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Minority Protagonists in the Young Adult Historical Fiction Novel

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MINORITY PROTAGONISTS IN THE YOUNG ADULT
HISTORICAL FICTION NOVEL

by

Patty L. Martin

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
Specialization: Communication and Writing

REGIS UNIVERSITY

April, 2006

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HISTORICAL FICTION NOVEL

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In young adult literature, the reader finds most of the same genres as are available for adult fiction. One of the challenges that readers of young adult literature face is that, although some progress has been made to develop and feature minority characters and protagonists, minorities are still underrepresented in young adult literature. Although young adult historical fiction features more minority protagonists, this is ordinarily done because historical fiction lends itself as an educational tool, where history, geography, and social studies can be illuminated through the genre. As demographics in the United States continue to change and as minority groups have greater representation in the U. S., young adult literature should include more minority protagonists.

Statement of the Problem

The writers of young adult literature have not kept pace with the incorporation of minority characters as protagonists nor have they used biracial or multiracial characters in either primary or secondary positions or written contemporary settings with contemporary minority protagonists. In the young adult literature that exists, minority characters are either in positions of secondary importance to Anglo American characters or in ethnically stereotypical settings rather than contemporary settings. The incredible dearth of young adult historical fiction, that contains a minority protagonist and a minority protagonist outside of ethnically stereotypical geography,

could be analyzed as a reflection of present social viewpoint, that is, antipathy toward non-Anglo Americans. Since readers associate their sense of self-worth through wish identification and empathy with protagonists, and as readers associate that lives written about are lives worth living, writers of young adult contemporary and historical fiction literature have excluded the minority protagonist and failed to develop the genres of multicultural young adult contemporary and historical fiction.

Purpose of the Project

Young adult literature has been used in many situations: (a) as instructional material for social studies, writing, literature, and other courses; (b) as a tool to develop empathy and social consciousness in multicultural curricula; and (c) as a means to communicate the norms of adolescence from such factors as power struggles to physical development. The purpose of this project will be to analyze the scholarly material of young adult literature as well as propose an original example of fiction with adolescent minority protagonists in both contemporary and historical settings. The more responsibility that writers of young adult literature accept as they provide adolescents with quality writing, that reflects all children, the more engaged those readers will be with the genre and sub-genres of this writing style.

Chapter Summary

In general, the genres of young adult literature are the same as the adult genres (e.g., science fiction, romance, and historical fiction). In adult fiction, minority characters and protagonists are featured more frequently by contemporary writers, shortening the representation gap between members of present U. S. society and

population percentages represented by the characters. Yet, young adult literature has failed to keep pace by featuring characters and protagonists that statistically represent U. S. ethnic groups. As readers sort through young adult literature, it is a challenge to locate protagonists who break the healthy, Anglo American, middle class, male mold. When they are found, most frequently, those protagonists are written in their ethnic settings in historical fiction. In Chapter 2, the review of literature, this author addresses the research on this topic. In Chapter 3, the method of the applied project will be detailed.

Chapter 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this project is to create a piece of young adult literature that addresses the multicultural nature of the U. S. In this chapter, articles written by academics and researchers, which are related to young adult fiction, adolescents, or multiculturalism, will be addressed. Novels read by young adults are nearly as old as the novel form itself. Adolescents enjoy this type of fiction, and some profit from the opportunity to relate directly with the protagonists whose physical features, cultural mores, and life situations closely resemble those recognizable by the reader. Many people read to escape into circumstances unlike their own, where characters and settings offer respite from the ordinary. Some read to engage in a literary exchange where characters exhibit associations with the intended audience, which communicates that the reader's situations are understood and accepted. This interchange between writer and reader can operate well, provided that they share cultural, personal, and universal commonalities. Yet, paucity is extant in young adult literature where the protagonists genuinely reflect the contemporary reader. As the young adult novel has been utilized as a tool for entertainment, education, and communication, young adults should be able to locate easily novels that feature characters similar to themselves. Too frequently, adolescent readers are presented with healthy, Anglo American, middle class males as the majority of protagonists with few alternatives, yet that characterization does not reflect all readers.

The Young Adult Novel

Some argument exists as to the definition of the term, *young adult* novel. George and Stix (2000) suggested two operating definitions: (a) anything read by people aged 11-20; and (b) anything written for and that reflects young people. Included in these definitions are literary characteristics: (a) a young adult main character, (b) realistic young adult language, and (c) themes and issues of importance to young adults (Stover, 1996, as cited in George & Stix). Herein is the dilemma. Is young adult literature defined by its readers and consumers or by its publishers and producers? If the producers define the genre, then it could be defined more heavily in the direction of what sells, assumedly to a market where not all adolescents have access to the purchased books. If the consumers define the genre, then one might assume the genre to consist of what is read and would be representative of its population.

Agosto, Hughes-Hassell, and Gilmore-Clough (2003) pointed out that every adolescent should be able to locate books wherein their lives are reflected through the settings, themes, but most especially the protagonists. As adolescents go through the various stages of physical, emotional, and intellectual change, it is vital to many to find solace in their reading of stories that are told on some level of young adult literature. Also, Agosto et al. suggested that adolescents enjoy genre based, formula, and series fiction because: (a) it contains an action filled plot, (b) the protagonist is the focus of the story, and (c) a happy ending is inevitable. When an adolescent reader is expected to read a novel for any reason, an intimate correlation between reader and protagonist is fundamental in order to ensure a positive interaction between writer and reader. Lives worth reading about are lives worth living.

George and Stix (2000) suggested that, when young adult novels are utilized in American Studies classrooms, students must be allowed to choose their own reading material. With this freedom, a positive impact is observed on students' fluency, reading rate, and comprehension. As most people enjoy having choices in decision making, students' sense of ownership in the curriculum is heightened, as is their: (a) personal responsibility to complete the reading, (b) motivation to be personally engaged in the learning process, and (c) interest in learning more about the particular topic being studied. So, when the consumer of young adult literature is consulted, a notable improvement in learning and reading areas are seen. If such an enhancement is observed when adolescents choose their novels for school, it could be postulated that a similarly heightened interest in reading would occur when they are able to choose reading for pleasure and entertainment.

Flaim and Chiodo (1994) recommended the integration of the young adult novel into Geography curricula, because stories "illustrate human behavior in various times and places and help students to form connections to those times and places" (p. 2). Also, they suggested that adolescent readers must connect with other cultures and physical environments to develop a universal perspective of the earth, since literature "humanizes distant locations and events and captures the imagination" (p. 2). If the young adult genre is used to humanize people and places, then it must embody those with sincerity and fair representation. Not only do adolescents collect data from written text about others but they do so about themselves as well, so the young adult novel can be used as a medium for communication and empathetic exchange between people and cultures.

Finally, Hebert and Kent (2000) discussed the value of the young adult novel in comparison to classical, canon literature. As they suggested, the young adult novel reflects the lives and realities of adolescents but, typically, these novels are not utilized in Honors courses, which limits gifted readers' needs to be active participants in the adolescent experience. As these researchers pointed out, many writers of the young adult novels were once gifted students themselves, and the young adult novel should be used as a medium to encourage gifted students to connect with protagonists and the settings which they face. As many people read to escape their ordinary lives, the gifted reader has many such opportunities through canon literature. Yet, also, adolescents engage in the reading process to have their situations validated as understandable and acceptable; it is only within the young adult novel can that be realized.

Young Adult Historical Fiction

Agosto et al. (2003) discussed the interconnections between young adult literature and genre fiction, such as mystery, historical fiction, science fiction, and the like. They noted that adolescents are particularly interested in reading genre fiction for several reasons (Schmidt, 1989, as cited in Agosto). First, adolescents depend upon a strong connection between self and the protagonist to continue reading; this is particularly true of series genre fiction, where readers seek to prolong the bond with the characters, particularly the protagonist. Second, the standardized format of genre fiction appeals to adolescents and keeps them reading. In addition, adolescents read to take in the story as well as to develop a better understanding of the character; this process appeals to them as they are engaged in the same course of self-exploration. Notably, historical fiction stands

out as the most widely published and read of the genre fiction categories, and it totals 38% of young adult genre fiction.

Blasingame et al. (2002) compiled a list of the best books for adolescents, which includes several historical fiction titles. In this article, Blasingame et al. incorporated an interview with the author, Mora, wherein the value of literature for adolescents and the connections to be made between reading and writing for adolescents in identity building was considered. Mora suggested that literature can be used to: (a) teach an enjoyment of language, (b) liberate and challenge readers, (c) to make readers feel less alone, and (d) push readers to feel uncomfortable when they confront things one normally would not. In the article, Blasingame et al. and Mora discussed Mora's viewpoint that adolescent readers are automatically writers, as adolescents in particular have stories to tell. To accomplish this, young people must see themselves as both readers and writers and be supported by educators who view themselves as writers. The value of young people's engagement in both a reading and writing process with young adult literature is that they are engaged in the writing of historical fiction as well as its consumption, as they occupy themselves with a balanced relationship with young adult historical fiction.

Seelinger-Trites (2001) analyzed the young adult novel and focused on the Harry Potter series by Rowling because of its popularity; also, the researcher used other novels, from historical fiction and other genres as support. According to Seelinger-Trite, the young adult novel depends upon power struggles and the cultural ability to question the power associations that structure an individual. Everything in the young adult novel, regardless of genre, is about teaching the adolescent about his or her place in the power

structure, which includes: (a) parental, (b) institutional, (c) sexual, (d) corporeal, (e) mortal, and (f) interpersonal power dynamics.

Seelinger-Trites (2001) suggested that, in almost every young adult novel, some establishment exists to simultaneously enhance and diminish the adolescent's impression of power whereas, in reality, little exists. The researcher proposed that even as protagonists are the driving element of the novel, which keep the readers progressing, sometimes, those protagonists may appear to subvert the dominant paradigm and, infrequently, reach an intended goal of increased position and power. If young adult literature encompasses power struggles, and it is about the abrogation of power from adolescents and young adult genre protagonists, then the same would be true of young adult historical fiction and its protagonists. Seelinger-Trites said,

With incredible consistency, the answer is this: You shall know your power and that power shall set you free—that is, until you begin to abrogate institutional power or parental power or sexual power or the very power of death itself, in which case, the narrative will remind you of your powerlessness as surely as Harry Potter must return at the end of every school year to reside in relative impotence with his Muggle relatives. (p. 9)

Similarly, the young adult novel and genre fiction are about power struggles, both explore the challenges between the controllers and the controlled.

McGlenn (2001) recommended the young adult historical fiction novel as an alternative to historical non fiction and textbooks. The researcher asserted that young adult historical fiction novels engage adolescents on a higher level than non-fiction texts because they employ the power of the narrative to bring people and events to life. In comparison, the focus of the traditional history classroom textbooks is on a survey approach, where names, dates, and events are listed without giving the reader an

opportunity to conceptualize the context for themselves. Through this genre, adolescents gain a sense of the complexity and ambiguity of events.

As the young adult historical fiction novel is incorporated into history and social studies curricula, McGlinn (2001) emphasized that the historical accuracy portrayed by the fiction author must be authenticated before its use with adolescents. The researcher focused the article on Medieval history, particularly, and listed several young adult historical fiction novels as examples where the authors presented the setting and historical details accurately: *Catherine, Called Birdy* (Cushman, 1995, as cited in McGlinn), *The Midwife's Apprentice* (Cushman, 1996, as cited in McGlinn), and *The Ramsay Scallop* (Temple, 1995, as cited in McGlinn) are examples. The three most frequent errors in historical accuracy found in young adult historical fiction are religion, literacy and learning, and literary works, because these encompass contemporary social mores. In addition, some writers attempt to depict protagonists who behave like U. S. teenagers which negatively effects historical accuracy (Barnhouse, 2000, as cited in McGlinn). As young adult historical fiction authors veer from historical accuracy, fantastical additives such as magic are more prevalent in the writing.

According to Agosto et al. (2003), 38% of young adult fiction reviewed in newspapers, magazines, and literary sources were historical fiction; young adult fiction is the most frequently reviewed young adult genre. Of the historical fiction novels collected for that study, 28% featured a protagonist of color. Of that 28% of minority protagonists, 42% were of African and 8% of Hispanic descent. Agosto reported that African American children comprised 15% of children in the U. S. (Casey, 2002, as cited in Agosto), Hispanic children comprised 17%, and all U. S. children from non-Anglo

backgrounds comprised 32% of the total. These statistics lead one to several conclusions. First, writers of young adult historical fiction included approximately the number of protagonists representative of the African American population in 2002. Yet, African American, Asian, and Native American children were over represented, whereas Hispanic American children were the most under represented of minority groups. Agosto et al. pointed out that the other young adult genres analyzed showed a paucity of minority protagonists in comparison to historical fiction.

Finally, in a multicultural society, where 98% of the growth in the child population in the 1990s were minority children (O'Hare, 2001, as cited in Agosto et al. 2003), it could be postulated that minority protagonists will become more prevalent and more valued. Moreover, although young adult historical fiction is more representative than other young adult genres, the portrayal of minority protagonists should be analyzed. As adolescents study world and U. S. history, as well as geography, adolescents may expect to read about characters of color in the settings associated with their ethnic heritages. This could explain the presence of minority protagonists in young adult historical fiction and the dearth thereof in other young adult genres. If producers and publishers are to provide material relevant to an ethnically diverse culture, more representative minority protagonists could be expected in all young adult genres.

Minority Protagonists

Agosto et al. (2003) cited and discussed the work of Bishop (1982), who analyzed the frequency of featured African American characters in the literature. Bishop found that the representation of African Americans in fiction had increased since the 1960s, although most often the representations were negative and stereotypical. In addition,

Agosto et al. identified three categories of books in which African American characters were addressed.

Socially conscious books were those written to help white children understand the experiences of nonwhites. Melting pot books depicted whites and nonwhites together without differentiating among them and showed nonwhites to be no different than whites except for skin color. Culturally conscious books were written for African American youth and reflected the uniqueness as well as the universality of the African American experience. (p. 258)

Although minority groups are less represented in fiction than expected, and although the literature varies in how those groups are represented, the frequency of featured minority characters had increased over time. As well, new awards and publishers have encouraged the distribution of young adult multicultural literature and young adult literature that features minority characters.

Based on their observations, Agosto et al. (2003) suggested that young adult minority groups are underrepresented by 50%. Of the genre fiction reviewed that featured a protagonist or major secondary character of color, the frequency was 16% or less than one-sixth of young adult fiction. In a realistic representation of the U. S., approximately one-third of the characters should be people of color. These researchers referred to main characters and major secondary characters of color only; their findings demonstrated that members of minority groups were underrepresented in both groups but most especially as protagonists. People of color were represented 16% in both major and secondary roles rather than specifically in leading roles. Agosto et al. noted that these analyzed reviews inferred a world population in which one-sixth is either a person of color or an Anglo American person with a close acquaintance who is a person of color. Had the study been limited to the analysis of leading characters only, the results of

minority group representation in young adult literature would have been even more dismal to analyze. Furthermore, these researchers noted that 98% of the population increase in the U. S. is children of color; therefore, it could be postulated that the need for more young adult literature that features minority characters will continue to increase.

Agosto et al. (2003) noted that, since U. S. booksellers are heavily dependent on the book reviews (e.g., as analyzed in the study) for distribution, marketing, and sales, those reviews have a notable influence on what books are noticed by consumers and which books sell. In genre fiction, all minority groups make up 16% of the total leading and major secondary characters in young adult fiction. African American characters are represented 32% of that total, and African Americans make up 15.1% of the American youth population. Interestingly, Native Americans (i.e., North and South) are represented 25% of the time but total only 1.2% of the U. S. youth population. Similarly, Asian and Asian American leading and secondary characters made up 15% of the minority total, and Asian American children make up 3.4% of the U. S. youth population. Although these numbers seem to indicate that those children who belong to minority groups are over represented, be reminded that these totals are within the total 16% of all minority leading and major secondary characters in young adult fiction. The remaining 84% of all leading and major secondary characters are Anglo Americans.

McEntyre (1999) observed that, also, ill children, and children who care for ill people, are among a minority group that is underrepresented in young adult fiction. McEntyre noted that, although children confront varying levels of illness, from first person terminal illness, life with an illness, injury, or abnormality, or caring for an ill person, the number of books that address such predicaments is incredibly small. Of those

available, very few are featured in bookstores; most are located in libraries only.

McEntyre pointed out that it is important to include this group of youth who confront illness as an important minority group that deserves to locate literature that addresses their realities,

stories model; they teach; they offer alternative ways of considering one's own condition; and above all they remind us that we are not alone. Every young person who is ill ought to be able to read a story of someone who has preceded him or her on that difficult path. (p. 36)

McIntyre's survey of young adult novels provided a viewpoint of U. S. society toward youth illness and how ill youth are represented. Although ill youth and youth who attend the ill can locate few novels that represent their experiences, there are contemporary novels extant, such as *Waiting for Johnny Miracle* (Bach, 1980, as cited in McEntyre) that represents their realities well.

McEntyre (1999) noted that young adult literature has many examples of poorly represented tales, where characters are idealized and made sainted through suffering. Clara in *Heidi* (Spyri, 1990, as cited in McEntyre), Beth in *Little Women* (Alcott, 1992, as cited in McEntyre), and Little Nell in *Old Curiosity Shop* (Dickens, 1996, as cited in McEntyre) are highly sentimentalized and spiritualized accounts of girls who are made angelic and flawless through illness. Just as stereotypical and negative viewpoints of ethnic minority groups in literature harm those individuals by misrepresentation, the same occurs for youth with illnesses. McEntyre identified six stages of illness that are addressed in well representative young adult novels: (a) normalization; (b) alienation; (c) unexpected emotions; (d) extra-familial support; (e) others' problems; and (f) God, meaning, and hope. As an individual could be a member of any sub-cultural group of a particular society, so young adults who confront illness are such a group. This researcher

suggests that only by reading about and familiarizing themselves with different perspectives can readers expect to understand the human experience rather than only being acquainted with that which is considered normal and acceptable.

Multiculturalism

Bean, Cantu'Valerio, Senior, and White (1999) suggested that multicultural literature should be defined in a comprehensive and inclusive manner rather than viewed as a sub-genre to literature that represents the majority. In doing so the ethnic, social, and racial diversity within a pluralistic society would be recognized. These researchers noted that there is a paucity of multicultural literature included in the literary canon. When multicultural literature is incorporated into the classroom, as well as used for pleasure reading, a greater understanding can be developed between those included in the majority and those included in minority groups. Students need to have multiple opportunities to react to and interact with multicultural literature, rather than being exposed to a small number of multicultural titles, which serves a less effective purpose of the inclusion of multicultural literature in classroom work. Also, when students of multicultural literature are coupled with personal reflective writing, they develop a greater level of interpretive and personal associations. Hence, Bean et al. utilized this method in their collection of data from ninth grade English students' engagement with and interpretation of a multicultural novel with an exploration of biethnic identity.

Also, Bean et al. (1999) noted that high school students should be challenged to read novels in greater depth especially those that feature characters who represent ethnic, racial, or social groups outside of their own. According to these researchers, the youth in

their study kept journal entries on their reading experiences and participated in Listserv discussions with students from another school, who was included in the study, to communicate about their findings, realizations, and reactions to the novel. The researchers reported that students were given specific questions that address stereotypes, heritage, and racial tension as writing prompts. Due to the guidance of the instructors, the communication between the two school groups, and the multicultural settings of both schools, students read and reacted to the reading more deeply than they might have as they completed the book as pleasure reading.

Bean et al. (1999) observed that students were able to make personal comparisons between their own lives and the challenges faced by the protagonist of the novel. In many cases, students conveyed emotional reactions to the characters and events of the novel that communicated their distaste for racism, racial tensions, and lack of understanding between the two minority groups that were represented in the novel. These feelings demonstrated the important values of not only the inclusion of multicultural literature in the classroom but, also, how important it is to encourage personal identification with characters that represent minority ethnic groups, as parallels and connections are made rather than observations of differences. Hence, the interactions between the multicultural novel and young adults is a notable one; in this case, with added guidance and instruction.

Although Tisdall and Davis (2004) did not directly refer to multiculturalism in their article, they included information could be applied to young adults' relationships with literature and their needs in terms of: (a) learning, (b) applying data, and (c) appreciating reading for pleasure. The researchers pointed out that youth are

shareholders in policy and cultural decisions, although their interests and views are rarely requested. This information could be applied to young adult literature, in that, if youth must be included in the literary choices assigned or given to them as data sources or for pleasure and when they are unable to recognize themselves as individuals and group members within literature. Again they are divested of literary connectivity and deprived of self-recognition in the process of identifying self within a novel and, therefore, unable to create an effect or become a partner in decision making processes, as their viewpoints have already been invalidated.

Smith, Batiste, and Echols (2001) presented resource information and survey results on: (a) multicultural education, (b) identity development, (c) young adult literature, and (d) their aspects. Their article included results that indicated that most Americans hold the opinions that: (a) racial tension is a serious international issue, (b) that minority groups are not given equal educational opportunities, (c) that too few people of color are employed in education, and (d) that 90% of Americans favor multicultural education. These results are fundamentally important, because young adults: (a) seek to read about characters who reflect their own lives, (b) are interested in being involved in curricular decision making, and (c) benefit personally and socially by exposure to multicultural literature and activities. As Smith et al. demonstrated, also, Americans favor the same, which indicates that young adult literature should feature more multicultural topics and major characters that reflect minority groups, including people of color and people marginalized in other ways.

Uses of Historical Fiction

George and Stix (2001) observed that young adults, educators, and researchers prefer the young adult historical fiction novel as an informational source to textbooks. As textbooks are encyclopedic and tedious, their use tends to extinguish young adults' motivation to learn about history, cultures, and human interactions. As school districts depend on the big business, mainstreaming model of standards based textbooks, where every student reads the same material about the same events and is expected to have the same outcomes, has student curiosity and aspiration to develop aptitude in social studies have diminished. There are several collective reasons that accounted for young adult disinterest. First, young adults are not consulted in any of the steps from policy making to assessment grading. Next, typically, young adults have no choice in what materials to read or where to locate data. In addition, as young adults are not consulted at any step of the learning process, they were not engaged in either the learning or the material. Young people should be viewed as stakeholders in their learning and reading experiences and engaged in the learning process by being: (a) encouraged to choose reading material; (b) offered literature that presents historical events from first and third person accounts; (c) presented with multicultural literature that suggests events should be viewed from multiple viewpoints; and (d) included in life skills combined with content based instruction such as problem solving, research analysis, and cooperative learning strategies.

Further, George and Stix (2000) suggested that there are five reasons that young adult historical fiction should be used as an effective social studies instructional tool. First, students become engaged in the learning process when they choose their own books. The researchers noted that most students are competent in their choices of appropriate reading levels and tend to choose materials that will hold their interests, whereas it can be difficult for instructors to choose appropriate reading for each individual in a classroom. Second, the reading level is naturally individualized, so that each young adult reads at the level of vocabulary, sentence structure, and comprehension level that he or she is able to handle. In addition, when young adults read first and third person points of view, they can experience historical events through first person empathy and third person observation. Fourth, young adults have a higher likelihood to read and complete the historical fiction novel than a non-fiction text; in non-fiction, questions are answered directly and throughout the writing, whereas historical fiction leaves many questions unanswered throughout the text, in order to create tension and heighten attraction to reading and history. Finally, the level of realism intrinsically entwined within historical fiction creates personal identification with the historical topic; thereby, young adults are engaged in both literature and history.

Nadeau (1994) noted that young adults' abilities to research in social studies is incredibly weak. Historical research begins with the formulation of a thesis. Background knowledge is needed to be able to create the hypothesis before research and data collection can begin. Specifically, young adults lack the background knowledge of history to be able to communicate about it, much less be able to research and report on it. Nadeau observed that, usually, most students do not usually know what historical

events interest them and, therefore, it is difficult to choose an appropriate topic, because they lack the cultural knowledge to differentiate between events, cultures, and people.

The student who has read at least one historical fiction novel has markedly more knowledge about a time period than a young adult who has depended upon textbooks and classroom lectures, which offer only survey information on history. The outcome of having read at least one historical fiction novel on a time period being studied includes: (a) background knowledge, (b) a set of assumptions to be verified, and (c) the ability to formulate a research question.

Nadeau (1994) noted that even high school young adults are novices at research because they lack fundamental information on historical events. Specifically, the use of historical fiction can provide the needed background information, because writers do research before they translate facts into fiction; also, they make the essentials more interesting as they surround them in description and literary devices, which brings the evidence to life. Since writers of young adult historical fiction are well known for admirable research, young adults are able to depend on historical fiction novels as sources of valid data; thereby, they are provided with a lower level of fundamental information before they are sent to research independently. The books are demonstrations of historical times, because they contain the dialogue, stories, cultural values and personal beliefs of historical people, which are then presented in an interesting narrative. A greater level of interaction with the literature occurs when young adults can locate characters, cultural mores, and situations that reflect their own realities. Otherwise, they read about the historical events and cultural history of the majority group and lose their positions as stakeholders in historical research and literary exploration.

Chapter Summary

Although a fairly new term, young adult fiction is incredibly popular, read by adults and young people alike. Readers appreciate the sub-genres of the form, although writers of young adult fiction have yet to keep pace with writers of adult fiction that is more representative of contemporary U. S. demographics by the inclusion of protagonists that represent minority groups and cultural mores other than the Anglo American stereotype. Many people read to escape into dissimilar circumstances, where characters and settings offer reprieve from the commonplace. Some read to engage in a literary exchange where characters display commonalities with the readers, which validates that the reader's situations are understood and accepted. The communication between writer and reader can operate well, assuming that they share social, individual, and universal commonalities. Yet, there is a paucity in young adult literature where protagonists genuinely reflect the contemporary reader. As the young adult novel has been utilized as a tool for entertainment, education, and communication, young adults should be able to easily locate novels that feature characters similar to themselves. Instead, young adult literary consumers are presented with vigorous, Anglo American, middle class males as the bulk of major and secondary characters with few substitutions, yet that depiction of U. S. young adults does not represent all readers. In Chapter 3, the method, audience, goals, and procedures of this applied project will be detailed.

Chapter 3

METHOD

For this applied project, the author will write a young adult historical fiction novel. The protagonists in the novel will represent, in a culturally sensitive manner, the members of multiethnic groups, as neither protagonist's heritage is revealed, but there are several clues that will indicate they are from a combination of European, African, Asian, and South American descent. As well, one of the purposes in writing the novel will be to demonstrate that an historical fiction novel with protagonists, who represent minority groups, could be written where protagonists are not featured in the settings of their ancestors but are rather contemporary, urban characters transported into such a setting. The author will write the novel with similarities to other young adult historical fiction such as the elements: (a) humor, (b) vocabulary level, (c) chapter length, (d) focus on plot movement, and (e) likeable protagonists who tend to make mistakes.

Target Audience

This author will not produce this draft of the novel with the intent to publish it; instead, further research and ongoing literary development would be required to polish the manuscript into a saleable condition. The author's purpose will be to complete a novel that fit the project criteria: (a) a protagonist that represents at least one minority group, (b) a work of historical fiction that sets a modern protagonist in an historical

setting, (c) a young adult novel that meets the standards of that genre, and (d) a work that is at the least culturally sensitive to the realities of the members of minority groups. The target audience would be made up of individuals who are interested in reading about such characters and learning about an historical time period, specifically ancient Egypt. As well, the intended audience would be young adults, aged 10-13 with a minimum of a fifth grade reading level and an interest in reading adventurous and fantastical elements in fiction.

Goals

The primary goal will be to produce a work of novel length fiction. Although the novel will contain many facts about ancient Egypt, as well as references to the protagonists who represent a multiracial background, the product will be a work of fiction. As the author is not a person of color and, except for being a woman, does not consider herself a member of a particularly disenfranchised or minority group, writing from the perspective of the protagonists will be a challenge. As well, the conflicts experienced by the protagonists, their backgrounds, and their areas of knowledge do not match the author's, which will pose greater challenges. Therefore, the author will seek to write a culturally sensitive, melting pot novel that includes characters who represent minority groups rather than a culturally conscious novel, which demonstrates the characters as members of a specific ethnic group. As young adult historical fiction novels are frequently used for both pleasure reading and instructional purposes, a further goal would be that it meets both needs.

Procedures

This author used the applied project design for this project. This includes:

1. choice of the plot sequence, characterization, and description appropriate for a young adult historical fiction novel;
2. informal query of young adults about their likes and dislikes in young adult literature and then apply those results to the text;
3. use the review of literature to include specific elements in the novel such as characters who represent a multiracial background, historical time period with contemporary characters, and an action driven plot with fallible but likeable characters;
4. outline and write the first draft of the novel;
5. complete the project draft of the novel; and
6. share the draft with readers of young adult fiction for feedback.

Chapter Summary

In this project, the author will write a young adult historical fiction novel. The protagonists of the novel will be representative of members of multiethnic groups in a melting pot fashion, where the characters behave as United States youth do rather than youth who belong to a specific ethnic group. There are several clues that will indicate that they are from a combination of European, African, Asian, and South American descent. The novel will be written to demonstrate that an historical fiction novel with protagonists who represent minority groups could be completed where protagonists are not featured in the settings of their ancestors but are rather contemporary, urban characters transported into an historical setting. The novel will have commonalities with

other young adult historical fiction such as: (a) elements of humor, (b) appropriate vocabulary level, (c) chapter length, (d) focus on plot movement, and (e) likeable protagonists who tend to make mistakes. In addition, the writing of this novel will partially satisfy a personal desire to complete a novel length work of fiction.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The primary purpose of this project was to produce a work of novel length fiction. Although the novel contains many facts about ancient Egypt and employs young adult protagonists of a multicultural background, the product is primarily a work of fiction. As the purpose was not only to produce a work of novel length fiction but to incorporate multiethnic characters into both modern and historical settings, the author sought to write a culturally sensitive novel that includes characters who represent minority groups. As young adult historical fiction novels are frequently used for both pleasure reading and instructional purposes, a further goal would be that it meets both needs.

Civilization Chronicles: An Extraordinary Family

Sophia glanced down the rows of pale blue airplane seats to her parents, who sat halfway down the aisle. She started along the passageway, her leather backpack straps digging into her shoulders more with each step. Her body ached from walking through the airport while lugging the pack, a bag of books, and a heavy laptop case.

Her turtleneck moved from side to side, as she squeezed between people who busily stuffed their bags into the overhead compartments. Her head pounded at the temples from a long day of moving around but getting nothing done.

A sharp prod into her spine shoved her forward and nearly tossed her into a vacant seat before she caught herself. Sophia turned to see her brother Farris balancing two shoulder bags.

“Stop pushing, would you?” She tossed the words over her shoulder at her twin brother.

“Are you kidding me? If I weren’t here, you’d take all year to get to our seats. C’mon!” Farris smiled and flashed his eyebrows up. His perpetual run-into-danger attitude tap danced on Sophia’s nerves when she was tired or nervous. Today she felt both.

She glanced ahead to her parents, who were only a few seats away and watched them laughing with the people behind them and tossing up their hands delightfully.

Barak, her father, wore his signature black turtleneck and beret like the Parisian artists a generation before him. He kept raising and lowering a plastic cup filled with ruby-red liquid. His white smile gleamed in pecan-colored skin.

As always, his pants were splattered with bits of red, blue, and yellow paint. Barak was a well-known painter who showed his work all over the world. His reputation as a master with a brush made his work more famous than any other.

Thank goodness he’s in a good mood. I hope they don’t get mad about the whole Alban’s Academy issue. She thought to herself and trudged forward toward her seat at 14B.

Her jeans zip-zip-zipped with swishing sounds as she shuffled along. Sophia scooted through the remaining people and squeezed into her assigned seat. Her black hair flowed to her waist and loose strands tickled her forehead and nose in the cramped space. As she tried to adjust her things, she felt her gold-flecked jade green eyes begin to redden with the dryness of being in the chemical-smelling air.

Sophia zipped the backpack open with a high-pitched zzzzz and sunk her hands inside, seeking the light bundle of metal, wires, and computer chips. Farris flopped himself in the seat beside her, which jostled the object in her hand. Having tossed Farris an irritated look, she grabbed onto the cool slick metal and began adjusting the object in her lap.

“Let me guess, you’re going to use your entrepreneurial skills and sell those on the plane too?” Farris elbowed Sophia lightly in the ribs.

“Farris, I realize that you have the mental capacity of an ant, but I really could do without your antagonism right now.” She retorted with a wide eye roll.

Farris drew his hands up beside his face like a panther’s striking paws and growled. “OK, I’m just trying to lighten the mood. At any moment, the parents could attack.”

“I know. It’s been bugging me all day. Neither of them has demonstrated any irritation.” Sophia whispered to him while clamping together two wires on the metal contraption in her hands.

“Well, we just got kicked out of school for what the fifteenth time? At some point they’ll get tired of us getting booted out of every school we go to and maybe even freak out on us.” Farris lowered his 6 foot tall frame next to Sophia to whisper.

“We have the only parents in the world who never get angry. Besides, it’s not that we try to get kicked out. Well, maybe you do, but I don’t. For me, it’s just amazingly boring to sit through slow classes. People don’t realize how difficult being a genius really is.” Sophia whispered back.

Sophia thought back to how she really liked to learn. She spent hours teaching herself what she wanted to know by reading every book she could find. She had to use what she learned right away to care about it. Otherwise, she was just memorizing for a test that would never matter.

“What excuse do I have? I’m not a genius,” Farris glanced at his parents with wheat-gold eyes then back to his sister.

“Farris, you’re one of the most extraordinary people I know. Even though we’re different, you’re still exceptional in your own way. You wouldn’t be in this family if you were average,” She answered.

Farris stretched his huge shoulders and bumped into his sister. “They’ve never gotten mad at us for school stuff, not even once, but there is a first time for everything.” Farris leaned into his seat. At 14, he was as tall and large as a man and was mistaken as an adult more often than his real age.

Sophia’s hands rested on the contraption in her lap. “Your work is important, too. How many kids can say they played on a minor league hockey team at 13? Or that they have done month-long endurance rides across Russia? And how many people can say that they beat out you-know-who by becoming an Eagle Scout at 10?”

Farris was not a genius; he was an adventurer. Like Sophia, Farris skipped school more frequently than he attended. But unlike her, Sophia’s twin brother preferred to spend his time spear fishing and living in the woods for weeks. He would test his incredible abilities of mountain climbing, running, and skiing with greater speed and ability than professional athletes.

Sophia saw the value of learning, even though that did not always mean school. Farris was different. Sophia analyzed that, for Farris, it took too long and involved too much sitting. He would rather travel the world by land, sea, and air. Sitting in lectures was a long waste of time to him.

Sophia smiled at her brother, comforted that although they both lived outside of the ordinary way, she had a companion who understood her. “By the way, what costume are you trying to pull off as clothing this time?”

“You don’t like this?”

“Isn’t it a little weird to wear a hunting vest on a plane ride, Farris?”

“It’s not a hunting vest. It’s for fishing. This one happens to have 10 outside pockets and 4 inside ones. If you paid attention to outdoor sports, you’d know that these are cool,” Farris answered and straightened the blue rope wrapped around his right shoulder.

“Um. . . OK then.”

“Besides, have you gone even 1 day since you were 2 without wearing red?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“I’m sure I have. I don’t always wear red. Anyway, what do you have in all of those pockets? We’re just going home.”

Farris pulled out each object as he listed it. “All of the supplies needed to be prepared for action and adventure at any moment: a 40 foot climbing rope, water purification tablets, three straws, flint, fishing hooks, breath mints, a global positioning system, aluminum foil, lemon drops, multivitamins, binoculars, a Spanish phrasebook, a

miniature flashlight, foldable silverware, a pocket dictionary, and of course my well-used Swiss Army Knife.” His answer left Sophia speechless.

She remembered the knife had been a gift from his parents when he turned 6. It had no fewer than 52 extremely useful attachments, including: ink pen, tooth pick, tweezers, pliers, six types of screwdrivers, lock pick, magnifying glass, saw, 13 types of knife blades, scissors, and many others.

Sophia remembered how he played with it by pruning the trees around their Geneva house, carved little statues of fish for his mother, and tightened all of the screws he could find.

The twins reclined their seats as far as they could, pressing their spines into the musty wool-scented fabric. They ordered drinks with fancy names like Coconut Mambo and Paradise Island and relaxed. They were finally going home.

“Farris,” his father leaned across the aisle, drink in hand, “what exactly happened this time? I don’t recall why you were tossed to the curb by old Alban’s Academy. You did show up to art class, didn’t you?”

Farris snickered before answering, “I went to art, but I got so tired of sitting all day. I packed my backpack and decided to see the east coast by rail. So, I bought a ticket and started off from Ontario. It was terrific! In New York, I saw tons of things-- the Statue of Liberty, the dockyards, and best of all I just spent a lot of time watching people on the subways. I like being in the woods more, but cities are an adventure too.” Farris leaned back into his recliner and sipped on his Coconut Mambo.

“Well done, boy. You’ve been traveling since you were 3, so there’s no reason not to take advantage of good geography, eh,” he said.

Barak continued with a story, “You know at your age, I also skipped school. My friends and I were all very interested in postmodern painters at the time. We would leave campus and travel to all of the museums. The best time to go was during an art opening; then they would have free food and lots of famous people to meet.”

“Next time, call to let us know where you’re off to, but we are glad you did a bit of traveling, Farris,” answered their mother. “Most of the time, we’re at the Geneva house, but you know how we have to travel for work. Did you get a chance to use any of your Latin on your adventures?” she asked, her voice danced through the air.

“Sorry. No one I met spoke Latin,” Farris answered politely, even though no one used Latin outside of their mother’s linguist friends.

“Well dear, let’s work on some Spanish when we get home. Millions of people speak Spanish. The sooner you learn it the sooner you can communicate with them. You are only as alive as you are able to communicate.” Zola-Oya batted long butterfly eyelashes before sparkling black eyes.

“Sophia, Farris. We’re so thrilled you’re coming home.” Barak smiled wide. “Too bad things didn’t work out better at Alban’s Academy. Luckily you’ll make it to Geneva just in time for an opening by a new French painter. You’ll like his work.”

“Father, I’ve been wanting to show you. This is my project from last month--a robotic companion unit with satellite feed and remote relay. This one is a cat.” She smiled proudly as her brother and parents looked on. The little robot sprouted wires from its sides and was painted with orange and yellow tabby stripes. Puffs of orange faux fur were attached to its ears and tail.

“Gorgeous, darling. It reminds me of a Picasso, really. It looks like you were being very creative at school,” her father Barak noted as he held up his drink in a toast to her successful creation.

“Does it recognize French, dear? Japanese? Swahili? Or just plain old English?” Zola-Oya, Sophia’s mother was a linguist and saw little value in things or people who were unable to communicate easily. Zola-Oya’s, named after two African goddesses, sat regally as a queen.

“Of course, Mother. Fifteen languages in fact. What use would it be otherwise?” Sophia responded. She used no fewer than five languages at the ripe age of 14--English, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Italian, and Hindi.

The steward approached and pointed to Sophia’s lap. “Excuse me, miss. You’ll need to put on your seatbelt now.”

The combination of Sophia’s use of languages, her café au lait complexion, and her taller-than-average height made people mistake her for Indian, Moroccan, or Spanish. She never found an easy way to explain she and Farris were complex human beings with no need of classifying themselves so simply.

Sophia continued, “You’ll like this even better than the robot. This is really a fantastic creation,” as she pulled out an everyday looking computer.

“Yeah, that’s a laptop, Sophia. Everyone has one these days,” Farris nudged and chuckled to himself.

“No, this is new. I reconfigured my old one. I took it all apart down to the microchips and rewired everything with micro-light fiber conductor, which I also had to produce since no one makes such a thing.” She saw wide eyes around her as she spoke.

“So, instead of my computer running on old, slow electricity speed, it runs at light speed. This thing should be able to do everything I can think of at the same time with no delays. It’s about 10 years beyond cutting edge.” Her smile sliced across the aisle, making the family bend their necks to catch a glimpse of the invention.

“Sweet! Can we hack into computers or send messages to Mars or e-mail the whole world at once or launch a space shuttle or. . .” Sophia cut her brother off before he could continue.

“You could and from anywhere in the world. Since it communicates thousands of times faster than anything presently called state of the art. It is totally untraceable. But those things are illegal, and I won’t let you,” Sophia snapped the laptop shut and returned it to her bag. “As I recall, there are no mountains to climb or places to travel in jail, Farris,” She winked at her brother.

The airplane filled up, and the travelers cuddled into their seats, wrapped in blue fuzzy blankets. As the plane left the ground with a series of rumbles and a silence that made her belly drop, Sophia hid her robotic companion unit and laptop beneath her seat. She glanced around for anyone wearing a black suit and sunglasses.

In the past, corporate spies for technology companies had stalked her ruthlessly. Five of her inventions from fourth grade were stolen then put on the market by huge corporations. She was furious after getting no credit for her inventions, and after that Sophia decided caution was the best course of action.

“Well, what can you do? Sometimes things don’t work out. You know what they say *don’t let school get in the way of your education.*” Barak smiled across the aisle then kissed Zola-Oya’s hand.

Sophia exhaled, relieved that to her parents, it was acceptable to test the boundaries of rules as long as no one got hurt. Great people throughout history have made incredible discoveries and created amazing things by breaking rules.

“Sophia, what happened to you? The Headmaster said something about a library, the ancient Greeks, and some borrowed books,” Zola-Oya inquired.

“It’s very simple, really. My history teacher wants us to be robots. He depends solely on popular theories to teach, which aren’t always accurate. So, I left school for the National Library to research his ideas. I found all of the information I needed but the librarians wouldn’t let me check them out without a parent, so I borrowed them. They’ve all been returned of course.” Sophia gloated at her discoveries in being able to prove her teacher wrong.

“Ce n’est pas grave. That means *it’s not serious* in French. I’ll get you a library card there if you need to use it, liebchen.” Her mother flagged down the steward for more drinks before leaning forward, “What happened when you got back to school?”

“When I returned to class with the books, Mr. Emery, my teacher, was upset at me from the beginning. Then, I gave my speech to the whole class, teaching them what I had found about the Greeks, and he got even angrier.”

“He turned red in front of everyone, and when the kids started asking questions, I answered them, because he was so busy breaking the lead from his pencils he couldn’t even speak. At least it wasn’t as bad as what happened in Australia.”

Sophia thought back to Accelerated Academy in Sydney. She argued with her fifth grade teacher when he taught the students never to use a dictionary. Instead, he told them when they read to guess what words meant instead of learning them.

Sophia researched his teaching and found that guessing at words had been proven to make readers dumber not smarter, because they were guessing instead of learning. She showed him that students lost up to five IQ points per year and eventually hated school when they followed his advice.

“Que Lastima! That means *what a shame* in Spanish. So, Alban’s expelled you for building robots and teaching classes? There’s only 1 more year until you’re finished, dear.” Her mother smiled from across the airplane aisle and held up her bright red drink in the plastic cup to tell Sophia she had done the right thing.

Everyone knew that Sophia would graduate 4 years early and had already been accepted to study at Cambridge University in England.

“That’s not all, actually.” Sophia became more excited to tell the rest of her story as her voice dropped.

“I’ve also been working on cracking the time-warp barrier from my dorm room. That’s the whole reason for rebuilding my laptop. Studying physics is so boring in class. It’s better to do physics than read about it. I’ve got most of it worked out now.”

“I needed something powerful enough to produce a stable time warp window and fast enough to make all of the mathematical calculations. I have to be sure that my arm doesn’t end up in 1804 and my head in 1972. When we get home, I’ll make my first attempt to open a time window and travel through the space time continuum.”

“Oh fantastic!” Barak blurted, nearly tossing his drink in the air. “That reminds me of da Vinci. He was an artist who invented all kinds of wonderful things.”

“Splendido! That means *wonderful* in Italian. Can I go with you? I’ve always wanted to visit Medieval Italy and study the language in person. Time travel is so

exciting.” Zola-Oya’s face lit up. She spoke over a dozen languages fluently and could understand another 10 easily. Languages were her life.

Sophia nodded and smiled at her mother’s acknowledgement, then continued her story, “So, in the end, I didn’t go to class for weeks. It’s amazing how angry the Headmaster got over my doing a little research to apply physics for something useful.” The whole family giggled, knowing Sophia was right.

The twins leaned into their recliners as dinners were served by a steward who wore a shiny silver tag that read Teague. Their mother recognized the name as ancient Irish and started talking to him in Irish, but he didn’t understand her and moved on.

They munched on peppery baked chicken, slightly dry bowtie pasta, and creamy Caesar salad. The flight was scheduled to take almost 10 hours. So the twins fell asleep, breathing in the stale airplane air. The parents engaged in a lively conversation about the influences of fast food on language and artwork with the couple behind them. The hours passed, and the family spent the time waiting to arrive in the beautiful Swiss mountains.

The red lights, that looked like miniature seatbelts above their recliners, flashed, a signal something was wrong. The steward spoke into a microphone from the front of the airplane’s main aisle, “The captain has requested that all passengers put on their seatbelts and remain in their seats.” Around him, rattling metal sounded as though bits of the plane were about to shoot through the air.

The sounds of muffled commotion--people murmuring, clothing twisting, and bags being opened and closed--woke the twins, not to mention that Teague shook them to

check that their seatbelts were in place. Their seats stopped bouncing just long enough for them to sit up straight.

“What’s going on?” murmured Sophia, rubbing her eyes with her palms.

“The plane has been flying through a lot of turbulence, and we are heading into a massive storm.” The steward smiled then ducked behind them to check on other passengers. The plane bumped up and down like an amusement park ride, leaving their stomachs 3 feet below their bodies.

“Should I offer to help the captain?” Farris pulled Teague back, “I finished the initial flight instructions and received my first pilot’s license at 6. I have also been trained in emergency procedures, super sonic flight, and commercial aircraft. I could easily maneuver us through a storm.” The steward nodded, No thanks, before continuing on his rounds.

Farris’s golden eyes flashed as he thought of flying the plane through the pounding rain and thundering claps of lightning. He pictured himself squealing with delight *Whoo! Yeah! Bring it on storm!* He imagined saving all of the passengers by showing the pilots how flying is really done. He decided offering his services as an expert aviator would be expected and walked to the cockpit to talk with the captain.

The sliding door smacked against the hollow wall when he opened it. “Excuse me.” He saw that two of the three pilots lay face down on the floor. All of the computers on the left side of the console were completely dark. Not even a flicker of light could be seen.

“I have all necessary training for flying this plane and can easily maneuver through the storm. Can I help?” Farris flashed a bright toothy smile to the co-pilot who flipped through pages of a flight manual.

“What? No, no, no. I don’t need your help! We just went off course and are experiencing a little engine malfunction. That’s all. The plane will be back on course in no time.” Farris listened to the pilot, whose displayed license read, Mireya, which was dated a week ago. She read over the manual instructions out loud, “OK, first pull the blue lever, then push the red button then twist the white knobs. Or was it the blue knobs? Blast!”

“You just got your license, didn’t you?” He smiled to show her he understood, “I used to read while flying when I started too. It gets easier.”

Farris could tell immediately the plane was in trouble, so he plopped himself into the co-pilot’s seat and told Mireya to toss that book out of the way. He grabbed the control arm then started punching buttons, turning knobs, and pulling levers.

“You can’t be here, young man!” The pilot shouted and shot him a definite look that said, *move it kid!* “Passengers cannot be in the cockpit. It is against the airline’s policy. You will have to leave *now!*”

Farris was much better at getting things done than at arguing his points with adults. Yet, he had to convince the pilot she needed his help if he intended to improve their likelihood of survival. “Listen, I know I’m not supposed to be here, but you might like the help or at least some company. I won’t get in the way or be a nuisance in any way. So, what are our coordinates?”

Mireya glared at him. Her black hair was falling out of the neat bun it had once been placed in, and dark circles had formed under her eyes. She looked frustrated. “The lead pilot hit his head on the navigational computer, knocking out himself and our communication. I’m flying blind, so I don’t know our coordinates. But I don’t need your help.” She turned and looked back at the manual resting in her lap.

“You know. I taught my flight instructor how to roll a plane in mid air. I’ve flown everything from a Cessna personal plane to a 737. I can help.” Farris wanted her to hear him more than anything, so he shot her a huge white toothy smile that could get him toothpaste commercials as a part-time job. He learned early on that smiling at people tended to make them more agreeable.

The pilot sighed and rolled her eyes, “Put this on, would you? In case we suddenly make contact with the flight tower, I want to be ready.” Mireya tossed him a headset, which was directly linked to the flight guides.

All Farris heard was a loud buzzing sound followed by cracks and a fuzzy noise. Farris threw away the headphones, knowing they were useless at this point. The plane was lost, and no one from a flight tower could help them. He turned the plane to the left directly into the storm and heard the engines winding up with sharp whirling sounds. Then came a loud crash as both of the engines blew.

“Now flip those switches there. Wait 1 minute then you grab the wheel. We’ll have to coast down. The rear engines are both shut down and are on fire. Don’t you guys maintain these things?”

Crack! A bolt of lightening slammed into the plane, sending a massive pulse of energy through the hull. It made nearly all the passengers scream as though they had just passed a long drop on a roller coaster.

“Grab the wheel. We’re going down!” Farris shouted and both of them worked in unison to move the limping airplane from harm’s way. “Look up there. We can land beyond that hill.” Farris pointed out a long patch of beige, treeless ground that lay just below them.

“No!” Mireya protested, “If we land this plane without the landing gear down and without a regulation runway, we’ll crash it into a million pieces!”

“It’s our only hope. C’mon, help me land the plane.” Farris grabbed the blue switches and flipped them, dropping the plane nearer and nearer to the ground below. Lower and lower the plane went, until finally it scraped the soggy ground. The sound of metal meeting earth caused his teeth to rattle.

Farris slammed on the brakes, which did no good, so he braced his arms against the console for the inevitable collision ahead. As the plane’s belly first tapped the mushy ground below, the remaining controls went dead.

“I’ve lost everything. The plane is landing itself. Cross your fingers we don’t flip!” Farris winked playfully then leaned over to Mireya’s station and looked at her console. Nothing worked.

“Oh no! At flight school, they used to show us videos of things like this happening,” she said, her jaw shook visibly, making her words skip.

Sliding across the ground, the plane spun and turned like a merry-go-round, tearing off the port side wing. Farris smelled the nauseating stench of fuel that sprayed

across the field. Then, when it seemed it would stop, the plane dragged its belly right across a boulder field. All he could hear from inside the cockpit was tearing, scraping, and crunching like one of those 2 am knife commercials trying to cut a can in half. Hunks of dirt and grass were tossed onto the cockpit windows.

The plane nearly flipped on its side but was both saved and doomed by boulders that were piled in the field, as they ripped through the hull, tearing it as an axe blade splits wood. Farris looked through the cockpit windows and saw a deep gloomy sky behind the bits of leaves, clods of dirt, and murky rain. He released his hands from the yoke and stared for several seconds at his whitened palms.

Damage Report

“We did it!” Farris and Mireya flung their arms into the air, celebrating that they landed the plane successfully. Farris stretched the excitement from his bones. He smiled at Mireya and put out his slightly sweaty hand to shake hers, “It’s been nice working with you. I should go check on the passengers now.”

“Alright, I guess that breaking the flight rules about passengers in the copilot’s seat wasn’t so bad after all. I’m going to use the communication system and attempt contact with the nearest flight tower and get them to send help,” Mireya saluted Farris to embark on his next adventure.

Slamming the cockpit door into the hollow wall once more, Farris left. His spine stood firmly straight as he entered the main compartment to see what he could do next. He stopped for a second, focusing on the scene before him.

Exiting the cockpit was like stepping from the space shuttle into a circus. Ahead of him lay a demonstration of madness. In Aisle 6, a couple of teenagers stared straight ahead like zombies, seemingly glued in place.

A black-suited man held his head in his hands sucking in the air from his palms.

A couple from Aisle 10 ran around wildly like crazed toddlers screaming and squealing. Behind the cockpit remained only half of the original plane.

Following 12 rows of seats lay a menagerie of metal and blue fabric, then a hole that opened out to a rainy, cool evening. Twenty feet after the hole rested the back half of the passenger compartment, tilted to the left, as bits of clothing and toiletries scattered and fluttered about the ground. Suitcases once neatly packed now sprinkled across a wet brown field, littering it with clothing, shampoo bottles, and wandering individual socks.

Thank goodness I'm here! Someone needs to have a cool head, Farris thought to himself.

“Mother! Father!” Among the clamor of whimpers and chatter, Farris’s voice was drowned. So, he walked the length of the plane still attached to the cockpit.

People started getting out of their seats and stretching, rummaging through carry-on bags. A tall man holding a small white poodle that had been stashed beneath a seat, talked to it quietly. “Oh there’s a little baby girl. Aren’t you a brave girl? We’re going to the doggie show still. Don’t worry.” He gently handed bits of white cheese into its nibbling mouth.

After him was a woman, whose once-neat hair leapt from her head in long streamers. She babbled into her cell phone. “Well, how do I know when I can get to Geneva? What I’m trying to tell you is that the stinking plane went down. That’s right!

A plane crash! Listen, I don't have time for this." She shook her phone then threw it into the field viciously as though it might help.

In Aisle 8, a pair of grandmother-aged ladies in flowery dresses with lace collars slapped cards on a tray table, probably using the game to take their minds off the landing, "That's an eight for me, dear. Now you remember the rules of rummy, don't you? We played it back in the blizzard of '47."

Farris trotted back to where his reserved seat waited. Sophia created a neat pile-- the robotic companion unit, her laptop computer, and several books were stacked together as though she was preparing for a trip. "Are you OK?" he asked, adrenaline rushed through his legs, vibrating them.

"Of course I am. I'm always OK, but I haven't seen Mother or Father since before the crash." Sophia's hands trembled as she rummaged through her bag, apparently checking for power cords and batteries, which she counted out loud. Although she had just survived a crash landing, Farris knew she still had to be on the lookout for technology spies. Confusion was the perfect time for them to steal her materials.

"Once I have things in order, I'll go in search of them. Do you know where we are?" Her voice cracked and her chin quivered.

"Somewhere in southern France, or maybe Spain. Or we could be in Italy. Really, it doesn't matter. We're down. Anyway, the pilot is making arrangements for an emergency team to be sent."

He placed his hand on her shoulder and squeezed. Farris reached into the inside pocket of his vest and pulled out a lemon drop, which he handed to Sophia then smiled.

“We’ll be fine now. Don’t worry.” He scanned the plane’s new opening to examine the rest of the damage.

As he approached the torn metal, several things stuck out. The rear part of the plane was in one piece, and the people who sat in the seats just behind the opening still stared wide-eyed at the plane’s front section only 20 feet away. Empty seats lined the rest of the compartment.

Farris noticed that most of the people from the back part of the plane wandered around in the soggy field. He followed them and saw a figure on the ground about 50 feet from the crash site. There was a heap of dark clothing, blanketed in cool rain and flashing lights.

He approached the figure as a squealing woman ran up to him, “We’re down! We’re down! We made it to the ground! I’ll never leave the ground again!” the woman leapt into the air like a court jester, clapping her hands as she danced and flipped her hair.

Farris knew from his first aid training that she was in shock. He searched the objects around him--an open suitcase with 10 pairs of white socks, a bundle of gray blankets, and a case of juice bottles. He grabbed a blanket and tossed it over her shoulders, then placed her on the ground.

Next, he saw a man holding his crooked arm against his chest. Farris ripped apart a pair of khaki pants and a violin bow that had been thrown from their suitcases and made a sling for the man to hold his broken arm in place.

Farris’ attention was still drawn to the figure on the ground. No one else was over there, and his fingers flickered as he thought of finding out. Farris’ hands sometimes twitched when there was something adventurous to do.

Perhaps someone had been thrown from the plane. Perhaps it is a low boulder and not a person at all. Perhaps I should stop thinking to myself and go find out, Farris thought.

Sophia ran up beside him, her dark hair danced in the wind as she approached. “I haven’t found Mother, but I think Father is one of the people who have wandered off. Most of the people are in a daze and are not making logical choices. They’re wandering around in shock. Where are our parents?”

Her question sounded simple, but the thoughts she dare not mention were not. Farris pointed to the figure ahead of them. There was a shady mass stretched across the wet ground as though a child had left a large doll outside all night.

Around the mass, orange light reflected, and red lights flashed on the surface glaze of rain, making the scene look like a Halloween parade. A lump developed in Farris’ stomach, and his legs felt like massive tree trunks as he attempted to drag one foot in front of the other.

The twins approached the figure. Every step was like a million years, as he gagged on the engine fumes in the air, felt the prickle of light cool rain on his face, but could not take his eyes from the figure just a few feet away.

Farris ran to it then, remembering that a few seconds to an injured person could mean life or death. As his knees sunk into the soggy earth next to the figure, Farris’s body stiffened. Slowly he turned his head to his sister and whispered, “It’s Mother.”

Farris clasped his Mother’s hand in his. She was completely limp. He swallowed hard and felt his stomach turn somersaults. He wished he had brought her into the cockpit before the crash to keep her from being thrown from the plane.

“No time to lose by us being in shock, Sophia.” He knew that if they gave into their emotions, they would end up like the other passengers of the plane, wandering the soggy field like zombies. Their Mother needed them to stay alert and behave the way they had been raised--as extraordinary people.

Farris removed the contents of his vest pockets onto the ground. He looked around for water and a first aid kit, but none were in sight. He laid his ear above her mouth to check for breathing. Humid air trickled into his ear canal, warming it in the cool night. Then he gently dragged his hands over her torso, arms, and legs feeling for broken bones. Her side swelled and had a hard bump in it, as though she had something hard in a shirt pocket. He placed her wrist in between his fingers and counted the seconds in his head then did the math to figure out her pulse. Farris exhaled hard.

He observed, since her eyes were closed that she was unconscious, so he tried to make the least amount of noise as possible. His mother was also breathing very faintly, which he believed may be due to injuries to her ribs. He did not move her, but covered her with blankets and built a temporary tent around her body with two rain parkas and three umbrellas. As the minutes went by, he checked her breathing twice more. Pink circles surrounded her eyes--the only color left in her face.

Sophia pulled her brother from their Mother's body before speaking, “Farris, I think I can fix this.”

“OK, how? At this point, I've increased her warmth, built a tent to keep off the rain, and checked all of her vital signs. I'll build a fire so that the heat will increase her circulation. As long as the emergency team arrives soon, she will be fine. If not, I will

have to put her into a fireman's hold and carry her to town myself. I'm not afraid to carry her."

Farris concentrated on taking one breath at a time. He rarely got upset, but seeing his Mother injured had ignited an energy that he had never felt. *It wouldn't be easy, but as long as I could keep walking and not fall, I could do it.* His muscles twitched at the thought.

He pictured the other option. People asking him, *your mother was injured and you just stood around? You did nothing as she died in a field?* His eyes instantly flowed at the thought.

"How about another idea?" Sophia waved her hand before his eyes to get his attention.

"What idea?"

"Remember I told you back at Alban's how I've been working on developing a way to move through both time and space?" Farris nodded at his sister as she spoke, "I can make it work. I was going to wait until we made it home, but now is the time."

Farris kicked a clump of grass away from him. *Why would she be bent on inventing at a time that obviously called for action and quick thinking? She's supposed to be a genius not an idiot. We need a doctor not a physicist!* He thought.

"No way! Why would you want to move through time? We have to help Mother now, not experiment! It's not right, Sophia." Farris could not understand Sophia sometimes.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Farris. This is the right time. Here’s what I’ve put together. First, Mother and Father were at the back of the plane when it started going down. You walked into the cockpit to land it. They were talking to a Russian professor about languages or art or something. Then when the plane was sliding across the ground, the three of them finally moved toward their seats. You know how Mother and Father are-- nothing is important unless it has to do with art or language. Well, think about it. They never made it to their seats. They were thrown from the plane!”

Farris nodded, knowing his sister was right. Each of them had a little bit of the same trait. If there was creating or discovering to be done, Sophia would drop everything for it. If there were adventure, traveling, or a competition to be a part of Farris jumped in.

“So, what we need to do is go back in time--just a little bit. If I’ve calculated this correctly, we have to go back 3 hours to about 11:45 pm according to my watch. That’s when you left for the cockpit. When we go back in time, you still go to the cockpit to land the plane. I’ll get Mother and Father and the Russian professor back to their seats. Once they are buckled in, they will definitely not get hurt.”

“Right! The professor can use my seat so that they can still discuss art and language from there.” Farris knew that his parents would not easily leave a good conversation, and they would have to be satisfied to at least be across the aisle from the professor to talk. “Get to work then. I’ll watch Mother in the meantime.”

Farris did watch his mother, but he also dressed four more broken bones, handled three cases of shock, and devised a temporary shelter for injured passengers who needed

to lie down. Sophia glanced up at him every few minutes. His 6 feet tall frame bent over one passenger, then another. He kept darting back to his mother's tent like a frantic puppy. His hair dripped with light rain and his clothes looked two sizes too big from the weight of water.

Sophia disassembled her robotic companion unit, fumbling through the pieces with cold, stiff fingers. *OK, if I use these computer chips together, that should create a shock wave. Then I need to add in a relay unit to allow me control over it. Let's see . . . this should work here. Oh if only I had some glue!* With the knives, screwdrivers, and tweezers from Farris's Swiss Army Knife, she invented something new.

Like a scavenger, Sophia scouted out objects from the piles around the crash site. A cell phone, a cigarette lighter, a set of walkie-talkies, and a garage door opener looked promising. She stuffed them into her pockets and scoured the suitcases and airline supplies for anything useful.

Her lower back ached, as she bent over her computer with her coat spread out to keep everything dry. She separated the pieces from her laptop, carefully releasing tiny screws and making a pile on her shoe. Then she sliced each wire, kept red, blue, and black separated. Her nose started to run as she worked, and rain trickled down her neck in thin, cold streams.

Oh come on, come on! Sophia's internal conversation was getting louder in her head until she started talking out loud to herself. *Peel the band-aid. Use that instead of glue. Will it work? No! It broke. Where am I going to get another one?*

OK, that part looks right. I wish I could look over the blueprints from the file instead of doing all of this from memory. It would be a lot easier if I didn't have to make

it up as I go along. Sophia glanced around and saw that only she, Farris, and their mother were still in that part of the field.

Oh no! People must have wandered off. Things are getting worse. With a small lighter, she melted a plastic straw to keep the two pieces of plastic casing from the garage door opener together. Six inches from her nose, she held out the 2 inch square device that stunk of melted plastic. She exhaled hard. *Well, nothing to do now but try it out.*

“It looks like something you’d find in the garbage. I don’t think that’s going to work.” Farris frowned at the ridiculous hunk of half-melted plastic his sister presented to convince him would send them back in time.

Sophia shook the contraption in front of him. “Look. This button starts a reaction within the device, which is in the laptop. From the battery set inside, a massive burst of energy would be released. This combined with us holding onto each other, to make sure we both travel in time, should cause a reaction in the quantum energy field to change our positions of both.”

“C’mon, you already told me about the energy and wires, and smarty science stuff. Is a garage door opener and a laptop really going to work?” Farris wondered if Sophia had just wasted all that time on nothing, and he would still have to carry his mother to town for help then come back and search for his father.

Sophia’s eyes scowled right through him. Farris could tell that she had no question about her time machine, because she glared at him with that scary look that girls get when they’re sure they’re right. He looked back at their mother, who lay silent and

still on the ground. The emergency team had not arrived, and they were running out of options.

Confidence glowed from Sophia's cheeks. "It will work, Farris. It's the best thing to do. Right now it's the only thing to do."

"OK. I'll give it 10 minutes. After that, I'm carrying Mother to town for help." Farris crossed his arms, holding his ground. The twins collected their things to be ready for the trial.

Unlike most siblings, the twins rarely argued or fought. One time they quarreled about whether trekking on a dog sled or driving a light-speed car across Alaska would be the better way to travel. Generally though, they never squabbled. This situation was very important, and each of them wanted the privilege of saving their parents' lives.

"Alright, Sophia. Give it to me, then. I'll hit the button and let's go back by a few hours." Farris reached for the device.

"Absolutely not! I made it, and I get to use it. You can wait for me to prepare it for the initial trial." Sophia pulled her arms back over her head, trying to keep them out of Farris's reach.

"No. Give it to me! I want to push the button. Let me push it first." Farris's eyes squinted half shut, and Sophia knew he was becoming more competitive. Two golden orbs glared at her within wind-whipped brown skin.

"You don't know how it's done, Farris. It's my invention! You're just like the stupid technology companies who can't even come up with their own inventions." Sophia roared as a swift wind tossed her hair into her face, making it difficult for her to

see more than a foot in front of her. Her fingers clasped the edges of the remote control, as wet hair slapped her eyes and cheeks.

Farris took advantage of the opportunity of her limited vision and grabbed the device but did not pull hard enough to get it completely out of her hands. He pulled straight up then to the side. The two yanked back and forth on the device, each sure that the other would let go. Farris grabbed Sophia's waist to tickle her, knowing she would lose control of the device if she laughed.

"Stop fighting me. I'm twice your size! You're not very smart for a genius if you think you'll win." Farris grabbed his sister around the shoulder and tripped her feet by sweeping them back with his leg.

Sophia felt like she would fall forward onto the soggy earth. Farris hauled her off of the ground as she hung her whole weight up by her fingers that were still clutching the device. She flung out her foot to kick him but missed and slipped backwards. Farris caught her behind her shoulders before she fell. Her eyes glanced at the remote control. Both of their fingers were positioned squarely in the center of the button.

Suddenly, a massive crash deafened them. They felt their bodies whirling as though they were on the spinning teacups ride at the amusement park, and it had gone out of control. Each of them opened their eyes wide to see sparks of red, purple, and gold all around them. The air in front of them smelled stale and dusty as though they had just opened an old trunk left in the attic for decades. The muscles in their arms were stretched, so that they had to lock onto each other not to be thrown outside of the tremendous array of sparks.

“Let go of it!” yelled Sophia as loudly as she could, unsure whether or not her brother could hear. “I said, let go!”

“What?”

“Let go of it, but keep holding my arm.” Sophia began to wonder about the particular details of operating a time machine. It felt to her that they had been traveling for hours, but she knew realistically it was no more than a minute.

The smell of sulfur filled the air and her throat clenched shut with the taste of metal like she had been chewing on a spoon. She snapped her brother’s hand off the device to gain control of it but kept a hold of his arm so that they would not be separated. The whirling wind between them tossed Farris’s rope, so that one end hung out of the circle. Past a few feet, it could not be seen; the rope disappeared into the mass of swirling color. Farris yanked it and tried to tie up the rope, which was flying around like a dancing snake, smacking the siblings in the face as it whipped around.

A massive orange light smashed in between them like a lightning bolt as Sophia released her finger from the device’s button. She inhaled for the first time in several minutes; a boom blasted in between them, making their heads ache. She was tossed backwards as the smell of burning hair made her nose wrinkle. Everything went black.

First Look at an Ancient Land

Sophia awoke with rocky, aching muscles and sand crammed in her nose. Her eyes stung like they had been glued shut, and her throat clenched tight. *It must not have worked*, she thought to herself, *We must have been lying here all night.*

Dry clumps of dirty hair hung about her defeated head. She guessed her backache and all-over sticky feeling was from sleeping in a saturated field. As the hot sun beat upon russet skin, she sat up to see what had happened.

What she saw startled her fully awake. All around Sophia stood tall dark men about 20 feet away in a large circle. Some held spears, and some leaned their arms on their knees, eyes locked at them. She pushed herself onto her elbows and noticed she was not lying in a rain-soaked field but on fine white sand. She reached her hand into the sand and let it glide through her fingers in long trails that trickled down like dancing fairies. She blinked several times and rubbed her eyelids with her palms to make sure she wasn't dreaming.

Farris lay a few feet from her. He was stretched over a small shrub with his arms straightened above his head. She scrambled over to him and nudged him by poking her fingers into his side.

"Wake up." She whispered. "Wake up, Farris. Something peculiar happened."

Sophia peeked back at the men surrounding them and decided it might be impolite to stare, so she tried to glance hurriedly from one to the next. *Who were these strange men? This makes no sense at all.* She wondered to herself what happened in the night.

"Farris, you've got to wake up. We're not at the crash site anymore." Sophia continued prodding her brother until his eyes blinked a few times.

"No way! Would you look at this?" Farris shot up and yanked a bundle of twigs from behind him, "I've been sleeping on a bunch of sticks. I was dreaming of a lion attacking me but that's what's been scratching me all night. I don't remember any trees or shrubs in the field. Hey, I'm hungry." Farris stretched and glanced around. His

fishing vest and khaki pants had dried out since the hours he spent standing in the rain the night before.

“Something’s wrong, Farris.” Sophia answered and pulled her brother straight up. “Look. We’re surrounded. This can’t be the emergency team.” She motioned to the people still circled around their sleeping spot. “Don’t stare. It’s rude.”

Her stomach twisted and turned, making her more nauseous as her belly churned and her throat clasped tight. Yet her eyes felt sharp and bright, like she could keep a watch on every one of the onlookers at once. She leaned closer to Farris, feeling safer near him. His face, that had been creased with the pattern of his vest from sleeping, now stared straight ahead, his eyebrows dipped in the middle. Sophia guessed he must be as disturbed as she was.

Farris latched his hand onto her shoulder, “Hit the button, Sophia.”

“What?” She asked.

“Hit the button. Hit the time machine button again. This isn’t France. We’re in some weird place. Get us out of here, quick. Quick!” His grip hardened onto her shoulder as she felt his angst pulsate from the heat of his palm.

Sophia snatched up the remote control from the sand and pushed the button. Nothing. She placed her index finger perfectly in the center of the button and pressed again, ensuring her finger did not slip or jump around. Nothing. “Farris, nothing’s happening. The batteries from my laptop must be exhausted. What now?”

The men moved apart, making a space in the circle around them. “No worries Sophia, I’ve been trained in Judo, Karate, and Jujitsu. I can take them all.” Farris chuckled as he spoke like a man who knows no fear.

“Oh really,” she retorted. Behind the men stood their leader--elite and proud on a gold chariot. He approached the children, not stepping down but drove his horses right up to the intruders in his land.

As the horses advanced, Sophia wondered if the man would continue pacing them forward. Each second dragged on, and each one was like an hour of cringing at the most horrible part of a scary story. As the horses reached just 4 feet away from Sophia's feet, they stopped. She exhaled hard and looked to her brother who sat comfortably in the sand one hand on his climbing rope, the other on his Swiss Army knife.

The man stepped down from the chariot and slowly approached. Around him glowed golden light, as though he were covered in glitter from a New Year's party. He wore an enormous necklace--black and gold braided leather with beads made of glass, gold, and bone. It twirled all the way to his shoulders and covered the top part of his chest. On his arms rested large bracelets from his wrists to his elbows. Each one matched the necklace with the gold and black pattern.

As the man drew near, he took each step leisurely, bare legs poked from beneath a white tunic. “Wow! That guy forgot his pants,” he joked with Sophia and nudged her elbow that leaned over his arm. She shot him a glance that shouted *be quiet* from it.

“What? I've seen a guy in a skirt before. C'mon.” Farris replied.

“I don't know. This isn't where the plane landed. We're somewhere else.” She whispered to keep her words from the men surrounding them.

“So, what do we do about Mother, now?” Farris's eyebrows scrunched together.

“Let's figure out what's happening here first, then handle Mother.” Sophia's answer wouldn't satisfy Farris, she knew.

In front of them, the man stopped, his left hand on the side of a massive black stallion. Farris made eye contact with him, and the man slumped to his knees.

“Most honored guests of Ra, we welcome you,” the other men still circling the twins knelt then. “Pharaoh’s prayers and sacrifices have been answered. We saw the burst of light and knew it was a sign from Ra--the sun god.” The man finished and planted his hands upon the warm sand.

“Pharaoh?” Farris whispered to Sophia.

Her breath stuck in her throat. Millions of worker ants rushed around in her stomach, making it impossible to move. Her elbows and shoulders started shaking, and her mind raced through millions of images seeking answers.

“Don’t ask questions right now. If I know what he’s talking about. . . oh. . . oh my gosh!” Sophia left her sentence incomplete and tried to gulp, but her throat ached with crackled dryness from sleeping in the desert.

“Noble messengers,” the leader continued, “may we take you to Pharaoh? He prayed for the day Ra would remember us and grant Pharaoh greatness. You have come to fulfill his wishes. Pharaoh welcomes you with gifts.” The leader gestured to his men, and several of them sauntered forward. They laid gold vases, jewelry, spears, and bowls of fruit on the sand in front of Sophia.

“What did he say?” Farris curled his lip and leaned into his sister.

“Remember when Mother taught us to decipher languages by listening to not only the words but the way people say them?”

“Yeah, I guess I remember.”

“They’re speaking a language I partially recognize. We’ll have to pay close attention, and we’ll be able to understand them. I’m understanding about half what he says at this point. If we’re careful, we should be able to learn the whole language within hours--a few days at the most.”

Sophia observed her surroundings, which made no sense. The men, the sand, the heat--none of it had anything to do with the place the plane landed. Things had changed so dramatically that there was only one possibility.

She tried to think through the situation. *Perhaps the time machine works perfectly, except for one minor flaw. I didn’t think about how to control its destination. Argh! I probably could have gotten us closer to the airplane if Mr. Must-Touch-Everything hadn’t pushed the button for so long.* Sophia thought to herself. *We’ve broken the quantum time and space fields and transcended both.*

“What do we do, Sophia? Should we try the button again? Want me to unleash my deadly Karate moves on him?” Farris leaned in.

“Don’t bother me. I’m thinking.” She hissed the words at him.

“Hey, you’re the genius around here. Haven’t you read anything in your millions of books that will fix this?” Farris snapped. He sounded more awake, as though he was finally taking the situation seriously.

Think back, she told herself. The man talked about Ra, which was the Egyptian sun god. He also wanted to take the twins to see Pharaoh, which was the name for king in Egyptian times. The men wore sandals instead of shoes, they were dark skinned, and the leader wore a necklace that covered half of his chest.

“We’re in ancient Egypt,” she squealed before throwing her arms around Farris’s neck. “We did it! Wait, I did it. The time machine worked. We’re not where we want to be, but oh think of how much Mother and Father would love this! Father could study Egyptian art and hieroglyphs, and Mother could learn Egyptian. You know how happy that would make her.”

“So, how do we get back to the plane crash? You hit the button and poof. Nothing. What now? I should’ve carried Mother and not listened to your weird ideas in the first place.” Farris’s tone dropped to irritation as his cheeks sagged.

His voice rose to a girl’s sound to mock her. “I’ll build a time machine.”

“Listen, if we’re in the past then Mother and Father haven’t been born yet. Not for a long time. Basically, our time will stand still until either we’re back in it or it exists in the right sequence. Right now, we need to get food and shelter then get the time machine working again.” Sophia whispered the words fast, trying to get the ideas to Farris but keep them from the prying ears surrounding the siblings.

“Mother and Father will be trapped in our normal time but not moving. Think of it as though all time, except where we are now, has stopped.” Dozens of books and lectures on quantum physics scrambled through Sophia’s mind as she calculated what happened when a time leap was made.

“OK, but let’s get that thing up and running again. I’m not about to let my parents die in a plane crash. Plus, I’ve got plans for spring skiing you know.” Farris’s cheeks lightened, and his lips cracked a grin.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence. Keep that thing hidden, would you? We lose that, we don’t leave here.” She pointed to the bag, which held the laptop and handed Farris the remote.

Farris nodded, “So, what’s there to do in Egypt? Hunting, traveling, hey is this where the Olympics started?” Farris suddenly perked up at his new reality-adventure in another time.

“No, of course not. That’s ancient Greece. We’re probably in a time earlier than that. The Egyptian civilization lasted for thousands of years. The Romans conquered them. We could be as far as 5,000 years away from our own lives. Don’t you ever read?” Sophia rolled her eyes.

“Read? I read what I need to read--topographic maps, travel guides, geography books, and of course sports magazines. Humph, read.” Farris sneered at Sophia. Since he was a boy, he could make ugly faces but did not know how to roll his eyes.

Sophia knew that, as the smart one, she would need to be in charge of this situation. She stood, and when she did, all of the men dropped their heads even lower. “Men of Egypt,” she began, “We have come from another place and time and will gladly meet Pharaoh. Ra expects we will be treated well, stay in the palace, and be able to tour the monuments Pharaoh has built.”

Sophia contemplated what was happening. In her regular life, the twins broke rules, snuck around, and worked alone to accomplish their goals. Now, an Egyptian Pharaoh waited to meet them.

The leader loaded the twins into his chariot, and his men organized themselves into perfectly straight lines on both sides of the carriage. “I am Caleb and at your service.

Anything you need.” He introduced himself before slapping the horses with the reins to get them trotting towards the city of Thebes. “What are your titles? Rather, how should I refer to you?” Caleb finished, before lowering his head in a small bow that showed respect.

“Sophia, and this is my brother, Farris.” Sophia held onto the edge of the chariot, wondering how anyone could comfortably ride in one of these for very long. A bumpy subway at rush hour with sweaty passengers packed together handled better than this. Sand batted her face and smelled of old dust.

“Really? I have never heard that name. Are you a goddess? If so, I do not think Egypt has heard of your deeds, and therefore we have no monuments built to you.”

Caleb held the reins with his hands in front of him and braced himself with his feet making a T-shape behind him. *That must be the trick to not falling over*, Sophia thought.

“Did you hear that?” Farris jabbed her in the shoulder, “he thinks you’re a goddess. I bet you’re really going to like Egypt, huh.” Farris snickered.

“No, Caleb. We’re not gods. We’re from a different place and time. Farris and I are twins.” She thought it could be a good idea to tell Caleb they were twins, when she remembered some African cultures saw twins as exceptional.

Sophia leaned towards Farris, “Do you think it’s really bad I told him we were from Ra?” Her bottom lip widened to show concern.

“No. You didn’t tell him we were from Ra. You said a different place and time. That’s true. We need to focus on food and shelter first. Getting the time machine to work has to be the next concern. Remember, safety first,” Farris winked.

“You’re right. We need to follow priorities.”

“How are you going to get that laptop to do its thing again anyway?” Farris asked.

Sophia blew a chest full of air from puckered lips. “It’s taken me months to collect the pertinent data. There won’t be any electricity, so I will have to construct a method for harvesting energy then transferring it into the laptop.”

“Yeah. Hey! Maybe I could catch a lion or a hippo or a giraffe or. . .” his voice trailed off.

“Priorities, Farris. We should stick to priorities.” Sophia pictured Farris dashing across the desert sand on foot after a giraffe.

“Yeah, right. I’ll make it a priority to catch a lion.”

Over the horizon before them, Farris saw blue blotchy patches that looked like pools of water on the sand. He pulled a pair of miniature binoculars from his vest pocket, which he kept for bird watching, avalanche blasting, and backcountry skiing. Into the tiny lenses he peered. On the other side of the lenses stood structures that looked like they belonged in a rain forest rather than a desert.

Massive sand-colored buildings stretching toward the sky clung together, surrounded by blossoming fruit trees and gardens. The pale walls overflowed in sinuous vines with large white flowers. Farris assured himself he could smell their honey scents from several miles away.

As he looked to the right, an enormous river extended against the plains in crystalline pale blue as far as he could see, even with the binoculars. He speculated if

there were fish in the water worth catching or if the vines could be climbed to thrust him to the fifth floor without his mountaineering equipment.

Cool! This is not what I expected. Maybe I can bury some treasure then dig it up when we go back to our time! Farris thought to himself as he rode in the chariot, one hand holding his binoculars still.

He recalled the images his mind had stored about Africa and Egypt. Small huts with thatched roofs, hundreds of miles of blowing sand dunes and not a drop of water in sight--these were some of the pictures he kept, but none revealed themselves here.

On the other side of the binoculars was a small-sized city. Farris counted the city sections. In the center rested several tall flat-topped buildings. Lofty walls almost like a medieval European castle's barricade separated the sections. As well, Farris saw wide roads that led in and out of the city on three sides. As the chariot was just a mile from the main entrance, Farris set the binoculars into one of his pockets. Being in ancient Egypt made his stomach do little flips and his muscles ache, as the unique city unfolded in front of him.

The chariot stopped just before a doorway in the city wall. Farris perceived the wall was at least 4 stories high and more than 5 feet thick. It appeared constructed from light-colored stone blocks, plastered in stucco or a clay coating, chipped at the bottom.

"This is an OK place. What do you think there is to do here?" Farris leaned over to Sophia. The dry air shriveled the skin on his arms, and his mouth became drier each minute.

"Well, the Egyptians made significant discoveries and were highly advanced in mathematics, medicine, and other sciences. Sometimes, people think our own time

period has been the one to make all of the great discoveries and innovations, but I don't think that's true at all." Sophia answered, always quick to add in some interesting piece of information from her reading.

"Maybe I could study some of those things while I'm here. It could be very useful." Sophia's gaze wandered off to some hidden place in her mind.

"Look!" Farris pointed at what lay ahead on their path. "Those are giant lions. Look at them. They must be 6 feet tall and 10 or 12 feet long and completely carved from rock or marble. Hopefully, I can carve one while we're here." Farris growled and scratched his fingers as though he were a lion on the attack.

In front of the chariot, people moved out of the way and bowed their heads until Caleb and the twins had passed. "Why are they doing that?"

"Respect. In some cultures, people will bow their heads, move out of the way, or stop what they're doing when someone important is approaching. Caleb must be a high-ranking person of some kind. It would probably be only wealthy people who ride in chariots," Sophia answered.

As the chariot turned the corner, Caleb slowed the pace of the horses. "We are approaching the palace now. You will be given quarters there as Pharaoh's guests. On your right is the path to the Mother Goddess Mut's temple. On your left is another path that leads to the great temple of Ra.

"Normally only Pharaoh, selected dignitaries, and clergy are allowed into it. Pharaoh grants permission to enter. You may be able to since you are from Ra himself." Caleb pulled back on the reins in front of an entrance, which was a tall triangle-shaped building with a flat top. "Horses are not allowed here. I will escort you inside."

The twins followed Caleb into a courtyard that held a glistening lake, sprinkled with fat white ducks and honking geese that splashed and dreamily paddled on the water. Surrounding the lake were palm trees, some of which held boys scurrying up to cut down the fruit stuck at the top.

Farris calmly walked 50 feet with his sister and escort before his hands began to flicker as the itch to do something outrageous overtook him. He sprinted across the sandy asphalt. Hard-soled boots slapped the pavement as though punishing it. His lungs forced in dry salty air, burning oxygen into pure muscle.

“Farris! Farris!” Sophia’s voice echoed as though she were miles away.

Up the palm he shimmied to the top, amazing all that witnessed his steady arms and legs grasp the trunk and pull his body up faster than any of the other boys. The earthy smell of the trunk reminded him of camping with the scouts.

“Farris! Get down!” Again, the voice, pestering.

He supported his weight on his left arm by clasping to the trunk and with the other pulled his climbing rope out of his inside vest pocket.

“Farris! Farris!” The voice, clearer now.

Without wasting a second, he made a lasso and tossed it straight toward the large brown fruit. “Got ‘em! That’s right; you’re mine now!” With a quick yank, Farris pulled four weighty balls to the ground at Caleb’s feet. Tossing the rope over his shoulder, he slid all the way down the tree’s trunk like a fireman shooting down a pole.

“Most honorable guest, Farris,” Caleb started out of breath, “Pharaoh owns these trees and their fruit. No man may pick the fruit of Pharaoh’s trees or take from Pharaoh,

as he is a god living among us. As you will see, Pharaoh Tutankhamun is a generous man, but even honored guests should ask before taking from Pharaoh.”

Farris’s face was already red from climbing the tree, but now he flushed even more. “Pharaoh owns everything? Oops, well sorry. I hope he won’t feed me to a lion or anything.” Farris growled and raked his fingers down his face.

“No harm done, I suppose,” Caleb forced a grin and gestured for the twins to follow him, “The slaves will collect these and use them for the feast tonight.”

“Slaves? Feast? Ooh, that means food,” asked Farris.

“Of course. You have come on behalf of Ra. Your presence will be celebrated with feasts every night. Pharaoh is anxious to meet with you. Please,” Caleb motioned for the siblings to follow him.

“It would be a good idea not to start off on adventures before we know what we’re doing. OK with you?” Sophia patted her brother on his shoulder.

“OK, I’ll try not to get myself thrown into the lion’s den. You can’t stop me from all the fun can you?” Farris growled and writhed, pretending a lion was chewing on his face.

“No, I can’t. But we don’t want to offend the Pharaoh and do anything wrong. We don’t know their customs here. Anything we do could turn out to be embarrassing or offensive. So, we have to be careful.” Sophia continued, “I think the best thing to do is to observe what other people do and imitate their manners. It will be especially important when we’re in front of Pharaoh.”

“Alright then, but I can’t stand around and do nothing the whole time. Besides, when are we going to get back in time to help our parents?” Farris agreed reluctantly. Sweat streams trickled down his cheeks.

“Maybe if you hadn’t screwed everything up, we would have just gone back a few hours and saved them. From now on, leave the technology up to me. You stick to climbing trees and everything else it is you do. Just ask first.” Sophia retorted and tossed her hair over her shoulder.

Sophia’s eyes widened, and her voice dropped as she spoke. “Hey, another thing. I am almost certain where we landed in time. Caleb said the Pharaoh is Tutankhamun. He was very young during his rule. He’s part of the 18th dynasty, I believe and around 1350 BC. He died as a young man and was possibly even murdered.”

“OK, so why do we care?” Farris slowed his walk to match hers and allow a little distance from Caleb who was still in front of them.

“Perhaps since he’s a child or a teenager at the oldest, we can make an ally of him. If so, we can stay here long enough for me to get the time machine to run again.” Sophia’s words were low and soft.

“Don’t get me wrong, Sophia. This place really is interesting, but I don’t know how we’re going to get back. What do we do now?” The excitement that covered Farris’s face earlier had plunged into a dull seriousness.

“I’ve been thinking about it all the way over here. I might be able to create a solar-powered energy collector. If we can take the spears Caleb gave us to a blacksmith to melt into small sheets, I might be able to make it work.” Sophia’s eyes danced wildly as she whispered at Farris.

“I have some foil in my pocket and electrical wire too.” Farris began taking the items from his fishing vest.

“Not yet!” Sophia slapped his hand away.

Their conversation stopped when they approached a long stairway that led up to the tallest building in the courtyard. Outside of the entrance flapped long purple and red drapes gently in the slow breeze. Covering the stone steps were flower petals, some of which hopped around as though dancing among puffs of air.

Sophia’s frustration caused her chest to heave in long sighs. She lacked specific information, which made her want to watch everyone around her at once, as though someone might reveal important data, and she didn’t want to miss it.

Anxious thoughts swarmed in her mind like a cloud of angry bees. *Are we in Tutankhamun’s reign of Egypt? Why aren’t we where we wanted to be on the plane? Did Farris’ grabbing the remote control throw us off course? Could a homemade solar panel really collect enough energy to refill the laptop’s battery?*

She felt Farris’ sweaty palm on hers. He must be just as nervous but too proud to show it. He pulled her toward the building entrance that revealed shadows in the shape of men. Her first step onto the stone turned her legs to jelly as her head swam in doubt.

Fishing with Pharaoh

The approaching figures grew larger with each step. Gold light flickered off their left sides. As the sun settled in the west, its rays pulled the figures toward the building’s entrance. Each one looked to be over 8 feet tall and dressed in similar necklaces, bracelets, and tunics that Caleb wore.

Sophia squeezed Farris' hand and pulled backward as if to hold off the impending meeting just a little longer. She thought to herself. *Maybe we shouldn't have gone off with Caleb. Perhaps we should have tried to escape into the desert.*

Sophia knew questioning her decisions wasted time and that the twins woke up not knowing where they were. How would they have known what to do right after waking up? Even though questions and doubts crowded her mind, they were here walking up the stairs of an Egyptian building, and there was no way out.

Farris seemed to know no regret or apprehension. His grip on Sophia's palm squeezed with anticipation. He hauled her up the stairs, nearly dragging her behind him. Sophia knew that although they were twins, and extraordinary people, they were very different.

Farris dealt with new things in the way he acted now--by dashing into whatever lay ahead with squinted eyes and a leading chest. He must have thought nothing of the possible dangers ahead. *Silly boy will kill us yet and then who would help Mother and Father from the plane if we become trapped or dead in Egypt?*

"Stop pulling would you?" Sophia muttered through clenched teeth.

"Oh come on, slow poke. You'd take forever if I weren't here to get you up a few stairs. I want to see inside. Check out those cool giant guys. At first I thought they looked kind of creepy, but now I want to meet them." Farris responded in his usual way.

"We should probably take our time and think this through instead of rushing into everything like a couple of wild animals." Sophia's face flushed as she tried to pry the fingers from her wrist.

“Hey, we both got ourselves into this. Now we have to keep going. The only way to deal with any situation is to face it and charge right through the middle.” Farris’s words were true, Sophia knew.

The siblings simultaneously felt the prickly, hot-skin, static-hair feeling one has when someone is staring. In unison both of their faces turned toward the figures, standing akimbo at the top of the steps.

The three extraordinarily tall men were so stiff, it seemed as though lightening beams might explode from their eyes and their skin may flake away to reveal that they were not men at all but demons wearing men’s bodies. Sophia ignored superstitions but sensed something otherworldly at this sight.

The tallest man from the center stepped forward, “Have you come to seek Pharaoh?”

“Yes, We explained to Caleb we’re from another time and place.” Sophia’s voice lodged in her dry throat, barely allowing her to speak.

“The seers saw the signs--two hawks flying East with mice in their talons, swift winds tossing water from the Nile. Then early this morning, the light that flashed, and Caleb went in search of you.” The leader pointed to the East with a long, muscled arm.

“What’s a seer?” Farris leaned his neck towards Sophia’s.

“A person who tells the future by observing signs in nature. Duh!” She whispered in return.

“You will wish to prepare first. Guests from the gods appreciate the rituals handed down from the sky people.” The tallest man gestured to the twins to approach him.

Farris whispered to Sophia, "I told you not to be so weird. He's just taking us to meet the Pharaoh--just like everyone keeps saying."

"It's always best to think things through and not just jump in. Remember the coconut tree?" She quipped back.

The twins followed the three men throughout the palace foyer. They walked down halls where one side opened into giant balconies that overlooked the city. Sophia saw the sprawling buildings; each neighborhood became shorter the farther away they were.

The buildings closest to the palace were just lower than her eye level, so her gaze skipped over the flat roofs to the streets below. People haggled and traded, a loose goat ran, naked children splashed water at each other, and women in white and pastel serapes went around so gracefully they seemed to glide rather than walk. The Egypt before her was left out of most of the history books she had read. This one was a 3 thousand year old urban civilization of vibrant, bustling Africans.

Farris saw a different city--one bursting with adventure and challenge. To the city's East he saw well-muscled sailors loading and unloading cargo being traded with Lebanon and Nubia. Farther out, ships held fishermen on smaller shell-shaped vessels, returning with the slime smell and weight of hundreds of pounds of fish. Farther North were hunting parties, most on foot. Almost all carried home some prize--a cheetah, a gazelle, or a goose dangling over sleek shoulders.

The guards settled the twins into their enormous rooms. Several servants were assigned to each to help them bathe in warm, flower-scented water. Then they dressed in

regal Egyptian clothing. Farris wore a white linen tunic with a leather belt and bracelets that matched Caleb's. Sophia donned a longer white dress with fabric so finely spun it felt like silk. Her neck and arms poked out through a gold serpent necklace and set of bracelets, carved like hippopotamuses.

Farris entered Sophia's room just as she was trying to stash away her computer parts and the time machine.

"These are my things. You cannot touch them--ever." Sophia's shrill voice bounced off of the walls. Farris could tell that she was trying to sound important and keep the servants from becoming curious about her modern objects. If someone took the time machine, the twins would be stuck in Egypt forever.

"She's right," Farris added as he took a few steps across the tiled floor, standing up straight to make himself seem imposing. "Those things cannot be touched. They are . . . um. . . they are from the gods! Any person who touches them will be struck down in a flash of light." Farris laughed to himself, thinking that was a pretty funny thing to say, knowing it was both true and false at the same time.

He saw the servants' faces nodding at each other in agreement and hoped that no one would start snooping.

The pair were led down three massive hallways, past huge stone rooms with blue tiled walls, slick floors, and windows partially-covered in sea-blue and wheat-yellow curtains. Finally the servants ahead of them stopped and bowed to the ground, letting the twins walk ahead of them into the last room.

As they entered, Farris set eyes on a quiet space with people packed into almost every bit of it. All of the people, but those on the raised platform knelt on one knee, their dark heads pointed down. He grabbed Sophia, knowing she would be scared and stuffed her into the crook of his arm. Past dozens of people, they shuffled and heard not a sneeze, not a breath. The air hung moist and heavy and gripped to his bare legs.

He continued walking slowly until he reached a man seated at the end--the only person sitting. The man wore a huge gold hat that sported wings on both sides of his head. Striped pieces of cloth dangled from the hat, across his shoulders, and down his bare black chest. His face was dark and serious. Either his features were distorted with colossal eyes and discolored lips, or the man wore a lot of make up. Farris walked up to the gold throne where the man sat and pulled Sophia into a deep bow. He sat on a golden throne and held a striped staff with a hook on the end and tassels dangling.

“Who are you?” the man boomed, his voice slammed against the walls as if it were a lead ball being tossed in a vicious game.

“I am Farris, and this is my twin sister Sophia,” he answered.

“Who sent you?” the man slammed the staff onto the floor, making Farris step back.

“Ah. . . no one really. Caleb said something about Ra.” Farris noticed people stood and began to crowd around the spectacle.

“You are not from Ra?” the gold wings on the hat twitched slightly as the man spoke, making him look a bit like an eagle would take his head and fly away.

Farris dropped the words from his lips one at a time. “No, I guess not really.”

“Then why are you here?” the interrogation continued but the tone changed from asking a question to demanding an immediate answer.

“Well, it’s really hard to explain. You see we were on an airplane and it went down, then my sister made this thing from her laptop. . .” Farris knew then he waded in hot lava. The man on the golden throne leaned his mouth into the ear of his bald-headed attendant. The perfectly spherical orb radiated bronze as though it had been rubbed with copper powder. From the clean-shaven skull, clear gold eyes latched onto Farris’s face and nodded as pierced ears wagged up and down listening intently.

“You are right, Aye. These people are not from Ra. They are common liars.” The man spat the words as his bald attendant stood, smiling a toxic grin.

Farris leaned into Sophia’s ear to whisper, “I don’t really know what I’m saying, Sophia. I kind of thought he’d be like Caleb and just be nice to us.”

“Ankht! Take this pair of imposter messengers away. Throw them in a hot dry place where they will have time to consider the severity of lying to the Pharaoh of Egypt.” A stern fist pounded upon the gold throne.

A young man crept out from behind the throne. His outfit matched Caleb’s, but his face beamed as though he found amusement in watching the intruders cower.

“Excuse my brother, Pharaoh. We are from another place and time and unacquainted with Egypt’s customs. If Egypt’s seers choose to interpret our arrival as a message from Ra, we will not question it. Like all visitors, we are at your service.”

Sophia’s voice sashayed through the air and replaced anxiety with something calmer.

“Sophia.” Pharaoh leaned forward against his thighs, displaying rings and bracelets intricately carved into African animals. The glacier warmed, trickled, and melted. “You are welcome in Egypt any day,” he smiled.

The young man Pharaoh called Ankht stepped back. He then snapped a spear across his chest and dragged his finger across his throat, looking right at Farris.

“Thank you Pharaoh. We appreciate your hospitality.” Sophia’s smile brightened the militant Pharaoh.

“Aye, stand back. We will hear about these visitors.” Pharaoh excused his attendant and leaned closer.

“Thank you.” Sophia smiled and flipped her hair. Sophia’s hair flip was a trick she learned to keep a boy’s attention without his noticing she was in control. Farris knew all about it and wanted to burst with laughter every time he saw a boy fall for it.

In an instant, the depth and volume of Pharaoh’s voice dropped. “Sophia is not an Egyptian name nor is Farris.”

“No, Sophia is Greek in origin, meaning ‘wisdom.’ Farris is Arabic, rather closer to Persian to you, meaning ‘warrior.’” She dropped her chin and peered at him through thick eyelashes.

“You are brother and sister, yes?” Pharaoh asked.

“Yes.”

“Are you married?” his next question.

“We’re 14! Who gets married at 14?” Farris’s words leapt from his throat.

“I was married at 8. It is very common to marry by 14. In fact I have two daughters already and am 17. Then you are not married to each other?” Pharaoh addressed Farris with quick, precisely timed words.

“No. Our culture does not marry family members.” Sophia’s explanation set off uncontrollable snickering and outright laughter from dozens of listeners in Pharaoh’s guests.

“You are truly curious, Sophia and Farris. Please,” Pharaoh stood, “join me in celebrating your peculiar arrival. We exult new friends in an old place.”

The sun blazed hot right from the time it rose. Millions of thick sunbeams invaded the twins’ rooms, highlighting the dusty, sparkling air. They met Pharaoh for breakfast then rode in a golden chariot to the docks.

Farris leapt onto the boat, which rocked slightly as he pounced down his full weight. Half a dozen royal servants were already aboard, scurrying around like busy ants. They set up the sails, checked the fishing tackle, and performed other jobs for the journey.

A rhythmic spray of misty droplets sprung from the Nile River, rinsing the salt from Farris’s face and arms from his early morning run.

“What’s in this?” Farris opened a woven basket with gnarled hooks.

“Those are used for gutting the fish onboard.” Siptah a tall, lean servant answered.

“You gut them right on the boat instead of cleaning them when you take them back to the kitchens?” Farris asked.

“Of course. The other fish and crocodiles eat the entrails, so we feed them.”

“Makes sense.”

“What about this one?” Another basket lid tumbled to the plank deck with Farris’s words.

“Fishing line of course.”

“Thick fishing line--weird.” Farris thought back to the ultra-thin line he was used to using that listed the size of fish that could be caught on the packaging.

“I thought you said you’ve been fishing before.” Siptah nudged him with a smile.

“I’ve done my share of fishing, yes. Fly fishing, river fishing, spear fishing, and caught an award-winning Blue Marlin off the coast of Mexico. Every kind of fishing is different. It’s an art form.” Farris returned with a boast.

“Art? No, fishing is food. For Pharaoh, fishing is talking to the water creatures, looking for signs of the future.”

“What! Don’t you fish for sport?” Farris stood akimbo, staring at the servant.

“Sport? I don’t understand.”

“You know--to get away from it all, get into the woods, backpack 10 miles to a mountain lake, fun. Relaxation? Hello?” Farris squinted his eyes and gesticulated with his hands as he spoke.

“What is there to relax from?”

“Ah, duh! Life. Work. School.”

“Work is life. Everything is work. There is no sport.” The servant flashed pristine white teeth as he spoke.

“Wait a second.” Farris cast the rope he had been wrapping into a neat coil.

“You mean to tell me that Egyptians don’t do things for fun? You don’t try to escape the boring junk you have to do everyday?”

“Well, yes and no.”

“Which is it--yes or no? I don’t get it.” Farris picked up the rope again and looped it into its basket.

“Life is life. You live it. Then you go to the next life and live that. Then the next one. There is no difference between work and sport. It’s the same thing.”

“Oh brother! I can tell you a thing or two about a thing or two. Where I come from people work most of the time and can’t stand it. Then 2 weeks a year they do what they’ve been dreaming about all year long and go fishing or skiing.” Farris stacked baskets woven from river reeds on top of each other.

“That sounds terrible.” Siptah tossed an empty basket for Farris to stack.

“You’re telling me. I can’t deal with it, so I escape.” Farris answered.

“Escape?”

“Yep, I have a bad habit of leaving things I’m supposed to do for the things I want to do. Sophia and I have both been kicked out of about a dozen schools.” Farris’s eyes drifted away, focused on a camping trip in seventh grade that got him expelled from Adventurer’s Academy in Argentina.

“That sounds better, but still.”

“Yeah, better.”

“What is this skiing?” Siptah finished organizing the equipment and sat on a basket, his knees wide apart.

“Oh it’s great. You put long boards on your feet and slide down a mountain of snow. I once cross-country skied through Scandinavia in winter. You’d love it.”

“You must be a brave man to do such things. I shall learn much from you.”

Siptah turned to organize the other servants and shout out orders.

Farris glanced to the back of the boat. Sophia, Pharaoh, and seven members of his entourage sat coolly eating black grapes while being fanned by servants holding flowing white feathers. It was a picture of contrasts--graceful white cloth and cool dark skin set off a strikingly cloudless sky.

“So you see, Pharaoh Tutankhamun, there is a lot of debate about the building of the pyramids. I’m glad to hear that my theory is correct.” Sophia popped grapes between her lips making a hollow thump after sucking in each one.

“This is the place.” Pharaoh announced as he stood and pointed a lean arm toward the center of the river.

The servants scattered all over the boat, pulling back the sails, dropping the anchor, stacking the oars, and pulling the fishing tackle from the baskets. Farris bounced around with them. He appeared unable to spend more than a minute in his cushioned seat with Pharaoh. Farris was a firecracker itching to blast off.

“Look Sophia. It’s like fly fishing.” Farris jammed a rod in front of her eyes, “you just pull the line like this and control it by twisting it around your arm. Here, I’ll set up a pole for you.”

“No thanks, Farris. Fishing isn’t for me. Besides it’s getting hot, and the more I move the worse I feel.” Sophia drew her hand across her forehead.

“Well jump in the water then.” Farris gestured to the edge of the boat.

“Are you kidding? We have no idea what kinds of creatures live in the water. If I had a list of the species of fish we could expect to see I could decide, but without accurate data, it’s not worth taking a chance.” She nodded her head no.

“Oh come on. There is water and hopefully fish. They won’t bite. No, wait! I hope they do bite so we take home some for dinner.” Farris leaned down as though he would haul Sophia by the ankles and toss her overboard.

“No. You want an adventure then catalogue the varieties of dangerous fish on your own. You do realize there are Nile crocodiles in there, don’t you? Besides, I’ve got to figure out the finishing touches on a solar energy collector. I think I can put it together tonight.” Sophia’s hair fanned out against the white pillows; she leaned back, no longer thinking about the fishing trip.

Farris watched his legs flop as his heels tapped the boat’s portside all afternoon. His fishing pole sagged lifelessly against his thigh, resting its tip in the water. Behind him, the low murmur of Sophia and Pharaoh’s conversation echoed a mocking chant.

Boring trip! No one’s caught even one fish, and no one is even paying attention to fishing. Ugh! What’s the point? If Egypt is going to be this boring, we should be working on getting home faster, Farris thought.

Several of the servants started undressing to simple loincloths next to Farris.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Pharaoh wants the fish caught now, so we will catch them.” Siptah answered while pulling his tunic over broad shoulders.

“What do you mean by *catch them*?” Farris twisted to see his companion better.

“We’re jumping in. Fishing poles are not the only way to catch fish.” He answered with a gleaming smile.

“Jumping in? I’m with you then.” Farris stood, dropping his pole into the water and pulling off his tunic in a swift singular motion. “OK, what do we do?”

“Take this. You dive down. If you see a fish, you slice his fins and fasten him onto the hook. These men will pull up the heavy fish when we catch them.” Siptah gestured to three men standing on the port bow.

“Excellent!” Farris thrust a knife between his teeth, stepped up to the edge of the boat and dove, allowing his figure to glide into the water as though he were a fish being tossed back into the river.

Beneath the surface, the water glowed with lime green light from above. His muscles stretched wide within the water, forcing his way through it as he swam, knife gripped tightly in his teeth.

Farris examined mossy rounded rocks littered about the river floor. Thin silver fish meandered between them as though dancing to an unheard tune. He dove deeper, glanced above him at the smooth white ship bottom.

Ahead of him, a few of the servants sought after their chosen prizes. Siptah chased a sleek silver fish, its fins catching the light like spider webs woven from silver thread. The fish dodged the slave’s maneuvers as though this game had been played before.

Farris’s chest tightened, so he surfaced for air. While treading water, knife locked in his mouth, he thought, *it’s about time I got into something fun to do. Sitting on a boat*

all day was so lame when I could have been doing this. He inhaled deeply and dove down again.

Ten feet beneath the surface, he saw it--a dark blue fish with a yellow underbelly and a red tail; its whiskers and wide mouth reminded Farris of catfish. He nudged his body through the water to sneak closer. The fish turned sideways as though wanting to trick Farris into getting lost among the rocks. Farris pulled the knife from his teeth and held the blade parallel to his forearm. He kicked gently, trying not to create unnecessary waves, and like a slow, steady torpedo got 2 feet from the elaborately dressed creature.

Farris swung his arm in a long arch toward the fish, hoped to catch its side with his blade. It darted to his left just enough to go unharmed. Farris swam forward and swung again with a shorter arch this time; he tried to catch the fish off guard and snag a prize.

C'mon, fish! I want to catch you. Get over here. Farris felt his shoulders contract and his chest heave. He would need air soon, he knew. There was only one last chance before he would have to surface again.

He kicked his legs hard and with a swooping motion, his arms nearly rammed the fish backward into a deep green underwater vine. His hand advanced and dashed the blade into the fish's side, which stunned it at first then caused it to twist and flip out of control. Farris grabbed its slimy scales but couldn't get a strong grasp. His left hand snapped while the right one pinched the fish from the top. His lungs twitched within his chest, and his diaphragm slammed the remaining air out of his body. He needed oxygen.

With a firm grip on the brightly striped body, he emerged and gasped to suck in a gallon of air at once. He paddled over to the boat and held up his trophy with blood

dripping down his arm. The corner of his eye caught a long snout approaching. Green scales soaked up the sunlight, making the creature nearly impossible to distinguish from the water's surface.

“Farris! Get out of the water! Get out NOW!” Siptah screamed; his palms cupped around his mouth to create a megaphone.

In the distance, Farris heard Sophia scream before he took a breath and submerged. Among the riot of twisted bits of vines and reeds, Farris detected a pinkish hue as fish blood mixed with water. Behind the candy-pink strands of liquid he made out the striking massive paws of a reptile.

He surfaced, nearly tossing himself out of the water and completed three strokes as he attempted escape. Muffled scream-like noises gurgled in and out of his ears, and his head bounced up and down on the river's surface. His left arm stroked hard into the blood-scented water and as he lifted it for another blow, he felt the rigid scales graze his skin. Crocodile.

Bashing his head into the boat's hull stopped Farris immediately. Turning, he faced the crocodile whose jaws gaped at his head when Siptah's body grazed past him onto the attacker.

Beneath him, the water revolted with glimpses of legs, an open toothy mouth, a slick twisting tail. Farris could see the crocodile had rolled the royal servant under the surface. The exterior calmed, and a single ripple skipped toward the riverbanks. Siptah's face emerged first, his arm braced around a bloody crocodile head.

Farris draped a cloth about his rescuer. “That was the most amazing thing I have ever seen! You have to teach me how to fight crocodiles.”

“The crocodile is my prize for today. I have won before. Someday I may not be so lucky and the great reptiles will feast on a young man.” Siptah coughed out the remains of Nile water that leaked into his throat and pointed to Farris’s fish.

“Throw that out. Those fish are not for eating.” Siptah laughed. “Cat fish are not food for people. They are food for fish.”

Farris stared at the lifeless mass in his hand and giggled. “We’re eating this one then. I’m not throwing it back.” He said before tossing it onto the pile on the deck as Sophia’s green eyes rolled at him.

Pyramid Tour

“Pharaoh Tutankhamun told me he would take us to see the pyramid construction. This is the chance of a lifetime. I could write several important papers about this when we get home.” Sophia flipped her hair over her shoulder.

“Why is he building his pyramid now? He’s not dead yet. We’re both teenagers, and you don’t see me casket shopping,” Farris’s cheeks were pink from whatever wild activity he had done that morning.

“A pyramid is a burial chamber. They started building them during their lives, so at death the pyramids were prepared for their final rituals.” Sophia dragged her fingers through her hair as she spoke.

“Kinda weird, isn’t it?”

“What?”

“Being so obsessed with death. I mean half of what they talk about is death. When do they have time to live?” Farris asked.

“It’s a different culture, Farris. We can’t judge them by the values of our time period. We can only observe what they did and see it is a fact. That’s all,” Sophia said.

“Whatever. How is the solar juicer going?”

“The what?”

“Our solar pack to recharge the laptop battery so that we can get back home. You do remember home, right?”

Sophia’s eyes brushed across the stone balcony they leaned on. “Of course I remember home, and yes I still have the solar pack set up. It’s challenging though.”

“Why?”

“Well, I can’t leave it out all of the time. If someone came along and decided to experiment or play around with it, it’s just the touch of a button and our lives would end here in Egypt, and some Egyptian would be sent who knows where in time.” Her eyebrows jumped as she spoke.

“Oh, right.”

“So, I only leave it set up when I’m here to supervise it. Otherwise we could create more problems for ourselves than we already have.” She answered.

“Speaking of problems. When do we have to go on the boring tour of the pyramids? Is there going to be anything to do there?” Farris asked.

“Oh, you’re impossible! It’s not everyday you get the chance to see how the pyramids were built and you’re complaining about having something to do?” Sophia placed her fists to her hips and glared her at her brother.

“Ah-yeah. If I wanted to go on tours, I’d have bought a ticket. Oh no! This isn’t going to be like those millions of art museums in Paris is it?” Farris whined.

“I can’t believe you! The Parisian museums are the best in the world and. . .”

Sophia’s sentence was cut short.

“And they’re boring. I want to *do* something not gawk at a heap of rock or measure it. When can we go home?” Farris smacked his dry lips at Sophia.

“Just go to the pyramids. You’ll appreciate it at some point, I’m sure. And I think we can try the time machine in a day or two. I have to wait until the battery is totally full. I don’t want to run a time machine on half of a battery. Who knows what that will get us?” Sophia said.

“Probably leave us here in super lame Egypt. I’m going for a run. Maybe I’ll see what Siptah’s up to. See ya in an hour.” Farris strode off to the street.

“Farris, wait!” Sophia lunged for him.

“What now?”

“Since you don’t want to see the pyramids, even though I think that’s an early sign of insanity and something you will seriously regret for the rest of your life, why don’t you stay here?” Sophia suggested.

“Stay here? Oh sure. That’s going to be a million times as exciting as seeing the pyramids. No, I’ll just go and suffer through them.” Farris answered.

“Listen. What I’m thinking is that you stay and watch the solar power collector. That way it can be running all day and we can accumulate more energy into the battery. Hopefully we could leave even sooner. What do you think?” Sophia hoped he would take the bait.

“Alright, I’ll be the babysitter for the solar thing. I still don’t know what I’m going to do though,” he whined.

“Find someone who will play a game with you in your room. Then you can do both. Just don’t leave that solar collector unattended,” Sophia pointed to the laptop, which was connected to the solar energy collector on the balcony.

“What game am I going to play in my room? Chess?”

“Chess wasn’t invented until almost 20 centuries later. You’ll have to choose something else. We can’t run the risk of changing anything even by teaching them a game.” She answered.

“Great. Today just gets worse, doesn’t it?” Farris moaned as he shuffled towards his room.

Sophia’s bracelets clanked together as she shook her fingers, pointed across the landscape, “So the rock is brought in from quarries over there?”

“Yes, in the rainy season no work can be done in the fields. The river swells and eventually floods. Very little can be done, so many people leave the city.” Pharaoh nodded knowingly as he spoke.

“So there are only three seasons?” Sophia asked.

“Of course. Akhet is the season of flood. The land becomes fertile for planting. Peret is when the river recedes back to its banks. The planting is done then. Shemu is the time of drought. The land dies and waits for Akhet to bring it back to life.” Pharaoh said.

“Interesting. So much depends on the river’s cycles.” Sophia braced her hair back with her hand. The Egyptian headbands women wore allowed the wind to toss her long strands in her face.

“Hapi and Anuket are the Nile god and goddess. They protect the river and allow us to survive by maintaining its cycles. Without the floods, Egypt would die.” Pharaoh’s smile gleamed at her as rays of sunshine awaken a sunflower.

“So, when is work on the pyramids done?” Sophia picked bits of sand from her skin, which had blown at her from the desert.

“When the pyramid is complete.” Pharaoh looked at Sophia as though to say *everyone knows that*.

“No, I mean what time of year does the work stop?” she asked.

“I see. Most of the production happens during Akhet when it is rainy and flooding. If the men work on the pyramid, they eat well and make more money. Look there.” Pharaoh pointed to a long white tent being constructed about a mile ahead of them, “There they will stay. Workers eat better food than they get in the city. I provide doctors and send gifts to their families.”

Sophia turned the corner of the path she and Pharaoh Tutankhamun walked. Past dozens of shady palms trees and short fern-like shrubs, the path opened up. Ahead of her the air changed from a slightly damp morning scent to crisp, dry desert breeze. Sophia’s white tunic had clung to her legs all morning but became instantly light and flaky as the air borrowed all of the moisture in the area.

Sophia’s breathing stopped momentarily. A white structure gleamed ahead of her. Its sides reached for the sky, and the paleness of its limestone coating reflected the sun. The marvelous arrangement of polished rock, vast desert, and never-ending azure sky radiated before Sophia.

“Oh! Can you believe this?” Sophia finally inhaled. “Wow! This is absolutely amazing. How tall is it?”

“Tall enough. This pyramid is very small. Khufu built the largest temple, which is 130 blocks tall and has over 120 layers of rock. Mine will be smaller.” Pharaoh answered.

“Where is the pyramid you are building?”

“You will see. We will use the chariot, but it will take a while to arrive. You may be disappointed, as little is happening there now.” Pharaoh directed Sophia toward his golden chariot, drawn by his royal steeds.

The chariot’s wheels clanked against small rocks and bits of discarded metal as it rolled to its destination. At late afternoon, the sun radiated slightly less searing than a few hours ago. Sophia leaned forward on the chariot’s frame to watch the wheels glide over the land, crushing everything in their path.

Pharaoh Tutankhamun’s chariot reminded Sophia of a carriage from the Wild West. Six horses drew it along a path paved with limestone about 16 feet wide, plenty of room for several chariots to pass each other simultaneously. Above Sophia, wooden bars stretched thick linen fabric. The light that passed through the covering glowed golden yellow and lit up the dust specks in the air as though tiny fires floated to the ground.

Sophia leaned into the linen pillows she had slept on. Her fingers flickered as she yawned several times. Afternoons were useful only for sleeping. Any other kind of activity proved futile. On both sides of her slept Pharaoh’s constant companion attendants. Across from her, Pharaoh’s barely decorated face looked earthly. Normally,

he wore black eyeliner in triangular shapes then glazed his lids with royal blue or seaweed green powder to give him an otherworldly appearance.

“What is it?” Sophia posed the question to him as she sat upright against her pillows.

Pharaoh’s finger dashed to his lips *shhhh*.

“Where are we?” she whispered.

“Nearing the Valley of the Kings. There are great pyramids there. Also this is where I will be buried. My pyramid is being built there now.” He motioned for her to cross the chariot and sit next to him.

Sophia stumbled across the rocking chariot next to Pharaoh and plopped herself beside him. Inside the compartment, the smell of deep breaths mixed with sweat in the afternoon heat. A swath of linen covered the side window and flapped slightly in the breeze caused by movement. Outside she saw three shepherds sleeping under trees in a small oasis with their flock cuddled up in a mass of white fluffy wool around them.

“Sophia, you must tell me of your place, your time.” Pharaoh’s black eyes drilled through her as he spoke, “I feel you know things I need to hear.”

Sophia swallowed hard. She knew a lot of things that could be useful to Pharaoh Tutankhamun. She knew enough about world history to know that he would meet with an untimely death at 17, perhaps even killed by his successor. She also recognized that she could tell him nothing, as any act may drastically change the course of history.

“Things are different where I live, yes,” was her only answer.

“I fear many things, Sophia. The seers have interpreted bad omens since I became Pharaoh at 8 years old. Also, Egypt has problems.” His face turned away as he sighed.

“Problems?”

“Yes, Egypt is always threatened. Any moment and another invasion can happen. Throughout the great history of Egypt, there have been many people who have wanted what we have--power and wealth. During invasions, people do not follow the proper rituals of burial. If a man is not mummified correctly, he will wander in the next life hungry and sick.” He blinked several times.

“I see. Is this something you fear?” she asked.

“The seers have foretold I will not live long, so work on my pyramid started early. I fear those who work with Aye and Horemheb. They operate against my laws and slither like serpents away from the light. I have been under the control of them since I became Pharaoh. Now Egypt may attack Syria and Nubia because of a trade dispute. I only care for a good life for Egypt. Yet war is upon us.”

“I see.” Sophia thought back to the reign of Egyptian Pharaohs. The one following Tutankhamun had been called Aye. Following Aye was Horemheb.

“Do you see the future, Sophia?” he turned to face her.

“That is a hard question to answer. In some ways yes, and in some no.” Sophia balanced a careful line between honesty and cautiousness.

“Sophia, you are very wise, perhaps much wiser than the seers. Do you see my death in the future? Will I be buried as a king?” Pharaoh grasped her hand.

Sophia bit her lip, unsure what to say. The Pharaoh was so easy to spend time with. He was intelligent, capable, and close to her age. She wanted to tell him what she knew and let him decide what to do, but the responsibility of knowing the future made ripples race across her head.

“You will be the most famous of kings, Pharaoh Tutankhamun. Your name will be sung thousands of years after this life.” Sophia thought of a comedy song her uncle sang to her when she was little with the name King Tut repeated in it.

“Sophia, will you help me defeat those who work with Aye and Horemheb?” His black eyes sparkled as the words tumbled from his thick lips. “Will you?”

The chariot jerked to a stop and the door hissed open. Sand burst into the cabin and shook the passengers as salty, gritty tastes invaded their nostrils and lips. The hair on Sophia’s neck arched and her eyes darted around at the other passengers. She jerked her hand from Pharaoh’s and stepped onto the smoldering sand.

“Fan. . .tas. . .tic!” Sophia said the word slowly as though she was learning to speak.

“These three pyramids were built by my predecessors. The Valley of the Kings holds dozens of royalty; Pharaohs from 2,000 years ago are buried here. It is important for us to visit them. The ancestors must be remembered or they will be weak in the next life.” Pharaoh explained.

“Very interesting. So this is a form of ancestor worship but with a religious purpose.” Sophia remarked.

“Ancestor worship?”

Yes, throughout history, some cultures performed rituals to acknowledge their ancestors. History books made it sound illogical. I used to think it was silly, but now I understand.” Sophia clarified.

“Come.” Pharaoh wrapped his dark, lean arm around Sophia and led her along a tiled path. Above them large white birds fluttered and called to each other. The East wind blew over them with a smoky smell of broiling meat.

“There. The pyramid of Thutmose. He was a commoner and worked his way up through the military ranks. After hard work, he became Pharaoh and left a legacy for his family. Priests are there now. You should see the feeding ceremony.” Pharaoh pushed her on.

Sophia approached the temple, which shimmered white on the West side where the sun struck it directly. Four bald men dressed in leopard pelt shirts and white linen skirts carried bowls inside.

The priest in front walked up to a 6 foot tall statue and bowed. He gently placed his bowl onto the ground in front of it. Into the bowl’s opening, he plunged his fingers then wiped the statue’s lips with goat’s milk. The next priest followed and rubbed greasy meat across the lips then discarded the remains into the bowl. The other two completed the ritual with fruit and beer.

Finally all four men sauntered to an indentation in the temple’s design, which looked as though a door may lay behind it. They bowed, lay their bowls of food on a small offering table and exited by crawling on the ground backwards.

“I understand part of this, but explain to me exactly what just happened.” Sophia asked.

“The priests dedicate their lives to the ancestor Pharaohs. From age 5, they are trained in preparing food for them, washing their images, whetting their appetites during the ritual, and leaving food for them to receive. By morning, all of this food will be gone. The Pharaohs return at night when they need to eat.” Pharaoh said.

“Does anyone question whether it is really the dead Pharaohs who eat the food or animals?” Sophia questioned.

“Of course the Pharaohs eat. If there is not enough food in the next life, they must still persist. The responsibility of every Pharaoh is placed on the shoulders of every living person. Civilized people care for the living no matter what life they are in.” Pharaoh nodded then walked Sophia toward the chariot.

A few steps before entering, he asked, “Have you thought about my question, wise Sophia?”

“What question?” Her face flushed crimson, as she feigned ignorance.

“Will you help me to defeat Aye and Horemheb? I want a new life for Egypt. For thousands of years we have looked only backwards. We have honored the ancestors by living by the same codes they did. I do not intend to offer a dishonorable change, but Egypt must adjust to survive another 5,000 years.” His black eyes moistened as the wind worked to dry them out.

“I will have to consider that very carefully, Pharaoh. I cannot make any promises. Egypt could benefit from applying simple changes, but it is a difficult decision for me.” She retorted.

Sophia's heart pulverized her chest and threatened to leap from its cage as the sight came into view. Her throat clenched shut, making it impossible to either breathe or speak. She grasped Pharaoh's hand stretched out across the chariot window. A faint murmur escaped her lips just before the horses halted.

She dropped her feet from the chariot and thought *Farris is such a fool! How could he have missed this? Oh what an experience. There isn't an Egyptologist dead or alive who wouldn't have given everything to be here right now.*

"This is it." Pharaoh placed his hand on her shoulder blades.

"Yes, it is."

"Would you like to walk up the ramp?" Pharaoh asked after a few seconds of silence.

"You have to explain everything! I must know every tiny detail. Don't leave out anything!"

"This ramp will be torn down when the structure is finished. Do you see here is where the rocks are loaded onto logs? Ten men roll each one up the ramp. Once it reaches the highest point, it is set in place." Pharaoh began explaining the construction.

"After that more stones will be inserted until the entire external structure is complete. The internal area can still be accessed from here," he pointed to an opening in the North side of the pyramid.

"After the external stones are in place and the ramp removed, the entire pyramid will be lathered in white limestone. This will direct me to the next life, as the sun's rays reflect the path to the next world, where I will be asked over 40 questions to be allowed passage in."

The pair walked up the ramp and looked out on the valley landscape dotted with gold and white pyramids and paths that led in and out. Leopard robed priests scattered about the valley floor with bowls of fruit and beer, while workers in loincloths reflected the sun's heat with the sweat of their backs.

“What do you mean, *it's missing?*” Sophia kicked off her leather sandals after she considered throwing one right at Farris's head.

“Well, it's not my fault, Sophia. I didn't mean for it to happen.” His palms faced upwards as though he offered her some invisible object.

“Farris, you have to think back. What did you do today? Start from the beginning.” She tossed her body onto the down bed, her nose inches from his.

“OK, I went for a run with Siptah. We stopped at a market and drank some coconut juice. We came back here and played some game with little glass rocks. He won like 50 times, which was stupid, and I was bored. He left and I fell asleep.” Farris's eyebrows were arched in a way that said *please don't get so mad*.

“When did you notice then? When did you even get the idea that anything had changed?” Sophia interrogated.

“Um, I don't really know. I slept for a while. There aren't exactly clocks around here you know.”

“There's a sundial right down in the courtyard, Farris!” Sophia hurled the words at him as though she threw stones.

“Hey, you’re the one who said that sundial doesn’t work. You told me no one invented a decent sundial for centuries.” Farris’s pleading gaze fell to the floor once the words were out.

“Farris! Don’t blame me for your mistake. Now, what happened?” Her eyes shot tiny darts back at him.

“OK! OK! I checked the laptop before I fell asleep. Siptah left after the game. I know he wasn’t here afterwards, because he had to work. I think it was gone when I woke up.” His shoulders hunched lower as the words tumbled from his mouth until he was speaking at the tile floor.

“I can’t believe you lost the time machine, Farris! Now what are we supposed to do to fix this, huh?”

Trade and War

“I don’t think anyone stole it to be malicious. Probably someone was curious and wanted to understand more about us.” Sophia’s words rang throughout the banquet hall.

“A thorough search will be done of the palace, Sophia. If an Egyptian stole from my guests, I will make him pay dearly. I promise you that.” Pharaoh Tutankhamun leaned toward her shoulder, shaking a bone with goat’s meat hanging from greasy sinews.

“No, really. I don’t want anyone to pay dearly for anything. I can’t imagine this was anything but innocent curiosity.” Sophia drew her eyebrows together. Something about Pharaoh’s tone felt wrong.

“I am the Pharaoh and my guests are to be treated with respect. I will have no thievery in my palace.” Pharaoh’s tone dropped and the severity of his threat cut Sophia so deeply she wished she had not mentioned the problem.

“Farris and I will continue looking for our things. I’m sure they will turn up,” she attempted to soothe the king accustomed to having everything his way.

Sophia lay down the flat bread she used for scooping lentils and beans. “What do the missing items look like?” Pharaoh’s question lodged a rock in her throat as she pondered how to explain a laptop to him.

“Well, let’s see,” she took time to translate the description of a laptop into ways that would make sense to a man born 3,400 years before its invention. “I had a dark leather bag and inside of it was a black box made of a material not found in Egypt. It is a coconut’s weight and if opened could cause serious harm to a person.”

“Sorcery is in this box. I knew you were intelligent in ways I do not pretend to understand, wise Sophia.” Pharaoh narrowed his eyes.

“First she’s a goddess, now a sorceress! You’re moving up in the world, Sophia.” Farris chimed in after tossing a nut onto her plate.

Pharaoh spoke rapidly, revealing his excitement. “So, you are a goddess, Sophia? I knew it from the moment I saw you! Beauty like yours is unseen in Egypt! Intelligence to know the future and create magic! Sophia, you held all of this from me?”

Farris snickered until a full giggling attack forced him from his cushioned seat onto the floor, where he slapped the tiles with his palm. Tears gushed from his eyes, coating his face in a moist veneer.

“Pharaoh Tutankhamun, ignore him. No, I’m neither. I’m just a girl. That’s all. Do you remember that I told you Farris and I are from another place and time?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Well, we have different objects that may seem like sorcery to some people who are not familiar with our technologies. But they are not magic or otherworldly at all. They are everyday items that people use to complete their work. It’s very difficult to explain,” her sentence trailed off.

“I see. These technologies are missing then?”

“Yes.”

His eyebrows crowded together when he asked, “What would happen to a person who opened this box made of material not found in Egypt?”

“Honestly, I don’t know,” she answered.

“This is your technology, and you do not know what would happen?” he probed.

Another giggling fit overtook Farris until he laid his forehead into his plate, as he mumbled something about, “We don’t even know how to use the stupid thing or we wouldn’t be here.”

“You see, if Farris or I opened the box, we would be fine, because we know how to operate the machine safely. If an Egyptian did, that person may touch the device incorrectly and be harmed.” Sophia laid out the words cautiously. She wanted the servants to hear so that their gossip would spread the word not to open the box. She had no intention of giving the impression that she and Farris were more than they were.

“I understand.”

“Thank you.”

“Wise Sophia, I will locate and return your box to you. In return, I must ask a favor.” Pharaoh straightened himself on his red cushion and wiped his slippery fingers and mouth on a stack of sand-colored linen napkins that lay on the table’s end.

“Alright, what can we do?” she asked.

“Ambassadors from Nubia arrive tomorrow to discuss problems in trade. They organize shipping between Egypt and many countries. The goods Egypt receive are poor quality, but we send our most finely spun linens and other precious items.” He leaned into her shoulder to whisper, “Aye and Horemheb create problems with Nubia. A war is to be expected if a solution is not found at this meeting.”

“What can we do? Farris is far from a diplomat, and politics is not my area of expertise.” The skin beneath Sophia’s eyes swelled as she spoke.

“Just be there to listen. We can discuss it afterward.” Pharaoh shoved his plates of food away and left.

Farris bustled over to Sophia, hauling wads of food into this mouth. “What did he say?”

“That you’re obnoxious,” she answered.

“I knew that already. He could’ve said it out loud.” A smile and a wink followed his self-acknowledgement.

“He wants us to sit in on a meeting with the Nubian ambassadors, but he doesn’t want us to say anything.” She whispered, keeping her words only for Farris.

“Is this one of those cultures where women weren’t supposed to be smart or speak in front of men?” Farris asked while shoveling a handful of apple slices into his mouth.

“Not at all. Egyptians treated men and women equally in most things. Have you noticed that his wife Ankhesenamun does whatever she wants? Technically she will be in charge of the throne when he dies,” she pointed out.

“Oh man. You know what I heard? She’s his half sister. Ugh! That’s so gross. They’re married and even have kids,” he uttered the words as though they revealed a forbidden secret.

“Everyone already knows that, Farris. Egyptian royalty married their fathers, brothers, and even grandfathers. It’s a different culture, remember?”

“I’m wearing a dress, Sophia. How could I forget?”

Farris paced himself as he jogged through the streets of Thebes. In late afternoon, the sun still shone in unprotected spots of the city, and exercising in its rays promised to roast a person unaccustomed to the heat. He headed into shadows cast by striped market tents and colossal statues.

In his path, an Egyptian boy of 4 fed leaves to a goat that wagged its tail at light speed. Women selling hand-woven baskets smiled and waved at Farris, causing his face to pucker as he tried to hold back an embarrassed smile. Through the sandy paths he pounced, running in leather sandals and a linen tunic that reached mid-thigh.

Each inhale was matched by four quick steps. The white building walls buzzed by Farris until, out of a side entrance, a body charged up and met his, running in unison.

“Farris, what is in your basket today?” the bright face beamed back at him.

“Siptah, hey. I just have to burn off some energy. Sitting around a palace all day drives me crazy. Run with me a while, then we can hang out in the market and get coconut juice.” He replied.

“And gaze at beautiful faces?” Siptah prodded.

“Of course, don’t Egyptians like girls?” The pair of running teens laughed.

Around the outside corner of Mut’s temple, the boys ran, Siptah pushed Farris into a stack of baskets to get ahead. Farris took a short cut through a beer hall where men played board games and sipped their thick barley beverages. Siptah cut ahead by sprinting across the market and reached the coconut vender seconds before Farris did.

“You run like an African, Farris.” Siptah breathed heavily as he spoke.

“I should. I’ve run two marathons.” Farris answered, holding his side.

“Africans run everywhere. Some Africans run as transportation, because they do not have horses and chariots. They are feared warriors.” Siptah tapped the counter indicating he wanted coconut juice.

“Oh yeah. I’ve seen pictures of the warriors who run across the desert. That must be tough to run in the heat for hours.” Farris slugged down half of his glass.

“Not days, Farris, weeks. They stop to eat and rest then run again. You are African in your own time, Farris? You run?” Siptah’s question stopped Farris.

“It’s hard to explain. Both are true.”

“What do you mean?”

“My great grandmother was African, so yes I’m part African. My mother is the darkest of us, and she’s quarter African. But in my time, lots of people run, not just Africans.” Farris said.

Siptah tossed back the remainder of his juice, “Do you miss your time, Farris?”

“At first I did a little bit, but I like it here. There’s stuff to do now that I met you. I’m not always in trouble with adults, which is great.” Farris stretched his arms into a circle above his head then pulled them behind his back until it cracked.

“Look, Farris. The goddess seeks the light.” Siptah pointed to a young woman with olive skin, a long tan scarf tossed over her shoulders.

Farris’s heart fell into his stomach as his breath caught in his throat. “Is she really marrying that old goat?” He asked.

“It is a good match for her. She will raise the status of her family by marrying.” Siptah answered.

“How old is she? Twelve? Thirteen?” Farris questioned.

“Something like that. Her husband to be is 40 Perets or more.” Siptah said.

“She should marry someone young, so that she can fall in love and have fun,” Farris commented.

“Someone like you?”

“No, I’m definitely not ready for that. Not even in Egypt.” The spell was temporarily broken, and the boys wandered into the courtyard, which was lined with palm trees and speckled by half-clothed playing children.

“Come on.” Siptah grabbed Farris’s wrist and pulled him into the crowd that formed near the ancient statues.

A man crossed to the center of the market crowd and placed himself between two massive statues of ancient Pharaohs. His pressed tunic and clean sandals made it obvious he worked indoors and was not one of the market people.

“The royal messenger,” Siptah pointed to him.

“Citizens of Egypt. Pharaoh Tutankhamun has declared the end of Shemu is near, and Akhet will be upon us soon. Royal hunters will seek the sacred lion and bring it to the riverbanks. Its sacrifice will bring about Akhet. Sign up for working the pyramids.” The messenger read from a sheet of papyrus and took down names shouted at him from the crowd.

“What is this?” Farris asked.

“When Shemu ends, there is little work for the people to do. The fields will be flooded, so many go to the pyramids to build Pharaoh’s final resting place. A lion is sacrificed each year to start the floods. You will see. Once the lion is dead, the river will overflow its banks and soak the land.” Siptah explained.

“If the lion isn’t killed, the river would still flood, Siptah.”

“No, when I was a small boy the lion was not caught and no floods came. Many Egyptians died for lack of food.”

“Oh. So, who gets the lion?” Farris asked.

“Royal hunters. I am one and will join them this year. It is a great honor to be chosen,” Siptah smiled.

“Cool! Can you get me in too? I want to hunt a lion,” Farris’s muscles twitched at the thought of lion hunting.

“I’ll see what I can do.” His friend answered.

“We have heard much of your new sorcerers, Pharaoh Tutankhamun. They come from another land and seek to overthrow Egypt then attack our territories.” Smenk, the Nubian ambassador stated with serpentine hand gestures.

Sophia was amazed that Pharaoh Tutankhamun showed no emotion at all but watched each speaker in turn.

Aye slammed his fist upon the table--rock upon rock. “Lowly Nubians will not insult the Pharaoh of Egypt. We will cut you to bits before your lips speak another harsh word.”

Horemheb, Aye, and Nakhtmin created a wall with their bodies. Shoulder to shoulder they blocked the exit, although it looked like they were straining to seem interested in the conversation.

“This is not about Nubia or Egypt. It is about the sorcerers. If Egypt is under attack by evil magic, Nubia will aid you. Evil must be stopped at its roots. If left on its own, it will breed and spread.” Smenk appeased his attackers by supporting Egypt.

Back and forth the men argued and shouted across the length of the room. Sophia’s head throbbed from the pressure of men screaming, and her eyes ached from being expected to watch their chicken fighting all afternoon. The air hung heavier with each minute as the bickering lingered on.

“The Himalayas send good perfume and spices but not enough. The traders along the way must be stealing for themselves,” Horemheb complained.

“The wool from Scythia still has not arrived. And what about the Mycenaean pottery needed for storage? We have received neither.” Smenk pointed out that Nubia too lacked several expected shipments.

“We invade then,” Horemheb’s constant insistence for war was an old song.

“Horemheb, you are greatly appreciated and admired, but as Pharaoh of Egypt, I decide when and with whom we go to war.” Pharaoh’s words met with wounded ears and anger boiled up in the men.

“Pharaoh, we must! Palestine will continue to steal from Pharaoh and the Egyptian people unless we demonstrate to them who truly rules the world.” Horemheb’s chest heaved and hurled his words far from his lips.

“Perhaps a private meeting among military officers would be appropriate.” Nakhtmin slammed his spear onto the tile floor.

Pharaoh Tutankhamun leaned to Sophia to whisper, “Do you understand why I wanted you to see this? Every meeting is like this--screaming and threatening, always calling for invasion and war.” He winked before sliding back into his seat.

It took nearly all of her remaining composure to smile in return.

“There is always compromise, Sophia. Running a nation while dealing with men like Aye and Horemheb means giving into some things.” Pharaoh’s words were strong but his voice faltered.

“You’re going to invade Nubia and Palestine. This is because Horemheb and Nakhtmin are bored and want a war to try out their new military tactics. These are people’s lives you’re talking about not a game.” Sophia spat the words at him as she pounced down the hall like an angry jaguar.

“You don’t understand what it’s like, Sophia. Stop!” He grabbed her arm and swung her around so that she faced his chest, which was heavily decorated in ceremonial

gold necklace and wrap. “Aye and Horemheb have been essentially running Egypt in my name since I was a boy. I cannot fight back all at once.”

“Yes, you can, and if you don’t, you’re a coward,” Sophia stunned herself that she said the words out loud.

“I understand, Sophia. It’s not that easy. Perhaps in your time people act with courage all of the time but not here,” He said.

Sophia considered her options. She could forget about her new friend altogether and spend her time searching for the time machine. She could help him improve the situation with Aye and Horemheb. Or she could tell him the truth.

“Pharaoh Tutankhamun, I have to tell you something. I’m not supposed to, but this is the time. Aye and Horemheb are going to murder you. Aye will marry Ankhesenamun.

“After Aye’s death, Horemheb will become Pharaoh. He will replace your monuments with his own and erase your name as an Egyptian king.” Sophia’s heart skipped beats as it pounded twice as fast as usual.

She knew logically that revealing anything about the future could cause serious problems in the time-space continuum. But as she stood before her friend who had just declared war on Nubia and Palestine, her urge to help overtook the desire to be rational.

“Sophia, there are many rumors. I know. You should not believe them. Aye and Horemheb love gold, riches, and war. They are not the killers of Pharaohs.” Pharaoh clasped Sophia to his chest and hugged her in the hallway.

With a sharp shove, she pushed back, “No, I mean it! They’re going to kill you and take over Egypt. Listen to me!”

“Poor Sophia. I should not have asked you to come to the meeting. I thought it would be useful for me, but I see I have put you in danger by introducing you to politics.” His hands attached to her shoulders and stroked the strands of hair that dangled down her back.

Oh my gosh! Why didn't he believe me? I can't tell him again or he'll think I'm completely mad. Sophia's thoughts collapsed as her defeat overtook her. Palestine and Nubia would be invaded. Men sworn to protect him would murder Pharaoh Tutankhamun.

Lion Hunt

Sophia paced the length of her room, thinking over every possibility of what could have happened to the time machine. Dusty bits of feathers from her bed stuck to the soles of her feet, as though she wore downy slippers. Her linen dress fluttered as she walked from the balcony to the door and back again.

Thoughts of the laptop dominated each second. *First Farris went out with Siptah, and the time machine was still in the room. Let's see. I set it on the balcony to collect energy from the afternoon sun here.*

Her fingers walked over the rough surface of balcony ledge that opened to a palace courtyard below. She looked down and saw the royal cupbearers, cooks, and other servants leaving their duties for their homes. A woman stopped, her hair tumbled down her back as she coaxed a headband into place. She quickly waved to Sophia then darted away, joining her coworkers.

Sophia could not return the greeting fast enough before the woman dashed off. The realization that the woman saw her at the window gave her pause.

If she can see in this window, maybe she could see if something was left on the windowsill. Living in a palace made Sophia feel secure, because high walls and dozens of well-trained guards could guarantee her safety from every imaginable foe. *But no number of guards could defend against snooping eyes,* she thought.

Sophia hiked her dress up to her knees and stepped onto the flat roof just a few feet down from her balcony. Across it, she tottered, making sure to observe even the tiniest details carefully. Carved sticks and decades-old glass beads littered the corners of the roof, as though a child made a game of tossing them into place years ago.

The plaster coating remained intact all around the balcony, which showed the laptop had not fallen into a crack. She ran her hands along the sides that dropped to the courtyard below. A sharp shock caught her finger, which threw her back against the balcony wall and made her lungs cramp and feel like they could leap from her throat.

“What was that?” She said out loud with no concern if someone heard her. Her right index finger showed two striped burn marks, reddening. She shoved the finger into her mouth to cool the burn and leaned over the edge to see what insect or strange object caught her off guard.

Over the roof’s lip lay a thin black wire attached to a flattened spearhead, still covered in aluminum foil. “Yes!” She exclaimed before reaching down once more, this time to bring it back up. Her solar energy collector rested in her palm, its remaining power now drained and housed in her burned finger. Sophia dropped her torso over the edge of the roof again in hopes of seeing her laptop lying below. Nothing.

She dragged her fingers along the hallway walls, thinking as she went. *Someone had to have thrown the solar energy collector off of the balcony, but who? And what happened to the laptop and remote control?* Sophia considered options of interviewing the guards and servants or searching every inch of the palace herself. Neither one was a quick solution.

“Wise Sophia. Wise Sophia.” A little voice sang to her from behind plum-colored drapes, peeking out to call her name.

“Well, hello. Are you playing hide and seek?” Sophia asked.

The little girl’s round chocolate face nodded to her and called again, “Wise Sophia. Wise Sophia,” while giggling and pulling the drapes nearly off of their bars.

Ankhesenamun’s sleek dark face emerged from the room; a westerly sun dragged its rays across her side, making her glow like an angel. “Hello, wise Sophia. Come in.”

“Thank you.” Sophia entered and scanned the room, which was scattered with toys, dolls, and long strips of brightly colored cloth. “This must be the nursery.” She uttered before crossing to the center.

“Yes, the girls play here with their nurse. My duties call me away much of the time.” Ankhesenamun gestured for Sophia to sit at a bench covered in animal furs.

“Your daughters are beautiful. How old are they?” Sophia asked, trying to come up with a topic of conversation for Pharaoh’s wife.

“They are 12, 7, and 3. Pharaoh Tutankhamun wants sons to take the throne, so we hope for more.” The queen answered.

“Twelve? How long have you and Pharaoh been married?” Sophia was uncertain if the question was polite.

“I was married to our father Akhenaten before Tutankhamun. I was 15 then, and Tutankhamun was 8. If Tutankhamun dies young as the seers have foretold, I must marry again.” Ankhesenamun’s face was serene as she handed toys and dolls to her daughters.

Sophia’s heart shrunk into a tiny pebble within her chest. She knew the Pharaoh would die soon and that his wife would marry Aye before disappearing from history forever. “We can all hope he lives a long life then,” was all Sophia could say.

“Wise Sophia. I have heard you are a great sorceress and have used magic to come to Egypt. Some say you and brave Farris are here to overthrow Pharaoh and ruin us. Is there truth in these words?” Ankhesenamun petted her daughter’s hair as she spoke.

“Of course not.” Sophia’s heart exploded into a boulder that leaned against her ribs. “Farris and I are here by accident. We don’t want to be here and can return home once our belongings are found.”

“Wise Sophia, do not be offended. Aye says things in the dark corners of this palace. He plans terrible deeds. I care nothing for politics, although the creator god Atum placed me as queen of Egypt twice.” Ankhesenamun answered, her fingers brushing long strands of thick black hair.

“What exactly does Aye say, Ankhesenamun?”

“He cannot poison the heart of Tutankhamun, who loves you. So he pollutes the ears of anyone who will listen to rumors. You and brave Farris should always be cautious.”

Sophia's head swam in words, thoughts, and feelings. Pharaoh loved her. *What did that mean? Aye was plotting something and spreading rumors about us--why?*

Sophia excused herself and stumbled into the hallway, barely breathing. She leaned a limp hand onto the wall and took one breath, then another, concentrating on each of Ankhesenamun's words. A warm touch settled on her shoulder and she spun around, letting out a screech for help that could be heard only in her mind.

"You look unwell, guest. I will escort you back to your chambers." Aye's coal black eyes drilled holes through her skull, as she stood motionless, speechless.

"Even in the palace, a royal guest should not be alone. Terrible things happen even in palaces." His massive hand wrapped around her arm, binding the fingers to her flesh as his finger reached his neck and made a slashing gesture.

Sophia twisted her arm over her head--a Judo move Farris taught her for escaping an attacker, which released the gigantic hand. "I can find my room on my own. You don't happen to know anything about some of our things that are missing do you, Aye?"

His colossal eyebrows gathered in the center. Sophia trotted down the hall toward her room, blood pumping in a torrent over her body.

"You're not going to believe it!" Farris did one-armed push ups on Sophia's floor.

"What now?" She tossed her body onto the bed, hugging her pillow.

"Siptah got me in with the royal hunters. We're going lion hunting. Isn't that cool?" His voice rose each time his body pushed away from the tiles.

"Sure, great," was the only answer he received.

“And then we bring the lion back alive for some ritual thing about water or flooding or something. I don’t care about that part. I’m just glad Siptah got everything worked out for me to go.” He stood and completed 20 squats, his thighs swelling with blood, arms extended.

“Tell me if you see my laptop on the way,” Sophia’s words muffled through the pillow.

Farris stopped exercising and leaned over Sophia. “Did something happen? You seem weird.”

“Things are not good, Farris. We have to get out of here and back home.” Her words were nearly lost in the puffs of down and linen.

“I thought we were pretty much stuck here.”

“Well, if we’re stuck here, we may not live to find our way out.” Sophia flopped over, revealing a heavy face.

“What happened?”

“You name it, Farris. I accidentally told Pharaoh that he’s going to be killed by Aye, and he didn’t believe me. Then everyone tells me that Aye is spreading rumors that we’re sorcerers and are trying to take over Egypt.

“Plus Ankhesenamun said Tutankhamun loves me, and I don’t know what that means. Then I ran into Aye in the hallway, and he told me that bad things happen in palaces, which sounds like a warning.

“Our whole reason for time travel was to get Mother and Father into the front of the airplane, and without us going back in time they’ll die. I hate this place!” Her words were lost in angry punches into her bed.

Farris shunned serious emotion. Crying and screaming were the worst, especially from his sister. Like many boys he feared the emotions of girls. Sometimes girls seemed like they could explode in a vicious screaming rampage or break down into grief-stricken globs of shrieking flesh in an instant. They were delicate flowers with poisonous venom and thorns.

“Well, it’s not that bad. If Tutankhamun didn’t believe you, then he won’t change history at all by doing anything differently.” His hand patted her forehead as he spoke, unsure how to comfort his sister.

“And if he loves you, well that happens too,” Farris thought back to the beautiful girl in the market he saw earlier, destined to marry a middle-aged merchant.

“I don’t really think we’re going to find the laptop. Whoever took it probably smashed it into a zillion pieces by now.” He patted her shoulder.

“I don’t think you truly understand the severity of our situation, Farris.” Sophia’s eyes glared inside pink web.

“This would be a little easier if you had read even one history book on Egypt. Pharaoh Tutankhamun is murdered at age 17, his wife Ankhesenamun is forced to marry Aye and probably murdered afterward, then Aye and Horemheb erase Tutankhamun’s name from monuments, scrolls, and hieroglyphs.” She continued.

“Yeah, that is bad.” Farris answered.

“Very bad. You think we’ll be left alive if Aye is willing to murder the Pharaoh of Egypt? I don’t think so. I have too much still to do in my life, Farris. I don’t want to die at 14.” Sophia dropped her cheek onto Farris’s arm. They leaned against each other and shared several concerned heavy sighs.

The sun lounged hours away, so Farris prepared. He packed the suggestions Siptah had given him--spears, knives, an extra pair of sandals, and a bedroll. Farris stuffed his own things into the leather bag as well, his Swiss Army knife, the climbing rope, and his vitamins. Several days in the desert may weaken his body, so he wanted to stay as healthy as possible.

Farris strapped leather sandals onto his feet and slung the pack over his shoulder, spears rested parallel to the floor as he stepped from his room. The guard outside of Sophia's room snapped to attention when Farris crossed her door. He turned and faced the man. Although Farris was only 14, his height and build made him look much older.

"Make sure nothing happens to her." Farris glared at the guard as he spoke, hoping to sound older.

"Yes sir. I understand," was muttered as Farris strode off into the time when night and morning met.

Farris gnawed on his lip. *Is it really safe for me to leave Sophia alone? What if Aye kidnaps her or worse?* For a week, Farris had pictured himself chasing down a lion on foot and catching it without weapons. Thoughts of being the hero and champion drove him to succeed, but no amount of honor could replace his sister.

Siptah's face looked cool and composed, as though he had just walked up to introduce himself. Farris wondered how Africans were able to tolerate exercising in the heat for hours, even days at a time. The crown of Farris's head boiled, and his shoulders cramped from carrying his pack and equipment across the sand.

“Up here, we will rest at the oasis,” the captain laid out the order. The royal hunters filed toward the patch of grass and vines surrounded by palms.

Farris collapsed onto the oasis floor. His pack still clung to his shoulders as he fell asleep on impact.

“Farris. Farris,” Siptah nudged him.

“What? I want to rest,” Farris answered.

“Plenty of time to rest when we return home. Now we must find the lion pride.”

Siptah spoke in between slobbery bites of an apple that shot streams of juice on his chest.

“How do you keep from cooking out here?” Farris flipped onto his back.

“Fatty water,” Siptah answered.

“Fatty what?” Farris leaned onto his elbows, his lip curled in a disgusted sneer.

“Here,” Siptah removed a teaspoon of thick jelly-like substance from a pouch and forced it into Farris’s water skin. “Drink,” he said and shoved the leather container under his friend’s nose.

Farris tossed back the fluid, “I don’t taste anything,” he scoffed.

“Good, then drink it and run like an African.” Siptah clenched the apple between his perfect white teeth and chuckled.

“Hunters! Line up!” The captain hollered across the oasis, and a dozen men fell into place, one beside the next. Each hunter carried his own equipment--food, water, weapons, and survival gear. Only the captain rode in a chariot, which would later be used to convey the sacrificial lion home to Thebes.

Farris wore a square of linen over his head and tied it on with a strip of leather.

Why am I having so much trouble with the heat? This has never happened to me before.

Farris thought to himself and contemplated his problems with activities he had been fond of before arriving in Egypt.

“Hunters, march!” The captain shouted and slapped the backs of his horses with leather reins.

Farris pounded one foot in front of the other. His headache receded more with each mile. On his left Siptah jogged, spear in his left hand, round bronze shield in his right elbow. On his right Ankht hustled along. Siptah warned him earlier that Ankht was Aye’s nephew, which made Farris’s heart beat a little faster and kept his eye lids peeled at night.

“Siptah, do you think we’ll ever find a lion?” Farris’s words floated in the early morning breeze toward his friend.

“Yes. Hapi and Anuket, the god and goddess of the Nile, must receive a sacrifice each year. A lion is killed to bring about the floods. Without the water, there will be no food. If the gods want Egypt to starve, we will find no lion.” Siptah answered without question.

“You know, it’s funny,” Farris retorted.

“What?”

“Egyptians seem certain that the gods do all kinds of things. The Nile can’t even flood without a god getting hungry,” Farris continued.

“The world is organized by gods, and people live from one life to another. These things we know,” Siptah answered.

Farris flicked grains of sand into the air as he spoke. “How? How do you know it?”

“The sky people told Egypt long ago. They taught Egypt many useful things so we could rule the world.”

“What are the sky people anyway?” Farris questioned.

“Some say the gods. Some say the messengers of the gods. Some say people who live in other places and visited Egypt long ago.” Siptah’s mouth crushed a bit of wood as he spoke.

“Like aliens? People on different planets?” Farris sat up, interested.

“Yes, I have heard of different planets. You know them?” Siptah smiled and spat the wood chip onto the ground.

“No, I don’t know them personally. Man, Egypt gets weirder by the minute!” Farris dragged his pack nearer and tossed a handful of dried date pieces into his mouth.

“So, we’ve been looking for this lion pride for 5 days. Are we ever going to find them?”

“If Hapi and Anuket are to eat, we will find them,” Siptah answered, stretching across his blanket covering soft white sand.

Across hundreds of miles of drifting sand, a yellow band of light poked out, reaching upwards. Heaving seconds passed, and then another beam another joined it. Farris, mesmerized by the sun’s announcement, stared blankly ahead. Dozens more beams joined the group until the burning globe broke the crust and began cleansing the earth’s surface by fire. The sun lifted up above the horizon as the hunters slept.

A female's irritated roar caught Siptah's ear. "Farris, now!" Siptah grabbed his spear and slammed two daggers into his belt before tearing off across the desert floor.

Farris attempted to wrap the straps of his sandals around his ankles twice before giving up and tossing the slats of leather onto the sand. A knife in one hand, he snatched up a spear and his climbing rope in the other and tore off after his friend.

Ahead Farris could see Siptah's ebony legs stretched in drawn-out paces, snapping the sand with precise clips. Farris dashed over a sand hill, dropping his spear down the slope he had just ascended. Back he went for it, grabbed the spear, and tossed it over his shoulder. His naked toes dug into the sand, forcing his calves to contract with each step.

Cool morning air rushed into Farris's lungs, each breath felt as though the tiniest droplets of desert dew soaked through his veins and lodged themselves in his chest. He saw Siptah ahead, still running straight away from camp.

"Siptah!" Farris's voice was lost on this wind.

"Siptah, wait!" Farris knew if he was ahead and his friend lagged behind, he would continue running, so catching up to Siptah was the only option.

Ahead of Farris low hills closed off the landscape glowing orange and gold in the early morning light. Siptah disappeared around the North corner of the hills, and Farris thought he could save time by dashing over the sand dunes instead of cornering them. Up into the deep sand, he waded, trying to keep up his speed. His thighs and arms had swollen from not stretching before sprinting several miles into heavy desert sand.

Between his toes tiny streams of fine sand trickled as he took each step, bounding for the top, seeking the other side. Farris felt a nip on the back of his right calf as though a stray string had come loose from his tunic and floated down.

He glanced at his calf just as his left leg sunk into fine sand. He reached for a low-lying desert shrub to brace himself from falling. The rope had loosened itself and half of its length dragged on the desert floor behind him. Farris couldn't justify stopping for the rope, so he dragged it up the remaining sand dune.

At the top, the desert's entirety opened up to him. To the East, the sun glittered like a mass of luminous crystal. The North revealed several oases, where tiny dots of people hummed across the earth in blue and tan cloaks, already tending their gardens and animals. The South opened up into an endless expanse of horizon--sand and sky shaking hands.

Beneath him, the sand dune was littered with sage-colored shrubs and sprigs of grain. The bottom edge revealed his companion, standing akimbo and surveying the desert breadth.

"Farris, can you see them from up there?" Siptah hollered, cupping his hand around his mouth.

"Nothing. I never saw them," he answered.

"Me neither. I heard a female. She roared to say she is very angry. Perhaps she knows we come for her or her mate." Siptah waved Farris down from the dune and plopped himself on the sand.

Farris gathered his rope around his arm as he waded down the sand then collapsed next to his friend, "Well, what do you think? Should we go back to camp or what?"

“Yes, I do not know this part of the desert. We would need help anyway. The lion must be captured alive for the sacrifice. It is no good to the gods dead.” Siptah answered and reached for his friend’s hand to help him up.

Before Farris reached up for the hand, the air whispered and whistled, not a breath was heard. Siptah flew back as though hit by a massive invisible force and rolled several times upon the desert sand. Farris’s eyes focused on the velvet mass that wrapped around Siptah. It looked as though a gigantic stuffed animal had been thrown at the boy, wrapping its legs through his, kicking.

Siptah’s slack body was hurled to the ground after several turns and lay stiff for a few seconds. Farris called out, “Siptah! Get up now!” He hoped the shrill words would awaken the hunter.

Siptah’s head snapped up and seemed to stare straight ahead, then he scrambled to his feet and dashed to where Farris stood, Siptah’s spear a foot away.

“Spread out. He will have a harder time with us apart,” Siptah roared just before the lion answered him with a deafening growl.

Before the boys, the male lion bounced upon his front paws, as though courting them into a battle. His tail flipped side to side, sending a gritty blast of air at his pursuers. His mane stood on end and his eyes glared with the venomous ire of an infuriated adversary.

Farris’s heart stopped beating for several seconds, as he looked the beast up and down. *Maybe we should have followed orders and not traveled without the others,* he thought to himself.

“Farris, circle him--like this,” Siptah bounced up and down on the ground like a jack in the box out of control, moving a few feet to the left with each pounce. His movements, matched with Farris’s seemed to have a confusing effect on the lion, as its mane widened and it pawed the ground in between blasts of lion speak.

“Siptah, what’s the plan? Is there a special way to bring a lion home alive?”

Farris chucked the questions over the lion’s head to his friend.

“He will either run away or attack one of us. If so, we must capture him.” The sound of Siptah’s voice jumping every few seconds barely reached Farris’s ears.

“OK, but how do we capture him? Do you have a lion trap or something?” Farris pictured the kinds of lion traps Egyptians may have devised--a sticky net that could be thrown over the animal or a cage with a nice chunk of meat that would lure the giant cat easily inside.

Farris enjoyed the luxury of wandering thoughts no more as the lion leapt onto Siptah, placing its enormous paws onto his friend’s shoulders. The two rolled again across the desert floor, Siptah’s legs stretched out on the lion’s chest to keep its hind claws from his belly. The wrestlers tumbled in several complete turns, which gave Farris the needed split second to secure a slipknot in his climbing rope.

He tossed the blue line through the air and caught the lion under the mane, taking its attention away from breakfasting on Siptah. The hunted became the hunter as the lion ambled toward him. Farris pulled in the line an arm’s length at a time, stalling for time to think of what to do now that he had an angry lion on a leash.

He tangled a slipknot into the rope just a few feet from the lion. Farris cast the circle beneath the lion’s anticipated next step and pulled. A huge pink mouth grappled

with the rope that held both his neck and his paw. Farris glanced at Siptah who bounced from behind the lion, clicking the soft ground with his spear in a circle around the creature's position.

The lion must have had enough of rope games and on three feet dashed toward Farris and slashed down. The crushing smell of grimy fur masked his face before he heard a shriek from the distance. Globes of saliva dropped from the lion's mouth before the slashing sound of ripping flesh. Darkness.

Wounded Prey

"What happened?" Sophia's voice cracked as she entered the stone-walled room.

Pentu raised a green glass container that held thick liquid. He set it upon a table across the room from her. "Are you the one called Sophia?" He asked.

"Yes, Farris is my twin brother." She observed Farris's lifeless body lying on a table behind the doctor. Siptah was splayed out on a table near the wall.

"Follow me outside, Sophia," the royal physician answered and closed the door behind them.

"Brave Farris aided in catching the sacrificial lion for the flooding ceremony to bring about Akhet. Other royal hunters were hurt in the fray." Pentu stroked his long black goatee as he spoke.

"Will he be alright? When will he recuperate?" The words drifted from Sophia's mouth, as her strength faltered and her head reeled.

"He should recover easily. He is young and very strong. You may stay with him now and observe the treatment if you like. Patients usually enjoy having a friend to tend to their needs." Pentu answered calmly.

Sophia reentered the room. Shadows crept across the wall like wandering spiders, and the air hung on her lips. Farris' arm splayed across his chest unnaturally. He had been stripped down to his loincloth as had Siptah. Sophia kept her distance in the silence.

Mumbled nonsense escaped Farris's mouth, and his head tossed to one side, facing Sophia. She stepped across the room to clasp his hand.

"Farris. Farris, can you hear me?" She whispered to her damaged brother.

"Lion. Siptah." Was his only response.

"Farris, you're at the doctor's now. You'll be alright." She surveyed the wounds her brother endured. On top of a broken arm, his chest and legs presented several bruises the size of apples. Across his neck and chest was an oozing abrasion, which bore half an inch into his skin.

What are we going to do now, Farris? You run off to play the hunter and end up beaten to a pulp. If Father were here, he would say you looked like an old sculpture—all smashed up. Sophia's thoughts wandered to the images her father had shared of Roman statues with the arms and legs cut off by invaders to take away power from the gods whose images were represented in stone.

Pentu slid the door closed, "Sophia, help me now." He handed her a tray covered in clay bowls, each one held a different colored salve.

"I may need your assistance, Sophia. These will heal the hunters. Do you have the head for medicine?" He asked.

Sophia thought back to the five books she had published at age 10 on how to improve the world. One covered the topic of being prepared to be a good citizen when needed. It covered the topics she thought every citizen should know--first aid,

swimming, safety, communication, and emergency procedures. For a second, she almost laughed that now she would take her own advice.

“Take this cream and spread it on Farris’s wound from the lion.” Pentu pointed to a seaweed green concoction that looked like a bowl of slime and smelled more like a riverbed than medicine.

She shoved her fingers into the gel as her stomach forced her breakfast forward, nearly making her sick from the horrible stench. While pinching her nose with one hand, she spread the salve with the other across the gash in Farris’s chest. The gel seemed to be more interested in sticking to her fingers than to the blood-crusted crease on her brother.

“What is this stuff? It smells awful,” Sophia didn’t want to seem ungrateful but reeled at how such a foul design could heal the human body.

“Yes. Yes, it smells rotten, doesn’t it? I have become accustomed to smells here. This is goat’s urine and bread mold combined. It will clear up the worst cut in a matter of days.” He answered matter-of-factly as he slathered Siptah’s leg with an equally vulgar blend.

“Wait. This is goat’s urine? I’m putting an animal’s pee onto my brother?” Sophia’s breakfast threatened again to resurface.

“Of course. Everything in nature is useful in healing in some way. It is the doctor’s purpose to decide how every plant, animal, or even *pee*, as you call it, can be useful.” Pentu smiled.

“You’re certain this will work?” She shook the bowl at the physician.

“Naturally, I am a professional, Sophia. Now, please.” He gestured to her patient.

Sophia spent hours patching up Farris and Siptah with brews that under normal circumstances would cause her to insist on analyzing all research before using. But with her brother and his friend seriously wounded by the lion, she followed Pentu's instructions without question.

Sophia's linen dress hung on her exhausted, strained muscles. Her day with Pentu drained her body of energy and her mind of clarity. Farris's gain of consciousness eased her fears, but she knew he still had a long way to go before all of his wounds healed.

Pharaoh waltzed onto the stage, followed by two dozen priests and priestesses, wearing sapphire-blue robes that trailed to the floor. They appeared to float across the ground, their hands fanned out beside them like wings. Behind them a fat bearded man, wearing a crown of reeds, which was dotted with lotus blossoms approached Pharaoh and stood before the crowd.

Ankhesenamun leaned into Sophia. "The god, Hapi."

Following him, a tall sleek woman approached, she also wore a reed headdress, hers woven with ostrich feathers affixed to the sides and back. Her figure did not reflect the light from the flaming torches surrounding the platform the way Hapi's did but absorbed color.

"The Nile goddess, Anuket," Ankhesenamun pointed to the woman. "She wears the gazelle's skin and has come to embrace the land with fertile water from the Nile."

Sophia lifted her chin to the Queen, whose black eyes sparkled against coffee skin sprinkled with gold dust. Trailing the procession were four rows of drummers, each one slapping a perfectly timed beat to the footsteps of the gods.

Sophia looked out to the crowd below. She remembered images of events seen in newspapers where a hundred thousand people gathered in some city square. The photos looked contrived to her, as though impossible to squeeze so many people into a few square blocks. Before her, she knew there had to be at least twice as many, as the sea of shoulders and faces peered at the parade.

“I am honored that you invited me, Ankhesenamun.” Sophia leaned into the Queen of Egypt’s shoulder.

“Of course. The ceremony is important, and Farris was very brave for helping to catch the lion.” The Queen nodded.

“Yes.”

“I was surprised to hear that Farris and Siptah did not have a bigger hand in catching the lion.” Ankhesenamun shook her head up and down as she spoke.

“Really, why?”

“Ankht is known as a man who does not finish a job well,” the queen whispered.

“I don’t see the problem,” Sophia puckered her cheeks as she spoke.

“Ankht could not have done this feat. The story goes that he caught the lion single-handedly after saving Farris and Siptah from its grasp.” Ankhesenamun whispered directly into Sophia’s ear.

“I still don’t understand. Farris and Siptah were found unconscious after having been attacked by a lion. Someone must have saved them. I can’t imagine they caught a lion and saved themselves while unconscious.” Sophia’s mind whirled as she tried to collect each of the pieces to the mystery.

“Of course, they could not have done anything.” Ankhesenamun gave up easily and returned her eyes to the crowd below.

“There’s more isn’t there?” Sophia whispered, making sure no one but the queen could possibly hear her.

“Of course there is.” Her companion stated flatly, eyes glued forward.

Sophia grabbed the tissue-thin shawl from her shoulders and held it to her face, covering her moving lips. “OK, so what is it? Did Ankht not capture the lion?”

“No, he did not. He could not.” Ankhesenamun smiled and bowed to the head priest who danced on stage, tossing flower petals into the air and performing a blessing of the city.

“OK, so why would Ankht lie and say he brought the lion back?” Sophia mumbled to herself but in the queen’s direction so that her companion could answer.

“A soft man will use sharp sticks to make himself seem strong,” the queen smiled and winked at Sophia.

Sophia’s head reeled inside and out. Not only had a long day left her exhausted but riddles swarmed around her, wanting to be solved. The queen offered kindness and a form of darting honesty by guiding Sophia toward a secret she knew and others suspected. Sophia could not decipher the maze of clues in her fatigued state.

After the priests, priestesses, and gods cleared the platform, the dancers arrived. Sophia heard the drummers banging faster with each second. First a simple boom-boom-boom sound kept the people walking at a steady pace. Soon afterward, the drums sporadically mutated into a dozen different rhythms happening at once.

The dancers all looked basically the same. They all wore white loincloths. Their wrists, ankles, and necks were decorated identically. Each had a cobra crawling up each leg in bronze metal. Their arms were wrapped in beaded bracelets covering all of their skin from elbow to wrist. Necks jiggled within bands of gold thread woven around blue and white beads.

Dancers pounded the ground, making everyone around them vibrate with the beat. Their jobs were to dance around the Pharaoh and the clergy, cleansing the air. It guaranteed that Hapi would like the sacrifice and bring the floods to Egypt. Their legs and arms swung like graceful ribbons.

Sophia's eyelids got heavier by the second. Her skin felt like it had been stuffed with cotton, and she couldn't get the queen's words to leave her alone.

Between two rows of dancers, a cage was being pulled onto the platform. Long lengths of rope coiled over men's shoulders as they dragged the metal structure forward. The creature's eyes flickered over people on the platform and those in the crowd, as though he sized up whom to eat first.

Across the cage floor the lion paced, placing massive paws upon the thin flooring one at a time. His tail escaped the bars and slapped a dancer onto the ground as he jingled past. The yellow mane stood on end and his muscles tensed visibly even from across the platform.

So this is the mysterious lion huh? I don't see why it's such a big deal about who caught you--Farris or Ankht. Sophia thought to herself, although even her energy for thinking faded.

Finally, the procession stopped and Pharaoh's entourage, including Sophia, sat on comfortable silky cushions. The stage was lined with Pharaoh's royal house, his wife and children, his distant cousins all attended. Sophia stayed next to Ankhesenamun hoping to hear more about Ankht and unravel the riddle.

The fat bearded man representing Hapi stood before the crowd and all drew silent, "Tonight we send a message to Hapi, thanking him for the Nile waters. We ask him and Anuket to embrace Egypt, embrace Thebes and send the floods."

"The hero Ankht brought the lion to Thebes. He saves his fellow hunters then brings the prize home. May he be a son of Egypt for all days." The speech continued.

"Without heroes Egypt is nothing. No wars will be won. No food will be eaten. No Pharaohs will see the next world. Every person must stand up as a hero and keep Egypt the same as it has been for 50 centuries." Hapi shook reeds at the crowd as people went wild with yelping and singing, their voices lifting the air away from earth.

"Hapi and Anuket, flood Egypt!" The fat man howled into the night breeze.

The lion's cage was pulled onto the center of the platform. The front gate slammed open, and the air echoed with a metal clang for what seemed forever. The lion was calm then and stepped one paw out of the cage then another. He stood in front of his cage without any ropes wrapped about his neck or spears pointed at his throat.

Before him a golden bowl filled with raw gazelle meat waited. He tiptoed to it and sniffed, scrunching his nose as though he knew some secret. The lion tossed the hunk of flesh into the air as a child plays with a ball.

The crowd was perfectly silent. The human sea that once showed a thousand rows of shoulders and faces now went dark. Only backs could be seen, as each person in

the crowd knelt facing the lion. She turned quickly to Ankhesenamun whose eyes were closed and her head rested on her knees. Everyone but Pharaoh sat with eyes diverted from the giant cat.

The lion ripped at the gazelle flesh, holding it on the ground with its paws and pulled bits of it up with its long teeth. “What’s going on?” Sophia asked Ankhesenamun, who offered no acknowledgement at all.

After finishing off his meal, the lion stood. Sophia sensed that staying still like everyone else was probably best, but the urge to squirm overtook her and she shifted on her cushions. Ankhesenamun’s long fingers slapped down on Sophia’s thigh. “Don’t move,” she whispered.

“What’s happening? Why is everyone so still? Is this the ritual?” Sophia’s mind overflowed with questions and starved for answers. Ankhesenamun opened her eyes and glared at Sophia. Her stare screamed *Be quiet and stop moving!*

Sophia glanced back at the lion that lay on the hard platform, his tongue lagged from his mouth carelessly. Chirping frogs and buzzing dragonflies could be heard in the distance as a new breeze swept up her hair and filled her lungs with the coolness of night.

Everyone--Ankhesenamun, Aye, Ankht, Horemheb, Pharaoh’s daughters, and two dozen others sat lifelessly dumb. Their eyes cast down, their mouths sealed, and no movement whatsoever.

Sophia stood. *What is wrong with everyone? Are they all dead too? Are they in a trance or under some spell? I’ve never seen anything like this.* She thought to herself as she stood and looked around the thousands around her.

Pharaoh stood and raised his hands above his head, making a cup with his palms. His eyes seemed to be looking at some other place, and his face radiated with tranquility through smooth dark flesh.

Four hunters entered the platform silently. Each held the handle of a huge stretcher made of woven reeds. They carefully set the stretcher next to the lion. Each slid his arms beneath the creature and at once lifted. Their silence continued, and Sophia gazed at them, wondering what would happen next. Once the lion was in place, the hunters, led by Ankht, lifted the beast and turned to leave the stage.

Still cloaked in silence, the priests, priestesses, and royal entourage lined up behind the lion's procession. They all walked to the edge of the Nile, only a short distance from the ritual's place.

"What's happening now?" Sophia begged Ankhesenamun for an answer, but the Queen clasped one hand over Sophia's mouth and another on her arm, leading her with the pageant.

The lion and his carrier were placed on a sea mist green boat at the edge of the Nile. Scents of moss and fish scales wafted through the light breeze, as the hunters placed him gently onto the boat. Ankht covered the lion's body with flower petals of white lotus and pink asters. He made a short speech. The words were garbled by the time they reached Sophia's ears. He then grasped the edge of the stern and shoved the lion's carcass out to the river. The massive yellowish-tan body gleamed under the full moon.

Climbing the steps back to the city square, Sophia held her dress to her knees to keep it off the ground. Somewhere in the East a lightning bolt cracked through the sky and slammed down against the earth. The air cooled and smelled sweetly of rain.

“See. The rain will come and the floods will cover the fields. The Nile will feed Egypt,” Ankhesenamun smiled.

“What was all of that about?” Sophia took each step slowly; even in the moonlight it was hard to see the ground.

“The lion was sacrificed for Hapi. We show respect for the lion’s brave deed by showing him silence.” Ankhesenamun tossed her long hair over her shoulder, which had been braided with gold and blue beads.

“I’m sorry that I didn’t follow the procedure correctly. The entire ritual was very confusing to me,” Sophia thought back to a time when her friend from school assumed Sophia was Greek and took her to a religious ceremony that was equally confusing.

“You are not from Egypt. It is hard to understand our ways, I’m sure. We follow the rules of the gods and do as they have asked. Hapi must eat for us to eat, and we show respect for his sacrifice.” Ankhesenamun clasped her friend’s elbow as they sauntered toward the palace.

“Ankhesenamun, I’d like to ask you a question,” Sophia’s stomach worked itself into thick knots and bubbles.

“Yes.”

“I think Farris and I will have to leave soon,” Ankhesenamun stared with wide eyes at Sophia. “But why? Is Egypt not good enough for you to stay? There is no better

place. The entire world admires our wealth and technology. They all try to be like us and are jealous of our happiness.”

“That’s not it. You see our parents need us to help them, and to be able to accomplish that goal we have to leave. Without the technology we brought with us, we are unable to leave this time.” Sophia watched Ankhesenamun’s black eyes as the queen glanced around at the people around them.

“Wise Sophia, leaving is no way of dealing with a problem. You must stand strong against Aye and Horemheb.” Ankhesenamun’s whispered words caused Sophia’s skin to pucker in tiny clammy bumps all over.

Sophia’s thoughts squirmed around in her mind, offering different solutions on how to answer. She could not reveal again that Aye and Horemheb planned to kill the Pharaoh and force Ankhesenamun to marry Aye for the throne. She knew inside that she would not be harmed by the power wielding men.

“No, I’m not concerned about them right now. Our parents are in danger, but only if Farris and I cannot locate our technology.” Sophia dropped the words from her mouth one at a time, ensuring she did not say the wrong thing.

“Then what you should do is stay. Pharaoh loves you, so you should marry.” Ankhesenamun’s words slapped Sophia awake, although she still ached from the day’s work and the long evening of watching a lion sacrifice.

“You want me to marry your husband?” Sophia was unable to contain the short laugh at how ridiculous it sounded.

“Yes. We will be friends and will raise our children together. Sophia, everyone at the palace adores you. You should join the royal family. Since you are not Egyptian,

the only way to accomplish that is to marry.” Ankhesenamun’s smile lit up the path in front of her but darkened the one Sophia trod on.

Sometimes I love Egypt and want to stay forever, and sometimes I think these people are just as crazy as the ones in my time. She thought to herself, careful not to let those words slip between her teeth.

“What about another idea?” Sophia’s cheeks lifted.

“Yes?”

“What about if Farris and I joined the trading caravan headed for Lebanon?”

Lebanon has a massive forest, and Egypt depends heavily on their resources. I know a lot about ecology and can help to teach them sustainable management practices.” Sophia’s idea leapt from her for the first time. To her it sounded better out loud than it had in her mind. If she and Farris were trapped in Egypt forever, they had might as well escape danger and teach people about treating the environment well.

“What are you saying, Sophia? You would leave Egypt? I have heard that all lands outside of Egypt are rough and desperate. No one likes living there. Those people all try to come here to live.” Ankhesenamun’s thoughts sounded familiar.

Some people in Sophia’s time thought the same thing about their countries. *Isn’t it interesting? So little really changes over time.* She thought.

“I will think about it, Queen Ankhesenamun. Being a part of the royal family would be an honor no girl could refuse.” Sophia satisfied her friend by telling her the words she assumed the queen wanted to hear.

“Good! At least think of us over those in Lebanon! Who would choose a forest over a Pharaoh? Besides he loves you.” Again Ankhesenamun said the word love that

mystified Sophia. She too felt something for Pharaoh but nothing that could be described as love.

“Yes, Pharaoh is wonderful. Why do you say he loves me?” Sophia stepped up the palace steps, dragging one foot before the other.

“He told me of course. He is my brother.” The queen answered with a light pinch and a deep smile.

“Why would you want someone to marry your husband? That doesn’t make sense to me.” Sophia stopped at the top step and turned to her friend.

“Pharaoh and I love each other as brother and sister. We are not in love. We were expected to marry, so we did. He was only 8 you know. We complete our duties for Egypt and live in our separate ways.” Ankhesenamun patted the hand that sat on her arm and urged Sophia forward.

“Does it benefit Pharaoh to have more than one wife?” Sophia asked.

“Yes. He must have lots of children, and two can have more than one,” the thought nauseated Sophia, but she forced a smile as the queen spoke. “It benefits me too. If Pharaoh has many lesser wives then my status and that of my children is also raised.”

“I see.”

“Oh Sophia. I do not mean that I seek to benefit from your marriage. We all love having you here and want to find a place for you to be happy staying.” Ankhesenamun stopped in front of the entrance to her chambers.

Sophia smiled even though she felt more like collapsing.

“Good, so you will consider Pharaoh as an alternative to running to the outer worlds of Lebanon. How horrible that would be.” Ankhesenamun kissed her friend’s cheek and stepped inside.

Sophia pondered the queen’s strange request as she made her way to her room, dragging her fingers along cool walls as she went. Running away to Lebanon would give her the chance to study ecology in pre-industrialized lands. Marrying the Pharaoh was an option she did not want. She may be able to convince him to arrest Aye and Horemheb before they could inflict their damage. Neither option settled well with her as she drifted off to sleep.

Hieroglyphs

Farris stepped out of Pentu’s chamber and stood in the doorway. His frame stretched upward toward the sky. Farris’s muscles packed down into what felt like clumps of marbles all over. His shoulders were gooey after lying still so long.

Pentu rushed out of the door, nearly knocking Farris into the street. “Farris! Brave Farris.”

“Yes.”

“I nearly forgot. Take this seaweed cream with you. Cover the wound with it once a day before sleeping. It will stop infections and scarring. You will be running again in no time.” The old physician patted Farris on the shoulder as one pats a stray dog then returned to his work.

“Seaweed cream? Gross!” Farris stuffed the salve container into the sling that draped over his mending arm and walked toward the square.

Beneath him the ground felt soft from an early rain. The humidity hung heavily and cleansed his lungs of desert sand lodged there since the lion hunt. People darted from one side of the street to the other, calling to Farris to buy their food and wares.

Farris's gaze lingered out across the length of tents and covered heads. He glanced over a dozen nomadic tribesmen, who must have come into Thebes to trade. They haggled loudly with local merchants. White robed women walked with little hops in their feet, skipping over the worn path.

"Farris!" The voice called out, but Farris could not determine its direction.

"Farris!" Again.

Farris spun around several times, looking over the heads for the speaker but recognized no one. It seemed he was suddenly traveling alone.

"Farris, there you are. I went to Pentu's for you but you had gone." Siptah clasped his friend by the shoulders and embraced him.

"Hey! I'm so glad to be out of that miserable doctor's office. It smelled in there." Farris returned the smile, recalling the room he and Siptah shared for nearly a week.

"You should be healed now. Well, except your arm. How is it?" Siptah asked.

"OK. I'm not supposed to do any exercise, which is going to drive me crazy. How am I supposed to just sit around and pick my nose for a whole week?" Farris move as though to shrug his shoulders but stopped when the pain clenched him.

"Listen to Pentu. He is wise in healing. If he says do not run, then do not." Siptah answered.

“I know. It’s just so boring to do nothing all day. This one time, when I was 7, I backpacked across the Amazon and sprained my ankle rock climbing. I couldn’t move at all for 4 days. It was awful, and now this is going to be for a week. Ugh!” Farris clasped his arm and groaned.

“I have to drop off some things for my brother. Would you like to come along?”

Siptah gestured away from the square.

“Sure.”

“Have you heard the news?” Siptah’s voice dropped as he spoke.

“No, what?”

“The news of the cheating hunter.” Siptah dragged out each word as though there were poison in their sounds.

“What?”

“Ah yes, the cheating hunter took claim for the work of 10 men and called it his own.” Siptah nodded to Farris as they walked.

“I don’t have any clue what you’re talking about, Siptah.”

“Ah! You foreigners make me spell out everything as though you are children.”

Siptah tossed away the words then grinned.

“Siptah, you’re a weirdo. Why don’t you stop using silly brainteasers and talk like normal people.” Farris antagonized his friend with a jab to the ribs.

“OK, child.” Siptah winked before continuing, “We went to hunt the lion with the royal hunters. We left the camp and ran across the desert to seek the male. You remember?” Siptah started the story.

“Ah yeah. I was there.” Farris answered.

“You recall we found the lion and engaged him in battle, right?”

“Yep, I remember that too.”

“Then you threw your great rope over the beast and stopped him from charging me. Then he attacked you.” Siptah started to annoy Farris. They had both been at the attack and knew exactly what had happened.

“I know what happened. So what’s the deal about a cheating hunter? I asked you if I could bring my rope. Is that the problem?” Farris roared.

“Of course not. You think Egyptians don’t use rope? We’re not barbaric, Farris.” His friend retorted.

“OK, so what then?” Farris stopped in front of a three story white building made of mud bricks.

“The lion knocked you out with its great paws, but I was still awake. I could still see and hear.” Siptah continued.

“Yes, and?”

“A rider approached on a nomad’s steed--a stolen nomad’s steed. He saw the attack and rode for us. I was just about to jump upon the lion when the man drove his horse before me. He shoved me out of the way and blew a sleeping dart at the lion, knocking him out.” Siptah’s eyebrows lowered as though all had been revealed.

“Was there something in there that was supposed to shock me?” Farris asked.

“Of course! The sacred lion cannot be tranquilized. It is an unfair hunt. If that was the way we hunted, we could slaughter all of the desert creatures within a generation and have nothing but humans.” Siptah explained.

“I still don’t get it.”

“Ugh! There are rules to hunting, and having an unfair advantage over a beast is one of them, especially a sacrificial animal. They are not to be treated like enemies and caught with poison. It is dishonorable to the lion and to Egypt.” Siptah said.

“So, why do we care? Egypt got its lion, which they killed anyway for a flood. We escaped with our lives and a few broken bones.” Farris scrunched his eyebrows as he spoke. The sun beat against his forehead as he faced it, trying to understand his friend.

“It is dishonorable to break the rules of tradition. Egypt has been the same for thousands of years. Everything today is the same as before. Shame will come to Egypt because of this deed.” Siptah sauntered on.

Farris thought about hunting in his own day. The white tigers of Asia were hunted to near extinction. Poachers killed elephants for their tusks then left the carcasses to rot in the sun. Hundreds of plant and animal species had disappeared to feed man’s desire for rarities.

Farris ran up to Siptah, “OK, I get it. I get it. So what do you want to do about it?”

“The cheating hunter is a coward. We know this. You must stand strong against his lies. Remember Ankht is the nephew of a powerful man, perhaps more powerful than Pharaoh himself--Aye.” Siptah answered and ushered Farris down the road.

The boys entered the wide room, decorated with hieroglyphs sketched on the walls. Bits of clay and writing sticks littered the floor. Farris stepped over a stack of tablets that were placed in the center of the room. The chalky smell and dust in the air made his lungs squeeze and his nose run.

“What is this place?” Farris asked.

“School. My brother, Tausert, is studying to be a scribe.” Siptah answered before crossing the room to the courtyard door.

Farris surveyed the place. It had no chalkboards, no chairs, and no desks. Boys ran around the courtyard in loincloths. Their heads were shaven except for single ponytails placed on the sides. It looked like a fun place to go to school.

“Master Seti, this is my friend Farris. He visits from another land unknown to Egypt,” Siptah introduced Farris to the teacher.

“Ah, you are the brave one. Are you not?” Master Seti asked.

“The brave one?” Farris’s face contorted in confusion.

“There are worse names to be known by,” Siptah answered and elbowed Farris.

“We have heard of great deeds. Yes, you went on the lion hunt. It seems the lion wanted to make a feast of you, yes?” Seti’s words made no sense to Farris until the old man pointed to the sling wrapped around his arm.

“Oh yeah. I keep forgetting about that. I guess the lions don’t like to eat stringy boys.” Farris answered as his eyes darted over the schoolmaster.

Master Seti looked like a man in his 60s with a long white and gray beard that stuck out in several directions. His tunic bulged in the middle as though he wore a white Santa costume. A never-ending smile revealed gapped brown teeth, chipped at the edges. His hands were rarely seen in front of his body but formed a bow at his back.

“I must deliver these to Tausert, Master Seti.” Siptah displayed a large bag of nuts.

“Of course, I will fetch him.” Master Seti hobbled off, hollering at boys as he went.

“Why are you giving your brother a bag of nuts?” Farris peered into the sack.

“To trade. My father is at the pyramids, and no money has come yet. Horemheb says the workers must arrive 2 weeks early without pay this year. My brother can trade the almonds for other things he needs.” Siptah answered, pulling the tassels closed on the bag.

“What pyramid?” Farris asked.

“The one Sophia visited. She went to see where Pharaoh would be buried. The work has begun now that the rains started. Soon it will flood.” Siptah tossed the bag at a gangly boy of 8 whose stick legs hung out of his tunic like dark spaghetti noodles.

“Sophia said the workers get paid extra to work at the pyramid.” Farris shot his voice over three screaming boys who invaded the courtyard like highway bandits.

“Not this year. This is the year of weak men, not of warriors and hunters.” Siptah turned to leave.

“Yes, I know several languages. I also created a course for students to learn languages online when I was 13. There are now 5 million people in the program.” Sophia dragged her fingers across the indented images carved into the walls. Their brightly painted symbols fascinated her.

“Ah wise Sophia, I strive to understand some of the things you speak of. Your land must be fascinating.” Pharaoh Tutankhamun followed her.

“I’m sorry. I keep forgetting to keep the other time away from this one. I remember with everyone else but you.” Sophia’s smile beamed light throughout the yellow-light, dusty room.

“I’m glad. I want you to forget your old life and be yourself.” Pharaoh returned to the inscriptions, “Look, here is a message about Anuke, the goddess of war. She is busy now striking down Nubia.”

“Doesn’t it bother you that people in Nubia are being killed for Egypt?” Sophia asked, careful not to reveal her irritation at Pharaoh’s viewpoint.

“Why would it bother me? War is death, which brings new life. Everything works in a cycle, wise Sophia.” He answered.

“Blaming life and death on a natural cycle in ecology is a casual way to defend yourself. You’ve sent soldiers to kill thousands of people just to make a point. Doesn’t that make you feel anything?” Sophia dropped her hand from the hieroglyphic image of a woman with a bow.

“No, I feel nothing. Should I?” Pharaoh answered. His eyes gleamed right at Sophia’s forehead as though he could see right through her.

“I suppose not.” She turned back to the hieroglyphs and wondered why he felt nothing. “What’s this one here?” She asked, pointing to a yellow circle with a cobra peeking out of the top.

“Ra, the god who delivered you to Egypt. He is the ruler of the universe, as I am the ruler of the earth. Ra can be seen in many places, but the sun is where he lives.” Pharaoh pointed out the pictures that showed a sun surrounded by planets, people, and animals.

“Isn’t Ra the oldest of the Egyptian gods?” Sophia squinted to see the hieroglyphs in the dull light.

“Yes. There are other gods who are almost as old as Ra. He is the creator god who made the original universe, then other gods made changes to it.” Pharaoh directed her to a story, which was laid out in more than 20 pictures.

“I see.”

“Ra is not recognized as much as he once was. Other gods are important now, as they influence us in our daily lives.” Pharaoh answered.

“OK.”

“At the beginning of my reign as Pharaoh I opened the temples which had been closed to the people by earlier Pharaohs. I changed my name from Tutankhaten, which meant *Living Image of the Aten* to Tutankhamun, which means *Living Image of Amun*.” Pharaoh nodded as he spoke.

“Why would you do that?”

“Really I had no choice. Aye decided it was something Egypt wanted, so I agreed. At 9, I was thrilled to be the leader of the world and wanted to do whatever it took to make the world better.” Pharaoh began to walk down a corridor, decorated with brightly painted hieroglyphs on both sides.

“How did changing your name make Egypt better?” Sophia skipped to catch up with him.

“Akhenaten was the Pharaoh before me and my father. He changed a lot of things about religion and politics in Egypt. That made a lot of people angry, especially those who benefited from keeping Egypt always the same. Aye had me reopen the temples,

because Egyptians are easier to control when they are thinking of the afterlife rather than this one.” Pharaoh Tutankhamun dragged his fingers over an image of a large bird with blue wings.

“That’s awful,” Sophia regretted the statement as it slipped from her mouth. *Why did I say that? I should not have told him my real thoughts. That could offend him.* She thought to herself while nibbling on her lower lip.

“No, not awful. People must be controlled, otherwise there is chaos.” Pharaoh’s eyes were set on the bird. He didn’t glance up even once.

Sophia and Pharaoh continued walking slowly down the corridor. They tapped their fingers at the bright colored ridges made in clay painted to look like animals. The images communicated more than quick messages but held the whole of Egyptian history in their meanings.

“Do you know what I want to do now?” Pharaoh shifted and faced Sophia.

“No. What?”

“I want to change Egypt. I want to change the way we deal with other countries. I see an Egypt that can feed the world, ensure peace, and teach understanding between people.” Pharaoh said the words flatly, as though he had asked Sophia if she knew anything about cats.

“Doesn’t that go against everything that Egypt has stood for? Wouldn’t making changes create problems?” Sophia took a step toward him and into the sunlight drifting in through a courtyard door a short distance behind him.

“It is time for change. I have seen this in nature. Everything changes. If Egypt is to remain the ruler of the world forever, we must become better than we are,” he answered.

“If everything has worked for so long, why change now?” She questioned, even though she agreed with this idea more than attacking Nubia over a trade disagreement.

“Lebanon, Syria, Nubia, Greece. Many countries develop power and intelligence by changing. We have remained the rulers because of a large army, and of course the gods have wanted this.” Pharaoh turned and walked into the courtyard, taking in a deep breath as he stood in the sun.

Sophia stayed in the hallway for a minute. *If Pharaoh wants to make changes, perhaps that is the reason Aye and Horemheb want to kill him. Maybe he is trying to change the Egyptian way of life, which will damage their wealth or status. People would do anything for wealth.* She pondered before approaching the entryway.

“Sophia.”

“Yes.”

“I must speak with you.”

“We’ve been talking for hours. Speak to me now.” She answered, scrunching her nose over why he would ask her for something he already had.

“If I begin to make changes in Egypt, I will need intelligent advisors.” Pharaoh continued to stare into the sky.

“Yes.”

“There are few advisors in Egypt who have traveled to the far lands like China, and few who understand men.” His eyes relaxed as the sun dipped behind a cloud.

“Yes.”

“I will need the very best advisors to lead Egypt into a new age.” He glanced at her.

“Alright.” Sophia had gotten used to the way Egyptians spoke in riddles and rarely said anything directly. She wondered how Pharaoh’s thoughts had anything to do with her.

“So would you agree?” He asked, eyes staring right through her.

“Agree to what?”

“I want you to agree to be a lesser wife and my advisor.” Pharaoh’s words snapped Sophia through the middle, cutting her in half. She had dreaded the day he would bring marriage up again. The topic had been suggested so many times and was a route wrought with danger.

“If you want to make change in Egypt, perhaps you should begin with having only one wife.” She suggested, stumbling back a step.

“One wife?” His laughter stabbed her as though he had thrown a thousand tiny daggers.

“Yes. Why not?”

“A Pharaoh must have many wives to maintain status as a great man. It is important in Egypt.” His laughter trickled from his heaving chest.

“If change is what you want, you should seek change by being a good example.” She retorted.

“Change with making Egypt more important, wealthier, more tolerant, yes. Change in wives, no.” His eyes returned to black oval disks.

Sophia had no response and wiped dust from one foot with the other.

Farris plopped himself onto the down bed. He stared at the ceiling's blue paint that made him feel like he was waking up outside. His arm thumped in pain as he tried to shift it inside of the sling.

Sophia burst into the room, nearly tearing the curtains off of their rods as she waved her arms. Her hair stuck out in every direction, making her look a little crazy. Dust bunnies trailed behind her.

“What’s wrong with you?” Farris rolled onto his side.

“Ugh! Egypt is a loony bin! Learning about history first hand was a good idea for killing time until we could get the time machine running again. But now everything’s out of control.” Sophia pressed her face into a white fluffy pillow and screamed into it.

“I don’t think we’re really going anywhere. That time machine is gone. Some jerk probably smashed it up then fed the pieces to a goat to hide the evidence.” Farris chuckled at the picture that formed in his mind of a goat with a satellite signal.

“We’re leaving, Farris! We have to leave and really soon.” Sophia moved the pillow away just long enough to speak then replaced it onto her face.

“Where are we going to go anyway?” He chewed on a strip of reed that had been lodged in his sling.

“Lebanon maybe.”

“So, you found a sale on time machines in Lebanon? Why didn’t you bring this up earlier?” Farris threw the reed at Sophia and laughed.

“Don’t be so sarcastic. Pharaoh wants to marry me and he’s getting pushy about it. It makes me uncomfortable. I know that Egyptians married young, and I know it looks like we’re stuck here. Ugh! It’s just not what I want to do with my life!” Sophia replaced the pillow and mumbled something impossible to understand into it.

“You want me to kick his butt? I will and with one arm.” Farris held the giggles in his mouth until Sophia squealed bursts of laughter into her pillow.

“No! You always do that and make nothing out of serious situations.” Her laughter slowed into measured echoing hiccups.

“It’s better than freaking out every 5 minutes. So, do they have Olympics in Lebanon? Maybe I could do the discus or the long jump.” He said.

“Greece! That’s Greece! Oh my gosh.” She smiled and faced Farris.

“So what do you want to do?” He asked.

“Find my time machine.” Sophia’s eyes darted over the ceiling then back at Farris. “The way I see it the best thing to do is find it and go home. The other options are for me to marry the Pharaoh and try to convince him to arrest Aye and Horemheb before they kill him, or we leave for Lebanon.”

“Why Lebanon?” Farris tried to straighten his sling twice before unrolling it and tossing the linen to the floor.

“Lebanon has a huge forest. Those trees supply much of the Middle East with lumber. In our times, the forests have been completely devastated. If I’m going to be stuck in 1350 BC, then I’d might as well save a forest and do something to change history for the better. I thought we could do forestry management there.” Sophia glanced over at Farris.

“OK. Can Siptah come?”

Pharaoh's Last Day

Farris kicked an egg-sized rock down the path as he walked. It rolled into a wall then stopped. He kicked it again. It bumped into the tailor's foot. He kicked it again. It rolled into the courtyard and was lost in the crowd.

Like every day for the last 2 weeks, the streets smelled like pond water. Everyone's skin was shiny with the humidity that follows the Nile's flooding, and sweatiness was everywhere. People were happily trading, tending to their work, and talking about the flood and the pyramid's progress. How boring it all was to watch everyone else with something to do.

Farris meandered through the market square. His arm limply hung in its sling. His feet shuffled one in front of the other, going nowhere. *I wish I had something to do. This is so boring waiting for my arm to heal so that we can get out of here.* He thought as he looked out to the crowd.

Across a line of people in white tunics Farris saw someone he recognized. Ankht looked around as he walked, as though he was looking for a familiar face. He surveyed the crowd with darting eyes and walked quickly, holding a bag over his shoulder and a spear on his arm.

Ankht surfed his way through the crowd, pushing people out of his way and forcing a path where none had been. He looked as though he was trying to get away from something. His face twisted over his shoulder with every tenth step, and he kept the bag close to his ribs. His suspiciousness would have been obvious to anyone who noticed him, but everyone at the market veered out of his way.

Farris crossed the tables of traders with knives, dried fruits, and yards of fabric to sell. A bearded man grabbed him to buy perfume. Another caught his shoulder to tell him about the quality of his goat's milk. Farris headed on, focused on Ankht's strange behavior.

Ankht marched down a street on the west side of the market square past the shops and eateries. He waited outside of a plain doorway and looked around again, then backed into the entrance. Farris followed until he was a few feet from the building's opening.

I don't know if this is such a good idea. He thought to himself. Maybe I shouldn't be following Ankht, but he looks so weird, and I wish I knew what he's doing. Anything is better than sitting around.

Farris approached the doorway and leaned casually against the wall. Voices trailed out of the open windows above. It sounded like several men arguing. Some of the voices sounded familiar. Numerous thumps of people walking down stairs made Farris slide along the wall away from the doorway, putting space between him and where Ankht entered.

No one exited the building, so Farris edged closer to the entrance, leaning his ear in. The voices he had heard upstairs were the same ones who now shouted downstairs.

“What are we supposed to do then?” One voice hollered.

“If Pharaoh is suggesting these kinds of changes Egypt would be ruined!”

Another chimed in.

“Can you imagine the kind of damage this might cause? Egypt would be giving up power to countries all over the world. Nubia would be handling its own trade issues.

Lebanon would send lumber whenever they felt like it. How are we supposed to maintain control in chaos?" The first voice called out.

"We have to do something about this. Otherwise it could be an end to life as we know it." One voice said. Several voices agreed with grunts.

Farris's curiosity swelled as the voices trailed out of the white building. He wondered who was in there and why they seemed so angry. These people sounded like they absolutely hated the Pharaoh.

"If we are going to be citizens of Egypt then we must stand up for Egypt." The first voice sounded familiar. Its deep roar reminded Farris of someone he had heard before. He thought back, trying to match up a face with the voice. He recalled times of being at the palace where people spoke in their normal tones. This voice had the ear of Pharaoh. Farris was sure of it.

"To be citizens of the strongest country in the world, sometimes we have to act even when it goes against our laws. Something must be done." The first voice continued.

Farris sorted through dozens of memories to make the connection. He remembered a time that he had been climbing up the side of the palace walls, showing some of the guards how to scale a wall using mountaineering skills. A man burst into the room and yelled at Farris for teaching things that had not been approved by the Egyptian army. Horemheb! That was it! As leader of the army, Horemheb was always yelling and carrying on about rules and war. His face matched the first voice.

"We must dispose of Pharaoh to save Egypt from his ridiculous ideas!"
Horemheb's voice rang out.

No one answered right away. The room fell silent, and Farris twisted his neck to listen to the conversation inside without seeming too obvious to people in the street.

“Listen. Pharaoh wants to change everything. He has some silly vision of how he wants Egypt to be. This is the same kind of nonsense that his father did as Pharaoh, and we handled that situation didn’t we?” Horemheb said.

“So you’re saying the only way to deal with this problem is to kill the Pharaoh? Murder the god who sits with us on earth?” Someone responded.

“Yes, it’s the only way.” Horemheb answered.

“Horemheb is right. There is no other way. We have worked to influence Pharaoh for 10 years and have been able to control him. Now that he is more mature, he is making decisions on his own and asking for our counsel less and less. I also think that his new sorcerers have something to do with his nefarious ideas.” Another familiar voice explained.

“My uncle is right. We should also think about the sorcerers and their evil that is poisoning the mind of Pharaoh.” Ankht’s voice was obvious. After being on the lion hunt with him, Farris could recognize his scratchy weasel screeches anywhere.

“What about their magic that you have? Is it dangerous?” A voice asked.

“We have not found a sorcerer of our own brave enough to open it. At this point we have heard that if anyone opens the box, he will be destroyed. Since these sorcerers have come to Egypt in such a strange way, wearing their odd clothes, and influencing everyone they meet, we are unable to understand the magic.” Aye’s voice formed an image as his greasy thick face burst into Farris’s mind.

“So what do we do first?” Ankht asked.

“First we wait for the right moment. Pharaoh must be handled in a way that no one will suspect us. After Pharaoh is taken care of, we will deal with the sorcerers.” Aye answered, leaving the room silent.

Farris heard enough to clear up what was happening in Egypt. He stumbled away from the wall in a daze, his head cloudy with evil words and careless deeds. His appointment with Pentu was coming up, so he trotted away.

“You see, Sophia. The skinned mouse can cure many things.” Pentu pointed out the section of a scroll decorated with Hieroglyphs to make his point.

“Does a patient eat the mouse readily? It seems to me that a person would have to be tricked to eat a skinned mouse whole.” Sophia answered, peering at the scroll.

“Some patients are very easy and will follow all of my recommendations without question. Children can be harder to convince to eat a mouse, yes.” The physician let the scroll snap shut and grabbed another from a pile stacked on his table.

“It’s understandable. I would have to be incredibly sick to eat a mouse. Yikes!” Sophia shook.

“Look at this scroll. Here we see the many uses of hippopotamus feces. It can be used in creams or salves or even teas. If you read this section, you will understand why the Hippopotamus is so important to Egyptian medicine.” His finger trailed across a series of hieroglyphs.

“Pentu, I can’t read the hieroglyphs well enough to understand. I have been working on learning them as quickly as possible, but there are hundreds of images to memorize.” She squinted at the pictures but understood only pieces.

“Thousands. There are thousands of different images in hieroglyphs if you look at the old ones compared with the new ones. You should attend school as a scribe to learn all of them. Then return to me so that I might teach you medicine.” He smiled.

“I would love that! I love learning when I can use my studies right away. In my old schools, we would learn and memorize but apply none of our skills. It felt like a waste of time.” She added, knowing she could never accept Pentu’s offer. At this point, Sophia had to choose between running away or marrying the Pharaoh.

“I understand. Study with me. You will be a great physician. I can see that already.” He answered.

She smiled at Pentu, not wanting to tell him no outright.

The door behind them clunked as someone stumbled in. Pentu and Sophia turned to see Farris standing in the entry.

“What are you doing?” Sophia caught the scroll that tumbled across the table when Pentu removed his hand from its edge.

“Come in, brave Farris. Come in.” Pentu ushered Farris into the room and sat him on a bench.

Sophia noticed that Farris’s normally excited face was drawn down. His forehead sagged into his eyes, and his cheeks were heavy and puffy.

“What happened, Farris?” She asked.

“I’ll tell you later.” Farris mumbled the words that she barely caught.

“Ah! Look at this. Sophia, come and examine.” Pentu pointed to Farris’s healed arm. Sophia expected to see a skinny arm with clammy pale skin covering it. But Farris’s broken arm looked like nothing had ever happened to it.

“This is amazing! I’ve never heard of a broken bone healing in 2 weeks.” Sophia noted.

“Looks great, doc. Thanks.” Farris bolted out of the door before Sophia or Pentu could say another word.

Sophia waltzed through the hallway. Her visit with Pentu left her with some exciting secrets of the hieroglyphs. She could learn about Egyptian medicine and teach Pentu a few things to improve life in Egypt. She thought about writing a book of her travels and everything she learned.

Bounding into her room, she heard Farris next door. Sophia’s feet floated across the tile floor as she entered her brother’s chamber.

“You wouldn’t believe the day I had. I’m so excited! Pentu wants to teach me medicine. I know I can’t accept, but it was generous of him to offer. I’ve been thinking about our options with being stuck in Egypt.” Her words drifted from her lips as she spoke.

“I’ve got one up on you, then.” Farris patted the bed for his sister to take a seat.

“What’s that?” She asked.

“I found some secret information today.” Farris spoke as though he were an undercover agent assigned to locate the enemy in foreign lands.

“I saw Ankht at the market today. He looked really suspicious and kept looking over his shoulder like someone was watching him.” Farris continued.

“Uh. Huh.” Sophia wondered if she was going to hear any facts or some imaginary game about secret agents. His whining over the past 2 weeks about having nothing to do made her try to avoid him.

“Then he went into this building, but here’s the weird thing. He backed in. No one does that! Normal people walk straight in.” Farris’s story continued.

“Where is this going, Farris? I’d like to study some hieroglyphs tonight.” Sophia retorted.

“Keep your pants on.” He answered.

“OK, so he went into the building, backed in. Then I stood outside. I hear a whole bunch of people yelling and screaming about how much they hated Pharaoh and how screwed up Egypt is, and all this other blah blah stuff.” Farris’s story picked up when Sophia heard that people did not like the Pharaoh.

“Then after they talked about Pharaoh for a while, they said they were going to kill him. Kill him! That’s so uncool.” Farris dropped onto the bed, his chest heaved with breaths for a minute.

“Then what?” Sophia tapped his leg to get him to continue.

“So, then I realized who was there. It was Ankht, Aye, Horemheb, and some other guys who aren’t important.” Farris said.

“Not important? These guys are talking about killing the Pharaoh. This is very serious.” Sophia’s voice cracked and her lips puckered in anger.

Farris went on. “Get this. Then they talked about the evil sorcerers who are poisoning Pharaoh’s mind and how they were going to kill them too!” Farris flopped

back onto the bed, dashing his fists into the soft down. “Oh man! This place is nuts sometimes.”

“Wait. What sorcerers? I’ve heard people refer to us as sorcerers. Was he talking about us?” Sophia’s eyes rounded and her mouth dropped to the floor.

“Of course it’s us! They want to kill us. This is so insane! We’ve got a real adventure on our hands. These guys are bad news, and I’m not going to sit by and let them keep us in Egypt forever.” Farris threw his arms upwards.

“Farris, they do kill the Pharaoh. That’s what happened in history. He was murdered by a strike to the head. He may have also been poisoned before being struck.” She answered.

“Oh yeah. I keep forgetting about history. It’s so real now that we’re here. Anyway, here’s the big news.” Farris leaned forward.

“There’s more?” Sophia’s eyebrows jumped.

“Duh! Tons more. I left the best for last. Here’s the real killer to the story. Aye has our time machine.” Farris’s hands joined as though he held an imaginary bat. His eyes glared forward, he swung, and drew his hand to his forehead to watch the make-believe ball fly out of the stands.

“They’ve taken the time machine? They’ve tried to take our lives away from us by trapping us here. We could’ve been in Geneva by now.” Sophia’s face burned red hot.

“I say what we do is get some spears and about 50 guys then storm in there and take it back. Rip it right out of their hands. Yeah!” Farris punched a fist into his palm.

“Good work, detective Farris. You’re hired!” Sophia answered, letting her body relax. “No. You’ll ruin everything. I’ll got a better idea. Come on. Take me to see where it’s located.” Sophia stood and headed for the door.

Pharaoh Tutankhamun and Sophia strolled along the path that led to the pyramid. Gigantic hunks of stone were hauled up the pyramid on ramps that wrapped around it. Thick logs rumbled as they rolled under the stones, which glistened white under the midday sun.

“The work is coming along very nicely. I have started two statues to be placed in the city as well. It should please the gods.” Pharaoh leaned his hands against the stones stacked to build a column.

“It looks good.” Sophia’s eyes darted and her faced squeezed. Her mind floated to a teenaged boy and a time machine.

“Sophia, why are you so far away?” He asked.

“Um, I don’t know. I guess I don’t feel very well today.” She said, not totally lying or being honest.

“Should we go back to the palace then? We could play some board games or have the dancers to perform for us.” Pharaoh’s eyes were edged with black liner that made them look enormous. His eyelids were caked in royal blue dust.

“Maybe we will go back, but I should lie down.” Sophia knew that lying down would not appease the constant flutter and rolling in her stomach.

“Sophia, anything you want. As a queen of Egypt, you will be given every imaginable request at your word.” Pharaoh snapped his long fingers, grabbing her attention. His eyes pierced her skin as he looked at her.

“Pharaoh.”

“Yes.”

“We need to talk.”

“There is nothing to say. No human being could turn down the chance to rule the world. I know. You do not need to speak.” Pharaoh put his hand on Sophia’s shoulder.

“No. That’s not it.” She started. “I keep trying to tell you but you’re not listening.”

“Listening to what? He asked.

“This is not my life. I don’t want to stay with you or in Egypt. I want to find the time machine and go home. Our parents are waiting for us to help them.” Sophia’s voice cracked as she held the urge to scream in her throat.

Pharaoh let out a huge sigh that lasted as though he held 10 lungs worth of air in his chest.

“It’s not you or Egypt. This isn’t for me, and you know that. I’ve been trying to leave here since I arrived.” Sophia answered before he spoke.

Pharaoh said nothing but stared at the sky. “It is not for you to decide what happens in your life, and it is not proper for anyone to turn down the throne of Egypt.” Pharaoh’s hand contorted into a fist, slamming into the palm of the other.

“I will find your time machine now, and when I do I will destroy it. You will follow my orders, Sophia, or you will learn how strong the will of an Egyptian Pharaoh

can be.” His eyes burned with orange flames that licked up within them. His knuckles turned to black marble weights within his skin, and his muscles shook visibly.

Sophia’s mouth fell open as she watched the Pharaoh walk away and ignore his chariot then begin running toward the city. His guards followed 50 feet behind him; spears glistened over their shoulders.

Great! The only friend who could protect us and who won’t listen to me when I warn him is gone too. Egypt is crumbling under our feet. She thought to herself before stepping toward the chariot.

Cowards and Heroes

Farris and Siptah marched toward the market. Farris massaged the healed arm that throbbed now and then. A short gust of wind tossed sand into the boys’ eyes as a warning that going further guaranteed danger.

“What exactly are we doing, Farris?” Siptah spat bits of sand from his lips.

“I just need a little help with something. You could consider it payback to the cheating hunter.” Farris cupped his hand at his forehead to block the blast of wind.

“The cheating hunter has been found out then?” Siptah bumped Farris’s elbow to keep his attention.

“No exactly, but I found through undercover investigation that he is involved in a nasty spy ring.” Farris nodded Siptah to follow him around the corner.

“I do not know spy ring, Farris. Will we catch the cheating hunter?” Siptah leaned in as though the people surrounding them might understand the conversation.

“He’s in with the wrong crowd. He’s gone down the wrong road. You know what I mean, right?” Farris hoped his clichés would reach his friend who sought justice against Ankht.

“Stop speaking like an Egyptian, Farris. Tell me what is happening.” Siptah winked and stared directly at Farris as they walked.

Farris stopped in front of the eatery where men spent whole days sipping black drinks, arguing over which god was most interested in Egypt or which family would bring home the next big game catch. “We’re getting something back that was taken from Sophia. You remember me talking about that? The thing that got us here?”

Siptah nodded, his eyes squinted as though to say he knew exactly what was happening.

“Basically some really bad people took Sophia’s laptop. . . ah. . . I mean her thing, and I’m going to get it back. I just need you to keep watch at the front door.”

Farris slapped his friend on the shoulder.

“You are not telling me about all of the fish in your basket, Farris.” Siptah retorted.

“I’m not talking about any fish! Man! I’m talking about stealing people’s lives-- bad people stealing. I’m talking about things that I can’t tell you because if I did it would mean you’d probably be killed.” Farris had thrown his bag onto the dusty ground and waved his hands in front of his face as he spoke.

“Farris, I will follow you into peril without question, but if my people are in danger, you must say so.” Siptah answered.

“No! Ugh! It’s so stinking frustrating. No one is in danger yet. Right now the only thing we have to do is get Sophia’s thing back from the bad guys. Are you game?” Farris picked up his bag, tossing it over his shoulder.

“I will play your game if you tell me who the bad guys are.” Siptah’s answer left Farris at the edge of a dirt road with two unattractive options. He knew he could easily tell Siptah all of what would become of the Pharaoh and the Queen as well as Aye and Horemheb both becoming Pharaohs themselves. Or he could take the safe road and tell Siptah just enough to keep him happy.

“Siptah, Aye and Horemheb stole something from Sophia. Ankht knows about it. We just need to get it back.” He answered.

“Many days in the palace have taught me to separate the good men from the bad. These I have known about for some time. Stealing I never guessed would become their habits.” Siptah started down the market road.

As the boys approached the white building where Farris had listened to the shouts of treason, they stopped.

“OK, Siptah. This is it. I’m going in through the back way into the roof entrance. I want you to stand guard at the front door and stand watch. If anyone tries to enter, stop them. Tell them jokes or something. Just keep them out.” Farris directed Siptah to the same entryway Ankht had backed into.

“Yes, Farris.” Siptah took a regal stance in front of the door. His spear crossed in front of his body that he held with rigid arms. His eyes faced forward, barely blinking.

He looks like the Buckingham Palace guards, Farris thought, remembering the English guards dressed in red who were taunted by tourists who loved the play the game of getting them to laugh.

“No, no. Not like that. You have to look casual. You can’t look like you’re about to attack. Mellow out.” Farris shook Siptah’s arms loose and directed him to the wall. “Don’t think of this as formal guard duty. You have to look like you’re just standing here.”

“Yes, Farris. Is this Sophia’s plan?” He questioned with a wink.

“Of course. I would have included a brigade of ninjas and charging elephants if I had planned this.” Farris smiled.

“What is a ninja?” Siptah asked.

“Never mind. Now, I’ll walk out of the front door. So when I walk out, just walk along with me as though nothing happened.” Farris waved and darted around the corner.

Farris tossed his climbing rope to the top of the building, latching the slip knot he had made onto a notch on the roof. He dug his toes into the edges of the wall and slammed his fingertips into tiny crevices of the wall. Within seconds, he was above the sight of anyone staring straight ahead.

He forced his left big toe into a crack that ran the height of the wall, which broke off a piece of clay. It crashed on the ground as a woman passed below, a basket of vegetables in her arms. She didn’t look up.

Farris continued to scale the wall one move at a time. First his left foot rose almost to meet his hand. Then his fingers fumbled around for a grip, where his fingertips could hold the weight of his body against the vertical surface.

His right foot reached higher along the wall for a place to dig into. Nothing. Farris looked down and saw 4 feet around his foot of perfectly flat, smooth surface. He needed a crack or an edge to give his foot something to hold onto. He kicked his foot around, searching for an indentation--anything.

His rope lashed around his waist to catch him 2 feet above the ground if he fell. He looked up and saw just 6-7 feet of flat surface ahead of him. With his right arm, he wrapped the rope around his forearm and pulled, grabbing with his left hand to pull himself up.

The top of the building allowed for a view of the market and surrounding neighborhoods. *No wonder Aye and Horemheb took this place. They can see most of Thebes up close from here,* he thought to himself before rolling the rope around his torso, slipping on his sandals, and dropping through the roof opening.

The room Farris dropped into was completely dark with only the roof entry as a window. He felt along the walls to find the door. The air was old and smelled dusty and stale like the back seat in a car not driven for a decade.

Farris felt a corner and ran his fingers around its edges to feel a way to open it. He stepped forward silently. The door let go and slapped against the ground, thudding as though he had kicked it down purposely.

Great! So much for a secret entry, he thought to himself. He grabbed the door and stepped over it to smash his body behind a stack of crates the broken door landed against.

“Penkhtusu, get up there! See what’s going on.” A voice from downstairs shouted.

Farris heard footsteps scuffing up the plank boards to the third floor. “This is nothing. The old door fell.”

“Penkhtusu, force it in place. Make sure it will not fall again. The boss will be here soon.”

The man followed orders, muttering to himself questions about why he always had to do the boring jobs and dragged his feet down to the second floor.

Farris considered what to do next. If the men were watching the landing, he might not be able to sneak past them. The laptop could be anywhere in the building, but where?

He approached the steps on tiptoes. Below him was a spiral staircase that looked as though it had been built a thousand years ago and never kept up. Some of the steps were missing, and some dangled by bits of gnarled twine at their edges.

Farris stepped down onto the first step. No noise--good. He took a few more steps before *creeeeeeeek*; the piece of board leaned against the wall and squealed. *No! Don't say anything. Be quiet!* Farris hoped the board could hear the thoughts in his head.

The minutes dragged by and he imagined Siptah standing outside trying to hold off Aye with jokes and stories. Egyptians loved to tell stories, especially glorious ones about the gods. Siptah was not a gifted storyteller and would probably tell a 30 second yarn to buy Farris a little time but be lost about telling another.

Farris decided now or never. He bounded down the stairs, skipping as many of them as he could. The noises were unbearable. Smack! Bam! Slam! His feet pounded

the steps until he hit the second floor and twirled around behind a tall case that held spears and shields.

“Penkhtusu, stop bouncing on the stairs like a wild monkey. I told you I am working and the boss will be here soon.” An angry voice shouted from the wall behind Farris.

“I have done no bouncing and am no monkey. I’m going to the market for food.” Penkhtusu’s voice answered, as Farris watched him saunter off.

Farris surveyed the area. Another set of rickety stairs led down. The case behind him held weapons. Around the corner he knew the angry voice was attached to a face and a body that could catch him. A blonde-colored wooden door barred entrance to a room across the hall. To get there, Farris would have to get past the angry man and hope no one was inside. The closed door made it seem like a perfect place to keep stolen goods.

He took a deep breath and wrapped his head around the corner. In the tiny room was a man about 70 years old with yards of excess skin and a chocolate-colored globe for a head that he stroked as he muttered to himself.

Farris took one leap and was past the door. His heart beat so hard it threatened to leap from his chest onto the floor. His back and shoulders collected enough sweat that the bag slipped around as he moved. He took two steps to the door and pushed.

Inside, a packrat’s dream lay before him. Crates were stacked to the ceiling with jars filled with strange baubles. A pile of scrolls against the wall threatened to topple on top of Farris as their weight leaned into each other. A table was packed up several feet with bottles, wadded heaps of fabric, and spearheads broken decades ago.

In the corner sat a wooden trunk, its lid caked in a mile of dust with eight fingerprints dotted across the front edge. Farris grabbed the lid and heaved. Inside chaos of straw awaited him. He dug through the mass with his fingers. Dust splattered up into his lungs, making them contract as though he might sneeze.

Down he plunged his hands until a hard surface revealed itself. Farris grabbed hold of it and pulled. Sophia's laptop lay before his eyes. He shoved it into her leather bag and replaced the lid of the box. *Now or never. Don't get caught.*

Sophia paced the length of her room all morning, wearing a clear line into the tile floor. She had packed up her clothes and a bracelet Pharaoh gave her into a neat pile next to her bed.

Why didn't I insist on going with Farris? He's taking too long and should have been back by now. Her mind reeled in images of her brother being taken prisoner by Aye and Horemheb. In her pictures, his wrists and ankles were bound in chains as the laughing Aye shook the laptop at him.

Sophia threw herself onto the bed and curled her legs to her chest. The hallway outside was deadly silent, the guard posted outside of her door didn't even sneeze.

Clicks on the tiles outside of her room marked the rhythm of running. Sophia sat up, expecting to see Farris's face rush into her room.

One of the queen's personal servants tapped at the entryway then bolted in. "Wise Sophia, the queen needs you right away. The Pharaoh has been injured!"

“Oh no! Not now.” Sophia muttered to herself. The thought that Aye and Horemheb got to the Pharaoh before she could say goodbye brought a deep ache to her chest that thumped with each passing second.

Sophia leapt from the bed and dashed after the servant to visit with her friend Ankhesenamun.

Sophia entered a blackened room. The windows were covered with heavy red drapes, the air stunk of incense clouds, and a dozen women moaned in the corner with deep guttural fits of sobbing. Sophia crossed the room to Ankhesenamun who sat up perfectly straight at the Pharaoh’s bed.

“It looks like you will not be joining our family after all, wise Sophia.” The Queen said.

“What happened?” Sophia asked, although she already knew the answer long before it happened. The teenaged Pharaoh was hit over the head and lay unconscious.

“His enemies have won, wise Sophia. I wish you could have foretold this event and warned us to keep Pharaoh safe.” The queen answered.

Sophia swallowed hard, knowing she had.

Farris dashed out of the entryway. Sweat trickled down his neck onto his chest. He held his sister’s leather bag with both hands, knowing its contents would save their lives. Siptah paced beside him as planned, stretching his long legs out with each step.

“How is the ending, Farris?” Siptah asked, pointing to the bag.

“Fine. Let’s just get back to the palace fast.” Farris forced his legs forward to take each step as though he was about to bounce ahead into a sprint.

As the boys turned the corner of the street, a familiar face appeared. The beautiful girl from the market peeked her eyes from behind a white scarf that she had wrapped around her head.

“You are the brave Farris they speak of, aren’t you?” She asked.

Farris gazed at the almond eyes, knowing this would be his first and last time to talk to the beauty. Her skin glistened in the sun under a veneer of olive oil. Rose petals wafted from her breath as she exhaled.

“Yeah, I’m Farris.” He hated himself as the words slipped from his mouth.

That was such a stupid thing to say! Why did I say that? Why didn’t I say something to make her laugh? Farris thought to himself as his faced flushed red.

“I hear you went on the lion hunt and engaged the lion in battle near the great sand dunes.” Her eyes twinkled with tiny blue and silver crystals as she spoke.

“Yeah, Siptah and I ran for a while and saw the lion. It took a while of dancing around him. But I brought my climbing rope and was able to catch his leg and his neck to slow him down.” His answer sounded more polished to his burning ears. If he couldn’t sound cool at least he could sound like a bit of a hero.

“My father says Ankht could not have taken the lion alone. Is there truth in these words? Will Egypt suffer for Ankht?” Her eyes widened and pooled with droplets of clear liquid at the bottom as her chin quivered.

Siptah hollered from several yards ahead, “Farris, leave now.” He held his spear before his body to create a blockade as the lean image of Ankht approached.

“I have to go now.” His last words to the lovely girl floated through the air.

Ankht's legs kicked out from beneath a royal white tunic. His hands spun a spear in circles as he took on the stance for personal battle.

We just left. How did they find out so soon we have the time machine? Farris' thoughts crowded his mind, and his stomach heaved in twisted knots. The wind suddenly died into stale air.

Farris turned and saw Aye and Horemheb, both outfitted for battle with spears and shields. Flanking them were a dozen of their soldiers, men loyal to Horemheb the army officer rather than the Pharaoh.

"Men and women of Egypt," Siptah shouted into the crowd as hundreds turned their faces to him. "I show you the coward hunter. This man pretended to capture the sacred lion for Hapi alone but brought shame to Egypt. We must remember to follow the laws passed down for 50 centuries. Egypt survives because we are honest, brave men." Siptah kept one hand on his spear but pointed the other directly at Ankht's face.

Ankht dropped his spear and looked around. Hundreds of voices that had chattered about the weather, argued about the price of grain, and babbled about which god was best now lay silent. The crowd leaned forward.

Mumbled rumors were heard whispering among the throng.

"This is the one then?"

"He did not really capture the lion?"

"What will happen to Egypt?"

"Look at what happens to boys these days."

Siptah turned to see Aye glowing with a blood red face behind Farris. "Run! Farris, now!" Siptah shouted and ran toward the men led by Aye and Horemheb.

Farris pounded the earth with his flat sandals, slapping one foot upon the ground as though he were being chased by demons. He turned the corner at the market and ran directly into the basket weaver's shop. Baskets and lids flew 10 feet into the air as Farris passed, tossing the merchandise as he went to slow down the soldiers behind him.

The leather bag slapped Farris with every step, making a slurping noise against his sweaty back with each beat. He ran on through the eatery, tossing over tables as he heard men behind him complaining as they stumbled around the room. Farris dared not look back to see who trailed him but continued on toward the palace.

He slipped through a back street and hopped over two children playing with a pile of trinkets in the road. Their bald heads displayed single black ponytails on the sides. His foot splashed down into a puddle and slid across the lining mud, nearly throwing him to the ground.

Behind him Farris heard the screeches of men to stop for the royal guards.

He bounded up the palace steps, taking two at a time. His breath filled his chest with dry buckets of sandy air as he dashed inside past the palace guards posted at the entrance.

He bounded into Sophia's empty room. Nothing. No sister anywhere. He searched the room and found her pile of clothes, which he shoved into the leather bag.

"Sophia!" He shouted into the direction of the door.

"Where is she? We don't have time for her to be wandering off to learn about hieroglyphs now." The words soared from his chest.

A scuffling sound made him grab his rope and lash it to a beam in the ceiling. He could glide across the room and meet his attacker when he walked through the door.

Instead, his sister appeared. Her face was swollen and wet. She walked with her arms wrapped in front of her body. Short breaths seemed to choke her.

“Sophia, come on. I’ve got it. We’re being chased and we have to go.” He shot the words at her and ran to his room for his clothes and fishing vest.

“Farris, Pharaoh has been killed. He’s in a coma but could die at any minute.” She answered with glassy green eyes.

Farris flew back into the room, his things piled on his arms. “I know he was your friend, but Aye is chasing us. We have to go. I’ve got the time machine. See what you can do.”

Her eyes widened and her hands fluttered to the leather bag. She reached into her pile of clothes and pulled out the solar energy collector she had created to refill the battery.

“We only have a quarter of a battery. We can’t go now. It will probably take a couple of weeks to collect enough energy to use the time machine.” Her answer slammed Farris in the chest and onto the floor.

“We don’t have that kind of time.”

“We just have to take our chances and see how far forward we can get. If we end up in a decent place, we might end up in a place with more advanced technology where we could collect energy more quickly.” She shot him an uncertain glance.

The hallway flooded smacked with footsteps of someone running. Farris grabbed his rope and wrapped it around his wrist. Siptah’s face appeared.

“Siptah!” Farris released the rope and ran to embrace his friend.

“Siptah, come with us. We’re leaving, and you won’t be safe in Egypt anymore. Pharaoh has been killed, and Aye will become the next Pharaoh after marrying the Queen.” Farris rattled out the truth to Siptah.

“No, Farris. Egypt is my land. I realized what was happening today when we walked to the market. Today, I will leave with the trade caravan to Lebanon.” Siptah peaked his eyebrow to show he meant business.

“What will you do in Lebanon?” Sophia’s eyebrows scrunched together.

“Work with them to treat the land well. The gods will follow me, as I have been a servant to Pharaoh always.” Siptah answered as footsteps scrambled in the hallway.

Aye, Horemheb, and Ankht burst into the room. Their eyes gleamed with matching shades of hatred. Spears in hand, they each took the stance for personal battle.

“Sorcerers. You have poisoned the ears of Pharaoh and murdered him in his bed. You will pay in this life and the next.” Aye spat the words from snarled, cracked lips.

“Go.” Siptah tossed the word over his shoulder to the twins.

Sophia fumbled with the cords and wires of the time machine. She dropped the laptop onto the floor, making Farris’s heart leap as it hit. Her hands reached down for it and punched a few keys before folding it into the leather bag.

“It’s fine. We still have a quarter of a battery.” She announced with a crackling voice.

“Hit it. Hit the button.” Farris ordered, as he grabbed his vest and held onto his sister.

Horemheb lunged past Siptah and headed straight for the twins, his spear drawn at their heads. Farris wrapped the rope around his wrist once more and leapt into the air.

He landed his right foot directly into Horemheb's chest, sending the army general flying backwards across the floor.

Farris tossed the rope over the beam and rolled it into a messy ball in his arm.

“Hit it! Let's go!”

Farris hugged his sister around the waist. The last thing he wanted was for either of them to be left behind. The room shook. The images of the bed, the balcony, and the blowing blue curtains blurred then faded to gray fuzziness. Snaps crackled in the air around them, and sparks burst close enough to burn their skin. Red and purple lightning bolted, threatening to strike their bodies that clasped each other--their only security.

A deafening crash blasted through their bodies, shaking the bones of their arms and legs into jelly. The air swirled with the stench of mildew and dust bunnies. Farris' muscles swelled and ached, then threatened to let go of Sophia's waist. She called something over her shoulder that he could not decipher. The smell of sweat mixed with the overall nausea that Farris felt from spinning. His head was slammed backward and everything went black.

Sophia woke to the smell of burned hair and dusty air swirling around her. She exhaled hard as she felt she had held her breath for an eternity. She reached over to her sleeping brother and put her hand on his chest, feeling for the rhythm of breathing and fell asleep, glad that, although she did not know where they were, they were both alive.

Chapter Summary

Although the preceding piece of fiction does not meet the criteria or level of expertise in professional writing to be a publishable piece of fiction, it does serve other purposes. This project is the proposal of a piece of original example of fiction with minority protagonists in both contemporary and historical settings. They are not limited to settings, regardless of time period, by their ethnic backgrounds but are primary, dynamic characters that operate as their own personalities, where ethnicity is secondary to personal ability and integrity in an attempt to achieve their goals. These characters meet with adversity, power struggles, make mistakes, and learn better ways to survive, which are themes to which young readers may relate.

In Chapter 5, this author's accomplishments will be shared. These include: (a) the completion of the novel, (b) initial responses to the novel by informal readers, (c) analysis of those responses, and (d) recommendations for future studies. As well, this author's reflections on the process of writing a novel, combined with analysis of initial reader responses, will provide an analysis for the next steps for this author as a consumer and analyzer of young adult fiction.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The findings from this project are presented in this chapter. The topics addressed are: (a) what was accomplished, (b) initial responses to the novel, (c) information gained by this author by that feedback, (d) what were the limitations of this project, and (e) what different approaches this author might take in future in regard to writing young adult multicultural historical fiction.

Overview of the Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project was to write an original example of fiction with minority protagonists in both contemporary and historical settings. As writers of young adult fiction and non-fiction must take responsibility to ensure that all children and groups are represented in writing, the more young adult literature that reflects the population of young people in the United States and other countries must represent minority groups as primary, powerful characters. By doing so, more young people may recognize a greater ability to associate with characters in writing. Young adult literature is used for a variety of situations: (a) as instructional material for the classroom, (b) as a tool to develop empathy and social consciousness in multicultural curricula, and (c) as a means to communicate the norms of adolescence from such factors as power struggles to physical development. Thus, although this project is not a publishable piece of fiction, it is an attempt at multicultural fiction, interesting to many young people.

Author's Accomplishments

This author accomplished the completion of her first novel, which was included in Chapter 4 in its entirety, and she requested and received feedback from three readers of young adult fiction. Although the author had taken several creative writing courses, all of which required extensive creative writing in and out of class, the completion of this novel posed a greater challenge, as it had to meet the criteria of being not only a piece of young adult fiction but also include: (a) multicultural protagonists, (b) contemporary and historical settings, (c) research into the facts of Ancient Egypt to produce accurate details on the setting, (d) maintain throughout the novel the gifted abilities of the protagonists, and (e) continually remind the reader that the protagonists were not Anglo European children but from multiple ethnicities.

Reader Responses

This author works with other individuals who read young adult fiction and non-fiction for the purposes of pleasure, education, and for presentation in the classroom. Three of these individuals were asked to review the novel and give their general feedback on its usefulness. These communications included:

1. Email communication with educator and parent from Ontario, Canada from Spring 2005
2. Email communication with educator and parent from Vancouver, Canada from Spring 2005; and
3. Email communication with an adolescent from Denver, United States from Summer 2005

Analysis of Reader Responses

All three readers commented that the book was a good first draft, also, they agreed that it was not written at the standard of young adult literature that is presently published. The Ontario contact commented that the writing was both too wordy and too descriptive and that both the opening and closing scenes lacked the proper format of other young adult adventure books. The adolescent commented that the characters were a driving element of the book but additional revisions were needed to perfect the voice and point of view in the novel. Finally, the Vancouver reader commented that the book could be used as an instructional piece in the teaching of ancient Egypt but required additional revisions to meet the standard.

Since the standard for young adult literature is as high as that of adult literature, many criteria are taken into consideration when reviewing a piece of writing for what purposes it may serve. These include: (a) quality of writing, (b) accuracy of facts, (c) presentation engaging to young adults, and (d) outline matches the format of other books in the same genre. For the purposes of this project, the author attempted to incorporate minority protagonists in positions of power and to present them as extraordinary as individuals, rather than extraordinary as minority representatives. Although this author found that each of these quality criteria is extraordinarily important alone, the challenge is to produce a piece of fiction that successfully meets all the standards well.

Limitations of the Study

In considerations of the limitations of this study, this author believes that ongoing writing practice is required to achieve the criteria of both quality, publishable young adult fiction but also fiction that may appeal to a greater audience by the incorporation of minority protagonists. This author feels satisfied that one of the criteria was met, most particularly, accuracy of facts about Ancient Egypt, but also that it is possible with more practice at writing to achieve more of the criteria of quality writing. As every writing experience is a learning experience, another attempt to rewrite this novel may produce a piece of writing that achieves two or more of the quality writing criteria.

Another limitation was the time factor. With more time, additional improvements could be made to the novel, which may produce a higher quality of writing, and additional attempts could improve it further with a potential end result of a piece of writing that may meet all of the quality writing criteria.

An additional limitation was lack of experience with writing. With experience comes greater ease of applying the requirements of any profession. Although this author has taught writing and literature, she is not a writer by profession. Therefore, the challenge to write well posed a greater challenge at this point than it might at a later date with additional experience gained.

Recommendations for Future Action

Presently, this author does not intend to rewrite this novel for improvement but does intend to learn more about the format and writing styles used in young adult literature by the study of both young adult novels and non-fiction pieces by writers of young adult fiction. This author intends to develop a greater base of knowledge from

which to work for future fiction writing attempts with the purpose that a new piece of writing at a higher quality may be achieved.

Project Summary

In conclusion, this author believes her thesis was partially proven. Young adult literature is used for multiple purposes by young people, educators, and parents. It is possible to create a work of fiction that appeals to a greater audience by the incorporation of a minority protagonist, as well as to present a story that teaches and entertains. A greater base of skill and knowledge are required to achieve that goal by this author, but it is possible. As the demographics of the U. S. changes, so will its writers, as literature reflects the reality of people and the culture. As writers of young adult fiction enjoy a fan base of both young people and adults, the market for such literature should continue to exist in order to fulfill the purposes of education and pleasure.

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