

Indy is on the trail of the legendary lost city—and this time it's no game!

# INDIANA JONES

and the Fate of Atlantis



By  
**Dale Dassel**

CHRIS '10



“Hey, what’s that?” Sophia pointed ahead, where a thousand tiny dewdrops glittered in the hallway like gems on a sheet of black velvet. Indy pushed the lantern forward as they drew closer, but the darkness refused to give up its secrets until they were nearly on top of the spot. He spun and tackled Sophia just before the floor split open like an inverted drawbridge, falling away beneath them.

In that instant of panic, Indy grabbed her around the waist with one arm, while the other—holding the lantern—shot out to grasp the edge. He nearly lost his grip when the trapdoor slammed roughly into the ground. Hanging from the steep incline, Indy glanced over the collar of his leather jacket and saw rows of razor-thin obsidian knives meticulously staggered down the length of the 10-foot drop. In a diabolical feat of engineering, the blades were oriented edgewise to present a nearly invisible profile in the camouflaging darkness.

A loose pebble fell into the pit with a metallic plink, disturbing a sheet of glittering powder that covered the bottom. Indy shuddered when the smooth white sand stippled into a grid of geometric pinpricks. An unwary trespasser would be flayed to bloody ribbons on the ancient razor slide, and then deposited onto a salt bed lined with iron nails to suffer an agonizingly painful death...

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**INDIANA JONES™**

and the

**FATE OF  
ATLANTIS**

by  
Dale Dassel

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*For Doug, Jane, and Nick,  
and all the pixel pushers who brought  
Fate of Atlantis to life.*

*Nur-Ab-Sal made me write this.*





## PROLOGUE

Indiana Jones was in a tight spot. Literally. The passage was dark and cool, its walls pressing against his shoulders with a vise-like grip. Unfortunately he didn't have his leather jacket for protection. Indy moved awkwardly in the confines of the narrow space, crawling on his knees, pulling himself forward with one hand while aiming a thick electric flashlight into the inky darkness. Its weak, flickering beam illuminated only a couple feet ahead to reveal a featureless ribbon of ground that seemed to stretch away into infinity. The batteries were almost depleted, but he hoped that they would hold out long enough for him to reach the other end of the tunnel, otherwise he would be forced to navigate in the dark. He was pressed for time, facing dire consequences. If he didn't return with the idol, Marcus Brody was as good as dead.

“Come on, just a little further,” Indy muttered to himself in the dusty silence. Sweat beaded on his brow and trickled into his eyes. Indy squinted against the salty sting, but couldn’t pause to wipe his face. He had to keep moving. Suddenly he stumbled over a protrusion on the floor, jarring his elbow roughly against the wall. The flashlight clattered to the ground, blinked out, plunging him into a pitch-black cocoon of darkness. “Damn it,” he cursed, patting around on the floor until he found it again. Indy thumbed the switch on and off repeatedly with no effect. He thumped the end of it against the ground in frustration, and the beam stuttered back to life. “Good. Now stay on.”

“Do you see anything yet, Jones?” The muffled voice echoed through the passageway. Evidently Mr. Smith was not a patient man, and Indy knew that he couldn’t afford to keep the tall, blond-haired stranger with the indeterminate accent waiting much longer.

“Not yet,” he called back over his shoulder.

“Then keep looking,” ordered Smith, who was holding a gun on Marcus at the beginning of the passageway.

The English curator was in his mid-sixties, and that was no age for a man of his disposition to be gallivanting around the world after artifacts. In spite of his fretful nature, Marcus had grown considerably bolder in the pursuit of archaeological relics ever since their quest last summer for the Holy Grail. While the experience had given Brody a much-needed bolster of confidence, Indy didn’t like to encourage his old friend. But it was too late now. Marcus *was* here, and they were both in trouble. If he didn’t

find the statue, Indy didn't know what he would do. Especially since he didn't have his whip or gun with him.

He clawed his way through a gauzy sheet of cobwebs that spread across the corridor like a gray veil, and wondered if the passage would ever end. No sooner than he contemplated the thought, the floor dropped away, spilling him onto a hard, flat surface. Indy rolled over and quickly jumped to his feet. He slashed the light in every direction to reveal his surroundings. He found himself in a large hall that was nearly ten feet wide, and maybe three times as long, with thick wooden beams that crossed the ceiling high overhead. Dusty shelves lined the walls of the chamber. The archaeologist blinked in disbelief as his beam skipped over row upon row of pots and vessels, dull golden ingots and ornate statuary fashioned out of brass, wood, stone, and ebony. There were literally *thousands* of artifacts, a virtual storehouse of ancient wealth, more treasure than one person could acquire in a lifetime of collecting. The sight left him breathless.

"I'm through!" Indy shouted back down the passage. Hopefully the announcement would soothe the gunman's impatience and buy him a little more time. He moved forward, swiping the flashlight along the first row of cluttered shelves to begin looking for the particular item that Mr. Smith sought. As much as he wanted to linger and examine the artifacts in detail, Indy knew he had to focus. He had already searched two similar treasure rooms without luck. This was his last chance to locate the idol that would spare Marcus Brody's life. He had to find it.

“Indy, please hurry!” Brody urged in a voice laced with panic.

*I'm working on it, Marcus*, he thought, sweating profusely in the stifling darkness. As he scanned the collection, Indy tried to envision what the object looked like, based on Smith's description. It was supposed to be a short bronze statue about seven inches high, with upraised arms and horns on its head. He gazed over crude stone tools, potsherds and arrowheads, a gilded mask inlaid with precious jewels. Moving deeper into the vast repository, Indy struggled to tune out his expert eye that stubbornly attached an historic identification to every relic that he saw. He glossed over an elliptical battle shield made of hammered copper, and ignored an elaborate jade votive bowl from the Qin Dynasty. This was taking too long, Indy thought. He could just imagine Smith waiting outside with his gun pressed to Brody's head, knowing that he would pull the trigger without the slightest hesitation if Indy returned empty-handed. No. It wasn't going to happen, he promised resolutely.

The myriad of arcane relics became a dusty blur as the search grew more desperate. Indy abandoned his academic mantle and reverted to the more primitive visual identification medium of shape, commanding his eye to respond only to anything that had pointy appendages. He turned left and right, attempting to survey both sides of the room simultaneously. Shelves crammed with blunt vases, intricately carved stelae, mosaic tiles, a fragmented bas-relief frieze that once adorned some ancient structure... All of it became meaningless to the frantic archaeologist.

Then all at once, Indy froze. His breath caught in his throat as he spied the statue on the top shelf, nestled between a chipped funeral urn and a shallow clay bowl whose rim was etched with a flowing, wave-like design. He reached up and plucked the horned idol from its lofty perch where it had rested in the darkness for untold years.

It was a curious-looking thing. The small, cylindrical copper body was tinted with the green patina of age, and unusually heavy. The statue regarded him with a cold obsidian gaze while the open mouth was frozen in a silent whisper. Its thin, pointy arms were held upright in mock worship. A pair of short curving horns protruded from its head. The style was both ancient and futuristic, and Indy noted that it looked vaguely Minoan; A blend of disparate cultural influences, although he couldn't say which ones. He rubbed his thumb over the crust of corrosion that ringed the seam where the two halves of the torso joined together. Flakes of ancient blue rust crumbled away, and the top half of the idol rotated with a dull mechanical hum, like a piece of clockwork. Indy held the statue close to his ear and twisted it back and forth, listening closely. This time there was the unmistakable grind of gears engaging. He wondered why somebody would put such a mechanism inside of an ancient statue.

"Jones, where are you?" Smith shouted angrily, snapping Indy out of his reverie.

In his curiosity about the idol's inner workings, he'd momentarily forgotten about the steely-eyed gunman impatiently awaiting his return. Indy hurried from the treasure room and ducked into the pas-

sageway, clutching the horned idol tightly against his chest. "Take it easy, I found it!"

"Very good. Now please hurry back if you value your friend's life," he taunted.

Indy's mind raced as he clambered through the darkness. Smith might shoot him the moment he stuck his head out of the tunnel, then take the statue and kill Marcus anyway. He needed to come up with a plan, and fast. The main problem was that he didn't have any weapons handy, and the size of the tunnel made it difficult for Indy to spring out and catch the gunman off-guard. Maybe if he threw the statue on the floor, the distraction might buy him enough time to take him down. Of course that could backfire if Smith was a trigger-happy fellow. He might shoot first and ask questions later. That was about his only option, because the air was growing brighter, the end of the passage was coming up fast. Was he willing to risk it?

Before he could act, Indy tumbled out of the crawlspace and squinted in the bright sunlight that streamed through the windows of Caswell Hall. Beyond the ivy-framed portal, he saw a bright blue sky laden with fluffy clouds. Birds flitted among the leafy trees that were in full bloom across the manicured green lawn of Barnett College. It was a picture perfect spring day on campus. The only thing out-of-place was the imposing figure of Mr. Smith, dressed in an unseasonably long overcoat, and pointing a Luger at Marcus Brody. The elderly curator sat in a chair nearby, looking pale and flustered. A sheen of perspiration glazed his forehead as he clung to his very last shred of sanity.

“I’m back.”

“Oh, thank heavens,” Marcus breathed with relief.

The tall stranger trained his pistol on Indy as he stood up. “You don’t look at all well, Doctor Jones.”

Indy’s hair was disheveled and streaked with cobwebs. The sleeves of his tweed jacket were covered in dust and soot, and the toes of his patent leather wingtip shoes were scuffed. “Exploring our collections can be hazardous,” he quipped tensely, “but I found what you wanted.”

“Excellent. Now hand it over.” Smith’s native accent became thicker, his faux English deteriorating in his urgency.

“First I want to know why it’s so important to the Reich.” Indy demanded, holding up the strange horned idol. He’d already concluded that Smith was a Nazi agent, but what he didn’t understand was why the Nazis were so interested in a worthless copper statue.

“For goodness sake, Indy, listen to the man. He has a gun,” pleaded Marcus.

If Smith was impressed by Indy’s perceptiveness, he kept it well-hidden behind a mask of Aryan superiority. Through strictly-enforced discipline and training, he had learned to achieve total control over the emotions that plagued the more inferior races, such as this filthy American who had carried out his bidding.

His razor-tight grin was both smug and condescending. “You can’t even begin to imagine the power in this relic, Doctor Jones. It belonged to an ancient empire of supreme technological power, a military sovereignty that conquered every nation in the

world at the dawn of history. Now we will harness that power for the Fatherland, and claim our rightful place as the rulers of the free world.”

Indy made an effort not to roll his eyes at the spiel, which must have been memorized by every Nazi captain and agent from Hitler down. “You mean the Hyperboreans. *Die Herrenrasse?*” He regarded the tarnished bronze figure with a sneer. “Germany is going to need a lot more than *this* to win the war.”

Smith’s grip tightened on his pistol. “You have wasted enough of my time, Herr Jones. Give me the statue before I lose my temper.”

“Then take it.” Indy said, lobbing the heavy idol at him.

The blond gunman turned up his hands to catch the statue, apparently not expecting Indy to give up the prize so easily. The moment that the gun was pointed away to the side, Indy leaped forward and tackled him around the waist, driving Smith into a nearby table. The Luger fell from his grip and clattered away. Marcus Brody jumped out of his chair as the two men rolled around trading punches on the floor. Smith was larger and stronger, but Indy was faster. He landed a hard right fist to the Nazi’s jaw, followed by another to the side of his head. He was ready for a third when Smith responded with a powerful, lightning-fast jab that snapped Indy’s neck back. Smith used the moment of opportunity to make a swipe for his lost gun while the stunned archaeologist recovered from the vicious blow.

Realizing what he was doing, Indy quickly pushed off of his knees in a desperate lunge and managed to grab hold of the attacker’s foot just as he reached his

weapon. His hand was curling around the grip of his automatic pistol when Marcus Brody suddenly intervened by slamming Indy's discarded flashlight against Smith's wrist. He let out a howl of pain, and retracted his arm before Marcus could strike again. Still smarting from the punch, the Nazi clutched his injured wrist and looked around frantically. He might not be able to win against the American, but he would not leave this country without the object that he had traveled so far to attain. Indy made another grab for him just as Smith spotted the copper statue lying beside Brody's chair. Smith deftly twisted his body to the side and snatched up the idol, bolting for the door as pinpoints of light spangled his vision.

Indy was fast on his heels. "Marcus, call the police!"

Smith fled from the archive room and raced down the hall of the vacant building, which was usually empty on weekends. However on this particular Saturday afternoon, a janitor had recently finished applying a fresh coat of wax to the wooden floor at the landing of the main lobby. A cacophony of rapid footsteps caught his ear, and he looked up from his work to see two men charging out of the Antiquities department. The taller one in the blue overcoat was being pursued by a familiar-looking professor wearing a gray suit. The janitor quickly pulled his mop bucket out of the way as the men barreled towards the polished lobby at breakneck speed. He knew that he was about to witness a disaster in the making.

The lanky blond man reached the wood-covered floor just as the professor snagged the tail of his long overcoat and dug his heels into the carpet. The fugi-

tive hit the glossy wax and unleashed a cry of startled surprise as his feet shot out from under him. The momentum of his flight was enough to pull his arms free of the overcoat. He skidded across the floor on his back and crashed into the opposite wall, cursing in German. The tweedy professor leaped over a large patch of wet floor and propelled himself across the wax like an ice skater in an attempt to reach the other man before he could escape.

Still clutching the horned idol, the Nazi agent scrambled up from the slippery floor just in time to avoid Indiana Jones, who raised his arms to cushion the impact as he slammed into the wall. Smith was gone by the time Indy had regained his footing. He burst through the door and looked both ways, but the thief was nowhere in sight. Indy sat down on the front steps to catch his breath. *Damn*. He still couldn't figure out why the strange copper statue was so important to the Nazis.

Smith had first approached Indy in the faculty lounge where he was having lunch with Marcus, claiming to be a researcher from the American Museum of Natural History. He was looking for a Bronze-Age statue in one of the many collections that Barnett College housed for other institutions. Indy agreed to help him when he produced the necessary paperwork to validate his story, and they set out for the seldom-used archive rooms. As it turned out, the tall German spy had an innate knowledge of the campus layout. He knew exactly where to find the maintenance passage hidden behind a bookcase in the corner. When Indy protested that it was nothing more than a ventilation shaft, Smith pulled his gun on them and forced

Indy to enter the narrow tunnel.

As it turned out, the passageway led to a long-forgotten storage room that had been walled shut during renovations in the 1920's. Indy had heard rumors about Barnett's immense and largely uncatalogued repository of artifacts, but Smith couldn't have possibly known about the secret room unless he had obtained a set of blueprints for the building. He estimated that any resourceful and well-funded person could accomplish the feat quite easily, but he still had a few unanswered questions. Namely, where did the Nazis learn of the bronze statue, particularly its location among the dusty relics that were sequestered away in Caswell Hall? Then he realized that he might already have the first clue.

Back in his office, Indy and Marcus rummaged through the pockets of Smith's lost overcoat. Along with an SS passport which identified the blond man as Klaus Kerner, they discovered a ragged copy of *National Archaeology*. A page in the middle of the magazine was earmarked at an article entitled 'Icelandic Antiquities', which detailed the 1929 Jastro expedition to Iceland. Indy's photograph adorned the top of the page, directly opposite the portrait of an attractive redhead with a winsome smile and bright green eyes. Her name had been circled in red pen below her picture, along with a crudely drawn exclamation point.

"Who's the woman?" Marcus asked, looking over Indy's shoulder.

"Sophia Hapgood, a grad student from Boston University. She was my assistant on the Jastro dig."

“She looks positively charming, Indiana.”

Indy scowled. “She’s a spoiled rich kid who went into archaeology to rebel against her upper-class family. Her parents expected her to be a social butterfly, or something. Then she got hold of some crackpot mystic’s book and went all flaky on theories about lost continents, reincarnation, that sort of nonsense. Anyway, she finally gave up archaeology to become a psychic.”

“How odd,” Brody remarked, scratching his chin thoughtfully while Indy tried to discern what valuable information, if any, could be gained from the magazine.

Suddenly it clicked. The article linked him to Sophia, who’d spent years collecting artifacts that reflected her passion for Atlantis—the technologically advanced civilization that Kerner championed for the Nazi cause. The Jastro dig turned up a number of unusual artifacts that defied classification, including a strange bronze pendant that Sophia proclaimed was from the lost kingdom. She became so enamored with the necklace that she kept it for herself. Indy was willing to bet that several other choice pieces had found their way into her personal collection as well. Suddenly his heart plummeted as he realized that she was the Nazi’s next target.

Brody must have read his mind. “Indy, Kerner found you. What if he finds her? We should warn the woman.”

“I’m way ahead of you,” he said, removing his fedora from a hook on the wall. “I have to get to New York and find Sophia before Kerner does.” He put his hat on, then paused thoughtfully in the doorway.

“You know something, Marcus? The coldest year of my life was the one I spent in Iceland with Sophia.”



1

THEATRE ROW

*New York City, June 1939*

Dusk had nearly set by the time Indy's taxi squealed to a stop at the curb of the Imperial Theater on West 45th Street. The last rays of sunlight traced the skyscrapers in threads of silver fire against the cool indigo sky as he stepped out of the cab and handed the driver his fare, plus a generous tip for whisking him from the train station through rush-hour traffic in record time. Turning from the street, Indy raised his eyes to the glowing marquee that soared across the front of the building and shook his head in disbelief. He never thought he would see the day when Sophia's name would be up in lights. But there it was for all to behold: *Madame Sophia: One night only.*

He strolled up to the glass ticket booth, where a young dark-haired girl was busy counting the day's

receipts. Her long red fingernails were a blur as she tallied the ticket sales against her cash box. She was clearly in a hurry to leave for the day. Indy tapped on the window politely. "Excuse me. Can I get one for Madame Sophia's show?"

The cashier looked up in surprise, having been absorbed in her work. "I'm sorry sir, the show's sold out," she apologized in a thick Bronx accent made worse by the piece of gum that she was chewing.

"You're kidding," he flinched.

The girl shook her head. "No seats, no standing room, no exceptions."

"Thanks a lot," he said, tipping the brim of his fedora. *Terrific*, Indy thought, ambling down the sidewalk. Now what? For all he knew Kerner was already inside, sitting in the front row, while Indy couldn't even get into the building. Or *could* he...

Half a block away, the theater terminated at the intersection of an alley. Indy hurried past a vacant newspaper stand and rounded the corner by a telephone booth, following the perimeter of the building into the shadows. He nodded with satisfaction when he spotted a utility entrance at the side. A buzzing lightbulb above the door threw a splash of dull yellow ambience across the alley, illuminating a collection of discarded packing crates and garbage cans. High up on the side of the theater, a fire ladder climbed the brick wall, passing a nearby window on its way to the roof. Indy sized up his options and decided to try his luck with the door first, rather than risk charges of breaking-and-entering. If it was locked, he could always say that he was a fire inspector.

Indy twisted the handle several times, but it was

bolted securely shut, as he'd expected. He was about to make for the ladder when the door swung open, and Indy was confronted by a heavy bouncer who looked like a Cro-Magnon in a tuxedo. The man squinted into the darkness with a set of small, beady eyes, jutting out a wide lantern jaw stained by a gritty twelve o'clock shadow. His overstuffed suit jacket stretched tightly across his chest, barely containing his massive girth. The buttons were pulled so tight Indy thought they might pop like a balloon. A comically small red bowtie added a touch of forced elegance to the brute's ensemble.

The guard scowled at him. "Whadda ya want? This ain't no ticket office."

"I'm here to see Madame Sophia." Best to start with the truth, figured Indy, see how far it got him.

"You go in through the front door or you don't go in at all, see?" The hired muscle balled his hand into a meaty fist, threatening Indy's face. "Now hit the bricks!"

Indy didn't have time to argue with this Darwinian nightmare. He slammed the guard's teeth together with a piston-like uppercut to the jaw, and the goon hit the pavement like a sack of potatoes. Out cold. "After you." He grabbed the unconscious doorman by his ankles and dragged the tough guy behind the crates to sleep it off. Then he slipped inside the building and made his way to the auditorium.

Indy poked his head through a velvet curtain and gazed over an audience that filled every plush seat in the house, including the latecomers who had paid full admission just to stand in the aisles. He couldn't believe that Sophia was packing them in like this. He

was wondering how she had managed to book such a prestigious venue when he spied a large signboard by the stage:

*The New York Theological Society presents  
Madame Sophia: The Light of Atlantis*

Then everything suddenly made sense. The whole room was full of crackpots. Indy scanned the faces in the front row, and felt relieved when he didn't see Kerner. At least he'd arrived in time to prevent the Nazi from doing anything to her. Finally turning his attention to the woman of the hour, he was stunned at how much Sophia had matured since Iceland. When he'd last seen her, she was a fresh-faced grad student of 23—just a kid. Now she was positively *stunning*.

The slender archaeologist-turned-mystic was garbed in a violet silk blouse with loose-fitting sleeves, and a stylish black knee-length skirt that emphasized her hourglass figure. Her dark crimson hair, pinned up in a neat coif on the back of her head, gleamed in the ambience of the powerful footlights lining the stage. Dazzling silver earrings complimented the shiny bracelets that encircled her slender wrists. Although he couldn't see it, Indy somehow knew that Sophia was also wearing her prized necklace. She never went anywhere without it. Except maybe the shower, he mused with a smile.

The elaborate golden proscenium arch soared high above her, framing a massive sixty-foot projection screen where fanciful images of Atlantean life played out to Sophia's enthusiastic narration. Indy

nearly cringed as the redhead spun a hackneyed yarn of pseudo-history that sounded like something pilfered from a dime novel. But the sold-out crowd was hanging on every word in rapt attention. The place was quiet enough to hear the proverbial pin drop. He couldn't believe that anybody would actually pay to see Sophia, who had filled his ear with this garbage for the entire duration of the Jastro expedition—six long months tenting out in the remote Icelandic wilderness. Back then, he would have paid gladly just to get away from her. But these people were here voluntarily. Water finds its own level, he supposed.

Indy was startled by a tap on the shoulder. He wheeled around, prepared to slug the duplicitous Nazi officer, and stopped short of decking an elderly man in a visor cap. The guy wore a pair of loose-fitting pants with suspenders, and puffed on a thick cigar. Indy saw a folded-up newspaper tucked under his arm. A racetrack gambler. "You must be the new doorman. It's about time they got rid of Biff. He was such a pushover."

"Uh, yeah. I'm the new guy. Jones is the name."

The gambler stuck his hand out. "I'm Lenny, the projectionist. Nice to meet you, Jones."

Indy shook it with an amicable smile, relieved that he hadn't put the projectionist's lights out. "Likewise."

Lenny blew out a puff of smoke. "So what do you think of her?" he asked, nodding to the stage where Sophia expounded on the virtues of her utopian society.

"She's... something else," Indy offered noncommittally. He didn't want to offend the guy's obvious

admiration for the celebrated mystic.

“I hear ya.” The stagehand’s gaze wandered off, as if suddenly distracted by something behind the curtain. “Well, I’d love to stay and chat, but I have to run the ghost in a few minutes. That’s always a big moment.”

“Nice talking to you,” Indy said. Lenny gave him a pat on the shoulder and hobbled off with his newspaper and cigar. Indy scratched his head in confusion. “Ghost?”

He followed the old pensioner around the corner and found himself in a forest of ropes that dangled from ceiling-to-floor. A white, filamentous form with outstretched arms hovered in the rigging. A closer look revealed that Sophia’s star attraction was about as supernatural as anything that could be purchased from a linen shop. The faux apparition consisted of a bedsheet drawn over a wooden kite frame, with some kind of horned mask attached to the front. *Same old Sophie*, Indy thought with a smile.

The woman was a consummate shill for anything to promote her far-fetched schemes about Atlantis, especially if she could make a buck doing it. Not that she needed the money, because Sophia came from a rich family. Her passion was driven by a genuine belief in her mythical lost kingdom at the bottom of the sea. Tonight’s event was undoubtedly financed by a stable of wealthy clients who regarded her as a spiritual advisor brimming with Atlantean wisdom. If Indy still knew her like he used to, Sophia supplemented her bankroll with palmistry, tarot readings, and a crystal ball. Some people never changed, he marveled.

But Indy's amusement was short-lived. Through the curtains he noticed a pair of fidgety-looking ushers advancing towards the stage. They sported the red-and-gold uniform of the Imperial Theater staff, but their features were distinctly European. More Nazis. Just what he needed. He looked around, expecting to see Kerner, but the SS colonel was nowhere in sight. He had to act quickly. Indy clambered up the backstage ladder, disappearing into the curtains.

"Hey, you can't go up there!" Lenny protested.

"Don't worry, I'm also a fire inspector," Indy called back. He made his way across the narrow steel catwalk in search of a loose rope among the fly rigging. He found one that seemed long enough, reached over the hand rail, snaring it just as the ushers positioned themselves on the stairs at either side of the stage. They eyed the crowd nervously, waiting to make their move.

Indy heard a sudden commotion below. "All right, where did he go?" roared the furious bouncer that he'd sacked earlier.

"Who?" Lenny asked.

"The guy in the brown hat! Where is he?"

"You mean the fire inspector? He went up there." The old projectionist pointed up at Indy among the velvet folds.

Biff snapped his head up in murderous rage, spotting him. "You're dead, pal!" A moment later, the whole lighting grid shook as the gorilla thundered up the ladder.

Out in the auditorium, the Nazis mounted the stage, creeping along the blue curtain toward Sophia, who was oblivious to their presence. "Aw hell," Indy

muttered. Only one thing to do.

Holding his breath, he took a firm hold on the rope and launched himself over the rail. The fedora flew from his head as he swung across the stage, landing directly between Sophia and the startled Nazi ushers, who paused at his unexpected entrance. Indy saw a flash of white in the corner of his eye. The crowd let out a collective gasp as the linen phantom screamed out of the rafters with a high-pitched wail, its rope blazing around the wheels of an ancient pulley. He released his grip on the line and watched the counterfeit spirit crash to the floor in a heap of broken sticks and rags. Indy winced. So much for Sophia's big finale.

"Hi, Sophie. Can we talk?"

The outraged mystic turned three shades of red while she glared at the man responsible for wrecking her big production, a man whom she hadn't seen in almost 10 years. "*Indiana Jones!*"

She was about to slug him when Biff let out a bellow of outrage, spying his escaped quarry from the catwalk above. They both looked up as the tuxedo-clad thug began to climb over the railing. Then Sophia's ghost was miraculously re-animated as he dropped from the catwalk and came down on the same line Indy had used. His three-hundred-pound girth pulled the rope taut, and the fluttering mass of rags shot into the rafters and shattered an arc lamp, bursting into flames. The crowd was on its feet now. They were getting more action than they'd paid for tonight. Meanwhile, the Nazis recovered from their surprise and charged across the stage. The livid bouncer lumbered toward Indy from the opposite

direction, stomping his fedora into the floor. Indy glanced up at the beautifully projected Atlantean scenery with regret. Things were about to get ugly.

“Sophie, get out of here!” he shouted at the top of his lungs. Then the four men collided, and all hell broke loose.

Indy ducked as the burly doorman plowed into him, using the man’s momentum to throw Biff over his shoulder into the two ushers. The floorboards trembled as they crashed to the stage in a heap. Indy was ready when the first soldier jumped to his feet, unhurt. His less-fortunate companion was pinned under Biff’s massive body. Indy collared the Nazi with a powerful right hook that sent him back to the wood. He was about to hit him again, but paused in surprise when he saw that the soldier was just a kid of about twenty. The moment of hesitation cost him.

Biff grabbed Indy’s leg with an angry growl and yanked his feet out from under him. The archaeologist quickly found himself on the floor with his adversaries. “I’m gonna kill youse!” the doorman swore, pummeling Indy’s body with cannonball fists.

Indy gritted his teeth in pain, twisted and thrashed, struggling to get away. The fight was not going well. Then Biff grabbed the professor’s tie and pulled hard, snapping his head back roughly. Indy’s face went red as the enraged bouncer throttled him viciously with his own tie, trying to squeeze the life out of him. The second Nazi usher finally managed to pull himself free of the doorman’s bulk. He quickly regrouped with his partner, and together they advanced on Indiana Jones, confident that the American could be dispatched easily now that he was at a disadvantage.

“Indy, watch out!” cried Sophia. Behind her, the projector splashed the final images of Atlantis across the screen as the show neared its conclusion. The futuristic buildings of the city were shattered by an enormous tidal wave in a scene of destruction that seemed to mirror the chaos below.

Suddenly confronted by the two uniforms, Biff paused from strangling Indiana Jones to regard the Nazis in surprise. “You want a piece of me, too? Come and get it!” He shoved Indy away roughly as the men came forward. Gagging for breath, Indy quickly loosened his tie and wobbled unsteadily to his feet. Spots danced before his eyes. The remaining Nazi drew a compact pistol from his jacket and pointed it at Indy while Biff picked up the first soldier and tossed him off the stage like a sack of rice.

A woman in the front row shrieked at the sight of the weapon. Distracted by the outburst, the Nazi agent glanced into the audience, letting his aim falter. Indy quickly seized the moment. He dove forward, catching the German around the legs. They hit the floor together and grappled for control of the gun. The assassin fought in total silence, exhibiting a steely lack of emotion. In fact, Indy realized that neither of the foreigners had uttered a word since the brawl first commenced.

“What’s wrong, you guys forget how to talk?” He repeated himself in German for his opponent’s benefit. “*Habt ihr Typen vergessen, wie man spricht?*”

Enraged by the taunt, the soldier threw a vicious punch at his face. Indy ducked the flying fist and slammed the Nazi’s gun hand against the stage twice before he finally released his weapon. He kicked the

gun out of reach and pulled his arm back to deliver a knockout blow when he suddenly felt an iron grip on his wrist. Before he could react, Indy was pulled away bodily.

Biff spun him around, grabbing him by the lapels of his jacket, and stared nose-to-nose at him. "Hey, what are you, some kind of Nazi?"

Indy might have laughed if his predicament weren't so dire. He pointed at the gun-toting attendant. "No, *he* is."

Biff looked quickly between the two of them. "I heard your Nazi-talk, smart guy, and I don't like Nazis."

"That makes two of us, then." Indy said, kicking him between the legs.

"*Oof!*" Biff clutched himself and toppled to the floor like a chopped tree. Down for the count.

With the doorman out of the picture, Indy faced off with his last adversary. They circled each other, waiting to see who would strike first. The Nazi smiled grimly, flexed his fingers into fists, anticipating the fight. Before either man could act, Sophia came up behind the German spy and clocked him over the head with the *Madame Sophia* signboard. He toppled to the floor, out cold.

Indy looked at the redhead in surprise, grinning. "That's my Sophie. Still knocking 'em dead!"

Smoke drifted across the mezzanine from the ceiling. Somebody coughed. Indy looked up, suddenly aware of the audience who'd witnessed the entire fray. Fifteen hundred people stared at him in open-mouthed silence. Indy smiled weakly and shrugged, jabbing a thumb at the unconscious bodies piled on

the stage. “No ticket.”

Lenny stepped out from behind the curtain and began to applaud. It was the best performance he’d seen in his forty years as a stagehand. After a beat, the rest of the crowd rose to their feet and joined him. A standing ovation. Indy took a ceremonious bow. Sophia Hapgood stomped away furiously, exiting the theater, stage left.



2

DEPARTURE

Sophia Hapgood angrily jabbed the key into the doorknob of her Park Avenue flat, pushing her way inside of the apartment with Indy on her heels. He raised his hand to block the door, anticipating that she would try to slam it in his face.

“I was trying to help you.”

She was furious and he didn't blame her, although Indy hadn't planned on getting involved in a fistfight on the stage of the Imperial Theater, and subsequently thrown out. He tried to convince her on the ride home that he'd only intervened to prevent Nazi agents from kidnapping her. Sophia railed back, saying that he'd embarrassed her in front of her most prestigious devotees, that he'd tarnished her image as a legitimate spiritualist, and that her career might never recover after the incident. She was clearly over-reacting, and Indy said as much.

“*Overreacting?*” she exclaimed, pulling off her beige overcoat in the darkened foyer. “Oh, you have some nerve. Do you have any idea what I had to go through to book that venue? My *parents* were there tonight, Indy! This was my big break, and you *ruined* it!”

“Knock it off, Sophie. You’re a scientist. You don’t need flying rags and all this psychic mumbo-jumbo,” he countered, trying to talk some sense into her. “You’re better than that.”

“I am *so* mad at you right now!” She raised her hand as if to strike him, paused and got a grip on her temper, then snapped the light switch on. They stepped into the apartment and stared in shock. Sophia’s jaw fell open. The place had been completely ransacked.

The furniture was turned over and her paintings were torn from the walls. The bookcase was rifled, its volumes lying scattered across the floor in a heap. A velvet-covered antique chair was smashed beside the window. Her desk had been completely gutted. Its drawers were pulled out and emptied onto the carpet. Her green desk lamp lay shattered on its side. They discovered a similar scene in the bedroom. Sophia’s bed was stripped bare, the mattress upended. The mirrored vanity was the victim of similar treatment, its doors flung open, her clothing strewn frantically about. She dashed into her office to confirm the worst. The shelves were empty. All of her artifacts were gone, cleaned out, stolen.

“What happened to my apartment?” she cried.

No wonder Kerner had been absent from the theater, Indy thought. He was here searching for At-

lantean relics. “What does a Nazi spy want with old statues?”

Sophia’s expression became hard. “They’re looking for the power of Atlantis.”

Indy couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Sophia was crazier than he’d thought if she actually believed Germany would expend the resources to search for a fabled city under the sea. The country was gearing up for a full-scale war against the Allies, a war driven by a maniacal, power-hungry dictator. Indy doubted the Führer had a vested interest in the Lost Continent, but Hitler’s *Ahnenerbe* certainly did. He’d already seen them in action, and he knew the situation was getting serious. The Nazis would relentlessly pursue any artifacts Kerner deemed important enough to obtain for the Reich, Atlantean or not.

“I used to think you’d make a good scientist,” he said, bending to pick up a crystal paper weight from the floor. Indy regarded the billiard-sized sphere, feeling its cool, heavy shape in his palm. “Yet you concealed important artifacts.”

Inside was a miniature coral reef with tiny orange fish swimming through the crystal matrix in suspended animation. The whimsical image touched something inside of him, and Indy suddenly understood the degree of Sophia’s passion. She truly believed in her vaunted lost continent. Not as a carnival show theme, but stone cold reality. The woman lived and breathed for Atlantis everyday of her life. It was her aspiration. Her dream. Not unlike his own father, whose lifelong obsession for the Holy Grail spurred a worldwide race against the Nazis for possession of the ancient cup. If Indy had enough faith in his Dad

to help him achieve his goal, maybe he could spare a little for Sophia, too.

“So what if I kept a few pieces? Not that it matters now. At least I still have the most important one.” She drew open the top of her blouse to reveal the bronze pendant she’d claimed from the Jastro expedition. Indy moved closer to examine it.

The necklace, a thick, wedge-shaped horned chevron made of tinted copper, bore an eerie resemblance to the idol that Kerner had stolen. Its brooding, pig-like face had triangular eyes and a narrow, diamond-shaped mouth. A concentric spiral adorned the flat vertical nosepiece of the chunky pendant. The two relics were definitely related, Indy concluded with archaeological certainty. No question about it. But he still wasn’t convinced that they came from the lost continent of Atlantis.

“Interesting. But what makes it so special? I’ve never seen you take it off.”

Sophia went back to the living room and retrieved a blood-red metallic bead from her purse. She held it up to the light for Indy to see. The tiny gem burned like a speck of lava between her fingers, a miniscule sun reflecting the ambience of the chandelier’s light tenfold. “This is orichalcum, the metal first described by Plato.” She placed the bead into the mouth of the horned medallion, and waited.

The lights suddenly grew dim, flickering in the surge of a power flux. An ethereal green mist began to sparkle around the stone-faced pendant. Indy took a step back, uncertain whether or not the phenomenon was dangerous. The redhead closed her eyes and tilted her face upward in concentration.

The emerald glow intensified, disseminating into filaments of slithering light that encircled the woman's lithe body like a snake, enveloping her limbs. Indy squeezed his eyes closed reflexively, shutting out the sight as he remembered the Ark of the Covenant. The golden chest had eradicated an entire platoon of Nazi soldiers in a fiery blaze of destruction which was preceded by a creeping mist. Although Indy and Marion Ravenwood were spared, he wasn't taking any chances now.

"*Watch,*" Sophia urged. Indy looked up warily to see the mist disperse, forming a shape in the air that was not unlike the malevolent image on her pendant. Sophia opened her eyes, and a pair of glittering ruby spots simultaneously materialized in the ghostly face, startling Indy so much that he stumbled backwards, tripping over the overturned chair on the floor. The apparition had vanished by the time he regained his feet again.

Sophia crossed her arms in superiority. "What do you think?"

Indy didn't know how to explain the phenomenon, but hoped that it was another one of her parlor tricks. "It's a hell of a lot more convincing than your flying kite. How did you do that?"

"*I didn't do anything.* That was Nur-Ab-Sal, my spirit guide." Sophia explained that he was an Atlantean king who projected his spirit essence into her necklace during the final days of Atlantis before the cataclysm struck, destroying the great empire. The king's bid for immortality had apparently paid off. She went on to say that Nur-Ab-Sal guided her to the pendant's location at the Jastro digsite. Then, as

if on cue, Sophia held an arm to her forehead as if she might faint. “Wait, I’m getting something.” She stretched her other hand into the air and wiggled her fingers dramatically.

“Come on Sophia, give it a rest.” Indy joked halfheartedly. He wasn’t anxious to experience the illusion again.

“I see...” Sophia’s brow furrowed in perplexity. “A book?” Her eyes flicked open, looking away distantly beyond the walls of the room. Her mouth moved silently, but no words came out.

Indy touched her arm in concern. “Hey, are you okay?”

She blinked rapidly and her gaze suddenly snapped into focus again. “Hermocrates...”

“What about him?” Indy asked, recalling the general from Syracuse.”

“Not the man. The book. Nur-Ab-Sal says the *Hermocrates* holds the answers that we seek. It’s one of Plato’s lost dialogues, and we have to find it.”

That book was a legendary hoax, Indy thought. Along with the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Plato’s *Hermocrates* was another dialogue attributed to the famous Greek philosopher. Like many other rumored and sought-after documents, it was lost to history when the library at Alexandria was destroyed by fire in 48 B.C. No proof of its existence had ever been found. “The last time I checked, the only platonic thing that you wanted out of me was a relationship.”

Sophia regarded him coolly. “You’ve got that right. Now, are you going to help me or not?”

Now it was Indy’s turn to be upset. He couldn’t believe she was trying to push this on him. The spring

semester at Barnett had just ended, and he was looking forward to the upcoming break before classes reconvened in the fall. Three solid months away from his teaching post were stretching out before him. He wasn't about to waste them chasing after some phantom book to satisfy Sophia Hapgood's crackpot fantasies. She could go look for Atlantis on her own. He had better things to do.

"Forget it, Sophia. That book is a myth. It doesn't exist."

"What if the Nazis find a copy? Did you ever think of that?"

Indy's face hardened into a sober mask. She didn't have to spell out the rest. He could easily imagine what would happen if the Nazi regime got their hands on an unlimited source of Plato's super-energized metal. It would propel German physicists ahead in the atomic arms race by a quantum leap, making Adolf Hitler's *Wehrmacht* into the world's ultimate superpower. The Nazis would bomb their opponents into oblivion and take over whatever was left of the globe—an Aryan-controlled world in which all inferior races were purged out of existence. He couldn't let that happen. "Fine, I'll help you," he relented without enthusiasm.

He'd already dealt with the Third Reich earlier this year when he raced egomaniacal ex-archaeologist Magnus Völler for possession of a sacred biblical artifact, the Staff of Moses. Indy recovered the prize and sent Deutschland's finest packing, and he was prepared to do it again if it meant stopping the Nazis from obtaining another weapon that could turn the tide of the war in Germany's favor. With any luck, he

could get to the bottom of this Atlantis thing before classes resumed. If not, he was positive that Marcus Brody could pull a few strings in the Archaeology department to extend his leave of absence under the guise of summer fieldwork abroad.

It was going to be a busy night, Indy knew. First they had to file a police report about the break-in, and then make flight reservations for Iceland. The Jastro digsite was the logical place to start, being the original source of Sophia's collection. Indy recalled that its current resident, Dr. Björn Heimdall, had been digging there for the past couple of years. He might be able to tell them more about the strange bronze artifacts that the Nazis were so interested in. But Indy still had to drive back to Barnett College for his things, leave a note for his secretary to inform Marcus about his sudden travel plans, and then return to New York in the morning to pick up Sophia. He would be lucky to get any sleep at all.

\* \* \*

Karl and Torsten stood stiffly in the uncomfortable silence of the opulent hotel room, scarcely daring to breathe. They were too nervous to appreciate the velvet drapes, plush carpet, and polished gold trimmings of the upscale Manhattan hotel that served as the team's base of operations during their mission in America. The air was like ice as Klaus Kerner paced before them in crisp, measured steps. His glossy patent leather wingtips glided silently across the floor, like the prowl of a great cat stalking its prey. The silver *Reichsadler* pin that gleamed on the breast of the

Colonel's expensive suit was the only outward sign of his fealty to the Nazi party that he allowed to mark his civilian disguise.

The SS leader gathered his thoughts before he spoke, so that his words would have maximum impact while utilizing as little breath as possible. An immaculate Aryan soldier, Kerner did not like to waste anything, especially time. After narrowly being thwarted by Indiana Jones and failing to locate the necklace at Sophia Hapgood's apartment, he was anxious to return to Berlin and present the horned statue to Dr. Übermann, and Kerner wanted to make sure that his instructions were executed perfectly in his absence.

"I am leaving tomorrow. You are to follow Fräulein Hapgood and acquire the artifact in her possession—the necklace."

"But Jones is protecting her, Herr Oberst," protested Karl, the nervous young recruit whom Indy had collared in the theater.

Their commander's verdict was swift and harsh. "If Jones interferes, kill him. If you fail me *again*, mark my words you will spend the remainder of your career on the corpse disposal squad at Dachau. Do I make myself clear?"

The Abwehr agents exchanged fearful glances. "*Ja-wohl*, Herr Kerner!" It required extreme discipline to resist clicking their heels and saluting their superior officer, who had briefed them about proper conduct on Allied soil. Kerner explained that they were not to speak in their native tongue, nor exhibit the military reflexes that were so rigidly cultivated by their training. Any slip-up would be a risk to the secrecy

of their mission, and that was unacceptable. Kerner's goal was nothing short of complete world domination. They could not afford to fail in their campaign to increase the power and influence of the Fatherland across Europe and beyond. If he succeeded, history would remember him as the man who handed the Reich its ultimate victory.

He consulted the most recent intelligence report from their other agents in New York. "The Americans are leaving for Iceland in the morning. Here is their flight information. Do not show any mercy to the woman," Kerner addressed Karl pointedly, causing him to flinch.

The nervous young soldier was a recent graduate of the Abwehr intelligence program, unsure of himself on his first assignment outside of Germany. The kid was weak, an untested soldier with no combat experience to harden his nerve or strengthen his fortitude. At least Kerner could rely on Torsten, his senior officer by more than three years. Torsten had completed several important missions for the Regime, proving himself in campaigns on the battlefields of both Poland and France. He epitomized the cool efficiency valued by the National Socialist Party. In short, he was a perfect Nazi soldier. If Karl faltered in his duties, Kerner knew that Torsten would complete their mission without fail.

"Report to me when you have the other item," concluded Kerner, handing over the file to his men. "You are dismissed." He turned on his heel and marched from the room without another word.

\* \* \*

Relaxing with his hands clasped over his chest, Indiana Jones dozed peacefully in the crowded *Pan-American Airways* lounge in Port Washington, New York. Sitting across from him, Sophia Hapgood twisted anxiously in her chair as they waited for their boarding call. She consulted her wristwatch with an impatient sigh. "I hate this."

"Don't worry, we'll get there." Indy promised.

"I just wish they would hurry up so we can leave already. I can't stand just sitting here when Kerner is already on the move."

"Now boarding flight 138, non-stop from New York to Atlantis." Indy smiled under the brim of his downturned fedora. "Look, Sophie, there's your call."

"Very funny. But we'll see who has the last laugh when we really *do* get to Atlantis."

"I can hardly wait."

She scanned Indy from head-to-toe, frowning at his outfit. He wore a battered leather jacket over a khaki shirt, loose-fitting brown trousers and a pair of scuffed work boots. His second skin, she thought sarcastically. "I can't believe you're wearing a jacket in June. You'll wind up getting heatstroke," she predicted.

"It'll be cold when we land, and I don't feel like changing my clothes." Indy said without looking up. "I'd suggest you bundle up, too."

"*I'm* not packing a coat in the summer," Sophia argued. "I prefer to travel light. It's more efficient." She was dressed casually in dark green jeans, a loose-fitting cotton blouse, and a pair of tall, rugged boots.

“Fine then, just freeze to death. See if I care.”

The redhead eyed her tiny suitcase on the floor doubtfully. “If it’s that cold, then I’ll just buy something when we get there.” She suddenly leaned forward and squinted at Indy’s hat in the dim light of the lounge. “Is your hat brown or gray?” It was hard to tell.

“Leave my hat alone,” Indy grouched irritably. He didn’t like people criticizing his style, especially Sophia.

“Listen, I’m footing the bill for this trip, so I can say anything I want. Do you have any idea how much these tickets cost?”

Indy shook his head.

“They were expensive, even by my standards.”

“I didn’t ask you to buy them,” he reminded her.

“Well, I like to travel in style.” Sophia declared firmly.

“Then why don’t you pull a few strings with Nur-Ab-Sal and see if he can get us a seat in first class?”

The redhead crossed her arms petulantly. Indy didn’t have to see her face to know that she was blushing. “Get bent, Jones.”

Indy chuckled to himself. He was looking forward to the trip already.

Across the room, Karl and Torsten watched the pair closely. They had been following the Americans since sunrise, shadowing them to the airport from Sophia Hapgood’s mid-town flat. Jones had arrived by taxi cab, which indicated that he was not romantically involved with the woman, although he seemed to regard her with familiarity. According to the intel-

ligence dossier provided by Kerner, they had been colleagues in Iceland ten years previous when Jones was field supervisor on the Jastro dig. Hapgood was his assistant. They separated after the 1929 expedition, without further contact or communication until now.

Consulting the profile, Torsten knew that Hapgood was allegedly a clairvoyant medium with a passion for Atlantis lore, while Jones was a certified archaeologist and tenured professor at Barnett College, in upstate New York. He wanted to know more about him to help anticipate any further trouble they might expect, but the rest of Jones' file was classified. Kerner, in typical fashion, only gave them what minimal information was required for their mission. They would have to regard Jones with caution until they could learn more about him, because he would not underestimate the American again.

An announcement broadcast over the intercom sent the room into a burst of activity as passengers began to gather up their things and move to the exit. Karl tapped him on the shoulder, nodding at the redhead, who swatted the brim of Jones' hat, and berated him for being so lazy. The Abwehr agents were on their feet at once, following the couple at a safe distance lest Jones recognize them from their previous encounter. They trailed them to the boarding gate, handed their passes to the smiling flight attendant without a word, and moved outside to the waiting plane.

“What’s wrong with you, Indy? Don’t you want to see the scenery?” Sophia asked as the newly-chris-

tened *Yankee Clipper* taxied down the channel of the Long Island Sound.

“Sorry, I didn’t get much sleep last night,” Indy replied from the seat beside her, his fedora pulled low over his eyes once more. He’d resumed his nap immediately after boarding the plane from the marine terminal dock.

“This is an historic occasion. We’re the first passengers ever to fly on this plane!”

Indy didn’t share her enthusiasm. “I’m here. Isn’t that enough?”

“But you’re not enjoying the *moment!*”

“Yes I am. Just wake me up when we get there.”

The massive Boeing 314 accelerated into the wind under the screaming thrust of four Wright Twin Cyclone radial engines, rising from the water in a spray of cascading white foam. The aluminum-skinned airliner gleamed in the late morning sunlight, winging its way east for the tropical Azores Islands, where a connecting flight would take them north to Iceland, on the rim of the Arctic Circle.



3

FIRE AND ICE

The Vatnajökull glacier stretched inland from Iceland's barren coast like a glassy doormat, welcoming visitors to the end of the world. The frozen river of ice flowed westward from the North Atlantic into the vast sub-arctic desert spanning the continent's barren interior. After landing in Reykjavík, Indy stopped at the nearest clothing shop for Sophia to buy a coat. She promptly selected the most expensive one that the store offered, a supple ochre-toned sealskin parka with a removable fur collar. Once she was bundled up against the cold, they rented an old 1924 Ford and set out across the glacial ice cap towards the Jastro dig, a remote archaeological site that lay somewhere in the mysterious regions of eternal ice.

"Cold enough for you?" Indy asked from behind the wheel as the Ford motored along the bumpy volcanic road that split the whitewashed landscape.

“This heater is a joke. My ears are *freezing*,” Sophia shivered, her gloved hands tucked under the armpits of her new jacket for warmth.

“I hate to break it to you sweetheart, but this bucket doesn’t have a heater.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

“They didn’t make ‘em back then,” he smiled.

The Tin Lizzie bounced over a large snow-covered rock, nearly jarring Sophia out of her seat. “Apparently they didn’t have suspension, either,” she winced, then added: “Why can’t Atlantis be in someplace warm, like Florida?”

“Some people think it was,” Indy replied. He’d heard various rumors attributed to the location of the fabled continent, including the Caribbean Sea just off the coast of southern Florida. “But this isn’t Atlantis, is it?”

“Not according to Nur-Ab-Sal. He says that the Jastro site is just an outpost, founded by survivors in the aftermath of its destruction.”

“Survivors, huh? And where else might we find these other outposts, because you can bet that Kerner will be looking for them, too.”

Sophia grimaced. “I don’t have a list, if that’s what you’re asking for, but Nur-Ab-Sal will tell me when we get close.”

Through the Ford’s dirty windshield they observed an endless sheet of snow and ice, intermittently broken by black rock formations that scarred the jagged terrain of the central highlands. Low, dark clouds saturated the sky, pressing down upon the bleak landscape while a frigid gale buffeted the frozen tundra. They were completely alone in the cold, windswept

realm. Sophia grew quiet and withdrawn as they traveled the forty miles inland to reach their destination. Each mile nearer to the digsite brought her uncomfortably closer to the past, which she recalled with increasing clarity. By the time they finally arrived, the redhead felt as if she'd never left.

Indy turned off the car and reached into the back seat for his coiled bullwhip. He opened the door and got out, snapping it onto his belt. Sophia eyed the whip. "You're still carrying *that* old thing around?"

"It's my favorite piece of equipment." he said defensively, tugging on the brim of his fedora.

"Right."

Turning from the car, they surveyed the desolate site, trying to get their bearings after being away for so long. The Jastro dig was situated on the slope of a broad, snow-patched hill that hugged the shore of some unnamed lake, overlooked by the imposing shadow of Mount Hekla rising in the gloomy distance to the southeast. The bleak atmosphere cast a pall of desolation over the countryside, and Sophia wondered how she managed to keep her sanity for the many months they had lived at the remote location. The answer, she realized, was as close as the medallion around her neck. Nur-Ab-Sal imbued her with the fire of ancient knowledge, and told her exactly where to find many secret artifacts hidden among the forgotten corners of the lost outpost. As long as Sophia had her necklace, she wanted for nothing else.

Indy and Sophia hiked up the dirt path to the ruins, past a large cabin tent shivering on its frame in the gusty wind. They saw a cluster of wooden crates

and a selection of artifacts lying on a table nearby, waiting to be catalogued and packed for transport. The main entrance protruded from the raw dirt of the hillside, framed by a pair of thick stone pillars capped with a heavy lintel. The columned architecture had a distinctively Minoan flavor that reminded Indy of similar sites in the Aegean. Heavy, angular wall slabs appeared to grow directly from the dirt where a whole corner of the buried structure had been excavated. The grassy slope grew directly to the edge of the roof, terminating on the stone.

“Let’s take a look.” Indy cautiously led the way inside, not knowing what to expect. Sophia followed closely behind him.

The diminutive figure of Björn Heimdall stood on a crate, dressed in a bulky fur-lined coat, knit cap, heavy leggings and boots. He drove his hammer against a chisel positioned at an angle on the ice-covered wall, methodically chipping around an object encased within. He looked up in surprise when he detected movement at the end of the corridor. Heimdall worked the Jastro site by himself, and rarely welcomed visitors into his private sanctuary. He preferred to work alone and unaided, without any bothersome social contact. Leave that for the archivists who put his work on display at the *Nationalmuseet* in Copenhagen. Still, he was willing to adopt a mantle of civility for his unexpected guests, who might be contributors come to lend financial support to his research.

Heimdall paused from his efforts and waited patiently while the interlopers made their way down the shadowy, ice-covered passage. His congenial expres-

sion vanished when he realized who was paying him a visit. “Doctor Indiana Jones, I believe. And Madame Sophia Hapgood. This is my digsite now. Go away.” He wasn’t interested in discussing his work with the Jastro veterans, particularly ones whose departure had left the site with such a reputation of disgrace.

Indy frowned at the cold reception, dispensing with any pleasantries he had planned. Clearly they’d interrupted the man. “Not feeling very friendly today, are we Doctor?”

“I do not associate with thieves.”

“We’re not here for artifacts—”

“And you won’t *get* any!” Heimdall retorted haughtily. “You thieving Americans nearly ruined my work here.”

“Hey, our work made your work possible!” Sophia fumed, clenching her fists in outrage.

“Calm down.” Indy restrained her with a placating hand to prevent her from attacking the arrogant little Swede. “We just need some information, that’s all.”

Heimdall wiggled his tiny shoulders, reconsidering his misplaced accusation. “Oh. Well that’s different.”

Before he continued, Indy noticed the ice-obscured relic that Heimdall was exposing. He moved over to examine it. “What’s this thing you’re working on?”

“It’s probably a homing beacon for wayward spaceships. Soon I’ll have it out of the ice,” he said confidently.

“I thought you were still digging up Norse graves in Denmark,” Sophia cut in.

Heimdall’s moustache twitched with irritation. The old professor was not accustomed to being in-

errupted. "I was. Obviously now, I'm not."

Indy's curiosity was piqued by the strange metal spiral embedded in the side of the cavern. "What do you expect to find here?"

"The secret of Hyperborea. That's what the Greeks called Iceland, you know. You read how they sailed north to a fog-shrouded land, but how they never set foot upon it. After traveling thousands of miles, mere fog wouldn't turn them back," he insisted. "Some idiots claim they were repelled by ghosts."

"That's *fascinating*, Doctor." Indy lied. He was just humoring the old man to ensure his cooperation.

"As I was saying, I am convinced that these travelers came to earth to form colonies like Atlantis."

"That makes sense," Indy said, playing along. If Atlantis, like any mighty empire, was conquering lands far beyond its borders in an attempt to widen its base of power, it would need outposts and colonies to maintain its rule. But now it was time to discuss the matter-at-hand. "Have you ever heard of Plato's lost dialogue?"

Heimdall considered the question absentmindedly. "Yes, there are rumors about such a book, but I've yet to see it. There are two people you might want to visit. Charles Sternhart, in Tikal, a shady fellow who claims he translated the whole thing. And Filipe Costa, in the Azores Islands. As a researcher he's a farce, but he's a sharp trader," advised the elderly archaeologist.

Sophia wandered over to a wooden table set up against the wall. Like the one outside, it was covered with relics yielded from the ground by months of painstaking work. Indy noticed her scanning the as-

sortment with all the enthusiasm of a bride-to-be selecting her wedding ring. He turned his gaze back to Heimdall. "What can you tell me about orichalcum?" Indy was vaguely familiar with the term, but knew little about it. Since the old prof was in such a talkative mood, Indy had a few questions for him. Namely, he wanted to know more about the fiery bead that brought Sophia's necklace to life.

"Ah, yes. The metal of the gods. The name first appeared among the Greeks. Literally translated, it means 'mountain bronze'. It is said that the inner wall of Atlantis was covered in orichalcum."

"Which burned with its reddish gleam," Sophia added, examining another metal coil with keen interest. The artifact resembled an eel, and had the ubiquitous open mouth shared by the horned idol and her own necklace.

"Almost sounds like Corinthian bronze," which Indy knew to be an alloy of copper and gold. "But what was it used for?"

"It's a potent source of power," explained Sophia.

"No, it was a form of currency," Heimdall argued.

Indy looked between the two scholars, amazed at how people with such a firm conviction in their beliefs could be divided over the purpose of a simple metal bead. "I'm sorry I asked."

Sophia smiled indulgently. "Could you please give us a few minutes, Indy? We're going to talk shop for awhile."

"By all means." Indy doffed his hat and made his way back down the ice-covered hallway. He didn't care to waste an afternoon listening to the Atlantologists discuss every aspect of their imaginary conti-

nent.

Indy had what he came for.

From his view atop the berm, Indy gazed out over the barren wastes. The surrounding landscape was a craggy relief painted in shadows. Patches of verdant greenery appeared almost black against the foreboding sky, lending the country a dismal, dreamy atmosphere. The glacier lay to the west, a flash-frozen river of ice that drained out of the rugged foothills in frosty, rippling folds. In the far distance he could see the faint red glow of ancient volcanoes glittering in the preternatural dusk. At least they could soon leave this miserable place and head for a warmer climate, he thought with satisfaction.

Costa's location was convenient since the Azores were the hub of cross-Atlantic travel. From there, Tikal was just a hop away by plane. They could pay a visit to Filipe on the way down to the Yucatan Peninsula. Sternhart was in Guatemala, which was fine with Indy. He'd been on several digs in the area, and knew the country fairly well. Indy looked up as Sophia joined him on the hillside, carrying a cloth-wrapped parcel. Evidently she'd bargained her way into another piece for her collection. They stared over the tundra in silence, each lost in their own thoughts. Finally, Indy spoke up.

"Why *did* you take them?"

Sophia didn't say anything for so long that he thought she wasn't going to answer him. "I was afraid that you guys wouldn't give me credit for the artifacts I found," she said, fingering the pendant around her neck.

So that was it. “You mean Jastro and Thorskald? They were the ones in charge—not me.” said Indy defensively. “I had nothing to do with it.”

Her nod of acknowledgement was barely perceptible, as if she were still afraid of being punished for what happened all those years ago.

“And you thought it would be better to take your cut of the glory and split, is that it? How many pieces did you have to sell before the guilt was gone?”

“Enough to finance a career change, since I obviously wasn’t going to be promoted, *Doctor Jones*.”

Her sharp emphasis on Indy’s title caused him to flinch. “Who else did you sell to, besides Costa? I have to know if I’m going to help you.”

She crossed her arms like a petulant child being unjustly punished. “I dealt with Alain Trottier and Omar Al-Jabbar. We did everything by mail. I never met them.”

“And Heimdall,” Indy added. Sophia regarded the parcel tucked under her arm, and sighed.

“We should leave now, Indy. I think something bad is going to happen here.”

“What makes you say that?”

“It’s Heimdall. Something is wrong with his aura.” While talking to the lone excavator, Sophia noticed that Heimdall’s aura was clouded by darkness, his future uncertain. She knew he was going to die soon, but didn’t know how.

“There’s a storm coming,” Indy said.

“I can feel it, too.”

“No. I mean there really *is* a storm coming. Look,” he nodded.

She followed his gaze to see a wall of blackness

covering the horizon from one side to the other, blocking out the distant volcanic ridge. The enormous cloud swelled upward like a charcoal tidal wave, churning with malevolence as it rolled across the earth in a nightmarish cascade. Sophia's eyes went glassy with terror while a bitter lump of ice settled in the pit of her stomach. "Oh *no*..."

"*Run!*" Indy yelled.

Torsten peered through his binoculars from their vantage point behind a cluster of large rocks, watching Jones and the redhead several hundred feet away. There were not many places to use for cover in this freezing, godforsaken country, he reflected miserably. Then he smiled, thinking that he would like to get the American woman alone. She was a spirited helion, and he knew several ways how she might keep him warm.

"What are they doing?" Karl asked from nearby.

"Nothing. Jones is just standing there in the snow like an idiot."

"What about the Fräulein? Is she still inside the cave?"

"*Nein*. She is there with him now. They are talking." He set the binoculars down and reached into his breast pocket, fishing out a pack of cigarettes. It was going to be a long day.

Karl gave him a look of disdain as Torsten lit up and savored a deep, long drag. "I wish you wouldn't do that here. They might see the smoke."

"They are not even looking this way."

"But if Kerner were here right now—"

"Well Kerner is *not* here," he snapped irritably, "so

I don't want to hear anymore about it.”

It was pathetic, Torsten thought as Karl turned away quickly, smarting from the reprimand. His young protégé was a disgrace to the Swastika, weak-willed and prone to intimidation—unworthy to serve the Führer and the Fatherland. The only reason Kerner paired them off together was so that Karl could obtain some firsthand reconnaissance experience in the field. But he hadn't learned anything from him on this trip so far, particularly in taking advantage of the many freedoms that one could enjoy while on assignment abroad. Such a shame.

On the other end of their lookout spot, Karl gazed longingly at the photograph in his hand and sighed, wishing that Mercy were here with him now. He studied her smiling monochromatic image, remembering the color of her sparkling blue eyes and wavy golden hair, the sound of her laugh and the warmth of her touch. He missed her badly, and wondered when he would see her again. Right now he despised Kerner for giving him this assignment, which had taken him to this miserable gray country, so far away from his beautiful young wife and their home in Germany. But he chose to serve his country, and accepted that duty like a good soldier. For that honor, Karl had no regrets.

Torsten saw his partner looking wistfully at the picture. “Do you have to *beg* for Mercy, or does she come to you willingly?” he teased with a wicked smirk.

“Shut up!” Karl hastily tucked the photo back into his jacket while his companion laughed and blew a puff of smoke in his direction. Torsten was such a

bastard, he thought ruefully. The senior agent had a reputation for overstepping his authority, like back in New York when he'd pistol-whipped the two theater ushers rather than acquire their disguises in a discreet manner. Karl felt bad about it because he didn't like to see people get hurt if they did not deserve it. But Torsten relished the opportunity to dispense pain or suffering when he could, as evidenced by some of his battle stories from the front lines. Still, it was probably better to work *with* Torsten than against him.

Torsten flicked his cigarette away carelessly, sending a shower of glowing ashes to the ice. He raised his binoculars to check on Jones again. "The Americans are moving," he reported tersely just as a strong wind gusted over them, kicking up dust and snow. The Abwehr looked beyond the digsite and suddenly realized why the Americans were running like mad. A massive storm was sweeping across the landscape like a black plague, heading directly for them. He threw down the fieldglasses and bolted for their car, which was parked behind a low ridge about forty yards away. "Get to the car! *Schnell!*"

"What is that?" Sophia yelled as the storm swept down from the glacier.

Indy huddled by the grill of the Model T and unfolded the starting rod. "Volcanic dust storm! Get the key ready, because this is going to be close!" He pulled out the choke lever and hand-cranked the car. It took him several frantic tries before the cold four-cylinder engine finally sputtered to life. Indy jumped inside and slammed the door shut, throwing the clutch into gear. They peeled off down the road,

spewing dirt and gravel as the dust cloud swelled, filling the sky behind them until Indy's rearview mirror resembled a piece of smoked glass.

"Go faster, Indy!"

"I'm trying!" He drove the ancient Flivver hard. The speedometer needle crested at 45 miles per hour—the car's maximum speed—and shivered, the twenty horsepower engine practically screaming as Indy pushed the Ford to its limit. But it still wasn't fast enough. The black wall kept coming, bearing down on them like a living nightmare. Suddenly they heard a series of sharp reports coming from the back of the car, and Indy feared the worst. The muffler was backfiring.

"Whoa!" Sophia cried as tufts of snow kicked up in a rapid line, sprouting alongside the speeding vehicle, pacing them. Somehow Indy knew it wasn't the muffler.

They looked back to see another vintage roadster in fast pursuit. It was driven by a pair of dark-clothed men. One of them aimed a sleek, compact pistol through the passenger-side window, firing at them.

"Who *are* those guys?"

"Nazis," Indy snarled. And it wasn't difficult to imagine what they were after. Spurred on by the gunfire, he practically ripped the throttle lever off the steering column trying to coax more speed from the overworked automobile.

Another bullet tore Sophia's door mirror away— inches from her hand. Silver fragments of glass splintered everywhere, stinging her arm. "*Ow!*"

"Hang on!" Indy shouted, swerving the Ford from side to side in an effort to avoid the Nazis gunfire. He

wanted to see them try to hit a moving target in the dark. The Ford suddenly slipped, its bald tires struggling for purchase on the slushy mixture of snow and gravel. Sophia screamed as the car slewed sideways, fishtailing wildly. Indy gritted his teeth in determination. He wasn't going to let the Nazis win. He tapped the brake gently and the car straightened out, realigning itself with the road.

Sophia's face was gray. "Are you trying to kill us?!"

"No, but they are!" Then he thought about the Webley holstered on his hip. But Indy couldn't drive and shoot at the same time. He glanced at Sophia. "Can you fire a gun?"

"I've never even *touched* one before!" she confessed.

"There's no better time to learn! Take mine," he said, quickly thumbing open the flap.

She stared at him in disbelief. "Are you serious?"

"Serious enough for the both of us! Now take it!"

She reached for Indy's belt and gripped the handle, gingerly drawing out the massive revolver. "It's heavy!"

"It's supposed to be. Now shoot. Try to aim for their tires," he instructed as another bullet spanged off the rear fender.

The redhead bit her lip uncertainly, and made up her mind. She couldn't very well find Atlantis if she was dead, and she certainly wasn't going to let the Nazis have it either. She pointed the gun out the window and squeezed the thick trigger, flinching as the Webley bucked in her hand, discharging a .455 round with a deafening blast. It was like firing a cannon. She beamed at Indy with a bright grin. "Hey, I did it!"

“Great, now actually try to hit something!” he growled irritably, dodging another shot with the Ford as the onyx leviathan spilled across the ice, relentlessly devouring everything in its path.

Sophia narrowed her eyes at his challenge. “Okay tough guy, check *this* out!” She twisted her body around in her seat and extended her arm along the body of the speeding car, sighting the Webley’s barrel in line with the pursuer’s right front wheel. Sophia felt like she was in a gangster movie as she squeezed off another round. Her hair blazed a crimson flame in the wind. The Nazis headlight imploded as if struck by a brick, and they swerved abruptly to the left shoulder of the road, away from her gun.

“Hey, this is actually kind of fun!” she cheered with enthusiasm. “How did I do?”

“Better,” Indy replied tersely, “Now do the same thing, but aim lower.”

“You’re the boss!” she grinned with exhilaration. Sophia was enjoying herself immensely.

“*Verdammt!*” Karl cursed, trying to keep his gun steady while they bounced along the rutted highway with the roiling black storm nipping at their fenders. “The Fräulein is armed!”

“Forget about her. Just put a bullet through the back of Jones’ seat!” Torsten ordered angrily. He wanted to end this chase once and for all.

But before Karl could take another shot at the Americans, the woman fired at them again. The car suddenly listed over to one side, stumbling as their front tire went flat. Torsten fought the wheel to bring it back under control. Jones swerved abruptly on the

road ahead, but they struck the massive rock before he could match the swift maneuver. The German's car jumped up in the air and plunged into a deep crevasse beside the rural highway.

Dazed by the impact of the crash, Karl saw the fractured windshield fog over, the glass becoming opaque as the air grew pleasantly warm. The car seemed to shiver in the depths of the snowbank as the ground rumbled angrily below them. The layer of snow slid from the hood and gathered on the fenders, melting away in the hot steam that suddenly filled the pit. Then he realized the danger they were in. "Earthquake!" he cried, forcing open his door against the weight of the piled snow.

Torsten's door was wedged firmly against the wall of the crater, so the senior officer clambered across the front seat and scrambled up the side of the fissure on Karl's heels. The pair ran for cover as the ground exploded behind them, erupting in a massive pillar of boiling water that sprayed into the blackened sky. The geyser blasted the car upwards, throwing it sixty feet in the air. Karl and Torsten covered their heads and ran as hard as they could in the opposite direction, praying that it didn't land on them. The car slammed nose-first into the concrete permafrost, crumpling on impact nearly a quarter of a mile away.

"*Scheiße!*" Torsten swore angrily, watching the American car speed off into the distance. Karl screamed. The Abwehr officer wheeled just in time to see the geyser consumed by the plague of wind-borne ash that swept down on them. Before he could think or act, they were enveloped in darkness.

“Well, that takes care of that.” Indy announced proudly. “Nice shooting, Sophie.” Then the Ford began to sputter, its engine stumbling. Not good.

“Indy, what’s wrong with the car?”

“I don’t know.” He looked at the gas gauge, blinked in disbelief. “What the *hell*? It says we’re out of gas.” He filled the car with petrol before they left Reykjavík, but they had only driven about fifty miles, not nearly far enough to deplete the Model T’s 10-gallon tank.

“What?!” Sophia cried, looking behind them to see the black wall advancing with unabated fury.

Indy looked around frantically as the roadster decelerated over the uneven terrain. They were going to have to find a place to hide, and fast. “I think we’re in trouble.”



4

SOPHIA'S VISION

The Model T rattled and sputtered, its engine coughing fitfully as it consumed the very last drop of fuel in the tank. Ahead of them, the desolate stretch of dirt road continued into the bleak horizon, urging them to keep going when Indy knew it was hopeless. He was ready with the clutch, shifting the car into neutral to keep from throwing a flywheel. Indy scanned the plateau, a barren waste of rocks and stunted grasses, looking for somewhere—anywhere—to take cover from the oncoming storm. Sophia watched in awe-struck horror as the black tidal wave rolled over the stranded Nazis, whose car was destroyed in the gushing plume of the geyser, and kept moving forward, its hunger unsatisfied.

“What are we going to do, Indy?” she pleaded as they continued to decelerate. “It’s almost here!”

“Sit tight, and hope it’s not as bad as it looks.”

He tried to steer the antique roadster on a clear path, swerving around large rocks and treacherous potholes, determined to milk every last bit of momentum out of the car. But Indy knew that he was only prolonging the inevitable. It was just a matter of time before the Ford rolled to a stop, leaving them stranded in the path of destruction. His worst fear materialized a few moments later as the steady crunch of rubber on frozen gravel lapsed into grim silence. They were at a dead standstill in the middle of the remote Icelandic wilderness. Alone, with nowhere to run or hide. And the storm was coming up on them fast.

The frigid wind howled like a hungry beast, ready to gobble them into its gaping maw. Indy set the parking brake to anchor the Ford in place. Sophia quickly rolled up her window, scooted over on the seat and put her arms around him, trembling with fear. She closed her eyes to the wall of black chaos and buried her face against Indy's chest, praying to Nur-Ab-Sal for all the help they could get. Indy held onto her tightly and braced himself as the amorphous blackness bore down on them like some impossible freight train.

When the storm finally hit them, it simply nudged the car gently, rocking the Model T on its creaky suspension bars, swaying it from side to side like an oversized cradle. Not quite the world-shattering blast of annihilation they had expected. The windows were quickly obscured by a coat of volcanic sand, plunging Indy and Sophia into complete darkness. As they sat huddled in silence, listening to the wind swirl relentlessly beyond the pitch-black veil, Indy imag-

ined that the storm was infuriated by its failure to kill them.

“How long do you think it will last?” Sophia asked hoarsely. Her mouth was dry from screaming.

“Hard to say,” Indy replied. “These summer storms can come up pretty quick. Depends on how big the cloud is, and the speed of the wind.” He knew that dust storms could spin themselves out within a few minutes, or last for many hours, depending on the conditions. Who knew how long they would be there?

While he tried to sound confident, Indy left his other concern unspoken. If they had survived the raging dust storm, then so could the Nazis, and since both parties were without vehicles they would have to travel on foot once the storm finally passed. Indy estimated that the chase had taken them roughly ten miles from the Jastro dig, which meant they had about thirty miles to walk before they reached Reykjavík. It was close to noon, so they still had the better part of the day to travel before nightfall. They had to make civilization by sundown or they would freeze to death from exposure to the elements.

Sophia fell asleep after awhile, leaving Indy to ponder their fate alone. Peering at the blackened windows reminded him of being inside of a submarine floating through a deep ocean abyss, and he actually felt a sort of weightlessness in the dusky void. The archaeologist leaned back in his chair, suddenly overcome with exhaustion. He closed his eyes and listened to the sand pelting the glass windows of the car. It was a continuous, hypnotic drone, like radio static hissing on an empty bandwave.

Indy grew drowsy, hovering on the border of sleep when he heard a new sound, one that came from inside the car. It took him a moment to source the tiny chain links of Sophia's bronze necklace, which clinked together as she shifted position in her seat. Indy felt the shape of her warm body nestled protectively in his arms, and smiled, thinking there were certainly worse places for a man to be than holding a beautiful woman in the dark. Then he pictured the eerie horned face on her pendant, and he was immediately reminded of the quest which was responsible for their current predicament.

Indy thought about Atlantis.

From his recollections of the ancient myth, Indy knew the story of Atlantis was first told by Plato in two of his dialogues, the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, written about 360 B.C. But the Greek philosopher pointed out that the account was brought to him by Solon, an Athenian statesman, who heard the tale during a visit to Egypt, where knowledge of the disaster was inscribed on pillars of wisdom in the great temple at Sais.

Plato described a highly-advanced civilization situated on a continent of unparalleled natural beauty, set out in the deep ocean 'Beyond the Pillars of Hercules'. The city itself was laid out in three concentric rings of alternating land and sea, divided by a large canal that admitted entrance to the interior. The central island was home to the Temple of Poseidon, a magnificently overwrought edifice of gold and silver which was dedicated to the sea god who founded the great marine empire.

Atlantis met its tragic destiny when its citizens be-

came corrupted by power and greed, their divine nature degenerating into baser human depravity. The city was destroyed by a massive earthquake and swept from the face of the earth by tidal waves in a single day and night, disappearing into the sea forever.

But the intriguing legend was compounded by a mysterious twist. The *Critias* dialogue inexplicably ended in mid-sentence at the moment when Zeus was about to proclaim his punishment for Atlantis to the assembled gods. Thus, his exact words were denied to the historical record. Like Atlantis, they were forever lost. It was unknown if Plato was interrupted in his writing and never bothered to finish it, or whether he intentionally abandoned the fate of Atlantis at its climax for dramatic effect, like Edgar Allan Poe's epic *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.

The quest to find Atlantis fired the imagination of mankind in the centuries since Plato first wrote about it, and its location had been the subject of wide-ranging speculation. There were dozens of possibilities, only a few of which Indy could recall at the moment. Traditionally, the city was said to reside in the Atlantic Ocean which bears the name of Atlas, the first king of Atlantis. But other seekers contended their own theories about its ultimate resting place, in locations ranging from South America to Antarctica, and everywhere in-between. It wasn't a contemporary obsession by any means. People had been fascinated by the story of Atlantis since antiquity.

One particular account that stood out in his mind was that of Ogygia, a great continent described by Plutarch in his *Morals*, located "five days' sail west from Britain." Indy personally thought that Helike,

a Bronze-Age city near the Gulf of Corinth, was a more likely candidate for the legend since it was a disaster contemporary to Plato's own time. Like Atlantis, Helike disappeared into the sea one night during the winter of 373 B.C. Its mysterious destruction was preceded by 'immense columns of flame'. The event was attributed to the wrath of Poseidon, but Indy knew from experience that there was usually more to a story than posterity often recorded.

*Many have been the destructions of mankind, and many shall be...* Indiana Jones suddenly shivered as Plato's words leapt to mind, unbidden. They made him stop and focus. Indy set aside his academic skepticism and tried to picture Atlantis as an historical place, a civilization now lost to time, and he wondered what force could be sufficiently powerful enough to destroy an entire city in one night. Indy drew a blank but pressed on stubbornly, following his train of thought to a logical conclusion.

Suppose Atlantis had possessed some type of as-yet-unknown weapon which allowed it to subdue all the nations it reputedly conquered, and subsequently was destroyed through a misuse of that power? Then another thought occurred to him, something that was literally within his grasp: Sophia's necklace. More specifically, the small bead that she fed into its mouth receptacle. It was orichalcum, the metal specified by name in Plato's account—the reddish material which clad the inner circuit of Atlantis in a fiery gleam that burned in the light of every sunset that fell upon the great kingdom until its end. What if the ghost illusion was more than just an optical trick wrought by a discharge of green electricity? What if it was some-

thing more?

If that meager display was any indication of what orichalcum was capable of producing, it didn't require much imagination to realize what German physicists would do with a large supply of the portable, self-contained high-powered energy source. Kerner was already on the trail of the Lost Continent, and Indy knew the world would pay dearly if orichalcum should fall into Nazi hands. He was already committed to helping Sophia find Atlantis, but now Indy was determined. He had to stop the Nazis at all costs.

Hours lapsed by in bone-rattling isolation as the storm raged on around them. Sophia shivered while she slept, and Indy hugged her tightly, sharing his body heat to keep them both warm. Finally, the wind fell to a soft whisper. Indy lifted his head and listened carefully. Everything was silent. Time to take a look. He reached over and gently rolled the window down. A skin of volcanic ash fell from the glass, tumbling to the doorsill as a cool breeze flowed in from outside. The sky was dismally gray, but at least now he could see the horizon, where the volcanic backbone of Iceland slumbered like some gigantic beast.

Sophia stirred in his arms. "Hey sweetheart, welcome back."

She sat up, squinting in the harsh daylight. "Is it over yet?"

"Yeah, and we need to get moving if we're going to make Reykjavík by sundown."

They zipped up their jackets and climbed out of the car, only to find themselves on another planet. Sophia Hapgood stared in stunned awe, but Indy had known what to expect. The snowy ground was black

in every direction, stained with powdery volcanic ash to the limits of their sight.

“What *happened?*”

“Dust storm, like I said. They come sweeping down from the mountains and leave everything like this. Just be glad we weren’t outside, or we might have suffocated.”

They stretched their stiff bodies in the refreshing air while Indy walked around the car to survey the damage. Like the surrounding landscape, the Model T wore a thick coat of black dust. He found two bullet holes in the trunk, and a silver gash on the rear fender where a Nazi bullet had shaved away the paint. The passenger side mirror was also gone, but the automobile was otherwise in good shape. Too bad it was out of gas. Then a thought suddenly occurred to him.

Indy opened the passenger door and lifted the front seat. He rapped his knuckles on the gas tank, producing a hollow tone. Indy unscrewed the gas cap and peered inside. A sliver of light illuminated the bone-dry reservoir. He dropped to the ground and slid under the car for a better look.

“What are you doing down there?” asked Sophia, taking her suitcase from the trunk.

“Making sure I’m not crazy.” Indy swept his hand over the rear wall of the gas tank and found a dime-sized hole in the metal. He stood up and brushed soot from his jacket, satisfied to have found the source of their misfortune. “I *knew* we didn’t run out of gas. They shot a hole in our tank.”

“Great. What do you think the rental agency is going to say when they see this?”

Indy picked up his own suitcase and closed the trunk, pocketing the key. "I don't know, but we'll be long gone by the time they do."

Sophia's shoulders fell wearily as she looked at the stretch of endless road vanishing into the gloomy distance. "I don't want to do this..."

"The sooner we start walking, the sooner we get there," Indy stated with certainty.

"How philosophical," she mused, "Is that from one of your lectures?"

"No, that's just practical insight."

"Next time try using some practical *foresight*, and remember to bring along extra gasoline."

Indy tugged on the brim of his fedora, and grinned wryly at the redhead's wit. "How philosophical. Did Plato teach you that, or was it Nur-Ab-Sal?"

Sophia returned the smile with a hint of admiration for his smooth come-back. "Let's go, Indy."

Indiana Jones and Sophia Hapgood put the shadowy cone of Hekla to their backs and began walking south along the deserted road, with the Nazis behind them and Atlantis waiting somewhere ahead.

\* \* \*

"Which side of the bed do you want?" Indy asked, dropping his suitcase onto the mattress of their single-bed hotel room.

"Ho-hoo no," scoffed Sophia. "You're sleeping on the couch, Mister."

"Well that's generous. I thought I'd be lucky to get the floor, if you had your way."

She smiled. "I don't hate you that much, Indy."

Only a little.”

It was nearly six o'clock by the time they stumbled into Reykjavík with their luggage, tired, grungy, and sore from their 35-mile trek across the frozen Icelandic tundra. Indy wanted to stop at the first hotel they came to, but Sophia deemed it un-classy, and insisted on finding a better place to stay. Four blocks later they came to the *Hotel Reykjavík*, a towering ultramodern steel-and-glass high-rise building. The 5-star establishment suited her much better, and Sophia rented a room while Indy called the airport to confirm their flight the next morning. He tried to hire a charter plane without luck, due to a heavy snowstorm heading in from the coast. In the end, there was just one deluxe suite available, and it had a single queen-size bed, which they were now arguing over.

“Come on, Sophie. It's been a long day, and I'm exhausted. I promise I just want to sleep.” Then Indy noticed her dubious expression, and realized that a little more persuasion needed to be forthcoming. “Besides, you can always trust a doctor.”

“Yeah, unless his name happens to be Jones. I remember what you tried to pull the last time we were here. It didn't work then, and it's sure as hell not going to work now.” Then she paused in reflection, and smirked knowingly at him. “I think you tried to use that ‘doctor’ bit on me the first time, too.”

Indiana Jones grinned. “Can you blame me?”

Sophia relented. The smile was all it took. No matter how she tried, she couldn't resist that crooked smile of his. “Fine, you can sleep in the bed with me. But no funny business. We're just traveling together, okay?”

“Trust me,” he said suavely.

“I’m still working on that.”

As they unpacked their bags and settled in, Indy had to admit that Sophia had good taste. The deluxe hotel room was an exercise in chic minimalism, with its gleaming Formica walls, luxuriously soft gunmetal carpeting, recessed lighting and floor-to-ceiling windows draped in jet black silk. Their queen-sized bed featured a quilted pillow mattress with satin sheets and a lavish matching bedspread, and silk pillowcases adorned with a dark chocolate mint. A tall silver torchiere with an onyx shade stood on either side of the massive headboard—one lamp for each occupant. The bathroom was equally elegant, with a double vanity sink, wall-length beveled sheet mirror, walk-in shower, gleaming silver fixtures, and checkered marble floor tiles.

“I like traveling with you,” complimented Indy.

“Well, what can I say? I travel in style.”

“That’s easy when you have the dough. I have to rough it on a professor’s salary. Not that I’m complaining, mind you.”

“Well, enjoy the amenities, Indy, because it will probably be a long time before you get to stay in a place this nice again.”

“Thanks a lot, Princess.” Indy carried his toiletries kit and robe into the bathroom, stuck his head out the door. “Dibs on the shower.”

“Indiana Jones!” Sophia pounded her fist on the door a moment after he locked it. Then Indy pounded back, mocking her, and she could hear him laughing as he turned the shower on.

Indy took his time, finally emerging twenty min-

utes later in his bathrobe, toweling his mussed brown hair while a cloud of hot steam rose behind him. “Shower’s all yours, Sophie. Don’t take too long,” he teased with a smile.

“I hate you.” She gave Indy a vindictive punch on the shoulder and shoved past him into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

Not to be outdone, Sophia was in the shower nearly twice as long, but Indy didn’t care. He was relaxing comfortably in bed when she finally came out, dressed in a pair of shiny emerald green silk pajamas, with a towel draped over her shoulder. Her damp crimson hair glowed like copper wire under the vivid electric lighting of their hotel suite. Indy noted that she was holding her necklace by the chain, with the pendant dangling at her side. So she *did* take it off when she showered. “Let me take a look at that thing for a minute.”

Sophia bit out one harsh word: “Ha!”

“Just let me see it, will you? I had an idea about it when we were stuck in the car.”

She padded across the thick carpeting and flopped onto the bed beside him, resting her back against the cushioned headboard. Sophia cupped the bronze chevron in her palm so that Indy could study it. “What are you thinking?”

“The orichalcum, it’s some kind of energy source, isn’t it?”

“I never really thought about it that way, but I assume so.”

“Does that ghost thing happen every time you use it?”

“Yes, but Nur-Ab-Sal does not require a physical

manifestation to commune with me. The medallion is just a vehicle for his spirit.”

“How long have you been... visited?” Indy desperately tried not to ridicule Sophia’s spirit guide or offend her in the process.

“Since I first found it at the Jastro dig.”

“Where did you get the orichalcum from?”

“I found samples of it in almost every Atlantean relic that I’ve come across. Most of them have hidden storage receptacles with a small supply of beads inside.”

Indy nodded as if he suspected as much. “Just like batteries.”

“Yeah. I had a jar full of them before my apartment got cleaned out. Why so interested?”

“Because I think the Nazis want to use it against us.” Indy went on to explain his theory about the destruction of Atlantis as Plato described in the *Critias*. He reasoned that if orichalcum was as potent as he suspected, it could give the Nazis a serious advantage in munitions capabilities. “With a big enough supply, Germany could make the most terrible weapons of all time. That’s why Kerner is so interested. He doesn’t care about Atlantis, he just wants its energy source.”

When Sophia considered everything she’d just heard, it made her furious. “Atlantis was founded on the ideals of universal peace and harmony, knowledge and respect for all mankind—not something to be exploited for war.”

“They’re Nazis, Sophie. They don’t care about that. Germany wants weapons, and orichalcum is a means to that end. We’re the only ones standing in

their way.”

“So we’re going to take on the whole Reich all by ourselves, is that it?”

“Why not?” he shrugged, “We have all summer. Unless you have other plans.”

Indy was crazy, but she admired him for sticking to his guns when she needed him. Heck, she was even willing to forgive a few past misdeeds for the sake of his support. “Actually, I *do* have something else in mind.” Sophia slipped her pendant over her head and snuggled closer to him with a coy smile. The mischievous gleam in her green eyes made Indy suddenly forget how tired he was, and just how badly he wanted to go to sleep.

He touched her face tenderly, caressing her cheek, then threaded his fingers through her damp red hair and pulled her close to kiss her deeply. The taste of her lips was worth every cold, miserable mile that he’d walked to finally enjoy her in their extravagant surroundings.

“I thought you hated me,” he breathed.

“I’m starting to get over it,” she smiled back, then pushed him down onto the mattress and slid on top of him.

They rolled over, kissing and groping in a fever of sudden passion. Indy sucked on her earlobe, biting softly with his teeth, teasing with his tongue. He still remembered her weak spot after all these years, and Sophia knew it. But she didn’t care anymore. She just wanted to lose herself in the delicious cocoon of pleasure. Indy slipped his hands into her pajamas and stroked the smooth, hot flesh of her back, then splayed his fingers open to grip the flare of her hips.

She moved against him, feeding the sexual magnetism burning inside. As the wave of heat consumed them, the last thing on their mind was the Nazi regime and the lost continent of Atlantis.

They were startled by a knock at the door. “*Herbergapjónusta!* Room service!” the maid called in her thick Icelandic accent. “*Kampavín? Kaviar?*”

“No, we don’t need any champagne or caviar!” Indy growled. Talk about lousy timing.

“*Heitur handklæði?*”

Sophia gritted her teeth in irritation. “Not *now!*”

“*Ho-kay!*” said the maid cheerfully. “*Góða nótt!*”

“Next time, don’t pay extra for room service.”

Indy muttered, eagerly resuming his explorations.

“Tell me about it.” Sophia gasped as he began to slide her pajama pants down. Then she bucked violently, throwing him off. Her head snapped back, hitting Indy on the mouth.

“What’s wrong with you?” he said, rubbing his sore lip.

“I—*unhh!*” She dug her fingernails into the mattress as her body stiffened in a violent spasm. Her medallion glowed with a soft green aura, its eyes burning vividly red. The lamps flickered, alternately dimming and brightening on either side of the bed. Something was happening.

Indy grasped her by the shoulders with concern. “Sophie, what’s going on? Are you okay?”

“*Mmh*, let go of me, Indy. I think I’m having a vision,” she said, grimacing painfully.

He slid off the bed and stood back to give her room, unsure of what to expect. The redhead thrashed wildly, ripping the top sheet halfway off

the bed. Then she sat up and pulled her legs beneath her in one smooth motion, assuming an Indian-style position. Indy kept his distance, but watched closely. Sophia placed her hands palms-down on the mattress, and raised her face to the ceiling. The bed lamps winked out, plunging the room into darkness. Tendrils of electric energy sparkled through the links of the chain as the pendant projected its eerie fluorescent light across the woman's upturned face. Her mouth was parted slightly, her eyes closed. She looked more like a sorceress now than a seeker of Atlantis.

When she spoke, her voice was cool and clear. "The first key..." she whispered.

Indy reached out and touched her hand gently. "What is it, honey?"

Her mouth moved silently until she found her voice again. "I see a pyramid..."

Indy still wasn't sure if he believed in Nur-Ab-Sal, but he did have faith in Sophia. "Describe it for me," he urged.

She touched the medallion on her chest, holding it between her thumb and forefinger, concentrating hard. "It has five tiers... stairs on all sides... partially covered by jungle, and yet to be reclaimed."

"Then it's not the Temple of the Jaguar," said Indy, dismissing the most famous pyramid in Tikal.

"In the temple lies the keeper of the first key... and that is all."

Her eyes flicked open and the medallion went out. The bedside lamps abruptly sputtered back to life. Sophia Hapgood looked around in a daze, blinking rapidly. "What happened?"

“I think you were possessed by that necklace. You said something about a pyramid in the jungle, and ‘the first key.’”

Her brow knitted in perplexity as she tried to remember what she’d seen, but Sophia drew a blank. “I said that?”

“Yeah. Does it make any sense?”

She smoothed out her nightshirt and tugged the elastic waistline of her pajamas back up with a sigh. “No, but I need to sleep on it. Maybe I’ll have the answer in the morning.”

Indy looked crestfallen. “So you still don’t want to...”

Sophia pulled back the covers and switched off her lamp. “Good night, Indy.”

Indiana Jones crawled into bed beside her, turning off his lamp reluctantly. “Thanks a lot, Nur-Ab-Sal,” he muttered sullenly.

Sophia giggled in the dark beside him. “Sorry, Indy. Better luck next time.”



5

THE BLUE ISLAND

If clay tiles were gold, then Indiana Jones was looking at a fortune. From his lofty perspective behind the wheel of the 1935 Ford sedan cruising along the mountain road, he saw a florid blaze of mission-style Spanish roofing overspreading the verdant green slopes of Horta. The paradisaical tapestry of orange-topped stucco buildings nestled around the glittering bay could have been a picture postcard advertising the beautiful Azores Islands. Too bad they weren't here to enjoy the scenery. Indy focused on the road snaking up the spine of Cabeço Gordo, ignoring the gorgeous vista and the riotous flush of hydrangea flowers gliding past the car. He was trying to stay focused on their mission, but his partner wasn't helping very much.

Sophia Hapgood, wearing a pair of expensive sunglasses and a blue silk headscarf, flew her hand out

the window like a glider on the warm breeze. “Ah, this is nice. But Iceland was more fun.”

“No,” Indy corrected her, “Iceland was *almost* fun.”

Sophia giggled, and apologized for the tenth time. “I can’t control Nur-Ab-Sal. He’s a blessing and a curse.”

“Definitely a curse. You owe me.”

“I’ll take a raincheck,” she laughed again. Sophia couldn’t keep the giddiness out of her voice. She was on the quest for Atlantis, and having the time of her life. Nothing could dampen her spirits.

“Are you having fun volcano-hopping?”

“What on earth are you talking about?”

“The Azores are located on a tectonic ridge that runs all the way back to Iceland, so we’re basically sitting on a volcanic seamount.”

“It’s summertime, Professor Jones. School’s out. Try to relax and have some fun for a change.”

Having spent much of the day crammed into airplane seats, Sophia was thoroughly enjoying her newfound freedom. They had flown out of Reykjavík that morning to Foynes, Ireland, followed by a connecting flight to Lisbon, and finally westward on Pan-Am’s return clipper to the Azores. When they landed on Faial, Sophia contacted Filipe Costa by telephone and was politely surprised that the esteemed professor was anxious to meet the celebrated mystic of Atlantean lore. Costa promptly invited them to lunch at his hacienda above Horta, where they were currently en route. Meanwhile, Indy still had a few more questions for Sophia, if he could get her to pay attention.

“My *god*, this is beautiful!” she gushed as they

rounded another curve. The trees parted to reveal a breathtaking panorama of lush volcanic hills bordering a turquoise sea. Its crystal surface mirrored the dreamy clouds dappling the sheet of endless blue sky.

“Tell me something,” Indy said, navigating the uphill slope. “How did you get so hopped-up on Atlantis?”

The redhead smiled at him, pleased that Indy was finally coming around. “The search for Atlantis is the search for our human origins, the meaning of our existence. The proof has been all over the world for centuries, right there in plain sight for those who aren’t blinded by the so-called ‘historical’ record to see it. We can’t even begin to reproduce their wonders with modern technology. But who were the Atlanteans, and why did they leave so many monuments behind? That’s the real mystery.”

“What’s your theory?” Indy asked, genuinely curious.

“I think they were trying to leave us a message, or maybe even a warning. It makes sense that they would preserve it in huge stone structures, built on such a colossal scale to withstand the ravages of time. I’m trying to figure out what the message is, and why it was so important for all the trouble they took to pass it down to us. Is it a warning to not repeat the mistakes of our Atlantean forefathers and suffer their tragic fate, or knowledge that will benefit mankind so that we can fulfill the potential of our species?” She paused to look at Indy, who remained focused on the road ahead. “You think I’m crazy, don’t you?”

Indy had to smile at her enthusiasm. She sounded like one of his overzealous grad students, ready to go

blazing through the jungle with a machete to uncover a lost city like the next Hiram Bingham. “Crazy? No. Misguided? Yes. So you really think that all the cultures of the world are related?” It all sounded a little too pat.

“I didn’t say they were *all* related, but many of them, possibly yes. Are you familiar with the Pyramid Belt?”

Indy thought about it for a moment, then shrugged. “Tell me about it.”

“Okay, if you look at a globe you will find that all of the major pyramid-building civilizations, Egyptian, Mayan, Peruvian and whatnot, stagger the equator along the 31-degree longitudinal parallel.”

“So now we go from chasing volcanoes to chasing pyramids?”

“It beats chasing shadows, which is probably what the Nazis are doing right now,” Sophia quipped. “Anyway, the pyramid-builders established their civilizations along the equator because it ran through Atlantis before it sank. The survivors were trying to rebuild their homeland in the places they fled to, which surround the original colony. Does that make sense?”

Indy shook his head in disbelief. “If I’d heard that story from anyone but you...”

“I know it sounds crazy, but I put a lot of research into this. And Nur-Ab-Sal backs me up.”

“Then why don’t you just ask *him* where to find Atlantis, since he knows so much about it? It would save us a lot of trouble.”

“Don’t you think I’ve already tried that? Nur-Ab-Sal says everything will be revealed in due time. I think he likes me to follow clues so that I can prove

my worthiness.”

“Okay, let’s drop the spirits for a minute. What do you know about this guy we’re going to see?”

“Costa is a retired professor from the University of Coimbra. He taught history and civilization for over twenty years until he caught the Atlantis bug. From what I’ve heard, he’s more of an armchair adventurer than a practical archaeologist, so now he mostly collects Atlantean relics and studies its history. I think he’s also working on a book.”

“Great. Why do I get the feeling this is going to be a long lunch?”

“Oh, it’s not that bad, Indy. If you like my theories, I’m sure you’ll be fascinated by his.”

“I can hardly wait.”

The road curved around a palm-covered ridge two miles later, finally merging into the driveway of an impressive two-story hacienda. It was immediately evident that Filipe Costa was doing very well for himself in his post-tenure days. His immaculately landscaped estate featured rows of sturdy palm trees which shaded his beige stucco residence, built directly on the side of the mountain overlooking the broad Atlantic horizon. The main entrance, a pair of large wooden doors, was flanked by Romanesque marble columns that supported an ornate decorative arch. Orange and red hydrangeas punctuated every windowsill and ledge with a burst of color, swaying gently in the breeze from their clay flower boxes. The overall effect was distinctly Mediterranean, and Indy could easily picture the villa perched on a hill above Athens or Barcelona.

“Are you sure this is Costa’s house?” he asked as

they stepped onto the front porch.

“Pretty sure, but I’ve never actually met him.”

He eyed the parcel that Sophia had acquired from Heimdall. “What’s in the package?”

“Leverage. I’ve been in the trading market for a long time, and I know how to deal with these guys. Now let’s get down to business.” Sophia tucked the wrapped parcel into her handbag and lifted her sunglasses into her hair. She cleared her throat, knocked twice on the front door, and waited. “Mr. Costa?” It opened a moment later, and Costa hobbled out to greet them.

Indy expected the landlord of such a resplendent manor to be attired in an expensive white suit and a tropical hat, but the hunched figure of the seventy-year-old professor resembled a fisherman more than a distinguished scholar. His faded shirt, flannel vest, baggy trousers, and worn leather slippers belonged to a man who preferred to spend his afternoons lounging in a comfortable recliner with a book in his lap rather than chasing down proof of his lost kingdom.

Costa leaned heavily on a gnarled cane, quaking as if he might fall over without its support. He regarded them suspiciously until his flinty eyes lit with recognition at the sight of the redhead. “Madame Sophia, the renowned psychic?”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance, Professor Costa.” she said pleasantly, and shook hands with the old man.

“*Boa vinda!* Welcome!” Costa regarded Indy, dressed in his customary travel clothes—minus the leather jacket—and scratched his snowy beard. “And who might you be, sir?”

Indy extended his hand. "I'm Dr. Indiana Jones."

Costa shook quickly, and seemed to be annoyed by Indy's presence. He clearly wasn't expecting anyone else but Sophia. "What exactly are you a doctor of, Mister Jones?"

"I teach archaeology at Barnett College, in New York."

"Another historian. Very good, very good. The world needs more teachers."

"We need your help, professor." Sophia was unable to keep the urgency out of her voice.

"At your service, Madame. *Entre*. Please come inside, we have much to talk about."

The hacienda was ordinary-looking enough on the outside, but inside it was a whole other world. Filipe Costa lived in a museum devoted to the pursuit of his passion. The main hallway was home to a row of rich wooden cabinetry displaying a collection of arcane relics he'd accumulated in the years after his retirement. Paintings of underwater cities populated by mermaids and seahorses formed a gallery on the pale stucco walls. The floor was a mosaic of verdigris and bronze clay tiles. The old timer shuffled along with giddy energy, like a kid trying to impress new friends with his toy collection. Indy followed Sophia as Costa escorted them to his private study, a spacious room in the back of the house with a vaulted ceiling, where bookcases lined every wall.

The library, unsurprisingly, was crammed with hundreds of publications devoted to lost continent lore, all vying for shelf space with more ancient relics. While Costa eagerly consulted Sophia's expert opinion on several prominent acquisitions, Indy took

a closer look at some of the purportedly ‘Atlantean’ finds. He quickly realized that the professor’s historical expertise did not extend beyond the borders of his own country. Among the curios were a golden Aztec mask, Mayan funerary tributes, and a hand-carved wooden Inuit statue.

Indy browsed the room looking for another horned idol like the one Kerner had stolen. He noted that many of the items exhibited a common design element in the form of a sinuous running spiral which seemed to represent sea waves. “What can you tell us about Atlantis?”

Costa looked up from a copper fish statue that he was showing Sophia. “I can tell you this: You’re standing on it. It never sank, at least not all the way.”

“You’re kidding.”

“I am not.”

“In that case, what led you to place Atlantis in the Azores?” He just *had* to hear this.

“I didn’t place anything, it’s just the facts. Plato’s dialogue spelled it out in plain Greek. Go look for yourself if you don’t believe me.”

Sophia laughed at the old timer’s wit. Indy smiled at the notion of walking off the beach in a weighted diving suit and following the shelf down to a world of spectacularly preserved ruins just waiting to be discovered on the abyssal plain below. If only it were that easy.

“So, do you talk to Atlantean spirits like Sophia does?” The redhead shot him a dirty look for attempting to embarrass her in Costa’s presence.

“All the time,” he replied without missing a beat. “They have me collecting their material things so

they can come back to earth. I speak mainly with Antinéa, a princess from the Second Age of Atlantis.”

“How do you communicate with these spirits?” He thought about Sophia’s necklace, but said nothing because he was positive that Costa would try to buy it off her if he knew about it.

“They talk to me through this ring I find on a dig in the Pyrenees.” He splayed his wrinkled fingers to show them a hefty band made of reddish metal, inlaid with a dark green jewel. Indy noticed the evil horned face with the triangle eyes glaring from the side. It was a miniature version of Sophia’s pendant.

They were interrupted by the appearance of a matronly young woman with a round face, dark hair, and deep brown eyes. “Papa, lunch is served on the veranda.”

Costa smiled benevolently. “Allow me to introduce my lovely daughter, Conchita, the pearl of my life. *Obrigado, meu doce*. We will be along in a moment, dear.”

“*Sim, pai.*” Conchita curtsied with her red dress and bustled from the room.

Costa led his guests from the private study to a spacious upstairs balcony overlooking Faial’s tranquil aqua bay, where a set of wicker chairs were clustered around a wrought iron table, shaded by a massive umbrella. The patio railing was lined with flower boxes showcasing a riotous assortment of red hydrangeas and indigo lilacs, all kissed by the gentle breeze flowing in from the sea.

The old man swept his arm over the stunning Atlantic seascape. “Welcome to *Ilha Azul*, the jewel of the Azores Islands.”

Sophia leaned on the railing and closed her eyes as the cool river of wind washed over the balcony and stroked her face with its delicate currents. "I could stay here forever."

Indy gazed down at the lower patio, and wished they were dining below. The backyard featured a large swimming pool with an adjoining hot tub, framed by a sprawling path of orange adobe tiles. He leaned close to Sophia, whispering. "Did you bring your bathing suit? We could go for a swim after dinner."

"You wish!" She tried not to blush at his brazen suggestion.

Conchita bustled around the table, placing hot dishes on the woven reed mat. A veritable seafood buffet was laid out in steaming clay pots. Plates of squid, a giant boiled slipper lobster glazed in warm butter, *bacalhau*—codfish soaked in olive oil; Shellfish stew made with vegetables, fava beans served with *chouricos*, a generous bowl of *caldo verde*, a potato soup mixed with pork sausage and sprinkled with chopped greens, and a loaf of soft floured bread called *broa*.

Professor Costa settled into a chair and filled everyone's glass from a bottle of expensive red wine. "Let us indulge our appetites for good food and the subject of our passion."

"Yes, lets!" Sophia clapped her hands with delight, and began to fix her plate. Indy, feeling distinctly out of place, hastily followed her example while Conchita prepared her father's dish. Then she distributed bowls among the guests and ladled them full of a gray oatmeal-textured substance with thick chunks of meat.

“*Aprecie con meus elogios,*” Conchita smiled pleasantly. “Enjoy.”

Indy picked up a spoon and sampled the strange soup. He winced at the bitter salty taste, but tried another spoonful for the benefit of their gracious hosts.

Costa’s daughter beamed with culinary pride. “You like, Señor?”

“Yes, it’s very good,” he lied. “What is it?”

“*Sopa da lampreia.* My specialty. Papa, how do you say in English?”

“Ah, lamprey rice soup.”

Indy explosively spat the mouthful of gruel back into the bowl. Sophia giggled fitfully as he wiped his tongue thoroughly clean on a cloth napkin. Conchita’s plump face turned red, and she huffed back into the house, outraged by the rude American’s behavior.

“I am sorry, Dr. Jones,” Costa apologized, “but my daughter is not versed in your American cuisine. Lamprey is a great delicacy in this part of the world, and she takes pride in making the dish.”

“No, that’s okay. I appreciate the effort. I’ll just find something... not so snakey.”

Sophia stifled a meaningful cough as Indy scanned the other plates for a normal fish to eat. “What’s in this ‘Lost Dialogue’ you mentioned?” she asked, finessing her way out of the awkward moment.

“You, of all people, should know, Madame.”

“Actually, that’s what we’re trying to find out. I was told that you knew something about it.”

“Why, it’s the last word on Atlantis, young lady!”

Encouraged, she pressed on. “Do you have it?”

“Nope.”

“Have you read it?”

Filipe Costa nibbled on a piece of bread thoughtfully. “Not exactly.”

“Do you know where we could find it?” she asked, growing desperate now.

“Well now, that depends. I might trade the information for a rare Atlantean artifact, such as a certain necklace I’ve heard so much about.”

“I’ll *never* trade away my necklace,” Sophia declared, clutching her pendant protectively.

The old man was undeterred. “Well, if that’s how you feel—surprise me.”

It was just the moment she’d been waiting for. Sophia reached into her handbag and produced the cloth-bundled artifact she cajoled from Heimdall in Iceland. She carefully unwrapped the linen strips and held the bronze coil out for his approval. “This is an extremely rare piece that I recently acquired from the Jastro dig.”

Costa fumbled to retrieve his eyeglasses from his vest pocket, and held the artifact close to his face in order to appreciate its detail. He traced the eel’s head with a thumb, prodding the sharp metal teeth, the diamond-shaped eyes. “*Magnifico!*” he breathed with excitement.

“Can you tell me what it is?” asked Sophia.

“Yes, I believe this is an Atlantean heater. It most likely adorned a bed chamber of the royal palace during winter.” He held the statue aloft and viewed it from different angles. “Very interesting. You’ve got a deal.”

Indy leaned forward, ready for the crucial bit of information that Heimdall had sent them for.

“Now listen carefully, I don’t know exactly where

to find it. But the Lost Dialogue of Plato is in the Ashkenazy collection. Got that?"

"I'll be *damned*." Indiana Jones pounded his fist on the table hard enough to rattle the crockery, startling Sophia and Professor Costa.

"What is it, Indy?"

"Barnett College owns the Ashkenazy collection!" He stood and paced the balcony, working furiously to anticipate Kerner's next move, *if* the SS colonel even knew about the book. "We have to get back to New York right now."

Sophia was on her feet instantly. "No, Indy! Remember my vision of the pyramid? We have to go to Tikal."

"I can't believe it. We've been looking all over Christ's Creation and it was at home the whole time."

"You don't ignore visions of ancient wisdom," Sophia warned, "Otherwise you're just asking for trouble. The book is safe, but the key to Atlantis is out there in the jungle somewhere. What if the Nazis find it first?"

At this point, Indy knew that Sophia was calling the shots, especially since they were burning through her personal fortune to fund the whole expedition. "Fine, we'll go to Tikal," he relented.

She turned to Filipe Costa. The old man was muttering to himself, still preoccupied with his new prize. "I'm afraid we must take our leave now, Professor. We have more outposts to find, and the Nazis may already be ahead of us."

"Then go, by all means," he said, rising to shake her hand. "Stop those madmen from capturing the glory of the Lost Kingdom. You have my blessings."

“Thank you for the delightful lunch.”

“It has been my pleasure, Madame. Don’t be a stranger now!”

“By the way,” Indy said, “Sophia mentioned you were writing a book.”

“My third, actually. It will be the culmination of my life’s research, a final attempt to prove the existence of the Lost Continent once and for all. I am calling it: ‘Imagining Atlantis.’”

“Sounds intriguing. I’ll have to take a look when you’re finished.”

The old scholar gave Indy a nod, assenting that the brash archaeologist was okay. “I will send you both a copy, since you are dedicated students of Atlantis.”

“Thank you very much, professor. I look forward to reading it.”

\* \* \*

“That’s our ship!” Sophia announced, pointing to the flying boat bobbing in the cobalt water at the edge of Horta Bay. The mooring crew moved around the seadock with machine-like efficiency, preparing the giant silver-skinned amphibian for its flight. A trio of stewardesses in green dresses chatted in the shade of the Boeing 314’s broad wing as uniformed porters wheeled carts up to the plane, loading baggage and mail into the cargo holds. Passengers milled the length of the boardwalk, basking in the warm tropical weather, taking pictures of the *American Clipper*, and buzzing optimistically about the upcoming flight. Indy could understand the excitement.

The new Atlantic fleet was the toast of the aviation industry, representing the most luxurious form

of passenger air travel in the world. After conquering the Pacific with its fleet of Martin M-130's, Pan-American was now prepared to take on the rest of the globe, offering regularly scheduled flights from the Eastern United States to Europe and South America via Newfoundland, Bermuda, Lisbon, and the Azores. The new transatlantic service promised to shave off weeks and even months from traditional ocean liner cruises. It was the dawn of a new era in travel, and they were there to witness it.

Indy's own excitement was tempered by the implications of what lay ahead. He leaned on the railing and stared over the choppy waves, whose tips gleamed like mercury flames in the late afternoon sunlight, pondering at the things hidden in the black fathoms below the impenetrable shroud of water. Professor Costa's words haunted him, and Indy suddenly wished he still had the Staff of Moses so that he could part the sea and reveal the treasures buried in the ages of seaweed and muck. Then he might finally know the truth, whether Atlantis was reality or myth, because not knowing was the most frustrating part of it all.

His intense silence did not go unnoticed. "What's on your mind?" Sophia wondered.

"It's really out there, isn't it? I never really believed in it. I don't *want* to believe it."

"Why not?"

"Because if we prove Atlantis existed, it would change everything we know about human civilization."

"Change is not a bad thing, Indy. Just think, you could be the man who rewrote history."

“Yeah, I suppose.” he said without enthusiasm. It sounded like more of a burden than an honor. Aside from shattering the foundations of archaeology, the discovery would also alienate hundreds of his colleagues all over the world, not to mention upset his father, with whom Indy was enjoying a newfound relationship after their Holy Grail quest. Was he willing to jeopardize a lifetime of achievement just to help Sophia find the waterlogged ruins of some prehistoric society that may not even exist?

“The world would be a better place if more people were open to life’s possibilities, rather than being narrow-minded and biased. Once we accept the reality of the Lost Kingdom, mankind will achieve true enlightenment.” She suddenly embraced Indy, and hugged him tightly while her red hair danced like electrical sparks in the salty breeze. “Thank you for doing this for me.”

Her sincerity moved him to an unexpected degree, and Indy felt like less of a partner and more of a hero to the woman. When Sophia pulled back to look at him, her green eyes were filled with expectation like a child on Christmas morning. “What do you think we’ll find when we get to Atlantis, Indy? An underwater paradise? The answers to all of the world’s greatest mysteries?”

Indy hadn’t given any real thought to the possibility of finding the place. “Illumination,” he finally said with a wry grin. It was the perfect answer, guaranteed to please her.

“Yes!” She gave him an impulsive kiss on the lips, practically the first time she’d touched him since Iceland. The fleeting moment of pleasure was over be-

fore Indy realized it, and Sophia moved away to pick up her luggage before he could pull her close again. "Come on, they're boarding now. Let's go!"

Indy shouldered his backpack and followed her down the ramp to join the line of passengers by the plane.

"There they are!" Karl hissed as Hapgood's red hair and Jones' brown fedora came through the doorway of the lounge. The Abwehr quickly raised their newspapers to cover their faces while the Americans filed onto the plane amid the boarding passengers. Sitting on the outer seat, Karl held his breath as they moved down the aisle close enough to touch. Being in such close proximity to their targets was risky, but their mission demanded it. So far their strategy had worked perfectly. They would keep out of sight until the plane landed, let Jones and the woman depart first, and then follow them. Torsten still had no idea why they were going to Central America, but they could not afford to fail again after the fiasco in Iceland.

By the time the storm had passed, the Americans were gone and they had no way of catching up to them, or learning their destination. Torsten was worried about Kerner's reprimand, knowing that the Oberst would make good on his promise if they did not retrieve the necklace. They backtracked to the digsite and found the old man busy digging away in the ice cave, oblivious to the storm outside. Fortunately, he was more than willing to divulge Jones' destination when threatened, but they killed him anyway, much to Karl's distress.

They drove the professor's antique automobile back to Reykjavík and bought tickets at the airport for the Azores connection flight, followed by a systematic search of the major lodging accommodations to find out where Jones was staying. They endured a fitful night of sleep in a room down the hall from the Americans, waking up early the next morning to prevent another escape by their quarry. Torsten was still upset with the way Karl had handled the pursuit, and even moreso by the junior officer's squeamish remorse about killing the old man. But at least they were back on schedule.

When they arrived on Faial, the Abwehr gave Jones a good lead and trailed them to the mansion above the city. They surveyed the house from their hiding place in the bushes until Jones appeared on the balcony with Costa. Torsten watched them through binoculars. He spoke excellent English, but unfortunately was not adept at reading lips, so he could only guess as to what they were discussing. His attention piqued when Hapgood gave the eel artifact to the professor, an exchange made even more interesting when she received nothing in return. It was apparent that she traded the artifact for some kind of information.

Jones and Hapgood left soon after the trade. Torsten wanted to storm the house and threaten the old man for whatever he told them, but Karl talked him out of it by arguing that the Americans could escape by the time they finished interrogating him. Torsten was disgusted because he knew his partner was anxious to avoid another murder, but he also realized that Karl was right. They ran back to their car, hidden

in a palm thicket off the roadway, and followed Jones to the airport. He secured tickets for their flight to Central America while Karl sent off a coded telegram informing Kerner of their progress. With any luck they could kill them in the jungle, take the necklace, and return to Germany at last.

The captain's voice came over the flight intercom. "Welcome aboard Pan-American flight 153 to Bermuda. Estimated travel time is 18 hours. Please fasten your seatbelts securely, as we prepare to take off. Thank you for choosing Pan-American Airways, the system of the flying clippers. Enjoy your flight."

Torsten repeated the pilot's instructions to Karl, whose grasp of English was far inferior to his own. The flight attendant pulled the outer door closed and latched it securely, then took his seat beside a stewardess.

A muted rumble shook the green-paneled cabin, vibrating the plush carpeted floor beneath their feet. All faces peered expectantly out the windows to see the four massive propellers whirling faster and faster, blurring as the engines powered up to full speed. There was a slight lurch and the plane began to move on the dark waves. The pilot churned a wide arc across the bay until the massive Boeing was pointed into the wind. The Clipper roared across the water, shedding a plume of white mist, gathering speed until the world suddenly fell away and it lifted into the ocean of sky, heading west after the blazing sun.



6

## URANVEREIN

### **Oranienburg, Germany**

The *Auergesellschaft* compound resembled a large warehouse from the air, but nobody flying over the 25-acre spread of nondescript buildings in the rural countryside northeast of Berlin would guess that its inauspicious roof and plain brick walls encompassed a production plant for the development of industrial-grade, high-purity uranium oxide. In fact, the unremarkable facade was designed to conceal the true purpose of the massive factory, constructed less than six months earlier, as the heart of the German nuclear program. Its main floor was a whirring hive of activity, where rows of gas centrifuge machines utilized artificial gravity to separate Uranium-235 from Uranium-238, yielding higher concentrations of the element for weapons production. But the truly im-

portant work occurred far belowground, safe from the cameras of Allied spy planes.

Six levels of research laboratories comprised the subterranean core of the Oranienburg complex, all devoted to the singular purpose of exploiting Hahn and Strassmann's revolutionary fission process. Only persons with the highest security clearance had access to the electro-chemical facility on the lowermost level, via a series of strict security checkpoints, and even fewer still were permitted entry into the clandestine inner sanctum designated simply as Research Laboratory D, a spacious room of angular concrete surfaces built to virtually bomb-proof specifications. This labyrinthine security network safeguarded the classified research occurring within the most secret laboratory in Europe.

It was here, deep underground and far from the prying eyes of the world, that Klaus Kerner placed the corroded bronze statue on the table before Professor Hans Übermann. "See what Herr Jones has kindly provided?"

"What on earth?" The bespectacled senior physicist leaned forward to examine the horned idol while Nikolaus Riehl, the director of the research facility, regarded the crude artifact with a dubious frown.

Kerner crossed his arms expectantly and waited for the professor's assessment, confident that he'd succeeded on his vitally important mission. "Isn't it amazing?"

Standing proudly at his full height of six-foot-three, Klaus Gerhard Kerner considered himself an elite warrior. The blond, square-jawed soldier was the epitome of Aryan perfection, right down to his

piercing blue gaze which subordinates and strangers alike termed 'cold'. After his recent trip to America, he was grateful to be attired in his familiar green SS uniform, once again free to display the symbol of his loyal devotion to Germany: a red swastika armband with black piping, the crowning achievement of an illustrious military career.

Kerner served his country in the Great War, serving on a *Sturmabteilung* mortar team in the German 3rd Army. The capture of an enemy tank on the Western Front earned him an Iron Cross for bravery, and a position on the Bavarian Storm Tank detachment. After the war, he chose a police career in his desire to command respect and provide order for Germany. Kerner joined the fledgling SS in 1928 as a guard for prestigious Nazi speakers during political rallies, exhibiting a fierce devotion that enabled him to rise quickly in the organization, culminating in a post on Adolf Hitler's personal guard regiment. He was elected into the *Reichstag* two years later, and finally promoted to a full-fledged Oberst in charge of overseeing the *Waffen-SS* program in its mission to acquire new weapons for the Nazi party.

It was there that the Colonel was paired with Hans Übermann, one of the chief weapons developers working with the *Ahnenerbe* to locate arcane historical weaponry that might successfully be applied to the German Army for the war effort. His first priority involved a mythical substance called orichalcum which was described in Karl Zschaetzsch's book, *Atlantis: Die Urheimat der Arier*, or Homeland of the Aryan. The ancient element promised untold wonders if they could locate a source in existence, and its

pursuit set him on the trail of several notable Atlantis experts rumored to possess artifacts from the Lost Kingdom. Now that he'd acquired the statue from Jones, Kerner would see if his efforts were about to pay off.

Übermann turned the robust little idol in his hands to study it from all sides, noting its tarnished condition with distaste. "I send you all the way to America to find the weapon of the age, and you bring me this prehistoric knick-knack?"

"Herr Doktor, this 'knick-knack', as I believe you call it, comes from the Lost City." Kerner's tone was irate. He had no time for the inane opinions of this ancient windbag. He wanted confirmation on the success of his mission, and nothing more.

"Then we have failed. I see no evidence here of a magical metal that Plato called 'orichalcum'."

Riehl scratched his chin but said nothing. This Atlantis operation was entirely Kerner's affair until he gave the institution something worthwhile to produce. Otherwise Riehl would stay out of it and leave the colonel free to embarrass himself as he saw fit.

Übermann rose from the table and strolled over to a large diagram pinned on the wall. The word *Uranbombe* was boldly printed in white letters across the top of the blueprint, depicting a cross-sectional cut-away which revealed the inner workings of a large bomb with fins. He tapped a large red circle inside the bulbous warhead, indicating the source of its destructive power.

"You see Diebner's device, Herr Kerner? It is perfect! We need only the fissionable material for the core and it will be ready for production. Uranium is

the only element capable of sustaining a chain reaction, but we are unable to manufacture it in sufficient quantity. *Der Führer* is unsatisfied with our progress,” he fretted, wringing his bony hands together nervously. “He was displeased by the early miscalculations, and says the timeframe for our program is too long, our technology too unreliable. Science cannot be rushed, you know.”

Kerner knew of the situation. “I am well aware of Herr Hitler’s lack of patience, Doktor Übermann, but it will not permit us from moving forward with our endeavor. Once we prove ourselves with this device, we will gain the full support of the *Heereswaffenamt*. Then Germany will be unstoppable, and the Americans will cower before our nuclear superiority.”

“Yes, yes,” he said irritably, “but we only have, at present, thirty tons of uranium, and the quality of the material is unsuitable for our purposes. Alas, I’m afraid we need something else.”

“This might prove useful,” Kerner withdrew a sealed glass vial from the breast pocket of his uniform. “Among Fräulein Hapgood’s possessions were these curious metal beads. They were stored with her other relics. It is my guess that we found the treasure we seek.”

Übermann held up the vial and studied its brilliant copper luster in the stark electric lights of the laboratory, then returned to the table and picked up the horned idol. “Hmm... Notice how the statue mouth is open, *ja?* Let us place a bead inside and see what will happen.” He twisted the lid off the vial and rolled a shiny bead into his palm.

Klaus Kerner watched closely as Übermann

pushed the bead neatly into the idol's mouth receptacle and set it down again. The statue's eyes immediately came to life with a glowing yellow light. The men all stepped back as the small statue began to vibrate on the table, emitting a high-pitched whine like a power saw turned up to full speed. A brief snow of rust flew from the torso, which spun at the waist, whirling in circles with increasing speed. The glowing eyes were a blaze of light as it jittered across the surface of the steel lab table, the upright arms a greenish blur.

"*Mein Gott!*" Nikolaus Riehl exclaimed in astonishment.

The horned idol tumbled over the edge and struck the floor with a dull thud, where it continued to whirl madly. Sparks flew as its metal arms grated against the unyielding stone. The statue stumbled awkwardly in a wide circle, writhing like a wounded animal. The stunned onlookers thought its frenetic dance might continue forever until the torso began to slow as its dose of orichalcum was depleted. The triangular-shaped eyes pulsed weakly and finally went out. The ancient icon lay still in the sudden quiet of the laboratory. The intensity of the display left them breathless at the possibilities of their newfound energy source.

Although he was not an easily-impressed man, Kerner was awestruck by what he'd witnessed. "You saw that? Think of trucks powered by these beads. Think of tanks. Think of *airplanes...*"

"Use your imagination, Kerner," chided Übermann condescendingly. "Think big like the Americans. Think of bombs!"

"We will make the Reich an unstoppable force!"

Nikolaus Riehl cried in triumph.

Übermann, the ever-practical physicist, maintained his focus in the midst of all the excitement. “But first we must test! Let us submit the orichalcum to the Evonik.” He picked up the glass vial and hobbled towards a large machine which dominated the austere laboratory. Behind him, Kerner scooped up the horned idol and quickly followed, anxious to learn if this new material could give his army a dominant edge over their American enemy.

They had a decisive advantage thanks to the Degussa Corporation, a refinery of precious metals which was contracted to furnish the *Auergesellschaft* with the very latest in scientific technology. Their state-appointed benefactors had spared no expense in providing all of the tools necessary for the Army Ordnance war effort. As a result, Germany had one of the most sophisticated manufacturing facilities in the world at its disposal. Kerner saw the promise of success everywhere he looked.

Rising above them was a massive Tesla Coil slaved to a high-voltage induction capacitor that stood humming against the wall. Situated opposite the capacitor was the notably shorter Van de Graaff generator, topped by a large silver sphere, positioned on the other side of the stark gray expanse. A chain of oversized plasma globes were suspended from the ceiling like a glass model of the universe, strung together with a network of condenser lines. But the centerpiece of Übermann’s domain was the *Uranmaschine*, a blocky refrigerator-like device that housed a circular apparatus mounted on a thick spindle. The particle accelerator was precision engineered for

isotope separation and the measurement of nuclear constants, however Übermann was confident that it could be used for other purposes, as he was about to demonstrate.

Riehl manned the green-paneled control board while Übermann slipped his hands into a set of insulated rubber gloves and donned a pair of goggles. Twisting a thick handle, he opened a door to the accelerator and slid out a flat metal tray. The research director flipped a set of red switches in sequence, and a row of corresponding indicator lights blinked on in response. The machine came to life with a sibilant hum that slithered across the floor like oil beneath Kerner's boots, making the SS leader uncharacteristically nervous. In truth, Kerner understood very little about this new technology, and what he didn't know frightened him. But the physicists worked with single-minded confidence, so Kerner brushed away his foolish trepidation as the experiment began.

Übermann, cloaked in his long white lab coat, gently placed several of the red orichalcum beads into a lattice of cube-like boxes that resembled an oversized ice cube tray, slid the tray back into the particle accelerator and shut the heavy door, locking it with a deft twist of the handle. He double-checked the seals and pronounced the machine ready. "Activate the reactor," he instructed.

Adjusting a pair of dials with the finesse of a jewel thief cracking a safe, Nikolaus Riehl called out the indicator readings to his aged colleague. When the electromagnets were primed to full capacity, he initiated the cyclotron. Almost immediately, a deep, ominous whirring sound emanated from the great machine.

The sheer power of the rapidly accelerating centrifuge produced a thrum felt through every surface in the room. Kerner swallowed the bitter taste in his mouth, and clenched his vibrating teeth together as the concrete floor trembled underfoot. Even from his safe distance, he could see the skin of the *Uranmaschine* blur like a mirage that might suddenly disappear.

“Frequency rate is constant,” Riehl reported as calmly as if he were announcing a chess move.

Übermann shuffled closer, irresistibly drawn to the accelerator. He cupped his hands over his forehead and peered into the viewport. A series of rapid flashes stunned the narrow portal with the radiance of the sun, each one more brilliant than the last. Kerner and Riehl flinched warily while Übermann continued to stare into the fission chamber, enthralled by the desire to bask in the awesome power they had unleashed.

“*Das ist wundervoll,*” he breathed. The lenses of his thick-rimmed goggles glowed with an unearthly light. He reached up and touched the machine reverently. “The energy that drives the universe...”

The luminous blaze suddenly erupted with blinding intensity. Übermann staggered back in horror as a blue corona lit the reinforced lead-glass window, followed by a blast of intense heat that scorched the laboratory air with tropical warmth. The accelerator shivered, struggling to contain the force of the violent reaction blossoming within its over-clad shell.

“*Critical!*” Riehl yelled in panic. The research director slapped the emergency button, cutting power to the reactor, then dropped to the floor behind the

control bank and pulled his lab coat over his head, anticipating the explosion certain to follow.

The shockwave hit the Tesla Coil, shattering the overcharged electrodes. Klaus Kerner threw his arms up for protection as a discharge of white-hot sparks rained over him. From the corner of his eye, he saw Hans Übermann scrambling for cover in the midst of the chaos like the coward that he was.

“*Himmel!*” the wiry physicist cried out in alarm when a wild snap of electricity leapt for the ceiling, attracted by the ionized gases inside the plasma lamps. The rampant power surge traveled through the condenser lines overhead, bursting each sealed globe with a sharp explosion. A blizzard of glass covered the floor like crystal ants, scattering in every direction.

The disaster ended with a series of sharp reports when the energy flux ravaged a vacuum diode console, shattering its cluster of cathode tubes. The accelerator whirled to a halt, and everything became silent. Kerner stood warily in the haze of electrical smoke, amazed that they were still alive. He primly brushed away shards of delicate glass from his neatly-starched uniform and looked around in shock. Nearly half of the laboratory was destroyed, including the main power generator. But the Evonik machine was miraculously intact. Hans Übermann hurried over to join Riehl at the control board. Together they consulted the instrument readings in disbelief.

“Amazing!” Riehl gushed. “There is significant neutron multiplication without any trace of radioactive contamination.” It seemed almost impossible to consider, but the data did not lie.

“Do you realize what this means? We are on the verge of sustaining a chain reaction!” Übermann paced over to Kerner and clamped a bony hand around the SS captain’s arm. He held up the vial of orichalcum. “We need more of this material, Kerner, much more. Can you get it?”

“This jar represents all that Fräulein Hapgood amassed. In addition to our field operations abroad, I have two agents following her and the American professor to see if they can lead us to another source. In the meantime, I have recovered a journal which may prove useful in discovering the origin of this material.”

The old man shook his head irritably. “Let me show you something, Kerner.”

Übermann led him from the main laboratory into an adjoining room occupied by a sturdy plywood table. Its surface was covered with a complex network of diodes, vacuum bulbs, and something that resembled a round sponge cake with a battery stuck in the middle. Kerner surveyed the meaningless clump of devices in a brief glance, unimpressed by what he saw. He plucked at a springy wire and released an impatient sigh. They were wasting valuable time. “What is the meaning of this?” he demanded sharply.

“This is where it all began. Seven months ago we bombarded uranium with neutrons to produce nuclear fission. In seven months we went from this to *that*.” He jabbed an emphatic finger toward the ruined site of the reactor experiment. “And now our work is obsolete. By all rights we should be dead from such a mishap, yet we are not. I think the message is quite clear. We are destined for greater things

in the future, but we must act *now* unless you want the Americans to supersede our work.”

Kerner maintained a veneer of cool patience to cover his seething temper. He felt like throttling Übermann’s skeletal neck until it snapped. “I brought you exactly what you asked for.”

“Yes, but all of our toil will be meaningless unless we can deliver the *Uranbombe* first! Do you understand how important this is? It is imperative that we get more orichalcum at once.”

“We are preparing to launch a mission to monopolize this ore, and I have every resource to succeed at my disposal. Until then, I suggest you remember the extent of your authority, *Doktor*.”

Übermann matched Kerner’s venomous smile, undaunted by the threat. “Good. Then I will prepare a report for the Ministry of War announcing our progress. The fate of the world is in your hands, Kerner. Try not to drop it.”

\* \* \*

## **Uranverein Institute, Berlin**

The steady buzz of conversation in the auditorium lapsed into respectful silence when Professor Hans Übermann mounted the stage and made his way up to the podium. He did not bring a sheaf of papers for a speech as might be expected for such a momentous occasion, or even a rolled up diagram to share with his audience. Instead, he carried a small aluminum box which he placed on the right-hand corner of the stand. The elderly physicist adjusted his thick

glasses and squinted in the bright stage lights, regarding the roomful of colleagues that filled the tiered rows to near capacity.

He scanned the prominent faces in attendance: Kurt Diebner, Walther Bothe, Robert Döpel, Hans Geiger, Wolfgang Gentner, Wilhelm Hanle, Gerhard Hoffmann, Otto Hahn and his assistant. Übermann smiled to himself, pleased that all the key figures of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kernphysik* were present to witness his moment of triumph. The occasion marked the first victory for the newly-established *Uranverein*, which was formed only two months earlier. The fact that they had progressed so far in such a short time convinced him that Germany was destined for greatness, and Hans Übermann was responsible for that success in no small part.

Übermann had been one of the founders of the *Verein für Raumschiffahrt*, and concurrently held a chair as director of the Kammersdorf Experimental Station at Brandenburg, where he had received the title Doktor. It was in that capacity that he worked alongside Professors Hahn and Strassman to split the atom. When that dream was finally realized late last year, he urged the military to provide funding and capital to support further research for their program. The results, he promised, would yield Germany the ultimate weapon.

Now he was pleased to bestow his finest achievement on the organization which would lead his country into the future. "My esteemed colleagues, I am here tonight to make an historic announcement: We have beaten the Americans in the race for nuclear armament." He opened the box and withdrew the

bead of gleaming red metal, then raised it high to show the roomful of assembled physicists. "Behold, orichalcum—the *Wunderwaffe* of the age!" he declared triumphantly. "The energy of uranium, without any radioactivity!"

The proclamation elicited a wave of chatter from the audience, who found his bold promise exciting as it was unrealistic. Several upraised hands begged for immediate attention, but Übermann refused to take questions. He would not be drawn into a debate about the validity of his claim. Tonight's meeting was intended to show that the Institute was ready to deliver on its purpose.

Aside from providing uranium to the *Heereswaffenamt* ordnance office, the *Uranverein* was charged with building an atomic weapon to deploy against their enemies in the forthcoming conflict. Their progress was hampered by the inherent production difficulties of working with nuclear material, and ceaseless pressure from an impatient war department. Things might have continued this way until Kerner's timely discovery rendered uranium obsolete. If Degussa could mass-produce quantities of the Atlantean metal for the construction of orichalcum-based weaponry, the possibilities would be limitless.

"Orichalcum is the primal source material which created the world. According to legend, the gods of Atlantis build their great empire from this remarkable alloy. It is exponentially more powerful than uranium, and far exceeds the potential of the atomic reaction. Today we harnessed that power for Germany!" cried Übermann, shaking his fists in the air with maniacal zeal. "The first *Überbombe* will soon be dropped over

America by our planes, and the Allies will surrender before our might! We stand on the cusp of a new era in human history!”

Watching from the shadow of the curtain off-stage, Klaus Kerner smiled broadly as the roomful of scientists stood and applauded the speech in unison. *Der Führer* himself could not have done a better job. He didn't need their approval, of course, but the show of support reinforced his belief that Germany would shape the world as it was intended to be. Kerner brushed back his crop of sandy blond hair and strolled from the auditorium with purpose. It was time to take control of their destiny, and he would not fail.



7

## TIKAL

Strands of misty light filtered through the dark jungle canopy to stain the humid air a perpetually greenish hue. A machete flashed in the gloomy dusk, startling a toucan from a nearby tree in an explosion of yellow feathers as Indiana Jones chopped a prickly escoba limb from his path. Trudging a few paces behind him, Sophia Hapgood mopped the feverish glaze of perspiration from her face with a saturated handkerchief and swished her hands to disperse a cloud of gnats drawn by the taste of her sweat. Her long red hair, tied in a ponytail to prevent snagging on the dense flora hedging the narrow trail, stuck to her neck in a thick, wet clump. A heavy layer of mud coated the soles of her boots. The straps of her field pack dug painfully into her shoulders, chafing her skin with each labored step. It was like toting a bag of rocks through a sauna. Sophia had never been

more miserable in her entire life, and they were still miles from Tikal.

Hiking in the shadowy isolation of the rainforest, surrounded by nature at its most primitive, the rest of the world and its troubles seemed so very far away. The harsh discomforts of the jungle almost made it easy to forget that Adolf Hitler was arming the Nazi regime in the wake of the recent Pact of Steel agreement, which assured mutual cooperation between Germany and Italy in the event of war; A war that could break out in Europe at any time. That sobering thought reminded Sophia that her present suffering was for the benefit of the greater good. They were the only thing standing between peace and total devastation if Kerner succeeded in his mission, because the ruthless SS colonel would turn the power of Atlantis against humanity the moment he attained it.

Sophia touched the pendant on her chest and felt a surge of hope that Nur-Ab-Sal would protect her from any dangers they might face. Too bad he couldn't do something about the insects.

As they marched deeper into the temperate jungle, she kept a wary eye out for any sign of standing water. Her anxiety stemmed from a lifelong phobia of diseases, fueled by accounts of malaria that were prevalent in so much of the popular travel literature. To Sophia, each shadowy pool was a stagnant breeding hole swarming with clouds of blood-sucking parasites eager to infect her with some incurable virus. Whenever they neared a patch of water, she enacted a frantic ritual of rubbing her arms, neck, and face to prevent any mosquitoes from landing on her. Indy laughed at her paranoia, but Sophia didn't think it

was very funny.

She began the day refreshed and eager for their hike to the Mayan ruins of Tikal, but her enthusiasm quickly waned after traversing a quarter mile of dew-laden underbrush in an envelope of tropical steam that plastered her clothing to her body like a second skin. The jungle was much more frightening than she'd ever imagined. It was a dark, primal world, constantly alive with movement and sound. Swift black shapes leaped through the overhanging branches like ghostly shadows, emitting unearthly howls that were answered by the scream of a jaguar somewhere in the unseen distance. The air buzzed with the shrill, ever-present chatter of locusts, which escalated into a maddening symphony of noise that grated on her ears until she wanted to scream.

As if her frayed nerves weren't punishment enough, everything had gone from bad to worse since they left the trail. Thanks to a psychic nudge from Nur-Ab-Sal, she and Indy had spent the last two hours bushwhacking their way through the sweltering lowlands of Guatemala in search of the pyramid from her vision, where the first key to Atlantis was allegedly located. While her spirit guide had never led her astray before, Sophia was regretting her decision to veer from the well-established road to Tikal for an aimless trek through the uncharted green hell. It was her fault that they were lost, although she would never admit it.

Just ahead of her, Indy paused to flay a web of thorny vines that stretched between a pair of trees in their path. Sophia, who had been staring fixedly at the ground, suddenly bumped into him. She looked

up with a rude scowl and prodded him in the back. “Quit being so pokey! Keep moving.”

The archaeologist ripped away the severed vines and turned to confront her. “What’s your problem?” he said testily. “You haven’t stopped complaining all day. If you have something to say to me, then spit it out right now, because I’m getting tired of this.”

Sophia stood nose-to-nose with Indy, her cheeks burning with scorn. “You want to know what’s wrong? I’m tired, I’m hungry, and I’m sweating like a pig. I hate this place. I wish we’d never come here.”

“Then blame Nur-Ab-Sal. Don’t take it out on me.”

“*You* said this was going to be a nice walk.” Her voice rang with accusation.

“It *was* until you decided to leave the path,” Indy countered.

“Only because Nur-Ab-Sal said we were going the wrong way.”

“Fine. If you’d rather trust some phony spirit over a topographical map, then lead the way.” He extended his arm, beckoning her to go first.

She preoccupied herself by repositioning the weight of her backpack to avoid his icy stare. “Don’t be ridiculous. You’re doing a fine job. And Nur-Ab-Sal is *not* phony.”

Indy glanced at the unused machete hanging at her side, and felt a burst of irritation. He’d given it to her at the start of the hike, thinking that she would help him slash through the trees in an effort to make better time to the ruins, but the redhead hadn’t so much as touched it.

“You know, it wouldn’t kill you to give me a hand

with this," he said, gesturing at the surrounding brush with his own green-streaked blade.

She raised her hands and gave three slow claps of mock applause, along with a humorless smile. "Happy now?"

"You can't have Atlantis delivered on a silver platter, Miss High Society," he said sternly, "and I'm not carrying you, either. Now let's move." He held her gaze for a lingering moment and then stalked off, leaving Sophia alone in the middle of the jungle.

She gaped at the empty spot in disbelief, stunned that he would abandon her like that. As if her day wasn't going bad enough, the last thing she needed was to be lost in this godforsaken place. She swallowed her pride and hurried to catch up with him.

As much as she hated to admit it, Sophia Hapgood admired Indiana Jones. She caught herself appraising the lean, fedora-clad figure with the burnished leather whip on his belt more than once during their hike. Indy personified the archetypal explorer: A trailblazing soldier of fortune, completely at home in the harshest jungles on earth. Not only was she drawn to his ruggedly handsome looks and cool machismo, but also to the man's relentless perseverance in the pursuit of whatever goal lay before him, no matter how formidable the obstacles. Even if that obstacle was her, Sophia smiled as Indy's blade slash left and right, methodically disposing every bit of foliage barring the way. They were finally making the first real progress towards Atlantis, and nothing was going to stand in the way of her dream, not all of the gnats or mosquitoes in the jungle.

A large, furry creature suddenly scampered across

the path, nearly running over her feet. Sophia let out a squeal of surprise and latched onto Indy in fright. “*Ooh!* What was that?”

“I didn’t see anything.”

She pointed insistently to the spot where the animal had disappeared. “It looked like a giant hamster!”

Indy peered into the underbrush, and shrugged. “Some kind of jungle rodent. Probably a capybara. Don’t worry, it’s harmless.” He disentangled himself from her grip and continued walking.

She waved her hands in a burst of irritation, scattering the persistent halo of insects that hovered about as if she were sweating honey. “Why would the Atlanteans build an outpost in this malaria-infested hole, anyway?”

“Because it was the central hub of a major east-west trading route,” he explained, stepping over a large tree trunk lying across the trail. “Besides, the hardest path is often the best one to take.”

“Did you hear that from a shaman, or something?” she grunted, awkwardly mimicking his move.

“Nope. I read it in a fortune cookie.”

“Dime-store philosophy?” she sneered, loathing his attempt at humor. She was in no mood to be amused. “How’s that working out for you, Professor?”

“Not bad, actually. Makes for easy bonus questions on tests, and my students love it.” Indy grinned, enjoying their banter.

Despite her caustic remarks, Sophia was adjusting to the hardships of the journey quite well. But Indy sympathized with her. He knew the wilderness was a new experience for the Boston-bred psychic, whose

life was rooted in a world of luxury and privilege. Given the circumstances, he needed all the cooperation that she could offer.

Central America presented some of the most challenging terrain on earth. The Petén Basin alone covered more than 12,000 square miles of dense lowland rainforest—one-third of the total area of Guatemala. In addition to being the heartland of the ancient Mayan empire, which extended from the Atlantic coast across the Yucatan Peninsula to the Pacific, the region was home to a wide range of animal species including jaguars, panthers and an incredible variety of tropical birds, monkeys, bats, rodents, and spiders. In essence, they were exploring one of the largest natural zoos on the planet, which was no easy feat for a posh cosmopolitan girl like Sophia Hapgood.

After an exhausting 18-hour flight from the Azores, their tiny charter plane touched down on a bumpy dirt airstrip in Santa Elena, near the capitol city of Flores. That was when Juan, the pilot who'd flown them in from Belize, informed his passengers that his fee had nearly doubled since takeoff, and all because Sophia had promised to spare no expense if he could get them into the country as quickly as possible. Indy protested the increased rate, but relented because he was too tired to argue. He just wanted to sleep. The bone-weary travelers trudged from the airport to the nearest hotel, and fell into bed after a long overdue (albeit separate, much to Indy's dismay) shower.

The next morning they awoke refreshed and ready to hit the trail after ten solid hours of sleep. Emerging from their hotel room, they were stunned to find that

the town in which they had arrived under the cover of darkness was a disaster in broad daylight. Palm fronds were plastered against buildings with broken windows, and rooftops devoid of shingles. Pieces of corrugated siding and other debris littered the muddy streets. Everything was glistening wet. Citizens piled wreckage in heaps alongside their damaged houses, trimmed broken tree limbs, mended walls, and gradually restored order to their town with a perseverance attesting to the fact that hurricanes were a way of life in Central America.

Securing provisions from a tent market near the outskirts of town, they hired a pair of guides willing to show them the quickest route to Tikal. Indy had not visited Guatemala in over ten years, and he knew the old trail leading to the ruins had long since disappeared, probably reclaimed by the jungle within months of the 1926 London University expedition. The party crossed Lake Petén Itzá by boat, only to find that man-made roads did not extend into the vast wilderness beyond. So they were forced to travel as far as they could with mules, and forge the remainder of the 40-mile distance to the site with machetes.

The air was humid and sticky in the jungle, the ground spongy with dead vegetation. They were forced to abandon the pack animals after only a mile due to the increasingly muddy conditions. Indy paid the guides and sent them back to civilization with the donkeys. Sophia watched them leave with regret. In spite of how much she hated riding the ill-tempered beasts, she wasn't thrilled about slogging through the tangled undergrowth on foot. She shouldered her heavy bedroll and reluctantly followed Indiana Jones

into the mist, searching for her lost outpost.

Checking her watch now, Sophia was amazed to see that they had been hiking for more than five hours. The jungle was a continuous blur of green and black in every direction, with no end in sight. Her aching shoulders slumped in despair. She didn't know how much further she could go before she finally collapsed from exhaustion. She wanted to stop and rest, but knew they had to keep moving. Suddenly she bumped into Indy's outstretched arm, and realized that he'd stopped.

"Again?" she exasperated, trying to disguise her relief. "Really?"

"Unless you want to go for a swim." Indy stepped aside to let her see the rain-swollen creek that flowed through the wilderness on a meandering course, blocking their way. Leaves, branches, and other hurricane debris churned in the swift green current, which resembled liquid jade amid the verdant foliage.

Sophia rubbed the back of her neck with embarrassment. "Oh. Thanks, Indy."

Indy sized up the situation and realized the creek was too wide to jump across, and there was no telling how deep it was. "We could ford it if we still had the mules. Guess we'll have to find another way."

"You're out of your mind! I'm not crossing that thing. Let's walk around it," she suggested, pointing upstream.

"It's a creek. It goes on forever in both directions. Besides, there could be snakes or crocodiles."

Her eyes darted around warily, but found no sign of danger. "I thought you were an adventurer. Did you lose your nerve?"

“Yeah,” he replied, chopping a thick vine that ascended into the canopy overhead. “Right after I hooked up with you.” Indy hauled the vine over to the shore and gave it a few pulls, testing his weight on it.

“I don’t believe this. You really want to play Tarzan right now?”

“It’s the only way across, unless you have a better idea.”

“Fine, then. I’ll go first, if you don’t mind.”

“Why?”

She grabbed the vine from him. “Because I’m lighter and you might break it before I can swing across.”

“Take your backpack off,” Indy suggested, shedding his own. “Less weight. I’ll throw it over when you reach the other side.”

“My backpack is fine where it is, thank you very much. Besides, I pack light, remember?”

With that, she approached the edge of the bank where the ground sloped away. She peered into the brackish water, took a firm two-handed grip on the vine, and leapt into space. She was halfway across when a loud snap echoed like a gunshot in the branches above. Sophia cried out in surprise as the vine abruptly dropped several feet. Indy winced as gravity deposited her unceremoniously in the mud on the opposite shore.

“God *damn* it!”

Indiana Jones chuckled at the sight of Sophia Hapgood, the Princess of Park Avenue, floundering in the jungle stream and swearing like a sailor. He lobbed his rucksack over the water, cut another vine

free, and swung across to help his fallen companion, who was still raving when he pulled her up the slippery bank.

“That’s no way for a guardian of the forest to talk,” he chided with feigned pity.

She gave him a murderous glare. “What the hell are you talking about?”

He touched the tiny red flowers of a plant growing nearby. “*Ixcanan*. Also called red heads.”

Flushed with humiliation, Sophia viciously tore off a large, waxy leaf and began to wipe the mud off her pants. “I hate this damn place.”

Indy scratched his nose to cover his amusement, and turned his attention to the surrounding jungle. “We should be in the vicinity of the ruins by now. Are we getting close?”

“How should *I* know?”

“Why don’t you ask your travel agent, Nur-Ab-Sal?”

“Are you making fun of me?” The hard edge in her voice warned him to choose his next words with care.

“No, I’m serious.” He plunged his machete into the ground and squinted at the leafy canopy above, judging the angle of the sunlight. “It’s going to be dark in few hours. I’d feel better camping in the ruins tonight instead of out in the open.”

Frowning at his impatience, she looked around as if their goal was hiding behind a nearby tree. “Let me see if I can contact him.”

Sophia closed her eyes and swished her hands in the air, summoning an invisible essence from her surroundings. Then, with arms outstretched, she turned

in a slow circle, witching over a wide swath of uncharted wilderness like a human divining rod. Her hands began to shake, trembling spasmodically. “I sense Nur-Ab-Sal. His spirit is close.”

*Closer than Atlantis, that’s for sure*, Indy thought wryly, but kept it to himself.

“There.” Sophia let her arms drop. Her eyes flicked open and she strode off with purpose in a seemingly random direction. Indy grabbed his saber and followed, wondering how they were supposed to locate one particular pyramid based on a psychic vision that occurred halfway around the world, from a person who had never set foot in the country before. He hoped that Nur-Ab-Sal had a good sense of direction because the ruins of Tikal spanned more than 50 square miles of jungle. They could be searching for a very long time.

His concern was put to rest a few minutes later when they came to an abrupt clearing, where a white ribbon of road cut through the wilderness like a deserted rail bed, vanishing from sight in both directions.

Sophia gave a vindicated nod, reaffirming the wisdom of her Atlantean guide. “See, I told you to trust Nur-Ab-Sal.”

“Okay, I’m impressed,” Indy admitted. “Which way do we go now?”

“Just try to keep up, Jones.” She turned left and continued along the path, which was covered in sparse vegetation. Indy’s compass pointed to a westerly heading. He was almost positive they were traveling on the *sacbe*, a network of paved roadways that spread across the country like a great limestone spi-

der web, joining all the major ceremonial centers of the Mayan empire. The true extent of the ruins was unknown since the jungle had reclaimed the ancient civilization after it was abandoned around 900 A.D. But Indy knew that if they followed one strand of the web, it would inevitably lead them to a structure.

Sophia paused on a rise, where a break in the trees offered them a good view of the surrounding terrain, and shielded her eyes against the midday sun, a ball of white flame in the azure sky. "Lots of hills around here," she observed, scanning the horizon.

"Those aren't hills," Indy said, moving up beside her. "They're unexcavated buildings. Temples, pyramids... probably hundreds of 'em. It'll take more than a century to uncover everything," he estimated. "But don't hold your breath."

A pale flash suddenly grabbed her attention. Sophia whipped out a pair of binoculars and trained them on the bright spot. The distinctive shape of a Mayan roof comb peeked over the treetops in the distance, capping an unseen temple below the horizon. "Indy, I see it! I see the pyramid!" She passed him the binoculars eagerly. "Take a look!"

Indy saw the telltale signs of ancient weathered structures in the glare of the afternoon sun. "Good eyes, sweetheart. Looks like you found it."

The sight of the monument gave Sophia renewed strength. She put aside her previous misery and stalked off toward the ruins at a determined pace. Within minutes they could see patches of stark limestone through intermittent gaps in the foliage. Unable to contain her excitement, she broke into a run.

"Hey!" Indy exclaimed as she plunged into a

grove of kapok trees and disappeared. He caught up with the redhead a moment later to find her kneeling breathlessly in the shadow of a massive pyramid overgrown with dense vegetation—exactly as she had foreseen.

The ancient Mayan edifice towered over them like a stoic guardian of the jungle. Trees grew rampant up the slopes of the terraced mound, which narrowed to a truncated platform 200 feet in the air. From the peak, a large temple knifed the blue sky with its blade-like roof comb, while a broad staircase descended to the plaza below. Only a quarter of the hulking structure was exposed under the layer of gnarled vines that wrapped the stone in a thick green web. Despite the work of the excavators, it appeared as if the jungle was trying to swallow the pyramid back into the earth to keep its secrets hidden forever.

Indy glanced at Sophia kneeling in the grass, clutching the pendant around her neck, eyes sparkling with emotion. He gave her a gentle squeeze on the shoulder but remained silent, unwilling to disrupt her moment of rapture. He understood perfectly. Gazing up at the majestic limestone pyramid rising above the jungle, he was struck by the same awe that Ambrosio Tut must have felt when he first came upon Tikal in 1848. Indy envied the gum sapper for being the first modern person to arrive on the site since it was abandoned at the end of the 9th century. After all, it was every archaeologist's dream to find a remote, pristine civilization, untouched by the hand of man, while Tut had stumbled across one literally by accident.

He wondered what the pioneer would think of the most recent visitors, guided there by the disembod-

ied spiritual ancestor of the Mayans who had built the ancient city of *Mutal*, as it was known from hieroglyphic inscriptions found in the ruins. Also called “The Place of the Voices”, Tikal was one of the largest and most spectacular pre-Columbian cities in the Yucatan. Less than half of the known buildings had been reclaimed from the clutches of nature in the decades since its discovery. The rest lay hidden beneath shapeless mountains of dense vegetation that dotted the Guatemalan wilderness. Each one, Indy knew, represented a structure yet to be unearthed, a time capsule of ancient knowledge just waiting to be opened.

He felt a touch on his shoulder. “Thanks for letting me have my moment, Indy.” Sophia said with a bittersweet smile. They stood together and gazed at the pyramid in awed silence, unable to move. “Is this what it always feels like?”

“Well, it’s one of the perks,” he replied with characteristic modesty.

In truth, being in the presence of ancient ruins evoked a sense of euphoria unmatched by anything else. It was a feeling of humility that electrified every fiber of his being with the promise of long-forgotten secrets waiting to be revealed. Time was irrelevant when one became attuned to the past. Indy could reach across history and connect with the people who left these monuments as a legacy to their existence. The wonder never failed to amaze him.

Sophia stared across the clearing in a daze. The sight of trees growing atop the pyramid was absurd, whimsical, like something out of a dream. She couldn’t believe that she was actually there.

“What are those?” she asked, pointing at some large, dog-like animals with pointy snouts and long tails that were darting among the tangled overgrowth.

“Coatis. They’re sort of like big squirrels.”

“Are they dangerous?”

“Not unless you’re a lizard.”

“Then let’s go. We have to find that keystone.” She was about to take a step toward the pyramid when Indy snared her by the arm. He pointed at a large circular hole in the ground, inches from her feet.

“Watch where you’re walking,” he warned. “These things are all over the place.”

Peering into the dark void, which appeared bottomless, Sophia felt a cold chill when she realized how close she’d come to falling into the pit. Her ashen face reflected the obvious unspoken question.

“It’s a *chultun*,” Indy supplied. He added that the chambers were excavated by the Mayans directly into the limestone bedrock, and used as reservoirs to collect drinking water during the rainy seasons, food storage, and also for human burials.

They sidestepped the hole and crossed the open plaza, where piles of dead foliage were heaped along the base of the temple, the refuse of the excavation efforts. Sophia approached the pyramid and placed her hands reverently on the stone while Indy examined the Pre-classic temple with scientific detachment. He lifted a web of thorny vines to reveal a layer of crumbling orange stucco that adorned the monument in antiquity. The Mayans originally painted their buildings in blazing colors that could be seen for miles. Now all that remained was bare limestone speckled with black mold and lichen. Then he no-

ticed something else, a large square hole cut into the stone behind the leafy screen. A quick survey of the foundation revealed that the cavities punctuated the lower course of the pyramid at regular intervals. Indy was mystified. He'd never seen such a feature before on any Mesoamerican structure. Unfortunately the holes were clogged with vines, making it impossible to see into them.

Indy shed his knapsack beside a nearby stela and stretched his sore arms after their arduous trek. Taking his cue, Sophia dropped her own bedroll on the grass and plunked herself down at the bottom of the pyramid staircase. She fished her canteen out of her pack and took a long drink while Indy perused the inscription on the upright stone.

"You're sitting by a giant snake, you know," he remarked casually.

The redhead came off the stairway like it was on fire. Indy was doubled over with laughter as she scanned the area in alarm. "What the hell is so funny? I don't see any snake."

He ambled over to the staircase and patted the ancient carving. A crimson flush arose in her cheeks when Sophia realized that the end of the stone banister was carved into the head of a giant serpent whose body extended up the face of the pyramid. She had been sitting by the snake's head. Enraged, she darted forward and slugged the archaeologist on the shoulder.

"Ow!" Indy rubbed his arm tenderly. "That wasn't very nice."

"Well neither is scaring the hell out of me!"

Fuming with embarrassment, she retrieved her

hastily discarded canteen and sat down again. Indy offered her an unconvincing apology and reached into his backpack for his own canteen. He unscrewed the cap and quenched his thirst with a swig of tepid water. They both looked up at a rustling sound that suddenly came from above. A bright green parrot lit on the branch of a tree growing on the lower course of the pyramid. Sophia glanced at the bird with disinterest, but Indy decided to have a little fun.

“Polly want a cracker?”

“*Polly want a cracker?*” echoed the parrot in a shrill voice.

“Oh my God, you just *had* to do that, didn’t you?”

Flapping its wings noisily, the parrot whistled, “*You had to do that? Bwaaak!*”

“What a smart bird,” Indy observed.

Sophia gritted her teeth in irritation. Keeping her eyes riveted to the parrot, she slowly extended her hand towards Indy. “Give me your gun. Right now.”

“*Give me your gun! Give me your gun! Awwk!*”

Indy clapped her on the shoulder. “C’mon, it’s not that bad.”

“*It’s not that bad! Bawwwk!*”

Sophia threw a nasty look at the annoying animal. She really was prepared to shoot the damn thing if it didn’t shut up. Her wish materialized a moment later when a loud gunshot shattered the jungle solitude, followed by a scream. The parrot flapped off wildly into the air, shedding a trail of green feathers in its panicked flight. Bushes thrashed and footsteps pounded nearby. Somebody coming closer. Indy drew his Webley and pulled Sophia down behind the stone staircase just as another shot blasted the air. He

didn't know what was happening out there, but one thing was certain. They were under attack.



## TOMB OF AN ATLANTEAN KING

Footsteps rustled the dry ground foliage: frantic, desperate, and surprisingly swift. Indy aimed his gun over the thick stone banister and scanned the plaza, tense and ready to return fire. Huddled in the crook of the ancient staircase beside him, Sophia listened in wide-eyed fear as the frenzied pattering marked the approach of the unseen enemy. Indy tightened his grip on the Webley's trigger just as a lithe orange shape burst into view and streaked across the clearing in a flash of color. The animal vanished into the jungle with a feral growl before he could shoot. More footsteps quickly followed. Then a tall man in khakis dashed around the corner of the pyramid with a long rifle. He dropped to one knee, aimed, and fired into the underbrush where the big cat had fled. The shot echoed through the green canyon, and faded away in the balmy air.

“Bloody jaguars!”

Sophia jumped up from her hiding spot. “Did you get it?”

“Good lord, man!” The rifleman wheeled in surprise, startled by the unexpected voice. He stared at the disheveled redhead in her dirty, sweat-soaked clothing. A broad grin spread across his tanned features. “I say... fancy meeting you here!”

Indy stood up beside her and holstered his gun. “Likewise.”

The Briton’s smile evaporated at the sight of Sophia’s companion. “Oh. Hello, Jones.” he said in a tone flatly devoid of enthusiasm.

“Have we met before?” Indy’s gruff voice matched the other man’s displeasure.

“No, but I recognize you from the journals.” He gave Indy the once-over, adding with a distasteful sniff, “And I must say that you certainly *write* better than you photograph.”

Sophia giggled at the jeer. “I’m sorry, but we haven’t been introduced. I’m Sophia Hapgood.”

The hunter shifted his rifle in the crook of his lanky arm, and kissed her hand with a gallant flourish. “Charles Sternhart, Ph.D., independent thinker, researcher, and merchant.”

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. Sternhart,” she replied, blushing lightly at the intimate gesture.

“The pleasure is all mine, darling. And please call me Charles.”

Indy checked the snaps on his satchel to conceal his sardonic expression. Anyone who would cite a list of credentials to bolster their over-inflated ego didn’t deserve to be taken seriously. Sophia was clear-

ly charmed by the British archaeologist, but Indy thought he looked like a pompous ass, and opted to treat him like one.

“Why are you hunting jaguars?” he asked sarcastically.

“I’m not hunting them, you blithering idiot. Those damnable creatures keep getting into my food supply.”

Tall, handsome, and lean, Charles Sternhart was cut from the same cloth as every turn-of-the-century British explorer. He cultivated the image in his choice of attire: An impeccably crisp safari outfit, sturdy leather boots with tall knee socks, and the customary white pith helmet to shield his eyes from the harsh tropical sun. Even his neatly waxed moustache echoed the tradition of his Victorian forebears, though it looked painfully outdated in the mid-twentieth century.

Sophia offered her sympathies for all of his troubles. “Oh, it’s nothing I can’t handle without my trusty Winchester.” He patted his gun affectionately. “So, what brings you all the way out here, Jonesy? Decided to take a holiday from teaching?”

“Not exactly.” Indy threw a furtive glance at his partner, who nodded her encouragement. “Actually, we’re hoping to find some evidence of Atlantis.” No reputable archaeologist would ever admit such a thing, but Indy’s professional record wasn’t exactly spotless, and he didn’t give a damn what Sternhart thought about him one way or the other.

“Evidence is easy, you’re surrounded by it. Proof? Now that’s hard.”

The response immediately pegged him as another

blind zealot on the quest for the Lost Kingdom, just like Heimdall and Costa. Indy dropped his mantle of academic credibility and got down to business. “What can you tell us about Plato’s lost dialogue?”

Suspicion clouded Sternhart’s face. “Why do you want to know about it?”

“One of your colleagues said you were the expert on the subject.”

“I’m the one who translated it, I can tell you that. I’d worry that you were here to steal my last copy, but someone called Mr. Smith beat you to it.”

Sophia looked flabbergasted. “Who’s Mr. Smith?”

Sternhart took some fresh ammunition from his pocket and proceeded to reload his rifle. “He showed up last week, a tall man with a German accent and a pistol. He could have taken all my souvenirs, but he only wanted the book.”

Kerner no doubt, using his customary alias. That confirmed it. The Nazis really were ahead of them, and they had the horned idol and a copy of the *Hermocrates* manuscript. They couldn’t afford to waste anymore time, but there was still the matter of Sophia’s vision about the so-called keeper of the first key. If the SS captain was in a hurry to leave after obtaining the book, then he probably missed it altogether. Kerner might have all the clues, Indy conceded, but the information would be useless without a way to enter Atlantis. Finding the key would give them a critical advantage, and it was up to Sophia to locate it. But first they had to get inside the pyramid.

“What can you tell us about the temple?” Indy asked, hoping to further the cause.

“The locals claimed Mayan Indians built it. Now I

ask you, does this look like the work of primitive savages, or does it seem much too civilized?”

“*Exactly*,” Sophia agreed. “It would be impossible to produce such architectural wonders without the technology of the Atlanteans.” Then she recalled a recent news article about Yucatan archaeology. “Do you know Sylvanus Morley? I read that he was searching for clues about the original inhabitants of this area.”

“That publicity-seeking twit doesn’t know a funerary crypt from a bathtub,” Sternhart snorted contemptibly. “He has this ridiculous notion that inscriptions have more value than the artifacts of a civilization. Well, I’ll be hanged the day he carts a stone mural off to the British Museum. He’s digging at Chichen Itza, if you must know, but I am the one in charge here.”

The list of archaeologists who had worked at Tikal was brief, but distinguished. Frederick Catherwood and John Lloyd Stephens had surveyed and mapped the city in the 17th century, while Alfred P. Maudslay literally wrote the book on Mayan history in his definitive 5-volume *Biologia Centrali-Americana*. However, his most visible contribution to Mesoamerican archaeology was the stunning vistas he’d cleared around Tikal’s main plaza during his 1881 expedition. Sternhart, for all of his pomp and pride, had barely excavated a single pyramid, Indy thought smugly. Unless he uncovered a massive treasure trove, he would be lucky if history gave him a passing glance.

“My work is truly significant,” he boasted for Sophia’s benefit. “I made a thorough survey of the outer casing when we began to uncover it, and there

were no tunnels penetrating the interior. I was the first one to set foot inside of the temple since ancient times.”

In spite of his dislike for the British scholar, Indy was grudgingly impressed. Most of the major well-known sites had been ravaged by greedy looters searching for gold artifacts that could be sold for quick profit. A virgin temple was one in a million. Sternhart was a lucky man indeed.

He gestured to the forested mound looming above them. “How long did it take you to clear off the overgrowth?”

“Nearly four months. We’ve been at it since March, and I say it’s progressing quite nicely. I’d hoped to have it entirely uncovered by the end of summer, but the hurricane put an end to that goal. It passed through just last week and brought my excavation to a complete halt. My workers deserted me and returned to the city to aid the repair effort. Rotten bit of luck, I’m afraid,” he commiserated. “Who knows when the dig will resume?”

“That’s too bad,” Sophia remarked, earning a look of disapproval from Indy.

“Don’t worry, darling. There’s plenty here to keep me busy for quite awhile.” Indy imagined that Sternhart’s spirited optimism concerned Sophia more than his archaeological agenda.

“Can we take a look inside?” she asked.

“But of course. Please follow me.”

Fawning like a schoolgirl, Sophia took his arm and threw Indy a playful wink as the British archaeologist led them around the forested pyramid. A network of splayed roots clung to the mossy base stones like a

pale spider web, anchoring the lowermost trees to the artificial ridge. Sternhart's campsite was set up on the lawn beside the temple. It consisted of a tent village and some work tables clustered around a large central mess tent. Boxes of food and supplies were strewn across the grass where the foraging jaguar had been interrupted. There was also a crude souvenir stand brimming with Mayan paraphernalia.

Sophia picked up a scale miniature pyramid replica with delight. "How cute! Did you make these?"

"Yes, actually. I sell them to help finance my workers' salary. I also have souvenir postcards and mugs, if you're interested."

Indy turned over one of the models and saw a price scrawled on the bottom. "Jungle tourism," he marveled in disbelief. Some people would do anything to make a buck.

"I foresee the day when Tikal will be a thriving tourist destination like Cairo. I am simply capitalizing on the trend."

He surveyed the dense thicket of jungle around them. "Not anytime soon, that's for sure."

"Let's get on with it, then." Sternhart grabbed a lantern and escorted them towards the pyramid.

Darkness closed around them as they passed through the corbeled entrance into the main hall, a long corridor with angled walls that narrowed to a point ten feet overhead. The temperature was noticeably cooler inside the temple, where the ancient stone leached the moisture from the air. The pungent odor of moss filled their nostrils. The trio followed the passage to an L-shaped bend which culminated

in an empty chamber. From there, daylight reached them as a faint blue halo in the outer doorway.

The room had the appearance of a burial crypt from what Indy could see, but there was no sarcophagus, or even a painted mural that commonly adorned most royal Mayan tombs. The place was completely barren. The only decoration was a pair of wave-like designs that ran from floor-to-ceiling in a vertical band, bookends to a blank section of wall at the angle of the passage.

Indy traced a finger along one S-shaped link of the interlocking chain. “Engraved symbols of water and life.”

Sophia surveyed the featureless expanse of limestone in acute disappointment. “This is it?” she balked. The emptiness came as a shock after she had endured so much agony on behalf of Nur-Ab-Sal, who had promised her the key to Atlantis. “I can’t believe this! There’s really nothing here.”

“Well, almost nothing.” Sternhart beckoned them over to a large sculpture hidden in shadow at the far end of the room. His lantern revealed a stylized elephant head with large ears and stunted tusks. Its trunk was missing. There was a slot in the wall between the tusks, indicating the place where the animal’s ubiquitous appendage had been. “What do you think, Dr. Jones?”

“It could be a representation of Ganesh, the Hindu elephant god,” Indy mused. “He was known as the Remover of Obstacles.”

“But of course there are no elephants on *this* side of the ocean,” Sternhart pointed out.

Sophia touched the carving with excitement.

“There were elephants in Atlantis! Remember how Plato wrote about them in the *Critias*?”

“By jove, you’re right! I never made the connection!” Sternhart puzzled at the significance of this new information. “I’ve been here all year, and I couldn’t make heads or tails of this room. It does seem rather strange that a temple of this size and grandeur would serve no apparent purpose, don’t you agree?”

“I do.” Indy peered into the cavity between the tusks. He put his hand inside and felt a smooth, round socket. It wobbled slightly when he pushed down, but he didn’t have the strength or leverage to move it any further. He withdrew his arm and went over to the sculpted wave design for another look. Its shape gave him an idea. Moving from top to bottom, he traced the carving with his fingertips and noticed how the incised motif grew noticeably deeper as the spirals intertwined near the middle of the wall. “Hmm...”

“What is it, Indy?”

“Give me that lantern.” Sternhart obliged. Indy took a rag out of his satchel, unscrewed the fuel reservoir cap and doused the rag in kerosene. Then he rubbed it into the crevice to dissolve the centuries of grime that had accumulated around the wave.

The British archaeologist scratched his chin nervously. “I hope you know what you’re doing.”

“I do now.” Indy unfolded his pocketknife and deftly inserted the blade into the crevice at the edge of the spiral, much to Sternhart’s horror.

“Now hold on a moment, old bean. You can’t possibly—”

Before he could finish, Indy wedged the knife back and forth around the curve of the wave, which lifted a fraction of an inch out of the wall. "Aha!"

Sophia clapped him on the shoulder. "Look!"

Indy methodically traced the wave, chipping away dust and grit until the frieze was defined as a separate piece fitted into the wall. Sternhart quickly added his own hunting knife to the effort. Together the two men carefully pried the heavy stone free and lowered it to the dusty floor of the chamber. Carved from a single piece of limestone, the twisted sculpture measured nearly three feet long, and over four inches thick. Moreover, it seemed to resemble a curved elephant trunk as Indy had suspected.

Charles Sternhart brushed his hands on his shorts. "Brilliant thinking, lad!"

"I bet Ganesh will be happy to have his nose back." Sophia said.

"Then let's not keep him waiting," Indy replied. Sophia helped them pick up the spiral and maneuver it over to the elephant head, wrestling one end of it into the hollow niche between the tusks. Indy pushed in with his shoulder and felt the nub of the stone wave settle into the socket. The sculpture was finally complete after untold centuries. They stood back to admire their teamwork.

"What happens now?" Sternhart wondered aloud.

Sophia stepped forward confidently. "I know." She crouched under the elephant head and used her shoulder to raise the trunk, pushing it from vertical to horizontal.

They heard the muted click of a hidden mechanism, followed by an ominous grinding sound. A

section of the wall rumbled open directly across the passage, sliding upward to reveal a hidden chamber within. Lying prone on its back was a robed skeleton wearing an elaborate silver crown engraved with the same running spiral design that adorned the outer walls of the crypt. The remains featured knobby protrusions on the wrists, misshapen teeth, and stunted horns growing from its forehead; a hideously deformed parody of a human being. Strips of reddish leather were tightly wrapped around the malformed appendages. The exposed bones were covered in a furry moss-like texture.

“Bless my soul, the tomb of an Atlantean king!” the site director gushed jubilantly.

“Oh my God!” Sophia leaned into the tomb, her green eyes sparkling with the wonder of discovery. She pointed to an object clenched in the corpse’s bony hand. “We found it! I can’t believe we really found it! Nur-Ab-Sal was right!”

“Let me see that.” Sternhart carefully pried open the skeletal fingers to retrieve a flat, circular stone. Indy pushed the lantern closer to illuminate the artifact.

“What is it?”

“It’s a small stone disk with images of land and sea engraved on it. I do believe it’s a worldstone!”

Indy reached into the alcove and touched the femur bone, rubbing his fingers together as cinnamon ash trickled between them. “Calcium,” he mumbled. “This guy must be at least five thousand years old.”

“Impossible. This is a Pre-Classic tomb, Dr. Jones, therefore it cannot be any older than 1,800 B.C.,” Sternhart declared adamantly.

“Tell that to *him*. The growth rate of calcium is something like six millimeters per year, I think.”

“Gosh, it gives me the creeps.” Sophia prodded the crusty leg and then quickly wiped her hands on her pants. “Why are the bones red like that, Indy?”

“Paleolithic tribes used red paint to confer immortality on an important person. Red is the traditional color of life. It became a mummification ritual in absence of actual mummification, which didn’t develop until much later in history.”

“You mean like reincarnation?”

“Sort of.”

“Wait. There’s something else. Look,” she said, pointing to the back of the tomb.

The lantern spilled its orange glow over the wall to reveal an inscription etched into the moldy stone behind the grotesque skeleton. The shadowy characters moved under the wavering flame, dancing back and forth in the light. Indy pushed back the crown of his hat for a better view. The script resembled Mayan, but appeared to be a stylized form that he’d never seen before, a curious mix of Itza’ and something vaguely Sahidic.

“Can you read it?”

“Maybe with a little help from Nur-Ab-Sal,” Indy said dryly.

“Leave that to me.”

The redhead leaned into the secret crypt and pressed her hands to the wall. Closing her eyes, she moved her hands over the characters and felt the ancient script with her fingertips. Her brow furrowed in concentration. Her lips moved silently, but she did not speak for a long moment. Then she began re-

citing the ancient words in monotone, like the full-trance medium that she professed to be.

“Azatlán will live on, past fallen cities and wars that overthrow the mighty empires of the earth, beyond civilizations stomped into the dust of history, reborn in the dreams of our descendants, and returned to its former glory. Time... is the seed of the universe.”

“That’s from the *Mahabharata*,” Indy said in bewilderment. “What is a Hindu inscription doing in a Mayan tomb?”

“You have me there,” Sternhart admitted.

When Sophia Hapgood turned back to her companions, her face was damp with perspiration. “I told you, everything is connected to Atlantis.” She jabbed a finger at the engraving on the wall. “*There’s* your proof, Mr. Sternhart.”

“Sorry, but I’m afraid I’ll need a little more,” he said, pulling a gun on them.

Indy felt like he’d been punched in the stomach. “What are you doing?”

“I know some chaps who are rather keen to get their hands on this piece.” He pocketed the world-stone and aimed the gun at Sophia. “I’ll have your necklace, as well.”

A wave of anger surged through Indy when he noticed the Walther P-38 in Sternhart’s grip. His hand flew to his holster, but froze as the Englishman primed his pistol with a sharp click. “Not so fast. Put down your gun and don’t try anything foolish. Nobody has to get hurt here.”

Smarting from the unexpected betrayal, Indy placed the Webley on the floor and backed away several steps. “How much are the Nazis paying you?” he

snarled.

“You can’t put a price on self-preservation, Jonesy, but it’s a substantial amount I can assure you.” He twitched his fingers in Sophia’s direction. “Now my dear, if you would be so kind.”

She covered her pendant protectively. “*No...*”

“Give it to him,” Indy ordered.

“But Indy!”

“*Now.*”

She reluctantly lifted the chain from her neck with the pouty expression of a child relinquishing her doll to a scolding parent. Her visible anguish stoked Indy’s outrage to the limit. He couldn’t let this happen to Sophia because he knew the loss of her prized necklace would be like raping her soul. Sternhart stepped forward anxiously to claim his prize when Indy unfurled the bullwhip and cast it towards him in a fluid arc. The leather hissed through the ancient gloom like a sinuous bullet, slashing the Briton’s face with a livid red stripe. Sternhart dropped his pistol with a sharp howl of pain, and covered his bleeding face. Indy kicked the gun away into the shadows.

“Give me the stone.”

Suddenly the temple began to shake. The floor rumbled below their feet. Dust rained from the ceiling above. An ominous grinding emanated somewhere deep within the core of the pyramid, a sound that rippled the cool air like slush. The swatch of pale daylight flickered in the doorway as a stone panel began to descend over it, an ancient safeguard to insure that the king’s treasure would not be taken by an unworthy intruder. Charles Sternhart stared at the necklace dangling from Sophia’s hand, caught

between the goal of his mission and the desire to escape with his life.

Then everything happened at once.

He made a frantic dash for the corridor and nearly collided with the green parrot that winged its way into the room, squawking in alarm. Startled by the bird, Sternhart stumbled back and tripped over his own feet, landing on the floor. He dove towards the hallway and hastily scrambled under the trap with only inches to spare.

Indy arrived just as the slab closed firmly against the floor, sealing them inside of the chamber with the parrot. He pounded his fist on the wall. "Damn it!"

All at once, the tremor stopped. Everything was silent. The only light came from the oil lamp which had been abandoned by the duplicitous archaeologist. Perched on the head of the elephant statue, the parrot fluffed its wings restlessly in the darkness. Sophia rubbed her face in agitation. She couldn't believe her luck. It was bad enough to be trapped inside the pyramid with no hope of escape, but now she was imprisoned with that damned bird.

"This is *not* happening."

"Unfortunately it is." Indy said, re-coiling his whip. He snapped it to his belt and retrieved his Webley from the floor. He raised the lantern, scanning the walls. Moving from one corner to another, he ran his hands over the damp stone, searching every surface in the room with keen attention.

"What are you looking for?"

"Another way out. These places usually have

more than one exit, just in case the builders ever got trapped inside a tomb of their own making. We just have to find it.”

“*Find it!*” repeated the parrot.

“Then why not start with the most obvious place?” The psychic took two quick steps to the elephant statue and deftly swatted the bird, which abandoned its roost and flapped around the room, bumping off the ceiling above them. Sophia pushed the elephant nose back to its original position and the crypt slid shut. Then she bumped it a notch further using her hip. There was a muffled ratcheting sound as a new door opened in the wall adjacent to the sealed exit where Sternhart had escaped. The parrot winged for the hallway and vanished through the door.

Indy tipped his fedora, admiring her ingenuity. “I knew there was a reason I liked you.”

“Just get me out of here and I might give you a few more,” Sophia said suggestively.

Indy smiled, intrigued. “Is that a promise?”

“We’ll see.”

She was about leave with him when a bright glimmer on the floor caught her eye. Indy watched her kneel and pick up the tiny object. She held the familiar red bead up to the lantern and watched it gleam in the firelight. “Orichalcum. It must have fallen out of the tomb. We may need it later.” She dropped it into her breast pocket and followed Indiana Jones deeper into the Atlantean pyramid.



9

## TRAPPED!

The crash of stone reverberated in the tunnel with a bone-jarring thud. They whirled in surprise as the doorway suddenly vanished behind a massive granite slab, and they were engulfed in a cloud of dust.

“No!” Sophia slapped her palms against the monolithic barrier. But it was too late. The door was closed forever, and there was no chance of going back.

“You didn’t know that was going to happen?” Indy said with smug condescension. “I thought you were a psychic.”

“I’m only as psychic as Nur-Ab-Sal wants me to be. I never said I could predict the future.”

In that moment, Indy felt like punching Ignatius Donnelly in the face. If the Minnesota congressman hadn’t written that infernal book that influenced Sophia Hapgood as an impressionable young student, she might be a legitimate archaeologist now, rather

than a mystic on the quest for Atlantis, and they wouldn't be trapped inside of a pyramid in the sweltering Guatemalan jungle.

"Terrific." He adjusted the lantern to burn brighter. "All right, stay behind me, and don't touch anything. We have to find a way out of here."

"Spare me the sarcasm, Jones. The Atlanteans were a peaceful society. This isn't some booby-trapped temple in a Republic serial, you know."

"Really?" He rapped a fist on the enormous stone block that sealed the portal behind them. "Are you sure about that?"

Sophia crossed her arms. "Okay, smart guy. You have a point."

"I'm serious. This isn't a game."

Caution governed every step as Indy led the way down the narrow tunnel. He swept the lantern back and forth, looking for any signs of a trap. The walls were hewn from enormous stone slabs, fitted together with razor-like precision, and spaced closely enough that he could almost touch both sides at once. The inner passage was in pristine condition compared to the pyramid's crumbling exterior, and that worried him because it meant that any arcane security precautions would be in good working order. Indy wasn't fooled by the primitive design. He'd been through enough death-riddled tombs in his career to know that things were never as simple as they looked.

In locations from South America to India, he'd seen the lethal defense mechanisms employed by the ancients to safeguard their most valuable treasures. There were a thousand gruesome ways to die, and the next unwary step could be a man's last. Survival

often depended on quick reflexes and a keen sense of intuition. Sometimes he could anticipate the horrific trials they devised. Other times, he couldn't. He was lucky, but they still managed to surprise him.

The silence was disrupted by a frantic rustling noise as the parrot careened down the hallway in search of a way out.

"Do you think we're really trapped in here?" Sophia's voice bounced off the walls with a hollow ring.

"Not if we can find a passage to the top."

"How do you know there's a way out?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't. But I'm counting on it. We need to get out of here and find the Lost Dialogue before the Nazis get too far ahead of us."

"I'm glad to see that you're finally coming around."

"Yeah, well I can't argue with proof etched into the wall of a 5000-year-old sealed crypt."

"Hey, what's that?" Sophia pointed ahead, where a thousand tiny dewdrops glittered in the hallway like gems on a sheet of black velvet. Indy pushed the lantern forward as they drew closer, but the darkness refused to give up its secrets until they were nearly on top of the spot. He spun and tackled Sophia just before the floor split open like an inverted drawbridge, falling away beneath them.

In that instant of panic, Indy grabbed her around the waist with one arm, while the other—holding the lantern—shot out to grasp the edge. He nearly lost his grip when the trapdoor slammed roughly into the ground. Hanging from the steep incline, Indy glanced over the collar of his leather jacket and saw rows of razor-thin obsidian knives meticulously stag-

gered down the length of the 10-foot drop. In a diabolical feat of engineering, the blades were oriented edgewise to present a nearly invisible profile in the darkness.

A loose pebble fell into the pit with a metallic plink, disturbing a sheet of glittering sand that covered the bottom. The smooth white powder stippled into a grid of geometric pinpricks. Indy shuddered. An unwary trespasser would be flayed to bloody ribbons on the ancient razor slide, and then deposited onto a salt bed lined with iron nails to suffer an agonizingly painful death.

Sophia twisted her body, trying to shake him free. “Get off me!”

“Stop moving!” Indy struggled to maintain his grip on the thrashing woman.

“*Ow!* Your purse buckle is digging into my back!”

“It’s a satchel,” he hissed into her ear. “Hurry up and grab the ledge!”

She reached up and curled her fingers over the protruding stone slab. Indy released her and quickly grabbed on with his other hand. The lantern burned his wrist, but his sleeve protected his arm from the worst of the heat. He felt the shape of Sophia’s body pressed below him, smelled the scent of her sweat-soaked hair.

“We’ll have to do this again sometime without the spikes,” he suggested.

The redhead tensed like a bristling cat. “If you don’t move *right now*—” she warned. Indy quickly redistributed his weight and eased over. Sophia scowled at him. “That was some cheap trick, Jones. You’ll do anything for a thrill, won’t you?”

“Can it, sweetheart. I just saved you from your peace-loving Atlanteans. Check out their welcome mat.” He directed her attention to the legion of razorblades gleaming just below their heels.

Sophia looked over at Indy, her ashen face riddled with guilt. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

The archaeologist managed a humorless grin beneath the brim of his fedora that was mashed against the wall. “Don’t worry about it. You still owe me a couple more reasons, remember?”

She smiled in spite of their predicament. Indy always did look on the bright side. “Okay, I *definitely* owe you now.”

“Great, now let’s get the hell out of here so we can settle up.”

“Sounds good to me.”

Grunting with effort, Indy pulled himself up and eased over the edge until he was sitting on the hallway floor. He set the lantern down and quickly hauled Sophia out of the pit while the parrot flew easily across and perched on the wall above them.

“*Hermocrates, a friend of Socrates! Bawwk!*”

Sophia threw Indy a weary glance. “Remind me to kill you if we get out of here alive.”

He surveyed the black razors and crystalline sand at the bottom of the pit. In all his years of adventure, Indy had never seen such a nasty trap. What was it protecting? Was there something else in the pyramid besides the king’s tomb waiting to be discovered? He looked across the gulf, where fifteen feet of deadly space separated them from the rest of the floor. The passage beyond was obscured in a veil of black fog. There were no wooden beams to snare with his bull-

whip. No easy way across.

Sophia bit her fingernails nervously. "Any ideas?"

"I'm working on it." The parrot suddenly flapped its wings, drawing his attention to its perch on a narrow sill above them. The ledge ran the length of the hallway, and provided the only way to traverse the deadly razor pit. Sophia fidgeted anxiously. Her composure had been reduced to a spastic bundle of nerves after being trapped inside the booby-trapped tunnel. If she panicked, there was no telling what she might do. They had to keep moving.

Indy set the lantern down. "Are you ready to get some fresh air?"

"God, yes."

"Then turn around," he said, spinning her to face the wall. Before she could protest, he crouched down and grabbed her around the hips, then lifted her up.

"What are you doing?!"

"Getting us out of here. Just like you wanted. Grab onto that ledge."

She traced the path of the narrow lip until it vanished into the darkness mid-way across the pit. Then it suddenly dawned on her what he had in mind. "Are you trying to get us killed? We can't do that! Indy, put me down!"

"Put your toes on the bricks," he said, struggling to keep her steady.

The parrot flapped its wings uneasily as Sophia reached for the stone outcropping. She took a swipe at it. "Shoo! Get out of here!" The green bird flew off to escape her vindictive attack.

With her weight distributed between the wall and the ledge, Indy put his hands on Sophia's bottom and

pushed her closer to the ceiling.

She glanced back at him, smiling. "See anything you like down there?"

"Maybe if I had some more light," he confessed. The lantern was still resting on the floor by his feet.

"Hmm, that's too bad."

Sophia pulled herself up until she was hanging by her fingertips. The stone was in perfect condition. It felt solid and capable of supporting her weight. Indy watched from below as she carefully slid one hand along the sill, testing the method that would carry her across the pit.

"Good. Now try each handhold before you move, and whatever you do, don't look down. I'm coming up next."

He secured the lantern to his belt and jumped up to catch the slim vestibule jutting from the wall. Then, toting three pounds of British steel on his waist, along with the heavy kerosene lamp, Indy began to follow her over the pit.

The redhead inched along with deliberate slowness. To counteract her rising panic, she stared at the texture of the ancient limestone, inches from her face, acutely aware of the ebony razors gleaming in the faint sphere of lantern light. Her muscles quivered like rubber. Her arms felt like they were on fire. Salty sweat burned her eyes, but she couldn't wipe them without losing her grip. One wrong move and she was dead.

"I'm going to kill that miserable bastard..." she huffed, sidling along the rim.

Indy grappled his way closer. "Sternhart? What did you see in him, anyway?" he asked, remembering how

she'd flirted shamelessly with the British explorer.

"Charm," she replied without hesitation.

"What, I'm not handsome enough for you?"

Sophia put a little more distance between them.

"You're a different kind of handsome, Indy."

"Thanks. That makes me feel better."

A piece of the ledge suddenly broke free with a sharp *crack!*—a sound that was like a cold knife in her belly—and Sophia plummeted into the terrible jaws waiting to swallow her up in the darkness below.

White hot pain scraped her chest like a fiery rake when she struck the edge of the pit and folded over. She kicked her legs frantically, her boot tips skimming the razorblades while she scabbled to grasp the floor seam. Just as she was sliding backwards, Sophia deftly plunged her fingers into the crevice, that shallow canyon of salvation, and held on for dear life. Indy hurriedly spanned the rest of the sill, avoiding the broken gap, dropped to the floor and quickly pulled her to safety.

"It's okay, sweetheart. I've got you now. Everything's okay," he soothed, holding her close while Sophia trembled uncontrollably.

She felt his rough whiskers on her face, smelled the musky odor of his cologne mixed with sweat, and burrowed her head into his leather jacket. There was no safer place to be in the world. After a moment Sophia pulled back with a look of sudden, wistful longing. Indy closed his eyes in anticipation, but the kiss never happened.

"Indy, look! I see a light over there!" She pointed to a group of orange spots hovering in the distance. "Maybe it's the way out!"

The archaeologist sighed with disappointment. “Be careful,” he called after her. “That light at the end of a tunnel is usually a train.”

“Don’t worry. Nur-Ab-Sal says it’s not a trap.”

“I don’t *trust* Nur-Ab-Sal,” he muttered irritably, peeved at the ancient spirit for ruining another intimate moment with Sophia.

He found her at the end of the hallway, confronting a wall decorated with nine circular mirrors that were arranged in three parallel rows. The silvery glass reflected the lantern light and scattered their image across its various faces: A swatch of brown leather, a curl of red hair, the crown of Indy’s hat.

Sophia positioned herself so that her pendant appeared in the central mirror, and spread her arms in supplication.

“Nur-Ab-Sal is a mighty king, and his eyes see through!”

The parrot flapped around in circles overhead. “*A mighty king! Awwk!*”

The pendant’s eyes flickered green, and the stone barrier dropped into the floor to reveal the next chamber. The parrot immediately flew through the opening with a delighted whistle. Anticipating another trap, Indy grabbed Sophia by the belt and hauled her back before she could follow. The whole temple shook with a deafening crash, like an oversize train rocketing through a narrow tunnel. They were blown off their feet by a powerful rush of air that exploded from the passage, and a gut-wrenching tremor that knocked them senseless.

They sat up, dazed, amid a snowstorm of green feathers. Indy touched his ear, felt blood on his fin-

gers. A kaleidoscope of colors swirled in his vision. *What the hell just happened?* He fumbled for a bright orange blur nearby, and grabbed the lantern before any of the fuel spilled out.

Sophia picked up a feather and regarded it with disdain. “Good riddance.”

A cool blue aura filtered through the doorway. Indy crawled forward and cautiously peered into the room to see a cavernous space defined by weak light streaming through a series of holes along its lower walls. They were the same ones he’d seen from the outside, now free of the choking vines. Indy guessed that they had reached the center of the pyramid, but its hollow core was a completely unique design feature, unheard of in traditional Mayan architecture where newer temples were built over the older, more primitive ones.

“Indy, look at *this...*” He brought the lantern to the middle of the cavern, where a wonderstruck Sophia stood gazing at a thick metal column that rose from the floor and vanished into the darkness.

The beam was sandwiched between a pair of carriage-sized bronze wheels that were countersunk into the floor. Each one was rimmed with gear teeth that neatly interlocked with a knurled channel in the sides of the column. They were joined by their spindles to a large housing that embraced the pillar. Indy was dumbstruck by the anachronistic device. It looked like something that might have been produced during the Industrial Revolution, not by the ancient Maya.

Maybe Sophia really *was* onto something. When he stopped to consider it, the Mayans were a good candidate for the descendants of an advanced civiliza-

tion, given their sudden rise from Neolithic obscurity into a full-fledged society of unparalleled scientific brilliance. The only comparable example of such spontaneous cultural development was the Egyptian, which sprang to life in its first two dynasties. What were the odds that each independent culture, separated by half a globe and several thousand years, shared a common ancestor? At the moment Indy had more questions than answers, and it was not a situation that he enjoyed on a quest of such magnitude.

“Do you know what this is?” Sophia said, pointing to a horned face on the control panel that was identical to her pendant.

“Probably another trap,” Indy predicted. “Be careful.”

She fed an orichalcum bead into the open mouth. The tiny eyes gleamed red and the floor heaved with a metallic groan, like the death cry of some prehistoric beast. They were thrown to their knees as the ancient wheels of the mechanism chewed into the bronze column. A large square platform lifted from the floor and climbed into the darkness, taking them with it.

“It’s an Atlantean elevator!” she cried over the noise of prehistoric gears ratcheting together in a coppery blur.

“I thought Mr. Otis invented the elevator!” he shouted back.

She laughed with delight as they hurtled blindly through the void in a terrifying rush of euphoria. Indy pulled her down beside the control panel, afraid that they would be crushed against the roof of the pyramid. The odor of burning metal singed

their nostrils moments before a fiery spray of sparks erupted from the wheels. A sharp jolt wracked the platform. Sophia cried out in terror as it suddenly listed to one side, scraping the walls and raining a shower of fire into the black abyss.

They were thrown to the floor when the ancient elevator came to an abrupt halt in the middle of a small stone room. "Move! Go!" Indy shoved her ahead roughly, and they tumbled off of the lift just as the metal spire shattered like a piece of brittle glass. The platform vanished in a cloud of rust, and fell for a brief eternity before crashing in a thunderous heap at the bottom of the 200-foot shaft.

Indy peered over the side, looked back at her. "Let's take the stairs next time."

"N-no kidding," Sophia stammered.

A faint buzzing sound came through a rectangular doorway covered in a screen of thick vines. Beyond the foliage they could see the dim glow of the evening sky. Sophia shoved past Indy and wiggled through the curtain of vegetation, eager to get out of the pyramid. He was about to follow when he noticed something etched into the lintel above the doorway. He raised the lantern and saw the peculiar, omnipresent running spiral design, luring them onward.

Daylight was a memory in the sky when Indy emerged from the pyramid at dusk. Its overgrown summit was covered with trees and plants, a green plateau floating above the sea of endless jungle stretching across the horizon. The buzz of arboreal insects filled the night. Sophia stood atop the western stairway, basking in the last rays of sunlight. She fingered her pendant,

muttering to herself.

He touched her shoulder. "Hey. Are you okay?"

"I can't believe I almost died in there," she said quietly. "My life nearly ended."

"Do you still think it's worth it?"

She looked at him, appalled. "We *can't* quit! If the Atlanteans couldn't handle their own power without destroying themselves, what will happen when the Nazis get hold of it? We have to find Atlantis before they do. We are not giving up."

"I never said we were. Do remember that spiral design in the king's chamber?" Indy described the scrollwork he'd just seen over the door lintel, and how the motif matched the designs on the other artifacts, forming a tangible link to this unknown culture that he'd never encountered before.

Sophia nodded, pleased that he was beginning to see the truth. She pointed to the nose on her medallion. "That's the symbol for Atlantis. The waves signify its nautical heritage and naval dominion. We should find the running spiral at every Atlantean colony that we visit, but first we need the Lost Dialogue to help locate them."

The pieces of the puzzle were starting to fall into place. While he certainly wasn't about to base the validity of her claim on some old copper artifacts, Indy had seen too much evidence to dismiss her theories out-of-hand. He was confident that they were on the right trail. Whether it would lead them to Atlantis remained to be seen, but Sophia was right. Once they found that book, they would have the answers they needed to continue the quest. Or at least he hoped so.

Indy shook off the reverie when he noticed how dark it was. "Come on. Let's get moving while we can still see our way down."

He took her hand and together they carefully descended the steep stairway on the excavated side of the pyramid. Halfway to the bottom, gunfire shattered the evening tranquility. Bullets punched into the limestone masonry, stinging them with flying rock chips. Indy pulled Sophia onto the nearest rampart and ducked beside the staircase. He doused the lantern.

There was a pause in the strafing. "*Guten Tag*, Herr Jones! So nice of you to join us this evening. We were getting anxious that our prize might have been lost. And here you are, just in time to deliver it to us."

"What prize?" he yelled back.

"The necklace, of course. Do you still have it?"

Indy pulled his gun out. "Yeah, I've got it right here!" He aimed over the staircase and blasted off a few shots until the hammer fell on an empty chamber.

Standing in the plaza below, the gunman leveled his weapon up the slope of the pyramid and fired again, briefly revealing his position by the flash of the muzzle. Sophia covered her ears against the noisy gunfire. "Who on earth would be shooting at us?" she said frantically.

"It's our friends from Iceland."

"You mean those two ushers who attacked you in New York?"

"They're Nazi agents working for Kerner," Indy said, breaking open his gun to reload. The spent cartridges were automatically discharged by the star-

shaped extractor, and clinked against the stone like tiny bells. He dug into his satchel for a speed loader and plugged six fresh bullets into the Webley's cylinder, then snapped the revolver shut. He paused uncertainly. The air was suddenly quiet. Too quiet. The Nazis had stopped shooting. Indy cautiously peered over the serpent banister, but couldn't see anything in the overwhelming blackness.

"Jones!" The shooter called out from the base of the pyramid. "Give us the necklace and we will let you live!"

*Yeah, right*, Indy scowled. "Since when did you guys become so reasonable?" he shouted back at his invisible enemy.

"Since it is too dark for me to shoot you now," Torsten replied matter-of-factly.

Indy knew that he was right. It was pitch black, and they were now just voices in the dark. He holstered his gun. "Well that's considerate!"

"Now throw down the necklace, please."

Sophia clutched his arm with a look of scathing intensity. "Don't you *dare*!"

"I wasn't," he argued.

"Fräulein Hapgood! Surely you value your life over a piece of old jewelry? Under the circumstances, it would be best for you to comply, since you are in such an unfortunate position."

"If you want it so bad, then why don't you come up here and get it?" challenged Indy.

"Because I lack both the time and the patience. Now you have one last chance. Give me the necklace or die." Torsten paused, smiling in the darkness. "Though it *would* be a shame to waste your lovely

companion before I enjoy the pleasure of her company.”

“Your mother!” Indy pointed the Webley in the direction of the Nazi’s smug voice and emptied the gun into the sea of blackness, hoping to hit the sadistic bastard.

The German laughed. “Your aim is terrible, Dr. Jones! I think maybe you could use a little more light. Here, let me help you.”

From the bottom of the staircase they saw a small flicker of flame. The flash was bright enough to reveal a pair of hands holding a lantern with a rag sticking out of the fuel reservoir.

“Oh *shit*,” Indy cursed as the Nazi hurled the firebomb at the temple.

The glass globe shattered against the stone with a tremendous *whoosh!* and a gigantic ball of orange light stunned the inky blackness. The flames spread across the vine-covered pyramid in a sheet of liquid fire, devouring the ancient behemoth. Indiana Jones snared Sophia by the arm and fled along the terrace to outrun the heatwave that incinerated the air like a broiler oven. The roaring flames lit the courses of the pyramid in sharp relief, throwing a writhing serpent shadow on the side of the staircase in an impromptu equinox. Bullets raked the stone steps as the Nazis opened fire on their newly-illuminated targets.

The temple surged with movement. Wildlife poured from the blazing slopes like water from a compressed sponge as animals abandoned the thick vegetation. Bats squealed from the raging inferno amid the smoke and glowing ashes that flickered like fireflies in the night sky. Coatis and howler monkeys

scampered away in panic, bounding helter-skelter down the mountain of fire while the Nazis hosed the pyramid with bullets. Insects and snakes crawled through the burning flora, desperate to escape the flames.

They ran flat-out for the end of the pyramid, oblivious to the gunfire and terrified animals. Sophia coughed in the thick, acrid smoke that choked their lungs. Her throat hurt, and she could hardly breathe. She stumbled, scraping her knee on the rough stone, but Indy dragged her around the corner and plunged into the jungle: a vertical black wilderness untouched by the hellish blaze. High above them, the temple's burning roofcomb pierced the night sky like a flaming dagger. They ran through the tangled lush, meandering along the stepped courses while the foliage hissed and popped in the distance.

"Watch your step," Indy advised as they sprinted for the broken stairway.

The fire suddenly crested over the pyramid, bathing the western face of the temple in vivid orange light. The flames rushed down the other side in a roaring tidal wave. They tore recklessly through the thick trees, tripping over roots that snaked over the broken stone ledge until they reached the broad staircase, which was relatively open, with only a few trees growing on it. Indy and Sophia descended the burning pyramid in the shadow of the flaming avalanche. They reached the ground and ran across the plaza for the jungle.

Sophia focused Indy's shape in the darkness, intent on keeping him in sight. Suddenly a fiery pain ringed

her torso and Indy vanished as the ground swallowed her. She landed hard on her back, stunned. She lay gasping for breath as bright stars swam before her eyes. Dazed, she sat up and found herself in a small room with stone walls. A large cockroach scurried up the damp, moss-covered walls. Flickering orange light rimmed the contour of a round hole in the ceiling, one of the chultuns that Indy warned her about. She gingerly touched her sore ribs. It hurt badly, and she didn't know if she could climb out of the pit.

The hissing flames grew louder as the fire swept into the jungle. Sophia knew that she had to get out of there before she was burned alive. She was reaching for the hole when she saw something move above. Was it Indy or the Nazis? She called out for help. Her cry was answered by a feral growl. Her blood turned to ice when she saw the golden eyes of a jaguar peering through the entrance. Startled, she scrambled back into the chamber, which extended about 10 feet into the bedrock. The big cat dropped into the hole with graceful ease. It hissed at her, baring its fangs.

The jaguar flexed its claws out, preparing for the kill. A low growl rumbled in its throat. Sophia pressed her back against the wall in fright. It was steeled to pounce when a burst of ruby light scathed the passage, startling the cat. Its ears flattened in response. The eyes of her pendant were ablaze. The jaguar froze uncertainly, mesmerized by the spirit of Nur-Ab-Sal. There was a quick movement from above. A loud blast shattered the calm. The jaguar's head snapped violently to the side, and it collapsed in a heap. Indy's familiar brown fedora appeared behind it. Crouching by the hole, he pushed back the brim

with the barrel of his smoking Webley.

“Are you okay?”

“Indy! Thank goodness it’s you. I thought I was catnip.”

“Not tonight, hon. Now let’s get out of here.” He dropped his bullwhip into the cenote and braced himself while she climbed the braided lash. He took her by the wrist and pulled her out.

She threw her arms around him tightly. “Thanks, Indy!”

“Anytime.”

Sophia looked around with sudden concern. She could see Sternhart’s campsite ablaze in the distance, but the fire hadn’t crossed the plaza into the jungle yet. “Where did the Nazis go?”

“I guess they didn’t stick around. Probably figured we were done for.” But Indy had a more important question on his mind. “Why is everyone so interested in your necklace?”

“They think it will lead them to Atlantis. But it won’t.”

He took her by the hand, and they began to walk. “Why not?”

“Because I am the vessel for Nur-Ab-Sal. He can only manifest himself through me, so the necklace is useless by itself.”

“Well, considering that Hitler’s Secret Scouts are on the case, it must be a top drawer priority in Berlin,” Indy surmised. “We have to find that book, and fast.”

“I think they failed to earn their merit badges in fire safety,” she joked sourly. “Maybe we could wire Marcus Brody to find the Lost Dialogue and mail it

to us. That would save us some time.”

“Marcus isn’t the best person for finding things,” Indy confessed. “But I’ll send him a telegram to let him know that we’re coming home.”



10

## FORTUNE-TELLING

“I know it has to be around here somewhere,” said Marcus Brody, patting down the front of his suit jacket.

Sophia Hapgood adjusted her gold pince-nez glasses with a frustrated sigh while the elderly curator searched his pockets for the key to the archive room on the second floor of Caswell Hall. She was trying hard to maintain her patience, but they were running out of time. They couldn’t proceed without Sternhart’s book, the long-lost *Hermocrates* manuscript, which hopefully would reveal the location of the Lost City. The longer they spent searching for it, the closer Kerner and the Nazis would come to finding Atlantis. The archaeological discovery of the era was at stake, and they couldn’t even get into the library!

“Ah, there it is. I knew I had it!” Brody announced triumphantly, producing the key from his breast

pocket. He jabbed it into the lock upside-down, and fumbled to make it fit.

Sophia coughed impatiently. It was all she could do to keep from grabbing the key and unlocking the door herself. Indy gave her a stern look of rebuke.

“Oh, Dr. Jones! Professor Jones!” They turned at the excited voice and saw a well-dressed young lady running down the hallway, waving frantically at them. The pretty co-ed came to an abrupt stop in front of Indy, her shoulder-length brown hair swirling around her face. She brushed her bangs back and smiled sheepishly. “Professor Jones, I’ve been looking all over for you!”

“Hi, Kathleen. Nice to see you again,” he said pleasantly.

“Gee, you sure look dandy today!” she beamed with unalloyed admiration. She hugged a clipboard to her chest and twisted from side to side like a giddy schoolgirl. Indy blinked in surprise, disoriented by the strong scent of rose water perfume that washed over him. She must have poured the whole bottle on herself, he thought. “Why uh... thank you,” he smiled uncertainly.

After more than a week traveling abroad, Indy was glad to be back in his clean-shaven professional mode, dressed in a beige tweed suit, glossy bal-oxford patent leather shoes, and black wire-frame glasses. Meanwhile, Sophia had gratefully shed her field clothes for a conservative pastel V-neck blouse with an orange jacket, a yellow thigh-length skirt, and stiletto heel pumps. Her ovoid spectacles and neatly-pinned hairstyle reminded Indy of a librarian. He found the look oddly attractive.

Brody frowned at the impetuous student. “Now Miss Marc, Professor Jones is busy with some very important work, and he really cannot afford any interruptions.”

“Oh, I only have a few questions this time, Dr. Brody, I promise.”

“It’s okay, Marcus. She’s not bothering me.”

“Thank you, Dr. Jones!” The student’s inquisitive blue eyes sparkled happily. Her voice was cheerful and melodious, a sound of pure joy.

Kathleen Marc had a cherubic face with a broad forehead, prominent eyebrows, and a dainty button of a nose. She was impeccably attired in a long-sleeved gray dress with a squared neckline framed by rhinestone pins. A beret was folded over her dark brown bangs at a jaunty angle.

Indy knew the petite co-ed well. Not because she was the head reporter for the *Barnett Bugle*, but because she had an intense crush on him. She was a familiar face around the archaeology department, despite being a journalism major. She always found reasons to visit Indy during office hours, and freely volunteered to run errands and generally help out in any way possible. While some of his colleagues considered her behavior disturbing, Indy found it amusing. He’d had his share of female admirers over the years, but Kathleen Marc was by far the most persistent.

Some students gave their favorite professors small store-bought gifts for the holidays, but Kathy presented him lavish, handmade cards adorned with archaeology-inspired motifs. Last year he’d received a birthday card written in Sanskrit and a Christmas card composed in Arabic. To her credit, the text was

completely accurate. Indy was impressed because her attention to detail showed more effort than some of his own students put forth in class. Another time she decorated his entire office in roses for teacher appreciation week, much to the jealousy of several girls who'd placed a single flower bashfully on his desk. Indy was surprised when Kathy didn't change her study major to archaeology, but she was firmly devoted to a career in journalism. She promised that as long as he continued making incredible archaeological discoveries, she would report them. He was also certain that she was completely serious about being his biographer someday.

"Well, if you insist." Brody finally managed to open the door. "Yes. Right this way, Miss Hapgood, Miss Marc. Please watch your step, because it's a bit untidy in here."

"And you don't have tenure," Indy reminded Sophia, who gave him a predictably withering expression in return.

Marcus flipped a switch, and banks of fluorescent lights revealed the length of the sixty-foot hall.

The archive room of Barnett College was part library and part warehouse, a jumbled chaos of history. Skulls, pots, and bowls were crammed into odd niches on the dusty shelves that held the university's collection of historical documents. The floor was cluttered with stacks of books piled haphazardly amid crates of surplus relics. Indy gazed across the room, awed by the sheer volume of material. It would take a month for even a cursory inventory of the place, he estimated. He drew the blinds open to allow more light in. Taking his cue, Kathleen traipsed over to the

far end of the room and worked her way back towards him. Soon, a curtain of warm golden sunlight streamed in through the windows, warming the stale books. The odor of aged paper filled the air, tantalizing the imagination with long-forgotten knowledge that would reveal the secrets of the past for anyone bold enough to search for them.

Brody fanned the dusty air. "I'm afraid there hasn't been a proper inventory in about fifteen years. So please excuse the mess."

The expansive archive which had been so carefully maintained in the early days of the college now resembled a rummage sale, since there was no longer a dedicated archivist. Indy had spent hours searching the neglected storage rooms of Caswell Hall whenever he required relics to augment his lectures.

The collections of contributors like Dunlop, Sprague, Ward, and Pearce, had been stored away since the golden age of the university, when wealthy benefactors funded digs all over the world. But those days were long gone. The funding dwindled between the Great War and the stock market crash of '29. Now nobody had the cash to spare for the frivolous pursuit of sending scholars around the globe to search for the dusty relics of history. Indy didn't blame them. How could they afford to be so charitable when their own society was laboring under the shadow of the Great Depression? The glory days, much like the artifacts here, belonged in a museum.

Kathleen picked up a life-like statue of Bast, the Egyptian cat goddess, perched precariously on the edge of a crate. "Dr. Brody, do you believe museums are legitimate repositories of cultural artifacts even

if the items have been procured by less than noble measures?”

“Well, that’s quite a socially-conscious question. The university takes great pride in upholding the National Museum’s reputation of moral integrity, and as the chairman of the archaeology department, I insist that every artifact is obtained in accordance with those standards,” he said confidently.

“Because I’ve heard some interesting stories about some of Professor Jones’ expeditions...”

Marcus cleared his throat. “Yes, well, Dr. Jones is a certified archaeologist, but his methods may vary from standard practice as befits the circumstances of each particular dig site.” Brody looked at him for support. “Isn’t that right, Indy?”

“Stories often get exaggerated in the retelling, Kathy, and you can’t believe everything you hear.” Indy placed the statue on a nearby shelf and withdrew a book. He patted its cover. “It pays to discover the truth for yourself. The library is usually the best place to start.”

The pretty brunette stepped closer and gazed fondly into his eyes. “That’s why I’m here, Dr. Jones.” she confessed brazenly. “So let’s discover some history together.”

Indy noticed Sophia’s look of pointed amusement. “Yes, let’s discover some history, Dr. Jones. The card catalog is a good place to start.”

“Plato’s lost dialogue should be here somewhere,” Indy said in his most businesslike tone. He followed her to the card catalogue in the middle of the room. Kathleen trailed after him like an adoring puppy.

“Does it have anything to do with the statue that

was stolen last week?"

"How do you know about that?" said Indy suspiciously. He pulled out the 'S' drawer and began to flip through the cards looking for Sternhart's name.

"I interviewed Dr. Brody about it right after he filed his report with the police. I've just been waiting for you to get back from your trip so I could corroborate everything."

Marcus rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly. "Well, I saw no harm in telling her about it since a major theft does qualify as news, and so little of interest happens on campus during the summer."

"That's great, Marcus. We've had enough trouble already. I don't think advertising the purpose of our expedition is going to help."

"Oh, please," scoffed Sophia. "Like the Nazis really keep tabs on you through the *Barnett Bugle*."

Kathleen stifled a nervous titter. Then her eyes grew large. "Nazis? As in *real* Nazis? What expedition?"

Indy's glare could have melted lead. "They tracked *you* down through a 10-year-old copy of *National Archaeology*." He glanced at Kathleen. "You're not actually going to publish this, are you?"

"Are you kidding? My news director would kill me if I kept the lid on a story this big! It's going to be front page news by next week!"

"That's great," he said glumly. "I always like making headlines."

"Don't worry! I'll paint you in the most positive light, Dr. Jones, I promise."

Undeterred by Indy's reluctance, Sophia decided to indulge the girl's curiosity. "As a matter of fact, we're

trying to find a rare book called the *Hermocrates*, which is Plato's final dialogue on Atlantis. It's supposed to be somewhere in this library."

"Oh, that's interesting." She jotted a note on her clipboard. "Are you planning to add more mythology to your curriculum?"

"Yeah, something like that." Indy muttered vaguely. The last thing he wanted to do was announce to the entire academic world that he was looking for Atlantis. Sophia had destroyed her reputation for that very reason, but Indy saw no benefit in tarnishing his already checkered past. Besides, if his father found out that he was entertaining serious notions of the fabled lost city, he would never hear the end of it.

"Don't lie to her, Indy." Sophia admonished. "We're trying to find clues that might lead to Atlantis."

"But isn't Atlantis a myth?" Kathleen asked.

"It is," replied Indy. "But try telling that to the Germans."

"No, it *isn't*," Sophia interjected firmly. "Atlantis is as real as Manhattan. Only disbelievers and fools think otherwise."

The reporter scribbled furiously. "Okay, then why is it so important to the Nazis?"

"The Atlanteans created a metal called orichalcum that contains a powerful energy source. Dr. Jones thinks the Nazis might use it to make some kind of weaponry, but we're not sure yet."

Indy shook his head while he methodically thumbed through the catalogue. He couldn't decide what irritated him more, Sophia's loose tongue, or the fact that he couldn't find any listing for Charles Sternhart.

Maybe the document was a ruse, he thought. Maybe the double-crossing archaeologist lied in order to throw them off the trail. It made sense considering that he was cooperating with the Nazis. But a false lead was better than none at all, so they had to keep searching for the book until they eliminated the possibility of its existence.

After four hours combing the library for the *Hermocrates*, they were no closer to finding Plato's mythical book than they were a week ago when Björn Heimdall confirmed Nur-Ab-Sal's cryptic message. When the card catalogue failed to turn up any leads, Indy delved into the literature, gathering every book about Atlantis that he could lay his hands on. He browsed the yellowing pages of forgotten tomes for any clues that might reveal the location of the Lost Continent while Kathleen quizzed Sophia, who acted like a celebrity being interviewed about her latest movie role. By the time they were finished, the student knew enough about their quest to satisfy a federal inquiry.

Sitting at a long table, Indy rubbed his sore eyes and glanced at Kathleen, dozing beside him with her forehead resting on her notepad. Its curled pages were filled with dense notations for her article. "Okay, let's call it a day." He stood and gathered up an armload of reference books that he wanted to study further.

Sophia bolted to her feet instantly. "We can't give up now! We still haven't found Plato's lost dialogue."

Marcus Brody spoke up. "Indy's right, Miss Hapgood. Why don't you two go have dinner together, and I will continue to work here. In fact, I've taken

the liberty of making reservations for the two of you at a fine restaurant downtown.”

“You did?” Kathleen balked, surprised and more than little envious.

It was difficult to tell who was more stunned by the news, Indy or Sophia. “Marcus, you shouldn’t have!”

“Oh, don’t be absurd. It’s the very least I can do after everything you’ve been through. Go and enjoy yourselves. You deserve it. Please don’t fret, Miss Hapgood. We haven’t exhausted all of our resource yet.”

“Really?” she asked in disbelief. It seemed they had turned the whole library upside-down with no trace of Sternhart’s book.

“Oh, far from it. There are still two more archive rooms to search through.” Brody checked his watch. It was quarter-to-seven. “You two had best be getting along now. Dinner is at eight.” He reached into his jacket and handed Indy a pair of reservations.

“How long have you been planning this?”

“Oh, I’ve had some time on my hands since you two left for Iceland. Now have a pleasant evening.”

Kathleen stepped forward and shook Indy’s hand impulsively. “It’s been a pleasure, Dr. Jones. I just know everyone is going to be thrilled when they read about your expedition.”

“Thanks, Kathy. Now don’t forget what I said about embellishing the truth.”

“Facts, truth, it’s all the same, right?” she said, trying not to blush.

“You’ll figure it out,” he laughed.

When Indy turned to walk away, Kathleen Marc was filled with a warm glow because she saw that her

idol was blushing too.

“How perfect!” Sophia laughed when she stepped out of the car and saw her name written in flowing cursive italics on the restaurant that Marcus had recommended.

The *Sophia Café* was a posh Mediterranean venue clad in burgundy stucco. Fig trees dotted the cobblestone sidewalk lined with wrought iron tables. Grape vine-covered trellises fanned the large ogee arch windows of the building. Indy handed over his keys to a uniformed valet, who promptly drove away his green Plymouth to admit the next automobile in line. Before he could escort her to the door, Sophia trotted up the marble steps and posed below the glowing sign as if she were the headliner for a spectacular show.

Only a woman like Sophia Hapgood could make the act of smoking look elegant, Indy thought as she took a puff from the long cigarette holder that she held in a lace-gloved hand. His eyes traveled her svelte body, tracing the smooth curves of her hips and waist, so tantalizingly defined by the tight shimmering fabric of her calf-length indigo dress. A matching brimless hat covered her hair, which fell to her shoulders in a gentle copper wave. She accessorized her outfit with a button-on wrap trimmed in white waffle crêpe. A subtle touch of rouge, and green eye shadow enhanced her porcelain complexion. Indy frowned at the telltale bronze chain links that vanished into her bust line. Swell. They couldn't even have dinner without Nur-Ab-Sal.

“Did you know that in finishing school I was

known as the Cassandra of Commonwealth Avenue?" she said, breaking his reverie.

Indy joined her at the top of the steps. "You went to finishing school? I never would have guessed."

She brought up her cigarette holder with a flourish. "Can't you tell by my poise, *dah-ling*?"

He chuckled at her theatrical falsetto. "Ah, how could I have missed it? Snappy outfit, by the way."

"This is a J. L. Hudson original," she informed him as they strolled into the foyer arm-in-arm. "It costs more than a year of your salary."

"And guess what? At the end of the day, it's still just a dress." Indy countered smoothly. He opened the door and beckoned her inside. "After you, Princess."

The sonorous violin strains of *Beyond the Sea* played over the soft clatter of silverware and the murmur of the crowd as they were seated by a tuxedoed maître d' who took their drink orders and vanished into the well-dressed crowd. Indy flipped open his menu and glanced around at Fairfield's upper-crust society, a mix of highbrow socialites who were too absorbed in their dinner conversations to appreciate the charming Old World atmosphere that surrounded them. The cafe had pleasant beige walls decorated with oil paintings of serene natural vistas, dark cherry wood tables, and weathered sandstone floor tiles. Bulbous electric lamps punctuated the haze of cigar smoke that hugged the wood-paneled ceiling. The savory odor of spiced meat scented the air, tempting their appetites. The place wove such a convincing spell that Indy almost believed that he was sitting in some tavern in Morocco.

“Sophia’s. Nice place,” he remarked.

Sitting across from him, Sophia glanced up from her own menu. “I’m glad you like it. Is the service any good here?”

Indy locked eyes with her. “I don’t know. I’ve never tried it before.”

“Well, maybe you just have to give it a chance. There’s a first time for everything, you know.”

“It’s just hard to find the time to visit, but I always heard it was nice.”

“You were never curious about the food?” she teased playfully. Her cheeks displayed a touch of scarlet.

“I tried a sample once,” he confessed, turning a page in the menu.

“And how was it?” Sophia folded her hands indulgently and awaited his answer.

Indy browsed the selection of dinner soups. “Pretty good from what I can recall.”

“You didn’t stay for a meal?”

He gave her a wry smile. “Oh, I *wanted* to, but they were pretty busy that night. Besides, I know how hard it is to get a reservation at such an exclusive place.”

Sophia’s face reddened more deeply. It was obvious they were no longer discussing the restaurant. She cleared her throat. “Sometimes you have to wait for a quality dining experience. But it’s always worth it,” she promised.

“I don’t know,” Indy grouched. “These fancy places are usually overrated.”

The redhead bolted up from her chair. A flush of dark scorn simmered on her face. Indy glanced up nonchalantly. “Where are you going?”

"I— I have to go powder my nose," she huffed in outrage. Turning on her heel, Sophia nearly collided with a tuxedoed waiter carrying a gift-wrapped package on a linen-covered serving tray. "Watch where you're going!"

"Excuse me, Miss Hapgood. I have a gift for you and Mr. Jones."

"What?" She turned back to the table and shot daggers at Indy. "If this is your idea of a joke, I'm not in the mood for it."

His expression of bewilderment convinced her that he was as baffled by the delivery as she was. "Who sent it?"

"Sir, I've only been instructed to present you the gift along with this card." The waiter set the small parcel on the table, along with a beige envelope. "Have a pleasant evening."

When he was gone, Sophia took her seat and studied the flat parcel. "I swear, Indy, if this is some kind of joke—" She left the threat unfinished.

"I don't know anything about it," he said adamantly.

She set aside her animosity and peeled the paper away. Her pulse quickened at the sight of a faded leather-bound book. She hastily flipped to the first page. Before she read even a single word of Sternhart's handwriting, Sophia knew that she held the last remaining copy of the *Hermocrates* in her hands. Indy scooted his chair around the table and read over her shoulder.

*Now at last I have Plato's Lost Dialogue translated entirely. The Greek original is lost, so I've used the Arabic*

*text I found in an Italian monastery years ago and always thought was a hoax. Now I wonder... could this remarkable book hold the secret to long-lost Atlantis? Probably not. No one will publish it, that's for certain. The fear of ridicule is too great. To be safe, I've sent a copy to Ashkenazy.*

—Charles Sternhart  
London, 1922

Sophia was overwhelmed. They really had it! Indy opened the card and found a note from Marcus Brody: *I chose this venue to set the theme for your continued excursions. Good luck with Sophia. I wish you both the very best.* He showed her the card. “Does he know something that we don’t?”

“Come on, I think we have some reading to do.”

“Hold on a minute. We haven’t even had dinner yet,” Indy said. “Marcus obviously went to a lot of trouble to show us a good time, I think the least we can do is enjoy it.”

He raised a hand to summon the waiter back to their table. Indy ordered baked tilapia fish and kaka-via soup, while Sophia chose a vegetable couscous platter with steamed rice, and sesame seed Ka’ak bread rings. They paged through the journal over cups of mint-flavored coffee until the food arrived. Dinner was an agonizingly slow affair for Sophia, who wanted to scarf down her meal and leave. But Indy made her set the book aside and savor the fine cuisine. All the while, they puzzled over Marcus Brody’s cryptic note.

“Our jungle friend Sternhart is quite the scholar,” Indy said as he closed the cover of the book.

It was close to midnight when they finished reading the *Hermocrates* dialogue, which was nearly twice the length of Plato’s *Critias*. The pages of the leather-clad tome bulged with paperclips where they had marked the most important passages for easy reference. Sophia yawned and stretched her arms. They were sitting in the study of Indy’s small two-story brick house on Lincoln Street, two blocks from the gently rolling hills of West Canada Creek. A copy of the Kircher map lay on the carpet between them. In the middle of its aged surface was a lozenge-shaped continent labeled: *Insula Atlantis*. For the past hour they had been comparing Plato’s numbers against the projected size of the city, but there was a discrepancy in the translation. For some reason the math didn’t work, and Indy was too tired to think about it anymore.

He picked up their empty wine glasses and headed for the kitchen to refill them. It was a lot for him to absorb. Sternhart had a lot of time on his hands considering that he not only wrote the book, but also made several copies. He wondered how much of it was actually based on its purported historical source, and how much the British scholar had embellished where it suited his purpose. What did he expect to gain from such an elaborate hoax, besides open ridicule? No wonder the book was holed away in some obscure library collection. He was probably too embarrassed to publish it.

Sophia quickly rose to her feet and touched his arm gently. “I’m not asking you to believe in Atlantis,

Indy. I'm just asking you to believe in it for me."

"It's easier to disbelieve," he conceded.

"Yes, it is much easier to look away from the unknown. But it takes real courage to confront it."

Deep down, he knew that she was right. There was more to Atlantis than the folk tales and old myths that spread throughout history. If so many world cultures shared a consistent memory of such a place, then he had to believe there really was some truth to the account, even if he couldn't prove it at the moment. At least they got a good meal out of the bargain, he conceded. Then everything suddenly fell into place. "The restaurant," he said with conviction.

"What?"

"Mediterranean food. Marcus figured it out already. Look," he said, pointing at the oversized study atlas that lay open on the coffee table. "Plato's ten-fold error."

The redhead sighed wearily. "We've already been over this. He got his dates mixed-up. Why is that so important?"

Indy looked at her patiently, the way he did with a student who couldn't quite connect the dots. "It means distances could also be wrong. We may not find Atlantis in the Atlantic at all." He flipped the pages to a two-page spread of the globe, and traced a finger across the watery expanse between Spain and Turkey. "If Plato is right, Atlantis is in the Mediterranean."

Sophia canted her head for a better look at the map. "You mean 300 miles from Greece instead of 3000."

"Yes, the cradle of civilization."

“You could be right. He once told me he came from the middle of the world. That’s what ‘Mediterranean’ means.”

“But *where* in the Mediterranean?” he wondered aloud. The *Hermocrates* mentioned colonies and outposts, but didn’t name them. It also confirmed that the keystones were needed to enter the city, and they had none since Sternhart had taken the worldstone. They were still no closer to finding Atlantis than before they had read his book. Indy glanced at Sophia’s necklace. “Maybe Nur-Ab-Sal can tell us,” he said, reaching for it.

“No!” Indy’s hand was seized by a flash of intense heat. The sharp odor of sulfur stung his nostrils. He released the necklace like a burning coal. Sweat covered his face. “What happened?” she asked.

He dipped his fingers in the glass of wine. “I don’t know. Are you sure that thing leads to Atlantis?”

“Sorry. Nobody else is supposed to touch it.” She took the wine glass from him and set it on the table. “I’m going to tell your fortune.” Before Indy could accuse her of having too much to drink, Sophia gently took his face between her hands and locked gazes with him. “Look into my eyes. *Deep* into my eyes...”

Indy liked the feeling of her soft hands on his skin. “If you insist.”

“You are a remarkable man, Dr. Jones. You possess great strength of character. You are resourceful...”

It felt strange to hear Sophia speaking to him her pseudo-dramatic trance voice, but he allowed her to continue, if only to prolong their moment of closeness. As Indy stared into her eyes, his skepti-

cism evaporated into wonder. He followed the gentle curve of her eyelids, tracing their shape, and suddenly imagined that they belonged to an omniscient being scrutinizing the existence of the world from some other reality. Their emerald intensity drew him inward with an irresistible hypnotic spell. He suddenly felt as if he were a million miles away, separated from his body by a great distance. The sensation was frightening, but not entirely unpleasant, he decided. Her soothing voice brought him back to the present.

“Always eager to solve life’s deepest mysteries...” she continued. While she spoke, Sophia admired the rugged curve of his jaw, the scar on his chin... She could read the man like an open book. Every line and crease on his face told a story that revealed much more about him than the average person would ever realize. As the words poured out of Sophia, her hands unconsciously slipped down his arms, touched his broad chest, simultaneously feeling his inner and outer strength while she lost herself in his hazel eyes.

“Is that part of my fortune?” Indy suddenly asked.

The question disrupted her psychic flow. She blinked in surprise, suddenly aware that her arms were draped around his waist. How did that happen? Maybe it was the wine, or maybe it was the late hour, but she didn’t care anymore. “Do you want me to tell your future?”

Indy shrugged, playing along. “Sure, why not?”

She leaned close and whispered in his ear. “You’re going to get lucky tonight, Professor Jones.”

A smile of intrigue tugged at his mouth. “Hmmm. Tell me more.”

“Well, first *this* is going to happen,” she said, sliding

one hand around the back of his neck. Sophia pulled him closer, tilted her face slightly. “And then *this*.” Their lips brushed for a brief, electrical moment, but she did not commit herself to the kiss. Instead, she hovered there, drawing out the suspense. Her lower lip grazed his like a feather, touching him with the lightest caress. She didn’t want to give him everything at once. “Then *this*,” Another quick buss on the lips. “And *this*,” she whispered, pecking him again, and again. Each kiss had more force behind it, each one lingering a ravenous moment longer. Sophia’s heart pounded. Her pulse raced like lava in her veins. She couldn’t believe how badly she wanted to give herself to him after fighting the urge for so long.

Indy slowly walked her backwards until she was pressed against the wall. He nuzzled her jaw and kissed her throat while his hands explored the flowing curves of her body, devouring her natural shape through the thin fabric that separated him from her warm flesh. Sophia shuddered with pleasure as a warm glow spread through her body. His touch was like magic, and she just wanted to melt. Then he kissed her slowly, tasted the wine on her lips, savored their softness.

“Sophia, I luh—”

She quickly put a hand over his mouth to silence him. “Don’t say it, Indy. You don’t have to say it.”

Indy was crestfallen. “Why not?”

“Because it’s not love. Not this. We’re just good friends. Let’s not spoil it, okay?” He saw the brief, sad flicker in her gaze, but nodded his acceptance to treat the woman on her own terms. If she didn’t want him to profess the yearning that he felt so strongly, then

he would respect her wishes. He stroked the side of her face gently, brushing back a lock of crimson hair. Their lips met in a tender union of ecstasy, feeding each-other's desire.

“What does this remind you of?”

“I don't know,” he breathed.

“The Jastro dig. Remember what we almost did at the back of the fourth antechamber? Up against the wall?”

He smiled at the forgotten memory. “We were cold.”

“Not for long,” she gasped. The heat of passion flushed her cheeks as they kissed with more intensity.

Indy's mouth devoured hers. “We were searching for... artifactual evidence of the viking settlement in the last unexcavated passage.”

She put a hand on the back of his neck and pulled him closer, kissing him more urgently as if she couldn't get enough. “Don't stop,” she whispered.

Indy didn't need anymore encouragement. He gripped her shoulders and pressed himself against her forcefully. The redhead thrust her hips forward, enjoying his aggressiveness. Indy pushed back with equal vigor, pinning her against the wall. She squirmed against him, and he could feel the pulse of her rapid heartbeat through her chest. Sophia reached behind her neck and unbuttoned the clasp of her dress, letting it fall in a silky pool around her ankles. The bronze pendant and chain followed a moment later.

“Sorry, Nur-Ab-Sal. I'll take it from here,” Indy knelt down and kissed her belly, pressing his cheek against her smooth abdomen, savoring the natural

scent of her skin radiating from the heat of her body. She combed her slender fingers through his tousled hair and held him close.

Suddenly he picked her up by the waist and carried her over to the sofa. He gently deposited her onto the cushions, and fell on top of her in one smooth motion. Her hair splayed out across the pillow like strands of burning copper, framing her face in a fiery halo. She parted her thighs as he moved against her. His desire suddenly flared to a burning intensity, its flame fueled by the awareness of what he was doing with her, that he could have her because their friendship was built on mutual admiration and respect. They were so much more than friends or lovers. Maybe not quite soulmates, but close. Sophia frantically peeled his clothes away and they merged, their warm flesh sliding together in a friction of velvet ecstasy that they never wanted to return from.



## DESERT SANDS

“*Yaa jamila!*”

The jubilant cry rang out in the hot, dry air, echoing from the stucco walls of the narrow cobblestone street. Sophia Hapgood shaded her eyes against the glaring sun and spied her caller, a young Arab resting below a canvas awning nearby. He waved at her with a bright smile, obviously unaccustomed to seeing women with flaming red hair wandering through the open-air souk. “*Hello! Hello!*”

She gave the teenager a dirty scowl, and quickly thumbed through the small English-Arabic dictionary that she’d bought when they arrived. After a futile search, she stuffed the book into her purse and deferred to Indy. “What did he say to me?”

“Give the kid a break. He just called you beautiful. That’s a compliment, you know,” he replied, sidestepping a merchant who guided a donkey over-saddled

with crates of fruit. Indy felt sorry for the poor animal as it staggered through the overcrowded street with its heavy load.

“Oh.” She turned and waved back, returning her admirer’s enthusiastic smile. “Sorry, I didn’t understand you!” The kid laughed good-naturedly, and yelled a more provocative phrase that Indy didn’t bother translating for her.

Indy laughed. “See, you haven’t been in the country for a day and you’ve already made a friend.”

“Yeah, right.” she scoffed. “I think he just likes my jeans. I bet the women don’t wear fashions like that in *this* country.” As if on cue, they strolled past a rack of colorful robes displayed by a clothing vendor. Sophia let her fingers trail through the sheer fabric of a transparent lace veil.

“Well, I can’t blame him,” Indy said lightly. He felt giddy and carefree, still riding the wave of euphoria from their tryst earlier that week. He relished the tide of sweet intimacy they had indulged in for hours, the unrequited passion of their lovemaking. Sophia was amazing. Indy had never been so satisfied in all of his life, and he never wanted it to end. But they eventually fell asleep in the early hours of dawn, exhausted as they basked in the warm afterglow of total fulfillment.

The next morning they made travel arrangements for Algeria, which he decided was a more promising location for the continuation of their quest than Monte Carlo, the home of Alain Trottier, a stuffy French scholar who traded relics with Sophia by mail. Based on his research, Indy reasoned that they were more likely to find a tangible lead in North Africa

than the French Riviera.

The southeastern Tassili Mountains were said to harbor the ruins of an unknown civilization to which more than one nineteenth-century scholar accorded Atlantean origins. Others claimed that the ancient harbor of Carthage was a replica of the legendary city. In 1874, French archaeologist Félix Berlioux declared that he had found the Lost City in the foothills of the Moroccan Atlas range, between Casablanca and Agadir. The rumors stemmed from a widespread belief that Atlantis represented a prehistoric memory of the flooding of the Mediterranean basin, which left numerous outposts across the region.

It could have been a page from *The Arabian Nights*, Indy marveled as they strolled through the bustling Casbah, the original walled city founded on the former Roman settlement of Icosium. Stark sunlight gleamed on a gilded minaret that punctuated the forest of spires needling the cloudless blue sky above the capital. Jaunty music wove a hypnotic thread in the rich tapestry of marketplace life, provided by a trio of turban-clad street musicians playing a hide-covered *dumbek* drum, accompanied by the reedy whistle of a *nây* flute, and a 5-stringed *oud*. The air buzzed with a fragmented babble of voices in a mix of French, Arabic, and Berber so dense that it was impossible to focus on any particular conversation amid the constant sing-song call of merchants offering their wares. The scent of overripe fruit decaying in the gutters mixed with the pervasive aroma of hookah smoke tainting the warm afternoon air.

Following the address provided by Sophia, they climbed another flight of innumerable stairs which

traversed the winding streets of the High city. Indy felt the weight of the *Hermocrates* in his pocket, and shook his head incredulously. He still couldn't believe that he was actually pursuing the myth whose insistent appeal spurred the imagination of every archaeology student who entered the field with hopes of uncovering Plato's nautical Utopia. And here he was, the stuffy professor who categorically dismissed those frivolous freshman dreams, traipsing through the alleys of North Africa with a self-proclaimed psychic to locate an obscure antiquities dealer who may or may not be willing to help them. Just perfect, Indy thought, spying the twin-domes of Ketchaoua Mosque rising up like giant chess pieces in the distance. He pointed them out to Sophia, who was unimpressed.

Architecture in the Middle East looked the same to most people unfamiliar with the Islamic world. They only saw a jumbled assortment of bulbous domes, vaulted archways, and strangely-shaped windows. But Indy's trained eye readily discerned the varied styles between the Egyptian and the Algerian, whose buildings were pronounced by a more angular design than Cairo's Mamluke era filigree-laced minarets and Ottoman-inspired mosques. Yet there was a degree of similarity amid the diversity. The broad peak of the Sultan Hassan Mosque in Cairo, built from stones at the Giza Necropolis, somewhat resembled the Djemaa-Djedid Mosque in Algiers. So the confusion was understandable to those who couldn't appreciate the difference.

Amid the compact tangle of masonry that enclosed the labyrinthine streets, the careful observer

could also spot elements of the French influence that permeated the native style: Ornate rosettes woven into the elaborate scrollwork of the door frames, and arched windows embellished with classical *fleur-de-lis* and *flèche* point motifs. When Sophia remarked her surprise that so many people in the city spoke French, Indy explained that the two cultures had been inseparable since the colonization in 1830. Evidence of the French occupation was touted in bilingual signs on every street corner and building, in addition to the overwhelming French populace which rivaled the native Algerians in sheer numbers. Naturally, she drew a parallel between the French colony and the Atlantean outpost they were searching for.

When they came to an intersection at the confluence of three streets, Indy consulted a basket vendor for directions. They went left, and followed an uphill staircase nestled between two buildings pressed so close together that their overhanging roofs nearly touched. Sophia's florid mane turned more than one head in the shadowy alley, a dark channel bisected by a narrow strip of sunlight. She moved closer to Indy for safety until they emerged into another jam-packed marketplace teeming with activity.

All along the busy street, merchants shouted over the commotion, frantically hawking their wares as if there were no tomorrow. The assortment of goods was diverse as the languages offering them: colorful hand-woven tapestries, paper lanterns, blue glassware, and copper pots. Beyond the textiles and pottery was a commissary lined with baskets of produce. A crowd of spectators were gathered a respectful distance around a turban-wearing knife thrower who

juggled five blades with incredible dexterity. Nearby, a beggar in rags observed the act with disinterest while patiently soliciting donations. He had seen the knife show countless times, and the novelty had long since worn off. But the juggler performed with enthusiasm nonetheless, eager to impress the tourists that were the source of his livelihood.

Sophia grabbed Indy's hand, like a child afraid of being separated from its parent, as they cut through the sea of robed figures and made their way towards the largest food stand. She was grateful to give her sore feet a rest when they finally stopped in the shade of the broad canvas awning that protected the grocery from the blazing sun. The variety was impressive. Aside from domestic staples like figs, dates, olives and cashews, the vendor offered bananas, oranges, plums, loaves of fresh-baked bread, and an assortment of meats and spices. The sight of so much food made Sophia realize how hungry she was. They hadn't eaten anything since breakfast.

Indy greeted the shopkeeper, a tall, grim-looking Arab in yellow robes. "*Salaam alaykum*. What looks good today?"

"*Wa alaykum us-salaam*. Ah, English. Today we're having a special. Squab on a stick, only 20 dinars." He gestured to a row of small birds impaled on sharp wooden skewers. The daily special was crawling with flies in the heat.

Sophia's appetite was instantly erased by the parasite-covered squabs, which looked suspiciously like barbecued pigeons. Indy glanced at her. "Are you hungry?"

She shook her head quickly, and took a step back

for emphasis.

“Ah, no thanks,” he declined the spoiled poultry with a polite wave. “Can you tell me where to find Omar Al-Jabbar?”

“Omar?” The grocer spat on the ground. “His pitiful excuse for a shop is down the alley.” He pointed to a keyhole-shaped archway that led behind the marketplace.

“*Shukraan.*” Indy thanked him. “Come on, it’s this way.” They walked along the edge of the street, skirting the dense flow of pedestrian traffic. “I knew we were in the right neighborhood.”

“Do you actually trust that guy? He could have been saying anything.”

“There’s no reason for him to lie. What’s wrong?”

Sophia sighed. “I don’t know. I just have a hard time trusting people that I don’t understand.”

“Because you don’t speak the same language?”

“Yeah, I guess.” she admitted bashfully.

The reluctant confession told him that she wasn’t proud of harboring such suspicions. But Sophia wasn’t as traveled as he was, and Indy could sympathize with her anxiety. “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of you,” he promised.

She forced an uneasy smile. “Thanks, Indy.”

He squeezed her hand. “Here, I’ll teach you something right now. Look,” he said, pointing to a frayed banner that was strung across the mouth of the alley:

اثار رائعة على اثمان صادقة

“Omar Al-Jabbar: Splendid antiquities in accordance with sincere prices,” he declared.

She watched him scan the baffling assortment of squiggles from right to left. “Why are you reading it backwards?”

“It’s not backwards,” he said patiently. “That’s how Arabic is written and read. You’d be surprised how many foreign languages work like that when you’re only used to English.”

“Oh, and I suppose you’re some kind of an expert?”

Indy adjusted the fedora on his sweat-soaked brow. “I know enough to get by. Now, let’s just see how honest Omar’s prices really are.”

The narrow alley led to a dead-end lot where three buildings abutted, forming a stucco canyon that was shaded by a thick canvas awning stretched between the surrounding balconies. Above the makeshift ceiling, a web of linen-filled clothes lines danced in the wind. The shop was overcrowded with cracked vases, and shelves full of worthless trinkets that might have been scavenged from a dumpster. It was more like a rummage sale than a curio shop, Indy thought. Aside from several clay pots of recent vintage, he couldn’t find a single genuine artifact among the assortment of bootleg merchandise that Omar offered with such integrity.

His dubious attitude was lost on Sophia, who pawed over the junk-laden tables with surprising enthusiasm. Indy never would have pegged the wealthy socialite for a thrifty shopper.

“I’m sure they have some great deals,” she said, scrutinizing a price tag as if she could magically extract the U.S. dollar value from the quoted amount of dinars.

“Yeah, like two for the price of three,” Indy quipped dryly as he browsed another table piled with garbage: A small red wagon with only three wheels, a hopelessly tangled yo-yo, and a brass spittoon that was apparently still used. If the selection was any indicator of what they could expect from Sophia’s Algerian connection, Indy knew their chances of locating an Atlantean relic were slim.

He was examining a faux ruby ring when a swarthy man in purple robes appeared from behind a line of hanging rugs. “That is a very wise purchase. They say it has the power to cloud men’s minds.” Omar tapped his fingertips together nervously like two dancing spiders.

Indy dropped the ring back into a box of costume jewelry. “Somehow I doubt it.”

“You are very funny, my friend,” the proprietor chuckled.

Omar Al-Jabbar was a round, girthy Arab with dark hair, and a fidgety disposition. His chubby face was dominated by a thick moustache, and bushy black eyebrows that overshadowed a pair of shifty eyes. They positively gleamed when he caught Sophia admiring a pair of ivory earrings.

He swept past Indy as if he didn’t exist, and sidled over to the redhead, eager to make a sale. “These lovely earrings were carved from the tusks of a prehistoric mammoth.”

“Really?” she exclaimed in genuine surprise. Sophia had no idea that she was holding such a valuable treasure. She gently set them back on the table with reverence.

“Yes, it is true!” Omar snatched a dirty plastic

brush from a rusted coffee can full of hair utensils. "And this ebony comb was once owned by Mata Hari herself." The spidery fingers danced again.

He spent the next few minutes bustling around the dingy rummage store, bragging about his dubious wares, most of which invariably had some type of royal provenance, Indy noted with amusement. The fact that Sophia Hapgood actually believed the man's outrageous claims was only half as funny.

"You know, for a psychic you're almost as gullible as your clients," he said, interrupting a sales pitch for a white cane touched by Queen Victoria that had inexplicably found its way to Omar's back-alley shop in Algeria. Indy set aside the freshly-painted cane and confronted the slimy peddler.

"Let's get down to business. I hear you deal in Atlantean relics."

The rotund merchant offered a bemused smile in reply. "Really? I had no idea the famous Indiana Jones was such a fool, traveling so far and risking so much in pursuit of a mere myth."

"How do you know my name?" Indy demanded.

"Yeah, how?" Sophia added unnecessarily. She was equally surprised since they hadn't introduced themselves.

"My dear Miss Hapgood, when you are Omar Al-Jabbar you know these things."

A visible flicker of astonishment crossed her features. Indy's hand immediately went to his holster. "Are you working for the Nazis, too?" he snarled.

Omar just laughed quietly. "Al-Almaan steal my own treasures from under my nose, and threaten me if I do not cooperate with them. They are hardly

worthy of my loyalty," he assured. But Indy wasn't convinced by the smooth reply, and said as much. Omar shrugged. "That is the way of things in this world, Dr. Jones. You can only trust yourself. But I will help you find the German infidels if you desire. Please wait here a moment."

The portly Algerian trundled to the back of the shop and disappeared through a jeweled curtain. He returned a moment later with a piece of folded cloth.

"This map will lead you to their dig site," he said, unrolling it on a table. The hand-illustrated map of the region was devoid of names, aside from that of the capital city. The beige expanse was otherwise punctuated with vague mountain ranges and a sparse assortment of blue spots that indicated oases.

Omar drew a plump finger along the Mediterranean coastline that spanned the upper part of the document. "As you can see, this map is very crude. I was able to construct it based on reports from scoundrels who come to trade from time to time. They tell me the dig site is located here, deep in the Atlas Mountains."

The bold red symbol under Al-Jabbar's fingertip gave Indy a wry smirk. Contrary to his teachings, it seemed that X once again marked the spot.

"Piece of cake, right?"

"Oh, don't say that, Indy. I'm hungry!" Sophia complained.

The map was probably next to worthless, Indy judged, but at the moment it was all they had to go on. The interesting part would be negotiating its value with the antique dealer, and he had a feeling that the price would be considerable. He was surprised by

Omar's terms of sale.

"The map is yours. The only thing I ask in return is that you bring back a particular item for me, a large stone disk with a hole in the middle. I believe it is known as a sunstone." Indy and Sophia exchanged a glance of surprise that the shrewd merchant did not miss. "Ah, I see that you are familiar with it. Then you also know that it is one of the keystones to the Lost Kingdom. I had one of these stones many years ago. Unfortunately it was stolen from me, and I desire to have it back."

Indy pointed out the glaring hole in Omar's conundrum. "If you have the map, then why don't *you* go look for it?"

"Alas, the desert is no place for a civilized man like myself," Omar said with feigned pity. He was obviously not anxious to expend any more effort than necessary to acquire his relics, as evidenced by the assortment of junk that cluttered the surrounding shelves.

"But why should we get it for you?" argued Sophia. "We have better things to do."

Omar refolded the map and tucked it under his arm with finality. "Like wander the desert aimlessly until you find the lost outpost?" The Arab stroked his moustache with a devious grin while Sophia gawked in disbelief. "Trust me, you cannot afford to bargain this way with Omar Al-Jabbar. My offer is worth its weight in gold."

"I've got a better one," Indy growled. His patience had finally run out. He drew his Webley on the sizeable purple target. "The map for your life."

The conniving merchant's face darkened with out-

rage. He grudgingly handed over the map. “May a goat be the mother of your children.”

“See, I knew we could make a deal. You just need to use the right kind of currency.” Indy stuffed the map into his satchel, but kept his gun out in case Al-Jabbar had one hidden within reach.

Omar recovered his smooth demeanor in an effort to save face. “Very well, Dr. Jones. I can see that you are a man not easily persuaded. I would be grateful if you could recover as many artifacts as possible from the Germans, and have them delivered to me in compensation for the generous use of my map.”

Eager to be done with the slimy shopkeeper, Indy nudged Sophia towards the alley. “I’ll see what I can do,” he replied with a vengeful glare.

“Nice doing business with you!” Sophia beamed cheerfully.

Before leaving the shop, Indy left Omar with his own farewell. “*Waalidatuka shar mutah.*”

“Can you believe that he was actually going to keep the map after he showed it to us?” Sophia asked when they returned to the marketplace.

“Yeah,” said Indy. Omar’s double-cross really didn’t surprise him that much. Right now he had other things on his mind. Namely, finding a way across the desert. They hadn’t seen too many vehicles in the city, and certainly none in the Casbah, where the ancient streets were too narrow for anything larger than a mule cart. Their best option was to rent some camels from the livestock market, and hire a guide to take them into the Sahara. First, they needed to convert their cash into local currency so they would

have something more than a gun to barter with. Indy wasn't worried about legal repercussions from Omar, because he knew the shady antiques dealer would not voluntarily seek out the police.

Sophia tugged on Indy's sleeve. "We really need to stop for lunch somewhere. I'm starving."

"Me too," he replied, suddenly aware of his own hunger pangs. He was looking down the street for a cafe when Sophia vanished from his side.

"Hey!" she cried as the knife thrower deftly snagged her by the arm.

"Look here, ladies and gentleman. A volunteer!" he exclaimed to the gaggle of onlookers.

By the time Indy realized what was happening, the turban-wearing juggler was guiding her towards his painted target board while the audience jeered enthusiastically. His first instinct was to grab her back, but Indy knew that it would ruin the show. These Arabs just wanted some entertainment, and Sophia's red hair made her the most attractive target in the souk. So it was all just harmless fun. To her credit, Sophia actually looked scared as the knife artist positioned her against the pockmarked wooden board. It was spattered with faint brown splotches that were supposed to resemble dried blood, Indy knew. She was probably more embarrassed than anything else.

He clapped indulgently along with the rest of the audience when the performer proudly declared himself the greatest knife thrower in North Africa. To validate his claim, he tossed a knife into the air, twisted his body and caught it behind his back in one smooth motion, and then repeated the feat with his other hand. The crowd roared in approval, eager for

more. The knife artist paced off and turned to face his target. Sophia tensed when he pulled his arm back for the throw.

Sunlight burned the razor-edged blade that was about to fly towards her. Then Indy saw the performer sneer with grim determination as he prepared to fulfill his mission. It suddenly dawned on him what was happening. Indy belatedly reached for his bullwhip as the assassin cast his arm forward. But he knew that it was too late. Sophia would be dead before the whip uncoiled.

A robed figure suddenly sprang from the crowd. There was a blur of movement, followed by a silver flash. Indy heard a metallic ring. Sophia gasped, and for a terrible moment he thought the worst had happened. He couldn't believe his eyes when the knife skittered harmlessly to the ground. The swordsman had intercepted the flying knife in mid-air with one swift slice of his weapon. The knife thrower's face clouded with anger, and he quickly slung his remaining daggers in rapid succession. The Arab's blade became a ribbon of liquid metal as he deflected the volley with an elaborately flowing series of slashes that sent all of the deadly projectiles clattering against the cobblestones.

In a final act of desperation, the assassin reached for another blade tucked in his boot. This time Indy was ready. His bullwhip flashed through the dusty air with a leathery hiss, and the knife went tumbling away as the juggler's arm jerked like a broken marionette. Clutching his wrist, the knife thrower glared at Sophia's rescuers with murderous rage. He spat a vehement curse at them and fled the market in dis-

grace.

The crowd cheered while Sophia hugged Indy tightly. He tipped the brim of his fedora at the robed warrior, and complimented his incredible skill. “*Anta maahir ma’a hatha as-sayf.*”

“*Afwan.*” The swordsman bowed and introduced himself as Abdul Aziz. Indy recognized the flowing blue robes as that of the *Imajaghan* Tuareg, a tribe of Berber nomads known for their great swordsmanship.

Sophia was captivated by the lean figure swathed in a billowy powder blue robe that flowed like a sheet of wind wrought in material form. His face was hidden by a length of indigo cloth that wrapped around his head, leaving only his intense coffee-brown eyes visible. She had a desire to reach for the elegant bronze hands that wielded the weapon of her salvation, but knew that such behavior was considered inappropriate in some cultures. She didn’t want to offend her new hero.

“How did you know that guy was going to kill me?”

The Tuareg ignored her and addressed Indy in Arabic. “Al-Hazzan’s loyalty can be purchased for the price of a goat. The Germans got to him very quickly when they learned you were coming to North Africa.”

“The Nazis are here?” Indy asked, re-coiling his whip.

“Al-Almaan, yes. The presence of foreigners in my country is growing everyday,” he reported gravely. The fact clearly disturbed him.

“Yeah, I’ve heard.”

Algeria had been a bed of civil unrest since 1847, when the French began a mass immigration in an attempt to replace the indigenous culture with their own. The Muslim revolt of 1871 only added more fuel to the fire, and the government had been steadily restricting freedoms ever since. Eager to expand their empire, the French greedily claimed large tracts of Berber territories by 1914, and then had the audacity to draft Algerian soldiers to fight alongside them in the Great War. The tension was thick enough to cut with a knife, and Indy knew that the Nazi forces assembling outside of the capital wasn't going to improve the situation. Were the Germans mounting an invasion army, or did they have another purpose? They had to work fast.

"How did they find out?" Indy asked. "Nobody knew about our trip except for my boss, Marcus Brody."

"The Abwehr have eyes everywhere in this part of the world. I'm sure they are watching us even now."

Sophia felt invisible while the two men conversed in Arabic. Eager to introduce herself, she discreetly retrieved her translation dictionary and skimmed through it for an appropriate greeting. Then she gave the Tuareg her most winning smile. "*Salaam, effendi.*"

Abdul chuckled politely, but remained focused on Indy. "Her attempt is very good, but the proper greeting is '*Salaam alaykum*,'" he spoke in thickly-accented English.

The grammatical chide made Sophia's blood boil, but not so much as Abdul's blatant refusal to look at her. Humiliated, she stuffed the book into her purse. "God, I feel so *stupid* reading this thing!" She turned

on Indy in exasperation. "Why is he ignoring me? Am I not good enough to talk to?"

Once again, the swordsman spoke to Indy, who translated on his behalf. "Abdul says he's sorry that he can't talk to you directly, but it is a custom of his tribe that men cannot speak to foreign women."

"What kind of a stupid rule is that?"

"Look, you're in a whole different world, and that's just the way things work," Indy said evenly.

The Tuareg gestured at Sophia without making eye contact. "*Sha'arukee halwa, yaa amiratee al-baydaa' al-jamila.*"

"He said your hair is pretty," Indy reported, then smiled when Abdul added something else. "He asked if all Western women are as beautiful as you."

"They *wish*," she exclaimed with characteristic immodesty. Indy laughed, but Abdul did not seem to comprehend her sarcasm.

"How do you know about the Abwehr?" Indy was surprised to hear the name of the German intelligence organization, but even more amazed that a Tuareg nomad would know of them.

Abdul surveyed the marketplace uneasily. "It is not safe to talk here. Too many ears to catch our secrets." He pointed to a café down the street. "Let us go someplace safe to talk."



12

## THE PEOPLE OF THE VEIL

The conversation resumed in the shadowy *Dar Maghreb* café, behind a latticework jali screen that filtered the harsh daylight into a blurry glowing mosaic. Overhead, a creaky ceiling fan stirred the hot air just enough to irritate Sophia, who ravenously devoured a honey-flavored *pastili* cake while their new ally explained the situation. Abdul spoke English for her benefit as Indy sipped from a cup of mint-flavored *etzai* tea.

The mysterious veiled swordsman was a member of the Algerian People's Party, a resistance group dedicated to promoting national independence through non-violent opposition. Persecuted by the French colonial government, they were now forced to operate in secret. Abdul joined the organization as a representative of his tribe, the nomadic Tuareg who wandered the Sahara desert, in order to keep

track of French activity outside of the capital.

“Six months ago, Al-Almaan begin to dig holes in the sand. Can you imagine? They put up fences with guards that shoot anyone who comes near.”

“What are they protecting?”

“They find old things with strange markings,” Abdul said, obviously puzzled that such insignificant items would warrant open violence.

“Describe the markings.”

The Tuareg made a swirling motion in the air with his finger. “They were like circles, joined together.”

Indy nodded grimly. “Looks like Kerner found what he was looking for.” Abdul corrected him, saying that the operation was led by an Englishman, something that Omar had failed to mention.

“Sternhart,” he muttered darkly. It made perfect sense. How else could the Nazis have found a dig site in the middle of the desert without clues from the *Hermocrates* dialogue provided by the scholar who had originally translated it? He wondered what the hell was so important out there that the Nazis would post an armed guard.

“The dig site is the next outpost!” Sophia exclaimed suddenly. “But why did that guy try to kill me? To keep us from finding it?”

“The Nazis seem to think we’re better off dead for some reason. Can’t imagine why...” Indy looked at Abdul. “How did you know they were after us?”

“We monitor all foreign communications. When the Germans found out you were alive, they hire a local assassin to kill you, as not to cause alarm. Why, I do not know.”

“Must be something damned important if they

want us dead so bad.”

“It has to be the next keystone,” Sophia said with conviction. “They need all three of them to get into Atlantis. Just like it said in Plato’s *Lost Dialogue*. We have to find it before they do.”

“Who says they don’t have it already?” Turning to Abdul again, Indy said, “Are they still out there?”

He nodded. “I saw them only last week, still digging.”

“Okay, so we’re still in the game,” Indy said, feeling a little better about the situation. He knew that Berlin wouldn’t waste valuable resources tearing up the desert for nothing, which meant the Nazis hadn’t found what they were looking for yet.

He took the map from his satchel and unrolled it on the table, placing their cups on the corners of the document to keep it flat. “This will show us the location of the site, if it’s accurate. What do you make of this map?”

Abdul Aziz examined the cloth in silence for a few moments, nodding thoughtfully, and tapped the ‘X’ mark with a tanned finger. “This is near Bou Saâda, perhaps two days’ journey south.”

“In the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. Can you take us there?”

“Yes. This I will do happily. We must not allow Al-Almaan to take power in our country. They respect us even less than the French, who destroy our way of life.”

“Wait a sec!” Sophia said, her face lit with a sudden flash of inspiration. “Atlas. Atlantis. Don’t you see the connection? It’s another clue. The mountain range was probably named by the refugees who set-

bled there after Atlantis sank!”

Indy rubbed his whiskery chin with tedium at her hackneyed logic. “Don’t push this too far, Sophia. That’s a pretty wild conclusion to draw from a few letters.”

“But it makes perfect sense!” she beamed in triumph. “It’s a sign from Nur-Ab-Sal!”

Here, Abdul’s blue-shrouded head turned fractionally in the psychic’s direction, but his veiled face was inscrutable. Indy couldn’t tell whether he was confused or intrigued by her rambling. “Nur-Ab-Sal?”

“A spirit that supposedly inhabits her necklace,” Indy explained. “She thinks he will lead her to Atlantis.”

A beat passed. The Tuareg blinked uncertainly, trying to comprehend what he’d been told. “You seek the country of Atlasee?”

Indy downed the rest of his tea, wiped his mouth on his sleeve, and set the cup on the table. “Yep. And so do the Nazis. That’s why they’re digging up the desert. The French have nothing to do with it.”

Abdul chuckled gently while a rosy blush of anger simmered on Sophia’s face. “There’s nothing funny about this,” she said with unflinching severity. “They’ll use the power of Atlantis against the world if they get there before us. That’s why we have to stop them.”

“Ah, but the seeker of the First Land is doomed to travel a road whose end is not its conclusion.”

“What are you saying?” she challenged.

The Tuareg fixed his gaze solemnly on Indy. “That place can never be reached because it is beyond all existence; A philosopher’s journey towards an ideal.”

This was too much for Sophia. She wasn't going to sit idly by while the nomad dismissed her life quest as a mere fantasy. She lifted the bronze chain from her neck, and slapped the medallion on the table. "Plato didn't write *this*."

He gaped at the horned visage in amazement. "*Wallabee*... The god-king speaks to a Western woman?" Abdul reached for the necklace, but Sophia quickly covered it with her palm.

"Look, but *don't* touch," she warned firmly. Indy vouched that the talisman burned the uninitiated, and displayed the marks on his hand to prove it.

Resuming his native tongue, Abdul regarded the pendant gravely and said that the face represented a powerful *jinn*, or evil spirit, known as the Great Deceiver, who would lead them astray.

Indy relayed the message to Sophia. "Nur-Ab-Sal is *not* evil," she responded indignantly. "He represents Atlantis, the unity of all nations, and seeks to bring its wisdom back into this troubled world for the good of mankind. I am his vessel, and I will spread the light of his glory."

"Jeezam, you sound like a fanatic," Indy groaned. He was getting tired of her gospel spiel, no matter how convincing she made it sound.

Abdul quickly made up his mind. He stood, grasping the pommel of the sword protruding from his blue sash. "Allah has brought you to stop Al-Almaan from stealing our heritage. For this, I pledge the support of my people. Let us go into *Tinariwen* and rid our soil of these infidels once and for all." Without another word, he headed for the door.

Indiana Jones rolled up the map while his partner

slipped her necklace back on. "That thing is better than a passport."

"What can I say? Nur-Ab-Sal opens doors."

"Yeah, and not just Mayan ones," he said, recalling the mirrored passage in Tikal.

"The student of Atlantis is the world's guest," she philosophized with smug optimism.

Indy replaced the map in his satchel and snapped it shut. "Just make sure you don't wear out your welcome."

\* \* \*

"You should have retrieved that necklace from her burnt corpse," Klaus Kerner sneered contemptuously when Torsten had finished his report.

"We could not reach Jones or Fräu Hapgood because of the fire, Herr Oberst. The necklace was an unfortunate casualty of my oversight," the operative confessed, hoping to appease his angry commander. "But we acquired the stone, which is one of the items on Doktor Übermann's manifest."

Beside him, Karl withered under Kerner's critical gaze, but said nothing to bring the SS leader's wrath upon him. Torsten was getting exactly what he deserved, as far as Karl was concerned.

"I approve of your methods, Agent Fleischer, creative as they may be," Kerner said, turning the worldstone over in his hands to study the crude orbs carved on its rough surface, "but you lost the necklace, which was the primary objective of your mission."

Torsten mustered all of his courage to voice the

burning question that had been on his mind since the start of their mission. "Why is this object so important, Herr Oberst?"

Kerner slammed the stone disc against his desk hard enough to dent the wood. The two Abwehr jumped involuntarily. "I am asking the questions, here! Do you understand?"

"*J-jawohl*, Herr Kerner!" Torsten quickly stammered while his younger comrade tried to keep his legs from shaking like rubber.

Neither took comfort from the stark beige walls of the debriefing room on the third floor of the German Embassy in Algiers, where they had been ordered to report via communiqué following their assignment in Tikal. The atmosphere was uncomfortably hot and grim. A trickle of sweat ran down the side of Karl's face, but he dared not wipe it away. He glanced at the tightly shut window, fervently wishing for it to be open, if only to admit an equally hot breeze to dispel Kerner's boiling anger.

Aside from the lost necklace, Kerner's mood was soured because he despised this godforsaken country. He shared the Führer's opinion that Africa was a barren, dirty wasteland, populated by inferior races of people. Additionally, it offered no resources of value for the German empire, unlike the oil-rich Balkans, or Turkey, with its vast supply of metal ore. This hellish desert was not even worth colonizing for military purposes because nobody wanted to fight over it. Kerner's presence was required by Berlin, which considered the Atlantis project a top priority mission. He was anxious to leave at the soonest possible convenience, and never set foot in Algeria again.

The tall SS commander glared back and forth between the trembling intelligence agents, who awaited his verdict in rigid fear. Then he smoothed his blond hair back with a swipe of his hand, as if trying to restore an air of dignity to the office. Kerner was pleased that he was a feared leader, because fear was the ultimate sign of respect. And he deserved to be respected.

He looked Torsten directly in the eyes, challenging, *daring* him to protest further. "Due to your 'oversight', as you put it, Agent Fleischer, you and Agent Sankt are assigned to patrol duty at the desert outpost until the other keystone is found. When it is located, you will deliver it to me personally, *ja?*"

Torsten snapped a crisp salute. "*Jawohl*, Herr Kerner. I understand—"

He was disrupted by a sharp knock at the door. Kerner frowned in irritation. "*Was?*" he snapped angrily.

A young courier from the diplomacy office timidly stepped into the debriefing room, saluted Kerner, and handed him a typewritten report. "Khalid Al-Hazzan failed to kill Fräuline Hapgood, Herr Oberst."

"And what about Jones?"

"The Amerikaner is also still alive," he confirmed.

Kerner felt like chewing nails. "How did this happen?" he demanded furiously.

"Apparently, they were assisted by a nomadic warrior from one of the desert tribes."

"You are dismissed." He sent the messenger slinking away with a steely look. The air in the room seemed chilled by several degrees. Nobody spoke in the heavy silence that followed. Kerner turned his

frigid gaze back to Torsten and Karl, jarring the petrified Abwehr with an unexpected smile, as if some cheerful thought had just occurred to him.

“Follow me, gentlemen, and I will show you how I deal with failure.”

He led them to the basement, where he ordered a pair of uniformed SS guards to release the knife-thrower from a holding cell which was usually reserved for political prisoners. The soldiers promptly opened the door, and hauled the Arab roughly from the wooden bench where he had been sitting. Following on Kerner’s well-polished heels, they dragged the bewildered man up the narrow stairwell to the roof of the German embassy.

Outside, under the broad blue sky and warm sunshine, the colonel directed them to take the prisoner to the edge of the roof. The troops backed away, leaving the handcuffed Arab standing alone in the open. Karl felt a cold lump in the pit of his stomach as Kerner unfastened the flap holster on his belt.

“You were ordered to kill the Americans, and you failed. Drawing his Luger P08 semi-automatic pistol, Kerner looked directly at the Abwehr agents. “The Schutzstaffel does not accept failure. Let this be an example.”

The juggler wrung his chained hands together, pleading for mercy in his native tongue, but his efforts were in vain. Kerner methodically leveled his gun, aimed, and fired without even flinching. There was a sound of thunder, and the prisoner’s head snapped back violently. A bright red stain blossomed on the front of his turban. The knife-thrower reeled backwards and tumbled over the edge of the roof to

the dusty cobblestones, four stories below.

Karl choked in horror, wobbled unsteadily, and threw up on the gravel rooftop. Torsten laughed nervously, and patted him on the back like a drinking buddy who'd had one too many.

Re-holstering his gun, Kerner regarded the weak-willed agent with disgust. "Go collect his filthy brown carcass, and bury it in the desert on your way to the dig site. You have your orders."

No, he thought. Time was of the essence, and they had wasted enough. He needed that necklace to find the Lost Kingdom, and the woman who owned it was the key to reaching it. She knew all of its secrets. Her involvement was essential for them to succeed. Kerner was ready to take matters into his own capable hands, because he wanted Jones out of the picture once and for all.

\* \* \*

They presented a sobering image from afar, Indy knew: Three tiny dark spots inching across an infinite ocean of golden sand scorched by a perpetual sun. Beyond the bustling port city of Algiers, the desert was eternal and unchanging. Jagged mountains hemmed the distant horizon, bridging the parched landscape and the soaring blue sky. It reminded Indy of Utah, where his dad relocated their family to continue his Grail studies after his mother's death. In the years that followed, the gulf between estranged father and son grew as vast as the desert that now surrounded him. But they had mended the bitter past, and if they could cross that impossible expanse, Indy

reasoned, their tiny caravan could surely conquer the 50-mile tract of Sahara to the Tuareg village, a day's ride to the southeast.

It seemed they had been riding forever. Every dune-covered mile was indistinguishable from the one before it, and the one that lay ahead. Indy sleeveed the sweat from his face, squinted in the harsh glare. The fedora shaded his eyes, but did little to protect him from the stark sunlight reflecting off the burning sand. His khaki shirt was unbuttoned, while his leather jacket was folded up in the saddlebag of his dromedary, along with his whip and satchel containing Omar Al-Jabbar's map. As he loped across the boiling wasteland, Indy could almost hear the shifty merchant cursing him: "*May the sun addle your brains and cook your flesh.*" He pushed away the negative image and focused on something more pleasant.

Indy looked ahead of him and admired the burnished glow of Sophia's rusty mane in the desert light. Her long red hair fell in loose, shimmering waves down her back. Unable to find a wide-brimmed hat in the marketplace prior to their trip, she simply wore her sunglasses and a white silk veil draped modestly around her half-open blouse. Her bare forearms had turned pink from exposure to the sun while she read the *Hermocrates* to pass the time. She gripped the tall forked saddle pommel for balance and fought to keep the book still as she bobbed to the awkward gait of her plodding mount.

The Berber called them 'ships of the desert', but Sophia thought the camel was the ugliest creature she'd ever seen. Despite the bumpy ride, it was the most efficient animal for desert travel, perfectly

adapted to the harsh climate of the Sahara. The camel's thick fur actually repelled hot sunlight while its long, double-jointed legs kept its body high above the scorching sand. The distinctive hump did not store water as commonly believed, but was rather a deposit of fatty tissue that would otherwise trap heat in the rest of its body, while its flat, sealable nostrils and long eyelashes deflected windblown sand particles.

Sophia's gaze strayed from her book to the lean silhouette of Abdul, riding nearby. With his bright azure robes, he almost seemed a part of the sky itself. She saw his blade glitter in the sunlight, and imagined him to be a noble knight of the desert, proudly surveying his golden kingdom astride his royal mount. Despite her initial frustration at his refusal to speak to her, she now found that very same aloofness intriguing.

Indy noticed her dreamy expression. He leaned over and gave her a nudge. "I didn't know you had a sheik complex."

The redhead blushed because her feelings were so obvious. Following the Tuareg warrior across the open desert, she admittedly felt like Agnes Ayres in the immortal desert motion picture epic. "Well, he's no Valentino, but I'll take it."

"He's better than Valentino. He's the real thing," Indy said, chuckling.

He turned his attention back to the sweeping, dune-covered landscape, which appeared misty and vague as it stretched further away. Almost like a painting of a desert instead of a real one, Indy thought, surveying the low, dark ridge of the Atlas range on the horizon. The German dig site was located some-

where in the foothills. He shook his head. It didn't look good. Not from any direction.

"What's wrong?" Sophia asked, perturbed by his grim assessment.

"The terrain. There's absolutely no cover out here unless we wait until nightfall to make our approach. Otherwise they'll see us coming miles ahead."

"Well, we can't do that," she said. "We need to get there and stop the Nazis as quickly as possible."

"Easier said than done, sweetheart. It'll take us another day to reach it, and even then we'll need cover to get close, since they have armed guards."

"A disguise?" suggested Abdul, falling back to join them.

Indy looked at the nomad's robes with newfound appreciation. "Of course! That's perfect."

"Then you will be Tuareg," he declared with a firm nod, as if the matter was settled. "But first we will speak with the *marabout* for guidance on our quest."

Sophia gave Indy a questioning look. "A tribal prophet, or holy man," he said. "They're religious leaders in Berber society. Like priests."

"But why would he want to see us?"

"Good question. I'm wondering the same thing myself."

The rippling dunes resembled water in the late afternoon sun: liquid folds of sand striped with dark, shadowy ribbons. But the water did not flow. The golden sea was frozen by some kind of impossible magic that defied reality. Time also seemed to stand still as they drifted through the endless desert. An austral wind blew misty plumes of spray from the

crests of the sandy waves. The dreamy illusion suddenly vanished in an explosion of red spots when the trio topped a high dune, and a patch of domed structures shattered the beige monotony like poisonous mushrooms.

The village fanned across the flat brown plain in a wide circle surrounding a drystone well equipped with a modern rope-and-pulley system. The curious dwellings were covered in animal skins, lashed over a framework of thick wooden branches by ropes that were staked into the ground. Reedy woven mats formed the outer walls. The low door openings, each guarded by a wooden tribal totem, hugged the sand to keep keep the temperature cool within. Indy guessed that the tents could be quickly disassembled for travel, although the camp had the look of a permanent settlement.

When he mentioned this, Abdul said that the Tuareg were being suppressed after more than two thousand years of nomadic freedom as leaders of the trans-Saharan trade route across North Africa. In the late nineteenth century, they were massacred in a hard-fought rebellion against the French colonial invasion of the Sahel. The caravan trade that was once their livelihood, had now been replaced by railways, while their territories were annexed by the French government like the American Indian reservations.

As they entered the camp, Indy felt as if he'd stepped back into history. The air was filled with the braying of livestock, children laughing, the tinny ring of metal being forged; Sounds of life that seemed miraculous in such an inhospitable environment. The Tuareg village was a time capsule—a living portrait

of the caravan culture as it existed in the Sahara more than 2000 years ago, when pastoral nomads tilled their life out of the hot sand centuries before the great cities of Europe were founded, a culture that even pre-dated the Dark Ages.

The people of the veil were as timeless as the desert itself. Physically, they were a lean, almond-complected people with Arabic physiognomy. Sophia noticed how the younger generation displayed their faces openly, but the women were uncovered while the men were all veiled. She was confused because it was the complete opposite of life in Algiers. She couldn't contain her curiosity any longer.

"Why do the men wear veils instead of the women?" she asked. Indy explained that the Tuareg were a matriarchal society, in which the women were not bound by traditional Islamic practice to wear the all-concealing burqa in public. "I don't understand."

"It's considered inappropriate for a woman to be seen by any man besides her husband. Any violation of his *namus*, his virtue, is a mark of dishonor on the whole family."

She was appalled that Arabic women were conditioned to view their bodies as something sinful than must be covered, and behave accordingly. "That's depriving them of identity! Like being a prisoner in your own clothes!"

Indy grimaced at the ignorance of her statement, which lacked consideration for the political and religious complexities of the culture. He summarized the tenets of Lady Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* in favor of a lengthy explanation. "Yes, it's kind of repressive, but the veil actually provides women

more freedom to go about their lives without harassment. At least in theory.”

Then Sophia recalled a magazine article in which a French model gushed about smoking and drinking to maintain her glamorous figure, until her waistline withered away. Considering the tummy-cinching undergarments of the haute couture, perhaps her contemporaries were the ones being repressed by the caprices in vogue.

“And to think that I was actually starting to like it here, too.” she pouted.

“Relax. We only have to wear the robes for a day or so. Then we can go back to being ourselves.”

“We have arrived,” announced Abdul, reining his camel to a stop near a large tent covered in lavender hides. Its reedy walls displayed a complex pattern of interlocking triangles that were reminiscent of Celtic knotwork. They gratefully dismounted their camels and stretched while Abdul bound the animal’s legs together to prevent them from running away. He instructed them to remove their shoes before going inside.

The cool, shadowy darkness was a welcome shock from the relentlessly blazing sun outside. The air was pleasantly cool. When his eyes adjusted to the dim light, Indy was surprised by how much the tent resembled a primitive house. Woven rugs lined the outermost walls, effectively blocking out the oppressive heat. The space within was neatly partitioned into separate quarters by wicker screens.

Abdul told them to wait in the main living area, and then disappeared behind a heavy blue curtain. Sophia sat down beside Indy on the large patterned

rug that covered the floor. She glanced around nervously, then drew her knees up and curled her bare toes into the cool sand at the edge of the carpet.

“Wouldn’t it be nice if it rained?” she said wistfully.

Indy looked at her as if she’d lost her mind, but offered no reply because they were on sacred ground. He hoped she would take his respectful silence as a hint.

A moment later, their host emerged from behind the curtain and stood proudly beside the cloth door. “May I present Prisha, descendant of Tin Hinan, Mother of Us All...”

He drew open the curtain and the *Amenokal* glided gracefully onto the carpeted threshold. She was a stunning young woman with dark olive skin, deeply-painted indigo lips, and vibrant cinnamon eyes that sparkled like warm honey. Her beautiful face was framed by the voluminous hood of a silky violet kaffan robe embroidered with silver thread.

Indy immediately saw that she was of East Indian descent, but moreover that she was *gorgeous*. She practically radiated an aura of wisdom, intelligence, and mystery that left him breathless. But Sophia was even more stunned when Abdul met her gaze for one startling moment.

“And...” he smiled broadly, and proclaimed: “My wife.”

“His WIFE?!” Sophia nearly bolted to her feet in outrage, but Indy gripped her arm to keep her firmly seated. In truth, he was equally surprised, because Tuareg religious leaders were traditionally men. Then Indy recalled the Hindu inscription from the pyramid in Tikal, and he wondered if her nationality was more

than just a coincidence.

Prisha bowed politely and settled gracefully before them. She took Sophia's hands with a warm smile, and said, "Hello, sister. I am pleased to meet you at long last."

"You are?" she asked, looking baffled.

"I have watched you from afar, and I knew our day of reunion would come."

"Thank you for inviting us into your home," Indy said with a respectful nod. He removed his hat and placed it on the ground beside him.

The *Amenokal* regarded him with a pearlescent smile that glowed on her dusky complexion. "You have traveled far to join us today. You have my eternal gratitude for bringing my *Bahana*. I have much to tell her of the quest which occupies her soul."

Sophia looked skeptical. "Really? And how do you know about my quest if we just met?"

The Tuareg priestess lifted her cowl to reveal a small tikka pendant on the middle of her forehead. "Because we are of the same spirit. Soulmates, as you call it." Sophia Hapgood jolted in shock. Indy sat up attentively. Things had just become interesting. The silver icon was an exact copy of Nur-Ab-Sal, except its eyes were rectangular slits, rather than the menacing daggers of Sophia's necklace.

"You worship Nur-Ab-Sal?" she blurted, anxious to learn more about her spirit guide from another person familiar with him. Never in her life did Sophia imagine that other examples of her Atlantean god existed.

"We do not worship graven images. Nat-Hal-Bar is the counterpart of your heathen god."

“Evil? You don’t know anything about my spirit guide,” Sophia said, her voice laced with quiet scorn. Indy could see her anger simmering just below the surface. He hoped she didn’t lose her temper, because he was unsure of the penalty for sacrilege among the warrior tribe.

“They form a twofold spirit of the eternal struggle between good and evil; A balance of darkness and light. One cannot exist without the other.”

While she spoke, Prisha spread a black cloth on the floor and withdrew a small leather pouch from her robes. She poured out a handful of tiny lizard bones into her palm. She closed her eyes, muttered an incantation in Tamasheq, and released them. The bones fell against the velvet in a spindly pattern of ribs and legs. The tiny skull stared up at them from the center of the jumble with its hollow little eye sockets.

She waved her purple-stained fingers over the skull. “Do not be deceived by the Dark One. His path leads to destruction. Resist the power at all costs, or you will follow him into the oblivion that consumed his kingdom.”

“But we’re trying to stop an even darker force that will destroy the world using the power of the Lost Kingdom.”

The *Amenokal* pressed her hand against Sophia’s forehead. Her dark eyelids fell in concentration. “I am impressed. You have a strong hold on your spirit guide. His darkness has not yet tainted you. Beware, his influence will grow stronger in the Lost City, where he reigns in spirit, if not in the flesh. You will be at *his* command unless you rid yourself of his

trappings.”

“I could never give away my necklace,” said Sophia while she touched her pendant. “Even if I wanted to. Nur-Ab-Sal has never led me astray.”

Indy remained silent during the séance, absorbing the wisdom of Prisha’s message. As he suspected, the necklace was a malevolent thing, a force that would feed on Sophia’s soul and poison her mind with false hope until she returned it to Atlantis. Then it would kill her. She had to get rid of it before it was too late.

“If you go to the city of our ancestors, you will destroy it.” Prisha warned.

“But I just want to *see* it,” pleaded Sophia.

“Why must you see if you already believe?”

“To reaffirm my faith,” she confessed. “I’ve never wanted anything more in my whole life. I can’t turn back now that I’m so close. You understand, right?”

The priestess gathered up the cloth full of bones with a weary sigh. Her amber eyes were glistening, and Indy could see that she was clearly distraught as the bittersweet struggle of emotions played across her face.

“I, too, have seen the evil forces which will soon overtake the world. The conflict will threaten the interconnectedness of all things. You, my dear sister, have the strength to prevent it. But I pray that you also have the strength to save yourself.”

Sophia reached for her hand impulsively. “Don’t worry. I know when to stop. I promise.”

“Find peace on your journey. Its reward is greater than the goal which you seek.”

“I will,” she vowed solemnly.

The two women hugged each-other tightly and

wept. Indy looked at Abdul, who had observed the meeting impassively. The Tuareg warrior gave him a curt nod, a silent pledge that he would help them succeed at all costs. Indy returned the gesture. The message was clear. No matter what happened, Sophia Hapgood must be protected. The fate of the world depended on it.



13

## LOST OUTPOST

“How do you tie this damned thing?!” Sophia’s muffled voice exploded through the wall of the tent. The outburst was followed by Prisha’s good-natured laughter.

Standing outside in the cool air, Indy secured the *cheche* wrap of his own *djellaba* with a wry smile, enjoying her latest tantrum. He glanced to the east, where the soft glow of dawn profiled the desert horizon against the indigo sky. A gentle wind brushed the shadowy dunes as the last stars winked out of existence. The scene was so peaceful that he couldn’t imagine the Nazis anywhere close by. Their evil simply could not exist in a world of such serenity. But it was wishful thinking.

Indy suddenly felt old as he placed his rumpled fedora into the saddlebag of his camel, tethered beside the tent. He’d faced the Germans more times

than he could remember over the years, and it wasn't getting any easier. He knew that they were out in the desert right now, digging for god-knows-what under the burning sand, and it was up to him to stop them. Again. But he couldn't keep it up forever. One day he would have to quit. That day was still far off, but he was looking forward to it. When it finally did come to pass, Indy could rest in the knowledge that he had accomplished more in his adventurous exploits across the globe than most people did in their entire lifetime. Right now, though, he still had a long, dusty road ahead of him.

The calm was disrupted by the agitated braying of livestock, and a jabber of hushed voices in the dark. Indy saw a shadowy blur of activity in the nearby picket-post corral, where Abdul and his men struggled to herd the camels that would carry them to the dig site. He took his canteen from the saddlebag and headed for the stone well at the heart of the village. He had a feeling that it was going to be a hot day, and not just because of the sun.

As Indy drew the water bucket from the depths, he recalled their night among the Tuareg.

When the tribe learned that they had come to stop the German soldiers from invading the country, their mission was heralded with joy, and a celebration was held in their honor. The blue men of the desert entertained their guests with a traditional sword dance. Circling a roaring bonfire to the pulse of a hollow drumbeat, the warriors twirled their blades in a dazzling acrobatic display that grew in fervor until the night was ablaze with fiery ribbons. The dance was poetic; a lethal ballet of ancient skill honed by blood-

shed through the centuries to preserve the Tuareg legacy. Indy felt privileged to witness the age-old ceremony that few westerners had ever seen. It was a spectacle unlike anything he had ever witnessed before, and one that he would never forget.

“There you are, Jones! I thought you were still sleeping.”

Turning at her voice, Indiana Jones nearly dropped his canteen into the well at the sight of Sophia Hapgood in her Tuareg outfit. The curvy redhead was draped in a teal chiffon *abaya* with a sheer gossamer veil. The morning sun glowed behind her, a halo of white flame that silhouetted her head in a fiery wreath. For one breathtaking moment Indy mistook her for Brigid, the pagan goddess of eternal light. As the deity approached him, she lifted the hem of her billowy caftan above the sand to reveal Sophia’s rugged leather boots.

“I always *did* look good in bed sheets, but I don’t see how these people walk around in them all the time without tripping.”

The divine illusion was shattered. “Well, they are more fun to roll around in than wear,” Indy said dryly.

Sophia admired the light blue folds of his Arabian disguise until her eyes settled on his bulbous turban. Then she giggled. “Aw, I’m going to miss your hat.”

Indy tucked the canteen back into his knapsack. “Don’t worry. It’s right here with my jacket.” He fingered her silky robe. “You should have brought yours, too.”

“How am I supposed to know that it gets cold in the desert at night?”

“I don’t mind keeping you warm,” he grinned.

“Well consider it a privilege, smart guy. But keep up that attitude, and you *will* need your jacket.”

The sound of gentle thunder shook the ground as Abdul galloped up to the tent, followed by a dozen lapis-robed Tuareg soldiers veiled in ominous black head wraps that masked everything but their eyes. The cavalry was equipped with antique flintlock rifles and ammunition belts, in addition to the traditional meter-long *takoba* blade of their tribe. Their camels snorted, pawing the ground restlessly, anxious to move out.

“A most blessed morning to you, *Sahib Indee*. I present our finest warriors to fight the German infidels,” he boasted proudly. “Today we ride to victory!”

Indy had to admit that the group of Arabian warriors cloaked in silent anonymity was impressive, but it was too much. “We don’t need a caravan to announce our presence. Just the three of us. Anything more would attract the kind of attention I’d like to avoid.”

“As you wish, my friend.” Abdul nodded keenly, assenting to his wisdom. He turned to address his men. “Follow us at noon. Ride half a day behind.”

“Good. That way we’ll have back-up in case we need it.” Indy brought his dromedary to its feet with a snap of the reins. “Let’s get moving while the weather is still cool.”

The tent flap opened as Prisha came outside to bid them farewell. She offered a prayer of good fortune for their journey, and then pressed a small object into Sophia’s hand. The psychic held up a small amber fish jewel tied to a length of gold cord. “What is this?”

“A compass to your dreams. It will guide you to

the Lost Kingdom when you lose your way. Always remember me by it.”

Holding the fish up to the light, Sophia noticed how the bauble was exactly the same color as the *Amenokal's* compassionate eyes. Eyes that suddenly twinkled with a mysterious, knowing smile as the tiny fish whirled on its cord.

They shared a final embrace. “Blessings be upon you, sister. We shall meet again in another life.”

“I know we will. Thank you for everything. I promise that I’ll never forget you.” As she saddled up on her camel, Sophia fought back tears for the pure, selfless love and spiritual awakening that she had received from the woman who had become closer than a sister in their brief time together.

Indy beckoned her to take the lead. “After you, *jamila*.”

“You’re *too* kind, Dr. Jones.”

The sun began its ascent as they headed south across the carpet of glittering sand, riding towards the imperious band of gray rock that marked their destination. They moved steadily towards the mountains, but found themselves chasing an illusion. The Atlas range that appeared so close at the outset seemed to recede into the distance the further they rode, perpetually out of reach beyond the sea of golden dunes that rose and fell with maddening regularity. They were riding in place but getting nowhere, like some kind of cruel magic trick.

The Sahara Desert covered more than three million square miles—an area larger than Europe—spanning the equator, and dividing the continent

into North and Sub-Saharan Africa. It was a landscape of endless dunes, barren salt flats, and dusty, arid plains. A person could easily burn or freeze to death in the extreme subtropical climate, depending on the time of day. The temperature fluctuated from blistering highs of 120 degrees in the afternoon, to bone-chilling sub-zero after sundown. Indy pushed the sobering figures from his mind and ruminated on Plato's lost dialogue, which he had studied late into the night.

The *Hermocrates*, ironically, was a narrative debating the existence of Atlantis, in which the titular character refuted his skeptical colleagues with numerous facts about the Lost City. Indy was most intrigued by the mention of a Greater Colony and a Lesser Colony, whose gates could only be opened with the very same keystones they had been searching for. Unfortunately, the text failed to name these outposts. The curious absence of detail made him suspect the dialogue wasn't written by Plato at all. In fact, the book read more like an instruction manual on the workings of the Atlantean empire, replete with descriptions of technology that seemed like imaginative fiction penned by the bored scholar who labored over the translation. Still, it was the only thing they had to rely on until more concrete evidence came to light.

The hours wore on in a monotonous sludge of existence as they crossed the trackless desert. By midday, the temperature was unbearable. The heat rose from the sand in shimmering, transparent flames that blurred the air, and played tricks with their vision. Dark, snake-like mirages slithered across their path, only to vanish when they drew near. Weak from ex-

haustion, Sophia Hapgood clung to the saddle horns like a rag doll and blinked her leaden eyelids, trying to stave off the deadly fatigue that would claim her life if she drifted to sleep. Her skin felt tight across her face. Her throat was parched. She lifted the canteen to her chapped lips and painfully swallowed the last drizzle of warm water, desperately wishing that it was chilled with frosty ice cubes.

Indy noticed her flagging constitution. “Hey, sweetie, are you feeling okay?”

Wobbling dizzily, she managed a dull, glassy gaze. “I think my brain is on fire,” she rasped.

He touched her forehead. “You’re burning up. Abdul, we need to find water and shade. Fast.”

“There.” The warrior pointed to a tiny dark spot in the middle of the beige wilderness. “Two kilometers, perhaps three.”

“We need to hurry. Here, put this on.” Indy reached into his saddlebag and placed his hat firmly onto her head to provide some relief from the sun. He grabbed her reins and prodded his camel towards the distant oasis, pulling her along with him. Sophia squinted through her heat-induced fugue as a thicket of vegetation materialized from the hellish wasteland. She almost wept when they finally trotted beneath the umbrella of thick palms that ringed a crystal clear pond. The cool shade was a shock to her overheated body, and she slipped from the saddle in a dead faint. Luckily, Indy caught her before she fell. He lowered her onto the sandy shore, and splashed water on her face until she regained consciousness.

Scooping handfuls of water from the pond, he urged her to drink. When her eyes refocused, Sophia

saw Indiana Jones gazing down at her in concern. "Feel better now?"

The redhead handed his fedora back with a feeble smile. "Thanks, but I think it looks better on you."

He stroked her head fondly. "That's my girl. If Abdul hadn't spotted this oasis, you'd be a goner."

She reached up and clutched the nomad's hand in a gesture of gratitude. "Thank you, Abdul. I owe you everything."

"You owe me nothing. Friendship has no price, apart from love," he said, finally breaking his silence.

Although the blue veil masked his expression, it magnified a disarmingly compassionate gaze from eyes that had avoided her for so long. She gaped in amazement, stunned by the first words that he'd ever spoken to her. "*Now* you talk to me?" Sophia winced, immediately wishing that she'd held her tongue.

Abdul Aziz chuckled. "The desert keeps its secrets. I am not worried."

"I think you're in good hands now," Indy said, rising to his feet. "I'll try to find us some food around here. You like dates?" Before she could respond, he strolled off into the jungle to give them some privacy.

The Berber took an oilskin bag from his robes and filled it in the pool. Sophia wasted no time in kindling their friendship. "Won't Allah be mad at you for talking to me? I'm not a Tuareg." As much as she admired the man who had saved her life twice now, she didn't want him to violate his religion on her behalf.

"Allah is merciful and understanding. He knows that I love my sweet wife Prisha. But he also knows that I will not ignore my friends in time of need. For that reason I am pleased to help you on your quest."

He tied the water pouch and looked around for their camels, which had strayed into the shady grove to escape the heat.

“But—”

“Rest now. We shall talk more later,” he promised.

She watched him go in a daze, scarcely believing what had just happened. Only when she removed her headscarf did Sophia realize that her Arab clothing made her more appropriate to converse with. Oddly, she didn't mind. But now it was time to rest. Unlacing her boots, she slipped her aching feet into the cool water, and lay back on the sand with a sigh of contentment. Above her, the blue sky glittered between the swaying palm leaves.

“I could stay here forever.”

A dark shadow eclipsed her face, followed by the barrel of a rifle. “For breaking the law, you just might.”

Startled, she rolled over to see her accoster, a thin, acne-scarred Arab with shifty eyes and a pointy goatee. The scoundrel wore the brimmed kepi and white tunic of a legionnaire, with baggy trousers tucked into tall riding boots. His wiry frame barely supported his worn leather gunbelt stocked with spare bullet cartridges.

“This post belongs to the French government. You dare trespass without authorization?” He motioned her with his gun. “On your feet. Now.”

Sophia quickly stood and raised her hands like a hostage. “Don't shoot. I just wanted a drink.”

He stared in astonishment at the sight of her blood-red mane uncurling over her shoulders. “You are not Tuareg. Where did you come from?”

"I'm an American." She tried to sound confident, hoping that her nationality somehow accorded her a higher status than the average prisoner, or at least prevented her from getting shot.

The rifle dropped a little. "Show me your passport," he commanded.

"It's in my purse, but my camel ran away with it." The explanation sounded ridiculous, but it was all she could think of at the moment.

"Then give me a reason to not arrest you for polluting my oasis with your filthy, unwashed feet."

"I don't know what you mean," she said calmly, wondering where the hell Indy was.

The Arab glanced around furtively, suddenly anxious. "Remove your clothes."

"*Excuse* me?" Sophia balked in disbelief. "No, I don't think so."

The agitated soldier drew a bead on her with his ancient rifle. "Undress now, please. If you satisfy me, then maybe I let you live. If not, you will get your wish to stay here for long time."

"Well, how can I refuse hospitality like that?" She slowly unfastened her belt sash, mentally cursing Indy while the scruffy fiend savored her with lustful eyes. The poor wretch probably hadn't seen a woman in months, and it wasn't hard to imagine what he had in mind. Where the hell was Indy?

A fusillade of heavy raindrops suddenly rattled the tree canopy, and the startled soldier aimed his gun skyward as dried figs pelted the sand all around him. Indiana Jones sprang from the bushes and wrenched the weapon away. He jabbed the legionnaire in the gut with the rifle. Abdul appeared on the other side

of the trail with their camels. Sophia glared at them. "It's about time!"

Confronted by the new arrivals, the disarmed Arab railed in outrage. "You have assaulted a duly-sworn officer of the Foreign Legion, and you are all under arrest! I am taking you back to the city."

Indy trained the mercenary's gun on him. "I think you've gone above and beyond the call of duty, soldier. Why don't you call it a day?"

"I am Tarak Ben-Kenobi, First Battalion regiment. This is my post, and I do not take orders from lawless *kafir* like you," he spat vehemently.

Incensed by the insult, Abdul swept forward, gripping the hilt of his sword menacingly. Ben flinched, but stood his ground. Indy tensed, knowing that the Tuareg resistance leader would kill the scrawny colonial enforcer without a second thought. He had to act quickly before things got out of hand.

"What would it take to forget we ever met?" he asked, remembering a few pieces of worthless statuary that Sophia had purchased in the Casbah. A well-placed bribe just might spare some unnecessary bloodshed.

Ben Kenobi stroked his beard shrewdly, reconsidering his hasty threat in light of the proposal. "Well now, it depends on what you have to offer."

Indy dug in the saddlebag and gave him a soapstone figure of an archer drawing back his bow. "Here you go, friend. A rare carving of obvious value."

The patrolman dropped the statuette in the dirt with barely a glance. He brushed his hands together in disgust. "Fah! I have no need for such material trifles. I only take gold or silver." He glanced at So-

phia again. "Or the woman, also."

The last of Indy's patience was gone, and he was fed up with trying to negotiate with the scrawny desert rat. "Then maybe I'll just file a report with Governor le Beau. I'm sure he'd be thrilled to know that his troops are open to bribery."

Kenobi knew that he would lose his job if word of the incident got back to the capital. He stomped off through the trees, mounted his camel and galloped away in a furious cloud of dust, hurling a string of French profanities behind him.

Sophia retied her loose robe. "What a charming fellow."

"You seem to attract those types," Indy conceded. He pitched the legionnaire's rifle into the bushes. "Let's restock our water supply and keep moving."

\* \* \*

"God, it's hot out here."

Sophia Hapgood took a swig from her canteen and shifted positions on the rocky mountain slope, but found it impossible to relax on the griddle-hot stone that burned her skin through the fabric of her robes. Worse, there was not a shred of wind to ease the fury of the sun glaring down from the cloudless blue sky.

"That's why they call it the desert, sweetheart." Lying belly-down beside her, Indy panned his binoculars over the 10-acre dig site, a quarter of a mile away.

He traced an imaginary path for them to follow to the heart of the excavation, a branching, multi-leveled pit cut into the desert floor. A sizeable mound

of dirt was piled beside the main trench, along with a dusty bulldozer. On the opposite side of the hole, a portable crane was mounted to a concrete slab which also held a cluster of 50-gallon drums, covered by a large canvas awning. Further back, Indy saw a steel water tower rising above the compound.

Anxious to explore the dig, Sophia nudged his arm. "What can you see?"

"A lot of equipment, some vehicles..." He tallied an ancient pickup truck, two motorcycles, and a strange half-track type automobile. "At least there are no tanks," he muttered with relief.

"Any Nazis?"

Indy shook his head. A small tent village flanked the inner perimeter fence, but there was no sign of activity in the camp. "The place looks abandoned. That should make it easy for us."

Sophia rolled over to face Abdul, sprawled on the ledge beside her. "How was the site found?"

"Many moons ago, a terrible sandstorm uncovered a tree growing in the sand, a tree without branches. It was the mast of a buried ship. A team of scholars came from the city to see it. The Germans followed soon after."

"But who would build a ship in the middle of the desert? It doesn't make any sense."

Indy stowed his field glasses. "Let's go find out."

Leaving their camels in the shaded valley below the ridge, the trio scurried across the gravel shoal spanning the barren plain. They'd nearly reached the dig when a dust cloud billowed into the sky on the far side of the compound. They froze at the unmistakable sound of an engine. "Shit. I knew it couldn't be

this easy. Try to keep low, and follow me. *Hurry.*”

They raced the beige smoke plume to the German encampment and reached the fence just as a half-track came into view. Indy quickly slid under on his belly and lifted the barbed wire for his friends to follow. They darted between the tents to hide. He held his breath, praying that the soldiers wouldn't see their footprints in the sand. Fortunately, the patrol motored past without stopping.

When the car was gone, they crept through the silent camp, using the excavating equipment for cover until they made it to the pit. Indy peered into the stygian depths and spied the remains of a wooden ship in the shadows below. He paused, listening for any voices in the cavern, but his ears met with stark silence.

“I'm going down. Keep your eyes open, and yell if you see anything.”

Sophia was huddled nearby in the shade of the bulldozer with Abdul. “Be careful, Indy.”

Descending the shaft through a razor-sharp wedge of sunlight that bathed the sandstone wall in a rosy glow, Indiana Jones landed beside the shipwreck in the subterranean gloom. The air was dry and cool, the oily darkness almost thick enough to breathe. The archaeologist knelt by the ship and noted a pile of broken clay wine jugs lying within the dry-rotted cedar skeleton. The curved wooden ribs described a broad-hulled vessel with a pronounced keel. He brushed a layer of sand from a crude stone anchor, half-buried in the soil. Indy scratched his chin thoughtfully.

“Early Iron Age. Phoenician... or possibly Greek,” he estimated. It might have classified as a boat grave,

if not for the absence of human remains. Still, it was an interesting find. Indy wished that he had more time to examine it, but it was too risky. The longer they stayed, the greater their chances of being caught by the Nazis. He wanted to find the keystone and get out of there as quick as possible.

Startled by the unexpected noise of a motor chugging to life, Indy stood tensely, steeling for a Nazi ambush as the darkness wilted away in the glow of electric lamps hanging from the ceiling. The wan light revealed a large stone chamber reinforced with stout wooden posts. Indy relaxed when he saw that he was alone in the room. Aside from the noisy gasoline generator that supplied power to the lights, there was only a work table and a length of mine car track which spanned the rubble-strewn floor. Piles of rocky debris were heaped along the walls, but the chamber was surprisingly bare. Maybe they were too late, he thought. The Germans might have already found the prize and moved on. But if that were the case, why were they still patrolling the site?

“Ooh, it’s nice and cool down here.” He looked up as Sophia clambered down the ladder to join him, followed by Abdul. She pulled back her veil and scanned the room with a cursory glance before settling on the ship. That was the real prize. “Wow, a Phoenician bireme! How do you suppose it ended up all the way out here?”

“Perhaps this was the harbor of some long-vanished sea,” Abdul speculated thoughtfully as he studied the condition of the wreck.

“That’s my guess, too.” Indy said. “The Mediterranean was much larger in ancient times. There are

desert ruins from here to Iraq. I've even worked on some of them myself. Who knows, maybe Atlantis was an empire of the sand?"

"The true believer can find proof in the largest pyramid or the smallest stone," she said, caressing one of the broken ship ribs. "This mighty vessel carried refugees here after the sinking of Atlantis. I'm sure of it. Wait!" She stood alertly, as if summoned by a silent, omnipotent voice. "I sense the presence of Nur-Ab-Sal nearby."

Dowsing the room, she led them to a relief hidden in the shadows on a wall behind the generator. The painting showed a pair of dark-haired females in billowy blue dresses, tossing a ball-like object in the air. Indy saw a familiar golden chest between the twins. It looked like the Ark of the Covenant. The vibrant colors were remarkably well-preserved in the dry, shady atmosphere belowground. Indy noted how the figures were depicted in profile, which was common to the Amarna style of art.

"Look," he said, tracing the painted orb. "It's the Aten, the sun disk of Ra. Sorry to disappoint you, but this was an Egyptian outpost."

"No. These are the Sisters of the Light. The gatekeepers of Atlantis. They were one of the twin children of Poseidon and Cleito."

"I think you need to brush up on your mythology. Poseidon had five sets of male twins, and none of them were the gatekeepers of anything."

"Don't contradict me, Jones. I have spiritual guidance from the last king of Atlantis. Nur-Ab-Sal knows all, and sees all."

"Then where's the gate?" he challenged.

“Why it’s right here, of course. Just look.” Closing her eyes, Sophia ran her hands over the stone painting like a person reading Braille, but her face skewed in frustration after several moments of fruitless searching. “Well, it’s... It should be...”

She stepped back from the wall with a heavy sigh, her confidence visibly waning. “Strange, Nur-Ab-Sal tells me that this is the right place, but I just can’t find it.”

“That’s because it’s only a picture. If the keystone really is here, it’s probably buried in an unopened antechamber. Look over there.” He pointed at two adjacent alcoves filled with rubble.

“Maybe we need more light?” Abdul chimed in helpfully.

“Yeah, and some shovels,” Indy said without enthusiasm. After all of the suffering they had endured to get to the dig site, the last thing he felt like doing was clearing a tunnel on the remote chance that it may contain the artifact they were searching for.

The clairvoyant was scrutinizing the mural intensely, literally *willing* the stone to give up its ancient secret, when Abdul’s comment hit her like a ton of bricks. The solution was staring her in the face. “Light. The Aten... The sun disk. A *disk*. Follow the light, and the kingdom will be revealed.”

Her hands traveled up the wall. She grasped the chiseled rim of the bas-relief sphere with her fingernails, pulled on it, and the “sun” fell from its shallow recess. “Ha! Hidden in plain sight.”

“Clever,” he remarked.

“We finally have the key to Atlantis,” she proclaimed, offering the stone to Indy with great cer-

emony.

“Or at least one of them. There are three stones, according to the book. Remember?”

The granite disk was nearly a foot in diameter, with four distinct solar images carved along the outer edge at quarter intervals. Around the central spindle hole was a recess to accommodate the next key in the set. Sophia pointed out that the circular shape of the stone signified unity, wholeness, and perfection—the virtues of Atlantis.

He handed the sunstone back. “Here, you hold onto it. I think Abdul’s found something.” Across the room, the nomad beckoned them over to a badly damaged section of wall, where the fractured rock had been hastily patched with mud. Indy touched the plaster. “Cement. And it’s still damp. Somebody covered this up recently. Let’s see what they were hiding.”

He chipped at the wall with his pocket knife until bits of clay littered the floor. Beneath the crude veneer, they found the image of a single landmass carved into the ancient sandstone. It was a slender island with a jagged coastline.

“The island of Crete,” Indy said.

“That’s it! Crete must be the Greater Colony that was mentioned in the *Hermocrates!*” exclaimed Sophia, clutching the sunstone against her chest. “We really found it!”

“Well, it certainly fits with Plato’s description of a mountainous island with an oblong shape.”

“Do you know what this means? Now we can find Atlantis!” She tugged on his sleeve, practically jumping up and down in excitement. “Come on, let’s go right now!”

“Yes. Let us take a visit there together. Especially since we are all searching for the same place.”

Klaus Kerner strode boldly from the shadows, flanked by two plainclothes German agents with pistols. It was the first time Indy had ever seen his nemesis in full regalia. The statuesque colonel cut a striking figure in his custom-tailored SS *Waffenrock* made of jade gabardine wool, and matching Jodhpur breeches. His tunic displayed a modest assortment of badges, but the pride of his ensemble was the blood-red swastika band on his left sleeve. Flawless blond hair. Chiseled features. Icy blue eyes that cut like a knife. The pretty boy was 100-percent Nazi, all the way down to his polished jackboots.

Torsten gestured at them with his Mauser HSc. “These Arabs speak English quite well, Herr Colonel. Too bad they did not cover their tracks so good. *Araber tragen keine Stiefel, meine amerikanischen Freunde.*”

“I’ll remember that next time,” Indy muttered sourly.

Kerner extended his hand to Sophia in formal greeting. “Fräulein, I don’t believe I have made the pleasure of your acquaintance.” When she responded with a bitterly caustic glare, he snapped the sunstone from her grasp.

“This relic is the property of the *Ahnenerbe*. Thank you for providing us both the key to the Lost City, and its location.” He touched the mud-splotched wall, rubbed his fingertips together primly. “It seems that we require the assistance of another Atlantis expert since Doktor Sternhart has outlived his loyalty. Your powers are truly remarkable. They will prove

useful in the Lost City.”

“You’ve *got* to be kidding me. I’m not going to help you monsters find anything.”

“Monsters? What is it Herr Jones has said to give us such a distasteful reputation?”

“Nothing that you haven’t earned for yourself.” Indy jibed.

“Unlike you beastly Americans, we are descendants of the *nordisch atlantic*, the superior Aryan race, founders of this magnificent lost civilization which predates history itself.” Kerner preened his pale coiffure with such a theatrical flourish that Indy might have laughed if he weren’t being held at gunpoint. “Such a distinction is hardly the work of monsters, I think.”

“Do you really believe that?” Indy sneered at the medals gleaming on the Nazi’s breast; Awards for bloodshed. The bold cantilevered runic armband glared in his face; A once-benevolent icon turned perpetually evil, and his contempt poured out in a bitter torrent.

“You bastards turn the swastika sideways, persecute innocent people, and commit wholesale atrocity in the name of national pride. And for what? Because your psychotic Führer buys some Russian mystic’s bullshit theory about a so-called ‘Master Race’ from Atlantis? Yeah, that’s real noble.”

“Atlantis was perfect. This world is not.” Kerner said in a voice measured with icy calm. “Ridding the human race of its inferior people is the price of progress, and a very small one to pay, I might add.” The tall, square-jawed German circled Indy, keenly appraising his rugged visage from all sides. “Perhaps,

Herr Jones, you might even be harboring some Jew yourself.”

“Fuck you.”

With those words, he'd pitted his life against the very core of the Nazi's patriotic devotion. Disbelief and fury mottled Kerner's face like measles, but he regained his composure with a frigid little smile. “That is quite enough mud-slinging. Time is short, and I have need of Fräulein Hapgood's services.”

“So do I,” Torsten snickered lewdly.

“Agent Fleischer! *Ruhe!*” Kerner's sharp reprimand promptly stifled the officer's amusement.

“You're not using me for anything, you son of a bitch.” Sophia seethed, red-faced with fury. “I wouldn't help you find Atlantis if my life depended on it!”

Kerner drew his gun with a dispassionate frown. “It might. I am offering you a choice, Fräulein. Join us, and fulfill your life's ambition. Or join your friend, another rotting corpse on the road to glory.” He aimed the Luger at Indy's chest. “*Auf Wiedersehen, Dr. Jones.*”

A tremendous roar shattered the air. Indy tensed, but felt nothing. Then the lights flickered as a massive dirt avalanche poured into the chamber, obliterating the patch of blue sky above the entrance. Everything vanished in a thick cloud of dust. Primed with adrenaline-fueled hatred, Indy lashed out blindly with a vicious kick to Kerner's wrist. The SS colonel bellowed in agony as his gun flew into the haze. Indy delivered a knockout blow to Kerner's handsome face that sent him to the dirt, unconscious.

“The sunstone!” Sophia practically dove to the

floor after the precious relic.

“*Du da! Jones!*” Torsten stabbed his pistol towards Indy and fired a deafening cannon blast in the tight confines of the chamber. He stared in disbelief because he’d missed in the smoke. Enraged, Indy leaped towards the dumbstruck agent and sacked him like a linebacker, driving him over the mine car tracks. Torsten fell, striking his head against the metal rails with a dull thud that made Indy wince. The second Abwehr agent raised his gun to retaliate when he felt razor-sharp tip of Abdul’s sword pressed against his throat.

“Drop it, son.” Indy advised him.

Karl immediately put his hands up in surrender. “*Ich habe nur Kerners Befehle befolgt.*” I was just following Kerner’s orders.

“Then I’d find some better friends if I were you,” he responded in German while relieving the young agent of his weapon. “Because you’re keeping bad company, kid.”

Sophia rejoined him with the sunstone. “Got it.”

“Great. Now let’s get the hell out of here.”

Returning to the ladder, they were astonished to find the bulldozer crashed face-down in the massive landslide clogging the entry shaft. Splintered wooden planks protruded from the dirt mound where the ancient galleon had been pulverized in the collapse. A sliver of daylight glowed in the very corner of the alcove—all that remained of the opening. Sophia peered up at the narrow blue slice. “What happened? Did the roof cave in?”

“I don’t think so. That earthmover was on solid ground,” Indy said.

“*Salamu aleykum!*” A blue-veiled face that Indy recognized as one of the warriors from the support squad appeared above them.

“Izem! Thank Allah you are here!” Abdul quickly scaled the dirt pile and vanished through the crevice. Indy and Sophia wasted no time in following. A pair of bronze hands pulled them into the blinding sunlight. Their rescuer was a lean Tuareg in dust-caked robes. Indy gave the bulldozer driver a hearty pat on the back to thank the man whose timely action had saved his life.

Thunder echoed across the cloudless sky. Shripping Tamasheq battle cries filled the dusty air as the legion of blue-robed warriors galloped across the dig site with their swords raised high. The cavalry had arrived, and not a moment too soon. Sleepy Nazi soldiers poured from their tents, bleary-eyed and disoriented by the commotion. The sight of the rampaging Arab riders snapped them to instant sobriety.

“*Zu den Waffen! Wir werden angegriffen! Beeilung!*”

Bullets sparkled off the bulldozer’s steel treads like fireworks. Grabbing Sophia by the arm, Indy ran hell-bent-for-leather towards the cluster of vehicles parked by the crane while gunfire raked the parched soil around them.

“*Yalla! Yalla!*” Abdul climbed onto the upended excavator and waved his sword to rally his men to battle. The Tuareg responded by unleashing a volley of musket fire that drove the Nazis back among their tents in surprise. Indy used the cover to slide behind the steering wheel of the nearest half-track, a small, angular car made of corrugated gray sheet metal.

Sophia took the passenger seat beside him. “What

is this thing?”

The sedan appeared to be a hybrid model, with a triangular caterpillar tread configuration in place of its normal rear wheels. There was a spare tire mounted on the hood, and a 10-gallon gas can strapped to the front fender. The side panels featured the word ‘*Volkswagenwerk*’ stenciled above a toothed sprocket emblem.

“Who cares, as long as it runs. Lucky for us Kerner left his keys in the ignition.” He started the car, jammed the gas pedal down, and the half-track lurched into motion.

“Waitamminute. Where’s Abdul?”

Indy twisted around in his seat, and saw him running towards the crane with Izem. The blue nomads ducked out of sight among the other vehicles, but reappeared a few seconds later, running like mad.

“What the hell is he doing?”

“Abdul, come on! Hurry!” Sophia waved frantically, urging him to run faster.

The Tuareg dove headfirst into the back seat of the moving vehicle just as a hail of lead stitched the burning sand close by. “*Imshee! Go!*” Indy didn’t need any motivation. He floored the accelerator and they sped across the dig site while the helpless German soldiers watched in disbelief.

“*Die Araber entkommen! Zu den Wagen! Haltet sie auf, bevor sie das Tor erreichen!*”

Incensed by Indy’s theft of the car, the Nazis laid down a line of counter-fire against the marauding nomads. They broke from their position and scrambled for their vehicles. Half of the troops piled into the old flatbed truck while several more took the oth-

er half-track. The motorcycles roared off ahead of them, intent on catching the 'Arab' fugitives before they could reach the open desert.

"Here's where the fun begins." Indy muttered as the military convoy peeled after them in hot pursuit.

The second Kübelwagen shot forward, spewing sand furiously in its eagerness to join the chase. Behind them, the crane boom suddenly came to life on its own. The massive arm pivoted in a circle as if magnetically drawn to the speeding car. The steel cable went rigid and the half-track jumped violently off the ground in a shower of gears and bolts. The spinning treads frayed apart, unbelting from the drive train, and the vehicle crashed back to earth in a cloud of dust. Sophia gawked in astonishment. Its rear axle had been torn clean from the undercarriage.

"Wow! Where did you learn *that* trick?!" She had never seen anything like it before.

Abdul shrugged modestly. "To stop a camel from running, simply tie his legs." A sharp burst of gunfire suddenly ripped through the windshield, chopping the plate glass to shards.

"Get down!" Indy punched the ruined screen flat against the hood to clear his line of sight, then jammed the pedal down, running the sedan to its maximum speed. The weak, 4-cylinder air-cooled engine screamed to propel the ungainly tracked vehicle through the thick Algerian sand.

"*Indee*, look what I find!" Abdul popped up from the back seat with a Karabiner field rifle.

"Great, let 'em have it!" Indy growled as the BMW motorcycles arrowed in on either side to intercept them.

The first soldier drew alongside the car and reached for his holstered gun. Abdul whipped the rifle up and picked off the Nazi at point-blank range. The speeding bike crashed to the ground and skidded into the path of its twin. The other rider swerved sharply to avoid the collision, but the handlebar of the fallen motorcycle went into his whirling spokes, and the two machines twisted into a tangled heap of metal.

The truckload of Nazis roared past their fallen comrades with its deadly cargo, a pincushion of steel gun barrels. The troops standing behind the cab leveled their guns on the roof and opened fire on the lumbering half-track.

“Sonofabitch,” Indy swore. He twisted the steering wheel hard, and the car slewed sideways to evade the gunfire. Bullet holes riddled the fenders as the German vehicle see-sawed like a block of lead on ice, but the shots miraculously missed the rear engine compartment. “This thing doesn’t steer worth a damn,” he grimaced, trying to regain control of the skittering vehicle.

“We don’t have time for this!” Sophia declared impatiently. She jerked the rifle from Abdul’s hands, and took aim at the cluster of red 50-gallon steel drums that were marked: *Lebensgefahr! Entflammbar!* in bold white letters. She cradled the heavy rifle as the half-track bounced roughly over the dirt, focused, and pulled the trigger.

*Click.*

Nothing happened. Another string of German bullets kissed the half-track’s rear treads. Panic flashed through her body like ice. *Click. Click. Click.* Sophia fumbled the rifle desperately, struggling to make it

shoot again. "What's wrong with this thing?"

"It's a bolt action! You have to chamber each round!" Indy yelled over the crack of gunfire shredding the austral wind.

The redhead clumsily worked the lever and jammed the bullet into place. She rose to her full height, ignoring the staccato chatter of death that buzzed around her like annoying mosquitoes, raised the gun and sighted down the barrel. Dust particles stung her eyes as she squinted hard in the phosphorescent sun glare that burned the world in a vivid white glow. Her target was a smudgy red blur dancing on the Karabiner's muzzle. She took a deep breath of searing hot air, steadied her aim, and fired.

The crane vanished in a fiery orange blossom that engulfed the fuel pad, igniting the remaining barrels in a series of deafening *whomps!* A massive pillar of flame scarred the blue Saharan sky. Bodies flew screaming through the air as the concussion slapped the Nazi truck like a tin cracker box. The force of the blast shattered the water tower, unleashing a torrent that swept away the tents and flooded the excavation pit with mud.

Abdul released a cry of celebration echoed by the ring of Tuareg camel soldiers that galloped around the speeding half-track. The Berber cavalry discharged their guns in a triumphant victory salute. Sophia held up the sunstone with a bright grin. "You call this archaeology?"

"No, but I seem to have a talent for it!" They crashed through the wooden security gate and raced into the desert wilderness, leaving the ruined dig site far behind.

\* \* \*

It was a floating death trap, Sophia decided, warily circling the enormous yellow hydrogen-filled globe that would carry them to Greece. They would be riding in a creaky, phone booth-sized wicker basket attached to the silk balloon by a rope lattice netting which looked as if it might disintegrate in the wind gusting over the rocky Gouraya peninsula, on the Mediterranean coast.

She wrinkled her nose at the sharp odor of rubber doping that stung her nostrils, even from a distance. “Do you actually know how to fly one of these things?”

Indy turned from the lanky Arab in the green robes who was explaining the flight controls to him. “Kareem is teaching me the basics. I haven’t piloted one since the war, but there’s nothing to it.”

In truth, the archaic hydrogen balloon wasn’t so different from the Rozière-type aerial surveillance platforms that he had used in the Belgian army. Indy was confident that he could handle the aircraft once he understood the gas venting and ballast operations.

Sophia apprehensively eyed the word ‘HYDROGEN’ stenciled on the dented gas canister hanging from the outside of the basket. “Does anybody else remember the Hindenburg? There’s a reason they don’t use this stuff anymore.”

Indy doffed his hat. “Well, it’s not exactly a luxury flight, but it’s the best we can do on short notice. Besides, it’s free.”

It had been three days since they fled the dig site

for the Algerian port city of Béjaïa, where Abdul's cousin operated an aerial tour service. Indy was anxious to put as much distance as possible between Africa and Greece, because he was certain they hadn't seen the last of Klaus Kerner. With good tailwind and a little luck, they could beat the Nazis to the Greater Colony, and ultimately Atlantis, if the fabled city even existed. In spite of everything, Indy still had his doubts. But they had come this far, so he had no choice but to see it through.

He watched carefully while Kareem demonstrated how the parachute vent cord peeled open the top of the balloon to vent gas for a quick descent. The rim of the basket was saddled with heavy sandbags to be used for ballast during ascension. The airship could fly with little or no heat during the day, but the burner was used to keep the hydrogen at a constant temperature to ensure a level flight after sundown. Only a small amount of fuel was needed to fly for lengthy periods of time, Kareem said.

This last bit of information piqued Sophia's interest. "How long can we fly before we need more hydrogen?"

The Arab scratched his beard for a moment, considering the question. "The longest flight that I hear of lasted twenty days." He beckoned to the swollen balloon. "Gas leaks out sometimes, so probably less." A particularly strong gust of wind swirled a dirt devil around them. "See? Good wind for flying! You will travel far today!"

There was a loud roar as he fired the blast valve. A gout of orange flame leaped into the balloon's narrow throat like a blowtorch, and the basket lifted off

the ground by several inches. The airship strained at its mooring ropes, which were tied to rusty iron rings embedded in a quadruplet of stone blocks around the balloon.

Standing at the edge of the clearing, Abdul watched the balloon dance in the salty sea breeze, eager to whisk his new friends away into the wide blue sky. Sophia stared in disbelief because the Tuareg had lowered his veil to reveal his handsome bronze features. She strolled over and gazed wistfully upon the face of her guardian for the first and last time.

“You truly are a noble warrior, Abdul. Brave, kind, heroic... Thank you for protecting me.” She took his hands in hers. “I wish we could have spent more time together.”

“The sands are always shifting, *Al anesah Sofeea*. Such is life.” She embraced the blue desert warrior, never wanting to let go. “May Allah smile on you always,” he whispered in her ear.

“You, too.” She pulled away reluctantly, then picked up her valise and carried it over to the balloon, where Kareem placed it inside of the basket along with Indy’s rucksack.

Then he helped her onto the wooden crate to climb inside. “*Sha’ar ahmar-ma ajmal!*” The balloon owner regarded her tall knee-high boots, dusty jeans, and disheveled blouse flapping loosely in the wind. “You fly around the world like Amelia Earhart?”

Sophia Hapgood couldn’t help smiling because her outfit conjured up the image of the famous aviatrix. She turned up her hands with a shrug. “Sure, why not?”

Kareem, noticing the tears in her eyes, mistook her

sadness for fear. "Do not get lost, I hope."

"Don't worry, Kareem. Not as long as she's with me." Indy chuckled as he helped Sophia into the basket. "After you, Miss Earhart."

Abdul came over to say goodbye. "Farewell, *Sahib Indee*. It was a grand adventure. You did well. May the German infidels never return to my country."

Indy shook hands with the Berber nomad. "We sure gave them something to think about, didn't we? Thanks for everything, Abdul. You are a good and honorable friend."

"Ready to fly now?" Kareem asked.

Indy climbed into the basket and took hold of the control cables. "Ready."

Together, Abdul and his cousin released the mooring ropes, and the giant yellow balloon lifted into the sky. Sophia waved at Abdul as the earth shrank beneath them, until his tiny blue figure vanished from sight. She heaved a deep sigh and put her arms around Indy for comfort. A strident wind blew them eastward over the deep blue Mediterranean, towards Atlantis. Towards destiny.



## DIVING FOR ATLANTIS

Dark waves lapped at the faded 'Port of Kalymnos' legend painted on the hull of the rusty fishing trawler plowing through the Aegean Sea. Dimitri Valsamidis checked his compass bearing against the coordinates marked on his navigational chart, rolled the wheel several degrees to port and, after several more minutes of traveling, determined that he'd arrived at the precise location requested by his passengers. The old Greek fisherman cut power to the grumbling marine diesel and dropped anchor in the middle of nowhere. The *Promised Land* glided to a standstill in the choppy surf, 40 miles north of Crete. The island's distant, jagged profile was the only feature breaking the panorama of watery desolation around them. The rest of the world was composed of water and sky.

Dimitri stepped out of the wheelhouse and kicked one of the dented wire baskets piled amid the rolls

of tangled netting that cluttered the deck of his boat. "These are the coordinates you provide me, but there is nothing here, not even a good harvest." he complained to the tough-looking man in the brown hat and leather jacket who was huddled by the aft gunwale with his beautiful red-haired companion. The Americans were too preoccupied with their old book to be concerned about the rough current threatening to capsize his ancient hook boat. "You waste my time, but you pay good money, so I don't complain so much."

Sophia Hapgood flashed him a bright smile. "Relax, Dimitri, we're after a lot more than sponges. We have a whole *world* to discover."

The sailor's bushy gray eyebrows knitted with skepticism, adding another decade of creases to his weathered face. "Under the water is nothing but mud," he said, gesturing to the foaming swells that rocked the boat. Not many sponge divers worked the waters around Crete anymore, although he knew of several lucrative reefs in the area. None, however, were this far out, so he couldn't imagine what they possibly hoped to find out here.

Sophia returned her attention to the *Hermocrates*. "Okay, let's go over it one more time, just to be sure."

Indy heaved a tedious sigh, and read the text aloud for the fifth time that day. He could almost recite it by memory. "*So glorious Atlantis founded two colonies, the Lesser 340 miles north of the City and the Greater 390 miles to the south.*" He slapped the book shut. "That's all it says."

"Now, factoring in Plato's tenfold error, we divide by ten, so the Greater Colony," she turned, point-

ing to the rocky pinnacle climbing out of the cobalt waters in the distance, “would be 39 miles to the south, which should put us directly over Atlantis.” She stomped her heel twice on the wooden deck for emphasis.

“If it even exists,” Indy reminded her.

“Which is precisely why I’m going, and you’re not.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You are a disbeliever, unworthy to gaze upon the Lost Kingdom. I am destined to see it first. It is my privilege and birthright, according to Nur-Ab-Sal.” It was then that Indy realized she wanted to make the dive herself. It was crazy, suicidal, and he was putting his foot down.

“Absolutely not. It’s too dangerous.” Deep sea diving was risky, even to a trained professional, let alone a complete novice like Sophia. “Besides, you can’t even swim, and I’m not going to let some imaginary spirit talk you into you to an early grave.”

“For the last time, Jones, Nur-Ab-Sal is *not* fake. He’s my spirit guide, and he’s calling to me now. And I don’t have to swim because I’ll be walking.”

Indy reached over and grasped the steel winch cable on the back of the ship. “This dive line is probably less than a mile long. You’ll never reach the bottom.” He pointed to the old captain who had observed their debate passively. “How long is this cable?”

Dimitri shrugged. “A few hundred feet. Good for shallows, mostly. Depends on depth.”

“That’s more than enough,” Sophia insisted stubbornly.

Desperate now, Indy tried a different tack. “Maybe

Atlantis never sank. Did you ever think of that? It could be the thousands of shattered Greek islands spread out across the Mediterranean. Why don't we search around for more clues? We're bound to find something."

"Fragments," she scoffed. "Pieces. The main landmass sank into the sea 11,000 years ago," she said in complete ignorance the tenfold error that she was recklessly betting her life on. Her impatience was affecting her judgment, Indy realized, and she wasn't thinking clearly. Not a good sign.

"This is crazy. What are you going to do if you reach the bottom? Walk around in the dark and *hope* to find Atlantis? It's a myth, Sophia. Wake up." Indy swept a hand over his face in frustration. He couldn't believe he'd followed her fantasy this far. What was he thinking?

Her features softened to the border of desperation. "Please let me go, Indy. I've waited my whole life for this moment. Don't deny it now that we're so close." The archaeologist met her pleading gaze that speared him with a pang of guilt. He knew there was no way that he could talk her out of it.

"You sure you really want to do this?" Sophia nodded firmly. "Okay, I'll help you suit up."

"Be careful with my suit or you buy me a new one," Dimitri said as they headed for the hatch below deck.

They went downstairs into the cramped cargo hold, where the diving equipment was stored. Sophia, eager to fulfill her dream at long last, promptly stripped down to her underwear with no sign of inhibition.

"You'll need clothing to keep warm," Indy stated

in his most businesslike tone. He handed her a set of long thermal underwear from his travel valise, and tried not to stare at her smooth, bare limbs while the petite redhead stepped into the oversized pajamas and pulled them up to her slender waist, holding them up with one hand. Indy helped her snug the baggy top over her torso. Sophia held up her arms with a sheepish smile. The broad shirt wilted off of her narrow freckled shoulders. The sleeves trailed several inches past her hands. He cinched his webbed belt around her waist to keep her pajamas secure, and then gave her a pair of thick wool socks to put over the set that she was already wearing.

“Don’t you think this is a bit much? I’m already sweating. This is June, remember?”

“You won’t be sweating in a few minutes, trust me. Sit down,” he said, pointing at a narrow bench. She complied while he pulled the bulky diving suit from the locker, then wrestled the lead-weighted boots and spherical brass helmet onto the cabin floor. Indy unzipped the rubberized twill canvas bodysuit and helped her step into it. Sophia grunted when he lowered the heavy 12-bolt corselet onto her shoulders. The brass yoke bore the oval seal of the Xyth Pio factory, stamped with the year of its manufacture: 1899. Lastly, she stepped into the massive boots, which buckled securely over the legs of the diving suit.

Sophia wobbled unsteadily to her feet. Her head emerged from the gaping neck ring of the oversized outfit, which hung loosely on her small frame. “I hope this canvas relic holds together.”

Indy leaned forward, took her face in his hands,

and kissed her tenderly, savoring the softness of her lips. "Are you warm enough?"

Her cheeks darkened with a rosy blush. "I am now." She turned around awkwardly, her boots thumping on the wooden floor, and trundled upstairs. Indy gathered the helmet in his arms and followed her to the deck, where Dimitri was preparing the crane. Sophia sat on the transom and worked her lead-weighted legs over the side until both feet were dangling above the water. The old sponge diver clipped the crane hook to a thick metal ring on the top of the helmet, and connected the air hose into the brass nozzle on the backside. He switched on the compressor by the port railing, and the rubber umbilical hose stiffened and hissed as pressurized oxygen flowed through it.

"You dive before, Miss?" he asked, winching the brass globe into the air.

"Of course I have," Sophia lied cheerfully.

"Good. Remember to breathe normal, and do not touch helmet. I give you one hour, then you come up, okay?"

"That's more than enough time. Just make sure to keep that air machine going."

Indy stood before her with the enormous helmet between his hands. "Are you really sure you want to do this? It's not too late to turn back."

"I haven't come all this way to quit now. Atlantis is waiting for me down there. I have to go."

He held her solemn gaze and knew that she was right. He couldn't stop her from realizing her dream now that it was so close at hand. He reached up and stroked her cheek softly, then motioned for Dimitri to lower the winch. Indy guided the heavy brass

globe over her head and blurted the words, "I love you," just before the helmet sealed against the neck ring. The salty old Greek worked his way clockwise around Sophia's neck, twisting the wing nuts securely to form an airtight seal while Indy looked on and prayed to God for the integrity of the ancient suit.

Indy tapped on the side of her helmet. "Can you breathe in there?" he said loudly. Sophia's small face nodded behind the round glass viewport. She looked so helpless inside of the bulky suit that he had to restrain himself from forbidding her to go. He maneuvered the L-shaped hoist over the water while Dimitri cranked some slack into the line. Sophia waved to signal that she was ready to dive, and then pushed herself over the edge, into the waiting depths.

\* \* \*

Sophia wiggled her toes apprehensively inside of Indy's thick wool socks as the steel cable lowered her through the sapphire water towards her destiny below. A sugary mix of hope and terror tickled her veins, for she was experiencing a moment that she never thought would come. Her lifelong dream was soon to become a reality. Still, she was alone, with nobody to share it with. Then she smiled at the memory of the kiss she had shared with Indy. His impulsive profession of love warmed her as the cold water temperature bled through the rubbery skin of her suit. The thrill was quickly erased as doubt gnawed at her psyche, rendered even more fragile by the bitter cold grip of the unknown. What if she was wrong about everything? What if there was no Atlantis? What if

Indy was right? Maybe it never existed at all. Was he telling the truth about her dive line being too short? How deep was the Aegean? She'd forgotten to ask. All of these worries skewered her like icy needles as she continued the interminable descent to the bottom.

The minutes wore on like hours, and her mind drifted with thoughts of Atlantis to distract her from all of the fears that plagued her. She dreamily envisioned how the silt-covered ruins might look at the bottom of the sea. Would she discover fluted Doric columns, or angular Mayan-style masonry? Perhaps the buildings would exhibit elements of cyclopean Egyptian architecture! Or maybe it would be a harmonious blend of influences that spread across the world from the homeland of civilization? How fantastic that would be! Sophia could hardly stand the suspense. The greatest mystery of all time was about to be revealed to her, and she could finally put those years of ridicule to shame, starting with Indy. When she returned to the surface, she would send him down to see it for himself, and he could never deny the existence of Atlantis again. Then they would get some cameras and—

*What are you looking for down here?*

The voice came from the darkness, jarring Sophia from the reverie that anchored her calm. It was the voice of the ocean itself, challenging the puny mortal who intruded its domain on a flimsy steel thread.

"The lost city of Atlantis," she answered automatically.

*Listen to yourself. Isn't that absurd?*

"No, because I believe."

*In an old bronze necklace that represents an empty, worthless dream?*

“It’s my dream.”

*You are here for something else.*

“Like what?”

*Maybe you need to find yourself,* suggested the abyss.

“I know exactly who I am. Who are you?”

*I am that which you seek, but you will not find me in the mud.*

“What mud?”

Suddenly there was a sharp jolt behind her shoulders, a noise that sounded like a muffled gunshot from inside of her helmet. Her body jerked roughly, and Sophia felt herself falling into the midnight void. White-hot panic burned in her mind like a torch when she realized that the dive cable had snapped. Her thickly-gloved hands flailed uselessly as she shot through the black water, dragged down by her heavy lead-weighted diving boots. She fell for what seemed like an eternity until her legs plunged into a thick, gelatinous material, and she was mired chest-deep in the mud on the seabed. Only her arms and helmet protruded from the slimy muck. Sophia struggled in vain, but she wasn’t going anywhere.

*Did you forget that you are wearing a cursed necklace?* the voice was now smugly condescending. *Such a small thing to die for, don’t you think?*

Through the round lens of her viewport, there was just enough dim light for Sophia Hapgood to see the steel cable drifting down in a great lazy loop to circle the site of her imminent grave. She was all alone on the bottom of the sea, anchored in the soggy morass

by a 400-pound dive suit with lead boots. An empty expanse of bumpy green mud spread across the submarine horizon. There were no roads or buildings, no soaring pyramids, not even the great glass dome that protected the city in her wildest dreams. There was no Atlantis. The dark realization was like a cold slap in the face. Her dream was dead, and so was she.

A cauldron of bubbles erupted from the air hose connection on her helmet. She cried out in panic when a ribbon of frigid sea water slithered down her spine, soaking her wool pajamas into a sopping, icy skin. The water filled the legs of her suit, rising to her thighs, her belly as death seeped higher and higher. Sophia thrashed her arms and bent her knees, futilely trying to extract herself from the cement glove that held her in its impossible grip. Her breath came in ragged hiccups, fogging the viewport of her helmet into an opaque veil as she fought for air. Panic slithered like ice through her veins, numbing her senses into oblivion. The water pressed against her helmet, the freezing mud against her body until it felt like a mass of rubber wrapped in a canvas cocoon. By the time the water reached her chest, there was no sensation left at all.

Then she felt a spot of intense heat between her breasts, a soothing warmth which radiated outwards, bringing a vestige of life back into her frozen limbs. Sophia tilted her chin down into the water and saw a luminous green glow staining the neck ring of her suit. Who knew death could be so beautiful? She had trusted Nur-Ab-Sal, arrogantly believing herself immune to the Atlantean king's influence, and it was her undoing, as Prisha had foreseen. The fluorescent wa-

ter reached her chin. The salty flavor of death seeped into her mouth. She managed one final gasp before it grazed her lower eyelids. She blinked warily, but refused to relinquish herself to the darkness. A tiny stream of air bubbles tickled her cheek as the last of her precious breath escaped. Moments before she succumbed to the water, Sophia noticed a small, dark shape sitting upright in the mud, inches from her faceplate. A familiar pair of triangular eyes flickered to life in the inky deep, revealing the curving brass horns of the Atlantean idol. She stared helplessly, watching those impassive eyes blur into red smudges as the sea masked her vision. It was the last thing she would ever see.

“Sophia, wake up.” A hand touched her face inside of her helmet and she opened her mouth in terror. Frigid saltwater filled her throat, muffling her scream. Sophia jolted awake on a rough woven surface, gasping for air. Bright sunshine warmed her body. Cool wind against her skin. She was lying on a blanket surrounded by wicker walls. A sheet of blue sky wrapped the bulbous yellow orb high above her. The balloon, of course.

“Welcome back, kiddo. I thought you were going to sleep all day,” said Indy, patting her arm. His familiar lopsided grin bristled the mask of stubble on his face.

“You need to shave,” she said in a dry voice.

He reached into the backpack and offered her the canteen. “First chance I get.”

She sat up, took a long drink, and rubbed her eyes. She took another deep breath, inhaling the sweetest air she had ever known, and puzzled over the mean-

ing of the terrifying dream, trying to draw out the unconscious metaphor. Diving. Taking the plunge. Was she in over her head? At the end of her rope? In deep trouble? Was the mystery of Atlantis unfathomable? No. She refused to believe that.

“Where are we?”

“Right on target over the Greater Colony, believe it or not. Take a look.” Shivering in the cool air, she wrapped the blanket around her and wobbled to her feet, bracing herself on the rim of the swaying basket. They were floating about two-hundred feet over a deep blue sea that crashed against Crete’s rocky peninsula. Sophia looked down in disbelief when she saw a small white fishing boat with a hoist on the stern, directly below them.

“Drop a rope and ask the captain to reel us in. His name is Dimitri.”

“How the hell do you know that?”

“Because we’ve met already, trust me.”

“Friend of Nur-Ab-Sal?”

“Don’t ask. Just get me on the ground as soon as possible.”

“I’ll second that. There’s too much air up here. It’s hard to breathe.” Sophia glared at Indy as he quickly vented off hydrogen until the giant balloon hovered barely fifty feet over the water. “*Kali mera!*” he yelled down. “Ahoy there! Can we get a ride to shore?”

The wiry old fisherman looked up in surprise as the gigantic balloon eclipsed the sun over his boat. He yelled back to them in Greek and, after a bit of negotiating, caught the mooring line and reeled them in, concluding their 5-day aerial odyssey across the Mediterranean.



## HORNS OF CONSECRATION

Sophia Hapgood stopped at the end of the rutted dirt path that wound through the rolling hills of northern Crete. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, savoring the pleasant evergreen-scented breeze that whispered through the barrier of pine trees atop the knoll. Golden sunlight flickered through the needled branches, painting her face with gauzy amber threads as the wind brushed her hair into silky red ether. Exhaling deeply, she looked across the pastoral vista with a smile of utter satisfaction.

“Can you believe how *beautiful* it is here? The air, the temperature... just perfect!” she beamed. The creaky squeal of wood rudely disrupted the blissful tranquility.

A knit of irritation stitched her brow as Indiana Jones picked his way across the rickety, slatted footbridge that spanned the narrow ravine. Anchored be-

tween a large block of stone embedded in the ground on one side of the gully, and the exposed cornice of a larger structure on the other, the treacherously decayed walkway was in danger of disintegrating in a stiffer wind. Using the single guide rope provided for balance, the archaeologist deftly trod the last few skeletal planks and planted his boots on solid ground beside her.

Indy tipped his fedora at the decrepit bridge, vowing never to cross it again. “Yeah, perfect weather for discovering a lost continent,” he remarked sourly. Sophia had never been to Greece before, but it annoyed him how she acted like they were on vacation instead of in a desperate race against the Nazis to prevent world domination. In fact, she had been strangely exuberant since they had arrived, a mood which clearly sprung from the goal of her obsession. But she was absolutely right about the locale. They couldn’t have wished for a more perfect day to visit the island.

Stark sunlight scorched the clear Aegean sky, casting a blaze of mercury gems across the sapphire waves that crashed against Crete’s rocky shore, several miles north. Seagulls winged through the gusty currents, occasionally swooping low to catch fish near the surface. Greece definitely beat out Iceland for scenery and comfort. At least you couldn’t freeze to death in the Mediterranean, Indy thought, surveying the ruins of Knossos from the grassy slope of Kephala Hill, which overlooked the cluster of stone buildings huddled like a broken ivory tile on the verdant countryside.

Sir Arthur Evans’ restoration of the Minoan palace stretched across six acres below them, an elabo-

rately stacked complex of apartments, staircases, and rooms that, in its heyday, would have resembled a lavish hotel rising above the thickly-forested landscape. The heart of the ancient capital was a broad, open courtyard where dignitaries and guests of the royal family could enjoy the pristine climate amid the beauty of cleanly-sculpted architecture wrought in gleaming white stone.

The palace was truly a marvel of ancient engineering. Its revolutionary design used light wells to naturally illuminate the building without smoky torches and oil lamps, while its elevated position on the hill channeled sea breezes through a network of air shafts to cool the rooms during the summer months. The royal apartments once featured hot and cold running water, a complete drainage system, and adjustable partition doors that slid neatly into the walls to regulate light. With such amenities, Indy could easily see how the Minoan culture might have inspired the story of Atlantis.

Gazing over the ruins now, he recalled the most famous legend about Knossos. According to myth, the palace was home to King Minos, the ruler of Crete, and more famously the Minotaur—a mythical bull-headed monster said to dwell in a massive underground labyrinth below it. The Athenian hero Theseus, in an effort to spare the annual crop of sacrificial victims offered to appease the monster, entered the maze and killed the Minotaur with the help of the king's daughter, Ariadne, who gave him a sword to slay the terrible beast, and a ball of string to help guide him back to the entrance when his task was done. Indy was pretty sure that Sophia would

never do anything that generous for him.

She nudged his arm and pointed at the gleaming red columns that burned like fiery sentinels amid the whitewashed buildings of the ruined Bronze-Age city. “Look, Indy. Red, black, and white—the colors of the Atlantean empire, just like Plato described.”

She was right. The florid entasis columns fronting the chalky ashlar block walls of the palace were ringed with circular black capitals that buttressed a fragment of its now-vanished roof. Most visitors assumed the tapered pillars were made of stone, Indy explained, when they were actually carved from cypress trees, planted upside-down to keep them from sprouting once set in place. Their living counterparts, the dense groves of pine trees planted by Evans himself, screened the ancient site from the nearby modern city of Heraklion, preserving an illusion of unspoiled wilderness that Indy could appreciate.

“Well, what are we waiting for? Let’s go take a look!” Sophia exclaimed, sprinting eagerly down the hill. Indy pushed his hat back on the crown of his head and followed at a leisurely pace, refusing to be hurried on such a pleasant day.

When he reached the stone pathway at the southwestern corner of the palace, Indy climbed the steps with humbled reverence while Sophia bounded up the fractured staircase like a kid in a toy store. Strolling among the crumbled walls of Europe’s oldest civilization, he was awed by the scale of devastation that brought an end to the Minoan empire. The broken jumble of sun-baked ruins was the result of a massive earthquake that struck the island in 1700 B.C., shattering the magnificent city. In the aftermath of

the disaster, the citizens of Crete fled to the Greek mainland, abandoning their once-glorious capital to the ravages of time until Evans came along with Mackenzie to dig it from the earth more than two millennia later.

Indy followed Evans' progress with envy, but he never had the opportunity to visit Knossos until now. The most amazing feat, besides the state of meticulous preservation achieved, was that Evans and his team of local workers had managed to excavate the palace in only five years, a brief time by archaeological standards. The site was much more impressive in-person, and it gave Indy a newfound respect for what Arthur Evans had accomplished in his career. But success did not come without a price.

Most of his work was highly speculative, based upon imagery from Greek mythology. The stunning frescoes, in particular, were fanciful renditions cobbled from fragmented pieces that were scattered through the rubble of the collapsed buildings. The academic world criticized Evans' flagrant inaccuracies, scorned his use of contemporary materials in the restoration process, and leveled aspersions, Indy suspected, with particular spite against the independently wealthy amateur archaeologist who defined an entire culture at his leisure, while his jealous contemporaries struggled to gather financial support for work that would ultimately pale in comparison.

Personally, Indy doubted that these were the remains of Atlantis, but Sophia's conviction was evident as she walked briskly down the fractured mosaic boulevard, clutching her pendant compulsively. Invigorated by her surroundings, she stroked the

bronze-faced amulet and muttered to herself. "So close... We're *so* close. I just know there's something important hidden among these ruins."

"Evans went over this place with a fine-tooth comb," he said, kneeling to pick up a potsherd from the ground. He brushed a layer of dust from the chip and saw the faded blue curve of a wave painted on its ceramic surface. *Pithoi*, he thought, recalling the term for the oversize clay vases used for storage. They originally contained supplies of grain, oil, and fish. There seemed to be hundreds of them, lined up collectively in the trench-like magazines of the West Court, and standing alone among the deserted niches of the open courtyard.

"Trust me, there's nothing left to find."

"That's where you're wrong. Nur-Ab-Sal tells me that in his travels he has walked this ground, and bids us find the underworld passage to his ancestral home."

Indy dropped the ceramic wedge. "Archaeology is based on careful research and methodical planning," he reminded her. "Not messages from ghosts."

"Don't lecture me, Jones. I'm not one of your students. He led us to the pyramid in Tikal, and the sunstone in Algeria. How can you still doubt his power, after everything you've seen?" Her irritatingly smug look promised Indy that nothing he could say would make any difference. Her mind was stubbornly set in concrete as solid as the buildings around them.

Propping his boot on a truncated pillar, Indy regarded the desolate ruins with a sigh of defeat. Why did she always have to be so difficult? Hoping to improve her mood, he changed the subject. "So, this is

the Greater Colony?”

“Yes. Crete was established as a travel hub to the main island of Atlantis, sort of like an airport. This palace was a hotel for visitors waiting to enter the capital. It was also a marketplace. There were shops that sold goods, a cafeteria, and an office for granting travel visas.” She spoke with such certainty that Indy half-believed it himself.

“Airport, huh?”

The quip drew an irresistible smile from her. “And no—before you even say it—Thera was *not* the baggage claim, wise guy. Now stow it and help me find the keystone. It’s the whole reason that we’re here, in case you’ve forgotten.”

Indy’s stomach growled, suddenly reminding him of how hungry he was. He wondered what was taking Melina so long. Not that he’d really expected her to return.

The ten-year-old Greek girl had promptly attached herself to Indy and Sophia when they first arrived on Crete, saying that she could guide them around the island in exchange for money to help feed her poor family. “My father used to work for Mr. Evans before he left, and I play in the ruins all the time,” Melina had boasted when she learned of their interest in the archaeological site. “I can show you many things that tourists don’t see,” she said for added incentive.

“Like what?” Indy doubted that the eminent British anthropologist had missed anything of notable significance.

“There are some very strange paintings, and things that are still buried in places where people never look. But I find all of the secrets, and I can take you there,”

she promised, batting her large brown eyes at them.

Equally moved by pity and intrigue, Sophia dug into her purse and offered Melina a generous donation. When they reached Kephala Hill the girl ran off, promising to bring back lunch while they explored the site. They hadn't seen her since. Indy suspected that she used the scam on every tourist, charming an endless parade of rich foreigners with disposable travel money. Offering to feed hungry travelers after a long journey from the mainland seemed like a convenient way for a needy waif to score some cash. Apparently it worked, Indy marveled at Sophia's naiveté. When would she learn to stop trusting strangers?

"Follow me, Indy," she beckoned him.

Crossing the main courtyard, they saw a strange, pitiful sight that made Indy lament the lost grandeur of the original palace. A solitary staircase climbed into the sky towards the second floor of a nonexistent building. The summit now offered a vista of the olive-laden Kairatos River valley beyond.

The gypsum-clad mansion with its vibrant red-pillared balconies would have been impressive to any visitor during the reign of Knossos. The soaring roofline was fenced with a row of paired bull horns that formed a thorny battlement around its rim. The largest example of the sacred Minoan icon was the prominent Horns of Consecration that overlooked the terraced fields at the southern end of the complex, but Sophia had been too excited to notice the great sculpture.

They stopped to examine a wooden shed built conspicuously into the hollow doorframe of a free-standing façade; the sad remains of another vanished

building. The hut contained a wheelbarrow, some picks and shovels, a collapsible surveying instrument, stakes and string for grid-making. Apparently there wasn't much archaeological work going on since Evans' departure in 1931. Closing the shed, they were about to move on when a familiar design jumped out at Indy.

"The running spiral," he said, pointing out the aquatic sine wave pattern spanning the doorframes. Sophia was pleased to see the reassuring symbol of her beloved city.

"Naturally. This is the gateway to Atlantis, Indy. Nur-Ab-Sal says that we're very close now." Holding the pendant to enhance her spiritual connection, Sophia pivoted slightly, orienting herself to a half-timbered portal on the eastern side of the courtyard that was anachronistically reincarnated in concrete.

Like a determined bloodhound stalking an elusive quarry, she plunged into the shadowy door and stalked the narrow, twisting hallways of the royal apartments. At every turn, the walls displayed a rich legacy of artwork that reflected the Minoans love of nature. Elegant white gazelles stood attentively on bold crimson panels in one corridor, followed by a school of blue dolphins gliding across the soothing vanilla tapestry of the next. Beautiful figures of men and women populated the rooms, ageless denizens of the palace, forever frozen in time. Underscoring them all was the omnipresent spiral that flowed through the passageways with almost linear consistency. Whether guided artistically or spiritually, Sophia proceeded with a befuddling confidence that lent more credit to Nur-Ab-Sal's reputation than

Indy cared to admit.

“Time hasn’t been too kind to this room.” His indifferent tone offered neither remorse nor regret, but merely a simple observation. Sophia’s route had taken them on a circuitous path through the residential quarter, to a broken room adjacent to the Pillar Hall, north of the palace.

Like several other buildings, it was ravaged beyond repair. Soft, fluffy clouds drifted across the serene blue sky where the ceiling had once been. A large, jagged fracture split one corner of the room to reveal distant pines swaying in the breeze outside. The other corner seams were similarly cracked. Indy was horrified: The thick stone walls bulged *outward*, as if the room had filled with water until it burst like a balloon. He toed a piece of rubble lying in the dirt amid the remains of the ceiling, and wondered what unearthly force could do such a thing.

Considering its remoteness from the main palace and general state of neglect, Evans might have deemed the broken room plain, and unworthy of the attention that he lavished on his masterpiece. Aside from a group of large ceramic vases by the door, the only interesting feature of the room was a sun-bleached mural that dominated a periwinkle wall trimmed in red crown molding.

Indy wiped his hand across the faded painting. Years of exposure to the weather had taken its toll. The once-vibrant colors were washed out, their potency muted by time, but the design was still legible enough to see a large red circle with the distinctive Horns of Consecration in the very center. The horns

were surrounded by a trio of symbols: a small circle above it, and a bull's head and tail below, all joined by an acute triangle which converged above the great horns. He reached up and tried to pry out the disk, as they'd done in Algeria, but found that the circle was merely painted on the wall.

Sophia smirked in amusement. "You didn't really think that was going to work again, did you?"

"It worked before," he said lamely.

She touched the sacred horns in the middle of the circle. "According to Nur-Ab-Sal, this is the clue that we needed to find, but he won't say anything more. I think we're on our own for now."

"I'll copy it down," he said, retrieving the small field notebook from his satchel. As Indy sketched the mysterious diagram, he wondered what Evans had made of it, assuming that he'd actually seen it. Even though Greek archaeology wasn't his specialty, Indy knew that the small ring above the horns represented the sun, as circles and spirals commonly symbolized in ancient cultures throughout the world. It was similar to the Egyptian mural they had found in the Algerian dig site. Was it just a coincidence, or something more? Then he had an idea about its meaning.

He turned to tell Sophia about it. She was standing in the corner with her hands on the ragged stone gap where the horizon was visible outside. Her eyes were closed. "The sky was purple... It was dawn when the world was erased."

Panic suddenly seized her features, and she let out a gasp of terror. Her fingers clenched at the jagged crevice, digging into the rough limestone. Her body stiffened as if she were being electrocuted. Indy

hauled her away from the corner, breaking her grip on the wall. The psychic looked around in bewilderment, uncertain of where she was. "Are you okay?" he asked with concern.

She crumbled into his arms, trembling badly. "Oh, Indy, it was *terrible!*" she sobbed.

"What did you see this time?" he prompted her.

"The wave that destroyed Atlantis... I saw it happen." Her voice faltered with emotion, so Indy just held her securely until she quit shaking. Once she was calm, Sophia described her terrifying vision with blood-chilling clarity, as if she had witnessed the disaster firsthand.

She was dining on the balcony of the royal palace with her friends. The air was warm and pleasant. Birds were singing in the trees. Then a deep, ominous rumble filled the air, and the ground began to shake. The dishes on the table shivered, clinking like glassy bells in the growing tremor. She looked up in horror to see a thousand-foot tidal wave looming towards the beach. It crested over the city, an impossible wall of churning water that seemed to hang in the air for an eternity, dwarfing the buildings of Knossos. It was a mesmerizing sight. She stared in horrified fascination, waiting breathlessly for the inevitable end.

But Indy's quick action had spared her from the annihilation that followed. Sophia suddenly clutched his face and kissed him hungrily through the tears that blurred her vision, depleting her fear with desire to rid herself of the negative energy from the nightmare. When it was gone, she released him and smoothed her hair in a businesslike fashion.

"Sorry about that. I just needed to re-balance my

aura.”

“Glad to help.” He smiled with a warm glow of appreciation at the unexpected tryst.

“I don’t want to be in here anymore.” She abruptly exited the room and strode into the warm sunshine, but felt none of the cheer she had taken from it earlier. If this room harbored such intense psychic trauma, what would Atlantis be like? The experience might be too much to bear.

“What were you saying before?” she asked, trying to take her mind from the uncertainty of what lay ahead.

He held up the notebook. “I think I know what this mural means.”

“You figured it out already?”

“Yeah. Without Nur-Ab-Sal’s help. Follow me.”

It was an hour past noon when Indy unfolded the tripod surveying instrument on the chalky flagstones of the South Propylaea courtyard. Stark, crystalline sunlight burned the tall horns, throwing a pair of sharp, dagger-like shadows across the ground. He positioned the transit at an angle to the monument, confident in his theory that the mural represented a physical counterpart among the ruins. The puzzle was astonishingly simple to anyone with a little common sense, and the right equipment to solve it. Meanwhile, Sophia wandered over to the sculpture and dropped her backpack by the pedestal that supported the massive icon. The rising heat only worsened the spiritual malaise caused by the tidal wave vision. Feeling dizzy and light-headed, she sat down to rest in the curve of the horns.

Indy panned the theodolite in her direction, and smiled when Sophia appeared in the lens, gripping the upright stone prongs like a girl on a swing set. He chuckled at the image. "Having fun?"

"It's so *hot*," she replied, fanning herself with a folded map.

"I thought you said it was beautiful here?"

The redhead grinned weakly, looking faint. "Okay, so it's hot *and* beautiful."

"So are you," he complimented, peering into the scope again. Sophia waved back at him cheerfully. She was blushing, but tried to pretend like she wasn't embarrassed by his attempt at flattery.

She drew a hand along the contour of the rough, weathered horns. "So, what is this thing anyway? It looks like the town centerpiece."

"Probably a ceremonial altar," Indy replied, adjusting the focus dials. "The Mycenaeans sacrificed bulls to appease Poseidon, the Earth-Shaker, who destroyed the Minoan culture that ruled Crete before them. They guided the bull's head through the horns and cut its throat, allowing the blood to pour over the stone to ensure safe travel on the sea. It was their livelihood as traders."

The psychic lifted her hands from the stone and wiped them on her pants, grimacing. "Thanks. There goes my appetite."

"It could also represent a sun deity, like Hathor," continued Indy, sighting up the distant saddle of Mount Jutkas beyond the limestone fork. "The bull was the main symbol of the sun in ancient Egypt, which had close contact with Crete in the second millennium. The Egyptian symbol for the horizon is

nearly identical to the Minoan horns.” He pointed out how the stone horns also echoed the profile of their stolen bronze idol, with its upraised arms. The similarity was too strong to dismiss as a coincidence.

Now that he was on Crete, Indy was more certain that his initial assessment was correct. The statue was clearly a Minoan relic—probably a ceremonial effigy of Hēliakos, the great bull in the sky—and not a product of Sophia’s mythical lost city.

Just as he was about to move the scope, Indy saw Sophia’s face light up as if a remarkable idea had just occurred to her. She slipped off of her seat and dug frantically in her backpack.

“What is it?”

“I’ve got it!” She retrieved the *Hermocrates* and blazed through the paperclip-marked pages to the middle of the book. “Here it is: *When the great bull leaps through the sky at mid-day, the sun will freeze as the moon shines forth in all of its splendor...*” Her brow scrunched in confusion. “How can the moon rise at mid-day? That doesn’t make any sense.”

Indiana Jones grinned broadly at his partner. “Moon cults dominated the Bronze Age. The bull was a lunar deity in Mesopotamia. Its horns represented the crescent moon. The sun only freezes in the sky twice a year. What’s today’s date?”

She consulted her wristwatch. “June 22nd. Why?”

He pointed to the ground. The sun’s languid arc merged the shadow of the twin horns into a black needle that slanted sharply to the northeast, splitting the alkaline tiles like the hour hand on a clock face, precisely demonstrating how the timepiece evolved. Sophia clapped her hands in delight. “It’s a sundial!”

“Right. A solar alignment marker. The summer solstice is when the sun is at the furthest point from the equator. Congratulations, Sophie. You figured it out.”

“But what about the mural?” she asked.

“It’s a map. The shadow points the way to the treasure.” Indy opened his notebook and scrawled a calculation from the diagram, then consulted the azimuth compass on the transit. As he adjusted the scope and took the new bearings from it, Indy noted how the horns were aligned with the mountain, where the remains of a Minoan sanctuary temple used for astronomical observations was located. The ancient priests recorded the equinoxes and solstices, and used the quarter points to establish the annual planting and harvesting cycle that was critical to the Neolithic farming society that first occupied Crete.

Sophia just shook her head in wonderment. “You are some kind of impossible professor.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re like a walking history book. Nobody knows *that* much about every culture,” she said accusingly.

“I guess I read a lot,” he shrugged.

Skeptical, she said, “When?”

Indy rested his arm casually on the scope. “In my spare time, between teaching classes and helping beautiful rich girls find lost civilizations. Now, could you walk over there?” he asked, pointing to an area some distance away. He directed her to the spot through the lens of the transit, moved the surveying instrument across the courtyard, adjusted her position, and ordered Sophia to stop. “Right there. Don’t

move.” The sight lines intersected at a 50-degree angle, converging on a well-worn flagstone ten feet away from the Horns of Consecration.

She jokingly scratched a pair of crossed lines in the dust with the heel of her boot. “X marks the spot, right?”

Indy smiled wryly. “Yeah, sometimes. Let’s get to work.”

He pulled a trowel from his satchel and chiseled at the edges of the slab until he could finally slip the blade under the stone. They lifted the tile free. Below it, lying flush with the compressed earth, was a rectangular piece of brown metal stained with the blue patina of age. The tip of the trowel produced a hollow ring when he tapped it against the plate. Sophia wore a mask of pure glory as Indy extracted a small bronze box from the damp Minoan soil. “It’s a larnax,” he said. Something heavy rattled inside when he shook it.

“Well, open it already!” she urged impatiently.

“Did you find some treasure?” They both looked up to see the slight figure of Melina Nikitis traipsing across the courtyard carrying a wicker basket. The Greek peasant girl wore a threadbare cotton dress, and braided leather sandals. Her long, curly dark hair was decorated with a light blue ribbon.

“No, it’s a chest used for sacred burials,” Indy said. “They usually hold cremated remains. Let’s take a look.” Everyone held their breath while he gently pried the lid open. The ancient hinges, now reduced to shapeless lumps of metal, crumbled to dust as hot sunlight poured into the box.

Inside, lying on a cushion of green velvet, was a

glittering disk of pure white alabaster. Half the diameter of the larger sunstone, its edges were softly rounded like a bar of soap. A quadruplet of lunar orbs and crescents were delicately cut into the milky stone: a full moon, a slivered half-moon, a waxing moon, and a waning moon, all oriented to the horizon of the disk's curved edge.

"The moonstone!" Sophia took the disk with trembling hands. "Now we can access the gateway to Atlantis!"

Indy folded the box lid back. "Right where the Lost Dialogue said it would be—under the tall horns at noon." Indeed, a perfect image of the Horns of Consecration was etched into the metal underside of the lid. The moonstone had lain between the sentinel fork.

Melina lifted up the basket with a bright smile. "Are you hungry? I brought for you lunch like I promised."

"I think it's a good time for a lunch break," Indy agreed. He fitted the stone tile back into place and masked the chipped seams with dust to hide their discovery.

They gathered up their things and settled on the steps of a nearby shaded alcove to escape the hot sun. Melina unpacked home-made sandwiches, cheese crackers, and a thermos of cold tea. "I hope you like this. My mom helped me make it."

"Oh, that's nice. Thank you, sweetheart." Sophia said pleasantly. She unwrapped her sandwich and took a ravenous bite, then paused with a strange expression. She carefully peeled the bread apart. "Honey, what is this?"

“Peanut butter and mayonnaise. It’s my favorite!” she beamed with pride.

Sophia offered a mawkish smile, and reluctantly forced herself to take another bite while the girl watched intently to see if she liked it. She chewed and swallowed, took a deep breath, and regarded the unfinished sandwich with a greenish pallor. Perspiration beaded on her forehead, and not just from the heat. Meanwhile Indy devoured his own sandwich with gusto to show how much he really enjoyed it.

Then he wiped his mouth with a napkin, took a drink of tea, and picked up the stone disk while Sophia continued eating with great effort. “The moon was an ancient symbol of fertility,” he explained casually. “Each symbol represents one of the four lunar phases throughout the month. It’s also a metaphor for the female menstrual cycle, particularly when it appeared swollen and blood-red during a full eclipse.” Sophia dabbed her forehead with a napkin, and shuddered while Indy savored every second of her discomfort in retribution for the lamprey dish he’d endured on Faial.

“Finish it,” he ordered with a smile of toothy malice.

Melina looked on earnestly, oblivious to the battle of wills transpiring over her sandwich. Sophia’s gaze simmered with venom. “If I get sick, your satchel is going to be filled with more than just Atlantean relics,” she vowed icily.

Indy gave the leather strap a nervous tug. “Okay, I think you’ve had enough.”

Her shoulders fell with relief. She patted her stomach in theatrical exaggeration. “Oh look, I’m all full!”

she proclaimed cheerfully so as not to hurt Melina's feelings.

The girl rewrapped the leftover and gave it back to her. "You can keep the rest for later." Sophia reluctantly stuffed it into their backpack while Indy tried to hide his amusement.

"Let's get back to work now."

She brought out the *Hermocrates* and set off with no particular destination in mind. Indy followed, toting his backpack over one shoulder, while Melina hopped onto a wall foundation and walked alongside them, balancing with her outstretched arms. "I saw you come down in the balloon. Did you fly all the way from America?"

"No. But it sure felt like we did," Indy replied. "My legs are still sore."

"I am so glad you come to Crete. My homeland is very beautiful, yes?"

"Yes, it's gorgeous," Sophia said, leafing through the book. "I feel as if I've lived here my whole life. Like a part of me that has been missing."

"And now you are complete?"

"Once we find the gateway to Atlantis, then I will be complete."

"We learned about that story in school. My teacher says that Plato invented it."

"Well, I've been studying Atlantis for a long time, and I promise that it's real." She finally found the text that she had been looking for. "In fact, here's what Plato says about it: *Gates of the kingdom opened only with the aid of special stones. At many outposts, a Sunstone sufficed, if sunset made the tall horns red. At the Greater Colony a Moonstone was also needed, with*

*the sun dying as a new moon is born."*

"Well, the 'tall horns' can only mean one thing," Indy surmised. They went back to the monument for another look.

It was the same as before, except now the lengthening shadow no longer pointed to the tile where they had found the hidden box. Standing under the blazing mid-day sun, Sophia shaded her eyes with a frustrated sigh. It was nowhere near sunset, and her patience was running out. They were in the right place, with all of the necessary keystones in their possession, but the cryptic text was too vague to make any sense. She had no idea how to proceed without Nur-Ab-Sal. But admitting her dependence on the spirit guide wouldn't improve her mood, so she kept it to herself.

"I don't see how the color of sunlight on the horns would make any difference," she complained.

"Maybe we could paint them red, like Alice in Wonderland?" Melina suggested helpfully.

"That makes about as much sense as waiting for sunset, and we don't have that long."

"I think we're reading this too literally. Look at the color of the stones." Indy pressed the moonstone neatly against the larger sunstone so that she could see how the pale alabaster disk vividly contrasted the polished red granite. Its burgundy hue seemed to echo the terms in Plato's text, since an image of the setting sun did appear on it, while the new moon was likewise depicted on the smaller stone. "Notice how the hole is the same size in both disks, as if they were made to fit onto a post or something."

"Let me see those." She took the keystones and

felt a small protrusion against her hand. Turning the disks over, she made a remarkable discovery. "Look at this!"

Near the sunken rim atop the sunstone was a small metal nub about the size of a pencil eraser. Cut into the underside of the moonstone was a thin, semi-circular channel that inexplicably followed the contour of the smaller disk. Somehow both features had escaped their attention until now. The groove traveled halfway around the moonstone until stopping abruptly in a hole clearly intended for the nub on the disk below it. When she tried a test fit, Sophia found that the metal pin was engineered to travel the channel and stop at the end of the groove, which locked the two stones together like a combination lock.

"What do you know? A perfect fit," Indy remarked.

Standing nearby, Melina watched Sophia twist the stone wheels together until the symbols were aligned. Suddenly her eyes lit up with recognition. "That is part of the stone cake!" she exclaimed.

Sophia almost dropped the disks in surprise. She grabbed the Greek peasant girl with a look of desperate hope. "What stone cake? Where is it?"

"At the bottom of the hill. It has a metal candle that can fit into the stone like this!" She threaded her fingers through the hole in the moonstone, and whirled the disk like a top.

"Show me. Take us there," Sophia begged.

"Okay, follow me!" Melina darted across the open plaza while the adults hurried to keep her in their sight. They chased her to a steep dirt path which descended to the base of Kephala Hill on the far side of the palace. At the bottom was a conspicuous-

looking mound overgrown with weeds. Indy might have overlooked it at any ordinary dig site, but the unexcavated pile was distinctively out of place among the neatly landscaped ruins of Knossos.

Melina pointed at the hill. "Look in there."

Sophia fell to her knees before the conical mound, transfixed. Nestled in the thicket of dry grass was a corroded bronze spindle.

"This means something... It's important," she said more to herself than to her companions. Suddenly she began to rip away the vines with ravenous obsession, clawing and scraping feverishly at the raw dirt. Tears blurred her sweat-streaked face as she tore away tufts of grass and weed stalks in utter desperation. Indy and Melina stared speechlessly. Had she lost her mind?

Then she abruptly stopped when one side of the mound was laid bare. "Indy, look!"

He crouched beside her and saw part of a curved stone object that she had uncovered. He brushed more soil away to discern a smooth, beveled surface that was definitely not natural. His curiosity piqued, Indy moved to the other side of the mound and stripped the weeds down to bare soil. Melina quickly joined them in clearing away the centuries of dirt accumulated on the flat, circular pedestal. Sophia used a small twig to clean the dirt out of a hollow groove beveled into the surface, and whisked the altar clean with a brush. Only then did she notice the Horns of Consecration logo engraved in the stone above the bronze post.

Sitting Indian-style on the Aegean dirt, she held up the disks. "It's a lock. See, there's also a pin on the

bottom of the sunstone.”

She carefully fitted the larger disk onto the spindle, locking the tiny metal knob into the pedestal groove, and then placed the moonstone atop it. Indy had to give the Minoans credit. It was a primitive but efficient system. Altogether brilliant, and of a complexity unheard of in its day. When the keys were stacked, Sophia turned the wheels, aligning the symbols to the sequence in *Hermocrates* text. Below the horns, the New Moon slid smoothly above the Setting Sun.

Everything was quiet. Sophia held her breath tensely, not knowing what to expect.

“What happens now?” Melina asked.

Immediately, they felt the ground tremble. Then a portion of the nearby hillside sagged inward like a deflated balloon, crumbling into a heap of dirt. A cloud of pale dust billowed into the air, masking the area in a chalky haze. When the dust settled, they were amazed to see a tall, narrow opening framed by a set of identical stone pillars.

“It’s a secret door!” Melina cried with delight.

Sophia Hapgood rose in disbelief. Her knees trembled like rubber as she took several wobbly steps towards the portal. Indy grabbed her arm until she regained her balance. Sophia stopped in front of the entrance and touched her bronze amulet with awe. “Oh my God... This *is* the doorway to Atlantis. I see it with the eyes of my soul.”

Melina’s face was a mask of wonder as she peered into the yawning darkness. “What do you think is inside? The bull monster?”

Indy shook his head. “No, that’s just a story.”

From deep within the cave issued a prolonged roar,

like the muted whistle of a far-off locomotive. Or an angry bull. The girl's eyes grew solemn and fearful.

"You wouldn't happen to have a large ball of string in that bag, would you?" Sophia asked.

"Afraid not. But I do have this," Indy said, pulling out a flashlight. He thumbed the switch on. "Feeling adventurous, Princess?"

Sophia smiled. "Let's go find Atlantis, Dr. Jones."

"Don't forget the keys!" Melina dashed back to the pedestal to collect the stone disks. Together, they entered the unknown.



16

## LABYRINTH

Legend became reality the moment Indy touched the lintel-post doorway recessed into Kephala Hill. It felt cold, solid. *Real*. How could Evans and every other archaeologist for the past sixty years have missed it? As he stepped into the beckoning shadows, his brittle faith in the tenets of established history shattered with a final, resounding blow from the hammer of impossibility. If the myth of the Labyrinth hidden under the ruins of Knossos was true, then he had to accept that the lost city of Atlantis might be every bit as real. And if Atlantis, what else? The entire pantheon of Olympian gods? The fountain of youth? Time-travel? The idea opened up a whole new realm of possibilities too disturbing to dwell on.

Following anxiously behind him, Sophia stepped over the mound of soil piled between the stone pillars with a sense of *déjà vu*. The portal in the hillside

almost perfectly mirrored the Jastro dig in Iceland. In fact, they looked identical. “Doesn’t this qualify as site contamination?” she pointed out at seeing Indy’s boot prints embedded in the dirt.

“Maybe at an authorized dig, but since it’s not...”

“You’re an inspiration to future archaeologists,” she wisecracked, and then tried to shoulder past him into the tunnel. “Now let me go first, if you don’t mind.”

He barred the way using his arm, and warned her about the danger of ancient traps. She gave an exaggerated sigh. “For the last time, there are no traps here.”

“That’s what you said in Tikal.”

“The Mayans were protecting a royal tomb,” she argued. “The Minoans were condemning prisoners to the Minotaur. That *was* the trap.”

Indy stopped her cold with a somber look. “I don’t want anybody getting hurt.” He nodded at Melina, wading across the dirt pile to join them. “Especially her. So let’s take this one step at a time, okay?”

“Fine,” she relented. “Lead the way, Indy.”

Inside the tunnel, the air was cool and moist, sacred and untouched. Indy tasted the scent of ancient dirt with every breath. He swept the flashlight beam across the floor, peeling back the shadows that stained the craggy rock. Sophia carefully traced his footsteps with Melina following close behind. A slight breeze, faint as a whisper, stirred the darkness, drawing another ominous moan from the deep recesses of the earth. Now they knew that it was only the wind, channeled through the natural acoustics of the cave into a bone-chilling howl that evoked visions of the

creature rumored to inhabit the subterranean depths.

Once their vision adjusted to the dark, fear gave way to wonder as they beheld their surroundings. Eons of groundwater erosion had sculpted the cavern into a bizarre geological dreamscape. Sheets of wavy, paper-thin calcite rippled down from the rocky ceiling in stone curtains, sharp, needled spikes pin-cushioned the floor, and waxy limestone columns bridged the mouth of the cave like jaws opening wide to swallow the group of explorers venturing deeper into its throat.

Sophia took Melina's hand tightly, more for her own comfort than for protective reasons. "Don't worry, I will not get lost," the girl promised.

"I'm worried about *all* of us getting lost."

"Just stay close, and don't touch anything," Indy said. "I mean it."

The psychic cast a wary glance into the suffocating darkness. "This isn't the kind of cave with bears, is it?"

"There aren't any bears on Crete," he reassured her. "It's an island."

"Indy is right, no bears here. I will show you." To prove it, Melina picked up a rock and fired it into the shadows. They were startled when a loud metallic clang shattered the silence. The sharp report echoed through the tunnel, followed by a distant squealing; A concert of rusty hinges turning by the thousands. The agitated noise carried through the passage on the frigid current. Bats, Indy knew. Creatures that thrived in perpetual night until dusk permitted them to roam beyond the underground cavern.

More than a little unnerved, Sophia squeezed her

hand tightly. “*Don’t* throw things,” she commanded with as much parental authority as she could summon given the circumstances.

“Sorry,” Melina apologized with a guilty look.

When they reached the end of the passage, they found the rock lying at the base of a heavy bronze gate that screened another lintel-framed portal identical to the doorway at the entrance. Indy painted the area with a splash of electric light, searching for any sign of a trap before he turned his attention to the ancient metal barricade. Almost medieval in design, the cross-hatch grid was bolted together where the flat bars intersected. It was yet another archaeological anomaly in the Minoan ruins of Crete. But what purpose did it serve?

“Maybe this gate was meant to keep the Minotaur in?” Sophia joked half-heartedly. Melina giggled, but Indy said nothing.

Instead, he handed her the flashlight and crouched before the gate. He hooked his hands through the grating and strained to lift it. After a few seconds of useless struggle, he pounded his fist against the bars in defeat. “It’s too heavy,” he gasped. “We’ll never get it open.”

Melina Nikitis peered through the bronze cage and jumped up and down excitedly. “I see a handle inside! We can open the door!”

“What?” Indy aimed the flashlight through the rusty latticework and saw a spindle-operated pulley mounted on the wall just beyond the gate. He stuck his hand through the grating, but his jacket sleeve was too bulky for him to reach any further than his elbow. Indy withdrew his arm in frustration. Sophia

began to roll her sleeve back for a try when Melina spoke up.

“I can do that, too.” She slipped her skinny arm through the grating with ease, but the pulley was still beyond her reach.

“Here, use this.” Indy unsnapped the bullwhip from his belt and instructed her to use the handle to reach the pulley.

Standing on her tip-toes, she fed the whiplash through the fence and extended the heavy turkshead knob towards the control wheel. Melina flexed the bullwhip sideways, trying to snag the lever with the dangling wrist loop. After several tries, she finally succeeded. Indy took hold of the whip, being careful to keep the lash taut, and slowly pulled back on it. The braided leather creaked as it stretched, rotating the pulley wheel counter-clockwise. The bronze gate shuddered as the lock mechanism was released for the first time in centuries. Indy flicked the whip loose and quickly pulled it free. Melina cheered as the gate lifted towards the ceiling in a trickling shower of rust.

They cautiously pushed forward into the next chamber and stopped in disbelief when they were confronted by three more columned openings. There was a door on either side of them, and one directly ahead. All were identical. “Are we lost?” the girl wondered.

Sophia grimly assessed each portal with a glance. “No, but we’re getting there. Okay, Indy, which way now?”

“Why don’t you ask Nur-Ab-Sal? He seems to be helpful in situations like this,” he said, gathering his bullwhip into a coil.

“I tried to summon him back, but he won’t listen. I think he’s mad at me.” Then her face brightened. “Or maybe we’re close enough to Atlantis that he doesn’t need to guide me anymore. That must be it!”

Melina watched Indy fasten the leather weapon to his belt. “Why do you carry a whip?”

He smiled in the dark. “Because Sophia likes it.” The redhead swatted him on the arm for the inappropriate remark. Indy coughed. “Actually, it can be useful in the right spot. Like a rope or a lasso, I can grab things, and sometimes use it for climbing.”

“Where did you get that stupid thing, anyway?” Sophia scowled, upset by the double entendre.

“From a guy named David Morgan, in Chicago,” he said, recalling the elderly braider with the crooked fingers who had made the whip for him in the early 1920’s. Indy stroked the kangaroo hide lash fondly. The slick herringbone strands were darkened and worn with age, but the whip had saved his life more times than he could count. Like his cherished fedora, it was an inseparable companion that he never traveled without.

“Well, it doesn’t *look* very dangerous,” she scoffed.

“Don’t kid yourself,” Indy said. “It can kiss like a feather or cut like a razor, depending on how it’s used.” He tapped the scar on his chin. “Do you think I was born with this?”

She gave another impatient sigh. “Can we just get on with it?”

Circling the room slowly, Indy cast the light into the adjoining passages. Each one offered another group of branching doorways to choose from. But in the far corner of one expansive chamber, Indy

spied a broad rise of steps leading to a foyer where the ground had been artificially leveled. His instinct urged him to follow the break in the monotony. It had to lead somewhere besides another baffling array of intersections. He beckoned them to the other side of the cavern, took out a piece of chalk and scratched a bold 'X' on the floor between the columns.

Indy gave the chalk to Sophia. "Mark every doorway that we pass through, so we can find our way back."

Her expression was priceless. "I take back everything bad that I ever said about you."

They crossed through the next room and climbed the crude staircase up to the landing, where two more doorways awaited them in the shadows. Indy took the passage on the right, which led to another flight of stairs that corkscrewed along a gradual curve to a higher level of the cave. He groaned when they found themselves at the crossroads of another four-way junction. "You might want to break out that sandwich, because we may be here for awhile."

"Perish the thought." Her quip drew a dubious gaze from Melina. "I just meant... because I'm not feeling very hungry right now. So let's keep going." Then Sophia realized that the air was brighter, and she could see their surroundings with her own eyes. "Indy, there's daylight coming in from the outside!"

The murky gloom which plagued them in the lower level of the cave was dispelled by pale, diffused light seeping from hidden fissures in the ceiling. The natural ambience gave them a whole new perspective on the maze that they had been wandering so blindly through. "Turn off the flashlight. You're just wasting

the batteries.”

They could plainly see how ancient earthquakes had shattered the Neogenic strata, compressing the limestone into the broken tunnels around them. Indy estimated from the condition of the fractured masonry that the labyrinth pre-dated the earthquake, meaning that it was older than the palace of Knossos itself; Ancient beyond belief, with no precedent except the civilization which built the city. If such a place truly existed, it would be the archaeological find of all time.

“Maybe this was Plato’s cave, where shadows become reality?” Sophia postulated while Indy evaluated their choices.

He was impressed that she knew of the famous allegory. “It makes more sense than your ancient airport theory.”

“Hey, look at this!” announced Melina, who had found a flat panel carved into the rock wall beside one of the passages. Etched into the stone was a crude glyph of a human figure with a blocky torso and spindly limbs. Its upraised arms were spread wide, holding up a crescent sunbeam. It looked like nothing produced by any culture Indy had ever seen before.

“That’s the Atlantean symbol for happiness,” Sophia told them.

“How do you know that?”

“Because I’ve studied Atlantean hieroglyphics for ten years. Take my word for it, I know what I’m talking about.” She looked at him expectantly, waiting for a decision.

“Well, I’ve never been one to turn down a good

omen, so I'll trust the Atlanteans." He patted the stone glyph for luck, and proceeded through the doorway beside it, hoping that they were on the right path.

After an hour of wandering the hopelessly convoluted passageways and scratching chalk marks that would be next to useless on the return trip, Indy was mentally cursing whatever team of ancient architects designed the infernal place. Every room looked the same. Each doorway was a mirror duplicate of the preceding one. He tried to memorize the layout of the maze, but it was a futile effort. His mental floor plan became hopelessly confused after the seventh room, with all of its adjoining passages branching off in various directions. The task of mapping the cave system would require an entire team of cartographers, and an ambitious one at that. Now, Indy absurdly wished that he really did have a giant ball of string to guide them through the labyrinth.

Having descended into the blackness once more, his flashlight illuminated their path down a narrow brick-lined alley littered with stones that spilled inward from the collapsed roof. They were forced to move in an awkward crouch to avoid hitting their heads on the nubbled rock that pressed against their backs. Joining hands to keep from getting separated, Sophia maintained a firm grip on Melina while clenching Indy's hand in a trembling vise of steel as claustrophobia throttled her with renewed vengeance. Indy predicted that if he let go, she would snap into a hysterical fit and probably kill herself trying to escape from the cave.

“Do you really think this is the labyrinth of myth?” Her voice quavered as she fought to stay calm.

“Daedalus was the architect of the Labyrinth, according to legend. He modeled it on the Egyptian version at Hawara.” To help allay her paranoia, Indy spoke in his dry classroom oration style, as if he were delivering a lecture at Barnett College instead of crawling through a cold, dark tunnel. “But this place is different from the traditional style of labyrinth, carved on the nose of your pendant. If it were a straight-line Celtic maze, then all of the paths would fold together, and we would eventually find the center no matter which one we chose.”

“It all seems pretty random to me,” she admitted. “Maybe there is no center. But what would be the point, then?”

“In ancient times, labyrinths were designed as traps for evil spirits. Later, during the medieval era, the maze took on religious significance as a path to God that could be achieved through a symbolic pilgrimage to the center,” Indy revealed. The hall curved to the left, and he hoped that it would end soon, because he didn’t know how much longer she could hold out. Melina, whose smaller stature was more suited to the low ceiling, followed them in silence, showing none of the fear that gripped Sophia.

“What was the purpose?”

“The exact same thing that you’ve been preaching to all those crackpots for years: enlightenment. Though I’m not really feeling it at the moment.”

The psychic ignored the professional jab. “I know what you mean. I’m t-too lost to feel enlightened.”

The ceiling began to rise, and they gratefully stood,

easing the strain on their aching backs. The passage finally ended at another Minoan doorway. Indy stabbed a finger at the carved post, indicating for her to mark it.

Sophia chalked a jagged 'X' on the stout column and hurried into the next room, eager to leave the flattened cave. She was relieved to see that they were back in the maze again. "What do you think this place is?"

"It's obviously a natural cave system that the Minoans adapted for their own use. Judging by the rock formations, I'd say it's limestone karst. You can see how they fitted the passageways with doorframes, and carved staircases into the elevations."

"Okay, but do you think there's a way out?"

Indy could hear the obvious concern in her voice. "There are probably dozens, if they weren't sealed off by the builders. I think we need to find the center of the maze, whether it leads to Atlantis or not."

She finished his unspoken thought. "Which you're pretty sure exists by now."

He rubbed the back of his neck with a wan smile. "At this point, I'd be surprised if it *didn't* exist. But I'll believe it when I see it."

"Why must you find the city?" Melina chimed in, finally breaking her spell of silence.

"Because we have to stop some really bad people from getting there first." She hated to oversimplify the situation, but she didn't want to frighten her.

"You mean like the Nazis?"

Sophia flinched in the dark. She'd carefully avoided mentioning the Nazis in her presence, but the fact that the Third Reich's notoriety was known by a

Greek peasant girl half a world away disturbed her at a level too deep for words. “Yeah... *them*.”

“Don’t worry, Nazis do not come to Greece. We are too far away for them to find us here,” she said confidently.

“And I hope they never do.” Suddenly her mind was assaulted by a brief, intense vision that scarred her psyche.

The images were shocking: She saw hundreds of parachute troops dropping out of the sky over Crete. Nazi soldiers with guns storming the beach. The green hillsides raked by gunfire. Bullets shattering the golden summer calm. The sound of German voices shouted frantically, echoing in the tunnels around them. Sophia tensed, but Indy and Melina continued walking, apparently deaf to the voices from the future which resounded so sharply in her clairvoyant mind.

Her eyes grew misty as she watched Melina shuffling along without a care in the world. The sound of her hollow footsteps fell like thunderbolts in the dim cavern. She felt the child’s small hand in her own. Her heart was wrenched with guilt and sadness because she would not be there to protect Melina on that terrible day. Sophia knew that it was going to happen without a doubt, and nobody could stop it.

Melina detected the emotion in her ragged breathing. “It is okay. We are not lost if we stay together, right Indy?”

The optimistic words brought Sophia Hapgood to a halt. She couldn’t remain silent any longer. When she knelt down and took Melina by the shoulders, her eyes were gleaming with emotion. “In two years,

when the Germans come, you *fight*. All of you. Tell everyone that you know to fight back. This is your home. Don't let them take it from you. Protect the Greater Colony."

The bewildered Greek girl nodded, unsure of how Sophia knew of these things which had not happened yet. "But my teacher says that fighting is bad," she protested.

"Yes, it is bad, but sometimes you have to fight to protect what is good. Always remember that."

"Hey, don't scare her," Indy said gently, knowing that she'd had another vision. "She doesn't know what you're talking about."

"I am not afraid of Nazis," boasted Melina, hoping to impress her new friends with her bravery.

Sophia leaned close to Indy, and kept her voice low. "These caves will be crawling with Nazis in two years. I saw an aerial invasion. Parachute soldiers with guns, explosions... I want her to be prepared, because I couldn't forgive myself if I didn't try to help."

"That's all you can do, and you have. The last thing we need right now is a panic, so try to relax. Everything's going to be fine."

"No it won't," she said, sullen. "Let's just keep going. This place has too much negative energy."

The tunnel bent sharply to the left, and ended in yet another columned doorway. Its top lintel post was split in half diagonally, skewed by the geological upheaval that shattered Knossos. Framed with a pair of double columns, this portal was larger and more grandiose than the others. The outermost pillars were clad in the blood red heraldry of the palace aboveground, while the inner posts wore a coat of

deep blue paint like the domed churches on Santorini. Darkness shrouded the chamber within.

A look of apprehension paled Sophia's face, and she hesitated. It was clear that she didn't want to go in. Before Indy could say anything, Melina grabbed the flashlight from him and marched bravely through the door. A moment of silence passed. Then she screamed bloody murder.

Sophia's heart nearly stopped when they dashed into the room and saw the Minotaur looming over Melina in the darkness. The terrified girl stumbled backwards to escape the four massive horns projecting from the bulbous forehead of its grossly deformed skull. The jouncing flashlight cast fiery rings around the creature's hollow eyes, making them appear to glow with rage. A thick bronze ring pierced its bony snout.

Indy released the breath that he'd been holding. The monster was dead. Melina scrambled behind Sophia for safety as he illuminated the skeletal remains.

Draped in a sheet of dusty cobwebs, the giant yellow bones gleamed dully in the lantern light. Below its 6-foot span of double horns, softball-sized eye sockets stared blindly at the first humans to set foot in the labyrinth since the Minotaur's demise. A jagged ridge of spines lined the back of the bull's massive trunk, driven by legs as stout as a ship mast. Each cloven hoof could churn a spadeful of soil with the force of a steel piston. Indy was glad it was dead, because nobody could survive an encounter with such a beast.

But someone *had* slain the ancient nightmare.

The fight must have been nothing short of epic.

The crown of the bull's enormous skull was fractured with a deep split line, and the pommel of a large knife was buried in one of the eye sockets. Lying on the floor nearby was a heavy double-bladed axe head. Its wooden handle had disintegrated ages ago. Unbelievable as it seemed, Indy knew that he was looking at the result of 'Theseus' encounter with the fabled monster of legend.

"What in God's name is that thing?" Sophia gasped.

Indy examined the heap of bones in grim silence. "It's an auroch, a prehistoric bull that went extinct centuries ago. But the Minoans had a different name for it."

"The Minotaur..." whispered Melina in awe. "I thought it was only a story."

"Don't worry, sweetie, it's dead," she reassured her. When she took her gaze from the skeleton, Sophia realized that the bull had been slain at the foot of a towering Minotaur statue that presided over the chamber.

The giant effigy, nearly twice the height of a man, stood between a pair of thick stone pillars in a lintel-framed alcove that was carved into the wall. Its powerfully sculpted body was broad and muscular, clad in a stone tunic that was trimmed with the spiral wave design. As Indy's flashlight skipped over the statue, Sophia thought she saw an ancient script carved into the stone kilt below the running spiral. She immediately grabbed his wrist and moved it back to the spot.

"I'll be damned," he said, climbing the steps for a closer look. The spiral waves formed a belt around the Minotaur's waist, clinched by a labrys buckle. The

strange-looking script decorated the front panel of the tunic in four parallel rows.

“What does it say?”

Indy studied the glyphs for a second, then shook his head in annoyance. “I can’t read it. Nobody can. It’s Minoan Linear A. The alphabet shares some symbols with Linear B, but the words come out as gibberish when you try to decipher it.”

“Let me give it a try.”

“Be my guest. If you can decipher Linear A, then I’ll eat my hat.”

She scanned the text using the flashlight, and beamed triumphantly. “I hope you brought some ketchup, because I happen to be quite adept at reading old Atlantean.”

He crossed his arms skeptically. “Enlighten me, Princess.”

“Simple. It says that this cave is the realm of Nandi, guardian of Atlunus, and all who trespass shall be destroyed.”

“Who is Nandi?” Melina asked Indy.

“The sacred bull in Hindu mythology. It was the gate-keeper of Shiva.” He gestured to the double-bladed axe on the tunic, and the physical weapon lying near the monster’s skull. “Some depictions showed Nandi accompanied by a four-armed person, holding a pair of axes.”

“If this is the real Minotaur, then it means we’re at the center of the labyrinth,” Sophia reasoned. She descended the steps, followed by Melina, who clearly regarded the redhead as a surrogate mother. “So the gateway to Atlantis—called *Atlunus* here—must be nearby.” Indy, still smarting from his colleague’s in-

credible feat of translation, joined them in the middle of the room to admire the fearsome statue.

The stone giant suddenly grew taller when the floor sank beneath them. “*Oh!* What’s going on, Indy?” Sophia cried out in alarm. She grabbed onto him for safety as the platform floated steadily down between a pair of stout, grooved columns. But Indy wasn’t worried. It was obviously an ancient pressure plate, activated by weight.

“You forgot the rest of the legend: Nandi fell at the feet of Parvathi to plead forgiveness for cheating in a game of dice, thus sparing Siva from death. So, those who fall at the feet of the Minotaur are spared from death, in turn.”

They settled to the floor of a new cavern, nearly fifteen feet below the Minotaur chamber. The gush of moving water drew their attention to a glassy sheet falling down the wall to their right. When they stepped off of the elevator, the platform, now relieved of their weight, began to rise, climbing back into the darkness above. “There goes our ride,” Sophia groaned. “*Now* how do we get back?”

“We’ll find a way.” Indy strolled across the room and painted the rock wall in slow horizontal stripes, trying to determine the layout of the cave.

“Ew! I just stepped on something!” Melina wailed in distress.

“What is it? Indy, shine your light over here, quick.” ordered Sophia, sounding more motherly than she probably would have liked. When he lowered the beam to the floor, they saw the body.

Both women shrieked in unison. Their screams echoed down the corridor. Indy recognized the dirt-

stained khakis, tall boots, and pith helmet of the man who had betrayed them for the very object which lay only inches from his dead hand. "Sternhart," he muttered grimly. He unsnapped his front jacket pocket and slipped the worldstone inside without ceremony.

Slumped on his side, the lanky explorer had perished a short distance from the elevator shaft. Sternhart had been using his field pack for a pillow when he died. A walking stick lay nearby. His body was cold and stiff, his clammy flesh saturated with moisture from the waterfall. His lean, once-handsome face was gaunt and pale, his eyes recessed into hollow, bruised sockets. The welt from Indy's whip striped his face like a long blue worm feeding on his waxy flesh.

Sophia knelt beside Indy. "Oh my God, he's dead."

Melina stood back at a distance, unwilling to get near the corpse. "Is he really dead?" she whispered solemnly.

"I'm afraid so," Sophia said gently, so as not to scare her. "But it's okay. He just fell asleep and didn't wake up. How did he get down here?" she wondered.

"Evidently there must be another entrance into the labyrinth, and more than one set of keystones," Indy said, opening the Briton's pack. He nodded in silent confirmation as he withdrew exact copies of the sun and moonstones. Then he felt something cold and heavy inside the bag. He pulled out a book and opened the clump of damp, wrinkled pages of a journal. Carefully peeling apart the saturated pages, Indy found the last entry, dated more than two weeks earlier.

Sternhart's normally elegant script was shaky, almost illegible; the words of a cold, starving man

written in the near darkness during his last moments of desperation. On the floor nearby was a pool of dried wax, the remains of the candle that had been his only light source. As he read the blurred letters on the soggy, ink-stained page, Indy almost pitied the misfortune of his ex-rival.

*This Kerner fellow is quite mad, but I double-crossed him at my own peril, and so have only myself to blame for my lamentable fate. Still, it is better that I find the secrets of Atlantis before these Nazi brutes, because I fear the world will pay a terrible price if they should achieve it first. The vengeance they have in store for their enemies is almost unspeakable, and I shudder to see it come to pass. So, whether I fail or succeed, I can at least die with the satisfaction that I did everything within my power to stop them. God have mercy on my poor soul.*

*Now to the problem at hand. I am convinced the map room lies beyond the next chamber. Alas, I cannot get past the gate. I believe that static electricity will respond to orichalcum, but since I'm trapped down here, I'm not sure I have all the pieces for a makeshift detector or not. I grow weaker with each passing hour. My aching belly is my own punishment for entering the labyrinth without suitable supplies. Time was of the essence, and in my haste I did not prepare as thoroughly as I might otherwise have. At least sleep brings a welcome respite from the torturous pangs of hunger, and I shall go peacefully now, in the hopes that I am destined to find the Lost Kingdom in my dreams, if not reality.*

Sophia broke the grim silence. "What does it say?" Indy passed her the book. When she finished reading

Sternhart's last entry, she dropped the diary beside his corpse. "Serves him right, the son of a bitch. We almost died in that pyramid, thanks to him." she said bitterly.

Melina was appalled by her insensitivity. "That is not very nice," she scolded.

"He was a very bad man," explained Sophia without a hint of remorse. She crossed her arms, and regarded the cavern angrily. "And now we're trapped again." She restrained herself from kicking the corpse in the girl's presence.

"Not necessarily," Indy said. He walked over to the waterfall.

Light spilled faintly down from the cavity in the ceiling. He looked at it closer, intrigued. The sheet of falling water had a deep ripple in the middle where the currents folded inward, as if diverted by some unseen force. Indy reached through the water and grasped a heavy chain with thick, torus-shaped links. Following it down to the floor, he found that it was attached to a massive stone cylinder, resting in a hole. It was the elevator's counter-weight. The chain remained taut when Indy tugged on it with all of his strength, which meant they could climb its length back into the upper chamber. He told Sophia as much.

"Wait. What about the map room?" She walked to the far end of the cavern, where another door was all but invisible in the darkness. "It's just around the corner."

Caught up in the excitement, Melina beckoned him insistently. "Come on, Indy! It is this way!"

He withdrew his hand from the chilly water and

joined them at the passage. Inside, they found a craggy, rock-lined cavern with a single doorway blocked by Sternhart's immovable gate. Gazing through the bronze grid, they were dismayed to find that the pulley was positioned well beyond reach. Indy cast the light around the chamber, desperately searching for another way out.

Melina gave a startled yelp when a large spider scuttled across the roving flashlight beam. A flock of bats, disturbed by the noise, flapped out of a hole in the wall above the gate, chattering in panic as they disappeared through the passage into the waterfall room. Captivated, Indy scanned the flashlight across the wall behind the fence and saw a corresponding opening above the pulley. The bat fissure tunneled through the rock to the inside. It was their only hope of escape.

He looked at Sophia, whose perception stunned him less than her harsh reply. "Forget it. I'm not climbing through that goddamn hole. It's full of bats."

"Fine, then we'll rot down here like Sternhart," he said brusquely.

"I will do it!" Melina volunteered. "Bats do not scare me."

"No, sweetie. It's too dangerous," Sophia told her. "We'll find another way out."

Indy pushed the argument. "There is no other way, unless you want to climb through a freezing waterfall and die of hypothermia trying to find your way back to the surface."

"Don't start with me, Jones..."

"Look, do you want to get out of here, or not? It's

that simple.”

Unwilling to listen to them argue anymore, Melina scaled the gate and crawled into the hole before the adults realized what she was doing. She stuck her head out and asked for the flashlight. Indy tossed it up to her, and she disappeared, leaving them in the dark. Moments later, a smudge of yellow lit the wall behind the gate. Then Melina dropped to the floor with a delighted smile, clearly enjoying the adventure.

“See? Just like Tarzan!”

“Oh, brother,” Sophia groaned. “What does that make us: Tarzan, Jane, and Girl? Just don’t start swinging on vines like Jones does.”

Indy took the flashlight and spotted the pulley while she pushed on it with all of her strength. The wheel barely moved. “Kick it with your feet,” he told her.

Grabbing the wall for balance, Melina struck the handle repeatedly with the heel of her right foot until the lock finally clicked free. The gate squeaked open, and Sophia congratulated her with a hug. “You did great, honey! That was so brave of you to crawl through that hole for us. Tarzan would be proud.”

“Really?” Melina beamed happily.

“Come on, just a little further to go,” urged Indy.

A dozen yards beyond the gate, the tunnel vanished around a corner. Darkness clung to the walls like a plague, but a sheen of pale, milky light coated the floor, illuminating the path to the inner sanctum. Sophia shared a silent look with Indy. There were no words to convey her hope and anxiety. All of her dreams lay just around the corner. She drew her hand along the cold rock wall to anchor herself to reality

because her body suddenly felt light as a feather, as if she might float away at any moment.

Moving past Indy, she stepped into the light, and gasped.

Before them spread an expansive chamber made of cut stone blocks which seemed to emit a leaden shine, the source of the ambient glow. A gallery of sealed cyclopean doorways lined the walls. Each slab was engraved with a solar or lunar symbol, like the keystones. Sophia barely noticed them as she gazed upon the single most captivating sight she had ever beheld: A scale model of Atlantis, carved with incredible detail and precision.

The miniature city lay within a large circular basin in the floor. Radiating from the central island were two concentric rings of land populated by a breathtaking array of buildings. Pyramids, obelisks, and temples wrought in a perfect fusion of ancient design elements. Indy was amazed. The model represented the unity all of the cultural vestiges they had encountered in their journey: Egyptian, Mesoamerican, Greek and Indian architecture melded into a flawless aesthetical style that seemed inevitable, and yet somehow alien all at once.

Beautiful beyond words, its very existence defied comprehension. Indisputable proof, in cold, hard stone, that Atlantis was real. Nobody moved or spoke. They stared in humbled silence, afraid to blink as though the model would vanish like a dream if they took their eyes from it. Finally, Sophia found the willpower to approach the model. Pausing at the rim with her hands folded in reverence, she looked back to her companions, still standing by the tunnel

entrance.

“Atlantis. The city of yesterday’s forever...”

She beckoned them to join her. Indy and Melina drifted over to the elaborate model and circled it slowly, absorbing every detail in sheer wonder. Plato’s three-ring configuration was present, but there was no hint of the main canal that bisected the inner island. Although immensely pleased by the physical copy of her dream in stone, Sophia was disappointed that the Atlantean architecture didn’t resemble the city depicted on the slides at her presentation.

Then, realizing that a vital clue was missing, she looked around quickly. “Where is Crete?”

Indy didn’t see it either. Without a compass, there was no point of reference to indicate the orientation of the model, and therefore locate the actual city. Then another problem occurred to him. “How do we even get *into* Atlantis?” The question made Sophia feel like an idiot, because she had never considered it before.

“Use the key thing,” Melina pointed to the middle of the island, where a single bronze post occupied the place accorded to the temple of Poseidon in mythology. Sophia took the stone disks from her backpack, slotted the pins and grooves together, and snapped her fingers at Indy for the worldstone in his pocket. The psychic then carried the disks to the barren patch of rock at the heart of Atlantis, where she knelt and threaded the wheels onto the spindle.

She paused to admire the set with renewed awe. “Like the island it’s built upon... Do you see it now, Indy?”

He couldn’t believe how blind they had been. The

stacked keystones perfectly mirrored the circular layout of Atlantis. Indy found the subtle detail unnerving, because it proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the advanced prehistoric civilization had truly existed. Then he turned his attention to the row of stone doorways that suddenly brimmed with possibility. Any one of them could lead to Atlantis. But which one?

“Quit daydreaming, and give me the Lost Dialogue.” Indy hastily dug the book from his satchel and tossed it into her waiting hands. Consulting the *Hermocrates* for the alignment code, she read Plato’s text aloud: “It says: *To approach Atlantis itself a Worldstone was required as well, with a waxing moon the sky’s only reply to the fires below.* Meaning that we should line up the volcano with the waxing moon.”

As he watched her dial the keystones, Indy felt anticipation creeping into him for the first time. He was actually excited about Sophia’s quest, which now held the promise of a discovery unrivaled by any other in history. She pressed the spindle, but nothing happened. She pushed the button again, with the same result. Sophia blinked in confusion, then re-read the text only to find that she missed the last cryptic clue: “*Final entrance yielded only to contrary minds.*”

Melina grasped the solution immediately. “The stones are backwards. Turn them around!”

Sophia reversed the symbols from the Horns of Consecration icon, then mashed the bronze pillar down with purpose. There was a potent *click!* and the room came to life.

A tower on the model’s perimeter suddenly rotated in place. Two slitted windows glowed green, and the

small statue shot into motion, circuiting the radius of the miniature city. The floor churned into a hive of activity as the stone buildings rose and fell, juggling randomly like a set of bizarre lock tumblers. At the same time, a stream of water poured from a thin opening at the base of the wall and filled a shallow channel leading to the stone basin. The water flowed around the outermost ring before seeping through vents below the harbor walls to flood the two lesser moats.

A pool of soft, ambient light poured into the shadowy chamber as the centermost portal scraped open with a loud groan. The air was electric. Every single pore of Sophia's body tingled with exhilaration. She abandoned the stone disks and moved, trance-like, towards the doorway. Melina quickly hopscotched across the model, gathered up the keystones and returned them to Indy. He re-pocketed the worldstone, deposited the larger ones into the backpack, and they went after Sophia, who had gone ahead of them.

The room was immensely long, with a cavernous ceiling spanned by a row of thick, squared pillars from one end to the other. Cut into the floor was a shallow channel that ran parallel to the columns. Huge concrete ribs vaulted the ceiling above the track. Indy was amazed. The place looked, for all the world, like a modern, albeit eerily abandoned, subway platform. The stout columns were fractured, chipped, and filmy with cobwebs. The last train had left the station ages ago. But there was no sign of Sophia.

She had simply disappeared.

Melina looked around, perplexed. "Where did she

go?”

Indy spotted the redhead standing at the very end of the track, beside a huge stone object buried under a collapsed section of the wall. “There she is. Let’s go see what she found.”

When they reached her, Indy immediately saw that any chance of reaching Atlantis was gone. The large stone subway car sat askew on the railbed, buried nose-deep under a pile of blocks that must have once been the entrance to a tunnel. Water trickled from the ancient rubble and pooled in the channel. Melina knelt at the edge of the track to watch some glowing blue minnows dart around in the shallow ditch.

“Rapid transit. Simply amazing,” she marveled.

“A little *too* rapid, by the look of it,” observed Indy. He touched the train. “This thing is made of solid rock. Two or three tons, easy. To lift it alone would take—”

“Orichalcum. And magnetic levitation,” she supplied. “Rock becomes weightless, gravity a mere nuisance. The Atlanteans mastered all the forces of nature. How do you think the pyramids were built?”

“Too bad it’s wrecked. It probably would have taken us straight to Atlantis, if the city wasn’t underwater.” He looked at Sophia with regret. “I hate to say it, but this really does look like the end of the line.”

“What perfect choice of words, Dr. Jones! I could not have said it better myself.” Klaus Kerner strode down the platform with a small group of Nazi soldiers and his omnipresent Abwehr agents. The stormtroopers fanned out in a semicircle around them, guns drawn. “Thank you for showing us the way through the labyrinth, Fräulein Hapgood. Once

again you have proven your value to us. Now you will come with me.”

“Like hell I will,” she seethed.

“I see that a little persuasion is needed.” Drawing his gun, the SS commander snatched Melina by the arm and pulled her away roughly, pressing the Luger into the girl’s neck with a cruel sneer. Melina struggled and tried to break free of his grasp, but Kerner only squeezed her arm tighter until she cried out in pain. He looked pointedly at Sophia. “Yes?”

It was too much for her to bear. She crossed the dim cavern without hesitation, and stood by the squad of armed Nazis. The switch was immediate and without argument. Kerner released Melina, and she scrambled to Indy’s side for safety. “You are very bad people,” she pouted with an accusing scowl. Several of the soldiers laughed.

Indy glared at Kerner. Adrenaline-shot fury burned in his veins. He wanted to snap the Nazi’s neck and stomp his skull into the ground with his boot until it shattered like a glass ornament. The potency of his anger vaguely mortified Indy in the haze of red rage that consumed him. Their hatred was contagious. God, he was beginning to think like them now. “This is a new low, Kerner, even for the Nazis.”

Kerner looked at Indy, as if noticing him for the first time. “Ah yes, how could I forget our unfinished business?” He fired the Luger point-blank, shooting Indy in the gut. The deafening roar echoed like thunder across the subway, mixing with the screams of the women as Indy folded over and collapsed in a heap.

“Indy!!! *INDY!!!*” Shattered, Sophia fell to the floor

as if she had taken the shot. Her heart was blown out of her chest the instant Kerner pulled the trigger, leaving a hollow, ragged void of despair. She saw Indy lying motionless on the ground through tear-blurred eyes.

Her pain turned to rage when she saw Kerner absently shining the barrel of his smoking pistol on his sleeve. She threw herself at the Nazi captain, punching and kicking in blind fury. “*God damn, you, you son of a bitch! I’ll kill you!*” Two soldiers immediately restrained her by pinning her arms behind her back.

Kerner smoothed the front of his uniform passively. “Yes, yes, all in good time. But for the present, Fräulein, I have more important business to attend.” He lashed out with a vicious slap that snapped her head sideways. Karl flinched and averted his gaze. Melina screamed and rushed to help Sophia. Torsten snagged the girl by the arm and shoved her roughly to the stone floor. Sobbing, she crawled back to Indy and hugged him protectively.

Not one glimmer of human emotion stirred Kerner’s stony features. “Now, you will help us find Atlantis, or end up like Jones. It is a simple choice.” Sophia managed a feeble nod. The white shadow of the Nazi’s hand burned her cheek. Kerner opened the rucksack and searched through it methodically for the stone disks. “Very good. You found the second key. But where is the third stone? The one Herr Sternhart paid for with his life?”

With her face downcast, Sophia stared at the floor, unwilling to look into the eyes of the monster who had taken everything from her. Tears glistened down her face. “It was crushed by the elevator,” she mum-

bled.

Kerner's mouth twitched with an angry tic. "No matter. There are many such stones, as we have seen. We will find another." The Nazi captain surveyed the wrecked train and the collapsed tunnel, and determined that there must be other ways into the city. "Agent Sankt. Note the compass heading of this track, and radio Captain Wilhelm to chart a course based on the distance cited in the Lost Dialogue."

"What about the girl?" said Karl in concern while Melina sobbed with grief over the dead archaeologist.

"We don't need the brat," Kerner sniffed. "Leave her to rot with Jones, and seal the door so that she does not escape." He turned on his heel and strode away. Torsten laughed wickedly as the Nazis retreated and pulled the heavy stone door closed behind them, leaving Melina crying in the gloom beside Indy's still body.



## CIRCUIT OF THE OUTER RING

After a few moments of silence Indy rolled over, groaning at the fiery pain burning in his gut. A shot at point-blank range felt like being hit with a sledgehammer. He sat up on one elbow, grimacing in agony.

Melina pulled back in surprise, blinking her teary eyes in disbelief. “Indy? Indy, you are alive!” She threw her arms around him tightly enough to make him wince.

“Yeah, I’m okay, kid. I think.” He reached beneath his jacket and gingerly touched the spot where Kerner’s bullet had punched the granite worldstone into his abdomen. He gasped sharply, but knew the gunshot wasn’t fatal because there wasn’t a drop of blood anywhere. Unbuttoning his shirt, he found nothing more serious than a dark, crescent-shaped bruise from the impact. One of his lower ribs was certainly fractured, if not broken. *A small price to pay*

*for being alive*, Indy thought gratefully as he tried to stand.

Sniffing, Melina wiped her tears on the sleeve of her dress and helped him up. "Thank you for not dying, or I would be here all alone."

Once the dizziness faded, Indy opened his left front pocket and withdrew the relic which had saved his life. A small bullet hole pierced the leather. He fished out the crumpled lead slug and threw it away, silently praising the stonemason's durable craftsmanship.

The peasant girl tugged anxiously on his sleeve. "Why did they take Sophia?"

"They think she can lead them to Atlantis with her necklace," Indy replied, tucking the stone into his satchel.

"Is it a magic necklace?"

"It belongs to an Atlantean spirit called Nur-Ab-Sal. Sometimes he talks to her."

"He's a ghost?"

"I've never seen it, but Sophia can." He surveyed the shadowy cavern, trying to locate the source of the light that revealed its expanse. It was the same eerie ambience that permeated the upper labyrinth.

"The Nazis trapped us in here. What are we going to do?" Melina said worriedly.

"Well, I could use a little fresh air. Let's take a walk." Clutching his tender side, Indy ambled towards the far end of the corridor, where a faint stream of light issued from an unseen opening near the ceiling. Near the corner adjacent to the map room entrance, they discovered a flight of stairs hidden behind a solid banister carved into the rock. The steps climbed into

a large cavern with a wedge-shaped stone altar that pointed towards the opening to the outside world.

It was dusk when they emerged onto a rocky slope overlooking the sea. High above, the moon glowed like a silver coin in the sky, casting its milky shine on the dark waves crashing against the shore. The incoming surf burst against the rocks in a glowing spray, glazing the sand in a thick wet skin that dissolved as the water retreated into the blackness again.

“Where are we?” Indy clamped his fedora to his head against the buffeting salt breeze.

Trying to get her bearings, Melina looked further down the beach and saw a long wooden pier extending out into the ocean. “Amnissos.”

“The ancient harbor of Knossos,” he said, surprised to find that they had traveled nearly three miles from the ruins. His geography reoriented, everything suddenly became clear to Indy.

The Labyrinth joined the Cave of Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth whose cult had existed in the womb-like caverns below Crete since Neolithic times. The bull-worshipping Minoan civilization had neatly integrated the Mother-Goddess with their own deity in the Horns of Consecration, a physical representation of the sanctuary birth canal presided over by Eileithyia.

Melina suddenly pointed offshore, excited. “Indy, look at that big ship out there!”

Squinting in the dark, he saw the menacing shape of a German U-boat riding the tidal swell beyond the breakwater, its distinctive conning tower rising from the black tide like a steel monolith. A lone soldier patrolled the pier with a rifle. Considering their distance

from the ruins, Indy knew that Kerner would have to backtrack through the caves and travel overland to reach the sub. That would buy him enough time to stow away on board, and plan how to rescue Sophia.

“Is it a Nazi ship?” the girl asked, rubbing her arms vigorously in the chilly air.

“Yeah,” Indy sighed with the sobering realization of how the Germans planned to reach the fabled underwater city.

Melina shivered, hugging herself to keep warm. The temperature was falling fast. Thanks to him, she’d been put through enough danger already, and barely escaped with her life. The last thing she needed was to catch a cold. It was time for her to go home. Indy gave her the flashlight. “Can you find your way back to the village from here?”

“Yes, there is a road at the top of the hill, with lots of traffic to Iraklion. I will catch a ride home. It is not so far.”

Indy hesitated, unsure of what to say, but not wanting to leave her without a proper goodbye. “Well, I guess this is it, kiddo.”

He stuck out his hand. She clasped it and fixed the archaeologist with an intense look. “Before you go, please tell me. Are more Nazis really coming here, like Sophia said?”

Indy swallowed the lump of emotion in his throat, and nodded solemnly. “Yes.” He didn’t know what else to say, but he couldn’t bring himself to lie about the future which Sophia had spoken of with such conviction.

“What can we do?” she implored him.

Kneeling, Indy looked into her innocent brown

eyes with all the compassion that he could manage. "Go home and stay with your family. And always be safe."

She hugged him gratefully. "Thank you so much, Indy. I will say prayers for Sophia tonight. Please come visit us when you find her."

"I will," he promised, returning the hug. "Take care of yourself, and don't talk to any strange Nazis." Melina switched on the flashlight and climbed the ridge, leaving him alone on the hillside. Once she was out of sight, Indy picked his way down the slope and sprinted across the beach towards the U-boat.

Trying to keep low, Indy had nearly made it to the jetty when his foot caught in an unseen crevice and he tripped, sending a cascade of stones clattering across the shoal. The guard turned alertly at the sound and strode towards Indy with his automatic rifle. Indy flattened himself against the rock, praying that the soldier couldn't see him in the dark. The guard was only ten feet away when Indy made a desperate move. He grabbed a medium-sized stone, rolled sideways and hurled it towards the U-boat with all of his might. The rock clanged loudly against the hull. The startled Nazi whirled at the disturbance with his gun. Indy leapt forward, brandishing the blunt end of his bullwhip like a blackjack, and clubbed him at the base of his skull with the lead-weighted handle. The sentry dropped to the ground, unconscious, and Indy quickly dragged him under the pier, out of sight.

Two hours later, he heard voices approaching from beyond the stony ridge. Now dressed in the uniform he'd taken from the guard, Indy tensed when he saw the line of shadowy figures marching down

the trail by lantern light. Sophia was in the middle of the group, appearing subdued as the Nazis shuffled her across the beach. Misery etched her features, and even in the dark Indy could see that she'd been crying.

As Kerner neared, looking immaculate despite his lengthy subterranean hike, Indy snapped a sharp *Sieg Heil* salute while crossing the fingers on his other hand to jinx the show of fealty. Darkness concealed his face, and Kerner strode by without a glance. Indy dropped his hand to the rifle by his side and curled his finger over the trigger as he considered shooting the SS captain on the spot. But he knew the other soldiers would gun him down instantly, so he shouldered the Nazi field pack with his clothing, and followed the procession aboard the submarine.

\* \* \*

Sophia didn't care about finding Atlantis, or even if she lived. Nothing mattered since Indy had been killed, and Melina was left to die in the bowels of the Labyrinth. *I might as well be dead, too*, she thought miserably while Kerner hustled her down the gauntlet of hissing machinery in the heart of the submarine. With a single bullet, the heartless Nazi had turned her care-free world into an absolute nightmare. Her beautiful dream was gone, shattered forever. Her soul ached with a sadness deeper than any she had ever known, but Sophia was exhausted from crying and too numb to feel much of anything except the urge to vomit.

The stench in the depths of the sweltering U-boat

churned her gut. It was the most nauseating smell imaginable: An unholy blend of oil and grease ripened with human body odor, sweat, rotting fruit and spoiled meat that was draped over every fixture throughout the ship. Moving through the cloistered passageway, she stumbled over crates of moldy vegetables, wilted cabbage, mushy potatoes thick with fuzz, and fossilized loaf bread that couldn't be cut with a chainsaw let alone a knife; A vile grocery of provisions for the long sea voyage.

She crinkled her nose and took shallow breaths, trying desperately not to inhale the foul air as she was paraded into the sleeping quarters, where a dozen young sailors were relaxing and playing cards.

The reaction was immediate. Cheering erupted at the sight of the curvy redhead, whose presence drew suggestive jeers and whistles from the crew of lonely men who had not seen a woman in almost a month. Unable to escape the hungry gazes that undressed her, Sophia avoided the eagerly groping hands with as much dignity as she could manage, and endured the lewd phallic torpedo jokes only because she, mercifully, didn't speak German. Despite the horrible circumstances, she actually felt relieved when Kerner escorted her into a lavish wood-paneled cabin and pulled the curtain shut behind them.

Inside, a balding old man in a lab coat was hunched over a narrow table covered with paperwork, busily making notes and calculations. Kerner cleared his throat for attention. The geriatric scientist raised his wispy gray head from the map he'd been studying. He peered at them through a pair of thick spectacles, frowning like a bitter toad.

“Where have you been, Kerner? We should have left hours ago! There is a timetable for this mission, you know.”

“Relax, Herr Doktor,” he replied, pushing Sophia firmly onto the wooden bench. “I have collected our guide, and the keys which have eluded us for so long.” Kerner sat down beside her and Sophia immediately scooted away from him.

The physicist adjusted his glasses for a better look at her. “Ah yes, Madame Sophia, the renowned psychic. I am so pleased that you decided to join us at last,” he greeted in thickly-accented English. “Where is your meddlesome colleague, Dr. Jones?”

“Jones is out of the picture, and we will have no more trouble from him,” Kerner said smugly, pleased to take credit for the accomplishment. “Isn’t that right, Fräulein?”

Sophia stared at the table, avoiding his keen gaze. Anguish crumpled her pale brow. Her lip quivered but she maintained a stony expression, unwilling to break down in front of her captors. She wouldn’t give them the satisfaction of seeing her cry.

“Forget about Jones. How can you expect a man to lead you to Atlantis when he can’t even find a way out of the Labyrinth?” he taunted.

“Now, my dear, we have much to discuss concerning the subject of your expertise.” The old man opened a cabinet and withdrew an object that Sophia had never seen before, yet recognized instantly. It was the horned statue from Barnett College, the very artifact which spurred their entire quest. He set it down in front of her. “A fascinating relic, wouldn’t you agree? And one with unlimited potential, as we

discovered.”

Kerner produced a glass tube filled with blood-red beads and placed it by the bronze idol. “It is time to share your knowledge, Miss Hapgood. You can begin by explaining how to unlock the power of this ancient metal, the so-called orichalcum which Plato described in such tantalizing detail. Tell us, how does it work?”

Across the table from Sophia, the old man hovered over the statue with a hollow smile that sickened her worse than the foul air. The manic zeal in his eyes proved that Indy was right about everything. The Nazis were eager to turn the fiery pearls into a weapon of mass destruction, and unleash its power on an unsuspecting world.

She folded her arms and looked away in disgust. “Go to hell.”

“There is no point being difficult, Fräulein. We are making the greatest discovery in human history, and you are a part of it whether you like it or not. I suggest you cooperate before I am forced to *persuade* you.”

Fed up with the harassment, Sophia glared at Kerner. “Just who do you goddamn people think you are, anyway? What gives you the right to torture and kill indiscriminately, and then parade all over Europe like you *own* it?”

The scientist was taken aback by her vehement outburst. “How rude of me to forget myself on such a momentous occasion. I am Doktor Hans Übermann, the director of this mission on behalf of the Uranverein Institute in Berlin.”

Kerner bolted to his feet, outraged. “I am in charge

of this operation, you spineless sausage! How dare you challenge my authority!?”

“MY authority,” Übermann corrected. He calmly reached into his pocket and unfolded a typewritten letter stamped with the swastika-bearing Imperial War Eagle.

Kerner scanned the document in disbelief. Scarlet fury consumed his face when he realized that his leadership had been usurped by the wily physicist. “What is the meaning of this?!” he demanded.

Planting his bony fists on the table, Übermann rose to confront his colleague. “Can’t you *read*, Klaus? Due to your incompetence in Algeria, the *Waffenamt* has granted me full control of this expedition. From now on you will follow *my* orders, unless you want to lighten that uniform by a few medals.” He glanced at the seated redhead with a devilish sneer. “Perhaps Madame Sophia foresees a change of rank in your future?”

Klaus Kerner could only tremble with rage while Hans Übermann, empowered by the flimsy document, indulged his anger with a simpering smile.

“Now please try to show some respect to our esteemed guest, Colonel. She is here to help us, after all.”

Sophia tossed her hair dismissively. “I could give a damn.”

“*Schwein!*” Kerner slammed his fist against the paneled bulkhead, ripped the curtain aside and stalked out of the cabin in livid fury.

Übermann drew the curtain shut and resumed his chair once more. “You must forgive the Colonel. He has been under some stress lately.” Then he chuckled

as if the notion amused him. "Now, I believe you share the same fascination with the occult as *Reichsführer* Himmler. He was delighted to learn of your participation in our project, considering that he personally recommended you for it."

\* \* \*

Deep in the belly of the U-boat *Orogeny*, the bank of powerful electric motors growled at full capacity to drive the 850-ton German leviathan into the dark abyss like a gigantic steel blade, knifing its way towards the Aegean seabed north of Crete. Plying steadily through the dense water, the ship trembled with an ominous shudder; a prolonged hiccup of metal groaning in pain as the sea tightened its grip on the *U-41*. At 140 fathoms, the submarine had already surpassed maximum crush depth, and was now pushing the limits of its reinforced hull, specially clad in a jacket of double-plated steel by the AG Weser shipyard in Bremen.

In the bow torpedo bay, Captain Heinrich Wilhelm cast a nervous glance at the web of stout bracing that spanned the walls in place of the loading tubes which normally cluttered the deck. The metal struts, wet with condensation, gleamed like blood in the ambient red interior lights. The commander lifted his *Kriegsmarine* cap to sleeve the cold sweat from his brow before turning his attention back to the broad windows, fit snugly into the torpedo hatch plate recesses on either side of the hull. Outside, pale silt particles glittered in the pressurized xenon spotlights. The swirling sediment had a hypnotic effect

that might have been soothing if Wilhelm wasn't so terrified. Directly in front of him, an ocean of black death pressed against the thick Plexiglas with a force of 300 pounds per square inch, enough power to crush his U-boat like a tin can.

The ship was an iron coffin ferrying every soul on board to a watery doom at the bottom of the sea, yet Klaus Kerner savored the ride into oblivion with a glassy smile while the strains of Wagner's *Parzival* filled the narrow deck. The music lent the scene an air of deceptive calm as the deadly water pressure continued to build outside, but it did little to ease Wilhelm or the American woman beside Kerner, who stared into the darkness in vacant rapture, indifferent to the danger lurking just beyond the window.

Turning from the viewport, Wilhelm sighed tensely. "I can't believe that you sacrificed my shark's teeth for eyes that are useless at this depth. This water is black as oil, Kerner. What in God's name do you expect to see down here?"

"True, *Oberleutnant*, a shark without teeth is an ineffective predator, but we are not hunting." The SS commander stroked the acrylic shield with a leather-gloved hand. "We are on the brink of reclaiming our ancient homeland, and a weapon so powerful as to make your precious torpedoes seem like matchsticks. When we succeed, history will remember you as the man who rediscovered Atlantis. Such a prestigious honor outweighs any inconvenience that must be endured on behalf of your service to the Reich."

It was a novel prospect, but Wilhelm refused to be swayed by Kerner's megalomania. "If *Großadmiral* Raeder had not personally appointed me to this sui-

cidal mission of yours—”

He was silenced by a sonorous moan as the submarine bellowed like a dying whale. A hollow popping echoed through the vessel. Then a parade of dull thumps drummed the ceiling overhead, the cacophony of a ghostly platoon marching across the submerged deck. Sophia pulled the checkered wool blanket around herself tighter and shivered as the ocean clenched the U-boat in its watery vise.

Kerner was quick to spot her weakness. “Nervous, Miss Hapgood? You should relax. It is only a little... pressure.” He gave her shoulder a light squeeze, and grinned when she shrank uncomfortably at his touch.

“There is no reason to fear when destiny is so clearly in our favor. Once we find our lost kingdom, the Aryan renaissance will begin, and Germany will stand forever united in our ancient legacy.” The Nazi commander swelled with pride as he spoke. “As prophetess of the new Atlantis, you will have a place of honor in the World Reich, and enjoy the respect of millions who once branded psychics as charlatans. Even Jones could not give you such undreamed-of prestige.”

Fed up with his delusions of grandeur, Sophia finally broke her morose silence. “Are you really that conceited, or is it just the uniform?”

Wilhelm examined a nearby temperature gauge to hide his grin, but Kerner was not amused. “You Americans lack pride and vision in equal measure. I almost pity your country.”

“Speak for yourself. At least we’re *capable* of pity.”

Down the aft passageway, the sonar pinged sharply in the cold air. Wilhelm snatched up the radio phone.

“*Funker* Schulte, what is our depth?” he said tersely.

“Twenty-three hundred meters and descending, sir. Bearing eight degrees northeast at seven knots,” the technician reported.

“Very good. Maintain our present heading, decrease speed by five knots.”

“Yes, *Kapitanleutnant*.” The instructions were quickly relayed to the engine control room, followed by a pronounced change in momentum as the submarine slowed its headlong drive through the crushing blackness.

“We are still on course with the underground tunnel, yes?” Kerner said anxiously. Wilhelm repeated his inquiry to the navigator.

“*Ja*, Herr Oberst. Four hundred meters and closing. The signal is clear.”

They drifted in silence. All eyes were focused on the windows, tinted by the dark water into plates of onyx glass looking out into a universe devoid of starlight; the end of existence. The sonar continued to pulse steadily. Sophia yawned. Overcome with fatigue, she snuggled into her blanket and closed her eyes, allowing the reliable tones to guide her into a state of deep relaxation. The seconds and minutes stretched into an elastic eternity, wrapping her in a timeless cocoon, warm and secure. She was drifting away into the blackness when another prehistoric groan shook the submersible. Her cocoon ripped open at the sound of the phonograph needle zagging across the record. Wagner’s symphony died with a raspy scrape. Red emergency lights flashed, and a deafening alarm claxon blared urgently throughout the ship.

“What the devil is going on?” Kerner bellowed in the sudden chaos, grabbing for a pipe as the ship trembled violently in the water. The floor tilted like rubber, tossing everyone off-balance. Kerner reeled into Wilhelm, and the two men toppled to the deck in a heap. The captain pushed him away roughly and tried to regain his footing again.

Water dripped from the ceiling and streaked the glass windows, pooling on the floor. The phonograph crashed to the deck. Metal squealed in torment. Sophia clung to the bulkhead, feeling the cold wet steel shiver beneath her hands. She felt the bronze pendant warm against her chest, pulsing with the familiar presence of Nur-Ab-Sal. He promised her that she would be safe, but Sophia didn't care anymore. It was too late. Everything would be gone the instant that the sub caved in. There would be no pain or suffering. Just the swift, cold embrace of the deep, and then all of her problems would be gone. She bowed her head and counted off the last moments of her life in ragged breaths, waiting for the inevitable crush of death to reunite her with Indy.

She just wanted it to be over.

Just when the world seemed to be coming undone at the seams, the trembling stopped. The alarm died abruptly, and an uneasy silence fell over the ship. Everything was still. Nobody moved, uncertain if the danger had passed. Still hugging the support girder, she looked up warily, expecting the burst of cold black fire to devour the tinfoil walls the moment her guard was down. But it didn't happen. Miraculously, they were still alive, and the darkness was gone. Vivid teal light shimmered across the windows, filling the

deck with a breathtakingly beautiful glow that tinted the hellish red glare into an eerie green pallor.

Wilhelm quickly crawled over to the lower portal, anxious to see where they were. His wondrous expression shifted to terror. "*Gott in himmel!*" Slipping on the wet floor, the mariner launched himself at the radio phone dangling from the wall. "We're grounding! *Anblasen!* Blow main ballast tanks and trim tanks, one through five! Halt engines immediately! Set all dive planes at zero!" His orders thundered over the loudspeaker like the voice of God.

Fresh panic spurred Sophia to the window. She let out a startled yelped when she saw the seabed rising up to meet them. Kerner grabbed onto the nearest strut and managed to stand when the U-boat heaved with an abrupt jerk. Gravity slammed him roughly to the floor again. Outside, the sapphire water vanished in a sheet of boiling white bubbles as the ballast tanks were evacuated. The *Orogeny* rose on a cushion of elastic buoyancy and then settled gently to the bottom like a chunk of lead.

Wilhelm clutched the phone in a white-knuckled grip. "Schulte, give me a full damage report! I want to know everything right now!"

"*Schnell, schnell!*" The din of rushed footsteps and shouting filled the iron tube as the crew scrambled to assess the condition of the submarine from bow to stern. Moments later the radio crackled again: "No injuries, Herr Wilhelm. The engine room is taking on water, but not very much. The boat is sound."

"Very good. Stand by for orders."

Kerner sat up, scowling in anger. "What in the hell happened?"

“I already told you, it’s the pressure!” Wilhelm spat furiously. “The hull is like an eggshell at this depth. We are lucky to be alive.”

Sophia glanced out the window. The submarine hovered above the seabed, its iron belly nearly resting on the sandy bottom. She slumped against the wall, dizzy with relief. “Damn, that was close.”

“*Was ist das...?*” Wilhelm dropped the radio phone and stared out the starboard viewport, mesmerized by something outside.

Following his gaze, Kerner’s contempt quickly shifted into a mask of shock that mirrored Wilhelm’s expression. The men crowded the window, unconcerned about the lethal water pressure chiseling into every seam of the ship.

Sophia edged forward anxiously, more frightened than curious after their brush with death. She stared out in disbelief.

*The ocean was glowing.*

A vibrant cerulean mist stained the water, casting a perpetual twilight over the desert of smooth silt rippling off into eternity. The cool aura waned in the distance, where an indigo storm shadowed the foothills of a velvet-black mountain range on the horizon.

“Where is the light coming from?” said Kerner, more annoyed than wonderstruck.

Nobody bothered to answer him. They could only stare across the abyssal plain bathed in the cool, ethereal light. Wilhelm took up the phone calmly. “Schulte. Make the bow planes level. Come twenty degrees to port.”

After the customary delay, the submarine pivoted

slowly in place, revealing the monotonous expanse of bleak gray silt. There was no sign of life anywhere; not a single fish to be seen, no coral reefs, or even the sponges that were so prized by the local Greek divers.

Kerner observed the dull scenery with disinterest until he suddenly stiffened in surprise. "Look there!" He jabbed a finger at the starboard glass.

Across the desolate plateau, Sophia only saw trackless mud in every direction. Then, focusing on the spot indicated by Kerner, she glimpsed a slender object planted upright in distance, obscured by the hazy blue fog.

"Main motors ahead one-third, and remain steady on this heading," Wilhelm ordered.

Clouds of pale sediment billowed up in the cobalt water as the *Orogeny* rumbled into motion and set off across the open seabed. Inside, the anxious observers watched the terrain unroll in the platinum brilliance of the search beams. Fifty yards away, the sand vanished under a wilderness of thick sea grass that blanketed the ground like moss. The leafy green tongues licked the belly of the U-boat as the iron behemoth plowed an invisible furrow through the field. In the radio room, the asdic sonar pulses clicked louder as they approached the mysterious object.

"Incredible!" Wilhelm exclaimed when the spotlights burned through the chalky haze to reveal a stout column jutting from the mire.

Towering above the submarine, the immense pillar wore a skin of furry algae that shivered in the current stirred by its passing. Sophia discerned an ornate pattern of radial spiral grooves beneath the thick brown

slime, but she was unable to tell if the column was made of stone or metal.

Kerner pursed his lips in satisfaction, pleased by the indisputable evidence of human civilization resting on the ocean floor. “Do you still doubt me, Herr Captain?”

Heinrich Wilhelm gaped at the eerie sentinel, too stunned for words as they glided past the monument. Sophia just prayed that it wasn't the cargo of some ancient shipwreck. She felt a surge of hope when the spotlights bathed another kelp-sheathed post lying beside the upright column in the lush grass. Then a dozen more toppled pillars appeared below them, scattered across the mud like megalithic dominoes. Breathless now, she glued herself to the window as they crested a ridge where the seabed sloped into a steep valley strewn with large stone blocks. The silt-covered masonry was close enough to touch that she would have plunged into the freezing water and embraced the stones if she could have.

“*Aaah!*” Sophia jumped back in fright, startled when the ground abruptly vanished in a watery abyss, the rim cut cleanly by some ungodly knife. It was like the entire sea floor had collapsed into a vast, bottomless crater filled with milky blue smoke.

Wilhelm, the stoic submariner, recoiled from the gaping underwater chasm with a pitched cry of terror.

“*Mutter Gottes!*” Kerner swore as the world simply dropped away beneath his boots.

The soundman, blind to the dramatic change in topography, issued another clinical report from the aft cabin. “The signal is stronger now, *Kapitanleutnant*,

lying directly north of our position on frequency three-nine-eight point two.”

Startled, Wilhelm fumbled the radio with shaky hands. “Uh... good, v-very good, Schulte. Remain on this heading until I give further orders.”

The U-boat soared across the yawning canyon like a tiny steel minnow, piercing the amethyst water with its twin-bladed light rays. Ahead in the distance, a multitude of slender green shapes darted through the sea like ghostly bullets. The creatures moved effortlessly, diving and looping in broad parabolic arcs, tracing fiery rainbows through the water in a graceful ballet.

Klaus Kerner squinted against the glare of the spotlights, trying to make out what he was seeing. “Captain, what are those things?”

“I have no idea. I’ve never seen anything like it before.”

“*Dolphins*,” Sophia said quietly. Having never seen a real dolphin before, she found the animals indescribably beautiful.

Wilhelm cupped his hands around his face to see them more clearly. “Incredible... Why do they glow like that?”

“Because they’ve been sanctified by the water.”

Just then, one dolphin separated from the group. It shot towards the canyon floor like an emerald comet, pulling her gaze down to the enormous shapes resting there, shrouded in the cool blue mist.

Jolted from her peaceful reverie, Sophia pressed against the window for a better view. More rock formations? No, she decided with a quickening pulse. The forms were too regular, their arrangement too

perfect to be a product of nature. She held her breath as the fog evaporated with agonizing slowness, layers of opaque onion skin flaking away, dissolving while the sonar pinged faster in a rhythm that was matched by her own thundering heartbeat.

And then she saw it. After a lifetime of passionate longing, it was right in front of her.

Atlantis.

The legendary city lost beneath the sea.

From her lofty perspective, the city appeared in the mist below as it would be seen from an airplane descending through the clouds. "Oh... my *God*."

Immersed in the shadowy deep, the ruins looked vague, dreamlike; a ghostly mirage that only half-existed in the azure twilight. One thing, however, was crystal clear. The magnificent ringed city depicted at Knossos had been absolutely erased by time.

Sophia had always imagined an alabaster metropolis resting peacefully on the sea floor, untouched by time and perfectly preserved in the water. She should have known better than to embrace her cherished storybook fantasy of a paradisiacal stone city with flawless buildings marbled by shimmering sunlight, mighty walls encircling sandy plains and lush groves of seaweed.

The reality was devastating. Her glorious utopian Atlantis was a lumpy blanket of sediment that scarcely resembled civilization. Eons of silt draped everything in a gauzy texture, as if the monuments were carved in algae rather than stone. Only the largest structures protruded from the mud, scattered across the seabed like gravestones in the cold blue water. The smaller buildings that Sophia had seen on the

scale model were forever lost in the deluge of muck that clogged the streets and mired the pyramids to their summit. The rings, channels, and bridges were obliterated when the island was swallowed by the sea.

Sophia touched the Plexiglas viewport as the dolphins flew over the ruins like fiery torpedoes, blazing a luminescent trail across the liquid sky where clouds once soared above the great empire. "I don't believe it's real..."

"Was there ever any doubt?" Kerner said, breaking her reverie.

"How on earth is this *possible?*" exclaimed Wilhelm, convinced he was hallucinating the glowing dolphins cavorting among sunken buildings at the bottom of the sea.

"We are sailing into history today, Captain. Be grateful you are here to witness it, unlike our fearless *leader* who is too ill to partake in our destiny." Kerner sneered with relish, knowing that Übermann was miserably holed-up in his cabin, stricken with nausea since they began the dive.

The *Orogeny* drifted across the moraine, projecting its lights over the ghostly hills while the stunned observers watched the decaying stonework materialize from the mist in awed silence. Like the jungle-shrouded ruins of Tikal, the sprawling alluvial desert over Atlantis was an artificial landscape sculpted by the ruins below. Much of the buried city was suggested by amorphous mounds of sludge, while other edifices were clearly identifiable beneath the veneer of clinging muck. The sediment-laden pyramids, rising defiantly through the swampy oblivion which had consumed the great city, appeared strangely fragile,

like they might evaporate into dust if the submarine passed too close. From what Sophia could tell, the megalithic skyscrapers exhibited a hybrid Meso-Egyptian style, featuring angular stepped courses with beveled corners, uniting at a truncated capstone. In the cool aquatic dusk, the vertical faces were bands of deep gray shadow, while the pale green ledges, heaped with mud, seemed to melt into the fluorescent water.

Traveling on, they spotted an ovoid ziggurat with softly rounded terraces that gave the stone a strangely melted appearance. Other buildings emerged from the mist with architecture too bizarre to classify: Two pyramids fused together side by side; another capped by a domed temple, with columns flanking the grand staircase which descended into the mud; and still another whose layered tiers were punctuated by gaping black holes that reminded Sophia of a whimsically tapered modern high-rise building. But most intriguing of all was how every surface touched by their floodlights reflected a curious, glassy shine beneath the mottled skin of silt.

*What befell this serene city? Was it the sea level, slowly creeping higher? Or the earth itself, suddenly shifting? We may never know for sure. However it happened, panic must have gripped the citizens on that fateful day when proud Atlantis sank beneath the waves...*

Confronted by the moldering bones of the magnificent civilization, the words of her lecture sounded hollow and sanctimonious; the melodramatic prose of a carnival fortune-teller hawking wisdom as phony as the linen ghost that she summoned in her séance. Sophia felt sick with guilt, ashamed of her-

self for capitalizing on the greatest tragedy in human history, of profiting from the souls who perished in the terrible cataclysm that shattered Atlantis to the bottom of the sea. Now the only thing left was the somber remains lying buried in the mud, surviving only in the memory of those who still believed.

She gazed upon the ruins in subdued rapture, tortured by a bittersweet sense of elation. After years of longing, she had finally found Atlantis, a place that she never expected to see in her own lifetime. But how could she be happy when Indy was gone? She never would have come this far without his support, and all of the sacrifices that he made, in spite of his skepticism, to help realize her dream. Sophia owed her very life to him, but he wasn't here to enjoy the moment of discovery that she wanted to share more than anything else in the world. She couldn't celebrate her achievement without him. It just wasn't right.

"Is it how you imagined?" Kerner said, studying her morose expression to discern whether they had truly found the legendary city.

"What do you care?" she growled, bristling at the cold-hearted Nazi who had stolen the greatest moment of joy in her life. His aura was black and vile, a hardened soul incapable of feeling the sense of mystery and wonder that captivated her. "This isn't about your so-called Aryan race or the glory of Germany. It's about getting orichalcum for some damned bomb. That's the only thing that matters to you, isn't it? You make me sick."

"How very perceptive, Miss Hapgood. I see that your psychic reputation is well-deserved. You don't have to enjoy what I ask of you, but remember that

your life depends on..."

Klaus Kerner stared off into the distance, struck speechless by the spectacle that loomed over the scattered rubble of Atlantis. Sophia turned and stared across the ruins, thunderstruck. There, beyond the pyramids which clustered together like pale blue mountains in the fog, towered an impossible cone of prehistoric rock, a majestic Olympus of the deep, the largest mountain she had ever seen.

"The pillar at the center of the model."

"What does that mean?" Kerner prodded her impatiently.

"The mountain is where the spindle was on the model of Atlantis, in the map room on Crete."

"What is that moving up there, on top?" Wilhelm said, pointing at the misty pinnacle that soared high above the Atlantean plain.

A fountain of silver bubbles rose from a circular temple that crowned the summit, disappearing in a steady stream into the darkness above. The temple appeared to be a tower with smooth, cylindrical walls, topped by a softly-rimmed turret. The style was cold and futuristic, unlike that of any culture in the world. In fact, it almost looked like the neck of a gigantic vase emerging from—

"Oh my God, it's not a mountain at all. They built the city around a volcano, just like Pompeii. Earthquakes and fire. It was a volcanic eruption."

Kerner nodded. "Exactly as Plato described in the first dialogue. If that is the center of the island, then we must locate the main canal to the outside." He mapped the landscape intently, searching. "There. Go that way, Captain." he said, pointing to a distant

spot that was devoid of structures.

The U-boat altered its course, heading northwest, and the ruins were left behind as they plied across the barren wasteland. From the observation deck, they watched the contours of the sea floor unfold beneath the spotlights. After a short distance, the trackless mud suddenly dropped like a waterfall, spilling over a broad shelf that extended out of sight in both directions. The drop was subtle but plainly visible, as the whole seabed cascaded over a prominent ledge dulled by the thick sediment into a valley which Sophia imagined was the first canal that ringed the capital of Atlantis.

She wondered if any of the bridges remained intact far beneath the alluvial sludge when Kerner pointed out a prominent depression that emerged from the morass, traveling in a geometrically straight line, exactly like a road through the mud.

“That’s the main canal!” she blurted out, suddenly excited.

Kerner nudged Wilhelm. “Follow it, Captain. It should lead us to—ah, yes. There it is now.”

Almost on cue, the lamp beams dissipated in open water where the mud poured into the darkness. Here, Kerner directed Wilhelm to follow the rim north, and after a bit of maneuvering the *Orogeny* glided alongside the plateau, skirting the rugged shelf over the yawning abyss. All eyes were glued to the ridge, anxiously absorbing every detail as they traced its perimeter. Below the cliff, the lights revealed a lumpy surface covered in thick gray sludge which, through time, had accumulated on the natural rock like melted wax.

Kerner nudged Sophia. "You see the vertical uniformity. This was clearly the perimeter of the island. Now to find the entrance."

The humbled silence was broken by a fresh squeal of torment from the ship, a nerve-shredding apocalyptic siren that reminded them of the terrible pressure outside. The U-boat was resisting the crushing water with its last bit of strength.

"Take us down," Kerner said nonchalantly, possessed by a maddening coolness while the overstressed hull groaned its final agony.

"What?!" Wilhelm snapped in alarm. "I told you, we cannot go any deeper! This is suicide!"

"Hm. It seems our good captain is lost, Miss Hapgood. Would you kindly show him the way?" Sophia branded him with an insolent stare, but offered nothing in reply. "Come now, it is time to put your expertise to use. This is the reason we brought you, after all."

"I never promised to help you, especially since you killed Indy. Find your own way in."

The Nazi drew a tedious sigh and pushed her forcefully against the window. Sophia felt the cold gun barrel pressing into her throat. Kerner leaned close with the intimacy of a lover, his face cast in lead. "Now listen to me, you rich bitch, I do not have time to play these games with you. Show us the way into the city or you will die. It is that simple."

"Put that gun away!" Wilhelm barked. "This is a pressurized hull! If you fire that weapon you'll kill us all!"

Sophia glared at Kerner, but his chilling smile left no doubt he would shoot if she continued to be un-

cooperative. She nodded in resignation. "I hate you."

"Yes, I know." Kerner lowered his gun and stepped back.

Turning to the window again, she scanned the rugged wall scrolling past the submarine. The fossilized clay blurred on endlessly, but offered no sign of refuge. What if there was no way inside? Was Kerner actually crazy enough to shoot her dead, killing everyone on board including himself in the process?

Sweat beaded on her forehead. Panicking, she wiped her sweaty palms on the front of her jeans and felt something in her pocket. The amber fish jewel. She'd forgotten all about it. Prisha called it a compass to her dreams. "It will guide you to the Lost Kingdom," she had promised.

*A compass.*

Sophia held up the golden bauble to the window and concentrated, mentally envisioning a way into the ruined city. A cave, a grotto... anything. The fish twirled aimlessly as the string unwound. *Where is the entrance? Please tell me.* She grew dizzy watching the fish spin around until it finally came to a stop, all tension expelled from the cord. It hung motionless before the glass, pointing out into the gloomy water for what seemed like an eternity. Her heart pounded with dread. *Please...*

The fish abruptly flicked to the left and froze, pointing towards a distant part of the escarpment where the mud overshadowed a dark opening beneath the rocky ledge.

Relief melted through her like a warm breeze. "There," she said, pointing at the hole. "Dive inside and surface. It's a harbor."

“Do it, Captain.”

“She’s insane! It’s just a cave! We can’t dock at this depth! Kerner, for God’s sake listen to me!” Wilhelm was raging now, delirious with fury. He stepped forward in protest when Kerner suddenly turned the pistol on him.

“I am the ranking officer here, and when I give an order I expect it obeyed. Now dock the U-boat.”

Wilhelm froze, torn between fear and anger. “Where is your loyalty? You wouldn’t be pointing that gun at me if the *Führer* were standing here!”

“Don’t flatter yourself. We both know the *Führer* would never set foot in this stinking cigar tube. It is your loyalty that is in question, I think.”

“I’ll have you court-marshaled for this when we return to Berlin, so help me God,” he vowed.

The Nazi’s pale eyebrows crested inquisitively, bemused. “*Will* you?”

It was a stand-off between the SS officer and the outraged mariner held at gunpoint. Sophia, trapped between them with her back against the window like a fly stuck to a glue pad, felt the damp glass throbbing to the pulse of the motors. Outside, only a short distance away, the cave yawned open to swallow the approaching U-boat. It was their last vestige for survival.

The stress was too much. “*Put that thing away, you’re going to get us all killed!*” she exploded at the top of her lungs.

Kerner brushed a strand of limpid red hair from her face and pitied Sophia with a hollow smile. “You are beginning to worry our guest, Herr Captain. Let me help you decide.” Without warning, he jabbed

the pistol against the window beside her head with a sharp *clink!* Sophia flinched at the sound, like the taut whine of a steel cable splintering apart.

“Would you sacrifice our lives and the glory of the Reich for one pitiful act of insubordination? That is hardly the example of a good leader.” He drilled the gun barrel into the acrylic, producing the cringe-inducing symphony of a razorblade sawing violin strings. Kerner curled his finger around the trigger. Sophia gasped sharply. The flimsy barrier was now at its breaking point, barely resisting the millions of tons of seawater that would come crashing through the glass the instant he fired.

Wilhelm glowered at him with pure rage. “God damn you.” He grudgingly took up the phone and conferred with Schulte in a clipped tone while keeping his furious gaze on the psychotic Nazi.

The ship nosed towards the ragged portal, and into the waiting darkness.

Kerner’s gun went back into its holster. “*Danke.*”

***TO BE CONTINUED...***



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ANTEDILUVIAN WORLD





































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THE GOD MACHINE





































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ATLANTIS RISING





































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EPILOGUE







































## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DALE DASSEL has been a dedicated Indiana Jones fan since he first saw *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in third grade. A prolific fanfic writer and self-described perfectionist, his numerous stories based on the television sitcom *NewsRadio* garnered an honorable mention on the show's DVD commentary. *Fate of Atlantis* marks his first foray into the adventure genre. When he is not writing, Dale's interests include reading, watching movies and silent films, dream interpretation, synchronicity, ancient earth mysteries, antiques, web design, classic LucasArts games, hiking, bowling, photography, and sport whipcracking. He resides in Middle Georgia, where he is at work on his first novel.



## THE LOST CONTINENT

The theft of a mysterious bronze statue spurs Indiana Jones on the quest of a lifetime. Reuniting with Sophia Hapgood, his fiery-tempered former colleague-turned-mystic, and guided by the spirit of an ancient king, the intrepid archaeologist must race Nazi agents across the globe in search of the cradle of human civilization, and the forbidden power that brought it to a cataclysmic end.

From the blazing deserts of Algeria to the Greek isles of the Aegean, Indy and Sophia follow the clues of a legendary document that will lead them to the lost city of Atlantis. But relentless Nazi spies and devious rivals threaten them every step of the way. Whoever reaches the sunken kingdom first will possess the ultimate weapon of the age, and determine the fate of a world poised on the brink of war.