



RELIC WORLDS

LANCASTER JAMES

**AND THE MYSTERY OF
THE HAVAKAN GODDESS**

Lancaster James climbed up over the final lip of the ridge to at last behold his goal, the lost city of Adasso. It was much as he had pictured it; domed buildings with reinforced architecture to survive the elements for millennia. Clumps of white snow gathered in corners, and sprinkled across the stone rooftops of the small community nestled in this tiny valley. The shrouded hovels huddled around a central structure as though shivering under its protection; this was the Temple of Kofula.

It was a great deal larger than the other buildings, and bore a tall spire that covered much of the community in shadow as it reached skyward. The inhabitants had built the shrine to house their goddess who, it was said, had walked among them. Xeno-archaeologists and anthropologists alike had scoffed at the idea, but Lancaster had a theory that was now partially proven as he laid eyes on the temple. Their goddess was an alien; a Havakan, to be exact.

She had come to a world populated by a species humans now called the Rochata. They were a race that had barely acquired sentience when the light came down from the heavens, and the giant who called herself Kofula emerged from her "iron chariot." The legend held that she brought them enlightenment, and they developed their civilization around her, which grew exponentially, faster than most species; and they reached their Renaissance when most races would be entering their Bronze Age.

After nearly a thousand years of rule, she died, and her remains were laid in the temple that had been her home within the town of Adasso, the location of which was lost to history; and many believed it to be a myth.

The few who knew how to find it were lost to time as well, as the Rochata also passed into history more than 150 million years ago. They had gone extinct as many races did. They reached their Industrial Age at a much slower rate than the days when they had their goddess among them; and when they did, the Rochata poisoned the air with the gasses they used for fuel. They had no method of colonizing other planets, and so their entire species suffocated on their home world.

Lancaster had come searching for something specific. He believed Kovula was real, and she had left her own people for a reason. The Rochata language was primarily written in pictures, (their culture had developed so quickly that they still retained some very ancient forms of expression,) and they often drew Kovula wearing a pin or other decorative clothing that had carvings which resembled the Devil's Totem. The artifact was supposed to be a meter or two long, but on a 25 to 30 foot person, it would be about the size of a decorative piece of clothing.

The Devil's Totem had been an important artifact of the Havaka's long-time enemy the Milak Shivar. The Havaka had stolen it, along with other important treasures, and had them stored away somewhere secret. Then one day, the Devil's Totem disappeared. Many believed the Milak Shivar had stolen it back, but it was Lancaster's theory that Kovula had taken it, then run away to hide out on this planet where she was literally treated like a goddess for the remainder of her days.

Lancaster crossed over the stone bridge to the town. He could hear the stone crackling underneath his feet; the bridge was brittle, sensitive to movement and weight. Though it had lasted for millions of years, it would come apart with the gentlest of earthquakes, or a distant explosion. This latter was a grave possibility today as the Viveshi Corporation had a wrecker flying in to level an area nearby so that they could start building a supramall, and the beginnings of a colony. Corporations were generally uninterested in ancient ruins or even the treasures inside. They found them to be a nuisance, in the way, and an expensive obstacle to their progress. Though Lancaster's partner Little Jack had not found any reason to believe they were specifically destroying these ruins, even if they bombarded anywhere nearby, these ancient structures were likely to come tumbling down. Lancaster would have to hurry.

He had been lucky on the timing. In doing some last minute research at the museum through which he worked, Lancaster discovered that this specific season on the planet was a special one. Lancaster did not know exactly why, but it was celebrated as a religious holiday among the Rochata; and since Kovula was the only god they ever had, it likely had something to do with her.

Lancaster passed through the streets, stretching his neck to peek inside the empty windows. Though the Rochata were much shorter than their goddess, they still stood an average of ten feet tall, giants by human standards. He felt like a young boy sneaking around the offices of adults after hours.

Soon he arrived at the large central temple. The metal handles were placed high, for tall beings, and the stone doors themselves were enormous, intended for a much larger being. Lancaster looked it over, considering whether there may be traps on the entryway. There were masterful designs carved into the doors and the frame,

but nothing he could tell was dangerous. The artwork depicted a carpenter or similar laborer in a room filled with pillars. The laborer was working on one of these pillars, putting the final touches on it. This went along with earlier researching of the Rochata, which indicated that they valued hard work over pretty much everything.

Lancaster pressed on the doors, and they slowly creaked open, shedding light into a dusty room that had likely known only darkness for a very long time. It was sparse, and bare. Support beams held the ceiling five meters from the ground, and piles of debris revealed where furniture perhaps once sat. An altar of stone still stood at the front, along with the proof of Lancaster's theory; a three meter tall statue of a Havakan woman with her hands outstretched toward her congregation. Kovula.

What captured Lancaster's attention just as readily was a carved mural that stretched along the length of the walls. With the paint long since dissolved, it was hard for Lancaster to see the details in the mural very accurately, so he pulled out his Illuminator and scanned the walls, recording every part of the mural. When he had it all captured, he ran the image through several filters until it could give him a sharper image. He soon spotted the reason why he was just as excited to find the mural; there were a couple sections he recognized from his research.

Lancaster yanked out his notebook which he used to sketch notes and images. He found his rough outlines that matched portions of the mural, then he found their locations on the wall. These were important, but they were out of his reach.

Lancaster went outside and procured enough rocks to climb up so he could reach the mural. As he did, his partner Little Jack called him on his Talki. "Wrecker's inbound," he said.

Lancaster sighed. The planet's sun was setting and he'd hoped that meant there'd be no demolitions today. But he supposed they didn't need sunlight to destroy whole regions of a planet's surface. "How much time do I have?" Lancaster asked.

"Minutes," came the reply.

Lancaster didn't have enough of a boost to reach up comfortably, but he had just enough to stretch. He did so, rubbing his fingers against the dusty wall. He could feel the bumps in the carvings, but nothing more. He placed a foot against the wall, hopped up and slapped the mural.

A square section of the wall dented inward. Lancaster fell back off the stones, bringing a few of them down with him. He shone his light on the mural and saw that the indented portion was perfectly square, like a button. He had pressed the right point. He moved onto the next portion that he recognized from his notes. He still didn't know what this would do, but he was certain there had to be more. The ceiling was not tall enough for a Havaka, so there had to be larger rooms if she had once lived here herself.

He moved the large rocks, working as fast as he could. He did not wait until he had the same height as before; this time building his makeshift stepladder just high enough so he could make a short jump, and he slapped the next part of the mural. It, too, pulled in; the second button. Two more to go. And each time he moved fewer rocks, leaping higher. The last one he didn't land right, and the few remaining stones tumbled down with his twisting ankle.

But at least the effort was not in vain. Just as he tapped the last button, a muted clanging and a low rumble vibrated through the walls. This was followed by a crackle of falling dust and a cry of metal against cement as the statue of the Havakan goddess split in two, revealing a dark, gaping entryway into the inner chambers of the temple.

Lancaster slowly stood. His right foot was wincing in pain, but he was smiling ear to ear. He shone the light of his Illuminator into the darkness, and limped toward it. The new chamber opened up in every direction. The walls were further away, and the ceiling was higher. There were, however, an array of pillars crisscrossing the room, making it hard to see what was across the other side. There was something familiar about this room, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

He weaved around the colonnade searching for anything else; any decorations, exits, passageways, or even just clues. There were none. Though the columns themselves possessed numerous small holes. These would usually be discounted as insect or rodent holes, or the simple wear and tear of the elements, but these holes were well carved and perfectly aligned. What was more, they were on every pillar. They could be simple decoration, but they could also be traps set for the unwanted visitor who did the wrong thing.

Lancaster became very cautious with his movements, careful where he stepped, even where he looked. Outside he heard a distant roar of engines. The wrecker was in the area, and would soon begin its work. His time was very limited.

Suddenly Lancaster had a thought, perhaps even why the room looked familiar. He hurried outside, his foot reminding him of his handicap with a sharp pain, and looked over the door. The pillars in the carving looked exactly like the ones inside. He took note of the position of the laborer and photographed it.

He then hurried inside, this time more careful with his injured foot, and studied the positions of the pillars. He noticed that each grouping of pillars was aligned at least slightly differently from the next. No rows looked exactly the same. He studied the picture he had taken and compared it to the pillars. He turned the image into a hologram and held it before him, lining up his image with the posts.

At last he came up with the perfect match. Before him stood the pillar which the laborer had been working on in the carving. Going on a hunch, Lancaster reached for the side of the pillar. His eyes didn't leave the holes that might hold some deadly trap should he be wrong. His hands shook while he pressed his fingers against the cement. Then he pulled.

With a click, the false wall came off. He laid it down at the base of the support column and shone his light behind it. Behind the false wall was a basic lever. It seemed far too simple, and Lancaster was suspicious. But he saw no other alternative, so he pulled it.

Now a loud creaking noise filled the entire temple. Lancaster heard it echoing throughout the room and the next one. It was no wonder, for the ceiling was breaking apart in a spiral pattern. One end of it lowered to the floor on which Lancaster stood, and the other end rose up into the darkness of the spire above. Lancaster ducked down and protected his face from tiny bits of falling debris until at last it settled.

Lancaster stepped up the stairs cautiously, his face peeking up every step along the way, trying to get a glimpse of what was at the top. He could barely see much until he had reached the next floor. This was the chamber he had expected at first. The ceiling stretched up into a giant cone with a small dot of light at the top. Here, a Havaka could maneuver around without ever hitting its head. There was also a wide, ten meter long, tall stage, and a second platform closer to the center that was round with a white marble floor beneath several inches of dust. Around this platform stood a half dozen or so stands with magnifying and monitoring equipment attached to them. They looked like torture devices, but Lancaster recognized them as being amplifying tools used in astronomy.

Lancaster walked across the stage, heading toward the wall on the opposite side which housed Rochata writing in the form of images and symbols. These he could not make out, and he wondered if they made more sense when they still had colors of paint sticking to them. At the bottom, however, he found something he recognized; the stretched out hands of their Goddess Mother along with the symbol they had used for her. And suddenly he got it. He wasn't standing on a stage; he was standing on Kovula's sarcophagus, and the wall with the Rochata writing was her tombstone!

He leaped back apologetically. This was what he had come for. Lancaster pulled out his Illuminator again and set it to view in X-ray mode. He then scanned the top of the casket from top to bottom. He looked it over and saw the scant remains of bones. He searched the image carefully, trying to find something that might have been buried with her; anything... preferably the Devil's Totem. She had carried it with her throughout life, she must have had it buried with her in death.

A vibration shook the ceiling and dust sprinkled his hat. Little Jack explained in his Talki, "The wrecker's dropping its ordinance now. Time to make yourself scarce." It was said without much emotion. Little Jack knew that when Lancaster was onto something, he would only leave when the walls were falling around him, and they would soon enough.

Lancaster was starting to realize he would be leaving empty handed, and with no answers. The cold chill of failure coursed through his body. Then his eyes found the collection of tools on the other platform, and strange symbols on the tombstone. He scanned the stone with his Illuminator and used the filters to get a better look. Several of the lines looked like stands with poles and magnifying equipment reaching out from their trunks... They matched what was standing on the opposite platform!

Lancaster hurried to the equipment as the whole room began to rumble at the beat of distant booms. He set up the stands and arms per the instructions on his Illuminator screen. He realized soon that they were aligning with the dimly glowing crystal at the very top of the spire. He wiped the dust away from one piece of

equipment that had rows of symbols. Paging through his notes quickly he found that they were numbers. Once he had everything else set up, he found that the settings of these numbers moved the lenses on the magnifying equipment. Comparing the information again to the tombstone, he made an educated guess that this would have to be set to the number of years since her passing. Lancaster figured they hadn't ever guessed it would be used this long after, but the numbers could be adjusted appropriately, so he did.

At the moment they clicked into place, the lenses filled with glowing light, and an illuminated outline burned onto the platform. It was of two beings and a rod between them; one Lancaster recognized as a Milak Shivar, the other was the symbol the Rochata had given for the goddess. And the rod in the middle was the Devil's Totem.

Lancaster looked up at the top of the spire. The crystal there was glowing as well. He remembered that this was the season of the Rochata religious holiday. Seasons were often marked by star formations, and Lancaster considered a hunch he had. He pulled from his utility belt his Universalis Sextant and he aimed it at the sky. Even with the ceiling in the way, it read the stars that were in that direction and labeled them in a small hologram above the handheld device. The spire of the temple was pointed directly toward the star system humans had labeled Romos. Lancaster concluded that Kovula had returned the Devil's Totem to its rightful owner, and she had had her temple designed in such a way that it would point to where it had gone during the religious holiday. This staff had been her life's work; she gave up her home for it, and she even saw it through in death.

But not anymore. The walls of the spire shook, and the cracks formed at the top, reaching down like arms breaking apart the structure as it went. Lancaster ran down the steps and hurried out of the temple ignoring the burning pain of his right foot. He called to Little Jack as he dashed down the street, the walls of every building crumbling on each side of him. One piece of debris even swiped off his hat. He was swallowed by smoke as he rounded the final corner. He knew the bridge was just ahead of him, so he dashed for it. He emerged from the soot just as he came to the bridge...

Or what was left of it. The platform was crumbling into the abyss before his very eyes. Lancaster did not hesitate. He dashed across the blocks that remained, limping as he went, getting as far as he could as the blocks disintegrated under his feet. With the last solid cement slipping, he lunged forward. His chest slammed into the cliff wall, his arms grasping onto the ground. He clawed his way up, his feet aiding his effort until he got up over the edge.

Lancaster could feel the ground rumbling, and he heard the distant explosions from the wrecker's missiles destroying every other sign that life that once thrived on this planet. He also heard his partner's ship, Odin's Revenge, rise up over the lip of the mountain, ready to whisk him away.

Before him, the Lost City of Adasso crumbled to dust, and with it, the great mystery of the Rochata people, along with the incredible story of their goddess who had led their people to the path of civilization.

The End

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