

# AMAZON ANNE

and the  
Riddle of the Black Scarab

by Steve Kaye

## CHAPTER ONE: THE CHANGE

**N**O ONE NOTICED The Change for three days.

Buildings that had stood for decades vanished, tenements replaced storefronts, pitted asphalt streets became cobbled.

Yet no one noticed.

The sound of horses clopping through the streets, hauling ice or milk wagons, was heard again. Sleek sports cars and modern taxis changed to roadsters with rumble seats and bulky cabs with running boards.

And no one noticed.

The entire island of Manhattan had, over three days, shimmered piece by piece into an image of something from long ago.

On the third day – finally – someone noticed.

Travis Dade stepped from his four-story walk-up, jiggled his head until his neck gave a satisfying crack, and

took a deep breath. The smell of New York was unlike any other city, he told himself, in spite of the fact that he had never been anywhere else.

The air was tainted with all the smells and flavors of the houses around him, of the cars and trucks on the street, and of everything and everyone that had come before. New York was not a city to sit still. It was in constant flux. Still, there were old places and in those places were the old smells, the old sounds, the ghosts of New York's past.

Travis Dade lived in such a place on East Sixty-first Street. He had chosen his apartment with great care, enjoying the fact that the building had remained, except for renovations, unchanged in nearly 80 years. Travis Dade was a sentimentalist.

The air was brisk this morning. The Chrysler Building gleamed in the distance above the apartment tops. The clear air made it appear to be standing taller than usual. He had a one-block walk to the subway station to pick up the F Train or a good three blocks before he would find a cab around Cen-

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tral Park. A lightness of pocket convinced Dade to spend the buck and a half and take the subway.

Except the subway station entrance was not where it should have been.

This caused Travis Dade, a seasoned newspaperman with a keen eye, a moment's pause. That was when he began to look around.

A 1935 Ford coupé motored by, followed by a 1937 Chevy roadster, their art deco lines shimmering into view as they passed. In fact, now that he looked, all of the cars on the street had become like something out of an antique autoshow.

A horse-drawn cart clopped down the street, slowly.

"Hey, buddy," Dade called to the lethargic-looking man sitting atop the rig. "What's the gag?"

The cart driver's face scrunched up.

"All these old cars," Dade prompted, "your wagon. What's going on?"

The man reined his horse to a stop. "Me, fella, I'm puttin' in a day's work. What're you doing? You with the rodeo? Where's your ten gallon hat?"

Dade looked himself over. He wore jeans and running shoes, a T-shirt and a windbreaker. He rarely wore a hat because of a thick mane of black hair that fell to his shoulders.

"Where's the subway station?" Dade asked.

The cart driver chuckled. "You're turned around pardner, it's another block over. Or the El. That's a block the other way and down on Fifty-ninth Street."

"The El?"

Dade turned down Third Avenue and ran to Fifty-ninth Street. The elevated train tracks were there as if they had never been torn down in the 1940s. A four-car train sat on the tracks. In moments it began rumbling away from the raised station, the clacking of the wheels echoing down into the street. People streamed up the teepee-shaped staircases to the platform. People in hats and suits and dresses down to their calves.

Dade felt his mouth go dry and something rise in his throat. His heart beat furiously. Without thinking he dashed out into traffic and across the street to an old-fashioned drugstore. A bell tinkled as he burst through the door.

At the back of the drugstore was a sandwich counter with a soda fountain, and to the right of that was a telephone booth. Dade ducked inside and dug around in his pockets for change. He found a quarter and put it into the only coin slot available. The old dial gave him trouble, his fingers fumbling in the holes, and he had to hang up and try again, leaning close to the stationary mouthpiece as he held the receiver to his ear.

"What number are you dialing?" an operator asked after a moment.

"Um, I'm trying to reach the New York *Post* offices."

"Which branch of the Post Office, sir?"

"No, no, I mean the New York *Post*. The newspaper."

“One moment please, I’ll connect you.” The line went quiet for a minute, then another voice came on. “New York *Evening Post*, who are you calling, please?”

He asked the unfamiliar voice that answered for the City Desk and then for the City Editor, Birch Mallon. Mallon was out but was expected to return in a few minutes.

“Give me his voice mail then.”

“His what?”

Trying to keep a quivering sound from his voice, Dade said, “Put me through to his voice mail.”

“Look, pal, I don’t know what you’re talking about. Do you want to leave a message or don’t you?”

Dade hung up, his mind numb. He looked down at the small ledge in the phone booth where he had dumped his money when searching for coins. The money was wrong. The bills no longer had the large presidential portraits set off center. The portraits were smaller and centered on the bills, and the dates were from 1927 and 1934.

“Holy mackerel!” he exclaimed.

Out on the street a breathless Dade flagged a passing cab and climbed in. He asked to be taken to the *Post’s* offices, but specifically did not give the Avenue of the Americas Address, near Rockefeller Center. The cabby was good. He didn’t blink. He tossed back a cheerful “You got it, Mac,” and put the machine in motion. It was a quick ride through sunlit avenues full of taxis and streetcars. A couple of blocks

west the Empire State Building gleamed and looked taller than it should have. Some nearby buildings were missing, taller ones that normally crowded the venerable tower. Dade let all of it pass by in a blur without trying to focus, his head still swimming.

He almost threw a ten-dollar bill at the driver when the cab stopped before he realized the trip had cost a little more than two dollars. He tossed three singles over the front seat and hopped out. Then he saw he wasn’t on Avenue of the Americas.

He had been let out on lower West Street. Down the street, toward the river, a large building sat at the mouth of a pier, a United Fruit Company sign painted on its windowless white brick wall. In front of him sat a squat, gothic structure, seventeen stories tall. An etched brass plate outside the front doors read: *New York Evening Post*.

Dade swallowed hard and pushed his way into the newspaper building. The three-story lobby was a hive of activity, with people streaming in and out of elevators and a shoeshine stand doing SRO business.

Dade made his way to the bank of elevators and allowed himself to be pushed inside with the masses.

“Hi ya, Mr. Dade,” the elevator boy said, with a wave of his hand. He was a curly-topped youth wearing a red jacket with a double row of brass buttons and red cap with a polished bill. “Say, you covering the rodeo today?”

“Yeah, something like that,” Dade said, weakly. “Just kick me out at my

office.”

The elevator stopped at the fourth floor and the boy held the door open, tossing his head until Dade got the hint and stepped out.

“You be careful around them broncs, Mr. Dade,” the elevator boy said, some worry in his voice. “They kick you in the head you forget what planet your on.”

City rooms the world over look the same, and now Dade realized they had always looked the same. The computers were gone, the sleek telephones were now heavy and black, a clacking sound of typewriter keys pounding had replaced the pockety-pock sound of a keyboard in action – but these were only cosmetic changes. The urgency of the room was electric, and very familiar. Dade took a deep breath and calmed his nerves.

“Where the hell have you been?” a strident voice yelled. “The rodeo?”

Birch Mallon stood at his office door, hands on hips, fist wrapped around a handful of copy sheets. His face was a perpetual red in color and scrunched up in anger. That much hadn’t changed about Mallon. But there was something indefinable about him. He didn’t look out of place in this time period, as if he had never seen the second millenium.

“Get over here!”

All eyes turned to Dade as he threaded his way through the collection of desks and chairs strewn about the room. He followed Mallon into his office. Three others were there, men

he didn’t know. But their look was unmistakable: reporters.

“Listen,” Mallon said, slipping behind his paper-covered desk, “things are happening in this town. You’re my best men – well, most of you. You’ve got to dig out the story.”

Relief flooded into Dade. “Oh, Birch, you don’t know how glad I am to know you see these things, too.”

Silent stares greeted his outburst.

“You’re seeing things?”

“You know, the old time cars, the streetcars, heck my cab ride from Fifty-ninth Street was two bucks, can you believe that ....?” Dade noticed the air had suddenly gone very still. “What are you talking about?”

“Well, it’s not as important as streetcars and cab rides, Dade, but I’m talking about Boss Ginero and his boys roughing up the O’Brian mob and adding some air conditioning to a speak-easy on Eighty-first Street, one bullet at a time.”

“Oh.”

“I’m talking about that adventurer frail coming back to the States today from Brazil. I want a man down at Bennett Airfield to meet her. What the hell is her name again?”

One of the young reporters said, “Anne, boss.”

“Amazon Anne,” another corrected.

“Who the hell gave her that moniker?”

“Um, you did, boss.”

“Yeah, well, she’s always good for some copy and a picture.”

“Good looking dame,” offered one of

the others.

“Who asked you! And,” turning back to Dade, Mallon continued, “I’m also talking about a certain alderman in the thirteenth ward who’s got his hand jammed deep into the wrong till.” Mallon came around his desk and pressed his nose close to Dade. “In short, I’m talking about news! What the hell are you talking about?”

“Um, nothing.”

“Good. Then get out to the thirteenth ward and find out what’s going on. I want it for Friday’s papers. And get me enough for a piece on Sunday. I want this thing hot all week-end.”

“Um, right ....., chief.”

Mallon had stepped back to his desk and was leaning up against the edge. Now he rose with a strange look on his face.

“You hear that fellas? That’s respect.” Dade winced. Mallon’s voice was dripping with sarcasm. That’s something that had remained the same in this new world. “Does it look like I’ve got a feather sticking out the back of my head? Now get out of here and get me that story!”

Dade nodded and turned from the room.

“And you better have that rodeo story to me by tomorrow, too.”



One day, after watching a Twilight Zone marathon, Dade had promised himself that if he ever woke up in another universe – especially one where everyone spoke English – he would play along. He wouldn’t panic like they did on television. Well, television hadn’t been invented yet, it seemed, and panic was quickly overtaking him.

Outside he hailed a cab and was thrilled to see a sleek, modern Chevy pull to the curb. He gave the driver an address on West Seventy-fifth Street and settled back for the ride. The further north they got, the more things looked normal. They passed cars from the 1970s and 1980s. Dade even saw a modern Lamborghini.

For a moment he grew hopeful, but then several of the buildings shimmered, their signs and storefronts changing before his eyes. By the time he got out of the cab it had changed to a vintage 1937 Ford.

The ward office was not where he remembered, so he took a walking tour of the neighborhood. New York is one of those places where the old adage – the more things change the more they stay the same – truly applies. The upper Seventies had been a nice neighborhood seventy years ago and they still were.

The Change hadn’t completely enveloped the area. There was a strange mix of renovated brownstones alongside the originals. Small knick knock and antique shops, coffeehouses, and restaurants mingled with row houses and apartments.

There was a small art gallery – Robson’s – at the end of the street that still retained its modern design. Dade gravitated toward it, but stopped short as it began to shimmer.

Desperate to find someone that remembered as he did, Dade made an instant decision and ran into the shop even as the building rippled with a silvery glow.

Through the door, he found himself in mid-air. He dropped a foot, landed on the edge of a step and tumbled onto the shop floor.

“Oh, my!” A woman said. She was in her early fifties, a little plump, and wearing a calf-length dress. She ran to him.

Dade looked up at her, disappointed. He had missed the chance. The Change had taken her. She no longer remembered who she had been.

“Guess I didn’t see the step.”

“No, you didn’t.”

Dade stood up and brushed himself off. The shop had changed inside as well. When outside, he had noted through the window a collection of fine paintings standing on easels, and several lithographs in the window itself. The gallery was more of a curio shop now. There were fewer paintings and more objets d’art: glazed stones, urns, goblets and the like.

“Can we help you,” an older man said, entering through a back room.

“Well,” Dade said, “I was looking for...”

An explosion of glass and men burst into the room from the street, cutting

off Dade’s comment. He collapsed under the weight of the men, covered head to toe in glass shards. A squeaking, scratchy voice spoke, chilling the air.

“Where is the Golden One?! Give her to me, or everyone dies!”

## CHAPTER TWO: THE GOLDEN ONE

**T**RAVIS DADE LAY PERFECTLY still. The man who had spoken stepped with a rustling sound over Dade’s prone form, closer to the older couple. Another man moved into the room, his feet crunching on glass.

Cautiously, Dade cracked an eyelid and squinted up at the attackers. The man he could see was sun-browned and crowned with a flat mop of jet-black hair. He wore a narrow vest that appeared to be made of animal hides, and a grass skirt. His exposed skin was covered in dark tattoos that formed decorative braids on his arms, legs, and wrists. In one hand he carried a very short spear, no more than eighteen inches long. In the other hand he held a short pipe.

He snarled, showing blackened, chiseled teeth.

“Where is she?” he barked, jabbing the spear toward the woman.

“I don’t know,” she said, and fainted.

The second native screeched something in a strange tongue and collapsed. Attention diverted, Dade risked a look around and saw a man on the

floor, his head wrapped with a leather thong that had two heavy balls, one at each end.

The first native snarled again just as a whooshing sound flew past. Dade looked up to see another thong-and-ball device whipping around the native's head. The balls slapped into the man's forehead and he collapsed.

Dade rolled and came up to one knee, a tentative fist ready. In the window, a booted foot poised on the sill, stood a woman, her silhouette glazed by bright sun.

"Holy mackerel!"

She jumped into the room and over to the woman who had fainted, cradling her in her arms.

"Aunt Beth," she murmured. The older man came over to her, placed a hand on her shoulder.

She was a strong-looking woman. She could have been twenty-three years old or forty-three, it was impossible to tell. She had a curving, leggy figure that was accentuated by sleek brown riding boots, a pair of tan jodhpurs, and a tailored safari shirt that fitted crisply to her figure. A swoop of long hair fell across her face. It was café au lait in color, with a hint of red highlights, and a shade darker than her sun-bronzed skin. Her face, now grimly determined, was pretty with small features. Except for her eyes. They were large and round and ice blue in color, and they sparkled with flecks of silver.

"She'll be fine, child," the older man was saying. "She always has a start

when you come home."

The girl grinned sadly, then got up and returned to the broken window. A satchel lay just inside the store. She swooped it up and fished around inside before coming up with a rope. In short order she had tied one of the natives hand and foot.

"Drag the other over here," she commanded. Startled, Dade obeyed. In moments she had the other tied to the first.

"I don't have much time, Uncle Phil," she told the old man. "There are more of these, and somehow they're following me. I'll lead them away. I don't think you'll be in danger. Still, call the police."

"We'll be fine," he said. The woman was just regaining consciousness. The girl helped her to her feet then accepted a hug.

"I've got to go." She turned and looked at Dade. "Who are you?"

"Travis Dade. Reporter for the *Post*."

"Damn! I didn't want to deal with you fellas. I'll have a statement later." She scooped up her ample satchel and hopped up onto the broken window sill.

"Nothing doing," Dade said, chasing after her. "You're a story and I'm going with you. Just who are you?"

The girl stopped in mid step, turned toward Dade, a strange look on her face. "My name's Anne Robson," she said. To Dade it seemed she was expecting a response. "Amazon Anne," she added.

It took a moment for Dade to place

the name. The *Post* editor, Mallon, had mentioned her and the other reporters had seemed to be in awe of the name.

"A pleasure, Anne," he said, sticking out his hand. She took it, a firm, dry, warm handclasp that Dade found surprisingly difficult to release. "So what's your story?"

A lopsided grin creased her smooth, delicate face.

"I don't have time for this," she said, sweetly. "Down!"

Suddenly she grabbed Dade's shirt and threw him to the sidewalk, her grip surprisingly strong. She dodged to the right just as a short spear buzzed by. Holding his arm, Anne pulled Dade up and back into the store.

"Get behind the counter!" she yelled.

Two more of the grass-skirted natives appeared in the broken window frame. They had blowguns and sent tiny darts whipping into the room. Anne upended a heavy oak display table, sat down behind it, and dug into her satchel again to pull out a black Mauser automatic pistol. Peeking over the table she loosed three quick shots. Wild, agonized screams cut the air.

Dade looked around the corner of the table. Both of the blowgun-wielding natives were dead on the floor.

"I'll go out the back, Uncle Phil," Anne said, grabbing her satchel. "Call the police."

Without waiting for a reply, she turned and ran into the back room. Dade looked at Phil and Beth, huddled on the floor, holding each other, eyes wide with fear. He hesitated, then

shrugged and followed Anne into the back room.

A door leading out to an alley was open a crack. Bright sunlight streamed into the darkened storage room. Dade pushed the door open and some peripheral instinct made him duck. A huge club swooped over his head and smashed into the doorframe. Dade stood and jabbed out with a balled fist. He caught a chin and sent a grass-skirted native flying into a clump of metal trashcans.

Two others had grabbed Anne and were dragging her down the alley toward a waiting Buick town car. Her gun had fallen to the pavement, forgotten.

Dade hefted the weighty weapon and swung it with all his might down onto the head of one of the natives. The man collapsed soundlessly.

Anne, one hand freed, swung a fist at the other native who caught it and snarled an evil grin. He slammed his head onto Anne's forehead, sending the girl into a swoon.

"Let her go," Dade said, menacing with the heavy pistol.

With a slow turn, the black-mouthed native cast an evil glare on Dade. The man's mouth cracked into a horrific grin. He spoke loudly in some strange clicking tongue, and two more natives climbed out of the town car at the end of the alley, lifting blowguns to their mouths.

Anne recovered in seconds and scissored her legs around the native's bare limbs. The man yelped in pain and fell

to the pavement. Anne pounced on him and punched his face several times. The natives at the end of the alley began running toward them.

"The gun!" she yelled.

Dade tossed her the pistol. She caught in mid air, rolled over the unconscious native, and came to her knees firing, dropping the new attackers. Without a backward look, she leapt to her feet, grabbed her satchel, and ran away from the town car.

"Come on!"

Dade needed no encouragement. The unconscious native had begun to stir and was lifting himself off the pavement.

An old wooden fence, eight feet tall, enclosed the opposite end of the alley. A collection of crates and cans pressed up against it. Deftly, Anne hopped from can to crates and then to the top of the fence. She had one leg over when the first dart hit the wood with a thop! sound.

"Move it!"

Scrambling, Dade grabbed the top of the fence and pulled himself over as a tiny dart ripped through his shirt. He yelped and fell over the fence at Anne's feet. Instantly he was up again and running.

The alley let out on Seventy-sixth Street. There were no cabs in sight. Anne motioned for him to follow her and she ran toward the river then ducked back down another alley. She paused there a moment, leaning against a brick wall, and checked the loads in her gun.

"You're pretty handy with that thing," Dade said.

"I've had to be."

A look of concern washed over her face as she pushed off the wall and reached for Dade's arm. The sleeve had been ripped and one of the tiny blowgun darts was dangling from the shirt. With great care, Anne removed the dart then tore the shirtsleeve away. There was a small cut on Dade's arm and above it a single drop of thick, brown liquid hung, threatening to fall onto the wound. Anne wiped it away hurriedly.

She breathed a heavy sigh. "You got lucky."

"What is that?"

"Jumaroo. A very deadly poison." She took the dart and put it into a small phial she had taken from her satchel. Corked with a rubber stopper, she returned the tiny glass to a small pocket inside the satchel.

"That's a hell of a handbag, you've got there."

"You said you're a reporter – for who again?"

"The *Post*."

"You mean the *Evening Post*."

"Yeah, I guess that's what it's called."

Her eyes narrowed slightly in a look of curiosity mingled with a touch of suspicion.

"So who are the hula guys?"

"South American Jinji – cannibals, fierce warriors. We have to go. There will be more of them."

"Wait a minute!" Dade said, grabbing her arm. It was electric, touching

her. He felt a thrill shoot through his arm. He stifled a gasp and asked: "Why are they after you?"

A sheepish grin creased her face and she shook her head. "I-I wish I knew."

A car screeched to a stop at the alley mouth. Anne hefted her gun and fired three quick shots, smashing the front windshield, the sound echoing like cannon fire in the tight alley.

Dade started running away from the car, Anne on his heels. They came out onto Seventy-seventh Street, half a block from Riverside Park. The vast open greenery spread before them across the heavily trafficked Riverside Drive. Other than trees and a few rocks there was nothing to conceal them. They were exposed to the killers and their poisoned blow darts.

Another car screeched to a halt in front of them. Anne raised her gun again as a blond man stuck his head out the window.

"If you want to live, get in!" the man said.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE BLACK SCARAB

**M**ORE NATIVES HAD COME out onto Seventy-seventh Street, raising blowguns to their blackened mouths. Wasting no time, Anne and Dade jumped into the back seat of the new car, a heavy Chevrolet sedan. The blond man slipped back behind the wheel, engaged the clutch, pulled out into traffic. After a few blocks the na-

tive pursuit had been lost.

"Who are you?" Anne demanded, leaning up against the driver's seat. She still held the gun and casually aimed it at the blond man.

"I'm the man who just saved your life," he said calmly.

"Why?"

"My employer wants to employ you."

"I have my own problems right now."

"Yes. And perhaps we can find a way to eliminate them so you can accept a new assignment."

Anne considered this for a moment. "Where are we going?"

"Where you'll feel quite safe," the blond man said, smiling.

Concern etched deeply into Anne's face. She leaned back against the thick cushions of the back seat next to Dade.

The reporter looked at her and said, "Maybe now you can ...."

A raised finger and a slight shake of Anne's head made him stop in mid sentence. The girl didn't want to talk now, he told himself. She didn't like the set up, and Dade had to agree with her.

The blond man piloted the Chevy back to Broadway and turned south. It was a quiet ride, giving Dade some time to settle his mind. So much of New York had been taken over by The Change now. Little remained of the modern, graffiti-riddled metropolis he had known only a few hours before. He chuckled to himself and wondered if that was really a bad thing.

They turned onto Forty-second

Street and inched along through the heavy traffic to Lexington Avenue, and pulled into the garage beneath the Chrysler Building. The building had been too close to get a good look at it, but seemed to be the same building he had always remembered. Well, why not? It's exterior had remained unchanged since its completion in 1930 when it was, briefly, the tallest building in the world.

The blond man drove to the bottom level of the garage. When he did not slow down approaching a dead-end, Dade made ready to jump the man and wrestle the steering wheel from his grasp. But the concrete wall ahead of them suddenly parted and the sedan passed through undamaged.

Inside were several vehicles, from speedy roadsters to heavy, powerful touring cars, to flat panel trucks. In a dark corner, under a tarpaulin Dade could make out the tracks of a small tank.

The blond man stopped the car and got out. He went to an elevator and waited. Anne and Dade followed. A strange look had come over Anne's face. What had happened to enter this part of the garage, and what they found here, had not surprised her. But she looked on it as if looking at a dream.

The elevator had four buttons labeled for the Garage, Lobby, the Cloud Club, and the Spire. The blond man pushed the button marked Spire and the little car lurched into action. A minute later the doors swished open and the three stepped out.

Dade had been in the Chrysler Building before. The Cloud Club had been closed for years and had been in desperate need of renovation. There had been nothing above it other than maintenance ways and wiring to light up the triangular windows in the spire. This was different.

The windows were still triangular and there were several levels of them as the spire rose at an inward angle. But the room was large – larger than Dade thought it would be – and most of it was open. A spiral staircase, set off-center in the room, lead up to a second level that was partly open, too. A third level of closed rooms capped the interior of the spire.

Strange artifacts sat in display cases or piled on heavy oak tables along the edge of the room. Maps hung at angles. The room was littered with a hodgepodge of chairs in unique styles and fabrics. No two were alike.

Dade went to one of the triangular windows and looked out. New York spread before him, a map of concrete and steel in relief.

"Holy mackerel!" he muttered.

"Yes," a strange voice said, suddenly. "Impressive."

A man rose from a heavy wing back chair, his face shrouded in the darkness cast by uneven light streaming in through the windows. He was unnaturally tall, and thin, but not emaciated. Dade guessed his height at eight feet.

The man stepped forward like a stalking tiger, every movement perfectly controlled and sleek.

"Forgive the intrusion into your home," he said. His deep, soothing voice had a weird quality that seemed to echo all around them.

"Since this is my home," Anne said, boldly, the heavy Mauser still in her hand, "you won't mind my asking how you have access to it."

The man stepped into the light. His face was oddly round, but pleasant. He wore a thin mustache that almost disappeared on his upper lip. He smiled, and to Dade it seemed as genuine as a cobra's.

"My name is Jackson Crafter," he said, presenting a plain white card with his name and a fashionable upper West Side address printed neatly on it. "I am ... a businessman. In the course of my affairs I have access to certain theurgical insights that allow me entrée to secret places such as your humble abode. I knew of your return and awaited you here. When I heard of the disturbances on the West Side I realized you had arrived sooner than expected and were in some difficulty. I sent Bruno to assist you."

Bruno, standing by the elevator, smiled and nodded his blond head.

"Thanks." Anne looked at the gun in her hand and tossed it into a chair. She strolled around the room, looking at it and shaking her head.

"This isn't my place."

"Technically I suppose you're correct. It belongs, or rather belonged, to your father."

Anne turned on the man, half again as tall as her. "My father owned an

art gallery."

Crafter smiled beneficently. "Yes, and your mother owned a string of the city's most successful hair salons. Really, Miss Robson, that veil has long since been pierced."

"I never knew my mother," Anne said, quietly. "What do you want?"

"To hire you. I need you to find something for me."

She shook her head. "I'm an art dealer. You want a detective."

"What I need, Miss Robson, is an adventurer supreme. That is what you are. Your parents were both adventurers, Miss Robson, perhaps the greatest who ever lived. They've left you their legacy. Surely your own feats of derring-do measure up to theirs."

"I've never ...."

"Miss Robson," Crafter said, kindly, interrupting, "then perhaps you can explain who were those charmingly vulgar men with blowguns chasing you? Ardent admirers?"

Anne shrugged. "I had a little trouble in the Amazon – well, getting out of the Amazon, really."

"My point exactly."

Dade could see the silver colored flecks of her ice blue eyes churning wildly. Her brow was crinkled in deep thought. She lowered herself into one of the chairs and motioned for Crafter to sit as well. Dade stood off to one side where he could keep an eye on the blond man named Bruno and Crafter, and keep within reach of Anne's Mauser.

"What is it you want?"

"I want you to find something for me. I will pay you fifty thousand dollars. You will not have to steal it, but it is in the wrongful possession of another."

"And who is that?"

"I don't know," he shrugged, grinning.

"You said you had access to theurgical powers," Dade said. "Magic. Why not find this thing with that?"

"I'm sorry, we haven't been properly introduced." Crafter rose, and just the action of him getting out of the chair was menacing.

"Travis Dade, reporter for the *Evening Post*."

"I do hope this little discussion won't end up in the late edition." There was an edge to his voice that he had not shown Anne.

"That depends."

"Indeed. You have a colorful costume, Mr. Dade."

"Yeah, the rodeo's at Madison Square Garden. I busted a bronc to get a first person piece."

"Yes. I see. Very interesting; I look forward to reading it. Now, what was I saying?" he asked as he seated himself.

"You were going to explain about your magicks," Anne reminded.

"Of course. Whatever capabilities I have access to are meager compared to the supposed strength of the Scarab. I've had Bruno cast about but he has found nothing."

"Spells, huh?"

"You are skeptical, Mr. Dade? How

quaint."

"What is this Scarab?"

"The Black Scarab, actually. It is about the size of your palm and, obviously, black. Obsidian, actually, carved in the image of a scarab. It was commissioned by the pre-dynastic pharaoh Srqt-a-Ra, the Scorpion King, somewhat more than four thousand years ago. As was customary, it was buried with him in his tomb. He had used the Scarab, carved by an innocent child with decidedly exceptional skills, and forged with power by three mages, to rule Egypt for two hundred years. The innocent was sacrificed to the Scarab, his blood poured over and absorbed by the obsidian object. The mages, after the Scarab had been imbued with dark powers, dissolved into dust. Or so goes the legend.

"The Scarab lay undisturbed for two thousand years before a sect of Yagi Priests, themselves infamous for dark arts, discovered Srqt-a-Ra's tomb in Abydos and violated it. They fought a terrible war just to obtain the Scarab. Entire Egyptian tribes were wiped out, and the Yagi had won their prize.

"Yet such a prize was impossible to hold. The Yagi lost it almost immediately to a raiding party of Nubians, who most certainly had no idea what they had taken. The Scarab is lost for nearly a thousand years, and then it turned up in what is now Buda-Pest in the hands of a Gypsy woman who gleaned some of its power. But she was unskilled in true magic and wiped out half of Europe with pestilence and famine.

The Scarab fell from her hands and has not been seen since.”

Anne took a slow breath and said, “And you want this because ....”

“If the Scarab has retained its power over the years, it is too dangerous to remain at large. Find it, Miss Robson. Protect us all from its power.”

“And I just hand it over to you?”

“No. Such things are great temptations. You keep it. Put it someplace safe so it cannot be misused.”

“What if it’s in a safe place now?”

Crafter shook his head. “No, Miss Robson. It is not. Those magicks that I told you about to which I have access are warning me that the Scarab’s power is growing. Ready to be tapped. It must be found before it rises and destroys the Earth.”

#### CHAPTER FOUR: THE RUSHING DEATH

**C**RAFTER REMOVED A LONG wallet from his breast pocket and took a sheaf of currency from it and put the money on a small table between he and Anne. Twenty-five thousand dollars. A down payment. The rest to be delivered upon finding and securing the Black Scarab.

“You will need an Enchantra for when you locate the Scarab,” Crafter offered. “I have one who is familiar with this ensorcelled object. Shall I send him to you?”

Anne agreed. “Bruno mentioned something about helping me with my

current problem.”

Crafter smiled and nodded toward Bruno. The blond man wasn’t particularly large, but he seemed rock solid and capable.

“I’ll have him attend to that immediately. Godspeed, Miss Robson. For humanity’s sake.”

He bowed slightly then went to the waiting elevator and climbed inside. Bent nearly double he cast a parting smile before the elevator doors closed and took him away.

An awkward silence filled the room.

“Um, look, Miss Robson, you’ve got the experience here, but I think that guy is full of ... beans,” Dade said.

A wry smile played on Anne’s lips. “You don’t believe him.”

“In a word: no.”

“Me either. But until I know what’s going on it’s better to play along. Besides, if this thing has anywhere near the power Crafter claims, then I’d rather it were in my hands than his.”

Taking her satchel, Anne went to one of the display tables and, with one hand, swept aside the clutter. She dumped the contents of the bag then carefully felt inside for the glass phial with the poison dart. Dade picked up the discarded gun and brought it to her. She certainly hadn’t used the satchel as a purse. Spilled onto the table was an assortment of items few city women would need. There was a length of coiled rope, several pitons, a small grappling hook, about a dozen clips for the pistol, a leather-bound diary bulging with papers and wrapped by a rubber

band, and a number of small artifacts. There was also a packet about the size of a fist wrapped in a folded chamois.

Anne noticed him looking at it. She picked it up and unfolded the soft leather wrapping to reveal a carved stone that bore the image of a pregnant woman, in profile, holding an axe in one hand and an oval shield in the other. Etched onto the full belly was the image of a baby wielding a dagger. A leather thong pierced a hole at the top of the tawny, dull stone to form a crude necklace.

It sent an icy chill down Dade's spine.

"This is what started the trouble," Anne said, slipping it over her neck. "It's supposed to be an artifact of the legendary Amazons."

"The mythical warrior women of South America?"

Anne was about to reply when a loud thump echoed through the room. It had come from upstairs.

In a shot, Anne was halfway up the spiral staircase, pistol in hand. Dade followed.

This middle level had a long balcony off of which were several rooms behind closed doors. The balcony curved around the interior of the spire to end in several sets of bookshelves.

Anne paused at the top of the stairs, listening. After a moment she picked out a scratching sound she could not identify. She waited, still listening, locating the origin of the sound. Dade pointed to the second door on the left. Anne nodded and moved lightly toward

it.

Like a cat she pounced into the room.

"Egad!"

A man, sitting hunched over at a desk, jumped with fright. He was a slight man, about Dade's height, but thin and with a long, narrow face. He wore elastic bands about his sleeves and a green shade over his eye. In his hand was a pencil which he had been broken in the excitement.

"Miss Anne, I have asked you not to do that!"

"Sorry," she said, lowering the pistol.

"I've been awaiting your arrival for we have much to discuss, as you know."

"Yes."

Dade entered the room and looked the man over. The man with the eyeshades got a second shock seeing Dade and his head shook nervously for a moment as he muttered something unintelligible.

"I didn't realize you were returning with a guest," he said, after finding his composure. He stood and took a deep breath and stuck a hand out toward Dade. "How do you do, sir. Edwin Bartholomew Chesterfield the Third. Miss Anne's accountant."

"Accountant?"

"Well, as I'm sure you've seen in the papers, Miss Anne's adventures leave her little time to deal with the mundane matters of life. Her finances take a great deal of time to manage."

"Really?" Anne said.

"Not that I'm complaining, Miss Anne," Chesterfield said, stuttering. "Of course it's a pleasure. Always. Now that you're home again, we have much to discuss."

"I can't stay, Edwin," she told him.

His face flushed suddenly and he got a silly grin across his face. "Edwin?" he said. "Yes, of course."

Dade asked, "That's your name, isn't it? Edwin."

"Miss Anne and I are not usually so familiar. It was kind of ni...."

"Mr. Chesterfield," Anne said, "I do have to go."

"We," Dade corrected.

She tossed a hard look at the reporter. "We."

"If the gentleman is accompanying you," Chesterfield offered tentatively, "perhaps a different costume might attract less attention. I believe the clothing room will have something in his size."

There was a room at the end of the hall that had hundreds of different costumes. Chesterfield sifted through the various clothes and pulled out a dark gray suit that Dade's grandfather would have been comfortable wearing. But it was clean and it fitted him and, Dade had to admit, seeing his reflection in a full-length mirror, he looked good in it. Chesterfield slipped a light gray fedora atop Dade's head but removed it.

"Perhaps a trip to the barbershop first," he said.

Downstairs, Anne repacked her satchel. She paused over the tawny stone, looking at it curiously. Then she slipped the leather thong over her head and let it settle gently on her neck, the stone sliding down the front of her shirt. With Dade, his hat defiantly settled back on his head, she went to the elevator. Chesterfield mumbled something nervously but they were already in the elevator.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"The New York Public Library. I want to see if Crafter's story is true. If it is, we get on a plane for Egypt."

"And if it isn't."

The elevator door opened and Anne stepped out without answering. She paused for a minute to survey the autos parked within her secret garage. There was a 1935 Ford Roadster convertible, red inside and out, parked in a corner, gleaming dully in

the dim garage lighting. Anne hopped into the driver's side. The keys were in the ignition. She pressed the starter and the machine roared to life. Her face broadened into a satisfied grin. Hurrying, Dade climbed into the other seat.

Putting the machine in gear, she rolled toward the wall which grated open as the car neared.

"You've got some setup here," Dade said, admiringly.

"Don't I though."

They had just passed through the



open wall when three grass-skirted natives hopped out from behind parked cars. The garage erupted in the explosion of rapid gunfire. The natives had abandoned their blowguns in favor of Tommy guns.

Spider webs crackled on the windshield. Anne threw the car into reverse and hit the gas as she grabbed up her gun with one hand. She fired wildly as the car shot back into the hidden garage and crashed against the far wall.

The natives had scattered with her first shots, but were now regrouping. The wall began closing. Anne fired off her last two shells, grabbed her satchel, and jumped from the car. Dade had gotten out as well and ran to the back of the car, only a few yards from the elevator.

Two of the natives had gotten into the garage before the doors closed. Firing their Tommy guns, the natives tattooed the walls with heavy bullets. Anne had slipped in a new clip and fired back, dropping one of the natives.

"There's an intercom!" she yelled. "Tell Chesterfield we need guns!"

Anne laid down covering fire as Dade reached out and activated the intercom.

"Chesterfield! We're under attack. We need help," Dade called.

Anne ran over, slapping in a new clip. A second native was dead.

"Miss Anne, is that you?" a buzzing voice said over the intercom.

"Chesterfield, call the police and get some weapons."

"The intruder alarms sounded as soon as you entered the elevator. I've already alerted Captain Albert. He will be here in ten minutes."

"We may not have ten minutes."

The moveable garage wall groaned and shook. Something large was pushing against it, forcing it open.

The elevator arrived and they got in, relieved.

"There'll be more of them," Anne said, wary. "How do they find me?"

In moments, they were whisked up nearly eighty stories, back to Anne's spire headquarters. Chesterfield awaited them with a golf club held high over his head.

"No time for a round, Junior," Dade said, grabbing the nine iron away from the accountant. "We need guns."

"Yes, well, the armory is upstairs, of course ..."

Dade turned to Anne. "Can they get up here if the elevator is locked?"

"I don't think so."

"The emergency stairs, Miss Anne! If they get to the Cloud Club they can make their way up."

A door on the other side of the spiral staircase bulged suddenly and cracked. Dade gave the golf club back to Chesterfield, took Anne's gun, and reloaded.

"Get to the armory!" Dade yelled as the door cracked again, shattering a small panel. A face with a blackened mouth peered through the hole, grinning evilly.

Dade fired four shots at the horrid face, the bullets smashing uselessly all

around the opening. Anne didn't wait to see the outcome. She ran upstairs in search of weapons.

"We do not have the ammunition to waste on poor marksmanship," Chesterfield said coolly. He took the pistol, returning the golf club to Dade, and fired one shot. A sharp scream cut the air.

The door shattered completely and several of the natives poured in. Two were armed with Tommy guns and sprayed the room with lead. Chesterfield did not move. He pointed the heavy pistol and fired six bullets in rapid succession. The echoing roar of gunfire was deafening.

Dade, having dropped to the floor and covered his head, lifted his gaze. The three natives were dead. Two others outside the door were in the stairwell, also dead.

"Did they send the whole tribe? Hey, good shooting there, Chesterfield."

"Hardly."

Anne returned carrying two compact machine pistols, round drums pregnant with bullets clipped beneath the short barrels. She tossed one to Dade, gave the other to Chesterfield, and retrieved her Mauser. She wore a holster now and had tied it against her thigh. Dade found the image threatening and provocative at the same time.

"Captain Albert shall be arriving shortly, Miss Anne. We should make ready to meet him."

Chesterfield returned to the stairs and ascended. Anne and Dade had taken a step toward the elevator then

stopped and followed the accountant. Half way up the steps Anne turned about and went to retrieve her satchel.

Gunfire erupted at the doorway. Anne dropped behind a table, bullets splintering the wood. Another burst of gunfire exploded in the room, this time from Dade's gun, and the attacking guns went silent.

"Did they send the whole tribe?" Anne muttered and ran for the staircase.

More natives poured in over the top of the slain men. These were armed with blowguns. They sent a curtain of tiny darts flying up toward the balcony.

Anne shot back toward the natives and ran for the far end of the balcony. Chesterfield had opened a small door and was climbing through. Dade had one foot inside the doorway, his machine pistol pointed back along the balcony.

"Get in!" Anne yelled.

Dade ducked inside just as Anne threw herself on top of him. With one foot, she shoved the door closed and kicked the latch in place.

"Hurry! If they knew about the emergency stairs, they'll know about this."

They were in a narrow stairwell lit from above by filtered sunlight. The stairs followed the angle of the spire. At the top was a small landing. A heavy metal hatch and wheel lock was set in the wall. Chesterfield had just finished opening the hatch when the door below burst open. Dade fired off a short burst from his machine pistol.

“They’re bold! They’ll be through any moment!”

“Where are we going?” Dade asked the accountant, shouting above the howling wind that began whipping through the staircase as soon as the hatch opened.

“Out!”

Chesterfield operated a lever beside the door and a corrugated metal platform extended away from the opening. Side rails unfolded and lifted on the whine of hydraulics. The platform extended two dozen feet and was at least a dozen feet wide.

“I don’t care how screwy this world is!” Dade yelled. “I ain’t got wings!”

“You won’t need them!”

Chesterfield stepped out, gripping the side rails with fear-whitened hands. Anne followed. Dade fired off a few more bursts to keep the natives back then stepped out onto the platform.

The three hung in space, nearly eighty stories above Lexington Avenue. The concrete maze of Manhattan stretched below and all around them. Dade was marveling at the site when he heard a low humming sound approach. Above them floated a large dirigible, bulbous, with an ornate gothic metalwork superstructure, and a gondola fitted with a pointed bowsprit, at the fore, and four huge propellers aft. A smaller gondola, partly hidden by the craft’s approach, hung beneath the dirigible’s tail section. A rope ladder unfurled from above suddenly, stopping mere inches from the platform.

“Up you go!” Anne ordered, holstering her pistol.

Surprised, Chesterfield said, “You want me to go with you?”

“You’re not safe here. Hurry.”

Awkwardly, the accountant began his ascent. Dade was next, and had a time keeping his footing. The dirigible was only one hundred feet off the platform but it took ten long minutes to make the climb. At the top, two men waited to help pull in the refugees.

Anne held the ladder taut as the men climbed. Then she stepped onto the ropes and began her ascent.

Behind her, the metal hatch clanged open and a half dozen natives stepped out onto the platform. One paused to fire blow darts up at the open gondola door. Two grabbed for Anne. She kicked at them, sending one flailing over the rail and the other skidding backward.

“Take us up now!” she yelled, the howling wind whipping her words away. She began climbing again, hampered by her satchel.

Dade blasted a burst from his machine pistol and felled two of the natives, including the blow dart shooter. Two more of the natives lunged for the ladder again and grabbed hold just as the rope lifted away. Alone on the platform, the last native used his blowgun at the dirigible.

Inside the gondola Dade looked at the two crewmen and said, “We’ve got to haul this ladder up quick!”

Chesterfield yelped and dropped to the polished wood floor, holding his

arm. A tiny blow dart stuck out from between his fingers. Terror widened his eyes before they rolled and he flopped onto his back.

The dirigible shifted suddenly and dropped three hundred feet. Dade grabbed at the side of the open gondola door, reaching out to take hold of a crewman falling through the opening. Clinging desperately to the ladder, Anne had barely climbed past the bottom few rungs. The ladder flopped about as the dirigible plummeted. Two of the natives held her about her legs, pulling to tear her loose. She could not let go of the ladder to grab her pistol, and the wind whipped the fragile rope so violently Dade could not take a shot. She kicked at the men furiously. They bled profusely from broken noses and split lips, yet they would not release her.

Suddenly the ladder flopped over. Anne's grip was broken and she and the two natives plunged earthward.

#### CHAPTER FIVE: A KINDRED SPIRIT

**T**HE DIRIGIBLE SANK dangerously near the rooftops in the confining concrete canyons. Seeing her chance, Anne released the rope ladder and dropped twenty feet to the top of a cone-peaked water tank.

She landed awkwardly, slipped, and tumbled down the old wooden slat roof. Rolling, she stabbed a hand out and caught the rail at the top of the tank to keep from pitching off into space. One

of the natives missed the roof completely and, screaming, shot past the building and shattered onto the Third Avenue El tracks below. The other native crunched onto the rooftop and lay motionless.

Above, the deep hum of the dirigible grew louder as it approached, the rope ladder dangling from its belly. Anne caught the ladder and ascended.

Dade pulled her into the gondola and held onto her as the floor tilted with the dirigible's steep rise.

"Chesterfield was hit with a dart," Dade said.

Without hesitation, Anne threw open her satchel and pulled out a small phial of red pellets. She took several of these and slipped them beneath Chesterfield's tongue. The accountant had grown cold and very pale. He had stiffened so that his arms and legs were unbendable and his fingers had crimped into the shape of claws.

"We have to keep him warm," she said, and motioned for the crewmen to lift Chesterfield and follow her.

A wide, open wrought-iron staircase ascended from the center of the gondola and up into the balloon itself. They entered a narrow hallway that disappeared in to the gloomy deep recesses of the airship. Doors to many rooms opened onto the hallway. Anne opened several of them before finding the one she wanted. It was an infirmary, filled with cabinets of medicine, an examining bed, and several strange gadgets protruding from the walls on long, folded arms.

Chesterfield was placed on the bed. Anne covered him with blankets then raised side rails. She looked down at him, then touched his forehead and cheek. She ordered one of the crewmen to stay with the accountant and turned and left the room.

Dade followed her back down into the gondola and forward to the pilot-house.

A large wooden ship's wheel stood on a heavy mahogany post in front of a semi-circle of floor-to-ceiling storefront windows. For a moment vertigo overtook Dade. Looking out those windows he felt as if he had stepped into space and was floating above the city.

At the wheel was a burly, red-bearded giant, six feet tall and nearly as wide. He turned the wheel as if it were a toy.

Without turning he said, "Welcome aboard, lass!" His voice rumbled in a basso profundo that shook the gondola.

"Captain Albert," Anne said.

"And ye've brought company. Come forward, lad."

Dade stepped around the giant. Albert was a jolly sort; Dade could see that written on his face. But the man's eyes were black and they held terrible menace in them.

"Captain Horatio Albert at yer service, lad. Welcome aboard."

"Thanks, Captain. Travis Dade. I'm with the *Evening Post*."

"Lass! Come take a look."

Anne moved around Albert and followed his gaze down. Far below them was the Chrysler Building spire and

the platform they had used to escape. On it were several more of the natives. Suddenly a swirling black mist enveloped each in turn. Surprised, the natives tried to escape the platform but were all quickly consumed. Then the blackness compressed until it too disappeared.

Dade glanced over at Anne. "You think that's Bruno's doing?"

"Better late than never," she said.

Albert reached forward to a complex control panel and flipped a switch. Below, the platform folded back into the Chrysler Building as if it had never been there.

"Where to, then, lass? Set me a course. We have fuel and food enough to take ye around the world, and back again."

"Egypt, Captain Albert. Take us to Egypt."

They went back to the infirmary and relieved the crewman. The little red pellets were already working magic on Chesterfield. His limbs had loosened up and he was warming. He would have a bad fever for a while, Anne said, but that would pass. The accountant would live.

They stayed with Chesterfield until after the fever had run its course. Then they moved him to one of the state-rooms and put him to bed. He had awakened several times but was lucid only once, and then only briefly. He looked about, seeing Anne and Dade, and said, "Oh dear," then collapsed.

"I can bunk with him," Dade said.

"No need. There's room enough."

She showed him to a cabin, small but adequate.

"Egypt, huh?"

"Yes," she said, fatigue pressing heavily on her. "I will believe Crafter for now."

"Although you don't like to."

"No. In any case, I do not want to risk another encounter with the Jinji."

"You don't think Bruno got them all?"

"Perhaps."

Dade was feeling tired as well, and yawned. "How long will it take to get to Egypt?"

She shrugged. "A while." She smiled and reached up to touch Dade's long hair. "Enough time for me to give you a proper hair cut."

Down the hall, a dark figure peered out of the gloom. Unseen, it watched Anne and Dade separate. For a moment it remained, then vanished.

Dade slept for six hours. It was difficult to tell the passage of time. The rooms had no windows and no light filtered through. The air was generally warm, but the dirigible was, not surprisingly, drafty. After waking, he lay in his bunk quietly thinking. So much had happened to him in such a few short hours. He had started the day in the age of computers and supersonic flight. Here he was now aboard a dirigible in some fantasy world of nearly a century ago. He smiled ruefully. The greatest story of any century and he couldn't tell it because no one remembered how things had been.

He thought of Anne. She seemed out of place, too. Yet she was part of this fantasy world. At times she was confused by it, he was sure of that. Other times she knew just what to do, where to go. He sensed that she knew something about The Change, and he needed to get that information from her.

The smell of eggs and bacon frying drove him from his bed and out into the hallway. An open door spilling light into the corridor beckoned him. He walked into a small dining salon, complete with fixed tables, wooden chairs, table clothes, roseate carpeting, and curtained windows that followed the angle of the lower dirigible envelope and offered a spectacular view below. At the back of the room was an open door, partly hidden behind a screen, leading to the galley. Anne was inside, cooking.

"Thoroughly Modern Milly," Dade said, seeing her at the stove.

"What?"

"You can spend half a day shooting and punching bad guys and still have time to fix breakfast."

She scooped up a pair of scissors and said, "And find a little time to give a shaggy fellow a haircut."

"Um, you ever do that kind of thing before?"

"Actually, no," she said.

"Well, I guess it's in your blood. Your mother did own a string of hair salons."

After breakfast Anne got up behind Dade and threw a sheet around him. She held his shoulders firmly as he began to squirm. After the first snip!,

though, it was too late to get away, so he sat still and let her work on him.

"I suppose you've been doing this adventuring thing for a while," Dade said.

"Oh, sure. Years."

"Uh-huh. Probably have some great stories to tell. Maybe from your youth."

"How about you?" There was tension in her voice. "How long have you been a reporter for the *Post*?"

"*Evening Post*," he reminded. He wasn't about to be caught in a mistake like that again. "About eight years. My editor, Mallon, he's a pistol. Hard man, but he's got ink for blood."

"What were you doing at my shop yesterday? Were you assigned to me?"

"No. I was working a corruption story in the thirteenth ward. Got turned around and ended up with you."

Anne finished her cutting and brushed the hair from Dade's shirt. She took the scissors and comb over to a counter.

"I think you're lying," she said.

"Nope. One of the other fellows got you. He was heading down to Bennett Airfield to meet your plane. Now that you mention it, though, how did you dodge him?"

"I flew in on the Clipper."

"Why didn't you take Captain Albert and the magic flying carpet?"

She turned and smiled at him. "You really are a reporter."

"From my head to my heels," he said, inspecting his hair in a small mirror.

She looked down at his dark shoes and something moved across her face.

She remembered the shoes he had been wearing when they met earlier.

"You were wearing blue jeans and sneakers yesterday."

"The rodeo. Got to finish that story."

"Uh-uh," Anne said, shaking her head. "You were wearing Wrangler jeans and Adidas shoes."

Dade took a deep breath. "You know what Adidas are?"

"Yes. They don't exist now. But they did. Before The Change."

For a long minute they stood there looking at each other, both afraid to move or even breathe. Then Dade slowly outlined the last twenty-four hours he had spent in a whirlwind of strangeness. She watched him intently, smiling, frowning, nodding. Then Anne began her tale.

She had been in Brazil when The Change shimmered over her. She had been there to buy several new pieces of art produced by the native Brazilians, and some historical pieces as well. She had been talking to several cultured men who had driven her from Manaus to a small town on the river when they changed into the fierce, black-mouthed cannibals. They called her the defiler of Oxun, the river god. She barely escaped with her life.

For an hour they talked, and compared their new world with the old. The year was still 2002, but history had changed greatly. Much of it was still fuzzy for Anne, who had spent more time with The Change. For Dade, though, he knew nothing of this new world. It was a blank, like there was a

wall keeping it all out. But Anne did know a few things.

"The world is divided," she said. "There are pockets of realities. Different realities. New York is in a strange 1930s kind of place. But there are even pockets there. Some neighborhoods are right out of the 1890s. When I flew in, the Statue of Liberty wasn't on Bedloe's Island."

"The Statue went up 1886," Dade said.

"Yes. But there's more. Flying back over the jungles of Central America I saw some strange creatures, like things out of a nightmare. And something else. A dragon."

"This can't be real."

"So much has changed. And we're the only two who seem to remember the way things were."

Dade sat. "Why?"

Anne shook her head. Absently, she had pulled at the thin necklace about her neck, twirling the leather with her finger. The small stone carving she had earlier shown Dade came out of her shirt and lay against her chest. "I wish I knew. What's even stranger is that I know about some of this world. When I let myself, I remember things."

"The poison antidote for Chesterfield," Dade said.

"Yes, and other things."

"People seem to be the same," Dade said, confused. "Even their jobs."

"Are they? Or do you know some things about this new world, too?"

"No! How could I?"

"Your editor ...."

"Mallon. What about him?"

"Was he your editor before The Change?"

"Sure. He's been the editor since ..." Dade froze. Another name came into his mind. "No. The editor should be Mark Schultz. But Mallon – it's like I've always known him. I don't understand."

"Travis, I don't have an Uncle Phil. Not in the other reality. But I knew who that old man was in the shop."

"So," Dade said, his face blanching, "which is the real world?"

Anne shook her head.

"Wait a minute! When The Change came over you and the others in Brazil, did your clothes change?" She thought for a moment and said they had. "Mine didn't. I've watched people go through The Change. I've seen their clothes and hair and even their attitude alter. And when it was done they were completely different people. But not with me. Whatever is helping you remember is not the same thing that's affecting me."

Captain Albert's ample bulk blocked the doorway suddenly. He had entered the room on cat's feet, and stood with his hands on his hips.

"Captain?" Anne said.

"There's a plane following us, Miss Anne, and coming up fast. Thought ye'd like to know. An' she's armed."

### CHAPTER SIX: THE TOMB OF APIS

**T**HEY RACED DOWN INTO the gondola and forward to the pilot-house. The huge expanse of windows gave them an endless view of the sky. Dade looked at the altimeter on a brass plated panel of dials and switches. They were nearly twenty thousand feet high. Above them slightly and to the right an old Sopwith Snipe biplane had just turned into a slow dive toward the dirigible.

"Captain?" Anne asked, a tinge of worry in her voice.

"He's made several runs, lass. He could have fired on us at any time. Of course he would have been blasted out of the sky if he had. Though those twin Vickers machine guns do look mean."

"What's he doing?" Dade asked.

"Letting us know he's there. I think he wants to come in for a visit."

"How can he ...?"

"We've two plane hooks aft beneath the docking gondola," Anne said, then shrugged when Dade gave her a look.

Captain Albert waved to one of the crewmen, beckoning him over and relinquishing the wheel. "We should go meet with the man."

They went back up into the envelope and down the gloomy hallway, aft. Along the way, they found Chesterfield awake and rummaging through the galley for food.

"Ye look well, lad," Captain Albert exclaimed, jovially.

"Still a bit woozy, but none-the-worse for wear."

Chesterfield snatched up an apple and a chunk of bread and followed the trio. At the end of the hall, a close, steep companionway descended into a long, narrow room ringed by small square windows. On the floor were two large hatches. The air in the room was cold.

Outside, the Sopwith Snipe rose up into view once, then ducked below the airship. Captain Albert lifted one of the floor hatches and flopped it back on thick iron hinges. A blast of icy air swept into the room along with the gentle hum of the ship's engines.

The Snipe rose up under the airship and matched speed. The top wing of the bird blocked their view of the squat cockpit, but they could see a red scarf flapping crazily in the wind. The plane inched up and forward, and slipped onto a huge U-shaped hook. Immediately the engine died. Captain Albert lowered a folding ladder toward the cockpit and waited, but no one climbed out. Anne slipped over the side and climbed down. When she came back a moment later she held out the red scarf and shrugged.

"No one is there," she said.

"I am here."

The voice came from behind them at the foot of the companionway that led up into the airship's envelope. They turned to find a black-cloaked figure, his features shrouded beneath a blood red hood.

"We have much to discuss," he said in a soft voice that cut clearly through the howling wind.

The robed figure turned and climbed

up the companionway.

“Well,” Anne said with a shrug, “Crafter did say he was sending an Enchantra.” She closed the hatch and followed.

They found the robed figure in the dining salon standing in a shadowed corner.

“You sail for Egypt, this is not your final destination,” the figure said.

“Yer on my ship, lad. Ye’ll speak plain or not at all,” Captain Albert said, his voice heavy with an authoritative timber. “An’ ye’ll show us yer face.”

The figure paused a moment then reached up and pulled back his hood. He was a youthful man, although his head was bald. Thick, black sideburns grew from his temples down to his chin. A ring of black hair rounded his head, connecting the facial hair. His eyes were green and cat-like. He stared at the others intently. Neither his body language nor his demeanor gave off any suggestion of his intent or attitude: anger, fear, menace, friendship – none of it registered. It was as if he was a picture, an image of something unreal. It was as if he wasn’t really there.

“I am Omani Dahla. I was sent by Mr. Crafter to help in your quest for the Black Scarab.”

“You’re the wizard,” Dade said.

“Enchantra,” Dahla corrected.

“What’s the difference?”

“Attitude.”

Dade had taken an instant dislike toward the man, and wasn’t moved to change his feelings.

“Where should we be going if not to

Egypt?” Anne asked.

“I did not say you should not be going to Egypt. The signs will lead you to the Black Scarab.”

“If I may suggest, Miss Anne, since this man will not be our guide, that we adjourn to the library. Perhaps something there will help us focus our search.”

“Captain,” Anne said, “we need to make land in Maghra.”

“I’ll put ye down in the center of town, if they have one in that heathen sandbar.” The Captain gave a small bow and left the room.

Anne watched Dahla as the man slowly pulled his hood back over his head. For the briefest instant she thought she saw the hint of a smile cross his lips.

“I’m not sure I approve, Miss Anne,” Chesterfield said, pulling at the girl’s arm. “Four men accompanying a lady on such a long trip, it’s not seemly.”

“Four gentlemen,” she said, gently.

“True, of course, but with no chaperone.”

“Well, Chesterfield,” Dade said, “it could be worse. There could be seven of us and we could be really, really short.”

Twelve hours later they rolled out of thick cumulonimbus clouds into clear blue sky. Below, desert stretched endlessly. A patch of green blistered out of the yellow sand. They sailed east for another six hours before the captain and his crew began the delicate work of descending.

Anne and the rest came forward to the pilothouse. Dahla had again lowered his hood.

"Kemet," he said.

"Fertile Egypt," Chesterfield said.

Dahla nodded with approval at the accountant's translation. "Though this is more oasis than Nile Delta."

"Why not the town Crafter mentioned: Abydos?" Dade asked, turning to Anne.

Whether she hadn't heard the question or simply ignored it, Dade did not know. She stood at the large, floor-to-ceiling windows studying the land below. A soft, high-pitched hum permeated the pilothouse. Dade looked around for its source. Chesterfield caught his eye and nodded toward Anne. Dade watched the girl, and listened. The sound was coming from her.

"There," she said, suddenly. Her finger pointed to a small collection of ancient blocky buildings well outside of town. "Get us close to that."

Captain Albert settled the dirigible within two hundred yards of the buildings. Anne headed for the door, now garbed in pith helmet and with the Mauser strapped to her side. Dahla removed his robe and flapped it several times, then twisted it. It turned from black to the color of sand. Beneath the robe he wore black leggings and boots, and a black tunic with a swirling gold inlaid design.

Sneering, Dade said, "Abracadabra," as the Enchantra slipped back into the garment.

"Please keep the ship ready, Cap-

tain," Anne said. "We'll want to leave quickly."

Outside, the sun was blisteringly hot. Dade and Chesterfield removed their coats immediately. A crowd of Egyptians had circled the great airship, pointing and whispering. At the appearance of Anne and her companions, they took a collective step back. In moments, though, they pressed forward again, faces curious and smiling. Their appearance was such that Dade could not tell if they were modern or ancient Egyptians. The Change may have already swept over them, or they may have been untouched by it.

Dahla knelt and scooped sand up into his hand. "Deshret," he said, softly.

"You speak the lingo?" Dade asked.

Before the Enchantra could answer, Anne stepped up to a wizened, toothless woman and began speaking. She held up a cloth bag that she opened for the old woman to see, and bounced it in her hand. Dade couldn't understand a word, but the old woman smiled broadly and hugged Anne then pointed toward the larger of the buildings. She spoke for several long minutes then pointed again at the building.

"We are welcome," Anne said, turning to the men.

"Looks like you're getting the hang of this," Dade said, a sly grin on his face.

Anne shrugged. "I think so."

The weather-scoured limestone of the large building was cracked and looked as if it might crumble at any minute. Rotting beams supported its

squared entryway, giving it the outward appearance of a mineshaft adit.

The crowd followed Anne and the others to the entrance. They gave the new arrivals several torches and a smooth stone plate. Anne gave this to Dade to carry.

Inside, torches lit, they made their way cautiously through narrow passageways.

"I told them we come to honor Apis and to make an offering," Anne said.

"The bag of coins," Chesterfield said.

"Yes. They don't really worship this minor god, but they will welcome the coins."

They took several turns, examining the walls as they went. The narrow, low-ceilinged limestone corridors were empty of all inscriptions. After a few minutes they noticed that the floor, hard-packed with centuries of foot traffic, was angled down into the earth.

Anne paused suddenly, and crouched low. She reached out a hand and examined the crumbling limestone at the corner of an intersection. Again the strange high-pitched hum rose up all around them. Anne pointed down a new corridor. "That way," she said.

The passage let out into a large room lined with torch holders. A small stone bier sat in the middle of the room. On it were the tattered remains of an ancient cloth and some pieces of broken pottery. There was no other outlet.

"Dead end," Dade said.

The walls of the room were smooth. There were no cracks or crevices, nothing to suggest a place to hide the talis-

man they sought. Anne inspected the bier as others felt along the blank limestone walls. If there was a secret room, its access was well concealed.

"What did you expect to find, Miss Anne?"

"Well, not the Black Scarab," Dade answered. "The Scorpion King's tomb is in Abydos."

"This is the tomb of Apis, a minor god in the Egyptian pantheon," Anne said, running her fingers lightly over the walls. "The Black Scarab was made in honor of Apis and would not have been buried with Srqt-a-Ra as Crafter suggested. It would have been taken here."

"Well, if that's true," Dade said, "it was stolen long ago."

"Perhaps not stolen. But taken." Anne had stopped touching the wall and was now pressed close against it. Her eyes squinted trying to see something. "Bring all the torches here."

They brought the torches closer, the flickering light casting shadows on the wall. Anne ran a finger along the wall and after a moment they all saw it. There was something drawn there, pale and ancient.

"We need more light," Chesterfield said.

"Perhaps I can help," Dahla said, sloughing off his sand-colored robe. "Please stand back."

The Enchantra lowered his head and lifted his arms slightly. He did not look at the wall, but reached out for it blindly with probing fingers, and began to chant:

“Ah Elfyntodd Dwyr Sinddyn Duw  
“Cerrig Yr Fferllurig Nwyn, Os  
Syriaeth Ech Saffaer Tu

“Fewr Echlyn Mor Necrombor  
Llun.”

Dahla repeated the chant three times, his body arching in concentration. Silence followed the chant. The Enchantra had, for the moment, stopped breathing. Then sparks of light dripped horizontally from his fingertips and splashed onto the wall. A stream of electric yellow light flowed from his hands. The wall was washed in the fiery color. Millennia of grime and age were swept away until the tomb's inner chamber gleamed like pure gold from the reflected light of the torches. The faint drawings now stood boldly on the wall, their earthen colors bright and clear.

“Oh, see, this will be much better on the eyes,” Dade said.

Dahla took a long, slow breath then opened his eyes. “Yes.”

“This will take some time to decipher,” Chesterfield said, intently interested in the newly revealed hieroglyphics. “I can return to the airship's library and bring some books.”

“We won't need them,” Anne said, crossing to the far wall.

Amid the classical hieroglyphs were two other designs, both of which were out of place. The first was a collection of incomplete circles evenly spaced around a common center, like the shape of a four-leaf clover. A smaller duplicate was set within the first. Inside this was a stranger shape. There was a

vertical line along which were several series of lines and dots. The lines came in bunches – intersecting the vertical line or falling on either side of it – and the dots separated each bunch.

Anne removed a small pad and pencil from her khaki shirt pocket and sketched the image.

Dahla stepped forward, unmasked surprise painting his face. “These are Druidic symbols,” he said.

Dade, too, was surprised. “I don't know about those,” he said. “But I know where I've seen this image before. And for the life of me, I don't know how I could have seen it.”

### CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SCOURING STORM

**A**NNE TOOK THE BAG OF coins and emptied it onto the plate Dade carried, then put the plate on the bier. Then she led the men out of the tomb. The crowd awaited them, curious. Anne found the old woman and smiled sweetly. She gave the empty cloth bag to the woman who grinned toothlessly, and nodded. A cheer rose up.

“Man, these guys must be poor to cheer like that over a few coins,” Dade said.

“They will not touch the coins now,” Dahla said. “They will see the restored tomb and look on it as a favor of the gods because of the tribute.”

“Don't kid yourself,” Dade sneered. “Those coins are as good as gone.”

The old woman took Anne by the

hand and guided her to a huge tent. Each of the men was moved along with her, gently but firmly. Inside, pillows were arrayed on fine, thick carpets. Trays of food were laid out with pitchers of wine and honey. Several large, sun-bronzed men stood with heavy feather fans, waving them slowly to make a breeze.

The visitors were brought to the pillows and seated. The old woman joined them, smiling. She spoke rapidly in her tongue to Anne.

"We are to be guests," the girl said, "for our honoring their god."

A quartet of musicians entered the tent. They began playing and several girls rose to their feet and began dancing. The food was passed around.

Translating the old woman's words, Anne said, "They have had no visitors in many months, she says. We are a good excuse for a celebration."

Dahla wagged his fingers at the old Egyptian woman and muttered a few words.

The toothless crone turned to the others and said, "They say that I am an old woman and that my mind is going. But I know of what I speak. The Change came and made everyone different."

"Holy mackerel! She speaks English now," Dade said.

"Tell me what happened," Anne said, leaning close.

"The world shimmered. A silver light sparkled on everything and everyone. Homes vanished, tombs appeared. What was was no more. What

is has never been. Apis remains. The god was displeased and remade the world."

Dade nudged Anne. "She remembers," he whispered.

"Tell me what went before The Change," Anne said.

"Men with guns walked among us. Their trucks fouled the air. Now there is only the camel and our own good feet. The oasis is bigger, too. More families. Now you come and offer tribute. Apis is pleased."

"When did The Change happen? How long ago?"

"How long? There is no time any more. Seven days. Seven hundred years. What does it matter? The guns and trucks are gone. Apis is again happy."

Anne turned to Dade. "A week. That's before what happened to me in Brazil."

"And me in New York."

"This thing is moving over the planet like a wave."

The conversation died as everyone watched the dancing. The girls were young and pretty, and their movements were fluid. Dade found himself becoming hypnotized by their rhythmic undulations. After some minutes he felt someone's eyes on him. He turned to see the old crone watching him, smiling.

"Take one," she said. "Make babies. Apis will be pleased."

Dade forced a smile. "Maybe later."

The sides of the tent lit up suddenly in a fluttering white flash. Chester-

field jumped.

“What on Earth!”

The dancing continued until a low rumble shuddered through the tent, followed by a heavy blast of wind that blew open the tent flaps. Captain Albert was standing at the opening when the dust settled. Several of the Egyptians had climbed up on the man; and Captain Albert held more of them in his arms. They had tried to keep him out of the tent only to be dragged in.

“We haven’t much time, lass. There’s quite a storm brewing and we have to make sail quickly.”

The airship lifted off the ground with agonizing, but majestic leisure. To the south a great bank of black and green clouds roiling in a squall line crept forward. Slashing rain preceded the weather front, pounding the dry desert mercilessly.

The Egyptians had, with practiced ease, packed everything of value securely away, dismantled the tents, and found shelter in the various tombs and other small limestone buildings.

Captain Albert had opened the dirigible’s engines, cranking at full power, and the nose of the great airship lifted at a perilous angle. Everyone inside held onto side rails, transfixed by the swirling blackness on the horizon. For two hours they climbed, inching away from the storm.

“We won’t get above this in time,” Dade said. “This thing’s got a ceiling of twenty thousand feet, and that storm

front is higher.”

“Don’t fret, yerself just yet,” Captain Albert called back from the wheel. “Of course, ye might want to get into jumpers.”

The crew handed out square backpacks to everyone and instructed on their use. Unlike a parachute, the jumpers popped open into a semi-rigged airfoil that allowed the user to fly glider-fashion to the ground. Arms akimbo and through leather loop straps, the flier had a great deal of maneuverability. In a storm, though, this type of flying would be next to impossible.

Below, the storm swept nearer to Maghra. The leading edge sparkled silvery and shimmered off the sand in blurry waves. It passed over the oasis, twinkling and kicking up furious, swirling gusts of sand. The limestone buildings were scoured, pummeled by the heavy winds.

And then the line passed. Nothing remained. All the buildings, the palm trees, the large pools of water and lawns of dark green grass were gone – as if they had never existed.

Mouth gaping, Chesterfield said, “The storm. It wiped out the village.”

“No,” a grim-faced Anne said. “It was never there.” She looked over at Dade, who stood at her elbow. He understood.

“The Change does come in a wave,” he whispered.

Anne nodded. “And it’s coming back around, changing the world again. And it’s increasing in power as it goes.”

She turned and ran to Captain Albert. "We have one chance, Captain. We have to stay ahead of the storm and above it."

"We're gaining speed and altitude, lass. And I can feed the engines a little something extra," he said with a grin. Then he called over his shoulder. "Hope yer biplane is secured, dark one."

Dahla appeared at the foot of the companionway. "It is."

Captain Albert reached down to the brass control panel and flipped several switches. Then he took a deep breath and pushed a black button.

"Hold on!"

The airship lurched forward, the metal superstructure groaning under the sudden strain. The altimeter needle spun about the dial. Easing the wheel over, Captain Albert angled the great ship to the northwest. For long minutes they watched the black wall of clouds and the silvery shimmering inch closer. The airship creaked. Somewhere something snapped and a crewman ran off to find it.

Surprised, Anne felt a warm spot growing on her chest. She looked down her open collar and saw the trinket she wore around her neck was glowing. She took it off and stared at it. The thing glowed brightly with the green, black, and silvery colors of the storm.

Then they were away from the storm, beyond the squall line and out of its path. Captain Albert leveled the airship and turned off the "little something extra."

Anne looked at her trinket. It had

grown cold and was again the tawny dull color of stone.

"Don't turn it off, Captain," Anne said. "We have to get to our destination as fast as possible."

"Yer sure it's Buda-Pest ye'll be wanting, lass?"

Anne looked over at Dade. "Yes. Buda-Pest. Best possible speed."

"You're sure it's in Buda-Pest, Travis?" Anne asked. While racing to the ship after their feast at Maghra, Dade had told Anne where he had seen the symbols from Apis' tomb.

They were now gathered around a table in the dining salon, Anne and Dade somber-faced, the others curious. Captain Albert was a stoic mountain; he would not be surprised by anything he was told. Chesterfield fidgeted nervously, a fearful wonder all about his face. Dahla stood off to the side, folded into the shadows. His eyes, though, watched the others intently.

"It's in St. Catherine's Church. On the Buda side of the Danube." Dade had a pencil and paper and was re-drawing what he had seen in the tomb of Apis. He pointed to the clover shape. "This is a Christian symbol."

"And a Druidic one," Dahla said. "It is the symbol of mother Earth, the four elements."

"Christians call it a quatrefoil and it signifies the four evangelists."

"Very curious," Chesterfield said, "that two disparate followings should share a symbol."

"No," Dahla said. "Religions are not

born of whole cloth. They are built on what has gone before. The Druids have existed since before any recorded history. Before Christ, before Atlantis, perhaps even before mankind took its first steps. It is a belief that is one with nature and the natural gods.”

“And these symbols inside the quatrefoil?” Anne asked.

“Druidic writing,” Dahla said, tightly. Anne saw something in his black eyes.

“What does it say?” she asked.

The Enchantra hesitated. “It is a word. A name.”

“For crying out loud,” Dade said. “Just tell us.”

“It says, ‘Jesus’.”

“Holy mackerel!” Dade shouted.

“I don’t understand,” Chesterfield said. “Druidic symbols and writing about Christ in an Egyptian god’s tomb. How can this be?”

“The Yagi priests Crafter mentioned,” Dade offered. “They took the Black Scarab. They must have left the painting of the quatrefoil as a symbol of their victory.”

“Or as a warning,” Anne said. “But why Druidic writing?”

“Perhaps the Yagis were not true Christians but instead believers in Druidism.”

Anne shook her head. “No. This is an announcement. A declaration. But they didn’t want to leave a trail back to their home, so they used the ancient writing.”

“Perhaps,” Dahla said, stepping back into the shadows.

“I don’t understand about this Scorpion King fellow,” Chesterfield said. “His name – Srqt-a-Ra – suggests he was a follower of the Egyptian deity Re, the sun god. He would not worship Apis or Osiris, gods of the underworld.”

“He was secretly a worshipper of Osiris,” Anne said. “This is why he had the Black Scarab commissioned and imbued with powers. He wouldn’t have it buried with him. It was a gift to get him into the underworld, one he presented to Apis who, while a minor god, shared much in common with Osiris and was one of his minions. Srqt-a-Ra may have seen Apis as his gateway to the underworld.”

“Suck up,” Dade said.

Mouth hanging open, Chesterfield stared at Anne.

“I’ve got a library, you know,” she said. “I looked up a few things earlier while you recovered from the poison and Travis was sleeping.”

“Oh. Of course.”

“Tell us of The Change, lass,” Captain Albert said. His voice cut through the room with its suddenness. “Ye mentioned it as we were escaping that strange storm.”

Anne and Dade shared a look; it was time to tell them.

“The world is changing,” she began. “I don’t know why or how, but things that are supposed to be are not any more.”

“Magicks,” Dahla said. “Strong magicks. I have sensed it.”

“For this world,” Dade said, “that

makes sense.”

“What’s wrong with our world,” Chesterfield asked.

“Everything. We left a New York City that hasn’t existed in seventy years. Dinosaurs shouldn’t exist in Africa. Atlantis, if it had existed at all, sank beneath the sea eons ago.”

“But dinosaurs have lived in Africa for millions upon millions of years,” the accountant argued.

“That’s just it. They haven’t. This has become a world made up of perhaps hundreds of other worlds from different dimensions. And somehow, I’m certain, it’s tied to the Black Scarab.”

“And the world continues to change,” Dahla said. “That storm wasn’t natural. There were very strong magicks at work.”

“If it is magic,” Anne said softly, her voice thick with skepticism.

Dade looked back at the Enchantra. “But if it is magic, can you stop it?”

“I don’t know. If the Black Scarab is the power source, perhaps its destruction will stop The Change. Perhaps even reverse it altogether.”

“Ye weave a strange tale, lass,” Captain Albert said. “Yet no stranger than the world we live in. And ye’ve taken me on many a harrowing journey, and back again. I’ll follow ye. Where ever.”

“We have to find the Black Scarab. Then maybe we’ll have a clue what to do.”

The group broke up; Captain Albert going forward to the wheelhouse, the others to their cabins. Dade looked

around for Dahla but the Enchantra had faded into the shadows and was gone.

At that moment the robed man had stepped down into the small docking gondola. He lifted the floor hatch and a ferocious wind swept into the room. Yet it was a silent wind, unnaturally devoid of any sound.

Dahla climbed down the ladder extending to his moored biplane and closed the hatch behind him.

#### CHAPTER EIGHT: THE STONE TRAP

**H**OURS LATER, THE AIRSHIP circled above the city of Budapest Hungary as it crossed the Danube and lowered beside a watchtower at the precipice of the Gellért-hegy, a steep cliff overlooking the smooth waters of the fabled river. They had seen green-jacketed troops on the Pest side of the river, but things appeared peaceful beneath a sun-drenched blue sky. The Gellért-hegy was situated on the opposite shore of the Danube, on the Buda side of the city. Slightly downhill were several old monuments and a fortress that was manned by more of the green-coated soldiers.

A troop of the soldiers was waiting as the ship moored, their bayoneted muskets at the ready. They wore pillbox hats and long, high-collared coats. Anne presented credentials to an epauletted officer who stood stiffer than

his tall collar. He twitched his bushy mustache as he read, but seemed satisfied with her papers.

Anne, Dade, and Chesterfield debarked by way of a tall ladder.

"Where is the Enchantra?" Dade asked.

Dahla stepped around the front of the gondola, again in his black robe and red hood. "Here," he said, simply.

"The Hapsburgs hold sway here," Chesterfield informed, as they made their way down through the fort and onto the lone road that wound its way from the Gellért-hegy into town. "The Turks have been forced out several centuries now, but part of their culture remains."

"That puts it into the 1800s, by my calendar," Dade said.

Halfway down the hill they passed one of the several monuments dotting the roadside. This was a pillared atrium, at the center of which was a marble statue of Bishop St. Gellért.

"St. Catherine's is at the bottom of the hill in the Tabán district," Dade said.

"If you come from another dimension, Mr. Dade," Chesterfield asked, his voice laced with suspicion, "how is it you know where to find this church?"

"I wish I knew."

At the bottom of the hill the path split toward the Elizabeth Bridge and the Chain Bridge, with its stone lion sentries. Another path cut away from both bridges and wound around a low hill into the center of Buda.

Horse drawn wagons and hand

held carts maneuvered through the brick and mud streets. As they came into town, they saw rows of shops and houses, taverns and churches, all rising and falling over low, gently rolling hills. The clop of horses' hooves, rattling of carts, and constant murmur of voices echoed around them. Distant low toots from steamships on the river punctuated the warm air. People in colorful costumes filled the streets.

Several large churches sat richly upon the larger hills of Buda, looking imperiously down on the city. St. Catherine's was jammed into a very old section. The streets were narrower here and were made of well-worn cobblestone. Brick houses rose several stories high, shadowing the confined streets. Doors and windows were thrown wide open, and the smells of people, animals, and cookpots boiling lay like a cloud in the close canyons of the Tabán district.

St. Catherine's baroque spire stretched lumberingly into the sky, its several levels circled by arched windows and its upper section barbed with stone hooks. Huge oaken doors lay open atop two short flights of wide steps, above which was a detailed carving of Christ carrying the cross, a tearful crowd beckoning to him past Roman guards. Huge, narrow stained glass windows cut like wounds into the heavy stone walls.

An acolyte greeted them just inside the doors. He bowed and ushered the foursome to another set of doors leading into the sanctuary. The young man

bowed again and returned to his main entrance vigil.

St. Catherine's was a long and narrow building, unlike most of the churches in the split town of Buda-Pest that rambled over great plots of land. The foyer they were in was dark, the three-story ceiling lost in a gloomy haze. Several archways led off the foyer to more darkened recesses.

"Do you know where this image is located?" Anne asked, holding up the drawing Dade had made.

The reporter looked around, confused, then shrugged apologetically.

"We split up," Anne said.

Anne moved to the far end of the foyer and stepped into the gloom of an archway. Dade went into the sanctuary. Chesterfield paused for a moment, flustered, then chose a passage. He turned to watch which path Dahla had chosen but the Enchantra was already gone.

The dim light of the hallways made the search slow and painstaking. His glasses on, then off, then on again, Chesterfield crept along the empty corridor studying the walls and ceiling. A long, carved frieze adorned the top of the wall showing various angels and an endless parade of saints. The lower walls were plain except for the occasional stone carved with images. These were placed haphazardly about, some at eye level, some close to the floor. Most of them were of cherubs or of the Holy Mother. The marble floors were inlaid with a maze of patterns, many of them simple geometric shapes. Chesterfield

initially passed the quatrefoil image he sought, not recognizing it at first because it was upside down. He stared down at the inlaid tile, twisting his neck about until he was certain of what he was seeing.

He ran back to the foyer and into the sanctuary and found Dade. The reporter went for the others and they all joined Chesterfield back at his find.

"This is it," Anne said, comparing the floor stone to the drawing.

"What do we do, break through it?"

"That's solid marble," Chesterfield said, "we would need heavy equipment."

Looking around, Anne said, "If it's hidden below this, there might be another way down."

After a half-hour search of the corridor and the several doors leading from it, they found nothing. They were about ready to try breaking the stone when Dade noticed a small apse set into the wall at the end of the corridor. The quatrefoil was carved into the stone. On either side of the carving was a three-foot statue of a robed figure. These were turned away from each other, hands up and almost touching their featureless faces. The stone from which each was carved was flawed, dark and streaked as if black tears had stained the stone. Stabbing out from the backs of their robes were sets of small, sharp wings.

The quatrefoil and the Druidic writing had been chiseled into the stone. Anne stepped into the apse and knelt beside the carving. She felt the rough

vertical lines, paused at the small circles set between the letters. Gently sweeping with her fingertips, she brushed aside thick dust.

"This is it," she said.

Carefully, she set one finger on each of the small button-like circles between the Druidic letters and pushed. Nothing. She shifted her crouch and pushed again, throwing her shoulders into it. All four of the buttons moved.

There was the sound of aged stone scraping on stone and the panel with the quatrefoil grated open on ancient hinges to reveal an alcove about five feet high and almost as deep. At the back of the alcove was a narrow ledge. A weird light fell in a circle on the ledge, and within that light was the Black Scarab.

Dusty and aged, it had lost the black luster it must have had at one time. Time and perhaps handling had dulled its features.

"Make sure the door doesn't slam shut on me," Anne said.

"Yeah," Dade agreed.

Ducking low, Anne stepped into the alcove. The floor beneath her cracked, suddenly shattering. Anne plunged, her hand grabbing the scarab.

"Anne!"

Dade threw himself onto the floor and stretched down into the hole trying to grab the girl. He heard Anne yelp with surprise and then grunt.

"I'm all right," she said, her voice echoing slightly.

"I need some light," Dade said, call-

ing back over his shoulder.

The Enchantra stepped forward and waved a hand. Light, with a slightly green hue, brightened the alcove, and stabbed weakly down into the hole.

Anne stood above a black abyss, her feet clinging shakily to a ledge. She was about twenty feet down, well out of arm's reach. The hole was a vertical tunnel made of smooth, age-worn brick.

"We'll go back to the ship and get a rope," Dade said.

"No time," she said. "The ledge I'm standing on is contracting."

Now that he listened, Dade could hear the slow scrape of stone.

"Somebody grab my legs," Dade commanded.

"No," Anne said. "I'm going to throw the scarab up to you. Can you catch it?"

"Sure."

Dade stretched into the alcove, testing the remaining floor with his foot. It held. Straddling the hole, crouching, his hands were free.

"Hurry," Anne said, calmly. The stone ledge was now only inches wide as it slid into the tunnel wall.

"Ready."

She gauged the distance and the angle, then made a perfect underhand toss up to Dade's waiting hands. The reporter handed the scarab off to Chesterfield.

"All right, Chesterfield, now lower me down."

The accountant set aside the scarab and took firm hold of Dade's arms.

“Get the scarab back to New York,” Anne called up. “Find out what Crafter’s game is. He wants that trinket, I’m certain. It holds power. You must keep it out of his hands and use it to restore the world.”

The ledge had all but disappeared. Anne lost her footing and slipped. Desperately she grabbed onto the ledge with her fingertips. She hung there, straining, for several seconds until the ledge slid completely into the wall leaving only a crack to cling too. Finally, soundlessly, she slipped down the tunnel and into blackness.

“She’s gone,” Dade said.

“Give me your hand, Dade,” Chesterfield said.

The reporter was about to reach out when he saw something in the stone above the ledge where the scarab had rested. He planted his feet onto secure portions of the broken floor then wiped the dust away from the stone to reveal another symbol. A crossed set of ancient keys.

“Dade, hurry. We must try to find Anne.”

Ignoring Chesterfield’s pleas, Dade continued to clean the image of the carved keys. The keys seemed to be set tightly inside a recessed mold. Placing his palm at the center of the crossed keys, he pressed inward and felt the carving give. Stone grated and the panel in which the keys were carved slid down out of view, revealing a tiny chamber in which sat a glazed stone plate.

“Grab my belt,” Dade called, “and

pull me back.”

Emerging from the apse, Dade held up the plate that he had found. It was divided into fourteen sections, twelve of which circled a divided center. In each section was an image or a scene that had been carved into the stone. The plate was worn. Its paint had long ago faded and much of the glaze had eroded. The images were generally clear but unknown to the men. Except for one of the images at the center. It was the Black Scarab.

A second image shared the center with the scarab. Parts of it had been worn smooth. All they could make out was the figure of a woman with a hand raised and holding an axe.

“This is part of the riddle of the Black Scarab,” Chesterfield said.

“Yeah. The scarab’s tied into other talismans.”

“You think there are more?”

Dade shrugged. “Based on this plate, that’s what I would bet. How about our resident Enchantra? What do you think?”

But Dahla was gone. And so was the Black Scarab.

## CHAPTER NINE: LAIR OF THE YAGI PRIESTS

**T**HE DOOR TO THE SECRET alcove ground into place, locking away the tunnel into which Anne had fallen.

“We have to go back to the ship for supplies,” Chesterfield said, “and some

help to get Anne out of there.”

After thinking a moment Dade shook his head. “Anne said to get the scarab back to New York.”

“We don’t have the scarab!”

“Which means we have to find Dahla.”

“He could be anywhere.”

“Not anywhere. He’s got to take the scarab back to his boss, Crafter. And the only way to do that is to use the airship.”

“He’s an Enchantra, a wizard. He may not need to rely on mechanical devices.”

“Have you got a better idea?”

Chesterfield had none.

They raced through the cramped, cobbled streets of Buda to the Gellért-hegy road. Approaching the fort, they heard the throbbing hum of the airship’s motors coming to life. Breathless, they ran up the winding hill. The fort lay open, and the two men ran through it toward the tower at the edge of the cliff. The airship had already cast off its mooring lines. A squad of soldiers waved and cheered as the great ship lifted into the air, nose up, and over the cliff.

“He’s stealing the dirigible,” Chesterfield cried.

The main gondola was beyond their reach now, sliding over the cliff. The airship gradually picked up speed. Behind the main gondola the smaller docking gondola stuck out below the ship, and below that the Sopwith Snipe, moored on a hook, hung in tow.

Without pause, the two men ran for

the biplane. They leapt and caught hold of the tailplane and clung there desperately as they left the ground. Two shots rang out followed instantly by the clang of a ricochet. Dade sneaked a glance behind him and saw an officer yelling madly at one of the soldiers and holding the frightened man’s musket pointed groundward.

They were over the Danube now, and gaining altitude. Palms sweating with fear, Dade crawled toward the rudder and then pulled himself up onto his feet, straddling the plane’s tail. The airship was moving slowly, its four propeller motors humming loudly. Looking up Dade could make out at least four other casings that stuck out from the rigid frame of the dirigible. These were silent, but looked more like jet engines. In passing, Dade wondered if these were responsible for the “little something extra” that Captain Albert had employed to outrun the storm in Egypt.

Inching his way forward up from the tail, Dade got to the biplane’s cockpit and climbed in. He took a long, slow breath, calming himself. He hadn’t dared to look down, but now he did. They were at least two miles above the river and following it east. Gellért-hegy was miles behind.

Dade turned in the cockpit and motioned to Chesterfield to follow.

“Just don’t look down,” he yelled.

The accountant was white-faced and frozen in place. He had followed Dade’s lead and straddled the tail with the rudder behind him for support. But

he did not move forward. His neck was stiff and his eyes were wide and staring out at the horizon.

"You'll be fine. Just take it slow," Dade said, offering encouragement.

The wind swept away Chesterfield's response but he had clearly mouthed the word "Look."

Dade turned again in the cockpit. An undulating wall had risen up in front of the airship, and they were fast approaching it.

"Hurry!" Dade yelled.

Shaking, Chesterfield began inching forward.

"Get in here now!"

Dade reached out back along the tail, holding a hand out for Chesterfield. The accountant was only inches away now, leaning forward, his fingers stretching toward Dade.

"Another foot!"

Chesterfield crept forward some more then found his toe scraping against the lower wing. The plane rocked as they hit an air pocket. Dade stabbed a hand out and caught Chesterfield's arm. With a violent tug, he pulled the man into the cockpit.

"What is that?" Chesterfield asked, looking at the undulating wall in front of them.

"Up the ladder! Worry about that inside," Dade commanded.

Dade reached up and unfolded the ladder, then moved out of the way in the cramped cockpit for Chesterfield to squeeze by.

But there was no time. The front of the dirigible pushed into the wall and

disappeared. Momentum carried the great airship into the swirling mass of blue and white and purple. The small biplane rocked from side to side. Then the wall swept over them and for a moment they were numb and cold and unable to move. An instant later they were through. The dirigible was intact; the wall behind them now was whole and seemingly undisturbed. The air was calm and cool and the sun shone brightly.

"Okay," Dade said, breathing a deep sigh of relief.

They heard suddenly the sound of metal wrenching and looked up. The mooring hook holding the biplane snapped and, powerless, the craft plunged to earth.

Anne pressed the edges of her thick boots into the age-slickened walls, barely slowing her descent. Below her she saw a pale, greenish-blue light rising fast. She had only a moment to prepare as the tunnel ended and she found herself falling into a huge cavern.

Below her was a small pool of water. She splashed into that, plunging to the silty bottom. She had managed to point her toes, then bunch her legs as she struck bottom. She pushed off and lifted quickly to the surface of the shallow pool. All around her were worn, moss-covered rocks.

Anne pulled herself out of the pool and up onto relatively dry land. The greenish-blue light came from everywhere and gave her an eerie view of

the cave. The pool was a deep spot in a nearly extinct underground river. Only a trickle of water fed the pool and on the downstream side a trickle escaped toward a rocky precipice that had once been a waterfall. She stepped to the edge and watched dislodged pebbles clatter over the side. Had she fallen when the river was at full strength, Anne would have been swept to her death over the waterfall and to the rocks below.

The cavern was large and high and several tunnels seemed to lead away from this chamber. Clambering over the rocks, Anne got out of the riverbed and onto a well-worn path. Stalactites hung from the shrouded ceiling.

Examining each of the passageways, Anne felt for strong air currents and scanned for brighter lights. The tunnels she found were lit by the same pale greenish-blue light uniformly spread about the cavern walls. She broke off a small piece of rock and saw that the glow came from narrow, rippling veins that sparkled with the strange light.

None of the tunnels offered a promise of escape so she chose one at random. She had been walking down the rock-strewn shaft for half an hour when a solid wall blocked her path. She tried two other passages before finding one that led somewhere.

At first the shaft floor was littered with stones and boulders, making the going difficult. After about 200 yards, the rocks began to clear and a path began to emerge. Another passageway

joined this one a few yards further down and the path became a well-trodden road.

Anne paused at the intersection, listening and keeping her eyes alert for people. A soft humming sound came from down the new shaft, but it thrummed for several minutes without growing softer or louder. Whatever caused the noise was stationary.

Anne continued down the main path, now keeping close to the cavern walls. There was little to hide her. Stalagmites had been sawed or broken off to clear more space. There were the occasional natural alcoves, but these offered little more than a sliver of shadow. If someone came down this passage, she would be seen.

A new sound came down the tunnel in waves. It was the sound of human voices – not singing, not talking. But there was a cadence to it and a repetition.

The tunnel had been rising almost from the first. Now it leveled off into a wide shelf edged with dripping stalagmites. Like a balcony, it overhung and formed a ring around a natural bowl-shaped depression nearly a dozen feet deep and two hundred feet across.

Anne crept up to the edge, crouching behind the conical stones. Below were dozens of men gathered in a semi-circle around a stone altar. They wore deep purple robes with hoods that cast shadows over their faces. All of them were speaking – some ancient, indecipherable tongue – in melodic chant.

Anne felt a warm sensation on her

chest. Looking down, she saw the talisman on the rawhide string about her neck was beginning to glow. Quickly she threw her hand over the small, carved stone then, keeping the eerie light in her cupped hands, she looked closely at the trinket. It was radiating with the same phosphorescence the cavern emitted.

Holding the glowing stone tightly in her hand, she returned her attention to the amphitheater below. On the altar was a small pedestal covered in blood red velvet, and on the velvet lay a black object the size of Anne's palm. It shined as if wet and although less than two inches thick it seemed to have great depth. It was mesmerizing, even from this distance, and called to her. The Black Scarab!

Anne slowly backed away from the edge of the balcony and crawled into a shrouded crevice. There were too many of them down there to attempt to steal the scarab. She needed a way out, and a way to get out silently. The men in purple she took to be Yagi priests, or their descendants. If they believed themselves the keepers of the scarab, or its protector, they would not hesitate to kill her. Their chanting suggested an invocation. If that were true, Crafter might be right about the scarab's power growing, or at least that its power was being used again. She did not trust the man. He wanted the scarab for himself, of that she was certain. From what she suspected of the thing, it would only bring misery in his hands.

Several hours passed before the Yagi priests began filing out of the amphitheater. A handful of them came up to the balcony and exited down the tunnel, passing within feet of Anne's darkened hiding place. The balcony quiet again, she crept back up to the stalagmite-lined edge and looked into the bowl. Two of the Yagi priests lingered, talking. After a moment they left and Anne noted which of the many passageways they chose.

Hurriedly she searched for a way to the amphitheater and found a set of stone steps that led down through a short, close tunnel to the bowl below. The altar lay only a dozen feet from the stairs.

Approaching, the stone in her hand glowed even brighter. As if in answer, the scarab began to glow, too. It was a solid piece, the legs carved in relief into the obsidian. Despite its age it looked new, unlike the imitation she had tossed to Dade. It felt slightly warm to the touch. She noticed the bottom part of the piece had been carved into a deep concave curve. The shape was familiar to Anne. She took the stone in her hand and pressed its similarly convex shape against the scarab. They fitted perfectly.

Anne's mind began racing. Somehow she had been led to two powerful talismans that for some reason were meant to be joined, or had been joined at one time. The fact that they fitted together was no accident. There was power at work here, more than Crafter had admitted. What, then, was his

goal? Did he want power to destroy or to save? Something about the man suggested to Anne the former. She wouldn't take the chance. She would find a way to destroy the scarab or put it someplace where others could not use whatever power it represented.

Scooping up the talisman, Anne exited the amphitheater following the path the last purple-cloaked Yagi priests had taken. That tunnel narrowed and darkened as the ground began to rise again. Other sounds reached her. She could hear men talking and beneath that an open-air sound with a faint hint of clopping horse hooves.

She came to the end of the tunnel and found herself in a close, musty room. At the other end was a short flight of steps and a door. Sunlight streaked in through high, narrow windows set above two rows of coat hooks. The hooks bore the purple robes. Several of the Yagi priests, swarthy looking men with black, curly locks and thick facial hair, were still in the room, talking, slipping out of their robes.

One remarked to remember to close the entrance and another turned, obeying the command. His movement had been too quick for Anne to duck out of sight.

"A woman!" the man screamed.

The air went perfectly still for a heartbeat. Then Anne turned and ran back down the tunnel, several sets of heavy footfalls following her. The Yagi priests called out, screaming about the intruder.

A small side tunnel emptied into the

main shaft. Two robed figures stepped into the intersection as Anne barreled through. She sent them spinning.

Back at the amphitheater, she saw more of the robed men swarming out onto the balcony. They saw her and shouted. She had seconds to make her choice. Selecting a darker tunnel, Anne plunged into the shaft, running breathlessly. Pursuit pounded close behind her.

She found a side tunnel and ducked into this, then into another. The subsurface was honeycombed with passages. The weird blue-green light increased again and she found yet another tunnel. The pursuit seemed to have fallen behind.

The ground began to rise again and the strange light diminished. She had to get out of these tunnels and back to the airship. She couldn't be caught, not now.

She turned another corner then skidded to a stop. The tunnel was blocked.

Behind her she could hear the heavy booted feet of the Yagi priests. They had been confused in the tunnels but now had eliminated the other routes. They knew where she was. In moments they would have her.

Anne put the Black Scarab into her other hand with the first talisman. She needed a free hand for the Mauser. With it she might be able to hold them off, force them to make a path for her. It was a slim hope, but the only one that she had if she could not escape and get back to the airship.

The two talismans touched, slipping together naturally, and the glow they produced was nearly blinding. The light began to swirl around Anne and then formed an oblong shape against one of the tunnel walls. The blue-green light whorled and coalesced into a black doorway ringed by the strange glow.

Her pursuers were nearly upon her. She looked down at her pistol and then to the door. She had little choice. Holstering the gun, Anne stepped through the black door. Instantly, the light swirled again and then disappeared. Anne was gone.

#### CHAPTER TEN: THE POWER OF THE SCARAB

**C**LINGING TO THE UPPER wing of the Sopwith Snipe, Dade reached down toward the cockpit where Chesterfield hugged the lone seat. Above them the great airship rose and drifted away from them. Then the world began to spin.

“Get this thing started!” Dade screamed, cold wind howling in his ears.

“I can’t fly a plane!”

Dade pulled himself around until his feet dangled over the cockpit. The plane was spinning gently, more of a rocking motion. The nose of the Snipe had fallen over slightly, angling groundward. They were faced into the wind, and that managed to give them some loft and a light, continuous turn

to the propeller.

“Neither can I! Just push a button!”

Chesterfield looked at the mahogany control panel then back up at Dade. The reporter had slipped lower on the wing and was about to take a leap of faith and let go and drop into the cockpit.

“It’s a biplane!” he yelled back over his shoulder. “How many buttons can it have?!”

In fact the control panel was quite simple. There were five dials for altitude, pitch, airspeed, and the like, two toggle switches and a throttle knob.

“Just push something!”

Chesterfield flicked the first toggle switch and harsh pinpoint lights ignited behind the glass-paneled dials. The motor kicked when he flicked the second switch.

“Hit it again!” Dade was almost able to touch the back of the cockpit. Chesterfield, leaning close to the instrument panel, had pressed himself against the side of the plane to give the reporter room to get in.

Chesterfield flicked the motor toggle switch several more times, then began pulling the throttle knob at the same time. Dade dropped into the seat beside the accountant just as the motor turned over and the plane jerked forward.

They were now picking up speed, still spinning, and their nose was more sharply angled toward the ground. Dade slipped a leg around the stick and felt for the two pedals on the floor. Gently he pulled back on the stick while

he worked the rudder controls. For a moment, their spinning increased and it looked as if they would nose over completely, but Dade struggled with the ancient craft and finally got it level.

The airship was miles away now and behind them. Dade wore a grimly determined expression on his face as he banked the plane and began to climb. He banked several times during the climb until he was on line with the dirigible, and coming up behind her.

Chesterfield released a deep, endless breath now that the plane was under control and flying home.

"Great Heavens, man," he said, squeezed between the wood and fabric of the biplane and Dade's shoulder. "I had no idea you could fly."

"Me neither," Dade said.

Shaking, Chesterfield turned away and looked up at the sparkling blue sky and cotton ball clouds.

The plane edged closer to the dirigible as Dade brought the biplane up under the docking gondola. The dirigible's four propellers continued to thrum. But now Chesterfield saw the other four sleek casings begin to stir. The back ends had snapped open with a twisting motion. After a moment what looked like the round ends of a tube slipped out of the casings a few inches.

Chesterfield pointed toward the casings. "Are those engines?"

Dade took his eyes from the hook hanging below the docking gondola and followed to where Chesterfield pointed. The casings that Dade took

for jet engines were open and were ready to be ignited. If that happened, the biplane would never catch them.

Dade opened the throttle full and the little plane shot forward. Carelessly now, he lifted the nose of the biplane dangerously high. Up they went. Chesterfield screamed. The center of the top wing, which had a heavy metal eyelet made for dirigible landings, slapped onto the hook. The plane rocked back and forth on the hook, and the propeller rose up to cut into the bottom of the gondola. Dade killed the engine.

Suddenly, the airship lurched forward. The biplane rocked again, the tail knocking against the docking gondola. Dade reached up and lowered the ladder.

"Get up there!" he yelled.

The two men scrambled up to the hatch, twirled the wheel lock, and shoved the door open. In moments they had pulled themselves up, breathless, exhausted, into the narrow room. Dade kicked the hatch closed and spun the lock again.

"We must find that Enchantra," Chesterfield said, his voice strangely dark.

They got to their feet and climbed the companionway on shaky legs. By the time they had run forward and climbed down into the main gondola, they were steady again. Captain Albert was at the wheel and beside him stood another.

"Anne!" Dade called with surprise.

Anne Robson turned and smiled

brightly.

"I thought we'd lost you two," she said.

"You thought you'd lost us?"

"Miss Anne, it is a pleasure to see you, of course, but we need to find the Enchantra. He stole the Black Scarab and tried to steal the dirigible."

"Aye, that he did, lad," Captain Albert said. "Cast a spell over me to make me think ye'd all come back aboard. If I get my hands on that fellow ..."

Anne put a soft hand on the pilot's large shoulder. "Never mind, Captain. We'll look for him now. But I don't think we'll find him. He's gone back to New York. Of that I'm sure. Keep the engines going full. We must hurry."

"Anne," Dade said, "we saw you fall into that hole. How did you get out? And get here ahead of us?"

"There will be time for that later. Let's find Dahla."

For two hours, and with the help of the airship's crewmen, they searched every part of the dirigible. The Enchantra was nowhere to be found.

"That's everywhere," Chesterfield said dejectedly.

Dade snapped his fingers. "Not everywhere!"

Without explanation he ran toward the back end of the airship and down the companionway to the docking gondola. He threw open both of the floor hatches. Although the rear hook was still in place, the Sopwith Snipe was gone.

"There couldn't have been that

much fuel left in the plane," Chesterfield said.

"I don't think there has to be," Anne said. "After all, he is a wizard."

Anne stood in the wheelhouse beside Captain Albert, unmoving, watching the coastline inch closer. Along the way they had seen three more of the silvery storm waves racing across land and sea. They had not been close enough to see the changes, but the storms had left much damage in their wake.

The New York skyline grew larger. For Dade it was strange to see buildings he had only known from photographs. His world was gone, but there might yet be a way back to it. If the powers the others had hinted at were true there might be a way to stop The Change, even reverse it. Anne had said as much as they raced across the Atlantic. The key was the Black Scarab, but its riddle had yet to be revealed.

Captain Albert piloted away from the City and lowered the great airship toward Bennett Field in the southeastern corner of Brooklyn. Anne had radioed ahead. A landing crew was standing by, as was a large touring car to whisk them into the city. After the airship landed and was secured, Anne and her crew debarked and ran for the car.

"We must go to Crafter's Uptown office. Dahla will certainly ..."

"Look!" Chesterfield yelled. He pointed back along Jamaica Bay toward the Atlantic. A small craft ap-

proached, its engine sputtering, its wings dipping violently. The plane was just ahead of a tremendous black and green squall line that shimmered silvery along the leading edge. Another more violent Change wave was approaching the city.

"The Change will sweep over all of the city," Anne said. "In minutes, nothing may exist the way it does now."

"How do we stop it?"

Anne did not answer. Dade could see her jaw working and heard a soft, high-pitched hum rise up around him. She stared intently at the storm and the plane fighting its way to the landing strip.

"You don't," a voice said from behind them.

Without turning, Anne said, "Mr. Crafter, that thing must be stopped."

Dade pivoted to see the unusually tall businessman standing beside a long Rolls Royce. The blond, Bruno, stood by him, holding a door open. Bruno was still dressed in sharply pressed livery and wore a shiny black cap. He did not look at the group. Instead, Dade noticed, he glared at the approaching storm. There was no fear in his eyes. They reflected the maelstrom's colors and seemed to sparkle with anticipation.

"Such power!" he whispered.

"Indeed," Crafter said, with a tilt of his head. "And such power might be harnessed."

Anne looked down at the talisman hanging from her neck, the stone buried in her blouse. It was beginning to

glow.

"The Black Scarab," Anne said, her back still to Crafter.

"Exactly."

"It can harness the power."

"Yes. In the right hands, of course. Or it can bind the power."

"Anne said you wanted it kept safe," Chesterfield said.

"I do," Crafter said, a snake's smile growing on his face. "It's quite the temptation, though, isn't it."

"That thing scares the hell out of me, Crafter," Dade said. "And so do you."

Crafter tilted his head strangely, still smiling, and looked at the reporter as if for the first time. "You are a most distinct personality, Mr. Dade."

The approaching airplane dipped dangerously low to the ground then scaled up again, now only a few dozen feet off the surface of the bay. It was the Sopwith Snipe, and Dade had no doubt the Enchantra flew it.

Again the plane dipped as it slid up to the side of the runway. It struck the top of a tree a hundred yards from the strip, almost nosed over, then righted. The engine sputtered several times. The pilot worked the throttle, stretching the fuel, keeping the motor turning. Finally, the engine coughed one last time and died.

The Snipe was over the runway, gliding, sliding tail out. Behind it by a mile was the leading shimmering edge of the squall line.

Even before it touched down, they could see the plane would not land close to them. Anne started running toward

it, followed by Dade and Chesterfield.

The Snipe floated feather-like then its wheels touched the tarmac. With its tail off to the side, the biplane stumbled and rolled. The left wing of the plane punched into the runway, then the propeller snapped and went whirling down the landing strip. The aircraft nosed over and slid to a grinding halt.

Anne arrived at the plane first, stepped onto its upended wing, and reached into the cockpit. No one was there. She looked back toward Crafter. Another man stood with him. A man in a black robe with a blood red hood. Anne took off at a dead run toward them.

Dade jumped up onto the wing as Anne left. He saw for himself the cockpit was empty, and where its pilot had gone.

"That's a good trick," Dade said.

Breathless, Chesterfield said, "He's uses it too often."

Dade shrugged. "Still ..."

Anne got to the men as Dahla was pulling the Black Scarab from his wide sleeve. He held it before him. Crafter leaned down to look but made no attempt to touch it. A playful grin crossed his lips. Behind them the shimmering squall line swept slowly over the bay.

Before Anne could reach out and take the Scarab in Dahla's hand, Bruno suddenly appeared from around the car. In a wink he had taken the talisman and was gone.

"Oh dear," Crafter said innocently.

Anne fixed a hard stare at Dahla. The Enchantra turned away from her gaze toward the storm. Bruno was at the edge of it. He held the talisman aloft and spoke loudly, madly into the face of the storm.

Dade and Chesterfield had just arrived when Anne ran back toward the storm. She stopped yards from it. Dahla materialized beside her. The storm was sharply defined. In front of the shimmering silver there was nothing but the wind – no rain, no crumbling concrete or splintering trees. Nothing to suggest the devastation that waited behind the squall line.

Bruno stood inches from the storm now, screaming into.

"I command the powers of the storm to halt and obey. I call upon Yagouth and Thamala to bring forth the lightning catch and take all power into this relic! I command ....!"

He was gone. The squall line had swallowed him as if he had never existed.

Confused, Dahla said, "The Scarab, it has no power. How can that be?"

Anne grabbed the Enchantra by the arm and pulled him away from the storm. They ran for several hundred yards. She stopped them both, spinning him to look her in the eye.

"Can you stop this?" she asked.

"Not without the Scarab, no. And it's gone!"

Anne reached into her trousers pocket and pulled out a chamois-wrapped package. Quickly she opened it. The true Black Scarab lay in her

hands.

“Stop it,” she commanded.

He took the scarab in one hand, knelt to the tarmac, and raised the talisman above his head. In a streak of motion he slammed the scarab against the concrete.

Surprise etched his features. “It doesn’t break!”

Anne looked at the unmarred talisman. It still had undertones of black, but was now radiating the angry colors of the storm.

“Crafter said the scarab’s power can bind, too.”

The storm was within a dozen yards of them now.

Dahla stepped away another fifty feet then drew a circle on the concrete using his finger. A dark line trailed his movements. He sat in the center and placed the scarab on the ground before him. For long moments he did not move, his head bowed, his hands resting on his knees. Then he spoke.

“Anail Nathrock Uthvas Bethud Dociel Dienvey,” he muttered. Then he repeated the incantation twice more.

The scarab shimmered. Rather than glowing with a light from within, it seemed to be casting off light, shunning it in favor of darkness. It glowed white-hot for a moment, then settled, encased in a clear purple crust.

Behind them the shimmering storm had disappeared.

Dahla slumped, his breath heavy and ragged.

“A binding spell,” Crafter said. He had come up to them along with Dade

and Chesterfield. “Quite a good one, it seems.” He looked down at Dahla. “I did not think he had such power within him.”

Crafter turned and waved an arm. His Rolls Royce sped up to him, a door opened.

“You have done well, Miss Robson. My faith in you was justified.” His hand came out of his coat pocket holding a thick, white envelope. “The second payment,” he said, tossing the bundle to Chesterfield. “From time to time I might call on you. You have a knack for recovering items of value.” He glanced down at the encrusted scarab. “You will keep that safe for now, won’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent. Until anon.”

After the car had driven off the tarmac Dade asked, “Did he have another driver?”

Uncertain, Chesterfield could only shrug.

When they looked around, Dahla had once again disappeared. The scarab, however, remained on the concrete, dull and lifeless. Anne pocketed the talisman, then she led the men toward a waiting car.

“I don’t think I should ever trust that Omani Dahla, if he were to have the nerve to contact us again,” Chesterfield said, leafing through the envelope filled with money.

Dade shrugged agreement. “Still, he did pull our fat out of the fire.”

“I suppose. Perhaps, though, a fire of his own making.”

“Nothing’s changed,” the reporter said to Anne.

“No. It’s all as we found it. At least here in New York.”

“Holy mackerel, the greatest story I’ve ever had, and no one to tell it to.”

“Nonsense,” Chesterfield said. “Magical events are reported in the newspapers every day. I’m sure at least part of our adventure would be of interest to your editor.”

“I suppose. And if I stick with you guys, I’m bound to get some great stories for the paper.”

Anne stopped at the car. “I’d like you stay around, Travis.”

“It’s settled, then,” he said. “Although, we still have some questions to answer.”

“None of which,” Anne said, “will be answered today. For now I am satisfied that we stopped the immediate danger.”

The trio got into the touring car and drove off toward the city.



Eight days later, Alfonso Ipsolenti walked along the wide balcony overlooking his home and the grand city of his birth. It was more a parapet, really, lined with squat planters filled

with reedy and flowery plants, and no railing at all. The drop was precipitous but Alfonso had never been afraid of heights, had in fact never thought about them.

He watered the flora, absently moving from one planter to the next, balancing on the very edge of the balcony. Then he did something with which he was not accustomed. He tripped.

The sensation was unique for him. He felt himself tumble and then fall, and was more curious about it than alarmed.

He passed several other balconies, people smiling curiously as he sailed by. Soon he was enveloped in the ever-present fog that floated throughout the city.

Fear began to rise within him. He was falling – and couldn’t stop. He fell nearly seven miles.

While the fall might have seemed endless, and, once the fear subsided, somewhat pleasant, stopping was abrupt and unpleasant. He slammed into the earth at one hundred and twenty miles per hour, creating a substantial crater. He lay there for some time, then climbed out of the hole and shook the dirt off his clothes.

A crowd of people had formed around the hole. Their stunned silence greeted him. He smiled, and shook himself again. He had landed in the middle of a town square. A somewhat antiquated town with muddy streets, horse wagons, and small buildings with ornate façades.

A large piece of paper caught

Alfonso's eye. It was plastered on the wall of a tiny brick shop across the square. It had a large woodcut image imprinted on it of a lovely woman brandishing a weapon and standing provocatively – or so Alfonso thought – with a leg up on a rock. Above her, words were printed in thick, tall letters.

**Amazon Anne Stops Deadly  
Magick Storm**

Distaff adventurer travels the world to unravel the riddle of an ancient talisman and stops destructive storm in its path.

Alfonso looked up into the sky, into the thick puffs of clouds nearly seven miles above him. His home. He was bewildered at having lost his home so suddenly. Then he looked back at the image of Amazon Anne. An adventurer. She could help him. She could see him returned to his home, the Aerie.

Alfonso smiled with new purpose then turned away from the crowd in search of Amazon Anne.

THE END



**Next Issue: Amazon Anne and the Aerie of Doom**