

Isis Incarnate

the Goddess of Antiquity

by
WH Clark



***When I saw her, I want'd her greatly.
And the Beast said to me, "Why, do your wonder?
. . . I shall tell you the mystery of that woman."***

- Revelation 17:6-7



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Prelude ~circa 1860

Hello. I am Tecumseh, a name which means celestial panther in your language. On the Indian tongue the meaning is more like celestial sphinx. I am a Creek Indian warrior of the tribe that the white man called "Red Sticks" during the War of 1812. I am not THE Tecumseh. He was a Shawnee warrior-philosopher of my father's generation. I am named after him. I do my best to live up to the honor. I will be telling you a story about a great white soldier.

The last thirty years have been tragic for the Creek Indians. During War of 1812 we sided with the British against the Americans. Since we lost, our numbers have been decimated. Our tribal lands were taken from us. Our warriors have scattered to the four winds. Two generations ago we could call most of Georgia and Alabama home. Now it all belongs to the white man.

In the Creek Indian Nation, each tribe is comprised of two separate settlements. The "White Sticks" are peaceable and civilized. The "Red Sticks" are the warriors. The "Red Sticks" are responsible for the protection of the community. A pole painted red is what divides the two towns. That is where the name came from. When the War of 1812 happened, and Americans set out to destroy our whole race, all the "Red Stick" warrior Indians from all the many independent tribes came together to fight them. Now that the Blue Coats have defeated us, the surviving warriors had no where to go.

Most of the Creek warriors have by this time turned away from Tecumseh's teaching. They have embraced the Christian religion. It is not really such a big change for the "White Sticks" because they were always peaceable and idealistic. It is a different matter all together for the "Red Stick" warriors, however, to turn the other cheek and make plow shares out of swords.

There is a port on the Mississippi River called Baton Rouge. It got the name from a "Red Stick" monument placed to denote the boundary between the Houma and Bogalusa Indian nations. There were even ancient Indian mounds there in Baton Rouge, many thousands of years old. These artifacts mean that we are as ancient as the white man. The pale faces are upset that these three mounds are at the exact same latitude as three large stone pyramids in Egypt, half way around the round world in a place that used to be called Memphis by the ancients. Our sacred mounds are smaller, granted, but they are also five hundred years older.

A few of us Red Sticks escaped the American Indian round up. We found a place to call home in the river city of Baton Rouge, which means Red Stick in French. It seemed to be a reasonable place to hide.

No one in their right mind would hide in a place named right after your own self. There were many other Indians of different tribes in the area, so it is not hard for us to pretend to be civilized for a little while.

In the late 1850's there was much talk in the South of how the North was mistreating us Indians, and ignoring our representation in Washington's town. By 1860 some states had actually seceded from the Union, and war was sure to follow. Now the Red Stick warriors could speak of their hatred of the North freely, and expect no retaliation from white men.

Being a sensible people, my friends and I were wary of the situation. Indians are very particular about whom we follow, especially into battle. Our entire system is organized so that war chiefs arise by virtue of skill, success, and ferocity. The white man's system is different, and often military leaders arise with no skill other than political or social aptitude. That's "White Stick" politics, not "Red Stick" leadership. So we were careful to find a worthy leader before picking up the Tomahawk once again.

There was no hurry, in the spring of 1860. The South and North were in a war of words and although the pace in Baton Rouge had picked up a little from the excitement of it all, life was little changed. We took the opportunity of using this honeymoon stage of the Confederacy to find us a good white war chief. There were only twenty of us Red Sticks, so it was really no big deal; but it was important to us, and we took the selection quite seriously.

We found our leader in a West Point white called Earl Van Dorn. Joining his small raiding party, he led us west to Texas where we captured the federal forts at Galveston Island and even a couple of federal gunboats there. Then this General Van Dorn went up north to San Antonio to party with the Texans, leaving us Red Sticks behind.

We took to sitting on some hay bales in a small clearing near the Port of Galveston, watching the boats and people, and lending a hand loading the rail cars to pass the time. Van Dorn would be gone for a few weeks to central Texas, and we were still not entirely satisfied with his leadership. We had time yet to seek the right leader.

It was becoming unsettling to us, to perceive war from the white man's perspective now that we were officially aligned with the Confederacy. As we Indians had done in the early 1800's, the South was fighting for their land. They were also fighting for freedom and other ideals that were motivating to the white rebel soldiers. We Red Sticks had been motivated to protect our tribe, and that was it. We fought for people and children and wives; not ideals. Besides, these ideals seemed to us self evident and usually both sides in an Indian dispute had these same ideals anyway.

It was all very confusing, and it only got worse when we Red Stick warriors in Galveston had two weeks of free time on our hands. The whole Southern mystique, we had already agreed, was further complicated by the white religion called Christianity. The Creeks had suffered because of this Christianity once before already; it having motivated the Americans to wipe our nation out a generation ago, and to steal all our land, and kill all the White Stick noncombatants. Now these same Southern whites were justifying a whole new set of apparently contradictory goals by the same Christian Book of words.

We were doing just fine, discussing these things among ourselves while idly watching the goings on in the Port, until one of the Red Stick warriors said something about evil. The disturbing point is that he made sense, about how we were evil before to the Americans but now we're not evil to the Confederates even though we had not changed at all. It just seemed like all whites, no matter what side they are on, blame everything on somebody called Satan and all the evil he does.

We knew enough about the Christ to know that the Great Spirit got upset enough about people saying bad things about Him that He sent His son to investigate and to set the record straight for all human beings. Wouldn't the Great Spirit be just as upset about all the wrong things being blamed on this fellow Satan, to call for another son to investigate? That's how we Indians saw the situation.

Fortunately for this discussion, which was getting us all so very upset that we were on the verge of taking sides and then splitting each others heads wide open, was short lived. A stiff breeze was picking up off the Bay and we could see a large thunderstorm brewing not too far in the distance. A single massive anvil shaped cloud with steady bursts of lightening was coming right at us. The dock workers were frantic, to complete their off loading before the squall reached us. It's amusing, how scared white people are of rain. Only a few drops were falling now and they were panic stricken. We Indians just sat on our hay bails enjoying the cool breeze and the even cooler raindrops as they evaporated from our upturned faces.

A large schooner with many masts rushed into the port just then, and as soon as the last rope was made fast to the iron pilings on the pier wall, men were all over the halyards like ants loosening ropes and pulling sails down. The wind was picking up and halyards were let loose, sails lost control of, and every manner of salty sea curse word could be heard from the sailors aloft. We watched, enthralled.

The passengers made haste to embark and scurried to the nearest shelter. There were southern belles with billowing skirts held down in the wind not too successfully; gentlemen with bowlers locked down over their ears in the wind, everybody now getting quite drenched as

the rain came down in vast sheets of water. Large drops splattered in the packed dirt of the dock proper, causing tender feet in delicate shoes to falter and slide. Everyone was having quite the miserable time of it.

When all the passengers had gone, and most of the sailors were below decks, their task done, the scene became static. A steady rain was falling in a stiff wind. We Indians made as if to leave themselves, when suddenly our attention was wrenched back to the schooner as a huge bolt of lightening cracked feet away from the gangplank.

A figure was on the gangplank itself when this happened, trailing behind an enormous beast of a beautiful horse. Neither human nor horse blinked an eye nor lost a step as the lightening struck, ripping the ground asunder mere inches away from them and bursting eardrums from the immediate concussion of the thunder. The lightening was so close it left in its wake a trail of steam where the rain had been vaporized by the intense energy.

The silhouette stepped forward, horse in gentle tow, through billowing steam and blowing rain, undaunted by the circumstances. We Indians, only just now ready to leave this place, were riveted in attention. Someone so fearless, with a beast so powerful, is the kind of leader we were seeking. The rain all but forgotten, no fear ourselves of lightening or thunder, we observed with every ounce of our being.

The soldier was dressed in gray military pants completely soaked from the rain, with an black officer's stripe down the seams. Thick leather boots and a worn leather jacket were just as soaked, but it was the glittering silver saber arched on its leather belt looped loosely around one shoulder that caught the angle of light from the lightening. Silver trimming on the worn saddle balanced on the opposite shoulder was evidenced too. The figure wore a cavalry officers hat, water pouring from it's curve, to the back.

Right there in the middle of the mud sea that used to be the pier loading dock, the soldier stopped, turned, put the saddle on the giant horse, then got a brush out of the saddle bag and started brushing down the huge black beast. This went on for several minutes, as the storm passed and the rain lessened to a steady drizzle. A few rays of bright afternoon sunshine even showed up. It was then, that we Indians saw it was a woman. Not just because of her figure but she took her hat off, and loosed a forest of jet black hair that cascaded down strong shoulders.

The rain that soaked her clothing made her shirt cling tightly to a strong torso with broad shoulders. Large breasts were prominent, especially in profile, and if you looked closely the nipples were hard and jutting out of the coarse fabric. Her waist was trim, her legs long and shapely with strong thighs and prominent calves. Small feet were bound in leather boots. The overall effect on the Indians was dramatic, so as to

make their sticks grow hard. The followers imagined white sticks, the leaders imagined probing the woman in heat, her vaginal blood making their stick red and her passion heightening their own.

The woman had made her way all around the mighty horse, brushing down hard its front, back and sides, then she made to admire the stallion holding the reigns lightly in her hands as she stepped back. The horse reared its head, dug at the mud with its front feet clearly anxious for a good run on solid ground. The lady officer seemed no less anxious, packed her gear, buckled on the majestic silver saber around a small waist, and adjusted the saddle then made as if to mount.

By this time she was surrounded by twenty Red Stick Indians gawking in open admiration at beautiful woman, but mostly at the big powerful horse. The rain was little more than a drizzle, but the whole group was totally soaked and dripping rain from every seam and shirt sleeve. Most of the Indians, still shy in the presence of white men - much less, white woman - were slapping and petting and inspecting the horse. Tecumseh was looking right square in the soldier's eye. He liked what he saw.

Sweeping an arm around at his fellow Red Sticks, Tecumseh identified them and himself. The lady tipped her hat, letting loose an embarrassing gush of water as she did so, smiled a greeting, and held out a strong hand to Tecumseh in the white man's friendly greeting.

"Erb's my name. Louise Erb, from Memphis." Then she got right up on her horse and rode off at a gallop toward the nearest beach. We Indians all followed at a dead run. Then somebody remembered our own horses and a couple of Indians ran back to the pier, gathered all the reigns and followed along as the bulk of the Red Sticks were by now running through the surf.

One of the mounted Indians asked what the lady soldier had said was her name. The other Indian hesitated; then said, sounded like Lucifer is what she said to me. They looked seriously spooked for a couple of seconds, horses galloping happily under and all around them; then they both broke out in a ragged, somewhat evil smile - let loose a blood curdling holler, and went racing after their friends.

They all slowed down and stopped after a while, to admire the scattering of colorful clouds silhouetting the setting sun over the ocean. The two mounted Indians got off their horses, then eased stealthily over to look more closely at the white soldier. One of the Red Stick Indians was about to reach out and touch her to be sure she was for real, when the other grabbed his shoulder in a vice grip and pointed to a name branded into the horses' neck. Leviathan, it said in bold block letters worn with time but still discernible.

The hair standing right straight up on the backs of their necks, the two Indians shivered with terror, then made a mad dash straight out into the pounding ocean surf. They came ashore minutes later, shivering badly from head to toe. The others in the mean time had gathered up some drift wood and soon a roaring fire was going on the deserted beach, and everybody was gathering around to dry themselves out.

Once the sun had set, we were dry and sitting around the crackling fire. Tecumseh was called aside by the two horse soldiers and I was told in hushed words about their dark suspicions concerning this new white woman soldier friend of ours. We decided to tell her about this, which she did not confirm nor deny, as white peoples can do so famously.

By this time everybody in the group was in the discussion, Indians being impossible to keep away from a secret. The embers were nearly burned black in the camp fire before we finally came to an agreement. The white woman was to take a new name, and we decided a suitable one for her was Clark because of the famous Lewis associated with that famous Clark. It was not good logic, but if Red Sticks can hide safely in Baton Rouge then Louise should be able to remain undiscovered going by a name like Clark. We all shook on it, then scattered to find some food for our horses then bed them down for the night. We Indians were back by the camp fire in no time at all.

There we all were, sitting cross legged in a big circle on the beach at Galveston in Texas, talking about our futures and plans for glory. It was like fire water in our veins, to be really back upon the war path again. It was good to have found a leader worthy of the Red Stick warriors of the Creek Indian nation.

It was also decided that Red Stick Warriors was not a good thing to call ourselves because we were in the Confederacy now and we would be fighting alongside with men from Alabama and Georgia who had lost families to us during the War of 1812 and then after it during the Creek Indian War. So, using the same twisted logic, we called ourselves the Missouri Volunteers.

So that is how it all began with us, Colonel Clark's Missouri Volunteers. It seems a big name for just twenty people, and a long introduction has been written here as well, but now we all have something to live up to in the next few years of the Civil War. Well, actually it wasn't quite as simple as all that. We Indians had enough exposure to the Christian myth to be at least a little bit fearful of their notion of evil. There were those among us who wanted to consider this more before going gallivanting off on the trail with this white knight from some place called Memphis.

We were all still talking about things, and Tecumseh found himself bringing up this matter, of this white woman warrior being maybe evil. It's

to the Colonel's credit that, sitting right there amongst us, she seemed as curious to discover the truth about this as we. Before too long the discussion got heated, and we lapsed into our native tongue of Muskogee. Mostly because there are many subtle things, spiritual Great Spirit things, that cannot be adequately expressed in the English tongue. But also because it's uncomfortable for us native American people to be discussing evil in front of the accused herself.

After a while, I must admit that things were not going well for the Colonel. Evil is like that, hard to get out of the mind, and cleanse the spirit of its mere mention. We were on the verge of calling for a vote, when this great big huge shadow came over us - like evil itself, darkening our camp fire and stifling the sea breeze. We brave Indians shuttered, only to look up from the fire to see the nose of the big fearsome horse named Leviathan above us in the smoky air. Of course, several of us started with fright even worse; like so many little children listening to a scary story in a strange new place, but after all it was only a horse - so we told ourselves.

This Leviathan looked all around the circle of us, seeking out his master; he nodded his powerful neck when he spied the Colonel, then looked back at all the rest of us and gave a great big wet slobbery sneer. It was quite discombobulating to us, how this horse was putting us down in our very own pow wow.

By now everybody was silent, watching the beast, who moved then and came up behind the Colonel, holding down the reigns into the Colonel's lap. The Colonel tried to ignore the stallion, and made herself busy by rolling up her pants legs, revealing small feet; and then taking her small boots and smelly socks off. The reigns were still dangling in her pretty face, so she grasped them, and the horse yanked her right up on her feet. They went trotting off after that, dancing together in and out of the surf; she in her bare feet, the horse - well, you have the image.

So there we brave Indians were, discussing for all practical purposes the fate of a strange white female soldier who had just then left us, staring at a pair of tooled leather boots and dirty socks stuffed into the top. It was quite a foolish feeling, and having kind of lost the edge to the heavy philosophical things we were discussing, we all got up overly casual like, to stretch our stiff legs - and sticksb - then ambled down the beach after the Colonel and her smart but kind of scary great big horse.

It may seem odd to white people, but a sight we saw not long after was what made up our minds on this whole matter. Leviathan had outrun the Colonel in a foot race, and had trotted happily off into the distant surf breaking on the beach. We observed the Colonel, now playing little games with the many small birds called terns, scurrying in and out of the frothing surf waves plying the gently sloping sand, chasing the little birdies here and there like a small girl child. Admittedly, it made us braves think

seriously about taking our own moccasins off and playing in the warm salty water too; but we perished that thought.

The Colonel had herded all the terns into a large group, easily fifty in number. Then she stopped at the surf's edge. They stopped too, in the moist sand above the wave line. She looked at them, not moving a muscle. They stared back, motionless. Then with a little flurry, the group of birdies as if on command shuffled around to form the silhouette of a large sea gull, you know how you draw a big bird in the sand by connecting two arches. That was how these birds looked then. They were still, the Colonel was still - and by this time so were we Indians.

Then the Colonel raised her arms, yelled, and started chasing the little birds all over hell and back. They screamed. She screamed. They took a flight, and she scurried right after them. You had to have been there. It was a moment fitting for the Great Spirit.

It was good enough for us Indians, anyway.

I. Lago Vista, Texas

It was a sweltering 102 degrees outside in the carport. But there Kase sat, oblivious to it all, lounging casually in a beat up old wooden rocking chair and sipping a cup of hot herbal tea. His attention was wholly occupied by a pair of sparrows flurrying in and out of the open carport, bringing a steady stream of insects to a nest of young chicks only a few days old.

A dark weather front was approaching in the distance. The wind was picking up, and the smell of fresh rain wafted in the air. Rolling thunder was approaching, and soon the bright sun was obscured by deep cumulus clouds. The sparrows sensed the impending storm, and hastened in their parental duties with a stoic panic.

Kase identified each insect in the parent's beak as the industrious birds hopped and fluttered across the covered patio deck en route to the nest on top of a battered wood rack. There were bugs, worms, crickets, and spiders. Not very long ago, he'd spent weeks trying to find live bait in the yard, for fishing in the lake just beyond the tree line, and couldn't find a thing. Now it was summer time and the middle of a drought and these two sparrows found a veritable bounty of food - easily.

Kase was trying to figure out how he could train these sparrows to find bait for him.

A sleek black car pulled slowly into the gravel drive. The carport was surrounded by chicken wire and fifteen foot high photinias, and the driveway was further obscured by an awning and his small car. It was a very deliberate, even ominous approach, that his sensitive ears perceived. The car was not hastening to turn around in the drive, but was coasting to a hesitant stop.

Kase remained seated, listening carefully. He was clothed only in faded jean short pants, striped boxer shorts just visible above the belt line. A thin sheen of sweat covered a heavily muscled torso and even stronger legs. Balding hair was cut stubble short, and a two day old beard grizzled his chin and cheeks. Bright blue eyes squinted through heavily bloodshot eyes, when at last they opened as a car door was heard to close.

Cursed by a genetic disorder that rendered the eye's tear glands perpetually dry, he'd learned long ago to depend on his other senses whenever possible and to use what limited time he could see each day, for important things. This visitor seemed to be important, with an expensive car and what appeared to be diplomatic plates. A few blinks later confirmed this, and then the doorbell was ringing inside the small house.

Reluctantly Kase stood up from the rocker, walked to the fence at the edge of the carport, leaned over and directed his visitor to walk over to where he was. The visitor was dressed in a stylish Italian suit quite out of

place in the rural environs, stepping delicately across the deer droppings as he made his way to the crushed rock driveway. As he turned up the driveway to walk toward the carport, a white clerical collar could be seen. Also a long skirt with long, shapely legs showing. The calves were those of a runner or athlete, powerful and strong.

The two shook hands, and the distinguished visitor remained standing in the diffuse sunlight on one side of the rough fence, while Kase walked back and settled in the rocking chair. Hoisting bare feet up onto a metal bracket, he closed his eyes and waited.

"The Holy Father is at Saint Peter's door," said the suit after a while. She was referring to Pope John Paul. The media had been reporting a steady deterioration of his condition. In just the last day, the end seemed imminent.

"His Holiness asked me to bring you to him." The heat must have been oppressive, wearing a dark suit in the sunlight. You wouldn't know it from her calm countenance. But for a few furtive swipes with a handkerchief to mop sweat glistening on her brow, you'd think she was watching the opera in the company of equally esteemed people of the cloth.

"I grieve for John Paul," came the reply from Kase after a brief moment. "I'm such a small person in the giant scheme of the Church, there are so many others more worthy than I." To which there came no reply, and pressured by the silent gulf between them, he said "Besides, my mission ends with *Le' Papa's* demise."

"His Holiness," continued the diplomat with a terse smile of thick lips shinning with a delicate lip balm, "believed you would be reluctant to come, and so he instructed me to leave this with you." She handed over a large envelope with the Papal seal in deep red wax across the flap. "*Le' Papa* could no longer write, but he asked me to tell you verbally to continue your mission." Urging the other to take the package from her, "I have taken funds from the Papal Treasury that will cover your every contingency."

"So John Paul told you about my mission. It was my understanding that it was our little secret. I was to answer to Him alone." He handled the envelope like it was filled with drug money still soaked with cocaine, wreaking intolerably of sin. Nikki cringed inside to see how he handled it.

"I know of the Holy Father's pledge of secrecy," Nikki said. "Once he is gone I alone will know of your work, until you've brought your research to closure." Then, almost desperately, she implored her host to invite her inside. "Please, my kind *Monsignor*." The hellacious heat had suddenly become balmy from the humidity carried hence by the storm front. The heat index spiked, and even Kase began to sweat profusely

while rocking gently in the shade. Clearly the damsel was far more distressed than he. Common courtesy finally got the best of his weak sympathy, and he invited her in.

It wasn't any warmer inside, but in a short while the air conditioning made the small living room tolerable. The AC pulled the humidity down, and after a while the temperature began to drop too. Soon it was below 90F, and Kase visibly relaxed - even if Nikki suffers still. They were sitting across from each other with a tall glass of ice water each, Nikki on a modern three cushion couch and Kase in another rocking chair. It was a small living room, with barely a square inch to move between modern furniture and some antique blackwood chests of drawers. The walls were covered with books. More books were in simple wood bookcases on the floor. Ivy fell down the front of an elegant oak chest with a glass front to the top half, revealing fine porcelain china in blue and white. Small ivory statues of Michelangelo's David and the famous greek Discus Thrower were displayed amidst the 1800's vintage china. The external filter of an aquarium along one wall whirred, and beside it a small aerating bubble generator percolated. A ceiling fan in the middle of the room above the coffee table that stood between Kase and Nikki lulled them into a sympathetic tone, despite the uncomfortably close quarters.

"I'll miss John Paul very much," said the messenger. She hitched up her long skirt slightly, and crossed her legs. The coffee table was too close to the sofa, and she had to twist sideways to keep from knocking the coffee table with a high heel. It was several seconds before Nikki finally got acclimated, somewhat miffed. Then, noticing Kase watching her she became embarrassed, "I'm sorry, Father but I do not know your name."

"My name is Kase Clearey, but *Le' Papa* always called me Lucifer," with a smile. "I was his Fallen Angel, his very own Judas who would be the Almighty's enforcer and the bearer of bad news to the world." Kase was quite relaxed himself. He'd knocked off his sandals when he let Nikki in, and let the ceiling fan evaporate the sweat from his bare chest. After a few minutes, and several inelegant shivers from the chill, he donned an old T shirt that was two sizes too small for him and threadbare along all the seams. He clearly relished Nikki's discomfort, and wasn't about to make her more comfortable by dressing up to her level.

"I'm sorry again, but I don't know about your mission either," Nikki said. Then, spreading her hands with palms up, she gave the classic European sign for forgive me and tell me more. She was seated by the window and because of the glare Kase couldn't see her very clearly. She was shapely, but also strong like an Olympian. No doubt the slight misproportion was due to muscles not fat, judging by her iron man hand shake. She had a delicate face, and a full head of long, straight jet black

hair. Had it not been for the clerical collar, you'd have thought her an actress.

"I'm hesitant to tell you much. But what I do tell you – now or any other time, you must pledge never, ever to reveal any of it in confession." The diplomat nodded, but Kase pressed further. "If you must confess, it must be to me – say out loud that you understand and agree." The diplomat agreed, in French accented English. Neither of them spoke, and then she attempted to break the awkwardness between them.

"My name, Father, is Donna Marie Gâteaux. My close friends call me Nikki. I'm from the south of France and a place called Albe." Imperceptibly her chin jutted upward, with pride. "We are the province that originated the Albegensian Heresy in the 1200's. We're the people whom the Inquisition was meant to obliterate." Kase had nodded his acknowledgment. "It seems to me that John Paul has chosen me for this very reason. Am I not correct?"

"Indeed. I'd have trusted no one else, except with a background such as yours." Kase still vacillated with indecision momentarily, eyes closed in either prayer or pain. "My mission, Sister Gâteaux, was to brief the Holy Father on the condition of the small 2% but growing number of people afflicted with schizophrenia. He was very concerned for their souls. He thought it a Christian act of charity to seek them out and provide them solace."

The svelte lady diplomat interrupted. "Knowing the Pope better than you, I believe also he was curious." Then she nodded a few times, as if convincing herself of this. "Schizophrenics are well known to be fanatically religious, skewed though their perspective sometimes is. There's very little that differs between the state of religious euphoria, and that of schizoid conditions ~ Joan of Arc had visions, and most people thought she was insane; so, ultimately, she was burned at the stake. It was only later that her profound impact on society proved, in retrospect, that she was a blessed saint and not a blisped psycho."

"Or maybe the Church," Kase said cynically, "Always looking out for their corporate sponsors - is afraid the war on terrorism will diminish the supply of illegal drugs in the world." Nikki looked quite lost at his logic. "Writers, artists, actors, and musicians will no longer be able to get high; so society will need to depend on those who are naturally creative - the sundance kid, alias schizo kid. Can't have the quality of TV or the movies diminish, now can we - or people will start to pay attention to how rotten society and politics is, and rile themselves into doing something about it."

Nikki was trying to follow that bit of contorted logic, when Kase interrupted, "Have I been away too long, or have I missed women priests wearing clerical collars?" not too subtle about changing the subject.

"I'm as much of an experiment as you, kind Sir" she said demurely with a slight bow of her head. "The Holy Father was experimenting with female priests... *viola*." Said proudly, a little bit too loud, and with a flurry of arms and hands.

Kase thought briefly, then smiled for the first time. "On second thought, perhaps I will accompany you back to the Vatican." Then with a flourish, as he left the room to prepare for the long trip, the words fading as he bustled away. "And together you and I can ask the Holy Father to approve one last experiment – that of holy matrimony between his female priestess and his hench man Lucifer," said through the open bathroom door as he began a quick navy shower.

Nikki got up off the sofa, and wandered to a window in a dining alcove off the living room. There was no table, but another two cushion sofa ~ and naturally more books on the walls. A set of Britannica, the Great Books encyclopedia, and a small CD and DVD collection. She tilted open the mini venetian blinds, and was surprised to see a family of deer staring at her from the yard outside. Kase saw her as he made a dash from the bathroom to the bedroom at the opposite end of the house, rapped in a towel. "There's a loaf of whole wheat bread on the counter in the kitchen," he directed Nikki. "Take it out and feed the dear, if you will."

The kitchen was right off the so called dining alcove. It was as cluttered as the rest of the house, with bright orange walls and dark brown cabinet doors. A tier of open shelves above the white formica counter top was full of dishes, mixed with nick nacks. There were elegant card decks and small wood placards, both with bull fighting scenes. Another bull fighting scene decorated a plastic serving tray sitting above old electric stove with enough chrome to put a Harley Davidson to shame. This one was a poster featuring one of the old greats, El Cordobes.

Nikki found the bread, and stepped out the dark green back door, into a small back yard full of mature oaks, between which was stretched a clothes line. The deer came right around the corner to the back when they heard the door open. Nikki tentatively tossed a slice of brown bread in their direction - there were two mature deer, and two small does still with their spots - and they immediately took the whole piece in their mouth, and started eating. It was a silly sight, and Nikki laughed. The half loaf of bread was gone in no time, and the deer with their big black noses glistening with moisture came within an arms length of her, seeking more. She backed into the kitchen, gently closing the heavy metal door. Looking out thorough a window above the kitchen sink, the deer had laid down in the tall grass in the shade of the oaks. Nikki returned to the living room, and sat in the rocker, marveling at how much stuff had been fit into such a small space, but with no obvious sense of clutter.

Minutes later Kase returned, and began pulling clothes from the cabinets and closets opening off the living area. He explained that the bedroom was an office, and that the bedroom furnishings were actually all over the house. Nikki frowned, but Kase explained it works OK for a single guy with nothing but a cat for a room mate. He was wearing all black now – shirt, pants, shoes, socks, and even tie. Everything was clean, shining. The creases were expertly starched. They chatted as he packed things for the trip, as Nikki surreptitiously picked the cat hairs off her fine dark suit, then stood up to avoid any more. Just then the cat in question sauntered around the corner, jumped up on the small sofa Nikki was leaning against, and began to purr loudly - butting against Nikki as it did so. It was a large grey and white persian - the old kind with a full face, not the new breed with the smashed face - with long frizzy hair.

“I see you are not wearing the white clerical collar,” Nikki said as she stepped subtly away from the cat and brushed some fresh cat hair off her skirt. Then with a clap of her hands, she laughed with glee. “But of course – is it not your United States Naval Academy outfit, when you were a student there.” Then more mischievously, “Alas – beware the Pope’s enforcer.” At the sound of the clap, purring cat had scurried around the corner into the kitchen, where she could be heard crunching on some food.

“No, my lady. It's more like, Alas – beware the priest who will be tarred and feathered just as soon as his benefactor is deceased, and his mission is found out.” And then, when Nikki frowned slightly, not understanding. “Alas – watch the much hated priest disappear into the rambling streets of Rome, blending seamlessly into the populace just, another man in silent mourning at the passing of Saint John Paul.”

“You're concerned for your safety – in the city of Angels itself?” Then she fished something out of her handbag, a very large golden ring encrusted with jewels wrapped in a soft crimson cloth. She stood and almost reverentially, stepped over to Kase and handed the ring to him – cloth and all.

Kase took the bundle, unwrapped it. It was only seconds before he realized what it was and instinctively he was on his knees and weeping.

“I'm so very sorry, Father Clearey. The Holy Father has already deceased. Only moments before I arrived at your door step.” Placing a hand gently on his shoulder as waves of shock wrecked his body, she said gently. “John Paul asked that you keep his Papal ring as a sign of your mission, and His very great trust in you. When you're safely done, there will be a private ceremony to melt down John Paul's ring and to then place it with his remains under Saint Peter's Basilica like with all his predecessors.”

They remained so for the longest time – Kase recovering from the shock; and Nikki gripping his shoulder, moved beyond grief herself to see how deeply the news had moved the cleric. Then she implored quietly, “Father Kase – do you see what this means? Your mentor is gone, but he has entrusted the mission to you with this Papal signet.”

“Yes, it is so.” Then he got up and then continued packing his bags. Sister Donna Marie thought he was doing so out of some detached reality the grief had driven him to. Until he explained, “I shall go to Rome as planned,” and when Nikki backed off a pace looking a little bit lost and confused.

“Your mission plan has changed as well.” Kase said with confidence. “You’ll accompany me, and be my eyes until we get to the bottom of this thing.”

Nikki got up herself then, her strong back a little bit straighter than it was before, and tried to tidy up the horrible mess Kase’s packing had left behind. A quick call to a neighbor with instructions to look after the cat - and the deer - and they were both out the door and en route for Rome.

An argument ensued shortly after they were on the road into Austin. They both thought the other was dressed too conservatively. Bad things were said like cold sister in a habit, countered by grim reaper in the morning. Then it was quiet for a moment, as each pondered a fresh barrage of insults. It was Irish rage against French panache, and there seemed no compromise was pending, possible – or even sought.

Both passengers were startled back to reality when the driver abruptly slid closed, the window separating his compartment to the rear of the vehicle. They became self conscious about what was said, realizing that somebody had been listening; moreover, the size of the vehicle was cut in half with the driver’s compartment so isolated from the passenger cab, and their loud voices seemed much louder and their intimacy too close.

By the time hostilities were about to be renewed under new rules of engagement, they were off the winding Hill Country road and into the bustling community of Cedar Park – not too recently the fastest growing point in America. Not too far from the fastest growing intersection of this Cedar Park was a giant mall, and it was to there that Kase directed the driver. A little too quickly, the driver steered through the Lakeline mall parking lot and dropped his still sparring passengers at the main entrance to JC Penny’s.

The two clerics were still locked in heated conversation, as they walked through the double doors and into the giant store. As fate would

have it – or probably design – they stepped right into the middle of the women's clothing section.

Nikki fell immediately silent, and drifted off through the racks of fashionable summer clothes like a corn farmer into endless fields of healthy green stalks swaying in a light humid breeze. Kase fell in behind her, suddenly wary because it was clear the good Sister had never been inside a store like this before, or even imagined her own body enclosed in delicate and colorful wrappings like these. It was like a young girl suddenly projected into the sexually mature body of a grown woman, complete with hormone chaos and the sensual climax of self realization. Worse actually, because this lady had the will of a killer whale and the wit of a great white shark.

Much to his consternation, Nikki made a bee line toward the lingerie. She selected a few brassieres off the rack, all lacy and what Kase thought were several sizes too large for her. He moved to grab her hand and explain, only to have his hand slapped loudly away. Nervously Nikki moved toward the dressing room; then, shyly, retreated to where Kase stood shocked and helpless, grabbing his hand in hers and pulling him behind her.

In his ever active mind's eye, Kase could just see the picture they made. A frazzled nun carrying a fistful of colorful bras, with downtrodden man dressed in black in tow every bit the cloistered monk. It was their good fortune that the place was practically empty and that the usually solicitous sales people kept their distance – probably more out of fright than respect. So into the empty women's dressing room they went, and right on into a large corner alcove, the solid wood door closing ominously behind them.

Kase felt himself being pushed down into a seated position, and heard more than saw Nikki unclasp herself and then she was kneeling down with her back facing him and his bleary eyes opened to see two hands grasping clasps of the bra and motioning him to do the honors of locking them together. Shyness long since gone with the wind, Kase did as he was told; and then they were out into the open area and Nikki was eyeing her suddenly quite robust chest in the mirror, while Kase made himself as invisible as you can be, wearing a black outfit in a brightly lit dressing area with dazzling white walls.

“This feels absolutely glorious,” said Nikki – up on her tiptoes and then bouncing a little as the loose flesh of her breasts settled into their new firmament. Kase squinted out at her, motioned his approval – then opened his eyes full, to confirm first impression. Yes, those were stretch marks from what had evidently been a sport bra that she had been wearing. That would explain the sudden largesse of her bust, and also

probably the light headed feeling he was experiencing himself right about now.

“You must give me an opinion,” she said. Kase was cornered now, and Nikki stepped toward him and, turning, lifted his hands up to cup under her breasts. “Is this a good fit, Father Clearey?” she asked purposefully loudly, and Kase could see an evil smile at the corners of her mouth in her reflection in the mirror.

“What makes you think I know what’s a good fit,” he retorted somewhat impudently. But his hands were already giving him away, as he gently probed the seams and felt the tightness of the straps and fabric. “It’s just an engineering problem is all,” he muttered beneath his breath, “statics and dynamics.”

After taking a little too long to make his field inspection of the device, Kase felt another slap reddening his cheek and he was scolded by the damsel, now clearly in distress. With as level and calm a tone as he could muster, Kase advised her that the fit was too tight and that a larger cup was needed, maybe a larger size too; especially since it would probably shrink, and – by which time he found himself alone in the women’s dressing room, Nikki having rushed right out into the lobby clad only in a too tight bra and skirt unzipped half way to her crotch. Seizing the moment, he grabbed Nikki’s blouse and scurried out to drape it over her arms as she was making a most serious study of the accouterments displayed out upon the bra rack.

Showing eminent good sense, Nikki was not long after happily outfitted with a delicate cloth brassiere, no wire support or uplifting features necessary because she was much too well endowed. She graciously sought Kase’s opinion on a blouse to suit, and eventually somewhat reluctantly chose a sheer satin thing that was just see through enough to reveal the busting contours of the bra, which seemed to please Kase and in any event felt cool and classy against her skin.

By comparison, Kase’s clothes were chosen infinitely fast because Kase couldn’t see well in the first place and didn’t much care what he was wearing, and Nikki was more than agreeable to outfit him just as she desired. He ended up wearing khaki trousers, and a pale blue shirt with a little horseman on the chest named Ralph playing polo, that fit his athletic physique and made Nikki smile.

Standing by the curb waiting for their ride to negotiate the mall traffic, each carried an armful of new packages – mostly held between them, to somehow negotiate a little distance between them after the sensational clothes spree. Not to mention being embarrassed wearing

civilian clothes, and trying valiantly to ward off the creepy feeling that somehow this was sinful to be so attired, and even more so to feel so good about it. Nevertheless, being both of them honest heretics, the angst was gone in no time at all and when they bundled into the car once again they were the model modern couple.

The rear passenger compartment was taken up by volume in thirds; one third each to Nikki, Kase, and their purchases. At first they both had packages on their laps, and every where else. Then the boxes and bundles ended up in the middle, between them. No sooner had that happened than Kase, watching the cedars go by out the window as they sped toward Round Rock, felt a hand steal through the barrier of boxes, into his space, onto his lap; then grasp him between his legs. He squirmed with surprise, then spread his legs nonchalantly, and the strong, manicured fingers embedded themselves. Then Nikki squealed as Kase became hard. Immediately, they were tossing packages at each other like a couple of high school kids.

The driver, distracted, called them to a halt. The next few minutes were quiet behind him, but for the unfurling of packing and the tearing of paper and plastic. Suddenly, four hands started stuffing all the discarded wrapping paper into the passenger seat beside the driver. He drove the rest of the way to the airport like that, but at least his incorrigible passengers behaved themselves.

"Is it true," Kase asked, "That women wearing a skirt can have an orgasm by just rubbing their legs together, from the feeling of their inner thighs." Nikki blushed purple, and said yes I think so ever so demurely. But Kase could tell this was news to her, because she was trying just that to see if it worked. Moments later Nikki said a little more positively, yes it seems that might lead to orgasm - then added, batting her eyelids, given the proper stimulation. Kase ignored her, and pointed to a large complex of buildings to the east of the interstate as they drove through Round Rock going south toward Austin.

"There's Dell Square," Kase showed her. "The world wide headquarters of Dell Computers." Nikki wasn't more than casually interested, until he added. "To think that \$25 out of every \$1000 you pay for a new Dell computer goes right into Michael Dell's bank account."

Nikki was riled. "What does the richest billionaire in the world need with \$25, from the likes of you and I - even, from perhaps the poorest people in the world?" Kase ignored her.

"Not only that, but the likes of Micahel Dell, Sam Walton, Bill Gates, and all the other billionaires in the world all by themselves add a quarter of a percentage point to inflation each year, just because all that capitol they own isn't vested in free enterprise."

Nikki slammed her fist into his leg, "That's criminal." Then gently maneuvered the hand toward Kase's private parts. Kase tried his best to distract her.

"Don't you ever wonder how, if penniless people like you and I can have extreme sympathy for the poor people in the world - living in cardboard boxes by the millions in Mexico City, in the streets of New Deli, and throughout China," taking Nikki's hand in his. "If our hearts bleed in empathy because we have a roof over our heads and four square meals a day... how can a billionaire justify hoarding wealth so extreme that he's actually stealing from the poor by contributing to the inflation that diminishes the value of the poor man's negligible funds."

Nikki squeezed his hand and said only God knows. They watched silently as they approached the outskirts of Austin, then passed the University of Texas buidings on the right; then the beautiful pink granite state capitol building; and a scattering of tall buildings in downtown. All the instruments of power of the monied elite. Then across Town Lake, and right after was the loop to the left, toward the new Austin International Airport.

As the late model sedan approached the airport, Nikki was surprised when they exited onto a service road, then immediately onto the tarmac and right up to a sleek black twin engine leer jet. She had wanted to traipse through the famous airport lobby to see if there were any live music bands playing. She pouted when Kase told her firmly that they had played enough games for one day, and time was of the essence.

"S.P.Q.R" Nikki read off the tail of the jet, silver letters stenciled above a silver eagle. "*Senatus et Populus Que Romanus*" she said distantly, "For the Senate and People of Rome."

"That was the emblem of the Praetorian Guard," mused Kase. "The letters and the eagle were emblazoned on a bright red flag, and it signified their devotion to Rome." When he saw this was new to Nikki, he continued, trying to lighten her suddenly dark mood.

"The Pratorean Guard was formed a few years after Julius Caesar was assassinated in 33 BC. They were originally chosen from Caesar's favorite legion, Legion X – the Tenth Legion – which by all accounts was the most feared fighting force in Antiquity. When Caesar joined the enemy in battle, it was invariably Legion X that anchored his battle line. It's a pity they couldn'tt protect him from a few timid Senators wielding carving knives. Caesar's successor, Augustus, was the one who created the Praetorian Guard.

"As the Republic of Rome became an Empire, and over the centuries as the Emperor became a God, the Praetorian Guard became less of a personal bodyguard and more of a political influence. They were the balance between the Senate and the Emperor, and were the soul of

Rome – choosing honor over glory, freedom over dominion. They curbed the debauchery of evil Emperors, and calmed the Senate's constant clamoring for a voice in the government. They were the momentum of *Pax Romana*, the bedrock of the longest period of peace ever known to man.

“The Praetorian Guard was obliterated by the Emperor Constantine on October 30, in 312 AD at the Battle of Milvian Bridge – a stone bridge about ten miles from Rome, that stands to this day. The Emperor was weary of the high standards imposed upon him by the Praetorians, so he destroyed them. The Roman Empire was gone in less than a generation, decomposed from a mighty secular domain into an incipient religious one.

“It's rumored that the few Praetorians who survived Milvian Bridge moved east into the wilderness of modern day Romania and that it was they who protected the soft inner heart of Europe from the Turk hordes. They were greatly outnumbered and had to resort to terrifying tactics – impaling Turks on stakes, burning alive dissidents in their own population. It was from this chaos that the legend of Count Dracula emerged, and was sensationalized by Bram Stoker in Victorian England. All of this obscured the fact that were it not for Dracul's actions, Europe would have been quickly over run by the Turks and the Christian civilization would have been replaced by an Islamic one.

Then, seeming surprised at his own long windiness, Kase stopped abruptly. “Forgive me, Sister Donna Maria – it's a story told me from the cradle, to exhort me to a life of honor and selfish deeds for the common good.” Nikki nodded sympathetically, but livened up when he added, “Because October 30 is my birthday.”

Then, struggling to be a good companion on the long international flight, Kase inquired conversationally, “How does a pretty French woman end up with a Spanish name?”

Nikki smiled and blushed lightly, speaking demurely “My ancestors come from the Province of Albe but my blood is Basque – the separatist region of Spain on the border with France.” Then trying to justify the discrepancy, “Heretics then – heretics now, what more can I say?” Kase smiled and said nothing; evidently wishing her to say more.

“So ya'll were the people who believed Satan was God's equal” Kase interjected. “Correct me if I'm wrong, but don't you believe that Satan and evil are not subordinate to God as the Church taught; but that Satan and God were equals and independent, as suggested in the Book of Job?”

Flustered, Nikki said “Yes, this is true – as far as it goes; but tell me, how do you know of this?”

Facetiously, he replied “Lucifer knows about all heresies.” Then added tactfully, “I have made my life's work the study and interpretation of the Book of Job. It's there that God and Satan are treated as equals, when they make a wager between them about whether Job will lose his faith in the face of terrible hardship and personal pain.”

“I detect from your cynicism that you believe we Albens elevate Satan to the same level of power as God because we worship Satan. That's not the truth at all. We do so to show everybody that Satan is powerful and influential; can you deny so now, in this modern world?”

Kase was duly cowed, and she continued.

“Besides, when the Church announced the need to purge The Albigenian Heresy the Satan-God dichotomy of our philosophy was only an excuse to incur the wrath of the Holy Roman Church. The real reason is that the Church did not approve of the growing freedom movement in the south of France, which threatened the world order. It was just like your own Civil War – any historian will tell you that it was not about slavery at all. The poor whites in the Old South lived in far worse conditions than any black slave, who may not have been free but they were gainfully employed, well fed, well clothed, and otherwise taken quite well care of. None of which applied to the poor white population. Lincoln's Proclamation of Emancipation was a political action taken to further military goals; and not a compassionate act of a humanitarian.”

“I couldn't agree more – having many ancestors who fought for the Confederate flag, and at Vicksburg as well. But tell me, how is it you know so much about the American Civil War.”

“We Albens make it a point to know about all civil wars.”

“Point taken.”

“It's no coincidence that the Inquisition was based in Spain. Once the Albens were declared heretics, and the purge began; those who didn't fight, fled south to Spain. There was a civil war in France, as the Church fomented the fears of the northern provinces of France to excise the radical views on the Church they had in the South – where freedom was more cherished than obeisance to the feudal Church based system. Too bad, but freedom was not yet to be – and all the powers of church and state were used to eradicate the heresy.”

“Once the civil war in France cleansed the land of these liberal thinkers, the border was secured by the authorities and then the Inquisition was begun in Spain. The few Albens who clung to their beliefs were soon found out, and burned at the stake. It's written in the Vatican archives, that the Albens believed in a heresy. Freedom was, at that time, evil and so we were purged from the gene pool of the continent.”

“Disparaging the Abgens by branding us heretics is not unlike the fate of your own ancestors, whom all the world believes were vampires and drinkers of human blood.”

“Indeed,” Kase interrupted pointedly. “In our case however, the myth happens to be the truth.”

“This cannot be true,” and Kase nodded. “Drinking blood – human’s blood?” Another nod. “But surely, it is a thing of the past – no?”

“Absolutely not – it’s virginal blood that we imbibe; or should I rather say vaginal?” And suddenly Nikki was blushing furiously, and quickly hurried out of the room muttering something about needing the restroom.

Kase was riled, and followed her to the rear of the small plane and talked through the closed and locked door. “It’s true, Nikki. Where’s the harm in it – taking sustenance from what would be wasted otherwise? Human blood is rich in protein and iron and many other necessary chemicals – blood from the uterus intended to nurture a child in the mother’s womb is better yet - it’s like taking a multi vitamin, but infinitely more potent.” He stopped when he thought he heard Nikki retching and gagging; and slowly walked back to the cabin, disgusted in himself.

Evidently Nikki had pondered a comeback of her own, and upon her return she asked, “So what is Lucifer’s brood going to do about the latest Arab assault upon Christendom – in the persona of OPEC and sucking the life blood out of the west by virtue of our oil lust? Start a new Crusade – but Iraq isn’t working, is it?”

Pretending to be defeated, Kase waited until Nikki started to gloat. “Lucifer’s solution, if you insist; is simplicity itself – energy conservation. As being something of an expert in the field myself, I could tell you how the world’s energy consumption could be reduced by 25% overnight.”

“No way, senor – *es impossible*,” Nikki said the Spanish words with an endearing French accent. Complimenting the romance language innuendo, her body spoke volumes too. She had bounced onto her feet and was firmly planted in front of Kase, hands on hips and a rather convincing scowl upon her pretty face.

Kase was startled enough to widen his perpetual squint to look fully at her, and it was then he noticed the results of her recent retreat to the restroom. The smooth skin of her face was freshly scrubbed and cheeks lightly rouged, complimenting a delicate new orange tint to her lipstick. It brought out a smattering of light freckles on and about Nikki’s small nose, that made her look girlish and innocent. She’d even

unbuttoned her blouse so that as she leaned over now he could see deep cleavage, but the new bra was performing well too, he noticed.

“Yes, way - my beautiful *senorita*.” Kase shouted with an emotional flare of his own. “It’s even very cheap and easy to do – simply paint the shingles of your roof white, if you’re in a warm climate; and *immediatemente* – your summer cooling bill drops by 25%.”

“You’re serious, Father Kase” as she leaned over further, bending from the waist and staring him square in the eyes. He took the moment to dramatically open his eyes, and Nikki noticed he was focused not upon his startled audience but upon his audience’s *décolletage*. His guess was correct. She had not been aware how her movements exposed her bosom, in this brand new outfit of hers; nor how dramatic an affect this display of delicate white flesh had upon him. With a harrumph and a little turn to the side, she impishly buttoned up her blouse – then just as mischevously, unbuttoned it back again and crashed into the sofa beside Kase; turning sideways to face him, leaning back against the arm and sinking visibly into the deep soft cushions.

“So we Basques have been all these years whitewashing the stone walls of our villages, when we should have been whitening the roofs.” She shook her head, loosing the long hair from her neck; and frowned still unable to believe it.

“It’s true. You recall the energy crisis in California a few years ago?” Nikki nodded, being quite serious now. “All they needed to do was run out and paint all the dark colored roofs in the state white, and *viola* – the energy crisis would have been over the next morning.”

“And in places like northern Europe, or in the mountains of France where it’s cold – how are they to save so much energy?” Thinking she had trapped him.

“Why paint light colored roofs dark, is what,” reaching out with a rap to her knee. “And their winter heating bills drop just as dramatically.”

“I am understanding you right, that all these poor people who spend thousands of *pesetas* for extra insulation in the attic – all they really needed to do was just install light colored shingles on their roofs? This is just not making sense – why has this never been told; poor people like we Basques are ever vigilant to ways to save money – most especially as energy has gotten more and more expensive.”

“The insulation helps – but if you have an attic space, a \$50 attic fan saves even more energy in cooling a building than extra insulation costing twenty times as much!” Which got an immediate reaction from Nikki, and she was back upon her feet and confronting him with the same *décolletage*. Then she pretended to unfasten a few more buttons, and spread her shoulders apart to accentuate her natural attributes even more – “Tell me more, energy czar; tell me everything...”

“So sorry; energy guru is immune to feminine persuasion – but perhaps in this case, softened up a little.” As he paused to gather his logic to explain yet another way to save energy, Nikki laughed and kicked his leg lightly with her stockinged foot.

“*Basta, signore* ~ no more engineering please – I give up; I believe you. Just do not tax my brain any more.” Then she shook her hair loose, and managed a good impression of a distraught damsel in distress all collapsed upon the sofa. Kase just left her there and padded out of the room, muttering something about finding a bite to eat.

Nikki ran swiftly after him, physically restraining him from the kitchen and pushing him back toward the lounge. “My apologies, but *la cucina* is no place to conserve energy – not if you wish to prepare cuisine fit for human consumption. You just leave the dinner time to me, and go rest yourself and your blood shot eyes – but *no mas vino, capiche?*” she added slyly.

Moments later Nikki thought she heard a rhythmic thumping coming from the front of the plane, and dashed out of the small kitchen thinking there was something terribly wrong with the aircraft. It was only Kase lying flat on his back, ankle weights strapped on and doing the knee exercises he needed in order to walk. His eyes were closed and one straight leg went up with a giant weight strapped to the ankle; then a count of ten; back down to the floor; then again. Nikki though she was unnoticed, watching his whole body tense with each repetition; but then he smiled and winked. This upset her greatly and she turned on a dime and bounded back into the kitchen. “Men.... they are good for next to nothing” made it back to Kase’s sensitive ears.

Twenty minutes later wonderful smells wafted into the small lounge, and Nikki stole out of the kitchen and when she peeked around the corner, there was some strange man setting a table and not doing a bad job of it either. Nikki pantomimed the solicitous *matre’d* and playfully corrected Kase’s crude American place settings. Unlike before, he was gracious and elegant in the face of her hyper energy level; and Nikki decided the knee exercises must be a good thing for him somehow; and it dawned upon her that they must be to relieve great pain. Yes, that’s where the deep lines at the edge of the eyes come from; and why the eyes are set far into the brow – years of great pain. Perceptively, she surmised that not all of the pain was physical, but spiritual and mental as well.

As if reading her thoughts, Kase mentioned an old Army injury to the knees; and the need for regular exercises – the knees had no cartilage, and the muscles had to be strengthened to do the job of the

missing cartilage – otherwise it's bone on bone there. Nikki cringed at the thought. "Other men bring along their shaving kit whenever they travel; I bring along my ankle weights – besides I don't much like to shave anyway." To which Nikki made some snide remark then returned quickly to the kitchen and sounds of a pot boiling over.

It wasn't too long before they were seated before a simple but bounteous repast; Kase suddenly clean shaven, and Nikki making great pretense to wipe beads of sweat off her brow – being quite sure that Kase appreciated all the trouble she'd gone too. They dined in complete silence, although Kase managed a wide spectrum of appreciative sounds as he made a veritable hog out of himself, wolfing down every dish she had prepared. Nikki herself ate lightly, then when they both had their fill excused herself and gathered dishes to be washed. Kase found his voice, chided her for leaving the table unannounced; then promptly gathered the dishes himself and post haste everything was all sparkling clean.

When he returned to the lounge, Nikki was settled into the sofa and clicking through all the news channels on the remote television monitor. The sound was off, but all the channels were covering preparations for the Pope's funeral anyway. Kase offered her a delicate china cup and poured her strong *cappuccino* like a solicitous waiter; then settled down beside her, with his own cup of fragrant herbal tea. He motioned Nikki to turn the sound up and they spent the next while following the events, and especially all the dignitaries in attendance. Kase seemed to know them all; and a lot about each one too, even the minor figures. It was a whole new world, and she was enthralled.

Abruptly Nikki realized that she and Kase would be there in *Roma* before the sun set; and that they would be amongst the dignitaries, and before the cameras – and all that implied.

"Yes, Nikki – you'll be shopping again for a suitable outfit for the funeral; and no I will be happy to stay behind if you wish, but would be forever grateful if you would accompany me and allow me to benefit from your exquisite taste in the selection of my own wardrobe for the events."

Nikki smiled and patted him on the knee tenderly. He seemed asleep, so she ratcheted down the sound on the tele – but with a soft no from Kase, followed by a belated please; and she realized he had only closed his eyes and was listening intently to the commentary. So the sound came back up; but Nikki was herself soon sound asleep on the sofa, curled into a semi fetal position and clutching a large velvet cushion for dear life.

Nikki awoke with a start, looking around in the dimmed lights of the lounge. Kase was nowhere to be seen. Curious, she padded toward to kitchen; passing the restroom where the door was ajar, nobody within. She found Kase leaning over the kitchenette sink, putting some viscous drops into his eyes. Feels like motor oil, this stuff he noted.

“Your eyes – they aren't because of a genetic predisposition are they?” Nikki said with conviction. “I know because the tear drops come from the same place as saliva, and your mouth is never dry – or even gracious, come to think of it.”

“You're very observant – for a heretic” Kase countered. “You're also right. The condition is due to stress; chronic, extreme, prolonged stress.”

“I've read accounts, where modern practitioners believe stigmata is caused by stress.”

“I passed that stage many years ago. The knee exercises help relieve the stress in my ankles; I do similar exercises for my wrists and arms. It's quite interesting, how predictable are the precursors to stigmata ~ I used to think it was poison ivy; but poison ivy doesn't bleed, it just blisters.”

Kase had kept his closed while talking, working the ointment into every crevice of his eyes. In fact, it would not be possible for him to open his eyes for many minutes, until the lubricant was diluted by tears stimulated by the treatment. Being in an unfamiliar place, he was suddenly disoriented – and implored meekly into the darkness, for Nikki to take his hand. She led him back to the lounge, then sat down but Kase strangely remained standing.

“Why the sudden distance, Sister Donna Maria. Where's your wit and witticism?” She was ominously silent, but he knew she was there still on the sofa because she could hear her short breaths, almost as though she were in a panic.

“For a moment,” Nikki said softly, “I felt as if I were in the presence of the Archangel Lucifer himself” stuttering, she continued. “I mean, Popes don't show this kind of deference to mere mortals – and, well; I just was afraid, of you.”

“I know the feeling. I feel just the same way myself at times; not knowing what to do with myself or what to do with my life and my obligations.” His vision was starting to clear, and he blinked a shy smile Nikki's way. “If its any consolation, I'm more than a bit in awe of you, if you want to know the honest truth.” Then Nikki gently drew him down to the couch beside her, and the fearful future seemed slightly less so to them both.

“Just between us sparrows, I've always believed Lucifer to be a feminine archetype.”

“Well, at least you're smarter than you look” Nikki said quietly, and started to say more but Kase touched her lips with his hand and she was silent.

II. Roma, Italia

Nikki awoke just as they were flying over France. Kase didn't show up until they were across the Alps and well into Italy.

"You've digressed to the sports bra, I notice" was Kase's caustic greeting, as he ambled sleepily into the lounge – having slept on the kitchen floor quite comfortably.

"You're very observant," turning self consciously away from him, "Too damn observant for a man of the Cloth." He was by this time completely ignoring her, which was infuriating. Nikki's emotions took control.

"I was not comfortable with that lingerie. It gave me delicate feelings when I wore it; it made my nipples hard and the breasts engorged with blood and burst at the seams."

"So your were aroused by me, and you blame it on the bra."

"Don't be ridiculous. I'm a high Sister in a prestigious and disciplined order. We don't have feelings like that."

"I read somewhere that the true heresy of the Albigensians was not the equal status of God and Satan. I read that it was a much more French explanation, that they believed that the sin of lust didn't include autonomous reactions such as you have ascribed to me. Is that true?"

"I've already said that you had no effect upon me whatsoever. Why does your male ego insist otherwise? I've said it was the feeling of soft linen, and how it uplifted me and made me feel feminine; that's what initiated the arousal - not some lame priest with a bitter message and an ax to grind with his God."

"You didn't answer my question, Goddess."

After a brief withdrawal, and an almost comical grimace, Nikki crossed her arms defiantly and said with her back to the room, "OK, what if it might be true - what's to prove us wrong?"

But Kase was already out of the room and lathering up his face for an early morning shave in the bathroom against the five o'clock shadow, Texas time.

"How is it that you're so extremely well versed in the Albigensian Heresy?" she asked when he exited the restroom, slapping a light aftershave on his chin and cheeks. "Very few of our Order even know of the lust theology."

"As an archaeologist by training, you should know very well that archaeologists aren't the only people interested in Antiquity." Nikki would

not dignify this statement to ask how he knew her profession; evidently John Paul had briefed him on this.

"Yours is more than an interest - it's an obsession, to have delved so deeply into our secrets. Not even the Vatican Archives mention this aspect of our heresy." Then more quietly, "because we have purged any mention from the official record."

"I bet I know a few things about Egyptology that are beyond your experience."

"Not possible. Egypt is my obsession; my whole life."

"Then you know the Osireion at Abydos?"

Nikki laughed, hollered in fact. "You believe those Atlantis and Gods Walked Among Us myths about the Osireion? I didn't think you such a stupid fool, Father Kase. Or an idiot to assume that you could undermine my authority using trash like that."

"Then you were not aware that the syntax on the writings of the wall of the Osireion match the syntax of the writings of the Book of Job?" But Nikki had blocked him out completely, and he pursued the subject no further. He could tell that his remark had gotten the wheels turning, though; as Nikki was now deep in thought.

The flaps were lowered and the aircraft began its final descent. Nikki and Kase were for the next few minutes temporarily on the same wavelength, watching the approach to Rome through the port side windows. It was late in the evening, traffic was light, and only prominent landmarks could be seen lighted. It was raining. The monuments glistened. The pilot gave them a spectacular view of Saint Peter's Basilica. Even from their altitude the whole area could be seen crowded with mourners, rain be damned.

"I'm still not satisfied with your profound knowledge of the Albigenian Heresy. Your comportment makes me paranoid. I think you might be a modern day Inquisitor seeking to purge dissent from the Church." Said as they taxied down the runway after a clean landing.

It was Kase's turn to laugh, uproariously. "Calm your fears, little Sister. There's an entirely sensible explanation; and besides, I happen to agree with your heresy."

But Nikki wasn't convinced. Her face was locked with a steel resolve.

"OK, as you wish. But it will have to wait until we're on the road into the city." Nikki didn't speak a single solitary word as they embarked, whisked through customs on her diplomatic credentials, then were escorted into a chauffeur driven limousine with the utmost courtesy. No sooner than the car doors had closed and they were adrift on the road, than Nikki beckoned him with a motion of her hands and a daring jutting of her chin. Pray tell. All.

"You're aware that astronomy and cosmology are in some ways intimately related to the Godhead - creationism, and all that. There's a certain consistency to astro physics that lends support to the traditional thinking of all religions. I myself have stumbled upon a powerful new theory that upends all that; not subtly, but more like Galileo's belief that the Earth isn't the center of the Universe and Copernicus' theory that the planets orbited the Sun not Earth; and Kepler's actual evidence proving this notion. Whereas those changes took place over centuries, one baby step at a time; mine is all three at once - theory, evidence, and proof. It's all very controversial.

Nikki was interested now, though she tried not to show it. The stoic resolve and wounded pride were very much in evidence and would have been quite convincing if not for the twinkle in her eye. After a suitable pause, she said evenly "Your research has implications that are more than scientific, but spiritual as well." It was a statement.

"I suppose a comprehensive new theory that showed the Earth really was a center of the forces in the solar system would have spiritual implications." Kase said casually, but he was watching Nikki for the inevitable reaction. He wasn't disappointed.

"No. My god - this cannot be true. How did you do it? Tell me!"

"It's complicated but simple; and best left for another time." Kase had to hold up his hands, palms facing her; to quell her burgeoning protest, to allow him to continue. "Besides, you'll be far more interested in another part of the theory, that shows there is not one but two planes of orientation of the Solar System."

Nikki was quick to fathom the implications. "You mean in symbolic parallel to the God and Satan dichotomy? That on the cosmological level the Albens were right? Is that what your are saying, how the theologians interpret your work? My Lord, but it's a miracle; it's vindication!"

Kase smiled. Nikki was close to tears. All was forgiven between them. Then suddenly Nikki gave a little scream, and Kase found himself being embraced in her strong arms and also with her lips firmly planted upon his. Then she was pulling away, and reaching across to dab her lipstick from his lips with a Kleenex.

"I assume that was just an autonomous response, Sister Donna Marie."

"But of course, Father Kase" as she reached deftly forward to close the glass partition behind the driver. Then saying something about picking up this particular line of research at a later, more private time.

Nikki had expected the limo to drop them at some discrete but elegant, private hostel in the Old part of Rome, within casual walking distance from the Vatican. Instead the car pulled right up to the center of Saint Peter's Square, nudging thousands of people aside in the process. She looked questioning at Kase. All she got was something about this is the only honor I will ever get from the Church, and I damn sure intend to take it - if only for your benefit.

No sooner had the vehicle stopped than they were surrounded by Italian security police. An opening was made to the giant barb wire topped fence enclosing the square. In an instant they were alone in the wide open expanse of Vatican City - nothing between them and the awesome dome of Saint Peters, enclosed in the graceful arms of the colonnade around the huge square itself, but acres of puddles and wet cobblestones.

The crowd, at first clamoring to gain entrance to the square; suddenly became silent. An otherworldly calm settled on the environs, with only the light patter of rain to hear. Nikki didn't know what to make of this sudden turn of events. Kase grasped her arm in his and they took a leisurely ten minutes to cross the square. They paced carefully up the steps past Michealagelo's spell bounding statue of Moses, then into belly of the magnificent church itself.

A private mass for the Curia was in progress, but a young priest had been waiting for them. He showed them quickly out a side door and into the private chamber of an elderly prelate wearing the garb of an Archbishop. Greetings were made, and Kase was given a small briefcase. Then shaking hands in a special way - each man's hand grasping the other's forearm, in a double clasp, they parted with a "Strength and Honor" that was much more Roman than Catholic; probably a Praetorian Guard thing. It was clear to Nikki that these two old friends would not be seeing each other again, and also that this was Kase's last official act for the Church of John Paul - which was the only Church worth his allegiance.

They made haste to leave the place, escorted quickly through the bowels of the Vatican and leaving through an obscure entrance directly into the old part of Rome. Their driver was waiting for them. They were whisked rapidly to the outskirts of Rome, far away from city center; then left at a modern motel as if they were a couple secretly eloping in any small town in the Midwest of America.

Just like that. Their glorious trip to Rome was completed, in near disgrace. Nikki was numb with shock. The only thing she could think of was that she would not be shopping again after all, or rubbing elbows with the glamorous elite of the world.

"Cheer up princess," and Nikki was jolted from out of her gloom. "We're off to Abydos tomorrow at day break, and an elegant passage down the Nile to the ancient tombs of the pharaohs."

She was nonplussed; and said so. "You promise me the City of Angels, and deliver me to the City of the Dead? I'm supposed to be happy about that?"

"Then I shall be your Julius Caesar, and you shall be my Cleopatra - as we take a leisurely pleasure filled float down the Nile, to explore our most private thoughts and dreams." An unexpected eloquence from Kase, punctuated with a silly Shakespearean pantomime; was enough to sweep the tired Sister off her feet and into the double bed opposite his, in the single somewhat dingy motel room on the outskirts of Rome not far from the airport. The romantic scene was enough at least for Nikki to drift happily in near sleep, relishing a reluctant anticipation of what the new day might bring.

After no small amount of deliberation, Nikki made a huge act of disrobing under the crisp clean sheets, bundling disheveled clothes into a pile on the floor. With one last act of defiance she tossed the sport bra at Kase, seated at the round table squeezed into one corner of the motel suite, where he was going through the contents of the briefcase. She reached to flip the bedside lamp off, and watched Kase at the desk for a short while, silhouetted in the soft desk lamp; first as he smiled and cast aside the contentious bra, then as he had second thoughts and reached down and tore the bra into deliberate shreds; and finally, as the shreds were thrown playfully her way. Nikki ducked under the covers and stayed there.

"You seem such a passionate man, full of life and enthusiasm," Nikki said as she could not sleep, and she heard Kase stirring under the covers. "How is it that you have chosen the life of a scientist, spending your time among such prudes, who are so sexually deprived they make the most strictest Jesuit look like a raving sex maniac." Then she turned on her side to look at Kase, who was resting on his stomach with eyes closed. A hint of a smile was on his lips.

"I'm very much the wolf in sheep's clothing when it comes to science," he explained. "My field is celestial mechanics, the heretics of science, the bane to good sense and scientific discipline wherever we go." Which did not much impress Nikki, who promptly covered up the hint of fleshy bosom that she had tantalizingly exposed.

"Take Relativity as an example. It says that the speed of light is a limiting constant of the Universe. Celestial mechanics shows that Relativity is only a special case, and that motion doesn't stop when it goes the speed of light. Quite the contrary. It just behaves like a fluid - not the brick wall of Relativity. I use the analogy that Relativity is like the hymen

of the cosmos, a delicate membrane that when breached reveals vast possibilities beyond."

Nikki verily squirmed under the covers. "You make me blush."

"And this theory of mine, about Earth being the center of a new set of forces in the Solar System," Kase went on relentlessly. "There's a graph called a prolate cycloid that's a helix in 3D space; but in two dimensions it's a long, graceful sinusoid shaped wave, with a tight loop in the middle." Glancing over, he saw Nikki had the picture in her mind. "This loop is just in the shape of the vagina. In an obscure ramification of the theory I show it is a portal to a faster than light trajectory into deep space."

Nikki whined, "You're surely making all of this up, to seduce me." Kase said, of course not; when it comes to celestial mechanics he would never do such a thing. Then Nikki demurred, "Now you have made me wet." With that she lurched out of the bed, wrapped in the sheet, and sped to the bathroom.

A long cold shower later, and Kase was instructed to pass her bags through the door. Then the Sister reappeared stern and serious as ever; leaving Kase feeling quite the pervert, lazing under the covers. He felt sure a whipping was soon to happen. Instead the room was quiet for a while, but still full of electricity. All he had to do was promise talking sexuality things.

"Sadly, celestial mechanics is a much depreciated art on the continent. Of the three remaining research centers in my field, one is in Barcelona and another right here in Rome - the last is in Moscow. Actually, there are many Italian universities still teaching the field; and very much in France, too. The most prestigious award - our version of the Nobel Prize - is awarded each year by *Il Duce* himself, the leader of Italy. I took my training at the now disbanded group at the University of Texas at Austin; under two of the grand masters, one a Hungarian and one a Belgian. There are virtually no Americans in celestial mechanics; never were, the field is too much of an art, for Americans to understand well."

"Thank you for closing this discussion on a formal note." Nikki said with finality. Then she asked if he was hungry, saying the transatlantic flight had reset her body's time clock. They argued, but finally ordered out. The room lights went back on and they were both sitting up in bed, reading the Sunday edition of the New York Times they had picked up in the airport. Nikki had an elegant night gown on, and Kase had an old football jersey that was more holes than fabric. Nikki read the front page. Kase busied himself with the comics.

Only minutes later, room service arrived with Kase's Herculean "breakfast" of eggs, toast, bacon, and a whole *bocadillo* of freshly baked Italian bread. The bread was sinfully aromatic, and Nikki followed Kase's hint that when the belly is full all the blood is in the midsection, for the digesting; and not tempted to go elsewhere, if you know what I mean. Apparently it was an old Jewish custom; but Nikki didn't care if it came from the Ghengis Khan, so long as a full belly of bread gave her a few moment's respite from her burgeoning feelings.

"I beg of you, Father Kase," Nikki said between mouth fulls. "If we begin our discussion of the Osireion - Please, extra please - will you promise me that you have no strongly sexual theories in that regard; at least for just a little while, so I can get my bearings once again."

"Scouts honor," Kase said as he held up three fingers a mock of the French tripartite salute. "I shall be the castrated scholar of perfection, as incidentally many of the researchers at the old Library at Alexandria were. Apparently they believed knowledge was power back then; and that spaded scholars were safer."

Nikki held up her hand, "*Bastante* - stop - you promised." With that, Kase concentrated completely upon his breakfast fare, and devoured it with such relish and rapidity that Nikki had to wonder, where was it all going?

"Just how is it we are going to get to the Osireion. It isn't exactly a major tourist attraction; although the temple of Seti I is nearby."

"I'm more interested in the strange relic left by my namesake, one of the first Pharaohs of Egypt - Khasekhemy. The Hall of Barques, if you may recall."

"In fact, I do know the place. I confess to believing that you're very much as strange and unfathomable as your namesake. Who in their right mind would make a monument of a dozen fully equipped ocean going boats, right in the middle of the desert - miles from any water."

"Ten kilometers, actually; from the Nile River - on the west bank."

"The fancy black aircraft isn't provided by the Church, is it?" Nikki asked shortly after they were finished eating. "That meeting you had with the Archbishop was not official Church business either, is it?"

"Yes and no." Replied Kase. "The aircraft is not Church property; but the mission is sanctioned by Rome. At least it was approved by the late Pope."

"He was one of you," Nikki said then, on a hunch. "He was a Praetorian Guard." And it was all clear to her. "A secret society of do-gooders."

"We are secret only if you're not a person of honor and dignity. If you meet our high standards, then you would already know of us." Then pointing his finger at Nikki, "I'd venture a guess you have been approached before, perhaps by someone who appeared too good to be true - at a most propitious point in your life."

"Thank you, but no. You're the only such person who has gotten through my protective bubble of rage and insecurity. I'm not sure if you honor me or not ~ who are you people?"

"Nothing more than a loose organization of like minded individuals who make our resources available to one another to accomplish commendable goals in a world bereft of all chivalry and honor," spoken as if from rote memory. "We have no politics or self interest in this organization. Doing a mission with only self interest in mind is reason for immediate dismissal, or worse."

"So you have a racist agenda for world domination," Nikki accused.

"Not so. We come from all nations, all philosophies - communist, democratic, parliamentarian, or dictatorial. What we do in our day jobs is of no consequence. We are men, women; of all colors and religions. As they used to say in the Army, everybody is green - it's the mission that counts, above all else."

"And you are their leader, if I miss my guess."

"You're perceptive. Indeed, you're correct. I lead only because I am driven. I'm known within the organization as Quintus - because I have been licensed in five different engineering disciplines, something of an unusual accomplishment in this day of extreme specialization. They trust my broad reach of knowledge and the inferences I have drawn from it; but only so long as I am correct."

"So this whole mission is being underwritten by the Praetorian Guard? The private jets, the limousines, the shopping spree, and god knows what else to come?"

"Knowledge is more precious than any material goods, especially if that knowledge can benefit the general good of all. Everything else is inconsequential."

"What is the religious tie in, to the Church?"

"You've made me pledge to avoid any conversational topics along certain, shall we say, salubrious lines?"

"In this one instance, you can violate said anti-sensual guidelines."

"Very well. You already have Cleopatra on the brain, as we fly at this very moment to duplicate her lascivious and decadent month on the

Nile, drifting down river in the company of one Julius Caesar. She had long since seduced the noble Roman, but Caesar had been seduced by dozens even hundreds of women throughout the Mediterranean Basin. He was in his 50's when he met Cleopatra, then in her 20's but such was his power and his presence, that she fell under his spell as much as he was under hers.

"Now in all of those sexual liaisons, Caesar had not conceived a child - not with his wife, nor any of his mistresses. Until Cleopatra bore his son, whom they named Caesarion. Not long after Caesar was assassinated; then Cleopatra committed suicide by affixing poisonous adders - snakes - to her body, to keep from being tortured by the Roman army that had just captured Alexandria, under Augustus. Caesarion was never heard from again, and disappeared from the historical record.

"Mind you, Augustus sought the boy far and wide, and put an astronomical bounty on his head. With Caesarion alive Augustus' claim to the throne in Rome was never secure because Caesarion was a direct heir to Julius Caesar. Augustus was only Caesar's grand nephew.

"We Praetorians owed our ultimate loyalty to the person of Julius Caesar, and no one else. Having originally been of Caesar's much lauded Tenth Legion, having fought by and with and under him in countless fearsome engagements; he was our eternal light. By default, Caesarion was due our loyalty - and Augustus our ire, even after he formed the Praetorian Guard from out of the ranks of Legion X in 26 BC.

"Caesarion survived. The Praetorian Guard protected him. We kept him safe from harm in Lower Egypt where he had free access to the Library at Alexandria and could grow up beyond the reach of Rome. Egypt may have by that time been a Roman province, but the influence of the Ptolemys remained strong."

"Caesarion grew into a fine young man. He took a wife and then sought his own destiny. He took the name of Joseph, and he had a child whom the world knows by the name of Jesus. Only we know that it was not Mary who was the virgin who conceived an immaculate child; but Joseph, in a miracle recognized throughout the Roman Empire at the time, was born to the childless Julius Caesar and to the Goddess of fertility herself, Isis - aka Cleopatra.

"I know the questions on your tongue. We recognize Jesus as a man, grandson of two of the greatest monarchs of Antiquity. We leave the spiritual things to others, believing his soul could be as they say - the Son of God - but not needing that affirmation to believe Jesus was a good, honorable, and compassionate human being worthy of our respect and admiration.

"The one thing that distances us from Rome and the Church, which maintains a separation of Church and State as the Yankees would

say, is that Jesus' teachings are ultimately what brought the Roman Empire to an end. It was the separatist Christians, their divisive teachings, and their elitist ideology that split asunder the delicate balance of diverse races, nations, and faiths that was uniquely Rome. It's forever a reminder to our own Order, to avoid such a calamitous mistake ever again.

"So, you really are after a New World Order," she said. Kase only smiled.

"I prefer to think of ourselves as simply an equal opportunity secret society." Nikki laughed, despite herself.

"We're not elitists, as I'm sure you're implying," he said. "There's no equivocation in our open criteria ~ we welcome all who have the strength and honor to belong. We even permit Nazis in our ranks, who serve alongside Jews and Israelis.

"Granted, the Nazi cohort - we name ourselves on the Roman army terminology, with cohorts, legions, centurions, and so forth - was very closely scrutinized, and their mission is surveilled constantly - by a team, mind you, that includes Israelis. These Nazis are researching, if you bear with me, an important influx of funds that came from America during the 1930's. America was in the Great Depression at that time, but this small Wall Street firm - operated by several Americans who later became quite prominent in Washington - funneled the equivalent of many billions of dollars to the Nazis.

"At that time, Hitler's regime was on the brink of collapse due to lack of funding. They had always depended on nickel and dime contributions from working class people, but their increasingly totalitarian regime needed more money to run effectively - at least until it was firmly entrenched. The vast amounts of money they required came from America. The Nazi cohort is tracing the roots of the funding. The money flow itself was discovered by two highly regarded Jewish investigative reporters.

"The prominent Americans involved in this scheme were Allen and John Dulles, future Secretary of State and Head of the CIA, who were partners in the firm. A third partner, who was himself directly responsible for the Nazi investments, was George Herbert Walker Bush - the grandfather of the President of the United States, 'Grandfather Walker,' they call him in their Kennebunkport compound.

"The Praetorian Guard believes that the individuals who sent all that money to Nazi Germany made it all based upon a contingency, that they exterminate the Jews from the face of the Earth. The Nazi cohort is determined to find this truth out, and resolved to facing the consequences no matter the verdict. At the very least, the blame for the Holocaust will extend far beyond the German people and still rest largely upon the Germans, yes; but also perhaps some major American industrialists like

Henry Ford and Nelson Rockefeller, who were ardent supremacists at the time and open supporters of the Nazis in the 1930's in their grab for power on the continent.

"Another group, the Confederate cohort, is attempting to prove that it was the actions of the South that freed the slaves, as a consequence of the very complicated tactics and politics surrounding the Vicksburg Campaign. The Japanese cohort is trying to show that the attack on Pearl Harbor was done purposefully to draw America into the war, to ensure the defeat of the Nazis - although they never figured America would defeat Japan as well.

"All these organizations are researching the truth, to be sure history is written correctly. Too often, even in the not too distant past, the historical record reflects the attitudes of the victors. Doing so only covers up their faults, and paints their every last action as perfect and totally responsible. Not even Jesus himself was so perfect, in that his own faith brought down the peaceful empire that he most admired - Rome.

A little circus played out that morning, in their swank retro fifties hotel room. Both awoke about the same time. Kase, still curled up on the couch, pretended to keep his eyes closed while Nikki swept into the bathroom, trailing a white bed sheet behind. Actually, he really did keep his eyes closed, because she checked.

Then, while she was cleaning up behind a locked door (he checked that too) Kase got half dressed and had the room all tidied up by the time she was finished. No sooner had she left in a billow of steam, than Kase was in the bathroom, closing the door carefully.

"Tell me Father Kase," Nikki said loudly through the - just slightly open - door a minute later. "Do you always get so efficient first thing in the morning," with a huff.

"You didn't have to make the bed you know, we ARE in a hotel." Then to herself, I can handle it though.

"Thank the U.S. Navy for that little quirk," he said just as the shower started.
"Hospital corners and all."

You got that right honey, she said after checking underneath the bed spread, not quite believing it when she saw them. A few minutes later the shower turned off and Kase yelled out at her. "Old sailor's trick after a night on the high seas, Lassie." A mumble as he toweled off vigorously. "You make the bed up good, like tidy and new, and the little lady can't resist the temptation to muss it all up again."

"Monsignor Kase," Nikki responded with mock consternation, "You're hardly out of bed and your mind is already back there."

Something like, 'bed, hell - I was on the god damn sofa all night,' reached Nikki's ears; 'warm bed right there too all full of pretty lady; shoot, coolie's mind never got OFF bed.' She blushed a little to hear it.

"Navy men, they got to be prepared to shove off at any time, you see." She could hear the smile behind his words. "Must make the most out of infrequent port calls, you know."

"A lady in every port, Admiral?" came the slightly distressed retort.

"Oh, oh," he said seriously, loud enough for Nikki to hear.

"No, ma'am, not me. Too many distractions will get you shot in a moment. Then never make it home to sweet honey."

"Good grief, our little Navy man has an answer for everything." She offered a little up herself. 'We'll see just how sweet this here honey is,' she grumbled.

"Begging' your pardon, ma'am." Kase said gushing with courtesy, "But that one's from the United States Marines." Then when she seemed to be not impressed, "You know, the rough guys that always get us flamboyant sailors out of harms way." Making aaack noises, and choking his neck so as she could barely see in the mirror.

"Admiral, you best check your notes," said Nikki in her most officious tone.

"It is the other way around: Navy pulling Marines off bad beach," Nikki said. Kase took a long while to consider that one, and she expected some smart macho remark about her beach home. She heard him mumbling through the shaving cream. 'We're going to need a full amphibious landing to rescue this here dumb sailor.'

"OK, so you beached my whale on that one," he said like a naughty kid, a long, drawn out moment later. As though he thought she would forget and forgive. "Had a rough night, didn't I."

"YOU had a rough night." She really let herself fume now. "I invite some kind a hurting, peace loving man into my hotel room to nurse his poor frazzled nerves, and what do I get? Some kind of raging, high minded, mental crusader hell bent on returning to Eden."

"Well, I got you there didn't I," said a fresh innocent little boy face around the corner of the door.

"Brother, to quote one of your heroes," she said, hoisting her chest out and up.

"We have met the enemy and he is ours."

"OH, Oh; oh," he said after quickly backing around the door. "Best ring up the Army Air Corps. We in heap of deep do do now." Steps running in place rattled the whole room.

"Truce!" and he waved a white towel just outside the bathroom door as he slowly emerged, then swiftly picked up the hotel telephone.

"Room service," he yelled into the telephone, as if he was calling in a strike in the DMZ. "Get us two BIG coffees," breathing heavily as if he had just raced to the line. "Make that A.S.A.P, soldier." Kase hung up with a bang.

Looking around from the telephone, expecting an urgent request for an encore, Kase was crestfallen. Nikki was already busy on her laptop computer, working on some notes about Abydos.

"Doesn't look like I can make it to the office today, dear" she said coyly. It was quite silent in the room for a while, too long; and she looked up. Kase was still right close to the telephone, less that a pace from where he was minutes ago. The sunshine mood had evaporated, and a heavy overcast had taken its place. He was deep in thought, all the gaiety gone like a will-o-wisp in a thunderstorm.

"Don't worry," she muttered very business like, "I got you penciled in for dinner," suppressing a smile as she did so. 'If they don't kick your insolent ass out before then.' Then, not even looking up to relish Kase's relief, "Evening meal too." She went right back to her work, noticing out of the corner of her eye that he had at least started to tuck his shirt in tight. Tucked, as the military types do, to show a strong, small waist. Tailored pants showed strong lines of large thighs and bulges at the calves. Then he turned around to fasten his tie in the mirror, very attentive to his appearance all of a sudden.

Nikki couldn't help herself, but to admire his trim posterior - pencil to her lips and tilting her glasses down a bit as she did so.

"See there, bad girl," Kase chimed when he spied her from the corner of his eye,

"See what you missed last night?"

"Well, excuse me, Admiral," she countered, "But does a poor sailor's girl ever get a second chance?"

"Yes," as he stood tiptoe to look back through the mirror at her generous décolletage. Then, standing back firm, he made a big deal out of adjusting his pants, especially in the waist. "Yea, we'll just call it an extended port-o-call, shall we?"

"You're absolutely incorrigible," she murmured. "I should pity the poor Church, how you're going abuse them with your attitude." By now, she had turned full around to watch him, admiring him openly from head to toe. Kase was so completely absorbed in his preparations that he didn't even notice.

"Christ, you're in top shape today!" Nikki muttered to herself, pleased with what she was seeing.

Kase sat then, at a small bench in the bathroom alcove. Then he unbuckled his trousers and pushed them to the floor. Reaching over, he pulled a couple of bundles out of his medicine kit. Soon he had both knees wrapped carefully with an ace bandage, making a neat tight brace a couple of inches on either side of the joint. Then, with a screech he yanked off a six-inch swath of duct tape and wrapped either end tight so they would not come loose.

Then he stood, pants still at his ankles, and tested his full weight on each leg. Satisfied, he hoisted the trousers and yanked the suspenders over his shoulders. A small circle around that part of the room, and there was no evidence of any disabling limp at all.

As Kase was testing his field dressings, Nikki noticed the plain bright belt buckle and wondered. Now, that does not look very business like. She was just about to say something when he pulled a freshly pressed jacket from a dry cleaner's plastic bag.

"Oh, my," she said and her hand went to her lips in dismay. Kase turned, and it dawned on him that she had been watching all the while. With the most mischievous of smiles he said, "Kase's going to be a United States Army soldier boy today!" It was a carefully tailored jacket that looked like a military dress uniform, but without any insignia, ribbons, or patches. The effect was dramatic.

"Jesus," was all she could say. "What were you, Green Beret or something; SEAL's?"

"Not," he said. "Wouldn't be caught dead with that bunch of wieners - excuse me, ma'am - make that hot dogs!" With no further elaboration, he buttoned up the blouse and turned for her to admire.

Nikki went up to him, expecting to help him tidy up some.

"Don't touch," and gently gave her hand a rap on the wrist.

"You look like a renegade," she blurted out before realizing it.

"Yes," Kase replied, turning his head askew. "I do, don't I?"

Her own knees started to feel a little wobbly, and Nikki sat down on the bed. Looking up at him, she marveled at the transformation. He had trimmed the wild, disheveled hair of the day before to be neat and trim, ultra short, and military. The hair was lightly oiled so that it all stood straight up, not a strand out of place. The clothes were heavily starched, crisp and spotless.

Nikki was looking down, making a business of fumbling with the tallies on her shirt, muttering, "I think I'm glad I'm not going to be happy how this turns out."

"Me, too," Kase said mysteriously.

"Don't worry, love. Everything is as it should be!" There was a sudden conviction in his voice.

'He's either nuts, or a genius,' Nikki said. Then her neck snapped up.

"Damn it, Father Kase - you've got me talking to myself just like you."

"Stop it," and she folded her arm across her chest and tried to hold the pounding heart still in her chest.

Fancying the captive - and captivated - audience, Kase took a few paces around the room. "Look, Grandma Moses - no sugar cane!"

"The miracle of modern medicine. A fist full of Motrin will cure anything," he said with a greatly exaggerated swagger like a drunken sailor in Bangkok.

"Motrins, plus some well applied field wraps!" Then he started to drag his legs, knees stiff, like a penny actor in a Frankenstein movie.

"I'll make a deal with you Father Kase," Nikki said as she got up and started to get her things together. "I won't ask what you're up to, if you have breakfast with me."

"However," she said loudly and holding out her hands, "You've got to promise you won't sex with my brain either - is it a deal?"

"Signed, sealed and delivered."

Nikki was out of the room, the door swinging closed, before Kase scurried after her like a country kid going to the department store.

"God damn it, Kase O'Clearey," she was saying as the door closed, "Act your age will you?"

"Aye, Aye" came the deep-throated reply through the heavy oak door.

"You're driving me up the wall!"

On the way down to the lobby in the elevator, Nikki turned to him, a little off-balance from the quiet. The long walk down the heavily carpeted hotel hallway, and not a word passed between them. Kase, a few paces behind, was silent as a church mouse. She watched as he worked at getting the military walk and attitude down right. The hardest part, she smiled heartily, was the facial expression. It looked as though he had brushed his teeth with super glue, and was trying to adjust the set of his jaw permanently, with just the right lines.

The eyes much harder to calm, she saw. Concentrating mightily, Nikki slowed and she was walking even with him. Hunching shoulders, rubbing his eyes and craning his neck from side to side did not seem to result in the right feel. The eyes were indomitable. Then, just as they reached the elevator lobby on their floor, he huffed and pulled a pair of pilot issue sunglasses from his inside breast pocket. That will take care of the eyes, he murmured gleefully.

The elevator bell rang, and he hustled to take get on, still fumbling as he walked through the closing doors of the elevator.

A couple floors down, after a few well-dressed businessmen had entered, Nikki said to no one in particular, "On second thought, I liked you better in uniform Father Clearey," which he tried to ignore. "You were much better behaved."

Noticing a few discrete smiles cracked on the other people in the elevator Kase shuffled his feet a little. Looking up to the elevator display he said demurely, "Yea, Nikki - that's exactly what the Army thought - see where it got them!" adding a few seconds later, "And the Navy too."

"Maybe you should call in the Marines," contributed a passenger.

"No, Sir," came the subdued reply, "They absolutely love people like me!" Then

Kase turned and tilted his head down to peer over the shades; and graced the ingrate with the look of a remorseless killer. The businessman shrank back. Kase leveled his head carefully, then turned mechanically and stared steady at the little peep hole in the middle of the elevator door for the remainder of the ride down. A little hunch went through the shoulders, at one point. Nikki had the feeling he had become totally imbued to his new role.

"Go figure," Nikki replied with a sigh of resignation, glancing at the object of Kase's scorn. A crooked smile touched the man's lips and Nikki thought, "Wiener probably wet his pants."

The people in the elevator practically ran out as soon as it reached the lobby floor and the doors opened. Nikki and Kase were the last to leave. They were both smiling as their fellow travelers scurried away with nary a glance back. Nikki was waiting for him to take her arm and lead her off. Kase, though, was absorbed in taking the shades off so he could be the proper gentleman and look her straight in the eye. The elevator started to close; he reached out and the electric eye bumped it open again. Glaring at one another then, each tried to kowtow to the other. Then, just as the doors were closing again they scurried through in a very awkward fashion.

Kase pulled up short outside the electromechanical behemoth, to get his new act together, while Nikki looked around to see where the dining room was located. She set off shortly, Kase in undignified pursuit.

They settled at a brightly-lit table, remote from any other. No sooner, than Kase had helped her into her seat, than he was seated across from her, the Rome edition of the International Herald Tribune splayed out all over in front of him.

"Damn, how did he do that?" Nikki murmured. Then, held up a hand.

"No, please - No more Navy tricks, OK?"

"Marine trick this time, Ma'am," Kase said while still reading. "Mater D slid it under my arm as I walked past." Then with a huff, "How's that for respect, no?"

"Yea," Nikki responded, still studying the menu hard. "How's that for a spiffy disguise, Mister."

"Oh, nuts," he sighed.

Pulling the shades from his pocket with great fanfare, he adjusted his seat a little back from the table and tried to look relaxed. Hum, here's the contented husband taking his new wife on a tour of the big city Rome, he thought.

Here's the demure wife trying to cater to huge male ego, to keep it from being horribly bruised by the grindstone politics of the city he knows absolutely nothing about, she thought.

A waiter stopped by a little later. They ordered breakfast and a big pot of coffee. When the coffee arrived, Kase poured her a cup, then filled his up and unconsciously kept the pitcher on his side of the table. Nikki frowned and reached over to get it. Suddenly Kase crumbled up a page out of the paper and threw it violently at the floor.

"Damn cartoonists," reaching out absentmindedly to warm his cold hands around the steaming pot. Nikki pulled her own hands back, and watched as Kase took the shades off and rubbed his eyes and temples.

"Crummy political satire in the paper," he explained. "Got me dressed like a Neanderthal in a groin cloth, limping toward a coliseum full of Archbishops and lions all about."

"That's loin cloth," Nikki corrected, nasty thoughts filtering into her mind despite her best effort.

"They be going to get some primitive rage, I guarantee," spoken in a new accent to Nikki - Cajun/French brougham.

"They're going to have their show for sure," he said and the tears of frustration glistened. Nikki's heart went out to him.

"But not the show they expect - this is my sea today and even the seals will do my bidding!"

Breakfast arrived then and they had to muster some pretense of domestic tranquillity for the all-eyes waitress, who had obviously heard the last quips of conversation.

They thought all was in order. The waitress saw clearly how completely their lives were intertwined and mingled. She lingered a little longer than usual, letting them regain a semblance of composure in her respectful presence. Kase, still flustered, gave her a big tip already, and waved her away in his utterly abashed embarrassment.

They ate the meal swiftly and in contented silence. Kase poured her coffee full when it got empty, but kept the pot on his side of the table, still using it as a hand warmer. Nikki understood, and secretly marveled how sensitive he really was, to her slightest need.

As they got up to leave, Kase noticed the gravity in her expression. Will I see you again? Can you manage? Can I come? A hundred other questions etched her endearing countenance. Seeking to put her at ease, he slicked back his hair, punched out his chin and cocked up a fisted hand, holding the breakfast bill.

"Hasta la vista, baby," he said better than Arnold the middle aged Terminator, and he was off. Nikki watched him saunter from the café'.

As he left, she stepped over to pick up the newspaper page he had trashed earlier. Crinkling it open; well, the cartoon was more cruel than most, but not too much so. Kase had much to learn. She wondered sadly if he would lose all the charm and spontaneity as his skin got thicker under the onslaught of the mighty power brokers of *Roma*.

Suddenly weary, she sat back down at the table. Then reached over with a smile, got the coffee pot, refilled her cup and - with great pantomime - placed it squarely by her place setting. So there!

A few sips of blank-eyed staring later, she put the cup down. Opening her purse she pulled a very small, but very powerful, cellular telephone out and punched an automatic dial number. A voice responded immediately, and they had a brief conversation. All the softness was gone from her then, and Nikki found the inner strength to get on with her day.

Kase returned from the rooms with their baggage, and they left arm in arm to the foyer for the short trip back to the airport.

III. Cairo, Egypt

Silence ensured as the jet had by now landed in Cairo. They taxied toward a private hanger. Kase swore Nikki to secrecy in all of this - not that anybody would believe her - and pledged her safe conduct, no matter what. She was free to leave and never look back, and bygones would bygones.

"Hell no," she replied immediately. "You think I'm *loco* or something? We're going to Abydos right this very moment." Then as they were gathering their things to leave, "Although I'm afraid you'll have to cancel the leisurely boat trip down the Nile *a la Cleopatra*," muttering something to the effect that this goddess has no intention of being debauched by Caesar's younger, much more handsome namesake.

"I figured you would balk at a pleasant chance to explore your immature sensuality," Kase said way too casually. "There's an American special forces helicopter waiting on the tarmac a short distance away; we'll embark for the short trip to Abydos promptly after we get through customs."

"*Jesus Christo*, you didn't have to be quite that efficient." Nikki demurred. "Can't we at least stay in Cairo for a few days? Please? Maybe do some shopping?" Kase said nothing, but they were soon in Cairo fighting through the chaotic Egyptian traffic in a small beat up bug like car without air conditioning, the ubiquitous black limo unavailable because of the last minute change in plans.

Bright and early the next morning Nikki found herself being piloted out into the Mediterranean in a small, smelly, leaking little fishing boat cluttered with fishing nets, ropes, blocks, tackle and sundry other decrepit slimy things. What burned her more, were the devious devices by which Kase had manipulated her into making this disgusting expedition.

"Behind us is modern Alexandria," Kase swung his arm in an arc the city by the bay. "Below us is the ancient Alexandria, and in particular the royal palace of Cleopatra." The water was crystal clear but even in the choppy surf faint outlines of buildings could be seen, straight lines where there should be none, with splashes of color not natural to the surrounding ocean floor. Despite her best efforts, Nikki found herself mesmerized.

Evidently this moribund little boat and its grungy crew were a treasured property of the Praetorian Guards, who made this little pilgrimage on a regular basis, to the resting place of their Queen. They could just as easily have afforded a luxury yacht and James Bond diving

gear to plumb the depths to their hallowed shrine, but instead they opted for the real deal. Nikki was intrigued.

Kase rolled out a large blueprint on the deck of the trawler. It was well worn and encased in plastic against the elements. The drawing was an eighth scale floor plan of Cleopatra's palace, and Kase showed her roughly how it aligned to the dim lines visible deep under the surface of the water. Divers had visited the site and recovered artifacts, and confirmed that it was indeed the royal palace of Ptolemy - the first of whom, Ptolemy Soter, had been appointed sovereign by Alexander the Great; and the last of whom had been Cleopatra. The whole area had been torn asunder by a violent earthquake four hundred years after Cleopatra had killed herself, roughly coinciding with the end of the Isis cult in the region. As Kase elegantly put it, Neptune had claimed what was rightfully his, protecting it for posterity from the ravage of grave hunters and antiquities salvagers. The palace had only been recently discovered. No doubt a Praetorian Guard project, Nikki said.

"You know the story about how Cleopatra met Julius Caesar? The throne of Egypt had been absconded by a younger sister, Absinthe; and Cleopatra as the eldest and the rightful Queen, was then banned from the kingdom. She fled the palace with a small retinue of loyal soldiers and cavalry, and encamped on the outskirts of Alexandria in the hills overlooking the town. Julius Caesar, in the area to quell an uprising in Palestine, came to the rescue of the regime and initially supported Absinthe. He and his Legion were quartered inside the city proper, when porters came into his rooms bearing a gift from the Queen, an exquisite rug that they carried rolled up on their shoulders. No sooner had the rug been put down and the bearers left the room, than the rug unrolled itself and out popped Cleopatra, who no doubt quickly regained her dignity and pleaded her case before the famous Roman general.

"Caesar judged Cleopatra to be the rightful ruler of Egypt and, in which she no doubt thought an inconsequential gesture, Caesar pledged his handful of soldiers to support her fight. They were few indeed and ragged; and even along with her own loyal troops, who were far away, they were vastly outnumbered by Absinthe's powerful army. True to his reputation, though; Caesar took the offensive immediately and decisively, and in a startling surprise move fought his way out of Alexandria, with Cleopatra in tow, back through Absinthe's lines to join Cleopatra's small army. Then the whole force immediately turned about, and attacked the already somewhat confused Egyptian army and crashed right back through to the royal palace where Absinthe was captured, Cleopatra enthroned, and the younger sister banned for life to the island of Crete.

"This was a most agreeable turn of events, and Cleopatra entertained the famous general and his troops for a few weeks until they

had to leave to fight an insurgency on the northern coast of Africa many days travel to the west of Egypt. Caesar was transported quickly to the enemy's back yard by the Egyptian navy, then disembarked his much outnumbered force; defeated the undisciplined enemy in a surprise frontal attack, and promptly returned to Cleopatra's arms and a hero's welcome.

"There ensued the famous pleasure cruise down the Nile, during which time Caesarion was conceived. A few months later Caesar was recalled to Rome, but not before he had sworn his loyalty to Cleopatra and they had made plans for the grown up boy to have a united empire of Egypt and Rome under his sole control, leader of the known world.

"Back in Rome, Caesar became consul and then was appointed as an emergency dictator to preserve the safety of Rome in a bloody civil war with Pompey. Afterwards he attempted to return power to the people and to the Senate, to keep Rome a Republic; but on the Ides of March in 33 BC he was assassinated by a clique of Senators, and Caesar's grand nephew Augustus was appointed the first Emperor.

"Cleopatra was herself in Rome at the time Caesar was assassinated; could even have been by his side as the knives were struck home into the body of Caesar. She had been accompanying him openly and showing off their small child, and everybody knew Caesar was the sire. Cleopatra's presence may have created some fear, of a foreign influence not only upon the sovereign of Rome; but, as Queen of Egypt, a threat to the Roman Empire itself. In any event, after Caesar was killed she fled back to Egypt, there to await the expected dire consequences. The young child was never heard from again.

"Another civil war for control of Rome ensued after Caesar's death, between Augustus and Caesar's most loyal captain Mark Anthony. August managed to win on land, and Mark Anthony fled with the Roman fleet to Egypt where for a short while he remained peacefully, and was befriended - perhaps, seduced - by Cleopatra. The Romans followed soon after with a new fleet, and Mark Anthony sailed out to meet them, with Egypt's whole fleet as well. At the very last moment Cleopatra withdrew her fleet, and returned to the safety of Egypt. Mark Anthony's fleet was routed at the famous naval battle of Actium, and when news of his death reached her, Cleopatra took her own life by the poison of asp snakes just as the troops of Augustus were at the gates of the palace.

"All of Cleopatra's efforts were ultimately in vain, to protect her beloved Egypt from Rome and the Empire. She met the same fate as Caesar, who himself tried valiantly to keep the Republic intact. Knowing the fate of his grandparents, you can't blame Jesus for opposing Rome - or at least the Empire that it had become. In his own way he too tried to return power to the people, but the power of those opposed to him was just too great.

"Incidentally, the most revered figure in all of this to Praetorians is not Caesar or Cleopatra or even Jesus; but Joseph, christened Caesarion. It's Joseph who had a price on his head his whole life; and in constant danger from Roman agents; it's Joseph who bore his fate with silent dignity; who raised the boy Jesus and taught him his trade and his religion, then set him loose to be his own man. Islam holds Joseph in high regard as well, by the way.

"So, Nikki - I meant what I said. Then, now, anytime you choose you can go your own way. Were even I, the head of the Order, to say otherwise would mean banishment and the very worse kind of dishonor for me.

"Are there any other women in your Order?" she asked, compelled.

"Yes, many - some of whom you'd recognize as public figures. All of whom you'd cherish as kindred spirits. They have their own feelings about our heritage. They esteem Cleopatra above all other patriarchs. That's their right. Isis was a powerful influence through much of Antiquity. Hallowed symbols and ideas from practically every spirituality can be traced to Isis worship. By all rights Isis should be so revered in the modern era." Kase paused, and Nikki spoke then.

"Thus the mysterious personality of Father Kase is solved - how a stalwart warrior of the old way could be so sensitive and perceptive; much less cognizant of a woman's most secret raptures.

"Thank you. Can we please change the subject?" came a demand from the bow of the boat. "A squall is approaching and all hands are needed to maneuver our way safely back to harbor." They quickly made it back to land, long before any whiff of a squall could be seen. The fisherman's charm was cast anyway, and Nikki was in her element.

"Whatever happened to Caesar?" Nikki inquired, as Kase was fighting the traffic on the way back to their lodgings. "I mean, if Cleopatra is in her mausoleum, buried under the ocean in Alexandria - where did Julius Caesar end up. Why didn't we visit his grave when we were in Rome?"

"It's a much debated topic, Caesar's final resting place. Shakespeare said he was burned in a funeral pyre, at which time Mark Anthony made his famous speech, Friends, Romans, countryman - lend me your ears..." Said with a flourish, both hands off the wheel. "Most historians concur."

"But let me guess - the victors write history, and the Praetorian Guard doesn't believe the mere gossip that historians write for posterity?"

Kase's hands flew up off the steering wheel in a classic Latin gesture of ultimate frustration - and bravado, considering they were rocketing down a desperately thin barely paved road with a fast lane of solid traffic going both ways at full speed; while camels, horses, dogs, and small children crossed the thoroughfare unannounced but loudly screamed at. It all made the insanity of traffic in Rome placid by comparison. That's why Kase loved it so much.

"The general consensus is that Caesar was not stabbed to death, but only stabbed into submission. He was famous for physical prowess. He once swam in full battle armor carrying in front of him an arm full of precious scrolls as the Library in Alexandria burned. His body was so scarred from so many battle wounds there was hardly room for hair to grow or pores to sweat... Well, that's not quite true, but you get the idea - he was almost superhuman, and a dozen stabs that would have killed a weak, sickly Senator would not have phased Caesar in the least."

"Assuming the whole assassination was a premeditated plan to capture the seat of power at its most vulnerable point - the culprits would have done it all in vain, if they couldn't get rid of Caesar's child at the same time. So they kept him alive and tortured him - for weeks, months, maybe even years - to find out what happened to Caesarion. They would also have tortured Cleopatra to find out where she had hidden Caesarion, had she not killed herself before she could be taken alive.

"Torture is one thing; but torture of a man as strong and durable as Caesar must have been horrific. It would have made the agony of Christ seem like child's play. Yet, he never broke.

Kase slammed into the side of a bus just then, and soon he and the bus driver were out in the middle of the thoroughfare yelling at the top of their voices; blocking traffic from both directions, and then drivers from all those cars were out and yelling too. Nikki watched meekly. It appeared to her that Kase was having the time of his life - and perhaps even had rammed the bus on purpose.

Then with one last holler and a dramatic waving of his arms in total resignation, Kase pulled out his money belt and extracted a roll of what must have been thousands of crisp clean dollars - threw the lot at the bus driver, then turned and crunched up more dollars and threw them like spit balls at all the other cars and drivers blocked in the traffic. Everybody started to yell even louder still, and surely a total riot would have happened if the Cairo police hadn't showed up and dampened their spirits.

"By the way, what happened to our nice driver and the air conditioned limo?" Nikki asked once they were back into the thick of things.

"Oh, he's flying sorties off some U.S. Navy carrier in the Mediterranean right now," Kase said casually. "He was also our driver in Austin, by the way." Looking aside to see Nikki's reaction; but good for her, she didn't flinch.

"Let me guess - he does this kind of thing for fun, in his free time?"

"We all do. Those ugly thugs on the fishing boat were here on vacation - a couple of those guys make eight figure incomes on Wall Street. The pilot slash chauffeur is a Marine fighter pilot certified for carrier landings. He likes Austin; and of course, we all like Cairo."

"Who organizes all these people and all these missions; who coordinates everything?" Nikki asked with a growing sense of exasperation.

"Nobody in particular, it just kind of happens - like time shares; all these hotel rooms and airplanes and vehicles are just kind of there, and somehow they're always in use and in good repair. Like the city of Austin does, having dozens of big ugly bicycles painted bright yellow that people can take and ride wherever they like, then just leave them and somebody else rides it where they like, etcetera."

"My God - you people are truly insane. We're talking about million dollar jet aircraft - and armed god damn Apache attack helicopters, for Christ's sake. They have machine guns and missiles and bombs. Where does the money come from? Who pays the bills; what's to keep some terrorist or drug trafficker, for god's sake, from riding one of your jets or staying in one of your secret hotel rooms. You have no security, no nothing. It's a wonder you aren't on every watch list of every police organization in the world."

"We all have our circle of friends," Kase said defensively. "They overlap and we make new friends; and everybody likes a good mission when they have time off - it just works. Don't knock it - five minutes ago you were so impressed."

"What's to keep me from getting into a chauffeur driven limousine some time, and being driven to a remote spot and getting raped till my eyeballs explode? Nobody has ID cards or fingerprint recognition; nothing, nowhere."

"All those things can be faked - individual recognition, face to face; eyeball to eyeball; handshake to handshake, cannot. The chain of recognition is never broken."

"Then how the hell am I to function in this chaotic organization of yours if you're the only person who knows me?"

"The chauffeur knows you; the people on the boat know you; the bus driver and the drivers of the nearest cars all know you; what can I say? Its a start."

"Oh, *merde*. So it really was staged, all of it."

"Actually, no. Quintus the magnificent, never goes anywhere without full security; they were just keeping an eye on me ~ on us. I got carried away talking to you; slammed into the bus, and then we just all decided to simply share the moment."

"You people really are insane. Stark raving mad." But she relaxed after that, knowing friends were near; although still holding the dash with a white knuckled fierceness as Kase negotiated the last few blocks to their hotel. Actually it was a different hotel, and Kase screamed into the foyer area at full speed; slamming the brakes on full at the last possible second, almost running over a small group of tourists on a crosswalk. They kept walking, totally unfazed.

"This isn't just insane. It's an alternate universe. All the rules of life are just poof - gone, evaporated, *kaput*." As Kase pulled her out of the car, unwrapping her still clenched fists from the dash. Vaguely Nikki noticed that the car was still rolling, but a small parking attendant jumped in from the passenger side and got the car under control, before he sped off into the dusty shimmering heat.

Paranoia was not far away, or maybe a psychotic break. Kase could tell. With a few words, a raising of his eyebrows, and some not too flattering motions toward Nikki that implied she was hot, frustrated, lost, and confused all at once - could you please spare the Cleopatra suite for a few days; please, just this once for the big boss and his incorrigible charge?

They were escorted up to their new rooms, rather sloppily. The porter kept asking where their luggage was, holding his nose obnoxiously because both Kase and Nikki were drenched in sweat and smelling to high heaven. After what seemed an eternity, they reached the rooms and were shown swiftly in; the door slammed behind and noisily locked. The porter didn't even ask for a tip, even with wads of dollar bills still bulging from all of Kase's pants and shirt pockets.

Nikki almost ran to the bathroom - which was quite a ways across what was an extremely elegant suite, nicely furnished, and fully thirty degrees cooler than either the outside or the lobby - with each revelation, she slowed down until by the time she reached the huge bathroom with gleaming fixtures and piles of soft white towels, a semblance of reality returned and she managed to collapse in the wading pool sized tub and soak in a soapy wonderland until all the dirt and grime and fear were not gone, but at least receded to a manageable distance.

A polite knock on the door, and Kase was in the room with an arm full of cleanly pressed clothes which he left delicately on the counter, then slipped smoothly out of her silent movie. That was her signal to either dress and live, or soak and wrinkle completely into a prune. Nikki reluctantly chose the former, but took her sweet time about it.

"You should feel most fortunate to be in this gorgeous suite, Sister Donna Marie" came some words from Kase as she emerged from her inferno. He was quickly past her, and could soon be heard bathing. A bundle of clothes was handed through the suite door by a suddenly solicitous porter, which Nikki dutifully transported to the bathroom where she got an unexpected but not all together unwelcome look at Kase sans clothes, as he was stepping out of her bubble bath to dry himself. A full view actually, because the far side of the tub was one big mirror. Kase pretended not to notice, and Nikki pretended not to stay too long, gawking.

"Like I said," Kase continued as he stepped out of the bathroom a few minutes later buckling up his trousers, but bare chested. "You're fortunate - as am I, actually - to be staying in this huge elegant suite in the middle of downtown Cairo."

"Normally the good things go to those who don't often have them" Kase explained to Nikki's look of consternation. "The low income Praetorian Guard stays in the high income suites when he's on assignment; vice versa for me."

"Living the life," is how we put it. "That obnoxious porter who was so insulting to us, is actually a mere wage earner at a fast food joint in Cincinnati - this is his chance to crash the boss's party and to vent his ire at the upper class. He did rather well don't you think?"

"I guess so - he must be a good friend of yours."

"He's awfully good with surveillance; and has other important talents as well - not to mention being a great short order cook, which we need more often than you think for remote expeditions - like this archaeological dig we are going on tomorrow, at Abydos."

"Dig - you said we were just visiting." Nikki was suddenly interested; almost desperate to get back into her element.

"No, were're going to Abydos to test new ground; new theories - and maybe new accolades for your young but promising career, Professor Gâteaux." Which pleased Nikki no end; and Kase was glad himself.

"Surely you - and others - will headline the expedition."

"Most certainly, not. You're the boss once we arrive at Abydos. It's to you that will go the laurels. I'll be a mere digger at your beck and command, your most gracious highness."

Nikki was thinking very hard right about now; much too hard, for Kase's comfort. "This would probably be a good time to remind you that paybacks are not well looked upon in Praetorian circles."

"Praetorian circles be damned - you'll be living the life, I guarantee you my devilish friend with all the cards up his sleeve." The cajun pronunciation, a mere slip of the tongue, was most worrisome to Kase. Having been raised in that neck of the woods, he well knew that Cajuns were infamous for their memory of slights - and their retaliation in kind.

So it was, with more than a little consternation, that Kase turned and went to complete his dressing in the bath room. He was somewhat aloof for the rest of the afternoon, as they kept their distances - not too hard to do, in the vast suite. Nikki was busy searching the internet archives of the University of Chicago, and her Egyptology Institute there; emailing colleagues for the materials she would need. Things like that.

Kase meanwhile, somewhat uncharacteristically, just kind of lounged on the sofa and read the English language Herald Tribune. Half way through the afternoon he snoozed, then awoke when a package of spanish language *Asterix* cartoon books (about the little viking explorer who tricked the persuing Roman legions to a standoff at every encounter; who most surely was the bane of every Pataetorian except Kase, on every continent) were delivered; after which time Kase was clearly in heaven, chuckling often and out right laughing too. Better enjoy your decadent comforts now, Nikki thought; because you meet your maker in the morrow, as she added one more disgusting chore to her list on the back of an envelope, to assign to him once they were on site at Abydos.

Thus they passed the sweltering heat of the afternoon, in relative comfort and relishing a few well deserved moments of solitude and cogitation. That's what the history books will say anyway, if all goes as planned.

It was late in the afternoon, and the western sun was streaming directly into the room from the large patio, and Nikki got up to close the blinds to shunt the glare that was playing havoc with her computer screen. Much to her surprise, there was Kase lounging on the patio with pilots dark glasses and a body to kill glistening with sun tan lotion, sipping a jug of water and reading his precious cartoon books.

"Gonna get skin cancer," Nikki admonished from within the suite.

"The world's gonna be gone in twenty years anyway; what the hell do I care," came the out of character but entirely serious reply.

"What happened to my friend's eternal pool of optimism?"

"Reality is what - or hadn't you noticed?" Evidently she hadn't.

"Truth be told, the known reserves of oil will be depleted in twenty years. After which time civilization ceases to exist." With a sweep of his

hands, covering heaven and hell, "All this will be a mere memory, of an Atlantean time lost in a mythos of conjecture."

Nikki was stunned, but her mind kept calculating. "That's what the Praetorians are all about, isn't it? I knew there had to be some overwhelming motivation for all of you - that's it - energy, pure and simple."

"It's not THE reason, but it's one of the many that motivates our members. While all the leaders of the world play their fiddles like Nero, Rome burns." Then he added, "No one, no where has acknowledged the problem - our current energy use is totally unsustainable; no alternative technologies are even on the horizon. Even if they were, it takes decades for a new theory to reach practical applications; and no such theory exists." Then pretending to look at a non-existent watch on his wrist, "The event horizon is right about now - no theory exists; no technology twenty years from now when we need it. Bingo, the world ends in chaos."

"What about fuel cells?"

"Never happen - there's not even a hint of a theory to support fuel cells efficient enough to be any more affordable than photovoltaic solar cells - which have been at the infamous break-through-to-profitability horizon for decades. Just like fuel cells are, now."

"Electric vehicles?"

"Gotta have energy to create the electricity - no can do."

"You're serious about this aren't you?"

"It's the End of Days, no matter how you look at it. Every world leader has looked at it; and they've all decided the same thing - party now while the lights are on." Then Kase added, "That's why the Holy Father dubbed me Lucifer - because he made me promise to bring the bad news to the people's attention; or at least to try and avert total disaster."

But Nikki had already stepped back into the room, closed the curtains, and returned to her work. Evidently the Praetorians had a plan, or the great *Quintus maximus* wouldn't be reading *Asterix* out on a noisy deck in the middle of Cairo.

A short while later, Nikki crept out onto the patio clad in a skimpy little bikini that bulged and curved in all the right places, and demurely asked Kase to put some suntan lotion on her back. She nearly giggled when he did so quite casually, like he'd done it a hundred times before.

"Nice digs - where'd you get them?" the solicitous Father inquired.

"Your porter friend acquired them for me - just like you said, he's a man of many talents."

Kase frowned. "You learn quickly, grasshopper."

"I see right through your whole operation, *Monsignor*" she said boldly then, settling down on her belly, upon a couple layers of towels, facing Kase - making no pretense of obscuring his view of her generous cleavage. At which point he put down the *Asterix*, removed his glasses and just closed his eyes tight shut.

"Oh," said Nikki, actually quite hurt. "So you'd rather read your stupid comic book with your weak eyes, than look at a beautiful woman laying prone at your feet."

"Not at all, dearest. I quite need to concentrate on what you are about to say." Adding, beneath his breath, just the smell of you near me is more than enough to accomplish your objective of loosening my tongue with all the quite formidable feminine whiles at your disposal. Then he opened his eyes wide, took a long deep look; winked, then closed them to await her statement.

"Very well, your nobleness." Nikki said, lowering herself on her elbows to show less flesh, and also to be more comfortable talking to him.

"I think you're not on some kind of secret mission for the late John Paul, code named Lucifer. I think you were his chosen successor, and you both conspired that you would take the name of Pope Lucifer, as befitting your personality. I think something went wrong, you went out of favor with the College of Cardinals, and so you have resorted to plan B; and this whole silly Praetorian Guard fiasco."

"Correct on all counts," Kase said a few breathless moments later. "Also wrong on all accounts - but a very commendable try." Nodding approvingly.

"Yes, John Paul wanted me to be Pope more than any other; but no, I did not want to be Pontiff myself. I'm too independent, and I'm literally allergic to bureaucracy. It gives me a rash, and headaches. Yes, it was our private joke to think of me as Pope Lucifer; but no the Praetorian Guard is not a fiasco, but an organization and a vision to which we had both long since sworn fealty. Finally, yes I was cast out from the priesthood by a unanimous decision of the College of Cardinals; a Fallen Angel, in every sense of the phrase."

Nikki was fascinated. "Good Lord - you bucked the whole damn Curia. Only a stupid idiot would do such a thing." Then pointing her finger at him, "You did it for John Paul, didn't you? I know it, because giving you his ring was a huge debt of gratitude. Come on, you heretic you - what is it that you did?!" Kase sighed his resignation, melting much too easily before her craven enthusiasm.

"His Holiness was from Poland, as you well know. He grew up in the aftermath of the Holocaust - most of the concentration camps were in Poland. Of all the dastardly and evil things in the world, the only one for which John Paul had absolutely no patience - from drugs to terrorism, and

even child molesting priests - they all paled in comparison to how he thought about the perpetrators of the Death Camps.

"Back when I was still a young cleric working at the Vatican archives, he gave me a personal assignment. I was to research the Church's role in the Holocaust. He was somewhat miffed when the very next day I showed up in his office with a fascinating expose not long since on the New York Times bestseller list; that gave the whole story in complete detail. Naturally, he knew about that book; and the assignment to me was just a test of my scruples - and my boldness; which I passed with highest honors, I suppose.

"The next - the real - assignment was far more challenging. His Holiness knew all the rumors about the Swiss bankrolling the Nazis, hiding Nazi loot after the war, and even stashing tens of thousands of priceless paintings by the Masters in their vaults. He was less upset with the Swiss, than he was uncomfortable having the Swiss Guards as the official bodyguards of the Papacy; and policemen of the Vatican City itself. He saw such duties as the highest honor; which, if in fact the Swiss had been so intricately involved in the Nazi regime, was an honor best bestowed upon others.

"I was at that time more or less the local Praetorian Guard representative, and so I took the opportunity and introduced John Paul to who and what we were. He disparaged, in the most uncharacteristically loud voice, every single belief we have about the earthly genealogy of Jesus Christ; but admired our style and abstinence, and especially the purported honor of our Order.

"I did the research on the Master works, submitted it through channels; but when I did not hear from him for a few months, I went boldly into the Papal Office unannounced one morning and presented his Holiness with an elegant certificate making him an honorary member of the Praetorian Guard. He was touched, but also disturbed about the dirty history of his Swiss guards. He wanted them out, and I mean ASAP.

"Naturally, his wish was a command but practically overnight huge financial pressures happened on the Holy See - immediate repayment of major debts, tremendous short fallings in revenues, and more. Clearly the Swiss could not be dismissed so lightly, and so, they were not.

"That's it - they dismissed you because you advised the Pope rightly in this issue?" Nikki was incredulous.

"Actually, I did a little bit more than that" Kase said, innocently. "You see, John Paul was very stressed out about having the Swiss Guards around thereafter; and well, his condition was not amenable to stress, not at all. Consequently, I took the incentive to negotiate a few transfers, within transfers; while a few sets of orders were mixed up and lost - do you

get the picture?" She nodded, grumbling something about crazy Egyptian bus drivers and crazier chauffeurs.

"Well, push came to shove until one day I had quiet words with his Holiness and informed him that the new Guards on his personal staff - and he had noticed the new faces already. Well, I told him that those men were not Swiss at all but some very good friends of mine who were on assignment from Mossad, the Israeli secret service. Much to my surprise, the Pope beamed with pleasure, thanked me profusely and acted as though an unbearable weight had been lifted off his back. The Israelis were honored - and everybody knows they are the very best at what they do - and John Paul felt infinitely safer; and pleased too, that he had in some small way lessened the chasm between two of God's favorite families, the Jews and the Christians.

"Naturally, I was eventually found out and then tossed right out with the bath water. I suppose all the fake Swiss Guards will go back to Israel now that John Paul is gone, but they have rendered flawless service. Though they would never admit to it, I personally believe they were instrumental in saving his Holiness' life from the assassination attempt a few years ago. He had been intending to retire even then, due to the advancing state of Parkinson's, but remained the Vicar of Christ because he felt the Swiss threat was worse than ever; more serious than we had considered.

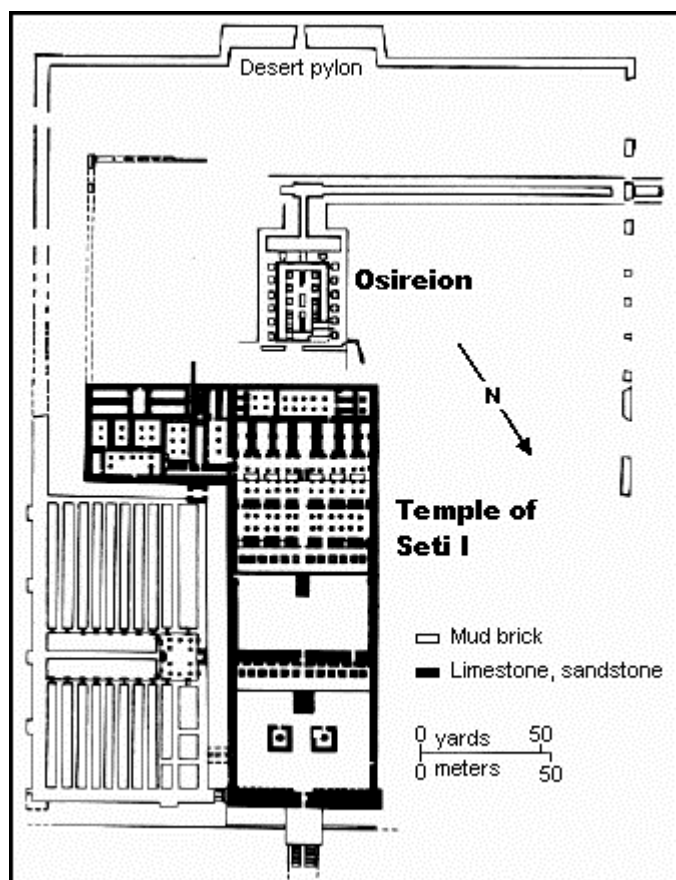
"I saw John Paul one last time, those many years ago. He told me then about how he felt the Swiss had tried to assassinate him, to keep word of their duplicity in the Nazi crimes from ever reaching the light of day - at least, from a powerful figure such as himself. I exhorted *Le' Papa* to step down, but he insisted - and he instructed me to observe everything from a distance, and to root out the disease at all costs.

"So, you can see why Praetorians are so extremely strict about sanctioning each operation as being absolutely without political or personal goals. We're in a life and death struggle with the Devils of Darkness, with the monied elite in every corner of the world; with the Swiss and every other nationality who condones evil and those who do it.

"Oh well, if it's any consolation, I think having a Pope named Lucifer would have been pretty radical. Especially if your background came out; the kids would just love having their very own Darth Vader in the Holy See."

"Things like that happen only in comic books, and dime novels." Came the reply, but at least it was accompanied by a smile.

It had suddenly grown dark, and so they retired into the hotel, dined on a light meal then turned in. It would be a busy day tomorrow.



IV. Abydos

Nikki awoke before sunrise the next morning, anxious to get on to Abydos. She found Kase outside on the patio, working out at a rapid pace. He looked briefly her way as the sliding glass door opened and she exited, wearing just a long sleeping shirt that reached midway to the thighs, hair tied in a chaotic ponytail. Nikki was a little bit perturbed that he didn't even pause the pace of his workout, but just waved hi, turned away from her and kept right on pumping.

"Don't tell me you're some kind of Chuck Norris Texas Ranger martial arts expert" she said with a frown on her face. The sun was just beginning to traverse the horizon across the city proper, and Nikki held her hand up to block the direct rays. Kase was fit indeed, as she got her first good look at him, clad now just in loose fitting jogging shorts. No stomach, broad shoulders, strong but not over chiseled chest; and legs to kill for - short tennis player legs with oversized calves and huge thighs - then small feet, leaving a good arch traced in sweat on the patio surface. She liked what she saw.

Kase paused in the calisthenics. "Not hardly - just doing the old Naval Academy workout, to loosen the joints and unclax the muscles." Then he was back at it, doing simple jumping jacks, breathing lightly in pace with the pat pat of his bare feet on the saltillo tile deck. "The farthest I got in martial arts was the primitive Judo class at the Academy - we called it hand-to-gland 101." Sounds pretty challenging, Nikki said blandly; still watching the muscles warp and wrap on his body.

"I suppose there are lots of Annapolis jocks in the Praetorian Guard" Nikki said, shaking her head to break the trance, then leaning against the wall and sliding down to sit on her haunches; watching Kase all the time. He stopped then, stooped to pick up a towel, then paced over and leaned against the wall beside her, doing some light stretches to loosen up. "Care to join me?" He smiled, "You look kind of tense." She was beginning to sweat in the direct sunlight, and her night shirt clung to her large breasts, glued by a dab of moisture. Kase tried not to notice.

"Having an autonomous response, are we?" Nikki said with a meek voice, and Kase blushed clear up to his ears. He urgently changed the subject.

"Actually, Annapolis grads are not much welcome in the Praetorian Guard. We clashed when I was there; and ever since. I was physically banned by the President of our Class from our 25th reunion a couple of years ago, to show you the level of animosity between us."

"What, is their definition of Honor too strict for you?" Nikki asked pointedly, wondering if the swelling in his trousers had diminished but afraid to look toward Kase by her side.

"Quite the contrary. I turned in a classmate for an Honor Code violation when I was there; my Company Officer refused to press charges, and so I resigned in protest." Then, when no sarcastic comment from Nikki was forthcoming, he added, "In the process I was myself given the infamous Silent Treatment by my peers, for daring to castigate one of our own." Nikki saw him shaking his head in dismay, out of the corner of her eye. "That's not honor, that's treachery."

They sat their silently for a while, watching the brilliant red ball of the sun god Ra inch up into the sky; Kase welcoming the cooling evaporation of sweat, Nikki growing increasingly dismayed at the crescendo of emotions welling up in her body, making her break out in a sweat almost as heavy as Kase's - all because of these cursed hormones. Her night shirt was beginning to cling to all parts of her anatomy, which she tried inexpertly to hide. Eventually she gave up with a humph, and sloughed all the way down on the floor and sat there cross legged, arms across her chest - damned if she would run away from herself.

Kase sensed what was happening, and waxed suddenly eloquent. "I guess you're wondering how I got into this Church thing, much less came to the attention of the Pontiff himself." Nikki was more or less catatonic at this point, so Kase did the monologue thing.

"I went to a private boarding school in Rome when I was in junior high, Notre Dame International School for Boys, run by the Franciscans. I used to pack a brown bag lunch then catch a bus into the center of the city, and spend all day Saturday and Sunday exploring the ruins; oblivious to crime, unconscious of the language barrier - I had some Spanish, but no Italian. I was totally enthralled by the earthly remains of the Roman Empire. I suppose the Brothers believed those innocent forays out into the dangerous real world by a blond haired blue eyed big American kid, right at the time the Viet Nam war was going on and everybody in the world despised Americans; well, they saw I had an incorrigible faith, and that I had no compunction whatsoever about acting upon it.

"No doubt their high esteem of me evaporated when during an unannounced room inspection, they found a playboy centerfold of a very large breasted beauty taped to the inside of my locker door." Kase turned his head to look squarely at Nikki's face in silhouette beside him; she refused to meet his eyes, but he could see her eyes roll around with a kind of insipid impatience. "Anyway, I suppose they took my name off their seminary recruiting list after that."

"My next brush with the Church was almost ten years later. I was enlisted, in the Army and a Chaplain's Assistant at Fort Sam Houston, in

San Antonio. I got there on an Eyes Only transfer arranged by my U.S. Congressman, after turning in a dozen senior enlisted for drug abuse at White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico. I got some big medal for 'staunch individualism and impeccable moral fortitude' because the accused had found me out, threatened my life, blew up my car, and totaled my motorcycle - with me on it.

"Well, I always thought it was the accused who did those things - until recently...." Kase mused, in an absent minded aside. Nikki sensed extreme malevolence, but didn't voice her fears.

"I think it wasn't the award that got the Church's attention; or even the damnable faith that let me coast through all the dangers and threats, completely unfazed - I had actually requested my superiors to remain at White Sands, to help the accused overcome their drug addiction. What got the Church's attention was that once I got the rush transfer to For Sam, I initiated an investigation by the Inspector General of the Army into the conditions at White Sands that had driven people to abusing drugs; some of those guys were only a couple of years away from retiring with full benefits, and they put it all at risk just to get high.

"Anyway, the IG investigation got me into big trouble; and I was myself discharged a few months later. Moreover, it got my boss, who had supported me in all of this - he was the Chief of Chaplains at Fort Sam, one of the most influential positions in the Army Chaplain Corps - he was transferred to some podunk outpost in the swamps of South Louisiana; and his wife, herself a high ranking Chaplain in the Air Force, was forced into early retirement. Meanwhile, I appealed my wrongful discharge repeatedly over many years, and with each try, the cover up got steeper and reached higher into the pecking order.

"Clearly I had stepped into some deep do do, and the military - indeed, eventually the whole damn bureaucracy - conspired to cover it up. At some point the Church must have gotten interested, and I got a summons from a Jesuit higher up one day in Austin only a few years ago. It was he who mentioned that White Sands was near to Roswell, New Mexico where the famous crash landing that happened in 1947, of what the Army initially announced was an alien spacecraft (and later corrected to read a downed weather balloon).

The extreme reaction by the authorities to my activities, is what got the Church to wondering about extraterrestrials, as they thought it obvious that the military was hiding something damning and very evil at White Sands. I was asked to start an investigation on their behalf. I had a very strong technical background, and they asked me to get to the bottom of it; only the facts.

"To make a long story short, it was at that point that I was introduced to the Praetorian Guard, and with a strong recommendation

from somebody in the Church, was let right in. I took to the task; got the attention of the red hats, and was eventually given kind of a field promotion to work in the Vatican Archives. They wrapped a white clerical collar around me, bound my ankles in a ball and chain to keep me from straying beyond the straight and narrow, and the rest is history.

By this time it was getting quite hot. Nikki had sat through the monologue patiently, although had lately started to fan her face with the towel Kase offered her. After his long winded expose', Kase stood up, then went to her and reached down with his hand, and helped Nikki to her feet. You look like a hooters waitress in a wet T shirt spring break contest he said. She jammed a fist hard in his side for that one, then ran inside. She was in tears before the door closed, and ran to the bathroom, while Kase went back to his workout.

Twenty minutes later the door cracked open, Nikki's wet head popped out with a shiny clean face below it and a toothy smile, to inform him that the bath was free. The hotel management was anxious for them to be on their way, if you please, so get your tight ass into the shower so we can get the show on the road *immediatente, por favore*.

When Kase stepped out of the bathroom half an hour later, clad in loose khaki pants, billowing white shirt, and his twenty year old Kelty leather hiking boots, it was into a new reality. He stopped short to see Nikki all geared up in her Indiana Jones archaeology dig outfit. They looked like twins, actually. But Nikki had the whip and Kase was the go-boy, and she was going to make the most of it.

"Since when do men take thirty minutes to bathe," Nikki said caustically as she pointed to their packed bags, walked right out the suite door into the hallway; leaving Kase to trundle behind her with all this new baggage that had suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

He caught up right before she reached the elevator, "Uh, excuse me Drill Sergeant; but I expect you have arranged transportation?" Knowing full well it was his resources they needed to get their gear to Abydos.

"Our Humvee is waiting outside the lobby," she replied haughtily. As the elevator door closed on the stunned Kase still standing in the hallway, before it slammed shut in his face he heard something about, "Pick up the digging and travel permits at the front desk on your way out." Which he did, of course; somewhat miffed at the high browed treatment he

got from the damned Praetorian porter, whom Nikki had clearly put under her spell.

Kase stuffed the permits into his briefcase, then juggled their luggage out the front door, feeling pain with each pace. By the time he reached the Humvee across the street his shirt was drenched in sweat, and the creases had long since gone from his trousers. There Nikki sat waiting, luxuriating in the crisp cool air conditioned vehicle, drumming her fingers on the steering wheel, impatiently; for the help to get his menial work done.

"You're enjoying this, way to much," Kase said as he slid painfully into the passenger seat and buckled up. "He mopped his brow, then shivered with fright as Nikki gunned the engine and burned rubber out into the narrow street; the giant Humvee fully two lanes wide, and taking up the entirety of the street blocking traffic both ways. Kase jammed his eyes closed, and didn't open them again until he knew they were safely on a major highway, cruising in light traffic on the way out of Cairo toward old Egypt.

"Chicken," Nikki said; making little pecking sounds. Kase laughed and hoped to god their Praetorian Guard escort had caught up with them following this unexpected calamity of events. True to form, one of their trademark jalopies cruised by - god forbid, but a woman was driving; an SPQR bumper sticker with the smiling silver eagle, subtly displayed on the bumper.

"One day very soon, I'm going to regret I ever invited you into the Order," Kase muttered under his breath. "Like, maybe today" as he unfolded a road map given him by Nikki, and made one last comment, "I see now why my old classmates rue the day they let women into the Academy."

Kase crawled over the seat into the rear deck of the vehicle, fished out his briefcase then crawled back into the front seat. He spent the next five minutes leafing through a sheaf of hundreds of super thin sheets of velum that looked like topographic maps. Nikki was about to ask what they were when Kase exploded.

"Crap, I can't tell a thing from these prints." Then after a moment of thought he asked Nikki, "You got any high intensity area lights in your equipment," but of course. "Infrared lamps?" naturally. OK, keep an eye out for a smallish mosque with a good dome; and pull off as soon as you spot one. Then pointing two fingers at his eyes, indicating his long distance vision wasn't so good.

They were still in the outskirts of Cairo, and there were many mosques; Nikki got onto an access road, and pulled to a stop at one fitting Kase's description. As he was getting out of the door, she called "Be careful, it's only a half an hour before prayers."

Kase was gone for a few minutes, disappeared into the double entrance doors. Traffic on the thoroughfare slowed down dramatically, everybody curious about the big black Humvee with the silver eagle on the side; not to mention the startling beauty of a western woman waiting impatiently on the driver's side.

Worshippers were starting to trickle into the Mosque, prayer rugs rolled under their arms. Then Kase came running out - hit the sizzling hot black top in his stocking feet, then ran back to put back on the shoes that he had taken off to enter the House of Allah. Back at their vehicle, he popped the rear door and pushed all the gear aside, then opened a hidden compartment in the floor and pulled out a money belt, an M16 and a couple of full clips of ammo.

Nikki was aghast as he ran back in, loading the M16 without missing a stride; then stopped to gingerly remove his shoes at the door, and disappeared inside. Any minute now Nikki expected to see all hell break loose, blood and guts everywhere. Instead, out comes Kase with the Mullah, arm in arm; the holy man now proudly holding his brand new automatic M16 rifle. They walked up to the the car, Kase urged Nikki out; introduced her to the beaming cleric, and told her that he was given use of the Mosque for half a day, in exchange for new prayer rugs for all the congregants, and a new rifle for their leader that he could use in his reserve duty as a mid level officer in the Egyptian Army.

Nikki said something like, sounds like a good deal to me; shall I unload the infra red lamps you were asking about? Yes, please, while a few volunteers use their old prayer rugs to seal off all the widows in the dome so we can have complete darkness within. A lot of things happened at once, everybody was happy and gracious; and in no time at all Nikki was watching Kase sweep and carefully dust the floor under the center of the dark Mosque dome, around which her archaeological dig lights were arrayed and emitting an aerie red light. Satisfied the place was pristine clean, Kase very delicately laid out all the velums in a huge rectangular grid; then beckoned Nikki to join him. She padded across carefully in her stocking'd feet, burning with curiosity.

"These are satellite photographs taken by a National Security Agency spy satellite on a recent pass," Kase said - holding finger to his lips, to tell Nikki not to ask where this highly classified material came from. The Mullah was standing at the edge of their set up, quietly looking and listening - Kase motioned Nikki that it was OK for him to be here; with a balled up fist on his heart. Nikki figured he was a Praetorian Guardsman.

"That's the Red Sea," Nikki said after a quick look. Then after a few minutes and her eyes got acclimated to the infrared illumination, the images obtained some depth and faint after images like ghosts materialized.

"These were taken with a special camera sensitive to specific wavelengths. Normally it's all digitized, and all the wavelengths are combined, and a computer filter is used to isolate different frequencies of light. Longer wavelengths reveal the surface topography, and shorter wavelengths penetrate further, revealing subsurface features. These images are hard copies of the shorter wavelengths, which you would see as black lines in white light; and they used a special ink to overlay even shorter wavelengths, visible only in infrared light.

"What are we looking for?" asked the Mullah from the shadows, who now had a magnifying glass and was on his hands and knees inspecting the checkerboard map."

Nikki had a magnifying glass herself, and went to hand a second one to Kase but he declined, pointing the two fingers at his eyes. He backed off the velum sheets, and stood outside the lights, talking to them.

"You both know the story of the parting of the Red Sea, when Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt. They got away, but the Red Sea just as swiftly flowed back into its banks, and swallowed up the pursuing Egyptian army. The area where all this happened is still covered with water, and reeds - and that's what lies along the center of these pages.

"There's a lot of background noise, as you can see. That is from the bones of the deceased; petrified wood; metal wheel rims, and other things. The infrared penetrates the reeds, the water, and a few feet of the clay substrate - it's the clay that has kept these implements from completely deteriorating over the last three thousand years.

"It's more likely the images are deposits of harder material that replaced the original metal and wood as it rusted and rotted away," Nikki noted, as she was inspecting the papers.

"Either way, ignore all that - mostly the darker lines. Beneath that is what the high energy short wavelength infrared rays bounce off of; you're looking for a long straight line, very faint because it is very deep in the ground. Perhaps gently curved, and maybe dashed - starting here, stopping; then starting up again along the same trajectory. See if ya'll can find anything like that."

Some late penitents had cracked open the door, releasing a blinding ray of light into the Mosque, so Kase hurried over to them, had some soft words; and locked the door behind.

When he returned to the others, there was a running conversation; the cleric in broken English, Nikki in the heavily French accented English that happened when she was excited. They had the beginnings of a line; then traced it all the way from one end of the Red Sea where it exited the Nile; all the way nearly to the other end." Kase had them show it to him, and he made little marks where each line segment began and ended; then stood back and judged the whole thing to be part of one long streak.

"Tell me what this is, Father Kase" Nikki said; and when the Islamic Mullah heard this he was a little more deferential to him, apparently having not realizing Kase was a fellow cleric.

Kase motioned them off the papers; then to a far corner of the room, where he said in quiet tones to keep anybody outside from hearing.

"We in celestial mechanics have a theory of gravity in the cosmos that implies that the action of Steven Hawkings brainchild, String Theory; is more than a theoretical structure of the universe, but something real and physical. Our planet Earth is held in stasis, in kind of a cocoon or web of these gravity strings. Occasionally a string breaks loose, and strikes the Earth. Do you follow?"

"That thin red line on those vellums that caused the parting of the Red Sea was caused by such a gravity string, raking the surface of the Earth.

The Mullah was already upon his knees, deep in prayer; having surmised that not only was this a real physical phenomena that happened, but something that had some sort of sentience, because of its association with the Exodus. It had literally been an Act of God. He was still deep in prayer, long after Kase and Nikki in a state of near panic, had packed all their gear, bundled up the vellums in a roll; and sped away from the Mosque, south on the highway toward Abydos.

Kase was driving now. Nikki was too shaken by the revelation. Kase had long since come to grips with the idea of gravity strings. He had known all along that a proper satellite survey would prove his theories correct. The divine providence angle didn't much bother him anyway; but clearly it reached very deep into Nikki's spiritual identity.

"You don't suppose the whole Exodus thing is just another Old Testament allegory - Moses, the snake that turns into a staff, the seven plagues." Nikki said in a distant monotone, trying to back herself out of an intellectual acknowledgment of God.

"Not likely," Kase said with conviction. "My guess is that the Exodus happened exactly as they said it did, and that the plagues and other things were added to make it all seem so surreal that nobody could quite believe it all happened." Nikki wasn't following. "In other words, the Red Sea did part to pave the way for the Hebrew's safety; but everything else about the story is embellishment and allegory, about the extremely spiritual ramifications of the event upon the Egyptians left behind."

"We're still going to Abydos - after that?" Nikki said long moments later. Kase smiled and said nothing, leading her to blurt out. "No way, Jose - you mean there's more to this escapade of yours?" Kase smiled even wider. Nikki was holding her head in her hands by now, long dark hair flowing around her arms. "This isn't happening. It just plain can't possibly be happening..."

Four silent hours later, Cairo and the Pyramids of Giza, and the Sphinx far behind them; the highway turned gently into an area of low lying reeds and they were at the Red Sea. A few more minutes and somebody was wildly waving them down. Kase pulled over, had a few words with the man, then continued on.

"Our cleric friend at the Mosque radioed ahead, " Kase began; then waited until he had Nikki's attention. "They sent a couple of local kids down to explore some of the more prominent lines."

"They really are etchings in the bedrock," Nikki finished for him.

"Yes, indeed."

Kase pulled off the road at a small oasis of date palms, and they had a picnic lunch. In the distance, in all directions, the tall reeds of the Red Sea wafted in the breeze. Cars sped past, oblivious to the significance of the place - as, indeed, had travelers along this important trade route for over four thousand years.

"Are you ready for the punch line, Sister?" Kase said, after they had slacked their thirst and hunger on a simple fare of dates, sun tea, and freshly baked bread.

"Go ahead, hit me one more time," Nikki said groggily, having long ago gone down for the count. So he very industriously and happily, almost skipped back to the Humvee, extracted a tube from his secret compartment. When he sat back down on the stone bench, Nikki moaned, "I thought this was going to be my day; me, the archaeologist - you've ruined my pride and my self esteem, you beast."

"Don't give up so quickly, babe; I now offer you a chance for reconciliation."

"I'm interested in this here oasis; or any in the vicinity," Kase said; pointing to three light green spots, signifying greenery in the middle of the Sahara desert a hundred miles or so west of Abydos. "Are there any ruins there, or any myths; things like that, to your esteemed knowledge?" He was all ears now.

"This whole place was an ancient trade route," Nikki perked up. "The Romans built a fort, at this oasis and it was used to protect the travelers from bandits and marauders." There was a line of green, roughly paralleling the Nile; several hundred miles long, ending at the southernmost end in the oasis Nikki had pointed to, the Kharaga Oasis. "The Romans called it the 'Great Oasis' and there is a settlement now at that place."

"Is there anything the least bit peculiar about the Roman ruins there?" Kase asked, and Nikki dove into her notes. Then she pulled out her laptop, hooked up some fancy antenna and got on the web, then surfed through the University of Chicago archives at the Egyptology Department. "You aren't telling anybody about this by email, are you" Kase said, and Nikki scowled and shook her head, hell no.

"There has apparently been some discussion about the architectural style of this Roman Fort. It's unlike any other building made by the Romans of that time; or at any time for that matter. It's more reminiscent of the very early Egyptian construction methods," adding stoically, "Actually, not unlike the structures remaining from your namesake's era, Khasekhemy."

Then Nikki snapped shut the laptop, and turned to glare at Kase. "Why do I get this feeling that you're leading me around like a dog on a leash," and when Kase hunched his shoulders all innocent like, she wadded up some discarded note pages and threw them in his face.

"Honest, scouts honor," with the sill three fingers held up in a Cub Scout salute, "I searched far and wide for what you have just told me, but could find no such evidence."

"So I solved your puzzle?" she interrupted, still angry. "OK, *Monsignore*; spill the beans - right now - all of them, you got me?" Kase waited until her blood pressure dropped below heart attack levels, and briefed her on his theory.

"Ten thousand years ago, the Sahara was a lush, green wonderland. Then it started to dry up; there were major climate changes all over the world. This was one of them. By the time of Khasekhemy's reign, it was almost all desert and looked more or less like it does today - a thin line of green punctuated by a few oases, with nothing but bleak desert on either side.

"Presumably this tropical paradise was not only popular with animals - who had been pushed from all quarters into the region by the advancing Ice Age 20,000 years previous - but with early humans as well. There was water and food enough for all. Then the climate began to change, and land was slowly, then more quickly lost to the advancing desert.

"I believe there was an ancient civilization there, with remarkable engineering expertise. As their water supply diminished, they built a giant aqueduct from the Nile, to provide them with a steady supply of fresh water all year long. The *castellum*, or end point of this aqueduct, was the Osireion at Abydos - which was first dubbed the Hypogeum or Water Works by Margaret Murray in 1903. We'll be studying all the hydraulic and archaeological issues involving the Osireion when we get there; for right now, assume that its structure is much more reminiscent of a Roman style cistern for a massive aqueduct, than it is of an Egyptian temple.

"The Hall of Barques monument a few paces from the Osireion attributed to the Pharaoh Khasekhemy is just that - a monument he left to tell posterity about the great aqueduct, or what may even have been a large river." Then, in a different voice all together, "The damn river dried up. Our whole civilization is dying. What the fuck are we to do with these stupid boats any more."

"I get your drift," Nikki asserted. Then added, "Very much in character too, if I dare say so myself."

"So you draw a line from the Hall of Barques to the old allegedly Roman fortification at the Great Oasis, which has similar architectural style and construction techniques to the work done during Khasekhemy's reign - and Bingo - the Great Oasis fort is five thousand years old, or maybe even older; if it was part of the ancient civilization that made the aqueduct.

"What happened to the people who build this marvelous monument," Nikki asked skeptically.

"I'm still working on that part. One possibility is that they emigrated to southern Italy, and became who we know as the Etruscans. They are admittedly one of the least known peoples of Antiquity; yet, their stone working skills far exceeded any other nation at the time.

"That's true," Nikki added thoughtfully. "It was the twelve tribes of Etruscans who built Rome in the first place - casually - almost like it was a hobby. In a single generation they constructed the whole original city; forum, temples, paved streets, and nine massive aqueducts supplying more water to the city proper per capita than any other city before or since; up to and including the modern day. Their massive storm drain system in the center of Rome called the *Cloaca Maxima*, is still in regular use to this day. It's the oldest engineered structure in the world." Then Nikki stopped short.

"But you knew all this," she said. Kase demurred that it was still most pleasant to hear it from her. She countered, "If this is old news to you; then I have to assume that it all ties in with your Praetorian Guard mythology."

"It's tempting - the twelve tribes of Etruscans build a magnificent Rome, then practically disappear from the face of civilization. Historians

believe they were assimilated; Praetorians believe they remained a cohesive element of society, and emerged three hundred years later, as twelve disciples and a mystical leader with a whole new philosophy." Then he waved Nikki's objections off, saying it was only a popular idea among his people that nobody really gave much credit too.

Kase had lost a little stature with this wild theory, but he quickly regained it. "Now we get to the heart of the whole matter - the Book of Job - which is by all accounts the oldest literary document in the world. Not even the Hebrews claim it was theirs; their tradition says that Job was not a Hebrew, but predated them, by millennia.

"There are no remaining writings on the Osireion walls - they almost immediately deteriorated as soon as it was excavated in the early 1900's and were exposed to the air for the first time in three thousand years.

"Wall writings don't usually deteriorate so quickly," Nikki added thoughtfully. "That would indicate that they were very, very old - much older than the reign of Seti I, whom everybody says built the place."

"I've already mentioned that the syntax of the writings on the Osireion walls - they were copied down by Margaret Murray and Neville before they deteriorated. I have a copy that I'll give you. The writing style matches very closely that of the Book of Job. The story they tell is even similar, if with different symbols. I believe Job was not an allegory at all; but the story of a real civilization, with a real heritage - and a real archaeological record.

"The Roman fort at the Great Oasis; the Osireion; the Hall of Barques," Nikki was putting the pieces together.

"The big mystery that remains, is what was the great calamity that caused the destitution of this civilization. Job says it was instantaneous, immediate, and totally catastrophic. The Osireion text confirms this, if indirectly.

"You're a little beyond me on that point. The big mystery that I see is not so old, but in the era of Exodus. Rameses was the pharaoh of the Exodus story; and his successor was Seti I to whom is attributed the Osireion." She held up her hand to silence Kase, "Yes, I know about the early controversy, that Seti I didn't build the place; that there are no records of its construction; of the transport of the massive granite blocks from the quarry far down river; that Seti I just added his *chartouf* to one of the walls, and claimed the Osireion as his own.

Kase mutely pleaded innocent, to questioning her depth of knowledge. "OK, so your theory holds some water - pun intended - and it

can be argued that the Osireion was there buried fifty feet under the sands when Seti I discovered it - how does all this tie into your calamitous end of Job's civilization theory?

"How does Amenhotep place in all of this; the heretic pharaoh who swept aside all Egyptian mythologies and proclaimed a One God religion; and built a brand new city on the Nile?

"He was right after Seti I, who himself only reigned a few years.

"No, you aren't linking Amenhotep's conversion to the Exodus and the Gravity String miracle of the Red Sea?

"Actually, no I'm not. I prefer the connection of Amenhotep's philosophy to the discovery of the Osireion. Something the Egyptians discovered there threw their whole five thousand year old religion completely out of whack. Amenhotep built his city; was happily married to Nefertiti; they had half a dozen beautiful daughters, then Nefertiti disappeared without a trace; Amenhotep literally tore his whole new city apart looking for her - leaving it in complete ruins, uninhabitable; then the daughters died, one after the other; and finally the great monarch himself.

"Sounds just like a repetition of what's written in the Book of Job." Nikki said.

"That's why I believe the Osireion is at the center of the whole mystery, and the Exodus and the bolt of energy parting the Red Sea is an indirect influencer." Then Kase with resignation, "I've wrecked my brains trying to come up with an explanation, but I just don't know enough about those people to understand them."

"Maybe they found something in the Osireion that was reinterpreted after the Exodus happened. That would explain the sequence of events being spread out over ten years and the reigns of three Pharaohs.

"It might also explain why the Osireion was buried right after all these events, never again associated with the magnificent temple Seti I built right beside it on the surface. There was absolutely no mention of the place by anybody anywhere, that I can find; other than a comment fifteen hundred years later by the geographer Strabo, about some deep well along trade routes, reached by a long flight of stairs from the surface.

It was finally Nikki's change to get in the last word. "You forget that Neville found dozens of coins when he reopened the Osireion in the 1900's. Each coin was from a different Roman emperor's reign, somehow secreted into the place, which nobody knew even existed.

"Except for the Praetorian Guard," she added herself a moment later. "The first coins beginning during the reign of Ptolemy Soter, the beginning of the Ptolemy's rule as pharaoh; which ended with Cleopatra and Rome's annexation of Egypt."

Kase waited for her to make the last connection.

"And the last coin was from the year that Alexandria was destroyed by the earthquake, and cast beneath the clear clean waters of the Mediterranean." Kased nodded ~ pretty good guess. "About the same time Constantine destroyed the Praetorian Guard at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, as well." They both started feeling kind of creepy.

"Tomorrow we look for an explanation; what secret it was that resided in the Osireion; why Amenhotep's rule was wrecked; how the Ptolemy's found out about it; and if in fact the Praetorian Guard can justifiably trace our roots back five thousand years, maybe even ten thousand years.

"Yes, and tomorrow I'll be damned if you'll knock my feet out from under me like you have these last two days," Nikki said. "Bloody heretic." She added solemnly, and spend the rest of the day buried deep in her notes and furiously doing research on the web. "Bloody witch," he responded.

V. The Osireion

By the time they arrived at Abydos, the rest of the expedition had set up much of the equipment. The encampment was laid out like the old Roman marching army camps, a clean line of white six foot high tents. Actually, all but the commander's tent were just staked out, so far. Each tent was a generous ten by twenty feet. The commander got one tent to himself, while each squad of six got a tent of their own. It was dark, and somehow Nikki and Kase ended up in the same tent; well, actually it was the only tent that had been erected so far.

Quintus got the commander's tent, naturally; and no sooner than the thing had been pitched, and he was fast asleep fully clothed on the floor. The light was dim and there was nobody around to point her way, so Nikki ended up in the very same tent; but at least in her night shirt and in a sleeping bag.

They both awoke when the rest of the workers all turned in for the night, and an abrupt silence instantly descended on the settlement. "I was here first," Kase said, sitting up and starting to disrobe. Nikki peered at him in the dim light cast by the kerosene area lamp in the middle of the camp twenty yards away. "So much for deference to women. Remember that, Sister Donna Marie; when in the company of a Praetorian, damn sure don't expect them to open a door for you," then quite fiendishly, "but damn sure be cautious about walking up a ladder first, especially if you're wearing a skirt."

Kase took a deep breath, and started to wind up an equally witty reply. Then he just let the breath out and said, "You know, Professor Gâteaux, hormones peak early in the morning," checking out his Timex chronometer with an air of exaggerated importance.

Raising his eyebrows, he waited for a rejoinder; but Nikki just smiled back. "Like maybe we should put a little distance between ourselves right about about now - to, like avoid the inevitable."

"Yea right," Nikki grumbled. "Here we are getting ready to uncover the very tomb that drove the pharaoh Amenhotep to insanity; brought the whole kingdom of Egypt to its knees, Lower and Upper regions alike," pointing at him like the wicked witch of the north, "and you, knave Praetorian, want to throw delicate damsel out into the cold, cruel night; beset by wolves and wolfish men alike; and *Ave Maria* knows how many ghosts and demons and creepy crawlers."

"Actually," Kase said reluctantly, "Brave Praetorian commander was going to vacate his spacious accommodations and sleep at the door of said damsel's tent, to ward off any dangers as might arise during the wee hours of the dark and dreadful night."

Nikki put on a sad face, "Please stay" and held open her make shift bed, beckoning him to join her. He stripped down to his underlings, and accepted the invitation. Fortunately they were both sound asleep in seconds, before any naughty thoughts happened; and they rested better than they had in a very long time.

When Nikki crawled out of the tent the following AM, shortly after sunrise; well, she crawled right back in. It was either a time warp out there, or an awfully realistic Hollywood set. A full Roman camp had arisen overnight; with dozens of men and women working feverishly, all attired in some version or other of Roman soldier clothing - infantry, archers, cavalry; they were all there, in authentic and apparently well worn outfits. There wasn't a machine in sight that didn't belong in 1st century AD Rome. Cook fires were smoking, horses and camels tethered and eating fresh hay.

Suddenly the tent flap was swept open, and Nikki practically cowered in the corner as a larger than life barbarian wearing light weight leather shorts, sandals, and a dark red shirt came barreling in; and introduced himself as Centurion Quintus, at your service. Before Nikki could say a word, he handed her a bundle of clothes with a sensible pair of sandals on top, and said something about breaking the fast in short order. Then he left as quickly as he had entered.

The clothes were well made, tough, and just right for a hot desert climate. There was a pleated leather skirt, sturdy sandals that laced up the ankles and gave good arch and ankle support in shifting sands, a billowing swashbuckling blouse with string ties instead of buttons - and a little note that Roman women typically wrapped their breasts clean around with a tight terry cloth; but she was welcomed to wear a damned sport bra if that was more comfortable. Signed with a little *Asterix* looking figure, and a bold script "Q."

A century was standing outside the tent as she was leaving, and courteously directed her to the mess tent at the far end of the compound. The twenty or so Praetorians were all seated, Quintus at the head of the table; having their hearty meal, and washing it all down with gallons of coffee, and more than a few quarts of weak red wine. The only chair left was at the end opposite to Quintus, so she sat down and her place was soon set with coffee, and bread. The rest she would have to get herself, if the lady so desired.

The group of roughly half men and women were all well known to each other, and those nearest to Nikki introduced themselves as experienced academics, most of them archaeologists - a couple whom she

knew already. The feeling of being in a Shakespearean production of Julius Caesar soon wore off, as she got caught up in everybody's excitement about exploring their Mecca and spiritual birthplace.

Quintus slammed his mug on the wooden table to get everybody's attention, introduced himself; then everybody went in turn, with a short two sentence bio. Then Quintus welcomed them all to the expedition, exhorted them to work hard and carefully; and turned it over to Nikki. She gave a general history of the Osireion, avoiding any of the innuendo's she and Kase had talked about; and briefly described that they were going to clean up the mostly excavated place, and trace any trenches, pipes or other mysterious stones or paths leading outward from the Osireion proper. This raised many eyebrows, and got them bursting at the seams.

No sooner than Nikki had stopped talking; actually just pausing to think of anything she had left out; then everybody started talking at once, and things just escalated from there. She had a clear sense, however, that everybody would end up doing just what they should - after all most of them were experts in excavations, if not Egyptian sites; and overall direction was hardly necessary. Now she understood what Kase had said the other day, about things just working out on their own. These were smart, skilled, and highly motivated professionals and they knew what had to be done. They were also disciplined enough to leave the mysteries to the team leader, Nikki; and to spare her the petty details, unless something was out of place or remiss.

Minutes later the tent was empty, and Kase and Nikki were carrying on a conversation across the length of the table. They quickly gravitated toward the middle, and then Kase rolled out a quarter scale map of the area and they went right to work.

Nikki stopped him mid-sentence, before he could start describing the schedule of events to her, "Can you please explain all of this?"

"Just think of it as an adult summer camp. Kids get to go play games and water ski and learn archery and basket weaving; we're just doing the same thing." And Nikki pointed at her elaborate dress and musketeer blouse. "Those you'll find are far more suitable to the climate and the work than anything you could have bought at your local archaeological outfitters. They were adapted over a thousand years of experimentation by the Romans, and after you get used to them you'll understand what I mean." Then, standing at attention with all the dignity of the Roman commander he apparently was, he asked officiously, "Is there anything else you require?"

Nikki smiled, then curtsied and asked sweetly. "What is to be my Roman name?"

"Whatever you wish, milady," Quintus smiled through his rough chin whiskers - one part of the attire he clearly liked.

"Shall we make it Nefertiti," Nikki said. "It seems to suit the occasion." Then grabbing Kase around the waist affectionately, "Just so long as you promise to tear down heaven and earth if perchance I disappear in the midst of the dig."

"You should expect no less," with a most deferential bow and a charming smile. He was in his element now, gracious in command and generous in bestowing responsibility. She quickly stepped up to him, tiptoed, and lightly kissed him on the lips. "Thank you, my Lord" she whispered.

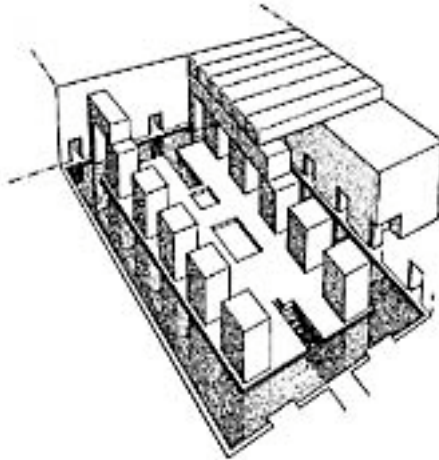
Nikki found herself actually liking her own outfit. The sandals provided all of the support of her usual heavy work boots, at a fraction of the weight; they were comfortable, and cool - not to mention somewhat sexy, with the ankle straps threading up her calves with some subtle brass fittings. The pleated leather dress was even more comfortable; two inch strips of heavy leather sewn to a kind of loose fitting cloth corset, with a soft cotton back support and bottom. She suspected there were some modern improvements on the Roman standard, but whatever the case the end result was - again, comfortable, supportive, and yes sexy. The leather was cool on her skin, and the loose structure allowed air flow across her thighs, and she felt good about her strong muscled legs; her Roman legs. The only uncomfortable part of her outfit was the modern sports bra. She made a mental note to ask one of the female mousketeers about the Roman equivalent, first chance she got - thinking how pleased Quintus would be, if she went completely native.

All the workers gathered a few minutes later - some of the Roman costumes slightly modified, replacing swords in belts with archaeological implements like brushes and spades; metal hats with soft floppy ones against the sun; but, all in all, the final result wasn't much different than the usual archaeology dig with the hodge podge of eccentric costumes, of which Indiana Jones was merely the norm.

They were spread out around the rim of the current excavation of the Osireion. At the surface of the desert it was roughly the size and shape of a football field. The sides were supported with a hundred years worth of various types of retaining walls, made of stones, mud baked bricks, and concrete. The top of the Osireion proper was fifty feet below the surface, and the walls of the circular amphitheater sloped in ward until they stopped

at the rectangular shape of the massive, twenty foot thick outer stone walls of the Osireion. The inner dimensions of this massive wall are roughly the size of a basketball court.

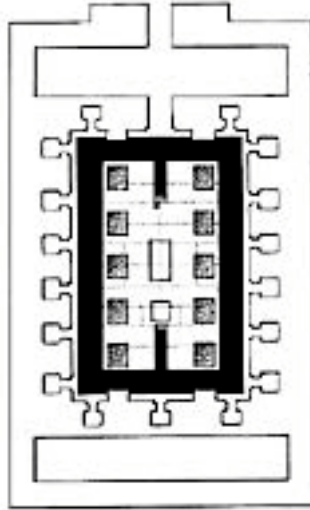
Inside the twenty foot thick outer walls ran an eight foot wide entrenchment, filled with water. Then came two rows of ten by ten foot single piece square stone columns. The central court between these columns had rough stairs cut into the ends, leading down to the rectangular pool; plus two holes in the center - one square and the other rectangular, about five by five feet and five by seven feet, each filled with water.



The massive outer wall has a series of seventeen six foot square rooms cut out of the solid rock. These rooms have no floor - like the rectangular pool - and best estimates are that the walls extend twenty or more feet below the surface. The water table is such that the rectangular perimeter pool is just full of water, without flowing out onto the surface of the center deck.

Draw one large rectangle the size of a basketball court, then a rectangle eight foot smaller inside of that one; and fill this perimeter with ten feet of water. Then a second rectangle twenty feet larger than the basketball court, and fill this with solid stone - then evenly space seventeen six by six rooms inside that stone wall, again each small room full of water. Finally, there is a flat deck of solid granite that is the basketball court; space two rows of five each, ten by ten foot columns of a

single piece of granite each, and cut two small holes in the middle. The stairs on either end leading from the central court into the rectangular perimeter pool are cut very roughly, and most experts believe they were not part of the original design.



The central columns are twenty feet tall, as are the twenty foot square blocks around the perimeter. Now place huge six foot thick slabs clear across the whole open court from outer wall to outer wall, cover the whole thing with sand; and that is the Osireion. There is one large room at the far end, outside of the twenty foot perimeter wall; and on the opposite end is an arch, and a set of stone stairs leading seventy five feet up to the surface - it's fifty feet to the top of the structure, then twenty some to the deck. This is the stairway that Strabo described in the Roman era (over a thousand years after Seti I's rule) as having visited, as a watering hole on a trade route.

What the Praetorians saw, standing spaced out along the perimeter wall, on either side of a wood stairway leading directly from the surface to the center of the central deck, is the whole thing with most of the roof gone, but with large pieces remaining as a roof of the perimeter pool. All the central columns are there, and the central court deck itself is relatively free of debris, as the place is an occasional tourist attraction.

The massive stones used to build the place weigh from twelve to twenty tons each, and come from a quarry twenty miles down the Nile.

There is the remains of a canal that was dug from the Osireion to the Nile, about two kilometers away, which was used to float the blocks to the construction site. At the opposite end of the Osireion is the remains of a circular stone lined conduit, that points straight in the opposite direction of the Nile. The inner court yard is normally dry, but when the Nile floods the water level rises above the surface of the deck for a few days.

A large temple was built on the surface close enough to the Osireion that a stairway could have led from the Seti I temple, down to Osireion. Extensive construction documents exist for that temple built right after Exodus and Rameses - orders for granite, records of shipment, and so forth. No such documents exist for the massive amount of materials needed for building the Osireion.

The Praetorians believed that the canal was dug not to transport stones for the Osireion, but for stones used to build Seti I's Temple. They believe the Osireion was discovered quite by accident, as this canal was dug, and that Seti I had a secret tunnel built up to his temple, and made it look as if the Osireion was part of it's design. Yet, the materials, design, and construction techniques of the Osireion are unlike for any other structure anywhere in Egypt, with the possible exception of some of the very early step pyramids dating from Khasekhemy's era, which are too deteriorated to make a definitive comparison.

The Praetorians also believe that the stone conduit leading away from the Osireion was part of a massive aqueduct, leading somewhere deep into what is now the Sahara; but at the time of which was a thriving civilization.

Quintus went through all of this for the spectators, as some of it was visible and some was not. Much of Seti I's Temple remains at the surface nearby; in fact, it was one of the best preserved of the Abydos structures - perhaps because it was believed to be haunted or cursed. Somebody asked if Amenhotep was the author of the Book of Job, and that he described his own fate, and that of his family; and that when Seti I built the temple and uncovered the Osireion, that this stopped the water flow the the culture, and was the swift end of that nation. A brief discussion ensued, and there was a consensus that Job had long since been a part of the Torah millennia before Amenhotep's time; and other details of Job did not jive well with the known account of Amenhotep's reign.

Nikki followed all of this at at distance, while marveling at the sheer scale of the Osireion and the wonderful proportions of it. It was almost relaxing to ponder the stark simplicity of the place, built so massively and with such extreme precision. There were no markings of any kind of any of the walls, as they had long since been eroded by

exposure to the air. Most of these writings had been in the large, wide chamber opening off one end of the central columned courtyard.

At this point the archaeologists were split into teams, and assigned several tasks. One looked at the two large holes square in the middle of the courtyard, told to take samples out of every possible crevice and analyze them. Another group was to find out exactly how deep the floor of the side rooms and the rectangular pool were, and to sample the sand extracted for any possible evidence that might indicate the age of the place. A third group was to trace the mysterious stone conduit. A fifth got the unenviable task to putting dyes and trace elements in the water within the Osireion itself, to see if any of it would leak out somewhere along the Nile River, just over the horizon.

As everybody decided which group they were best suited for, then negotiated who was to do what and how; they group by group drifted back to the camp to get the supplies and equipment they needed - or to have what they didn't need put on the helicopter transport list, to be shipped from a large hanger at the Cairo airport set aside for short term storage of supplies.

Meanwhile, Kase took Nikki on a tour of the bottom of the pit. They looked at the rough cut stairs down into the pool from either end of the central court yard; the finely chiseled holes in the middle of the court yard; and felt the coolness of the water. Nikki commented that the sides of the pool were notched on both sides, indicating it might have been covered with a stone or wood top.

On the way back up the wood steps to the desert surface fifty feet above, Kase was bounding up first; but Nikki slowed him down, and they talked briefly.

"These are highly regarded professionals, Kase. The tasks you have assigned all of them may seem important to you, but they're inconsequential to us. This place has been studied exhaustively in the past hundred years, and nobody expects to find anything new. Even the gist of your own theories have been tried, tested, and proven wrong. If you know something we don't you should tell us; otherwise it's an exercise in futility, and the results you get will be no different than what is already on the record. You need to give us something to look for, to theorize about - at least, if as usual, you haven't told us the whole story.

Kase thought about that for a while, then nodded that he understood where she was coming from, and he opened up.

"You know what the Ark of the Covenant was? I mean, originally - before all the supernatural myths about any army that carried it would

never be defeated; about how when the Hebrews still had it, they were true to form - never defeated? Which is why the Nazis were apparently so desperate to get it; to ensure their victory?

"You also know the more conventional story about how a dog kennel sized box the size of the Ark of the Covenant was used before Exodus, during religious festivals to kind of induce a religious state of euphoria in the people - or at least, what they were brainwashed into believing was a religious experience.

"I believe the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the big notch you see there in the central court yard, and that this whole place was used to keep some kind of animal that had either a hormonal affect upon people, or who had a high pitched howl that affected people; or a long wavelength sound, like the military has used on occasion for mind control experiments out at White Sands.

"The Hebrews knew about this scam because Moses had been indoctrinated into the High Priesthood. They took this animal away from Egypt in its kennel, called it their "Golden Calf" and worshipped it at Mt. Sinai like the good Egyptians they were; until they were told otherwise. After generations wandering in the wilderness, defeating every army that attacked them - rendering them euphoric and weak by the affects of this creature, to which as slaves they had been bred immune - then built their Temple in Jerusalem, which has a massive network of tunnels underneath, suitable for keeping this same animal or its offspring, captive. And the Hebrews continued to use its mind numbing properties to win converts, to Judaism by virtue of the same scheme practiced by the old Egyptian priesthood." Nikki took it from there.

"So, I'm looking for any evidence the big hole in the middle of the court was used to hold the Ark of the Covenant; any trace of animal remains in any crack in the whole place, droppings in the deep sand of the side rooms, and so forth. The other projects, seeking evidence the place was part of an aqueduct are self explanatory.

Then, evidently upset at having to reveal his innermost secrets, Kase bonded up the stairs and out of view. Nikki remained stunned for a few minutes, hurt by his rushed departure. She spent the rest of the day circulating among the teams and discussing this new theory with them. It was a splendid way to make their acquaintance - and since the new theory apparently came from her and not Quintus the Roman - it put her in a much needed place of authority. It wasn't until the very end of the day that she stopped feeling upset that he had run away from her that morning; accepting that he had done so in order to not be seen sharing his last ace in the hole with her.

There were a couple of rough canvas chairs in the commander's tent when Nikki returned, at the end of her rounds. Kase was already

there, flat on his back, doing his knee exercises. Nikki took advantage of having the captive audience, and shared what she had learned from her colleagues.

Everybody liked the Golden Calf idea, because historians like myths and symbology; but archaeologists crave hard facts. Any myth that can be transformed into a reality is gravy. It seemed unlikely that the Egyptian priesthood would let the Hebrew slaves get away so easily with their Ark of the Covenant, much less its precious contents. But they did wander aimlessly for a generation after leaving Egypt, during which time Amenhotep purged the priesthood when he declared the one God monotheism. After which time, there were not Egyptians aware of the Hebrew's duplicity. Nefertiti, who was actually and in fact as much of a monarch as her husband Amenhotep, would have known about the duplicity, and that may be why she was abducted.

Somebody also said that would explain the series of coins left in the Osireion. There may have been a small group - perhaps Ptolemy found out the truth, directly or indirectly via Alexander's travels far beyond the middle east, where rumors might have survived - who was dedicated to exposing the true nature of the Ark. Eventually the Hebrews found even this group out, and got rid of them.

Kase, listened carefully, as he rhythmically went through his long series of knee exercises on the floor - while on his back, either side; stomach. He was clearly pleased that there was general support for the project, and told Nikki to keep butting into his business that wasn't her own, because everything was going great and he would have surely have accomplished nothing without her good providence.

"But the score is still two days for me, and just one for you" he scolded her, when he got up off the floor mat.

A wave of light headiness hit Kase then, and he wavered on his feet from the sudden change in blood pressure as he rose quickly. Nikki saw this and quickly asked, "Does that mean I can stay here again tonight?" which got an affirmative before Kase even knew what he was saying.

Nikki was so happy she went running out of the tent, to get them both a tray of supper. When she returned, Kase accepted his tray without protest, and tried his very best to carry on a polite conversation while they were eating.

"You know Julius Caesar used to have blackouts. It happened a couple of times when he was floating down the river with Cleopatra; and supposedly once shortly before he was assassinated. There is no record

of it ever having happened in the heat of a battle; but, then again, it was Caesar himself who wrote the history of his campaigns in France in The Gallic War; and his campaign later against Pompey, in The Civil War.

"Tell me, Nikki; do the French - especially ya'll in the South, where Caesar did most of his conquering, hold any resentment against Caesar - or the Roman occupation?"

"Tell me first, Kase - what was wrong with Caesar, was he epileptic?"

"Yes, historians think so. But some Praetorians take the blackouts to be times when the gods were communicating with him." He shrugged, as if that was a theory even wilder than any of his own.

"No," Nikki said, "We French more admire than resent the Romans. They brought us many good things - fine roads, aqueducts, and protection from the Germanic barbarians. You won't get any negative feedback on me, about how great and good a man Caesar was."

"We Praetorians," Kase said then, "at least admire such a man who was able to accomplish as much as Caesar did, with such a disability. I suppose that's why we all liked John Paul so much; and why he in turn felt such an affinity to our group, which have no prejudices against disability, as is common in most of the population - especially the better educated folks." Then finding his manners, "Present company excluded, of course."

Nikki laughed. "We heretics are our own disability."

"You can say that again," came the jolly rejoinder from Kase.

Nikki spent the rest of the evening working at a small table set up in their tent, while Kase was out wandering around the other tents and apparently tipping the wine bottle with more than a few of his old Praetorian friends. He told Nikki when she returned that she had been a very stern taskmaster, and he was only trying to keep morale up; but she didn't feel hurt, only happy that they were making a good team between them.

Kase collapsed on the afghan sofa by Nikki's table, then with a loud sigh of resignation got up and sauntered across the tent to a small locked cabinet that hadn't yet been opened. He pulled a wad of keys from his pants, selected the right one; opened the chest, and pulled out a laptop PC with a large auxiliary battery. Nikki had been silently fuming all day, being deprived of her laptop because of the Praetorian prohibition against technology on a project site.

"Good girl," he said as he gently placed the PC on the table in front of Nikki. She looked up, quite startled - as he held a finger to his lips,

to be silent. Then she stood up, took his hand away from his face, and planted a big wet smooch square on his lips. He backed up a little from surprise, but she followed him and pressed on - French kissing the way she had read in some forbidden romance novels - which was evidently something new to Kase, because he was quite enthralled with the whole thing, and followed suit.

Later they settled comfortably into a solid bed, wide enough for them both now; and Nikki was very satisfied with herself, even though she was so far from her cloistered nun roots that seemed so solid only days ago, that it terrified her. It was good to have Kase to banter with, and to hold; and better, to reciprocate.

Lying there watching him breathe in the dusk, the damn eyes squinted and he said something about her please turning down the noise of the gears turning in her pretty head; and then something about Caesar being of an ancient family that traced their roots all the way back to the Roman god Mars. Nikki chastened herself for forgetting about his bloodshot-eyes-shut-while-still-awake trick, but was satisfied with one more tender kiss on the lips.

Ninety minutes later Nikki was sitting on top of Kase, legs on either side of him, shaking the daylights out of him. He stuttered awake, and said something worse than what what the fuck is wrong, half in English and half in latin.

"I found a hole in your theory - a great big one," she said excitedly, rolling off of him, and propping his head under a pillow so he had to look at her. He noticed a lantern was burning at the desk, and the PC was just shutting down into sleep mode.

"If the priests were so upset when the Hebrews were making trouble to be let go, then who caused the seven plagues?"

"Am I to assume these plagues were real and not allegorical?"

"Of course, you dense Roman," slapping lightly his stubbled face. In the process, making sure he knew to shave in the morning, or no more sweet kisses.

"Damn Mars and all the other Roman gods, but will you knock off the caffeine and take a little wine tomorrow?"

"Hey - private; or plebe; or whatever Romans called their foot soldiers - your superior asked your a question."

"Well, it couldn't have been the Hebrews - because they were slaves, and locked up. Nobody else would do it because they were all bureaucrats and part of the system." Scratching his chin, "I suppose that leaves the Praetorian Guard, to do the dirty deed."

"But they weren't even around then! Why would they do it, even if they were?"

"I told you the Praetorians started with Khasekhemy, who was fifteen hundred years before Rameses and Seti I. Perhaps they wanted the Hebrews to get away with the Ark of the Covenant, thinking they would then free the creature back into its element.

"Damn you to hell," and Nikki was straddling him again, but his time his head was propped up enough to see her loose breasts jostling beneath her night shirt. Only her ire stopped him from getting excited about that. "You're still lying to me." Then she started to strangle him with all her might, which was something; but not much to somebody as strong as he.

Wailing underneath her like he was desperate, Kase managed a hoarse "Because the creature was originally captured around the time of Khasekhemy. Because the Egyptians were enslaving the whole continent with its powers. Because the only way to stop it was to free it, and the Hebrews were a malleable tool. Because if you don't stop choking me I'll get blue and die and you'll never ever learn the secret."

Finally she released him, acting totally disgusted. "I'm sick and tired of your games. No more French mistress for you, unless you level with me, and pronto." Now her hands were firmly back around his neck, and the thumbs positioned over his windpipe; which was serious indeed. Kase felt the pressure increase.

"You know about the Rubicon?" was all he said, and Nikki stopped. But her hands remained poised, and she had his body in an iron grip between her knees. Kase acted dutifully helpless.

"Sure, Caesar constructed a sturdy bridge to Cross the Rubicon, the first European army to venture into Germania. The bridge building technology scared the *caca* out of the barbarians, and it was generations before they ventured south again. Caesar didn't even have to fight them; he just camped on the other side for a few days, packed up and moved south after burning the bridge. So what, buster?"

"Sorry, I meant Caesar's expedition into Britain."

"Same thing," Nikki said. "Cross the English channel, terrorize the natives, then return to Rome for another triumphal parade and accolades. So what, *hombre*?"

"Where was the Golden Calf all this time - under who's kingdom."

"Probably Cleopatra, since Egypt extended almost to Jerusalem and the Temple there."

"Caesar settled a minor conflict in Palestine on his way to save Cleopatra, remember?"

Nikki growled, and accused him of treason; and started to tighten the thumb screws.

"Stop, wait" Kase wailed. "Caesar captured the Golden Calf when he was in Palestine. Then he and Cleopatra conspired what to do with it. They had it sent up to the British Isles and set free. That was the whole purpose of Caesar's foray into Old England - he crossed the Rubicon, found that unsatisfactory; then England was better.

"You think I'm an idiot - Caesar's campaigns in the north were long before he met Cleopatra - you can't possibly connect the two."

"Not without the Praetorian Guard behind the scenes, plotting the whole thing."

"I'll kill you."

"The Golden Calf grew; the tunnels under the Temple in Jerusalem are ten times the size of the Osireion. The Jews could keep it there no more. They got their friend and benefactor Caesar to solve their problem.

"How did they get the Golden Calf all the way to England?"

"A Roman fleet was only recently discovered, laden with a treasure linked directly to Cleopatra. It crashed off the coast of modern day Turkey. It was payment for transporting the Golden Calf out of the Levant."

"Caesar scouted safe places to leave the Golden Calf; then took delivery of it right before there were problems in Alexandria; then Cleopatra got into the act, the Ptolemys having always been following the whereabouts of the Golden Calf anyway; when Caesar was assassinated, she seduced Mark Anthony, sent her fleet out with his - and with the Golden Calf; and withdrew her fleet once the creature was safely en route."

"No more god damn wine for you. You're incoherent. You're making no sense."

"Would you make any sense, with a crazy bitch straddling you with the thumbs screwing your windpipe shut?"

"What happened to the Golden Calf," finally releasing her grip because she was too tired.

"Why the Golden Calf grew when it was in the Jewish Temple, and kept growing after it was left in the nice cool British Isles - and kept growing in the modern day, until now it is the Loch Ness Monster."

"No way."

"I dare say she is your namesake, Nellie. But much better behaved."

"Give me it all - or I punch your eyes out." Holding two fingers in front of his face like the Three Stooges used to do.

"Nellie is a dragon. Dragons are creatures of hyper space. They nest here on Earth, mature over thousands of years measured in our time; then take flight into hyperspace."

"But space is a vacuum. Everybody knows that. Just like your head."

"Not according to celestial mechanics. Go at speeds above light and space behaves exactly like water - it has the same equations of motion as incompressible flow in fluid dynamics."

"Stop mathematics'ing me. That's cruel. Speak English."

"The Golden Calf metamorphosed into the Loch Ness Monster which will eventually change into a dragon, then fly off into hyperspace."

"I got that part of it, Professor Kase of the Clan Clearey, one time leaders of the secret order of Druids. How the Hell do dragons reach the speed of light?"

"I found a trajectory that does that. It's the overlap between two fractal levels. The intersection of two gravitational regimes between the inner solid planets and the outer gas giants in the Solar System. The gravity regimes intersect and form a shock wave which originates on Earth. The dragon just catches the wave, and it swoops right straight into deep space."

"OK I forgive you now." God damned if I understand you, though.

Kase was sopping with sweat, and Nikki's hair was so disheveled that she looked like Medusa herself. They were both suddenly conscious that their little escapade must have been heard by everybody in the camp. They listened. Perhaps not, thanks to Nikki throttling Kase's' booming voice and how her own words were spoken with a rasping urgency. They listened some more.

Horribly mortified, Nikki rushed to turn all the lamps in their tent out, and slapped Kase quiet when he started clapping to applaud her performance. Encore, he started to say before she strangled him one last time; and good. Then Nikki snuggled into his arms, grasping him tight with an iron grip. She was soon fast asleep, her breath warm on his cheek and her body comfortably contoured to his own.

VI. Temple of Doom

Quintus set up a large canopy in the central court of the Osireion. Then, like a field commander breaking in a new regiment of recruits, he lorded it over the various teams busy at their work all around the sunken amphitheater. He sat at a large wood table scattered with drawings, documents, and every shred of information ever published on the Osireion. None of the archaeologists was allowed to duplicate or remove any of these materials, but had to sit right there at Quintus' table to study the material and take notes if necessary. Even Nikki's laptop was confiscated and locked to the table by a rusty iron chain so encrusted with barnacles it must have come from Cleopatra's ancient, water bound Alexandria.

The archaeologists all resented this information control, but quickly adjusted and even started to appreciate the system. Quintus had studied the Osireion for most of his life, and with a eidetic memory - perfect recall of line drawings - he could direct them to exactly what they needed among the references. He kept a steady dialogue going, as a regular stream of visitors came by the canopy, telling each one what the other teams were doing but not too much, to keep them all focused on their own tasks.

Nikki was the last person to show up at Quintus' makeshift court. She had slept well into the morning, had a leisurely breakfast, and was the epitome of happiness as she sauntered down the wood stairs and planted herself across the desk from Quintus. A snide remark about stealing her laptop PC, and she popped the top open and more or less stayed right there for the whole rest of the day. Quintus was able to answer most of the other archaeologists' questions; Nikki and her research at the Egyptology Institute back at the University of Chicago managed the rest, but only after she was sure Quintus was extremely discomfited by her doing so.

"They're starting to grumble," Nikki said after all the crews had quit for the day, and trundled up the wood stairs to dinner and an early slumber. The sun was still well above the horizon, but low enough that the Osireion was itself in shade. "I think you should let me tell them what you told me last night," she said in the first reference all day to her rabid antics - and to the mysterious swellings on his neck covered by the most uncharacteristic pirate's bandana.

Quintus looked up from his drawings, looking fierce and utterly ruthless; eyes blood shot solid red from the days steady visual work, and smiled at her. "Aarrg - no can do, missy" then rubbing his eyes wearily, elbows on the table. "If'n I told them all that, they'd start asking all kinds of tough questions; then me'd have to tell them all the rest." Nikki had quickly

gone from luke warm to near boiling. "Ignorance, it here is bliss," Quintus muttered, and Nikki's tea pot was whistling dixie.

"You mean you're still withholding information from me - still?" Standing now, leaning forward across the desk with a sudden fury. "You beast," and she hit him hard with open palms on the side of his head. He grabbed her hands, constrained her actions; and gently forced her to be seated. Then grasping both her wrists in one of his supersized hands, he delicately pushed an empty wine glass in front of her, and with his free hand poured them both a glass of wine.

"Can we discuss this civilized, my beautiful princess Nefertiti." Evidently the piratesse was utterly immune to flattery, as the evil glimmer in her bottomless black eyes had the black beard convinced had he released her hand, there would have been a glass of perfectly good *vino* thrown directly into his face.

"Nefertiti was by all accounts the most beautiful woman in Antiquity," Quintus lectured her, discarding the ineffectual pirate bravado for something he hoped to be more sophisticated. "Nefertiti was also the most powerful woman in Antiquity, with the possible exception of Cleopatra." Then after a good swallow of wine for some liquid courage, "Before me now sits both their's equal - in beauty, both inside and out; and courage." Then looking hard into Nikki's eyes, "Don't wreck my expedition now, my love." He felt the resistance fade in her arms, and when her shoulders slumped in resignation, he released her hands and leaned back in his chair.

Nikki had a good gulp of the wine, pushed her glass forward for a refill; gulped most of that right down, then herself leaned back in her chair and waited for Quintus to talk.

"If'n you'd thought a little more with your brain and less with your hormones, you'd have surmised the whole truth on your very own." he said with mock consternation. "I've already told you all the pertinent facts," and Nikki realized that technically she had no reason to resent him - if, in fact, what he said was true.

"I was always told that women like their men to dole out the facts piecemeal, in kind of a romantic prosecution and cross examination, like in a jury trial." Then wiping the sweat from his brow, "But never did I think I would meet such a tiger as you." Which got a smile out of Nikki, and a raised eyebrow as he reached out to refill both their wine glasses.

"The grand scheme of things, then." Taking a long draw on his glass, Nikki noticed his hands were shaking. "I owe you no less." Puffing

out his cheeks and chest, in his very best but still sad, Perry Mason imitation, he continued.

"We have established, counselor, that there once existed a lush tropical paradise near what is now the Great Oasis. We're in the process of confirming that a huge aqueduct, perhaps following the ravine of a great canal dried up and filled with sand; that these means were used to transport water from the Nile to the civilization of Job, as the land dried up over the course of several hundreds of years.

"Now," dramatically deepening his voice, "There are a few loose ends that are not covered by the Book of Job - notably the mysterious Hall of Barques, and how it might be linked to the Roman fort at the Great Oasis that is actually far too old, to be a Roman fort. Old Testament stories sufficed to fill in the gaps of the Exodus and events after the Osireion was discovered by Seti I - can you think of any Old Testament stories that would fit the rest of our theory?"

Nikki raised her hand a short while later. Quintus had by this time gotten onto his feet, and was pacing in front of a makeshift podium, like he was lecturing to a large class of college students. Scanning all around the amphitheater, he pretended to look for any questions; ignoring Nikki, who frantically waved her hand. Then harumphing his disapproval, the renowned professor in his nicker shorts and Roman tunic, deigned to call upon the perpetually curious perky little brunette in the front row trying to seduce the professor with her bouncing breasts and gleaming smile.

"Very well. Miss Gâteaux, you have an idea?"

With the utmost deference, Nikki stood up, smoothed her hair back off her forehead, tucked in the sides of her blouse and thrusting her shoulders way back, arching her back at the same time; jutting her bosom out prominently, to the approving glare of the professor, who looked nonchalantly down through his half moon wire rimmed glasses deep into the impressive crevasse of her 100% natural, not silicone breasts.

"If you insist, *Herr Professore*, on raping what remains of the Bible with your specious reinterpretation of ancient history," Nikki said with hauteur, "Then you can say Khasekhemy was the Biblical Noah, who used his Barques to transport all the animals from the shrinking Grand Oasis, to the fertile Nile River delta. In other words, this ancient civilization was the Biblical Eden.

"And," Quintus drew out the word - reaching delicately across the table, and tweaking an erect nipple sticking out of Nikki's proffered breasts.

Nikki giggled like a coed, jostled her breasts wildly (Quintus observed that she had no support, modern or Roman), and replied in a manic understatement, "Adam and Eve lived happily ever after in their new home on the Nile, leaving behind them the snake of a line of Oases to the west in the Sahara."

"Very very good, young lady," said to the whole audience; and Nikki fainted dramatically, arms flailing and head hitting the table with a loud thump; as she collapsed on the pile of documents. Quintus gasped, and ran clumsily around to her side, leaning over her to fan her delicate face, crumbling up a fistful of priceless documents to do so. Then Nikki reached up, pulled him to her and they embraced passionately. She could feel his hardness against her, and pressed him to her with a pelvic thrust.

"Mars, god of war," she said breathlessly. "Pray thee, break through my veil of history." At which point four hands were pulling down two pairs of pants, and Quintus was impaled upon her and Nikki suffered the pain as he broke her hymen, stole her virginity, and they both wept; because she had stolen his as well.

Her pain was great, so he pulled away muttering his best excuses, "May I borrow some of those romance novels of yours; or perhaps we can read them together in the small hours of the night, milady." Their pants were soon back in haphazard place - or rather his shorts and her leather Roman skirt - but they lounged on top of the table, making out and exploring each other's body with their insatiable hands.

It was strictly business - at least during daylight hours - for the next few days. The archaeologists, at first somewhat despondent, quickly overcame their lethargy as one team after another reported satisfactory - even dramatic - progress. Everybody had taken to meeting at the wood stairs each evening, in the cool shade as the sun dropped below the rim of the amphitheater, to share stories and wine at the end of each day. They were quite an eccentric lot, and it was veritable Elizabethan theater each evening as they took to holding little skits beneath Quintus' once omniscient canopy, replacing his authority with their hilarity.

The first to arrive were always the dungeon diggers, as they called themselves. They were making slow but steady progress, excavating out the bottom of one side of the rectangular pool. They were now thirty feet below the floor of the central court, and still solid rock on all sides. Each day they also pumped out one of the six by six chambers down to sand at the bottom; removed as much sand as they could, then almost as soon as the pumps were stopped, the whole place filled right back up ~ side chambers, rectangular pool, and all.

An electric generator sled had been flown in, and positioned as far away as Quintus could get it (because of the noise); also a pump sled; and eventually a large mobile laboratory to do some delicate carbon dating and spectral analysis. Everything had been transported from the Cairo airport

by a giant Sea Knight helicopter, a massive twin propellor helicopter that could fit the whole mobile laboratory snugly in its midsection.

The stone channel leading away toward the desert opposite the direction of the Nile had been excavated several thousand yards but was thereafter lost in the shifting desert sands. That team was frustrated; and jealous of the others. Quintus was concerned, and working on another plan for them, to use satellite imaging to seek the subsurface aqueduct much like they'd done for the Red Sea project. There was no regular imaging of that area, and so they would need to get a shuttle flight specifically tasked to do so; which was no small undertaking.

An abundance of animal, mineral, and metal remains had been extracted from the Osireion proper; both from the pool as the level was lowered each day, and from the rectangular cut outs in the middle of the central court. Most of it was as expected, but a few finds suggested the Osireion was vastly old - perhaps far older than the 10,000 years suggested when the place was first unearthed in the early 1900's.

As each team reached a conclusive point, they gave a little seminar on their results during the evening meetings. Everybody was tired and hot, and the wine went straight to their brains, and often the slightest discovery got everybody to clapping and hooting like they were all watching a basketball games, Romans versus Egyptians.

Quintus had started to spend most of his time patrolling the perimeter of the rapidly expanding dig, to keep errant tourists and would be treasure hunters away. It had been many years since a major archaeological dig had been done at Abydos, and the locals were often there, seeking work as laborers. It didn't help that the location was so accessible to the Nile, and to nearby cities.

Nikki kept quite busy, as she with Quintus reluctant permission, piece by piece doled out the full story to her colleagues. They were doing brute force labor all day and it helped to keep their minds occupied and their hopes up. After twenty straight days, everybody practically went on strike and demanded a few days off to spend in civilization. Quintus swore them all to absolute secrecy - to include avoiding any form of alcohol or drugs that might loosen their excited tongues in the big city - and he bundled them all into a helicopter transport, off to Cairo.

Nikki and Kase remained behind, and could be seen at all hours of the day patrolling the perimeter, chasing away tourists or just plain galloping around on the Arabian stallions that had been secured for them. They talked about the findings, verified all the results; poked around in the diggings, and were generally going everywhere where the archaeologists

would not have wanted them to be. It was Nikki who first voiced some reservations.

"Something doesn't feel right," she said late on the third evening. They were seated in the canopy, still wet from a plunge in the pool. Kase was upset that the thick fabric of the Roman tunic she wore didn't have the clinginess of a wet T short of thin cotton. Nikki noticed his consternation, followed his eyes; and was once again respectful of the Roman's clothing design skills. Kase's thin leather pants, on the other hand, Nikki noticed clung tightly to his personals - although, by the same token, her own pleated leather skirt was most revealing, and she made the most of it.

Nikki had spent the afternoon going through her notes, while Kase was buried in some technical reference books doing pages of hydraulic calculations on his programmable HP hand held pocket calculator. Nikki was slowing overcoming her phobia of mathematics, as her curiosity about this private little project of his grew.

"I was wondering when you would say something," Kase said as he closed his notes book and zipped up the calculator in its leather case, in a usually futile attempt to protect it from the sand that was everywhere.

"Why didn't you say something before?" Nikki said, quite loudly - finding herself glad nobody was around, so she could be as emotional as she wanted.

"You were busy," he responded with a nonchalant shrug of the shoulders.

"You exhort me to tell you ever last little thing on my mind," welcoming the heat of passion in her own voice. "You bribe and manipulate everybody else to share their slightest intuitions with you," kicking a pole on the canopy. "This stupid tent of yours is like a bloody confessional." Closing her own notes, and pushing them crashing aside, the momentum was growing.

"We have pillow talk every night," Nikki bellowed. "You feel and squeeze and suck on me," turning now to face away from him so her blush wouldn't discredit her tirade. "Like a scorpion you torture all the flaws and prejudices of my colleagues out of me; you make me a traitor." Then kicking out a second pole of the canopy, forcing it to teeter precipitously into collapse, "Yet you still keep me in the dark."

Kase had skirted the reach of her kick, like a stable boy avoiding the clutches of a stallion too long pent up; uprighted each pole, then backed off what he judged to be a safe distance.

Clearing his throat, "Excuse me, princess" he said. "But neither of us knows what the other is talking about...."

Nikki pouted, then said, "You first." Arms akimbo, feet firmly planted, she conjured the image of an Amazon warrior.

"OK. The archaeologists seem to be acting kind of strange."

"How so," Nikki demanded. Kase could imagine her holding a bow and arrow, now notched in the string and aimed directly at his private parts.

"At first I thought it was just eccentricity, or maybe excitement about this brave new venture. Then, with your generous insights, I realized that this menial labor should not have been exciting to them at all. Why should they be excited, also, if nobody here will get any credit for what they find? They clearly each and every one - present company excluded, of course - have astronomical egos; why should they be so enthusiastic to put a feather in somebody else's hat?

"I thought everybody was so gung ho Praetorian Guard that they would do anything for the greater good, and be quite happy about doing it anonymously," Nikki pleaded.

"Granted, I'm that way; for sure." Kase confessed, "but as a general rule of thumb, the higher educated our people are, the less enthusiastic they are about what we stand for. Academics are especially immune to ideas like trust and honor and generosity; they're too selfish, too driven to publish." Then with his arm around her waist, and a peck on the cheek, "It's you alone whom I can trust here, princess." Peck. "I'm sorry if I have abused that trust - yet again."

"No," as she simmered down, somewhat reluctantly. "You were right to say nothing." Then, grabbing his hand, she led him back to the table, and they sat side by side; hand in hand. Her grip was fierce, though; and there lines of tension in her face. "Yes, we have a problem."

Kase managed a crooked smile. "OK, I described my perception of the problem - what's yours?"

"Their work has diminished dramatically, in both quality and quantity."

"Oh, I see." Kase said. He hadn't realized this at all, and it made him extremely upset. Nikki confessed before he could express his own consternation.

"I know," she said sadly. "I should have told you sooner." Looking dejectedly down at her feet, unable to meet his eyes. "We aren't at an impasse are we?" Then stammered, "I mean, still friends? Please?"

"My dear Nefertiti. You judge me on the qualities of others. I'm an honorable man, if nothing else. When I pledge my heart, it remains so. For ever, and ever." As he leaned over to kiss her forehead, then lifted her hand to kiss it softly. "Don't worry about my fealty. Promise?"

Nikki nodded, and awkwardly swiped tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. "I'm just scared, is all. Such horrible things are linked to this place - plagues, of blood, and death, and infanticide - whole cities wiped out, civilizations destroyed."

"We need the Tenth Legion here, and yesterday," Kase decided a

while later. "This is starting to get out of control. I'm calling now to make the arrangements."

In the Roman military camp, a few hundred paces away from the Osireion, later that evening as they lay side by side on the mattress of blankets and furs, it was suddenly too quiet. There were too few people, too few machines and tools. The danger was too nearby. Kase was asleep on his back, and Nikki maneuvered over and held onto him for dear life. His eyes jugged open as her fingernails dug inadvertently into his flesh, drawing blood. He felt her shivering from fear, so he turned over and they were face to face, naked under the light covers.

A distant helicopter could be heard then, and Kase said quietly in her ear, "Hamilcar is here, with the Tenth." Kase waited for her to stop shaking, as she drew strength and comfort from his flesh pressing upon hers. He felt an erection growing; pressing into the soft skin of her moist thighs. Nikki giggled, grasping his testicles in her one hand, and wrapping the other arm around his neck and drawing him to her. "Doesn't anything frighten you." He thought for a moment and said, "Nothing of this Earth does." But then the helicopter came roaring overhead, simulating a dust storm in its wake. Kase leaned close to her ear and yelled at her, "This is probably not a good time." She yanked on him, then bit his lip to where it was drawing blood; then leaned over and yelled into his ear, "You owe me one." Then he was out of bed, getting clothed, and running out the tent to welcome the reinforcements. Nikki got out of bed too, got clothed, and stepped outside, curious about all the commotion.

The giant Sea Knight helicopter was just lifting off, bright lights illuminating the swirling dust beneath it as it gently faded into the night. Perhaps a dozen people were drawn up in a rough line, M16's and machine guns and rocket launchers sprouting from every shoulder, bag, and box. Nikki saw they were in a military formation, as Kase saluted the commander he'd called Hamilcar, then side stepped down the line of men shaking the hand of each, slapping the shoulder of more than a few. Nikki walked over as his greetings were over, noticing that several of the soldiers were women; tough, seasoned veterans from the look of it. The entire group became silent as Nikki approached, and Hamilcar brought them to attention.

"You must be Sister Donna Marie," came the powerful voice of Hamilcar.

"And you are the Romans worse ever enemy," came Nikki's pithy reply, referring to the famous Carthaginian General named Hannibal of the noble Hamilcar family. Hannibal had almost single handedly destroyed Rome in its infancy, thereafter was the most reviled figure in the history of the Republic of Rome.

"Praetorians honor our enemies who fought well, as was the Roman custom." Kase came smiling toward them. "Besides, we need good generals." Hamilcar gave a salute, which Kase returned quite expertly, Nikki noted.

"You Praetorians are full of surprises," as she went to Kase's side and grasped his hand in hers. Then Kase murmured, you're about to see another, as a dark red confederate flag was unfurled and set at the center of the camp. It was the Stars and Bars, a dark blue X across the center with thirteen white stars set into the blue stripes, three on each arm and one in the middle, the X with a thin white border and the whole thing on a red crimson background.

"Legion X at your service," Hamilcar yelled in their direction.

"I should have known," Nikki said, smiling and somehow comforted by their presence. The soldiers broke formation, then began setting up several more tents along the straight lines of the existing Roman camp, stowing gear and setting a perimeter guard. They were all wearing tan on gray desert fatigues, with a small confederate flag as a shoulder patch. Their weapons were flat black, glistening with machine oil, and menacing enough for Nikki to feel her blood pressure dropping back to a decent level. No sooner than Kase's hand began to sweat lightly in hers, than the Tenth Legion was expertly bivouacked, and fast asleep. The quiet night returned, but for the rhythmic pacing of guards around the perimeter of the camp, and the light wafting of the dry desert wind flapping the proud confederate flag beneath a full canopy of twinkling stars.

"Two of my direct ancestors fought for the Confederacy at Vicksburg," Kase felt he needed to tell her. "One was a sergeant with the 1st Arkansas Rifles, the first Rebel unit formed after secession. Another was commander of the 20th Mississippi Cavalry, one of the last units to surrender."

"No doubt with a storied history," said Nikki as she turned to pull her man back to their tent.

"Quite so," Kase said as they walked barefoot back to their tent, the warm sand contrasting the suddenly cold night. "Colonel William N. Brown is attributed with the saying, "Mississippians don't know how to surrender" as an overwhelming Yankee force on land and sea faced them off at Vicksburg, demanding they agree to terms." Then they ducked into the tent, disrobed, and snuggled into bed. Nikki was lying on her side, her head resting on Kase's arm, he on his back and telling her a bed time

story. About all she could remember the next day was about how the Colonel had lost half his men covering the retreat of the massive retreat of the Confederate Army of the West, enabling them all to safely embark across the river with a large Bluecoat force in rapid pursuit. Only to be abandoned at the boat dock, their own army refusing to send the barge back to rescue them. So they stacked their weapons, surrendered with honor, and six months later were paroled from a prison up north in a prisoner of war exchange. Then, went right back into the fight.

"Don't know how to surrender," Nikki said dreamily, as her last conscious act of that long day.

First thing in the morning, Kase was screaming bloody hell as a bucket full of ice cold water was cast in his face. He opened his eyes to see Nikki dancing a little jig in their tent saying something about it's two to two now; two coups for Quintus, two for Nikki. Kase didn't argue, and regretted that he would soon have to staunch her splendid mood. He behaved properly upset, grumbled through breakfast, then arm in arm they walked down to the Osireion to take up their duties, no more worried about frenetic tourists or stealthy grave robbers.

The swarthy Carthaginian approached around noon, gave Quintus a report - gracefully paying his respects to Nikki as well. She invited him to join them for a cup of wine; but he suddenly scowled, turned about, and disappeared. Kase said he was short on manners but long on leadership, and left it at that. As for the other mercenaries, they could rarely be seen at all during the day, and even at night were mere ghosts, as they maintained security for the Osireion and the environs.

Nikki had never had her charms so rudely ignored, especially given the deference Hamilcar had shown her the previous evening. She suspected Quintus had goaded him into a state of high anxiety; probably with once again, something about this diabolical place that he'd not yet shared with her. This time Nikki bit her tongue, and resolved to make this one a victory for the vixen, pouring over all the research documents, and stealing a glance at Kase's own notes whenever he wasn't looking. Then she had it.

"It's Leviathan, isn't it?" she said when Kase was suitably indisposed, having just collapsed in his wood straight backed chair with a grimace of pain and a comment about having missed his knee exercises, gotta pick up the pace.

"Leviathan what," Kase responded clearly bothered by her intrusion. His ire only spurned her on.

"Oh. Wayward wench spreads legs for brave soldier, but he's too tired to impale her," which got Kase to laughing so hard she thought a rib would break. It was the first true mirth she had seen from him.

"I said Leviathan, and you heard me loud and clear," as Nikki elevated her voice a few dozen decibels. "Tell me."

"You can read. You tell me," Kase tallied with aggravating calmness, having recovered his defenses.

"OK. Leviathan, the creature of the deep ocean in the Book of Job. It's not of an ocean like of water, on Earth; but of the kind of space water, like you said exists at the speed of light." Her voice had trailed off, steadily loosing impetus. "Kinda."

"Yes. Exactly. Creature falls from space. Is kept captive in the cool wet environment of the Osrieion. Brought out on special occasions to induce a religious euphoria. Etc."

"Not that, bubble head," as she slapped him up side the face. "It's Leviathan causing the symptoms in the archaeologists. It's droppings or remains; maybe it used the sand in the small rooms like a litter box, and all those chemicals have been in solution, and are now active and symptomatic."

"Oh," Kase said. He hadn't thought of that. "I thought you were interpreting Hamilcar's rudeness to mean I'd told him something I hadn't told you." Nikki stood quite still.

"So you did; again." She stamped the ground and crashed the table with her fists. "You stupid fucking Zorba the Greek fanatic, I hope this whole dame house of cards collapse right in on your and your bizarre Praetorian Guard friends, just like happened to Anthony Quinn in the movie." She bounded up the stairs, but stopped half way when Kase said nothing. Nikki turned about, and saw he was just standing there, totally crestfallen. It even looked as though tears were welling in his eyes. She waited there.

"It's not what you think. I mean, you're right about Leviathan. But I thought you made the connection all along. The - What you said about Hamilcar isn't true. He - I mean, he was ... Dammit. Hamilcar was already on the way here when I called to order the Tenth Legion on site. He knows it; I know it, but he doesn't know I know."

Suddenly Nikki was in his face. Then her arms were on his shoulders, and she was shaking him with surprising strength. "You mean your mercenaries aren't here to protect us from the dangers here, but to keep us captive?" Then she was pacing frantically back and forth; back and forth. She was like a tiger cooped up in a zoo. Oh God, now we not only have Leviathan to fear, but now your elite force is zeroed in right on us. This is bad. Real bad. I'm gonna be sick.

Kase was quickly at her side, and dragging her under the canopy and into the shadows. You mustn't let them see us fret, it will give us away. Please. Please, try and act normal; do you understand, Nikki? She was rattled to the bone, but stayed where he sat her.

"Talk shop, Kase." Nikki pleaded. "Focus me on archaeology. What's your project. Tell me. Show me.

"I think the Osireion was more than a cool wet place. When it was all closed in, and buried; I have done some calculations. Remember how a thin film of water spread evenly across the whole central court, when we were cavorting in the pool? How our body volume displaced water, and it flowed over the ledge and covered the granite floor? The rock was hot, being exposed to the sun now; but if it was covered, heat would be conducted through the walls and huge granite slabs from the roof, and the water would evaporate almost as quickly as it does now.

"So what?" Nikki tried to say nicely, but it came out like a hoarse scream.

"The heat of evaporation, when water goes from liquid to gas, is huge. That much water evaporating on the surface of the central court would drop the temperature in the Osireion by ten degrees; and if more water was poured out, etc... the whole place could be gotten down as cold as your refrigerator.

"Wow, that is something." Then she gained a little composure. "Can we close it back in and try it?"

"That was my second project. To build a temporary roof, cover the place; and then cover it all up with sand to the surface. I suspect if it was all sealed airtight, then there would be a siphon action, and the Osireion would start doing its original purpose, sucking a huge volume of water out of the Nile river aquifer.

"No, can't test that yet." As her thoughts clearly returned to their predicament.

Kase was close to her now. "Nikki, look at me... Can you follow me OK," and she nodded yes. "If something happens; if you don't know anything else to do, get the flare pistol out of the treasure chest in our tent; fire it. Night or day. Just fire it into the sky." Do you understand? She nodded. "Tell me, what you'll do."

"Flares. Fire the flares."

"Don't forget," Kase repeated. Hamilcar was racing down the wood stairs then. Kase forcefully sat Nikki down, and jammed her head down; then blocked Hamilcar's view of her with his body, walking out toward him as he approached.

They had words, and Hamilcar was once again racing up the stairs. Kase told Nikki that Hamilcar was leaving to Cairo - to round up the archaeologists and get them back to work. She sighed in relief. Kase told

her they were going by horse and camel and would be a while; please relax, they would be OK.

Kase held her arm as they walked up the stairs, then to the mess tent where he made a bachelor TV dinner for her, which went down but not happily. Her stupor lifted a little when he stripped her down in the shower; soaped her clean, then toweled her dry. After a quick shower himself, he fashioned a couple of the giant room sized towels into a toga around them both, and they baby stepped across the hot stand back to their tent. The sun was only just setting, but long before the bright orange sky started to fade into yellow the black, they were both sound asleep.

Helicopter sounds. Swirling wind. Then familiar voices, and just like that all the archaeologists were back in the camp. One of them was standing in the flap to their tent. It was brilliantly sunny outside. Eyes squinting. They were all going right away to work. Many new ideas. Meet us in the canopy for the end of the day pantomime. No, didn't see or know about Hamilcar. No doubt he will find out we are back soon enough. Live well. Flap closed. Wake up, and at least go through the motions.

They spent the day in the canopy, sitting side by side on a bench, Kase translating the *Asterix* comics for her, replete with sundry Roman interpretations. By the end of the day Nikki was translating it back into French, bashfully adding some sexual innuendoes that came to her dirty latin mind.

It was dark by the time either noticed. Nobody had shown up for the evening soiree. It was kind of spooky, and not even Kase could calm his misgivings. Then the archaeologists appeared, holding torches of burning cloth rags wrapped around wood stakes. They made a procession down the stars and surrounded Nikki and Kase who by this time were cowering within. Nikki said they looked possessed. Kase said he thought it was a whole lot worse. The zulus were close, and listening. Kase asked Nikki, remember what I said? She squeezed his arm in acknowledgment, but then they were separated, each made to stand upright in one of the square holes in the middle of the courtyard, unable to communicate with one another any more.

"You don't know what you're doing," Kase yelled at the closest zombie like figure.

"It's Leviathan moving you," Nikki screamed. Then each yelled something, and kept up a steady stream of conversation.

"Some chemical or pheromone or virus has altered your perception of reality.

"You're in an artificially induced religious state. Like the priests did in Egypt. You're all Egyptologists - you remember that. You know what it was.

"It's happening to you. Fight it. Fight Leviathan.

Suddenly the circle broke, then formed around Kase. The circle was no more than an arm's length away. One of the living dead zombie freaks said, Hail Caesar. Another, Death to the Empire. Then they all had knives in their hands, and torchs in one hand, knives in the other; they took turns stabbing at Kase. Most missed. Some struck his crimson tunic, tore it and revealed a thick leather garment beneath. His torso was protected, but not his head or limbs.

Nikki, finding herself outside the ring of death; remembered what he had told her, and ran as fast as her feet would go, found the flare gun and cartridges. Again and again she fired the flares into the night sky, until there were no more; then she ran back to the amphitheater. It was cast in a paranormal dim red light, as the last flare streaked out of the sky light an impotent Roman candle. Two of them were at the stairs, blocking her from entering the court yard.

Kase was fighting still, bloody but fighting. He was obscured from the waist down, still standing in the sunken pit; but Nikki could see many deep gashes in his arms. The thick leather garment was almost ripped apart, and solid with blood. Nikki screamed bloody murder, broke through her captors; then, ran helter skelter everywhere, trying to attract some of them away. Kase told her to run; then his arms, with no more strength, started to falter. The knives reached their mark more regularly.

Suddenly there was the crack of a rifle. Then another. The zombies started to fall. They writhed on the deck, and shrieked with pain. Strong arms carried Nikki up the ladder to the surface; ghastly phantasms scurried down the ladder, and pulled a bloody but still conscious Kase out of the pit, at this point with several inches of his blood in the bottom.

The Osireion pit was sealed off, with minimal first aid delivered to the zombies. They started acting a little more sensibly, the pain of their injuries reaching through the drug induced fit. They were alive, if injured.

Kase was hosed down, four men holding one limb each. No sooner than one area was clean, before the blood started to flow; than Hamilcar darted in with a red hot sword, to cauterize closed a knife wound. One after the other, they did it until the air wreaked of burning flesh, pain, excrement, and blood. Kase had long since passed out, much to his good fortune. Soon the wounds were sealed, the blood stopped. A medic from among the mercenaries checked his vitals, they gave him some morphine, and carried him to the command tent. Nikki grabbed all the clean linen she could find, collared a young female soldier by the scruff of the neck

and ordered her to start bringing an incessant supply of hot water; then set about tending to Kase's gruesome wounds.

Hamilcar was there soon, gently pushing Nikki aside; but firmly. He broke smelling salts under Kase's nose; he awoke. They shared a few words before he passed out again. But before that happened she saw Hamilcar nod, and heard something about crucifixion.

Nikki stayed with Kase the rest of the night. He drifted in and out of consciousness, but somehow he was recovering rapidly. Outside in the night around the tent, there was a lot going on all night long. Blood curdling screams; cursing soldiers; slaps; gunfire; and torch lights going every which way. Hammers and wood, more screams.

By dawn all was silent. Kase was resting evenly, dozens of gashes cleansed and bandaged. They had long since run out of morphine, and Nikki watched helplessly as Kase gnawed on an oak block of wood between his teeth. She thanked god when he passed out; grieved when he was conscious. Finally she could take no more, and told the lady soldier - who had remained at the tent flap all night, carrying out immediately Nikki's every command. The soldier tried to restrain Nikki, to keep her from going outside. Then Nikki was outside, and regretted it instantly.

Across the plane of the Temple of Seti I and the Osireion, in two long straight evenly spaced lines, stood thirty giant oak crosses; two rows of fifteen, and horribly impaled on each and every one was an archaeologist. Rail road tie nails pierced each palm; and every ankle. Blood had pooled at the base of each cross beneath the victims, and soaked silently into the shifting sand. They were all dead, every last one of them. Soldiers had begun taking down the farthest cross; burying the dead in a mass grave. They wore chemical warfare gear as they handled the bodies.

The Osireion was off limits. The stairs had been burned down, and there was no further access. Tourists barges going across the Nile to the Seti I temple were stopped. No human could be allowed to witness what had transpired.

Nikki ran screaming, down the middle of the crosses. Men and women alike had been impaled, each brought to a merciful death by a swift spear strike through the left side. Running now to the burial sight, a soldier literally knocked her out with a blow to the head; when Nikki awoke

in a daze only minutes later, she was in a chemical biological warfare rubber containment suit. Somebody had placed a rosary and Bible in her hands, and then she went about giving them the Last Rites; one at a time, as they were lowered into a pitiless sand tomb.

Kase was in a real state when she eventually got back to their tent. Seeing, but likely thinking it was Hamilcar he voiced, "*Greeks* - damned them all - crucify them." Then he passed out. He needed blood and expert medical care, but Nikki knew that none would be offered, nor any accepted. He lived by the sword and would be proud to die by it.

Soon the whole place was cleaned up, and looking not much different than when they had arrived. A windbreak had been constructed around the amphitheater of the Osireon, and already sand was a foot thick in the interior. Soon it would be obscured all together, and all record of it purged from the historic record. It would be the Praetorian's secret, and no doubt they would dare to plumb it again some day.

A week of absolute silence and nearly complete solitude later, Nikki had come to grips with what had happened. Kase was strong enough to sit up and eat a good meal. He still looked like a mummy from the waist up, and behaved like a man from the waist down; but they were *simpatico*.

He asked if the victims of what they now called Leviathan's Disease had been given last rites, and smiled sadly when Nikki said yes. She said you got last rites a few times yourself, so bad were you hurt. He said that's good because it humbled his soul. He said he was sorry, they didn't stop it sooner; she said there was no avoiding it. Were there any collateral victims in Cairo, from indirect contact with the stricken; a few but they were minor, and thought it all a profound religious experience. I envy them that. Tragically, they had found out the secret of the Osireion.

Leviathan in the Ark worked, but the Osireion is where Leviathan lived for thousands of years. The place is thick with whatever chemical or virus or disease bearing bacteria; ten thousand times more concentrated than being in the presence of Leviathan carried around in the Ark of the Covenant. Why were we not infected, Nikki and Kase. We probably developed an immunity, Praetorians taking a pinch of the dust out of the place on a regular basis over the millennia, to use as a vaccination, in their primitive kind of way. That must mean that Nikki is from the Praetorian

lineage after all; maybe, but more likely descended directly from Nefertiti and Cleopatra. I wouldn't doubt it.

Maybe the Egyptians are immune too, some of them. That would explain why there were no illnesses when Neville and Murray and Frankfort dug up the place with the help of hundreds of local laborers. Of course, they just extracted the debris; we were fools to excavate the place, excrement and all. Did you know Seti I was horse stall cleaner; then got into the Egyptian army, and through distinguished service became Pharaoh when Rameses had no heirs. Sounds like a model Praetorian. Second in esteem only to Joseph.

I suppose the Praetorians don't much like me any more. They're all gone. Hamilcar told me before they left that you have been expelled from the Order and that he is the #1 now. God damn Carthaginians anyway. Perhaps we're destined to just be vampires, immortal souls lusting for justice. And for one another. You would make a splendid Albigensian Heretic, by the way. Thank you madam, I was wondering when you would ask that. There's always John Paul's signet ring. Yes, my "mission." You really do have a reason to live. Really? There is me ~ you have to take me shopping for some new clothes. How about a wedding gown? I would like that very much. It's a date then. Who will be there? Hey, Zorba the Greek's magnificent project may fail horribly, but he still has many many friends. I don't believe you any more. Aha, but I still have not told you the whole truth, quite yet. Oh. Don't be angry. Stop picking that scab, it will scar me for life. Ouch. That hurts. Stop. Wait. I will tell you all. Mercy. You are a one horse Inquisition. Not the eyes. I beg you. Stop. No. Ouch.

VII. The Holy of Holy's

"If everybody is gone," Kase's said as she helped him walk out of the tent, "Then where are the food and supplies coming from?"

"Your Mullah friend, at the Mosque," she said cheerfully. "You must have made quite an impression on him and his congregation because they have been sending us provisions by way of the Seti I Temple tours almost daily."

"You're going to ask why would a Praetorian Guard still help me." Nikki shook her head, here we go again. "Well, he's not a Praetorian Guard."

"But..."

"But, nothing." Kase interjected, gaining his feet after almost falling, catching himself on Nikki's strong shoulder. "I just chose his Mosque at random, held him at gunpoint; then appropriated his facility for our research." Nikki was appalled.

"I know it's hard to understand. Consider that every campaign that Caesar ever had was right straight into enemy territory. The first tribe he met he had to conquer, then befriend; so they would not bushwack him later, and so they would provision his huge army. His success was as much due to his people skills as to his military tactics. The key is to make a good first impression, and to promote peace and prosperity wherever you go."

"So where are we going now, Don Quixote, to promote peace and prosperity?"

"Perhaps our fat little cleric in the mosque Sancho Panza will enlighten us. Surely there must be something dramatic we can do for him, to earn our keep."

"So much for that idea," Nikki said the following day as they stood outside the mosque, thumbing a ride into Cairo. "I think you need to modernize your tactics, *generalissimo*."

"Perhaps it's our attire - or hadn't you noticed, that we look like a lady Roman soldier, carting around a walking mummy pilfered illegally from some tomb at Abydos?"

"Or maybe you're fucking helpless without your precious bureaucracy and status and unlimited funds."

"Oh. I forgot." Kase said. "Where's my briefcase?" They found it stashed in one of the duffel bags. Inside were a dozen Praetorian Guard credit cards.

"Game?" he implored.

"Of course, sky's the limit."

They caught a ride on a public bus, and ended up at a crummy little rundown hostel on the poor side of Cairo, passed out exhausted in an unairconditioned room, beneath a noisy ceiling fan, to the tune of roaring rush hour traffic outside. They hadn't felt so safe in weeks.

"What now, kimosabe?" Nikki asked, as they dined on salted bread, watered down wine, and melons. "Got your bearings yet?"

"Why, nurse Sister Donna Marie," Kase said impishly. "I never lost my bearings, did I?" Grabbing his crotch with one hand, to be sure all his plumbing was intact; then smiling gruesomely. Nikki rolled her eyes.

"OK. No more monkey business. Maybe you can help me. I'm having trouble fitting the Praetorian Guard into my world view just now. We have to figure out what their game is before we plan our own." Nikki was surprised that he deferred to her judgment, and wondered how long this nice man would remain in the gorgeous body she had been carting around.

"I think they're exactly what I surmised in the first place," Nikki said sincerely. "They're a powerful, elitist quasi terrorist organization out to secure a New World Order. They clearly have the means; they have a devoted, worldwide membership - and they will make any sacrifice to get what they want."

"Why did they bother to give me free reign, then?"

"What," Nikki smiled slyly, "You think I'm going to give you all the answers?"

"OK. Grasshopper. I will travel my own journey on this one. But you just wait, when I get my bearings back you will be putty in my arms." This did not impress Nikki in the least, probably because he had a couple hundred stitches left to pull until he was free.

"Let's assume New World Order is synonymous with Nazis; their Fourth Reich so to speak. They have a very strong root system in America, via the Wall Street firm that funded the Holocaust. Their political base goes all the way to the White House. None of those people on the Wall Street firm's Swindler's List were ever exposed, and presumably they've expanded their power base exponentially in the last eighty years.

"As for their interest in the Osireion, and willingness to play along with my game, the Nazis were occult fanatics. The Ark of the Covenant was on the top of their Most Wanted list. They were obsessed with anything far in the past, anything disassociated from mainstream ideologies; anything they could unearth, then interpret to suit their evil ends. As a relatively unknown artifact, but with a dramatic possible

explanation, the Osireion fit their needs to a T." Then after thinking a second, "That being the case, then there's no reason for them to leave me alive."

"They didn't, " Nikki smiled proudly. "I told them you were dead."

"Oh. Thanks. Good thinking, and all that."

"Worthless ingrate."

"So this whole Praetorian Guard thing is turned on its heels. Its not some green Earth new age feel good thing to free Willie the killer whale; but to imprison Leviathan the magical dragon, and to use it's power to assert their influence over the whole planet. "

"I told you so," Nikki said. "If you stopped thinking so much with your ego and more with your brain, you might accomplish something."

"Touché." Wetting a finger and marking an invisible chalk board; one more for the pretty lady. "I'm getting pretty far behind, aren't I?" And Nikki flashed ten fingers twice, for her; two fingers for him. Kase winced.

"So now we're back in the ugly political energy crazed world I had hoped we left behind." Kase said unhappily. "Oh well, it was nice while it lasted." Still acting a little hit in the head, he asked shortly, "Nikki, can you help me with this. Say anything, at all."

"OK. Other than the energy issue - which I think is a non issue because we don't really know how much oil there really is in the world, or how much we might discover in the next twenty years as current supplies are used up - other than that, what would you say is the most contentious issue out there right now?"

"It can't be associated with energy in any way?" Nikki shook her head, no.

"Can I buy a vowel?" A shaking of the head and a rolling of the eyes. Close your eyes and concentrate, she suggested.

"I pick the Twin Towers for \$50." Which perked Nikki up, and she asked by her posture for him to explain.

"There are three very strange things about that whole thing," Kase said. He started to count them on his fingers, but had first to separate fingers from bandages, to see which ones would stand up. Nikki laughed, to think she had been awed by this man only a few days before.

"First, the homing beacons on all three aircraft used on 911 were disabled. I was told by the president of an international pilot's association right after 911 that those things cannot be disabled from within the pressurized cabin once the jet is in flight. Thus, it could not have been done by any of the terrorists. The homing beacons are what make a jet appear on the traffic control radar screens at airports and control towers.

With no homing beacon, nobody knew where the planes were; hence, they could not be intercepted until it was too late.

"Second, the Twin Towers were over a hundred stories tall each. It is virtually impossible for a building like that to implode perfectly upon itself the way that happened. A large casino in Vegas was demolished for a TV show, something about a magician escaping unscathed; it took a team of experts a year to study the building, analyzing the structure, to determine exactly where to place hundreds of explosive charges. The same kind of structural analysis had to be done on the Twin Towers, to pinpoint a spot the size of small window as the target. Moreover, the aircraft had to hit at an exact speed, and with an exact amount of fuel, to pull this off. Six weeks at a multi engine flight school in Florida trains you to barely hit a two hundred yard runway; much less a ten foot wide window. Those aircraft were on autopilot; and, if anything, the terrorists were fighting to get them off autopilot, not to fly them into the buildings.

"Third, a couple of years before 911 they exploded a truck load of explosives in the basement of the Twin Towers, severely damaging the structure. The structural analysis needed to achieve a perfect implosion is hard enough on a sixty year old skyscraper; doing that on a damaged sixty year old skyscraper would require the resources of the best structural engineers in the world; and using a model that could only be solved by a supercomputer, and then only barely. Again, the first explosion to the superstructure should have rendered the 911 plan impossible, so in retrospect those terrorists did us favor. Sort of, if you think about it.

"Am I doing better?" Kase asked. Nikki nodded, then asked how many computers could do that kind of analysis.

"Well, only about a dozen organizations could do the analysis, having both the computer power and the engineering staff. Half of those are in Japan, where they have to design against earthquakes. The rest are in the U.S. However, of those, there is only one university with the horsepower and the brainpower to do the analysis for the damaged building. It's not even a supercomputer per say, but a massively parallel network of over five hundred parallel processors - used to solve ten thousand by ten thousand element matrices, to model the gravitational field of the Earth.

"Where? Who?"

"At the University of Texas Center for Space Research in north Austin. They're affiliated with the Engineering College at UT, where the structural staff exists capable of this kind of study.

"Gulp," was all Nikki could say. "That's pointing fingers at some pretty damn big cheese, *Mensahib*."

"It all fits, though. President Bush, grandson of the Nazi funding magnate, was governor of Texas; lives not far from Austin; and maintains

UT Austin as the leading institution for the Homeland Security grants. A pretty neat way to fund an operation like 911.

"Not to mention the disbanded celestial mechanics group there," Nikki added intelligently. "With celestial mechanics out of the way, nobody knows the ideas about space behaving like a fluid at speed of light velocities; so that makes any life in outer space infinitely more impossible, and deniable."

"I'm sure glad we're out of Texas."

"Me, too."

I stopped by my advisor's office a few weeks after 911 during his scheduled office hours. He was playing a game on the computer. A cartoon caricature of Osama bin Laden would dance around on the screen, and you had to explode make believe bombs to try and get him. My advisor wasn't real swift. He taught statics and dynamics each semester, and still enjoyed it after thirty years. I was bored sick after just one semester of being a teaching assistant for that class. The other course he taught was so simplistic it should have been a high school class. My advisor was a textbook example of the dire need for regular tenure review.

He had been my advisor for a year. During that time I had been signed up for a total of eighteen semester hours of supervised research classes. I was working hard on my research - an optimization of the Mars trajectory - but he would never, ever even look at my results or listen to me discuss my findings. The only thing he told me was, "Don't worry about your research - just study for the qualifying exams."

Most grad students take four weeks at the most, to prepare for the qualifying exams ~ the break between the spring and summer semester, the exams being given in the middle of June each year. My advisor expected me to take six months to get ready for them. He might have needed that long, when he got his Ph.D; but I sure didn't.

I thought it was really sick, that Osama bin Laden game he was playing. The fires hadn't even been extinguished in the Twin Towers yet, and American soldiers were already dying every day in Afghanistan. I tried to change the subject, only to get a long, elaborate, detailed description of the treatment he was undergoing for prostate cancer. About how they put little radioactive pellets around his prostate for radiation treatment, and how he had to take estrogen and how it made him weepy and sensitive but fortunately didn't make his tits grow. I listened as all grad students are expected to, and wondered how many other students of his had suffered through the same sappy monologue.

I finally asked, how could the Twin Towers have collapsed so perfectly - it's an engineering impossibility. He sobered up instantly, and said they were designed with concentric steel cylinders in the core of the building. Apparently he didn't know I had a lot of experience in construction and building design, having been a consulting engineer in the field for ten years and published two textbooks with McGraw-Hill. What he said with such conviction was absurd. I told him so.

The next day he had quit as my advisor. He passed the word around. Nobody else would be my advisor either - none of the other four professors who had already signed up to be on my dissertation committee were the least bit interested. I was a pariah.

I had asked the wrong question.

They were both quiet for a while. Then Nikki recollected where all this started in the first place, and wouldn't John Paul's original mission be easier?

"Maybe so. We've already found Leviathan the magic alien dragon. Do you want to follow through on the line of thought?"

"No, I'm tired and lost and disoriented. Can't we just go somewhere and talk and play; somewhere cool and safe; somewhere nobody would think to find us?" Kase had that damned if you do, damned if you don't look on his face; and she knew she was doomed to be belittled without remorse, once again.

"Oh. You mean the Osireion?" Kase said innocently.

"What? Surely you jest - it's buried under a hundred feet of sand.

"Yes, it and an inflatable rubber bladder.

"What is this you're saying, I don't follow" Nikki lapsed into broken English, with a heavy French accent.

"You know of my plan, I told you; how I wanted to test my theories there; to close the Osireion in and see if it would be cool, and if the hydraulic action of an aqueduct would start?" Nikki nodded, numbfounded.

"Well, the plan was much farther along than you assumed, I see. A great big inflatable neoprene bladder was delivered to the site right after the whole mess with the - well, you know. When I talked with Hamilcar after he hit me with the smelling salts, I told him to put that big plastic sheet - he didn't know what it really was; I told him to spread it out over the courtyard and all across the amphitheater, before they started covering the whole place with sand. He assumed it would act as a vapor barrier, and protect the Osireion from the elements for posterity. He thought it was an

ingenious idea, and followed through; believing no doubt he had gotten the best of me.

"So what do we do now? How does this help us?" Nikki said with the first sign of real hope he had seen since that horrible night. "Can we go soon - how soon?" Then Kase realized that, in his condition, he had missed the extreme stress she had been under; now revealing itself as a bona fide panic attack.

"We buy a couple of tanks of pressurized air like skin divers use, hook them up to the big black rubber bladder and inflate it until it encloses the whole inside of the Osireion with a nice sturdy roof. More or less. Theoretically.

"What about all the sand this pushes up to the surface, won't make a mountain that will be obvious?"

"Good question. But no; the sand will have settled a couple of meters by now, and when we blow up the great big spare tire, the surface will be quite level. We should probably go before drifting sands level the whole thing, which could be any day now.

"Shit, Kase - what the hell are we waiting for." Off they went, mummy screaming with pain as stitches pulled out by the dozens; as he was forced to run after the crazy Roman soldier dressed lady, buying all sort of bizarre equipment's on credit cards that didn't match his description so she had to unwrap his ugly face every where they went, which caused her no end of satisfaction, pulling masking tape off his face and all the tiny facial hairs with it; not to mention more than a few stitches. Nevertheless, Kase rarely did not smile, because soon they would be safe and sound.

Finally they sat in a rented truck, getting ready to head for a barge landing where a boat would float them across the Nile back to Abydos. Nikki started to gun the engine, but Kase reached over and yanked the keys from the ignition.

"Now what? Do you want me to cause you even more pain - like say a couple of broken legs?" Nikki was enraged.

"Calm down, tiger" patting her on the knee. "I need you to read me everything that we have been purchasing, slow and methodical like OK." Nikki was quiet. "When I close my eyes to listen, will you promise - scout's honor - not to assault me and cause me any more bodily harm?"

That got her to smiling. "Yes, if you let me turn on the engine to keep the air conditioning running. Allow me that, and I'll read to you until your bones rot or your soul ascends, whichever comes first."

"Done deal. Now read."

Once Nikki had finished the list, she started to ask what this was all about. He said quietly, I will tell you soon; please do as I say before I forget everything and have to start all over again. *Comprende?*

"Now write." Then Kase gave her a list of things to get, almost as long as the first one. When at last he was finished, she asked what the other things were for. He said they were to mislead the Praetorian Guard, who would eventually receive the whole credit card bill, into believing they were doing something entirely different, than what they were.

"When they analyze the complete list - and I know this, because I created the computer algorithm they use - they will believe we are provisioning a dig for some of the fabulous sites in Turkey that will soon be inundated by new damns nearing completion. They will not be happy paying the bills, but will do so because it will make them happy that I am occupied on another project, and not snooping into their business. They will also likely arrange to flood the plain while the dig is underway, suddenly; to get rid of us once and for all.

"I guess Hamilcar didn't believe me when I said you were dead, then?"

"I wouldn't say that. But he'll damn sure know you lied when these credit card bills go through."

"What do I do with all the extra stuff?"

"Have it delivered to our Mullah friend, with instructions - you guessed it - to fund an all bills paid dig in Turkey for antiquities, but to be sure and tell them to bring along an inflatable raft, in case of sudden floods. Oh, and please to dress somebody in lots of wrappings, and to keep him mostly out of sight in the shade, drinking wine - hmm, and reading *Asterix*. Don't forget to leave all the credit cards with him too, and to have a party on us; hell, a nice trip to Mecca with his whole congregation, eh?"

"You still trust him, like this," waving the credit cards in his face, "After he refused to help us the other day?"

"*Mademoiselle*. That is precisely the reason why I am trusting him."

"Jesus, you're a fiendish one aren't you?"

"Lady, you ain't seen nothing yet." Kase blurted out, then realized she would interpret it to mean he was holding yet more back; holding his hands before his face, "Please, I only meant to say that once I am on my feet again, we can take the offensive once again."

"Don't you miss the Praetorians?"

"You remember when you arrived upon my doorstep - what was that, a month ago?" Nikki nodded. "Well, I was sitting in my carport, sad that the birdies in a nest that had been tended by two industrious sparrows were now gone. I missed their little chirps, whenever one of their parents came with things to feed them.

"Let me just say that I miss those birdies now, more than I will ever miss the Praetorians."

"Wow. Spoken like a true Albigensian."

"Speaking of birdies and heresy," Kase said conversationally.

"That afternoon back in Lago Vista, I was also dwelling on the enormity of the task done by Noah; aka the people of Hamunaptra, shall we call it? Since the mummy now returns... Well, can you imagine coddling thousands of animals, all different kinds; and getting them all to crawl into this tiny boat, to float down a dangerous river or canal, to a strange new home on an unfamiliar Nile River? Just think of the patience, love, and dedication those people must have had.

"That is who I am. Not some power hungry maniacs driven to strangle the world for their own selfish aggrandizement.

"Slow down, now Kase. We don't want you busting any more seams from high blood pressure."

Watching the rapid current of the Nile, they were seated on the rear hatch of the truck, legs swinging and chatting up a storm, waiting for their ride across to Abydos.

"How will we know where the Osireion really is without any bearings or landmarks?" Nikki asked.

"Do you really think, as you say, that I have all the answers." She nodded yes, and twiddled her thumbs in her lap like a small child.

"Let's just find the old tent, make camp and worry about finding the Osireion when we get there." Then as an aside, "Sorry I didn't remember to put a radio transponder inside the rubber bladder, and to bring along an instrument to sweep the area for a signal."

"OK by me," she said lightly. "We'll go after it like we do any other excavation, one grain of sand at a time.

"Nikki, has it crossed your mind - to try out this Osireion dust; like, to experience the religious euphoria? You know that right about the time of Caesar, the Jews declared the end of prophecy, making it a sin punishable by death; it's more or less what they convicted Jesus of, and

they crucified him for it. That jives with my theory, about Caesar absconding with Leviathan - taking away the Jew's source of go juice, that they used to prophesy with.

"Maybe that's how Hamilcar was en route to the Osireion before you called him? It would explain the coins in the Osireion - stopping by to get a fistful of melange now and then; you know, the geriatric spice they used in the Dune books to see the future. Once the Jews lost their source it was too dangerous to keep using the stuff.

"Makes sense. They had a limited supply, but financed this whole operation so I would innocently show them how to mine the place for a steady supply. I guess that explains why there were so many Israelis in the Praetorian Guard.

"Well, I guess the fields wide open for us then. You go first!" Kase admired her damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead attitude.

"Actually, we both go first - if we're going to be living in the place; and exposed to the air and the water - best not to smoke it or eat it, since we'll probably get exposed anyway. Understood - no Timothy Learey LSD experimentation's; and we each keep the other under close scrutiny for any signs?

"I think they call that puppy love"

"Or just plain infatuation."

"We're talking circles again, Kase."

"I noticed."

"That means you're hiding something."

"I know it does."

"Gonna tell me?" then a short while later, "Or am I going to have to torture it out of you - again."

"I'll tell."

"Have you wondered why the two of us were not affected?" Kase said, withering under her relentless silence. "Me much less than you?"

"Yes. Once we got back to Cairo, and I thought about what we had been doing. I knew I was already infected. But you - you're absolutely untouched. What does that mean? Am I not drinking enough wine?"

"I wouldn't mind if you loosened up a little, with the wine I mean."

"What, so you can get a little action without working for it? Dream on." Kase winced when she slammed a fist into his shoulder. "Come on,

sport - where's the fun in that?" Then she snaked a hand across his shoulders, "Besides, you never get hard until I get rough and barbarian anyway."

"No secrets from the princess."

"Maybe it's a disease of the soul," Kase said long moments later. "Our spiritual training makes our souls stronger."

"Disease of the soul yes, maybe; you stronger and more immune than me, not a chance in hell. You've not been to seminary, or under the discipline, or anything. Your soul shouldn't be a whit stronger than any of those people who you crucified."

Then Kase added soberly, "If it's just prophesy that the stuff gives you, why were your archaeologist friends transformed into walking zombies - unless the future they saw drove them stark raving mad."

Nikki said nothing, but smiled brightly and laughed uproariously. "Come on, Kase. What's your theory on this one."

"The only explanation is that my soul has never been exposed to the contagion on this Earth."

"You're the alien?"

"Well, humanoid alien - like the two legged kind that many believe crashed at Roswell. They get through space in a shiny metal saucer spaced aircraft. Not the fire breathing dragon kinds of aliens like Leviathan, aka the Loch Ness Monster. They probably follow the same path through space; Leviathan just does it all on his - or her - own."

Then Nikki said more convincingly, "Of course. You are the alien. John Paul knew it, almost from the very moment; I can feel the same vibes coming off you, now that my hormones are in check; well, still raging but under control - no, not under control, more like saving up for the big sack race."

"I understand. I look forward to that too. How do you sense I am different?"

"Just like you said before. You have an unfathomable faith that grounds you to the Universe. Even the best of us most soulful of humans can accomplish, is grounding to Mother Earth."

"I don't want you to feel like I am better or anything. Because I'm not."

"I know, just different." She had a flash, "I bet you got a theory about that too - come on, I know you do; tell me, heavy math and all."

"You make me laugh. Everything I know I learned in kindergarten. Honest. Even the great new symmetric plane in the sky; that is anchored to the constellation Scorpio in the celestial sphere, and that coincides with the Earth's orbit or ecliptic only once in a blue moon and then on All Hallows Eve. It's also the beginning of a new year for Pagans and Wiccans, called Samhain."

"Your birthday."

"Yes, my birthday."

"So your soul came from somewhere way out there in the stars? Along some Route of the Ages that only opens every so many years?"

"That's awesome."

"Kind of far fetched, but better than the alternative."

"My, this is a first - an alternate theory. Hit me!"

"That aliens really did crash land in Roswell in 1947, one of them died then or maybe later. The soul was trapped here on Earth by our strong magnetosphere. It found a willing, but barely hospitable host, in yours truly."

"How so - I mean, inhospitable?"

"I was born six weeks premature, and spent the first six months in an incubator. I had spinal meningitis, jaundice, and a heart murmur from rheumatic fever in my first few months. My body rejected the soul."

"Looks like you're doing just fine to me. If the soul hasn't seeped out of all those damn holes in your skin, it must be pretty happy there now."

"Thanks, I do feel OK actually. But mostly only when I'm with you."

"That's funny - how you were in an incubator all the time. I'd noticed that wherever you are, at home or in a hotel or out on the desert, you're most comfortable around machines - ceiling fans, aquarium motors, traffic outside, huge pumps and electric generators throbbing gently in the desert night."

"My most favorite is Nikki's heart throbbing in her chest; Nikki's gentle breathing while I lie in her arms; even the regular drubbing you give me with your fists."

"All part of being human!"

"Thanks. You're too kind." Then, "No wait - no more kindness, not that kind; please."

"Thank god - there's our ride."

"You really believe this alien soul in my body theory, don't you? Where's your evidence?"

"It's hard to quantify, but it seems like my whole life has been to find out about Roswell - I only knew about the whole UFO scene a couple of years ago; but looking back, I've been driven to find out the truth. I chose White Sands when I enlisted; I caused way too much trouble when I was there, to try and freak the truth out of them; I later got hospitalized at Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio, which is a world famous burn center - and where survivors from a UFO crash at Roswell would have been sent. I even served as a weather observer in the Army, and so I can

see right through their story that the Roswell crash was a weather balloon; then going to UT Austin; studying celestial mechanics; getting into even more trouble in grad school; how I wrote an autobiography, called it Behold Leviathan; how I prophesied 911 and the crash of the shuttle three years ago; I said it was in the Middle East, but it did happen near Palestine, Texas - that rhymes with valentine not teen...

"Slow down will you, please." Nikki stopped him. "I can't write that fast - I'm taking notes of things to ask you about later," and sure enough Kase saw she was writing furiously with a ball point pen on the only available surface - her forearms.

"Soon as we've camped, I'm going to wash the incriminating evidence right off you" Kase threatened.

"No can do. I'd rather smell to high heaven until you fill in all the missing details."

"No please - you can't know how sensitive aliens are to smell - especially that of female humans, and ones in heat. You will destroy my mind, and never ever learn the facts."

"How'd you know I was in my period."

"I lust for blood. I wasn't lying when I said so earlier; especially that kind of blood."

"Here's a straw," and they both roared with laughter.

"Don't mind if I do so myself," and he put his head toward her mid section; only to have it swatted aside like a beach volley ball.

"Then you force me to reveal my secret Vampire teeth, with which I will inject you with a powerful sedative, rendering you immobile - but still conscious, while I ravage your body and feast on your succulent blood.

"My blood will make you more human; and your soul will weaken.

"For you, my love - anything; even to be doomed to stay on this besotted little planet of yours. Fare thee well, cosmos...."

"I think you will not be reading any of my secret stash of romance novels back at the convent. Your romancing skills are too wretched as it is.

"Then I shall not share my Playboy collection, so we can try all the tricks they talk about in the how to please your woman in bed column.

"Looks like another impasse. I tell you what. We'll read each others dirty literature, but only in bed at night - and, hey; we both must be awake."

"And mobile?"

"Certainly."

"I hope I get well soon, then."

"Me too."

Nikki had been reading the notes scrawled on her arms. "Hey, I think you're infected - you said you saw into the future, writing about 911 and the shuttle crash before they happened?"

"Yes, and the material was all copyrighted, so you can verify that I'm not lying.

"I wasn't accused you of lying," Nikki said solicitously. "Just breaking the Jewish prohibition against prophecy."

"Actually I think it was not prophecy. I think it was something far more sinister."

"Pray tell," Nikki almost salivated. "This is getting exciting."

"I believe, having been in grad school at UT Austin for a couple of years; that, well, somehow I put all the pieces together, of little snippets of conversation - and, a la White Sands, the extreme reaction to some whistle blowing I did there at UT - and simply figured out, at some level, the plans that were formulated and directed from the University.

"You mean," Nikki faltered. "You mean, your book confirms that people at UT planned and executed the events of 911? Just like you said before?"

"No," Kase said stoically. "But all the horrible things they did to me after I self published the book with Author House Books proves they did it."

"Right," Nikki said as she stared blankly at the notes on her forearms. "The White Sands method. Make some trouble, then see if they react as they should. If their reaction is far far more extreme that would happen anywhere else, you've triggered some kind of automatic defense scheme that protects some horrific secret."

"I haven't figured out why they blew up the NASA shuttle; although, they are in league with the terrorists because of 911; the Columbia was under ultra top secret security; yet, they still managed to blow it up.

"Can we hurry up and get back to the Osireion, and hide their for the rest of our days?" Nikki said, rolling down her sleeves to cover up the pen marks. "I think I'll take you up on that offer, to wash these damned notes off me." With a mischievous smile.

"It doesn't matter what format your research is in," the Graduate Advisor was saying, "I don't care if it's published in a peer reviewed journal. Nobody in this Department will read it." Then he reiterated. "Nobody."

This was the first meeting I had ever had with him. I'd been in graduate school for four years, and this was the first time I had been to his office - and the last. I would be expelled four weeks later. I had asked him what was the purpose of the supervised research classes I had taken, if not to get help on my research. I had signed up for a total of forty hours of thesis and research classes, but clearly I had assumed wrong - that my advisor should read my reports. My advisor had already told me point blank that it's Department policy to never give students any help on their research until they had passed their qualifying exams and been admitted to Candidacy as a Ph.D student. Apparently he was correct - which means it is Department policy not to help students with their Masters research either; which I had at that time been trying to complete.

"Those classes only allow you to walk around the halls for one more semester," the Graduate Advisor said, fuming. I protested that when undergraduates in the Department sign up for those classes, the student and professor sit down and make a schedule of expectations. "Nobody is required to do anything," he said again. The Architecture Department has a written contract for graduate students, in those kind of classes, according to the Graduate Dean. "This is Aerospace, not Architecture," he said.

A few days later I got a letter from this Graduate Advisor, telling me that I was not making sufficient progress. He said I should have taken the Ph.D qualifying exams the summer after my first full year in graduate school, and because I didn't take them until my fourth year, I had been behind the curve for three years. Apparently he never looked at my academic transcript because I entered grad school with a bachelor's degree. It takes two years to get a master's, and then a year after that is when you are expected to take the written qualifying exams. I was right on schedule, but he was the Graduate Advisor and so he was right. I was wrong.

Ultimately, I was expelled. The main reason they gave was that I had failed to take the qualifying exams after my first year in grad school. This was confirmed in writing by the Graduate Dean, and approved by everybody else in the bureaucracy. I appealed the dismissal, and a year later the President of the University denied my appeal. I kept fighting, until eventually the University assigned the Vice President of Legal Affairs to my case. He reviewed it, and again - I was not making sufficient progress, as per the Graduate Advisor's erroneous judgment.

It's significant that any faculty at the University can pull up any student's complete academic transcript in ten seconds on the computer. Since I took my bachelor's at UT Austin, they have my complete undergraduate transcript. Four years of grad school, and three years fighting the appeal all the way to the State Legislature, and nobody - none

of my advisors, the Graduate Advisor; nobody in the Graduate School or the Dean of Student's Office, or the bureaucrats in the Tower; nobody took ten seconds to access my academic transcript. What are the odds of that?

The semester after I was expelled, I was readmitted as a non degree seeking undergraduate student in the math department. Before they let me register for any courses I had to see an advisor, who went over my whole academic record with a fine tooth comb. I got more attention at that time than the combined total of five years in graduate school. It was the first time I felt like a real student, and that somebody sincerely cared about my academic needs, and career goals.

They hit the banks of the Nile hard then, and the barge master tied them up and soon they were plowing across the sand toward Abydos. Their tent was just like they left it. It was late, they were tired, so they didn't unpack anything but showered, and jumped right into bed. Well, Nikki jumped; Kase crawled. His whole bottom half was more than a match for her, however, but damned if she was leaking blood there, so he was tossed out to do his knee exercises; while she cleaned herself up. Eventually they worked things out, and got a well deserved nights rest. Well, most of the night.

"Kase, wake up." Nikki was shaking him so hard a filling fell out.

"Don't do that." Kase said as he rolled over, to spy two large black eyes surrounded by a matte of chaotic black hair, thick rouge lips with a grimace of teeth.

"Kase, you have a eidetic memory - total recall!"

"Yes. I remember. So damn what?"

"Hamilcar knows it. The Praetorians know it."

"And?"

"As Quintus you ran hundreds of operations. You know what almost all the members look like. You can break the whole organization."

"Yes, that's the plan."

"Shit, Kase." She was shaking him then, in full panic mode.

"They'll be after us. Here, soon - now!"

"Yes. I figured that." Smack, as Nikki slapped him hard - another loose filling. Smack on the other cheek.

"I just wanted a good nights sleep before..." Smack. "OK already. I'm awake. We'll get right to work." Smack.

When the sun blushed in the east, they had removed all traces of the tent and the former Praetorian army camp. Everything was crammed into their jalopy truck, and they were making labored progress toward the temple of Seti I.

"You're sure there's a secret passageway into the Osireion from Seti's Temple?" Kase asked from the passenger seat, his voice cracking with stress.

"No need to panic, cowboy" she said coolly. "Everything's under control. Wimp."

Sure enough, they found a secret door at the back of the temple ruins. Then a secret panel in the floor of the secret room. Upon opening the hatch in the floor, there were secret stairs - and quite a cool breeze coming up from below. The tunnel must go straight through to the Osireion. Ten steps down Kase started to lean on a convenient stone ledge; Nikki swatted him away with a broom, tossed like a spear from the stair landing above.

"Stop. Don't touch that. It's a release handle, to trap would be intruders."

"Oh. Thanks. You're good."

They carted the pressurized air tanks down first. Kase crawled around and found a nipple for the rubber bladder, and started inflating the thing. At the same time they carried everything down from the truck - well, Nikki carried everything down because Kase said he was disabled. Your legs work just fine. Pull. OK but it hurts. Not nearly as bad as this. Swat. Beastmaster. Slave.

The last load of supplies safely secured in the Osireion, which was by now passable around most of the perimeter, and all but the center of the courtyard was OK to walk standing up; the rest bent over a little. Kase was admiring his handiwork muttering things like genius. Magnificent. Moron. Hey, I didn't say that.

"What now Mephistopheles?" Nikki asked, bent half over from fatigue.

"Drive the truck down to the Nile and dump it, then come back ASAP." Nikki was still there. "Go. I have things to do; to calculate. I gotta put in some supports for this rubber thingey." They'd brought all the tent braces and brackets down, and Kase started putting them in place around the perimeter of the central court; jacking each one up until eventually there was a good eight feet of clearance even above the two rectangular cut outs in the middle of the center court.

Nikki returned two hours later, and collapsed on a pile of clothing and sheets. Kase patted her solicitously on the top of her head, then disappeared up the stairway with a roll of romex electrical cable. He was soon back down. She watched curiously as he wired the cable into a small electrical panel, threw the switch; and *viola* - there was light. Nikki tried not to be impressed. Then he disappeared back up the stairs with a sledge hammer and industrial grade crow bar. After a while, Nikki was worried. She was just getting up on her elbows to see what he was up to when there was a crash, a shout, and Kase came shooting down the stairs right in front of a massive wall of sand. The whole place was a dust storm; but it all settled after a while and the lights were at least still working.

"You didn't," Nikki said aghast. Kase nodded.

"We're trapped," and Kase braced for another swat. Instead Nikki dragged him by the ears over to the middle of the courtyard, stood him straight - two fingers pointed at his eyes; don't move or else - and slowly walked around him observing his features from every possible angle. She did this for the longest time. Kase was afraid she had gone mad.

"What are you doing - you don't have a knife in your hand do you? Are you insane?"

Nikki kept circling, but she appeared to be a little more satisfied with what she saw; or so Kase hoped. "See something you like?" Kase said tentatively.

"I'm just inspecting your faith. It appears intact."

"Sure. So what?"

"It means you have a way out of here. Otherwise your faith would not be so strong."

"The Force is with you, Jedi."

"Pray tell, Yoda."

"It's only a theory."

"You're trying my patience."

"Can we work on this later? I'm hungry."

"Now you want me to cook you dinner?"

"Would you rather eat my cooking?"

"Good point. I'm on it."

I went up the stairs to the Student's Attorney's Office in the Dean of Students building on campus. No, the Student's Attorney doesn't help students but actually prosecutes students who violate University rules. The lawyer I talked to had a file on me already, with an affidavit of a complaint that had been filed against me three semesters previous for misuse of University web and email. I said no such file had ever been made. She said the record shows you were brought in and counseled

about the rules and given a warning. I said that never happened. She said I was in worse trouble now because I'd not heeded their warning. I said that's ridiculous because no warning was given and you don't have my signature on the form acknowledging my receipt thereof.

Lawyers despise you when you use their own rules against them. This one took particular offense. Maybe because I was disabled, and she was too. She had a lazy eye that she used to good effect. I would rather she had worn a patch over the glass eye, that way I would at least have visual confirmation that the person I was dealing with was an evil no good double crossing pirate out to run my scared ass off campus.

Naturally, I panicked and spent the next week solid gathering mountains of documents to support my case. I was scheduled to take the written qualifying exams in only a few weeks, so it was time I could hardly afford to spend away from my studies. Mom came to me when I met with the lazy eyed attorney and her boss, the main Student's Attorney. They acted so upset that I took the charges so seriously, explained that they had been so stern because that's they only way they can effectively terrorize people into following the rules. You must really get back, they said, to study hard for your qualifying exams because this is not an important matter at all.

Actually, I found out just how important it was six months later - after I had passed the qualifying exams - when my advisor quit. He said one of the reasons he quit was that he had had to talk to the Student's Attorney about the material I had put on the web, i.e. my Masters dissertation research on the Earth to Mars trajectory.

That's what happens when you piss off an attorney. If they can't stab you in the back the instant after you run circles around them, then they harbor the slight until it grows into a malice and then they destroy you utterly the instant you show weakness. I never did get an answer to my question about where's the attorney the University is supposed to provide me, for my own defense. Apparently you have to provide your own, and they don't even advise you of your right to have an attorney present during questioning.

I don't much like the idea of part of my tuition paying for lawyers to work full time falsifying evidence to get rid of students who don't toe the party line.

VIII. Star Gate

"What's wrong?"

"They're not here yet."

"Are you crazy?"

"No, I'm an engineer."

"You want them to be here - why on Earth do you want that?"

"So my design will work."

"Care to enlighten me?"

"Well, I got to thinking about this very simple but very efficient air conditioning system. You know, the water coats the surface of the courtyard; evaporates, then cools the place down nicely - frigidly, even. Why would they do that? What purpose could it have?"

"To escape the heat of the day. To keep food fresh."

"Archaeologists; the Force is not in you very strong." Kase said, as he hobbled over to her way bent over like Yoda; leaning on his cane. Then he struck her feet with the cane; hmm good feet, though. Then her chest; hmm natural breasts; then reached over and pulled her lips open; hmm good teeth too.

"Jedi Deathwalker feels her pulse quickening."

"Hmm. Best avoid trouble in your fate wherever possible," and Kase backed slowly away, to stand in the shadows.

"The engineering analysis of this supercalafragalistic ice box says that the cooling was there to extract heat from a machine. This whole place isn't a Temple, or part of an aqueduct, or even a prison for Leviathan the pet dragon of little green men space travelers," and then he gave a little bow. "Even though it may have served all those purposes at one time or another."

"It's a Star Gate," Nikki added, in awe.

"Indeed." and he pointed to his head, waved his arms and encouraged Nikki to follow through on the logic.

"Hebrews steal Leviathan. Implode stairs when they do so, so nobody can get into the Osireion to see that the Ark of the Covenant is missing. The machine is damaged in some way, and the gravity string that is grounded on it - like a worm hole - breaks free. There is a local disruption in the gravity and electromagnetic fields, these cause the seven plagues. Then finally the gravity string breaks completely free, and rakes the bottom of the Red Sea. The rest is history."

"You would have made a good engineer, Darth Deathwalker."

"You better be a good one," Nikki threatened. "Because you have to get this thing working so it will whisk us out of here to your world; any world - just away from here and those blood thirsty heathen Praetorian Guard friends of yours."

"Theoretically, since the Osireion is really really damaged now; well, if I can get it charged back up, it will probably only transport us to some other place on Earth.

"You mean, like to Stonehedge?"

"I have no idea."

"That's not very reassuring."

"However, I feel like confident. My faith is strong. I suppose that means my unconscious knows more than my conscious mind and we will be OK.

"So, the Praetorians are needed to make this thing work?"

"I'm assuming they will come in trucks, and drive all over the place. When a truck passes over, it will push down the rubber ceiling; and when they drive off, the ceiling will go back to its position, and in the process like a plunger, suck a little water out of the pool; covering the deck and initiating the cooling cycle. Then the machine starts up, and sucks us away to another star gate.

"I assume you have done all the calculations for this?"

"No, all the proof is in the rough cut stairs leading down into the rectangular pool.

"You're kidding, right?"

"If I were, why would I be standing over here in the shadows far, far away from your reach?"

"Touché. What about the stairs.

"Leviathan was imprisoned here, right? Over millennia? It's a dragon, or a pre dragon whatever that may be. Dragon's don't need stairs. Humanoids do. Little green aliens with pointed ears who funny talk. Need they stairs. We.

"That means the place worked, after it was covered back up; after the Hebrews took their Golden Calf, and the place had no further use. It worked so well that aliens were transported here. But the place was buried. There was no escape. They had nothing to do but scratch out the stairs with their bare hands.

"The Praetorians came down every now and then to collect the bones of the dead travelers. That was their source of the melange prophecy Leviathan dust. Then the massive earthquake that leveled Cleopatra's palace happened, it shifted the Osireion so the roof fell in; breaking the machine, so no more transport; no more coins from Praetorians; no more prophecy.

"You have your ducks in a row. Keep quacking.

"Sorry, Yoda. Quack no can do."

"Hint: zoom forward to the modern era, early 1900's, the Nazi obsession with finding this place - the Well of All Souls - and recovering the Ark of the Covenant. What was in the Ark?"

"The dust of the tablets of the Ten Commandments," then she broke into clear sky. "But stone tablets don't go into dust. The dust must have been scrapings from the Osireion.

Kase started again once Nikki's eyes had cleared. "Assume that everything we have discovered now, was also known to the Nazis. They know how much of an advantage even a dim prophecy would give them in winning their war, but nothing remains of the prophecy dust. What do they do? Is there any dust remaining, of the slightest possible concentration?

"The Hebrew slaves - the modern day Jews. They gassed them, then extracted the dust from their bones."

"Think you now, the Nazis capable of that? Do you see the importance of that influx of billions of dollars from the Wall Street firm owned by Grandfather Walker Bush and the Dulles Brothers? It's they who orchestrated the Holocaust - the Nazis, ultimate pragmatists that they were, needed the Jews for labor. The German war machine was constantly short of gasoline - they barely got by and even had to resort to extracting oil from coal; they could never, ever justify burning a hundred gallons of gasoline for each corpse they cremated. Times that by six million and you have more gas than the Axis powers used in their entire war effort.

"Do you see now, why Hitler committed suicide minutes before the *Furerbunker* was overrun by the Russians; his remains still smoldering after having been burned - according to his precise instructions - in exactly two hundred gallons of gasoline; after which time all the bones still remained? Where are all those bones of the six million Jews killed by the Nazis; and the ten million exterminated by Stalin?

"But even that produced only a tiny bit of prophecy - they didn't even see D Day coming.

"Because 'they' weren't the Nazi high command, or even anybody in Germany. 'They' were the secret investors in America.

"I'm not following you."

"If you had only a thimble full of prophecy powder, enough for one weak trance - how would you use it?" Nikki was stumped. "OK, if you had only one wish, what would you wish for?"

"More wishes," Nikki replied. Then, "They used the prophecy powder to find more, a permanent source. They couldn't get to Nellie, hard as the Nazis tried to conquer the British Isles; so they - what?"

"They set a trap."

"To capture an alien. At Roswell. Which did they get - a dragon or a humanoid?"

"Both. They got lucky. The aliens keep baby dragons as pets. Imagine a scaly cat that breathes fire, flies, and that can withstand the rigors of space travel. They'd never leave home without one. The aliens died, having a life span like humans. Baby Dino is still alive, and captive.

"What was the trap?"

"Alamogordo. The A bomb tests. Like a magnet.

"How come you know all this?"

"I was there. Well, my soul was there; and the soul has a weak kind of memory. You humans explore it using past life regression. It's called instinct, in animals.

"Where's baby Dino now? Can you sense him - do you miss him?"

"He is in a lab, deep under the new microbiology building at the University of Texas at Austin.

"How do you know for sure.

"A good friend of mine was the construction superintendent for the building. I ran into him once when I was in grad school at UT. He said they were building a wet lab in the basement of the building.

"And..."

"My niece works in the microbiology department now. She says there is no wet lab, and no record of anything there. The place is secret. Baby Dino is there. I know it.

"And..."

"Yes, I do miss him," Kase said.

"We could use a fire breathing adolescent dragon right about now, you know.

"I think they are not easy to domesticate, however. There were many, many fires and alarms, before and all during construction of the new wet lab; all this was when I was at UT." He was evidently quite proud of the creature's intransigence. "It got so bad they made the main street through the UT campus, Speedway, a two way fire lane. I wrote a sarcastic editorial about that stupid plan when I was a staff columnist with the Daily Texan, and it was published - they probably read it, saw I was subconsciously very close to finding them out; then started harassing me, bad.

"I see what you mean, about how you have inadvertently traced the events of your past; going to White Sands, then Brooke at Fort Sam; then making an about face in your career, to get to UT about the time little Leviathan was moved there.

"The Fore is with me."

Nikki noticed something odd then. There was a little ripple in the pool. She pointed it out to Kase. They're here. Run. Get into the two openings in the middle of the courtyard. Roll into a ball, keep your head below the top. Wait.

Nothing happened.

"Where is this machine going to send us? Theoretically?" Nikki asked from her fox hole.

"Austin, I hope."

"We're going back to Texas - are you crazy!"

"I miss baby Dino. We're going to rescue him."

"You won't get within ten miles of that place. They've surely got the best security in the universe."

"Can't be that good if my niece Sarah got a job at UT. Although the Force is strong in her."

"We're not talking about infiltrating the organization - we're talking about stealing their Holy Grail. Besides, if they have the prophecy they'll know we're coming."

"We're not going there. All I need to do is disconnect the security system so baby Dino can escape. He'll know what to do then. Find me, he will."

"How can you possibly disable the security system?"

"Because I designed it - or, at least, the building where it is. It is called the South Austin Transfer Station, ostensibly a garbage recycling and waste disposal place."

"What makes you so sure it's where baby Dino is being held?"

"Was held there; is now where all the security controls are. Clever, isn't it - to have all the controls half a city away?"

"I was involved in a civil suit all last year. Bad things happened at the SATS station after it was constructed. Damage to the outside walls that caused extreme moisture infiltration; people working there got sick for no reason at all, suffering some unknown problems nobody could diagnose. Dino did those things to the building trying to escape; and people got sick because they were in such close proximity to him. I tried to just walk around the place, to prepare my defense by getting familiar with the facility - they blamed all the problems on me because my engineering seal was on the drawings - and saw this huge facility, with many wary guards doing absolutely nothing; then they kicked me out, threatened my attorney with another civil suit. They're surely hiding something there. Nobody guards garbage that closely, like it was solid gold; nobody."

"How can you be sure it wasn't all just ineptitude on the part of the city, the architect, and the contractors? All those problems with the SATS building.

"Because every piece of paper associated with that project - it was built long after I left the firm - is so illogical and unprofessional as to make it clearly all done by individuals under some kind of strange influence. Just like is described on the writings in the Osireion. Leviathan was there, I'm convinced of that. Growing baby dragon eats a lot; the only way you could move that much food is to disguise it as a garbage dump. From the high security of the place as it is now, it seems clear that the controls for the security of the wet lab in Austin are there at SATS; they could not hide all the monitors, the changing of guards, and so forth for a large lab at UT; so they put them all off campus. Or since the same equipment was in place for the security at the temporary holding place at SATS; they just kept it there.

"All we need to do is disconnect the main power to the building, the controls go down; baby Dino goes free, and that's that.

"How can we get past their security? That's a Tom Cruise mission impossible job.

"Not really. I just pick up the phone, call the power company. I'm doing some work on the main electrical service, please disconnect it for a few hours; when I'm done I'll call back to tell you it's OK to reconnect. See?" Then before Nikki's very eyes, he got out of the pit, walked quickly over; returned with a cell phone, made the call, identified himself; gave them his Professional Engineer license number; submitted the power outage request, they confirmed the power was out, and he signed off. Then checking his atomic powered Timex chronometer, "Dino should be home for dinner in a couple of hours." Nikki rolled her eyes, ignoring this remark.

"I suppose you have proof that baby Dino really is at UT, so you don't go to jail for disconnecting the power at this facility using your authority as a Professional Engineer?"

"A six inch folder full of documents written by dozens of bureaucrats at UT, all making no sense at all; just like Leviathan always has an effect on people. Its irrefutable, and it is signed by the Graduate School Dean, the President of the University; the Dean of the School of Engineering, and many other big shots. They're screwed.

"Why did they keep baby Dino in a temporary place like SATS? Why not transfer him from where ever he was directly to the wet lab at UT.

"Because I found out where they were hiding him when I was at White Sands, at a place called the High Energy Laser Facility with the revealing nickname of HELSTAF. I did a paper on laser dissipation when I was on post, and was assigned to measure the air quality in that building,

along with a physicist from the Atmospheric Sciences Laboratory - I was a weather observer tasked to ASL. That was in 1982. But I have total recall. I can remember everything about that place - the mirrors, the chemical storage tank yard out by the side, the huge dome covering the mirror area (which is where we measured the particle count, of dust motes in the air - which was far too high for a laser to work there), the giant computers beneath the dome; the large parking lot with far more cars in evidence than there were people; the extreme level of security.

"I got expertise in many engineering fields over the following years - mechanical, electrical, computers, and aerospace - and I can literally be the expert witness I am now, and walk back through all that I saw at HESTAF, and it is quite obvious the whole place was a front and that in lower levels they had baby Dino, and maybe some UFO wreckage.

"Anyway, all the heat I have caused up through the bureaucracy appealing my wrongful discharge, smoked them out of HELSTAF ahead of schedule; making them move to SATS, and the rest is history.

"They'd never put Leviathan in a building you designed.

"I didn't design it, actually. It was all done before I started with the firm; construction was held up by some environmental groups for several years. I was only with the firm for four months, worked on the project for only a couple of hours; but had to seal the plans for bidding because I was the only qualified engineer on the staff; so it was only by the most convoluted and unlikely series of extremely improbable circumstances that my name was on the documents; and even more unlikely that my name remained on them.

"The Force really is with you.

"And with you.

"How can you prove that the documents at UT and related to SATS are indicative of the presence of Leviathan. The writings on the Osireion walls are largely symbolic and subject to interpretation.

"Yes, but a lengthy statement I made shortly after I left White Sands - the grievance submitted to the Inspector General at Fort Sam that I mentioned to you - was studied at length by a psychologist; and he presented my case to a board of his peers there at Chambers Pavilion, at BAMC; not to mention scrutiny during the appeals process when I was still in the army, and since. That statement is exactly the kind of document as produced by UT and SATS. The doctors confirmed my condition; and they will conform the same conditions for all the documents related to the UT and SATS projects.

"Case closed.

Suddenly there was an implosion and all the air was sucked out of their lungs. The machine was working! Then they were tumbling in a small field of four foot high grass, bright sunshine and dark cumulus clouds scattered above. They both found their feet, overcoming dizziness; and Kase looked around; Nikki was holding onto his arm for dear life, looking like the Wizard of Oz had just whisked her back to Kansas...

It was a small modern looking, new two story building with a red metal roof, tan siding, and a cute decorative balcony on the second floor. The whole thing was surrounded by ugly parking lots, full of dirty older model cars. Giant garage doors were open to the rear of the building, leading into the trash compacting area of the facility. The building was open, and there was free access into the offices, no warning do not enter private signs or anything. So I walked right in, expecting I would be able to find somebody to get directions from.

On the first floor was a snack room to the right, linoleum floors, a large metal table, a few plastic chairs, and some vending machines. To the left was a formal conference room, carpeted, with another large table - a nice wood table - and some cushy chairs on wheels. A small stairway led to the second floor. At the second floor landing there was a closed door with a caution sign on it, beware. The door opened inward and if somebody happened to be going the other way right as you reached the landing, when the door opened you would be pushed right down the stairs. Fortunately the building, so far, was not occupied.

Hallways led to the left and right off the small foyer on the other side of the beware door. A dozen offices opened off the halls, but they were quiet and empty. A large picture window at the rear of the foyer gave a panoramic view of the trash compactors and transfer docks, on the ground floor. The front side of the foyer led to a small balcony. The whole place smelled like it does when you get caught driving behind a garbage truck, and your first impulse is to make a dash for the balcony for a breath of fresh air. What looked just like a heavy glass door opening onto the balcony wasn't that at all. The door didn't open, and all you could do is look out desperately at the tidy little concrete deck of the balcony, the red metal bannister, and wonder what kind of people designed this place.

Staggering down the hallway, hollering out if anybody was home, a meek voice answered and on the first door down the hall to the right a man was typing on a laptop computer in an office that was completely empty. The odor was worse in there, and a stealthy pace to the full wall of windows confirmed the not so obvious. The windows were decorative

only, and didn't open to the outside. After brief introductions, I was told the staff person I needed to talk to was the old building next door.

Walking across the parking lot, inhaling bountiful lungs full of fresh air, I walked tentatively through a high metal fence topped with barbed wire, and into a building with a pair of security guards at a front desk. There was a wall of TV monitors all around them, as if they were protecting the crown jewels and not a bunch of recycled waste. The halls were wide, dark, and ominous. The guards halted my impromptu exploration of the premises, begged to know my business, then said I was in the wrong building. I should go to the main administration building. Drive out the main gate, turn right, then at the next street turn right again; and after two more rights you'll be at the main building.

I did as instructed, but arrived only at a row of empty warehouses. Ten minutes later after retracing the instructions, and taking a few random side streets, I finally arrived at a place that looked like the main City of Austin sanitary waste offices. Parking in the lot by the front door, I looked down the road and half a block away was the building I had just departed from. All they had to do was tell me to drive out the main gate, turn left, and you're there in half a block. Why the run around, I didn't know. Maybe they were brain dead, inhaling garbage waste odors all day long.

Entering the administration building, there was a directory on the wall in the empty triangular shaped foyer, but no halls or doors leading off the foyer. The only door in evidence was marked for employees only, which I entered with no small amount of trepidation. I asked for the supervisor, having found a lone person at her desk; a severely disabled person, in a wheel chair. She told me - or rather, I interpreted through her speech impediment - that I was in the wrong office building, that the supervisor who was supposed to be in the first building, but who also had an office in the second building I was in at that moment; was actually in an office complex near the University. The disabled person in a wheelchair gave me the office number, which I dialed from a courtesy phone out in the empty nonfunctional triangular shaped lobby. The supervisor was not there, even though it was by now after the lunch hour, so I left my phone number with the answering service and drove home.

The City of Austin sanitary department supervisor did not return my call, but my attorney did. A lot had happened in the forty minutes it took me to get home. The supervisor had contacted the County Attorney's office, who had contacted my firm's attorney, who then called my own attorney (I had a separate attorney because of some conflict of interest), who then called my home and left a nasty message that I was not to go anywhere without his permission, under any circumstances, ever again. I spent the next six months trying to get somebody to get me a tour of the building, or even blue prints or pictures or any iota of information about the

building. I didn't get anything until a year later, six months after the suit had been settled, and those plans came by way of the Professional Engineering licensing board that was investigating a separate complaint about the project - that my engineering seal and signature had been forged on the drawings.

Clearly, bureaucracies exist only to protect the guilty and to discombobulate the innocent, which not only includes curious engineers but the general public and the media.

"Where the hell are we."

"East Texas - Leon County, to be exact. Not too far from Palestine, Texas - where the shuttle Columbia crashed a few years ago."

"You can't be right. How the hell would you know?"

"Actually, that over there is the intersection of County Road 112 and Private Roads 1220 and 1230; and that beautiful property belongs to none other than one Kase Clearey. Come, check out the letters in the mail box." Sure enough, there was mail in the box with that name on the label. Nikki just knew he had scouted the area, and planted the incriminating letters, before she had woken up.

"Is there somewhere we can go sit down? I'm feeling a little out of it." And Kase led her down the packed rock road with thick undergrowth reaching right up to the curb, giant hundred - no, two and three hundred - foot tall pines, oaks, and elms. It was hot as hell, sticky humid, and they were surrounded by a loud cacophony of insect and bird sounds.

"You sure we aren't in the Amazon, and not East Texas?" Nikki said, her finger nails still digging into his arm as they walked slowly down the road. They rounded a corner, then there was a small tool shed with a house number and a small sign, "Clearey" and a little behind it was a fixed up old trailer house, and a less fixed up addition behind. Just then a private street lamp by the house was kicked on by a light sensor, though the sun wouldn't set for two more hours; so deep were they in the woods that it was already dusk at ground level.

"Looks like a tree fell on your house while you were gone," Nikki asked as the farm house came into view. Thereafter she called it The Fallen Angel Ranch. Kase explained as they walked up the drive, lined with straight tall pines.

"There was a tree, and it destroyed the house. That was long before I got the property. I cleaned up the house, but left the tree as it looks pretty authentic from the road, eh?" Nikki didn't see the point. "It keeps the tax assessor from jacking up the property value, and nobody bothers to break in because it doesn't look worth the trouble."

Inside the small trailer house - twenty by ten; you will recall, the dimensions of a Roman army tent - was comfortable and neat. Heavy wood beams made a nice ceiling, the floor was patched in places but clean; and hand me down furniture was comfortable if not elegant. After all, it was just a weekend retreat or camp.

Around the back was a carport with no roof - actually, just enough rusty old corrugated tin to cover the bed of the huge GMC pickup Kase introduced to her as Bonnie Blue. (Which was the name of the Confederate flag of secession ~ a simple white star on a dark blue background.) They hopped in, and the engine roared to life like a posse of Harley Davidsons, but sounding better. It has a monster 400 cubic inch motor, gets ten miles a gallon coasting downhill; but Kase dearly loved the chrome mag wheels, the classic 1979 pickup style, and even the totally trashed out interior. There was a U.S. Naval Academy Alumni sticker on the rear window. Class of 1978. No doubt the reunion he had been banned from, Nikki recollected. He and Bonnie Blue would no doubt have made quite an impression.

They took a short tour in the truck around the twelve acres, along a path that Kase said was completely under water four months of the year, making a moat around the whole interior of the property. There were small paths here and there, angling off the main road; and Kase stopped once and showed her a tidy little fence he had built, complete with a wood door on a four by four frame of pressure treated lumber, all painted white.

"What's that huge log doing in the middle of your garden?"

"Oh, that's a perch for baby Dino when he comes to visit." Nikki was too tired to protest; so she just played along.

"Most people have humming bird feeders or purple martin houses. My husband Kase has a twelve acre dragon ranch, surrounded by water to quench the flames, and with a tidy little nest where two foot diameter dragon eggs can be protected from predators when they hatch." Kase led her back road slash moat, carefree as she had ever seen him.

They got back in the truck, which Kase had left running all the while because the battery wasn't dependable, on account of the bizarre electromagnetic fields that strafed the area; then drove slowly back to the house and parked. They went inside, crashed on the crummy chairs and sofa, opened the windows with the rusted through screens, turned on a floor fan and nursed a tall glass of ice cold Hawaiian Punch Red. The Osireion and Egypt and the Praetorian Guard seemed eons away, in some other dimension all together.

Shattering the night, suddenly there was a horrific shriek, and they rushed outside to see a giant bird circling overhead just above the tree line. Silhouetted in the weak dusk light, they could see it had a wingspan fully twenty meters in breadth. It was huge! Kase rushed back into the house, then dashed out carrying two boxes full of groceries - who knows what dragons like to eat, so he got some of everything - then ran full speed down the trail to the small fenced area. Nikki, grab the hose and follow me; turn the water on first - full blast.

Not-so-baby Dino was standing on the big log in the fenced area when Kase came around the corner. He was breathing heavily from the two hundred mile flight from Austin, and his fiery breath was singing the lower branches of the oaks and pines nearby. Loose limbs had already fallen to the ground, and a dozen small fires were sparking up. While Nikki scrambled around to douse all the fires, Kase stood outside the fence and tossed food into the enclosure. Whole loafs of bread; chickens with the skin off; chickens with the skin on; birds and squirrels that fell out of the trees, torched by the dragon's breath; apples; carrots; whole heads of lettuce; and then Kase finally urged Nikki over to direct the hose into its mouth. (See now why they used a garbage transfer station as a cover - how else would the explain carting truck loads of food to a laboratory?) A long draft of cool water later, and not-so-baby Dino curled up in a ball in the fence, and took a nice long nap. Nikki then hosed his body down until steam stopped rising off the interlocking scales.

Kase went through the fence, petted him. Nikki wouldn't go. No thanks. He's your pet dragon. Not mine.

The next few days were spent mostly hunting and fishing during the day, for dragon food. And playing in the night, when Dino finally figured out it was safest to fly about at night. He soon learned to find his own food, and they started to see less of him. He'd made some friends, they knew, of hawks and vultures, and hung out with them more. Nobody in the area really noticed much, since we were after all in Big Foot country and one more myth about a flying fire breathing albatross didn't much excite folks, along with the black panther tracks folks found, the buffalo gnats with the little hump, and the giant mosquitoes that suck your blood till they dropped on the ground and splattered they were so engorged.

It was far enough from civilization that nobody could get exposed enough to suffer the Leviathan disease, so all was well. There were enough rains in the area that Dino droppings and even baby Dino shit, when Nellie came over the Atlantic to visit on occasion and they got connected; well, the concentration of the prophecy dust was weak to nil, although sometimes people noticed the smaller animals who lived thereabouts and who ate the grass and weeds nurtured on the powerful manure, doing strange things.

A giant eight foot rattle snake always showed up at the crossroads, like clockwork, on Labor Day. You already know about the black panther people see now and then, even more often its tracks in the sandy soil. Deer and rabbits and possums thrived in relative safety from hunters on The Fallen Angel ranch, amongst the three hundred foot tall trees, which kept Dino from going after them. However, cows and horses grazing in all the area ranches invariably ran to hide under a tree whenever a cloud passed overhead; especially during a drought; fearing Dino was circling overhead, zeroing in on them for a snack. UFO nuts loved the place because of all the alien cattle mutilations, not to mention Big Foot sightings there and all through the Big Thicket in the neighboring counties.

Yes, things were back to normal in no time at all.

IX. Well of All Souls

"I don't feel very safe here any more," Nikki said two weeks later. Kase tried to ignore her, but she persisted.

"With their Leviathan escaped - all because of a ruse that can be traced directly to you by how you had the power to the security system disconnected - it's only a matter of time before they find us.

"This property isn't in my name," Kase tried to protest.

"But the electric and water service are."

"You're right. Where can we go?" Kase asked, really trying hard to figure out where they could go - it was an unforeseen circumstance.

"Back to the Osireion. Of course." Nikki said, as he was thinking.

Kase laughed, a strong relaxed laugh. His injuries had healed, and he'd gotten most of the mobility back in his arms and torso, where the zombies' blades had stricken him down like Caesar in the Roman Senate chamber. The muscles would all come back with time, and exercise, but a few areas were numb from severed nerves. It wasn't a problem.

"We'll have to get there the old fashioned way." Nikki started planning. "But we can't use credit cards or anything that is traceable. You'll have to sell Bonnie Blue.

"No way. Besides, they could trace the registration." Kase said, with his old determination. "I do however have certain very valuable ring that we could ransom to the nearest Catholic parish church. There should be enough for air fare.

"I have some Coptic Christian friends in Egypt," Nikki said.

"They'll help us with food and supplies for a while. Then as an afterthought, she said "I wonder how your Arab friend is doing; if he ever made it to Mecca."

"Don't ask me, my prophetic skills don't work any more - only Allah knows if they made it to Mecca. As it should be, so far as I'm concerned."

Two days later Kase waited in a rented van while Nikki met with her Coptic friends. Before she left Kase said to be sure and get enough extra to pay for an industrial grade air pump with all the fittings - gas powered.

They had to work fast when they got back to the temple of Seti I. They had arrived late in the evening, just as the last tour bus drove away to the barge landing on the Nile River. They would need to be inside before sunrise. Nikki worked her magic on the secret passageways opening from inside Seti's temple, while Kase rigged up the air pump and hoses. No sooner than Nikki had gotten into the top of the now sand filled

secret stairway, than Kase was pulling her out of the way. Stand by the discharge hose, and move it around frequently to spread the sand evenly, he told her. Three hours later the stairway was clear, and the gas air pump and tubing were secure within the Osireion along with their new food and supplies. They left the rental car on the dock with the windows open and the keys in the ignition, confident that it would be stolen and lost without a trace by high noon the next day.

They left the secret stairway into the temple free of sand this time, enjoying a walk late at night a couple of times a week to ward off claustrophobia and cabin fever. Kase got an expert guided tour of Seti's temple, and all the nearby digs. Nikki slowly recovered from the extreme stress of the last couple of months, and sharing her expertise with Kase and his keen intellect was great fun. His engineering insights gave her ideas for many new papers, on archaeological things long since believed sacrosanct. That pleased Kase no end.

If the Seti temple tour guides thought it was strange that Coptic monks showed up a couple of times a month for the full tour, laden with large boxes that were much lighter when they left, they kept it to themselves. The whole region seemed to have made the safety and security of Nikki and Kase their personal quest. They pulled it off so expertly that the authorities never suspected a thing.

Kase was redesigning the supports inside the Osireion so that he could simulate the slight deflection caused by the Praetorian vehicles, that had activated the Star Gate the first time. Nikki tagged along, peppering him with a constant stream of questions. Their voices echoed lightly in the chamber, but despite the granite walls and floor, the acoustics of the place dampened the noise remarkably well. The electrical circuit from the Temple was still hot, although they used lights and other appliances sparingly so as not to run up the Seti I's electric bill.

It was the middle of the summer, and at times 140 degrees outside, even more. But the Osireion stayed at a steady 75 degrees. All it took was a bucket of water a few times each day, poured across the central courtyard, and the evaporative cooling did the trick. It was a little on the humid side, but that was perfect for Kase's eyes. They had discussed the idea several times that he might have a blood link to whomever had been imprisoned there, that after generations of living in a constant humidity place their tear ducts might have degenerated away.

Eventually they got back to thinking seriously about the whole prophecy dust Leviathan thing. Nikki had found all her old notes stashed in a hefty trash bag that miraculously survived all the antics of the

crucifixions, their narrow escape, then their Star Gate exodus to Texas. Kase rigged an antenna, and hid it in the roof of the Seti I Temple, so that she had internet access with the laptop PC. Later the Coptic monks had gotten them a phone number for dial up access, and paid the monthly bill out of their coffers. In return, Nikki secreted for them a few minor artifacts out of the Temple.

Kase got the sub supports of the rubber balloon ceiling set up like an adjustable suspension, with actuators on each of the twenty or so supports controlled by analog links to an old PC left behind by the Praetorians. One day Kase stole the Global Star tracking unit out of a big SUV - Nikki being on the lookout to warn him if anybody approached. They sent it through the Star Gate, then Nikki called the operator long distance and, in tears and acted terribly desperate she was lost, could you please tell me where I am? It was within a quarter mile of the East Texas property. Three more times they did the same routine, and finally got the whole thing adjusted to where it went right to a clearing in the middle of the property.

Neither was brave enough to go through, even then. So Kase called a retired navy submariner neighbor friend, gave him the coordinates where the four Global Star tracking units had ended up; asked if he might look for them and UPS them to the Coptic church. He found three of them; and they all ended up dead in the middle of the clearing. so Kase volunteered to be sent through. He called from the neighbor's house half an hour later.

The next step was to try and be able to go both ways, which turned out to be easier done than said. The thing was somehow closely timed to stone, so they made a thick slab in the middle of the target clearing, and send a few things back and forth; then Kase volunteered again, and it worked well. They left it at that, shutting down the whole operation, considering it too risky for anything but an emergency out. It was a tremendous relief to have their backs covered.

"Why did the Jews call this place the Well of All Souls?" Nikki asked one day, deferring to his relatively deep knowledge of Old Testament spirituality. She had been writing a paper on some her new archaeological theories, with Kase's engineering help; and was going to submit it via email to a leading journal. She wanted to have Kase as a co author but he refused; insisting instead that she use the deceased archaeologists as co authors. Soon they were all publishing a flurry of controversial, but provocative papers in all the leading journals. Kase

treasured those articles, that she printed out for him off the internet, almost as much as his well worn *Asterix* comics. Nikki was glad to have him reading something worthwhile for a change.

"The Jews are kind of cyclical about how they talk about Souls. About the only thing you can pin them down about is that there are a limited number of Souls in the world.

"I assume you have gone further?"

"You assume right, Professor Gâteaux." Kase stopped what he was working on, stretched out flat on his back, head on his hands, closed his eyes and talked.

"I believe the human soul is the culmination of many incarnations over millions of years, going all the way back through the animal and plant kingdoms. If you take one link out of the chain, the whole process is broken - and no more souls can be made, at a higher level than that link. If you live a sinful life, your soul will revert to a lower life form, like that of a Praetorian or a snail. If you live a good life, relative to all other human souls, you will return as a human.

"So all the ecological disasters have long since, according to you and the Jews, stopped creating human souls? It's kind of like the human genome project has proven that we have snippets of genes from the whole span of the animal kingdom." Kase said affirmative that, little Sister.

"That means as the population of the world grows, more and more people have no soul at all? When did the Jews make their determination that souls were no longer created.

"Oh - a couple thousand years ago. When the total population was, maybe, three hundred thousand souls.

"My god - with three billion people on Earth now; that means only one in ten thousand has a soul?" Roger that, little Sister.

"Not to mention that from what I've seen, most of the good people who do have a soul either don't know it, don't take care of it, or literally destroy it with drugs, booze, or a hundred other dreadful things.

"What happens to the souls when there are no more people with them?

"Maybe they all get more and more concentrated in the good people who remain; who benefit from longevity and immunity from disease. Could be we are the last two souls on Planet Earth, human ones that is; animals are in far better shape, when they aren't driven to extinction.

"That's right, Jolly Roger - everybody but us little 'ones are pure and simply, evil with a capitol E. Consequently, this here place is truly and accurately the Well of All Souls.

"You didn't sound too sure of that, Kase." Nikki observed accurately. "That tells me that there's something more to it.

"Yes, there is. My best guess is that when the number of souls drops below a certain amount, then the rest kind of degenerate into a common collective subconscious; or, in Star Trek lore, a collective. We are the Borg. Resistance is Futile. You Will Be Assimilated.

"You can't possibly be serious.

"How not so? Modern society is riddled with controlling groups; engineering associations that make policy on virtually every aspect of technology; medical groups who render natural healing techniques like meditation unlawful in favor of chemical remedies available from pharmaceutical corporations; and major religious organizations that lend their stamp of approval to everything from war to technology. All together, they're ushering in a rapid de-evolution of the human genome.

"We Albigensians came to that conclusion a thousand years ago. Thank you for confirming our beliefs. Except the Albigensians are no more. Well, except for me.

"Ditto, for me and the Praetorians.

"Sounds kind of like Enoch the King and Aaliyah the Queen of the Damned, in the Anne Rice vampire chronicles. She traces the whole vampire myth back to two figures in Ancient Egypt, king and queen, who made a deal with the devil himself. They were infused with some kind of blood sucking demon who made them immortal, but with an unquenchable thirst for human blood. So long as they took blood, of humans or any mammal; they remained immortal. Without it, they die. Their progeny became so vast, and their ancient blood so very potent; that they became creatures of hyperspace, moving so very slowly in our time they seemed statues to modern mortals.

"My queen," Kase said as he got up and walked over, to stand in the larger rectangular indentation in the middle of the Osireion. "Take your place beside me, and we shall become one with hyperspace."

"Stuff it, psycho." Nikki said from the shadows. Kase laughed. "So much for the power of myth."

"My chronometer confirms what my stomach is telling me, that it's time for dinner, bed, and bedtime stories. Shall it be so?" holding out his hand, for hers.

"Why yes, my prince."

"You know, the French are the only government in the world to issue a formal statement in which they go just short of saying UFO's exist, but say a high level commission of military, defense, and civilian officials have determined that UFO's could be a threat to the security of France, if not to the whole world.

"We French like doing anything that upsets America. It's just so much fun.

"I know just what you mean.

"Tell me about Roswell. Just the facts. No first no filling in between the lines." Kase agreed, then began.

"The U.S. Army reported in a newspaper article that a UFO crashed outside of Roswell, New Mexico on July 2, 1947. They almost immediately recanted the article, and said it was a weather balloon that had crashed. The entire area was cordoned off, and no media were allowed near the crash site. The only information available is from retired military personnel who were at Roswell Air Station at that time. They say a large area the size of two football fields end on end was littered with tiny scraps of metal, and they were part of a task force detailed to collect all the metal scraps.

"A week later the Secretary of Defense, Admiral James Forrestall, went to Roswell on official business. A year after that Forrestall died at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Washington DC, after having been pushed or jumped out of his hospital room. He had been raving about Zionists, as he claimed; and everybody thought he was suicidal.

"Otherwise, it is helpful to know that Roswell - which lets say is near to the center of the square shaped state of New Mexico - is adjacent to two major military installations, White Sands Missile Range (it was then known as White Sands Proving Ground) which is a huge place that covers a swath right through the middle of the state, extending from Fort Bliss to the south at El Paso, all the way to Albuquerque in the north. Next to White Sands to the west, is Alamogordo.

"White Sands is where they brought the Nazi's U2 rockets for dissection, and where the allies tried to develop jet aircraft; which the Nazis had by the end of the war. The Nazi's couldn't deploy the jets because they had precious little jet fuel. They still test missiles at White Sands; and it's still the highest security military installation in the U.S. White Sands is also an alternate landing site for the NASA shuttle, and since the late 70's site of the \$1 trillion missile defense system dubbed "Star Wars" by President Reagan. That program has been funded at extreme levels for 35 years, and to this day cannot shoot out of the sky a missile whose trajectory, speed, and altitude is known.

"Alamogordo is where they tested the atom bombs. This was the most ultra secret military operation in the whole war - yet, they made the

largest mushroom cloud you could ever imagine; and these clouds spread unprecedented amounts of radiation in the whole eastern half of the state. It goes without saying that all of New Mexico and parts of west Texas had to be under martial law during these tests to keep word from leaking out, to cover up the rash of radiation poisonings in hospital emergency rooms, and so forth.

"There was another reason for a high security blanket in the whole area. Hundreds of top Nazi scientists and engineers from *Pennemunde*, the installation in Germany where they had made the U2's and jets, had been brought to America after the end of the war. Half went to Russia, half to America (they spearheaded the space programs in both nations). Since White Sands was the major testing facility for rockets, many would have gone there.

"Finally, about six months after Roswell a very hush hush group was formed called the Office of Policy Coordination. Members of this group included Forrestal, the Secretary of State John Dulles and the Head of the CIA Allen Foster Dulles ~ formerly Principals in the exclusive Wall Street firm that had funded the Nazi regime. The CIA had itself only recently been formed out of military intelligence units; why create another high level group? This OPC was given wide ranging authority not unlike that President Bush got by Executive Order after 911; but which he gave back later. The OPC's authority over virtually every aspect of the government was permanent.

"Those are the facts.

"And your most conservative interpretation?" Nikki probed.

"Nobody can deny that something big and metallic crashed at Roswell, and that Admiral Forrestal went to that tiny, inconsequential base a week later. Weather balloons, I know for a fact because I used them, are not metal. They're plastic. You tie a few square feet of aluminum foil to the bottom of the balloon. A radar tracks the metal foil, and after plotting the range and distance until the balloon gets out of range or bursts from the altitude, you get a plot of the speed and direction of the wind at every level. This is needed so when you fire a missile down the range, you can compare its behavior to the wind conditions. The radar and balloons I used when I was at White Sands were identical to those used after World War II. The balloons were synthetic, and only the trailer was metal.

"I first thought that what crashed was either a Nazi jet fighter captured by the allies and brought to White Sands for testing, or a new fighter being designed by the U.S. That would explain the urgent visit by the Secretary of Defense. The Roswell publication was not big news at all back then, it was retracted so quickly. It is only big news now. The big

news then would be the Secretary of Defense showing up at such a minor base - especially with Alamogordo and White Sands right next to it.

"The metal debris field, and some larger unexploded objects which were variously described by witnesses as a canopy or engines, would fit the fighter jet scenario. None of the soldiers picking up the debris or trying to identify it would have known about jet fighters yet because nobody knew they existed. Still, if they were interviewed after the Korean War in 1950, three years later, they would certainly know what jets were.

"It may or may not be pertinent, that this hypothesis of a jet fighter crashing was never posed, even by the U.S. government after jets were commonplace. It is a simple, logical explanation and would have quelled all discussion immediately. This becomes even more bizarre, when you consider that the OPC and all their mental horsepower, could not put out this explanation to cover the security breach.

"And your more out of this world explanation?" Nikki bated him.

"The fact that the jet fighter excuse was not used, or even thought of, shows that the best military mind in the war - in the head of Admiral Forrestal - was not thinking clearly. Nobody else was either, for that matter. Forrestal's hospitalization on a psychiatric ward at Bethesda supports this view; whether or not he was killed, he was still severely ill enough to be hospitalized, which is pretty damn bad. These facts suggest an exposure to alien technology or Leviathan's Disease; the pharaohs' curse of religious euphoria; whatever you want to call that thing that happened right here, to our archaeologist friends.

"All of this started on July 2, and carried through the 4th of July. That is a major holiday, especially for the military. That is not a good time to schedule a test flight for an experimental jet fighter - everybody would either be on leave, or going there. With all the Nazi scientists around, what few personnel remained would have to be assigned to secure their quarters. This makes it very improbable that it was a jet fighter that crashed.

"The only explanation left is what was first reported by the local newspapers. You must give them credit, at least, for calling to verify the facts and doing all the other things journalists do to ensure good reporting.

"The most definitive support of the UFO angle is that a rumor was floated, and by the modern day has been blown way out of proportion, that a secret organization called the Majestic 12 of high level officials was formed to study the UFO crash and subsequently cover it up. No UFO group, in any venue, has ever mentioned the OPC - which is quite well documented, and was reported openly not too many years ago in a NY Times bestseller. Clearly the MJ12 scam was disinformation, and the UFO community took the bait lock stock and barrel.

"The decision isn't a 'knock out,' but is more like an eighty twenty decision in favor of a UFO crashing at Roswell, especially in light of what we have learned at the Osireion and what I have told you about the University going to extreme measures to eradicate any vestige of respect for celestial mechanics, and how it says travel above the speed of light is possible.

"It dawns on me," Nikki said shortly. "Even if your Osireion isn't part of a terrestrial aqueduct from the Great Oasis - perhaps its an electromagnetic gravitational one from the fluid that happens when you reach the speed of light.

"Yea. Kind of like the liquid interface to the worm hole that the show on the Star Gate TV show and movies."

"Cool. When can we go?"

"Probably all we would need to do is to reconstruct the Osireion in its original form, but that would not be possible to do here. Either that or build an exact duplicate an another location, where a worm hole grounds to the Earth.

"Like maybe your place in East Texas?"

"Wouldn't that be awesome - I could tax every flight in or out, and make billions," rubbing his hands together greedily. "Actually, it's probably just a random end point specific to the wrecked Osireion, and is not an actual termination point for a worm hole. Although it might explain how Big Foot got there.

"The Big Thicket, though, covers a huge area - up to the Oklahoma border, across into Louisiana, and down to the Gulf. Big Foot could have been shot out of a worm hole from his home world anywhere in that area."

"I wonder if the Indian Mounds in Baton Rouge - where I grew up, are significant?"

"How so?"

"Baton Rouge is at the exact same latitude as Cairo, where the three big pyramids of Giza are. There are three large Indian mounds - among the biggest in the South, if a fraction of the Egyptian ones - on the campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

"Where's the connection?"

"I was hoping you would be the fool to pose a new idea for once, and not me."

"Take a walk, Buck Rogers. That's your job."

"Maybe crop circles happen where these gravity strings strike Earth. They can't all be fake - some have been reported to happen while people are watching. They aren't all in corn fields either, but in rice paddies and in snow. There's no way they could all have been faked.

"Why are the crop circles happening so frequently now?"

"Maybe we're pumping all the oil from out of the fractures in the Earth - oil is always found in fractured rock, trapped there - and because the Earth has become much less flexible, with out any oil in the hinges between the tectonic plates. That might explain why tsunamis and earthquakes are bigger and more frequent - and if these things are symptoms of the Earth becoming unstable in the gravitational string matrix, it might explain why so many crop circles are happening lately.

"Damn, you really fucked up my next wry sarcastic reply," Nikki said.

"What was that?"

"Who wants to go to space anyway? What's wrong with having a super subway here on Earth? Sure beats jet lag and waiting in airports and transatlantic flight movies and food and courtesy peanuts.

"I see what you mean."

"I'm starting to feel as threatened now as we were when all the boogie men were after us."

"Me too."

"Good, that keeps you motivated to get us out of here."

"Care to add a little more motivation to Kase's sputtering engine?"

"Never seen it run any other way than like a Harley" Nikki said hoarsely. "But, mister, I'll tune you up just fine if that's what it takes."

White Sands Missile Range was considered a remote location. If it had been outside of the continental U.S. it would have been a hardship assignment, it was so far removed from civilization. White Sands was a mile high in the mountains, nested on three sides in a cove of mountain tops. El Paso, Texas was a two hour drive due south - half the distance was through the missile range land itself, and the other half of the road to El Paso was through Fort Bliss military reservation. Las Cruces was an hour due east, straight down the mountain side. Another remote military installation Alamogordo was to the north west. Many soldiers - at least those who were in the lower enlisted grades, and having no family lived in the barracks - never left post during their whole tour of duty, especially if they had no personal transportation.

E4 Clearey arrived straight out of weather observer school at Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois. The 93E military occupational specialty, or MOS, was the most difficult enlisted job in all the three branches of the military. Most of the army 93E's had bachelors degrees, at least the dozen who were assigned to White Sands. Having no car or even a motorcycle, there wasn't much to do during off duty hours but read and study. Having recently completed a project well received by NASA,

the logical thing was to continue that research. The crux of the project was a model of the planets orbiting the Sun in our Solar System, which had an approximate solution; he purchased an Apple II computer - one of the first PC's available - brought it back to post from El Paso, and went right to work.

All the other enlisted on post called him "the professor," because weather observer's work took only a few minutes each hour to read instruments and fill out the weather log; the rest of the time he spent writing computer code and studying results. Clearey always worked the night shift, so he had the whole weather station to himself. His room back at the barracks was full of computer equipment, plotters, and data printouts. Even the forecasters and officers got interested after a while. All together, there was a solid support group. They encouraged Clearey to write up the research and present it to higher ups in the Atmospheric Sciences Laboratory; he did, but to no avail. Then his roommate wrote a letter to the Post Commander, and that got a go ahead. A two hour formal seminar was set up with Major General Niles Fulwyler and the Chief Scientist at the High Energy Laser Project, Dr. Ralph Davies.

The news was all over the post, at least among the enlisted. The head of ASL, a Colonel, was peeved because Clearey had gone over his head. He had Clearey sent to the mental health unit, for a psych evaluation. Even the therapist wrote in the doctor's notes that command influence had been the reason for the visit, not any overt sign of mental instability. Evidently the Colonel believed jumping the chain of command was a sure sign of insanity, and had no qualms about using his authority to put an end to such impertinence.

The key to all this was an infamous letter written by NASA about the manuscript "A Journal of 21st Century Technology," Clearey had written before enlisting. NASA said, in part "Your work was reviewed independently by both an engineer and a physicist. Although their backgrounds and scientific/engineering interests are different, both came to the same conclusion. Your concepts about the Unified Field Theory appear to be so profound that you are years ahead of the present scientific thinking in the areas in which you delved." The Unified Field Theory assignment was NASA's, not Clearey's. A copy of this letter is what got an E4 with a bachelors degree in mechanical engineering an opportunity to present a paper to the chief scientist of the \$1 trillion "Star Wars" strategic defense initiative project there at White Sands.

The manuscript evaluated by NASA had been written on the theme of the design of a faster than light aircraft, illustrating all the theoretical ideas in an engineered system. The intention of the presentation at White Sands was to illustrate an application in the dissipation of light, because the problem with the laser beams they were

able to create is that they dissipated and lost power due to atmospheric interference. The theory Clearey presented was accurate, but the language was not physics. In fact, it wasn't until almost twenty years later that he found out the language was an obscure science called celestial mechanics, using an even more obscure technique called regularization. Needless to say, the presentation was not a success. The Post Commander declined an earlier offer to make laboratory facilities available to Clearey, mentioned at the end of the presentation itself.

What happened after the meeting is much more interesting than the meeting itself. Clearey's car was sabotaged, first. A good used Fiat Brava that he just bought from the Las Cruces Federal Credit Union got a blown cylinder before it reached White Sands. A month later - he was rebuilding the engine at the White Sands auto shop, a perk for remote installations - Clearey purchased a Honda Shadow, a 750 cc street bike. A few weeks later it flew out of control, Clearey ditched it into the roadside going full speed and when he limped back to the barracks a few hours later, wires and headlights were hanging out all over. The machine was totaled, and Clearey was fortunate to be alive.

Evidently the theme of Clearey's presentation had gotten some folks at White Sands concerned. Aside from the laser dissipation angle, he had also brought in an elaborate poster of a faster than light aircraft, similar to that posed in "The Journal of 21st Century Technology" that NASA had liked to much.

It wasn't until many years later that Clearey made the connection. White Sands is only a few miles from Roswell, New Mexico where something crashed in July of 1947. White Sands Proving Ground, as it was known then, was the most secret military installation in the U.S. at that time. Roswell Air Station, by comparison, was a podunk. If there was anything worth hiding from the Roswell crash down, it would have been brought straight to White Sands.

The other piece of the puzzle is the \$1 trillion spent on the "Star Wars" missile defense system, at White Sands. Back in 1982 the best they could do was to fry a cow in a pasture half a mile away. Now, 25 years later, they have abandoned the laser idea entirely, but still can't intercept an incoming missile on a known trajectory. Either the military wasted that cool \$1 trillion or the spent it on UFO research. Incidentally, the proper term is "Unidentified Federal Outlays," which covers both contingencies.

Later that evening, long after sunset, they were sitting on the steps in front of Seti I's temple, gazing out over the desert.

"Some day they're going to catch us, you know." Nikki said, leaning back into Kase's arms. "Bonnie and Clyde, car riddled with bullet holes. Another urban legend."

"More like Pontias Pilate alias Praetorian Guard judge, trial for heresy, sanctioned by the Jews and the Christians and the Moslems and even the Athiests. Lend me your ears. Choose you ~ Barabbas the beautiful sexy heretic bitch - or choose you Judas the evil, conniving devil who polluted her pristine convent mind with his dark, crass philosophy?"

"The crowd roars. Kill them both!"

"Women rip their bras off, toss them up at Judas" says the somber male announcer on CNN, talking into a balled up fist like a microphone.

"As the macho male cameraman zooms in on their bouncing breasts," Nikki picks up the dialogue, "Then cuts to Barabbas blood soaked shirt, from the crown of thorns; her breasts jutting out, nipples erect - then drifts down to her crotch, wet with come; her shapely thighs and tiny waist making the camera go out of focus with lust.

"Cut." Kase interrupts. "You win. No contest. The people always go for Barabbas; especially a perfectly proportioned dame like you. They'd be crazy not to.

"Oh. Poor Kasey," Nikki planted a slobbery kiss on his neck, then explored his ears and cheek. "Maybe they would take pity, on all these horrific scars you have." And she traced with her hands, making slow but steady progress toward his crotch. She rotated in his arms, he lay back; and she was on top of him.

"Any last wishes before I kill you, my love" Nikki said when they were both stark naked.

"If you just please take care of our baby," Kase pleaded.

"What, I'm pregnant," as she pulled him up. Kase was now sitting up; Nikki straddling his waist, her legs spread around him so they were face to face, flawless breasts to scarred but powerful chest. "Oh, silly you." as she swat his autonomic response. "You mean the not-so-baby Dino? Of course I will take care of him, my love."

"No, Nikki is pregnant. I can smell it on you." As he suckled one breast, then the other. "Hmm I can taste it on you too. Tastes good."

"Be serious, Kase." Then he asked how long since her period. None since they've been back to the Osireion - what, three months now? And the morning bouts, the sickness. There's no other explanation - and hey, there's a little earthquake kicking inside you, I feel the booties.

"Sweet Jesus, you're right," and she buried his face between her breasts, as she hugged Kase violently. "We're going to have a baby heretic."

"God help us all," Kase said as he worked his hips and gently inserted himself into her. "My brains and brawn; your bravery and ballistic

temper." Then she yanked her hips to one side, wrenching his johnson painfully.

"I beg your pardon," she said as her hands reached down to grasp his ball bearings. "Maybe it won't be a boy, but a girl with my beauty and insights, with your temperament and stamina."

"Either way, perhaps Dino will score with Nellie and our little terror can have a fire breathing *bambino* dragon for a pet."

"If it's fire you want, I'll burn you right up," as she rolled him back on the stone stairs and then they rocked gently beneath the stars until consummating a sweet union.

"You think we'll go to hell for breaking our vows - and you my precious hymen."

"We can just do like Henry VIII and start our own Church."

"Too much trouble, I'd just rather be with you and our baby."

"I'm glad you said that, because I couldn't agree more. I'm tired of fighting the system."

"I think you mean that. It makes me happy."

"Kase, why do they have celibacy anyway. Do you think it is right or necessary?"

"My theory that inevitably people get screwed over by the system, horribly. Like I have been, for no fault of my own. Its a consequence of society, there's no way around it. Those people got so screwed up and stressed out that it takes a whole extra life for the soul to get back to normalcy. Without the Church and the dignity it gives to celibacy, those souls would be lost forever; instead of having a chance to return, better and more beautiful than before."

"What happened with our celibacy. Will our souls suffer in the next life?"

"I think we have together healed the wounds of this, and the last life. I know you have done that for me and I think you are likewise blessed. Celibacy served us well so far, but we are whole now - and are soon to create yet another beautiful soul."

"No matter what happens, Nikki - heaven or hell - we'll be together; serving in heaven, or ruling in hell."

"Damned if I wouldn't prefer the latter ; sounds more exciting and challenging."

"In my mind, wherever I'm with you - it's heaven anyway."

"That's so nice," Nikki said in tears.

"I hope our baby has your blue eyes," she added a minute later.

"With your tear glands," Kase added.

Then Nikki swiped some of her tears and pasted them on his eyes.
"What you lack in outer vision, you more than make up with inner vision.
From my place, I think it would not be a bad trade to make."
"Amen."

"Do you believe in God?" Nikki pillow talked some more.
"Not particularly. But I'm totally screwed if there isn't one," he
said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I may have lived an honorable and good life, but I sure
have pissed off a boat load of people - and faiths, nations, and whole
domains of science."

"Well," Nikki said so forcefully that her bosom heaved. "I believe
there's a God." Said with even greater conviction.

Kase turned on his side and looked at her for the longest time.

"Hmmm. Your faith looks strong. You must be right," then turned
on his belly and slept the sleep of champions.

"Sweet dreams, my beautiful God," Nikki said to his slumbering
form. "Till we meet again in the bright morning."

X. Shechinah

"You aren't an Albigensian or Sister or even a Christian, are you?" Kase said one day, as they floated single file around the rectangular pool, breast stroking. Nikki was so surprised she stopped swimming, stood up on the shallow sand bottom and clung to the side. It was a far corner of the large volume of the Osireion, opposite to the well lit area that was their living space. Her face was hidden deep in shadow, but Kase could hear her shallow almost panic stricken breathing.

"How did you know?" Nikki said finally, her voice full of despair.

"You're Mossad - you were among the group who served close to John Paul, weren't you?"

"Yes. He was the best man I have ever known, Jewish or otherwise - present company excluded, of course." Kase was standing beside her now. They were both naked, and Nikki began to shiver. She took his hand, and led him silently to the rough steps out of the pool, and they toweled dry.

"Can we slow dance, my love?" As she went to him, took him in her arms, and they began a slow lazy shuffle, bare feet on the cool granite floor, in exact rhythm to an invisible song only they could hear.

"I knew only because you subconsciously kind of slowed down on Shabbatt - each Friday evening. It was a very subtle thing, and I've only noticed it in the last few weeks because I've been so very solicitous for your health and safety, carrying our baby as you are."

"I'm so terribly in love with you, Kase." She paused, leaning a little over her big belly, to put a tender kiss on his lips, then renewed their slow undulating dance. "We connect on so many levels. You must realize that I'd never, ever betray you.

"Of course you wouldn't my Bride of the Sabbath," smiling as she lost a little balance, but catching her in his strong arms. "My Shechinah."

"I did well in all other ways, though?" Nikki perked up.

"Not one single flaw, right down to the unbroken hymen."

"Oh, but Kase" she said exasperated. "It was surgically put there, that's true; but only because I was born without it; and my superiors believed you would suspect otherwise." She reached up to wipe a tear from her eyes, "I was truly your virgin Mary, my Joseph."

"I never doubted that for a second. You were my first also," and Nikki said yes even I could tell everything you did you learned from kindergarten books.

Kase looked shamefully away. Then he was back with her; suddenly all ears, exquisitely attentive, and Nikki knew it was time to explain.

"I was born and raised on a Kibbutz, a very strict orthodox one. My family was French, and we trace our roots back to Albe; that much is true. In Israel, we were like your Amish, primitive and strict - no music, television, or western influences. We worked hard in the fields, and studied hard in school. My Torah skills were not so good. They were so bad, in fact, that my family sent me to a Catholic boarding school in Switzerland. I became a Catholic, then took vows for celibacy. Which I know seems odd, being a citizen of Israel. Anyway, I was selected for a full scholarship to study archaeology, and had just matriculated when I was assigned to Pope John Paul's detail, the one you orchestrated so masterfully - even the Mossad admired your subversive machinations." Kase could almost hear her blush, "I have been a devoted fan of yours ever since - an Albigensian heretic in everything but name."

Nikki had begun to look tired, so they paused from their dancing. Both got clothed, watching each other with big eyes, in the soft incandescent light cast by shaded table lamps in their living area, which was one of the Roman tents with one side removed to make it seem like a room. They both found canvas walls warmer and more comforting than granite ones, and the cozy tent lent a cherished corner of intimacy to their daily lives.

"Your inside knowledge of His Holiness made me jealous, too" Kase confessed, as they sat down opposite each other in a couple of lounge chairs. Nikki had a warm glow about her, as she sat gracefully with one hand on her big belly, the other on the arm rest. Kase was leaning forward, his eye sockets in shade as he stared intently at her. She assumed his eyes were closed, as this pose was one he often used to disguise his weak vision. It was very effective, if you didn't know him well. "That jealousy made me study you even more closely."

Nikki was crushed, "Then you did not love me?"

"Not at first, of course. You were a fascinating creature, and I marveled at your energy and cherished your cleverness." Then Kase squirmed in his chair, and turned his head imperceptibly from side to side like a Boston terrier trying to distinguish the source of a low, high pitched sound. "No - actually; well, I rather think I was in love with you from the first we met. It has only grown since, making my strong affection even then seem weak by comparison."

"You know, John Paul warned me about your language. He said, most fondly, that you had the tongue of the devil himself." She said as Kase leaned back, and his face and eyes were fully lit. "I tried to bolster my many faiths against you, but my defenses didn't last too long - did they?"

"You did well, princess. So well, in fact, that I sense your defenses are not only stronger now than ever; but the vastness of your mystery grows, and beckons my tepid soul."

"It's being with child. I am protective, fiercely so. You would do well to stay clear of my razor sharp finger nails," splaying her fingers out before her like a she demon cornered.

"I was wondering what happened to my stash of sandpaper went," said coyly. "But alas, a few more scars don't worry me - especially not when compared with what I gain in return."

"And what might that be, my beast master?" as she bared her teeth, to reveal sharp incisors like a vampire lusting for a blood offering.

"Your body - your soul - and your love." As he was kneeling before her, his lips to her hand swearing eternal fealty. Nikki purred with contentment, wagging an unseen tail as she worked her pelvis in the canvas bucket of the chair, aching to have him inside of her. Then Kase could see the baby was kicking, and Nikki got a helpless look on her face; like she was losing the reigns of control in her life - first to Kase, and now to this baby.

"Beowulf," she cried out in her best Shakespearean parody. "That's what we shall name the newborn."

"What if it's a she child," bemoaned the knight errant.

"No matter - Beowulf is good for a girl; especially the kind of she child you and I have made, sire."

"Your wish is my command," Kase said as he rose, backing away with a flourish, deep into the shadows, leaving Nikki alone with her thoughts.

Kase paced out of the darkness half an hour later, Nikki still resting in the chair just as he had left her. She smiled contentedly as he approached. So predictable, these men; you wonder sometimes how they ever survived in the wild before civilization happened.

"The rest of your Mossad team - the ones who masqueraded as Swiss Guards," Kase said breathlessly. "Where are they now?"

"It took you long enough to make the connection," Nikki chided. "You're impending fatherhood is slowing you down."

"Well?"

"You tell me, master Yoda." Nikki was fiendish in her innocence.

"They're your friends at the Coptic chapel," Kase said thinking out loud.

"You don't sound very sure of yourself," Nikki lapsed into matrimonial reverie.

"Oh, I'm sure enough." Kase responded, hands tentatively on his hips; as he stood feet akimbo. "It just rattles me badly to have been deceived so long, so well; yet by so obvious a contrivance."

"You Praetorian Guard were always so very easy to deceive," Nikki said with a casual flip of the wrist. "Since long, long before your namesake Khasekhemu."

"What? How so - there's not a force on Earth that goes back farther than the Praetorians!" Kase was aghast, but a little bit thrilled at the same time.

"The Praetorians have been hunting us down, to extermination for a dozen millennia. This here has been but the latest episode."

"We are Legion," Nikki said then, as if her body was under the influence of a demon. "We are the darkness," she continued more normal, and Kase prayed in his heretic soul that it had only been a figment of his imagination.

"Good god - you people don't have any more than tentative allegiance to Mossad, you're a group whole and complete unto yourselves."

"Verily, we are Albigenians," in the demonic voice. "Disbelieve me at your own peril."

"You think me a threat?" Kase said with as much conviction as he could suffer.

"No, you're just like the rest of us," Nikki said sadly. "You're whole and human, fragile and sensitive, good and evil. You embrace all life, treasure all creatures. You fear no faith, and stride confidently into a bold future of your own creation."

"You people worship Isis, don't you? And all the other Roman gods."

"You learn well, grasshopper." Nikki said, self absorbed. "We ARE all the Roman Gods, my liege." That insidious voice again.

"You're Macedonians - who claim Alexander the Great, and Cleopatra as your progenitors."

"Oh, we go back much, much further than that. We go back to Troy - to the twelve cities of Troy," said with a delightful laugh. "And from there, way on back to Job."

"You're the noble House of Job, from the land of Uz," Kase accused. "Just like it says in the Book of Job in the Old Testament."

"Indeed, you're correct," Nikki said proudly. "It was the Praetorians who destroyed our nation when they confiscated the *castellum* of our aqueduct, this Osireion," waving her arms to indicate the place where they had buried themselves alive. "It was the Praetorians who wiped out our entire nation. All, so they could entomb that Leviathan

creature who fell from space; to use its strangeness to enslave the nations of Egypt.

"You were one of us, Kase alias Khasekhemy. The unbroken lineage of pharaohs, begun with you and reaching all the way to Rameses, were a single isolated blood line; the Egyptians believed we were like they; but they were wrong. The priests believed they deceived us, even as the Hebrew slaves believed they deceived the priests; they were both wrong.

"The Praetorians put their own person on the throne with Seti I; then we with our Amenhotep, and our precious Nefertiti. Both were destroyed. Finally, we were back on the throne after Alexander conquered Egypt and made the Ptolemy's the royal family once again. Cleopatra was the last of our line, but not the last of our kind; by any means.

"So the Praetorians have been your sworn enemy, for tens of thousands of years," Kase intoned. "How so, then; that you have taken their Quintus into your confidence. With my strong connections to the Praetorians; by virtue of my birth date, my past life regressions, and my current life allegiances."

"We all make mistakes," Nikki said nonchalantly. "I was myself bedazzled by John Paul and allured by the power of the Church. My compatriots were devout Jews, sworn Israelis, and valued members of the Mossad. We all of us - you, me, them - have traveled separate paths, but arrived at the same conclusion. All roads lead to Rome.

"I believe you," Kase said as he sunk down in the chair opposite her. "Damned if I don't believe you."

"Good boy," Nikki said with an ironic smile. "Ask me the next question, when you are ready," as she leaned back like a Queen of the Damned on her golden throne.

"Troy," Kase said sooner than she had expected; very much sooner. "On the coast of Turkey, the poor little city that was destroyed a dozen times, built back again every time; until it was finally, desperately overwhelmed completely as told in the Greek tragedy.

"We do have that in common," Nikki mused. "Both we and the Romans hate the *Greeks*."

Kase waved his arms violently between them, motioning Nikki not to interrupt his train of thought. "Troy was there, during the whole of the ancient Egyptian reign; from Khasekhemy to Rameses, then Cleopatra - until Rome absorbed it. All the while, ya'll watched the Egyptians use Leviathan, then lose it; and when at last Caesar and Cleopatra secreted the creature out of the Levant, Troy need exist no more. So it was not again rebuilt.

"We were tired of war, weary of feuding, wanting only peace. We moved to *Lac du Neuchatel*, near present day Lucerne, in Switzerland.

We were the very origins of the Celtic culture; which eventually, not too obviously, followed Leviathan up to the British Isles. There we found our spiritual resting place - far away, in the northern fjords, as the Irish druids.

"You knew," Kase suddenly flashed. "You knew my link to the druids - how the Clearey's were the antiquarians or keepers of history, one of the three ruling classes of the Druid clan. You knew how my grandfather Cleary came from Cork County in Ireland, sired my father with the Confederate hero's daughter.

"Indeed, Kase." Nikki said. "You the rebel leader are our antiquarian; while I the archaeologist and historian, am the leader." Then she said, "Rather, we are co regents like Amenhotep and Nefertiti."

"An empire of two," Kase said sarcastically.

"More like twenty, when you count the others who are staying with the Coptics," Nikki corrected.

"A comforting thought," Kase mused. "I had been missing the level of security the Praetorians gave."

"You have that now, and much more" Nikki said. "Smaller is better, in this game of ours - much, much better."

"You spoke of having been raised in a community like the Amish here - or rather, there - in America," Kase said pointing to the supernatural machine that connected them to the states.

"My own ancestors - on the Confederate side - crossed the Atlantic seeking religious freedom. There were eight families of Mennonites; all Erbs. Seven settled in Pennsylvania, as ultra orthodox, pacifists differing from the Amish in name only; the eighth family went down South. They were not pacifists and fought bravely for the cause.

"We know the Erbs," Nikki interrupted. "They were from Switzerland, a family of famous doctors. That funny knee reflex when you hit that special spot on the knee is named after one of the Erb brothers; as are many other less well known psychophysiological phenomena.

"Yep, that's us," said Kase cheerfully. "We even had a heretic outlaw out of the southern Erbs after the Civil War. Went by the name of Wyatt, though he apparently westernized the name to Erp." And Nikki laughed wildly.

"You're kidding, aren't you?" she managed between tears of laughter. "Wyatt Erb!" Kase just laughed with her, until their mirth went its course.

"We knew the Mather family as well," Nikki said ominously in that deep scary voice of hers. "The self same Cotton Mather who burned the witches at the stake in Salem."

"Yes, highness," Kase said squeaky as a mouse. "They are on the other, my mother's side of the family." Then he perked up, "Although also on that side is U.S. President Rutherford B. Hayes, who served during Reconstruction."

"By all accounts a real son of a bitch who was hated by both sides."

"Yes that too," Kase said. Then he added sincerely. "You can see where I get the talent from, to infuriate everybody at the same time."

Nikki laughed hard again, holding her stomach so that Kase feared for the unborn child. "We Albigenians call that being a natural philosopher," she said shortly. "It's how Nietzsche got away with castigating every body, every philosophy at the same time - if you treat everybody with equal disdain they cannot accuse you of bigotry or prejudice, and if you do it as brilliantly as Nietzsche, you're honored as a natural philosopher."

Kase smiled appreciatively, until Nikki added, "I think you cross over the line, however, Father Kase, which has been your undoing." Then patting her belly, "Me thinks perhaps we will be able to help you mollify your despising audience more effectively, to get your point across more tactfully."

"Much obliged, ma'am" as Kase did his best John Wayne. "It's a wild rough country out yonder, injuns behind every tree."

"You don't know the half of it."

The day had by then passed them by, and they parted ways. Nikki went to prepare a light dinner and Kase hustled up and down the secret stairs, rigging up the air ventilation system.

The one problem with the Osireion was that it was too completely well hidden, and enclosed. The air inside quickly went stale. Kase early on rigged up an electric fan and, using the heavy duty eight inch air hose had been used to suck the sand out of the stairs; he jury rigged the electric fan and the air hose to pump fresh air from the outside, running the hose down the stairs and to some distant point inside of the Osireion. The fresh air pumped in, then displaced the stale air to inside the Osireion, so that after eight hours of pumping each night, the volume inside was fresh and crisp.

Nikki had at first wondered why she bothered. The contraption was noisy and made a mess. She was so obstinate about it, that Kase had to resort to engineering to baffle her into submission.

"Did you realize that the symptoms of oxygen deprivation and carbon dioxide poisoning, that happen when air stagnates in a closed

place with people breathing inside; that those illnesses have the exact same symptoms as Attention Deficit Disorder - lack of effect, short attention span, psychosis, and even death?" He had her attention now, especially knowing she had a delicate small child in her womb.

"A typical classroom full of children must have the entire volume of air flushed out with 100% fresh air every fifteen minutes during the school day, to keep the air safe."

"I understand," Nikki conceded. "Ventilate 'till your heart's content." She was thereafter most observant of any staleness in the air. In fact, before her pregnancy was done they had a veritable dark garden growing inside the Osireion - mushrooms, algae, seaweed, and many exotic plants from cave cultures around the world ordered over the web. There was certainly no lack of oxygen in that place; Kase still ventilated it all each night also, just to be sure. They were a family who valued their brain cells highly.

"Kase, you don't suppose all those little rooms with the sand bottoms," referring to the seventeen six by six chambers around the perimeter of the pool, "were meant to be used as we are? I mean, if you keep the water level low enough, and bring in good soil for the top like we have done, you can grow practically anything in that fertile sandy loam."

"The thought had crossed my mind," Kase said. "And might have stayed there to percolate to the surface, were it not my obsession with the physics of this place."

"I understand, my wonderful mad professor," Nikki managed, as she struggled to weed some of the plots, her belly huge and she was very near term. "That's why you have me along, to take care of the practical things."

"Speaking of practical things," Kase said with a note of worry. "Am I right to assume you have an understanding with the Coptics when the time comes for delivery of our child?"

"Not to worry," Nikki said in her most calming tone. "Not to worry."

"I AM worried," Kase said insolently. "We've been living in this place for months, breathing and eating and drinking a steady if subtle dose of Leviathan dust. We're not the same, I can feel it. My faith is weak" Nikki brushed him off with a flick of her royal wrist. "Just so long as your autonomous response is strong," she muttered.

"When I was at White Sands," Kase persisted. "When I was first exposed to Leviathan, I was told the abortion rate was the highest there

than of any other military installation." Kase was practically in her face. "I'm worried about our child."

"I thought we covered all that already," she said casually. "We both have the immunity in our blood, so too shall the child."

"But I myself showed symptoms," Kase persisted. "It's documented. After I visited HELSTAF and breathed dust particles of Leviathan's disease."

"Consider it to have been an inoculation, like for small pox or measles" Nikki commanded. "We Albigensians get inoculations all the time."

"What - you have a stash of the dust?"

"We have what the Praetorians have," came the simple but startling reply. "We have spies among them," she explained. Then waved around then, "Not that we need access to the Praetorian supply any longer."

"Wrong on both accounts," came a familiar voice from the shadows. "You're both infected and you must both be destroyed," said Hamilcar as he strode into the room in full centurion regalia, plumed polished brass helmet in hand, and red regal cape behind. Then, when he spied Nikki's advanced pregnancy, "Make that three who must be destroyed."

Nikki and Kase, utterly surprised, were swiftly immobilized. Their hands were bound and mouths gagged, and they were dragged up the secret stairs by Hamilcar's men. Up into the temple of Seti I, then out onto the moon lit plain beyond. There, awaiting them, was a circle of Albigensians and Praetorians holding torches aloft.

"The forces of good and evil have joined against us," Kase hollered at Nikki through the gag. "Your faith is still strong my love," she screamed back. "I can feel it. We shall prevail."

A puppet trial was quickly called, then a summary verdict just as quickly reached. Twelve Praetorians declaring Kase to the gallows; ditto for Nikki, and her beloved Albigensians. Bring forward the crosses, Hamilcar ordered. Not even the *Greeks* would stoop this low.

Kase was bound by the wrists to a heavy wood cross, piano wire from the feel of it. Then his ankles. The wire cut into his skin, and bright red blood trickled down his wrists and arms. Hamilcar appeared in his face, and he made a big show of the huge rusty railroad tie nails; a heavy sledge hammer in the other hand poised to strike. Kase saw out of the corner of his eye that Nikki has escaped, having cut through her nylon rope binding with those razor sharp finger nails. They caught her quickly,

and she was being muscled toward another cross ten yards away. She won't do so well with piano wire binding her to the cross.

Then a hammer blow struck, and an explosion of pain brought bloody tears to Kase's eyes. Hamilcar struck another blow, and the other wrist was bound to the cross. With all his might Kase swore he would not dignify Hamilcar by screaming. All of his misguided honor and faith, focused upon that single thing: don't scream, no matter what. Nikki was screaming, though; he could hear it. No nails yet, just wire; but she was screaming so loud it made the soul cringe. The night was filled with her screams. They echoed off the walls of Seti's Temple, sweet Nefertiti damning the whole fucking universe.

Then a double blow, a rusty nail through the feet; his legs were shredded in agony, an infinity of pain exponentially greater than the sum total of anything he had ever experienced. They were raising the cross up now, wiping the blood from his eyes; pressing needles into his eye lids, forcing him to watch Nikki bound on the cross below. She screamed and kicked, and the piano wire dug deeply into her flesh; first the wrists, then the ankles. Hamilcar moved aside, to give Kase a clear view; he raised the hammer, nail poised at Nikki's wrist.

A wretched shriek sounded. An explosion of fire and heat. A giant talon wrapped around Kase's torso, yanking the cross with him on it, right out of the sand. Wings fluttered, and then the other talon grasped Nikki on her cross. Gunshots rang out, big bird turned to face pitiful soldiers with pop guns, burned them alive with a scalding torch of a breath. They ran screaming, burning from head to toe; collapsing in the sand, smoldering. Nikki was still screaming. They were above the ground; the Nile was near. Kase passed out. Nikki kept screaming.

They were on the beach. Gentle waves broke the shore. He was bound still to the cross. Salt water washed over him, soaked into his grievous wounds; pain, escalating. He blacked out. Then Nikki was there, her own limbs wrapped in bloody bandages. He was cut off the cross, wire severed; nails yanked. Blackness. Then floating in the salt water. A body of pain. Nikki holding him in her arms, as cool salty waves undulated across them. Bloody tears of anguish trekked down her cheeks. Sweet god, he closed his eyes at last. The pain receded. He was nothing. He was faith. Nothing more was left of him.

They were flying again, dangling below fluttering wings. Talons gripped his torso, nails dug deep into his chest. They crossed a great sea. Then a great land, and descended swiftly to the ground. Many hands grabbed him up. He said Nikki's name. Her hand was in his. They rushed

toward a building. There was a shriek and a cloud of flame singed his attendants. They ran faster. More flame threatening; they ran even faster. Good boy, Dino. Kase was soon in a warm bed; drugged and sleeping.

Long painful days of agony later, and he was conscious. Nikki was there by the bedside. She was holding a small child in her arms. It's a girl she was saying. Look above your head. There was a fuzzy little dragon, birdie fur all disheveled; rubbery beak pecking Kase's arm - the one spot on his body that didn't ache, now did. It screamed so loud his ear drums hurt; then pecked some more. Happy family. There's a God after all. How pleasant to have at least one theory come true.

Then the room was quiet. He was alone with Nikki. She was wearing the clerical collar she wasn't supposed to have, saying last rites. He didn't feel that bad. Don't give up on me yet. Darkness. Nikki was speaking to him. A gurgly little child was propped in his arm. A scream of terror from the child as evil mummy Kase moved. Child replaced by smelly baby bird, with claws like stick pins grabbing his shoulder. Dragons like scare crows better than babies like mummies. Nikki's face there in his vision, beaming that impossible smile that healed all wounds. We love you, please get well soon. Moist tasty lips grasped his, and a luscious tongue sneaked past his teeth and played with his own lethargic tongue. Not in front of the kids, he thought. Freeing one hand, pinching a good one on Nikki's inner thigh. Hand poised above for a swat. Tears blur his vision, tender fingers wipe them away. They close his eyelids gently, and he is asleep.

"Am I speaking?" Kase said to the room.

"Yes, Kase I can hear you." Nikki said excitedly. Hands gripped his own. It's true. I'm alive. Is that good or bad? It must be good if Nikki is here.

"Can I have more morphine?" Kase asked, having a little trouble mouthing it.

"No more drugs," the same old Nikki said sternly. "All you can have now is love."

"How about some Hawaiian Punch Red?" and Nikki's raucous laugh brought joy to his heart.

He spat out the straw a few minutes later. "How are you Nikki?" Kase asked to the ceiling, which was all he could see lying flat on the bed. Two beautiful hands waved in front of him. A Halloween grimace from Nikki then as her face appeared momentarily, unblemished but blushing. Then some terrible commotion of chairs moving, grunts and moans; and two beautiful feet and two shapely ankles with wear marks from Roman

sandals dangled in front of his face. All was silent. "How are your breasts?" Kase said then. The straw was jammed back in his mouth, and the light was turned off. Yes, Nikki is doing just fine.

"Don't you get tired of nursing me back to health all the time?"

"The Albigensians were a nursing order, you know" Nikki said sweetly. "It's what we do."

"Speaking of nursing," Kase said, "How's Beowulf?"

"Growing by leaps and bounds," then Nikki thought for a moment. "Oh, you wicked man you." Kase said nothing, but hoped.

The door was closed, Kase heard. The lock was thrown. A hard back chair was pulled over and jammed into the door knob. Then the blinds were closed shut. Followed by a wrenching sound. Then, inch at a time, a long length of piano wire materialized before his eyes. Before he could think assassin, Nikki's incorrigible face appeared eyes dark with passion.

More silence. He heard the rustling of clothes. The light was cut off. A match struck, a candle was lit and the room was flickering with candle light. Then Nikki was crawling on top of him, stark naked. Her perfume was intoxicating. She kept crawling over him, and he was starting to despair. She stopped. Large breasts dangled before his rapidly dilating pupils. They were engorged with milk. The aureoles were large, and dark. She reached around, squeezed one breast lightly; a small nodule of milk appeared. She arched her back down; Kase took it in his lips, and warm succulent milk poured into his mouth. He sucked, and nibbled; Nikki writhed with pleasure. He was hard; and she pleased him between her hot wet thighs. The breast went dry. Kase held his mouth open for the other. Surprisingly, he got it. He reached his hands out as best he could, touching the soft smooth sides of her breasts; moving then down the dramatic curve of her waist, to the wide hips that had born him a child; then to her tight buttocks - finally the moist mons, forested with prickly hair. She moved down on him then, and nestled into his body with hers; arms cradling his head. Smile.

"Now that's what I call a Tour d' France," Kase said awestruck. He reached around her and held her close. "I hope Beowulf won't be mad." He said into her ear. She leaned over and nibbled on his lip. "If I get my Roman history right, weren't both Romulus and Remus suckled on the wolf's teats?"

"God bless the seven hills of Roma," Kase said - closing his eyes and taking in all of her with his every last sense. Nikki reached over,

pulled a blanket over her bare back, then snuggled deeper into Kase's arms and had the all time best siesta.

They awoke to a gentle knocking on the door. Go away Kase called out. Family business, she said seriously. Her pelvis massaged his groin. They rolled over on one side, maneuvered toward the middle of the hospital bed, then looked at each other; Nikki with her head braced on a hand, elbow resting on the mattress: Kase resting his head on a pile of pillows.

"By the way, sister Christian nurse - where are we?"

"In a great big three story little pink castle on the outskirts of Madrid." Then holding a finger to her lips, "I have absolutely no idea who these people are, what their affiliation is, or anything; all I know is that Dino brought us here."

"Mother nature knows best."

"They say it used to be the headquarters for the resistance during the Spanish Civil War. I saw a large concrete pill box enforcement across the road. It must be true. Franco lived here, I am told."

"It's a very beautiful villa now, with a large lawn; a round above ground swimming pool and a giant garden of spectacular roses," then she reached across - her clean shaven, fragrant armpit jamming into Kase's face, "See?" and then there were a dozen roses before his very eyes.

"They even have bidet in the bathrooms, although I am sure you bumpkin Americanos don't even know what that is."

"I for one do, " Kase said in defense of his bumpkin compatriots.

Nikki ignored him completely, and kept on rambling. "The villa is three stories, with a small turret at the top and looking very medieval. They bring sheep in to cut the grass; everybody knocks off for a siesta in the afternoon; it's all quite like home for me, and I am very happy.

"How come we aren't in Basque country?"

"Who cares," Nikki cut in. "If we don't even know where we are, then how can anybody else?"

"That's not good logic, Nikki." Kase chastened.

"It's good nursing, however" as she scrambled out of the bed, "and that's all that matters right now." Nikki was soon dressed, the furniture rearranged; a quite elderly female nurse with a nun's cap came in immediately - stumbling in, actually; as she had been listening through the door. Nikki whisked past her, issuing instructions to give Kase a sponge bath *pronto, comprende?* Kase and the nurse looked at one another, then she broke into a toothy smile and did as she had been told.

XI. Aravaca

"They've cut your morphine supply off," Nikki said.

"Why the hell would they do that?" Kase said with concern.

"Because if you're in pain, then I can't seduce you and put all their medical ministrations at risk."

"Idiots," Kase said. Nikki assured him that she had told them so, too. "Fools," Kase said. Nikki muttered, I used words far stronger than that. They're incorrigible. "Don't they know that won't stop us?" Evidently not. But perhaps we should take their guidance. Haven't we disingratiated enough kind peoples already?

"How are we to do that," Kase said, arms defiantly held across his chest. "There's nothing in the world that we talk about that doesn't lead eventually to sex." They apparently know that already. "Any ideas?"

"Spoken like a true Freudian." Nikki was in withdrawal. Kase was the hurting one though, and despite his best effort the agony was showing in the corners of his beautiful blue eyes. It only made Nikki want to crawl up on the bed to be with him, to comfort him with her body.

"We can talk mathematics," Nikki said brightly. "Would you like to tell me all about your celestial mechanics theories?" Kase rolled his eyes and gave her a thumbs down signal.

"Well," Nikki said, her new pony tails jiggling as she turned her head side side, like she was trying to shake coins out of a piggy bank. "I have it - why do you, all of you, despise the *Greeks* so much." Kase was unresponsive. "I mean, any time you're up to your eyeballs in hate and frustration, everybody yells *Greeks*, like it were a four letter epithet."

"We associate *Greeks* with the network of informants that existed through every palace and city center and governmental entity from the pharaohs to the Roman emperors. All these people, you see, trusted nobody who could be seduced with sexual favors, or blackmailed - so they had only eunuchs in their court. And these eunuchs were like an internet, they traded information freely among them so they had a better information network than any monarch."

Nikki was saying, "No," then plugging her fingers in her ears. "We're on the sex theme." *Madre mia*, stop this madness. But Kase kept right on going.

"These people are so damn powerful in the modern day that they've had removed from the tools of psychotherapy the very technique by which homosexuality can be cured. It's called orgasmic reconditioning. I have two versions of the same textbook; edition two says it is an effective technique; edition three does not mention it. The big psychological associations now say the method is too stressful.

Nikki still had her fingers in her ears, but yelled out since she could not hear, "Why have they done that - remove the orgasm from the therapy thing?"

Kase yelled at her, "Because it implies that homosexuality is an illness. That's why."

"Would that help pedophiles overcome their problem," Nikki yelled.

"Yes."

"What about unfaithful husbands turned on by topless dancers, to once again get excited by their mature but still nice looking wives?"

"Yes."

"What causes homosexuality in the first place?"

"Stress," Kase yelled at her. She got closer, "Stress" Kase yelled louder. Then they were hopelessly tangled in each other's arms, tickling each other and giggling like a couple of teenagers under the bleachers at a football game. They broke apart, faces glistening with tears.

"We should just tell them we're honeymooners," Nikki begged.

"That's a good excuse for us, in a latin romance language place like this."

"We've been married over a year," Kase said.

"So what, it's a long honeymoon - we had a lot of catching up to do, being celibate and all." Then she got a sudden idea, fished into her purse; pulled out a pair of giant sunglasses, reached over and put them on Kase. "There, if I don't see your eyes, I'll be OK."

"You need to wear a pair as well," Kase said.

"Hmm. I think I need to put a hat on you as well," Nikki said. She ran out into the house and came back with a giant floppy gardener's hat and jammed it down on Kase's head.

"This isn't working," and suddenly she was piling blankets and pillows and rugs on top of him. Then yelling, "Still doesn't work - what do I do now, Kase? I still want you so bad." Then she dove unto the covers, burrowing her way to Kase's side.

"I suppose this is how Cleopatra felt when she did that rug trick to get into his britches," Nikki said. "I thought it was a stupid idea when you first told me about it, but now it seems quite brilliant." They were still laughing away, when the mother superior came running into the room, slamming her cane on the top of the mound of blankets and pillows and rugs.

"Out you go, young lady," the mother superior said to Nikki. "Go take yourself a cold shower," and Kase knew he was in for another scrub down. He wondered casually how many layers of skin they would scrape off him with those heavy brushes before they reached muscle tissue. It wasn't the first time he'd be grateful for so many scars.

Later that day, after a restless siesta, Nikki came bounding around the corner into Kase's room, rolling a blackboard in front of her. "I have permission for us to talk mathematics and I brought this chalk board for you to write upon." Her hair was back in a severe bun, she wore a dark man's shirt buttoned up to the neck; her breasts were no where in evidence, no doubt because of an extreme sports bra. She work baggy long pants and high top Keds sneakers. The penultimate nerd. Kase laughed. Nikki pressed onward.

"Come on, Kase. You act as though you're afraid your mathematics is going to hurt me. *No es possible*. Here, let me try it on you. Why didn't Hannibal conquer Rome when he had his whole damn army there at the very gates of Rome; when his three brothers Hasdrubal, Hamilcar, and Mago all wanted to do so - why didn't he; tell me why?"

"See, your head hurts to find the answer, but you're not damaged. Go ahead. Try the mathematics on me. Make my day." She started to roll the board over to the bedside, but Kase stayed her.

"You do the drawing," Kase said. "We'll do it like they do on Greece in the modern day. The professor talks, while his graduate student writes everything down on the board."

"Put a small circle in the middle of the board. That's the sun. Around it move all the planets. They're all in ellipses, some oblong and some nearly circular. The orientation of these ellipses - say a line along the long axis - also is random, pointing in all different directions. Each plane is also at a different angle. It's all together a very unkempt organization of planets. *Comprehende?* Now you can draw a few circles around the sun, some close, some far; some egg shaped, some less so; eggs pointing in different directions. Make a big mess.

"Now draw one straight line out from the center of the sun; anywhere you like. Now imagine where each planet will be when it crosses this imaginary line in its orbit. Some will be nearly on the black board, others way below; others way above. Now assume you find a line that is in the middle of where all the planets pass that point. The distance of each planet perpendicular to the line averages to zero, equally as far above as below, on average. If we take the plane of Earth, called the ecliptic, as the plane of the blackboard itself, this line will either be a little below or above the blackboard.

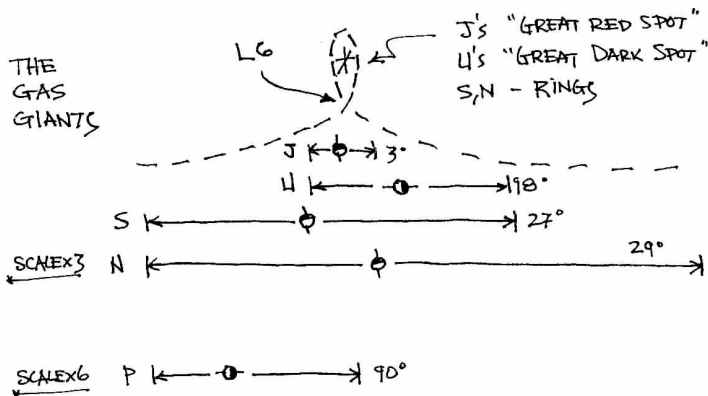
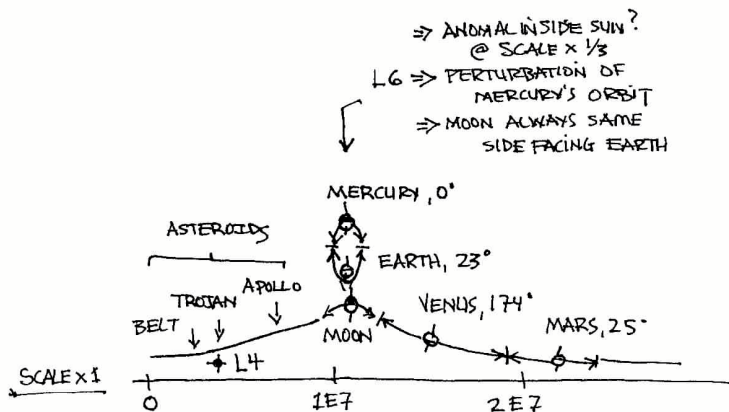
"Now do this same thing for many different lines from the sun, outward; covering the whole thing in all directions. If you put all these lines together, they form a perfect plane that is at an angle to the blackboard. Can you imagine that; this second flat plane is at some angle to the first, any angle but both blackboard and new flat plane have the same center; the sun.

"If we now look at the motion of the planets relative to this new flat plane, something miraculous happens. Each and every planet moves exactly the same distance above this plane as below it; not like before, where the motion was completely random and unpredictable. This new plane is what I call the Symmetric Plane.

"You also had a theory," Nikki said whispering and covering her mouth with her hand, "Some theory that had a shape like a vagina?" Giggling like a manic depressive. Kase continued unfazed, in exactly the same tone of voice and with the same academic cadence.

"The next idea is to look more closely at these motions using this new plane as your reference. Erase the sun and circles, and now draw a long smooth loop that has a gentle curve up, then goes up rapidly, makes a loop, then gently curves up again, and about one third of the way down, peaks slowly then gently curves back down.

"Imagine if you will that this is a water wave, and each planet sits on top of it like a round float for fishing with - a white round float, with a little red rod through the middle. Each planet is like this, rotating on an axis, fixed to the wave. This wave goes all the way around the sun, undulating outward like waves moving from a rock thrown into the calm surface of a pond; concentric circles moving outward. If you fix each planet to a part of this wave, rotate the wave around the sun; then the motion of the planet on this wave describes an elliptical shaped orbit that moves at an inclination to the axis of the wave. Furthermore, the axis of rotation points in the exact same direction throughout this motion, as it does in reality.



"All the planets are of course not on the same segment of the wave, but they each occupy a different region of the wave. Mercury is at the top of the loop; the moon is at the bottom of the middle loop (the moon always shows the same face to Earth); and the rest of the planets are spaced out along the whole length. I call this the System Wave.

Nikki was scribbling on the board, "Moon in phase with periods in loop shaped like you know what."

"It's no doubt hard to visualize, but it's not difficult to see once you get a handle on thinking of motion in three dimensions. The point is that this is a very special plane, to have such symmetric motion about it. There

are seven numbers to describe the motion of each planet - none of which are explained by any other theory - called the orbital elements. My theory describes them all, for all of the nine planets.

"Is this significant?" Kase asked rhetorically. "Well, a man named Bode came up with a way to explain just one of these numbers for all the planets - their average distance from the sun. He's famous. I find a way to explain all seven numbers, and I'm branded heretic and burned at the intellectual stake.

"Is simplicity and elegance a criteria in science?" another rhetorical question. "Copernicus' model of motion, with the planets moving around the sun in nearly circular orbits was far far more simple and elegant than Ptolemy's system, with extremely complicated cycles and epicycles and interlocking gears; made so that all the planets appeared to move around Earth, not the Sun. There was no proof at all for Copernicus' model for a hundred years, until Kepler; yet scientists believed it more valid than Ptolemy's system, only on the basis of its simplicity and elegance.

"Clearly scientists can no longer perceive elegance," Nikki said.

"I'd say it's a whole lot worse than that. I'd say they're totally lacking the soul that makes it possible to perceive elegance in the first place." Nikki let him simmer down, while she considered what he had said. She asked a few questions, and he made a few more comments.

"*Es magnifique*. Beautiful. Why doesn't anybody publish your work? Why did the University expel you, because of this beautiful creation? Speak to me!"

"This project has been universally rejected by every academic, institution, and technical periodical in the world. I even tried submitting papers on it to public repository of technical papers on the web, open to anybody. The paper was quickly purged from the system, and my name removed from membership.

"I don't believe you. Something so simple, so intuitively powerful - not to even be the subject of discussion, is insane.

"The computer program to generate the data is less than a page long. The whole thing is easy to duplicate, and quite easy to put into equations.

Nikki thought for a long while. "If this theory of yours is accurate, and gives important insights; then the fact that it has been so universally - and maliciously - rejected, is disturbing me."

Then a moment later Nikki said. "You told me that one of the two remaining celestial mechanics groups was in Barcelona, Spain - not too very far from here?" Kase nodded affirmative. "I'm starting to not feel very safe again - and you aren't even well enough to walk. We'd best be very careful just now."

"It gets worse," Kase said as he settled back into the hospital bed. "This whole method of approach in celestial mechanics went out of vogue around one hundred years ago, using what are called Fourier Series to model systems. It's a popular technique now in engineering, but has not since been used in celestial mechanics. I've done a great deal more work on this theory of mine, developing half a dozen different approaches proving it independently in as many different ways.

"Trying to find enough proof to get published; but still nothing is accepted?" Nikki added seriously.

"I've also developed engineering applications, or theoretical ones." Nikki perked up with that, being not as skeptical about his theories as Kase was. "I've come to the conclusion that these simple ideas could lead to a whole new technology - advanced enough even in theoretical form, to convince skeptics that space travel is possible.

"What if these theories were not tossed in the trash, but were developed - by thousands of scientists, over the last hundred years; doing infinitely more than you, one scientist, has done in five years?

"You have a whole fleet of UFOs that are not aliens, but man made. The New World Order. You also have very powerful incentive to destroy any research scientist clever enough to reinvent the wheel.

"It doesn't matter if the gun is in Alien or Earthling hands, it still kills. It looks to me like we might have already run amok of both factions, and they have combined resources to find us.

"It's still early, Kase" Nikki said a little while later, returning from a pit stop in the restroom. "You have me quivering with consternation now; I'm starting to see an enemy behind every face. Can we talk about something different?" She moved her chair over to the bed side, and sat there quietly beside him. "I feel right now that even if it was sexual, I would not get aroused." Kase squeezed her hand.

"Did you know many UFO's are sighted with amber landing lights, for example at the corners of a triangular shaped aircraft."

"Doesn't sound very high tech, sci fi, deep space to me."

"My own theory about UFO's is actually quite low tech. Want to hear it?" Nikki nodded, and leaned on the bed, head on her arms; watching him talk with those big black eyes.

"You know about the Freon ban; how it damages the ozone layer, and new safer freons had to be created?" Nikki nodded. "Apparently freon does cause ozone to deteriorate in laboratory conditions. However - and I know this from my work as a consulting engineer, designing industrial sized air conditioning systems; well, freon is ten times heavier

than air. The sensors we use to detect freon leaks are in the floor, in concrete pits dug into the foundation. There are also microbes in the soil that cause freon to deteriorate, in only a few hours.

"How then," Kase glanced at Nikki to be sure she was following him, "Can these heavier than air molecules make it several miles into the upper atmosphere to interact with the ozone?" Nikki suggested air currents. "They move horizontally and not vertically," Kase explained. What about mixing in the air. "That would put the freon into contact with the microbes in the ground, and it wouldn't survive a day." The jet stream? "No, that's along lines of latitude; it couldn't get the freons all the way from the northern hemisphere to the south pole, where the ozone layer is actually deteriorating."

"That's not all. The ozone layer is deteriorating faster now than ever. It's so big that a huge block of ice the size of Rhode Island sloughed off the Antarctic Ice cap just last year, because the ozone is not there, blocking the high energy ultraviolet rays, so the UV rays cooked the ice cap like a frozen pizza in a microwave oven. And will keep doing so.

"Actually, the worse part is that the Freon Ban has cost over \$1 trillion in new equipment, and the new 'ozone save' freons are at least 25% less efficient. So, everybody in the civilized world is paying 25% more for air conditioning, but the environment is as threatened as ever.

"I thought all this was leading to UFOs," Nikki said wearily.

"Let's take the other side, shall we?" Kase said, and Nikki perked up. "Let's assume that the freon does actually make it to the South Pole. How does it do that? There must be some kind of self propelled molecules," like sperms Nikki said quietly; and Kase completely lost his train of thought. He got going again after a while.

"What if some brilliant scientist figured out how to harness these Freon molecules, to put them in an aircraft and to render it virtually weightless. Then even a tiny jet engine would push a heavy aircraft at very high speeds; and it could make all the swift and inexplicable, right angle course changes all the UFO observers say they have seen." Nikki was deep in thought now.

"I found a letter in my father's papers a while back. It was a letter to his father, signed by President John F. Kennedy, thanking grampa Howard for exemplary service. He was a railroad engineer out in California; responsible for refrigeration cars mostly. My father was himself a very talented chemical engineer, being a world wide expert in heavy distillates of crude oil called resins. Wouldn't it be wild if my own grandfather was involved in the research that figured out how to apply the unique qualities of freon, for weightless aircraft? Nobody in our whole family knew grampa Howard ever did anything for the government. It must have been secret. It must also have been important, to warrant that letter

from the President. Maybe JFK was shot because he tried to expose the conspiracy, and my grandfather was the conduit JFK intended to reveal the Truth.

"Meanwhile, forty years later" Nikki added menacingly, "The original Freon that works is banned, while substitute chemicals are put in its place, and nobody nowhere will ever again be able to create the original Freon - and the secret of their UFO aircraft is secure." You're starting to think just like me, Kase said. Scary, aren't I?

"I see now what you meant with that Borg comment," Nikki said hoping it was the last word. "How industry does whatever they need, in the name of greed and profits; and the rest of the world be damned."

"Actually, I had meant it in another sense," Kase said. "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that the whole world is full of excesses. I've already explained how all our oil will run out in 20 years, which is a widely publicized fact by the way. Just think for a moment about all the other things besides energy that are not sustainable: population growth, air quality, water quality, the mining of minerals for fertilizer and chemicals, mining of metals and ores, radioactive waste disposal - all these will come to a crisis stage in twenty years, if not sooner.

"All these areas of industry are covered by dozens of professional organizations each. They lobby Congress, and often write the legislation itself. It's obvious that none of them are the least bit concerned, about things that are obvious now to even anybody who reads the newspaper. Oil prices are going up steadily because of limited resources; hunger is at endemic proportions in Africa and India; and so forth.

"There you have it - the Seven Seals of Revelations; huge, unsustainable foundations of modern civilization are totally, completely, and universally ignored by every academic, institution, Think Tank, and professional group in every nation, in every corner of the world - be it communist, free, rich or poor." They are the Whore of Babylon, Nikki added quietly.

"I suppose the Praetorian Guard is the enforcement arm of this vast right wing conspiracy," Nikki said trying to make a joke. "Or perhaps this New World Order of powerful organizations is setting the stage for when the problems will all be so extreme and complicated than no nation can tackle them with urgency, so they'll all have to turn over power to a universally powerful regime.

"Maybe so." Then he added, "Right at at the epicenter of this vast international web of deceit, sitting like a black widow spider pulling all the strings, sits the University of Texas at Austin. Home of the meeting of the Fortune 500 executives one semester I was there; setting up a row of tents just like the Praetorians used, sitting there around the main tower of the campus, like so many testicles spouting their invective semen right straight

into the poor innocent students minds; who worshipped the very ground they walked on.

"Shame on them," Nikki said. "No doubt they will make good corporate clones." *Greeks* - you mean sororities and fraternities, whom are almost exclusive in Fortune 500 hierarchies. Kase nodded, yes.

They were both silent for the longest time. "I'm getting real depressed," Nikki said into her crossed arms. "Kase, can we talk something sexy now - pretty please?" She got up and closed the door, then looked at him and batted her eyelids dramatically.

"Have you ever wondered why there are so many priests who are pedophiles; what with all the scandals and law suits - but none scandalized because of heterosexual activities in the confessional?" Nikki mouthed the words, god damn *Greeks*. Kase smiled.

"How about children of women with breast implants who can't breast feed their children," Or their husbands, Nikki elbowed him in the side. "To think of all those children growing up now who remember only sucking on a long white bottle of milk." *Greeks*, again. God damn *Greeks*.

"Have you ever thought, as you read Psalm 23; the poem about '.. though I walk through the valley of death... Then, the part about ... thy rod and thy staff comfort me." Nikki pointed to his groin; nodding with a great big smile.

"What about the white cracker at communion," Nikki wiggled a finger, pointing at his groin again ~ sperm. "and red wine," which Kase pantomimed to her own groin; and two fingers for vampire teeth, drinking the blood of a virgin.

"What about when you look at Jesus on the cross. Has lust every crossed your mind?" Almost invariably, especially since meeting you, Nikki whispered. "How about young teenage girls, who think obsessively of sex." Nikki couldn't say, having not been the typical teenage girl. Kase pantomimed her pony tails; Nikki broke into a laugh.

"They get upset at us for being so sexually explicit," Kase pretended rage. "They should take the boulder out of their eye before criticizing the speck in ours."

Nikki asked then, "Have you ever worked as a parish priest - taking confessions?" Kase indicated not. "I bet they get some pretty lurid details of sexual liaisons in the privacy of confession. Eh, what? Nothing like enjoying vicariously what you can't actually do."

Kase continued. "I doubt any member of the College of Cardinals has been in a common man's confessional. That's probably why they're so obstinate about prohibiting birth control."

"To think the Church, in banning birth control, has made population control a major sin."

"The industrial nations need a labor pool of desperately poor people, who will work for slave wages and in gruesome conditions - to line the pockets of the rich." Then he added as an afterthought, "Not to mention keeping a large pool of desperate, uneducated, hungry on the verge of insane, poor people who would instantly murder somebody like us who dared to disparage their nation, their religion - their Virgin Mary, their Jesus." There's nothing like security that can't be identified as security.

"Thanks Kase, I feel 100% better now, yes I do." She went to open the door, and motioned for Kase to x'nay the sex'nay.

"Got any theories about crucifixion, Kase baby?"

"Hold on a second while I switch gears. Right now I have the wrong reel in the movie projector. It's showing a long line of buxom women stretched out on crosses." Nikki swatted his crotch; but grabbed on to his autonomous response, when she found it. Then Kase swatted her hand away, adjusting the blankets over him to hide it.

"Crucifixion," Kase said. "Please be patient while Mork from Ork searches database."

"The Romans, I believe, used public crucifixion as a means of population control. Not in the sense of limiting numbers, but in the sense of exorcising the barbarian from the psyche of the peoples they conquered. Politics is often described as the art of making people do what's not natural to them, and the Romans set the standard.

"How does nailing somebody to a cross control people any better than any other kind of execution?"

"It doesn't, unless it has religious connotations - i.e. with the Christians. Stigmata is the physiological result - people learn by example, to focus all the stress in their wrists and feet. This vastly diminishes the stress level people can cope with because it eliminates the largest muscle groups in the body - legs, thighs, stomach, and arms - and puts all the burden of venting stress, on the smallest muscle groups; in the hands and feet.

Nikki said then. "I suppose this American Christian crusade to rid the world of terrorists, while spreading the good faith; is all part of the global scheme to psychologically crucify every last human being, in every corner of the planet." Kase nodded yes.

"As long as we're on the issue of population control, consider that once the ozone layer is gone - and it's only a millimeter thick as it is - the only people who will roam the surface of the planet during the day, without

massive UV protection - are blacks." Kase let that sink in, then continued. "To think blacks have tried so hard to marry whites; now they'll have to turn about face and start marrying each other, to try and get their color back. Michael Jackson's screwed.

"I suppose you come by your prejudice honestly, with your Confederate roots."

"I'm ambivalent," Kase admitted. "However, I think if the Civil War had not happened, even with the South losing, things would have been much different. It all comes down to slavery, and the mathematics. The slave trade was stopped by 1800. At that time there were 400,000 blacks in the South. Sixty years later when the Civil War started, there were ten times that many ~ four million. That's a whole lot of sex and having babies, for a race that was miserable and mistreated as slaves. The truth of the matter is that the poor whites in the South - 65% of the whole white population - lived in far worse conditions than the slaves, and it was getting worse by the day. Slavery was wrong sure; but you have to take it all in proper context. The South was as much of a day care center as a sweat shop.

"I assume you don't believe America should reimburse slaves for the hardships they suffered," Nikki said and watched his blood pressure double.

"It's only a matter of time, when politicians need the black vote so badly they'll buy it by caving in on the whole slave thing."

Nikki remarked that there was always more traffic in the hallway outside Kase's room when she was there. Guppies in a fish tank. Glub Glub. More like munch munch, shark that you are.

"You need to hurry up and get well, Kase." Patting his arm solicitously. "So we can get the dickens out of here."

"Just between us minnows," Kase said quietly. "I'm nearly well right now." And he lifted up the covers to show his legs were all scabbed up; and indicated his wrists were almost as good. Nikki was stunned, it had only been a couple of days.

"My petite stigmata has been a good inoculation against crucifixion," Kase said casually, spreading his arms out to mock what they'd tried to do to him.

"Can you scout around and find us a quick exit, Nikki?" Kase said, indicating ASAP by pantomiming the sex act. She rolled her eyes, but he could tell she was licking her lips in anticipation.

"Freud said most of his female patients back in that Victorian era suffered from nothing that could not be cured by regular, and strenuous

sex." Kase was saying really loud, as she walked out of the door, almost stumbling she was laughing so hard inside.

A week later, they were back at the Fallen Angel Ranch. There was no indication that the Star Gate had been used. Kase rigged up a care package for the bad guys on the other end, left it at the concrete landing site. If they ever cracked the code on the computer - or even figured out what the Osireion was good for at all - they'd never send something through first try, but just operate the thing. If that happened, it would suck up the care package Kase left, theoretically. Ten days later, they noticed the car package was gone. Then, running back to the cabin they searched all the news services on the web, and found an obscure notice about a terrorist attack in Abydos - a bomb had failed to detonate at the intended target, the Seti I temple. It had exploded harmlessly in the open desert nearby.

"I'm sad, the Osireion is gone," Nikki sobbed. "Doing that offends my archaeologists soul."

"It wasn't the least bit damaged," Kase assured her. "I sent them an area nuclear charge - designed to kill people but not damage structures. It had a little boom, sure; but hardly enough to even nick any part of the Osireion. All the electronics we left were fried; the rubber bladder probably melted, but otherwise it's just the way we found it.

"Now we know how to go from here to there, too" Nikki said, happily.

"It also proves that this place here is a full node, and not just a random ground."

"You mean we can build a Star Gate right here?" Kase nodded, deep in thought.

"I suspect our happy go lucky pet dragon not-so-baby Dino knew that from the very beginning"

"He's as conniving as any human," Nikki said admiringly.

"Has to be - to survive undetected and unnoticed on this malicious planet, for thousands upon thousands of years."

"Too bad we can't communicate with him. We could use some help right about now, from a real expert," kicking Kase in the leg.

"Somehow I don't think he'll show up until he damn well pleases."

"Did any of the plants survive the explosion?" Nikki asked.

"I suspect they were shielded from most of the radiation, in the cubicles."

"Will they be able to survive?"

"They have water, good soil, and air. They should do just fine."

"With the nuclear radiation and the prophecy dust, we might just have started an evolution of plants leading to sentience."

"Druids held all their ceremonies in oak groves," Kase rattled off. "They believed oaks had some special powers."

"How come you know so much stuff?" Nikki asked.

"You know it all now, too."

"You know what I mean."

"Ask me anything related to your vast knowledge of Egyptology, and I'll look the stupid fool that I am." Yes, Nikki said, I think I'll do that some time. Sounds like fun.

"I need to ask you something first, Nikki."

"Sure, throw me a fast ball," getting down on her haunches like a big league catcher.

"Did you believe my notion, about a disease of the soul. I mean, do you think it's possible?"

"I'm no expert, but from what we've experienced; and with the many unexplained things in just my one small area of archaeology - even when studying these almost paranormal events in the light of modern medicine - I'd say yes. In fact, I'd guess there are as many diseases of the soul as there are of the body and mind." Kase was listening carefully.

"Why?" Kase asked.

"I suspect when you corral human beings into unnatural circumstances like big cities and civilized jobs and complicated bureaucracies, all these things may not affect the body or mind, but they certainly can taint the soul.

"So the more civilized man gets, the more diseased the soul?"

"If you don't take good care of it, yes. That's what religion is all about.

"But you and I, we have no religion. Not really." Kase admitted, finally.

"Nonsense," Nikki said with confidence. "You're my god and I'm your goddess."

"Isn't that kind of presumptuous?"

"Oh, silly man. I wasn't speaking literally. Our lives and past and principles are steeped in religion. Our every breath is steeped in purpose and in meaning." But you're still my god, she thought; and Kase was relieved that she didn't realize she was his goddess.

XII. Centerville

Kase had the night shift. Nikki had the day shift. Little Beowulf worked 24 hours a day. They all took a siesta, escaping the heat of the day. Not-so-baby Dino swooped by one evening, dropped off his furry little dragon chick in the fenced in garden, then swooped away again. Not before scarfing down all the fresh vegetables, however. Nikki said he needed his greens. Kase said, what about me? Beowulf screamed. End of argument.

Kase was a natural for the night shift. He'd always woken up two or three times each night anyway, restless and stressed out. An hour of knee exercises, pumping iron, or riding the stationary bicycle and the stress was worked out; and he was good to go for a few more hours sleep. Now that Beowulf was around, either Kase got out of bed when she screamed in the middle of the night, to just do his exercises early; or, more often than not, Beowulf waited until Kase was awake and then screamed for attention. Apparently she had determined that was a more efficient use of resources.

A couple of months into the routine, and Nikki got a little concerned that Beowulf had not seemed as energetic during the day. Not that she minded, it just seemed curious. So Nikki snuck out of bed one night after Kase and the baby had gone out back to the other room, to spy on them. No wonder the poor baby was exhausted during the day. Kase had her bouncing on him, as he was on the floor doing his knee lifts; hanging on to his neck for dear life when he stood to do curls with the weights; and tucked in a back pack while he pumped on the stationary bicycle. Then they had a swig of Hawaiian Punch Red, and snuck out the back door, ran to the dragon pen, and sat on the big log while baby-baby Dino entertained them. They had brought along some marsmallows and straightened out clothes hangers, and the furry little baby dragon was coaxed into roasting them - although it took a quick wrist to whisk the finished product away before baby-baby Dino ate it himself. Beowulf howled at that, so loud she was hoarse.

Nikki didn't worry any more, not even when Beowulf's first word was Cato. That's what Kase had named baby-baby Dino - the name of his favorite Roman Senator slash philosopher. (He's the guy who had hundreds of ways to cook cabbage; each one could cure a different disease. By the way, Cato never spared a chance to disparage the *Greeks*.) Fortunately, Beowulf's second word was "MaMa," and a few days later Kase was taken off permanent KP duty ~ and 100% cabbage rations. It would be years before the baby would say "PaPa" probably because he was always there anyway.

Nikki's shift was a little more civilized. Their favorite thing was to feed the guppies in the fish tank. Beowulf was fascinated by the huge plecastamus, with its giant fin jutting out from its back, equally giant tail and side fins; and the big brown eyes that watched everything. Beowulf always insisted on feeding the bottom dweller herself, dropping the little algae disk in and insisting that they wait the ten minutes or so before the plecastamus ambled over and munched it down with its big round sucker mouth. They did other day things too, like swatting mosquitoes, catching crickets, and digging for worms.

Everybody's favorite time was siesta. They were all tired by early afternoon, and after a big lunch it was just the best thing to do.

"I wonder what kind of world we're leaving her," Kase mused as baby Beowulf slept peacefully between them, curled into a little ball.

"We can always send her to Texas A&M," Nikki suggested. "They hate the Texas Longhorns almost as much as you do."

"Yea, right." Kase drawled. "She can join the Corps of Cadets and become a lifelong Praetorian Guard." Nikki was surprised. I never thought they were a formal group like that. What makes you so hateful of the Aggies?

"It's how they used the old Roman crucifixion subconscious scheme to subdue the whole Aggie community, past, present and future." Nikki asked, how so. "You remember the tragic bonfire collapse? Five story high pile of pine logs collapses when the center pole breaks, killing twelve students who were working on the pile at the time?"

"Every time I see a reference to that, I connect the twelve victims in some way with a kind of Christian symbology," Nikki confessed. "I suppose dissident Kase believes it was all a plot, to project the crucifix symbol into people's mind, to reinforce the Roman stigma and vastly diminish people's stress coping abilities."

"Mostly, I was referring to the subsequent investigation for engineering design flaws. It was assigned by the law enforcement authorities to a big Houston Aggie consulting firm. Of course, they found nothing wrong - and none of the twelve families even filed a civil suit.

"So you're saying they didn't turn the other cheek out of deference to the Aggie cause; but because they were subdued by the crucifix angst," Nikki emotionally. Or maybe, she murmured, they sacrificed their kids and were honored to be party to the grand plan to subdue all Aggiedom to the New World Order, by this subversive Roman scheme for control of the masses.

"Maybe so," Kase said. "But what I think of is how the Professional Engineering Board white washed the whole episode, refusing to hold any engineers involved in the design and construction of the Bonfire accountable. They squirreled out of it by passing a rule that any project that's built with donated funds or materials doesn't need the seal of a licensed PE."

"Seems like an pretty innocuous rule to me," Nikki countered.

"I suppose, then, the new \$30 million engineering computer lab at the University of Texas didn't need to have a Professional Engineer's seal because all that money was donated?"

"Technically, yes." Then Nikki added, "You don't suppose that was the computer facility used to design the Twin Towers attack, to analyze the structure of those buildings so the jets would hit just right to cause a perfect implosion?" Noting also, that the Bonfire collapse was a structural issue - how better to practice for 911, to coordinate all the teams; than to try it out in your own back yard, where any sloppy mistakes could quickly be wiped off the record.

"Bush was governor then," Kase added. "And his successor was an Aggie. How better to cover your tracks?"

"So," Nikki asked pensively, "The Professional Engineering Board is on your shit list too?" I thought taking on the College of Cardinals took *cojones* - this is suicidal, she said to herself.

"I was so upset that I've suspended my license in protest - and told the Board why, in so may words."

"So you have a real, solid reason for once?" Nikki said, acting a little disappointed.

"I submitted documented evidence to the Board of many severe violations by licensed engineers at the University - slander, retaliation, theft of services, and misrepresentation. If any consulting engineer in private practice were to do such things they would lose their license, perhaps even go to jail - for a very long time. But no - academics are exempt from all the rules; they can lie and cheat and steal, and nobody can do anything. The Attorney General supports them in this; as does the Texas Legislature.

"*Mien got en himmel* - you don't ever think small, do you?"

"My God in heaven, indeed - there are more German ex patriots in Central Texas than anywhere else in the world - they have a Wursfest, and Octoberfest; all that stuff. Everybody always says all the Nazis went to South America to hide; personally, I think they all went to Central Texas."

"So that's where your whole New World Order is being orchestrated from - Central Texas, and the University of Texas at Austin." Then she added, "Well, with the support of the Brown Shirts in the Corps of Cadets as backup, drawing strength from their hero and all his

documents at the George Bush, Sr. Presidential Library there on the A&M campus."

"I suppose UT will have Boy George's library," Kase said. Then he laughed, "God, but will that ever clash with the LBJ Library already at UT. Maybe the burning Bush's Presidential Library will go to Baylor, the honorable Christian school; that would be more in fitting with the self righteous Bush profile."

"Speaking of profiles," Nikki added. "The Mossad was studying for the longest time, a document submitted anonymously, showing photographs of Boy George Bush and Adolf Hitler, side by side in profile. The likeness is astonishing ~ same nose, cheek structure, sublime elitist smile, set of the eyes ~ they could be clones. It was frightening."

"Kind of makes you wonder, doesn't it?" Kase said. Then cut short, as Beowulf was starting to stir.

"I'm beginning to not feel safe here anymore," Nikki said. "I get the idea that they're keeping their enemy - you, us - close, so they can keep an eye on us. As the old Corsican *Mafioso* saying goes."

"Where else can we go?" Then Nikki asked where he felt safest; what people or nation he trusted the most. "Probably the Spanish; the Spanish in Spain, that is.

"Maybe we should think about going back to that pink castle in Madrid." Then she gave that idea two thumbs down, mouthing *Greeks*.

"Perhaps not Madrid," Kase concurred.

"We French absolutely love the Spanish Mediterranean coast. Let's go there instead - let's have a fun time for once, make a vacation," Nikki said with growing excitement. "We can play tennis, swim, and sail."

"You play tennis?" Kase said.

"Better than you, for sure."

"Find us some clay courts." Nikki grimaced. Kase pointed, *bad knees*. Nikki pointed a little higher, but the *cojones* of a bull. *Ole' Torro*. See if you can pierce my red cape, crimson with vaginal flow. My sword is at your service. We're incorrigible, aren't we?

"So you think the Jews stole the Book of Job?" Nikki accused him later, after little Beowulf was pacified - by a pacifier, not a crucifix mind you. We aren't barbarians like all the rest of the world.

"No," Kase corrected. "I think they stole the whole Torah."

"From whom?" and Kase apologized, that he's still working on that.

"So you don't even believe, as you claimed, in this ancient Job from the land of Uz myth?"

"Not exactly. There are still loose ends." Nikki motioned with her fingers, gimme.

"I think man in Antiquity was far more civilized than we give him - or her, naturally - credit for. Consider that for five thousand years, all those tens of thousands of battles were fought between some of what we call the most primitive, brutal, hedonistic nations ever to exist anywhere; yet, between them all, in every conflict; they maintained the same universal code of conduct. It's only in the modern day that man has erred from that standard.

"I'm intrigued. Pray tell." Nikki raised her eyebrows.

"It was a general understanding that military leaders would under no circumstances be submitted to a level of violence different from any other combatant on the battle field. Nobody anywhere, ever targeted the enemy's general; they died in battle of course, but only in a fashion befitting their role as any other combatant.

"In the entire history of warfare, on all the seven continents, from the dawn of civilization until the modern era; no military force, anywhere, has sought to gain an advantage by shooting all - or even a disproportionate number - of their arrows or blunderbusses or RPG's at the officers or leaders of the opposing force.

"I agree, that's quite amazing."

"Political leaders may have been assassinated, like Caesar; but never military ones. Never. Ever."

"I said I agreed, Kase."

"Doesn't it surprise you that even the most primitive man, back to the Hittites and earliest Egyptians, the Babylonians and Persians in the Fertile Crescent; that all these peoples everywhere, had the same code of conduct?"

"Kind of makes human beings - at least back then - seem quite civilized.

"The one thing in the Book of Job that truly grates on my nerves, that doesn't fit into the puzzle is the use of the term 'House' in referring to Job's sons and daughters. The connotation is of a 'Great House,' not a single household but a whole nation state.

"Are you heading toward the Dune mythology," Nikki interrupted. She had noticed the well worn paperbacks of the Frank Herbert series on his bookshelves.

"Why not? We found a Star Gate. It doesn't work now, but probably did at one time. It's proof of an efficient, fast connection to

another world, perhaps hundreds - even thousands of other planets. Each world was under the supervision of a Great House. Then something happened, and the whole Intergalactic Republic collapsed.

"Maybe a Leviathan was sent through each Star Gate," Nikki suggested. "Then one by one, each world was disconnected. It degenerated into a barbaric chaos, a Borg culture." Then she looked closely at Kase, "Is this a War of the Worlds we're talking about here?"

"It's only a theory."

"When did modern man start shooting the leaders of opposing armies."

"The first to do it were the Yankees, during the Civil War."

"I know the story of Stonewall Jackson - all Europeans secretly admired the Confederates; and even at the time, there was widespread support for your cause. Yet, Jackson was killed by friendly fire." Nikki said.

"Yes, apparently," Kase replied. "However, that's not the Rebel General to which I am referring. I'm talking about the outright assassination of General Earl Van Dorn. It was accepted then as an assassination, and still is - although history, written by the victorious Yankees, try to blame it all on a jealous husband. But the undeniable fact remains, that General Van Dorn was murdered, and it changed the course of the whole war.

"Van Dorn was a cavalry leader, and he single handily stopped the first Yankee assault on Vicksburg on Christmas Eve in 1863 - yes, the Blue Coats made a major assault on the Day of our Lord, thinking they would gain the element of surprise. They had floated a huge army down the Mississippi from Memphis to Vicksburg, and disembarked above the city. It rained cats and dogs that night, making the amphibious landing really messy, and the Yankees were slowed down. Up above the cliffs, in Vicksburg itself; the Rebels frantically ran the railroad making lots of noise, and making the Yankees believe a large army was disembarking to reinforce them. It was a ruse. There was no such army.

"In fact, Van Dorn had loaded most of the army on railroad cars and made a mad dash inland, up to a major railroad terminal near Memphis at a place called Holly Springs. They overwhelmed the skeleton crew of defenders, and destroyed the railhead. When news of this reached the Yankees making their approach on Vicksburg, they had to withdraw because their supply lines were cut. Van Dorn's daring dash saved the day, and was legendary.

"The North was extremely anxious to take Vicksburg. It was the key to winning the whole war because once the North had free access to the whole Mississippi River they could send armies right into the heart of the South at any time. Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation freeing all the slaves in the Confederate States (but not freeing any slaves in Northern slave holding states) a week later, on New Years Day; hoping this would weaken the southern defenses, and resolve; and make it easier for their next assault on Vicksburg.

"From January until June, the Yankees amassed a huge force, in and around Memphis. Meanwhile, the Rebels were amassing another huge force in Virginia, which culminated in the Battle of Gettysburg; which the North narrowly won. The Yankees were so desperate to win Vicksburg - their own assault on Vicksburg happened almost at the same time as Gettysburg - that they killed the Rebels wild card, Earl Van Dorn; but still barely won the battle.

"My ancestor, Col. William Brown of the 20th Mississippi Cavalry, served under Van Dorn throughout his short career. Col. Brown fought in both Vicksburg campaigns.

"In their second campaign on the city, the Yankees had three huge armies converge on Vicksburg, commanded by their best generals - Sherman, Sheridan, and Grant. The Confederates had an inexperienced commander named Pemberton leading the ground forces, and with Earl Van Dorn dead, leading the cavalry also. The whole second Vicksburg campaign was fought in the low lying areas surrounding Vicksburg on the east side of the river - the kind of heavily wooded terrain where cavalry, and especially Earl Van Dorn, excelled. Had he been alive - the murder happened only a couple of days before the Yankees attacked - the very narrow Yankee victory would likely have been a standoff, or an outright victory for the Rebels. This, in turn, could have changed things dramatically at Gettysburg fought later that month - Vicksburg surrendered on the 4th of July - especially since the fatal flaw in Roberet E. Lee's plan there was in his choice of cavalry leader; the inexperienced Pickett - Van Dorn would not have made the same mistake as did Pickett, in delaying his charge until too late.

"So it is, the first major battle - maybe even the first whole war - won because an enemy leader was targeted specifically, in violation of every coda in existence from the dawn of civilization. There were several other instances, and the Confederate leadership often made bones about it, how the Yankees were targeting their leaders. I only cite this one because it is most familiar to me, and had the most dramatic repercussions."

"Too bad your great grandfather Col. Brown couldn't have made the day at Vicksburg." Nikki said brightly.

"Actually, his whole command was dismantled during the whole campaign - they were not on horseback, but just foot soldiers."

"Who the hell ordered that?" Nikki asked, irked no end.

"Pemberton - who was born a Yankee, in Philadelphia; and who had been in Charleston the whole war before he was made Commander of the Army of the West - so many of the Confederate military leaders had been killed by enemy fire - after the Charlestonians literally expelled him for ungentlemanly conduct."

"You think Pemberton threw the battle?"

"Naturally, with Col. Brown grounded, I'm a little prejudiced; but most historians believe the Rebels fought the battle well enough."

"But history was written by the victorious Yankees," Nikki argued.

"There's that, and the fact that the much smaller Rebel force down the river at Port Hudson Louisiana, defending that other important outpost on the Mississippi against a far larger Yankee force under Butler; almost dying to the last man. They caved and surrendered after Pemberton accepted terms - incidentally, every Confederate soldier at Vicksburg got a large sum of money as part of the terms. It was one of the very few times that the Rebels accepted money as part of the terms of surrender."

"Like I said," Nikki repeated. "They paid their traitorous general Pemberton off."

"Anyway, the whole warfare thing has degenerated now to the point where both sides target nobody but the leaders of the opposite side, with all their firepower."

"I see what you mean, about modern man." Nikki said. "Not a very pretty picture."

"But you can't link this one to Texas," Nikki asked. "Can you?"
Less surely.

"Only indirectly," Kase admitted. "I self published a novel about the whole Vicksburg Campaign when I was in graduate school, describing at great length in a literary context; what I have just outlined for you. A few months later that was a small notice in the Austin papers, that UT had moved all the statues of the Confederate leaders from the main mall in front of the Tower, to some obscure place."

"Damn Yankees," Nikki said. With real vengeance in her eyes. Not that the French were real high on the Bush Administration anyway; but Kase was gratified to have her willing support at last.

"I like to think of this whole sordid episode as the first coverup by the United States government," Kase ended proudly. "You can see how cleverly they managed that one - after four major wars and 150 years of practice, you can well imagine how deceptive they are now!"

"You don't much like the Jews do you?" Nikki asked later in the day.

"Only because they're getting off scott free in this war on terrorism going on." Kase said apologetically.

"The Jews fought the Palestinians for sixty years almost; in the most brutal, masochistic campaign in the history of warfare. They enraged the entire Arab world; then because the United States helped Israel, the terrorists targeted us. Now Israel is sitting pretty, making peace with all their neighbors and showing the whole Arab world what good friends they are. They aren't even America's friends now, after all we have done for them.

"But the United States trained the Arab terrorists, and Osama bin Laden himself, to fight that kind of war against the Russians, when they were still the Evil Empire." Nikki protested.

"Which would have meant nothing, but for the transference of emotions from Israel to the United States that has happened so dramatically since 911."

"So, what - you think the Jews were in on 911 - bringing America into the war, like the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; to awake the sleeping giant to defeat their ally Israel?"

"Whether or not, things sure have turned out swell for Israel - you can't deny that."

"Let me put it this way. Jews were not welcome anywhere in the world just before World War II. You've read about the ship full of refugees from the Nazi purges before the war actually started, how the ship sailed all the way around the world and every major nation refused to let them disembark - even the Americans, in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty." Nikki nodded that she knew that story.

"Well, the Jews haven't changed. Why does the world have such extreme sympathy for them now?" Nikki said, that's obvious; because of the Holocaust.

"How much more sympathy can they wrest from the Holocaust. Now that thousands of American kids have died fighting their war on terrorism. Now that the U.S. government has been driven to bankruptcy paying for the war in Iraq. The time is fast approaching when a mention of the Holocaust won't even get the door held open for them. The debt has been paid; they have Israel; they're prosperous and thriving in all nations of the world. They're wealthy and powerful and influential. They're not the David any more, but the Goliath.

"I'm not anti-Semitic." Kase implored. "I just think it's wrong for anybody to face charges of anti-Semitism from a dozen powerful Jewish

lobby groups; when all you ask is that Israel just be treated like every other nation; no better, and no worse. That's democracy, not anti-Semitism.

"Perhaps," Nikki said tactfully, "You have assigned to the Jews some of your well deserved prejudices against big business; acting on a kind of prejudice itself, that Jews are synonymous with big business?"

"I think it's not possible to separate the two. After all, Jews have been associated with business for their entire history. Any religion or people who associate themselves so closely with anything, runs the risk of being categorized against the grain. That's why we have separation of church and state in the United States. It avoids any such ambiguities.

"But you admit that not all bad things done by business are by Jews."

"Of course, that's obvious. However, they can't cry anti-Semitism because they are just the baby in the bath water; and plead ignorance and leniency.

"You champion the poor. Wealthy people take advantage of the poor by paying them low wages and pocketing large profits. Jews condone this practice, and get wealthy from it. So, since they're supposed to be highly ethical and religious, and supposed to not treat poor people that way, you hold them more accountable than just greedy non Jews.

"I don't discriminate. I criticize all unethical, inhumane business practices. It's no concern to me that many Jews happen to be in that category.

"So your feelings against Jews are just because of their Old Testament history.

"I have told my story to the best way I can fit the facts together. The Jews did what they did. I'm neither judge or jury. I'm just trying to quantify myths with hard facts. What the final impression is, that's not my problem. If the Jews or anybody else made mistakes in the past, that's their problem. I only want the truth, and a history that is accurate and not slanted; and for all the nations at war right now to realize that what they do now cannot be white washed if they win.

"So all you want is simple accountability.

"Yes. If the North violated the code of conduct to win the Civil War, they should apologize and stop making the South out to be unworthy. If the blacks were not as badly treated on the plantations as they claim; that should be acknowledged. Reparations for the Holocaust by Jews from the west should have a limit. There are too many poorly recorded things in history that underlie bad prejudices now.

"Like with the *Greeks*."

"Sure. The only thing I fault them for is subverting important psychological practices that could help other people; just because they were afraid of a little scrutiny.

"That still doesn't explain your obsession with truth in the historical record." Nikki had finally pushed him too far.

"Did you ever wonder," Kase asked menacingly, "Why Jesus never had any parables about woodworking or lumber, furniture or trees, buildings or structures. I mean everything he said was in parables, and you'd think that a man who had apprenticed to be a carpenter for ten years, then worked as a carpenter for another fifteen years, would have thought of many things in terms of his trade - nails, hammers, saws; sanding, varnishing, waxing; cutting bark from a tree, hardwoods and softwood; splitting timber for planks, cutting it into strips or carving it with a knife for chairs; soaking it in water then using a vice to keep in in a specific shape.

"Perhaps the men who recorded what he said didn't think in those terms, so that is not how they remembered what Jesus said." Nikki tried to explain.

"There was nothing the least bit practical, about anything Jesus said." Kase continued. "Nothing about waiting patiently for a tree to reach its prime before harvesting it; how multi use trees are, providing fruit and shade as well as lumber, firewood, and bark for herbs and tanning. Carpentry back then was a very deliberate trade - everything was done by hand back then, using chisels, rasps, sharp curved knives, and screws.

"Anybody who works with wood and metal and all the many tools, has got to think of things in those terms. Moreover, since most of the people he lectured to were also working folk, they would think in terms like that as well. Everybody uses the carpenter's craft, one way or another. Yet, Jesus didn't try to make a connection to them using this common denominator, and one with many powerful connotations and symbolism's possible.

"Kind of makes you think the whole gospel is made up," Nikki said sadly.

"The only thing that seems real is the crucifixion, and that took place on a massive oak cross. It seems the only place that Christ felt truly at peace; with a crown of thorns, nails through his body connecting him to a sturdy wooden cross.

"I rather think that Jesus was like a modern day President or Prime Minister, who just said the things that his staff tells him to say; does the things they tell him to do; living an empty life himself. Eisenhower had a staff of maybe twenty; Presidents now have a staff of thousands. Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address himself; no president since Kennedy could hold a conversation with kindergarten kids without a full briefing, and all his words projected on a screen before him.

"When it was all over, Jesus staff of twelve looked at their notes, and wrote up their version of Jesus ministry in their own language - that of

Jewish scholars and scribes, the closest they ever got to carpentry was pulling a splinter out of their thumb. What we know today as the Gospels is not what Jesus said at all, it's what the Jew Disciples put into his mouth. Christians have spent two thousand years interpreting Jesus' teachings, and they aren't even in his own words.

"When you put it that way," Nikki said, "It makes all the Disciples look like they were whacked out on prophecy dust."

"The Temple in Jerusalem - with its labyrinth of tunnels beneath, where Leviathan was held captive, was a frequent stop in their lecture circuit."

"Yes, and the Book of Job is the story of one poor man who was afflicted, going through a psychotherapy with the Three Wise Friends.

"Many people believe that Christ was the first psychotherapist," Nikki corrected. "But it looks like Job had him beat by, what, four thousand years?"

"Job was a noble, getting high class therapy. Christ was trying to cure everybody at once, in kind of a mass group therapy. Unfortunately, his teachings were watered down and never served their true purpose - trying to bring folks down from their drug induced UFOria." Which sounds better than it writes.

"It's all about the poor with you, isn't it?" Nikki asked pensively later.

"More about nature."

"The poor will survive."

"Nature won't."

"You'd rather the world slump back into a Dark Ages, than blast forward into a science fiction dream of a future."

"It wouldn't be worth it at the cost of destroying nature."

"You'd destroy this Star Gate and all evidence of it, just to keep humanity from spreading their diseased perspective out into the universe." Like a virus, she added.

"They'd figure it all out eventually, by which time they'd be mature enough to be responsible in their treatment of every other part of nature."

"But you'd use the Star Gate yourself, if it could be made secure."

"Maybe."

"You're playing God."

"Other people do it all the time."

"I think my experience with the South Austin Transfer Project illustrates all of this quite well. Are you up for one last example?"

"Last one."

"A million dollar project was designed, then built; then it had what the City of Austin claims were major design flaws. They spent more fixing the problems than they did building the place to begin with, then sued the engineers for the damages. My name was slandered in front of dozens of leading contractors and engineers; not only directly in my presence and on a video the City made for deposition; but also as all this legal mess was going on for close to ten years, day by day my name was discredited by everybody from clerks to corporate chieftains, to the engineering license board.

"I get the picture.

"They finally call me in, I find out what had happened with that building, and spend six months studying all the documents to figure out where the design went wrong. I find that a \$100 vent fan could have not only avoided all the problems that happened; could not only have fixed the conditions in the building as it was originally designed and built; but could also have reduced their utility bill by half of what they are now.

"That's funny," Nikki said. "Well, you know what I mean."

"After all they did to me, I still only wanted to help. I still thought only of saving energy. But guess what?"

"This is going to be tragic, isn't it?" Nikki predicted.

"I've been banned by the P.E. board from discussing anything about the SATS project; anywhere.

"Why would they do such a thing?"

"Because that project is the key log to the whole conspiracy theory. You pull the key log out of the log jam, and they all flow right on downstream - and nobody is the wiser.

"Like when the center pole of the Bonfire broke, and the whole thing collapsed.

"I'm starting to see the same highly systematized, delusional system as you are - they'll probably lock both of us away for the duration."

"That's why we have to find a safe place, put all this behind us, and let the world go where it will go. The P.E Board has cut my tongue out anyway. I have no choice but to be the Pontias Pilate, and wipe my hands this whole sordid mess.

"You can lead a horse to water."

"Good guys never win."

"We're doomed."

"Theoretically."

Slap. Kiss.

Pinch.

Oh

"Speaking of horses," Kase said later. "Did you know the Romans never adapted the leather harness commonly used for oxen to do heavy farm work, to be used for horses?"

"They were more humane back then. Horses were above such work. The only way to make it so, is to not design a harness fit for horses." Nikki said approvingly. "I suppose there are some good things to come from conspiracies."

"Modern man has no such compunction." Kase concluded, "About harnessing horses - or people."

"Can we end on a little better note, please?" Nikki said.

"Sure. The Romans didn't develop steam power either. They knew all about it, but went no further than to make little toy tops that spin around."

"No doubt they figured the world wasn't worthy of steam power yet."

"See," Kase said happily. "There's precedent for what I do. Let everybody just think the Osireion is a toy Temple - or even part of a toy aqueduct."

"I feel better now."

"About that Atlantis of yours," Nikki said coyly. "Wasn't it the Greek philosopher Plato who wrote about the myth, and got everybody excited about it?"

"Yes, that's where the whole feud started. His whole story was a satire - we weren't a land on the water, but destroyed because our precious water was taken from us. Plato was bragging, about how we had been obliterated by his ancestors.

"Wasn't Plato the one who wrote about ants," Nikki said then. "You know, the penultimate hive mind, the baby Borgs; with a queen ant and worker ants and all that.

"Never thought about that. Plato was really, extremely obsessed with ants. Perhaps it too was an allegory, a haughty statement on the inferiority of other humans compared to the chosen people, the hive minded *Greeks*."

"Gonna call it a truce?" Nikki put a finger to his wrist; then a thumb up meant his blood pressure was going up.

"No way. Some archaeologist published a study of the Swastika in 1894 - long before Hitler and the Nazis - and he claimed the Swastika was the symbol of Atlantis. He found them in pottery from ancient cultures all over the world; carved in stones; drawings - you name it. There was also a huge concentration of Swastikas in Troy.

"That kind of throws a wrench in the old machine, doesn't it?"

"I've always wondered how the Jews - the most pacifist people on the face of the Earth for two thousand years - would become such extreme experts at war, once they got Israel. Hell, it took the United States Marines two hundred years to get where they are; Israel did so overnight.

"And this means..."

"Maybe the Jews who went to Israel aren't Jews at all, but Nazis. It would be the perfect disguise. Fast a few months, stamp a number on your arm, and you're good to go." Then genuflecting to Nikki, "With all due respect."

"I may be prejudiced," Nikki followed through. "But growing up on the orthodox Kibbutz as I did, we never much liked everybody else - all the city folk with their politics and their jets, mindlessly attacking Arabs like they were just target practicing. We just wanted to be left alone, to take care of the land and study Torah, play with the kids, and learn. I still hate all this violence that follows us wherever we go.

"I assume most Israeli's aren't like that?"

"Hell no. They're greedy, hateful, abhorrent Jews."

They both laughed. "Semper Fi."

"There's actually a high concentration of UFOs sighted in Israel each year." Kase added. "There's quite a large UFO watching community there, as a result.

"Never saw one myself," Nikki tried to act disinterested.

"Come to think of it, there's a whole group of UFOlogists who believe UFOs were built by the Nazis." Nikki laughed when he said that UFOlogist word.

"That would mesh well with your ideas about celestial mechanics, in the early 1900's, turning away from a whole body of theory. Roswell was only two years after the war - what, in 1947?"

"Maybe the neo Nazis have secret UFO bases in Israel and are plotting to overthrow the world.

"The Secretary of Defense during World War II, Admiral James Forrestal believed the Israelis were a threat. He brought his fears to President Eisenhower, four years after the end of the war. Eisenhower wrote about that time that he believed Forrestal had an "obsessive paranoia about Jews," whom Forrestal referred to as Zionists. A few days later Forrestal was hospitalized for alleged suicidal tendencies. He was dead the next day - evidently they didn't post a suicide watch. Or maybe

the Zionists got to him, and threw him out the window. Jews would care for the infirm; Zionists would murder anybody who was onto them.. I think you can make that distinction, eh?

"Of course," Nikki answered happily. "Jews are observant, law abiding, patriotic individuals. Zionists are rabid Israeli terrorist Nazi fanatics who fly goofy but energy efficient UFOs all around the Earth pretending they are aliens, when they haven't a clue.

"Good girl." Slap. I like it better when you hit me here. Slap Do it again? Slap. You make me want to jump right into bed. I'm right behind. Hurry, before baby Beowulf wakes up. I gave her a little vino earlier. She'll sleep through anything. Yea, and be a drunk when she grows up. No, just a Roman. Hey, why not a Heretic. What's the difference. I see your point. Shut up, already. OK.

XIII. Castellon de la Plana

Safely packed away in a little apartment of a huge apartment building in Benicasim, which was a suburb of Castellon, Nikki spotted a diving platform out half a mile from the beach. Looks deserted. Want to race me there? They screamed out the apartment, knocked on the door of a kind neighbor whom they had befriended; she'd be glad to watch that adorable child for a few hours. Go, the nice lady said - have your fling on the beach. Maybe I can sleep at night, all the racket you make in that bed. In no time at all, Nikki and Kase were lounging on top of the platform; skyclad. The people on the beach were ants in the distance.

What if somebody in an apartment has binoculars. Can you go to jail in Spain for indecent exposure if somebody needs a spy glass to see you. Certainly not in France; probably not here in Spain either. We Europeans aren't as stuck up Baptist ultra conservative anti sexist as you Americans. No one in Europe would even think of such a law, and any legislator who proposed one would be laughed right out of office. We have civil rights you know. Freedom of sex is our eleventh commandment, and it's happened to be posted in every court house in the land - along with the other ten commandments, of course. All right. Enough already.

"What are those little hairs doing right here?" Nikki said distantly, fingering the base of his hard shaft.

"Penis enlargement exercises," Kase said. Then chided, "Don't you go making any jokes about how you wondered if anybody ever answered those spam emails on the web."

"No," Nikki said. "I know how you despise the internet." She asked how he did it. Trade secret. Yank. Tell me, or else. Not on your life. Then her mouth was over it and her teeth threatening. You wouldn't. Don't push it. What would you play with, or pleasure. My resolve is weakening. Who would sex you up, at all hours of the day and night. Her warm mouth was on him then, deep throating. Here, I'll show you. I just lie on my stomach, extend out so toward the legs. Takes a while, but it works. Doesn't it suck up your testicles and make you look like someone on steroids. Not if you stretch the sack. Like so. Ouch. No, grab it with your fist and pull gently. Nice. Now suck too. Slap. I see now why you are hung like a bull. The horns of one too. You mean like the statue of Moses at St. Peters. I always wondered about that. Must be what happens if you're truly celibate. I guess that shows who's what, then.

"How about those giant knockers of yours," Kase said as she was wiping the icing from her lips. "They're too big to be real, but I can't detect a thing; I've felt them every which way." Don't I know that. Trade secret. I like it when you nibble me like that. You think that's a threat. No, but I can do more than torture you with pain; as he mounted her. I can torture you

with pleasure. Kase was riding her, and massaging every corner of her body at the same time. What's your pleasure threshold. Stop. No, keep going. I do it with meditation. Read it in a book. Just go into a deep trance, imagine taking stairs down into your unconscious; then put all your anxieties in a big fancy jar, close the top. Now relax, journey up stairs into your mind, open the control box for estrogen and ratchet up the estrogen level. Hey. I do the first part for stress - the stress goes to the large leg muscles; then I just work it out with exercises. That's no mystery. Women have known about that for millennia. Not fair. Is so. I'll drive you insane. Please try, more pleasure. What's your pleasure tolerance. Infinite. Let's go there.

Hours later, lying steaming in each other's arms, they had some pillow talk.

"You don't approve of breast implants," Nikki said as a fact. Or viagra. I have you. Be honest.

"I think all those drugs and biox therapies and hair growth formulas have the same long term affect as abuse of antibiotics, which eventually makes them ineffective on people. A few generations from now everybody will have big bald heads, and small shapeless bodies with no hair, no genitalia, lipid muscles, and no ears."

"Sounds like an alien to me." Maybe the Nazi's medical experiments at the Death Camps were successful, and they found biochemical cures much like everybody is using now. Tell the Mossad to be on the lookout for a light skinned alien with a little mustache. That'll be Hitler. Don't grab me there. That hurts. I'm not poking fun at you.

"Did you ever wonder how police find criminals in China, when there are a billion suspects and they all look alike?" I suppose that's why they have communism there. Indians - from India - look all alike too, don't they. Hispanics in South America. Blacks in Africa. Arabs. They probably think all us Aryans look alike too. No way, we have too many colors of hair, eyes; facial features, facial hair. Evidently that means we're more law abiding too. How'd you get there? Everybody has a distinctive face, easy to recognize so easily caught for crimes. Women. But you love us, don't you. Always. Can we ride some more. My saddle is sore. I was kidding. Your penile erectile mechanism says otherwise. How do you hide that huge thing in a bathing suit. About as successfully as you hide those jugs of yours. There's an idea, men's bikinis showing a little raw flesh in the groin. Too hard to engineer. One wrong move and the head pops right out. Or the right testicle. Then the left. I often wish that to happen to women's tops, when I see them running on the beach. Trade secret. Silicon. Is not. Glue then. Is not. Semen. They were both laughing so hard Kase felt sure some of his long since healed stitches would tear out.

"I think those round hard breasts all the beauty contestants have are ugly," Kase said with authority. "I think the contests must be sponsored by manufacturers of breast implants," he continued, "and they don't even allow women with real breasts to enter because they make everybody else look horrible." How do they tell - get Howard Stern to come feel all their breasts. No they hire a real expert like me.

"There's nothing more beautiful than a fleshy, vibrant breast held loosely in a delicate bra moving gently and softly as a lady walks." Spoken like a true Frenchman. Perhaps I've underestimated you. You're even confident enough to let the lady on top, spoken as she was astride him. You're the control freak. Am not. What's wrong with liking to show off my 100% natural meditation enhanced pure fat breasts in front of the bulging eyes of the man I love, as she giggled. It feels quite exquisite to do this. No woman with silicon or salt water bags sewn in her chest will ever feel this. She shuddered with pleasure. No wonder they have female viagra now. It's an abomination. They have female hair growth formula too. Bald women, how sad.

"Perhaps you're right," Nikki finally said, falling asleep on top of Kase. "Thousands of worlds of humans were separated when all their Star Gates short circuited. Now some of them have made their way here - tiny, bald, smooth, featureless creatures all brain and eyes; to warn us.

"More likely, to harvest our genes," Kase said ominously. "If they've lost the capacity to reproduce, they'd need to splice human genes into their own."

"That would explain all the abductions," Nikki said. Suddenly Kase was out from under her, and they were into their swim suits; then he was pulling her to a small metal shed on the diving platform. What's this idiocy, I was just getting comfortable. I don't want them to see you, looking all around and scanning the sky for aliens. You're too beautiful. They'll surely want you for a specimen. That's why they took Nefertiti. She laughed, and pulled him too her, their sweaty bodies mingling as one. We're always so close, my love, have no fear. If they beam me up, they get you too. They'll need lessons on lovemaking. I think not, they have only to tune in to the Playboy channel.

Just think of all the free movies and satellite radio they get, up there in orbit. Somebody should sue them for copyright violation. What would they settle with - a free trip to Alpha Centauri. I think they have nothing to offer us that we don't already have. Point taken. We're already in Eden. Is why they want to be here too. Without us, I might add. Don't scare me, you make my sex flow. I see you're hard too. It's very warm in

here, out of the breeze. This heavy swim suit makes me hot. All six square inches of it. I meant more those ugly boxer shorts of yours. Yank. That's better. We have time for some more fun. OK You on top. I want you tired so I can win the swim back to shore. At this rate I think we'll have no energy left at all. We'll have to get a star flight emergency back to shore. It'll make the headline of every newspaper in France - honeymoon couple exhausts themselves on diving platform, must be airlifted to shore. Complete with racy photographs. We'll be famous. Sounds ravishing. I'm more excited now. Stop talking, and be my man of action.

"You wouldn't really take a job testing breasts at a beauty pageant would you," Nikki asked later with mock jealousy, still breathing hard. I'm the expert. No way. It took you months of constant probing to determine if I was natural. I'm still not quite sure. I need to investigate further. Make an appointment with my secretary. Who might that be. The matron in the apartment next to ours in black. She scares me. Scares Beowulf too, is why baby Beo never cries in her care. Saving up for us I think. Probably so. Shall we race to the shore? Ladies first. They were back home in no time.

"Speaking of women in black," Nikki said as they left their neighbor's with baby Beowulf in her arms. "Why do you suppose all the alien allies wear only black.

"Maybe it's cold down here for them, and they wear the black clothes to be warm. Heavy clothing would make them obvious.

"So they're promoting Global Warming via invisible brain waves into all the minds of world leaders, so that when they finally take control Earth will be nice and hot for them.

"Why not just go settle in the Amazon." Or just get fat, and all that extra insulation will make you hot no matter what, Nikki added.

"Not sure. Alien psychology is alien to me.

"If they look like humans, as these Men in Black supposedly do; then they must not be all alien, but hybrids of some kind. Like big breasted chickens they make now days." Nikki muttered something like, I'm sure you buy nothing else.

"Perhaps the hybridization doesn't include the sweat and skin cooling systems humans have. Maybe they're like animals with fur and must pant to cool down.

"So we should be on the look out for men in black who are panting," Nikki inquired. "Kase, look around you - that would include half the men in this town, lusting after all the big breasted birds strutting their stuff on this beach." Besides, she said; try being an attractive woman in this world; every man you see is panting to be in your pants. Present company excluded of course. Because he's already there.

"Then add Baptist to the description. They'll not be caught lusting, not in public at least."

"Surely you jest."

"Surely I don't." Kase added mysteriously. "Better that than observing their crotch for an erectile in function." Nikki said, just leave that part to me. You look for the panting Baptists in Black. I'll look for the panting Men in Black with erectile disfunction. Hopefully viagra is not so widely marketed around here yet. Just follow any suspect for four hours, until the drug wears off. It only lasts for four hours? Nikki asked, dumb founded. I told you chemical replacements weren't half as good as the real thing. I believe you.

"Why aren't we looking for Women in Black too?" Kase asked. Are you kidding. It would be impossible to imitate the billions of emotions a woman has, not to mention the body language. Don't forget the language language, Kase added. Wouldn't breast implants and wigs and birth control pills reduce the possible variations to a manageable level, so women could be safely imitated. Nikki was quite silent. No, Kase ceded; it'll never happen. Too damn many variables. It'd take all the computers in the world working for years, just to simulate a seconds worth of woman.

"I do like a woman in black," Kase said then. See what I mean, Nikki asserted; one track mind. Men are too easy. You haven't figured me out yet though, have you. Actually not, but you're an exception. You sound like that's a bad thing. Only because it's what every other woman craves, and I fear losing you. Yea, right - every woman wants a crazy, impulsive, grandiose, spurious, unpredictable, adrenaline addicted, time traveling, heretical, dissident, sex crazed maniac in their bed every night. Hmm. Likely not. I feel less afraid of losing you now. In fact, you should be happy I put up with you. Slap. Show me you love me. Neanderthal. Why must I always drag you to my cave when I need your lust. Why.

"Maybe Dyanetics is alien psychology," Nikki said, quickly. Then Kase got this sloppy expression on his face, and she just knew a long winded explanation was coming - she wasn't disappointed.

"I stepped on a sea urchin when I was a kid - not too far from here, in fact," Kase began, as they sat on the balcony looking out at the

Mediterranean. "Pop, who grew up on a farm, tried to pull all the spines out of my heel, but it wasn't working too well. So he drove me down to the clinic at the refinery where he worked - down the beach south a few miles in El Grao, the harbor town of Castellon. The doctor there put a salve on the spikes stuck in my foot, sent us home - and sure enough, a few days later all the spines were pushed clean out by the puss of white blood cells.

"And your meaning is?"

"Scientology says everybody has ingrains in their brain, bad memories that crop into the conscious mind and affect behavior. They work to resolve those issues, so the mind is pure and actions are consistent. They try to pull each spike out individually. Psychology just applies a calming salve, and everything just comes out nice, simple, and natural." Nikki asked, how do you know it's not the other way around, but Kase ignored her.

"Perhaps the alien physiology was changed in the hybridization process," Nikki thought out loud. "Our psychology doesn't work on them so well, and they have to resort to more primitive means.

"Who knows? Maybe Dianetics works against the effects of Leviathan dust; psychology just works on regular old human beings. No way to tell." Nikki remarked that psychology was created by Freud a Jew; Dianetics by L. Ron Hubbard a heretic - it still makes more sense for a Jew to create a psychology for fellow Levites; besides Nietzsche's work is far more profound than anything Freud did. Nietzsche treated the whole mind and spirit, Freud just the mind - alien mind, at that. Kase wasn't following her.

"End of discussion, evidently" Nikki said and she left to prepare a bottle for baby Beowulf.

When she returned, Nikki said "So we're back to that dreary War of the Worlds doomsday theme of yours."

"More like War of the Sexes," Kase corrected - and Nikki perked up. *Va vene*. How good. Let's do.

"Take this razor for example," Kase said as he scrambled in Nikki's large accessories case. Hey, that's private stuff, but Kase had already found what he was looking for. "Women have been using triple blade razors for a decade; men are being told only now that this fabulous new breakthrough technology is available."

"Not true," Nikki insisted. Is so. Her hands were on her hips, baby Beowulf having been dramatically transferred into Kase's arms. Baby in one arm, bottle in the other Kase was clearly being

outmaneuvered. How would you know mister know it all. Because I've been using a woman's triple blade razor to shave with for years. Oh. I suppose mister know it all finds the best engineered devices no matter the intended end user. It's what I do.

"So what," Nikki paced around him, taking advantage of her mobility; and Kase's lack there of. "Women deserve the best. We have this complicated hormone system and this thing inside that makes babies and makes us sick, and there are so many more things to go wrong. Why shouldn't we get the best of everything?"

"Your shirts - even simple little T shirts have nice hymns, luxurious stretch fabric, fancy stretch weaves - for the same price men get nothing but thin cotton shirts that shrink down two sizes the first time you wash them."

"You said yourself, Kase baby; that some conspiracies are good." Nikki said, sensing victory was near. "Wouldn't you rather see those svelte fashionable shirts on a shapely female torso, than on some scrawny stoop shoulder male with a fat beer belly and prickly little chest hairs sticking out of the delicate fabrics and showing above the plunging neck line." Her finger was in his face; tell me that, macho man. Kase was duly cowed.

"Can we get back to the War of the Worlds," Kase said, bobbling baby Beowulf in his arms. I'll not cross that Rubicon again, he said to himself. Not if you know what's best for you, as she grabbed the baby back; baring her breast to feed her naturally. Then jutting the other breast toward Kase - bet you want some of that, don't you. Keep insulting me and this - throwing the baby bottle at him - is all you'll ever get.

"As long as we're on the topic of sexuality," Kase said bravely - as if we're ever on any other topic, Nikki thought. "Does it bother you that female sexuality is used to market just about everything in the world - from beer to vacations, pick up trucks to lawn mowers." He paused briefly, to be sure this wasn't upsetting her; then moved on.

"I think female sexuality is being harvested just as ruthlessly by major corporate advertising campaigns as they harvest the wealth of nature, for their greedy profit hungry stock holders. Just like nature is being raped; so too with women. Nature will be exhausted soon; female sexuality will follow suit. How much more competition can you overcome - when men have been programmed to be aroused by powerful trucks with a hemi; ice cold beer dripping with moisture; and on and on. It's no wonder male sex drive is so low; and members of both sexes are becoming homosexual in droves.

"I guess that's why there are no x-rated alien autopsy websites," Nikki added. "I mean, I've never seen any female aliens have you? Their culture started just where we are, and a generation hence their advertising and drugs and cosmetology and customs and cuisine virtually eradicated

the femininity of the fairer sex." Kase remarked how insightful that was; and asked ~ you've been looking for female aliens - no, but I'm sure you have. Am I right. Yes, but not for the reason you say. Pure research. You better watch out or those aliens in low Earth orbit are going to target you to see what keeps that sex drive motors of yours in hyper drive all the time. They wouldn't dare.

"Not to mention the plummeting death rate in your fabulous spiritual homeland of Italy," Nikki said. Whispering in his ear - send your *compadres* over the Alps to get some lessons from we French. Zoom. Up will go the baby count, in no time at all. Swivving her hips in a little dance to the goddess Isis.

Kase collapsed in his chair, his powerful argument totally losing steam. It's hard to critique population control with a baby in the house, and another on the way. This is true - you know it, from my sweat, like before? Nikki was bursting with excitement. No, the doctor did a little x ray at your last checkup; told me you are expecting - a boy, he said. What happy news! A little, lower Kase, and what a demon he will be.

Shall we name him Grendel, after the mysterious beast in the epic tale Beowulf. Perhaps we've gotten the names of our children's mixed up. Not if you think how mysterious and dangerous a man, with all the insights and skills of a woman would be; far, far more so than even I. I see your point. Much as the baby girl Beowulf will have the strength and sheer bravado of a man - understood. I can hardly wait to see how they both grow up to be. They'll rock the world, I am sure of it.

A short while later, they decided to switch the names. It would avoid sexual confusion as they were growing up. They compromised, and gave each the middle name of the other. Who knows, baby girl might like to be called G. Beowulf Clearey when she grows up; hey, what about Grendel B. Gâteaux - no, I like for the boy Beowulf G. Cleary - what's wrong with G. Beowulf Gaeaux. Then they were laughing to tears. They can even change their own names as they grow up. Probably need to, if they alienate as many people as we have between us. We should start to be nicer, so they have a chance to make at least a few friends. Or we can just have many more children - and all the friends any of them need will be their own brothers and sisters. You sound like a *mafioso don* looking ahead to a whole horde of cut throat children - unashamed even, if the daughters are as ruthless as the male child. Have you the least doubt that could not be so? Actually, no. Sounds kind of incestual.

"What's wrong with incest," Kase said then. "I mean, it's not as if boys growing up now aren't subjected to arousal from buxom mothers,

clad in tooth floss thin string bikinis, lustrous gowns, itty titty skirts - there doesn't have to be bodily contact at all, for incest to occur.

"For once I agree," Nikki chimed it. "All your conservative Christian morality majority politician nerds harp about pornography, while they never cease to advertise on the most revealing soap opera prime time television shows. A romantic liason in a dramatic setting with delectate sound and lighting and vixen voice overs, is far more damaging than a still photo of a bare breasted beauty." After all, women are objects of beauty. All the old Masters thought so; proved so, in their paintings. "Every signal children get these days is sex; bare your breasts if you want anybody to do anything for you; smoothe your legs seductively or no man will fall in love with you." Then she said a little Oops. You have connived me into agreeing with you again, Kase. Where did you get such skills - if I didn't love you so much, I would fear you greatly.

"Do you think it better for a man with a problem to browse pornography and maybe watch a steamy movie with his wife, to try and transfer some arousal he feels to her," Kase inquired. "Or have him just pop a viagra, and get it on like a race horse out to stud."

"Good grief, but race horses have more sense than that," Nikki said aghast. "Even the Arabs had a good solution to that one, thinking of Arabian stallions; with their belly dancers and their silk dresses and beads and makeup." Allah, what I would do to have all those belly muscles those women have Nikki whispered. You'd surely drive me into everlasting manic ecstasy if you did. I would for sure try.

"I suppose they became so skilled, being in a harem and needing to attract the lust of their man over all the other beautiful women," Nikki stopped short. Kase was in a reverie, she knew, thinking of all those beauties vying to get into his boxer shorts. Then he kind of just stopped, and she could see the wheels turning; then grinding to a halt. He said something like - Nikki is a harem unto herself, then smiled happily at her. God forbid having to deal with a dozen women in heat; or worse yet still, when they all get to menopause at the same time. You have such a charming way of thinking, Kase. Thank you, *mademoiselle* I try very hard to please you, in every way.

"We're heading down that thin and narrow road that leads straight to the rack," Nikki said pensively a few minutes later. Then, adjusting herself in the chair; my body is sore already, though my soul still lusts. Pray tell, you save me from my desires - can we talk some mathematics for a little while, and you can dazzle me with that beautiful mind of yours.

"What is it you wish to know, kind lady?" Kase said, as he wrenched open the curtains on the patio window, found a black magic marker and prepared to use the double glass doors as his blackboard. Nikki squinted so badly, that Kase turned around; then saw what was wrong, and flicked on the patio light so that any dark writing on the glass would show contrasted to the dark evening sky outside.

"Tell me about this Mars trajectory of yours - the Jump Gate into hyperspace," Nikki said. Then pointing at the wide awake baby Grendel, pantomiming - baby awake, baby has ears. Don't put any ingrams in her brain by insinuating any sexual things. Scouts honor? That's such a silly salute, but I'll take it for now. Then Kase did a balled up fist to the heart salute, and Nikki said that was better. Strength and Honor, all that stuff. Carry on, centurion.

"What you are about to witness is an example of the power of mathematics," Kase began, with a flourish like a magician in Vegas. "Man has dreamed of walking on the moon as long as it has blessed the evening sky. Once we had computers, an infinite number of possible trajectories was tried using computer models, to find the best and fastest way to get to the moon from Earth. Yet, even with all those studies and analyses, it was a worker in celestial mechanics who found the best path - using nothing more than pencil, paper, and the mathematics. I dare say not very complicated mathematics either; just geometry, trigonometry, and a dash of the calculus.

"It was Professor Victor Szebehely who found a solution to the Three Body Problem - two primary bodies like Earth and moon, with a small third body like a spacecraft under their common influence - that showed a simple figure eight shaped orbit, with Earth and moon in the middle of the two loops; an orbit that was faster and more efficient than any other.

"This special orbit was used for the early Apollo missions because when a spacecraft is on that trajectory, if something goes wrong on the far side of the moon and they lose power, then the spacecraft stays on the loop and coasts right back to Earth. That's exactly what happened on Apollo 13, and it's the only reason why that crew survived.

"A similar trajectory exists for the Earth to Mars flight path. This time it's a Three Body Problem with the Sun and Mars inside the loops. Every spacecraft approaching Mars from Earth goes through the intersection of the two loops, called the L2 Lagrange Point. It's the point where the gravity on an object from the two primaries balances exactly.

"I created a computer simulation of the Earth to Mars trajectory that finds this exact point, and that puts the spacecraft on what is called a Free Return Orbit. It's 25% more efficient than any other conventional trajectory. Moreover, a spacecraft on this trajectory has an ideal approach to Mars, slow, careful, and if there is a problem it just loops back around the planet and you can try again. All the dozen or so mission to Mars that have crashed, have been lost right there - on the far side of the planet. If they had been using this special orbit, none of them would have been lost.

"Men would be walking on Mars right now," Nikki said like a cheerleader.

"Exploring all those mysterious straight lines on the surface." Kase added. You mean the H.G. Wells men on the moon ideas, the even Galileo commented on when he first spied the planet in a primitive telescope. The self same ones.

"Why would there be these lines - surely you have a theory," Nikki projected.

"My theoretical work shows Mars to be at an important intersection in the Solar System, kind of a central hub between deep space and several of the planets." Kase continued when Nikki looked kind of mystified. "If you're coming to our Solar System from deep space, the most efficient route is to land on Mars first using an express bus; then transfer to a smaller local route, to go to Earth. You use much less energy than if you try to go straight from deep space to Earth, and it's far more dependable.

"You mean," Nikki added intelligently, "How they use gravity to boost the speed of a spacecraft, like a sling shot; when flying past a planet."

"No," Kase said, impressed. "If you're going at close to light speeds, a gravity assist like that is negligible in its affect on the spacecraft. I'm saying that at very high speeds, Mars is so situated in the gravity field of the Solar System that it acts like brakes." Nikki was completely lost.

"It's easier to think the other way around. There exists a kind of fold in space, an intersection between two gravity regimes between the inner and outer planets. When two such waveforms intersect - like waves approaching a beach - the intersection between them travels much faster. You can catch the wave, and scream right through like a surfer; but in this case you're projected at very high speeds right into deep space - getting beyond the orbit of Pluto in minutes, instead of decades like it has taken the Voyager missions. That's why I call it a Jump Gate, like on Babylon 5 - it accelerates you into space, like the steam catapult on aircraft carriers." Nikki seemed to be following it OK now.

"It all works the same way in reverse. A spacecraft approaching the Solar System on the same trajectory will be swiftly slowed down, all

the same forces working in reverse. There's no other planet in the Solar System with this special property.

"Many comets orbit Jupiter at a focus instead of the sun, don't they?" Nikki asked.

"Yes, there's a family of comets that orbit Jupiter. However, they're slow moving bodies that take generations to complete an orbit. I found something infinitely faster.

Nikki was impressed. Then she got a funny look on her face. "I thought you were going to draw me some nice pictures on the window." Kase drew a smiley face and some silly looking stick figures. No more please. You draw worse than Neanderthals. Oh, but you should see my bison. You have just proved your own hypothesis, that man is de evolving.

"So this Mars trajectory of yours is a needle in a haystack," Nikki asked.

"Actually no." Kase said proudly. "The algorithm I made shows how any conventional flight path to Mars can be modified to use 25% less fuel; or arrive at Mars 30 days faster. It doesn't just work for one special mission, but for any mission.

"Sounds important to me," Nikki said. "So why did they expel you."

"Damned if I've been able to figure that out yet." Nikki mouthed, but you have a theory with a capitol T, spelled out with her hands.

"My best guess is that I labeled the subroutines in my algorithm names that made sense to me, like Hawkeye - a Navy surveillance aircraft like the famous P130 with the radar dome; or Catapult - the steam engine that accelerates jets so they can take off from such a short runway as an aircraft carrier; and so forth." Nikki was confused again.

"They panicked because one of the routines was called Catapult," Kase said. "It wasn't until much later that I developed the theory, about the Jump Gate into deep space. When I was at UT in graduate school, I worked exclusively on the computer model - a very conventional, nuts and bolts project; and if I hadn't named the one subroutine Catapult, I would have had a Ph.D. in celestial mechanics four years ago.

"They thought it meant you were onto the secret of Mars," Nikki said, and a bolt of fear made her shiver unconsciously. "It's true then; they did find all these theories of yours many years ago; they've known about the Mars bus stop transfer point for many years; and when you innocently called one baby subroutine a name that came from your Navy experience; they threw you and the bath water out - and in so doing gave themselves away.

"The White Sands solution - test the waters with a little bo bo. If they react with extreme prejudice, then you know there is a great big secret behind door one." Nikki said wisely.

"What do you suppose my next move is to be," Kase asked his prize student.

"I think you will publish all of these ideas of yours on the web," Nikki said slowly while watching Kase to see if she was on the right track; she was. "You make it hit the fan, and sit back and watch the New World Order implode right before our very eyes." Brilliant, no? You don't have to be arrogant about it. Who's arrogant - I got the damn idea from you. Me. No way. Old female strategy. Hint you know something, and if macho male goes berserk, your suspicions are confirmed. You found me out. Once you publish this they will change all their protocols. It'll be too late. Fortunately women already have an alternate way to test the waters, as you put it. No way. Yes way. Tell me. It's a matter of national defense. Looks more like a matter of personal pride to me. The fate of the world is on your shoulders. So what. The world be damned. You really feel that way. Yes. Me too. You know I'll test you. You will try. I'll tickle you. I'll laugh. I'll pleasure you. I'll come. I'll experiment on you with my super powers of sexual persuasion. I'll fake an orgasm, and still be ready for you. I'll spend the rest of my life, so help me, finding you out. I expect you will. That's the whole point. Women. Men. I know how women keep their cunts tight like new. No way. Sure - they do the PC exercises, like when you hold your pee. Yes, that's right. How did you know that. State secret, on a need to know basis. That's not fair. Oh - baby, crying; and they ran from the room like it was a national emergency.

XIV. Nurillar

Kase and Nikki moved into a villa, vacating the temporary apartment in Benicasim. The villa was near the harbor, called *El Grao*, and in an exclusive private subdivision with its own clubhouse on the beach. One end of the beach was a large rock breakwater that formed the lee side of the harbor (mostly for fishing boats), the other extending clear down to Benicasim along a long gentle arc of dazzling white sand with a border of high grass near the two lane road.

The villa was called Nurillar. It had a high concrete wall all around, a sturdy entrance gate, and a robust security system. It was on a secluded street, surrounded by even more exclusive villas with their own security systems. There was a ritzy condominium complex to the rear, behind a solid wall of thick trees laced with vines and integral to a chain link fence. A large two car garage took up most of the basement, the driveway making a steep dip from ground level, down to the garage level. There was a basketball goal on the side of the house at the bottom of the dip, made out of 1x4's from packing crates used for all their furniture and other household items. They planned to remain at this nice house more or less permanently.

Across the street, on the far side of the condos was an eighteen hole golf course. On a road leading directly inland fifteen minutes away, half way down the road to Castellon, were some clay courts in an exclusive country club. The house faced toward the beach, which was a few blocks away. Although the view of the beach was obscured by houses in between, a cool breeze reached the large front patio and when the surf was up you could even hear the breakers faintly in the distance. There was always a thin film of salt deposit on the patio and seaward facing windows.

The stucco house was a dark shade of turquoise with white trim around the many large windows. The patio on the front of the house was covered by large white and turquoise striped awnings, shading the rounded deck with white and black square tile in a checker board pattern. There was a strong iron railing painted black, and the interior side of the patio had large glass doors leading into the interior.

The ceilings were nine feet, and the large rooms with tan stucco finish gave the place a very spacious, comfortable, Mediterranean feel. The kitchen was at the right rear corner, with a back door opening onto a small utility shed in the back with washer and dryer. The ten foot space between the rear of the house and the back fence had several poles and was strung with clothes line. That whole area was paved, and the black top continued around the opposite corner, then into the driveway with the basketball goal. Two bedrooms were on the back of the house, then at the

front corner was a medium sized sitting room with plenty of sun at all hours of the day.

The yard was small but extremely well kept, by a gardener who came with the villa. Thick saint augustine grass was bordered with neatly trimmed shrubs around the outside walls. A gently curving path cut across part of the lawn, as a walkway from the driveway at the side of the property, to the large front door with stained glass in the upper half and fake antique wall sconces on either side. Five arcing steps up and you were at a small landing, and could either knock on the front door to gain entrance, or just walk through a small metal gate onto the patio itself. There was a large swing on the patio, the kind that is self contained with its own base and sun shade on top. It had thick waterproof cushions covered with expensive textured plastic with the same striped pattern and colors as the large patio awning above, a little faded from the sunlight

Kase shot a gecko lizard with a pearl handled BB pistol, as it crawled along the ceiling of the patio deck. Nikki made him paint over the little blood red tracks the gecko had made as it ran for cover. The neighbors dogs knew a secret opening in the fence, and would chase baby Grendel's kitten to the back door, and it would crawl up on the screen door and howl. Kase liked to throw glasses of water at the kitty, from the kitchen on the other side; especially if he had Beowulf in his arms - who howled even louder than Kase. Apparently the cat didn't much mind either, maybe it liked the cool splash as an antidote to the heat, because it never failed to show up when Kase was cooking breakfast in the kitchen. The neighbors dogs were a German shepherd and an Irish setter, named Rough and Reddy. They were American expatriates, working at the Esso refinery down the road - the same one Kase's Pop had built.

"Question, Nikki - you got a minute?" Kase asked, as they were all crammed into the porch swing the middle of one morning. Nikki said, of course. What am I going to do, ignore you while you're sitting right next to me?

"You're the web expert. I have some strange goings on I want your opinion on," as though he had explain a question. Nikki said, OK already; ask.

"There's a guy who runs four very, very large websites - one exclusively for all Mars news, one for NASA news, and so forth. You would never know from the look of them that they were designed and run by the same person. Am I right to assume a large elaborate website, with current news, updates, blogs, all the bells and whistles is quite a lot of

work?" Nikki answered, more than you could possibly imagine. If it's as elaborate as you say it should take a small army to maintain.

"So, I send a notice to thirty or so large astronomy and space websites, announcing the publication of a very interesting research paper I did on the Mars trajectory, and the strange combination of forces that are associated with the Red Planet. I write a nice cover letter, and add the specific name of each website or owner, as I send the emails out, to personalize them. Just like you would to promote a new book," Nikki was following OK.

"Most of the websites take several days to a week to respond. This guy with the elaborate space websites responds instantly, with a very irate message - stop spamming me, go away; all that. Am I right to wonder - why the angst, when I sent the letter to two different ezines, with two different email addresses, both emails nicely personalized."

"Sounds quite strange, for such a large website to respond so quickly; much less to single you out with a very angry response. I assume you two have crossed swords before - but this time you had published a good paper in a respectable journal, and were justified in sending the PR emails to them." Kase nodded yes. "It seems to me that, having higher esteem from the published paper, he should have considered your email more respectfully; not far worse, I assume, than you were treated before."

"On a scale of one to ten, how strange is this to you as a web event?"

"I'd give it a six," Nikki said. "But I have a feeling you've not told me the whole story."

"I'm just not sure," Kase wobbled. "I'm like a foot soldier told to patrol the streets of Venice, half of which are water. I know how things work on paper, viz submitting proposals to journals, and such - but not on the web." Nikki seemed to like that idea of him being vulnerable.

"I've also noticed, fairly consistently over the last couple of years, that when I tried to promote one website or another to the UFO and scifi community, I'd invariably send out say twenty emails but get only one response - mind you, these involve new websites, new books; not as if I was contacting the same people time and again, over the same material. The time between promotions is from eight months to a year." Nikki said that all seemed reasonable. "The strange thing is that, without exception, I'd send all those emails out - and get only one response. One visitor to the website, recorded on the visitor log. Could spam blockers be just deleting all my emails?"

"Spam blocking has only gotten effective in the last few months. Anything before that would have gone through. I'm assuming that the twenty emails you mention all went through, and weren't returned because of a bad email address." Correct. "And you didn't harvest their emails but

sent them to links at each website," Kase said yes, in fact most of them were sent via input forms on the sites.

"This happened consistently, with many different kinds of websites, which I assume covered the many areas of say X Files type topics - paranormal, UFOs, extraterrestrials, conspiracy theory, and such?" Kase said yes, he had one or more elaborate websites on each topic; fifteen in all, with several versions of each - plus many more strictly technical sites, on the Mars program, and his other theories - and he was very careful, to communicate only with websites he was sure would be interested in his material.

"I'd guess this one response for twenty emails sent happened thirty or forty times, for as many different websites; marketed over the course of several years." Nikki said, then took a moment to think it over.

"That's bad," Nikki said seriously. Kase asked how bad. Nikki said very very bad.

"It seems that many of the websites you emailed, even though they appear to be different, could be run from a single source." Which is getting harder to do now because the standard of website designs is getting harder to maintain.

"That would explain why the universe of say UFO websites is much smaller now than even a couple of years ago," Kase said. "A limited staff can only maintain so many sites effectively."

"Who would want to do that - keep many different sites, on the same subject? What purpose would it serve?" Kase asked, baffled.

"It's counterintelligence - they're spreading disinformation," Nikki thought out loud. "It's what Mossad might do."

"So, in my situation - what's their incentive?"

"Your ideas on UFOlogy are the only sensible ones I've ever heard," Nikki said. "Everything else out there on the web is so bizarre - little grey aliens, grotesque hybrid creatures, protect your brain from alien mind reading machines by lining your hat with aluminum foil, little electric volt meters that measure psychic energy. All that extreme stuff makes everybody think the whole UFO scene is so absurd as to make anybody who follows it seem a real nut case."

"So the government is keeping up all those bizarre websites, to spread disinformation around to keep more people from getting interested?"

"Apparently so," Nikki agreed. After a moment of thought, she asked "Has the quality of these websites been suffering lately - I'm thinking the funding would come from some secret military black project, and the Department of Defense is really strapped paying for the war in Iraq."

"Actually, yes - there are one or two really swift websites now; whereas only two years ago there were fifty or more, first class sites."

"There you go, then." Nikki said proudly. "Piece of cake."

Kase asked, trying to lighten things up, "Who's to say all those websites aren't created and maintained by aliens in orbit, from their spaceships?" Nikki said they couldn't do that because there's too much interference in the atmosphere. Kase said they might have advanced beam technology. Nikki laughed, sorry no enabling schemes. We aren't doing science fiction here.

Baby Grendel had begun to stir from her nap, stomach growling. Nikki buttoned down her blouse, bared a breast and snuggled Grendel into position. Kase watched all this, rubbing his stomach to say he was hungry too. Nikki smiled, shook her head sadly; and said no wonder she hasn't learned to say your name yet - you're competition. Kase acted sad, but perked up when she said maybe later if you're a good boy.

"Another odd thing I've noticed," Kase picked up the thread. "One of the largest UFO websites refused to put my banner ad on their website because it was political." As if everything about UFO's and the government conspiracy isn't political.

"He was quite serious, in this?" Nikki asked. Kase said yes, that the man was eager to link to my 'Texas eX Files' website but refused to have banners that were the least bit political - that particular banner had three themes highlighted; one was labeled 'conspiracy theory' and it had the name Bush spelled with a swastika for the s in Bush.

Nikki mulled it over, then came up with, "I think that confirms your theory - that at least that one website was run by the government - because government entities aren't allowed to be politically slanted in any way." She expected Kase to be happy at this news, but he wasn't.

"Speaking of politics in science, I had a formal paper on my Mars trajectory program published in the AIAA student journal - that's the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, the main professional organization in aerospace engineering - on their website. I contacted people at the University, telling them hey you can't expel me for research that's been published by the AIAA; or at least, using that to support my case against dismissal." Then he paused, expecting some kind of comment from Nikki, but got none.

"A few days later the president of the student AIAA organization emailed me a really nasty letter, saying my paper had been taken off their website because the organization refuses to be party in a political tug of war." I guess somebody at UT pulled some strings, to do that.

Nikki laughed, then quieted. "You're not implying that the AIAA can't be political either; because it too is a government entity?"

"Since 911 all technical papers in orbital mechanics have to be vetted by the AIAA before they can be published, so people don't put sensitive material out there. That's about as close to being part of the government as you can get - although miles away from being actually part and parcel of the government, as that flap I had with the AIAA implies."

"You seem to have issues with all this," Nikki baited him. Kase said, who me? Issues? Who in the world gave you that impression? Then he was back to the CNN announcer tone of voice.

"Right about that time the Chinese got hold of our whole arsenal of missile guidance hardware and software - decades of research; all because of one Chinese American spy at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories, according to the news reports."

Nikki the Mossad ex-agent protested immediately. "Every defense or military organization in the world - especially the Americans - compartmentalizes sensitive information like that, so that no single individual can get a hold of any more than a tiny part of the whole. It's quite impossible for one technician to abscond with everything.

"Well, that's what happened - and everybody accepted it right away, and it was back page news within days. There wasn't even a Congressional investigation.

"Dozens of experts with high security clearance would have to each copy a small piece of the whole jigsaw puzzle, then put it all together, for the whole body of research to have been stolen. There's just no other way possible, the way security is set up." That's what I figured, Kase added. Everybody uses C++ to all their programming these days because it's so well suited for compartmentalization - letting hundreds of people work on the same massive program, independently.

"Well, the Center for Space Research at UT is the second largest space group in the NASA community - and UT's prominence in NASA is so extreme that 75% of the people at JPL, the largest NASA space group, are UT graduates. It wouldn't be too hard for them to lock horns together, to pull that off for their Red Chinese buddies.

Nikki felt a cold shiver run clear down her spine. "It just occurs to me, that George Bush Senior was ambassador to Red China; when Boy George was young - they're both probably secretly communists," then pretending to look side to side with an extreme paranoia as though there were microphones all around them.

"Makes perfectly good sense to me," Kase said nonchalantly. I grew up right here in Spain when it was still a dictatorship under Franco. It was a safe, peaceful place to spend your youth - while everybody back in the states was rioting over civil rights and Viet Nam, and doing drugs. I'm no fascist, but I don't think Boy George has the backbone that I have, to not cave in to powerful influences like that.

"Then there's that huge dissident group in China, the one that uses a swastika for their symbol - but claims to just be a good health, meditation, live well kind of organization." Nikki added. "It would be more in character for the Bush's to be associated with that group."

"I'm getting a little scared," Nikki said. "Husband, can you please change the subject before my milk goes sour?" Kase thought so hard then, deep wrinkles in his forehead; Nikki giggled.

"The Chinese, you know," Kase added. "Obtained our complete nuclear arsenal by the same means - one low level technician, copying everything on a tape when nobody was looking - all the latest weapons designs; the works." Nikki frowned, and said she had asked him politely to change the subject.

"The Chinese put a man in orbit just last year - it took the U.S. forty years to do that; they did it in five. Now they have plans to go to the moon as well. Then build their very own space station." Nikki was getting hot now.

Kase sighed, and then said, "Back to internet issues - your specialty, not mine." Kase acquiesced. "How come one minute I submit my 50 meg web site - all dozen or so sub sites on the sundry 'X Files' topics - and the web logs show three hundred links indexed on google - one for each page. Then only a few weeks later, when I get a domain name of my own; google spiders the site, and only registers one or two pages. Why so?" He was happy to see that Nikki's ire had evaporated, and she was thinking hard.

"Usually web page priority goes up when you get a unique domain name. I assume you had all the right meta tags for indexing, robots.txt file - all that?" Kase said yes of course, nothing changed from A to B except for the root domain name registry.

"Sound like you're on some kind of black list," Nikki said. Did you check out a response for the other large search engines. Sure, Kase said; they all went from hundreds of pages being indexed, to only one or two. Sounds more like a black hole list.

"This is just for your 'Texas eX Files' sites?" Nikki said, trying to be hopeful. No - for all the technical ones too; the Mars research, the theory behind that; my energy conservation textbook site; and my 'Bar X Software' website with all the free construction software I give away with my textbooks from McGraw-Hill. That's not good, Nikki said. I was afraid you'd say that.

"I guess I told you that my energy conservation textbook with McGraw-Hill regularly loses money," Kase said trying to lift her mood. No - why do you think?

"Because contractors and engineers keep buying the book, then returning it and they deduct the return postage from my royalties. My electrical design book does well; but Retrofitting for Energy Conservation is in the red." Which he didn't seem to be surprised about, and Nikki waited for the explanation.

"I had a whole chapter about the Freon Ban in Retrofitting, like we'd talked about. I guess people in the industry are upset because they made an easy \$1 trillion dollars replacing all the old Freon 12 equipment; and there I am saying it was all a total waste of money and implying it was a conspiracy by the construction industry." You don't seem to be doing well even as a technical writer, Nikki said. You better not give up your day job. What day job - why, housesitting. Actually, you're doing well at your day job - keep up the good work.

"I've been banned from most of the public news groups too," Kase confessed. "Even the ones that aren't supervised."

"You're kidding - they're not supposed to filter any messages at all, but welcome all comers." Big Brother is watching, even when they say he's not there. He is. Everywhere.

"Not this comer," Kase said. You can come in on me any time, Nikki smiled crookedly. Kind of you to offer; shall we - later. But of course.

"Then there's the opening chapter in my autobiography Behold Leviathan," Kase started. "Nikki and Kase have a conversation in a posh Austin restaurant where he divulges the biggest top secret of them all," and he was not disappointed, Nikki was all ears. "The doubling principle is over - done, *kaput, fini*."

"You mean that idea that the speed of microprocessors will double every few years," Nikki asked; yes, Kase said. Yes, and the price drop by half at the same time. That part has been gone for quite a while now. The speed part is gone now too.

"Everything we know about transistors is based strictly on statistics - and they've gotten so small now, on the order of only ten atoms thick; that the statistical models are breaking down. Honest. It's quite true."

"From now on speed is accomplished by having parallel processors - same old Intels inside, but just two or three or four of them.

"What's wrong with that," Nikki asked a little less worried.

"The same old Intels cost only a dollar or two to make - new architecture chips, like we've been getting all these years cost hundreds of dollars because you're paying for all the research and development costs, as well as the construction of \$1 billion fabrication facilities for each new type of chip." So they're selling CPU's that cost pennies to make, for hundreds of dollars - what, a ten thousand percent markup.

"It gets worse," Kase added. Nikki said, no it can't possibly get worse.

"The new software to run on the new parallel processing machines - the software that we pay hundreds of dollars to upgrade." Nikki was afraid what he was going to say. "There are computer algorithms that automatically configure single processing software to work with two or more processors - the whole thing is automatic. It doesn't cost software companies a red cent to reconfigure their software to run on the new multi processor machines."

"I guess your novel didn't sell too well."

"You guess right."

"You're probably not too popular in Austin - first UT, and now this computer scam." Don't forget, UT is synonymous with the high tech industry - with Sematech there, etc. To think I used to be popular, when Austin was green and I was doing "BTU Bill's energy tips" radio show each week on KFON. Now Clear Channel is top of the heap, and I'm at the bottom.

"So everything I did," Kase pondered, "Every single problem I've had was because of politics. I just wanted to do engineering, and I did it - well; not realizing how political engineering has become."

But Nikki had put Grendel in his lap, and after running into the house was back on the swing with the laptop PC opened in her lap.

"I think I have your answer," Nikki said after searching google for a few minutes. She showed the screen to him, adjusting it so he could see it OK in the bright light. What am I looking at? It's a list of Executive Orders signed by President Bush on September 14, three days after 911. Looks like a years worth of work, preparing all those legal documents - and the White House did it in two days? Looks to me like they were ready for it - or maybe caused it, just so they could sign these into law. Why do you say that. Because none of these orders have been revoked yet.

(10990) .. take over all modes of transportation and control of highways and seaports

(10995) .. seize and control the communication media

(10997) .. take over all electrical, power, gas, petroleum, fuels, and minerals

(10998) .. take over all food resources and farms

(11000) .. mobilize civilians into work brigades under government supervision
(11001) .. take over all health, education, and welfare functions
(11002) .. designates the Postmaster General to operate a national registration of all persons
(11003) .. take over all airports and aircraft, including commercial aircraft
(11004) .. allows the Housing and Finance Authority to relocate communities, build new housing with public funds, designate areas to be abandoned, and establish new locations for populations.
(11005) .. allows the government to take over railroads, inland waterways, and public storage facilities
(11310) .. grants control to operate penal and correctional institutions
(11921) .. gives the Federal Emergency Preparedness Agency control over the mechanism of production and distribution, of energy sources, wages, salaries, credit, and the flow of money in U.S. financial instructions.

"Bush is a dictator already," Kase said, stunned into complete silence for the first time since Nikki had known him. Nikki grabbed his hand to see if he still had a pulse. Yes, but barely. He was white, she saw. Of course I'm white, they call it Caucasian on the job application forms.

"I've always wondered about the anthrax thing, too" Kase said. "Congress had comprehensive anthrax legislation prepared only days after the first anthrax in the mail scare. Yet, I had an appeal going through my Congressman at that time - and he told me that it would take two months for the document just to get from the House to the Senate, all their mail was so screwed up."

"Sounds like Congress is as dirty as the White House."

"Looks more and more like it was the U.S. government that did 911 - or at least facilitated it," Kase added. By turning off homing beacons, helping to ensure the towers imploded, then diffusing the subsequent investigations by powdering their noses with anthrax. Not to mention making themselves more absolute dictators than Caesar, with this shopping list of Executive Orders.

"Boy, am I glad we're not in America any more," Nikki said. What about the terror bombings in Madrid a few months ago - now the Spanish government is tight with Washington, sharing every shred of intelligence no matter how minor. Like maybe a couple with a small girl and a pregnant mother, moving into the country. Maybe. Spain did withdraw all their troops from Iraq - maybe they're not so tight with Washington. The only commitment they had was a hospital ship specializing in the treatment of nuclear chemical biological warfare victims. Oh. No such

threat exists any more, so they aren't needed - but they make it all seem like a protest to the war on Iraq; when in fact, it implies they're stauncher allies of Washington than ever. That's not good. Relax. We'll be OK for a while.

"Politics," Kase said after the longest silence. It all comes down to politics. They're all just Keystone Cops running around like chickens with their heads cut off, spending money by the boatload, and getting absolutely nowhere. Nikki said that summed it up well. So what are you worried about, princess?

"I see now why you were working so hard on the Mars trajectory," Nikki said later as they were having a pleasant dinner in the sun room. How so? "Because that's the only place where we'll ever be safe," with a laugh.

"We could always move to Hollywood," Kase said. "They like strange people there - probably welcome us with open arms." Too expensive. Let's wait until California secedes so they won't be so much influenced by the U.S. OK, either that or Arnold becomes president. It's a bet. What if Jeb Bush gets elected President. We go to Mars, ASAP. You better get to work on that trajectory of yours. Can you get us to Mars from the pad in your property in East Texas. Only way, given our budget. What budget. Vatican credit line. Isn't that a sin, ripping off the Church. Not if we're successful, and the first flag to fly on Mars is the SPQR flag. Sounds like fun. Let's do it.

"You know the funny thing about the Red Chinese getting all our missile guidance technology?" Kase asked later, "It's that the extreme security initiated since then keeps anybody else from benefitting from it - not even the European or Japanese Space Agencies; nobody but the Chinese."

"So not only do they have all the best missile technology," Nikki asked, "They have permanent and sustainable lead in the space race." All those U.S. tax dollars spent on security aren't helping us a bit any more - their only purpose is to keep the Red Chinese in the lead. Along with their North Korean buddies, of course." Kase laughed.

"You think that's funny?"

"Well, ironic. How global politics is so fucked up that security in America is doing nothing for us, but everything for the Evil Empire."

"That's not politics. That's treason." Kase said, not unless you can convince Congress of that subtle distinction. Fat chance. More like anybody who contests their power is doing treason.

"I see now why you don't even want to publish your research any more. It won't even go to benefit humanity, but to only lengthen the already long shadow of Red China over the free world."

"It's like medical researchers, after spending billions of dollars and whole lifetimes searching for a cure for AIDS, find a way to put it in remission with a cocktail of powerful but extremely expensive medicines. Only to then witness a massive trend of gays, back to their old multiple partners every night at the club; hundreds each year - because their fear of AIDS is over.

"That's probably why the U.S. health care system is going bankrupt, paying for AIDS treatment." Not to mention the UK health care system, and that of Canada and every other western nation. *Greeks*.

"Like I was saying, the same general idea goes for my mental health theories." Kase started again, "They won't be used to help people with mental illness," Nikki finished for him, "But by the corporations to get a deeper hook into our minds and souls, to sell us more things that we don't need."

"Same thing with the Church," Kase said. "Religion is a threat to corporate power." Nikki continued again, "Religion gives people the idea they have rights." That's contrarian to profits. I suppose God really is dead. Seems so.

"People don't go to church any more for personal enrichment or spiritual health, Nikki. They go for networking." It's where the elite gather to plot the subjugation of the masses. Christians are behaving just like Jews now. Of course, they had a good teacher. Well, the disciples put the right words in their teacher's mouth. I suppose it's no use waiting for Jesus. No. If he were to come back it would only reinforce the hold of the Church on the world; enhance the already insurmountable power of Big Business; and generally make the status quo so much more powerful than it already is, that it would truly be the End of Days. Better a few millennia of twilight than a million years of darkness.

"About that crucifixion theory of yours," Nikki said later. Kase had her pinned beneath him, and Nikki spread her arms wide, crossed her legs under him. "I figure if you're convinced it's valid, you must have some science behind it."

"Sure," Kase said as he thrust into her. "That's the L3 point." He punched her outie belly button, "L2." Then kissed her breasts, "the L4 point and L5 are here; then L1" - a big smooch on the mouth. "The ones along a straight line - L1, L2, and L3 are the unstable points in the Three Body Problem. They form the basis for all modern psychology. Here; and

here, the breasts" - the L4 and L5 points - " are the stable equilibrium points, which are totally ignored by modern psychology. You say sex is therapy. Vigorous sex. You must be in good physical condition for that. My point exactly. Now why didn't they teach that in our sex education class at convent. But Kase was busily inspecting her equilibrium points.

"These beautiful aureole's," tickling her teats; are called halo orbits - stable orbits around Lagrange points." So it was a Frenchman who found this theory, Nikki said. I'm so very proud. But what's wrong with modern psychology - I miss the point. Why, I thought it would be obvious ~ modern psychology doesn't use exercise as part of the cure. Action speaks louder than words. Your words are more powerful than most men's actions, if you get my meaning.

"Pharmaceutical companies. They abhor non chemical cures like psychotherapy." It's now as it was then, when Jesus was around.

"It won't be long before Baptists ban psychotherapy the way they ban meditation now, as the work of the devil.

"Baptists are funded by big business. Their policies are influenced by those businesses. It's always been so, now more than ever.

"Business isn't just raping nature; or harvesting sexuality to sell; its mining the depths of the human psyche, wrecking the very soul of man - for filthy lucre.

"However much sense you make," Nikki said sadly. "Your science may be sound and your logic pure," Kase continued for her. "But the masses believe their religious leaders, as the epitome of authority. They're incapable of independent thinking any more, Nikki countered. They can't withstand the stress of being different, so comprehensive and all inclusive is peer pressure of every kind. What the Baptists - or Roman Catholics or Jews - say, spouting the words of their Big Business sponsors and fund raisers - is the truth. It's not God who is dead, but science. Science is politics, therefore it cannot be science any more. Politics is business, therefore it cannot be politics - therefore it must be?"

"Conspiracy."

"What are those L points you were talking about," Nikki asked as she gyrated on his shaft.

"They are special points on the Three Body Problem. There's a 3BP on the subatomic level, as well as on the astronomical level. The transistor junction can be modeled as a 3BP, as well as human physiology. Likewise for the human psyche.

"You'll tell me more about this some time," Nikki says. It sounds interesting. I thought you were allergic to mathematics. You've apparently

inoculated me against the malady. Does it feel good. Kind of. It's like being independent. There's no politics possible in mathematics. If something doesn't work, it doesn't work; and no amount of convoluted logic will make it so. Now you see why I like celestial mechanics so much. But celestial mechanics is gone, doomed. Not so long as I'm around it's not. You're too brave for your own good. You're what make it possible for me. I'm glad. Can we stop talking and get down to business?

They were out walking on the beach, later that evening after baby Grendel was sleeping and a sitter was looking after her in the house. They stopped, and Kase drew some things in the sand. This is the Three Body Problem, he told her.

"Imagine the two large primaries are the Sun and Jupiter. Draw this line between them, and think of Jupiter as rotating around the Sun at a constant rate. If you fix Jupiter at this point, and consider the whole thing as rotating with Jupiter always remaining on the x-axis, then there are two special points at the apex of two equilateral triangles, the stable L4 and L5 points. In this case, there are groups of asteroids orbiting each point - the Apollo and Trojan asteroid groups.

Nikki said you have a dirty mind. Kase said not as bad as yours. She said yes, because she just thought they should have a brand of rubbers named Apollo. Kase said you mean like the huge rockets used in the early space effort. Nikki said, even mathematics with you gets sex'd up. Makes it more interesting, doesn't it? Certainly.

"Now we can look at all the Lagrange Points," and he drew some more figures in the sand. First you have the two big bodies, in a rotating coordinate system. Next, the figure eight loop I told you about - a stable orbit around the two primaries like they used for the Apollo 13 mission. The center of the figure eight is where the gravity force from the two big bodies is equal, in opposite directions. It's the L2 point. The L1 and L3 points are as indicated - they form a straight line and are called the colinear points, and are unstable. The L4 and L5 are stable points, sometimes called the equilateral points.

Nikki was looking skeptical. Kase said there is a large theory of mathematics supporting all of this. Nikki said, I have no doubt about that - it's the sexual part I suspect you of. Then Kase ran down the beach to a fresh patch of smooth sand, and drew a very elaborate figure. No doubt

you recall your physiology from nun's school. Actually, from my romance novels and my extracurricular studies. Either way, please continue.

"This is what the whole Three Body Problem looks like. Each closed loop is a stable orbit for the third body, which is very very small compared to the other two. These are called zero velocity curves, lines of constant energy. An orbiting spacecraft cannot cross any line unless it's given a thrust from its engines. You can see all the stable points, the figure eight shaped free return orbit, small orbits around the primaries, larger orbits around everything, and odd shaped orbits around the stable points L4 and L5. Now we can start labeling things, and soon the whole male and female sexual systems were labeled in the sand. Many were labeled by Nikki. How did you know all that stuff, Kase asked. Oh, no reason. Tell me. I'm a woman, we have symptoms of all these things; sooner or later, you learn all the names. Every woman does. Not. Well, perhaps only sensually deprived emotional French nuns in convent reading sexually explicit literature under the covers at bed each night by the light of a flashlight with dim batteries.

"So human's are the embodiment of the Three Body Problem." Well, some bodies more than others. Be serious, as she unfurled their towel and wrapped it around her shoulders - and her décolletage. But I was just going to show you how it worked, Kase protested. I was expecting that. This is a public beach. There are children. Keep going ~ or no *leche* tonight for bad *PaPa*.

"How does your crucifixion angst theory fit into all of this," Nikki asked. I'll have to assign that to your for homework, Kase said impudently. Nikki's eyebrows shot up. In that case, I think it's time to get right back to the villa so I can start working on my homework. Then she grabbed Kase by the swimming trunks and dragged him off the beach. A small crowd of beach goers had gathered around the diagram, by the time they were out of the club house and walking back home on the asphalt road. I wanted to swim. Me too. Why can't we just go play in the surf. Homework. Difficult problem. We'll get all sweaty. Is part of solution. Oh. We can come back and swim after. When it's dark. Skinny dip. Better.

"The whole purpose of religion has always been to strengthen the backbone of the poor people, so they can stand up for their rights against the powerful," Nikki said as they walked back to their villa, hand in hand. "Now you are saying that the Church is controlled by these powerful groups?"

"How else to render consumers infinitely susceptible to their advertising?" I see your point. The poor people have lost.

"The only way the poor can assert their rights now is by violence," and they both agreed.

"I see clearly now," Nikki said at last, "Why the government would orchestrate 911."

"It's quite obvious, in retrospect isn't it?" Kase asked.

"Very much so." So much so in fact, that I think nobody will be mad at you anymore. If you champion the little people, they will protect you. Or at least admire you, after you are martyred. Figuratively speaking, of course. You wouldn't. Not until baby Grendel's nanny is gone, of course not. Then you will be in my domain - the bedroom - and I shall ravage you badly. Where's the little people when you need them. Why, it's obvious - at home having fun, like us.

XV. El Grao

It was on walks down the beach that Nikki and Kase felt the most comfortable. Strange, isn't it ~ but psychologists have known that for years; paranoid people feel best not hiding all alone in some dark place, but out in the bright open air with many people mulling around. The beach was all that much better, because the wide open expanse of the ocean invites introspection, while the gentle breaking of the waves brings the patient into a hypnotic trance. But suddenly big breasted babe breaks the whole wonderful trance.

"Let's play a game," Nikki said cheerfully, skipping down the beach at the edge of the surf. Kase walked a little faster to keep up with her. "How about we come up with all the possible reasons why things in the world, especially politics, are the way they are right now." Kase was contemplating that idea when she said, "You first."

"Stupid citizens," Kase said. "If people followed current events better or had the horsepower to understand things, the *politicos* would have had to do something about it long ago.

"Why not stupid politicians," Nikki countered. "Even if the citizens don't have high wattage brains, their representatives sure are dim.

"People are still stupid," Kase interrupted. "What idiot votes for the person with more signs on the street corners, or more vapid adds on TV." That's called name recognition. Then Saddam Hussein would win an election for head of the UN. Nobody would put his sign on their lawn. The terrorists would. Maybe we could find all the terrorists that way.

"Politicians are too unassertive," Kase picked up the theme. "If they're inflexible on any given issue they're guaranteed to offend at least half the voters, so they're always wishy washy on every issue. By law, then nothing ever needs to get done."

"Voter's aren't all that demanding either," Nikki started back up. "A handsome face, and a full head of hair is all it takes to get elected. Even more so if you're single and eligible, or seem to be so." Kase said they teach that in Journalism 101 - have an older man with a perky younger woman anchoring the news desk, and everybody assumes they're playing around behind the set. You mean like us. Of course not, because we really are fooling around. That wouldn't get people's attention at all - flirting on prime time, are you kidding? It would be a tremendous hit in France. You don't have as many Baptists in France. I'm glad for that. Me too.

"We can blame it on the Baby Boom generation," Nikki said cleverly. "They've been spending more money than they earn all their working lives; now that they're a few years from retirement they're panicking - forcing absolute control over all economic principles, driving

the market up ruthlessly." Like what happened with the tech boom. Then the real estate boom. You might have a point there.

"Maybe it's just due to so many women in the work force," Kase said. "I've been reading that economists no longer have the slightest idea how to model the economy. Nothing works at all, not even the most sophisticated computer models on the most powerful machines." Good for women, Nikki said. The more unpredictable the better. All the more reason to stultify female sexuality - so their economic models work, and the rich can get richer, faster.

"Maybe the internet is a great big Artificial Intelligence, driving us and our puny brains to extinction." Nikki suggested. "That would explain all the strange things you experienced on the web, with search engines and news groups." No one would ever notice, everybody is so busy and so deluged with information. You don't suppose AI creates all those viruses do you - and the spams - kind of like an adolescent vengeance on its creators.

"The UFO people say the world is being controlled by the Majestic 12," Kase said somberly. "You know, the group that evolved out of the OPC formed by the Dulles brothers and Admiral Forrestal back in 1948. By now they're from all the major industrial nations, and they orchestrate things to facilitate the alien take over." Or maybe they're the G7 economic group - they never accomplish anything at all. Nikki was silent after that one. Your turn, Kase said. Shut up, I'm thinking. Kase was watching an imaginary watch on his wrist, and saying fifteen seconds before the Man in Black wins.

"The Nazis," Nikki said. "They lost World War II on purpose, knowing that the United States was already under the control of their big business supporters; and it was only a matter of time before they could overcome the whole world from a power base like that." Fuhrer Bush. Hiel to the Chief. I hope the Secret Service isn't around. Could you get in trouble for threatening the President even if you're in another nation. Who says we're in another nation. The New World Order happened years ago, we're just experiencing the fallout now.

"OPEC owns most of everything these days," Kase said. "They earn more than the whole annual Gross Domestic Product of the United States, every month. They're asserting their influence on the media to make the whole world one great big Islamic theocracy." I think you just won the Daily Double, Kase. That's the best one yet. Also the most scary one.

"Perhaps it's all just Divine providence," Nikki said meekly. "God is not happy with how we have evolved, so he's letting us destroy ourselves so he can start over again." Probably happened many times before. Millions of times, on thousands of planets. Hasn't succeeded yet.

God sure is patient. Maybe just unassertive. Or stupid. Why not female. That would explain many things right there. On your knees. Mercy, my Goddess. Beg for my favors.

"Could be scientists are just lazy and stupid," Kase said. "They've had it easy for the last forty years with the power of computers, making it super easy to create new technologies based on statistical models. They don't even know how to formulate new fundamental theories any more." How does that make what we have now? Science is dead. No new technologies, growth slows; world slides into depression. Extreme specialization does the same thing.

"Every body is locked into a mind set," Nikki said pensively. "Every new idea in the social sciences offends somebody - you can't even say the devil is evil without offending Satanists." Kase said you lost me on that one. "Freedom of speech is important for generating new ideas. Social theories go through many stages - some of them extreme and maybe bigoted - but end up being sublime and important. If you make it impossible for them to pass through the intermediate stages, they never mature." I see now why freedom was born in France. But of course, with we Abigensians.

"You know," Nikki said after neither could come up with any new ideas for a while, "Everything we said is true. Everything reinforces mediocrity. If science really is at an end, then the only way businesses can make profits is by virtue of a totalitarian regime." Most businesses are dictatorships anyway. People are accustomed to being lead around by the nose. Speak for yourself. We're a co-regency, although when baby Grendel is awake, she is absolute ruler. We're weak and submissive, but at least we realize that. We accept it, knowing it is not permanent. Same thing happens throughout nature. Yes, it's natural.

"Freedom is not a natural state of human beings," Kase said with conviction.

"We Abigensians learned that bitter lesson almost a millennia ago, when we tried to be free in the south of France." They not only defeated us in a civil war, but hunted the few survivors down like dogs and exterminated us, with the Inquisition.

"More or less what happened to the Neanderthals," Kase said furtively. But they were gorillas, primitive. Not so. They had quite exquisite jewelry and artwork. They just weren't as aggressive as Cro Magnon, and were wiped out. My theory is that the monster Grendel in the epic poem Beowulf was the last Neanderthal. You mean we named our baby girl after a monster? I though you knew that story. No wonder people always step back when we tell them her name. I think that's

because we're too damned happy when we introduce her, it makes them surprised. Not many people know the story of Beowulf, fewer would connect it to the name. I mean it's not like we named her Job. I read once that no Jewish child has ever been named Job, who is big in the Torah; and one of only three people who ever spoke directly with God. I guess that means they don't believe in God after all; just in themselves as the Chosen People.

"What happens when things start going down the drain," Nikki pondered. "Do the Chosen People take the blame?" Or big business, Kase added. Or the Church. Or scientists. Or industry. Poor politicians, they take all the blame even then. You'd think they would realize that, and step up to the plate now before it's too late. Then they would get no more soft money from Big Business. Better to go out a martyr while you're still ahead, like Jesus did. Our Joan of Arc did the same thing, Nikki said proudly. She was Albigenian? But how could you possibly think otherwise, *mon ami*.

"So, what's the plan?" Nikki asked.

"If science produces no new breakthrough technologies, then corporations are forced to spread prosperity into the world to make their profits. Prosperity reduces population growth, and makes things more sustainable. If new theories of psychology aren't found, to make advertising more effective, then industry has to sell their products by just making better products. That shifts the emphasis from basic sciences to engineering, as the well spring of innovation for dominance in any given industry.

"If your theories were to reach the light of day, and spawn a whole new tech boom; then all these problems would never be faced, until it's too late. So you hold onto the research, and wait patiently like Job until the population stabilizes and nature repairs itself; then test the waters." Kase said, that about sums it up.

"You're playing God."

"Yes." They'll probably accuse me of crimes against humanity if they find out I had all this theory developed and didn't publish. You have twenty years to build your case. Besides, if you keep working on your theories, by the time they bring charges against you what you have to offer will be more than worth the wait.

"Aren't you worried about Red China, and their billion citizens?"

"They're no match for the combined corporate power of Japan and the United States - the same old Axis, under a new anti-communist guise. Both countries are driven by the Baby Boomers to maximize profits over the next ten to fifteen years; and as peace spreads in the world, government leadership will streamline the industrialization of Third World nations. It won't be long before the level of education, medical care, and standard of living is consistently high all around the world.

"Wouldn't your theories and their technology expedite this process?"

"I think it would happen like it's happening in China now, where all their resources are going toward a lead in the space race. If space is less of a race, then they'll devote those resources where they are most needed - to improve the quality of life of all Chinese citizens, and to reduce population to sustainable levels.

"My theories would drive everybody crazy in a new space race, and they'd neglect everything else. It's better for them to think space is closed, just like Relativity says; and to focus on making Earth a livable place now before it's too late. There are tens of thousands of scientists needing to get published to keep their jobs; it's better they work on finding solutions to problems on Earth, than problems in space. There will be plenty of time for that, later.

"So long as you can live with that decision, it's OK by me."

"There is a beautiful aqueduct in the south of Gaul," Nikki asked later in the evening. "Called the *Pont du Garde*." Kase perked up. "You are familiar with it?" But of course, she answered her one question - it was the crowning achievement of the old Praetorian Guard.

"The Romans used to keep their soldiers occupied, during the *Pax Romana*, building roads and aqueducts. The roads, many of which are still in use to this day - most notably the *Appian Way* in Rome - were constructed more carefully than any modern road. They were dug ten feet deep, lined with gravel, then stone, then more gravel, and surfaced with stone. When no more roads could be built, they made aqueducts to bring fresh water into all the larger cities they occupied. There are records of some Centurions writing the Emperor of Rome, begging him to appoint a new magistrate for their region to replace the existing one, who is working the soldiers to death." Nikki laughed at that one.

"The famous *Ponte du Garde* aqueduct is one of the most famous because it is so extremely well preserved - three massive rows of elegant columns crossing a deep valley. There is no mortar between any of the stone joints, and half of the arches on one of the lower rows were

removed during the Dark Ages, to make a vehicular crossing of the river using the aqueduct. You look how that ruined the whole structural symmetry of the aqueduct, even with modern engineering science, and there is no possible way it could not have collapsed."

"I've been there," Nikki said. "*Es magnifique*. I have walked that very passage you mention. You look up and fear the whole thing will collapse at any moment. Yet, it has remained so for a thousand years.

"The Romans invented concrete, you know." Kase said proudly. "They didn't use iron bars to reinforce concrete the way we do in the modern day, but accomplished remarkable things. There is a round building in Rome, the Temple to Jupiter, with a large round hole in the middle of the roof. It was the largest arched building in the whole world until only fifty years ago. Even still, no one understands how it was built or why it does not collapse."

"You'd think they were copying the Great Red Spot on Jupiter, if not for the fact that telescopes had not yet been invented - glass lenses, yes; because Archimedes used them to burn ships in defense of his beloved Syracuse. There's a funny story, about Archimedes when the Romans finally took the city. Surrounded by enemy soldiers, all he said was, 'Get out of light, I can't see what I'm doing; I have work to do.' It's he who also said, 'Give me a place to stand and I'll move the world,' meaning a place to put a fulcrum for leverage." The patron saint of engineers everywhere, Nikki added.

"I see why you're in awe of the Romans and their skill with stone." Nikki said. "Also I understand why you might think them a much older civilization than they seem, with engineering skills so advanced - even by modern standards."

"Most of their efforts - the aqueducts and roads - were in Gaul, modern day France. I'm sure they would be proud that you have turned out to be such a civilized and cultured nation."

They were both silent for a while, having just exchanged compliments in a very civilized fashion. Fortunately baby Grendel started howling, and their much more natural state of chaos returned with a vengeance.

XVI. Washington D.C.

"Well, how was it?" she inquired.

"Oh, just another day at the office," Clearey said nonchalantly.

"Oh Good!" Nikki said with a sigh of relief. "No more fire works then? Oh, I'm so happy for you! Did you get your way? "

"Oh," Kase replied, "You know how it is - getting there is half the fun!"

They were having a pleasant, intimate dinner in a quiet corner of the café. The table linen, Kase observed a little self-consciously, was crisp and starched, silverware was shiny, and the dinnerware china exquisite. Just outside the window was a small garden with those miniature Japanese Belushi trees. Yes, it was a special evening for them both.

Then Kase noticed, from the corner of his eye, three uniformed men approaching. Like a *Tsunami* out of season, they looked very awkward in the ritzy joint. Then he started, as they came into focus. Dammit, uniforms. Brother not again! They came up quickly. Noticing the abrupt change in Kase's expression, Nikki turned to follow his eyes.

"Federal Marshals," one of them said and presented them with a warrant with less courtesy than the Ancient Mariner feeding the hungry Albatross. "We have orders to take Mr. O'Clearey into custody," motioning toward Kase with a crook of his neck.

"Sorry, mate," Clearey replied in his most swank Australian, shaking his head, eyes remaining locked on Nikki's.

"Nope, been there, done that," Kase reiterated to the stoic doldrums expression in the policeman's face. Totally ignored them, then; Kase turned and pressed onward with his romance. The officers didn't move. Pouting almost, they made little squirrel sounds and pawed at the ground like a cat looking for a clean spot in the litter box.

"Sorry, I'm not interested!" Kase said to them out of the corner of his mouth. "Can't you take a hint?" Acting put out himself, now.

"Come with us please, Sir" as they tried to hoist Clearey out of his chair.

"You heard the gentleman," Nikki chimed in. "We're not interested - bug off!"

"I beg your pardon, have you no manners?" Clearey said, the perfect English butler scandalized by their frontier Texas manners.

"You could please apologize to the lady!" Clearey said, wringing his arms from out of the grips of the musclemen. By this time, Nikki was giggling, at the insane brashness of her dinner companion.

It brought Clearey's heart joy to see the sparkle in her beauteous eyes. "If this is it, then prison will be worth every second of it," he said with

a Groucho Marx cigar twist of bread between two fingers, and she laughed a little bit more. Then the thugs tightened their grip, and his attention left her. They were strong and wanted him to know it. Clearey expected a pistol butt to the back of the head at any time.

Nikki put her wineglass down then, sobering up a little after their laugh. Very carefully she took a napkin and dabbed a speck of food from her lips. Then she reached down at her side to grab her purse, the model of domestic acquiescence. Standing, she pushed the chair aside and left to the powder room.

She was walking over to the U.S. Marshals, now; Kase saw curiously through the pain. One of them saw her approaching and said something rude.

"Fuck you," was the unexpected statement - from Nikki! "And you're whole kind!" Then to Clearey's great amazement she brandished a badge and spoke with a bitterness worthy of Job himself.

"FBI - butt out, boys." Nevertheless, they continued to pry Clearey out of his chair. Kase could be heard murmuring to himself, "Well, shit-fuck-hell-god-DAMN, if this don't beat all."

"This man is under house arrest on the authority of the espionage act!" the Marshal shouted at Nikki. Then with a sneer, "Sorry, You got no jurisdiction here. This is Washington D.C.," enunciating the last two letters like a Writ of Habeas Corpus. Then, while two of them were holding Clearey a third got a good wind up and punched him square in the stomach. Clearey recovered then gave him a good spit in the face. The officer reeled back, and motioned the third thug to take his turn while he cleaned the muck from his face.

They still ignored Nikki; until now. One of them turned and said something like "Yea, bitch; just you try and stop us." She rolled her head and said to Kase, prone on the carpeted floor as they tried to handcuff him "Bitch you want? Bitch you get." If Kase had been a dog he would have buried his head and covered his ears with his paws, her tone was so strong. "Render unto Caesar, ... "

Dropping her badge as if to say, so much for this tin horn, she said toward Kase's direction, "When are these macho pricks going to learn, anything?" only to have one of the Marshals grab her purse away. Kase could see she was getting angry now; he cringed at the thought. They went as if to grab her wrists and she gave the fellow a move that would have flattened Godzilla. The second one tried to follow suit, and he was down on the floor, even faster. Neither one moved a joint after that; for quite some time, Kase noticed.

The third Marshall had pulled his weapon by this time and looked very anxious to fire. He was backing warily away from what was a long reach of her dangerous limbs. "Can't you see you're outgunned, big boy?"

she taunted him as she followed his retreat, with not a thing in her hands, or a weapon in sight.

Clearey was getting up off the floor and trying to catch his breath. Looking to the side he noticed a couple of suits in the background; FBI, they flashed their badges. Odd, he thought, they don't come help the little lady; more egotistical Cro Magnons, it seems. Must be from Texas. He started feeling a little desperate then, and hoisted some more, trying his best to come to his wife's aid. Unfortunately, the knees wouldn't cooperate. They buckled. Kase could only watch helplessly, all crumpled up on the floor.

Nikki swiftly grabbed a wineglass. She dashed the wine in the Marshall's face in a blur of impossible swiftness. A few painful crunches and a little shrill sound from Nikki, and now the number one Marshal was down too. Clearey, hunched as he was regaining his footing and equilibrium, blinked dramatically a few times.

Then looked at her, and gave a "V" made with his fingers, plus a great big wink for effect.

Nikki supposed that was high praise from him. Oh, well, I'll settle for that, she thought.

They spent a couple of minutes then, both still standing, each tidying up their clothes. Clearey delicately arranged in his shirt with an Annapolis tuck, then straightened his tie. Nikki snapped open a cosmetics thing-O, and deftly applied a little dab of powder to obscure a speckle of sweat on her brow.

Clearey went up to her, asked if his tie was straight; she yanked it a little, then he grabbed the excuse to kiss her square on the lips. She acted outraged and slapped him lightly with a glove. He smiled, wiping the lipstick off his mouth with the back of his white shirtsleeve. The back-up FBI agents were dragging the Marshals out of the vicinity, by now; then, remarkably, themselves faded into the surroundings like chameleons.

"Bloody cowards," he called after them, brandishing a fork high in the air. Nikki giggled at the ridiculous sight, but felt a little better anyway.

Kase gently grasped her elbow, then; and lead Nikki to her chair. Pulling it out for her, she settles her in. Grasping her gloved hand gently, he gives her wrist a gallant kiss just above a leather wrist band, then goes back to his own seat.

"Waiter," he yelled overly loud before he sits down. "Another bottle of wine ~ if you please," like Hagar the Horrible in a foreign land. The waiter arrived with the chilled wine before he had even sat down. "Damn Spankey service, these FBI types." Nikki smiled, and all was well between them.

Leaning over the table, he said, "Well, where were we, beautiful lady?"

"Oh, just another day at the office, I suppose," she responded with a most endearing blush.

Grasping a book of matches she struck a light and lit the candles on the table. The room lights faded a little and the candles became more prominent. "Now that's a darn good trick, love," he said, motioning with his eyes and eyebrows the special effects. Nikki hunched her shoulders as if to say, what'd you expect - the pit and the pendulum?

"You have cute ears," Clearey said a little later, disarmingly.

"Oh, my," Nikki said abruptly. The words bubbled forth, hands cupped her mouth in a whisper and she said, "You give my ears a little TLC and I'm putty in your arms."

"Ha," Clearey replied, leaning forward and obviously conjuring bad things in his fertile male mind. "Super agent Nikki, in the throes of ecstasy succumbing to dissident Kase in big bouncy bed."

"No way, Mister," she replied boldly. "You think I move fast in this short skirt and high heels - sans clothes you be dead."

"Oh, but what a way to go!" and leaned back in his chair, elbows outstretched and hands clasped on his neck, to unselfconsciously savor the thought.

Nikki bundled up her napkin and threw it at his face. He almost tumbled over backward in the fragile chair. Arms flailing and legs splayed, Kase most ungracefully caught himself and bounced back forward.

Then he pushed off from the table, slapped his hands on his legs and just plain laughed, deep and long, tears streaming down his cheeks. Nikki watched a little amazed at first, grabbed another napkin and tossed it his way, then joined in too with a hearty cheer of her own.

"You know what, Nikki?" Kase said, gasping for air, "My ears are the same way." They both leaned forward, holding their chests to contain the most uncouth uproarious laughter.

"Yea, like that little big eared fellow on Deep Space Nine," Nikki said between heaves. "Quark, quark - what's a duck yell when its having an orgasm?" She lost it completely.

Then Kase sucked in a deep breath, leaned forward and said very seriously, "You aren't a Vulcan are you - with those super sensitive ears?"

"Why," came the tear-drenched rejoinder, "You met too many women who need sex only every seven years, have you?"

"Yea," he said as the laughter started up again.

"I mean no!"

One more, "Wait, I mean - Yea," and they lost it completely.

Incidentally, there is another monument in ancient Egypt that is just as mysterious as the Osireion. It is the Sphinx, located on the plane of Giza near the three giant pyramids of Cheops just outside the modern city of Cairo. With a human face and the body of a lion, the Sphinx is gigantic - it's the size of a city block and six stories high. It's carved out of a single piece of stone, right out of the bedrock. Left unattended, as the Sphinx was during most of Antiquity, drifting desert sands filled up all around the monumental statue, leaving only the head exposed to the elements.

When Murray and Neville first discovered the Osireion they believed it was built by the same people who made the Sphinx. The Osireion, being underground, could not be easily dated except in the context of surrounding buildings. The Sphinx, however, has patterns of erosion which geologists believe could only have been made during the heavy rains that ended around ten thousand years ago. This is the unanimous consensus among geologists. Archaeologists are just as unanimous in opposing them, believing the Sphinx was built at the same time as the great pyramids, around four thousand years ago. So, like the statue itself, the mysterious dichotomy of the Sphinx persists to the modern day.

Given that the cult of Isis was universal in Antiquity, it's logical to assume that it was universal before Antiquity as well - when the Sphinx was built; say, fifteen thousand years ago. It's not difficult to believe that the Sphinx is itself the epitome of Isis, and that they are both many thousands of years older than civilization itself.

Epilog ~ circa 1960

They were staying in a hunting cabin on property that had been in the family since before the Civil War. It was near Springfield, Missouri in heavily wooded land frequented by wild hogs, in a region that had been the most heavily contested of the War. The land had literally run red with both Yankee and Confederate blood for four long years, and it was no joke that tree rings dating from that era were stained crimson. The cabin had been built of some of those same logs.

There was just the two of them - newlyweds - Marie and Nelson. The husband had been raised on this same property by a gypsy mother and grandmother, clear through the Great Depression and then the World War II in Europe. They had emigrated from Prussia and spoke only German. The Springfield property had been an apple orchard - just as it had been since long before the Civil War. Back then, wealthy friends would escape from the steamy heat of Memphis during the summer, come to visit down the Missouri Pacific Railroad. The locomotives were steam powered back then and their little town of Cedar Gap was a stopping point, with a water tower and a small lake from a damned up stream to quench the engine's great thirst. The lake had gone the way of the Iron Horse steam engine. The apple orchard had been driven to bankruptcy by competition from mega farms. All the settlers had moved away, too. The only thing that remained was the small cabin made of blood logs.

The ground outside was covered with a foot of ice and frozen snow. A strong northern wind wailed through the trees, rattling the wood shutters of the cabin. Thick Civil War era sheet pane glass windows rattled in rough cut wood frames. Motes of ancient dust were blown by the wind out of cracks in the log walls, into the large open room that was both living room and kitchen. A giant fire in the stone hearth did little to warm the somber mood. They were trapped in the cabin, and would remain so for a week at least - by then Christmas and New Years would be over, and their unexpected absence from traditional family gatherings in Memphis and Baton Rouge would be forgotten, a vague memory.

Nelson had thought his wife was out forging for wood, late one afternoon. Then he heard sounds in the back room, metal scraping on wood. It was regular and rhythmic, quite noticeable above the staccato pelting the cabin was getting from rain and hail outside. Perhaps some wild critter was trying to get in out of the weather - a hog or boar, maybe a small black bear. He pulled himself out of the antique rocker at fireside, stepped across the main room, opened the wood panel door and peered in, perturbed.

Marie his wife was splayed out on the bed, stark naked, arms above her head grasping a bar in the ornate metal headboard. Her long

legs were spread, and she was in rigorous convulsions. Her body genuflected as though swivved by an invisible demon. The heavy curtains of the room were drawn closed, but the incandescent bulb in a bedside lamp illuminated her obliquely. It seemed to be a fit, as Nelson watched, but then he saw Marie's bosom flatten, become misshapen as an invisible body pressed itself upon her, then invisible hands massaged the large prominent breasts making the fatty tissue shift and change shape. All the while her hips moved in a steady rhythm, gently plunging an unseen penis into the thatch of moist hair between her thighs, rotating at the same time. Her body was covered with sweat in the humid air, and the room reeked of sex.

Nelson couldn't make himself turn away. The scene transpiring before him violated every Christian fiber in his being. His new wife was amidst an orgasmic event with the Devil himself, and Marie was enjoying it immensely. This was no rape by a being from another dimension, but a sexual act done permissively and perhaps by invitation. Marie was in a state of extreme bliss, moaning deeply and moving her curvaceous body in tandem with the demonic creature that was mounting her. Her eyes were closed in concentration, and when a deep smile didn't show itself on her countenance, then her lips were puckered and her tongue flirted with the demon's own lips and tongue. Their pace was quickening. Marie's breathing became shallower and was punctuated by hoarse exasperation.

Just as a spasm of muscle contractions began to wreck Marie's tight stomach, she opened her eyes - and looked directly into Nelson's own eyes. He stood helpless, knees beginning to buckle, as Marie's body continued to writhe on the white satin sheets. With her head turned toward Nelson she ran her tongue around her wide supple lips so they glistened brightly in the soft light. Eyes locked all the while, Marie arched her back in one final spasm of ecstasy as she came with a deep and powerful orgasm. Then, lo and behold, a veritable pool of thick white semen formed at her sex, flowing out of her vulva and through the bristling black pubic hairs.

Nelson was retching as he finally removed himself from the room. Shaking violently - he stumbled into the main room, closed and locked the door. Marie found him later that evening. He had hung himself with a belt strung from a thick rough cut wood joist in the ceiling. There had been nobody else in the house all day. Marie's secret liaison with Lucifer, was secret still.

A boy child was born nine months later. He was christened Will Herndon O'Clearey; his Mom called him WH; but all his friends just called him Merlin...

I've often wondered just how Christians believe their Savior was borne from the Virgin Mary. Given the extreme prejudice against lust that permeates the Christian dogma, evidently they don't believe there was anything physical going on there. I suppose God just magically transported a wad of semen into Mary's womb and the little sperms swam around and mated with an egg. Kind of like pre-industrial in vitro fertilization, but with the hymen remaining intact.

Actually, I don't believe Christians think much about the mechanics of it all. It's evil to think about lust being associated with the birth of Christ. However, if there was no lust, then there was no love either. No body ever said God loved Mary. If not, then the birth of Christ was by definition rape. If God in fact did love Mary, then she should be as important as God's son Jesus - if not more so. After all, if Mary had not made herself infinitely attractive to God he would not have seduced her and made a child with her.

The truth of the matter is that when they created Christianity back then, they made it similar to Isis worship so that they could win ready converts from the Isis cult. I'm sure in the early days Mary was very much more important than she is now, but having a goddess of fertility in a religion so violently opposed to sexuality; well, it's just not the right thing to do. Consequently, once the Isis cult was absorbed into early Christianity, and wiped off the face of the Earth entirely, they could sanitize Mary into a pristine Virgin, confident that Isis would never return.

Such was the staying power of Isis, however, that after Jesus was gone John in Revelations made up this whole fable about the Whore of Babylon being the epitome of evil and the undoing of the world, so that at any time in the future if Isis dared to assert herself the impetus would be over before it began. Consequently, anybody who dares to pose the kinds of questions I do here becomes an Antichrist, a Satan, or a Lucifer.

Personally, I think many Christian women would say their husbands are just like God - they love their sons far more than they love their wives. Christian men are not sensitive, or lovable, or anything beyond a shallow creature with petty feelings and no loyalty. Christian men treat their women like the Whore of Babylon, as an object of lust, a trophy, or a baby machine. After all, that's what their religion teaches - by example. I doubt if any Christians will read this book, but if they do, I hope they will learn a few things about how to treat women with respect and dignity, and to follow their lead when it comes to matters of the heart, and of the soul.

It's time Isis took her place in the pantheon of Divinity.

THE END

Time Lines

Climate conditions in the Sahara region

13000 - 9500 BC Period of heavy rains

9500 - 7000 BC Dry period

7000 - 3000 BC Rain again, but increasingly less frequent

after 3000 BC Dessication

8000 BC Neville's estimate when the Osireion was built

4500 BC Estimated burial of the first Abydos Fleet

3000 BC The first city of Troy founded at a strategic point on the Dardanelles

2635 BC Pharaoh Khasekhem, the Hall of Barques

1237 BC Rameses becomes Pharaoh

1225 BC Exodus happens, Hebrew slaves escape Egypt

1300 BC Seti I builds the Temple located near the Osireion

1358 BC Amenhotep and Nefertiti co-regents

1100 BC The city of Troy is abandoned, until about 700BC

957 BC Solomon's Temple is built in Jerusalem, where the Ark was

600 BC Etruscans annex a small village called Rome

550 BC La Tene Celtic culture started at Lac Nuchatel, Switzerland

333 BC Alexander the Great conquers Egypt, Ptolemy Soter Pharaoh

37 BC First Temple destroyed, new Temple built (no Ark)

33 BC Julius Caesar is assassinated

30 BC Cleopatra commits suicide, Caesarion disappears

25 BC Strabo visits the Osireion, thereafter called Strabo's Well

312 AD The Battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine v. Praetorian Guard

324 AD The last city of Troy fades into obscurity after the founding of

Constantinople

365 AD Massive earthquake hits Alexandria, Cleopatra's palace

1903 AD Murray and Petre uncover parts of Strabo's Well

1913 AD Neville excavates Strabo's Well, finds the Osireion

1924 AD George H. W. Bush sends billions to Nazis (1924-1937)

1933 AD Frankfurt renews Osireion digs and changes time line

1947 AD Something crashed at Roswell on July 2, 1947

1948 AD Admiral Forrestal and the Dulles Brothers form the OPC

1949 AD Forrestal found dead at Bethesda, apparent suicide

1967 AD Project Blue Book closed down by the U.S. Air Force

The following is list of the number of coins found in the Osrieion

Ptolemy II - 6 (successor of Ptolemy Soter, who was Ptolemy I)

Ptolemy III - 8

Ptolemy IV - XIII - 18

Ptolemy X - 1

Ptolemy XIII - 2

Cleopatra VII - 8 (the famous Cleopatra, mistress of Caesar)

Barbarous copy - 1

Claudius - 6

Domitian - 1

Antonius Pius - 1

Constantius II - 1 (served under his father Constantine as caesar 323-337; then as emperor in his own right. Constantine was the Emperor at The Milvian Bridge)

Author's Notes

Virtually everything that's said about the Osireon is factual - when it was discovered, by whom, the mystery surrounding its age, its location, its structure, the orientation relative to Seti I's temple, with the Hall of Barques made by Khasekhemy nearby. A hundred kilometers due west is the Great Oasis, at the end of a line of oases that snakes two hundred kilometers through the Sahara Desert in the modern day. This area was truly a lush tropical paradise up until eight to ten thousand years ago. There really is an old Roman fort at the Great Oasis, now a thriving town; but it apparently dates from other Roman constructions of that era, and is not as old as I implied.

The chronology is mostly accurate. Khasekhemy was the first Pharaoh of real consequence, around 3100 BC. The first Pharaoh was the mythical Scorpion King; Khasekhemy was the last king of the First Dynasty. Exodus happened fifteen hundred years later, just as I have said. It happened during the reign of Rameses, who was followed by Seti I, then Amenhotep the heretic. Nefertiti was Amenhotep's wife and co-regent, she was the most beautiful woman in Antiquity, she did in fact disappear without a trace; and Amenhotep ripped his kingdom - and his brand new city - apart trying to find her, but without success. He was the first, and last, Pharaoh to try and promote a monotheist system.

There were a series of coins found in the Osireion, and they started with the first of the Macedonian pharaohs, Ptolemy Soter; through Cleopatra and on into the Roman era, when a massive earthquake sunk Alexandria and Cleopatra's palace with it. Everything said about Caesar is true - the details of his relationship with Cleopatra, their child Caesarion, Cleopatra's fertility and Caesar's lack thereof; his campaigns in Gaul, crossing the Rubicon, and into Britain; to Africa and being in Palestine when Cleopatra was dethroned by her sister; the circumstances of his assassination; his black outs, possibly caused by epilepsy. The only liberty I have taken is that historians mostly believe Caesarion was captured by the Romans as he tried to escape; the small boy and a half brother Cleopatra had by Mark Anthony were ratted on by a *Greek* orderly of Cleopatra's. I prefer to believe that the small children killed by the Romans were substitutes, because the one thing *Greeks* place staff valued above all else was loyalty to their master, or mistress. That's their Achilles Heel.

The Praetorian Guard was a real organization, with influence during the later part of the Roman Empire roughly equal to that of the Emperor and the Senate, a triumvirate that was dissolved when the Praetorian Guard was obliterated by Constantine at Milvian Bridge just outside of Rome. The origins of the Praetorian with Augustus are not

valid, but entirely possible; nor the link with Count Dracul of Transylvania hundreds of years after the Battle of Milvian Bridge - which again is possible, but not factual. The fact that Dracul's extremely violent treatment of the enemy, and some of his own people who would not support him, is widely thought to be the only think to keep the Turks from overrunning Europe a thousand years ago.

All the Biblical facts cited are accurate - about Job, Exodus, the Golden Calf, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Temple in Jerusalem. Leviathan is a prominent figure in the Book of Job, but not otherwise connected with any later events unless you assume it to be a symbol of evil, which everybody knows is big in the Old Testament.

A crash was reported in the newspapers near Roswell, New Mexico on July 2, 1947. All the facts as so stated in the book, are facts. The technical ideas are accurate, including the hypothetical theories in celestial mechanics, the fast trajectory I found from Earth to Mars using a computer simulation, and all the rest. I find more supporting evidence all the time, form many areas of math, physics, and engineering. The equations of motion for the many body problem do indeed reduce down to the same ones as for incompressible flow in fluid dynamics. It's a baby step from that hundred year old proof, to showing space behaves like a fluid at faster than light velocities.

The facts sited about the destruction of the Twin Towers are accurate; about the homing beacons being disabled; the extreme difficulty of making such a tall building implode upon itself; the high level of expertise and computing power to implode a building like that, especially with its Achillies heel damaged by a prevous terrorist attack. I apologize if I might make some terrorists look better than they were; I do so only to inspire the authorities to face the facts that I have stated, and to explain it all better than I have. I do have bad knees, bad eyes, and what the VA calls a "stress disorder."

The particulars of Kase's biography are my own and the are accurate - the Naval Academy history, being banned; the problems at White Sands in the Army; the problems at UT Austin, and everything said about the wet lab, my niece, my contractor friend; the SATS project, all its problems; and all of the documents, written just as I have said without an ounce of credible evidence, are as noted. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if the evil people at UT Austin planned and executied 911 as well as the shuttle crash.

The only fabrication is Nikki, although the Albigensean Heresy was as I said associated with a movement for freedom in the south of France in the 1200's that threatened the feudal status quo, which then led to civil war and in turn was the main motivation for the Inquisition; tracking down and burning the Albigensian heritics. The city of Albe remains, although

probably sans heretics. They did have the dual God-Satan philosophy, but not the sexual one I attributed the them. They have no modern day roots in the Basque separatist region in northern Spain, except possibly as spiritual comrades in each others dissident arms. I do not support the Basques, but I do support their right to a free and independent state if they achieve it by peaceful and progressive means that benefits the people of Spain as well as their own people.

The whole Leviathan prophecy dust Roswell ET government conspiracy Nazi new world order theme is not so much of a fabrication, as what they call in journalism an angle - an overall theory that fits nicely to all the facts, both in my life and in all the historical miscellany cited. I am sure most of it will go away in the light of day, but I do honestly believe there is some truth in the structure I have given to the Book of Job, and how it is linked to the Osireion, and to a civilization at the Great Oasis, and perhaps even to the Etruscans who were so instrumental in creating Rome in the early days.

No offense was meant in anything said about the Church, or in the mentioning of Pope John Paul, whom I personally admired greatly and miss dearly because I am disabled myself. I hope he is made a Saint, although I will always consider him the patron saint of the disabled, no matter if he is sainted or not.

I really do have the Confederate ancestors as noted; although I'm not too sure about the "Mississippians don't know how to surrender," which since nobody else clamied it, and Col. William N. Brown was in fact at Vicksburg when this message was delivered to the Yankees, and since he was abandoned to the enemy by the Army of the West, and went right back to the war as soon as he was paroled by the Blue Coats; if he didn't say it, he certainly epitomized the expression.

The facts cited about the Wall Street firm funnelling billions to Nazi Germany are true; though their direct link to the Holocaust is my own inference. However, it is undeniable that the Nazis would never have survived without that huge amount of funding from America, so I was actually kind not to blame the whole World War II on them; and not just the Holocaust. Henry Ford was an ardent Nazi supporter; Grampa Bush and the Dulles brothers were principles in the Wall Street firm as noted. Since none of these still powerful families have disputed any of these facts, which have been in the public domain for a decade, having been published in a NY Times bestseller, The Secret War Against The Jews. I can only assume they are true even if my extrapolations aren't.

Everything I said about UT is true. You can get details of my dismissal, computer code, and comments by experts by doing a search at Google Groups using "Bill Clark whcii earthlink mindspring tbuill!" Interestingly, literally hours after I checked out the official Egypt

Exploration Society reports on the various expeditions to the Osireion in the early 1900's from the main UT library, they were recalled and have not since been returned to the stacks. Fortunately, I had copied everything I needed. There are over 100's of postings I made at Google, most of them in technical groups (most of whom have since banned me from posting). Once you read the responses made by the experts, there will be absolutely no doubt in your mind that Roswell happened, every scientist knows it did, and they are all terrified that anybody will find out and yank their precious funding.

Live well,

WH Clark

8.5.2005

Lago Vista, Texas

WILLIAM H. CLARK 2nd

>>EDUCATION

The University of Texas at Austin (1998 - 2003)
MSE Aerospace Engineering ~ Orbital Mechanics

My hoped for Ph.D dissertation, "The Gravity Assisted Bi-Elliptic (GRABET) Transfer Orbit" was not accepted and I opted out with an MSE based on course hours. I created a computer model to prove a new way to modify any conventional Earth to Mars trajectory to use 25% less fuel or arrive 30 days faster. I passed all the coursework (plus an extra three semesters of graduate level math courses) for a Ph.D with a 3.7 GPA.

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The University of Texas at Austin (1977-78)

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BS in Mechanical Engineering cum laude, Engineering Scholar

The United States Naval Academy (1974-77)
Superintendent's List, Dean's List, Company Commander, Platoon Leader, Admin Officer, ranked 21st in my class.

Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (1973-74)
Dean's List, Honor Roll, 4.0 GPA.

>>EXPERIENCE

O'Connell Robertson & Associates 1988 - 1996
ENGINEERING CONSULTANT, Austin, TX: Specification, design and drafting of HVAC, electrical, lighting, plumbing, and fire sprinkler systems using AUTOCAD and other software programs. Started my own software company, Bar X Software. Extensive experience in Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing (MEP) design of schools, hospitals, community colleges, government, military and commercial projects. Licensed Professional Engineer in MEP, energy conservation, software design, and now aerospace.

Nuclear Power Supply, Inc. 1987 - 1988
DESIGN ENGINEER, Austin, Texas: Conducted cost estimating, product development, thermal analysis and computer-aided design of pipe

supports for large bore piping in nuclear and conventional power plants, refineries, wastewater treatment plants and other industrial facilities.

Research 1986 - 1987

Various employers while writing and doing research that was well received by NASA. This research formed the basis of a computer program I wrote while stationed at White Sands. I presented this research to the Post Commander General Niles Fulwyler and the Chief Scientist Dr. Davies in a two hour formal technical seminar; further developed as part of my Ph.D research.

U.S. Army White Sands Missile Range NM 1983 - 1986

93E WEATHER OBSERVER, WSMR New Mexico: Received the Army Commendation Medal or ARCOM (the highest peacetime award of the Army) for "staunch individualism and impeccable moral fortitude." when I turned in a half dozen senior NCO's for using drugs on the job. White Sands is the highest security installation in the U.S. and site of the "Star Wars" ballistic missile defense laser research.

EXXON Company U.S.A. 1978 - 1983

DESIGN ENGINEER, Inland Drilling Group, New Orleans LA: Designed and administered exploration drill well programs. Duties required expertise in fluids rheology, piping design, geological evaluation, and drilling tools/equipment specification. Extensive field supervision during critical drilling operations such as casing seat hunts and abnormal pressure detection. Project engineer for a 20,000 ft rank wildcat in, and a member of the design team on the Monguere prospect, the deepest, hottest inland drill well completed by Exxon to that date.

>>Community Involvement

Psychological Associates Advisory Committee, public member

This is the Licensing Board for School Psychologists in the State of Texas. I was appointed by then Governor George "W" Bush.

KFON Radio

daily energy tips on this all-talk Clear Channel radio station (1993 - 1996) a.k.a. "BTU" Bill.

>>Publications

Retrofitting for Energy Conservation (McGraw-Hill)

Electrical Design Guide for Commercial Buildings (McGraw-Hill)
Misc. conference and journal publications