



THE TIME BEFORE

An Archaeological Adventure
by Derek P. Blake

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An adventure that starts with the accidental finding of a treasure trove during a holiday in Cyprus. The trail leads across Europe and the Indian sub-continent, pursued by terrorists and greedy collectors of antiquities and those who's reputations are on the line. The trail leads to a discovery that will shake the world to its very foundations.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Derek P. Blake has contributed to many magazines on scientific subjects, originally he was an aerospace engineer with a Ph.D. in control and guidance systems. He has worked on projects for British Aerospace, European Space Agency and NASA during that time. Later he was a manager of a Youth Training Scheme and finally a senior manager for a special needs Housing Association specialising in housing and supporting offenders, he is now retired.

The Discovery

Preston, Near Weymouth, England;
Tuesday, June 24th 2031

Breakfast in the Markson family was always a relaxed affair since Joanne had left home to follow her chosen career as an Archaeologist. Archaeology had always fascinated her since she was a child watching the operations of Channel 4's 'Time Team' on TV. Her parents had encouraged her in this interest, taking her on visits to archaeological sites both in Britain and across Europe and a visit to Cyprus in 2022 had finally convinced her that she should make the past into a career. Whilst in Cyprus the family, Jim, Carol, Joanne and their son Peter had visited the ten-thousand year old Neolithic settlement of Choirokoitia, on a steep hillside outside of Larnaca. Jo had been just 15 at the time but had the presence of mind to spot some unnatural stone formation in the hillside below the settlement. Despite the protestations of her father she had climbed over the perimeter fence and scabbled down the scree to the outcrop. Dad had returned down the path to the gate and took a goat-path along the gully outside of the site to find his daughter. By the time Jim had joined Jo she had already removed enough rubble and boulders to reveal a void in the hill beyond. Jim remembered Jo shouting to him to fetch a torch from the hire car with such urgency that Jim had responded immediately.

When Jim got back to the car his wife, Carol was already getting impatient and their ten year old son Peter was in the back playing his Game Boy-VR, as usual. Jim told his wife that he would just be another half hour or so as he was just humouring Jo for a while. Jim reached his daughter some ten minutes later to find her waiting for him outside of a manhole sized cavern. "Jo, you are not going in there, it's

too dangerous”, Jim had told her. Jo took the torch, switched it on and directed the beam into the hole, it took them nearly a minute to accustom their eyes to the darkness but gradually the scene took shape. They had both knelt there open mouthed and in total silence for what seemed like minutes before Jim broke the silence with a echoing, “Bloody hell!”. Before them, packed in like a store room at the British Museum, was the most fantastic treasure haul ever found on the island, it was a find that rivalled the great tombs of Egypt, both in financial and historical value.

This discovery had changed their lives forever, Joanne Markson became an instant celebrity and the Republic of Cyprus had presented her with a reward of five percent of the estimated value of the treasure. Although five-percent seemed scant reward at first, it amounted to almost fifty-million pounds sterling. Jo divided the money in two; twenty-five million to set up a Trust fund and the remainder between herself and the family. Needless to say none of the Marksons had any further need to work but Jim wasn't that sort of man, so he became the unpaid administrator of the Joanne Markson Research Trust. Joanne had studied hard for her 'A' Levels and obtained a place at Bristol University where she had obtained a first class honours degree, and now at age 24 was working towards her doctorate. So here they were enjoying a relaxed summer breakfast on the terrace of the house they had purchased just outside of Weymouth on the south coast of Dorset, England.

Modest as the house was for multi-millionaires it had cost them over one million pounds eight years ago, with a commanding view Weymouth Bay to the front and a chalk hill carving on the hill behind, it was an almost idyllic spot. There were four bedrooms, two overlooking the bay, whilst the other two gazed at the enigmatic form of the chalk giant

cut into the turf of the hillside, a remnant of a long dead religious sect. Jo chose the largest of the two back bedrooms, which she still used during 'vac's' and every three or so weekends when she was in the country. Peter was now at university in Manchester's UMIST, the foremost technological institute, in his second year of an Applied Physics Degree. Peter returns between every semester complete with three months worth of washing and a new idea for an invention to work on. Carol chose the master bedroom with the balcony overlooking the Preston Beach and the terrace, for her and Jim. Carol was the one who held the whole family together, which was no mean feat when they were so often separated by thousands of miles. Carol was slightly built with blond hair, her face although attractive was just a little too sharply chiselled to be called a classic beauty, she had never had a weight problem and loved her food. The family benefited from Carol's love affair with gastronomy and the family meal remained the high point of the day when they were together.

Today, Jim was off to London to appear on EU Today to explain some of the work the Trust had been doing over the past few months, so this was a much needed time of domestic tranquillity before the flight to London. The media had never lost interest in the Marksons even though the original discovery was almost nine years ago. The impact of the treasure items upon the accepted historical time-line had been immense, they were classified as Oufacts; Out of place Artefacts. As the items themselves were estimated to be around eleven thousand years old but were of a technological standard far beyond anything that could be expected of that era. The press at the time had had a field day speculating on the origin of the items, some even suggested that they had been brought to Cyprus by aliens and hidden as religious artefacts. Some parts of the establishment claimed that the treasures were fakes planted to cause maximum disruption to the accepted

archaeological time-line. In retort the Cyprus government had asked why anyone would spend over a billion dollars to such an obscure end.

The hoard had consisted of many hundreds of items, many of these had been constructed in pure gold, others were made of materials that had then been unknown to modern technology. A fascinating compass that not only worked but actually shielded itself from outside magnetic fields, meaning it would work in every situation, no one has yet replicated the technology despite having all its components analysed. There were alloy gold plates just microns thick that were engraved with diagrams and symbols that could not be obliterated despite the thinness of the material. Some of these diagrams have been identified as circuit diagrams for unknown uses, only a fraction have been identified and one of these seems to have been for a VDU circuit. A fascinating object was a model or prototype flying machine made from metal as strong as titanium but as light as styrene, again back engineering has totally failed to reproduce the smallest quantity of this metal. The Cypriot government has jealously guarded the hoard, allowing only Joanne and certain members of the Research Trust to have unrestricted access. Because of this the Marksons bought a house in Nicosia to use when research was being carried out and it was to this destination that the whole family would travel in another ten days. The house was large so also housed the headquarters of the Research Trust as well as a well equipped laboratory.

After breakfast Jim spent the morning preparing for the evening's interview, he ate his lunch with Carol, and just after one o'clock his LIMO (Low-level International MOdule) lifted off on an automatic course to London. The trip took almost thirty-five minutes and landed at the Tedington Lock Complex at fifteen before two. Jim always hated trips to London, the smog had grown worse over the past five

years, another effect of the progressive global warming process. LIMO's could only land on the highest of buildings now as the ground was permanently hidden in the smog, only 'Ground-track' vehicles could navigate the streets or were now allowed to. The little violet and blue LIMO was taken on the elevator to the parking area and a transverse-lift took Jim to the correct studio complex. Jim could remember a time when London was a pleasant place to visit, with parks and walks along the great River Thames but those days were gone now. The river had been sealed off from the sea with the Estuary Barrier and was no more than a canal now, the water in the broad width of the river evaporated quickly and the resultant rain turned the riverbed to mud, not that anyone could actually see it now. London's magnificent parks now alternated between mini-deserts and mud-bathes, the Serpentine in Hyde Park had finally disappeared in 2025 and Regents Park Zoo had closed the year before. In 2027 Heathrow Airport had closed, partly because of the introduction of the LIMO and partly because of the availability of clear days, Stanstead and Gatwick had taken up what strain there was but these were now under review.

The LIMO was introduced to the world in late 2020 by the Nissan Corporation in conjunction with Euro Aerospace and was an immediate hit with the super-rich, within the next ten years they were to become available to the average family. The design was based on the Harrier Fighter Jet but the engines now burned Hydrogen fuel. Auto-mobiles were finally banned in Britain at the end of 2030 but sadly most of the cars taken off the road in the run-up to that date ended up in Asia swelling their carbon emissions by a dreadful sixty percent. Most LIMO shuttles now converted their fuel from either sea-water or fresh water if you could find it, so a large section of the population now live within a few miles of the coast. In 2025 a new satellite system went live allowing the LIMO shuttles

to become truly international, providing foolproof navigation and vehicle avoidance to almost any destination on the planet. The journey to Nicosia took just three hours by LIMO and trips to New York could be achieved in just over four hours and with free fuel the old congestion charges imposed on auto-mobiles in the first years of the century were now being directed to the LIMO.

Jim met with the researchers between three and four-thirty and then rehearsed the interview with the presenter, Declan Brook between five and five-thirty. At six-thirty the transmission went live. The studio lights flared into life and the opening music flooded the stage, monitors and auto-cue screens flickered into life, "Hello and welcome to EU Today, on tonight's transmission", announced Declan. The taster clips rolled and the show was under way. Jim had to wait almost fifteen minutes before the interview was scheduled and he spent the time chatting to one of the production assistants about the difficulty the TV company was experiencing in recruiting suitable staff. The time went fast enough and before long Jim was ushered onto the set and settled in a leather armchair. Almost immediately Declan crossed the studio to Jim all the time talking to camera, "Please welcome the second most famous treasure hunter, Jim Markson; Jim welcome to EU Today". "Thank you Declan, it's nice to be back."

"Your lovely daughter is not with you I see Jim."

"No, she is quite busy at the moment."

"Tell us what Joanne is doing at the moment."

"Well Declan I'm not sure what she's doing at this very moment but generally she is in Ethiopia following up on some new discoveries."

"Really, that sounds exciting, tell us more."

"Well something like five months ago some people were white-water kayaking down the Blue Nile River, they decided to spend the night in a cave close to the river. When putting up their tents inside the cave they hammered

steel pegs into convenient cracks in the cave wall and floor, one peg disappeared through the crack as it opened up. Using the hammer they opened the crack further and nearly fell into the fissure.”

“Not another treasure hoard like the one in Cyprus”, interrupted Declan.

“Yes; but not the size of the Cyprus hoard but some very significant finds”, answered Jim.

“Significant in what way?”

“The items are very much in line with the original finds in so much that they are very sophisticated items, but these seem to be of a more practical type. There were only small quantities of Gold found and most of the artefacts seem to have a purpose or a practical use that we can only guess at this time.”

“What sort of age are we talking about here Jim”, asked Declan.

“Again, very much in line with the Cyprus hoard; we have only had chance to do some preliminary testing but certainly it looks like we have a date of around nine thousand years. We have hopes that we may be able to obtain a date that is much more accurate for at least one item.”

“Is this a new process?”

“No but one of the items has a decoration depicting a star constellation, if we can match that with known records we may be able to match a date.”

“That’s amazing; I think we have a picture of the item, do we? Yes we do. It’s beautiful! But who made these wonderful items, what civilisation could have been so advanced to produce products like these,” asked Declan

“That’s what we all want to know,” answered Jim, “and that’s what the Trust is all about, trying to determine who made them, why they were made, why they were buried in caves across the world; all these questions need an answer.”

“How many discoveries have been made up until now Jim?”

“I’m not sure, we’ve been involved in seven over the past four years, but there are discoveries that have been made over the past century and before, that fit into this category. There was the gold medallion that a woman in the US chipped out of a lump of coal way back in the nineteen-fifties. At the beginning of the twentieth century Greek fishermen in the Aegean brought up a mechanical computer in their nets, no one knows what that was used for still. The perfect spheres some two meters diameter that are found in parts of the South American jungle, not to mention the famous crystal skull that’s appeared in more TV programmes than you have Declan.”

“I doubt that,” commented Declan, laughing.

“Nevertheless, those and many hundreds of other artefacts have been found and all have things in common. They are very old, they are very advanced and no one knows what they really are, or what they were used for, well most of them anyway.”

“So what’s next Jim.”

“Well we need to examine these new finds and see if we can figure them out, but we are all off to Nicosia for the summer and do some work out there, Jo and my son Peter are joining us there. The Ethiopian government has given permission to take some of the items to Cyprus for research purposes, and can I express my gratitude to them for that.”

“The Cypriot government has also supported and sponsored your family I believe.”

“Yes we are so indebted to the Republic for their help and allowing us to base the Research Trust there, we just hope we can justify their faith in us and come up with answers.”

“Well thank you for coming in to talk to us Jim, I am sure all our viewers across Europe wish you every success with this fascinating project.”

“Thank you,” responded Jim.

“Now we turn to the news desk for an update.” The autocue blanked and the red lights went off, Declan shook Jim’s hand and thanked him again, “We’ll no doubt be seeing you again soon, and try to get that daughter of yours to come along next time will you?”

“I’ll try,” promised Jim.

Outside in the corridor it seemed dim after the studio lights and Jim made his way to the Green Room for refreshments before his trip back to Weymouth. A plate of sandwiches was waiting for him when he arrived there with a pot of synth-coffee; there was also a message from Carol asking him to ring her immediately. Jim switched on his Com Unit and told it to connect to Carol, Carol’s face appeared almost instantly. “What’s up Darling?”

“Jim, Joanne’s been on the Com, she tried to get you but you were in the studio, can you contact her before you start for home. She seemed a bit excitable.”

“OK Carol I’ll do it now, see you in about an hour. Love you, bye.” Jim closed the connection and asked the unit to get Jo for him, the screen flashed a warning that he was going outside the EU and the Western Alliance Area, a few more flashes and a dim picture of Jo appeared on the screen.

“Hi Dad, saw the interview on the satellite link, you did real good,” Jo almost shouted.

“What’s the trouble Jo, is something wrong?”

“Well yes and no,” she volunteered, “That artefact with the constellation on it, the one that you showed on TV, it sort of lit up,”

“What do you mean, ‘lit up’ asked Jim.

“Dad, I mean it lit up, it glowed for about ten minutes just before the interview started and then went dead again. It was a sort of blue-green light emitting from around the edges and through the little stars on the top.”

“Did you touch it?”

“No! Not when it was glowing.”

“Did you do anything to it before it activated?”

“Well we were examining it again, we were attempting to get a density reading with the Sonic SG Analyser.”

“Jo, don’t do anything with it again, Is that one of the items they are allowing you to bring to Cyprus?”

“Yes it is, but Dad. . . .”

“We will look at it when you get to Nicosia so don’t mess with it until you brother and I are there, this is out of your field.”

“Yeah but Dad . . .”

“Jo! This is a job for Peter and I; OK?”

“OK.”

“Good, we’ll see you next week then.”

“Dad, I love you.”

“I love you too sweetheart, bye.” The picture flickered out and Jim placed the Com in his case and sat down deep in thought whilst he ate his synthetic ham sandwiches.

On his way back to Weymouth Jim connected with his son Peter and told him about the artefact, “Can you borrow some test equipment from UMIST that might give us a clue to what is happening?”

“That would be great if we had even a clue to what it was or what sort of power it uses, Dad we’re working blind on this and I think we have all we need at the Trust Lab.”

“I was thinking of radiation, I don’t want anyone to go near it if there is a chance of radiation.”

“We have a clicker in the Lab but it can be any one of a dozen radiations and to cover that I would need to get an army truck to get the equipment out there not a LIMO.”

“Well have a think and do what you can Peter, OK”

“OK I have a word with Professor Gwilliam, see you next week Dad.”

“Bye Son.” Just then the proximity alarm sounded to tell the occupant that they were approaching their destination and Jim could see the lights of his house just below. The LIMO gently touched down in its bay and closed the

engines down. The canopy hissed open and Jim climbed out into the balmy June night, he could smell the brine from the beach a hundred meters away and smiled contentedly as he walked towards the house.

Nicosia, Cyprus,
22:15 Tuesday, June 24th 2031

In the laboratory the two research assistants had also been waiting for the interview on EU Today and had stayed late in the lab to catch the programme on the large LCD screen. Just before the interview things had started to go wrong. There had been a sudden whine from somewhere and the TV screen had gone crazy. No matter what the two did the picture was so broken up that there was no hope of seeing the transmission or hearing it, the ear piercing whine became so painful that the two decided to get out of the building. It lasted about ten minutes but by the time the whine had stopped the interview was almost over. The two spent all the following day puzzling over what had caused the anomaly. and, came up with nothing.

National Museum, Cairo,
19:16 Tuesday June 24th 2031

Habra had been a watchman at Cairo's museum for seventeen years, it was probably the most boring job in Egypt, nothing ever happened. The only reason he did the job was his intense pride in his country and particularly his interest in its history. In his spare time he was a volunteer guide taking visitors around the museum and explaining in great detail, in several languages, the significance of the various exhibits. He was well regarded and knew as much about ancient Egypt than any university professor, he had

even taught himself Hieroglyphics and could translate as well as anyone. Habra was just settling down to a steaming mug of real Egyptian coffee when it happened and he was totally unprepared.

At about 19:17 local time the lights, such as they were, flickered and all the intruder alarms protecting the museum triggered. The sound was ear-piercing in the empty display halls and the hot coffee spilled everywhere causing Habra to jump up in pain, while the mug smashed into a hundred pieces on the stone floor. Habra rushed out of the small security office into the main entrance hall and display area, what greeted him took his mind off the hot coffee and the alarm sounders. In the centre of the hall was a display case containing the famous Golden Pyramid that was discovered buried deep between the paws of the great Sphinx. The pyramid was some 1.2 meters from base to apex and 1.8 meters along the base, as far as it was known it was made of pure gold, without any impurities. What was now startling about the artefact was that green/blue light was emanating from a horizontal line around the seemingly solid sides, and a beam of light streaming vertically from the apex. As Habra stopped in his tracks the glass case surrounding the pyramid suddenly shattered into a million pieces. Habra ran, he ran faster than he had ever run in his life.

The main security office was situated in the basement, during the day it was populated by a dozen or so watchers gazing at twice that number of monitors, although no one was now watching the screens were still active. Active but not one was displaying a picture, each monitor was a mass of lines and white-noise. Habra stopped for a second then made his way to the telephone in the supervisor's office. The phone wasn't working, all that could be heard was a high pitched whine so he replaced the receiver and retraced his steps out of the security unit. He could hear a

sort of buzz that had a curious static quality that made the hair on your arms stand up. Habra made his way cautiously back up the stairs to the hall, as he reached the door he could see the weird light but he could now see other blue lights whirling around the walls. He was about to withdraw again when he realised that the new blue lights were coming from outside the main glass doors, it was the police reacting to the alarm. Habra raced across to the entrance fumbling to get the electronic key from his belt pouch, his hand was shaking so much it took several seconds to locate the key in the transponder. Eventually the doors opened and two police officers stepped briskly into the museum.

“What’s the problem”, asked the larger of the officers?

“The p,.. p.. pyramid”, stammered Habra, “it. . . .” Habra turned to see that the light and the beam had vanished and the hall was dark and as the other officer had now cancelled the alarm, was also silent.

“What pyramid?”

“That pyramid, the Golden Pyramid, it was, it came alive, there were lights....”

“Well there are no lights now”, said the second officer.

The bigger officer looked Habra up and down and said, “Well just have a look around, see if there are any entry points.” He started to walk across the hall and soon he felt the crunch of broken glass under his booted feet. “Can we get some lights on in here?”

“Sure,” said Habra and crossed to his office where the main lighting board was situated. Outside the high output krypton flood-lights flared.

“How in the name of Allah has this happened,” shouted the larger officer to his partner.

“Someone’s broken into the case,” answered the second policeman.

“Na, this was security glass, five centimetres thick, a bazooka round would bounce off it, I was on security detail when they sealed it up.”

“Well something broke it!”

“I think we had better take a statement.”

Stonehenge, Salisbury Plain, England,
18:17 Tuesday, June 24th 2031

The National Trust attendants were rounding up the last of the day's visitors and one young American boy was being particularly difficult, thinking that a game of hide and seek with his parents and the attendants was particularly entertaining.

“Come along ladies and gentlemen the site is closing, please make your way to the exit tunnel, thank you,” shouted one attendant.

The American couple managed to grab their son and started for the exit, as they approached the outer ring of stones the hair on their heads suddenly stood on end. The attendants stopped dead in their tracks as electricity seemed to crackle between the stones and tiny sparks played over the surface of the massif stones.

“Say buddy what's going on,” shouted the American man, “they turned the electric fence on too soon?”

“I'm not sure sir, can we move along down the path sir I think it would be safer to get away from the circle.” As they hurried to catch up with the other visitors they crossed the line of the ancient stones and each of the little group was thrown backward. Then it was all over. Thunder rumbled close by and lightning forked down to hit the central capstone. There was a smell of ozone in the air as all the visitors found their way back to their individual buses. “There's no problem ladies and gentlemen it's just a thunder-storm; we hope you enjoyed your tour,” the guide announced as he stood at the door of the bus, accepting tip

after tip. The bus drove off to the various hotels and the next leg of the tour of south-west England, and the incident was forgotten.

BBC Ten o'clock News and Weather,
London, England,
22:20 Tuesday, June 24th 2031

“. . . And now over to the weather centre with Janice Cook.”
“Thanks Michael, Well today has given us wall to wall sunshine across the British Isles but with some notable anomalies. Temperatures reached thirty-eight degrees in Newquay, Cornwall today, which is cool compared to the forty-six degrees recorded in Madrid. An electric storm developed over Salisbury Plain earlier this evening out of an otherwise clear sky, the thunder and lightning put on a display to equal any light show as this amateur video shows [cue video]. The light show lasted for just four minutes but the thunder continued for some half hour. Tomorrow will be“

Back in Weymouth Jim and Carol Markson enjoyed a late dinner together and discussed the interview, “What did Jo want you for,” asked Carol.

“One of the artefacts from the Ethiopian hoard, it acted in a strange way when they were examining it tonight.”

“What do you mean by ‘acted strange’ Darling”

“I don’t know, Jo said something about it lighting up. It illuminated around the edge, that lovely one with the star constellation on it, she said the little stars lit up as well”

“I don’t understand how some object that’s thousands of years old can light up.” Carol persisted.

“As I just said, I don’t know.”

“Why don’t you give Jo another call and get more information, I’ve got a bad feeling about this.”

Jim was silent for a few seconds, "I was thinking, we need to get the artefact to the Lab' as soon as we can to get the lads to check it out but I'm not sure if we have the equipment there that we need, Peter is seeing his Prof' to see what he can borrow but it may not be good to wait until the end of next week. Let me ring the Lab' first."

"Jim, there won't be anyone there at this time, " reminded Carol, "it's nearly midnight out there, you'd best leave it till morning now, but call Jo's com unit to let her know."

"OK" said Jim as he took his com unit from his pocket. "Joanne!" he said and the unit sprang to life, the message 'Calling' appeared on the screen and after about thirty seconds a sleepy looking Jo appeared.

"Dad?"

"Sorry about the time, I just needed to speak to you about the incident earlier."

"Couldn't it wait till morning," Jo asked.

"Your Mum wanted me to call tonight."

"Figures, thanks Mum," she shouted, hoping her mother would hear.

"No problem," Carol shouted back.

"Jo, I need to know in detail what happened with that star box."

"Dad, I told you, it just lit up."

"No Jo, something *had* to trigger it, it doesn't happen for no reason, try to think what were you or anyone else were doing when it triggered."

"We were just looking at it, I think I tried to see if it would open, like a sweet tin."

"Did it move in any way?"

"I don't think so, but I thought it was going to, it didn't though."

"Are you sure?"

"As sure as I can be."

"Jo will the Ethiopian Government release the item now, I want to get it to the Lab' as soon as we can, I'll get

someone to pick it up if you can get the paperwork sorted out at your end. Can you do that tomorrow Jo, first thing?"

"I don't know, I guess I can."

"Right I'll ring the Lab in the morning, let me know as soon as you get the release papers."

"OK, good night Dad."

"Night darling," shouted Carol as the connection broke.

Weymouth, England 07:00 Wednesday,
June 25th 2031

The next morning the com-unit woke Jim and Carol shortly before seven o'clock, it was Jo. "Sorry to wake you, I have the release documents Dad."

"What, Oh yes the release papers, good, I'll get one of the guys to come across for it. I'll get them to make contact as soon as they leave. See you next week."

"Who's that Jim?" asked Carol still half asleep.

"Jo."

"Hi Jo, it's Mum."

"Morning Mum, I'm relieved about that or I be wondering who Dad was in bed with."

"You are getting out of hand my girl," replied Jim, "it's a good job we're coming out there next week to take you under control."

"You and whose army, Dad?"

"You're pushing it now, you're still not too big to go over my knee young lady."

"Dad, you'd have to catch me first and don't forget you're not as young as you used to be."

"Go! Get the item packed; bye," Jim closed the circuit, "Your daughter is getting too cheeky." There was no answer, Carol had returned to her slumbers. Jim opened the com-unit and said, "Call Research Centre", once again the screen went through it's flickering routine before the face of John Moffat appeared on it.

“Good morning Jim,” said John in his Floridian American drawl. Professor John Moffat had been Jo’s mentor and lecturer during the second and third years of her degree at Bristol. John had become fascinated by the stories that Joanne had told about the Cyprus finds and had volunteered to help out during the vacations from university. John was originally from Tampa Bay and had obtained his PhD from Harvard where he lectured in Archaeology for six years before obtaining the ‘Chair’ at Bristol, England. He had become a firm friend of the Markson family during Jo’s MSc years and into her PhD, finally Jim had offered him the chance to work on the Research Project full time and John had instantly agreed.

“Hi John, what have you got arranged for today, are you busy?”

“I guess I was just continuing to work on the X Rays of that cube from Santorini

while we have it in the centre, but I guess you have other plans?”

“Actually I have John, how do you fancy a trip over to Jo in Ethiopia?”

“Sure but what’s the rush?”

“I want you to pick up that artefact with the star constellation on it, the one Jo sent the pictures of for the interview last night.”

“OK but I say again, what’s the gaw-darn rush, Jo’s gona’ be bringing it over next week.”

“Jo phoned me last night after the TV show, she said that the artefact had illuminated for some six or seven minutes when they were examining it, it sounds like some kind of radiation.”

“Wow! Now that’s exciting.”

“Maybe John but I suggest you get a lead lined box for it, it will need to be around a half meter to a side, can you manage to get something to do the job?”

“Yeah, I have a x-ray proof box in the basement that we use for sensitive films, I’ll leave within the hour.”

“Thanks John, give her a call when you are leaving and she’ll switch her personal beacon on. Let me know when you’ve had a chance to look at it, but...”

“By the way Jim, how did the interview go last night?”

“Didn’t you watch it?”

“Naw the screen went wild about a minute in, no picture nothing, by the time it came back on the interview was over.”

“That’s strange, yes it went well, nothing too challenging. Look I’ll let you get moving, be careful OK”

“Gotcha, see ya next week.”

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus
09:20 Wednesday, June 25th 2031

John sat there for some minutes thinking through the implications of what Jim had told him, it was extraordinary. How was it possible for something so old to store energy, and what sort of technologies were they dealing in ten thousand years ago? John stood, scratched his head, and crossed to the basement door. It took him several minutes to find the old film box and another ten to clean it, it was almost an artefact itself dating back as it did to the days of airport security machines. John placed the box near the Lab' door and went out, he needed to get some suitable clothes from his room at the house and get some food for journey. Within forty-five minutes he was ready to leave, except that he had better tell Dimitri what was happening, where was he anyway. John crossed to the local pager and touched the pad with Dimitri's name by it and waited for the response. Thirty seconds later the internal com chimed.

"Dimitri Aris here." Dimitri Aris was the Senior Technician for the Trust, he was every inch a Cypriot, born and bred in Pathos located in the east of the island, he gained a degree in forensic science at Athens University. After graduation he then moved back to Cyprus to work for the police department where he was working at the time of Jo Markson's discovery. He spoke perfect English and like many Cypriots had a kind of love affair with all things British. Dimitri was assigned to the case the day after the hoard was found and like almost everyone else had become intrigued by the artefacts to the extent that he approached the Marksons the year the Trust was set up and asked for a job. Dimitri and John did not always agree about things and as a Greek, he could get very passionate

about his views, and this did not sit well with the cool, thoughtful American.

“Dimitri it’s John, Jim’s been on the com, he wants me to take the LIMO over to pick up an item from Jo.”

“OK, will you be back today?”

“Not sure, but I just wanted to see if you fancied coming along.”

“Not like the journey on your own?”

“I don’t mind it, I can watch a movie, just thought you’d like to see where the real work is done.”

“John I know where the real work is done, it’s in my Lab’, any fool can dig around in the dirt and bring home trinkets. No, I have too much real work to do here thank you.”

“Suit yourself,” retorted John, laughing, “I’ll be getting off in a few minutes, see you tomorrow.”

“A whole day of peace, how nice. See you then.”

John picked up his bag and the film box and stepped out into the mid-morning Cyprus sunshine. He crossed the courtyard to the garages and activated his LIMO, the doors hissed as they opened in the gull-wing style of the Mk 1 and he clambered inside. True this LIMO was an early model but Jim had paid for several up-grades and John liked the older style, it was smaller than the later models but the seats and facilities made it more comfortable, being built originally for the super-rich. The LIMO eased itself out of the garage and settled onto the block-paved apron. “State destination or enter beacon code,” a slightly phonetic voice advised. John opened a connection to Jo, “Jo. Hi it’s me, can you activate your beacon for me please?”

“Hello John, leaving at last are you?”

“Less of the back-chat young lady or you’ll be on report, OK I’m receiving your signal, see you in two hours twelve minutes and . . . fifteen seconds.”

“Have a good trip Prof.”

Soon the LIMO was gaining altitude and speed and by the time the eastern end of the island slid silently behind him the optimum speed and altitude had been reached and John had started the classic movie from the entertainment pod, he loved the Indiana Jones movies and played them on almost every journey. Today's edition was 'The Temple of Doom'. John's only distraction from the screen was to watch intently as Egypt and the great pyramids trundled past beneath him. The LIMO picked up the Nile and flew ever south towards Ethiopia with the sun reflecting in flashes from the surface of the great river. Eighteen minutes before ETA the vehicle started to loose altitude and then swung into the decent curve at the end of which he knew Jo would be waiting to greet him.

As the LIMO settled onto the sand among a collection on LIMO transports and tents, the figure of Jo rose into the field of view, in her hand was the traditional bottle of ice-cold beer. The gull-wing doors hissed open once more and John made a grab for the bottle just as Jo whipped it away, "No, first I want a hug," she demanded.

"OK, Sis whatever you say, you're the boss."

"Yes and don't forget it," she teased as John lifted her off the ground in a big brotherly bear hug. Their relationship had evolved from that of John being a mentor into being her second brother. "Good trip?"

Yep, don't remember a thing sept' those darn pyramids."

"Do you want a tour of site or do you need a rest first?" she said as she dragged John off towards the edge of a gorge.

"It looks like I'm going the tour first then."

Below them the Blue Nile foamed through one of it's famous cataracts in the narrow gorge over boulders and falls, to their left a narrow path wound its way down the crumbling rock-face, on the edge the heat of the day contrasted with the cooler air lifting up from the river. Jo led the way down the path to a point where there had been a landslip. The two climbed the rubble mound and slid

down between the rubble and the gaping hole behind, the cavern assaulted the nose with a musty acrid aroma that caught the back of the throat. Neither moved for almost two minutes while their sight recovered from the attack of the sunlight, but slowly the entrance to the second chamber appeared.

Jo's head and shoulders disappeared through the hole in what looked like a rough dry-stone wall, then the remainder of her disappeared. Jo's voice came back to him, "Be careful you don't dislodge any more of the stones John, come on then." John followed Jo through the hole into the dimly lit chamber, on three sides shelves had been carved into the solid rock, the roof was as smooth as any modern ceiling but had two radial grooves cut into it swinging from the front centre to each side.

"Jo, have you noticed anything strange about this chamber?"

"You mean the smooth roof?"

"No I mean there is absolutely no indication of damp in here, no musty smell, no stalactites, not even a trace of fungus anywhere."

"You know I didn't notice that, I was concentrating on the artefacts, but now you mention it, but it's so hot wouldn't that keep it dry."

"Possibly, but they do have a winter here, there's water roaring through the gorge outside and there's vegetation growing just outside," suggested John, "I would suggest that the landslide outside was caused by a torrent of rain."

"So why is the chamber not damp", asked Jo.

"I don't know Jo but it bears investigating, I'll get Dimitri to come down and have a look, Jo, have you got a flash-light." Jo crossed to the shelf to the left of the entrance and returned with a large torch.

"Here, will this do?"

"That's great", John took to torch and crossed to the deepest part of the chamber, With the light he closely

examined the rock face, running his hand over the surface. “You know, this rock looks like glass.”
“That’s silly, what temperatures would it have taken to turn the rock surface to glass, thousands of degrees Celsius?”
“Yep, Sure would, we need to get this tested ASAP.”

“So, where’s the loot”, asked John when they re-emerged into the open.

“We keep them in the transport for safety.”

“Good,” John’s mind drifted away as he stood there twenty meters above the foaming Blue Nile. The gorge was about forty meters wide at this point and the roar of the white water filled every sense, it could be felt, smelt and tasted. Everywhere else there was just rock and the sandy soil, what trees there were clung precariously to small fissures in the rock and fed off the thin spray that rose from the river. “Why would these people hide their treasures in the ground like this, damn it look at this place, the only civilisation within two-hundred miles are a couple of God-forsaken monasteries. Where did they go, why were they here, this doesn’t fit with anything we know, there has to be a link somewhere.”

“And that’s what we’re trying to find out John, we’ve still a long way to go but we’ll get there.”

“Sure we will, but we know next to nothing about any of the objects we have and a total of zilch about the people who produced them, and what’s worse, none of it fits into anything we know. Our fellow academics regard us as cranks into the bargain.”

“That’s why we have to stick to the disciplines and not publish prematurely. Come on lets get back to camp and I’ll show you the new artefacts.”

As they walked back to the camp they chatted about Bristol and their mutual friends at the university. They walked directly to a large green tent with a silvered roof, in the tent

was their LIMO Transport, a larger version of the Mk3 standard. As they approached Jo shouted a command and the voice activated door opened to reveal an illuminated interior. The door gave access to a compartment about fifteen meters wide by three meters, to the left was the passenger cabin with seats for ten persons and to the left was the cargo area, which in this case acted as both storage area and laboratory. The space had been divided by a wire screen and gate to the rear end designating around sixty square meters for the secure storage of the priceless artefacts. Jo crossed to a flexi-pad and keyed in a code, the latches on the gate immediately snapped open, she crossed to the gates swung them open beckoned John inside.

“What do you want to see first?”

“Up to you,” John told her.

Jo reached up and lifted a metal box from a shelf about two meters high, “This is an interesting piece,” she opened the box and gently lifted out a circular object that looked rather like a UFO, it was about half a meter in diameter. There was a central dome that looked like polished quartz, the bevelled metal flange around the outer edge was engraved with eighteen symbols, the base was formed by three feet in the shape of serpent’ heads. The bodies of the serpents curled around the base under the flange and disappeared into the underside; the whole of the base was a dark green patina colour, whilst the top of the flange was a bright metallic gold.

“Ya know, I used to have a lamp that looked just like this,” laughed John.

“Really, what do these symbols mean then?”

“No, I didn’t . . .”

“I know silly, I was just Joking.”

“Right,” said John, slightly embarrassed, “Have you done any tests on this yet?”

“No not yet, we’ve been concentrating on the smaller pieces, this looks complicated.”

“Have you only got authorisation for the Constellation piece to be removed?”

“No, as we were moving out next week I got a blanket release.”

“Do you mind if I take this back with me as well?”

Jo continued to open box after box displaying all manner of strange and fascinating artefacts, none of which seemed to have any function other than decorative. There were rings that were too large to fit any human finger, medallions that had no means of suspension, a cube that measured just ten centimetres to a side, that weighed half a ton, until you turned it over, then it weighed just grams. They lost all track of time and before they knew it the PA system announced that the evening meal was ready. Reluctantly they dragged themselves away from the store, sealed the gate and left for the mess tent. Night fell fast and it was dark when they emerged from their meal, “Why don’t you sleep over and travel back in the morning,” suggested Jo.

“Yes,” agreed John, “I’ll pack the two artefacts tonight and stow them, then I can make a early start.”

“In that case I’ll give you a hand and then we can have a nightcap before you turn in.”

Thursday 26th June 2031 - Ethiopia
Camp
08:15 (local time)

The noise of the camp roused John at around eight-fifteen, when he emerged from the tent the sun was dazzling and he found Jo loading a sled with excavation tools.

“I thought you had finished all the hard work Jo”

“There’s been another slide the chamber entrance is covered again so I’ve organised the workforce to clear it for when Dimitri comes, get yourself some breakfast and I’ll be back to see you off.”

“OK, I’ll see you in a while,” John wandered over to the tent where he and Jo had eaten the night before, the tent was amazingly cool for the strength of the sun and the aroma of coffee and pancakes was equally inviting. The air-conditioning, Solar-con, was a recent innovation where the heat of the sun itself is used to evaporate moisture in a closed circuit. There was no cost to the environment or energy reserves, so it lends itself well to situations like this where the nearest civilisation is a thousand kilometres away. The pancakes were excellent and the coffee was real, not the synthetic muck you got back in civilised Cyprus, there were benefits to living in the wilds.

An hour later John had loaded the two artefacts carefully onto the LIMO and was entering the destination into the vehicle’s Sat-nav computer when Jo returned.

“Ready to go, John?”

“Why don’t you creep up and frighten the hell out of someone, Jo.”

“I thought I just did,” replied Jo laughing, “Give me a hug and I’ll see you next week.”

“OK Jo, you be careful with that chamber and don’t go in there on your own or without someone standing shotgun outside, right.”

“All right John, I’ve no need to go in there any more and I’ll make sure Dimitri is protected too. Bye, have a good trip.”
“Bye,” shouted John as the doors closed blocking out the sounds of the camp. The LIMO Shuddered slightly and then rose into the air, the camp receded rapidly below him and was soon out of sight. Once more the little vehicle roughly followed the Blue Nile north-eastward and John settled down for the journey, this time selecting an e-book to read.

Weymouth, England. Thursday, June
26st 2031.
08:30 {local time)

John Moffat was already back in Cyprus when Carol and Jim Markson arose and started getting breakfast. The couple settled themselves on their terrace overlooking Preston Beach and Weymouth Bay as Carol poured out a glass of fresh orange juice squeezed from the produce of a small orange grove behind the house. Since climate change had taken hold one of the advantages had been that sub-tropical fruit could now be grown in the southern half of Britain, anywhere from Cheshire southwards. This change had almost killed off the Israeli economy but the expansion of the European Community into a genuine commonwealth had come to their rescue just in time. The orange juice was good and natural, however the same could not be said for the cereal, locally this was known a Cardflakes, synthetic breakfast cereals had long since been produced from protein. The cereal crops had started to fail almost ten years ago due to the extremes of weather. Even dwarf varieties of wheat, corn and maze had failed to stand up to the high winds that now marked the autumn and spring and the dry summers and warm wet winters had proved just too much. Even the bread-basket of the world, the area of Canada and the USA known for it’s cereal

production had quickly degenerated into a dust-bowl. However tradition dictated that cornflakes were for breakfast, so that's what we ate.

Jim picked up his e-pad with the newly downloaded copy of 'The Independent' and started to flick through the pages whilst he sipped his orange juice.

"Anything interesting in the news today dear," asked Carol whilst she poured synth-milk on her cereal.

"Usual stuff."

"I don't know why you bother to download it then," said Carol in a sarcastic manner.

"Just need to keep up with things, Dear." After several minutes of silence Jim spoke again, "Seems there's been a outbreak of UFO's across Europe the night before last."

"Really, I thought there was no such thing," said Carol absent-mindedly.

"Doesn't stop people seeing them or reporting them though," Jim suddenly became serious, "but something has to have happened, look there are reports from as far away as England, Germany, France, Spain, Greece; the list goes on and they were all at roughly the same time."

"That's strange," said Carol putting down her e-pad, "What time were the sightings?"

Jim scrolled through the article, "Says they were all between eighteen-seventeen and eighteen-thirty."

"You missed it; it was when you were in the TV studio, that's hard luck," said Carol losing interest and returning her e-pad.

"Carol, that was also the time that Jo said that artefact powered up, do you think there's some link here?"

"No, probably just a coincidence."

"I'm not so sure, Jo said she missed the transmission because the TV went mad; what if it was the artefact that caused the effect," continued Jim, "and if it was, how widespread was the effect."

Carol was getting frustrated at being interrupted, she put the e-pad down and said, "Well you won't know will you until you give Jo another call and find out if the TV went off at that exact time."

"OK, I think I will," Jim took his com-unit and made the command, "Jo it's me again."

"Dad, three calls in three days, what's going on?"

"I'm not sure; I just have a gut feeling at the moment. When that artefact powered up the other evening you said that the TV went on the blink, so you missed the interview."

"Yeah, we lost the signal altogether," interrupted Jo.

"Did the power-up coincide with the TV going off and on again?"

Jo thought for a few seconds, "You know what Dad, now I think about it, yes it did. I wasn't taking much notice; I was more concerned with the artefact."

"As you would expect Darling; have you heard of anyone else having similar problems?"

"Dad, there aren't many TV's out here in the middle of nowhere."

"I meant, in the camp."

"Everyone was gathered in the mess tent for the transmission and I was just examining the artefact while we were waiting for your interview, have you asked John and Dimitri?"

"No, that's an idea though, thanks Jo."

"Dad, while I think of it Dimitri's coming out here tomorrow to have a look at the chamber, John reckons the walls are vitrified from heat and wants him to test it."

"OK that's fine, tell him to let me know the results will you."

"Yes I'll get him to call you from here."

"Thanks Jo, I'll speak to you later, I have a few calls to make," the screen blanked and then flared again as the connection to Nicosia was made.

"Hey there Jim," Dimitri said as the picture flashed onto the screen, "how did the interview go?"

Jim looked a little surprised as he said, “Do I take it you missed the transmission?”

“Sorry Jim the TV went goofy just after the interview start,” replied Dimitri in his Cypriot accent, and then come back as the man says ‘Good-night’.”

“Was it just you or was there anyone else affected” asked Jim.

“Yeah, a couple of neighbour they had trouble also.”

“But it wasn’t widespread across the city was it Dimitri?”

“No, no, my family they watched OK, they said you were very good.”

“Thank you Dimitri. Has John had a chance to look at that artefact he brought back yet?”

“He’s only been back two hours, he took boxes to the Lab and been in there since, should I get him Jim?”

“No, don’t disturb him, I’ll speak to him later. See you next week, and have a good trip to Ethiopia, let me know what you find.”

“OK,” said Dimitri and the connection was broken.

“Carol we seem to have a mystery on our hands,” said Jim as he put the com-unit down on the breakfast table.

“That’s nice dear.” Carol replied in a distracted manner.

Jim picked up his com-unit from the table and walked inside the house and to his study where he plugged the unit into the main display and called Declan at the EBC network. It took almost eight minutes to get Declan on the screen. When at last he did appear Jim was straight to the point, “Hello Declan, I need a favour.”

“Well nice to see you as well Jim,” said Declan

“Look,” said Jim, “this is urgent. I need to know if there were any reports of TV transmissions going down during the show the evening before last.”

“You mean while you were on the show,” Jim nodded his assent, “Yes I did hear something, I overheard a couple of techies talking.”

“Can you find out about it for me, where it happened, as much info as you can get?”

“What’s all this about Jim,” asked Declan “why the urgency?”

“I can’t say anything right now because I don’t know, but there may be a good story in it for you if you play ball.”

“OK, you’ve got me hooked; I’ll get back to you.”

“Thanks Declan,” the connection broke.

Two and a half hours later Declan called Jim back with the information; he had scanned all the reports and sent them to Jim over the com. Declan tried to pump Jim about why he wanted the information but it was easy for Jim to fend his questions off because he genuinely didn’t know why he wanted the data. There were hundreds of reports most of them covering the UK but a few from bordering territories, mainly France, Belgium and Holland but one or two from Norway and Sweden. Jim spent the whole day plotting the reports on a virtual map, the more points he plotted the more fascinated he became. By mid afternoon there were definite patterns emerging, literally patterns. Over half of the points formed long lines up and across the country. There were different types of report also, some viewers had experienced distortions in the picture whilst others had lost their picture completely to white-noise but a few had reported receiving pictures from another channel completely but that the reception of these pictures was very poor. Most of these latter reports were clustered around the Salisbury area, Jim coloured coded these red, the white noise reports he coded blue and the picture distortions he coded green.

It was almost ten-thirty in the evening when Jim fed the last report into the map but by then it was clear that the

mystery was getting deeper. He had a virtual map with hundreds of coloured dots on it that looked like a Christmas tree, except that there were several Christmas trees and they stretched out in all directions and even crossed the English Channel and North Sea. These trees had red roots blue trunks and green branches and Jim didn't have a clue what it all meant.

The System

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus
11:45 Friday, June 27th 2031

John had spent almost two days solid in the Lab' since returning from the dig in Ethiopia and had got exactly nowhere. The construction of both artefacts was a total mystery, the metals were not known to modern technology and because they seem to be indestructible John had no chance of analysing them. Not even a diamond cutter would scratch the surface when he tried it in desperation; however, John discovered that no matter how much pressure he applied, the cutter produced no heat whatsoever. On examination it was also found that no wear had been inflicted upon the cutter, microscopic measurements had shown that the cutter was exactly the same diameter after a fifteen-minute session with one hundred kilograms of pressure, as it had been at the start. Specific gravity tests had shown that the casing of the round object, the one they had christened the 'UFO', had to be less than a millimetre thick and that was not taking any internal mechanisms into consideration. No radiation had been detected from either object and they seemed totally inert. Both objects were a complete anomaly.

After all the tests possible, with the equipment available in the Laboratory, had been exhausted, John turned his attention to the symbols on the 'UFO' and the constellation depicted on the other object that the two techs had started to call the 'trinket box'. Dimitri arrived back from Ethiopia just as John had decided to take a break with a beer in the Cypriot sun, so after an initial period of joshing they both

settled down to beers and a discussion on their respective findings.

“OK now you’ve had your moment of fun, tell me how it went,” jibes John.

“As I just said to Jim from the LIMO, it’s amazing. I took a tungsten-7 drill rig with me, that should cut through any natural material, it took three hours to drill through one centimetre, that’s amazing hard. Under the microscope it confirmed that the rock has turned to glass for about five millimetres from the surface. I have done research on my journey back and found that it needs a temperature of above six-hundred degrees Celsius.”

“So, how was the vitrification produced, was the chamber cut by a laser do you think,” asked John.

“No laser we know today, and the walls are not exactly flat, it’s like the chamber was heated and then the surface melted and bubbled, and then cooled. There is one place where surface stone from the roof has dripped onto floor. I took a digital scan of the chamber to show in the VR.”

John thought for a while and then asked, “What is the indigenous rock there, is it sandstone?”

“Yes, it’s ideal for making glass and it has a high yield of quartz and silicone with a five percent content of red-oxide.”

“Iron!” said John, “when can you do a full analysis?”

“Couple days,” Dimitri estimated, full spectroscopic analysis, isotope half-life dating, it should be very accurate on this sample, a variable atomic density register; yeah about two days.”

“Well I guess we better get to it then,” said John as he stood to go.

Dimitri headed for the Lab’ and John settled himself in the office and set up the flexi-screen and key pad. John scanned the sketches he had made of the symbols into the computer and hit the search key. The computer’s voice facility stated ‘Working’ and the familiar rotating globe

appeared on the screen. Several minutes later a result came in on one of the symbols, the symbol was a cuneiform with a 'S' connecting the left arm to the vertical about half way between the base and the horizontal. The result appeared on the screen:

'Alta' [Al-t-è] Believed to be an ancient symbol for the earth's life-force or connection. Recently (later 20th century) adopted by a pseudo sect of the time dubbed 'New Age', which involved a mix of ancient and modern beliefs within a setting of 'save the planet'. More recently has been adopted by Earth-organism believers, this cult believes that planet Earth, in common with all other universal bodies, is a living conscious organism with an intelligent intellect that reacts to external stimuli. Symbol possibly early Greek in origin but some sources place the origin in pre-first dynasty Egypt as a similar symbol is found in early hieroglyphics, meaning obscure but some scholars are of the opinion that it means 'knowledge of the earth'.



John looked at the screen in total confusion and thought, 'Where in hell do I go from here, I don't want to get mixed up with the Earth-orgs, everyone thinks I'm on the edge of

pseudo-science as it is'. He decided to play the safe card for the time being and approach the problem from the Greco-Egyptian direction, at least that was the classic historical approach. John logged into the Cairo Museum web-site and used his password to get into the restricted area of the archives. He immediately fed the scanned image of the Alta into the image search, sat back and waited. Within twenty seconds a message appeared on the screen saying that the particular section the search needed had be temporarily suspended. John found this both frustrating and strangely fascinating, this had never happened before in all the thousands of times he had used the archive.

John then switched to the Department of Antiquities in Athens, Greece, everything here was normal and he accessed the archive without any problem. He found several references to the symbol but no definitive source or root for the character. Every reference connected the glyph with either the Earth, soil or knowledge, the use was that of 'obtaining' or 'extracting'. Every symbol was slightly different but the older the source the more consistent to his version they were, later versions seemed to have been embellished. Gaining little from the Greek archive John returned to the Cairo Museum only to be greeted by the same exclusion message. Knowing the head of Pre-Dynastic Acquisitions at the museum John decided to chance a e-video message to ask what was wrong and including a copy of the glyph, just in case.

To John's surprise he received an answer within minutes of sending, the message said that there had been some kind of incident involving an exhibit that he had been involved with and the Curator had closed the Pre-Dynastic section of the archive and the whole display section. It continued to say that he had found the glyph extremely interesting and it may be worth John's while nipping over to Cairo tomorrow

for a chat. The whole message seemed very 'cloak and dagger' in style so John decided to make the trip the following day. A message was returned to Howard Fulton, Director of Pre-Dynastic Exhibits, arranging to meet in the first floor Coffee Shop at one o'clock the following day. John put in another call to Jim Markson to update him during which Jim updated him on his exercise with the TV signal reports and the two discussed how the glyph and the Christmas-tree plots related to each other but came to no conclusion by the end of the call. John asked Jim to send the plot data through to him to have a look at and the call ended. The data came through almost immediately and John put it on the screen, he sat for a long time staring at it and finally fell asleep.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

07:05 Saturday, June 28th 2031

John had awakened early, the sun was already blasting the earth with its rays and the sounds of the city rose to the sleeping quarters, the island was alive again. He had a wash, shaved and had already eaten breakfast when Dimitri entered the dining room.

"You're up early today," Dimitri said as he entered.

"Yep, off to Cairo to meet Howard Fulton at the museum, they had some sort of incident there the other night."

"What sort of incident," asked Dimitri.

"I'm not sure, but I don't think it was a break-in. I sent him copies of the symbols that are displayed around the 'UFO' artefact and that seems to have peaked his interest, I would guess that there is a connection with this incident as well," stated John.

"Do you mind if I tag along, this sound interesting, asked Dimitri.

"Sure, I guess Howard won't mind and it might be useful."

John had another cup of coffee while Dimitri consumed his breakfast and the two set off for Cairo.

The trip took just over an hour and the two touched down in the municipal parking lot just north of the museum. John called Howard as they walked towards the main entrance and so by the time they had walked to the reception desk at the far end of the hall Howard greeted them. John, who had visited the museum on a fairly regular basis, had noticed that one exhibit that for the past few years had been the centrepiece of the entrance hall had been removed. After John had introduced Dimitri, Howard asked them to follow him to his office, the walk took about four minutes, the office was quite specious at about four meters square. There was a desk at an angle in one corner with four easy chairs and a coffee table, the remainder of the office consisted of benches that lined three of the four walls. The benches were piled high with papers and artefacts, microscopes and other equipment. John and Dimitri settled themselves into two chairs while Howard stood by the coffee table grinning, "Would you like a cup of coffee, real coffee not the synthetic muck."

Dimitri accepted almost before the last words had left Howard's mouth, he hadn't had real coffee since, well, before he had left the police. Howard leant over his desk and pressed a button on his desk-com. "Yes Dr. Fulton," a voice answered.

"Fatima, could you do me a favour and get us three cups of coffee please," said Howard.

"Certainly Dr. Fulton," Fatima replied and the com went dead.

"She's a real treasure, Fatima," Howard said indicating the desk-com, "She's really an Admin Assistant but she acts more as my P.A. Don't know what I'd do without her, and heaven knows how she gets hold of real coffee" Fulton settled himself in one of the other two chairs, steepled his fingers, smiled and asked, "Well John how are you doing these days?"

The small-talk continued whilst they waited for the coffee to arrive, after around ten minutes Fatima, a Eurasian of slight build with long dark hair, glasses and a friendly smile, brought in the three large mugs of coffee that she placed on the table and left. Almost as soon as the door closed behind Fatima, Fulton asked, “John where did you get those glyphs from?”

“I copied them from an artefact we are examining in the Lab’,” answered John.

“Interesting; but where did it come from before you got your hands on it Dr. Moffat?”

“It came from a chance find on the banks of the Blue Nile in Southern Ethiopia, Jo Markson is out there now winding up the dig. What’s this about Howard,” asked John.

Howard lifted a file from his desk and placed it on his lap before he continued, “Up until recently the central exhibit in the entrance hall was a very strange artefact, it was a replica pyramid, known to the world as ‘The Golden Pyramid’, maybe you know the object. I say strange because all the evidence we have indicates that it originated in the Pre-Dynastic Period, before the ancient Egyptians started to build or even think about pyramids. At that time the largest building was a ziggurat not much larger than a LIMO garage. The blurb says it was found deep between the front legs of the Sphinx but in reality it was sealed inside a chamber below the chest and not a part of the rock, making it possibly older than the Pre-Dynastic Period even. I feel that the Golden Pyramid was actually the model for the great pyramids, not a replica of them.”

John quickly interrupted, “And you didn’t let me know it was an Oufact!”

“I couldn’t, the museum would not let it be known that it was even pre-dynastic and I was under threat of expulsion from Egypt to let the whole idea of what this really was, go,” explained Howard.

“So what’s changed,” asked John.

“On the evening of the twenty-fourth of June, sometime between seven o’clock and seven-thirty there was an incident,” continued Fulton. “from what I have been able to find out from the security guard the pyramid came to life, he says there were pulsing lights and a beam of light shooting vertically from the apex. He also said there was a high pitched sound coming from it during this time. The museum has shut the guard up now, he has been paid off or threatened but he now denies everything and the press department has stated that it was an alarm malfunction. They don’t know I spoke to him first so I am not sure how long I am going to be in post here, I was worried. Then I got your message with the glyphs.”

Dimitri interrupted at this point, saying, “So what is connection between symbols and Pyramid?”

Howard opened the file that had been laying on his lap, he took out a number of photographs and passed them to John and Dimitri, “As you can see your symbols are identical to the ones around the base of the Golden Pyramid, we always assumed that they were early hieroglyphs. Your message woke me up to the fact that this artefact is not a one-off, this is big, bigger than this museum.”

“You say this was on the twenty-fourth between seven and seven-thirty.”

“Yes,” said Howard.

“What if I tell you,” started John again, “that at precisely that same time another object in Ethiopia powered up, with lights rather like the pyramid, during an examination by Jo Markson, and, the TV in the camp lost its signal, and we also know that many TV’s lost signal across the UK.”

“That’s amazing, we had a similar outage here, in Cairo, for about eight minutes, how stupid of me that I didn’t link the two occurrences,” said Howard.

“Where is Golden Pyramid now, can we examine it,” asked Dimitri.

“The museum has placed it in the strong-room in the basement; there is no way we can get to it, it’s where we used to keep the solid gold items that weren’t on display, it’s impregnable,” said Fulton, “but you can take this file if you’d like to, it’s a copy.”

There was a brief silence before John replied, “I’m not sure that would be ethical Howard, Jim Markson is very keen on ethics.”

Before Howard could answer the door to the office burst open and a large suited man walked in accompanied by two of the museum’s security guards. The man in the suit walked straight to Dr. Fulton, ignoring John and Dimitri completely, “I will take that Dr. Fulton”, said the man, removing the file from Howard’s hand. “I must ask you to leave the museum immediately and you will not be allowed to re-enter this building for the foreseeable future, these guards will escort you out.” The two guards stepped forward, waited for Howard to collect some personal items and then guided him toward the door.

The man in the suit then turned to John and Dimitri, “Dr. Moffat, if you will follow me I will show you out.”

Astonished, John replied, “You know who I am.”

“You are famous Dr. Moffat, one of the most famous cranks in archaeology with your most famous pupil, Miss Markson,” sneered the suit.

“Who are you, anyway, I like to know who my fans are,” retorted John.

“Me, I am Mohamed Gestall, curator of this museum, and Dr. Moffat, please don’t come back, ever!”

When they reached the street John asked Howard what his plans were, Howard was vague about what to do next so John suggested that he return to Cyprus with them until he decided upon his future. Howard accepted the offer as a ‘temporary’ measure and thanked the two for the offer. The three of them visited Howard’s rented room out in the suburbs and collected all his clothing and possessions

which they packed into the LIMO and in almost total silence they travelled back to Nicosia. They showed Howard where everything was and settled him into the guest accommodation and left him to get some peace and quiet so that he could come to terms with his situation. John went to the Lab' to report the day's events to Jim.

Weymouth, Dorset, England
15:20 Saturday, June 28th 2031

"I know that face," said Carol as she placed a steaming cup of tea in front of Jim, "What's on your mind?"

Jim looked up from the screen, "Eh' oh thanks Dear, I've been staring at this plot on and off for two days now and I can't workout the significance of it."

Carol looked at the screen and then at Jim, "What is it," she asked.

Jim explained about the LOS reports that Declan had acquired from the tech department at the BBC and how he had plotted them onto a virtual map. "I can see the patterns but I have no idea what they mean; I think it's important."

Carol studied the screen again and asked why there were different colours? While she continued to study the screen Jim explained his coding system. Suddenly Carol seemed to have an idea, "Jim do you remember anything about the New Age movement," Jim shook his head, "they believed that the Earth had lines of energy that ran across the surface, some believed that these lines were the nervous system of an independent organism that was Planet Earth." The penny dropped with Jim, "So you think these are those lines,"

"It's as good an explanation as any," said Carol.

"It's a good explanation if these lines actually exist, at the very least it's another line of research, thank you darling; see, you are of some use after all."

"You cheeky sod," laughed Carol, "I'm sure that I have a book about it somewhere."

"Can you find it, quickly?"

"I'll try," said Carol as she made her way out of the office. Following twenty-six minutes of frantic searching through bookshelves and then boxes in the loft, Carol reappeared in the office with a dusty cover-less book by someone named Paul Deveroe, a twentieth century writer of pseudo-

science. "Knew it was there some-place," she said as she threw it on the desk.

"Thanks Darling," Jim said as he picked up the book and immediately started to read, ignoring his wife completely.

"I'll go now, shall I, back to the kitchen?"

"Yes Dear, thanks," replied Jim without really hearing the question.

Within fifteen minutes of starting the book Jim was interrupted by his com-unit, he picked it up and flipped it open to be greeted by John's face, "Hi boss, I need to update you on my visit the Cairo Museum, bit of a mess I'm afraid."

"Go on," said Jim, "tell me the worst." John related the story of the visit and the fact that they had an extra house guest; at the end Jim asked, "How well do you know Dr. Fulton, is he trustworthy?" John explained that he had known Howard for some years since he was Professor of Egyptology at Cardiff University whilst he had been at Bristol.

"Jim I do think Howard could be useful to the Trust, he has a wealth of experience and is open minded enough to see that prehistory will eventually need to be rewritten," added John. After John's recommendation Jim authorised John to make an offer of employment to Dr. Fulton subject to their meeting in a few days time.

Before Jim closed the call he asked, "John, make sure you make Dr. Fulton very welcome for me will you."

Weymouth, Dorset, England
10:48 Sunday, June 29th 2031

Fascinating as the book was it did not seem to help, it was one man's view of something that was no more than a theory at best and a fantasy at worst. There were UFO's, plasma balls and crop-circles included in the book and as far as Jim was concerned, served to detract from any serious intent. Jim knew that he needed to talk to someone who had a more serious and knowledgeable approach to the subject, but who? Jim picked up the com-unit and called Peter, "Hi Peter it's Dad."

A whispered voice replied without any video, "Dad I'm in a lecture, can't this wait?"

Jim replied also in a whisper, "On a Sunday? One second only, can you get Professor Gwilliam to call me as soon as he can please, bye." Jim broke the connection without waiting for a reply and immediately accessed the Super-Web.

The Super-Web was an extension or an evolution of the old internet, like the old system it started life as 'Def-Web', a information system set up by the Western and European Defence Alliance. It was the military that initiated this system as a satellite based system using very strict access protocols that excluded the Moslem and Far-Eastern block, but again this became obsolete and was opened up to academics and then anyone who could afford the rather steep access fees. The Trust had been one of the early subscribers to the Super-Web, or Sweb as it has lately become known. The Sweb gives subscribers access to every reference work on the planet, thesis', research papers, technical text and reference books; almost any non-fiction work anywhere. The question was, would information about these 'Lay-lines' be classed as non-fiction or fantasy? Within two seconds the search engine

brought up over four-million hits, so Jim decided to narrow the search to research papers submitted through the four premier British universities. This search came up with four hundred and seventeen documents, twenty-three of which were linked to UMIST in Manchester so this is where Jim started to read.

One hour and a forty-five minutes later the Com-unit sprang to life with a call from 'General – UMIST', Jim hit the answer button and the face of Professor Gwilliam appeared, "Professor, thank you so much for calling back."
"No problem Jim, what can I do for you?"
"Was it one of your lectures Peter was in when I called," enquired Jim.

"It was," came the slightly curt answer from the professor.
"I am really sorry about that, I just didn't think there would be lectures on a Sunday," apologised Jim.

The professor laughed before letting Jim off the hook, "Don't worry about it Jim, it happens all the time, I've given up asking students to switch their Coms off in lectures, and this was a voluntary lecture, not part of the curricula."

"Anyway, apologies again Professor."

"It's Owen, I have told you before call me Owen," he told Jim in his sing-song Welsh accent, "Now what can I do for you."

This may seem a strange thing to ask, Prof. . . . Owen, but what can you tell me, in layman's terms, about Lay-lines."

The Professor stroked his chin a couple of times before he spoke again, "I know there has been a lot of Tommy-rot talked about them but they do exist, you only have to do some plotting on an OS (British Ordinance Survey) map to prove it. In simple terms they acted as navigation aids back in the middle ages and medieval times. Places like an inn knew what was in any direction from them and pointed out a distant land-mark for a traveller, the traveller then set out toward that point then looked for another land-

mark in the same direction, and so on, eventually they arrived at their destination.”

“What sort of land-marks, Owen,” asked Jim.

“All sorts, churches, particularly with towers or steeples, inns, cross-roads, burial mounds, moat-houses, hill tops or depressions in hills, tumuli and cairns and in particular standing-stones and stone circles like Avebury or Stonehenge. These occur on almost every long-distance or prime Lays.”

“So there’s nothing in these lines other than sighting marks, asked Jim.

“Oh, I didn’t say that, I said they were used as medieval sat-navs but the question you need to ask is how or why did all these land-marks forming straight lines in the first place. Do you know the odds of say five such points lining up precisely on a straight line?”

“No,” replied Jim, “but I am sure you can tell me.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, but it’s in the range of thousands to one, I’ll dig out the formulae in case you want to check it out, and there are hundreds of lines, perhaps thousands.”

The conversation lasted for more than an hour and when Jim finally cut the connection his head was buzzing with ideas, possibilities and more than a little excitement. Professor Gwilliam had told Jim about some research and archaeology carried out back in the nineteen-nineties, it would seem that a group of armature archaeologists had carried out some tests in the area of a suspected line in North Wales. With instrumentation borrowed from Liverpool University they had detected a weak magnetic signature exactly where the Lay-line was supposed to be. Using ground penetrating radar the group had pegged out a line some two-hundred meters in length in one field, this was blind tested using sensitive magnetometers and the second group traced out the identical line. Later the group had obtained permission from the farm owner to excavate a

cross-section of the line in three places. Over four weekends in summer and with the help of the farmer who owned the field, they carved out three trenches more than two and a half meters deep, At the bottom of each trench they found the same thing, the corroded remains of metal, a metal that contained iron and copper but also some other metallic constituents that were not at that time recognisable. A cross section slice was taken from each trench, one of these was given to Liverpool Metro University, the other two were left in the possession of the group who investigated the Lay-line. Professor Gwilliam promised to check with Liverpool to see if the section remained in their catalogue. All the findings were verified by the university and a paper was published at the time.

Six hours later Jim succeeded in finding the paper and downloaded a copy. It was a good paper of some thirty-thousand words and for an amateur group a good serious attempt at a scientific paper, it confirmed what Professor Gwilliam had told Jim. However the conclusion of the paper was even more interesting, the paper concluded that the North Wales Lay-line was the result of what seemed like a prehistoric subterranean cable. The paper stopped short of proclaiming that all Lay-lines were caused or originated from similar causes but hinted that it was a possibility, and if so, if there were prehistoric cables laid beneath the earth, what were they for? This question intrigued Jim, it was a question of the same magnitude as the question the Trust had been set up to research. Dating of the North Wales 'cable' had not been conclusive as the technology of the time had been flawed and therefore was inaccurate, however the suggested date was definitely ten-thousand years plus and minus a thousand; this placed the cable in the same time-frame as the artefacts they were investigating. An Oufact, right under their noses, and in England.

Jim needed to confirm the supposition so he immediately set the computer the task of finding and plotting all confirmed Lay-lines across the UK. It took an hour to input the criteria and the search strings but finally it was complete and Jim pressed the Enter/Run pad on his flexi-keyboard and the familiar computer generated voice said, 'Working'. It was a big job for the computer, even for a multi-core quantum processor machine like his, that was capable of performing a hundred-million operations simultaneously and would take hours if not a day or so to complete. Jim left the computer to its work and joined Carol on the terrace to enjoy what was left of the afternoon.

Weymouth, Dorset, England
04:56 Monday, June 30th 2031

At almost five the following morning Jim's com-unit buzzed him to consciousness; he flipped the screen open to receive the message 'Task complete' from his computer. Jim fumbled for the hold button, pressed it, turned over and went back to sleep. Three hours later Jim awoke at his usual time and had made his first cup of synth-coffee before he remembered the message he had received, he took the hot drink with him to his office and immediately activated the machine from hibernate. "Display plot," he ordered the machine and instantaneously the plot was displayed on the large screen. He could not believe his eyes, for there on the screen was what looked like the Christmas-tree he himself had constructed from the TV outage plots. "Computer, superimpose plot TV one over current plot to same scale and compare," the tri-colour plot faded in and the effect was obvious.

The computer reported, 'Comparison complete, eighty-eight point seven, three, percent coincidence, Chance of having the same root origin ninety-nine, point four percent.'

Jim stared at the screen dumbfounded, then ordered, "Computer, print both plots and the superimposition," he crossed to the printer and retrieved the copies from the machine and returned to the kitchen where Carol was busy making another Synth-coffee.

"Ah there you are, I wondered why I didn't get my morning drink in bed as usual," complained Carol.

"Sorry Dear, I got a bit diverted, look at these." Carol took the printouts from Jim and sat at the dining bar to read them.

"This is the plot that you showed me the other day, said Carol.

"Yes I know, now look at the others," encouraged Jim.

“But they look the same . . . Ho, ho my goodness, these are the Lay-lines, they’re almost the same,” Carol exclaimed. Yes, eighty-eight percent, according to the computer. I think we might be onto something here, Jim enthused. Did I tell you I spoke to Professor Gwilliam yesterday?”

“No, you mean about this?”

Jim gave Carol a potted version of the conversation with Owen Gwilliam as they ate their breakfast and both became excited about the prospects of investigating the system further.

“Jim, looking at these plots there seems to be several epicentres but there is also a primary epicentre here,” Carol said pointing to a convergence point in central southern England, “do we know where this point is?”

Jim picked up his Com-unit and pressed a button that connected him to his computer, “Computer, list the main nodes indicated by the two latest plots, list greatest first.”

‘Working,’ said the computer’s voice, “main node, Stonehenge, Wiltshire, successive nodes . . . “

“Computer stop,” ordered Jim.

“You heard that?”

“Yes, that’s interesting,” said Carol, “I wonder if anyone there noticed anything during the signal outages, why don’t you nip up there and ask around.”

“Now that’s’ another good idea, I will, later. Now lets start packing, I have a lot to take with us to Cyprus.”

Weymouth, Dorset, England
13:30 Monday, June 30th 2031

Jim was ready to leave for Stonehenge when Carol appeared dressed to go out. "Where are you going," asked Jim.

"I'm coming with you, it was my suggestion and I'm not letting you have all the fun."

The couple finished their lunch and piled into their LIMO. Twenty minutes later they were touching down through thick mist in the parking lot close to the visitor centre at Stonehenge. There were a number of LIMO's, transporters and surface vehicles in the parking area. Carol and Jim made their way to the entrance and paid for their tickets. The escalator took them down to the main exhibition hall, the hall had been built underground in order to preserve the ecology around the World Heritage Site and was an edifice to modern engineering. The roof was twenty five meters above the floor area, which was the size of a football field. As the couple strolled through the first shop that sold audio and video guides, binoculars, and other items that could enhance a tourist's visit, the announcement system declared that the next mixed media presentation was to start in five minutes. "Come on Jim lets see what they have to say about the henge," said Carol as she guided Jim's arm across the hall.

They found seats about two-thirds of the way along the curved block of the auditorium, as the presentation started. Immediately in front of the audience was a curved screen that wrapped around the opposite curve of the seating block, the screen filled the entire view of every member of the audience. Above the seats hung a multitude of lights and projectors whilst on the floor between the screen and the seating were installed several hollo-emitters. By the time the show started the auditorium was over half full and the sounds of a multitude of languages met the ear. The

lights dimmed and the screen gradually became a star-scape; in its centre a glowing orb started to grow into a dazzling sun and the commentary cut in, "Fourteen billion years ago the universe began and coalesced into stars and planets." Hollo-dust formed around the hollo-sun and gradually formed planets, one planet, Earth, expanded and showed a sequence of evolution through to the emergence of Cro-Magnon man. The mixture of video and holographic projections was impressive and ended with a tribe of semi-intelligent savages dancing under the full moon.

"Come on," said Jim, "lets start talking to some of the staff," he led the way out of the auditorium and back into the main hall. At the door a female attendant stood smiling and making polite comments to the audience as they left, "Hi," said Jim were you here on the twenty-ninth of June, a week ago tomorrow tonight?"

"Yes I was Sir, was there a problem," asked the attendant.

"I'm not sure; did you notice anything unusual between six and six-thirty that evening."

"Ho no I wouldn't, I finish at five-thirty, the visitor centre closes at five you see. You would need to ask one of the surface guides or security staff."

Jim thanked her and they moved away, Carol wanted to look around the exhibition hall so they spent the next two hours wandering among the exhibits. They had a meal in the cafeteria and then alighted the travelator that took them along the mile long tunnel to Stonehenge itself. As soon as they emerged into the open they felt it, both Carol and Jim looked at each other and exchanged the silent message. The air was somehow charged, the couple both felt the reaction through their skin and their exposed body hair, their skin tingled and the hair on their head and arms stood on end.

"Something's different here," whispered Jim. Carol just nodded her agreement.

At the gate they were greeted by a guide, "Hi, I'm Adam and I will be your guide for the next thirty minutes or so, please keep to the pathways laid out by the white marker stones, time will be allowed for photos to be taken."

"Excuse me, Adam, were you on duty last Tuesday evening, asked Jim.

"No Sir," Adam replied, "Now if we can all walk this way please the tour will start."

"Adam, can you tell us who was please," interrupted Carol.

"I'm sorry Ladies and Gentlemen; can you give me one minute please? Is there a problem Madam," asked Adam.

"That's what we're trying to find out, we need to speak to someone who was on duty between six and six-thirty last week."

Adam looked thoughtful for a moment and steered them to the exit of the tunnel, "Something did happen, I heard three of the other guides talking to one of the security staff, a freak thunder-storm by all accounts."

"Are any of them here today," asked Jim.

"As a matter of fact all but one are on duty," stated Adam, "They'll be in the staff room waiting for the next tour group."

"Can we speak to them," insisted Jim.

"I guess so," said Adam, "Come on I'll take you through."

Adam guided them back into the tunnel and to a door in the wall some five meters in, he used his key-card to open the door and led the way inside. They found themselves in a small canteen with several uniformed people sitting around sipping drinks and eating snacks. Adam walked across to the farthest table near the single panoramic window where two people sat talking, "Barney, these people would like to talk to you about the thunder storm last week, if that's OK," Adam turned to Carol and said, "I'll have to go, this is Barney and Liz they were both here last week, " and with that he rushed out through the door.

Jim stepped forward holding out his hand, "Hi Liz, Barney; I'm Jim Markson and this is my wife Carol."

Barney looked at the couple quizzically for a second, then jumped up, "You're that guy whose daughter made that big find in Cyprus aren't you?"

"Yes," admitted Jim.

"Well what can we do for you," said Barney as he moved to make room for them at the table, "I keeps up with all the latest archaeology news, pays in my job," he explained in a broad Wiltshire accent, "Can I get you a drink?"

"No, thank you, we just had food," Carol answered, "Can you tell us about the thunder storm last week, what happened."

"We were just closing and getting the last tour out of the circle, one problem Yankee family was hanging back. I went to hurry em' up and it was like we were in the middle of an electrical storm, our hair all stood on end and I saw sparks tracking across the surface of the stones, weird it were."

"How long did it last," asked Jim.

"Oh, about three or four minutes, we tried to get out from the circle but we hit some sort of force field and me and the young Yank got knocked off our feet. Then it stopped and we hurried out of the circle down the path, I looked back and it were like there were a thunder cloud over the circle, and a fork of lightening shot down and hit the main capstone, you can see the damage it caused."

"I saw that too," interrupted Liz, "I was waiting at the security gate for the area to clear so as we could go home. It was like something out of a Sci-Fi film, it even made the weather forecast in the ten o'clock news that night"

"Really," said Jim, "what did they say?"

"Just said it was a freak storm, that's all," said Liz.

"The air's not been the same here since," interjected Barney, "it's like the place has been magnetised. My watch stopped last week at the time of the incident, hasn't gone since, so I wore another one in the next day and as soon as I come out of the tunnel it stops and starts again after I finish work, look."

Jim examined Barney's watch and then looked at his own, they were both stopped. Liz joined in by showing her watch, which had stopped at about the same time as Barney's, at eight twenty-five.

"You're obviously not interested in the weather, Mr. Markson, so what's all this about," asked Barney.

"Its aliens in't it," said Liz.

"No, it's not aliens," laughed Jim, "but we're not sure yet what it is but unless it's a real coincidence I think it has more to do with the past than anything else, more than that I am not saying at the moment."

"It all sounds very exciting Mr. Markson, if I give you my mail address can you keep me informed," asked Barney as he wrote on a serviette, "If you hang on for ten minutes I take you up with my next group and I'll show you the damage."

The damage was not obvious to the casual visitor but it was serious, a chunk of the stone had been blasted off and, more seriously a crack had appeared dangerously close to the supporting vertical support stone. Barney told the couple that the chunk had been taken away for examination with a view to repair, in the mean time the area around the damage had been cordoned off. Following the tour Jim thanked Barney and promised to keep in touch, and that he felt that this would be the first of many visits to the national monument. The brief journey back to Weymouth was quiet as both of them were deep in thought about the implications of the incident.

* * * * *

The next few days were hectic, and Jim Markson spent most of the time working on the inevitable paperwork that needs to be completed before the family all met up in Nicosia, despite it being a busman's holiday all the usual preparations needed to be completed. Carol spent most of

the time organising the packing and that meant producing an itinerary and packing list, contacting local Cypriot suppliers to lay food in for the eight week break. There was also the closing and securing of the Weymouth house, covers over the furniture, and arranging for a contractor to come just before they returned. Peter arrived the night before from Manchester, loaded with equipment he had managed to borrow from UMIST and Professor Gwilliam's personal Com string in case he was needed. As expected everything was ready by the time they were to leave and Carol, Jim and Peter climbed into their loaded LIMO and lifted off for Cyprus.

The Holiday?

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus
14:30 Thursday, July 3rd , 2031

Carol and Jim Markson along with Peter landed at JMRT House and the welcoming party of Dimitri, John and Dr. Fulton were there to greet them. After the initial introductions for the benefit of Dr. Fulton, Jim asked he could have a quick meeting with Fulton over a drink by the pool while the others settled in.

“Well it's good to meet you Howard, do you have all you need here,” asked Jim, as he placed two cold beers on one of the pool's tables. Jim sat down next to Dr. Fulton and took a long look at the Egyptologist, he was a man probably in his fifties, about average height with slightly curly greying hair and a small walrus moustache. Even in the summer temperatures of Cyprus, Dr. Fulton wore a grey suit, but for all his stuffy appearance he was a fit looking man with a energetic and lithe look to him. “John tells me good things about you Howard, how do you feel you'll fit in with us?”

“Thank you Mr. Markson.”

“Please, call me Jim, we don't stand on formalities here.”

“Thank you Jim. I've known John for some time and I must admit that up until recently, the last couple of years basically, I had the opinion that he was crazy leaving the chair at Bristol to join up with a fringe organisation. I would probably count myself as crazy now so I think I'll fit in pretty well.”

“What changed your mind about us,” asked Jim.

“I have always been fascinated with the Pre Dynastic Period, mainly because there are so many unsolved mysteries, and the more puzzles you seem to solve the

more questions you uncover. They had just too much technology that was far too advanced for the standard timeline, and that technology leaked through into the Egyptian Dynasties. I've seen model aircraft brought out of the oldest tombs, golden artefacts that are really electro-plated base metals, perfect metal spheres with no trace of machine marks, even under the strongest microscope. Jim, there are hundreds if not thousands of Egyptian artefacts in that museum that make no sense whatsoever in the theatre of accepted history.

"So," continued Jim, "how can we make this association mutually beneficial to both of us, if that is, you are interested in joining the Trust."

"As I have already said I want to get to the truth, I believe that civilisation deserves to know the truth, after all we are all the result of our history and if that is built on a lie or ignorance then civilisation itself is a sham," Howard stated earnestly. "I need to find out Jim, and you need people who can interpret the evidence with an open mind and not someone with desperation to fit everything into the *supposedly* known history. You know, most archaeologists and historians are actually devotees to a religion and most are not only believers they are evangelists that will do and say anything to keep the faith and make you believe. Piltdown Man was never a student stunt, it was perpetrated by the establishment anthropologists because they were so desperate to find the missing link. I believe that evolution is the only possible explanation of how we got here but what's the point of manufacturing evidence, if you get caught out you just lose credibility. I also believe in God, by the way"

"Howard, I like your philosophy," said Jim, "I think we will get along just fine. Welcome to JMRT, consider yourself gainfully employed, whatever the museum paid you I'll pay you fifty percent more, you will get whatever money you need for research projects as long as they are approved by

Jo or I, work whatever hours you feel it right to work, when you need leave just let me know, that OK?"

"That's more than OK, I've never has such an offer," said Howard, "When does the famous Jo Markson join us I am looking forward to meeting her?"

"She will be here tomorrow if she can drag herself away from the dig. So do you accept, the offer" asked Jim.

"Yes, yes, I accept, thank you."

"Thank me by getting some answers Howard," responded Jim. The two men shook hands and the conversation turned to small talk as Carol, Peter, John and Dimitri arrived and the atmosphere changed to pure holiday.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

09:30 (local time) Friday, July 4th
2031

Everyone was up early the next morning as each had a busy day ahead, Jim and John started Dr. Fulton's induction, bringing him up to speed on the latest projects and in particular the happenings of the past ten days. Carol busied herself organising the accommodation and messy kitchen, after John and Dimitri had had the run of the place since the Easter recess, and Jim had also asked her to do some more research into the ley-line connection. Dimitri and Peter were making a start on trying to detect the power source in the Constellation artefact.

Cairo Museum, Directors Office

12:05 (local time) Friday, July 4th,
2031

Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque sat in his office staring at an open file on his soft-screen, he stroked his chin slowly and his large head moved from side to side, the pencil in his left hand revolved in his fingers like a windmill. Al-Faroque's attention was broken by a sharp knock on the office door, "Enter," he snapped without looking up from the screen. The door opened and two males entered the office, immediately taking seats in the lounge chairs to the side of the desk, Al-Faroque's glanced at them, "Please make yourselves at home," he said with a hint of sarcasm in his voice. One male was a French diplomat, a cultural attaché, based at the French Embassy.

The Frenchman was short In stature with a weasel type face that instantly suggested, 'don't trust this man', he wore the stereotype white cotton two piece suit that was the required dress in this country of dry heat. His farther was

Georges Dupree, one-time French Ambassador to Washington, his son Perry had followed in his father's footsteps but had been expelled from his post in the Israeli French Embassy for behaviour unbecoming of a diplomat. He had spent some years as a senior analyst in the in the French foreign service whilst obtaining a degree in Ancient History from the University of Paris. The degree took Perry into the Overseas Cultural Section and a posting to Cairo followed soon after; with a stern warning, from the Minister himself, that any further incidents would be met by dismissal. The warning had done little to restrict Dupree's activities and had been caught red-handed by Al-Faroque, taking bribes from local dignitaries for obtaining favoured places at an official reception. Since then Al-Faroque had used him to perform certain shady services for him.

The other man who sat in Al-Faroque's office was a tall, slim, American by the name of Homer John Carter the Third, a billionaire whose passion was to fund archaeological expeditions and then illegally strip the discoveries of every precious artefact, leaving only artefacts of wood, pottery etc to the local museums. Carter's family had made their billions from oil in the late twentieth century, most of which was made by extorting extreme prices as the oil seemed to began to run out. The Carter family had then turned to other areas where an easy buck could be made. Homer was a brash, loud mouthed man who had no scruples or conscience when it came to making a profit, everyone, including his family were seen as fair-game.

"Gentlemen, I won't thank you for coming because this little problem we have needs to be solved to our mutual benefit," Al-Faroque stated as he joined the two men around the coffee table.

"I'm thinking you mean the Joanne Markson problem," stated Carter.

“Who is this Joanne Markson,” asked Perry Dupree.

Al-Faroque looked at Dupree and sighed, “You are telling me that you have never heard of the Jo Markson Research Foundation, where are you living these days.”

“No,” answered Dupree, “should I have?”

“Well you better wise up fast fella,” interjected Carter.

Al-Faroque briefly brought Dupree up to speed and threw two memory crystals across to them, “I have placed the full file, everything I have on them, on these crystals, I think you will find it interesting and more than a little threatening to Carter and myself.”

“So what does it have to do with me,” asked Dupree.

“Perry I need you to do some work for us, like the good little Cultural Attaché that you are. This is definitely a cultural issue, do you not agree Homer, my friend,” answered Al-Faroque, “or otherwise you will be returning to France, if you get my meaning?”

Dupree said nothing but sank back into the chair as if to hide himself in the cocoon of the cushions.

“There’s already been a perceptible fall-off in the prices of certain artefacts since the interview a couple of weeks ago, everyone wants these darn Oufacts,” stated Carter, “They either need to disappear or I need to get my hands on some of the items they have, my contacts in the countries where these discoveries have been made can’t even get close to the finds, the governments have them totally locked off. Every government has gone Jo Markson crazy.”

“I know it is just financial for you Homer but it goes deeper than that for me, my country’s place as the first great civilisation is at stake, and now, my reputation is also threatened,” bleated Al-Faroque.

“Hell what’s a reputation and your place in history against a few billion dollars,” shot out Carter.

Al-Faroque looked hurt, “My reputation means more to me than any amount of money, I have staked it on these people being cranks, I have been published and televised saying so and now it looks as though they have the

concrete proof that will place not only my professional reputation but the reputations of hundreds of other renowned archaeologists around the world in the historical dustbin.”

“Hell Ahmed, I thought you valued that collection of yours more than that, I thought you and me was two of a kind,” retorted Carter.

“I feel that I should take that as an insult,” said Al-Faroque, “but I will take it as a compliment for the time being.”

“Now I’m not sure how I should take that, but as we have a common interest in this, I think I also will accept it positively,” answered Carter laughing.

There was a knock on the office door, which opened immediately and an attractive Egyptian woman strode in with a tray of Turkish coffee and cookies, “Thank you Fatima, place it here on the table please,” said Al-Faroque. The tray was put in front of the three men and Fatima hesitated for a second her eyes on the soft-screen that sat beside the tray.

“Is there anything else Director,” Fatima asked of Al-Faroque.

Seeing her roving eyes Al-Faroque dismissed her curtly, “No, that is all, get back to your work.”

Fatima left the room quickly and Al-Faroque poured the coffee, a dark treacle like substance that took its time leaving the traditional coffee pot.

“Say is that real coffee,” asked Carter.

“Yes,” answered Al-Faroque, “courtesy of an ex-member of my staff who saw fit to share restricted information with the Marksons.”

“Ah, the esteemed Dr. Fulton, no doubt,” said Carter, “here’s to Dr. Fulton then.”

“May he be sorry he opened his mouth,” added Al-Faroque.

“I’m sorry to interrupt,” said Dupree, “but where exactly do I come in?”

“Ah yes, Monsieur Dupree, we need you to infiltrate the organisation and find out everything you can about these

new artefacts they seem to have discovered in Ethiopia. I also need to know exactly what information Howard Fulton has passed on to John Moffatt, “ explained Al-Faroque. “Get their Trust and the information, that will do for now, later it may be necessary for you to take direct action.”

“And just how do you suggest I get into the inner-sanctum of this organisation,” asked Perry sarcastically, “I can not just turn up, knock on the door and say ‘Hi guys I’d like to join you as a spy, can I not?”

Al-Faroque’s mind was working fast as he suggested, “I think you should introduce yourself as yourself, a representative of the French government on a fact finding mission, maybe you can suggest that France is interested in funding some of the research. What do you think, brilliant, yes.”

“Except that I can not just disappear from the embassy for a few weeks, people will notice,” complained Perry.

“You should maybe take some leave, I am told you have not returned home for over three years so you must have several weeks owing to you,” stated Al-Faroque.

“Yes,” answered Dupree, “but I was saving it up for never mind, but what if they decide to check with my government?”

“That my friend you will have to manage yourself, after all you have to take some risk for your five-hundred thousand dollars,” said Al-Faroque, “Homer and I will of course be paying you for your services.”

“I will?” said Carter, “Yes of course, there could even be a bonus in it for you if you do a *really* good job, if you know what I mean, buddy.”

“Here are your air tickets for Larnica,” said Al-Faroque as he passed over a envelope, “you leave the day after tomorrow, I have already cleared it with your embassy. In the packet there is also a dedicated com-unit that uses a wavelength outside of the commercial bands, you can report in every night at three in the morning using text or voice packets. I can contact you directly through a

scrambler but you will not be able to speak directly to me, is that clear.” Perry nodded his understanding. “Off you go now Perry. Have a good time in Cyprus.”

Dupree sat there, mouth agape, for several seconds while Al-Faroque waited and motioned with his eyes that he should leave by the door. He slowly realised that he was being dismissed and just as slowly arose from the comfortable chair, and crossed to the door as if in a trance. Dupree stopped at the office door and turned toward the two men.

“That is it then,” he asked.

“Yes, goodbye Perry, speak to you soon, hopefully,” answered Al-Faroque.

Perry suddenly seemed to snap out of the trance state, quickly turned, snatched the door open and left the office. He exited so fast that he nearly knocked Fatima over in his haste to leave, “My apologies Madame,” he said and hurried on.

“Do not forget to hand your pass in at the reception desk, Sir,” she called after him.

Back in the office Al-Faroque he and Carter enjoyed a second cup of coffee, “Can you trust him,” asked Carter eventually.

“Can I trust you?”

“Point taken,” answered Carter.

“His allegiance is with whoever pays the fiddler, but I have another means of control that will be effective for as long as he needs to work and his father is alive. If we pay him too much that effectiveness will end. He will spend that half million dollars in a matter of months but it will keep him focused for long enough.”

“OK,” mused Carter, “then the bonus can’t be too big, huh.”

“That is correct,” explained Al-Faroque, “If you are agreeable we will use any bonus to get hold of the artefact with the constellation on it, I have heard some interesting rumours about it.”

Carter thought for a few seconds, then continued, "This constellation artefact, if it is so important, I think I can arrange to, shall we say, acquire to object. If friend Dupree fails, of course."

"Thank you Homer, it may come to that but we should also put some thought to discrediting the organisation, particularly Dr. Fulton."

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

11:20 (local time) Saturday, July 5th,
2031

Dr. Howard Fulton was totally engrossed in the examination and the cataloguing of the whole variety of artefacts that the organisation had acquired since its inception. He was as happy as a sand-boy working in the depository, there were so many interesting items here, things the like of which he had never seen before and everything seemed to intrigue him. He constantly interrupted the work of the others to ask questions or proffer a theory or idea, to ask about the metallurgy or to ask for a test on some feature of an artefact. He was almost annoyed when his personal com-unit sounded to tell him that he had a call. Reluctantly he left his latest project and looked at the display screen, he saw that the call was coming in from Fatima, his PA at the Cairo Museum, why should she be calling him, he thought. Nervously he pressed the accept button and Fatima's face appeared on the screen. "Hello Fatima, what can I do for you?" Fatima was a young single mother in her mid twenties, she had been assigned to him when he had arrived to take up his post at the museum three years ago. Dr. Fulton had always treated her with respect and Fatima had responded with her loyalty to him. Three years ago her English had been basic and Howard had persevered with her to bring her up to standard, he had paid overtime out of his own pocket in order to help her as the Museum did not pay for

overtime. Although Fatima was a pretty girl, and Howard was not slow to appreciate this fact, he had never attempted to take any advantage of his position.

Fatima looked worried as she seemed to constantly look from left to right like a frightened animal. “Dr. Fulton I have not much time, I am on my lunch break, but I need to warn you.”

“Warn me of what Fatima,” asked Howard.

“It’s Director Al-Faroque, I think he is out to get you and your new employer,” she said with panic in her voice.

“Calm down Fatima,” Howard said in the most reassuring voice he could muster, “and tell me what’s been going on there.”

Fatima found herself a seat in a green grassed area that Howard recognised as a favourite luncheon area for the city workers, “Yesterday Al-Faroque had two visitors, one was someone called Homer Carter, an American, and the other a French man called Dupree. When I took in coffee I overheard something that was suspicious so after I listened from the door. He’s sending the French man to you, to spy on you.”

“This man Dupree, how is he going to spy on us,” asked Howard.

“I think he is going to say he is from the French government who, he will say are interested in giving you some funding,” explained Fatima, according to the visitors pass book he is attached to the French Embassy here in Cairo. Al-Faroque said something about giving him a bonus for doing something else. I am frightened for your safety Dr. Fulton.”

“Fatima, listen to me, as bad as he is I don’t think Dr. Al-Faroque would stoop to violence, he’s just passionate about your country and its history,”

“Maybe,” said Fatima, “but I will nevertheless loose my job if he finds out I have contacted you.”

“That maybe so, but I’m not going to tell him.”

“But if this man Dupree is told to go away, they will know that I, how do you say, tripped you off.”

“Fatima it’s ‘tipped you off’, but you just leave that to me, I promise we will sort something out so he doesn’t catch on, OK?”

“I have to go or I will be late back.”

“Fatima, if anything happens, you contact me, you understand, get in touch.”

“OK, good bye,” Fatima said as the screen reverted to the Vodacom logo.

Dr. Fulton closed the com-unit and set off across the compound to find Jim Markson, the expression on his face was grave when he at last found him in the kitchen of the house with his wife, Carol. Jim turned from the cook-pot as he heard Howard enter and said, “Howard, is something wrong?”

“Well yes and no,” said Howard.

“And what the heck does that mean, Howard,” asked Jim.

“I have just received a call from my old PA back at the museum, she was quite distressed because she thinks Director Al-Faroque is out for revenge of some kind, I don’t know what they have told her. However it seems that he and some guy by the name of Homer Carter, an American, are sending someone to spy on us.”

“Well that’s good to know, we can send him off with a flea in his ear,” said Jim.

“No we can’t,” Howard stated forcefully, “if we do then Al-Faroque will know who has tipped us off and a very sweet young lady will lose her job. Can’t you see that this is an opportunity to produce a bit of disinformation.”

“Excuse me for being slow Howard,” said Jim, “but why would we wish to do that?”

“Al-Faroque is a passionate man, he cares about his country and the part it has played in ancient history, he has also spoken out about this organisation being what he calls ‘pseudo-science’. If we come up with proof that the

accepted history is wrong, he, above all others, stands to look like a narrow minded fool. Al-Faroque will do almost anything to avoid that and he has a lot of influence in the world of archaeology. I don't think for one moment he is motivated by revenge."

Jim thought for some seconds and finally said, "I see what you mean, Howard tell me everything you know."

"All I know is what Fatima told me but I can do better than tell what she said, I can play the call back for you, I always record calls just in case." Howard activated the 'bluetooth' in the com-unit and they watched the whole call on the kitchen soft-screen.

The video on the screen stopped and immediately Jim asked, "Who is this Carter person?"

Howard replied "I have knowledge of him although I have never actually met him, he's an American billionaire who has a very dubious reputation. They say he has a private collection of artefacts that is worth more than the collection in the Cairo Museum. He only collects items that have an intrinsic value, gold mainly. They say if there is something he wants there is little that will stand in his way."

"It seems we could be either a threat or a target, or both, to our Mr. Carter," theorised Jim, "I think you are right Howard, we have to tread carefully when our unknown guest arrives. I'll brief everyone over lunch and get all the important, and valuable, artefacts locked away. Jo is on her way and should be here in around an hour. Meanwhile I'll do some research on misters Carter and Dupree. We seem to be moving into a new phase of our existence."

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus
13:40 (local time) Saturday, July 5th,
2031

The aroma of bolognaise was drifting around the complex and stomachs were rumbling with the thought of a large Markson sized portion of their favourite dish when the relative peace of the Cyprus afternoon was shattered by the roar of six LIMO's dropping out of the blue sky. The first person out of the house was Carol, wiping her hands on the tomato stained apron and running towards the landing area between the laboratories and the garage. Close on Carol's tail was Jim who walked confidently in the same direction. The six LIMO's touched down one after the other; the last to land was the transporter, which gently made ground-fall on its hydraulic sleds, close to the Labs' to make the transfer of its cargo easier. One after the other the engines closed down and the gull-wing doors opened with a succession of hisses, disgorging its contents of dishevelled, sunburnt humanity. From the centre of the now swelling crowd one female figure emerged at a run and threw herself around the neck of Carol Markson.

"Hi Mum!" Jo hugged her mother, then spotted her father walking towards them and released Carol to direct her attention towards her Dad. "Hi Dad" she shouted as she then threw her arms around Jim's neck whilst she planted a lingering kiss on his cheek. A second later Carol's voice rose above the general melee, "Just leave everything where it is and get to the refectory, lunch is being served, *now!*"

The small crowd, knowing better than to ignore Carol Markson, and thinking foremost of their stomachs, instantly moved towards the house, and the dining area. Jim walked slowly with his daughter, their arms around each other as Carol followed with the crew she thought that nothing ever changes, her daughter would always be daddies little girl.

As the new arrivals neared the house other figures appeared from the labs and several of the excavation crew veered off to greet them. Peter Markson and John Moffat headed for Jo and her father and after more hugs disappeared into the dining room.

The noise of chatter in the room was deafening but as people found their preferred seats the noise level settled to a consistent loud murmur. When everyone was seated Jim rose from his seat beside Carol and Jo and hammered on the table with a convenient serving spoon, “Quiet please, *quiet!*” he shouted, the hubbub of conversation slowly ceased, “thanks, well firstly welcome back to civilisation to Jo and the excavation crew and we thank God for their safe return. Before we eat, which is I am sure the main thing on everyone’s mind, I have a couple of things to say,” this was greeted with cries of ‘shame’ and a number of boos from the crew, “thank you, I will be a matter of seconds. Firstly can I introduce a new addition to our permanent staff, can everyone welcome Dr. Howard Fulton, late of the Cairo Museum; welcome Howard. Secondly can everyone please remain here after the meal, I need to brief everyone about a visitor we will shortly be entertaining, this is very important so please don’t wander off. And of course lastly let us all bow our heads to give thanks for the food. We thank you oh God for providing for us with the bounty of your Earth, Amen,” there was a chorus of agreement from the diners, “now please let’s eat.” Immediately the doors to the kitchen opened and the local staff marched out with enormous pots and cauldrons of steaming spaghetti and bolognaise and the conversations almost stopped, drowned out by the sounds of cutlery against plate.

During the meal Jim briefed Jo in with as much detail as possible on the history of Dr. Fulton’s appointment and the events since, “There is so much to update you with at the moment the past two weeks have been hectic to say the

least, we will get some drinks after lunch and take some time by the pool to catch up,” Jim concluded as everyone finished eating and he stood up for the second time. “Can I have your attention please; does anyone know if there is anyone absent at the moment? No, then please bear with me before you move, I know that there is a lot to do especially for the excavation crew. What I am about to say *must not* go outside of the organisation under any circumstances. Earlier I introduced Dr. Fulton, Howard, to you; Howard was asked to leave his employment at the Cairo Museum due to him talking to this organisation and helping us. Howard is a specialist in Egyptian Pre-Dynastic Civilisation, a period that seems to include many of the artefacts we are investigating, and I am sure that he will be, if you pardon the expression, worth his weight in gold. Unfortunately Howard’s presence seems to have come at a price, John’s visit and Howard’s departure seems to have aroused some people to think of us as a threat and I can understand the reasons to some extent. At present we believe that there three people involved; the Director of Antiquities, Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque; an American billionaire by the name of Homer Carter III, who seems to be a very unsavoury and unscrupulous character, and finally a French man by the name of Perry Dupree who according to the French Foreign Office website is a Cultural Attaché at their embassy in Cairo. This man Dupree looks as if he is a sort of lackey of the other two and it is Dupree that will be visiting us anytime from tomorrow onward, under the guise of offering funding from the French Government. He will be here as a spy and maybe saboteur, we are not sure. What we know we owe to Howard’s ex-PA at the museum who could lose her job if Mr. Dupree finds out that we know about him.”

Whilst he is here folks, we need to walk a tight-rope. He must never be left alone in any sensitive area or have access to any of our more intriguing finds, especially the

ones we are investigating currently. If possible we need to give him the impression that we are a load of cranks.” Cheering and jeering broke the mood after the last instruction, “Yes, yes, I know, it won’t be hard in many cases, but lets take this seriously, share your craziest theories with him, dig out your copies of Enrich von Danikin books and revise the alien intervention theories, what ever it takes. We will give him quarters here and we will monitor everything he says and does, Dimitri will set up monitoring devices for us. OK just be careful what you say and do in Dupree’s presence. Now if there aren’t any questions you can go about your business. Oh and by the way we will have a social night around the pool tonight at eight. Thanks everyone.”

An hour later the family were seated around a drinks laden table on the pool-side. It was a beautiful summer afternoon, the family was together again, the sun was hot and a cool breeze was blowing down from the Crudos Mountains, it was as if all was right with the world and the four people were totally relaxed in each other’s company. It took two hours to update Jo and to some extent Peter, on everything that had happened since the day of the ‘Euro Today’ interview.

“I just don’t understand why this Faroque guy and the other one is attacking us,” asked Jo, “what have we done to them?”

“I think you will find we are a threat to both of them Jo,” explained her farther, “in different ways of course. No one has rubbished the work we’re doing more than Al-Faroque and he’s staked his reputation on us being wrong. With Carter it’s all about profit and intrinsic value not about the scientific and cultural value or about truth.”

“Yeah Dad, that’s all very fine and good,” interjected Peter, “but he’s already got billions, why would we be a threat to him he’s got more than enough to last several lifetimes.”

“That’s a very naïve opinion Peter,” said Jim, “wealth is like a drug Son, the more you have the more you want; it becomes a way of life. Carter stores, not collects, gold artefacts and that’s the source of his wealth; if that gold is devalued so is his wealth. He also deals in artefacts and if these new metals become the new currency no one will be interested in boring old gold.”

“Well I think the most dangerous one of the two is Al-Faroque,” Carol offered.

“I think you could be right, just this once,” her husband told her.

Jim was sitting to close to the edge of the pool, a dangerous place to get away with comments like that, and before he knew what was happening Carol’s foot was giving the leg of Jim’s chair a swift kick. The chair toppled backward taking her husband into the pool. The sight was too much and mother and children burst into laughter and then followed Jim into the pool.

The remainder of the day seemed to be equally as light hearted and the social gathering during the evening was certainly a success, it was just what everyone needed after the long weeks of past activity. By the end of the evening everyone was relaxed and had renewed old friendships and Howard Fulton had found that he had quite a number of new friends and admirers. First impressions of Howard Fulton was that he was a serious stuffy professor, and certainly that was the way he had presented since arriving at the house, but the evening had enabled him to let his hair down and the during following days he was a different person. Jo and John spent a lot of the evening together and no one knew if this was professional or personal. Peter found a new friend in Jenny a member of the excavation crew who had newly graduated that year as a field archaeologist. Like all good things the evening came to an end and without exception everyone collapsed onto their beds in undisturbed sleep.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus
08:32 (local time) Sunday, July 6th,
2031

The following day was the start of a week's holiday for the excavation crew who had been isolated and working without a break for over two months. Some of the crew headed off to one of the fine beaches on the south coast of the island, others had just stayed in bed catching up on lost sleep, and a couple were lazing on the pool-side with their breakfasts. The family breakfasted together in the dining room with John, Dimitri and Howard, the conversation centred on the impending visit from the unknown Perry Dupree. Following breakfast Joanne and Howard set off for the depository in order to commence the unpacking of the items brought back from Ethiopia.

The Depository was possibly the most secure area on the site and had been found accidentally when they had a new water tank installed. The builders started to dig a hole for the tank at the rear of the main house below a low bank when the mechanical digger bucket had crashed through into a three-thousand year old burial chamber. The chamber had proved to be similar to the ones near the town centre at Pathos in the west of the island, which are now falling into decay. The chambers were totally empty and there was no evidence that they had ever been used for actual burials. The Marksons had contacted the Cypriot government but the Department of Antiquities seemed less than interested in the find saying that as there were hundreds of such chambers all over the island it was not important to them. Permission was gained to utilise the complex of chambers after a safety survey and they became 'The Depository'. The complex consisted of seven rooms interconnected with short passageways and steps, the digger damage was repaired, the original entrance opened up and an emergency exit installed with an air-

conditioning system and now held some two and a half thousand artefacts together with priceless records and surveys.

Peter, John and Dimitri wandered of to the laboratory after finishing their breakfast with an extra cup of synth-coffee to overcome the affects of the previous night's celebration. The power source was the main item on their agenda, as it had been for the last few days, but so far no progress had been made and the trio were running out of ideas for testing the artefact. As far as they could tell the item was totally inert and dead and had no energy signature or radiation whatsoever. In fact they could detect no background radiation from the object making it a radiation 'black hole', which was a troubling anomaly. The X-ray equipment that was capable of penetrating laminated armoured steel showed nothing, they had failed to obtain even a microscopic sample for analysis and the spectrometer had produced an almost impossible analysis of the casing material telling them that it was metallic glass.

By lunchtime the three had again produced no results and the consensus was that, if it ever had some sort of energy it had been completely depleted on the night of the discharge. At twelve fifty-five the lunch bleep sounded and the two walked out of the lab in disgust leaving the object lying on the test bench in full view of the window. Lunch expanded to cover well over two hours as the discussion over the next steps to take, continued into the afternoon, Peter wanted to call Professor Gwilliam who was on vacation in Florida but John was not in favour of disturbing the professor until the very last resort. At twenty minutes past three the main gate intercom chimed but none of the three reacted, thirty seconds later Jim appeared at the door and called to them that the suspicious visitor had arrived. Instantly John remembered that they had left the Constellation object on the bench in front of the window, he

jumped up and dashed to the door, as he passed an astonished Jim he murmured something about 'Security alert' and disappeared across the compound to the labs. Once there he grabbed the object and locked it away in a steel cupboard in his office.

Shaking his head Jim continued his walk to the main gate, the gate was normally operated remotely from one of several locations but Jim did not want this visitor to have any chance of wandering off on his own. Jim arrived at the gate and used the small pedestrian gate to exit the compound then approached the hired surface vehicle. Jim approached the driver as the solar-glass window sunk silently into the door, "Can I help you," asked Jim in as friendly a voice as he could manage.

"Bonjour Monsieur, I am Perry Dupree," the visitor said holding out his hand, "I am an accredited representative of the French Government; you should have received a letter of introduction from the Overseas Cultural Office, no."

"No," replied Jim, "do you have some identity please?"

"Ah, yes the I.D.," Dupree dove into his jacket on the passenger seat beside him and came up with a small black and gold wallet, which he opened and passed to Jim.

Jim examined the plastic bio-metric identity card, which seemed to be genuine and passed it back to Dupree, "It says you are attached to the Cairo office, isn't there a consulate here in Cyprus," asked Jim.

Ah, yes of course but there is no one there qualified for this mission," replied Dupree.

"Qualified for what exactly," asked Jim.

"Qualified to evaluate the work you are doing, are you James Markson" the Frenchman asked.

"Yes, I so sorry, how rude of me not to introduce myself, but I have to confess that I am confused as to why you are here," Jim said as convincingly as he could, he was never very good at play-acting.

“Monsieur Markson, my government is interested in the work your organisation is doing and wishes, if everything is authentic, to offer funding,” explained Dupree.

Jim thought for a moment and finally said, “Well you had better come in and explain more, I’ll jump in and show you where to park,” Jim rounded the vehicle and sat himself in the passenger seat a fraction of a second before Dupree moved jacket, “Sorry about that,” he said as the Frenchman pulled his coat out from under Jim, who entered a code into a remote to open the gates. Jim guided Dupree across the compound to the garage area where they parked the vehicle.

“I’m afraid we will need to walk from here,” explained Jim, “we don’t allow any vehicles in and around the site.”

After the two had walked from the garage area to the reception and office, Jim called the kitchen for coffee to be brought over and they settled into the window seats of the reception. “Your set up here is very impressive, it cannot be cheap to keep a facility of this size running,” stated Dupree.

“Well no, but we are subsidised substantially by the Cypriot Republic, they have been very good with us since the original find. We purchased this place and a good parcel of land at rock-bottom prices, mind it was derelict when we took it over and took more than a year to renovate it.”

“It is all very nice Mr. Markson.”

“Now,” said Jim, “please explain all this to me, I have received no letter from your office so I am completely in the dark.”

“Monsieur Markson, pardon, Mr. Markson. . . .”

“Please, call me Jim.”

“Thank you, Jim. It is very simple really, my Minister saw your interview on ‘Euro Tonight’ recently and it made him curious about the work you are doing. He told me he had done some research and he is now interested in providing

some funds, however you will need to convince me that the research is of international import.”

“I see, but why would France wish to fund what is basically an Anglo-Cypriot project and organisation,” queried Jim.

“We fund many worthwhile projects all around the world, I suppose it is propaganda really but it shows the international community that we are a part of it,” explained Dupree.

“That seems fair enough,” commented Jim, “what do you need?”

“First of all I will need to book in at a convenient hotel, can you recommend one for me,” asked Dupree.

Jim needed to think fast, which would be better to have the Frenchman on site so that they could monitor him or keep him at arms length at a hotel, “Please, be our guest we have quite a bit of space even though the excavation team is here. We have the facilities for hosting conferences here and there is accommodation for up to fifty singles, more if people are prepared to share.”

“That would be wonderful if it is no trouble to you,” said Dupree, his face lighting up.

“That’s settled then, let’s go and get your bags and we will settle you in,” said Jim as he stood and motioned toward the door just as the coffee arrived.

Jim took Dupree to the room that Dimitri had prepared the previous day. It was like any other of the rooms except that Dimitri had used his expertise and experience from his police days to make it a total recording device, nothing could happen in that room or be sent from the room without it being monitored and recorded. “I’ll let you get settled and I’ll be back in an hour to show you the visitor facilities,” said Jim as he left Dupree in his room. Jim crossed immediately to the laboratory block where the three techies were working. “Hi Guys,” he said as he entered, “Our visitor is ensconced in room thirty-five, is everything working Dimitri?”

“Yes, I am getting a good strong signal; he just flopped onto the bed as soon as you left, he does have an active com-unit in there with a dedicated high-frequency chip, they think that can’t be monitored.”

“And it can,” asked Jim.

“Sure it can be, is just a matter of having the right equipment,” confirmed Dimitri, “he will probably use it for text only as that takes a micro-second burst and is less likely to be detected, but we can capture it no problem.”

“Good work Dimitri,” Jim complimented him and then turned to the other two, “Is everything secure in case he wanders around here?”

“It is now,” said John, I realised when you said this spy was at the gate that I’d left the Constellation device on the bench over there, in full view. It’s back in it’s case now so don’t worry.”

“Any success with it at all,” asked Jim.

“Dad, it’s like were dealing with a squash ball.”

“Well keep at it, we really need to know what all this is about,” said Jim as he left the three of them in the Lab.

At eight o’clock everyone gathered in the dining hall for dinner, Perry Dupree was seated in the centre of the core group with Jim on one side and Dimitri on the other, opposite him was Carol, Howard and John with Jo and Peter back to back with him. The conversation started of as general small-talk but soon came around to the history and purpose of the Trust. Dupree proved to be skilled at guiding conversations to where he wanted them to go and the group found it difficult to counter his questions and tangents. Finally Jim felt he needed to jump in and curtail this particular conversation, “Well I think we have had enough of shop talk for one night don’t you Perry, there will be plenty of time tomorrow to do a full briefing.”

After a short silence the conversation returned to inconsequential subjects in-between the munching, drinking and lip-smacking. After the eating was finished

and people started to break away to their rooms or local bars, Jim invited Dupree to join the family around the pool, which he gratefully accepted.

Forty-five minutes later Dupree appeared from the guest accommodation block on the far side of the pool and approached the small group relaxing in the warm evening air. Jim greeted Perry and provided him with a drink, "Please help yourself to drinks or nibbles and make yourself at home, said Jim.

Dupree seated himself in a vacant chair and looked much more relaxed than he had earlier, "May I compliment you on your hospitality Jim, Madam Markson, you have made me feel very welcome even though you do not know me, I thank you."

Carol turned to Dupree and placed her hand on his arm, "Please call me Carol, and thank you for the compliment Perry, it's not often I get some appreciation around here. Is your room satisfactory?"

"But of course, it is very comfortable, thank you," replied Dupree.

"So," asked Jim, how long have you been in the diplomatic corps?"

"I am not really a diplomat," answered Dupree, "I am a Cultural Attaché and my speciality is archaeology, oh I have never actually done any excavation since my degree I am sad to say. How do you Brits' say 'those who can, do, and those who can't tell others how to do it.'"

Jim laughed, "The saying is that they teach."

"But is not that telling others how to do it," retorted Dupree with a wicked twinkle in his eye.

"We take your point," assured Carol, "but don't say that too often we have a number of teachers and lecturers working for the Trust."

The evening drew on and everyone started to warm to Perry Dupree, the atmosphere was relaxed and the

conversation ranged from football to food, there was laughter and banter and all was well in the Cyprus night. Jo had just got into her stride with her experiences at University when the night was pierced to the heart by an other-worldly light that suddenly filled the night with the scream of a million voices. The four people on the pool-side sat in stunned silence for who knows how long until Howard Fulton came running from the direction of the main house.

“What the hell’s going on Howard, Jim called as he approached, the words left his mouth but it seemed like the sound was drowned out by the light and sound.

“I don’t know Jim, the computer just went crazy, I looked up and saw the beam of light in the sky, it’s coming from the labs’,” spluttered Howard obviously concerned, “It’s like the night at the museum, the same light.”

Jim didn’t hear the last part of Howard’s answer, Peter was in the lab; he was already running full tilt in that direction. As he rounded the corner of the house he saw the spike of light shooting straight up from the roof of the laboratory block and all the time the scream continued so consistently smooth yet it cut into the brain like a saw.

“Peter,” Jim shouted as he crashed through the door of the lab’,” are you alright?”

Peter was standing at the far end of the lab with John and Dimitri, John shouted, “Stay back from it Jim, we’re OK but we have no idea what it can do.”

Jim looked around to see Howard, Dupree, Carol and Jo stood behind him, Howard was holding the females back while Dupree was leaning across to see in through the open window. The lab was illuminated only by the ethereal light emanating from the object in the centre of the bench, all other lights were out and the soft-screens around the lab were flickering with zigzag patterns. The effect was like a scene from some sci-fi video.

“Can we get it back into the box;” called Jim over the screaming, “use some of that shelving to knock it in.”

Howard took a step forward and placed a hand on Jim’s shoulder, “Jim if this light goes straight through the room, the box isn’t going to do any good.”

“True,” admitted Jim, “but the box is lead lined. John, try it.”

John went into the office and retrieved the film box the artefact had travelled from Ethiopia in, opened it and crawling along the floor like a commando, placed it below the bench, then crawled back. Peter had retrieved a piece of spare racking from the far corner of the lab which John took without a word. The racking was only three meters long so John had to approach the object once again, when he was within reach he knelt and using the angle of the strut as a cradle slowly pushed the light source toward the waiting box. The artefact slipped twice and rolled across the bench during the process but although it turned over each time the light beam remained in the vertical attitude. After some minutes the object finally reached the edge of the bench where John thought the box was situated below. Just as John was preparing to make the final shove Jo pushed past Howard and her Father and ran forward, grabbed the box and held its open end to the object and shouted, “Now John.” John gave the strut a slight nudge and the thing rolled into the box while Jo slammed the lid shut. Everyone held their breath as the locks snapped into place then saw that the light continued to stream heavenward through the lead-lined box.

“What the hell did you do that for Jo,” her Father shouted.

Jo looked defiant and as she passed Jim said, “You forget, I was holding it last time.”

“OK, you three, come around here and let’s get outside,” ordered Jim, “as Jo has shown it doesn’t seem to be harmful.”

John lead the others around the far side of the lab and out through the door into the night, "So what do we do now?" he asked Jim, who shrugged his shoulders and continued to stare the skyward to where the beam was lost in the blackness of space itself. Then as suddenly as it had started the spike of light disappeared and an eerie silence fell over the compound. The Lab lights flickered back on as did the compound light in the local area, Jim had not noticed that they were out as well, and the group realised that everyone else was outside also. The remnants of the excavation crew, the domestic staff as well as the group outside the lab block were all standing in stunned silence staring up at the star studded Mediterranean sky.

John and Dimitri darted back inside the lab and found that the soft-screens had come back on and the computers seemed unaffected by the incident. Dimitri went straight to the video hard-drive to replay what had happened but the period of the actual activation was blank, "Dam, there is no evidence on the HD," he said as he kicked the leg of the bench. John was checking that the Local Area Network, the LAN was intact and had not been damaged by the incident. As John heard a noise behind him he glanced around to see Jim looking up at the ceiling where the light beam had passed through it. The roof was unmarked and whole, but Jim persisted to stare at the spot. John's attention returned to his computer. Jim at last moved toward the office where Dimitri had settled to testing his Video-drive, "I didn't expect the cameras to work when everything else was knocked out, don't beat yourself up about it," said Jim.

"Dimitri; have you saved a whole lot of really big files on the LAN tonight," they heard John's voice ask.

"No," answered Dimitri, "Why?"

"Because someone has added about fifty terabytes to the system," John answered.

“What,” shouted Jim, “we’ve only got fifty-six terabytes in the system, that’s not possible.”

“Well it’s there,” said John.

“What time was it stored to the system,” Jim asked.

“Just a minute I’m interrogating the system,” came the answer.

Dimitri suddenly became aware that the others had followed Jim into the lab, including Perry Dupree, he gently nudged Jim and indicated with a slight nod of his head toward Dupree. Jim looked in the direction of the nod and realised what Dimitri was silently saying. “Forget it, Jim whispered, “I have no idea how to explain tonight away to him, bolted horses and stable doors come to mind.”

“Sorry,” said Dimitri, “bottled horses and stables, I am not understanding you.”

“Doesn’t matter,” said Jim.

“You’re not going to believe this”, John almost shouted, “every byte of that was created during the period that gawdam thing was powered up.”

“Really,” said Jim, his voice cracking with excitement, “what’s in the files?”

“I sure wish I knew,” said John, nothing I’ve got will open them; as far as I can see it’s all trinary code.”

“That makes no sense what the heck is ‘trinary code’?”

“As far as I can tell it seems to be like binary but instead of using the two state numbers of ‘on’ and ‘off’, one and zero; this uses three states, ‘negative’, ‘neutral’ and ‘positive’; at least that’s the closest I can come to describing it” said John as he scratched his head. “I’ve never seen anything like it but I’m no expert in computers.”

Jim rejoined the group in the middle of the lab, “Well” he said, “You have joined us at a very interesting point in time Perry, I think we could all do with a drink, shall we return to the pool area?”

The group made their way in stunned silence back to the pool whilst John packed the Constellation Object away in

its box and took it to the Depository, where it was locked up in a secure cabinet. John then joined the others pool-side; he found them sitting in silence, glasses in hand huddled around a bottle of brandy. John helped himself to a double and collected a chair from the adjacent table, when he was seated he broke the tension, "Would you call that a result or not."

Jim first glared at John then broke into a smile, "I think that might qualify as a result, if we are desperate."

"What in the name of all that is holy was that thing," asked Perry.

After a moment's thought Jim replied, "It's one of the artefacts from the Ethiopian dig that arrived here last week, it's done this before so we brought it back early, the guys have been investigating it since. Don't ask anything else because we can't tell you, we just don't know how or why it happens."

There was silence for a over a minute and Jim could see Perry thinking things through, finally he said, "Does this have anything to do with the incident at the Cairo Museum two weeks ago?"

"Incident?" said Jim.

"There have been rumours going around that something weird happened one night, I think it was the twenty-fourth of June, there were reports of a light beam emanating from the museum up into the sky. From descriptions I have heard it sounds very similar to this incident tonight."

There seemed no point now in deigning what was blatantly obvious, so Jim admitted, "Yes we think there is a connection but we have no idea what that connection is, yet."

"I see," said Perry, "Well I for one have had enough excitement fore one day, I think I will retire if you do not mind, good night ladies, gentlemen." With a wane smile he rose and disappeared into the accommodation block, seconds later the light in his room went on. The others looked at each other with raised eyebrows.

Cairo Museum, Egypt.

21:05 (local time) Sunday, July 6th,
2031

Outside the Cairo Museum it was as if a bomb had been detonated, four fire appliances had arrived and several rescue units; there were dozens of police cars scattered around the streets surrounding the museum. The main doors had been shattered and several windows had been smashed to gain access. Alarm sirens were sounding in chorus with emergency vehicles. No one actually knew what had happened other than there had been a local power outage and that a green-blue beam of light had been reported shooting out of the top of the museum building with a sound like a million people screaming. Police and fire officers had broken into the building but could find no other damage, they found the beam coming out of the floor to one end of the main exhibition hall. The Director had been contacted and everyone had been waiting for him to arrive when the beam disappeared as suddenly as it had begun. No one had been allowed to approach the beam and there had been no injuries but the emergency services had remained until the all-clear was given.

Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque was still about seven kilometres from the museum when his com-unit sounded that a very special text message had been received. Without stopping he pressed the 'read' button and a synthesised voice started to relay the text verbally.

'You have received one text package from Perry Dupree, do you wish to hear this message?' the voice announced.

Al-Faroque said "Read."

'Your message reads: Something strange has occurred here tonight. We were disturbed at around ten o'clock by a screaming noise and a beam of light stretching up into the

sky. This beam emanated from a small artefact that was under test in the laboratory, it has the ability to pass through solid objects including lead leaving no damage. Beam switched off of own accord after about ten minutes, it does not seem to be dangerous and gives off no radiation. This incident similar to one on the night of the twenty-fourth of June. Please advise on actions. Perry Dupree. Message ends, do you wish to send a reply?’

“No reply,” stated Al-Faroque emphatically, as he completed his journey.

Jerusalem, Israel

21:55 (local time) Sunday, July 6th,
2031

I was one of those balmy suffocating Jerusalem nights when the city gave back all the heat it had gorged during one of the hottest days of the year. There was not a breath of a breeze and the light cloud cover made things even worse as the lights of the city were reflected back, giving the air a golden glow. The clubs were just getting into full-swing as the last of the tourists wandered back to their respective hotels or sat outside of bars relaxing; the tour buses shuttled they way around the district making their various drops after their visits to the country’s antiquities. The city was hot but at peace.

Peace continued to be a novelty after centuries of conflict and nearly eighty years of the tenuous, trouble-torn rule of the Israeli State. There were still individual pockets of Arab resistance but the sharing of the city had generally been a success, as was the agreement between Israel and Palestine to respect the borders drawn up by the E.U. Less than ten people had died due to hostilities over the past ten years and in these cases both governments had treated the incidents as murder rather than terrorism.

These incidents had occurred mainly around the shared holy sites of Judaism, Islam and the Christian faiths but generally the three religions co-existed with each other in peace and understanding. The major factor in achieving this co-existence was the Calcutta Accord overseen by leaders of the Sikh community in two-thousand and twenty-one, where it was at last recognised that all three faiths shared the same God. The Council of Jehovah had been formed the following year, consisting of leaders of all the senior leaders from all three religions and fractions. The Council had met on a quarterly basis since its inception and after so many centuries there was now an understanding between the members.

On the Temple Mount the multi-faith security detail were also relaxing after a busy day of safeguarding the sacred site and were sat around the outer walls in small groups talking. It started as a low rumble deep in the ground, the rock beneath the guard's feet began to vibrate, low vibrations at first but they gradually increased in frequency numbing the officer's feet and legs. One of the security men started to run towards the office calling, 'Earthquake, earthquake', but before he had covered half of the distance his legs gave out and he crashed to the shuddering ground. Within minutes all twenty officers of the Joint Security Service were sitting or laying on the ground surrounding the temple in total disarray and confusion. Their commanding officer, Uri Mayer, was on his back on the plaza in front of the main entrance when the vibrations came to their culmination and the blue-green spike shot up from near the centre of the temple dome. He threw himself over onto his stomach and covered his head with his arms, expecting that at any time the laser would cause an explosion that would blast them all to heaven, an explosion that never came. What came was the noise. He covered his ears with his hands but the screaming penetrated them into his inner ear, the pain went through his being like a hot

knife and then everything went black as Uri lost consciousness, joining the rest of his detail in blissful forced sleep.

Down in the city the only place that noticed the vibration was the university where several signals sent by sensors told the geology department that there had been a small earthquake near the Temple Mount. The incident was recorded and promptly forgotten, there had been a number of these recorded over the past two weeks but none were significant enough to be remarkable. In the touristy areas there were remarkable gasps of surprise as the beam of light filled the space between earth and the cloud cover above. The assumption was that this phenomenon was part of the tourist illuminations or the beginning of a laser show. There was general disappointment when later the beam was switched off and a general 'Awl' murmured through the streets around the Mount.

On the Mount itself the Security officers were regaining their consciousness. Uri was holding his head and trying to think what had happened when one of the Christian officers came to him, "Are you OK Uri," he asked in broken English, now the international language of the Middle-East.

"I think so, is everyone else all-right?"

"I do not have any information other than from my patrol, but we are OK," the officer answered. Uri struggled to his feet, his head was aching and his ears were ringing but he lifted his radio to call everyone in. The radio was silent and under the flood light he could see that it had been smashed when he fell. The alternative was to get to the command office and use the base unit, so Uri set off as quickly as he could manage.

"Start checking the other patrols on this side of the site," he said over his shoulder as he disappeared into the night. When Uri arrived at his office there were already two of the three-man patrols there discussing the incident, he

immediately pressed the 'Send all channels' button, "All patrols check in please."

Within a few seconds all four remaining patrols had radioed in to say that they were no worse for wear, other than a ringing in the ears and slight headaches. Uri ordered his second in command and 'Alpha' patrol to meet him inside the temple in five minutes and he made off for the main entrance.

Uri ordered an officer to the main lighting panel to activate all the internal lights, when the surroundings exploded in vivid light he saw that inside the temple all seemed well at first glance. Incredibly the roof seemed undamaged despite the laser beam hitting it almost dead centre, Uri felt confused by this and walked towards the centre of the temple.

"Sir, you had better see this," called one of the patrols near where the laser had hit. Uri hurried to where the officer was leaning over looking at something, what greeted him filled him with dread. The floor had cracked open right across the temple from one side to the other; there was a jagged gap that was wide enough to get his fingers into up to the second joint. Leaving the lights on and forgetting about the others Uri dashed back to the entrance grabbing a torch from the nearest officer on his way. He plunged back into the darkness outside and without losing any speed he ran around the outside of the temple to the position of the internal crack. Almost immediately his fears were confirmed as he saw the fracture highlighted in the beam of the torch, out here the fissure seemed wider and indeed it was, here his whole hand and the first few ten centimetres of his forearm disappeared into the crack. Uri followed the fracture to the edge of the plaza where the wall was split, he carefully leaned over the retaining wall, shining his torch down the rock face and saw the fissure disappear into the darkness.

Within ten minutes Uri had returned to the office and was reporting everything to his superior officer via a dedicated com-link. General Leonardo Marconi was part of the Vatican contingent and held the rank in the 'Swiss Guard' that guarded the Papal City, "I will be with you within the next thirty minutes," the General told Uri, "make sure the plaza lights are kept on so I can see to land." "Yes Sir," responded Uri and saluted before the screen went blank.

Twenty minutes later Uri heard the LIMO hovering just above the flood light's range, the General was obviously doing an aerial re-con before landing. Three minutes later the petrol blue LIMO touched down in the centre of the plaza and six members of the security detail formed up alongside the machine. The doors opened and General Marconi stepped out, "Dismiss you men, this is not an official visit, get back to your posts," he shouted.

Uri stepped forward to greet the General, "Sorry about that Sir, they seem to do it automatically," he said.

"Never mind that, show me this damage Captain," the General barked.

Uri took the General across the Plaza to the place where the fissure entered the Temple and then led the way inside so that he could inspect the damage. "I've already had a look on both sides of the mount, the whole thing seems to have cracked in half," continued the General, "Tell me more about this laser beam that hit the temple Captain."

Uri went through the story again but in more detail for the General's benefit, when he had finished he asked, "Do you think it's an attack Sir?"

"I just don't know what to think Captain but I need you to keep silent about this until we know what has happened, we have received no other reports thus far, so I doubt if anyone has noticed the fissure. I want you to make sure that this place is kept closed tomorrow and that is, *closed* to everyone, you understand?"

“Yes Sir,” responded Uri, “what reason do we give Sir?”

“Say we have discovered some building defect and the area is off-limits on health and safety grounds, until further notice,” ordered the General. “Lets keep this under wraps Captain, we don’t want anyone jumping to the wrong conclusions, do we?”

“No Sir,” responded Uri.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

22:40 (local time) Sunday, July 6th,
2031

As soon as Dupree’s light had gone on in his room Dimitri, followed by John and Jim had taken their leave from the group and returned to the laboratory office. As they arrived the monitoring equipment that Dimitri had installed was just starting to bleep to indicate that a transmission had taken place from room thirty-five. Quickly Dimitri accessed the hard-drive and downloaded the file to the soft-screen, there was a moments delay whilst the processor unscrambled the message and then the full text appeared on the screen. The three read the message in silence.

“Dimitri can this equipment monitor incoming messages,” asked Jim, “as well as outgoing.”

“Not unless we can get the security frequency of his com-unit,” said Dimitri “we could then access his unit remotely.”

“How do we do that ,” asked John.

“We need to get ahold of the unit and access it,” answered Dimitri, but I am sure he will have an access security code or a biometric code, so even if we get hold of it there is little chance of accessing the unit.”

“Can we use a scanner Dimitri, “asked Jim.

“Yes we could, but that would mean monitoring every transmission on the local frequency,” answered Dimitri, then his face changed with inspiration, “we could record all

the transmissions and then do a search for key words, it shouldn't be that difficult, just take a bit of work.”
“Great,” said Jim, “let's do it.”

EBC News Studio, London, England
08:44 (local time) Monday, July 7th,
2031

Erin Martindale, co-presenter of the news-magazine programme 'Good Morning Europe', took a deep breath and read the first few lines of the auto-prompt as she waited for the floor manager to count her in. The monitor showed a field reporter at Stonehenge finishing a linked piece about UFO sightings, the floor manager gave the signal for ten seconds and then continued to count down, "three . . . two . . . one," his hand fell to point at Erin.

"Welcome back, well as you have seen we are recovering from an extraordinary evening yesterday-night. Reports have been coming in since mid-evening last night of various anomalies across Europe and surrounding regions including India, China, North Africa. We have received many hundreds of pictures and all these have been posted on our web-site, here is just a selection," the monitor showed the first of the pictures and Erin relaxed. The pictures flashed onto the monitor screen one after the other for over a minute and then Erin was cued in again.

"The mass of reports emerging this morning suggests that something of significance occurred last evening. Video signals were disrupted and numerous reports of power outages across certain zones of Europe and several incidents linked to ancient historical sites. One explanation, put forward by several organisations, is that we have been visited by extraterrestrials. SETI has made a statement to say that whatever happened last evening was terrestrial in origin as their receivers detected no off-world activity, no signals were received other than background noise. The European Air Force has stated that no targets were detected in or around the Earth's atmosphere and the Moon detection station also confirms that there were no targets within a million miles of Earth."

“Reports in from both Cairo and Nicosia suggest that one or both of these sites was the epicentre of last night’s incidents. We take you over to our reporter outside of the Cairo Museum. Janice, what can you tell us?”

“Erin I am outside the Cairo Museum where last night saw a full-scale launch of the emergency services when a beam of light shot up through the roof of the museum into the night sky, accompanying the light was a screaming sound. Although the museum remains closed to the public it is believed that the beam caused no damage despite originating from within the museum. I recorded this interview late last night with an eye-witness.”

The picture of the museum’s exterior was replaced by a night-time picture showing police cars and emergency vehicles with their blue, red and green flashing lights, Janice appeared in shot with an Egyptian man. “Rayhim, you were here earlier during the event were you?” she said to camera.

“Yes, yes,” said the witness, “It was incredible there was this blue, or green light like a laser beam that went straight up into the sky and the noise it was terrible.”

“Can you describe the noise,” Janice asked.

“It was like a thousand people screaming together. I have it on my com-unit,” said Raymin.

“Why didn’t you say so, have you got the unit with you,” responded Janice.

“Yes, it is here.”

“Can we tap into it please Ryhim, we will make it worth your while,” offered Janice.

“Of course,” said Rahim

The Picture saw a technician take the Com-unit from the witness and plug a cable into it, then hand the unit back.

“Viewers we seem to have an exclusive here, recorded pictures from last night’s incident as it happened,” Janice said to introduce the movie clip.

Rayhim was seen to press a button on the unit and a dark picture of the museum came up on the screen. The picture

tilted up from the front entrance of the museum to the roof and there in all its glory was the beam, like a nail of light hammered into the roof and disappearing into space. There was also the sound, the sound that made Janice's hair stand on end. After just forty-three seconds of the picture Janice appeared on the screen again with Rayhim holding onto his com-unit while a police officer with the disconnected cable in one hand tried to wrestle the unit away from him.

"What the hell are you doing," shouted Janice.

The police officer spoke calmly saying, "This com-unit and the video clip is to be confiscated as an evidence of a risk to national security."

At last Rayhim lost his grip on the com-unit when another officer intervened, the second officer told Rayhim, "You will have the unit returned after the clip has been removed for evidence." Both officers disappeared out of shot.

"Well there seems little else to say after this drama here in Cairo. This is Janice Stone returning you to the studio."

Erin appeared on screen again, on her face was an expression of surprise, "Well thank you Janice that was more than interesting but at least we now have some pictures of the incident. We can now take you over to Nicosia Cyprus, where we have some more breaking news. Mark Sergeant is in Cyprus."

Good morning from Nicosia Cyprus where it has just come to light that the incident on this island centred on the compound of the Joanne Markson Research Trust. No one from the Trust has made any statement as yet but it is hoped that we will hear something from them soon. I have been reliably informed that almost the whole Trust are currently resident here, the Markson family arrived a few days ago and the excavation team returned from Ethiopia just two days ago. The Trust was set up after Joanne Markson made her famous discovery near the Choroikoitia Neolithic village right here in Cyprus. The Trust was set up

to investigate high technology artefacts from the distant past.” Mark’s hand went to his right ear and he listened intently for a few seconds, “Erin I have just heard that the Markson Trust will be making a statement at around mid-day our time, For now back to the studio, Erin.”

Thanks Mark, it’s just coming up to nine o’clock here in London and the News on the hour. We’re here for another hour so stay tuned; I’ll be back in ten.” The news highlighted the events of the previous evening and led with the video clip from Cairo. The first five minutes of the news was totally taken up by the incidents and interviews from witnesses.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

11:06 (local time) Monday, July 7th,
2031

“OK turn it off I’ve heard enough,” said Jim to Joanne after watching the main news from EBC.

“Are we going to get the blame for this Dad,” asked Jo.

“It’s a good safe bet that we will,” answered her dad, “it would seem to me that it’s the constellation artefact that triggers all this. It is more than a coincidence that these incidents have happened twice and each time that artefact has powered up. This has never happened before that object was unearthed.” Jim stopped talking, thoughtful for a moment.

“What is it Dad, I know that expression.”

“Jo, come with me, we need to talk to John,” Jim said as he made to leave the lounge. The two crossed the compound to the lab where John was at work on the spurious computer files. “How’s it going John?”

“It isn’t. I’m no computer nerd, we need an expert for this job Jim,” complained John, I’m getting no-place fast.”

“OK,” said Jim, “leave that with me. I need to talk to you two together about the constellation object. John, yesterday you dashed off when you heard Perry was arriving, tell me where the object was at that time?”

“It’s my fault Jim, I just left it on the bench right in front of the window where it could be seen, John apologised.”

“I’m not worried about that,” said Jim, “what I am interested in is the conditions the object sat in before the power-up. So what you are saying is it sat on the bench in direct sunlight for at least a couple of hours yesterday afternoon, is that right?”

“Sure, I guess that’s about it,” confirmed John, “Where are you going with this Jim?”

“I’m not sure yet. Jo can you think back to the first power-up, what were you doing with it, where was the object during the day,” Jim asked.

“I think I know where you’re going with this Dad,” said Jo her face beaming with excitement, “That day the artefact was sitting on the table outside my tent for most of the day, we had no security issues out there so we could do things like that. I was making sketches of the thing and plotting the star map but I kept being interrupted, that’s why I was still working on it late that night.”

The implications suddenly dawned on John and a shallow smile appeared on his face, “It charges up from the sunlight, it works on solar energy!”

“Exactly,” said Jim, “most of the time it’s been hidden in some sort of container or it’s been in the office where there are no windows. Pity is we dare not test that in case we have another incident like last night, have you seen the news broadcasts today Jim?”

“Unfortunately, yes, John answered. Have you thought what you’re going to say, there’s a media circus outside the main gate.”

“No, but I will have to think of something in the next twenty-five minutes,” answered Jim.

Thirty minutes later Jim was making for the main gate with printed press releases in a document wallet. As he approached the gate he saw the extent of the circus John had told him about, the drive to the gate was totally blocked with some thirty or so vehicles sprouting a forest of dish aerials from their roofs. As the reporters saw him approaching they formed a mob jostling for pole position and thrusting recording devices and microphones through the bars of the gate toward him. It was Jim's intention to exit the compound through the pedestrian gate but he rethought this and decided to stay within the gates. There was a cacophony of voices as he came within range of the microphones. Jim stood about three meters back from the gate and held up his hand for silence; eventually the babble of questioning voices receded to an almost quiet calm. "Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen," shouted Jim over the residual murmur, "I have a prepared statement, which I propose to read to your cameras, I will not be taking any questions and there will be no further statements at this time." Jim took a sheet of paper from the wallet and began to read aloud from it:

'Following the events of the evening of the eleventh of July this organisation has ascertained that there is a connection between an artefact that was discovered in Ethiopia a few weeks ago, and which is in our secure possession, at this facility and the events of last evening. The object that was shown on 'Euro Today' on the twenty-fourth of June, is the property of the Ethiopian government and is on loan to this Trust for research purposes. The properties of this object are unknown at present but this is being investigated by our laboratories, it is an extremely important artefact that may have repercussions on the history of this planet and maybe for our future power needs. The object represents a high level of technology that dates back to a time when there should have been

only stone age technologies, in the form of stone tools, not advanced electronic components like this object. We have in our possession other objects, as you will already be aware that supports a theory of an earlier technical society and we, the Trust, will be continuing with our work to discover the truth. Thank you for your attention.'

“That’s it Ladies and Gentlemen, now will you please clear our drive so that my people can get in and out of the compound, there will be no further communication. Thank you,” concluded Jim.

There followed another clamour of indistinguishable questions from the media corps at the gate as Jim walked away. Twenty minutes later all but three of the vehicles had left the drive but those three made no effort to pack up and seemed intent on remaining. Jim reached the house and made for his office.

“That was a very polished performance Jim,” said an accented voice as he crossed the lounge.”

Jim recognised Perry’s voice and turned to see him watching TV in the far corner of the room, “I’ve had a lot of practice over the past few years Perry.”

“Do you really have no idea what that thing is Jim?

Jim stopped his march to the office, “Perry, we haven’t the faintest idea what it is, it is obviously linked to other objects or sites across Europe at least but other than that we are clueless.”

“What exactly are you trying to prove with all this,” Perry indicated his surroundings, “what is the point.”

“The truth, Perry,” said Jim, “the truth,” Jim started to move towards his office once more, then thought better of it and sat down facing Dupree. “There is something very important that we are missing, world history has it wrong and I have a feeling that it’s got it very wrong. When Jo made that find years ago she gave humanity a second

chance to get history right and we took it. Who knows where it will lead, we could end up being related to aliens, though I doubt it. In the end we can't build society on a lie, may be that's where we have gone wrong and why society is in the mess it is in. Don't you think that is worth doing Perry."

Dupree looked a little astonished and answered hesitantly, "I suppose your are correct, however . . ." His last comment was lost as at that moment Jim's Com-unit sounded in the office.

Jim stood and started to go, "What price truth Perry," Jim said as a parting shot.

Jim arrived in his office and closed the door, the screen announced that someone called Barney Lane was calling, Jim frowned puzzled but he pressed the answer button of the com-unit anyway, there was no video, "Hi it's Jim Markson here, can I help you."

"Hi there this is Barney Lane," said the voice and after a slight pause, "from Stonehenge, we spoke last week."

"Ah, yes, Barney; how are you," asked Jim.

"I'm fine thanks," said Barney, "I just called because I wasn't sure if you heard the news, we had another of them incidents last night."

"Ah, I was wondering if you had," laughed Jim, "most of the rest of Europe has but I haven't got around to checking details as yet. So Barney, what did you see last night?"

"Well nothing directly, I wasn't actually there, my shift finished at five but I only live a couple of miles away. It was just after eight here when my TV went crazy, so I went outside to see if my dish was OK. I looked in the direction of the henge and there was this laser beam thing shooting up but it was sort of flashing on and off like there was a bad connection or something."

"Was there any sound with it barney," asked Jim.

“There may have been, I was two miles away see,” answered Barney, “but I think there was a intermittent buzzing but it may have been me imagination.”

“Do you have a computer there Barney,” enquired Jim.

“My son does.”

“Can you ask him to check to see if there are any spurious files that have appeared on his drive, you may be too far away but it’s worth checking,” said Jim. “Is there anything else you noticed at the time?”

“I took some digital video, would you like me to send it to you,” said Barney.

“That would be helpful, thanks,” said Jim, “are you at Stonehenge now?”

“Yes,” came the answer.

“Is there any damage this time,” Jim asked.

“No, not as far as I can see up to now”, he answered.

“Barney,” said Jim, “thank you so much for contacting me, what you have said is very interesting. I am sending you my personal contact addresses and you are on our contact list, so if there is anything else please don’t hesitate to contact me.”

“No problem Mr Markson,” Barney said, “speak again soon; Bye.”

“Bye Barney, thanks again,” Jim signed off, “hmm that’s interesting,” he said to himself out-loud.

Twelve minutes later a video package arrived from Barney and Jim lost no time in playing it on his soft-screen. The video was not of the best quality but it showed exactly what Barney had described, if one screwed up ones eyes you could be excused for thinking it was one of those old-time strip lights that was faulty. The beam flickered and flashed like sparks jumping between electrodes. “Computer,” called Jim, enhance sound and filter out foreground noise.” The computer obeyed and played the soundtrack again, Jim heard something at the edge of his hearing. “Computer, amplify the sounds in phase with the image

flashing.” This time the computer produced what Barney had thought he heard, a definite buzz every time the beam appeared. Computer, slow down playback by a factor of one-hundred. Again the computer obeyed, now Jim could hear something different; within that buzz was an intermittent blip noise at the peak of the beams brightness. “Computer, save to a new sub-file” commanded Jim. ‘Well done Barney’ he said under his breath.

Jim sat in thought for some time, doodling, and scribbling key thoughts on his desk pad, he was in a world of his own when the lunch chime brought him back to reality. When he opened the office door and turned to go he noticed that Dupree was still sitting where he had been some hour or so before and seemed to also be deep in thought. “Are you going to join us for lunch Perry,” he asked the Frenchman. “Pardon,” he replied, “ah, sorry, I was somewhere else entirely. What did you say Jim?”

“I asked if you were joining us for lunch,” repeated Jim.

“Thank you, yes,” said Perry as he rose from his chair. The two walked to the dining hall together.

“You looked like you were wrestling with something back there,” said Jim

Perry looked at Jim with what looked like surprise, “Yes actually I was, was it that obvious?”

“I am afraid so; is it about us and the funding,” asked Jim, “is there anything we can do to help?”

“Yes I may need to have a tête-à-tête with you later,” admitted Perry as they entered the dining hall. Jim nodded and made for his seat next to Carol.

John and Peter arrived five minutes later and took their usual seats, “Not like you to be late for food Peter,” commented his Dad.

“We’ve been struggling with those files Dad,” Peter said as he grabbed a bread roll.

“No luck yet then John”, Jim asked.

“Just a waste of time Jim, we need an expert,” replied John.

“Dad, why don’t I contact Professor Gwilliam, you know he lectures in Communication Technology as well and he’s a whiz with computer code and maths,” suggested Peter.

“It would be a help Jim,” put in John.

“I thought about it,” said Jim, “but I didn’t want to bother him while he’s on holiday.”

“I’m sure he wouldn’t mind,” encouraged Peter, “he says that he’s always bored by the end of holidays.”

“Peter, he’s only been on holiday for three days, I don’t think he’s even settled in to his villa yet,” said his Dad.

“But I don’t think he’d mind Dad honestly, he’s always asking about our work.”

“Ok, ok, I’ll contact him after lunch, now just act normally and eat,” whispered Jim.

“Actually Dad I just did, fifteen minutes ago,” admitted Peter, “he’s more than happy, so we sent the first ten files to him.”

“Why Do I bother,” said Jim shaking his head.

As Jim left the dining hall Dimitri also left, they came together outside the door and Dimitri fell into step alongside Jim, “Can I have a quick word Jim.”

“Of course, what is it Dimitri.”

“I think we may have fished a text package for Dupree,” Dimitri said.

“What does it say?”

Dimitri took a pad from his shirt pocket and handed it to Jim who took it to a seat under an old Olive Tree where he read the message.

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MESSAGE RECEIVED. CONCERNING
INFORMATION, NEED YOU TO ACT URGENTLY.
MARKSONS MUST BE STOPPED, WE NEED YOU
TO SABOTAGE AS FOLLOWS:
1. DISABLE COMMUNICATIONS
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2. ACQUIRE OR DESTROY ARTEFACTS (FIRE MAY BE GOOD OPTION)
 3. IF OTHER OPTIONS NOT POSSIBLE MAY NEED TO ELIMINATE PRINCIPLE PERSONELL IF THIS IS BEYOND CAPABILITIES WE HAVE RESOURCES AT OUR DISPOSAL
- CONFIRM RECIEVED AND UNDERSTOOD, THEN CONFIRM OPERATIONS AS COMPLETE.

HACJAF

Sent 12:17 07.07.31 origin: Cairo, Egypt.

“Well I think there is little doubt about who this is for,” mused Jim, “now I think I know what was on Perry’s mind before lunch. I wonder what he wants to talk to me about.”

“Jim be careful,” said Dimitri, it may be best to get your family out of here, you can use my house in Pathos if you like.”

“Thanks Dimitri I appreciate that offer,” said Jim clearly disturbed by the message, “has Perry sent a reply yet?”

“No, but he has read it for sure.”

“Keep this between us for the time being please Dimitri.”

“Sure.”

Jim returned to his office to think the situation through, the one thing he could not risk was his family, should he send Carol and the kids back to Weymouth would they be any safer there than here in this compound? Jim had just about come to the decision that the Nicosia compound had the better security when his com-unit announced a call. He flipped the cover on the com without checking who was calling but the face of Declan Brook was all the identification he needed. “Hello Declan, what can we do for you,” Jim said into the unit.

“Jim, what the blazes is going on down there,” was Declan’s opening greeting.

“You know as much as I do, probably more, things just got a little out of hand here last night,” answered Jim.

Declan was upset and his words were almost spat out of his mouth, “You’re telling me they got out of hand and from what I hear they are going to get even further out of hand. Jim, I thought we had an agreement, I helped you a couple of weeks ago, you agreed to let me in on any developments, so why didn’t you contact me last night?”

“Declan, I’m sorry,” said Jim, “things happened and I just haven’t had time to think about them yet, when my family are under threat the last thing I think about is playing up to the media.”

“Who’s under threat of what Jim?”

“Sorry, I should not have said that,” admitted Jim.

“Oh no you don’t, you have said it now there’s no going back, what’s this all about,” insisted Declan. Jim outlined what had happened concerning Perry Dupree and the text packages. Have you informed the police yet Jim, I think they should be told, and I think you should tell the Cyprus Office of Antiquities as well.”

“That’s a good idea,” said Jim, “after all they are our main funders.”

“OK Jim, I’ll do some digging about this Al-Faroque character, but, and there is always a but isn’t there, I want exclusive rights to this whole story. I will manage all your press releases and deal with the TV people for you, what I want, is to come out there with you for the next few months with a camera crew. I will not be there one-hundred percent of the time but I will make your compound my operational base until further notice,” Declan continued.

“Do I have time to think this through, it’s a big step and it should be the family’s decision not mine alone,” asked Jim.

“I can appreciate that Jim, how long do you need to talk to them,” asked Declan.

"I don't want to tell the kids about the threats yet, but I need to tell Carol and then consult with Jo and Peter," Jim stated, "could you give me twenty-four hours?"

"Sure," said Declan, "ring me tomorrow, but think about this, having a camera crew around will definitely help with your security and the EBC will help toward your funding with a good size fee."

"Good point," agreed Jim, "we'll speak tomorrow." Jim closed the connection and once more sat in thought for another twenty minutes before he went off to find Carol.

EBC Headquarters, London

14:47 (local time) Monday, July 7th,
2031

Declan closed his com-unit and turned to his desk screen, the panel sprang to life and he pressed the on-screen soft-button for internal communications. A number pad appeared on the screen and he entered a four digit number. A few seconds later the number-pad was replaced by the picture of a balding man in a suit and tie, behind him was a misty aerial view of the Thames. The man looked into the screen and said, "Good afternoon Declan, what can I do for you?"

"Good afternoon Sir," Declan responded, "I need your authorisation on something that I think may be very big."

The Assistant Director of EBC looked critical as he smiled into the screen, "OK tell me about it, you have exactly sixty seconds." Quickly Declan apprised the Assistant Director of the situation whilst the executive continued to work on papers in front of him. Declan finished his proposal and the director shuffled his papers. "I agree with you Declan this does look as though it could be a big story and because it affects us by the signal interruptions I think we should be

involved in this. If this Markson guy gives the OK you have my authorisation to follow it up, but I want regular updates at least once a week. I will set up an account as soon as you tell me it's on. Well done Declan," the director concluded, "Looks like we get to trust your nose for a story again. Enjoy yourself."

No sooner than the screen blanked than Declan accessed the EBC database, the computer commenced its search for Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque, within a second the report came back '*Finished search*', the computer stated. "Send to print," Declan ordered. Twelve sheets of tightly printed paper slid into the tray with several pictures, "Computer, summarise to print," said Declan and another two sheets dropped into the tray. He took the papers and started to read, five minutes later he placed the papers into his briefcase and left for the Egyptian Embassy.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus
17:22 (local time) Monday, July 7th,
2031

Carol Markson sat dumbfounded, staring out of the window towards the city, after Jim told her about the text package, she immediately felt concerned and then shocked. Outside the late afternoon sun was turning everything a warm shade of gold and as Carol watched the scene her feelings turned from anger to indignation. "Dam it Jim this is our home and no one is going to drive us out," she said at last. "That's all very well Carol but we have the kids to think about, not to mention those we employ, we have a responsibility to them as well," added Jim. "What do they think about it," said Carol, "have you asked them?" "Not yet," admitted Jim.

“Well I suggest you do,” his wife prompted, “and I don’t think you should keep it from Jo and Peter, they are not kids any more and after all this is Jo’s Trust.”

“I guess you’re right, I’ll tell Jo and Peter and then call a staff meeting for tomorrow.”

“Good,” said Carol as she stood to leave, “what we’re fighting for is truth and what we believe in. This thing as gone too far to let some corrupt archaeologist and an American hoodlum stop us now,” Carol disappeared through the door but within two seconds she reappeared again. “And Jim, don’t worry, contact Declan Brook and agree to his offer, the sooner he and his crew are over here the better,” with that she finally left Jim alone.

In the next two hours before dinner Jim was extremely busy. First he spoke to Jo and Peter, Jo’s reaction was a carbon copy of her mother’s, while Peter wanted to arm everyone and start round-the-clock guard shifts. He then made contact with Declan and agreed to give him the exclusive he had asked for, Declan updated Jim about the fact that the Assistant Director of the EBC had approved a budget for the project and arranged to arrive, with a crew, late the following day. Jim had just finished talking to Declan when Perry Dupree knocked on his office door. Jim looked up and bid him enter, as Perry sat himself in one of the spare chairs he noticed that he had an expression on his face that looked as if he were about to burst into tears. Jim poured him a glass of water from the cooler and noticed that his hands were shaking quite violently. “What ever is the matter with you, you look terrible,” said Jim feigning no knowledge of what been going on.

“Monsieur, I really need to tell you something, it has been tearing me apart for most of the day,” answered Perry.

“OK,” said Jim, “the floor is yours.”

Perry took a long draft from the glass then placed it on the occasional table, “I have to make a confession to you Monsieur Markson.

“Yes?” prompted Jim.

“I am not here as a representative of the French Government and there is no extra funding on offer,” admitted Dupree. “I am in fact here to spy on you for another person who is worried that you will discover something that will change accepted history. It is his reputation that he is concerned about and that he values above all else, this man is in a high position and highly regarded.”

Who is this ‘*gentleman*’,” Asked Jim.

Dupree regarded his hands for a few seconds and without looking up, said, “I don’t think I can tell you that, he is a powerful man. There is another who is also powerful and dangerous, I think you would call him a gangster, he makes millions out of pre-historic artefacts and has a personal collection that is said be worth billions. Of this man I would fear for my life.”

“So how come you agreed to spy on us Perry,” asked Jim.

“This ‘*gentleman*’ has forced me to do this for him because he has information that could result in me being recalled to France in disgrace,” admitted Dupree.

“Why have you decided to reveal all this to me Perry,” said Jim, “instead of just reporting back to your employers.”

“Today I have received a communication from them telling me to do something that I cannot do,” explained Perry.

“Since I have been here you and your family have treated me with respect and I have found that you are all decent people who are committed to what you are doing, and that is why I am informing you.”

“Perry, tell me what your employer has asked you to do,” Jim almost ordered.

Perry stared out of the window and would not look Jim in the eye, “I have been ordered to commit murder Monsieur, I am to stage an accident that kills you and your family but as I say I cannot do this thing.”

“Perry, I am very glad you have decided to come to me with this,” said Jim, “but you need to know that we actually knew

about your assignment before you arrived and we intercepted both your report last night and the text package you received this morning and we are taking the matter very seriously.”

“Ah, I see,” said Perry, “I was wondering why you were not showing the surprise; what do you propose to do with me?”

“I am not sure,” admitted Jim, “you have committed no crime so handing you over to the police is not an option. What will happen if you return to Cairo?”

“I can bet that the embassy will be receiving a report from my employer.” Perry stopped and considered for a moment, then asked, “Do you know who my employers are?”

“Yes; Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque and Homer Carter,” announced Jim.

Perry shook his head and looked Jim full in the face for the first time, “You know that they will send others to do this job when they know I have failed?”

“I suggest that you stay here for the time being,” suggested Jim, “this place is as safe as anywhere but it’s up to you.”

Merci Jim, I have taken rather a lot of back leave so if I may I will take you up on that offer, I may be able to help in some way, I have an archaeology degree and I do have diplomatic connections.”

“Well that’s settled then, why don’t you go and freshen up before dinner,” said Jim “and just relax tonight. I’ll see you later.” Dupree left Jim’s office and returned to his room. Jim also left his office, locked it and went off to find Carol, who he found in the kitchen supervising the kitchen staff and the evening’s dinner. Jim called Carol to one side and updated her on his meeting with Dupree.

“Do you trust him,” Carol asked.

“Just as far as I can throw him,” Jim shared with her, “but I have an idea of how he can be useful.”

“What about everyone else, there’s going to be a lot of suspicion and ill-feeling around towards Dupree,” said Carol.

“I know that,” answered Jim, “I’ll let everyone know after dinner tonight.”

The remainder of the evening was uneventful for which Jim was eternally thankful. Dinner was a restrained affair but everyone was politely friendly towards Perry, as thankfully Jim had managed to brief everyone who would be in contact with him. After dinner the family, John, Dimitri, Howard and Perry assembled by the pool to relax over drinks until one by one each retired for the night.

Adelphi Hotel, London

07:55 (local time) July Tuesday, 8th,
2031

Declan Brook awoke suddenly from a restless sleep, he had been working on the JMRT project until almost three in the morning and when his com-unit sounded he initially confused it with his wake up alarm. It took him a few seconds to get his thoughts together before he pressed the 'audio only' soft-button on his com-unit, "Declan Brook here, who is this?"

A precise but accented voice greeted him, "This is Ahmed Ataman here Mr. Brook, I am private secretary to the Consul for Egypt here in London, I believed you called to see the Consol yesterday."

"Yes I did," answered Declan, "are you calling with an appointment for me?"

"Not exactly," said Ahmed, "can you tell what you need to see the Consol about please?"

"No," said Declan, "I can't, its confidential and not something I would be prepared to share with, with the greatest respect, a private secretary."

"Then I am sorry I can not help Sir. . ."

"Look here," said Declan in as forceful a manner as he could muster, "I am trying to save your country a mighty lot of embarrassment and possibly save somebody's life. If you refuse to put me through then when this story hits the world press I hope you can justify yourself to your masters."

The connection went quiet for some seconds, then the voice returned, "Mr. Brook I have just noticed that the Consul is free now, would you like me to put you through?"

"Yes please," said Declan rather too sarcastically.

"Consul Al-Shaikh here, can I help you Mr. Brook?"

"I hope that what I have to say will help us both and some more innocent people besides Consul," said Declan.

"Mr Brook, my time is limited I am afraid, so if you wouldn't mind being succinct."

Declan's temper was beginning to rise by this point but he bit his lip, "Consul, I have information that one of your country's senior officers, one Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque of your Antiquities Department, is engaging in espionage against the Jo Markson Research Trust, an organisation engaged in the investigation of out of place artefacts. It would seem that he is planning violence against members of the Trust."

Mr. Brook, I am aware of Dr. Al-Faroque's issues with this organisation but I cannot imagine him contemplating violence or even espionage against anyone. Dr. Al-Faroque is a respected officer of the Egyptian government and a world renown scholar who is above reproach. Tell me Mr. Brook, what evidence do you have?"

"We have a text package that was intercepted from Dr. Al-Faroque to his operative in Cyprus," Declan informed the Consul.

"And this text-package, it is signed by Dr. Al-Faroque?"

"Of course not, would you sign an instruction to murder someone," asked Declan.

"Mr. Brook when you have incontrovertible evidence of Dr. Al-Faroque's involvement then please come back to me, in the mean time I wish you good morning." With that the connection was broken leaving Declan seething.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

08:31 (local time) Tuesday, July 8th,
2031

Peter crashed through the door to his parent's bedroom without ceremony, his Dad was already up and sitting in a chair by the window, his Mother must have been still asleep before Peter burst in, but she sat up rubbing her eyes. "Dad, you need to take this call from Professor Gwilliam," called Peter as he crossed the room to his father.

“Professor,” Jim said as he took Peter’s com-unit from him, “what can I do for you?”

“It’s these files that you sent to me,” the professor’s voice announced.

“I’m sorry about that; my son sent them to you without clearing it with me first Owen,” Jim apologised.

“There is certainly no need to apologise for Peter, he did exactly the right thing,” enthused the Professor. “These files are, shall we say fascinating I’ve been working on them since Peter sent them through, John was the one who assumed that the files were written in trinary, but that is only true for the designations, the actual files are constructed in septemial.”

“What in blazes is Septemial,” asked Jim.

“It is unique as far as I can tell, that’s what it is,” said Owen, “simply it’s a means of counting using ‘seven’ as your base, like binary uses two as its base, one and zero. I haven’t done any research on it yet but as far as I know this is the only case.”

“Is this significant Professor,” asked Jim.

“Significant; this message could be from another planet or universe even, if what Peter tells me is correct it may be the most significant message ever received by the human species,” the Professor blurted out as if the words were choking him. “Jim, you know I’m on vacation at the moment and I only have my soft-comp with me, Manchester is closed up so I wondered, would it be OK if I came over to you in Cyprus and used your facilities?”

Jim smiled, “Yes of course it’s OK, the more the merrier but I need to warn you we have a bit of a situation here, we are under threat of death and you may not want to risk that.”

“Jim, I have a feeling that this supersedes any threat, for the chance to work on this I would face the devil himself,” stated the Professor.

“Professor you will be most welcome,” said Jim.

“I was hoping you’d say that,” Owen replied, “I am already packed and just loading my LIMO, I’ll be there later today

“But it’s what, one-thirty AM there, wouldn’t it be better for you to get some sleep first,” suggested Jim.

“No, no, Jim, I can get my head down for a few hours while I’m over the Atlantic, there’s no time to loose,” came the reply, “see you later.” The connection was broken before Jim could make any further suggestions.

“We had better get some more food in, if any more people arrive we’ll be running out soon,” said Jim with a bemused look on his face.

“What was all that about,” asked Carol, still sat up in bed.

“Beats me, Dear, but Owen is certainly excited about something, I guess we’ll just have to wait until he arrives,” said Jim, “what’s the trip from Florida, eight, ten hours?”

“The way Prof pilots that super-LIMO it’s more like six hours,” advised Peter, “he thinks he’s still in the RAF.”

“So he should be here for four o’clock,” calculated Carol, “I’ll get the housekeeper to get an extra room ready, how many are in this camera crew with Declan Jim?”

“I would guess, possibly, two cameramen, two soundmen, a couple of production assistants, and of course Declan,” counted Jim, “that’s seven; seems to be getting a popular number.”

“What?” said Carol.

“Never mind,” said Jim, “I would get another ten rooms ready just in case. Peter did the Professor say anything else to you?”

“Not that I understood Dad,” replied Peter, “he said something about historic records but also that he had only managed to convert about one kilobits of the code.”

Cocoa Beach, Florida

01:55 (local time) Tuesday, July 8th,
2031

Professor Gwilliam closed the connection and transferred the last of his belongings into his LIMO, closed the doors and started the engines. The LIMO lifted gently into the Floridian night and the myriad of lights traced the outline of the theme parks and the turnpikes to the west and the East coast, below him was Cocoa Beach, the little town inexorably linked to the early space program. Owen had purchased the property in Cocoa Beach whilst working on the NASA Mars mission as a second home. It had become his retreat after the completion of the mission and after NASA had been disbanded in 2027 to become the Terran International Space Administration along with the European Space Agency, the Indian Cosmic Exploration Authority and the Russian Cosmic Agency. Only China had refused to join TISA, preferring to go it alone and avoid the international supervision that was a part of the new administration. The little house, as with so many in that town, had always looked out of place in the tropics and would have looked better suited to an English Cotswold village, down to roses around the picket gate. Inside of course it had every modern device known to man, originally the basement had housed a fully equipped electronics engineering lab but the need for that had disappeared with NASA. Now it was a sanctuary, a place of peace and quiet where Owen retired between semesters, but this was different, this was just about the most exciting thing that had happened to him since the Mars mission touched down on the surface of the Red Planet.

At a altitude of sixty kilometres Owen entered the destination coordinates into the navigation computer and waited for the series of orbital control stations to register

and authorise his flight. Thirty seconds later the acknowledgement arrived and he pressed the soft 'navigate' button on the control panel, he entered the speed request at maximum minus five percent, into the computer and waited for the response. Within ten seconds he felt the machine orientate itself and commence the acceleration towards the North-East. Owen watched as the illuminated Florida coast slipped away behind him then unpacked his soft-screen. "Computer, tell me about any incidents of 'septemial' or previous use of 'septemial'."

'Working' responded the soft-screen. Eleven seconds later it reported '*Search complete, only one known use of 'septemial' recorded*'. It said.

'Well that will save time' Owen thought to himself, "Computer, initial report verbal, full report, save to display."

'Initial Report; Septemial was used as a supposed verification of the Jewish God's inspiration of religious writings, mainly of the Old Testament. I has been considered impossible to write in septemial and this is a fact in all languages other than ancient Hebrew. In Hebrew each character has a numerical value from zero to nine and certain characters are used as numerals. A word can be said to be in septemial if all values when added together result in 'seven'. The Old Testament entirely has sentences paragraphs and chapters that result in seven and are confirmed as septemial. Full report on display screen. End'

Owen looked stunned as he continued to read the full report in detail on the soft-screen, he wasn't a religious man, never had been and he regarded those who had a personal faith with suspicion. As a result this was foreign territory for him and he felt uncomfortable. Although he understood the principles involved he was forced to ask, how was it possible for someone to write in this manner. The report on the screen sited instances where individuals had attempted to write in this way and had produced only

gibberish by producing a dictionary of septemial words and trying to use them to construct a coherent sentence. No intelligible sentence had ever been produced, but the ancients had managed to write book upon book in this method and that had made so much sense that it had been translated into almost every language known to man. Was there a link between this form of writing and the computer code he had discovered? The thought filled him with both excitement and trepidation. After reading the full report twice Owen settled down on the rear bunk and fell into a restless sleep.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

09:55 (local time) Tuesday, July 8th,
2031

Breakfast was served as usual, and following the communal meal Jim went straight to his office. After a moments thought to get his mind sorted out he activated the office com-unit and entered the link to the Cyprus Department of Antiquities. Jim had become friends with the Director of the department, an ex-pat Brit who was previously the RAF's resident archaeologist for the Sovereign Territories in the South of the island. Martin Roughley was the person who first contacted the family following the original find and had pushed the Republic to help set up the Trust and had supported them since that time, he was now regarded as a family friend. Jim presented the happenings of the past forty-eight hours to Martin in as much detail as he could, "As I said I just thought I should bring you up to speed on all this," concluded Jim.

"I am glad you have, I just need to think through which is the best way forward from the Cyprus Government's standpoint, said Martin, "have you informed the local police yet," he asked. Jim confirmed that he had not done that and

Martin continued, “Leave that to me Jim I’ll get someone to get up there from Police HQ to talk to you, and I will contact our Embassy in Zamalec, Cairo and get them to make some enquiries, unofficially of course at this stage, but I am viewing this very seriously. I will get back to you as soon as I have anything, now try not to worry Jim, love to Carol and the kids.” And with that the screen went blank.

Just after lunch a Chief Inspector arrived at the main gate, one particularly burley member of the excavation team who had been given the temporary job of gate security guard, admitted her whilst another member of the team conducted her to Jim’s office. The meeting was short and Jim appraised the Inspector of the relevant details in rather more detail than he had told Martin. Inspector Angelique Balkizas was supplied with copies of both text packages, then interviewed Perry Dupree and Howard Fulton, then left after just two hours. Thirty-one minutes later a super-LIMO dropped out of the blue sky and into the garage area, the rear door opened and Professor Owen Gwilliam almost dropped out waving his hand like a demented film-star. Peter was the first to reach the gate to the landing area and greeted the Professor like a long lost uncle. As soon as the backslapping was over Peter asked him to move the LIMO away from the landing area and into one of the garages as Declan was expected at any time with his production crew. After the Professor’s LIMO was safely garaged Peter took him to the workshop next to the lab, where John, Dimitri and Jim had gathered.

“Welcome Professor,” said Jim as he shook the Welshman’s hand warmly, “you know John, I believe, and this is Dimitri our Senior Lab Technician, forensic and security expert.” Owen shook hands with both John and Dimitri, as his gaze wandered around the workshop. “You have good facilities here Jim,” said Owen, “half my colleges in the UK would be proud of a workshop like this.”

The workshop was about twice the size of the lab and was equipped with a huge range of purchased and donated equipment from the mundane items like pedestal drills and lathes to spectrometers to negative field generators. Peter proudly gave his professor the ten-cent guided tour and then brought him back to the other three men.

“Lets go over to the lounge where we can talk in comfort,” said Jim and lead the way across the compound to the main house.

As they strolled across the grassed area their attention was diverted to a distant whine and a black speck clearing the mountains behind the house. The speck grew larger and soon it was evident that the vehicle was approaching the compound, as it was emblazoned with EBC in white letters along each side Jim declared, “Looks like Declan and our tame production team is about to arrive, Peter you take the Professor to the lounge while I meet our roving reporter.” The four continued their walk while Jim veered off back towards the landing area. As he arrived the six hatches of the EBC vehicle opened and seven people jumped out, one of them was Declan who spotted Jim and came towards him.

“Hi there Jim, it’s great to be here at last, I’ve heard so much about this place,” said Declan.

“Nice to have you here,” replied Jim, “you’re just in time to hear a briefing from Professor Gwillam, come on we’re in the lounge.”

Declan shouted back to his crew, “Can you get the equipment unloaded, I’ll be back soon.” One of the crew shouted an ‘OK’ back and Declan left with Jim. “Is this the Professor Gwilliam from Manchester UMIST by any chance,” asked Declan.

“The very same,” answered Jim, “He’s my Son Peter’s Professor and mentor, in fact it’s Peter who got him involved.”

They arrived in the lounge, helped themselves to drinks from the tray and seated themselves in the air-conditioned

luxury of the very British styled lounge. As the inevitable small-talk progressed Carol joined the group, with Jo in tow.

As soon as his wife and daughter were seated Jim asked; “I will not pretend to understand what you were telling me on the com-unit this morning, although it did sound exciting, so I wonder if you could run it past me again so that everyone is up to speed.”

The professor jumped up and immediately went into lecture mode. “At first I thought young Peter was playing a joke on me, I had heard of trinary theory but had never seen it in operation, I managed to write a short program to translate the trinary into decimal but all that did was to reveal that the file names were actually numbers. Of course I thought that I had cracked it at that point when I managed to open the first file, but then all I found were more numbers, although the numbers were indeed in trinary as John suspected, the actual code included symbols zero to six. Of course there is no system on this planet that uses septi-decimal as its base code, every computer we have developed has always operated on a thing called ‘machine-code’. That is simply binary language, counting in zeros and ones, used in various bit-strings, that’s a number of bits or switches that are either on or off. When computers became popular about fifty or so years ago they operated with bit-strings of eight switches, we called that hexadecimal but that quickly increased as computers became more and more sophisticated, sixteen, then thirty-two bit, sixty-four, one-hundred-twenty-five, etc. Today we are working with bit-strings of around two or four thousand, some of the really high level machines are working on thirty-two thousand, what we now call kilobit.

Now imagine this; not only do we have say four thousand switches each with an on and off state, with this system we need to have a system that operates with each switch

having seven positions.” There was an involuntary ‘Wow’ from Peter but everyone else sat in stunned silence. “Now do you see why I was so excited?”

“So we haven’t got a computer that can read the files, Professor,” said John more as a rhetorical question than anything else.

“That’s what I thought at first but then I remembered that back in the late nineties gaming programmers produced ‘emulators’ that forced a computer to act like an older obsolete machine. So PC’s of the nineties could run games that were written for antique machines like the Atari or Commodore 64, etc.” Owen could see that Peter was about to ask about these old machines, so he held up his hand, “They are not important Peter. What I am proposing is that we, that is Peter and I, write a program that will emulate the computer that these files were designed to run on. It will be a big job, especially as we do not know at this point how their computer recognised text or graphics, in the end we may end up an unknown language or just gibberish. It will be a gamble, but a very interesting gamble.”

“Any idea how long this will take Owen,” asked Jim.

“No I haven’t but I am prepared to stay until the finish. However I did some research on the way over here. I thought that I had coined the word septemial to describe this code but it seems that the Hebrew nation beat me to it. It would seem that the oldest parts of the Holy Bible were originally written in a form called septemial. Each character of the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical equivalent and basically if a word, sentence or verse, even a chapter has a sum of seven, then that’s written in septemial. It’s almost impossible to reproduce, except that the Old Testament is totally written in that way. It’s regarded as God’s seal on His word, but that only works in ancient Hebrew, it seems that God didn’t account for his word being translated into other languages. Now I think that we may have a clue here

as to how we translate the files. It also seems that both base numbers are significant, both three (trinary) and seven (Septemial) are sacred numbers of the Jewish religion if not the Christian faith. Three relates to life, Father, Son, Spirit; as it applied to man, body, mind and the so called soul. We have three dimensions in our world that we can move in, if you disregard time. However seven is the real holy number, The number seven is equally sacred amongst Islamic, Christian and Jewish religions, the Jews have this seven branch candlestick, there are seven days in the week that God designated, Take the perfect world number four and add to it the perfect divine number, *three*, and you get *seven*, the most sacred number to the Hebrews. It was earth crowned with heaven; the four-square earth plus the divine. In the Book of Revelation the number *seven* is used throughout. There are *seven* churches, *seven* Spirits, *seven* stars, *seven* seals, *seven* trumpets, *seven* vials, *seven* personages, *seven* dooms, and *seven* new things. *Seven* symbolizes spiritual perfection. All of life revolves around this number. *Seven* is used over *seven*-hundred times in the Bible. It is used 54 times in the Book of Revelation alone. There are *seven* notes in the musical scale. Noah took the clean beasts into the ark by *sevens*. Life operates in a cycle of *seven*; changes take place in the body every *seven* years. There are *seven* bones in the neck, *seven* bones in the face, *seven* bones in the ankle, *seven* orifices to the human body and *seven* holes in the head. Believe me this stuff goes on and on, to pages and pages, I know, I read them all on the way over until it put me to sleep.”

“In these files we have both of these numbers, the trinary and septemial. As this is the only incidents of this combination anywhere on record on this planet, I think we need to take this as a bit of a clue as to its origin and possibly its content,” Owen fell silent while everyone looked

at each other in silence, Peter was the first to break the silence.

“Professor, what about the other number,” Peter asked, “the perfect four.”

“Good question Peter,” said Owen, “I was wondering if you would pick that one up. I’m afraid I don’t know, both three and seven are prime numbers but four isn’t, however we need to be on the lookout for any use of four as we work with the files.”

“Dad, I’ve just realised,” Jo suddenly interrupted, “that artefact, the one that causes the anomalies, the constellation shown on it, there are *seven* stars in it.”

“Have we got a date from the observatory for that particular configuration yet Jo,” asked her Dad.

“No I forgot all about it,” admitted Jo.

“Can you chase them first thing tomorrow,” asked Jim.

“Well thank you Owen, I think you have given us our first and most staggering clue to date, we are grateful to you.”

“As far as I can see it’s the only pointer we have,” concluded Owen.

Jim got to his feet and replaced Owen in front of the small group, “Can I have your attention for a few moments please,” he said, “I just wanted to introduce Declan Brook to you all. I don’t think there is any need to say who Declan is but what I wanted to say is that we have agreed to give EBC, through Declan, exclusive rights to the reporting of developments within this organisation for the immediate future. Declan will also be making a documentary and I envisage that he and the production team will be with us for some time, can I therefore ask everyone here to cooperate with the crew. We have agreed that nothing is released or is included in the documentary without our authorisation, so please be as open as you can.” Jim looked across to the Professor and continued, “Of course this only includes those persons that are actually employed by the Trust. It is up to you Professor how much of your work here is

divulged to the media, if any. I am sure we have all been given plenty to think about so I suggest we all take a break and prepare for dinner; we look forward to meeting Declan's full team over food. Thank you everyone."

Over the meal Jim and Declan discussed their plans and thoughts in some detail, central to their discussion was the fact that Perry had refused to go on air. There was also the security issue to be considered and Declan promised to call in a consultant he knew who would advise them as a favour to him.

"Look," said Jim, "why don't I go on air instead of Perry, I know all the details and I think I have a high enough profile that I will be believed, what do you think?"

Declan thought for a while and said, "It might just work, but we will need a peak viewing slot, I will need to get my boss on board with this though."

"Can we do it from here or will we need to go back to London," asked Jim.

"Fraid we haven't got the equipment to go live from here but we may not need to go back to London," explained Declan, "we may be able to use either Rome or Athens."

"Athens is the closest," said Jim, "I really don't want to be away for longer than is strictly necessary."

"I appreciate that Jim, leave it with me, I should have an answer by tomorrow this time," said Declan.

"Can you get your security guy in before we have to go," asked Jim.

"I'm hoping so, but it depends on where he is and what he's doing."

Victoria Avenue, Cairo, Egypt.

10:30 (local time) Wednesday, July 9th,
2031

The front door alert system announced that Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque had a visitor at his late British colonial property in the East of Cairo. Al-Faroque referenced the soft-screen and confirmed that his expected guest was climbing the steps to the front veranda. Homer Carter didn't knock on the door but seated himself in one of the wicker chairs arranged around a large circular bamboo table. Al-Faroque opened the front door and walked towards his visitor. "Hello Homer, thanks for coming," he said.

"What's the problem Ahmed," Carter responded.

"Our little French bird has let us down I'm afraid," Al-Faroque told Carter, "I've sent him three packets over the last two days without any response."

"Do you think they've turned him or has he just chickened out," asked Carter.

"Does it matter," said Al-Faroque.

"Sure it does," stated Carter, "if he's fingered us to the authorities. I think we need to make a positive move, quickly"

"I agree Homer, do you have the resources to reach Cyprus?"

"I sure do, Professor," said Carter, leave it to me. I got a Turk that stayed after unification; he's done a few jobs for me in the past."

"He will make it look like an accident, won't he," asked Al-Faroque.

"Don't worry Ahmed he's a pro, you just leave it to him. Now what about a drink or are you joining the fundamentalists?"

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

12:20 (local time) Wednesday, July 9th,
2031

Declan strode confidently into Jim Markson's office just off the common sitting room waving a piece of paper, "Jim," he said, "got it fixed, you're on air live on Friday from Rome and we've got a peak hour slot."

"That's great," said Jim looking up from his soft-screen with some surprise at the interruption, "what time are we on?"

"It goes out at eight o'clock local time but that's seven back home and eight in Cairo, peak viewing right across Europe," replied Declan, "and a Friday night to boot. We need to be there two hours before broadcast time so I suggest we leave here about three."

"That's good, will you be doing the interviewing," asked Jim.

"You bet, this is my exclusive don't forget," said Declan, "Oh by the way my security guy will be here on Friday as well so he can be tightening things up around here while we're away; as long as we can get back in after the broadcast, huh," he added laughing.

Jim shook his head as Declan exited his office, 'These media people' he thought.

Declan collected the production crew from their quarters and loaded up their transporter, they were off to an archaeological site in Larnaca where Jo Markson and part of the excavation team had been called following a com-call the previous evening. Not that Declan was particularly interested in old ruins but one needed to get as much background as one could. The site was part of the remains of one of the ancient City-states that existed over four thousand years ago, Jo had said that recent excavation work on the site had revealed even older remains below

the already discovered archaeology. Declan secretly hoped that he would be on the spot if a new discovery was made.

The production crew landed in a small side-street outside of the perimeter of the site, there was a delay getting in through the small pedestrian gate as the man in the booth was very wary of them and had not been told of their impending arrival. Eventually Jo arrived at the gate and swiftly smoothed the way. Jo took the crew along a path then across a bridge built for tourists to view the remains, they went through another security gate unlocked by a swipe card and descended a flight of steep steps to the level of the old city. "Can you notice anything interesting," Jo asked Declan.

"Well yes, I see some very interesting remains of very big walls," answered Declan, "is that what you mean?"

"Well sort of," said Jo hesitantly, "look at the stones at the top and then look at these blocks here at the current level, what do you see?"

"Look Jo I'm not an archaeologist I'm a current affairs reporter," said Declan with some frustration, "why don't you just explain?"

"OK," said Jo, "if you compare the stones that make up this wall, top to bottom we can see plainly that the lower the level the better quality the archaeology is. See how the uppermost blocks are rough in comparison to the ones below. These lower blocks are dressed to something near perfection and the joints are so tight that you can't get a point-o-five millimetre feeler gauge in-between them, see."

"I see what you mean now," said Declan suddenly becoming interested, "but haven't the upper blocks been weathered?"

"No they were only uncovered back in the mid twentieth century and besides that you can see the tool marks," Jo pointed out where chisel marks could be seen in the blocks

above their head, “now show me the chisel marks on these blocks.”

Declan inspected the lower blocks closely for several minutes, then returned to Jo saying, “These stones are incredible, they are as smooth as if a laser cut them, but the size of them, they're gigantic, how did the ancients move them into place?”

Jo smiled and continued with her lecture, she was enjoying having a captive audience, “Not only are they square to within incredible tolerances but each block is laid exactly in-line to within one millimetre.”

“Are there any other sites like this one, where there stones laid so accurately,” asked Declan.

“Yes there are quite a few that we know of but I suspect that there are many more, the sites we know of are spread all over the world, some beneath the sea, some on mountain tops,” continued Jo, “some have blocks of stone similar to these that have been transported hundreds, even thousands of kilometres.”

“Like the stones that make up Stonehenge at home,” suggested Declan.

“Exactly like those,” agreed Jo, “only the stones at Stonehenge are quite crude in comparison. You know the real mystery with Stonehenge, I'll tell you.”

“I thought you might,” said Declan.

“The mystery is that the people who erected those stones had the technology to move them from the Welsh mountains to Salisbury Plain then erect them vertically. Then, not satisfied with that carve spigots and sockets to keep the horizontals in place on the verticals. But they could not dress the stones to any accuracy at all.”

“You know Jo,” said Declan thoughtfully, “I never looked at it that way, do you think it was erected in a hurry or maybe something happened to them in between.”

“Those are possibilities,” agreed Jo, “there is a similar mystery here. You would think that the technology and

skills would improve over time but here it looks as though those skills were lost as time went by.”

Suddenly Jo turned and started walking away, saying, “Come along then, lets get to what you came to see.”

Declan followed her around the end of the great wall under the viewing platform to an area that had been screened off from the public’s gaze. There, a trench had been dug about ten-meters long by possibly five meters wide; in the trench were four of the excavation crew that Declan had seen in the compound. The crew were working furiously carefully making the trench deeper, examining every little spoonful of spoil that came out, but in the centre, immediately under the wall was a polished surface of white marble. Declan ordered the production crew to set up and get some footage of the excavation including the marble.

“We think the marble forms a new wall beneath this one,” Jo explained, “we made a few test holes this morning and it seems to continue beyond the end of this site. John was down here earlier with ground-radar and there seems to be a void behind this slab of marble so we are taking this block out first to see what is behind it. It may be a entrance porch through the wall below us.”

“You mean there is a chamber behind that,” asked Declan.

“Well I wouldn’t guarantee a chamber as such but there is a void space,” said Jo, “ John couldn’t get any idea of how big it is because it’s under the wall.”

“How long will it be before you get in,” Declan asked.

“We should be in by this evening.”

“Great,” said Declan, we’ll hang around if you don’t mind.”

“Be my guest,” said Jo.

Palestinian National Security Agency
HQ, Ramallah,
Republic of Palestine. 14:30;
Wednesday, July 9th 2031

“Ladies and Gentlemen, please can we have order, the formal meeting of the Internal Security Council is now in session,” Osman Arafat called the meeting to order. Osman, the more moderate adopted son of the famous Palestinian leader of the late twentieth century was the Minister of Homeland Security an office he had held since the inception of the Republic. He was both well liked and well respected by his own countrymen and the world’s leaders, however he was a strong uncompromising man who was passionately patriotic. Like his father before him he was short in stature and stocky but very muscular, his dark brown eyes were piercing and gave the impression that he could see into the soul. His beard was luscious but immaculately trimmed and his two-piece suit was from Saville Row and the standard for diplomats everywhere.

The Security Council itself was made up from all walks of Palestinian life, of course the military made up almost a third of the seats, with the Secretary of Defence, advisers and the Generals, occupying the six places. The police held the other third of seats consisting of the National Police Chief (who answered directly to Osman Arafat), the three provincial chiefs, the head of Criminal Intelligence Agency and the head of the Anti-Terrorism Section. The remainder six seats were taken by two senate representatives, three community representatives from the three provinces and a Judge from the Palestinian High Court who advised on the legality of the measures suggested by the council. Minister Arafat, as chairman, held the casting vote, but this had only been used during their monthly meetings once, since Osman came into post. This however was their first extraordinary meeting.

The delegates swiftly took their seats and quiet descended out of the babble of voices and Osman Arafat continued speaking from the large leather chair at the head of the

table. “Ladies and Gentlemen we have a possibly contentious security situation to discuss and make some recommendations in respect of actions and responses from our republic. What I am about to divulge to you all is strictly top secret at this time and a news blackout has been imposed should a leak occur. I would remind all present that we have all signed the National Security Agreement and what is discussed here today must not under any circumstances be discussed or divulged in any way, is that understood?”

There were nods and sounds of agreement around the table.

Osman cast his eyes around the table and then continued, “At around nine PM on the sixth of July, last Sunday, the Holy Temple of the Mount in Jerusalem was hit by some kind of laser beam.” There were astonished murmurs around the table while Osman continued, “this footage taken from security cameras around the site shows the attack quite plainly.”

The screen behind Osman flickered into life and showed night time scene of the Temple Mount site illuminated in its usual way, the picture flickered and a blue-green beam appeared stretching from the cloud cover to the top of the dome there were more flickers and the screen went blank.

“Unfortunately that is the extent of the video we have as all the cameras in the vicinity of the site were knocked out,” Osman continued, “some sort of short-range EMP we believe. The security detail on duty was also incapacitated for a time but regained consciousness before the beam disappeared so were able to give good statements of the incident. The statements are in the sealed folders in front of you.” Each of the council members reached for the file and opened it.

“What was the extent of the damage,” asked the National Chief of Police.

“I’m coming to that,” snapped Osman who pressed a button on a small consul in front of him on the table. Once again

the screen behind him flickered into life. “This video was shot at first light inside the Temple Mosque, as you can see there is little or no damage to the actual building, the point where the laser struck is, incredibly, unscathed. Not even paint work or the gilding on the dome seems to have been affected by the attack.”

The Chief of Police opened his mouth to speak again but Osman noticed this and cut him off before he could issue any sound. “I know what you are about to ask Chief, so why are we in special session if there was no damage? The fact is that the damage sustained goes way beyond damage to the building.”

“This video will now show you the extent of the damage,” the video switched to the temple floor and followed the crack across the entire span of the building. Again the picture switched to an external view of the plaza area and again followed the expanding fissure to the edge of the plateau, and then a helicopter mounted camera took over and tracked the crack down the rocky side of the mount, switching to the opposite side and following it back to the retaining wall. “We have plumbed the fissure and as far as we can tell the entire mount had been severed in half, how far down this goes is anyone’s guess. We are waiting for experts to do a full survey, the Israelis are organising this. In short Ladies and Gentlemen we have been attacked by who knows who, an attack that has struck at the very heart of our nation and belief system, as well as that of Israel and of course it is significant to Christians also, not just a building, though that would have been bad enough, but an attack on the very holy land itself.”

The council sat in stunned silence for almost half a minute until one of the community leaders broke the silence by asking, ‘who would do such a thing as this and how can a weapon split an mountain in half without touching the

building sat on top of it?’ He of course asked the question in everyone’s mind.

“We do not know, neither Criminal Intelligence nor Military Intelligence has come up with anything, nor are they aware of any threats against us. We need to ask two basic questions, firstly as the mount is a holy site for both ourselves and the Israelis we need to ask who was the attack against them or us? Secondly we need to ascertain who the attacker was. The attacker is unlikely to have been the Israelis for the reason mentioned before. That reduces the possibilities a little.”

General Hessian was the first to voice an opinion, “Who has the finance and capabilities to develop such a weapon? There are no terrorist groups on this planet who could mount an attack of this magnitude; there can be only one possibility, the Christian West. They have the finance and the capabilities of placing a weapon like this in space. Who else can it be?”

After a thoughtful silence the Judge of the Palestinian High Court, cleared her throat and leaned forward, “In my view it will be a mistake to place a news blackout on this incident. Firstly this republic remains under the microscope by the international community, we are a very young nation and keeping this under wraps would make it seem that we have something to hide, when we are committed to transparency. Secondly there are already clips on the super-web and not revealing this incident will only fuel conspiracy theories. In my opinion we should openly suggest that it was the Christian factions in the west and sit back and see what happens.”

Osman looked thoughtful, “I can see your reasoning and there are advantages to your counsel, may I suggest it be put to the vote.”

The vote for releasing the information was carried with only one vote against and two abstentions, the Judge and

Osman were charged with producing a press release as quickly as possible.

EBC TV Centre, London, England - One
O'Clock News

13:00 (local time) Thursday, July 10th,
2031.

“Good day and welcome to the lunch-time news,” said the news-reader. The picture changed to a library shot of Jerusalem while the news-reader voiced over the video. “After almost a decade there are concerns in the European Parliament that peace in the Middle-East is under threat. Both the Jewish community and the Palestinian authorities are demanding that the Christian West own up to who was responsible for an alleged High-Tec attack on their most sacred site a few days ago. A spokesman for the Palestinian Republic gave us this statement earlier today.” A nameless individual appeared on-screen with the Government building in the background, he was holding a single sheet of paper from which he read to camera. “The Republic of Palestine feels nothing but sorrow at the unprovoked attack on one of Islam’s most sacred sites, the Temple Mount was attacked on Sunday the sixth of this month by an unknown orbital based weapon that created a geological fault in the rock of the mount. This has necessitated the closure of the site to all visitors until further notice. This government calls upon the European Government, the USA and the United Nations Organisation to identify the aggressor and to impose sanctions and resolutions in order to curtail any further attacks. We will also be demanding reparations from the aggressor for the damage that has already been done. This nation has to assess which of this world’s nations has a) the capability and, b) the financial recourses to develop such a weapon?” The video feed reverted to the studio and the news-reader, “We have been informed that the Israeli Prime minister is also about to make a statement, as soon as she commences the statement we will take you straight over to Jerusalem.

The European Department of Security has told us that they know of no attack against any member nation. Inspectors have been sent to Jerusalem in order to assess the damage caused, but were refused admission to the site. However satellite images of the Temple Mount suggest that a fracture has occurred in the bed-rock but awnings have since been erected over the area. These pictures have been received in the past few hours.” The picture changed to a long-shot of the Temple Mount from across the Kidron Valley, the picture zoomed in on the mount itself showing green awnings lazily flapping in the slight breeze, whilst a reporter described the scene. Without warning the voice of the news-reader cut in on the report, “We are now taking you over to Jerusalem for a live statement from Israel’s Prime Minister.”

The Prime Minister, Mrs Heidi Goldbloom appeared on screen with a number of ministers and security personnel, standing behind a podium bearing the insignia of the Star of David. A voice out of shot announced, “Ladies and Gentlemen, the Prime Minister of Israel Mrs Goldbloom.” The shot was replaced by a close-up of Premier Goldbloom whilst the background noise disappeared suddenly.

“Today I address the European Union, the United Nations and every nation on this world of ours. Be aware Israel will not sit back and accept an attack upon its territories without making a response. The EU President has assured me that no member state has mounted an attack upon this state and my dear friend President Jackson in the US has assured me that they have no intel on any attacks. Our relations with the Christian community have never been better so we are prompted to look farther a field, but may be we need look not so far a field. Whoever is responsible for this incident, be warned we will retaliate. The Temple Mount is Israeli territory, although it is shared between the three faiths who have an interest, as of mid-night tonight

Israel is rescinding the shared responsibility agreement and will be assuming full control of the whole site. Thank you ladies and gentlemen, that is all.” Premier Goldbloom turned from the podium and disappeared through a door.

The feed switched back to the news studio in London, “Well that’s the situation today in the Middle-East, we will come back to the situation later and of course we will keep you up to date with breaking news as the crisis develops. We have of course reported on the incident previously and it maybe that neither the Palestinian or the Israeli governments are aware of the background of those reports, EBC will keep you informed, Now to other stories today.....

Office of the Israeli Prime Minister,
Jerusalem,
16:20 (local time) Thursday, July 10th,
2031.

Heidi Goldbloom was born in the USA and is the daughter of Jacob Goldbloom the soft drinks and snack millionaire. Heidi first came to Israel to join a Kibbutz for a year after obtaining a first class degree in politics from Harvard University. Her stay in the Kibbutz was marred by the troubles of the early twenty-first century but her experiences motivated her to stay in Israel and to work towards peace between the Jews and the Arabs. Not a capitulating peace but a peace formed in the strength of two nations who looked to the security of their populace. So far the approach had worked and peace had lasted for eleven years. During those years Israel had gone from strength to strength, her military was amongst the strongest in the civilised world and had taken her place with the USA, the UK, France, Germany and Russia, in mounting peace keeping details across the world. Israel had also become

strong from a financial sense, and was now the seventh richest nation in the world, having the highest standard of living in Europe. In short Israel has become the tiniest Super Power and much of her success is down to Premier Goldbloom, possibly the smallest PM in office anywhere, what she loses in physical stature she more than makes up for in presence and determination. Although she has been compared to Thatcher, the UK Premier of the nineteen-eighties, her politics are a far cry from what became known as Thatcherism.

Heidi Goldbloom strode forcefully into her office and stood before the window that looked out across the vista of Jerusalem. She spun around to face her Minister of Defence, "It has to be Iran, who else would want to attack us Ben? The Palestinians have a vested interest in the Mount, the Chinese couldn't care less, we are friends with the Christian world and hell Ben there's no one else who could afford to hit us with a beam weapon or could even get the weapon into orbit."

"We've spoken to every contact we have across the Arab world, there is just no hint of any aggression plans anywhere," Ben told her, "we the US and the UK have all been monitoring Iran for years and they have never placed a payload in orbit that could generate this kind of power. TISA has scanned every piece of hardware in orbit and they have checked back to the fifth and there is nothing that would account for the laser strike."

"Did they look for energy spikes in this area," Asked Heidi "at the time of the attack?"

"Yes Prime Minister," answered Ben, "they picked up the spike, or what they think is the beam, but it registered as lightning."

"A ten minute lightning strike," said the PM incredulously, "and they didn't think that strange?"

"That's what they told me," said Ben, "the detection computers just logged it as lightning."

“Mark my words Benjamin, it will be those fanatical Islamists, they can’t cope with peace for more than a decade,” the PM almost spat out the words, “Get our forces on full alert and get me President Jackson on the phone, this thing isn’t finished by a long way.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus
14:00 (local time) Friday, July 11th,
2031

"We must be away soon Jim," shouted Declan from the doorway of the communal sitting room.

"I'll be there directly," came the answer from the open door of Jim's office.

Declan turned and returned to the dining room to finish up his coffee. The domestic staff were clearing away the last remnants of the lunch and the clatter of crockery and cutlery echoed from the open kitchen hatch. Over the clamour of the kitchen Declan heard the internal phone sound and seconds later one of the Excavation Crew called across the dining hall. "Mr. Brook, there's a Gerry Holbrook at the main gate, they're asking if you can collect him?"

"Sure," shouted Declan, "I'll be right there." Declan exited the air-conditioned comfort of the dining hall into the blazing heat of the Cyprus afternoon and walked the four-hundred meters to the main gate. Through the heat haze he could soon make out the familiar figure of Holkey, the Royal Marine detachment's name for Gerry. Declan greeted his friend with the usual mock karate attack, then threw their arms around each other and hugged.

"Dec, you old sod, good to see you again," said Holkey.

"Come on I'll give you the whirlwind tour, I'm afraid I'm leaving for Rome within a few minutes, I was hoping you'd get here a bit earlier," said Declan leading the way back to the main buildings. Declan had briefed Holkey over the com two days previously, so all that was needed was to orientate him. They took a roundabout route to Jim's office while Declan pointed out the various elements of the complex, arriving at the office some fifteen minutes later. "Jim, I'd like you to meet my old friend Holkey, I mean Gerry Holbrook our security advisor."

Jim stood from his desk and held out his hand, "Good to have you here, what do I call you Gerry or Holkey?"

"Either will do but I prefer Holkey."

"I've given Holkey the whistle-stop tour," said Declan, "so all there is to do is introduce him to the family and we can get away."

Jim picked up the internal phone and pressed several buttons, after a few seconds four lights glowed on the panel and Jim said, "Can you all spare a few minutes to meet our security advisor before I leave for Rome and I'm leaving within ten minutes," There was a slight pause before Jim continued, "No Peter I can't hang on for an hour, I told you, Declan and I are leaving in ten, just drop what you're doing, OK." Jim cut the connection and turned to Declan and Holkey saying, "Kids, eh."

"Tell me about," answered Holkey, "I've got four."

"My sympathy," said Jim as Carol and Jo entered the office, three minutes later Peter arrived panting. "Now we're all here I just wanted to introduce Holkey to you all. Holkey will be reviewing our security and making some changes. I want you two," Jim said to his two offspring, "to cooperate in any way needed, OK?"

"Sure Dad," Jo and Peter said almost in unison, "Now can I get back to the lab?" finished Peter.

"I'll come and see you later Peter when you're not so busy," said Holkey as Peter disappeared out of the door.

"He doesn't mean to be rude, he's so single minded when he gets into something," said Carol, "I'll take Holkey for a coffee."

"No you wont, this guy's got a lot of work to do in a very short period of time," interjected Declan, "I want this compound as tight as a fortress by the time we get back from Rome tonight."

"Yes Captain," said Holkey giving him a mock salute, "you heard the man I'll just get to it m'am."

Twelve minutes later Declan and Jim took off for Rome and Holkey unpacked his surface-transporter. He had brought a great number of pieces of equipment with him so had travelled to Cyprus from London on a scheduled flight. The flight cost had included a segment of freight and the unloading of this had caused a delay at Pathos Airport followed by a drive across half of the island. Holkey got to work setting up the equipment without any delay, he set up laser detectors around the entire perimeter and an inner network of motion and heat sensors that scanned the area up to twenty meters inside the perimeter. After that there were the twenty wireless high-res cameras that continually panned across the compound and the vibration sensors that were capable of recording a snake travelling across sand. It was after six when he was satisfied with the job and returned to his allotted room to shower. At six fifty-five the mealtime chime rang through the intercoms and Holkey set off to find the dining room. As he entered no-one took any notice, they were all watching a large TV screen mounted on the far wall, he waited at the end of one of the tables trying to recognise one of the family he had met earlier. Jo noticed the newcomer and waved Holkey to a seat close-by.

EBC TV Centre, Rome, Italy - 19:00

(local time)

Friday, July 11th, 2031.

The production assistant took them to a bay in the studio set and gave them instructions and a running order. No sooner were they seated but a researcher descended upon the two with some notes for Declan. "We have pictures of both Ahmed Al-Faroque and Homer John Carter, Mr. Brook, but I'm afraid that Mr. Carter's is quite old," she said in her lyrical Italian accented English.

“That’s OK, I have no idea what he looks like anyway,” answered Declan, did you find any previous shady deals that he’s been involved in?”

“Yes, here are the details of three antiquities scams he’s been convicted of, each time he’s been fined, two million dollars the last time,” the researcher told Declan in her Italian-English dialect.

How long have we got to air,” asked Declan.

The researcher look at her watch and answered, “There’s about eleven minutes to your item.”

“Fine, and thanks,” Declan said as the researcher disappeared into the glare of the studio lights. Declan busied himself putting his introduction together while Jim watched the activities in the studio.

Two minutes before they went to air the researcher returned and gave Declan a picture. “I think we better use this shot instead Mr. Brook, it’s-a just come in, it seems that others are interested in these two people,” said the researcher.

Declan took the photo and looked at it, a smile appeared on his face as he passed the picture to Jim, “Our lucky night Jim,” he said.

Before Jim had time to digest what the picture, meant the floor manager appeared and said, “Stand-by please, thirty seconds to air.”

The countdown sped quickly by and almost before he knew it the FM was counting them in, “three, two, . . . “ and the hand pointed at Declan.

“Good evening Europe, this is Declan Brook reporting from Rome,” he started, “Tonight we have one of the strangest cloak and dagger stories we have ever reported on. Several weeks ago viewers will remember me interviewing Jim Markson from the Jo Markson Research Trust,” the camera cut to a shop of Jim while Declan continued his introduction. “There were a number of anomalies that night

that resulted in people in some areas suffering an interruption in transmission, coincidentally caused by one of the objects featured in the interview. Discoveries by the Trust are challenging the accepted history of this planet and there are some that are not happy with that situation and wish to put a stop to the Trust's activities. One man who has continued to be a active critic of JMRT is Egypt's current Director of Antiquities, Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque." A picture of Al-Faroque appeared on the monitors. "Dr. Al-Faroque has gone on record several times as being opposed to what the Trust is doing. However recently he seems to have stepped over the line. Al-Faroque is pictured here with American Homer Carter, a man who has been convicted three times for irregularities in connection with illegal antiquities trading and theft. This picture clearly shows a close relationship between Al-Faroque and Carter as they enjoy a drink together on Al-Faroque's veranda at his home in the suburbs of Cairo just a few days ago. Dr. Al-Faroque you should really chose your friends better. A week ago the JMRT received a covert visit from an agent of Al-Faroque and Carter, fortunately when this agent was ordered to 'eliminate' one or more of the Trust members he approached Jim Markson, co-director of the Trust, and told the full story, Jim Markson is with us now."

"Jim, why is Al-Faroque's agent not here to tell his story himself?"

"As you know Declan, we tried to get him to do just that but he is fearful for his life," Jim answered, "He told me that Al-Faroque told him that if he didn't do as he was ordered they would inform the French government of certain indiscretions, he now fears that because he has confessed to us they will now kill him."

"So," continued Declan, "Al-Faroque and Carter have threatened at least two people. How seriously do you take the threats?"

“I take them very seriously,” answered Jim, “Dr. Al-Faroque has based his whole credibility on our theories being wrong. He has made hundreds of thousands of dollars and built a reputation on the acknowledged history line, if, as we believe, there was a previous high-technology society, everything Al-Faroque, and many other archaeologists have stood for, will be wiped away, and all the ancient history text-books will need to be rewritten.”

“But surely that’s not a reason to kill someone or try to destroy their organisation,” pushed Declan.

“One would think not, most people that do not agree with us are scathing but good natured, Al-Faroque however has gone public and in-fact has written several books attacking JMRT. If we find incontrovertible proof, his carrier will be destroyed, without a doubt” Jim stated, growing in confidence.

Declan turned to camera again and told his audience, “Homer Carter has aligned himself with the good doctor and because Carter has a collection of what is thought to be the oldest artefacts of civilisation in his private collection stands to loose millions if these new artefacts are proved to pre-date those in his ownership. For Carter it’s just a matter of protecting his investments. People, I have seen things in the last few days that would be beyond belief, machines and equipment buried for thousands of years the purpose of which we can only guess at. Over the next weeks and months I will be bringing you exclusive news on these developments, research which I am sure will astound you. This is Declan Brook for EBC in Rome”

The red light flickered out and the lights were dimmed to a more normal level, “Well done Jim, that will give them something to think about. By the way I have arranged for that interview to be repeated in the morning news for Egypt as well.”

“Well lets hope Al-Farouque watches the morning news,” added Jim.

In the background the news programme continued from London and other European centres and before they knew it they were both avidly watching the current item. The news reader was reporting on a press release from the Israeli Prime Minister’s office concerning a laser attack on Jerusalem’s sacred Temple Mount. The Israelis were looking to blame someone and it sounded as if the prime suspects were the Moslems, Palestinians, or Iran. Then the newsreader gave the date and time of the attack and both Declan and Jim turned to look at each other, each had a look of horror on their faces.

Declan almost jumped off the set and strode across the studio floor to the stairs that led to the control-room in the gallery. “Get me a face to face with my office in London,” he shouted as he entered. The item-producer indicated the booth at the rear of the gallery and Declan followed the nod into the little room, within a second the wall screen came to life showing a picture of his assistant. “Janet can you drag Alex in here please,” he said abruptly.

“Alex is still in the control-room Declan, we’re still on air”, Janet told him.

“Yes I know that Janet, I’ve just come off set, or weren’t you watching?” Janet opened her mouth to speak but Declan continued, “Just get him in here, it’s important.”

Janet disappeared from the screen but pretty soon Declan could hear approaching voices, “Who the hell does he think he is, ordering people around,” Alex’s voice could be heard as they got closer to the com.

“I can hear what you’re saying Alex, I’m not deaf,” Declan shouted into the screen, “Who the hell do you think pays your wages?”

Alex was the Executive Producer on Europe Today, Declan had taken a risk and employed him four years ago, the risk had paid off despite his regular bad attitude. “What the hell

do you want,” Alex said as his face appeared on the screen, “don’t you know we’re still on air!”

Declan ignored the comment and pushed on with his own issue, “Do you never actually listen to your news and digest it or are all of you total morons?” he asked sarcastically.

“What have we done now boss,” asked Alex, discerning the tone in Declan’s voice and quickly moderating his attitude.

Declan took a deep breath and sighed, “What story am I working on, that reported anomalies across Europe on the eleventh?”

There was a blank look on Alex’s face, “Er, which one would that be boss?”

“Remind me why I employed you Alex,” questioned Declan, “think Cairo museum.”

“Oh yes, the lightning strike story,” said Alex as he suddenly remembered the story.

“And what story have you just run re Israel,” prompted Declan.

“The laser attack?”

“Yes, and,” said Declan.

“Sorry, I’m not with you Mr. Brook,” answered Alex looking perplexed.

“Alex, hasn’t it struck you that both the Cairo incident and this supposed laser attack happened at exactly the same time.”

The expression on Alex’s face changed to one that Declan had seen before, it was the look that he got when he found an exclusive, “So you’re saying that Egypt was attacked at the same time.”

“No Alex, I’m saying that the anomaly that affected the museum affected Jerusalem as well,” said Declan, “the situation in Israel looks volatile but it wasn’t an attack and we need to tell them that.”

“I see,” said Alex looking thoughtful, “what do you want to do about it?”

“By my reckoning we’ve got about twelve minutes to get this story out, contact both the Israeli PM and the Palestinians, you have the contacts, put the story to them and get statements, then get it on air as breaking news before you go off air,” instructed Declan. “And Alex, get everybody onto this, and I mean everybody.”

Jim and Declan watched the remainder of the transmission from the Rome control room, which was by now deserted. The final five minutes of the transmission were taken up by the London presenter, Erin Martindale, who luckily was up to speed with the Trust’s work. First EBC replayed a clip from the earlier statement from Heidi Goldbloom, the Israeli Prime Minister, immediately followed by the illicit video of the Temple Mount incident inter cut with some com video from Cairo. Someone had done a good job in a short space of time and matched the time indexes of the two clips. Erin Martindale reappeared on screen and made the suggestion that the two incidents were linked. They had managed to get Heidi Goldbloom on the com live, her reaction was just good television, it wavered from incredulity through relief and finally into suspicion and disbelief. The impromptu interview ended with Heidi Goldbloom stating, “If this report is true we will be relieved that it was not an act of aggression but you must understand that our most sacred site had been irreparably damaged. Of course we will need to investigate this theory and take advice on our response.”

Erin’s image appeared on screen again and as the last few seconds of the program counted down said, “And that is Europe Tonight, Goodnight.”

Victoria Avenue, Cairo, Egypt.

20:03 (local time) Friday, July 11th,
2031

Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque sat at his antique desk, his soft-screen before him, frantically finding the new address for Homer Carter, his hands were shaking so much that he touched the wrong address twice before Carter's image appeared on the screen.

"Ah Dr. Ahmed, you look troubled, can I help?"

"Where are you Carter," asked the doctor.

"I'm in New York, why," came the answer.

"So you wont have seen the Europe Tonight program," continued Al-Faroque, "Jim Markson was on the programme, being interviewed."

"So," came the sarcastic reply from Carter.

"So, he's blown us up, the whole story, Al-Faroque tried to explain. The little rat Dupree has spilled your beans, they mentioned us both by name and said that they have evidence that we are threatening to kill some of them. You have to pull your Turk off quickly if anyone gets hurt they will come straight to us."

"Hell Doc," shouted Carter, "I knew we couldn't trust the Frenchman. Leave it with me, I'll see if I can get hold of the Turk, you sit tight and don't panic."

The screen reverted to its saver screen and Al-Faroque sank back into the chair holding the sides of his head with his palms, he shut his eyes and said a silent prayer to Allah.

EBC TV Centre, Rome, Italy - 20:00
(local time)
Friday, July 11th, 2031.

While the final credits were still rolling the com-unit in the control room signalled an incoming call, Declan rose and crossed the floor to the wall mounted unit, where pressed the 'Accept' button. The screen flickered to life and the face of one of the Rome studio receptionists filled the frame and said in perfect English, "Senor Brook, I have a call from London for you, will you accept it?"

"Yes, thank you," was Declan's response and immediately her face was replaced by that of Alex's, "Well done Alex, now I know why I employed you, that was an excellent piece on very short notice."

"Thanks Boss," said Alex accepting the compliment but brushing it aside immediately, "but I think we may have stirred up a nest of vipers, Heidi Goldbloom is demanding a meeting with the head of the JMRT, she also wants to talk to you and says they will need the evidence."

"No problem Alex, just make an appointment for next week, can you," asked Declan.

"I tried, but she wants to see someone tonight," answered Alex.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus
21:12 (local time)Friday, July 11th,
2031

Her personal com unit chimed just as Carol was making her after dinner coffee, she replaced the microwave-kettle on its stand and rummaged in her pocket for the unit, eventually finding it inside a kitchen wipe. Carol flipped the

unit open with exasperation, then saw Jim's face on the screen and her demeanour changed. "Hi Jim, where are you," Carol asked as it was obvious that he wasn't in the LIMO on his way back by the studio in the background.

"Carol, we're going to be delayed I'm afraid, we have to make a diversion to Jerusalem on the way back," Jim announced slightly sheepishly.

"Jerusalem! Why in hell are you going there," asked Carol.

"It's a long story, hopefully we are going to stop a war breaking out. I'll fill you in when we get back," Jim fudged the answer, "How's everything there, did Holkey get his equipment installed?"

Carol realigned her thought train and replied, "Err, yes, he said everything was in place but he needs to adjust it and fine tune it tomorrow. How long are you going to be in Jerusalem, have you eaten yet?"

"OK," said Jim, "no we are going to get something from the restaurant here at the studios and eat on the way, and I'm not sure how long we'll be. We have an appointment with the Israeli Prime Minister at eleven o'clock so it's going to be the early hours before we get back. Just ask Dimitri to be on his toes, I'll be back as soon as I can. See you later, love you."

"Love you too," said Carol as the connection broke.

"Dam," said Carol as soon as she closed the unit, she collected her coffee and wandered over to the sitting room sipping from the cup. The family were already there, still discussing the TV broadcast with Perry, Howard and Holkey, "where's Dimitri," she asked Peter.

"He's just finishing calibrating the receivers for Holkey, he'll be here in a minute," answered Peter.

Seven minutes later Dimitri entered the lounge with a satisfied expression on his face, "Well that's as good as we're going to get it tonight, any infringement of the

compound, Holkey and I will get a warning on our com-unit," he said as he sat down.

"Dimitri, Jim has just been on my com and asked me to tell you that they have been delayed so won't be back until the early hours and can you hold the reins tonight," said Carol.

"No problem," he replied, I was going to do a last patrol before I go to my bed."

After coffees they all made for the pool terrace where the conversations continued till just after midnight. Dimitri was the last to leave the terrace as he set off on his security rounds. First he made his way to his office to check the monitors and sensors were all operating correctly. One of the body-heat scanners seemed to have failed so Dimitri set about a diagnosis; it took him almost an hour and a half to fix the problem but as he left his office he felt confident that all was working as it should. As he closed the door he noticed a momentary flicker on one of the inferred screens, he turned back to look but there was nothing and after another five minutes without any further indications Dimitri continued his round. He made for the South side of the compound where the lights of the city below could be seen; he then turned East heading for the main-gate in the North-east of the compound. All was quiet as he approached the gate-house, there he stopped to chat and have coffee with Frederick Heinz, one of the excavation crew. At just before two-thirty, his 'dead-man's alarm' clutched tightly, Dimitri left the gate-house and headed North and West where the compound was cut into the slopes of the mountains. The lights here were lower and the stars shone as brilliant and bright as Christmas tree lights in the dark velvet sky, Dimitri stopped to stare towards the heavens and the elliptical smudge of the Andromeda Galaxy almost directly above his head.

In the darkness a figure crouched in between the folds of the hill just beyond the compound fence. He was listening

hard to every sound the silence could throw at him, the loudest sound was his own breathing but he had trained his mind to screen that out, the next loudest were the insects. They were a source of comfort to him, those insects gave him information like one-way radar he picked up the sounds and translated them into a picture. He heard a toilet being flushed and several snoring patterns reached him from the building in front of him, to his left he could hear the voices of two people talking. The almost invisible figure moved forward, planting each foot with care, gradually increasing the pressure on the ground until his full weight was transferred, ready to withdraw it at a nanosecond's notice. Although unseen he heard the breeze on the wire of the fence centimetres in front of his face, he stopped, now feeling the vibration of the damper sensors pulsing through the wire. Two blue jets flashed momentarily like needles in the blackness of a velvet dress, the figure jumped at the same instant and the jets propelled him over the four meter fence. He landed without a sound just as a door clicked shut somewhere to the East. The voices ceased and he prostrated himself melting into the short scrub beside the perimeter path. He felt the oncoming footfalls before he heard them, someone was coming down the path.

If Dimitri hadn't been staring up at the sky he would have been rendered unconscious but the blow hit him square on the top of his head, with a sickening crunch Dimitri's skull collapsed inward, he was dead before he hit the floor. The 'dead-mans' alarm fell from his hand and released the transmitter switch. Instantaneously lights cut through the blackness and the still of the night was pierced by alarm sounders. The black-clad figure heard the sound of running feet and again pressed a button on his cuff, again two needles of light flashed and the intruder shot into the air, disappearing as silently as he came.

Shackles Hotel, New York City, USA
14:30 (local time) Friday, July 11th,
2031

Carter selected the address for eleventh time, the return signal played its, by now irritating, jingle, Carter made yet another mental note to change that dam tone, and for the eleventh time the feminine electronic voice told him that the com-unit being paged was switched off. “Dam you Turk, where are you,” Carter shouted at the screen.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

04:35 (local time) Saturday, July
12th, 2031

Dawn was still an hour away as Jim and Declan made their approach, from their altitude the sun was still a ghostly smudge in the East. The compound lights were blazing as their LIMO slid in slow over the compound and touched down gently in the landing area. The 'gull-wing' doors opened and the two men emerged stretching and yawning after their journey from Jerusalem, both wondering what all the activity was about. In the flood-lights Jim saw Carol come running towards him, he could see she was visibly upset and his wife flung her arms around him and wept into his shoulder. "What ever is the matter," he asked.

Through her sobs Carol told him of Dimitri's fate, "Frederick found him after the alarms went off, he'd only spoken to him a few minutes before."

"What are you saying," asked Jim, "Dimitri's dead?"

"What was that," said Declan, "you're kidding me!"

"I wish I were Mr Brook," snapped Carol.

"Has anyone informed the police yet," asked Jim.

"Yes they have," came a voice from behind him, "Demos Petros, chief inspector," said the voice as a well built figure resolved from the glare of lights, hand outstretched, "Please to accept my condolences Mr. Markson."

"Thank you inspector, do you have any idea how it happened," Jim asked.

"We'll know more when is light, but it look like he was surprised by someone, no sign of struggle."

"Al-Faroque," shouted Jim, "this is Al-Faroque's handiwork."

"Who is that, sir," asked the inspector.

"I think we need to have a chat Inspector," said Jim

"it's Chief Inspector," corrected Demos, "and I was planning to do an interview with you Mr. Markson."

The interview took place two hours later and Jim laid out the whole story for the Chief Inspector, including all the evidence they had collected.

"I think there is little doubt that this Dr. Al-Faroque is the key to this attack Mr. Markson, I think that I need to talk to him very soon, stated the Chief Inspector, "I will contact our embassy in Cairo, and get Interpol involved."

"Thank you inspector," said Jim, "Mr. Aris was a dear friend as well as a dedicated researcher and faithful employee, I think we all need to see the people responsible punished."

"We will do our bests, you are very favoured by the Cyprus government and I have been given the instruction to put every recourses to find this persons," promised the Chief Inspector as he excused himself. Then he turned at the doorway and added, "Mr. Markson, I advice you to look after your Son, he seem to be very upset."

"Thank you Chief Inspector, we will," answered Jim. The Inspector disappeared to arrange the removal of Dimitri's body and Jim immediately followed him out of the office.

Outside in the sitting-room Carol, Jo and John sat in silence, "Where's Peter," Jim asked.

"He's in his room Jim," answered Carol, "he wanted to be on his own, I thought it was best to leave him to come to terms with Dimitri's death."

"I'll look in on him in a moment," said Jim as he sat in a chair next to his wife; he took her hand and asked, "So what do we do next?"

Carol was the first to break the silence, "If this is what the future holds, personally I don't feel like it's worth going on with all this."

"Mom!" Burst out Jo, "you mean pack up and go home so that poor Dimitri has died for nothing? And I for one am not going to cave in and let these bastards win." Jo put her face in her hands and through her sobs said, "It's made me

more determined to go on than ever, the world needs the truth, whatever that may be.”

“Let’s just sleep on it, we may feel different in the morning, we’re all upset and angry. . .” added Carol.

“No Mum, It’s my call and I say we continue,” Jo interrupted, “you and Dad can go back to Weymouth if you want but I’m staying.”

“I think I have to agree with Jo,” said Jim, “if we collapse at the first real hurdle everything we’ve achieved so far will be for nothing.”

“I guess I have to go along with Jo as well,” added John, “hell, I hate the idea of letting these guys win, I’m in to the end.”

“Thanks John, Dad,” said Jo looking up, her face stained with tears and her eyes red.

“I wasn’t saying we should give in,” said Carol, “I just suggested we should think about it, but if we’ve all made our decisions then count me in.”

Jo got to her feet and crossed to her mother, gave her a hug and said, “Thanks Mum.”

Nothing much got done for the remainder of that day, everyone walked around in a kind of trance, groups sat around whispering to each other and slowly shaking their heads. The only people who were working were those newcomers who had not known Dimitri well enough to grieve. The evening consisted of almost everyone gathering in the dining room for dinner and afterwards Jim and Jo asking everyone for their support. Jo offered to pay severance to anyone who wanted out. No one took the offer, *then*. Later the pool terrace was crowded and drinks flowed easily, but there was little joy. At around ten Peter emerged and sombrely joined his sister and parents, almost an hour later he noticed that the laboratory lights burned in the darkness and silently left the pool to investigate.

As he approached the Lab he could see Professor Gwillam, Dr. Fulton and someone else pouring over a soft-screen on one of the benches. Peter startled the three as he walked in through the door and he could see that the third person was Gerry Holbrook, the electronic security specialist. The Professor rose and approached Peter, "Are you OK Peter," he asked.

"No, but life goes on," he answered. "What are you three up to?"

"We thought that we would give your family, and those who knew Dimitri well, some time to grieve, I hope you don't mind," explained Owen Gwillam.

"No of course, thank you Professor," said Peter, "any progress with the data?"

"May be, Lad. Holkey here thinks it may be some sort of video feed and not text we're dealing with," said the Professor.

"It was just the way the data is grouped," interrupted Holkey, "it reminded me of a raw scanning data."

"That's great" said Peter a little subdued.

"Don't be too hopeful, we've got a long way to go, we don't know the scan length or the number of lines in a full picture, if pictures they are," said the Professor. "We don't even know if it uses the same system we use or anything else about it, we're just shooting arrows into the fog, hoping that we'll hit something."

"I know Professor, we just keep looking until we hit something significant," said Peter as he turned to leave, "I'm going to bed. Good night each."

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

05:12 (local time) Sunday, July 13th,
2031

Peter spent a restless night as did the remainder of the family, at just after five Peter gave up and went to the pool for an early swim only to find Jo had beaten him to it. “You been here all night,” he asked as he saw his sister.

“No, only been here twenty minutes, I couldn’t sleep.”

“Me neither,” said Peter as he threw himself into the cool water. The siblings swam in silence for some long time, both losing track of time. As the sun burst over the surrounding buildings it brought them both back to the here and now and as if at some unheard signal they climbed out of the cosseting liquid and returned to their rooms.

At seven-thirty the buzzer for breakfast sounded and the corridors started to come alive but the door to Peter’s room stayed firmly shut. Inside the room Peter laid on his bed with his soft-screen lodged on his bent legs, his fingers flitted deftly over the screen as net-page after net-page flicked across the screen. At last the pages slowed and one settled on the screen whilst Peter read intently. Unusually late for breakfast Peter lifted a page from the printer opened his door and made for the dining room. The room was still crowded and his sister was deep in conversation with John when Peter entered and interrupted the discussion. “Sis, have you seen this,” he said as he pushed the printout in front of her.

Jo read the header quickly before answering her brother, “Yeah, I remember something about it, but it was years ago. Isn’t it supposed to be in India somewhere?”

“Yes it’s somewhere in southern India, the site won’t say whereabouts cause they don’t want visitors,” Peter answered. “Well not crank visitors, they went ex-directory

after von Daniken published his first book in the mid twentieth century. Do you know anything about it Jo?"

"Not really," she answered, "Everyone just assumed it was the delusions of a sick mind when Danikin announced that they had TV six-thousand of years ago." Jo stopped and stared at Peter with that look that depicts the realisation of truth. "Oh crap, I see where you're going with this," she exclaimed. "Come on, let's see your professor."

Professor Gwilliam had already finished breakfast and had returned to the Lab to continue work on the data and was typing feverishly as Jo and Peter charged in.

"Well good morning you two," said Owen.

"Professor, have a look at this," said Peter, handing over the printout.

The Professor took the sheet and quietly read through the information, finally placing the document on the bench whilst he continued to stare at it. "Interesting," he said without looking up.

"Do you think it has any bearing on what we are trying to do," asked Jo.

"I don't know but at the moment it looks like the only lead we have," observed the professor, "This German guy, isn't he regarded as a bit of a crank in serious scientific circles?"

"That's true," admitted Peter, "but mainly because he believes that aliens from another world came here and interfered with our early society. That doesn't negate the evidence just the conclusion he came to."

"True" nodded the professor, "I know it's not the best of timing but can anybody check this out, get some detailed pictures?"

"We'll see Dad and see if we can organise it," said Jo.

"We could get John to do a virtual scan if we can get permission to make a visit," offered Peter.

"Good," said Owen, "if these relief carvings are circuit diagrams then we may get a clue to the technology we're

dealing with and the way it uses this data,” he concluded indicating the soft-screen in front of him.

“Have you found something Prof?” a voice asked. Jo and Peter looked around to see Holkey coming in behind them.

“Sort of, these two have found what could be a clue”, said Owen handing the paper to Holkey.

Holkey sat on one of the Lab stools and looked at the printout. A minute later he took a magnifying glass to the paper and studied it closer. “I would say that there is a pretty good chance that this is a circuit diagram but what it’s a diagram of I would not like to say.”

“That’s good enough for me, we’ll see Dad straight away,” said Peter.

Republic of Cyprus Police
Headquarters, Nicosia, Cyprus
11:00 (local time) Sunday, July 13th,
2031

“Thank you for coming in to see me,” said Chief Inspector Demos Petros as he shook hands with Jim Markson. The office was much larger that it had need to be and was stacked with files tied up in bundles. One wall was lined with green filing cabinets each with a different coloured dot next to the lock, the opposite wall contained a window that had a ledge too high to see out of. In the very centre of the office was an air-force blue metal desk that had probably been there since the Second World War and possibly British military surplus. “I just wanted to confirm a few thing with you and to bring you up to speed with where we go. Please sit,” the Chief Inspector said indicating a bent-wood chair of the same vintage as the desk.

“No problem Chief Inspector,” answered Jim, “I needed to get away from the compound for a while”.

“I am not clear to motive that this Dr. Al-Faroque has to kill Mr. Aris. Can you tell me reasons why to kill Mr. Aris?”

"I think it was just bad luck that Dimitri was killed, I think the intended victim was me or one of my family," answered Jim. "That's the information we were given, one of us would be the target."

"So, he was in wrong place at wrong time."

"I guess you could say that, he was just on his security rounds."

"But why does respected doctor wish to conspire to kill fellow archaeologists?"

"That's a god question," said Jim, "It would seem his reputation is at stake, particularly as he has publicly attacked us as frauds. The other side of the coin is that if the accepted archaeology is proved to be wrong then a lot of people will lose a lot of money. Investments in artefacts, profits from books, lecture tours, the whole spectrum. Dr. Al-Faroque seems to be afraid that we are on the right track and will stop at nothing to stop us."

"Hmm, now you explain I see the issue Al-Faroque has," the Chief Inspector concluded. "This is same for other man," CI Petros looked at his notes, "the American, Carter?"

"Not exactly, Carter seems to be totally money orientated," said Jim, "we have been informed by Perry Dupree that Carter has a large collection of very valuable artefacts. His fear is that those items will lose value if an alternative history is discovered, we also believe that he wants to get his hands on some of the artefacts in our safe keeping."

"But I am inform that these items are not yours, they are on loan, no?"

"Yes, that's right, many of the artefacts we are investigating belong to your government, and others to the various countries where they were unearthed."

"Mr. Markson, I can tell you, we have duty here to protect government property, under circumstances I propose to station a detachment of police to your compound and personnel. We cannot protect you out of Cyprus but while you in the Republic you will have police protection."

“We would welcome that, thank you Chief Inspector,” said Jim.

“Please call me Demos, I think we will get to know each other well over the next few weeks.”

The Chief Inspector sat back in his chair and lifted a file from an unseen drawer of the desk, which he opened, “I am happy to tell you that we have much progress made since yesterday.”

“Oh really,” interjected Jim.

“From enquiries and, what do you call, M.O. we think that the person attacking you was hired killer called ‘The Turk’,” C.I. Petros smiled inappropriately, “He is a dangerous man this Turk, he is cold blooded. Was in Turkish Army of occupation and stayed on after unification, but for armistice he would have been arrested for war crimes. We have often tried to get evidence to arrest him.”

“It seems you have little evidence this time either,” suggested Jim.

“You are right, nothing on CCTV, no DNA or witness, best chance is to get admission from Al-Faroque or Carter.” He again referred to his file, “We know Turk was not home at time of attack, our surveillance team saw him leave in car but lost him in Troodos

Mountains, but he was heading in our direction.”

“Do we have any hope of getting hold of Carter or Al-Faroque. . . Demos,” asked Jim.

“I have spoken to Martin Roughley , our Director of Antiquities, who I believe you know well.”

“Yes we do,” acknowledged Jim.

The Chief Inspector nodded and continued, “There is international agreement in the E.U. in respect to theft of archaeology, Mr. Roughley has contact with Embassy of the Republic of Cyprus in the Arab Republic of Egypt. I am sending the statement from Dupree to him in hope it will be enough to get access to Al-Faroque. Egyptian police are already looking for Carter for other matter. I have request

interview with him if they arrest him, but sadly he is in America at moment. If we get Al-Faroque to talk the US may extradite Carter.” Petros closed his file indicating that the interview was over.

“Well,” said Jim getting to his feet “that all sounds hopeful, if there is nothing else I need to get moving.”

“Certainly, thank you for coming to see me, Jim, I hope to have good news soon.” The two shook hands warmly and Jim left the office and stepped back into the warm sunshine of Nicosia.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

14:30 (local time) Sunday, July 13th,
2031

After taking a walk in a local park to think things through Jim returned to the compound North of the city, here he found his two offspring waiting for him. Jim grabbed a sandwich from the kitchen and joined them by the pool, “Right, what’s all the panic about,” he asked his son and daughter.

“Professor Gwilliam is finding it difficult to translate the data-burst because he has no idea of the system used to access it,” started Jo.

“Holkey seems to think that the data is video, so Professor Gwilliam is looking in that direction but, they still have no clue to the scanning rate, scan length, number of scan lines,” interrupted Peter. “So I did some research on the net as I had a memory of something, I found this relief carving in a temple in Southern India purported to be a circuit diagram for a TV or VDU.”

“Well done you two, but why this panic,” asked their Dad.

Peter jumped in again before Jo could open her mouth, “We think there may be a clue in the carving but since that von-Daniken guy found it, the Indian government has kept it under wraps, we need permission to get to the temple and a licence to do a virtual scan of the place.”

“I see,” said Jim, “you want me to apply through official channels so you can get over there. OK leave it with me.”

“By the way,” said Peter, “there is also this site in India where there is evidence that uranium has been mined some ten-thousand years ago. The question is why did people need uranium back then when Britons were not much better than savages?”

“That’s interesting Peter, but you need to ask if those ancient Britons were actually savages when they obviously had a technological basis to their culture. Don’t make assumptions based on the accepted history records, Peter, that’s what this organisation is all about.”

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

09.00 (local time) Tuesday, July 15th,
2031

Thankfully the police finished their tests on Dimitri's body quickly and permission was given to hold the funeral without undue delay. These days bodies were not stored in police morgues endlessly, modern technology meant that wounds and internal organs could be examined in holographic imagery without the need for the cadaver. DNA and Meta Scans preserved almost every detail of a body with the exception of toxicology but these could now be done in seconds to a accuracy undreamed of only twenty years ago.

There was a large police presence in the compound as the family and staff assembled ready for the ground vehicles that would take them to the funeral. Police dogs searched for traces of explosives whilst other armed police officers patrolled the perimeter. As the vehicles arrived they were searched and their drivers credentials checked, no one got into the compound, or out, now without a government pass. Holkey had been working closely with police advisors and extra security had been installed so that none could avoid being on CCTV for one second. The images were then stored on massive molecular hard-drives in a secure room within the Police H.Q. In among all this activity Declan's camera crew had been covering everything for the great European viewing public.

Slowly the cars moved through the compound gates, Dimitri's parents in the lead vehicle behind the hearse followed by a cortège of thirty-four other vehicles transporting the one-hundred and sixty-four mourners. Slowly down the steep hill from the compound near Kioneli, towards the city the procession crept, locals lined the routs and threw tributes in front of the hearse whilst they bowed

their heads in respect. As the cavalcade drew closer to the city centre the crowds grew thicker and barricades had been hastily erected; police controlled the traffic flow to allow free access to the Orthodox Church. Outside the church the media had gathered in force but only Declan's crew were allowed inside the beautiful building. At the request of Dimitri's family the service was a simple one but still the beauty and dignity of the proceedings filtered through to the millions of viewers across the world, the result of Declan's campaign to publicise the plight of the Trust. In the traditions of the Greek Orthodox Dimitri was interred in his families tomb at their local church at Theletra in the South-east of the island near Pathos, this was strictly a family affair and the mass of mourners and media left them to grieve in peace.

When everyone returned to the compound they found it as much a fortress as when they had left for the funeral. As good as his word Demos Petros had now stationed a division of armed police at the Trust's headquarters. It took forever to check everyone into the compound but thankfully by lunch time everyone was cleared and able to enjoy their food together.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus
08.30 (local time) Wednesday, July
16th, 2031

Activity started early, Jo and Peter were off to India on a three day research trip and were busy loading a LIMO, while Jim and Carol worried about their safety. Chief Inspector Petros has arranged with the Indian Police for them to have a guard throughout their travels and the Indian Government had insisted upon it. Martin Roughley had arranged to call to see Jim at nine o'clock on his way to the airport to catch the flight to Cairo, so Jim was keeping an eye out for his arrival at the main gate. Just as the two offspring were about to leave John came bounding out from the main residential block waving, "Jim, there's a call for you from the Israeli Prime Minister, it sounds urgent," he called.

Jim left the send-off party telling his son and daughter to be careful; he crossed to his office where the Israeli Prime Minister, Heidi Goldbloom was on-screen waiting for him.

"Yes Prime Minister, what can I do for you," asked Jim.

"Ah Mr Markson, we seem to have a little problem you may, hopefully, be able to help us with."

"I will do my best Madam Prime Minister."

"By the way, thank you for making that detour the other night, I hear you arrived back to a tragedy, please accept the condolences of this administration, I fear we may be somewhat to blame for delaying your return."

"Equally Prime Minister you may have save my life, we will never know," said Jim, "so what is this problem?"

"As you know, we are very concerned about the current state of the Temple Mount; yesterday we called in our people from the Geological Survey Department, just to make sure the hill was stable before we go about repairing the structural damage," explained the Prime Minister. "The report I have in front of me has disturbed me rather." She

picked up a folder, thumbed through a few papers, selected a sheet and seemed to read from it. "It seems that during the survey our scientists heard a hum emanating from the fissure, they used some very sophisticated seismological equipment that detects earth movements far below the surface to analyse and pinpoint the sound. According to this report," she held up the folder again, "the 'hum' has an epicentre one-hundred and twenty meters below the summit and is as close as they can make out dead centre to the mass of the mount. This morning I have been informed that the hum is producing vibrations in the temple to the extent that objects are moving around. I am sending you a copy of the report with all the technical data, please, if you have any suggestions I would be glad to hear them. This is not just a rock with a building on it, it is something that is central to all three Abrahamic faiths."

"Madam Prime Minister I will get my scientific staff to look at it, but I can't believe that we can come up with anything more than a government geology department," commented Jim.

"I have a feeling Mr. Markson that the problem is not entirely geological," stated the PM.

"Ah, in that case I will keep you informed of any theories we come up with."

"That is all I can ask, and thank you again Mr. Markson," she said as the connection was cut.

The seismology report came through a few seconds later, fifty-three pages to say there was a humming sound coming from the rock, around forty-five minutes of video and a audio recording taken from a microphone lowered twenty meters into the fissure. Jim listened to the audio first and then skimmed through the video without seeing anything of real interest. He typed in another address and forwarded to packet to the Lab mainframe. By the time he returned to the garage area his son and daughter had left,

so he headed for the Laboratory block. He found the Professor and Holkey pouring over individual machines.

"Hello Jim the kids get off alright?" Owen greeted in his faint soft, Welsh dialect.

"Yes, thanks, I assume," replied Jim.

"It'll do them good to get out into the field for a while after the past few days," commented Owen.

"Yes," agreed Jim, "I think you may be right. I've just forwarded a package to this machine, I wondered if you'd look at it, but first I had better bring you up to speed on the Jerusalem incident." Jim pulled up a lab stool and related the account of the Temple Mount.

Owen looked intrigued, "Of course geology isn't my field but if there's a hum there has to be something electrical or mechanical to make it."

"Well all the information is in the package, look at it and see what you think," Jim strolled across to where Holkey was busily working on some electronics, "I bet you wish you hadn't agreed to do Declan this particular favour Holkey," Jim said.

"Not at all, I'm really sorry about Dimitri, but I have to say, what you are doing is fascinating," replied Holkey. "I was going to have a word with you anyway, I was wondering if you'd mind if I stayed on for a while, I'll earn my keep, but I'd like to see how this data translation pans out."

"Holkey, I have no problem with that, in fact I was wondering if you'd be interested in coming on-board formally, to take over from where Dimitri left off."

"Jim, I can't promise that I'll be here on a permanent basis, a bit of a wanderer in me, but I'd like to stay for a while, thanks," said Holkey.

"It's a deal then," agreed Jim and the two men shook hands.

Southern India

18.05 (local time) Wednesday, July
16th, 2031

Peter set the LIMO down in the parking area of the EU Commission to India in Bangalore. Waiting inside the Commission was Gupta Sing the Indian government's representative and Principal Archaeologist for Mysore, Tamil and Nado Provinces. As they entered the reception Sing came striding towards them, he was an impressive man over two meters in height with broad shoulders and a classic face. On his head he wore a tradition maroon turban adorned by his badge of office, but otherwise he was every inch the archaeologist, kaki shirt, cotton shorts and sandals.

"It's such an honour to meet you both, welcome to India," he said in perfect UK English, "I hope you had a decent trip?"

"Thank you yes," replied Jo, "I'm Jo and this is my brother Peter."

"Oh yes I know," said Sing, "I have followed your exploits avidly, please call me Gupta, I will be at your service for the next three days."

"Are we going straight of to; wherever we're going, Gupta," asked Peter.

"My goodness no, I just came to welcome you and to brief you, I hope you don't mind," answered Gupta.

"Oh right," Peter said flashing a look at Jo, "Well brief away then Gupta."

"Okay, let's get started then," Gupta lead them towards two low couches in a recess of the reception area and sat down on one. The two youngsters sat on the opposite couch and leaned forward in feigned anticipation. "Tomorrow I shall collect you at five AM, and we will travel in the department's Trans-LIMO, we will have a two hour flight

and then we must travel by surface vehicle. I need to tell you that the windows of the vehicle will be blacked out for the entire surface journey, you understand?"

"Yes of course," said Jo.

"We will also need to search your equipment for any GPS units incorporated, we need to protect the site from sensationalist people and tourists who will spoil the holy temple. If you can have your equipment laid out here," Gupta indicated the reception area, "by six forty-five, please. Right that's the official bit over and done with, so I'll be away and leave you to relax in our lovely city." Gupta stood, shook their hands firmly again and left with a final wave.

The two looked at each other, "What a character," said Jo and both burst into laughter.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

17.15 (local time) Wednesday, July
16st, 2031

"Holky!," shouted the Professor, "Come and look at this."

Holky appeared over the professor's shoulder, "What's up Prof," he said, looking at the screen where the professor had been working.

"Based on your intuition about this data being video rather than some sort of text I searched through the first section of data for a likely simple pattern," explained Owen as data flashed across the screen. "Strangely enough I found a section quite close to the end of the section that looked promising," a section of code froze on the screen and highlighted itself. "I wrote a quick program to search for likely scan sequences, it took the computer about fifty minutes but it has assembled something significant, Look." Owen hit a soft key on the screen and a character appeared.



Holky's mouth fell open, "You actually got something out of the code," he exclaimed.

"Looks very much like it, doesn't it" laughed the professor. Owen reached over and pressed a button on the internal com system and waited a second or two, "Jim," he said, "I have something you might be interested in, can you pop over?" He re-pressed the button and sat back. "And the credit has to go to you for spotting the code was video not script,"

"But that's a character not video," replied Holkey.

"Yes it is," said Owen, "but don't you use text in videos? Text or symbols are the simplest of video code and they stand out in the coding, that's what I was looking for, a section of high and low numbers, background and foreground."

"Of course," said Holkey, "why didn't I think of that."

"You probably would have, it's just that I'm used to analysing data," explained Owen, "we make a good team, don't we?"

Just then Jim and John entered the Lab looking expectant, "What have you got for us Owen," asked Jim. The Professor went through the same explanation sequence again and again the symbol came up on the screen. "Well done Owen, does this mean that you've cracked the code," asked Jim.

"Not at all, at best it's a clue," explained Owen, "at least we know that Holkey was right about it being video code. The

computer has extracted this code because it was simple, it may be just a part of a frame sequence, it may not be the right orientation, negative or positive, etc.”

All this time John had been staring at the screen in silence, suddenly conscious that John had been silent, Jim looked round and read the expression on his face, “John, is something the matter,” he asked.

“Yeah,” said John in a sort of absent tone, “I think I’ve seen that symbol before.” John suddenly walked off into his office and returned with a file that he opened on the bench next to Owen. A few seconds of scrabbling through papers that looked like text packages he pulled a sheet of paper from the file. “Is this the right way round Professor,” he asked.

“Not necessarily,” said Owen, “as I said I’m not sure of orientation.”

John laid the sheet of paper on the bench next to the screen, now it was the others turn to stand aghast with jaws drooping. “I think we need to get Howard in on this, this is one of the sketches I sent to him at the museum, it came from one of the objects we brought back from Ethiopia and one that Dr. Fulton identified it as being included as one of a number of symbols on the Golden Pyramid.”

“The pyramid that disappeared from the museum entrance hall,” asked Jim.

“The very one,” replied John, “Here’s research I did on it, I’d forgotten all about it with everything that’s been going on” John placed a bunch of paperwork on the bench.

Owen took the top sheet and quickly read through, “This is interesting,” he said, reading from the page “*Symbol possibly early Greek in origin but some sources place the origin in pre-first dynasty Egypt as a similar symbol is found in early hieroglyphics, meaning obscure but some scholars are of the opinion that it means 'knowledge of the earth'.*”

“Yeah, but the context there seems to be wrong, I found that most contexts indicate that it’s not ‘*of the earth*’ but ‘*out of the Earth*’,” said John, “that’s a subtle difference and an important one considering recent discoveries.”

“Can we have a chat with Howard Fulton,” asked Owen.

They found Dr. Fulton in ‘The Depository’ as usual, working on cataloguing the many artefacts that were in the care of the Trust. He had almost converted the high security storeroom into a workshop, a bench had appeared in the centre, which supported several machines and pieces of equipment, and a miniature photo studio had been created in one corner.

“What’s this, a deputation,” Howard said smiling, as the four walked in, “I don’t usually get visitors down here, except Jo.”

“We need to have a chat Howard,” said Jim, “Owen here has cracked a small part of the data-burst code.”

“A very small part,” added Owen

“Nevertheless a piece that seems significant though,” said Jim.

“Remember those symbols that I sent to you at the museum,” asked John.

“Of course, but I never got a chance to follow up on it,” Howard said, “before I got the boot. Why?”

“That *small part* of the code that Owen has recovered has given us this,” John handed Howard a printout of the symbol, “as you can see it’s identical to the one that you identified as being on the ‘Golden Pyramid’. We were hoping that you could tell us a bit more about the pyramid.”

Howard went to a shelf in the next chamber and returned with an old battered leather briefcase that he opened and extracted a manilla file, “I have done a lot of research on this artefact over the past year, It was originally excavated quite recently from a chamber in the rock between the paws of the Giza Sphinx, the museum claimed it was a replica of the great pyramid. Carbon fourteen tests date it

at between three-thousand and three-thousand five-hundred, BC, but there are problems with that date, the symbols are one of them, the symbols are not hieroglyphics, they pre-date them.”

“If the carbon dating placed a contemporary date on the object how can it pre-date hieroglyphics or be pre-dynasty,” asked Jim. “It’s not unusual to get false dates from carbon tests,” stated Howard. “Carbon-dating depends on supposition; we suppose that all things started life with a certain level of radioactivity and that the half-life of that radioactivity is also constant, in reality things are not that simple. Certain areas of the Earth have been subjected to higher particle bombardment than other areas, catastrophic nuclear irradiation produces secondary thermal neutrons from cosmic ray interactions. For instance a burst of radiation from a nearby supernova could not only reset radiocarbon clocks but also heat the planet’s atmosphere, melt ice sheets, and lead to biological extinctions. It may mean that we need to add as much as ten to twenty thousand years to carbon dates in some cases; the problem is that we do not know which areas of our planet have absorbed what levels of irradiation. Add to this the constant bombardment of cosmic rays from the universe at unknown past rates, and we have a recipe for total confusion if you accept carbon dating as definitive.”

“Wow,” exclaimed Jim, “I never realised the potential for inaccuracy was so great.”

“I have heard of this theory before,” said John, “but it’s one of those conspiracy theories that cranks go for.”

“The evidence is there John,” said Howard, “find any artefact that has been tested more than once and look at the discrepancy between the readings. We have objects that we know are contemporary by other dating methods, which have wildly differing carbon ages.

“But there aint any reputable members of the scientific community that support this, are there,” asked John.

“Of course there are, but most are frightened to make it public,” admitted Howard, “I have known department chairs at the Lawrence Berkeley Nuclear Laboratory that have been secretly researching the phenomena for years and fully realise the implications.”

“I think as an organisation we should formally disregard all carbon-dating results,” announced Jim, “after what you have just told us I don’t feel we can trust it any more, no, further than that, I think if true it will muddy the waters for us.”

“So what did you make of this ‘Golden Pyramid,” asked Owen.

“I didn’t get a chance to make a lot of it, as soon as Dr. Al-Faroque found out I considered the thing Pre-Dynasty I could no longer get access to it. However it is not solid and it is not gold, when you get close to it you can feel something, like being close to an electrical sub-station. Now that I think about it, the one time I worked close to it for an extended period, I felt sick afterwards, I don’t know if it was the artefact though.” Howard dove into the file and pulled out some folded paper, which he unfolded to reveal a rubbing of one side of the pyramid. “As you can see there are seven symbols along the bottom edge, your symbol was on one of the other faces that I didn’t get time to rub.”

“Seven again,” said Owen, “that number keeps cropping up everywhere, I’ll bet there were three rows on each side, were there.”

“As it happens there were, but only on three sides,” answered Howard, the fourth side was covered with script of some kind but nobody could ever figure it out, unique you see not found any where else.”

“You don’t have a copy of that do you,” asked John.

“You know I may have a digital picture still in my memory card,” Howard answered. “It’s in my room, I’ll dig it out for you later.”

“Can we get access to this pyramid,” asked Owen.

“No chance,” said John, “they’ve taken it off display, and I would guess it’s off limits to everyone.”

Just then the food-ready bell sounded. “Come on lets continue this over dinner,” said Jim, “I’m jolly hungry after all this excitement.” The five men made their way from the Depository to the dining hall and the discussion continued into the evening.

Bangalore, Southern India

05:00 (local time) Thursday, July
17th, 2031

Gupta was a good as his word when he arrived at exactly five in the morning; he walked into the reception area and woke the duty concierge from his power nap. “Good morning,” he said, “would you be so kind as to inform Ms. and Mr. Markson that I am here to collect them, please.”

Both Peter and Jo were already up and dressed when the internal com sounded, surprised though they were that Gupta had actually arrived at five they both grabbed their rucksacks and went down to join him. “We haven’t actually eaten breakfast yet Gupta,” protested Peter.

“No worries Mr. Peter, I have a nice breakfast in the LIMO for us all, as soon as I check your bags for GPS equipment we will make a start.”

The morning was dark and the air was fresh despite the warmth, in the East there was a glimmer of the dawn. Gupta checked their bags and equipment thoroughly and carefully repacked everything exactly as he had found it. Ten minutes later they were lifting off, Gupta set the auto navigation system and joined them in the passenger compartment where he opened a locker and served breakfast. There was plenty of food from traditional Indian to the European breakfast roll, cereal and fruit juices. Once breakfast was over Gupta explained he security arrangements.

“I am sorry about all the ‘cloak and dagger’ stuff,” he said, “the truth is that the carvings you are interested in have been moved for safe keeping. After Heir Danakin’s book was published in the sixties, every UFO nut in the world wanted a piece of them. It is very sad but we had to swap the carvings for similar panels in another ancient temple a long way away. The nuts and fanatics continue to come to the site but are disappointed when they can’t make head not tail of the carvings.”

The flight took a little over two hours and the two youngsters found them selves explaining what the Trust was trying to achieve. Gupta seemed genuinely interested especially in the artefacts they have been investigating. "We have much unexplained archaeology in India you know," Gupta said. "The ancients were not as backward as we like to think, there is much evidence to suggest that an atomic war took place on our sub-continent many, many thousands of years ago.

"Really , " said Jo only half interested.

"What evidence is that," asked Peter.

"Well for one there is a mine, well a quarry actually, where uranium has been taken from the ground. Geologists tell us that judging by the weathering of the rock it was quarried between thirty and fifty thousand years ago."

"How does that suggest a nuclear war," Jo asked rather sarcastically.

"We also have a nuclear bomb crater to the North-east of Bombay over two kilometres in diameter."

Jo suggested "Most probably a meteor strike like the one in the US."

"Oh no," said Gupta. "No trace of any meteoric material has ever been found at the site or in the vicinity, and this is the world's only known "impact" crater in basalt. Indications of great shock from a pressure exceeding 600,000 atmospheres and intense, abrupt heat that is indicated by basalt glass spherules that have been found. The crater is now filled with water and is almost circular.

"Whereabouts is this crater Gupta," asked Peter now even more interested.

"It's about 400 kilometres North-east of Bombay."

"Is it accessible," Peter enquired.

"Yes, do you want to visit it?"

"I thought we'd do a fly-over on the way back," said Peter.

Two hours later they landed the LIMO in a government facility in a small town not far from what Peter thought was

the East coast. They transferred all their luggage to an old twentieth century Landrover Discovery for the last leg of the journey. They were bumped and jolted for over an hour before they turned off the rough track and bulldozed through fresh undergrowth for around a one hundred meters before a large ruin came into view. The Landrover stopped at the foot of a flight of steps and Gupta announced that they had arrived.

The three quickly bundled out of the vehicle and Gupta led them up the steps into the temple; he suddenly produced two torches and giving one to Jo, pressed forward into the darkness of the temple. After making their way along several passageways and rounding as many corners they found themselves in a chamber about ten meters square, in the centre there seemed to be a pit and on inspection it contained another flight of stone steps descending into a lower level. "Don't go down there," Gupta shouted to Jo and as he shone his torch down the steps and they could see that almost half of the steps were missing leaving a six meter drop for the unsuspecting explorer. Gupta moved to the far wall and seemed to move a lever embedded in the floor, immediately they heard a grinding noise and looking into the pit they saw the missing steps swing into place. Peter was the first to descend but they could see little until Gupta disappeared again, then started a small generator and strategically placed lamps flared into life. The carvings were breathtaking and Jo spent almost an hour examining them whilst Peter tried his best to make sense of them as engineering drawings. Gupta told them that the lower level was thought to be far older than the temple above and that little research or archaeological work had been done due to a lack of resources, the remoteness of the site and a need to protect the find for future generations. They spent the next two hours setting up the equipment and calibrating the scanners. Gupta having returned to the Landrover, minutes

later he served lunch and suggested they eat before starting the work of scanning the carvings.

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

09.30 (local time) Thursday, July
17th, 2031

No sooner had breakfast been over that Jim received a call from the gate-house to say that Chief Inspector Petros was asking to see him. Jim went to the gate to greet the Chief Inspector; they exchanged greetings and pleasantries as they walked back to Jim's office. "How can I help you Demos?"

"Is just a courtesy visit to update you," said the Chief inspector. "We have heard from Egypt department of Justice that request for interview with venerable doctor has been refused."

"Dam!" said Jim.

"But we have other concern," continued Demos, "Department of Antiquities has made complaint through official channels about you accusing their esteemed director, Al Faroque on TV broadcast based on word of Dupree."

"Which means," asked Jim.

"Means that our government get involved and who know where that lead."

"Great," said Jim, "that's all we need, issues with the Cyprus government; they have been so supportive up to now."

"And they may continue support, but they do not like bad relations with other country; much is down to Martin Roughley who is still in Cairo," said the Chief Inspector. "Now I let you get back to work and I need to speak to my officers and inspect security arrangement; after all I am inspector, no," he said with a chuckle. As he was going through the door he turned back to Jim, "Please, Jim, not to

worry, we get everything sorted,” he turned and disappeared into the lounge.

Unknown Location, Southern India
12:45 (local time) Thursday, July
17th, 2031

The heat and humidity was almost unbearable sitting in the clearing by the Landrover and they were glad to get back to the work inside the temple where the constant temperature was more temperate. There were nearly fifty relief carvings around the walls and alcoves of the chamber, plus another twelve leaning against the wall in another anti-chamber, these were the panels that had been moved from the publicised location. Peter took responsibility for recording the main chamber whilst Jo scanned the twelve stored panels. The main virtual scan of the chamber required several set-ups due to the arrangement of alcoves, so Jo managed to finish work first, and joined Peter in his task. It was the third set-up and Jo was monitoring the scan on a soft-screen in order to calibrate the focus when she noticed it.

“Stop there Peter,” she shouted. Jo took one of the torches and crossed to the alcove where Peter was working.

“What’s up Jo,” asked Peter.

“There’s something not right about that carving,” Jo said pointing to one panel at the end of the alcove, “it stands out on the scan but you can’t see it now.” Jo went back to the monitor screen to check it out and to show Peter. “See there that lobe thing, the shadow is much deeper than the rest of the carving,” Peter agreed and they returned to the alcove.

“This is it,” said Peter pointing to what looked like a plum bob on a cord. Jo felt the lobe and tried to remove it, then

pressed it but nothing happened, “let me,” he said. Jo stepped away and Peter took a quick look around to see if Gupta was within sight, then with a swift action hit the lobe with the stabilisation weight from the tripod, the lobe moved.

The movement was only slight but it was there, the scan told them that the movement was zero point seven-eight millimetres; Jo stepped in and examined the lobe again, she pressed it again, and then a little harder, the lobe moved into the panel and stopped two centimetres in, then nothing. “That was worth it,” said Peter. Then Jo heard a faint hissing sound that was just audible, telling Peter to shut up they both listened intently, the sound stopped. Seconds later it started again but much louder, then a new sound joined the hiss, it sounded like two grit stone grinding wheels from an old windmill. Just then Gupta came running around the corner.

“What have you done,” he said, “what is happening?”

“We found this button in that panel,” explained Peter, “we pressed it.”

“Oh my goodness,” exclaimed Gupta holding both hands to his cheeks. “Quick let us get out of here before the whole ruin comes down around us.”

“No,” said Jo, “we wait and see what happens.” The grinding noise continued faltering spasmodically, and then dust started to stream from above them. The three stood back from the dust-fall, Gupta stood rather further away than the others, through the dust a gap started to appear in the wall in alignment with the left hand side of the panel. They held their breaths. The black void grew wider until it was fully ten centimetres wide, then everything stopped leaving an eerie silence.

Jo who was still holding the torch rushed forward and pressed her face into the gap whilst thrusting the lit torch through, she could see little but swirling dust. Then she

caught a flash of reflected light from her torch, "There's something in here, but I can't see for dust," she reported.

"Let's leave it until the dust settles," suggested Peter.

"Let us leave it until I can report back to my department head," suggested Gupta, "we don't know what is in there or what condition the structure is in."

"Let me think," said Jo, "this is a hard decision, I think we'll go with . . . Peter's suggestion."

"I am not happy with this," stated Gupta, "it is getting late and we have a long journey back."

"It's a good job you have camping equipment in the Landrover then isn't it Gupta," Peter said.

"That is for emergencies," stated Gupta emphatically.

"Well this is an emergency, isn't it Gupta," stated Jo, "there is no way I'm leaving until I've seen what is in that chamber."

They all trooped up the steps and into the hot air of the clearing. It was nearing five-thirty and the sun had sunk below the surrounding vegetation back lighting it with vivid greens and yellows. Two wild monkeys were investigating the Landrover but after noticing the three humans emerge from the temple scattered into the jungle chattering warnings to their social group. Both Jo and Gupta made a call on their com-units, Jo contacted her Dad to report in and tell the family that they were spending the night in the jungle and they would be delayed by at least a day. She promised to let her father know as soon as they found out what the mysterious chamber contained. Gupta had a uncomfortable conversation with his head of department, but things were smoothed over when Jo took the com from him and promised that the Trust would make good any damage and provide professional archaeologists to excavate the site if needs be. They were granted a temporary two day excavation permit. Gupta was a lot happier after this and became enthusiastic about the find.

Gupta's emergency supplies provided for three days and included food rations. They ate the remaining fresh food at six-thirty and then ventured back into the temple. It took some fifteen minutes more for their sight to recover from the daylight outside before they tried to look into the newly discovered chamber. The first sight Jo had of the interior made her gulp, although everything was covered in a good layer of dust, it looked like the control-room of an alien spacecraft.

"Peter," Jo asked, "can we get a VR scanner through that gap?"

"Not a chance," he replied, "we need at least another two centimetres, but we need to finish the scans we came for first."

"I have an idea," said Gupta, "You two finish the scans and I will fetch the hydraulic jack from the Landrover and see if I may open the gap up a little."

"Good idea," said Peter and went back to work finishing the scans.

Five minutes later Gupta returned with the vehicle jack and worked tirelessly for the following two hours while Peter and Jo scanned the remainder of the chamber. When they had finished they returned to the alcove to find a lattice of makeshift bracing.

"I think we are just about ready," said Gupta, climbing out from a cage of tree trunks, bamboo and stones, "let us try it." Slowly Gupta started to pump the handle, the jack took up the slack and started to exert pressure on the stone door. The gentle pumping continued and the set-up gave a groan, rock crumbled and the bracing shook; the door started to move, one millimetre at a time but every one was worth it. At around fifteen centimetres Peter announced that he could get the scanner through but Gupta kept pumping, saying, "I want to see what is in that room with my own eyes, let us keep going until it stops." So the pumping and groaning continued, twenty, twenty-five

centimetres, then a stop while Gupta adjusted his bracing and pack the gap with stone. The opening of the stone panel resumed ten minutes later and within a half hour the gap had opened a massive forty centimetres. It took only seconds to reduce the bracing to rubble and Jo to lead the way into the chamber.

The two torches could never have done the chamber justice and it was up to each person to assemble a picture of the contents from the various fragments illuminated by the beam from each torch. They stood in the centre of the chamber, taking in the scene with mouths agape. The room was large, they estimated at least thirty meters long and twenty wide, in the centre stood what looked like an altar. At one end two pillars stood about three meters apart and in front of them was located an ornate desk curving around and about fifteen meters wide. None of them could tell how long they had stood there but eventually Gupta brought them back to reality, "This must wait until tomorrow, it will be dark outside and we have not yet made camp." Reluctantly they left the chamber and trooped out of the temple into the late Indian dusk. After they had set up camp Jo made a call to their dad to report the find and send some rather bad quality pictures from the com-unit.

"We've finished the VR scans and we will be doing some of the chamber tomorrow after we've cleaned the dust off and Peter will be doing an initial examination, if we can't get it done tomorrow we may stay over another day."

"OK Jo," said her father, "will you be able to send the scans of the carvings through for Professor Gwilliam to work on them."

"Dad, Peter says he'll be sending them in bout thirty minutes after he's zipped it."

"We'll look forward to that, look after your selves and give me a call tomorrow, not too early, remember the time difference please," said Jim.

"OK Dad," Jo laughed, "here's Peter"

“Hello Son, exciting day then.”

“You bet Dad, I just wish we’d brought Professor Gwilliam along,” said Peter.

“I’m sure you can cope fine, Son, If you need him you can always call him on the com” said Jim, “and Peter, for the time being make sure nothing from that chamber gets into the daylight.”

“I don’t think there is much chance of that with Gupta looking over our shoulders all the time.”

“That’s all very good” said his Dad, “but Gupta may decide to take some evidence back to his chief,”

“Leave it to me Dad, be in touch tomorrow, bye.”

JMRT House, Nicosia, Cyprus

12:31 (local time) Thursday, July
17th, 2031

The VR scan packages arrived in six separate envelopes, Jim with the Professor and Holkey viewed each one on the wall soft-screen in the lounge, the biggest screen in the compound. The scans were good quality and the with excellent definition, as they flipped through the reference frames they marvelled at the diagrams of unknown devices. “What do we run this on Jim,” asked Owen.

“We have the VR set in the Lab store,” Jim told him, “I’ll get it out and set up for you.”

“How many sets have you got Jim,” asked Holkey.

“There’s just one machine but I think we have four input/output sets,” Jim told him.

“I just thought if both the Professor and I could go in we may find something quicker,” suggested Holkey, “I think I could recognise a few circuits.”

“Sounds like a plan to me,” said Owen.

The VR sets were set up in the lounge where others could watch the feed on the screen, all the furniture was cleared

away and by mid afternoon the search commenced. To Holkey and the Professor it was like wonderland, Owen started on the wall reliefs and Holkey took the panels stacked against the wall. The search went for just forty-five minutes before Holkey struck gold. "I think this looks like some sort of video circuit Prof, come and see what you think."

Owen moved to where he could see the blue figure representing Holkey, "Lets see now what have we got here," he closely examined the image and Holkey talked him through why he thought it was a video circuit. "OK I think we have something here," he said, book-marking the image.

Both men came out of the system and Owen ordered up large printouts of all the carvings. Jim came out of his office having got bored with watching them after ten minutes, "That was quick," he said.

"Holkey found what I want to start with," Owen said, "but I think we need to look closely at *all* the carvings. Looking at these diagrams I don't think we are dealing with what we think of as a VDU."

"What do you mean," asked Jim.

"When we flipped through the index images earlier, unless it's missing, there was no sign of any cathode tube or LCD, Plasma, or the soft-screen systems we use. I thought it a long shot to hope for something we knew," Owen explained. "However I *think* Holkey has identified the information we need to take the next step."

"So we're making progress then," asked Jim.

"Why certainly, but I'd rather wait until we get the scans from this new room that the kids have found before we go any further," said Owen. "I'm off to Jerusalem with you tomorrow but Holkey will be doing his very best to translate the carving he found."

Unknown Location, Southern India
07:33 (local time) Friday, July 18th,
2031

When Jo and Peter awoke they found that Gupta had gone, however the initial panic that they felt was relieved when Peter found the note taped to the front of their tent, it read:

Jo/Peter
I have gone to the nearby town where there is a government Archaeological & geological survey unit. I think we need some equipment to remove the dust and more lighting sets to examine the artefacts properly. I spoke to the district manager first thing this morning and they have most of what we need. I should be back by 10am so relax but DO NOT under any circumstances go back into the temple until I return.
Your servant
Gupta

“Good old Gupta,” said Peter as he passed the note to Jo, “come on let’s get some breakfast and relax for an hour or two.”

“This is so frustrating,” Jo said answering Peter as she read the note, “can’t we just do some re-con while we wait.”

“Jo, no, we need to respect what Gupta says, we need him on our side. If we ignore his instructions we may never get near the contents of the chamber, the government are already being skittish about these sensational finds, let’s not upset them.”

“Why are you so sensible Peter,” she asked, “you’re right, let’s eat.”

They had a breakfast of coffee, tinned grapefruit and cereal bars then they pulled the camp beds out of the tent and lazed in the morning sun. However neither was idle, Peter viewed the pictures of the newly discovered chamber on his com-unit whilst Jo worked on her discovery report on her beloved fifteen year old Laptop.

Gupta was as good as his word and returned to the temple at ten minutes after ten, they heard the Land-rover five minutes before he arrived, as he entered the clearing towing a box-trailer he was waving madly. "I have almost everything we need and I have acquired some fresh food also," he called through the open window.

It took Peter another hour to get the vacuum system installed and working whilst Gupta set about wiring up the extra lighting sets. Jo, who couldn't wait started cataloguing the items as soon as the first light was switched on. The first thing Jo noticed was the similarity between this chamber and the one she had left in Ethiopia a few weeks ago, how distant that seemed already. The walls were glass smooth and on examination were obviously vitrified; the corners were precise right angles; the inside of the door was constructed from some sort of metal, however there was not a trace of corrosion. At the opposite end of the chamber from the two pillars were rows of obviously tailored racks some of which contained objects whose purpose was a total mystery. In one corner was a rack that seemed to be made of a very soft spongy plastic; in this were scores of what looked like glass disks the size of spectacle lenses but about half a centimetre thick. Above the plastic rack were hung several yokes; rods of about twenty centimetres in length with a circular yoke at one end which obviously fitted the lenses below.

As the dust started to be removed from the floor and the long desk the filters collected a number of small objects,

Peter and Gupta could hear them rattle down the tubes and enter the trap. Peter being curious as to what they had caught stopped the vacuum to examine the contents of the trap, what he found were human teeth. Other items were found in the dust; artefacts that looked like bracelets, several medallions, a neck chain with what could be a key attached, and several other indescribable small objects. Peter was fascinated by the desk arrangement and convinced that what they had found was some sort of control room with the desks being possibly the actual control panels. The top surface of the desk had many features and a script that was totally foreign to any of the three; there were crystals that stood proud of the surface and Jo spotted several small recesses that were the identical size to the lenses she'd found earlier. Peter found an access panel in the floor just between the desk and the pillars that had come loose; in the recess were cables of a sort, they were of a transparent jelly substance with no sign of metals inside them and tough enough to hold their integrity. None of the access panels in the desk could be opened and Peter's frustration with this was aggravated by the total lack of a visible power source.

By using a miniature camera attached to a swan-neck stalk he could see that some of the cables were connected to at least one of the pillars where they extended below the floor. Peter examined the pillars more closely, they were about three meters high and around four meters apart, the top thirty centimetres of each were different, they looked like electrical ceramic insulators. The pillars seemed to be made of opaque glass but tests with a test meter told Peter that the material was conductive with a very low resistance. Each pillar was surmounted by something that looked like a golden winged person, or angel, facing outwards and wings folded back to point at the other angel. The folded wings were about half a meter in length with a line of small glass beads along the underside of each wing. Peter thought the

angels looked familiar but he could not think where he had seen them before, were they insignias or was their a practical purpose to these winged creatures, but that could wait till later. Connecting the pillars in a straight line along the floor was a groove about three millimetres wide containing another row of glass beads.

With all this equipment there needed to be a power source of some kind, cables of a kind, insulators, control panels, everything screamed out for energy. Peter used his multi-meter to check for any source of power but there was none. "Peter come and look at this," Jo called from somewhere behind him.

"Where are you," he called.

"Just back here," she answered, "there's an alcove in the corner next to the racks."

Peter followed the direction of her voice and found his sister with one of the hand torches in a small chamber around three metres square, "Gupta, can we get a light in here please," he shouted.

A minute later Gupta arrived with a gas-lamp on a stand, he sited the lamp near the doorway and switched it on, "Where did this room come from, I did not see it before?"

"I don't know I just sort of backed in here," responded Jo.

In the room stood nine black cylinders of around thirty centimetres in diameter formed up in a block mounted upon nine thick plates of what looked like glass with each plate connected to its neighbour by a transparent rod of about three centimetres diameter. The walls and ceiling of the room were also lined with the transparent material but the floor was spongy and slightly tacky. Peter suddenly realised that in this chamber there was not a speck of the dust that had flooded the outer chamber. He took out his multi-meter again to check for energy readings and had a surprise, "Jo, these cylinders are magnetic," he said, "and a real strong field as well."

"What does that mean," asked Jo.

"I don't know yet but it must have something to do with a power source," Peter answered, "strange thing is I can't register the magnetic field from outside this room. My guess would be these are some form of capacitor."

"Could they be a form of battery," asked Gupta.

"Well that's what a capacitor is in effect," Peter informed him.

They spent another four hours examining the two chambers before Gupta suggested they record virtual scans, and reluctantly Jo agreed.

Five-thousand Metres above Jerusalem
on approach to the Sanhedrin
Building 12:10 (local time) Friday,
July 18th, 2031

The newly built Israeli Government building sprawled below them, white in the bright sunlight, as Jim and Professor Owen Gwilliam approached the designated landing area resolved itself as their destination. As the LIMO touched down several security men appeared on the ramp and walked beside the vehicle as it moved to the parking area. "Nice welcoming committee," noted Jim.

The two were escorted to a nearby elevator that whisked them down to the Prime Minister's office where they were asked to wait. On the stroke of twelve-thirty the Prime Minister swept into the office and shook hands with Jim without actually stopping; her travel ended behind the giant arcadia wood desk. "Thank you for coming all this way gentlemen, Israel appreciates it.

"A pleasure Madam Prime Minister," said Jim.

"Please, call me Heidi in private, we try to be as informal as possible."

“Thank you, Heidi,” responded Jim, “This is Professor Owen Gwulliam, one of the worlds foremost physicists,” Heidi jumped up and rounded the desk so that Owen could shake the Prime Minister’s hand.

“I’m not sure if that’s a title I can live up to,” said Owen laughing.

“I’m sure you will fulfil any introduction Professor,” Heidi said still holding on to the professor’s hand, “I have read several of your books and I have to say they fascinate me.”

“Has there been any further developments at the Mount since we last spoke,” asked Jim

“There was a tremor yesterday afternoon and I’m told that the fissure has opened another three millimetres,” said Heidi, “I have to say that this administration is very worried about this situation as are the Muslim and Christian governments who support and protect the sanctity of the Mount. What do you think you will be able to do for us?”

“Well now I’m not sure if we can actually *do* anything,” said Owen, “we have come here to assess the situation and see if we can find a reason for the quake or if it has anything to do with the incidents at the Trust’s HQ, the Cairo Museum and various other sites across Europe.”

“I have asked my Minister of National Security to take you across to the Mount and give you any access you need,” Heidi explained, “the area is still closed to the public so the site is all yours. We have also arranged for our Head of Geology Studies from the University to be there with his team.”

“We will provide you with a full report of course,” said Jim.

“If you would, just provide Ben with details of your findings,” asked Heidi, “he can then brief me,” she abruptly stood and offered her hand again, signalling that the interview was at an end.

“Thank you for providing this opportunity,” said Jim, shaking hands with the Prime Minister.

“Nice to have met you Madam,” added Owen.

“The pleasure was mine Professor,” responded Heidi, “we must arrange for a longer meeting when things are not so hectic, there are so many questions I would like to ask you. Goodbye Professor.”

The two men left the office and were escorted back to the main entrance where they were provided with security passes. Outside they were ushered to a surface vehicle, “Where are we going,” asked Jim.

“To the Temple Mount,” answered one of the security men, “isn’t that what you are here for?”

“We have scientific equipment in our LIMO on the roof that we need to collect,” explained Owen.

“That’s no problem sir, you will find that your LIMO is already at the site,” the security man informed them.

“The area is a high security no-fly zone, the vehicle needed to be secured.”

“Great,” said Jim, “who gave them permission to interfere with private property I wonder, God’s chosen people seem to overstep even their divine authority.” The vehicle speed off toward the Temple Mount.

Unknown Location, Southern India

14:20 (local time) Friday, July 18th,
2031

The scanner beeped six times signalling the end of the scanning process for the second time, there was just the second smaller chamber to complete now and the job was done. They moved the eight scanning heads and the recorder into the chamber and positioned them in the usual box configuration, the recorder was connected and the three vacated the room as Peter pressed the remote control to activate the scan. Forty-five minutes later the six beeps sounded again and the recorder automatically

powered down. Peter immediately entered the chamber and disconnected the recorder then removed the memory chip. "I want to send this to Professor Gwilliam straight away, I need him to have a look at it before we leave," he said.

"Isn't he with Dad in Jerusalem," said Jo.

"Yes but his com-unit has a virtual chip that can project one-fifth scale images, all he needs is a dark corner," Peter told her.

Outside in the golden daylight of early evening Peter connected the memory chip to the com-unit and brought up the Professor's connection. Professor Gwilliam answered almost immediately, "Hello Peter, you got something for me," he asked.

Hi Professor, we've just finished scanning some pretty interesting chambers and I wanted you to have a quick look before we left," Peter told him.

"Well I'm with your Dad at the Temple Mount at this minute," Owen told him, "when are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow morning, knowing Gupta it will be first thing."

"OK then I'll have a look later and get back to you Peter," Owen promised, "is there anything particular you want me to look at?"

"We found two more chambers, one looks like some sort of control room, the other smaller one might be the power source. I just want you to have a look while I'm here in case you can suggest anything I need to do."

"OK Peter I'll get back to you later."

"Thanks Professor, I feel very excited about this it may be crucial, in fact this could be the find that shatters established history for good."

Temple Mount, Jerusalem, Israel
13:42 (local time) Friday, July 18th,
2031

"I spoke to your Peter just now Jim, he's just sent some virtual scans through of two new rooms they've found at the temple," Owen told Jim at the first chance he had, "he seems quite excited about it; talked about a control room."

"Peter's always excited about something," said Jim without paying too much attention to what Owen had said. "Owen come over here and look at this will you?" Owen followed Jim to where the fissure disappeared under the wall of the structure, "Just have a look down there, is it my eyes or is there a light down there," Jim said pointing into the fissure.

Owen strode across to where Jim was pointing, "There was no mention of heat in the reports so magma is not a possibility. Let me see." Owen got on his knees and tried to exclude the bright sunshine by cupping his hands around his face. "I'm not sure if it's the after glow of the sunlight on our retinas Jim, we would need to check after dark."

"Minister!" called Jim, to the tall figure who was talking to one of the Israeli Geological Team.

Ben held up a hand to signal he would be there shortly but continued his conversation with the geologist. The two continued peering into the fissure until a voice behind them asked, "Mr. Markson, was there something?"

"Ah Minister," said Jim rising from his knees, "tell me, have you dropped a camera into the fissure?"

"No, why would we," replied the Minister.

"This may sound silly but I thought I could see light down there," said Jim, "can you see anything Owen," he said over his shoulder.

"Sorry to disappoint you Jim but I can't see anything," answered Owen.

Ben appraised the two Brits with a dubious eye and then said, “Mr. Markson, why on earth would there be light down there?”

“I don’t know, it was just something I think I saw in my peripheral sight,” explained Jim, “is there any possibility that there is anything inside this rock?”

The geologist who Ben had been talking to had wandered over to join the group and was standing behind Jim. Jim saw Ben flash the scientist a quizzical look and then nodded to him as if to answer some unspoken question. “This is Dr. Wade, he is our principle geologist, I’ll let Dr. Wade answer your question. Dr. . . .”

The geologist stepped forward sheepishly at the minister’s introduction, “Actually we have a good idea that there are a number of voids below us, many years ago the university did some investigations with ultrasound and ground-radar. They registered a number of void spaces, some of which, we think, are the remains of a much, much earlier temple that was built on this site. Some of the readouts showed arches or what may be a vaulted ceiling. Truth is we have little idea what was here before the present building our government has never allowed any invasive investigations, the university has made application almost on a yearly basis over the last fifty odd years without success.”

“You said, ‘some of the voids are part of a previous building’, I take it there are others that are not explained,” asked Owen.

“Yes, Professor Gwilliam, and it’s those other void spaces that have worried us for a long time,” Dr. Wade answered.

“Why do they worry you Doctor,” couldn’t they be just natural caves?” responded Jim.

“Some, yes,” answered Dr. Wade, “others are shown on the geophysics readout as angular spaces with flat walls, floor and ceilings, some seem as if they may be interconnected with passageways. However some of the passageways look far to small for any human to get through, some are around a meter square another are only

around twenty centimetres square and seem to go nowhere at a very steep angle.”

“And no one has ever been allowed to investigate,” interjected Owen, “that’s criminal.”

“Not really Professor,” interrupted the Minister, “we would need to tunnel through hundreds of meters of solid rock at a cost of millions of dollars, and don’t forget this is a sacred site to three faiths, it could upset a lot of people. There have already been objections from a list of countries to closing the site.”

“Do you mind if we drop a vid-cam down there,” asked Jim.

“I don’t see any problem with that,” answered Ben as Owen, almost pre-empting the Minister’s answer, crossed to the equipment case that had been placed some hundred meters away.

Unknown Location, Southern India

16:10 (local time) Friday, July 18th,
2031

After sending the virtual data to the Professor Peter had returned to the ‘Control Room’ to continue his hands-on exploration. It was a huge disappointment to him that there was no power to the equipment, he longed to see these unknown objects working in whatever way they did. Peter made digital images of the cable work and components inside the only panel he could access, none of these gave any clue as to their purpose as they were completely alien to him. After almost an hour Jo joined him in the chamber and commenced a detailed inspection of the artefacts. Like the technical equipment, most of what she saw was unknown to her; until that is something caught her eye. Embossed down the side of the central desk was a combination of hieroglyphics that looked vaguely familiar to her.

“Peter bring your camera over here,” Jo called, “I need an image of these symbols.”

Peter arrived within seconds and made a two-D and three-D image of the embossed symbols, “Something you recognise?” he asked his sister.

“Maybe,” she said, “these are very similar to early Egyptian glyphs.”

“Can you read them,” asked Peter.

“I don’t know, let me have a go.” Jo raced out of the chamber to retrieve her personal com-unit from her pack. Three minutes later she was back and calling up her hieroglyphics file. She traced each symbol into the pad with her stylus for the processor to make matches. The glyphs were not perfect matches but the database gave her eighty percent hits. The first glyph came out as ‘RU’ the second was translated as ‘SHAL’ and the third the processor was equivalent to ‘IMUM’. “Ru-shal-imum” said Jo.

“Is that really what it says,” said Peter

“I think so,” said his sister.

“So what does it mean?”

“I don’t know that Peter but see how it forms a cartouche with this line around it, that means it’s a name, a person or a place,” Jo answered. “I have to say I’ve never heard of anyone or any where called by this name. I’ll need to contact John”

“I was hoping it would say ‘ON’ or ‘Energise’ or something,” said Peter looking disappointed.

Jo ignored her brother and continued on her own thought train, “But why would there be Egyptian glyphs in an Indian temple,” she said as much to herself as to Peter. “I’m going outside to speak to John, can you let me have chip with those last images on so that I can show him” she asked her brother.

“Yes, but it’s my last camera chip, and I need it for the fly-over of the uranium mine,” “You will have it back in ten minutes,” said as she left the chamber.

Temple Mount, Jerusalem, Israel
16:00 (local time) Friday, July 18th,
2031

“Well what ever it was the fissure is too narrow the get the camera through,” said Owen finally as he retrieved the camera from the depths of the rock.

“There was something,” said Jim, “I’m sure of it.”

“Well there’s precious little we can do except put a bomb down there,” said Owen.

“That’s a thought we could use a bomb,” Jim said looking a little happier.

“Have you lost your marbles boy-o,” Owen said with a look of horror.

“No,” Jim said quickly, “a sound bomb to give us a picture of what's below us.”

“Won’t the Minister object, he seems very protective of this place, doesn’t he.”

“If we're quick he won’t know,” said Jim, “he won’t be back for an hour. Come on lets get the equipment from the case.”

The two hurried across the concourse to where the equipment case sat in the late afternoon sunshine. Jim dragged the recorder unit out whilst Owen took the bomb and the laser measure across the top of the mount. Within fifteen minutes they were ready to trigger the bomb. Jim nodded to Owen, they took a quick look around them and Jim pressed the red button to set the recorder rolling and send a signal to the bomb to activate. They both felt the ground beneath their feet shift slightly as the bomb released its burst of energy. Seven seconds later the recorder emitted its three bleeps to signal that the operation was complete. Jim’s hand reached forward to

close the machine down just as another tremor reached his feet.

"I thought that was it," said Owen.

"It was," said Jim looking worried, "the bomb only has one pulse before it needs to be recharged." Jim checked the recorder and added, "Anyway that last tremor was a different frequency, the recorder says it's a real earthquake."

As he pronounced the word 'earthquake' another tremor hit them, a much stronger movement this time, one that made the recorder bounce off of the ground. A piece of masonry hit the ground twenty meters away and Dr. Wade emerged from the temple at a run. The two men looked at each other and Jim quickly grabbed the recorder unit and pushed it back into the equipment case. At the silent signal Owen followed suit and set off to retrieve the shock emitter carrying a woven sack. Wade was too busy looking up at the temple to notice what Owen was doing and they were able to stow the bomb without being seen. A third shock wave hit them three minutes later and a cloud of dust rose from the concourse that engulfed most of their immediate area. As the dust settled they saw that another fissure had appeared running almost at right angles to the first one and a gaping crack was now visible running from ground to roof up the wall of the temple. Jim and Owen busied themselves packing up the remainder of their equipment and as they closed the doors of the box an Army vehicle roared onto the concourse followed by the Minister's transport and a cavalcade of vehicles following. The minister jumped from the vehicle before it had fully stopped, another vehicle slowed beside him and he issued orders, "Get those civilians out of here," he shouted to the driver as he pointed toward Jim and Owen. The vehicle moved off in the direction of the equipment case and screamed to a halt beside it. An army officer jumped from the LIMO and saluted Jim, "The Minister has ordered us to

get you back to your transport as quick as possible, can you get in gentlemen.”

Jim and Owen didn't argue and boarded the vehicle while their equipment case was hauled into the rear compartment by four lower ranked soldiers. The Limo took to the air almost as soon as the rear doors were closed. From the air they could see the extent of the damage, several new fissures could be seen and a whole section of wall was missing on the far side of the temple, the two said nothing. Suddenly an alarm sounded and the driver pressed a button on the control panel, he spoke briefly in Hebrew before turning to the two men, “You have call from Prime Minister,” he said curtly and pressed another button. A partition rose between them and the driver whilst a soft-screen rolled down from the roof, the screen flickered to life and an image of the P.M. appeared.

“Mr. Markson, Professor, are you OK,” asked the P.M.

“Yes we're fine Prime Minister,” answered Jim.

“I suppose it's too early to ask if you if you have any findings” said the P.M.

“I'm afraid so Ma'am, we have a lot of data but it needs to be processed, we need a couple of days,” explained Jim.

“If things progress the way they seem to be going presently we may not have a couple of days,” said the P.M. “we just need to know what is happening.”

“You have our word Madam Prime Minister,” said Owen, “as soon as we have anything we will get back to you.”

“Thank you Professor, I am sure I can rely on you both.” The screen went blank and retracted back into its housing as the LIMO touched down next to their own transport on the roof of Government House.

Unknown Location, Southern India
16:35 (local time) Friday, July 18th,
2031

Satellite coverage was not good over southern India and it had taken some time to get an acceptable signal, but at last John's face was recognisable. "Hi John, I need to ask you something," said Jo.

"What no 'Hello John, how are you', Just I've got a question to ask?"

"Stop it John, I've found something and I think it may be important," continued Jo.

"Go on then girl, what is it?"

"We found a new chamber while we were scanning the temple carvings, Peter thinks its some sort of control room."

"Really," interjected John, but Jo ploughed on.

"and I found this cartouche with what looked like Egyptian glyphs in it."

"Egyptian glyphs in India, are you sure," asked John.

"No, that's why I wanted to talk to you. Peter took some images of it,"

"Can I see them," asked John.

"I'm sending them to you now," said Jo as she clicked the send button on her com-unit.

Instantly the pictures appeared on John's screen and after a quick look he confirmed Jo's findings, "You're right they are very similar to Egyptian hieroglyphics, however very early forms" said John, "let me run them through my computer."

"I did some matching and I think it's the name 'Ru-shal-imum'," said Jo

"Give me a second here," said John, he waited for his computer to respond and finally said, "Jo, I sure taught you well, you are spot-on, if these glyphs really are Egyptian, there's only an eighty percent match for the characters so there is room for error."

“Assuming that the translation is right John, what does the name relate to, does it ring any bells with you,” asked Jo.

“Not off the top of my head but it sure looks familiar, the literal meaning is ‘the city of Shalem’. I know Shalem was a popular god around the middle east, fertile-crescent area around the twentieth century BC and before but I never realised that Shalem worship extended to the Indian sub-continent. I’ll need to do some research on this one, I’ll give you a call back on your com. When are you heading back, Jo?”

“First thing tomorrow, I think, if we can drag Peter away from the control room.”

“OK I’ll speak to you later

Roof of government House, Jerusalem,
Israel

19:02 (local time) Friday, July 18th,
2031

“There is definitely something happening here Jim, I don’t like it,” said Owen after a long silence, “those bombs should not have had that effect.”

“Not unless they triggered something else inside the hill,” replied Jim.

“That’s true, but what?”

“There has to be another power source down there that either amplified those bombs by about a million or reacted to the vibrations in some way and . . . and I don’t know.”

“Well for someone who doesn’t know, you’re making a fine job of analysing the physics of the situation,” replied Owen, “you are spot on my boy. Let’s have a look at the trace the bombs generated.” Jim clambered into the luggage compartment and managed to open the equipment box in the confined space; he retrieved the recorder unit and brought it forward. Owen connected the recorder to the on-board computer and went to work typing code into the

machine whilst Jim watched in fascination at his speed. "Right-te-ho," said Owen after another two minutes typing, "let's see what's inside that rock of theirs." Owen hit the run key and the screen filled with blue, yellow and black dots. Gradually a three dimensional picture took shape, yellow where there was solid rock blue where there were other softer materials; where the yellow and blue mixed to create green it showed the presence of denser materials and where black showed there were voids.

The two stared at the construct in almost disbelief. There on the screen were rooms, passageways and a cavern the size of a cathedral. In the centre of the great cavern were a group of bright green objects and many of the rooms also showed objects that could be of metal or some material much denser than rock. There were softer objects also, wood possibly, lining many of the passageways and rooms. "They weren't kidding when they said there were voids in there," commented Jim, "there's almost a hotel in that rock."

"Question is, how far this arrangement goes down," added Owen, "the results only give us the top hundred meters or so, and it looks like these voids keep going."

"Do you think the Israelis know about this?"

"I'd lay bets they do," said Owen, "if they've done any tests at all they know there's more there than just a few vague voids."

"So what do we do, let them know we know or keep quiet?"

"Well if you want my advice . . ." started Owen, but was interrupted by the chime from the com-unit. Jim leaned over and pressed the answer pad on the LIMO's control panel.

"Hi there you guys," said the image of John, "having fun?"

"Actually, we're not John, is this important, were a bit busy just now," answered Jim.

“Under the circumstances I thought you may want to know about our new development,” said John obviously a little miffed at his greeting from Jim.

“What circumstances John?”

“Why the circumstances that the Temple mount is disintegrating of course, answered John, “That’s where you are, isn’t it?”

Jim’s face showed the surprise that he felt, “How do you know about that,” he asked.

“It’s on all the news networks, the temple is collapsing and more fissures are appearing all the time.”

“That was quick,” said Owen

“Not really, it seems every news service in the world has a crew in Jerusalem right now,” answered John.

“So what’s this development you have?”

“Jo contacted me a few hours ago to check on a cartouche she found in this Indian temple where they are.”

“Why are they still there, they only went to do a virtual of those relief’s,” butted in Jim.

“Ah, I forgot to tell you about that,” said Owen.

“Thanks Owen,” Jim replied feeling more and more that things were getting out of control.

“They found some hidden chambers under the temple, but I’ll tell you about that later,” continued John, “one of the chambers is like some sort of control room with what looks like control panels, on one of them Jo found some Egyptian glyphs and one of them translates to ***‘ru-shal-Hmum’***.”

“And so?”

“Well that was the ancient name for Jerusalem when it belonged to Egypt before the twentieth century BC, see the connection now Jim?”

“No?”

“Don’t you think it’s strange that we should find an artefact in an Indian temple that bears the name of one of the oldest cities on Earth, written in early Egyptian glyphs? Jim that area has the oldest continuous civilisation anywhere

and just down the road is Jericho, that's acknowledged as the oldest courteously occupied city anywhere, if there is going to be an epicentre for everything that's been happening it has to be in that area."

"Jim, what John is saying makes sense, this area was civilised before England had its tribal divisions," prompted Owen.

"If that's true then what can we do, everything seems to be slipping out of control," said Jim, "I'm just not sure what we *can* do."

"Jim," said John from the screen, "the only thing we can do is see this thing through what ever happens, I have a feeling it's out of our hands anyway."

"OK, thanks John, sorry for being abrupt. We're just leaving in a few minutes, we'll be back in a couple of hours," said Jim as he cut the connection. Jim sat back in the driver's seat and stared at the roof lining for a few seconds. "Owen, have you ever started something that you wished you'd never even seen?"

Owen laughed, "Many times my friend, many times."

Jim inserted the starter key into the card slot on the control display and the twin engines burst into life, Jim set the destination then placed the machine on automatic. As the LIMO rose gently into the air the com-unit chimed again, the screen flashing a priority signal from the Israeli state. Jim wearily leaned forward and pressed the accept button with his forefinger, it was the Israeli Prime Minister again.

"Mr. Markson, are you on your way back to Cyprus?"

"Just, Madam Prime Minister," answered Jim, "we are currently over Jerusalem waiting for our autopilot to cut in with a course."

"Good, I'm afraid I am going to ask you to stay with us for a while," the PM said apologetically, "we seem to be experiencing more problems at the temple mount and we are desperate for any help you and the Professor could afford us."

“I am not certain what we can do, but of course any help we can give we’d be happy oblige; however, It would help if your people were a bit more open and honest with us Madam Prime Minister.

“I’m sorry Mr. Markson, I’m not sure what you mean.”

“I am referring to the information we weren’t given about the internal features of the Mount itself,” scolded Jim.

“Ah,” said the PM, “I asked them to provide information on a need to know basis.”

“And they assumed we didn’t need to know the the rock is honeycombed with passages and chambers when we are looking for the cause of the disturbances?”

“I am sorry, we have needed to guard the Mount against all those keen archaeologists who would swarm into our most sacred site.”

“I may be showing my ignorance, for which I apologise; but why is the mount so important to you rather than Islam or the Christian believers for that matter?”

Mr. Markson, Jim, the Mount or Har ha-Bayit to us, has lain at the centre of Jewry for over five *thousand* years. We were here before the founding of Rome, King David conquers a Jebosite stronghold of Zion and builds the first Hebrew city, the ‘City of David’ just south of Temple Mount, he reigns for thirty-three years in Jerusalem. Before that Abram was asked to sacrifice his son there, when God provided a goat instead, the original name for this outcrop is Mt. Moriah. David brought Ark of God to Jerusalem and placed it in the Tabernacle of Moses that was erected there on that lump of rock. If you have the time I could continue all evening”

“OK I take your point Madam Prime Minister, we are on our way back to Government House.”

“I will have you brought directly to my office, we can talk over Dinner.” The Prime Minister’s face disappeared from the screen as the LIMO touched down for the second time that day.”

Prime Minister's Suite, Government House, Jerusalem, Israel, 20:30 (local time) Friday, July 18th, 2031.

Jim Markson and Professor Owen Gwulliam had already been waiting in the ante-room to the Prime Minister's suite for twenty minutes and two com-calls home when Mrs Heidi Goldbloom, Prime Minister of the world's fifth most powerful state, entered. "Welcome back gentlemen," was all she said as she crossed the ante-room and disappeared through a door at the end of a short corridor, five seconds later her head appeared again around the door, "Well, are you hungry or not," she asked. Jim and Owen looked at each other and quickly rose from their chairs and followed down the passage. In the room a table had already been laid for five places, the table was a thick slab of glass with a one and a half metre diameter Star of David that seemed to be captured in mid-air in the very centre. Owen ran his hand over the table in admiration of the artefact, "I see you are admiring my table Professor."

"I certainly am Madam Prime Minister, it's a beauty," answered Owen.

"Enough with the 'Madam Prime Minister' stuff already, please this evening I am just plain Heidi. Yes it is a beautiful piece, it was a present from your country actually."

"Wales," questioned Owen.

"No, I meant Great Britain, as well you know Owen. It was presented to me when I was Minister of Trade by a company called Pilkington Glass. They say that the star was created by trapping a hologram in molten glass, it was meant to be a desk but it was such a pity to cover it with papers. Drinks gentlemen?"

As the PM poured three glasses of twelve year old malt whisky the door opened and an aid announced that Ben and Dr. Wade had arrived, "Ah just in time, a schnapps for

you Ben and I believe yours is a Bourbon Dr. Wade; it's Emanuel isn't it?"

"Why yes, Prime Minister," Dr. Wade said hesitantly.

"Emanuel, we are all using our first names tonight, so please conform," she said smiling as the glass was passed to him.

Benjamin seemed very much at ease with these informal arrangements and settled himself into a chair next to the head of the table, "Are we ready to start eating, I am starving," he stated in his strange mix of his German and American English accent.

Heidi immediately turned and pressed a push button to the side of the drinks cabinet, "If you want to keep your Ministers in line all you need to do is feed them well," she countered.

The meal was a pleasant affair that consisted of over-elaborated traditional Hebrew dishes and much small-talk and hilarity; it was almost as if the trouble at the Mount was in another world. Once the dinner was over and another round of drinks had been poured the five people moved to a sitting-room on the other side of the small corridor.

The PM immediately started the discussion by stating, "Jim here is a little upset that you two have not been totally open and honest about what lies below the Temple Mount, I think we should mend some fences to start with and share our knowledge of the passage system. Ben?"

Ben looked a little uncomfortable as he sat forward in the armchair, "You must understand that we needed to protect our secrets in the Mount, otherwise we would have had every crackpot in the world sniffing around the site."

"Yes we understand that now," replied Jim, "Heidi has explained the Mount's significance for you, to us."

"There have always been speculations about the place since the beginning of the twentieth century," continued Benjamin, "when, mainly Christian writer's started to

analyse the new Gospels and our holy books and came up with all sorts of theories.”

“My predecessor, Mrs Mayer, our first Prime Minister, ordered an initial geological survey.” Interjected the PM. “In those days instruments and methods were crude but the war had developed some new instrumentation that showed there were caves inside the Mount.”

“As the site is an important issue with Islam we could not get permissions until about ten years ago to make any meaningful surveys,” Ben continued, when we did we got the surprise of our lives. Emanuel was in charge of the USGS team that came to do the survey.” Ben indicated that Dr. Wade should take over the explanations.

“We used a form of side penetrating radar and took several sections through the rock at various levels using the piazza as zero-datum. We found there are many voids and passageways, some of them we have since mapped.”

“Just a minute,” interrupted Owen, “are you telling us that you haven’t investigated these tunnels?”

“Yes of course we have, I just said we’ve been mapping the passages,” said Wade.

“Where is the access point,” asked Jim.

“I think what the Professor is asking Emanuel, is have you been inside,” explained Heidi.

“Oh, no we haven’t actually broken through, this Mount is sacred ground,” stuttered Dr. Wade, “it would cause all sorts of problems with our partners.”

“Just in case you hadn’t noticed that sacred rock is falling apart and you haven’t the faintest idea of what you’re dealing with,” Jim almost shouted at Dr. Wade. “Don’t you think it’s time we found a way into that labyrinth?”

Owen pulled his PDA-Com out of his pocket and placed it on the coffee-table in front of them, “We did some three-dimensional scans earlier and I down loaded them into my PDA v-projector,” he said, “may I turn off the lights for a minute,” Ben threw the light switch and the Professor’s

PDA projected the internal 3D map above the table. The two Israelis and Emanuel Wade looked on in amazement as the multiple rooms, passageways and the central cavern resolved in front of them.

“Tell me Owen what are the blue and green areas,” asked Heidi.

The blue indicates low density materials, like wood or other organics, the green however shows the interesting bits, those areas are high density materials,” explained Owen.

“Wait a minute,” asked the PM again, “high density, like metals?”

“Exactly,” said Owen, “and look at the regular shapes we have in green.”

Heidi Goldbloom sat back in deep thought while she stared at the hologram.

“How far down does this cover,” asked Ben.

“About a hundred meters, give or take,” answered Jim now calmed from his outburst.

“Ben, I don’t think we have any alternative, we need to get in there ASAP,” said Heidi

“I agree, but how,” asked Ben, “looking at this there are no obvious access points.”

“No there aren’t,” said Owen, “I checked, within the hundred meters there are no lower density points that would even indicate a filled in or sealed tunnel. The only way these chambers were carved was from below.”

“How can that be,” asked Jim, “unless there are kilometres of tunnels under the city.”

“The only way we can access this complex is to mine through to the nearest void,” suggested Owen, “I estimate that to be around forty-one meters if we tunnel through from here at the South-east corner just ten meters north of the corner and just above the public path.”

“If that’s what we have to do, let’s do it,” announced Heidi, “we can easily close off that part of the Kidron Valley, Ben can you see to that?. I will contact the Palestinians and the

leaders of the faiths, but this is my decision on the basis of a national emergency.”

Owen told them he could get a laser-mole out there within a day, and that it would take around three days to cut the forty-one metre tunnel. Jim offered to pull the team in from Cyprus to do the archaeological work and the group broke up with assurances that Heidi and Ben be kept informed on a daily basis. Jim and Owen were provided with accommodation in Government House and they thankfully retired after a very long day at almost midnight.

VIP Accommodation Suite, Government House, Jerusalem, Israel, 08:00 (local time) Saturday, July 19th, 2031.

Jim and Owen found that the Sabbath was not a good day to get anything done in Jerusalem, although like most cities it had become cosmopolitanised in the past twenty years. It was quickly decided that after making some essential calls they would head back to Nicosia. Breakfast was of a standard continental type and very much a do-it-yourself affair which was eaten during conversations through Com-units to London, Manchester England, Florida and Cyprus. By eleven o'clock they were once more taking off from the roof of Government House, they took a flypast of the Temple Mount and saw for themselves the terrible devastation that seemed to be continuing. Less than two hours later they were touching down in the JMRT compound to be greeted by Carol and John.

"Start packing, we're off to Jerusalem first thing tomorrow, full scale excavation, the biggest yet," shouted Jim as soon as the gull-wings had opened.

Carol stepped forward and kissed her husband firmly, "What's all this about Jim," she asked.

Jim briefly updated Carol whilst they ate lunch, "I'll do a full briefing for everyone later when Jo and Peter are here, but that's where we're up to," he told her, "I think this is going to be a long job Dear. The Israeli government are supplying us all with full board living quarters, some semi-military establishment just outside the city so all you need to bring are clothes and personals."

"Don't I get the chance to decide if I want to go or not?"

"You can stay here if you like Dear but we need the whole team so the only people left here will be the security people," Jim told his wife.

“That might be a nice peaceful rest after the past weeks,” Carol said thoughtfully, “but I guess I’d get bored, so I may as well tag along, just for the ride you understand, nothing to do with missing you.” Carol smiled and placed another kiss on Jim’s forehead.

“Of course not Dear, you can go sight seeing while we work our butts off.”

Before lunch was finished Jo and Peter arrived, Peter made straight for the dining room where his professor joined him. They remained in deep discussion for almost two hours, pouring over images from the ‘control-room’ chamber. The discussion would have continued for longer but they were interrupted by Jim’s voice through the announcement system, “*All personnel, please assemble in the lecture theatre in the conference centre in thirty minutes, lecture theatre in thirty minutes for a Jerusalem briefing please, thank you.*”

“Come on sunshine, I suggest you go and get a shower before the briefing or you may find yourself in a corner on your own,” advised the Professor.

“Oh I forgot about that,” said Peter, “that’s camping for you.”

At four-thirty every employee, volunteer and trustee of the Joanne Markson Research Trust was assembled in the lecture theatre, there was a atmosphere of excitement in the air and rumours were running riot. Jim Markson walked out onto the elevated stage and stood quietly, those who were stood chattering quickly found a seat, the conversational murmur ceased and the noise of seats hitting the stops subsided until only the faint sound of the air-conditioning could be heard.

“Thank you all for attending at such short notice,” began Jim. Tomorrow is a momentous day both for us and for archaeology, we are about to embark on a dig like no other. We have been tasked by the Israeli government to

investigate a site where no archaeologist has ever been allowed before, actually inside of the Temple Mount. Let me say first and foremost, this site is regarded as a most holy and sacred site by the whole of Jewry, Islam and Christians, above all we will respect that at all times, is that understood?" There were general nods of assent around the auditorium. Jim went on to outline the events of the past thirty-six hours and explained the Israeli Government's position and the importance of the Temple Mount to that nation.

Jim continued with a list of operational leaders and their responsibilities, "On site Professor Owen Gwilliam will act as technical advisor, he has kindly agreed to stay on with us instead of resuming his vacation in Florida."

"I wouldn't miss this now for the world," piped up Owen from somewhere in the darkness.

"Owen will co-ordinate the initial tunnelling operation and will assess anything that is found before it is removed or even touched," Jim continued. Peter will work as Owen's assistant. Jo and John will jointly be site directors and they will manage the whole excavation. Howard Fulton will be responsible for recording and archiving, both in the Mount complex and at our assigned base. Declan Brook, are you prepared to handle the press, the Israeli Prime Minister is more than happy to place that in your hands and the EBC have already agreed, there will be a massive amount of interest from the world's press."

"Yes, it will be an honour," called Declan.

"Thank you Declan," Jim said as he looked back to his notes. The excavation teams will work under your usual assigned Team Leaders. Although the Israelis will be mounting a security operation, we have engaged Gerry Holbrook."

"Holkey if you don't mind," shouted a voice from Jim's left.

"I'm sorry," apologised Jim laughing, "we've engaged Holkey to advise us and as an independent advisor for the

military on site, also as security for any shopping or site seeing trips outside of work. And finally of course Carol and I will be working as administrators and liaison. Professor Gwilliam will be returning to Jerusalem first thing in the morning to start the tunnelling. We then have three days to transfer from here to Jerusalem. Good luck everyone, have fun tonight, from here on it's work all the way. See you all in Jerusalem.”

Shufat Barracks, North of the city of Jerusalem, Israel, 12:08 (local time) Sunday, July 20th, 2031.

Professor Gwilliam arrived at Shufat to be greeted by Ben Marks and a small detachment of commandoes from the Israeli Armed Forces. Ben's greeting was surprisingly warm considering how he had previously kept them at arm's length, "Welcome back Professor, I hope you had a good trip."

"Very tolerable thank you Minister," replied Owen.

"I think we can dispense with the formalities from here on in, don't you, let's use our common names shall we Owen," suggested Ben.

"Fine by me Ben."

"If you will follow me I'll take you to your quarters, we have them all ready for you," Ben said striding off in the direction of a two story concrete building that dominated the various wooden huts and workshops that surrounded a hot, dusty yard. "If there is anything you need just let one of the security units know and they will arrange to have it brought here." They entered through double metal and glass doors into a well furnished reception area that was chilling after the heat of the yard outside. A soldier who had been sat at a desk facing the doors, jumped to attention and saluted as the Minister entered, "As you were Sergeant," Ben told him and he relaxed back into his chair. "Sergeant Hopleman here will look after any needs you have and will act as liaison," the sergeant rose to his feet again and offered a hand to Owen who shook it warmly.

The sergeant relieved Owen of his briefcase and kitbag then climbed the stairs to the upper floor. The tour of the ground floor took only ten minutes but in that time Owen could see that the workrooms and laboratories were more than well equipped, at the far end there was a dining hall with a large kitchen attached. Ben explained that the

kitchen would be staffed twenty-four hours a day from that evening by the Army Catering Division. When they returned to the reception area Ben went behind the sergeant's desk where there was light wooden door, opening the wooden door to reveal a heavy metal door beyond he entered a code into a number-pad and the door slid open with a pronounced hiss and the bleeping of an alarm. Behind the metal door was a lift of about two meters square, Ben indicated that Owen should enter and then followed him in, immediately pressing another code into a pad and the door slid shut.

The lift took longer to descend than Owen expected and after a few seconds Owen asked, "How far down are we going?"

"Fifty meters, it's fully bomb proof, but not nuclear I'm afraid," answered Ben.

"I take it you're not expecting one of those," asked Owen with a grin.

"No, those days are gone, I thank the Lord, but any treasures you find will be safe enough down here, it's air-conditioned and really quite comfortable if you'd like to stay down here,"

"I think I'll pass on that thanks Ben, but it may be a good place to hold a party, no complaints from the neighbours." Ben laughed as the door slid open again. Before them was a cathedral of a basement the ceiling was some ten meters above them and from their vantage point at the top of a dozen steps they could see the floor was a maze of partitions forming possibly twenty or so rooms and workshops. At the far end, high above a control room area was a star of David probably five meters from point to point. At the nearest point to the lift were empty storerooms containing rack upon rack and shelf upon shelf covered in nothing but dust.

"You are welcome to use these storerooms as your archive and any of the workshops, but we would prefer it if you did not interfere with the remainder of the complex.

The two men re-entered the elevator and rode back to the surface, Sergeant Hopleman was back at his post when the door opened in the reception, "Your luggage is in your suite sir," he said as they passed the desk. Owen followed Ben to the stairs and up to the first floor and a glazed landing area with more easy chairs, a drinks machine, entertainment console and a communication booth. The floor was divided into two by a corridor that stretched the full length of the building to a fire door at the other end. On the side that overlooked the city there were ten accommodation suites and the other side, that enjoyed a view of the yard, were individual rooms accommodating seventy people. Ben led the way into one of the suites, which was well furnished and equipped.

"If there is anything you need that we haven't supplied please let Sergeant Hopleman know," said Ben, "I'll leave you to settle in Owen. Ben crossed to the door opened it and stopped, over his shoulder he asked, "When does your 'Mole' arrive?"

"Due to land at eighteen-ten at Jerusalem International, with its operating team."

"Good, I will meet you there at six, I've laid on a heavy duty helicopter to transport it to the site," said Ben.

"Oh no Ben, it will need to come here to be assembled and commissioned, that will be done over night, and then we will need your chopper again to fly it to the Mount. Can we can have it there for eight?"

"Very well, I get the pilot to stand-by here until it's ready to move, see you later," with that Ben closed the door and Owen heard his footfalls fade out down the corridor.

Jerusalem International Airport,
Israel, 18:10 (local time) Sunday,
July 20th, 2031.

Right on time the fixed-wing transport landed at Jerusalem International Airport, good as his word Ben was waiting in the military section of the field when Owen arrived. The Cygnus transport taxied into the restricted area at eighteen-seventeen with its rear ramp already opening. The craft came to a halt as half a dozen blue-clad figures scuttled down the ramp to secure the ground plates, two more appeared pushing a loaded pallet. Within two minutes the first of the Mole sections was on the tarmac, five minutes after that the transport had been unloaded and the Cygnus was taxiing out towards the main runway leaving the team and the Mole on the apron. Owen charged forward to greet Roger Mellor, the team leader, "Welcome my friend," said Owen giving Roger a bear hug, "it's good to see you." "And you Prof," returned Roger. "How's the old girl doing," Owen said nodding toward the sections of the Mole. "Aye, she's a bonny wee machine, not a moment of trouble from the beastie," Roger replied. Owen caught sight of Ben edging towards him, "This is Benjamin Marks, Israeli Minister of Security, Ben this is Roger Mellor, one the best engineers I have ever known." "I am pleased to meet you," said Ben, "you will be well rewarded for your time here, thank you for coming." "Pay will not be necessary Minister; I'm doing this for the Prof, he designed the beast and I've made more that my fair share of wealth from operating it," announced Roger. The team, together with the Mole were all flown to Shufat by eight o'clock and after a good meal the team started work on assembling and commissioning the machine.

Shufat Barracks, North of the city of Jerusalem, Israel, 06:28 (local time) Monday, July 21st, 2031.

By six-thirty the Mole was assembled and ready for systems testing. At seven-thirteen Roger pronounced that the machine was 'fit to run a marathon' and with military precision at eight precisely the helicopter lifted the Mole from the yard on its journey to the Temple Mount. While the transfer took place the hard working team consumed a hearty breakfast, despite Rodger's complaint at there being no porridge available.

North-east corner of the Temple Mount, Jerusalem, Israel, 09:01 (local time) Monday, July 21st, 2031.

The sun shone relentlessly down from a clear morning sky as the first rails were connected and the Mole took its initial bite at the rock of the Mount. Wisps of smoke started to rise from the lower laser cutters as they started to cut, the cutter swung from side to side on a pendulum until it had managed to penetrate to a certain depth. Suddenly other fixed swivel lasers activated, carving at various angles into the stone, the first cutter had separated from the mass. This was quickly followed by a high pitched whine as the ultrasonic emitters came online, a half second later the prepared stone shattered into a thousand pieces and was removed by an adaptation of the Archimedes Spiral, and the first chippings emerged from the rear of the Mole. There were just three versions of the Mole of which this was the smallest, designed to cut cylindrical tunnels from one metre to three metres in diameter. The largest version was capable of cutting a tunnel fifty metres in diameter and

had been used to cut the second Channel Road Tunnel and the tunnels between Scotland and Northern Ireland and between Hull and The Hook of Holland in Europe. The mid-size Mole had cut the shuttle link between Gibraltar and North Africa, which as a British project, has not pleased the Spanish government who benefited from the tolls. Owen had retained the patent for the machines and either allowed them to be constructed under licence or contracted the tunnelling to Roger, the machines had made them both very rich men.

Owen and Roger had met many years ago at the University of Edenhough as students, Roger had gained his degree in Mechanical Engineering and obtained a job in the Scottish oil fields. Owen had continued at university gaining a doctorate and then a research grant and lecturing post at the University of London. When he gained the Physics Chair the university advertised for an assistant and Roger had applied for the post when the Scottish oil started to dry up. The professor had been approached by an Australian Mining Company, Walarue Minerals, to develop a more efficient means of creating access tunnels into mineral seams. The two had worked for almost two years on the project and succeeded in creating a small version of the Mole, fees from Walarue had paid the manufacture of two other versions and the business had been split between Owen and Roger. It was now a multi-billion dollar industry with depots on all five continents each with its network of agents.

Although the progress was quite slow at just one and a half meters per hour for this model, it had proved to be the most efficient and safest method of creating tunnels. As the Mole progresses it subjects the tunnel wall to high temperature penetrating lasers that vitrify the stone into a reinforced casing, which in most cases needs no further reinforcement. The machine seemed to attract a great deal

of attention, as although the area had been closed to the public, a stream of government officials visited the site during the day. In the distance could be seen the telescopic lenses of television crews pointing at them from the opposite side of the Kidron Valley.

By the end of the first day the Mole had cut fourteen metres into the rock and a satisfied, tired and dirty team thankfully returned to Shufat for showers and a very substantial evening meal. After food most of the nine strong team retired to the upstairs sitting room but despite the facilities available, the sun, noise and exertions of the day had taken their toll and most were asleep in their chairs. Owen and Roger took the opportunity to do some catching up and demolished a bottle of twelve year old single malt between them.

North-east corner of the Temple Mount, Jerusalem, Israel, 11:27 (local time) Tuesday, July 22nd, 2031.

The Mole had started cutting again at eight that morning and everything was going to plan, dumper trucks had started clearing away the chippings from the previous day and by nine a cloud of dust had been generated obscuring most of the work from onlookers. Jim had just arrived and was donning a respirator set before venturing into the dust cloud to check on progress. With the dust and everyone wearing masks it was difficult to recognise anyone, however he eventually recognised the portly figure of Owen and pulled him clear of the dust cloud. "How is everything going," he asked.

"Fine, no problems thus far," replied Owen, "has everyone arrived or are you the advance party?"

"Carol and I have just arrived the rest are following this afternoon and tomorrow depending on your breakthrough estimate," Jim told him.

"If all continues as it is at the moment we should breakthrough by lunchtime tomorrow."

"That's good going, I'll let Jo and John know," said Jim over the noise of the machinery.

The tunnelling continued a-pace for the remainder of the day and by six o'clock there were just eight metres left between the Mole and the targeted void. During the afternoon the Trust's personnel arrived in two's three's and four's, some stayed at Shufat and settled themselves in, preparing the labs and organising their surroundings and work areas, while others visited the excavation site. Equipment also started to arrive and the security detachment made themselves useful by unloading the LIMO Transports and moving items around. Jo, Peter and John arrived just before Roger's team arrived back from the site. The dining hall was crowded that evening and food

ended up being served until past ten o'clock. At nine the site management team met for a briefing in the conference room next to the dining room. By ten-thirty everyone was fed and relaxed or asleep after another busy day.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
04:05 (local time) Wednesday, July
23rd, 2031.

Jim wasn't sure if he were dreaming when his shoulder was gently shaken, so he just turned over and grunted, but the shaking just continued. He slowly opened his eyes expecting to see Carol, instead he turned and in the early dawn light he saw a soldier dressed in brown camouflage. As soon as he sat up the soldier saluted and spoke in a low voice. "Sorry to disturb Sir but we have a problem at the site, can you come into the office Sir?"

Jim, still groggy from being disturbed, pulled on a robe and followed the soldier out of the apartment and down the corridor to the office he had yet to use. In the office he found Owen and Sergeant Hopleman already there. Jim was about to ask what was going on when a voice from behind him made him start.

"Good morning gentlemen, I'm sorry to get you up at this time of the morning but a situation has developed at your Temple Mount site. Please take a seat," said the officer in one of those voices that told you he was in command. The soldier and Sergeant Hopleman saluted smartly and ushered Jim and Owen to chairs where they sat down followed by the army personnel.

"Let me quickly introduce my self, I'm Major Davidson and I'm have overall command of the troops on internal security. Now to business, I have just come from the Temple Mount excavation site. At three o'clock this morning a group of terrorists invaded and took over the site, I have seven men dead and several injured, we have foreign nationals in control of part of our most sacred site. Mr. Markson, I need to know what is going on!"

"Major, I have no idea what is going on, we're just excavating to find out what is causing the earthquakes

under the Mount and hopefully find out once and for all what the great mystery of the Mount is,” answered Jim.

“I am aware of why you are here Mr. Markson and what has brought you into the confidence of the P.M. What I need to know is why we have terrorists on our doorstep killing my men,” Said the Major.”

“We don’t know what’s in there yet so I can’t understand why anyone would go this far in taking the site over,” offered Owen.

“But we have had some problems with a couple of people trying to stop us,” said Jim, “we lost one of our team a few days ago but we still don’t have a clear reason as to why.”

“Who are these people who have tried to stop you,” asked the Major.

“We have two names,” answered Jim, “Dr. Ahmed Al-Faroque, Director of the Cairo Museum and an American collector and billionaire by the name of Carter, Homer Carter.”

“Ha, our old friend Carter,” remarked the Major, “Homer John Carter is persona non gratis in this country. Several years ago we caught him trying to smuggle some very ancient scrolls out of the country, scrolls that were rescued from the great library of Alexandria. We believe he has been involved in several other thefts from the Israeli state but this is the only theft we have proof of.”

A frown spread across Jim’s face and after a few seconds he asked, “What were these scrolls?”

“We don’t actually know, they were written in a lost dialect possibly a branch of Hebrew but very early,” the Major explained, “other than their age as far as we know they were of no great value.”

“Major, in this world the most valuable commodity is information,” interjected Owen, “I think you will find that it was the information contained in those scrolls that was the valuable artefact.”

“Are you thinking what I think you are thinking,” asked Jim.

“That he’s after something he thinks is hidden inside the Mount,” said Owen.

“Yes, and what is the one artefact that so many have searched for but never found and legend has it is hidden inside the Temple Mount,” asked Jim.

“The Ark of the Covenant,” replied Owen.

Major Davidson smiled one of those condescending smiles, “Not that old thing again, I thought the world had truly given up on that legend, but it’s just like Carter to want to possess the one unique object in all of history.”

“What do they hope to gain by taking over the site, they can’t use the MOLE because we have the computer control with us here,” asked Owen.

“They possibly didn’t realise that Professor,” said Major Davidson, “but that’s good it gives us an advantage in that they’re stuck in that tunnel. In the mean time I suggest that you and your people stay on base while we beef up security here. The next detail is due on at six o’clock and I’ve ordered an extra squad. In the mean time we have them contained.”

An hour later twenty soldiers marched into the barracks accompanied by an RPG launcher and an armoured LIMO. By this time everyone in the accommodation block was awake and getting dressed as quickly as they could. Five minutes later the whole team were assembled in the parade ground asking questions about what was going on. Jim introduced his family to Major Davidson and in turn the Major introduced his troops, although in somewhat less personnel terms. The kitchen opened a serving hatch onto the yard and produced hot food for the troops and the visitors; in no time at all everyone was getting to know each other and mingling. Eating breakfast alfresco in the early morning sunshine seemed to lend itself to making friends, even in the surroundings of an army barracks. Jim eventually found Owen and Howard and suggested they

convene a research meeting to find out as much about the Ark as they could, they agreed and Jim borrowed the PA on the armoured LIMO to announce it. "Hello, can I have your attention for a moment," Jim called over the general mêlée, "attention JMRT teams. Can everyone report to their respective team leaders who will soon have a research assignment for you. Senior staff and team leaders, there will be a research meeting at eleven o'clock in the conference room, please make every effort to attend. Thank you."

Jim jumped down from the LIMO and within a minute his senior staff were around him.

"What's this research about Dad," asked Jo with her mouth full of chocolatey-biscuit.

"That's what I'm about to tell you Jo," said Jim, "right everyone, we need to know all that there is to know about the Ark of the Covenant, theories, clues, conspiracies, descriptions, last records, claims that have been made, anything."

"You're joking aren't you Dad, are you turning into Indiana Jones or something," asked his son.

"No Peter, it's no joke, we think Carter is behind the raid on the site and we think there may be a chance that he's after the Ark, after all there's supposed to be a bunch of legends that it's hidden under the Mount."

"Aren't they just fairy-tales," asked Jo.

"Well maybe, maybe not; either way a lot of people believe it and one of those could be Carter," continued Jim.

"Whatever we believe, if he is behind this he is serious enough to kill for it."

"Typical, just when I thought we were going to get the day off," said Peter.

"Don't worry, when you've done this there's plenty of work to do getting this place organised, his Dad chided. Now go and brief your team members discretely and get them to

slowly leave the yard and get on with it, but don't make it obvious and no talking about it to the military, OK."

Jim's children and senior staff wandered off and joined in with the fraternising again. The party continued for another half hour but slowly people wandered off to their individual tasks and their army officers briefed the new troops, all was quiet at Shufat Barracks. At just before eleven o'clock people started to assemble in the conference room. By five after eleven the only one missing was Jo.

"Where in blazes is Jo," her father asked of Carol.

"Just make a start Jim," Carol advised, "you know what she's like, if she's on to something she won't leave it until she's done. She'll be here when she's ready."

Reluctantly Jim opened the meeting, "Right everyone let's get started, Howard drew the short straw and got the easiest task of finding out what the Bible and Jewish texts say about the Ark. Howard?"

Howard shuffled his papers, cleared his throat and started to speak, "Generally the Bible and Jewish writings concur over the Ark. Basically it was a box about one-hundred and fifty centimetres long by a metre wide and around fifty centimetres high, mounted on feet or legs, this is not clear. It seems it was made of wood, arcadia wood, and then completely covered with pure gold, inside and out. There were also two wooden carrying poles also covered in gold that fitted through four gold rings attached to the feet. For some reason these poles, once fitted, were never to be taken out again. There was also a lid made from solid beaten gold that fitted the top of the box, the lid also had the forms of two angels or cherubs facing each other, the figures were supposedly beaten out of one piece. of gold. The angels had their wings vertical and curving over the lid to form a sort of shaded seat. The Ark was constructed whilst the Hebrew nation was wandering in the desert of Sinai, around three and a half thousand years ago, after they supposedly left Egypt where they were slaves. This

calls the whole story into doubt as there were very few sources of Arcadia wood or any other wood, in the region and it is also doubtful that they would have possessed that much gold; unless they had been stealing from the Egyptians, but gold is heavy. However according to the scriptures, they managed to cast a golden calf, but we are not told how big or small this calf was.

When the Hebrews finally settled in Canaan they carried the Ark with them wherever they went and kept it in a special tent within a tent that they called the Holy of Holies. Eventually they adopted Jerusalem then called Zion, as their capital city and there a temple was eventually built by King David on a low outcrop where Abram had supposedly had a meeting with God as he was about to sacrifice his only son. Coincidentally this same outcrop had also been sacred to previous inhabitants of the city not to mention the Egyptians and is associated with the worship of Shalem. The outcrop was previously called Mount Moriah and was used as a threshing floor before David bought it from someone called Araunah to set up an altar of sacrifice there, and this is replaced when Solomon built first temple that also contained another building in its exact centre as the 'Holy of Holies'. The first temple was a massive building measuring fifty cubits to a side, a cubit is roughly half a metre so the construct was twenty-five metres square.

The Ark is supposed to have rested here for over four-hundred and ten years until, strangely twenty-two years before the temple was sacked by the Babylonians a King named Josiah had the Ark and some other artefacts secretly removed for safe keeping after he received a vision of the Temple's destruction."

"What other artefacts Howard," asked John.

"There were four other items, the tablets with the commandments on them that were kept inside the Ark, a

jar containing 'manna' (that's some kind of foodstuff the Jews ate during their time in the wilderness), the staff of Aaron and a jar of anointing oil that was used for anointing the new kings."

"Have any of these items ever been found," asked Jim.

"No, as far as we know, but then a couple of jars of some unknown substance and a stick may have been found and discarded at any time in the past couple of thousand years as junk."

"Good point," said Jim.

"When Josiah ordered the items be removed in secret it must have been very difficult, wherever the Ark was taken it needed to be carried by the poles so the only way out was through the front door and this was guarded day and night, just as the temple was open twenty-four-seven. It is thought that the Ark was taken out via another route, possibly through passages that led from the temple down through the rock. Since that time it has never been seen again, at least there is no record of it."

"Howard sat back in his chair indicating that he had finished, "Thank you Howard," said Jim, looking around, "Peter will you go and see what's keeping your sister please, we need her input."

Peter stood and sighed, "I guess," and left the room.

"Right John can you update us on any recent activity surrounding the search for the Ark," Jim asked.

"There are several theories, as far as I can tell most Jews believe that the Ark is stored safely somewhere below the temple and that it will be rediscovered once the temple is rebuilt. The favourite location for this secret storeroom seems to be somewhere directly below the dome of the tablets, that little pagoda out on the middle of the concourse; not underneath the Dome of the Rock as is popularly believed. No one has tested this theory as the temple and Mount have until a few years ago been under Islamic control and all attempts by archaeologists to

persuade the Palestinians to allow investigations have been refused. “

“Another theory is that it is hidden somewhere between Jerusalem and Jericho, this is based on the stories that the tunnels under the Mount stretch that far into the wilderness and when the Ark was removed they took it down these passages to hide it in caves in Judean Desert that have been forgotten or totally lost due to earthquakes. Another theory is that it is hidden in the Church of St. Mary, Axum, in Ethiopia. Yet another claims that it’s hidden beneath the hill of Golgotha or Calvary, the hill where Jesus Christ was crucified but we are getting into the realms of fantasy here because that theory involves Christ’s blood falling on it after an earthquake caused a fissure to appear at the moment of His death. Another researcher claimed it was a drum and ended up in central Africa. There are many more theories getting more and more fantastic. One even purports that aliens took it back after loaning it to the chosen people, and another. . . .”

At that point Peter burst back into the room, “Dad I can’t find Jo!”

“What do you mean, you can’t find her,” asked Jim.

“Simply that, I can’t find her, her team say they haven’t seen her since she gave the tasks out at around seven o’clock. She hasn’t been at her terminal or back to her room, nobody’s seen her.

“She must be somewhere on this site, have you tried the basement, she may have gone exploring,” asked John.

“No, but the Sergeant has been on duty outside the elevator all the time and he says she hasn’t returned to the block since just after six,” answered Peter.

“I think we need to inform the Major or whoever is in charge, Jim,” said Carol urgently.

“Yes dear,” said Jim looking more casual than he felt, “good idea.”

The Major was just getting into his staff LIMO as Jim got to the reception area. Jim shouted from the stairs to the Sergeant to stop Davidson, but instead of running after the LIMO he pressed a button on the com unit and got straight through to the vehicle. The LIMO lifted from the ground, rose about ten meters and then sank back to earth. Almost before the LIMO had touched down the gull-wing doors opened and Major Davidson jumped to the tarmac and was striding back toward the doors to the reception.

“Who is missing Mr. Markson?” Davidson barked.

“My Daughter, Jo; we can’t find her anywhere, she was here earlier with everyone else outside but she never turned up for the strategy meeting.”

The Major turned to the Sergeant standing to attention behind the desk, “Have you checked with the main gate Sergeant?”

“No Sir, not yet,” answered Hopleman.

“Well don’t just stand there man, check with them,” Davidson demanded, “I would have thought it was basics to do that as soon as she was found to be missing. I’m sorry about this Markson.”

Both the Major and Jim stood to listen to the Sergeant on the internal com-unit, “It’s Ms. Jo Markson [pause] she did? [another pause, longer this time] What time was that? [pause] Who checked the passes? [yet another pause] Send him up here now” he finished and replaced the com on the desk. “Main gate says they booked her out with an Ensign at o-eight twenty hours sir, the duty guard is on his way up here now, Sir.”

“I don’t understand,” said Jim, “she was supposed to be doing research, why would she leave this barracks?” For the first time real worry lines appeared on Jim’s face.

“Let’s not jump to conclusions, we need to get the facts and react to them,” reassured Davidson, “she may have just wanted something from a shop, you know what these young women are like.”

Just then a soldier trotted up to the glass doors of the reception and the Sergeant opened the door for him, "Levi Cohen, reporting Sergeant," he spat out rather than said.

Major Davidson was not in the mood to stand on protocol and waded straight into Private Cohen, "Why did Ms Markson leave the base Cohen?"

"Said she was wanted urgently at the Mount site, Sir."

"Who said this, private," asked the Major.

"Her escort, Sir," Cohen replied.

"And who exactly was this Escort," Davidson persisted.

"Don't know, Sir; one of the new men on attachment, Major Sir."

"You mean to tell me that you allowed an unknown person to escort a civilian off of this base without obtaining either an identity or asking for a pass for the civilian, soldier?"

"Err, Yes sir, but he was one of us, in uniform Sir, just came in with the new detachment," said Cohen rather less confidently and with a slightly redder face.

The Major considered this for a few seconds before announcing, "Consider yourself on a charge Cohen, I'll deal with you later, so confine yourself to the barracks; dismissed."

Cohen snapped to attention, saluted and marched smartly out of the reception.

"I now fear we may have a situation on our hands," announced Major Davidson.

As-Silsilen Street, The Jerusalem Old City; 12:45 Local time Wednesday 23rd July 2031.

In the Old City, in a building that dated back to the time of the Crusades three men stood guard over a windowless room beneath ground level. In that dark, musty room was Jo Markson, frightened, and angry with herself for falling for the scam without checking with her Dad first. She was not blindfolded, there was no need, there was no light. She

could hear the men outside talking in a language she couldn't understand; she knew there were three of them, three distinct voices. She had explored the room already, the walls were irregular, stone; the floor was also rough cut stone, they curved up where it met the walls, it bore no horrors, it was like a hundred stone cut chambers she had visited over the past few years.

Jo guessed she was in the Old City by her surroundings and the length of the ride there, so this was possibly a refuge cut by Crusaders after the rout of Jerusalem by the Saracens. Many houses in the Old City had these refuges prepared, just in case Richard's army lost the final battle, being caught by Saladin's men was not an option, it was a fate worse than death, that came later, much later. Then the thought struck her, there was usually a second exit from these chambers! In the darkness Jo started once more to explore the room, feeling for any sign of a crack or depression. This was time consuming work, that I suppose was a good thing, she thought. After some long time, Jo didn't know how long as her watch had been taken from her, she heard another sound, not above her but outside somewhere. It was a grating sound followed by a waft of stale air, then two more voices outside. Less than a minute later the grating sound occurred again, then the new voices were gone leaving the murmur of the original three males,. Jo's blind examination of her prison continued.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
14:25 (local time) Wednesday, July
23rd, 2031.

A helicopter with Palestinian markings approached Shufat Barracks at a low altitude, the troops on the ground watched it as it swooped in over the rooftops and hovered as if it were landing, dropped something outside the

guardroom then speed away. Ensign Cohen approached the package with care and retrieved it with a two meter grab. Someone else arrived with a 'BB', a bomb suppressing enclosure, the package was placed quickly in the BB and placed in an open area away from any potential damage. Some twenty minutes later the Israeli Bomb Squad arrived and extracted the package from the enclosure; just four minutes later the package was declared safe. Major Davidson relieved the Bomb Squad Captain of the package and opened it. Inside was Jo Markson's wristwatch and a printed sheet of synth-paper. The Major quickly read the paper and marched quickly to the operations room behind the main block, right at the centre of the barracks.

As the door to the operations room swung open Major Davidson announced, "I want my full staff here within thirty minutes, make it so Sergeant." He turned and marched swiftly to the reception, the Sergeant stood to attention and saluted but the Major ignored him making straight for the stairs, which he climbed three at a time. "Mr. Markson!" he shouted as he reached the corridor. Jim Markson's head appeared around the door to their apartment. "I need to see you and Professor Gwilliam in the conference room, now, if you'd be so good Sir."

Jim made towards Owen's room but as he did so the door opened and Owen himself stepped out, "Yes, yes, I heard, everybody in this blooming place heard." The two walked together the short distance to the conference room, the major was already there.

"Please, take a seat," said the Major.

The two seated themselves across the table from the Major, "What's happened," asked Jim. "you may have heard that chopper a short time ago," Jim and Owen both nodded, "well that was our friends at the site making a delivery to us," said the Major, opening the cardboard tube

that contained the two items. "Is this your Daughter's wristwatch, Jim," he said as he passed the watch across.

"Yes, it was a birthday present," confirmed Jim looking closely at the watch. "Where is she Major?"

"Your Daughter can't be too far away, they haven't had time. In the mean time we have a demand from the people holding her."

"What do they want," Jim asked.

"They want you professor, or at least someone who can operate that machine of yours, they say that there seems to be parts missing."

"We always remove the processor unit for safety reasons," Owen said, "it's standard procedure."

"Well they say we can have Joanne back once they have the missing piece and someone who can operate the excavator," Davidson stated. "I have to say that unusually they have made no threats about harming her."

"Let me go," offered Owen, "but it takes two to operate the machine, I'll need to ask for volunteers from my team."

"Can you brief one of my technical men to operate it," asked Major Davidson.

"I guess we could, given time," said Owen.

"Right," said Davidson, "you have one hour Professor."

"An hour?"

"One hour Professor, so you had better get going!"

As Silsilen Street, The Jerusalem Old
City; 14:30 Local time.
Wednesday, July 23rd, 2031.

It seemed like she had been searching the walls and floor of the little dark cell for hours, and Jo sat down in a corner exhausted and dejected, may be this wasn't a refuge after all, she thought. Jo sat quietly and motionless for several minutes, listening to nothing, there was complete silence, even the murmur of the guards had stopped. The only

stimulation to her senses was a light draught of air that wafted across her forehead , it was soothing in some way. Suddenly she realised that the current of air needed both a source and a destination, if only she had a flame. Without moving too much in case she disturbed the slight flow, Jo licked her fingers and held them up into the flow. She could just about feel the cooling effect of the evaporation on her fingers.

Jo didn't know how long it took to trace the destination of the air current, she lost it so many times and seemed to take forever to detect it again, but find it she did. The flow disappeared into a small fissure close to the floor in the far corner from the door. Jo fished in the small pouch she wore around her waist and under her tee shirt, no one had noticed it. In the pouch was a chrome nail-file, a must for any female archaeologist who valued her appearance. Carefully she inserted the point of the file into the fissure to test which direction the crack followed, it went downwards at an angle of about sixty degrees. Jo knew she needed to work quickly, the file did not make a good scraper but it was all she had, speedily she worked on the fissure to enlarge it. After about ten minutes of work the hole was big enough to get two fingers into the void, she hooked her fingers and pulled and she sensed a slight movement in the impacted dried mud. A few more tugs removed a chunk of wall the size of an open hand. Desperately Jo pulled at the irregular shaped stones that bordered the original hole, and one by one they came free. Jo dropped one rounded rock into the void and it rattled away into the abbess beyond, she held her breath lest one of her guards had heard it, but there was no other sounds. Finally Jo could find no further loose rocks. The resulting void went downwards under the floor slab. Jo traced the edges of the floor slab, it was just over fifty centimetres on a side, not too big. The file lost no time scraping out the grime of centuries, it took time but finally Jo could make it rock slightly. Using the original hole

as her access she tugged and tugged at the slab, with each tug the slab moved another millimetre, then came loose, with Jo falling backwards and bumping her head on the floor.

There was no time to nurse her bruised head there was a passage to investigate and hopefully an escape route. Her feet found a hold in the side of the vertical passage and she slipped easily down into the shaft. About five meters down Jo stepped onto a floor, her hands found a passage way to one side and feeling her way she carefully made progress along the passageway. Jo was conscious that these escape tunnels often contained traps to confound any pursuers so each step was taken tentatively, feeling the way with both hand and foot. Just as her confidence was building Jo's right foot found a void where the floor should have been, now on her knees she felt around for loose stones and chose two roughly egg sized pebbles. The first pebble she dropped over the edge of the void and counted, one, two, three; crack, the pebble hit stone at the bottom, 'Hm,' thought Jo, "over a hundred foot". The remaining pebble Jo threw ahead of her and heard it skitter along the passage as it continued on the opposite side of the pit, but how wide was this void? There was no way of knowing.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
16:31 (local time) Wednesday, July
23rd, 2031.

Owen had been in conference with the army's engineer for just over an hour when the door burst open and Major Davidson walked in, "Time's up I'm afraid Professor, you can finish your briefing on the way to the site."

Owen and the engineer, sergeant Goldbloom, who was a civil engineer attached to the security unit as an advisor,

dressed in blue coveralls and were ushered into a LIMO. The journey took less than five minutes, they landed inside a hurriedly built compound on the opposite side of the Kidron Valley from the site. As they approached they could see the ring of security; field guns, machine gun posts, RPG launchers and even two tanks with missile pods, around the entrance tunnel. Of the attackers there was little evidence other than an army livery ground vehicle and two individuals wearing fatigues and carrying automatic weapons stood outside of the tunnel entrance.

Professor Gwilliam and Sergeant Goldbloom were escorted to the security perimeter where a Captain asked if they were ready? Goldbloom gave a thumbs up signal and the Captain raised a microphone to his lips, "Attention, attention, the two engineers you have requested are about to approach you, they are unarmed."

One of the figures by the tunnel waved them forward. With guns behind them and the guns in front of them, projecting red laser dots on their chests, they walked across Kidron Valley into the jaws of the unknown.

As Silsilen Street, The Jerusalem Old
City; 16:47 Local time.
Wednesday, July 23rd, 2031.

Jo sat on the edge of the pit trap almost in tears, she couldn't take a chance and make the jump as she didn't know how wide the pit was and if she sat here she would be captured again. Jo stood, as a thought struck her, the pit must be too wide to jump as any pursuers would have tried that, there must be some other way to cross. Jo again started exploring the walls at the edge of the pit, she found that on one side of the passage the natural stone wall ended just before the edge of the pit. Where the pit plunged to a deathly termination the wall was made up of

dressed stones, why? Jo's fingers explored the joints between the stones, they were just a bit too perfect, most of the blocks were mortared into place but one seemed to have no mortar at all. She pressed on the stone and it gave, more pressure and the block slid back into the wall and stopped about thirty centimetres in revealing a handhold hollowed out in the stone below. It was plainly impossible to hang by one arm whilst finding another handhold thought Jo, there must be foot cavities also. Once she knew what she was looking for it was easy to find the rest for her foot, it just needed a kick to send the stone sliding into the wall.

Jo set out to cross the trap, first finding the handholds then kicking stone blocks until she found the rest for her feet. The pit seemed to be around four metres across and she needed to sit down on the other side whilst her heart stopped pounding and her legs stopped shaking. As Jo sat there she heard the stones resetting themselves, another five minutes and she continued her journey along the passage one tentative step at a time. Suddenly her hand failed to make contact with the right hand wall, Jo caught her breath thinking it was another trap but it was merely an alcove. Why put an alcove in a tunnel Jo thought? The archaeologist in her prompted her to explore the recess, her probing hands found what she thought at first was brush, however further contact proved her wrong, it was an ancient torch. Then her hands flaying around in the pitch black found the oil before they found the bronze bucket that it was contained in, then they found a shelf that held something unfamiliar. It was a box with rope protruding through the lid, she couldn't figure what it was, it had another compartment, and inside it was some kind of stone, smooth and shaped. Then it dawned; it was a tinderbox.

But how did it work? It took over five minutes of experimentation to produce the first spark, the second ignited the torch that had by now been soaked in the oil. The light nearly blinded her after the hours she had spent in the total darkness. As her sight returned Jo could see a door at the end of the passageway just some two meters away. Hoping that the door was the way out to the world above, Jo turned the handle and pushed, but nothing moved. She was trapped again.

Investigation Tunnel, Temple Mount,
Jerusalem, Israel, 17:15(local time)
Wednesday, July 23rd, 2031.

The two gunmen frisked the Professor and Goldbloom between the truck and the entrance to the tunnel, there was nothing to find with Owen but with Goldbloom they missed the stud ear-ring communication device and the five shot stun gun that was built into the body of his pen. They did find the wristwatch communicator but that was a plant anyway and not knowing any different they overlooked the several other devices that nestled with other tools on the toolbox they carried.

They were pushed into the mouth of the tunnel and followed the directions to walk, instructions made by the men pointing with their AK21 automatic weapons. They walked briskly to where a group of people were gathered around the cutting machine. One figure turned at their approach and split from the group to meet them.

“Ah, Professor Gwilliam, I had expected two of your team,” the figure said, then half turning back to the group said, “ladies and gentlemen this is a great honour, let me introduce you to the inventor of this wonderful machine, Professor Owen Gwilliam.”

Owen had not expected to be recognised and was a little taken back, “You have the advantage over me sir,” he said. “Ha! Yes I do, I more in ways than one, Eth? People call me ‘The Turk’ or just Turk, but who is this you have with you,” asked the Turk.

Owen recognised the name as the one the Cyprus police had suggested as the murderer of Dimitri, but he made no sign of recognition. “This is one of my team that volunteered to come with me.

“Name, Professor, give me a name, I want to know who I have in my tunnel,” shouted the Turk.

Before Owen could think up a name Goldbloom spoke out, “Conrad Kinch Sir, I come from Basal in Switzerland, I am a graduate engineer, just recently joined the Professor’s organisation.”

The Turk turned to one of the group, saying, “Go check him out, quickly. Pardon me if I don’t allow your assistant near the machine until we check him out, he could do no end of damage to my plan. You will pleased to stay here until then.”

The two were shown to a seat about twenty metres from the machine and placed under guard.

“Do you have a washroom,” Goldbloom asked one of the guards, “nerves you know.”

The guard turned to look at the other man on the other side of them but he just shrugged. “Surey,” he said with a heavy accent.

“Did you know you have a face like a hyena,” Goldbloom said to the second man who just smiled back.

“What are you doing,” Owen asked, “trying to get us killed.”

“No, trying to find out if they can understand English,” Goldbloom replied, “and I’m pretty sure they can’t. Don’t worry about them checking me out, I just got the name from control they have already updated your public records and given me a whole new life”

Ten minutes later the Turk returned, "Seems you are genuine Heir Kinch, How long will it take to break through with your machine Professor?"

"Not sure," said Owen, "twelve to fifteen hours maybe, but we can't run the machine for that long continuously"

"Now," said the Turk, "are you playing for time or are you telling me truths. I will be watching you Professor, you will need to prove to me that this machine cannot perform for long periods. Now let us get started, up you get gentlemen and get this thing cutting rock."

It took twelve minutes to connect the control box and power up the machine. With a great shudder that seemed to shake the rock around them the MOLE sprang to life and the laser cutters commenced turning the rock to lava. This was going to be a long night.

Somewhere below, The Jerusalem Old City; 17:49 Local time. Wednesday, July 23rd, 2031.

No matter how much Jo Markson pushed, shoved, pulled or kicked the door, it would not yield to her molestations. She was just giving it one last kick more out of frustration than from any hope of opening the portal, when the earth shook and the gate gave a loud creak then opened just a few centimetres. Enthused Jo pushed, hard and the ancient door scraped and stuttered but opened. Out of breath she leaned against the great door's frame for a few seconds, as she picked up the flaming torch once more she heard a long scream coming from back down the tunnel, her guards had found the trap. There were a couple of oaths issued in some foreign language and the distant sound of two voices shouting followed by receding foot falls then, silence.

At the end of the passageway the form of Jo Markson stepped through the doorway and into a large cavern. The cavern seemed to be partly natural and partly manmade with some smooth vertical walls and some walls rough and sloping to meet the upward sloping floor. Jo was at the highest point of the natural floor where it met the roof. She could see below her that where the man-made walls were, the floor was also flat, making a path through the natural rock of the cavern. In the vertical wall several doorways could be seen, at each end of the cavern the path disappeared into a number of what from this distance, looked like tunnels. There was also a noise, a sort of hum mixed with a kind swishing vibration that was all around her. Which way to go though, that was the pressing question and she was so tired, and now that she thought about it, she was hungry as well. Jo climbed down from the doorway and stepped onto the path, she turned right.

Investigation Tunnel, Temple Mount,
Jerusalem, Israel, 18:05 (local time)
Wednesday, July 23rd, 2031.

Professor Gwilliam and Sergeant Goldbloom stood surrounded by the aggressors, the Professor held the remote control processor as Goldbloom dodged from side to side doing the checks that Owen had instructed him to do. The machine was turned to its slowest setting that was not obvious to those watching.

The Turk's com-unit suddenly sounded and was answered with a curt "Ya!" What ever the call was about it did not please him and he shouted orders into the unit in some unintelligible language. He turned to two of his group and a short discussion took place before he walked away smacking his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"I wonder what all that was about," Owen asked Goldbloom as he shuttled past him for the twentieth time in ten

minutes, Goldbloom said nothing until he shuttled past Owen again.

"They've lost Ms Markson some how she's escaped," Goldbloom whispered as he past by.

On the next pass Owen asked, "Does that mean we can escape?"

The next pass the question was answered, "No, not until control tells us they have her safe."

So the cutting process of the tunnel continued

Control Van, Kidron Valley,
Jerusalem, Israel, 18:15 (local time)
Wednesday, July 23rd, 2031.

The Control Van was hot and stuffy in the summer evening despite the windows and doors being open. In the valley the air was still and there was thunder in the air, in the control van the atmosphere was no less charged.

"Did you get the com conversation, Sparks," asked Major Davidson.

"I did Sir," came the instant reply.

"Get a translation, as quickly as you can," the young technician was asked.

"Just coming through Sir."

Thirty seconds later the Major was holding a printed translation of the conversation between one of the abductors and The Turk, it read:

Unknown Voice: Turk it's Rapha, we've lost the girl.
We went to take her some food and she wasn't there.

Turk: How?

Unknown Voice: She escaped through a hole in the floor, a sort of shaft hidden in the floor. It leads to a passage with a trap in it, we lost Corren, he's dead, he fell down a pit onto spikes.

Turk: And if you don't want to follow him into the next world you will get after her. You understand, [shouts] I want her back. Go!

Communication ends.....

The Major placed the translation on the desk, "A stroke of good fortune I feel, coms will you let Jim Markson know that his daughter has escaped and put out a general instruction to military and police to look out for her, she could surface anywhere but my guess is she was held in one of the cellars or old refuges in the Old City, they have been used previously by terrorists, so concentrate on that area."

"Yes Sir."

“Sparks, tell Goldbloom to hold tight until we find her, then we’ll get them out.”
Sir.”

Somewhere below Jerusalem, 18:35
Local time
Wednesday, July 23rd, 2031.

The hum had disappeared now but the passageway just kept on going. On each side of the main passageway there were interminable chambers and rooms, her heart longed to explore all of them but her priority was to get out of these caverns and back to her family. The main passage suddenly took a turn to the right and descended steeply until the path became steps. The width of the path and the height of the roof never seemed to vary always around two meters wide and three meters high. Now the path levelled out again, Jo calculated the level must have dropped some thirty meters in the past ten minutes and now right in front of her was the most ornate archway, it looked so out of place in these rough natural caverns.

Over the arch was a tablet that contained an inscription in ancient Hebrew, the flickering flame of the torch made it difficult to read and Jo’s ancient Hebrew was not what it should have been. From what she could make out it said:

None but the Lord’s righteous
And those who are left behind
Shall enter this Holy, Holy place
Others the Lord will smite
And [*something*] will be upon them
Into the [*something*] covenant unto the
end of time [*or*] era.

Jo had seen inscriptions like this just before traps in the Egyptian tombs, if you were lucky time had disarmed them but some, mainly mechanical ones, remained active. Once more Jo found herself on her knees examining the ground, here where the path met the arch the chiselled rock path gave way to paving slabs. The joints had been filled with dust but that meant nothing, if it was a trap it could be active despite this. With her trusty nail file she scraped out some of the dust from the centre slab, inserted the file and used it as a lever, she felt the slab move and she stopped. She did the same to the right-hand slab; then the left, these slabs were rock solid, in fact further investigation proved that the joints were false and had been carved to look like joints. It was only possible to walk upright if one walked through the arch in the centre, the safe passage on each side entailed bowing down or crawling on knees.

Very cautiously she edged her way through the arch in a crouching position one slab at a time, there were seven slabs on each side of the arched tunnel, and six in the centre row. Jo got to the other side of the arch safely and arrived on a ledge high above the floor of a cathedral of a cavern. Below her she could just make out an ornate construction right in the centre of the cavern. There seemed no way down that she could see so she turned to retrace her steps through the arch, as she did so a glimmer of light caught her eye, no there were two lights in that dark cave. One was faint and projected a silver line across the floor; it was the light filtering through a long crack in the roof, daylight. Jo placed the torch inside the arch to hide its light, now she could see that there was a light coming from the construct in the middle of the cave, a green/blue light so faint that it would have been missed completely in anything but this level of illumination. The hackles of her neck were standing on end and she realised that this place was special in some way; she could feel the electricity in the air. She thought that this may be a live version of the

control room chamber they had found in India; or rather she hoped it might be.

She was torn, the archaeologist in her yearned to investigate this place but her logical side told her she needed to find a way out. Jo retrieved the torch from the arch and examined the ledge, it was large enough to accommodate around fifty people and she estimated it to be about five meters wide at the broadest point. On each side the ledge continued, but narrower, much narrower, in fact it looked less than half a metre wide and sloped gently down. There was no way to see if it descended to the floor and also no way of knowing if there were other entrances or exits. Again her logic told her that the archway trap was just too easy to overcome, she may not be so lucky if there were other access points. Jo held the torch out at arm's length to illuminate as much of the narrow ledge as possible, her fears were confirmed. About ten meters along the ledge was a human skeleton impaled on a spear protruding from the rock wall, so there were more traps, that was not the way to go. Reluctantly she retraced her steps through the archway. She now knew that around twenty meters above was the surface and likely the fissure in the Temple Mount, she needed to find a way upwards other than the main path she had just followed.

Again Jo found herself outside of the archway looking again at the inscription;

None but the Lord's righteous
And those who are left behind
Shall enter this Holy, Holy place

'Left behind, why those who are left behind' Jo thought, *'two sets of people, I don't understand this,'* she thought. "Good God I really need some help here," Jo spoke out loud as she turned ready to climb the steps again. As she

did so something caught her attention, an area of shadow that did not dispel as the torch moved, she thrust the torch toward it and the deep shadow turned into a fissure in the rock that had a dog-leg entrance. Moving cautiously once more Jo stepped into the fissure, it was tight but she passed through without let or hindrance, inside it opened up into a small cave with another flat floor, at the far end steps could be seen rising into a shaft. Carefully, examining every centimetre, she mounted the steps. It was a long climb but after what seemed an age the steps brought her to what could only be called a low landing just a metre from floor to ceiling, but there was no exit. Above her were slabs, wedging her shoulders against one slab and her feet against a wall she pushed, the slab moved, not a lot but it gave against the pressure. Jo pushed and pushed but the slab just rocked. Jo needed to rest and sat quietly, she could hear voices, voices close at hand through the slabs. Jo shouted for help and kept shouting, laying on her back kicking the slabs overhead. Then a single voice "Hello, ist der someones down der please?" said someone with a German accent. "Yes," shouted Jo, "can you fetch help to get me out." "Ja, said the voice, "I vill get ze commander,"

It took another twenty minutes before Jo saw the full light of the evening and the strong arms of two Israeli army officers pulled her from the floor of Dome of the Tablets in the centre of the temple plaza. Jo stood for fully five seconds before her knees gave way and she collapsed from total exhaustion.

Control Van, Kidron Valley,
Jerusalem, Israel, 20:45 (local time)
Wednesday, July 23rd, 2031.

“They have the girl Sir,” Sparks said as he turned from his soft-screen.

The Major turned to one of the screens to see two medics lifting Jo onto a gurney, “Is she all right,” he asked, looking worried.

“Yes Sir, the medics say she just collapsed from exhaustion, she’ll be fine after a good rest.”

“Good,” said Major Davidson, “Tell Goldbloom that we have Ms Markson safe and to commence interference.” He took out his personal com-unit and placed a call to Jo’s father, “Jim? Major Davidson, just to let you know we have your daughter safe and she’s fine. We’re taking her to the infirmary to check her out but as far as we know she is fine but exhausted, you’ll have her with you before midnight.”

Davidson just heard Jim swallow and the words “Thank you,” choking from his throat.

“Just relax Jim, I’ll be with you as soon as we have this situation here sorted out, goodbye,” and Davidson broke the connection.

Investigation Tunnel, Temple Mount,
Jerusalem, Israel, 20:50 (local time)
Wednesday, July 23rd, 2031.

In the tunnel Goldbloom sidled up to the Professor and whispered, “Jo Markson, they have her safe. It’s up to us now Prof, we run interference.”

“Interference?”

“Yes, we disrupt things here, cause problems, divert their attention, understand,” explained Goldbloom.

“If it’s problems they want I your man,” said Owen smiling. He typed some instructions into the control unit and winked at Goldbloom.

Almost instantly a siren sounded and a small explosion showered everyone with pieces of rock as one of the laser cutters stuck and locally overheated the rock in one area.

The Turk was on the scene within seconds, shouting, "What the hell has happened."

"I did warn you that you couldn't run this thing indefinitely," said Owen.

"Well get it fixed, fast," ordered the Turk.

"I'll do my very best," promised Owen, and then under his breath he added, "for us." Owen climbed up the access ladder to the top of the cutting head where there was an access door to the heart of the machine. There were all sorts of mechanical noises coming from the open access door for the following eighteen minutes; bangs and hammering, clanks and grating sounds. All the time the Turk strode up and down on the catwalk at the bottom of the steps. Then Owen emerged with Goldbloom in tow and climbed out onto the cutter arms after a minute or so Owen called down "OK," and the cutting head revolved until the next cutter was within his reach. This happened eight times then Owen climbed down.

"Am I going to get my tunnel now Professor," asked the Turk.

"Oh yes, you're going to get it Turk, we just need to be in the control cabin to fire it up," said Owen.

"OK, but get a move on," said the Turk.

Professor Gwilliam and Goldbloom climbed back through the access panel into the machine but not into the cab, they stayed inside the door peeping out through the transparent panel.

Goldbloom spoke directly to his control and said, "We're ready here, what ever that means," he looked at Owen.

Owen smiled and tapped the side of his nose with his index finger.

Goldbloom just said, "Go Prof'."

Owen pressed the start up button and the generators whined into operation, the cutting head slowly started to revolve and the Professor pressed the yellow and black striped activation button. All hell was let loose at that instant. Laser beams strafed the tunnel behind the great machine like bullets from a giant Gatling gun. Each laser cutter fired in turn, each one set at a different angle, holes appeared in the floor as members of the team that had captured the tunnel fled to the safety of the open air where Israeli troops arrested them and escorted them away. Suddenly there was a terrific bang on the access door through which Owen and the Sergeant had been watching the mayhem. They both jumped back and looked down to see a bullet shaped dent in the steel door. The Turk had been on the catwalk when the machine had started spitting its rain of fire; too close for any of the cutters to hit him, now he was aiming to fire on the door again.

Fortunately the cab had been constructed from reinforced laminated steel as a safety feature, it acted as a cocoon in case of a cave-in and could easily resist the attack from small arms. Another bullet thudded into the door, this time the laminated glass panel took the impact. Owen slipped away from the door and clambered into the operators seat, engaged the reverse drive and the MOLE started to move backwards towards the entrance. The movement was sudden and unexpected, it caught the Turk off guard and he lost his balance. A move into forward traction and then into reverse again resulted in the Turk being thrown towards the safety rail, his lumber area hit the rail and his legs swung upwards. The gun flew from his hand as he grabbed for the rail, his legs flew over his body coming down on the other side of the rail. The wrist of the hand that had grabbed the rail broke with a sickening crack and he made another grab for the rail with his left hand and then hung there helplessly. At that moment Major Davidson with a SWAT team rushed into the tunnel to find

the remaining aggressors standing with their hands on top of their heads and the Turk in no condition to resist being arrested.

As Sergeant Goldbloom and Professor Gwilliam emerged from the cab three of the SWAT team were marching The Turk away, the Major turned as he saw the two come down the steps, "Good job, Goldbloom, nicely done," he said.

"Nothing to do with me Sir," Goldbloom responded, "it was the Prof's show entirely, I just looked on."

"Well Professor, that was an amazing piece of work, we saw the whole thing from the entrance," said Davidson, "for a tunnelling machine it makes a passable weapon. Well done Sir! As a matter of interest this 'Turk' is wanted in Israel and a dozen other countries for espionage, murder, and other crimes. A good day's work I'd say."

"Glad to be of help," said Owen, "how is Jo Markson?"

"She's fine, exhausted and rather dirty, I believe, she's quite a plucky young lady that one," Davidson said.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
23:10 (local time) Wednesday, July
23rd, 2031.

When Professor Gwilliam arrived back at the barracks Jo was already there and far from being exhausted she seemed full of energy, he could hear her excited voice as he approached the conference room along the first floor corridor. He opened the conference room door to be greeted by almost the full team who stood and applauded him as he entered. "Stop it now," he shouted but the applause continued, "I've done nothing."

"Don't try to kid us Owen," shouted Jim, "we've seen the video feed, only one person could operate that machine in that way." So the applause continued and so did the backslapping. After a discrete period Jim interrupted the

celebration of the returning hero and said, “Jo was about to tell us something important so if everyone will take their seats we’ll find out what was so important that she needed to sign herself out of hospital, Jo.”

“As you all know,” Jo said commencing her story, “I was abducted and held in a twelfth century crusader refuge. I was lucky and found the escape tunnel; eventually that tunnel broke into a cave system, partly natural and partly man-made. I followed what looked like the main pathway and that brought me to a large cavern, a cathedral sized cavern right under the Temple Mount. But here’s the good bit right in the centre of the cavern is this hut, I couldn’t see it very well but there is a very feint light emanating from it.” Jo filled the team in on all the other details of her escape and the access stairs to the ledge in the cavern and then added, “One thing is strange though the cavern is protected by Egyptian style traps, the other control room we found in India had no such protection, however the link is logical, it was the Egyptian glyphs and their name for Jerusalem, in the Indian control room, we need to get permission to examine this new cavern.”

“I agree Jo,” said her Dad, “but I think the permission we have to burrow into the Mount covers anything inside that cave system. We will contact Ben and Dr. Wade first thing in the morning for their advice. However, I will add one more thing before we break up and get some sleep. We need to keep an open mind about what’s in that cavern, yes, it could be another control room, From the research we’ve been doing since this morning it could equally be the resting place of the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant. Or it could be something entirely different. What is undeniable however, is that either someone is desperate to get there before us or desperate to stop us, or both. Now off you go to bed, all of you, including you Joanne, especially you.

They all slept well that night, except for Joanne who slept fitfully, partly because of the delayed trauma from being kidnapped and imprisoned, and partly from the excitement she felt over what secrets the Mount chamber held. Her mind could not stop constructing scenarios of what they would discover in that little hut and it was after three in the morning before she finally fell into a deep sleep.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
08:31 (local time) Thursday, July 24th,
2031.

The whole team assembled for breakfast in the refectory, the subject of conversation was of course the events of the previous day but one team member was missing, Jim had left orders that Jo should be allowed to remain in bed until she awoke naturally. Jim had been up since seven and had already spoken to Benjamin Marks who had agreed they needed to talk and would be arriving with Dr. Wade within the hour. There was another standing ovation for Owen Gwilliam when he arrived for breakfast, which he again shrugged off. The mood was generally up-beat and an air of expectation hung just out of reach.

At nine AM on the dot, the Ministerial LIMO arrived with it's escort followed by Major Davidson's staff vehicle. As Jim watched the arrivals through the refectory windows as all five vehicles landed in the parade ground and their occupants walked in procession to the reception Jim rose and said, "We'd best be getting to the conference room." Carol, Peter, John and Owen immediately left their table and hurried up the back stairs to the first floor Conference Room. They arrived just seconds before the Minister rounded the corner of the corridor and managed to get seated before the Major burst into the room in his usual way. The official party silently found seats and no one spoke while Benjamin arranged his papers in front of him.

"Firstly," said the Minister of National Security, Marks, "Let me apologise for the inconveniences of yesterday, the PM has given me explicit instructions to assure you that the people responsible will be brought to justice. She has also added her apologies to mine for the dreadful treatment of your daughter; how is she by the way?"

“Asleep at the moment, but she certainly seemed OK last night,” answered Jim.

“Good, we will of course arrange any treatment or counselling that Jo may require,” Benjamin Marks continued. Now to the business at hand, we have viewed the video of Jo’s debriefing last night and consulted with our Moslem partners. Can I ask you to brief us of just what you propose in respect of the cavern.”

Jim outlined the procedures that would be followed in the investigation of the chamber and any contents. Jim emphasised that whatever it was in that chamber must be the cause of the earthquakes under the Mount and shared the research they had done on the previous day surrounding the Ark of the Covenant.

As Jim finished his presentation Dr. Wade asked, “Mr Markson, what makes you think that the cavern contains the lost Ark?”

“I don’t think anything Dr. Wade,” answered Jim, “I merely think it is a possibility, a possibility that seems to fit with the documented evidence we have and I know that a hundred theories have been based on those facts but we just need to be prepared. Jo seems to think the enclosed area of the cavern is another Control Room site like the one she and Peter here found in India.”

“Jim,” Minister Marks interrupted, “you must realise that the Mount is a sacred place and despite hundreds of applications to excavate the chambers and tunnels under the Mount no one has ever been allowed to go anywhere near the site. Many feel that we should leave well alone, and that any interference by man would be regarded as sacrilege.”

At this point Peter butted into the discussion, “I’m sorry for butting in on this and I know I’m just a student and not even a student of archaeology, but really, can we afford to ignore what’s been going on over the past few weeks? This is not just an Israeli problem or a problem for Islam, this involves most of the world East of the Atlantic. We have reports of

anomalies from Spain, Italy, the UK, Egypt, India, a dozen European states not to mention the African Union, and the UAE. If something isn't resolved soon I feel this thing will go global." Everyone in the room was looking at Peter open mouthed, making him feel self-conscious, "I'm sorry, but that's the way I feel."

"Thank you for that summary Peter and thank you for reminding us that we are a part of the global community also," stated Benjamin. "Peter is right we have more than Israel to think about here, not what the world will think of us but what it will think if we do nothing. Dr. Wade, can I have a word please," Benjamin finally asked. He and the Dr. rose from the table and disappeared through the door saying, "Excuse us for a moment."

There were voices outside for some minutes, the Minister's voice becoming dominant over Wade's and then the conversation ended abruptly, the door opened and the two re-entered the room. Benjamin's face was like stone and the Doctor's was red, it was obvious that whatever Dr. Wade's opinion was it had been over-ruled by the Minister. As soon as the Minister had reseated himself he began to speak, "Thank you for bearing with us everyone. Having earlier consulted with my Palestinian counterpart and their President, I have been given authority to make whatever decision is required in this situation. I can therefore inform you that I am going to allow JMRT to investigate the Temple Mount thoroughly in line with the agreement we have already made. However there are two caveats to that, one, Dr. Wade is to be a full member of the investigation team and is to be kept fully informed of progress, difficulties and decisions. There will be a nominated Palestinian invited to join the team also, whoever this is will be here on the same terms as Dr. Wade. And secondly the Israeli Government will control news releases to the worlds press."

“Err, I’m afraid that I have already made an agreement with Declan Brook for exclusive rights to whatever we discover,” Jim admitted.

“That’s no problem as long as Mr. Brook works with and through this administration,” said Benjamin. “As we will need to wait for a couple of days for our Palestinian nominee can I suggest that you take, say, three days vacation before we start. The original tunnel will be a crime scene for a while, but we now have an alternative entrance, so you will not be able to get your machine out for a few days Professor. I think you deserve a few days relaxation after yesterday’s suspenseful episode, see the sites, do the tourist things; or we can take you to the coast for a few days, alternatively you can use our governmental Dead Sea Resort, this is used by our MPs and their families, all on us of course.”

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
14:00 (local time) Thursday, July 24th,
2031.

Jo slept till mid-day but was obviously not herself and Jim was pleased to accept Benjamin’s offer of some recreation. A vote had been taken and the overwhelming majority had voted for the now celebrated Dead Sea Resort that rivalled South Africa’s Sun City. Everyone had busied themselves selecting the clothes they needed for the trip and packing, since the announcement at eleven o’clock. Carol had packed some things for her daughter and now everyone was waiting in the shade of the accommodation block, for the transporters to arrive. Then at exactly two o’clock, here they were, hovering in over the surrounding buildings ready to take their passengers on-board for the short hop to the Dead Sea. There were also members of the SSS (Strategic Security Service, the Israeli equivalent to

Britain's SAS) and four Mossad secret service men all of which had been sent to keep them safe.

By two thirty the group were checking in at the famous Dead Sea Resort as VIP-guests of the Israeli Government. The complex was vast covering almost two thousand hectares of Dead Sea coast, there were more swimming pools than you could count, bars, restaurants, every sport you can think of. Water-sports are a speciality, water-sports where you just can't sink, the safest place in all the world's water. The place was a wonderland for young and old, and everyone in between. Within an hour of arriving Peter had rented two remote-water-ski units and with John were immediately roaring around the resort's water-sport area that stretched five kilometres out into the inland sea. Jo just crashed out again beside the pool nearest to her luxury accommodation.

By the following day Jo was more her old self and agreed to replace John when Peter made off to do more water-skiing. The food was excellent and the accommodation all one would expect from a world class resort and every member of the team made the most of the time they had at the resort. During the second night the Markson family were disturbed by someone moving into the apartment across the hall, but it wasn't until the next morning that they discovered who the newcomer was.

At breakfast the following morning the whole team were assembled early, a tour had been laid on for them that would take them to the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Just as Peter was collecting his second portion of pancakes and maple syrup, a new resident walked into the restaurant. Peter immediately noticed her because he was a twenty-one year old red-blooded male and she was a dark haired beauty, tall, slim and with the most wonderful smile Peter had ever seen. She exuded

confidence, strode across the restaurant without a sideways glance, collected a juice and croissant, selected a table in the midst of the team and settled down with newspaper to eat breakfast. Peter couldn't help himself, he walked across to her table, "Hi," he said, "I'm Peter, was that you moving in last night?"

"Yes I know, and yes it was," she answered.

"You know who I am," he answered.

"Yes, you are Peter Markson, engineering student at Manchester UMIST," the dark-haired beauty confirmed, "That's your Professor, Owen Gwilliam, and those are your family, should I go on?"

"OK, who are you," challenged Peter.

"My name is Nina Cathage," she said holding out her hand for Peter to shake, "I am the Palestinian nomination to your team."

"Well welcome Nina Cathage," Peter took the offered hand, shook it but forgot to let go.

"Can I have my hand back now, please," Nina asked.

"Oh, sorry. Come bring your breakfast over and meet the family."

"Everybody, this is Nina, our Palestinian representative on the team," said Peter.

There was a chorus of 'Hello Nina' from the rest of the room and Peter found a vacant chair that he pushed in next to his seat.

After formally introducing the rest of his family he resumed his breakfast but after a few mouthfuls suddenly stopped, "Say what are you doing today," he asked of Nina.

"Well," she said, "let me see, I think I'm booked on a tour of the Dead Sea Scroll Caves and Visitor Centre," then broke into a laugh that was so infectious that the whole table joined her. "Do you mind if I join you Peter?"

"No, not at all, in fact I insist on escorting you personally."

Peter spent the following two days with Nina and rarely left her side. They both loved water-sports and many other sports, they took a old mini-moke together out into the desert and came back with a second century amphora, Nina was good at everything she did. By the time the transporters arrived at the end of the third day to take them back to Jerusalem, they were inseparable. The evening flight back was uneventful and once back at the barracks everyone got an early night in preparation for a hard day's work the next day.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
08:30 (local time) Saturday, July 26th,
2031.

Breakfast was over by eight-thirty that Saturday morning and as soon as the tables had been cleared Jim Markson commenced the briefing. There were some rigid rules to be covered and quite a number of religious conventions to be observed. Thankfully none of the extended team was particularly religious but the general population was so Saturday was not a good day to start on, but the alternative was to lose another two days. Of special concern were the traps that protected the cavern, already discovered by Jo, and any other chambers that might be discovered. Jim asked that anyone with previous experience of Egyptian explorations or traps come forward and form a scouting party. Five of the team volunteered for the task and this small team gave a brief impromptu health and safety briefing to the remainder of the team. Finally Jim said, "Right everyone, lastly, no one does anything, and I do mean *anything*, without the knowledge of their team leader. Now there's a lot of work to be done under the Mount, lets get moving and let's be careful down there."

At nine thirty the transports were waiting for them, piloted by non-religious Jews of course. These days only around eight percent of the Israeli population were practising Jurists; in reality most of the worlds faiths had declined over the past ten years, with the exception of Islam. Islam had softened its outlook on the world following the public outrage after nine-eleven and then the two-thousand and twenty sinking of the MV Colossus cruise ship, with the loss of over four thousand lives. Soon after that the notorious terrorist Abdul Bin Cadada had been captured after his own organisation had turned against him and his closest henchmen. Islam now boasted to be the largest faith organisation worldwide. Jim expected there to be some

objections from the religious minority of Jews, even demonstrations, especially in the circumstances.

Just before ten o'clock the loaded transporters landed on the plaza of the Temple Mount. The whole area had been cordoned off and screened since Jo had emerged from the underground stairway some days ago, the tourists and worshippers were now excluded from all but a narrow shielded walkway around the right hand edge of the plaza. The fissure across the rock had of course been cordoned off previously for safety sake. The smaller Dome of the Tablets had been totally covered by an inflatable bubble, not only shielding it from curious eyes on the ground but ones in the air also. Inside the bubble the domed roof had been removed together with the eight pillars on which it stood. Tradition has it that the Holy of Holies was originally located not under the Dome of the Rock but under the Dome of the Tablets also known as the Dome of the Spirits. The stone paving slabs had also been removed and temporary steps with a handrail installed to allow access to the uppermost landing. A generator was also purring away supplying electricity and lighting to the dark stairs and beyond.

It took most of the morning to unload and set up the equipment, teams given their briefings and the initial survey of the plaza, and the upper part of the steps. A full virtual survey was to be done as a record of exactly what was found and any alterations made to the surroundings, this was one of the conditions laid down by the two governments. After lunch Jo at last led the way down the rock-cut steep steps that took them to the archway, the entrance to the main cavern. Lights had been fixed to the walls of the stairway but no one had ventured through the arch so the first task was to extend the power supply safely through the arch and then set up the specialist lighting sets. A steel ramp was installed over the 'trip-stones' of the arch's

trap and the lighting sets brought down in sections. This was the responsibility of Peter's team and the task was achieved in less than an hour. Lighting gantries that were normally used in a vertical position throwing light downwards, here were used horizontally, protruding from the ledge above the cavern to illuminate the rock-face down which they needed to climb.

Jim decided to abandon the two narrow paths that led from each side of the ledge as in the illumination it could be seen that they were protected by dozens of trap holes. Although these traps would need to be decommissioned, examined and recorded eventually, for now the target was to get to the floor of the cavern and the constructed hut in its centre. The engineering team measured the distance to the cavern's floor as thirty-two meters; again that was Peter's team's task, to get the field team safely to that floor.

First heavy clevis bolts were drilled into the rear of the ledge, into these were fixed short scaffold poles, short because they had to be carried down the stone stairway, to fix these poles in place 'U' bolts were drilled into the rock. From these poles were constructed a cantilever structure that finally hung over the sheer face below the ledge. To the structure a pulley system was fixed with a sort of breaches-buoy connected to the rope system and to an electric winch, which was controlled by the person hanging on the end of the rope. The first one to descend on the winch system was Peter, his job was to examine and record the rock face, looking for trap holes and trigger stones, then to check on the cavern's floor. Some Egyptian chambers had been filled to drowning depth with quicksand, for this a water source was required in which to suspend the very fine sand, only one of these had ever been found in a liquid condition. You never actually knew what a sand floor was like until you touched down on it.

Peter was strapped into the climbing harness and the carabiner screwed shut, he was slowly swung out below the pulley, with a video camera and a virtual survey unit attached to his helmet he pressed the down button on the control pad. With a heart-stopping jolt the apparatus started to lower Peter downwards toward the floor. The video lights flared on and the feed came through to the soft-screen on the ledge, the first thing they saw was that the rock-face was littered with trap holes and trigger stones that formed the only hand holds on otherwise smooth rock. Halfway down was an inviting looking ledge that anyone getting that far on the end of a rope would have made for as a resting place; this ledge was one big trigger. At last Peter reached the floor and not attempting to release himself inched the winch down until he felt the resistance of solid floor below him. Not moving from the breaches he used a testing rod to probe the floor around him, it all seemed very solid and safe, so he stepped out of the harness. Making sure his safety line was taught he ventured further probing with the rod as he moved until he had checked enough of the floor for the advance party to set up more lights.

The Israeli Army Engineers had loaned the team a telescopic ladder that came in short modules of two meters. The modules were fixed together on the ledge and winched out slowly and horizontally for forty-six meters, the flying end was then lowered to the floor of the chamber and fixed at the mid point by cables fixed to fly-bolts fired into each end of the upper ledge. This now acted as a forty-five degree stairway, complete with handrails and a sliding safety cable.

Hot on the heels of the engineering team Jo's team were the first to descend the stairs as the electric cables were lowered, and as soon as the lights went on they commenced extending the safe area. Once the safe zone

reached the dais on which the little room was perched another field team took over checking the floor around the back of the dais whilst Jo's team started removing the dust from the floor.

"Jo, come and have a look at this," one of her team called within a minute of starting to brush the dust away.

"What is it," answered Jo as she crossed to where Hailey was kneeling and brushing dust.

"There's something carved into the floor," Hailey told her.

"There's some here as well," called another team member.

Whatever it was, it was big, the two busied themselves clearing the dust of three thousand years. Before they realised it Nina had joined them and a good area of the floor had been cleared, about ten square meters in total.

"It just seems to be lines carved into the floor but we won't know until we've cleared the whole area," said Jo, "we'd best leave it for now, we'll have vacuum extractors tomorrow." Jo just wanted to get a look at the central construct before they finished for the day, so Jo left her team, and with Nina, they cautiously approached the dais but just as they were within a meter of the dais they were interrupted by her Dad calling end of work for the day. Reluctantly they climbed back up the stairs, leaving the cavern in the hands of the Army engineers.

Beneath the Temple Mount, Jerusalem, Israel, 09:10 (local time) Sunday, July 27th, 2031.

The cavern looked so different when the field teams arrived the next day, the breeches-buoy had gone and in its place was a cage elevator, the staircase had been better secured, the rock face behind the elevator was covered in a chain-mail curtain and the whole cavern was illuminated like daylight. On the main floor were all sorts of equipment including the 'dust-suckers' that Jo had needed the night before and a ventilation system, that constantly pumped fresh air into the cavern, had been installed. Declan Brook's team had installed cameras everywhere in order to catch every moment of the investigation, these cameras were controlled from a production van on the surface that was manned by both EBC and Israeli Government media personnel. Each evening a condensed news clip would be released to the world's media of that day's discoveries. The field archaeology team was split into four, one to investigate the central construct (Alpha Team), another to complete the excavation of the floor and work on the carved lines (Beta Team). The third team, consisting of the five volunteers who had previous experience of Egyptian tombs, were to examine, record and decommission any and all of the traps (Delta Team). The fourth team was commissioned to explore and map the tunnels, caverns and passageways that emanated from and through the Mount, this team carried both virtual scanning cameras and TV cameras, (Gamma Team). So under the scrutiny of the world's media the work began in earnest.

The Alpha Team started off by taking virtual scans of the construct. Although Jo led the team both Peter and Nina joined up. It was a surprise that Nina chose that team as it was expected that her interest would be the exploration of the tunnels to ensure that no one encroached on the

Mosque above. Of course where Nina went Peter went also. The central construct was not approached until the full floor had been cleared and recorded, by mid-day the floor was cleaned and a holographic scan taken. Jim called a meeting of the team leaders on the ledge to discuss the lines, which were better seen from above. The overhead camera gave a good view of the whole floor, from the picture on the soft-screen it was just a jumble of scrawling lines.

“Well these lines must mean something,” stated Jim, “they have been purposely carved into an otherwise flat surface with such precision; do you know the width of the line doesn’t vary by as much as one hundredth of a millimetre?”

“Wow!” said Peter, “That’s as if a machine cut it,”

“Or a laser,” interjected Owen, “what about the depth?”

“Again the depth is three point eight millimetres and just doesn’t vary at all,” Jim said.

“The scan is accurate to a micron and there is just no variation,” Owen informed the group.

“That’s impossible,” stated John, “even a laser can’t produce precision like that.”

“Let me try something,” said Owen. He tapped in some commands and the view distorted as if it was convulsing, first it turned into a disk and then seemed to resolve into a sphere that flattened out, colour flooded into the picture. Suddenly the picture looked like a map, but of what?

Jo jumped up shouting, “I recognise this, turn it through about sixty degrees right,” she asked Owen.”

“No problem,” Owen said tapping in another command.

“It’s Pangaea!” Jo called.

“Remind me, what is Pangaea,” asked Owen.

“It’s the world before the continents split up and drifted off around the Earth on their tectonic plates, the super-continent”, said John.

“Right,” said Jim, “so what’s its significance here?”

“We won’t know unless we look at the construct at its centre Dad,” said Jo.

“Very well, make a start but go carefully, one step at a time,” Jim told her.

“Great Dad,” said Jo, “I love you,” as she placed a kiss on her Dad’s cheek.

Jo quickly descended in the cage elevator to the floor of the cavern, Peter, Nina and Dr. Wade followed her down the staircase and the four of them stood looking at the building there for several minutes. The structure was built on a rock dais and was rectangular, there were two steps that were carved into the rock and ran all the way around. The dais measured around seven meters by just over eleven and a half meters, Peter, who took the exact measurements said it conformed to the ratio of a ‘Golden Rectangle’. Peter being Peter of course gave everyone a mini lecture on it’s qualities and said it was a specific ratio based upon one to one point six recurring and could be found in nature from flowers to galaxies and were the result of something called ‘Fibonacci numbers’.

Carefully they circumnavigated the structure, they noticed that the lines of the floor map continued across the steps of the dais. The structure resembled a giant four-poster bed with the curtains drawn. Despite the now constant airflow across the cavern they noted that the curtains never moved. Jo went to tread on the first step in order to touch the drapes but Peter shouted to stop her.

“Wait until I’ve checked the step for triggers, Jo,” Peter said. It took another twelve minutes for Peter to crawl all the way around the dais checking every inch of the rock steps. Half way around he found a recess in the lower step, Peter shone his torch into the recess. It was about thirty centimetres wide by twelve high, inside Peter could see two round objects. He quickly took his brush and cleaned off the dust of years, now the two objects glistened gold. He carefully and slowly took hold of the left hand

object and tried to lift it out, it slid forward easily, it was a rod of either brass or gold about twenty-five millimetres diameter, fully three meters long with a spherical finial at each end of about fifty millimetres diameter. There seeming to be no adverse reaction, so Peter withdrew the second identical rod and took them back to Jo. The consensus was that they were solid gold, Jo was rather disinterested in the rods and placed them on the equipment trolley.

“But what of this dais Peter,” asked Jo

“As far as I can tell this is one solid slab of rock, separate from the floor, it seems to sit on the floor,” he said.

“Peter, that’s all very well but is it safe,” insisted Jo.

“Yes, it seems like it,” Peter stated.

Gingerly Jo placed her foot on the first step and then slowly transferred her weight to the leading foot.

No reaction.

She transferred her other foot onto the top step without any repercussions. Tentatively Jo stretched out her hand to touch the three thousand year old fabric but just before her finger made contact she quickly withdrew the hand. “Ouch!” she cried, “It’s electrified.”

“Wait,” said Peter, “let me get my equipment.” He dashed back across the floor to where a pile of instrument boxes had been piled up, opened a number of cases one after the other finally selecting a medium size case and brought it back to the dais. He took an instrument out of the box with a probe attached to it and thrust it toward the curtain, the thing bleeped and Peter looked at the readings, “There’s some sort of force field just in front of the fabric,” he said. Peter made off again but returned some minutes later with Owen Gwilliam in tow. The professor retrieved another instrument from Peter’s case and made some more readings, scratched his head and wandered off in an

absent-minded manner. Jo, Nina and Dr. Wade looked at Peter who shrugged and followed the Professor.

“Professor,” called Peter, what’s happening, what can we do about the field?”

The Professor stopped to face Peter, “It’s a static mesh, we need something to earth the field, I’ll need to get a shielded cable sent down.”

The Professor’s words seemed to stun Peter, “I don’t think you will need a cable Professor, come and see.” The two walked back to the dais and to the equipment trolley, “I found these in a recess under the step, I think they’re earthing rods.”

“Could Be Peter,” said the Professor, “but where do they connect?”

“I think I have an idea,” said Peter, leading them off to where he’d found the rods, “See here, there are two spherical sockets at the terminal of these lines.”

“You may well be right Boy-o, but where does the other end go,” Owen pointed out.

“I think if we place the ends in the sockets and lower the other ends keeping them as parallel as we can, they will find the corresponding sockets,” explained Peter, “we’ll need to wear rubber gloves though.”

“OK,” said the Professor, “let’s try it.”

Each protected by a pair of electrician’s gloves borrowed from the engineering team the two inserted the rods into the sockets and were lowering them slowly towards the curtain. As the spherical ends neared the curtain an arc of electricity jumped across from the field, a second later they felt the rods connect with something solid and came to rest in a stable position. The two rods now formed the rails to a set of steps at the top of which the rods had pushed the curtains apart forming an entrance. Peter tested the entrance and was about to pass into the structure when the voice of his sister fell on his ears.

“Hey!” she called, “I found it, I go first.” Peter returned down the two steps and made an exaggerated gesture for her to enter.

The curtains muted the light from the floodlights somewhat but in the subdued and diffused light she immediately recognised the object sitting on a plinth in the centre of the raised dais. She could hardly believe her eyes, she Joanne Markson had found what almost every archaeologist over the last three hundred years had longed to find. There in front of her was a golden box of about a meter by half a meter, topped by two kneeling angels, their wings arching over the box. The whole thing was stood on legs and each one sported a golden ring of about seventy millimetres diameter.

It was the Ark of the Covenant!

Peter was right behind her as she approached the Ark, “Don’t touch it Jo” he whispered, “the Bible tells of some guy who touched it and died.”

“Thanks Peter,” she whispered, her voice cracking with emotion.

The remainder of the group silently formed a circle around the Ark, just staring at it open mouthed.

“I thought this was just a myth see,” mumbled Owen.

Almost immediately the spell was broken and both Nina and Dr. Wade had their com-units out reporting the find in whispered tones. Peter held the instrument in his hand that he had used to detect the static field, he stepped forward and thrust the instrument toward the Ark. The instrument got closer and closer to the surface and finally touched the golden metal, there were absolutely no readings.

“It’s inert,” Peter said, “There is no sign of any activity here, if it ever was active it’s dead now.”

Jo hesitantly placed her hand on the object, nothing happened, she breathed a sigh of relief and gripped the angels that were attached to the lid and lifted. The top

moved, and Peter stepped up to help, the lid was lighter than they expected and they almost fell over as it suddenly gave way and parted from the box. The contents were displayed to the light for the first time in who knew how many years, and there, in front of them was, nothing! The box was empty except for a layer of sand in the bottom.

There was a feeling of general disappointment in the group. The thought of finding the stone tablets that God had written on, had inspired them all even though only one of the little group was in any way religious. Yet that one, Nina had shown the least expectation as they worked to enter the construct. Peter immediately started to examine the object in detail taking scans and virtual images of the box, the lid and the two carrying poles that were laid through the rings on the side the box.

“Shouldn’t these poles be made of solid gold,” Peter asked to nobody in particular.

“That is what the scripture says,” answered Nina.

“Well these are definitely not solid gold,” Peter stated, “in fact they feel like wood.”

“Let me see,” demanded Jo, snatching one of the poles out of its rings. She took a knife from he pocket and scraped the gold pole, the gold came off the pole revealing the fine grain of some red wood, “You’re right, it is wood,” she said looking aghast.

“The other one is the same,” said Peter transferring his attention to the actual object and scraping the wing of one of the angels, “this is the same the thing’s a replica, its just carved wood, painted.”

“I want a full analysis of this thing, how old the wood is, dendro-dating, paint analysis, I want to know what type of chisel carved it, and I want it fast,” shouted Jo, “Peter can you oversee this, I know you’ll get it done.”

Peter called two of the Lab staff down to collect the fake Ark and supervised the removal back to the barracks and

the Lab. It was already three o'clock in the afternoon when they started work on the Ark but the technicians knuckled down and within an hour they had the preliminary results. Peter ensured that the fake Ark was deposited in the secure store-room in the basement before he grabbed the printouts and made the hop back to the Temple Mount. Jo, his Dad, Nina, John and Dr. Wade were all waiting on the Plaza when he landed his LIMO.

"You couldn't call the results through?" said Jo as Peter climbed out onto the paving.

"Sorry," said Peter, "I haven't read them myself yet." Peter handed the printouts to Jo who snatched them and began to scan through them.

"This is crazy," Jo said to her Dad, "The gold paint, it's eighty percent real gold with some kind of resin mixed in. The wood was cut down in the year three thousand, seven thirty-four BC, look at this, as far as they can tell it could have been carved using a modern chisel. No striations above fifty microns, we'd have problems achieving accuracy like that today."

"So, at some point after thirty-seven thirty-four BC, someone made a replica of the Holy Ark," said Jim, "but for what reason?"

"Someone stole it and put a fake in its place," suggested Peter.

"Possibly," said Dr. Wade, "but maybe the real Ark was hidden away safely whilst they didn't want anyone else to know it was gone."

"What if Babylon did take the Ark," Nina said, and this was simply made to lift the spirits of the people when they arrived back from exile."

"That would also make sense," said Jim.

"But what if someone, some more modern archaeologist has already found the Ark right here, taken it away and replaced it with a modern one made from ancient wood," said Peter.

“Don’t be silly Peter,” said his sister, “why replace it when no body would miss it. Let’s wait for the carbon tests on the gold paint.”

“Well look, it’s nearly five now,” said Jim, “let’s just knock off for the day, we’ll have the carbon dating by morning and we’ll know more.”

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
07:45 (local time) Monday, July 28th,
2031.

As they were finishing breakfast one of the lab-techs came into the dining room and gave Jim a sheet, “The carbon dates for the paint,” He said.

Jim opened the folded sheet and looked at the results, a smile spread across his face and he tucked it under his plate.

“Dad!” said Jo, “stop teasing me, what’s the date range?”

“It says that the gold was particulated before it was bonded with the resin.”

“Dad, the date!” cried Jo.

“Oh, sorry, didn’t I say,” answered Jim smiling, “the particulation is dated to five sixty-six BC

“That’s just twenty three years before the destruction of the first temple by Nebuchadnezzar,” said Jo.

Dr. Wade who was sat the adjacent table turned around and said, “The King Josiah at that time is said to have removed the Ark for safe keeping twenty-two years before the actual destruction.”

“But wouldn’t he have taken it into the wilderness somewhere,” asked Jim.

“Well that would have been a very public thing, you see there were strict laws about how and who could move it,” said Dr. Wade. It’s almost certain that it didn’t come out of the front door, there would have been guards and people around twenty-four seven and there’s no record of it.”

“So it’s now almost certain that it went via the underground tunnels,” said Jo.

“That’s why people have always believed it to be somewhere under the Mount,” Wade replied.

“Which doesn’t explain why there is a fake there instead,” said Jim.

“Unless,” said Jo, “the fake was like the second line of defence, if the Babylonians destroyed the temple there was a good chance they’d find the chamber.”

“So there’s more to find,” said Peter.

“I certainly hope so Peter,” said Wade, “we have discovered nothing that would explain why the Mount has torn itself in two, or what made the wooden Ark glow in the dark.”

“I think the force field might explain the faint glowing,” interrupted Professor Gwilliam.

“OK,” said Wade but that still leaves that fissure.”

The breakfast continued as did the general discussion and Peter tried to continue the conversation with Nina but the interchange was very one-sided; he couldn’t quite get his head around what Nina was all about. She very rarely took part in any of the archaeological discussions, but always seemed to be there. True he fancied her like crazy, but even in that area, despite her attaching herself to him, and he to her, the relationship had gone no further, no hand holding, no kisses, nothing, and it was leading to frustrations in Peter. Breakfast finished the dining room emptied and a fleet of LIMO transporters lifted off from the barracks and headed for the Temple Mount Plaza. Before they descended underground Jim reassigned some of the personnel to the Gamma Team, charging them with the task of finding either another hiding place for the Ark or an alternative way out. Alpha team headed by Jo, returned to the dais where the fake Ark had been discovered, Jo was convinced that there was more to the elaborate set up of the dais than to just stand a fake on.

Beneath the Temple Mount, Jerusalem, Israel, 09:15 (local time) Monday, July 28th, 2031.

“Right,” announced Jo, “let’s look at every inch of this slab of stone, if Peter is correct and this is one big block, there has to be a reason.”

The four of them set about doing a finger-tip search of the dais, Peter used the virtual scanner and watched the monitor closely, just as he had done in the temple in India. Nina seemed content to just watch everyone else while Jo covered the upper surface of the dais and Dr. Wade gently tapped everything with a small geological hammer. Nina was beginning to get on Peter’s nerves. Despite his being distracted by Nina’s behaviour Peter spotted something on the screen. The fake Ark had rested upon a round plinth about a metre high and one and a half meters diameter, on the screen Peter could make out what looked like characters carved in individual stones or cartouches about half way up. He called to Jo to come and look, she then excitedly dashed back to the plinth to examine it more closely. Yes there were carvings in the stone and they looked like Hebrew. Dr. Wade rushed forward to see the characters.

“These are ancient Hebrew script, they are more hieroglyph than character,” he said, “some I don’t even recognise. Don’t forget that the nation spent a long time in Egypt and Egypt once ruled over this area.”

“Let’s get them cleaned up,” said Jo, “Peter can you print out each glyph and stick it above the appropriate carving please.”

When the printouts were in place Wade examined each one and its position, there were seven glyphs. As they were fixing the printouts to the plinth Peter spotted Gamma Team using a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) on the

floor of the cavern, "Can we borrow the G.P.R. for a few minutes," he called.

The unit was brought through the access point onto the dais and Peter plugged in the hand-held emitter, reset the machine and started to attack the plinth. The images immediately came up on the monitor, "I thought so," he murmured.

"What have you got peter," asked Jo.

"Look here," said Peter pointing at the monitor screen, "each of those blocks with the glyph on is separate to the remainder of the plinth, they've been fitted amazingly but they are definitely separate. See how each one has some sort of lever connected at the back, they are either traps or an operating system for something."

"Or both," said Jo, "can you tell which ones are safe, or otherwise."

"Sorry, there is a limit to the range of these things and the definition we can get."

"So we still need to work on these glyphs," said Jo.

Dr. Wade had been busy on his com-unit whilst Peter had been investigating the internals of the plinth. A relay station had been set up by the engineering team to insure that secure communications with outside world could be maintained and both Wade and Nina had taken maximum advantage of the facility. Whilst continuing to use the com, Dr. Wade wandered over to where Jo and Peter were hunched over the monitor.

"I think I may have something," Dr. Wade said to them, "I have my department on the com and according to them we have some near matches. Five of the seven glyphs all have negative connotations, death, torture, hell, loss and illness."

"OK," said Jo that leaves two."

"Yes but I actually recognised one of the glyphs, one that amazingly has hardly changed in all those thousands of

years, this one.” Dr. Wade pointed to one of the symbols that Peter had pointed out.



“This is ‘Chai’ simply the Hebrew word for living, but what the other glyph is we have no idea.”

Jo contacted her Dad on her com-unit, Jim arrived within a couple of minutes and she quickly briefed him on their progress and the issue they now faced.

“So it’s a fifty-fifty chance if Dr. Wade is sure he has the meanings correct,” said Jim.

“I’m as sure as I can be,” answered Wade.

“And Peter thinks they activate something by sliding in?” Jim said.

“We can see these levers connected to the seven stones,” said Peter indicating the monitor.

Jim considered the situation for some minutes as he paced up and down the dais, finally he stopped, “Right, I suggest we chance it but we use something as long as possible to do the pushing.”

“At the position the ‘Chai’ stone is at on the plinth we’re going to be limited about two meters,” said Peter, “or we’ll hit the force-field. I think we could use a floor clamped hydraulic ram depending on how far it needs to be pushed in.”

“That sounds like an option,” said his father, “lets go do it”.

They waited over an hour for the hydraulic ram to arrive from the Army Engineers H.Q. It took another twenty-five minutes to clamp the ram to the rock dais and fix a push rod to the ram. When all was ready the army personnel evacuated the dais leaving the five at the farthest point with a remote control to the hydraulic pump. Peter passed the remote to Jo saying, “Your baby Sis.”

Jo passed the remote back to Peter, "I don't know how to use this, you're the engineer."

"Wow, thanks Sis," Peter said ironically, "here goes." He pressed the green button and the electric motor whirred into life. Thirty seconds later the a green light flared on the handset indicating that the hydraulic pressure had been achieved, Peter pushed the slider that activated the ram and the push rod shook with the pressure but the stone did not move. Peter increased the ram's pressure and the rod started to bend.

"Are you sure the stone is supposed to move back," asked Jim.

"Yes, it can't work any other way, it has to push that lever at the back," answered Peter, "remember this thing's been here for at least a couple of thousand years without any maintenance, it's bound to be a bit stiff."

Just as Peter was about to increase the pressure yet again Professor Gwilliam appeared in the access way, "How's it going then," he called to the little group at the far end of the dais.

"It wont move Professor," answered Peter.

"Take the pressure off the ram for a sec Peter," Owen said, "let's try a different set up." Owen released the push rod and rested it at the foot of the plinth, he disappeared for a few seconds reappearing with a shackle bar from a tow truck and fixed the it to the push rod at the same level as the stone with another bar acting as a lever against the floor. "Try it again, Peter," he said.

Peter again pushed the slider up once more to increase the pressure, almost immediately the bar shuddered and slowly the stone started to move into the plinth. Nothing happened for what seemed an age, then, when the stone was around five centimetres into the plinth the whole dais shuddered as if there were an earthquake. Fragments of stone started falling from the roof and bouncing off the force field above them, outside in the cavern, people

scattered in all directions as larger lumps of rock fell from the fissure onto the cave floor. One arm-chair sized fragment scored a direct hit on one of the generators and a plume of fire engulfed one end of the cave and several of the floodlights were extinguished plunging half of the cave into semi-darkness.

The dais continued to vibrate violently and the group were about to make a dash for the access when the two earthing poles fell from their sockets closing the door in the force field, they were trapped. Before anyone could react they felt another sensation, the dais was sinking into the floor. They watched in astonishment as this giant slab of rock sank and they could see the floor level through the translucent drapes crept upwards. Had they activated another trap?

Down and down crept the dais, soon the cavern floor was above their heads and still they travelled down. When the illuminated hole above them was some ten meters above, the dais stopped with a gentle bump. The only light was that filtering through the hole in the ceiling so they could see little of their new surroundings. Jim took his com-unit from his shirt pocket and tried to call John in the cavern above; there was no response from the unit and he quickly realised that the force field above them would prevent the signal getting through.

“Looks like we’re cut off from the world above folks,” Jim stated, “that field is stopping communications and they wont be able to re-instigate the access because the second set of terminals is down here with us. Has anyone got a torch?”

They had three torches between them, a standard low energy krypton and two long life high intensity LED lights. Jo switched her torch on and did a three-sixty of the new cavern, it was empty except for the dais, roughly circular with seven tunnels leading from it, and these were equally

spaced around the cavern. Each tunnel had a cartouche above it containing more glyphs. This time they were on their own without the help of Dr. Wade's departmental database.

"Are those glyphs the same as around the plinth," asked Peter.

"I doubt it," said Jo, "but let's see," she removed the printouts and made her way to one of the tunnels, shone her torch on the cartouche and then on the printouts. "No, this one is different."

Dr. Wade borrowed Peter's torch and started looking at the cartouches himself, he moved from one to another and then back again. Jim also visited each tunnel, licking his index finger and holding it up to see if he could detect any air flow to or from any of the tunnels, but sadly the air seemed still. Peter sat on the edge of the dais deep in discussion with his Professor whilst Nina just stood watching everyone.

"I think," said Dr. Wade, "that these glyphs are in fact numbers, from one to seven."

"What's the point of that," asked Jim, "if you don't have the right number you're stuffed."

"Even if we get the right tunnel it doesn't mean that there won't be any traps," interjected Jo, "there's always the chance that an enemy could work out the right way and just send parties down each tunnel."

Peter and his Professor had now moved and were examining the walls of the chamber in detail, Owen was tapping the walls with his penknife.

"What are you two doing," asked Jim, "I can't see there being any secret panels here."

"Me neither," answered Owen, "but your Peter has just made a good point, that there has to be a power source for that energy shield up there, if we can close that down at least we've got an escape route."

Peter's idea seemed like their best chance so the other four seemed to give up what they were doing and rested on the steps of the dais. After another fifteen minutes had passed Owen turned to the resting group and said, "Are you four going to sit there all day then?"

"What can we do," responded Dr. Wade, "we don't have the number."

"Listen," said Owen, "I'm no archaeologist or historian for that matter but do I remember seeing somewhere that Hebrew words or characters have numerical values, I just wondered if the converse was true see?"

Dr. Wade jumped up, "Yes you're right! One is Ox, two is House, three is Camel, four is door, five is hand, six is hook and seven is spear"

"So what does that tell us," asked Jim.

The only one that stands out to me is four, the door," said Jo.

"Isn't that a bit obvious," called Peter.

"May be Peter," said Dr. Wade, "but don't forget it's probable that these measures were defence against a foreign invader, possibly Babylonians, and they would not have known the nuances of written Hebrew stroke Egyptian."

"Good point," called Peter.

"Peter!" shouted his Professor, "this sounds hollow, listen."

Owen tapped a specific area of the wall again and sure enough it did sound hollow. Owen hit it hard with the penknife but nothing happened, he opened the knife to use a thick spike blade and started to hack at the rock but it was useless. The wall was like glass and the knife never even scratched the surface. Peter started to kick the rock with his heel, but other than hurting his ankle it had little affect.

"Why did we leave the tools on the floor up there," Owen lamented.

"Looks like there's only one alternative," said Jim, "its tunnel number four or nothing."

“Keep together and use one torch at time,” Instructed Jim, “Keep your eyes open and if you see anything just call ‘stop’. If somebody shouts, then everyone stops dead, got it?” Everyone murmured assent and they took their first steps onto tunnel number four. The low light from the cavern above was soon lost as after twenty meters as tunnel four curved down and to the left, there were no marks on the walls, floors or ceilings that anyone could see.

“I wish I had the machine that cut this tunnel,” said Owen.

“These walls have exactly the same characteristics as most of the chambers we’ve been investigating over the last few years,” said Jo.

“The cavern we’ve just left was partly the same,” added Peter, “but not the main cavern above, that was either natural or hand hewn.”

“Or both,” said Jo.

It felt like they were going around in circles as the tunnel continuously bent to the left. After five minutes the tunnel came to a dead end.

“Looks like we got it wrong,” said Jim, “let’s get back to the cavern.

Jim turned to retrace their steps and Nina, Wade and Owen turned to follow.

“Hang on,” said Jo, “this doesn’t make sense. Why cut a tunnel without any traps only to have it come to a dead end? Peter, have you brought the virtual scanner with you?”

“Yes, it’s in my rucksack.”

“Get it out and scan this wall will you,” urged Jo.

Peter extracted the scanner from his pack and set it up in the centre of the tunnel, unrolling the soft-screen on the floor. The familiar green line appeared on the left hand wall and quickly flashed backwards and forwards across the walls, as it did so an image started to form on the screen. A few minutes later the scan was complete and everyone

crowded around the screen, most looking over Jo and Peter's shoulders.

Peter spotted it first, "What's that in the side wall," he said.

"Do I see a crack in this end wall," asked Jo, "or is it a scan line?"

"No," said Peter, "it doesn't line up with the grid."

Peter left the screen and went to examine the right hand side of the wall. No one without their sort of technology could possibly have found it if they had not known it was there. Peter exerted pressure on the area indicated by the scan and the wall gave way to his touch. The touchstone moved until it very obviously came to its limit and stopped. Nothing happened for several seconds then the group heard a hissing sound together with a foul smell.

"Gas," shouted Jim and started to drag Jo by her arm away from the tunnel end.

"Wait Dad," said Jo, "it's just stale air, it'll clear in a minute." As she spoke a crack appeared in the flat wall in front of them; a chink of light found its way through into the dark tunnel.

As the door hinged inward then swung wide Jo and Peter could not believe their eyes, for spread out before them was a room almost identical to the room they called the Control Room back in India. It was rather larger and had a row of what must be seats along the back, and the consul was longer but other than that it was the same layout. There were also two extra doorways in the back of the room, twice the number of stations at the panel each one labelled with a cartouche, just as in India. The biggest difference of all was that this room was illuminated; the light came from the ceiling, which seemed to glow with white light. In front of the consul was a extra small dais with four sockets in the floor.

Professor Gwilliam's eyes looked as if they were going to pop out of his head, the room was every engineer's dream, he moved from place to place looking, touching, his mind working to make sense of what he saw. Once again the walls were perfectly flat and smooth with corners of precisely ninety degrees. There were the two pillars and the rows of tailored racks but this time without any objects on them, however there were racks of the lens type objects; many more than there were in India. Here the two pillars were half as tall again as the Indian versions but again everything was pristine, no trace of corrosion on anything and this time no dust. Peter started looking for the second room and sure enough the other side of the farthest most door he found the nine black cylinders all connected as before with the glass plates and rods. The professor had not spoken for the past five minutes, he seemed to be stunned by his surroundings, but Jim had continued his investigation and found another tunnel behind the second door.

The door in the centre of the back wall consisted of two doors making an opening of about three meters square, with the tunnel outside the room being just that bit bigger. Jim shouted, "Come along everyone, we need to find a way out of here."

Owen spoke for the first time since they had entered the room, "Do you mind if I stay here," he said, "I'm afraid I just can't drag myself away from all these goodies."

"We *are* trapped down here you know Owen," said Jim, "who knows how long it will take to find our way back."

"I'll be fine Jim," answered Owen, "I may even find out how to turn that force field off and operate the lift."

"Dad," piped up Peter, "If Professor Gwilliam is staying here, is it OK if I stay as well?"

"No Peter, it too high a risk."

“I’m sure between the Professor and I we can work something out to get the field to power down, and, and lets face it, at the moment it’s the only exit we know of.”

“Well,” said Jim, “you have a point I suppose, but make the exit your first priority; right?”

“We will I assure you Jim,” laughed Owen.

Jim, Jo, Nina and Dr. Wade set off along the new tunnel in search of an exit. The tunnel was exactly the same as the one they had travelled through from the rock lift, featureless. Jo turned back towards the double doors and froze.

“Dad, come and look at this,” she said.

Jim strode the dozen meters back to his daughter, “What is it Jo?”

“There above the doors, see,” said Jo pointing to a cartouche. “That is definitely Egyptian, second dynasty I think, old Kingdom.”

“Is that significant,” asked Jim.

“I think that the Hebrews had nothing to do with building these tunnels and I think that the Egyptians had everything to do with them,” Jo said excitedly.

“What about that room there,” asked Dr. Wade, “did the Egyptians build that?”

“No Dr. Wade, the glyphs and style are different,” said Jo, “I think that the Hebrews if it was indeed those people of the Old Testament, found it and adapted it. See that cartouche is a blend of old hieroglyphs and an unknown language but it’s carved on the only bit of rough rock in this tunnel, so that wall was the original. Something changed, something very different happened when the Hebrews took this land over.”

“Let’s just be careful, we don’t know what to expect,” said Jim, “If the Egyptians did build these tunnels there could be all kinds of traps.”

The four pushed on along the tunnel, time lost meaning, other than being able to keep a check on it with their watches there was no way to detect its passing. The darkness, the featureless walls and floor, nothing gave them a clue of how far they had travelled, there was no way of telling if they were travelling in a straight line or curving around on themselves. It was only by placing a torch on the floor that they could tell if they were descending or ascending and it seemed that they were slowly and consistently travelling in an upward direction. They had been walking briskly for seventy-two minutes when they suddenly entered another cavern, this one was natural as far as they could see but it presented them with a problem. The only exit was seven meters up an almost vertical rock face.

The Control Room - 11:39 hrs

After over an hour Peter and Owen had found no hint of the force field's operation, they could recognise none of the symbols attached to the various stations and operators. Peter busied himself trying to trace cabling, looking for anything that left the control room that might feed the field. Owen tried to figure out how any controls there might be, actually worked and to identify the power source, however the lenses had a magnetic pull all of their own. Owen had taken one of the lenses from the rack and kept turning it over in his hand then every few minutes he would look at it, each time from a different angle, and then he would pocket it again. Owen spotted a red multifaceted crystal set into the top on one of the control panels, he went to look closer and for some reason wanted to touch it, his hand barely touched the dome as he lightly stroked it. To his surprise the crystal started to glow.

The four stood gazing at the elevated exit as if it were about to become a stage show, "Well if they brought the Ark through this way they would have needed a fork-lift to get it up there," observed Jim.

"Let's assume they did," said Jo, "in that case there has to be either a way to get up there, or another exit, so let's get to examining every inch of this cave." Jo switched her torch on and swung the beam around the cavern. The beam stopped and focused on an area of rock a metre or so below the high exit where she spotted a line of hieroglyphics. "Wait," she said pointing to the hieroglyphics, "there are some glyphs up there."

Dr. Wade rejoined Jo whilst the other two continued their examination of the cave, "Can you make them out," Wade asked.

"I think so, but in this light it's not easy," Jo strained her eyes to read the glyphs and tried to sketch them on her pad and after some discussion they agreed that what Jo had drawn was as accurate as they could expect.

"I recognise this cartouche," said Wade, "it represents Osiris the Egyptian god of the underworld."

"Yes I agree, that's very apt anyway," said Jo, "considering where we are."

"I have it," Dr. Wade suddenly shouted, "it says, 'Your resurrection will be gained just as Osiris came back from the dead' do you agree?"

Hesitantly Jo confirmed Wade's translation, "Or this could mean elevation and not resurrection," said Jo.

"Well either way we still get the meaning," said the Doctor.

"Point taken," said Jo, but how does it help us?"

Jo called her Dad and Nina back to them and repeated the riddle to them from her pad. "I'm no expert in Egypt," stated her Dad but it seems to me we need to pool what knowledge we have concerning Osiris."

“I know it was Osiris that started the Egyptian obsession with resurrection because he was murdered in a fight for power with his brother Set and then resurrected by his sister and wife Isis.

“Yes but you forget one detail,” said Nina, taking an active role for the first time.

“And that is?” asked Jo.

“Set chopped Osiris’ body onto several part and hid the pieces,” continued Nina, “it was Isis that found all parts except one and put them together to bring him alive.”

“Which piece was missing,” asked Jo.

“Er that is immaterial,” broke in Wade, “but I get the point. There is something in here that needs to be assembled to get us up there.”

“So I guess it’s back to searching the place,” stated Jim. They spread out looking for anything out of the ordinary.

It was over twenty minutes later when Dr. Wade shouted for everyone to see what he had found. The other three joined him to see a buttress of rock that didn’t quite meet the floor. Jim and Wade started to examine it more carefully, they pulled and pushed at the ridge of rock but after several minutes nothing happened. Jim kicked lightly kicked the rock in frustration as he stood back, at that, the bottom of the buttress clicked and sprang forward. The section of rock slid away from its mechanism to reveal itself to be a dressed section of stone rather like a rail-road sleeper with a fifty-millimetre hole bored in one end.

“Great,” said Jim, “so what do we do with this now that we’ve found it?”

“I suggest we find another twenty of them,” said Wade, “and hope they all open up holes like this one has.”

The other three stared at Wade not knowing what he was talking about, until they followed his gaze; there in the face of the rock below the exit, about two meters above the floor was a hole. Closer examination revealed that the hole was specifically cut to accept the slab they had just liberated,

forming a step. So well hidden were the other steps that it took them another eighty minutes to trace them all and build the staircase to the exit. Once complete the four mounted the steps and set off down yet another tunnel.

The Control Room - 13:25 hrs

The red crystal flickered and then bloomed like a great red ruby, all around him a hum rose in volume and Peter came hurrying back from one of the side rooms. "What have you done Professor," he asked.

"You know Peter I have no idea," he replied, "I just touched that red crystal."

Almost as he spoke the various control panels came to life one after the other their buttons and lights flickering and then glowing brightly. There was the smell of burnt dust in the air, the kind you get when you use a heater for the first time after the summer. On top of each panel a transparent plate was mounted between two posts and these posts were sparking with raw energy, Peter guessed it was more dust burning off. A flicker on the peripheral of his sight diverted Peter's attention.

"Professor!" he said.

Owen looked up from one of the panels in time to see each of the transparent plates lighting up like a computer monitor. Then the energy found the two large posts at the front of the control room and traces danced around them making the insulators glow with that blue-green light that they had seen that night back on Cyprus. Peter and Owen stood in awe as a final buzz created a flat electrical field between the posts and finally illuminated to form what looked like a cinema screen six meters by four. However there seemed to be nothing showing that day other than white noise.

The new tunnel continued in an exact straight line as far as they could tell using Dr. Wade's laser pointer as a guide. At Jim's suggestion they picked up their pace and after an hour had covered almost five kilometres without any change in direction. It actually felt like they had travelled much further simply because there was nothing on the walls to denote the passing of either time or distance. Each of them felt a growing depression at their situation, Jo had brought a bottle of water with her as had Nina, but less than a litre of water would do little between the four of them, if they didn't get out soon. Then there was the fear of where they would emerge, would they be in the middle of the desert or come to a dead end, but the big question was how long would this tunnel stretch?

Two hours and forty minutes later Jo spotted the dulllest glimmer of light straight ahead, their pace increased again, inspired by the sight of light and ten minutes later the tunnel spewed them out into a sunlit natural cave. The cave was around twenty metres from floor to roof and roughly thirty meters in diameter, the sunlight entered the cave through three openings one in the roof and two in the walls about three meters below the upper opening. The opening in the roof was circular and about a meter in diameter, the other two were each about two meters high by maybe half a meter wide and looked as if they could be used as access points from the outside world. The access to the lower openings looked like an easy climb but no one was thinking about their escape route at that moment, all eyes were fixed upon what was in the centre of the cave. A sunbeam from one of the openings somehow reflected off the wall and onto a three tiered stone plinth in what must have been roughly the centre of the cave floor. Standing on the very top of the plinth was a golden box identical to the one they had found in the great cave.

The four stood in silence, mouths agape each one swimming in their individual thoughts, fears and elation. Each knew instinctively that this was the real thing, the actual Ark of the Covenant. The light that reflected from the Ark seemed to be more intensive than the reflected beam that illuminated it, it shone like the sun itself projecting little beams of its own on the surrounding walls. The light seemed to entrance the four adventurers and time stood still. No one knew how long they stood in silence staring at the golden box, somehow they knew they were on holy ground and that sense of awe penetrated their very souls.

They were brought out of their individual trances by the sound of a helicopter passing overhead and each looked at the others with a kind of embarrassment. It was only then that they looked at the scene with the eyes of the scientists they were. I was truly an amazing sight, arrayed around the Ark and on the other tiers of the plinth were other objects, they could see a wooden staff, a large open topped earthenware jar with two smaller sealed jars a large golden menorah a knife or dagger and several boxes of clay tablets. There were other various objects the origin of which was obscure but the excitement that the four felt excluded all else just looking at the array before them.

Jim looked at his daughter in amazement to see tears rolling down her cheeks. She was breathing in shallow gasps. Jim grabbed his daughter and hugged her while the gasps changed into heavy sobs. Jo clung to her father tightly while she regained control of herself and calmed her breathing. "Come on Dad," she eventually said, "let's see what we've got here."

They walked slowly and cautiously to the plinth, partly in awe, partly because of the tradition that the Ark could kill, they were all conscious of the words in 2 Samuel 6

"When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God."

As Jo was recording everything on her com-unit as they circled the plinth she noticed that Nina was on her knees before the Ark, she stayed there with her head touching the floor for some time, no one interrupted her.

Dr. Wade suggested that the wooden staff may actually be the staff of Moses, the famed staff that turned into a snake in front of Pharaoh. "I believe that these sealed jars contain Manna," he said "that's the food that God gave His people to feed them in the desert, and tradition will have it that the knife is the implement that Abraham was about use on his son before God gave him the ram to sacrifice."

Jim ventured unto the first level of the plinth and looked into the large jar. "This is full of scrolls," he announced, "looks like papyrus to me."

"Don't touch them Dad," called Jo urgently, "if they are that old they will crumble away at the slightest touch."

"I won't," her Dad promised, "but they don't look brittle, in fact they look brand new."

"You know what is strange," said Jo standing back, "despite the fact that this cave is open to the air, there's not a trace of dust on anything, it's like everything is new."

"You're right," agreed Wade, "if I didn't know better I'd say this was a hoax but even a hoax would some trace of dust even if the hoaxers placed it there."

"Look at the walls," said Jim, "you'd think this rock had just been cleaned."

"Can we dare to touch the Ark," asked Jim, walking back from the wall, "after all there are records of people being killed."

"The scripture says that *Uzzah* the guy that touched it to stop it toppling over, died because of his irreverence,"

commented Wade, “maybe we should pray before we do anything else.”

“Why would we want or even need to do that,” asked Jim.

“Uzzah who put out his hand and touched the ark, where the glory of God rested before the temple was built,” continued Dr. Wade, “The glory of God struck him dead because he was not sanctified and prepared. Uzzah's intentions were entirely good, but the holiness of God burns up the unholy.”

“Isn't that just mumbo-jumbo though,” asked Jo.

“No, is not,” shouted Nina, that is problem with world, no body believe in anything any more. Jews they spout about holy relic and holy place but don't even recognise Sabbath. Christian worse like social club they put up with anything, people insult Christian God but the do not care. Jew and Christian pathetic they laughing stock through all Moslem world,” she spat in her pigeon English.

“Nina, the probability is that the Ark is some sort of electronic device,” said Jo.

“You are infidel, you know nothing,” Nina shot back.

“Look whatever this thing is we're not going to find out unless we examine it,” interrupted Jim, “Nina, Jo, come and give us a hand lifting it down, I think this one is going to be heavy,” Jim turned and mounted the second step of the plinth and was about to take the next step when he was stopped in his tracks.

“No!” screamed Nina, “You will stop.”

Jim turned slightly exasperated, saying, “Now look here. . . .” As he turned he saw Nina stood feet firmly planted apart and in her hands she held an automatic hand gun that was pointed directly at his head. “What the?” is all he could manage to get out.

Beneath the Temple Mount, Jerusalem,
Israel, 18:33(local time) Monday, July
28th, 2031.

All attempts to neutralise the force-field had failed, there had been no communication with the group of six since they had descended on the stone lift early that morning. Infra-red cameras had been set up above the housing where the foe-ark had been but no movement had been detected. Carol had maintained a great strength and assumed control of the remaining teams together with efforts to find her husband, daughter and son. By early afternoon it had been assumed that the group were attempting to find an alternative exit from the lower chamber. The Israeli military had sent up personnel LIMO's and search and rescue helicopters sent out to search the surrounding wilderness as far as the Dead Sea and Bethlehem but no trace had yet been detected.

"I'm sorry M'am," reported the co-ordinating officer of the search, "no sign as yet, we may have more luck after dark when we can use the body heat detection equipment as the ground temperature reduces."

"Thank you Captain," said Carol as the officer saluted, "John, there is little we can do here, can you assemble a team to remain here, we will return to the barracks and use that as a control centre."

John chose his team who would remain in the great cavern, two who were qualified as field first-aiders, four of the technical team and two field archaeologists just in case. Everyone else started to file up the narrow passageway to the entrance. Just as Carol and John reached the ledge that formed the entrance gallery there was a loud electrical buzz that rose swiftly and then stopped abruptly. Those on the ledge and those that remained in the cavern stopped and turned just in time to see the force-field collapsed. There was a general cheer as people returned to the great cavern.

It had taken them hours of trial and error before they figured out that the control for the force field above was on a separate panel and controlled by the manipulation of an orange gemstone. Peter and Owen found that these gemstones both rotated, rolled and plunged, rather like roller ball controls in the last century, except these also sensed the proximity of a human hand and automatically energised. As Peter held his breath and pressed the orange dome he actually heard the cheer from the great cavern, the first communication they had had from the outside world since around nine-thirty that morning. Peter punched the air with elation at the sound and Owen slapped him on the back in congratulation. They heard the sounds of metal step-ladders being lowered and voices calling, Peter went from the control room to meet the party and show them the way and was greeted with hugs and back-slaps.

Within ten minutes the first of the rescue team entered the Control Room and stood aghast at the sight that greeted them. Behind the main group came Carol Markson, the look of relief on her face was plain for everyone to see and the first words out of her mouth was, "Where's everyone else?"

"Dad went with the others to find another way out," Peter answered, "There's another tunnel through those doors."

"Can we call them back?"

"They left hours ago," said Peter, "if there is another way out Jo will find it, so I shouldn't worry."

"At least we know the direction they've headed in," interjected John coming back from the tunnel, "it looks like that tunnel goes in dead straight to the south-east."

"Can you let the search parties know that John," asked Carol, and John headed off in the direction they had come.

The Cavern of the Ark, somewhere south-east of Jerusalem, Israel, 19:12 (local time) Monday, July 28th, 2031.

Nina had changed, no longer was she the quiet dolly-bird archaeologist that had triggered Peter's amorous desires, she was now a threat as hard as iron.

"I want everyone over there in that niche where I can see you," she ordered.

Jim climbed down from the steps and moved backwards toward the small alcove that Nina had indicated holding his hands up at shoulder height. He saw Jo make a move towards Nina but before she could take any action she said, "Over here all of you, there's no need for anyone to get hurt."

Jo and Dr. Wade slowly joined Jim and stood side by side, their backs to the rock wall.

"Sit down please, on floor," Nina ordered and the three did as they were bid. Watching the others intently she dove into her back-pack produced an old style satellite radio phone, which she turned on, there was a burst of static before she pressed the transmit key. She spoke into the radio in Levantine Arabic, which only Dr. Wade could understand. After several 'calls' there was no reply, then in English she said "Dam!" Nina then returned to the back-pack and retrieved what looked like cable. "I need you to get antenna up to opening," no one moved, "You, Jo, you take this up there, quickly." Still no one moved, "I will use this gun, I'm not afraid to."

"I would be very careful with that if I were you Nina," said Jim, "if you miss the bullet will ricochet around this cave and there's as much chance of you getting hit as anyone."

"I not miss, I am marksman," Nina informed them.

Jo stood, "OK, no need for shooting, I'll take it up there for you."

As Jo started the climb Nina stood farther back to enable her to watch all three of the group. "What do you hope to gain by this Nina," asked Jim, "you want the glory for yourself, or is there a cash value on this artefact?"

"This not about personal glory or money, we are taking it for the Palestinian people and all Islam, this will unite us everywhere."

"Don't you have a faith that unites you already, why do you need a relic to do that," persisted Jim."

"We are many different factions, one not speak to another and fight each other, this make Islam weak," she said, this will unite the Army of Mohamed, all blessing to Him, will rise and conquer all lands."

"I thought we'd got past all this sectarian rubbish," said Jim. "Truth is truth," said Nina, "true faith will succeed."

Jo was about twelve meters up and had stopped for a breather in the difficult climb and to think the situation through. Should she make her escape through the hole above her or loose the antenna, or fix the thing so that Nina could make her call? She could of course make an emergency call on her com-unit when she arrived at the entrance, Nina had forgotten to take it from her.

Suddenly a voice from below called, "What you wait for, move on," shouted Nina waving her gun. Jo continued her climb and another six minutes saw her arrive at the access point, "You fix antenna in open then drop cable down."

Jo stepped through the hole into the evening sun, she found herself about fifteen meters up a cliff face that overlooked a gorge, the face continued above her for who knows how far. To the left the gorge opened out into another ravine. Quickly she took her com-unit and using the built in Galileo-2 GP System recorded her position and instantly transmitted them to Major Davidson's control, this had been set up after her abduction for just such emergencies. She took the antenna and dropped it into the gorge below then leant back into the cavern and shouted

down, "Sorry I've dropped it outside, I'll have to climb down to get it."

"Fool you haf' done this to delay me," screamed Nina, "you will get it or I shoot your Father," but Jo had disappeared again. Nina uttered what must have been an oath and started to climb up after her, her gun tucked into her belt.

When Nina reached the entrance she suspected that it may be a trap and sure enough Jo had climbed above the window ready to kick her down into the gorge. Nina exited facing up the cliff gun in hand and immediately forestalled Jo's attempt to attack her. Meanwhile inside the cave Jim gave Dr. Wade instructions to go back down the tunnels as quickly as possible to get help, he slipped silently back into the tunnel and ran at full speed until he was sure he was out of pistol range. Up at the entrance Nina was able to use her radio without the use of the antenna and this time, whilst covering Jo with the gun, managed to contact whoever was waiting for her call. Jo could not understand what was being said but one word stood out, a name, that of Dr. Al-Farouque. Just then, as if on cue an Israeli helicopter roared overhead, making the most of the diversion Jo made a grab for the gun but Nina was too quick for her, parrying the thrust of her blow with the radio, which went crashing down into the gorge, exploding into a thousand pieces as it bounced from rock to rock below. As Nina gazed at the shattering of the radio Jo again took the opportunity, this time kneeling Nina in the stomach but her gun came down and contacted Jo's knee instead.

Jo screamed as the metal of the gun collided with her knee and the searing hot pain spread into her whole leg. She lost her grip on the rock-face and slid down for three meters before getting a purchase on small outcrop.

"You can stay there an wait for my people to come," Nina shouted as she disappeared back into the cave.

Jo's knee throbbed as she tried to get herself in a better position; she looked around, assessing her situation and looking for a possible way down. She was about twelve meters from the floor of the gorge, and where she was it was a sheer drop, she would need to work her way along the edge of the wall if she had any chance of getting away. For now, she was forced to stay where she was until her knee regained some use, so she settled herself in the most comfortable position for the wait.

Nina carefully climbed back down into the cave and it wasn't until she reached the floor that she realised that Dr. Wade was no longer there. "It take hours for him to get back for help, my people be here soon, there is nothing you can do, if you behave no harm will be done."

"Where is my daughter?"

"She is safe, is on the rock outside, there is no where to go."

"Is she all right," persisted Jim.

"She have accident with leg, is not serious."

"So what is going to happen Nina, how will you get the Ark out, it won't go through those holes up there, asked Jim.

"We will need to go to tunnel when my people arrive.

"Why?"

"They will open roof, there will be flying rock."

"You mean they're going to blow a hole in it," Jim challenged, "that may put the Ark at risk."

"Is just artefact to you, to us is symbol."

"Nina, that Ark could be the key to the future of human-kind, if this God exists; he gave it to Israel, which your people were a part of back then," persisted Jim, "it could unite all three of the faiths that have their origin in the early Semitic tribes.

"No, Jew and Christian lost their way when they reject Mohamed a great prophet from Allah, all praise to Him."

Outside in the golden light of the Israeli evening Jo was regaining the use of her leg, carefully she worked her way along the edge of vertical cliff, there were a lot of loose rock chippings and pebbles along the thirty degree ledge, so the going was slow. Eight minutes later Jo was clinging to a rock on the western edge of the cliff, from here it was a fairly easy climb down to the floor of the gorge, easy for someone with two good legs that is. Jo was not one to let a damaged knee stop her and very soon she reached the more level ground of the floor. Sitting on a convenient boulder she retrieved her com-unit from her jacket pocket and tried to reach someone back at the barracks. Sergeant Hopleman answered her call and was able to confirm that the Major had received her co-ordinates some time ago and a rescue vehicle was on the way. Jo quickly updated the sergeant on the situation with Nina, he in turn connected them into a three-way call with Major Davidson. Davidson immediately scrambled one of the security sections from the barracks and warned the rescue transport of the situation. After Jo had described Nina's radio conversation to someone and that she had heard the name of Al-Farouque, the two search choppers were also recalled into service and diverted to the co-ordinates to give support. Jo tried her best to describe how the small entrances to the cave were orientated, she also stressed that the precious Ark was vulnerable on its dais in the centre of the cavern. Davidson assured her that only minimal force would be used. "It sounds to me as if we will have company at your location Miss Markson, so I would advise you to find somewhere safe to shelter until we have secured the site," the Major continued.

"Don't forget that my Dad and Dr. Wade are also in the cave."

"I assure you that this fact will be at the forefront of our strategy my dear, we are here primarily to protect you and your personnel. We should be with you within fifteen minutes."

Ten minutes later Jo heard the sound of several helicopters approaching up the canyon that the gorge adjoined just half a kilometre away. Jo had already found a safe place that also afforded her a view of the buttness that contained the cave, she hoped that these were Israeli aircraft but from her vantage point she could see that they were not. The helicopters were old type private machines that were intended for crop dusting and spraying, but these had been converted to carry weapons. There were four machines, each painted in desert colours, two were fitted with rocket-launchers on brackets from the landing skids. One machine sported two machine guns and a sort of canon mounted underneath the cockpit. The fourth was larger and obviously carried personnel, the doors were open on each side and two soldiers stood on the steps holding high-velocity weapons. As they approached they slowed and the personnel carrier obviously started searching the terrain of signs of their prize, the other three machines spread out to form a triangle with the transport in the centre. Search-lights from all four choppers came on almost together and Jo realised that darkness was falling. Seconds later a red flare shot out from the area of the access window and the choppers reacted as one.

The transport followed the smoke trail and a rope dropped from the far side, four soldiers or people slid down the rope and disappeared from view. Jo crouched in her hiding space, her com-unit in hand giving Davidson a running commentary on what was happening.

“Miss Markson,” the Major’s voice interrupted, “our force will be with you in a matter of seconds, please get under cover.”

Within a count of ten Jo saw the lights of the Israeli aircraft approaching from almost overhead, There were six helicopters and two LIMO transports. Jo ducked down below the line of site and held her breath.

In the lead Israeli Army Scorpion Helicopter the co-pilot made a wide band transmission that, at this range will almost certainly be received by the rouge choppers. "Unidentified aircraft, this is the Israeli Army, please land on the gully floor immediately or you will be fired upon. Please respond and comply."

Immediately the rogue transport ascended vertically at top speed whilst the other three tried to assume an attack posture. "Blue Leader to Blue Alpha, can you round up the stray please, over," called the co-pilot over his radio.

"Roger that," came the reply and one of the gun-ships roared off into the sky toward the transport.

Suddenly there came a flash from one of the choppers that were fitted with rocket-launchers and an RPG started its journey to the receding Scorpion. The reaction was swift and well rehearsed, Blue Leader launched an AMM that chased off after the rocket whilst Blue Beta swivelled on its rotor-shaft and fired its EMP weapon. The offending chopper's engine faded and died whilst its electronics were fried beyond repair, the auto-giro kicked in and the machine descended to the ground, making a heavy landing.

EMP weapons were developed in the previous decade by a British scientist as a response to car crime. The unit generates a low level electro-magnetic pulse similar to that produced by nuclear bombs by actually producing a minute clean nuclear explosion in a shielded chamber and focusing the resultant EMP in a narrow beam. British police were the first to use a hand-held version to stop certain cars by knocking out their electrical systems. These were quickly developed for military and peace-keeping operations with more powerful capabilities. The AMM weapon or CRITers as they became known (Close Range Implosion Triggers) were a recent product by Israeli munitions developers that were designed to combat conventional aerial weapons. The CRITER locks onto a

rocket and shadows it at very close range until the weapon explodes, that explosion triggers an implosion in the CRITer that cancels out or absorbs the shock-wave. It has been estimated that these two innovations have saved in excess of a hundred thousand lives since they went into manufacture.

Two of the Scorpions took up position directly behind and above each of the remaining choppers and were ordered again to land and surrender. Both of the rogue machines immediately started to descend but one decided it could make a getaway and shot off at speed back down the gorge its engines and rotors straining to achieve altitude and speed. Within seconds Blue-leader had turned and fired its EMP emitter but sadly the chopper losing its power whilst at speed careered into the rock face and burst into flames just opposite Jo's position. Jo felt a wave of panic as the chopper crashed, hands over her head she made herself as small as possible beneath the overhang of rock and felt the wave of hot air hit the nape of her neck. Wreckage from the machine showered down on her position and bounced off of the rock face above. High in the now darkening sky a glass-like sphere momentarily appeared followed by an almost inaudible pop that signalled the RPG had been safely neutralised by the CRITer; a minute later the Scorpion and the transport were heading back towards the gorge, now illuminated by the burning wreckage of the downed chopper.

The remaining chopper landed safely and the pilot and observer stood with their hands in the air surrendering to one of the Israeli ground crews. Seeing that the fire-fight was all but over Jo emerged from her hiding place and made her way towards the helicopters that were now landing further up the gorge. By the time Jo got to the choppers Major Davidson was just emerging from the lead Scorpion, "Major!" she called.

“Well hello Ms Markson, I’m relieved to see you are safe,” said the Major, “I assume you father and Dr. Wade remain in the cave with your terrorist friend?”

“Yes, but I saw those four soldiers drop down near the entrance, so I think they will have company.”

“I already have a squad of commandos sorting that little problem out,” Davidson informed her, “please get into this helicopter where you will be safe and until my men have the cavern secure.”

Jo was about to argue that she should accompany him but a shiver and a wave of fatigue engulfed her making her realise that she had had little to eat or drink since breakfast that morning. Jo thankfully accepted Davidson’s offer and climbed into the waiting Scorpion. Inside it was warm and there was food and drink on offer, which Jo accepted thankfully.

In the cavern the five Palestinians had been fitting lifting slings to carrying poles of the Ark, they had heard the commotion outside but had no idea of the outcome; their job was to prepare and protect the artefact. Jim had been handcuffed and gagged and now sat inside the tunnel in almost total darkness, he had also heard the faint noises from the outside world and just hoped that his daughter was safe. He also heard the voices shouting but could not understand what was being said.

In the cavern the five Palestinians were startled for a moment when a loud-speaker blared out instructions in their own language.

“Lay down any weapons you have and assume a prostrate posture.”

The four figures in black that had been busying themselves around the Ark dove for cover behind the dais supporting the Ark. Guns appeared in their hands as the four commandos swooped down the ropes from the two entrances high up in the wall; they took aim and pulled their

triggers. Click, click; nothing happened, the guns one after another failed to discharge their deadly missiles. Each man examined their weapon, shook the pistol and changed the magazine clip and tried again; click. It was as if there were no bullets in the guns, one by one they threw down their weapons and the four mails together with Nina, spread-eagled themselves on the cave floor. The commandos cable-strapped their wrists and sat them in the alcove where Jim had originally been placed. Jim, having managed to shuffle to the end of the tunnel managed to create some noise by stamping his feet on the floor, which attracted the attention of the Israeli commandos. Within seconds Jim had been freed and was being checked over by a field medic.

“My daughter, Jo, is she OK,” asked Jim of what seemed to be the squad commander.

“She’s outside with the Major,” the commando answered, “I got word a few moments ago and she’s fine.”

“Thank God,” said Jim as he visibly relaxed.

Two-thousand, two-hundred and fifty meters above and a little to the east Blue Alpha Scorpion was continuing to chase the rogue transport that was ignoring their hails to return to the gorge or land. Flight Captain Mallic kept his cool as the transport ducked and dived and then descended quickly into another ravine, “I am about to fire the EMP that will take power away from your transport, please land immediately, this is your last warning,” he said. The transporter held its course, zigzagging at speed through the ravine at about a dozen meters from its floor. It was difficult for the Scorpion to get a clear shot as they rounded buttress after buttress in the ravine, finally Blue Alpha climbed out of the ravine and flew a straight course above the transport. The end of the ravine could now be seen just over a kilometre ahead where it widened out towards the Dead Sea. The Scorpion gunned its engines and shot ahead to the end of the ravine where it spun

around waiting for the transport to exit the ravine. Captain Mallic's thumb flipped the safety guard off the red button and stroked the fire button on top of his control stick and with lightning response the thumb pressed down on the guarded button. The invisible pulse beam activated for less than a tenth of a second but the effect was almost instantaneous, the transport suddenly lost what altitude it had and dove nose first into a plume of sandy soil and dust. The Scorpion quickly landed next to the transport and the four strong commando crew jumped into action securing the rogue machine.

The transporters occupants were stunned rather than injured and as soon as they were cleared the commandos loaded the five men into the Scorpion and took off for command HQ where they were secured in a holding room. Jo, her Father and Dr. Wade were transported back to the barracks where they were subjected to a medical. Despite the late hour Jim and his daughter insisted that they return to the Temple Mount to join up with the other half of their family. Reluctantly Major Davidson agreed and ordered a transport for them, "You really should rest after your ordeal in the desert you know," he said as they climbed on board.

The Cavern of the Mount, Jerusalem,
Israel, 00:24 (local time) Tuesday,
July 29th, 2031.

There was a warm greeting for both father and daughter when they at last emerged into the great cavern, they were both relieved to find that Peter and the Professor had been released from the control room. Jo wanted a full briefing on what had happened and how they had figured out how to lower the force field. The briefing continued all the way back to the barracks and it was close to three AM before they wearily dragged themselves off to bed.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
10:17 (local time) Tuesday, July 29th,
2031.

The aromas of the breakfast menu had been percolating through the main building for over two hours when Jim and the family finally made it to the refectory. Both Jim and Jo were aching from the exertions of the previous night settled for two mugs of steaming coffee and a round of toast rather than avail themselves of the cooked selection on offer. Half way through breakfast Major Davidson arrived and joined them in drinking coffee whilst he updated himself on their condition. “I would advise you to take it easy today, he said, “there is little you can do with the artefact until we get it back here.”

“What artefact is that Dad,” asked Peter.

“Oh didn’t we tell you, we think we found the real Arc,” announced Jim. There was suddenly a complete silence across the dining room and all faces turned towards Jim who now wore a smug smile on his face. The silence gradually disappeared and was replaced with enthusiastic chatter and cries of ‘well done’ and ‘congratulations’ being thrown towards Jo, Jim and Dr. Wade.

“You’re bringing it back here Major,” asked Jim quizzically.

“That is our intention certainly, is there a problem with that?”

“Only that there is some sort of protective field emanating from that thing,” said Jim, “whatever it is it provided a dampening field so that those Palestinian guns didn’t work and if we look in your holy writings it reports someone being struck dead just for touching it.”

“You take that seriously?”

“I certainly do; after being there when those guns would not work in the vicinity of the box I can’t deny that there is something powerful connected to it,” explained Jim.

“So what do you suggest Jim,” asked Davidson.

“Your scripture says that only the priests can handle it, members of the tribe of Levi, I believe” suggested Jim, “can you find four priests who are Levis?”

The Major rose from his seat and over his shoulder said, “We will just have to, won't we Jim.” Five seconds later he was out of the door.

“Let's hope he doesn't kill anyone in the process,” commented Jim.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
16:05 (local time) Tuesday, July 29th,
2031.

Later that afternoon a transport landed in the parade ground, surrounding it in the air were three Scorpion choppers hovering. Major Davison was the first to alight, “Where's Mr. Markson, can someone fetch him please, at the double!”

The sergeant jumped out of the transporter and ran to the main building, two minutes later he returned, “He's on his way Sir.”

Jim emerged several minutes later and crossed to where the Major was standing, “Problems Major,” he asked.

“Not at all Jim, behold the Ark of the Covenant and four Levi priests,” Davidson announced as the Ark was carried out of the transporter by four men dresses entirely in black holding the two golden poles.

“Has anyone else touched it other than the four priests,” Peter asked.

“Not as far as I know, we've kept it isolated and under guard,” answered the Major.

“Gentlemen can you take it to our laboratory please,” Jim asked of the four Levis, “Peter will show you where.”

The Ark was taken reverently down to the basement by the four black clad priests, when they reached the prepared area they asked permission to be left alone with the Ark for a while in order for them to pray. Peter agreed and left the basement in peace, close watch was kept on the artefact via the CCTV system and an hour later the four filed out of the elevator. Peter and Professor Gwilliam were the first to make it to the Ark and immediately set about taking remote readings. They could find no evidence of force-fields but the Professor thought he could feel something, a vibration that made the hair on his arms stand on end.

"I don't know what it is Peter but there is something there," Owen explained, "look at my arms."

"OK," said Peter, "let's use remote contact devices." The first was a surface plate microphone, a very sensitive listening device that can hear the footfalls of ants walking across a timber beam. The microphone was mounted on a remote creeper and connected to a Bluetooth device that sent any sounds to a com device. Slowly the creeper inched forward under the guidance of Peter's right thumb. Gently the microphone made contact with the side of the Ark and then Owen turned on the interface. Immediately the com-unit started to record and the trace showed that a high frequency sound was emanating from the golden box. Further analysis showed that the sound, faint as it was, fits the profile of an ultrasonic device and careful measurement brought them to the conclusion that the sound was not dangerous. Peter ordered two lab-rats to be brought to the laboratory and whilst they waited he and the Professor retired to the sitting room and discussed the results.

They examined the detailed HD video that had been recorded of the Ark and discussed all of the features, after only a few minutes Jo had joined them and watched the screen intently. The professor suddenly paused the video, "Peter, did you scan the dimensions of those sockets we found in the control room dais?"

“Yes,” replied Peter.

“Can you put them on the other screen please?”

Peter connected his com to the input of the desk model and brought up the detailed scans of the four floor sockets, “Thanks Peter.” The professor studied the images and then merged the scan with the video, “I think we’ve found where the Ark belongs Peter, he announced, “look here the socket dimensions and their spacing is identical to the feet of the Arc, and look here, there are some kind of connectors inside the sockets.”

“And I thought they were for flag poles or something,” said Peter.

“An easy mistake to make Peter, but in my experience everything has a purpose,” replied the Professor with a hand on Peter’s shoulder. “Look here on the Arc’s legs, they look like decoration but those grooves fit exactly the contacts in the sockets.”

Immediately Jo jumped up excitedly, “We need to get the Ark back into the control room and plug it in,” she exclaimed.

“Let’s just not jump to dangerous conclusions Jo,” ventured Owen.

“But we do need to get the Ark down into that control room as soon as we can,” continued Jo unabashed.

The 'Cavern of the Mount', Israel,
10:00 (local time) Wednesday, July
30th, 2031.

By ten hundred hours the following morning the Ark of the Covenant was back in the main cavern inside of the Temple Mount. The word had spread like wildfire within government circles and the Prime Minister with almost the complete Cabinet were in attendance to watch the Ark loaded onto the elevator and descend into the passage ways below. The four priests were once again in attendance and they formed a stately procession along the tunnel toward the control room. Large video screens had been set up in the main cavern, now christened 'The Cavern of the Mount', so that the assembled dignitaries could watch the re-installation of their most sacred artefact. No one had dared actually touch the Ark, partly out of fear, but mainly out of reverence although it seemed harmless there remained something about it that defied mortal touch. Even the Prime Minister was careful not to get too close to the artefact, but each of those members of Israel's government knelt as the Ark was carried past, an unusual display of religious fervour.

At last the Ark reappeared, this time on the video screens, and those watched in awe as the four Levities lowered the box and located the legs into the sockets. As the golden poles were withdrawn from the Ark spontaneous applause broke out across the cavern and tears formed in so many eyes as the lost relic was finally back where it belonged. The applause gradually gave way to a silence that could be felt in anticipation of what would happen next, but nothing did.

In the control room the expectation also gave way to frustration in the absence of any activity, in that chamber heads were turning as they looked to each other for an

answer. The dismayed silence was broken by Peter who called out, "It's in the wrong way around." Peter walked forward and was pointing to the legs when Owen got to the Ark. Immediately Owen could see that the decoration on the legs had not fully engaged with the grooves in the sockets. The four priests were brought back and the Ark was turned, this time the legs slotted neatly into the sockets. Nothing happened for what seemed like an age and the feeling of despondency rose again in those present. Then after what was actually fifteen seconds a pulsing buzz started, low at first but quickly gained volume, the air in the control room seemed charged with static and finally the control panel slowly came to life. There were lights everywhere across the surface of the panel, some were steady and some were glowing with a pulse, however the real attention getter was what happened in front of the panel.

The space between the two pillars was filled with a curtain of wavering light with sparks jumping the space between them. The light changed from transparent through translucent to opaque, a simmering screen of charged air. The colour changed then from dazzling white to light and then dark blue, a blue that was like velvet or the sky on a summer's night. Slowly symbols appeared on that screen, symbols that had not been seen for several millennia.

"Does anyone have any idea what those symbols mean," asked Jim who had just broken the trance that had held him for the past four minutes. Nobody answered.

"They could be anything and mean anything," said Jo, "some symbols look similar to hieroglyphs, but what ever they look like it would be just a guess, do you recognise any John?"

John was still in a state of shock but roused himself to answer, "Some of them look like glyphs we have found on artefacts but we still don't know what they represent."

“We need to get an expert in, anyone have any suggestions,” asked Jim.

“There are a couple of people I know in the States that could help us,” offered John.

“Who are they,” asked Jo and her Dad simultaneously.

“Professor Lester Hurwitz for one,” said John, “and there’s Dr. Mark Corrigan, both have chairs at Harvard, between them they are the worlds foremost authority on ancient languages.”

“Can we get them here,” asked Jim.

“I just need some bait,” answered John, “Peter get me an image of that screen.”

John reached the surface and immediately contacted Harvard University but found that both Hurwitz and Corrigan were on vacation and by coincidence, they were both in Egypt at the Cairo Hilton. John immediately connected with the Hilton Hotel and left a message for the Professors to contact him. It was after seven in the evening when John’s com-unit signalled a call, he opened the unit to be greeted by the smiling face of Lester Hurwitz.

“Well I be, it really is you, Jonnie Morris, my star student,” said the face, “What can I do for you Morris?”

“Sir, Professor, it’s Moffat, John Moffat.”

“Sure it is John, my memory aint’ what it used to be,” apologised Hurwitz, “now what’s the problem here?”

“Professor, I’m in Jerusalem working on a dig inside the Temple Mount and we’ve found some glyphs that we can’t recognise,” explained John.

“And you want my help,” replied Hurwitz in his Alabama drawl, “just send the transcript to the University John, I’m on vacation ya know.”

“I was rather hoping you’d have a ride up here to Jerusalem Professor,” said John, “these glyphs are kind’a special. I’m sending you a picture taken just a few hours ago, see what you think Professor.” John tapped the send key and the unit blinked and stated [Object Sent]. John

watched the Professor's face as the picture appeared on his screen, it turned from mild boredom to amazement in just two seconds.

"I'll be there by mid-day tomorrow, John," stammered Hurwitz in excitement, "Corrigan is here with me, you remember Corrigan, do ya mind if I bring him along?"

"I was hoping you would Sir," answered John, "you can land on top of the Temple Mount, I'll make sure you have clearance."

"Say Jonny boy, are you by any chance mixed up in these incidents with the laser and the museum here in Cairo?"

"Yes I am Professor, See you tomorrow, and thanks."

"Sure John, I'll be there," Hurwitz said as they broke the connection.

The Temple Mount', Israel, 11:25 (local time) Thursday, July 31st, 2031.

The LIMO dropped out of the clear blue sky at an alarming rate, the braking cutting in at the last moment and the landing just a little too heavy for the good of the LIMO. John had not seen his two mentors since he had left Harvard after gaining his Ph.D. He liked Hurwitz, a jolly southerner from Alabama, a little brash and loud and John suspected that his brashness was merely a front. Corrigan on the other hand was a hard person to get to know, he presented as quite grumpy and bad tempered but was the most focused of the two. Corrigan was a widower of some twenty years and for that reason languages had taken over his life. Hurwitz on the other hand had many interests other than his chosen profession, many of which were females, and he was a confirmed bachelor. The two climbed out of the LIMO and both looked around looking for a familiar face. John waved and crossed to the LIMO

shaking hands with first Hurwitz and then Corrigan who looked annoyed.

“We were supposed to be on vacation you realise that Moffatt,” stated Corrigan.

“Yes I do sir and I am very grateful to you for agreeing to come all this way, we hope this will be worth your while,” apologised John, then thought, why did I say that.

John gave the two a guided tour as they descended through the rock to the control room, bringing them up to date on the project. Both men showed little interest in the cavern or the ancient technology but when they reached the control room, everything changed. John tried to introduce those people who were in the room but they ignored every thing and every one in favour of the various glyphs displayed on the screen. John turned to Peter and Owen and shrugged in frustration. The previous evening and that morning had seen further advances in the understanding some of the controls, and they had discovered how to access several different displays on the screen. Hurwitz was jumping up and down with glee but Corrigan maintained his total concentration and continued making notes on his pad. John suggested leaving them to it for a while and he, Peter and Owen decided to explore the small side tunnels they had found.

After two hours of exploring empty tunnels and chambers, Peter decided that hunger was a higher priority than empty rooms and left for the Cavern where a mobile canteen had been set up by the army. Hurwitz and Corrigan continued their examination of the first display until just before fifteen hundred hours, with Peter being called in twice to change the display, they spent another hour in discussion between themselves before they went in search of John. They found John in a side chamber full of jars where he was attempting to open one without causing damage.

“We think we may have some information for you guys,” announced Hurwitz, “this sure is an amazin’ place but it’s no more amizin’ that what we think we have discovered.” “I’ll get the others,” said John, “we’ll join you in the control room.”

Owen walked back to the room with Hurwitz and Corrigan to await the remainder of the team.

After almost twenty minutes the family, together with the core team were assembled in the Control Room ready to hear Hurwitz and Corrigan’s conclusions. Of course Professor Hurwitz was the spokesperson and he was determined to give a good show.

“Can I just thank y’all for inviting us here, it’s sure has been a real treat for us and we would like to stay on for a while to do some more work, if y’all will have us.” He looked around expectantly.

Jim responded, “I think we can accommodate two more at the barracks,”.

“Okay,” Hurwitz continued, “to start with, these are *not* hieroglyphs, it’s sure fact that they are several generations of script removed from them. Many think that hieroglyphics and cuneiform were the first written languages, not true. The Egyptians only used hieroglyphics for ceremonial uses, for every day, they used a cursive hand that pre-dated hieroglyphics. True cuneiform pre-dated hieroglyphics and takes us back as far as two-thousand B.C. In the nineteen-nineties, a new written language was discovered on tortoise shells in China that takes us back to circa six-thousand B.C. Yet another system of writing is found in Cretan hieroglyphs, these are now considered to be the forerunners of the Egyptian system. In a nut-shell folks what you have on this here screen seems to be the origin of Cretan hieroglyphs, but, and this is mighty big ‘but; your glyphs are several factors more sophisticated than the Cretan hieroglyphs. We know how Cretan hieroglyphs evolved and there’s no slot in that evolution for your glyphs,

so, Cretan hieroglyphs must have devolved from what we have here. Based on the rate of evolution for early languages we are assuming that a language devolves at a similar rate, we both agree that your written language here dates back to eight or even ten thousand years B.C. This obviously predates any known language by thousands of years, a real doosey of a bombshell.”

“Hi,” said Jo, “I’m Jo Markson, Director of this site, what do you mean when you said that Cretan hieroglyphs had devolved from these glyphs?”

“Let me see if I can explain,” continued Hurwitz, “and this is greatly speculative; it would seem to us that a written language appeared from somewhere, who knows where, was used by certain peoples for a season and then fell into disuse. However some of it continued in a more and more simplified form, until, firstly a plateau is reached at a level that is required by the level of civilisation. Secondly the language then starts to evolve again, often in a slightly different direction. A similar thing would most likely happen if a global war suddenly thrust our society back into the Stone Age, we would have no need for much of our language and it would be lost. What’s left would then start to develop again as society civilised and technology increased.”

“I see,” said Jo, “so you are saying that there was a much higher society before the ancients, society develops time after time in similar ways.”

“That’s the theory that has been proffered often in the past but without any real evidence,” confirmed Hurwitz.

Jo looked at her Dad, who gave a slight nod and Jo continued, “I think we may have that evidence Professor, we will show you later. However we need to know, do you have any idea what those glyphs and symbols actually mean?”

“We have an idea of what they mean but it is sketchy at the moment, until we get more information to allow us to extrapolate the meanings,” interjected Dr. Corrigan, for the first time.

“One thing I should say at this time,” continued Hurwitz, “the Cretan hieroglyph system was based on the Cretan city of Knossos and not only that but one of the words or glyphs we have identified represents that very city. There seems to be some intrinsic link here.”

As it seemed that the two professors were about to leave things hanging in the air, Jim jumped to his feet and asked, “but what are your feelings, can you share any suspicions you may have, whilst we are all gathered here.”

“Mr. Markson,” started Dr. Corrigan, “science does not build theories on feelings or suspicions, we need to do much more research and many weeks of examination before we can share our theories.”

“Now just hold on there Corrigan,” interrupted Hurwitz, “we haven’t been invited here by these good people for nuthin’. As we’ve already stated everyone of these glyphs seems to be a less cruder version of later glyphs found in Egypt for instance, there are also signs that these glyphs could be a common denominator between the Egyptian and Chinese glyphs. There are also similarities to Arabic and a dozen other glyph systems we have encountered. If so, this could point to a common world wide language existing before what we term the ancient world. These symbols all seem to relate to ancient cities, in reality we think that some of them may relate to cities that have been lost to us. Now boys and girls, we may be entirely wrong about all of this, as Corrigan here has stated we need many months to study this whole complex and several years before we could publish. I can only reiterate that all of this seems to be pointing to Crete and in particular, Knossos, as that seems to be the primary glyph and language centre.”

“What are you saying Professor,” asked Jim, “that the tower of Babble story is true and that Knossos was the centre of civilisation.”

Hurwitz and Corrigan looked at each other for some seconds as if exchanging thoughts then almost simultainiously turned to Jim and said, “Yes!”

The whole team had started to file out of the control-room and into the passageway when the electrical buzz started. Most of the people looked around at the entrance through which they had come, some just continued toward the elevator. Within seconds the buzz grew in volume to the point where no one could ignore it, some increased their pace towards the exit others, overcome by curiosity returned to the control-room. What they found there held them spellbound. The screen was now active again and instead of white noise some kind of image was forming between the two vertical terminals. The image was very indistinct but Peter recognised yet another control room illuminated only by the light for another screen. This control room was much larger than either the one he now stood in or the smaller one he and Jo had discovered in India. Hurwitz was transfixed with his hand still on the large hemisphere in the centre of the central panel on which he had accidentally rested his hand, and which now glowed violet under his hand.

“What have you done,” asked Peter in disbelief.

Hurwitz, looking slightly abashed admitted, “Hell, I just leaned on the panel without thinking, it just buzzed and started to glow.”

“What are we looking at Peter,” asked his Dad.

“I have no idea,” he responded.

“Well going by that illuminated symbol in the corner of the screen I would guss we are looking at another control room, may be the main control room possibly in Knossos,” suggested Hurwitz.

“Of course,” stated Peter, “let me try something.” Peter took hold of the glowing hemisphere and turned it slowly to the right. The image on the screen desolved into white-noise and then went blank, white-noise then blank again, then another image of a smaller control room and white noise again. After several blanks and some white-noise a bright image appeared on the screen and Peter recognised it as the Indian chamber they had unearthed. A figure ran into view and stopped in front of the screen with an open mouth, it was Gupta their Indian guide.

“Peter, what the . . . how,” exclaimed Gupta

“Can you hear me Gupta,” called Peter.

“Yes I can, but how is this possible,” came the answer.

“Long story Gupta,” said Peter, “if you come over to Jerusalem I show you.”

“Yes, please, I will try to get away, this is fascinating Peter, and not a little exciting.”

“OK, hope to see you soon,” said Peter and pressed the hemisphere down, the screen ceased its operation and all that was left was the slight smell of ozone. “Well we know what that does now and how to operate the screen,” Peter continued with a smirk on his face.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
20:30hrs (local time) Thursday, July
31st, 2031.

Jo convened the core team in order to assess the events of the day, and as expected, there was an atmosphere of great excitement in the room with everyone trying to talk at once. “Come on guys one at a time,” shouted Jo. When a sort of calm had descended

Peter was the first to speak, “Look it’s quite obvious that our next move is to get access to the Knossos site,

everything points to that being the key to everything we have discovered.”

“Do you realise how difficult it will be to get any kind of investigative access to Knossos, asked Jim, “the Greek government are not known for making life easy, especially when you’re talking about one of Crete’s main tourist attractions.

“Yes, I know that Dad, we’ve been here before,” said Jo, “so we need to get the ball rolling as soon as possible, like first thing tomorrow.”

“I agree,” stated Peter.

“Peter we don’t even know where this room might be, it’s a big site and there is nothing to suggest that the main control is even within the excavation site,” argued their Father, “for all we know it could be under the sea, there’s been such a lot of earthquake activity in the region over the millenia. What access do I ask for?”

“I suggest we seek a meeting with the Director of Antiquities, or whatever they call him in Greece,” commented Professor Wade.

“That still leaves us with the problem of finding an unknown location,” said Jim.

At that, Owen Gwilliam interjected, “I think I may be able to help with that, if someone activates the screen here in Jerusalem I think it’s possible that I could detect any anomalous electrical or energy signatures from my LIMO if I fly around the site for a while.”

“Can we please do that before I get to see the Greek Director,” pleaded Jim.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem, Israel,
09:12hrs (local time) Friday, August
1st, 2031.

Professor Owen Gwilliam's LIMO rose from the parade ground in Shufat, Jerusalem as soon as the LIMO has accepted the course, he had started fitting the equipment he needed to detect the energy signature of the video screen. It would take less than an hour to reach Crete so Peter had already made a start and he left the barracks for the Mount as soon as Owen was away. Owen flew north-east at 295 degrees to Crete where he followed the northern coastline as far as Heraklion and then turned due south to Knossos, the one thousand and fifty kilometer trip took him just fifty-five minutes. As Owen hovered over the famous city of Knossos he contacted Peter on the LIMO's com-unit, "Hi Peter, are you ready to activate the screen?" "Yes Professor all's ready here," answered Peter. Owen was just about to switch on his scanning equipment when a LIMO Transport of the Greek Police dropped out of the sky and hovered nose to nose with him. "Hold on Peter, we may have a problem here, I'm having a visit from the Greek Police," Owen transmitted.

Γεια σας, ακολουθήστε μας κάτω παρακαλώ. As the com over ride came to life.

"I'm sorry I do not speak Greek," Owen replied.

Immediately the reply arrived, "Follow us down please."

"Professor, what's going on?"

"Just hold on Peter I'll hopefully contact you shortly," Owen descended the two-thousand meters to the ground and landed next to the police LIMO, the police were already out of the vehicle waiting for him and they did not look happy. Owen opened the LIMO door and stepped out, "Is there something wrong officers," he asked.

“Can you tell us why you are hovering over this site,” said the officer with one bar on his epaulette, presumably the senior officer, “can I see your identity?”

“I’m just looking for something officer, I am a scientist and I am surveying the area,” said Owen, “I didn’t know I needed permission for that,” He said as he handed over his identity card.

“Normally you don’t Professor, but there was an incident here last evening.”

“What sort of incident?”

“Some sort of localised earthquake at 18;13 hours, just outside the perimeter of the site, brought one of the storage sheds down but nothing else was affected,” said the police officer. “We are looking out for anything out of the ordinary.”

“Well officer, if you give us some time we may well give you a solution which, if my theory is correct, will definitely be out of the ordinary,” said Owen.

“I will need to report you were here sir and then you can go on your way,” replied the officer, “Please wait with your vehicle sir.”

Owen climbed into his LIMO and re-established the com link with Peter, “Peter I think I’ve found the location of the control room.”

“But I haven’t switched the screen on yet Professor,” replied Peter

“We just struck lucky, there was a small tremor here at the precise time that screen came live last night, brought a shed down, so I guess our jolly room is somewhere below where the shed used to be.”

“Well who exactly is responsible for the site?” Jim was saying into his com-unit as Peter walked into the office.”

“I can only advise you to contact Greek Ministry of Culture, Department of Antiquities, sir,” said a voice.

“But it was the Department of Antiquities that passed me to you.”

“I’m sorry, it is not I you need to speak to, I will transfer you back, hold please,” said the voice.

“Dam!” said Jim to no one in particular.

“Dad, Professor Gwilliam’s found the site.”

“Great, now all we need is permission to go in.”

“I think this may help us, the Professor said the police were there and they had a localised earthquake at the exact moment the screen was switched on, they want to know how it happened.”

“Thanks Son, that will definitely help.” Fifteen minutes later Jim had secured the permission to investigate the site from the Minister of Culture herself.

Shufat Barracks, Jerusalem,
Israel, 15:20 hrs, Saturday August 2nd
to Sunday August 3rd, 2031

By the time Owen arrived back at the barracks plans were already being made to split the team into two. Owen and Peter were to take charge of the Jerusalem team until Jo, who was to head the excavation of the Crete site, had the control-room unearthed and clear, Owen and Peter would then move in with the technical support team to evaluate and report on the new find. The Cretan authorities would clear the debris of the storage shed and its contents by nine on Monday morning the fourth of August and would be responsible for the security of the site. Jim decided to make Friday and Saturday a rest period before the new excavation commenced but on Saturday morning Hurwitz and Corrigan arrived at the barracks in a state of excitement.

“Hi guys,” said Horwitz, “we just finished translating the glyphs on the centre console and we think you should know that we are almost sure of what one label means.”

“Also the subsequent reference,” added Corrigan.

“Yeah, the, whatever he said,” continued Horwitz, to cut to the chase, there is a hemisphere on the far right of the

panel that we think says 'Hall of Knowledge' and it also has the insignia for Knossos linked to it in a cartouch with a further symbol that we didn't recognise.

"However one of your team recognised our rough drawing of the glyph and told us there was one just like it in one of the side rooms," said Corrigan.

"We of course investigated and found an inscription in Old Testament Hebrew, a cinch to translate, it says:

Oh Lord who has sealed away the sum of all knowledge

For those in future times the tree of knowledge shall bear witness

To the Lord's greatness and power for all times.

This place shall be known only to the high priests of Israel and shall be named

The hall of Knowledge. So says the Lord."

There was silence for what seemed an age, finally Jim exclaimed, "Wow!"

"The myth of the Hall of Knowledge has been known for well over a century since certain Egyptian scripts were discovered," continued Horwitz, "and it has been thought that if this hall existed it may be beneath the Sphinx, but I guess everyone was wrong. Wrong because we thought it was a myth and wrong because we thought it was in Egypt."

"That is not so wrong as it would seem," said Jo, "the Golden Pyramid that was the cause of so much trouble in Cairo, was originally found beneath the Sphinx, between the front legs. What if that pyramid is, or was the storage device for the knowledge?"

"And you accidentally activated the download facility when you uncovered the Constellation artefact," interjected Peter, almost jumping up and down with excitement.

"That's not a bad deduction," said Owen, "so, all of the columns of blue light other than the Cairo one were

downloads to various control rooms, and where it could not get through, that's when it caused problems, like here in Jerusalem.”

“And Stonehenge,” said Jim.

Howard stood open mouthed, finally saying in what was almost a trance, “So the knowledge was under my nose all the time and we really did find the hall of knowledge.”

“Well,” said Jim, “at least we have a theory for the P.M. As to what caused the damage to the Mount.” Jim

immediately left the group and made a call on his com-unit to the P.M. And updated her on the new theory.

“Thank you Jim,” said Heidi Goldbloom, after a silence of some seconds, “I am quite speechless. If your theory is correct, this is something that will change the world, this may be bigger than any government can handle on its own. Will you keep me in the loop Jim?”

“I will madam Prime Minister,” responded Jim, and closed the link.

There and then, the best laid plans were changed, and it was evident that once the initial excavation of the Knossos site was complete the whole team would transfer there.

The previously appointed Temple Mount team would wind down the investigations there and hand the site over to the Israeli Ministry of Archaeology. Construction teams were already in place to stabilise the Mount and make it safe by anchoring and then filling the fissures and then repairing the damage to the Mosque.

Knossos, Crete, 09:00hrs (local time)
Monday, August 4th, 2031.

Jo Markson stepped off the LIMO into the bright vivid Cretan sunshine, followed closely by John Moffat, "That's some hole there John," she said. Jo was looking at a crater around eight meters diameter where the storage shed had once stood. The ground had simply given way and crashed to a new level some way below. The Knossos site director was there to greet them and offered to show the advance team around the excavated city. Jo declined the tour offer, she had been there before and realised that much of the palace was a reconstruction and not necessarily the genuine article. As Jo exchanged pleasantries with the director another two transports arrived kicking up dust and making the director shield his face, he then quickly took his leave. The transporters were unloaded and the domestic facilities set up before lunch when sandwiches were handed out. The team ate and drank in the hot sun atop the hill gazing at the view across Heraklion to the Aegean Sea beyond.

After lunch Jo managed at last to get to the hole, the vertical sides ended in roughly flat ground some four meters down, the clean-up crew had shored up the sides and had created a ramp from scaffold poles and boards that ran along the sides of the hole; by which the stored equipment and artifacts had been rescued. Jo descended the ramp and tested the flat bottom of the pit, 'concrete!' she thought, it was the floor of the storage shed. "John, can we get the ultrasonic drills down here and start breaking this section of floor up," she called from half way up the ramp. Within minutes four of the team were setting up the ultra-drill and ten minutes later they were standing on the granulated remains of what was once the shed's floor. The borrowed diggers had the concrete rubble cleared by thirteen-twenty and then continued to remove as

much of the soil as their arms could reach. Ground Penetrating Scanners detected a small void directly below with much larger voids to the East and West at eight and a half meters below the existing surface. Jo uncovered the first void just after three in the afternoon; it was just large enough to get her arm through between several beautifully dressed stone blocks whose inner surface had been finely polished. "John," Jo called, "these are polished marble on the inside but I can see nothing."

"I'll bring a lamp attached to a swan-neck down," answered John. Within a minute John joined Jo at the hole and thrust the Florescent lamp down into the hall below together with a small portable video camera. They both gasped as the picture coalesced on the soft-screen, what they saw was a hallway with a polished, if a little dusty, brown marble floor with white marble walls, at regular intervals were niches containing objects. The hall turned a corner about thirty meters to the east but to the west it disappeared into the darkness.

Jo stood up and climbed up the western ramp, "That hallway turns directly into the hill just about under that road," returning to John she continued, "it breaks my heart but we will have to break through the marble to get in there."

John returned to the camp and rallied two of the team to bring stone cutters down to the dig, it took less than an hour to cut a trapdoor into the twenty-five centimetre thick marble and install a secure set of steps. One of the generators whined into life and powers cabled were lowered into the opening along with bundles of stand-lamps, all was ready for the entry into a world that had not seen humans for ten thousand years.

Against John's wishes, Jo chose another of the team to accompany her into the hallway, "John I need you to hold the fort topside, you are my safety net if something goes

wrong here,” Jo explained. Still not happy with not being able to accompany Jo, John returned to the camp and told Ethan to report to Jo. John settled himself in front of the two-way video set and watched as Ethan joined Jo, he saw them switch over to helmet-cams and the entry began. Ethan immediately started working as his training took over; he loaded the lighting trolley with the stand-lamps and started pushing the load along placing lamps at every ten meters. Jo reached the corner first to find another hallway fading into the darkness; the lamps soon brought light to reveal an ornately carved wall blocking the hall. The carving of the stone was so exquisite it took Jo’s breath away and all she could say was a repeated “Wow!” The carving was so unlike anything that existed above in the Knossos Palace, no bulls or horns, in fact nothing that looked remotely like anything Minoan or Greek. There was a frame around the outside of the wall depicting trees, plants and flowers, all intertwined with various fruit. In the center were two humans, one man and one woman both completely naked. However the carving was not the usual stylised figures but totally detailed, proportionally correct and anatomically correct also. Both the male and the female figure held a crystal in their hand, which was proffered to each other and were about thirty centimetres apart. Above the figures appeared a cloud that blended into fire, enveloping the two figures, at their feet were small animals, a dog, a lion, a lizard, a pair of dolphins, a snake a horse and many others. On closer inspection Jo saw that the wall was constructed from two blocks of marble, each some four meters high by three meters wide, the join running between the two figures.

“John,” Jo called over the link, “I think these are doors, but there are no handles of any kind.”

“Try feeling around the carving,” answered John, “there may be some sort of hidden latch, but unless those stones are hollow it will take more than you two to move them.” Jo

set about exploring the carving with her hands, probing the deep recesses of the relief, but without success. The obvious choice was the crystals and Jo examined each one in turn but they were set solidly into the stone as if they had been fused to the stone.

“There is nothing that I can feel or see that looks like a latch and if I push there is no give, it’s just solid.”

“We could try some C-4 if you like,” suggested John.

“Are you crazy,” shouted Jo, “You can’t destroy a work like this.”

“Just a joke Jo, but they have to be doors, why would you put such a wonderful sculpture in a dead-end, it would be to impress people that came through that way.”

“OK, I’m going to try the other direction to see if that goes anywhere.” Jo and Ethan retraced their steps to the

trapdoor and set out along the hallway to the west. The hall was as straight as a laser for over one hundred meters then split at a ‘T’ junction, to the south were the remains of steps, but the ground above had collapsed and they disappeared into a wall of rubble after four steps. To the north a smaller passage continued for fifteen meters before taking a left and continuing west. After another fifty meters that too disappeared into a wall of rubble. “OK we can excavate both of those sites at a later date, everything here seems quite safe, so I sending Ethan back and I’m going to have one more look at those doors.”

“OK,” replied John, “do you mind if I join you there?”

“Please do, maybe you can figure it out,” was the reply

John made his way down the ramp and was climbing down the steps that had been fixed at the entry point as he saw Jo disappear around the corner to the east. Jo stared intently as she approached the doors for the second time, lost in thought; she paused around three meters from the doors before striding forward with her hands out reaching for the two crystals. As her hands came into contact with the two crystals there was a buzz that she felt more than

heard, before everything went black. John hurried down the hall to the corner and was just in time to see Jo melt into nothing.

The feed from her helmet cam had stopped and all that could be seen was noise, the recording didn't help John either, all that could be seen was a shot of the torsos of the figures before the feed went dead. Jim's thought was that it now fell to him to tell her parents that they had lost Jo for the fourth time. "Jim I honestly have no idea what happened, just as I rounded the corner she sort of dissolved, one moment she was there the next nothing." "What about her com set, I suppose you tried that," asked Jim Markson.

"Yes, of course, we have been calling her Com and on the video link for the last hour, the police are here and I think they suspect me of something."

"OK John, just hold on over there, we will be with you in a couple of hours, we are just leaving a care-taking team here because everyone wants to come over to help."

John severed the connection and took a deep breath, outside the site was swarming with police, and a police helicopter was hovering overhead. The police inspector was still writing in his note book so John waited patiently.

"Mr. Mófát, I must ask you not to leave Crete until you have permissions to do so," said the inspector.

"Don't worry, I not going anywhere until Jo is found, Inspector."

"The only thing that stop me from arresting you is the feed from your helmet, so we will watch you," he said as he left the back of the transporter.

"Inspector," John called after him, "we need to get into the site, so that we can investigate what happened," the inspector stopped outside the door and turned.

"OK, as long as one of my officers stay with you all the time, you are experts and you may have more success than a tired police man."

An hour and forty minutes later a fleet of seven LIMOs appeared in the east and landed one at a time in the olive grove behind the Royal Lodge. Five minutes later a worried looking Jim appeared in the makeshift camp followed closely by his son Peter. "What have you done so far John," said Jim as he hurried across to where John was pouring over some site plans.

"We are just scanning the ground to see if we can locate the path of the passage," explains John, "but the hallway is so deep that we're having problems."

"OK John, I brought the seismic generators that we used on the Temple Mount, let's see what we get with them."

It took less than an hour to position and set up the seismic resonators and true enough they gave a much more detailed image of the subterranean world beneath their feet. The position of the short corridor was quickly located and it was decided to drill three meters to the north of the 'doors' where the passage continued into the hillside.

Professor Gwilliam was already on his way and one of the laser-moles was also in flight by the time they had located the spot.

"Now," demanded Jim, "I think it's time that you showed me these doors where my daughter disappeared, don't you?"

John guided Jim down the ramp, collecting one of the two police officers on the way, and down into the Marble Hall. The lights flared into life at their entry and Jim was in awe as they walked along the passage. "Have you noticed, there is no other form of lighting along this corridor," asked Jim.

"No, actually I hadn't, I have been more worried about your daughter."

"Aidiastikos," muttered the police officer.

"And he's more worried about his uniform getting dirty," concluded Jim.

They turned the corner and faced with the ornate wall, or doors, with the two crystals shining like beacons. “So the palace above, when does it date from, three thousand BC?”

“About that,” answered John.

“And we’re about, what, six, eight meters below that level?”

“Yes, about that.

“That makes this older than five thousand years, possibly eight thousand BC, yes?”

“More like ten to twelve thousand BC Jim, judging by the strata outside.”

“Twelve thousand years, John and look at this place, who ever built this was almost ten thousand years ahead of their time, even the Romans could not have attained this height of skill with this stonework. Venus de Milo is crude compared to these figures and when have you ever seen crystals cut with such accuracy and clarity in a twelve thousand year old artefact.” Jim all the time had been examining the relief in minute detail, “The technology that created this would have been almost capable of creating anything, who knows what technologies they had.”

“I see where you are going with this, Jo must have activated something,” said John, “but what?”

“Where was Jo standing as you glimpsed her disappearance?”

“She was standing just here, in the centre of the wall.”

“How was she stood?”

“She had her arms out-stretched.”

“Like this,” Jim held his arms out horizontal to the floor and to his sides.

“No, more like this,” John held his arms above his head and in front of him, his hands about thirty centimetres apart.

“That’s reminds me of the ancient attitude of prayer described in the Old Testament, and coincidentally the exact position of those crystals.”

“Yes, that’s what must activate the mechanism, see it’s as if the two figures are inviting us to hold hands with them,” said John with a little more enthusiasm than he felt.

“Look here,” exclaimed Jim. John looked at what Jim was pointing to, “there’s a symbol here between the crystals on each side of the join, do you recognise it?”

John produced a magnifying glass from his pocket and held it over the symbol, in the stone there was what looked like a letter g with an apostrophe [g’].

“Why would a twelve thousand year old carving have a letter ‘g’ carved into it, could it be the sculptor’s signature?”

“No Jim, it’s not a signature,” interjected John, “and it’s not a letter ‘g’, it’s two symbols and they are Hebrew. The character that looks like a ‘g’ is in fact the Hebrew letter ‘bet’, or ‘beyth’ and the other mark is ‘yod’ or ‘yodh’.

“So what do they mean.” Asked Jim.

“Er’ they are just letters, but if I remember right, they both have numerical values, bet is two and yod is twenty, twenty-two.

“Twenty-two, is that it, it makes no sense.”

“I’m thinking Jim just hold on,” insisted John who walked the length of the short passage twice, “these Hebrew characters have reference symbols associated with them, but not always. ‘Bet’ has a reference of a house and ‘yod’ has ‘hand’, so, it can be ‘house hand’ or ‘house twenty’ or . . . ‘two hands’ or”

“That’s it two hands, two hands on the crystals, exactly as you saw Jo as she disappeared,” Jim almost shouted, “two hands on the crystals.”

“So what do we do now”, asked John, “do we go after her?”

“Yes, but not yet, let’s share what we think with the others and wait until the laser-mole gets here and bores down into that passageway on the other side,”

“But that could be tomorrow, Jim,” said John excitedly, “we can’t leave her alone, goodness knows where until tomorrow.”

“Well who is going to risk trying it out?”

“I will,” said John almost before the words had left Jim’s mouth.

“Ok, but you take a high power transponder with you and some emergency rations,”

“You’re on,” said John, “as a Star Trek fan I’ve always wanted to ‘beam up’.

The three retraced their steps out of the hallway and John collected the equipment from the transporters before returning to the short hall accompanied by the same police officer making the same complaints about the dirt on his uniform. With the rations and the transponder in a satchel, he approached the wall, with one glance over his shoulder to see the officer being totally disinterested in him, he grabbed the two crystals just as everything went black.

John felt rather than saw that he was in a much larger chamber, there was no light whatsoever getting into wherever he was, he felt in the satchel and retrieved a hand-lamp. The light stabbed through the darkness like a sword, he was in a chamber about fifteen meters on a side, the walls were decorated with a frieze depicting various unknown characters. At the end farthest away there appeared to be a doorway, as this was the only exit John made for it. Beyond the doorway another corridor continued with doors off it at regular intervals of around seven meters, each of these led into a small room, some contained the remains of furniture as far as John could see in the limited light from his hand-lamp. After about eighty meters John came to another set of doors blocking the passage but these were conventional doors as one was slightly open. He also noticed that in the whole of the complex, just as Jim had noticed earlier, there seemed to be no means of lighting. John gently pushed open the unlatched door, the only sound was a slight murmur from the hinge as the door swung open as easily as if it were on air, he walked forward the only sound now his footfalls. The

hand-lamp showed him he was in another chamber like the first, only this one contained racks of some sort of equipment in enclosures. In front of him another pair of doors, John walked on and yet again pushed open this next set of doors. Immediately one sound met him, a trembling voice, the voice of Jo.

“Who’s that, hello!”

“Jo?”

“Is that you John?”

John swung the beam of the torch around, “Where are you Jo?”

“I, I don’t know, I didn’t bother bringing a lamp with me,” came the obviously frightened reply, “wait, I can see your light, I’ll stand up.” Slowly Jo pushed herself up the wall she had been sitting against until she could see the source of the light. “I’m over here John.”

John turned and saw her and quickly made his way toward her, “Thank God you are OK, we thought we’d lost you,” said John as they both fell into each other’s arms and hugged. The hug lasted longer than it should have and inevitably ended in a long lingering kiss, “I thought I’d lost you Jo.”

John panned the lamp beam around the room and Jo saw where she was for the first time in four hours. The room was yet another control room, rather like the one in Jerusalem but very much larger, there were rows of seats and control panels, multiple screen emitters and all sorts of equipment the use of which they had no idea. The ceiling was a dome of polished white marble just like the hallway outside but in the centre there was a golden boss depicting angels with intertwining wings surrounding a crown. John handed Jo some of the food he had brought, “Your dad has the laser-mole on the way, they will be drilling down into the anti-room tomorrow until then we just sit tight and make ourselves comfortable.”

“Ok,” agreed Jo, “but I have a better idea, what say we explore this place and maybe we can get ourselves out.” “Sounds like a plan to me,” said John, but first I need to see if this HP transponder works down here.” John extracted the transponder from his satchel, plugged a lead from the reactor section of his hand-lamp into the unit, and switched on. “John Moffat calling Jim Markson, come in Jim.” There was a brief hiss and the faintest of sounds that may or may not have been a human voice, “It’s no good, the signal is too weak, but I think they picked something up.”

John set the lamp to shine upon the ceiling so that the whole room had some low level illumination and started to explore whilst Jo finished off the first batch of rations. He was looking for a spherical switch, like the one Peter and the Professor had found at Jerusalem and India, but he could not see anything that looked the same.

John spotted a large chair right at the back on the highest level, he made his way to the top level. From here the room looked like the old NASA’s Huston Control he’d seen in videos, the big chair had a control panel with more controls than any of the others, and j

John guessed it to be the master panel. “I’m going to take the lamp up here for a while so that I can look at this panel, so it’s gonna’ be darker for a while, OK Jo?”

“OK John” Jo answered.

The strange thing was that there was no dust on the panel, nor was there any on the floors, the panel and the room looked like it had just closed for the night. John sat in the big chair; the panel in front of him was well laid out with everything within easy reach. John took his pick and stabbed a finger at what he thought may be a button, it was the biggest and most obvious feature on the board.

Nothing happened. He took a stab at another, and then another, then he rolled a crystalline ball and turned some levers but nothing happened, “Dam,” he muttered, there’s

just no power.” John banged the desk with his fist, “What did Peter do to get power at Jerusalem Jo?”

“I think he did something in a side room, some kind of power generator,” replied Jo

“Come with me, I don’t want to leave you in total darkness again,” Jo joined John and they went back into the equipment room he had entered through.

“This isn’t it, there were tall cylindrical things with conduit coming out of the top and bottom,” said Jo.

They went back into the control room and walked the walls, then they found it a door, hidden by a niche just behind where John had been sitting in the big chair. Jo had to be right, the chamber was full of cylinders with the tops connected by conduit. They followed the lines but found nothing that remotely looked like a switch.

“There must be power here or else that transporter would not have worked,” offered Jo.

“Good point,” said John, “but where is the master-switch?”

Outside of the generator room John stopped to think where there may be a switch that activated everything, he leaned back against the door frame and his back felt something. John turned and in the light of the lamp he saw a small flat panel about the size of a hand, the idea hit him like a bolt of lightning, he placed his hand on the panel and again nothing happened. Dejected he withdrew his hand and turned back to Jo and was about to shrug when the first panel in the dome started to glow. The glow brightened and the next panel came to life, then the next, and the next. Within a minute the room was flooded with light, “Well, that’s one problem solved, what a foolish place to put a light switch, by a door,” John laughed.

“Obviously foolish,” laughed Jo.

“Right, let’s see what we can do for the rest of this complex shall we.”

John started at the big chair and Jo commenced her investigation at the front where the image generators, that's what Peter had called them, were situated. The hours passed without any spark of success, in the outside world it was almost midnight and both Jo and John were feeling decidedly fatigued. They returned to where John had left the satchel to open another packet of rations. Jo made herself comfortable in one of the chairs in front of the master consul while John sat on the edge of the big chair talking to Jo. As they ate their meagre meal the tiredness flooded over them, Jo curled up on the floor and John sank back into the chair. As his full weight was taken by the chair a miracle happened, all at once every panel in the room came to life, buzzing noises and clicks woke Jo from her half sleep and lights flashed from the various panels. "it's the chair Jo, it was the chair," John shouted with sheer joy.

Above ground Knossos, Crete, 00:17hrs
(local time) Tuesday, August 5th,
2031.

"There's been nothing since the brief signal earlier today, well yesterday now," said Jim Markson, Jo's father, "but I still think that it was John and the fact he tried to contact us means he's found Jo. I think we should turn in and get some rest, we need to be on form tomorrow, sorry later today."

Carol Markson had already retired to bed and cried herself to sleep, fearing the worst, Peter had been busy with Professor Gwillam, preparing the site for the laser-mole when it arrived at around five AM, so he had already crawled into one of the LIMO's to sleep over an hour ago. Everyone else was either busy or sleeping. Dr Wade finished his whisky and withdrew, as did the professor, and very soon the camp went quiet. At twelve twenty-five, six com-units sounded their 'urgent alarms and the camp was suddenly awake again. Jim reached for his com and pressed the 'answer' button, "What is it," he grumbled, The voice on the other end was one of the team they had left in the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, "Jim, everything has powered up here, the control room, it's fully active."

"Who was on shift, did someone touch something," Jim asked annoyed.

"I was Mr. Markson and I wasn't even in the control room, I was in the passage outside."

"OK," said Jim, "make sure no one touches anything." As Jim broke the connection Peter opened the LIMO door.

"Dad, it's Gupta, he says he's just heard that the Indian control room's just gone hot, they don't know what to do."

"Tell them to do nothing Peter." Just then Jim's com beeped urgently again, this time the face on the screen was that of Declan Brook,

"Jim, we are receiving reports of all sorts of strange occurrences coming in from all over Europe and Asia

Minor,” reported Declan, “Stonehenge is glowing and there’s a glow been reported from the excavations of Troy in western Turkey, and a dozen other locations, what’s going on.”

“I really don’t know Declan,” said Jim, “but I will let you know as soon as I find out.” Before he had time to rise from the LIMO seat his com beeped again, “Yes,” said Jim.”

“Mr. Markson, we have pictures, well one picture really, I can see John Moffat and your daughter in another control room.”

Just before dawn two transporters with a bullet shaped pad slung between them appeared over the hills to the east, the two objects grew in size as the sky behind them brightened. The laser-mole was dropped exactly on the spot where the ground had been cleared, eight meters above the underground chamber, by seven am the mole had started its drilling operation.

“We should be through by mid-morning,” Professor Guillam announced, and left Roger and his technicians to manage the tunnelling in order to join the breakfast meeting Jim had called for seven thirty. Most of the team were there eating by the time Owen arrived, he helped himself to sausage, bacon, egg and tomatoes from the table and found himself a seat next to Dr. Wade who was sipping his second cup of coffee. Owen greeted Wade and started to ask what the meeting was about, when Jim rapped on the table and asked for everyone’s attention.

“In the early hours of this morning we began to receive reports from across the ancient world,” announced Jim, “from India, Turkey, Greece, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and so on, twenty-two reports in all, all about strange lights, sounds or equipment springing to life. In Jerusalem the control room we uncovered is now fully functional, as is the one that Peter and Jo discovered in India, seven

museums have reported artefacts powering up, Stonehenge has its own electrical storm again complete with dancing arcs. It's quite a show by all accounts. Jerusalem reports that they have a picture of, what we assume is the control room below us here, through that we conclude that both Jo and John are safe and well." There was a short cheer from the team before Jim continued, "We can only assume that the Crete control room is the key to our mystery as it seems that John and Jo must have managed to activate it, causing the whole system to power up. Who knows what else has activated in places we don't even know about. When that mole breaks through, I calculate we have about twenty-four hours to come up with some answers before it hits the fan." Jim took a second to refer to some notes, "Peter I need you and Professor Gwilliam to get in first and start trying to make some sense of the whole system."

"I think it's time that everyone started calling me Owen," shouted the Professor.

"Thanks pro. . . . Owen. The excavation team needs to get the access shored up and secured before all the visitors start rolling in. Samantha you will have your time cut out fending off the media, can you see me for five minutes after this meeting, I guess Declan will be here before the day is out after my conversation with him earlier, so everyone just refer any questions to Sam here."

"Artefacts team, you know your job, as soon as the access is secure I want everything that is not necessary out and into the transporters for safe-keeping, check with Peter or Owen before you remove anything."

"Any questions?"

Above ground Knossos, Crete, 10:45 hrs
(local time) Tuesday, August 5th,
2031.

Jim Markson's com buzzed in his pocket, he snatched it out quickly and opened the lid, it was Owen Gwilliam, "Jim, we seem to have hit the hard stuff, I think it's the ceiling of that chamber, shall I hold it back until you get here," he asked. "No," answered Jim, "keep going, I'll be there in a few moments."

Jim left the portable building that served as an operations centre and office and ran across the site, crossing the public track that ran between the site and the drilling operation and into the field where Owen and his technicians had been working since first light.

"We're through Jim and the mole is reversing back out we should be able to get access in about ten minutes," Owen said as Jim joined the assembled team around the mole's gantry.

"Good, I just want them out and then we can get on with the job of untangling the mess we seem to have left across Europe and Asia."

Slowly the laser-mole extracted itself from the hole and slid up into its gantry and then the gantry smoothly slid back leaving a perfect cylinder of a cavity. As the gantry moved back a water spray activated to cool the surrounding rock and the onlookers could see little but a column of steam. The steam quickly cleared and an extending access ladder was installed and fixed by anchor bolts that were shot deep into the rock. Jim was on the top of the ladder before the engineers had climbed out, a second after the yellow helmeted engineer stepped back onto the surface he was descending into the darkness.

Close on Jims heels were Peter and Owen, helmet lights were switched on and the three found themselves in the ante-chamber with the frieze, they followed the corridor that

led to the control room doors. They exchanged looks for a second before Jim and Peter gave the doors a hefty push, the doors swung open as easily as they had when John went through them many hours ago, and father and son fell through them landing sprawled on the floor in the brightly lit control room. As Jim and Peter found their feet again two people were aroused from their sleep, each entwined in the other on the highest staging of the room.

“Very cosy,” said Jim, “is this what you get up to when you get trapped in a strange control room?” Jo quickly extricated herself from John, whose colour quickly drained from his face, and ran to hug her father. “Don’t look so embarrassed John, we have seen the signs for some time now, you belong together.”

Jim looked around him, for the first time taking in where he was, “This is some place, twelve control stations, and I’m guessing we have multiple screens here when they are activated, at least three, maybe five.”

“Everything comes live when someone sits in that chair at the top,” offered John, “I sat in it last night and the whole place powered up.”

“Yes we know,” said Jim with a rye smile on his face, “and by the way, Jerusalem’s been watching you on the big screen all night.”

“What,” exclaimed Jo, looking slightly abashed.

“Don’t worry,” assured her dad, “there’s been no report on your extra-curricula activities, we have some more urgent problems to deal with later, when you activated this equipment it triggered responses from all over Europe and Asia as well as several artefacts in the Cairo Museum that seem to have caused some damage, again. John you’re with me, let’s sort out some kind of press release, Jo you go and get some fresh air and sunshine for the rest of the day and leave you brother and Owen to see if they can make any sense out of all this.”

The three left the complex via the ladder and the various teams moved in to measure and record every detail of the discovery. Peter and Owen set out to find the commonalities between this room and the one they'd worked on in Jerusalem. Many of the symbols were the same, but there were new ones, Owen produced his notebooks and they started to make progress. Owen sat in John's 'big chair' and worked at the main console while Peter experimented with the various stations, after what seemed like hours Owen was ready to try some experiments. The main console had several domed crystals and some twenty of what looked like touch pads. Of these, five showed signs of wear more than the other fifteen. Owen thought that these touch pads may be a way of entering an access code. Owen worked out that if the pads were numbered one, two, three, four and five and each appear in the numbers with no repeats, and no eliminations (so numbers like 11133 are not valid) then there would be one hundred and twenty combinations. If you use any of the five, any number of times up to a maximum of five times, using any possible way of making a five digit number using only one, two, three, four and five, so that 33455 for example is valid, then the number of combinations is three thousand one hundred and twenty-five. Owen tried the lower combinations first, based on the fact that all five pads displayed about equal wear, and of course one hundred and twenty was a much more manageable number of combinations.

Fortune was with Owen and at the thirty-seventh combination, the panel unlocked and became fully functional, whatever that meant. Now all twenty pads were illuminated, and each displayed a different symbol, one symbol both Owen and Peter recognised, the symbol that represented Jerusalem. So that was the starting point, Owen held his breath and touched the pad, there was the sudden and loud buzzing sound that Peter had heard

previously, then arcs or electricity jumped between two of the terminal posts just as it had in Jerusalem before the screen appeared. Seconds later the screen congealed into white noise, which cleared to show the control room below the Temple Mount. Peter spotted the Egyptian hieroglyph for ear and pointed it out to Owen, who then touched the adjacent pad.

“Jerusalem, can you hear us,” called Owen in his booming Welsh voice.

A very surprised technician popped up from behind a panel, “Yes we hear you, is that you Dr. Gwilliam?”

“Yes, Ok, thank you, just testing” said Owen and switched the sound off again.

Peter left the Professor to work on the panel whilst he went off to explore the control room, and he soon found the room containing all the equipment lockers. As Peter opened the first locker he was amazed to find it full of the small transparent discs similar to the ones they had found previously. Here there were thousands of them, locker after locker was filled with them, twelve each in what seemed like some kind of plastic case.

Peter took one case full of discs and returned to the control room to show Owen. Owen examined one of the discs, turning it over in his hand a few times, then suddenly he stopped, took a magnifying glass and held it up to the light. “Look Peter, the disc is full of very fine lines, like those holographic blocks you get as souvenirs, but without the image,” said Owen.

“To me, it looks like one of those video bars that Sony have been developing,” said Peter, “they have multi recording layers, like multi layered CD’s but instead they have thousands of layers rather than three or six.”

“I think you may be onto something Peter, if you’re right there will be some kind of player here somewhere, look for a slot or recess that will fit the discs.”

They both started to search, they examined each panel in turn, but found nothing, Owen seated himself back at the master console and sat thinking and idly fiddling with the features on the panel. Then one of the crystal domes moved slightly, it took Owen a few seconds to realise it but he then examined it closer. The clear uncoloured crystal hinged up to reveal a recess the same size as the disc, he tried it for size, and the disc dropped into the recess and the crystal snapped shut. Another screen activated and again showed white noise for a few seconds, the clear dome pulsed with white light as a picture appeared in the screen. They both thought they were watching a feature film at first but soon realised that this was a recording of real life, the two sat enthralled for hour after hour as the images played before their eyes. Peter brought more discs from the lockers the viewing continued into the evening, and they both lost all track of time.

At eight-forty-five Peter's com jangled, he was still watching the screens.

"Peter, you know you've missed lunch and dinner," said his father's voice, "What are you two into down there?"

"What," said Peter, "good grief is that the time."

"Yes it is, and your mother and I think it's time to take a break until tomorrow."

"OK, but I think you had better see this Dad."

"What ever it is, it can wait until the morning."

"But Dad . . ."

"In the morning Peter, get Owen and yourself up her, get something to eat and then get some sleep, that's an order Peter."

"OK, but we need to talk over eats."

"Right Peter, in the mess tent, ten minutes."

Jim was already there when Peter and Owen entered the mess tent and they crossed directly to him. "Food first, we can talk whilst you eat."

Peter and Owen collected the food that Jim had saved for them from the field kitchen and brought the trays over to the table where Jim was sipping a hot chocolate. As Peter started to eat he realised just how hungry he was and started to eat at high speed. Owen on the other hand took things slowly and savoured the flavours of the food.

“Let me start filling you in on what we have done today Jim,” Owen started as he ate. He related the story of what steps they had made and how Peter had discovered the lockers filled with the small discs and how they had started to play the discs like DVD’s.

“Peter found some discs that were separate, they were in a sort of coloured plastic case,” Owen continued, “we wondered why they were separated and in a case, there were eighty-four of them, twelve in each case. Anyhow we started watching them, I still can’t believe what I was watching, it has left me confused and more than a little uneasy.”

“So what’s on these discs,” asked Jim.

Peter, having satisfied his immediate hunger, entered the conversation, “What if I told you that what we have found is concrete evidence that the account in the Bible is true, what would you say?”

“Is this a joke, Peter, how can there be proof,” replied his Dad.

“I think, Jim, you should review these discs and see what we’ve seen,” interrupted Owen, “that’s why I feel confused.”

“Look, you two are tired, you’ve been at it for almost twelve hours straight, whatever you have found, it will look different in the morning,” said Jim.

“I don’t think so Dad, you need to see it, there is no way that everything on those discs is made up, I don’t know how it was done but believe me it’s real.”

“Jim,” said Owen, “we will do as you say and leave it till morning but I tell you it has me thinking and I have always been a confirmed atheist and humanist.”

Jim rose from the table shaking his head, he bid good night to his son and Owen and left them to finish their meal, he continued to slowly shake his head in disbelief as he left the tent into the warm Cretan night. Peter and Owen talked for another hour before fatigue forced them to concede that Jim had been right and they retired to their respective tents. They both slept fitfully and had dreams that were foreign to them for several hours before they sank into a deep sleep.

Judgement Day

Wednesday, August 6th, 2031. The Cretan Control Room

It was almost ten o'clock when Peter awoke the following morning, he dressed, grabbed some breakfast from the mess tent and went off to find his father. He found Jim in a discussion with Owen, they both went quiet as Peter entered and greeted him.

"Are we going down to the control room now, Dad," Peter asked.

"We were just waiting for you Peter," answered his Dad, "lets go, I want to see what has you two all wound up. Peter will you tell Jo and John that we are going down now, they want to join us."

Peter set off in the direction of the habitat tents whilst Jim and Owen walked off toward the access hole in the next field. Jim and Owen were waiting for them in the passage when Peter, his sister and John arrived, they entered the control room together and Owen took the 'big chair' as before, the complex sprang to life immediately. When everyone else was seated, Owen dropped the first disc into its recess, closed the crystal lid and the show began.

The previous night there had been only pictures, so both Peter and Owen were a little surprised when the disk

played with audio, sadly the language was alien to all those in the control room.

“I think we can do without the sound for this screening,” announced Owen and pressed the audio pad. The only effect that the pad had was to switch to a different language, Jo recognised it as ancient Aramaic, but it made no more sense to anyone. A further press brought up Hebrew, then Greek, and no one could believe it when the seventeenth selection changed the language to English. “I think it's some sort of translator,” suggested Owen, “just one more miracle to add to the growing list.”

“Not miracles Owen, just very advanced technology,” commented Jim, “but let's listen to what your miracle has to say, shall we.”

Owen had paused the disk and before he started it again, said, “Let's leave the judgement till later shall we.”

The screen remained a solid black after Owen restarted the disk and the voice continued in English, *'These records have been stored since Yeshua` was sacrificed, awaiting a specific time when they will be revealed to a doubting world. You five people now have the responsibility to reveal what you have found to mankind.'*

Owen paused the disk again, “You realise that there are actually five of us here, I suppose.”

“Wow, that's a little spooky,” said John, “who is this Yeshua` anyway.”

“You heathen John, didn't they teach you anything about Christianity,” scolded Jo, “That was Jesus' Hebrew name.”

“Shall we continue?” suggested Jim, and Owen continued the playing.

'Within the volumes that you will discover here is the complete record of mankind's history from his creation until the death of Yeshua`. By this time human kind will have developed sciences far beyond anything that man would have previously understood, yet with that science man has fallen away from the path that I set, as I knew they would.'

Man has ignored the conformations and prophecies that I gave the patriarchs, even in the very act of fulfilment.

My messengers built the technology that you see before you, but humans understood it's secrets, later many saw but did not understand. This technology was built for an age when technology would bloom again, as a last sign before the end. As you will see, the civilisation reached a peak before I sent the flood. What you will see is a visual record in which you may move just as if you were there, you may use the controls before you to select and move your view. The cases follow the rotation of the colours of the rainbow, commencing with red and ending in violet, each of the seven colours represents one of the seven periods of my people. These were the records on which Moses based and reported the days before he existed. Everything you will see will be in real time, the images cannot be speeded up or slowed down.

*This is the last chance for mankind before Yeshua` returns and your Earth is no more. **Heed this warning.***

The screen remained black for some thirty seconds and five people stared at the blank screen open-mouthed, then a tiny white light appeared in the centre of the blackness and almost instantaneously it engulfed the screen with blinding white light that hurt the viewer's eyes. When the light subsided the screen was filled with millions of small lights that were in constant flux. Quickly the small lights started to form into groups and clusters, as the clusters of lights formed they fell into what seemed like a dance, swirling and spinning to some unseen waltz. The only sound in the room was the occasional swallowing, gasps and gulping of the viewers. Within minutes all five people could recognise that the spinning groups of lights were in fact galaxies, the beauty of it all was stunning. Gas clouds started to form and within them tiny flashes that illuminated the various colours of the gases. Within the embryo-galaxies there were also flashes of light as one star collided

with another and still more clouds of dust flared and fused into ever-growing and glowing, spheres of solid matter, becoming proto-stars and planets. Very quickly the planets cooled and were captured by nearby stars. The interactions between the gravity of the planets and the stars started to shape the galaxies, and spiral arms started to form and the rotation started to slow. Suddenly it was obvious to the five viewers that they were looking at the Milky Way galaxy in its infancy.

Within seven minutes the view was as each one would have expected their galaxy to look and the view started to zoom in on one particular arm of the galaxy and then to one particular star that was surrounded by gas and dust. Within the dust there seemed to be lumps that were revolving around the star. As they watched the lumps became larger as they swept up the dust particles and the dust thinned, the lumps glowed with the heat and in their semi-molten state they became spheres. There were many such spheres varying in size, some were drawn into the star, other, larger ones attracted their own smaller spheres as moons. Within minutes the scene was a recognisable as the formation of our solar system and each of the five could name each planet. Soon most of the dust and gas had fallen into the star or had collected around other planets as rings or clouds of debris, and the view again zoomed in on the third planet out from the star, the Earth.

The Earth looked just like a ball of child's modelling clay when all the colours had been squeezed together to form one featureless lump with a hazy swirling atmosphere. Then more clouds of gas were attracted to the little ball and a reaction took place, the gases seemed to solidify and then turned to liquid which fell upon the Earth's surface in torrents until the whole surface was covered in, what everyone assumed was, water. Massive violent currents appeared in the water, surging and flowing around the

planet and great waves reared up and crashed, convulsed by the cooling surface. Jets of steam shot into the atmosphere and formed into yet more clouds. The light from the star suddenly increased as the first solar-flare shot out into space from its darkened surface. The view sank below the cloud cover into the dim atmosphere and circumnavigated the planet passing from night into foggy, dusky day. The scene faded to black as Owen paused the disk.

They all sat in silence for some minutes, each lost in their own thoughts. Jim was the first to speak. "Are we totally sure that all this is not some kind of con?"

"Dad, are you serious," said Jo, "after everything we have been through and discovered over these past weeks."

"All this equipment as well as the disks give an age of up to twelve-thousand years," interjected Owen, "most probably around eight to ten, in reality, so I can't see how it can be faked, Jim."

"How about you Son, and John, are you buying this?"

"I agree with the professor Dad, there is no way this can be a fake set-up, we don't even have technology like this yet, it's a hundred years ahead of us, at least."

"Well if nothing else it vindicates my theory about a previous technical civilisation," stated Jo, "It seems that for once archaeology will be about the future, with all this technology we have discovered."

"You have been particularly silent John, what are your thoughts," asked Jim.

"Hmm, oh, sorry," said John as he was roused from his own thoughts, "Honestly; I think this is going to cause so much trouble, just after things have just settled down. It's going to be one religion against another again. Personally, I think we should fill this place with plastic and blow the whole thing into space."

That caused an uproar from the other four and a chorus of 'NO!' 'NEVER!' and 'You have to be kidding'. For Peter it

was the technology, for Jim it was business, in Jo's mind it was about vindication, and for Owen it was a sudden belief in one omnipotent God, after a lifetime of atheism, and a new meaning to life.

Owen touched the crystal cover again and the video continued. The pictures took them through the lifting up of dry-land, the Sun flaring into life and its light and warmth reaching the Earth's surface, the land giving birth to grass and plants. They saw many animals forming out of the very earth and finally the forming of Adam from the clay of the ground. The five spent the whole day watching the first disk, none hungered for food or drink and they sat transfixed by the images they witnessed. At after nine o'clock in the evening Carol arrived to see what had happened to her family, and fell into the group as a watcher for another three hours until she forced herself out of the trance-like state and forced them all to quit for the night.

Thursday, August 7th, 2031. Crete Base-camp.

Early in the morning Jim contacted a security firm and by ten am guards had been placed on the entrance to the control room, all but the core team had been excluded from this part of the site. The security company had issued identity passes to the core team, but not one would enter the room this day. Jim had called a meeting and because there was little privacy under canvas, had booked a meeting room at the newly refurbished Agios Nikolaos Hotel in Heraklion. The hotel was a a comfortable place with adequate facilities and the meeting started with a Greek-style lunch at one o'clock. "OK people, we have some decisions to make here," Jim stated with half a mouth-full of bread and feta cheese, "the first of those decisions is, are we qualified to decide whether to release this discovery or not."

Owen was the first to attempt an answer, "As far as I am concerned, it would seem that we have already been charged with that very task, the very fact that it was known that there would be five of us listening to that introduction, confirms it."

"That could easily have been a coincidence Owen,"

"I don't agree Jim," replied Owen.

"Me neither," chipped in Peter, "I think it was like a sign aimed specifically at us."

"Well it certainly shook me," added Jo, "what do you think Mom?"

"I was not there for that bit, but if what you say is true then, yes, I think the responsibility lies with us," stated Carol. "I feel rather excited by this actually."

"OK, that's four out of the six of us, so unless you have any desperate objections John, we can say that the first decision is made," concluded Jim.

"I just feel that we will be doing more damage than good if we release this information at all. What will happen to all the Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and every other religion when they find out that they are wrong, they won't take it lying down after hundreds or even thousands of years of traditions."

"Maybe that's just the point," answered Owen.

"What, plunging the world back into religious wars," retorted John.

"John, are you denying that these records are from whom they purport to be from," asked Jo.

"No, but I am not convinced that it's a message from God, either. What's your feeling Jim, we haven't heard from you yet?"

"You know, I really don't want to believe in the existence of an all powerful God, but I have to admit, what we saw yesterday was pretty convincing, but I have to agree with you John, I dread the repercussions."

"What if it is humanity's last chance though," interrupted Owen, "that would make it a do-or-die situation. Do nothing

and be condemned to who knows what, release the information and at least there would be a chance for those who choose to believe.”

“You’re right Owen,” answered Jim, “I think that comment tips the balance somewhat.”

The meeting continued into the evening, talking over what should be done. It was decided that they would formulate a press-release, which would be released to both the world's press and to the list of significant people, simultaneously. They agreed that they would ask Declan Brook to handle the media side of things after briefing him about the find and likely repercussions. The list of 'significant people' would include the heads of state and of the heads of various faiths that still existed in any strength, as a matter of courtesy it was decided that the prime minister of Israel, Heidi Goldbloom and Dr. Wade, who had been recalled to Israel the previous day, would receive the news one hour prior to general release.

The press-release would be in the form of a certified video and a text document. Jo, Peter, Declan and Owen would be responsible for the video, which would include verifiable scientific information, whilst Jim, Carol and John would construct the text document. A time frame of twenty-days was agreed for the production of the video and document, an extra week for editing and thinking time, and a date of September the eleventh at mid-day for the release itself. Any spare time was filled with viewing more of the disks and often Owen would remain up all night listening and watching the records, he found the violet section most intriguing and to the team he seemed to be a changed man. The video was completed within fifteen days, but the text occupied the three people right up to the dead-line. Strict security was maintained throughout and there were no leaks, despite several requests for updates from various news agencies on slow news days. In the week prior to the

release the text was rewritten four times, but the video satisfied everyone in its accuracy and presentation, with Owen fronting the piece.

Finally the release day arrived. Having been forewarned to expect a very important document, P.M. Goldbloom received her copy at exactly 11:00 hours. Twenty minutes later Goldbloom was on the Com to Jim.

“James, what can I say, effectively I am speechless. In many ways I am so thrilled that my faith has been vindicated, but I am so sad, that if this is all true, my nation effectively rejected our Lord incarnate,” said the prime minister. “Thank you for giving me forewarning that this was going to be released. Of course I would have liked a few weeks rather than an hour, but I do understand your reasons.”

At exactly mid-day Declan Brook hit the button that sent the video and the text statement to every media agency across the world and Jim did the same with the mail to his 'significant people'. 'That's it,' thought Jim, 'now we just sit back and wait until it all hits the fan'.

In EBC the senior news editor saw the video and the text arrive on his open screen, he sighed and tapped the screen with a lazy forefinger and started to read. As he read his eyes opened wide and his tiredness receded into the background.

Proof Positive That God is Real

a Press-release from Joanne Markson Research
Trust.

The JMR Trust is pleased and honoured to announce the results of its latest research and archaeological project. The project has resulted in a

most unexpected conclusion, that God (as in that of the Christian and Jewish believers) does in fact exist.

The attached video, which includes much of the material recorded prior to the ultimate discovery, and is therefore totally objective, explains both the history and methodology of the project. The video also contains technical information and evidence as to the genuineness of the finds, including radiometric dating and photonic damage counts (PDC), full mapping scans and laser probe results, in addition to molecular analysis and schematics of many of the artefacts discovered (where they are fully understood and do not pose any strategic significance).

The six Directors of the Trust would make the following points:

- ^ The Trust has had no agenda in promoting any specific faith system.
- ^ The results of the project are and have been treated in complete objectivity, up until the point of final discovery.
- ^ No public funding has been used to further the project in any way.
- ^ No country, nation or faith has had any influence in the project or it's directors or employees.

That said, we are all convinced about the authenticity of the finds and the above statement to which they refer. The disks referred to in the accompanying video have undergone every test possible and the ages of the disks range from the

first century AD to the eighth millennium BC or earlier. The visual records that they hold will be examined by TISA and the ESA as well as several major universities world wide, who have the equipment and know-how to complete tests.

The Directors of the Trust believe that the introductory statement on the first disk is indeed from a supernatural entity, though not necessarily the actual voice of God. We also urge that the governments of this world take the warning seriously, as, until we have proof to the contrary, all indications point to the warning being genuine, and from an entity that has intimate knowledge of this Earth's history, future and it's people.

There are exactly eighty-four disks in what we call, 'The Rainbow Section', seven colour-coded cases, each containing twelve disks. In addition to The Rainbow Section there are another two-thousand four hundred and one disks, interesting this number equates to seven times seven times seven times seven times seven. As each disk holds approximately twenty-four hours of video and audio information we estimate that it will take some six to ten years to view all the information. The Trust believes that the disks found in the Israeli and Indian sites may be duplicates but there is a definite chance that these disks are extra, however these disks have yet to be counted or viewed. . .

Although only a fraction of the way through the text the editor turned to the video and sat open mouthed as the video culminated in scenes from the first disk and the verbal introduction. He lifted the Com-set on his desk a contacted the editing suite, "whatever you are doing, stop.

I have a story that will blow your minds,” he said, “along with the rest of the world.”

**“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.
The words of Jesus in Matthew 10:34**

Epilogue

Every TV station and news agency ran the story within an hour of the release being sent, response was muted at first, the world seemed to stop in stunned silence, with the usual humanist and atheist groups making light of the story. Things changed as the item grew in import, as entire news programmes were devoted to the issue. The Greek government attempted to commandeer the site and seal it off but world outrage forced a rethink and the site was declared a World Heritage Site that was taken over by the United Nations. Christians around the world celebrated, but there was little celebration within the leadership of the main churches. Governments both international and sovereign went strangely quiet and refused to make any statements to the media.

The Ark of the Covenant was handed over to the Israeli government, who in turn handed it into the keeping of the Chief Priest of Jewry. The Ark was never intrusively investigated as events negated the need. The Ark was installed in the largest synagogue in Israel. The restoration of that most sacred of artefacts prompted the move to rebuild the temple, not on top of the Mount but to the side that included the Wailing Wall, the one piece of the temple left standing after the demolition by the Romans in the year seventy AD. This single fact had a huge effect on the Christian church, as it was the last prophesy that needed to be fulfilled before the supposed second coming of Jesus Christ.

Over the first year after 'The Revelation', as it became known, the world's population slowly split into factions of believers and a myriad of sects that in one way or another opposed the Revelation. Riots occurred and several wars broke out between Christian sects and followers of the old faiths. Just when things were at their worst a leader

appeared as if from nowhere, who brought peace to the warring Earth. Was he just a man, the 'beast' of the Book of Revelation or the second incarnation of Jesus Christ? But that's another story. . . but not The End

Principle Character Bios

Jim Markson – Age 46, ex HR Manager for a international petrochemical company and amateur archaeology enthusiast with a background in Engineering planning

Carol Markson – Wife and very much a mother – the family organiser – gave up a career in forensics with the UK Home Office when she gave birth to Joanne a year after marrying Jim.

Declan Brook, TV presenter and ex-hack with a nose for a good story. Reputation as a champion of truth. EBC TV presenter, ex-S.A.S Commander, who was later employed making propaganda videos for the Afghanistan Administration, before moving naturally into broadcasting.

Joanne Markson – Archaeology Student with a BSc and MSc, now working for her PhD. Came to fame as a young girl and quickly became a celebrity, after her accidental discovery on Cyprus.

Peter Markson – Student in his second year of an engineering degree at Manchester's UMIST, keen on video games and the latest music craze 'Cardboard Rock'.

Professor Owen Gwilliam – Peter Markson's mentor at UMIST – lectures in advanced engineering / communication technology / menstruation / monitoring instrumentation. Worked on the NASA Mars mission of 2012.

Dimitri Aris – Senior Lab Tech – Degree in forensic science from U of Athens – worked for Cyprus Police Dept at the time of Jo's original find. Now works at the Research Centre.

John Moffat - American and ex-lecturer in archaeology at Bristol Uni, was Jo's lecturer during her 2nd & 3rd degree years and became fixated about the oufacts. Now works at the Research Centre.

Howard Fulton – Director of Pre-Dynastic Egypt section at the Cairo Museum, born in Birmingham England, professor of Egyptology at Cardiff University for 12 years, became Excavation Director of the Elephantine dig and became Director of Pre-Dynasty department three years ago 2018.

Dr. Ahmed Al-Farouque – Director of Antiquities at the Cairo Museum, officious and extremely protective of Egypt's place in history and of his own theories. Written 5 books on the history of Egypt and a best selling novel based around the origins of the Egyptian nation. I rumoured to have a private collection of Egyptian artefacts worth a billion dollars. Has an unsavoury reputation for

corruption and has been investigated by the Egyptian Government but no prosecution followed due to lack of evidence.

Homer John Carter – American billionaire known to deal on the black market and suspected of artefact thefts from a dozen countries inc Israel, Egypt, Iraq (believed to possess many of the artifacts that disappeared during the second Gulf War), Iran . Known associate of Dr. Al-Faroque.

Erin Martindale – TV presenter of Anglo-Irish extraction, has a strong Irish brogue, previously was an investigating reporter for the Euro Times and uncovered many exclusive stories before going into TV working for UK Independent. Recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes. Reputation for being tenacious, has the nickname of the 'Rottweiler'. Is married with a seven year old son called Declan. Husband is a bank president for HSBC in the city but is often away on business and therefore Declan has been mainly brought up by a nanny called Selena.

Barney Lane – Guide at Stonehenge, amateur archaeologist. Has worked as a volunteer labourer on several archaeological digs, including the famous dig of Camelot in Somerset, England during 2017-19, when the full extent of the site was realised.

Martin Roughley - Director of the Department of Antiquities in Cyprus, previously the resident archaeologist for the Royal Air Force and the Sovereign Territories, holds a doctorate from Cambridge in field archaeology and held the rank of Flight Sergeant in the RAF.

Gerry Holbrook (Captain-Ret) – security expert – served with Declan Brook during the Afghanistan uprising in 2024 when the Taliban made their fateful counter attack. Was employed by the British army in 'black-ops' with the S.A.S. and later on placement with the Afghan government.

Ch Inspector Demos Petros – Nicosia PD A Greek-Cypriot born in Larnica and worked his way up from a patrol officer. Has served with the force for the past thirty-seven years.

Mrs Heidi Goldbloom – Prime Minister of Israel, American born, and educated at M.I.T, gaining a BSc then a MA at Cambridge, England in Political Sciences. married with two grown up children.

Benjamin Marks – Israeli Minister of National Security – German born Jew whose parents as children survived the holocaust and remained after WWII as community leaders in the GDR. Attended Heidelberg

University and later West Point Military Academy in the US.. Married with one daughter.

Dr. Emanuel Wade – Senior State Geologist – American-Jew by birth, previously taught at Stamford University and was a member of the US Geological Survey monitoring board. Was one of the first to realise that the accepted time-line of the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures was too short by several thousand years.

Major Ethan Davidson – British born of Jewish family attended Sandhurst and Cambridge University - security expert. Now a naturalised Israeli attached to Internal Security Agency – very intelligent and nobodies fool.