



The Rainbow Bridge

The 12 Keys of Amenti

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Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said: "one *can't* believe impossible things."
"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

(Through the Looking Glass)

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PROLOGUE: LARA'S STORY

According to Lara Rainford, anybody of her age, and who was reasonably normal in the head, would just *know* that a trip to Egypt would be about as much fun as a visit to the dentist. Until, that is, she shared with them her quite peculiar story of the Ancient Pyramids; monuments that were not really what they seemed to be. And when she told of the secrets that she'd uncovered there, and the adventures that she'd taken, she wouldn't blame these same people for taking a sudden interest, while at the same time wondering if she were really quite mad.

But the truth of the matter was, thirteen year-old Lara was not mad at all. You might call her a little strange if you didn't know her better, because she had friends in places that other people couldn't even imagine to exist and these same friends had led her to a story that had been buried for tens of thousands of years. The adventure, though frightening at times, was quite real though, and while it sounds rather bizarre, so too are her friends. And there were other considerably horrid and creepy people that she'd met that you'd also imagine wouldn't entirely be real. These were people who didn't want this story to be found, nor to be told to the world for that matter. These others had tried to stop Lara and her family from finding the secrets, but there had been powerful forces that had guided them and protected them.

Is it a crazy story? Yes it is. Is it a true story? Well, yes...if you *make* it so... To really get to the truth in Lara's story, you have to live it yourself. Lara will tell you quite frankly that you should not *blindly* believe the things you have been taught to believe. Or even *kind of* believe the things that she'll share with you. You must test them out for yourself. Poke them and see if the truth is alive and real inside your own heart, and if it is, you will know because you'll feel it and experience it....

Lara's last trip to Egypt had started with some great excitement, all of it surrounding her father, Professor Nicholas Rainford. He was an archaeologist, who liked digging up ancient cities and finding mouldy-looking mummified people in coffins. No-one ever called him Nicholas unless he was getting an award or something. The lanky dusty-haired man was Nick to his friends and family, and Dad to Lara and her fifteen-year-old brother Noah. Dad had made a very strange discovery in Cairo, right in the basement of the Great Pyramid. It was strange because in all the books that he had read about The Sacred Powder of Gold, or Great Legacy, this weird stuff was said to be only a legend, no more than just a fantasy powder written in ancient books. It was supposedly used by High Priests in Ancient Egypt and it had quite intriguing magical properties... They'd found it right at the end of his last expedition. In fact, they'd finally ended the whole digging project because after six months of rather tiresome excavating, they hadn't found what they were *actually* looking for. It was only when Dad had gone back to the site with some workers to collect a few tools he'd left behind, that he'd stumbled across the legendary Sacred Powder of Gold. Beside the jars in which the stuff was found were a number of scrolls with information on them. It all just seemed to be sitting there, as if it had been there all along and just hadn't been noticed by anyone... What they found really and *truly* wasn't what they had been looking for.

Melissa Rainford, just plain *Mum* to Lara and Noah, who was a somewhat prissy scientist, and who never believed a thing until it was tested, tried and *only* then true, had brought it back with her to England and had it examined in her laboratory to see if it really was the actual thing. When it turned out to be exactly that, everyone had gone mad. The phones had not stopped ringing and people from the newspapers had all camped in the Rainford garden for three nights before the whole family had made their escape to Egypt. Noah was cross because he had wanted his picture in the papers, but Dad wasn't allowed to talk to the press you see, not until the discovery had been officially stamped and sealed by the Egyptian authorities.

Sister Abigail had warned Lara about this trip to Egypt. Lara had been a little worried, especially when the old lady had told her to bring the Dreaming Crystal, and that they would have to visit the Masters of Time. Sister Abigail was a strange Australian Aborigine woman who lived in the Dreamtime, and quite a

friend indeed. Lara didn't tell too many people about the life-long companion who visited her in that awkward space between sleep and waking, and who sometimes shrieked things in her ears when she wasn't expecting it. Her family knew, of course, but only her Grandmother Lou actually believed Sister Abigail was real. Mum thought Lara was really quite daft simply because Sister Abigail couldn't be put in a laboratory jar with chemicals and left until she turned blue. Mum couldn't prove Sister Abigail to be real, so she didn't believe a word of it and often huffily said that she thought it time Lara grew up. Dad sort of believed that Lara was telling the truth, but rather thought that she was just imagining things and getting herself all mixed up. Noah, who always liked to keep up appearances just said she was stupid as always, but she secretly knew he *kind* of believed her and really did like the stories she told...

So, with the crystal in her suitcase, harassed parents and a grumbling brother beside her, Lara found herself back in Egypt.

CHAPTER 1: THE CUSTODIANS OF THE PORTALS AND THE MASTER'S OF TIME

Seth stood hardly able to contain his rage as the others scuttled into the room and fretfully took their places in front of ornate gold painted chairs. The short balding pot-bellied men, *Aides*, or Seth's *Custodians* formed a circle around a waist-high carved eagle arising quite majestically from a black marbled floor. Wearing a black shirt and trousers, Seth's dark eyes shone dangerously out of his tanned grimacing face. His goatee beard twitched slightly as his chin moved from side to side. The others peered through thick unkempt eyebrows that shaded frightened bulgy eyes. They were afraid of what they'd been summoned to hear.

'SIT!' he bellowed, as they bowed in reverence of the small built man. 'SIT, I SAID!' he roared again, this time spraying with spittle one of the twelve grey-suited men sitting nearest him. 'I WANT ANSWERS! ANSWERS, YOU HEAR? THE ENGLISHMAN HAS FOUND SOMETHING, AND I WANT TO KNOW HOW HE DID THAT!!!.... TALK TO ME!!!'

'Your...your Grace,' one man stammered, standing and trying to bow as he spoke, 'it is as much a mystery to us as it is to you....'

'DON'T YOU GIVE ME THAT!' Seth yelled in fury, as the man fell back into his chair with fright. 'GIVE ME ANSWERS! TELL ME HOW, AFTER ALL THESE CENTURIES, THIS MAN FOUND THE POWDER! ALL THE PORTALS ARE SEALED OFF, SO HOW WAS IT REVEALED?'

'Sir' another Aide spoke up, 'we had a man there on the job with the Englishman, keeping an eye on things. But he reported no find. In fact the expedition was called off. What they were looking for couldn't be found and the Englishman decided to end the project. This new discovery was a huge surprise to them. They only came across it when he, Rainford, went back with a couple of workmen to pick up some tools they'd left behind. Our man had been recalled by that time. The whole thing was over. It was a chance thing.'

'SO HOW DID HE GET THE POWDER OUT? WHERE WERE YOU? WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU? HOW DID HE GET IT OUT?' Seth, trying to calm down, but not doing a good job about it, paced up and down within the circle as the aide spoke.

'Sir, nobody knew what it was until he'd taken it out of the country. Nobody took it seriously since it wasn't really recognisable to anyone. He and his wife only *thought* they might know what it was. The authorities let them take samples because nobody was really that interested. *We* didn't believe it was anything special because the portals are all closed. Later they tested it and sent it to other laboratories in the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan. It is what they thought it was, it's...'

'I KNOW what it is,' Seth snapped, his fury subsiding. 'It is the Sacred Powder of Gold. What I demand to know is, how it GOT here. We haven't had a problem for thousands of years. How did it get through?' Seth's eyebrows were knotted, his shoulders shrugged and his hands up in the air. 'Who brought it through, and through WHERE? He looked for answers amongst the twelve aides. When nobody answered, he said, menacingly, 'We'll meet again very, very soon. And...' he pointed at them, 'you'll all have answers for me. I want the Englishman silenced. There will be no conference. See to it that you stop it from happening.' He looked around the room, which had gone very quiet. 'And I demand that you get hold of the Sacred Powder. Get it away from them. Whatever happens they must not know its true value. And find out how it got through the closed portals. There's something suspicious going on. Something very suspicious indeed.'



The glistening gold of the crystal chandeliers met Lara's slowly opening eyes and brought her sharply out of sleep and to her senses. She smiled gleefully as she snuggled into, and inhaled the crisp fresh linen of the hotel bed. She sat up against large soft pillows and looked at her reflection in a large bronze-framed mirror opposite her grand four-poster bed. Adorning the walls all around her, were large paintings of Pharaohs carefully gilded with fine gold paint. She leaped up onto the bed and draped her white sheet around her, sarong-style. Closing her eyes, and moving gracefully on the spacious bed, she imagined walking into the marble bathroom with gold fittings and, like Queen Cleopatra, taking a bath in ass's

milk. Just then, the door to an adjoining room crashed open, making her jump nearly clean out of her skin.

‘Noah!’ she yelled at his grinning face, ‘can’t you knock?’

‘What, and miss classic scenes like this? He charged at her and threw her down on her back. He tickled her until her shrieks and yelps convinced him that he’d tormented her for long enough.

‘Come on Queen Lara, you’ve got to get dressed. We’re off out for the day.’

‘Where?’ Lara enquired, pulling her tangled hair out of her eyes.

‘Hell only knows,’ Noah groaned, ‘more ancient bricks and mortar to look at, no doubt. To think people pay to see this pile of ancient rubble. They should call in a demolition crew and pull it all to the ground. *Just Say No to Tourism Torture*, is my motto. I’ll have it printed on T-shirts and sell them at Dad’s conference as a protest.’

They swung their heads towards a loud knock at the door. Noah sprinted to open it and their mother stood there with an enquiring look upon her face. With terribly neat short brown hair and clean pale skin, she was dressed in the usual uniform of khaki shorts, khaki t-shirt and hiking boots. She looked more like an Egyptologist than a scientist. ‘Aren’t you two ready yet?’

‘I am, Her Majesty ain’t’ Noah said snootily, making Lara giggle.

‘Fifteen minutes, then Lara,’ Mum said firmly. ‘Noah, please wait for your sister and then meet us in the foyer’. Smiling rather primly, their mother clicked the door shut.



Ali Mehmet spotted Lara sitting cross-legged on the hot desert sands, a short distance from the Great Pyramid. The group that included both her parents and his nephew stood huddled next to the closed entrance while the guards outside the pyramid entrance moved around lazily in the heat trying to preserve their energy. Lara was now waving excitedly as she caught sight of her and Noah’s long-time friend and she jumped up to meet him as he ran across the sands towards her. Ali Mehmet, the oldest and longest serving patrolman of the Giza Plateau Security Force, beamed widely as he grabbed Lara and bear-hugged the living breath out of her.

‘Mashallah Lara! You big girl now! Soon you be beanpole!’ He squeezed her again and again and in between gasps she squealed with delight.

‘Ali Mehmet! Stop! Look at you! You’re exactly the same!’ They stared at each other for a moment and began laughing. Old Ali Mehmet had known Noah and Lara since they were both very little, as every year their Dad visited the ancient sites of Egypt and often worked alongside Hassan, Ali Mehmet’s nephew. Hassan was an archaeologist like their Dad Nick, and he loved Egypt so much he always took the Rainford family on trips to remote areas that no tourist ever travelled.

Ali Mehmet nodded over at the group. ‘You are going in with them?’

‘Yes. And you’re coming too,’ Lara declared firmly. ‘Noah’s up for it. It won’t be the same without you.’

‘Something going on,’ Ali Mehmet whispered rather dramatically, his brown eyes flashing beneath rather disorderly bushy eyebrows. ‘Something upsetting the adults. I have one of my visions and I think it is connected. There is a large sign up, it say that the pyramid is closed for the day for repairs. They no want any Tom, Dick or Ali going in.’ Ali Mehmet squinted mysteriously at Lara. ‘They all acting *veeery* strange.’

‘One of your *visions*?’ Lara stepped closer to Ali Mehmet. He gave a rather exaggerated sigh. He knew he’d got her hooked. Ali Mehmet was a story-teller. Ever since he could remember, he’d have strange visions of light that would suddenly come upon him when he was visiting an ancient site with his father. The light would make his body tingle and often his head would be filled with a low buzzing noise. At one time when he was especially young, he used to pass out and his body would shake with frightening convulsions. Afraid for his son, Ali Mehmet’s father had taken him to a traditional healer who explained that Ali Mehmet had a gift. The rivers of light that entered his brain contained information that had to be accepted by Ali Mehmet. And so, as the healer taught him how to relax as the light passed into his entire body, he stopped convulsing. The light episodes didn’t last long, but for days afterwards, weird and wonderful stories would flood his mind. He didn’t *think* them up. They just *came through* him and he knew they were true accounts of things that had happened long, long ago. He’d always had a good

audience in Lara and Noah and when they were growing up they'd listened for hours to his stories about the Pyramid Age and the Sphinx and anything to do with ancient Egypt. Once, when Lara had asked why *he* received the stories, he explained what he had learned...that stories are ghosts that float around us, they are the keepers of true history, the keepers of the keys to the truth about who we really are. And stories lie in wait, for sometimes they even *know* for whom they await. Every once in a while special storytellers are born. The ancient stories enter their hearts and wait to be told to the world ...Ali Mehmet was a story-teller.

'So what then, what about your vision?' Lara stared at Ali Mehmet who now looked a bit spacey, as if he'd floated off with the fairies.

'The Great Pyramid,' he said, pointing back at it with his old leathery thumb. 'The story is still coming, but already I see picture of underground tunnels and chambers that are creepy and horreeeble. And now, something happening with your Baba.'

'Well, Dad made that Sacred Powder of Gold discovery in the Subterranean Chamber, right there in the basement of the Great Pyramid.' Lara remarked. 'He was looking for underground tunnels, but couldn't find any. He and other Egyptologists had reason to believe that there were hidden tunnels and chambers under the pyramids. He told me and Noah that some ancient texts hinted that these tunnels existed and there were even pictures and diagrams of them. The money he was given to do the digging ran out, so he had to stop. That's when he found the Sacred Powder of Gold stuff. He's supposed to give a press conference about it, but someone is trying to put a stop to it because they want to ask Dad and the workers more questions about it all.'

Ali Mehmet stared down at Lara rather seriously now. 'The chambers right underneath the Great Pyramid...my story say that long ago they used by the ancient priests and priestesses who have many kinds of terrible experiences so they can prove they have the power to get from here to...to where was it now?' Ali Mehmet ruffled his unruly grey hair as he searched his memory. 'Well, it was somewhere that is better... anyhow, they fight with demons and find their way through tunnelled mazes where some of them die from horrible deaths'.

Lara looked aghast at Ali Mehmet. 'Don't tell me all this tunnel stuff is going to end up a true horror story?'

'Who knows?' Ali Mehmet shrugged. 'Let's see what happen. Let us follow them in.'



Bent double in the Great Pyramid, the group who included scientists and people of the Egyptian museum climbed the narrow passages of the ascending corridor, ahead of Noah, Lara and Ali Mehmet. Huddled over, the back of her head brushing the roof of the narrow tunnel, Lara remembered running up and down here easily in the years when she and Noah were so much smaller. Then, the Great Pyramid had just been a playground of enormous fun, with both of them being allowed to roam around as their Dad did their research and Mum kept an eye on them in the background. Now, however, she sensed the trickery and deception of the place. Something wasn't right here; these long passageways and odd chambers all hid something and sometimes she wondered if there weren't invisible people here... She shrieked as Noah snuck up behind her and bit into her shoulder. Ali Mehmet hooted as Noah, back bent over and hands dragging on the ground, opened his eyes wide and hung out his tongue, pretending he was the walking dead. Lara had a fit of hysterics as he hung onto her body and chomped at her, doing as he'd done a thousand times before. She never tired of Noah's juvenile pranks, even if he did repeat them over and over. After her laughter had subsided, Noah reminded her and Ali Mehmet that they'd been warned by Dad to hang back. 'We'd better keep out of their way,' he said in a sinister voice, his teeth bared and looking quite scary, 'old Scabby King Tut might put a spell on us.'

'Scabby King Tut?' Ali Mehmet asked, 'Who are you talking about Noah?' Ali Mehmet practically crouched in this small space, his long legs comically sticking out to the sides as he nimbly shuffled after the youngsters.

‘Didn’t either of you see the wrinkled old prune with the gargantuan yellow teeth? He looked like the undead just excavated from one of Dad’s stinky tombs. I swear he smelt like rotting dead leaves. I had a mind to offer him some of my deodorant.’

Ali Mehmet didn’t have a clue.

‘Now that you *mention* it,’ Lara chimed, ‘there *was* a strange looking man in grey trousers. He was part of the group, but sort of lagged behind, not saying very much. He seemed kind of weird, ancient but not *old*, if you know what I mean.’

‘I *never* know what you mean,’ Noah chirped. ‘What? What’s up?’ Noah peered at Lara who was now clutching at her ears.

‘My ears are ringing...shush.’ She rubbed at them as a voice she just about recognised said, *He’s ancient, a Custodian of the Portal. Watch out for him. Be very careful.*

Lara felt cold and her skin raised up with goose-bumps. She swiftly broke away from Noah and Ali Mehmet and started walking as quickly as any person hunched in such a small space possibly could. She wanted to catch up with the group again, who were now way ahead up the tunnel. They were nearly at the entrance to the Grand Gallery, a rather magnificent structure in which they could all stand normally. With Ali Mehmet lagging behind, Noah caught up with Lara and pulled at her bowed shoulder. ‘What’s going on? What’s in your head?’ He knew his sister well. She was the weird one alright, and he’d had some adventures in the past with her invisible friends. He wasn’t always sure what was real and what wasn’t, but it had all been good fun. He’d gone along with her because she could be entertaining when she was being crazy. Now, although he was no longer in touch with her spooky world, he knew she’d picked up on something and he wasn’t going to miss out on it, crazy or not. ‘What’s going on?’ he nagged, ‘Is it Old King Tut?’

‘Sshh, Noah,’ Lara replied irritably, ‘I want to get a closer look at this strange man’.

‘Why? What did you hear? I swear you’ll get nightmares looking at him. It’s better than the movies.’

Lara slowed down. Noah was tiresome when he was bored, but she was thankful for his company now.

‘I need to catch up with them, Noah. We’ll hang back so they don’t see us. Let’s talk later.’

‘Cool,’ Noah replied grinning, ‘It’s about time things lightened up in Ancientville.’

The three of them crouched at the entrance to the Grand Gallery, huddled back in the narrow tunnel so they wouldn’t be seen. The group were further up in the Gallery talking in hushed tones. They were arguing, and sometimes Dad’s voice could be heard as his temper rose. Lara didn’t know what they were doing up here. The discovery had been made in the basement, yet some of the group had insisted on a tour through all the chambers and tunnels. Whoever these people were, they were examining something, though Lara couldn’t imagine what.

She caught sight of the strange-looking man, ‘King Tut’. He lingered behind the others, looking at the walls...was he sniffing at them? Lara shook her head...no, couldn’t be...it was as if he was trying to find something...He also appeared to stare intensely at her father from time to time...was he trying to read his mind...Lara shook her head again. What *was* the matter with her? Her mother was right. Her imagination was a little wild sometimes...Poor man, just because he looks a little odd doesn’t mean... Just then, something bizarre happened. The man’s face started to move, as if it had suddenly collapsed into waves of greenish energy. His facial features were still visible, but they moved...in fact, his whole body started to wobble slightly. Lara turned to Noah, whose mouth was literally hanging open. Ali Mehmet didn’t move a muscle. The boy and the old man were frozen to the spot, terrified to move. Their eyes glued to the strange man, all three watched as he reached into his pocket and took something out. It was a small metallic flask. He opened it deftly and quickly poured whatever was in it into his mouth. As suddenly as it had started, the movement in his face and body stopped. He became...solid...again. Not one of the other adults had noticed a thing. In fact, they’d started moving towards the furthest opening to the King’s Chamber. The man lagged behind as the others stooped to get through the narrow entryway. The last in line, he bent over, and then suddenly stopped in mid-air. He raised his body slowly and turned his head little by little until it had completely swivelled on his neck. His eyes searched in their direction, and Lara, Noah and Ali Mehmet hardly breathed for fear that he might sense them. He sniffed again and an

awful, evil smile twisted his face. He turned his neck back, and exited the Grand Gallery. The three friends stayed fixed to the spot for what seemed a very, *very* long time.



CHAPTER 2: THE SECRETS OF THE GREAT LEGACY

As she drifted into sleep, Lara felt the familiar warmth of the black void travelling at great speed towards her like a giant spider's web. Hurling towards the bliss of deep sleep, she heard Sister Abigail's voice calling. *Lara! Don't sleep! Come to me.* Lara found herself standing in the hot sun of the Australian Outback, looking at a group of kids huddled over a giant crystal that jutted from the ground. Lara was familiar with the Crystal Oracle, a rather strange yet exciting rock that Sister Abigail explained was linked up with many crystals in Lara's world. Sister Abigail stood amongst her friends, her large brown eyes sparkling with excitement as she greeted Lara.

You took your time sleepy head! We've been waiting on you a while now! Her hair looked wilder than ever; dangling strands of twisted black ringlets bouncing from her head from every possible angle. Beaming at Lara, her large lips revealed a vast array of glistening white teeth and her shiny black skin, resting over a heavy-set bone structure, crumpled into a zillion folds and creases. She'd told Lara once she was as old as time itself, yet her body was as agile as a young girl's, and her mind as sharp as a whip. *I know,* Lara said as she shaded her eyes against the bright sunlight. Her eyes were trying to adjust from the darkness of sleep and she was eager to see the other children more clearly. *You have to tell me what's going on, Sister Abigail. I know you've been trying to warn me about something since we left for Egypt, and stuff is happening that I need to tell you about.*

Laughing, Sister Abigail put her hands up as if to stop Lara in her tracks. *Steady on, little sister! We've a lot to talk about and besides, we're going to see the Master's of Time. They'll explain everything.*

A young boy with red hair and a rather freckled nose and who looked to Lara to be about eleven or twelve, stepped out of the crowd of kids who were all now peering at Lara. He stared pointedly at Sister Abigail. *Is this the girl who's going to....?*

Sister Abigail interrupted the boy, frowning a deep crease into her brow. *Bertie! Hold up now! What's with you lot today...Doesn't anybody say hello anymore?* She turned to the other kids and swept her arm theatrically towards Lara, bowing as she did so. *Children, this is Lara, who, just like you, visits me in the dreamtime. Like some of my visitors, she comes here as she dozes off to sleep. She hasn't yet learned to dream while she's fully awake.*

Lara greeted these children who surrounded Sister Abigail. She was fascinated by their presence. She knew Sister Abigail had many friends, but this was the first time Lara had met any of them. She normally met with Sister Abigail on her own and she learned lots of interesting things from the old lady. Mostly though, she heard Sister Abigail in her ear when she wanted Lara to know something important. And if Lara were honest, even though it felt as real as anything else in her life, until this moment she had sometimes wondered if the Dreamtime really *did* exist.

A tall blonde girl with one thick golden plait of hair falling down her back stepped forward and grabbed Lara's arm. *It's so exciting to meet you. Sister Abigail has told us all that a big adventure is starting and that you're part of it. And how wonderful to be meeting the Master's of Time!*

The thrill of anticipation ran through Lara's body, and she wondered what the adventure could possibly be. She turned to the old lady. *Sister Abigail, what exactly is the Dreamtime? It's not the same as the sleeping Dreamtime, is it? I'm not dreaming in a sleeping sense?*

No, absolutely not. The Dreamtime is the place that we travel to with the mind. To be here, you have to dream and to dream you have to use your imagination. You can dream while you sleep and dream while you are awake. Katie here, finds her way to me while she's awake.

Yes, Katie piped up, letting go of Lara's arm. *I just sit still and imagine I am with Sister Abigail. I've got a very good imagination. I really focus on her face and then I find myself here.*

Lara had a pressing question to put to Sister Abigail. *Why, Sister Abigail, doesn't everybody have this experience? My parents, for instance, think I'm a little crazy when I talk about you.*

Sister Abigail laughed. *Your parents? They think you're crazy? That's just so funny! You're parents and Noah were once as crazy as you! They all used to talk to me! A long time ago that is. When they were young.*

Lara's mouth hung open.

You'll catch flies that way! Sister Abigail laughed heartily. *Many children have these kinds of experiences, but as they get older, they learn not to believe in themselves. Then all the fun stops.*

Lara let out a low whistle. Her *mother* knew Sister Abigail? This was big news.

Yes, Sister Abigail said gravely. They knew me once, and they'll meet up with me again. They're going to have to remember. Something big is going on but it is not for me to speak of all the details yet. All I can tell you is that you are going to undergo a test of your personal power which means you are going to have to have faith in yourself. I will help you with that. And not only you will undergo this test, but others will too. It is for the Masters of Time to explain things to you. Now we have to find our way to them, using Dreamtime power. Remember, you can use this power at any time in your own life. You just have to believe. Do you remember the songs I taught you last time you were here?

'Yes! Can we sing them now?' Lara was jumping up and down with excitement. The other children laughed at the sight of her. She'd learned these sacred songs over and over with Sister Abigail, but hadn't been allowed to sing them until their purpose was ready to be activated.

Yes, kangaroo girl. Now stop jumping and listen carefully.

Sister Abigail explained once again to Lara and to some of the other children who'd never learned them before, the purpose of the songs. There were six that Lara had learned, and all had to be sung in the right order. She had to keep the exact beat she was taught, and allow the tones of the music to direct where she walked. She was not allowed to **think** about where she was walking. The music would gently push them to the sacred doorway of the Masters of Time.

Let's begin by becoming very quiet on the inside, Sister Abigail said to Lara. *Let's be still and focus on nothing else but the task of journeying to the sacred doorway.*

The two of them sat quietly for a few minutes before Sister Abigail began to hum. Lara followed. Soon, they were singing their songs in perfect harmony, allowing the musical tones to move the atoms of the body, to give them their direction. Lara's eyes closed as she allowed the music to take over her mind and she felt her body pulse to the natural rhythms of the world. She was part of it all, she felt no control over anything or any control over her. She and the world were one, together, moving each other, making way for each other. As the song sequence ended, Lara opened her eyes. She felt as if she'd emerged from a deep sleep. She was refreshed, alive. The other children were nowhere in sight. Ah, Lara thought, they'd shifted *dimensions*. While staying in one spot, they'd moved from one world right into another kind. As she looked around, Lara and Sister Abigail stood before a large rock. There wasn't anything much else in sight, except some spiky-looking grass and a few odd bushes. The landscape was completely different to their meeting place. Here it was drier, quieter.

Where's the doorway, Sister Abigail?

What, you can't see it? Sister Abigail teased, looking at the empty space around them. She went and stood by the rock. *Come here, Lara,* Sister Abigail beckoned. *I'm going to teach you some words that you have to repeat six times over. But you have to lay your hands on this rock for them to have any meaning or purpose. The rock will hear your message and assist you in journeying to the Masters of Time. Now, start memorising.*

OH SACRED BEING WHO PERCEIVES ALL LIFE, ALL THOUGHT, THROUGH EVERY DIMENSION,
TRANSPORT ME TO THE GREAT MASTERS WHO RECOGNISE MY SPIRIT,
WHO SEE BEYOND MY LIMITATION TO THE GREAT SOUL THAT IS I AND ALL ELSE.
TAKE ME THERE THAT I MIGHT KNOW MY CHALLENGE, THAT I MIGHT PREPARE TO CLAIM MY POWER.
TAKE ME TO THE CENTRE OF ALL LIFE, WHERE I BEGIN AND WHERE I END AND WHERE I ENDURE.



Noah peered through the half-open door of his mother's hotel room. Mum sat on the shaded balcony of her hotel room, lost in thought, her mind anxious and questioning. The situation felt as if it were upside down and inside out; this whole trip was getting to be one big disaster. And the worst thing about it was that neither she nor Nick could figure it all out. One minute everything was okay; yet now they were

practically under interrogation with the same stupid questions being asked over and over again. Not that there was anything to *hide*. Nick had found the Sacred White Powder of Gold, she'd got it all tested, and that was that! Yet everyone was making it all sound messy and complicated. All poor Nick wanted was to tell the world through the press conference. All the big universities with lots of money would be terribly impressed with him for finding it. They'd offer him money to find out more about what the powder could do, and they'd all be happy. She still couldn't work out what the problem was. She let out a huge frustrated *Harrumph!!!* She jumped as a voice cut into her world of disturbed thoughts. 'Someone's in a tizzy!' She turned to find Noah standing behind her. He looked sunburned.

'Hello Noah, you startled me. Why aren't you down at the pool? Where's Lara?'

'Well, Lara's still down there, trying to get a fashionable lobster red tan, I think. *I'm* taking a break from oven temperatures. I thought I'd take some of the artificial air of the hotel rooms into my lungs instead of scorching them to death out there. My room's boring. I came to see what you were up to. There're a few nice girls out there, but hey, I'll let them miss me for a while.'

Melissa smiled at her son. He was so full of himself these days; she and Nick couldn't help but laugh at him. He reminded her of her own teenage years when she'd been just as overconfident and cheeky.

'So,' he stated enquiringly, slumping into the seat opposite hers, 'what's going on? When's the press conference taking place?'

'It's supposed to take place in the next three days. The way things are going we'll be on a plane back home before that happens.'

'So what *is* the big problem?'

'I really don't know. Nobody's saying. Dad and I don't know what's being covered up.'

'It's the Sacred White Powder of Gold that's the problem, then, isn't it? I thought you'd tested it to see if it was real.'

'Yes. It *is* the real stuff. That's not an issue here. All the scientific research papers are in order. And we received clearance from the Egyptian authorities to take it out of the country, test it and release it to the press.'

'So it must be powerful stuff then. Perhaps they've found out what it can do and don't want ordinary people knowing about it. They'll use it to make spaceships or something. Probably the CIA have found out about it and want to make weapons of mass alien destruction.'

'Don't be silly. *We* don't even know what it can do, and we're scientists. I just tested it to see if it is actually the Sacred White Powder of Gold, as the ancient texts said it was. And it is. We've got some idea that it can be used in the laboratory for certain experiments, but beyond that, we don't know yet what it can do. We don't know if it is as *magical* as they say it is. Funding from wealthy universities will help us with that information.'

'Texts? Magical? What are you talking about? *Elaborate* please.' Noah relaxed back with his hands behind his head.

'Dad found some scrolls next to the jars of powder. The scrolls also called the powder *The Great Legacy*, because it is *supposed* to be a gift from the Gods. The scrolls themselves were ancient manuscripts belonging to the High Priests of Heliopolis. These scrolls described how one should prepare this substance through special processes. It's not easy to make it, and it takes time. But they did do it. Not everybody had knowledge of it. They kept it strictly to the Heliopolitan Priesthood and used it only in the temples because it was supposed to have spectacular properties that made them physically experience unbelievable things.'

'What?' Noah sat up, intrigued by this. The girls by the pool could wait a bit longer. This was a fascinating story.

'That's just the stuff of legend,' Melissa said airily, 'its not *true*. Most probably it had medicinal properties that were exaggerated.'

'Tell me then,' Noah said raising his eyes dramatically, 'what did the *legends* suggest, Mrs Sceptical Scientist?'

'Well, according to old scrolls, not only found in Egypt, but in Mesopotamia and other ancient sites, the Sacred White Powder of Gold was supposedly a substance that when swallowed with water could change the way the atoms of your body worked. What this means is you become able to shape-shift, that is, change your shape. You can apparently shift dimensions, move from this one to other dimensions of

existence. You can walk through walls, walk on water. You name it, according to the texts, you can do it.'

'Cool stuff!' Noah was mesmerised. 'Why didn't they share this with everyone else? Why were the Priests so special?'

'Well, according to the literature, it is a substance that has to be used carefully because it works with the human thought system. It responds to the way that you think. If you are a positive person, for example, your experiences are likely to be really wonderful. If you are very negative, you might end up on dimensions that scare you out of your wits. The people of the temples were highly trained in that they first had to develop very focussed minds so they wouldn't think bad thoughts by accident. Anyway, that's how the literature goes. Like I said, it sounds like the stuff of legend. What we *do* know is that it has some good scientific properties that can be used in different areas of technology, so we do want to explore it further.'

'Where did you say Dad found it?'

'In the Subterranean Chamber of the Great Pyramid. Why?'

'And what was it he was looking for originally?'

'The supposed underground chambers. You already know all of this.'

'Yes, but why do you say *supposed*.'

'Because it *is* supposed. Nobody knows for sure if they are there. Dad and the others studied a lot of texts and ancient drawings. They suggested that the tunnels really did exist. As you know, after all their hard work they didn't find any additional entrances or passageways, anyway.'

'But the tunnels were supposed to be used by the Priests, Priestesses and temple students... *initiates*... as a sort of test to find power, didn't Dad say?'

'Yes, but...'

'Yes, so if the powder was found right there, couldn't it have been used to get in? What I mean is, perhaps the properties are actually real, and they used the stuff to enter into the passageways? Perhaps there is no physical door as such.'

'Noah,' Melissa smiled, '*that* is the most ridiculous theory I have ever come across. You're beginning to sound like your sister.'

Melissa got up from her seat and ironed out the creases in her shorts with her now sweaty hands. The sun was still high in the sky and the heat intense. What Noah had said had disturbed her. She wanted to escape before he influenced her already questioning mind with Lara-type theories. She wanted to keep her scientific thoughts in a nice straight line. No magic. No disappearing acts. No walking on water. Just science, if you please.

'Before you go, I've just had a thought.' Noah knew he'd ruffled his mother's feathers and was enjoying his power over her immensely. She looked down at him, frightfully nervous and barely breathing.

'What if somebody left the Sacred White Powder right there for Dad because he couldn't find any entrance? What if someone somewhere, or should I say someone *some-dimension*, materialised it so he could use it to walk through the walls? Do the maths, Mum, you're a scientist. Dad's looking for the testing grounds of the temple initiates. Spiritual texts tell him exactly where to find it. He doesn't find it. Instead, he practically falls over a heap of Sacred White Powder of Gold that wasn't there before. And just in case he's forgotten all the other stuff he's read about the powder, he finds next to the jars recipes and information about its properties. He can use it to walk through walls. Or shape-shift. Or whatever it is he needs to do to get through to this world beneath the Great Pyramid. Come on Mum. Get with the programme. All the facts are there. Someone doesn't want Dad, or anyone else for that matter, to know about this White Powder stuff or the underground tunnels. Someone doesn't want Dad to find the invisible doorway. Who knows what it might reveal?'



Noah's imagination had been thoroughly hijacked by the information his mother had shared with him. He thought of the freaky scene he, Lara and Ali Mehmet had witnessed in the pyramid. That grotesque man had, at first, been hugely suspicious in his behaviour, hanging back from the group and peering at the limestone walls. They had been standing there for *centuries* on end. He must have looked at the same

boring gigantic bricks a zillion times at least. He was looking for something that couldn't be seen with the naked eye. Then he'd begun to...*shape-shift*...his mother had used that word. After drinking some stuff, he'd gone back to normal, but he'd still been able to twist his revolting neck right round like some lizard...and he'd stared in their direction. He had sensed them, all right. Noah just *knew*.

Yup. Something funny was going on. He'd have to find Lara and have a talk with her. She'd been asleep under her brolly by the pool last time he saw her. He'd go down and wake her up.

On his way to the pool, Noah decided he'd first seek out his father. If he could just find out who 'King Tut' really was, he and Lara might be able to do some detective work on this whole messy affair. It would be cool if he turned out to have the answer to all his parents prayers...yeah, well, fat chance...but it was worth a good try. If nothing else came of it all, he'd have a ball with Lara and he might not regret yet another stupid trip to Egypt.



Lara felt a bit dizzy, but soon came to her senses when she realised where she was. The domed building was too immense even for words. In fact, words couldn't really describe the place itself. She knew it was crystalline because the walls spoke to her...her feelings were so strong...she could understand everything around her...everything communicated somehow...she just knew things. Lara saw a row of chairs in the distance, and above one of them bobbed a set of wiry black ringlets. Sister Abigail had already arrived. She moved towards the seating area, and Sister Abigail stood up to meet her. *There you are! I'd practically given up on you! I was ready to pop off home again! Heaven knows what this lot must think!* Sister Abigail winked at Lara as seven huge figures suddenly appeared in the chairs opposite the row Sister Abigail had been sitting in. Their unbelievable size matched the space of the building, yet Lara didn't feel small or afraid. In fact, she felt the same way that she did when she snuggled up close to her mother or father. She felt warm and loved and very safe.

Sit down, Sister Abigail whispered to Lara with a smile. Seated, the two of them sat in silence. The Masters wore simple light blue robes. They weren't made of a material she recognised. If she were forced to describe these garments, she'd say they were robes of blue light. She couldn't really tell about their hair either because they wore a kind of halo of light around their faces and shoulders. Very gentle blue light shone from eyes of such depth that looking into them made Lara feel light headed. One of the Masters spoke.

Lara, came a powerful, yet gentle voice. Lara looked at this being without speaking. *Lara, our Great Sister has brought you here so that you may have some knowledge of the events that will come to pass. We are here to tell you of the challenges you and your family are to face, and what those challenges mean. What we cannot tell you is how it will end, as the challenge is for you to create the outcome that you wish for.*

Lara stared at the Masters and still didn't say a thing. Sister Abigail leaned over at her and poked her in the ribs. Lara took a breath and asked, *Challenges?*

Yes. It is time for the Horus-Taskers to awaken. You are a Horus-Tasker and so are the members of your family.

A Horus-Tasker? Lara looked at Sister Abigail questioningly.

What, you're a parrot now? Sister Abigail grinned. *Are you going to echo everything they say?*

Horus-Taskers belong beyond time, the Master explained. *They are people who are related to great beings who belong beyond time. They are human beings with a special genetic code that activates at a certain time.*

Special genet...? Lara shot a glance at Sister Abigail...*Sorry, great Master, I don't know what you mean by special genetic code.*

Every human being has DNA. DNA is called the building block of the human life form. The human DNA decides if you are tall or short, fat or thin, have blue eyes or brown eyes. It decides what kind of person you are, and how you react to things. DNA is in every cell of your body.

Lara interrupted. *I know. We learnt about it at school. It decides whether we look like our parents or not. The Master continued. It decides all that and so much more that human scientists have not yet discovered. Horus-Taskers naturally have human DNA, or they couldn't be human. But they also have a little strand of DNA that ordinary human beings do **not** have. This bit of DNA is like a computer chip that contains information about who they are and where they are from. Through this chip they are able to remember the truth about their beginnings... and more importantly they remember their power. Their power?* Lara squirmed in her chair. She was parroting again. The Masters didn't seem to mind. *Human beings have no idea how powerful they are. The reason for this forgetfulness, you will find out later, when you begin fulfilling the Prophecy of Osiris.*

Lara scratched her head and the Masters smiled kindly down upon her. They instructed Lara to listen very carefully as they explained to her the story of the Prophecy of Osiris, and the task of finding the 12 Keys of Amenti. By the time they had finished, her heart was beating wildly. The adventure she had expected was about to begin and she was scared...and...to be honest, secretly delighted at the same time.



Noah had to shake Lara out of her stupor. He'd called her name three times to wake her up, but she hadn't stirred. 'For heaven's sake, Lara, have you got *sunstroke* or something?' Lara blinked and looked around her, trying to shade her eyes from the invading sun's rays. She felt a bit groggy, having been so deeply asleep...no...not asleep... with the Masters... Lara looked up at Noah. 'What? What's up?'

'Come on, let's go. We're going to go to the Great Pyramid.'

She rubbed her eyes trying to get a hold of herself. She felt strange being back here. Her body was heavier, somehow. 'What, now? On our own?'

'Dad's up at the hotel. He's still fighting it out with whoever's in charge of this whole thing. Mum's stressing because she can't scientifically join the dots. She looks like she's got mad cow disease. All sort of wide-eyed and frothy.'

'What are you talking about Noah?' Lara sat up on her sun bed. Her head was clearing quickly, thank goodness. These days, she seemed to spend all her sleeping hours on adventures with Sister Abigail. She never felt tired though, something that she was thankful for.

'I'll explain on the way. Get dressed. We're going to find a way into the Great Pyramid. Old King Tut's up there with some of his buddies, apparently. I've been and asked Dad about him. He's supposed to be one of the top honchos of the Antiquities Committee. Sort of on the board or something. They give permission for people to dig around, and they snoop about to make sure archaeologists don't stuff the things they find up their shirts and run off with them. The ugly mug's got a name. Abdul Bakr. I prefer King Tut, personally.'

'I'm not going there!' Lara looked wide-eyed and frightened. 'Not after what we saw, Noah! Anyway, what do you want to go there for? We'll get into serious trouble! We can only go in with Mum and Dad. The place is closed down. And besides, I don't fancy having King Tut eat us for lunch!'

'It's probably almost tea time now, anyway, not that the flipping sun would have any respect!' Noah looked into the sky and shook his fist at the hot ball of fire that made them sweaty and uncomfortable.

'Listen,' Noah went on, 'there's a huge thing going on and it's all a bit dodgy if you ask me. There's skulduggery happening and all sorts of people are trying to stop Dad from revealing his find. This find is special, it's meaningful to human beings and the boring old archaeological fogies have only just discovered its value. Now they're trying to stop it from coming out into the open. Old King Tut's got something to do with trying to get in the way of revealing it. I'm pretty sure of that.'

'Where did you get all this from?' Lara was impressed with Noah's interest in this problem. She was beginning to make links with something the Masters of Time had said. She'd have to remember...Noah hadn't given her time to recall everything she'd experienced. She usually needed some time to think on things she experienced in Dreamtime, time to bring the understanding of it all into her waking world. She sat for a moment, massaging her temples. Noah looked at her questioningly...he'd seen her do this before, of course. He knew of her episodes in the dream worlds, and usually she rubbed her head when she was remembering things, when she was making connections... Now, he wondered what exactly it

was that she was trying to remember...Lara hurriedly tried to recollect things. It came back in spurts of information. *Horus-Taskers*...? The spurts became floods and suddenly it was all there. She remembered. Was all that Noah was saying related to what she had learned with the Masters of Time? Probably. She'd better just go ahead and find out...even if it did scare her half to death.

'Come on then, let's go. I'll have to get dressed first, and you can explain the rest on the way. I've a few things to tell you too, if we get the time. You've got some funny DNA. You're a Horus-Tasker.'

'Say what?' Noah exclaimed, following Lara to the changing rooms. The expression on his face was a picture and Lara laughed. 'Don't worry about it,' she said giggling. 'You'll find out sooner or later.' Noah shrugged as she disappeared into a cubicle to get dressed.



As they approached the Great Pyramid, Lara and Noah slowed down. There was no way they could sneak past the guards. This lot weren't the usual bunch; they were a newer crew, probably standing in for the day while the old-timers took some time off. 'King Tut's' group had already gone in. The entrance was open, but a little further away was a metal road guard that said 'No Entry' on it. The big sign mentioning repairs still loomed high and mighty. Lara and Noah ambled over towards the guards, but were told to stop by one of them.

'The place is closed. Don't you see the sign? You cannot come in today.'

'Yes, we know,' Noah answered, 'but our father is an archaeologist here. We came yesterday with the Museum group. We left something in there. A satchel. We just want to run in quickly to fetch it.'

Lara looked at Noah uncertainly. What kind of excuse was that? No one just *ran in quickly* to the Great Pyramid! The guards didn't seem to notice the ridiculous reason, but they weren't going to let them in either.

'You can't go in!' the same guard exclaimed, 'we don't know your father! We must have official authorisation to let you in when it is closed for repairs. It is dangerous to go in when they are fixing things. Come on kids, go back to your parents!'

Just then Ali Mehmet came into view. He was a distance from them, but Lara could make out his form. He was coming in for the evening shift.

'Noah look! It's Ali Mehmet! He might be of some help.' Lara lowered her voice to a whisper, 'Only don't mention what we're here for. After what we all saw yesterday, I don't think he'll let us go in. He's likely to worry that we won't be safe.'

Without any further ado, both Noah and Lara started racing off to meet their old friend. He laughed as they approached him.

'Hey kids! How are you? I have no sweets for you! Shame on me! You surprise me! Where is Baba? Building closed today!'

'Ali Mehmet,' Noah said breathlessly. 'Dad's not here. He's at the hotel. Yesterday when we were with you, we left a satchel in there. It's in the Subterranean Chamber. Our mobiles are in there. Mum and Dad will kill us for sure if we don't get them! They don't know we are here. Please let us go in. The other guards won't let us!'

'Wait, wait!' Ali Mehmet cried. 'You left your satchel?' Ali Mehmet looked directly at Lara, who found it difficult to lie. She averted her eyes quickly. Noah answered for her.

'Our mobile phones are in there. They're brand new! Our parents will positively murder us if we don't get them! Our lives are in your hands Ali Mehmet!'

Ali Mehmet still kept his gaze on Lara.

'Mobiles phones? You leave your mobiles phones?' he looked into her eyes for an answer. He was suspicious and she knew it. 'What you really want, hey kids? You must not go there. It dangerous! You saw what happen yesterday...something going on. But I don't know what. No. You don't go there.'

'We just need to get in there, Ali Mehmet,' was all Lara could say. 'We won't hang around. We'll get our stuff and come back out.'

'Come. Walk with me,' Ali Mehmet said. He nodded in the direction of the Great Pyramid. 'Who is here today? Your Baba busy in hotel now.'

‘Just a group of the museum people,’ Noah replied. ‘We kind of know them. We won’t bother them, we promise, don’t we Lara?’ Noah nudged her in the ribs.

‘We won’t bother them, we promise Ali Mehmet. We’ll try to be quick.’

‘Mmm...’ Ali Mehmet pondered as they approached the other guards. He said something to them in Arabic. They held a conversation that neither Lara nor Noah understood. They appeared to be arguing at one point, the other guards gesturing towards the pyramid while Ali Mehmet shrugged his shoulders and pointed at Lara and Noah. Finally, Ali Mehmet said, ‘It’s okay. Go in...’

‘Thanks Ali Mehmet!’ both Lara and Noah cried in unison.

‘Wait...you must quickly go. These men worried because the important man tell them no people to go inside. Not any people at all. Very strict man, they say. I tell them your Baba important man.’

They ran to the entrance, and as they went in, Lara turned to look at Ali Mehmet. She looked directly into his eyes. He stared at her, transfixed for a moment...he felt strange as a flash of light dizzied him ... he remembered something... the Prophecy.... This one? *This* girl? Lara? No! No! The Prophecy of Osiris! It was happening! The children! They mustn’t go in there! The old man’s knees gave way as she turned her back and walked in...

Something wasn’t right. Lara and Noah had been into this place a zillion times and it had never felt like this. They were feeling peculiar. Light-headed...as if they were coming apart...They could hear a low hum, as if there were a machine running. It didn’t seem to come from any direction. It was just *around* them, *part* of them somehow. It came from *within* them as well as without. It was...well it was *everywhere*...Lara and Noah kept moving, but neither quite knew where they were going. They’d started off heading down the narrow tunnel towards the Subterranean Chamber at the base of the pyramid. Lara had known that was where ‘King Tut’s’ group were headed. She seemed to remember stuff that the Masters had told her. She remembered, not in the ordinary way, but by just *feeling* things. And she’d *felt* the group were at the base. They were up to something. Now, though, she couldn’t think straight. The hum was lulling her mind, making it calmer, unable to think normally...she couldn’t string thoughts together... she... she...?



The guards watched aghast as Noah tumbled out of the entrance and fell to the floor. Hours later, he awoke in a hospital bed to the piercing gaze of his mother. ‘Noah!!’ she cried. She looked frantic. Her red, bloodshot eyes searched his. ‘Noah! What happened? She’s gone! Where’s Lara?’

Noah tried to make sense of the look on his mother’s face and her desperate questions. Slowly it dawned on him. The pyramid! She was in the pyramid! They didn’t know!

‘She’s in the pyramid! The Great Pyramid! We went in there!’ His mother shook her head. She sobbed before answering. ‘She’s not there, Noah. We’ve searched everywhere! Where did you both go? What happened? Oh please tell us! Remember Noah, *please!*’

Noah lay in his bed struck dumb with terror. What *had* happened? He didn’t know, did he? He didn’t have an answer for anyone. He looked around the room. There were so many faces.... his father...his mother...the nurses...Hassan...Ali Mehmet...the other guards...and...and...’King Tut.’

CHAPTER 3: THE MYSTERIES OF THE GREAT PYRAMID

The Custodians faced Seth. Even though they had good news, they still didn't trust him. He looked back at them. 'SO?' he bellowed. Grimacing against the echo the large room threw out, the Chief Aide stood to answer. Did this man Seth not *ever* talk normally? He bowed before speaking.

'Sir, Your Grace,' the Chief Aide said. 'Rainford has been sidetracked for now. His attention is elsewhere. That buys us time to get hold of the Sacred Powder and find out where it came from. And there's something else...'

'YOU MEAN YOU STILL DON'T KNOW? WHAT THE...?'

'Your Grace,' the Chief Aide interrupted quickly, 'we do have some information but not all that we need. We have the girl.'

'The GIRL? What GIRL?'

'Rainford's daughter, Your Grace. We caught her prying in the basement chamber. She knows who we are.'

'WHAT...What do you mean? *HOW* does she know us...Did you INTERROGATE her?'

'Yes Sir. She just said the Seven Sages told her. The Masters of Time.'

Seth dropped to his chair. He was flabbergasted. *The Masters of Time? The Masters of Time?* What? He thought...but no dumb human could know of *them*...

'Sir,' the Chief Aide said. 'It turns out that the Seven Sages...the Masters of Time are back...working to remind human beings of their power. They have been working amongst us for a while. They have a way to get in here, to get into this world.'

'HOW? ALL THE PORTALS ARE CLOSED!' Seth's ears began to leak wisps of black smoke. This had to be a rude joke, a nightmare that had got out of hand. All he had wanted to know was how the Sacred Powder got here. He'd assumed it was an accident, one of those dimensional things...sometimes freak dimensional shifts took place and secrets were revealed...but now it was escalating into something else entirely! Now the whole problem included the Masters of Time and their own entry into HIS world! And reminding human beings of their *power*? This was terrible! Despicable! DANGEROUS! What was happening? How did all this happen?

'Sir,' the Chief Aide said slowly, 'the girl says that she and others are here to...to... fulfil the Prophecy of Osiris...' his voice trailed off...this was the part of the Rainford girl's story he was dreading to tell.

Seth looked stunned. For once he didn't say anything. He just stood there as if he'd been knocked senseless by a massive blow to his body.

'The Prophecy of Osiris?' Seth didn't raise his voice. It was as if he was unable to do so. His eyes, though, said it all. They became dark, distant...shadows seemed to pass through them, like black clouds over an empty landscape. Was that fear they saw...? No, it couldn't be...this was Seth standing before them, the Dark Lord of the Heavens. He was afraid of no mere mortal...right?

'But the Prophecy...that can't happen...it cannot *be*...no human knows...*How*...?' his voice trailed off... He paced slowly without saying anything. The others kept quiet, afraid to say something. They'd never experienced this before... Suddenly he stopped and put his head down. As he raised it, his eyes did something quite incredible. They bulged from his head and as he directed his gaze at the Chief Aide, they shot out bolts of such powerful electrical lightening, that the Aide fell to the floor, struck almost lifeless. The others gasped and sat rigid in their chairs as Seth continued to pace up and down, only this time far more quickly. The Chief Aide's face was starting to move. In fact, his whole body was vibrating...it was becoming a mass of green waves...his clothing fell to the floor in a heap around his shoes... the waves became a green mound of iridescent slime that slid along the floor making the most terrible hissing sound.

'Do something!' one of the other Aides called. Seth was oblivious to the commotion, his pacing adding to his trance-like state. A tall man stepped forward and took a flask out of his jacket pocket. He followed the green form and knelt down. He reached for the front of it and found the mouth opening. He dropped some of the liquid from the flask into it. Immediately, the Chief Aide's new form started to vibrate again,

waves of energy emanating from, and shifting around, the body. Moments later, he was back in human form, looking pale and frightened, but very much alive.

Seth still paced up and down as if nothing had happened. The Custodians looked at each other, not knowing quite what to do. Eventually an Aide spoke up.

‘Your Grace.’

Seth looked up.

‘What?’ he asked quizzically. The others shot glances at each other.

‘Your Grace, we have to discuss this affair. Please tell us what to do with the girl.’

‘Yes. The Girl. Mmmm...’ Seth strode to his chair and sat down. He tapped his fingers on the arms of his seat and began to hum. Finally, he asked questions to the air above him. ‘What to do? Yes, what to do?’ He was acting *very* strangely. Suddenly the Chief Aide, though still a bit shocked by his slimy ordeal, had an idea. He beckoned one of the men to come to him.

‘Give him a swig of the Tonic.’ He pointed to the man’s breast pocket of his grey suit. ‘He’s out of sorts. His brain waves are messed up. Give him some of the Tonic.’

The man took out his flask and walked over to Seth.

‘Sir, I feel you need a drink of this. It will do some good. Please.’

Seth looked at the flask and took it. He inspected it closely and smelt it. He had his own supply somewhere, so the others didn’t know what he was doing, but Seth did finally take a sip. Then another. And another. He closed his eyes, and the man took the flask out of his hands. Suddenly Seth leapt from his chair.

‘TALK TO ME!’ The others breathed a sigh of relief. The monster...their *master*, was back. They needed their leader. They wouldn’t know what to decide without him. He always knew what to do when things went wrong. Why, he’d got them to this dimension in the first place. He’d taken over and he ruled the world. Frightening as he was, at least he *decided* things. Got things *going*. They didn’t like to see him scared, with his brainwaves all mixed up like stew. Where would that leave them? Probably they’d become green slimy stew themselves and end up back where they’d started.

‘Sir,’ the Chief Aide started again. ‘You have to tell us what to do with the girl.’

Seth went quiet for a moment. This was the greatest disturbance to his body he’d ever experienced since he’d got to this place. This world belonged to him. It always had done. No human being was strong enough to beat him. Why, no stupid human could even know who he really was. Once every few centuries someone might find their way through the portals... but usually it was an accident, and anyway, the Dark Gatekeepers eventually got hold of them...This dim-witted race of people only cared about money and the glittery things that it could buy. They believed anything they were told. How could anyone know about the Custodians? It took POWER to know about them. Human beings had long given away their power to money and things. The human race was a slave race. HIS slave race. And so stupid were they, they didn’t even know they were slaves! The Dark Gatekeepers had usually caught whoever had found their way through the portals and they certainly had never got to know of Seth! How could anyone know about the Custodians? *How?*

‘The Prophecy of Osiris. Well, who would have thought it...’ Seth straightened himself up in his chair and took a breath. ‘Right’, he said, looking around the room at all the wary eyes, ‘we have to start figuring this one out. What happened, how did you get hold of her?’

‘She came to the Great Pyramid. Abdul Bakr was leading a group of us in the basement. He told the Antiquities Committee that he was going to inspect the site where Rainford found the Sacred Powder. He secretly got a group of our people together. They took in their generators so they could make a closer inspection.’

‘Their generators?’ Seth wrinkled his eyebrows.

‘Yes. They used the Doorway Generator to move through various dimensions. We thought perhaps the Sacred Powder was hidden in one of them.

‘Did you find anything?’

‘No. We went through as many dimensional doorways as we could, but as you know we couldn’t go through all. The frequencies were too high. We didn’t want to risk anything.’

‘Where is she? Where’s the Girl? Did she tell you how the Masters were getting in here?’

‘No. We’ve got her in the base of the pyramid. We’re using the generator. She’s off-dimension, so nobody will find her. We need to move her though. I don’t know why, but I think we need to put her somewhere a lot safer.’

‘We’ll send her through the Rainbow Portal to Rainbow’s End.’

‘But Sir...it’s dangerous! We must *not* allow her through there! Anything could happen!’

‘DON’T QUESTION ME! THEY’LL NEVER FIND HER THERE! THEY CAN’T EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE THAT SUCH A PLACE EXISTS! IF WE’RE LUCKY, THE DARK GATEKEEPERS WILL GO IN AND FETCH HER. IT’S THE BEST PLACE! AND I WANT TO SEE HER!’

The Custodians shot looks at one another that displayed real fear. The Chief Aide kept quiet. Perhaps their leader *did* know best. But if anything went wrong...if that place were to be discovered...it could mean the end of their race. The Custodians would be finished...forever.



Lara sat looking around her. She was in the Subterranean Chamber, on a platform of limestone rock. The light in here was unusual. Normally, the place was in blackness when it wasn’t lit up by a dim bulb. Now though, light seemed to come from the wall...from her... It was quiet, but she could hear and feel the hum vibrating throughout her body. They’d left Lara here for a while on her own. She knew that they didn’t know what to do with her. They’d gone to meet with their leader, whoever *that* was, and they’d be back.

She’d lost Noah. Lara remembered getting confused...it was the hum...she must have wandered down into the basement, while a dazed Noah did *his* own thing. Her knees looked a bit scratched and dirty. To get to this deep underground chamber, she’d had to bend over almost double to climb down the long corridor from the entrance to the Great Pyramid. Then, to get to the Subterranean Chamber, she’d had to crawl in the dark. Usually, she was careful to move in a way that didn’t damage her knees, but since she had been barely conscious when she’d made her way here.... The next thing she had known, the hum had stopped and she’d been surrounded by a whole group of men asking all sorts of questions. ‘King Tut’...Abdul Bakr...was amongst them. He’d asked lots of questions about how she knew about them. She hadn’t been sure that ‘King Tut’s’ lot were the same bunch of bad guys the Masters of Time had told her about until they had started asking weird questions. Now she knew. The adventures had begun.

She had told the men about the Seven Masters of Time. They’d looked shocked and had started wobbling...shape shifting...the same way ‘King Tut’ had done in the Grand Gallery. After a tot of their drink, they’d gone back to normal and had asked even more questions. Before they went, though, they’d tied her up and sat her in a chair that was on the rather uneven raised platform that ran along one side of the room. They’d switched something on, and as she watched them, they disappeared...into thin air! Also, the walls around her had changed colour. Well, they were the *same* colours, but more vibrant...brighter...more alive...*younger*?

The tone of the hum started to change slightly. She could feel it in her body...something was moving, all the cells of her body were moving, adjusting...every molecule tingled with the faint movement of electricity through her body.... then...then *they* were back. She felt the atmosphere had changed again with their arrival. The pyramid usually had a stale feel to it, ancient and idle, empty and discarded like an old paper bag. It possessed a power that stood still, unused, rather like a bomb hidden in the basement of a house...It felt like that now that the hum had stopped. But *before*, when the group had disappeared, it had felt different...there was life, excitement, *movement* here. Ahh...she got it...*they* hadn’t disappeared, *she* had! They’d used their equipment to shift her into a different dimension. It was the same pyramid, but a different...time frame? Or a different...a different *place*? She couldn’t get her head around it.

The group were standing before her, with a dark-haired man she’d never seen before. He glared at her; he was clearly angry and confused at the same time.

‘Lara Rainford.’ The dark-haired man declared. ‘Rainford. You Rainfords. You’re nothing but TROUBLE!’

Lara jumped in her chair. She cupped her ears and glowered at him. This man’s voice was *so* loud!

‘I can hear you quite well!’ she cried, ‘you don’t have to shout!’

‘I’ll speak the way I wish!’ Seth replied, annoyed by her insolence.

‘People only yell when they are frightened,’ Lara said. ‘If you’re not frightened, you don’t have to yell.’

Seth screwed up his eyes. ‘Frightened? Of you? I’m not frightened of ANYONE!’

‘So don’t yell then!’ Lara exclaimed. Seth looked at her. He wasn’t used to this. People were normally terrified of him. He hated kids...they were...well *horrible* creatures as far as he was concerned and this one wasn’t any better than the rest. She brought news that shocked him. He *was* scared...the Prophecy of Osiris was beginning to happen and he didn’t know how to stop it. He wasn’t *prepared*. To make things right he’d twist answers out of her if he had to, and he’d twist all right, twist and twist until he got what he wanted.

‘You’d better answer my questions, or else.’ Seth said to Lara, keeping his voice down. He wasn’t about to be polite or anything, but he also wasn’t going to get into arguments with this pipsqueak nuisance of a kid.

‘Why wouldn’t I? I’ve got nothing to hide. I’ll tell you anything you like as long as you don’t shout,’ Lara replied. Seth was flummoxed. He’d expected her to be...well, he hadn’t known *what* to expect really. He felt a bit disappointed. He liked being in charge, but he didn’t feel like he was the boss around this little squirt.

‘Well if I *do* shout, what then? I’ll have to twist the answers out of you then, won’t I?’

‘When people shout, I cry. And when I cry, I blubber and you’ll have to get tissues and I might even get hysterical. I just scream and you can’t do anything with me because I can’t think straight because my brains just seem to fry up....’

‘All right, all right! You don’t have to go on!’ Seth frowned. He’d better just get on with it. This one would argue all night and all day if he let her. ‘So tell me then, Lara Rainford, what do you know about us?’

‘Well...’ Lara bit her lip and looked skywards. She had to remember everything the Masters had told her.

‘Well, your people, your group of twelve are known as the Custodians of the Portals...you’re the...sort of...*boss*?’

Seth straightened up pompously, looking down his nose at Lara. ‘I’m in charge, yes!’

‘Hmmm...there are a number of portals, or doorways should I say, out of this Earth dimension, and you have locked them up.’ Seth shot looks at the others. He turned back to her glowering. ‘Go on,’ he said, trying to keep his voice even, ‘what else do you know?’

‘You are not from this world. You came from another place. We kind of know you as the people from the skies. You discovered our planet and have now settled here, though people don’t know anything about you. Ordinary people, that is... When you first got here, you didn’t look like us because you had completely different DNA. But you took strands of human DNA and put it together with yours and you now have human form. You’ve sort of got a problem, though...your own DNA doesn’t quite match up with human DNA. The atoms and molecules behave differently... and if you get upset about things you turn into green goo...’

‘Goo? We’re not goo!’ Seth was offended and looked to the others for support.

‘I don’t mean anything by it! I don’t have another word for it. What do you call it then?’

‘We call it Switching. We Switch if the human DNA does not activate.’

‘Activate?’ Lara enquired.

‘If it doesn’t fire up and create our current human form.’ Seth took out his flask. Lara jumped in.

‘That’s your Tonic’, she said nodding at the container. ‘When you take that, it fires up the DNA and you have a normal human body. When your emotions get over excited, when you get upset, you tend to vibrate too much and you turn to...you *Switch*. Which is not good for you, because you cannot function as green g...when you Switch. You can only function in your other-world body, which is solid when you are in your own dimension...’

Seth took a sip of his Tonic and peered over the rim of the flask. ‘Do you know *why* we are here?’

‘Yes. To take human power. To use it...’

‘We don’t take anything! Humans give it to us!’

‘That’s true. The human race works for you and you give us very little in return, but we don’t do anything about it because we don’t realise it is happening. The whole human race works very hard in different jobs, making the world a place for you to make a lot of money so you can have lots of fun. You get very rich and we mostly don’t. You let *some* of us get rich so it doesn’t look too fishy, but most people in the world are just workers, even if they *do* have nice jobs.’ Lara looked at Seth’s face. It was comical. His eyes were kind of popping because he couldn’t believe that she *knew* all this stuff!

‘You came here,’ Lara went on, ‘to take our power by making a world in which we have to work to make money. If we don’t make money, we have nowhere to live and we starve. The world didn’t used to be like that before you came here.’

‘Aha! But nobody remembers that nice world! Hah!’ Seth looked pleased with himself.

‘Of course we don’t. Well, *I* know about it now. The Masters of Time told me that human beings used to be so happy and never had to work. And they never went hungry, they had a lot of fun and they all liked each other a lot. There was no such thing as war. You create all the wars, so that we don’t think about being slaves.’

‘You human beings have NO power, and can’t do ANYTHING without US to tell you what to do!’ Seth crossed his arms huffily and turned his eyes up to the ceiling childishly.

‘We have forgotten that we are powerful, that’s all. Your small circle of twelve runs this whole world. Each of you are given tasks of making sure all the world’s governments run things the way *you* like them to be run. You make sure that all the people in this world depend on their governments for everything. We don’t use our own minds. You make sure we are prevented from using our minds and stopped from remembering that we really do have power by producing lots of movies, countless TV programmes, new computer games, new electronic equipment, new fashions. We get all excited and forget ourselves because we are so distracted.’ Lara felt a bit guilty because she realised that even *she* constantly nagged her parents for the latest mobile phone, fashionable clothes, new computer games and ipods. She never used to think that her mind was being trained to be a slave!

‘And,’ she said, ‘whenever anyone *does* question the way things are, you make out that they are mad!’ Lara was getting angry now, and she glowered at Seth as she spat out these last words.

‘Hah! Then you lot should get over it! If you don’t like it all, why get the new mobiles, or should I say new *Barbie* dolls?’ Seth sniggered at Lara and she wrinkled up her nose at him.

‘Well that’s just it, isn’t it?’ Lara crossed her arms triumphantly. ‘That’s why the Prophecy of Osiris is coming to pass...we’re going to change all of this for the better.’

Seth stamped his foot, turned and raged. He grabbed his Tonic from his shirt again and sipped...

‘Listen you...you...Rainford girl...’ Seth stammered. It was proving difficult *not* to shout. ‘You’d better tell me what those fools are up to...how are you, *you* going to start up this...this...*Prophecy* thing?’

‘I don’t know. There isn’t a set plan. The whole thing will help us regain our power so we can tell the rest of the world how to regain theirs. Then, you people will not be able to control us.’

Seth thumped his temples with his fists. Lara didn’t know how he didn’t crush his own skull. ‘Confound it! Those interfering blithering idiots... *The Masters of Time*... Huh! They won’t *win* you know!’ He looked fiercely at Lara, who didn’t look scared at all.

‘Maybe not,’ she replied, her answer making Seth’s jaw fall open, ‘the Masters say it is all up to us, the Horus-Taskers. The outcome isn’t determined. We might win, we might lose, who knows. I do my job, my parents and others who are also part of this, will do theirs, and if we make the right choices we will win.’

‘Well good!’ Seth smiled triumphantly. ‘Consider! that you’ve lost! I’m going to take you somewhere you’ll never be found.’

‘Where?’ Lara asked warily. She didn’t want to stay *here* indefinitely, but she didn’t want to go to a place where she couldn’t be *found*.

‘Never you mind.’ Seth said, raising his eyebrows at her and smiling rather spitefully. ‘But don’t worry, I’ll make sure there are plenty of *Barbies* there for you!’



Abdul Bakr looked down at the boy in the hospital bed. The kid didn't know anything. He'd gathered that much from his sister this morning. He'd *known* these two meddling kids were trouble. He'd smelt them, *seen* them in the Great Pyramid, hiding like a couple of slugs under a rock! And he was sure someone else was with them. Who the other person was, he couldn't be sure. It was kind of dark, after all, and he *had* felt a bit woozy before he took the Tonic. Now the girl was trundled up in some other dimension, and here her brother was as dazed as the day he was born. Well! Serves them right! That'll teach them to nose around in other people's business! Abdul Bakr was cross and could feel his body starting to tingle and almost...come apart at the seams...he knew the signs...he furtively took out his flask and took a nip of the fluid. He immediately felt better. More *together*. There was enough hullabaloo going on with Rainford's find, without these two bothersome kids creating havoc. The trouble was, the girl knew everything and the boy nothing. They couldn't return the girl because she knew too much and his Master, Seth, wouldn't let her share the information she had with the world! The *Prophecy of Osiris!* Well! They hadn't seen *that* coming! Why, Abdul Bakr and his people might as well pack up and go home...or turn into green slime if they were exposed! The boy and the family would obviously try to find the girl. Abdul Bakr and the others just hoped the press would not get hold of this story, and have people start asking questions. Damage control. That's what he was here for. He'd poke his nose in everywhere, find things out, and put the spanner in the works wherever he could. Hopefully, the family would give up looking for the girl, think she was dead and go home. Then, it would all blow over. Rainford would forget about the find because it would remind him of his beloved daughter. Abdul Bakr smiled to himself. Yes! That is how it would be! He'd make sure of it.

Noah didn't look at Abdul Bakr much. He didn't want him to know that he knew he was a spy. A spy for *whom*, he had no idea, but this man was trouble. He had something to do with Lara's disappearance, but he couldn't prove it. He'd have to be careful about what he said, that's all. The trouble was, Abdul Bakr hung around like a bad smell. He just wouldn't leave the room. Didn't he need the loo or something? Noah had to keep pretending he was still dazed just so the guy wouldn't suspect anything!

His parents were with the police. The only people in the peaceful lamp-lit room now, were a number of the guards and Abdul Bakr. The guards felt guilty for letting the kids into the pyramid, and now they were here, visiting Noah, with food and cakes prepared by their wives. Abdul Bakr was here because he had been in the pyramid and was a witness that Lara hadn't been down in the base area. He was also part of the Antiquities Committee who knew about Nick Rainford's work and he was *supposedly* making sure they were all being taken care of in the right way. He and the members of his team had told the police they didn't know anything when first asked about Lara's disappearance. He'd told the police that he'd been down there in the Subterranean Chamber with his group, and they'd only come out after all the commotion had taken place.

Suddenly, a nurse burst into the room, talking loudly in Arabic. She began shooing everyone out... thank his lucky stars! Noah couldn't believe his luck. Abdul Bakr was trying to argue, but the nurse was mammoth in size and with a rather scary stare. He wasn't going to argue much with her unless he wanted a perfect pair of shiny black eyes to show off to the world! Noah quickly beckoned to Ali Mehmet, who stood at the back while the others were bundled out. Ali Mehmet immediately came to his bedside.

'Ali Mehmet, I need to talk to you.' The nurse turned to Ali Mehmet and grabbed his arm muttering something in Arabic. These nurses certainly had no manners! Ali Mehmet began talking quickly, pointing to Noah. His tone was low and whatever he was saying sounded convincing to Noah who couldn't understand a word. The nurse gave an irked glance at Noah and threw up her hands.

'Tell her not to let anyone else in Ali Mehmet!' Noah cried.

'Don't worry. She a killer nurse. Everybody bounce from her.' They both laughed. 'What problem *shebab?* What happen to my Lara? You remember?'

'No. But I think that man, Abdul Bakr, knows where she is.'

Ali Mehmet looked aghast. He went pale as he exclaimed, 'Noah! We call police now. Your Baba with police as we speak.'

‘No Ali Mehmet. It’s not that simple. That man is strange, not human! You understand? This is not a normal situation. Lara went into the pyramid to follow him. We think he’s trying to stop Dad from talking to the press about his find. Something’s going on. Something bad and it’s not human.’ Ali Mehmet just stared and started muttering something in Arabic. Then, he hit his forehead as if suddenly remembering something.

‘The Prophecy! It’s here. It’s here Noah!’

‘What are you talking about Ali Mehmet? I don’t understand.’

‘The Prophecy. I see in vision. The lady come to tell me many years before when I a baby like you. Many years she come over and over to tell me. It coming, she say. The change is coming. I must help the changing. The children will change the things. Especially the girl. The little girl know everything, the lady says to me. I must help the little girl. The little girl!’ Ali Mehmet was almost shouting as he remembered his visions, ‘The little girl is Lara!’

‘What lady told you, Ali Mehmet? What did she talk about?’ Noah sat up in his bed.

‘Lady Abigail. She tell me she Lady Abigail!’

‘Sister Abigail? Sister Abigail? Lara’s friend is Sister Abigail! She’s been talking to Lara for years! Nobody believed her!’

‘Yes!’ Ali Mehmet was getting excited now. ‘Yes, Lady...Sister Abigail! She say she the Bush Lady. She my friend for many years! I’m dreaming and we walking and playing and visiting the people.’ Ali Mehmet pointed to the sky. His eyes were alight. He looked at Noah. ‘We must be careful. We saying nothing to police. We talking only to your Mama and Baba.’

‘I don’t know where to start looking for her, Ali Mehmet. I don’t know what’s going on. I don’t know how to find Lara if they’ve looked in the pyramid and all around it.’ Noah’s eyes were filling up and he tried to fight back the tears. The reality of losing his sister was only now dawning on him.

‘No, Noah, no looking with this.’ Ali Mehmet pointed to his eyes. ‘We look with this.’ This time he pointed to the middle of his forehead. ‘This is the true eye of the man, the eye of power. When you looking through this eye, you see everything everywhere. Never listening with the ears. The Gods talking to you with this.’ He pointed to his forehead again. ‘We find her. I know. Bush Lady tell me everything. Later I tell you story of the Prophecy. But now, Lara good. She clever girl. Know lot of things. She find her way back to us.’

Noah lay back in his bed comforted by Ali Mehmet’s words. He was going to find his sister. He’d find Lara if it was the last thing on this earth he did. First though, they’d have to speak to his parents. He took a deep breath. That would take some doing.



Melissa had long since stopped crying. What she was hearing from the old man and her son while sitting here in the hospital room had flabbergasted her to the point of silence. She didn’t know what to think. The events of the last few days in Egypt had all been a bit much to take in, but considering the circumstances, she had no choice but to *try* to understand it all. Noah had told her of his suspicions about Abdul Bakr, or ‘King Tut’ as he and Lara apparently called him. He’d said crazy things about the man *shape shifting*...for goodness sakes! He believed there was a conspiracy to stop Nick from taking the Sacred Powder out of the country, or ever *seeing* it again what’s more...and he’d said that Lara had warned him before they’d even left England that something strange was going to happen. Just as she’d begun thinking that she’d ask the doctors to check Noah’s head for possible concussion, Ali Mehmet, their trusted friend, had started telling her and Nick about *Sister Abigail* of all people...the same person Lara had spoken of for years. Sister Abigail had also foretold the future, she’d spoken to Ali Mehmet of a moment in time when Lara would disappear...in order to begin the fulfilling of the Prophecy of ...of...*Osiris* or something...oh! It was too much to believe...being forced like this to think in non-scientific ways was just too horrible for Melissa... but she was beginning to realise that if she was to find her daughter, she had better start thinking in a way that would help her do just that. Nick hadn’t said very much during Noah and Ali Mehmet’s story telling. He’d just listened with wide, questioning eyes, and Melissa suspected he was willing to listen to anything that might help them find Lara even if it all did sound incredible. The police hadn’t been able to find Lara *anywhere*. They’d sent teams of men looking

for her at all the tourist spots and were still checking each vehicle at roadblocks on all routes leaving Cairo. They thought she must have been kidnapped, though nobody could possibly figure out how. She finally found her voice and put a question to her son.

‘Noah, are you sure Lara didn’t follow you out of the pyramid. Can’t you remember *anything*?’

Noah shifted about in his bed. ‘No, I can’t. All I could think about was sleeping. Everything else was fuzzy. There isn’t anything else *to* remember.’

‘The men who were in there were on the Antiquities Committee. Are you suggesting that they could have taken Lara out of there without the guards seeing anything?’ Melissa was desperately trying to understand what was in Noah and Ali Mehmet’s heads.

‘No, Mum, she’s still down there in the pyramid. They’ve got her in there somewhere. In a chamber or something.’

‘There aren’t any hidden chambers that we don’t know about Noah,’ Nick said, looking at his son carefully, ‘and the police have scoured every passageway and chamber.’

‘She’s down there, I know it,’ Noah said firmly. ‘Ali Mehmet thinks so too.’ Melissa and Nick’s eyes moved in Ali Mehmet’s direction.

‘It true my friends. The Bush Lady tell me Lara one day go through big doorway nobody see. The bad people put on the music and they go some place nobody can see.’

‘Music?’ Melissa asked trying to follow Ali Mehmet’s words.

‘A low hum! That’s it! I remember!’ Noah sat bolt upright. ‘It was different when we went in this time. There was this hum. It sort of went right through your body, made it tingle in a funny sort of way. I felt like I was kind of coming apart, all different parts of me floating off into space. Then I felt sleepy...yes, I remember that! Lara was walking ahead of me.... she *knew* they were in the base of the pyramid. We were headed down in that direction. I turned to go back and don’t remember much else.’

‘Hum?’ Ali Mehmet looked puzzled.

‘Hummmmm...mmmm’. Noah made the sound at the back of his throat. ‘That’s what we call a hum! The music that you’re talking about.’

‘Aha! Yes! This music, when the bad people put it on, it change the body. The Bush Lady show me. She sing to me...no...she HUM to me... and I change places! I am gone from here to here.’

Nick and Melissa searched each other’s eyes desperately. What *was* this all about?

‘Noah, Ali Mehmet, are you saying that the hum created a dimension shift? That Lara is down there but we can’t see her because she’s in another dimension?’ Nick looked at them both.

Ali Mehmet turned to Noah.

‘Yes, Dad. The way that King Tut...Abdul Bakr...was looking at the walls that day was extremely odd. He was looking past them, at something that nobody else could see. He was inspecting something. He obviously has some way of seeing past bricks and mortar.’

‘Oh dear! What are we to do? I’m confused! I don’t know what anybody is talking about!’ Melissa was feeling overwhelmed now. ‘What’s got into your heads? Why are we talking like this?’

‘Because it true, my friend.’ Ali Mehmet said. ‘Now you not feel good because you cannot see or understand with this or this.’ He pointed to his eyes and ears. ‘So don’t use it. Use this!’ he tapped his forehead between his eyes, ‘And this!’ he thumped his chest with a closed fist. ‘Feel your heart telling you truth. Feel the answers here. Everything we must feel. Outside there...’ Ali Mehmet turned to the window behind him, ‘outside there, nothing real. Everybody lie. Nothing true anymore. People lie. You lie. Your eyes and ears lie to you. What is truth? Now nobody know. Nobody want to know. Bush Lady Abigail say believe only what your heart tell you. Only believe this heart voice. Does your heart have voice Melissa? Do you listen carefully?’

Melissa was quiet for a moment. She needed to think about Ali Mehmet’s words. Ever since she’d arrived, she’d known something was very wrong, but her mind kept telling her that soon everything would be sorted out. She’d known that people were lying, but she’d not wanted to believe her feelings. She’d *thought*...her *mind* told her... that if they did everything right, explain how things were to the authorities and show all their official documents, somehow everything would work out well in the end. Well nothing they did had come to anything. In fact, things had slowly got worse. And all the time, she

had felt the wrongness of the situation deep inside of herself. She'd had a *feeling* that something very bad was going on. But she hadn't *listened* to her own feelings. She had listened to her head, her *scientific* head. A head that told her that her heart feelings didn't matter, but that only her mind calculations did. Now, her son and their long-time trusted friend were speaking a language she didn't understand. This was storybook stuff and she was uncomfortable with it. Yet something within her connected with it, against the will of her mind, of course. The whole thing was giving her a headache. One idea was tugging against another and she needed some paracetamol.



Lara looked at the sight before her. Leaving the base of the pyramid and making their way out of it had been an education for her. Instead of crawling through the usual narrow tunnel leading from the basement, they'd walked up a spiralling flight of limestone steps that led from the centre of the Subterranean Chamber into a large unusually lit space. This being some other dimension, its truth was revealed...the pyramid was alive...*real*...From the look of the walls as they'd climbed, this was no longer an underground room. In fact, it seemed that the Great Pyramid was really even *greater* than anyone imagined. In Lara's dimension, was part of it still buried in sand and it just *appeared* to have underground chambers?

They were now standing on a floor of the Great Pyramid that looked up to the apex, the point where the four sides met. Awash with a magical glow, starlight poured into the vast space through shafts in every side of the four slanting walls. The shafts were positioned at different levels and light beams criss-crossed over each other creating a pattern of bright threads of light that formed a huge geometric shape, a dodecahedron, in the centre of the pyramid. Lara hadn't seen a starlit room like this before. It looked as if the walls were adorned with stars, but they sat outside the windows, far back in space. Somehow, these shafts caught their light, and the shape in the centre gently vibrated as the stars slowly changed position in the night sky.

Lara pulled her eyes away from the magnificent sight and looked around her at the men. The dark, loud man had gone, but not before giving instructions on where the others were to put her. In the basement, they'd switched on one of their machines and the walls had changed again, they came back to life, awoke from a deep sleep...but this time, all the men stayed with her. There were about five of them, and they hadn't seemed too pleased with their instructions. They spoke to each other in a tone...and the language wasn't Arabic either...that made her suspicious that these men felt their master was not doing the right thing. They felt it was dangerous to put her in the place called Rainbow's End and were definitely not happy about it. She wasn't sure what to make of it, but she felt they were not worried about *her*. They were worried about *themselves*...which meant that wherever she was going really was ...well, *escapable!* Or, people could possibly find her there! Well good. That meant the dark haired man was wrong about her having failed the challenge. It hadn't even begun yet!

A tallish man...well, he *seemed* tall compared to the others... walked to the place that Lara could see was the dead centre of the pyramid floor. Right where he stood was a low platform of limestone rock jutting out from soft brown soil. With four steps leading up onto the wide round stand, the man climbed onto it and stood looking over at the others. He beckoned for them to come to the platform.

Lara stood at the bottom of the stand and looked up at the man. 'Come up,' he said to Lara. 'The rest of you stay where you are.' Lara climbed the steps onto the wide carved rock and joined him. 'Okay! Pull the switches!' he called to the others. Someone scuttled a few yards away and bent down to lift something from the ground. From where Lara was standing, it was difficult to see, but he seemed to push soil away and grab at something, pull it up...a trapdoor? Then, he leaned into the space in the ground and pulled at something. A lever perhaps? It was probably a good guess. As he pulled, Lara heard a...*sliding* noise... she looked up in the direction of the sound...light was pouring in from the apex of the pyramid! A shaft of light that looked like a perfect pillar of white stone fell from the dark sky into the

splendid building, bathing and surrounding them, cutting them off from the men who stood around the platform. Then came the hum, a different tone from the sounds the machines had made before. It was a higher tone, not really a hum if you thought about it, but a long drawn out... *ting!*

Lara felt her ears tickle. She rubbed at them, then her head sort of itched and she tried to rub that too. Then, the tickling and itching stopped and she felt lighter and lighter as if she was coming apart...like before...this felt comfortable... but strange...she was moving...upwards, upwards...she tried looking around her, but she couldn't see much...she moved upwards...slowly and gracefully...like a ballerina...then she was aware of entering something...a sphere? A circular space...the light beams, the way they fell, yes! She was floating within the geometric shape, the dodecahedron she'd seen in the centre of the pyramid! Wow! The man, floating beside her, nodded to a space directly behind her. There, in the centre of the dodecahedron, were two high backed seats. Lara looked at the man, not quite knowing what to do. Suddenly, the *ting!* tone switched to a slightly lower one. More of a long *tong!* Then, Lara felt a little heavier. She plonked into one of the chairs and the man did the same into the other. They both sat for a moment. Lara looked at the man and opened her mouth to ask a question, but he just put his finger to his mouth to quieten her. No noise. No additional sounds. The tones only...the tone switched again...a lower pitched sound, a hum, was accompanied by beams of gold light that now surrounded them. The gold beams were coming from the shafts and from the apex. They were sitting in a gold dodecahedron that grew brighter and brighter until Lara had to close her eyes against the brilliance....

When she opened her eyes again, Lara was seated on a rock in a starlit meadow. The gold dodecahedron was fading slowly and, as her eyes adjusted to this new landscape of fresh earthy fragrances, it disappeared entirely. Only when she closed her eyes was it still there, in all its radiance. Focussing now on the scene around her, she became aware of the sound of water running over rocks. Some trees stood nearby and Lara could hear an owl hooting from the hidden branches. The man was beside her. He looked around him, seeming uneasy. He looked at her. 'Someone will come. We have to wait a while.' He looked up at the stars and Lara followed his gaze. The night sky was beautiful. The group of stars called the constellation of Orion stood high in the sky, directly above them. Dad had explained that Orion was the hunter of the night sky, and he'd shown her and Noah the outline of his body in the dark heavens. Dad...Lara became a bit misty-eyed. She hadn't thought too much about her parents in these last few hours. She'd been more concerned about where she was going and how she was going to get back. Now, looking at the sky was making her sad. She missed Mum, Dad and Noah.

'They'll know we've arrived,' the man was saying. Lara looked up at him. 'This is not normal procedure, so it may take a while before they get to us.' The man took out a cigarette and lit it with a lighter from his pocket.

'Not normal procedure?' Lara was interested. She wanted to find all their weak points. Why were they afraid to bring her here? Why did they think their boss, the dark-haired man, was wrong?

'You kids don't get here this way normally', he replied, looking at her, then looking away. He puffed on his cigarette, now staring at the ground. He was a bit of a misery to be around, Lara thought.

'How do you mean?' she enquired, trying not to sound too inquisitive. She didn't want to alarm him and make him stop talking.

'Well, you get here through the portal, usually. The Rainbow Portal. It's where all of you end up. At least bits of you, anyway.'

'What are you talking about?' Lara asked. 'Bits of us? Do you kill kids? Chop them up or something? Send their bits and pieces here?'

'Hey no!' the man cried, staring at her aghast. He'd bitten into his cigarette butt and now he spat it out in disgust. 'You've got some imagination!'

'What then? What do you mean by *bits of you*?'

'I don't know, just, just, bits of you...your character...I suppose...'

Lara didn't say anything. She sat quietly. It was a tactic not to seem too sneaky and nosy. He puffed and then spoke again.

‘You humans have DNA problems. Your DNA creates some strange things to happen. First you are born, then you enjoy being young children with no responsibility. You are afraid of nothing, and trust in everything. Then, a time comes when you change into something else. You’re like caterpillars that change into butterflies. You stop being children and become adults.’

‘What’s strange about that?’ Lara asked.

‘Your DNA changes. The body starts transforming into an adult one. What do you think happens to the child part of you?’

‘We just grow up?’ Lara wasn’t sure what was coming.

‘You come here, that’s what.’

‘Here? I don’t get it.’ Lara wondered if this man wasn’t a bit funny in the head.

‘In your normal world, your body changes into an adult. You start thinking like an adult...like the ones before you...like the adults around you. When it stops being time for the child to play, the body begins to change. It slowly gets rid of the child. The child is pushed away. It goes away, leaving only its memory in the body, because the adult body doesn’t want it.’

Lara was starting to understand. She didn’t like what he was saying but she *thought* she got it now. The child in everyone human came here, to this place called Rainbow’s End. The human body changed, everyone eventually became adult and childhood became a memory of freedom once experienced by all. It made sense. This was the world of the children of humanity. Now why did the human DNA do such a strange thing?

Before Lara had a chance to ask the question, she heard voices. The man had already stood up and had begun walking to a nearby tree. Lara followed him. Across the little river, they saw two people approaching. In the light of the moon, Lara could see they were talking and laughing. One was a beautiful woman in a white ankle-length dress, drawn in at the waist. She had long waves of dark hair and she wore what appeared to be a few bright yellow flowers tucked in it. Next to her, walked a child of about eleven years old. It was a boy. He had a mop of untidy blonde hair and a tanned face with freckles. He wore shorts and a striped t-shirt. As he moved alongside the woman, he shimmered...and...Lara could almost see through him! He looked a bit ghost-like, yet the woman...well she looked *normal*.

They moved towards Lara and the tall man, and at about twenty or so yards from them they stopped. The woman’s face lost her smile as she looked at Lara’s travelling companion. Her eyes moved to Lara and back again to the man. She looked at him with questions in her eyes. Lara looked up at the person standing by her side. He looked almost...embarrassed...? He glanced quickly at Lara and said,

‘I’ve another for you. It’s not normal procedure, but...’

‘Not normal procedure?’ The woman’s voice was soft, yet strong. She looked at the man with a fierce stare. He didn’t quite know what to do. She spoke again. ‘Not normal procedure? This child is still in her birth body! What are you people up to now?’ She looked at Lara. ‘Are you okay child?’

‘I’m fine,’ Lara answered. ‘I just don’t know what this place is.’

‘Don’t worry I’ll explain...but for now,’ the woman turned to the man, ‘I want to know how you got in here if you didn’t use the normal channels.’

‘I can’t tell you that. The girl came with me, but she won’t know how to get back. Just take her. I’ve got to go.’ The man walked back to the rock and sat down quietly. He glanced up at the star-jewelled sky, lowered his head and closed his eyes. Lara and the others watched him. Nothing happened for a while. He just sat in silence...eventually something *did* happen. He started to shimmer, and gold flashes of light shot out from around his body. Then suddenly, he was gone. Lara, the boy and the woman stared at the empty space for a time before Lara ran to it. She touched the rock. It was slightly warm where the man had sat. She sat down on it and closed her eyes. Nothing. She looked up at the sky as he’d done, but there was nothing but the beautiful stars. The woman came over to where Lara sat and gently took her hands. ‘Don’t worry, my dear. You’re safe here for the moment. We will not hurt you.’ Lara looked at her and for the first time since the whole journey began, she started to cry.

CHAPTER 4: THE DARK GATEKEEPERS OF THE ASTRAL PLANES

Nick and Melissa sat looking at each other across the dinner table of the hotel restaurant. It was late and only a few people still sat sipping their last coffees. The light was low and candles burned at the centre of the tables. Both were exhausted but neither of them could sleep. It wasn't any wonder considering the events of the last twenty-four hours. Nick's mind was racing as he spoke to his wife.

'Listen Melissa, we have to go over the facts. Let's think about the properties of the Sacred White Powder. By doing that, we might get some idea of what is going on here.'

'Nick,' Melissa searched his eyes, 'are we really going to believe what Ali Mehmet and Noah are saying? Don't you think it's all crazy stuff?'

'We say it's crazy because we don't understand it, but it doesn't make it untrue. The way I see it, we have to make a choice about what we believe. You are sitting there, not knowing which way to go. Do we believe in the way that we always have or do we try to think another way? Lara has experienced a different life to us, a life in which outlandish things happen. I mean, she talks to an Australian Aboriginal woman, who also happens to know Ali Mehmet! Sister Abigail tells Lara the same things that she told Ali Mehmet! Really, we can't ignore things like that, can we? And we've had experience of all the things that Lara has told us in the past; her dreams, her predictions, her warnings. We didn't *ever* listen to her, but we were *always* surprised when the things she said turned out to be true.'

'Yes,' Melissa said sadly, 'and we just brushed them away saying they were coincidences. Coincidences indeed! How many coincidences do we need to see the truth? The truth that our daughter is special, that she understands life better than we do.'

'Right!' Nick exclaimed, somewhat surprised by Melissa's words. He could see she was trying hard to change her point of view.

'You see Melissa, right now, there's stuff going on under our noses that we cannot see because we don't think along those lines. If we do start thinking in a crazy way, then we *will* see what's going on!'

'That's right!' Melissa cried, 'How many times do people say that human beings only see what they want to see? If we only opened our minds and saw things in every way possible, instead of thinking that only *our* way counted, we wouldn't miss a thing!'

'So, Melissa, we are going to make a decision here and now. We are not going to look back once we have made it. We choose to believe or not. At some point in everyone's life, they have to make a choice like this. We cannot be in two minds otherwise we will not find our daughter. Will it be our usual way of thinking or are we going to open our minds to new possibilities? If we decide on the new path, then we cannot go around thinking everyone mad.'

'I want to open my mind. I just want my daughter back. I feel that in order to find her, I have to think like her.'

'Good. I'm with you on this whole thing. Now...we haven't got time to ponder. Let's get to this business of the Sacred White Powder. What's so special about it? Let's think *magical*. Let's pretend we are the ancient Priests. How would we use it Melissa? And *why*?'

Melissa and Nick huddled over the table, talking and opening their minds to the new adventure ahead. *Now* they felt hope, now they felt joy. They knew it was in their power to find their daughter. Before they did that though, they had to look for all the hidden clues as to what this journey was about and what they had to *do* to rescue her.



The following morning Nick and Ali Mehmet were in the Subterranean Chamber of the pyramid. They hadn't got any official papers to get in. If they had asked for permission, Abdul Bakr would have insisted on coming with them. He'd have wanted to know what they were looking for, and would have snooped around after them. Ali Mehmet and Nick had simply used their position to get past the guards. Everyone knew Lara was missing. They were familiar with Nick and were friends with Ali Mehmet.

Nick showed Ali Mehmet where he had found the Sacred White Powder. The pile of rubble still sat in heaps around the chamber. In the centre of the poorly lit room was a hollowed out hole in the ground,

around which was placed a railing to stop any visitors from falling through. The pit fell to a ledge about ten feet down, and from the ledge ran a horizontal tunnel that met with a wall of rock. It looked as if this rather long, very narrow tunnel led *nowhere*...which was strange, because *who* would dig out a tunnel through solid rock if it didn't lead to any place? If a person climbed down past the ledge, the pit continued downwards for a further fifty feet. Nick's team had created the ledge by digging from the ten foot mark further into the ground. Nick believed that there existed underground tunnels and chambers, but hadn't been able to get to them. Once, many years before, another archaeologist had dug in the same place, but had had as little success as Nick. Lots of good scientists had brought in special machines that could tell them whether there were any tunnels in the ground. Most of the machines had shown that there were corridors running in every possible direction. *Getting* to these tunnels was the problem. The underground world that a lot of people knew to exist, just couldn't be found...but *why*? *Why* were they hidden? *Who* had gone through so much trouble to hide them? *Why* were so many tunnels in the whole of the pyramid so narrow, and *why* did a lot of them end up in front of a great wall of rock?

Nick climbed over the rubble that had been created by the digging to the spot where the Sacred White Powder had been discovered.

'Mmm...' Ali Mehmet pondered. 'So it appear there. From another place.'

'From another dimension?'

'Yes, dimension. It come from there. Let me sit.' Ali Mehmet moved to where Nick stood and sat on the pile of rocks, adjusted his bottom to get comfortable and closed his eyes.

'What are you doing Ali Mehmet?' Nick asked.

'Sshh...I using this,' he pointed to the middle of his forehead.

Ali Mehmet sat quietly, trying to clear his mind. When his racing thoughts slowed down and he felt more peaceful, he looked around the chamber without opening his eyes. He was using his third eye, the invisible eye in the centre of the forehead. This, Sister Abigail had taught him, was the centre of the imagination. The imagination was the eye that saw everything. Not only was it the eye, but the ears and the touch and the taste and the smell. Using the imagination to see beyond the physical things around us; helped us to understand more, to experience further adventures than this world would allow.

Ali Mehmet looked around and asked a question in his mind...*What is here? What is here beyond what I see with my physical eyes? Where did the powder come from? Where is Lara?* He relaxed until his mind began to allow pictures to form.

The walls around him began to change. They seemed to brighten up, though the colours weren't different. Everything seemed to come alive. Usually this place was like a rock tomb, a kind of hollowed out grave that was grey and lifeless. Now, the aliveness of the walls seemed to bring light to the basement. He could *see* better. In his mind, he looked all around him. The great thing about using the imagination was that you didn't have to turn your body. You could just see everything *everywhere*. All you had to do was decide where you wanted to look and your mind went there.

He searched the walls and turned his mind to the direction where Nick was standing. Nick had moved to the centre of the room and was leaning against the railings that surrounded the hole in the floor. He could see and feel Nick in his mind's eye. Suddenly though, Nick disappeared and a flight of stairs materialised...they seemed to spiral upwards...At the foot of the stairs, where the hole had been, was another set of steps leading downwards. These steps were neatly carved out of the rock and they descended deep into the ground...light escaped from the depths, like a glow...Ali Mehmet moved his mind to peer into the stairwell going into the ground...he approached...slowly...slowly...then suddenly a large dark figure leapt out and stood crouched before Ali Mehmet, who let out a scream so loud, it made Nick jump up from the railings and trip over some rocks. Ali Mehmet opened his eyes sharply. 'Hahhh!!' he cried. 'The Dark GateKeepers! They guard the gateways! They don't let us pass!'

Nick brushed off the dust from his already grubby jeans. He was sitting on the mound of stones onto which he'd fallen. 'What Ali Mehmet? What did you see?'

‘The Masters before...tell me about the Dark GateKeepers. They don’t let us pass! They here! They see me! They know now, we going to come! Maybe they kill us!’

‘Who are they...the Dark GateKeepers, Ali Mehmet? What are you talking about?’

In the dim almost greenish light, Ali Mehmet’s face looked wild. His eyes darted everywhere, and his breathing was noisy.

‘Ali Mehmet, calm down! Take a deep breath! Hold it! Breathe out! Again! Slow down, calm down...that’s better.’ Nick had climbed over to Ali Mehmet and had placed his hand on his back. The old man calmed down and breathed more easily.

‘The Dark GateKeepers,’ Ali Mehmet said slowly, ‘they keep everybody here. They don’t let us pass.’

‘Don’t let who pass? You and me?’

‘Not anybody. No human being. We are trapped here. This world we don’t leave. When we die, we come back here. Over and over, because they don’t let us leave.’

‘Who are the Dark GateKeepers, Ali Mehmet?’ Nick was trying to make sense out of the old man’s broken English.

‘They are the demons. They keep the souls here in the world. When we die, we have no body, we are only soul. Your soul is you, Nick, but with no body. Maybe I feel you here, but I not see you with eyes. When we die, we must go back to where we come from, but the demon not let us.’

‘But why? Why keep human souls here? What good would that do?’

‘Power. They use the human being for power. We are slave. We do anything they want. But they don’t let us know we slave so we don’t fight them.’

Nick slumped back against all the rocks and closed his eyes. Whew! This was getting to be an adventure of sorts. He’d chosen to believe and now he must remember to do so. He couldn’t label Ali Mehmet a foolish old man now, just because the story was...well...almost incredible.

‘So what did you see, Ali Mehmet?’ Nick had to try to figure out what was going on so he could work out their next move. The old man described his vision in graphic detail.

‘Why you not look yourself?’ Ali Mehmet asked Nick. Nick looked back at his friend inquisitively.

‘Me? I don’t know how to see things like that’

‘Everybody see things like this. Just imagine. Close your eyes. Go on. Close.’

Nick closed his eyes. On Ali Mehmet’s instructions, he relaxed his mind and went as quiet inside as he possibly could, breathing deeply and softly. Then, with his eyes closed, Nick used his imaginary eyes to see into the space around him. He relaxed again and formed questions...Where did the White Powder come from? Who are the Dark Gatekeepers? He allowed images to form in his mind. The room grew brighter...the walls were lit up somehow...or were they just bright? An image flashed in front of him...a dark-haired man in a white tunic...*White Brotherhood*...the name sounded in Nick’s ears...the man was holding his hands together...he had the Sacred White Powder in this hands...*take it Nick*...Suddenly, the image of the man was gone...Nick looked around the room to the centre...the railings were gone and a spiral staircase stood in its place...it wound up far above Nick’s head...in fact, where *was* the ceiling? It was at least a hundred or so feet up! The spiral staircase turned upwards...where it lead Nick had no idea...he could follow it with his mind...instantly, Nick was at the top of the stairwell looking up into...a great hall? No...it was...wow! The pyramid! But...he could only see the four sloping walls...they met at the apex, right above where he stood now...there were no rooms, no tunnels *at all* inside this whole floor! It was *light* in here...not dark and dingy like before...rays of sunlight were coming in through the windows...windows? Not windows, *shafts*! He recognised them as shafts; narrow passageways in the solid heavy brickwork of the walls, allowing light into the building. Light entered the various shafts at exact angles, forming a shape...a dodecahedron! It was perfect geometry! Suddenly, Nick saw a shadow...no not one shadow...two...three...four...they moved from all four corners of the vast building...they’d seen him and moved quickly...he watched for a moment as they advanced...they stopped...they were shaped like...like...two-legged hounds? They were dark-shadowed creatures whose eyes glowed in order to see him more clearly...they watched carefully as they crept closer...Nick held still...watching them equally as closely...he could feel something...a...*sucking* sensation...he was being sucked towards them...Nick took a breath and opened his eyes...he was on the floor of the Subterranean Chamber with Ali Mehmet staring at him wide-eyed. ‘You see them?’

Nick was speechless for a moment. Then he spoke ‘Ali Mehmet, was that *real*? Didn’t I just *imagine* that experience?’

‘You imagine, yes. And it real. Very real. Imagination is real. Now you see all things that you want. Your body eyes stop you from seeing everything. The body eyes only for this world. The imagination is for you to see *any* world. The imagination is the true eye.’

‘Well then, I saw them,’ Nick declared, ‘in all their glory.’ He described his experience to Ali Mehmet.

‘Who was the man in the white tunic... *White Brotherhood*?’

‘These people all help us...They come to help us with the Prophecy. The Bush Lady Abigail, the Masters; they tell me all things from a child. I travel with the lady. She old. Older than this world. They all teach me. They tell me time will come I must tell people. I must help the people who get into trouble with the Dark GateKeepers. Now the time is here. I didn’t know the persons is you Nick. I didn’t know the persons is Lara and Noah and Melissa. I am happy the people is all of you, because you are my friends. You are my family.’ Ali Mehmet’s eyes welled up with tears, and he hugged the close friend sitting beside him.

‘We’re glad we’ve got you, Ali Mehmet.’ Nick said sentimentally. ‘Without your guidance, I don’t know what we’d do. You and Lara, you’re the same. You think the same. You have the same experiences. Only you can help us.’

‘Then we find her. We must find a way to meet her. We must find her with the imagination. Any other way, we find nobody.’



On the plush carpeted floor of their hotel suite, Melissa fumbled through the pages containing the translations of the scrolls. Noah, seated across from her on a pile of satin cushions, watched as his mother looked for some passages about the Sacred White Powder. The hospital had let him go home early this morning as they couldn’t find anything wrong with him. He was glad to get out of the way of that *pesky* Abdul Bakr fellow. The man had poked his head around the door of the hospital room practically every hour on the hour, pretending to be concerned, asking if Noah was okay, and... if he remembered anything about the disappearance of his sister. Noah had tried to sleep, but had given up all hope of that bald-headed nuisance leaving him in peace. Abdul Bakr had looked quite pleased with himself when Noah had insisted that he couldn’t remember *a thing*.

Mum was on board with this crazy escapade Noah was pleased to learn. He was surprised by her energy...she was really *going* for it with all guns blazing. She looked up at Noah who had been distracted by an interesting looking glassy object lying near her.

‘What’s that?’ he asked crawling over to pick it up.

‘It’s Lara’s,’ Melissa answered sadly, ‘I went to search her bags hoping to find some clues...you know your sister...she’s always got something up her sleeve. Well I found this. It’s her crystal, don’t you remember? She called it the Dreaming Crystal that Sister Abigail gave her.’

‘I remember now. That was ages ago. We didn’t believe her. You were convinced that someone at school had given it to her and that she was dramatising.’

‘Yes, well...’ Melissa looked down. ‘Things are different now. I fished it out of her bag. She obviously brought it with her for some reason.’

Noah held the Dreaming Crystal in his hands. It was a large twelve-sided clear quartz crystal, which looked like it was made of glass. It felt warm to the touch as Noah turned it slowly in his hands, peering into it at all angles. The Dreaming Crystal absorbed and reflected the light, rainbow colours bounced from it and Noah felt a strange tingling in the middle of his forehead. Then, something caught his eye...a movement in the centre...a figure? Was there a figure in the crystal? He blinked and the figure was gone... Noah put the crystal down...he looked at it again...the figure...she had looked familiar...*she*? His mother’s voice broke through his almost hypnotised state. He turned to her.

‘These are the translations of the ancient documents found in those jars next to the Sacred White Powder that Dad found. I must confess I just skimmed over some of it, I didn’t think stuff like this could be true.’ Melissa shuffled the papers in her hands, trying to put them in order.

‘But it all makes sense with what’s going on...’ Noah answered in a small voice. He still felt a bit funny around the head region. That crystal...was it *doing* something?

‘I know...Egyptologists think that the ancient stories of Gods and High Priests are *mythical*, the stuff of fairytales. Why *should* it be mythical? Why, because people don’t understand it? I’m beginning to realise now that historians and Egyptologists are not really as clever as they *think* they are. People find wonderful artefacts and ancient buildings, but they never, *ever* find real information about what they were used for, so everybody *guesses* at everything and then write what they *think* in history books as if what they were saying was true. I should know, I’m married to an Egyptologist who complains about this all the time!’

‘So? So what do the notes say about the Sacred White Powder?’ he’d better keep Mum on track otherwise she’d lecture on and on for hours about the weaknesses of Egyptologists.

‘Oh, yes...I’ll read bits and pieces out to you...’

The powder was made by a group of alchemists who called themselves the White Brotherhood....they also went by the name The Order of the Dove. Nobody else had the ability to make the powder because it’s quality was too high for the earthly world...the Brotherhood didn’t make it here because they didn’t exist here ...they made it and delivered it to the High Priests of the Temples of Egypt.... they delivered the goods by way of the Great Doorway and by using the music of the universe to pass through...’

Melissa looked up with widened eyes at Noah who had leaned forward listening intently. Hadn’t Ali Mehmet said something about music making people change dimensions? Noah had heard the hum. She went back to the text.

The High Priests ruled Egypt...they ruled along with the Pharaohs of that time...the Pharaohs were called Horus-Kings...they were the sons of Osiris... The High Priests of Egypt worked closely with the White Brotherhood...

The High Priests taught students of the temple about using power...people in the human world are trapped in this dimension...when they die, they go to a place called the Astral...they roam around the Astral, lost...then they come back to the earth again through human women who get pregnant...they live again, then die again and keep coming back over and over again...because all the doorways to the heavens are closed off...

They are closed off by people who rule this earth...These are people that humans do not know about...they use the Dark GateKeepers to guard the heavenly doorways...

The job of the Priests was to teach students how to get through the doorways to the heavens, past the Dark GateKeepers...to teach them these things, the students had to practice...they used the Sacred White Powder to travel to the Astral and roam its corridors while they were still in their human bodies...

The White Brotherhood were also GateKeepers of the same Portals...the students were tested at the Portals by the White Brotherhood, and if they passed the test, they would be allowed through...they could leave for the heavens in their bodies or they could return to the earth and leave the Astral when they died. If they failed their tests, they were taken by the Dark GateKeepers and kept prisoner in lower dimensions until they found the power to escape...’

Melissa rubbed her eyes. This was a lot to take in, a *lot* for her usually sceptical mind. She had never believed anything like this before...but now she *must*...she’d made a promise to herself, this was the world that her daughter understood, and she would try to understand it too...she looked down at the crystal lying next to Noah and leaned over to pick it up. She needed some comfort that she was doing the

right thing. She hoped that she wasn't on some wild goose chase...the hand holding the crystal suddenly felt hot...she looked down at it...faint electrical currents ran through her hands...she peered into the clear quartz...there was a woman...it was...it was...Sister Abigail! Melissa let out a loud squeal and dropped the crystal. Noah jumped up and backed away when he saw his mother's face.

'What? What?' Noah shouted.

'Oh my goodness! It's her! It's Sister Abigail!' Melissa's eyes darted about as the memories came flooding back ...but...but...it couldn't be...yes, it was true...Sister Abigail had visited her too! When she was very young! She remembered now! How could she have forgotten?

Noah's eyes nearly popped out of his head at his mother's words...that was it! It was her! Sister Abigail! She used to visit him and take him to some great places! They'd had such fun...but then...then he'd forgotten? How had that happened?

Suddenly, there was a piercing ringing sound. Both Melissa and Noah cupped their hands over their ears as it rose in pitch and then fell...it evened out to a low drone...then they heard her voice...

'At last! You remember your old friend!' Sister Abigail's voice was so familiar now to Melissa and Noah, it felt as if they'd never left her side.

'Take the crystal! Both of you! Take the crystal and hold it in your hands...together!'

Melissa and Noah were both stunned. They had so many questions they had to ask Sister Abigail.

Melissa grabbed the crystal from the floor and held it up on the palm of her hand. Noah placed his hand around the base of the crystal.

'Rest your arms on something Melissa. This might take a while.'

Melissa rested her lower arms onto a nearby coffee table. She and Noah waited...a beam of light shot out from the crystal...and another...and another...more beams travelled from the crystalline centre into the middle of the large room. Pictures began to form...they were holograms, moving pictures created out of light. Noah and Melissa gazed at what looked like a 3-D movie in front of them. Slowly, the pictures of the movie expanded...the hologram grew until Noah and Melissa found them selves sitting in the familiar surroundings of Sister Abigail's native Australia...and there she was, the same old friend they had abandoned so long ago...

'Let's talk' she said, her hair bouncing as she laughed at their wonderment... *'about the properties of the Sacred White Powder...the sky people who came and changed their DNA.... and most importantly...'*

'And Lara?' Melissa interrupted quickly. *'Of course, but first I must tell you about the Keys of Amenti which will help you to find her.'*

Later, after Sister Abigail had gone, and Melissa had placed the Dreaming Crystal on the table, Nick and Ali Mehmet burst into the room. They both looked wild-eyed and excited. 'Melissa! Noah!' Nick shouted, 'Have *we* got news for you!' Melissa looked at Noah and back at the two men. 'You too?' she smiled.

They sat for a long time, sharing the important information that would help them on their journey.

CHAPTER 5: THE CHILDREN OF RAINBOW'S END

Lara stood by the Rainbow Bridge and listened as Lady Madonna spoke. A group of children about Lara's age and a little older flocked around, looking at her, amused and fascinated. Some of them had tried to touch her and their hands had felt like the lightest feathers brushing up against her skin. They'd giggled and laughed; all of them jostled for a place to see her more clearly.

'Don't mind them,' The Lady had laughed, 'you're a treat, a real novelty. They've never seen anything like you here before.'

Lara held out her hand and some of the children reached out to touch her again. They gasped...this strange girl was so...so...*solid*?

'Who are they Lady Madonna? Why are they here?' Lara sort of knew the answer, but wanted a better explanation than the one Seth's man had given her.

'They are the children of humanity...these are the children left behind when people become adults.'

'Why are they so...so light...so transparent?' Lara had seen that some of the children were more transparent than others.

'Because they don't have a body to live in...their bodies have become adult and there is no room for their child spirit in adult bodies.'

'Oh!' Lara exclaimed, 'I *think* I understand. The man who brought me here did explain, but I don't get all of it!'

'I know, my dear', The Lady sympathised, 'it is very difficult for you. Think of it this way; children and adults are very different, aren't they? They think differently, am I right? Did you notice?' The Lady was smiling. Lara nodded in agreement.

'Children are not afraid of anything. Children climb trees, they take exciting risks, they make friends without any worries, they laugh easily, they love everyone and forgive anything. When people start to become adults, this way of thinking leaves them. As adults, they start being afraid of the world. They worry about things going wrong and so they stop having adventures in life. They work too hard and stop having fun. They get cross with each other quickly and only love people if they get something back.'

'How is it that you are here, Lady Madonna?'

'I am one of many caretakers of children. We are known as the Angels of Peace. Do you know what *peace* means Lara? Peace means to be *whole*...to feel completely free, sort of to be an adult and a child both at the same time.'

'Does that mean the children are lost here? Can't they ever go back to their bodies?'

'Only if adults want them to...the child spirit is the part of us that loves life so much we see all the energy, all the colours, all the fun, all the prettiness, all the strange and wonderful ideas. We love everything because our hearts burst with the beauty of everything. But adults choose to be afraid. They look for the dark side of everything. To an adult, there is always danger lurking around a corner. You will have noticed that some children are more transparent than others. These children have grown into adults who are more playful, more trusting, less serious than others. They are transparent because they are partly in their adult bodies.'

Lara turned from The Lady, and her thoughts went to her mother. Now *she* was a serious one, with her scientific outlook, always afraid, always looking for... Lara's eyes suddenly lit up. She turned back to Lady Madonna excitedly, 'Is my mother here? My father?'

'Of course,' The Lady smiled, 'but they won't recognise you as their *daughter*, though they'll understand that you are connected. Nick! Melissa!'

Lara stood open-mouthed as Nick and Melissa stepped forward from behind the crowd of children, holding hands...they must be about twelve years old? They giggled as they looked at her...she recognised them from photographs her parents had shown her...Lara felt dizzy...this was such a strange meeting! She stepped forward...she felt their energy...they were definitely her parents...in a way, they *did* feel different...they were *kids* after all...she reached out to touch them...they laughed and touched her back...the two of them held hands tightly and looked lovingly at each other...yes, Lara remembered

now, they had been childhood sweethearts...her father was more transparent than her mother, but that made sense to Lara...Suddenly, from beyond the crowd, pushed a little boy...Lara recognised him, but only just.... he was almost ghost-like...not really formed...it was Noah! The boy smiled mischievously...it was definitely Noah! But what was *he* doing here?

‘Noah’s leaving childhood,’ The Lady smiled a little sadly, ‘but he’s taking his time. He is struggling in the way all teenagers do at first. Giving up trust and joy is difficult for the human body. Eventually, his form will be stronger. The children are always this transparent when they first get here.’

The Lady pointed to the bridge she had brought Lara to see. Lara, though finding it difficult to take her eyes off her family members, turned to look in the direction the Lady was facing. It was the Rainbow Bridge, the bridge that led back to the dimension that Lara had come from. It was a beautiful structure, made from silver metal and inlaid with precious colourful stones of the earth. The walkway was paved with shiny cobblestones that had not been walked upon since it was built.

‘This is the bridge that leads out of here, but the portal at the end of the crossing only allows the passing through of child spirits. The children arrive through that portal. It is a gateway from, and into, the human soul. They rarely go back through, unless their adult selves become whole and accept their child selves back...sadly, though, the truth is the children of the human world are trapped here.’

‘What happens to the children, then, they just stay here *forever*?’

‘The people from the skies feed from them...’

‘The people from the skies...’ Yes! The Masters had told her about them...and she’d *met* them! The sky people were the Custodians... They’d brought her here! But *feed* from them? ‘What do you mean *feed*, Lady Madonna?’ Lara asked horrified.

‘The people from the skies use the energy of these children to prolong their lives. They take children from here and place them in their laboratories. The children’s spirits are absorbed into the DNA of the sky people.’

Lara sat down. She was shocked. She looked up at The Lady. ‘Why are you telling me all this Lady Madonna?’

‘I think you know, don’t you? This is part of your test as a Horus-Tasker. You have to have this knowledge so that you can use it to win your battle.’

‘You know all about that?’ Lara asked.

‘Of course,’ The Lady replied, ‘you are here as part of a test to see if you can win back your power. We have all been informed.’

Lara was intrigued and gladdened by this news. She moved closer to The Lady. ‘I’ll get out of here, won’t I, Lady Madonna?’

‘I don’t know, Lara,’ The Lady replied looking at her closely. ‘I don’t know. It’s up to you. You are a Horus-Tasker, and every once in a while people like you pass by this place.’

‘Do they all get out?’ Lara held her breath to hear the answer.

‘Not all, Lara. Not all find their strength, not all find their true power.’

‘What happened to those who failed, then?’ Lara asked fearfully. Her eyes did not leave The Lady’s.

‘The Dark GateKeepers came and took them away.’

Lara’s voice was small, now. ‘And where did the Dark GateKeepers take them?’

‘To the Ashen Forest. In that dark place, their spirits are captured by evil beings. Only in finding their power can they ever get out. None that I know of have ever escaped.’

‘Couldn’t you have helped them, Lady Madonna?’

‘We cannot interfere with your chosen experience,’ The Lady replied, ‘this is your test, your job as a Horus-Tasker. All we can do as Angels of Peace is take care of the children while the adults continue to choose being afraid. We can’t change the choices of any human being, but we can love them the best we can. We have to stand by and watch the sky people take away the children to their laboratories. We can do nothing because that would be interfering with the choices of human beings. You volunteered for this mission to find power. If you pass this test, others will learn from your adventure and you can then tell

people what is happening to them and teach them how to use their *own* power. If you don't pass, nobody will learn anything. It is in your hands.'

Lara looked at the Rainbow Bridge. Her heart felt cold at the thought of the Ashen Forest. She knew now, that she couldn't rest too long with the Lady Madonna. She couldn't hide in this children's world even if she'd wanted to. The Dark GateKeepers would come for her. She didn't know who they were yet, but The Lady would tell her. She had a task to perform and she'd better start doing something quickly. She looked at the Rainbow Bridge to the portal. She had to get out of here. She glanced around her. The little boy with the mischievous smile was grinning at her. Noah, she thought suddenly... Noah would help her to get out of here. But she'd have to find a way to make contact with him.



'WHERE IS IT? WHERE? CONFOUND IT! WHY HAVEN'T YOU FOUND THE POWDER? RAINFORD CAN'T KEEP IT HIDDEN FOR LONG! THE LAST THING WE NEED IS FOR HIM TO TAKE IT AND GET THE PROPHECY IN MOTION! WE'VE GOT THE KID HIDDEN! IT'S OVER! OVER, DO YOU HEAR!'

Seth ranted on as usual, spitting as he yelled at the top of his lungs, with the Custodians listening on, waiting for him to see some sort of reason. The Chief Aide gave a heavy sigh, hoping his raging boss wouldn't notice. He didn't fancy turning into green goo right now. Green *goo*? That Rainford girl had got them started on that one. He didn't fancy *Switching*, if you please. Why *wouldn't* Rainford be able to hide the powder? It's not as if the Aides were *sniffer* dogs now, right? They knew how to sniff things out that had *potent* smells, but this Sacred White Powder didn't smell of *anything*. Mr. *Furious* up there knew *that* much. The Aides had looked everywhere. They'd had Abdul Bakr on the case for the last twenty-four hours and he couldn't find a thing. His team had searched the Rainfords' rooms while they were out, and still the powder was missing. At this point, they didn't want to alert Rainford that anything was wrong. As far as the man was concerned, his daughter had been kidnapped and gone forever, and the Aides just hoped he'd get on a plane as soon as possible and get on home. Then, they'd be shot of this problem and their boss could stop ranting. They'd all get a bit of peace and quiet and a good night's sleep. Hopefully, they could look back on this episode and perhaps learn from it. They'd have to find out how the girl got in touch with the Masters in the first place...it was just *mind-boggling* the whole thing...how did anyone get past their portals?

It would be a good idea to ban these darned archaeologists from poking their noses around old sites like these. Let them go dig on the beaches or something and find old fossils and a few old shells...The Chief Aide looked up at his boss. Steam came out of Seth's ears and he kept on sipping his Tonic in case he Switched. Sometimes, he looked like a big bozo. The Chief Aide smiled smugly to himself. Yes, a big stupid bozo.



Abdul Bakr was suspicious. Rainford and his old buddy had been to the pyramid this morning, and now they were going *again*? The wife and kid were going too, by the looks of things. Abdul Bakr's secret spy at the pyramid entrance had told him what was going on. Ali Mehmet had told the spy they were coming *again*, but hadn't mentioned what they were after. What *were* they up to? Were they just going to have yet *another* look for the girl? If they were, they wouldn't find anything...the boy couldn't remember what had happened to him and his sister...he'd had a gormless look on his face the whole time he'd been in the hospital, and he'd even looked like a brainless bug when Ali Bakr himself had gone to the hotel room to ask after his health.

He called a couple of the Aides and arranged to meet them at the Great Pyramid entrance within the hour. He'd give the family some time to get in there ahead of them and they'd follow them in and see what they were up to. The Aides would pretend they were on a police mission to find the Rainford girl... or *something*...jeez...Abdul Bakr just wished those darn Rainfords would go home! What pests this family

were turning out to be! First, they had to put up with the too-big-for-her-boots daughter with all her knowledge and fancy *Master* contacts...well *that* got her nowhere, didn't it? Now she was holed up in a place no one would ever find her! And most probably the Dark GateKeepers would get hold of her and have her for lunch... And luckily, her family were pretty stupid. They wouldn't have a clue where she was. Not in a million years...the mother was one of those self-important sceptical scientists who were convinced that if something couldn't be seen it didn't exist; well *thank goodness* for close-minded people like her...they'd keep everyone ignorant for at least another thousand or so years... and the father was a buffoon archaeologist like the rest of them who believed all the so-called *official* made-up stories about the pyramids and other old buildings! To think they gave them those silly university degrees... degrees in lies! What a laugh these humans were. They sat around with their noses in the air, all puffed up, smoking cigars and acting important...as IF! As for Ali Mehmet, well that old fossil was as brainless as they came...Oh! Abdul Bakr was feeling tired and bad-tempered with everyone. He rubbed his temples. He'd go down there to the pyramid just to put his mind at rest and then he'd go to bed early. He desperately wanted some sleep...

Little did Abdul Bakr know, but in the next forty-eight hours or so he was going to *need* it.



The four of them stood in the Subterranean Chamber, surrounded by the rubble. Melissa had never liked this place; it gave her the creeps. It felt like an enormous rock coffin, a carved out hole in which people were placed after they were dead. Melissa clasped the Dreaming Crystal in her hands. She looked over at Nick who was unwrapping the package he'd taken out of his shirt. He'd hidden it there, afraid that someone would find it and confiscate it. They couldn't take any chances at the moment. Nobody was sure who were the good guys or the bad guys. They weren't even sure anymore whether they could trust the *police*. Ali Mehmet had his eyes closed. He was trying to concentrate and quieten himself. He was afraid of the Dark GateKeepers and he needed to calm himself down before he tried to take them on.

'What now, Dad?' Noah asked, looking bemusedly at the Buddha-posed Ali Mehmet sitting on his heap of stones.

'What now? Now, I'm going to sample this Sacred White Powder. We'll soon find out if it is what the scrolls and *Sister Abigail*, I might add, *say* it is.'

'What is it made of? In the hotel, it looked like tiny flakes of snow.' Noah touched the brown package that Nick held in his hands.

'It's a substance made from gold, apparently,' Nick replied. 'It is gold that is somehow taken right down to monatomic form.'

'What?' Noah asked, scrunching up his eyebrows questioningly.

'It is monatomic gold. What that means is, it began life as a gold metal and was heated in many, many stages until it finally heated right down into single atoms. That means it is not really gold as we *know* it anymore, but is just what scientists call a monatomic *form* of gold. Human beings cannot take any kind of gold powder into their bodies because it is poisonous. This is not gold powder like you might think. It is something different entirely.'

'Well it's white for a start...what does it actually *do*?'

'Well, you know that the body is made of organs like the heart and lungs and such? And the organs are made of cells, and the cells are made of molecules and the molecules are made of atoms? Well, monatomic gold is supposed to take all the atoms of your body and make them move very quickly.'

'So? What difference would that make?', Noah asked.

'If I put my hand on your arm now, it feels firm to my touch. See?' Nick placed his hand over Noah's upper arm. 'Now that's because your atoms and my atoms are moving at a certain speed that we both recognise. All the atoms that make up this physical world move at a certain speed, and we can touch, see, hear, smell and taste all of it. We can do this because the atoms of all these objects move at *more or less* the same speed. The Sacred White Powder, however, is supposed to make the atoms move even faster than they usually do. So, if I take this stuff and it speeds up the movement of my atoms, it would mean

that the people in this world, or dimension, would no longer see me with their eyes. They would no longer hear me or sense me in *any* physical way.'

'What, then...you'd disappear in a puff of smoke?'

'Not quite. You wouldn't see me, and I probably wouldn't see you, but I would encounter a new world, or dimension altogether. My atoms would be moving at the same speed as people of that world and I could have conversations with them or whatever. I'll find out sooner or later.'

'That's so cool!' Noah was very impressed with the Sacred White Powder. 'Can I take some too?'

'Let's first see what happens with me...it's ancient, so it might not even work anymore.'

'It's not ancient,' Noah said. 'It was delivered to you by the White Brotherhood. And, Sister Abigail *insists* that it works.'

'Maybe, Noah. Maybe. I certainly *hope* the White Brotherhood thing is real because that means someone is on our side in this whole mess.'

Nick took out a plastic water bottle that dangled from a thin chain around his neck. There was only a small amount of water in it and he unscrewed the top, took out a plastic spoon from inside his shirt and scooped a large spoonful of the powder from a small opening in the brown wrapping. Nick carefully dropped the powder into the bottle and shook the container. Some of the extremely fine particles floated about on the air around Nick. He repeated the action three times and then drank the substance down in a couple of swallows. He refolded the package and handed it over to Noah. 'Keep this on you in case anything *does* happen,' Nick said. 'Use your water bottle, the powder absorbs into the blood stream far quicker when taken with water.' Noah put the package in his shirt and secured it at the top of his trousers under his belt line.

Melissa stared at Nick, while Noah poked at him to see if he was still physical to the touch. Ali Mehmet remained in the same position with his eyes closed, unaware of what was going on around him.

'Give it a chance!' Nick cried at Noah, who had his fingers dug far into his father's ribs. Noah sat down on the rocks beneath his feet, his eyes glued to Nick. If his father popped off leaving a smoky trail, he wanted to be the first to see it! Nothing happened though. They waited for what seemed like a long while. Eventually, Nick sat down, disappointed.

The sound of voices and shuffling in the narrow tunnel that led to this chamber caused the three of them to turn their heads towards the entrance. They all looked at each other. Melissa glanced over at Ali Mehmet and realised he must be off somewhere on some Dreamtime adventure, because he still did not stir from his position. The voices were loud since, to hear each other, the group...whoever they were... had to call over their shoulders. Crawling had to take place in a line, one person behind another because the tunnel was too narrow for anything else. The shuffling and the voices grew closer and closer.

Noah listened carefully. The strangers were near to the entrance now. He thought he recognised one of the voices. Of course. It would be, wouldn't it? It was that creepy-crawly pest of a man, King Tut! Abdul Bakr was coming to check up on them! Noah looked at his mother, who had her eyes on the entrance, and then turned round to Nick... Noah's eyes darted around the chamber... Nick was gone!

'He's gone!' Noah managed to whisper loudly just as a head poked out of the tunnel into the chamber. Melissa gave a few startled glances around her, looked uneasily at Noah and brought her gaze back to the entrance.

The men were climbing out and dusting themselves down. One was feeling about in his shirt pocket...he appeared to have lost something...he said something to the other who tapped his own pocket reassuringly... Two of them stood before her now. Melissa recognised them from before; they were on various committees. She hadn't realised how small they were until now...they weren't midgets or anything, some were of reasonable height, but their features were just...small... they had small hands and protruding eyes... and they were wiry, not heavy muscled.

The men stepped forward and put their hands out for shaking. They wore big grins...a little *too* big, Noah thought... They pretended to be surprised to see them here. Abdul Bakr's bald head popped through the entrance and it took all Noah's strength to stop himself from going straight over and poking him in his annoying bulgy eyes...there were now three of them...there didn't appear to be anyone else coming through the tunnel.

'Hello there!' Abdul Bakr cried as he brushed down his trousers. 'What a coincidence! Are you feeling good now Noah? Do you remember anything?'

'No. It's all a blank. We're here to trigger a memory or something, but it didn't work! I can't remember a thing!' Noah watched Abdul Bakr, whose popping eyes moved in all directions as he spoke.

'Shame! But never mind! Where's Mr. Rainford?'

'Oh,' Melissa stepped in, 'he...he went up to the King's Chamber...' she looked over at Noah who seemed far better at lying than she did.

'Yeah, he went up there to see if there were any clues the police might have missed. He'll come down soon.'

'What's *he* doing?' Abdul Bakr pointed to Ali Mehmet who still hadn't moved. He sat with his legs crossed and his hands resting on his knees. Abdul Bakr pushed his head forward and strained his neck to get a better look.

'He's praying!' Noah said, 'don't disturb him...'

'Praying? But he's a Muslim! Muslims don't pray like that!'

'No, but Lara was a Buddhist! He's respecting her beliefs!' Noah looked over at his mother who rolled up her eyes in disbelief.

'Oh,' Abdul Bakr said turning his body away from Ali Mehmet's direction, but trying to keep his eyes on the man. Noah wasn't sure that Abdul Bakr was convinced with his explanation.

'What are *you* doing here?' Melissa asked Abdul Bakr.

'Same as you... we're looking for clues as to who might have taken your daughter. If you say there's nothing here though, we might as well all leave! We want to lock up the Great Pyramid for the next couple of weeks. There's been too much going on. We don't want the public alarmed by any possible further incidences. We don't know if there are groups of kidnappers taking tourists or not. We'll find out after further investigations. We're lucky to have kept this quiet. We should go now.'

Melissa looked at Noah, who thought quickly. What could they do? They couldn't let them lock the place up! And what about Dad! This was getting to be a mess! And where the heck was Ali Mehmet? His body was here, but his mind had travelled off somewhere... suddenly all heads turned in Ali Mehmet's direction... he was moaning... crying... he started yelling... 'They know! They know! The Dark GateKeepers know about Lara! They going to fetch her...They will take her to Ashen Forest! She there! She there with the children! Rainbow...Rainbow... Noah! Speak to her!'

Abdul Bakr rushed at Ali Mehmet and the two other men followed. Abdul Bakr grabbed the old man by the shirt collar, pulled him to his feet and shook him.

'Where have you been! What are you talking about? Talk old man!'

Noah and Melissa stumbled over the rubble to Ali Mehmet's aid. 'Leave him alone!' Noah cried. 'Don't you touch him!'

Abdul Bakr turned to Noah and Melissa, his eyes bulging! 'Praying? You think I'm stupid? He's been travelling!' Abdul Bakr started ranting and raving in some language that was certainly *not* Arabic. He looked from Noah to Melissa to Ali Mehmet while yelling stuff that nobody understood. Melissa stepped back in surprise as Abdul Bakr's face started going green and moving...he kept on ranting...he seemed to start collapsing...his body started shimmering and green waves of energy, like smoke, started coming from him...his face was falling apart as his mouth continued to move...he reached for his shirt pocket and grabbed for the Tonic...Noah lurched at Abdul Bakr and knocked the Tonic from his hands...it fell into the rubble...the other two men ran at them, one tripped over the pile of rocks and the other, grabbing at Abdul Bakr, reached into his own pocket... he looked down...nothing was there...he'd lost his Tonic in the tunnel! He turned to the man who'd tripped and reached down for his pocket, but Noah took a leap and tumbled right down on both of them. In the tussle, the second man managed to throw the Tonic clear. Abdul Bakr ran for it, grabbed it and made for the entrance to the narrow tunnel. He poured the stuff

down his throat in great gulps and as he sank to his knees, his body stabilised. It stopped moving and became solid again. He put his hands to the floor and crawled back through the tunnel.

Ali Mehmet, meanwhile, grasped Melissa's shoulders. 'Go!' he shouted, 'Go to the Great Lion! Lara at Rainbow's End! Sister Abigail tell me! You must go to the Great Lion and find the White GateKeeper! Go now!'

'But what about Noah! I can't leave him!'

'He fine! The men finished. Don't worry!'

Melissa looked down in horror at the newly forming green slime on the floor of the Subterranean Chamber. Abdul Bakr had taken off with the only remaining Tonic. The two men left behind were now formless and luminescent...the green slime actually glowed in the dark like the gooey plasticine her children used to buy from toyshops. This horrible stuff though, was even wetter and slimier...it slid off the pile of rubble and moved along the floor and up the walls...her skin crawled at the sight...she looked over at Noah who watched the whole scene with a look of disgusted fascination. Melissa, Ali Mehmet and Noah looked on as eventually the slimy green beings disappeared altogether...

Ali Mehmet turned to Melissa, 'You still here? There no time!'

'But I don't understand, Ali Mehmet? What is the Great Lion and what do I do when I get there?'

'We have to use this,' Noah interrupted. He was looking tousled, with his hair standing up and dust smeared over his shirt and trousers. He held the package in his hands. 'It worked for Dad. It'll work for us.'

'But...but...we don't even know what's happened to Dad. Shouldn't we wait for him to reappear before we go swallowing this stuff? Anything could have happened to him!'

'Do we have time?' Noah asked his mother with exasperation. 'Whoever's in charge of Abdul Bakr's lot are going to figure out something's wrong. You heard what Abdul Bakr said, They plan to close this place. They don't want us poking about. And now he's gone off for help, we're really going to be in trouble.'

'But I'm worried...' Melissa was deeply anxious. 'I don't know what move to make next...I don't know where Nick is, I don't know if I should leave you, Noah... I don't know what to...Melissa felt a surge of heat move up her arms. She looked down at her hands and found them still clutching at the Dreaming Crystal. In all the excitement, she'd quite forgotten about it. A light in the centre of the crystal caught Melissa's eye. She looked up at the others and with one hand put a finger to her lips.

Everything was quiet in the chamber. The light grew until it encircled the clear stone in Melissa's hands...it moved from the crystal to the centre of the rocky cave, leaving a silver trail that ran into the crystal centre. The light strengthened and expanded until it took up most of the space in the chamber. The three of them sat down to watch in awe; nobody said a word



Back in the Subterranean Chamber, Nick had suddenly had a funny turn after thinking the Sacred White Powder wasn't going to work after all. He'd started by feeling as if he had butterflies in his stomach...then ...he'd got a strange case of goose bumps that kept on raising on his skin in waves...after that, he'd begun to hear a sound, a humming in his body...it was a sound he was familiar with, yet he'd never heard it before.... wasn't *that* weird? He'd also been able to hear voices, lots of them... people were talking in his ears nineteen to the dozen... then the voices had disappeared... he'd looked around at his wife and son... they'd started shimmering...the walls of the room had started moving...becoming fainter... everything had become brighter, more alive... soon, the Subterranean Chamber had disappeared. The strangeness in his body had eased as the new surroundings came into view... His head still felt peculiar... his eyes felt a bit itchy, and his forehead felt tickly...he tried to scratch at it but the sensation was *inside* his head...

Nick found himself seated on a marble floor in the middle of a hall so huge that he couldn't even *begin* to imagine its measurements. The building was domed, and in the dead centre, encased in clear crystal right under Nick's bottom, was a gigantic white dove of polished quartz.

He stood up and felt dwarfed by the hall. It was quiet...peaceful. He waited, almost holding his breath. He began to hear music...the sound was all around and within him... the air seemed to glitter with gold sparks, as if someone had allowed gold fairy powder to fall from the ceiling... then they appeared... they just were *there*, all around him... groups of men in white tunics and brown roped belts tied at their waists. They *all* had dark brown curly hair and brown skin, though they were of different shapes and sizes...*all* were bigger in size than Nick, who was quite tall by human standards... and they wore sandals... There was something so peaceful about these men, something so divine... Nick was speechless; he couldn't think of anything to say for himself. One of them spoke first.

'Hello Nick, we've been waiting for you. My name is Balthazar, and these are my Brothers. We are known as the White Brotherhood or The Order of the Dove. We welcome you.'

The White Brotherhood...The Order of the Dove...! The people who made the Sacred White Powder! So it *was* true! This being called Balthazar had a voice and face that was so gentle, so *caring*; it made Nick's heart want to burst just being in his presence.

'Who are you exactly...I sort of... I know *of* you...' Nick was overwhelmed... He'd felt this same way on his first day at school many, many years before...

'Of course you know of us...we sent you the Great Legacy. The White Brotherhood acts as a bridge between humans and Orions. The Orions are beings of knowledge and of great civilisation. They have a form that is very different from yours, and so we speak on their behalf concerning spiritual, priestly matters. We have both Orion and Human DNA, and exist on the borders of their dimension. We are known here as the High Priests of Orion. We pass down knowledge from these people to you.

'Where are we?'

'This is the Temple of Orion, Nick; it is also known as The Great Domed Hall. We are within the City of Heliopolis.'

'The what? But it can't be, can it? I suppose it must be...' Nick was babbling. He thought he'd better keep quiet until he'd composed himself. *Heliopolis*? The great, legendary city of Heliopolis? It was so old... so *ancient*. Nick had studied the history of Heliopolis; it had been a great bustling city situated near to where Giza is now. It had been a place of great learning and people had come from all over the world to study there. Great temples had been built at Heliopolis, and it had been written that the greatest, most magical teachings had been secret. Nobody ever found out what these teachings were about because everyone who took them was sworn to oaths of secrecy.

'Did I travel back in time?' Nick asked.

'No Nick,' Balthazar smiled. 'You travelled *out* of time.'

'*Out* of time? How is that?'

'Heliopolis never existed in time. This was never a place in your physical world. It belongs here in Orion. This is not a place where time passes. We always are. We do not move forwards or backwards. We do not exist in time like your world does.'

'We're *in* Orion?' Nick looked around the Great Domed Hall. 'The star *constellation* Orion?'

'Yes. To get here, you have to move through a portal. Instead of travelling through space and taking a lot of time to get here, you simply move through a portal.'

Nick stared at Balthazar, and then frowned. 'I wish I could understand what you're talking about.'

'Let me give you a demonstration.'

Balthazar looked to one of the men of the White Brotherhood, who looked up at the centre of the domed roof. He lifted his hands, palm upwards, and closed his eyes. The ornate ceiling opened as if it were sliding glass. What looked to Nick like a metal plate floated gracefully and slowly downwards in a perfect vertical line. It moved as if it were light as a feather... did gravity exist here? From the floor, near

to where Nick was standing, the dove rose from its crystal encasement to meet the plate. Nick blinked and looked down at the crystal the dove had been covered in. It was liquid, and moved about throwing off rainbow shafts of light. The dove spread its wings and received the plate on its back. Nick could see now that it was not metal at all. It was something like moving, shimmering silver-coloured liquid, and as it began to spin, it shot light beams upwards into the room.

‘What is that?’ Nick asked Balthazar. As Nick’s voice sounded across the room, the light immediately formed pictures. It was a picture of Nick looking confused. In his head, lots of different pictures were spinning and bumping into each other. He had a frown on his face. The picture faded in and out, and sometimes formed the snowy interference dots that he saw when his TV wasn’t properly tuned in to a particular station.

‘As you can see, it’s a sound translator. It translates sound into pictures. It is part of us. When we speak, it forms pictures. We only use it for our students because they sometimes find it difficult to understand what we are teaching. They hear words, but not their meaning. You know what I mean. There have been times when you have spoken to people and later found that they did not really understand what you were trying to say, even though you used all the right words. This machine makes sure the true meaning of what we say is clear to the student.’

‘Yes, up there I looked exactly the way I feel...completely baffled! But what happens when you all talk at once?’ Nick asked.

‘We never speak when another is speaking. We only listen with respect. Human beings have yet to learn this lesson. You ask this question because you all are always in competition with each other. No-one listens to the next person unless they are saying the same thing that they believe. To listen is to try to understand and respect another person’s feelings, even if they think differently to you.’

Nick laughed to himself. Now that was *so* right! Everybody always had opinions about things and everyone was always trying to prove that they were right. That’s why people talked at the same time! No wonder the world was always at war. Nobody bothered to listen to each other.

‘Let me help you understand how you are here in Orion’. Balthazar paused for a moment to allow the pictures above the dove to disappear. Then, he began to talk again and new pictures flashed in the air above them.

*The planets and stars in the night sky only **appear** to be far from each other. If you get into a space rocket and use time and distance to get from one planet to another, then you will experience the **sensation** of time and distance.*

Pictures of space travel flashed before Nick. Rockets glided through the black void of space as their clocks showed millions of years passing before a planet was reached.

Distance and time are not real. They are just part of the life drama. Human beings are playing a game where they are rooted to one place, and all other places are far from them. Time and distance are just part of the game.

Nick watched a school Nativity play taking place on a stage...it was a primary school. Children were taking roles in the play...Mary, Jesus, the shepherds, Joseph and the Three Wise Men... On another stage, positioned right next to the Nativity play was a different drama going on. This performance was about space aliens and such things. Some kids were dressed up in space suits and some had scary costumes that made them look like space monsters. A rocket ship took off from its stage and travelled all around the hall where the two plays were taking place. The clock in the rocket showed millions of years passing before the craft landed in the middle of the Nativity play.

The people in the drama imagine all the stage props are real. They think time and distance are real. What they do not realise is that it is all just a game.

On the Space stage, a kid in a spacesuit walked to the side of the stage and tore a hole in the 'scenery'. He crawled through the hole and punched another hole in the scenery from the Nativity stage. Then he stepped through and stood before Mary, Joseph and the others. The characters in the play looked surprised to see a spaceman...as well as the space rocket.

So, you see, there are portals like this all over the earth. Orion is one stage play and Earth is another. You don't need spaceships, only portals if you want to get to different places quickly.

Balthazar raised his hands and the images faded. The silver liquid plate ascended beyond the glass ceiling and the Dove descended into its liquid crystal home. The room was silent and Balthazar paused in stillness. His brothers stood in a soft cloud of gold light, and waited for the words and pictures to become part of Nick's understanding.

'I understand now,' Nick said finally. 'But,' he pondered, 'what about Heliopolis...it seems we have evidence... buried under Cairo are the remains of this city...'

'No, you don't have evidence of this place. You have *stories* of a city to which many travelled and received great teachings of magic and power. There is no city of Heliopolis under Cairo. There is only a city through which people could enter the *portal* that leads to Heliopolis. To do this, they had to have tremendous power. It took many, many years of life to reach this level.'

'So, how did the people who wrote of Heliopolis know about it?'

'They were all students of personal power. They found their way to us through the magic of the mind. The writers that you speak of could never give away our secrets. To do so, would alert the Custodians. We could not let them know of our work here. All teachings were, and are, secret. These writers came to Egypt to study in the temples with the great priests. After many years of learning, they found their way to us. To reach the White Brotherhood and attend the school of Heliopolis is the greatest honour. It means you have reached the highest level of power. They could never tell others how they were able to reach a city that did not exist in time. They spoke instead of a golden place where they learned many things. Readers and listeners could only *guess* where these students had gained their knowledge. They guessed in the same way as historians and archaeologists do.'

'So this is Orion? Wow!' Nick was still trying to take all this in. 'But who *are* the Orions? What have you got to do with us human beings?'

'We are some of the original earth people... it is a long story that all of you Horus-Taskers will understand if you find the Keys of Amenti...As for this place, this is a world all human beings dream of, that they deserve if they are prepared to take back their power. You have to be powerful to live in a world like this.'

'But why?'

'Because your thoughts create your world. You will learn this on your journey. If your thoughts are negative, as those of human beings mostly are, then you create a difficult world to live in. Human beings are afraid of being poor, of dying, getting hurt, getting ill, working too hard or working too little, afraid of homework, afraid of everything! When people are afraid, they make everyone else afraid and they don't live happy lives.'

'But then, how did I get here? I'm not a student of power.'

'You are a Horus-Tasker.'

'Yes, I learned that fact from Ali Mehmet.'

'Horus-Taskers have great knowledge. You are related to us. You have strands of our DNA, which is the memory of your power. You simply have to *remember* this power. We gave you the Sacred White Powder because your DNA recognises it. It does not have the same effect on everyone. The body has to recognise it.'

'Will Noah be able to use the Sacred White Powder?'

'All Horus-Taskers can use it. Other people, ordinary human beings for example, must take it over a longer period of time for it to work. They have to change their diets, their behaviours and the way that they *think* before it will have the effect that it has on you.'

'The scrolls said that the priests of the temples used to give it to their students.'

‘They only gave it to those who were of a very high level of personal power. They had to take a journey to reach us, but that journey tested everything they had learned. It tested their power. If they failed, they did not reach us.’

‘What happened to them?’

‘They were taken by the Dark GateKeepers to the Ashen Forest. It is a very dark place, full of terrible, *unspeakable* evil. To get past the Dark GateKeepers requires great personal power. They can escape, but have to look for the power inside themselves before this happens.’

‘Why am *I* here now?’

‘To remember the Prophecy of Osiris. The Prophecy lies within you; you have already learned a great deal from us although you do not remember. Your daughter going missing started the whole search for Osiris, which is a search for personal power. Lara’s kidnap was part of a grand plan to begin the unfolding of the prophecy.’

‘She was kidnapped for sure? Will she be alright?’

‘I cannot say. It is up to you and the others. Success lies in understanding the real story of Osiris.’

‘I know the *story* of Osiris from the history books, but how is it related to personal power?’

‘The story of Osiris is a riddle. You will find out the truth as you go. To know power, you have to find it in yourself. I cannot *tell* you to have power. As you uncover the story of Osiris and what it means, so you realize who and what you are.’

‘It sounds complicated.’

‘Maybe it is. But you will begin uncovering the truth once the journey begins. It is important that you do well because you will have to fight dreadful evil using your personal power.’

‘Dreadful evil?’ Nick’s voice was faint, lost somewhere in the back of his throat.

‘Yes. We have to prepare you. You have a very difficult task ahead. You are going to need every ounce of power to survive. You are going to make a journey to the Ashen Forest.’



Ali Mehmet, Noah and Melissa sat in silence. A figure started forming in the centre of the light...it was a woman...as she moved, her body threw out shafts of rainbow light...Sister Abigail! Ali Mehmet gasped and put out his hands to her image.

‘*Greetings loved ones,*’ Sister Abigail called cheerily. ‘*What’s with the gawping faces? You’re not used to magic yet? Still getting surprises? In fact, I have another surprise for you...*’ Sister Abigail looked around at the three awe-struck faces. ‘*Someone I know needs to speak to you...*’ Sister Abigail’s image slowly faded without waiting for any response from the others. In her place, a scene appeared...there was a green meadow... with trees, a small brook...and near the meadow a bridge...it was silver...with bright stones of different colours...someone sat on the bridge, right in the middle... Lara! Lara was sitting on a small rock in the meadow, with her eyes closed... her mouth didn’t move, but they could hear her voice...

‘*Noah! Noah! I need you to hear me, Noah!*’ Noah jumped up from the ground where he was sitting.

‘I hear you Lara! I hear you!’ Noah was overjoyed to see his sister. Lara sat still. She repeated the same phrase. ‘*Noah! Noah! I need you to hear me, Noah!*’

‘She can’t hear me!’ Noah turned to his mother.

‘*Sit, Noah!*’ Sister Abigail’s voice cried out of nowhere. ‘*Focus on her. Focus your energy! Don’t shout to the image that you see. Speak to her mind. Focus your message to her mind.*’

Noah fell to the ground and sat cross-legged as Ali Mehmet had done earlier. He focussed the words *I hear you* at his sister. He formed an image of her face in his mind and imagined himself *becoming* her body. Then, he focussed the words again *I hear you, I hear you Lara*.

Ali Mehmet and Melissa watched the image of Lara in the crystal light. She sat still, chanting the same phrase over and over again. Suddenly, her chanting stopped...another voice could be heard...it was Noah’s! Melissa looked over at her son, who was focussing his words silently. She couldn’t hear him

here, but she heard him in the crystal light! Lara looked up. She closed her eyes again and smiled. She heard him!

Melissa leaned over to Noah and whispered, 'She hears you Noah, speak to her now!'

Noah spoke. *Lara! Where are you? Noah heard the answer in the crystal light. I'm in a place called Rainbow's End, Noah! It will be difficult for you to get here!*

So how did you get there?

They brought me here, King Tut's men! They brought me through the Great Pyramid! But we came through a portal...they used some sort of machine to make the humming sounds...the hum changes the body, Noah!

It's alright, Lara, we know about that, but we don't know how to make the sounds ourselves. We've got the Sacred Powder. That might help! Or we might have to find their machines. We'll get you out!

Noah, I have to get out soon. The Dark GateKeepers are coming for me!

I know. Ali Mehmet told us! Can't you remember how you got there, Lara, the exact route I mean?

Yes, I remember, but I'm not sure how to get back without a humming machine...I'll try...but if I do get back into the pyramid, what then? I'll be stuck between dimensions!

Tell me exactly what happened, Lara. We have to try something!

The three of them listened carefully as Lara described her journey to Rainbow's End. Not only did she tell them about the Lady Madonna and the children, but she also spoke of her conversations with The Lady and her talks with the Masters of Time. They learned more about the Horus-Taskers and the awesome challenge that lay ahead.

Noah, I have a message for Mum in all of this! Melissa sat up.

Tell her to have complete trust in herself. She gets very afraid of getting things wrong, and then doesn't do them. If she is to succeed as a Horus-Tasker, she must not ask so many questions. She must just follow her heart, even if things don't seem to add up!

Lara gave a smile, and Melissa wiped tears from her eyes.

We will succeed together, if we have faith and trust in ourselves. We have to believe we can do it, otherwise we will definitely fail.

Noah focussed carefully now on his sister. *Lara, we have to talk as much as possible. I want you to try to find your way back into the Great Pyramid. I'll try to find my way to the dimension that they took you to. After that, I don't know. They're going to close the pyramid, so we'll have to figure something out. Let's try and meet half way. I can't think of any other plan for now. We have to start somewhere.*

*Okay Noah. We have to believe we can do it. We **will** meet, okay? No question about it.*

No question. See you soon. In person!

Melissa, Noah and Ali Mehmet watched as the image of Lara faded. Melissa felt a stab of panic, and then calmed herself. Her daughter had spoken. She, Melissa, would have to have complete trust in herself. All her questions, all her worry, would get her nowhere. Melissa knew that she still had a lot to learn, but that she didn't have time to sit pondering over these new wonders. She'd have to do just as Lara said. She'd have to *trust*. Well, she'd simply do her level best. She looked at the others, who were deep in thought.

'We'd better get going, guys. We'll have Abdul Bakr's men on our tails before we know it. I know I've got places to go. I won't ask questions, I'll just figure it out as I go. I'll try to trust the whole process. Noah, you've got a lot to figure out. We don't know where Nick is, but I'm going to try not to worry. As for you Ali Mehmet, what are you going to do?'

CHAPTER 6: THE LION PEOPLE OF ORION

Melissa stared up at the Sphinx. This huge statue of the lion with the man's face and headdress of an Egyptian pharaoh, rested in the sand, silent and secretive, holding the mysteries of thousands of years of Egyptian life. She stood between the gigantic paws and looked up at its towering body looming up into the early afternoon sky. She felt its force; it was overwhelming, like the task ahead of her. She frowned and bit her lip. How on *earth* was she to get in here? A lot of strange things had happened lately, but the magic didn't seem to want to happen now. Ali Mehmet had said she was to come here, but why? How was she to do whatever it was she had to do? In her search for the right spot to enter the place...if she *could* enter that was...she'd walked around the great statue twice. Now she was exhausted. The heat of the sun and the length of the journey were too much for her. She sank to the floor and took out her water bottle. It was cooler here; the sun was moving behind the great lion, and its head cast a shadow that Melissa was grateful for. After a long drink, she felt better. She stayed in the shade for a while lounging into the warm sand and resting her head back against a large granite block covered in ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphics. She closed her eyes...it had been a stressful time...she felt sleepy...but no! She mustn't sleep...what about...she dozed...and saw the woman in the cream tunic...

'Melissa! Come! Get up and walk!'

Melissa blinked and stared at the woman while trying to heave herself up from her spot. She knew she was asleep, yet she was also awake. She stood to meet the woman whose hair fell to her waist in a straight shiny yellow mane. She was odd-looking. Melissa tried to focus on the strangeness but then the woman spoke.

'I'm Selene.' The woman put her hand out and took Melissa's into her own. Her hands...they were soft and...did the back of them have a fine golden coat of **hair**? 'Come. Stand over here.' Melissa looked into the bizarre almost **too** bright green eyes and nodded. That was it! Selene looked like a cat. Her skin was silky and smooth; she had a creamy complexion on a small oval face. Her tiny mouth was upturned and heart-shaped and her nose small and petite. Her almond-shaped eyes turned up slightly at the corners. She definitely looked like a cat!

'Where are we going?' Melissa asked, as the woman stepped along the small opening between the paws of the Sphinx. Selene stopped and put her hands on Melissa's shoulders, turning her to face the body of the lion. Melissa saw that the granite block had gone. Just the lower breast of the lion stood bare and smooth...almost brand new looking! Melissa turned back to Selene.

'Do you know where the opening is? Are you here to help me? Who are you exactly? I don't even know you! Why do I need to follow you?'

'Sshh! So many questions!' The woman grabbed Melissa's hands again and looked into her eyes.

'Your journey for personal power begins here. Do you know what it is you are searching for?'

'Why, yes of course. My daughter, Lara...she's gone missing, and...'

*'I know about Lara. But what is it **you** are looking for?'*

'Well if you know about Lara, then you know...'

'What is it that you are looking for, Melissa? If you cannot answer the question, you cannot pass through the portal.'

'The portal, but where...' Melissa swung her head in every direction looking for a cave, a tunnel or **something** to indicate there was a way in to this place. 'Where is it?'

Selene stood watching Melissa's eyes, moving from here to there, searching. She watched as Lara's mother began walking from the paws along to the breast of the lion, running her hands along the rock surface, searching for an opening while at the same time marvelling at its smoothness. In her waking world, the lion was as old as time...and it **looked** it.

'Melissa!', the woman called sharply. Melissa turned her head, startled at Selene's tone. 'You are not ready to go through this portal. You will have to take the route of the dead. On this road, you will find your answer to my question. Until you know this answer, I cannot allow you through. Take the journey of the Duat.'

'But, you can't...' Melissa's voice trailed off as Selene simply vanished into thin air. She ran to the spot where the woman had stood and let out a frustrated breath. What now? Melissa sat down in the same spot as before, only this time she leaned against the breast of the lion. She was sleepy again...and dozed...

Melissa awoke as dusk was settling in. The sun was sinking further down into the depths of the horizon. She leapt up and dusted herself down. Why had she slept when there was work to be done? Why? She stamped her foot as tears of fury stung her eyes. What was the matter with her? Where was Selene? Was Selene just part of a dream? Why couldn't she find her daughter? Melissa looked up into the darkening sky and let out a loud yell...'Help meee!'



Abdul Bakr was terrified. How on earth was he going to break this to the boss? He'd be thrown to the Dark GateKeepers. Those ugly, menacing creatures liked a treat of green slime for dessert. It was a horrible fate; those who were fed to them had failed in their duties in one way or another. They ended up being part of the bodies of the Dark GateKeepers, never escaping until the revolting creatures died. Only then could they return to their own dimension, when the dead Dark GateKeeper's body had rotted...Abdul Bakr shivered at the thought.

What was he to do? If he *did* tell the others, he was finished. He was lucky to get out of the chamber in one piece. That dastardly boy had known about the Tonic! He seemed to know as much as his sister! And what was that old fool Ali Mehmet doing *travelling*? How did they all know about stuff like that? This whole thing was now pretty much out of control, and guess...just *guess* who was going to get the blame? Every one of those Rainford's was a danger to the world order. They just seemed to...*know*... things. *How* they knew was anybody's guess.

Abdul Bakr was at a loss. What were his choices? *Not* telling put the whole world system of slavery in danger. If this got out to the press, and that Rainford fellow *liked* to talk to the newspapers, the human race would realise what was going on and things would start to change. Yet if he did let the others know what was happening, he'd be finished off. Why should he be noble? If his boss, Seth, weren't such a drama queen, if he were more *reasonable*, he'd tell the truth about the big mess-up. If he couldn't be part of things because the boss couldn't keep his temper, why should he save *their* world?

The other two Aides had met their fate down in the Subterranean Chamber and were gone. Finished. Dead. They'd probably gone to the Great Graveyard in the Galaxy. They had been important members of Seth's circle of Custodians. How he was going to explain their disappearance was another huge problem. To be here in *this* world, was a privilege. Only a few were selected to be part of the leading circle. They'd been together since the whole take-over had started. All of them were trusted members of Seth's team.... well, he'd just have to think of *something*...

Being here in this world, meant nobody really had to die. Not unless you were stupid enough to have a car accident, get a fatal disease or get in the way of a mad gunman's bullet or something. When the body got old, and the human body got old *quickly*, they simply took a kid or two from Rainbow's End and absorbed them into the DNA. Their lives were prolonged. Some of them, especially those in prominent positions, presidents or other leading figures in the world, pretended to die when they got old. The authorities put dead human bodies that they took from hospital morgues into the coffins so that people would think them dead. They had state funerals where anybody important attended and made fancy speeches. Then, the real person, still alive, was whipped off to a special clinic and their DNA was given a dose of human child energy. They soon revived, took on some of the characteristics of the human child, were much younger looking and were placed back into society before taking on important positions again.

Only a certain number of Abdul Bakr's people could come here from other planets...there was a very strict rule regarding migration...his people *fought* to get here. This was a place of willing slaves...you didn't get a situation as good anywhere else in the universe. His planet was dead after the place had finally blown up during the Fourth War with a neighbouring planet. Most of his people had migrated to different worlds, being taken in by kindly nations. They had to look after themselves though, changing their DNA so they would look like the people of their new home planet. This green slime thing was a characteristic of DNA swapping. Mixed DNA was a difficult thing, because unless you were born from the planet itself, you lived with the danger of Switching.

His own people, living amongst people of other worlds, all wanted to come to Earth. They jostled for a place in the line to get here. But Abdul Bakr and the eleven other aides ensured only a certain number got through at a time. Over-population meant that there was more to share, and Abdul Bakr's ruling group did not like to share.

So? He had no choice. He would just have to tell his boss and the aides some story to keep them happy. He'd have to take charge of the whole thing himself. Abdul Bakr would *have* to get help though. He couldn't chase those Rainfords through the dimensions all by himself. He thought for a moment. Who would be the right people for the job? After racking his brains for a while, an idea suddenly dropped into his skull like a rock from the sky. His eyes popped out of their sockets and sat on the edge of his eyelids before springing back into place. He grinned to himself. That was it! With *their* help, he couldn't fail! The trouble was, nobody could know what he was doing...in fact, if everything went according to plan, *who* knew what *else* could happen...Abdul Bakr stood up straight and puffed out his chest. Mmmm...yes! He quite fancied himself as the next boss!



Noah swallowed some of the Sacred White Powder mixed with water, and waited. Mum had gone off in search of this lion thing that Ali Mehmet had told her about, and Ali Mehmet...well...he hadn't actually said where he was going. He'd just mumbled something about Sister Abigail and had crawled after Noah's mother in the tunnel.

Noah focussed on Lara. He thought that if he kept her face in his mind, somehow the powder might take him to her. He didn't know this for sure, but there was no rulebook for this sort of thing. Nothing was happening just yet, but then Dad had taken a while before he vanished. He'd just have to wait, and hope that Abdul Bakr and his cronies didn't show up soon.

After a while, Noah got tired of focussing on Lara. He felt like his whole body had pins and needles...hey, was *this* it? Was he changing? Noah looked around. Everything was still the same. The pins and needles continued...he was feeling itchy as well, but he didn't quite know where to scratch at himself. He looked up suddenly to a sound. It was a shuffling noise...out of *nowhere* someone appeared a few feet away from him...it was a man, a very tall man. His head almost touched the rock ceiling of the chamber. He wore a black cape and black boots. His hair was golden and fell to his shoulders.

'Hello Noah,' the man boomed. His voice was deep and loud.

Noah peered at him through the gloom of the darkened chamber. His face looked odd...it was heavy...and *furry*? Was this man...was he half *lion*?

'Hello,' Noah said warily...

'Don't fear me, Noah' the man said.

'Why do you look like a Lion?' Noah needed to make sense of the man's appearance.

'I am from Orion. We are the Cat people. The lions on your planet are our relatives. They are here for a reason you will not understand now.'

'Oh.' Noah took a deep breath. 'Did I switch dimensions?'

'Yes, but you'll return in a moment...you are not ready for your journey just yet. I am here to offer you some advice. You have to follow the path of the Duat if you are to find your sister.'

‘The path of the *what*...but I said I’d meet her in a different dimension. Here maybe.’

‘And you will do so, but not yet. This portal is blocked off to you by the Dark GateKeepers. To get past them, you need special skills and you do not possess them. If I let you pass through, you will be carried off by them for sure.’

‘Phew!’ Noah thought the whole thing sounded awesome. Like the movies. ‘What skills are you talking about?’

‘Focus. Confidence. The ability to see your own vision rather than the one they will give you; you must believe in your own way of doing things and not follow the way of others because their ideas seem better than yours.’

‘But that’s easy! I am already focussed and confident. I always do my own thing!’ Noah was up for a battle against the Dark GateKeepers. Focus? Confidence? This is *Noah* you’re talking about...

‘No. You must take the journey of the dead. On this road, you will develop the skills to fight the influence of the Dark GateKeepers.’

‘Journey of the dead? Listen, I don’t have time for this *riddle* thing...’

‘Until you learn of the Duat and take the journey, I shall not point out the way. Remember these words as you try to make sense of everything...*as above so below*.’

‘As above, so... Hold on a minute! So *you* can actually get me there? Hey now, please, you don’t know me, I’m really...’ Noah stopped mid-sentence as the man disappeared. He was gone! What a nerve! Noah was annoyed that anyone would *not* think him focussed or confident. Jeez! What now? Fat lot of good that powder stuff was if all it got him was a good-for-nothing *lion* man in a cape who didn’t let him past the first gate! Noah kicked the rubble in a fit of temper. He looked around and down at the tunnel entrance. He’d have to go back to the hotel and find out what this *Duat* thing was...



Ali Mehmet sat in his room and stared at his tiny glass of tea. He’d put so much sugar in it that some of the crystals hadn’t been able to dissolve in the warm brown liquid. He’d come to his little hideaway home in the guard barracks after Melissa and he had left the Great Pyramid. Now, he was deep in thought...What next? Where *was* everyone? Where was Lara? What was he to do now? Ali Mehmet was afraid. He knew he had to help Lara, but he only had to *think* about the Dark GateKeepers and his legs turned to jelly. To actually go *find* them and deliberately get into a fight with the horrible creatures, was feeling right now like a fate worse than death.

His ears started ringing...Oh, Oh! He knew what that meant! Sister Abigail was on the warpath. He’d felt blessed all his life to have friends like her, yet in these difficult times, he dreaded her presence. He didn’t see her as any help, rather as a thorn in his side. She kept reminding him to use his power...Oh heck, *that*. Ali Mehmet liked all the ideas she’d taught him, but now he didn’t want to face his fears because that meant facing those Dark GateKeepers. Using his power was better talked about than done!

The ringing continued and gradually got louder. He fought the sound...he made himself think of something else. He sat forward on his wicker chair and sipped at his tea. He brought his mind to the thought of his nephew, Hassan, and all the archaeological trips he’d been on with Hassan’s family. They’d travelled a lot...what good times! He loved Hassan’s family; they’d all done so much together. Ali Mehmet had never married. He’d loved a woman once...he still loved her... a long time ago when he was a young man. But she’d only been a visitor to Egypt; they’d had a wonderful romance and then she left with her parents...that was forty years ago, and he’d never given his heart to another... he thought of her now...she’d been a vision of beauty with a mane of flaming red hair and the deepest sea-green eyes... he’d loved her from the moment he set eyes on her...they’d run through Giza, seen all the monuments, sipped tea together in the local tea-houses...they’d kissed in the moonlight...By the time the weeping Ali Mehmet had reached down to his large box of men’s tissues on the floor beside his bed, he realised the ringing was gone. Wow! This was a first! He’d never done that before. He had the *power* to chase off Sister Abigail if he wanted! Ali Mehmet jumped off his chair with the ease of a teenager. He laughed. He loved Sister Abigail, but right now she was scary. She *expected* things of him. He needed to rest. So

much *stuff* had been happening, and he was weary of it all. He needed to sleep. Ali Mehmet peered out of the window of his small room. The sun was still high and it was extremely hot. He looked at the inviting bed and threw himself down on it. Sleep. Yes...that's what he'd do...



Nick was on the steps of The Underground Labyrinth, a maze of tunnels that lay under the Temple of Orion. Balthazar had led him from the Great Domed Hall into what looked like the dungeons of hell. Nick could not believe that such a place existed in so beautiful a city as Heliopolis. He said this to Balthazar who stood behind him on the steps leading down from the floor of the great building. They'd travelled downwards a long way and now they'd stopped because Nick needed to take a few breaths before going any further.

'Ah!' Balthazar smiled. 'For human beings, such beauty and wisdom as you find in Heliopolis is lost, forgotten. Heliopolis is only a dream to humanity. This is their idea of heaven. To create a place like this, people have to remember their power.'

'So what is *this* place, Balthazar?', asked Nick.

'These tunnels all *lead* somewhere, and they *come* from somewhere. For people like you who have to find something important, you have to travel these tunnels. There isn't another way for you to go. Some of the tunnels come from lower dimensions like the Earth. People who seek their power, and *use* it, find their way through the maze of corridors and end up here. Those who *don't* make it, end up in frightful places.'

'I don't really understand,' Nick said. He stayed on the higher levels of the steps, afraid to go down any further. As the steps descended, the light was fading and Nick was barely able to see his feet. The smell was a mixture of damp earth and mouldy brickwork, with a hint of rotting vegetables...

'Why do people have to take this route? Can't they cut through a portal, or something?'

'The tunnels test you. They show you things that make you realise your power. You could use a portal, but when you got to where you were going you would not have the power you needed to take what you wanted.'

'Why is the place so...so...*eerie*?'

'It is this way because it is haunted by the thoughts of those who are lost here. It is the creation of human beings who cannot let go of their fear. To enter this place is to enter within the self.'

'So how do I get to the Ashen Forest?'

'There are many routes, many choices of tunnel. Only one route will lead there.'

'But how big is this maze? How can I find a route without a map?'

'The place is endless. Many people started out in Earth-time many thousands of years ago and still wander the maze looking for direction. Some reach us, and some get caught and captured by the demons that lurk in certain tunnels. The route is inside of you. Everybody has a dream for their lives. The route to that dream lies within them. Within us all is the true map, the route to our own happiness. Your happiness lies in the accomplishment of your task in the Ashen Forest. The route to the Ashen Forest is inside of you.'

'It sounds too...*far-fetched*. If what you're saying is true, wouldn't everybody reach their dreams?'

Balthazar looked at Nick long and hard. 'Come with me.' He took Nick's arm and led him further and further down the steps until they came into blackness. As they reached flat ground, Nick could feel the hardened soil beneath his shoes. He was blind and felt panic rising in his body. His eyes moved around frantically in their sockets as they searched for some light to guide them. He reached out his arms, seeking Balthazar, and felt the comfort of his companion's shoulder.

'This is the *Void*, Nick, the eternal blackness. Everything that you want is created in the Void.'

'But you told me this is the Labyrinth! I can't see a thing! Don't you leave me here!'

'This *is* the Labyrinth. This is the maze of your mind.'

'But you said that other people have been wandering here for thousands of years.'

‘Yes. But everyone in our lives is a mirror image of our thoughts. So if you see people, you see yourself. What and whom you see here are the thoughts that are in the deep places of your mind. The Labyrinth is like your dreams...all your thoughts show up in the form of people and things...and situations’

‘I can’t see a thing that you want to show me.’

‘Stop trying to use your physical eyes, Nick. See with the body.’

‘But I don’t understand...how do I see with the body?’

‘As a child, didn’t you ever wake up at night looking at your room, only to realise that you had the blankets over your face?’

‘Yes. I do remember that.’

‘So just see like that now. See with your mind. Don’t *try* to see, just *see*.’

Nick relaxed. He stopped focussing on what his mind could not see. He remembered what Ali Mehmet had said. The third eye...he should use the *real* eye, the imagination...he made a decision to just...*see*.

All of a sudden, the place where they were standing came into full view. It was as if someone had switched on a light. Nick could see the grimy-bricked walls and the damp mouldy ceilings above him. They stood in a corridor, along which many tunnels went off in different directions. ‘Do you understand now?’ Balthazar asked, looking at Nick. ‘Human beings can see all things if they want to. They are so used to using their physical eyes, that they have forgotten that they have sight even without them.’

Balthazar ushered Nick down the corridor and into a closed space. It was a sort of large, bricked room with an open entrance. In the corner, a man with filthy long straggling hair sat crouching and scared as they looked at him. His face was smeared with dirt and his robes were blackened, torn and ragged. As he whimpered helplessly, Nick saw his teeth, both yellowed and rotten hanging from diseased gums. He was young looking...

‘This is Tom,’ Balthazar said, looking at the man sadly. ‘He’s been wandering the Labyrinth these last three hundred years. Down here, time does not exist, but I give you time frames so you can understand how long human beings can take to learn to find their power.’

‘Can’t we help him?’ Nick asked, looking at Tom’s cowering body. He was *so* afraid!

‘We cannot,’ Balthazar replied, looking at Nick. ‘He chose the path of power by entering the Labyrinth. In his Earthly life, he was very unhappy. He was afraid of many things. He decided to study the way to power, which means he had to learn *how* to give up his fears. Eventually he found his way to the Labyrinth. The time came for him to enter this place to *face* his fears. Facing our fears is the only way we can know that they are there and the only way that we can let them go. That is what he is doing. It is a rule that all those who enter must find us, no matter how long it takes. It is a rule he understands.’

‘But he is afraid!’

‘Of course he is. He has been in this room for months. He is terrified to leave it because he has encountered many demons that he has created through his fear.’

‘Why are you showing me this man?’

‘Tom is lost. At this moment, his fear is stronger than his vision of finding Heliopolis. He was trying to find his way to us, but then he started getting ideas of failing in his mind. The idea of failure creates a demonic picture. Now, all he sees are demons. When he starts focussing on finding us again, he’ll find his way to us. That is how creation works. You hold an idea in your head and then eventually it shows up in your life.’

Nick peered into the room and shivered. He didn’t want to end up like Tom. ‘I’m afraid’.

‘Of course you are. Remember, nothing happens by chance. *You* create everything in your life. You are tasked with finding the Ashen Forest and doing what we have prepared you for. And once this is done, as a Horus-Tasker, you will share this experience with others. It is your task as an Egyptologist to share the legacy of power with others.’

Nick took a deep breath. He carefully put one foot forward. He looked up into Balthazar’s caring eyes and said softly, ‘Somebody once said that the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.’



Lara was pleased. She'd made contact with Noah and she was now trying to hatch a plan to get back to the pyramid. She'd returned to the bridge in case Noah wanted to get in touch. She'd spoken to him here so she saw it as a good luck token. Maybe it would give her more luck in thinking up ways to get home. Lara was also happy because she'd noticed that her parents' child selves had faded quite a lot. Noah was just a wisp of energy, though from time-to-time all of them returned to normal. The Lady had told her it was a good sign because the adults were obviously trying to trust themselves more and were making efforts to release their fears.

Lara sat in the evening sun, waiting for an idea to form in her head. The sun was moving down closer to the horizon. It wouldn't be long before it was dark. She rubbed her hand on the cobblestones beneath her. *Come on. Give me your energy. Give me your knowledge. Help me like you did Noah.* She sat still and nothing came. *Transport me back to the pyramid.* Lara tried to stay fixed to the spot but couldn't help wriggling around. Her bottom was getting cramped.

She focussed on the bird song and the soft whisper of the breeze in her ear. This was good...there was a rustling sound...Lara's ears picked up on the faint noise...the birds continued their chatter ...and the rustle remained. She looked around. Nothing moved except the tree branches. They waved and...did they rustle? The noise was different to the rustle of *leaves*...her eyes fixed on the end of the bridge towards the closed portal... no, it wasn't a rustle, it was more of a... march? Was it a march of feet through long grass? Someone was behind her on the grass verge...it was The Lady. She looked panicked.

'Lara,' she said walking closer to the bridge, 'they're coming.'

Lara looked at her. 'Who...?' She stopped and glanced back at the closed portal. 'Oh!' She jumped up and ran to The Lady. 'I was trying to get out Lady Madonna. The bridge brought me luck with Noah, but this afternoon it didn't help me.'

'The bridge? What are you talking about, Lara? The bridge didn't help you with Noah! *You* helped you! Here is your first lesson: to command power, you have to *own* it!'

'Own it?'

'*You* create your experience Lara! The lucky charms don't create it! You have given your power to the bridge and now the Dark GateKeepers are approaching.' The two of them looked over at the portal. It was definitely a marching of feet.

'How far away are they, Lady Madonna?'

'Not far at all. They'll be here by morning. You've got to work through the night, it's the way things always were.'

Lara looked at the Lady and then put her hands to her head. She'd already wasted time looking for help outside of herself. She looked over at the portal again and swallowed hard. The Dark GateKeepers were coming, and she was terribly afraid...

CHAPTER 7: THE JOURNEY OF THE DEAD

Seth was disturbed. He sat on his elaborately decorated chair and looked at the circle of empty seats. His eyes moved warily to the place where Abdul Bakr usually sat. Something wasn't right with that man. He was keeping something from Seth and the Aides. Abdul Bakr had been on his team since the very beginning, when they'd first hijacked the Earth. The man was good at his job...he snooped around and poked his nose into everyone's business. Abdul Bakr was the person who was the true head of all the secret government agencies around the world. These secret groups kept an eye on people to make sure that nobody would change the way Seth had organised the world. If someone *did* try to change things, the Aides would make sure that the person got killed or was removed from their jobs. Of course, everybody who worked as spies in these agencies *thought* that they were controlled by people of their own country, but those in the top jobs knew who the *real* bosses were. The Custodians were known as the Invisible Ones to the highest government people around the world. They never attended any gatherings or conferences. They just ran the whole world from this hall in Egypt.

Seth and his Aides had sat together in the beginning and invented slavery. The ideas they came up with were wonderful! One of the Aides was responsible for inventing money and banks. Another invented the idea of jobs. Human beings could work lots of hours in a day for very little money. Then the money they earned had to be put into a bank, which charged them for putting it there! Human beings never argued about these things because another of his Aides came up with the idea that if the human people were made to hate each other they would concentrate on fighting together rather than on the slavery! So sometimes the Aide would tell governments to create reasons to have wars with other countries. Or the wars could be *in* their countries between people of different religions or different colours. It was easy to come up with reasons to make people hate each other. Humans believed *anything* they were told! Seth had never met any race like this one in all the planets he'd visited. When there wasn't a war, one of the Aides on Seth's team always made sure that humans had things to take their minds off their problems. Such things were new fashionable toys, clothes, electronics and movies. While humans kept their minds on getting bigger and better things, they didn't question why they were treated like slaves.

Now, though, things were not good. Seth could feel it under his skin. And Abdul Bakr was up to something. His eyes had bulged in a funny way when he'd told his story, and Seth had not believed him. He'd come running in from the pyramid and warned them all to close the place down. Apparently, the Rainford family kept going there to nose around and look for clues about their missing daughter, and Abdul Bakr was worried that *Ali Mehmet*, one of the older security guards, might help them find something. Abdul Bakr believed that Rainford had given Ali Mehmet the Sacred White Powder for safe-keeping and the old man had swallowed some of it. He'd found the old man on his own in the pyramid trying to travel. Abdul Bakr said that the powder had had no effect on Ali Mehmet, but that he was planning to make sure the man met with some kind of a fatal accident. He'd also said that the two Aides who had gone to investigate with him were trailing the family. Funny that. Seth knew Abdul Bakr had his own team of spies to do his dirty work. Why would important people like Aides be asked to follow *anyone* around...they would refuse to do it for a start. Seth felt a cold shiver move up his spine. So where were they then? Where *were* his two Aides?

Seth breathed deeply. He always followed his hunches about things and they proved right. He reached down to a small table beside his chair and pressed the buzzer on the intercom phone. A voice answered. 'Get in here now,' he commanded his Chief Aide, 'something's gone badly wrong.'



Melissa and Noah crouched over the pile of books on the cool polished floor of Hassan's home. Warm air wafted in from open French windows and the early night sky showed off its sparkling treasure to anyone who cared to look. Ali Mehmet's nephew was pointing out some diagrams and explaining their meaning.

Hassan's English friends had practically *barfed* into his home earlier on this evening and asked for books on information about the Duat. 'The *Duat*?' Hassan had questioned them with knotted eyebrows. 'The Duat? Where's Nick? He knows about stuff like this.'

'Nick's out...with the police...somewhere...' Melissa had said quickly. 'We need the information urgently.'

'But why? What's going on?'

'Hassan,' Melissa said carefully, 'it's about us finding Lara. I can't go into the whole story, you'd never believe it for a start, but if you can just give us some information, we'd be grateful.'

'Ali Mehmet will probably explain it better,' Noah piped up.

Ahh. Uncle Ali. Now that figures. Hassan had stared at the pair of them. They looked dishevelled, like a couple of tramps. They were dusty and tired-looking. His heart went out to them. It must be terrible to lose your family member. Whatever they wanted, he'd give them. Uncle Ali was probably spinning them one of his famous stories of adventures through pyramids with wild Aborigine women. He'd heard them all as he was growing up. Trouble was, Uncle had now gone too far with his tales. These people were mad with grief. They would believe anything if they thought they might get their child back. Perhaps they thought that by following the path of the dead... 'Okay,' Hassan said. 'I'll get the books so we can look at the pictures. I'll explain the rest.'

'The Duat,' Hassan explained, 'was believed by the ancient Egyptians to be the Kingdom of the Dead, a placed ruled by Osiris. Do you know who Osiris was, Noah?'

'Sort of. Dad told us the stories of the Gods, but I can't remember much now. He was one of the children of the Earth-God, Geb and the sky-goddess Nut, wasn't he?'

'That's right. There were four children, Osiris, Seth, Nephtys and Isis. Osiris married Isis and they ruled over Egypt together. Osiris was the very first Pharaoh, and Seth became jealous of his power. Eventually, Seth killed his brother Osiris and cut up his body into fourteen parts. He then spread the bits and pieces all around Egypt hoping they wouldn't be found. But Isis, being a very determined woman, found all the parts except one, and put her husband back together. She used her special powers to breathe life back into her husband. The one part of him that was missing was his phallus....'

'His phallus?' Noah enquired.

'His *penis*,' Melissa raised her eyes as she said the word.

'Because it was missing,' Hassan continued, 'she couldn't make a baby, so she made an artificial penis and placed it on Osiris' body where the old one should have been. Then, she became pregnant and gave birth to Horus.'

'How did she manage *that*?' Noah asked doubtfully.

'I think,' Melissa said pondering the question, 'that in the light of all this information we've heard in the last twenty-four hours, it means that she used special DNA methods to make that child. You know, like those sky people did when they first got here.'

'What?' Hassan asked in astonishment. 'What are you talking about?'

Melissa suddenly realised what she'd said. 'Oh...nothing. It was just a thought. Carry on Hassan.'

Hassan looked down at his books with a worried frown. Melissa wasn't well. Someone should give her some pills or something. At least until they find Lara...*if* they ever find the poor girl.

He went on... 'Osiris left for the skies and created a kingdom there. His son Horus grew up and went on to challenge his Uncle Seth. He beat Seth and took over the throne of Egypt. When Horus died, he followed a special path that eventually rejoined him with his father Osiris. All the Pharaohs that followed were supposed to be Horus reincarnated...he was reborn into the bodies of the reigning kings, in other words.'

'So he went up to the skies to join his father, and then returned again to rule in another person's body?' Noah enquired.

'Yes.... and no... If you look up there now...come, I'll show you...' Hassan got up and walked through the French windows onto a tiled terrace. The others followed. 'Look up there'. He pointed to the Orion constellation. Noah could make out the form of the Great Hunter. Finding the three stars of Orion's belt was the easiest way to begin tracing out the figure. 'That area and beyond, is the new kingdom that Osiris created. That area is the Duat.'

Noah studied the dark glittering sky with interest. 'So what exactly *is* the journey of the dead?'

'The ancient Egyptian Pharaohs believed in reincarnation...that human beings were born again into new bodies when they died in the old one. They were reborn, that is, if they didn't pass the tests in the Astral plane. The Astral is the place that the human soul goes to after death...These Pharaohs called themselves the sons of Horus and, when they died, they believed that if their souls were pure, they would return to the body of Osiris after they were dead. To get to Osiris was a difficult thing, though, because they had to face all sorts of horrible things to test how pure they were. They would spend seventy days doing the journey and if they passed, reunited with their father. The sons of Horus, or Pharaohs, learned many things about the Astral plane before they died. They learned how to get past all evil situations they encountered. If they forgot their knowledge, they were either hauled off by demons and things or were simply reborn into human bodies.'

'Tell me more about this Astral plane.' Noah hadn't heard about this place. He bent his neck forward onto his chest. It was getting a bit stiff from looking upwards.

'It's *supposed* to be the place we go when we die. In that place, we apparently meet all our demons that we create with our thoughts. All the horrible things we did to, or thought about other people while we were alive, come back to haunt us on the Astral level.

'It sounds horrible! Do you believe that Hassan?' Noah's eyes were wide and questioning. After all the mean things he'd done to Lara, all the pranks, all the cursing...he shuddered at the thought.

'Who knows?' Hassan shrugged. 'The ancient Egyptians certainly believed it all. They wrote enough about it, after all.'

'So what is the meaning of *as above so below*?'

'The Ancient Egyptians believed that the sky and the ground were the same thing. In other words, the places in the sky can be found on the ground.'

'Is that true?'

'Well, some Egyptologists have found that to be the case. Two very interesting Egyptologists discovered that the three stars of Orion's belt were lined up in exactly the same way as the three pyramids of Giza.'

'Oh yeah!' Noah exclaimed, suddenly remembering Dad talking about it. 'There were programmes on TV about that!'

'Yes, and since then, they and others have found that the pyramids of the whole Memphis area are all positioned in the same way as the stars in the sky.'

Noah went quiet for a moment. What did all this mean? What was the man in the pyramid, Orion, trying to say? He'd said something about following the path of the dead... but the dead went on a journey to the stars... *as above so below*...

'Hassan, can I see that picture again?'

They examined the picture that showed the Duat journey. It was complicated. Noah didn't know what it meant. Melissa looked over at Noah. She was quite lost and hadn't said very much at all.

'Hassan,' Noah said. 'Let's say it really is true that what is in the sky is mirrored on the ground. If I were to take a journey to Orion *on land*, how would I get there?'

'Good question, Noah! It is one that has been studied by Egyptologists for a long time. The same two authors we talked about also did some interesting work on the subject. They believe that the journey began on the east bank of the River Nile. Whoever took the journey had to cross the Nile by boat and make their way to the paws of the Sphinx. Once there, the Pharaoh, or whoever, had to go through a doorway of some sort...it was supposed to be invisible...'

'A portal to another dimension?' Noah interrupted.

'Yes, I suppose so. At this portal, there were two routes to choose from, one by land and one by sea. Both led to the same place, the fifth division of the Duat, or Orion...'

'The three pyramids, in other words,' Noah finished.

Hassan stared at his two friends, who were quiet for a moment. Noah looked over at Melissa thoughtfully, then, still keeping his eyes on his mother, put a question to Hassan.

'Hassan, do you believe the stories about the Sacred White Powder? Do you believe that they have magical powers as the scrolls said they did?' By now, Noah was looking at the man whom he knew was quite confused by all these questions put to him at this rather strange hour.

‘Well, I never really thought...’

‘Neither did I’ Melissa piped up all of a sudden. She looked at Noah, then squarely at Hassan. ‘I thought it was all hocus-pocus. The lot of it. Now, though, I know the stuff is everything the scrolls said it was.’ Hassan scratched his head and frowned. He didn’t know what to say. In fact, he didn’t know what these two were getting at.

‘Hassan,’ Noah said slowly, ‘you know the journey of the Duat, right?’

‘Well, I’ve studied...’

‘Yes, you have. That’s the point. If we all took the journey together, you know what to expect, where to go...’

‘Yes!’ Melissa shouted. ‘Exactly! Hassan, you can guide us! Noah, that’s a great idea!’

Now Hassan was completely mystified. ‘What *are* you talking about? I don’t mean to be rude, Melissa, but have you gone *mad*?’

‘I know how all this looks, Hassan, believe me, but if you want to help us find Lara, you’re going to have to listen very carefully to our story, to the reason why we’ve been asking these questions. We need you as our guide.’

Hassan didn’t speak. Slowly, the other two began their story.



Abdul Bakr shuddered as he spoke. The Dark GateKeepers stood before him, dense black shadows in the gloom of the lower regions of the Great Pyramid. They couldn’t keep still...light from the stars spilled from the upper walls and they warily watched the rays as they formed the geometric shape at the centre of the pyramid. The darkness was their home. Light meant death to them. The energy that came off these creatures was worse than the foulest smell possible. It was energy that made the skin crawl with revulsion. It made Abdul Bakr think of every nightmare he’d ever had, every horrible story he’d heard and every terrible picture he’d ever seen. These, these... *things*... made it so a person couldn’t concentrate on what he was saying. Abdul Bakr kept stopping and starting the speech he’d prepared. He had to focus his mind not to think of all the wickedly bad pictures that kept entering his mind. He tried telling himself that *he* was in charge these days... why, if Seth could talk to this lot as if they were his best buddies, well so could he! Abdul Bakr felt a bit more powerful now, but he had to fight to keep his mind clear.

The Dark GateKeepers listened to the noise that came from the mutant man before them. The noise told them they were going to be busy all night. More humans coming through, more humans to feed on...excitement went through the crowd...dark eyes glittered with glee...they liked humans. Humans made good food because they were so afraid of everything! It was easy to scare them. Some of them beat the Dark GateKeepers, but not too many of those who were stupid enough to come this way were successful. Some got through the doorways, but often didn’t get far. Most of them hid in the dark tunnels shivering and jellified by terror for all eternity! The mutant man was telling the Dark GateKeepers to come out of the doorways. Some still had to guard them, but the rest were to roam in the Astral corridors! They weren’t normally allowed to do this. Roaming was against the rules in case they were discovered by travellers, those people who could visit the Astral world with their minds. Humans were not allowed to know that they were trapped here. They were not to find out that they could never leave the prison and go to the place they called Heaven. To get there when they died, they would have to go through the doorways...but the Dark GateKeepers put a stop to that. Instead, the useless humans hung around the Astral, scared to death by their thoughts and bad deeds, until they were born again into another human body to be used as an energy slave...



Ali Mehmet thrashed about in his bed, unable to wake up. His forehead was wet and his pillow drenched, but try as he might, he could not escape from the Astral corridors of his travelling mind.

Ali Mehmet had tried to run away from the unpleasant situation through sleep, yet now he found himself in a very unsettling place. As he'd drifted off on his cool pillow, hoping for the peace of deep slumber, he found himself hurtling towards a huge black spinning hole that looked like it had an eye at its very distant centre.... He'd shrieked as he realised what was happening and had tried to wake himself up by jerking his body violently, but he'd just continued spinning out of control until he'd reached the hole. Once he entered the swirling blackness, he seemed to lose sense of himself. He didn't know what had happened to his body...he certainly couldn't feel it. He was just his *mind*...it felt strange, like he had to work hard to keep himself in one piece. His thoughts wanted to separate from each other and run off in different directions. This was what it felt like to lose your mind, Ali Mehmet thought. This is what mad people did. They lost control of their thoughts. He managed, though, to keep them together...just about.

He kept plunging through the blackness at such a speed, he felt a sickness in the pit of his stomach...so he still had a body...Ali Mehmet just didn't know where it was. He was obviously still connected to it. He suddenly became aware of the eye...it blinked as he approached it at alarming speed. It looked this way and that, and then suddenly it stared straight at him. Before Ali Mehmet had time even for a frightened whimper, he'd spun right through the centre of the eye and found himself quite still in a dark, black space.

It was silent, and Ali Mehmet felt his thoughts start to spread out again, like treacle escaping from a broken jar. He pulled them back once more. Where was his body? He hadn't realised before how the body kept all the thoughts glued together in one place. This was tough work, trying to keep the mind from running away! He was getting a headache, even though he didn't have a head...well not here, anyway. Suddenly there was a sound...a hiss? Someone...something was Sshh...ing...Sshh...Sshh...Sshh...Sshh... Ali Mehmet let go. At once, his thoughts spun from their centre and separated into many groups of ideas. Somehow though, as if from some distance, Ali Mehmet looked on, watching the scene as his thoughts took the form of people and things...

Ali Mehmet was in the scene now, he was in his own thoughts, in this strange drama...he was himself and he was everything else...he was all the actors and all the stage props at the same time. He was in a dark corridor with a low sloping ceiling...there were doorways leading off the corridor and the walls were worn, dirty and damp...rivulets of water ran down the sides and green moss clung to the surface as dark slime oozed out of cracks in the rock. He heard a cackle of laughter coming from one of the rooms off the corridor. His heart froze in his chest. He didn't like the sound of that voice. It was a familiar one, but he couldn't place it. The cackle sounded again and Ali Mehmet felt as if he was suffocating...he blinked and a dark figure stood before him. It was a man in a black cloak and boots. The cackling sounds still carried from the room as the man pointed at Ali Mehmet and with a beckoning finger, ordered the old man to follow him. Unable to do anything else, Ali Mehmet moved behind the man as though magnetised. They moved towards the sound of the strangled laughter and Ali Mehmet made funny sounds from his throat as he tried to moan. He was too terrified even to get a word out, yet he had no choice but to follow. They stopped outside the entrance to a cave-like area and the man entered, with Ali Mehmet behind. The smell was almost unbearable, but Ali Mehmet didn't seem to have the ability to lift his hand to his nose to squeeze it shut. He had to experience the stench of rotting flesh...a young woman lay half propped up against the wall, she laughed wildly when she saw them and then suddenly covered her filthy broken-toothed mouth as her eyes widened in terror. She tried to stand as she looked frenziedly at Ali Mehmet. She turned to her side and clawed at the walls, trying to escape their presence. Ali Mehmet knew her...he didn't understand...who was she, this young woman? He was frightened and confused. The dark man turned to look at him. His eyes were saying something...then his voice, in perfect Arabic said, *'Look at yourself...look at what you've done...'* Ali Mehmet looked from the man to the terrible scene as the woman scratched at the walls, her fingers bleeding from rotting nails. She stopped clawing and looked at Ali Mehmet again...he gaped in horror as he realised who she was...Helen! It was Helen! The girl he fell in love with in Cairo all those years ago! He ran to her and tried to take her stinking body into his arms. Her foul breath made him draw back in horror as she opened

her mouth to scream...he didn't understand...what was Helen doing here, hadn't she returned to Europe with her family? She was still the same age...yet he'd met her forty years ago...

'The mind knows not time... only the body experiences it,' came the man's voice. 'You gave her up to the caves of the Astral. You sent her here.'

Ali Mehmet looked at the man. 'But Helen went back to England.'

'In your mind, you gave her up. You were both in love and you gave each other up. You were scared of love and so was she. You both were scared to marry. You both were scared to have children. Yet you loved each other. When you love someone or something, and you do not live your dreams, you send a part of them here to rot, in the caves of the Astral.'

'But isn't she in England?'

'Her mind is here in this hell. Her body is in England. Just like your mind is here and your body is in bed in Cairo.'

'Has she gone crazy or something?'

'You call it that in your world. Really, being crazy just means your dreams end up in the Astral and you spend a lot of time here, out of your body.'

'Why am I visiting Helen? Why do you say that I caused this?'

'You caused this together because you both belong together. You both gave up on your dream of love and now she's crazy and you're a lonely, old man. What is your life about? Working? Sitting alone in your room hoping your nephew will take pity on you and invite you for supper? You're an old man who has done nothing with his life because he was afraid. You are just like Helen. You have rotted away the years. Helen is your mirror image. So Ali Mehmet, how does it feel to be an old man who is too lazy to help the people he knows are in terrible trouble?'

'Why do you say I am lazy?'

'You are lazy because you are afraid of everything. You were lazy to love and now you are lazy to help your friends. Why did you sleep when you should have been helping them? You sleep a lot, don't you, Ali Mehmet?'

Before Ali Mehmet could answer, the man had turned and swept out of the cave. Despite his wishes, Ali Mehmet was forced to leave Helen, now cackling again, clinging to the walls.

They weaved in and out of similar corridors until they came to a sudden halt before a heavy wooden door. It was a door rotten with age, and one attached by ancient iron hinges to the rock wall. The man turned to face the somewhat paralysed Ali Mehmet. He pointed to the door. *'Beyond that door, lies your courage to follow your dreams. The door has always been there, yet you refuse to open it. You ask many questions, yet the answers are there for you.'*

Ali Mehmet stared at the door. This man was right. He was scared of everything. He had been scared to ask Helen to marry him, scared of marriage and children. He was scared to fail at everything. He was now scared of the Dark GateKeepers, and he was scared that if he got involved with trying to find Lara, he would fail and she would die a nasty death.

*'Everyone is afraid of something, Ali Mehmet,' the man said kindly. 'The thing is, though, we must always do the things we are called to do **anyway**. We must not let our fear of failing stop us. When we do let our fears stop us, they become demons in the corridors of our minds. They haunt our sleeping moments, taking away our peace.'*

Ali Mehmet walked to the door. He pulled on the rusty ring that would help yank it open. The door was jammed. He yanked again. Still it wouldn't move. He turned to the man and gave a questioning shrug. The man looked at Ali Mehmet and said, *'When our fears become our demons, all the doors to courage and freedom remain closed. To open the door you have to get rid of the demons. You know what to do.'*

Ali Mehmet closed his eyes and imagined Helen. In an instant he was with her again, in the cave. She was quiet now, and through the oily hair that hung over her face, huge eyes peered through red-rimmed sockets. 'Helen,' Ali Mehmet said softly, 'I sorry I let you go. I afraid of many things and I give up on my dream to marry you. Now I know that to find my power, I must be brave and follow my heart even when I afraid. Please return to your body in England. Let your mind be well again. You do not belong

here. You not be afraid no more. When all this over, I come to find you and we marry. I have loved you all this time and I know you loved me too.'

As Helen looked at Ali Mehmet, tears filled her eyes. A light from above them both pierced through the darkness and Helen began to transform before the old man's eyes. Her hair seemed to burst into flame as the shining red returned to give it full bloom. Her eyes became the deepest green emeralds he'd always remembered before he went to sleep at night and her skin returned to the palest English porcelain. She was an image of beauty, the way he'd always held her in his dreams. Ali Mehmet wept before this vision of Helen, and as he did so, she began to age slowly before him until the forty years had caught up with her. Ali Mehmet gasped. She had lost her youth, but not her beauty. She smiled upon him and said *'I will wait for you and give you strength.'* With that, she disappeared before his eyes. They were free!

Ali Mehmet closed his eyes, focused, and again found himself standing before the man and the door. The door was open. The man waved an arm towards the door. *'Go Ali Mehmet, and do your task. Help Lara, and in doing so, find your own power. There will be many things to fear, but walk past them and you will be free. Remember, the demons are all your thoughts, all of your broken dreams.'* Ali Mehmet took a breath and smiled warily at the man. He looked towards the door and slowly, he walked right through it.



Lara looked up at the night sky, her heart beating a little too hard. She wasn't thinking clearly. She needed to calm down. She lay down on the cool grass near the Rainbow Bridge. Lady Madonna had left her alone for a while so she could pull herself together. She needed to come up with a plan to get out of here before the Dark GateKeepers arrived. As she tried to gather her thoughts, the steady thud of their marching feet travelled the depths of the earth to reach the ground beneath her. Morning. She'd have to think of something before morning.

Lara closed her eyes and took a few deep breaths. Sister Abigail had taught her a breathing exercise that would make her feel calm in difficult situations. Taking tests at school didn't compare to being carried off by the Dark GateKeepers, but she hoped it would work even now. Lara imagined she could see the air she was breathing and coloured it gold. She inhaled the gold air, watching it travel into her lungs, fill them and enter her bloodstream. Then, she exhaled slowly allowing the breath to carry all the fear out of her body, leaving her clean and peaceful. She did this a few times until she felt completely relaxed. The trick, she remembered Sister Abigail saying, was that when you focussed on your breath, your mind couldn't be busy with fear. When you were not thinking about the things that made you scared, your body relaxed and could think clearly again.

Lara's heart beat much more slowly now. She smiled and opened her eyes to meet the familiar sight of Orion in the night sky, holding up his bow and aiming for the Heavens. There he was, the Great Hunter...Dad had told her so many mysterious stories of Orion...the three stars that made up his belt were mirrored on the ground in the form of the three pyramids...the three pyramids? Lara sat up suddenly, still staring at the sky. She leaned back again. The three pyramids! They were lined up in exactly the same way as the three stars of Orion's belt! Lara's heart started racing again, only this time it was a good sort of racing...she felt excited...didn't she see Orion clearly last night when she'd arrived at this place...and didn't the man, just before he'd disappeared back to where they'd come from, look up at the sky? She'd travelled here via the Great Pyramid...Lara jumped up. Orion's belt was a key to her getting out of here. She didn't know how...yes, she *did* know how! She ran across the grass away from the Rainbow Bridge and found her way to the meadow in which she'd arrived the previous evening. The rock she and the man had sat upon was positioned almost in the middle of the area of wild grass. She walked over to it. It was a low-lying rock that covered quite a large area of ground. It was rough in places, but smooth in others. She looked at the place she had sat with the man. It was smooth. She ran her hand along it. Yes...smooth from many years of use. She climbed onto the rock and lay herself across it. She didn't feel too comfortable, but she was able to lie and stare up at the belt of three stars and think for

a while. They came in here...through the Great Pyramid. This place...Rainbow's End...was it another dimension of Earth? This meadow...she sat up carefully on the rock and then hoisted herself up until she was standing, looking out onto the expanse of wild grass. She jumped off the rock and ran to the edge of the grass where the meadow ended. The grass was different here in the meadow...it was wilder...outside of it, the grass was thicker and softer somehow, like the grass that people had in their gardens. She ran around the entire meadow. It was pretty huge, and by the time she'd been right around, she was exhausted. She'd travelled quite far out from the rock in all directions and when she'd roughly measured the distances, she was sure they were equal on all sides. That was it, she thought. This meadow is on the same spot as the Great Pyramid. 'Now', Lara declared to the stars, 'all I have to do is figure out how to get back into that dimension.'



Nick was tired and frustrated. He'd wandered through what seemed like hundreds of tunnels and they all looked and smelt exactly the same. They seemed empty and silent...he hadn't met up with any demons yet. Not that he welcomed their company, thank you very much, but this endless emptiness was getting to him. At least let there be different *scenery*. He leaned against a wall and slid down it to the floor. He'd take a rest for now, before he carried on with this pointless search for direction...what was it Balthazar had said? Nick's eyes were heavy and he struggled to keep them open as he tried to recall the man's words...*the route is within you, Nick, Balthazar was saying...he was standing over Nick...*

What are you doing here Balthazar? Am I asleep? Am I dreaming?

No-one ever sleeps, Nick, they just think they do. The mind travels out of the body to give it a well-earned rest. The body is just a battery that eventually runs out. The mind is like a wire that has a plug to other dimensions. It plugs into the body during the day and makes it work by thinking. Then at night, when the body is tired of thinking, the mind unplugs and goes somewhere else.

Why are you here?

To remind you that the route is within you.

Well there's no route anyplace. I just keep wandering down the same old tunnels.

Sounds like a human being to me. Try focussing.

Oh. Wasn't I doing that?

Have you found your route?

No.

I rest my case.

Nick opened his eyes. They felt heavy and he rubbed them to give them some life. Balthazar was gone. Did he fall asleep? Did he dream? Nick remembered Balthazar's words. No. His mind had left his body for a while. Nick rose to his feet and looked up and down the tunnel. Both directions looked the same. He thought for a moment. Focus. Focus on where he was going. Nick tried to picture the Ashen Forest in his mind. He'd never seen the place, but the *idea* of it was enough. He visualised the image of trees and evil faces, and he began chanting silently...*Ashen Forest, Ashen Forest...*over and over again while walking...the walls...they were starting to look very different...they were starting to look very *sinister* in fact...they were moving...moving forwards? Suddenly Nick felt the sensation of backward movement as the walls picked up speed...back...back...was his body changing? The movement stopped. Nick took a breath and blinked...he looked down at his body...*oh my word!* He was a teenager again...



Seth addressed his audience of nine Aides. The two empty chairs sent a message to Seth that was a dagger to his back. He'd been betrayed by one of his top men, and he had to do something about it now. He also had to sort out this mess with the Rainfords. Who knows *where* they were? Seth and the Aides hadn't heard a *thing* from that weasel Abdul Bakr in the last few hours. He was up to something, and Seth, Dark Lord of the Universe was not going to let some slimy, bulgy-eyed *nobody* get the better of

him. Why, Seth had ruled this place practically *forever*, and no-one...NO-ONE was going to take his place.

‘Listen carefully,’ Seth started. ‘I want you to arrange a meeting with the Black Sorcerer.’ Someone gasped, but not one of the nine men said a thing.

‘DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID?’ Seth roared, aggravated by their silence.

‘Yes Your Grace,’ The Chief Aide piped up quickly, ‘you want us to meet with the ...the...um...’

‘BLACK SORCEROR!’ Seth finished rather loudly.

‘Wh...wh...where would you like this meeting to take place, Your Grace?’ The Chief Aide was sweating. He wiped his brow with a handkerchief and reached into his pocket for his Tonic.

‘Where do you think? There isn’t a choice. We’ll have to go to him.’

The Chief Aide took a sip of his Tonic, placed it back in his pocket, but before he could step backwards and bow humbly before his Dark Lord, he fell to the ground in a faint.

CHAPTER 8: THE BLACK SORCERER OF THE ASHEN FOREST

The Ashen Forest was black with the night. The stars were hidden to the prisoners by the thick cluster of Sentinel Bats that circled the trees and the edge of the woodland area. Every now and again a cry from beneath the trees would go out and pierce the deathly night silence. An occasional flash would light up the pitch dark as the great yellow eyes of the Soul Watchers opened momentarily.

The Black Sorcerer peered from his dark heavy-hooded robe into the blackness from his window. Beside him, amongst his ledgers on a writing desk, lay a letter from the Custodians of the Portals. They were coming to meet with him...*here*. He'd been waiting for them, long before their letter arrived. The Crystal Skull had told him all that would come to pass and he had simply bided his time. He'd waited for the drama to begin so he could play his part, and now the time was upon them all.

A flurry of activity signalled the landing of bats in the courtyard of his home. One of them let out a screeching sound and the Black Sorcerer's eyes narrowed as he received the signal. He sent it back, pulses of energy returning to the large assembly of mammals. It was quiet again as he made his way out onto the porch. When he got occasional breaks in the winged blanket above, he observed the moon half-asleep in the night-sky and watched as Orion stretched his bow, ready for the war about to break out. The Sentinels were on watch. They knew something was in the air. It was in their nature to know. Nature was their ally, the constant rippling energy of information forever moving through the atmosphere, allowing them to know who was coming and what was in their hearts.

The bright-eyed crowd parted, their wings fluttering as he entered the throng and positioned himself in the centre. He towered above their much smaller forms. They could barely make out his figure, heavily covered in his long black cloak. Against the dark sky he was a black phantom...their eyes fixed on the moving shadows within the Black Sorcerer's hood, and they listened to his communication, ears vibrating as they received the signals he was transmitting.

'The Crystal Skull has informed me that the Osiris Prophecy is coming to pass.' he began. High-pitched sounds bounced back and forth among the listeners. The excitement was high.

'The Custodians have requested a meeting and they will be here shortly. They want to make an agreement with us...they want us to help them win the war against the Human Ones.' The crowd was hushed now. The Black Sorcerer held the silence for a few moments.

'They will come with their clever words. They will come with their trading tools.'

A scream echoed through the Ashen Forest and with it came an icy rush of cold air. The Black Sorcerer raised his head and looked towards the thicket of trees.

'The prisoners are restless. Even *they* know something great is coming...' The Black Sorcerer walked slowly among the crowd, deep in thought. He stopped and looked at them.

'It's almost feeding time, and the prisoners are prepared for feeding, are they not?' The crowd nodded with hungry anticipation.

'Yes, then we'll wait a while. We'll wait until our guests arrive. The Custodians will receive the hospitality of the Ashen Forest. They will not be in a position to refuse.'

The Black Sorcerer lifted his cape and bade farewell to his followers. He ascended the steps to his home and, turning to face the tree-lined entrance to the Ashen Forest, gave a low chuckle. He'd give them their banquet first. Then...*then*, they'd get a grand tour of the woodland prison...



Noah and Hassan sat on a bench on the East Bank of the Nile while Melissa crouched on the ground in front of them. They were a suspicious-looking bunch, all huddled together over Noah's brown bag, but of the people walking, trading and eating around them, nobody took too much interest in what they were up to.

Noah was trying to scoop the Sacred White Powder into Melissa's water bottle, but there was a slight breeze coming off the river and it was blowing the incredibly light substance in all directions. Noah and Hassan had taken their doses. Poor Hassan was still a bit shell-shocked after hearing their story, but he felt he had no choice but to try to help his friends. Even if they'd lost their minds, at least he could tell himself he'd tried to give them hope. Nick had disappeared somewhere, supposedly using this magical stuff and unfortunately nobody had any idea where his uncle was. Hassan had found himself in charge of this very strange expedition into the past, and now his studies and *good sense* would be tested.

Melissa swallowed her mixture of water and powder and the three of them settled down, waiting. 'Just keep focussed on the Journey of the Dead,' Noah reminded them. Hassan just shrugged.



Lara pictured the Great Pyramid in her mind. She imagined she was sitting within its walls looking up...what did she see? The dodecahedron! Shafts of light created the geometric shape...when she'd taken the journey with the tall man, they had risen up to meet it within a pillar of white light and then a sound had turned the dodecahedron into gold...in moments, she'd found herself here in the meadow.

Looking up to Orion, Lara realised that the rock she was sitting on had to be perfectly in line with one of the stars of his belt. That also meant that this was a doorway, a portal...and that by sitting on the rock, she was sitting in an energy field. She closed her eyes and imagined being in a ray of light coming from one of the belt stars. It was gold, and it covered her completely...covered the whole rock, in fact. She imagined sitting in the dodecahedron, and remembered the sound that had turned it gold...she didn't have to *make* the sound...she could just remember it and *replay* it in her mind...she focussed hard...harder than she'd focussed on *anything* in her life... the sound was there in her mind...it got louder...louder...it was real now...her body was tingling...she wanted to scratch inside her body...some parts felt itchy...then she felt light and peaceful...when Lara opened her eyes, she was in a chair, next to an empty one...in the gold dodecahedron! The light was very bright and Lara had to shade her eyes, but she was moving downwards and, as she did so, the light faded to silver and then white. She'd moved out of the dodecahedron and was moving down the pillar of light. She found herself on the raised platform in the middle of the Great Pyramid base. She'd done it! Lara leapt into the air and shrieked with joy. Yes! Yes! Yes!

A sudden movement made Lara turn. Far, far into the distance, rising from the crevices where the walls met the floor, dark shadows moved towards her. She turned around...they were coming from all sides. Lara screamed...the Dark GateKeepers had found her! She bit at her hand in terror as she looked around. Up ahead from where she was standing was the stairwell that led into the Subterranean Chamber. She looked at the distance between the Dark GateKeepers and herself and tried to judge whether she should run for it. The only alternative was to stay here. She could stay within the beam, and perhaps move up again...but what then? Where would she go? She was in trouble whatever she did. She'd have to take a chance. Blankets of grey and black moved in waves towards her...the Dark GateKeepers were getting closer. She jumped off the platform and landed awkwardly on the soil of the floor base. She got up and ran for the stairwell. She slowed as she approached and moved carefully down the narrow steps, afraid of falling and breaking an ankle. It was dark down here...the stairwell seemed to descend forever...where was the light that had been here last time? After what seemed like an eternity, Lara found herself in the pitch black of the Subterranean Chamber...only the smallest flicker of light travelled from the centre and she stumbled around until she tripped over something...Lara hit her head on a hard object and passed out before she could hear the shuffling bodies of the Dark GateKeepers and feel their hot, foul breath on her twisted neck.



Melissa, Noah and Hassan found themselves sitting on the bank of the Nile in the dark. Apart from the fact that the electric lights and the throng of people had now disappeared, something was different...*very* different. A moving cloud revealed the crescent moon and a shaft of light reflected off a building far in the distance across the water. A rather confused Hassan got to his feet, pointed to the light and rubbed his eyes.

‘It’s the Great Pyramid!’ he shouted, ‘Look! The moonlight is reflecting off the polished surface! During the Golden Age, it used to be covered with a beautiful polished stone...’ Hassan fell back down on his knees. ‘My God! We are in the Golden Age! Oh my God! What...what...what do we do?’ Hassan grabbed his head, his hair and his face. He was in such wonder. He looked at Melissa and Noah, looked across the river...*river?* Or was it the *sea?* He spun around, looked at the scenery behind him and grabbed his hair again, his eyes wide with excitement. They were on a bank...but not a *river* bank...more of a muddy *beach*...*The pyramids, all of them...and other buildings...they were visible in the distance...but...they seemed to be on a huge hill...an island in the sea!*

‘Hassan, please!’ Noah called. ‘Pull yourself together!’ Melissa frowned at Noah, but before she could tell him off for being sharp with Hassan, a loud horn sounded. They looked in the direction from which the noise had come, and it came again, a little louder this time...it was obviously getting closer. Looking across the water, they could just about make out a barge...a rather large one at that. There was a figure at the helm...they couldn’t see clearly. Suddenly there was light...the person was holding up a lamp of some sort and waved it at them. Whoever it was obviously knew they were there, though none of them could figure out how they could be seen on the bank from such a distance without any light. ‘We must wait here,’ Hassan declared. ‘I know the story of this barge. It is the first part of the journey of the dead.’



Nick, the teenager, battled with the voices in his head. He tried to keep the idea of the Ashen Forest in his mind, but the image kept slipping away. The walls were speaking to him, distracting him...did he recognise the voices? Nick turned to examine the familiar-looking brickwork and found himself standing in the grounds of his old secondary school. He watched as the images of his youth sprang into view and listened to kids shouting greetings or insults as if he’d never been gone...

Hey Nicky Boy! Nicky Nerd! Paula Summers, the most popular, some say prettiest, girl in the school, had been his worst nightmare. Paula was the school mafia boss; whether you had a good day or not depended on *her* and she had the Melrose Private School Mob on hand any time of day or night to carry out her orders. The Mob were made up of Paula’s male admirers, those who hoped beyond all pointless hope to get into her good books and catch at least a flirtatious smile, or at most, a kiss and cuddle behind the bicycle sheds. Paula had rewards for all kinds of behaviour, and TR, which stood for *Total Rejection*, was the worst. If a person was crazy enough to refuse one of Paula’s demands, she would declare the poor victim ‘out-of-favour’ and TR was the punishment. Not one person in the school spoke to them for as long as the mafia boss decreed.

The Mob had cornered Nick one morning, the day after an important science test. Passing the test meant one got to go on a trip to London to the Science Museum and stay overnight at a Four-Star Hotel. Those who failed had to stay behind and attend science study class to catch up before the end-of-year finals.

The Mob had way-laid him as he walked to morning assembly. *Hey Nicky Nerd! Paula needs a favour...* Paula had missed school the day before and had been given the opportunity to write the test that morning. She was now demanding that Nick write the questions and answers on a slip of paper and give it to her to take into the examination room.

Nick was terrified...Paula was capable of unbearable emotional torture if her orders weren’t carried out. He’d had to suffer the taunts of her followers year in and year out as he’d excelled at school in all of his

subjects. Paula hated clever people. Amongst a million other wicked things, he'd had nasty things written on his school locker, rotten vegetables stuffed into his school bag and had endured the horrible experience of having his swimming trunks whipped off him in the school pool while everyone jeered and dared him to get out... Nick never fought back. He didn't like the idea of black eyes; in fact, he just didn't like to *argue* with people really... This year, she'd made him suffer far less and there were even times when she'd been quite *nice* to him. Nick had purposely not done so well in his fourth year at school... and as he had expected, he somehow got on better with the others...

Nick was tempted to do as she demanded, yet he knew just what happened to cheats at this rather expensive private school. They had a zero-tolerance attitude, and rumour had it that kids had been expelled in the past for just *looking* at each other during a test. Even before he could think on the problem, Paula confronted him before the doors of the school assembly hall. *Nick...Nicky...she'd purred...she'd smiled at him the way Nick had seen her smile at the endless line of boyfriends...Nick could hardly catch his breath...he'd do anything...anything not to get back into her little black book of Total Rejects...anything to have her smile at him that way...perhaps she might even get to fancy him just a little bit...*

Nick had given her the answers, and she'd passed her test. They'd gone to London and, once again, he'd been ignored and pushed to the end of the long line of would-be male admirer-puppies...*Nicky Nerd...she'd laughed at him, again and again on that very same trip....*

Nick stood in the school grounds amongst his school memories feeling the misery of those long ago days...then, suddenly, he heard an enormous thunderclap...the sky went dark and lightning crackled as it shot across the sky above him...the buildings of the school loomed eerily in the sudden darkness and as the rain began to pour she was there, standing before him...

Paula Summers was wet through, her hair clung to her head as rivulets of water ran down her face and neck...she was saying something...asking something...*Why, Nick? Why did you betray yourself? Why did you all betray me?* She seemed to be crying, but it was hard to tell as the rain pelted down even harder...

Betray her? Nick was confused...nobody ever betrayed *Paula*...

Do you know where I ended up Nick? I'm in prison now...I'm in prison for stealing and harming people. I always took what I could get from everyone...and nobody...nobody stood up to me! You...a Horus-Tasker! You never stood up for yourself. Why, Nick?

But...Nick didn't know what was happening...but I just didn't want...

I know what you didn't want, Nick...you didn't want to be unpopular...you didn't want TR, so you betrayed yourself. You betrayed the Horus-Taskers...

But I didn't know I was a Horus-Tasker!

But you were a good person...you were clever and...and ...so honest...so honest that I hated you, but you let me win, you let me change all that...and why? Because you wanted to be one of us, one of the bad people!

No! I didn't want to be bad...I just didn't want to be alone...

It was just a test, Nick! A test to see if you could keep your power, stop other people stealing it from you by making you do what they wanted you to do. Life sends us many tests...some people get hard tests, some easier ones. I was a power thief. I bullied people into doing what I wanted. There are many types of power thief in our lives and bullies are one of them. The test is always to see if we can be ourselves, no matter what. I was a childhood demon that you had to fight so that you could learn to be strong. But you let me win. You never fought back, you made sure that you didn't do quite as well at school, and then you gave me the answers to the science exam! And now look at me. I'm in prison and you...well you are still the same!

Nick blinked. Still the same? What was she talking about? He was a grown man now, and he was an archaeologist.

*Yes, still the same, Nick. The Egyptologists have the wrong stories about Ancient Egypt and you know it. You know a **little** of the truth now, but you're afraid to remember the **rest**. You're still a coward, Nick, pretending you're stupid like the rest of us. You're afraid that if you remember the truth about the Horus-Taskers and the Halls of Amenti, you will be rejected. You're scared the old-fashioned Egyptologists will make you suffer TR!*

Nick felt the goose bumps rise on his skin. The sky raged and Paula was shouting to be heard. She was right. He *was* afraid to speak the truth. He dreamed sometimes about the Halls of Amenti...but when he woke up, he wouldn't let himself think about the dreams. When he slept, he'd go places...to *schools*? In the dreams, his teachers would tell him to remember...remember Osiris...*Osiris*? Remember Osiris and the Halls of Amenti...

You should have fought back, Nick, black eyes or not, TR or not! Slowly, your power would have returned. You fight and fight until one day the bullying stops because you have won the battle against your fear! And when you fight back, you teach other frightened people something. You show them that courage wins over in the end. Have the courage now, Nick! Have the courage to remember the story behind the Prophecy of Osiris. Teach the children the truth and teach the Egyptologists the truth...change the way people look at their world, Nick!

Oh my! Nick fell to the ground as the power of the memories flooded his mind...he remembered it all...the teachers...the schools...Osiris...the Halls of Amenti...He watched the pictures in his mind...where had he been? Why had he been so afraid of this knowledge? He travelled through his memories, weaving in and out of time...putting the great story together...*now* he understood... no...*now* he *remembered* the great duty of the Horus-Taskers.

Nick returned to the present moment as he felt the sun on his face. He looked up into the face of Paula Summers. She smiled and the sun grew brighter...brighter...until Nick had to shield his eyes...when he opened them again, the walls were back, rushing past him, making him feel as if he were flying forward...

The movement stopped. Nick was back to normal again...he was back in his adult body, but he felt different...he felt *free* ...free to uncover and reveal the Prophecy of Osiris.

He sat down for some time, remembering. Nick suddenly felt a tingling in his chest as he raised his hand, a spark of light shot out from his heart area...the light filled his body...he was enveloped in a bright halo of light that bounced off the walls of the corridors...an image suddenly flashed through his mind...*a yellow eye*? Nick felt a sudden urgency...the Ashen Forest...He had to get there fast... something was happening...he closed his eyes and pictured the place as clearly as he could...he focussed...and focussed...soon, beads of sweat poured from his forehead.

It was the wing of a large bat that caused him to open his eyes...



Ali Mehmet ran for his life. They were panting like dogs in the distance behind him...no matter which tunnel he'd taken, they were there, wandering...waiting! He dodged in and out of this endless maze...running from them...He called...*Lara! Lara!* But he never seemed to find himself anywhere except within more tunnels that looked the same and were occupied by glittery-eyed *black* things....Sister Abigail had told him that the Dark GateKeepers were not allowed to wander the Astral corridors...yet here they were...

The man in the black cape had told him the answers were here...*with the Dark GateKeepers? Answers?* He didn't know what his questions were. Except one...how do I get out of here? As the question formed in his mind, Ali Mehmet's ears started ringing...*Yes! Yes! I'm listening!* It was Sister Abigail for sure!

Stop, Ali Mehmet! Stop and face them! Stop running from the things that you fear! Ali Mehmet didn't stop. Was the old Bush Lady mad? Stop? Why should he listen to her? She was wise, but...Ali Mehmet continued to run...*Stop and face them! You're good inside! If you think happy thoughts, they can't feed off you! They hate light! Happy thoughts are shiny BRIGHT thoughts!*

Feed off me? Feed? Ali Mehmet ran even faster...he pictured their teeth, sinking into his leathery skin and rickety old bones... up ahead a black dog-shaped shadow spotted him with eager, glittering eyes...Ali Mehmet turned sharply into another corridor and stopped suddenly. There must have been more than a hundred of them...he'd been ambushed...he turned to run back, but they were behind him too... he sunk to the floor, weeping in terror...

The black dog-like creatures closed in on him...the reeking breath hot on his face and arms... Ali Mehmet felt a sucking sensation...*slurping* sounds filled the tunnel as he grew weaker...*feeding*...his body could no longer move...he was paralysed...not even his neck could move...in his trance-like state, he felt pulling...*pulling*...the Dark GateKeepers were taking him somewhere.



The wooden barge loomed large in front of them. It had stopped about a hundred or so yards from the bank and swayed majestically in the low light of the half-moon. The man at the helm, whose face they could not make out, held the lamp high... quite suddenly it threw out an enormous amount of light ...the white rays reached them on the bank and seemed to Melissa to make the three of them glow like angelic beings. His gravelly voice travelled with the beams from his lantern and filled the halo of light that surrounded them.

Welcome to the Astral planes, the pathways to power. I am Thoth, the Crossing Guard of the Celestial Waterways! To alight the boat, you must open the first portal with your knowledge! Until I have posed my question to you, this light will protect you from the Dark Ones!

The three of them recoiled as black figures rose from the water about fifty yards away. These creatures moved to form a semi-circle around them. Melissa felt a shiver run up her spine and she grabbed the arms of both Noah and Hassan.

Do not fear the Dark GateKeepers, for they have no power over you if you possess light. I am Thoth, bringer of light. Light is knowledge...Light is wisdom. All of you have the wisdom of this journey written inside of you, but you have to unlock the doors to that wisdom. If you remember your wisdom, your light will shine and no dark creature can harm you. If you choose not to remember, however, then the Dark GateKeepers will take you away. You will become a prisoner of the Ashen Forest and later their food. At the first gate, you will make a decision which path you will take.

Noah eyed the black shadows warily. They edged forward, advancing on the three of them. His mother's eyes were closed now... she couldn't look as the wobbling *dog-like* figures approached the wide perimeter of light that surrounded them. Hassan's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets as he watched the creatures' teeth...*fangs*...drip with black...*slobber*. The Dark GateKeepers stopped short, about thirty yards from them. They made rasping sounds, turning their backs and edging away...Noah nudged his mother.

'You can open your eyes, Mum! They can't come any closer...they don't like the light!'

Melissa slowly raised her eye-lids, and peered into the shadowy darkness beyond. Her stomach still lurched at the sight of the dark demons, but she calmed a little when she saw them all turning away and moving back.

A horn sounded, then another, and another...a symphony of sounds began and as they did, the sky lit up just around the barge to reveal the figure. A shuffling of bodies and rasps came from the darkness. The creatures moved further into the blackness. At the sight of the figure in the light, Melissa gave a gasp and Hassan fell to his knees, holding his hands together as if in prayer. Noah shaded his eyes with his hands and peered under them to get a better look in the glare of light.

The figure was a man...well, he had a man's *body*, but his head was that of some sort of ...*bird*?

'Jeez!' Noah exclaimed. 'What the...'

'It's Thoth...his head is that of an Ibis!' Hassan explained excitedly. Thoth spoke.

*I welcome you, blessed Horus-Taskers. I am Thoth, The Bringer of Knowledge. This is the beginning of your journey and I am here to tell you of the challenges ahead. You are about to take the journey of the Duat. This is part of a journey in which you have to find the answers to a series of riddles. The answer to each riddle will be a piece of a story and you have to slowly build the story in order to find what you are looking for. But before you can do that, you have to **know** what you are looking for, and the answer to this will get you through the first portal...the Great Waterway. All Horus-Taskers have twelve Keys encoded in their bodies. These Keys are the answers to questions. To get through the portals, you have to remember the Key codes and tell them to the White GateKeepers. Some of you already possess a number of Keys without realising it. And there are some Keys you still have to discover. All of you are different. If you remember them, your body will become filled with light as the doors to the Halls of Amenti open. It is time that you remember your beginnings and your great knowledge. You will begin by remembering why you are taking this journey. If you do not remember, it is because you **choose** not to. If forgetfulness is your choice, then you cannot pass over the Great Waterway and the Dark GateKeepers will claim you.*

There was silence as the three of them looked at each other.

'It's pretty obvious, isn't it?' Noah shrugged. 'We're here to rescue Lara.'

Melissa frowned. Hadn't she given this answer to Selene at the Sphinx earlier this evening? Hassan gestured for Noah to speak on their behalf.

'Um...' Noah squinted as he looked up. 'Well, we're here for Lara. We're doing our best to find her, and we were told to take the path of the Duat.'

Your answer does not allow you to alight the barge.

'But why? Why won't you let us on?'

It is not I, but you who decides your fate. I am here to serve those who take this journey, but to take it, you have to answer the questions correctly. All I can do is try to encourage you to remember the answer. Lara's disappearance started this adventure for you. She gave you a reason to begin it. Though you need to find her, she is not the true reason you are taking this journey.'

The three of them looked at each other with alarm, then Hassan looked to the floor in thought. Noah scratched his head. He looked puzzled. Deeper...they were looking for Lara...yes...but why? Melissa recalled the stories Lara had told her through the Dreaming Crystal. The Horus-Taskers are on a journey to find their power...

'I think I know the answer!' Melissa hissed at the other two. She didn't know why she was trying to speak quietly. 'We're Horus-Taskers...we're looking for power, right?'

'Yes,' Hassan answered, 'but there's more.'

'Give it to us.' Noah said, looking into the blackness, keeping guard. 'Otherwise we're going to be somebody's supper.'

‘Horus is the son of Osiris, Hassan continued. ‘I feel the answer lies somewhere in the story of Osiris because Thoth mentioned the Halls of Amenti.’

‘Where, *what*...are they?’ Melissa asked, concentrating on Hassan’s face. Knowing the Dark GateKeepers were lurking in the shadows made her focus very powerfully.

‘The Halls of Amenti are where Osiris lives. Thoth says that if we find the keys, that is, if we answer the riddles, we bring in light from the Halls of Amenti. So *Osiris* gives us light.’

‘Are we supposed to be looking for Osiris, then?’ Noah was desperate for an answer. The thought of *not* figuring out this clue was too horrible to entertain.

‘Yes...but we need to answer the question *why*.’ Hassan pondered. ‘If you remember our earlier conversation, Osiris ruled the Earth and when his brother Seth killed him, the Earth and human beings went to rack and ruin. On Osiris’ death, Seth chopped him up into pieces...14 to be precise, and hid them all over Egypt. Isis, his wife, was determined to bring her husband back to life, and so went in search of Osiris’ body parts. She found all except his phallus. She made an artificial one and put it on his dead body. Then, she got pregnant with Horus. Osiris came back to life and went to live among the stars. Orion, as you know, is his home.’

‘So?’ Noah pressed.

The whole story is a hieroglyph...’

‘A hieroglyph? But hieroglyphs are ancient Egyptian letters, aren’t they?’

‘A hieroglyph is a symbol...a symbol stands for something’, replied Hassan.

‘Yeah...like on road signs,’ Noah said, ‘A picture of a zigzagging line means the road is slippery...’

‘Precisely, Noah.’ Hassan paused for a moment before continuing. ‘But the Ancient Egyptians were trying to tell us a story...the story of how we all got here...the story of human creation. So they left us hieroglyphs that were arranged to tell the story of Osiris. The point is, the story *itself* is a hieroglyph!’

‘You’ve lost me, Hassan,’ Noah said, ‘how can a story be a hieroglyph?’

‘I’ll answer that, Noah,’ Melissa piped up. ‘You know those riddle games you like to play, the lateral thinking puzzles? The one time, I began by telling you that a carrot and two pieces of coal were lying in a field. Then I asked you how they got there. Your task was to work out the riddle by asking me questions to which I could only answer *yes* or *no*. Do you remember the answer to that riddle. Noah?’

‘Of course! I did that one with Lara...by the time we’d asked you a thousand questions, we fitted the story together...it turned out that it had snowed the week before and some kids had built a snowman. They’d used two pieces of coal for the snowman’s eyes and a carrot for his nose. The following week, the snow had melted, leaving the coal and carrot lying in the field!’

‘Do you see now?, Melissa continued. The riddle was a Hieroglyph! There was a story behind the picture of the carrot and the coal.’

‘Got it!’ Noah chirped. He got it *very* clearly. ‘Carry on Hassan.’

‘Hieroglyphs can be read in layers...what I mean is, you can look at the hieroglyphs and tell the story. Then, you take the story, and ask yourself what the *real* story is behind the story you now have...handling it rather like your lateral thinking puzzles. You look at all the characters and try to figure out what they are doing in the story.’

‘But why would anyone tell a story in such a difficult way, Hassan?’ Melissa was intrigued, but confused.

‘They would hide a story within a story *if* the story was Top Secret stuff. That is, they’d hide the story in a situation where if it were told straight out, the storyteller would be arrested and killed.’

‘What are you actually getting at, Hassan?’ Noah asked, leaning forward. ‘Are you saying that the story of Osiris isn’t what we think...that we have to look at the characters and find out what the true meaning is?’

‘I’m saying exactly that.’

‘Ah...!’ Melissa cried. ‘I see what you’re saying, Hassan. We are searching for the truth about who we are, and the truth lies in the story of Osiris. It suggests that human beings are not what we think we are! That something happened where we lost our power and the story somehow tells us how we can regain that power!’

‘Bingo! On this journey we’ll find out, and we can then tell others!’ Hassan shouted proudly.

Before Hassan could call out the answer, a great spark of light shot out from the heart area of all three of them, making them glow even brighter than before. Suddenly, they found themselves moving up the shaft of light towards Thoth's lantern...then they were seated in the middle of the strangely scooped out vessel, amidst an assembly of men...with animal heads....

Noah didn't mind their strange faces and clothing...he was glad to leave those black shadows behind...for the time being...



Abdul Bakr stood on the floor of the Great Pyramid, watching as the Migrants floated down the light column in pairs. The light had a dirty green glow and the sound that transported them was more of a low drone than a hum. Abdul Bakr needed a team. This new lot were *his* people, all of them from the same planet that blew up...they were desperate for entry into this world. They lived as guests on a neighbouring planet...those planetary inhabitants were ugly great things...hulking green Lizards who looked like men...and unfortunately *his* team looked just the same...They'd been begging to get in for a thousand years or so, but the twelve Custodians did not let too many of their own in. They were greedy. They'd wanted the world, the slaves and all the goodies the slaves created for *themselves*. Too many of them would have been dangerous...the Custodians would have ended up fighting for power against teams of their own people. No thanks. It had been best to keep them all out, *except* for a few who were around the world, doing the dirty work.

But that was then. This was now. Now that Abdul Bakr was going to take over, he'd better pick his own men...they were going to bump off the current Custodians, so they *still* didn't have to share... He couldn't see Seth's group obeying him after Seth became green goo... the Chief Aide would never listen to a *thing* Abdul Bakr would have to say. No...Abdul Bakr was clear on what had to be done. He had to devise a plan to send them all on their way to the Great Graveyard in the sky...

One by one the newcomers filed down the stairs of the platform. Their green scaly forms were grotesque...they wouldn't win any beauty competitions...Abdul Bakr would have to deal with the way they looked when the other Custodians were dead. For now, they had their own Tonic. Like the Custodians, they *also* Switched when things went wrong...their bodies were also made from 'borrowed' DNA...Abdul Bakr would have to see to it that this ugly bunch didn't get themselves in a flap...they were revolting enough as it was, without turning into green goo to cap it all...

They stood in a line...Abdul Bakr counted. Twelve. *His* team. He puffed up with pride as he instructed them to address him as 'Your Grace.' After lecturing them on their new duties, he sent them back onto the platform. They were all to meet in another place. They had work to do...a lot of *very* dirty work...

CHAPTER 9: GHOSTS OF THE PAST

The nine Aides were seated around a large table roughly carved from a huge ancient tree of the Ashen Forest. It was positioned in a clearing next to which hulking trees huddled close together...listening...spying... the Chief Aide shuddered quietly, his eyes scouring the trees for movement...every now and again, a scream echoed through the eerie silence and flashes of yellow light lit the thicket momentarily as the watchful eyes blinked to the sounds of fear...

The group didn't speak. Their wary eyes searched the darkness around them. The dim candles flickered on the tables, their wax creeping like bony fingers along the surface of the wood, but the light was poor. The sky occasionally lit up as those sinister winged...*things*...flapped suddenly in unison, revealing the moon and making the Aides jump from their tree stump stools... Their Master had insisted they all come here to see the...the...Black Sorcerer...WHY His Grace imagined they needed *his* help was unimaginable...things had to be *really* bad for them all to be here in this unforgiving place...

The table was set for supper, but nobody was hungry, even though they hadn't eaten in many hours. Their Master was with the Black Sorcerer as they spoke...and others were preparing dinner...*fresh food for my guests*...the Black Sorcerer had ordered...*fresh* from the woodland prison... *I expect my guests to eat and drink*...The Chief Aide felt sick. If they didn't banquet with this...*creature*... their Master, Seth, would take his anger out on them...they'd have to eat... eat...well, it was unthinkable to even put his mind on the food they would receive...

Somebody was coming...no...it sounded like a number of people...dragging something? All the Aides' heads were turned in the direction of the sounds...they squinted in the dark as the forms, vaguely lit by some kind of lamplight, trampled through the wooded thicket...

The food had arrived.



The Crystal Skull was perched between the two of them. Seth eyed it from time to time as the Black Sorcerer communicated through it. A single candle gave off a sparse light from a nearby window-frame, but Seth wasn't about to complain...he didn't need to see the creature opposite him, thank you very much. There was enough to think about without having to look into the face of this, this...

Liquid crystal moved as the Skull translated the sounds that came from the Black Sorcerer, giving him a voice.

'So, the Prophecy of Osiris is unfolding...what precisely, do you want of me?'

'I ask,' Seth said unsteadily...he was not used to asking anyone for anything... 'I ask that you assist us in arresting the Horus-Taskers.'

'You want us to *arrest* them?' The Black Sorcerer was secretly amused.

'They are roaming the Astral planes, trying to uncover the Prophecy.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because the Prophecy states that the only way for them to find the truth of the Prophecy of Osiris is to use the Astral route. And they got past two of my Aides. They've disappeared.'

'Your Aides? They are dead?'

'I'm sure of it. Another Aide, a third is planning something. He is working against us, I suspect.'

'You don't know what is going on, do you?' The Black Sorcerer leaned forward on the table. 'How can you ask for help when you do not know what is going on?'

Seth was speechless. He felt anger rising in his chest...frustration...he reached for his Tonic.

'You do know one thing,' the Black Sorcerer said, sitting back in his chair, 'you know that something has shifted. The winds of change are upon you. I sense the vibes in the air. I understand it here...' The Black Sorcerer pointed to his head region. Seth took a few slugs of the liquid from his flask.

‘The Horus-Taskers are strong people. Osiris has a powerful presence here right now. How did they get past you, Seth?’ The Black Sorcerer was enjoying himself. Seth was arrogant; he saw himself as *King of the World*. Now, the man was feeling small. Mere humans had fooled the Great Seth.

‘You can help,’ Seth said, swallowing hard.

‘Why would I?’

‘Because you get to keep the Ashen Forest, that’s why!’ Seth was rattled. ‘If it wasn’t for my presence in the human world, this place wouldn’t be here! People end up here because they try to get through the doorways to the heavens. Your Astral GateKeepers catch them and keep them here. If Osiris returns, the Forest will no longer be. You and I need each other!’

‘You do not understand who I am, Seth,’ The Black Sorcerer said calmly. ‘You seem to have no idea.’

‘You are darkness, that’s what,’ Seth spat. He didn’t like the tone of this conversation. The Black Sorcerer wasn’t jumping to his assistance.

‘I am a creation of the darkness of the soul, Seth. I am what you create. I am what those humans create. I am their prison guard, because they need me to be!’

What was this...*thing*...talking about? Seth didn’t have a clue. ‘I need your help. Are you going to help me?’

‘I’ll be whatever all of you create. I am your darkness. I serve you.’

Seth threw his hands up in the air. ‘What does *that* mean?’

‘Whoever finds their way here is trapped by their fear. They need a place to act out their fear. Their fear makes pictures in the Astral. You know the Astral, don’t you, Seth? You know how it makes pictures of your thoughts?’

Seth knew. He and his Aides controlled the Astral. Well, sort of. They’d put GateKeepers there, to trap human souls... He kept well away from it...it was a place that magnified your thoughts...good or bad, they somehow created pictures of things that were in your mind. Which was scary for Seth. He didn’t know *how* to have pleasant thoughts. It wasn’t in his nature...he was one of those people who were just plain...well, *wicked*.

‘The Astral is just another version of the world, Seth,’ the Black Sorcerer said, ‘except the world creates the mind’s pictures in a different way. In the world, whatever we think, we create, by bringing people into our lives who create good or bad experiences for us.’

Seth sighed. ‘Well, I want to get rid of these Horus-Taskers and stop this whole Prophecy from coming to pass. I’d like it if you could send more Dark GateKeepers out to the Astral pathways to arrest them. They’d never get past great armies of those things.’

‘You haven’t understood a thing, Seth. It makes no difference how many we send. If the Horus-Taskers find their power, they will beat all of us. If they are weak-minded, we get them here.’ The Black Sorcerer again leaned across the table. ‘You know what, Seth?’ Seth narrowed his eyes suspiciously. He wasn’t sure what was coming.

‘Those Horus-Taskers have an advantage over you. And do you know why?’ Seth was silent, riveted.

‘They have the advantage because they are learning about authentic power. You only know how to steal it.’

Seth and the Black Sorcerer sat in silence for what seemed a *very long* moment.



Sister Abigail bellowed her message, her voice bouncing off every cell, rattling every bone in Lara’s body.

‘LARA! WAKE UP! WAKE UP! WAKE UP!’

Lara opened her eyes and found herself leaning against the Eucalyptus tree. Her head hurt and her neck felt a bit stiff. She squinted against the sun and groaned.

‘LARA!’ She sat up sharply to the sound of Sister Abigail’s rather cross tone. ‘For goodness sake! Lara, you’re about to be hauled off to the Ashen Forest! Get a grip of yourself!’ Sister Abigail stood over Lara, her face stony, her eyes popping out of her head. ‘You can’t stay here! I just had to get your attention somehow!’

'Sis...sister...' Lara's head ached.

'Lara, don't talk, just listen. They're all around your body. They're sucking up your energy so that you'll become paralysed. Bring in light like I taught you.'

'Light...'

'Just do it Lara! Now!'

Lara struggled to get her senses together. She closed her eyes again. Light. With her mind, she saw a shaft of gold light pour into the top of her head. She imagined the light getting stronger, pouring in, filling her body and expanding out from her body in a great halo. The light got stronger and stronger, she poured and poured light in....

Lara opened her eyes to the dim subterranean chamber...her cheek was flat against the floor ... the *demons*, or whatever they were, were crouching in the shadows, hiding from something...she lifted her aching head and straightened her neck. They crouched further as the dim light moved. She looked around for the source...there was no candle or light bulb...no! It was her *own* light! She'd filled her body and it was radiating light! They were afraid! Of *her*, of Lara!

Lara rubbed her neck and head, all the while watching the creatures who hovered at the borders of the light that surrounded her. Her ears began ringing...Sister Abigail...*Lara! Keep the light going. You are already powerful...you have to try to find your way to the others...two are in the Ashen Forest...the others are busy discovering the Keys of Amenti. All of you have to somehow get together. When you do, you must share the keys, share your experiences. Some will have learned, others will not. You have to help each other to find Osiris. All of you have to make the Prophecy of Osiris come to pass!*

Lara took a deep breath. She closed her eyes and took more light into her body. Then she got up. They were creepy, these things, but she was suddenly unafraid. They couldn't hurt her if she kept calm and saw this situation as a game she had to play in the right way. She knew about the story of Osiris, but wasn't sure of the full meaning just yet. She had to find the others...make sure they found all the keys...So, what did she do now? Lara looked around her for a long moment... then climbed the steps back up to the pyramid floor.



Nick lay in the semi-darkness, surrounded by trees, the smell of mouldering damp in the air. Someone was watching him; he could feel eyes boring into him. He sat up...there were *things* in the trees...suddenly something brushed past his face, making him jump to his feet in fright. Something stood behind a nearby tree. He...she...*it*...was quite large...about two feet off the ground...Nick could just about make out a form. His heart thudded in his chest...the thing moved...something fluttered...*wings*? Nick thought quickly...was he going to stand here terrified? Jumping at every sound? No. Nick moved towards the trees slowly at first and then ran for the form...Nick shrieked at the top of his voice as he came face to face with...*with*? With the *BAT*. It was a gigantic thing compared with the flying variety Nick had seen soaring out of caves...this was the size of a small child...and it cowered, backing off from him...the light...yes...Nick realised he'd taken in more light...the more he understood about the Prophecy of Osiris, the more light he radiated...the light kept *bad* things away...

Nick took a few bold steps towards the bat. It slunk further back, eventually turning, raising its wings and flying off through the trees.

There wasn't much light, but Nick trampled through the thicket in the direction the bat had flown. Every now and again his blood froze with the sounds of screams that pierced his ears. There were flashes of yellow light that accompanied the cries...Nick did not know what he was going to find; all he did know was that whatever it was, he had to face it.

He kept walking, occasionally stumbling upon a slippery, mossy rock or over the gnarled exposed roots of ancient trees. A noise caused him to stop suddenly. There was an eruption in the dark sky above...the blackness broke up like tearing paper...Nick realised that bats were everywhere...something was happening...they knew...they knew he was approaching...

There was a smell...it was sharp...metallic...*blood?* Up ahead was a break in the trees...Nick moved faster...it was a clearing...something was going on...as he approached, Nick slowed down. There was movement...then a loud scream and yellow light...*eyes?* Nick crouched behind a tree and peered into the clearing. Dimly lit by candles, were rows of...Nick narrowed his eyes to get better focus... *boxes?* No...*cages*. There were things in the cages...animals...Nick crept further forward. He needed to see more clearly. He crouched down...people were there, two people...no...they were bats...walking bats! They were dragging something...they threw...it...into a cage. Then...*IT*...shrieked...
'No, No! Please! No! No hurt me! No ea...eat...me! Hah!' The terrified voice pleaded in vain. Nick gasped...it was human! It! Nick knew the voice! It was Ali Mehmet!



Hassan, Noah and Melissa found themselves standing in front of the Sphinx, only it didn't look like the one they knew...it was facing in the right direction...but mounted on a huge building...a gigantic *round* temple of some sort...in fact *everything* looked strange...Hassan pointed to the three great Pyramids...apart from being shiny and new, they were on a rather high levelled hill overlooking everything...there were other temples and buildings, but this one was powerful...the Sphinx was just *ornamentation* by the looks of it...

The boat had taken them across the water to the island on which the pyramids sat. Thoht had lowered them into shallow water, and they'd waded onto the bank. They walked a short distance to the Sphinx building. It wasn't difficult to know the route directly to its doors, because a great granite pathway led the way from the place the boat had stopped. In addition, silver lions marked the route, as if to remind them where they were headed. And yet, when they got there, they'd thought they were in the wrong place, until Noah had looked up and saw the Great Lion perched up in the sky on top of the circular temple. There wasn't anybody around, strangely enough. It didn't even look as if the place was, or ever had been, inhabited.

The Sphinx building had gigantic silver doors inlaid with beautiful star designs...the whole sky was copied onto this door and it reflected the low moonlight beautifully. As the three of them stood there marvelling at the new sights, a sudden sliding sound drew their attention to the doors. They were moving...sliding open. The doors stood apart, revealing a vast space within the walls of the marble interior. The three of them stood still, unsure what to do, when a figure appeared at the entrance. It was a woman...or should they say...a *cat* woman.

Selene. Melissa smiled to herself and then sighed. She hoped to pass through *this* time. Selene stepped out and beckoned them to come up to the doors. 'Welcome,' she smiled as they approached. 'I'm Selene.' She turned and walked into the building. Hesitantly, they followed, walking into an immeasurable space that was certainly bigger on the inside than it appeared on the outside.

Selene stopped again and turned to them. 'Before you move through the portal, you have to walk the Labyrinth.' She pointed to the white floor, and explained what was expected of them. Embedded in the white marble was a black stone pathway winding into the distance, turning in on itself backwards and forwards again and again like the longest piece of twisting, turning spaghetti lying on a plate. It wiggled up and down, around and about until it reached a point in the middle of the temple. The black stone, Selene told them, was Hematite. 'The spirit of the Hematite crystal will help you remember.'

‘We have to follow it?’ Noah asked Selene, going over to the beginning of the path and peering down at it. ‘It’ll take us forever in this place!’

‘But you *have* forever, Noah! This is the Astral plane. Time does not exist here!’ Noah frowned, trying to get the dimensions of the place into his head. Somehow he felt that things were not normal in this dimension. Not normal at all.

‘Selene,’ Hassan asked hesitantly. ‘Is this Heliopolis? The City of Gold?’ His eyes shone. The Egyptologist in him was curious and pleasantly mystified.

‘No, Hassan.’ She replied gently. ‘Heliopolis is just beyond the portal. It is not of the human dimension or the Astral. It belongs in Orion.’

‘In the sky?’ Hassan was whispering in awe.

‘That’s just how it looks, Hassan,’ Selene said smiling, ‘but we live just beyond the Great Doorway.’

‘You are from Orion?’, asked Hassan.

‘Yes. The Great Lion tells you that, surely? We are the Cat people.’

‘But what...’

‘Too many questions, Hassan.’ Selene said firmly. ‘You have work to do. All your questions will be answered in good time. Now. All of you. Walk the path. I will meet you at the centre.’

The three of them looked at Selene, then at each other. One by one, they began the journey of the Hematite Labyrinth.



Horried, Nick waited in the dark shadows until the Sentinel Bats had disappeared. Ali Mehmet lay in his cage moaning softly. Nick crept through the thicket, into the clearing. The smell was foul. All around him were cages...people lay in them, hunched up, dirty, scabbed and thin. And they smelled terribly. He tried to hold his breath, but soon realised he’d just have to get used to the odours of this awful place. He reached Ali Mehmet and, still hunched down, looked into the cage. The old man lay flat out, eyes closed, moaning.

‘Ali Mehmet!’ Nick hissed in the darkness. Ali Mehmet recoiled in his cage whimpering in the corner, like an animal. ‘Ali Mehmet! It’s Nick!’ There was quiet in the cage for a moment, then Ali Mehmet opened his eyes slowly. He whined this time and rolled flat onto his stomach, looking up at Nick through sorry-looking eyes.

‘Ali Mehmet, what happened to you?’

‘The Dark GateKeepers! They take me!’ Ali Mehmet’s voice was a little too loud.

‘Sshh! Keep quiet old man! I’m here to help you!’ Nick was certain those great yellow eyes could see everything...why else would they open whenever people screamed? Were they checking that nobody was interfering...that there were not rescuers like Nick about? He’d better be careful, keep Ali Mehmet calm.

‘Ali Mehmet! Don’t speak. It’s Nick. I’m here to help you...if you make any noise, they’ll come back for you!’ Nick’s long-time friend lay quietly in the cage. At least he’d understood, Nick thought thankfully. But what now? What was he going to do with Ali Mehmet? Nick couldn’t leave him here. Someone was coming...Nick whispered sharply to the old man. ‘Ali Mehmet. Someone’s coming. I’ll be back for you.’ With that, Nick shot back into the trees.

Sentinel Bats...four of them shuffled to one of the cages. They opened it and pulled someone out. It was a woman, as far as Nick could see. They hauled her onto a long wooden bench situated right in the centre of the clearing. Her head hung limply off the end of the bench while one of the Sentinels sunk his teeth into her neck. There was a slurping sound, and the next Sentinel took up his position and did the same. Nick suddenly got it. Vampire bats! That’s what they were! They fed off animal blood...*and* human blood by the looks of it! When the four of them had finished feeding, they took the woman back to her cage. They looked in the direction of Ali Mehmet’s cage and made some strange sounds. One of them lifted a wing...pointing towards him. Luckily, they turned and headed off in the opposite direction, back where they came from.

Nick spied a wheelbarrow at the edge of the clearing and crept over to it. It contained a load of vegetables; they smelled slightly off. He tipped the barrow over, off-loading the vegetables onto the hard soil. He pushed it over to Ali Mehmet's cage and set it down, while he went to open the iron-grilled door. It wasn't locked...why should it be? Did they get rescuers here on a regular basis? Nick didn't think so... 'Ali Mehmet!' he called softly. 'Ali Mehmet, I'm back!'

The old man looked up, turning his head.

'I don't move, Nick' Ali Mehmet said quietly. 'I not able to move. My body stop moving.' He lay there looking up at Nick.

'But Ali Mehmet, you'd better move, or else you're going to be supper for these Bats!' Nick didn't know what to think. Was the old man going crazy?' Someone screamed again ...the yellow light flashed and Nick saw it clearly...the eye...the yellow eye...it appeared as transparent as a ghost in the clearing and flashed open...then closed again...did it see him? Nick stood upright...he looked around him, then bent down to the cage.

'Ali Mehmet! Come on! You were fine a few minutes ago! You're scared, that's all!'

'That's all?'

The voice made Nick jump around, and when he saw the figure in front of him he fell to the ground in fright. It was a tall form, in a long black robe. He couldn't see this... *person's?* ... face clearly, but two dark yellow button-like eyes shone brightly within the hood. A see-through skull dangled from the neck of the robed...*man?*... ..it had some sort of moving liquid in it...The creature with the yellow eyes reached down to Nick and stretched out a...hand...only it wasn't a hand, it was a bat's wing with long bony fingers extending from the edge of it. He was offering to help Nick up from the ground. Nick looked momentarily at the fingers and backed away...then he raised himself up to stand in front of the hooded figure.

'Hello Nick.'

Nick didn't reply. He was trying to make sense of the voice. It didn't seem to come from the hood, but...from the *skull?*

'This is the Crystal Skull, Nick. He translates my sounds into human words. And he lets me know what is going on in all the worlds of this great universe. I am the Black Sorcerer. This Ashen Forest belongs to me.'

Nick didn't answer. He peered into the hood. The Black Sorcerer reached up with his hands and pushed his hood back. Nick gasped and stepped back. The *person's* rounded man's head was covered with fine fur and two large ridged ears stood up stiffly from his temples. A strange-looking pug-nose lay flat amongst folds of skin on his face and sharp teeth curved from pink gums in a cleft-mouth. He was sort of half man and half bat, by the looks of his body, but Nick reckoned this creature's face and teeth were *all* vampire bat.

'Yes, Nick...that's what I am. A vampire bat... with quite a bit of the human in me. Well, what else do you expect when I feed off human beings only...everything we eat we eventually become...right? Even if it does take thousands of years for us to make the changes. All my people...they feed only from human beings...they are like me...'

'What...what do you want from me?' Nick was afraid. All this talk of feeding was making him nervous, *especially* after what he had seen earlier.

'Not your blood, Nick, that's for sure. I'm well fed for the night...though... if I get peckish...' The Black Sorcerer looked towards Ali Mehmet and made a licking sound with his tongue. Nick's skin crawled.

'But I'll give you the chance to take him first, Nick.'

'What do you mean? You're going to free him?'

'Who am I to free him? Who are you to free him, Nick? Only this friend of yours can free himself.'

'Is this a joke, then?' Nick asked, his irritation now bigger than his fear. 'Are you making fun of us?'

*'No, Nick. No jokes. You can take this man if he frees himself. The joke is that you think that **you** can free him. Human arrogance is wonderful to observe. I cannot keep him here, and neither can you free him. This is a lesson you must learn. One of the Keys of Amenti.'*

'You know about that? Who are you?' Nick was intrigued. Was this a good guy or bad guy? What was he?

'I'm whatever you want me to be, Nick! I serve all who need me! I am a creation of the human mind.'

'But nobody wants this! Nobody wants to end up here and have their blood sucked by vampires!'

'I'm sure they don't, Nick, but they create it just the same.'

Nick wasn't sure he understood. *'So I can take Ali Mehmet?'*

'Clearly, you do not understand. But there's nothing like experience to make you see the truth. Go on then Nick. Save your friend.'

Nick looked warily at the man-bat. He turned to Ali Mehmet and after one more glance over his shoulder, reached into the cage for his friend.



Melissa felt as if she were coming apart at the seams. Her body wanted to explode into billions of atoms and fly off in all directions. But she held on. *Let go Melissa!* A familiar warm voice gave her comfort. She continued walking, following the Hematite path, winding round and round. She'd lost all sense of the other two...they'd started off in single file along the path, but they'd somehow lost track of each other...everything kept changing...her thoughts, the scenery...

She was at school...*kindergarten*...she was...three years old? Four? She was standing in a corner, facing the walls of the toddler's school. She was not allowed to look at the other children. She sobbed uncontrollably, but it didn't do any good.

This is what happens to children who tell lies...

But I didn't lie, Mrs. Templeman!

Fairies don't exist, Melissa, except in fairy tales! Didn't your mother ever tell you that?

But...but...there's one standing on your shoulder right now, Mrs. Templeman...

I'm going to speak to your parents, young lady...you're insolent as well as a liar...

Little Melissa cried as she watched the fairies wave her goodbye...they were leaving her, yet they were her *friends*...when she turned, some of the other kids were waving at them too. Melissa had invited them in from the nursery garden so the other little ones could see them...they'd had such fun...the fairies tickled the kids and fooled around until Mrs. Templeman realised what was going on and started yelling. Try as she might, Melissa could not get the teacher to see her friends...and now she was in trouble for persuading the others to see something that Mrs. Templeman said was *really* not there...

It's dangerous, Melissa, to imagine such things...people will lock you up in a prison and throw away the key! Don't you know that! You'd better learn now, my girl, before you grow up to be a complete and utter mad woman!

Melissa had always hated being singled out. She'd always been the good girl at school and now she was here, disgraced before all her little friends. The shame was unbearable, and she nearly collapsed with her grief. But Mrs. Templeman said she needed to learn...here and now. She would stay in that corner all day. *And* she was not to eat lunch with the others all week.

And learn she did. The pain in her heart, the separation from the others was more than she could bear. Melissa had never seen another fairy since that day.



Noah was bored with this walking lark. Hassan was up ahead and seemed to be talking to himself...or to someone else, but Noah wasn't surprised...the man was a basket-case at times ...as for Mum, well he could barely see her in the distance...she was charging round this path thing, like a woman possessed. Noah kept going though. He knew he'd better or *cat woman* wouldn't let them through the portal...these cat people seemed to think they knew everything about him...Noah felt a tap on his shoulder...he turned, startled...it must be *cat wo*...No! *What?* It was himself! It was Noah! But how...

Hi Noah! His double was a cheerful soul...

Noah looked aghast at his mirror image and then quickly looked around to see if the cat lady was playing some kind of trick on him...nobody was around...Hassan had disappeared, so had his mother...it was just this hall...No! It was changing! It was...he was in a jungle! Broad, towering trees hanging with rope-like creeper met at great heights and thick green plants of different varieties sprung out of the ground at every angle...it was closed in, wet and hot...yet the Hematite path wound on, clear and untouched by the jungle...

Noah looked back at his double. 'Who the bejeezus are you?'

Who do you think? Noah felt beads of sweat forming on his brow. They ran down the side of his face. Strange. The exact same thing was happening to his double...it was like looking in a mirror...

'Well you can't be me. *I'm me.*'

Well, I'm you, too!

'What's going on? Have I finally lost my mind? That's it, isn't it? I'm a lunatic like my sister! We've all gone mad...even poor Hassan!' Noah wiped the side of his head with his arm. The rivers of sweat on his double's face disappeared.

I don't know. Are you mad?

'Is this a riddle?'

I don't know. Is it?

Noah breathed hard. 'You're crazy!'

Which means that you are!

'Well if I wasn't barmy before, you're doing a good job of shaking up my marbles now!' Noah turned from his double and walked into the undergrowth. He didn't know where he was going, but then again, did he ever?

Stick to the path Noah!

Noah stopped and looked down. He stood on some mossy turf, next to the Hematite track. He stepped back onto it.

Keep going Noah!

'Huh?'

With your smart aleck remarks. Keep going boy, you're entertaining me.

'What are you on about?'

Keep talking. Fill your head with nonsense. Stupid remarks. Jokes. Tough-guy talk. Don't get serious, will you?

Noah looked at his double quizzically, but didn't say anything. He just turned around and started walking on the path. Maybe this...this...dream thing would end and he'd find Hassan and his mother...

Cat got your tongue?

Noah jumped back as his double swung upside down in front of him, suspended from a tree branch.

'How did you...?'

Who are you Noah?

'Er...Noah?'

Smart remark! Clever! Keep going so you don't have to find out why I'm here!

'I already know. It's a test to see if you can mess with my head. Well, you might as well try something else. I'm not going nuts for you.' Noah pushed past his double and kept walking.

Aha! Mr. Know-All as well as Mr. Smart-Remarks and Mr. Over-Confident.

Noah frowned. He didn't like this. He didn't understand it. He stopped and turned to face his double, but he was gone. Noah swung around. Nothing but jungle. Disturbed, he turned and walked...slowly at first

then fast. His double had gone...he'd obviously passed some sort of test, so when was he going to get out of this place?

The path, although clear on the ground, was getting a little crowded at shoulder level. Bushes and tree branches leaned over as if deliberately trying to get in Noah's way. He shoved them to one side... and then found himself in front of a giant spider's web. Noah's double dangled in the middle and the great thing blocked his path. The double was wrapped up in...*cotton cloth*? No. Spider's silk. He looked powder white. Dead. He was suspended amongst many other creepy crawly things, all wound up in the deadly network of silken threads. He couldn't be lifeless, though. Noah knew *that* much. Spiders just paralysed their prey, they didn't kill them off. Not right away, anyway. They kept them alive and fresh, so they didn't go off...

'Jeez, Louise,' Noah breathed. What now? Was he supposed to get up there and rescue his double? He didn't fancy ending up as spider's bait. He knew about these web things. They were made with the stickiest gluey substance on the planet. He'd never get out if he tried to get in. So? What to do?

Noah looked around him. He caught sight of a long broken tree branch in the low bushes. He walked over to it and picked it up. It was long enough to poke at his double and see if he could get a response. Noah stepped over rocks and tree stumps, trying to get a side view of the web and its dangling prisoners. It was a bit difficult to get to him without getting stuck himself, but if he climbed the tree from which one side of the web began, he could get level with his double.

The tree was knobbly with age, and was easy to climb. He got to the branch that he'd aimed for and crept along its thick heavy arm. Balancing carefully, Noah stopped as he got to the edge. The web was poised between two trees and hung beautifully and dangerously. A noise caused Noah to swing around. As he did so, he stared straight into the eyes of a giant Daddy-Long-Legs spider. Noah edged back...then lost his footing. He tumbled from the tree...but before he reached the ground, he found himself bouncing...then swinging...he went on like this until the movement slowed...when it had stopped he tried to move his arms, but they were stuck...he looked down...he was caught in the spider's web with his double; they were lying top-to-toe.



Hassan sat on the wooden chair. It had just appeared on the Hematite path, getting in the way of his walk. He had looked at it for a while, and then decided to sit down. Climbing over it and getting on with the walk, didn't seem quite the right thing to do. It faced the direction he had just walked from. Maybe this was a test. *What* test, he couldn't imagine. But the ancient students of the temples...the *initiates*...had gone through lots of tests and so maybe this was one of them.

He sat for a long time. He crossed his arms, scratched his head, twiddled his thumbs, yawned a few times and then whistled tunelessly. After a while, the wooden slats were making his bottom hurt, so he got up and rubbed it.

'Gross!' came a voice. Hassan swung round to face the chair.

'Stop scratching your bum!' An old lady with small rounded glasses and hair twisted in a bun glared at Hassan. They were no longer in the great building, but on a bridge, overlooking a stream.

'I'm not! My buttocks were a little cramped, I'm just rubbing...*if* you don't mind! Please watch your language!'

'Only if you watch your manners!'

'Who are you, anyway? Where did you come from? Where are we? Are you a test?' Hassan looked around him at the scenery...there was *daylight*? It was a vast green lush landscape of ...in fact, weren't they outside the Sphinx building again? *But*...he turned to the woman and back again...there was grass, trees, vegetation...but this is Egypt...*hah*?

'*You're* testing *me*, my man, with all those questions that you already know the answers to.'

‘What...’

Suddenly, the old lady started laughing...she laughed and laughed until Hassan’s blood started to run cold...the laugh was getting strange...sinister...she laughed hysterically now as her teeth yellowed...she shrieked and whooped, her eyes reddening at the rims and milky layers of skin covering her eyes...her hair started to fall out as Hassan looked on, aghast at the site of this vile creature. The woman cackled and gurgled as her laughter came to a stop. The sky darkened as rain clouds rushed overhead and soon great thunderclaps crashed in the heavens as the rain fell soaking them both...

‘The Prophecy! The Prophecy Hassan!’ the woman shrieked, her mouth twisting into a vicious sneer, saliva spewing from her mouth and following the tracks of the rain. Where have you hidden Isis? Where?’

Hassan’s eyes darted everywhere wildly...*Isis?*

‘Where have you hidden me?’

Hassan felt sick...He stood for a moment as something in his head...a light...clicked on...then he ran backwards and forwards on the bridge while the woman thrashed around in the storm, the rain transforming her into a demonic picture...*Isis? Isis?*

‘Remember! Remember! Remember me!’ The woman fell to the ground...she started to rasp horrible sounds...

‘Save me Hassan’...

Hassan stopped in the middle of the bridge. Isis! The wife of Osiris! She’d brought Osiris back to life! It was part of the puzzle, the Great Hieroglyph! Who was Isis in this grand picture? Hassan paced again, then stopped...thinking.. thinking...*remembering*...Isis was... the *sixth sense*. Isis was the part of us that just *knew* things without anybody telling us... Isis was his *deep feelings* about Egyptology...things that he knew in his heart, things that couldn’t be proved, things that went against the normal stories that Egyptologists put into history books. Hassan had always known the truth in the Hieroglyphs...he knew that the stories of human beings and the people who took over the world were hidden within other stories... you had to look deep in your heart to know the truth of Ancient Egypt. Now, however, Hassan had to face that truth and be brave...he had to speak that truth now, and change history forever...

He turned to the woman, who was no longer on the bridge. Looking around for her, Hassan realised the rain had stopped...the sky had darkened and the half-moon was out. It was a clear beautiful night. He found her below the bridge, in the water...she was young...beautiful...her flowing robes covered a pregnant stomach...her long black silken hair reached her waist and she threw a kiss from her lips to Hassan...

‘Do not hide your knowledge, Hassan. Do not sit facing the wrong direction. Do not feel comfortable with the lies the world has been told. You have one of the important Keys of Amenti that you must share with the others. Listen carefully to the other Horus-Taskers, for they have Keys to Amenti that you do not yet possess.

The woman turned and walked downstream...Hassan watched her until she disappeared...



Noah dangled helplessly. A movement from the corner of his eye alerted him to the tree branch from which he fell. Hovering there was the spider...their eyes met...Noah was almost paralysed at the *thought* of the thing paralysing him...the spider put one of his legs forward...he seemed to be thinking...*thinking of what?* Noah wondered...

Whether to come down now, or not, Noah.

Noah’s eyes spun back to the cotton ball that was his double.

‘I thought you were finished off by the spider!’ Noah exclaimed.

Got to get your attention somehow!

Noah's double laughed and flew up from the web to the tree opposite the giant spider. The silk cocoon was gone. Noah remained in his sticky prison. He tried to wriggle his arms, but the threads just seemed to wrap themselves further around his body, gluing him more firmly to the web.

You see what happens when you're not still, Noah? When you move too much? In your case, you talk too much, joke too much, tease too much. You're never serious. Never still.

'But why do I need to be a boring old drone?'

You don't. But you have to know yourself. You have to listen to yourself. Listen to what your heart tells you and to what your feelings tell you.

'I never understand anything you say,' Noah said miserably. His eyes wandered over to the spider, who still watched him with interest.

Your sister, Noah. Tell me about her.

'Lara? She's...she's...well, my *sister*. What else is there to know.'

What is she like?

'Like all kid sisters. A pain, most of the time. She's weird, as well. She sees things. Strange things. Sometimes its fun. A lot of the time she gets on everyone's nerves. Her weirdness is why I'm lying here right now!'

But aren't you weird too, Noah?

'Nope. Not normally, anyway. On this trip, I've discovered a few things I can do, though. Sometimes, I think I'm going to wake up any minute and find myself at home in bed in England.'

You're the same as Lara, Noah, only you're too scared to admit it. You're stuck in this web, because you are kidding yourself. You're making a lot of noise in your head, with all the jokes and quips...your fancy smart remarks. You are kind of creating a noisy web so you don't have to face the fact that you are like your sister.

'But...'

Don't argue, Noah. That's just more noise, more webs/ If you want to get out of here alive, think about what I'm saying. If you want to find Lara and the Keys of Amenti, you have to admit that you have power, admit that there's a lot more that you know about yourself. You can dream and travel with your mind. And you can see things if you want to. Be real, Noah. Know yourself and be yourself. Stop pretending you are ordinary and dull. Magic is everywhere. Magic belongs to all children and all adults if they care to remember and play with it.

Noah lay in thought for a long time. When he opened his eyes, the jungle was gone, and he was lying on the Hematite path in the great hall.



Selene stood at the centre of the Labyrinth as each of them approached. The massive circular area was walled and, in the middle, was a huge six-pointed star. Melissa, Noah and Hassan stood at the entrance to the circle. Selene motioned for them to sit on stone seats, situated at the walls.

She called Melissa to the centre. 'What have you learned about yourself, Melissa?'

Melissa took a breath... 'I have found Self-Belief. Self-belief is everything. We give away our power when we believe what we are *told* to believe. Our greatest proof of anything is our *own* experience, not other people's, or not so-called scientific experiment. When we experience something that others do not, we must honour it and learn about the world from it. Our experiences are important and they take us to many new and wonderful adventures in life. We do not need to convince others to believe us, for they have their own experiences and their own beliefs. We lose our power when we allow others to tell us our experiences do not mean anything.'

As Melissa finished, her body began to glow with a bright halo light. Selene took her hand and pulled her gently to stand at the centre of the star. When Selene let go, Melissa disappeared.

Noah was next. Selene looked at him closely. ‘What was your lesson, Noah?’

‘Self-Knowledge. We have to know ourselves to know our power. We have to *accept* that we can see and feel things beyond the ordinary. We have many more senses than just the five physical senses. Sometimes, because we are surrounded by people who have forgotten this, we also make ourselves forget since we do not want to be different. Humans are powerful when they remember to use, or even train themselves to use, their forgotten gifts. We don’t *have* to be ordinary. To be magical, we have to know our power, know ourselves.’

Standing at the centre of the star, Noah released Selene’s hand and disappeared through the portal.

Hassan closed his eyes as he faced Selene. ‘I have re-discovered Personal Truth. So often, we believe in something that others do not, yet we pretend to believe what they believe so we can be popular. We are scared to speak our own truth in case people stop liking us. But when we lie like this, we lose our power. Deep down we also do not feel good about ourselves because we keep changing who we are to be like everyone else. This means we never get to the truth because everyone always has different ideas about things. When we have the courage to say what we think, we become strong. We always know which path to follow because we believe in the truth inside of us that tells us what to do for the best.’

Hassan felt light as he let go of Selene’s hand and passed through the portal. Squinting in the semi-darkness of the tunnel, he found his two travel companions. They looked at each other and smiled happily. Like three glowing angels in the black of night, they sank to the floor of the dim corridor to consider their next move.

CHAPTER 10: THE TESTS OF THE HORUS-TASKERS

Lara stared at the eagle on the platform. It flapped its wings at her and made a squawking sound. She turned her head to keep an eye on the Dark GateKeepers who crept towards her, then back again...she had to remember to keep the light flowing in through her head...when she was distracted, the light dimmed a little and the Dark GateKeepers came in closer. It was hard focussing on light *and* trying to get some direction. She was on the floor of the Great Pyramid where the dodecahedron gently moved above it. The eagle had been waiting for her...it squawked again and she slowly stepped her way over to it. It was a huge white bird with sharp eyes and a hard stare...it *commanded* her presence and she obeyed. As she approached the platform, the eagle suddenly transformed into a man. Lara stopped...He stood, arms crossed on his chest, legs solid and unbending in worn brown leather trousers. He wore a waistcoat with painted patterns, and feathered headwear sat around his face, falling down the front of his body to his waist. His creased, reddish-brown face was set with a hard expression, rather like the eagle's...he looked down at Lara, then let his arms fall to his side.

'I am White Eagle.' The man's voice was deep and strong. 'I am your guide through the Astral tunnel. You listen to me and you'll get through. You hear me girl?'

'Er...yes...yes.' Lara peered into the light at him. 'Do you mind if I ask you where you came from? *And*, of course...where we are going?'

'We are going to find the others. You have an important Key to show them. The Key of all life. They are calling you with their Spirit, so you must find them.'

'Will we see my parents and Noah?' Lara's heart beat faster.

'Yes, if you do things right. And we also find the others too. But first they find *other* Keys. This important. They must see they strong like you. They don't see they strong now. They must see this before you find them. Then all of you share the Keys, share the story. Then you show them big Key.'

'Why do you say I am strong, White Eagle?'

'You are child. All children strong with power. The little child believe in everything until the parent make them weak. They believe in magic. When you grow to adult, you must always keep the child inside. Then you are strong always. You keep your magic.'

'Where did you come from, White Eagle? Are you a Native American?'

'Us Native Americans...and *all* the other red people come from the stars...our stars are called Seven Sisters...*Pleiades*...you know these stars?'

'My father points them out sometimes. He knows more than me.'

'We come from there...there is one beautiful sun, Alcyone, and seven sisters were born from her. Six sisters be happy and healthy. The Earth is our seventh sister .She is lost to us, she hurts and she cries, so we come to take care of her. The people of the Earth have stopped loving her. They pollute her beautiful rivers, they throw rubbish into her green valleys and they dig into her heart to take out diamonds, gold and oil. Without love, the Earth sister will surely die. We come to live here to show her love so she not die and the Earth people not die too.'

'So how come you are helping me with this journey?'

'When you and others find all the Keys, the people of the world will learn about their power. Then, in time, they will begin to respect and love their Great Mother Earth. You will see that all of you are connected... *here*.' White Eagle pointed to his heart. I help you, so I can help our Great Sister.'

White Eagle beckoned for Lara to get onto the platform. 'Come girl. Now we follow the path of your father.'



Nick was tired out. Ali Mehmet lay in his cage like a great lump, whimpering like a baby. Nothing Nick said could persuade the old man to come out of there. He was *paralysed*, he said.

'*He's paralysed with fear, Nick,*' the Black Sorcerer chuckled.

‘What’s so funny?’ Nick yelled now. He was frustrated with Ali Mehmet. Nick wanted to get his friend...and himself out of this awful place, but the man wouldn’t budge.

*‘He’s funny! Can’t you see that? He’s doing this to himself! All the prisoners do it. They focus so much on what they are afraid of they actually create it! And because they **think** they are powerless, they become so!’* The Black Sorcerer continued to chortle, his pink tongue pushing up against his ugly sharp teeth.

‘Ali Mehmet!’ Nick cried again at his friend. ‘We can leave here if we want! Look at the Sorcerer here. He said we can go if we want to! You’re free to go! What more do you need to hear?’

‘No Nick! They cheating me! I run, then they find me. Then they eat me. Put me on fire. Cook me. Eat me!’

‘They surely will not, Ali Mehmet. That isn’t how it works! We can get light into our bodies! Sister Abigail...the White brotherhood...all the *good* guys say so!’

‘But they stronger, Nick. Much stronger! They play with us. We are not strong Nick. Not strong! We must do as they say, or there is big trouble!’ Ali Mehmet started making funny noises and carried on whimpering in between. He was losing his mind by the looks of it.

Nick sank to the ground, his head in his hands. He had to get out of here, but he couldn’t leave without Ali Mehmet.

‘You should go, my friend,’ the Black Sorcerer said, smirking. *‘He’s given his power to me. He’s made me stronger, made my existence more meaningful. Go. They’re all mine through their own choice.’* The Black Sorcerer looked around him. Nick looked up at him scornfully.

‘Don’t blame me, my friend. We all choose our thoughts. What we choose, we experience. Simple as that. I am not the enemy. He...they...their thoughts...are their own enemy.’

Nick got up from the ground as the Black Sorcerer walked away. No. He wouldn’t give up that easily. He, and the other Horus-Taskers were all in this together. This wasn’t over yet.



‘Do you think we should choose a tunnel and walk down, it?’ Melissa stood, looking down the rock corridor. They’d found tunnels running off it in all sorts of directions. ‘Or should we stay put...maybe something will appear magically...who knows?’ She shrugged.

‘I think we should stay here and focus... or *something*,’ Hassan said unsteadily. He wasn’t sure about anything.

Noah scratched his head. ‘Tunnels, damn tunnels! It’s all so confusing! I think we need a *compass* or *whatever!*’

A bright light startled the three of them. The corridor was gone...they were in a large circular room carved out of rock. It seemed to be moving ever so slowly, round and round...ahead of them were two men...guards of some sort...each stood in front of an entrance to a tunnel. There were no other exits to this place...

Noah jumped up. ‘Who are you?’

‘We are the Lords of Decision’ one of the guards said pompously, his nose in the air. The other one gave a great belly laugh, which started the first one off with the giggles...and then a fit of hysterics followed from them both... Melissa, Hassan and Noah looked on as the two short pot-bellied men, covered in chain-armor and holding metal staffs, laughed until their sides were splitting...they quieted down as Hassan’s voice blared above their mirthful noise...

‘Excuse us! Hello! Excuse *us*?’

‘Your excused,’ said the second guard and the two of them started the whole thing off again. This time they fell to the ground, holding their sides, choking with hilarity...

‘Don’t you...’ Guard One tried to stifle a chortle... ‘Don’t you want to go through the tunnel? Don’t mind us! We’re always like this, we like a laugh....’ They giggled uncontrollably...

‘Which one?’ snapped Melissa.

‘Which what?’ asked the same guard...he took a deep breath to calm himself...his cheeks were pink from laughing and he wiped tears from his eyes. He eyed Melissa carefully...she was sharp this one...not good for a laugh...

‘Which *tunnel*,’ she replied tersely. Noah called this her *School-Marm* tone. No-one argued with it. Not even Noah.

Hiccupping now, Guard One got up and looked at Melissa sheepishly. Guard Two followed, straightening up his twisted chained body suit. They glanced back at their respective tunnels and stepped back to stand in place. They looked *very* serious now.

‘So? Which tunnel?’ Melissa demanded again.

‘Where’re you going, Marm?’ The first guard asked politely. He wasn’t messing with *this* lady.

‘I...where are we going Hassan? Noah?’ Melissa turned to face her two companions.

‘To find Lara.’ Noah said quickly.

‘To find the Halls of Amenti? Osiris?’ Hassan enquired.

‘Aren’t they the same thing?’ Melissa asked them both, ‘Finding Lara, finding the Halls of Amenti? *Power* and all that?’

Noah and Hassan shrugged simultaneously.

‘Well, you could take this tunnel,’ Guard Two said, pointing his staff down its long wide corridor.

‘Or this one,’ said the other, indicating his tunnel with his thumb.

‘But this one’s better, you could go via the looping tunnel...it should give you time...’

‘No,’ Guard One argued...he looked at Melissa. ‘You should go straight there...’

‘But straight ain’t straight, is it?’ the other interrupted.

‘*Wherever* they’re going, they can’t get there straight, unless...’

‘Unless they change their minds,’ Guard Two finished,

‘Change our minds about what?’ Melissa asked.

‘About if and where you’re going. The straight path loops sometimes.’

‘Please!’ Melissa was confused. They looked at her cautiously. Melissa rubbed her eyes. Was the room moving around a little faster?

‘We want to find Lara. Which tunnel? Can’t I get a straight answer out of you two?’

‘It depends which one she’s down.’ Guard One shrugged.

‘Probably this one’, the other guard said.

‘Don’t you know?’ Melissa asked irritably.

‘Don’t you?’ Guard Two retorted, hurt by her tone.

The room was moving much faster...

Melissa tried to concentrate. ‘How should I know...’

‘How should she know?’ Guard One snapped at Guard Two.

‘Lara knows,’ Guard Two chirped.

‘Then I know,’ Guard One decided.

‘Know what?’ Melissa asked

‘She’s down this one,’ the first guard declared. ‘Or that one...is it your one?’ he looked at the second guard confusedly. ‘I’m dizzy!’

The room was spinning...Melissa couldn’t find her thoughts...they were in a jumble...she turned to Noah and Hassan...they were holding their heads.... the guards were prancing about merrily, waving their arms and trying to keep their balance...

‘We’ve got to find Lara... Hassan! Noah! Get up! Am I the only one trying to get sense out of these two?’

Hassan bristled. ‘Ahem!’ He cleared his throat and narrowed his eyes. He was dizzy too! ‘Which tunnel, please gentlemen?’ He sounded rather drunk.

‘Hiwch vere noe oyu awnt.’ The first guard said.

‘What did you say?’ Noah asked cocking his head to one side.

‘Hiwch vere noe oyu awnt.’ The first guard repeated.

‘Sti pu ot oyu’ the second guard said nodding seriously. He clearly wanted to help them.

‘Eys,’ the first guard agreed. ‘Sti lal pu ot oyu’

The room spun now at such a speed, that all of them fell to the floor...the guards were laughing hysterically and clowning about in their woozy state...

‘STOP!’ Melissa had had enough. The spinning ceased and everything was quiet in the rock room. They all looked at each other.

‘I think...’ Melissa began, ‘No. I KNOW...that we had better make a decision.’ She looked squarely at Noah and Hassan. ‘Let’s stop being confused about where we are going. It’s silly, because we really *do* know. This is the lesson we have to learn. Being confused is an excuse not to make a decision because we are afraid of the Astral plane. When we are confused, we don’t have to do anything...’

‘Like go down nasty tunnels and bump into Dark GateKeepers!’ Noah interrupted. He was starting to understand.

Melissa stood up and dusted herself down. Everyone followed.

‘Hassan,’ Melissa asked, turning to him. ‘Ask your question again.’ She turned to the guards. ‘We are ready to listen. We will not confuse your words with our nervousness. Give us the exact same answer... Hassan?’

Hassan cleared his throat again. ‘Which tunnel, please gentlemen?’ His mind was clear.

‘Which ever one you want.’ The first guard said, repeating himself quietly.

‘What did you say?’ Noah asked cocking his head to one side. He couldn’t hear him clearly

‘Which ever one you want.’ The first guard repeated.

‘It’s up to you’ the second guard said, nodding seriously. He clearly wanted to help them.

‘Yes,’ the first guard agreed. ‘It’s all up to you.’



Seth held his breath as the Black Sorcerer led him through the thicket to the Black Caves. Seth didn’t particularly want to *go* there, but the Black Sorcerer insisted...he said that if the Custodians wanted an army of Dark GateKeepers, then they could *have* them...Seth was convinced this *bat* guy just wanted to see his skin crawl when he saw their dwelling place...

And his skin crawled *very* nicely. The place was dark...the caves were set in a wall of rock...in fact, these demon-inhabited mountain ranges surrounded the Ashen Forest...the Dark GateKeepers were the border keepers...an occasional escapee didn’t have a chance once they got to the foot of them...if they weren’t caught and eaten first, the ice-cold air that hung around the dark bleak rocks froze them to death.

Shadows moved in and out of the caves. Seth held a low-lit lantern...The Black Sorcerer had warned him to use as little light as possible...*bats could see in the dark*, Seth realised...the Black Sorcerer didn’t need any help whatsoever...as they moved further into the area, something brushed up against Seth’s face...he jumped back in ghastly fright...it stank and was *slimy*...holding up the lantern, he saw long poles stuck in the ground...attached to them were strips of flesh...strewn around the grounds were bones...some still had meat on them...

Eyes glittered as they caught sight of their visitors, and a wave of garbled chattering swept through the throng of Dark GateKeepers. They moved in to surround Seth and the Black Sorcerer, but kept a distance...they weren’t happy with the lamp.

The smell was unbearable...it came from the area *and* from the Dark GateKeepers themselves...rotten flesh...that's what they'd been eating... Some still had food around their mouths...flesh clung in threads to their teeth...others just stood there and slobbered goeey saliva that bounced a few times before it fell to the ground...Seth heaved, ready to vomit, but tried to steady his stomach by taking a deep *stench infested* breath and holding still... If anyone could see his face now, they'd say he was as white as death...

The Dark GateKeepers listened to the noise coming from their Dark Master, the man with the Crystal Skull...they were being ordered to crowd the Astral corridors...big trouble was coming and the man next to him needed their help...he needed many of them to come at once...

The Black Sorcerer looked at the suffering Seth and chuckled...*lets get out of here. You've got a battle to be getting on with...*Seth quickly followed him out of that repulsive place. When they got back to one of the clearings, he broke away from the Black Sorcerer and threw up in the bushes...

The Black Sorcerer looked on. He sighed to himself. Everything was changing. The Prophecy was in motion and the Custodians were unprepared. For *now*, that was... Seth, the Black Sorcerer knew, was full of surprises. He wouldn't be shocked if he managed to sort out these Horus-Taskers once and for all. But you never knew. Were the human ones capable of taking back their power? The Black Sorcerer smiled to himself. It would be interesting...yes...it would be very interesting indeed...



White Eagle thumped at the drum with a rhythmic movement. Lara wouldn't say that he was *singing*...rather that he was chanting in a *sing-song voice*...the drumming was making her feel peaceful...they were at a campfire and the sounds rose to touch the stars above...the air seemed to shimmer and there slowly appeared in the night sky, a circle of light...the drumming was doing something to her body...she felt light-headed, it was as if her body was moving...she rose slowly from the ground to meet the circle of light...White Eagle was with her, yet she could still hear the drumming...

Moving through the portal of light, she found herself sitting on the wall of a great stone well, her feet dangling in the water, socks and shoes and all...White Eagle sat beside her and, facing them, stood a group of dark-haired men in white robes. They had kind faces and reminded Lara of the Seven Sages...the Masters of Time.

Welcome Lara and thank you Brother White Eagle for bringing her to us. Two of the men walked over to Lara and helped her off the wall. Her feet were sopping wet...

They called themselves the White Brotherhood, and they'd met up with her father! The man who called himself Balthazar told her that Nick was in the Ashen Forest trying to rescue Ali Mehmet who had somehow been captured by the Dark GateKeepers.

You, Lara, Balthazar informed her now, must go to the Halls of Amenti. There you will be tested to prove you have the power to open up the Great Gates. Inside those gates resides Osiris...

'But shouldn't I try to help my father and Ali Mehmet first?' Lara asked. She was desperate to be reunited with her family again.

This is one way to help them Lara. There is a great storm coming. The Custodians of the Portals are preparing for war. You need to build your power, for right now, the light of all the Horus-Taskers put together is not strong enough to fight them. You must go to the Halls to find more light.

Lara looked at White Eagle. 'I wait for you, little one. This your test. You go alone now. It is important.'
Lara felt tears prick the back of her eyes. *Alone again?*
Balthazar took her arm. *They need you, Lara. You are strong.*
Lara gave a half-smile. 'How do I *get* to the Halls of Amenti?'
Come this way.



Back in the forest, Seth sat at the head of the wooden table with his Aides, the remaining nine Custodians of the Portals. They were grim as they discussed everything that had happened since Rainford had found the Sacred White Powder ...they also looked as sick as he felt...they'd dined on...well he wasn't going to think about it...he'd only just got his stomach settled from his little *visit* to the Dark GateKeepers. Every now and again, as they talked, they sipped at their Tonic, they were *that* ruffled...they'd better be careful with their supplies...they didn't know when they could next top up their flasks...

'Strategy,' Seth declared. 'Strategy. We have to work out a plan of action to stop these people getting to the portals. They're all over the place...I don't know how they're doing it...those Seven Sages...'
Seth stopped to breathe...the Masters of Time...they started all this...they were sneaky...*sneaky*...!

'May I suggest, Your Grace,' the Chief Aide offered, 'that we barricade the Halls of Amenti?'
'Aren't they already guarded by Dark GateKeepers and...and...*whatever?*'
'They are. There are a number of guarded gateways before they reach the Great Doors. But the point is, we never banked on *this*, did we? We never thought that *anyone*, let alone a whole *crowd* of troublemakers, could wander the corridors...we've been safe for thousands of years...'
'I'll go and check it out myself.' Seth declared. The Chief Aide was right. That place was the most dangerous. It was *the* place that, if opened, would change everything. This wasn't a job for these lowly servants of his. He'd feel safer sorting it out himself.
Seth stood up to go. 'In the meantime, get those Dark GateKeepers organised. I want this over with. And...' he looked around at them menacingly, 'go easy on the Tonic. Keep calm. Relaxed. We don't have further supplies on hand.'



Unable to believe his ears, Nick crouched in the thicket close to the group of Aides. ...this was the *enemy...the enemy of the human race!* These were the people the Horus-Taskers were trying to overpower...whatever *that* meant! He recognised them from the Antiquities Committee and other offices...jobs that looked ordinary, when in fact they had a whole lot more important tasks that they were *officially* responsible for...

They were discussing the horrors of their problem...Lara, Noah, Ali Mehmet...they were discussing *all* of them ...they were in deep trouble, from what he could hear...their world was falling apart and they were rapidly trying to fix things...it seemed as if one of their own men had turned against them...that made Nick smile...yes...it was a bad sign for them!

A great force hit Nick from behind...before he could utter a sound he fell headlong into the clearing...right at Seth's feet...

The table went silent for a moment as the Aides stared dumbstruck at Nick gasping for breath on the floor...he'd fallen flat on his stomach and couldn't get any air for a few seconds...As oxygen finally found its way into Nick's lungs, the others started to talk wildly amongst themselves...looking down at Nick and then up at Seth, who had been ready to leave for the Halls of Amenti.

'PROFESSOR NICHOLAS RAINFORD!' Seth cried, pushing at Nick's shoulder with his foot.

'Now what a pleasant surprise! What brings a man like *you* to a place like *this*?'

Nick was more interested in finding out how he'd ended up on the floor. He looked over his shoulder...a Sentinel bat stood in the shadows...Nick had been too engrossed in the conversation at the table to hear anyone sneaking up behind him.

'I SAID...' Seth repeated to the distracted man lying before him, 'what a *PLEASANT* surprise! You'd be polite if you'd answer me, Rainford! What brings you to the Ashen Forest?'

Nick looked up. He'd hoisted himself to his knees, when two Aides jumped away from the table, grabbed his arms and yanked him to his feet. He was still a bit bewildered by his fall.

'On second thoughts,' Seth declared, 'don't answer me. I get the picture. You're on your troublemaking mission and you've found your way here as one of those unfortunate tests your people have to take. Tests they never pass, I might add.'

Seth pushed Nick back to the ground. 'Call a few of the Sentinels. I want him locked up. Hostages are good. They make the enemy do what you want!'

Nick found himself trussed up in ropes in the middle of the clearing. He yelled in protest but it did no good. The Aides had surrounded him. As Seth gave them orders concerning where to keep him, the Black Sorcerer appeared from the darkness of the trees.

'Hey!' Nick shouted at the man in the black robes. 'Aren't *you* going to do anything here?'

'I serve your needs, Nick. Didn't I tell you that?'

'But they're imprisoning me!'

'No Nick. This is your doing. I tried to teach you a lesson, but you wouldn't listen.'

'What lesson? What are you talking about?'

'You have to ask that? Oh Nick...you really are in trouble.'

The Black Sorcerer looked at the scene before him and chuckled. '*Look at you all,*' he exclaimed, '*what a shambles.*' With that, he walked away, leaving Nick to puzzle over his words, and Seth to wonder yet again what the Black Sorcerer was all about.



Lara was distracted. The sky was golden. In fact, there was an unreal golden glow to this whole place...not that anything *else* that had happened on the Astral wasn't weird...at least the events had *felt* real...this was different. It was *dream*-like... it gave her a funny warm glow in her body...

Up ahead in the distance was a gigantic building...it was domed... smooth...there were windows... and light glowed from them...the glass seemed to Lara to hold *in* the light...as if it was just *bursting* to get out...was this really the home of *Osiris*?

A path led up to the gates. It was a rough stone...no...a rough *crystal* path...Lara bent down to look closer...she knew it to be *Sodalite* crystal...an indigo blue rock...along with her mother, she kept a nice collection of stones like these...the path wound on ahead of her...whoever had laid it, didn't have a straight eye...it was crooked and messy-looking and some of the Sodalite was jagged, jutting up dangerously...She'd better be careful not to trip over...but she stayed on it, and started to make her way up to the gates...they seemed a long way all of a sudden...she sighed and stopped again, feeling unexpectedly tired...oh well...however far they were, she just had to keep walking...and so she did...on and on...and on...



Ali Mehmet lay in his cage listening to the sounds of the Ashen Forest. His pounding heart had slowed to a normal speed...perhaps it had got utterly fed up with beating so fast and was now on strike...Ali Mehmet chuckled to himself... another scream pierced the air...he jumped in his skin...another yellow flash...there were sounds of dragging bodies, shrieks and slurping...earlier it had terrified

him...now...well *now*...he was getting used to the noises...he didn't feel quite as frightened...he was scared, yes, but not paralysed like before...he moved his arm...whoa! He leapt up, his head hitting the roof of his cage...he could move! There were sounds again...more of these bat people walking about...looking for more blood to slurp...he hoped they wouldn't pick him...he lay quietly...his heart had started to thump a bit more in his chest, but he managed to stay calm...the bat people walked past him...when the clearing was quiet again, he sat up. It looked scary out there. He didn't know if he was brave enough to get out of the cage. In fact, the cage looked *safer* than any place outside of it... What would they do if they caught him? He was certain these other humans were food of some sort...the bats seemed only interested in their blood, but then what happened to the bodies he'd heard being dragged off? Maybe if they caught him they'd feed him, piece by piece, still alive, to animals...or other creatures...perhaps they'd drink his blood dry, draining him of all life...what if they beat him senseless?

PERHAPS! WHAT IF? MAYBE! COULD! WOULD! POSSIBLY! PROBABLY! MIGHT! ...

Ali Mehmet cupped his ears...jeez! Sister Abigail was loud! His ears hadn't even rung first to let him know she was there!

*Of course your ears were ringing! You were too busy with your ... 'what ifs' ...and your 'perhaps this' and 'perhaps that!' Are you listening to yourself, Ali Mehmet? Are you listening to all the reasons you are giving why you **cannot** get out of that prison of yours?*

'But...they...'

*But nothing! Everything you are saying is only **possibility**! Nothing is real until it happens! How about this? What if you actually got to escape? What if you bumped into a Dark GateKeeper and scared the living daylights out of it? What if those bat people came to get you and you socked them good and proper in the teeth so they couldn't suck your blood? You might actually **WIN** if you take a risk! Huh, Ali Mehmet? How about winning? Do you fancy that?*

'Yes...'

*How about some positive thoughts for a change! Don't you know you can talk yourself **into** something, just as much as you can talk yourself **out** of it? It's just a choice!*

'It's a... choice?'

*You can put good thoughts in your head and that makes you feel powerful! Or you can scare the wits out of yourself like you've been doing! Choose, man! **CHOOSE WISELY!***

Before Ali Mehmet could answer, Sister Abigail was gone. She had a habit of doing that. She didn't like *backchat*. The wood was quiet for now. He sat with his thoughts for a long while until a noise in the thicket startled him. He eyed the trees warily. Someone was making their way out of the bushes. Was Nick back or was it the Dark Gate...*No!* He wasn't going to do that *scary* stuff anymore! Whoever it was...if they were nasty, he was going to put up a fight! The form crept toward him...his heart was thudding...then...then it soared with *joy*...

It was Melissa!



Noah and Hassan kept going. They'd created a picture in their minds of the Halls of Amenti and they kept it in their imaginations as they walked. They didn't speak much because they knew that conversation would distract them from the image they were working hard to keep alive in their minds.

Sister Abigail had spoken to Melissa, Hassan and Noah through the Dreaming Crystal and suggested that they split up for the time being. Nick was in trouble she said, and Melissa had to find Ali Mehmet. She told all three of them to focus their minds on where they were going and to keep a picture in their heads. They'd have to concentrate hard, she reminded them, because they were not used to doing things like this. For a while, they'd travelled together in silence, concentrating, and the next time Noah and Hassan looked around them for Melissa, she was gone.

They kept walking and focussing, and the tunnels seemed to guide them, somehow. They didn't think about which of the many corridors to take...it seemed as if the tunnels chose *them*...a sudden noise jolted them out of their thoughts...silence...then again...it continued...a low hum...no...a low droning sound... up ahead, the rock tunnel was glowing with a low light...they looked at each other questioningly, *hopefully*...the tunnels were *ending*?

They walked towards the light...they could see now it was moonlight... and found themselves out in a desert area...there were rocks jutting out of the landscape and ahead, a huge mountain face leered at them...they walked on for a while until a group of jagged rocks blocked their path... as they walked around the huge cluster, they found themselves staring into the faces of a group of ...green men...*lizards*? Before they could make any sound of surprise, a voice behind them made them jump...

'YOU! What are *YOU* doing here!'

Hassan and Noah turned to look into the popping eyes of Abdul Bakr.

'Shouldn't I ask *you* the same question?' Noah answered, his eyes wide with amazement. 'Or maybe not...you're probably here to make trouble... put the spanner in the works...*typical*!'

'Don't I know you?' Hassan queried, looking in Abdul Bakr's face...aren't you the man from the Antiquities Committee?'

'He's one of *them*, that's what,' Noah answered before Abdul Bakr could... 'He's somehow connected to Lara going missing! Snooping, spying and now up to goodness knows *what*! What are *you* here for, anyway?' Noah swung round to see what this place was and what the...*men, lizards* were doing... 'And who are this lot? What are you all up to?'

The Lizard Men stood around, not quite sure what to do. They didn't look friendly, but they didn't make a move. They'd been handling some sort of electronic equipment, in front of a large oval-mouthed cave. Noah moved his body to get a better look into the cavern...a kind of see-through curtain...no...a shimmering veil...seemed to be suspended there...

'You...you...how dare you...I'll ask the questions boy!' Abdul Bakr stammered with fury at Noah's nerve. 'I'm in charge here! I'm the new Boss!'

'Boss of what? Boss of the nosy parkers? Are these The Nosy Parker Brigade? You didn't answer my question...what are you doing here!'

'You'd better be careful how you speak to me!' Abdul Bakr shouted. He barged past Noah and yelled something in a strange language to the Lizard Men. Four of them moved towards Noah and Hassan and before they could protest, both had their arms pinned to their sides and were being dragged backwards, towards a small rock outcropping.

'Tie them with something!' Abdul Bakr shouted. Noah noticed the man's flask poking out from the top of his shirt pocket. He glanced around at the other Lizard Men. They had flasks too...but they were put aside in the green leathery folds of skin at the top of their thighs.

The Lizard Men failed to find anything with which to tie Hassan and Noah. They hadn't banked on holding hostages, so hadn't come with supplies...The prisoners struggled, but the Lizard Men were strong.

'Their shoelaces!' Abdul Bakr yelled, 'Use their *shoelaces*!'

He sent two more of his people to undo their laces. Their fingers, *if* you could call them that, were clumsy, and Abdul Bakr ended up doing the job himself. He tied their hands, while all the time his eyes popped and steam escaped from his ears. When he finally got up, he was starting to shimmer in green waves, but he took a great swig of his Tonic to steady his human form. Hassan was horrified by this sight and Noah simply nudged him in the ribs with his elbow and said he'd explain. Noah knew the poppy-

eyed man was ruffled good and proper. If he could wind his nerves up a little further, Noah knew he could get Abdul Bakr to end up as that nasty green slime he'd seen in the Great Pyramid basement...

'Now!' Abdul Bakr exclaimed... 'I'll do the asking! What are you doing here?... You're related to that buffoon of an old guard, aren't you?' Abdul Bakr was looking at Hassan now.

'Don't you talk about my friend like that!' Noah wanted to jump up and punch Abdul Bakr's lights out.

'Do you *ever* stop talking?' Abdul Bakr turned to Noah, his face twisted with disbelief. 'If I had some tape, I'd stick it all over your mouth!'

'Ali Mehmet is my uncle, yes.' Hassan said, graciously. Noah wondered how he did this *polite* thing.

'And I am here with Noah because we are Horus-Taskers. I believe you know the story.'

Abdul Bakr glared at Hassan, then at Noah, then he stomped off... came back and stomped off again. He didn't know what to do with them... *no*... what *was* he thinking? Of *course* he knew! He'd summon some of the Dark GateKeepers! *They'd* know what to do! He charged back over to Hassan and Noah, who were busy wriggling their wrists about trying to get out of their shoelaces.

'I wouldn't bother with *that* lark,' Abdul Bakr said triumphantly, 'by the time you've loosened the laces, the Dark GateKeepers will be here, looking for dinner!' With that, he marched off feeling really quite pleased with himself.



Melissa reached Ali Mehmet's cage. 'Ali Mehmet! What are you doing in here!'

'Very good question!' he answered, beaming at his friend. He pushed open the front of the cage and clambered out. Melissa steadied him as he reached the ground. They hugged... then Ali Mehmet grabbed Melissa.

'Come now! We go to trees! Before somebody see us! There we talk!'

They ran for the trees as one of the prisoners screamed in despair. The yellow eye flashed, just missing the pair. They scrambled for the bushes and burrowed down quietly.

'The eyes,' Ali Mehmet whispered to Melissa, 'they everywhere! And the bat people...'

'I know! I saw them! Ali Mehmet! Sister Abigail says Nick is in trouble. Do you know anything about this?'

'But he here, Melissa! First he come to me... he say I must come, but I afraid... I stay here... now, I free myself... but Nick not here. I don't know where he go. I just know he speak to big man. The man boss. Very scary man...'

Ali Mehmet's eyes widened, 'I don't like to look at him!'

'Where is this big boss man, Ali Mehmet?'

'He here. He boss of this Ashen Forest. I don't know where.'

'We have to try to find Nick. Perhaps this man took him?'

'I don't know! Let's try to find Nick! He try to help me, I try to help him! Let's go!'

The two of them turned and skirted the clearing, staying hidden in the trees. Melissa hushed Ali Mehmet when he tried to talk. She wanted to concentrate on Nick's face. She was determined to find her husband.



Lara sat at the gates of the domed building, nursing her wound with some leaves she'd picked up along the way. The path had been long and winding... it *deceived* people... the castle had seemed close, until Lara had started walking... she'd walked and walked for what seemed hours... she was feeling exhausted... in fact, far more exhausted than she *should* have felt... she'd had to stop a number of times... eventually, she'd fallen onto a jagged piece of rock in the path... it had cut her knee.

She cleaned it now, since she didn't know what else to do. The gates were closed and there didn't seem to be anyone around. And besides... from the gates, another long winding path snaked its way up to a wall

with a huge iron door...she'd sunk to the ground...no thanks...she couldn't face another one of those walks...not *now* anyhow...maybe she should take a nap...she was so, so *tired*...

Wet...her face was wet? ... Lara opened her eyes and she squealed in fright...staring down at her was a huge Lion...she fell onto her back, only to gaze into the eyes of another...

*'They are harmless, Lara!' came a voice...she stayed on her back...they didn't **look** harmless!
'They won't... can't hurt you...they were licking your face...that's how you awoke!'
Lara sat up slowly, eyeing the Lion in front of her...perhaps...perhaps the voice was right...the Lion's eyes looked kind...powerful and kind...She raised herself to her feet and turned towards the voice. It was a woman...tall, dark...was she going to have a baby... was she pregnant?*

'I'm Isis. Wife of Osiris.' The woman held out her hand. 'You've reached the first gate to the Halls of Amenti.' Lara allowed the woman to help her to her feet.

'Sister Abigail and the Masters have told me a little about you. How many gates are there?' Lara enquired.

'There are two. To get through this gate you have to pass a test. The next gate...well, lets see if you can get through this one first...

'I have a test? Now? But I've just walked...it feels like forever...'

'The path tired you Lara...it's the crystal spirit, it clears your mind, it clears it of old stale thoughts,'

'I didn't know I had any!'

'Well, all humans do. But the clearing makes you tired...you cannot get through the gates unless you are clear-headed. It also makes you fall into a sleep-state, so you can see us.'

The Lions pushed up to Lara. She slowly put out her hands to stroke their heads.

'Come Lara, follow me.'

The woman led Lara to the large gates and the Lions followed. The gates were closed. Lara stopped, and looked to the woman to open them. She didn't look as if she could push them, and there wasn't anybody else around to do the job...

'Well, Lara...don't you want to open the gates?'

'Open the gates? Oh.' Lara looked at the woman, then walked up to the great iron railings and gave them a hefty shove...they didn't budge an inch. Then, Lara looked at the point that the closed gates met...was there a lock on it? She studied the area closely...no...nothing. She turned back to the woman.

'I can't do it. They're too heavy.'

'This is your first test, Lara, you have to find a way to open the gates!'

'IT'LL NEVER HAPPEN!'

Lara spun on her heels to the sound of the booming voice...everything here was so peaceful, so dreamlike...and now this voice...it cut through her body like a blunt knife...

'SHE'LL NEVER GET THROUGH!'

Lara recognised the man. He looked angry and dangerous. He was the Boss of those men who'd kidnapped her.

'Seth!' the woman exclaimed. She knew him! Of course! Wasn't he the brother of Osiris and Isis? The bad brother who was the dreaded enemy of Osiris? Lara looked at Isis. She didn't appear to be afraid. This comforted Lara. She didn't want to go back to Rainbow's End, or worse, be kidnapped again, this time by the Dark GateKeepers. The Lions crouched low...they growled dangerously at Seth...

*'They won't attack him, Lara,' the woman said, 'he's not in the same sleep-state that you are...he can see us and speak to us, but that's all. He can't touch you. This area is sacred space. He and his type cannot get past these gates in the way that you are doing. You have to have a clear mind, and the Astral plane, with all its strange tests helps you clear up old ways of thinking. Seth and his people can only **observe** you, and try to stop you with persuasion.'*

'But what about if I wake up...'

'Yes, he can attack you when you are awake, but only if you do not pass your test. If the gates open, it means you know your power. Then, he can't touch you. He will not be able to match you. The only thing he can do is frighten you in some way. If he scares you, you would lose your sense of power...'

Seth stood there smiling as the woman explained things to Lara.

'Well, I'll give you some credit, girl,' he said, 'how you got here...well...those Masters must have given you a good map...some pretty good instructions. But this is as far as you go.'

'You came in time, Seth,' the woman smiled...you can witness Lara's test...

*Seth rubbed his hands and grinned. 'The TEST! He knew that the White GateKeepers couldn't help these travellers...that was the joy of it all...they only **tested** these freaks and most of them couldn't get through.*

'Good! She'll never get through! If she does, I'll give her my throne!'

Lara stared at Seth questioningly. This whole Astral story was a bit confusing in parts. It seemed a person got to where they were going with the mind. She'd figured that much out. But what about the gateway to the heavens? What was that all about? What was Seth doing here...how could he stop people from going through? She put her questions to the woman, but Seth answered.

'These are my Astral corridors! I use them to trick the human mind out of going to the heavens when a person dies.'

'You made this place...this...this...dimension?'

*'He didn't make it, Lara,' the woman answered, 'but he does his best to control it, and he's doing a pretty good job. This place is a natural place. When humans die, they are supposed to come here first to be greeted by Angels and are then taken to the heavens. That's how it **used** to happen. Then, the Earth had some visitors...you know the story...they wanted to make slaves, so they placed Dark GateKeepers here, who frightened the human souls so much, that they thought they had lost their power. Then the Dark GateKeepers imprisoned them until living human women became pregnant and the old souls simply went back into new bodies. Now, the souls come here when they die... then go back into bodies as soon as a woman on Earth becomes pregnant... which is almost immediately. They do this before the Dark GateKeepers get them.'*

'So we never get to the heavens?' Lara understood things a lot better now.

'Some people do, though not many. Some human souls have been told about this story, so they prepare themselves for the time that they are going to die. The Ancient Egyptians are a good example of these people. There are also people in the world now, who prepare for the Dark GateKeepers. When they die, they know exactly how to beat the evil ones.'

'They learn how to pass the tests?'

*'Yes...the test is to see if they have **understanding** of their power and also if they have the courage to **use** their power. Not all people pass the tests. Human beings get frightened very easily now. Much more than they did before.'*

'Why don't the Angels help them?'

*'Because every human being, or living creature has their own power. No-one can give power to you and no-one can take it away. What a bad person can do, however is make you **think** that you do not have power.'*

'How does a bad person do that, then?'

'By making you frightened. Fear is a strange thing. It is a voice in your body that tells you that you do not have power. An Angel cannot give someone power. An Angel can try to convince you, when you are afraid, that you do have power, but you have to believe it.'

'So if I am afraid of someone, it means I do not recognise my power?'

'Exactly. And you then do everything that the other person tells you because you are afraid of them.'

'And that's why I rule the world!' Seth announced proudly. 'Nice story, isn't it? Come on, now. I'm looking for some fun here! Let's see how much power you have Little Miss Horus-Tasker! You're not

even close to opening that gate! I'm looking forward to imprisoning you...don't worry, I shall not allow anyone to eat you...you'll be by little caged pet for life! A souvenir of this momentous occasion!

'I have to tell you,' the woman told Lara, 'that Seth does not understand things the way he should. He knows that he can make people fear him and make people his slaves, but he does not understand how it works. If he did, he wouldn't have to try to steal people's souls.'

'Why are you nice to him?'

'Because he is a soul too, who does not yet understand his power. He only thinks he does because he is a thief. One day he will learn and he will pass through these gates to the heavens.'

'Crazy talk, that's what that is!' Seth laughed. 'Don't fill your ears with her nonsense, Lara! Come on! Get on with the test! Try and open the gate!'

Seth couldn't stand still. He was practically hopping with excitement at the thought of hauling Lara off.

'You've got two chances of success, Lara Rainford! Fat chance and no chance! When I'm done caging you, I'm going to barricade this place...get a whole bunch of the Dark GateKeepers out here. That'll finish this sorry episode for good!'

'Yes,' the woman said, looking at Lara. 'Let's continue with your test. It is time for you to show understanding of your power. Later, you will demonstrate it by using it. Now... you have to find a way to open the gates.'



Abdul Bakr was nowhere to be seen. Noah wiggled the shoelaces tied round his wrists, but they wouldn't loosen. Hassan was too busy gazing at the cave to wiggle anything. The Lizard Men had set up some kind of sound system and were twisting knobs to create various musical notes. He couldn't see into the cave...it was too far from where they were sitting to see what was inside.

'Noah, stop that for a moment,' Hassan said, looking at the boy as he tried to get his teeth around the laces. 'What do you think they're up to? They're making sounds with that machine...but it seems as if they can't quite get the right tone or something... Noah?'

Noah gnashed away. The laces were shredding under the pressure of his teeth. He looked up suddenly, his mouth dripping with saliva.

'Jeez, Noah, wipe your mouth!' Hassan said wrinkling up his nose. 'Come to think of it, we haven't eaten since this journey began. Are you hungry Noah? Because I'm not.'

'Nope. It must be Astral magic or something.' He wiped his mouth on his arm. 'I've just thought of something Hassan.'

The older man looked at Noah.

'When Lara and I were last in the Great Pyramid together, there was a humming sound. It messed with our heads, somewhat. Then, Ali Mehmet talked about music and portals...so did some of the scrolls that my Mum and I read. I reckon the cave's a portal to someplace...when we were a bit closer, I could see inside...there's a veil of some type in there. It sort of sparkled and moved, and reminded me of a very thin shimmering silk scarf my mother has at home.'

Noah went back to his shoelace. He kept munching...it would break any second now...Hassan watched the men, thinking...

'Got it!' Noah whispered loudly...he wriggled his wrists and the laces came free. He glanced over at the Lizard Men who were not the least bit interested in their new Boss's prisoners. Abdul Bakr was still missing.

Noah crawled closer to Hassan and started untying the tight knot that Abdul Bakr had fixed. He pulled until it came loose.

'What now?' Hassan asked Noah. 'The guy will be back with his GateKeepers before we know it!'

‘We need to get into the cave,’ Noah said.

‘The cave?’

‘Once we’re in there, we can get through the portal.’

‘How? If they’re having trouble...’

‘They’re a bunch of useless Lizards! Noah’s your man. Follow me Hassan!’

Hassan followed Noah as he dodged behind various rocks. They made their way up to the great wall of mountain rock that held the cave. None of these Lizard-Men had checked on the prisoners...they discussed the equipment, some of them appeared to be arguing amongst themselves. Others made sounds with the machine while two of them peered into the cave to check if anything was happening.

‘They’re in and out of the cave Noah! We’ll never get in there.’

‘We will if we distract them!’

‘But how are we going to do that? ...’

Suddenly, there was a noise underfoot...the ground was vibrating, as if a mini-earthquake was about to occur...in the distance, behind a small mountain, dust clouds flew up...was it a small army of dark creatures marching in unison?

‘Hassan! It’s them! The Dark GateKeepers! We’d better do something...Abdul Bakr’s returned!’

‘Lets throw stones, Noah...over there! Throw them in the direction we were imprisoned! That should distract them! Hopefully, they’ll think we’re hiding in the rocks behind!’

They picked up stones from the ground...the Lizard Men were watching the approaching dark crowd with puzzlement...Noah and Hassan started hurling stones...a few crashed against other larger rocks and some bounced off the ground in all directions...one or two of the Lizard Men turned to look and see where the noise was coming from...as they did so, they suddenly started yelling something ...the prisoners were gone!

Three or four of them ran to the spot where Noah and Hassan had sat. Others stayed put, watching the show from their positions...Noah cursed...the Dark GateKeepers were approaching...there weren’t as many as they thought...they just *sounded* like an army...still...it didn’t matter how many there were...there were enough of them to eat Hassan and Noah in seconds...

They couldn’t find the prisoners...*now* the Lizard Men near the cave budged...they bounded off after the others, scattering in different directions, leaving only two of them loitering at a small distance from the cave. One of them went to watch the Dark GateKeepers while the other toyed with the machine. He wasn’t having any joy...the ground was rumbling now, and he threw his hands up in frustration...he went to join his companion. The approaching crowd were not far...they sent ahead of them a funny smell...something rotten in the air...

Hassan and Noah ran for the cave entrance. As they did so, one of the Lizard Men spotted them. He yelled to alert the two who were watching the approaching visitors, but the noise of the footfalls drowned out his voice.

Inside the cave, Noah and Hassan encountered the strange veil...it really did look like a huge bluish semi-transparent silk scarf...they could not see what was beyond it. Hassan went in closer and put his hand in front of the blue shimmer. Nothing happened. He tried to put his arm through it...his hand and lower arm disappeared...there was commotion outside and Hassan pulled his arm back, looking at the cave entrance...Noah moved slowly away from it, his back to the veil...he and Hassan kept to one side of the cave where they would not easily be seen...a horrible smell was creeping in...the Dark GateKeepers had arrived...there was a sound of shuffling feet by the entrance...voices! Abdul Bakr was yelling...next thing they knew he was there...in the cave...in front of them...

‘Run for the veil Noah!’ Hassan shouted.

‘There’s no point!’ Abdul Bakr sneered. ‘It acts like a blue silken void where nothing exists! You have to ask it to transport you. You have to speak to it with sound! You clowns wouldn’t have a clue!’

Noah and Hassan edged backwards towards the veil...two dark shadows loomed in to view behind Abdul Bakr...

‘I’ll be here when you get back...there’s nowhere for you to go! I have a hungry mob waiting...it is better to be devoured piece by piece than to run forever in blue nothingness!’

Noah and Hassan turned and lunged straight into a sea of blue waves...they ran until they couldn’t run any more...then they stopped. Nobody had followed them...it was silent and blue and...empty...they walked... further...and further...they kept going for what seemed like a long time until they realised that they weren’t getting anywhere...

They finally stopped and looked at each other through the blue haze. ‘What now?’ Noah asked Hassan.

‘I thought *you* had the answer,’ Hassan replied.

Noah thought for a moment. ‘Well, I had the answer earlier. Let’s hope it works.’

Noah sunk to the ground. He looked up at the expectant Hassan.

‘Sit’ he ordered the standing man. ‘We’ve got stuff to do’.



The Sentinel bats surrounded Melissa and Ali Mehmet, bony fingers pressing into their arms and shoulders. They were standing outside a wooden house in a clearing full of Sentinel bats. After sneaking around the forest, they’d spotted the Black Sorcerer...Ali Mehmet had pointed him out in terror...and reluctantly, they’d followed him through the trees to this place. As he’d walked through the courtyard, he made some shrieky sound to the Sentinel bats while turning and pointing in their direction. The next thing they knew, Melissa and Ali Mehmet were being hauled into the clearing outside the house.

The Black Sorcerer stood on the steps of the house. The Crystal Skull moved slightly as it translated his sounds...

‘Well...tonight is a very busy night...it’s a good thing we are creatures of the dark. There’d be no rest for us otherwise. I’ve no doubt you’ve come to ask me some questions. You might as well go ahead. All the visitors so far have done so.’

Melissa and Ali Mehmet looked at one another, each daring the other to speak. This was a creepy person...

‘Well? You’ve been hot on my tail, and now you’ve got nothing to say for yourselves?’

‘We are... looking... for Nick,’ Ali Mehmet stammered breathlessly.

‘Yes, Nick...my husband,’ Melissa ventured. ‘We thought you might be holding him.’

‘Nobody here is held against their will’.

‘But I was trapped here!’ Ali Mehmet protested.

‘But not against your will,’ the Black Sorcerer insisted.

‘But...’ Melissa said hesitantly, ‘all these... people... have surrounded us.’

‘You were following me. I wanted to give you the chance to ask me the questions that you wished to. You are free to leave now if you like.’

‘Oh. Is Nick here...in this...in the Ashen Forest?’

‘Yes. The Custodians have captured him.’

‘So he is being held against his will!’ Melissa was confused.

‘No. I tried to help him but he insisted on doing things his way. He is now a prisoner of his thoughts.’

‘But I thought you said the Custodians have him!’

‘They do.’

Melissa felt exasperated.

‘Can you tell me where they have him?’

‘I can. But there’s no point you chasing after him, really. You cannot do anything.’

‘He’s my husband. I have to try!’

'Go ahead then. But remember, you can't win any battle without knowing your power. You have to remember the Keys! Maybe the three of you can work it out together.'

'Who are you?' Melissa asked the Black Sorcerer, intrigued by his words. 'Are you a Horus-Tasker?'

*'I serve the dark side of the soul. Nothing more, nothing less. People who struggle with their power find their way here. If they choose their fears, they give themselves to me. I show them their worst nightmares...I **am** their worst fears. If they choose power, I am of no use to them.'*

Melissa looked around her. She nodded. 'Yes. I understand.'

The Black Sorcerer sighed. It was about time somebody understood. There was hope for the Horus-Taskers after all.

CHAPTER 11: FINDING THE HALLS OF AMENTI

Lara focussed on the gates...eyes closed, she imagined them swinging open ... she worked hard on this image in her mind, and when she opened her eyes again, after what seemed a very long time...the gates were still firmly shut.

‘Ha ha! Lara!’ Seth shouted. ‘Keep going. This is the spectacle of spectacles! I must applaud you for trying so hard, but my dear, as I keep trying to suggest, you are *no* magician!’

Lara was frustrated. She’d tried so many ways to get these gates opened...she’d even kicked them at one point...Seth had loved that. He’d had the nerve to gleefully offer to kiss her toes better! Lara looked at the woman, who while waiting patiently for Lara to work out the problem, gently rubbed at her large stomach. Isis, Lara thought. Isis, wife of Osiris. Was she really pregnant? Hadn’t she already given birth to Horus, son of Osiris? Why was she pregnant now? With what child? Lara sighed. This Horus-Tasker thing was a real...

*Lara jumped up suddenly. Hold on a minute! Isis. Pregnant. Isis found the pieces of the murdered Osiris. A man murdered by...why, it was Seth, wasn’t it! Lara turned to face him now, and he looked at her suspiciously. He wasn’t happy with the way she’d got up so suddenly. That sort of movement smacked of a **brainwave** to him!*

‘My goodness! Isis!’ Lara turned to the woman. ‘You’re not really a person, as such, are you?’
The woman beamed, nodding with encouragement.

‘You’re the Gateway! The story of Osiris is a riddle! A riddle of power! If we understand it, we understand our own power. Osiris didn’t really come back to life, he went somewhere...to the skies, to Orion, to the Halls of Amenti...they’re all the same thing!’

‘I think you’re talking gobbledegook,’ Seth interrupted, though he didn’t sound convinced by his own words. Lara ignored him.

‘Seth killed Osiris. Seth, this man standing here, is a symbol of the side of human beings who are only interested in money, the side that does not care about other people and about love. So Seth killed Osiris. Osiris is power. So our human greed killed our power. Or should I say, we got so greedy that we forgot that we had power. Now, we have people from other planets working for Seth, who make us so afraid that we allow ourselves to be slaves.’

‘The gates, Lara, the gates!’ Seth taunted. ‘You’re telling nice, confusing stories, but you’re not opening the gates!’

‘Isis is the part of us that can get Osiris back. There is a part of every human being that can bring back their power if they want to. Isis is in every man, woman or child. Isis is the imagination. She uses her feelings and inner magic to make things happen. All the things that we have done on this journey...the crystals, the imagining, the focussing. All of it is real. It is the Isis inside of us that can do these things. By using our Isis, we bring back our power. So you, Isis, are the gates. The child in your tummy shows us that we have to be creative with our imagination!’

A noise made Lara turn. The gates were open! Suddenly, feeling tired again, Lara sunk to the floor...her eyelids were heavy and she struggled to keep them open...she wanted to look up at the woman...but she was so ...Lara closed her eyes and slept...

When she opened them again, the woman was gone. Lara felt refreshed, more alive than ever before...she was more...more...powerful! She pulled herself up and turned to go through the gates. Seth stood there, glaring.

'I wouldn't go through, if I were you,' he threatened. He looked dangerous now. His teasing was over. 'You can't frighten me.' Lara replied. 'There's nothing you can say to make me afraid.'

'Oh no?'

'No.'

'How about this, then? I've got your father. Walk through that gate and you won't see him again.'

Lara froze. Seth smiled. Unfortunately for Seth, his smile thawed Lara's instant fear.

'No. You're just trying to scare me. You're the one who is afraid because I'm going to open the Halls of Amenti and you'll be finished. You don't have *anybody*, otherwise you wouldn't be standing here.'

Seth glowered darkly. 'Then I'll somehow have to prove it, won't I?'

He watched with dread as Lara entered the first of the gates to the Halls of Amenti. Whatever happened next, he could not allow *her*, or *any* one of the Horus-Taskers for that matter, to get through the second gate. He'd better do something fast. Yes. He'd better act *very* fast indeed. Everything was changing, but he was not about to lose control.



The two troublemakers never returned. Abdul Bakr had waited for an *eternity*, but these Horus-Taskers were a stubborn lot. If he knew anything at all, it was probably that the Rainford boy wanted to annoy the living daylights out of him and make him sit here endlessly. He was probably chuckling to himself right now, thinking of Abdul Bakr twiddling his thumbs and waiting like a brainless chump for the two timewasters who'd only get back in their own sweet time. Time didn't seem to exist in these dimensions...or if it did, it was all messed up... whether it was night or day depended on a person's *mood* or something... it was all so *confusing*. It infuriated him too, that he should be having to do all this stuff...charging about through the tunnels and goodness knows what else, all because of those meddling Rainfords. The world had been good...everything had been beautiful for thousands of years...and *now*, because of a bunch of nosy twerps...

Abdul Bakr jumped up. No. He wasn't sitting here a minute longer. He had to sort out his problems. Seth and the others had to be exterminated, killed, made good and dead so he could take over. Should he leave a Lizard or two here by the caves? No. He'd leave the Dark GateKeepers. He'd order a whole gang of the stinking fiends to keep guard. As soon as the two bumbling fools walked through the veil, they'd be torn to shreds and gulped down in milliseconds.

Right. The machine. They had to find the right frequency band...the right *sound* to get them to the Halls of Amenti. He wanted to make sure the gates were clear. He ought to put a few men there to scare off any Horus-Taskers who tried to get through the gates. They'd probably never get through *anyway*, if history was anything to go by. Those White GateKeepers tested would-be *heaven-goers* with stupid riddles, but usually the students were too dim-witted to get through. The trouble was, those pesky Horus-Taskers were busting through into all *sorts* of places. It must be the Masters of Time who were giving those tricksters the answers to their tests or something. Whatever it was, Abdul Bakr had better put a few scary individuals near the gates, just in case. Maybe he would succeed in scaring them off before they got anywhere near a White GateKeeper.

He went outside to join the others. He gave out his orders and Dark GateKeepers shuffled around the entrance of the caves to stand guard. Abdul Bakr stood by while his Lizard Men continued to fiddle with the machine...he turned the dial in different directions hoping to find the tone that would open up a portal... something happened... the dial was pointing at Abdul Bakr at one point when one of his cave-watchers yelled...the veil had changed colour! A portal had opened!

He turned off the machine and the veil returned to its original shade. Abdul Bakr shouted for everyone to stand in the blue shimmering waves, and the Lizard Men crowded in clumsily while he stood at the machine. He turned it on again and ran for the veil as it changed colour. Standing in the pool of colourful

waves, a great noise, a rising squealing tone, made Abdul Bakr and his men cover their ears and squeeze their eyes tightly shut. When it died down, they found themselves amongst a multitude of trees.

‘What the...’ Abdul Bakr gasped as he took a few steps around him. He recognised the smell. This was *not* the place he was trying to get to! He turned to the others and gnashed his teeth in fury.

They were in the Ashen Forest.



Hassan crawled over to Noah, who was pulling damp leaves from his body. His ears still rang from the noise, but it was quieting down slowly.

‘What happened?’ Hassan asked, not really expecting an answer from Noah.

‘This place stinks,’ Noah complained. ‘And what’s with the spooky shrieking?’

‘And yellow flashes,’ Hassan said warily.

Earlier, they’d sat in the blue void trying to hum on Noah’s instructions, only to find that nothing had happened. Noah had insisted that if they could just find the right tone, it would open up a portal or something. Hassan had thought the idea was mumbo jumbo, but didn’t have the heart to say so. And besides, he didn’t have any better ideas himself. It was during their useless efforts that they’d suddenly heard a horribly loud noise that rose until they’d had to cover their ears. And here they were, in a forest of some sort. Noah was obviously right about tones and portals, but they couldn’t figure out quite what had happened.

‘Come on Noah,’ Hassan exclaimed as he got up. ‘Let’s find out where we are and what’s next.’

Another shriek filled the night air, and bats wings flapped furiously above them. Although they didn’t feel cold, both of them shivered as they started to make their way through the eerie darkness.



Melissa and Ali Mehmet stood in the trees, way back from the mountain-lined encampment. At least that’s what it looked like to Melissa...an *encampment*. It was dark, and Nick was sitting on a stool surrounded by dim candles. Further away were a group of men...the *Custodians*. Melissa recognised them from the Antiquities Committee, and she’d learned a lot more about their *additional* duties since this whole adventure had begun. The candles flickered and spat as wax tried to drown out the insistent candlewicks. Nick sat all trussed up with ropes, staring at his hands, no doubt wondering how he’d ended up in this place. Even further back than the Custodians, Melissa spotted dark shadows lurking...Dark GateKeepers.

‘We not move now, Melissa,’ Ali Mehmet whispered. ‘We think first.’

‘Think of what, Ali Mehmet?’ Melissa hissed. She wanted to march over there now, and sort out these nasty characters who held her husband.

‘We not help him with hands. He must think himself out of here.’

‘What are you talking about?’ Melissa challenged Ali Mehmet.

‘Before... *I* am captured. Nick cannot help me because I have to think myself out of there. Black Sorcerer say so. So I think good things and now I am out.’

‘I don’t think so, Ali Mehmet. If we charge in there and make a distraction, Nick can run for it.’

‘Then they catch *you*, Melissa! Or me! This work only if Nick *think* right! This is test Melissa! I find out that we cannot help another person...we only must tell them what is right way to think. Everyone choose the way they thinking and they choose the things that happen to them.’

Melissa looked at Ali Mehmet and sighed. Maybe he was right...*maybe*.

‘How did you figure out the test, Ali Mehmet?’ Melissa asked.

‘Sister Abigail. She speak to me. Maybe she speak to Nick.’

‘I don’t see how. She’s never spoken to him before. The only time *I* have spoken to her...unless...hold on Ali Mehmet! Maybe she *can* speak to him!’

Melissa fumbled excitedly in her pockets and found the Dreaming Crystal. She held it up triumphantly.

‘I think we should ask her advice first...’

‘Yes. Then we get this to Nick,’ Ali Mehmet interrupted. ‘She tell him like she tell me!’

‘I hope so, Ali Mehmet,’ Melissa said happily. ‘I hope so.’



Seth was fuming, and as he trudged through the trees, he kicked at a few tree trunks. This was bad! *BAD!* He had to stop the girl from going through to the second gate of the Halls of Amenti. How these Horus-Taskers were getting through was anyone’s guess! To pass through gates like these, the students in the past had to have heavy tests of their character...were the Horus-Taskers *really* finding the Keys to the Halls of Amenti? He knew that the Keys weren’t actual *keys*, but that they were powerful ideas that made a human being understand themselves better...but how? *How* did they pass the tests! They were all *over* the tunnels, having *all* sorts of experiences and if they succeeded...and told the rest of the world...well...he could *forget* this whole idea of continuing to rule the Earth! He’d have to go back to his *own* planet...and *that* was all blown up to smithereens...oh WRETCHED PEOPLE! He couldn’t let it happen!

He had to scare the wits out of the girl, but the trouble was, she was getting too big for her boots! She wasn’t having any of his scare tactics! Words alone wouldn’t do any good. He had to somehow find a way for her to know for sure that Seth, King of the World, was holding her father hostage. That would stop her. Human beings were easy targets when it came to their family members...they *loved* them too much! And all those Horus-Taskers were linked through family and friendship. No. It would be easy to terrify the lot of them. He just had to find a way to let *her* know he meant business. Dealing with the rest of them would be a piece of cake.

Seth approached the filthy, disgusting home of the Dark GateKeepers... there was no other safe place to hold their hostage...and *let’s be honest*, beggars couldn’t be choosers...he and the Custodians were on their own in this whole mess...the Black Sorcerer was no help, he just kept talking in riddles, but the Dark GateKeepers, well, handled right, were enough to terrify the devil himself. No one could escape *that* place. They’d die of the stench or of fright before they ever got out of there...

There was light in the trees just before the mountain clearing...now *that* was strange...this was bats *paradise*, they loved the dark... and those revolting creatures couldn’t *live* with light...so what was going on? Seth was suspicious...Horus-Taskers perhaps? It was most likely something to do with that meddlesome crew...he crept in closer...quietly...he trod like a ghost...careful not to make any noise... and there they were...

What Seth saw, brought great joy to his heart. Suddenly in his mind, there was great hope once again...glory...victory...he could stop the girl once and for all. Stop those Horus-Taskers from ever revealing anything...*anything* to the rest of the world....

Yes! The King of the World was back...and all was lost for those poor useless world-saving fools. Seth smiled a big smile. He was on top again.



Abdul Bakr peered through the trees at the Custodians. So this is where they were hiding out. The Black Sorcerer had told him where they were... that evil-looking creature didn’t seem to know *whose* side he

was on...he spoke in riddles that totally confused Abdul Bakr...to be honest, he was glad to get out of there...

Now he had to lie in wait. He had to wait for the right opportunity...there was a commotion...someone was being dragged from the trees right opposite him across the clearing...Seth was there...and a *woman*? He fixed his eyes on her...the light wasn't great...just candles everywhere...no doubt to ward off the Dark GateKeepers...they couldn't always be trusted to stay away from people, even *with* orders... the light kept them at bay... yes it was definitely a woman...ah! It was Rainford's wife!

The Custodians had dragged her to where her husband sat. The two of them had hugged and kissed...a pretty awful sight when Abdul Bakr really thought about it... and then the two of them had got into a huge argument with Seth... Abdul Bakr wasn't close enough to hear *everything* that was said...he'd just heard stuff about *crystals*...and *Sister Abigail*... and Seth was giving a sermon on how the end was here for the Horus-Taskers. Abdul Bakr didn't foresee any problems... Seth could dispose of the Rainford couple...two less troublemakers for Abdul Bakr to worry about. Then, the way would be clear. Abdul Bakr would race in and take over once and for all.



Ali Mehmet cried with joy as he hugged Sister Abigail.

'Oh I miss you Sister Abigail! I miss you!'

'Me too, Ali Mehmet! I missed you too, but enough of the drama! You've got too much to do! You've got to get to Lara!'

'But why only I am here, Sister Abigail? Why not Melissa also?'

Melissa and Ali Mehmet had called upon Sister Abigail using the Dreaming Crystal. They'd held it together and focussed until the light had shone from its centre and the Aboriginal woman had created a huge bubble of light that had surrounded them. They'd started speaking about Nick, but before they could have a meaningful conversation, people were suddenly rushing at them through the trees. Sister Abigail had yelled at them both to close their eyes and focus on her. Only Ali Mehmet did so and found himself in the Australian Outback as he'd done so as a child a million times before.

'Melissa is stubborn,' Sister Abigail declared, 'she had other thoughts of rescue in her head. She didn't listen to me. Fortunately, you did.'

'But I tell Melissa!' Ali Mehmet exclaimed wretchedly. 'I tell her not to save him! He only can save himself.'

'Lovebirds! She wanted to save her husband in all the wrong ways. They'll figure out their test like you did! They're Horus-Taskers. I have faith in them. Anyway. You've done well so far, Ali Mehmet! I'm proud of you! Your next step is to get through the first gate of the Halls of Amenti. If you pass the test, you'll find Lara. She'll need your help at this point. I'll get you to the first gate through my own portal. The rest is up to you.'

Sister Abigail looked down at the old man sitting in front of her. She'd known him all of his life and he'd always been afraid. Now...*now* when it counted, he was finding his courage...



The Lizard Men stretched themselves out under the trees of the Ashen Forest and nodded off... it was tiring work, coming from another planet and working to overthrow the current leaders...their new Boss snooped about, waiting for the right moment to attack, but for now...well, there was nothing else to do but get some well-earned rest...

Noah crept behind the trees where the Lizard Men slept, while Hassan kept his eye on Abdul Bakr. Noah was glad of the moonlight, even if there wasn't much of it...it was only half out, for a start, and also,

some of the time, the bats swarmed the low skies above, leaving the forest in pitch black. The Lizard Men snoozed...some even snored...Noah looked around at all of them and then tip-toed to the one nearest him. This was dangerous...if the sleeping *thing* woke up, Noah would be someone's breakfast...that was if daybreak *ever* came in this terrible place... he reached down slowly to the Lizard Man's thigh...gently...ever so gently, he tugged at the flask tucked into a fold of skin...the green man snorted and twisted...Noah froze, his hand barely touching the bottle...the Lizard Man settled again and Noah slid the flask out skilfully, tucked it into the belt of his trousers and moved off towards the second sleeping Lizard Man.

Abdul Bakr's eyes popped backwards and forwards as he watched the scene ahead of him. He couldn't figure out what they were up to over there. Seth had this crystal thing in his hands and there was light spewing out everywhere...the Dark GateKeepers had run for the caves, many of them making the most obscene noises...this light covered Seth and the couple, and other things were happening...was there a black woman appearing in the picture?

Hassan watched Abdul Bakr. He and Noah had found him here after first coming across that awful Black Sorcerer. The strange half bat half man had laughed hysterically, saying this was the best adventure that had ever taken place in thousands of years! He said the Ashen Forest had turned into a throbbing train station overnight, with all sorts of characters turning up to hound each other. Everyone was looking for someone, he'd said...at least the strange fellow had told them where to find all the others...he and Noah hadn't realised who ALL the others were...they turned out to be Nick, Melissa, the Custodians *and* their Boss...and now this bunch of hoodlums...Abdul Bakr and his Lizard Men cronies...

Noah had suggested they steal their Tonic and bury it somewhere, then figure out later what to do about rescuing his parents. Without the Tonic, the Lizards would be easier to tackle in a fight...or so Noah said. He seemed to know about this shape-shifting lark... Abdul Bakr was looking over his shoulder...what was he looking at? Had he heard something? Hassan strained his ears to hear...nothing...Abdul Bakr sniffed the air and his eyes sort of bobbed about in their sockets... he turned and headed back to where the Lizard Men lay sleeping...



Lara stood at the second gate to the Halls of Amenti. The heavy iron door was enormous...in actual fact, Lara couldn't see how it would open... *if* she passed the test that was... it had no hinges and neither was it two halves that swung open and shut...there was no meeting point at the centre of the huge rectangular piece of metal. It looked as if it was just part of the wall itself except it was metal, and the rest of the wall brand new brickwork...

She stood there waiting for someone to appear...no one did. She didn't feel sleepy, either. The land around the walls closest to the door, was rich with herbs and flowers...the smell was glorious...Lara breathed the rich odours of nature deeply ...a movement came from a thick waist-high bush near to the path she had travelled and now stood upon. Lara watched it closely and stood on tip-toe to see if there was anyone crouching behind it. She couldn't see anything, so she walked over to where she thought she'd seen the movement. There was not anyone there...but there was a powerful aroma...a heavy smell that reminded her of her mother's cooking...she was beginning to feel a little dizzy...her eyes were playing with her...a figure was forming from the bush...

Lara!

A figure stood in the place of the bush...it was green with violet flecks...it didn't look like a person...it was just a form...

Lara! Don't be alarmed! I am the spirit of the Rosemary Bush...my aroma helps you remember...it clears out the old ideas that you have about yourself...it clears the thoughts that tell you that you are not

magical and not special...poor human beings have forgotten they are special...I help your mind throw out all its fear...just breathe, Lara. Breathe and clear out your head...I will fill your body and clean you like you would clean an old cupboard!

Lara did as she was told... she breathed in the herbal aroma...soon, she was sleepy...she went and sat by the great iron door and let her head fall onto her chest.... she fell into a deep sleep...



The Black Sorcerer looked at the Crystal Skull on his desk. It told him many things about the world. It told him what had been and what was happening now. It always spoke the truth. It did not know how to lie. The Crystal Skull knew all things and now it told the Sorcerer that the first gate to the Halls of Amenti had been entered. Seth was fighting hard... he was a dangerous man and knew how to get what he wanted... But Seth had more than one enemy... his own people had turned against him... never before had the world come so close to discovering its power...in the past, the students of the schools of Heliopolis had sometimes passed through the gates to the heavens...not often though...but when they did, it was for their own gain...this time, a group of people, the Horus-Taskers, brought into the world by the Masters of Time, were doing it so they could give *everyone* a chance to discover their power *without* the horrors of the tunnels...this idea was new, and it was frightening for the Custodians...

The Black Sorcerer went to his window and looked through up into the moonlit sky. How long? For how much longer would he be here? The Crystal Skull was not able to tell the future, for the future does not exist. There is only ever the past, or *now*. All things that were coming would depend on what happened now, in this moment. The man in the dark robes looked down into the courtyard at his people. They were here to serve those who needed them...and if they were no longer needed, then...they would go back to where they came from...



Lara's eyes opened to find Ali Mehmet staring down at her. He looked as he always did when he saw her...brimming with happiness, and his eyes full of tears...

'Mashallah Lara! I have found my precious child!'

He grabbed her arm and pulled her up. Lara hugged him until he pretended to gasp for breath. She laughed.

'You miss your old friend, Lara?'

'Oh Ali Mehmet!' Lara cried. 'I'm so glad you're here! You made it too!'

'Yes, my child. But my nose all twitchy now from the Rosemary smell!'

Ali Mehmet wrinkled up his nose and wiggled it around, and Lara laughed again. It felt like old times.

A rumbling noise behind caused them to turn their heads. The great iron door was moving...it was sliding from one wall into the other, disappearing into brickwork until it had gone altogether. Lara and Ali Mehmet stared at the crystal path that led up to the doors of the Great Halls...

'All that you encounter begins within,' a voice said.

They turned away from the entrance to face a man in a white robe with shoulder-length brown hair. Lara recognised him as one of the White Brotherhood...

'All that you encounter begins within,' Balthazar repeated, smiling.

*Before Lara or Ali Mehmet could answer the man, their ears started ringing... Sister Abigail's voice was loud...and it wasn't coming from inside their ears...a picture was forming in front of all three of them...they could hear Sister Abigail speaking, but they saw...Seth! The picture loomed in front of them...it was as if the horrid man was right here with them...Lara knew that he couldn't hurt them though, because he could only **observe**...*

*'Lara, Ali Mehmet!' came Sister Abigail's voice, 'I have a visitor for you...in fact, a few visitors...'
'THANK YOU!' boomed Seth's voice. He was grinning like a demon at Lara. He looked at Ali Mehmet.
'You too! I would have thought you too old for this sort of thing! Seems I'm wrong, though, eh?'
'Can't you leave us alone?' Lara shouted. You're actually getting on my nerves! We're here with Balthazar. We're going to pass through the second gate!
'I shouldn't bother, my dear...'
'Are you still trying to frighten me? I'm getting bored with...'*

Seth smiled as the image of her father and mother appeared next to him...

*'You were saying, Lara?'
'Mum! Dad! Oh my goodness! What's happening? Where are you?' Lara stared at them aghast. She was confused...overjoyed to see them... but with Seth? What on earth was going on?
'Move away from the gate, Lara!' Seth shouted before her parents could answer her. 'I wouldn't go through if I were you! There's too much to lose, wouldn't you say? As for you old man, I think you've got too much sense to do anything stupid!
'What?' Lara demanded, 'What are you going to do to them?' She felt panic rise in her body. She could not bear the thought of anyone hurting her parents.
'What do you think I'm going to do? Do I look like a kind old teddy bear? I'm going to KILL them, that's WHAT! Unless of course, you walk away from that gate and forget that any of this spectacular drama ever happened.'*

A hand rested on her shoulders. Lara turned to Balthazar. She'd forgotten about him for the moment.

*'What does it mean, Lara,' Balthazar asked her.
'What does what mean?' Her eyes darted back to her parents...they were trying to say something, but Seth was threatening them.
'Focus Lara,' Balthazar insisted gently.
'Are you still there girl? Don't these people mean anything to you?' Seth's voice was menacing.
'All that you encounter begins within...It will help you if you understand what it means. Focus on what is important.'*

*'But my parents are important! Ali Mehmet, what should I do?'
The old man came to her side and took her hand. 'One of the Keys, Lara, is this... we cannot help any person...when we try to do this, we let them believe they have no power. We must tell them they have power to change the things in their lives and we can explain how, but we must not do anything for them! Your mother, father, they must find this Key and they will be free!
'Walk away Lara! The Dark GateKeepers are on hand... they're slobbering at the thought of biting into these two miserable creatures!' Seth smirked as he spoke.
'Lara,' Ali Mehmet pleaded, 'Think... all that you encounter begins within ...it mean that what we thinking we creating...no? You're Mama, Baba, they must think good thing, not bad thing! You Lara! Think about power! Then you win!
'Don't get involved with riddles, Lara! They'll only get your parents into trouble....'
'LARA!' Melissa yelled at the top of her voice. 'Go through the gates!' Lara watched, horrified, as one of the Custodians grabbed her mother and pushed her to the floor.
'DON'T LET FEAR HOLD YOU BACK!' her father managed to shout, before he too was knocked to the ground... Lara was frantic. She looked at Balthazar. He smiled encouragingly.
Lara looked at Ali Mehmet. 'Let's do it,' she said. 'We'll go through the gate! But first, let me calm myself.'*

She closed her eyes to the sound of Seth's taunts and threats. She was afraid, but she had to now find her sense of power again...this, she thought, was going to be the hardest thing she'd ever had to do, but she had to take the risk...there was too much at stake....



Horror-struck, Abdul Bakr stared at the boy. His belted waistline was stuffed with flasks and his arms and hands full. His men lay on the floor of the forest, some up against trees, fast asleep, snoring as if there was not a terrible battle going on...

Noah looked at Abdul Bakr, equally astonished...where had *Hassan* got to? ...He appeared suddenly, in the shadows behind Abdul Bakr and before Abdul Bakr could voice his absolute fury, Hassan had grabbed him around his neck and covered his mouth with a large hand. Abdul Bakr's protests were muffled as Hassan dragged him back to his peeping spot. The smaller man wrestled and bit at Hassan's hand...Hassan yelled out and yanked his hand away... Abdul Bakr leapt away, his face red with rage... 'You...you...' Abdul Bakr didn't have the words to say how he felt...his ears were steaming, and he reached for his Tonic. Hassan suddenly realised what was happening, bellowed at the top of his voice to try to startle Abdul Bakr, and lunged for the flask. Abdul Bakr shrieked with astonishment at the noise, but managed to jump out of the way and Hassan fell flat on the ground.

The racket woke one of the Lizard Men, who leapt to his feet upon seeing Noah...Noah ran for the trees and threw the flasks as far as he could into the brush just as the Lizard Man gained on him...fortunately for Noah, the green man tripped over one of his sleeping companions. Their shouts were enough to raise the dead... Noah turned and headed in Hassan's direction.

Hassan pulled himself up as Noah ran straight into Abdul Bakr. The man grabbed the boy by the scruff of his neck and tried to yank him to the floor. Noah hurled his body over Abdul Bakr's and the two of them went flying into the mountain clearing...they tussled on the floor, each trying to push the other's face with their free hand...they rolled around in the damp earth until the brightness of lamplight stopped them in their muddy tracks... three Custodians stood over them...Abdul Bakr stared up...in the lamplight, his face had changed colour...he was white...white as death...



Nick and Melissa looked at each other...their eyes were alight...Seth's eyes were bulging...he'd dropped the Dreaming Crystal and the picture of Lara had disappeared... he looked demonic...he grabbed his Tonic quickly and swigged it in large gulps. He couldn't believe what he saw...a muddy, pasty-faced Abdul Bakr, his arms pinned back by two of the Custodians, gazed up at him...his face said it all...he was guilty of betrayal, and terrified of his punishment... behind him was a young man...the Rainford boy presumably... he looked sulky and rude... not a bit frightened...

Before anyone could speak, a stampede of Lizard Men entered the clearing...all charging for the group... the Custodians, though dumbfounded by the sight, acted quickly and ran forward to meet them. A massive brawl took place...Abdul Bakr, his arms free and suddenly filled with nerve and guts, ran for Seth and leapt at him, clawing at his face like a mad animal. They fell about the floor kicking and punching...at one point, they even pulled at each other's hair...not that Abdul Bakr had much... but his ears were yanked in all sorts of directions...

Nick struggled up from the ground. The ropes that had once been tight around him fell about his feet. He looked at Melissa.

'Let's get out of here!' he shouted. Melissa grabbed the Dreaming Crystal from the floor and ran with Nick, heading for the trees. Noah saw his parents up ahead and yelled at them to follow him. They turned to head off after their son. He led them to Hassan who was standing watching the fisticuffs with fascination. The clearing was crawling with green slime... the Lizard Men had no Tonic whatsoever and the Custodians had finished off their very short supplies... The only brawlers left were Seth and Abdul Bakr. They'd stopped fighting and were both sipping their Tonic, and looking around them in horror as the last of the slime disappeared into thin air...

'Now for the task of getting to Lara and Ali Mehmet,' Nick declared to the group standing before him.

'I think this will help,' Melissa smiled, holding up the Dreaming Crystal. The four of them studied it for a moment, and then together, clasped their hands around it....they were off to the gates of the Halls of Amenti....

CHAPTER 12: THE MAGIC OF THE MIND

All six of them stood before Balthazar. He beckoned for them to follow him as he made his way to the Rosemary bush and summoned its spirit. By breathing in, they began the journey of remembrance...Balthazar then led them through the iron gate to the Great Halls of Amenti... they all looked at him quizzically...didn't they have to take a test?

'To have come this far,' Balthazar explained, 'means that you have enough sense of your own power to enter the Great Halls. The phrase *all that you encounter begins within*... this is part of a Key that you must clearly understand for you to *completely* own your power. Once this Key is realised within you the Halls will reveal Osiris.'

The Great Doors opened and gold light flooded out from the Halls of Amenti... The Horus-Taskers stepped into a vast marbled building...a turquoise mosaic pathway led to a central point way in the distance, and from the centre seemed to go off in various directions to different... *mirrors?*

'This is the Great Mirrored Hall, Horus-Taskers, where you will discover the secrets of the human soul. Walk the path now to the centre. They did as instructed and found themselves standing at different points of a circle. Each of them had to walk their own path to a mirror and follow the orders given by Balthazar.

At the mirror, each of the Horus-Taskers gazed in at their own images... the light in the Hall dimmed slowly and they continued to stare into the eyes of their own reflections... soon, the light was extremely low...and very gradually the images in the mirrors began to change...the Horus-Taskers kept their eyes fixed to their own eyes in the mirror while facial and body features transformed.... Balthazar's voice, filling the air with quiet power began speaking...

Gaze, Horus-Taskers into the depths of your own soul and take the journey of the human self....

The first image was like that of an Angel...it was a golden Being, a woman with a Halo and white robes...

The Divine Self, Horus-Taskers... this is who human beings once were...

After holding for a while, the image faded... then... something darker was forming...a man... it was *Seth!*

The Negative Self, Horus-Taskers, the self who gave in to greed, selfishness, bullying...this is what you became! Through choice!

The image shifted once more and the Horus-Taskers again looked upon themselves...

The self you see now is both Divine and Negative! What you choose to be is up to you! You must not judge the Custodians, for they are a part of you...for them to rule your world, you have to allow it by being your Negative Self! They are here because you have chosen greed, selfishness and powerlessness. Should you choose to be your Divine Self, they have no power over you!

Turn now Horus-Taskers, and keep your back to the mirror!

The Horus Taskers turned and faced the centre of the room...

I request that Lara come to stand in the circle at the centre...

Lara walked to the circle and stood there as a bubble, a huge sparkling bubble, just like the ones that people blow from soapy water, rose from the floor. This bubble didn't bob around unsteadily and pop into the air as the soapy ones did. This one floated gracefully and was a perfectly shaped ball of light. It came to a stop in the air above Lara and the other Horus-Taskers.

Oh Great Orb of the Grandfather Sun, show our Sister Lara and the Horus-Taskers the Great Key to human magic ...

The centre of the Orb first flashed a series of tiny silver stars that glittered and twinkled like the sparklers Lara loved setting light to every year on Bonfire Night. And then images began to form right in the middle of the perfect sphere. Lara recognised herself in the pictures. She was standing in her mirror at home. From her body, very faint waves of energy were moving outwards from her centre. They moved like water does when a pebble is dropped into it. She could see what she was wearing and she could see perfectly well all the things in her room. In fact, when she looked closely, *all* the things in her room had faint waves of energy coming off them. In the Orb, she was younger than she was now, and as she peered into the mirror, she frowned and crossed her arms furiously. *'I hate you!'* she started shouting *'I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!'*

Do you remember this time in your life Lara?

'Yes, I do,' Lara answered, still mesmerised by the images within the Orb. *'My parents were cross with me because I told them about Sister Abigail and the Dreamtime. I'd told them many things and this time, they were angry and said I was making everything up. I hated myself for seeing things that other people didn't.'*

Yes. Now watch what happens to the body when we get upset.

The vision of Lara in the Orb began to glow red. Red waves of energy moved from her body in stronger pulsating waves. The waves reached right out into the world and beyond to what seemed like infinity. The vision switched to a school scene. It was the playground at school! Oh yikes. There was Suzie Spencer. Lara didn't like seeing Suzie Spencer in the Orb. Suzie was the school bully. Everyone just hated her! All the school kids played; some bounced balls to each other and others played hopscotch. Some were chasing their friends around and jumping on each other's backs. All of them had waves of energy coming off them! So did the school building and the plants and the school gates! It was weird...everyone was playing with people who had the same colour waves. Yes! The waves all had different colours and the colours were so different to anything she'd ever seen before. So many different kinds, so many variations! Wow! Lara was impressed. Suzie was the only one not playing, besides Lara. Lara was standing apart from her friends watching them hop around on numbered squares. Their colours were sort of orange-yellow...they were the same...she could remember not wanting to play, feeling irritable with everyone after her argument with her parents. She was cross with Sister Abigail and cross with herself for 'seeing things'. Her wave colours were red...and so were Suzie's! Suzie walked over to where Lara was standing and started taunting her, calling her mean names and poking at her arms and chest. When Lara told her to just shut up, Suzie landed her fist square on Lara's right eye. Of course, there followed a commotion and a teacher came to haul Suzie off for the umpteenth time to the headmaster and for detention.

You were both sending off the same wave energies. The wave energies contain information about what it is you are thinking. People of the same thought patterns stick together because energy likes to come together. It is magnetic. Do you understand?

'Yes. All the kids playing together had the same colours. I suppose the colours match the way we feel?'

That's correct. Your colours shift and change all the time, but people have an underlying colour, one that comes from them all the time. It is deeper down inside of you, not so clear as the emotional colours.

'Suzie must be red inside and out! She's always looking for a fight!'

She's always red because she does not like herself. She has had life experiences that have made her angry all the time. Now, that anger is all she ever feels. She becomes angry to see happy people because she doesn't remember how to feel happy herself.

‘So, whoever hates themselves that day will get Suzie for company!’ Lara clearly understood that human experiences give people ideas about things, and those ideas travel on energy waves from our bodies. People who think alike have similar colours and so they attract each other magnetically. So if we think bad things or good things, we are always with people who are the same as us, whether we want to admit it or not!

And, sometimes the TV or magazines and books give us new ideas, new ways to look at things in the world. When we start to think a bit differently, that is the way we draw new experiences to us without realising it. We might watch bad things on TV that make us have some silly ideas, or we might read a good book that makes us more sympathetic towards others. Either way, we change our ideas, and then we change our experiences. We find ourselves in situations, good or bad, according to how we think, and according to the changing ideas that make our personalities.

‘And knowing all of this is what makes magical people and non-magical people!’ Lara exclaimed.

Ponder this...all that you encounter begins within...

As Lara walked back to her spot by the mirror, the Orb slowly disappeared and the light in the Great Hall brightened. As it did so, the Horus-Taskers found that the Hall looked different...the mirrors were gone.

...

Before them was the strangest sight...there were many people present...they looked like Lions.



In the centre of the Great Hall now, was the Sphinx... or at least it *looked* like the one near the Great Pyramid. This one was just as huge and perfectly formed...the lion's body with the man's head... around them were people...they were humans with lions features...they were golden-haired, beautiful creatures with perfect chiselled faces...Selene was amongst them...she stepped forward...

Horus-Taskers, we are blessed that you have reached us. You have finally completed the circle.

The Horus-Taskers looked at each other. ‘The circle?’ Noah asked. He was transfixed by these beings.

You started here, with us. You left through these doors into the Astral and were birthed into human bodies, bearing our DNA. It was your task to help human beings to remember their beginnings... you were born into human bodies to help them realise their absolute power. Being in human bodies, it is difficult for you to remember who you are as Horus-Taskers. We had to wait for a time that we could activate the Prophecy of Osiris. It was planned so that you would have to do this journey of remembering so you could tell other human beings how to find their power.

‘I'm not sure I understand it all,’ Hassan said. ‘What happened to the human race?’

Once upon a time, human beings were Divine Beings, but with time and lots of different experiences, many developed the Negative Self. The human race became divided into Divine Beings and Negative Beings. Soon, from the skies, came visitors who saw that most human beings had become greedy and selfish, and they took advantage of this. These visitors were very clever and very evil. They had blown up their own planet through their greed and selfishness, and here, they found people who were greedy and

selfish like them. The visitors made slaves out of humans without them even knowing what was happening and today things have not changed.

‘So these visitors were... *are...* basically aliens who visited the earth?’ Noah asked, his eyes wide.

*Yes. Visiting different planets is a normal thing in most of the universe, just as it is normal to visit different countries. Visitors don’t come in **spaceships**, though. They come through portals in the earth or sky... in **travel ships**... no one travels through **space** as you know it. Seth’s people just let you think they do to keep you thinking that travelling to different planets is too difficult or even impossible. That way, you will not think about leaving the planet and living elsewhere! In your world now, Seth’s people do not allow visitors to come, and they do not allow humans to know of such a possibility. The portals are closed. They want the Earth to themselves.*

‘So who are you, exactly?’ Lara asked.

We were the original Earth people. There were some of us who did not give in to greed and selfishness. We chose our Divine Selves. We tried to tell our brothers and sisters that they could also choose a better path, but they would not listen.

‘Why do you look half-lion, half-human?’ Noah enquired.

We once looked like you. When most humans followed their greed and selfishness, we had no choice but to leave. We could not force others to think like us, and the world became a terrible place to live. So we went through the portals to Orion...these people are Great Divine Beings. They are Great Lions like this Sphinx. We became one with them. So now, we look similar.

‘So what is it that you do here... now...with us?’ Melissa was fascinated by this story of Ancient Human History.

It has always saddened us that our people changed in this terrible way. It was worse when we saw what Seth’s people did... and still do. So we tried to help by setting up our own portals by building the Great Pyramids. All pyramid structures that are mathematically perfect are portals. The Sphinx, and the many temples that we built were Hieroglyphs for you to read. The area you call Egypt was a Divine Land. Only the Divine Beings lived there until we left for Orion. In fact, we didn’t live there all the time...we came back and forth through the portals to help human beings who wanted to change. We built temple schools so that people who wanted to learn how to change back into Divine Beings could be taught by us. But Seth’s people soon found out what we were doing and closed the portals. They blocked up the Great Pyramid so that its inside was no longer mathematically perfect.

‘But why is there no history of this?’ Nick asked curiously.

In some of the temples and in many books, we left the stories of your true history. Thoth, the Crossing Guard of the Great Celestial Waterway, was the Divine Being who came back many times to write of human history. Many of these books were burned by Seth’s people. We also made sure that we left the stories in complicated Hieroglyphs so that Seth would not understand them. Even today, people have not understood the stories within the stories. So the history of humanity is still in Egypt, written in Hieroglyphs on the walls of temples and tombs, but Egyptologists are yet to understand them. Seth’s people changed your ideas about human history. They wanted you to believe that you have no power, so they destroyed most of the knowledge of it. They did not want you all to wake up one day and change your minds about living this kind of life. They needed you to believe that you depend on them, on their governments, on their whole way of life. They made you believe that you had no imagination and no way to have magic in your life.

‘So who are the Masters of Time and the White Brotherhood?’ Noah asked,
‘Yes, why have all these different people like White Eagle and Sister Abigail helped us?’ Lara was also eager to know.

We are all here to try to tell human beings that they have choices about how to live. There are Divine Beings all over the universe who care about human beings and what has happened to them. It is only human beings who do not seem to care much about themselves. The Masters of Time and the White Brotherhood are also Orions, but they have different types of bodies. Sister Abigail and White Eagle are from tribes who originally came from the Pleiades star system. These stars are sisters of the Earth. In this world are many people from different places in the universe. We work together as one family to assist our enslaved brother and sister human beings.

‘So now we are here, what’s next?’ Nick asked.

Now that you have found your way here, you have completed this circle and now that you have discovered the Keys to your power, you can tell other human beings...but first...you have to give us all the Keys...when this task is done, you will meet Osiris...

CHAPTER 13: THE TWELVE KEYS OF AMENTI

The Horus-Taskers stood just outside a huge circle of shiny polished black granite rock...it was divided up with gold lines to form what looked like pie pieces...each section was equal in size and twelve of them made up the circle.

The Horus-Taskers were ready. As each of them spoke up, giving two Keys, gold writing formed on a section of the circle...it was recording the Keys of Amenti...

Nick began...

'We create our reality with our thoughts'...as he spoke these words he remembered Ali Mehmet lying in his cage, thinking terrible things and creating a frightening world for himself... it was only when he chose more positive thoughts that he was able to get out of his cage... The way that we see the world, and the feelings that we have...fear, anger, love, are all there because of our thoughts...and we *choose* those thoughts... when we think of all the good things that we *want* to happen to us, and keep these happy thoughts in our minds at all times, we *feel* happy and positive about life...eventually these good things happen to us... and it is the same with bad things... it is all our own choice... Nick knew what *he* preferred to create...

Declaring the second key, Nick said, *'The world is a mirror of the way that we think'*

Stepping back he realised that Lara's experience with Suzie Spencer was a good example... and he and Ali Mehmet had ended up captured and surrounded by evil beings because they were thinking negative things... the world around them really was just a mirror of what was going on in their own heads! Nick could now see that many people in his life were good mirrors, and some were bad mirrors...at least now he knew that all the bad things he had experienced, he could change by making himself think positive thoughts as much as possible, and also by believing in himself and following all the Keys of Amenti... *And*, if he really wasn't sure whether his thoughts were good or bad... all he had to do was look at what was going on all around him in his life!

Stepping forward, Melissa continued...

'We have the power of choice...we can choose good thoughts or we can choose bad thoughts.'.. Melissa understood that nobody *makes* us think anything. We *choose* what to think, even if it doesn't feel that way sometimes... Often people are around us who say mean and nasty things and we flare up in anger, or we just feel bad inside. We must remember though that we have choices... if the things they say really are not true, we can choose to believe that we are good and special and ask those people who insist on their negative opinions to please leave us alone. If we realise that the things they say are actually *true*, we can choose to change the way that we are and become more loving, honest people.

'We must also accept other people's choices'...Melissa realised that we must all allow people to choose their own way of doing things. You do not have to make them do things your way even if you think you are right. What is right for you, is not always right for others. Or, sometimes people simply need to make mistakes so that they can see things for themselves! You should tell people one time only what you have experienced, but if they choose to go ahead and do their own thing, you must respect their choices.

Noah went next...

'Always follow your own inner voice. Don't let others tell you what to do.' Noah remembered that he always used to follow what his friends did even when he knew inside something was not right. Often, he would end up in trouble because he didn't listen to the voice inside of himself that urged him to do the right thing. So many of us are like this. We get a feeling inside of us to do something, and then we do not listen to it, because we do not trust ourselves. We listen instead to somebody else because we think other people have the right answers.

'Speak your truth at all times'... Noah sometimes lied to people. Not just ordinary lies about what he had been up to, but deeper lies, such as what he really thought about things that happen in life. Sometimes people have beliefs about things that other people do not have, but they do not tell other people. They pretend to be like everyone else. He knew now that when someone lies, it means that they are afraid and do not know their power. They are afraid that people will reject them. When we live honestly and follow all the Keys of Amenti, we are powerful and people *see* that power because they see we are not afraid to be ourselves.

Lara followed Noah...

'Always trust yourself and believe in your own experiences. Don't let others tell you your magical life is not real.' Lara used her own life as an example. She had been so miserable at times, when her parents, brother and friends had not believed her about Sister Abigail and her experiences. Sometimes, she wondered if she was a silly girl just like they had told her. She started to believe she was weird, crazy or just plain stupid. Now, she knew that other people were not right at all. She now believed that everything was true, simply because it was her own experience and she didn't have to prove a thing to others. Many people in the world have strange experiences, but they believe that there is something wrong with them. All it takes is for all people to have trust in themselves for them to know that they are special and privileged to experience different things.

'Always do what you believe to be the right thing. Never do something that is not true to you just so that people will like you.' Lara had learned that her father and Hassan had been afraid to do the right thing in their lives, in their jobs. Sometimes, when they knew that other Egyptologists were wrong, they didn't say anything in case the others said bad things about them. So many people lived their lives this way. There are times when we have to tell people what we really think about them or their ideas, but do not in case they dislike us. We end up being followers of other people because we do not have the courage to do what we believe to be right.

Ali Mehmet came up next... He spoke slowly. *'Keep your mind in the present. Let go of the past. The future does not exist... you are creating it in the present with your thoughts.'* Ali Mehmet knew he was guilty of keeping his mind in the past. He never married Helen because his mother and father had not been happy together. He always remembered his unhappy life as a child because his parents hated each other. He had chosen to believe that marriage was a bad thing because of his parents' experience. So really, Ali Mehmet was making choices in the present based on past experiences! Instead of thinking about how happy he and Helen were and *would be* together, he thought about his parents past experiences. And so, he had robbed himself of happiness! He knew now, that he just had to think of today and wipe the past clean from his mind. It didn't matter what happened way back then. It only mattered what happened now. A lot of people live in the past without realising it. We should always question why we make certain choices in our lives. Are we doing things because of our past experiences? Or are we fully here, in the present, thinking good things and making totally new experiences?

This next Key was dear to Ali Mehmet. *'Know that every being in the universe is connected... they are part of our new magical experiences... respect and love all of life and you will always have nature as your friends'*... Ali Mehmet learned this from Sister Abigail... he knew he could speak to plants, animals and all sorts of creatures with his mind and his heart if he wanted to... only humans had forgotten that we are all connected, and so never communicate with nature... when we love nature, we are good to it. We do not throw litter on its beautiful soil, and we do not hurt the land with our deep digging just so we can wear diamonds and precious metals. We love it as we love our friends and in return, it gives its beauty back to us. We also get to know about the lives and the realities of totally different Beings... so totally different from ours! What an education!

Hassan came on last...

'We must only help others by speaking of their great power and teaching them how to use it...we must never do things for people that make them believe they are powerless'... Hassan understood that human beings get very confused about the way that we should help each other. Sometimes in school, we help our friends by giving them the answers to tests, when this is not the right way to assist them. Giving the answers only makes them lazy. If we help them by showing them how to study, or assist them by helping them with their areas of difficulty, then we help their minds to grow. We must not give the kind of help that makes people lazy. We must give the help that makes people grow strong and powerful with their minds. Hassan knew that from now on, whenever someone asked him for help, he was going to ask these questions...will it make them weak, or will it make them powerful? Then he would choose the kind of help he gave others according to what the answers were.

The next Key had been a special learning point for Hassan in this adventure, *'Use your imagination. It is the Key to travelling and experiencing things in other dimensions...it is one of the greatest powers we have'...* This adventure was the proof of that! The human mind is more powerful than any human being knows. It does not *appear* to be strong, because human beings do not use the power of *focus* any more. Humans just let things happen and then get happy or sad about it. They don't seem to take much part in *creating* what they want! When they start focussing on the things they desire, they are surprised at the magic that happens! Hassan hoped that this journey would teach children to hold on to their imaginations and use it...right into adulthood. Then, they could live any kind of life they wanted...

The Twelve Keys given, the writing on the great granite circle glowed in his golden glory...the Horus-Taskers watched in great wonderment as the circle began to sink through the floor of the Great Hall...it sunk lower, lower, until a great light poured from the ground... the twelve sections of the circle moved from their centre and slid back...revealing a vast opening from which an immense gold light rose... it entered the Great Hall... and held its great awesome presence...

'Osiris...' Hassan breathed....

I AM Osiris... I AM your power...I AM the power from which everything in the universe is made...I AM the place that everything returns after it dies...I AM within you... your imagination speaks to me and I create what your imagination commands...I AM you, I AM nature... I AM everything...

The Horus-Taskers understood it all now. The Halls of Amenti are the *Hieroglyph* for the human soul... The Halls are not a place...they are the soul of every creature in the universe...inside every human being is Osiris...the Great Power...this is the story that must be told...

The gold light of Osiris began a slow descent as the Horus-Taskers watched...the Twelve Tablets of the circle moved back into place, revealing the inscribed Keys of Amenti.

Gold dust began falling from the vast skies of the Halls of Amenti...the Horus-Taskers held out their arms and allowed the love of their great ancestors to fill their hearts and souls...as the Halls disappeared, Melissa felt a very different presence around her... it was a strange Being.... a Divine Being... suddenly she knew what it was...it was the *story*...the story of Osiris... this story had lived a lonely, isolated existence...for thousands of years it had sought a storyteller who would allow this tale of truth to be told... It is an important story that will help the children of the world...they have to learn the truth...for only they would have the courage to change things...this story slipped into Melissa's heart and she held it there, ready...

She'd call the story the *Rainbow Bridge*...in honour of the children of Rainbow's End...soon they would be back in our hearts and souls...Melissa would make sure of it.

Epilogue: One Year Later...

Ali Mehmet's wedding in Cairo the following year was a huge affair...the press was there, snapping the happy couple, and later, when Ali Mehmet saw he and Helen's photograph in the newspapers, he was *well* pleased...he looked *very* handsome indeed! And at *his* age!

Lara, in her frilly pink bridesmaid's dress, popped wedding cake in her mouth. Noah poked at the cake on his plate, wrinkling his nose up in disgust. 'You look like the icing on this cake, dressed like that,' Noah moaned. 'Bloody weddings! They should be banned... especially after a person reaches a certain age! I thought Ali Mehmet had more sense than to get involved in a fiasco like this!'

'I think Helen looks beautiful,' murmured Lara, her mouth full.

'She needs her head testing, that's what,' Noah went on. 'Ali Mehmet will drag her off to all sorts of places with that imagination of his. He never knows when to stop these days. She should have stayed put in her rainy English village, safe and sound, and nutty as a fruitcake!'

The children watched as newspaper journalists surrounded Melissa. She had recently released her children's book, *The Rainbow Bridge* and it had reached the best-seller lists very quickly. Even adults seemed to be intrigued by it. The journalists were asking Melissa their favourite question...*was the story actually true to life...all of it?* She answered in the way she always did, with a secretive smile. 'Sister Abigail told you in the beginning, didn't she? That all stories are alive, that they are true...sometimes the characters are made up, but the story is real... you just have to learn to read the truth underneath...'

Cameras flashed at all the wedding guests, and especially at the two distinguished Egyptologists, Hassan and Nick, who had shocked the world with the wild story of their adventures using the White Powder of Gold. At first, few people had believed the stories. But then it was scientifically tested... and more than that, one or two scientists had been horrified to observe Nick and Hassan walk through walls after swallowing the stuff with water! The supply that Nick and Noah had carried soon ran out, what with all the tests, but the powder was now being made by all sorts of people trying to follow the recipes given on the Ancient Scrolls... they couldn't get close to making the real thing though... their thoughts were of greed and selfishness, and well... what they created just didn't even *look* like the real stuff... they sold quite silly versions of it on the Internet, and in health shops, but nothing they made was ever effective...would humans *ever* learn? Until they followed the Keys of Amenti, no power could ever be gained from external things...power only belonged within.

Lara put her hand in her pocket... the Dreaming Crystal was warm...Sister Abigail was here, on the Dreamtime Level, with all of them...all they had to do was see her with the Third Eye. In Lara's other pocket was a small diary in which she'd recorded a story that White Eagle had told her recently. It seemed to capture everything she had learnt on her adventures through the dimensions... Amidst the festival light of the flashing cameras, she took out the diary and read her favourite words again...

Once, a long, long time ago, the Creator gathered all his creatures together and said, 'I want to play a game. I want to hide something from Humans and see what it takes for them to find it. It must be a place you feel they would never look. It is an important secret. It is the knowledge that they create their own reality.'

*The Eagle said, 'Give it to me, I will take it to the highest mountain'.
The Creator said, 'No. One day they will go there and they will find it.'*

*The Salmon said, 'I will place it at the bottom of the sea,'
'No. They will go there too.'*

The Buffalo said, 'I will bury it on the Great Plains,'

The Creator said, ' They will cut into the skin of the earth and find it even there. '

*Grandmother Mole who lives in the breast of Mother Earth and who sees with spiritual eyes said,
'Put it inside of them, in their hearts and in their souls. They will never bother to look there!'*

And the Creator said, 'It is done!'

The End