

A  
RELIC WORLDS  
DIME STORE  
CHAPTER  
1

# Lancaster James

AND THE SEARCH FOR THE  
PROMISED WORLD



RELIC WORLDS:

LANCASTER JAMES  
AND THE SEARCH  
FOR THE PROMISED WORLD

'Relic Worlds: Lancaster James and the Search for the Promised World'  
Copyright 2007 by Jeff McArthur

# PREFACE

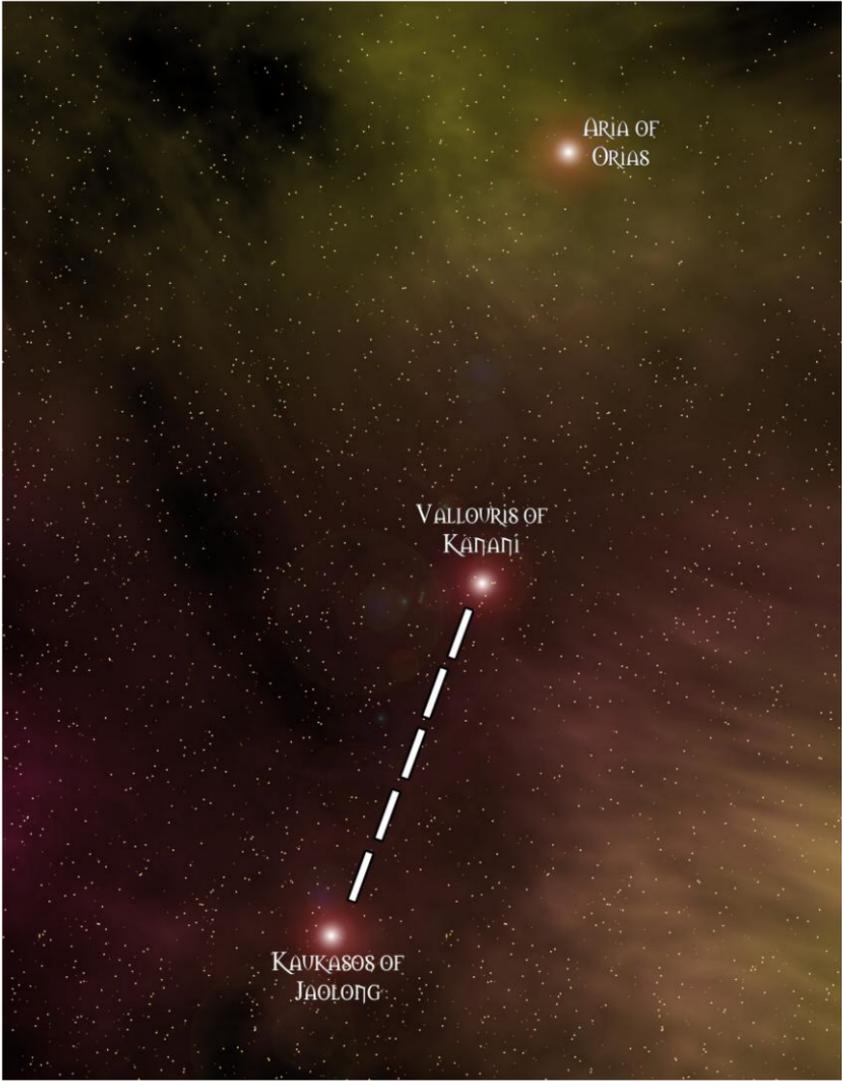
'Lancaster James and the Search for the Promised World' is part of the series 'Relic Worlds', which chronicles the adventures of Lancaster James, the anthropologist adventurer who travels to distant planets exploring ancient ruins in search of artifacts that will unlock some of the greatest mysteries of the universe.

This dime store chapter is the first of multiple chapters, each of which will be for sale for 10 cents. When all put together, they will make up the completed novel. Look for them at this same site, or at our website:

[www.relicworlds.com](http://www.relicworlds.com)

You will also find at this site not only the continuing adventures of Lancaster James, but also games and other interactive puzzles which can be solved by the reader.

To Theresa & Edwin  
two of my biggest supporters



ARIA OF  
ORIAS

VALLOURIS OF  
KAHANI

KAUKASOS OF  
JAOLONG

# CHAPTER ONE

## KAUKASOS

The blinding flurry of sand swirled and shifted in the chaotic air. Visibility was little more than a yellowish-brown haze with a faded background of contour lines that outlined the endless sea of dunes. A tall wave of haze shimmered off the top of the hill as Lancaster James approached the crest. He ducked his head down just as he reached it, and felt a gush of wind knock into his hat, the tiny pebbles tapping like raindrops along the rim. His secondary sark, a long-flowing shirt often worn like a jacked, tied around his waist caught and fluttered up

behind him while Lancaster paused to catch his balance.

At last he rose his head slowly and peered into the ripples of sand to see what was ahead. He could find nothing through the tan mass, and so he adjusted the settings on his goggles to get a better glimpse through the storm. The distance cleared enough for him to spy where the next couple rises were, and some of the details of the sand, but there were no signs of walls peaking through them. He adjusted the goggles to spot the structural integrity of a wall made of something other than a natural substance, or any sort of smooth surface. Nothing, not even buried in the sand. Lancaster sighed with disappointment. It shouldn't be much further.

He switched on another reading in his goggles, this time on the side. Information he had recorded earlier rolled into position; coordinates along with pictures of a rocky floor and wall. Specific, tiny bumps in the surfaces were highlighted into various colors based on their importance. This had been the view at the bottom of a well Lancaster had climbed into a month earlier.

It had been an underground well beneath the surface of the planet Vallouris. Above ground, the remains of an ancient Sigueran city sat mostly consumed by the wild weeds of the jungle. A secret passage had led him to an underground labyrinth where he had found little of value except for a series of hidden arrows. The arrows were hidden in that they looked like normal bumps on the wall until he felt around and discovered definitively sized bulges which were smoother than others, and were placed in exacting patterns. Following the arrows, he had discovered that they pointed into the well, wherein they stopped.

Having been in a hurry because the area was about to be demolished to make room for a Supramall, Lancaster had gotten the scans of the wall and floor so he could study

them later. He found the same bumps and dots here as had been on in the arrows, only this time they were in the shape of a map. The ones on the wall were star patterns, as seen from the surface of Vallouris. One prominent bulge had been larger than the others. Lancaster was certain that was the system to which he needed to go.

The other clue, the one that made up the floor, appeared to be a planetary map with two lines intersecting at a specific point. This would be the spot on the planet where he needed to go. For what, he did not know, but the Siguerans were the most elusive, violent, and fascinating race of all, and he had to find out what they were hiding. They had appeared and disappeared throughout the history of the cosmos, each time conquering the other races that existed in the galaxy before vanishing, then reappearing again when another epoch of alien races evolved and became space faring.

The Siguerans themselves seemed to have separate overground and underground races. Those on the surface built upon the ruins of their vanquished foes, while those below created vast networks of chambers, carving out some of the most elaborate structures in the galaxy. They had vanished once and for all only a few hundred thousand years before humanity appeared on the galactic scene, having abandoned their subterranean dwellings a million years or so before their final disappearance.

When Lancaster had flown with his partner Little Jack to the star system depicted on the Sigueran wall, they had found only one planet, Kaukasos, within the habitable zone. Though signs of ancient alien civilizations were found on planets of all types throughout the galaxy, most were located within the same habitable zone that humans had evolved in on their own planet Earth. The Siguerans, though they were highly adaptable, preferred the habitable zone, and so Lancaster assumed Kaukasos to be the planet.

Kaukasos was almost all desert, though there were small ice patches on its poles, and some water underground. Occasional mountains of pure stone rose out of the ground that reached dozens of kilometers into the sky, outstretching the reach of the sands, and a few precious oases of trees pocked the ground. But besides these, the windy deserts were all the planet had to offer.

None of these oases were anywhere close to the point on the floor-map where the two lines intersected, and so Lancaster had to make his way through the rough winds of the desert, rising and lowering over dunes like waves in the ocean.

But now he was at the correct spot. He was sure of it. But there was no sign of an ancient Sigueran city. He had always found their buildings first, particularly their spiraling spires which twisted into the sky. But no such beacon existed. Nothing could be spotted for miles.

Lancaster took in a deep breath of discouragement, wondering if they would have to check the other two planets in the system. This meant his environmental suit, which he hated to wear. He pulled out his Talki, huddled away from the wind, and called to his partner. "Little Jack," he said.

"Wilco," came the curt reply. Little Jack was always quick and to the point.

"It views as a bust," Lancaster said. "Jond on over to..."

The words had no sooner left his lips when he felt his legs yanked downward, sucked into the sand. He grasped tightly to the Talki as the rest of his body submerged into the ground and he immediately felt himself tumbling along with loose soil further into the earth. His ears were overwhelmed with the loud hissing, behind which, he could faintly hear Little Jack calling to him. He had no control. His whole body was being yanked

downward, surrounded by his assailant of swirling sand, also descending in a whirlpool, as though tugged by an invisible force.

Suddenly he felt his leg bump a metallic surface, one that slanted and slowed his fall. He bounced to the side, and continued dropping, until he felt an entire side of his body hit another surface, and he slid down it, this time, a more steep surface that felt like a funnel, as though everything was guided toward a single spot where they entered a narrow tube. Lancaster tried to grab onto the floor and hang on, to stop himself, but his hands only came up with the unrelenting current of sand which swept his hand with it, and he continued along with everything else.

Cocooned inside a blanket of fast moving sand, he slid ever downward. His body swished up one side, then the other, tumbling over a couple times, turning once or twice to the left and to the right. Then suddenly he felt nothing underneath his body. He was freefalling in the air, still surrounded by the shell of sand sharing in his fate. He fell a couple meters until he hit the hard, rocky surface of the ground, stopping him once and for all. The dirt and sand spread out all around him, pouring across the floor; some of it bouncing back up and filling the air in a dusty cloud.

Lancaster was coughing, choking in the thick brume, and spitting out the sand from his lungs. He could see puffs of it sputtering out of his mouth and joining the haze around him.

The haze, in fact, was all he could see. The room was dark, and would be pitch black if not for a few slanted holes which let in shafts of light from the surface at steep angles. These rods of light dimmed and brightened with the shifting sands above the holes.

There was little he could tell about the room, except that the floor was covered in a dust several inches

thick, and that it was at least five meters wide in both directions.

“I’m over your position, Lancaster. What’s with the disappearing act?” Little Jack was calling.

“Little Jack, I’m nove,” Lancaster said, letting him know he was all right. “Find a place to park Odin’s Revenge and I’ll find my way up there.”

“Wilco that,” Little Jack said.

Lancaster rose slowly to his feet, checking himself for damaged limbs on his way up. He pulled the goggles off his eyes, placed them on his forehead and loosened his scarf. All he could see about the room were the sharp shafts of sunshine made almost solid by the thick dust that drifted inside them. He checked his jacket pockets, feeling which devices might have been damaged. Everything seemed in order so far, so he removed his Illuminator, a device that projected beams of various spectrums of light, from infrared, through visible, all the way to ultraviolet and beyond, which Lancaster kept handy at all times.

He held the Illuminator forward with one hand and adjusted the settings with the other. He began with a full burst of white light so he could see around the room. It was approximately ten meters large in all directions and a few meters tall, the distance to the funnel-shaped roof from which he had fallen. The walls were blank, and a single, short, rectangular door sat off near one corner.

The doorway was the most curious aspect of the room. Most Sigueran doors were hourglass shaped. This was a plane passageway with no curves, and no actual door that opened and closed. However, upon closer examination of it, he did see a thin, decorative partial ledge which snaked its way around the room and through the opening. This room had probably looked rather nice before time and grime covered it up.

Lancaster ran through the different light spectrums

on the Illuminator, inspecting the room in various forms. There was nothing else to learn. This was simply a room to be dumped into. So he switched the Illuminator to brighten the way forward, held it in front of him, and exited the room.

A corridor wound its way in one direction, bending and curving a couple times as he walked over the rough cobblestone floor. At one corner he noticed several holes above him, and he stopped to check for a trap he might have set. Holes such as these sometimes denoted spikes or lasers or some other weapon to kill off intruders. But these were placed more randomly; more likely to drop small, poisonous animals on the victims. After scanning the holes and finding a small chamber above, he determined that this was the most likely trap, and assumed that whatever animal had once lived there had died or moved on millennia ago, and so he moved on.

The corridor straightened out and he could see far ahead an intersection where other halls led in different directions. He stopped short of them by a couple dozen yards, however, sensing that something just wasn't right. He didn't know what it was for a moment, but he had learned to trust his instincts; they gathered more information faster than he was able to consciously process.

He realized at once that it was two things that seemed out of place. First, he hadn't exactly entered through the front entrance. Who knew what was brought in by that direction? The Siguerans wouldn't let just anything in. They were infamous for laying traps for intruders, and he had already come across one former ambush, so he had to be on the lookout for more. Second, the very end of the light from the Illuminator was catching the floor near the intersecting corridors. It was smooth. Patterned bricks of a beautiful, shiny rock covered the ground, not the cobblestone upon which he was walking. There had to be a

reason for this.

Lancaster studied the floor, searching for patterns both with his eyes, and with the Illuminator. As it had done so many times in the past, the Illuminator found what he was looking for. It compared the patterns of the cobblestones to everything in its database. On one stone it located small etchings of a symbol he had seen on Vallouris. A line which was bulbous on one side came to a point on the other, and a couple circles sat about an inch above it. These were the arrows that had led him to the well which brought him here in the first place. They were well hidden on this cobblestone whose rough surface was so chaotic that anything written upon them was hard to find. “You clever bastards,” Lancaster muttered.

Believing they wouldn't bring him all this way to kill him, he trusted the symbols. He stepped on the first cobblestone on which he had found this arrow. He found another a few rocks ahead, then another. He kept stepping on the arrows upon which he was instructed to step. Each was in a row, and they each brought him closer to the intersection ahead. Lancaster confirmed every cobblestone with the Illuminator before stepping on it. He felt a bit silly, tiptoeing slowly like this when no other danger appeared around him. The rest of the floor, in fact, looked as solid as any other.

He neared the third to last stone. Beyond the final one, the floor was laid out with the smooth brick, so he knew he'd be safe. He was, in fact, looking ahead to see which direction he would go. He shone the Illuminator down each corridor as he stepped on the second to last cobblestone.

He felt his foot slip at the same moment he heard a deafening crackle and roar. All of the rest of the cobblestones were coming loose. Lancaster didn't have time to think. The end of his path was still too far away to

jump to, so he turned to the wall and kicked off the stone upon which he was standing. He had done it just in time, as the entire floor fell beneath him. Every stone tumbled into the dark abyss below, grinding together in a loud grumble as they fell.

Lancaster hit the wall hard. His hat flew off his head, and his hands grasped desperately for the decorative ledge which stuck out a few inches. He found it, and his fingers dug into the flowing decorations. There he clasped on for dear life, looking around to watch his hat tumble down with the stones, ground up among them and shredded into nothing. He could just see it at the end of the beam of light from the Illuminator, which was strapped to his wrist. After losing one in a similar fashion before, Lancaster had learned to attach important items to his body. He needed to learn to do the same with his hats.

He watched the cobblestones until they fell out of sight. He could hear them somewhere in the depth crashing, all crunching together in a solid heap. How or if they would reset themselves, Lancaster didn't know, and he didn't want to wait to find out. He scooted across the chasm, going hand over hand, grasping onto the little ledge, and making his way to the other side.

There, he stepped atop the smooth floor and sighed with relief. He peered down each corridor, and they all looked the same, so he guessed, and headed to the left.

The ceilings were low, and the walls had flourishes of carved décor with occasional pillars that framed doorways. Each led into rooms that were all decorated differently, as though there was a rule that no two rooms be designed exactly alike. Their furnishings were covered over with sheets of dust and sand, as though prepared for moving day. Lancaster tried to guess the purpose of the rooms by the shapes of the sand. Some lay like beds or couches, others stood like pillars or hat racks. They all had

platforms and dips; the subterranean Siguerans loved three dimensional architecture, and it was hard to distinguish what floor one was on because of the way a room would enter at one level, then exit half a meter down, or three meters up.

Some rooms were rudimentary, others were quarters for those who lived there, another was what looked like a communal shower, and he found one that seemed to be a kitchen. This was actually one of the more valuable rooms, as what a civilization eats says a lot of things about them, but Lancaster was most curious about the purpose of this colony.

He continued on into another room, and when he rounded the corner he was shocked to find a giant insect's arm reaching toward him, its body leaning in his direction, ready to leap on him. Startled, Lancaster leaped back, his Illuminator still pointed at the creature. He pressed a button, flashing a blinding light. He forgot to look away, and found himself stunned by the sudden blast. He shook it off as quickly as he could and looked at his assailant.

The insect was still, leaning toward him, yes, but standing in place. It was about two meters tall, had the shape of a praying mantis, and was covered in a layer of sand. Though it looked menacing, Lancaster felt safe enough to approach it and blow off some of the covering from its face. Sure enough, it was a statue made of a bronze sort of material. It seemed to be staring in the direction of the door, but it had no eyes. Still, the contortions of its face somehow made it seem like it was passing judgment.

Lancaster brushed off sand from its outstretched left arm, which was also pointing toward the door, or perhaps a little further in. The end of its arm appeared sharp enough to run through a person, and it had a second arm which branched out the bottom of its leg that had

fingers.

Lancaster inspected the right arm, which was hanging looser, not pointing at anything, and found that the branched off section had fingers that was holding a book. It was solid metal, part of the statue, unable to be opened, but the cover had a design on it. He blew hard, throwing up a cloud of sand in the air. As it cleared, he could make out the symbol; it was a star shape with the arrow symbol he had seen on the cobblestones in the middle. He knew this book cover design from somewhere, but where exactly, he could not remember.

Lancaster felt around his pockets until he found his notebook, and he yanked it out. Most people made fun of him for using a book of paper instead of an Electro-Pad, or Wrist-Holo that could carry all his information, but Lancaster preferred the old fashioned method, reminding critics that paper doesn't break or run out of battery power.

He thumbed through the ragged pages with their soft edges. He had small tabs on the ends to remind him where things were. He remembered what these tags were more by the sight of them than the labels. He found the page and opened to it. He had an image drawn of the symbol on the book, and underneath it the word "Travel." Though the notebook provided him only one word, Lancaster suddenly remembered everything about it. Many of his notes had only a word or two to jolt his memory, and he was able to fill in the rest. In this case, he remembered that there was a book that spoke of a prophecy; the prophecy of a promised land, and their god of travel would lead them to this place. This insect was most likely that god, and Lancaster shivered at the thought of god like that leading him anywhere.

He quickly sketched out the statue of the god, drawing the symbol next to it; then continued to search. He had a theory now of what this place might be, and he

wanted to see if he was right. Returning to some of the rooms where he had already been, he went to the upright sheets of sand that looked like they covered pillars or hat racks. He used a stiff-haired brush to throw the dust off and uncovered more statues. Most looked similar to the first one, though some had two legs rather than four, and others looked a bit more like bats. Curiously, none had eyes. A few seemed to have hollow slots for eyes in their torsos, but Lancaster wasn't sure what that meant. Comparing them to notes he had kept, Lancaster found that they were all either gods of travel, or related in some way to gods of travel.

All these elements confirmed for Lancaster that this settlement was clearly intended only for the subterranean Siguerans. They were much more religious than their over-ground cousins, but when their settlements were found in conjunction with them, which was most of the time, little in the way of their religious shrines were found, and those were discrete or even hidden in secret chambers. This entire colony seemed dedicated to worshipping their gods. There was even a large worship chamber where Lancaster found a half dozen statues all in one place, all looking over an area of raked seating with room to pray, and all without eyes. The front wall of this room, just past what looked like the pulpit, had a carved piece of artwork that showed a winding road leading to a distant sunset. There was no ground next to the road, no trees, no grass, no anything; just the path and the sun.

At the base of this wall, right at the beginning of the path, was another doorway framed with pillars. Just above the doorway, at the start of the path, was the symbol he had been following for two years now, the Constellation Crest, the relic which Lancaster believed would lead to many of the Siguerans' most incredible planets and unlock their greatest secrets. This was the direction he was

wanting to go, so he stepped up to the door and walked through it.

Inside was not what he had expected. Rather than finding a treasure trove of artifacts and information about the Siguerans, he found... nothing, more or less. All that greeted him was a rectangular room, approximately twenty meters long by five meters wide with six statues on either side, all facing inward, but none with eyes. Instead, they all wore holes in their exposed torsos. In the center was a long, blank sand pit, and on one end was a roller with embossed writing on the surface and a hand crank on the side. Lancaster wondered if perhaps it was once the treasure room and it had been looted. It was the only possibility that seemed plausible at the moment, and it became more and more likely as nothing more emerged when he continued to search.

The statues elicited nothing. They were not even the gods of travel. These were horned creatures with oversized heads, the gods of protection. But they were staring without eyes at a blank slate of sand. The only unique features about them were the tips of their horns, adorned with diamonds which reflected light in a very specific direction.

Lancaster tried to read the designs on the giant cement roller, but they were indecipherable. They looked more like carved in drawings than they did symbols or letters. Some were deep, some were shallow, and some had layers, sinking in one level after another, reaching into the roller a dozen inches or more. Most of the deeper carvings were connected by straight, shallow carving lines which intersected to every point on the roller.

It was in exploring these that Lancaster began to understand the puzzle. The flat, straight lines reached out mostly in a grid, crisscrossing every couple feet, separated by several square or rectangular holes in the roller that

reached deep inside it.

Lancaster ran his hand across it, almost as though feeling it would give him some clue, but he could not decipher any language from it, and became pretty certain it wasn't. The answer was staring him in the face, but he couldn't put his finger on it well enough to dare a guess.

Then he determined to try the obvious. He walked to the side of the roller that had the hand crank. He began turning it. At first it resisted, not budging, then, whining, picked up, and the roller slowly began to twist. The cement pressed against the sand, which crackled in protest. The ancient gears creaked and the concrete rumbled across the ground. The gear stuck, then loosened and surged forward, then slowed again. Lancaster pressed both hands hard against the crank and continued to push, then pull, then push in a counter-clockwise direction.

The roller made it a few meters across the flat surface, and behind it the sand was being shaped into patterns. Lancaster continued to twist the crank, and the roller continued across the surface. He didn't look back until he had made it all the way to the end, at which point the roller had come full circle.

Lancaster turned back to the sandy surface to find it formed into the shapes of buildings, roads, parks... a city. The cut-out sections of the roller were molds that formed a miniature metropolis. Lancaster ran the Illuminator over it, staring in amazement, recording the model in its database. As he did, the light flashed across the blank face of one of the statues.

Lancaster had a thought, and he pointed the light at one of the statues. Though it had no eyes, it was intently staring at one particular point. He looked down at the map, but without pupils in the eyes on the statue, it was hard to tell exactly what it was staring at. He then noticed another statue staring the same way. He compared the two, and got

a better idea of the point where they were staring, but still could not be certain. He looked at the other three statues and found that all of them were staring at the same point. He triangulated the position by looking closely at each face, then down at the ground. There, just off center and a little closer to the side the roller was now on, was a two story building, the first floor a flat structure with statuary on the corners pointing diagonally away from the building and into the sky, and the second floor a dome with a flat top. Etched very lightly into the flat portion of the dome was the symbol for travel he had just seen on the book.

There was clearly some importance to this place, so he took a Snapfish, which held better resolution than the Illuminator. He could compare the tiniest details on board Little Jack's ship.

He had taken two pictures and was about to take his third and last when the sand buildings exploded. Lancaster stumbled back toward the entry, but didn't retreat, curious as to what had happened. Through the flurry of flying sand he saw a long, insectoid leg sticking out of the sand, feeling around for land to grab onto. Two other legs grasped the sides, and pulled forth a torso, which slid out of the sand, searching around the room. It had the body of a beetle, and the head of what looked like a prehistoric dragon. Its long mouth was full of sharp, pin-like teeth. It had two dark slots at the front of its face where its eyes would normally be, though these looked more like nostrils, and they winced like they were sniffing the air. Its long legs had spade-like hands, perfect for digging and sharp enough to stab into hard surfaces, or skewer its prey. Lancaster saw that they also had some sort of suction, or stickiness to them as well, as two of them grabbed the ceiling and pulled the rest of its long body out. The back had the appearance of a scorpion, its back legs much like the front ones, and behind it a nimble tail with

layered skin that looked like armor.

It no sooner had turned toward Lancaster than he was out the door, running for his life. He figured that this must be the animal which had once been stored above the corridor and used as a trap, now evolved over hundreds of thousands of years into something much bigger, and far more dangerous.

He heard it moving behind him. One of its spade legs stabbed the ground on which he had been standing, and the rest of the body followed. It made a clicking chirp sort of noise, like a cackling cicada. Its body knocked over everything it ran into, smashing the statues and bashing through the doorway. A cloud of dust and sand covered over it, leaving behind a trail, like a comet weaving through the hallways.

Lancaster dodged around corners and rushed headlong down the halls, his Illuminator held out in front of him with its white light as bright as he could get it. He was trusting that he'd find an exit as he dashed through the unexplored territory. He couldn't go back to where he had entered, there was no chance of escape there.

As the light bounced ahead of him, he heard the sand rushing up behind him, and the rapid clicking got closer and closer until it was just behind his neck. He sprinted forward, then jumped into a room to the right. The large creature had to halt, back up, then go at the door.

Lancaster bought some time, but he lost it immediately. He had stumbled into a room with several statues, and his curiosity got the better of him. He hesitated, trying to see what they were behind their layers of sand, but the beast crashed through the door, and Lancaster immediately went for a passageway on the opposite side where a few steps led to a slightly elevated level. Weaving around the statues, he made it to the opening and jumped in and over the steps as he heard the

creature behind him knock straight through the statues, smashing them into several pieces as it went.

Lancaster rose to his feet and saw the animal again frustrated by a doorway too small for it. Lancaster knew he didn't have much time, so he began jogging down the hallway, a little slower now as he tried to decipher which direction he needed to go, and to make sure he wouldn't be coming upon any more traps.

His lead was once again cut short as the wall shattered next to him, and he was thrown against the opposite side. The light from the Illuminator flailed wildly, and Lancaster saw the creature's legs were over him, grasping the opposite wall, its body sliding over his. It was only by the fact that the creature thought he was already further down the hall that he avoided being smashed or eaten. It was looking away and did not see him below. Lancaster rolled back into the room and rushed back toward the hall from where he had come, hurtling over the debris of the statues as he went.

The clicking creature heard him, and turned around. Once in motion, it headed with incredible speed, even as it smashed through obstacles, but it lost pace when it had to maneuver.

Lancaster now used the lead to gain more. He turned the corner into his original corridor. When he heard the creature smash through the doorway he had gone through, he leaped into a room to his left. He leaped down several stairs and through another doorway. The next few rooms took him on a labyrinth both up and down and left and right until he was thoroughly lost as to where he was, and how deep he was. Not that he had known where he was before, but now he couldn't even find his way back to the map room if he tried.

He was amazed that the creature could still follow him. He was at least five rooms ahead of it, but yet it was

still coming, smashing priceless artifacts as it went, destroying the last remains of this once amazing civilization.

Lancaster stopped, considering where to go next. His only hope for survival was to get out of this underground maze.

Then he noticed something. The sounds of the creature bashing everything stopped as well. Lancaster knew that he could still hear it because he could still hear the clicking. It just wasn't chasing him. Had it been following the sounds of him running, and now there was no sound to follow? He switched his light to ultrasound to take away the beam, and he waited, watching.

The large animal hesitated a little while, shifting through the room, listening. Lancaster was sure it didn't know where to find him. But its guessing brought it closer and closer, and soon it would figure him out, and he was near to a dead end, so he had to get moving again before he got trapped.

But first he wanted to find a way out. Randomly running would eventually lead to a part of the structure that was caved in, and he'd be trapped there as well.

He kept the face of the Illuminator pointed forward so he could continue to monitor the creature through its sounds as he watched through the screen on the top of it. He ran it through its memory of what it had seen, watching moments of the chase to see if there was anything he had missed as he was running through the rooms and hallways. Most of the video was shaky and blurred. The Illuminator had been in his hands as he was pumping his arms, running, or sliding through doors. Most of what he saw was flashes of light against walls, or the occasional statues as he passed them, or debris as it tumbled all around.

But then he found a ray of light, literally. At one point when the Illuminator swept quickly across

horizontally, he caught a glimpse of another light, a small one, in the distance. It went by so quickly he had almost thought it was just a reflection of his own light. But he ran it back to look at it again.

He heard the clicking much closer now. It echoed off the wall he was huddled next to. He checked the reading on the Illuminator. Just one more room and the creature would be in the same one as himself. Lancaster hoped it would take a lot of time getting its bearings in that room, but it was unlikely, considering the fact that it was following its sense of smell, and Lancaster wasn't exactly scentless at the moment. He had to find the exit right away.

He went back to the video and ran it by frame by frame. Sure enough, it was an exit. Lancaster had the Illuminator register where it had been when it took that image, then had it calculate the directions back to that location.

While the Illuminator made its calculations, Lancaster pulled out of one of his pockets a plastic ball. He had thought this to likely be a useless item and had not wanted to use up one of his pockets for it, but had kept it just in case. By pressing one of the sections of the ball, he could choose what scent would be released from it and then place it where he wanted the scent to emit. His ex-wife Mika had given it to him while they were married, hinting for him to use one of the better smells before he came back from one of his adventures. He now needed it for the opposite effect. He pressed one of the sides at random since he couldn't look at it, and threw it to the other side of the room. He hoped he had gotten a bad smelling one, but as a pungent flowery aroma filled the room, he found he had failed. It still did its job in any case. The creature squeezed its head through the door, stalled, then pushed its torso through, cracking the sides of the entrance. It didn't

even look over at Lancaster, it was fixed solely on the smelly ball.

Lancaster carefully crept around behind the animal, lowering his head beneath its tail. He watched each footstep with a dim light, making sure he didn't step on any debris. Every step had to be completely silent, for if the creature became aware of him, it would only take a fraction of a second's flip of the tail to bring the stinger in on his neck and end his life.

The animal moved away, continuing toward the smell. It stopped there, confused, looking around for him. Lancaster slipped out the door and hurried toward the next. He followed the Illuminator's guidance system toward the exit.

In his excitement to get out, his footsteps became louder, and the animal heard him. It clicked faster and rushed toward him. Lancaster now ran, sprinting through rooms and rounding the hallways until he got to the corridor where he had been earlier. The creature gained on him, losing ground when it had to round corners, but remaining tight on his tail.

Lancaster saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Sure enough, it was sunlight. But would he be able to make it before the creature got to him, he wasn't sure. All he could do now was run.

The clicking echoed up and down the hall and rang in Lancaster's ears. He heard the legs and arms grasping the halls, the floor, and the ceiling as the animal's neck stretched out toward him, its razor teeth opening wide, ready to bite. Lancaster ran with all his might, the light ahead of him growing larger and larger. But judging from the size of the light and the distance of the creature behind him, he wasn't nearly close enough. He was going to be eaten.

Then he noticed a diffused glow at the edges of the

exit. Some of the light was going through sand. He suddenly realized that what he was seeing was an optical illusion. The exit was very near, it was only small because most of it was covered by sand. This may have been a bad sign as he could not get through it as quickly as the creature, but at least he'd be there sooner to find out.

A few seconds later, he was doing that very thing. He leaped for the door head and hands first. He pointed his shoulder toward it, intending to ram it with all his might. He could feel the air coming out of the creature's mouth, its breath covering his back. It had the stench of rotten meat, its last meal. The sharp teeth opened to make Lancaster its next.

Lancaster crashed through the sand, which flew out in a plume above him. He fell, tumbling head over heels down a long dune slope. Above him, the dragon-like head of the creature popped through, but went no further. It watched its dinner roll down the hill, then pulled back into its cave unsatisfied.

Lancaster lay on the sand for a while, looking up at the hot sun, catching his breath. At length he recovered, and called to Little Jack to pick him up.

*To be continued...*

[www.relicworlds.com](http://www.relicworlds.com)