

The background of the entire page is a vibrant, green-toned illustration of a jungle. A prominent waterfall flows down a rocky ledge in the center. To the right, a wooden bridge with a railing spans across a gap. In the lower right, a large, dark, winged creature is perched on a branch. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and adventurous.

**RELIC WORLDS**

***LANCASTER JAMES***

***AND THE LOST TRIBE  
OF THE RAGINOR***

The jungle was thick with fog so dense it felt as though [Lancaster James](#) and his partner [Little Jack](#) were slicing through a solid substance. The mist clung to every leaf and vine, every tree trunk and every bush, as though it was a web attached to them. Waving away the vapor, it was only replaced a moment later, like water refilling the ocean that had just been scooped.

The cackling tick of insects and birds reverberated just out of sight in every direction. Most seemed small and harmless, but Little Jack kept his two pistols Huginn and Muninn ready for those growls he was hearing both above and below, and for the slithering he heard near the ground and in the trees.

They were keeping a particularly close lookout for signs of cracks in the earth. When flying into the area they could see from above that the jungle was interrupted by deep canyons whose bottoms were beyond the capabilities of their sensors. One wrong step and they could be tumbling for a very long time.

They tried to watch around them as well. Lancaster and Little Jack had come to this planet to locate the remains of a Raginor city that was supposed to be somewhere in these woods. It had been listed on a map within an artifact known as the Constellation Crest. Ruins were all they expected to find since the Raginors had lived about a hundred millions years ago, and because they had been targeted by the original owners of the Constellation Crest, the [Siguerans](#), who were known for conquering and destroying entire civilizations. They had, no doubt, killed the inhabitants of this planet, and Lancaster only hoped they left behind enough for him to learn something about this once thriving culture.

The flora and fauna were consistent with Raginor traditions of habitat. The trees were wide, tall, and firm. They had a unique pattern of thick bark that stuck out of the trees as they corkscrewed their way up the trunks like thin ridges. Their leaves were wide, and felt like plastic. Barely over half of them were green; the rest were shades of orange, purple, and pink, and a few stood out as red. Lancaster avoided those; his research had told him they were poisonous, and he didn't want to test the hypothesis.

Lancaster drew his Illuminator again and scanned the area around him. The device aided his sight into areas his eyes could not see by delving into other light spectrums, and sonar, as well as other means to detect what was in front of it. He studied his readings as he could audibly hear Little Jack growing impatient behind him. Lancaster's own breath of disappointment revealed his lack of success at finding anything.

"The Siguerans could've destroyed it," Little Jack said, referring to the lost city for which they were searching. "Or the jungle might've eaten it up in the centuries since."

Lancaster drew in a deep breath. He was hesitating, trying to come up with some reason to keep going rather than accept the truth. But he held his breath mid-exhale. His forehead furrowed and his eyes squinted in concentration of a thought he just had. The Raginors were known for the dexterity of their hands, climbing as much as they walked. Their choice of settlements in forests may not be a fluke. He hurried to the nearest wide tree trunk and looked it over. He felt at the bark that protruded up around the circumference. It was just wide enough that one could fit his foot on it, and could walk it like a tight rope performance.

Lancaster scanned up the tree with his Illuminator, confirming that the narrow ledge wound its way up far along the trunk. "I credit I found the lost city," he said.

Little Jack stepped up behind him and said, "Only one way to ascend."

They had been climbing slowly and steadily for a quarter of an hour. Despite their speed, they had gotten rather high. They couldn't see the ground, though they had lost sight of that only

a couple meters up. But they knew it was a long way down, and one slip would spell their doom. “They couldn’t be bothered to build hand rails,” Little Jack complained.

“Raginors didn’t need it,” Lancaster argued. “They...”

“Was just being clever,” Little Jack said before his partner could ramble into a lecture. Lancaster got the hint and stopped talking.

The fog had lifted the further up they went, and now they could actually see more than 20 meters. Presently, Lancaster caught his breath at what he beheld. Platforms supported roughhewn structures that clung to the trees. They were covered over by leaves and vines which embraced them in camouflaged hugs, but Lancaster knew an intelligently designed building when he saw one, even through nature’s attempted cover-up. He started toward it a little faster.

“Hold... Hold. Hold!” Little Jack said, having to get more insistent with each use of the word. Lancaster was mesmerized by his goal and he had to be snapped out of his excitement. He looked back at Little Jack, who motioned toward the bark-stairs in front of him. They stopped. And they didn’t look as though they had worn away; they simply weren’t built into the tree anymore. Lancaster looked across the chasm toward his goal, and he wondered what the Raginor had been thinking. Had there been a draw bridge that was on the other side? There were a number of branches that hung in between which would have blocked any such bridge, but they wouldn’t necessarily have been there millions of years ago.

Then he got it. The branches *were* the draw bridge. Raginors walked with their hands as well as they did with their feet. They could swing through the trees with the same ease as on the ground. The branches were simply a different kind of road for them, one that others would have difficulty following; including him.

Lancaster explained this to Little Jack, who reminded him how far down it was. “Thanks for that,” Lancaster said.

“Just figure you should know since it figures to’ve slipped your mind,” Little Jack responded.

“Yeah. But if I don’t go across to there, we mosed here for nothing. The branches are sturdy,” he said, pulling at one of them. “And there are plenty here. I can put my feet on some of them while I grab with others.”

“You aren’t a monkey,” Little Jack told him.

“Or a Raginor,” Lancaster continued. But he was bound and determined, and Little Jack knew he couldn’t change his mind once it was made. So he said no more, and he watched his partner prepare himself.

Lancaster plotted a course in his mind along the trail of branches, determining where each hand would grab and each foot would step. Then he launched himself forward, nabbing one branch, then another, placing a foot down on yet another. He didn’t dare stop. He may not be able to balance in one place. Instead he retained his momentum, hurtling through the corridor of branches. He realized suddenly with horror that his right foot had landed on the wrong branch, and it broke his entire rhythm. His plotted course was gone, and the branch he had launched himself toward was not the one he had planned on. He grabbed it, but he didn’t know where he was going next. He swung a little slower and longer as he found somewhere to land his left foot. With no time to think, he skipped over toward his right, finding a branch to grab onto while in the air. He swung, but found no branch to step on, so he pressed his foot against the tree trunk and found a branch on the other side to grab. He was close now, but a single miss would mean he’d tumble to his doom. He quickly plotted another course to take him the rest of the way, and he followed it, hoping the branches were strong enough. The last one looked a little flimsy; and

indeed it broke under his weight. But luckily he was only a meter away from the platform, and he leaned forward and grabbed onto it, hanging on for dear life.

Pulling himself up, Lancaster found himself at the edge of the Raginor city. Enclosures of all sizes clung to the trees, covered over by leaves and branches that embraced them within their wooded grasps. He had made it. A light rain drizzled overhead, dissolving into steam where Lancaster stood, and settling into mist below. The buildings were connected by planks which, though overgrown with every kind of plant life, were steady enough to remain intact. The most Lancaster heard of any structural buckling was the occasional creaking noise. Though he was still amazed, Lancaster was used to this by now. Advanced alien civilizations had developed architectures and alloys that lasted millions of years; a practice that was a blessing for every xeno-archaeologist and anthropologist practicing today.

Despite this, however, Lancaster still had to be careful. Though the structures were sound, they had sat on trees this entire time; trees which did not always remain inert. And so ancient cracks could result in larger breaks should he test them too harshly. As he looked around, he noticed a few sections that had given way, and so he maneuvered cautiously through the town.

Within the buildings were partial floors dividing each level like balconies. These were accessible to one another through crisscrossing pegs and bars, and occasionally branches. He hopped from level to level, searching for some clue as to the purpose of each building. He found none. They were all empty. And not empty as in the furniture had nothing on or in them; but utterly empty. This town had been abandoned; not lost due to an extinction event. The Raginor here had likely picked up their things and moved.

As Lancaster scanned a room, he turned to see a large bird he had not formerly noticed. It stood proudly on the windowsill on the opposite side. The bird was large, about half the size of Lancaster, and did not look afraid. Nor did it appear to be threatening. The bright purple and orange feathered animal simply studied Lancaster curiously.

Lancaster returned to his work, pulling a device out of one of his jacket pockets which could measure the age of synthesized materials. As he lifted the item, he noticed the bird again. It seemed to be a little closer, but he saw no signs of movement, and it was standing perfectly still, staring at him. Lancaster kept his eye on the fowl a little longer, then turned to one of the walls. He chose a part and wiped away dirt and greenery...

A nearby noise attracted Lancaster's attention, and he turned to see the strange bird now standing less than two meters away from him. It was motionless once again, as if it had always been there. It was, at the very least, self-aware enough to know how to play the old game of Red Light, Green Light.

Lancaster now kept his eyes on the bird while he raised his hand with the device to scan the wall. He turned his head very briefly so he could make sure that his hand was over the correct part of the wall as he turned back toward the animal. In that little time, the bird had begun to move; and now it continued to waddle toward Lancaster even though he was looking right at it. Then it began chattering. At first Lancaster only thought about how uneven the bird's call was, but suddenly he realized that it was not a common animal cackle. It was making noises with patterns that sounded a lot more like the syntax of language! His eyes wide, Lancaster bent down, lowering his face to the height of the bird. He listened carefully for anything he might recognize from another language, or to catch on to whatever the birds' was.

The next time that the bird said something Lancaster had already heard, he tried repeating it back. The bird straightened up, and somehow looked annoyed. It was silent for a moment while Lancaster made the noise again.

Then the bird lashed its neck forward and swiped Lancaster's hat right off his head. Lancaster had only time for a yelp before the bird spread its wings, fell back, and hurried out the window. The move had been so sudden that Lancaster didn't fully understand what was happening until the creature was out of sight and his head felt naked. Lancaster could hear it chirping off in the distance, as though mocking his failure. Leaping to the window, Lancaster caught one last glimpse of it, and his hat, disappearing into the fog below.

Lancaster pulled his Walki up to his mouth and called Little Jack. "Would you like to do a little bird hunting?" he asked.

"Why?" Little Jack asked suspiciously.

Lancaster hesitated. He knew that Little Jack would not live it down if he learned that Lancaster lost his hat this time to a bird. So he just said, "Never mind. I'm piking my way down."

Lancaster used his Geomagellan, a mapping device that had recorded the major landmarks when they flew over the terrain before landing, to locate his next destination. He laid in the coordinates for the nearest canyon and led them in that direction. Little Jack again watched closely for creatures to jump out at them through the fog. He began watching for birds, but after noticing Lancaster didn't have his hat anymore, he deduced the real reason his partner had wanted him to be on the lookout for one.

Lancaster had set out for the canyon based on a hunch. The Raginor had left their tree city, but for where? He had measured the age of the structure to the era just before the Siguerans had placed this planet on the map. That told Lancaster that the Siguerans had narrowed in on the Raginors, and the Raginors had determined to move on. If they had left for another part of this planet, it would likely be to somewhere that was not as easily visible from space. Thus, the canyons. It was at least worth a look.

The fog cleared ever so slightly as the two men came to the lip of the canyon. It was sudden, and straight down into oblivion; and they were glad the device had warned them ahead of time when they were coming up to it. Lancaster pulled out of his jacket his specialized Prismatic Binocs that allowed for him to see distances in various spectrums and get scientific readings on the objects on which he had focused.

On this part of the planet, the sun never rose to the top of the sky; it always shone at an angle. As such, most of the canyon never received sunlight, and ice had formed along the edges only a couple dozen meters down from the top. The Prismatic Binocs revealed a change in temperature from 30 degrees Celsius to below zero in a matter of yards. They could both hear the crackling of the ice shelves as they echoed in the darkness below.

Lancaster could not make out any structures that he had suspected were there. All the Prismatic Binocs could come back with were readings of steep walls and thick ice shelves with occasional large boulders. Nevertheless, Lancaster had a hunch, and he didn't want to leave without at least trying. He attached a line from his grappling gun to one of the larger and sturdier trees. He attached the grappling gun to his belt and approached the edge. "Make sure nothing touches that wire, will you?" he said to his partner.

"You afearedd a bird will make off with that, too?" Little Jack asked dryly.

Lancaster glared at him a moment, but Little Jack only stared back through his wide, frosted over glasses that covered half his face. No one could win a stare down with Little Jack, so Lancaster didn't try. He leaped into the abyss.

His boots tapped against the edge, first smacking dirt, which puffed around his legs. Then they tapped against mud, some of which stuck to his soles. Then they tapped against hardened mud, almost as tough as a rock. Then they tapped against ice. It had gone faster than he had ever experienced. Lancaster tensed his toes a couple times in a specific pattern, then knocked the boots together and spikes came out the front. He kicked them hard into the ice, and secured himself, testing their weight. Once he got them securely fastened, he removed an Illuminator head band from his utility belt and he strapped it over the top of his head. At the front of the head band was a light he could switch to any light spectrum, but he chose for the moment an automated adjustable white light that raised and lowered in intensity based on how far the nearest obstacle was to him. That way, the ice that was directly in front of his face wouldn't blind him, but he could still look across the canyon and see what was there without taking his hands away from climbing.

Slowly he lowered down into the darkness, his feet walking downward, kicking into the ice. Soon, no light reached him, and it could only be seen when looking directly up at the ever shrinking gap where sky was visible. Below, not even his Prismatic Binocs could detect the bottom. All that came from that direction was the snaps and crackles of the breaking ice. It was getting louder, and occasionally there was a crashing noise as somewhere an outcropping of ice got too big and fell apart under its own weight.

The temperature dropped quickly, so Lancaster put on his spiked gloves and pressed a button inside his jacket that heated it up. The hat would have had something similar, but it was instead keeping some bird's nest warm.

After dropping for about twenty minutes, Lancaster switched to several other spectrums, trying infrared and ultraviolet. Finally he left it on illuminated X-ray to see beyond some of the ice. He had to switch between that and white light so he could see where he was going, but most of the time he didn't need that. There was one direction for him; down.

The crackling of the ice was all around him now, though he could not see any of it. Each snap and pop could be coming from anywhere, even deep within the ice shelf, and its noise was being amplified through the acoustics and the incessant echoes.

A half hour into the descent, Lancaster was ready to give it up. There may not be another city. The Raginor were star faring, so they could have left this planet behind and settled elsewhere. At any rate, there was no reason to be so certain they had built anything down this canyon. Besides, he was running out of line.

He turned his head to look around the canyon, wondering if there was any sign of getting near the bottom. There wasn't, and none of his devices could even still detect the bottom. As if aware of his conundrum, Little Jack called, saying, "Have you pinged to the other side of the planet yet?"

Lancaster didn't respond; he just took one last look around him. As the light from his Headband Illuminator brightened to reveal the opposite cliff side, Lancaster recognized a pattern. The ice sheets seemed to fall in unusually perfect symmetrical order. And some seemed to cross vertically. It looked almost like the outline to a... building. He followed the lines down as they dropped into the darkness far below. Then he followed them side to side, making out where one structure might end and another began. Though the ice ebbed and flowed like waves in an

ocean, there were enough distinct lines along them to reveal a pattern. And that pattern repeated several times to the left and right.

Lancaster needed to get closer to effectively use the X-ray light. So he told Little Jack he'd be a bit longer, crouched down facing the opposite side, and kicked off. He fell quite a way, almost to the end of his line. But he knew he had a lot of leeway, and he reached the opposite wall safely; cutting into the ice on the opposite end with his spiked gloves.

The light from his Illuminator twisted and refracted in the ice, revealing a masonry wall like a wavering ghostly visage, or an underwater treasure. Shifting to the left, he could see an opening that led into a wider room. Shining his Headband Illuminator in X-ray revealed the details of the room. It was definitely Raginor. There were several levels that stuck out of the walls like balconies, and crisscrossing rods for climbing.

He pulled out his Eco Analyzer and ran it over the ice, measuring its thickness. A little over a meter. He had tools that could cut into that, but the constant roars of the breaking ice reminded him that this might not be the safest option. Taking down a major support in the ice shelf could be like taking down a pillar on a building, bringing the entire structure down.

And so Lancaster kept looking. The thickness of the ice wavered, but it was never much less than a meter. Sometimes it grew to several yards where moisture had built up into a bulge.

He found one spot where the light from his Illuminator bounced through to the room fairly easily and intense, but the Analyzer said it was nearly two meters to the opposite side. Lancaster wondered how this could be, and at last theorized that there could be an air bubble inside. He decided to chance it, fully aware that if he was wrong, he could be bringing a huge shard of ice down on himself. Lancaster removed his precision laser cutter, set it to the proper cutting depth, and got to work.

Lancaster went slow enough to make sure he got through the ice, but he didn't disturb a lot around it. As he got to the fourth side, he heard cracking deep within. He froze his cutting hand and scanned the ice sheet all around it. Nothing... Nothing that he could see at least. So he kept going.

A rapid snapping like distant fireworks cackled from within the sheet he was cutting, and he saw a small, rough line form and break into several forks like a lightning bolt. But the sheet held, and the section Lancaster had cut came loose. He pushed it forward, into the air bubble. He had been right. The piece crashed against the floor a couple meters down.

Lancaster pulled himself into the air bubble and measured the second sheet. When he had the distance, he set it into the laser cutter and carefully cut into the second part. Again, the walls groaned and crackled, but they held. And he was able to push another square of ice forward that crashed onto the ice floor, this time right where Lancaster's feet were.

Lancaster pulled himself into the structure, stood on solid ground, removed the grappling gun from his belt and placed it securely near the opening he had made. Turning back to the room, he went about maneuvering up and down the platforms, aiding his climbs and descents with the bars that stretched across the rooms. Unlike the structures in the trees, these were furnished and decorated in the fashion of the Raginors, which appeared the most like humans of any of the alien races.

About a quarter of each room was covered over in ice. The rest almost might as well have been. Most things were still intact, though few items that weren't heavy furniture still stood. Like many Raginor structures, the doorways between rooms were not always at ground level; sometimes they were between two platforms, and sometimes one had to swing from one

chamber to the other via bars. These were freezing cold, even through Lancaster's gloves, and he tried to use these for fear he might get stuck to them.

Maneuvering through the rooms was further complicated by the fact that many of the walls were not built but rather were ice walls that had formed into place, and some entrances and exits were partially blocked. Lancaster took as many photographs and holographs as he could, and encrypted them all with galactic and geo-coordinates so the scientific community could do further research.

After taking one of his photos, Lancaster noticed something on one of the shelves. Most of the items he had been passing were mundane, and few would function, and might even fall apart if someone picked them up. But one item was something Lancaster had read about. It was metallic, about the size of the palm of his hand, and pyramidal in shape. He turned it over to look at the base and see if it had what he suspected.

Indeed, there were a pair of lines that ran parallel to one another, then formed a bulb at one end. Lancaster placed his thumb over the bulb, then ran it down the lines. The walls of the pyramid opened up at the front, revealing a few metallic rods that looked as though they should be plugged in somewhere. "A Sahu Crystal," Lancaster whispered to himself in amazement. It was believed to carry data. The museum where his ex-wife worked, and for whom he was working, had built a prototype machine that could read one of these if one was ever recovered. This would be the best find of all. Lancaster placed it in his bag he kept slung around his shoulder, and he also grabbed a few of the nicer looking mundane items to show off. The photos and the location would be the best treasures to get back, but these would at least provide something physical.

Then something else caught his eye that startled him enough to duck for cover. He panted in fear for a few seconds, peeking out at what he had spotted out of the corner of his eye. It was still there; the outline of a form through which he could see, like a ghost. He could make out a torso, and part of a head. It was still, unmoving. A part of the ice that had formed in the shape of a being?

Lancaster approached it cautiously, watching for it to move, but it remained perfectly still. The form seemed to be leaning against a wall. Its body was half formed, half missing. Lancaster could make out a shoulder, part of a leg, what looked like pieces of three limbs. It was delicate, like very thin ice. Lancaster reached out to it to touch it, to see if it was natural or something formed. His finger tapped it lightly. It felt like a very flaky crust. Then it crumbled into dust at his feet within a second. He tried to catch it, but only managed to catch flakes. Whatever it was, it was destroyed. Suddenly, Lancaster was kicking himself for not taking an image of it first either in 3D or at least in 2D. What the delicate half statue had been was a mystery, though Lancaster theorized it had been old skin of a Raginor which they shed every now and then, and the cold had frozen it in place for all these years... until Lancaster came and interfered.

He continued along, going vertical now, but trying not to travel too far from a direct path to where he came in. This was an entire city carved out of the cliff, and it could go on for a very long time. He didn't want to get lost. He hopped from one platform to another, occasionally grabbing rods as he went. A long ice shelf sliced through the building on one side, and he climbed up it with one foot while he stepped up the various levels with the other like stairs. He paused at each one, scanning each room, and photographing some.

At one point Lancaster stopped on a floor to go through his photo and holographs. They all looked good, but one of them caused Lancaster to halt his breath. It was from one of the first



rooms he had stopped on during his ascent. He spotted the shadow of a figure at one of the exits. Lancaster had not noticed it at the time he took the photograph, but it saw him. The figure appeared to be staring right at him.

Lancaster quickly looked around to see if anyone was watching him now. He found no one. He switched through several spectrums on his Illuminator to make sure. He was alone. Lancaster then turned his attention back to his Imager. The picture had 3D elements, so he shifted it to a projected hologram and took a closer look. Sure enough, a shadowy figure stood there in the doorway. There was not enough light to reveal any details about it; just its shape, which was a torso with two legs and what looked like four arms.

A shiver ran down Lancaster's spine that shook his entire body. He was not alone down here. He quickly crouched and looked around himself. He peered into every exit to the left and right, then up and down. He listened closely. Silence, save for the constant, distant booms and crackle of breaking ice echoing through the canyon. The vapor from Lancaster's breath hung languidly in the air ahead of him, as though it was afraid to move as well. Was he being hunted? Had whatever creature it was not seen him?

But Lancaster wasn't here to be a coward. Discovery was his job, even in a dark, frozen city deep underground. He returned to the long sheet of ice and lowered down until he saw where he had begun using it. Then he hopped back down the platforms, trying to land more gently now to make less noise. On one platform he knocked away from ice and it crashed against a level below, then tumbled into another, then ricocheted off a few bars before crashing onto its final platform. At each point it made a loud crashing noise that echoed through every chamber and out into the canyon.

Lancaster stopped and watched the floors below. If something had heard the noise, perhaps it would go to it and he could see what it was. He pulled in his breath, breathing as little, slowly and evenly as possible.

After a few minutes, there was nothing, not even the sound of anything moving around. Whatever this creature was, it wasn't as clumsy as him.

At last Lancaster moved again, slower this time, quieter. It was difficult as some platforms had to be leaped onto. But he disturbed them as little as possible. On the final platform he pulled his Imager as he was making his step and he slipped, crashing chest first onto the floor. The Imager slipped from his grasp and began to tumble down into the maze of levels. Lancaster brought his other hand around and managed to catch it out of the air. He sighed with relief, then rolled onto his back, looking at the Imager.

The room in the image matched the room he was in, and the shadow of the figure should be right...

Lancaster hopped up, realizing he had put himself into a compromising position on the ground. He looked over at the exit where the shadow had been. It was hard to see anything but darkness there. The Imager had picked it up where his eyes saw only a black void. He switched the Headband Illuminator to thermal imaging to see if the creature was still at the doorway. It didn't pick anything up. It was possible that the creature didn't give off much heat, so he checked several other spectrums and got nothing.

It was time to take a closer look at the entryway where the shadow had been. Lancaster stepped cautiously toward it in case it was a room or two away. He put the white light on so he could see better. The light crawled across the straight walls and waves of ice until it filled the dark hole, and revealed the wall of ice beyond. Encased within it was a form with a head, a

torso, four arms, and two legs. Lancaster might have thought it was human if it wasn't so hairy, and if he didn't recognize what it was. "A Raginor," he whispered to himself in amazement.

It wasn't quite what the Xenological Museum of Natural History had pictured. They had a display of what they thought a Raginor would look like based on fossil fragments and cryptic records. Very little solid data had ever been recovered of the Raginor, so they had had to make as best a guess as they could. They had set it up as a sort of snake creature with two thin, spindly arms and legs that were like a spider's. It had brown or black hair all over its body and eyes on the sides of its face.

Now, looking at this perfectly preserved specimen, Lancaster saw they had been pretty far off. It looked more like a human ancestor, or a chimpanzee, though with far less fur. Its skin was scaly and shades of yellow and green. It had occasional small suction cups at important locations for grip. It possessed four arms and two legs, or perhaps two arms and four legs; the pair in the middle resembled both, but were wiry like tails. The clothing was a one-piece with sealed seams along several joints where it could get in and out. The posture of this Raginor was slumped against a back wall, as though it had been dead, then was frozen over.

Lancaster had several theories as to what had happened, but none had sufficient evidence to make a determination. Besides, that could be more thoroughly discovered by an archaeology team. He just needed to tell them how to get in. So that they could see what he was talking about, Lancaster scanned the cadaver with a Holocapture; going over the body slowly to make sure it captured every detail and filled it into the 3D model.

Looking at the virtual model, Lancaster noticed that one of the hands was outstretched almost to the edge of the ice. Lancaster pulled out his hand heater and placed it next to the ice. A layer became loose and melted away, dropping slowly to the ground below. He pushed the heater closer, cutting his way to the hand until he had exposed a finger.

Lancaster put the heater away and removed a glove. The cold immediately assaulted it, but he didn't mind. He reached forward and touched the skin of the Raginor. It was hardened, but felt of leather. He even felt tiny ridges of a fingerprint. A new sort of shiver ran down Lancaster's spine, one that only comes from the haunting connection of a long ago past. Or perhaps it was the accomplishment of one of Lancaster's greatest dreams; to touch a real intelligent alien life form. He held his finger there pressed against the Raginor's for a time, and he scanned it with his watering eyes. The alien's face was scrunched up, as though in pain. This was common in the bodies of ancient animals, even when they were preserved. But knowing that something caused the Raginors to go extinct caused Lancaster to see more in that expression; anguish. Was this the last Raginor of this city? Had they all died and only this one to carry on until it froze to death and got encased? Lancaster hoped the Sahu Crystal would provide some answers.

To further assist the study, Lancaster sliced off a part of the finger's edge, and a hair. "Sorry about this, partner," Lancaster said. "But your donation might just help us avenge your race."

Then Lancaster heard a growing rumble like rolling thunder coming straight for him. The deep noise was followed by rapid snapping, and the ground began shaking beneath him. The ice was shifting where he was.

Lancaster dashed for the edge of the platform where he had entered. He reached the edge of it just as the walls began to shift. Debris sprinkled on him as Lancaster leaped off the platform and grabbed a rod. He kept moving as the entire area rocked back and forth. He held tight to each rod he grabbed, stepping on a couple platforms as he made his way down to the

level from which he had begun to climb. A sharp pain wracked his leg and he fell to the ground. He had twisted his ankle as he landed.

A deafening screech from the side told Lancaster that he didn't have time to recover. He looked to see a large ice slab that hung over the room he was in was lowering. Being between him and the doorway, the slab would cut him off from his exit. So Lancaster got up on his one foot, and hobbled on his other toward the passage. He saw the sharp bottom of the slab; like a guillotine. It was dropping as fast as he was moving. He had to pick up the pace. He placed forward his injured foot and ran on it. The pain shot through his whole body, and he stumbled, but he got a little more speed. The slab was passing the height of Lancaster's head, and he had only a moment left. He kicked off his good foot and tumbled forward, rolling past the dropping ice sheet.

He just made it, but the pack was still on the other side. With a yank, he brought it to him just in time.

Lancaster was panting now, lucky to be on the right side of the ice sheet. However, he wasn't safe yet. Though the tectonic movements had ended, the residual effects were still taking place. Sharp ice shards were dropping from the ceiling, crashing to the ground as though they were being shot out of a gun. Lancaster rose to his feet, but was still slow in the process. One of the shards hit him as he was straightening, stabbing into his shoulder. Another smacked his head and nearly knocked him unconscious.

Lancaster looked through the deafening rain of ice crystals and found the grappling gun and wire. He B-lined toward it, hobbling as fast as he could. One shard knocked his right shoulder down, though it was a blessing in disguise as he looked up to see a shard large enough to slice through his head coming right at him. He dodged to the left, avoiding the blade, but landing on his injured foot. He shouted in pain, but his voice was mute compared to the shattering noises around him.

He had to keep moving, so he set his eyes on the wire and he hurried forward, almost falling toward it. Lancaster reached his hand forward to grasp the grappling gun and it was stabbed with a shard. Screaming, yet still moving, Lancaster reached his other hand forward and grasped the handle. More shards were hitting his back like rain, but he ignored the pain and jumped out the hole, attaching the gun to his belt as he went. He felt it snap into place, and the wire went taut as he swung to the other end of the canyon.

When his body thudded on the other side, Lancaster coughed air back into his lungs and looked back at the hole. White smoke billowed out of it, some of it clinging to the hole he had made, repairing itself. The booming crackles echoed into the distance. The ice around Lancaster had settled once again, and it was another area's turn. Lancaster began to think an expedition here would not be feasible, especially considering the cautiousness of the *Universalis Arcanum*. But maybe the university where his ex-wife Mika worked could analyze the data from the Sahu Crystal and the DNA from the body, as well as the photos and holographs.

At any rate, Lancaster was making his way up out of the canyon. His work here was done.

**The End**