

THE PYRAMID

A STORY BY

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Origins

The pyramid really exists, and I have been down the cave beneath it. There are legends of its Templar origins, and attempts have been made over the centuries to reach the rumoured gold. The rest you probably think is just a story.

The Pyramid

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My job takes me all over Europe. Sometimes I stay in one place for a few weeks, sometimes for months. Some places have a lot to offer in terms of museums, or country rambles, or mountains to hike on. Others are simply places to work, with nothing interesting in them at all. Like everything in life, my job can be interesting or boring, there's no telling what might be in store for the next contract.

I make a lot of friends moving around. Far from having the loneliness of a suitcase life, there is often somewhere at the end of a long drive with a welcome, a hot drink, a meal, and all the gossip that has accumulated since my last visit. One such contract took me to the south of France, out of the tourist season, where I had friends whose door was always open to twentieth century nomads such as myself.

These friends lived on a mountain near the coast. You can see their house perched high up on the slope, with a magnificent view of the mountains north and west, and of the Mediterranean to the south. In the time this story is set, the coastal autoroute was being built, and housing developments had not reached up from the tourist belt to ruin the wooded mountain slopes. You could look out from the house to a centuries old view of hilltop villages, but today the valley and the mountain slopes are developing an ugly slash of commuter belt suburbia and holiday homes.

The family who owned the house were gregarious people and there were always people like me, far from home and on our own, being fed and entertained at the weekend. The most popular occupant of the house was Bob, a large

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and evil looking boxer dog who was as gentle as a lamb, and as soppy as a kitten. One autumn evening, when a log fire was blazing, the wine was flowing, and the house was full of visitors, we started telling stories, travellers' tales from around the world. Anyone could tell a story, but the house rule was that a story had to be true, although in nodding respect to the ancient art, embellishment was allowed. We heard stories of Africa, tales of business ventures lost and won in remote places, of someone who went opal prospecting in the Orinoco basin and finished as a footwear salesman in Sao Paolo, of lovers leaving glowing footprints at night on the beaches of Goa. Late in the evening, one of the guests who had quietly listened to our stories stirred and looked around.

“None of these stories can match what happened on this mountain a couple of years ago.”

Our host tried to stop him, but the wine and ambience had worked its magic, and we insisted on hearing. Those who know the area will know that this happened many years ago. The people

in the house moved elsewhere long ago, and I have lost contact with all the people who were there the evening I heard this tale. It didn't happen to me, this adventure, I relate it as best I can from memory, and tell it in the spirit of those autumn evenings gathered round a blazing log fire in a house on a mountain. From this point, I'll move the telling to the person who wasn't impressed with our travellers' tales.

* * * * *

Round the mountain from the house is a stone pyramid about as high as a small house, supposedly built by the Knights Templar. Beneath the pyramid is the entrance to a cave that goes down in three stages of about fifteen feet each to a large circular chamber. A single large column of stone reaches from floor to roof. At the back of the chamber is a vertical shaft that drops sixty feet to another chamber. There is evidence of an earthquake centuries ago that is supposed to have buried the entrance to a third chamber. Local legend says the third chamber contains a hoard of Templar treasure.

One autumn afternoon a couple of years ago, I

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was in this house, and conversation turned to the pyramid. We listened to the stories, made jokes about the treasure rumoured to be hidden in a secret chamber, and how we would spend it if we found it. Some idiot thought it would be a laugh to explore the cave, and the suggestion was readily taken up. It's a dangerous walk up the mountain in the dark, so we planned an exploration for the next weekend.

Quite a few people turned up. Some of the party wanted to explore the ruined fort at the summit, or to picnic. That left Pete, Steve, Dave and his girlfriend Jamie, and me. A couple of people from the house were coming to help with lowering us to the cave. Both Pete and Steve have been down the cave before. Those of us that remember Dave should have known that this wasn't going to be just another silly idea for a Sunday afternoon. Most of his activities involved some kind of lunacy. Serious lunacy. This time he turned up in chain mail, a helmet, a sword, all plastic, and his usual cocky grin.

"You're not going down there dressed like that," said Pete.

"Try and stop me," was Dave's response. "I'll be all right, I've got my climbing boots on, and my jeans."

We looked at each other. You dare not argue, for fear of pushing him into deeper lunacy.

"Besides," said Dave, "if we're going after the treasure of the Knights Templar, they'll expect us to be dressed properly."

We checked the equipment. It was simple enough for the job we had in mind, some ropes, a hard hat each, lanterns, a plastic sword. Someone had brought a pair of mobile radios so we could keep in touch with people at the house. You reach the cave by a short climb to a track, then follow the track south along the side of the mountain, a good half hour walk from the house. We left instructions at the house for someone to call us at five, in case we got carried away and forgot the time. We left the house and walked up to the track, accompanied by a grinning lunatic in plastic chain mail. Pete gave me that unforgiving look that tells you this is the last time he gets involved in anything that has Dave anywhere within a million miles of it. I grinned and

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shrugged. Life would be empty without the Daves of the world to lighten it.

The day was hot, the sky was blue, the sun was shining, and families were strolling or picnicing on the mountain. Even today the tracks are rough, and probably much as they have been for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years.

Wild herbs abound and each step you take releases the aromas of rosemary, thyme, and basil from leaves crushed under foot. Butterflies fly even at this late season, and migratory birds, especially swallows, fly around waiting for the right breezes to take them southward across the Mediterranean to their winter quarters in Africa. You can see abandoned terraces, the stone walls barely visible beneath the scrub, where people have grown vines since Roman times for their annual supply of wine. A few olive trees grow wild, perhaps marking ancient settlements long since disappeared. When all of human kind has passed from this world, there will remain the regular lines of terraces and the olive trees. After a long and pleasant walk we left the track and made across the slope to the pyramid.

“Right, who’s going down first?” asked Pete, knowing full well that the tin pot knight had already claimed the privilege. “And leave that sword behind.”

Dave dropped the sword down the hole. Pete sighed and tied one end of the rope to a heavy rock nearby. Steve fitted a canvas harness to Dave and showed us how to undo it when we reached bottom. It wasn’t a long drop to the first chamber, about fifty feet in three stages, the middle one gentle enough to walk. Experienced climbers would have had no trouble but we were all amateurs and ropes were the only way we would be able to get in and out of the hole. We all looked down the hole and I had several moments of doubt. Pete nodded to me.

“You’d better go down second, but wait at the bottom for me. Steve and Jamie can wait at the top, they can come down when Phil or Dave comes up. Right, lamps on please.”

We put on our head lamps and switched them on and off several times to test them. Dave was lowered, grinning that idiotic grin of his, after he promised that he would definitely wait at the

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bottom for the second and third team members to join him. True to his promise, Dave was waiting at the bottom, with headlamp fixed around his plastic knight's helm, and sword in hand. The first cave is like a miniature cathedral, with a magnificent column from ceiling to floor. The rubble of centuries litters the floor and a set of stone steps is discernable, leading down into the rubble. I suspect that the rubble is about six to eight feet deep, otherwise the steps make no sense, and possibly the rubble hides a collapsed corridor leading off into another network of caves. It was my first time down a pothole and I was suitably overwhelmed. While I was being overwhelmed, Pete shouted down the hole to find out what was causing the delay. Pete can get excitable when things don't go according to his plan. I shouted an apology, and shortly he was on his way down. Dave moved into the cave. "Hey, you're supposed to wait for Pete," I called after him.

"What's going on?" Pete called out from above.

"It's Dave, he's gone for a look around."

"I'm only looking at the stalagthingy," Dave called back.

Pete muttered something and continued down. When he reached me, Dave was still looking at the stone column, the light from his lamp bobbing around the wall of the cave.

"Rule number one underground," said Pete, "is we never separate, especially in this cave. There's a vertical shaft to fall down, and nothing but rock to bounce you at the bottom."

"I saw it," said Dave. "Kinnell, look at all this, I thought you said there was nothing down here."

His voice came from behind the column.

"Wait there, don't move," said Pete, leading the way. There was nobody there.

"Where are you?" Pete called out.

"I'm here," Dave replied. "Look at all these boxes."

His voice came from our left. Pete cursed, shining his head lamp around the chamber. No Dave.

"Stop fooling around Dave, this is no place for

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games.”

“Look at this,” came Dave’s voice again. “Where did all this stuff come from?”

The chamber was still empty, but Dave’s voice came from no more than a few yards away.

“Where are you?” asked Pete.

“I’m in this second chamber,” said Dave quietly, “trying to open these boxes.”

“What second chamber? What boxes?”

“These boxes,” replied Dave, “there are dozens of them.”

Pete and I looked at each other, then at the walls around the cave. We both had the same silly idea and looked for a secret door, the sort you see in adventure films. We went all round the cave but there was no other exit. Steve’s voice came from above.

“What’s going on down there?” he shouted.

“Dave’s gone off somewhere,” Pete called back.

“Tell him to get back here, or I’ll set the dog on him.”

“I don’t think Bob would like it down here,” said Dave just behind us.

We turned round and there he was, with a small box in his hand.

“Where were you?” Pete asked.

“I told you, in the second chamber. Look what I found.”

He held a wooden box, about the size of a box of sugar lumps. Pete said nothing, he probably thought, as I did, that Dave had brought the box with him, hidden under his chain mail. Dave brought out a pen knife and tried to prise open the lid of the box.

“I bet this is hundreds of years old,” said Dave.

“I expect it is,” muttered Pete sarcastically.

The lid of the box sprang open and scattered the contents over the floor of the cave.

“They’re mine,” said Dave, “I found them.”

We picked up clear pebbles, some red, some green, and some rough colourless crystals.

“What is it, glass or plastic?” asked Pete.

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Dave scratched one down the rock wall of the cave. The rock showed a long scratch.

“Glass or plastic wouldn’t do that,” said Dave quietly.

Pete looked as puzzled as I did and tried to scrape one with his own pocket knife, but the glass wouldn’t scratch.

“Do you suppose these are rubies and emeralds and stuff?” asked Dave.

“You okay down there?” Steve called out.

“It’s all right, Dave’s with us,” Pete replied. “He’s found this old box.” He turned to Dave. “Now, tell me the truth, where did you get this box?”

“I told you, in the second chamber.”

“Show me.”

Dave led the way behind the column.

“Where did it go?” he asked.

Pete looked from Dave, to me, and back again.

“Tell me exactly what you saw.”

“I told you, I went through here to a room that was stacked high with boxes, all sizes, and

swords and daggers all over the place.”

“Let’s go through this again,” said Pete. “Lead us from the hole to exactly where you went into this room.”

“I just walked over here to the stalagmite, had a look behind it, then turned round and walked straight into the chamber. When I walked through here before there was a red stone slab on the floor, I had to step over it, and there they were, boxes stacked up to the roof, and swords and daggers all over the place.”

“If the room was here,” Pete said, “then maybe it’s one of those trick chambers. Might have been a trap, but our pressure released it somehow. If we hadn’t been here, you might have been locked in for good.”

“Then why didn’t it close behind me?” Dave asked. “I could hear you plain as daylight.”

“I don’t know what’s going on, but we have to get out before it happens again.”

We went back to the rope, Dave went back behind the column.

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“Where the hell are you going?” Pete shouted.

“To have another look. Besides, I left my sword in there.”

“Stuff your sword,” Pete shouted.

“Won’t be a minute. Look at this, the room’s back again.”

Pete and I followed but the walls of the cave were as solid as before. No room, no boxes, no swords or daggers, no Dave.

“Okay. I’ve found my sword, I’m coming out.”

“I’ll wrap that sword round his neck,” Pete muttered.

We waited in the cave for Dave to reappear.

“Where are you?” Pete asked.

“I’m at the foot of the hole, where are you?”

“At the bottom of the hole,” sighed Pete. “Look, something weird is going on, this place must be riddled with hidden chambers and passages, but there was only one hole down into it. Can you see daylight?”

“Yes.”

His voice was right beside me, but a little fainter, as if he was talking through a heavy curtain.

“It’s an illusion,” Pete said, “like the Whispering Gallery in St. Paul’s Cathedral. Who’s stupid idea was this?”

I kept quiet. It was my stupid idea.

Jamie called down, “Pete, what’s going on?”

“I don’t know, I think there must be a trick entrance to a hidden chamber. Dave went through into one full of boxes, we went into the usual empty one. Now he’s trapped in a different set of caves.”

“Stop mucking around and get me out of this hole,” Dave called.

Pete told him in no uncertain terms what was going to happen if he didn’t get back to us at the proper hole.

“Keep your hair on,” said Dave, “I can see another tunnel over there, you must be through there.”

His voice moved away from us to the other side of our cave and he started that awful tuneless

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whistling of his. The sound moved straight through the solid rock and faded, as if he was walking down a tunnel away from us. We still hadn't recovered when we heard his voice again, apparently some distance into the rock.

"Stone me, look at all this stuff."

"What stuff?" Pete asked. "Where are you now?"

"I'm down the tunnel. There's a cavern full of chain mail and swords and stuff. It must be the knights' changing room."

"Don't be stupid," Pete shouted, "and get back here."

"All right, spoil sport. I can come back without you."

His footsteps came echoing out of the rock then we heard his voice by the hole.

"Throw the rope down you creeps. Here, who the hell are you?"

"Who's who?" Pete called out.

"Someone just looked down the hole, but it wasn't Steve or Jamie."

"That's easy then," Pete said. "Steve, have a look around, see if you can see someone looking down another hole in the ground."

"No," he said shortly. "The only people looking down a hole are looking down this one."

"Well tell one of them to stop looking and throw a friggin' rope down," Dave shouted.

"Shit," said Pete banging his head on the wall. "Shit, shit, shit."

"Calm down," I said. "Let's try again. Dave, go back to the first room you found and walk out of it."

We watched the column, and Dave walked from behind it, with plastic sword, and another box in his arms. Pete rushed forward with fist drawn back for some serious argument. Dave swore and rushed back.

"He's disappeared again," said Pete in disbelief. "And I didn't see any rock door slide across. He went right into the darkness, then he wasn't there when I got there. Dave, you there?"

"Yeah," he sneered, "and I'm not coming out until

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you've gone back up the rope."

"Suits me," Pete muttered. He walked back to the rope. "Steve? I'm coming up, I've had enough. You coming down?"

"Not likely, not with that lunatic down there. If you've got the harness on, we'll help you up."

Pete disappeared back up the hole.

"You coming up?" Steve shouted.

Against my better judgement I declined the offer, saying it would take two of us to trigger whatever was switching chambers on us. One of the others came down, followed by another.

"Okay Dave," I called, "Pete's gone, you can come out."

He did, but to the other hole, not to the one where we stood. We tried several times but we couldn't get Dave to come to our chamber. One of the newcomers studied the walls where Dave had disappeared.

"There's no sliding rock door. This is solid and continuous," he said. "There isn't the smallest gap around here. There is no sliding door."

I leant back against the wall, slid down it and sat on the floor of the cave.

"There has to be," I said wearily. "We've triggered the damn thing twice. How are your lamp batteries, Dave?"

"Fine," came the reply, but fainter than before. "Hey, what are you guys doing?"

We heard a sliding, grinding noise from the hole, and went back to see what was happening. It was Dave who spoke next.

"You creeps, you've blocked off the hole, there's no daylight."

Our hole was still open, and daylight was pouring down.

"We haven't done anything," I called back.

"Will you creeps stop messing around?" came Dave's voice, but much fainter. "What's that? There's something moving back in the box chamber, is that you Phil?"

"No, I'm by the hole, so are the others. What is it?"

"How should I know? There was nothing there

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before. ‘Kinnell, what the mother duck is that? Are you guys playing a trick? There’s a hell of a stink down here. Jesus H., what the frig is that? Hey, keep away from me, get away.’”

Dave’s voice was getting frantic, and we could hear another sound quite clearly, a slithering sliding sound, and an obscene gurgling sound came with it. The smell hit us, like the smell of rotting corpses. We retched and stumbled for the rope. The sound that came next must have been Dave, I’ll never know, but only a human voice could have made that scream, one not of pain, but of desperate terror. The scream echoed around the cave we were in, and still there was nothing there. We panicked, a blind unthinking panic where the body takes over and the mind goes to sleep for the duration.

We scrambled up the rope, pushing and shoving whoever was above us, not caring if we kicked the person below. When we got to the top and out of the pyramid, people were fleeing across the side of the mountain, and still the screaming did not stop. It went on and on, pausing only to take another breath before it continued. I fell to

my knees and covered my ears with my hands, but even that couldn’t keep out the screaming.

After what seemed like hours the screaming lessened, and broke into sobs of deep despair, sounding only remotely like the friend we had taken down with us just a couple of hours before. The ground stank of that rotting flesh smell, as if all the graveyards of the world had opened beneath us. I was still kneeling there when Steve came over to me, and brought me to my feet. If his face was white and fear torn, mine must have been beyond description.

“What the hell is down there?” was all he could think to say.

I could only look down at the ground, where Dave’s sobbing could be heard. And when the screaming came again, a sound so clear and distinct that I swear we could all feel the same pain tear through our nerves and knife deep into our skulls.

We ran, all of us left on that mountain, we ran and left our friend to that unimaginable horror. I don’t remember the running, only the intermin-

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able screaming. I don't remember running in any direction but I arrived back at the house as the screaming had died to a distant sobbing and moaning. Terrified families abandoned their picnics and were fleeing in cars down the mountain tracks. Someone said something about having phoned for the police, the fire services, anyone, but what they could do was anyone's guess. Something obscene had perverted the innocence of that Sunday afternoon, and it still held Dave in its grip.

We all stood around, listening to the fading sobs, the moans, and the occasional screams that echoed around the mountain. The road down to the village was almost jammed with cars trying to get off the mountain, and the emergency services trying get up.

It was dark when the first vehicles managed to get through and all they got from us was mute pointing up the mountain. They needed no further explanation when the screaming started again. So God help me, I wanted to flee too but somehow we forced ourselves back to the pyramid. The screams, the sobs and moans, and

the smell faded slowly through the night, as if they were sinking into the earth and rock. It seems amazing now to look back on it, but nobody spoke during that time, nobody did anything but listen and stand by mutely as our friend was dragged down into God knows what hell beneath our feet.

The rescue teams had come prepared for the worst of human carnage, but those screams were not the death cries of any creature. They were the cries of a human soul lost in terror beyond any imagining. One of the rescuers could take it no longer and pushed and threatened his team into action. His threats seemed to be effective, for the team soon had a generator providing lighting and ventilation, and a rope ladder was lowered down the hole. Five of them went down, and soon we could hear the sound of hammering as they searched for the hidden chamber.

"He's trapped," said Pete. "He's trapped in the dark, that's all, we'll get him out. I'd be frightened too."

If he was trying to convince us, he wasn't doing

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a good job, as none of us wanted to think about what was going on down there. The rescue team came up after a couple hours, defeated. No secret doors, no secret chambers, no hollow walls, just solid rock. We went down in groups, each trying to find what the others had missed. The ground above was searched for evidence of the other hole. We found nothing.

As we discussed the next tactic, a bizarre couple came across the mountain toward us. A priest in full ceremonial garb, and a big man dressed in military fatigues, a couple of pistols in his belt, and a Kalashnikov held across his chest.

“Ye gods,” said Pete, “that’s all we need.”

“Who is it?” I asked.

“He lives in the village, they call him the German but I think he’s Norwegian. He was in the Foreign Legion for years. He disappears for months at a time. Some say he’s a mercenary. He’s a real head case, what you would call local colour. And he’s up here. Just what we need. If we don’t find Dave soon we’ll have every nutcase in the region up here.”

The German was grinning all over his face, the priest was muttering incantations and sweating like the proverbial pig. The German came over to us and held his gun out to us.

“Good gun, good gun,” he said in an atrocious accent. “I get your friend.”

The pair went over to the hole, and the German knelt in front of the priest who sprinkled holy water everywhere, muttered more incantations, took the silver crucifix from around his neck, kissed it, and hung it around the German. That done, the priest scurried away across the mountain back to the village. The German showed us the bullets.

“Silber,” he said grinning. “Kill devil hisself. Good bullets.”

“Ye gods,” muttered Pete, “silver bloody bullets. Is there no end to this madness?”

Apparently not. The German went over to the hole and we were all startled by a scream from Dave, deep in the earth.

“Throw the rope down,” he implored, “for God’s sake throw the rope down.”

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The German looked down the hole and grinned, the light of battle flicking across his face.

“I come, I come,” he shouted. “Kill demon fucking real dead.” He turned back to us as he lowered himself into the hole. “I get your friend.”

The German, if that was what he really was, shouted as he went into the hole “Kom, demon, kom here demon, I kill you fucking dead,” as if he was calling for a lost kitten.

Pete spoke. “St George is going for the dragon with a Kalashnikov that fires silver bullets. This is nuts.”

“I won’t need silver bullets if I get my hands on it,” said Jamie. “If it’s hurt my Dave, I’ll screw its bloody head off.”

Pete sat down heavily to the sound of St George shouting in the cave below while somewhere Dave was screaming and sobbing. All we could do was sit or stand around while the madness continued. Jamie was getting seriously distraught. The sounds below died away, and the night aged into dawn. When the sun rose above the mountain behind us, we heard St George

shouting from the hole. We rushed over to find him climbing back up the ladder.

“Well?” I asked, but the German just shook his head.

“I think demon take your friend,” he said. “Too late.”

“No it’s not,” screamed Pete. “There’s no demon. My mate’s down that hole and he’s trapped in the dark and he’s frightened, and I want him back up here with us.”

It was the first time we’d heard Pete refer to Dave as his mate.

“I look all over, no friend down there, he’s gone, demon take him. Pray. Is all you can do.”

“Did you find the chamber with the boxes?” I asked.

“Yes, and others, but no friend.”

“If you found the chamber,” said Pete, “what are we waiting for? Take us down there. Show us how to get into it.”

The German shook his head and tapped his forehead. “The key is here,” he said. “Cave won’t

let you in if you don't have the key." He took off his crucifix and threw it down the hole. It clattered down to the floor of the cave.

"Big demon stink down there. Cross make it good. I go get priest, we all pray."

Pete looked on in disbelief, broke down and wept. As I live and breathe, we all did. Pete suddenly got up and walked back to the house.

"Where are you going?" Steve asked.

"To the University. I know some of the engineering people, maybe they can organize some hole boring rigs, see if we can find that other chamber. In the meantime, keep trying anything you can think of."

We all looked at each other and there was a stampede to the hole, as everyone rushed to break the walls of the cave down. We banged, we hammered, we hit the rock with bare hands. Someone tied the crucifix to a rock and the rescue leader managed to talk some sense into us as the ventilation system tried to cope with the demand for fresh air. We organized ourselves into teams, each one spent an hour down the

hole, then came up to join the rest banging on the ground, prodding for the other hole, kicking rocks, shouting down into the ground, trying to get a response from Dave, but the cave still refused to yield its prisoner.

Pete returned at midmorning. By noon there were trucks coming up the mountain loaded with gear, engineers rushing around to find a spot for their bore holes, and a full cave rescue was in progress. It was a miracle the rigs stayed on the slope, much of it had to be manhandled into position because of the danger of the trucks toppling over. The cave was surveyed and the walls tested, but no secret chamber revealed itself. Bore holes sank through solid rock. No holes, no secret chambers, no spaces. Until the police blocked off the road we had sightseers getting in the way, and every psychic and mystic for miles around came to offer advice, survey the ground with pendulums, tarot cards, and crystal balls. By dark the police had cleared everyone except the rescue teams off the mountain. We couldn't get rid of the German, though he seemed to have hidden his gun from the eyes of

the police.

“No good,” the German said to Pete as more negative news came in from the bore hole teams. “Other chambers are not in this world. Is all a trick from long ago.”

“Bullshit,” Pete spat, and went back to organize bore hole teams to another sector.

We set up arc lights to continue the search into the second night and discussed dynamiting the walls of the cave, until someone warned us we might bury Dave in the rubble. The last search team was reporting negative about hidden chambers just before dawn when an unearthly scream ripped from the ground around the mountain. It was unmistakably Dave’s voice. We ran, shouting to Dave, trying to find where he was trapped. The scream came again and broke away into desperate sobs and moans. The sounds came three hundred yards north of the hole.

Steve nearly collapsed. “We were boring in the wrong place,” he moaned.

“We’re coming Dave,” Pete screamed, “can you

hear us?”

“Yes. Stop messing around and throw the bloody rope down,” Dave screamed back. “I can’t hold it off much longer.”

We started rushing around the area trying to find the hole Dave was shouting about, still nothing. We heard him loudly and clearly, and he could hear us, but we couldn’t get any sense from him, just rambling screams about something down there coming for him.

The German had reappeared with a double-handed sword strapped over his back, and a Crusader’s tunic with its red cross over his combat dress. He was running around shouting that ‘it was time’, whatever that meant, and Dave’s screaming came back loud, clear and frantic. So there we are: screams, sobs, and curses coming up to us out of the ground, rig crews rushing around under the arc lights, a maniac dressed as a cross between Action Man and a weekend Crusader, a pop-eyed priest mumbling and sweating his life away, Jamie shouting at something in the ground to keep away from her Dave, and us on the verge of a

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breakdown. We'd had no sleep for nearly forty eight hours, and things were getting seriously weird.

The German somehow got us to stand in a circle around the patch of ground that Dave's voice came from, and to top everything we had an earth tremor. The crews ran for the track, out of range of their collapsing rigs, the German bent forward to release his sword from its scabbard on his back, the priest knelt at the edge of the circle, looking as if Satan himself was about to come up out of the ground at him. Jamie was still shouting. I know we'd been awake a long time, but I swear to this day that the ground, rocks and all, started to boil just like those mud geysers in Yellowstone Park. All the time the German had this triumphant glint in his eye with his sword held above his head ready, and shouting "Kom demon, kom, I kill you focker," or something like that. Then the German was shouting at Dave.

"Stab the focker, Dave, stab it in the mouth, get that focker."

He shouted at the priest who threw a crucifix at the centre of our circle, and damn me if the

crucifix didn't sink right down into the ground. He shouted again, and the priest threw his Bible at the same place and the same thing happened. Jamie was still shouting and Pete seemed to be on the verge of hysterics. Suddenly, at the peak of the lunacy, the German leapt into the middle of the circle and stabbed his sword down into the earth screaming: "In nomine patri et filii et spiritus sanctus," and something in a language I didn't understand, all the time stabbing his sword up and down into the ground, and screaming curses and God knows what. The ground screeched as if it was being torn apart by some monstrous giant, and I heard Dave's final desperate scream. I pray to God I never hear a sound like that again for the rest of my life. It pierced my skull, tore every nerve to shreds, and smashed deep into my soul. Everything stopped suddenly, like time had stood still and didn't feel like starting again. The German roared at the sky, pulled the sword from the ground where it was buried up to the hilt, drew himself up to his full height, and with a roar he thrust the sword back into solid rock up to the hilt again, and something deep in the earth died. At this point, something

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deep inside me decided that it would be a good time to pass out.

I woke up wrapped in a sleeping bag on a camp bed. Bob the boxer dog was jumping up and down around me barking. Someone came in with a cup of hot sweet tea.

“I had this weird dream,” I said.

“It was no dream,” she said, “it’s a nightmare, and we’re all in it.”

There was a boom across the mountain just as Pete came in looking like death warmed up.

“I brought some seismologist in to find out what’s inside that mountain,” he said nodding toward the window.

“No sign of Dave?”

“None, not since that maniac German stabbed the ground.”

“That really happened?” I asked.

Pete nodded again. “Don’t worry, Steve passed out too, and Jamie’s under sedation. I’m living on pills. It’s like the Third World War out there.”

“What day is it?”

“It’s Thursday, you’ve been out two days, with shock, fatigue, and God knows what else. Steve’s been up since last night. What a bloody mess. We’ve been back down the hole again, full survey, everything anyone can think of, ultrasonics, seismic stuff, mystics, mediums, any nutcase who can come up with an explanation that works. We drilled holes horizontally through each wall, and vertically through the roof and floor.”

“And?”

“Solid rock in all directions. 100% solid rock. No secret chambers. Nothing. I just can’t get a grip on any of this, it’s totally unreal.”

Pete sighed and put his head in his hands.

“I did like him, though I didn’t know ‘til he’d gone. All I ever did was shout at him and get pissed off with him. I didn’t know I liked him.”

“There are only two explanations that work,” I suggested. “One, that it’s a hoax, and I don’t think even he was lunatic enough to set that up.”

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“He couldn’t plan a sandwich lunch, never mind something like this. Besides, he wouldn’t have dared to upset Jamie, she’s the only person who can keep him together. Explanation two?”

“The German was right.”

“Oh hell, don’t even think it. This is the age of rockets to the moon and quantum theory and stuff.”

“Then where is he? Where’s the secret chamber? Where did that box and the stones come from? Where are they now?”

“No idea. Souvenir hunters took them, or we scattered them. Nobody thought to save them.”

I reached over to my anorak and pulled out a rough, clear crystal the size of a pigeon’s egg.

“Get that analysed. I hope it’s quartz. I caught it as it flew out of the box. I thought Dave had pulled a trick too and wanted to have a look at it when we got back up top. I forgot all about it in the excitement.”

“Good man. I know someone who can give me a quiet opinion. If it’s what it looks like, then the

German is right. And the world is truly weirder than we can possibly imagine.”

“No, it has to be quartz. You look almost dead, want me to take over?”

“Steve already has, I’m just staying awake long enough to get to my bed. I’ll drop this off on the way.”

I’d like to say that this story has a tidy end, like any story would, but life is not like that. The search gradually wound down, the mountain was left in a mess, not the slightest sign of Dave or the secret chamber. Jamie survived and we often saw her walking around the pyramid calling his name. There was no last minute miracle. For the next few days we cleared up the mess on the mountain, hoping to find clues to Dave’s disappearance, but of course there were none. Dave simply ceased to exist.

* * * * *

Several months after these events I was in the area again, staying in a friend’s empty apartment, and I received a telephone call late one night.

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“Whoever you are, it’s two in the morning,” I grumbled, about to hang up.

“It’s Pete. Steve’s coming. Something’s happened up at the mountain. He should be with you in ten minutes.”

The connection was broken, leaving me a few minutes to get dressed and think, then Steve was ringing on the bell in the entrance hall below. I continued dressing on the way down.

“What’s happened?” I said blearily. “It had better be important, I’ve a meeting with clients at nine.”

“Don’t know,” said Steve. He pointed at the figure huddled half asleep on the back seat. “Pete said to bring Jamie. He’s already up there. It’s about the pyramid.”

“Damn, not this again.”

“Fraid so, but he wouldn’t say what.”

Pete was waiting for us at the house.

“Stop the engine and listen,” he said.

Steve killed the engine and we got out of the car. I could hear nothing but the night breeze rustling around the woods. Then I heard it, a howling

from across the mountain. Steve closed the door of the car so it wouldn’t disturb Jamie.

“It’s a dog,” said Steve.

“I know dogs,” said Pete. “That’s not a dog.”

“When did it start?”

“Just about dusk. We took the dog out for an afternoon walk. We walked up the track by the pyramid and Bob started getting nervous, then went berserk, snarling, barking, yelping. It took three of us to get him on the lead and back home. We had to lock him in a back room, he just went wild. We had a vet come up and tranquilize him. For a while we thought it was rabies or something. Then a couple of hours later, that howling started. We thought it was a dog for a time too. But that’s no dog, and it’s coming from the pyramid. It stops for a while then starts all over again.”

“It’s some idiot trying to spook us,” Steve suggested.

“For ten minutes yes, maybe twenty,” said Pete, “but not off and on all evening.”

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The howling came again across the still night air, and faded into what might have been a moan. We all shuddered.

“That’s no dog,” Pete simply.

“So what do we do?” I asked.

Pete held out a pistol each to me and Steve, but we refused them. He put them back in his pocket and shrugged.

“I’ve left a radio in the house, and I’ve the other. We’ll keep in touch, in case we need outside help.”

“Where are we?” Jamie asked sleepily.

Just as she got out of the car the howling started. She dropped back onto the seat, eyes staring. A few seconds after the howling stopped she whispered “That’s my Dave.”

“No Jamie,” said Steve, “it’s a dog, we think it’s in the hole and we’re going to get it out, or put it out of its misery.”

The howling started again.

“That’s my Dave,” she insisted.

“Dave’s been gone for months,” said Pete gently.

“No, you don’t understand, that’s my Dave, that’s how I first met him.”

“What?” said Steve. “Howling out of a hole in the ground?”

“No. I used to go out with this bloke who was an amateur astronomer and we used to go to these all night star parties. We’d set up telescopes on a hill in Sussex and spend all night looking at stars and planets and things. One night, about midnight, this almighty howling started down the hill and slowly got nearer. Then it went quiet. Everyone was terrified, then it came from a hedge nearby and broke into giggles. We turned on our torches and there he was, Dave, in fits of giggles. I fell for him then and there.”

The howling started.

“Dave,” Jamie shouted, “We’re coming.”

She ran up the track, and Pete ran after her again.

“We don’t separate,” he said. “That’s how this mess started.”

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“He’s been gone for months,” Steve muttered to Pete. “Nobody could survive down there so long without food.”

We reached the top of the slope just above the pyramid, and the howling started again. Jamie tried to pull away from us but Steve held her back. The howling subsided into a sob.

“Dave,” Jamie called, “we’re coming, we’re coming.”

Pete stopped the party within sight of the pyramid and we heard him cock the hammer of his pistol. He saw a large figure in nearby bushes, brought the gun round and fired, but Steve knocked Pete’s gun hand skyward. The shot whistled high into the sky.

“You come, your friend come,” said the German coming into the light of the lamps.

“It’s you, isn’t it?” snarled Pete. “You’re doing this.”

“No,” smiled the German. “Your friend come back.”

“He was lost months ago,” Pete said, “it’s not

possible”

A sound then came that I swear ought to have given us heart failure.

“Pete? Steve? You up there? Stop messing around and throw the rope down, I’m freezing.”

It was Dave.

“We’re here,” said Jamie, rushing to the pyramid.

“Jamie?” Dave called. “What the hell are they playing at? I’ve been down here all day and night and I’m friggin’ well freezing.”

“That’s no ghost,” Pete said and rushed over to the hole, shouting “How long have you been down there?”

“Since you lot beggered off yesterday,” Dave shouted back angrily.

The German had brought a rope and harness, and tied one end of it round a big rock. I shone a torch down the hole and saw the familiar face of our local lunatic.

“Hurry up,” he said, “I’m knackered. I don’t want to be here if that damned thing gets back.”

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“What thing?” asked Pete not wanting to know.

“You don’t want to know,” said Dave quietly.

“Tell the house, phone ambulance,” said the German, “say man fall down hole.”

“Ambulance?” Pete queried. “Hey Dave, you injured?”

“No, not exactly.”

“Well, how exactly?”

“Grazes, bruises and some weird burns, don’t know how I got them. They itch a bit, it’s not serious.”

“Is demon,” said the German quietly.

“Now I know I’m going mad,” said Steve.

“Is time, you go down,” said the German. “Don’t rush, plenty time now.”

Pete called down. “Dave, do exactly as I tell you. Stand back from the hole, and don’t do a damned thing until we’re both down there. Got that? Absolutely nothing.”

“Okay, but hurry.”

Pete and I went down the hole, me first. When he

got down Pete was shaking like a leaf in a force nine gale. I’d be liar if I didn’t admit to nerves too. Dave came forward with a peace offering.

“Hi guys,” said Dave, “Am I glad to see you. Hey look, I’ve brought a present for you.”

He held out a small wooden box. Pete grabbed it and threw it at the wall of the cave.

“Did you see that?” Pete muttered.

“What?” I asked suspiciously.

“I threw it back into the cave and just as it hit the wall, a chamber flashed into view, one full of boxes, then disappeared when I blinked, so the box landed back in the correct chamber, not this one. It knew which chamber it belonged too. Weird, truly weird. This needs some thinking about.”

“Stuff the thinking,” Dave whimpered, “I’m cold, and I want to go home.”

We went back to the hole and hugged Dave. He was cold and shivering, and close to collapse. We fixed him in the harness and he was hauled up. When I got to the top there was a lot of

hugging going on, and endless questioning, but the German made Dave lie down so he could check for broken or fractured limbs. He was clean, but he had these strange burns.

“Demon burn,” muttered the German.

“Demon burns? You mean I didn’t dream it?” The German shook his head. “I dreamt the damn thing chased me all through the tunnels.”

“What tunnels?” asked Pete.

“The ones under this mountain. It’s riddled with them. Caves and enormous caverns full of real chain mail and helmets and swords and daggers and boxes of treasure. All sorts of stuff, enough to equip an army, and pay them for a few years too.”

The German shook his head again. “Not this mountain, the other one, where other hole comes up.”

“Other hole?,” Dave asked growing visibly weaker. “If it wasn’t a dream then I really killed the demon?”

“The demon?” asked Pete. “Is this for real?”

“Dunno. I thought I’d passed out ‘cos I dreamt the creep chased me all over the tunnels. Can’t remember what it was like, and I don’t think I want to. I was in one of those caves and it got me cornered. All I could think to do was scream at it, then the weirdest thing happened. The walls of the cave started talking to me in this funny accent. It kept saying ‘*kill der focker, kill de focker in der mouth*’ then a crucifix came out of the roof and dropped on the demon and it screamed, ye gods how it screamed, then it came at me again, and stone me if pages of a book didn’t come fluttering out of the roof, falling all over the place, including over the demon. That really got it riled up but it couldn’t get at me for some reason, then just as I was heading for real insanity, this sword came stabbing up and down through the roof of the cave and the walls started yelling again, ‘*kill der focker in der mouth*’. It was absolute bedlam down there. Then the thing reared up over me and all I could think to do was hold my sword up at it, my frigging plastic sword, then it slashed at me and something made it jump back and I thrust my plastic sword at its mouth.”

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“What happened then?” asked Pete.

“I fainted.”

“You fainted?” Pete repeated.

“Right. It seemed the best thing to do. There was some serious lunacy going on down there and I just wanted to wake up.”

“Jesus,” Pete muttered.

“Then I did wake up and found my way back to the hole, but there was nobody there. I shouted and shouted for hours and thought I heard Bob barking. When nobody came I started howling, I thought the sound might carry further.”

“What made the demon leap back when it could have had you?” asked Jamie.

Dave shrugged, but the German pulled aside the tattered shreds of Dave’s plastic chain mail. On his tee shirt was a Templar cross.

“Where did you get that?” Steve asked.

“Copied it out of a book. I painted it on the day before we came down here.”

“It saved your life,” said Jamie.

“Saved his soul, demon not care for life, only soul,” said the German, while he was packing his gear.

The ambulance wound its way up the mountain tracks. Someone explained about an ‘accident’ and the medics fussed around Dave and gave him a shot of something.

“I’m a real knight now, eh?” said Dave dreamily, waving his plastic sword. “Kinell, I killed me a real friggin’ demon.”

Just before they took him away, he sat up and looked around at us.

“I got just one question.”

“Fire away Sir Knight,” said Steve.

“Why didn’t you throw the friggin’ rope down?”

He passed into an oblivious sleep, and the plastic sword slipped from his hand. Steve picked up the sword and put it into the plastic scabbard hanging at Dave’s belt. The medics lifted him onto a stretcher and into the ambulance. Jamie went with him, and we walked back to the house.

The Pyramid

“Bloody lunatic,” Pete muttered as the ambulance made its way along the track. He turned and spoke to the German who was repacking his rucksack.

“It was just a dream, right? Caused by the cold and dark?”

“In this world, maybe. In that one,” he nodded down the hole under the pyramid, “is as real as this.”

“It’s not possible,” Pete mused. “This mountain is solid. There are no caverns or corridors down there.”

“This mountain solid? Yes, but other one not. That’s why Templars put treasure there. Nothing but some old demons to worry about. I know that place.”

Before Pete could think of any more questions, the German, if that was what he really was, had walked off down the slope to the village, waving over his shoulder as he went.

“Nothing but some old demons to worry about, eh?” Pete muttered. “One day I’ll find out how they pulled this off.”

Nevertheless, we shuddered as we walked past the pyramid, and hurried back to the house.

The only way we can rationalize these events is that Dave, with the help of the German, pulled a spectacular hoax on us all. However, there are two facts that won’t rationalize. Firstly, Dave went into deep shock at the hospital and stayed in a coma for two weeks. He recovered, he’ll survive anything. The second fact is that piece of rough quartz the size of my thumb. It wasn’t quartz, but a diamond. Perfect and flawless, and worth more a king’s ransom. I’d show it to you, but one day I took a ferry out to Corsica, and halfway across I threw the stone into the sea. That stone had a strange look about it, and I don’t want to know its history, especially if it really came from a secret cave.

The pyramid is still there, and the cave. It’s just a hole in the ground, with a couple of chambers. People have been down there since, and come up again. There is no secret chamber, the walls are solid. We’ve the survey reports to prove it.

* * * * *

The Pyramid

There was a long silence when the storyteller finished his tale, and despite the blazing log fire we all shivered, and looked toward the window. Bob the boxer dog shuffled nervously and whined quietly. The storyteller and the people who owned the house looked at each other, as if some secret dread passed between them. I have seen the pyramid and the hole, and these days there are houses built on the slope just below them.

You think this is just a story, don't you? And why should I tell it now after all these years? Because I heard recently that a group of potholers went down that hole under the pyramid looking for Templar treasure. Only one returned, as a babbling mental wreck, claiming the others had disappeared through a solid wall of rock, and that something dreadful was attacking them. Of course, that's only a rumour, but if you go anywhere near that damned pyramid, you've been warned.