

EYE OF EGYPT

PART 2: THE MIRROR CHAMBER

CHAPTER 1

Egypt 1862 North of Cairo. Nestled into the foothills above an abandoned archaeological dig stood the fortified estate of Eldorado. Once a home to a wealthy legionnaire colonel, it was now a place of sanctuary... at least for the moment.

Sebastian sat on its ramparts looking out into the vast emptiness of the desert thinking about the last few months. From the cold walls of London's Bishopsgate orphanage, to the tunnels and ancient mysteries of Egypt seemed an impossible transition, yet here he was. He had made as many friends as he had enemies and had changed from an innocent head boy to a man with blood on his hands. The ancient bracelet he'd found on the ship out of London many months ago sat comfortably on his wrist, but its ability was anything but comfortable. It gave him the completely impossible ability to change places with another, know their thoughts, their desires, and their memories and use them however he chose. Although he still couldn't understand how or why it happened, the fact he had taken the place of others was all part of the reason he was still alive and currently sat there on the ramparts of Eldorado. It was also the reason he sat there as Dale Anderson, the Colonial Policeman they had met some weeks ago in Alexandria. Dale's was a body he had possessed more than once, but since his near death experience in the Saqqara tunnels, it was the one he again occupied.

As Sebastian sat there gazing out over the desert, the policeman's dispositions were in full throttle. The estate's well-fortified walls provided considerable protection and their location was secluded, but Dale's calculating mind was uneasy, things were too quiet and Sebastian knew to trust these instincts. Something wasn't right.

Suddenly, not far from where he was contemplating, a window swung open and the professor bellowed enthusiastically, “Sebastian, would you be so kind as to toddle off and see if Tobias is awake? I need to have a chat with the two of you... pretty much right away.”

Tobias had been wounded in their ordeal at the Saqqara dig site some weeks earlier but was recovering well. Arriving, albeit slowly at the professor’s door, the two found the academic amidst piles of notes, parchments, maps and textbooks. Despite having been awake all night, he was full of beans as he looked up across his pebble-thick glasses. “Jolly exciting all this... and I really do think we’re making history because I’m convinced my translation is close. Now all I need to do is decide on the most accurate interpretation.” He placed a large volume back on the shelf behind him and nonchalantly added, “How would you two feel about accompanying me on an expedition to South America in the next few weeks?” They exchanged looks, grinning like children in a sweet shop as the professor returned to his desk of parchments and notes. “I take it that’s a ‘yes’ then?” he grinned adding, “righty-ho, South America it is... now... how about you go ask Madame Dubois to rustle up some kippers and eggs and we’ll put the proposition to the others.” He paused momentarily, looked up and added, “Oh yes, something else...” Sebastian and Tobias stopped in the doorway casting a look of expectation, “tell her I prefer my eggs poached.”

At breakfast, everyone was in high spirits and excitedly chatting about the prospect of a new adventure when François entered the room. “Sacrebleu, pardon the intrusion, but I have some pressing news. Some of my men returned from Cairo and say there is talk of rewards for information concerning the whereabouts of the professor and the box we found. Also, it would seem there are a number of hostile parties being raised to seek out our company. Mon conclure? We are no longer safe here at Eldorado.”

The professor pursed his lips and nodded, “This was inevitable. It seems we’ve made and indeed kept some very unpleasant enemies, so I see no option but to adapt our schedule. Your instincts young Sebastian, were spot on and consequently I suggest we make preparations to leave

for America tonight.” He fumbled under the table and produced a leather satchel he had brought down from his study. He shifted some plates along the table, opened the bag and removed a map. It depicted the Americas. He looked to François and Bart, “All right, I need you two to ride ahead to Alexandria and secure passage on a small ship called the Sovereign. Find a man called Abraham, he’s the ship’s Master, and tell him Emerson needs his help... and give him these.” He dug out a small lacquered statue and a bag of gold coins and passed them to François. “Tell him to be ready to set sail as soon as we arrive.” Sebastian’s astonished look at the disclosure of these pre-arranged items got him a cheeky grin of presumed innocence from the professor, “One can never be too prepared young Sebastian. What we know about those who seek us is that they consider life insignificant and that they will stop at nothing to get The Gift back. That cannot happen, at least until we manage to discover what it represents. So, what we have is a race. Not a race of our choosing, but a race none the less... and perhaps by good fortune, it is a race that we currently lead. So onward I say, onward, ready, set, go and tally-ho!”

Bart and François left the room and headed to the estate’s stables where they gathered two small backpacks packed some days earlier. It seemed they too had anticipated the events leading up to an accelerated departure, but they had an ulterior motive for leaving Eldorado and the professor’s request had just complicated things. As they prepared their horses for the journey, Bart whispered nervously to François, “Are you sure no-one knows what we plan to do?”

“Oui, I am certain, but the money, we must do what we said we would do. Yes?”

Bart hesitated for a few moments as he fed a new cigar into his mouth, then nodded, “You have my word,” and the two rode out of Eldorado.