

A JAKE FINCH BOOK



RELIC HUNTER

THE SHADOW NEMESIS

CC DEHAVILLAND

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By

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“My life often seemed to me like a story that has no beginning and no end. I had the feeling that I was an historical fragment, an excerpt for which the preceding and succeeding text was missing. I could well imagine that I might have lived in former centuries and there encountered questions I was not yet able to answer; that I had been born again because I had not fulfilled the task given to me.”

Carl Jung

PROLOGUE

The halls of the old granite-built library smelt of old books, leather and polish. The slightest noise echoed through the corridors and enormous central void. For a brief moment, sitting at the oversized oak desk surrounded by the finest leather-bound reference books, watching people immersed in their own little worlds of research, made Jake feel almost like an accepted part of the establishment. He pulled his messenger bag closer to him and quietly hunted inside for a pen and buried his head into 'Herodotus's Histories.' It was only when the scornful and dismissive looks poured down on him that his bubble burst. He may have been a little sensitive, but the attitude was there. The young man hadn't been to university to study under one of the well renowned names in his chosen field. Neither did he have the luxury to be able to call himself an 'old boy' of some exclusive school. He had only got to where he was because of his passion, hard work, tenaciousness and sheer bloody mindedness. A handful of A levels at a sixth form college was the sum of his academic prowess. But this wasn't the yardstick to measure a man by, particularly not this one. A brain can be trained in many ways, and he certainly had a brilliant mind, he was just never given the opportunity to prove it. Nevertheless, it would never stop him doing what he adored — delving into the past and answering questions that had been hidden away for centuries. It was fair to say that 'the establishment' didn't think much of Jake Finch, but then again, he didn't think much of them.

Scribbling on a pad, Jake became aware of a presence standing over him. He looked up and saw a tall man cradling a couple of books and staring at him with disdain. Behind him, one of his lackeys, eager to impress.

‘This is a place for scholars Finch, not an all-night cafe. When are you going stop infecting places like this?’ The individual spat the words, obviously unimpressed with the young man.

Jake looked up and placed a book over the writing on his paper pad and closed a nearby reference book. ‘Charming Muir — did they teach you that at Cambridge or Eton?’

‘Oxford, actually. But I wouldn't expect you to know that. What is it now?’ Muir strained and saw the book Finch had closed. ‘Herodotus? What could be interesting you now, Greeks? Persians? You're after the Golden Fleece or is it Atlantis? That's A-T-L-A...’ he said scornfully.

‘Brilliant! What do you want Muir?’

‘I thought I'd let you know that the dig in the Hebrides was a waste of time, just as I thought it would be. Your research is appalling, your practices are laughable, and it was ultimately three weeks of freezing my balls off on some windswept island for nothing.’

‘If you were so sure it was going to be a waste of time, why did you exert so much effort stealing my work and deriding me yet again?’

‘Well, as you ask, I conducted my own research — the way one is supposed to do. If there was a chance of finding the “Jade and Golden Buddha,” then it would be appropriate that a proper archaeologist should find it and prove the theory that the Chinese travelled long sea-bound journeys, far before they were thought to have happened - and not some idiot on a Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme weekend,’ Muir sneered.

‘Well, as we're being honest with each other, I'll let you know something. While you were playing it by the book at my expense, I asked the farmer if he needed any help with his livestock with it being lambing season, and he was delighted.

That meant I was able to watch what you were doing and take a look around as well. Although you managed to pilfer most of my work, it wasn't everything and I did my own detecting and inspected the coastline. It occurred to me quite early on that you were digging in the wrong place.'

Muir placed his books on the table and leant in, closing in on Finch as he continued talking.

'The coastline was treacherous but, in my research, there were a few references to a whale. Now whales are sometimes spotted up and around there, but it is not a common sighting, so why bother talking so much about one. Then it occurred to me — what does a whale do? It has a blow hole so it expels air and water then breathes again. Anyway, I put two and two together and watched the coast and sure enough, on the high tides, a blow hole would erupt from out of the rocks, so I followed it. A quite perilous journey and it meant I got wet and cold, plus it took some balls on my behalf as I had to enter the water and allow myself to be sucked into the current of the blow hole.'

'Does this have some sort of point to it?' Muir sighed.

Finch smiled and ignored Muir's interruption. 'Well, I was dragged into a small, claustrophobic cave system, and discovered some artifacts in a corner, which proved the area had been used to store merchandise and indeed that travellers from distant shores have visited the island long before history tells us they did. My paper will show all my findings.'

Muir was visibly angered by Finch, 'Your paper!' Muir's voice was raised enough to draw attention to their conversation. A deliberate attempt to embarrass Finch. 'Your paper. Why would anyone in my profession waste their time on reading the scratchings of an amateur, uneducated child who can't get on a dig for love nor money. You are and always will be a laughingstock. So, do yourself and everyone else a favor and

leave this to the people who have spent their lifetime studying and educating themselves in this field and hence know what they are doing. I'll even buy you a metal detector so you can play on the beach as a going away present. You're a joke Finch, a tiresome, pathetic joke and it is time to go!

Finch was acutely aware that all eyes were on him, and he wished the earth would open and swallow him whole. The anger was rising, and his fist clenched. He wanted to vault the table and teach this arrogant sod a lesson. It was all he could do to quell his temper. But that wouldn't achieve anything, except merely prove that he was not to be taken seriously and was just a thug. Muir could tell that Finch was twitching and his initial bravado was leaving him. He was no match for Finch physically and although he had a vicious tongue, he was no fighter.

Finch ran his hand through his blond hair and packed up his belongings. He stood and stared intently at Muir with his piercing blue eyes. He was also aware that a lot of what Muir had said was true, and that cut deep.

'Don't worry Muir, it may seem a good idea now to knock you off your perch and onto your arrogant arse, but even I know that it wouldn't be the wisest course of action. Besides, my father always taught me that violence was never the answer. You're right, people will never take me as seriously as a man with your background and credentials. The great Raymond Muir, Eton, Oxford and distinguished fellow. So, I will need to up my game, get better and forge my own path. But what you won't do is stop me from carrying on and beat me down with your spiteful rhetoric. I will earn your respect and I will prove you wrong,' Finch said, brushing past Muir and heading for the exit. Then he stopped and swung around to Muir. 'I think you'll find that my paper will make a difference, particularly when I show them this.' With that, Finch removed a small green and gold carved Buddha from his bag and waved it at Muir.

Muir gasped as he saw the object and struggled to get any words out of his mouth.

Finch smiled, replaced the artefact in his pocket and winked at the attractive receptionist who was manning the desk. Finch would prove that he was no less of a scholar than Muir and any of the others.

This was just the start.

CHAPTER 1

20 years later.

The cool wind played with the loose sand and it danced over the surface of the desert like children skipping with the carefree abandonment of youth. The camels stirred and gave a muted rumbling roar and the flames from the log fire cracked and flared up into the starlit sky. The desert was a harsh foreboding environment but the prize for surviving it was the savage beauty it had to offer. It was bitter by night and relentlessly hot by day. Parched of water and abrasive. All the while, holding a mystique that had to be experienced at least once in a person's life to understand its attraction. The figure by the fire twitched. His eyeballs flitted uncontrollably while he dreamt yet another dream, so tangible that it could almost have been real.

1513. Branxton, Northumberland - England.

The cool air of the English summer morning had left a blanket of dew on every surface it caressed. There were men everywhere. Dirty, hungry, tired and cold. This Scottish army had amassed on the English border under the banner of James IV, keen to tell King Henry VIII that he was no potential overlord of Scotland. Although years of fighting had been ended by the Treaty of Perpetual Peace in 1502, the hatred was still tangible between the two patriotic neighbours, and it didn't take much to ignite the spark of war once again. Now, after much belligerent and truculent rhetoric from Henry, coupled with Scotland's 'Auld Alliance' with France, whom England were fighting already, meant that Scotland were ready to fight and were embedded on sassenach soil, keen to kill the English once again.

The atmosphere was tense but not fearful which, understandably, it should have been, for all war was a frightful business. Henry's army was vast, led by The Earl of Surrey and it consisted of 26,000 men, including artillery, archers, cavalry and infantry. They were all battle-hardened soldiers who were keen on clearing the Scots from their land. This was not a force that would have deterred the Scots though, for they amassed 30,000 men of their own, all filled with hatred and a desire to inflict as much damage and retribution upon the English as possible.

Gillie rose from his seat and stirred the pot of oats and barley to prevent it from catching and sat once more. His appearance was feral. His beard, unkempt hair and kilt gave him a barbaric and menacing look. As he sat watching the flames, a squat, solid man made his way toward Gillie's pot. As he passed, he slapped the crown of his head as if swatting an irritating horsefly. Gillie whipped round, his eyes ablaze at being accosted, only to calm immediately at the sight of his childhood friend and kinsman, Mowbraid.

'Here! I brought you some drink! This dammed weather seeps through to the very soul,' grumbled Mowbraid, throwing Gillie a bottle of mead he had liberated from the monks earlier. Gillie smiled.

'Ah! You're the man – Health!' he said, taking a fair slug from the bottle and instantly feeling the effects of the warm liquid permeating down his throat and around his body. 'What's happening?' asked Gillie.

Mowbraid sat beside him. 'Things are starting to move and the English are getting twitchy, not that there's any need. There's bloody thousands of the bastards.'

Gillie smiled, unscathed by the thought of hordes of Englishmen waiting to maim him. He took his pot off the fire

and tried the concoction. It was good and the two men shared a warm meal before the day's proceedings. Suddenly, the call to arms came. A large, bullish man carrying a double-headed axe rallied around. 'Come on, you lazy bastards. Gets youse up to the line, and hurry on or you'll get the thick end of this up your arse!' The man indicated by shaking his axe at the soldiers.

All the men gathered their belongings and made haste to the line overlooking the English. The roars went up, first from the Scots and then the English. The noise was deafening but the calls were united against their foes and it sent a shiver up Gillie's spine. Before they knew it, the call was made and the Scots started to charge the line of The Earl's army.

Gillie was fit but the ground was heavy. He ran as fast as his legs could take him without a hint of fear in his heart: blood and adrenalin screaming through his veins. The English were getting closer and he picked his man. Sword in hand and targe in the other, he crashed headlong into an infantryman carrying the colours of Henry. Gillie was filled with battle frenzy. He had caught his enemy square in the throat with his shield, which stunned him and without a second thought, he whipped his sword round and opened up his face and neck with a single blow.

The throng was thick and there was barely room to move an arm. Blows rained in from all sides and it was as much luck as it was skill that Gillie wasn't sliced from another angle. As always, Mowbraid was at his side shrieking and laughing as he scythed his way through man after man. The blood ran fast and the smell of urine and faeces intermingled with warm blood was enough to make a man retch.

The fight was intense. Pushing forward, Gillie felt a sharp pain to his thigh. A blade had cut into his femoral muscle, though not enough to disable him. This just spurred him on even more and his blood-crazed eyes bore into the man who had just injured him. Then he heard a sound all men feared on the battlefield: the

eerie hum of arrows in flight. Hundreds of them piercing the sky and impaling anything they hit. There wasn't time to cover up, just to pray that the arrows would miss their target and hit somewhere or someone else. Men from both sides screamed in agony as broad-heads and bodkins slammed into muscle, bone and soft tissue. The man next to Gillie tried to cry out, but it was a guttural growl as the arrow had sunk itself deep into his throat.

Gillie was in his element, completely focused on pushing through and killing anything in his path, but he was aware that his footing had changed. Instead of the slippery smear of blood, it was now sticky and tacky and then the smell gave it away. He was standing in a trail of tar laid by the English earlier. He instantly panicked and called to Mowbraid. 'Mo! Get back. We're standing in tar! They'll light us up like a torch. Get back!' Mowbraid looked down and realised that it was true, but the crush behind was too much. The only way out was forward through the English. But they had little time to worry, for the haunting noise of arrows punctuated the air once more, but this time they were alight. As soon as the flames hit the tar, it ignited with a roar, sucking the oxygen from the air and spawning thick black smoke into the sullen sky. All around Gillie and Mowbraid were thick, yellow angry flames spitting and grabbing hold of anyone close and inflicting its own personal misery on them. Gillie could feel the intense heat building all around him and the air was filled with the anguished cries of men burning alive. Gillie was scared and couldn't get out.

He whirled his sword around, trying to carve a way through the lines, which had now fractured significantly with the introduction of the fire, but the acrid smoke was suffocating and Gillie was losing strength. The panic was welling up inside and overpowering all his other emotions, and then everything started to fade and the darkness enveloped him.

CHAPTER 2

Jake woke with a start. It was dark and the fire was still alight. He rubbed his face with the palms of his hands and grabbed his water bottle from his backpack and took a swig. Sleep wasn't going to be an option now; just a bit of peace to collect his thoughts and some warmth offered from the flames was all he could expect. The small campfire was mesmerising and Jake found himself lost in the twisted dance the flames created. They were magical, but they were menacing. Lulling their audience into a trance, just waiting for the right time to pounce and devour whatever it was that dared to venture too close. Jake blinked hard and removed his gaze from the glow and thought about what the next day would bring, for he knew that he was close to uncovering the tomb of Satyros, which could in turn, if his studies were correct, lead him to the resting place of the so-called 'mythical' Library of Alexandria – in his view, the greatest of all the Wonders of the World and in no way a myth.

Jake didn't like labels but if he had to call himself something, it would be an historian and archaeologist. He was also a protector of days long gone, an adventurer, a man who craved a way to be able to touch the past and live the life of both the ordinary and extraordinary of yesteryear. Living in the present in this relentless modern world of excess and greed and frantic pressure, was a hell that Jake tried to escape and the past offered him the peace and excitement he needed. He was a man most definitely born into the wrong era. Growing up, his father died young of cancer, which meant that life was tough. He wasn't the type to go off the rails; in fact, he studied even harder, though his sixth form college never really offered the education he craved. He had dreams of studying at Oxford or Cambridge; he was certainly bright enough. But a lack of funds, coupled with poor opportunities, put pay to those lofty plans. Nevertheless,

nothing was going to stop him from doing what he loved. In his spare time from working odd jobs, he would bury himself in books and languages, both ancient and modern. He was a sponge, absorbing every ounce of knowledge he could get. He would apply to get on digs and was occasionally successful, but he loathed the arrogant way the others treated him. He felt like the pot washer in amongst the commis and sous chefs. He hated that and learnt little as they were not willing to give him the time of day. So, he followed his own path and began to make his mark. He was still shunned from the established 'old school' circles as being a chancer and merely just 'playing the game.' He was no academic. No letters after his name to say that he knew what he was talking about. One man called his theories flimsy and whimsical and without substance. Plus, his general appearance made people wary and perhaps jealous. He was dark from his outdoor ventures, with a mop of blond hair. Tall with a good physique but had a regal quality that gave him a certain 'air', a quality the historical society despised, particularly as their wives rather fawned over him like one would over a cute puppy. He was charismatic without being smarmy and had striking blue eyes which gave him an ethereal look. He would say 'to hell with the establishment' and hated them collectively for their attitude, but deep down, he wanted to be accepted and welcomed as their equal. This wasn't to satisfy his ego but more to be thought of as their equal. He may not have any official credentials, but he had worked hard to get to where he was today and people hired him because he got the job done, but a little appreciation would have been nice.

Although born and raised in West Wales, his tanned looks and English accent always betrayed his Celtic roots. Roots he was fiercely proud of. Indeed, his little cottage made of Welsh flint overlooking Poppitt Beach outside of the town of Cardigan, was the only place he could really relax and unwind. It was his little

piece of heaven in an unsettled, messy and often spiteful world, and he adored it.

As he sat on his roll mat on the sandy ground, he retrieved his old Moleskin notebook and thumbed through the leaves. He came to a page with its corner dog-eared and in bold letters was the phrase ‘ANGELS WILL SHOW THE WAY!’

He sighed and stared up at the night sky which was ablaze with a billion stars. ‘Angels huh? Well, if you are up there, you couldn’t give me a hand now, could you?’ Jake smiled whilst addressing the heavens. He was a Christian, but not a practising one. He never went to church, only read the Bible if it was part of an historic investigation, but he believed, and more so, wanted to believe. His problem, and one of the reasons he was sitting on the parched, cold ground in the middle of North Africa was, that he needed to KNOW! Believing was not good enough. He was happy to believe for a while, but he wanted to know the facts. The world for Jake Finch wasn’t grey; it was black or white. He didn’t like grey, which was tough in his line of work as history was awash with assumption and hypothesis and he didn’t like it; he liked facts. A reason why he was so fastidious in his work. As for religion, he allowed himself a little leeway, owing to the fact that he didn’t want to be proved wrong. He had seen much of the world, good and bad, but he knew that there were some strange things that couldn’t be explained and he would have to accept that. One thing was for sure, and that was Finch was a good man.

Dawn broke and the sun rose slowly over the desert and with it, the first rays of warmth to dull the chill of the night. Finch had already risen and was fixing a cup of coffee for himself, a prerequisite for the day. Accompanying him was a workforce of ten or so Egyptian diggers. These guys were the usual ‘rent-a-crew, used for excavating in the hot Egyptian desert and they

knew the routine well. Also present was the representative of the Antiquities Department from the Cairo Museum, Femi El Masri. He was a rotund jolly man with a wisp like comb-over, who always gave the impression of being a bit of a push-over. But Femi was nothing of the kind, he had a mind as sharp as a blade, coupled with a rare wit and cunning outlook. His knowledge of antiquities was barely paralleled, but money was his Achilles heel and Finch had paid him handsomely to enable him to gain access to the tomb. The deal was that everything in the tomb was Cairo's and all credit would be Egypt's too; all Finch wanted was to sift through the 'grey matter' and get the answers he desired to find what he was really looking for. The Great Library. Of course, the powers that be in Cairo would have had a vested interest in Finch's results. If the Great Library of Alexandria did exist, it would belong to Egypt and they would seek to lay claim to it, wherever it may be. Finch was positive it did; he had researched too long and forfeited too much of his life to be proved wrong. Moreover, there was a voice from somewhere that pushed him forward. It gave him hope when he doubted himself. With Femi's, help, he could complete his work without hindrance and get out of Egypt quickly.

Finch didn't like Egypt. It was strange that an adventurous historian would have such an active dislike of a place with so much rich history, but he loathed it. It wasn't just the heat; it was the culture. Everything had a price and everything was for sale. No one was trustworthy. There was no honour or moral courage and he hated that. The only thing that kept him here was his goal and the love of the rare items of historical note that Egypt had in abundance. His wish was to find what he wanted and get back to Wales.

Femi rose with a broad grin, dressed as always in a dirty suit, tie and leather shoes. An odd mode of dress for the desert but it

suiting his being. Finch, on the other hand, was wearing his white T-shirt, cargo trousers and ex-army issue desert boots and as usual, his well-worn beige baseball cap with black wrap-around glasses balanced on the peak.

‘Good morning, my friend, *Salam Aleikum,*’ Femi said in his soft voice, ‘and Inshallah today may be the day that we will break through and find whatever it is we are looking for.’ This was accompanied by one of the many handshakes he liked to offer.

‘Here’s hoping,’ Finch retorted, just a little grumpy after his lack of sleep. ‘Would you like some coffee – it’s hot and fresh?’ he asked Femi, but he had already headed towards the other Egyptians for a glass of hot sweet tea. It was all the Egyptians drank and not to Finch’s taste at all.

It was now just gone one in the afternoon and the desert sun at its zenith had been particularly spiteful. Work on the dig was progressing, albeit at a slow pace. There was a definite change of soil and sand colour and they were at the right depth to be there or thereabouts. Finch took a break from the digging. He liked to lead from the front and get his hands dirty and the Egyptians liked that. Besides which, he knew that the moment his back was turned the pace of the dig would reduce significantly. He got to the tent, pitched fifty metres from the site and took a huge swig of lukewarm water and poured a little on his hand and rubbed his face and neck with it. Sitting slumped in a chair in the corner was Femi. For a local, he didn’t seem to handle the heat well at all. He was still in his suit and was out for the count. His head had fallen backwards with his mouth wide open and was producing the sort of sound one would expect to hear from a lion trying to eat a live wildebeest whole. With a damp handkerchief in one hand and the other resting on his ample stomach, which was protruding from the bottom of his shirt, he was a sight to behold. Finch chuckled to himself and

was just about to take another swig when there was a great shout and furore from the dig site.

Finch dropped the bottle and ran down to where the noise was coming from. When he got back to the site, he could see that a small part of a wall had been unearthed. The Egyptian workers stood motionless, anticipating that a great find of ancient Egyptian wealth had been discovered and awaited their next instructions. Finch stared at the wall. Could this be what he was looking for? He lifted his cap and ran his hand through his wavy, blond matted hair. He could hear the panting of Femi running down the slope behind. He was flustered, having been woken so suddenly by the commotion, but there was no way he was going to miss overseeing the unearthing of the tomb.

After a while, Finch gave the instruction, 'Knock it through – gently! Let's see what's inside.' The wiry Egyptian by the wall pulled a cloth over his mouth and nose and took the sledgehammer in his hands and struck the wall with surprising power for a man of his stature. Instantly, the wall began to succumb. And it wasn't too long before a hole large enough for a substantial man to put his whole torso through had been formed.

'Enough!' Finch shouted and held his hand up to emphasize the point. He removed his powerful Maglite torch from the holster on his belt and made his way to the hole. He peered through and smiled to himself. Inside, the walls were fairly plain with a few hieroglyphics, and apart from a sarcophagus on a stone table, all that was in the room was an ordinary silver box no bigger than a small suitcase. *This is it!* Finch thought. *This is bloody it!* He took a moment to control his emotions, for it was vital that he kept them in check otherwise, suspicions would be aroused.

'Let me see! Let me see!' shouted Femi, grabbing the torch from Finch and pushing his way past him to squeeze through the

gap. He shone the beam of light on all four walls and stared at the puny offerings that were being offered to him after so much effort.

‘I am sorry, my friend. It appears that luck is a cruel puppeteer,’ Femi said, handing him back the torch.

‘But this is it. This is what I have come here to find,’ answered Finch.

Femi squinted, looking at him with suspicion. There was a pause, almost uncomfortably so. Then Femi erupted with enthusiasm. ‘TEA! Come, let us have tea!’ He turned Finch and guided him to the tent whilst barking instructions in Arabic to the workforce to stop and take tea themselves.

At the tent, Femi put the kettle on the gas stove and lit it. He prepared the cups for the revolting sweet tea and turned. He motioned for Finch to sit and whilst he did so, went to the door of the tent and took a good look around so that what he was about to say did not fall upon anyone else’s ears.

Femi turned and sat opposite Finch. ‘Mr. Finch. Jake. We are friends ...Yes?’ said Femi, not requiring an answer. Finch nodded. ‘You are a most eminent historian and friend of Egypt and a light for many less worthy to follow. So why is it that a man like yourself can dig in the insane heat of an Egyptian desert and find a tomb which holds no treasures and is clearly belonging to a man of no repute. It must be one of the most stark and uninteresting finds that I have witnessed in my career. The question I must ask is why do you have the look of a man who has found a tomb akin to that of Tutankhamen? You hid your emotions well. Nonchalant...Yes? But I am a man who can see what there is not to be seen. You have found what you are looking for, after all, you said so yourself, Jake, and I want to know what that is. And please, before you speak, understand that I will know the truth that will pass your lips and a lie. If you lie

to me, Inshallah, you will never see inside of that tomb. It will be excavated by museum staff and you can read about it in my paper. Do you understand me?’ Femi finished and sat back in his chair, clasping his hands and holding them to his chest.

The easy-going, quiet Egyptian had flashed a side of his character that Finch had suspected but was still nevertheless surprised by. A man he thought he could manipulate had just changed the rules of the game. Finch had to tell him the truth, but he knew also that Femi’s love and passion of antiquity would be the key and that his being a part of what Finch was about to say would ensure his reputation for years to come. It was time to come clean. It was Finch’s time to stand and ‘check his arcs’, to ensure there were no spying ears close to the tent. No one could hear what he was about to say. As he did so, Femi flinched ever so slightly, wondering what Finch was going to do. Finch ignored this and after inspecting the scene outside the tent, pulled his seat toward Femi, sat and leant forward.

‘OK. You got me! But I thought you would,’ Finch said, trying to flatter him. ‘We are friends and so I will tell you exactly what I know, and you can believe it or not.’ Femi sat up, eager to hear more. Finch waited for a moment, his blue eyes burning into Femi, making him feel uncomfortable. ‘The tomb you have just seen is the tomb, I believe, of Satyros. He was a Greek architect who oversaw the building of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus and friend of the Ptolemaic dynasty. In 323 – 283BC, more or less, Ptolemy I who was the first pharaoh in the dynasty of the Ptolemaic Pharaohs, presented what was one of the greatest wonders of the ancient world: the Great Library of Alexandria. You’ve obviously heard of this.’

Femi shifted in his seat at the ridiculous thought that a man of his standing would not have heard of such a place. ‘Of course, everyone has heard of it. It was destroyed by a fire!’

Finch continued as if Femi hadn't interjected. 'Ptolemy was a lover of the arts, math, literature and everything he felt the Greeks had given to the world. He adored Alexander the Great and felt that the library was a tribute to him. But he was paranoid that this priceless collection could be stolen or destroyed by an invading force or by an accident which indeed it was in 48BC by Julius Caesar.' Finch got out his notebook and read:

'It is often said that the Romans were civilised, but their most famous general was responsible for the greatest act of vandalism during antiquity. Julius Caesar was attacking Alexandria in pursuit of his arch-rival Pompey when he found himself about to be cut off by the Egyptian fleet. Realising that this would leave him in a desperate predicament, he took decisive action and sent fire ships into the harbour. His plan was a success and the enemy fleet was quickly aflame. But the fire did not stop there and jumped onto the dockside which was laden with flammable materials ready for export. Next, it spread inland and before anyone could stop it, the Great Library itself was blazing brightly as 400,000 priceless scrolls were reduced to ashes. As for Caesar himself, he did not think it important enough to mention in his memoirs'. He finished reading and placed the book back in his pocket. 'Yes, it was destroyed and the world mourned its loss. But in his paranoia, Ptolemy had got an army of learned scribes to copy every single parchment that was housed in the Library. There were thousands upon thousands and it took years, but it was done. It was these copies that were burned.'

Femi leaned forward, his eyes like saucers, wide and in wonderment. 'Well, if the copies were burnt, that means... I mean what happened to... where are...?' His words were failing him in his enthusiasm and excitement. Jake held up his hand to slow him down, threw a cursory glance around again and continued.

‘Every time a copy was made, it was placed where the original sat and the original parchment was removed. The copies were all marked with an ancient equivalent of an invisible marker which denoted that it was a copy and not the original itself. It was ingenious. The scribes were sworn to secrecy and were told that if they uttered a word of this, they would be mutilated along with their family and would be disgraced in the eyes of the gods. One scribe was apparently heard whispering the secret to his wife, so it was said, and was pegged out in the sun and, after watching his family endure the same fate as him, was then blinded, his tongue cut out, hot oil poured down his throat and then left for the animals to feast upon. The Wonder of the World wasn’t just the Library itself; it was the fact that the biggest secret of the ancient world was actually kept! Anyway, there needed to be a new resting place for the Library, so Ptolemy got Satyros to build him a place in which to house this Library, away from invaders and natural disasters and where only a choice few knew of its whereabouts. He had heard that there was a man by the name of Eupalinos of Megara, a Greek engineer who built the Tunnel of Eupalinos on the island Samos in the 6th century BC, which was an amazing feat of engineering. Ptolemy liked this idea of tunnelling into rock and wanted Satyros to take this job on.’

‘And he did so. He found a place and dedicated his life to building a subterranean Library of Alexandria to survive for millennia to come. Ptolemy was thrilled. It was finished just before his death and he had all the workers who had built it slain. Satyros had proved his worth, but unfortunately for him, Ptolemy had him put to the sword as well, as he didn’t want anyone to know this secret. He buried Satyros in a modest tomb making everyone aware that he had nothing to give to prospective robbers. I believe that the tomb we have found belongs to Satyros and that in the box will be a few coins and bits and pieces but, more importantly, a clue to where the Library is today. For I believe that his son, who was privy to the

information, wrote an obituary, if you like, to his father after his death and placed it inside the box. This information will give me the whereabouts of the Great Library of Alexandria. That is why I look pleased on seeing such a mundane tomb in the middle of a forsaken desert.'

Jake finished and slumped back in his chair, with the look of a relieved man who had told his last confession. 'I need you to believe me. I need you to help me unravel the greatest find of the entire world. You can be the reason I find this. You!'

Femi sat, his mouth agape. 'Well, I have heard some nonsense in my life, but this...!' Finch's heart was in his mouth. 'But this,' he continued. 'If this is true and there is a chance it exists – and a little credit went my way – then it is a chance you must take!' Femi stood suddenly and pulled Finch up grasping him by the shoulders. 'If, my friend, this is true then I will do all I can to aid you in your quest. We spend our lives peering down a tiny hole trying to find and make sense of the past. If you find what you are looking for, you could smash a hole the size of Egypt and walk through the past answering questions that I have not even thought to ask yet!' By this time, Femi was shaking and salivating with excitement. The kettle on the gas was steaming ferociously and he moved it without thinking of the heat raging from the handle. He recoiled and the shock brought him out of his trance. 'Come quickly, we must see whether the greatest adventure of your life starts today or will dissolve away like the fine sands we stand upon. Come! Come! There is not a minute to lose!'

CHAPTER 3

The two men made their way towards the dig site and called two of the Egyptians who were sitting enjoying their tea break, completely unaware of the excitement that had just been generated in Finch's tent. When they got to the wall, Femi told them to widen the aperture into the tomb. Without much effort, a path was cleared and a large hole opened up in front of them. Finch took his torch out from its holster and stepped into the tomb. He hadn't got more than a few yards inside when he was accompanied by Femi. The air was stale and there was something incredibly melancholic about this bare room. For if it did hold the body of such a great man as Satyros, then it was a sad and ill-fitting end to someone with such a talent and who had helped save the greatest wonder of the world. Finch stood with his torch on full beam, scouring the walls for clues and evidently enjoying the moment. Femi just wanted to know the result. He pushed Finch in the back impatiently toward the box. Finch leant on a bent knee and placed his hands either side of the plain silver box. He bit at his lower lip in anticipation. His heart skipped a beat at the thought of what could be inside the chest and yet he didn't know how he would cope with the disappointment of finding it empty.

'Come, Mr. Finch! It is time – open the box,' whispered Femi, awaking Finch from his daydream. Without a pause, he started to open it up. It was stuck at first but with a little gentle persuasion, it opened without a sound. Finch took the torch and had a look inside. As he suspected, there were a few coins dating to the Ptolemaic age. That was a good sign. There was also a wonderful scarab knife, quite short and curved to a right angle at the bottom, the kind found in the Middle East. *Another good sign*, he thought to himself. There was a small piece of cloth which

had been wrapped around some tools of this man's trade. Working tools, a small hammer and compass. Surely this was Satyros. He searched more but that was it! Finch's heart sank. There was no clue as to where the Great Library may be hiding and nothing of any particular evidence that this was the great Greek architect. Finch sat back on his heels and put a hand to his face.

'Trinkets!' he said. 'Just trinkets.' There was silence and when Finch eventually caught Femi's eye, he could see that they were dancing in the half-light of the tomb.

'Mr. Finch – for a man who aims to seek out what is not yet ready to be found, you seem to capitulate all too easily,' said Femi. 'May I?' With that, he picked up the torch and shone it into the lid of the box.

When Finch realised the box was empty, he had let it fall flat on the ground and hadn't looked at the underneath of the lid. For there was wedged a papyrus scroll bound by a faded red tape. Finch gasped and found it difficult to swallow. He reached in and with the utmost delicacy, picked up the scroll. Its condition was incredible. He carefully undid the tie and unravelled the parchment. It was magnificent. As he unrolled it, he could see a huge amount of writing and a diagram. Finch had found what he had come for. He laced it back together and placed it in the box, picked the whole lot up and together they made their way back to the tent. Femi, appreciating the importance of the find, took a wad of notes from his pocket, paid the Egyptian foreman and waved the workers away. He scurried up the hill to the tent so as not to miss a thing. By the time he had got to the tent, Finch had already got the scroll out and had pinned it on the table, securing each corner down with whatever he could find. He scabbled for his old notebook and pen and started to translate the words, making a note of everything. It was in remarkable condition and was written in the most perfect Greek. It read loosely:

My father's life's work containing the Great Hall of Alexandria is now in its final resting place and I fear that my life is in grave danger. The Library lies in a country to the south-east of Greece, where the men are painted by the sun but have a great air amongst them. On an arid and vast plain to the east, it lies beneath the earth. A sunken hole and lagoon in a parched land overseen by a tower. Do not feign a dead end for seek and you shall find.'

Finch grinned and clapped his hands with delight. 'I have found it!' he cried.

Femi stared at him in bewilderment. 'My friend – I do not wish to be the man who shatters your dreams, but there is many a land to the east of Egypt that contains... painted men and I dare say a few oases at that. Do you know where this place is that the ghost of millennia past speaks of?'

Finch was unsure how much he should reveal to Femi, but his over enthusiasm got the better of him and he stood quickly and retrieved a map from a bag.

'Look here!' said Finch, pointing to the map. 'If you look south-east from Egypt, you are in this kind of area.' Finch was now pointing to the Middle East. 'Here, there is many a 'painted' chap! Now I had suspected for some time that it was somewhere there from research and various documents, but it was all hearsay. I think that it is in Oman. You see, Oman was known as Mazun and was the land of the Parthians who were a great dynasty. Now the Parthians and the Sassanids, who later took over from the Parthians, liked law and order and were great traders and more importantly they loved history and craved knowledge. Their leader, Arsaces I, admired the Greek civilisation and often modelled his own state on Greek ideologies. Ptolemy knew this and asked him for his blessing and protection to move the Library to Oman. The Parthians were

strong and no one would waste too much time conquering a desert. It would be a secret that would be passed down from sultan to sultan and they would forever be the keepers of the Library, always knowing that under their lands stood the knowledge of the world. And so it was. This lagoon that they speak of, is, I think, the Bimmah Sinkhole, is now on the coastal road between Muscat and Sur. It is a truly amazing natural phenomenon and overlooking the sinkhole are the ruins of Qalhat. A square, now dome-less mausoleum of Bibi Maryam. This is where I think the Library is.'

Femi stared in disbelief. Finch, getting to grips with himself and realising that in his exuberance may have said too much, looked into Femi's eyes. 'Now you know what I know. What will you do about it?'

Femi straightened his back and turned, collecting himself. He had felt annoyed by an accusing Finch but allowed himself to calm before he answered. He turned and spoke calmly and collectedly.

'Mr. Finch, Jake, we live in a world full of deceit and hatred. Everyone trying to outdo everyone else for the sake of money, status or power and I too have been guilty of taking advantage of situations to line my own pockets, it is a weakness. There are some people though, occasionally, who still seek to respect the world for what it has to offer and to try and answer the secrets it hides so well. I may be an Egyptian of today but my heart is beating in antiquity. What you have possibly found is the greatest treasure, save for the Holy Relics that the earth has. If you could find this, it would be too wonderful to comprehend and yet I hope with all my heart that you fail in your quest, for this can only bring with it greed, sadness and fighting. For men will do anything for it and ultimately it will be the destiny of the Library to be destroyed. But, if you do find what you seek, all I ask in this corrupt world is that you keep it to yourself, save one man,

and tell him all that you discover, for that man will die a happy man.’ Femi clasped Finch’s hand in a double handed handshake and kissed the back of it, smiling as he did so. ‘Our secret is safe.’ He released Finch’s hand and looked one last time at the parchment. ‘What is this?’ asked Femi, pointing to the bottom of the scroll. ‘The writing is strange and different from the Greek.’

Finch stared down and saw that indeed there was more. How he had failed to see this first-time round was a mystery, but there under the Greek inscriptions was a language unlike anything Finch had seen before. And yet, just as someone who stares at an anagram can decipher it straight away, without a thought, the letters and symbols seemed to make sense to him.

ENOCHIAN:-

CL707&70 727/710&C 7700 70722 7277 7&77CV 7277
 7&77 7070077 7C77 77 7677&0 7777/7C 7007C 7777&7
 .67777 7&77 7&77 7C6777 777&C 7&77C7077C 7007C

The Great Library, the greatest prizes. The chalice of Christ and the Casket of the Prophet Moses.

Finch played dumb; he liked Femi and semi trusted him, but he did not want to share this dream with him anymore. ‘They look like a secret code, it’s rather odd. Do you have any ideas?’ he asked.

Femi just shook his head and wiped his beaded forehead. ‘It is a language unlike anything I have seen. Still, if anyone can work it out then you, Jake, are the man to do it. What will you do now?’ asked Femi.

'I will, with your permission, leave Egypt as soon as possible and head back to London to tie a few things up before I head to Oman,' Finch replied. 'May I take the scroll?'

'Of course and Inshallah, may you find what you seek in good health. Just let me know; yes?' Femi embraced Finch and made his way to the dig site, shouting at any remaining workers, causing them to scurry around like rats fleeing after a door to a darkened room had been opened. Finch wasted no time in packing up his belongings, taking particular care of the scroll. He got into his jeep and headed back to his hotel room and readied himself to leave Egypt and get back home.