

OVERWATCH®

BASTET



A SHORT STORY BY MICHAEL CHU



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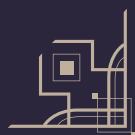


A SHORT STORY
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A

fter days of lying in wait, Ana's target had appeared in one of Cairo's opulent, ancient palaces. Abdul Hakim was a king in his own right, one who was using his power and influence to squeeze the life from the city, making himself and his followers rich in the process. But before she had her chance to capture him, the first ghost appeared: Jack Morrison. Though he was masked and had assumed the identity of a vigilante—Soldier: 76—she recognized him immediately.

The world believed that Morrison was dead, killed in the destruction of the Overwatch base in Switzerland, but Ana had her doubts. Though Jack had escaped death, a specter followed behind him... the Reaper. A killer clad all in black, his face hidden behind a bone white mask.

Reaper had confronted Jack, and Ana had leapt to his aid. She had subdued Reaper, wrestling him to the ground. But when she had stripped off the ghoulish mask and seen the ruin of a face beneath, she recognized Gabriel Reyes, a friend and comrade she'd known just as long as Jack. Gabriel proved to be the real phantom as he'd faded into thin air, disappearing like a whisper.

She was left with the revelation that Gabriel and Jack, two men like brothers to her, were not dead.

In fairness, they thought I was, too.

She took a deep breath and surveyed the scene. Bullet marks patterned the walls, tiles on the floor were cracked, and the bodies of the manor's security guards—muscle for

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Hakim's illegal enterprise—were splayed about like children's toys. At the heart of the courtyard, Jack stood impassively.

"I got them all," Jack said as he rifled through one of the fallen mercenary's belongings.

A guard on the ground between them groaned, and in a flash, Ana drew her sidearm and fired a sleep dart into his neck.

"You missed one," Ana said.

Jack gave one of his good guy shrugs. "It's nice to see you, too, Ana."

Ana engaged the targeting visor from underneath her cowl. The heads-up display failed to activate. She flipped it back up, annoyed. "Any idea where he went?"

Jack activated his visor and scanned the area. "Not a trace."

Something to worry about later.

"That doesn't look good," Ana said. Jack had been shot right beneath the giant numerals "76" on his jacket. As she took a closer look, she could see that the jacket and his flesh had been ripped apart by a shotgun blast. From that range, it should have killed him, but Jack had certain advantages. His wounds could heal themselves—a legacy of his past as a test subject and an enhanced

soldier in the American armed forces. She could already see the pink of new skin forming at the edges, but not completely. Where it looked the worst, his flesh had turned necrotic and black.

"I'll be fine," Jack grunted. "It just takes us some time."

Us, Ana thought. Jack was adapting quickly to the knowledge that his former best friend was still alive.

Or did he already know?

The faintest sound of approaching sirens interrupted her.

"We should get going. Sounds like someone's noticed."

Jack nodded. "Lead the way."



An hour later, Ana and Jack crouched in the shadows, watching as hover taxis zoomed by and a pair of civilians riding robotic camels made their way down the street.

Overhead, skiffs and surveillance drones crisscrossed the sky, the former carrying the well-to-do of the city to their afternoon appointments, the latter mobilized by the shootout in Hakim's palace.

Ana navigated the narrow alleys, finding the routes through the labyrinthine tangle of streets and pathways, keeping an eye out for the patrols that circled like hawks. For once in her life, she was grateful for the city's patchwork infrastructure, still recovering a decade after Overwatch's intervention. The state of Ana's home country was one of the reasons she had been drawn back to it. She felt responsible for Overwatch's legacy here, whether it had been her choice or not.

In the shade of one of the massive, derelict cooling towers, the heat from the oppressive afternoon sun was a little more tolerable. It didn't bother Ana, but Jack seemed to be laboring. His genetic enhancements should have helped

him acclimatize to different conditions, the same way they should have stopped the blood that was seeping through the shirt he'd tied across his midsection as a bandage.

"You need to take better care of yourself," Ana chided him.

"You sound like Angela," Jack grunted.

Ana waited for a police car to speed by, lights flashing, and then she signaled him forward.

"Think they're looking for us?" Jack wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Most likely," Ana said, squinting at the car's retreating form. "But there's a lot of crime here. The police are busy."

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CHOICE OR NOT.***

Another part of our legacy.

Jack had fallen behind a few paces, leaning against one of the walls. "Reminds me of Prague."

"I'm not carrying you this time," Ana said. "Come on, Jack. Keep up." She dashed out of the shadows and across the street, feeling the full blast of sun above and the heat baked into the stones beneath her.

Back in the shadows, she continued. "Prague was your fault. Why you ever thought Reinhardt could be stealthy is beyond me."

Ana waited for Jack to defend himself. When he didn't reply, she turned around. He had collapsed on the paving stones, out in the open.

Not now, Ana thought as she ran back to him. She tried to pull him up. "Wake up, Jack." But he gave no response.

Ana slung Jack's arm over her shoulder and lifted him, carrying him down the alley.



Jack drifted awake. That wasn't normal. Even before the army, he'd always been a light sleeper, starting awake at the slightest disturbance. His eyes adjusted rapidly to the dim light of the room as he sat up. He was on an old military surplus cot with a threadbare blanket. His side ached like hell.

"Finally," Ana walked over, silent as a stalking cat. "Tea?"

"I'll take whiskey if you have it."

Ana rolled her eyes. "Yes, Jack, I happen to keep a bottle around just in case you show up."

"Tea's fine," Jack said in a smaller voice.

Ana stretched her shoulders. "You know, I had to carry you all the way here."

"I've been shot plenty of times. It's never felt like this." Jack grimaced as he shifted, twisting around to get a better look at the wound. Three large gashes crisscrossed his back and sides, but they'd been stitched together with dark thread.

"There's something very wrong with that wound. We should probably take you to a doctor." Ana moved to a low table with

an induction burner and placed an ornate gold kettle on one of its two heating pads.

"I don't think a doctor's going to know how to deal with this." Jack looked grim.

"Dr. Ziegler's not too far away," Ana suggested. "But I'm not carrying you."

"No doctors," Jack said. "And especially not Angela." *How would we even begin to explain this to her? I doubt she'd want to see us now. Two lost ghosts.*

"I tried stitching you up myself," Ana said apologetically. "I never was much good with field dressing. Didn't need it very often."

He ran his finger over the jagged stitches. "Looks like a butcher went at it."

"Well, you can take care of yourself from now on, if you like."

"It's a little hard to reach," Jack said sheepishly.

"Then don't complain." Ana paused. "And shouldn't that be healing itself?"

Jack nodded. "It should be. Maybe the shells were laced with a biological agent?"

"You're sure you don't want to see Dr. Ziegler?"

"We'd have to explain to her that we're not dead," Jack said.

"She's the miracle worker. She's probably used to it by now," Ana laughed.

"No Angela," Jack said, and that was that.

He looked around at Ana's home, as it were. It was a mix of tactical equipment, military surplus, surveillance devices, and

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“ WHEN I
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WHO I WAS. **”**

some light touches of domesticity. The space was more archaeological site than apartment, ancient stone chambers with worn stone columns, and the walls had been carved with hieroglyphics, though some looked like the work of more modern vandals. On a low table, Ana had set up a little display of ancient objects that had been carefully preserved: a jar with a ram's head lid made of pale, milky stone, a black and gold mask bearing the visage of a fierce cat goddess, a chipped vase of brown-red clay, and a small, brilliant green figurine of a falcon.

Jack took a closer look at the antiquities. "This place reminds me of a museum my mother took me to in New York when I was a kid." It had been one of his favorite parts of the trip, running around the transplanted ruins of an ancient Egyptian temple. He smiled at the memory.

Ana offered him a blue mug with a red plaid pattern. "It's a necropolis—a city of the dead."

"Appropriate," Jack chuckled. He motioned towards the small display. "What are these?"

"I found them when I moved in. I couldn't very well throw them away. These relics have survived thousands of years. Empires rose and fell, and they're still here. I figured I should take care of them before I sent them to Dr. Faisal."

Jack blew gently on his tea to cool it. "You've been here the whole time?"

"Ever since I left the hospital in Poland." Ana watched as Jack sipped his tea.

He made a face at the bitterness. "Any sugar?"

Ana ignored him. "When I woke up, I didn't remember who I was. I had no name to give them, so they called me, 'Janina Kowalski,' your Jane Doe. For months, I sat in that hospital room in pain and confusion. Dr. Lee told me I was lucky. Well, as lucky as you can be after having glass and shrapnel embedded in your skull." Ana felt the phantom pain of her eye even as she recounted the experience.

"We tried to find you," Jack said somberly. "I used every resource at my disposal. Gabe even put McCree on it personally. Not a trace. Everyone else tried to convince me

you were gone and that I was being irrational. But deep down I knew that you couldn't be dead."

And I was right, Jack thought.

"Dr. Lee kept me out of the system. I convinced her some dangerous people were after me."

"I'm dangerous?" he asked, playing innocent.

"You're a kitten, Jack," Ana laughed. "Eventually, I was able to piece together what happened, but I don't know how much of it is real and how much I've filled in the blanks myself. I remembered the mission. We were pinned down by the enemy sniper, and I was trying to flush them out. I remembered lining up the shot. But it was almost like there was a reason why I didn't want to remember what happened next."

Jack looked down into his teacup.

"It was because I recognized that sniper," Ana said, studying him carefully. "You already know this."

"Amélie?" Jack said. "Yes." He had learned that and more over the years, but he left it unspoken.

"Poor Gérard," Ana sighed.

The pair sat in silence for a while as the steam drifted lazily from their cups and dissipated into the dusty haze of the ancient room.

"Why are you here, Jack?" Ana asked at last.

"I never forgave myself for leaving you behind. I heard about a bounty hunter in Cairo, and I hoped..." Jack set the mug down.

"You never were good at letting go," Ana chided him. "Too stubborn for your own good."

"I NEVER FORGAVE MYSELF FOR LEAVING YOU BEHIND."

"Gabriel is out there. Talon is getting more powerful. They need to be stopped, and everything that we've suffered—everything that you've suffered—needs to be made good on. I'm going to take them apart, piece by piece." Jack's impassioned words echoed off the stone walls, and he had clenched his fists. He slowly released them. "But I can't do it alone. I need your help."

Ana crossed her arms. "You can barely stand. You fainted in the street. The only thing you need to do is recover."

"Don't let this go. Don't be like the others. They dismantled everything we spent our lives building, and then they made us into villains."

"We're not all like you, Jack," Ana said. "Some of us can move forward."

"This is moving forward," Jack growled.

"You're excited," Ana said. "You're not thinking straight. Get some more rest. We can talk after."

"After?" Jack's eyes flashed to his mug and then looked back at Ana. "Did you—?"

He collapsed on the cot.



Ana waited until Jack was deeply asleep before she lifted his legs onto the bed, tucked a pillow beneath his head, and pulled the scratchy blanket over him. He had scars she didn't recognize, and his hair had thinned and faded to a silvery white. While he slept, Soldier: 76 slipped away, and she could feel the presence of the Jack she remembered.

She picked up the empty mug and left him to rest.

***“DON'T LET
THIS GO.
DON'T BE LIKE
THE OTHERS.”***





Later, Ana returned to the darkened complex, her supplies in a canvas sack she carried over her shoulder. With the lights off, the place felt more like a tomb than ever. She walked through the entry corridor and into the main chamber to find, of all things, Jack, shirtless, doing one-handed pushups through gritted teeth. He'd discarded his bandages in a small pile on his cot. Ana could see the angry red and black of the wounded flesh, bound together by her inexpert stitching.

"You're going to tear those stitches out," Ana remarked.

"I was feeling a little restless," Jack explained.

"You did sleep for two days," Ana said. "Hungry?"

"I'd kill for a burger."

Ana gave him a look of disbelief.

"But I'm not picky," Jack flashed her that smile he used to try to get himself out of trouble. He really was like a child sometimes.

Ana pulled paper containers of food out of her sack and placed them on the low table in front of him. The rich smells drifted through the air. There was falafel and beans, and pockets of freshly baked bread stuffed with steaming minced lamb meat and onions. "It's not my cooking, at least."

"Thank god for small miracles," Jack chuckled.

In spite of herself, Ana laughed as well.

Jack attacked the food like someone accustomed to having to wolf down meals quickly. Ana helped herself to a little, but mostly they ate in silence. When they'd finished, Jack leaned back on the crate he was sitting on and settled back into his questioning.

"Why didn't you tell me you were alive?" Jack asked.

"I don't know if you'll understand," Ana said. "Gabriel would, but you're different in some ways."

Jack's expression was unreadable. "And Fareeha? You let her think you were dead."

"That was the hardest part." Ana sighed. She stood up and walked over to her desk, where there was a small framed photo Ana with her young daughter on her back. Their arms were both spread wide as though they were flying. "Fareeha

would have expected Captain Amari to return, but she was gone. The moment I hesitated, I changed."

"You can't blame yourself," Jack said softly. "How could you have known?"

"Don't patronize me, Jack," Ana snapped. "Of course, it was my fault. It doesn't have to haunt me for the rest of my life, but I can accept the blame."

"It wouldn't have made a difference to us. We would have wanted you back. It turns out we couldn't do it without you," Jack said, touching her shoulder gently. "Overwatch needed you. And now I need you."

Ana read the desperation on Jack's face. "Getting revenge for what happened won't accomplish anything other than getting you killed."

"Maybe, but I still have to fight. Everyone else gave up, but not me."

He blames me, too. Ana realized. "Stubborn."

"You couldn't give up the fight either," Jack said. "Why else were you at Hakim's palace?"

"I tried to live quietly, you know. I would be near my daughter and be at peace. But the longer I lived here, the harder it was for me to escape the fact that we are responsible for what happened to this city. We shut down the Anubis project, and Egypt has never recovered." Ana stood up, turning her back to Jack. "People's lives are hard. They're being taken advantage of by parasites like Hakim. How could I let it go on when I knew there was something I could do?"

"You're fighting for justice, just like me," Jack said.

Ana's eyes narrowed. "Revenge isn't justice."

Jack threw his hands up. "We're after the same thing. Why do you think Hakim was meeting with Gabriel? He's working for Talon. The rot on this city is going to spread, and it will ruin the world just like it always does."

"Hakim runs a criminal organization that has strangled Cairo. The police and the government either turned a blind eye or they're being paid off by him. Food supplies aren't being distributed to people who need them. Medical care is almost



impossible to get," Ana said. "Look me in the eye and tell me you can leave without doing anything."

"Cairo and the world will suffer until we bring them all down! You have to see the bigger picture," Jack said heatedly.

"Are you even hearing yourself? You would never have made this argument before," Ana said disapprovingly. "The way we do things matters."

"Times change," Jack said with finality. "Either you're coming with me, or I'm leaving. I've already wasted too much time."

"I'm not going," Ana said.

For a long moment, Jack stared at her in silence. "A sniper takes the most dangerous threat out first. That was your job." Jack picked up his ruined coat. "If you want to waste your time on petty criminals, so be it. I have a war to fight."

He stormed out.



After Jack left, Ana switched on her computer. Jack had been using it earlier, and the screen was cluttered with articles about Reaper's movements and appearances. Ana wondered who had been supplying Jack with some of this information, but that was a puzzle for another time. She browsed through

the reports and remembered the ruined face she had seen behind the mask.

Gabriel... what happened to you?

One of the articles indicated that casualties in one of Reaper's attacks had suffered the same sort of wounds as Jack.

That damned scientist, Ana thought with disgust.

The other information offered little new insight on the Reaper, providing only a view into Jack's mind. He was following a spiderweb of corporations, government officials, and financial institutions, all hopelessly tangled together through corrupt arteries and shady intermediaries. It was the sort of problem that was never Jack's strong suit. He preferred two sides, concrete facts, and one clear, unequivocal decision.

The messy stuff was always Gabriel's arena.

Not as much as it used to be.

Ana considered her options. In her heart, she knew she wanted to stay. Egypt was failing. In a few more years, it was likely that it would fall into chaos, torn apart by profiteers and criminals like Hakim. As the bounty hunter Shrike, she had slowly been making a difference, little by little. If she left, all her work would be undone.



*IT WAS THE GODDESS BASTET.
A GUARDIAN.*



But there are other people here, like Fareeha. They're not helpless. It doesn't have to be you.

That pride again.

She looked back at articles about the vigilante Soldier: 76. One caught her attention: a break-in at LumériCo's newest fusion plant. There'd been a gunfight in the middle of the market—a number of serious injuries and property damage—all of it attributed to him. But there was also eyewitness testimony from a local girl in Dorado. Even though everyone else thought he was someone to fear, she'd called him a hero.

It doesn't have to be you, but sometimes, people need something to believe in.

Ana knew what she needed to do. She walked over to the makeshift shelf that held the treasures she'd found in the necropolis when she'd first arrived. She looked at the feline face on the ancient mask. It was the goddess Bastet.

A guardian.

Jack walked through the sleeping city. The cool night air was a pleasant break from the heat of the day. Given the late hour, the streets were quiet, even though he had wandered into the city center. The stalls selling food, scavenged omnic parts, or fabrics and textiles had all long since shut down. Curfews weren't imposed, but the city's residents were advised to stay indoors after sundown for their own protection. After coming face to face with Reaper, the dark was a pool of shadows that hid the unknown.

Jack had been on the hunt for some time now, gathering information, and tracking what leads he had. He'd had the benefit of being unnoticed, but things had changed. There was no doubt that Talon and its allies knew he was coming for them. He had gotten one good night's sleep since he arrived in Cairo, and it was the first in as long as he could remember.

I can't believe she drugged me, Jack thought.

He was uneasy now. Staying in one place for too long was risky, especially now that Gabe would be looking for him. He had to move on.



Night had crept towards morning and a full moon was hanging lower in the sky when Jack finally returned. Ana was sitting at the computer as he entered.

"Come back for the rest of your things?" she asked without looking up.

He walked over to her, "I'll help you capture Hakim. Once that's done, we go after Reaper."

"We have to make sure the city is secure," Ana corrected him. "I'll only leave with you after things here are settled. That means not just Hakim, but his followers, too. I need to know that the people will be safe."

Jack's jaw clenched as he considered the offer. "Then let's go over to his manor and round him and his men up. One quick strike before they have time to prepare."

Ana shook her head. "No rushing in. Remember how it went last time?"

"It would have been fine if Gabe hadn't showed up," Jack said.

Ana arched an eyebrow.

Jack sighed. "What's the plan then?"

"We start at the bottom and work our way up. Close the net around Hakim, starve him of his resources, and force him out into the open. We have to expose him and the people that are protecting him. Understood?"

***“SOMETIMES,
PEOPLE NEED
SOMETHING TO
BELIEVE IN.”***

Jack sighed, relenting. "You know, I told Gabe they picked the wrong person for Strike-Commander."

"Yes, but you meant him, not me," Ana replied.

"It could have been Reinhardt," Jack smirked.

"Let's not be crazy now."



Ever since the fight at his palace, Hakim had been reticent to return, instead moving between his safehouses in the city. Jack had been able to track down a number of them and found the one that was most conducive to their plans. He rented an apartment that overlooked it. Ana and Jack hadn't bothered with niceties: the room was furnished only with a couple beaten-up wooden chairs and a wooden crate. They took turns with one sleeping bag. After the second day, Ana had insisted on bringing a hot plate so she could make tea.

Within a week, they'd rounded up a number of Hakim's associates, whittling away at his organization. Word spread about someone targeting Hakim's organization. Whoever it was, people agreed, they meant to bring Hakim to justice. But after the initial burst, things had slowed down. Hakim went further underground. He was being more careful. There was nothing to do but wait.

The boredom wasn't so bad for Ana. As a sniper, she had more than her share of patience, and having the freedom to

move around, take naps, and even go outside, made it more than tolerable. Jack was restless, though. She saw the way he looked out the window, searching the horizon endlessly, and Ana knew his gaze was fixed on one thing.

Gabriel.

"Anything?" Jack asked, glancing up. He leaned back in his chair in a way that would make a school teacher worried. There was something in his hand.

"No sign of Hakim. What are you looking at?" Ana asked.

"Oh, just reminiscing about the old days." Jack passed over the small stack of photos. They were well-worn, creased in places, and had obviously been Jack's companions for a long time.

The top photo was a picture of them with Gabriel, all three looking young and optimistic, though Gabriel already showed signs of the stress of leadership weighing upon him. They'd just won a major battle in Rio de Janeiro. "I remember the beach," Ana smiled. "We look so serious in this picture—it's funny!"

"That's why it's a great photo!" laughed Jack.

It's good to know he can still laugh.

She turned to the next one and almost dropped the photos in surprise. She'd never seen the photo, but she recognized it immediately. Jack looked so much younger. He had just stepped off a military transport for leave. It was the other person in the picture that surprised her—a dark-haired man,





dressed in a casual, black button up shirt. Jack's arm was around his shoulder.

Vincent.

"Vincent... I haven't thought about him in years," Ana said. "Still keeping a candle lit for him?"

Jack shook his head. "Nothing like that."

"You've never looked in on him? You must have been curious. All the surveillance power in the world. I bet Gabe would have put a Blackwatch agent on him if you asked," Ana said.

Jack glared at her.

"Okay, touchy subject."

Jack laughed. "He got married. They're very happy. I'm happy for him."

Ana was unconvinced. In the early days, Jack talked about him often, floating a dream that the war would end quickly, and maybe he'd have a chance to return to a normal life.

But a normal life was never the reward for people like us.

"Vincent deserved a happier life than the one I could give him." Jack sighed. "We both knew that I could never

put anything above my duty. Everything I fought for was to protect people like him... That's the sacrifice I made."

"Relationships don't work out so well for us, do they?"

Ana said, unconsciously running her thumb over where her wedding ring used to be.

"At least you and Gabe managed to have families."

The pair lapsed back into silence.

***BUT A NORMAL
LIFE WAS NEVER
THE REWARD FOR
PEOPLE LIKE US.***



Ana glanced out the window to see the familiar figure of Hakim entering the apartment block. "It's him." Ana passed the photos back to Jack, who carefully slid them into the inside pocket of his jacket.

"Ready?" Jack asked as he put his mask and targeting visor on, picking up the heavy pulse rifle where he had propped it against the wall.

Ana took her own rifle, quite a bit more manageable than Jack's, and slung it over her shoulder. She clipped a few flashbangs to her belt and then retrieved the last item from her pack: the black and gold mask.

"You're bringing that?" Jack asked.

"You inspired me, Jack. Soldier: 76 is more than a vigilante. The world knows that name. Your enemies are afraid you'll find them. I don't want Hakim, Talon, or anyone else to plunge Cairo back into chaos the second I'm gone. I'm putting on a new mask. Not a hunter this time, a protector. The kind of persona that I could leave behind to keep the people safe... Bastet."

"I just thought my mask was scary." Jack smiled.

"Bastet is scarier than an old lady."

"Ana, there's nothing scarier than an old lady," Jack said.

"You would know."



One week later, Ana and Jack were packing up the necropolis base. They'd leave much of Ana's belongings behind, taking only what they needed for the journey ahead. Hakim and his network of criminals had been dismantled. The news had started to report about the movements of a guardian named Bastet who had captured Hakim and exposed the extent of his crimes. Even the government was forced to act.

"What about these?" Jack pointed at the shelf that had the Egyptian artifacts on it.

"I could barely manage carrying you, and you want me to bring all this?" Ana said. "It's well-hidden. It will just wait here until I can find a proper caretaker."

"Fareeha?" Jack guessed. "You talked to her?"

"I... left her a message," Ana said.

"You're sure you can leave things like this? It could be a long time before you see her again."

If ever.

Ana sighed. "She never responded to my first letter."

Jack winced. "She'll come around in time. She loves you. Did you tell Sam anything?"

"I will, eventually. Maybe," Ana said. "I made a big enough mess of his life without having to give him the news. None of us are very good at saying goodbye, are we?"

"We're better than Reinhardt, anyway. I'm pretty sure his life is just one long attempt to avoid saying a goodbye."

"How is he?" Ana asked.

"That's a long story," Jack said. "But I suppose we'll have time."

Ana nodded. "There's something I want to be clear about before we leave, Jack," Ana said. "I'm going with you, but I'm not convinced that this is a good idea at all. Talon, Overwatch, Gabriel... I already let go of them. It hurt." She paused. "When I first came to the necropolis, most of the artifacts I found were ruined. I saved what I could, but I had to leave the rest. That's what's most important, Commander."

"Don't call me, that," Jack grouched. "And come on. We need to pay a visit to some old friends."



They left the necropolis, sealing the entrance behind them. Long after they'd left, the relics of ancient civilizations laid in wait in the darkness of that dusty room. At the center of them all was a golden mask bearing the face of a goddess. Just as it remained in the hearts of the people of Cairo, and the fears of those who would harm them: a mask and a name.







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