who had guarded the Horus Temple at Edfu through all the troubling years. His devotion of overseeing the God of Kings had been rewarded with his appointment as High Priest and under his hegemony were all the kingdoms religious orders. He had become a true holder of the faith and Pharaoh had laid upon his shoulders all the ecclesiastic duties of influence. He adorned a gold chain of office and donned the leopard-skinned cloak a true man of holiness and power. The cloak held special significance as Khunitep had inherited the glorious task of overseeing Pharaohs journey to the afterlife and he had become chief architect of his tomb.

Khunitep though realised he himself were merely mortal not a living God and on his frequent visits to the Pharaohs Court had taken along his acolyte Alynna. Khunitep had become increasingly jealous of the attentions the Pharaoh plied upon his acolyte on these occasions. Alynna only ever entered the hypostyle hall when accompanied by her Master but Pharaoh had started asking Khunitep to bring her along as he had come under her hypnotising spell of beauty and even though the High Priest obeyed he secretly raged within as an obsession had also taken over his own mind. She intrigued them both and Khunitep knew also that she threatened his position as High Priest by the unwanted favour Pharaoh bestowed upon her.

In his chamber Khunitep had breathed the secret scent and drifted off into an opium enhanced trance. This was the way of visions and the sacred journey of the spiritual mind. He had witnessed the severing of the Cobras head and the empty nest that held despair. He had portend how Alynna would one day destroy the very line of Horus and the Kings bloodline

would be broken forever. Khunitep knew it was his devote duty to curtail her damaging ambitions however her humble charisma when in the seductresses company dispelled the doom he held within his soul.

In secret and with furtive fund raising Alynna had managed to possess a temple of her own to pay tribute to her own deities strictly disobeying the Pharaohs own doctrine. Through a network of trusted servants and devoted converts to her perverse religion she had managed to gather a strong following. In the Western desert within the catacombs of an abandoned Aten tomb she had built a shrine and chamber to continue her worship of the Gods that nourished her in the depths of darkness. Every twenty-eight days when the moon bloomed and her womanly crimson river flowed she gathered with her followers. They drank intoxicating magical potions from plant resin and beverages of boiled lotus leaves to heighten their devoutness. They fumigated incense and chanted sacred mantras to the Gods that had slept undisturbed for many eons. They held strange ceremonies that Alynna had erudite from the clay tablets, which required sexual acts to be performed, naked dances upon the sand and the offering of human sacrifice.

The Egyptian Priesthood had decreed that human sacrifice to be the strictest of all taboos and anyone committing such a profaned act would fall foul to the death penalty by Pharaohs own diktat. Alynna had no fear of authority as she believed her Gods would covert and protect her as they had done so before. In the evenings she spent her time recording what she could remember from the clay scriptures and copying her thoughts onto papyrus as the knowledge had firmly imbedded itself in her psyche. In her herbal laboratory she had learnt to cast spells and combine liquids to appease the spiritual needs of her growing wisdom. Experimenting with magic and alchemy as her mastery of potion making and the black arts using her serfs to test out her fascinating elixirs. In her training she had used her skills well using ointments of bee stings to apply to her male sacrifices, which held their erection throughout their gruesome deaths. The same ointment had a similar effect upon the female genitalia but only old women were put to death at Alynnas command. Her own Priests were all feminine and men were only ever used as slaves or sacrifice-chattels under the domain of her magical prowess.

In the Temple of Amun she still had to say her daily prayers however in the coffin texts she had discovered one with duality that suited her own needs

The helpless one, asleep
 The helpless one, silent
 I alone know how to find you
 I alone know how to wake you
 My sister! My Brother
 Come; Lay on us your bones
 Come; Let us lift your head
 Come; lay us in your arms
 Come, let us wake him
 For Asar, the seasons turn
 For Asar, the moist kisses
 My Sister! My Brother

Her most prized possession however was still the crystal orb, which she had developed into a powerful entity as it absorbed electrical matter of the human spirit-the soul. It had bestowed upon her many gifts and gave her a means of gaining power over her followers forever. One day whilst meditating with the orb a flaxen-faced messenger had rushed into her herbal shrine unannounced.

“Priestess come quickly the Pharaoh is in peril,” the messenger had stammered out his news with urgency in his tone.

She grabbed hold of a leather bag and placed her beloved orb within it and a few vials from her craft to hurry out and follow in the messengers wake.

Horemheb lay in his bedchamber surrounded by a throng of Priests and Court officials. Their conversations babbled and died as Alynna entered the room. Her pace composed but urgent as the scrutinising eyes of the Egyptian power mongers fell upon her. A pathway opened out in the sea of bodies and at its end stood the lion footed bed. Pharaoh lay naked except for a loincloth around his waist. His face deathly pale and his skin clung to his bones as his fever had eaten away his flesh. His lips had a blue taint, his complexion had yellowed and a swamp of moisture lay beneath his sallow frame.

“He counselled for you oh witch,” the Grand Vizier Rameses spoke with disdain in his tone.

This young and powerful Lord stood to become the Kings heir upon the throne if Pharaoh died not directly of the Royal line leaving Egypt without a legitimate inheritor as there Pharaoh.

“Then let us pray that he has still time after being in the hands of this plague of sorcerers.” Alynna answered with vehemence towards the Court Physicians leaving the gathering officials and holy men in stunned silence.

They watched her methodically each silently praying that if the hand of death fell upon their Pharaoh and Anubis took him they could lay their blame upon this woman. Alynna would be reviled throughout the Black Land if Pharaoh perished and this thought made Rameses smile. Alynna placed her hand upon Horemhebs brow and felt the burning fever that had consumed his soul. His eyes were limped and it mirrored his state of delirium.

“I must risk this redemption,” she mouthed silently knowing he was already in the throes of death and that fate awaited her if he should pass away.

Alynna carefully removed the stopper on the tiny ceramic vassal that she had taken from her leather bag and as the eyes focused upon the potion she placed Pharaohs hand upon the hidden orb. She administered two drops, which fell upon the bridge of Pharaohs blue lips. In his feverish turmoil his thirsty tongue struck out like a viper and absorbed the morsel of moisture. The orb glowed and Alynna masked it’s light with the leather holdall.

Moment’s later Pharaohs head began to sway and his arms and legs thrashed out in an agonising spasm. His blue lips parted and he let forth a pitiful scream.

“AAAgggghhhh,”

“You’ve killed the King, you’ve poisoned him,” accused Ramon the Captain of the Pharaohs bodyguard who had already begun to draw his sword. An encore of accusers filled the halls as Pharaoh still twisted and turned upon the bedding. Alynna sat composed by his bedside ignoring the raucous hateful slander until the Pharaohs spasms had subsided and he fell into a deep devouring slumber that would regain him his strength that the fever had destroyed.

Khunitep pushed his way forwards as the crowd of accusers hushed in horror. The High Priests felt the Kings chest and his heart still pumped out the song of life. He next felt his brow and the fever had abated.

“It’s a miracle, he lives,” the High Priest announced smiling upon Alynna her only ally in the Court she noted.

“Thank Horus the God of Kings,”Rameses declared trying to steal away the witches recognition.

“Thank Horus,”the cry was taken forth

Alynna quietly slunk from the chamber as Horus was officially declared champion of the day.

Jack had to go to some lengths to procure a four wheeled drive vehicle as tourists were heavily discouraged from driving with the security implications and any journeys beyond the safe resort areas were strictly forbidden. Cruising along the Corniche passing the Winter Palace he had cloaked his head in a white cotton shameel with the cloth dangling from the sides to cover his western features from any prying eyes. He had forked out a small fortune in procuring supplies, as with his need for secrecy and haste he had not the time to haggle and drive a hard bargain. He pulled in the metallic blue Discovery alongside the protecting decorative hedgerows on the plaza of the Isis Hotels shopping parade. Anne should have been waiting here for him and he scoured his eyes in abstract panic for her.

“Come on,” He crowed impatiently as she emerged in the alcove, which led into the Hotels foyer. The narrow passage usually only accessed by the baggage handlers who collected the heavy suitcases of new patrons from the airport coaches and conveyed their luggage to their respective rooms, however no Police manned this entry point and it gave Jack an easy place to park relatively unobserved. Walking in Anne’s stride was a fellow attired in a khaki safari suit and sporting a wide brimmed panama hat perched at an angle upon his brow shielding his face.

“What’s he doing here,” Jack questioned Anne as she drew level to the drivers window.

“Never mind what I’m doing here, if were going to get this show on the road we should be steaming ahead already Old Boy,” Henry announced in

a boisterous and almost cantankerous manner as he boarded the vehicle after overhearing Jack's comment.

Henry tightened his seatbelt around his cumbersome waist as he watched Anne gracefully stroll around the to the front of the vehicle to enter the jeep on the passenger side.

"What's he doing here," Jack repeated this time whispering in her ear as she settled into the leather trim upholstery.

"Henry discharged himself this morning, didn't you Henry dear when I told him of your plans. I couldn't stop him he was most insistent," Anne replied in defence to Henry's huffing and grunts in the rear as he made clear his disgruntlement at being talked about.

"Are we going or are we just going to sit here and admire the view in Johnny Arab land like a bunch of bloody clowns," Henry interrupted their gossiping as his short fuse blew out another retort.

"Okay fine," Jack stated out loudly about to twist the key in the ignition when a tap on the window broke his concentration.

Mickey's broad smile could be gleamed and his breath vapour had left a cloud upon the glass.

"Hello my friends," he greeted the occupants of the Land Rover with as their hearts jumped at the undue attention this situation created.

"Hi Mickey, listen can't stay and chat, I really have to get going," Jack hadn't lied as the engine fired up on his last word but the Arab took as hold of the wing mirror to steal back their attention.

"Mickey he want to come along, Mickey good driver show you way," he pleaded in a child like bearing trying to earn a fast buck and it made it difficult for Jack to refuse his offer as he didn't want any loose ends to betray their trail.

"Okay hop in," he decided making him a fellow conspirator.

"The more the merrier," Henry declared in a flat humourless tone not impressed by Jack's hasty decision.

In the dead of the night they reached the Wadi El Nil. They parked upon the edge of the palm-forested oasis at which they had prearranged their rendezvous. The Shepherd boy chewed upon the soft sticky fruit from the date and spat the inner stone onto the ground as he waited unwearingly. He had seen the luminance of the approaching headlights and they blinded

his vision as he felt the first trickle of caution come upon him. Then he focused above the dip of the beam and recognised the goat worrier.

“Tell him to get him,” Jack blasted Anne as Refaat came alongside of the vehicle.

The catch of the door clicked and as it opened the warm friendly features of his comrade greeted him.

“Doctor, Doctor Allah is praised and forever merciful. It is good that you are well,” the Shepherd boy had spoken sliding upon the seat and placing his hand upon the Englishman’s shoulder in a roughish and caring manner. Then he gave Henry a customary kiss on both his whiskered cheeks in the traditional Arabic manner before he could stop him, as this behaviour was ungentlemanly and intimidating to his own morals. Henry blushed at the open display of male bonding and in his view the intimacy had gone too far.

“Yes fine fine fine my Boy,” he grunted out, “We have work to be done,” he added sitting bolt upright as he skilfully tried to side step the course of the conversation from his own well being. Anne found it difficult to wipe the smirk from her face at her brother’s embarrassment, which had amused her particular sense of humour.

The Land Rover came to a halt on the flush of the desert as they stopped to gaze in wonder at the dawn rising in the eastern sky. The horizon transformed romantically into a myriad of colour as purple and blue hues developed as the night gradually dissolved until the yellow orb nestled in dominance upon the seat of the sky.

“Which way”, Jack snapped breaking the others from there hypnotic absorption at nature’s splendour.

“That way,” the shepherd boy answered pointing towards the northwestern region as they continued their journey.

Ahead of them lay a corral, hastily put together with strips of plastic tape between the bone-dry timber poles as a temporary animal holding. On the edge of the fence there stood a wooden trough and the bare bleached bones of a goat lay at its foot.

“Petra,” Refaat murmured recollecting how after the sandstorm that she had not been found. The desert winds had now uncovered her and the vultures had picked upon her bones.

They parked at the corral and the relief as they disembarked the vehicle as stiff limbs soon eased as they strolled into the Shepherd boys lead towards the crescent of a huge towering sand dune.

“Here,” he gestured pointing at the base of the dune as they reached the far side.

Quinn and Mickey each held a spade they had brought from the vehicle and they now began clearing the drift of the golden earth that had buried the place they had come here to find. The others watched as a pit slowly emerged with their progress as they dug out layers of sand forming two small dunes by their toil. Jacks shirt had sodden and flapped with his digging motion and stuck upon the heat of his body when he paused. The spades clanged simultaneously as they hit the stone. They used their hands to scrape away the last of the sand covering the mantle and as it brushed away a thick slab of granite was revealed. Using the spades and their shoulders for leverage the four males in the party heaved and shoved. Henrys face had turned crimson with strain and Mickey’s pearl teeth formed into an imbecile smile through exertion.

“Okay. Okay everybody stop”, Jack suggested and they stood too, to hear what he had to say.

“If were going to make this budge were going to have to do it as a team, so are we ready,” they all got into place under his command.

“One...Two...Three...Heaveeee,”they used their combined strength upon both spades to gain as much purchase as possible upon the dead weight. The lid grated severely sharp as it started to budge. A few more concerted efforts a hole two feet square had been uncovered enough for their needs. “I’ll go first.”Jack volunteered and no one challenged his enthusiasm staring into the abyss.

He untied the clasp upon his rucksack and pulled out the coil of nylon rope from the haversack. Mickey and Refaat took the strain on the rope as Jack descended into the abysmal gloom. A few moments of traversing into the black hole his feet touched upon solid ground. He clicked on the rubber torch and the darkness seemed not to be penetrated by the battery powered light. He could make out a pile of rocks on his left hand side as if this sanctuary had been disturbed previously. He paced carefully forwards placing his feet with a delicate care and he reached the far wall deciding to follow its course.

“God it’s bloody dark,” he whispered too himself as the torch had no authority in this chamber. He shone the beam downwards using it at least to examine his footfalls and any pitfalls with visions of snakes and scorpions playing upon his mind. Then his head struck something hard that virtually knocked him out cold but he somehow managed to retain his balance. The torch flew up to inspect the obstruction as his other hand massaged his aching scalp to lesson the numbing sensation of pain and nausea.

“That stone lintel my Boy is an oil lantern and you usually light it with a match,” Henry rebuked with his unexpected appearance making Jack jump with fright.

“No wonder you didn’t find this bloody place it’s so bloody dark,” Jack commented to Henry as he struck a match upon the rough edge strip of the box. He placed the burning sliver of timber into the oval dish of the stone lintel and a flame took hold.

“Amazing, absolutely bloody amazing after all these centuries it still contains some fuel,” Henry stated quite chuffed with himself by this fact. “Are there anymore,” Jack half questioned already searching in the new twilight of the chamber.

Anne and Mackey had descended into the chamber as the brightness began distributing itself. Refaat on the other hand had opted to stay upon the surface as his suppersitious nature had got the better of him. His only concern was having the strength to pull the others from out of the ground. “Oh my God,” Anne abruptly exclaimed as another oil burner ignited and the hideous reptilian features upon a statuette were uncovered.

“A splendid find Sir,” Henry interrupted his sisters outburst with. “Meretsegar the Snake Goddess-she who covets silence.” he resumed the tour of enlightenment with but inside Henry had also frozen when the Snake Goddess had come to life. Unbenown to his companions he had been in this room before both in the living world and a nightmare world that haunted his dreams utterly.

“What’s that over there,” Anne spoke out again this time with excitement as an oblong shadow loomed in the darkness.

Another oil lamp ignited and the ornately engraved stone of the altar with its crafted indentations came into display.

“An altar or table of some kind I guess,” Jack remarked to the find but having no archaeological knowledge relaxed the assumptions of his statement.

Henry's hands began to tremble uncontrollably and he pocketed them to shield his visible distress. He knew he had come here to face up to his own demons and the panic in his soul slowly eroded away his calm persona. The dread in his mind would not let go and he knew his only cure would be to stand against them with fortitude.

Anne was unaware of her brother's torment as she pranced from corner to corner like a lost school child—totally amazed and bewildered by this tomb and its untold history. History had no measure upon Mickey he had ferried too many tourists to the Ancient sites and treasures of his country and had an indifference to this place as to his thinking this was just another relic—another attraction. Jack had come here to Egypt in pursuit of love with the excuse of getting his crystal idol deciphered by gaining Henry's confidence, however he gawped in marvel and mystery with an excitement rushing through his veins as a sense of adventure had taken hold upon him.

“Here I found something else,” Jack announced as he gleamed the ordered pattern of the sandstone walls.

Anne came scuttling across with a giddy fascination in the fantasy of her brooding thoughts.

“What is it dear,” she asked clasping his arm and placing her cheek onto his.

“You tell me you're the expert,” he replied as the torch beam tracked by her eyes raised and illuminated the wall ahead.

“How wonderful hieroglyphs,” she announced as the elaborate pictographs came to life

“Henry come you must see this,” she called out and as her brother entered the light Anne couldn't help notice his foreboding expression and exhaustion that had overcome him.

“Henry my dear whatever's wrong. I warned you that you weren't well enough for this trip,” Her concern became preoccupied as she scolded him the woman's instinctive sympathetic reaction which she found hard to give at times.

“Shush woman with your heckling, I’ll be just fine. Now what’s all this about and what have you found,” He shrugged off her anxiety with a brave charade as mustered by his composure. Brushing quickly passed them to hide the telling fear written within his eyes.

“Can you decipher this,” Jack queried enthralled focusing the light expectantly upon the beginning line of the picture text.

“Does a goldfish in his bowl with a three second memory passing the sunken wreck say have I been before,” Henry repartees in his self styled sarcasm.

Henry examined the text huffing and grunting before clearing his throat to narrate the script written upon the wall.

“Horemheb Living God and Pharaoh of this Sacred Land has declared this sacrilegious Temple should be sealed forever under the curtain of the sand. The heinous acts of heresy committed to appease false gods shall lie buried to hide their sin for all eternity. The remains of the sacrificed shall be fired of all living tissue and their bones bleached clean by the mighty Ra. Their spirits may then be free from the demons that had possessed them. The Heretic Priestess and all her phyles are hereby banished from the Land of the Pharaohs and a sentence of death placed upon them if they were ever to cross the boundary of the King. This is the decree of the living God Horemheb who gave mortal life in defeating the evils of this land.

Khunitep

“Makes you wonder what did occur here, sacrifices, bleaching bones it’s enough to give you the creeps,” Jack exclaimed as the narrative ended.

“Lets go, lets go from here please,” Anne said as her fascination evaporated as she felt the horror still present in this dark cavern.

White light formed a blanket upon the Temples of Karnak making the rising columns, obelisks and kiosks stand out in an eerier radiation. The moon had swelled to its full blossom and glowed mightily in the hollow of the night sky. A black-cloaked figure concealed itself amongst the shadows as they moved unseen throughout the Temple complex. Karnak had many gates an open house for the people of Thebes

to worship, only within the Pharaohs sacred quarters there was restricted access and was guarded rigidly by the Royal Bodyguard. So the shadow had little to fear or hinder their course as it slipped away causing no undue alarm as it had done numerous times before.

Entering the encircling settlement of the town there were many places to seek refuge. Only the barking of a dog and a man urinating upon a wall startled her momentarily as they had been her only reason for caution. On the outskirts of the habitation a hired guide waited clutching upon the reins of a grey-coated donkey.

Amongst the darkness that night other shadows had been obscuring there way with far more caution. The shadow that had trailed her had waited patiently in the blackness for her to leave her quarters and hanging back in her wake as she sheltered in between the stumps of the high pillared colonnades. They had espied her stealthy progression using every crevice to mask her path and in the hustle of the settlement they had temporarily lost sight of their prey. Until one of there number had virtually stumbled upon her and had played upon urinating against a wall to make his presence seem innocently naïve.

Tonight Alynna had been in an unusual hurry as her duties at court had taken on more significance and in the weeks ahead preparations were in hand for the ritual festival as the holy reunion of the Cow headed Goddess Hathor and the Falcon headed God Horus was set to take place upon the Nile. Every summer upon the solstice Hathors effigy would be paraded from her Temple at Denderra and set afloat upon high prowed reed boat upon the great river. Her husband's effigy of Horus would disembark from the Temple of Edfu and a ritual coupling would take place when the two boats met upon the life giving water of the Nile. Then the two Gods were seated in the Temple at Luxor for the populous to praise and admire with weeks of festivities preceding this glorious event as they thanked the Gods for their beer and grain. The resident Priestess and herbalist Alynna had been in high demand for her lotions, potions and spiritual draughts. People believed in the power of magic and they desired these potable fragments of necromancy to stay in tune with there beliefs and even though the priestess knew most her elixirs were nothing more than narcotic remedies they were highly sort after. She called them fanciful names Blood of the Serpent, Blood of Hephaistos, Blood of Vesta, Blood of Lion and Bone of

the Phyasimian and the Egyptians drank her concoctions with fire in the repute of the effigy upon the bottle.

Alyнна knew the risk she had taken leaving the sanctuary at this time and hoping that her absence would go unnoticed as the full moon drew her own spirit towards the worshipping of her own Gods. A breeze freshened the night air as they disembarked from the felucca and headed into the green plantations of the west bank. There the agriculture drifted away as they crossed the threshold where the sun baked earth reigned supreme. The darkness held a still breath and only the insane call of a hyenas laughing bark broke the nothingness of the gloom. An outcrop of ridges illuminated by the moon told Alyнна there sanctuary was nearly here. She dismounted the grey donkey as they ascended the slopes keeping upon the high ancient shepherded tracks.

“Manta Mari, I here something,” the guide spoke as he glanced over his shoulder. Alyнна stopped and stared across the wasteland frontier with the torchlight’s of Thebes still visible upon the horizon.

“Your ears are troubled by the rambling of your own head,” she spat out unremorsefully before turning her back to him to continue the climb.

The guide just huffed and carried on. He surmised that it was of no concern to him why this secretive woman had paid three gold pieces to escort her into the wilderness. He had suspected that they were rendezvousing with her secret lover to conduct some adulterous liaison or maybe she had come out here, as others had to give birth to an unwanted child and abandon them to the fate of the Gods. He couldn’t help notice that she had coldness in her eyes and he had not noted a heavy stomach and her manner held a hatred that told him she had never been one to love or brood.

“Stop here,” she demanded and her hands searched under her cloak for the hard object. She knelt and knocked the flint and striking block together to make sparks fly onto a cluster of dried fauna. Moments later a flame flourished and covering the fire with the corner of her cloak three times she signalled ahead. A torch waved back in reply and Alyнна stamped out the burning grass as she sprung to her feet.

“We can go now,” she instructed.

“Yes Manta Mari,” he replied using her Priestess title with his intuition concluding that this was indeed a furtive romantic encounter.

As they approached the rise to his surprise four bare breasted nymphs came running towards them.

“Thank you Amun,” the guide mouthed praying under his breath not quite believing the spectacle. They grabbed hold of him playfully and giggled childishly as they led him away.

“Amun be praised and thanks be to you,” he mouthed again as the nymphs placed a golden goblet to his lips in which he took a draught of the sweet tasting wine. He was beckoned to drink more as he offered it back and he eagerly obliged draining the contents. The nymphs laughed as they danced around him as he focused upon their nubile breasts shinning in the moonlight and enjoying their frolicsome motions. The nymphs swam in a dizzy haze as the fleshy bodies merged into a pink fog. His legs failed to steady him and he collapsed upon the earth in an unconscious state.

Drip drip drip drip drip drip drip drip tap tap drip drip drip tap drip. His mind awoke with an agonising drone that reverberated through the width of his skullbone. A pain that would not clear or abate. He experienced the throbbing principally around his central forehead and his eye sockets stung with a maddening itch. He tried to move his left arm and it stopped dead. His back was in an increasing strain with stiff muscled rheumatism as his body lay upon a harsh flat surface. He tried to open his eyelids, as they seemed to be glued together by a sticky crimson substance that had welded his eyes lashes together. The seal broke as hairs pulled out in clumps from the eyelids and then he caught sight of the gloating eyes above him. The slaughtered goat hung up on top of him with it’s throat ripped out and the sticky glue had been the animals still congealing blood dripping upon him.’ He watched a droplet of blood forming upon the goat’s wiry chin and as it fell he tried to twist his head away but it stayed wedged in-between two blocks. The droplet splashed upon the forehead as he also tried to bring his feet to his knees but he found they had been secured also. He felt the warm blood running upon his brow and into his eyes.

Alynnna orchestrated the rudiments for the blood ceremony organising her nymphs and handing out her instructions in preparation for the ritual. The guide glimpsed movement all around him and then he glanced downwards as he felt his loincloth being untied to expose his manhood. He heard the deep connotations of the ceremonies chant and reeked the strong aromas from the incense burners spraying into the room. Then he became aware

of cold compression being massaged into his manhood, which took hold of his attentions. The sensual soothing caress was extremely pleasing until the coldness suddenly turned to fire and painful sensations shot through his body as he experienced an unreal discomfort as a thousand concentrated bee stings were rubbed into his member. His penis went instantly rock hard and he winced out as it swelled up with the vast amounts of poison within it.

He hadn't felt the cold water washing away the cream until this sensation overrode his pain. He made out the arcing back and hair of the woman and focused upon the teeth shaped crevice of her spine snaking up her body. Her skin oiled and shinning as slid atop of him and placed his overlarge phalanx within herself. The chanting took on a new heightening as the woman rocked in ecstasy as she took her fill of his manliness. Then she let out an almighty cry and the cantations grew to crescendo and then another nymph mounted him as soon as the first as called out to the Gods in satisfaction with the bubbles of passion consuming her soul. Another Nymph took over from the second and then another took her turn each pleasing themselves upon his tortured part. The Manta Mari appeared above him and measuring up the discomfort in his face it seemed to her liking.

“You can produce no more seed from your swelled up penis and you will find no pleasure in our worship. To appease the Gods though we must release your seed and so to appease them I will cut out your seed makers and eat the seed that has yet to grow within them,” Her mesmerizing cruel eyes smiled as she discerned the fearful reaction that had fell upon him.

Horror struck by her statement he watched her mount him as the others had done before. His penis felt warmth as she clasped her vagina upon him. Her back arched as she savoured the sliding moment of entry that made her womanhood purr with excitement. He caught the glint of metal as he made out the hilt of the bull headed knife. He tried to struggle but the fastenings were too robust and the weight of the woman upon him his midriff kept his hips down. A searing dull pain hit his scrotum as it severed and he felt her prying fingers burrowing into his flesh as the round plums of his testicles were dislodged. His eyes rolled to the back of his head, as his whole stomach seemed as if it had been ripped open. He heard

the Manta Mari calling out with passion as she still rode upon him displaying the bloody lumps for her followers to bear witness.

The red balls of flesh were carefully diced and each nymph took a piece and chewed upon the bloody morsel in offering. The man had turned anaemic through loss of fluid as his groin bled heavily from the incisive wound. The grooves on the altar channelled the precious substance so it funnelled into the stone basin. Alynna sat over and studied her victim as he slowly faded away into oblivion. Her God the divine spirit that conjured himself upon the earth as a ferocious black bull had demanded the offering of the seed of life at the time when the woman's seed was sacrificed through menstration. The soul of death and the seed of life were the dual complexity that completed her holy covenant. The sexual acts stimulated the worship and the blood the essence of his image to be exalted upon the earth. Alynna a true disciple and dedicated preacher of his commandments as she had astutely erudite his laws in the cave and had memorised by heart the readings of his wisdom upon the holy clay tablets. Relics of a forgotten age. A time when the Lords of all creation had conversed directly with man and gave to him the very secrets of creation. Man had abused their power and the laws of existence were taken from them except for a trusted few that passed on the secrets through the ages covertly. They also though had perished as the Gods knew mans very mind and Alynna had fell to the temptations left by these gifted men with the archaic laws laying abandoned at the foot of her tomb. The primeval force of darkness that had ruled everything in the beginning and in her caged youth the evil had warped the goodness from her heart and soul. She was now a vassal for the evil forces of creation the Gods of wind, thunder and Darkness. The darkness had moulded her into a true prodigy of the She Devil she was still yet to become.

The wooden doors of the Temple burst open unexpectedly and the High Priest Khunitep stood there in the aperture with an army of guardians in his wake.

“What unholy blasphemy is this,” he roared seeing blood smeared nymphs screaming with the shock of the intruders and the carcass of the goat hung upon the altar. Alynna walked to his front and stood there laughing maddeningly in their faces.

EXODUS

The City of Thebes rejoiced with its people overwhelmed by the cavorting festivities and magnificent parades which complimented the Horus ceremony. Hathor and Horus were at peace together in the Temple of Luxor and the Egyptians celebrated and rejoiced at this holy reunion. Although inevitably the two lovers would be separated again and their deities sailed back down the Nile to their Temples at Edfu and Dendera to pine for each other once again unto the following summer. The Egyptians would also pine for they would return to the drudgery of everyday existence and the justification to drink excesses of alcohol and indulge in carnal pleasure would once again be denied. The brothels would close their doors again under Pharaoh's harsh decrees and public drunkenness would carry the punishment of flogging. Alynna could descry the haughty laughter and giggling voices of female serfs chased merrily through the streets. She had heard the raucous cheers as the colourful displays and pageants of many decorated barges had passed upon the Nile and heard the cries of obedience to Pharaoh as he had confronted the masses upon the brow of his ship at anchor with his Golden double throne aloft as he made his speech that culminated the highlight of the celebrations. Fatted calves were slain and clay pots of wine endowed to his people and they paid homage to this merciful and benevolent leader. Alynna had listened held prisoner throughout the festival guarded in her quarter and only once in twelve long days had she been granted to leave her prison and that had been to administer her medication to the recovered Horemheb. That time however she had not been permitted to see him-Pharaoh in person and felt humiliated as she

handed the potion into the hands of the Court Physician. The days were long with little to occupy her troubled cohesion stuck in this chamber day and night was heartbreaking to the least as she eavesdropped the noises of merriment that resounded from every direction.

She knew her acts would not go unpunished and the anxiety of not knowing what fate had in store lain heavy upon her heart. Every footstep that echoed out from the cobbled yard filled her with trepidation and as footsteps sauntered and filtered away her unease temporarily subsided. She let vent with relief. Her only solace was being able to bribe one of the guards and have messages relayed to her devout followers who gave her hope in her heart. Two days had passed since the termination of the festival and this time the steps upon the cobbles didn't fade and soon she made out the keys rattling on the door lock. Two shaven headed Priests from the Temple of Amun stood in the aperture with their red gowns shinning oppressively in the moonlight. One of them had a distinctive pock marked face and carried the sceptre of office proclaiming he had come here directly upon Pharaohs authority.

"You must come with us, we are here to escort you to your trial," he announced holding no emotion in his tone and his blemished features remained deadpan as he forwarded his message.

"Very well," Alynna replied placing a shawl on her shoulders hoping to hide her modesty and face up to her judgement with some respect.

The Grand Hypostyle Hall with a forest of pillars towering above and the powerfully hypnotic hieroglyphs painted with exotic colour adorned upon the walls as testimony to the Black Lands majesty fledted by. They approached the three principle Temples of Amun, Khonsu and Mut as the deep taint of incense trickled from these hallowed sanctuaries as Priests prayed for the soul of the Black Land and redemption of it's people. Alynna glanced at the Leonine Sphinx of Tutankhamun that depicted him like a lion ready to pounce as her world fell apart from the fabric of her once living inner being. Her hands shook involuntary and she blinked repeatedly to hold back the tide of tears waiting to unleash from her frightened eyes. Her abdomen an empty chasm of dread and her thoughts racing upon the dreadful cruelties that could be condemned upon her. They approached the high walled palace gate and two obese eunuchs stood sentry. These sentinels with copper curved swords and knobkerries by

their side were trained in one art alone-the art of murder. The guards stood aside as they waved the escort of Priests by without a murmur and their sandaled feet made no sound upon the solid marble floor beyond.

Gold the nectar of the Black Land. Walls of pure glistening gold, chests crammed with gold, sistrums overflowing with gold recent tributes from Campaigning Generals aligning the route to bewilder the visitor. The most precious metals and jewels adorned every niche of the Kings house with each piece of furniture having a gilded coat of the yellow metal. Alynna discerned a black bulls head with horns of gold a good omen she hoped falling upon her own primitive beliefs. A Golden shield hung aloft displaying the Kings Arms of battle and beneath the throne inset with emeralds, which made it glitter majestically. This however was not the true throne but the throne Horemheb would sit upon in the afterlife. The double throne dais of the two kingdoms lay ahead. The twin chair of power with a vultures and cobras head entwined representing Pharaohs dominance over the upper and lower lands of Egypt. Horemheb sat with the uraeus crown upon his head, the Golden Serpent” the cobra that rises up to protect the King”. In his left hand he clutched the crook and in his right the flail the two symbolic marks of office. To his right Khunitep was seated with a select faction of the Priesthood who Pharaoh could call upon for advice and benediction. On Pharaohs left sat the Grand Vizier Menpehtyre or Rameses, as his chosen throne name would be if he ever adorned the double crown of power. Upon his immediate left were the Lords of Thebes and visiting Lord of Memphis with a small assemblage of Military Officers including Pharaohs bodyguard and commander of ten thousand Ramun.

The splendour and regalia of the court and it’s officials with hanging linen banners displaying the regimental symbols of Pharaohs Armies and Navies at first became a daunting spectacle. Alynna stepped into the empty square overshadowed by the raised officials sat on a platform in their high backed chairs. She had the impression of being a chicken that had escaped the coop only to be surrounded now by a bloodthirsty pack of wolves. She had become determined to show them no fear after she had prostrated herself to Pharaoh by placing her forehead upon the ground she immediately stood tall and proud in defiance.

“Please be seated,” Horemheb gestured as a Palace slave brought forth a stool but Alynna shook her head to the offer and the slave retreated.

“These proceedings may be long and you may tire upon your feet but if that’s your wish to stand, then so it may be,” Pharaoh concluded his face pure white with powder and his lips painted black a macabre jest to enhance his status as adjudicator.

“I will stand,” Alynna answered in a demanding tone finding her voice, which took the court by surprise with her venomous tone.

“As you wish,” Pharaoh reaffirmed in his effeminate tones, “Now let us begin the proceedings,” as he waved his crook showing his impatience with this whole affair.

Rameses stood and surveyed the congregation before he began his oration.

“My Lord divine protector and ruler of the two kingdoms, son of Horus and living God who rules every man and creature in the Black Land.

Today we assemble to judge this woman,” Rameses threw an accusing finger towards Alynna making great emphasis on his last word which he spat out with distaste. “Alynna Priestess of the Sun God Amun,” he addressed her formerly and paused before continuing, “this witch has in total defiance of Pharaohs doctrine committed acts of unmentionable heresy against the state of Egypt and all its glorious temples.” at these words the members of the court jeered and Rameses had to pause until the commotion had cleared. “Furthermore she has offended the very Gods themselves with the offering of human sacrifice,”

The court erupted upon this accusation.

“Burn the witch,” defiler of Horus,” “Harlot of Seth,” obscenities rained down from every quarter but Alynna stared doggedly at the pennants above, inspired by the golden crocodiles and blue eagles painted upon them.

Alynna’s legs had gone numb and she screwed up her toes to stimulate blood flow to prevent her keeling over. The proceedings had continued remorseless all day and now it was Khuniteps turn to speak her once admiring tutor.

“On that dark night myself and three brother priests were witness to the most unholy of rituals taking place. I am a learned man and know of many barbaric rituals. The Hittites throw men into pits to be devoured by wild beasts, the Cushites who hand over their captives to their women who

make them eunuchs without the use of any instrument, however on that night we followed the acolyte Alynna, I have no words to describe the full horror that I had gone to bear witness to. Everywhere there was blood and a dead goat hung profoundly from the ceiling. Upon a slab a man had his torso removed and the naked phyles had used his blood to anoint their own bodies. Only you my Lord Pharaoh have the divine power over life and death of your subjects. She has betrayed your very authority over this land and insulted the triad of Gods who herself had devoted her trust. This woman is an evil and malevolent menace to our customs, practices and principles and only one penalty, the ultimate penalty can justify the nature of her crimes, death.”Khunitep finished his summing up for the prosecution and through his long declaration he had not once looked upon the pretty features of Alynna, as he could not bear the hypnotising power of her beauty.

“Thank you Khunitep, your words are both wise and foreseeing,”Pharaoh directed his own comments to the High Priest before he addressed the court.

“I have listened carefully to the evidence brought before me from my Priests and Councillors. I have listened with both interest and patience to the pleas and advice you have bestowed before me, but what has our accused have to say. Priestess what have you to offer this court in defence,”Pharaoh dictated his jurisdiction and placed the attention of every eye upon the woman isolated in the centre of the marble floor?

Alynna eyed her audience with contempt but when her eyes met the Pharaohs own her voice softened as she spoke.

“My Lord I have nothing to say this council. Do with me what justice dictates for I am what I am,” the court had half expected some plea for mercy or something more entertaining than this and there anger seethed with a fresh flood of accusations drowning out the ambience of the hall again.

“Very well Priestess,” silenced reigned as Pharaoh spoke out.” I will place my judgement upon you,” he placed the crook and flail of office closely to his chest and silently prayed to the divine God of justice Osiris for equity in his wisdom.

“You have committed great sins where I alone can offer no atonement or mercy from the breasts of this heart that carries the weight of the double

crown. My council has presided and forwarded their evidence against you and you have returned no defence to refute their accusations. So I call upon my father great Horus to grant you favour for you saved the life of his son and I call upon mighty Sobek the eater of the unfaithful to chastise you for your blasphemies. I Horemheb Pharaoh of the Black Land banish you from my Kingdom. My Royal Guards will escort you across my borders and a sentence of death awaits if you ever enter my Kingdom again," Pharaoh stopped however the council were stunned by the clemency he had given in his judgement.

"My Lord the only sentence of death is placed upon yourself, for if I leave this Land you will ultimately perish," Alynna answered him as the council broke into uproar again.

"Lord she is using her witchcraft against you," Rameses hailed.

"Kill this evil, destroy the spirit of Seth," spat out the Priests

"Speak of this peril," Pharaoh persisted ushering the insurrection.

"Your medication my Lord is not yet complete," Alynna replied knowing it was only the power of the orb that kept him alive.

"My Lord this is trickery typical of this woman. She only wants reason to poison your soul. Look at your health and feel how strong is the beat of your heart. I beseech you not to listen to her words that only corrupt your mind," Khunitep made an abrupt outburst uncharacteristic of his usual reasoned persona however he had become concerned as he perceived the obsessive affections in Pharaoh's eyes when gazing upon the accused.

"Enough of this," Pharaoh's anger had surfaced at the pandemonium that had disrupted his tribunal again." Khunitep do not dare dictate to me of my well being or impose upon my affairs," his anger directed towards his High Priests who slunk back submissively into his chair.

"Ramun," Pharaoh called and his General came to the front of the courtroom." Ramun carry out the directions of this court and banish this woman from my Land," Pharaoh ordered sternly but his heart lay heavy not healthy as he looked down one last time at the image of her beauty. "Very well my Lord," Ramun acknowledged striding across the marble floor on his bronze muscular legs with his gold amulets and gold chain of office gleaming proudly.

“You have no concept of what you’re doing,” Alynna stared directly at Pharaoh before she was unceremoniously dragged from the courtyard by the guards.

The galley sailed swiftly upon the strong current and the southerly breeze was also in their favour. The high prow of the reed boat dived into the wash of white water and then rose again in a cutting motion that made the vessel sway from aft to stern avoiding the heady giddiness of rolling from side to side. Alynna had sailed before as a captive upon the pirate ship and now again captive not knowing where her true destiny would be taking her. Pharaoh had granted her a small decree and she had chosen the route of her exile. She had decided upon the south under the ever-watchful gaze of Sirius that shone brightly and predominantly in the southern hemisphere. She could not of bore the hurt of travelling north as their lay her roots and the unpleasant memories of her long buried past were still upon the shallow memory of her psyche and that road had already been traversed and she sought more than ever, greener pastures. To the west lay the great never ending desert which lay barren and desolate only the barbaric Bedouin found comfort from its torment. To the east lay the sea leaving only south holding any promise for a new life through the crocodile infested swamps and across the cataracts into the land of Nubia and into the mysterious lands that lay beyond that.

On the fourth week of the voyage Ramun had become less hostile with his captive. He abhorred the immoral crimes she had committed and at the trial had been one of the advocators braying for her death. Looking upon this woman now with her gleaming golden locks and deep blue/green eyes his emotions had been stirred. Listening to her sweet feminine tones that hummed as a nightingale sings and identifying the passion and care within her tormented soul his first instincts of her evil had evaporated into an angelic awe.

“It will be another seven moons before we reach the boundary of the Kings land. We will have to abandon the boat at the cataracts and we will be at the mercy of the Gods in the hostile landscape that still has to be crossed. Only crocodiles and bandits habitat these swamps but have no fear my Lady myself and my men will grant you safe passage as Pharaoh has ordained,” Ramun wanting and needing to converse with her had knelt

by her side as she sat amongst the spare canvas of the sail which doubled as her sleeping quarters upon the cramped deck.

“Thank you my Lord your consideration is most noble,” Alynna smiled at him, a smile that would steal the heart of any man. Her eyes gleamed with innocence that held a womanly charm, which made a man possessed, compelled to protect her and therefore gain her attentions. Alynna knew the hold she had upon him, the seed she had planted had grown, but to what advantage she could use this influence she had yet no idea with the five other members of her armed escort to also watch over her.

Horemheb stepped out of the pool and indicated to his personal slave Mutu to bring forth the linen to dry his body with. He sat upon the stone bench with the falcon headed rails as Mutu rubbed the sprinkles of moisture from his skin as the steam still rose from the bathing water. Horemheb bowed his head forward and Pharaohs hair dripped with water and he made an impatient gesture for the slave to concentrate on drying his head. Rubbing his black locks in a circular motion whilst Pharaoh sat straight backed in a proud posture. The slave withdrew the towel and made an unexpected whelping cry. Pharaoh spun around to witness his humble locks of hair amassed in the fold of the linen. He placed his hands onto his hair and felt it falling away in his grasp.

“What madness is this,” he groaned staring vacantly at the clumps in-between his fingers.

After disembarking the galley at anchor before the roaring crescendo of the cataracts and Ramun leaving two of the escort to guard the vessel for their return journey to Thebes. They entered a small village where they bartered for donkeys to venture further beyond the cataracts. The mountain of boulders in the Nile that locked the river but prevented further passage along its watercourse could be discerned as they trailed the banks. Alynna with a few of her possessions that she had been allowed to gather from her Acolytes cell had been seated upon the most robust animal a white donkey whilst the soldiers walked with their equipment straddled upon the backs of the other animals.

“Well my Lady I hope your not afraid of Sobeks wrath as here he reigns in abundance,” Ramun remarked referring to the crocodile headed God as they breached the swamp that housed it’s minions.

“I have no fear of your Gods. I respect them but my Gods are with me and protect me as I place my life in there judgement alone,” Alynna spoke with faith placing her hand on her haversack to feel the warmth of the orb although her words spoken from the darkness in her heart dispelled. Ramuns features contorted with her blasphemous confession and she realised the bond she had upon him on the boat had already been broken.

The High Priest ran to his summoning across the courtyard, stopping momentarily to make a devout remark to his protector Amun as he crossed the threshold of his temple. At the gate of the Palace awaited the Grand Vizier pacing back and forth with an impatient stride.

“Where have you been,” Rameses spat out with impertinence.

“Forgive me my Lord but your message has only just been passed to me,” he apologised before speaking again. “Of what importance have I been summoned most ungraciously,” Khunitep had added gaining courage from his position and knowing he was under the Pharaohs protection.

“Of what importance,” Rameses scolded his tongue upon the phrase, “The utmost importance our King is in peril. It has been a full moons cycle since that witch departed. She is the one responsible for this as her harlots breath predicted,” Rameses had convinced upon himself that Pharaoh had been poisoned and knew he was on the brink of death. He knew also that if Pharaoh died the throne would pass rightfully onto him. Only one person had as much power and influence as himself over the King-the High Priest and he wanted desperately to eradicate this equation.

As they entered the Kings bedchamber incense burned and a party of priests chanted incantations calling upon the Gods to restore his strength and heal his spirit. His Queen Lillititi and her maidens wept by his bedside as they carried out their own vigil. The Pharaoh had withered with his skeletal frame eaten of muscle, his few strands of hair had greyed and his face aghast with agony and wrinkled beyond recognition.

“Horus grant him mercy,” Khunitep prayed upon beholding the wretched state of his once proud regent.

The Kings milky white eyes registered dimly and his chapped lips parted with effort as his crease brow strained.

“My Lord you speak,” Khunitep beckoned for silence before he pressed his ear to the Kings lips.

“Sshheee,” his voice rasped with a hoarse weakness, “sshhee has placed this curse upon me. I will die soon make the preparations for me old friend. See me through my final journey,” the King paused through exertion before mustering enough strength to speak again. “Do do not seek revenge as my heart holds no anger,” his eyes closed and his mouth lay open with his last proclamation upon his lips.

“My Lord, my Lord,” Khunitep shouted in dismay and shook him however he knew in his heart and through experience that his beloved Pharaoh had died. He embraced him as tears welled up in his eyes.

The line of white and gold chariots rattled out of the gates of Thebes and people peered from behind cloth curtains disturbed by the sudden outburst of horses galloping through the cobbled streets. Fourteen chariots manned by Pharaohs own elite guard” the Asp that Stings” with the snake motif emblazoned upon their shields. Each chariot bore three soldiers and only the lead chariot carried a fourth controlled by their Commander Darius, which reluctantly to the leader of the expedition had an extra body to carriage. Khunitep clung to the wooden frame as the wheels bounced upon the uneven road with trepidation his thoughts reiterating the words of the newly endowed Pharaoh still clearly echoing in his brain.

“Find her Priest and kill her,” Ramese had ordered him although Khunitep had protested in vain.

“Our Pharaoh Horemheb has decreed that she would come to harm and I have the responsibility of seeing my Lord resting in his tomb,” he had argued strongly knowing if he went his position, as High Priest would be in jeopardy.

“Priest your Lord decreed that no harm would befall her upon his land, if you are faithful to his desires then see to it that you do not break this oath and tarnish this land with her blood. Horemheb will sail upon the eternal river in seventy days you have that time to bring her head to me or I will have yours in it’s place. Now get out of my sight,” Rameses had smiled within as his demands would be hard to accomplish with such a deadline. “Very well my Lord it shall be done,” Khunitep had reluctantly agreed having no more grounds on which to argue.

Darius a young noble man and Commander of ten thousand had become incensed with rage by his uncle’s sudden demise. The task of catching up with the murderess and avenging the death of the Pharaoh would be his

most honourable and dutiful command he had ever been given. He followed the road south through Luxor with his teams of horses at full gallop. The wind had silenced and the river provided no haste as the chase demanded speed the only commodity they had in their favour. Ramun had a full cycle of the moons start and Darius knew the astute Commander would not waste much time or opportunity in escorting the witch off royal turf.

A green tail struck out and within the beds of reeds shuddered with a violent tremor and the cry of a distressed donkey filled the air. Ramun spun around disturbed by the sound as a member of his escort screamed out alarmingly. The jaws of the crocodile had snapped around his shinbone and the crunching of muscle and bone could be discerned. The crocodile a huge fourteen-foot monster retreated hastily with its prize dragging the soldier further into the jungle of reeds. Swords unsheathed and the escort ran into the heart of the swamp chasing their comrades shrieks as Sobek viciously mauled upon his leg.

“Spread out that beast is here somewhere,” Ramun instructed as their prey had vanished into the foliage.

The white donkey had gone into a trot and Alynna looked back with some regret and mixed relief as she made her break for freedom. She descried the calls of the stricken soldier and had watched the others rushing to his aid. She knew this may be her only opportunity and using the misfortune to her own advantage had whipped the donkey into a gallop with the flat of her hand.

“Over here,” one of the escort had called finding the mangled remains of his comrade. Ramun raced across the reed beds cutting his legs upon the razor sharp edges of the bull rushes. The crocodile had feasted upon a chunk of its victim’s waist whom it had taken with him and the bite had severed the spinal cord killing its prey instantly.

“Curse the beast,” Ramun snapped as he heard the breaking of water and realised the creature had found sanctuary in the deep water.

“Captain, captain,” another call came from a member of the escort to his rear. Running back through the swamp he didn’t need to be told what had occurred with the white donkey know where to be seen.

“By the wings of Horus we must find that witch,” he mouthed as his heart sank at losing sight of her compelling beauty.

The Psion laptop flashed and the E-mail requester displayed upon the screen as the envelope icon came visible in the toolbar. Anne had arranged her clothing upon the bed still undecided on what dress to wear that evening. The hotel room door opened and Anne turned and smiled knowing she had been caught out with her womanly vanity as she hurriedly placed her dresses back into the wardrobe.

“How did it go,” she asked gently as Jack came back from the international dialling booth.

“Not so good, Paul Collins is handling the day to day stuff for me superbly, although he did confess that there’s a backlog of appointments and he’s already getting irate phone calls from insurance companies I’m contracted to,” he told her the news from home and she could sense how worried he had become as his cherished business had begun tearing away at the seams by his absence.

Jack knew he desperately needed to return to the UK and attend to some small repairs, she was here though, the woman he loved and he knew his heart would break if he left here without her.

“So what are you planning to do,” she questioned still arranging her wardrobe and then after a final look sat at the dressing table.

“I don’t know, I just don’t know, things will straighten themselves out, they always have before,” he allowed himself a little optimism.

“Jack, Jack,” Annes excited voice took him away from his depression.

“What’s wrong darling,” he answered.

“Fancy going to Nigeria,” Anne remarked unexplainably.

“Nigeria are you mad,” he replied to her statement.

“I wish oh I wish it’s true,” she continued her voice almost pleading.

“What’s going on,” Jack said stepping over to Anne who sat at the dressing table in front of the laptop.

“Listen Jack promise you wont get angry with me,” Anne spoke looking sheepishly into his eyes.

“Why?” was his response?

Anne made her confession of placing the digital photographs of Jacks crystal statuette upon the museums website hoping that it may gain some attention and therefore it’s mystery may be solved.

“You promised you would keep my find to yourself,” Jack began to speak but was cut short.

“I’ve had an E mail from Klaus Schillerman a historian working on the Niger Delta. He wants us to contact him as he has found the same pictographic text on a site he’s excavating. Isn’t it marvellous our first lead,” Anne could not contain her excitement.

“Marvellous,” Jack replied without any joviality as his mind was consumed with his business matters back home.

“What will we tell Henry, his heart is set on staying here and getting permission to excavate that tomb,” Anne remarked as a cold shiver went through her as she referred to that dark and evil place.

“Sod Henry he can do what he likes, he hasn’t exactly been very forthcoming with his help so far,” Jack knew his statement to be harsh and expected a rebuttal from Anne for his comment.

“Henry is an expert and I assume he’s a little embarrassed as he didn’t recognise the inscriptions don’t be too hard on his pride Jack,” was all Anne said on the subject before continuing. “Imagine we might be on the threshold of some great discovery; if we can decipher this code just think what secrets it might hold especially if there’s more of this text as Schillerman is implying. When the Rosetta stone had been deciphered by Champolion it unlocked the key to the language of the Pharaohs want to go Jack. Even if we find nothing I don’t want to pass up that chance. This is my work and that’s why I chose this profession for that once chance of making a historical discovery,” Anne’s passion for her vocation and the excitement of the find that had brought them together had spilled into an emotional crusade of her life’s ambition.

“Calm down woman, Okay well go. I also want to find out more but a few lines of text in Nigeria isn’t really a breakthrough, as we can’t make heads or tails from it. I’m not saying we shouldn’t go I’m just preparing you for the worst as a fruitless tree might be all that we’ll find,” Jack’s conscience racked between the reality of his own profession and the fantasies of pursuing this venture further.

“I know that and have considered it. I’m prepared for the worse but are you Jack do you still believe in finding out your crystals origins,” Anne picked up the statuette lying at the side of the laptop. “The beauty and power bestowed in this artefact springs out many questions do you still want

them questions to be answered,” she spoke out as his own eyes marvelled on the delicately carved figurine.

The great Niles impression hung still like a limped pond with the whiteness of the dark heavens materialising upon its flat surface. Also in the mirrors gleam loomed the giant shadows of the hills from the Valley of the Kings where the immortals had tried to lay undisturbed and where the last rays of sunlight had departed behind their screen. The large sails of the feluccas were folded around the mast as they moored by the side of the square silhouettes of the cruise liners docked alongside the quays of the major hotels as they restocked whilst their pedestrian cargo spent a night on solid ground. The moon held full its white glowing orb filtering a surreal aura in the midst of the clear-cut stars. Scented aromas of fruit palms, acacia trees and the taint of the hotel kitchens furnace blended into the spicy aromatic air.

They held each other close inspired by passion at the romantic emotions of witnessing the ancient and modern glories shadowed by the everlasting sky. They were alone here on the lawn of the hotel garden with the Nile in their wake and they lay on the soft grass beholding the sights and enjoying the tranquillity of this moment.

“There are so many stars out there,” Jack remarked dreamily staring above into the threshold of the universe.

“You don’t get to see them this clearly back home with light pollution and the horrible cloudy weather we have to endure,” Anne added metaphorically.

“Yes I enjoyed the night sky when I was aboard the yacht at Cape Verde it gives you that insecure and phenomenal sense of how big it is out there and how small we are down here,” Philosophically put Jack hugged Anne closer towards him.

“You know that constellation above is Orion’s belt,” Anne made it out with her finger the belt and image of the three star formation.

“No I didn’t,” Jack, admitted his ignorance of astronomy.

“In Ancient times that constellation would have been to our south and they associated those stars with their God Osiris,” Anne well versed in Egyptology lectured Jack and intrigued his ignorance.

“They were pretty observant in their world,” he commented showing his interest.

“That bright star below the belt,” Anne fingered the air again locking on to her target.” Is Sirius which they recognised as Isis there God of fertility and those two stars are the Hyades which they associated with Seth there Demon God,” Anne continued painting a picture of the stars in ancient times and marking out the visible zodiac configurations.

They were two people with one bright soul that shone like the stars they discussed. They were both vulnerable individuals who drew strength from the love that they shared with each other. Jack fumbled in his pocket and drew out the flask of scotch. He poured two tumblers to the brim with golden nectar.

“Cheers,” he announced to the sky as they felt the warm liquor in their mouths was as warm as the love in their hearts.

Aniba capitol of Nubia and gateway to the unknown, beyond lay the mystical Land of Kush and to the west the impassable barren desert inhabited only by the nomadic Bedouin and the San people who came from mysterious lands afar. The settlement of Aniba acted as a trading post where rare timbers, spices and slaves were harvested in the south and bartered for gold, silver and weapons from the metal rich Egyptians in the north. The town a mix of shoddy poverty ridden shanty huts where the majority of the population dwelt and the exuberant large sandstone villas in the centre of the settlement owned exclusively by the rich and powerful merchants. In the square courtyard of Aniba an assemblage of lavishly dressed Merchants from near and far had gathered excitedly as another caravan had recently arrived from the land of Kush and they were already awaiting the opening bids as the slave auction was about to begin.

On a raised platform the slave traders-rough unscrupulous men displayed there goods and tried to hearken the offers as a cacophony of noise broke out as rival merchants shouted out there bids in unison as the highly competitive field was unleashed. Slaves were in short supply as there had been no major wars or campaigns for many years to bring back captives and the enforced labour supply in Egypt grew scarce so they fetched a high price. Aniba bustled with interest as fat Merchants grew rich from this most despicable but most lucrative of trades.

A slave girl with coffee coloured skin and small petite breasts struggled as she was dragged upon the podium with great cheers from the crowds. They applauded her tenacity as she would fetch a high price as there was no better sport for a slave owner than breaking in a young filly .A hooded figure watched the slave girl with interest as she remembered her time on the podium and the fat oppressive Attikula having his way with her own flesh. Alynna shuddered involuntarily at the thought and then headed to the rendezvous point. Alynna had previously instructed twelve of her acolytes by smuggling letters from her prison cell to flee here away from Egypt and any retribution before her trial had begun. Alynna had pledged to join them if she still had any control over her life and she knew that life was at stake even if her followers had not. Alynna had entrusted them into the powers of the orb and she realised now its influence would be wearing thin on her disciples and once it had gone they would be damned. Alynna did not fully understand its magical ability however its lethal nature had become well known to her through early experimentation. She pushed her way through the throngs of Merchants on the square and smiled to herself as she recognised a friendly face ahead.

“Hello Attacia, I’m here as I promised,”Alynna faced this high cheek boned woman with a broad smile.

“Ohh great Mistress,”Attacia remarked surprised as her arms wrapped around her“beloved priestess.” We knew you would not fail us, we are once again your humble and devout slaves,”Alynna felt Attacias shoulders tremble as she cried with both joy and relief. Alynna was surrounded by her followers all coming to hug there Mistress and ask for her protection. “Come my dears there’s work to be done,”Alynna announced breaking her bond from them as she knew her safety was not as yet guaranteed.

Ramun and his men entered Aniba later that day and his first port of call was too Tuti Mariangas Palace Villa, the Chief Merchant and uncrowned ruler of Nubia.Entering the glossy white interior that laid cool the air of the hot day and crossing the lawn under the shade of the wide frong palm trees. Seated under a fabric mastaba the fat obese frame of the shaven headed nobleman feasting upon fruits and wine served by his slave girls who had originated from every known region and every racial group. Tuti didn’t stand to honour his guest as had been tradition when there Egyptian Commanders were present but the days of Egypt’s control upon his region

were long gone with the strife of civil war and insurrection that had shrunken the Kingdoms boundaries. Tuti nodded to an empty seat with his eyes as his mouth held silent crammed full of delicacies from his lavish meal. After a long draft upon the pitcher of wine he was finally in a position to converse.

“So my friend what brings you to my land and how can I assist and honour our Great Pharaoh,” he belched in a mocking and demeaning tone.

“It’s a delicate matter of some importance, which I’m not at liberty to elaborate upon,” Ramun had noted the arrogance of this man however Ramun knew him well and under his brash exterior lay the heart of a weasel.

“You are amongst friends, you may speak freely, but I Tuti your friend would not insult you into telling me more than I need to know,” the Merchant’s eyes grew wide as he answered and his arms drew apart with appeal on every mention of the word-friend.

“It concerns a woman,” Ramun revealed with a hint of embarrassment caught by the observant nature of the Merchant as the Egyptian had averted his gaze.

“Go on tell me more my friend you have my wholehearted interest,” the Nubian laughed out loudly as women were his major hobby and he collected them callously. He knew how they could consume a man’s soul and in Ramun he had seen a soul already lost.

“I’m looking for a woman,” the soldier regained his dignity staring the Merchant in the face and concentrating upon his duty. “Her hair is the colour of the sun and her eyes blue as the sea, although she may have disguised herself here. My problem is that she has either just recently passed through your town or will do so very soon. I know you have eyes and ears everywhere that is why you are the most successful and affluent Merchant and I need you to help me with my dilemma,” Ramun gave his report as if narrating his orders to a high ranking general.

“One woman,” Tuti mused, “one woman in such a large town is not such an easy task my friend,” the Merchant teased stroking his chin and shaking his head with doubt.

“I know nothing or no one goes in or out of Aniba without you knowing your spies are everywhere,” Ramun’s voice raised and Tuti smiled seeing his unrest.

“My friend you know me too well but sometimes I make mistakes my eyes are not always open and my ears are not always clear,” Ramun went to interrupt but Tuti held up his arm abruptly as he carried on. “However I may have come across the information you desire already but how with this wealth of knowledge I glean everyday have benefits to me. I have many eyes as you say but many eyes cost me dear so how much is this knowledge worth to thee Commander,” Tuti turned to the table and selected a grape as if it were a pawn upon the chessboard. He peeled it with patient intent as he mused upon his guests reply.

Ramun went into silent brooding thought before he decided it was time for him to move his own piece.

“Pharaohs good will and blessing is not something to be bargained for as my country grows strong once again as you have know doubt heard. Soon the trade routes will be vibrant again and many lucrative trade treaties with Egypt’s marketplaces may be issued. Tuti Pharaoh has a benevolent ear and his friends will be rewarded greatly and yet his enemies may face rack and ruin without such good connections. His protection is not something to be brushed aside and if you are obstructing his will then I would be at liberty to report it,” Ramun opened his cloak and placed the falcon headed gold seal of Pharaoh before him authenticating he was on royal duty. The Commander watched the fat Merchant with interest as his words digested in his mind. A direct threat or insult would only have blazoned Tuti Mariangas overblown sense of worth although subtle phrases soothed well upon his ears and most importantly spelled out the portent of doom in the realms of his own imagination.

“My friend your charm is endless and overbearing and your problem comes readily to my mind,” Tuti smothered his response with a snake like charm of his own.

“Continue,” Ramun suggested now with authority as Tuti popped the fleshy grape into his humongous mouth.

“Not one woman you seek my friend, but thirteen who headed out into the great furnace at midday. They were warned that only death awaits them out there but they would not listen to an old mans wisdom,” the Merchant had turned serious as he knew his information fed a pain within the other mans heart.

“I will make certain that Pharaoh hears of his loyal friend in the south and I thank you for your cooperation and you have my pledge and word of honour upon that, however old friend there is one other matter that Pharaoh would be grateful of you attending to,”

Tuti had drunk himself into a stupor after the Egyptian had left and at dawn the following morning his head rang out with the alcohols after effects. He experienced a thundering sound in his ears and then descried a loud crash as the villas doors burst open.

“Outrageous,” he thought picturing his slave girls treating his house with such ill respect. He managed to gain his balance and headed like a bull into the interior of the house.

Darius had entered Aniba with his cohort of troops spreading havoc and fear amongst the local population. They had ridden hard day and night and their Commander and his priest had stormed directly into the head Merchants villa. His soldiers ransacked the rooms and the crashing of furniture had disturbed the morning’s ambience.

“What is this intrusion of my privacy,” the Merchant announced as he witnessed his possessions in disarray.

“Be silent fool, I come direct on Pharaohs decree and I have reason to believe you may be able to assist me,”Darius had a menacing voice, which held a tone of authority.

“I am your humble servant my Lord and faithful to our Pharoah,”Tuti changed his demanding tune setting eyes upon the soldiers rampaging his property and in mortal fear of his own safety.

“I’m looking for Lord Ramun I believe you know him well and the witch that is under his protection,”Darius blunt and offensive made clear his assignment.

“Many people they come and they go,”Tuti appealed with his hands raised to the heavens.

Darius drew his sword and with a shoulder charge pressed the obese man onto a wall. The blade came to rest upon the Merchants throat and a trickle of blood appeared where the razor edge had touched.

“Don’t take me for a fool,”Darius temper had flared and the pressure upon the sword increased.

“Please effendi don’t kill me, I’m only a humble man. They went south into Kush I swear it to you,” Tuti pleaded and the blade receded its bite slightly.

“When,” the Egyptian questioned almost foaming at the mouth with rage.

“Two days ago effendi please that’s all I know,”

“You have been most helpful,” Darius placed on a false smile upon his angry features as he withdrew his blade.

“Two days,” Khunitep mouthed knowing his own timescale was running out.

A land of lifeless tundra with a horizon that hung in a blurred haze afar into the distance. An explosion in the sky awash with colour that loomed cloudless and opaque which emanated ever reaching and in a complete dominance that laid the earth to a dusty waste. The air oxygen rich and stifling with a dry humidity that replenished the lungs but left an arid mark upon exhalation. She knelt onto the sand and cupped it in her hands feeling the harsh grains running through her fingers as if her life were draining away before her very eyes. Alynna stared into the full expanse of the golden desert and pondered if the rest of the world beyond her known realm was just a desolate plain as what now lay before them. She had lead her followers into the abyss, into this unforgiving inferno knowing none would dare pursue them into this hell upon the earth. Twenty days of unrelenting progress on tortured feet that blistered upon the scorched sand. Their water supply was drawing thin as they each developed an avaricious thirst and their pack animals drooled emaciated and exhausted with the hard arduous trek. The donkeys had been acquired cheaply however the price mirrored their poor condition and old age as Alynna knew they would not see out the end of this journey.

“How much longer Manta Mari must we endure this,” Attacia spoke her mind as her red bloated features and tormented limbs dictated her words for her,

“Have faith in me, follow in my steps without complaint or question and the answers you seek will be rewarded by your faith and virtue,” Alynna gave her back the gift of her wisdom, which her young admirer took to her bosom with renewed faith.

As the incinerator of the earth disappeared from sight and the cooling night air drifted across the sand lifting the heat of the day. The only light evolved from the voluminous mass of the moon and the bright specks of the many stars. Alynna knew the constellations well and to her south she could make out the God Osiris and below him upon the rim of the horizon his wife Isis. To the North Seth glared down at her and Alynna had calculated by keeping Seth to her right and Osiris to her left the land of the Horus Kings was being left far behind. Alynna had a sudden premonition and became instantly alert as she turned to the heavens to curse Isis.

“Harlot of the night and fornicator who gave life to your bastard son the Falcon headed one, you and your brethren will never stop me for Seth has breathed deep into my soul and his phalanx has impaled me with the gifts of darkness. You go and pray to your Benben stone the iron rocks that crown your pyramids but within me is the power of the phoenix that wrought that stone to earth,” Alynna scolded the Egyptian Gods she had once sworn to protect and the meteorite stone that was hallowed and revered at Helipolis that had been the cult symbol of the Priesthood and the foundation stone of their religious beliefs.

“Soldiers,” the cry came and under the pallor of the silvery moonlight the party turned to spy the shadowy figures that were drawing closer and their hearts overflowed with awe at the prospect of being captured now. “Make camp and we shall rest,” Alynna called out which bemused her listeners ears however not one questioned her authority even though under their breaths considered her order a fallacy and they contemplated their doom.

Ramun and his men had followed their path and the dust tracks had made it easy like chasing a paper trail. They noticed the firelights upon the rise of the dune and they knew they had caught their prey. They entered the campsite like black spectres with the moon at their backs and they had total surprise as the women were huddled around the flames of the campfire seemingly unperturbed by their abrupt arrival. Ramun glared at each woman’s features in the darkness as the firelight licked its luminance upon them. She wasn’t there he concluded with a hidden rage and realised they may have pursued a false trail for all these long days. Then like an apparition she materialized climbing up the slope of the dune into the campsite. Her white garment appeared yellowed in the artificial light and

the fires made her spectre shimmer with radiance. Her blonde hair bleached pure by the sun hung down her shoulders and the ends folded inwards under the neck like serpents tails. Her eyes profound and penetrating she held her audience at bay with total mesmerization.

“Puppet of Pharaoh why do you seek me out here in the wilderness beyond the claws of your kingdoms might,” her voice held an echoing drone which made her presence eerie and remote.

“Alynnna I have not come here under anyone’s decree only my own desire to set my eyes upon you again,” Ramun had become completely and utterly lost in a web of his emotions and his passion poured as he knelt before her vision.

“To be with me truly you will have to be initiated into our ways,” she said offering forward the orb for him to touch.

“I would do anything you ask of me my Lady,” Ramun responded bowing his head in obedience and his two soldiers dropped to their knees in his wake embroiled as much as he by her mystic overpowering authority.

“You must know this, that if you take hold of the scared one you will die a thousand deaths before you are reborn and you will worship me without the knowledge of your own will. In all you will become my humble and willing slaves,” Alynnna gave them warning of what they were about to commit themselves to, as a small part of her felt some remorse although her wisdom fell upon smothered ears and closed eyes to anything but her enchanting beauty.

Ramun took hold of the sacred one in both his rugged hands and the orb glowed in a blue luminescence. He passed it on to his men with trembling arms as they also illuminated the orb as it drained away their very soul.

“Welcome to my world,” Alynnna announced as Ramun began to shake violently and went into a fit of convulsions upon the sand. His men followed as they shook and contorted with their muscles thrashing out uncontrollably. After a few moments Ramun went limp and his men collapsed by his side as they were taken by a sleep filled coma.

The cloud of dust could be discerned for miles around and the thundering clatter of the chariots carried upon the wind many moments before they actually came into view. Ten nights had passed since their departure and their hectic pace generated the overall anxious mood of their leader. As they galloped into the town square which lay empty at this unearthly hour

as the bazaars and slave market stood like ghosts waiting to come to life with the dawning of the day. The horses saturated with white stains of perspiration and bellows of steam emanating from their wide nostrils.

Darius dismounted his carriage before it had halted such was his anger and with a deadly rapt made off in the direction of the head Merchants villa. Passing by the sweet scented acacia groves that lined the courtyard and into the depths of the aromatic flower garden. His sandaled foot smashed into the timber door and the securing copper latch buckled in reverberation. He pounded the door again and the metal fixing went flying off the frame as the portal breached open.

“TTTuuuuuuutttttiiii,”Darius screamed in an animal drawl that sounded as if his mind was upon the brink of madness.

An obese naked body came scurrying out from a doorway. He stopped dead as he spotted the Egyptian and spread his wide frame over the portal to shelter the two naked Nubian slave girls who had been entertaining him. Their young shallow faces were wrought with terror and they clutched the mould of their breasts to guard their modesty.

“What is this outrage,”Tuti enquired through the clattering of nervous teeth.

“You lying suckling pig,”Darius raged kicking over a table in his wake and an explosion of fruit was strewn around the room. He pushed Tuti in the chest with a balled fist and his huge bulk toppled backwards collapsing upon a cedar wooded ornate stool, which broke into smithereens by the impact. Blood poured from his splintered backside and the slave girls screamed with the violent outburst.

Darius drew his sword from its gold encrusted sheaf and the slave girls stepped backwards involuntarily urinating through fear. The water trickled down their legs and formed a still pool on the floor.

“You told me they had travelled south into Kush you lying dog,”Darius fumed resting the point of steel upon his breastbone and prodding into the flesh.” I will ask you once again which way did they travel,”

“Effendi, effendi please do not kill me, I told you only what I had been told myself,”Tuti lied knowing it was his only strategy as he lay hapless upon the floor.

“Your lies sprout up like poisoness vines, do you really take me for a fool you fat pig. We met a caravan on the road to Kush and one of the

Merchants told me something that should interest you. He told me he had seen Ramun visiting your house would you like to continue for me or would you have me skewer you like the fat ox you are,"Darius knew he had been deceived although to what end he had yet to find out.

"Effendi, effendi it was Captain Ramun he told me to do this, I swear it to you,"Tuti now pleaded for his salvation.

"Tell me more,"Darius encouraged with a prod of his sword.

"He threatened me effendi, he said he would take my life,"Tuti began but Darius pressed on the sword to encourage him to change tract from his grovelling." He told me to send any of Pharaohs troops south whilst he trailed the woman west,"Tuti divulged all he knew.

"Ramun is an honourable man who would do no such thing. I should kill you now like the dog you are for suggesting this,"Darius raised the blade and the fat Merchant flinched expecting the death blow.

"No wait," called out Khunitep who had watched the proceedings from the doorway of the villa.

The sword hung ominously in the air and Tuti glared at the priest with desperation as his last vestige of hope.

"What is this priest , have you not the stomach for a mans work. If not be gone and let justice and honour be upheld,"Darius flared at Khunitep at being interrupted and the vengeance for wasting those ten valuable days were going to paid for in blood.

"I have not come to question justice but what this man says may well be the truth,"Khuniteps anger had also been unflinching with the electric mood of there pursuit." Answer me this, Ramun should have returned once he had delivered her here as his task had been completed. Why is his galley still moored at the cataracts, why have we not crossed his path and why is he not here," the High Priest spelled out his argument and his anger subsided with the torrent of words.

"Star worshipper you do not make accusations against a brave honourable man without good grounds not heresay. If you are wrong I will personally cut out your tongue so you may never again speak ill of your noble masters,"Darius had a serious intent within his answer but he realised all was not well with what the Merchant had confessed.

"Effendi I speak the truth I swear,"Tuti protested getting onto his knees hoping the priest's wisdom would lighten the soldier's heart.

“Which way did you say they went,” Darius asked matter of factly.
 “Into the great desert effendi. I tried to warn them,” the Merchant frowned highlighting his concerns.

Darius brought down the sword without any warning and the obese man held up his arm in defence. The blade hacked through the wrist as his fingers twitched from the severed hand upon the ground. The sword fell again and the Merchant's other arm was severed below the shoulder. Tuti witnessed his limb land with a dull thud and stared dumbstruck in macabre horror. His senses stunned by shock as blood spurted from the two gaping wound holes. The Nubian slave girls both fainted with excrement adding to the puddles beneath them. Khunitep had turned his back upon the carnage and he heard the cracking snap of the final blow, which severed the spinal cord with a sucking retort. The decapitated head landed at his feet amongst the spilt oranges and grapefruit. He could still envisage the pleading expression frozen in his limped eyes upon his death mask. He shuddered with contempt at this atrocity and he surmised that this anger would languish within the executioner's own heart everlastingly.

A Harsh buzzing retort rang out from the metal detector as the three men in black suits sauntered through the Isis Hotels main entrance. The security Officer stood to challenge them however the white shirt of the Tourist Police Officer at the door waved him off casually with a gesture of his hand. The security officer slunk back into his chair behind the green baize-searching desk. The most important looking of the three black suits approached the reception desk and the florescent lighting made his sweat soaked receding head shine in vitality. The red-coated reception clerk glanced up from his paperwork and sensing menace by the three men who had their eyes masked by shades.

“How can I help you,” he began but was abruptly silenced as a muscular arm gripped the loose material hanging at the neck of his shirt and another flashed a Polaroid picture under the receptionists nose.

“What room,” the bald man asked with a stern authority.

“Four five nine,” he managed to blurt out as a choking sensation brought clarity of judgement to his mind as the guests number suddenly came to him.

The man in the white suit cradling the silver topped cane watched with interest from the foyer bar as the three black suits entered the lift. The thud upon the door must have disturbed the guests on all three floors and made Jack jump bolt upright in bed.

“Who the hell is that,” he cursed more to himself, as the thundering had not yet abated.

“Jack be careful,” Anne mentioned as he pulled his trousers on before answering the door.

“What is it,” Jack called from the portal with fear enveloping and a tightening sensation flushing through his guts.

“Open the door Mister Quinn this is the police we need to speak to you urgently,” the voice held a serious but gentle tone within one breath.

Jack fumbled with the lock as his nervous grip struggled to turn the catch but as it rotated open, the door was forced inwards as the lock released. Jack's bodyweight flung backwards crashing onto the floor as the three-burley officials entered the room.

“What the hell are you playing at,” Jack shouted as fear lined adrenaline coursed through his veins. His temples pulsated and the gut ache intensified as the three dark shadows loomed above him.

“Mister Quinn my name is Rasheed Mohamed I am the Minister of Antiquities and your name has been brought to light in tampering with my countries heritage,” the bald headed Minister with a corpulent physique was framed by two muscular bodyguards of the security services.

“What nonsense is this,” the accused instantly retorted the allegations.

“This nonsense Mister Quinn is very serious,” The Minister said as he began unfolding a newspaper to reveal upon it's cover a golden statuette of a woman in a supine pose that seemed to withhold some secret erotic message.

“I've never seen this before,” Jack added as his eyes followed the sweeping curves that still held his attention as he studied the photograph carefully. The headlines were in Arabic but he realised it was on the front page and the important news of the day.

The Minister invited Jack to stand with a signal of his hand and he sat himself upon the foot of the bed with Anne.

“Listen what's this all about,” Anne joined in covering her naked breasts with the quilt cover.

“Miss Armitage we apologise for the intrusion nice to meet you,” the Minister responded in a polite tone before returning to his more purposeful demeanour.

“This feature in the National Party News is of great concern to my country, ever since the Pharaohs have laid down to sleep people have stolen their treasures and you Europeans have a lot to answer for the ransacking of Egypt’s glory. This statuette,” he pointed again to the image on the news print, “is of great age and found its way upon the black market. We’re trying to determine who has it and more importantly where this treasure is being hidden. We want to find it before another artefact leaves our borders and is stolen from heritage forever. My agent,” as the Minister spoke one of the bodyguards removed his shades and smiled as Jack recognised him immediately.

“My agent lost track of this artefact’s trail and it has already led to the arrest of one unscrupulous street trader where we acquired this photograph. I believe you have had some dealings with a certain shepherd boy from the Wadi El Nil he has been appropriated as the finder of this relic at the tomb you and your friends travelled to illegally without permission or permit,” The Minister paused but Jack’s attention had focused on the other agent and the bitter taste of betrayal. Mickey the taxi driver a government spy he couldn’t believe he had been duped so easily. “Yes we know Refaat,” Anne acknowledged knowing what was coming next.

“Well then my agent has already confirmed how you made your way illegally to the Wadi and whilst there how you entered an unauthorised tomb carrying out archaeological work without grants or licenses against the express authority of my Department,” The Minister’s voice had raised but Jack couldn’t hold in his own anger welling up inside.

“Now listen here, we found that tomb by chance and we took nothing from it. So don’t think you can come bombasting in here with your threats. We have rights and I’m damn sure your breaking everyone of them,” he fumed gaining pleasure as the Minister floundered back a little with a fresh swell of perspiration covering his olive skinned features.

“Mister Quinn, Mister Quinn” the Minister repeated as Jack let vent his frustration.

It was Anne who noticed the two Security Officers fingering their holstered side arms under their jackets and she butted in tactfully to restore order before things got out of control.

“Hang on, hang on,” she yelled until silence and calm filled the frosty atmosphere between the two men,” You accuse us,” she began speaking calmly but Jack highly strung cut her short.

“You accuse us,” he added raising his voice again.

“Shut up Jack,” she blasted him and his lips stilled taken aback by the unexpected attack. He took the pose of a naughty schoolboy with her but he remained silent at her request even though it was killing him within.

“You accuse us Mister Mohamed of robbing your tombs. Firstly we took nothing from the tomb we discovered and secondly you would have known nothing of the tombs existence if it weren’t for your spies and our help. I protect peoples heritage that is my job I cannot answer for others but we are innocent of stealing your treasures,” Anne gave her sensible assessment of their situation.

“Miss Armitage you give your opinions with charm,” the Minister responded with a glaring glance at Jack laying heavy a hint of sarcasm in his last statement.” So this mystery remains unsolved but I do not want a diplomatic incident over this matter involving your embassy, which would do none of us any good. I have revoked your visas and your stay in my country is no longer welcome. I have with me your deportation papers and we expect you out of Egypt within two days. You are restricted to Luxor until Monday and by then you will be gone. Forgive but My Men will have to search your room,” the Minister gave his own opinion of how to solve the problem.

“This is preposterous,” Jack insisted as the two bodyguards started pulling the drawers from the dresser.

“Maybe it seems preposterous to you Mister Quinn but the other alternative is less to your liking remaining here in our jail until we can deport you,” the Minister warned and Jack nodded his head in resignation.

“Minister look here,” one of the guards said clutching the crystal figurine.

“What have we here,” the Minister gloated.

“That’s the property of the Manchester Museum and we have the paperwork to prove it,” Anne challenged as Jack shook his head in disbelief as it reminded him of her deceit of robbing his possession.

“Let me see,” the Minister held out his hand unexpectedly. Anne fumbled in her handbag on the bedside table and produced a sheaf of papers.

“Its registered property of the Manchester museum and the digital photographs dated attain to its authenticity,” she informed handing over the documents.

“Yes this is in order,” the Minister answered disappointedly as his men placed the statuette back in the drawer.” Very beautiful piece not good keep things like this in your room,” he added handing her back the figurine

“You never told me you had the registration documents with you,” Jack whispered showing Anne his annoyance,

“I’m a heritage protector Jack things belong in their rightful places for all of us to share,” she replied.

“You know Lady if I didn’t love you so much I would consider you a very untrustworthy person to know,” he said smiling as she knew he had forgiven her already for stealing his treasure.

“Remember two days and you go,” the Minister said as the search was completed.

“We got you,” Jack acknowledged,” Thanks for your warm hospitality,” he couldn’t help adding.

“Next time my friend you should hire a camel, taxi drivers are not to be trusted,” Mickey said as he closed the hotel room door and Jack heard laughing voices from there wake.

“Its not all fun is it, this archaeological business I have discovered,” Jack whined hugging her closer.

Lips dried and cracked with sores by the fury of the suns ever consuming heat with their faces scorched and bloated like lobsters by the intensity of the deserts arid caress. Bodies swaying with exhaustion wracked by fatigue as they blundered onwards passed the thresholds of pain where the only sense of warmth was in the nothingness of their delirium. The party were upon the brink of death but mutiny or madness never entered their minds as they followed in the footsteps of the Manta Mari westward compelled to tag along in her strides.

The last of the donkeys crashed onto its hind legs and gave out a last rasping cry before it buckled completely and lay to be ravaged of flesh in the sands of time. Nobody gave the animal a second glance to its plight they were all beyond reason with one aim to keep moving under the torturing umbrella of the sky. Then it came scurrying at the top of a dune. Its sharp protruding ears and stealthy streamline body gliding effortlessly in its home terrain. They stared upon it with despondent eyes as they envied the litheness of the desert jackal and their lips were too sore to be parted to curse at it and scare the scavenger away. Minds numbed by sunstroke to form any reason as it perched its head towards them and gave them a cursory stare. Then as if taunting them to chase it away it sauntered a little ahead of their course with its bushy tail wagging energetically. Blindly they proceeded in the canine's wake not knowing or caring where it might lead them.

Alynnna changed tract and veered west again onto their preordained route however the jackal ran to her front growling profusely and jumping with its front paws in the air. Alynnna's exhausted mind as if hypnotised circled back to follow the jackal's lead. Anubis the jackal headed god of the cemetery and mummification pumped in that dog's evil heart Ramun pondered as if the jackal was reaping more corpses for his spirit master.

They glared upon the blurry horizon of white sand as tiny shadowy fingers grew under the mass of burning light. The dark fingers broadened and changed from grey to green and they all spellbound witnessing the growth of lush life within the desolation of the desert. They each smiled insanely with renewed hope in their hearts as their lips bled with dried wounds opening from waterless mouths that pouted out for sustenance. Ramun was still not convinced seeing the Jackal and the image of paradise beyond he knew Anubis had them in his grasp. The Jackal went into a sudden run and they quickened their pace also as if they were apart of his pack. The Jackal began to sprint and they copied with tired limbs burning with the effort as new energy sprouted, as the palm trees grew taller and the digit formation of the vegetation upon the horizon had come to life with images of lush groves, which covered the circumference of the now visible deep blue lake.

They let their saviour the Jackal have the honour of drinking first as they watched his long tongue lapping up the cool water. His fur lined throat

bobbed up and down as he swallowed with the thirsty souls languishing in untold relish. Then they all drank diving their roasting heads into the cool water and as their mouths touched the icy liquid a burning sensation ripped through their own throats.

“Just sip,” Ramun advised knowing well aware of the dangers they could inflict upon swelling up tortured mouths.

They sipped and rinsed until they could stand the pain no longer.

“Manta Mari forgive me for my impertinence,” Attacia said apologising for her uncertainty during the trek.

“Child there is no need to forgive me, for you are my children and I am your mother to nurse you and suckle you. I only ask for your obedience and faith in the Gods that protect and watch over us as they have done this day.” Alynna responded focusing upon the jackal that lay in the shade resting quietly.

THE THUNDER IN THE DARKNESS

They had filled the animal skins with water and picked out fruits from the forest. Alynna had decided on heading south into the unknown leaving the boundary of death they had just crossed behind them. They wandered over semi arid regions across pasture and through wooded glades. Then they came upon another frontier a forest of trees stretching as far as the eye could see. Upon the plains before the jungle of foliage grazed animals thousands and thousands of antelope, horses with strange black stripes and herds of mighty elephant. Docile wildebeests grazed unperturbed by the intruders presence in their midst as they had not yet learnt to fear mankind. Ramun and his two men unslung their bows and crept forward with the hunger in their bellies making their hunters blood run hot. They kept their backs to the austral wind so the animals wouldn't catch their spur. They fired three arrows simultaneously and a an antelope yelped out as he felt the metal barbs pierce it's hide. Dark bloodstains appeared on its russet coat and its cries of anguish had made the herd begin to fret as they all stood nervously acute to this sudden hidden danger. Soon the plains were awash with creatures stampeding away in collected panic as great dust clouds rose up to the heavens and a thundering retort made the earth shudder. Ramun exhilarated by the awesome spectacle soon came to his own senses chasing the injured antelope and it had only gone a short distance before it buckled with the strain of it's injuries and the blood loss sapping away it's strength. Ramun reached the stricken beasts kicking its legs out in agony on the veld and culled it quickly with his blade.

The campfires burned vibrantly and the smell of roasting meat brought cheers to their hungry hearts. They ate ravenously and the texture of the red meat after so much fruit and berries consumed the whole in their stomachs that the forest pickings had not. They lay with the deep soft grass at their feet and it gave them an opportunity to be thankful. The women sang hymns to the Manta Mari and presented her with wild flowers as she sat with Ramun listening blissfully to their sweet intonations.

“This is the Land where my Gods will be praised and worshipped to with huge temples and lavish palaces that will stand for all eternity,” Alynna said whispering her thoughts, as the night sky seemed so hypnotic and graceful in this new land.

“Egypt grows mighty once again Alynna and I fear that one day they will come here,” Ramun spoke out his concerns realising he now was a traitor and probably an outcast to his own kind.

“Yes I have pondered upon that as well, that is why we are heading further south through that impassable jungle and beyond there we will find a promised land,” Alynna had already decided their path and Ramun looking upon the dark oppressive tree line knew that it would be no easy journey that lay ahead.

A strange foreboding had gripped Alynna as they entered under the canopy of the far-reaching forest. She had spent her adolescence in a half gloom world of her surreal upbringing and within that dark cavern she had learnt to control her fear amid the blackness that had harnessed in her soul. However this leaf covered cavern had walls that breathed life as branches bristled noisily upon the humid breeze. She caught the cacophony of a monkeys haunting howl above the sweet call of a singing lark and then the heavy scuttle of branches as something more sinister was masquerading in its depth. She catch a glimpse of them again in the shadows an abrupt glare of those of the cold yellow eyes coming from the darkness. Eyes that seemed possessed bestowed with abhorrent evil that reflected within its maddened gaze.

Ramun increased his pace casually until his strides matched with Manta Mari to walk near her side.

“Were not alone here Mistress,” he warned under a shallow breath with his focus switching to both flanks with consternation.

“Don’t be so rash Ramun, whoever they be is of no concern as yet. Let them watch for we may need allies in this land, but first they will need to overcome there fear of ourselves,” Alynna responded with confidence keeping her eyes focusing ahead and not giving those yellow eyes the satisfaction of seeing her own dread.

Two huge tree trunks stretched into the heavens, giant pillars with their broad leaf crowns umbrellowing out like giant mushrooms above the canopy. The forest path passed through the timber sentinels and stood in

there midst between this gateway a creature blocked the way onwards. It's skin ash white painted with clay hanging in folds depicting it's great age, it's hair peppercorn coloured and arranged in disorderly locks. The flat face with broad bridgeless nose alongside the high unnatural cheekbones above the wide prominent mouth. It held sway as if it were a ghoul of the underworld materializing with it's yellow eyes that pierced through any mortal soul. The white painted face displayed a grotesque mask and it's mouth full of rotten teeth opened as it yelled out the most abysmal drowl. Animal or man, the question burned in Alynna's mind as she stepped cautiously forward towards the demon as more of his kindred began appearing from the depths of the forest.

An evergreen canopy of trees flitted by beneath the undercarriage of the Cesna light aircraft as she began to lower her engine speed in preparation to land. The dirt strip loomed up rapidly as the planes engines throttled into reverse and the aircraft buffeted in midair with the crosswind. The wheels bounced true and hard bumping the passengers before the Cesna settled into a steady drive upon terra firma. "That was most certainly the worst ride of my life," Jack remarked as his back and legs ached crammed into the Perspex cabin after experiencing every bellow of turbulence and bout of high wind.

Henry gazed out of the porthole glancing the red earth and the wild forestation of that which is Africa. This untamed continent that both whites and blacks had fought over for its possession with a long history of conflict at it's tumultuous best-a frontier always upon the precipice of change. Always fired by the spirit of true adventurer.

A white safari jeep waited at the edge of the runway come crop field and the Cesna halted a few yards from the vehicle. A thin willowy man brandishing a wiry moustache and shoulder length mousy hair strolled out into the red dust clouds of the airplanes wake to greet them. They each squeezed through the aperture and were relieved to place their feet upon solid ground.

"Gut afternoon mein friends," the man spoke out in a strong accent as they had climbed out of the Cesna door.

"Klaus," Anne acknowledged with anticipation at the short sleeve shirted man donning khaki knee length shorts a picture postcard of past colonist

supremacy she thought. His blonde hair and lithe physique also would of made a good advertising campaign for a German 1940s propaganda poster.

“Ja Herr Schillerman at your service fraulain.is this meinheir Armitage,”the German questioned to the man by her side.

“No I’m Jack-Jack Quinn pleased to meet you,” he said offering his hand.

“Very pleased to meet you groovy guy,”Schillerman replied shaking his hand in a strong grip.

“And this is Henry,” Jack introduced their final member.

“Henry Armitage,”the archaeologist responded.

“Ah you man and wife,” the German enquired.

“No brother and sister,” Anne quickly interjected grabbing Jacks arm to confirm her allegiance.

“So my good fellow are we going to stand here all day chitter chattering or are we going to get on with doing some professional research,” Henry intervened in his usual impertinent manner.

Kontagora lay in the northwestern region of Nigeria and this ancient settlement that had been founded by the Bedouin settlers and Arab traders who still left their mark with mud brick mosques dating back to the 12th century. The local Yoruba tribes had not took to the Muslim religion that the distant invaders had brought with them. When the Arabs had left the Kontagora Mosques had laid hidden in the depths of the jungle until the pioneers and elephant hunters of the 18th century the new invaders had rediscovered them enigmas from a lost forgotten time. Most of the Kontagora mosques had been studiously dated using carbon dating technology and Archaeological time frame principles. The Arab prophet the great Usherman had been buried in these once flourishing structures a noted signal of how powerful these religious centres were in their heyday.

Kontagora had been long forgotten again until Schillerman had gained funding from the Munich academy to begin new excavations and restore the adobe brick foundations to some of the more dilapidated ruins. It was whilst carrying out these repairs he had come across his fruitful discovery. Digging in the hard clay to obtain material for replacing the brick foundations with authentic materials he made clay pits to provide his needs. Whilst digging out one of these such pits the whole ground had collapsed and beneath he found to his delight and surprises a warren of

caves. After clearing the area further he found it be an earlier Nok settlement and discovered potsherds and bone fragments to confirm the era. The Nok era spanned back to the earliest prehistoric times of Africa and within this settlement he also unearthed structures of stone and a strange polished plinth.

The granite plinth had been carefully smoothed and engraved upon its flat facia were a series of glyphs or signs. Writing in early African culture had been unknown and here lying beside these broken foundations he had found the unthinkable. Going public to gain acclaim with this find could have brought him ridicule with the only corresponding evidence a few potsherds and this strange text. It was only by browsing the internet searching for similar finds he had come across Professor Armitages article on the mystery of the crystal statuette and to his disbelief he could see the same early writing upon this artefact.

Schillerman drove his guests through the dense shrouded jungle roads as the Kontagora ruins were still remote for casual visitation and this helped to keep the tribes of destructive tourism at bay and therefore the mosques were still in a reasonable condition. The mud brick walls were covered in lichen and overrun with foliage. Beyond a courtyard where the pyramid style mosques were in a state of repair with scaffolding up their sides a strange sight to witness in the heart of the jungle. They disembarked the jeep and each of them stared skywards at the towering constructions seeing the funnels shaped building each pointing symbolically towards the heavens. Schillerman led them to a polythene-sheeted area that flapped in the wind where under the timber frame was his workspace.

“Welcome to my camp guys,” he said humbly welcoming them to his abode. Herr Schillerman reminded Jack of some lost hippy abandoned here since the sixties in his own little time warp of forgotten eras.

The Nok ruins were still some way beneath the modern ground level and polythene sheets protected this area from the ravages of the nature. They entered a low roof space going down some clay-hewn steps and they had to duck beneath the timber supports to gain access. Inside the shapes of ancients walls and protruding stone blocks could be seen sticking out of the red earth .The stones were scattered as if a great catastrophe had happened here such as an earthquake or major flood.

“A marvellous find I may say so my dear fellow,” Henry remarked slapping Schillerman on the back a mark of his victory.

“Its here guys what I want you see,” Schillerman stopped before the plinth and shined his torch upon the facia.

“It’s definitely not part of the Usherman era,” Anne noted the aged granite boulder as if it had stood there since the beginning of time.

“No it’s definitely not it has been buried here in the earth for much longer and I have found dating evidence potsherds and bone fragments buried nearby to provide conclusive evidence of these facts,” the German became excited as he exhibited his treasure.

Henry went forward and began scrutinising the neatly engraved inscriptions.

“Hmmm,” he murmured in a knowing fashion but his linguistic prowess was still bemused by this strange language.

Anne admired it with wide-eyed fascination and she knelt in the confines of the dig and stroked the smooth stone lovingly with her hand.

“It feels so cold,” she remarked as her delicate palm caressed trying to spread warmth to it’s chilled soul.

“Here let me,” Henry intoned placing his huge hand flat upon the polished surface. A force unexpectedly ripped into his body throwing him back like an electric charge. The bulbs in the timber-framed dugout exploded and the glass rained downed in a fine powder. Henry went into a state of epilepsy as he convulsed in a spasmodic fit and his eyes rolled to the back of his sockets.

“Quick make sure he doesn’t swallow his tongue,” Schillerman suggested having seen similar maladies of this type before.

“Protect his head,” he added.

“Here use this,” Jack said and offered his rolled up jacket.

Schillerman ran outside and made his way to the radio shack.

“Hello Abuja central this is site fourteen come in over,” he spoke into the mouthpiece.

“Hello site fourteen what is your licence and permit number over,” a voice came into the headset requesting identification.

“Abuja central this is an emergency. I repeat emergency. I need air ambulance at my locality to pick up figures one casualty over,” Schillerman got his message across.

“Hello site fourteen your message is understood, but I still need permit number to authenticate over,” the voice on the headset was determined regulations would be adhered to.

“The number is Alpha five four zero one you got that over,” the German made known by his tone his irritancy of regularities.

“Okay site fourteen air ambulance requested ETA 1400 hours, well standby for any further assistance you may need control over,”

“Danka site fourteen out,”

Darius had trailed his quarry to the borders of Kush and then back to Nubia before he had realised he had been deceived and that she had flown across the desert. He had ordered the chariots broken, as they would ride horseback into the soul-destroying heat of the Sahara. After many days only four of the fifty mounts still survived as Darius had run them to their deaths. His men were becoming mutinous seeing the folly of this expedition. To save face and maybe a murderous revolt he had sent his soldiers back to Nubia except two of his most trusted lieutenants Djedhor a minor member of the Egyptian aristocracy, Panehsy a son of a General from a long family line of military heroes. The High Priest Khunitep who was destined to venture further he had no option. Khunitep had nowhere left to run to even if he had wished to the sun would soon be setting upon his seventieth day and Pharaoh would be laid to rest in his tomb without him. All that waited for him in Egypt was infamy the ultimate shame brought upon him by the priesthood for his absence.

Crossing the deserts expanse with more haste they miraculously picked up fresh tracks with footprints still in the sand and at nightfall they could espy the distant glow of a campfire. They left their horses with the Priest to guard and then the three soldiers made there way using stealth towards the firelight. Using the valleys of the dunes and the uneven landscape to shadow their approach. Darius peered into the camp from the lip of the dune and saw a camel seated with a black shrouded figure sleeping by the warmth of the fire.

“Bedouin,” Darius spat out disappointedly. “Wait here,” he said to the others walking towards the Bedouins camp.

He managed to get within a few feet of the camp before the camel spat and snarled in warning. The Bedouin agile and vigilant alarmed by his startled mount came instantly to his feet with the intrusion.

“Don’t be alarmed old one I wish you no harm,” Darius spoke out making out the Bedouins greying locks and haggard features.

The wizened Bedouin although old and frail was in quite good physical shape for his many years and he could understand the tongue of the Pharaohs well having been taken as their slave in his youth.

“What do you want out here away from your Palaces and your ever vibrant river,” The Bedouin asked uneasily.

“Do not Be unruffled old one I am out here searching for a group of travellers of my own kin and wondered if in your own travels that you had come across them,” the Bedouin had seen the young blonde headed woman and her party pass by two nights ago even though the sight strange and bewildering to his eyes he had kept his distance. These were dangerous times in even the heart of the Sahara. He realised this soldier obviously not alone by his rank was closing down upon there trail.

“They headed towards the south,” he answered pointing towards Sirius hoping to buy them time although he had not known that the Jackal had already changed them onto a southerly course. The Bedouin still carried the scars on his ribs and back from the fury of the Pharaohs whip and he had vowed that he would never send another to that fate.

Darius held his fury building inside as he knew he was getting close but he sensed the hatred in the old mans eyes and he needed to be certain as another wild goose chase out here in the desert would be his last. He signalled to his men who came out of the shadows and he himself edged towards the campfire as if keeping warm. He drew his sword as he neared the Bedouin.

“Old one you have been most helpful although my mission is of the utmost importance so forgive me as I must press you further,” Darius had said coldly as his men ambushed the Bedouin from behind pinning him to the sand.

Djedhor and Panehsy held his frail arms as Darius placed the end of his iron sword into the fire until it glowed red in the hot ashes.

“Open his top,” Darius ordered as his men ripped the black jezebel from his body.

In the eerie light his white scars shone which had marked and disfigured his young body. Darius knew this old Man would not break so easily and perversely he relished the challenge. He took the sword from the fire and carefully examined the fiery red tip of hot metal. He slowly lowered the sword as the Bedouin arced his back instinctively as the fiery tip was placed upon his chest. The Bedouin grimaced with the searing pain but surprisingly no sound passed his lips. Beads of sweat ran down his face and neck and the sword sizzled upon his running perspiration. The smell of burning flesh tainted the night of the desert air before Darius lifted his blade leaving a black charred wound.

“You are strong old one,” Darius remarked in admiration reheating the blade in the embers of the fire.

On the third burn that seared the soft flesh of the torso the old man let out a shuddering agonizing scream and his voice carried across the empty landscape with a haunting ring.

“I dread to think what new madness is pleasing that devil and I beseech you Amun to bring salvation to the originator of those screams and grant him clemency in the halls of Thoth,” Khunitep had spoken calming the startled horses and praying for the soul of the damned.

An hour later the screaming finally ended and Darius had grown weary of the sport having to wait to bring back the Bedouin from unconsciousness all the time. He had his men have him forcibly kneel whilst he decapitated him and the Bedouins blood soaked into the dry arid sand.

“I salute you old one you died well with courage and may in the afterlife you live without shame,” he said sheathing his blade.

They journeyed on into uncharted regions and two days later they reached the great lake of the Jackal upon the border of a new and lush green land. After many days of travelling they rode into a straw hut village hurriedly abandoned with clay pots still boiling upon the stoves. The natives had scattered and hid in the jungle away from these demons that had four legs and stood ten foot high. They had never seen a horse and rider or shinning armour and their superstitions made it furiously irritating for Darius to gain any intelligence from the locals. After weeks of scouring the wilderness Darius first hopes of finding her quickly had dwindled into despair. His men had stayed with him loyally but even they

now were becoming critical and lay question to ever being able to complete their task. Darius made a hard decision and then made his plans known to his three companions so once again they may have some hope still in their hearts.

“We will continue with Pharaohs last wishes and obey his command until the moon is full again in the sky. Then my brothers if we cannot find this witch we will return back to Thebes in shame so be it. All I ask of you over this short span of time is to keep your eyes and ears focused and try to complete our task before the moon blossoms. If we do not succeed you have my word of honour that I will abandon all hope of pursuing her further and go back even though in shame to face the consequences of my failure.” Darius breathed life into their tired souls as they now had a sparkle of hope seeing the Egypt they loved and cherished once again.

They continued the search with a newly found passion as they followed paths deep into the jungle and cut fresh tracks of their own. On the evening prior to the full blossoming of the moon Darius had tried one last path before preparing for the long trek home. Along the trail through the dense interior of the forest they came to a gorge that sank deep into the earth and blocked their progress any further. Clinging to the edge with their sure-footed mounts they followed its run until they discovered a rope bridge, which gave them the means to continue. They dismounted and walked with the horses in single file upon the precarious and unsteady structure. Khunitep stepped onto the timber walkway with a prayer in his heart as he saw the abyss through the gaps in the wooden slats, which seemed to go down forever and ever. The ropes began to sway with strain as they came to the dip of the bridge and he prayed even harder as his legs shook unnaturally with fear. As they reached the halfway mark upon the forty-foot span the ropes creaked and whined worryingly. Darius then noticed the dark shadows moving in the forest upon the other side and then he saw the clay painted figures emerging from the undergrowth and taking post at the bridges securing anchor blocking their way to safety upon the far side.

“Turn back,” Darius ordered but looking to their rear the clay painted shadows were also in the forest to their rear.

“What do you want from us,” Darius pleaded stranded upon this deathly stage.

“Surrender your arms throw them over the side or the ropes will be severed and you’ll fall to your death if you do not comply,” A woman’s voice emanated from the trees at their front.

“It can’t be her. The witch,” Darius cursed under his breath.

“If only Ramun was here,” Khunitep mused silently.

“There’s only one way of being sure it is the Witch, discard your weapons,” Darius ordered dropping his sword over the side.

The swords and daggers were thrown off the bridge into the abyss and then she emerged from out of the darkness ethereal in appearance. Her gold hair glistened in the twilight and her white robes mirrored the waxing of the moon. As Darius and his men stepped off the bridge they were seized by the yellow eyed savages and manhandled into the depths of the jungle.

Gripping the smooth bamboo rods and testing their rigidity Darius soon came to the conclusion that the two foot high and four foot square cage he crouched in was robust enough to prevent his escape. Cowered down like an animal had swelled his rancour and he hoped death would come quickly to restore the honour he still bore within him.

“Master,” a voice called to his left, he turned to see Panehsy in a similar cage to his own. Darius still felt drowsy from some potion the savages had made him drink and the affects of the incapacitating drug had not completely yet worn off. His head numb and his eyes aching with the strain of being awake. Whatever they had given him had made him go into a state of paralysis but now he had regained enough strength to gain some focus upon their situation.

“How are you,” he asked.

“Groggy and uncomfortable I’m afraid,” Panehsy replied with a dash of panache his families line of soldiering blood was still able to find courage in depths of despair.

“Same here can you see anyone else,” Darius enquired.

“Yes Djedhor is beyond me but he’s still out cold,” Panehsy informed his Commander.

A stabbing pain abruptly hit Darius in the side, which made him keel over reacting to the impact. He twisted his neck awkwardly in the cramped cage to discern the mud caked Wild man at the bamboo frame and he also noticed the sharp pointed stave in his hand with a fresh coat of crimson

upon it's point. His hand shot down and he came across a finger hole size wound in his guts bleeding slowly.

"Bastard," he yelled in temper at the flat nosed pygmy.

"Aaaagghh," he screamed again as the stick stabbed into his thigh as his tormenter laughed out at his agony.

Darius temper seethed above the pain although he thought better of expressing his anger with his voice again.

"If I get half the chance ill snap you're scrawny neck you ignorant baboon," he seethed under his breath to quell his displeasure.

The day long and unrelenting lay bare in the intensity of the sun. Darius had never known a thirst quite like the one he was experiencing now. His lips hardened with lost moisture until the first crack of broken skin had gelled upon his mouth. Around midday commotion broke the ambience of the camp as a hunting party returned with an antelope hanging upside down on a pole carried by two of the wild men. Following in the footsteps of the hunting parade a little black girl paced behind them innocently carrying a bunch of yellow flowers she had just picked from the forest. She looked over at Darius and smiled which he tried to return but his lips were too parched. She came over dragging a water skin and dropped it by the cage door and then turned her back and scurried away as if knowing what she had done was wrong.

"Thank you, bless you sweet child," he said placing his hands around the animal skin and taking a draft of water. He managed to get four mouthfuls before the sharp stave pierced his skin and the water carrier was whipped from his hands. Another jab of the stave struck his leg and another wound opened but Darius could withstand that for the drink had been worth the pain.

"Little Dove, Little Dove," Alynna called and the girl with the flowers came running towards her.

"I picked these for you Manta Mari," the girl said handing over the flowers.

"You're a wonderful thing Little Dove and very intelligent you have learned to speak my tongue well and you have shown me how to speak yours," Alynna acknowledged the Childs gifts and how good friends they had become.

The night came and the three captive soldiers were dragged out of their cages as the wild men snarled and spat upon them. Others came from the mud huts to taunt and join in the humiliating of the captives. They had urinated upon the only meal they had been offered which they declined to touch and Darius staring back at these Devils knew that no humanity lay within them. Fires lit up the jungle trail and ahead a circle of fires could only mean a clearing and ahead he descried the screams of Panehsy and he prayed for a quick death to come to him this night.

The blind beggar had demanded an audience with Pharaoh as he wrote his demands upon a papyrus. The eunuch guards had laughed and spat in his face and had removed him from the palace gates numerous times but he still returned with renewed determination. Rameses had heard the raucous abuse from the guards as the beggar returned again.

“What’s all this noise,” he demanded

“This beggar my Lord he will not be told, if we move him from here he sits outside the sacrificial crypt of Amun he has been demanding to see you,” the Eunuch Guard reported the events of the last few nights.

“How amusing lets see what the fool wants,” Ramese ordered intrigued by the madness of someone who sought death so easily.

The beggar was brought before the Pharaoh at the Palace Gates his face had a grotesque peel of scarred skin, his mouth a mere slit where the lips had been removed and his eyes covered by filthy rags.

“What do you want fool,” Rameses questioned a little perturbed by his demeanour.

The beggar cupped his hand to his head forming an ear as his lobes had gone leaving only scabby holes. His hands trembled as he scrawled upon the papyrus. Rameses snatched the parchment from his grip with impatience as soon as the beggar had stopped writing. The fresh ink had the hieroglyph of a name upon it.

“Khunitep,” Ramese said looking at the beggar with disbelief and astonishment. Beneath his name an earlier message had been wrote in which Pharaoh read out.

“You will not hear of me, see me or speak of me no more,” was the message he bore for the Witch

The days and nights in Abuja were laborious as Anne doted over Henry's health worries and Jack becoming overly anxious as he tried over bad communication systems to restore confidence back into his insurance clients back in the UK. He knew his overlong absence was spelling doom although his heart was burning with fire and his fears evaporated when ever he was in Anne's company. They had acquired rooms in the modest Revolution Hotel within easy reach of the hospital as they waited for Henry to recuperate from his relapse. Anne had spent most her days in the antiseptic halls although Jack having a stressful wandering mind with all his troubles had took to strolling through the town to ease his mind. Jack adored browsing through the bazaars, breathing the exotic scented air and found peace in the slow paced lifestyle of the African Continent. It was on one of these strolls when bartering over the price of mangoes with a street trader he caught sight of the man in the white safari suit. He recognised him but couldn't place the reason or purpose for knowing him.

"Hey you," Jack called through the busy market and the white suited man suddenly turned to head off at an erratic pace with his silver topped walking stick by his side.

Jack tried to weave through the crowds but when the first open space came to pursue him the stranger had completely disappeared.

"He must owe me money," Jack conjectured staring down the empty avenues.

At night they had both started drinking heavily to ease both their worldly concerns and then they would make passionate love through the night intoxicated with both liquor and amour. One evening whilst Jack ordered whiskeys at the bar they were glad to acknowledge the presence of a friendly face as Schillerman came into the Hotel Lounge.

"Thank God I've found you, ive been looking for you everywhere," he said as he approached them.

"Want a drink Klaus," Jack welcomed him as the bartender served him, "Ja Perrier bitter," he nodded to the barman.

"So what's all the fuss," Anne asked smiling.

"The hospital eventually told me you were staying here I need to discuss something with you," he said furtively.

They found a quiet cubicle away from the noise of the music and hubbub of the saloon.

“So Klausey what’s all the nudge nudge wink wink for,” Jack asked intrigued but light hearted by events.

“It’s about the stellae and the statuette,” the German paused to sip his water,” you said you found the crystal off Cape Verde is that correct,”

“Yeah that’s about the tall end of it,” Jack replied still bemused.

“Well this will blow your mind you might find it incredible but a colleague of mine over in Peru has found the same glyphs at Manchu Pichu.If that’s true we could be upon the brink of discovering some unknown civilization with a archaic tongue that has breached both sides of the Atlantic,” the German jostled in his chair as he spoke with excitement.

“South America it cant be true,” Anne exclaimed.

“This is becoming something of a global expedition,” Jack said unenthusiastically sipping his whiskey.

“Oh I can’t wait to tell Henry,” Anne beamed with the new revelations.

“Wait there’s more what you doing tomorrow night,”Schillerman had said.

They had been stranded in Abuja now for six days and Henry had stayed unconscious for the first two of them and not one of the doctors could clearly divine the cause of his condition.

“Maybe he’s epileptic or has diabetes and never knew it,” Jack pondered with Anne as they walked along the wards to check upon him again.

“Nonsense Jack they brain scanned him,” she had started to say.

“And did they find one,” he joked unremorsefully.

“Very funny Jack and they have taken blood samples and every other silly routine and he has no history of anything your suggesting,” she had added returning to a more serious mode.

“Maybe it’s shock from the Egypt incident whatever the hell happened there,” he suggested still lost.

“Maybe who knows I just hope he’s going to be all right when I tell him what Klaus told us last night,” Anne stated knowing the overexcited nature of her kin.

Henry was awake when they pulled back the curtain and entered the bed space.

“Sorry to be such a nuisance and all sis,” Henry greeted them ashamed by his illness.

“Your not a nuisance at all,” she coaxed him with.

“So any news from the head shrinkers,” Jack prompted enquiring about his brain scan results.

“Nothing Old Bean, they found nothing,” Henry informed.

“I told you so,” Jack whispered to Anne continuing his private joke in the corridor.

“Anyway sit down both of you I’ve something to confess and I don’t want you thinking I’ve lost my trolley or gone do lalley so sit down and listen to me,” Henry patted the bed inviting them to be seated.

“It’s about that stone stellae and what I saw when I touched it. Ive been having some sort of vision and at first I thought to myself that my sanity had flown the coop that’s why I haven’t mentioned it. Im to old a bird to be tricked and I know now what I have been seeing is the truth,”

Henry took them back to that dark night in Egypt when he had secretly entered the Tomb and fumbled through the darkness. He told them of the horrors he had witnessed in his sleep ever since and he told them how even before they reached Nigeria he had dreamt about the stone.

“You told us you had never set foot in that tomb before we all ventured out there together,” Jack hit out with all the trouble he had landed himself in with the Egyptian antiquities board.

“My dear Boy I didn’t mean to cause you any bother I swear but I didn’t know then myself if I had or had not. The visions were so strong in the hospital I lost sense of fantasy and reality. Please accept my utmost apology,” Henry gruffly smiled as Jack nodded to forgive him.

“Now then let me tell you about that stellae.....

A Musty aromatic scent filtered through the moist evening air and the crackle of roasting firewood split the silent concerto of the dusks dwindling light. The overbearing shadow of the encompassing jungle could be descried in the background an omnipresent vision of the darkness that now befell them all. Darius breathed in the aroma of the smouldering foliage and miasma of perfumed incense. He shuffled as the roundness of the trunk he had been lashed against by the wild men bit into the flat arc of his muscular back. He turned to his left to see panehsy in the same predicament tied to the bole of a tree with leather thongs cutting into his wrists and ankles. He turned to his right to perceive

Djedhor bound and trussed in the same manner with his head bleeding profusely from ill treatment of the savages who had vanished and left them in the wilderness surrounded by a ring of torches and a huge roaring pyre. "Have good heart and courage brothers, our Gods will protect us from the devils malice," Darius had said almost in a sermon to goad their flaxen spirits but within his own heart the dread of what awaited venerated throughout his anxious intellect.

He glanced towards the burning pyre and watched with fascination as the flames reached out into the night sky. Above the full blossom of the moon gave the arena an eerie pallor that made the environment fade into a yellow sheen. In the fire light shadows pranced naked women dancing and singing out unfamiliar hymns like apparitions the dark spectres raised their arms in tantalizing motion and their legs cavorted in a ballerinas pose. There shadows grew larger as they approached still dancing and mewling out their well-rehearsed cantations. As they came within reach of the captives Darius observed their faces covered in a black cosmetic making their lips and eyes devilish and prominent. Mesmerising in the half-light they danced around the poles gliding to the heavens and back down to the earth as they circled and circled around. Darius was face to face with a girl of Asiatic beauty no more than twenty years of age. He looked upon her with a majestic eye, as his traditional roots had been proud and gentlemanly to spurn a woman or barrack her. Her hips weaved in a harlot's motion and her arms crossed like a serpents hypnotic dance. Darius had become spellbound by the swirling curves of her womanhood and the soporiferous dance. Then her head shot forward like a striking cobra, which made him, flinch with surprise and her teeth were sharpened to points and her mouth drawn as a spittle filled snarl abruptly launched into his face. He felt the warm salvia upon his cheek and then her head bore down upon his neck. His body cringed as he felt her breath on his sensitive skin and with an immediate start he screamed as she bit deep into his flesh. Her teeth sank into the soft muscle and severed the tendon that connected to the collarbone. The pain so intense his body perspired involuntarily and every muscle tensed in anticipation of further agony. She dropped to her knees and he glanced down seeing the red smear of his own blood around her thin lips. She smiled in a dreamlike state in her religious frenzy with the macabre red liquid of life painted upon her face.

His butt shook as his war skirt had been torn from around his waist making him completely conversant with nature. He saw the brown leather thong and fawn loincloth of his attire slung upon the ground. He stared down again with a mixed emotion of helplessness and embarrassment overcoming him. His tormentor still smiled before her black shiny locks disappeared into his midriff. He squealed again as a chunk of his thigh felt the carnivorous cut of her teeth. Then he stood straight bolt upright with every nerve on alarm as he felt the warm silky feel of her mouth sucking upon his member. Gripped by sheer terror cold sweat gathered in his clenched palms and his neck hairs stood on end expecting the cut of her sharp bite. Instead his mind began to swim as a sensation overcame his soul and his penis grew firm and erect. The pain of the biting wounds absorbed into the untold pleasure of her fellatio upon him. A whirling impulse had consumed his body as his manhood spurted into her bloodstained mouth. She swallowed the sacrifice of his sperm with a gawp of total derangement as if stimulating her womanly sexual drive by this act alone. She stood with her nipples completely erect and he made out the glistening sheen in the yellow moonlight between her legs. She drifted away back towards the pyre and mingled with the dancing spectres in its make.

Moments later another of the acolytes approached with the same maddening gleam in her own eyes. She danced the writhe of the serpent before snarling into his face. This time she bit into his neck on the other side creating another painful wound. She dropped to her knees as if in submission and he felt her tongue licking the crevice of his hips. He screamed as her jaws locked into his posterior digging into the soft tissue. He nearly fainted as she wriggled her head with his flesh in her mouth experiencing the pull and the torment of her cannibalistic puncture. Spitting a lump of red meat upon the fertile earth she glared upwards with a crimson stain adorning her petite features. He moved his head and within a surreal nightmare was there to witness as another acolyte kneeled before Panehsy whose ear was hanging off by a thread on his left side. "By the Gods," he cursed as he felt his soft manhood slipping into her hot chamber. This time the sucking soon became uncomfortable and he clenched his teeth as she rocked her head upon his thighs. After a few

moments a warming sensation engulfed him and he felt a trickle of semen fall upon the woman's tongue.

The Acolyte approached the fire spitting the semen into the flames as an offering. Alynna had not appeased her Gods for some time and she wanted these men drained of all their seed to appease her Idols. She knew their sacks replenished given time but once they were finally barren then she would reap their souls. She had sent Ramun and his men to survey the surrounding areas and to find a quarry to relinquish her dream of building a city of stone. She knew her sacrifices abhorred him although he still remained loyal to her wishes. So his absence suited her needs to conduct her religious practices whilst keeping her subjects in line. Her Egyptian Phyles had travelled with her from Nubia and she loved and trusted them all. Her most loyal servant Attacia came running to her now.

"They are barren Great Prophet," she exclaimed excitedly.

"How shall we appease the Gods Attacia. what most heinous manner should these men die," Alynna teased her acolyte testing her imagination.

"You have taught us Manta Mari that sexual magic and blood lust symbolises the making and ending of all life. Let us cut off their manhood and choke them with it whilst we drink the sexual magical blood from their groins," Attacia played out her religious fervour.

"Attacia you are an astute and wise in the ways of our sorcery. I have wonderful ambitions for you to achieve but you have forgotten stone. Stone is the bedrock of the Mother Earth and we must sacrifice on stone for it to be truly sacred," Alynna corrected her most gifted apprentice

Alynna brandished her bull headed knife and had Djedhor forcefully knelt before the smooth polished stone stellae with his manhood lay upon it. Gazing into the mans eyes as she took hold of his limp bloodied member.

"I give you this offering, this symbolism of man," and with that the knife cut through the supple flesh. A Nymph collected the blood in a golden goblet that spilt from his groin.

The wine was drunk before Alynna had to smash the mans teeth in with the hilt of the knife and force his penis into his throat. They watched Djedhor die agonisingly in a choking spasm before Darius and Panehsy were given the same murderous ending.

The Stone Stellae was covered in blood and it dripped profusely upon the blood prayer etched into facia.

The Shanty village of Taruga lay at the foot of the old Elephant trail that snaked it's way through the savannah forest in the north of Nigeria. This had been the traditional homeland of the Bantu tribes since the first dawning of mankind. It lay a few miles to the west of Kontagora the site that Schillerman had spent the last five years renovating and ignoring the countries prehistoric roots this wild ever-changing and uncertain continent until he had found the stellae that had changed his professional priorities. Before the village of Taruga had come into sight they caught the scent of cooking fires and heard the hubbub of sounds that constituted their daily life. Childrens delicate playful screams and laughter, the guttural cacophony of domestic dogs yapping and barking and the melodious chant of men and women singing tribal songs as they tethered the crops in the surrounding grain fields.

Anne's mood had become light and excited as the first honeycombed roof of a dwelling came into view beyond the baobab trees and tamarinds. "Look Jack, isn't it wonderful," she said tugging his arm as a field of oval topped huts opened out from the claustrophobia of the jungle.

"Edgar Rice Burroughs eat your heart out, eeeeeeeeeeeaaaaarrrrreeeoorr" Jack cajoled doing a poor Tarzan impression, which Anne smiled back to only curtly but reassuringly. "You ignoramous," Henry rebuffed at Jacks childish humour miraculously back to full health once he had learnt of their invitation here from Schillerman.

"Taruga," Schillerman gave them the guided tour as he painted out the picture of all that surrounded them. "Taruga has been inhabited for around the same length of time as my Nok site where the stellae was uncovered. The people here are Bantu and are indigenous to the original Tribes that once dwelt here long before the Kontagora Mosques ever exsisted. Their culture, beliefs and customs have altered very little. They still use the same farming techniques and cultivating techniques that are still passed down by their ancient forefathers." the German indicated to the fields where ox ploughs churned the red earth and the villagers hand planted the seeds in it's trough singing tribal rhythms to bless and enrich the harvest."

In the old days crops were of maize, yams and supplements from the fruits of the forest used for both nutritional and medicinal needs,"Schillerman continued although his guests were just awestruck by the beauty of wild Africa.

Schillerman obsessed with this red-earthed land and overflowing with love for it's people and culture. He was the best guide money could buy and his knowledge came from the passion in his soul. His guests were non paying on this tour but the same fire came from his every word and he swept his listeners away as they realised that time had virtually stood still here at the village. They could have walked here with Livingstone in Victorian times and the spectacle would have been pretty much the same. He also had a deep admiration for the Bantu peoples naiveté and envied them for not having to live in the modern world consumed with stress and anxiety. He knew they had their own fears, down to earth fears of living in this hostile environment, depending upon the rains to water their crops and the hidden curses of hookworm, tsetse fly or contracting malaria from the bite of the mosquito. These problems were life or death however they coloured their wows with supernatural superstitions and if ill fate attacked them they had their own Gods and bogeymen to blame.

As they breached the encompassing dwellings they noticed a crowd had been gathering in the centre of the village. The Bantu attired in animal hides cut in the shape and style of a shamma and in a heavy cloak of eland a tall proud man tried to gain the crowds attention. Muhaba the headman showed grey fringes on his once black tar locks and his skin hung loose on his frame where his muscles had evaporated away with age. As the jeep neared the centre the crowd fell silent and Muhaba spoke for them all when he gave his greeting.

"Welcome to Taruga digger of the dirt," he directed his words to Schillerman as he got out of the jeep with outstretched arms the headman emphasized his sincerity.

"Welcome Muhaba it has been too long since we last met," the German acknowledged his hospitality in the Bantu dialect.

"Digger of the dirt my people are troubled by your visit. I will not lie; tell me why you have come to my village,"Muhabas face showed appeasement to his request but within his eyes something troubled him deeply.

“We come here, myself and my friends to seek audience with the Juju Lady,” as the German spoke the crowd went into a fracas of troubled discussion.

“The Juju Mama is not accustomed to your western culture and her powers are sacred to my peoples culture,” Muhaba defended his villages witch woman.

“Muhaba the Juju Lady has her own mind and I would like to ask her opinion of whom she should and should not be permitted to see,” Schillerman argued his point but the crowd were becoming openly hostile to his suggestions and they threw abuse upon him.

Anne felt uncomfortable with the preceding and her trail of vision fell upon the aggressive stares of the villagers. Amongst them a broad faced obese woman who lent over with consternation upon her features and secretively whispered into the ear of a young boy. The young boy scurried away after receiving the message into the maze of the honeycombed huts with some haste. Then the broad faced woman’s eyes met with Anne’s and within the brown pupils she could sense the mixture of fear and hatred that was directed upon her. To break the stand off Anne smiled but the woman’s huge head turned the other way in disgust and Anne felt as if she were just about to break down and cry.

By this time a heated discussion had broken out in the village centre with the headman and some of the village elders raising their voices at each other. Schillerman quite nobly stood his ground with own outbursts of Bantu directed at the council of elders, which left his own entourage bemused and anxious over the precedings. The raised voices were becoming angrier and the crowd more and more at unrest. Jack could no longer hold back his curiosity and temper any longer.

“Klausey what the bloody hell are they waffling about and what in Gods name is this all about,” he asked the thousands of questions that were going through his mind in one sentence.

“It’s the Juju woman she’s had some kind of a bad vision. Tribal hokum pokum and all and with them being so protective over her spiritual powers it’s causing them all kinds of concerns with us wanting to visit her,” Schillerman tried his best to relate the goings on before being drawn back into the tribal debate.

Anne sighted the little boy emerging again as he sprinted at pace and raced back towards the obese Lady who had sent him away. Through panting breaths he related a message to her. The obese woman with huge unfurled breasts pushed her way into the heart of the tribal gathering. "Silence," she roared in a deep lunged boom and within seconds the flow of arguments had petered out into an uneasy silence.

"The Juju Mama has spoken. She will see them," those few words ended the long debate and Muhaba lead them into the interior of the settlement.

A small group accompanied Schillermans party and Muhaba had become sullen at losing face to the big-breasted woman who had become their guide as she shown them the way. This part of the village lay deserted except for a stray dog or a brown face peering out from a honeycombed homestead with curiosity. They made out the Agapanthus floating upon a boulder-rimmed pond and the line of oil palms that marked the boundary of the village.

"Wait here," the obese woman beckoned at one of the dwellings. She went down on all fours to crawl through the small opening of the hut with her breasts dragging upon the dirt floor.

A few moments passed and her huge head reappeared again in the aperture.

"She will see you, but only digger of the dirt and sweet ivory may have an assembly. The others must wait here," Anne blushed at her tribal name as the woman spoke in English.

Schillerman went in first with Anne at his heels into the dank confines of the dwellings. Her hands felt the smooth coldness of the mud floor, which had been freshly sprinkled with urine to dampen down the arid dust. A small fire crackled away heartily in the huts core with harsh aromatic fumes promulgating within the constriction of the clay walls. Beyond the amber glow she had her first glimpse of the holy woman. Straggled lines of grey plaited hair similar in texture to old hemp rope covered her gaunt cheeks and deep lines were encrusted upon her features with the derision of age. Her eyes glowed in the firelight but even with this emblazonment they still seemed as black and dark as the night. Anne shuddered unhappily as she seated herself cross-legged next to Schillerman upon the opposite side of the fire. An unearthly phase went by before anybody

spoke and Anne's skin crawled with goose pimples as a premonition of something appalling unexpectedly hit her.

"Why do you come here, why do you seek me out," the old woman spoke in Bantu and as her mouth opened she portrayed the solitary black tooth that she still possessed in her gums. Her voice whining and shrill Anne become aware of an untold agony languishing in her antediluvian being.

"What did she say," Anne asked the German nervously absorbed in the vibrant tension of the cramped dwelling. Schillerman translated the words before turning to ask the Juju woman his own questions.

"We have come here Juju Mama to ask of your great wisdom. We seek knowledge concerning the old settlement at Kontagora and you being all wise and all gifted may spell out to us the mysteries of this place that time has eluded," Schillerman spoke long and fast before turning to Anne and repeating his words with one descriptive line.

"I have asked," was all he had stated.

The old woman stared longingly into the flickering flames of the fire as if searching the recesses of her own soul. Her lips mouthed out a mumbling drawl in an unnatural chant as if disappearing upon another astral plane of existence. An aura of mystic clung within the honeycombed hut and Anne started to drift in the heavy atmosphere of the moment.

"Uhtara Manta Mari," the old woman reprised her intonations and Anne became troubled at the ranting and phrases that were being declared. She instantly recognised the language and of it's origin. A tongue offensively read but never spoken for over two thousand years. Archaic relics of prehistory coming to life instantly within the living breathing breath of this old woman's chant.

"Oh my God," Anne exclaimed in a whisper, "Shes chanting in ancient Egyptian," she revealed to the Germans own surprise.

"Egyptian," Schillerman asked her again in bewilderment but Anne silenced him with a graceful finger placed upon her lips as she listened in total fascination to the sonorous chant. The astute nature of Anne soon began picking up the pronunciation of the hidden accented verbs that had long been buried with the last Priests at the temple of Phillae and the old world civilization of the Pharaohs.

The Juju woman's eyes suddenly widened unnaturally with her pupils strangely entralling and enchanted hidden in the depths of her traumatic

meditation. Her back straightened abruptly from her slumped pose and her knees rose up to her chest as her brown mottled shamma floated around her body having a life of it's own.

"You ask for knowledge that I vowed upon my sacred name Little Dove that I would never again have spoken. I gave my earthly soul to keep it unheard of and secret," her voice had switched back to her tribal dialect in a more coherent manner. "I have lived too long to cherish those vows and it's once potent meaning and I am ready to break my oath that I gave as a young girl in her puberty to be granted immortality. The omens have spoken, but be aware I warn you for what you are about to be told will curse you and the Manta Mari will never let you sleep and her venom will hunt you down for any who dare to seek her," Little Dove rested in her squatting posture whilst Schillerman translated her warning as Little Dove spoke again.

"She came to my village before my breasts had bloomed and my crimson waters had run...

Crawling out from the hut as the moon-hung heavy in the night sky like the old woman's prophecies and Anne's heart felt laden with the knowledge that she now possessed.

"How'd it go," Jack asked expectantly standing to greet her from the hut he had lent against for most of the day.

"Don't ask now, please," she begged with her tone masked and her shoulders shook with the cold of the evening air as it hit her.

"Are you all right my dear," Henry boomed as he appeared from the gloom sucking on his pipe with the aroma of Lloyds Bondman's tobacco emanating in his wake.

"Yes lets just go, lets just get out of here," she pleaded.

Jack felt the urgent nudge on his back as he strolled through the honeycomb of huts. He turned sharply to see Schillerman behind him obviously perplexed.

"She's right we best go," he added with expression.

"Why what's wrong, what the bloody hell happened in there," Jack confronted the German with sternly.

"The old crones dead and once the rest of the Bantu discover that fact, there not going to be holding any enquiries," Schillerman made clear there disposition

“How,” Jack asked confused by the sudden turn of events.

“Lets just say she willed herself to death for now,” the German responded tight lipped as his concerns were addressed to escaping from the village unscathed.

They had reached the old elephant trail before an undulating scream broke the rhythm of their plight. Jack looked back from the jeep knowing they were already safely away but his concerns now rested with Anne who looked as if she had seen a ghost that would haunt her for the rest of her life.

Henrys visions returned that night as he lay in the room of the Hotel Revolution in Abuja. He felt his mind washing away into the realms of oblivion. He sensed fear sheer and utter, pulsating terror the kind that has it's own roots. The animalistic instinct so inbred into the mould of our beings that it has been with us since we stood upon our hind legs. His chest heaved and beads of sweat broke from his skin in rivulets. Cold icy rivers that tingled his nerves as they sprouted like fountains of dread from every pore in his body. People were running and screaming all around him. Black native people primitive yet civilised he felt. Mud huts were blazing and he stepped over the mutilated bodies of small children strewn upon the red earth. Muscular Warriors came rampaging from out of the bush with cow tails tied upon their oiled legs and feathers adorned in their war skirts. They stood tall and overbearing striking terror by their very presence. I should be hiding he thought. I should be running he realised however the warriors paid him no attention as he found himself trapped in this nightmarish movie.

He caught sight of the bare breasted village women tied together from neck to neck by fork shaped timbers and being lead along by the tall warriors on a chain. The surviving males of the settlement were hounded down and encircled. They fell to their knees begging for quarter but were slaughtered mercilessly one at a time by the short stabbing spears, which Henry knew to be the assegar. Henry also knew of this infamous weapons history and how it was the preferred fighting tool of the Zulu the great conquering tribe that had once ruled the savage continent of Africa.

Leaves flew as branches whipped back and rattled. Her feet raced upon the uneven earth already painful and bleeding even though she feared

greatly to be mindful of her woes. Her lungs gasped for oxygen in this moist tropical climate and she wheezed upon every breath. The thickness of the forest abated with her red skin covered in welts from the whipping branches and now she could sprint freely across this clearing. Alynna descried the heavy footfalls and turned to make out Attacia racing towards her.

“Manta Mari you must flee they are coming,” she panted out her message.

Alynna had been sent many troubling reports of this new emerging race ruled by a mighty warrior named Chaka who possessed no fear and granted no mercy to his enemies. She had been told stories of how they speared children throwing up their carcasses in the air and catching them upon the points of their assegais for pleasure. She knew they butchered every male and how they took the women for their own. They were more than a match for her small band of fifty female followers and her loyal companion Ramun and his two men. She could expect no clemency from Chaka as herself being a sorceress they would immediately put her to her death. She decided they must leave, after all these centuries in this land of sanctuary it had finally been invaded.

Chaka stood proudest and tallest of all his people. Strong and terrible. His head ordained with a black induna the crown of the King and his body ripples of taught hard muscle. He had banded his people together and with an army of two thousand had gone on a bloody conquering campaign to claim Africa as his own. They had reached the far region the land of the Tonga and the Bantu and brought about campaigns to overthrow their rulers. Village by village they had raised them to the ground and brought the spear to their occupiers. They had captured many cattle and many women and from these women he had heard of the sorceress the Manta Mari who they had prayed to bring about their salvation from the Zulu. The Zulus themselves had their own witches and wizards. The Griots, the Bards and the storytellers who would frighten his own people into obedience with their tales of awesome power. The great Chaka himself had once consulted the oracle of the Umlimo a young virginal witch who resided in the caves of the sacred mountain. The tales though of the Manta Mari from the Bantu and Mashona women they had seized had captivated him with their visions of her untold beauty. He had learnt how she alone had tamed the wild men of the North and made them her guardians. How

she had walked upon the earth for a thousand years and how she took the form of a man-eating panther once the moon had rose. He had heard how her followers ripped out human hearts and ate them whole and that there sanguinary nature would never be quenched.

He made a vow to track down this witch and find out how much truth was to be found within these myths. His own regiment had travelled west for this very purpose and they came across the remnants of the sorceress temple fortress in the heart of winter. Chaka stood before the cut stone citadel and never before he had seen such a mighty structure. With towering walls and a mountain of a building within it's foundations. Chaka had ordered his men to tear it to the ground and for three long days and nights they broke up the mortar joints with the points of their assegais and sent the huge blocks tumbling down. Once the structure had been broken the pieces were buried under the red earth. Chaka stood atop the molehill mounds of his demolition and declared.

"I am Chaka. I am Lord almighty and decree this once sacrilegious place to now be holy ground," and he ploughed his assegai into the earth.

"Bakula," his Warriors called out in salute.

A Shriill call of an eagle broke through the ambience of the calm night. The murky shapes of the goats moved wraithlike and only the occasional bleat and periodic clacking of a crickets cry rose above the unearthly silence that prevailed.

"Maria," Refaat called out to one of his herd that was straying and threw a rounded stone in front of her path to coax her back into the fold. The task performed more through tedium than necessity as it helped pass the time in the coolness and isolation of the heights.

The goats had begun to stir in a wary motion and even though their concerns were minimal the Shepherd boy honed into their sharp instincts through experience and automatically began scanning the dark shadows of his surrounding terrain. His eager eyes picked up the contours and well-known profiles of the sharp crevices. He followed the curve of the rounded hills and looked for imperfections in the evenness of the triangular peaks. There lay no movement amongst his landscape and his troubled mind could lay to rest.

"Huh," he sighed at the Goats with a false bravado for scaring him witless.

“You will one day end up scaring me to my demise,” he chastised the herd again as the last sensation of fright had ebbed away.

He rebounded with a start as the cascading smash of loose shale redistributed by the weight of a strangers lost footing upon the pebble ground made his senses acute once again. As he spun around in the direction of the disturbance he descried the metallic click and then his ears were deafened by the thunderous bang and his flock scattered into mountains.

The intruder placed the .44 Magnum back into its shoulder strap with a professional ease. He strolled up to the body of the Arab Boy and kicked it hard in the side to check he had no life left in him but upon reflection staring into the gaping hole where his face had once been he realised he need not of bothered to get this confirmation.

“Old habits die hard,” he smirked scrutinising the goats scampering over the hillsides.

“Tie up looses ends,” he said with satisfaction,” Looks whoever takes over from you pal has his work cut out,” he smirked again a customary habit he had picked up by his lonely lifestyle finding a source of pleasure from his own sick sense of callous humour. His smile curled to a snarl, as he knew it was a fair trek back to his vehicle and the silver topped cane gained little purchase in the soft earth.

The rumbustious of the crashing surf exploding upon the rock face made Alynna reminisce of a time gone by when she had perched herself upon the Minoan cliffs tops and hearkened the clarion chorus of the sonorous beat of the sea. Upon the spindrift air she sucked in the taste of the salty breeze and could feel it’s sheer body and magnitude. She glanced down as another cracking bellow had broken forth from the waves and then heard the whining fall from her landward side as a tamarind tree snapped and smashed into the earth. She watched over her army of Nymphs supervised under the direction of her astute Commander Ramun stripping bark, cutting timber and binding them upon the reed floats of the rafts base. They imitated the ancient seafaring design that the Red Sea fisherman had mastered with high prows and bitumen to caulk the seal of the boat to make it seaworthy.

They had come to the end of the line; no more refuges were to be found as the land had been swallowed behind them by the Zulu invaders and only a mass of water now stood ahead of them. The Zulus were closing in upon the sorceress having pursued her and her entourage half way across the continent. Alynna's only blessing and saving grace had been the Zulus' frenzy for murder upon their march as they massacred anyone who crossed their path and plundered every homestead they had encountered. If it had not been for this slaughter Alynna well knew they would already have been in Chaka's hands as the Zulus' war march was renowned for being fast. They could run fifty miles in a day through the haughtiest of terrains. Chaka though had decreed there would be no more diversions as he had already learnt of their plans to build boats upon the beaches and flee his land and he knew the time was now to catch the Sorceress before it had run out.

The first reed boat had been assembled and Ramun's men smiled proudly at her sturdy design, which would have made the esteemed shipbuilders of Babylon very proud they had considered. The followers of the Manta Mari had neither the tools nor skills to construct large seagoing galleys and had placed their hopes in this age-old reed boats used by their forefathers. Six more boats still lay in raft form upon the sand waiting to be constructed when the dreaded call had arrived.

"They're coming, they're coming," a look out yelled in alarm from her observation post on a hill dune as a black horde became visible upon her eastern horizon.

The completed reed boat had to be rolled upon poles and dragged towards the surf. Twenty of the acolytes raised the wooden supports and a few feet at a time made headway towards the surf. Alynna made her own way back to the beach and immediately dispatched the handful of lingering wild men to slow down the Zulu warriors' advance. The look out came racing across the dunes in sheer panic, as the boat haulers were already knee deep in the waves trying to balance the raft upon the buoyant waves.

"Manta Mari they massacred them," the look out called out in dread referring to the wild men who were slaughtered mercilessly by the overwhelming horde.

“I know child I felt their presence leave me,” Alynna responded to her news.

It was Attacia who noticed them first a black throng with feathered headdresses and long ox hide shields. The Nymphs screamed as they ran into the sea and scrambled aboard the vessel as their Goddess stood and stared upon the invader with a defiant stare.

“Alynna,” Ramun called out running through the shallow water along the beach as he had discerned a group of the Zulus breaking rank and racing towards the Sorceress.

Ramun's men ran passed the Manta Mari and with swords drawn clashed into the hide shields of the advancing Warriors. Ramun reached Alynna and lifted her up in one sweeping move upon his strong arms and headed back with her into the fury of the waves. The crystal orb slipped from her grasp and made a cracking retort as it splintered upon a beach rock.

“Nnnooooo,” she screamed out kicking her legs for Ramun to let her down. “Ill get it, you get aboard,” he stated placing her upon the dry deck of the Reed Boat.

As he turned he saw in dismay his two loyal friends being butchered upon the beach as he groped upon the sea floor in the current as he tried to retrieve the orb the bedrock of their religion. He plunged his head under the waves and he found the shard that had broken off when the crystal had fractured. He took his head from the sea and to his unease he made out two Zulu sprinters crashing through the water towards him. He ducked his brown locks back into the salty brine and this time find the orb lying serenely upon the bottom. He then started to thrash out as he ran into the waves with all haste as the Zulus gained upon him.

The Reed Boat had reached the point of no return as the hand of the tide gripped upon it and drew the vessel into the far encompassing ocean. White water flew in the air with the rapid progression of the athletic Zulus as they closed upon their quarry. The Acolytes and Alynna witnessed in horror as the black warriors were almost upon him. Alynna looked over her shoulder into the sanctuary of the Ocean and glared back in dread as Ramun and their sacred idol were about to be captured. Alynna quickly whispered into the ears of two of her nymphs who were both young and agile.

“We will always love thee Manta Mari,” they both said as they dived off the boat swimming against the current into the pursuing path of the warriors. The other Acolytes eyed with both shock and exhilaration as they swam passed Ramun and into the arms of the Zulus. They fought with them fiercely with their nails and teeth however the warriors brought down their war clubs and rendered them unconscious. Ramun swam for all his worth against the pull of the tide dragging him in the wrong direction to the Reed Boat. Eventually he managed to scramble aboard and glared back towards land and seeing the two Zulus still in the water were nothing more than specks. The Boat was well out of danger from the invaders as it drifted out into the emptiness of the sea.

Chaka stood upon the cliffs as his braves dragged the two captured women onto the beach. He had never seen such beauty with their porcelain skin, silky black hair and their distinct Egyptian splendour. He screwed his eyelids into the sun to make out the shape of the Reed Boat still upon the horizon and called out from his perch upon his mountain.

“Sorceress you have outwitted me the mighty and terrible Chaka King of Africa and I salute you-BAKULA,”he roared and all his mighty warriors aligning the cliffs beat their shields and raised the points of their assegais towards the heavens calling out, ”BAKULA,”then brought their spear points down again directed towards the sea.

THE CHILDREN OF THE SUN

WonkaTonka is troubled the Old Indian thought referring to their great spiritual Father as the grey heavens rumbled restlessly and blue streaks of lightening flashed across the sky. He neared the end of his arduous journey on this pilgrimage summoned by the spirit masters to a council meeting of the Shaula, which was of great consequence. He came to the fork of the Yoaltepec and Tepeacac rivers and entered the traditional tepee encampment where exotic paintings of Buffalo and Horses were stretched upon the hides. He made his way towards the huge blazing fire that burned fiercely in the centre of the many wigwams. Many Indians in lavish Tribal costumes donning masks of war paint upon their face and bodies. They danced around the flames shaking spirit rattles and singing Tribal chants that held a depressive and doom filled aura.

The Old Indian sat by the fire hearkening the ancient songs and his heart laid heavy upon their implications. The dancing and singing went on throughout the long night until the head of the Shaula the Chiefs of all nations sat in council. They gathered around the fire as they could almost taste the blazing wood and in the smoke they hoped the spirits had been summoned from their slumber as the portent of the songs had been intended. The head of the Shaula Quatazela adorned a gold headband with brightly coloured feathers and he spoke now into the ethereal embers of the smouldering ashes.

“Welcome to you all on this dark and foreboding dawn. Only once in our past only once previously in our people’s great history have we met upon such an important and spiritual affair. I welcome my fellow brothers of the Condor the Huari, the Moche, the Nazca, the Zapotec, the Inca, the Aztec and myself brothers here for my own brethren the Maya. I welcome you my brothers of the eagle the Iroquois, the Arapaho, the Inuit, the Yurok, the Wichita, the Shawnee, the Cree, the Shuswap, the Sekani, the Yellow knifes, the Chipewyan, the Cherokee, the Apalachee, the Choctaw and the

Yaquis,” Quatazela began the lengthy and customary opening of the council and Tribal ceremony.

The pipe of allegiance a long thin piece of clay decorated with feathers and tassels was passed from hand to hand as they drew in a sacred breath of their oath and breathed out the trust they would place within the bonding of the council. The spirit rattles were shaking again and a drum gave off a deathly beat in the shadows as they awoke their spiritual fathers.

“We are all aware why we have been gathered here, we have sat patiently waiting biding our time for over five long centuries. Shegasgar has awoken and soon the dual of the light and the darkness will take place. Now is our time is it arrived as prophesised through the ages. The Eagle of the North and the Condor of the South fly together once more. The hidden ones have been sanctioned for and they are coming here awoken from the depths of their hiding places. We must have heart and call upon our spirit fathers for guidance on how we should pursue our quest. We have called upon the Earth Mother, the Sun Father and the Water Spirits to guide our hand and show us the way to the spiritual light. For we are after all the Children of the Sun,”

The clay pipe was emptied of tobacco and the sacred weed was placed in its bowl and as it was lit a green smoke emanated into the night. The pipe was passed from hand to hand around the circle of the Shaula. As they drew in the narcotic tobacco their eyes closed and their heads fell into a slumber as they entered the phantom world of their Ancestors. The old Indian was one of the last to puff upon the pipe of peace and vanished upon bottle green plains and the stampeding roar of the buffalo.

The fire smouldered and its intensity had long since burnt away and the first red lines of dawn were upon the sky.

Quatazela raised his head and an expression of fear had etched itself upon his countenance. Soon after, the others returned back to the land of the living until they all sat brooding upon the individual wisdom that had been bequeathed to them by the Ancients.

“Grey Wolf of the Chipewyan,” Quatazela spoke out into the meeting place.” they have chosen you most wise and trusted friend to find and seek out the one we call the Canbanna,” he finished his statement.

“So it must be,” the Old Indian remarked as he came to his feet and collected his bundle of belongings hanging at the end of a long carrying stick. He slowly ambled out of the campsite and towards the great mountains upon his new pilgrimage.

Upon the thirty seventh day of the voyage the water skins had run dry and the baking sun had made each of them sick with delruim. Their thirsty mouths were bitter and arid as they twisted their tortured blistered lips uncomfortably. The journey was becoming unbearable and the spell that had consumed their souls had begun to fade. Alynna knew what the others did not and she had not considered herself as she touched her idol an electrical vibration shot through the course of her body a sign of it’s yearning pain. Alynna haunted by the voices in her head and her Master making her be judge advocate over who would live and who would ultimately die. On the thirty ninth day Karena a young Acolyte with a nubile figure awoke screaming out in terror and as her sisters tried to console her they could feel her trembling in a violent fever. Within a few moments they stood back from her and witnessed her transformation with disbelief and horror. Her brunette locks changed before their eyes to pure white, she opened her mouth to scream again and her teeth dropped out onto the deck from her bloody gums and she sat their then letting out a silent whimper.

“What evil has overcome her Manta Mari,” Attacia searched for salvation from her Goddess fearful for her very own soul.

“It has been ordained that not all of us are destined to see the end of our journey that is the will of the Gods and the fate that has been placed upon us. From creation we grew from a seed and in death we wither like a flower,” Alynna made her response to her worshippers plea.

Karena mumbled and crooned through the night as her face shrunk into her skull, her breasts shrivelled and drooped from her chest until they were no more than flaps of skin. Alynna knew her Acolytes were appalled and subdued and she made her decision to end their misery.

“Throw her over the side,” she stated almost calmly as a sickening despair was revealed upon Karenas wrinkled and unrecognisable features. Alynna justified her decision comforting herself upon the fact that one day that would be her fate, all their fates in a time—a time yet to pass.

Her thin emaciated body was lifted and tossed callously as if refuse over the side. Karena called out in the most unintelligible howl raising her arms towards the heavens in defiance of Alynna. The waves quickly washed her away and her cries grew steadily faint and distant. Alynna stroked the fractured upon her idol tenderly and experienced a warm pleasing glow as Karena succumbed to the might of the Ocean and sank beneath its tides. Alynna felt renewed hope and strength as her Master was once again revived.

The red earth lay dominant within the Zulu Kraal and the Warriors gorged themselves upon the slain oxen and gulped vats of strong barley beer. The Regiment of Chakas own the Lions had all chosen young wives from the spoils of their campaigns upon this eve. Chaka himself had taken the two porcelain-skinned beauties as brides for himself. The communal wedding ceremony had continued throughout the day until the fiery orb in the sky had diminished. The young maidens had danced bare breasted showing off their femininity with the short marital knives as their Warrior husbands had paraded in full battle dress before them.

At the end of the celebrations Chaka had entered the Chieftains Kraal to taste the fruits of his two new brides. He lay upon the Leopard pelts as they snuggled up beside this strong powerful Man. He slept first to regain his strength from the exertions of the wedding ritual and to clear his head of the strong ale. He awoke with a start as a vibrating stir disturbed his slumber. He opened his eyes to discover to his horror that two skeletal frames were laying by his side. He cascaded the bones across the room in anger as his brides had literally shivered to death to their very bones. He had been about to consummate them as his wives and now that accursed Sorceress had used them to taunt his pride.

The sight of land drew miraculously near and they headed into the expanse of the delta with green lush forest upon either side. The land still seemed so distant as if this were the widest river Alynna had ever encountered even dwarfing the mighty Nile. They all scanned the shore for a dry bank to moor the Reed Boat although their search was fruitless as the river extended beneath the trees. Thunderous explosions made them alert as they came within earshot this most wonderful sound musical to their hunger as fruit dropped from the overhanging trees and crashed into the river. Coconuts drifted by and were anxiously collected. Breadfruit,

berries and yams were picked out of the water around them. They gorged their hungry stomachs on this feast and they laughed out good heartedly as more outbreaks of cascading fruit hit the river. Branches moved magically by their own accord, which spooked them and then Attacia the first to notice, the crimson faced monsters staring from the treetops.

“Devils,” she screamed but as they leapt from branch to branch they discerned that they were only monkeys and later they would learn their name the Wakiri.

Bulbous eyes floated upon the surface as crocodiles emerged in a sea of ripples to breathe and the black flat tails of otters splashed in the water as they dived. The river glistened as the sun smiled upon the reflective surface and the reflective scales of the abundant fish were illuminated beneath the water. Ramun scooped his arm under the wash and brought out a silvery fish with ease as it wriggled in his hand displaying its scarlet belly. He drew his arm back in alarm as it gnawed upon his finger and he let go of the Piranha that splashed back into the river and swam away to safety.

“The swine bit me,” he confessed to the merriment of the others.

As darkness fell with the flapping of cormorant’s wings, the glug of a submerging Caymans dive and the cries of the wakiri held a strange and sinister tension amongst them. Alynna felt her strength returning from fresh water and a diet of fruit and fish. Her crystal benefactor’s energy had drained and she knew eventually she would have to renew it. The orb had lost many of its souls upon the journey and soon it would need a replenishment of fresh sacrifices to survive.

A Bittersweet moment fled by in Quinn’s mind as his seat shuddered and the Boeing 747 took to the clouds above Abuja. To some extent relieved at returning back to the England to sort out his business affairs and then again hurting as he left his beloved Anne behind. Henry had another relapse and his adoring sister had stayed on to nurse him back to health again with a vow to follow him once Henry had the strength to move. He ordered another whiskey from the stewardess as the plane reached altitude and sipped it mournfully nursing his own bruised emotions. He tried to focus his mind upon all they had achieved; discovering the Temple in the sands of the Sahara and the strange structure

buried in the dirt at Kontagora. He recalled the visit to the village at Taruga and his interrogation of Anne once they had reached the Hotel bar.

“So what the hell happened for that woman to suddenly die and have the anger of the villagers hurled upon us,” Jack had questioned her

“Little Dove was her name Jack. She told me she had walked upon the earth for a thousand years. She told me stories of the enchanting Egyptian Priestess they knew as the Manta Mari. The very same Priestess who carried out bizarre rituals in that tomb we uncovered and who was unceremoniously banished from the kingdom by the ruling Pharaoh Horemheb,” she revealed her insight into the tales that the Juju Lady had told.

“How’d an Egyptian Priestess end up in a god forsaken place in darkest Africa,” Jack pushed her again not quite taking in all she that she made known.

“Quite easy my dear fellow either by sea along the Mediterranean and along the coast of Portugal or across land through the Sahara. A hard journey but not totally improbable,” Henry offered his own advice.

“A thousand years was she sane,” Jack changed tract looking at his amber whiskey in dismay.

“The first lines of the Pharaohs were acquitted with very long unbelievable years of reign until it was suggested that the name; the Kings name passed from father to son was the measure of the Ruling Reign. When a name changed with no Heir or through the death of the eldest son a new era began,” Schillereman butted in with his own theory on Little Doves confession.” The Juju woman is probably at the end of a long line of daughters all possessing the spiritual ability that gave them their power,”

“Nonsense she spoke in the Ancient unheard of language of the Pharaohs,” Anne dismissed his claims with her gut instincts.

“So your saying Klausey this witch is like the one hundredth Little Dove,” Jack said totally rejecting her feelings.

“Maybe it is Jack I don’t know but it felt to me as if she were divulging the truth and she gave her last breath doing it,” Anne counterattacked his rebuff with.

“Maybe she really was,” Schillerman said confirming his own doubts and disbelief.

His feelings of losing Anne kept entering his thoughts and his insides churned with an uneasy reaction of his deep-seated love. He picked up the in flight magazine and fingered through the pages. Hidden within the glossy supplement was a recent copy of the African Chronicle obviously discarded by an inbound passenger? The headlines had trumpeted the West for their increasing Military presence upon the Continent and for the first time in many decades the volatile beast that is Africa had finally begun to purr with the hope of peace and a new vibrant enthusiasm. He thumbed to the next page to catch a headline in the small print at the foot of the page that fixed his attention straight away.

SHEPHERD SHOT IN THE SANDS

He read through the small article and a tear formed within his right eye. Refaat murdered whilst tending his flock and the tabloid had laid the blame at the foot of fundamentalist's outrage. Jack perturbed by the news and he reasoned lots of things led to people's early demise but something within this just didn't ring true.

At home in his simple apartment in Manchester England he had slumped himself into a depression. His heart longed for Anne's company and for the first time in his life he felt so alone. His relic the crystal figurine stood proudly upon the mantelpiece and he cherished it even more knowing as soon as Anne returned it would no longer be his. The sculpture of the Goddess held his love and devotion for Anne within it and he knew firmly within his heart that one day soon she would be coming back to him. He secretly hoped she was missing him as much and then the thought of her not doing so made him anxiously pour another whiskey.

In front of him upon the coffee table lay a battered old atlas of the ancient world and he opened it upon a World map at the time of the Pharaohs and upon it traced the imagined route he presumed the crystal Lady had undertook.

"Why leave Egypt and go south," he asked himself and seeing that at that time that it was a vast unknown.

"Fear makes you run," he decided and then noted the crossing of the Sahara to the great Lake.

"Whoever you were my Lady, bottoms up," he drained his glass too.

Then he recalled Schillermans information of traces of the elusive text found in the south Americas. He traced a line across the Atlantic from Africa to the New World and shook his head in disbelief and then a notion suddenly occurred to him where had that Old Mans boat sailed from? He pondered upon that question for the remainder of the restless night until drink drifted him off into oblivion.

They eventually found a low bank in which to moor their boat and they were thankful when they walked again upon dry land. She gazed with an engrossing energy of the child within her as she looked upon this green lush land with enthralment. The mighty rainforests all consuming only broken by the occasional ripe savannah. They cut a path through the dense undergrowth for many days until they came upon the wide-open plains with fertile earthy soil that would sustain them. They continued inland enjoying the openness and freshness of this newly found domain. A wild yet arid place that bore no fruit like the forests but would yield crops, as Alynna knew her dreams were coming to life wondrously as her the creator of a brave new civilization. Then Ramun interrupted her vision.

“We have company,” he informed her and her heart broke as the dream shattered into a thousand fragments upon her conscience.

In amongst the high grass upon the plain they had hid with only the ephemeral peek of their plumes or the shimmer from their coats of many colours.

“We must greet them,” Alynna announced without hesitation.

She walked steadfastly forward and almost timidly the others fell into her tracks as if she were their protecting shield. One hundred feet from the edge of the high pampas she stopped abruptly and seated herself upon the soft ground and her worshippers followed her example. An uneasy silence fell and the sharp call of a machua bird pierced the fragile air and Alynna experienced her heart beat racing and had to take deep long bouts of inhalations to calm her brittle persona.

The pampas grass swayed as if brushed in places by an invisible breeze. Then the pampas parted and stood only a few yards before her, this magnificent being adorned in a yellow spotted fleece of a jaguar slung over his feathered crimson cloak and upon his head the green carved mask

of a serpent. He held a square reed woven shield and in his right hand he grasped a wooden mace with serrated teeth upon its killing edge. A vision of both terror and awe mixed within the same manifestation. The Serpent man swiped the ground before him with his evil looking weapon in a strong side stepping and well rehearsed motion as he drew steadily nearer and nearer beating the air before him. Ramun went to get to his feet fearing for his Mistresses safety isolated upon the plain before them however the reassuring hand of Attacia pressed upon his shoulder. Her eyes never stopped gazing upon her Mistress as if subconsciously she could read the Manta Maris every command. Ramun reluctantly sat back down again with a hapless rage coursing through his veins.

The Serpent now stood directly before her and raised his mace high in her wake readying to let forth the deathblow however it never came. The Serpent held frozen and Alynna got to her feet to match his stature and her green eyes penetrated into the mortal being behind the mask.

“Beast of the forest, I have come to tame your anger,” she spoke out to it. Slowly as if by her will alone the wooden mace lowered and as it fell other members of the Serpents tribe appeared as they walked out from the confines of the pampas. Hundreds of the Serpent headed warriors faced her and one of their number adorned in the cloak of a jaguar with gold necklaces regally displayed came to there fore. He spoke out in a guttural and harsh tongue, which seemed unintelligible. The orb glowed brightly beside Alynna and the fog of words came clear in her mind.

“I am Matzutala of the Jaguar City you are trespassing upon hallowed ground. By law and by custom the great God Quetzalcoatl (feathered serpent) as rained the judgement of the dance of death upon you,”

“Does this sacred ground belong to you solely and who gives you the right to speak for the gods,” Alynna with one hand upon the orb replied in their own tongue.

The Chief appeared visibly stunned by her effrontery and gave off a tirade to save face in front of his people.

“I speak in the name of Quetzalcoatl the feathered one for I am the living embodiment of his soul upon the earth,” Matzutala made his birthright and decree known

“You speak as a man not a god if you want to hear the gods at your peril be it. You must never answer to them in your own name that is your

blasphemy upon them,” with that Alynna took the orb and placed it in both hands above her golden head as it glowed incandescently.

The natives dropped instantaneously unto their knees and even the Chief fell to the earth blubbering apologetically under his breath. They were mystified by wonder and fear as Alynna held the power of the Gods for them to bear witness.

As she stood before them they felt the aura of her overpowering force and the warriors mumbled the words of their own superstition.

“Mama Huaco,” they mouthed in divine marvel the sister of the creator Gods who they themselves called the Virocochas who had come to their land many centuries ago with their white faces and long beards and gave them the foundations of their religion. Their eyes now fell upon Ramun with his unkempt beard and they prayed silently for their own salvation

The Jaguar War party led them along the sacred ceque lines that ran geographically out from the City of the Sun their Capitol as a mirror of the sun Gods divine supremacy upon the earth. The dirt tracks straight and true ran through the agricultural vales which made Ramun stare in awe at their ingenuity and at predetermined points they passed solid stone markers known as huacos upon the route, the places where the locals would make offering of coca, chica (a beer made from maize) and rocks which formed sacred mounds called apachetas. They came across the people of this strange land in the fields dressed in vibrant crimson clothing and the farmers stopped their toiling to gaze upon the white and black skinned persons that marched along ceque lines. Children laughed and waved as they came across a village with sturdy stone abodes and timber framed roofs. The elders of the village had not the naive innocence of their children and stared upon them with apprehension and a trace of pity.

like mirage it emanated shimmering with awesome splendour a huge citadel with cyclopaedic stonewalls rising to the heavens to protect it. Alynna wept without a sound within as the memories of her beloved Thebes were brought back vividly to her mind. Ramun found those same emotions pulsating within him however his own soul had been damned with the covenant of the devil and he found it hard to succour his own true emotions.

“Cusco the City built by the giants,” Matazula announced proudly and as they drew closer they had to crane their necks to see the stone sections towering above them.

Once passed the fortifications they entered the town with its labyrinth style of narrow streets weaving through a meandering maze of stone passages.

“The foremost Inca placed his staff of gold into the earth and for the City of the Sun to be born,” Matazula spoke out full of pride but only the ears of Alynna were able to grasp his bygone testimonies.

Ramun overcome with a preordained claustrophobia and unease as they entered into this unfamiliar environment. They trod upon brick laden causeways and all around them they could make out the glittering of gold that would of held spellbound the most avaricious adventurer. He kept his hand firmly upon the hilt of his sword expecting some unknown treachery to befall them at any moment. He exhaled with some relief as the narrow streets came to an abrupt end and opened out into the plaza which laid open the centre of Cuzco. Circling the square were stone temple complexes dedicated to their everyday Gods of thunder, rain, the moon, fertility, and the rainbow and upon their northern side dominating the square stood the Coricancha the centrepiece of the Inca nation. They halted mesmerized by the splendour of this holy sanctuary-The Temple of the Sun dedicated to their principal God Inti who mastered all and fathered the Sapa Inca the first ever ruler of the Incas vast empire.

The news had soon spread of there arrival and from empty deserted streets quite suddenly without warning the townsfolk appeared in their droves filling the great square in their thousands. They were dressed in the varied colourful plumage of the wide-ranging birds of the encompassing rain forests. A deafening golden gong resounded upon the heights of the Temple of the Sun and the excited crowd stood in complete and utter silence. Four Priests elaborately dressed in yellow tunics with huge gold discs protruding from their nose appeared in the gateway of the temple. They sprinkled flowers upon the ground and in their wake four muscular oiled bearers in yellow loincloths and shaven heads carried the throne of the Lord Inca upon their backs as he sat upon it. The people dropped to their knees in abasement to he who has the heart of the Puma and the supremacy of the Condor. The bearers kneeled in unison as they carefully

lowered the throne however the impatient Lord Inca stepped to the ground before his throne settled upon the earth.

“Hail Mancho Rocha,” a priest roared out from the summit of the Coricancha.

“Hail Lord Inca,” thundered from his abased subjects as they kissed the ground.

Mancho stood proud with his chest high however he gawped upon the woman in astonishment as she stood arrogantly before him without any protocol to his position of authority as the crowd roared again in prayer.

“Lord Inca living God,” they had called praising homage upon their king.

“Matazula,” the King snarled to his Curaca Lord of Cusco as Matazula came to his feet in abeyance.

“Yes my Lord,” he acknowledged his calling.

“Who are these people and why does one of them defy and humiliate me by not paying me any respect” he questioned with deadly authority.

“I am Mama Huaco Lord Inca and have returned to renew your faith in the gods and bring opulence to your kingdom,” Alynna's hand rested upon the orb in her haversack and she spoke the words her master placed in her mind.

The Lord Inca stepped back open mouthed almost dropping his vara, the golden rod that had been placed into the fertile soil of Cuzco and now symbolised the ruling Incas staff of office. He stared upon her in amazement and lost all use of his well-celebrated vocabulary as a fear had enclosed upon his throat.

“It is true my Lord Inca, she is who she portends to be,” Matazula answered his dumbfounded leaders doubts.

Mancho Rocha stood six feet tall and he came across all-powerful although his body was only slender and his skin pallor anaemic with his inbred features almost feminine. His ears elongated by ear spoons called orejones which only the elite classes were permitted to adorn as they decorated their lobes in this disfiguring fashion. He wore a golden headband with yellow and green plumes. His black cloak woven from the delicate fabric of vampire bats wings, which bristled gently with every motion of the wind. He Lord Inca both man and God, all terrible and unfeared to his peoples own utter disbelief and bewilderment bowed his head before this strange golden haired woman. This affirmed to the Inca

the beginning of the Pachacuti the reversal of all time when the Inca Lord will never again rule supreme and they let out a sigh to this ominous sign. "Mama Huaco we welcome you home," Mancho Rocha found his voice again and the people cheered her.

"Lord Inca you are most gracious," Alynna thanked him from her own mortal soul.

Alynna and her party were directed to a building upon the corner of the square in which they were allowed to occupy whilst the towns people queued outside its door with gifts of fruit, flowers, honey and bread to warm their undernourished selves, Alynna took each offering personally stood in the doorway and lay praise upon each and everyone one of them. Ramun organised the defences it was not to his liking the abrupt manner in which the greeting ceremony ended with the Lord Inca retreating with his council behind the stronghold of the Coricanhca. He had set eyes upon the offensive gaze that had gelled in Mancho Rochas departure and had felt an ill wind brooding within the Lord Incas devious mind. Ramun knew they were vulnerable here in the heart of the Incas domain but when he paused to assess his misgivings he smiled seeing his Goddess Alynna winning over the hearts and minds of the people and somehow he knew he would be saved by her wisdom again.

Mancho Rocha cut the yam into four symbolically as this represented the four kingdoms of his empire. The Tahuantinsuyu the land of the four quarters. He placed the golden knife down which had been delicately crafted into the shape of the all-conquering Anaconda the giant snake of the Andes. He bit into the sickly fruit before he turned to his assembled council.

"What am I to do with this witch, here mocking me in my domain," he said spitting out the chunk of the fruit with distaste, as he still feared the troubling sensation that had overcome him whilst in her presence.

"We must kill her, kill her now before her poison spreads," Idis the High Priest of the Sun Temple suggested.

"We must not and cannot do such a heinous thing if she is the Mama Huaco the Gods would surely avenge such an outrage," Matazula had already become endeared to Alynna and in his own way spoke his mind.

"We must be rid of her but not in that way," the Lord Inca concluded.

“The Palace of Mancho Capac still lies unused and abandoned give her this as your gift my Lord,” Matazula uttered expressing his thoughts out loud.

“Yes your right Matazula you have found us the answer,” the Lord Inca added to his ideas.

“It has lay forsaken for many years and lies high up in the sacred valley away from the politics and ears of the people. Here she could have no influence upon your reign my Lord if you will forgive my implications,” Matazula knelt as his devious scheme took fruition.

“Yes your right Matazula far away from my palaces and courts. Give her Manco Capac with my blessings and see to it that you escort her there upon the dawn as I have no wish to set eyes upon her again,” the Lord Inca approved of his nobleman’s plans.

The hot arid scorching sand of the Egyptian Sahara and the sweltering humidity of the Niger delta had begun to disturb Jacks judgments as he organised his briefcase in preparation for another day at his office. His apprehension of losing his livelihood had been premature as his partner Paul Collins had done a first rate job of keeping the old trustworthy company ship afloat. There had only been a couple of minor and irritating problems still left to be sorted out and Jack had remedied them upon his first day back in the hot seat. His thoughts still drifted to Anne as her voice upon the phone had told him she would be returning within the week and that was almost two days ago. He missed her like mad and it drove him crazy cooped up behind these four walls so he made his decision upon the spot.

“Paul I’m going over to Silberts to check out that warehouse fire and then ill go and make a report to their insurers the mutual you’ll be fine here wont you,” Jack had said standing and already putting on his jacket needing to escape the insanity of this prison.

“Yeah fine Jack I’m knee deep in my claims to be able to do the field work on that job anyhow,” Collins acknowledged his acceptance of Jacks escape.

The fire at the Silbert warehouse had took four fire tenders and fourteen hours of dangerous work to bring back under control. The chemical products that had been stored within this factory had been highly

inflammable and had given off toxic fumes. Jack studied his copy of the chemical companies accounts and it showed dramatically the sudden decline in business to his suspicious mind. The fire investigators report done by the first at the scene Fire Chief had laid dubious unproven reservations that this could have been down to premeditated arson and if Jack could prove that case the insurance company fronting Silberts were liable to save a fortune in compensation payouts and Jack knew he would get his usual 10% of those saved proceeds. All he had to do without any doubt was establish that Silberts had deliberately torched there own premises which would be no easy task to prove and gain for themselves a pecuniary advantage.

He drove down the A6 through the suburb of Walkden and into Little Hulton and then onto the Crofters Park Industrial Estate. He caught sight of the twisted mangled metal roof and the blackened half demolished brick walls. Remnants of a once flourishing factory as he parked before the wreckage of this once well-built structure. He crushed ashen flakes of timber underfoot and could stench the putrid dankness that only a chemical fire could of left behind. He stepped over one of the once surrounding exterior walls and made out from his blue print where the offices must once have stood. He stepped over the charred remnants of a door sign with the capitol GE surviving from the placard of the Gents toilet door.

“So the directors suite must have been west of here,” he confirmed to himself scrutinizing his blueprints as at the same time he took in paragraphs from the fire investigators report.

“Possible petrol combustion found here mmmm,”he read out in the footnotes.

Jack got to his knees and meticulously examined the uncontaminated threads of the melted nylon carpet that had stretched throughout the office complexes.

“A first rate candidate for the incendiary device here,” he smiled to himself as he discovered the fragments of a broken bottle a good candidate for a Molotov cocktail that had smashed here.

“So fire initially broke out upon the north wall and flames were seen issuing from windows on the eastern side within five minutes of the igniting flame,” he paused still reading out the report from the fire brigade.

“Windows,” he exclaimed and he glanced over to the collapsed eastern wall and wondered if an incendiary device could have penetrated the building from there.

“Suspect,” he jotted down in his own notes.

“Canbanna,” a voice made him jump out of his skin coming from behind.

“Jesus what the hell was that,” he said swivelling to discern the old Indian attired in a decorative poncho sitting crossed legs beyond the charred remnants of the door belonging to the gents.

“I have searched long and hard for you Canbanna we don’t have much time,” Grey wolf stated nobly.

“Much time for what. What are you rambling on about,” Jack said perplexed at being taken away from his investigation.

“My words have no double meanings Canbanna they do not ramble or fork like the great meandering rivers. You must come with me quickly we have many tasks to do and not much time in which to do them if all is not yet to be lost,” The Indian talked but his words and meanings did not have any consequence upon Jack.

“Listen pal as you can see I’m rather busy and as for rushing off with you well I’m afraid that’s quite frankly out of the question. So why don’t you go back to your local drug dealer and ask him politely to put you on another trip as the one your on now is beginning to piss me off,” Jack had freaked with the first appearance of this man and he hit back with his own macho temper.

“Canbanna if that is your wish then you will surely lose her forever,” Grey Wolfs words tormented Jacks attentions.

“Lose who what you waffling about,” he demanded an answer.

“The squaw named Anne who stokes the fires within your spirit Mister Quinn,” the Indian spoke his name and this freaked him out even more than before.

“What the hell do you know about my affairs and how the hell did you now my name you work for Silberts trying to scare me off the scent,” he protested as he fumbled for his mobile phone as the Indian sat just tolerantly staring.

“Hello hello,” he spoke into the phone although all he got was her messaging service.

“Okay Old Man what’s really going on here and where’s Anne,” he made his demands becoming somewhat perturbed.

“Canbanna you must travel with me across the sea into the lands of the Americas,” Grey Wolf made known his pilgrimages destination.

“Listen fellow I’ve just spent two whole months gallivanting around the globe with somebody far more appealing than yourself and ill be a monkeys uncle if you think I’m going to believe your nonsense for one moment longer,” Jack gave the Indian a tirade of abuse.

“You must come with me it has already been written,” Grey Wolf replied calmly and prophetically.

Upon the coming of the dawn Alynna and her party made there way upon the Llama caravan road towards the towering panorama of the Andes. Prior to their departure at Cusco the lord Inca had provided them with llamas and the locals had loaded stores and food upon the sturdy beasts. Alynna stood in the empty building where they had spent the night and she thanked her Master for his protection and influencing hand. The assemblage of her followers and the Guides of the Lord Inca had all gathered upon the plaza and Matazula had grown impatient waiting upon her. As Alynna made her final preparations to leave a figure appeared unexpectedly in the far doorway.

“Are you truly her,” a feminine voice spoke out in reverence.

“I am her Mama Huaco daughter of the Gods and beloved of the Inca,” Alynna responded.

“I am Salina kupac daughter of the Moon, sister and wife of Mancho Rocha. I have fifty Amazon warriors as my personal bodyguard and Mama Huaco I give them to you if you will let me come with you,” Salina pleaded she could no longer stand the bullying traits of the Lord Inca.

“Would that be wise for you,” Alynna asked concerned for her safety.

“Wise or not Mama Huaco it is my dear wish and do not have any worries over my brothers wrath as he fears you and there is no longer any love between us,” Salina let out the secret of the Lord Incas concerns about her.

“To journey with me Salina you must be willing to obey me and your Amazons follow the disciplines of my religion,” Alynna pointed out as the orb glowed avaricious.

“Mama huaco,” a voice called out from her rear and she turned to see the impulsive Matazula.

“Yes I’m coming,” she answered but as she turned to the far doorway the shadow

Of Salina had already vanished.

Matazula paced ahead of their column as they followed the course of the Ururamba River and as the llama trail ascended magnificent agriculture terraces were there to greet them upon their journey. The green valleys held warmth and welcome measuring up to grey foreboding aspect of the mountainous Andes. They felt the heat and humidity as they climbed above the cloud forests and became overwhelmed by the cool mountain breeze as they ascended the steep tracks. Upon a plateau on the summit of one of the monumental peaks the abandoned palace of Mancho Capac stood almighty in the realm of the condor. The fortress built from the rigid stone from the core of the mountains character. The strong timber gates were forced open and within a jungle of vegetation had taken root and overwhelmed the interior.

Alyнна realised then that lots of hard labour would be required to turn this abandoned fortress into a palace of her likening and fill it with grandeur once more.

“This is a sacred place Mama Huaco once called Machu Picchu the esteemed sanctuary of the Nusta,” Matazula revealed to them the ancient name that his people had referred to this place by.

On the second day at Machu Picchu the gate guard shouted out a warning gaining Alynnas attention and the Manta Mari ran to the entrance of her realm. Upon the Inca road a group of travellers down the valley could be discerned and they came up to the mountain citadel a group of fearsome warriors carrying short shields and long spears.

“Salina I welcome you,” Alyнна called to the head of the company.

“Greetings Mama Huaco I have come as I had promised,” she shouted back across the mountain top that echoed in the hollow valley. “Ive brought my fifty Amazons for you Mama and give them to you and place them under your direction,”

“Salina as I once told you in Cuzco to be with me you must worship me and I see by your devotion that you will be a good disciple to my cause,” Alyнна thanked the Inca Queen for her gifts.

“Tell your Amazons to report to my Commander Ramun much work and clearing out of the undergrowth has to be done. He will put them to good use and keep them busy,” Alynna instructed as the Inca Queen relayed her orders and the fifty female warriors trotted off regimentally in formation up the avenue of the citadel as she had ordered them to.

Ramun had spent the day setting bonfires and having the wild plants and wild flowers that had invaded this place over its years of desertion gathered and burned to reveal the once beautiful lawns underfoot. He gazed in bewilderment at the military contingent marching at the double in his direction they halted before the Egyptian and one of the red skinned beauties spoke on behalf of the others.

“Great War Lord we are yours and await your orders,” the Amazon had made known.

“Well my fine ladies there’s plenty here to keep idle hands at bay. You can start by gathering up the foliage and bundling it so we can put it to the torch,” he told them as they split off in groups of five to undertake their mission.

“The Manta Mari does not waste time getting herself recruits,” He mouthed to himself as he placed more bushes upon the crackling bonfire.

Schillerman checked the corridor again warily before he shouldered the door again. This time the wood splintered near the latch of the door. He glanced over his shoulder for a second time before hitting the entrance again and this time the door flung back to the wall. The ransacked apartment with clothes and drawers strewn all over the floor immediately took him aback. He noticed the brown coffee stains from a smashed pot mug on the glass table, which had a recent fracture within it. He could picture the struggle in his mind and he now feared for the worst.

Jack had phoned back into the office as he had left the Silbert investigation with other worries now on his mind.

“Hi Paul it’s Jack I’m going to call it a day Ill see you in the morning,” he had phoned to notify him.

“Wait Jack there was a message for you from that place you were at in Nigeria. Some pompous guy called Armitage was trying to reach you and he left you a number,” Collins passed over his own news.

“Have you the number there,” Jack said? Asking with apparent concern.

“Yeah sure,”

Twenty minutes it had took him to get through to the Revolution Hotel lounge and it was Schillerman not Henry that had answered him.

“Jack we’ve been trying to get hold of you all day,”

“How’s Anne what’s up,”

“It’s about Anne Jack you best sit down,”

“No just tell me now I need to know,”

“She’s gone missing Jack well more than missing her Hotel Room had been trashed and her belongings rummaged through as if in a robbery,” Schillerman gave him the bad news as straightforwardly as he could muster.

“Jesus I’m coming over there today,”

“You can if you feel you need to Jack but the authorities are scouring the town and the villages for her now as we speak, hopefully they will find her soon” the German added optimistically

“Okay Schillerman thanks for letting me know so quickly,”

“It wasn’t me Jack it was Henry who phoned for you immediately,”

“How’s the old bird taking it,” Jack asked knowing Henry was having a hard time of it.

“He’s not so good Jack those fits he keep having are definitely getting worse,”

“Okay keep me informed I’m going to check out some flight schedules,”

Jack hastily parked up his Cavalier and raced into his apartment where he threw in a few belongings into a travel case and recovered his passport.

Almost as an afterthought he placed the crystal figurine into his luggage as it reminded him so clearly of Anne’s beauty. When he came back out of the building the old Indian sat cross-legged at the front of his car.

“Canbanna you will not save her going back to Nigeria she is no longer there. You can only save her now by going forward. Shegasger is drawing fast upon our tail and he has already begun to hunt us down.” Grey Wolf spelled out the portents of doom

“Listen how do you know she’s not in Nigeria and how the hell did you know she had gone missing in the first place and how the hell did you know that I lived her,” Jack questioned highly suspicious of this stranger.

“My ways will not be to your understanding but I know who has your woman and if you come with me you may be able to save her,” Grey wolf spoke in deep yet reassuring tone

“Listen if this is some kind of hoax or you take me on a wild goose chase I will bloody murder you,” Jack was slowly giving in to the Indians persuasive ways.

“It is not me you should be wanting to kill but Shegasger who has your woman and anything with a soul will ultimately perish in his hands,”

“I don’t know what the hell your saying Shegasgar means nothing to me. I must do something though. Something that will help her so cut out the riddles and give me the facts,”

“Come Canbanna we must go and find ourselves an iron bird to cross the sea to the Americas. Once there you will have all the answers you desire as the great Tupac will guide you and reveal all he knows.” They got in Jacks car and headed off in the direction of Stockport and Manchester Airport with Quinn not knowing why he had placed his trust in this crazy old man.

Alynnna stared through the mists of the cloud forest from atop her mountain citadel into the valley below created by the erosion of time and force of the Uramumba River. At Machu Picchu she had an army of fifty Amazon Warriors and her contingent of Acolytes under her Command. The Lord Inca remained feared of her awesome power and had bestowed upon her this remote fortress built by his ancestor Pachua to keep her as far at bay from his sphere of influence for as long as it was possible. Alynna though revelled in seclusion and this place with its clean air in the high altitude and the beautiful architecture helped cherish her desires. The avenues were proliferated with ornate fountains that Ramun had renovated from the original design and they held her with its charm and beauty.

On the Llama trail leading up to the pass and onto the gateway she smiled as she distinguished the tiny black line that had come into view. Lord Matazula headed the front of his Army of Serpent Headed warriors and in their wake, dragged brutally along were a party of Mamari Warriors captured in battle and as agreed by the Lord Incas treaty Alynna had right

to a fifth of all the spoils of war such was the terror she had placed in Mancho Rochas mind.

She bathed in readiness in the blue lagoon at the height of her citadel and her handmaidens dressed her especially for the occasion. As her golden hair was combed through and oiled a messenger arrived from her Amazon sentries and stated that the Lord Curaca was at gates of the city. Alynna walked gracefully down the length the plateaux sticking to the zigzag course of the water canal that fed the sixteen predominant fountains along her path. She ordered the gate open and four Amazon sentries unhinged the ropes and lowered the barrier that crossed the threshold of the gates span. Matazula had lost the zest of his youthfulness with his haggard weather beaten features all too apparent and his vibrant long black hair streaked with white snake like lines.

“Welcome Lord Curaca it is always a pleasure to see you Matazula,” Alynna addressed him by his nobleman’s title before welcoming him as her friend.

“Priestess you become more beautiful every time we meet,” the Inca Lord replied still panting heavily as the thin air took toll upon his aged lungs.

Watching with interest behind Matazula stood Amura a young apprentice Shaman of the Temple of the Sun. He had been granted leave from his studies at the convent of Vilcabamba the religious and theological university of the Inca. He scrutinized her intently bearing in mind the childhood stories he had been told about the Witch upon the Mountain, which he knew off by heart. She hadn’t appeared quite as he had imagined picturing in his mind some ogre or fiend and observing her in front of his very eyes amidst the beautiful flower gardens and vivid fountains of Machu Pichu she seemed to him the very essence of beauty and purity itself.

The Mamari Indians a group of thirty who had been taken captive by the Inca were dragged along by heavy chains and thrown into a wooden stockade and Alynna’s Amazons immediately took up guard around the compounds vicinity. The Mamari were an agriculture race and had for many years paid tribute to the Cuzco Kings to live in harmony by their side. The harvest had been poor and the Mamari had grown ill with starvation and poor nutrition. When the Lord Curaca had come for the Incas annual tribute there had been nothing to offer for that year. Mancho

Rocho on hearing the news had chosen their fate for them and declared war. With an army of 500,000 the Inca had devastated the Mamaris homelands and took what plunder they could in retribution for the lost tribute. Hunaska had seen them coming the Serpent headed demons in their war masks and almighty conquerors of the Condor Tribes. They had tried to repel them but as one Inca fell another stepped into his place such was the number of their great army. Hunaska had fought them until he had no strength to raise his axe and he was unceremoniously bludgeoned unconscious upon the ground. Himself and three hundred of his brothers had been taken as tribute he had been shackled and forced to make the long march to Cusco with them. He had been subjected to stand and watch his fellow braves taken up the steps of the Sun Temple and ritually slaughtered until a river of blood had run upon the stairway. The Inca Priests in loose white garments with yellow feathers in their headdress carried out the butchery through the long dismal and heartbreaking day. Then himself and thirty braves had been taken to one side the only survivors of the tribute the Inca had stolen away from their land. Hunaska couldn't understand why he had been taken here to this strange fortress in the clouds and he felt the heavy remorse at not having died with the rest of his kin. He felt uneasy here as he had seen the mysterious blonde haired Priestess and wondered what newfound fate had in store for them.

Matazula and his band of a hundred Serpent Warriors were served maize bread, fruit and drink by Alynna's Acolytes. They were shown their guest quarters where they could bed down for the night. Amuru couldn't sleep his curiosity had taken a hold upon him and his astute mind needed to answer the uncertainties that burned in his heart. If this fabled Witch had her roots in his Inca myths or was just pure fantasy. He had wisdom of the magic arts. Sorcery had been part of his Priests disciplines and he knew the spirit world contained unwritten ways and roots of their ancestry. He had volunteered to escort the Mamari here taking a break from his chosen role and wanting more than ever to visit the legendary Castle of the Demon Sorceress.

He strolled out into the courtyard where torches enlightened the trapezoidal building and the grey mist hung with an eerie aura. At the top of the rise lay the mythological Temple house of the Nusta renowned in

his childhood fairytales as the Lair of the Demon and he knew by gaining the courage and going to that place he could answer the riddles of his suppositious mind. Sticking in the formation of the shadows he made his way from one building to the next as he crept through the citadels grounds. He froze as a noise came out of the blue and moments later he heard the struggles of a Mamari prisoner as two Amazon warriors hauled him across his path. Amuru tagged along in their wake as they headed up the plateaux towards the House of Nusta. Voices broke the calm of the night as the escorting Amazons and their prisoner were greeted by the two gate guards stationed at the entrance of the Temple. The young shaman had to circumnavigate the outbuildings and approach the Temple from the western face.

A wall of cyclopean stone blocked his way but stretching his arms his fingertips took hold enough to pull himself up and eventually after a short climb he managed to drag himself onto the ledge above. He dropped off the wall into the courtyard on the other side and he made out the square temple that had been set in its centre. He caught sight of the escort again as they entered the strange place of worship and he knew he had not a prayer of following them without being discovered. He lost his nerve momentarily as stories came into his head of how cruel and merciless the Demon Sorceress could be and he stopped to gain his composure. He reaped enough self-control to climb onto the roof and try to find a safer point of entry. Scaling the large granite blocks his sandal lost its footing upon the smooth face and his knee smashed into the edge of a sharp stone. He wanted to scream out in agony but had to suppress it as he grated his teeth to mask his pain. He found purchase on a wedging stone and managed to project himself atop onto the timber and straw roof frame. There he rested and examined the gash in his leg as he tied off a strip of cloth from his cloak to help stop the bleeding. The straw roof had been easily penetrated as he pulled clumps of the hay from its housing. Beneath lay a tightly jointed timber frame with clay based cement sealing the joints in an airtight hold. Amuru took out his knife and begun working as he dug into sealing mortar. After a few minutes of careful toil a hole of light started to emerge and the tang of perfumed balm incense came from within. He drew his eye closer to the crack intrigued at what might lie beneath.

Acolytes danced as their naked oiled skin shimmered in the false light making them seemingly appear to be living torches as the firelights mirrored upon them. He discerned the Mamari Warrior bound to a stone ceremonial altar and catching the glint in his tormented eyes he drew back for a moment knowing that they had been fear ridden. The deep intonations of a mantra had begun and the golden haired Priestess materialised in her Acolytes midst. Scantly clad in a white chiffon gown that had been crafted so frail it clung to her skin and a golden belt wound tightly around her slim waist. Her voice rose in some archaic tongue, which ordered the commencement of the blood ritual. Ointment of bee stings had been anointed ceremoniously upon the Mamaris member and he shrieked out horrifically as its potent effect took hold. The first of the Acolytes mounted him and her oiled body swooned atop of the sacrifice. Then the other worshippers took their turn taking their fill that fed their twisted lust and sexuality.

Alynnna sat her thighs astride the Mamaris face as the last of her Acolytes rocked her midriff upon his waist. She held his chin and pushed his mouth upwards towards her womanhood and grabbing his hair forced his mouth towards her passion. His tongue rubbed against her intimate places and her head lolled back in ecstasy. He could distinguish the salty taste of blood as her crimson waters had started to flow. Alynnna lifted herself from him as his face had been smeared in red ochre of blood from her womb. She took his manhood in her mouth and pumped his fluid within her as she swallowed his seed. Her body reacted to this pleasure with her nipples erect as her bull headed knife cut deep lacerations into his thigh and his blood trickled out onto the altars crevices and ran along its channels into the basin. Then the knife slashed his wrists lying open his veins and his skin pallor had discoloured as his life fluid drained away. The Priestess took hold upon the blue orb and placed it upon the Mamaris pounding temple, the orb glowed incandescently as it stole from him the last vestiges of his being.

Amuru abruptly heaved as his half digested stomach contents were churned out and he spat out lumps of grain meal onto the timber roof. He had become accustomed to the rituals of sacrifice but the ceremony he had

just witnessed had sickened and darkened his heart. He heaved again as the last of his evening meal splattered once again upon the timber. He then became aware of the complete absence of activity from within the Temple and with urgency he peered back into his spy hole. Staring directly back up towards him as if she could leer beyond the boards. Alynna's eyes had penetrated his very soul. She stood there beneath him caked in blood dripping morbidly onto the stone floor with raw lumps of flesh still visible within her mouth as she cried out nightmarishly.

"Intruder get him he must be killed," she had called.

Amuru shot bolt upright at his discovery and without hesitation jumped from the rooftop. His ankle twisted badly upon landing and he hobbled as best he could towards the encompassing wall.

"Intruder," an Amazon called out upon his tail as the guards raced over with the echo of their running feet thumping upon the cobblestones in pursuit.

He scrambled onto the wall with surprising dexterity he knew he hadn't before possessed and once over disappeared into the shadows dragging his injured leg behind him.

Upon the dawning of the new day Matazula's war party were ready for departure and they had assembled upon the courtyard in preparation for their trek back to the Jaguar City. Alynna stood with her own entourage dressed in a rich silver robe with a golden serpent wrapped around her neck.

"Matazula we honour your visit and you are always welcome here at my refuge in the clouds," Alynna made her official speech of departure.

"You are truly a most generous host Mama Huaco and we praise you for your hospitality," the Lord Curaca spoke anxiously wanting to be gone from the lair of the Witch.

"Who is that there, that handsome young boy in your party," Alynna spoke out her surprise question casually pointing into the ranks of the serpent warriors.

"That is Amuru a young restless scamp who can't decide if he wants to be a mighty warrior or a studious priest," Matazula introduced the young apprentice with.

"I would like to talk with him," she asked.

“Amuru,” the Lord Curaca called out to the sheepish looking boy who limped towards them. Alynna took him to one side out of earshot of the others.

“Amuru your Lord Inca has just informed me that you’re training to be a priest. I can teach you all you’ll ever need to know without having to creep around in the darkness,” her voice subtle and reptilian smiled upon his embarrassment.

“As he offended you,” Matazula asked inquisitive to their discussion.

“He has done me no harm just a curious cat that has more courage than he does have sense,” Alynna chastised him playfully but Amuru averted the stare of her hypnotising eyes.

“My humble apologies Mama Huaco upon your kind offer of an apprenticeship here but I cannot dutifully accept as my allegiance is placed upon another teacher,” Amuru talked like a man not a boy and Alynna could sense this boy’s spirit had a strong and natural vein.

“Never mind then one day though I’m sure you will be wise enough to come and serve me,” her tone venomous as this boy had managed to defy her will and authority standing before her still able to draw breath.

The gates of Machu Picchu closed behind them and Amuru felt an eerie foreboding of his doom upon her departing words and made a secret vow that somehow he would find a way to destroy her perverse religion forever.

Anne had returned back again to the Revolution Hotel absolutely shattered from her vigil at her brother’s bedside at Abuja General Hospital. As she made her way to the bar for a well-deserved nightcap when she bumped shoulders with the gentleman attired in the white suit and Panama hat.

“Oh I’m sorry,” she remarked noticing the silver topped cane he bore.

“No harm done Madam you must be Anne Armitage,” he said quite unexpectedly as his hawk eyes shone with warmth and kindness.

“Yes how do you know that,” Anne enquired taken aback by his charm and mannerisms.

“I’m a colleague or more you say a competitor of your brother Henry. I procure antiques for the private collectors market something I know doubt you wouldn’t approve of. I had heard about your brother being laid up. I

was surprised to learn Henry was here I thought his interests lay in Egypt. I've just popped back from there today myself unfinished business and all," The man in the white suit revealed as his hooked nose seemed to twitch his finely pointed moustache.

"Yes his research is in his North Africa however we are over here visiting a friend Klaus Schillerman you may now him," Anne acknowledged there purpose of being here in Nigeria.

"Yes I have heard of him the Mosque man of the jungle" he cajoled." Could I buy you a drink Madam." he offered extending his arm invitingly towards the bar.

"Yes that would be lovely I have had a hard day," Anne said truthfully with her head and feet aching and she yearned to sit down.

They found an empty table in the lounge and talked at length and it was the man in the white suit that asked most of the questions or just sat listening tentatively to Anne as she described Henry's worsening condition. Occasionally Anne would pause to sip her whiskey that warmed the foundation of her soul. She was thankful for a caring ear to pay attention to her woes and she felt so desperate and lonely here now without Jack who she missed more than ever.

"It's getting late. Thank you for your company you have been most charming but forgive me I must retire I have another busy day ahead of me tomorrow," Anne made her excuses as it was getting late into the night.

"Your company was also most charming Madam," the man replied tipping his panama hat.

"My apologies I got so carried away telling you all my troubles I never asked you for your name," Anne asked almost as an afterthought.

"The names Hugo—Hugo Crane at your service Madam," and he bowed most graciously removing his hat in the time honoured tradition of the gentleman class.

The coffee burnt her tongue as she relaxed back in her Hotel room and she reacted by biting her lip to lesson the pain. Knock-Knock resounded from the door.

"Hello who's there," she enquired to the unexpected intrusion.

"Forgive my imposition Madam Armitage," she heard the voice of Hugo Crane from within the corridor.

“Please open the door Madam. I have some distressing news about Henry the hospital has just rung and asked for you at the bar and forgive me for imposing but I took down the message for you,” he lied most skilfully.

“Okay then” she answered as she flicked back the latch on the door and Hugo burst in with some urgency and closed the door behind him.

“Have a seat Madam,” he suggested his face morose and Anne fearing the worst.

“Here Madam let me take your arm,” the kind Gent offered, as she became light headed and she had felt an uncomfortable sensation upon her upper arm where he had grabbed her.

She noticed him hurriedly pocketing back the syringe and her world spun around in a blurring vision.

“You’ve drugged me,” Anne mouthed as she stumbled and crashed into glass table with her elbow smashing the cover and the coffee cup smashed under the weight of her back.

“My apologies Madam but what has to be done. Has to be done,” he resigned himself with that he placed her carefully back onto the chair.

Hugo started his unsavoury work tipping out the cupboard drawers and scattering the contents onto the floor. He raked through the wardrobe ripping out the clothing and throwing it to one side. He turned her handbag upside down rifling through the contents until he discovered the certificate that he scanned through with his cold eyes.

“Well ill be damned,” he uttered pocketing the paperwork of ownership referring to the crystal figurine.

Only a dozen of the Mamari were still left alive as Hunaska and his fellow braves had watched them come religiously upon each cycle of the new moon and take away his tribesman. They had slowly dwindled down and with eighteen souls to mourn already Hunaska still clung onto a faint hope of salvation as his shrewd mind had figured out the basis of a plan. Examining the bamboo construction of their cage they had become aware of the tightly knitted ball joints that held the uprights in one piece. The joints were black formed of hardened bitumen and they realised the seals could be broken unearthing the securing twines beneath using the sharpness of a hard-edged stone.

In two more nights time the moon would blossom once again in the sky and upon the eve of the hunters moon Hunaska and his braves had made there decision that this would be the time they would attempt their breakout.

Ramun had grown weary, sickly depressed of his unnatural years of life and he knew now how much he had been maliciously cursed. He understood his fate would be to walk the earth until the end of all time and a complete and utter loneliness consumed his anguished heart. Once he had been besotted by Alynna`s beauty however time had a way of taking it`s toil and the Priestess had steadily befallen weary of her Egyptian manservant. As Alynna had walked in the gardens of her citadel she wouldn`t even pay him a second glance anymore and her cruel indifference hurt him more acutely than any torture upon the earth. He had become a recluse and for many moons had confined himself with regulation to his quarters. Only Attacia the much loved of the Priestess had paid him the infrequent visit although she only had words for her Mistress and after she had departed it always broke his heart leaving him in a bitter rage of his own jealousy. He knew between these four empty walls he had found solace not knowing what evils went on all around him.

The fateful night had arisen and Hunaska carefully organised his men to lesson any premature suspicion emanating from the guards. Five of his warriors stood in the hub of the cage in animated conversation shielding Hunaska from the viewpoint of their guards. He had chosen the bamboo rod that he plied pressure upon as one his braves worked upon the joint above as they planned to make a gap wide enough to squeeze a body through. The bitumen already cracked and the twines cut into with the stone tool broke with the first flat-footed blow that Hunaska reined upon it. He had to manoeuvre his body lithely through the narrow opening and once done he crawled stealthily into the shielding protection of the shadows. Hunaska then bided his time anxiously awaiting for his accomplice to arrive.

The Amazons strong and lean were armed with a iron edged spear which they had used mainly to prod their disruptive captives through the bars of the stockade and a square animal hide shield that had protected them from missiles that the prisoners had occasionally laid there hands upon. The guards stood by their posts in the torchlight and Hunaska and his

accomplice made their move, creeping unseen slowly towards them. They hesitated only a few feet away and they got a whiff of the animal fat oil they had anointed their nimble bodies with. In unison they flew out from the shadows upon the blindside of the Amazons. They had only mere seconds to take the initiative and the warrior women's features contorted expressing their surprise and shock as the Mamari fell upon them. A wrestling bout ensued with the spears and shields discarded in the fracas. The Amazons agile and healthy were more than a match for the emaciated and weakened state of the Mamaris. Hunaska had grabbed his guard by the throat in a strangle hold to prevent her from calling out into the night for assistance and her nails raked drawing stripes of blood upon his face as she struggled with his tightening hold, Hunaska's eyes streamed with tears as her nails bore into his skull and only the repentant hatred for his vanquished people drove him on to grasp her harder. Eventually she lay limp in his hands and he glanced over to ascertain that the other guard had been taken care of also. Her tongue hung blue from her contorted mouth in the false light brought Hunaska from out of his blood lust and back to the reality and danger of their situation.

The faces of the Mamaris lit up as their prison door was opened and they evacuated the stockade to form up on the fringes of the open courtyard. Hunaska gestured with a finger selecting two of his men and then placing two fingers towards his own eyes in the manner of a viper's tongue as he made out to them the two guards upon the main gateway. The chosen warriors slunk off into the mist of the night as they made their way cautiously to the entranceway of Machu Picchu. Hunaska collected the fallen spear and shield off the Amazon he had murdered and his men collected the weapons from the other fallen guard with another spear and shield plus a short dagger to add their arsenal. Hidden within the shadows they waited upon bated breath spying the silhouettes of the gate guardians and from time to time each questioned what had become of their own two warriors. Hunaska made them out first and witnessed the foremost guard take a tumble and searching for the second guardian to his dismay heard her scream out a warning.

“Aaaaaggghhhh,”

“Run,” Hunaska called with urgency as they rose to their feet and raced towards the portal. His sixth sense made him glance over his shoulder

halfway across the exposed courtyard and already he could discern the torchlight's racing down the mountain. He stepped over the bodies of the sentries who had finally been dealt with as two of his braves took charge of the drawing ropes and in panic started to hoist the securing beam of the wooden gate as it lifted from its housing. Hunaska made out the shapes of the leading apparitions gaining upon them as finally the beam raised enough to grant them passage. They scampered through the barrier in haste and onto the pathway beyond. Hunaska froze momentarily on descrying the gurgling shrieks as his two braves who had hoisted the beam had ran out of time to carry out their own escape and spears were thrust into them ruthlessly as the Amazon garrison had caught up upon them .

Ramun had been disturbed by the alarm call and had been one of the first to react. He grabbed a hold upon his old trusty sword and ran like the wind along the fountain rows to bear witness to the last of the prisoners fleeing through the gateway before it slammed closed as the two Mamaris holding the weight driven mechanism were impaled and slaughtered by the Amazon women.

"After them," Ramun called rousing them with his own blood curdling by the excitement and his humdrum existence had something to focus upon for the moment.

"Stop," an identifiable voice rose above his own and everybody halted in his or her tracks at the command of the Priestess.

"Ramun select twelve of my finest warriors and pursue them. I want them back here dead or alive by dusk tomorrow or don't bother returning at all," primarily Ramun had been glad to be back in her favour but as she had finished he realised again how little love she now had left for him. Only one thing caused Ramun a wry smile, as he knew within himself her spell upon his mortal being had begun to break.

Hunaska wise in the ways of his enemy the Inca had guided his braves away from the well-trodden paths of the Inca road and into the wilderness. This wild mountainous terrain, which made going treacherous by night, had at least afforded them refuge from being discovered by the guards intermittently stationed upon the Royal road. Before the dawn had broke two of his men had lost there footing in the dark plummeting to their deaths a hard price to pay for escaping although they were aware that the

only warriors that were going survive this would be the ones who still possessed their own wits and courage.

Ramun had hastily selected the twelve Amazons closest at hand as he had not the time to be choosy and had ordered them to equip themselves in addition with bows and arrows as he had little faith in these women warrior slaves possessions of Alynna. The Egyptian Commander knew it would be fruitless trying to track them in the darkness but he felt almost alive again and didn't want to let any opportunity to quell this feeling pass him by and he became aware of within a growing disdain for the Priestess and a fear gripped him as he became certain it would soon shine right from him.

"On me, hoist the gate," he ordered his legion and they trotted out of the gates of Machu Picchu with his Amazons in close file behind him. They had been informed by the lookouts in their elevated watchtowers that the prisoners had last been seen heading west and they made headway in that direction. It hadn't been long when there efforts paid off by the spine-chilling scream that echoed out across the mountaintops as the first Mamari had toppled off the steep mountain face. Ramun gained bearing from his death cry and they paced out a more strenuous step upon there tail. Scurrying up the inclines and taking precautions on the slopes another undulating scream broke the semblance again and gave confirmation that they were still upon the right track.

Hunaska glared upon the coming light of day with relief and awe. The high passes could now be mastered with greater speed but here in the elevated Andes they stuck out to prying eyes. Hunaska had seven warriors still with him and they had three spears a shield and a dagger between them. He called a halt to gain their composure and make out there heading from the rising sun. There homeland lay many leagues to the northwest and it seemed a lifetime away as he measured up the rocky landscape that overshadowed every horizon.

"We must make haste," he commentated his thoughts to his exhausted warriors who he realized were weakened by malnutrition and the loss of spirit they had suffered with the incarceration they had endured. Their strength sapped from them with every footfall although hope still lived in their hearts at being free once again. It drove them above the physical torment and gave them the will to prevail.

The Amazons had gone into a battle run as the light of dawn christened the sky. Determined to wreak vengeance for the murder of their comrades they whipped along the narrow paths with fire burning within them. They knew the mountain trails by heart and slowed calculatingly for the treacherous turns and sped along the firmer ground. Ramun scoured the heights above the valleys below him and it wasn't long before they picked up the scent and they were back upon the chase. Soft green lichen naturally formed on the smooth damp rocks and they discovered a recent footprint that had disturbed its formation. The Amazons increased their pace with the hopeful find and soon after they caught the glint of metal reflecting upon the wash of the sun in the pass ahead.

Hunaska had slowed down their own pace to an idle trot, as he knew by his brave's gaunt tortured features that they had little left to offer. They needed food and especially water to replenish their exhausted spirits and in the rainforest valley below he knew they would find both. As he debated the best route down the mountain his thoughts were broken by a cry that shattered his consternation. The rearguard warrior had abruptly fallen and as he fell Hunaska just managed to glimpse the shaft of the arrow in his back.

"Quick, run they are upon us," he warned as another flurry of arrows bounced off the sharp cliff face behind them.

Ahead of him Hunaska could distinguish an old Llama trail that descended from the heights.

"This way," he showed the way to his men as they ran the gauntlet upon their tired limbs stumbling upon the precarious track. Loose shale and the paths modest girth made it extremely difficult to negotiate as hooves not feet had patted it down although it remained their only chance. The hail of arrows petered out as they sought protection from the blinkered side of the mountains slope however it came to mind that the archers were fleet of foot as they raced to catch them. Hunaska took a glance to his rear and perceived another of his men downed at the top of the pass by an arrow and it had been most fortunate for Hunaska to look back at that very moment as another of his braves directly in his slipstream lost his footing and fell towards him down the incline. Hunaska had reacted instinctively stepping aside as the warrior raced passed him upon the steep gradient dragged forward by his bodies momentum. He shivered in relief, as the

realisation of the stricken brave colliding with him would have sent him to his doom. He looked on with dismay as the unbalanced man tried in vain to halt his decent upon the incline and then ultimately he began to scream realising his fate as he approached the precipice. He lost his struggle to bring himself to a standstill and went tumbling into the abyss. Going down forever and ever into the lowest points of the valley they all stared with incredulity as the brave took to the air and dropped into oblivion.

“Let him be,” Ramun raged at the Amazons as they had halted to stab to death a wounded Mamari they had come upon. They plucked out their blood caked spears and followed his lead without question. They had lost the opportunity now to pick them off and slow their progress with the bow as they had done upon the paths. The Mamari had found sanctuary within the umbrella of the rainforest at the foot of the valley. The Amazons stride increased again with urgency as they hurried along the Llama trail to prevent their quarry from disappearing completely.

“Scatter,” Hunaska roared, as they knew the hunters were less than a spear throw behind and his men understanding his panic divided as they broke into the forest. Only one other brave still clung to Hunaskas wings and he afforded himself a smile hoping his plan would at least give some of his men the chance of freedom.

Under the canopy of the forest the world seemed dark and oppressive and Ramun had been reminded of his fear and disgust that tormented his own spirit. He had forsaken Amun and had damned himself to the darkness for all time. He listened to the dripping cacophony of rainwater upon the leaves and it harked him back to the blood that had been shed in the service of Alynna. He found a huge frong with a basin type leaf and washed his hands symbolically in the cool water within it. The Amazons watched him with bemusement at his action as they also listened to the sporadic distant cry of a forest creature or the scuffle of one of its many dwellers. The distinctive crack of a splintering branch caught all of their attention and Ramun immediately sent two of his soldiers in hot pursuit. He had organised the rest of his troop sending them off in pairs in every direction he had figured upon his counterpart on having been shrewd by the daring escape they had planned and he had concluded a astute opponent would of split up his forces.

“This way,” he directed two of the Amazons not assigned to a search party and they headed off in the last direction they had not yet covered.

The heavy crunching clatter made Hunaska spin around midstride to see his comrade Unka had tripped and had landed heavily on the leaf proliferated earth.

“You hurt,” he asked with concern.

“Forgive me Hunaska I cannot go on,” Unka mouthed with tears of fear written in his eyes.

Hunaska dragged the young warrior back onto his feet and dragged him into a thickset clump of foliage.

“We hide here,” He comforted his fellow brave with.

Within moments they could discern the telltale whipping swish of moving branches and their hearts stopped beating and the hairs upon the back of their necks stood on end with apprehension. Through a sudden whoosh of parted leaves a running man appeared attired in fine gold armour with a plumed helm and stood only an arms length before them. He had halted to descry the resonance of the forest and in his silence they caught wind of the heavy trampling of others in his wake. A scream shattered the lull as the hunters had found a Mamari only a hundred paces from them.

“Silence,” Ramun motioned with his finger upon his lips for the benefit of his two Amazons.

Unka had started to tremble uncontrollably and the branches around quivered with his convulsions. Hunaska had gone into a cold sweat and placed his arm around his comrade to help control his dread malady that had taken hold upon him. Then an unearthly explosion cracked the tranquillity of this garden of nature as thousands upon thousands of fruit bats perturbed by the unnatural entities in their domain had taken to flight. The unilateral flapping of so many wings came over as if hands were beating upon a thousand drums and the air turned to a complete blackness as they took to the air drowning out the clarity upon the floor of the forest. Ramun laughed out in exhilaration at the spectacle, as the Amazons froze disturbed by the supernatural connotations of this aura. Unka crouched and then unexpectedly went into a run under the sheltering cloud of the swarm of bats.

“No you fool,” Hunaska had called at his heels although the deafening roar of vibrating wings had drowned out his voice.

The two Amazons vigilant had spotted the unexpected movement as Unka had emerged from his hiding place and they were first upon his tail. Ramun had stayed put as he swore he had heard a call in the uproar and waited for the bats to settle down from their fluster. Eventually a calming hush had returned and only the dripping of the rainforest leaves could now be discerned.

“I know your there,” Ramun called into the trees.

“Have you no honour are you not ashamed cowering in the wilderness like a scared rabbit show yourself if there is any honour within thee,” Ramun orated to the encompassing greenery.

“I am no rabbit, I only cower in aid to survive,” a voice answered him to Ramun`s surprise.

“So you do possess the symptoms of pride,” Ramun caught his rancour to push him further.

“I am Hunaska Prince among the Mamari people and I have a proud and honourable nature and unlike you Inca we do not sacrifice our prisoners as we treasure life and only kill for the necessity of war for our survival. To me you are nothing more than a barbarian,” Hunaska had been goaded and answered his tormentor.

“You have spirit as well I see,” Ramun had warmed to this mans boldness.

“I have a fine spirit and when I die it will be without fear,” Hunaska countered him again.

“Show this fine spirit then if you dare,” Ramun kept to the same tactic.

Hunaska stood and walked unflinchingly from the bushes standing gallant and superior before the hunter.

Ramun measured up this athletic Mamari and took note of the dagger tucked into his waistband.

“So Royal Prince I can offer you a warriors demise,” Ramun said and gestured by bowing insultingly.

“Kill me quickly barbarian by the sword so my spirit may return and avenge thee,” Hunaska knelt with his words offering his life freely.

Ramun unsheathed his sword and tossed it into the undergrowth.

“That would be not so honourable,” he added pulling out his own knife.”
Now we are even my Royal toad are you still man enough,” Ramun stood poised waiting for the Mamari to challenge.

Hunaska got to his feet and pulled the dagger from his belt and approached the challenger in carefully measured paces.

“So you also have a death wish barbarian,” Hunaska mocked as he lunged with his dagger arm holding the point out straight trying to catch his opponent off guard.

Ramun casually brushed his assault aside and with his over reaching strike Hunaska had to thrust out once more to maintain their sparring distance.

“Not today my Prince I don’t think,” Ramun answered his charge with smiling.

Hunaska struck again and put Ramun upon the defensive as he moved backwards. The cunning Mamari had skilfully took a firm hold upon Ramun’s knife arm whilst his own blade stayed free as he tried to plunge it into the barbarians chest. Ramun twisted adroitly and the grip on his arm broke as he managed to throw his body backwards away from the strike of the knife as it cut the air. Ramun punched down as the Mamari overreached again catching him upon the knuckles with the shaft of his own weapon. Hunaska cried out in pain and his dagger fell from his grasp. Ramun had the advantage and he managed to place his blade under his competitor’s throat with a wild demented scowl written upon his face. Hunaska flinched and stood rigid as he prepared to meet his ancestors as the cold steel brushed against his skin.

“It would be a tragedy for this world to lose another honourable man, what do you think Prince,” Ramun stated lowering the blade.

Hunaska opened his eyes again in disbelief.

“I agree,” he managed to muster through the rush of shock that had still took hold upon him.

“Come this way quickly, we still may have a chance of outflanking the Amazons,” Ramun added retrieving his sword and heading into the forest.

As the night fell they came to the conclusion that they had evaded the hunters and they halted upon a ridge top that had emerged as the forest had ended.

“Why did you spare me,” Hunaska had the opportunity now to ask still unsure of his good omens.

“Once I had what you possess. The gift of being a Nobleman I have forsaken my own spirit but I can offer you the chance of life and in that

way I atone myself from my sins that I alone have committed,” The Egyptian wept after spilling out his torments upon the Mamari.

“You are still full of honour Ramun,” Hunaska replied and then added.” My homeland is over there upon the fall of the horizon,” the Indian waved his arm across the savannah out towards the edge of the earth.” My land is beautiful and plentiful most years when the Inca do not rob us blind with their taxes. You are most welcome to journey with me and once we are there I will make you welcome,” Hunaska’s eyes were full of warmth as he talked of his homeland and his invitation to this enemy genuine who had at this moment become his friend.

“I’m overwhelmed by your generosity Hunaska although how wonderful your homeland seems I must decline. I have my own soul to salvage and my own demons to defeat before I could walk as a true man again,” Ramun poured out his heart again to this Indian’s compassionate listening ears.

“Hunaska is forever in your debt may the Goddess of the Moon always shine upon you,” The Mamari gave him a blessing prayer from his own beliefs but it had been unknowingly badly chosen.

“Farewell Hunaska the time has come to part our ways and thank you for your blessing but to be truthful I’ve had enough of Goddesses to last many lifetimes although your prayer is received thankfully,” Ramun answered him honestly.

“Farewell then honourable one and May you cast out your demons soon,” Hunaska said the last words between them.

THE WACTHFUL EYE OF SIRIUS

A stream of fiery torches snaked down the mountain paths, beacons floodlighting the route like thousands of fireflies as the people of the Inca Nation marked the procession for his final journey. Bearers carried the symbolic reed boat high aloft upon gold leaf poles and they endured the weight bearing down upon their shoulders with love and pride. Mancho Rocha the Lord Inca had died. The King had departed this earthly paradise and his mummified body adorned in his Jaguar cloak would sit in the Temple of the Sun for all time. They now carried his spirit down to the shores of the Sacred Lake to return his soul back to the arms of the

moulders of all creation. The millpond surface of Lake Titikaka shimmered with the reflection of the very many torches making it appear magically alive waiting to ferry the Kings spirit to his eternal resting place. The barge nestled gently onto the water and the bearers unfolded the triangular sail. The pure white robes of the Priests were discerned at the waters edge as they prayed with sincerity for the Guardian Spirit to take care of their beloved King as he embarked upon his final journey into the afterlife.

They all knelt the whole Inca Nation in submission before the Sacred Barge as the torches were laid upon it's deck and not before long above the hush of the silent solace of his people the crackling of burning reeds could be heard. The easterly wind of the Guardian Spirit took hold upon the sail and the boat glided ethereally and serenely into the water. The flames rose up above the deck and plumes of incense-laden smoke could be scented in the barges slipstream. Women began to wail in mourning and children began to sing the sacrosanct songs. Tears were visible upon the hardest warriors eyes as they watched the funeral pyre consuming the spirit of their Lord Inca.

Amurus eyes were dry as he attended the Kings funeral ceremony and he had seen the death of Mancho Rocha as a blessing with him gone the protector of the Witch upon the mountain had been laid to rest. He could concentrate upon laying down the foundations to his life's mission of ridding this land of the poison that had affected it. He placed his arm around his young son Viraco the one who would accomplish the legacy of completing his life's work if the mission he was about to undertake proved successful.

The Sacred Barge had become indistinguishable only a ball of flame that began to hiss and steam as it sunk into the water and then the Lake gurgled as it swallowed up the spirit of the King. The thousands of torches on the mountain trails and along the Inca Road were put out in order one at a time as the Kings spirit had kindled for the last time as it vanished from the land of the living. Eventually as the last torches faded only darkness could be prevailed.

Hugo Crane had landed upon the shores of the Americas in the year of our Lord 1784. At the impressionable age of thirty four he had acquired an unhealthy addiction to drink and to complement this a destructive gambling habit that had seen him through his life in diverse stages of rags and riches. In the summer of that year however his luck had taken a turn for the worse and he had to flee the gothic Streets of Whitehall, London with a string of debts and the deadly threat of repercussion as the Magistrates, Bailiffs and the more unsavoury money lenders were all hounding upon his coat tails. He packed his few belongings and with his last shilling to his name had gained passage aboard a clipper bound for the safe haven of New York.

After two arduous months searching for labour and to keep himself from starving to death in the rat infested ghettos that were proliferated with immigrants from every corner of the known world he had succumbed to begging to sustain himself and keep barely alive. One day a fine Gent in Top hat and tails showed pity upon him and tossed him a silver coin. Even though his stomach panged with hunger clutching the silver dollar he entered O'Hallerrans Bar and sipped down his first rye whiskey to quench the other fire that burned within him. Here he found his second piece of good fortune as the Barman in casual conversation informed him of vacancies for temporary labour had become available upon the dockside. Working alongside Irish Navvies, Polish migrants and French refugees as the grain harvests had come to their fruition and were being shipped back to England for the auctioning houses. The pay a dollar a week had been generous and after three months of hard heavy work lugging the grain sacks for hoisting into the cargo bays Hugo had managed to put enough by to invest in a moderate card game.

The Irish settlers lived hard and played hard with every Friday spending their pay on woman, beer and Hugo's primary obsession gambling at O'hallerrans Bar. On the dockside he heard the rumours of a coming game with the main players being the most influential men in the ghettos. Angus O'grady the dockside foreman a big husky man with long flowing ginger hair and a mountain of a beard covering his hard rugged features had made the arrangements for the game. Thomas McGinity who carried a toothless grin and dishevelled nose had become a major player with the money he had earned from his other notorious past time prize fighting. Frederick

Morgan was a gentleman and Manager of the shipping company who loved the thrill that the big game signified and of holding the poker cards in his sweating palms.

The entrance fee to gain a place in the big game had been set at fifteen dollars a small fortune in the ghettos as to Hugo it stood at three months wages. Hugo though to bolster his stake had to put his life on the line and had managed to acquire a small loan but he couldn't resist being involved even if it meant him falling into a lifetime of debt once again. A green baize oval table lay before them and the commencing hand had a dollar opening. Hugo watched \$5 of his pot disappear as he folded upon the first five hands. On the sixth hand Angus had dealt out the cards, Hugo glanced at his own cards three Queens, 7 of Clubs and 5 of Hearts. He asked for two and as they were delivered he didn't even bother to glance upon them. "One Dollar," Thomas had said placing the silver coin into the kitty to start the bidding.

"Three Dollars," Frederick Morgan raised.

"Three Dollars and Ill raise you one," Angus announced boldly.

"Four," Hugo added matching the burly Scotchman and knew this hand held tempo by the confidence of the bids.

"Ill fold," Thomas announced backing out of the game sensing danger.

"Four and Two," Morgan continued raising the stakes.

"Six and four," Angus tempered the contest.

"Ten," Hugo croaked pushing forward the stack of dollars before him and realising he had only fifteen more loaned dollars to his name.

"Ten and two," Morgan increased the hand by his mandatory raise of two.

"Twelve and raise three," Angus allotted counting Cranes coins on the card table.

"Damn," Morgan scolded throwing in his cards.

Angus glared at Hugo seeing the void of space where his stake had once been as he placed it in the pot with the rest of his money.

"Just you and me then Laddie," the Scotchman added.

"Fifteen and Ill raise you fifty," Angus stated and his eyes beamed with menace.

"I'm afraid I haven't got that much to place," Hugo admitted defeat almost coolly.

“Ill lend it to you Laddie,” Angus said and Hugo had already learnt how half the men on the dockside had fallen into debt with this man through loans or gambling debts and they were forced to pay him back at astronomical rates of interest.

“If you insist,” Hugo accepted with an air of dignity, which secretly infuriated the bullying character of the Scotchman.

“Ohh I do insist Laddie,” he hissed through his yellowed teeth.

The Foreman in his haste to claim the prize and humiliate his prey turned over his cards 3 Kings and 2 Sevens.

“Full House,” went out the ushered cry from the crowd that gathered around to view the game.

Hugo shook his head in disbelief and placed his hand face down upon the baize.

“Teach you to play with the devil Laddie,” the Scotchman bolstered scooping up the pile of dollars towards him.

“Not so fast Angus, Let the man show his hand,” Thomas interrupted in a toothless grimace knowing they had another slave firmly in their pocket.

“Aye Laddie turn them over,” he had agreed.

Hugo casually flicked over all five cards in one smooth rehearsed and practised turn to the sudden shushes of the entire room. Angus looked upon them with astonishment knowing it had not been the hand he had dealt him and somehow it had been rigged as he glared upon the four aces laughing at him with no explanation in his thumping head.

“You cheating bastard,” the Scotchman snarled and before Hugo could react a cutthroat razor slashed before his face. He stumbled backwards and the unbalanced chair with his bodyweight upon it came crashing to the floor. Luckily Thomas and Morgan had restrained the infuriated Foreman.

“Angus man, calm down you can’t make a scene too many questions will be asked,” Thomas whispered in his ear knowing that there were many men in this very room that had fallen foul to their scam.

“Englishman take your money and run. If you’re seen in this town again Angus will surely kill you if he sets eyes upon you again,” Thomas added, Crane discreetly scooped up as many dollars as he could.

“Here take this for the fifty owed dollars,” Thomas had said handing over to Hugo a silver topped cane before he fled.

Tupac Amuru knew well that the Inca roads the highways of the King were heavily guarded at various waypoints and anyone upon them without a quipu, a Royal knot approving right of passage did so under the peril of instant death. The high mountain passes and rope bridges were sole property of the Lord Inca and Tupac knowing this all to well, aware of his own peoples laws and customs had to conquer his own sense of betrayal with the threat of death hanging over him he followed the trails tentatively north. The guard posts along his route were every now and then he made sure he observed the soldiers from a safe distance. Tupac had then the time to determine his course and circumnavigate the crude straw roofed billets that housed the customary three of four armed Incas that were stationed there. Then high in the mountain passes where snow had coated the vast peaks and even the mighty condors stood out gloriously against the pure white eminent backdrop he had take to greater care. The sentinels below in the valley only had to glance heavenwards as he moved through the icy plateaux's and scaling the precarious cliff faces to overcome the outposts that barricaded the passable roads.

High up amongst the clouds towers of rock reached into the very heavens haunting and oppressive. Tupac shuddered as another icy blast of bitter wind screamed from atop the frozen summits with it's chilly force shooting through his flesh and wrapping it's freezing tail around his very bones. Amurus teeth chattered constantly behind his blue lips and his red raw eyes stung out with the unpleasant cold. He believed he would truly perish up here in the frozen deserts of high altitude where his lungs desperately sucked in for air that contained no relief within it. Then descreying the gurgling calls of the banshees surrounding him in the veils of the icy mist and he questioned if the Witches Demon had finally caught up with him here in this lonely desperate fold.

"I will not die here," Tupac shouted into the face of the galling wind and forced out his steps with a hidden, resolve.

An ugly snorting yell broke from the nostrils of some foul despicable beast and it's call penetrated through the night as Tupac shook with terror at what demons would lie before him. At that moment as if by some divine miraculous will he felt the warmth of the wind and as he entered into the phantom mist although he stopped dead in his tracks as the strange guttural blasts and cries of the banshees came again from beyond to haunt

him. His body shivered with hopelessness as the trivial respites of heat taunted him then the temperate climate unexpectedly settled and it felt as if Inti the God of the Sun had breathed upon him with a blessing for his protection. He took heart by this thought as the mist tingled his frozen skin he persuaded himself that Inti had answered his prayers and not forsaken him.

The mist cleared in his wake and before his feet lay a bubbling frothing lake where Inti's inner fires had truly awakened. Geysers, which he had mistook for demons spurted water high into the Andean sky and hot springs steamed warming the frosty air. He sat upon the rocks still shivering as Inti wrapped his comforting arms around him and gradually his soul revived as life returned to his frozen body. The caustic pools rippled and gases erupted into violent whirlpools upon the lakes frantic surface. Tupac realised how thirsty he had become but the acidic sulphurous water could not quench his needs and his want had intensified as he had somewhat recovered. He took out his flint knife and chipped into the ice knowing that beneath its hard crust, snow melt flowed. He placed his lips to the ice-cold nectar and it tasted as good as any of the sacred wines. All through the long night he stayed sat upon the rock pedestal watching with awe and fascination the dances of the swirling steam and rejoiced as the geysers shot out water into the air. He thanked Inti with his prayers for not forsaking him and understood that his journey had the favour of the Gods so his faith renewed as he contemplated upon his holy quest.

Upon two rope bridges sentries had been positioned at either side and Tupac had to descend to the foot of the mountains and then scale the mountain upon the other end to persist with his journey. Many times upon his travels he had lay or froze trembling as Guards had almost stumbled upon him and at this point the mountain ranges of the Andes lay at the back of him and before him lay the frontier of the Aztec Nation. He afforded himself gratitude and prayed to Inti for bringing him this far unscathed but he appreciated the series of fortifications spread along the border had to be crossed intended to warn his own people of invasion and send runners back along the Royal Road to Cusco. The runners used the guard posts as relays to speed along their messages so the Inca Armies could be mustered to counter any threat.

Staring down vacantly upon the wooden latticed structures along the frontier he knew his vigilance would be put to the test. He glanced upwards to the orb of the moon and befell entranced in its dreamy eerie light and then he looked across upon the horizon as the earth blackened. He discerned the orange wisps of campfires coming into life from the fortifications which were kept under surveillance with awe as streamers of smoke were masking against the moonlight.

“It is time,” he announced to himself.

Crouching down in the manner of the puma as he ran making progress whilst his profile lay low to Pachacamac the creator deity of the earth as he used his god as a shield. The streamers quickly became more distinguishable and his nostrils caught a whiff of the charred wood smoke and drying coco leaves that the guards smoked to keep them alert. He dropped to his stomach as a cacophony of voices broke the chill in the night air. He pressed his body into Pachacamac and took hold of the earth deity as he made out the glow of the campfire, which was less than a stone throw distance from him. Tupac had nearly stumbled upon them in his haste. He crawled now through the thick dry grass of the pampas and the voices began to fade. He glanced over his shoulder and the firelight had completely vanished and he let out a sigh of relief. He lay for some considerable time gaining his composure before he found the courage to stand.

He walked no more than three paces before hands were upon him and a huge palm that had a horrible stench covered his mouth as he tried in vain to shout out. He lay upon the ground with three red-faced devils upon him with Eagle heads upon their war helmets. He smiled secretly knowing he had made it across the frontier as a club of sharp obsidian stone cracked its blade wickedly upon his skull and sent Tupac into oblivion. He came too with blurring vision and a taste of salty blood in his mouth. He glanced upon the war club silhouetted upon the crown of the moon as it rose again and Tupac knew that the next blow would kill him.

“Viracocha,” he cried out weakly as the muffling hand shifted and the three painted faces gaped at one another in bemusement.

Dragged upon his feet and marched for three days into the interior with no food and only the shortest respites for rest. Amuru had already accustomed himself for death by their inhuman exertion as he stumbled

and fell repeatedly with the wound in his head still open making his mind spin with the dizziness of concussion. His legs tortured him upon the rise of a mountain too steep to contemplate however the reign of blows from the obsidian headed clubs managed to keep him going every time. He would crumble into a heap upon the ground and the winding blows brought him abruptly back upon his feet again. They reached the summit and beyond yielded a wondrous sight, which held Amuru mesmerised. The legendary City of Tiachuchan. City of the Gods and home to the last of the great ones Viracocha.

Two pyramids dominated the citadel standing ominous yet proud overshadowing the stepped Temples and glimpsing one with blood flowing upon it's staircase Tupac was well aware that they also sacrificed there captives to the Gods. Somehow he found new vigour to proceed entering into the heart of the enemy's domain. In the Aztecs capitol he prayed he would find the answers he so desperately sought. One thing still troubled him deeply of how he could change his fate from being sacrificed to becoming a guest of the Emperor and being allowed to state his case.

The Aztec people had started to gather as the Sentries had alerted the citizens to the small War Party that returned descending the sacred mountain with a prisoner in their midst. Amuru looked upon the glorious gateway carved out in the serpent body of Quetzalcoatl adorning it's ominous snake head glaring upon him hungrily and once in it's body he could view the multitude of feathered plumes of the population as thousands cheered a welcome upon the war party with their fresh lamb for the slaughter. His three captors handed Tupac over to the white robed figures that greeted them who bore a golden eagle upon a small crown whose profession Amuru only knew too well with dread as they were ceremonial Priests who carried out the sacrifices a role he himself had trained for but not yet had to perform in his own society.

"I must see the Virococha,"he demanded to them but his pleas fell upon deaf ears as the Priests just smiled back in a grisly manner at his whines evilly.

Manhandled up the steps of the Temple until upon the flat precipice he found himself hauled into the air and placed upon the stone altar. His shirt ripped open by the serrated blade of a ceremonial knife, which lay bare his chest where any moment now they would cut out his still pumping heart.

The biting coldness of the anointing oils hit his flesh with the poisons applied to help numb his senses. His ears throbbed as the chanting prayers were spoken above him and the serpentine face of Quetzalcoatl sent fear through his veins. He descried the sacrificial blade lifting towards the Inti as the final prayer of offering came from the lips of the Head Priest in the Serpent Mask. Transfixed in horror, as the knife froze in midair ready to end his days.

“Shegasgar,” he cursed at the ending of the offering prayer as silence reigned.

“Shegasgar is back, kill me and you kill yourselves,” Tupac raged on finding his voice.

A frail hand took hold upon the Priests knife arm as he was about to lunge and an old man stepped into view from the shadows.

His long bony finger prodded into the ashes of the fire and Tupac still recovering and overcoming his brush with death tried his utmost to relax measuring up this ancient sage that had spared him.

He knew he was the one. The one he had searched for and read so much about from the library at the convent of Vilicabamba. He perceived his scraggy aged hair long but brittle with the still surviving traces of black hair showing the glory of a time gone by. His body wrapped in loose skin where once his strong body must have manifested. His jowls gaunt and sallow however his eyes retained a spark of his ever-knowing wisdom. The raptor of the crowd had abated with their anger as they had bayed for his blood and now they stood perplexed outside the Viracochas house. They speculated who this stranger was who had stirred such compassion in their spiritual leader. In the citadel apprehension, suspicion and fear of ill omens had run rife, as this encounter had originated a mystery that had overtaken their superstitious minds.

The finger grey with dust and blackened by the charcoal upon the tip unexpectedly lifted and stabbed out in the direction of Tupac.

“Inca,” the gummed mouth toothless formed upon the single word.

Tupac nodded in response.

“Soldier,” his mouth moved again.

“Priest,” Amuru corrected him proudly.

“Shegasger,” the mouth opened again but this time the eyes widened to place emphasize upon the dreaded word.

“Shegasger is in my land. I have seen him with my own eyes,” the young Inca carried forward his news.

“You Inca, You are healthy. You posses your own mind. How can this be so? No one but a God or a Demon can confront Shegasger and live. How have you done this Inca,” the Old Sage questioned him sceptically.

“I have seen him his blue glow and an almighty fear has grown within me since that day. His shadow the Priestess now walks masquerading as your once great sister Mama Huaco. I came to you to seek you out with my life in your hands and would lie abase before thee to gain your acumen. I have heard you are all wise and all knowing and your seed goes back to the beginning of all time. I came here in peace to ask for your guidance and learn from you and hopefully rid this demon from our world,” Tupac spoke both truly and passionately and the Viracocha held a tear back in his eyes as he could see within this young man what a true and noble spirit he possessed.

“Inca you have many things to learn we must begin immediately,” the Old Sage replied as Amuru smiled broadly knowing that with the grace and will of Inti he had accomplished his mission.

The trickling rhapsody of the cascading water droplets glistened with radiant colour under the shower of the new day sun. The spring water pure and clean with the freshness of the invigorating air in this high humid paradise. Alynna ran her delicate fingers through the wash of the crescendo and within the spurting fountain she felt it’s cold and graceful texture. Her soul wept as it had dawned upon her of how she missed him. How much she missed Ramun and regretted at this moment the way she had shunned and spurned his loyal companionship. He had not returned that fateful day with the Amazons and his body scoured for in the rainforest had never been recovered. Only three of the Mamaris had been recaptured alive and the Priestess in a fit of rage brought on by the concept of treachery lurking in her sceptical mind had ordered the twelve Amazon warriors who had failed her butchered upon the nights blood ceremony and she drank their blood devouringly to quench the anger of the days fiasco. The three Mamari were made to bear witness so they knew their fate and they shrieked out hideously as Alynna’s nefarious blood lust had reached it’s pinnacle. The ceremony had achieved

little towards abating her temper and frustration and upon the dawn she had withdrawn into the dark fathoms that had once been a frightened young child and Alynna found a momentary lapse of refuge from the insanity of her life.

Upon the summoning of her Mistress Attacia wiped the tears from her cheeks as black smudges of malachite eye paint had soiled her smooth porcelain complexion. Her lips trembled to some extent from her bouts of crying and sobbing that had taken a hold upon her after the onslaught of the preceding nights ceremony. She had never before seen her Mistress in such a fiery rage and this had troubled her. Ramun had been her anchor through her calms and storms of this surreal place and she wept a tear for him as well. Ramun she had admired like a true brother. Even though cursed he had somehow retained his caring noble bearing and Attacia could confide in him like no other. Now he was gone and she deduced he had by some miracle found the will to cast away his demons. In a way it made her proud of his righteous spirit able to thwart off Alynna and then all of a sudden she felt betrayed abandoned here to rot away by herself. Attacia slipped her capeskin cloak over the shoulders and left her rudimentary dwelling to answer the Mistresses Call.

At a steady pace the fountains fledted by with their continuous splatter and the rippling rush from the drainage canal made her become uneasy as the blood channels of the altar came into his consternation and the haunting bellows of the dammed could be heeded in her minds ear. Halfway up the rising plateaux before the House of the Nusta she could make out Alynna sat serenely at the basin of a fountain and a hatred engrossed Attacia for the callous divergence her Mistress at times possessed.

“You sent for me Manta Mari,” Attacia announced her arrival.

“Yes child, how is you that you never mentioned to me that Ramun had made plans to leave,” Alynna's hand still dripped with water under the fountain and she never moved her fixation away from the water and met with Attacia's eyes.

“It is true I had an idea of his ambitions although I never could be certain of it,” Attacia defended herself against this accusation.

“Oh come child you have been seen on many occasions entering and leaving his quarters what ever for I wonder?” the Mistress smiled cold-heartedly as she made her point clear.

“Only for friendship,” Attacia fought back her insinuations

“Friendship or conspiracy it’s all the same to me. You’ve defied me once before Attacia giving Little Dove a piece of my crystal and sending her away into the forest,” Alynna cut deep as Attacia had fallen in love with their delicate African flower and had aided her escape so she would not be ensnared by the Mistresses evil.

“I never gave her the crystal, you know that it had broken off as she had played and I had not realised she had took the splinter. I did though help her to flee at the time the Zulus were upon us and a child had no chance of surviving our journey,” Attacia defended her position.

“It is now of no significance,” Alynna stated matter of factly.

“No Manta Mari it is. I have always been faithful and loyal to you,” Attacia bowed slightly to confirm her obedience.

“You would not leave me, would you—would you child,” It had become Alynna’s turn to plead as her fear of being forsaken by those closest to her tormented the very fabric of her concentration.

Attacia paused taken aback and relished this moment having Alynna under Wings for once.

“You know that would be impossible for me,” she stated dogmatically.

“Yes,” Alynna raised her tone in annoyance. “You may go now I want to be on my own,”

Strolling back down the plateaux towards the living complexes Attacia mused if it could be somehow possible to really survive away from her bewitchment. She had seen others perish that they had called it the Egyptian curse the Hundai after the death of the mighty Pharaoh Horemheb and Attacia was overcome with nausea of the very thought of this wicked death. She had born witness to this aging death and had watched others withered in to dust in front of her very eyes. She burst into tears with the hopelessness. She placed the fantasy of a new life firmly into the back of her mind knowing it would only turn out to be a fallacy only something though a fine light that could be dreamt upon and nothing more than that.

The Manatoya plantation stretched for many miles across the green pastoral fields of Virginia. The plantation house more of a manor house with its great size had been finely constructed of solid oak wood beams and painted in a pure white making it glisten and stand out in the sunlight. On its facade a huge veranda stood and walkway porches where you could sit in the cool air and breathe in the taint of the sweet aroma of the surrounding Acacias. A few hundred yards behind the Manor house shielded by a screen of Red Ash Trees the shanty village of the slave quarters lay. On some evenings upon the veranda you could discern the bass deep rhythm of their dark continents tribal songs they had brought along with their pagan religions and through the chants of the nights the cry of a new born baby.

Hugo Crane rode down the pine corridor avenue enjoying the shade as the triangular roof of the plantation site came into his view. As they drew into the courtyard he made out the strange brown skinned people carrying pales of water towards the kitchen and some of them tending to the flower gardens.

“Ill take for you Miser,” a young black male with bright prominent eyes took hold of the reins upon his mount.

“Where can I find Miss Alynna,” Hugo said stepping off the horse as he had found out the owners name whilst passing through the local Town.

“Madam is inside the Plantation house Miser,” the black stableman informed him.

Crane studied the skull carved brass knocker with interest as he hammered upon the door. A plump black housekeeper donning a blue dress with a white apron answered the taps on the door.

“Can I help you Sir,” she enquired in a brash voice.

“I would like to speak with Miss Alynna,” Hugo made his business known.

“Should I say who’s a calling,” the housekeeper rhymed out

“My name is Crane—Hugo Crane,”

“And the nature of your visit,” she persisted.

“Employment,” he stated out rather embarrassed.

“Come in and have a seat in the drawing room Mister Crane,” the housekeeper invited

Hugo’s eyes bulged as the housekeeper directed him into the drawing room. The exquisite furnishings and solid oak desk made him palpitate but

not as much as the objects in the glass cabinet that had caught his attention. Golden masks of snake headed serpents, elaborately decorated vases, crude ancient weapons with axes of obsidian and an iron edged spear. The cabinet was crammed with a magnificent collection of oddities of the past, which strangely fascinated him. In his mesmerizing he hadn't noticed her entering the room as he focused upon the treasures avariciously behind the glass.

"I see you are admiring my collection," Alynna interrupted as he reluctantly took his gaze from the shimmering gold.

"Admire it's splendid," he added turning to see this most beautiful Lady and his fascination of the gold drifted immediately from his thoughts."Oh forgive me Madam Hugo Crane at your service," he added

"And how may I be of service Mister Crane," Alynna questioned his visit.

"Actually Miss Alynna if it's proper to address you in that manner," he had begun.

"It is continue," Alynna said curtly.

"Well Miss Alynna I have not been in the New World for long and basically I was trying to secure for myself some gainful employment and as I passed your ranch I fell in love instantly with it's grace, charm and beauty," Hugo answered speaking more in terms of her than the plantation.

"My collection it pleases you," Alynna changed the subject not giving an opening to express his own charms any further.

"Yes Miss Alynna I have never set eyes on so many marvellous things," he said truthfully.

"Very well collect your things the bunkhouse is at the back," Miss Alynna came back to their topic of conversation with.

The bunkhouse Crane had been allocated was adequate however the four beds in the room spoke out volumes to him, as his privacy was his most treasured benefactor. Having to share this accommodation he knew it would be something he could not get accustomed to. His bunkhouse comrades ambled in noisily as the plantation workforce came to the end of their laborious day. Crane studiously inspected each one of them as they tipped their hats in recognition to him but not a single word was uttered to him. James Brown had been the first to enter a thickset burly man sporting a gruff unshaven chin that was overly large. He had grown up in the

backgrounds of the cotton mills of Northern England and washhouses. At the age of sixteen he had stowed away to the New World and here twenty years later he earned his coin harvesting the cotton to feed those very same Mills.

Rupert McClintock a failed English man of the gentry had escaped here to bury the shame he had wrought upon his respectable family name. He had used the whorehouses once to often and ended up being the father of three illegitimate babies conceived to the prostitutes. A huge scandal had ripped across his County of Kent and he sat there with the ulcerating sores of the early stages of his syphilis itching in his drawers.

Gunther Dietrich of Austrian decent had come from the picturesque hamlets of the Alps. He was an ox of a man with wavy light blonde locks and he had come here for adventure and to perceive for himself a segment of the big wide world.

“Good day Gents, I’m Hugo Crane your new companion,” He spoke out breaking the respite.

“Bah” Brown barked throwing his boots off and crashing upon the straw filled mattress.

“Howdy,” McClintock drooled masking his once pompous accent.

“So you have arrived in Manatoya welcome to Valhalla and may Thor grant you wings to flee my doomed friend,” Gunther recited to the stony eyed gaze of the others as he spelled out his warning although it had fell upon deaf ears as Crane took no heed of his gibberish.

The room rocked with the snoring cadence and flatulence until Hugo could stomach it no more and he sauntered out into the fresh night air. An owl hooted and the wind brushing the Acacias made them bristle. The plantation starlit with the vivid speck of Sirius in the southern hemisphere and the moon gave the earth a yellowed haunting tint. It would have been ghoulish and spooky scene but there she stood in the floodlight of the aura from above.

“Hugo,” she called as her white chiffon gown transparent floated gracefully as it shivered in the breeze.

As if in a haze Crane stepped towards her although the further he walked the further she seemed away.

“Hugo,” she called again.

His pace increased to capture this beauty in his arms as he stridden out his breathing became abruptly heavy and then he stopped dead in his tracks. All he could hear were the whistling of the woods all around him as in stood in the heart of the Acacia forest.

“Did I dream this,” he surmised but then a faint thumping beat caught his attention.

He mustered his resolve with determination as he traced the source of the disturbance as he ventured further into the forest. He came upon an open glade a relief from the heavy foliage and the mushroom bowl shape of a native hut stood before him. Smoke rose from the aperture on its roof and blended ethereally with the night sky. The earth reverberated to a pounding rhythm emanating from the drum sound from within the hut.

“Hugo what took you,” her voice called, as she stood silhouetted in the honeycombed structures entrance.

He didn’t hesitate this time and he ran towards her, however as he reached where she had been stood unbelievably vanished into thin air. His head spun from side to side. His mind totally refused to accept the illusion and his heart pounded like a mountain Lions upon the hunt. He ventured into the dark interior where the beat of the drums had drowned his ears and as he crouched to enter the abyss-silence reigned. He stood in the absolute blackness and patted his pockets habitually as he searched nervously for his matchbox.

“Miss Alynna are you there,” he called into the darkness as his hand fumbled with the crude box. He wiped the sweat from his brow before he took out a sliver of wood and sulphur and struck upon the mud wall. It fizzled into life and he yelled out in surprise. The match dropped and he stood there shaking in nervous tension. He could now smell what he thought he had glimpsed but he found another match to confirm his convictions. He struck it in a deliberate motion and cupped it in his hand to cradle its brilliance whilst he gained his self-control. Holding the flame out he made them out again, the pile of mutilated black human corpses. “Jesus,” he cursed dropping the match and scrambling from the hut.

Dawn broke and the singing voices of the African Plantation workforce came out melodiously above the chirp of singing dovetails that nested in high beams of the Manatoya Mansion. Crane rose from the bunk with his head aching and eyes were strained. Did I just imagine it, he thought. His

task for the day would be supervising a gang of labourers in field four to the western edge of the plantations boundary. The black labourers all male twenty in number worked doggedly and uncomplainingly hoeing the hard ground for seeding. They sung tribal songs that told of their long history and they smiled as they toiled which made Crane respect these strange people immensely. As midday approached and the cook wagon rolled up with Gunther at the reins and Crane knew he had the opportunity to gain some time for himself.

“Chow down,” the German called as the labourers queued for their meals. “Gunther I need a small favour. I have to pop back to the bunkhouse could you hold the fort out here for me,” Crane had asked seeing his charges happily eating.

“Ja you go,” Gunther acknowledged.

Crane headed east as if going back to the bunkhouse but once out of sight veered south. He tried to make out the beginning of the Acacia wood. He stepped through the dense foliage heading roughly the same way he could remember from his dream. His horse became edgy and grey patches of perspiration had ruffled his copper coloured hide. Then the forest ended as he had expected and the mud hut stood there in his midst and the yellow straw roof seemed less oppressive in the sunlight. He tied his horse at the entranceway and wandered carefully into the denizen of its core. His head inside bowels of the hut he drew in air with his nostrils trying to catch the incarnadine smell of the dead. A sickly odour hit him but it was more of age and the dilapidation of the place than of that of cadavers. He stood within and the white clean sand upon the floor came visible. He lit a match, which illuminated the bare interior showing it empty and cleansed. How did I know this place? Why did I have that vision? His mind buzzed with the mixed emotions and enigmas within it.

“Hugo,” the voice gave him a start and he swung around in surprise.

“Miss Alynna,” he greeted her stood there in the aperture.

“Hugo why are you here,” she questioned.

Hugo remained silent for a long moment before he replied.

“You came for me in the night,” he remarked.

“Yes Hugo I did, do you love me Hugo,” she asked him quite openly.

“Yes I do very much so Miss Alynna,” he told her honestly.

“Would you serve me Hugo,” she asked this puzzling question.

“Yes I suppose,” he didn’t know how to answer.

“Then kneel before me Hugo and Ill make you mine,”

As the commercial jet liner soared above the clouds Henry had unbuckled his seatbelt and settled into his chair. Overcome by lethargy he drifted off into the realms of myth and reality. Henry could make out the hideous masks of the serpent headed war party as they returned with their spoils of war. The Chunco Indians hapless souls were dragged along by ropes that connected each of them in a giant human chain. The crowd grew excited as they approached the centre of the square before the Coriacañcha. Muscle laden men in white ceremonial gowns and yellow feathers in their plumes took charge of the bound men from the Serpent Warriors. A young captive at the head of the chain had his ropes severed and the Priests dragged him up him up the staircase towards the precipice where the ominous shadow of the altar stood upon its flat surface.

Alynnas pulse raced with an uncontrollable rush of excitement and a sensual erotic mood had taken hold upon her charisma. The Chunco Indian reached the summit to be held down bodily by his arms and legs upon the altar. A white robe stood before him Idis with his gold chain reflecting in the sunlight a mark of his office of High Priest. He held aloft the blade of Inti and called out to the Sun God to honour the sacrifice laid out before the mighty orb. The knife came down and a stream of fluid shot into the air reddening the white robe of Idis. The blade sharp as paper cut into the soft flesh of his abdomen and Alynnas began to swoon in ecstasy experiencing her nipples rubbing upon her cloak. Her acute senses had hearkened the cruel echoing death cry of the young native giving forth his last breath of life and then silence as he passed into the world beyond our own. Idis held aloft the dripping and still pulsating heart to the drowning cries of approval from the crowd.

The next captive on the chain had to be clubbed into submission and carried up to the altar in the clouds as he fought desperately to preserve his salvation. The knife caught the sparkle of the sun again and Alynnas stirred by the warm sensation feeling titillating her vagina and she parted her lips to let forth a sexual moan. A thick river of blood had begun flowing down the steps as it snaked its course like the writhing of their Serpent God that

the Jaguar people worshipped devotedly. Hands gripped Salina the Former Queen or Quoya of the Inca Nation as the chain of prisoners had been vanquished and the priests dragged her towards the river of blood.

“Mama Huaco,” She called to for mercy.

The Priests stopped and looked to Alynna for her approval as she swirled in the abyss of her demonic desires.

“Mama Huaco,” Salina her acolyte called again in desperation.

“Take her if you must, but remember the Gods have had their fill already from your blood lust and in your avarice to appease them you may find that one day you are the one that will be dragged upon the summit.”

Alynna gave forth her wisdom

“Release her,” Huayna Capac, the ruling Lord Inca ordered another who feared the wrath of the Witch upon the Mountain.

“Sacrifice her, you cannot undo what you have already done” Alynna spoke out defying the Lord Inca and Huayna Capac dropped his eyes as he made his resignation obvious to his trepidation of this enchanting Goddess.

Salina looked back at the Mama Huaco with the hurt of betrayal and the horror of her fate engraved upon her expression as she was dragged up the steps of the river of blood. Attacia also stared upon the Manta Mari with scorn and hatred as she became aware of Alynna's swoons as she could stench the blood fever of this unholy place. Salina was held upon the Altar and the Idis Priest had lifted the sacrificial blade in readiness to end her days.

“Wait,” Alynna called above the sonorous deathly stillness of the Inca and she began ascending the blood-splattered staircase and as Mama Huaco reached the summit she took the dagger from the Idis Priest to stand in his stead.

Salina wouldn't give her the satisfaction of glaring into the death pall of her passing and focused her gaze upon Quilla the Moon Goddess. The blade came down and a line of her life's fluid discharged in the direction of her Moon entity. Alynna cut out her heart and she held it aloft but no cheers emanated from the crowd. Alynna then placed the still pumping ventricles upon her mouth as blood dripped appallingly upon her tongue. Her countenance had lost all senses of reality as she drank the Luke warm nectar.

“Mama Huaco, Mama Huaco,” the Inca began to chant more through the terror of this Goddess than sanctioning to her grisly actions.

The voice disturbed Henry as the drone came to his ears again and he opened his eyes to the Golden haired beauty before him making a blood red offering before him. His arm struck instinctively in horror and the tray with its contents spilt upon the aisle floor.

“Jes, Sir I only you asked if it was you that had ordered the Bloody Mary,” the Stewardess had said damping down the drops of the drink that had stained her uniform.

The Viracocha had instructed Tupac into the ways of the Ancient Maya. He had taken him to the centre of the universe and shown him the sacred Calendar Stone. This huge cylindrical device had many intriguing complexes and held the secrets of both time and space. The huge cog like segments all interlocking turned in all the phases like the orbits of the planets and the Maya had seventeen different calendar motions to calculate both time present and future and the concept of space and its effect upon the Earth Mother.

“The Maya held the numbers themselves to be holy entities tools and possessions of the Gods,” Viracocha informed his astute pupil as they circumnavigated the huge reckoning machine.

“The Maya used the calendar stone for prophecy not only for predicting the solstices and the solar and lunar eclipses. They could also predict the catastrophes that would face mankind. You have heard Inca of the seven suns,” the Viracocha asked.

“Yes Master the seven epochs of time and we will be upon the verge of the sixth sun within the near future,” Tupac had heard of the sacred time phases from the Quipucamayocs the gifted myth writers of Villacabamba.

“The epochs are the span of the Maya upon this earth, not just the Maya but the Inca, Mamari the Chunco. The time we have been granted by the Gods upon their garden. This is Tzolkin the divinatory calendar that counts our year in a 260-day cycle and has eighteen twenty-day months” Viracocha began pointing to the different cogs upon the floor.” This is the vague year calendar which counts 360 days of a solar year and the five unlucky days we count but do not relish and this is the Calendar of the guiding planet Venus which gives a long count of 26,000 years and

within it's turn are the seven suns and as you can see we have only two more suns granted upon us. The suns are in 5,126 year cycles and the sixth spells doom upon your people the Inca." Virococha went silent as he let his pupil sink in the facts of the day's lesson.

"The seventh sun is called the Inkarra and the long count goes back tracing time and the movements of the planets for 400 million years and my young Inca all the calendars in their motion stop and do not go beyond the solar year 40065 (2012AD) this is the setting of the seventh sun. This is our doom the end of our races we will inevitably come to an end. Anyway enough for now," he had concluded seeing the weariness in Amurus eyes as he measured the run of all time and space.

The scented flower gardens had bloomed and were the most spectacular feature in the grounds of Teotihuacan. Here wide brimmed roses spread avid colour and irises snaked up the walls as green spectres of wonder. Pansies, apple groves and neatly sculptured hedgerows all held a grand aura. Artisans Scribes and Poets wandered within its meandering paths gaining inspiration and vision from its beauty. Tupac walked past the red flowered orchids, petunias and lilies and lotuses floating exotically upon a carefully crafted pond. Viracocha walked here every morning through the groves of the lovely aromatic garden and it now had become their daily ritual. Tupac had enjoyed his time here with the Aztecs and had bonded well with his mentor the Mayan Shaman Viracocha.

They listened to the sonnets of the humming bird's call and the harsh cry of the Macaw, as the birds were just as colourful as the surrounding flora and fauna.

"Master,"Tupac went to speak as they completed their third circuit of the grounds. Amuru waited as he knew the Old Sage by now and that he liked to view the world about him before he commented upon it.

"Yes Amuru,"he acknowledged knowing his pupil had an overactive intrigue in the mystical world in which they walked.

"You told me the seventh sun what does this portend for the future," Tupac spoke the question that burned in his mind since first setting eyes upon the Calendar Stone.

"You look upon a leaf with its delicate and frail beauty. The fragility of the wings on the Humming Birds that give them the magic to fly. So

beautiful yet so easily destroyed,” the Viracocha gave him his riddle of life.

“Our World Master is it not strong as a mountain or is it so very frail and if we forsake the Gods we would fall and wither into the dirt,” Tupac asked his own enigma and he waited for a response but it did not come until they had completed another lap of the flower garden.

“This fragility you ask upon is like your own faith. If it is weak you have no purpose without guidance and if it is strong then it ripens like a fruit or buds like the flower,” The Old Sage all wise and all knowing had spoken in answer.

“Shegasger why do the Gods let such evil threaten their garden Master,” Tupac had found another enigma with his intellect excitedly high “I now see your true question young Inca. You look for the Rat on top of but not beneath the garden you have to dig to the roots not the beauty it portrays,” Viracocha now mused silently.

They went around the flower garden again without a word between them and the Old Sage directed them back into his house where over the years Tupac had shed his boyhood skin and changed into a man. Tupac had a son Viraco who he had named in honour of the fabled Sage before he ventured on his holy quest many years ago. He missed his son dearly but his instruction into the ways of the Maya had been invaluable to him. Tupac had studied the philosophy of the Mayan ways and of how they were keepers of all time bestowed upon them by the Gods. He had mastered their theology of the fire ceremonies and the feathered Serpent who the Inca also worshipped but in a different ways. Then he had learned the secrets of the Calendar Stone and the Inkarra the reversal of all time. He had seen how the planets moved in the night sky, how Grandmother Moon could affect the tides and when Grandfather Sun would plunge the earth into darkness again.

Viracocha sat with pessimism debating if this was the right time to teach the Inca the lesson he had always desired to understand. Viracocha had given him the skills of the shaman and shown him the way of the Earth Mother.

“Inca prepare yourself for your hardest and final lesson,” the Old sage had spoken sitting by the fire.

Viracocha placed more coals upon the hearth and poured two cups of the spiritual fluid called Iwasqua that brought forth upon you the vision bringer. They both sat cross-legged facing one another and the Old Sage passed Tupac the bowl of hallucinogenic alcohol. They both took sips from the pungent brew whilst they chanted prayers to Quetzalcoatl the flying Serpent to speed them on their way.

A pedestal of rock in the mould of an anvil hung above the crashing seas might. The Night black as the primordial dawn of all time and the awakening of mankind had begun. The frozen earth ruptured by the pounding of the meteorites and great chunks of ice from the poles exploded as they thundered upon the cliffs in the ocean. A wizard his name Izapa stood upon the rock pedestal and by his face Amuru saw it wrought with anguish and pain. He looked into the wizard's hand and he held within it a hunk of the quartz that he had stripped from the Earth Mother. The Wizard shouted out a prayer across the caverns of existence but he did not summon the forces of good or of nature but the malevolent ones that hungered only for death and devastation. The Wizard held the crystal aloft as lightening struck it repeatedly.

"I am Izapa first upon the earth and call upon you Shegasger. I am your Servant who will serve thee for all time. I abase myself before thee and the darkness that coverts thee. I swim in the halls of damnation as I beseech thee Shegasger let darkness overcome me and I will bond with you in allegiance for eternity,"

The heavens roared in anger as heavy rain battered the earth and lightening rippled across the sky as it emanated from the crystal. The seas rocked and the crashing ice flows smashed against the walls of rock, The waves opened with a rampant fury and a huge feathered claw manifested and reached out to lay it's talons upon wizards head. A flash of blinding light lit up the heavens and the earth as the wizard stood upon the rock pedestal no longer and all that stayed put was the quartz emanating in a blue caescence. Then the mighty Serpent arose from the waves bringing darkness back upon the earth, it stretched it's mighty wings from horizon to horizon and ultimately by some profound miracle placed it's serpentine head into the quartz with it's great body turning into a black mist as it disappeared within the crystal. Tupac drew his eyes into the visualization more wildly and the crystal had formed into mould of the wizard's skull

and within the looking glass he espied him screaming out in untold misery.

Tupac came from the trance sweating profusely and his hands still shook from the nightmarish world he been brought back from.

“Inca I have taught you the ways of the Earth Mother and you now possess the wisdom you desired to destroy him, but do you have your faith. The faith to carry out this quest and be burdened by its intricacy” the Viracocha had spoke.

“I do Master,” Amuru let his heart speak for him.

“Then it is time for you to leave young Inca for you have a great deal yet to achieve,”

“I will miss you Old Father,” Tupac stated with tears in his eyes.

THE SIXTH SUN

Tupac Huallpa gazed upon the eight crystal skulls upon the trapezoidal skull rack and his eyes ran with water. His grandfather the great Tupac Amuru had moulded the first of these crystal effigies. His own father Viraco Capac had dedicated his life to their creation and even Huallpa himself now in his old age had spent his youth shaping the hard quartz with cloth and sand.

“Why have we created these,” A young apprentice Priest asked as he finished off polishing one of the skull formations.

“My grandfather told me long ago,” Huallpa began with, “That we are coming upon a great age upon the verge of the sixth sun when the planets align and the Earth Mother is at one with the conflagration of the Universe in the far reaching sky. This is prophesied as the doom of the Inca,” Huallpa told his son the daunting news.

“Why are we doomed Father,” Wahskar Kokar asked again.

“My Grandfather believed in his faith and he would say to me in my youth. That if you place your trust in the Gods you will eventually bloom

like a flower. There is evil my son wrought upon our land and my Grandfather your Great Grandfather firmly believed in the power of the skulls and that they would save us,"Huallpa told his young apprentice his words of wisdom.

"I hope to bloom one day Father,"Wahskar implied with sincerity.

"Lets pray we do Son, Lets just pray we do,"

Alyнна arrived in Cuzco with her entourage of Amazons and Acolytes. They paused at the Gates of the Jaguar City listening to the panpipes and the people rejoicing in the festival of the coming of the new age. Attacia stood by her Mistresses side her last companion who had begun the long journey from Egypt and smiled at Attacia even though a foreboding hung in her eyes. The loss of Ramun even though many eons ago still hurt both Attacia and Alyнна deeply and their remorse had not lessened any with the passing of time. Attacia concluded by now that he must of surely perished for his body must have withered away as his soul screamed out for mercy within the crystal. They stepped through the Gateway with the Pumas head flanked by winged attendants upon the archway. The great Temple of the Sun rose up to the heavens where everybody prayed that the alignment of the planets would soon come to pass and a new glorious age be set into motion.

Alyнна had been mistaken, even though she would not of believed it with her own eyes but Ramun still survived. Living in the depths of the Rainforest. The fragment of the crystal that had broken off upon the Bantu shores still nourished him and his skills as a warrior had protected him from the many dangers of this land. His face haggard and bearded by his hard living but beneath that growth his face still unblemished by the passing of time. Away from the Manta Maris possessive charm he had managed to forget his past evils and found a remnant of his once true soul returning within in. At night he wept alone with the howler monkeys as the shame of his deeds haunted his slumber although in the daylight hours his spirit soared hunting game and feeding off the fruits of the forest to survive.

One day Ramun had discerned a harsh unnatural roar and the unfamiliar aroma of salty spindrift air wafted through the forest. Captivated by his curiosity he followed this new scent and as he traced its source as more thunder rebounded when he drew near. A golden beach lay before his feet

as the forest had abruptly ended and the open spaced ocean glared at him with majesty and freedom written upon his eyes. The puzzle had been solved and he laughed out luridly at being such a fool. Here he could fish and bathe living unmolested from the tropical insects that had smothered him under the canopy. He set himself to work immediately in a dreamlike haze of untold happiness as he tore down branches and collected dried thatch from the floor of the jungle. A shack rapidly stood proudly upon the beach that sheltered him from the sweltering sun and bananas, yams and fish hung plentifully across his door. He lay upon the hot dry arid earth brushing back his sodden hair from bathing and stared out into the crashing surf. Somewhere out there over the sharp horizon lay his Egypt that he pined for and tears formed as he recalled himself as a fine young Officer in Pharaohs court.

His dream was shattered as they came upon the horizon he made them out the dark shapes and as they grew taller he recognised the shapes to be galleys although larger than he had ever seen before. Soon their huge square-rigged sails came into view and Ramun secretly wished they carried the Cobra headed insignia of the Pharaoh upon them. He was soon disappointed instead of a Cobra they displayed a red cross upon their canvas sails. The Ships came to anchor in the next bay to Ramuns new home and he ran through the forest to try and spy upon them more closely.

Admiral Fernandez Alonzo Sanchenchez the third, head of this expedition that had been nobly sanctioned by Phillippe the King of Spain stood on the beach as if Lord of all the Earth as his three Galleons were unloaded. Soldiers, Arms, Horses, Food, Wagons and the Royal Standard were ferried upon the beachhead. King Phillipe had granted him a Royal commission to explore the reaches of the New World as the Spanish had a growing lust for gold when their palates had been wetted when Cortez and Hernandez had lavished the riches they had unearthed from the Americas upon the Royal Household on their return. Sanchenchez had not come all this way upon the God forsaken ocean to be outdone by the endeavours of others and he had already received troubling reports that the sails of his rivals galleons Francisco Pizarro had been seen upon the horizon before they had laid anchor. He had come here to this affluent barbarous coast with his vast private Army of men, horse and cannon. His only Achilles heel would be the Jesuits that he personally hated, an army themselves of

missionaries who had come to tame the savage into the ways of the Christian heaven. Whereas Sanchenchez had simply contented himself with conquering them and he had already decided with certainty that his mission would not consist of turning into a crusade. The Catholic Church had a powerful persuasive voice in Spain and it would have been more than his worth and to his assured demise to have protested against the Jesuits participation whilst at Port in Spain. The authority of the Inquisition still relevant but here in these unknown lands he would be King and consulate of his own advocacy and with this absolute rule he would justify his own ends.

As the Army of Fernandez Alonzo Sanchenchez made camp upon the beaches as he himself, returned to his lavish cabin aboard his flagship *The Glory of Castile*. Below decks it housed his grandiose oak lined bunk elaborately adorned in gilt silver and fine sought after silks from the lands of the Moors. He lay upon the red cushioned upholstery of the bunk with it's mattress of goose feathers and awaited the reports from his scouting parties that had gone into the interior. After a rare vintage brandy and a fifteen-minute catnap he found he could not find peace in his usual bourgeois ways as excitement burned in his gourmandised stomach. Through the thick lens of his spyglass he had scanned the beach and watched his scouts returning dragging two savages behind them.

A knock upon his cabin door annoyed him as it brought Fernandez away from his dreams of Empire and supremacy.

"Enter," the Admiral stated as Captain Rodriguez came smartly to attention as he entered the portal.

"Your Excellency, the camp is secured and the fort is well under construction. The horses have been corralled, cannons have been emplaced to secure the perimeter and all sentries posted," he reported with efficiency.

"Very good Captain," Sanchenchez said with a mere wave of his hand as his men had toiled relentlessly upon the shores to complete his orders and maintain his protection.

"Also Excellency two natives have been captured in the forest what are your orders," the Captain enquired convinced their execution would be required.

“Bring them straight to me unscathed, let me see the nature of the beast we have come to quell,” he replied smiling sardonically upon the Captain as Rodriquez knew that the death of the savage within their own homelands would now be imminently at hand.

“Very well your Excellency,” the Captain replied not quite able to mask his bitter rancour.

The Admiral chuckled childishly as he espied the rowing boat setting off back towards the shore and he observed Captain Rodriquez wading knee deep in the water as he ran to the beachhead hoping his men hadn't been over zealous and prematurely exterminated the savages. The two Chonco Indians were dishevelled having been beaten without remorse as the soldiers had gained sport from inflicting their cruelties upon these heathen sinners. Fortunately for the Chancas and the Captain they had not as yet died from their injuries. The Chanca Indians a tribe that had once ruled the Land where the Incas now prevailed had been conquered by the Jaguar headed people in the time of Mancho Capac the Sapa Inca, the first ruler of the Incas and the first to bear their gold bar of office the Vara. Mancho Capac had took their homeland from them and murdered their ancestors leaving only a small band of survivors who had thrived as hunter gatherers in the clouded forest. Basari and Mecundia had been out searching for game armed only with their blowpipes that fired darts tipped with poison from the Yellow Back Toad, when these strange Gods mounted on heavenly beasts had surrounded them. They both fell upon their knees in homage but soon discovered that these Gods were Devils for they had no pity and were to be feared as much as the Inca.

Bundled upon the wooden raft they were taken across the waves to climb up to the City upon the Sea and they feared they would never again set foot upon the cool dry earth. Taken into the dark bowels of the moving City they were pushed ruthlessly into a small chamber and forced upon their knees where the God Giant donning a headdress of white metal stood before them terrifyingly. On the Giants chest an intricate necklace hung and the Giant shock it before their petrified eyes.

“Gold,” Sanchenchez shouted at them as he displayed his chain of office. The two Indians looked to one another in despair and the raining blows of their captors made Basari wonder if they searched for the soul of the Sun God.

“You show me where to find gold you heathens baboons,” Sanchenchez ranted placing his fingers to his to his eyes that made the Indians cower believing that this demon would soon be tearing out their own

“The Jaguars rule the Sun,” Basari mouthed out in his Chanco tongue indistinguishable to the Latin speaking Spaniards although it had an effect, the beatings stopped.

“What did the heathen say,” the Admiral announced becoming hopeful that the interrogation was going to bring forth fruit, ripe golden fruit that stole away men’s hearts and minds.

Basari swallowed conspicuously to gain a measure of raw courage and placed his own two fingers into his fear-ridden eyes and then grabbed hold upon the chain of office. Sanchenchez demeanour suddenly glowed with the lust of greed.

Ramun had kept his eyes upon the obese man who had been bodily carried to the threshold of the beach in order to keep his boots dry and it brought to mind the opulent grandeur and rank of the Viziers in his beloved Egypt. He made a note of the heavy plated armour and knew this man was no warrior as he struggled to walk with this ornamental frame upon him and he laughed out as the fat pretentious Merchants such as Tuti Marianga were brought freshly into his thoughts. His expression changed to concern as he made out the two Indians in the small ferry boat manacled and bruised and he knew by experience that these strangers had come here to conquer. He inspected the horses the fairytale beast of his youth with a saddened heart and physically felt for a nimble white stallion that had to bear the Grand Viziers burden. The columns of Men began forming into rank on the edge of the forest and he became perplexed by this new threat invading into his world.

Sanchenchez upon the verge of his adventure made ready to give the order for the March inland leaving behind a small garrison who would finish the fortifications and protect their harbour.

“Men of Spain, Men of God” he looked upon upon the Jesuit contingent,” We embark on an untrodden path, a path of glory and a pathway into the annals of history, before us lie hardships, endeavour and maybe even death. Then again we are in the pursuit of Gold, Honour and the Glory of Spain and when we return with great riches and tales of our heroism the Spanish people will embrace you and make you Dons and your

grandchildren will be enthralled by the stories of your bravery for all eternity,” a great roar exploded upon the beach and his men brandished their arms in the air.

“Now let us pray for God, Spain and King Phillippe who have placed this great honour upon us,” the soldiers and Jesuits knelt upon the sand and the mounted Conquistadors bowed their heads in respect and as the Cardinal of the Jesuit Order made prayer for the soul and salvation of this holy crusade.

Huallpas hairs had turned white and his once dexterous hands were riddled with arthritis as over the years he had rubbed the fine powdery sand over the finished creation. Eight other Shamans accompanied him an order called the Shaula that his ancestor Tupac Amuru had founded. He stared through tired sockets at their creations the nine, the nine skulls that formed the covenant of the Viracocha. They stood upon a trapezoidal the sacred skull rack in formation with only one missing to form the covenant the Demon Skull that rested upon there pedestal forming the sacred pyramid. This had to be done upon the setting of the sixth sun when the celestial bodies had aligned in the heavens to lay bare the soul of all creation. Only at this time, this secret time that had been recorded by the Maya the keepers to the keys of creation could the Demon skull be broken open and as the old epoch of the fifth sun died a new age would be created. The Shamans had placed their faith in the belief of the seven suns taught to them by the spiritual leader Tupac Amuru. They knew the time span of mankind upon the earth had seven glorious epochs, the sacred suns and if the Demon Shegasger was not destroyed before the advent of the final sun then the epochs would regenerate no more and all life would perish in a time without end.

The grey scudded heavens shuddered and a thunderbolt of lightening electrified the dark embers in the sky. Silhouetted on a solitary protruding branch of a dead sycamore tree a Raven had been illuminated in the eerie light, standing with menace as if calling upon the ferocity of the storm.

“Pantuac, is growing angry as he roars from his abdomen and death awaits upon the wings of the Great Mother,” Grey Wolf had spoken with his

voice clear as it rose above the crashes of thunder as he unfolded the riddle of the Ravens omen.

“Where are you taking me from here, I’m beginning to doubt your sanity as well as my own for following you here and I beginning to feel as if I’m chasing the whims of a nutty fruitcake,” Jack stated angrily wiping the rainfall from his brow. For three days he had trekked in this god forsaken mountains exchanging his suitcase for a rucksack to contemplate the task. He didn’t know why he had followed this old decrepit Indian but his instincts, just a gut feeling told him it was right and for those same three days he had tried to get hold of Henry on his mobile phone. He had been phoning direct to Nigeria to find out the latest on the authorities investigation into the disappearance of his beloved Anne however nobody in Abuja had been able to find him.

“Canbanna we wait,” this name which the Indian kept referring to Jack by had finally rankled him and when he had questioned the Indian upon this matter only to be told by Grey wolf who had uttered four words in response with no explanation; *Singing Bird, Chosen one*, and that was all he would divulge. Quinn kept thinking that this Indian that had dragged him half way around the world had to be crazy but then again he felt a strange affection and bond towards him.

“Wait, wait for what,” Quinn had lost it again as his voice faded out into the wind as it helped hide the full extent of his anxieties for Anne and his untamed anger.

“We listen and we observe for our ancestors to show us the way and we wait now for a sign,” the Old Indian answered Jacks frustrations with another one of his tiresome riddles he thought.

“Will this sign have written upon it, this way, over here or just go to hell,” Quinn rebuked his rhyme but Grey Wolf let him vent his temper upon the wind.

They found rudimentary shelter in an abandoned shepherds shack. A frail dry leaf roof abode, which was supported by three-wicker wood walls that swayed and buffeted in the gale. Damp straw littered the floor along with recent Llama dropping. The winds gushed through the gaps in the rickety framework and water dripped incessantly from the makeshift roof. They sat inside the shelter without uttering a sound as the devil vent his own anger upon them. The storm finally ceased and soon a blue sky dilapidated

the grey scudded heavens. Grey Wolf forever tolerant and sagacious stared out of the portal and upon the green lush of the Andean landscape with a sad but hidden love in his eyes. Jack on the other hand had paced constantly to and fro within the cramped shelter as he cursed out his frustrations in low inaudible mumbles only mimicking his own troubled mind.

“Listen,” the Old Indian had spoke, as Jack froze upon the abating of the storm and the preceding calm.

A shrill cry pierced the air long and sharp but filled with majesty.

“What is that?” Jack questioned.

“Look with your heart Canbanna,” Grey Wolf replied indicating his frail index finger up towards the heavens.

Jack had to screw his eyes to focus into the bright blue ocean of the sky and there it flew proud and untamed with it’s white crowned head and feathered brown body soaring with supreme authority.

“The Messenger,” Grey Wolf concluded smiling up towards the Eagle.

It hovered directly atop of them as they gazed in wonder floating in the thin air for what seemed an eternity before it circled and flew south back along the trail to Teotihuacan.

“So what the blazes is that supposed to tell us,” Jack fumed.

“The patient hunter always finds his prey. The rampaging bull scares away his foe and rarely makes a kill,” Grey Wolf surmised his deductions.

“Just tell me Old Man, just me for once in plain English without your riddles or fairytales as they flummox me even more,” Quinn had lost his cool with the Shamans ranting.

“The Great Eagle has told us to wait, as we the hunter will soon be the hunted,”

“You mean while were here upon the high road, fresh air and scenery and all that, then there out there whoever they me looking for us,” Jack answered with bitter sarcasm believing more than ever he was living out the Indians own animated fantasies.

Hugo Crane stuck out like a sore thumb in his khaki safari suit and hunting rifle as he traipsed in the footsteps of his two Mexican guides. They had patrolled the Andes to no avail for two weeks waiting in ambush but the only thing of interest that had come down the main freeway was

the occasional border patrol police car which made Hugo a little perplexed with his ambitions set upon murder.

After a further two days in the mountains Grey Wolf knew the Englishman could not be tolerant here any longer as he ascertained their concealment here seemingly achieved nothing.

“We go now,” the Old Indian, stated unexpectedly with no further elaboration although Quinn secretly smiled knowing their vigil had ended.

“Go where,” he asked quite rudely.

“Back to the holy City where the Condor and the Eagle await us,” Grey Wolf had revealed although this meant nothing to Quinn.

“Will they know, these sacred birds of yours all the answers to where Anne has gone,” Jack retorted sarcastically turning his eyes to the clouds for comfort.

They kept to the seldom-used Llama trails upon the steep escarpments circling an insignificant terrace farmhouse and smiling dumbly to the peasant farmer as they crossed his path. Grey Wolf lead him through the agricultural terraces and over the rope bridges in the high passes that had once been the road of the Inca As nightfall came they breached the last hilltop and the wonder of the mighty pyramids silhouetted upon the diminishing horizon. It lay there ominously and magically this once proud City of the Mayan Kings. To the north stood the impressive Pyramid of the Sun and to the South the smaller but just as magnificent Pyramid of the Moon. This dark citadel that stood unmolested in the centre of this rocky and adverse vista took Jack aback in his stride. They found a more solid footing upon the Citadels ancient foundation stones and they paced their way along the Avenue of the Dead that ran through the centre of the temple complexes

“Unbelievable,” Quinn muttered however Grey Wolf remained aloof brooding upon the sins of the past and the sins of the future.

They halted in the shadow of the portentous structures whilst Grey Wolf collected tumbleweed to kindle a flame and loose branches to feed a fire within a short time span a hot bristling blaze warmed their souls.

“Come and get warm.” The Shaman had offered his companion.

“Okay Ill sit down and before you say it, I know okay we wait,” Jack had been fidgeting about as usual pacing up and down the course of the Avenue.

“Tonight Canbanna we cannot afford to wait you must embark upon your chosen journey for as the moon nestles in the sky two more times Amuru the all knowing will be awaiting upon you in the shadow world. That could be our last ever day or maybe the beginning of a new era. The fate of the four winds lies in your hands and you must prepare for what fate has in store for you,” Grey Wolf with his knowing tone kindled the air of their conversation.

“How do you know the world will end in two days,” Jack asked interested but unimpressed.

“As we arrived here I saw the Great Eagle perched upon the Pyramid of the Sun, he stared upon me with his sharp eyes and then his gaze shifted to the dying horizon with an menacing frown. Upon his proud beak he whispered to me upon the wind that the coming days will bring with it the dawn of all evil,” the Old Mans eyes had tears within them and Jack knew he had to be gentle this time with his responses.

“I did not see any Eagle,” he spoke out mildly still doubting.

“For you look at the world as if blind you must look with your heart Canbanna and spirit to feel the true nature of all things,”

“Old Man you seem to have a riddle for everything,” Jack responded a little brasher and bolder.

“Not everything has a solution as your world dictates to you,” Grey Wolf sounded drained and in no mood to argue.

“You answer one riddle with another in science we at least seek to find a solution, your race must be the most confused upon the entire planet,” Jacks words were stern and a trifle hurting but the ways of the Indian had bemused him into frustration.

“It is your own kind Canbanna that are confused your minds choked with worry, your hearts torn in two and your spirits shrouded with self doubt. Release your spirit Canbanna my friend to the Earth Mother, be at one with creation and listen to the earth song it will heal your troubled thoughts,” Grey Wolf closed his eyes hoping Quinn would copy his invitation.

“That’s bollocks and hokum,” he cursed.

“Be quiet,” Grey Wolfs voice had rose and Jack tried his best to relax to appease the Indians wishes.

They sat along time by the fire hearkening the flames and crackle of splintering wood. Jack placed his palms upon the Earth and swore he felt it vibrating ever so gently.

“Free your mind Canbanna,” Grey Wolf coaxed him hypnotically and he tried to concentrate upon the hum of the Earth Mother unsure where this would lead. Then all of a sudden his mind went black devoid of feeling or thought. The low drone hummed now unabated a whispering hum so faint that you lose it in an instant if not concentrating directly and totally upon it resonance. The Earth song calmed him in a strange mothering embrace and he instinctively pushed his palms flat upon the earth as the trickling vibration juddered within his body.

“She sings well tonight Canbanna, her final cries for the ears of all mankind to behold,” Grey Wolfs voice radiated through the rhythms of the Earth Mothers kindly bosom.

Quinn’s hands caressed lovingly the smooth perfection of its finish and he experienced an overwhelming joy. He patted the crystalline with its velvet sheen as if it were child and his caring spiritual conviction sank right into its depth.

“The fire of freedom, the fire of compassion, the flame of hope burns within them,” Jack mouthed the words however he knew he had not been the speaker.

“Who are you,” he asked in his own words.

“My name is Viraco a shaman a protégé of the great Amuru,” the voice replied.

“Why are you so happy I can sense your joy,” Quinn asked again with warmth overcoming his own spirit.

“My work is done, the crystal is complete and at last my spirit can pass into her and aid the salvation of all men,” the voice clarified his sacrifice and his fears.

“Then why are you so happy at ending your life, you still have blood in your veins, I can feel them coursing your heart beat is yet so strong,”

“My life is of no importance, I have completed my chore and I go now to join with my master, my great father,” the voice faded and Jack felt a drowning sensation as Viracos spirit died.

“No please. No please don’t die,” Jack pleaded for him, as he knew his life force had been drained into the quartz.

“Do not worry for me, for I go to my salvation,” the voice returned ever so faintly and then silence reigned.

Jack cried as he had felt love, hope and sacrifice pure and untarnished. He somehow knew the sacrifice that Viraco had made for the benefit of others, nameless others whom he would never know.

Alynnna walked through the streets of the Jaguar Kings passing by the large hewn cyclopean walls of its fortress known as piedras and the Temples constructed of finely hewn ashlar. The abodes of the Inca had double doorjambs with carved loops for fastening the doors in place and finely carved snakes decorated the exteriors. In the plaza Alpacas a variety of Llama were being sheared and the wool drifted in balls upon the air creating an artificial snowfall. Women collected the sheared wool in bundles, which was then dyed in clay pots before being spun upon the bamboo looms, as they created exotic garments with the rich Chavin designs upon them. These red cloaks and ponchos adorned in animal and flora caricatures were highly treasured by everyone and demand for new costumes had erupted upon the eve of this momentous occasion.

Many wood fires burned outside the Inca dwellings as venison, Llama and raccoon meat were roasted and the cooking taints coloured the air. In the courtyard a huge cage had been recently erected and within it a humongous and despicable beast lain the fabled giant sloth. It had an almost sad humanoid face and long claws at the ends of its fur coated body. It stood as tall as an elephant and once culled would feed a thousand hungry bellies.

“Chappaqua, devil monkey,” an Aztec soldier cursed as the terrified giant slunk back in its cage uncertain of its fate.

Dancers rejoiced on the main square of the plaza, alongside entertainers, fire-eaters and panpipe players as they turned the festivities into an elaborate celebration.

Attacia felt a hand upon her shoulder and she turned as another hand fell across her mouth. A bearded stranger with haunted eyes looked straight into her.

“Don’t be alarmed it is only I,” he said and she recognised his voice immediately as if awakening from a pleasant dream.

“Ramun I thought you had perished,” she responded displaying her relief.

“No not as yet,” he answered sardonically in a serious tone.

“I must go and tell the Manta Mari that you walk and breathe and of your return,” Attacia spoke excitedly turning ready to race away to her Mistress with the good news.

“No you mustn’t do that Attacia, I have only returned briefly for one reason,” he scorned.

“What reason?” she questioned losing heart at knowing he would soon be gone again.

“Listen to me Attacia I have done this from the seed of love I still have within me. You are all in great danger, you must convince your Mistress to leave here at once,” Ramun begun his story but Attacia abruptly halted him by her concerns.

“What danger?” she had interrupted with but he continued through her words.

“A large Army of white faced warriors who are armed with magical weapons have landed upon the shore and make haste for this City. I have seen them with my own eyes. Tell the Manta Mari to leave now before it’s too late and tell the Jaguars to hide their woman and children in the hills,” Ramun had finished with.

“What nonsense, what Army, the Jaguars are outright rulers of this land,” she demonstrated.

“This Army is very different Attacia it came from across the sea and already the Chanca and Mamaris are united with them and leading the Army here. Heed my warning Attacia for I must leave now before I am discovered. May Ra be merciful and forgive us both our sins,” Ramun spoke out nobly as he had become the master of himself.

“You can’t go,” Attacia protested.

“I must,” and with that he slunk into the crowd. Attacia had seen how he had altered by overcoming his demons and tears formed in her eyes for her own forsaken soul.

Not a mouth or hand dared tremble as they stood in awe within the Temple of the Sun. Gongs rang, drums blared out a hollow boom and Shamans sung out prayers to Inti God of the Earth. The flickering light of the pharos torches enlightened the alcoves where the mummified bodies of the dead enthroned Inca Emperors slept. There preserved bodies draped in

gold armour with a symbolic Jaguars pelt wrapped around them. It had been said they if they awoke their Lords and Inca would deafen the sky making them reverberate. Alynna stared into the empty accusing eye sockets of Mancho Rocho and he appeared to snarl defiantly back at her as if the Jaguar had embodied him. Alynna then had her first premonition of danger enclosed by the Inca Emperors sat aloft in their golden thrones as if ready to pass judgement upon her.

The reverberating drone of the gongs faded, the hollow beat of the deerskin drums abated and the prayers were halted and in the ensuing silence a foreboding took a hold upon her at the preordained setting of the sixth sun. A shaman parted the crowds as if parting the waves attired in a brightly coloured ceremonial tunic with yellow and gold ribbons tied into his locks of hair. He stopped directly before Alynna and spoke out. "Witch upon the Mountain, the day of reckoning is upon you," he announced.

The Spanish soldiers had surrounded the plaza and had managed to emplace their cannons upon the high walls. The Inca were preoccupied in the ceremony of the coming of the New Age and the Conquistadors couldn't believe how easy it had been to set their ambush into operation. Their leader Francisco Pizarro had boldly marched into the square with his officers around him. He had demanded audience with the Lord Inca had the Idis Priests had run into the palace for his litter bearers to bring him.

Alynna could no longer speak consumed by an untold terror that the Shaman had upon her. Her feet moved forward though she tried with all her will to stop them. The Incas gawped spellbound with astonishment, as this most feared woman stepped slowly one pace at a time in an otherworldly haze towards the alcove of the Mighty Conqueror the Sapa Inca Manco Capac. Under his alcove stood a tzompantli, a skull rack and upon its finely hewn chiselled shelves rested the nine. Pure white crystal skulls staring with boding evil upon Alynna. One niche still empty on the rack, set upon the zenith the crown of the pyramid and Alynna had already took hold of her possessed blue skull in offering and she knew it be her destiny to place it upon the tzomoantli.

Atahualpa the ruling Lord Inca raised aloft on his litter came out to greet these strangers who had walked into the centre of the Jaguar City and stood before the Coricancha. Pizarro studied him this feather strutted

savage as he was carried across the plaza and now stood aloft on his litter before him. The Conquistador having no time for pleasantries if their plan was going to work walked towards the Lord Inca and paused as he stood in the centre of his bearers. Pizarro swiftly took hold of Athualpas arm and dragged down from the heavens to the utter disbelief of his entourage of Priest and Nobility. The Incas in the Plaza were incensed but then without warning the Spanish discharged their arquebuses and thundering cannonades rained downed from the battlements.

An explosion unexpectedly ripped through the sandstone upon the west wall of the Coricancha and slabs of loose masonry fell onto the crowded audience and yells of terror preceded before a crushing death took a hold upon them. A runner barged into the Temple of the Sun.

“Athualpa the Lord Inca has been seized,” he had cried out.

Another explosion rocked the Temple and threw the mummy of Mancho Capac from his eternal throne and his skeletal remains smashed into the tzompantli. It shattered with the impact and the crystal skulls all nine of them were rolling upon the floor. Alynna came from out of the compelling trance, shocked not aware where of what was or what had just been. A hand spun her around and Attacia faced her.

“Manta Mari we must leave,” she had said reassuringly.

“Yes Child,” Alynna had responded still in the abyss of the terrible dream.

The cannoned from the Spanish Guns had wreaked havoc across the City of Cuzco as fires broke out across the citadel. The Conquistadors spread fear and panic butchering the inhabitants. Francisco Pizarro and his Officers had taken the Lord Inca Hostage and they barged into the Coricancha and barricaded the Sun Temple doors.

Alynna and Attacia located their train of Llamas and as they left the Jaguar City with their Amazon escort trotting protectively by the Manta Maris side. They had left Cuzco as the battle had reached it’s zenith and as they headed into the safety of the Andes they glared back at the ill-omened clouds of drifting waffs of Gunpowder smoke. Pizarro manhandled Atahualpa to the doors of the Coricancha and holding him there with his sword at his throat for all Incas to bear witness. The fighting stopped, as they feared for their Kings well being and the Spanish had fulfilled the prophecy of the Sixth Sun.

Huallpa wept as he collected up the fallen skulls with his life's work ending in failure. He knew by the chaos continuing outside that his beloved City had come into mortal danger and he convinced himself that evil had reigned supreme this day. He gathered around his brothers of the Shaula his fellow Shamans and each took a bundle at his behest.

"Learn from the Monguba Tree," he told them as they knew how the sacred tree scattered its seeds upon the four winds and when they landed and drifted upon the surface of the mighty Amazon River the fish in the river would consume them. Then when the time was right they would pass through the fish and create new life. A new dawn for the skulls to reawaken. The Shamans covertly exited the City and split off into every direction following the words of Huallpa and taking the route of the Monguba.

Gold, gold, gold had been the war cry of the Conquistadors as their cannons had rung out in every direction. They had marched into battle with their arquebuses, halberds and cutlasses at the ready. The muskets cracked alighting the plaza and a fog of gunpowder had hung over the arena. The cannons bellowed out grapeshot indiscriminately slaughtering the celebrating Incas who had been in its path. The Spanish were not concerned in who they murdered man, woman, child or beast.

Admiral Fernandez Alonzo Sanchenchez came to the rise with his hands upon his hips in a cavalier style and stopped in his tracks upon the hilltop. He could espy the rumbles of cannon and the sharp retort of enfilade from the arquebuses as his City of Gold had been whisked from under his very nose. A bitter gall took him as his Army of conquistadors, priests and Indian allies awaited in the backwoods of the forest.

Atahuallpa had promised to fill his cell with gold from floor to ceiling and with this ransom set. Inca runners had made off upon the roads in order to collect the bounty from every corner of the empire. Francisco Pizarro stood in the plaza when the assemblage of his Spanish countrymen and some of the savages from this land had entered the courtyard.

"Francisco," Sanchenchez had exclaimed in greeting.

"Good day to you Fernandez and what brings you here to my City," he taunted him with knowing the victor had gained the spoils.

“We, I mean I wondered if you needed assistance here to quell the rest of the savages,” Sanchenchez almost begged such was his want for the yellow metal.

“Fernandez everything is under control here and your offer however noble is just not needed.” Pizarro with a cruel grin enjoyed bating the flustering pig before him.

“So we will leave you then,” Sanchenchez spoke trying to contain his enragement that sickened his avarice as he observed the beauty and splendour of Cuzco.

“Wait, don’t be hasty Fernandez the Inca here have told me about a fabulous City chock-a-block with riches and Gold, I have not the resources or time to find it but I’m sure you have” Pizarro said with his derision of this aristocrat ending.

“Where is this City of Gold,” Sanchenchez opened his eyes and ears wide to hearken this information.

“It is called El Dorado and I can provide you with an Inca guide who says he knows the way their from his grandfathers,” Francisco Pizarro had heard the Inca tell their stories of this legendary place although the gold from the ransom was coming in steadily and he also wanted rid of this pompous foolhardy gent.

“El Dorado,” Sanchenchez whispered the words knowing if he spoke them too loud they could be lost.

They had come from where he had not known. These Native Americans in their costumes so diverse and creative that they spread colour upon the darkness of the ruins at this once eminent Mayan Capitol.

“My brothers the Shaula-the last of the great Shamans of our tribes,” Grey Wolf spoke

With sorrow in his tone.

“Why are they here, why am I here,” Quinn muttered his double-edged question.

“Canbanna your mind must be as clear as rainwater and your thoughts as free as the wind before you may take to the spirit road and embark upon your journey,” Grey Wolf answered his curses with traditional Indian wisdom. Campfires soon burned predominantly upon the plains in the

shadow of the pyramids of the Moon and the Sun. Lamenting songs broke the night and called upon the awakening of the day.

The shadows had come in the darkness and as the sun arose Quinn could see the thousands of Indians who had camped upon the Avenue of the Dead and the surrounding fields of Teotihuacan. He made out the group that seemed to be heading towards them.

“This is Chanting Bird of the Sioux,” Grey Wolf announced as he introduced Jack to a shrivelled face Indian adorned in green and yellow on his feathered headdress.

“Welcome Canbanna,” the Sioux responded grabbing Jack’s arm in a strong embrace.

“This is Quatazela Musaru of the Mayan people he embodies the blood line of the first of our kind the Viracochas,” Grey Wolf had stated proudly of this man in the prime of his life, thin and willowy with a chequered poncho in the chavin design wrapped around him and a wide brimmed straw sombrero upon his head.

“Canbanna,” the Mayan mouthed measuring up this man before him.

After seemingly endless introductions had to be completed Jack was thankful when he was invited to sit around the campfire. The Shaula began singing their tribal songs heralding the coming of the Seventh Sun. Quinn nestled back to be engrossed by the sombre atmosphere in the panorama of this necropolis and heeded the deep rooted traditions coming once again alive. He observed the dark shadowy forms of the pyramids against the backdrop of the sky that had changed to a golden array as the sun gazed in supremacy from up high.

The day long as the lamenting songs and prayers were chanted in salvation of the Earth Mother until the sun had once again disappeared from the sky. The singing abated as darkness fell and a long thin clay pipe with feathers and hanging tassels along its length was alighted. Guamatla of the Naura people offered the pipe to Jack and he had to take hold of it with both his hands. All eyes rested upon him as he sucked in and swallowed the bitter tasting acrid tobacco. His eyes stung from the fumes he had exhaled and his throat ablaze with a harsh dryness. He coughed out as his lungs revolted and the Shaula broke out into laughter as they smiled reminiscing of their youth and their first taste of the vision bringer. The chanting inaugurated again and Jack discerned his vision blurring as he

stared into the fire. He leered at the flames as they danced and leapt with the resonance of the tantalizing chants. Then sporadically a ball of fire would implausibly jump and disappear into the dark sky. His pulse quickened and his head throbbed as he fought to retain his grip on reality.

“Your mind must be as clear as rainwater and your thoughts as free as the wind,” he heard the echo of Grey Wolfs voice as a blinding flash exploded in the recesses of his brain and when his perception returned he sat there in the sunlit rainforest. The wail of a Toucan and the laughing grunt of a Howler Monkey brought him back to his senses as he glanced around him. He could observe the man with black silk locks of hair and the pointed beard that he had fashioned. He just sat there staring upon the ground. Endlessly gawping into the leaf clutter of the jungle floor and Jack made out the careful movements he made with his hands. Jack drew nearer intrigued and could see the coarse piece of blue quartz in his hands.

“Time is running out,” he spoke to Jack without lifting his head.

“Why is time running out,” Quinn asked him.

“Look at my fire within the quartz it is fading,” he remarked his eyes still set upon the earth.

Jack stared intensely into the quartz and could distinguish a blue aura slowly passing away.

“What is that?”

“That is my soul going to damnation being devoured eaten away to the place you refer to as hell,” the Man held profound doom in his voice.

A silence loomed between them both as they studied the light vanishing and when this stranger looked up again he had the face of an old man, not just any man but the old man that Jack had nightmares about when he had witnessed him drown himself in the Atlantic on his voyage aboard the Enchanted Beauty,

“Who are you,” Jack asked in shock.

“My name is Ramun but that is inconsequential to you,”

“What do you want from me,?”

“To save me, in order to do this you must destroy the seed that holds my soul captive and destroy it’s power before all is too late,” Ramun pleaded with a portent of doom.

“What power? What seed?” Jack said bemused.

Ramun reached out to the place where he had deliberated upon the ground and lifted the carefully sculptured crystal figurine from where the splinter of quartz had once been.

“Alynnna,” Ramun mouthed at her image” Take this it is all that remains of my one true soul, I give you this as a legacy for all to behold what time has in her wings for us,” Ramun offered the figurine.

“Who is Alynnna,”?

“Alynnna is the evil that devours the souls of the damned, feeding off the blood of man like the locust she swarms attacking the crops of life. You must stop her before they are no more seeds left to sow,”

Grey Wolf gazed with a musing expression at the yellow moon and the black wafts of cloud crossing its aura. Quinn still in a shaken state of disbelief and disorientation from the visions narcotic drug that had brought it to fruition still ringing in his constitution. He felt confused and his train of thoughts wouldn’t steady in any direction.

“I spoke with Ramun, the Old Man who I watched die and who gave me this,” Jack held the object hoping it would unravel the enigmas building within him.

“Many Moons ago Canbanna the Snake Priestess came to this land. She brought with her the demon spirit we call Shegasger and with his immorality he corrupted the will of the people,” Grey Wolf had spoken.

“Go on,” prompted Jack this time interested in his riddle.

“Canbanna if you want to know the truth you must embark upon the sacred journey and take council with the great one Tupac Amuru. Only he can guide your spirit from the darkness to the light,” Grey Wolf answered and Jack mulled over the riddles in his mind.

The white flakes drifted aimlessly spiralling and whipping as they were caught upon wafts of hot humid air rising from the forests below. Alynnna fascinated by the snowfall that fell from the great clouds above the sacred mountain far up in the Andean heights that had absorbed her. The overshadowing precipice of the Pichu Mountain stood in a dark dominating glory and from it’s precipice spewed the snowstorm as the wind buffeted the icy peaks upon the summit. The light flakes held a moment of magical beauty until they vanished as they absorbed into the

soft pampas of her Citadel Palace. She smiled at her innocent thoughts of tranquillity that bestowed in her and then a foreboding awareness of destiny had overcome her. The realisation that the falling snows was an omen of her time at this place petering away. Proclaiming the end of her days at Machu Pichu.

Her hatred turned towards the foreign invaders and how they had imprisoned her protector the Lord Inca and enslaved the Jaguar people to their ways as they wrought havoc across the Inca Empire. Her Guardian once strong and invincible dismembered and conquered by these new masters who had only one God-the yellow metal they called gold. The Inca Shamans had turned against her trying to destroy her and her beloved master. This land had an ill wind wrought upon it and the time had come to venture to a more protected shore.

The cloud forest dark and impenetrable as they tried to manoeuvre wagon, horse and cannon through its mass. Sanchenchez wiped his huge sweaty head with a towel and his clothes were sodden in this cesspit of the earth he conjectured. Captain Rodriguez had seen the fallacy of going into this unknown frontier and wondered what madness would befall them all. This quest for the mythical City of Gold had roused his soldier's avarice although now after two long months in this Jungle the dream had begun to die.

Sanchenchez on the night beforehand had the Inca guide put to death as he no longer had belief in his integrity and knew he had been sent upon a wild goose chase.

Basari and Mecundia walked in the wake of the devils and it amused them how the Spaniards how gotten themselves forlorn out here in the garden of the Great Mother. The Mamaris as well as the Chancas had lost their fear of these white gods and they made preparation to rid themselves of the devils.

The belongings of the Manta Mari were carefully packed as news had filtered from Cuzco that the foreign invaders had executed the Lord Inca Atahualpa by strangling him with a turning screw. The Llamas were laden with possessions for transportation and Alynna made her last prayers here in the House of the Nusta. Upon a black stone pedestal the Demon Skull nested emanating in an eerie blue sheen that illuminated the dark chamber. Alynna prostrated herself before the shrine.

“Master I serve thee, I love thee and I obey thee,” she whispered upon her deity.

“My Child, you nearly failed me,” came back her Masters deep booming but captivating voice.

“Oh Master forgive me, a great fog clouded my mind and I had not the strength to resist it,”

“My Child you do possess strength although your loyalty to me is becoming weak,” the voice said with a renewed menace

“My Master that is not so, you are everything to me. My existence, my life and my whole,” Alynna inaugurated a prayer.

“My Child it is not so, your frail humanity and emotions sicken me as they are not focussed upon me but upon others. My Child I want us to be at one. My Child be at one with me,” the Demon became adamant.

“Yes Master I would do anything to be at one with you,” Alynna abased herself before him.

“Then so it shall be,”

The night crept in bringing thoughts of hunger and the biting cold prevailed. Sanchenchez tried to keep warm but his body shivered like a humongous jelly and his expensive silk clothes were saturated to the core. The laughing chortles of the Monkeys irritated him and the shrieks of the forest made him find it hard to sleep.

Captain Rodriquez had his mind set on mutiny and knew he could gain the confidence of his men. His Excellency was taking them all to there deaths and it was only Sanchenchez himself that couldn't see this.

Basari had been in council with the Mamari and they were all in agreement. He saw his braves now slinking off into the shadows to prepare for the attack.

“Tonight the Devils will dance in the darkness,” he said to himself significantly.

The high-pitched yell gave Rodriquez a start as their Indian allies came at them from the dark. His men mostly at slumber were clubbed to death as they lay. He made out the shadow screaming as it ran towards him with the War club held high. He pulled his pistol from the belt and fired point blankly but it didn't discharge, as the powder was wet. The club came down and he ducked to one side as the whooshing of the killing strike passed his ear. He drew out his cutlass and bludgeoned the Mamari before

he had time to react. He gazed upon the encampment swarming with the Indians and he knew they had already lost this battle. He turned and took to his heels into the undergrowth.

Sanchenchez descried the yells and confounded the creatures of the forest until he heard the sounds of death all about him. He recognised the face of the Indian who stood above him with the mace. The savage who had grabbed his chain of office aboard the Glory of Castile.

“Don’t kill me, Ill make you rich,” the Devil Giant had implored before Basari had split his head in two as if it were a ripe melon.

Alyнна called her loyal Attacia over and as she took one last look of the glorious vista that had surrounded her paradise.

“Attacia I don’t want you to ever leave me,” the Manta Mari had said

“I would never leave you Mistress,” Attacia replied.

“I need to be certain. Forgive me Child,” Alyнна held the blue orb before her.

The cloud of dust that held the secret of time brushed away with the wind. As withered ashes were wrought upon the austral wind.

“Master we head north is that is your will,” Alyнна spoke to the voice within her.

Her God who took his antagonism out upon them devouring their souls to strengthen his resolve for this new journey he had consumed her Amazons and once again she faced the world alone. Alyнна left Machu Pichu bare and lost to the annals of history.

She had never experienced being so cold as her shoulders trembled involuntarily and her body ached with rheumatism. Her thoughts were disassociated and hazy as if in a weird delusion that had no will to fade away. Her eyes refused to focus until she became aware of the tightness around her head and came to the realisation that she had been blindfolded. As her senses returned she knew that no clothing lay upon her and her wrists and ankles stung from being bound in a star shaped position. Horror and dread consumed her as she lay hapless and at someone else’s mercy.

“Ahh your awake my sweet,” a voice so close that she felt the warmth of breath upon her ear.

“Who are you?”

“I have many names in many tongues, I can speak a hundred languages fluently. I have seen this world through the passing of time. Every day and night dies but I am forever my sweet.” Alynna taunted her prey with her rhymes.

“Where am I,” Anne demanded

“In heaven my sweet,” Alynna replied kissing the curve of her ear lobe.

“Your not funny,” Anne said but her pitch displayed her fear.

“Don’t be alarmed my sweet, I will take good care of you,” Alynna admiring her nubile body spread eagled and brushing her hand lightly over her left nipple which responded with a mixture of cold and dread,

“What are you doing,” Anne scolded trying to succour her bravado.

“Relax your in good hands,” as Alynna stimulated both her breasts.

“Stop it your sick, you need help,” Anne tried to resist and then froze in terror as delicate soft hair brushed in between the top of her thighs.

“Stop please stop,” she now pleaded. As she slowly started to become aroused by the other woman’s actions.

“Oooooohhh,” Alynna swooned kissing lovingly her womanly triangle.

“Please stop,” Anne losing her breath as her chest rose drifted off into the heady realms of complete ecstasy.

Hugo Crane looked upon the neon sign of the Goddess Night Club with disdain. This seedy fetish bar upon the outskirts of Brooklyn fed his Mistresses nefarious activities. The Club a hotbed for transvestites, deviants and people into diverse practices such as bondage who got pleasure from giving each other pain. The real reason though for this façade was that the Priestess still needed sacrifices and some of the deviants that had darkened the Goddesses door had never survived to tell the tale. As Alynna herself had concluded that many people in suburban society would not admit to having such diverse sexual practises so when a certain Club Member vanished his friends and family were none the wiser that he had ever been here.

Hugo nodded his head to the doorman in recognition and passed a naked hooded man trussed to a cross being whipped by a leather clad Lady at the bar. He smirked to himself at the ludicrous profanity of it all as he passed through a door marked private.

His stomach churned and he had to compose himself before entering into her room. He had failed her and he prayed compassion still brooded within the complexes of her being.

He stood there sheepishly in her office with a green leather topped desk and her display cabinets housing the treasures that had once fascinated him so deeply.

“Mister Crane,” Alynna stared at him momentarily as she raised her head from examining her nails.

“Madam Alynna,” he answered lamely cradling his panama hat in his hands.

“So you have failed me,” she toyed with him asking the cutting into question that he found hard to deny

“Madam I must confess it did not go as we had hoped it would,” Hugo tried to share the blame.

“As WE,” she interrupted shattering his hopes.

“As you had wanted,” he submitted to her will.

“Where is the shard,” Alynna demanded.

“I’m afraid I’ve been unable to find Mister Quinn, however you have his woman to lure him to us,” he conveyed his thoughts to her.

“There is no time for that anyway his woman no longer belongs to him,” she smiled sardonically.

“That old fool Armitage is out of the way he’s gone back to Egypt I thought you’d like to know Mistress,” Hugo tried to win back her acclaim.

“Forget Armitage where do you suppose the elusive Mister Quinn has gone too,” she stabbed at him not giving him an inch of remorse.

“I’m at a loss, I followed him back to England and then I discovered he had gone to Mexico, I searched everywhere but he was nowhere to be found, he had disappeared” he completed his report.

“Come, come people just do not vanish Mister Crane. Would you like to know where your elusive prey is right now,”?

“Yes,” he answered to her.

“Teotihuacan the Ancient Citadel and this time Mister Crane I am coming with you,” she revealed.

A door opened as somebody entered the room. Her blonde hair shimmered and glowed as Alynna examined her nails again dispassionately by the interruption. Alynna’s nails were abnormally thick

like the bole of a tree as they epitomized the years of her life. In her heightened rage she had stood supreme terrifying and all beautiful and yet an awesome power she possessed. Crane looked upon his Mistress with absolute fear. The Lady decrepit with her over long unnatural years and her brittle bones too arthritic to walk upon the earth sat in the wheelchair by Alynna's side. Her mind and soul remained forever youthful and fresh however her body wrought with ravages of time. Her once coal black hair white as the Andean snow fall and her once mesmerising beauty wrinkled beyond all recognition. Only the eyes bore the torment of the centuries and the hatred that welled within her. Attacia had been cursed by the Mistress making her into a pet assured that she would never leave her side.

The voice of the Shaula were singing to the spirits as Jack and Grey Wolf took their places back amongst them. The Mayan Shaman Quatazela came before Jack and from out of a canvas holdall he took out a crystal skull in the exact dimensions of the human form. The shaman spoke in Quetzal the Mayan tongue as he placed the skull in his lap.

“The master of the nine made by the grand wizards own hand,” Grey Wolf loosely translated the Quetzal for him.

Quinn placed his hands upon the smooth cranium and immediately felt a dreariness hit him as it drifted him into a world of shadows and dreams. He could just make out the hum of drowning chants and the swish of the spirit rattles as the Shaula began to sing. Jack descended upon an invisible plain. Alert and aware out of the blue he found himself in the confines of a dry roomy cave with sufficient light penetrating in from the jagged opening to discern the sandstone texture of the walls. He glanced to his left knowingly and by him an Indian was seated in a red patterned shawl. Jack scrutinised his labour as he vigilantly carved and sculptured a huge piece of quartz using a method of sand and cloth. He experienced his own hands aching as he rubbed the grains onto the crystal with the cloth and his other hand carefully adding more sand. His skin had peeled over the years with his fingers calloused as they polished this rock. He then realised he worked upon the curve of the cranium and then it dawned on him that he was looking through the eyes of the Shaman. His soul had emanated within the priest's body as he viewed the world through a surreal dual

perspective like peering through two layers of glass. The human spirit however held emotion and each pane of this glass carried it's own song. Living and breathing Jack could sense the patience, care and dedication that the Shaman took into his task of sculpturing the quartz. He also knew that the Priest would be dead before the skull had been perfected and also knew that it would take a hundred years to complete this carving but he didn't know why?

The vision had ended as Jack could once again hearken the crackling roar of flames, as his senses seemed twice as alive and acute under the sonorous chants of the Shamans as they brought together the union of the spirit world with the living world.

"Tupac Amuru is the wise eyed wizard who guided me to you. He is master of the skulls for in them his spirit is reborn," Grey Wolf told Jack as he entered back into the land of the living.

The last embers of the fire had died away as the horizon enlightened to the awakening of the dawn.

"You are our only hope Canbanna singing bird, May our ancestors guide you well as the Seventh Sun is the next sun upon the horizon,"

"Grey Wolf what is this Seventh Sun and I'm still confused I still don't know what your people want from me," Jack stated honestly

"Our people Canbanna as what I am about to tell you will have consequences upon the entire planet. You have taken the sacred journey and walked the path so I will give the enlightenment that you so desire," Grey Wolf had spoken although Jack grasped it was somebody else's spirit within his own.

"Are you the Master of the Skulls," he interrupted quizzing his assumption.

"Yes it is I Tupac Amuru. Now sit back and listen Canbanna for there is not much time left for us. Time Canbanna do you have a wristwatch," the Amuru asked to Jack's puzzlement.

"Yes I do," he remarked.

"Canbanna that is how you perceive time we see time in many sacred forms and the most revered of these are the Seven Suns spanning over twenty six thousand years. When the Spanish came to the Americas that heralded the dawning of the Sixth Sun and there are only Seven

Canbanna. The Seventh Sun falls on the 21st December 2012 in your calendar reckoning,” the Amuru paused

“Jesus as Grey Wolf said that’s tomorrow,” Quinn said ironically as he talked to the embodiment of Grey Wolf.

“Your people have no understanding of our ways I have watched them from my spirit cloud but that was not always so. We see time and space as one. We can see our past and we can see the omens of our future. Your people live for now but now has already gone and has no further meaning. What I am trying tell you Canbanna that we live our lives with meaning, the enlightenment you seek is somewhat complex but let me try to explain it to you in your own meaning. We believe everything has a soul the trees, the birds and the sacred soil. You sing to the trees and they bear more fruit, you sing to the birds and they sing back and you tether the earth and it brings forth life. Crystal is a natural product, the purest thing on the earth as it contains the soul of the Earth Mother. This lump of clear rock that has come to symbolise everything that you worship in your own world Canbanna. It is inside your computers, your televisions, your wristwatches and your satellites that you build. Crystal technology in your world is in it’s infancy but we Indians have known of it’ hidden powers since the Maya became the Keepers of Time. We have listened to the sacred music the crystal sings and we have sung back to it nurturing its soul. Our thoughts have been stored in its heart and then replayed as you have witnessed yourself through the vision. The Earths core is sixty per cent crystal a huge ball of recordings of thought and feeling spanning back to the very beginning of creation. This is what we call the Earth Mother as thought is energy and our spirits are energy and the Crystal Skulls have the ability of the Earth Mother for they are her children,” Amuru paused and Jack contemplated what he was being told and his dependable view he had of the world was blown from his hand like sand.

“The Demon Skull the one we call Shegasger was created at the birth of time when the Earth Mothers crystal had been fractured in many places by huge fists of Iron and rock that hurtled down from the Universe. The Earth Mother had nearly been destroyed at that time and within her she had imprisoned the Demon spirit of Shegasger. He escaped through her many fractures and at first tried to rule the day and the night but he had not realised that the Earth Mother had already begun to rejuvenate herself

such was her will. So Shegasger to save his own skin had made a pact with one of the first of creation. The Men who walked as Gods upon the Earth and he hid in his Demon form in a piece of the Mothers rock. He betrayed the pact he had pledged himself to and long he laid forgotten and abandoned until one day he made another pact with an old Witch who sold her daughters soul to this devil.” Amuru paused again as Jack came back from the volcanic wastes of times beginning.

“Shegasger is an evil entity and was not content in storing only our feelings and our thoughts but our very souls. The crystal of the Earth Mother is impartial neither good nor evil but the day of reckoning approaches and the Demon has hoarded enough energy over the centuries to conquer the creator and when the Seventh Sun Sets he cannot win the day or he will consume every living soul on the planet and destroy the Earth forever.”

“Wow,” Jack mouthed halting the Shaman” I missed out on the sixties but I feel as if I’m tripping,” he cajoled as the serious overtones were just to catastrophic to contemplate,

“You believe Canbanna, You must believe in this. I know you find it strange as your secure and robust world that you thought you once knew is now fragile and has been shattered open before you. Open your eyes and listen to the wind Canbanna enjoy it whilst it lasts for soon the songs of the Earth Mother will be heard no longer,” Grey Wolf came from the trance to find Jack sitting perplexed and ill at ease.

The neo-classical style architecture upon the Cairo branch of the National Bank of Egypt stood proud and magnificent with it’s Corinthian fluted pillars surrounding the oak panelled doorway captured a moment of the Great British Empire and it’s imperialism. Henry Armitage trooped up the steps in as aristocratic poise as his own predecessors must have done in Colonial Times. He stormed through the oak doors with brass trimmings as if he were conquering this corner of the globe with his usual overbearing air of self-importance.

“You Man,” he bellowed in the centre of the foyer directing his voice towards a solitary enquiry desk with a bow tied clerk sat behind.” You my dear fellow I need to get into the nick knack drawer,” he had informed the clerk as he towered above the Egyptian bank employee who sought refuge

with his eyes to found all the customers in the bank had there attentions upon him by the volume of this Customers voice.

“Sir before I can grant you access you must have three statutory forms of identification,” the clerk responded efficiently trying to seem calm with the growing interest.

“Do I really have to dilly dally like this everytime,” Henry blustered pulling out his wallet with some aggression.

“I’m afraid it’s the Banks policy Sir,” the clerk answered as Henry unfolded three documents and banged them onto the desk one at a time. The clerk scanned his passport jotting down the serial number and his driving Licence where he did the same and then briefly eyed the letter from the Egyptian Antiquities Commission confirming his work permit in this country. The Clerk verified the two numbers he had recorded and checked them with the Bank records.

“Satisfied.” Henry said with irritation snatching back his forms.

“Everything seems to be order Sir, would you care to follow me,” the Clerk snatched up a bunch of keys and Henry stuck to his tail frowning.

They walked deep into the bowels of the old Colonial Mansion where papyrus prints of the Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs and Gods decorated the walls where once had been Renoir’s and Constables. The keys jingled irritably in the Clerks hand as he hid his nerves and Henry became relieved to hear the squeal and clang of an iron gate opened and close to put an end to the annoying noise. They halted at a desk where an Armed Guard sat reading a paper.

“Sign here,” the clerk motioned to a book on the desk as the guard never lifted his eyes away from the tabloid.

“More bloody red tape,” Henry moaned filling in the details on the visiting register.

HENRY BERTRAM AMITAGE BOX 602

“Your free to take your time and access your belongings,” the Clerk implied as Henry walked passed the guard into the corridor beyond.

Grey gunmetal deposit boxes lined his route from ceiling to floor all marked in clear numeric order. He circled around a set of stepladders for those less fortunate than himself who had to climb the heights to recover their possessions. He stopped dead in his tracks at deposit box 602 and fumbled for the key in his safari jackets side pocket. His fingers clasped

upon it and he fed it into the lock, which turned with ease. He opened the door to his security locker and inside a white shoebox became visible with Clarke's printed on a label on its fascia. He pulled the box out carefully and took off the lid. He brushed aside the protecting tissue paper and a glint of gold reflected in his eyes. He recollected back to that fateful day at the Wadi en Nil when the excited tones of the shepherd boy had distracted him from his work of copying out the rock paintings. The gold talisman that had been the root cause of his bouts of derision and fever over the last few eventful months. It had driven him to the brink of madness and driven him into the abandoned temple with a supernatural haste that had almost killed him and brought on the harrowing nightmares of the spectre Alynna.

He examined the Golden figurine in his hands of a small squat man with gold leaf covering the line of his eyes, a hand clamped over his mouth and two wedges blanking out the form of his ears. It had been a most unusual find and most compelling had been the archaic hieroglyphs carved on its base that had taken him this long too fully master. The top line read:

Khunitep High Priest of Thebes

And then the symbols that had unlocked this key a blue baboon representing in the Ancient world an Old Man wise and patient And a Cobra royal protector and avenger of the Pharaohs.

In silence I brood to one day avenge thee

THE REVERSAL OF ALL TIME

The Warriors had gathered upon holy ground for the Inkari the return of the Native Americans united as the Condor and the Eagle flying upon high. The old religion and beliefs had been rekindled as the Shamans danced in their colourful ceremonial garments. They beat deerskin drums and shook spirit rattles, as it seemed a giant rattlesnake had come to awaken the Earth Mother.

“HeerMaana HeerMaana HaMaana HaMaana CochaMana,”the Indians sang.

Jack watched this magic as if in a dream as spectres brandishing tomahawks danced in his wake and a chanting wail of the Tribal Prayer joined in the rattling of the air.

“You can feel it Canbanna,”Grey wolf stated in an excited tone

“What,” Quinn asked above the droning as he came from his own world of inner thought.

“The Earth Mother is here amongst us can you feel her breathing Canbanna,”

“Quinn stopped dead at the Old Indians words and concentrated. He felt the ground seemingly move rising and falling and an atmosphere struck him as he was wrapped in her comforting embrace.

“She is with us by our side,” Grey Wolf implied as he smiled broadly for the first time.

The dark inverted V shapes of the pyramids were silhouetted upon the red fire of the horizon. A mist of darkness enveloped the earth giving it an almost biblical appearance and in this mist danced the Army of shadows. War paint adorned their faces with streaks of black and white. Buffalo

cloaks, buffalo horns were worn proudly and they carried their traditional weapons as they walked as braves maybe for the last time upon the earth. "The War Party is upon the plain," Grey Wolf narrated the more vibrant dances that the Shaula now performed.

"Why do they do this," Jack asked fascinated by the war tunics.

"They do this for they are you and me, sons of the earth,"

Quatazela held his tomahawk high in greeting as he drew near he patted Jack on the back in a fatherly manner before whispering into Grey Wolfs ear.

"What's happening?" Jack questioned.

"The Nine are here they have come out of there resting places lets pray they do their duty upon the dawn," and with that Grey Wolf began chanting.

A tumultuous robust wind whipped down the valley of Teotihuacan and it made Jack shudder violently. As he awoke a cold residue of dampness clung to him and he opened his eyes to a veil of white mist. A drowning beat hummed in his head as he still felt the slumber in his eyes. The mist stirred unnaturally and within its frail fabric he glimpsed the spectres and apparitions in the morning cloud, this strange environ. He felt the grip on his shoulder and he jumped in shock to turn with relief and see Grey Wolf by his side.

"Canbanna wake up you have a guest," Grey Wolf said and Jack couldn't believe his eyes what he saw in the Indians shadow as he rose from his slumber.

"Henry What in blazes are you doing here," Jack said with amazement.

"I cant explain it Jack but I know, just know Anne is alive and she is coming here also," Henry explained with his expression in sober thought.

The brim of the horizon lit with an ethereal aura and the mountains of Pachamaca were illuminated in an illusion as they stood huge sentinels of solid gold. A thin veil of black cloud eroded the almost clear sky and in the heart of the valley a black procession snaked down the ancient Llama paths.

"The Sorceress is upon us," Grey Wolf revealed as a dark ominous shadow masked the suns twilight eclipsing the clean daylight as it drifted into obsolescence.

The Nine were placed on the tzompantli Skull Rack in the Avenue of the Dead in the centre of the Pyramid of the Moon and the Pyramid of the Sun. The Shaula all kneeled in prayer as the pure crystal effigies embodying the souls of their fore fathers were placed with care in there ordered places. Long into the day they prayed until the coming of night. Alynna had come here sanctioned by the will of time itself with thirty trusted Acolytes for her own protection. She had brought along Attacia to witness this historic event as her servants had carried her across the Andes. She now sat upon the step of the Pyramid of the Moon looking frail and distraught. Jack caught sight of Anne by the side of the Sorceress. "Anne, Anne," he called to her across the divide.

"Canbanna it is of no use she is under the spell of Shegasger," Grey Wolf answered with emotion in his heart and Jack fell silent knowing that the wise Indian would have been right.

Alynna went into dark caverns of the primordial night and she started to walk in the manner of a zombie towards the tzompantli skull rack. The celestial bodies had begun to align in the sky and the Earth Mother lay bare her soul. Alynna paused before the collection of skulls the Nine. She took hold of her skull, the Demon Skull Shegasger and held it aloft for all to descry. Placing the Demon Skull upon the Nine to complete the pyramid the covenant of the Viracocha. Alynna knew if her Master triumphed on this day Nine new Hells would be created.

The heavens reverberated and shuddered with blue lightning streaking across the sky answering the call of the Seventh Sun. the Mayan calendar cogs had ceased to move for all time and they grinded to their final turn upon the wheel of all known days. The Shamans shook the spirit rattles as they awakened the dead and Alynna's Acolytes swooned in homage to their master. The earth trembled and Jack lost his balance as the Earth Mother stopped rotating with the Planets aligned in the sky. The rotation of the poles had ceased to exist and man-made satellites plummeted down into the planet as the gravitational pull of the Earth had cut loose its hold upon them. Quinn helped Henry to his feet by offering his arm as the song of the Earth Mother had gone and Jack felt like he wanted to cry. "Inkarri the reversal of all time," Grey Wolf narrated the unusual phenomena.

A great mist came down the plains thick and all smothering blocking out the pyramid of the Sun and the pyramid of the Moon as it inundated the aura of the Citadel. Hugo cursed as he lay in position on the apex of the Moon Pyramid as his snipers viewpoint had been obscured.

“The sprit clouds,” Grey Wolf pertained this fog all around them.

In this ethereal mist the spectres and apparitions that Jack had seen upon the dawn. The Shaman War Party chanted to the spirits of their ancestors and the rattles reverberated in the unearthly mist. The Nine Skulls shone out in brilliance with a myriad of colours all the shades of the rainbow whilst the Demon Skull emanated blood red with the souls of the damned screaming within it’s midst. Alynna had made her way back to her Acolytes from the Avenue of the Dead across the plain of Teotihuacan as they all waited the Army of Darkness and the Soldiers of the Light upon bated wings.

The Tzompantli glowed with the Nine skulls giving off a white angelic aura hinged by a red incandescence that had manifested from the hellfire of Shegasger. Then within this white aura it took shape at first a black smouldering wisp that rose up and then it nurtured expanding upon it’s materialization. A huge abominable creature rose from the embers of the spirit fire and it dominated the sky with it’s wings expanding shrouded in fire like the mighty fabled phoenix of ancient lore.

“Shegasger, Inkarrri has begun where space and time have no beginning or end” Grey Wolf mouthed appalled.

The Demon a feathered serpent with a tail that whipped into the impenetrable darkness above and brought it down as it fractured the Mother Earth to imbed within it’s crystal. Shegasger serpent head stood in the heavens with a hideous beak and it opened to let out a ghastly shriek that pierced the ears of everyone upon the plains, as it was reborn chilling the very roots of creation. The serpent head and shrieking beak struck down as it roared from the sky and six Shaula Indians raised their tomahawks to it as they perished with their bodies collapsing upon the ground as the Demon sucked out their souls from within them. The head rose and electricity crackled around it devouring their spiritual energy.

Out of the spirit clouds they stepped the Viracocha, the Amuru, Huallpa and thousands of other great Ancestors as they took there places with their brethren. They chanted and shook rattles at the beast as the head came

crashing down from aloft again and six more of the Shaula were vanquished as Shegasger glowed in a blue eminence. Upon the Tzompantli the blood red skull of the Demon flared and the two skulls beneath shone amber. A struggle of faiths ensued but the amber skulls vibrated and started to crack and with an almighty bang they had vanished into dust.

Quatazela let out an anguished cry of despair as he perceived the Covenant of the Viracocha crumble and it desolated him knowing what life force had lay within them. The Blood Skull had dropped onto the next layer upon the pyramid as another battle of faith had occurred. Bolts of blue lightening enlightened the monster as the souls within the crystals had been gulped downed by his malevolent beak. The next three skulls changed from white to amber and they too began to crack as Shegasgers eyes shone bright red like two planets in the sky.

“Canbanna only you can save us now,” Grey Wolf said to Jack as he lost heart.

Jack had taken only a couple of steps with the whole Indian Nation looking upon him for salvation when an arm halted him in his tracks. Henry walked before him and Jack followed a few paces in his tracks. Henry walked into the sinister metropolis with his golden statuette under his arm and marched towards the towering manifestation of Shegasger. As he reached the Tzompantli he could discern the aura as wraiths both good and evil swam in an abyss battling to the death. He had a start when the three amber skulls blow up in his face and then he heard the horrendous shriek of the beak aloft as a thousand souls were destroyed as three new hells had been created. The Serpent flew down upon the plains the victor and fifty more of the Shaula were devoured in celebration and it’s humungous wings blazed in a blue and red fire.

Jack strolled out in the wake of the Demons devastation and he observed Henry kneeling before the Skull Rack as if in prayer. Before the Aura of the battling souls and he lay upon the earth the golden statuette. A spirit of a man emanated in a crouching pose and when he stood tall and proud like a Jaguar. His head had been religiously shaven and he was in the prime years of his life with muscle definition and a pointed black beard.

Khunitep called upon his great Gods as he gazed up at the ghastly shadow and called out in defiance of its gruesome beak that shrilled upon him.

“Creature of the night, creature of the gloom. I beseech Amun to tame your thunder, Khonsu to extinguish your pride and Mut to return you to the underworld from where you were abominated”. Khunitep had spoken.

Hugo had his image in the sight aperture, he relaxed his breathing as he had been trained and waited to hold. His cold mind and body steady to get off the killing shot. Jack felt as if this were the longest walk in the world and he walked upon this Hell on Earth with the fires of Great Feathered Serpent in the sky alighting his route

Hugo had him now dead centre in the crosshairs and his shoulders relaxed, as he made ready to squeeze off a round from the Barrett .50mm calibre snipers rifle. The sight zoomed in and Quinn’s head was as large as life. He squeezed the trigger ever gently relishing the shot His back lurched as he felt the intense pain and he instinctively screwed around his head to see the bull headed knife in his back. Attacia stared into the death filled eyes as he glided away. She had crawled meticulously on her feeble physique from step to step up the Moon Pyramid as she cursed the demon form of the Manta Mari.

“You have treated me as your chattel, a mere possession, you pray upon the ignorant and condemn the wise,” She had sworn upon every painful step.

Hugo dropped the weapon as the grip left his hands it knocked his silver topped cane that tumbled down the slope of the Moon pyramid to rest upon the black earth.

Jack was upon this black earth, his brow had beads of adrenaline upon it and his legs carried him with a nervous wobble. The red fires burned more fiercely atop and the four final skulls shone like the Suns of time as they fought against this evil with all there might. Jack took his place by the Priest who called upon the wrath of Amun.

“It’s a fine day for it,” Jack cajoled hiding his fear but the Egyptian had no meaning for his words. He raised his crystal shard above his head holding it with both his hands. Jack held the figurine like a sacrificial blade aloft and within it emanated Ramuns noble spirit in the crystalline sheen. He smiled at Jack with proud flowing tears of redemption in his eyes.

“God help us both,” Quinn mouthed the only prayer he could conjure and he brought the crystal down with all his might into the cranium of the Demon Skull. It cut into it surprisingly easy like a knife cutting through

butter and the entire Tzompantli exploded all five skulls into a thousand grains of sand.

The creature let out a haunting scream that rocked the very foundations of the Earth and within its wings holes ripped through it by beams of bright light as they tore its dark cloak apart. The mighty head with red maddened eyes swirled and twisted as it let out more of the tormenting shrieks. Then its great body finally collapsed as its shadow raced upon the earth and the Indians ran seeing this doom come upon them. Then it landed without a sound and its wake was just a grey misty cloud.

The Manta Maris Acolytes trembled and they stood quivering in their mortal bodies. The flesh fell from their bones until all that remained were their skeletal frames in the shadow of the Pyramid of the Moon. Then the bones cracked and the skeletons crumbled onto the soil with their skulls imploding into dust to return to the bosom of the Earth Mother

Alynnna trembled herself fixated by terror with her body writhing and throwing until all that stood in her stead was a young girl standing in her place.

“Mother where are you,” she called with fright.

Khunitep approached the young girl and took her by the hand and led her into the clouds of mist.

“The spirit cloud is shifting,” Grey Wolf said as Jack himself perceived the green savannah of the plains and the Pyramids were coming back into sight.

“By Jove that was the best bloody light show I’ve ever seen,” Henry remarked seemingly in fantastic health and for once beaming with a broad smile. Jack stood in aspect shock when an abrupt voice brought him back from oblivion. He glanced into the cloud to discern the Priest with the young blonde haired girl. He said once again the undistinguishable phrase.

“Thank you my friend and may Amun bless you,” someone translated for him and he turned again to see Anne by his side.

“Thank God your Okay,” he said in disbelief hugging her too him for all his worth.

“Jack look,” Anne told Jack as he glanced back into the cloud to see a young Indian standing before him.

“Mighty Warrior you have brought about the legacy and destroyed the demon of the Witch upon the Mountain,”Tupac Amuru had spoken with Grey Wolf translating the Quetzal for him.

“The new age has dawned the Seventh Sun has passed,”Quetzela called out into the dark clear heavens as the spirit cloud dissolved and the Earth Mother once again began singing.

THE END

.