

Chapter 18



2001 Egypt Near the Djoser Pyramid

The small group of archeology students from John Hopkins University listened carefully to their professor, Marty Wenabe, as he explained the significance of the hieroglyphics and symbols they were studying on the walls within the Gisir el-Mudir complex from the second dynasty near Cairo, Egypt. This area of the complex was below ground and got light from a few breaks in the stone ceiling. The group of graduate students were cramped uncomfortably within a small corridor, but that did not seem to bother them. They listened with focused curiosity to every word their professor told them. They were dressed in an assortment of loose cotton shirts and work trousers.

Professor Wenabe had a passion for his work, and these summer trips to Egypt with his students was a favorite part of his year. They made tracings of some of the hieroglyphs on the walls of this ancient temple as he explained, "I think some of these are much older than the time they are generally credited. Come with me. I want to show you something very interesting just up the corridor here."

As they got up to follow him around a corner in the complex, a man came up behind them and introduced himself to one of the students. He was dressed in loose khaki pants, and a cotton shirt, and carried a large camera bag hung over his shoulder, which he necessarily guided through the narrow corridor before him so as not to bump the ancient walls.

He called out, "Professor Wenabe?"

The professor turned back upon hearing his name and looked at the man around the heads of his students. "Yes, I am Professor Wenabe."

"I'm Jack Largent. I'm taking photographs at the new archeological site over at the Djoser pyramid area working with a group from the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo. I heard you were asking about me. I wondered if you might be wanting a photographer."

"Oh, Jack Largent. Yes, well, I am glad to meet you. You have gained a good reputation among my colleagues. Call me, Marty, and these are young student archeologists from my graduate class at John Hopkins University," Marty said, motioning to his six eager students.

"Since you are here perhaps you would like to do some photography for me right away. I have something of a curiosity I was just about to show my students. Care to follow?" Marty asked.

"Yes, of course! Lead the way," said Jack.

They made their way to the end of the narrow corridor, and a turn to the right led them through a portico into a more open area inside the ruins. Within was a raised structure of stone at the opposite end. Large stone columns went up twelve feet to a mostly closed stone ceiling above the chamber. There were broken areas here and there in the roof that allowed some daylight into the space.

Professor Wenabe led them to the stone edifice that rose about four feet from the floor at the far end of the open area. It was covered with hieroglyphics and showed a broken section near the bottom revealing its hollow interior. There were symbols beside the broken area, and below the open hole in the structure was more writing, but in a different language.

"This is what I wanted to show you. Note if you will the hole in the stone, and the symbols on either side of the hole, and the inscription below the hole. I think they carry some significance," he said, as his students drew closer to study it.

“It looks to have lost some of its luster, and we’re missing some of the message I fear,” continued Wenabe. “Mr. Largent, could you possibly get a photograph of it for me? I have had little time to examine this particular inscription, and if I could have a photograph to study, that might be just the thing.”

One of the female students remarked, “They look like circles, professor.”

“Yes, exactly. But what makes these these particular circles even more interesting are the rough hieroglyphics just below them, and then there is the writing below that in still another language. They appear to tell a story, but I have not been able to study them at length, and some of them are too worn to be legible anymore,” said Marty.

“I might be able to help with that,” said Jack. “I have a small remote flash that I can sync with my camera. If we can have one of your students hold it just down there a ways we can use it as an accent light, and I think it will show the edges of these glyphs. We tried it next door at the Netjerykhet pyramid, and got pretty good results.”

He handed the small portable flash to one of the students and directed her to hold it about six feet away pointed toward the edifice. Then he stepped back and took a couple of readings with a small flash meter before beginning to take photographs of the circles and the hieroglyphics. For the next few minutes, Jack photographed the edifice covering all sides but focusing on the area of most interest to the professor. After taking a dozen photos from different angles, he nodded to Marty, and asked, “I think I got it. Is there anything else here you need?”

“Did you get this set of letters along the bottom of the column? You will note they do not match the others.” Marty asked.

“Yes, I thought they looked like ancient graffiti,” said Jack

“Yes, indeed. Fascinating. Timing is everything isn’t it, Mr. Largent. How soon can you get me copies of those photos?” the professor asked, eagerly.

“Oh, well, I know a place in Cairo that will process and proof this roll in an hour, and it is about two hours from here by car. I have been using it on the other site,” he said.

“Skip the proofs, Mr. Largent. Can you just make me eight-by-ten inch blowups of each photo, and make sure I can see things clearly in them?” he asked. “I would love to see them later today if that’s possible.”

“Well, I guess...sure. But what’s the rush, professor? This ruin has been here for five thousand years at least,” queried Jack.

“I should explain, Mr. Largent. Tomorrow is our last day on this trip. After that, we will all be returning to Boston to continue our studies. I would like to discuss the inscriptions in the photographs you just took as a culminating lesson and to review just how much my stellar students have learned this summer.”

Professor Wenabe stepped back and gestured around the ancient room they were in. “This is a very interesting chamber. It was a sacred temple built right below the main temple above, Mr. Largent. Only the priests were allowed here in ancient times.”

He motioned to the large hole in the in the bottom of the edifice. “I think something was taken from here, and I am hoping that inscription can tell me what. Of course, it could just be an example of ancient vandalism, but I am working on a theory right now, Mr. Largent, and this may be central to it. I will explain tonight when you bring me the photos; say seven p.m.? I am staying at the Luxor, and they have a fabulous chef at the restaurant there. Perhaps you will join us for dinner?”

“Oh please, Mr. Largent. We would all love to see the photos,” one of the young girls pleaded.

“Well, I guess I can’t say no,” said Jack. “Seven p.m. at the Luxor it is.”

“Fine, fine...I will make reservations. See you then,” said professor Wenabe.



Jack was a little late when he entered the elegant dining room of the old Luxor Hotel. The maître D' gave Jack the once over, saw his casual dress, and started to send him away from the ultra-formal, elegant restaurant. But then Jack told him he was with the Marty Wenabe party. The maître D' grumbled a bit, but then relented, and led Jack into the dimly lit interior of the dining room. Jack noticed those dining were dressed formally and felt immediately out of place. When they arrived at the table, Professor Wenabe stood and put out his hand gesturing to the seat next to his around the eight-place table. The maître D' gave Jack a menu and a final expression of disapproval before he departed.

"I don't think he likes me," said Jack. He looked a little embarrassed as he glanced around at the six students, and the professor. Jack noted the students were dressed like they were going to a school prom.

The professor was quick to mend his feelings. "Rubbish. A little variety will trim his nose nicely. May I offer you some wine? Since you are here as our honored guest, I can finally bring out the good stuff," said the professor, as he signaled the sommelier over.

After telling the sommelier what he wanted, the professor turned back to Jack, and asked, "What do you have for us? I have to say I am as excited as my crew, and beside myself with anticipation. In truth, Mr. Largent, we all arrived here early for cocktails and have been talking eagerly in anticipation of your arrival. I can't wait to see the photos."

"OK, but all of you call me Jack, please. You make me feel as ancient as the pyramids calling me Mr. Largent," he said.

"Of course, Jack. I am Marty, and this is, Sue, Matt, Harley, Bridge...short for Bridget...Meredith, and David," said Marty, as he watched Jack open up the oversize manila envelope.

"I took the initiative to print a couple of them up to twenty by twenty-four inches, and I think you'll see why," said Jack. "Even I was surprised at the detail that showed up using that extra kicker light."

Marty moved away dishes, and glasses, and stood up as he laid out the large print in front of him. It was magnificently detailed showing every groove of the ancient inscription on the stone edifice. Much of the old paint was worn off, but the carved grooves in the stone still revealed the message well. Marty gave a gasp, and the other students got up from their seats and gathered around him. They began to talk rapidly to each other as each seemed to see one significant ancient hieroglyph and then another that held a meaning for them. They were creating quite a commotion and oblivious to their surroundings when the maître D' once again returned, and asked them to please respect the atmosphere of the restaurant.

They all but ignored his pleas giving him only a sideways glance as they continued to argue about the meanings of the hieroglyphs in competitive earnest. The maître D' did not like to be ignored and left sharply to consult with the hotel manager.

Jack who had retreated to a chair opposite the group surrounding Marty watched the body language of the maître D' while he was talking to the manager, and it did not bode well for them. He got up and went over to talk to both of them before things got troublesome for his new friends. He deftly passed them a hundred dollar bill each, and said, "I sincerely apologize for my friends. They have made an amazing discovery out by the Gisir el-Mudir complex today, and that is why they are so excited. This is a large hotel. Do you think that perhaps we can be served in a private dining room? I think we are going to be quite loud with further discussion of what they have found, and we don't want to make any disturbance or cause you any trouble. I really would appreciate it, and I think it will resolve all of our concerns."

The manager smiled in agreement, snapped his fingers, and a bellboy materialized instantly.

Ten minutes later they were ensconced in a private dining room that overlooked the Nile River and were continuing their boisterous conversation, which evolved into more of a debate. Professor Wenabe guided their discourse to areas of further investigation, and the six enthusiastic scholars took notes, and argued their ideas and theories. Marty asked for some presentation materials with more money passing hands, and a bellboy soon arrived with a large marker board, tape, and poster-size paper that quickly filled with hieroglyphs, and interpretations.

Fascinated by the energy level, Jack sat back and watched. Their eagerness and passion were invigorating. They worked until past midnight and fit their gourmet dinner in as an afterthought blended within the animated conversation. Finally, Marty told all of them to leave with instructions to meet at breakfast in the dining room at seven.

When they were gone the room seemed eerily quiet. Marty poured himself a glass of wine and joined Jack who was sitting alone nursing a glass of his own on the balcony watching the Feluccas make their peaceful way down the Nile under the full moon.

He sat down, and said, "I can't thank you enough, Jack. It was fortuitous that we ran into you today. Honestly, your photographs made this whole trip worthwhile and a rewarding experience for all involved. You saw the reaction tonight of my learned students as they knowledgeably argued their ideas with one another. It was wonderful for me to see, and a fitting close to this exercise. I am very proud of them."

"You all seemed very excited in there, but I only got a little of it," said Jack. "I'm happy I could help. Frankly, I don't think I have seen that level of enthusiasm over any of my archeological photographs before."

"What do you think you heard, Jack?" asked Marty.

"Honestly, I felt like a bit of an intruder so I made myself scarce and opted for a more peaceful night enjoying the view of the river from this balcony. But I think I heard some discussion about the ancient Assyrians which I found interesting, what I heard of it, because those photos are from an Egyptian temple. I didn't get much, and what I did hear, kind of ran together for me," he explained.

"Yes, we spent a great deal of time talking about the Assyrian conquest of Egypt. That might just be the key to everything, Jack. You have to understand that the Assyrians at that time were the most powerful nation in the area. Their army developed the horse in warfare. Imagine what it would be like if you were a foot soldier to face an army that was all on horseback. They were the first to use chariots in warfare too. They were ruthless and cruel conquerors of other nations, and that is how they subjugated and held so many diverse tribes together for so long. People of the surrounding nations feared them and most succumbed to their dominance. This lasted for two hundred years and was the beginning of the great empires in the Western world.

"To illustrate my point, there is one story about King Ashurbanipal who had just conquered a rebellious Elamite king. He hung the pickled head of the Elamite king on a wall in his bed chambers while night after night he made love to the conquered Elamite queen. That story presents a vivid picture and mindset of the time.

"Around 671 BCE, the Assyrians conquered Egypt. They had tried before and been defeated, but this time with their new battle technologies they were successful, and they sacked Egypt and carried it all back to Nineveh, their new capital. That is why I was excited by the writing below the hole in that edifice, which you photographed in the temple. I couldn't see enough of it before to be sure of what language it was. But I suspected it might be Assyrian, and you helped me prove it."

"So you think there was an object in that structure in the temple that was taken away by the Assyrians. But why would they do that? Was it made of gold or something?" asked Jack.

"I don't know. I don't even know what it looks like. But if it were impressive enough, they would have taken it back to their capital either for its value, or because they believed it was an Egyptian god. The ancients believed that a city could not be rebuilt if they took away their gods, so it was a common practice to carry away a conquered nation's symbols of their gods," explained Marty. "The edifice you photographed got my attention originally because of the circles. The mystery of the hole and the ancient writing around it furthered my interest."

"Ah, yes, the circles. You mentioned them before. Why are they so important to you?" asked Jack.

The professor's expression changed and became more serious as he asked, "Jack, have you seen those concentric circles before?"

"Well, I have, professor, but it doesn't mean anything. Nothing to do with here I'm sure," said Jack.

“But it could, Jack. It could be very important. It just might all be connected. Those concentric circles can be found all over the world in almost every culture in some form. I have seen them in China, Central America, Iraq, India, and now, here. Where did you see them before, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Marty I come from a small valley in Northern Cambodia that dates back thousands of years. I suspect someone with your background would find a lot to work with there. I have to admit I’m hesitant to tell you where I saw those circles,” said Jack

“Siem Kulea,” said Marty.

“You knew?” asked Jack, surprised.

“I have not been completely honest with you, Jack,” confessed Marty. “Word got around quickly in my profession that the photographer who had created the magnificent photographs of the treasure from Thap Cham was branching out, and was available to photograph other archeological sites. By the way, those were excellent photographs, and probably the best ever taken of any treasure collection. I suspect by that effort alone you have received many offers to join archeological sites from my colleagues.”

“I am proud to say I received many offers, more than I could possibly accept. That part was entirely unexpected. I have to admit I really like doing this kind of photography after being an advertising photographer for many years. But please, continue. I want to know just how you know about Siem Kulea,” said Jack.

“When word went out about your career change, I was already informed, and interested in that find at Thap Cham, and the woman who found the treasure after so many centuries. Indeed, I have read the books written by Catherine Marsh and found out as much as I could about Maisong Sambath Largent, the Champa queen. I admit I am still fascinated on both a professional and personal level with the whole story. I have studied the Champa legend, and I know these circles are significant. What I don’t know is why. But you helped clarify a couple of points.

“Our meeting today wasn’t entirely coincidental. I knew you were working on the Djoser pyramid site and arranged our outing this summer to be nearby on the off chance I might find an opportunity to get together with you. That is something I have not been able to do since we are usually on opposite sides of the world. As our time here was ending, I arranged for you to get word that I was looking for a photographer.”

“I don’t understand why you didn’t just call us, and ask to come to Siem Kulea, and meet with us,” said Jack.

“Sometimes I am too clever for my own good. Many years ago when I was in Southeast Asia, I met a very resourceful man who explained to me that Siem Kulea was much like a fortress for the protection of Queen Maisong and that no outsider could go there. I have spent many years thinking of ways to get you, or Queen Maisong, to invite me to your paradise valley.”

“The valley *is* well protected, and frankly Mai would probably have said no to your inquiry. She shuns publicity. Where are you going with all of this?” asked Jack.

“Jack, these circles are connected with an ancient race, and I think they were alien from another world entirely. I know. It sounds crazy, and I admit I thought so myself at first. But there is one person on this planet that refutes that. You know who I am speaking of, don’t you?” he argued.

“Mai,” said Jack softly. “You think Mai is connected.

But then Jack shook his head firmly in denial. “Look, Marty, Mai is just Mai. She is brilliant in many ways, but a real bumblefuck in others. In any case, I will not talk about her. Sorry. My private life is off limits. I will have to insist.”

“I suspected that would be your answer, Jack,” Marty said, affably. “I am hoping you will carry my request to her, and let Queen Maisong decide if she will talk to me. I would love to meet her and talk with her. I didn’t expect you to say yes, and I am not in any kind of hurry. Get to know me first, and you’ll see that I’m not a threat of any sort. This is a professional and entirely personal curiosity, and it isn’t my intention to publish anything concerning this topic.

“But, Jack, you should know that there is someone else investigating this, and they are moving faster than I am. If I’m right, Queen Maisong needs to be warned, and protected.”

“What did the hieroglyphs say?” asked Jack, quietly getting more anxious.

“I did not tell my students, but in their entirety, they seemed to indicate that the ancients might have been able to control the weather, and the means to do that was somehow contained inside that edifice. It is just a theory so far and a hopeful one at that. I really don’t know for sure where this is going,” Marty explained.

“So you think this ancient race that might be aliens had some means of controlling the weather. Do you mean here in Egypt or everywhere?” asked Jack.

“I think they were able to control the weather around the world, Jack. I believe the means to do that is still around and we can find it. We just need to look for these circles and find what was taken from that structure in the chamber. I have some ideas about that already based on what we found here. But you didn’t answer my question, Jack. Where have you seen these circles?”

“Trust me, Marty, it can’t be connected,” answered Jack.

“How can I know that unless you tell me,” Marty argued, smiling.

Jack got up, poured himself another glass of wine, and handed the bottle to Marty. “I saw them on the door to my wife’s chambers in Siem Kulea, Marty, along with a seven-headed snake. I am afraid when I saw it the first time, I overreacted, and embarrassed Mai, and myself. It was not one of my better moments.”

Turning toward the view of the Nile River Marty pondered this new revelation. “Seven-headed snake, you say? That’s the Naga, Jack. I never made that connection with the circles before. But of course, the Naga is endemic to Southeast Asia. Fascinating.”

“Marty, who are these people that you say are investigating this thing? Are you just guessing, or do you have hard evidence there is someone else looking into this theory of yours?” asked Jack.

He turned back to answer Jack’s question with some background. “You don’t need evidence. They are not trying to hide the fact they are getting involved, at least not from me. Early in the spring several years ago, I returned late from one of my classes and found my home office had been ransacked. I was devastated because they took my computer—took the whole tower. I couldn’t figure it out until I realized all of my files and papers on Queen Maisong, the circles, and the Champas, were missing. The only saving grace was that I am meticulous about backing up my files, and they did not find that hard drive, which I kept in another location. But, Jack, I had extensive files and information about Queen Maisong, the Champa heritage, and legend. I feel that I know Queen Maisong as well as anyone, and now I am sure they do too.”

“Who are these people, Marty? Who is doing this?” asked Jack.

Marty looked over, and pointed a finger toward him as if to say, “Hold that thought, I’m not done.” He continued his narrative. “They left me a card right on my desk. Written on the back was a note that said, ‘Don’t call the police. We will return all of your files soon, and you will be greatly rewarded for your silence.’ One month later, they returned everything. I had even put in a superior alarm system by that time, and it apparently was no deterrent to them. I returned home as before and found everything on my desk. There was an envelope containing twenty thousand dollars cash, and a note saying it was for consultation fees. There was another card with a telephone number on it promising another twenty thousand dollars, if I would meet with them. I called and ended up talking to a woman who said her associate wanted to meet me in person. I had a seminar in New York the next weekend, which she already knew about, and she asked if I would be willing to meet her associate for dinner while I was there. Purely out of curiosity, I agreed. I was determined to give her associate a piece of my mind. Of course, I also wanted to find out what was going on, and to collect another handsome consulting fee. However, I informed her that I would not meet unless she told me right then the name of her mysterious associate. She said his name was Hinsu Yameda, and that he was the CEO of Asian World Investments.”

Jack almost dropped his glass. He looked over sharply at Marty and got up. He began pacing as Marty continued to relate his story. “He turned out to be a very cordial, and charming man, and we had a delightful meeting. I daresay we shared an ardent mutual interest in the ancients. We talked all through drinks, and dinner. By the time he left, I was embarrassed to discover I did not know much more about him than when I started. He had masterfully guided our conversation to my own efforts and ideas on the

topic. I have to say I fell right into his agenda for the evening. Of that I am certain. I'm afraid I always fall prey to flattery, and compliments about my work. You can readily ascertain I am not the best investigator in situations such as that. But that is the very reason I wanted to meet with you. The more I know about Queen Maisong, the more I want to protect her, and I am confident this Yameda character is up to no good," said Marty.

"You can bet on that, Marty. But he must have told you something or given you some clue about what he knew, or where he was going next with this. Anything come to mind?"

"I am afraid I mentioned to him that China had discovered a very interesting ancient site in the mountains when they were searching for rare minerals. I heard about it through our professional grapevine. They were telling the world it was an ancient Chinese site. When I heard about it I immediately asked to visit the site, and they turned me down. I don't think Yameda with his connections would have much of a problem going there. Their discovery was about five years ago, and I have no doubt he has already investigated that lead. It might be an important find if my calculations are correct," said Marty.

"And Yameda has all of your calculations?" asked Jack.

"Well, not exactly. I didn't have everything written down in my papers. Come here a minute...let me show you," he said.

They got up and went back to the table in the private dining room, and Marty began drawing a rough map of Europe, and Asia on the whiteboard.

"This is how I see it," he said, as he marked an X in certain spots from Egypt in an Easterly direction. "We are here in Egypt. I suspect there is a site up in Europe, perhaps in France or England. But if we include a site in Iraq that I know about, one in India, and the one in China, and connect them like this," he said as he drew a line between each site forming a zigzag pattern up to China.

"Can you see where the next site might be located, Jack, following the same pattern?" Marty asked.

"Yeah, Siem Kulea," Jack answered. "So you think there are these sites all around the world, and that ancients used them to control the weather "and since you think Mai is descended from these ancients, you think there must be something at Siem Kulea, and she might know about it."

Marty drew a final line from the China site down to Siem Kulea making a nice zigzag line from Egypt. Putting his marker down he said, "I don't think that is a coincidence. But I am pretty impressed, Jack. You're a quick study."

"I get that from hanging around Mai," Jack answered. "But if you are correct they will want to get into Siem Kulea. Do you think Yameda has figured this out?"

"No clue, Jack. But that is precisely what I wanted to talk to you about. What do you think?"

"I have a bad feeling, Marty, a real bad feeling. I think it is time you met my wife. I frankly can't and won't talk about her with you, and I am sure she will want to pick your brain about what you know. When will your work be done here?"

"I will finish up tomorrow. As I said this morning, timing is everything. I will send the kids home on a separate plane, and we can head to Siem Kulea the following day. That is, if you are inviting me to visit?" asked Marty.

