

Chapter 1

Lost Civilization Found

“Kill d’em dead.”

Grandpa Nathaniel sat back in his chair and gazed out the window as he spake while I listened attentively.

Musket fire echoed across the majestic Nile as we were forced to defend ourselves against a band of local robbers. We had no choice but to stand and fight them since it was too late for us to run and there was nowhere for us to hide

As our heads hit the sand beneath a deadly volley from an array of hostile muskets, I could hear the readily distinguishable accent of a Frenchman barking orders in English to his band of paid brigands. And they were indeed a crew that no English gentlemen would want to meet in a dark alley at midnight. They were at least fifty of the meanest, scruffiest down-and-outers I had ever seen in my young life. Even in the toughest areas of London, the riffraff weren’t such a well-developed species of riffraff.”

“Nathaniel, I’m worried about you,” my father said. “Be sure to keep your head down. That fiery red hair, against the light-colored sand of the riverbank, makes you an easy target. You’re a walking, talking bull’s-eye for that band of no-goods!”

“I will. And Father, please let me help defend the crew. One more musket could make a difference and help us win this battle.”

“Son, you know that handling a musket isn’t something to take lightly. With this weapon, you are the killer of men. You hold a man’s life in your hands. Are you willing to take that responsibility?”

“Father, it seems to me that either they kill us or we kill them in this battle. It is not about playing our Creator. Rather it is about self-preservation, is it not? It is not about philosophizing as our twelve men stare down the barrels of fifty muskets. Perhaps we can continue this philosophical debate at a later date—that is, if we even have the chance in this do-or-die battle.”

My father nodded slowly. “Fine. Here. Take Old Betsy, and use her well. She’ll be a friend for your entire lifetime and serve you as she served my grandfather and my grandfather’s grandfather before that.”

“Thank you. I will respect her and call on her to protect me only when my safety or the safety of my men is placed in great peril.”

While the battle raged on around me, I could not help but admire the fine military weapon my father had just handed me. This beautiful musket bore an exact resemblance to the one in Thomas Gainsborough’s 1748 painting, *Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrews*. The weapon had a single, smooth barrel with an oak stock. She had many dents in her metal barrel and gouges in her wooden stock as remnants of her former glory in a myriad of battles to preserve the life of a relative and the honor of our country. As I gazed at my new friend, the sound of my father’s voice brought me back to the reality of the moment.

“Nathaniel Kenworthy, are you going to use that weapon or ogle it like some beautiful woman who just arrived at the king’s annual ball? Come on, son. You asked to join this fight...now join it!”

“Sorry. I just could not help myself. She is a beauty with such a long history behind her. Imagine, my great-grandfather held her close to his beating heart at the Battle of Culloden; my grandfather carried Old Betsy in the Napoleonic Wars; and my father defended our colonial possession at the Battle of Fort Erie. If she could only speak to me and tell me every exciting detail about her illustrious past.”

“She can speak to you if you load her, aim, and shoot at those brigands who want nothing more than to end our lives for the supplies of food and silver we have in our sailors’ trunks. Come on, lad. Get in the action or return my prize musket to me so I can stop the assault of those dirty thieves.”

Realizing that I had just rung out the last ounce of my father’s patience, I quickly loaded Betsy with some black powder, added the lead shot wrapped in cloth, and rammed it in fully. I primed the flashpan with a small amount of fine powder, closed the flashpan, and raised her to my shoulder. Carefully I aimed at my target. *Boom!* In a moment, I had ended the life of a young would-be robber as he was preparing to load his weapon. At the time, it did not sink in that I had killed a man. The battle was too intense to worry about feeling guilt or elation. Our lives were on the line.

Above the roar of the muskets, I made a tactical suggestion that would turn the battle in our favor. “Father, may I propose that we have the men hide amongst that grove of *Fraxinus dimorpha* about twenty meters from where we are now? This type of species is well known for its rock-hard trunks,

which will help protect the men from the horrible brigands' volley of death."

"I don't want to criticize your eloquent use of the King's English; however, why do you always have to go into a long diatribe about a task that seems relatively straightforward and uncomplicated? Why not just say, 'Get the men over there amongst those trees'? No scientific jibber-jabber, no species this or species that, is required."

"Sorry. Nevertheless, I did not want to confuse you and have the men hide behind the *Trema orientalis* there on the right, since they are known as the softest tree trunks in this geographical quadrant of the Nile River. That miscalculation could cost the lives of our men; hence, accuracy is important when describing the proper location to launch our attacks and counterattacks from. Would you not agree, Father?"

"OK, OK. Fine. I now know what species of tree is the best when defending oneself against a group of dirty brigands. Sometimes I have to wonder exactly who is the father and who is the son in our family. You are such a precocious child. Still, I'm proud of you and your wily intellect."

Needless to say, my father's question concerning our roles in the Kenworthy family went unanswered, as there were more important issues at hand.

As the battle raged on around me, I cautiously crawled on my belly amongst a hail of musket balls to our newly proposed site. In modern warfare, it was common for the British army to form a straight line and then shoot their weapons in unison. However, this move would leave us reloading at the same moment as well. Rather than shoot at the robbers *en masse*, we changed our strategy to have each man shoot and then reload. As we adopted this approach, our heads popped up randomly, like

characters in jack-in-the-box toys, to unleash a deadly round upon the scoundrels who wanted our English heads and our silver as their trophies.

After several minutes all the men except one had assumed their positions at our new site. Only Clive Smith-Jones was not harbored safely behind the tree trunks of ironwood. A big, slow man, he made an easy target for the robbers' fire as he carried a one-hundred-kilogram keg of black powder on his shoulder. It came as no surprise that when the bandits emptied their muzzleloaders upon us, the big man was the first to fall from our group. As several well-placed shots found their mark and he collapsed before our eyes, his massive frame landed on the powder keg and it shattered into a thousand pieces. The saving grace of his loss was that his body hid the most expedient means of our survival. He would have wanted it that way.

My father saw that his most highly prized giant of a man had dropped and that the gunpowder was a mere twenty meters away from the line of advancing robbers. Ever the quick thinker, your great-grandfather put his plan into motion immediately.

“Nathanial, fetch me a lit torch, and men, cover me. I'll put a speedy end to this battle before I sacrifice any more of my valued crew.”

I handed my father the torch, and he methodically made his way within throwing distance of our dead comrade. A second later, he tossed the torch. Ten robbers never knew what wiped them off the face of the earth that day. It was quick and painless.

“Here's my gift to you and your lot!” he yelled.

The gunpowder exploded, and human body parts scattered within a fifty-meter radius. Unfortunately our cook for the journey, Isaac Hartley, took a direct hit from the

disarticulated torso of a wicked robber and died instantly from this fluke accident.

At least one positive thing occurred as a result of Clive's and Isaac's deaths: the brigands had no stomach for continuing their attempt to rob us of our precious cargo. They turned tail and ran straight for the inhospitable desert area east of the river Nile.

"Hurrah! God save the King!" The men said. They were ecstatic. We had won round one with some fairly nasty creatures called men.

"Son, we beat them robbers at their own game and are safe...at least for the moment. We need to find that secret passageway before they change their evil minds and come back for round two. We're sitting ducks along this thin ribbon of the river's flood plain. We need to hit pay dirt, and soon. These past fifteen days have been physically and emotionally draining for the men."

Father continued. "We've been shot at, two men have died, and we have been just going around in circles. I fear that the men may abandon this mission if we don't come up with solid evidence that the passageway is real and not the whimsical writings of the ancients. Regardless, you and I shall persevere. I didn't travel thousands of leagues to go home empty handed except for burying two of my most cherished sailors."

"We simply cannot give in or give up to the forces of evil, whatever form that might be, Father. We will remain positive. We will find the way to the ancient temple site, and we shall accomplish our goal."

"I thank you and appreciate your positive mind, Nathaniel. Look, I've read Plutarch repeatedly, and he said that where the feline mountain meets the desert, a traveler will

discover the entrance to the temple site. And Josephus visited the sanctuary and corroborated Plutarch's account." He turned his attention to the soldiers gathered around. "Men, collect the bodies of our crewmembers and prepare them for a decent burial here amongst the sand dunes of this enchanting country. Nathaniel, go and grab those accounts from my trunk. I'm going to read the ancient texts one more time. Perhaps, there's something I've missed."

I made haste and retrieved the papyrus texts of the ancient writers for your great-grandfather. As I passed them to his waiting hands, I could see he was clearly more intent than ever. Maybe the encouraging words of his favorite and only son had reignited the spark that was quickly fading.

"Son, listen, it's written that we should journey three days upstream, which we did, and then search upon the western shore of the river for a low-lying mountain that resembles a crouching feline awaiting the right moment to attack its prey, which we have. But there is still no sight of that elusive cat."

Twilight had just arrived in the Land of the Sand, and as the sun slipped away to divide the day into evening, we were provided a magnificent silhouette of the low mountain range running parallel to the Nile in a north and south direction.

"Father, there; about thirty degrees north. That appears to be the outline of a crouching *Felis catus*, indeed an emaciated one, making ready to strike an unsuspecting victim."

"Hand me that glass lad. By Jupiter, you're right. Men, make haste and load our supplies into the boats. We need to cross over to the site before it becomes too dark and we lose yet another day in this ancient land."

“Excuse me, Captain. I’ve tried my best to put Clive back together, but there are a few pieces missing from this human jigsaw puzzle. Both Clive and Isaac are ready for burial. Shall we honor them at this time before we chase after *your* elusive dream?”

“Yes, of course, Elijah Farley. My apologies, and no slight or disrespect meant to our deceased brothers. Let’s gather around our brave comrades and wish them well on their journey to the next world. Remove your caps, lads, and join me in prayer.

“Compassionate Father, have mercy upon our two brothers, Clive Smith-Jones and Isaac Harley, who were taken too soon to be joined with you, the creator of all that is small and all that is large. These men were honest, responsible, reliable English lads, the salt of the land and the vapor of the air. Each loved his country, family, and fellow sailors as he loved himself. Each shall be missed by grieving widows, weeping children, lamenting brothers and sisters. Their earthly mothers and fathers gave them life, and now it is time to return their lives to a higher power, the benevolent one of each and every man who is gathered here today in mourning for a brethren and a friend. May they join their families and relatives who have passed before them. May they now have peace and have love—the love of those who have already joined you.”

“Amen.”

When Father finished his stirring eulogy to our fallen comrades, Warren Tanner, Bennett Meade, Harland Brownlee, and Theodore Sutler gingerly placed Isaac’s lifeless body into the newly dug grave that would be his eternal home. Seeing Clive Smith-Jones was such a big man, at least ten stone heavier than Isaac, it took four more crewmen to lower him in his final resting place.

“Captain Kenworthy, them was nice words fer the lads. Clive would’ve enjoyed ’em and laughed at his mates cryin’ like babies.”

“Thank you, Reuben Belter. My words simply expressed how each crewman felt about the tragic loss of these two fine men. I speak for each of us when I say I’ll miss that big man’s smile and sense of humor. And of course, we’ll all miss the culinary skills Isaac displayed in the ship’s galley. All right, men, let’s dry our eyes, but not forget with our hearts. Our wonderful mates will live forever if we remember them and how they touched our lives.

“Now, let’s turn this very sad day into a joyous day by finding the lost cave that will lead us to the Egyptian cult of Bastet. Cole Bottell, take the helm and steer us true to that outcrop of jagged rock that appears to be a moggy in want of a good feed. Archibald Foster, organize the men and supplies. We set off in thirty minutes, so make haste. And, Levi Elwell, take these last precious moments to gather some flowers to mark the final resting places of our dear friends.”

“Aye, sir!”

“Nathanial, pack my trunk, and be sure that we don’t forget Plutarch and Josephus in our excitement to find that hallowed passageway to another world that time has forgotten.”

“You have little to fear. I would not leave our dear friends behind, Father.”

As I spake those words, the air was electrically charged with excitement. Perhaps, we could put all the sadness and hardship behind us and find what we had journeyed weeks on end to discover. That feeling of anticipation has remained deep within my soul the past eighty-one years. You see, it seems that

once you have experienced the highs of such adventure, you want to find another and yet another. It is this cycle of exploration and dependency upon the chase and the final capture of an elusive dream that feeds the soul. A body feels lifeless, a soul seems hollow, without a dream, a desire to succeed, a river to conquer, or a mountain to climb. And that constant pursuit of something just out of your reach, just over the horizon, just ahead of you, is surely as addictive as any *Lachryma papaveris*, which caused the First Opium War in 1839.

“Nathaniel, are we packed up and ready to go?” my father asked. “Once again you’ve got that faraway look in your eyes, and when that happens, I really don’t know if you hear me, know where you are, or know who you are.”

“You are correct as always, Father. In fact, I was just imagining what life must have been like when the Egyptian pharaohs ruled the world—when the viziers dashed about the battlefield with razor-sharp *khopeshes* in their hands and hacked the heads off of the invading Hyksos or Hittite warriors; when members of the white kilt class diligently recorded the inventory at the state-owned granaries; and when the entire Egyptian civilization depended upon the cycles of *Akhet*, *Peret*, and *Shemu* gifted annually by the benevolent Nile River.

“Is daydreaming a bad thing? Let me ask you a question. What comes first: the great stone monument on a sandy plateau or the vision of a great stone monument on a sandy plateau in the mind of an architect? Please do not judge me harshly, Father, for being a dreamer. After all, it was, is, and will be the dreamers whose thoughts changed, change, and will change our world. Just think about the wonderful inventions created by...”

“All right, all right. Can we continue this conversation after we’ve found the lost temple complex and have experienced this ancient culture firsthand?”

“Of course. I have your prized volumes safely stowed away, Father. Let us not waste another valuable second in my philosophical ramblings then.”

As the sun kissed the feline’s darkening silhouette, the men pulled hard on the oars as they quickly fell into a rhythm that would have made an Oxford coxswain cry with tears of utter joy. Their hearts and souls were focused upon one thing and one thing only—getting to that elusive site before the sun fully disappeared behind the mountain range. After what seemed like only a few minutes, although it was more than an hour, the sandy soil of the river’s western bank embraced us.

“Well done, men. Now, let’s set up camp for the night. It’s too dark to be wandering around any cave at this hour of the day. There is great peril in exploring underground caverns as dark as the Bronson Tunnel at twilight. Although we want to be successful in our mission, it’s imperative that we be safe as well. After we eat and have a sleep, we can tackle that felicitous feline with renewed energy in the morning.”

Dinner was behind me and dawn before me when I finally closed my eyes and entered into the spirit world.

“Son...Nathanial. Come on. Get up! It’s four thirty in the morning, and a new day breaks upon us. This is the unforgettable day we enter into a tunnel of time and reemerge in the past. You don’t want to miss it, do you?”

“Father, please. Let me sleep just a few more minutes. This dreamer is still dreaming, and what an adventure!”

Your great-grandfather would not hear of my quest to complete my adventure.

“Lad, get up and get up now. We need to have breakfast and locate that cave entrance. We aren’t going to let a single moment of daylight escape us.”

I dragged myself out of bed and threw some water on my face, ready to tackle a real adventure instead of just an adventure in my mind.

“OK. Archibald Foster and Levi Elwell, we need you two brave men, the most skillful with your muskets, to stay put and guard our supplies. Maintain strict vigilance, and if you even sniff an ounce of danger, fire your muskets three times. We’ll get back to camp as soon as possible. Be alert, and don’t hesitate to warn us of any danger, no matter how small. After licking their wounds and bandaging their egos, those brigands may have a different idea this morning after reflecting upon the cowardice of their retreat yesterday.”

“Aye, sir,” Levi said. “Them brigands ain’t gotta chance here. They had better move on to easier prey or they will feel the sting of our lead shots on their worthless hides.”

“Good. That’s what I want to hear, Levi. God be with the two of you and that we see you again soon and in good health. Men, let’s go.”

Father, the crew, and I marched double time with great anticipation that today was the day we would solve a three-thousand-year-old mystery.

Your great-grandfather led an eclectic band of adventurers that morning to the foot of the mountain where we saw the crouching feline the day before. It was an arduous

journey to say the least. Huge, irregular-shaped rocks lay at every step, interspersed with nasty thorn bushes that dug into our skin and held on. By the time we reached the base of the mountain, most of us were bloodied from head to toe.

“Men, take a break and wash those wounds. There’s no telling what kind of infection or malady will occur from those injurious prickles.”

“Father, may I? This particular species of thorn bush is commonly known as *Acacia nilotica* and is indigenous to Africa as well as the Levant. While the reddish sap that drips down the trunk of the bush in the spring is gummy, and therefore rather annoying when it stains your wool shirt or pants, there is no reason for worry. Herodotus himself journeyed along the Nile twenty-five hundred years ago and wrote that this plant had many medicinal qualities, which included relieving stomach ailments and skin irritations. So, while we may be hurting at the moment from the sting of those needle-sharp barbs, in the long run, we might be thankful that we have these scratches all over our bodies. With dearly missed Isaac no longer providing his culinary expertise, perhaps the members of our expedition will be better off from this encounter with *Acacia nilotica*.”

“Great. There you go again. Nonetheless I thank you, and the entire crew thanks my little professor for that enlightening lecture. Men, no need to worry. Now, let’s find that entrance to the temple.”

We had trudged along another five hundred meters or so when we were suddenly faced with an overgrown hedge of *Acacia nilotica*. Father became very excited by what had initially appeared to block our progress along the pathway.

“Men, this is it. I can feel it. Surely we have found that secretive opening to the ancient Bastet Temple complex. Grab

your machetes and start hacking here or there or anywhere. That entrance is here, right under our English noses!”

The men grabbed their machetes and dove headfirst into destroying the only object barring us from success. I was amazed that so few men could do such great damage to the environment, but this was nothing new for humankind. We have always managed to find a way to bring our nurturing mother to her knees.

“Captain, over ’ere. Thar’s a gap in d’rocks, and it looks like a passage to somewhere.”

“Gideon Keynes, well done. When we celebrate this great victory tonight, you’ll receive an extra pint of English spirits for this remarkable find. Lads, clear the last bits of that hedge away and roll those rocks aside so we’ll have a better look at what Gideon has found.”

After another hour of backbreaking work, we had moved enough rubble aside to emancipate the conduit to the ancient world.

“Men, this must be what Josephus wrote about—and look! There are some faint remains of Egyptian hieroglyphs. A lit torch, please.”

My father read the inscription. “Beware, traveler: While it is easy to enter this sacred passageway, it is not so easy to exit it. Ra will serve your still-quivering entrails to Osiris to forever and a day torment you with a set of sharp, gnashing teeth.”

Murmurings rose from amongst the men as they envisioned their grisly end at the hands of Osiris.

“Men of modern-day England,” my father said, “surely you hold no belief in such an ancient warning? Let me remind

you how the universe works. Remember the old saying, ‘Be careful what you ask for; you just might get it’? Well, if you focus upon something happening, it will happen—good or bad. So, if you believe the curse will bring all damnation upon your soul throughout eternity, you’re right. And if you think that the curse will not bring all damnation upon your soul through eternity, you’re right. Now, what do you choose to believe?”

The men began to speak up.

“Captain, yer right, like always. I’ll follow ya and live to tell me grandkids about it as well.”

“Ya; me too.”

“And me as well. We’re on yer side, Cap’n.”

“Men, I want to sincerely thank you from the bottom of this aging heart for being such rational thinkers in this potentially frightening situation. We’ll all survive, and we’ll live to have a pint or two back at the Goat’s Head Tavern when we get back home. You have my word as a gentleman and sea captain.

“Nathanial, let me speak to you alone for a minute.” He led me just out of earshot of the men. “Since you’re the smallest lad amongst the crew, I want you to go first and then we’ll follow you every step of the way. We have your back covered, but as I mentioned to the men at the camp, be alert. Maybe, just maybe, that threat made by the ancients so many millennia ago was just a threat; however, we just don’t know. I don’t want to lose my only son—the son who is as bright as the sun itself.

“Be especially mindful for booby traps that will end your life in a split second. The Egyptians were masters at disguise and trickery, particularly when it came to preserving their heritage and their secrets, and this is one secret they may not want to

share with the modern world. Rumors abound that the pharaohs created a myriad of ingenious methods to eliminate the tomb robbers that would try to get their greedy hands upon the opulent goods that the deceased carried to the next world. Perhaps Bastet is just as wily. So, be mindful at all times, and expect the unexpected.”

“Father, I will remain vigilant along the entire way. And if it is decided by my Creator that I should be taken to another world this very day, feel no remorse or guilt. I have lived a happy fifteen years; I have the best father and mother any child could ever have; and I have a compassionate family of uncles and aunts who made me feel loved, wanted, and cherished. How can I feel sadness having been so fortunate in this life?”

“It’s not right for a child to die before a parent. I couldn’t carry on if anything happened to you. Now, be sharp, and come out the other side unscathed except for a wee scratch or three.”

As we returned to the men, I could see a tear flowing down your great-grandfather’s cheek. I had never seen this seasoned army veteran shed a tear for a thing or a person.

“All right. Let’s go, men.”

I grabbed a lit torch and slowly made my way around every huge boulder and small pool of water that stood in my path. I moved quickly and was soon far ahead of Father and the men. Suddenly, the hair on my arms went straight up. There was danger. I had no idea what it was, but I knew it best to listen to my inner self, my guardian angel, so to speak, in situations such as this. My innate savior told me to hit the dirt. Without a split second of hesitancy, I let out a loud yell, and just as I ate a mouthful of dirt, a series of six arrows zipped past my head and harmlessly bounced off a boulder that stood behind me.

“Son, what happened?” Father called. “Are you all right?”

“Yes. I am fine. The archer missed the tree and hit a target behind me. Do not worry; they did not even graze me.”

“What! There’re men with bows and arrows running wild in the cave? I didn’t see a soul. Are you sure?”

“Father, there are no archers present. My words were merely a metaphor for those who usually shoot arrows to kill their enemies, and fortunately, they missed me—the metaphorical tree.”

I stood up, spit the dirt out of my mouth, brushed my britches off, and prepared to meet my destiny in that black labyrinth of tunnels.

The terrain within that mysterious cave was as hilly as the Midlands with meter-high hills in some areas and two-meter depressions in others. It was difficult to maneuver, and I fell several times while going up or down a sharp slope. And the worst part was that I saw a pool of water ahead of me. Not knowing how deep it was, and assuming it was water, I walked straightway into the middle. Lo and behold, it was not water at all but a thick, black, syrupy liquid. Darn it all; I had ruined my new britches! Mother would kill me. It was just a few weeks into our journey, and this wearable gift from my darling mother was soiled. I would never get that black gunk off of my clothes!

“Father, watch out. I just walked through a pool of black syrup. Careful or you will suffer the same fate that I have.”

Father laughed. “You’re right. You’ve destroyed your britches. You can’t wash this stuff out of your clothes. Best to use them as a torch. Son, for such a precocious young lad, didn’t

you see that was raw petroleum? When it seeps out of the ground and forms these shallow pools, it has the thick viscosity of sweet honey produced by the meadow bees.”

“I have never witnessed these black pools in my young life...ever. But I now know, although it is too late to save my britches.”

“Lad, that’s what life is all about. You experience new things, and some are good for you and some are bad. And if you make the same mistake twice, well, you haven’t learned a thing, and you must keep making the identical gaffe until you finally learn. However, for every bad thing there is a little good in it as well. We just don’t see it that way sometimes when we’re up to our knees in black gunk.”

I brushed off as much as the gooey liquid as humanly possible with such little light available and no cleaner at hand. Then I carried on, hoping that Father was right—that there was indeed good from such bad. Shortly thereafter, I heard the men walking behind me and an unidentified noise ahead of me. I was perplexed by the unfamiliar sound. My conscious and subconscious self quickly scanned every tissue of my mind to identify the noise emanating roughly twenty or thirty meters in front of me. My mind came up blank. Still, a faint clicking sound was becoming louder. I did not have to wait long to learn what man or beast was responsible for the unusual noise that rang in my ears.

“Father, look!”

There, coming at us as quickly as the Suffolk Inland Train, were millions of predatory arthropods—the feared shiny, ebony, twenty-centimeter *Hadogenes troglodytes*. Our torches revealed the onslaught of our would-be judge and jury members, and their verdict was not going to be a pleasant one.

Again, Father's quick thinking was about to save our lives.

“Men, run and run for your life—it depends upon it! We've got to get back to that pool of petroleum Nathaniel found about twenty meters back there. In the middle of that pool of gooey liquid lies a small bit of land just large enough for the lot of us. Hurry!”

The entire crew, with me and Warren Tanner taking up the rear, ran as fast as our English legs would take us. I tried my best to encourage him to move faster, but to no avail. I was about five meters ahead of my crewmate when the unthinkable happened. Poor Warren did not have a chance. As he stumbled upon the ground, millions of scorpions covered him and consumed his body within seconds. I never even heard him scream. The end was so quick, and they were such efficient predators. Although every second counted, I turned and saw Warren's skull with no flesh on it and his mouth wide open as if wanting to scream before the gruesome end. We had lost three men in two days.

“Nathaniel, quick!” my father called. “Turn around and keep running as fast as you can. There's not much distance between life and death.”

Within a few precious moments, I caught up with the rest of the crew as they splashed their way through the black gunk that just a short while ago had been my enemy. Now it was my ally, and I fully understood what Father meant when he said that with the bad comes the good.

We all made it to the small piece of land within the center of the pool—our bastion of freedom. But there was little to cheer about as the murderous lemmings blindly followed each other to their deaths, drowning in a pool of viscous black oil. Seemingly

it was instinct and not rational thought that drove these creatures to their dinner and to their death.

“You, Reuben Belter and Theodore Sutler, throw your torches into the oil, now!” Father ordered.

There wasn't a moment to wait. We were about to be overrun by the hordes of villainous scorpions that had just tasted the blood of an Englishman. Although many that entered the pool had died instantly, their bodies piled up above the surface of the liquid. The advancing menaces used their dead as a bridge to reach our now superficial sanctuary.

When Mr. Belter and Mr. Sutler threw their torches into the pool of oil surrounding us, a huge fireball erupted. The flames from the oil rose two or three meters into the air. We had to hide our faces in our hands for fear of being burned by the inferno that raged around us. And along with the red-hot flames that encircled us were luminous clouds of black smoke. The billows of smoke carried pieces of the scorpions' bodies in the air, which in turn landed upon the men. The smell was horrible. There is nothing quite as nauseating as the rancid smell of burnt flesh, even if it is the dreaded *Hadogenes troglodytes*' flesh. Still, although we were in danger of meeting our maker at that moment, the oil ended the assault of the would-be assassins of the remaining crew members.

“Men, hang on just a few more minutes,” Father called. “We're winning this life-and-death battle!”

After another fifteen minutes—which seemed like forever—the flames of the petroleum died down and what was once a pool of black gunk all around us was now just dry land with roughly ten centimeters of black ash that had been the bodies of such highly efficient killers.

“Lads, we made it! We passed this test from our Creator and have lived to go on. Nathaniel, do you notice something very strange here?”

“No, Father. The oil hit its combustion point when we threw the torches into it; the bodies of the scorpions ignited as a result and were burnt to a crisp; and most of the crewmen have survived yet one more trial placed before them. No. All seems quite ordinary in my mind. Why?”

“You never noticed the obvious? I’m shocked that this detail, and a very important one at that, has escaped you. Wouldn’t you suspect that the smoke from the burned bodies would consume the immediate area of the cave? Not so!”

He continued with his mode of reasoning. Clearly it was Socratic based. This was more than just pointing out what I had obviously missed. My father’s voice revealed his excitement until it hit a crescendo, his proclamation reverberating off the walls of the confined space surrounding us and becoming deafening.

“All right. The black clouds have slowly dissipated from around us leaving the air relatively clear and no longer pungent from those incinerated bodies. This can only mean one thing: We are close, really close, to getting out of here!”

Once he came to the realization that a portal of freedom lay just ahead of us, he did not even wait for our response. No, he just started running in the direction where he suspected the conduit to discovery was.

We scurried along after Father, but he had clearly outdistanced the men and I...he was on a mission. Yet I could not fault him. This was his dream, the dream that had inspired him to leave our safe, comfortable home in the motherland to

face the perils of the sea, the danger from the brigands, and the threat of the largest genus of scorpion recorded by humankind. It was all we could do to keep him in sight and not lose him to the numerous possibilities that lay ahead.

“Lads!”

Jubilation rang clearly through his voice, and we knew he had realized his goal. We all gathered at the sacred spot and peered out of the cave to gaze upon what had led us thousands of leagues from our families. I took a deep breath of fresh air as my eyes became accustomed to the bright sunlight that was beaming down upon us that morning. The magnificence before me jolted me from my nineteenth century reality. There before us lay a surreal site: a sumptuous oasis surrounding a fully preserved ancient Egyptian city, just as it was thousands of years in the past.