

## OF OREICHALKOS FORGED

In Victorian times Warren would no doubt have been a shady purveyor of mummified Roman statues of doubtful ancestry. But nowadays all things classical were quite out of fashion while precolumbian pottery and ancient eskimo carvings were definitely in. Warren was willing to provide them in any required quantity. His clients seldom had reason to complain. None of them were archeologists.

He studied the knife the girl had just unwrapped. Leafshaped, almost a foot long in a particularly rich golden red. Burmese gold? He hefted the artifact. No, copper and not even the customary core of lead to add weight.

He raised his head. "Looks good. Did you forge it yourself?"

The girl frowned, pursed her lips. She had the finely sculpted face and fair complexion of a Hindu princess Warren thought. "It isn't a forgery!" Her voice was high, not pleasing at all.

Warren slowly shook his head. "Not a forgery then. All right. Perhaps then you would like to explain some... ah, let us call them anomalies?" He placed his index finger on the sculptured grip. "This here. An octopus. Nice clean lines. Late Minoan I would guess. The shape of the blade is pure Celtic, while those decorations... well, with some imagination one could call them Aztec. Several thousand years between them. Too much." He placed the knife back on the cotton wrappings. "Good solid work, mind you, but criminally sloppy in the details."

The girl licked her lips. "You won't buy it?"

"No, not this. But any work you care to make on commission, work more disciplined. You have the talent. This ceremonial knife..." he tested the edge once more. "For a ceremonial it must have been, much too dull to cut. This knife, it has an authentic feel to it." He smiled. "It would almost seduce me to believe in some still undiscovered treasure. Can you get me more?"

The girl nodded. "Yes, but they'll look just the same. I'm a diver. I really found them."

"I see. Care to tell me where?"

"A wreck. Its holds were filled with tradegoods. All kind of things."

"Never make your story too complicated. An exiled oil sheik forced to sell his heirlooms. Ok. An old Yaqui sorcerer, why not? But look, this knife is what archeologists call a forgery. Like new. Salt water is powerful corrosive. Copper won't last more than a few centuries."

"It isn't copper." She leaned forwards, her face a feral mask, all sharp planes, thin lips. "It's oreichalkos, you fool!"

He almost sent her away. Like most experts he didn't suffer fools gladly. But the knife was just too perfect: it had an inner consistency, a realness, for all its amateurish combination of styles.

So he made the effort and smiled. He had had a lot of practise: his smile contained

