

THE SEEKERS

BONUS BOOK

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER



John O'Melveny Woods

The Seekers

Bonus Book

to

Lost Tomb of Alexander

Prequel

John O'Melveny Woods

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*LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL*

The Seekers

The Lost Tomb of Alexander

Prequel

www.TheSeekers.com

10, 827 B.C.E.

Our ancestors made a startling and terrifying discovery. A huge, worldwide cataclysmic event would soon befall the Earth; one that could literally destroy all of humanity.

Racing against time, the world's civilizations came together and constructed monuments and repositories around the globe - high in the mountains, deep within the oceans, in the deserts and jungles... hoping against hope that somehow a few of them – us – would survive and use this knowledge to start civilization anew.

Repositories, which to this day remain undiscovered.

They also foretold of a group in the future who would uncover and decipher the codes and clues left for us... and help rediscover our true past... a group they called

The Seekers

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The libraries in Alexandria, Egypt,
housed the largest repository of ancient knowledge
and history ever assembled in the known world

The destruction of the Serapeum and its contents
in 48 B.C.E. is considered one of the most
significant losses in human history

*October, 1187 C.E.
Vatican City*

POPE URBAN III was quietly praying in the small chapel attached to his living quarters when he was startled by a gentle knock.

“Sic?” he asked.

Cerius peered his head around the opened door.

“Excellentiam vestram?”

Pope Urban acknowledged him with a nod. He stood up, made a sign of the cross across his chest and kissed the crucifix hanging from his neck. Motioning, Cerius followed as he passed through the door leading to his office and toward an ornately carved gold leafed desk. Once seated, Cerius waited for permission to speak.

“You have something for me?” Pope Urban asked.

Cerius handed him a rolled piece of parchment paper. Pope Urban read along as he slowly unrolled it. Silence reigned as Cerius observed the pope’s face flush as he continued reading the document. Finished, he thought for a few seconds and looked up at Cerius.

“Are you sure of this?” he asked

“It is a direct translation of the sacred documents that were brought back to us, your Holiness. We have brought in additional experts on their various languages, and they have confirmed it as well.”

The pope absorbed the response. A frail man who had only assumed the role as supreme leader of the Catholic Church a few years earlier, he had much to ponder. The Crusades in the Middle East were not going well, and he had heard reports of a defeat in the battle of Hattia. And now this. He leaned forward in his chair, his ruby red robe falling to the sides.

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“How can this possibly be?” he asked. “It seems to contradict everything we believe in!”

Cerius stared, eyes averted downward for a few moments. “We have known about these tales for months,” he stated. “Many other documents have confirmed their authenticity. I am afraid... it is true.”

Pursing his lips while laying the parchment on his desk, Pope Urban sat back again in his chair, incredulous. Finally, rubbing his weary eyes, he shook his head and continued.

“You have done an excellent job, Cerius. Please keep this information in the strictest of secrecy. I will contact you again soon.”

Cerius stood up, folded his hands before him and bowed. “This changes nothing, your Excellency,” he proffered. “We are still the shepherds of our flock’s souls. Nothing will come between them and our most beloved God.”

“Perhaps not,” Pope Urban responded. “We shall see.”

* * * * *

“CAN THESE TRANSLATIONS be true?” the pope asked.

His Excellency took the parchment and read it as he walked toward the large desk that overpowered the room. When finished, he set it down upon the desktop. Pope Urban continued pacing the floor near the window awaiting a response.

“Why was this done without my knowledge?” his Excellency demanded.

“I had no knowledge of it either. They are the translations from the various tablets we have been receiving from the Crusades. Is it true?” Pope Urban pressed.

“And if it is?”

He stopped his pacing.

“What of our flock?” the pope demanded to know.

“Your flock?” his Excellency responded with a short laugh. “Your flock, as you call them, are simply workers who benefit your church. If they learn about their true origins, or of some future destruction, then what is it of your concern? The church will still be in control.”

“They are the children of God,” the pope reminded him.

“Children who you seem to conveniently maim and torture at your fancy, I might add.”

“For their own eternal salvation.”

“Eternal salvation indeed.” He stared directly at the pope. “You know nothing of salvation or the truth. The *real* truth. For if you did, you would have much to fear. So much, you cannot imagine.”

“How do you know this?”

“I know.”

Pope Urban turned away from the man’s stare and started pacing again. “I do not believe you,” he shouted, dismissively waving his arm. “God put his handprint on this church. And I believe we are doing His divine work.”

“Whose divine work is that?”

Pope Urban stopped and stared.

“What do you mean by such a question? Who are you to-”

“Who do you really think God is?”

“No one can know God,” the pope fired back. “They can experience His divine and gracious blessings and know Him as their savior, but-”

“Enough of this back and forth chatter,” his Excellency coldly spoke, interrupting the pope. “While your concern for your flock is most touching, the issue at hand is how imperative it is that this information *not* be revealed.”

Pope Urban eyed him, his stare reflecting his thoughts.

“What do you suggest?” he finally asked. “The scribes already know.”

His Excellency rubbed his chin for a few moments before responding.

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“We will form a group of your most trusted scholars to address this issue,” he stated. “They will be charged with finding all references to these revelations and destroying or storing them away. We will have them sworn under penalty of death and excommunication to protect it with their lives from being revealed.”

He focused his attention back upon Pope Urban. “As you now know, the release of these revelations would be catastrophic. We must protect the church from the danger of untrained minds.”

“Perhaps, but I do not want some rogue group operating within the hallowed walls of my church. If I agree to such a plan, they will need to be under my charge.”

“I will not be dictated to like some minion of yours,” his Excellency responded icily, turning around and staring out the window. “I will seek out those whom we may need, and report what I have done.” Turning back. “Until then, pray to *your* God that we are not too late.”

* * * * *

ELEVEN MEN SAT around the large onyx marble table in the anterior building to the Vatican. The group’s mumblings subsided when his Excellency entered the room. Walking purposefully, he wound his way around the table and stood at its head. He cast his silent gaze and held each one’s eyes for a moment before moving on to the next, and then sat down.

“His Holiness has asked me to gather you here today to discuss a grave situation. As you know, our Crusades in the Middle East have, until recently, been meeting with a great deal of success. Tens of thousands of artifacts have been filling our catacombs for hundreds of years. However, we have discovered, while cataloguing and translating them, that many of these artifacts present a problem.”

“What sort of problem?” asked one of the cardinals.

“Heresy,” his Excellency replied.

“What do you mean?” another exclaimed. “What is the nature of this heresy?”

“Myths and accounts about the true origin of mankind, and who their gods really were. Tales of catastrophic events predicted to happen in the future. These myths pose a danger to the church. His Holiness wants us to protect these and all future discoveries from ever falling into the wrong hands. It will be up to each one of you to acquire and place within our secret catacombs anything that contradicts *your* beliefs.”

“*Our* beliefs,” one of the bishops corrected him.

“The church’s beliefs,” his Excellency continued.

“Why should we fear release of this information,” another bishop posited. “We are the true church, chosen by our Lord Jesus Christ. Heathen beliefs are of no concern to us.”

“Agreed,” stated another. “Why should we even concern ourselves with this matter?”

His Excellency stood up.

“This knowledge, coupled with the inconsistencies of your most holy bible, could undermine the church’s authority and power. His Holiness has deemed the knowledge and very existence of it as blasphemy, and has authorized me to create this group to protect it at all costs.”

“All costs?” a cardinal asked.

“With your very lives.” He let his response hang in the air before continuing.

“You will be the guardians of this knowledge; entrusted to keep our existence secret, and perform what is required.”

“And this is from his Holiness?” a cardinal asked.

“Yes.”

“And why are we dealing with you and not his Holiness directly,” another asked. “If this matter is so important, I would think-”

“I, for one, would need to see a signed papal authorization for such an undertaking as this,” interrupted the highest-ranking member of the group as he stood up. “Even if it is to be secret, we

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need the written blessing of the pope himself as supreme leader of the church before I would endorse such an undertaking.”

Mumbling from the group grew into consensus.

“I will speak to his Holiness and obtain the papal authorization,” his Excellency responded flatly. “In the meantime, you are not to speak to anybody about this outside of our group. Secrecy is paramount.”

* * * * *

“**T**HE MEMBERS I have chosen have asked for a secret papal order,” his Excellency stated, “authorizing them to work as an organization within the church. Much the same as the Knights Templar decree at the council of Troyes.”

“Who is it that will be within this group?” Pope Urban asked.

“I think it advisable that you do not know their identities. This will take it out of your and future popes’ subjective control to mitigate and possibly corrupt their mission.”

“And what exactly is their mission?”

“To be the guardians and protect the blasphemous knowledge from ever being released,” his Excellency replied. “And to search out and find other locations where it may still be hidden.”

“I see.” Pope Urban walked to his window overlooking Vatican square. “And if I am not to be informed of whom you have chosen, who exactly would be in charge of overseeing this group?”

“I would help them in the scope and execution of their duties. Thereafter, they would operate independently and autonomously.”

Pope Urban turned around and stared directly at him.

“I told you that I will not have a rogue group operating within the walls of my church without my knowledge!” he shouted.

“Do you want this knowledge to be revealed?” his Excellency responded. “Are you prepared for the utter chaos and destruction this will create? Your church will not be able to withstand such revelations.”

"The Lord will protect us if it should come to that," Pope Urban replied, jaw clenching in anger.

The man started laughing. "The Lord? Are you serious?"

"I know who you are and what you represent," Pope Urban continued. "And yet I will never cede control of this matter to some faceless, nameless group operating within these hallowed walls! Do you understand?"

"I do. Yet it is you who does not understand what needs to be done. It is not only *your* church I am protecting. It is much bigger than that."

"I demand to know the names of this 'Guardian' group, as you call them, immediately." Pope Urban banged his fist on his desk. "There will be no more discussion."

Silence greeted the pope's outburst. The man pursed his lips.

"I am meeting with them again tomorrow. I will stop here first to comply with your request."

Pope Urban rubbed his hand.

"I am sorry it has come to this. You are a trusted advisor to the church, but my authority must be honored and respected."

"And so it is... and so it will be," the man answered with polite restraint.

"Have the papal order written and bring it with you tomorrow. I will sign it as a secret directive once I have been informed of who is involved."

* * * * *

"**T**HE PAPAL ORDER has been drawn per your instructions," his Excellency stated to Pope Urban. The pope looked up from his desk and acknowledged his presence. He handed the parchment to Pope Urban. After carefully reading it, Pope Urban set it down and waited. His Excellency pulled out another small sheet of parchment and handed it to him.

"The names you requested, your Holiness," he said gracefully.

Pope Urban looked them over and smiled.

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“Excellent,” he exclaimed as he dipped his pen in the inkwell and signed the order. After letting it dry, he took a stick of sealing wax, heated it above a candle’s flame, and dripped some wax on the signature area. Waiting a few moments, he pushed his index finger’s ring into it, sealing the papal decree. Handing it back, Pope Urban sighed.

“I have a need for some good news, Lilne, for I fear our forces have met with a setback in Hattia. My heart is heavy.”

“Then good news will reign. Let us seal this papal decree with a toast from the fine holy wine you keep in your desk.”

“Ah yes, this calls for its sanctification,” the pope lamented as he produced a finely engraved glass decanter from the bottom drawer of his desk. His Excellency removed two glasses from a chapel shelf. Pope Urban poured the scarlet red liquid into them and took one. His Excellency raised his and smiled.

“To the church,” he saluted.

“And the continuation of her power and protection of her secrets,” Pope Urban added with a rueful little smile.

They both downed the wine and set their glasses onto the desk. His Excellency continued staring at the pope for a few seconds, smiling. Suddenly, the pope grabbed his head and shook it. Swallowing hard, he felt his throat closing.

“What have you done?” he whispered hoarsely in horror, grabbing his throat and laboring to breathe.

“Your God’s work,” the other man laughed as he watched the pope struggle for breath.

The pope’s eyes comprehended that he would be dead in a few moments. Struggling he raised his hand to bless himself.

“I warned you,” his Excellency stated, leaning in toward the pope’s ear. “There is much more at risk here than your church.” He continued to whisper for a few moments.

“No, it can’t be,” the pope screamed as his body twisted in its last throes of life. His head hit the desk with a hard thud as he fell forward, eyes staring blankly.

Lifting the pope's lifeless head he grabbed the names of the Guardians. Holding it over the candle, it caught fire. He tossed it next to the pope's ashen face.

* * * * *

“I HAVE DONE what you have asked,” his Excellency announced, “and procured the secret order you desired from his Holiness *yesterday*. I trust this will be sufficient for us to proceed?”

The eldest cardinal picked it up and read, noting the signature and wax seal.

“We are authorized to proceed by his Holiness, and to use whatever means at the church's disposal to accomplish our tasks.” Looking toward the group sitting around the table, he continued. “It is all in order.”

“What are we to do now?” asked one of the bishops.

“At this point, all evidence that has been found in the Holy Lands is being brought here,” his Excellency stated. “Those of you who were chosen because of your ability to translate will need to view every artifact and see if it indeed contains blasphemous information. Others among you have been chosen for your mathematical and astronomical skills, and still others for your knowledge of historical events. We must coordinate our efforts to assure nothing gets out from the church unless it has been approved. We must also be diligent and scour even the most remote regions of the world in search of these lies and blasphemous rumors.”

“Your Excellency!” a brother shouted as he ran into the room, panting. “Your Excellencies,” he continued, acknowledging the eleven bishops and cardinals present. “I... I have troubling news.”

“What is it, my son?” one of the cardinals asked.

“His Holiness. Our most beloved Pope Urban III... is dead!”

“What?” a collective gasp let out in the room. “How did this happen?” he was asked.

“It appears he died while writing at his desk,” the man replied.

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The group looked to the man at the head of the table, who was bowing his head in reverence and then crossing himself.

“This is a tragic loss,” he stated icily as he looked back up. “His weak heart must have given out under the strain of this most grave threat,” he conjectured.

“No doubt,” the head cardinal replied, crossing himself and kissing his thumb. “We must bow our heads and pray for his soul, and honor him in death by performing the work he set forth for us in his final decree.”

“Indeed,” his Excellency concurred. “For heaven no doubt waits with open arms for someone so pious. May our reverence and obedience speed his holy ascent.”

* * * * *

1947 C.E.
Guatemala,

“**D**OCTOR WERNER! Doctor Werner!” shouted the foreman as he ran into the tent in animated excitement. “You must come see what we have discovered. Come quickly!” He motioned with his arm as he darted back out of the tent.

Shaking himself awake from a restless nap, Dr. Werner sat up on the military style cot and swung his legs over the side. Sweat poured down his face and neck as he tried to wipe it off with an already soaked sleeve. Checking for tarantulas and violin spiders, he shook his Danner boots upside down and slipped them on, methodically lacing them.

* * * * *

THE PAST TWO MONTHS had been grueling, and the stress was starting to take its toll on him as well as his diggers.

Funds for the exploration and excavation had been approved six months earlier by the New York Museum of Natural History in conjunction with the Guatemalan government. The thrust of the project was two-fold: one, to focus on exploring the area known as the El Negrito area; and two, to try and locate the source of the ruins described in the book *Danger my Ally* by F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, the discoverer of the Mitchell-Hedges crystal skull.

For thousands of years this area had been the site of religious pilgrimages and worship. Mayas, as well as Aztecs, revered it as a sacred site. However, no stone or religious structures of any significance had been discovered so far.

To get to the site, Dr. Werner had taken a train from New York down to Key West, and then boarded a boat to Punta Gorda. From there he had hired a half-dozen local indigenous diggers headed by

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Juan Escobar, his English-speaking foreman. Within a few days, they had started the estimated three-week trek into the hot and humid jungles toward where they believed the main part of the site was located.

Fighting hordes of mosquitoes that seemed to multiply in number with each step they took deeper into the jungle, Werner constantly wiped the sweat out of his eyes that was dripping down his forehead. It was at that point that he tried to remember why he became an archeologist in the first place.

Having become fascinated with ancient archeological stories in childhood, he began reading books about the various discoveries around the world, especially Carver's discovery of King Tut's tomb in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt.

Excelling in school, he was accepted into the University of Pennsylvania's graduate program where he had finished his Ph.D. by the time he was twenty-two. Dr. Werner was immediately hired by the New York Museum of Natural History to head up its fledgling Central American Antiquities department, funded in great part by a donation from the Henry Flagler Foundation of Standard Oil fame.

Tall and gangly by genetics, his brown hair and green eyes gave away his black Irish heritage. A sparse beard covered his face after he tired of the daily ritual of shaving in the jungle.

During the past two months they had managed to discover the main site of the religious rituals, and had dug an area over a hundred yards square to various depths. There had already been some amazing discoveries almost on a daily basis.

Every new stratum of soil revealed more artifacts that both surprised and amazed him. It was one thing to study about digging in the field; it was altogether different to actually be doing it. Clay vessels were uncovered intact, many containing golden figurines caked with dust. Statues of jaguars and other animals carved out of rock, some recognizable and others unknown, were found on almost every level.

However, there had also been some rather grim discoveries as well. Remnants of young female skeletons were discovered that apparently were sacrificed throughout the past millennia, buried in a quadrant of the dig that Werner deduced might be associated with the performance of rituals.

The digging had been going slower than Werner had expected because of his penchant for recording, in exact detail, what, where and on what level the artifact was discovered. His earlier digs in Mexico under the direction of Manual Gamio, whose pioneering work in recording archeological finds was legendary, had sealed his reputation as a studious and meticulous archeologist. This tedious work extended the dig and seemed to upset the indigenous diggers, who wanted to work faster than he allowed.

No matter, Werner thought. What I'm doing will eventually shed important light on this culture and will allow future archeologists to draw conclusions even after I am gone. It is well worth the trouble.

* * * * *

“HOLEY MOLEY IT’S hot,” Dr. Werner noted, standing up in his tent and shaking as much sweat as he could from the straggling hair hanging over his forehead. Replacing his hat, he pulled down the mosquito net around his face and tucked it into his collar. Outside the tent, he was met by the relentless deluge of mosquitoes that he’d reluctantly learned to tolerate. He could not understand why those damn mosquitoes never attacked the natives. *Maybe it’s something in their blood?*

Walking down to the main dig, he could see his lead foreman waving him on and pointing into the pit. The other diggers were standing around and staring into it as well.

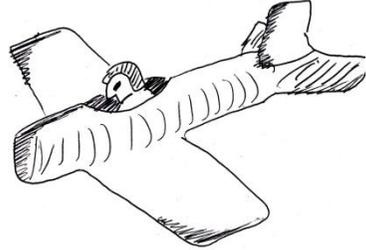
“What have you found?” Werner asked as he reached them.

“Look for yourself,” Juan answered, pointing.

Following his finger, Werner could see an object half buried in the soil. Scrambling down into the pit he took out a brush and

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started to carefully sweep the remaining soil off of the object. Setting the brush down, he picked the object up. It was surprisingly heavy. Carved or cast out of some sort of metal, he guessed. Measuring about six inches in length, there were two wings protruding from the front third of it sticking out about four inches per side. A feather-like tail extended from the rear, with a vertical fin rising up from it. However, its most unusual feature was a cockpit carved on the top with a man's head sticking out of it.



Werner studied it from all angles with the eye of a forensic archeologist. It didn't make sense. It wasn't a man flying *upon* a bird. It was more mechanical than that. Also, it didn't have a bird's head and the wings in the front were smooth – no feather carvings.

“What do you think it is?” Juan asked excitedly.

Holding it up high against the humid jungle canopy, Werner frowned.

“Well, if I didn't know better, I would say it looks awfully darned close to a modern day airplane,” he replied, shaking his head. “But that would be impossible, given the five-thousand year old layer of stratum it was found in.”

“Look what we found over here,” Juan beamed as he motioned for Werner to follow. They reached the deepest part of the dig and they could see the workers had exposed the top of what appeared to be a huge rock. About six feet of diameter was sticking out.

“What was so special about a rock?” Werner asked.

“Look at this,” Juan stated as he handed Dr. Werner a compass. It was whirling around erratically. Juan then slid down into the pit, grabbed a hammer, walked over to the rock and hit it hard with the tool. A loud ringing sound, like the resonance of a bell, emanated from it.

"It's some sort of iron, Doctor Werner," he said smiling. "I think it may be a meteor."

Still holding onto the artifact, Werner quickly scrambled down into the thirty-foot pit to examine it. Touching the rock, it felt cold. Suddenly, the object in his other hand felt burning hot, causing him to drop it. Shaking his hand to cool it he commented to the foreman.

"Maybe this thing is made from a piece or chunk torn off from this meteor?"

Reaching down he picked up the artifact, tossing it up and down in his hand so it did not burn.

"Have the men continue to uncover this, Juan," he ordered, standing up. "I'll go back and take measurements regarding where it was found."

He peered around the site awhile longer, periodically lifting the netting around his face and wiping the sweat from his forehead with a soaked sleeve.

"I'll write up a report on this object later and send it back via the couriers," he continued. "They should be here in about a week with supplies. I'll need you to sign the affidavit as to the provenance of where it was found."

"No problem, Señor Doctor Werner," Juan replied.

Holding up the plane-like object Werner again looked at it.

"I wonder what my colleagues will make of this."

* * * * *

DR. WERNER WAS awakened by a loud buzzing sound within the pitch black of his tent. He had gotten used to the non-stop noises of the jungle, but this sound stood out as new. Fumbling for the kerosene lamp, he sat up, torched the wick with a match and lengthened it to expand the light. Holding it up, he was expecting to see a mosquito the size of a bird.

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Stopping his scan at the wooden table next to his makeshift desk, he could see the airplane-like artifact vibrating and moving about the table's uneven surface.

"What the..." he mumbled as he stood up and walked toward the table, furrowing his brows in disbelief. He watched as the plane continued vibrating and dancing atop the table for a few seconds.

Setting down the lamp, Werner picked up the plane. Suddenly, he began shaking with violent and uncontrollable seizures as a bluish-white light moved up his arm to engulf his whole body. He succumbed helplessly to the flow of energy while visions began to stream before his eyes,

A massive fireball streaked high across the sky with white smoke pluming behind, leaving a trail as far as he could see. It smashed into the ocean, causing a concussion shock followed by a wave that rose in the water hundreds of feet high as it emanated outward in a concentric circle.

The scene changed as hundreds of thousands of screaming, terrified people in large cities grabbed their children and belongings and rushed to higher ground. Natives in villages stood helpless as the tsunami rushed toward them with deadly speed.

Another fiery meteor hurtled toward the jungle, leaving behind a serpent-like trail of smoke. It slammed through the tree canopy creating a huge pillar of soil and dust that shot up thousands of feet. Volcanoes erupted, spewing lava. The earth buckled into mountains.

Huge cities crumbled, crushing more screaming people inside buildings, crying for help. A deluge of water covered those cities in seconds, killing and washing out the bodies to sea as if they were ants in a tide pool.

Within his agonized convulsions, Werner was consumed by the terror of his vision's victims. He felt his body could handle no more

and was ready to explode. The object dropped from his hand as he fell to the floor, drifting into a pulsating dark abyss.

Juan and the workers rushed to the tent, finding him lying on the floor, babbling in an unknown language. The foreman knelt down and touched his shoulder.

“Are you okay, Doctor Werner?” Juan asked, looking up to the other workers and then back down at Werner. “Doctor Werner? It is me, Juan.” He placed a hand on the doctor’s shoulder.

A bluish-white electrical pulse discharged from Werner’s body and threw Juan across the tent into the netting. The workers’ eyes went wide as Werner let out a blood-curdling scream.

“No! No more!” Werner pleaded, eyes rolling and back arched. “Ahhhhhhhhhh...” he screamed.

Within moments, he stopped flailing and collapsed onto the dirt floor again, unconscious.

“*El hombre es poseído,*” (This man is possessed) one of the workmen exclaimed. The others quickly agreed.

“*No, he is not,*” Juan replied in Spanish.

“*He is sick with the devil and his evil spirits!*” another exclaimed. They all started backing out of the tent.

“*We must get out of this bad place, quickly,*” another stated.

“*Wait. You must not go!*” Juan shouted, but it was no use. The workers rushed back to their tents, grabbed their belongings and fled into the jungle.

Looking at Werner on the floor, the foreman took a big breath and shook his head.

“I hope you are not possessed by the devil, Señor Doctor Werner.”

* * * * *

TWO DAYS AND NIGHTS passed as Juan sat by and cared for Dr. Werner, damping the sweat from the fever he had contracted and keeping his lips moist. Werner continued babbling in a language unknown to Juan, while constantly stiffening his body and letting out blood-curdling screams.

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On the third day, he opened his eyes and stared blankly through them.

“Señor Doctor Werner,” Juan exclaimed, joyous at his awakening.

Werner rubbed his head and eyes as he sat up in his bed, seemingly oblivious to Juan’s presence. Shaking himself awake, he stood up and walked barefoot toward the screen flap and out of the tent. Making his way the quarter mile to the site, he stopped atop the main pit where they had found the meteor and walked around the perimeter.

Juan followed silently as Werner continued to mumble, appearing to be making mental calculations.

“The evil must be destroyed at its source,” Werner finally blurted out. “Protect the knowledge... assure it is not lost again.”

Rubbing his outstretched hands together in a circular motion, he had an idea. Walking back to the camp area, Werner seemed to be aware of all around him, moving his head side to side to observe every detail of life in the jungle. The insects. The plants. The air itself.

Reaching the camp, he proceeded to where the digging supplies were kept and started rifling through the boxes. Inside one he found a pack of cigarettes left by a worker and stared at it. Standing up, he opened it, pulled out one of the unfiltered tobacco sticks and lit it up, taking a huge first inhale.

Juan finally blurted out from behind him. “What are you doing, Señor Doctor Werner? You do not smoke.”

Werner bent back down and continued searching for something until he found what he was looking for—a box of dynamite with blasting caps. Picking up the box, he stood and searched frantically until he found the fuse material wound in a huge roll. Carrying those items in his arms, he walked back toward the site.

“This will kill the evil,” he stated, lips pursed. “Just what I need.”

“What are you doing, Señor Doctor Werner?” Juan pleaded urgently as he followed behind. “What are you planning to do?”

Ignoring him as a horse would a fly, Werner reached the site, set down the box and wick material and made some additional mental calculations.

“Yes,” Werner said under his breath. “This will do the trick.”

“What will do the trick?”

Werner bent down and proceeded to remove the six-inch sticks of explosives from the box, setting them to one side.

Juan grabbed one of Werner’s arms to stop him “You can’t blow up this holy site, Señor Doctor Werner. It is wrong!”

Werner stood up and pushed Juan into the air, the force of the move causing Juan to fly almost ten feet before slamming into the ground with a big thud. Werner squatted back down and continued to unload the dynamite from the box, seemingly unfazed.

“*E hola!. The devil has taken your soul, Señor Doctor Werner,*” Juan screamed in Spanish. “*I can do no more for you.*” He backed away from the area on his hands and knees.

“*May God have mercy on your soul.*”

Juan stood up, shook the dirt and dust off and ran to his tent. Quickly grabbing his belongings he put them into a knapsack and rushed back to the site. He observed Werner fumbling with the dynamite.

“*Buenas tardes, mi amigo loco,*” Juan stated sadly as he tipped his hand against his head, turned, and disappeared into the thick jungle foliage.

“I must protect the knowledge I’ve been given,” Werner mumbled as he laid out the explosive sticks about six feet apart around the rim of the pit. “The evil must be destroyed!”

He started inserting the sticks into the side of the pit about a foot below the rim.

Four hours later he’d finished placing all of the sticks of explosives into the rim and tying the fuse twine to each one, creating a giant, connected circle.

Nodding a job well done, he stood up.

“This will protect it from falling into the wrong hands.”

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BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

Suddenly, his expression changed to one of concern. He ran back to his tent, found the plane-like artifact, used a towel to pick it up and ran back to the pit limping, his bare feet by then bloodied by the rocky soil.

Lifting it up like a glider by the towel, he tossed it into the pit. The artifact landed in the reddish soil near the meteor. Lighting a cigarette, he took a huge inhale and blew it out quickly, then picked up the end of the fuse line and lit it with the hot red embers.

His eyes followed the flame for a while as it slowly made its way toward the first stick. Then he turned and hurried back the quarter-mile to his tent and waited. It didn't take long. A huge explosion erupted, followed by another, and then another. Concussive shocks rocked the tent and surrounding supplies, shaking the ground. A huge black plume rose from the site hundreds of feet into the air, while tons of soil and rock rained down onto the pit, covering it completely.

Werner stared at the plume as the last of the explosions died, tears of relief running down his cheeks. "The evil has been destroyed," he whispered out loud, finally breaking into a smile.

He pulled out another cigarette, lit it, and slowly blew the white smoke through his nose and mouth.

"Now, I must warn the world."

* * * * *

Present Day
Rome, Italy

DIANDRA WEISS SAT by the pool at the Grand Hotel de la Minerve in Rome, scribbling notes on a yellow pad of paper. The sun's rays, although being blocked by the high clouds, peeked out intermittently to tease the worshipers that had lined the pool area in their bikinis. Forty-ish, Diandra was dressed in shorts and a tank top with a wide-brimmed hat to protect the light complexion that accompanied auburn hair.

She noticed a sharply dressed woman in slacks and a St. John knit top walk around the pool and head in her direction. Looking back at her notepad, she continued writing.

"Doctor Weiss? Doctor Diandra Weiss?" a female voice inquired.

Startled, Diandra looked up. "Yes?"

"May I sit down?" the woman asked, pointing to the chair next to Diandra.

"Of course," Diandra replied, straightening in her lounge chair and setting her pad and pen down.

"My name is Judith Epstein, and I'm from Harper Daniels," she said, handing Diandra a card. "I understand that you are working on a book about archeology?"

"That's right," Diandra said. "But how did you-"

"We received an inquiry letter from you about six months ago," Judith interrupted gently. "And it finally made it across my desk. Are you still interested in having it published?"

"Of course I am," Diandra exclaimed. "But how did you find me here?"

"I checked with the New York Museum of Natural History and they told me where you were."

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

“You didn’t say anything to them about this, did you,” Diandra questioned, concern in her tone.

“Of course not. I understand the nature of the project.” Judith winked and pulled out a mini iPad, scanning her notes.

“This type of project fascinates me, Diandra. I have always been a fan of alternative archeology, and this fits perfectly into our company’s plans for publishing this year.” She looked up. “How close are you to finishing?”

Diandra thought about that question. She had started the project almost a year earlier, after finding an artifact that she knew was genuine and located in sub-strata indicating it was over twelve-thousand years old. When she submitted the paper she had written on it, it was rejected by every major archeological peer-reviewed organization in the world. This caused her to start questioning why, leading her to discover that she was not the only archeologist that ran into these types of problems.

Doing further research, she found dozens of instances with other archeologists. It seemed the powers that be had been thwarting the publication of what they considered to be findings that did not fit into the orthodoxy of established archeological thinking. This both angered her and spurred her into action.

The idea for a book coalesced when she coincidentally ran into a cardinal at the Vatican who wanted to get some of their archives published anonymously, including the secret areas not available to the public. As her research continued, she realized that the museum she worked for would not be happy about what she discovered, and might even take offence to it. Since then, she had been in a quandary as to what to do.

The question from Judith had sparked an idea she hadn’t contemplated before.

“I have one more chapter I am working on, and I’m waiting for some papers and photographs. Perhaps in a month or so it will be finished. But can I ask you a question?”

“Of course,” Judith replied.

"No one can know I am involved. I've shared a little of the data with some colleagues and they went ballistic. So I am wondering... can I sign the deal and release the book under a pen name?"

"A nom de plume?"

Diandra hesitatingly answered. "Exactly."

"I don't see why not. Will it make the deal if I agree?"

"Yes."

"Okay then, it's a deal."

"Wait a second," Diandra piped in. "There are a couple of other stipulations."

"Such as?"

"Nothing gets edited out of the book. All of the information stays in, regardless of who or what disagrees with it."

Judith nodded an affirmation. "Anything else?"

Diandra strained to think of other things to ask for, but drew a blank. This was everything she hoped for. A major publisher, editorial control and...

"What about the money?" she blurted out.

"I was wondering when you would get to that." Reaching into her Dior bag, she pulled out a check.

"We'd like to give you a hundred-thousand dollar advance, which will be used against future royalties, etcetera, etcetera. Will that work for you?" Judith handed Diandra the check.

Diandra eyed it and smiled. "I... I don't know what to say."

"How about yes?"

"Definitely yes."

"Good. I can't tell you how excited we are to be publishing your book," Judith said, standing up and reaching out her hand. Diandra returned the gesture.

"It was a pleasure meeting you, Diandra, and I look forward to working together. My office will handle the contracts and details."

Judith checked her watch. "I have a flight to catch to New York, so I'll leave you to finish writing your bestseller." She winked and started to walk away. Stopping suddenly, she turned back.

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“Oh, by the way Diandra, what is the name you want us to use?”

“Doctor Karen Sue Lanier.”

Judith mouthed it and smiled.

“I like it. See you soon, Diandra,” she said over her shoulder as she walked back toward the hotel lobby.

Diandra sat in the chaise longue for a few minutes staring at the check, and broke into a big smile.

I think I'll take the rest of the day off!

* * * * *

*Davos,
Switzerland*

WILLIAM P. DUFFIN, or 'Skip' as he has been known most of his life, always felt uncomfortable where large numbers of people were concerned. Though retired for two years from his position as Director of New Technology for M16, a position he had held for the previous four decades, he was still being invited to the International Conference for Security Professionals being held in Switzerland. It was an honor he relished, and the only conference in the world where he could find, all in one place, the latest in high-tech security.

At over thirteen stone and covered in a loose-fitting suit, his five-foot eight-inch frame was not the most graceful. In fact, he stood out starkly against the chiseled bodies of the various security details from governments around the world that attended those sorts of events. *CIA whores*, he thought. *Dumb as rocks*.

And it wasn't lost on him that at sixty-seven years of age, he ranked as elder to all of them by at least twenty years. But he knew he could match wits and expertise with the best of the lot, and had proved it time and again at M16. And he didn't mind his weight at all. On the contrary, he loved to dine out at the finest five-star restaurants during his world travels and sample the latest in fusion cuisine, and considered his corpulence a badge of honor. Even if a case of indigestion reared up once in a while. *So be it*.

Thinking about why he felt so uncomfortable, it all boiled down to having nothing to say to anyone. He despised small talk, especially with those he considered morons, and small talk was the main currency expended at these types of conventions. Everyone was either trying to network or make a deal. Skip simply wanted to examine and test the latest high-tech gadgets that were available and then leave. The last two days he had been going from booth to booth learning about retina scanners, facial recognition, bio-metric

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readings and the latest in computer security and surveillance. His previous stature, while working at the equivalent of Great Britain's CIA, assured him of first class attention and the pampering he was used to.

Near the end of the second day he was tired, so he decided to stop in the bar at the Arosa Kulm Hotel and Spa to see if they could provide some steamed water for his tea. They could. After the waitress brought a steaming hot kettle and cup to his small table in the corner, Skip took out a triangular bag of P G Tips and gently lifted the lid, placing it with familiar adeptness into the teapot. After quietly counting to twelve, he used his spoon to fish out the bag and was ready to place it on his saucer when he was interrupted.

"Skip!" a man shouted from the other side of the bar as he pushed past the various patrons and made his way toward him. Startled, Skip dropped the spoon and whipped around.

"Skip, ol' buddy. How the heck are you?" George Pastore added, extending his right hand.

Skip observed the friendly gesture but kept his arms to himself as he picked up the teapot and started to pour himself a cup, ignoring the man.

"Say, you're not still mad about... what was her name? Mary? Marie? Yeah, that's it. You're not still mad about that Marie incident, are you?"

"No," Skip lied as he set the teapot down and brought the cup to his lips, sipping his tea.

Two years earlier they had both been at the same conference in Paris. Skip had met a remarkable French woman, Marie, and he was immediately smitten. They'd spoken for hours during the conference, and rather than ending such scintillating conversation, had then dined together at Restaurant Le Meurice on Rue de Rivoli.

On the last night of the conference, just as Skip had finally worked up enough nerve to ask her on a date proper, he saw Marie with George who, a bit drunk, was wining and dining her. Lacking the nerve to walk up to the table and address the two directly, he

observed them from a corner laughing, and finally leaving. He followed them as they went up to George's room.

He never saw Marie again.

"Let me buy you a drink, old chap," insisted George as he bulldozed his way next to Skip's table and sat down, clapping him on the back. Skip stiffened, smiled wanly and showed him his teacup indicating a drink was entirely unnecessary. He physically leaned away from him.

"Right," George acknowledged. Snapping his fingers to get the bartender's attention, he ordered a scotch and water. Turning his attention back to Skip, he leaned in and continued speaking in a soft whisper.

"You'll never guess what I am doing now, Skip," George taunted, raising his eyebrows and wiggling them.

"I'm gob-smacked, George," Skip replied, taking another sip of tea and staring at George through his gray eyebrows. "Do tell."

George moved in still closer, causing Skip to back away even more, pushing out his elbows to attempt to stop him from touching anything.

"I've been hired by Whitestone Consulting to write the code for the software that will create an impenetrable firewall for all the Pentagon's computer systems."

Skip set down his cup, pulled out a handkerchief and started to wipe his hands.

"That right, George?" he finally answered. "I am sure those boys in brass are sleeping sound as kittens knowing you are on the job."

The waitress brought the drink to the table and set it down. George picked it up and downed it in one shot.

"They are," he gloated, slamming down the glass. "And you can be damn sure that *anyone* dumb enough to try and hack their way into those government boys' computers would end up spending the rest of their lives in jail thinking about what went wrong." He turned around and motioned for another drink.

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

“Brilliant job, George.” Skip nodded, taking another sip of tea. “I am now completely convinced the Pentagon is buttoned up tighter than a bug’s ass.”

“Right,” George answered. “It is.” George leaned in even closer, almost causing Skip to fall back out of his chair. “You sure you aren’t mad about Marie? She was a great piece of ass, but she just didn’t turn out to be my type of gal. You know how that goes.”

“Of course I do,” Skip lied again. He had no idea how that went, and the fact was he had found Marie entirely compelling. Spellbinding, really.

The waitress brought George’s drink, and he downed that one as well, slamming the glass onto the table. Looking up at Skip, he smiled and started to get up.

“See you later, old boy,” he quipped, slapping Skip on the back again and causing him to cringe. “We’ll keep in touch.”

“Without a doubt.”

Skip watched as George flamboyantly paid the bill and walked out of the bar.

I’ll show that ham-fisted wanker a thing or two, Skip vowed as he savored the last few drops of his tea. Setting the cup gently on the saucer, he smiled.

Pulling out his Samsung phone, he scrolled through until he found a number and hit send.

“Hello?” answered a pleasant female voice after two rings.

“Hello my dear,” Skip replied. “It’s your favorite spy.”

“Well, well... how are you Mister Duffin?”

“Splendid, my dear. But I do have a favor to ask. Would you be so kind as to book me into a nondescript out of the way hotel in New York... maybe the Queens area, for next week? It will be a short stay. Maybe for two days. And, oh yes, a flight as well?”

“First class, I presume?”

Skip beamed. “You presume correctly, as always.”

“Nondescript room doesn’t seem your style, does it?”

“On a top secret mission and all that, my dearie,” Skip responded. “No one is to know where I am.”

“Anything else?”

“No, that’s all for now. Email me the details through my personal server.”

“Certainly, Mister Duffin.”

Skip pushed end call and set the phone back into his jacket pocket.

Nothing is impossible to break into.

* * * * *

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

Rome,
Italy

MCINTYRE LOOKED around at the patrons of the outdoor Caffé Rosati on Piazza del Popolo Street as he cautiously approached the table where Diandra Weiss was waiting. He gingerly slipped into the chair and set a manila envelope on top.

“I was afraid you were not going to show,” Diandra said matter-of-factly, acknowledging he was almost thirty minutes late,

“I had to make sure I was not being followed,” McIntyre replied, still looking around in between sips from his glass of water.

At just under six feet, he felt he did stand out in the typical crowd of shorter Italians. His thin graying hair and bushy eyebrows gave only a hint of his fifty-seven years of age, while the collar he wore with the business suit gave away his commitment to the church. Diandra was always mesmerized by the depth of his gray eyes, which sank into a wizened face that rarely smiled.

“Do you think you are being followed?”

“I’ve no way of knowing. There is a group that does not want this information getting out. One man in particular,” his voice trailed into silence.

“Would you like an espresso?” she asked, changing the subject. “I’m buying.”

“No time, thank you, Dr. Weiss.”

“I’ve got great news,” Diandra stated, a smile covering her face and leaning in toward McIntyre. “I’ve been approached by a publisher for the book.”

“How did they find you?” he asked.

“I’m not sure. I did send out some inquiry letters when I was first starting the project. Maybe they were following up on it.”

“That is great news,” McIntyre responded.

"I couldn't have done it without your help, you know. Without access to the information in the archives it would only have been a rehash of known facts instead of the groundbreaker it's now becoming."

McIntyre pushed the manila envelope toward Diandra.

"Here are the pictures and copies of the documents I promised you," he said. "They may be the last."

Diandra tilted her head. "Is there a problem?"

"Perhaps," he replied, his eyes holding back more. "I just think it prudent to stop for a while. You have more than enough for your book."

"Indeed, thanks to you."

"It is not I, Dr. Weiss. There are officials much higher up that want this information to be released."

"How high?"

McIntyre hesitated while he thought for a moment.

"The top."

Diandra digested his response before continuing.

"Why?"

"I am not allowed to say any more. We'll leave it at that."

"Will I hear from you again?" she asked, twirling a strand of her auburn hair with her fingers.

"Keep checking the Vatican Times and look for our code. If I need to get hold of you, that's how I will do it."

Diandra understood that to mean the code they had used for the past six months to arrange their meetings. McIntyre would place a notice of a meeting for a group they made up, giving a time and day of the week. They would meet at the prearranged location and then pick a new location for the next meeting. It had worked well, as far as she was concerned, and seemed pretty innocuous except for the James Bond cloak and dagger part of the plan.

They had also devised a clever way to transfer the information in Latin, using pig-Latin as the underlying basis for it. Staring into McIntyre's eyes, she could see, for the first time since they had met six months earlier, the concern and fear in them.

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“You okay?”

He nodded.

“I’ll send you a proof copy of the book before it’s published,” she finally said. “They are fast-tracking it and it could be completed within the next few months.”

“Send it to me care of the Vatican gift shop.” Starting to get up, he hesitated for a moment. “What’s the name of the book going to be?”

“Unexplained Archeology.”

* * * * *

*Al-Jazira Desert,
Western Iran*

THE GARAMOND 3000 GPS in Dutch's ultra-light aircraft indicated that he was three kilometers from his target. *So far, so good*, he thought, although the most dangerous part of the clandestine mission still lay before him.

* * * * *

THE CIA HAD discovered, through advanced satellite imaging, a secret camp about thirty kilometers from the western border of Iraq in northwestern Iran. Although unable to positively identify its purpose, an astute analyst had made out what appeared to be Morse code dug into the sand near one of the buildings – a message that was asking for help. This urgent and mysterious message prompted her to research further. She discovered that a handful of US troops had disappeared near that area about a year earlier and were considered missing in action. *Maybe there could be a connection?*

The military wanted a closer look.

Using an intermediary named Navaro, Dutch Vorhees had been hired to stealthily reconnoiter the area, get some pictures, and discover what the camp was being used for.

Dutch decided the site was too far inland to reach on foot or by vehicle without being detected. He needed to come up with an approach the Iranians would not be expecting. After researching the problem, he formulated a unique idea: flying in under the radar.

Purchasing a model 501 Pegasus ultra-light aircraft from TFM Corporation in Gardena, California, he had it retrofitted with a four cylinder air-cooled Rotax engine with a whisper quiet Fischer exhaust system. A four-bladed forty-inch Kevlar propeller rounded out the package.

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This little baby should be virtually undetectable, Dutch noted to himself with satisfaction.

ONCE EVERYTHING arrived in Iraq, Dutch loaded the ultra-light's wing assembly on top of the desert camouflage painted Mercedes G550 SUV, and put the engine and landing gear inside the rear. He drove two hours north from Kirkuk, and then four hours more east to a spot within ten kilometers of the Iranian border.

It took Dutch a couple of hours to assemble the craft. Satisfied that it was in working order, he checked his watch and the weather reports on his Samsung smart phone with the SUV's satellite uplink. Reports had forecast a crystal clear night, with light winds from the south. He noted that three hours remained until sunset. After securing the ultra-light with nylon ropes to the Mercedes, Dutch sat down and leaned up against the shady side of the vehicle that offered some relief from the ninety-five degree weather. He decided he'd try to catch some sleep, and was out in thirty seconds.

DUTCH AWOKE AT sunset and caught a bite to eat from his provisions while he whiled away the hours until it was near 11:00 o'clock.

When the time arrived, he sprung into action. Slipping on a flight suit, he zipped it up and checked to make sure the Snickers bars were present in the special pockets he had sewn into his clothing. Pulling on a bullet-proof flak jacket, he velcroed it together while positioning his Smith and Wesson silver-plated .45 automatic in a holster across his chest. His .38 was holstered against his left leg, and a Bowie knife strapped to the outside of his right leg rounded out his arsenal.

Turning his attention to the ultra-light, he checked the fuel levels with his LED pen-light and turned the valve to the on position, watching the liquid course down the tube like an IV bag. He primed the engine and then eased his six-foot frame into the

Kevlar seat and fastened the four-point safety harness. *So far, so good.*

Putting on his helmet and night-vision goggles, he checked the aircraft's controls. Using the joystick, he moved the side ailerons left and right, and then the canard flap up and down. The rudder movement that operated the wing slats was checked next with the foot pedals, wiggling them and pushing hard to make sure they were free and moved easily.

Pressing the electric start button, he smiled as the Rotax 550 roared to life on the first turn. Dutch gently pushed the throttle forward with his left hand while holding brakes until the engine purred up to two-thousand RPM, creating a small dust cloud behind him, and then throttled back. No unusual vibrations detected from the composite propellers. *Good, he thought. She's working perfectly.*

Sliding the throttle forward without brakes, Dutch lunged the craft forward on its tricycle gear. Pointing it into the eastern wind, he gave it full throttle and raced through the sand on the special balloon tires he had ordered for the craft. Within fifty feet he pulled back the stick and the canard raised the nose off the sand. Seconds later the craft's rear tires lifted off and he started climbing at a thirty-degree angle of attack according to Dutch's altitude indicator, leveling off at three hundred feet.

The canopy and metal tubes were powder coated in black graphite non-reflective paint. Dutch was banking on the fact he could fly it without creating a radar signature on all but the most sophisticated systems, which his research had indicated the Iranians did not possess in that area of their country. The whisper-quiet propellers, turning at subsonic speed, coupled with the Fisher exhaust and low RPM of the engine meant that he could barely be heard outside a hundred yards.

It took Dutch about twenty minutes to cross over the Iranian border, where he pushed the stick forward and lowered his altitude to about fifty feet above ground level. He guided the craft toward the coordinates where the satellite had indicated the compound was located.

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

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EYEING SUITABLE SPOTS for landing, Dutch pushed the joystick forward, pulled the throttle back and aimed for a strip of clear sand straight ahead. About five feet above the ground he cut power, pulled the control stick full back and eased it to a soft landing. The sand slowed the craft down to the point that he needed little braking. Hitting the engine kill switch, he unbuckled, climbed out of the craft and took off his helmet, wiping the sweat from his brow. It was still hot, even in the middle of the night. After turning off the fuel switch, he hammered stakes into the ground and tied the wings to them, pointing them into the five-knot wind. He was about two kilometers away from the compound and would walk the rest of the way using his watch GPS for coordinates.

Dutch wasn't expecting any trouble, but was always prepared for it. A six-year stint in Special Forces had impressed upon him the need to always anticipate every possible contingency, and then plan for it. For this mission, he had the element of surprise and the remote location in his favor. They would not be expecting anyone to be peeking over a sand dune to get a look at what they were doing. He reasoned that whatever they had at a base that far into Iran would need a minimum of guards to protect it. Still, he patted his .45 to be sure, and could still feel the .38 special backup.

He made his way through the desert in his sand-colored flight suit until he could see his target about one kilometer ahead. He crabbed his way another half a kilometer and stopped. Scanning the area with his night-vision binoculars, he could see no one was patrolling the outside perimeter. *Pretty sloppy security.*

He squatted and made his way around the perimeter until he was satisfied with his position. Digging a shallow hole, he laid in it to wait for daylight. He reached into his flight suit and pulled out two Snickers bars. Although soft, they were still intact. It was a few

hours until dawn and he wanted to make sure he was not low on blood sugar.

This was the tough part. Waiting. He had been behind enemy lines many times in Afghanistan and during the first undeclared war in Iraq. He was used to it. Still, it was hard duty. He thought about how he felt after looking at the satellite pictures. His suspicions were the same as the analysts' had been. The Iranians could be holding American servicemen as hostages.

If it were true, it could turn into an international incident. The Israelis had been accusing Iran of accelerating their uranium enrichment program and trying to make fuel for nuclear weapons for years. The latest UN vote on that issue had not gone in Israel's favor. If it turned out that the Iranians were secretly holding US servicemen, it could give the Israelis the excuse they needed to start an incident that could escalate very quickly.

On the other hand, the US needed to stay neutral in order to placate the Russians, who received the lion's share of Iran's oil and gas. If the United States insisted on going in with guns blazing to rescue them, then that could piss off the Russians and start a whole other set of problems.

Dutch checked the batteries of his Canon 325 digital camera. He took a few practice pictures of the compound to check that he was close enough to get the clear resolution images he needed, while still being far enough back to escape detection. The photos looked fine.

Now he only needed to while away the hours until sunrise. He reached in and pulled out another almost-melted Snicker's bar.

* * * * *

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

Valsequilla,
Mexico

ANOTHER BLISTERING HOT and sunny day greeted Sam as he walked out into the sunshine from his small sleeping tent. Stretching out, cat-like, he wiped the sweat from his forehead. At five-foot ten inches, Ibrahim ‘Sam’ Hussein was slim and lanky. His hair was short, wavy and jet-black. A long slender face, framed by high cheekbones, gave off an air of aristocracy, which may have been related to his family’s royal Persian ancestry. Light-skinned with dark bushy eyebrows, his brown piercing eyes were framed by slightly darker circles beneath. However, his most prominent feature was an infectious smile that was returned by everyone he met.

SEVERAL YEARS EARLIER, a farmer had stumbled onto remains that would indicate the area was settled by humans thousands of years ago. However, the artifacts gave conflicting views of exactly how old the settlement was. Diandra had submitted a proposal to explore the site and hopefully discover more remains that could shed light on these ancient people’s age and history. It was located near a cave where earlier signs of human habitation were discovered. However, years of illegal excavations by tomb robbers stripped the caves of any meaningful dating.

Diandra and Sam had been digging into the lower strata of dirt surrounding the cave. In the process they’d struck a layer of volcanic rock, halting further digging. The grant they received only allowed for a six-week budget and they were three days away from that target date. So far, nothing of significance had been found.

SAM WALKED OVER to Diandra’s tent to find it empty. Surmising she was at the site, he made his way through the foliage toward the dig area. Along the way, he passed a half-dozen workers on break drinking a special blend of tea that helped them acclimate

to the altitude. Smiling at them, Sam continued until he could see the cave nestled into the side of a red rock canyon. Piles of rock and debris marked where they had been digging. Reaching the rim of the site, he saw Diandra bent over in intense concentration, brushing away soil using a makeshift paintbrush they had purchased locally.

“You okay down there?” Sam shouted.

Startled, Diandra turned, stood up and nodded. Her shoulder length hair, tied back in a ponytail, complimented her straight graceful five-foot eight-inch frame. Soft features, deep green inquisitive eyes, naturally arching eyebrows and full lips surrounding a smile highlighted slight character lines around the edges.

She motioned for him to come down. “I think you’ll want to see this, Sam.”

Sam spun toward the wooden ladder and lost his footing as the rim of the dirt wall gave way. He slid, desperately grabbing for something to arrest his descent all the way to the bottom of the fifteen-foot deep pit, finally rolling to a stop.

“Shit!”

Diandra raced to his side. “You okay?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Sam replied, shaking his head at his own stupidity of being too close to the edge of the open pit. His hands were scraped and bleeding, and his right pants leg was torn open near the knee. He turned over and maneuvered himself up to his knees, and in a final push regained his feet.

“Remind me to never do that again,” he commented to Diandra as he checked out what other damage may have occurred. Satisfied that nothing was broken, he turned his attention back to her.

“That was stupid as heck,” he finally said.

“I didn’t want to say anything,” she replied, half-laughing. “But you’re okay, right?”

“Seems I’ll still live to see my grandchildren’s children running around,” he answered. “But it sure hurts.”

He held his scraped hands up to her and shook them, grimacing.

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

“They just need a little TLC,” Diandra replied, “and a touch of peroxide. I’ll see if we have any in the tents.”

“I’ll be alright. What was it you wanted me to see?”

“You sure?”

“Yes,” he said with an elongated emphasis on the word.

“Well then, come see what I found.” She walked back to where she had been brushing twenty-feet beneath the cave. Sam followed. Kneeling down, she resumed brushing and then looked to Sam.

“What do you think?”

Sam squinted as he tried to place into context what he saw.

“A footprint?” he finally answered.

“A sandal print, actually. Definitely of human origin.”

“How can that be? The volcanic rock layer we are in is at *least* one point three million years old.”

“According to everything we know, it can’t be human,” she replied. “And yet, here we are, looking at it.” She continued brushing the dirt away to reveal two more sandal prints in the volcanic rock. “Seems we have a problem here.”

“What do you mean, we have a problem?” Sam asked.

“This is outside the scope of accepted archeology. No one will believe us.”

“What? This is a fantastic find! It will shed new light on our history. Can you imagine? Sandal prints that old?”

“I can, Sam,” Diandra said as she turned back toward him. “But I’ve dealt with this before. It doesn’t fit. It’s an OOPS.”

“OOPS?” Sam repeated, quizzically.

“Out of place artifact.” Diandra stood and wiped the dirt from her knees. “There are literally hundreds of them throughout the world. For instance, there was an anatomically modern human skull discovered in Argentina, at a depth of thirty-six feet. The limestone above it was unbroken, meaning it had an age of one and a half million years. And, in 1889, a small human figurine was brought up from a depth of three hundred feet while digging a well. It was in a formation that was over two-million years old.”

“Two million years?”

"I know, hard to believe. But these OOPS exist all over the world. And yet our esteemed peer-reviewed archeology publications just pretend they do not exist." She threw her brush down, hard.

Sam stood up, favoring his scraped palms.

"Yet those sandal prints clearly exist," he stated. "They are real." Scratching his head. "What are we going to do?"

"What we always do," Diandra said. "We'll document the find, take pictures, and submit it for publication, although I don't hold out much hope. In the meantime, I have some camera equipment up in the cave." She pointed. "Can you go and get it?"

Sam looked over toward the dark entrance.

"I'd... rather not. How about if you go get it, and I'll see if I can find something for my hands," he suggested, holding them up for her to see.

"Sure," Diandra replied, looking at her watch. "Meet back here in about fifteen minutes?"

"Deal," Sam replied. As he started to walk away he stopped and turned back. "How come you know so much about these OOPS?"

Diandra surveyed the area.

"I've been doing a lot of research on them, Sam. A little side project I'm working on."

"Cool. Maybe you could tell me more about them sometime?"

"Let's focus on the dig," she dismissively replied. "We can talk about them later, if you're still interested."

Diandra watched as Sam shrugged, scrambled up the wooden ladder and walked back toward the tents.

"You'll be reading about it soon enough," she mumbled, using her sleeve to wipe the sweat dripping from her brow.

Laughing to herself she turned back around, picked up her discarded paintbrush and walked to the area she was working. After a few minutes she uncovered more sandal prints. Sitting back on her legs, she frowned.

Let's see how Archeology Today explains this away.

* * * * *

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

Al-Jazira Desert,
Western Iran

RISING AT 6:41 THAT morning, Dutch watched as the sun bathed the compound in hues of red, orange and yellow. A chain link fence topped with coiled razor wire completely surrounded it, while a second chain link fence ten feet tall inside the first one assured whoever was inside was going to stay there. The compound was about a half-mile wide by a quarter-mile long. Three dozen buildings of various sizes were scattered about the inside, with satellite dishes and electronic communication towers topping four of them. The morning light revealed two guards pacing the area between the fences.

Dutch had placed himself east of the compound, hoping the sun shining from behind him would help conceal his presence. He estimated he needed to wait another two hours until its azimuth rose high enough to capture shots that would reveal anything, although he had a special lens if he needed it that could work in low light. He also was hoping whoever was there were early risers.

Dutch didn't have long to wait.

From within one of the corrugated metal buildings, four American soldiers were ordered out and into the yard. Leveling the camera on his left arm while lying down, Dutch started capturing the images. The men were then ordered to do calisthenics. One of them refused to cooperate. He was forcibly grabbed by one of the armed guards and brought over and tied to a six-foot pole.

The guard grabbed a long, heavy whip and started flailing the soldier, who writhed and screamed in pain. Dutch put down the camera and tightened his jaw. Here he was, only a half-kilometer away, and helpless in watching one of his fellow servicemen, one of his brothers, being tortured before his eyes. Anger welled up as he continued to snap pictures again. Rescuing them on his own was not

an option. He'd run the risk of getting them, and himself, killed. He could only observe and document the beating.

When he had taken enough pictures, he gave a short salute, crabbed his way back about a hundred meters then dashed to his ultra-light.

Removing the stakes from the ground, he unhitched the tie-lines and primed the engine. Putting on his helmet, he noticed a plume of dust in the distance. It was from a vehicle – heading toward him from the west. His escape route. Quickly jumping into the craft, he fastened the harness while starting the engine. Barely waiting for it to warm up, he pushed throttle forward causing the craft to lunge out of the sand.

The canard lifted the Pegasus' nose off the sand within fifty feet. A little more back-pressure on the stick propelled Dutch into the air. Turning around he could see the vehicle skid to a stop and men jumping out. Dutch had a choice, and it was a bad one. He needed to stay low and fast to get away from the ground patrol, but that would put him heading directly toward the compound.

Then he had an idea. An outrageous one. *Two birds with one stone*, he thought.

He gained another fifty feet of altitude and headed right for the compound. The Pegasus crossed over the outside razor-wired fence and headed toward the center buildings. Dutch could see the gape-jawed Iranians wondering what the heck was going on. He'd counted on that. Turning hard right about thirty degrees, he headed back to the west.

Looking up, the prisoners also observed the strange craft, especially the small American flag Dutch had sewn into the black polyester cloth under the right wing of the craft. They cheered and whooped it up as Dutch gave a short salute with his left hand and pushed full throttle with his right.

“That’s what I’m talkin’ about!” shouted Dutch, yanking his arm up and down like an engineer pulling on a train’s whistle. *It should also give them some hope. They weren’t forgotten.*

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

The Iranian guards quickly regained their composure and started firing at the craft. Bullets strafed the Pegasus as he struggled to gain altitude while being careful not to stall the craft.

Bullets flew, tattering the wings and canard. He continued to climb. Looking at his altimeter, he could see that even at full power the craft was starting to lose altitude. Taking a direct heading for the border he lowered the nose and kept three-thousand RPM and full level stick. The canard kept the nose up but the lack of lift from the main wings was causing the craft to sink slowly.

Dutch realized he wouldn't make it to his vehicle, but he was hoping to put some distance between himself and the patrol, at least crossing into Iraq. At about one-hundred feet above ground level, he was able to use full engine power combined with ground-effect to maintain his altitude. He looked back to confirm that the patrol vehicle was far behind, having to crisscross their way through the hills and terrain to follow him.

Although not afraid, Dutch was concerned. Taking inventory of the situation, he found that his wings were at less than fifty-percent lift, and continuing to tatter and tear. He could smell gas, indicating that the fuel tank had been hit. The Kevlar cockpit and seats had done their job; he wasn't hit by the onslaught of bullets. He checked his GPS and found he had crossed into Iraq and was only a few kilometers from his vehicle. But that was the only good news. A quick glance at the altimeter confirmed what he could feel. He was losing altitude.

Suddenly, he heard a loud crack. The right wing folded upwards. The stick shook violently as the craft turned hard right into a death spiral. Dutch used the rudders to try and correct, but to no avail. He was going down. Reaching over to his left, he flipped back the switch cover and pulled the red handle for the emergency BRS chute. A rocket fired from a tube atop the craft and within five seconds the thirty-foot canopy had fully deployed above the ultra-light, jerking and slowing its spiral descent into the desert with a violent force.

Seconds remained before impact. Dutch reached for his harness, loosened it, and braced for the crash. The plane continued falling to the right and hit the sand nose first, slowly cart wheeling twice and mangling the wings and canard before finally coming to a complete stop.

Dutch unhitched the harness and crawled out of the wreckage of aluminum tubing, wing canvas and wires. One of the jagged tubes had ripped a nasty gash in his left thigh. Gritting his teeth, he began dragging himself away from the craft. Within seconds, the entire plane exploded in a ball of flames.

Holding one arm up against the heat, Dutch grabbed his leg and grimaced. It hurt like hell. A quick check confirmed it was not broken. He'd deal with the pain later. Taking off his helmet and flight suit and tossing it into the flaming wreckage, Dutch hobbled in the general direction of his vehicle while he checked his watch's GPS. *About a kilometer away.*

Reaching a small hill, he dropped to the ground behind a slight rise and turned back, waiting. The patrol vehicle arrived about five minutes later and stopped high on a ridge.

Pulling out his binoculars, Dutch observed them looking through their binoculars toward the smoking carcass of his aircraft. They shook their heads as if they thought nobody could have possibly survived the crash, jumped back into their vehicle and took off back toward the Iranian border.

Dutch set his binoculars down and smiled. If they thought he was dead, then they would not think the Americans had been warned. That meant the prisoners would more than likely remain there – at least for a while.

Limping back to his SUV, Dutch eased himself in and started the engine, letting it idle while he ripped the fabric from this right pants leg and wrapped it tightly around the left. He pulled out a Don Quijote cigar, stroked it with his fingers, picked up a lighter from the console and flamed it.

All in all, that went pretty well, he smiled, slowly exhaling the bluish smoke.

LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
BONUS BOOK PREQUEL

He pushed the CD player button. Credence Clearwater blasted out *Fortunate Son*. Gingerly pushing in the clutch and shifting the Mercedes into gear, he floored the pedal and took off leaving a trail of spewing sand...

* * * * *

Ancient prophecies tell the tale of a special band of souls whose destiny is to uncover the truth of humanity's creation, existence and future. Known as **The Seekers**, they discover that our ancestors left messages for us - hidden throughout the world in ancient monuments, secret vaults and tombs - that when put together offer hope to everyone... hope that all is not soon to be lost. For the prophecies also foretell a recurring cataclysmic event, worldwide in nature, that will soon arrive.

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The Lost Tomb of Alexander

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LOST TOMB OF ALEXANDER
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John O'Melveny Woods is the author of several books including *Return to Treasure Island* and *Jesse James' Secret*.

The Lost Tomb of Alexander is the first Seekers book in a series of ten that the author plans on writing.

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