

FROM THE CLASSIC ERA OF DOCTOR WHO

LETHBRIDGE-STEWART

FEATURING A BRAND NEW STORY



THE BLACK EGGS OF KHUFU
TOM DEXTER

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Lethbridge-Stewart: The Series

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LETHBRIDGE
—
STEWART

THE BLACK EGGS OF KHUFU

Tom Dexter



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2022



STORY ONE
**ASSIGNMENT IN
ALEXANDRIA**

'HAVE YOU ANY IDEA EXACTLY HOW FAR THAT is?'

It was the third time he'd asked. Colonel Lethbridge-Stewart's journey had taken close to a week to reach Cairo, and Ahmed was certain that this fact was about to be brought up again, but the site of the black granite slab proved to be enough of a distraction.

The trawler tilted slightly from the weight as the surface water burst, and the pulley system's engine finally won. Two divers guided the rock as the holding ropes strained, heaving it onto the main deck. The sunlight almost crackled in the air with heat across the Alexandria shoreline. Even the noise of the Abu Qir Bay docks in the distance seemed to go silent as the crew stared suspiciously at what they could now see. It looked new, freshly carved; completely bereft of any decay or barnacles.

'I thought you said it had been down there for centuries?' Lethbridge-Stewart levelled an instamatic camera at its indented texture, neatly layered in rows, which was almost like lettering, as he tried to focus the lens and follow his orders to document everything.

Ahmed moved alongside him. 'Paris and Helen of Troy were stranded here, when Menelaus was trying to hunt them down.'

'Had to wait for the ferry, did they?'

'The city was lost to the waters nearly two thousand years ago, Colonel. Artefacts, trinkets, trivial remains compared to, well... They've been found before, but nothing like these have ever been seen.'

'To be honest, old chap, that still doesn't tell me why I'm here.' Lethbridge-Stewart focused on a clearly chiselled image. As far as he could see, it was the oval outline of an egg, nothing more. 'These are just rocks.'

'You need to speak to General Cosgrove,' said Ahmed and he smiled wearily. He already knew what he was

letting Lethbridge-Stewart in for. 'The more of an impact you make...' His voice was competing with the engine as the Bull Nose Morris veered wildly round a corner. '...The more likely people are to remember you.'

Street vendors dived for cover, some grabbing baskets of fruit and trinkets to get their stock out of the car's way. Lethbridge-Stewart found he was clinging tightly to the passenger door and the side of his seat.

'I'm just not used to counter intelligence officers being so-'

'Colourful?' General Cosgrove grinned beneath his huge handle bar moustache. The bow tie, white fatigues and pith helmet made him even more distinctive. 'Like I say. Method behind the madness. Anyone takes a bullet to me, it'll be noticed that I'm gone. Too many questions. Don't you think?'

The brakes screeched as the car pulled up at a street corner. Cosgrove leaned out of the window and spoke with a vendor, clearly haggling. In seconds they were on the move again, narrowly avoiding a donkey loaded with palm leaves.

'Here, try this on.'

Before he could say anything, Lethbridge-Stewart felt a hat being wedged onto his head.

'It's called a fez, old man. Like I say. Time for you to be noticed.'

The brakes screeched again. A handcart just ahead had overturned, and traders were arguing over the value of damaged melons as Cosgrove sounded the car horn.

'Suppose I'd better take you to see the alien.'

'The what?' Lethbridge-Stewart stared at the general.

'Well, hardly likely to call him Colin or Clive, am I now?'

Lethbridge-Stewart stood in the dimly lit room, lightly

fingering the metal implements on the mortician's tray in front of him.

'How many people know about this?'

'I should think half of Cairo. The walls are lead lined, under the advice of your colleague. Professor something-or-other? But they're not sound proofed.'

'Yes, yes, quite. Possible radiation. Has it been checked?' Lethbridge-Stewart sorted through the tools on the tray. Hardly the most hygienic equipment, but the hospital ward was on lock down and there were no staff to help.

'Technology here is less than forthcoming. We just have to make do. Let's put it like this, nobody's died yet, if that's any consolation?'

'Is there something I could keep this in?' Using a pair of tweasers, Lethbridge-Stewart delicately lifted a brittle section of skin. Against the overhead light bulb, there was a grey texture to it and veins coursing through its structure, like a petrified leaf.

'We've given him the code name of "The Tourist". Thought it was rather apt.' Cosgrove emptied an envelope from his inside jacket pocket and handed it over.

The body was dehydrated, technically mummified by the sand and dust that had enveloped it for so long, but while the integrity of its shape was clearly humanoid, its anatomy was anything but. The oval skull and eye sockets, the thin lips curled wide in pain across the jaw, and the protruding tendons weaving round the arms to the extended length of its fingers, curled as though clutching something. It was impossible to tell its age, but the height was almost certainly that of a child.

'Cosgrove, I truly hope there's a reason why you didn't alert the authorities as soon as this was found?'

'That's where things get a bit murky.' Cosgrove looked flustered as Lethbridge-Stewart turned to face

him, pocketing the skin sample.

‘What on earth do you mean?’

‘It’s a case of who else it would alert, and what they might do with the egg.’

There was a very awkward pause.

The binoculars focused in on Cosgrove’s car as a porter drove it to the front of the hospital, and Kraylin watched as the general climbed into the passenger seat and allowed Lethbridge-Stewart to drive off.

From his vantage point on the roof across the street, he turned to Levovitch. Both men were dressed like tourists, too clean and crisp to be real. Levovitch examined a clear photograph of Lethbridge-Stewart arriving at the airport.

‘It’s him. His passport said he was a salesman.’

‘Will they never have an original thought?’ Kraylin reached into a satchel across his shoulder, producing a cartographers’ map. ‘Do you think they’ll leave it until morning?’

‘If that’s who I think it is, Kraylin, he’ll be driving to the pyramid as we speak.’

The Pyramid of Khufu? Last of the seven wonders of the world, so it’s not exactly discreet.’

The left headlight spluttered on the Morris as another hole in the road made it feel like the car was about to shatter.

‘Less throttle, old man.’ General Cosgrove patted the dashboard affectionately. ‘You’re talking about 756 feet each side at the base, maybe close to 460 feet high. Bit of an expedition, whatever way you look at it.’

‘And the body?’

‘Our friend the Tourist?’ Cosgrove tried to unscrew the top of his hip flask. He never enjoyed travelling at night. ‘There’s an ascending passageway to the king’s

burial chamber. Found him cowering in the corner.'

'How long had it been there? Fifty, sixty years?'

Cosgrove pondered for a moment. 'Oh, well before looters emptied the place. And that was around 820 AD.'

The car brakes slammed on, creating a small dust cloud, and the wheels skidded in the sand. Lethbridge-Stewart stared at the general. 'You mean to say he was there for over a thousand years?'

'He just appeared. Part of the wall caved in and disgorged him. Fact of the matter is, he was probably sealed inside with the pharaoh himself, and that was another two thousand or so before that!'

The egg was black. It was so densely coloured that it had no definite curve to its surface. Like a hole had been punched through into unending darkness. The longer Kraylin gazed at it, the more its surroundings slipped out of focus. It almost started to draw you in, but its embossed carvings were enough to distract you.

Four small pyramids encircled its body, each with a different hieroglyph at their lowest point, leading around to a dominant facial outline, raised against its texture at the front of the stone. Closed eyes, downturned mouth, round head. Almost human, but not quite. A crude childlike representation, or something else entirely? It was impossible to tell.

'The analysis is rudimentary.' Levovitch approached Kraylin's desk, flicking through paperwork. The office was functional, and hardly befitting their rank, but their stature after the mission's inevitable success made it tolerable. 'Summary?'

'The texture is part granite, part substance unknown, fused at an apparent molecular level. There's no available drill point to break through the surface.'

'Is that it?'

Kraylin stared at him. 'As I said, sir. Rudimentary at

best.'

'It tells us nothing, apart from what we can already see.' Levovitch gestured to the markings on the egg. 'Four pyramids. Four eggs. It's obvious. We have the first, so the others are clearly in other burial chambers. But which ones?'

'The two Englishmen. What if they find them?'

Levovitch looked concerned. 'The old man has authority we cannot buy. The other has the expertise. We let them figure it out, and then...'

The desk drawer opened and Kraylin took a revolver out, carefully placing it in front of him as he leaned back and smiled at Levovitch. 'We collect the pieces.'

The oil lamp offered very little in the way of reassuring light as Cosgrove led the way down a sloping tunnel. They were entering the heart of the pyramid.

'Wouldn't it have been wise to bring something more suitable than, well... Just that?' Lethbridge-Stewart would have paid good money for a generator and lights at that precise moment, or at least a couple of good torches.

'We won't need it. Believe me.' The mouth of the passageway suddenly opened up, leading into a far bigger chamber. Cosgrove went straight inside. 'Just you watch.'

Gaping like a jagged fracture in the mouth of the limestone, the excavated entrance leading into the Pyramid had several ropes cordoning it off. In the headlights of the approaching truck, the two on-site security guards lay on the ground, quite dead.

The brakes clicked on silently, and Levovitch dropped to the ground as he jumped down from the passenger seat. His marksmanship was still good. With his rifle across his shoulder, he reached into the tool box clamped to the vehicle's running board and found the hammer he

needed.

Glancing towards the general's Morris, parked a few feet from the guards, he started to close in towards it.

The general held the lamp as high as he could. Now wearing a fez as well, its colour gave the air a slightly red tinge. Just over six feet wide at floor level, the walls of the Grand Gallery were built at an angle, tapering up to a narrow roof so it was only a couple of feet wide at its peak.

'I call it the glow worm effect. Can you see it?'

He dimmed the fuel feed to the lamp and the wick spluttered. Sure enough, a soft fluorescence hung in the air, as though the stones were absorbing and enhancing the light.

'Remarkable, don't you think?'

'And a bit too far ahead of its time for comfort.' Lethbridge-Stewart frowned as he brushed his fingers across the wall. The dust left a faint glow on his skin.

Cosgrove stood in the far corner, scuffing his heel around. 'Poor fellow was found down here.'

Lethbridge-Stewart took the lamp from him and held it up, looking towards the ceiling. 'Dust generally falls downwards, correct?' He grabbed a slender pole lying on the ground. Tying the lamp to the end of it with a handkerchief, he glanced at the general. 'In order to find the answer, you simply have to know how to look!' Directly overhead at marked intervals, four circular holes ran along the ridge of the roof. 'And our friend was found clutching a stone egg, you say?'

'For dear life,' said Cosgrove. 'About the size of a pineapple.'

'What would you think if I suggested it could slot perfectly into one of those holes, General?'

'Good grief! So, what about the other three?'

Before he could answer, a rifle butt struck the back of

Lethbridge-Stewart's head.

A dull, almost muffled explosion brought Lethbridge-Stewart back into consciousness. He found himself in the general's car, and the bonnet was enveloped in flames.

Lethbridge-Stewart emerged into the rising sunlight squinting, dazed and bleary, but immediately went to unholster his revolver as he saw Cosgrove's body being dragged into an unfamiliar truck in the distance. He didn't understand. This was a civilian operation. No weapons. Strict instructions.

'Blast!'

The figure who had dragged Cosgrove's limp body turned and mock saluted with a malicious smile as the vehicle started to pull away.

Lethbridge-Stewart, bewildered, watched the truck drive into the distance. The route back to Cairo ran through the eastern cemetery next to the main pyramid. That much was clear, and the dust trail spiralling up from the truck gave a fairly accurate indication of where they were. They were moving slowly; the route was too hazardous until they hit the main road.

Lethbridge-Stewart had no choice. He would have to run, heading for the village the general had driven through, Nazlet el-Samman. An idea struck him. The route was entirely downhill.

'First rule with fire,' he muttered, sprinting. 'No water? Find sand.'

The fez proved invaluable as he threw scoop after scoop of sand across the flames, which quickly went out. The engine was destroyed, but it was the steering that mattered, and that was intact. With the brake cables snapped, there was no turning back.

Heaving with all his strength, he managed to push the car around so it hit the brow of the slope leading

through the graves directly ahead, and the basic rules of inertia began to work. Kicking the door off the driver's side as the wheels started to gain speed, he balanced on the vehicle's frame, working the steering and aiming towards where he guessed he'd meet the truck.

Fragile slabs of stone exploded into fragments as the Morris clipped them, ricocheting it left and right but still letting it close in. The first bullets hitting the bodywork made it all too clear he'd been spotted. With one arm supporting him through the burned-out windscreen, he ducked down and tried to slant the car at an angle so it gave him more cover as it moved.

A spray of bullets hit the front outer tyre. Immediately, the car began to swing back towards the gunfire. One shot strafed and clipped his fez.

'Now that's just not cricket!'

Snapping off the wing mirror with his free hand, Lethbridge-Stewart managed to angle the reflection at the truck. Maybe two hundred, two hundred and fifty feet until he hit the road alongside them. If he wasn't looking in that direction at that exact moment, he'd never have seen something fly through the air and land in the foot well of the passenger's seat.

Four to eight second fuses.

He jumped, forward rolling, perfect parachute drop, counting out loud, waiting for the grenade to go off. As he reached twelve seconds, he uncurled himself and looked up. The fireball detonated and the Morris splintered, like a jagged burst paper bag.

'Thirteen seconds...'

Without even realising that someone was standing directly alongside him, he looked up in alarm as he spoke.

'The fuse. Far too long. The only people that have that kind of thing... They're Russians!'

The Bedouin camel trader smiled at him, near toothless, with those that remained as fractured as his

English. He'd watched the whole thing and knew there was a sudden need for transport.

'You want camel?'

Lethbridge-Stewart glanced at the line of creatures flanking out behind him.

'I have no money.'

'Give me watch. On your arm. I trade you for fastest.'

As Lethbridge-Stewart stood up, he noticed the pale green wooden crates strapped to the sides of the camels.
'Where on earth did you get those?'

'The shrapnel from the car, it must have hit the petrol tank.'

Levovitch climbed through the canvas flap leading to the rear of the truck, and slumped into the seat alongside Kraylin, who sat at the wheel.

'We'll make it back to the city. The cars are waiting for us there. Then we question him. Find out what knowledge they have.'

Kraylin glanced in the rear-view mirror. 'You said the other Englishman was dead.'

Levovitch looked at him, puzzled. Leaning round, he opened the passenger door and looked out. With fuel running out fast, the truck was slowing, and the camel charging towards them was gaining fast. Sitting astride the hump and clinging on to the reigns, the Englishman managed to return the earlier mock salute before reaching down to his side.

Levovitch swung back into the seat, bellowing at Kraylin. 'Get off the road! He's weaponised the camel!'

Kraylin spun the steering wheel around.

In theory, the World War II rocket launcher Lethbridge-Stewart had got off the camel dealer was decommissioned and heading for the scrap yard. Fortunately, he knew how to make it work again. Resting

the barrel across the hump, he primed the weapon and shouldered it, taking aim. The trigger clicked, Lethbridge-Stewart's shoulder jerked and there was a dull thud as the missile spat violently towards its target, just as the truck moved around so its side now faced him. Clipping across the tarpaulin roof, it detonated in the air, but the fireball licked the side, setting the vehicle's top alight.

As the camel slowed to a stop, the vehicle turned to face them head on. The doors opened, two men leaned into view, one of them aiming a rifle at Lethbridge-Stewart, who'd already reloaded and levelled the launcher right at their engine.

'We have the egg,' spat the one without the gun.

'I've primed my rocket. Hardly a stalemate. If you shoot, chances are I'll fire this either way, and you won't be able to tell the difference between your ash and the sand.'

'What do you want?'

'Just my colleague.'

The armed man tried to whisper through gritted teeth. 'He doesn't want the egg?'

'He's bluffing! Why is the old man more valuable?'

'They must have figured out where the eggs are! He's too valuable to lose...'

'I can hear you, you know.' Lethbridge-Stewart took the fez off and balanced it on the camel's head. He took clearer aim. 'I'm going to count from ten. Ten...'

No movement.

'Nine... Eight... Seven...'

The first Russian motioned to his armed comrade.

'Six... Five... Four...'

The armed man's eyes narrowed.

'Three... Two...'

'And we get to keep the egg?'

'Of course. And as a military man, you have my word.'

The Russian slammed the passenger door.

In seconds, Cosgrove stumbled out from behind the truck, his head bleeding slightly, clutching his fez to his stomach. The engine started as he moved towards the camel, the gears snatching loudly and the still burning vehicle turned around. Clinging on to the side of the door, still aiming his rifle, the Russian finally went back inside the driver's cabin as they moved off.

'Is there room for one more?' The general was slightly breathless.

Lethbridge-Stewart swung his leg round and jumped down to the ground. 'Be my guest. Are you alright, old chap?'

'Nothing a shot of whisky wouldn't cure.'

'Funny you should say that.' Lethbridge-Stewart produced the general's hip flask from his pocket. 'You dropped it earlier.'

Cosgrove took a swig and he was helped up onto the camel. He threw Lethbridge-Stewart's bullet wounded fez down. 'These Russians. Not what they once were. Cold War must have numbed their brains.'

'So they did have it with them?'

Lifting the egg out of his own fez, Cosgrove passed it down to Lethbridge-Stewart. 'Hardly likely to let it out of their sight, were they now?'

'Could it have become trapped?'

'Don't get what you're saying, old boy.' General Cosgrove refilled his pipe and lit it.

Ahmed was on a losing battle as soon as he brought the idea up. 'Maybe there was a way to get in and out of there, after it was sealed?'

'Tissue samples have been analysed. Expedition from the British Museum based in Cairo. Amazing how co-operative people get when you impound their passports.'

While they talked, Lethbridge-Stewart examined several maps charting the tunnel systems within the pyramids. None of it added up. The pyramid of Khafre, Menkaure, the pyramids of Queens; there was far more than one, so why Khufu?

'Strategically, there's an awful lot of wasted space in these things.' He tapped the one showing Khufu.

'That's what I mean.' Ahmed moved to join him. 'It's all down to finding the right entrances. There are theories that tunnels could lead off for miles, which take you into burial chambers we have no idea about.'

'I see. More camouflage. Now, that I can understand.' Lethbridge-Stewart moved the egg around like a paperweight, holding another map down as Cosgrove moved alongside them.

'They are graves, you know,' he said. 'Rest in peace, and all that.'

'Yes, quite, but what else was in there with them, these pharaoh chaps? What was our friend, the Tourist, trying to do?' Taking the egg in his hand and looking at the motifs beneath each pyramid, Lethbridge-Stewart tried to grasp the logic of what they meant. The shadow he cast from the sun as he held it, made a straight line reach out across its surface. No matter which way he turned the egg, the shadow remained solid and resolute. 'Of course!'

Both Ahmed and Cosgrove looked at him, and he smiled and raised the egg up, so it was level against the pyramid in his eye line.

'The four pyramids,' he said. 'They're like the points of a compass.'

'And you sold the man the rocket launcher?' The Bedouin trader smiled toothlessly and nodded as Kraylin counted out note after note of money. 'You have no idea how happy that makes me.' Turning around, he signalled to

Levovitch, who stood, rifle in hand, by the gates of a vast military scrapyard.

‘Signal for them to move out. We might make it there before sunset.’

Firing the rifle once like a starter pistol, Levovitch waved his arm in a large arc. Engines roared, creaking into life. Battered and dented from shellfire, but still working, a line of four abandoned Nazi tanks began to edge forward, turrets swivelling and levelling their barrels as the drivers brought them back to life.

‘So, my friend gave me some advice on how they clear quarries these days. Instant archaeology if you like. Saves weeks on the digging.’ General Cosgrove held up a stick of dynamite he’d produced from his pocket, and he fiddled with the fuse.

A few feet away, Lethbridge-Stewart and Ahmed stood at a cornerstone.

‘We’ve got one egg, which he seemed to have died trying to hide,’ Lethbridge-Stewart said. ‘So where do you think he’d bury the others?’

‘Excuse me.’ Cosgrove pushed past. ‘Some believe the foundations go down maybe a hundred feet. What if it’s somewhere on the surface?’

‘Some sort of hidden external chamber?’ Lethbridge-Stewart glanced up the ridge of stone they were facing.

‘Better stand back, chaps,’ Cosgrove said. ‘I’m useless at setting timing fuses.’

Only four seconds passed before the explosion went off.

Counterbalanced against the walls of the Grand Gallery, the scaffolding Ahmed had unloaded from his truck reached up to the ceiling, allowing Lethbridge-Stewart access to a small platform via a ladder of planks. He carefully held the first egg, lifting it towards one of the

ornate carved holes he'd spotted.

The explosion outside caused a shower of dust to fall, making him choke slightly.

'How much more of that damned stuff has he got?' Lethbridge-Stewart asked.

'That's the seventh,' Ahmed counted. 'But, we have three of the eggs.'

Lethbridge-Stewart tried again. 'Not the best batting average, but like you say.'

The tip of the egg touched something and an interlocking ring of stone, like an iris, suddenly slid into place around it, holding it fast.

'Gentlemen, number four!'

Even from as high as he was, Lethbridge-Stewart could see that there were wisps of smoke drifting off Cosgrove's jacket.

'You really shouldn't stand so close when they detonate, General.'

'I know, I know.' Handing the latest egg to Ahmed, Cosgrove started to head back outside. 'Old age offers a blissful excuse for making mistakes, when you actually know what you're doing all along.' He disappeared into the adjoining corridor.

Another egg slotted and locked into place. Ahmed loaded the pulley they'd rigged up to carry them up to the ceiling.

In the distance neither of them noticed the echoing rumble that seemed to be closing in.

So much dust erupted when the scaffolding collapsed that the air seemed to be shrouded in fog. The last egg locked into position when the first wave of shellfire hit, the whole structure lurched as Ahmed ran for cover, and by holding on to the support bars as it slowly collapsed, Lethbridge-Stewart avoided any rapid or fatal descent.

He was still badly winded and choking, but even as

he tried to get up and regain his balance, he could see that all four eggs were starting to pulsate with light, and a growing spread of energy was reaching down the sides of the walls like roots tunneling into the ground from a tree.

To his side, he caught Ahmed's hand and pulled his arm back as he reached out to touch the pattern of veins that were forming, clearly powering something. But where was it?

Another volley of explosions shook the foundations, and a crack split across the floor behind them, gasping out long dead oxygen from the air pocket of a chamber somewhere below.

Lethbridge-Stewart had to shout to Ahmed above the noise that was enveloping them. 'Where's Cosgrove?'

Ahmed started to run towards the entrance as he realised the old man was in danger. As Lethbridge-Stewart followed, neither of them saw the wall panel behind them start to slide open.

'Sometimes, it's time to fight. Other times you have to realise the odds are stacked against you. This is probably one of them.' Cosgrove couldn't raise his arms any higher to show he'd surrendered. The barrels of four tanks were focused squarely on him.

Lethbridge-Stewart and Ahmed stopped dead in the entrance mouth as they saw what was happening. Kraylin moved to the prow of the lead tank, and this time he saluted Lethbridge-Stewart.

'Gentlemen. Come into the light. Stand a little closer together and I can be economical. Maybe one shell will finish all three of you at once?'

'It's just a map.'

Levovitch slapped Lethbridge-Stewart hard across the face. 'Try again. And this time, make me believe you're not lying.'

Kraylin held up the map. He grabbed one of the pens Cosgrove kept clipped to his breast pocket, and started to draw across the paper.

'You ignore here, here and here...'

A line linked the Pyramids of Queens.

'You don't even look here...'

Again, the line continued to link the points of the pyramids as he joined it to the other larger structures

'And yet you figure out to go here.'

As an outline formed, emphasising the peak of the final pyramid, Lethbridge-Stewart suddenly saw what everything meant.

'Major? Major? Come quickly!'

One of Kraylin's men charged out of the pyramid, frantically trying to get his attention. Curious, he snapped at Levovitch as he moved off, dropping the map to the ground.

'Just one move, one breath out of place...'

Levovitch smiled.

'Can you see it?' Lethbridge-Stewart barely whispered.

'What's that, old man?' Cosgrove spoke under his breath.

'Look at the map. The way he's linked the pyramids... Don't you see what it is?'

Ahmed's eyes widened. 'It's a circuit board!'

Lethbridge-Stewart looked at him, his voice barely audible. 'And I think we've just completed the loop.'

'What is this?'

The doorway had opened. It hadn't taken long before it was found. A simple chamber, lined with gold, and at the epicentre, ornate and crafted to perfection, a sceptre embedded in the ground at the end of a narrow trench, leading to a raised dais.

Kraylin marvelled, not so much at the value the jewels

and precious metals clearly had, but more at the power and authority the room must have represented.

'It looks like some kind of throne, sir.'

'Yes, yes you're right.'

The words one of his guards had said were all that he needed to hear. Kraylin glided around to the dais and slowly sat on it, almost regally. He looked up.

'Bring the prisoners to me. Now!'

The Grand Gallery was now pulsating with energy, the walls seeming to echo with a deep heartbeat as though the pyramid was powered up, almost coming alive.

As they were led towards the new chamber, Cosgrove glanced at the ceiling. The eggs were now no longer visible. The whole ceiling was a mass of undulating light.

'Wish the dynamite had cracked one of the wretched things. What use is a cracked egg?'

Lethbridge-Stewart glanced at him for a moment, his mind racing over what he'd just heard. 'I won't kneel for you.'

Ahmed and the general were already on the floor. Their refusals had been greeted with a rifle butt to the temple, and as Levovitch drew back, ready to do the same, Kraylin motioned for him to stop.

'No!'

'Why not?' Levovitch stared at him.

'Humour me. I want to know why. Are you trying to hide fear with pride? Is that the English way?'

'Not at all. I just never bow to insanity.'

Levovitch went to strike Lethbridge-Stewart, but Kraylin was once again quick to intervene.

'No. If you won't bow... Then bring me that sceptre.'

'I don't think you realise what that probably is.'

'Levovitch. Shoot his friends. In the back.'

Levovitch breached his rifle and aimed at Ahmed.

'Humour me for a moment. Soldier to soldier.' As

Lethbridge-Stewart stepped forward, other rifles unlocked and took aim.

Kraylin waved his hand, the barrels lowered.
‘Of course.’

‘You have the eggs, you have the power that they possess, what possible use is humiliating us to you now?’

Kraylin’s stare didn’t falter.

‘Politically, none whatsoever. Like you say, I am the power over all of you now, so even sport would be trivial as an answer. No. It’s not even professional. It’s personal. Bring me the sceptre; that will destroy you more than any bullet ever could.’

As Lethbridge-Stewart took a step forward, he just glanced at Levovitch. ‘You realise you’re next, don’t you?’

‘What?’

‘What if he’s testing me? I’m an obvious successor to you.’

‘He’s lying.’ Kraylin dismissed the threat, but the slight laugh Lethbridge-Stewart allowed himself did more than enough damage.

‘What are you laughing at?’ The tip of Levovitch’s ever present rifle pressed against Lethbridge-Stewart’s left temple.

‘You’ll find out.’ Lethbridge-Stewart’s smile as he turned and looked over the weapon made Levovitch snap.

He moved forward and took hold of the sceptre. ‘It should be me.’

‘Get back to where you were! The colonel will bring it to me, then you can kill him.’

Levovitch threw the rifle to the ground, pushing the sceptre as he grasped it. There was a loud click as it seemed to click into a notch, and again as it moved closer to Kraylin.

The other guards drew closer, watching as the hum of energy in the room increased.

'Move back to your position, soldier!'

The sceptre clicked again, moving closer.

Lethbridge-Stewart grabbed the rifle, and unnoticed with Ahmed, helped Cosgrove to his feet.

'Come on.'

'What is that thing?' The general was bewildered.

'It's no sceptre. It's a lever. We completed the loop, they're about to turn it on!'

Raging, Kraylin tried to stand, but his hands, his body, everything was fusing with the dais as the sceptre finally touched his hands. In seconds, the surrounding volume of light was blinding, and the last thing his eyes saw was a futile salute from Levovitch.

In the Grand Gallery outside, Ahmed led the general towards the tunnel as fast as he could, while Lethbridge-Stewart took aim at the furious blaze of energy overhead. He opened fire, backing away, hoping he could get out in time as the smell of burning dust billowed out of the chamber.

The entrance was lined with rubble. Areas had caved in. There'd be years of excavating ahead to find any sign of the Grand Gallery or what they'd seen happen there. Like so many things the dust would become sand. Behind him, the reassuring bellicose groan of Cosgrove as Ahmed helped him to his feet proved any injuries would be fleeting.

And there, in the sand, Lethbridge-Stewart's fez. He picked it up and brushed the dust away with his sleeve. A reminder, if one should be needed, of what may have happened had he not been called in.



STORY TWO
**THE EASTER
INVASION**

'AND YOU just pull the cord and this thing opens up? Marvellous what they can do these days!'

Rifiki stared at General Cosgrove, sitting on the edge of the seat opposite him in the helicopter's passenger bay. The Bell UH-1 Iroquois was ex-military and relatively safe, but the old man was fidgeting around with the straps of his parachute and liable to activate it at any second.

'All the things you have done? All your years in military service, and you've never used one before?' Rifiki was incredulous.

'Never had the need, old chap! No time for all that jumping and forward rolling nonsense. Planes tend to get blown up when they get hit, don't you think?... Well, at the least the ones I've shot down did!'

Cosgrove pulled a fat Cuban cigar from inside his jacket pocket, biting the end off and spitting it out through the open doorway, watching it spiral down through the air like a stray bullet. As ever, he was wearing his uniform of pale white fatigues, colourful bow tie and braces. For once, his pith helmet was clenched tightly in his hands and the warm air blasting around him made his handle bar moustache, to Rifiki's mind, look like fluttering white feathers.

It had been less than twenty-four hours since Cosgrove had arrived in the Valparaiso region. The inevitable dinner with the Polynesian Ambassador had descended into a now blurred recollection of decanting too many varieties of brandy, and the journey to Rapa Nui was beginning to take its toll. There was only so much coffee he could try and down before take-off.

'You're not asking me any questions, General?' Rifiki shifted the rifle around he was carrying rather awkwardly. He was an archaeologist. His job was to preserve and respect, not to shoot at things, but the Chilean General Javier had ordered him to protect

Cosgrove when they left the airbase, no matter what.

'I observe, I collate the facts based on what I can see and I react,' Cosgrove's philosophy was also his mantra, but it mainly acted as his excuse to avoid any briefings and relentless paperwork. He'd been seconded from Alexandria at short notice, and the interminable journey he was enduring was the result.

Rifiki had been overseeing some minor excavation work and made a discovery. Something that had set off alarm signals when he'd telexed the details and sent photographs off to the British Museum in London, asking for their opinion. Within a day he'd been told that a government department, something called the Analysis Bureau, would be sending an advisor incognito and that he was to show him exactly where and what he'd found. Everything was too conspiratorial for his liking, but Cosgrove seemed to revel in it and was being far from indiscreet. The first thing he'd done was tell him who he was, and blown his cover completely.

'Good grief! They're rather splendid, aren't they?' Cosgrove was leaning out of the hatchway, balancing one foot on the running board as he looked at the coastline ahead. They'd arrived at their rather extraordinary destination.

The Moai statues, towering sculpted stone heads, were dotted across the landscape like archaic chess pieces. He knew that there was something like a thousand of them in total, completely unique and far more ominous than he'd ever anticipated.

'Welcome to Easter Island, my friend.' Rifiki smiled, acutely aware that Cosgrove was completely in awe of the monoliths.

'What on earth is that sound?' Cosgrove asked. 'I can hear it, like some kind of echo, even over the engine?'

'That is the chorus of their voices, General, lamenting the sadness of their fate to the wind.'

'Fromage.' General Cosgrove smiled broadly, clutching his lapels with either hand, his foot up on a rock so his body was turned slightly to one side. A plume of smoke drifted up from the cigar clenched between his teeth.

'You look like a hunter, are you sure about this?' Rifiki had taken the photograph, as requested, and pulled the rapidly developing picture out of the side of the camera.

'Flap it around a bit, makes it dry quicker.' The general came over, proudly taking the Polaroid and examining it carefully. 'Sure you don't want one? Bit of a memento and all that?'

'I see them nearly every other day, General.'

'Quite right too! When in Rome, and all that, eh?' Cosgrove was more than pleased. It was true, the image showed him standing next to one of the stone heads, looming over him with its dark frown, looking as though he'd shot it. 'So, where's this hole you've dug up, then?'

The excavation site centred around the side of what Rifiki's team had assumed to be a burial mound, rather like the Saxon ones he'd read about that had been discovered in rural England, but unlike them, there was no central chamber. The ground on Rapa Nui was made of porous rock. That's why there were no trees, they just couldn't take root, so the landscape consisted of nothing but grass on a thin layer of soil. So when it became clear that the mud ran far deeper to one side of the mound, funding was quickly approved to try and find out why.

Sitting squarely in the centre of the hole, so smooth that it glistened with the darkness of oil in the sunlight, sat a carved stone egg, some ten feet high and six feet in circumference, with carvings etched into its black shell.

'From what we can ascertain using seismometers, it seems that there is a hollowness at its core,' Rifiki explained as Cosgrove moved towards it. 'But, there is

no evidence of how a space like that could have been hand carved. It's sealed. No entrance point or exit for any craftsman.'

The face, larger than the ones he'd seen before, was etched deep and framed by hieroglyphs that were beyond deciphering. General Cosgrove's every instinct was to reach out and touch the surface, but he stopped himself.

'It's just there, like an air pocket,' Rifiki continued. 'We just don't know what it is?'

'I've seen something like this not that long ago, but they were smaller. They were all destroyed.' Cosgrove tried not to panic when he realised the implications of what he was thinking. 'They were called the Black Eggs of Khufu, and this, my dear chap... It might well be their God.'

'It could be a form of obsidian, but to carve it and shape it like that, there were no techniques. It pre-dates the right technology by many, many hundreds of years. The raw material is as sharp as glass, and to have survived that long and so perfectly intact?' Rifiki watched as the pilot's crew from the helicopter tethered ropes and straps around the egg.

'How long do you think it's been there?' Cosgrove drew heavily and blew smoke from his cigar.

'We know some of the last heads were buried around 1200. This? It was so deep, maybe three thousand years before that?'

'I'm going to need a flip chart to explain this one to the minister!' The general stepped back a few feet as the Bell helicopter arrived. One of the crew still on board lowered a winch chain, which was quickly attached to the egg. Slowly, it began to ascend. The jerry-rigged set up holding it creaked loudly under the strain.

'It will come back.' The voice was right beside Cosgrove. Quite clear and distinct, despite the sound of

the rotor blades. The people of Rapa Nui had been near wiped out by plague, invaders and dwindling resources for survival over time. Only a few were left, and for the want of a better word, Mergawa was their Shaman.

Cosgrove turned and saw a frail man, his age indistinguishable, but his eyes crystal clear and watery blue. Wrapped in simple cloth robes, he reached out and put his hand on the general's arm.

'To look into the eyes of power, you must hear it speak.'

'I'm sorry, can I help you, old chap?'

'It will come back,' and with that Mergawa turned and walked away.

'Lethbridge-Stewart. Yes, Minister,' said Lethbridge-Stewart with dread as he was handed the phone. 'I'm at the officer's mess, bit of a regimental dinner.'

For once, Colonel Lethbridge-Stewart was wearing a full tuxedo and bow tie. There was always effort to be made at these events, and it wasn't for fear of any judgemental opinions, it was entirely down to his sense of pride. The jacket had been cleaned, trousers pressed and shoes polished to the point of reflection. It was somehow inevitable it would go wrong.

'The British Museum? What, now...? There's a car waiting? Yes, yes, of course. I'm on my way, Minister.'

Lethbridge-Stewart paused as he replaced the receiver. He glanced at his military uniform, clearly hanging in the open wardrobe. The room at the Army and Navy Club was booked for another night, he could make it from Pall Mall to the museum in a matter of minutes. St James's wasn't that far from Bloomsbury, so maybe he could get whatever this was about over and done with relatively quickly, and be back for drinks at the very least. If things went in his favour, maybe even a hint of desert, but there was one thing that suggested

this might not be the case.

The minister had mentioned General Cosgrove. He looked at his holstered revolver hanging next to his jacket and shook his head. Surely there'd be no need for that.

'This had better be good, Cosgrove.' Lethbridge-Stewart strode across the forecourt towards the steps leading up to the British Museum's main entrance.

'My, my, we do look quite the double agent, don't we now?'

'Let's make this quick, shall we?' Lethbridge-Stewart was in no mood for the General's involuntary quips. He moved past him and pushed against the doors leading inside. 'What's exactly going on?'

'Think of it as a reunion. Not so much with an old friend,' Cosgrove headed after him. 'More of a close relative.'

'What is this, their boss?' Lethbridge-Stewart stared at the egg in disbelief. Supported by scaffolding braces while a plinth was being built around it, the rock was due to become the centre piece of an exhibition as you arrived in the vast Great Court of the building.

'Thought you might recognise it? As you can fully appreciate, it sent quite a few memos speeding around the corridors of the Ministry, after what happened in Egypt, if you see what I mean. And, you know, it all seemed so perfectly inert to begin with. Quiet as a lamb.'

'Seemed.' Cosgrove shifted uncomfortably on his feet as Lethbridge-Stewart turned to face him. 'That's past tense. I never like that kind of talk, especially when it crops up in situations like this. What's it doing here.'

'Lateral thinking from the minister. Our boffins scratched their heads a bit and shrugged it off as benign, so why not put it on display, charge a few coins for the punters to see it, and *voilà*, the costs of flying it over are

covered... But, then...'

'But, then what?' Lethbridge-Stewart's eyebrow arched.

'Well, that's why we've called you in. Ransom, if you wouldn't mind?' The general signalled to a security guard who was waiting by a rack of lighting controls on the wall nearby. 'If you'll allow me to demonstrate what happens when it goes dark.'

The lighting clicked off, and just as Cosgrove anticipated, the outline of the carvings on the egg began to glow. Slowly, they started to change from a dull yellow haze, intensifying to a brighter, fiercer golden glow which enveloped the entire structure.

'Is this what happened with the other ones?'

'Not quite on this scale, no. That's quite enough of that, if you could, Ransom?' Lethbridge-Stewart called out, but as Ransom threw the switches, nothing happened. He quickly grabbed his torch from his belt, switched it on and flipped open the fuse box alongside the controls.

'Ransom? I think urgency should be our watchword here?' Cosgrove added. There was an audible hum emitting from the egg, almost a slight grinding sound, like rocks being scraped together

Slowly cracking open, a gap began to appear across the mouth of the face etched into the egg's shell. Stretching down to the jowls, it started to open like a grotesque puppet's jaw. Now radiating light that was far too bright to look directly into, Lethbridge-Stewart shielded his eyes as he saw something roll out and rumble across the floor, splintering the tiles underneath thanks to its extreme weight. The only comparison he could think of was that it looked like a large stone cannon ball.

'What on earth are they?' Cosgrove stepped to one side as a second one appeared, coming to a stop near his

feet.

Ransom moved up beside Lethbridge-Stewart.

'Give me your gun, man! Quick!'

'I'm a museum guard,' Ransom shouted over the noise. 'You're meant to be the bloody soldier, not me!'

At that same moment, Cosgrove cried out, landing badly as he fell. The stone ball was beginning to unfurl, and a spike of rock had stabbed through the air, splintering at the tip to form a hand. The fingers had quickly clasped onto Cosgrove's leg, and his eyes widened in fear as another arm appeared, then legs and slowly as its neck clicked upright, a head. It titled sideways, blankly looking at Cosgrove. It had the carved, impassive face of one of the Moai statues.

Lethbridge-Stewart spun around, sensing movement to his side. Another of the rocks had opened, forming another Moai figure, which arched its back with its arms stretched out. Suddenly its mouth opened wide, before it lurched and leaned forward. The sound it made was guttural, like some kind of echoing roar that had long been lost in time. Splinters of stone spewed out, firing through the air like a machine gun.

'Get down!' Lethbridge-Stewart grabbed Ransom and threw him to the ground, shielding him as the marble flooring around them exploded into dust. Again, his instincts made him look up. A third Moai creature was reaching down, clasping on to Ransom's leg, who cried out in terror as he pointlessly threw his torch at it.

There had to be something that could help. There, by one of the exhibition stands a few feet away, was a fire extinguisher. Lethbridge-Stewart managed to get some purchase with his foot and threw himself towards it, sliding awkwardly as he grabbed it, levering himself up so he could swing it round. The stone figure was so close that the impact on its head was instant, shattering it completely, but the body just stood there refusing to fall.

Only a few seconds passed before the broken fragments of skull started to swirl round, spiralling back up towards it neck and reforming into the same black stare.

'Alistair!' The Moai figure that had attacked Cosgrove was lifting him up in front of the egg, where its mouth had opened even wider with flames belching out from inside. It looked exactly as though the general was about to be fed into a furnace.

Lethbridge-Stewart needed a weapon. There, behind the Moai creature closing in on him. Free-standing metal poles used to link the rope railings surrounding the egg. Basic rugby tactics kicked in. With all his might, Lethbridge-Stewart charged at the figure, near winding himself and only making it stagger back a few steps, but it was enough. He tumbled across the ground as though he was landing from a parachute drop and grabbed the nearest pole, swinging it round his head like a sword before lunging it forward to try and save Cosgrove.

The pole speared the Moai, impaling it to the open, cracked ground behind it. Cosgrove fell free, quickly scrambling to his feet as Lethbridge-Stewart yanked him away from the creature, which was slowly pulling itself away from the pole.

He had no more than two or three seconds. To the right, Ransom was unconscious, maybe he'd been hit, maybe he'd fainted with fear, but now he was being carried towards the egg. There was nothing Lethbridge-Stewart could do. On the left, the other Moai was charging at him, stone shards spitting from its open mouth, arms outstretched.

'Run!' It was all that Lethbridge-Stewart had time to shout.

Nothing was happening. It was a Wednesday. Drawing the short straw for the night patrol shift around Bloomsbury was always like watching paint dry. High

Holborn, Russell Square, Long Acre, it was all the same. The only wild signs of life they encountered were literally cat fights, but PC Smith and PC Weir drove on. Their Ford Zephyr pulled up outside the imposing wrought iron gates that ran along most of Great Russell Street. The lights were clearly on inside the museum, and the noise was muffled from inside, but could still be heard quite clearly.

'Zed Victor One to base, come in?' Smith held the car radio microphone close to his mouth.

'Come in, Zed Victor One, over?' The static crackled over the duty sergeant's voice.

'Sarge, we're outside the museum. Is there anything going on tonight that you know of? Hell of a racket coming from inside.'

At that moment, the doors of the main entrance crashed open. Both Lethbridge-Stewart and Cosgrove charged out and tried to get down the steps as quickly as possible, but the wooden framework behind them suddenly exploded as one of the Moai creatures tore its way out. PC Smith stared open mouthed as Weir grabbed the microphone from him.

'Come in Base, this is Weir! We need back up! Repeat, we need back up right now!'

The impaled Moai struggled, unable to lift itself completely free. The other quickly approached and grabbed the metal pole, pulling it out of its back and snapping it in two as it came free. Lethbridge-Stewart and Cosgrove turned and seemed to watch the egg for a moment as something started to emerge from its open maw.

Crawling at first before rising to its feet, a new shape stood before them. Smaller, more humanoid, but with a similar thick set brow and stone skin, it roared as its mouth opened wide and stone splinters began to belch

out. The only clue that it was once Ransom were the tattered remains of his uniform, which began to fall to the ground as he lurched towards the main entrance.

Alarm sirens suddenly blasted into the air down Shaftsbury Avenue, as the corrugated doors of the fire station echoed loudly as they opened. It was no more than three minutes since the call went out, and two fire engines sped out heading for the museum. As they hit Tottenham Court Road, they joined the line of three black transit vans, all layered with wire mesh protecting the glass and all packed with armed riot police. The first one swerved slightly, only just avoiding a man in a tuxedo who came round a corner and only just avoided getting hit.

Lethbridge-Stewart didn't stop running and kept going, racing towards the barred gateway of a building site. The concrete and steel support structure loomed in front of him, as he started to climb over the fence and into the compound beyond.

Two or three large statues, all acclaimed works of art, sat around in the darkness of the museum forecourt, and Cosgrove was hidden behind what he hoped was the safest option. Lethbridge-Stewart had simply vanished. The last thing he could recall was a sense that he'd been pushed towards his vantage point, and then that he was simply alone. The only real sound was the stone Moai creatures moving around, their rock feet dragging across the paving, and he knew all too well that they were hunting him down.

Abruptly, headlights came into view along the street outside the forecourt's surrounding railings, as emergency sirens blasted through the air. The closest Moai turned and charged towards the main gates, roaring with fury. The first police van swerved away as the driver

saw it rip the left side from its hinges, but the second didn't have time to react. The front of the vehicle just seemed to burst into flames as it hit the creature, with sparks flying everywhere as the engine caught fire.

The police in the first van were out, charging forward and brandishing riot shields, while one of their officers tried to prise open the rear doors of the burning vehicle. The second Moai lunged forward, smashing its fist through the blistering paint on the side panel and dragging another officer out. Using him like some kind of bat, it lifted his body by the legs and swung him, slamming him into the policeman by the doors.

The third van had hit the remaining gate as a Moai stood in front of it, spewing splinters of stone across its side. The metal was beginning to buckle and split before the police inside even had a chance to get out into the street. One officer staggered out, waving for the fire engines to stop and move back to safety.

Peering out to look towards the museum steps, Cosgrove could see Ransom as he stood looking down on the chaos, his mouth opening wide as he screamed with rage. In that split second, one of the Moai crashed to the ground alongside the edge of the statue Cosgrove was closest to. Something had smashed it apart. It was in fragments. Its severed limbs thrashed wildly, and its head lurched sideways as it split in two. Bewildered, the general scrambled to another vantage point and looked out.

Through the clouds of dust this created, Cosgrove could see Lethbridge-Stewart in the driver's compartment of a crane. The caterpillar tracks had crushed the remains of the gate and it was now swinging its arm back as another Moai charged towards it, roaring with anger. With the headlights blazing, the engine revved as the wrecking ball flew forward and smashed into its skull,

disintegrating it completely. As it flew back on itself, it scythed the upper half of the Moai's torso in two.

Moving up out of the shadows to face the crane, the third Moai opened its jaws, stretching wider and wider, as an unrelenting barrage of rocks spat out as it shrieked. The glass on the windscreen shattered as Lethbridge-Stewart threw open the door, and wedged the accelerator so it was locked into first gear and kept moving forward. As he held onto the door frame, ready to jump, the roof of the cab suddenly crunched down. Ransom was crouched there, his head tilting, almost smiling to himself as some part of his memory recognised Lethbridge-Stewart. He leapt forward, tackling him to the ground.

Turning to move away, the third Moai jerked slightly, unable to move as its foot had become caught in the remains of the gate, which the crane was now crushing as it moved forward. Howling with anger, the creature clawed at the ground as it fell to its knees, its body exploding piece by piece as the weight of the vehicle pulverised it.

Lethbridge-Stewart landed heavily on his back, and the weight of Ransom landing on top of him winded him. There was no way he could fight him off. Punch after granite punch slammed into him, but then, quite suddenly, a rod of metal burst through Ransom's chest like a spear. The last thing Lethbridge-Stewart could clearly see before he passed out was Cosgrove, standing behind Ransom, holding the end of the railing he'd used to stop him.

With the air still thick with smoke from the flames the egg had created, torch beams cut through the atmosphere as a trio of soldiers edged into the Great Court. The group captain leading them motioned for them to move further in as he spoke into a walkie-talkie, his voice barely audible through his gas mask.

'Perimeter secured. Please confirm the position of the

object, over?’

‘It should be right in front of you, Group Captain,’ came the crackled reply.

‘Confirm, there is nothing to report. There’s what looks like a small crater surrounded by some scaffolding and bits of rope. There’s scorching on the ground in the immediate area, but the target has gone. Repeat, the target has gone.’

There were splinters of stone surrounding the display plinth, but the main exhibit had simply vanished.

‘You know something? I was looking forward to my dinner tonight.’ Lethbridge-Stewart was sitting on the footplate at the rear of an open ambulance, sipping from the tea he’d been given by the driver. Firemen moved around, while the nurse attending to him wrapped a blanket round his shoulders as Cosgrove closed in. ‘Roast beef. Yorkshire pudding. I suppose that’s an act of complete rebellion, seeing as it’s not even Sunday.’

‘The front window of that sweet shop over the road. Got clean blown in. So much sugar. Diabetes in waiting, if you ask me?’

‘You’re not even listening, are you, Cosgrove?’

‘Sorry, old man. Gone a bit deaf after all that noise. Here...’ He moved his arm around after carefully hiding it behind his back. ‘Little bit of indiscreet looting on the quiet. I’ve got something for you. Happy Easter!’

Wrapped in a large pink bow, sitting in the palm of his hand, was a dark chocolate Easter egg.

Mr Quebec took pride in the fact that his lab coat was always crisp and clean. His heels clipped against the floor as he briskly walked down the featureless corridor, checking the notes on his clipboard, peering through the spectacles perched on the end of his nose. As he approached a lone armed guard standing on duty by a

plain grey door, he either ignored his salute or just didn't notice it.

'Good morning, sir.'

Mr Quebec waved a hand dismissively. The guard produced a key chain and started to unlock the door.

'You're with the Analysis Bureau, if I'm correct, sir?'

'And what exactly would that be?' Mr Quebec peered at him over the rim of his glasses.

'I wouldn't know, sir.'

'Precisely, Sergeant. And that would be because?'

'There's no such thing as the Analysis Bureau?'

'How astute you are. Now go away and guard something more effectively.'

As the door shut behind him, Mr Quebec turned the lights on. The room was now almost blindingly white and sterile, the only feature being a desk bolted to the floor with chairs facing each other from either side. As he sat down and placed his clipboard in front of him, the figure sitting opposite him, heavily cuffed and manacled, slowly looked up. A solid metal face mask shielded his mouth, and his skin sounded like a foot crunching on gravel as it moved.

'Now, your name is Ransom. Am I correct?'

As the sun started to set on Rapa Nui, Mergawa climbed over the prow of the pathway leading down to Rifiki's excavation site. Several villagers followed in a silent procession, carrying spades, hoes and whatever digging tools they'd been able to find.

Even though darkness was beginning to appear, a glow of light seemed to be hovering around the hole. The villagers could easily see to perform the task that lay ahead. Mergawa stood a short distance away, watching quietly and looking down at the egg, now back in its resting place as they started to bury it once again, back where it belonged. Rifiki, now wearing similar cloth robes to his moved up alongside him and quietly smiled.

FOR ANOTHER ADVENTURE WITH COSGROVE READ...

