

MARCO DI CAPRIO

**THE MYSTERY
OF EASTER ISLAND**

English translation by Antonio Siclari

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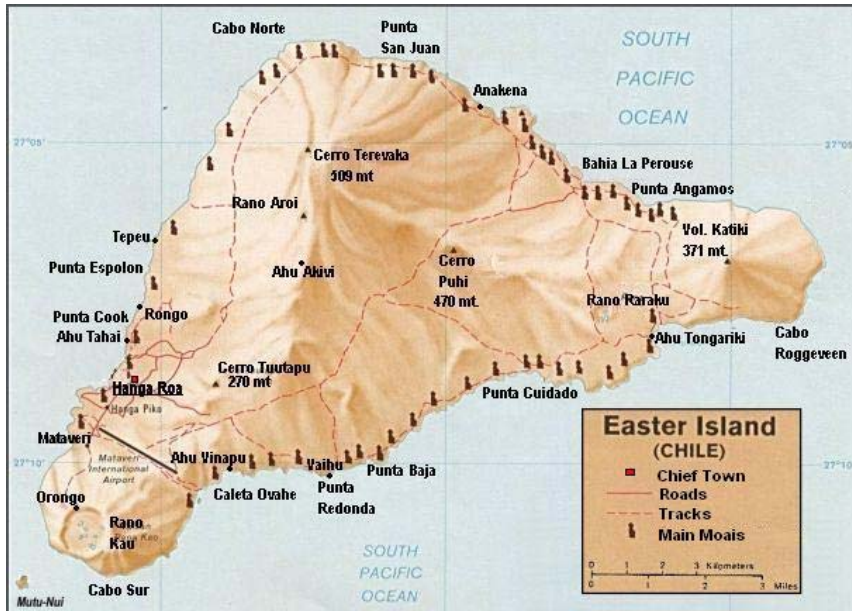
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NOTE OF THE AUTHOR

A lot of matters dealt in this volume come from my imagination: the plots of the secret agents and the archaeological research conducted by the protagonists don't represent any reference to the reality. In fact, the mystery of Easter Island has never existed; I believe that it will exist either. In any case, I want to specify that the historical excursuses and the put forward theories from the researchers about the past of Rapa Nui are real and, in this novel, they are described in precise and accurate way. Equally, they belong to the reality the physical nature of the island and the archaeological sites. Characters and other mentioned places are my invention and they have the purpose to confer truthfulness of narration. Any analogy with places and people, alive or disappeared, it is purely casual. The native inhabitants of Rapa Nui are not hostile towards the foreigners; on the contrary, they quietly cohabit with the researchers of other nationalities and many of them are also archaeologists.

EASTER ISLAND - RAPA NUI



THE MYSTERY
OF EASTER ISLAND

Prologue

The deepest darkness closed in upon that so ugly and desolate land. Covering one hundred meters or ten kilometres seemed the same thing: only rocks and deposits stood out but nothing else. A labyrinth with no way out. Mitch Freedendall kept on walking. An icy wind blew madly on his face and it lifted a halo of dust that darkened the view. He turned a glance to his neon torch and cursed. That gadget, which had emanated a magnificent white light just a little before, was damaged: it slipped from his hand by mistake and it had fallen on a heap of pebbles. Mitch stopped gasping, he dried the sweat on his forehead and fixed thoughtful the ground in front of him: there was a light descent and a strange twinkling stood out among some stones. The man seized the shovel from his backpack and leaned it in that point that had attracted his attention. A screeching made him start. He understood that it was a metallic edge made of bronze and he started digging around him with caution while his expression quickly changed.

Mitch found an inlaid casket in wood. Some strange drawings and symbols stood out on the cover but he didn't take so much account: he was dying to see the content. He forced the lock that stopped the opening at a single blow of axe and finally his yearning curiosity was satisfied. Mitch remained to fix the inside of the casket, hearing his heart beating madly because the amazement: he could scarcely believe his eyes. He had found something too precious: he would have never imagined finding himself in such a similar situation. He searched his pocket, he seized his radio, and he selected the frequency and tried to call: his companions had to be in the surroundings. A woman answered with ringing voice. Mitch explained what happened to him in the least details with a too excited feeling and he gave his right coordinates that he was reading

on a pocket satellite detector. Then he stopped the communication and waited that his friends turned up.

He had not to wait long because he soon saw two outlines standing out on the ground in the obscurity of the night: a man and a woman reached him running. Joy was uncontrollable: it really seemed the most beautiful evening of their life. It would have been only unfortunately an illusion: it was happening something too disturbing. Mitch changed attitude shortly after and fixed in front of him with suspicious air: he had a strange sensation. Some shuffling could be heard more and more insistent. The three friends closed the casket and they picked it up: the instinct invited them to escape... but where? They risked losing themselves anyway; despite they had so precise location tools. They swallowed and held their breath resigned by now: a deadly terror hacked on their face. About twenty armed soldiers came out from a dense fog of dust with threatening air to surround them: they were armed with machine gun and they aimed them with extreme attention. One of these came forward, perhaps an officer, and it made a sign with his hand. The soldiers started going slowly closer and closer to the three friends. They had their finger firm on the trigger and they were ready to shoot. Mitch instinctively tightened the casket under his arm. Here is the most valid reason to kill.

“Rapa Nui: the big rock”

It was an island of the Pacific Ocean, Chilean possession from 1888: Easter, well-known also with the Polynesian name “*Rapa Nui*” (big rock literally), it represented one of the most isolated and mysterious places of the world. On the islet (162.5 Square Kms), they were three volcanoes and some reliefs - the tallest, with its 510 meters, it was the Cerro Terevaka - completely wild zones and also human constructions. Among these, it certainly stood out an airport in the small place of Mataverí. The buildings, which made the island unique in the world, were the *moais*, imposing statues of tuff tall about ten meters; these probably represented a close-up of the progenitors of the local Polynesian native, known with the name of “*Rapanui*” or, more simply, “*Easter Island people*”.

The natives, on the arrival of the Westerners, they were pacific and hospitable towards the others. The authoritarian attitude of the foreigners and their greed of the ancient local treasures made the natives very hostile and dangerous during the XXI century. These last ones had approved that their land was an alone Chilean possession after having received some important guarantees from the governorship. The South American dominators would have avoided to impose too many laws to the natives, recognized the authority of their king and granted them to live in community set apart in the island villages. Hanga Roa was the chief town and centre of the Chilean governorship, but they were not less important the centres of Mataverí, Vaihu and Anakena. Despite all these precautions to avoid useless bloodsheds, the Chileans often found themselves to have to fight the natives getting great losses; Easter Island people, in fact, illegally possessed a very competitive army

and they were skilled warriors. That nation of South-America could not benefit from Easter Island anymore: Rapa Nui didn't give any economic and political advantage; it rather represented only a huge cost because of the maintenance of the archaeologists that lived there.

These ones incessantly tried to reconstruct Easter Island history, still wrapped completely in the mystery... the researchers, in fact, put forward only a series of suppositions without absolute proofs, judging on the oral stories handed down by the natives for centuries. The only documents had been found in the XX century: a series of tablets written with some strange hieroglyphs: the so-called characters in *rongo-rongo*, not yet deciphered. The writing was a luxury of few people and only the priests had put down in writing something in the ancient history of the islanders. The archaeologists, besides so many legends, learnt about the knowledge of the existence of an unknown object, of which they heard about from the natives, that the native priests knew well, they intended to hide to the others and they identified with the word "mystery". The curiosity of the archaeologists grew more day by day and it was reported also by the mass media: they all dreamt to discover this imaginary mystery of Easter Island by now.

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The assignment

It was the 3 January of the year 2099. The Chilean president, following so many mediations with his collaborators at the government, finally decided to start the negotiation to assign Easter and go to Parliament to let the deputies' vote regarding the matter. The news immediately travelled round the world and also arrived to Washington; Jeffery McNamara, an American diplomat secretly affiliated to the CIA and right-hand man of the president of the United States, welcomed him with enthusiasm, noticing the greedy opportunity to make the island finally become an American possession.

That evening, the leader of the South America state, after so many little civil discussions, went out in advance of the room of the Parliament with very tired but satisfied expression. He was now drinking a glass of tequila, sat behind the desk of his office to celebrate his triumph: he did it... Easter would not have been Chilean anymore. That island had become a matter too burning for his administration; therefore he could not absolutely ignore the pressures of the Americans.

The agents of the CIA had given him the warning two days before: <<See to it that your deputies vote for the assignment, otherwise we will announce everything to the United Nations. >>

The Chilean leader, a sensible man, understood of course very well the importance of the message: if he could not find the solution to the problem, they would not only have dismissed him from his office, but he would have been tried even by the international court for crimes against the humanity.

Now the South American president was a free man: having carried out his “duty”, any secret agent could not have touched him anymore; he would be allowed to trouble him either. In any case, the Chilean leader kept on being in a cold sweat and trembling with fear: a hour before he entered Parliament very worried, and he started telling the usual truths for which it would have been good to sell the island; some deputies of the opposition, however, had mentioned to the position of prestige in which Chile was thanks to Easter Island: since the mystery had become the greatest enigma of the millennium, overcoming even the Grail's one, the government received even more incentives from the Unesco and from various tourist corporations. Other deputies, on the other hand, had guessed the possible assignment like an ashamed surrender of Chile with Easter Island people that raged for some time with popular revolts, or like an immoral refusal to protect the archaeological community. The Chilean president, nevertheless, had exploited his oratorical abilities to find a good pretext; in fact, he tried in any case to make his people understand that the sale was essential to collect the necessary money to reduce the national debt and to commission works of social utility. After having made this kind of speech, then he let the parliament proceed by the electronic vote; when he noticed that they voted for the assignment, he had held tears of joy back.

Now the Chilean leader could not believe it yet... he wiped the sweat away from his forehead, he drank a sip of his tequila and thought: “The most of the job is finished! Now the auction is the second and last mission, simple and marginal... I have only to monitor the transaction, so that things go for the best. I don't want to be annoyed again from the Americans.”

The Chilean president had to surrender the island to the nation that would have offered more money in a sort of auction within the end of the week; every potential buyer could offer once and this had to be more than one hundred billion of dollars. In any case, nobody seemed interested to buy Rapa Nui. The day after, the United States and China made their offer. The Asian colossus had acted for first: they were ready to pay eight hundred billion of dollars. Paradoxically the Chinese didn't really intend to buy the island, but only to

increase the price because they wanted to make Americans spend so much money for a triangle of earth that didn't mean anything for them. Thanks to the intervention of some skilled spies, they learnt that McNamara would have bought Easter for an exorbitant amount of money. The governor Jeffery McNamara had then offered five million about evening that would have assured certainly his victory on future donations from other possible parties. The Chilean leader, at the end of the day, decided to close the transaction in advance and, during a press conference, he declared that the United States were the new owners of Easter Island.

McNamara, in the moment of the announcement, was in his office in Washington glued before a monitor with one of the best friend of his, the colonel Henry Wilkins. He could not hold back his exultation: he was indeed in seventh heaven.

<<I can finally appropriate that island>> McNamara affirmed, to say the least enthusiastic <<I cannot wait to do it. >>

<<Jeff, still a little is clear about this matter... why have you bought a small island like that?>> the friend colonel asked <<Do you want, perhaps, to earn money from there thanks to the tourism and the incentives of the Unesco?>>

<<That's right, Henry>> McNamara answered <<Easter is a real gold mine, but nobody imagines it. Very soon it will become a tourist heaven like Puerto Rico. >> The colonel Wilkins didn't know anything regarding the real McNamara's intentions: in reality, besides the diplomat, only some men of the secret services knew about the misdeed. <<Have you idea about how Easter will be administered? >> Wilkins asked again.

<<Yes>> McNamara nodded <<It will be an American protectorate with an American governor, chosen by the island citizens through free elections. It will also have a parliament separated from ours but watched over by the American authorities.>>

<<Do you already know who can stand as a candidate? >>

<<I don't know... in any case, I will now go to Rapa Nui to arrange some matters. >> <<I think about following you; my help could be useful to you... we have also to bring Easter Island people to account>> he warned Wilkins <<They are dangerous. >>

<<They have spoken of it to me>> McNamara thundered <<It won't be a handful of natives to stop the American power. >>

<<Many people say that their king is warlike>> the colonel explained him <<We should deal with him for a stable and lasting peace. >>

<<I will never deal with a native... on the contrary>> McNamara started <<We will go and meet him to illustrate our impositions. I think that Easter Island man lives in his own building located in Hanga Roa from which he manages his people; at Easter, in fact, the power of the monarch is absolute: the king names all the officials, selected among the members of ancient local noble surnames, he decides the politics, he has the full right to move his army when he wants and he is replaced by his male first-born on his death. >>

<<As far as we know the Chilean regent was no use>> Henry Wilkins interrupted him <<Am I wrong? >>

<<Not at all>> Jeffery McNamara said <<His authority was too limited and his position was become only a simple formality of the Chilean state. But my governor, whoever he is, he will finally tidy Rapa Nui up at any cost. >>

McNamara and his friend left the office escorted by some body guards, they sat on a limousine and, shortly, they reached the airport. There they got on a military jet and directed toward Easter. They were accompanied by the general John Blackwell and four hundred American soldiers that had to be used only as permanent garrison of Rapa Nui. Other two thousand militiamen should have reached the island the day after: they would have been a further defence from the warlike natives.

The news of the sale of the Chileans also reached Easter, which was wrapped by a big sultriness: in fact, since it was January 5, the summer already started from long time in the southern hemisphere. The Chilean regent and other exponents of the government of Santiago walked along the streets of the chief town Hanga Roa with the suitcases in their hands. All of them thought with anger about their years wasted to guide a quite ungovernable island and try to soothe the revolts of the natives; they regretted not to have spent that time in other way. Luckily they were now about to return in country: soon Easter Island would have represented only a faded

memory for them. The Chileans reached the airport of Mataverí in twenty minutes and they remained waiting for their airplane, which was late. An hour later they saw that the American diplomat McNamara and his collaborators were going down from their imposing military jet, they greeted them wishing they could hold the natives at bay and they directed toward the embarking pavilion, where their flight was ready to leave.

McNamara went out of the airport with his men and sneered to the Chileans that considered incapable in military circle. The general John Blackwell, meanwhile, took everyone to the parking place, where about fifty jeeps were stopped, and he got on his with the diplomat and Wilkins; he sat to drive and he ordered to all the other soldiers to follow him as far as the near Hanga Roa.

During the brief journey, the colonel Wilkins, sensible man, mentioned to the eventuality to put a police station in the island chief town instead of a barracks full of soldiers. The general Blackwell confirmed immediately instead the importance of the soldiers as defenders of the citizens on a so insecure and swarming triangle of earth of warlike natives. While they were being intents to discuss on similar things, the three found themselves to cross the principal road of the chief town to the edges of which were assembled hundreds of rejoicing Easter Island people. Oddly the natives seemed to hold the new dominators better than the Chileans and they hymned the name of the diplomatic McNamara with great admiration.

The man decided to stop the jeeps, he went down with his collaborators and the soldiers, he greeted the people that crowded around him, and he murmured a half word. Some natives very elegantly dressed, believing that McNamara had taken a liking to their people, they came closer to him.

<<Glory to you McNamara! We will give hospitality to you and your friends>> they warmly said in Rapanui, the language of Polynesian stock, spoken by Easter Island people.

The diplomat didn't understand a word and cast a glance surprised to an interpreter that was among the soldiers. The man went closer to him, he translated without delay the message and frowned almost intimidated: as foreseen, the diplomat got mad.

<<What?>> McNamara started <<I am who have to give them hospitality, because the island is an American possession from now on... listen, tell them that I want this island gets habitable for a lot more people. I will build new buildings and I demolish what it remains of the vegetation. >>

The interpreter, without wasting time, reported everything to Easter Island people. These ones changed expression: from sunny and smiling, their faces became dismal and full of hate; their behaviour changed instantly also: if first they wanted to embrace McNamara, they now had intention to slit him. In fact, they started to lift their fists in air and howl.

The translator, intimidated rather, didn't hesitate, then, to utter in a low voice, turning to McNamara: <<My lord, they have said that, if you want to fight, you have a worthy adversary in front of you. >>

Meanwhile, the soldiers firmly grasped their machine guns and intervened on some Polynesian people that were laying their hands on the diplomat, using, however, their weapons only like clubs. McNamara, after he was satisfied of the intervention of his men, made a speech in enough short and concise English, by which he explained to the Polynesian his "rules" of pacific cohabitation. The American government would have allowed them to have monarch and laws apart, on condition that they all had left later the chief town Hanga Roa within the day after. Easter Island people had to transfer; besides, the royal residence in a village almost entirely abandoned called Rongo that was located near Punta Cook. In fact in that place there was a building, built many centuries before by Easter Island people and turned to take a king.

The treasure

The decisions of McNamara made soon the turn of the island and naturally they also reached the royal palace of Easter Island monarch Hotukau; he, furious, waited that it was growing dark to go out in his balcony and to make a speech to the people gathered in the principal square of Hanga Roa, just in front of his residence.

The monarch talked with big disdain of the arrogance of McNamara, of his wish to subdue the natives and of the many deceptions of which he was able. Nevertheless, the king Hotukau ordered to his people, even if unwillingly, to accept the conditions just because advantageous; in fact, the distance of the regal authority from Hanga Roa, centre of the American governorship, allowed to the Polynesian leadership to prepare a revolt against the dominators distant from indiscreet eyes. As foreseen, Easter Island people of Hanga Roa moved, the sultry morning later, without delay in the abandoned village of Punta Cook, where a little Easter Island people community lived.

At the same time the Americans took possession of the old palace of the Chilean governorship that was the only proper centre to take the island government according to McNamara. The usual routine on the island was starting again by now, but a governor was still missing that should have been selected from all the citizens of the island through free elections. Nevertheless, the American diplomat didn't seem to agree: to carry into effect his secret plan with calm, he would have had to put someone he liked at the power. He wanted a not very liberal man that would not have put in discussion his behaviours and would have limited himself only to approve all of his choices regarding Easter without asking too questions.

McNamara thought that a man with such requisite was certainly the general John Blackwell. He, in fact, loved the war more than whomever other and he didn't ask anything else other than an aggressive politics towards the foreigners. With a governor of that kind, McNamara could have completed punitive consignments against the natives when it would have been more opportune. Unfortunately he had not so much trust in the soldiers, and he feared that the general could elude him; McNamara decided to opt for an alternative solution: he himself would have run as governor. He didn't mind that idea, rather it thrilled him very much: the diplomat would have enjoyed a position of prestige on the island and he would have checked that his plan was carried out in the best ways. The obstacle that seemed insurmountable was another: as to be certain to get the power. If the elections were not held, the diplomat would have appeared to the island archaeologists like a man with dictatorial powers; in spite of everything, McNamara found in any case the way justify his movements.

The following morning, on January 6, he proclaimed himself governor of Rapa Nui and, during a press conference, he explained to some journalists of a Polynesian broadcasting station that he was an official with special powers: he would have stayed in office, till when the danger of tumults was not stopped by the natives. After he had finished to talk to the press, the new governor, trying to enjoy few time of relax, he went to the beach; when he came back, around six in the afternoon, he saw that in his office a person was sat with a very happy air in front of his desk. He was the Californian Mitch Freedendall, superintendent for the excavations on Easter Island and head of the archaeologists. The governor looked at him with interrogative air, he took a seat in front of him and he asked him the reason for the visit.

<<There are some great novelties>> Freedendall began
<<Yesterday a Danish archaeologist has pointed out some inscriptions near the volcano Rano Aroi, speaking of a rich treasure belonged to the ancestors of Easter Island people and buried near of one of the island relieves... unfortunately we don't know which one. Even today, the finding would represent one of the dearest objects of the king Hotuaku and the natives. >>

McNamara's eyes suddenly illuminated. <<We have to find it as soon as possible>> the governor replied <<A similar treasure has an enormous value from the historical and cultural point of view. Besides it can also be useful at my purpose. >>

Mitch Freedendall nodded. <<I have understood what you mean, but I don't think that it has something to do with it. The archaeologists don't believe that too...>>

<<And don't give a damn! >> irritated McNamara brusquely interrupted him <<they won't be some bookworms like your employees to stop my aims. >>

<<My archaeologists are not lazy. On the contrary they are more devoted to the adventure than I was least until a couple of years ago. I will solicit them to sieve the whole zone. The island is not too large... you will see that we will find it in less than one month. >>

<<After you have found the treasure, I will make its content analyse. For now I count on your support and I hope that you won't disappoint me. You know well that is not worthwhile for you to do it. >>

That same evening, Mitch Freedendall invited the archaeologists to explore the surrounding zones at the high grounds of the island, just as the inscription suggested. The smallest group directed toward the volcano Rano Kau, situated in the southern zone of Rapa Nui, under the guide of Mario Caruso, a twenty-four year-old young very promising American. After he had arrived in proximity of the volcano Rano Kau, he understood to have isolated himself from his companions by mistake; despite everything, he didn't stop and took a lane excavated on the slant of the volcano leading straight on its summit. After he had crossed around five hundred meters, the youth noticed that a contingent of warlike Easter Island people armed with rifles blocked him the way; in a first moment, Mario thought about doing an about-turn, pretending not to be intimidated by the meeting.

<<Hey, my friend, are you American? >> one of the armigers with friendly air asked.

Mario that spoke a very difficult Easter Island language, they said in English with frankness: <<I am sorry, but I have not a lot of

familiarity with your language. If I have understood well, one of you asked me if I am American. >>

<<I can speak English well, my friend! >> another Polynesian said
<<Are you a scientist? >>

The archaeologist understood not to be able to reveal the purpose of his mission: Easter Island people would not have approved his cause of course; he had a long sigh and he invented an excuse: <<I am an archaeologist, but I have no bad intentions... I only walked and I meditated on the history of your ancestors. Can you tell me something about your origins? >>

Easter Island man answered with thoughtful air: <<My friend, you have a sincere face. Surely the reasons are honest for which you want to know the history of my people... you don't want to steal nothing, I imagine. Unfortunately, as perhaps you already know, the king forbids to his subjects to mention to similar details with whatever foreigner. >>

Just in that while, it started raining: the watches immediately ran toward the valley to protect themselves, and they ordered to Mario to follow them. The American tailed Easter Island people for a tract at a slow pace; when he realized to have outdistanced them, he came back and covered the dirt road that conducted on top of the volcano again. Soon the rain became a big storm with strong winds, lightning and thunders. The archaeologist, completely soaked by now, could hardly continue because of the draughts that had become too violent. After having walked for some other meter with big spasm, Mario stopped an instant to rest and look for a covered place; he fixed a point on the ground, he noticed a metallic object that stuck out from the ground, he threw out a shovel of his backpack and he started digging with curiosity. He found a rudimentary coffer with some writings and some signs represented on the cover, he forced the lock and opened it: it was really the treasure of Easter Island people.

Mario was in the seventh heaven: it was the very first piece of luck of his career; now it was a real problem to take it away. The archaeologist could take the heavy coffer by himself making it drag on the ground; in that situations, after his descent downhill, he would have had few possibilities to escape with agility from the field

of vision of Easter Island watches, surely positioned around and protected from rain. Mario, after having meditated for a long time on the pros and cons, he decided to risk; he turned and crossed the steep lane in descent, favoured by the strong wind that exhaled behind his shoulders. He went downhill and heard a big silence... he didn't know if he had to believe it a good or bad sign: the enemies could be also in the shade. In any case, the young man dragged along a line of moai with caution, until accidentally he stumbled on one of the bases, called *abu* by Easter Island people, used to take pair of moais. A native armiger, well protected behind the statue, he aroused suddenly and started looking around with thoughtful air. Mario, meanwhile, was a prey to the panic and the desperation: his heart started accelerating the pulsations, his hands started trembling like leaves to the wind and his face got like fire. In fact, if Easter Island man had found him with the treasure, he would not have hesitated to eliminate him. Luckily, the drowsy sentinel turned a fleeing glance in front of himself and went back to crouch. The American finally had the go-ahead and kept on winding along the moais; when he realized to have reached the border of the village, he breathed a sigh of relief: he was able to take the treasure away to Easter Island people: an arduous enterprise to tell to everybody. The other members of the consignment were few meters far from Mario in a cavern-shelter; seeing him with the coffer, they ran to meet, they loaded together the treasure on one of the jeeps with the intention to take it to Hanga Roa the day after, and they came back sheltered with the hero of the enterprise.

At the first lights of the dawn, the archaeologists came back in the chief town with their off-road vehicles; McNamara that was walking along the little excavated streets of Hanga Roa, as soon as he noticed the boys with the treasure, he stopped them. He hardly held back a big cry of joy and he congratulated to the group with enthusiastic air.

<<Good! You are a great team>> the governor said <<This is an inestimable discovery with historical and cultural value. To reward you, I will get that the American office of the research grants you the highest possible honours! >>

<<Governor, the merit is not ours, but Mario's one that challenged the bad weather of last night for the success of the mission>> one of the researchers said <<It is right that he is rewarded only>>

McNamara went closer to the head of the consignment and said him with great admiration: <<You are a real archaeologist, my boy! You deserve a cash prize... we will see what the Ministry decide about it. >>

At that very afternoon, Mario Caruso was called at the building of the governorship by some exponents of the American office of the research; he received there, with his big amazement, a medal and a check for twenty thousand dollars. He had finally been repaid, after so much arduous job on Easter Island, with the discovery of goods with an inestimable value. The governor McNamara took part in the prize giving ceremony for Mario and he congratulated a lot of times with the researcher; he asked him, besides, to be more often informed on discoveries and recoveries of historical importance that concerned the island. The American archaeologist was amazed by similar requests: it seemed strange for him that such an important man was interested of his job; nevertheless he promised to McNamara that he would have done the possible to inform him about everything.

An interesting discovery

The following morning on 8 January, the archaeologist Mario Caruso woke up at eight o'clock, he got on his convertible jeep, parked out, and he started toward the beach of Punta Espolon; the young man had to meet some colleagues and explore the sea backdrops in that zone with them, provided of his underwater overall.

Mario reached shortly the destination, he parked his jeep behind a moai, and he entered the descent to sea and started fixing the landscape that was wonderful from above: from up there, a small inlet was noticed along the coast with some white sand and a clear sea. Caruso went down on the desert shore and noticed that all the colleagues still had to arrive; only the superintendent, for that archaeological expedition, was there already. It was Jerry Davis, a man as old as him, well known at international level and his friend of infancy, waiting sat at the shade of a palm.

<<You ever arrived earlier today>> Jerry affirmed in jolly tone
<<You are getting too precise. I have understood. You aspire to a promotion and to take my place. But I advise you... nobody has my nose to discover ancient finds. >>

<<Yours is luck, Jerry>> Mario inveighed ironic, sitting close to him <<You know better than me that you are not worth. You are only in that position of privilege in comparison to the other colleagues just by chance>>.

The two friends remained in silence for few minutes: they were absorbed to fix the waters of the ocean, from which a strong breeze that beat on their faces was coming.

<<I continually meditate on our job and on how many other efforts we have to complete for reconstructing the history of the island>>
Jerry burst out <<It's a fundamental mission... I hope that my calculations are not wrong. >>

<<In this zone of the ocean we have found quite a lot finds in the past>> the other retorted with firm tone <<I trust very much in the mission. >>

The archaeologists had decided to program this expedition because they wanted to discover some interesting sign that could take on the traces of the big mystery. All of them, in fact, believed that the waters of Punta Espolon could contain many interesting finds; already different times, small statues were discovered and furnishings engraved by various inscriptions.

<<We have been working for decades hoping to find a least trace that leads us to the mystery>> Jerry affirmed <<we have collected only defeats and disappointments till now... it was wasted job. >>

<<We should perhaps reflect on the finds that we hold>> Mario said <<I know that it is a hypothesis, in my opinion, the treasure and the mystery have to be connected; both are precious objects and of fundamental importance to the eyes of the natives. >>

<<We have already discussed among colleagues of it and you know well that all gave their opinion against a similar hypothesis. Also the coffer should bring us to exclude such theory. It contains some simple precious stones that have nothing special. I know it, the mystery can represent anything, since we don't know what it is, but it is an extremely rare object with mystical powers according to ancient written testimonies.>>

Mario affirmed that this description had been surely exaggerated; he hypothesized that Easter Island people had been extracting in the past precious material in abundance on the island from a richer subsoil and picked up the superfluous in the coffer discovered from him that represented the fruit of the work of the ancestors... and maybe the mystery could be a very precious gem, hidden under some ancient downfall or set in a megalith sculpture.

<<Only you could make a similar hypothesis>> Jerry laughed <<Perhaps too fanciful, but original. >>

<<Only wandering with the imagination, something of historical validity can be supposed>> Mario confirmed with definite air <<In any case, we will discover the mystery of Easter Island at the cost to work the whole life in Rapa Nui. >>

The colleagues that Mario and Jerry waited finally went down on the beach; they went near to the two men and greeted them warmly.

The archaeologists, without delaying too much, they wore the underwater overall, they entered the transparent waters of the ocean and moved offshore; after they had reached an acceptable depth, they effected the immersion and activated the “Ocean defender”, an instrument that emanated an electromagnetic field able to get further sharks or similar sea animals.

The archaeologists patrolled the surrounding zone at Punta Espolon for four hours, breathing pure oxygen by their capacious cylinders. They were very tired and disheartened by now, on the point to give up. Fortunately a French archaeologist saw a metallic edge coming out from the bottom of the sea. The European researcher went near to the strange object, she removed the soil that surrounded it, she found a casket with big amazement, and she took it and came back to the shore with the colleagues, even more amazed than her. Mario, after he had observed for a long time with the others the signs engraved in the iron of the cassette, lost his patience, he opened it and noticed that to inside there was a thin tablet of stone containing incomprehensible symbols. He was amazed and rather confused: he had noticed that writing in the French Polynesia, therefore the same could not be attributed to Easter Island people. The colleagues eyed the content of the tablet, they tried to decipher some symbol and they lost their patience: nobody was able to understand a syllable. Mario remembered about a Canadian glottologist, expert in archaeology, named Patrick Ford with whom he had affected some important researches in the past: surely he was the right man for deciphering. After that Mario informed the colleagues of his intentions, Jerry Davis ordered to everybody to come back to the archaeological centre with him: the solution opted by the friend was excellent ... he, on the other hand, knew Patrick Ford too because of his great ability to decipher any type of Polynesian writing-apart

the incomprehensible rongo-rongo, that had been archaic or eighteenth-century.

When the researchers had arrived in the chief town on board of their off-road vehicles, Mario, Jerry and other four archaeologists among the most influential went into the building, they directed toward the study of the glottologist and, after having informed him about their strange discovery, they handed him the open casket with anxious air.

<<I have seen similar ideograms only to Hiva Oa, in the Marquesas Islands. I know very well them however>> Patrick assured confident <<Despite the symbols are a little scratched, I will try not to disappoint you. Unfortunately you will have to wait for some time. >>

<<Of course>> Jerry nodded friendly, slapping his interlocutor's shoulder <<We could not even pretend a quick work from the most experienced researcher of Polynesian ideograms... after all, the tablet and the casket have lain for centuries under the water. >>

<<As the situation is outlined complex, I prefer immediately to get down to work>> the Canadian man murmured, leaning the casket on his desk <<I don't hide you that I am curious to know the meaning of the registrations. >>

The archaeologists greeted the glottologist, leaving him up against his hieroglyphs, and they went to have lunch together, satisfied of their behaviour; for Mario that day passed really in a hurry. The young man, after having eaten, he went to the beach with Jerry and with some colleagues, as well as dear friends, to have a swim and he remained there for the whole rest of the day; in fact, he took the way back around midnight.

A strange letter

Mario's jeep roared, while the driver directed toward the chief town. The roads were all excavated and no of them were asphalted on the island; besides, the lamp-posts were rare that could illuminate only with their slim neon light the principal road of Hanga Roa. Being at disposal so miserable courses, it became essential the use of the off-road vehicles that, on the other hand, were very expensive at that time. The use of the aircraft was, besides, very limited, because the island was too small and didn't offer suitable space for landing; this last technological invention, projected for the first time in 2051 by Chinese engineers, it consisted in a real machine, with more eccentric forms than terrestrial ones, done on purpose for flying and cross long distances. Its peculiar characteristics clearly consisted in the lack of wheels and a piston engine: these aircrafts, you fed by electric energy, were suspended in mid-air - thanks to gamma rays and they could climb to any altitude.

Mario found himself soon to enter the chief town, when he heard his mobile ringing. The researcher didn't waste time to approach in front of the neighbour archaeological centre and to answer: it was Patrick, saying that he finally has succeeded in translating the tablet. Mario was beside himself with joy... he felt that he would have known something very important. The discoverer of the treasure immediately entered the building, he crossed the corridor of the atrium, he went up the stairs, and he knocked the door of the study of the glottologist and went in with enthusiastic air. The room was rectangular and enough large: looking at it from the door, one could immediately note a couch close to the entry on the left wall. A little more far, a wide window stood out, while a desk was at the bottom

of the room; behind this one, there was a bookstore. Mario saw, besides, an imposing television set, high-technology product, on its right opposite to the sofa. Patrick that was sitting behind the desk invited him enthusiastic to sit in front of him and he reported him that he had done a good translation work, better than he hoped. He opened his laptop that he had put back in a corner of the writing desk a little before; he removed the “stand-by” setting and turned it toward his friend. The American, almost shivering with the emotion, brought it near to him and read with very careful and impassioned air.

Dear colleague, the old treasure of Hotu Matua is a very precious and important relic; perhaps the most illustrious of all... but it is always a terrestrial object, not very divine. Before the mystery falls among our hands, we were not sure that we had the favour of our ancestors, but now we are sure that our custodians protect and look us, both from the high and the lower part. The treasure was overshadowed, like the most of the ancient relics. Unfortunately we have been too unwise and not very crafty, we have faced a certain war with excessive lightness and we have paid everything dear, besides disappointing the divinities. Now those damned men have massacred our friends and our darlings and demolished many moais; tell me, are they worthy to possess the mystery? Well, I will punish them... I have already given back the ancient value and shine to the old treasure, thanks to my work, it got a “piece” of mystery.

Mario looked better at the word file to see if something else was written, he moved his forefinger on the pad, he gave a last glance and he addressed to Patrick with confused air.

<<Many parts are very difficult to be understood>> the Canadian man affirmed <<If you want to blame me to have translated badly, I assure you that you waste only your time. >>

<<But one can understand a little from this text... perhaps having the hieroglyphs in front of me, it would have been better. >>

Patrick cared to give his interpretation: first of all, Hotu Matua was the first native king. According to the tradition, after having dreamt a strip of wonderful land in the middle of the ocean, he left an archipelago with his family and set the sail in canoe; many months later he berthed on a land in which he recognized what he had

imagined: Easter Island. The historians had the tendency to see something true in this legend: perhaps, around 400 AD, while in Rome the Western empire collapsed a series of people left the Marquesas Islands to direct toward East. Maybe these people needed new earth to cultivate or they were defeated a war; in any case, they reached Rapa Nui, bringing with them seeds of banana tree and chickens. Patrick stopped on the culture of Easter Island people: the “custodians” mentioned in the passage were their ancestors, dead warriors in ancient times. The natives attributed a vital importance to the cult of the ancestors, just as the Germanic populations and the Viking ones did. Mario explained that the so-called custodians looked from lower place too, because Easter Island people believed that the moais contained the “mana”, the spirit of the ancestors that watched over on the villages and on the people. The American stopped about the well underlined war in the tablet: it surely dealt about the notorious conflict among the two factions historically rivals of the island... the long and the short ears. The former dominated on the latter and, according to some hypotheses, they were aristocratic and priests, the custodians of the ancient traditions and the commission agent of the moais; in fact, they forced their slaves, the short ears, to carve the statues in the quarry of the Rano Raraku and to transport them, probably using some trunks, on some bases of stone, just the *abus*. The excessive deforestation and the overpopulation made the ground mainly unproductive, thing that made the short ears rise up: the poor slaves had to work hard for moving sculptures of thousand of tons and, then, to see their own bread denied for that cause. Around the XVII century, the builders rose up with violence, they captured the aristocrats and, since they had not anything to eat, they fed on their flesh. According to another version, the long ears, tired of the protests, they planned to capture the slaves and to devour them to humiliate them; the plan, however, failed and the brutal aristocrats ended up being victims by their same plot. Patrick, listened to Mario's story, wanted to specify that, according to other sources, the explorers of the XVIII century - Roggeveen, Cook and La Perouse - had found, during their trips, a fertile ground still and able to give many fruits with the least effort. <<Many conflicting hypotheses

exist about the history of the island>> Patrick kept on explaining <<It is not easy to hypothesize the agents for which a ground covered of plants has become bare and arid. >>

<<The human cause is evident>> Mario affirmed <<In any case, I think very probable that the phenomenon of erosion of the ground has been gradual. The ground immediately could have worsened after the era of the explorations of Rapa Nui. Perhaps the civil war has broken out because the two factions didn't intend to compete for the resources of the island. >> Patrick stopped about the last part, the most important of the whole registration: what did one mean “piece” of mystery? Surely it was very difficult to imagine a part of an unknown thing. Mario, hypothesizing the object very looked for as a precious gem, explained that there could be a small glimmering fragment in the coffer. He turned his attentions to the textual typology: someone had written an informal letter to a friend, perhaps a close relation that wanted to inform about his actions. The greetings are missing and, more important thing, the signature, elements that could have illuminated the archaeologists.

Patrick specified not to have skipped even a hieroglyph of the tablet, he took it in his hand with confused air and he started thinking in a loud voice about the use of the writing: why had the anonym used the Marquesas Islands language? Better still, Easter Island people that, according to the hypotheses of the researchers, had not any contact with other people since they disembarked at Rapa Nui, how did they know the Marquesas Islands language? Mario beat a fist on the table with vehemence. <<I am literally going crazy! >> he howled with confused air and rather exacerbated <<We cannot count on our strengths to understand that damned missive!>>

<<But we can on the strengths of others>> Patrick said with happy air <<I perhaps know an old Easter Island wise man that could help us. He lives on the slopes of the volcano Katiki or Poike, at southeast of the island. He is one big friend of mine and he has already helped me in the past... he could be the right way for us. >>

<<Damn, Patrick! >>Mario sighed <<Why the hell have you not told it first! >>

Just at that moment, the head commander of Easter Island army, Rong Kohau, was at the foot of the Rano Kau: Easter Island man had just known by some armigers that the treasure was not at its place anymore and also he thought whom to blame. He mounted his horse and left toward Rongo; he brought a big lantern with him that illuminated his way in that dark night. After having covered a brief coastal journey, the native reached the royal residence of Hotukau, he entered the room of the throne without letting himself introduce by the watches and he noticed that the king was sat on his armchair with drowsy air. <<Majesty, an unbelievable thing is happened... the evening before last, the Americans have stolen us the treasure! >> the commander Kohau exclaimed <<Some sentinels have sworn to have seen one of them in the surroundings of the Rano Kau.>>

At these words, king Hotukau started: <<What? The big treasure is in McNamara's hands! It is your fault, Rong! >>

<<My Sire, I don't know anything>> the commander cleared himself <<I was at home to protect myself from the rain. >>

<<We have absolutely to get it back>> Hotukau noticed <<This time, the Americans went too far... if I thought to organize a simple revolt, I was wrong: now our objective is to assault the palace of the governorship and punish McNamara. >>

<<I think that a similar thing is not possible. The Americans are very cunning, my majesty. They have very probably stolen the treasure to hold us at bay. If they see us with the army in the chief town, they could destroy our sacred object in thousand pieces. >>

King Hotukau shook his head and made a grimace of anger. He could not believe that the U.S. citizens had found such a simple way to hold his warlike impetus at bay; unfortunately he had to admit that it happened.

<<Damn, it is true>> the monarch affirmed <<Despite everything, I believe that they don't even have the least suspicion on what the treasure really represents. They cannot know it. >>

<<Yes, but I will try to find an effective way to take away the treasure to the Americans without they can realize>> the commander Kohau with diabolic air affirmed <<I know it is not easy, but let me do it. I will invent something. >>

Hotukau welcomed the idea with enthusiasm and affirmed that he fully had trust in the other; he was sure that everything would be resolved in short time.

Crucial meetings

Mario and Patrick's jeep roared in the night, when the two brave archaeologists had finally reached the destination: the volcano Katiki was already extinct since a lot of centuries, but its imposing massive structure always let something anxious betray. The two parked on the small beach that was in front of the high ground, they went down from the jeep with enthusiasm, they gave a glance to the waves, just perceptible, of a calm sea; this last detail seemed to give them a certain sense of calm. They directed toward the volcano, they took a mule track that led straight on the top of the volcano and they stopped half-way. There, in a cavern carved in the rock of the slope, the old Easter Island wise Ariki lived. The Polynesian that was stretched out on the naked rock at the entry of his shelter, he looked at the stars with a passion: he had got a sophisticated knowledge of the astronomy by now. Ariki lowered for a second his look, he saw the two men in front of him, and he recognized the Canadian and invited them to sit next to him. Patrick showed a bow as a sign of respect, while Mario thanked in a very difficult Rapa Nui language.

<<My boys, how come your visit? >> the wise man asked curious
<<Maybe it's not a courtesy visit. >>

<<It's always a pleasure to come and see you>> the Canadian snickered in impeccable Easter Island language <<In fact, I wanted to ask you a question of vital importance. >> He drew a printer sheet out from the pocket of his trousers, on which the original text of the tablet was annotated, he handed it to Ariki and asked to throw light upon that not very clear text. The wise man snickered and talked about a very anxious and passionate history. At the end

of the war among the short and long ears, some priests of the aristocratic faction saved themselves running away in the more hidden places of the island, living mainly into caverns, or setting the sail. One of them stayed at Rapa Nui, keeping on communicating with other colleagues: he simply paid some farmers, so that they took his missives to the other colleagues hidden on the island. He was used write with the Marquesas Islands language, since the enemies and the humble people ignored it; the erudite aristocrats could write that way, since they saved old codes written at the time of the big migration of Hotu Matua. The old priest, not tolerating to see the imaginary “mystery” in the hands of the short ears, decided to act: the sacred object had to leave those ignoble hands. Nevertheless not all were worthy, in his opinion, to possess it instead his enemies. He scattered, so, in the whole island a series of signs disguised as riddles that he called “pieces” of mystery - almost comparing them to the dowels of a puzzle: each of these, if resolved, it would lead to another up to finally discover where the big mystery is hidden. The priest marked his signs with the drawing of a *toromiro* leaf, an extinct plant by now that rooted at Rapa Nui. By this trick, he signed the riddles that could not be confused in any way with those of other colleagues. The hunting to the “mystery” started from the treasure, in which there should have been the starting point sign... only the sharpest and more intelligent could decipher and get the final solution, which was worth the dream of a life for the archaeologists. <<Sensational! >> Mario exclaimed with great joy <<we hold the coffer and also the riddle... we can immediately begin the hunting. >>

<<It won't be easy>> Patrick sighed <<I can only say that we deserve to get the solution, after all the efforts that we have done in our working life. >> <<You have to do more of them still, my boys>> Ariki nodded <<I know that you won't speculate on the mystery, in the case you should find it... if I knew where it was, I would save you the work. Unfortunately it is a secret in the hands of king Hotukau's priests. >>

The Canadian got up from the ground, followed by the other colleague; he thanked and warmly greeted the wise man, affirming that it was late. The archaeologists took the way back home with the

adrenaline sky-high, dreaming new discoveries and recognitions worldwide, and they came back to the beach. They had in front of them only wet and sticky sand, but nothing else. An anomalous wave, in fact, had swept the beach away and dragged who knows where the jeep, while they were speaking with the old man. The two were dumbfounded: they could only rely on their own feet to come back to the chief town. Mario looked at the full moon and told that the slim light of the sky was enough for illuminating their way. Patrick made a sign of disapproval, he looked through in his pockets, he snatched a torch and explained to the other that there were two ways to come back to Hanga Roa; the first solution was to follow the long paths excavated of the hinterland while the second was to walk along the coast, shorter way. Mario opted for the second one, despite he knew that it needed to cross a small grove that coasted along the narrow beach; this one, composed mainly by palms, it started from west of Katiki to finish near Ahu Tongariki, archaeological site of notable importance. It was one of the few ones on the island and it was formed during the XXI century because of the works of reforestation of the botanists on the bare territory of Rapa Nui.

Mario and Patrick walked at a brisk pace and they found themselves in the quit of the grove shortly: the noise of the waves of the sea as background reassured them and almost made them forget to have so much to walk. The silence was disturbed well soon by some sibilant voices that sounded coming from very close. The two archaeologists moved with caution and they saw some shades standing out on the ground illuminated by the moon; at the level of the hands, they stuck out some protuberances from the outlines, particular that worried Patrick. He suddenly turned off the torch; he instinctively hid himself behind a palm, dragging Mario toward him by his arm. He had scented the danger in the air: few instants later he saw five people armed with revolver came out. They were three women and two men that dressed a black camouflage battledress. One of them turned toward the palm of the archaeologists, she attentively looked at aiming the gun and, luckily, she noticed nothing strange. <<Damn, we had to end just on this damned

island! >> she cursed, rather irritated <<'They could assign us a more amusing mission. >>

<<Calm, baby>> one of the two men said, putting back the weapon <<ours won't be a monotonous operation... two scoundrels hide in the north of here, but we don't imagine even where. >>

<<We have to discover them before they risk to speak>> another of the three women with dark air explained <<'They can give serious difficulty to the system; therefore we are forced to make them be silent forever! >>

<<Excellent>> the third one intervened, making his revolver rotate around his forefinger with impatience <<Always ready to eliminate the swine! We will cover ourselves with glory coming back in country. >>

The five sneered, they laid down on the ground one close to the others, they took some beers from their backpacks and toasted to the success of their important mission. After they were enough drunk, they went wild: they sprinkled themselves with the rest of the drink, they sang and shouted like mad persons. The youngest man of the company, lowered on one of his she friends, started kissing her on her mouth and on her neck with passion. The archaeologists understood that it was the right moment to slip away; they crawled along some very distant palms, convinced they could not be noticed, and they went out shortly of the brushwood. They stopped in front of the moais of Ahu Tongariki, thinking over on what they had seen; what did those sinister men do there? Why do they expect to eliminate some "scoundrels?" Perhaps they were simple killers that had an unsettled account with two people: even they hoped to take revenge for it. Yet they wore a camouflage battledress and they talked about devastating consequences in case their mission failed. They could not act for them. There must surely be something sinister and dark in this plot... a bigger reason for Mario and Patrick that thought over without being able to find an answer. The two men, very irritated, they decided to leave behind similar questions. They snatched the torch and they started walking again, under the sky of an as veiled as mysterious and marvellous island.

The two archaeologists didn't feel their legs anymore by dint of walking; they looked at the moais in proximity to the sea and they understood that they were near Hanga Roa by now. It was half past four in the morning: they had "flown" up to there with the anxiety to return to the archaeological centre. They crossed a plain with slower step and they finally took the excavated path that led to the chief town: they already saw to outline against the horizon some buildings. The usual quiet that reigned during Easter Island nights seemed to be disturbed by something of very anxious. One can scent a sense of anguish and dismay in the air; some distant howls seemed to reach the ear of the two archaeologists. They darted an interrogative glance, they speeded up the walk with worried air and they finally reached the way of the chief town.

A reluctant crowd oddly crowded the street; many persons cursed, others were welcoming the authorities: a handful of American federal police officers. Mario asked to a man what was happened and he answered that there had been an accident to a person... nothing else. The police didn't evidently make anybody pass. The two archaeologists finally sighted a crowd prepared in semicircle around a serious wounded man and they realized that they were all colleagues. They made room with strength and, after thousand attempts; they saw something that was better not to see. Jerry Davis was on the ground in a blood sea with serious wounds at his abdomen and his face: someone had shot him. Mario, in tears, crouched close to his friend.

<<Damn, what have they done you? >> he murmured with his voice broken by the weeping <<Who has reduced you in this state? Don't worry; an ambulance is coming to assist you... I already hear the sirens. >>

<<No, it is too late>> Jerry retorted with hoarse voice, almost smothered <<they have discovered me, bastards. I believed in the justice and in the authorities, but now... to hell. >> Mario was amazed and rather impressed by the words of the friend. <<But who? >> he asked <<Who are you speaking of? >>

<<They exploit us, all those damned men! >> Jerry answered with a thread of voice, almost fidgeting because of the terrible spasms <<They want...>>

These were the last words of one of the most illustrious archaeologists that had given everything he got for Easter Island and to discover its mysteries. His passion and his hopes ended in the grave with him by now. Jerry Davis beat violently his head and he died with his shut eyes, looking the illuminated sky... the dawn of a new day was about to rise and he would not have been part of it anymore. Mario remained to fix him and started shouting for the pain: a prolonged cry for that colleague, as well as great friend of life. Both came from the same town, and they attended the high school together in Anaheim, a district of Los Angeles. Anybody would have given him back the person with whom he played truant the school or followed the girls anymore. It would have been more painful to report his death to his fiancée that had never approved his choice to go on that lost island in the Pacific Ocean. The police intervened on the scene of the crime and ordered to Mario to leave the place. Patrick, seeing that his friend didn't want to go away, he took him away. The two men directed together toward the archaeological centre with funeral air: the Canadian asked to himself about the reason for that absurd death, while Mario didn't say a word.

Close there, the light of McNamara's office in the building of the governorship was switched on, despite it was very soon. The diplomat sat behind his desk and warmly discussed with someone that was opposite to him. It was Mitch Freedendall, the superintendent for the excavations on Easter Island and head of the archaeologists.

<<So a poor irresponsible boy has been punished>> the man sighed <<I am really sorry for him. He wanted just a little of honour. But damn! It would have been enough some threat! >>

<<By no means... I could not risk keeping alive another nuisance>> McNamara affirmed <<I don't absolutely want too many people to hold me in the palm of their hand and to wreck my plan. It is already strange I have not wanted to make you kill. >>

The governor justified the death of that uncomfortable person that could have damaged his big projects with cruelty and satisfaction. He perhaps thought the homicide plotted from him like an essential sacrifice for his dreams. On the other hand, as he often affirmed,

the end justifies the means. Yet that was not even the only foreseen crime: McNamara affirmed that other two scoundrels knew burning information, but soon their mouths would have been sewn forever. Freedendall felt a strong remorse: he really desired to disappear for what he did. That night, one of his more promising archaeologists had bothered him and he had not given him any chance to be warned on the consequences. Freedendall had consulted the governor for a simple suggestion... he would now have preferred not to have ever done it. McNamara interrupted him in his reasoning, affirming to be very tired: he wanted to rest a little. The day after, he would have had to work quite a lot because it was necessary to carry up with urgency some administrative matters. <<Don't worry, Mitch>> the governor with diabolic air sighed <<we will keep in touch for any news. >> Freedendall got up from his seat yawning, he winked and went out of the room murmuring a half word with funeral air.

A “piece” of mystery

Patrick saw the light of the afternoon sun that shone through from the curtains of his study: he was stretched stunned on the sofa. When he came back to the centre, he stretched for thinking over about the new researches with drowsy air and he progressively fell asleep. He got up and looked at the clock: it was half past two. He remembered to have taken the coffer of the treasure from the deposit in which all the archaeological finds were found, he went behind the desk and found it on the ground close the chair. Patrick intended to conduct the researches of the first sign of Easter Island priest by himself: Mario was in low spirits... at least he looked so the last time that he saw him. He put the coffer on the desk; he seized a magnifying glass among his tools and explored with his eye the external surface of the find. He had been scanning it for a quarter, until he eyed some symbols that seemed to take him to a good track: some little men engraved on the back showing a right point of the coffer. Patrick turned it and saw that the signals lost on the bottom of the trunk: what could it mean? He had not even the least idea of what was the sign; therefore he didn't know what to look for. He grazed with his fingers the metallic surface, he thought to feel the empty space under and he beat more violently, understanding he didn't make a mistake. He had perhaps found the solution. Patrick snatched a rubber hammer; he beat against the metal and noticed that it easily came off: the trunk had a false bottom outside. He could glimpse among the dust a tablet of well preserved stone, he extracted it from the coffer and he realized that it had remained there for more than five hundred years. Patrick blew with strength on the rocky axle: the symbols were well visible. He

noticed low on the right the rudimentary incision of a leaf: this, without a shadow of a doubt, could be identified like the toromiro. The first evidence of the hunting to the mystery had finally come to light. The Canadian was enthusiastic indeed. He looked better at the symbols and understood that they were typical of the language of the Marquesas Islands: the evident proof that the old priest had written. If it was rongo-rongo, the ancient writing of Easter Island people, the tablet surely would have remained shrouded in mystery. For centuries, glottologists and researchers had been trying to decipher hundred tablets in the real language of the priests Rapa Nui, but nobody had ever succeeded in the enterprise. Some of them hypothesized that the word “rongo” meant peace and they thought the writings treatises of not belligerency among short and long ears. Others believed that they were formulas for magic ritual and others thought about annals and rudimentary monographs of Easter Island history. The symbols of that lost language represented a very rare sample of primitive writing; in fact they introduced a lot of similarities with the signs found at Moenjio-Daro, in the valley of the Indus River. Deciphering the rongo-rongo would have been a victory for the glottologists and a help to understand better the traditions of people so far from our culture. Patrick examined, once more, the hieroglyphs by the magnifying glass; he nodded and started translating, supported by his laptop, with the enthusiasm high-sky. It was not a very easy job, but around half past seven in the afternoon the Canadian could consider himself satisfied of his operated; he was disturbed twice only, when a colleague had come to bring the coffer of the treasure to take it in the store: the usual nuisances.

Meanwhile, Easter Island commander Rong Kohau was with a group of four armigers of his on the main street of Hanga Roa; the team walked stealthily, sheltered behind some moais: all seemed unarmed, but, in reality, they had some well sharp knives and guns calibre nine in the pockets of their jackets. The gang had come in the forbidden village to the natives to conclude the mission approved by the king in the maximum secretiveness and he had not any intention to disappoint the expectations. The five Easter Island

people crept, camouflaging themselves among the grass, they reached shortly the back of the archaeological centre and they waited behind an enough tall wall. The chief town was rather emptied: many American soldiers had repatriated, leaving only less than thousand units to garrison the island and with them many delegates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Only the colonel Wilkins and the general Blackwell had remained for fighting in case of necessity. McNamara would now have managed everything on the island as he thought better.

Kohau scanned the entry on the back of the archaeological centre; he attentively looked at the zone and understood that it was the right moment: he ran toward the door with his men and went in. The team moved stealthily and crossed a corridor with caution. The head of the gang eyed some signs on the wall, he noticed that the deposit of the finds was upstairs and invited the others to make some other steps forward. The five armigers went upstairs, they heard some voices in the distance, they opened the first door that they found in front of them and went in a dark room; they misted the door, they noticed through a small opening that two archaeologists were passing and they waited for a while. When they felt in a safe place, they were on the way to leave that place. Kohau leaned on the wall, while his men opened the door, and he started up by mistake the electric switch; the five men saw an enough large room with many bookstores and without any window: that was the room of the finds. At the centre, a long rectangular desk could be admired, on which there was a coffer and some maps, the one of the treasure so looked for. Easter Island people bent in front of that so precious object and one of them grabbed it laughing: they thought to have done it to McNamara and all the archaeologists' face. Kohau made the trunk passed in his hands, he felt the contact that the bottom was broken, he gave a glance and he horrified: the "piece" of mystery, as all Easter Island people called it, it had gone. The native general felt his nerves destroyed, he tightened his fists and let the coffer fall on the ground with a sudden impulse. The noise caused by the bump boomed and alarmed the archaeologists near the room. The gang understood they had to slip away; the five men slightly opened the door, they heard the noise some steps far

and hastened to wind out the store. If they had got down at once, someone could immediately have seen them. Kohau saw a leaning wall on the left, at the end of the corridor that was what they needed: it would have allowed them to protect themselves behind there if someone had arrived. Easter Island people followed the orders of their commander; four archaeologists, shortly after, ran to see what had happened and they went in the room of the find, giving the chance to the fugitives to escape. The five men went down with caution, and they directed to the door on the back of the building; just in that while, they heard the shouts of some archaeologists that had sighted them, behind them. It was not important by now. Easter Island people went out in the street and escaped toward Rongo with their tail between their legs: the U.S. citizens had discovered the sign and would have paid their curiosity dear.

Patrick was still in his study and was drinking a sip of tequila that he had taken from a piece of furniture close to the window: he had just corrected some things of his translation that could be really meant complete. He was happy about what he had discovered and he cannot wait to tell Mario everything. He had heard, a little before, the volume of the stereo coming from the next room, in which the discoverer of the treasure accommodated; perhaps the music could bother him, but Patrick liked it very much “Billie Jean”, one of the greatest Michael Jackson's hits. This very famous singer was Mario's preferred one; despite he lived so much time before. Now, everything kept silent. The Canadian knew that his neighbour used the music to relax himself or to make himself comfort: at least Patrick wished that the friend resigned himself for the loss of Jerry. He thought it was the good moment to go to Mario; he took his laptop and, just while he was leaving the room and someone knocked at his door. He went to open: it was just his neighbour of room that washed his face, put in order his hair and sprayed his aftershave, ready to come into play again. Patrick invited Mario to sit in front of the desk.

<<How are you my friend? >> the Canadian asked <<Are you better now? >>

<<Very well! >> the other smiled that could not be sad for too much time <<Let's leave everything behind and work for discovering the mystery. I believe that these were the last wishes of Jerry. >>

Patrick was glad about it and told him everything of his arduous enterprise of translation. He explained that the translated text didn't expressly point out the place in which to find the second sign of the hunting, but it let understand everything in clear way. He also told about how he could find the tablet that was not well surely in view, and he was satisfied not to have wasted too much time to look for. Mario, gone into raptures in a while, asked to see immediately the translation; the friend put the laptop on the desk, he opened a word file and read articulating well the words.

Hunting to the mystery started; inexperienced and irresponsible wayfarer, immediately leave the game if it is not for you! You have to find another piece on the sacred mountain... whereas the great caldera is extinguished and the stone-cutters cut into small pieces with a big will, until they have rebelled. Alas, you will never go out of that place, unless you don't scan under the incomplete giant, where the grace of the gods will never darken. Wayfarer, you will never go out of the tempestuous waters working only by a shovel... only the leaf of the sacred tree can help you, which you will sight when you finally have come to see the bank.

Mario remained silent; he turned the laptop toward himself and hastily read the few lines again. The sign referred to one of the present relief on the island with an unusual adjective: any archaeologist had ever thought to a sacred for Easter Island people. Patrick thought many similar: the Olympus, the thick one of the Uluru - called more commonly Ayers Rock -, Tibet and Mount Athos. The description was subsequently clearer, when it specified the nature of the place: one quarry of stone, in which the stone-cutters withdrew and worked devoting themselves and with accuracy. These lines made the two archaeologists started: there were not any margins of error by now... the described place was surely the Rano Raraku, an extinguished volcano.

Here the short ears extracted tons of stone by rudimentary tools, they built, guarded on sight by their dominators and whipped if necessary, the famous moais and they raised them with trunks of lumber and ropes. From there the slaves dragged the sculptures with those same ropes that weighed tons, as far as the sites of adoration—usually located at the entrance of the villages. This was not surely the only theory about the transport of the moais: some sustained that, on the ancient roads, a carpet was set, made with wood rolls so that to make the extended statue easily slip. Others believed that a sculpture was even built piece by piece and then assembled on the place: this thesis can be easily denied, since they have been found only big moais in the quarry of the Rano Raraku. Nevertheless any hypothesis could be excluded entirely without any evident proof. The description spoke about a rebellion of the stone-cutters: when there was the civil war on the island, the builders probably joined to the rest of their people to beat the long ears. They wanted to protest against the demolition of the trees, operation that impoverished the ground and denied them the bread; they were certainly besides anxious to teach a lesson to their oppressors that forced them to superhuman works. Looking at the site of the Rano Raraku, the time seemed to have stopped entirely: one could notice that the tools in stone were near to some incomplete moais as the stone-cutters had left them during the revolts. Some researchers believed that the sculptors left suddenly the jobs to rise up; instead, others thought that these had gradually left the jobs, since the wood to transport the moais decreased as soon as up to stop entirely: the revolt would have burst only in a second moment. The last lines of the tablet were based on the impossibility to find a poor sign in such an ample field of searches; therefore, the priest advised to look for under something incredibly stately: surely, according to the two archaeologists, it had to be the giant moai, eighteen meters tall, the greatest ever found in Rapa Nui and that was incomplete in the quarry. Mario explained that the author made use of a metaphor of course, when he spoke about the tempestuous waters to point out the inciting phase of such an important search. The priest advised not to work only by a shovel, which seemed an incitement to use the head in the most difficult situations: the enterprise would not

evidently have been even easy with the last precise statement. Patrick, murmuring the two final lines, gave his interpretation; only after having seen the leaf of the sacred tree- surely the toromiro - engraved on a tablet, the seekers could declare to have finally found the second sign without margin of error.

<<The tablet is more comprehensible than it seems at first impact>> Mario commented on, being at the seventh heaven <<we can finally say to be on the right way, my friend! >>

<<You but the way to the mystery is long>> Patrick sighed, sinking into his chair <<we hope everything will be ok. >>

The Canadian said that it was necessary to organize a team, to put together a group of colleagues with whom to be able to begin the hunting; more people in the suite of a person and bigger the probability of success is. Mario approved Patrick's choice, assuring him to have thought whom to engage in the company. The Canadian retorted, explaining him that they could not organize the expedition by themselves. Despite the archaeologists had much freedom on the island, they were always state employee and forced to dig where their superior pointed out. Patrick and Mario had to well inform Freedendall about the new discoveries about the mystery and to induce him to support their expedition to the Rano Raraku. Maybe they could suggest the names of the colleagues with whom to work to the superintendent, but for the rest, they could not do anything else.

<<Mitch could, in the worse of the cases, refuse to make official our search>> Patrick commented <<In such case, we would be assigned to other excavations and forced to do everything in the free time by ourselves... but I don't think: the head is our friend. >>

<<He looks like more a companion of games than the superintendent>> Mario laughed <<he allows all of us to manage ourselves the way we want, to decide where to dig and take part to the projects that more we like. >> The two archaeologists saw that it was almost nine o' clock, dinner time, and they started toward a near cafe between laughter and another.

Plans more or less allowed

The slim light of Mitch Freedendall's study had still turned on at half past one in the night; the head of the archaeologists was lowered among his papers with enough tireless look. He had a pen in the right hand leaned on a sheet: he had not been writing an only word for about twenty minutes. An hour and half earlier he was visited by Mario and Patrick that told him everything. Mitch was very amazed and had attentively followed their words without interrupting them. He was happy. When he heard about their expedition, he looked more enthusiastic: he had even assured that he was ready to disburse the money for the researches of his own pocket. Mitch had immediately calculated the budget that, removed the remunerations from the archaeologists, it didn't represent, at all, a prohibitive expense. Mario and Patrick had added that they would also have conducted the researches without seeing a penny. Mitch had reassured them and didn't waste time: he had drafted a list of the archaeologists for the researching team and rejected various names. At the end, he had preferred to support Mario and Patrick with two she archaeologists, the most skilled in his opinion, rather than so many other inexperienced people. The selected women were the twenty four years old Australian Alicia Bresciano, very sharp and erudite, and the beautiful twenty eight years old and coloured Cuban Mercedes Ramirez, lover of the adventure. Besides not only the expedition was very pleasant to some sinister people that Mitch knew, but it was also a good way that the head of the archaeologists had to get rid of the two most curious and smartest employees that could have bothered him. The team promised very well with a staff of that kind and gave the safety to Mario and Patrick to have two

impassioned and desirous colleagues to discover like them. Mitch was sitting on that chair with uneasy air: he was undecided what to do. He suddenly put the pen, he took out his mobile from his pocket and he dialled a number looking uneasy.

<<Mr. Governor, I have sensational novelty! You don't even imagine what's about to happen. Listen well to me, because what I have to say is very important. >>

The royal palace of Rongo was dark indeed that night as ever: only a small street-lamp illuminated the entrance. Once more, Easter Island king Hotukau was in the room of the throne with the commander Kohau; he that was in the presence of him around three hours before, he had reported all the particulars of his mission and spoken for a long time about a lesson to give to the Americans.

<<It is not easy to intimidate those bastards! >> the monarch exclaimed, sat on his throne <<We have to find to radical solution... we are forced to act how we have never done in our glorious history. >>

<<I would opt for a raid in the chief town>> Kohau explained <<with the nervousness to the sky-high, we will certainly massacre the U.S. citizens. It is true that our enemies are very skilled, but I know very well how to spur my men. >>

Hotukau was thinking for one minute: the solution of the general was too hurried; fighting against one of the greatest world powers would have been complicated and to win would have been a dream at the end of the impossible. The monarch yawned and, when he was giving up, he heard a voice whispering in his mind. Despite everything, it was a good plan: the American soldiers were not so many and their troops were overwhelming; rather it was worth to try even more hazardous solution than Kohau's one, the danger was part of the military actions on the other hand.

<<Rong, what you think if we occupied militarily instead the whole island! >> Hotukau started <<you could split your army in various contingent, each of which will move toward a zone of the island. In short time, these squadrons will meet one another in Rongo, after having kicked the Americans out! >>

No king ever had risked to say a similar thing or would not dreamt of thinking about attacking with so few guarantees, at least from when the short ears had beaten their oppressors. Kohau remained silent, he tried to stammer a half word, but he stopped then: why to object? He liked the proposal very much: the soldiers always dream to conduct a so unusual and glorious operation at the same time. The taste to try was palpable for Kohau. He manifested his enthusiasm; he drew out a rudimentary map of the island from his pocket, and explained what he had in mind. An imposing army of three thousand Easter Island people, about halves the armed forces of the natives would have gathered in Rongo. From there the general would have split them in three big groups: one would have moved toward Cabo Norte and would have tried to occupy Anakena; another would have reached Punta Angamos through the hinterland and, from that place, they would have left toward the Rano Raraku and Vaihu to clear up the southern coast from the enemies. The third group, led by Kohau in person, would have faced the most difficult battle: they would have infiltrated to Hanga Roa and moved up to Cabo Sur, if they had succeeded in the intent. <<Excellent, my general>> the king satisfied commented <<I like this plan. We will act tomorrow evening. Those damned American will learn once and for all who is the strongest between the two lines up. >>

Kohau nodded, he put the map back and he greeted saying to go and rest in view of the great day of the preparations. Hotukau approved and remained another half hour on the throne: he fell asleep there.

An interesting track

The team of the four searchers of the second “piece” of mystery was gathered out at the archaeological centre at seven of a very bright morning. Mario and Patrick, who had slept not very long, had the chance, in the two preceding hours, to know better the two colleagues that had rarely joined with them at the excavations. Mario was now talking affably with the Australian Alicia Bresciano. The American had seen her few times, but now that he saw her in front of him he noticed that she was beautiful even more from close up: she was very tall; she had a perfect physique, her light browned hair that tended almost to the blond, her blue eyes and an enough small and attractive nose. Alicia always worked with her inseparable friend, Mercedes Ramirez: she had long and curly brown hair, she was dark, enough strong but she was a shocking beauty, typically Latin-American.

<<So, I finally have the pleasure to meet you, Mario>> Alicia affirmed <<your name is known in the environment. >>

<<Yours too>> Mario laughed <<there are few attractive girls like you around. >>

Patrick interrupted the discussion saying that it was time to leave. The searchers wore their backpacks and left by a four seats jeep toward the Rano Raraku: the adventure finally started seriously. The American was driving and he was accelerating, hoping to reach the destination as soon as possible, the Canadian was alongside, Alicia and Mercedes sat on the back seat and they discussed in a low voice. The jeep crossed Hanga Roa and went on along a grassy plain, strewn with some rare moais. Alicia asked some questions about the new Mario's discoveries and she looked firm to find this sign.

Mercedes enjoyed the fresh air that was blowing: she would never have liked to go down from that car. She cursed and asked why the expedition had been fixed early in the morning. Her friend answered that Freedendall had decided: one could not object on the decisions of the head. The jeep finally got over the coastal village of Vaihu, from which the threatening shade of some very tall moais outlined, it shortly crossed an excavated path, immersed in the green, and it finally came in proximity to the Rano Raraku.

Mario stopped the off-road vehicle enough far from the volcano and got down with the other passengers. The four had opted for continuing on foot, because further on the plain started being blocked by the statues. Patrick turned and observed that the shore of the sea, jagged and forming an inlet, was not very far indeed; just next to the waters, the Ahu Tongariki set rose, a series of moais located on an only base. The volcano was in the hinterland, instead: it was an enough low relief, with two peaks; the first one took the caldera, place in which there was the quarry, and it was a little higher than the second. The tops were separated by a light slant in the central part. The archaeologists finally moved and came on the slope of the volcano, strewn with moais without base that oddly looked toward the sea. According to some hypotheses, those sculptures had been staying there for centuries, waiting to be transported, since the quarry was already full: this would also explain why they had not any base under them or a pukau, a headgear. These ones, usually made with terracotta, were carved in Puna Pau, near the Ahu Akivi place, nearly at the centre of the island, and they were put on the moais after their transfer to the fixed place. Some sculptures of the Rano Raraku, during the XXI century, were moved to the places of cult, while the archaeologists had added the eyes to others. The researchers, many decades before, had discovered that originally the moais possessed them, therefore they thought well to embellish them, adding this detail about their face. Easter Island people carved the form of the eyes in the coral and they drew on them a pupil with much care; by these, the statues looked living. The Westerners, after this great discovery, could finally understand why the natives called Rapa Nui with the name "*Mata ki te rangi*", the eyes of the sky, too. The word was a metaphor that was pointing out the group of the

souls, contained in the statues, of the mythical ancestors that watched over their people from the other world through those coral eyes.

The four archaeologists got along the slope of the Rano Raraku with efforts: they helped themselves with some wood sticks, panting persistently more and more. Many steps later, they could see the top and the caldera of the volcano: it was very large and covered by grass, broken here and there by the red soil, and marked out by an enough soft slant. Some wild and free horse free ran around the meadow. The place of “birth” of the moais and the quarry of stone were just in the caldera, the place pointed out by the sign. Under the archaeologists' feet, in the zone of maximum depression, there was a little pond: it was the ideal to refresh themselves when it was so hot and also for the horses, which went there to water. In the past that place was the biggest water reserve, with the Rano Kau that Easter Island people had at disposal in an arid and dry place like Easter Island. The four persons ran along the slant of the caldera and they went down towards the quarry: maybe later, during the warmest hours of the day, they would have availed themselves advantage of the little pond some steps far. They immediately noticed a series of dug niches, in which some imposing and almost ended moais were preserved, some stone tools and so many incomplete sculptures leaned on the ground, laid down or erected; one of them that struck Alicia in particular way, represented only the face up to the nasal septum, while another one had not any torso. The archaeologists thought about what to do; Patrick pointed out two big moai, leaned on the near ground, a zone where the slant seemed particularly eroded by the work of the stone-cutters extracting the stone. One of those was fearfully tall and it was the most imposing statue of the whole island, which Mario and Patrick had immediately thought; very often it was nicknamed “incomplete giant” from the archaeologists, whom let presage that the priest described that... rather, Easter Island man surely alluded to that moai. It was really difficult now to succeed in scrutinizing under the colossus: it was necessary to shift it at least a centimetre. Mario, sure of the physical strength over the mental one of the group, suggested hooking some

very strong ropes that he had in his backpack to the edges of the statue; doing so, the four could drag it.

<<You are crazy! >> Alicia exclaimed, turning to the colleague
<<How the hell we do... the work of art weighs tons. >>

<<If the short ears did it, it will be easy for us>> Mario affirmed
<<Trying doesn't cost a thing. >>

<<We will end at least all in the infirmary with our broken back>>
Mercedes suggested <<if not in the grave. >>

The Cuban thought about sprinkling the sculpture with some greasy substance, so that it was possible to make it slip easily from the place in which it stood motionless for centuries. Patrick stopped thinking: an action of that kind would have damaged at least the monument. Mercedes said that it was more important to find the mystery than keeping a moai, since thousand copies existed scattered for the whole island.

<<What are you chattering! >> Alicia intervened <<Every statue is a unique work to safeguard. For the archaeologists, discoveries of superior or inferior category don't exist. All are important!>>

Patrick and Mario agreed, affirming that they had to find a way to act without ruining the giant. Alicia thought about the surrounding ground and she felt that she had a genial idea. The Australian suggested that it was possible to see under the moai digging a big pit in its proximity; later, it was necessary to dig a small piercing that passed under the sculpture. Doing so, they would have realized their purpose. Mario congratulated with Alicia for the banal plan but brilliant and effective, besides thinking why he had not a similar idea.

The archaeologists seized shovels and picks and started digging. At noon, they were still beating on the ground with extreme caution: they had not absolutely to damage the statue and the maximum attention needed. An enough wide pit had been dug just close to the moai, while the hole that stood out below the statue was narrow and small, but enough good to see if there had been some sign. The four took some torches, they went down in the hole, and they illuminated the interested part and threaded the shovels, trying to feel something hard: nothing. Perhaps the casket was higher up the piercing or, they simply had even to widen the earth corridor under

the moai. Patrick convinced that the signs were correct, crossed his fingers and gave these orders: the tablet could not be wrong. The archaeologists beat with the pick against the walls of the small piercing under the moai and, later many hits, they succeeded in making a mini-gallery in which two people hardly could come in, if squatted or on all fours. The two women got into it and started striking the gallery on the way to contact the giant moai on the surface by now; Mario and Patrick, instead, went out of the hole to give their orders. Mercedes, by dint of beating from the gallery toward the surface, made a part of the layer of soil that divided her from the ground collapse, causing a landslide. The giant moai fell on one side inside the hole, lifting a notable quantity of soil and overwhelming the Cuban and the Australian. The two archaeologists out of that disaster, they literally were dumbfounded and crying. They heard the unfortunate two women cries, then nothing.

Mario and Patrick immediately threw themselves in the hole, they saw that the entry to the piercing from underground was blocked by some piles of black earth, they removed them and gave a glance to the colleagues: Alicia lost consciousness, while Mercedes' face was stained with blood and she whispered something. The American and the Canadian threw out the colleagues from the gallery; they gave first aid to the wounded Cuban and tried to see if the Australian was still alive. Mario, lowered on Alicia with stunned air, put his two fingers in her throat, he ascertained that she breathed a little and he was dumbfounded. Patrick took the first-aid kit from his backpack to treat Mercedes. While he was cutting a little of adhesive tape, he saw the American stock-still in front of Alicia and he exhorted him to do something with furious air if he didn't want to see her dead: maybe by mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Mario brought his lips to the Australian's ones and he felt a sudden sense of tenderness towards that woman that he just knew and he already felt her so close not only physically. He grazed her face and hair with delicacy, until he saw that she was recovering. Mario disinfected and bandaged two enough deep wounds on an arm and a leg, and then he heard Alicia murmuring some words. The Australian warmly thanked her friend and told, toughing her forehead, to have a terrible headache; the American explained that,

luckily, the moai was fallen so that to cause few damages. If he had collapsed on the back, he would surely have crushed whoever was under it with its weight. Alicia, even painful, stood up again, grazed Mario's cheek with her lips and saw around her that Mercedes was well; despite she was hardly able to recover. Patrick went close to his American friend.

<<It is evident that the sign is not there>> the Canadian indignant affirmed <<Look what trouble happened for trying to dig there under... if someone had died, we could be investigated for manslaughter: we are the responsible persons of the mission! In the meantime, we don't know what to do. >>

<<The priest remembered to have to work by their head and not only by the shovel>> Mario explained with irony <<We have done the contrary of what he said... and we have seen the very comforting results. >>

The American had a walk on the banks of the little pond, while the Canadian looked after the wounded women; a leaf of toromiro under an incomplete giant in the caldera in which the stone-cutters cut into small pieces. Mario wondered where he and Patrick had mistaken. Surely the place was right: another quarry, like the one described by the tablet, didn't exist... he was sure that it was the Rano Raraku. The giant now gave a lot of problems: yet the solution of the enigma was to hand, Mario felt it. It was a state of big meditation, like never happened in his life.

The fever of the waiting

Rongo looked really a port at four o'clock in that hot afternoon: thousand of warriors were poured again with the maximum secretiveness in the village. Kohau was giving them orders in front of the royal palace, where many men had already been gathered for mission. He had already chosen the lieutenants of the two expeditions to which he could not attend: Takapu Matari would have guided his thousand men toward north, while Anakivi Atamu would have moved to east. Now, while he was assisting to the last preparations, he thought over a good strategy to occupy the chief town: it was not a very easy mission, but the native general had intention to conclude it at all costs.

Kohau excluded the least possibility to run away: in the case Easter Island people were in serious difficulty, he preferred to keep on fighting and die with his men with dignity rather than escaping. The soldiers knew well this stand, but they didn't object: in their veins the blood of their ancestors gushed out, the ones that had always fought with their head up for their country... and they were ready to emulate them, because Rapa Nui could see a new dawn. They wanted to admire one day when all Easter Island people had been free from any foreign domination.

The commander Atamu went close to his superior Kohau and asked at what time the departure was expected. The general answered that he preferred to wait at dusk, because dark was the weapon to the purpose of their three thousand warriors. He put himself under a near plant, one of the few ones, and he waited with his folded arms; he looked at his soldiers practicing with their weapons while they were shooting to some targets in the field next to them and

progressively he closed his eyes. He would have waked up when it would have been the moment to leave.

Coveted solution

The archaeologists were still on the Rano Raraku, but this time they were not working as a group: they freely walked along the caldera, looking for a solution to the riddle of the priest that didn't evidently point out the hoped place. Mario nervously walked on the banks of the little pond with Alicia, after having given a further glance to the biggest moai. He was literally going crazy: was it possible that the “piece” of mystery lay under an incomplete giant? It was very probable, but the sentence had surely a double sense to give precise indications: what did the author of that enigma mean? What could that so dark word refer to? Mario remembered that the priest had recommended using the reason besides the tools for excavation: he had to rack his brains and to get all the elements that could help him in the reasoning. He had restricted the field to the caldera of the Rano Raraku; therefore the “giant” had to be close. Few objects were in the caldera of the volcano: the niches in the grass could not hide something enormous; the statues were already inspected from top to bottom by now... the little pond of the crater was left. Mario had searched well already its waters enough transparent, but he was sure not to have noticed anything particularly: only some block of stone and a rocky and bare bottom. No, he was convinced that the little pond didn't possess at all the requirements to make him curious; his sixth sense told him to look on surface. He suddenly turned, he looked at the whole caldera with a good view and he was sure not to notice anything that was perhaps slipped previously with a little of disappointment; maybe, if he had been the contrary, he would have had the hope of a new card for his game. Alicia was almost worried on seeing her friend so shaken.

<<What's the matter with you, Mario? >> the Australian asked laughing <<you always scan in the surroundings. You look like a wanted man that fears to be caught at any moment. >>

<<I thought over> he explained with a hoarse voice <<Now I am more than sure... the priest pointed out that moais. Someone has perhaps arrived earlier than us or even...>>

Mario suddenly started: he remembered a very anxious detail that, with a good probability, could lead him to the solution. He explained what he had thought to Alicia without delaying. Perhaps the word “giant” represented one of Easter Island ancestors, nicknamed so because he was strong, brave or very tall. The sign lay, according to the reasoning, under the body, or better the rests, of the ancestor. The word “incomplete” would not have had sense anymore: a person cannot be considered so. The priest, just to confuse the ideas, had added this adjective that referred to the homonym statue in honour of the same ancestor. In fact the moais were erected just to commemorate and keep, in a certain sense, “alive” the heroes of the past.

Alicia was amazed and turned her thumb to her friend as gesture of approval; the American called the other two archaeologists back and informed on his thesis: there was now a dead body to look for. The Canadian swore to have heard some colleagues speaking, several years before, regarding to a giant. He snatched her last generation laptop from her backpack, she turned it on, connected to internet through a satellite net and she found further information on the site of the archaeologists at Rapa Nui. She found few information, result of Easter Island oral tradition; according to these, the giant was a very strong and important commander that, for order of the king, had punished some subjects, belonging to the group of the short ears that had been accused of lese-majesty. The merciless military head eliminated with brutality his enemies, armed only with stone tools, and he ate their flesh with his warriors. Shortly after, he got a victim to a showdown between the clans of the long ears and his body was not touched. According to the legend, he was buried on the outskirts of the little pond of Rano Raraku, a place that he always loved very much. These last details were very useful to the group: they knew that the dead body had not been devoured or

burnt and they thought about being very close, if not just above its rests... the field was considerably restricted by now.

<<It won't be very easy>> Patrick confided, motivated more than never <<but we will try everything to find the burial of this "giant".>>

<<Who knows if this is a waste of time>> Mercedes affirmed desolate <<In my opinion, the sign doesn't exist: the priest has written all lies! Once more, we will remain empty-handed and without any hope to discover the mystery. >>

<<This not the moment to give in, Mercedes>> Patrick started, brusquely raising his voice <<we have to believe in ourselves and in our means... we can do it. >>

The four archaeologists were armed with a pick and they started looking for around the little pond with insistence, digging here and there and scanning some detail that could make them understand the existence of a sepulchre. The searches continued insistent for about two hours, when the summer sun started slowly setting in the horizon line. The hopes to find something seemed really vain; the archaeologists had rummaged along the whole shore of the lake by some very sophisticated tools. Alicia and Mario even dived into the little pond to explore well the backdrop, confiding on their ability of apnoea: both loved the sea very much and they had a particular aquatic instinct. Mercedes had believed to have found the point of a tablet on the shore, but she realized that it was a simple raw block of stone. The excursion at the Rano Raraku was the biggest waste of time for them in their life. A bitter disappointment, difficult to cancel. Mario discouraged ran toward Patrick, but he stumbled on a small block of stone that just stuck out from the ground. He stood up with scorn; he touched his painful heel and landed a kick to that stone. The American, without wanting it, removed the dust that covered the rock on the ground and he saw that some characters, similar to those found on the tablet, were engraved on it. Mario was sure that it was the Marquesas Islands language, he shouted with joy and he hugged rejoicing Alicia that was close to him, with an impetus of euphoria: only the author of the enigma could have written in such an abstruse form. The other two archaeologists flocked in short time; Patrick stooped on the rock and translated the

hieroglyphs in a while: some signs that sharply determined the victory of the team. The rests of the giant lay surely under there.

Congratulations, solitary wayfarer. You have used your head in the right way. Now you can also work by the shovel. Remember that everything won't be so easy next time.

Mario didn't even dare to imagine what it could happen worse later. The four persons seized their shovels and picks and started digging before finding a chest made of tuff, inside which it was preserved an enough long skeleton, devouring by the time. Under this container, Mario snatched a small coffer closed with some iron threads rusted outside. He dealt a violent blow with the shovel on them; he opened and found an absorbed tablet in the dust marked by the drawing of the leaf of toromiro.

Lightning raids

The chief town was very calm that evening: the slim light of the street-lamps illuminated the few passers-by that occasionally walked along the roads; there was not much to do in Hanga Roa, considering that there were not any recreational places. A very Spartan town helped the soldiers to concentrate, but it risked, at the same time, to depress them. The general Blackwell thought over passing in front of the archaeological centre: he wanted to subject the king of Easter Island people to the American regime by a military operation, but he knew to have few soldiers at disposal. The ones garrisoning Hanga Roa were less than one thousand by now, while five hundred were posted over the whole rest of the island. The general wanted reinforcements, but the Congress had denied them to him without delay... rather they had called half thousand of soldiers to country back: incompetent. At least Blackwell believed so, very annoyed at Rapa Nui: he didn't know anything about the history of the island or about the stories of the Polynesian civilizations, he knew even less about archaeology and he underestimated any discipline. The only important matter was represented by the tactics in war; it was too good for him since he was born. Soon he would have left the island... but it was not that day. He had to test himself first and show to be able to subjugate the hated Polynesian. Some drums played again closer and closer, shuffling got more and more insistent, madmen shouts dispelled in the night. Blackwell felt a quiver along his back. The soldiers that garrisoned the border of Hanga Roa ran to the general and reported the huge tragedy: one thousand excited Easter Island people were at the gates.

Blackwell, very intimidated, called all the troops back and disposed them in many lines of thirty soldiers along the principal road, each of which was entrenched by sacks of sand. The machine guns were unsheathed, the few tanks positioned near his palace, the howitzers placed behind the houses: a makeshift that risked to be easily routed. The general sent some scouts to recall the troops scattered along the whole island: these had to run and defend Hanga Roa at all costs. The general didn't know that the other zones were not better.

Another group of thousand natives had already reached its objective, occupying the beach of Anakena; the few unfortunate Americans that garrisoned the north were around two hundred: they had tried stopping the enemies by the artillery on the Cerro Terevaka but their few howitzers were clogged. Some had been forced to face the men of Takapu Matari at Cabo Norte, ending to get victims into an ambush; many of them hid themselves in Anakena, where they had organized a roadblock. Unfortunately the native troops were overwhelming and they had massacred dozen American militiamen. One hundred defeated, convinced not to be able to do better, they had found the salvation by escaping, turning toward southeast. The last contingent of Easter Island people had just gone beyond the site of Ahu Akivi, in the very middle of the island: this found itself in front of an easy way too. Few American militiamen garrisoned that part and they had tried stopping the passages through the hills of the hinterland by few tanks. Some artillerymen had opted for an obstruction of artillery, analogous to that of the Terevaka, fearing the direct contact; in this case, however, they had used sniper guns to avoid that the near monuments suffered damages. The commander Anakivi Atamu was not wrong footed by these movements, but he had taken a lot of time and work to pull the hostile defensive lines down. The Americans had eliminated six hundred enemies with their tactic and, unlike their fellow soldiers in the north of the island, they had valiantly fought: they surely gave in with more honour. Now Easter Island commander Atamu proceeded prompt toward east with his warriors: he felt that nobody could have stopped his triumphal march.

A difficult interpretation

The archaeologists were sat around the moais under the slim light of the starry sky. Mario, Alicia and Mercedes talked among them in a low voice, not to disturb Patrick, who was intent to translate the tablet with his laptop. The Canadian had not any difficulty, but he had to deal with a text enough scratched. He could, luckily, to interpret apparently the incomprehensible symbols and continued his work: it was nearly finished. He opened the software and another, he eyed the tablet, he pushed some buttons on the keyboard, and he read over and smiled: a not very clear text that rather gave important indications. Patrick called his colleagues around him and he received an ovation of joy. They ran immediately to sit next to him. He fixed the screen of the computer and read the tablet translated in English articulating well the words.

It seems that the hunting to the mystery started again; solitary wayfarer, this time no further sign will help you in the enterprise. Your trip continues on the divine beach... whereas our big father left the first vestiges. Pay attention to the place from which he watches on the island with his more beloved children and with the best warriors. You will find the coveted leaf under the line of the reimirot that starts from there and stands out to the light of the god Tavaku. It will simply be enough to look not far away from the right eye of the solitary avenger.

Mario, Alicia and Mercedes looked each other, as to wonder what their colleague read. Patrick affirmed that it was very difficult to get the solution and that the priest had not given him an easy sign to interpret. Nevertheless he understood the bare necessities to start a very serious search and he convinced that the field was very

restrictive: they would not surely have spent their whole life to look for the sign. The Canadian swallowed and gave his interpretation. The divine beach of which the tablet spoke was the Anakena one; they told that the first king Hotu Matua disembarked just there, leaving perhaps the first human traces on the island, with his widened family and with the servants, giving life to a new civilization. For this last reason, the priest had spoken about this mythical character as “father”; the adjective “divine”, that the author applies with immense pleasure, it was to be considered like a typical custom of the long ears, which wanted to raise their ancestors. The tablet advised to observe a place from which Hotu Matua could watch the whole island. Someone who didn't know the nature of the island would perhaps have believed the foolish hypothesis; yet the vital essence of the ancestors lived with their statues. There were not luckily enough sites of moai at Anakena to muddle Patrick's ideas; the only one was known with the native name of Ahu Naunau and it was behind the beach. The last lines almost frightened the Canadian, who had any idea how to interpret the message. It seemed really impossible to understand something of it... perhaps it was easier to look for a needle in a haystack. Alicia intervened speaking of the reimi: this was an ornament of the breast in the form of half moon made of wood, which the natives usually attached to the necklaces. At the two extremities of the object, well sharpened, there are two heads that looked upward. The reimi, coloured in red on white field, was part of the official flag of Rapa Nui; this became official almost one hundred years before and it was waved for the first time with the Chilean flag in September 2000. Before that date, the red reimi was considered non official symbol of Easter Island community. Alicia specified that the natives had not chosen a moai as theme of their flag, because it remembered a past of slavery and suffering for their ancestors short ears. Well different was speaking about the line of the reimi: what could it be? Mario tried to give his explanation: it concerned maybe a visible sign on the statues in particular circumstances. Mercedes remembered that Tavaku was an old Easter Island God of the night, and this made deduce that the line was clear under the starry sky. Alicia put in order the ideas of the colleagues and jumped to her conclusions: on

the moais of Ahu Naunau, it had to be the sparkling drawing of a reimi showing the imaginary solitary avenger... the target next to which to look for. The priest recommended to look under the line, alluding to the hidden meaning of the symbol... used just like a signal. Mario remembered of a solitary moai that lay not far away from the others: this had immortalized an uneasy and threatening air that made imagine very rough and vengeful the person in honour of whom it had been graven.

<<Boys, there is no doubt>> Mercedes affirmed <<We did it! It has to be as you said. >>

<<We will see on the field>> Patrick nodded with sceptic air <<it sounds strange that Easter Island people knew phosphorescent material... who knows, maybe even the priests jealously kept techniques in the forefront.>>

<<We have to follow all possible and imaginable tracks>> Mario intervened trusting <<We have not any necessary elements to exclude some of them. >>

The Canadian let himself convince by his friend's words and approved the hypothesis of the colleagues, even if he didn't succeed in holding back a yawn: he was very tired. He postponed everything for the next days and suggested to the others to come back to the chief town with the jeep to rest a little. The other three archaeologists, who were also worn-out, realized that midnight goes by, they nodded at Patrick's words, and they got up and took the way to go out of the caldera.

Fierce battles

The battle of the chief town was whooping with ferocity and big impetus. The Americans were in an ugly situation, above all because their dangerous adversaries had valiantly fought and without any fear. The men of Kohau had easily broken down the first lines, demolishing the sand sacks used as protection by the Americans and dismantling the guns of support. They had faced the enemies and often had torn them to pieces without pity. Proceeding along the principal road of Hanga Roa, the guerrilla of the Americans became more and more suffocating and difficult to oppose. A lieutenant of Kohau had seriously been wounded, and this alarmed the native general. He didn't waste time to call the cavalry that anxious waited at the entry of the chief town. A formation of riders provided of rifles had smoothed the way before the infantrymen, armed with machine gun, enabling the other detachments of the army to deal with the American artillery. Easter Island cavalry fought by the old way, mounting the steeds, and not with the modern tanks, because the natives could not manufacture them with opportune speed in the small armouries of their villages. The natives preferred to spend time assembling several guns and howitzers, rather than manufacturing few tanks. The charge of the tanks would have been replaced by aggressive and well trained war steeds that at Rapa Nui didn't miss in the stables of Easter Island people.

Despite the intervention of the cavalry, the battle was equally bloody for the natives: Kohau had eliminated the persons at the howitzers, but he had lost too many men to continue the battle. Once occupied the centre of Hanga Roa, only the zone of the governorship building was missing, only defended by four tanks that aimed

threatening against Easter Island people. As if it was not enough, two hundred American soldiers were almost prepared in a breadth circle around the building. Kohau, hearing the first shots, had opted for sending before the cavalry. This one, supported by the infantrymen, had gone very close to the hostile line up overwhelming a big number of adversaries. Nevertheless, in this tactic there were the germs of the defeat. The Americans could easily change disposition widening the deployment in form of circle and englobing inside the whole Polynesian contingent. Kohau and his men, strongly weakened, found themselves trapped in a vicelike grip.

Now attacked from all sides, they were about to fall overpowered by the Americans. The native general understood that his time had come and he lowered his machine-gun: after he had victoriously fought in so many complicated battles, the time for him to perish on the naked ground had come. Yes, his time had come, but it was not the good moment to leave yet. Kohau remembered his words: ahead till the last bullet and the last breath. Only death could stop him. He showed signs of a reaction, they shot his hand, he let his weapon fall on the ground and unsheathed a revolver; they shot his shoulder again and, as if it was not enough, he felt a terrible burning next to his leg and another not far from his abdomen. Entirely riddled with holes, Kohau fell on the ground under the body of one lieutenant of his that was just killed by a pistol shot.

<<Infamous destiny>> the native general, closing his eyes, thought. Then, the dark.

That evening seemed very calm... even too much: the light of the night time sky above the silent moais decidedly gave the impression of a surreal climate. The four archaeologists went down with calm from the slant of the volcano, visibly tired. Nevertheless they didn't show signs to stop: a day of intense work was not enough for making their impetus lose. They suddenly heard some shouts breaking the big silence and whooping far away. They leaned out toward a precipice to see downstream. Hundreds of native warriors went near to the Rano Raraku, tightening their fists and howling at the top of their voices. Among their line the famous flag of the

reimiro stood out, on which they had engraved some characters in their ancient rongo-rongo writing.

The archaeologists quickened their pace to run at breakneck speed, they went down from the Raraku and hid themselves behind some sculptures to scan the movements of the Ester Island people. These were set out in lines: five of those were reserved to the infantry and four to the cavalry; guns and howitzers stood out from the back areas, loaded properly by the artillerymen. In front of everybody, the commander Anakivi Atamu was upright with diabolic air. The natives sighted the jeep parked by the archaeologists not very distant and they instigated their fury on it: they riddled it with holes and set it on fire. The four, looking at safety distance, cursed in a smothered voice.

<<There are some Americans around>> Atamu sneered bold <<I will roast them. >>

<<They won't have gone so far>> a lieutenant assured <<We will catch them. >>

The archaeologists became dumb, they crept along the near moais and quickly directed toward north, while Easter Island people went close to their old hideaway: it was the only way to do it to the terrible Polynesians' face. Atamu, at that point, thought about having imagined the voices of the Americans and came back in the line up among his men.

Easter Island warriors moved toward north, perhaps disposed to camp, juts where the archaeologists sheltered again; they were closer and closer to the obscurity of the night, like in a nightmare. Patrick and the others held their breath and started shivering as never happened in their life. After some second, they saw that the natives turned frightened and they realized that somebody else was approaching from far, even more threateningly. They heard some insistent steps coming from northwest: they were more or less hundreds of people. From the outline of the Rano Raraku, infantrymen armed with machine gun, artillerymen with mortars and howitzers, even some tank came out. Among the lines of these daring soldiers, the American flag stood out. In front of everybody, it could not do without noting the skilled author of that raid: the colonel Henry Wilkins. His militiamen, two hundred in all, were

allocated at Vaihu; they should have helped the artillerymen in the hinterland, but unfortunately they had not arrived in time to the battleground. Luckily they had noticed, from far, that Easter Island people directed toward east: they had decided to follow furtively them and prepare an ambush when it had been opportune. From northeast, other components of the infantry were arriving, surely the Americans defeated coming from Anakena; Easter Island people were trapped from all sides by now: the only way out was the sea behind them.

Atamu spurred his men, amazed to the battle, and he joined the fight. It was the last occasion in which he used a rifle: he shot at random without not even seeing the adversaries to hurt, feeling the obscurity nearest than usual. After few minutes, he remained immobilized by the fear. He felt a bullet entering in his back, he screamed by the burning, he fell on the ground and he remained firm where he was a prey to the convulsions. The battle was a disaster for the natives: hundreds of dead and dying persons completed the background of the Rano Raraku. The sacred high ground, where the statues were born, had become a cemetery for human rests.

Insidious way

The clock told just midday when the four archaeologists had arrived to the beach of Caleta Ovahi; in front of them, there were a small woody zone and a high ground, the Puha, on the other side of which Anakena rose. They could finally lie down a little on the beach.

The evening before, they had not come back to the chief town because the colonel Wilkins had strongly dissuaded such a movement and they had slept not many hours on Tongariki beach. They set out at dawn without telling Freedendall regarding the second expedition: they had all the necessary signs to continue their hunting to the mystery by themselves. It was not a very easy search... it had never been, but this time the archaeologists had to work in hostile field. Wilkins, after his comforting success, would have liked to continue toward Anakena regaining as soon as the whole north. Unfortunately his troops were not many and too tired: they had already performed a real miracle at the Rano Raraku. The four archaeologists had eluded the overseeing of many Easter Island warriors that patrolled Eastern coast of Rapa Nui during the morning: now they were convinced that nobody could stop them anymore.

They laid down on the thin sand to rest a little and they went to fish something to eat on the near rock-cliffs: they were very hungry. Mario succeeded in catching many tunas, but also some exotic fishes that looked eatable: the waters of the island were very populated indeed, but it was also true that was not a very safe zone for fishing. Many sharks wandered around, and it was not rare those terrible predators devoured human flesh. Mario also ran into some giant

torpedoes that never saw before, giving up fishing them to avoid bad surprises. Our seekers devoured shortly everything and they remained to discuss on the beach; Mario and Alicia went to have a swim. The two young people had a good time: they made some speed contests, dives from the near rock-cliffs and somersaults. When it was four o' clock, Patrick called them back: it was time to go away. The Canadian had heard rolls of drums and he feared to cross some armed Easter Island man in the zone.

The archaeologists entered the small woody zone in front of the Puha that was full of palms and very dense: another intervention of the botanists that had tried to plant the trees that had been cutting by the natives centuries ago. They suddenly heard some voices and guffaws coming from not so far; Mercedes noted a sub-machine gun standing out from a palm. The four hid themselves behind some thorn bushes that seemed done just for them, at the side of a path excavated among the trees. They saw three women and two men walking in front of them, who brought to firing position some sub-machine guns and wore the battle dress. They were those sinister persons that Mario and Patrick had met in the brushwood around the volcano of the old wise man. <<Damn! We should be very near!>> one of the young women cursed, aiming the weapon with sure air <<According to the orders, the two scoundrels live here around.>>

<<That's it>> the happiest man of the company snickered, who was close to her leaning his hand on her back <<You can already get ready to strike baby. We will leave the sign in this mission. >>

<<The government will pay us very good>> the second woman affirmed, who nervously shook the sub-machine gun <<By this mission it depends the future history, the destiny of the United States and, perhaps, the one of the whole world. >>

<<Let's think before acting. The target is on the other side of these palms>> the third woman explained, looking concentrated through the trees <<We will pounce upon the scoundrels like a grizzly catches a wayfarer on the mountains. >>

The five sinister persons sneered and moved into action. Alicia, scanning well their suits, recognized the coat of arms of the most

famous intelligence of the world embroidered on the uniforms: those were CIA agents.

The five secret agents threw themselves on the ground, they took to wind on the naked earth in front of the eyes of the archaeologists with their head turned, however, from the opposite side; they could not directly realize that someone was looking at them, unless they hear some noise. The four seekers didn't show signs even to hiss a half word and they often held back their breath, knowing that even a puff could recall the attention of the experienced secret agents. These ones gave a glance over the trees in front of them with the binoculars; they passed through a palm and went out of the brushwood. They saw a little zone apparently disseminated of moais and an abandoned wood log cabin, covered by the shade of some rare eucalyptuses - as the platinum on Easter Island; behind this habitation, the Puha rose that grazed it by its sweet slant. The secret agents cast a satisfied glance, they crept along the sculptures with big agility, and they reached the log cabin and came up under the arcade by some battered stairs. They leaned with their back on the wall next to the entry; they beat a hit with their elbows and felt that the moment had arrived to move into action.

<<Give up, damned bastards! >> one of the two men shouted, the bolder one <<Your time has come... you have stopped laying down the law in Washington. >>

He broke down the door with a kick and let the women came in, aiming the sub-machine guns: there was nobody. The log cabin, nevertheless, was not abandoned: it was composed by only a room with two beds, a dinette, a room with chairs and sofa in bad condition. The secret agents went out of the hovel with interrogative air; they got down and heard some shots coming from far. The other man, the one that had not come into play, was shot to his abdomen and fell suffering on the ground, howling by pain. The women understood that someone was aiming at them from the rock-cliffs with a sniper rifle, on the east slope of the Puha. The secret agents left their dying colleague on the ground, they set out toward that direction crawling along the moais, they heard other shots, this time in vain, and they cursed. They raised their eyes and noticed that the two scoundrels were going down from their

position decided to cross the brushwood: they were a man and a woman that were not more than thirty years old. She, unlike her companion, grasped a gun calibre nine: she was now trying to shoot her enemies, escaping through the brushwood. The secret agents changed direction; they got up and started chasing the two scoundrels. They went out soon from the zone full of palms and they were again on the thin sand; one of the women of the CIA, the one more concentrated, aimed to the head of the man in front of her with the sniper rifle, and she punished him mercilessly. The other scoundrel kept on escaping, this time towards the waters, decided to dive. She fired a shot, it pierced through the secret agent that had punished her friend just a little before and she stumbled on the damp sand. She got up again with an instant of delay and she saw around herself the three hostile survivors.

<<You have a precise aim>> the man with the uniform commented, aiming his unarmed prey to her nape <<Unfortunately your run is over. >>

<<This whore has killed my best friend! >> the most decided of the secret agents shouted, leaning her sub-machine gun on her temple <<She deserves a special treatment...>> The fearless warlike landed a kick in the face of the woman on the ground, another in her stomach and a more powerful in her head. <<These are for my friend>>she explained raged <<I would like to torture you as it should be... but it is useless to waste time with a slut like you. >>

She fired some shots that broke the skull to the unarmed woman on the ground. Then the secret agents lifted the killed two dead bodies, they set them on fire and threw them burnt in the sea: the stream would have dragged them who knows in which point of the Pacific Ocean. The dead persons were unrecognizable in face, the fingertips were devastated, the digital imprints could not be recovered anymore and, above all, enough requisite didn't exist for carrying out the DNA test. Whoever had found the bodies, they would not have had necessary elements to identify the victims.

The three agents got further in direction of the brushwood, after having buried the dead companion under the sand, to go and recover the body of the other colleague. They heard a strange rustle

and saw the leaves of the bushes moving; some instant later they noticed the outlines of some people that got further toward the slant of the Puha: something told them those persons had assisted to their mission. It absolutely needed to stop and hush up them forever; otherwise those could identify the secret agents and create an immense uproar. The three surviving killers were decided to eliminate the witnesses with few bullets. They went over the woody zone and saw the four archaeologists coming up along the slope. They chased them and shouted a half sentence that the seekers of the mystery didn't understand. The archaeologists started running along an excavated little road that led more easily on the top of the high ground. They covered many meters uphill and, when they had almost arrived on the top, they stopped for a while; they immediately started running again, noticing behind them that the aggressors were gaining. How did they believe they could save themselves on the top of the hill? There was no way out there. Alicia was thinking: she was convinced to be able to get off with ability in that situation. Mario, next to her, looked very more uneasy and disturbed. When the secret agents started shooting, the American was about to be stricken: a bullet passed nearby him, leaving him unharmed. The four archaeologists finally reached the top and they noticed that, from the other side, the slant of the Puha was vertically to the sea.

<<Damn! >> Patrick exclaimed, looking at the precipice <<There is no way out. We have ended in the grave. >>

<<Maybe an escape exists>> Alicia whispered sure to the others <<Listen to my plan. >>

The Australian explained her intentions with much calm, articulating well in a low voice the words, she invited the others not to seem too bold, above all Mario, and she explained that all had to keep together in order to do it. The other three friends nodded. The secret agents arrived just at that time on the top, aiming the sub-machine guns against their preys that lifted their hands up, looking afraid.

<<Your run is over! >> the boldest woman of the company shouted <<This time I give you a good thrashing. >>

<<We surrender>> Mercedes stammered with her trembling hands
<<Don't shoot. We are archaeologists in mission. >>

The Cuban explained the reason why she was with the colleagues there. When the secret agents heard the word “mystery”, they were almost surprised but they didn't change their aggressive attitude. The man of the company drew near to the Cuban, aiming his sub-machine gun to her forehead, and he had a sneering laugh: he looked like he didn't care what the archaeologists were doing in that zone. Alicia interrupted him summoning not to shoot; she explained that she would have preferred to throw herself with her colleagues from the precipice rather than dying by three criminals. The archaeologists went toward the crevasse, they looked in face the aggressors behind them for the last time, they closed their eyes, and they murmured a half word and jumped together down. After the work that they had done for escaping from the secret agents, they threw themselves from one hundred and forty meters. The incredulous secret agents went close the ravine; they leaned out and saw that under of them there was not only any water: a heap of terrible rock-cliffs had surely minced the flesh of the archaeologists. They thought to notice from the top some human rests and traces of blood just on those black rocks that coasted along the water of the ocean at the base of the hill. The secret agents got further laughing and started going down from the mountain along the path excavated by the other side.

Meanwhile under the crevasse, from which the archaeologists threw themselves, some insistent shuffling could be heard, as if someone was celebrating downstairs; but the Puha was not a condominium. Yet, under there was something; looking from the crevasse, a small rocky base could be noticed few meters low that led in a cavern through a small hole. Who cared to throw himself nearer possible to the slope, they found that plinth of stone to their feet; this led toward the interior of the hill and it was difficult to locate for those people who were on the top. Alicia's plan, who was the only one to sight the base in the past, foresaw to exploit it to their advantage. The archaeologists had not reached the heaven... they were there rather still, on that island, which didn't stop surprising and giving them more or less unpleasant surprises. They were laid in their small

cavern unharmed and happy of the saving danger: they had never spent such a risky day in their life.

A reasoned solution

Our archaeologists had finally arrived in the zone of Anakena; it was almost seven in the afternoon, but the sun was very hot. Mario went beyond a zone covered of palms that surrounded the beach, and he found himself in front of the archaeological site of Ahu Naunau. There were seven moais on a platform; four of these had the pukau, a headgear made with dark red colour rock, one was without this ornament and two were without their heads. According to some scientists, the block of stone present on the head of the moais didn't represent a hat, on the contrary the hair of the ancestor that the sculpture represented. A hypothesis of the kind had been welcomed with not much enthusiasm, because it was very easy to be denied since not all the moais had the pukau. In fact Easter Island people had not usually their heads shaved, rather they were accustomed to have their hair enough long. However any hypothesis could be excluded till an absolute proof. Around the platform, a big expanse of grass could be noticed on which was not difficult to find heaps of stone more or less big, maybe removed by the moais in the past. Behind the seven moais there was a big beach, to which one could enter through a path east located. Behind the little road, a hill could be admired: it was really the Puha vertically to the sea.

Mercedes noticed at the base of the high ground an enough short sculpture, isolated in comparison to the others, without any pukau and with a very uneasy air: it seemed just the solitary executioner of whom the priest made suspect. The archaeologists went near to that strange moai and they threw out shovels and picks from their backpacks. Mercedes and Alicia dealt a violent blow of pick in the ground, Mario beat the ground under him and hammered the shovel sure that the wanted object was very more in low. Patrick cast a

glance to the hole that had dug with the colleagues and noticed that it had become enough wide and deep. He felt the sun very hot on his back; he put his shirt off and kept on working with disheartened air. Half an hour later, the archaeologists had raked up the whole zone around the solitary moai without finding anything. Mario and Patrick recommended to the friends to put back the utensils. The most obvious solution was never that right one as far as it seemed. <<Yet I cannot understand>> Alicia broke the silence <<The solitary avenger should be this moai. >>

<<It may be that the priest refers to the bones of this character>> Mario intervened <<just like to the Rano Raraku. >>

<<No, it is impossible>> Mercedes denied him, shaking her head <<I don't believe that the friend is so predictable. This time the solution is an enigma, boys. >> Alicia proposed to find the imaginary line of the reimi, on which they had thought over so much: surely this element had not been added at random among the signs at the priest. Patrick was sceptic about the hypothesis of the colleagues; the tablet advised to look under the line, but it didn't clearly approve the hypothesis of a double meaning of the word. Probably one of the statues was the solitary avenger; it had a rudimentary reimi engraved on its head, very visible by the light of the moon, precisely near to an eye. Under the symbol, shredding with the pick, it would have been possible to pick up another object... maybe, a sheet made with another material on which the second "piece" of mystery was engraved. Mario and Mercedes thought the hypothesis improbable, but they decided to look for the reimi on the sculptures in any case. They spent a lot of time next to the moais, scanning every single millimetre of their surface without finding anything. The sun was almost falling by now, and the air started to be finally fresher. Unfortunately there was no trace that could confirm Patrick's hypothesis. Mario, seeing the two moais with the cut-off head, started: if the line had been on a head cut in following age? The sign would be lost forever and the mystery, once more, would have been like it was. No, it could not be. Mario didn't dare to imagine a similar tragedy.

The archaeologists started beating again on the ground until Patrick threw in the sponge: there was not way out. The slim light of the

evening didn't even succeed in comforting him: the sky was almost dark by now, but the drawing didn't come out before his eyes. He started thinking also that the reimi-ro had not to shine: Easter Island people didn't possess, in his opinion, very sophisticated techniques to make an object phosphorescent. Surely it was necessary to treat the drawing with special varnishes that didn't exist at that age, or using material sparkling that existed in kind. This was a hypothesis by far unlikely: he didn't know any element with these eccentric characteristics, but he didn't think they existed. Maybe the reimi-ro shone by the light of the god Tavaku by another reason; the Canadian felt the solution very near, but he could not understand why the author of the enigma called into question the divinity: he could not intend the starry sky. It would have been too banal and being obvious would have taken the priest to a professional "suicide": his caste was famous just for the abstruse and tangled riddles.

Patrick half-closed his eyes and thought over: he arranged the place where he was many years before, when the big civil war of the island was finished by now. Which places were very esteemed by the long ears and diffused for the whole island? Patrick had found the solution and he was convinced of it... nobody could stop him anymore. The line surely pointed out a cult place not very distant, discovered few years before on the island; this place was used for magic rituals, for the adoration of the starry sky and the moon. It caused much sensation among the archaeologists, because it looked very much like the sites distant thousand of kilometres like Stonehenge in England, enough unusual sets in Polynesia. Patrick remembered that there were also a big reimi-ro carved on the rock around there and some small symbols like to those ones engraved on the ground that looked like aiming in direction of Ahu Naunau. Yes, the hypothesis was going off smoothly without any fault. The line of the reimi-ro was, therefore, that imaginary strip that started from Anakena towards the place in which rites were celebrated in honour of the God Tavaku. The priest specified to look for the light of that divinity not by chance: it was a wink to the seekers that could be helped by a similar sign. The Canadian, by experience, knew that he had not to skip some particular when he interpreted the riddles

of the past. The solitary avenger was an enough short sculpture that rose in the very middle of the place thought; it had even a very showy right eye that impressed the archaeologists. These asked themselves for days because the sculptors had drawn it that way: perhaps just the priest had commissioned it to measure. The most veiled riddle of the history seemed revealed; luckily, Patrick's volcanic mind worked to properly and thought over the most difficult solution. The archaeologists moved toward north with the enthusiasm sky-high.

A night visit

The village of Rongo was silent that night: the silence of a mutilated victory. Surely the native army had attacked with effectiveness and torn up the most part of the territories to Americans. Nevertheless it suffered two heavy defeats, lost too many men among its own lines and risked very much. The southern borders of Easter Island people were marked by a curved line that started from Rongo to finish in proximity of the Rano Raraku and Ahu Tongariki. The whole north of the island was under the regal authority of Hotukau. The monarch was decided to keep the conquered positions and train new troops to send to the borders. He understood that it was better not to attack again the territories remained to the enemies, avoiding other bloodsheds and a further contraction of the number of warriors at disposal. When the favourable conditions for an offensive had arisen again, Hotukau would have been the first one to send its troops.

A mysterious character wandered along the streets of the village, limping at the shade of the palms. He wore a kind of balaclava and some bandaging in his left hand, shoulder and leg. He bore like a soldier, with a criminal air. He turned toward the royal palace, taking a little and isolated road, excavated in the north of the village. When he saw the door on the back of the building, he knocked leaning himself by his arm. A watch went to open, he mistook him for a mendicant and he aimed his rifle against him. The sinister man reproached the sentinel with irritated air and put the mask off: he was the commander Rong Kohau. He didn't die in battle; he was not as unlucky as he believed. He kept his left hand with the other, making a grimace of pain, he accepted reluctant the apologies of the watch and went in the room of the throne, where he waited for the

king. The king, despite wakened up, he was very happy to see the general again.

<<Damn, Rong! >> Hotukau exclaimed enthusiastic <<They had told me that you were dead. You are still luckily in this world. I should have had to replace you, but I realized that another person with your military talent didn't exist. >>

<<I have had a narrow escape>>Kohau with a hoarse voice commented <<I cannot even believe it now. >>

The native general told shortly his story. Being seriously wounded during the clashes, he felt a deadly sharp pain in his abdomen, and he had collapsed on the ground. Luckily, the bullet shot him to his groin and had not injured some vital organ. Kohau was in a bad state of health under the dead body of one friend of his, died some instant later. The Americans had shot the last hits with the tanks to the survivors without giving them way out and cleaned up the battleground, throwing all the bodies of Easter Island people in the park of the town. They would have buried all of them the following day. Before the next morning, the general had reopened his eyes and went away from Hanga Roa crawling toward north and he had reached an enough isolated and calm place on the sea front. He extracted all the bullets with a rapier that always brought with him and he bandaged himself with some bandages found in the pocket of his uniform. After having rested almost the whole day, he turned toward Rongo still painful, but safe.

<<You have shown to have plenty of courage>> the king snickered, giving a slap on his shoulder <<Rong, pass in infirmary and let my personal doctors change the bandaging. You have to recover your health, because I need your help in the army. >>

<<Always at your service, my sire>>Kohau assured, making a grimace of pain <<The Americans will regret for not having killed me on the sacred ground of Hanga Roa. I will soon come back to the chief town, I will punish them and I find the “piece” of mystery.>>

He greeted the monarch and left the room grinning: his willpower was also stronger than the death by now.

Revealing view

The archaeologists had not long reached the place of cult pointed out by Patrick: this was located at Punta San Juan, slightly more to north of Anakena as foreseen. They had not had to walk very much and they could get down working with the excavation tools. The place was located two hundred meters toward the hinterland and it was characteristic indeed: it had a circular plant, well put in prominence by a series of rocky poles that marked the border. These were hammered in the ground and methodically prepared all around the sacred place. At the centre of the site, some ritual bases could be perceived, on one of which a big reimiro was noticed, carved with precision.

Patrick had not been wrong, as far as he knew: he knew that place like the back of his hands. The archaeologists went near to the only moai, which was laid down and covered with soil too, and they started digging around. The night breeze blew on their faces, while they were trying to find a least sign. They had been searching for two hours, they also shifted the more distant ground and they examined the right eye of the moai, which didn't seem to conceal any secret. Patrick's reasoning seemed perfect, yet he was denied with much facility on the field. The irritated Canadian let shovel and pick fall on the ground with anger, and he proposed to come back to Anakena. Mercedes and Mario tried to console him in vain, looking resigned: that hole in the water had been a too big disappointment to digest for everybody. Everything was over by now, the dream to discover the mystery has disappeared: without that "piece", the walk toward the discovery was inexorably arrested. New ideas were necessary to go on, energies and a boundless imagination, which frankly the archaeologists had exhausted. These

walked along the coast, they came on the beach of Anakena and took a little road on the slope of the Puha. They would finally have taken shelter for the night and some rest on the top. They laid down on the soft grass and, before closing their eyes, they cast a last glance to the view from the top of the crevasse. The quiet of the zone reassured them, and gave them a sense of safety: even the giants of Ahu Naunau seemed to watch over on them with the big and massive structure.

Alicia fixed the ground in front of the moais, she swore to perceive a slim bluish light intermittence under a thin layer of soil and she drew the attention of her colleagues. Patrick leaned out to look better, while Mario threw a binocular out of his backpack. The four were incredulous in front of that show. Did they mistake one thing for another or was it real? The light seemed to delineate the contour of a very big figure on the grass, which arrived as far as the entry of the grove in front of them. It was a curved image, which oddly started just from the feet of the moais. Oh, Alicia's blue eyes were suddenly illuminated... she could not believe it. She took out of her pocket a photo and she ascertained with excited voice: the line of the reimi, just that one. The archaeologists were full of joy and they shouted like possessed persons. The Australian woman ran to embrace Mario, who leaned his hand on her ankles and held her in his arms. She kept on shouting for long time and she burst into laughter since the American was tickling her.

The four seekers went down running from the hill, they came inside the perimeter marked by the reimi engraved on the ground, and they started shifting the earth in that zone. In few time, they started seeing clearer; in front of the moais, Easter Island people had paved a zone with an enough known mineral: the fluorite; this is provided with very peculiar characteristics, since it can store in the daytime a quantity of ultraviolet rays of the sun that turns into photons in the night, illuminating itself dark bluish. The whole covered surface, very probably, was covered by a landslide many centuries ago, leaving only hardly some indication of contour out of the earth. The fluorite reimi finally returned by the light of the night. The archaeologists were enchanted; it seemed that some street-lamps had been placed in front of the moais of Ahu Naunau. That source

of night light, which chemistry had explained with rationality at the beginning of the XX century, it seemed inexplicable to the eyes of the natives that meant it like the symbol of the power of the God Tavaku. It needed to find the right point now, in which the piece of “mystery” was buried. The priest advised to sight the solitary avenger, but there was no trace of this imaginary character.

Mercedes stopped on another detail: the right eye. The reimi-ro, being a half moon formed by two heads at the extremities, it also had this detail. What did really represent the reimi-ro? Nobody knew it, however it was also probable that it represented a warrior... or better two war companions, heroes that had fought in ancient times for the country. Yes, the hypothesis sounded good. On the other hand, Mercedes already imagined those two faces as theme of a moai... they had not only the pukau. Alicia had a strange idea; the tablet told that Hotu Matua was represented at Ahu Naunau with his children and some warriors. Maybe that headgear was not a simple hat or a way to draw the hair; it was almost surely a symbol that marked only the heroes coming from the ruling surname or from noble families. Patrick and Mario approved the hypothesis, while they were digging under the eye of the fluorite reimi-ro: it was sorry to ruin a so nice monument, but they were decided to put everything back in its place. The four seekers dug for many meters: the hope seemed to fade away again. Suddenly, Mario heard the joyful shouts of Mercedes; the Cuban woman had a casket of very rudimentary metal between her hands. The woman forced it with a hit of shovel and showed a tablet marked by the usual leaf of toromiro off. They had finally added another wedge to the puzzle, the more surely suffered.

Patrick was intent to press some keys on his laptop: he could not get his head away from the screen for an instant. The archaeologists were camped around in the woody zone Ahu Naunau and stretched in the middle of the grass, waiting to see the translation of their expert of symbols. Nobody had slept or tried to rest; all were in nervousness and anxious to know the next sign that would have approached them to the mystery. The four were concentrated on their mission, the most important of their life and disposed to give

their soul to succeed in the great enterprise, whereas everyone had miserably failed. Patrick laughed, he pushed the last key and turned the laptop toward the others; the screen was a bit damaged during the run on the Puha, but it held on like its master. A word document revealed an enough dark translation, but not impossible to understand.

And so you have succeeded in your small enterprise, but don't believe to have got it already. The way is still long... when it seems you are prompt; you will find the most dismal darkness and the terror more worrying. Solitary wayfarer, you will have to move to the west till sighting the summer village of the kings. No one can help you in the search anymore; only the sun, when it set, it will show the position with the help of the forehead of the keeper. Under the thick blanket, only a wall will separate you from your path that can be illuminated by the enthusiasm, the passion and your fortune... above all this value will bring you to see the beloved leaf again.

Alicia horrified and was firm in front of the screen without uttering word. Mario considered this absurd and without meaning sign after having cursed the priest. Mercedes confessed not to be very intuitive in subject of riddles. Patrick read the first lines over and tried to disclose what he had understood; the summer village of the kings, which the tablet fixed to west, it was surely the one of Tahai, halfway between the chief town and Rongo. The Canadian remembered very well that Hotukau spent a lot of time there around before the Americans arrived; digging among the memories, he remembered of other kings that in past had spent their moments of relax there. Mario had been so many times on the beach of Punta Roa, behind the statues of that place, of which the last one with Jerry Davis.

Alicia finally started to reason and she explained that the keeper of whom the priest spoke was naturally one of the two most isolated moais of the others, which all were on an only base. The first one was situated toward the sea, but the researchers supposed that it was tiled from other statues before the civil war. The second was risen toward the hinterland, but it looked toward south and not the other moais as many others could think; it evidently was used to protect

the southern border of the village. Yes, the archaeologists supposed that this was the sculpture pointed out by the sign. How could a keeper indicate the position? Surely it didn't speak, but the tablet gave a very burning sign. Mercedes thought some second and started: the sun, beating on the surface of the sculpture, produced a shade; it was necessary to dig in the exact point in which the forehead of the moai was reflected on the ground. The rest of the writing looked like Greek for the archaeologists.

Patrick thought to a sort of allegory, if so it could be defined, according to the words of the priest: even the path was represented by the difficult search of the mystery, blocked by a wall with which one could intend an obstacle difficult to surmount. Probably the new sign, marked by the leaf of toromiro exactly, was not in that point, but a little more distant or deeply. The degree of difficulty of the enigma, as soon as the game progressed, increased, therefore the priest gave vaguer indications... now the brain helped more, but it was not all in the search. The archaeologists had to have so much fortune. The recommendations of the priest didn't frighten Mario: the case had favoured the group already and it would not have abandoned him, in his opinion, in the crucial moment... or he hoped so at least.

The four turned the laptop off and decided to sleep for some hours: early in the morning they would have left on foot toward Ahu Tahai. Patrick was the only one to be awake for half an hour more: the enthusiasm and the accumulated adrenaline didn't let him sleep. He made a phone call, despite the late time, to a person, convinced that he was still awake. He laid his mobile and looked around: he had a strange feeling, as if he felt spied by someone. He heard the deep breath of the colleagues sleeping next to him, but nothing else. He had perhaps imagined everything. Yet he was not a daydreaming person. He laid down, he looked at his watch and he just half-closed his eyes. He heard a shuffling, he suddenly woke up, and he raised his head and saw the leaves of a bush moving. Patrick was rigid without making signs to a movement, but he didn't see anything of suspicion apart from some lizards escaping with fear. He closed his eyes and heard a deep silence that inspired him confidence; perhaps the noise of fronds that broke or a breath of wind had been enough

to impress the mind of a suspicious natured man. The Canadian relaxed and imagined new discoveries, then the empty.

The enigma in a meeting

Mitch Freedendall was still in his office: he was having a heated argument with some sinister men. He looked very shaken and uneasy; despite he was tired as never. He got up from his chair, he drew near to the window and he beat his fist on the Venetian blinds. <<So you tell you me to be calm! >> he cursed <<You have been protagonists of a too risky mission. >>

<<We have tried to be prudent>> one of the guests retorted <<It was a hitch. I know it, you are the only person that doesn't belong to the services of intelligence to know everything, but there is no reason to worry. Nobody will ever discover anything: we have eliminated the witnesses. >>

Freedendall drew near to the desk, he sat again, he remained some second silent and asked who were that unfortunate men; one of the two women told that a group of archaeologists had put a spoke in their wheels. Our archaeologists had met just the secret agents on their walk the day before. But were they really sure to have killed the witnesses of the homicides? Freedendall horrified: a thing of the kind was not possible. He had heard Patrick by telephone, who had explained him that all the members of the team were very well. He explained to the bystanders as matters stand and he admonished them: the government cared very much to the safety of that team; in the case the secret agents had killed them, they would certainly have been demoted. They were amazed and cast an interrogative glance to Freedendall: was it more important those unfortunate persons than the mission itself for which the government worked for a long time? However they didn't object in any way when he told them that the archaeologists worked to a very important project: it was normal that Mitch worried about his employees. They only wanted to

specify that they didn't intend to end under investigation if the archaeologists had reported them. The other of the women beat a fist on the desk and explained that the plan had not absolutely to be discovered, because they also care to the greatness of America as agents of the CIA. Mitch nodded, he specified that he would have done the possible so that everything was right and he greeted his guests. He snatched his mobile, dialled a number and phoned.

<<Mr. Governor, we were nearly to the catastrophe>> Freedendall panted <<Your agents, not knowing the plan to perfection, they were eliminating the wrong people. No, they are safe and sound luckily. Damn! Everything risks falling through. Yes, okay. When it will be, we will find the scapegoat. Count on my support. >>

An unpleasant surprise

The sun was not setting yet when the four archaeologists glimpsed Ahu Akivi, an archaeological place of the hinterland next to which also a native village rose. Their legs were not quite tired, since they were used to walk even more; that sense of exhaustion was due above all to the hot day that could be felt even at seven o'clock in that red-hot afternoon. Perhaps the archaeologists would have been more distant if only they had succeeded in waking up earlier than ten at Anakena: unfortunately tiredness stopped them.

Ahu Akivi was located in a green zone surrounded from the hills, on which the few shed trees sometimes formed small groves. It was believed like one of the most ancient and important place for its seven moais, positioned on an only base; these represented some long ears commanders. They had no pukaus, symbol for the four archaeologists that they were not linked to the ruling surname on the whole island at that time. They laid down at the shade of the sculptures to rest for a little: Patrick leaned his head on the ground and fixed the sky with drowsy air, Mercedes turned back and closed her eyes to recover some energy.

Only Mario and Alicia looked still lively and quick; they remained to discuss, joking and making fun of each other: nobody could stop them, when they split their sides. The Australian took the water bottle, she sprinkled some drop of water on her face for refreshing herself, and she knocked over what it remained in the container on the hair of her friend and started running toward a woody zone behind the moais. Mario ran after her heatedly, he grabbed her laughing and leaning his arms on her back and he felt the flames of the passion blazing like a stately fire, looking at her so enchanting face. He approached his lips to Alicia's ones and started kissing her,

tightening her stronger to himself. The two found themselves shortly on the ground; Mario felt that he was sweating by the emotion, he put his t-shirt off and kept on kissing the Australian on her neck. The girl, despite she felt a pleasant breeze blow on her face, she seemed to fix the fronds with suspicious and almost disturbed air. She heard a strange rustle; she stood up and attracted Mario's attention.

<<Something strange is happening, I am sure>> Alicia panted, fixing the other <<Believe me, it is not a good sign. >>

<<You have nothing to fear>> the American assured, holding her in his arms gently <<There are only you and me here. Damn, it is perhaps my fault... you are uneasy, because I have run too much>>

<<No, but what you are saying>> she shook her head, leaning her head on Mario's breast <<This is not the reason. >>

The girl warned some distant shuffling, she heard some just metallic perceptible noises, she saw an outline behind a tree and she lowered on the ground with his companion, hearing a burst of sub-machine fire reaching her. The two had moved just in time. They suddenly got up, they luckily shunned some other shot, and they saw about ten Easter Island warriors armed with sub-machine guns coming out into the open from behind the trees. They ran out of the brushwood without turning back, they came near to the other colleagues and they started running with them away from the sculptures. The four looked back with frightened air and they took an excavated way that led them to southeast, coasted along by a hill. They were horrified noticing that other two squads of twenty native warriors ran toward them, showing the sub-machine guns with boldness; now the enemies were also in front and to the right of the poor archaeologists that were completely surrounded.

The four stopped and racked their brains; they had not much time available. What had they to do? They could not make an opening among so many bloodthirsty people. They looked around and found the solution handy: a narrow hole, in which one can go on all fours only, it broke the walls of the hill offering them a good shelter. They rolled on the grass, they crawled along some blocks of stone that hid the view to the pursuers, and they quickly entered the breaking: no native could imagine a similar movement. Seeing their preys

disappear, the warriors would have come away, remaining empty-handed, leaving the chance to the archaeologists to come out into the open. Unfortunately the natives noticed the astute movement of the archaeologists, but they arrived late near the hole. Kohau in person went near to the narrow passage to look inside the cavern. The dark that there was from the other side, it prevented him from looking the archaeologists in their faces. The commander could have sent only one warrior at a time in the cavern, and this would not have been prudent. He had a crueller idea: it made the hole obstruct with some rocks. The hideaway would have turned into a grave for his enemies. While he was getting further, his warriors already howled of joy: the mystery was safe by now, nobody could tear it from its place.

Kohau found an old man during his walk, he gave him a slap on his shoulder, and he thanked him for the service that he had given to his country. Looking better at him in face, he looked Ariki indeed, the hermit and wise man of the volcano Katiki. But what did this character do? He had, first of all, committed a serious mistake talking to the archaeologists about the mystery and the signs marked by the sacred leaf. He felt that the seekers would have been on his trail: he felt remorse to have spat it out. He wanted to come before them on the places pointed out by the priest in which to find the signs, but he didn't know them as all the native wise men didn't. He only knew that the starting point was the Rano Kau, other known news. Easter Island people could have destroyed the first sign, but they didn't know how to open the back of the coffer without grazing its sacred surface. Their particular affection to the treasure had induced them not to eliminate such a compromising tablet. The wise man had found the way of making up for his mistake with a stroke of luck: an evening, walking near Anakena with melancholy air, he found the archaeologists seeking in the brushwood. He hid behind the fronds and followed their speeches, understanding that they were addressed to Tahai. He had left the forest when the archaeologists had lain down, stumbling on a fallen branch that had alarmed Patrick; he directed to a friend of his, who took him to the royal palace of Rongo with his car. He confessed his story to Hotukau and gave the indications to stop the archaeologists. The

monarch got angry to the words of the old man, but he promised to pardon him if he had succeeded in killing the seekers. He thought to stop them with a consistent contingent of warriors in the hinterland, because Tahai was under the American jurisdiction. Kohau offered as head of the expedition, and he decided to make an ambush to the archaeologists near Ahu Akivi, sure that those would have passed there. The story had agreed with him. He affably discussed now with Ariki. Incredible, the wise man that looked so friendly and honest, he had betrayed his western friends. He didn't absolutely feel the remorse to have told them to go to hell, but only sense of relief, having stopped them just in time.

The archaeologists were in the dark of a very narrow cavern: the only small opening of light was enfeebled bringing with away the hopes of salvation. Mercedes wagged with anger, beating her fists against the rocky walls, while Alicia and Mario were embraced and immovable. Patrick touched behind his back and noticed to have his backpack with the whole documentation, shovels and picks still. He drew out the laptop and he noticed that it didn't turn on: the batteries were exhausted; therefore the computer worked by solar energy. The Australian seized her pick and started striking the rocks that Easter Island people had positioned in the opening, trying to riddle with holes. Mario and Patrick followed her example, while the Cuban beat from the other side of the cavern. She didn't even know what she was looking for, but the strength of the desperation pushed her to try in another direction: she perhaps hoped to find a bigger cavern toward the inside. Mercedes felt the wall surrender in a point and some stones collapsing; she removed the deposits and noticed a thick tunnel about fifty centimetres and very long. She could not see the end of it, but the slim light of the night seemed to come from the bottom. The archaeologists exulted at that sight, they held one another and they entered the gallery, in which they could enter one at a time and go on all fours. They covered many meters in that piercing, almost feeling the palm of their hands be consumed. They finally noticed that they came out into the open by another bigger hole under the starry sky. They laid down on the ground and raised upward their hands: they were saved by chance.

A pleasant fall

The four archaeologists finally glimpsed the plain of Tahai, at the first lights of the dawn; the fizzy air of the morning was good to them in a certain sense: they seemed lively and motivated. After that upset no one could stop them on their walk. The plain one was enough big and desolate: five moais stood out on an only base in proximity of the beach, to which one could enter through an adjoining descent. The statues were enough small: only two ones had the head and others two were cut on the head; the last one preserved just a piece of the torso: it was a simple ruin by now. Two very particular moais stood out not far away from the five ones from the other side of the descent. One rose on a big base; it was one of the most picturesque and beautiful moais of the island because of numerous restorations: it wore a shining pukau and two eyes of white coral. The other one was situated on a small raw base and it had an absorbed look: it was just the keeper thought by the archaeologists.

Mario caressed a horse that seemed docile like all the others on the island, and he went near to the pointed out moai. He attracted his colleagues' attention; he took the shovel and decided to get down to work. Alicia remembered that it needed to wait for the sunset to find the right point, but the others decided to start working anyway. Patrick explained that the shades lengthened on the ground in the morning and in the evening, because the sun was tilted compared to the horizon. He could have even found easily the right point at that time, but not in that situation: some clouds darkened the sky. In any case, according to the Canadian, it was probable to find the new "piece" of mystery going about ten meters far from the moai. The archaeologists followed Patrick's suggestions and they worked with

their excavation tools, beating with a lot of work on the hard and compact ground of the plain. The priest was really right speaking of thick blanket.

The hours quickly passed and the torrid sun in the summer, rising half day, started tilting toward west: it was seven p.m. The archaeologists were in an enough wide and deep pit: they had stopped digging only in the warmest hours of the noon. Mario was puzzled: wasn't it too obvious to identify the keeper with that statue? He knew by experience already that the priest didn't love too simple signs; he surely wanted to allude to something unthinkable. Mario, as far as he strove, he could imagine anything else to identify with a keeper in the plain. He climbed along the walls of the pit and started lost in thought toward the moai; suddenly, he stamped on a part of the incredibly friable ground and he almost sank with his foot. Mario now felt himself just dominated by the adversity: among so much space in that plain, he risked to end really in that more dangerous. He cast a curious glance low, he noticed the shade of the statue standing out to his feet and he started: he precisely trod the reflection of the forehead. That could not be the place in which to look for the "piece" of mystery: the shade would have lengthened more during the sunset moving itself toward the hole that had dug during the day. He made a step back, crouched, seized the pick and struck the ground with strength next to the leg and he started. The soil was slipping within a radius of three meters, making fall the poor archaeologist in a depression of some meter too. The noise of the impact attracted the colleagues' attention that leaned out toward the pit and they quickly let themselves down inside. Alicia was the first one to let down; she went close to Mario, noticed that he had only some superficial cut on his limbs and she gently held him, without giving him the time of say a word. The archaeologists, enthusiastic for the discovery, realized to have made a small mistake: they had not minded about the mentality of the priest. He could intend a period of time more than one could believe, and he certainly alluded to the setting sun.

Now the archaeologists were in a small rectangular room with the holed walls and made with blocks of volcanic stone. A big rocky incision revealed that they were very near to the aim. Patrick was

very happy to ascertain that it was in the Marquesas Islands language, and he translated in hurry by the laptop. He turned pale in a second: it was not the pure solution that he had been waiting for so long time.

Wayfarer, no one will plough this abandoned and sad ground before you. You will come up to here, and not further without the fortune... this is the wall that will perhaps divide you from your leaf forever.

Brave deed

Mitch Freedendall was drinking a glass of grappa with absorbed air, sat behind the desk of his office. He could not stop thinking over: he had his mind darkened by the pain. He was very bad like never he was in his life. During the day, he did nothing else than remaining sat in the only bar, of the chief town, to drink. He maybe finally perceived the regret not to have done anything to save the two scoundrels, to whom he was attached by a special relationship, some year ago. Fredendall was one great friend of theirs and knew a lot of burning details like them. He admired them, because they had dared to oppose to McNamara's plans and tried to save themselves from his brutality, having few possibilities to survive. On the other hand, Mitch had not objected: not only he put at the powerful persons' disposal, but he had continually backed up and encouraged them... typical toady behaviour. It was disgusting. He felt so sick to kill. He now knew that the archaeologists had risked ending their mission in the cemetery. He remembered Jerry and his past as ambitious boy: unfortunately it seemed a so far memory. All this could not be right. Freedendall felt the senses of guilt gnawing at his mind and a cry coming from the bottom: the terror had turned him into the monster that he was not. He threw the glass against the Venetian blinds and he felt satisfied to see it breaking against the glasses. It was the moment to make a step forward, to close with the past and write a new chapter, even if this required a big will power. Mitch didn't fear anybody anymore: he simply wanted to honour the memory of the dead ones in his conscience. What to do? There surely was no way-out to their death. It was better perhaps to take it out with some people and tell them what he knew... even somebody else would have known a truth that concerned them. He

hoped to receive some good suggestion to stop the sinister plans of the governor in the shade. No, he didn't want to involve them in illicit trades in any way: he would have kept the secrecy on their meeting. If he couldn't, he would have been ready to pay once and for all the weight of his responsibilities.

Evanescent vision

The archaeologists were aghast and rather surprised by the incisions on the wall in front of them. They could never imagine that the priest alluded to a real wall as concrete obstacle to their search. They fixed one another for some instant, thinking on what to do. Mario went near to the wall and remained to think an instant. He explained that this could easily be pulled down with a scraper or a bulldozer. Patrick denied him: in the case that the wanted tablet had been inserted inside the wall, it would have been shattered by tools of the kind. Mercedes hypothesized that the sign could be in a secret room, very plausible opinion. Mario beat the walls in front of him with his fists, he felt that they were well thick and excluded such eventuality. Alicia thought that a piece of plaster could hide some perfect niche to contain a tablet. The seekers decided to follow the suggestion of the Australian; they scanned the wall with attention and were disappointed. They felt disheartened and they could not find even some other solution. Mario started kicking furious against the plaster. He could not accept to have arrived so ahead in the search of the mystery and to be forced to stop just at that time. The hard work of the archaeologists could result vain by now and their dreams risked breaking down against that miserable wall. All this because fortune doesn't help who deserves only. Mario felt a piece of plaster coming off, and he observed amazed that the wall was broken from an empty space few millimetres wide. He shouted with joy and called the colleagues with a loud voice: he was on the right way.

The archaeologists took the excavation tools and patiently removed the plaster away from the point in which Mario had kicked. Everybody horrified at the end of the work: a block of solid stone

covered incredibly a big hole of rectangular form. Surely this introduced in some very dark and mysterious place. The enthusiastic seekers already tried the charm of the unknown. Another problem now was waiting them before throwing themselves to the adventure; it was not possible to remove the block of stone barchanded. Alicia threw out of the backpack an entangled rope and she affirmed that this could help them. The archaeologists tied the rope very firm to a prominence on the rock and they started pulling with strength: they felt the sweat on their foreheads and they groaned by the effort. They succeeded in shifting it and make it fall on the ground, freeing the opening from a seal that had been covering it for hundreds of years. They noticed a gallery in enough tenebrous and long descent: even a slim light at many meters of distance could not be perceived. The seekers took some torches from the backpacks and they crossed the tunnel at a slow pace, almost timorous; they were amazed, springing in a cavern to say the least anxious. They got anxious, absorbed in the dark of that place. The archaeologists aimed the torches in front of them and, driven by curiosity, they continued along an enough wide corridor. The walls were made by corroded and dark browned volcanic rocks; Alicia grazed them with her finger and she noticed that they were oddly very damp: perhaps the ground in surface was permeable and allowed the water to pass in the deepest depressions. The corridor continued with a little steep descent: some rocky paintings adorned it in the best way possible. War scenes and hunting, shepherds that reared livestock on the top of the green island hills, fishermen on the beaches and slaves knelt before a sovereign: good and picturesque drawings. What struck particularly the seekers was the one showing some men intent to carve and lift some moais with the ropes. The images made clear how natives' life in ancient times was, and they helped the archaeologists in their work very much. These reached the end of the corridor and they horrified; a transparent underground little pond with a radius of around one hundred and twenty meters divided them from a bigger cavern. That's the reason of so much damp. A wood float was anchored with some ropes on their bank: they used that to plough the waters. Patrick also found a baton to row. The other ones remained very curious to scan around with the

torches. Mario, invited by the freshness of the water, dipped his head for some instant. He noticed something abandoned on the rocky backdrop. He returned on the surface, he seized his torch and addressed the light toward the backdrop; he noticed that this reflected on the sweet waves shifted by the float. Who knows, it was perhaps simply a heap of soil.

The seekers got shortly on the other bank of the little pond. They took the pointed out cavern as previously and they found themselves again in a very sumptuous and picturesque room. This was rectangular: seen by the entry, one can notice a big table of stone surrounded by very rudimentary chairs. Some lances, armours and shields were hanged on the walls on the right. A very bug and sumptuous throne stood out at the end of the room, adorned with embroideries and drawings. Rocky paintings surrounded the room: they represented the deeds of a man during his life that looked like a monarch by his attitude. Another entry introduced in a smaller room almost covered by the throne: some pallets served as beds on the floor, paved by some blocks of tuff. The archaeologists felt lost: where have they to look for the “piece” of mystery? The two rooms were very big, but they didn't allow shining through any sign that could entangle them. Patrick cast a careful glance to the throne, while Alicia and Mercedes examined the floor: a removable tile or a covering of cloth perhaps represented good hideaways. Unfortunately their hope faded away in few instants.

The American fixed the fingertips with absorbed look: he felt the solution very close. He leaned his hand on the wall and left his eyelids half open. He thought over about the words of the priest. No, there was no way out this time. The companions and he could now do little: only the bandaged goddess could hold out her hand to him. Yet he understood that it was useless to appeal to the fortune without having a least sign or following up a clue. He didn't even see anything of suspicious... Mario had suddenly a shiver running on his back. He felt a droplet of water falling from his face, he touched his wet hair with a release and he started. He attracted his colleagues' attention, he ran toward the bank of the lake, he got on the float with them without giving them an explanation and he rowed, overpowered by the emotion. He cast a glance to the waters and

stopped, seeing a strange outline on the backdrop. Looking better at it, it didn't seem the noticed soil anymore when he had dipped his head. He finally explained to his colleagues what he had thought and he saw them disposed to support him with all their strengths. Mario wanted to reach the backdrop to eye that strange object from close up. It was not an easy enterprise, because it was necessary to swim about twenty meters under water. The American confided in his good apnoea gifts and he was decided to finish that little mission by himself. The archaeologists dissuaded him a similar movement and they demanded that someone accompanied him. Alicia didn't draw back and he plunged with her companion. They easily swam up to the backdrop, with their wide-open eyes. They had two particular underwater torches to have some light. They noticed with great amazement that a trunk was hammered in the ground and covered with dust. This formed a shield that protected the object from the sight of whom was in surface. Alicia and Mario shifted it from the backdrop, they took it with their arm and, with the other one, and they swam upward. They resurfaced one minute later; they took deep breaths and got on the float celebrated by the companions that got anxious. They cast a curious glance to the wood trunk; they opened it and noticed that it contained a tablet of stone in good conditions. The beloved leaf was low in the text.

Patrick was intent to type the keys of his laptop: he had not stopped an instant since he had come back to shore with his friends. The translation proceeded quickly and with certain fluency. The Canadian was firm only for few minutes on two words, but he succeeded in resolving his problems consulting a file of symbols in his computer. Reading the text in English again, he was puzzled. He turned it toward the others.

Dear wayfarer, this time even a bit of adversity could not stop your walk. I have to recognize that the Gods want you as new custodian of the mystery. Well, I will help you not to hamper their will now. Go a bit far away from the big bay to south. There the fire devoured the last vestige of a great people leaving a simple heap of bricks. Dig in the space among this and a before heap of pebbles. You

will find the last piece of mystery. It will be up to you, then, to put together all those that you messily hold.

Patrick was astounded by the facility with which the priest surrendered to the seekers. Perhaps, after Easter Island man had put them to hard test, the moment of the prize had come. The archaeologists agreed with the explanation of the Canadian. They attentively read the last lines of the passage again, and they agreed that the mentioned place was certainly Ahu Vinapu.

This place had a small wall made of very particular stone, which was composed of numerous blocks inserted with precision. The Polynesian had not similar techniques of construction. Contrarily, a people existed overseas knowing them very well: the Incas. It was very easy to notice similar walls of stone on the Andes of Peru, walking among the ruins of the Macchu Picchu or Cuzco, the ancient capital. Many researchers, like the Norwegian Thor Heyerdahl, considered Vinapu as a proof that South American populations had been ancestors of that actual insular one. This famous character of the XX century made build a float too, the famous Kon-Tiki, with which he took a journey from Peru to Easter Island; the experiment showed that ancient populations could migrate toward distant lands with rudimentary boats. Unfortunately test of the DNA, made on ancient bones and on some inhabitants of the island, gave the incontestable test that Easter Island people came down from Polynesian people. How did they build a similar wall? This was always a big enigma.

The archaeologists ascertained they could not even be wrong on the place: Vinapu was a little far away from the sea and from Caleta Ovahe, a big southeast inlet of the island. They were perplexed only reading the last two lines again: what did the priest mean, recommending them to put together the pieces? They perhaps had to decipher the last tablet using the signs found along their walk. Yet it was a very strange hypothesis; they didn't seem to give particular indications to the place in which the real mystery was hidden. Alicia invited the others not to think about anymore: it needed to start toward the next destination. They could not certainly imagine without holding the last "piece" between the hands. The seekers

started toward the exit of the gallery. A ring made them stop an instant. It was Patrick's mobile.

<<Hello! Hi Mitch>> the Canadian suddenly said <<Now? Okay, let's meet there in Ahu Vinapu. Look, what a coincidence! We were just going there. See you later then. >>

He cast a look to the watch: it was one in the night. Their head had indeed to be in a hurry.

A not very desired guest

The seekers found themselves in the plain of Ahu Vinapu again, just under half an hour. The starry sky glittered on the grassy mantle and the silence of the night conveyed a sense of big calm. Mario drove his feet in the ground and cast a glance in front of him; Alicia slightly leaned her head on his shoulders and her arm around his back. None of the archaeologists felt a least sign of yielding or tiredness: they were too curious by what was waiting for them. Why did Freedendall intend to meet them in such a solitary place? The seekers seemed too amazed to find a valid explanation. They could glimpse the famous Incas wall at a distance of one hundred meters; next to this, a man waited turned back: he gazed the ground with drowsy air. Here it is the head. Finally their perplexities would have enfeebled.

The archaeologists quickened their pace, but they stopped after few footsteps. Another person came close to Freedendall with grim air and softly: he came from the opposite side, the direction of the sea. He gave a slap on his shoulder. He seemed to arouse a certain fear to his interlocutor. Patrick perceived something suspicious in that meeting and he noticed that none of the two men had sighted him with the colleagues yet; he invited them to stretch themselves out with their belly on the grass in order to hide properly. The seekers crawled along the plain very carefully and they reached furtively the back of the wall. They were in a good place for eavesdropping.

<<Mitch, I see that you are always nocturnal>> the strange guy snickered <<You never change. You seemed very busy: are you waiting for anyone? >>

<<I minded my own business, agent Lerwin>> Freedendall answered, striving to return the smile <<I like the peace and the

serenity of this place. You should know that I love walking among the marvellous monuments of the island to relax and unwind. >>

The most sinister man explained that he was coming back from a reconnaissance: he wanted to keep under control the borders of war with the natives. He wore a camouflage uniform and some heavy-duty boots. He had the symbol of the intelligence embroidered on his suits adorned by some little stars. The agent Lerwin was an enough important person. He told Mitch that he had chosen to take that way to come back to the chief town and he affirmed that he surely expected to find him there at dead of the night. He wanted to thank him for the support given to his men and the great plan. He showed off his compliments ad nauseam: his interlocutor seemed ready to vomit. He reminded him that that whole story had started from him, despite Mitch had not even had the least awareness of it at the beginning. He also spoke of some stupid Chilean agents; if these had not intervened in the story with naivety, the Americans would never have known about a similar plan... daydreaming for the future. <<You are very good, Mitch>> Lerwin continued with a more serious voice, putting his hand in his small pocket <<A real patriot. One day, people will build a statue in honour of your memory. >>

The head of the archaeologists was nauseating, listening to those absurdities. He noticed a metallic object that shone through from the pocket of the agent. He fixed the ground illuminated by the moon: an outline revealed him that Lerwin had just taken out and aimed it against him. A calibre nine silencer. He felt his hands and legs trembling besides to a terrible quiver along his back. He slowly raised his head.

<<Did you think to make fun of me, damned son of bitch! >> the agent shouted with impassive air <<Did you think that a miserable phone call made with a particular code was enough for confusing a possible interception? Idiot! >>

<<Agent Lerwin, I didn't intend to reveal anything>> Freedendall stammered with amazed air <<I have always been faithful to the CIA and the governor McNamara. I would never have dreamt to divulge so delicate particulars. >>

The guy was upright in front of him with the sinister look. He pressed the trigger three times: his face let a feeling of enjoyment and satisfaction shine. Mitch felt an awful sharp pain at his abdomen and shoulder. He fell back and he remained on the soft grass in a sea of blood. He tried to react, prey to those terrible convulsions; he shouted a last desperate cry with his wide open eyes toward the obscurity of the sky. Everything seemed black like never that night. He noticed his aggressor to put the handgun on his head. The last bullet killed him and saved the most atrocious pain. Lerwin cast a fugitive glance to the barrel of the weapon and put it back in his pocket. He ran toward the sea like a gazelle, he dived and swam fast. He disappeared in few instants. The seekers went out unsecured and they were lowered on Mitch's dead body. The signs of the sadness could be read on their horrified faces. A very mild and pacific man was killed in such an absurd way. The archaeologists were sad to have looked without being able to intervene: they could not clash against an experienced killer. They knew that he, once put with his back against the wall, and would not have thought twice to kill someone of them too. Luckily they leaned out to see that strange guy: they had him in their mind.

Two strokes in one

The seekers remained for a long time in silence: they could hear only their intense breaths and the pulsations of their heart that pulsated still with impetus. The Canadian had the courage for first to grab the dead body by the arms and started dragging it more distant. The others helped him, seizing the legs and the bust: they had intention to start digging the same to find the new sign. They believed that continuing their search would have been a right way to honour the memory of Freedendall that so much cared to the discovery of the mystery.

Patrick examined the ground in front of the little wall with the sole of the foot and took the pick; he beat with such vehemence not in the least appear even tired. The others three followed his example and they widened the dug pit: nobody could stop them anymore. They perforated and beat together on the ground for an hour, stopping only few instants to take back breath. They dug the ground for twenty meters deeply and ten wide. Alicia found some other piece of wall and a strange object inserted in the ground. She removed it with so much patience and she was amazed to see a terracotta vase with the enough narrow neck. She looked inside the find, she noticed that there was an inserted tablet and she called the colleagues. They tried to throw it out. They tried in vain to make it pass toward the outside, but there was no way of reaching the goal without forcing the vase. They widened its superior extremity with some light hit of pick and they did it. They were not sorry to have damaged an ancient find. The seekers attentively observed the tablet. They could not notice even a small indication about the leaf at margin of the text. The symbols were totally different from those used for writing in the Marquesas Islands language. It was not that

the sign very coveted, but it perhaps represented something important anyway. Patrick noticed an important detail. He explained that the symbols were gathered in two columns according to the system of writing. The inscriptions on the left border were in Quechua language, the one used by the glorious Incas and deciphered from a long time, while the ones on the right seemed in rongo-rongo indeed. This bilingual tablet revealed two big mysteries; in fact it represented the incontestable proof that the South American natives touched the banks of the island and this gave the starting point to decipher the enigmatic rongo-rongo.

The seekers started digging again. Despite they expected something different, they discussed on the consequences of that finding with passion. Now hundreds of documents written by the natives waited to be translated: the hope got stronger to be able to clarify many aspects regarding the history of the island. The archaeologists found some other old pot in the middle of that heap of earth. The tiredness and the resignation took the place of the hope and the grim soon. It was enough; the fate helped them even too much in that night.

The Canadian recommended to everybody to stop and he came back in surface, decided to take the search another day again. Mercedes, climbing along the walls of the pit, stumbled on a pebble and fell arousing loud laughter of the colleagues. She fixed that strange stone and noticed that it was very bigger than she thought. She went closer to it and she beat with the pick on the surrounding ground. The looks of the other colleagues suddenly changed. The Cuban found a big rectangular box made of tuff, grazed by some irregular signs. She seized it, she went up the wall of the pit again, and she noticed that the cover was blocked by some threads of rusted iron. Mercedes removed them with boldness and slowly opened the container. She found a tablet of stone. The leaf of toromiro stood out under the text and marked the end of their long search.

The archaeologists felt happy and disoriented at the same time: they didn't succeed in believing in what was happening to them. They forgot all the worries and the problems, seemed distant veiled memories. They perceived the adrenaline that flowed in their veins

and a tension that was about to fill them from the depths. Patrick looked well at the symbols of the tablet and started typing the keys of his laptop with decision. He felt the awareness to be one step from the history and understood to be very lucky having at her disposal a good opportunity to succeed whereas many more elderly colleagues had failed. Like a novice soccer that played a world final. He realized soon to have to work more than the expected for deciphering the ideograms. The language was always the usual one, but the form looked more abstruse and complex. Patrick consulted some files and was forced to waste a lot of time to find the solution to his problem. He was often as far as to give up, but he knew he could not disappoint his colleagues, still flew into the celebrations. He proceeded promptly as far as half text, but wasted even more time with the conclusion. He could not find the meaning of two or three hieroglyphs. He punched against the keyboard of the laptop and consulted the whole database available before succeeding in getting off. He cast a glance to the horizon: the sun was just rising. He read the whole text again and improved it replacing some more proper synonyms. He finished after two minutes. He turned a feeble smile to the colleagues that showed much bitterness.

Run near the old abandoned temple of the fast gull, where its influence and its impetus will always reign uncontested. That zone is and also will always be charming in dark times: the fields, which drought never impoverished, flourish with wheat still. The beach takes in a lot of boats, since all the sailors leave and come back from every voyage without ever being shipwrecked. Look carefully and don't let the eye deceive you. Follow the hidden and old way of the sun in direction of the wide mouth with enthusiasm and grim. Find the exact point where this was cut by the new way of the darkness and the impiety with shrewdness. You will feel the touch of the blind fortune under your foot. The mystery waits impatient for you there.

The archaeologists were dumbfounded: they knew they could not embark on an easy search, but now the sign was too complicated indeed for their liking. The few comprehensible elements were represented by the description of the fields and the beach. Alicia told not to know anything regarding the fast gull and she noticed by

the horrified looks of the others that these found themselves in her same situation. Mercedes explained that this figure could be a legendary hero or, more obvious hypothesis, a divinity. For his part, Mario affirmed that it was not necessary to understand who he was. The temple could tighten the field of research, because on the island they were indeed few in ancient times; unfortunately all had gone lost, devastated by fires, repeated lootings and tribal wars. It was necessary to look for with hope among the few historical documents their exact position, despite the risk, not to find any mention to the temples, was very high. Nobody succeeded in finding an explanation regarding the strip of the sun or the darkness. The one of the tablet seemed a so abstract landscape that a writer with big imagination could not even imagine a place on the island with which to identify it.

The seekers surrendered, and they decided to return to Hanga Roa. Their search waited only for the last wedge of the puzzle, the more difficult one. The documents of the archaeological centre were the only ones to be able to support them. Mario walked quickly along the plain: he seemed that more anxious to arrive to the chief town. He needed to meet a person and knew that his friends would have surely followed him.

Jeffery McNamara's jeep roared in the morning. The governor of Rapa Nui crossed an excavated route with very tense air and visibly absorbed: he had gone for a stroll on the island disposed to enjoy the fresh air and unwind after all those hard work days. He thought over on the last events now, which had upset the island, above all on the war between American and natives. He was pleased when the natives had been stopped in the chief town and at the foot of the Rano Raraku, but he now wanted the general Blackwell forced the enemies to withdraw from the front. He had often phoned him and he had reproached him, because he noticed that he didn't show signs to move. The soldiers waited only the orders and they looked really impatient. They called "coward" their general and held him unable to lead that war, which now seemed them, so simple. Temporizing didn't certainly make win the wars. Only a man

succeeded once in the enterprise. His name was Quintus Fabius Maximus, but the times changed very much.

McNamara pushed strongly his foot on the accelerator and puffed: shortly, he would finally have had a meeting with Blackwell to ask him which plan he was thinking of doing, but he had to fix some urgent matters in the maximum secretiveness first. He turned to the right and crossed the main avenue of the chief town Hanga Roa, a very populated zone, surrounded by some buildings of modest dimension. Few early-rising archaeologists wandered here and there: some went into the near bar to have breakfast. McNamara finally saw the building of the governorship; he parked the jeep in the parking space of the courtyard and came in. He greeted the watches; he crossed a corridor and went down in the undergrounds with mysterious air. He remained much time there. When he came back, they announced him a visit. He watched the watch: eight o' clock. Who could it be?

McNamara went to his office and found the four archaeologists returned from Ahu Vinapu. He warmly greeted Mario and his colleagues. He sat behind the desk and let them speak. He was stunned by their words. He heard about some secret agents with homicidal folly, about Lerwin and the poor head killed ruthlessly. They were disturbing and dreadful stories indeed. Patrick hypothesized that someone was obstructive towards their search. The governor collected himself after having been lost in thought for some instant and showed all of his sorrow for the fate of those two people that lived in the log refuge. He was decided to punish the persons responsible with steadiness and resoluteness. He seized his laptop and drafted some identikits according to the witness as for general rule. He frowned with decision: incredibly identical to as he believed. He turned the laptop toward the guests with a certain fear and he saw them nodding. Lerwin and the killers, wearing the battle dress, were done for. The governor remained silent for some instant, then he assured that he would have done all the possible to punish them. The archaeologists thanked him for his availability; they got up from their seats and greeted him.

McNamara sank into the armchair looking anxious: the sweat almost dripped from his forehead. He dialled a number on the display of

his mobile and called someone. <<Hello! Our agents have been discovered>> he explained with irritated air <<No, they have not acted with caution. We have absolutely to do something, we cannot leave them free. They easily represent identifiable targets. Yes, okay. Put the plan in effect. I am just thinking the right way to solve the problem. >>

The silence of the innocents

The deafening sirens dispelled the silence at dusk. Mario started and got up from the sofa looking drowsy: he had decided to watch TV for a while after lunch, but he suddenly had fallen asleep after few minutes. He strongly yawned; he stretched and watched the watch: nine o' clock. He heard much confusion in the street and he leaned out the window of his study. Some cars of the federal police stopped in front of the entrance of the principal road to stop the passage. Others stopped in front of a little distant house. About ten men black dressed went out of the cabins and showed off some machine guns. Two of them irrupted in that building and went out, holding a man by the arms. He looked shouting something at the top of his voice and Mario didn't succeed in perceiving. The archaeologist opened wide the window.

<<Damned bastards, you repay me in this way after the services made to this damned country! >> the guy shouted <<You cannot fling me into prison, isn't it! Don't you know who I am? Well, when it is verified that you are making a mistake, I will send you all on the electric chair! >>

Mario recognized the voice. He looked better at that man and he had no doubts anymore: it was Lerwin. He was impressed of how the governor was so prompt to find the culprit. The reason was still unknown. The archaeologist connected to internet, but he didn't find any news regarding that matter yet. He drank some coffee and went out in a hurry from the archaeological centre. He noticed the cars of the FBI coming closer, he crossed a tract on foot and he saw the standing governor in front of the entry of the only bar of Hanga Roa, the *Rapa Nui café*, with some police officers. A black car stopped there. Mario greeted McNamara, who seemed really very

satisfied of his behaviour. He was informed about the dirty story in short time. Lance Lerwin was a very important man in the ranks of the CIA. The governor explained that a pair of phone calls had been enough for understanding that he was not on Easter Island, on the contrary in Tahiti on holidays. A series of fast investigations made understand his sinister plan. McNamara was puzzled: he didn't believe wire tapping and software piracy were enough for visualizing the files of his laptop.

Lerwin was convinced that the acquisition of the island was a wrong move, pushed by a speculative wave of American entrepreneurs and nothing else. Building constructions for the sector tourist and advertising the icon of Rapa Nui, it represented the only target that the Americans could propose. The archaeological discoveries didn't interest very much in the White House according to the secret agent. Unfortunately war and rebellions had increased the useless expenses in dreadful way. The island burdened more and more on the government budget like a big boulder. Blackwell seemed not to do anything to make all this finish, and he wasted time planning a possible battle with too caution. Lerwin felt to have to take precautions. He had understood that a defeat would have been the only way to convince the Americans to abandon Rapa Nui. He had decided to help the natives, knowing the passwords of a lot of protected areas on government sites. He had easily got secret information and he had no scruples to pass them to messengers of the King Hotukau that he met in the different place of the hostile territory at dead of night. His distorted mind was convinced to act in the interest and in the good of the American citizens. Lerwin had also found some parties that helped him in his targets: some subordinates of his, three women and two men. He communicated with them through an enough sure telephone line, convinced that nobody would have intercepted the discourses. The whole plan went off smoothly and nobody suspected about Lerwin's staying on the island. A night, unfortunately, Lance's gang gathered in the surroundings of Ahu Tahai. The agents had heard some shuffling and they caught three people eavesdropping: Freedendall and the two dead people at Anakena. They were on the point to kill them, but the roar of a jeep had alarmed and made them escape: they were

some soldiers in patrolling. The gang could not risk to be sighted. It would have been a catastrophe. Lerwin was worried that those civilians could blab what they had heard around. He had got some information concerning them, using their identikit, and he had met them many times without agreeing with them. He had so send the team to kill the two less important characters, deciding to deal personally with Mitch Freedendall. The bad luck had stopped Lerwin and his gang at the end.

Mario nodded and showed a weak smile, looking upset, after having felt the unbelievable history told by the governor. McNamara assured him that he had also found the survivors responsible of the double homicide at Anakena. The archaeologist showed his lively enthusiasm and wished the police officers and him a good work. He saw them getting shortly on the car, anxious to start the work again, and to disappear on the horizon shortly after. He remained to fix the road in front of him. A secret agent agreed with Easter Island people for the good of the citizens. It was the first time that he heard a similar thing. Why should a soldier have had to stop the investments of the government to the war display? The agents of the CIA lived of wars and they had a preference above all for conflicts of less important like the Rapa Nui one in order to act without too many pressures. Mario was also perplexed about the speed of the investigations too. Was it possible that McNamara succeeded in discovering a history of the kind in less than twenty-four hours? Perhaps Mario was simply letting himself impress entirely by irrelevant details. Yet everything sounded enough absurd.

At the same moment, an uncovered jeep advanced toward the airport of Mataverí. The three secret agents, survivors of the homicides of Anakena, were leaving the island unaware of the contortions that happened. They sang, they laughed and sipped the last drops that remained in their bottles of beer. They were speeding at one hundred kilometres an hour, but they seemed to control easily their car still. The agent Beta-Two scanned the environment behind a heap of rocks positioned on the border of the road, few more meters forward. His eye of lynx checked the situation with caution and with the safety of the real professional. He could

glimpse the light of the headlights of the jeep. He seized the silenced and black gun, and he slightly leaned out forward. He shot two shots. The tires screeched on the ground. He perforated an anterior and a back wheel of the running car. He saw the car immediately veering. The three people in the driver and passenger compartment didn't distinguish the dull noise of the revolver in state of drunkenness. Their run finished nearby on the hard rock of a little wall.

Beta-Two went closer to the plates of a rolled up jeep and he cast a glance to the passengers: everybody died. Perfect. Their alcoholic rate in the blood would have made believe that they were running very much on the road. Everybody would have believed that the victims had accidentally got a flat. Beta-Two picked up the cases on the ground and pulled the bullets out from the tires with pliers. He went away in the night. Lerwin was in jail driven to the silence, and the only three parties had their mouth shut forever. Nothing would have been discovered anymore.

<<The plan is safe. Truth is darkened forever by now>> Beta-Two murmured in the obscurity.

A fresh story

Mario went into the searching room in the dark of the archaeological centre. He kept on thinking over the story that McNamara told him, too much improbable in his judgment. He noticed that some colleagues were sat in front a big rectangular table with theirs laptops and with some tablets. Patrick and Alicia warmly discussed, while Mercedes wrote and sometimes stopped to think.

<<Hey, Mario>> the enthusiastic Cuban called him <<But where the hell were you? I thought you were lost. We have never discovered so much in an only day here! >>

Mario appeared very curious to learn the novelties. Mercedes explained him to have translated some rongo-rongo tablets and she was very amazed, because several of them represented annals and reports of historical kind. These recalled to her very much the maximum pontiffs of the ancient Rome in monarchic and archaic republican age. The bilingual tablet discovered in Ahu Vinapu represented a declaration of war between Incas and long ears. Taking note of the new testimonies, the Cuban had reconstructed with the colleagues a part of Easter Island history wrapped in the mystery before.

The Incas undertook an overseas expedition at the times of their apogee; in fact their sovereign Huayna C  pac, convinced that no hostile army could beat him on the dry land, he looked for a worthy adversary by sea. The colonists travelled by sea on board of some rafts, falling a prey to the terrible oceanic flowing and they reached and saw Easter Island many months later. They disembarked around the year 1525 near Ahu Vinapu and they started to colonize the zone building imposing fortifications. They tore a lot of lands to Easter Island countrymen by strength, and they maintained their

position for about ten years in the southwest peninsula of the island. They got independent after the dissolution of the Inca Empire of the last sovereign Atahualpa, killed at Cajamarca in 1533 by Francisco Pizarro's men. They elected their chief and lived by fishing and agriculture. The long ears ignored and avoided them with contempt and disgust.

Around the year 1535, the South Americans found themselves again facing a notable demographic increase and to a progressive impoverishment of the ground, intensively exploited and without common sense. They were forced to go out of their borders and to attack openly the long ears. They occupied shortly the whole south of the island, and they reached the gates of Hanga Roa. Easter Island people organized a competitive army in a great hurry, and they faced the enemies more times. They also lost the chief town and they were forced to banish the monarch in the underground of Ahu Tahai to protect him. The war lasted many years; it was balanced and rich of front overturning. It was interrupted only by brief armistices. Easter Island people started conquering again the southern territories around the last decade of the XVI century, they encircled the Incas in their fortress in Vinapu, and they finally exterminated them. The long war finished, leaving a completely bare island; the armies had devastated fields and zones of pasture anywhere, representing the only sources of food for the slaves.

The long ears that never discouraged on erecting moais, they kept on deforesting trunks. All these factors irritated the short ears. They noticed that their dominators come out strongly weakened by the conflict and that they found it hard to recompose a good army. They decided that was the good moment to rebel. The short ears beat their masters with big difficulty and, at the beginning of the XVII century, they started demolishing the moais. It was the beginning of the new age, the one of the tangata-manu, the bird-man. The rest was well known history.

Authorized hypocrisy

Mario was very impressed by Mercedes' story: archaeology had taken a big step forward that day as never happened before. Thor Heyerdahl would surely have been proud of his searching team, he thought. The American went to take a seat behind the rectangular desk, and he looked over other tablets. He unfortunately could not really concentrate his job: he had no head at that moment. <<Damn! More I think it and more my restlessness rises>> he shook his head <<Something doesn't convince me. This is not a good sign. >>

Alicia cast him a curious glance. <<What are you referring to? >> the Australian asked <<Knowing you, it is not any idiocy. Come on, Spit it out. >>

Mario swallowed and told all that happened to him shortly before. He told he was wakened up by the sirens, to have assisted to the arrest of Lerwin and to have met the governor. He shortly explained the story that had been reported to him to prove the guilt of that man and his absurd plot. The archaeologists stared at their friend with surprised air, and they affirmed not to be informed regarding that strange arrest. They agreed to hold Lerwin's reason inconsistent and too much unlikely. Patrick intervened, saying that the government tried to cover some not very clear detail when it lied. Alicia affirmed that it had to be an important thing, if the authorities tried to protect themselves that way. Mercedes specified that it could be a game among secret agents and that perhaps the high offices of the United States were not well informed about it. The archaeologists decided to investigate for trying to discover as possible about the reason for the forgery motive. They didn't absolutely know where to start from, and they had not even the least

idea how to investigate. They remained to think over for some instant. Alicia felt that she was having a great idea. Why not to start from the victims? They could have something in common that interested to the secret agents.

Patrick turned his laptop on; he connected to Internet and found an article on Lerwin's arrest on the web site of a newspaper of the island. He was looking for the names of the two unknown victims. Their petrified and bloodstained faces often come back to mind. He finally found the information that he looked for. Their names were Mike Doherty and Jennifer Parker. The one was a stockbroker, and the other one worked in a data processing systems company. The Canadian found their photos made smaller, in black and white that looked like the ones on a daily paper of beginning twentieth century. He didn't find any additional news regarding their professional experiences. He had a strong impression that everything was even too much reticent. Patrick magnified the two identikits and coloured them by a special program to stamp them. Alicia suddenly started and turned a look full of joy to the Canadian. He saw that the Australian pointed out the icon of a database on the desktop and understood her purposes. That program allowed looking for the files of all the archaeologists working on the island simply entering a name, an identification code or a photo. But how did it cross her mind to find two people that totally do two different works? He tried to do how she told him and he horrified. He was lowered on the computer to fix the screen with air to say the least impressed. Two cards of the archaeologists coincided with the identikits ones.

The first one belonged to Landon Kempsey, an expert searcher thirty-nine years old that had dug and worked in half world. He had been in Italy, above all in Pompeii and surroundings, in Mexico, in Egypt, in Iran and in Latin America. He won the prizes many times for his discoveries and he moved to Easter Island for a short time in 2097 before retiring to private life, despite he was very young. The other card belonged to Sharon Warner, an American archaeologist just thirty-six years old, coming from Oakland. She had dug in the Middle East for a short period and she had known Kempsey when she moved to Latin America. Since then she had followed and

assisted him in the excavations. She also retired with him when she was thirty-four years old.

The archaeologists became dumb. The government had been very aware and had published the false names of those two victims to the press. They also minded to put too many decent photos on the web to avoid that the cheat came into the light. Alicia explained that, seeing the coloured identikits and improved them in resolution, she realized to have seen that faces somewhere else already. A flashback immediately took her some months ago. The Australian had gone to Freedendall's one afternoon to discuss with him regarding to an archaeological expedition. She had knocked the door of his office and she went in: there was nobody. Her boss had left the laptop turned on: the cards of Kempsey and Warner stood out on the screen. She watched them for few instants. Mitch had immediately come back and he had reproached Alicia to have peered at on his computer without permission. The Australian was really struck by the outburst of her boss, who rarely looked out his mind. For this reason, she reminded those photos that were already engraved for a long time in his mind. The archaeologists understood that the three victims of those strange homicides had in common something: the profession. This detail, apparently irrelevant, had carefully been hidden from the American authorities. The four searchers looked one another with interrogative air in the slim light of the room. There should be a reason.

Mercedes recommended to Patrick to see in the database possible missions that Freedendall could undertake with Kempsey and Warner. Mitch had not become manager of the archaeological centre for long time and he worked as simple archaeologist previously. The Canadian confided in the suggestion of the Cuban: he maybe could discover something suspicious. He made the cards of the database smaller and placed them side by side referring to that three men on the screen, he attentively searched some information; he found a list with their missions and compared them. He noticed that the three victims had undertaken only a mission together. He read the description of this expedition: this had to be undertaken in the first months of the year 2097 in the desert of Atacama, one of the most arid places of the planet, located in

northern Chile. The three had the task to find some finds of the Inca age and start the excavations of an ancient fortification, of which some ancient inscriptions spoke. They left irresponsibly alone, provided of rudimentary and a little efficient communication instrument like radio or mobile phones. After a short time, their traces lost and they reported them missing. The American military aviation flew over the zone for long time and even the army was troubled for raking up the desert of Atacama. Colonel Mark Wellington's experienced troops casually found the three unlucky persons again two months later. The archaeologists looked curious and perplexed by this story. Why the Americans had gone to look for some simple adventurers in foreign land? They could calmly apply to the Chilean authorities to ask for help. Yet they didn't do it... there should be a reason. Where to find the answer to this enigma? The archaeologists noticed that Mario smiled thrilled like a child.

<<I have the solution>> the American intervened swallowing <<Mark Wellington is one dear friend of mine from the high school. I, he and Jerry were practically inseparable. We had so much fun, we went around "to pick up" together and we often got in trouble. He surely will reveal us everything. >>

<<But this person lives in the United States>> Alicia cast him a discouraged glance <<It is dangerous to speak by phone about these things, someone could intercept the call. >>

<<Oh, if it is for this, there are absolutely no problems>> Mario retorted with a smile on his lips <<I have talked with Mark few days ago. He moved here because of the war at the moment. He is in a field not very far from Hanga Roa. >>

The joy of the archaeologists got uncontrollable. Now all were curious to talk to this character.

Sharp optimism

The royal palace stood out in Rongo in that so dark night as it rarely happened, illuminated by a series of street-lamps along its entire perimeter. Nevertheless the atmosphere that one breathed in the surroundings certainly was not so good. A strange tension was perceived in the air. The courtyard housed five hundred warriors, many of which trained with a will; the infantrymen, armed with machine-guns, intended to shoot some targets from the distance, while other special forces, consisted above all by riders and veteran killers, they were lined up in front of Kohau.

He spoke to them looking convinced, and with very firm tone. His speech was short and concise. The commander recommended to everybody to use some tactics learned in war a short time before, and he explained the benefits they could be drawn by the least effort. Tired because of an intense job day, he headed toward the border of the training field where the king Hotukau waited for him. He slightly turned back, he noticed that the Special Forces were unsheathing again their guns and smiled: his warriors were really very well-disciplined. He had never had the chance of scolding them or catching them idling; he was really pleased more and more every day to see them foreseeing his orders and to carry them out without turning a hair. He knew that his men cared about their country and that they hated more than him the Americans; the war was a personal matter for all Easter Island people that always felt underestimated and they wanted to show their royal strength in the battleground. All the natives had the intention to give a useful contribution to defeat their hated dominators, even the civilians and the most emarginated people. Kohau reached the king and stopped in front of him. Hotukau looked at him in his eyes with admiration

and gave him a slap on his shoulder, satisfied. <<You obviously have the right stuff, Rong! >> he told him with enthusiastic air <<We would already have lost the conflict without you. The Gods have saved you instead, and they allowed you to live for long time more. >>

<<My Sire, I always try to give my best. Our men are very well, if we keep in mind about their morale>> Kohau sighed <<Unfortunately their physical condition is unsatisfactory. We cannot attack yet. We should still wait till next week. >>

The monarch let intend that there was no hurry, but he also let realize that it needed to protect better the territory and unfold a higher number of troops at the borders. The native general reassured him, and he explained him that his collaborators worked as well as him in the other zones of the island. He was convinced that the Americans would not have attacked yet; they wanted to have an infallible plan because, according to Kohau, they intended to avoid losing too many men during a possible raid. Easter Island commander remained silent close to the king, fixing the dark sky of the night and looking absorbed: he dreamt new enterprises, great victories and slaughters of enemies. The native didn't know that someone, not very far, was planning the end of his glorious army with much care.

The general John Blackwell was sat behind the desk in his office in the building of the governorship, looking pleased. He had a map of the island in his hands and looked at it with care. He didn't succeed in taking his eyes off of it, and he felt to be next to the victory as never. He left a hand from the sheet, he felt the ledge of the desk in front of him and he found the glass of beer almost filled up to the edge, which he had sipped shortly before. He drank all in one gulp with an ironic smile. The plan was perfect, his army was good and his military genius worked properly: a lethal combination. He suddenly put the glass; he snatched a pencil and traced two signs on the map.

The attack was expected two nights later. The army would have been separated in four contingents. The first one, composed by five hundred units, would have gone beyond the hostile lines to Punta

Angamos to Colonel Wilkins's command. He would have destroyed the defensive positions along the oriental coast of the island, massacred all the enemies in the zone and reached the village of Anakena that would have become an easy prey of conquest. The second contingent, composed from as many units of the first one, would have crossed the hostile lines to the foot of the Tuutapu, a hill near the chief town. He would have devastated the hinterland with tanks and put in a fix the enemies to the command of the expert colonel Wellington. He would get on toward northeast and fixed to join Wilkins' men in Anakena as final target of the raid. Easter Island people would have paid attention in the stricken areas, risking leaving themselves open dangerously in other more important parts on the island. The third American contingent, composed by six hundred units, would have moved one hour later from the chief town toward Rongo, protected by few hundred enemies by now. He would very easily have routed the native defences to the command of the general Blackwell in person and he would have started infiltrating in the village. A fourth contingent, formed by three hundred American soldiers, would have reached Punta Espolon swimming with the guide of the young colonel Dave Morrison. He would have defeated few enemies in the zone and also besieged Rongo by north, stopping the only way out to Hotukau and to its sentinels for a possible desperate escape by the defeat. That village, hammered in on all sides by now, would have surrendered as an innocent zebra surrounded by a flock of hungry lions. The king would have been massacred with his family and Easter Island people would have lost their guide. The soldiers, returned from the victory at Rongo, would subsequently be pushed toward the hinterland and joined to the rest of the army; they would have defeated the last enemies at Cabo Norte and completed the occupation of the island with extreme facility. The Americans would have laid waste all the symbols of Easter Island dominion and cancelled forever their installations.

General Blackwell's eyes were shining, while he was imagining his great revenge on the natives. The general didn't seem even complaining about the soldiers he had. He had asked for reinforcements to Washington after the last battles and he got two

thousand well trained and thirsty of blood men. Many of these were too young people and inexperienced. The government left the riskiest missions in the East to the veterans. Blackwell didn't care about it. The general simply wanted several units to be able to attack Easter Island people and he got them without problems. It was enough that his men had a charismatic guide like him and that they could count on some very smart officers. On the other hands, who move the pieces on the chessboard, he wins. Blackwell was sure that the native poor men would have let themselves easily deceive by his simple stratagem. They would have understood to have fallen into a trap too late in order to be able to react adequately. They would have inexorably capitulated with that terror of whom is driven to the impotence.

“Let's finish underestimating the endless resources of the American army” Blackwell thought, in the seventh heaven” The obscurity it is behind the corner for them by now.”

An old friend

The jeep of the four inseparable archaeologists sped in the night under a stupendous starry sky. Mario realized that he was proceeding at a speed of eighty km per hour on a planned route excavated next to the sea, but he didn't care so much: he was too excited to think to other. He cast a fugitive glance to the schedule: his watch said late midnight. Patrick, by his side, had not said a word and looked absorbed in his thoughts. Alicia and Mercedes were speaking since they left on the back seat and they didn't show signs to close their mouth. Mario didn't listen to them, but he perceived their big enthusiasm. The archaeologists felt that they were about to discover something really important and upsetting, despite they even had no idea of what it was. The American continued toward the hinterland, realizing that the path got more and more impervious. He suddenly noticed, in the obscurity, to be in proximity of a curve and he brusquely braked and makes the tyres on the ground screech. His colleagues nearly jolt from their seats, clinging at the door of the jeep. They cast a glance to Mario that let a satisfied and visibly anxious air show. One hundred meters from them an enclosure, formed by barbed wire, divided them from about ten curtains; in the middle of these, an American flag, moved by the pleasant breeze that blew that evening, stood out. It certainly was the field that the archaeologists looked for.

The jeep approached very slowly toward the enclosure, in front of which two sentinels armed with sub-machine guns nervously walked to and fro. They, noticing that the archaeologists were going down from the car and that they went closer quickly, aimed threateningly and without delay the weapons against them. <<This is a forbidden area! >> one of the two watches, with definite tone, exclaimed

<<No civil is admitted. If you take another step forward, I am authorized to shoot you. I warmly recommend you to keep clear! >>

The four researchers suddenly stopped a meter far from the sentinels with timorous air. Only Mario looked more relieved and enough calm of his position.

<<I am a dear friend of your colonel>> he explained them <<I have to speak absolutely to him about vital importance thing. >>

<<You realize at least of the time! >> the other irritated watch thundered, pointing out his watch with insistence <<You believe you can come and give me orders whenever you want! >>

The American researcher felt that the soldier was perfectly right, but he knew that his friend would never have disdained one visit of his.

<<We are archaeologists and we have been working for a long time on the island. Tell your superior that Mario Caruso has come>> he firmly said <<It won't surely sound true to him to have heard a similar thing. >>

The watch went away curious, leaving to the other the task to guard that civilians, he unthread from his pocket a walkie-talkie rather old and he turned it on. He reported what he had heard all in one breath and he heard that the voice from the other side of the device was really thrilled as never happened. He went closer to the archaeologists, turned a sinister glance to Mario and he explained him that the colonel had authorized him to cross the border of the field with his friends. He guided the archaeologists through a passage in the barbed wire and showed them the way. He crossed a small grassy path, at the sides of which the tents of the soldiers had been pitched, without saying a word. It seemed he didn't want to accept the presence of four strangers in such a secret military field: he was convinced that the civilians could ask too many questions about the environment and something important about the war to his superior; nevertheless he didn't imagine that the archaeologists had different plans. He finally came in a circular field of training, where one could see some wood targets and a firing ground were perceived in the shade of some palms. The watch told them to have patience for some minutes and left them alone in that so dark and anxious place. The song of the crickets broke a surreal silence and

full of anxiety. The archaeologists heard some shuffling behind them.

<<Mario, it is true that you have finally found the time to come and see me then! >> a serious voice exclaimed in the distance <<I didn't hope it anymore. Luckily, you don't work at night too. >>

The four colleagues turned and noticed the outline of a very tall man standing out on the ground. They raised their faces and saw that he had softly reached them in few seconds.

Mark Wellington was almost two meters tall, he had enough short and blond hair, a short and well-kept beard, and he had blue eyes and mighty arms. He wore a battle dress, very similar to the colour of the asphalt, a pair of gloves and boots. Wellington went near to the two women of the group and complimented for their breathtaking beauty. He shook the hand to the Canadian and turned a warm embrace to the old friend. Mario and Mark remained to speak for few minutes, laughing and joking; the second affirmed that he was surprised not to have seen him too run down, because many people said that there was so much to dig on the island. The first one said that each person chose what to deal with at the centre and he specified that he tended to choose always impossible missions.

<<Well, unfortunately this is not a courtesy visit>> Mario specified <<I need some information that only you can give me, my friend.>>

<<It is always a pleasure to help you>> Mark Wellington smiled <<I owe you a favour, do you remember? I will never be able to repay you. >>

The colonel referred to a trauma of which he would hardly have forgotten. Eight years before, during a sultry evening of July, he went to Santa Monica Beach to have a swim at midnight with a group of friends. The full moon stood out in a stupendous sky and reflected its rays on the transparent waters of the ocean. He found himself alone at the lake again very soon, and he realized that he was not able to locate the shore anymore. He had looked for someone in vain for an hour in the vicinity, but he could see nothing but some water in front of him. The ocean was getting rough and the waves got high and threatening. Mark had called for help at the top of his

voice in the middle of the stream, but he was run over by the power of the waters and sunk. Mario, who was in the place when the friend had casually been swallowed by the waves, had not wasted time to challenge the danger to save him. He had found him on the backdrop shortly after and carried him to shore by a very fatiguing swim. Mario felt to have done the right thing and he didn't pretend anything in change. Now, nevertheless, it was convenient for him a precious testimony like his friend's one. He had a long sigh and informed him about what he read in the database of the archaeological centre regarding Kempsey and Warner. He spoke to him about the mission carried out in Chile and about his incredulity when he had known that the American army had organized the help by itself, without involving the local authorities. Wellington breathed deeply, he leaned on one of the palms that were nearby him and laughed ironically.

<<I think that your sources are too reticent>> the colonel affirmed
<<They hush up too important truth. >>

<<I don't understand>> Alicia intervened with perplexed air
<<What could they have kept us secret regarding the mission? >>
<<Almost everything. It is maybe the case that I inform you about one rather anxious history. >>

The archaeologists cast a glance curious. Mark slightly scratched his forehead and started telling. Freedendall, Kempsey and Warner parted in the arid desert of Atacama with the conviction to be able to work better and have greater chances to find important finds. The three had also chosen a point of meeting whether to meet that evening, but very soon they realized that it was not easy to find something in the middle of the stones of that desert. Nevertheless Freedendall was lucky: he pushed in proximity to the sea and he had found something very precious, a rare find. He contacted his two colleagues, giving them the coordinates, and he had talked of his sensational discovery by his radio, tuning in it to a low frequency. As it is known to a lot of radio hams, more the frequency is lower is the ray of the region in which the transmission is spread. Doing so, the archaeologist believed to be sure that his communication would have been gained only by his colleagues not very distant.

Freedendall unfortunately didn't imagine that the desert had a lot of ears. Long before, the Chilean army had placed a series of repeaters hidden under the sand, able to gain whatever radio signal in every part of the desert of Atacama. The employees to those instruments, which worked in a secret military base near Antofagasta, had been always annoyed by their work, because they rarely intercepted radio signals in that zone. That day they had perceived all of that strange transmission, which they had forwarded to their superior. The Chilean army got into their heads to recover the fabulous find at all costs, they shortly unfolded secretly in the desert, and they captured the three American archaeologists. The commander of that patrol, in accordance with the government, had not hesitated to move them to a secret jail to the borders of the desert and had subjected them to a questioning. He had asked them with kindness where they had hidden the find and he had also made them search, but he found nothing. The Chilean soldiers had atrociously tortured them for weeks then: they forced the three archaeologists to have baths in hot water, they beat them up, they confined them in the completely dark rooms, and they did much more.

Those poor martyrs, one day, succeeded in establishing a connection by internet with a palmtop computer, took away to a watch, in a more decent jail and they had sent their message calling for help to the CIA. After having told to the American intelligence about those terrible misadventures, they had promised to give them the find and very precious information in exchange for their liberation. The authorities of the United States let themselves plot by the proposal and they had sent Wellington with his men in the desert of Atacama for a special mission. The able troops of the colonel brought the Chileans to their knees, and they shortly got the prisoners back by very convincing weapons. Mark let Freedendall, Kempsey and Warner got on his aircraft with the order to take them directly to Langley, the town of Virginia centre of the intelligence. His superiors had recommended him not to ask too many questions to his favourites. Wellington, for his part, had not even dared to cast a glance to the find discovered by the three researchers. He also wanted to avoid to disappoint the trust of the superiors and to be degraded just when he had become colonel short time before. He

only limited to ask to Freedendall how he could hide so well the precious object from the claws of the Chileans. Mitch had explained to have put it inside one of his radios, where no Chilean watch would ever have dreamt to check. He had always taken it with him, because he proved to the soldiers that the instrument that kept it, it didn't work enough to broadcast signals to the outside. A very crafty trick.

The archaeologists got astounded listening to Mark Wellington's story, and they looked incredulous one another. How was it possible that a similar plot happened in silence in the era of the digital press? Above all, why was it so important for the government and which peculiar characteristics could it possess? <<I understand your perplexity>> Wellington, looking disappointed, continued <<Also, I would have liked to know more of it. Unfortunately the military code prevents me from involving too much in secret business. >>

<<This is a burning case>> Patrick intervened <<A very sinister move is spinning around that damned find. We could never understand before having discovered it. We absolutely have to find other signs. >>

Mark was amazed by the spirit with which the archaeologists had undertaken that new search, which seemed, unfortunately, to be not easy. He would have liked to help them; despite he knew to have already done very much, speaking to them about a secret mission. He didn't feel to have certainly sufficiency elements to give him a track to follow, but he was striving in any case to find it. He tried to concentrate, despite he heard the archaeologists discussing heatedly among them. He suddenly remembered a very strange detail. When he arrived on Easter Island, Mark went to the palace of the governorship to get the command of that field. He had noticed that the door Jeffery McNamara's office was left half open. He eavesdropped and heard that he recommended to some watches to keep far the new soldiers from a very particular forbidden zone for a well precise reason.

<<I have a feeling that this damned island hides burning details too>> Mark rudely intervened <<The undergrounds of the palace of the governorship are armoured and guarded at sight. It seems that inside there are some very important secret dossiers, regarding

also my mission in Chile of two years ago. Who knows, maybe these contain even some interesting information to discover. >>
<<Really? >> Mario incredulous sighed <<We have to do something. Our hunger to know cannot wait. >>

The archaeologists were amazed: the big tension was palpable and the enthusiasm had skyrocketed. The four agreed on wanting and finding the way of going into that forbidden zone. They knew that it would have been a complicated and risky operation: the sentinels would not have been clement in the case that they had caught them snooping in that part of the building. Nevertheless the archaeologists perceived the inebriation and the pleasure to risk as never it happened in their life. They understood that, if they had succeeded in their intent, they would have got a lavish reward. They would not have failed for any reason in the world.

Yearning desire

Mario Caruso was swimming in the open sea looking visibly tired. Water formed a big boarding and even a small wave could not shift it. Despite everything, every stroke seemed harder and harder and his bellows worked hard to breathe. It was unbelievable that he himself felt the weight of the tiredness, so used to more difficult crossings. Luckily, his friends from California didn't see him: they surely would have repented to have admired him in the past for his swimmer capabilities. One hundred meters far, Alicia was waiting for him, in the water and she suggested him to follow her. A strange fog was rising around her. <<Let's go, Mario>> she snickered <<If you are as good in bed as you swim, I am really in troubles! >>

The archaeologist suddenly saw a wave rising imposing behind Alicia and he tried with his strength to push himself forward. He moved his arms and legs with all the energy and the tenacity he had, but he realized that he could not move. He was there, immobile and impotent.

"It is not possible" Mario thought horrified "This damned water seems more solid than the steel."

He struggled in the desperation and he felt his heart skipping a beat, while Alicia was inexorably crushed by the waves and disappeared in the fog. He uttered an instinctive and superhuman cry that resounded for long time.

Mario suddenly woke up; he opened his eyes and looked around with restless air, to say the least.

"My God" he thought, breathing a sigh of relief "it was only luckily a fool dream."

He looked at his watch and he noticed that it was five in the afternoon. The night before he didn't sleep very much, and he immediately went to rest after lunch, in order to be able to recover energies in view of the mission of that evening. He jumped down from the sofa of his study with agility, and he made for the exit. He wanted to drop in on Alicia's room. He didn't not intend speaking about work or investigations this time. He had perceived a great physical attraction between the Australian and him, since the first meeting, but he realized that he felt something else, now that they started knowing each other better. It was a very strong feeling that he could not express by words. Maybe it was love, but Mario understood that it would have been restrictive talking in these limits of his agreement with Alicia. The American had never spoken to her about his feelings, despite he was even about to eliminate the most intimate barriers between them at Ahu Akivi. He didn't even care about clarifying his tie with her: the work had perhaps taken him so much to make his private life overshadowed. He needed to see her now, and only this was important to him.

He crossed a long corridor quickly, and he knocked at a door. He heard the noise of a key that turned in the lock from the other side, he saw the door open wide, and he cast a look to the inside before going in. It was a very bright room and with a rectangular form. Mario noticed that there were a sofa and an ample window on the left, a well furnished bookstore on the wall on the right, and a small desk opposite at the end of the room. He cast a glance to the girl that was in front of him. She wore a black short sleeves sweater with a light neckline above her breast, and a pair of red shorts. Mario looked enchanted and he didn't succeed in taking his eyes off her: Alicia was terribly sexy that evening, more than the other times. The Australian made an ironic smile, knowing very well the reason why he looked at her, and she stared at him amused with her blue eyes.

<<Do you want to come in, or are you decided to stay standing there the whole afternoon? >> she started, closing the door of the room behind of him.

Mario slightly burst out laughing looking embarrassed. <<You are really a knockout today>> he said <<I have to admit I have done right to come here. >>

The Australian smiled for that compliment: she was happy to hear that. The two sat on the sofa and they had been speaking for about ten minutes, visibly discussing with amiable air. Mario, chattering, filled her with compliments. He told her that the light of her eyes was as enchanting as the one that her hair emanated and he confessed that he was breathless seeing her terribly seductive curves. Alicia was deeply struck by those Mario's words, and by the right time he chose to say them. She felt that she liked them terribly just the man that sat close to her: she literally broke down at his feet.

<<To be frank, I am here to confess you something more>> Mario affirmed, holding her hand and staring at her in the eyes with sweetness <<I feel I cannot stay without you anymore. When you are away, I feel like dying: I do nothing else but thinking of you... I wish I could hold you in my arms and kiss your marvellous mouth.>>

Alicia was very stricken, but also rather surprise: she didn't think that Mario would have opened himself that way. <<I now know that in my life there is no place for another woman, darling>> he continued <<I would like so much to make you happy, even if the happiness that I have to offer will be never the one you could infuse on me. It is true that I am ridiculous, but so I try to express an inexplicable truth: all the words of the world would not make the idea of what I feel for you. I can tell only you that I love you, and I will never stop loving you. >>

Mario could not resist at the sight of that so angelic face. He approached his lips to hers for few instants and he stopped to stare at her again. Alicia was lost in his look. She whispered a word of love in his ear, she tightened him, and she let herself go to another "deeper" overwhelming kiss, feeling the fire of the passion burning inside of her. She could not stop and she wished that instant lasted for the eternity. She perceived the adrenaline that flowed in her blood and a feeling of immense happiness. She had never felt anything similar with any other man: that one was surely the most beautiful day of her life.

Shortly, the two were lying on the sofa one on the other. Mario put his t-shirt off: he felt an unbearable heat and the sweat that dripped from his forehead. His heart beat madly and his legs trembled: his

uncontrollable emotion burst with health. He started kissing violently her neck and with overpowering passion. Alicia felt her breath getting deeper and deeper, and an uncontrollable desire. She could not control her actions anymore: the instinct had taken the place of the reason. She put her shirt off too, as her man did, and she threw it away.

Mario slowly opened his eyes again. He felt his head exploding and his back in pieces: he was rather stunned. In return, he perceived a big joy for what had just happened with his woman. He was lying naked on the sofa and fixed the ceiling with his eyes. He touched alongside and noticed that the place was empty. He was getting up and saw that Alicia was upright before of the window. He dressed himself again in a hurry and reached her in an instant. He watched the clock: it was almost eleven. The Australian stared at him, looking tired, and gave him a kiss on his lips. Then she told him that they had to start getting ready for their mission in the secret undergrounds of the building. She pointed out a backpack that she had on the desk and she opened it. They found a lot of things inside, which could be useful to the two: some chloroform spray cans, some rags, some very sophisticated walkie-talkies and a pair of silencer revolvers. Alicia handed him one of it, and she explained that it would have been very useful in case of need.

“Damn! Let's hope there will be no occasion” Mario thought “I don't want to shoot.” He took the gun and one of the radio instruments anyway, without saying a word. He heard the telephone ringing and he answered: Patrick was waiting for them on the back of the building with Mercedes. He was getting impatient. He thought that his friend rushed too much, but he didn't object and reported him that he would have found him on the spot in an instant.

Not very distant, a sinister figure was rather absorbed in the obscurity of his study. He talked in a low voice by the mobile with very mysterious air. A small opening of light seemed to shine through among the Venetian blinds of the window on his right. It was the agent Beta-Two, the merciless executioner affiliated to the CIA. <<Damn! Things are getting too complicated. You, I have

told it to you. The archaeologists really intend to go into that underground>> he explained, articulating well the words <<I have heard while they were discussing among them at the research centre. Okay, I will do my best to stop them. Don't worry. I will pay attention even about the way to do it. >>

Timely shrewdness

Mario and Alicia's jeep proceeded, illuminated by the slim light of a street-lamp, along a small road not very busy at the borders of the chief town. Despite the target was very close to the centre, they had decided to use a mean of transport enough fast in order to run away after the mission. The American stopped at the sight of some palms and realized to have come in the fixed place. Patrick and Mercedes waited for him. They carried a backpack on their shoulders containing about the same equipment. Mario stalled the jeep and let Alicia go down.

The group continued on foot along a lawn covered by some palms here and there. He finally noticed the wanted building standing out one hundred meters far, surrounded by some mighty boundaries. The Canadian explained that he could look some old maps of the Blackwell's building up. This had a side entry enough easy to violate, and it was never adequately guarded by any sentinel.

The archaeologists finally came in front of the boundaries, they noticed a poor front door made of wood and they understood to be precisely in the place pointed out by Patrick. Unfortunately, the entry was strengthened by different plates made of resistant iron and a big lock. The Canadian snatched some tools from his backpack, convinced of their effectiveness to force even stronger doors. He tried flat out and by the techniques he knew, but he could not pull it up. He made an angry grimace and turned toward his friends. None of them seemed an experienced burglar or seemed to have a best idea. Mario walked around the boundaries thoughtful and he saw that the Cuban was coming close to him. He felt that she was asking him which idea he had, but he could not help pressing against her arms disconsolate. He instinctively took a step back, and he realized

that his feet didn't lean on the naked ground anymore. He crouched, he removed some leafy branches, and found an iron and rusted grille, slightly torn off that stopped the access to a small hole. Obscurity prevented Mario from seeing what there was beyond. The other three, got curious, snatched their own torches and illuminated those bars revealing the existence of a narrow burrow with a rectangular form.

"An air intake" Mercedes thought "It will lead surely straight to the undergrounds: we could not find any best passage."

Patrick held back a cry of joy, he bent on the grille, and he seized an axe from his backpack. He hit on the most battered bar, he demolished it in less than five seconds and freed the passage. The four adventurers went down in the hole and proceeded along the burrow, paying attention not to even make the least noise. Alicia held her breath and covered his torch with a rag not to get a too dazzling light, which would easily have been recognizable from the other side of the narrow gallery. The archaeologists came, after some meters, and saw some plastic bars horizontally arranged: they had walked so much that they felt their hands almost worn-out. Mario and Alicia removed them with some pliers and jumped out the burrow, followed by the others two. They found themselves again in a very dark and anxious room. The walls were covered with hooks, on which sub-machine guns of every kind were hanging. An imposing locker made of stainless steel was situated at the end, on their right; it had well sealed compartments, which could be open only through an analysis of the digital imprints. The door, from the other side of the room, was armoured and covered with a fresh white painting, which still emanated a too prickly odour.

Patrick noticed that there was only a handle, but he didn't find any trace of the lock: the door had to be closed from the outside by an electronic card or some other technology. He suddenly heard the noise of a hammer, beating far away. His first thought was the grille. "We caught in the trap" the sweaty Canadian thought "Someone is closing us from the outside. We risk to remain sealed in a grave."

A diabolic giggle echoed faraway.

Patrick stared at his friends in the obscurity of that room. The terror and the anguish were evident on his face.

“Who has forced me to investigate on this dirty business of the government!” he thought indignant “Now I should be intent to find a solution for the last sign of the mystery.”

He felt suffocated in that small room and had a long sigh that didn't make him feel better. He had to find a way to go out as soon as possible, but he didn't think anything. Mercedes snatched her mobile: she could have even communicated with someone to the outside, despite she didn't expect to have some help. Unfortunately she noticed that there was not enough wave band in the undergrounds. The Cuban was surprised: she got through in closer places, but the transmission was perhaps disturbed by other reasons. She turned toward her friends and she was desperate as never. Mario snatched the handle of the door and pulled strongly, while Patrick, irritated, thumped against the wall. Alicia summoned them to calm and proposed to save the energies to find a good solution to their problem. She fixed thoughtful corner on the wall and she started: her attention was attracted by something next to the door that she never saw before. She addressed the light of the torch toward that point and she was amazed at that sight as their friends besides. Well hidden in a niche, there was a mini-computer composed by a flat display and by a small keyboard.

The archaeologists understood that this had to be used to unblock the door typing a password or something of that kind. They would not perhaps have succeeded in finding it without having a valid sign, but they finally glimpsed the faint light of the hope. They threw themselves to look at the electronic device closer, but they ascertained that the dilemma was a different one. A notice on the monitor instructed to type the answer to a difficult question, to say the least, and it specified that they could try only three times.

“Oh, my God!” Patrick thought, shaking his head “Perhaps it was easier to guess a numerical password. *The location of the more secret American base of the world.* Number of letters not specified. We will never get it this time.”

The Canadian supposed that his friends had thought the same thing, fixing their looks of extreme disappointment. Mercedes proposed to try with “Area 51”, being such an enigmatic and very guarded place. That base, of which only few exponents of the CIA knew the real

name, housed only few landing strips on surface, according to the images of some Russian and Chinese satellites. It was very probably developed in the subsoil and included different plans floors to a depth of ninety meters. It had become famous due to the UFO sightings in its neighbourhood, but probably these were new prototypes of airplanes that the CIA experimented in the skies around the Area 51. Patrick and Alicia denied the Cuban, explaining that her hypothesis was too much obvious to be right. Mercedes tried to type her answer anyway, and he noticed that it was wrong among the annoyed looks of her colleagues. The archaeologists thought over again, but ideas seemed very confused: nobody was expert within military matters. Mario suddenly shouted with joy.

<<Of course! >> he exclaimed enthusiastic <<I had to think about it immediately. I was an idiot! >>

He explained that the American base of Thule was surely the proper place for a further attempt. That town, the more northerner of Greenland, had taken down the name with which the ancient Romans identified the regions of the extreme north of Europe that they knew. It took in an enough famous air base as point of support for the polar expeditions, but it had been closed to the public since the half of the XXI century to leave space to important and unknown searches. Mario tried to type Thule on the keyboard, he confirmed and was petrified: it was not the right word. No, it was not possible. Yet the American was convinced to have all the reasons to waste that attempt. The archaeologists could not now be wrong.

Patrick thought over and suddenly felt an image jumping in his mind. He had read somewhere that the Johnston atoll, lost in the Pacific Ocean and believed uninhabited by a lot of people, could took in a secret base. Some images taken by Chinese satellites had roused a structure covered in the thick of brushwood on which the American flag was lopping and a dock at the entry of the lagoon. That was not surely a proper place to build a sure base, since it was always swept by the strong oceanic streams. Patrick typed "Johnston" on the monitor without telling anything to his colleagues, he felt their curious looks on him, and he confirmed in fit of a strange tremor. He noticed a green writing on the screen,

and the metallic noise of the handle that was opening up. The Canadian shouted with joy, he held his friends in delirium; he opened the door and went out furtively with them, aiming his gun forward.

The archaeologists found themselves in a long corridor, on whose walls a series of doors introduced in enough spacious rooms, in the white light of neon. Some sentinels patrolled to the two extremities of the passage with drowsy air and visibly annoyed. The four firmly leaned on the wall on the left, and they started advancing, creeping with caution. Alicia held back her breath, and she felt progressively suffocated. Mario perceived his heart beating madly, he blushed and started trembling: he wanted to find a way to stop the instinct, but he understood that it was really impossible. The archaeologists passed through the first door that they found nearby. This room took in a very spacious office, characterized by a desk rather in a mess and covered with papers. Mario cast a glance to these and noticed that they had the stamp of the intelligence. He could not find any important detail, and he put them back in their places, where he found them. Mercedes was stricken by a very big aquarium that was situated on one of the walls of that room: she saw tropical fishes and very beautiful amphorae. The archaeologists passed to the next and last room on the wall on the left, passing through a door that could be easily seen behind the desk. They went in with wary air and they found themselves in a computer room: some small tables were tiled and used for computer and printers. A very curious laptop was on a big desk at the centre of the room; it was grey-dark, full of accessories and had the coat of arms of the CIA with a slogan: we work for your safety. Mario, after having heard a lot of stories of threats of secret agents towards the civilians, was not very convinced anymore of that message. The archaeologists noticed a picture behind the big desk; this represented the landscape of an extra solar planet just discovered according to the conception of an artist. Alicia pointed out on the right a glass flowing panel that introduced them in the corridor.

The adventurers leaned on the wall, they moved the shutter with caution, they put their head out of the room and they breathed a sigh of relief: the sentinels, which moved from where they were

before, were enough distant. They went out the room furtively, and they fixed curious a big and near steel door, situated at the end of the corridor. This seemed well sealed and with a mini-computer with a sensor sideways, which noticed the thumb fingerprint and allowed its opening. Mercedes understood that there was a secret laboratory of the intelligence over the door, reading an iron nameplate on which the coat of arms of the CIA stood out. Patrick cast a glance of approval: that was the proper place for their searches. The archaeologists felt that only a stroke of luck could have helped them at that time. They desperately need some "authorized" fingerprints, and they didn't know how to get them. Mario shivered. The sweat dried on his skin and that feeling of refreshment was even too whetted by the air conditioning that exhaled in that underground. Alicia, on the contrary, felt a burst of heat wrapping her: her heart beat even stronger and her face was red like a tomato. Nobody succeeded in finding a solution to their problem or had enough calm to think over at least on what to do.

Patrick leaned out toward a room with the walls made of glass on the right of the corridor and he noticed that a man with a white coat was turned inside, not very far from the threshold. He talked by his mobile in a loud voice and gesticulated violently. The Canadian had no doubts and hardly succeeded in holding back a cry of joy: that was the right moment to act. The Fortune had smiled at him and he didn't absolutely want to waste the only occasion that he gave him. Patrick threw out of his pocket the revolver and slipped away behind the man, followed by his friends. He aimed the weapon to his back and he heard his breath blowing intense: he had never threatened someone, and hoped not to have to do it just that night.

"There is always a first time" he thought "Sigh and relax."

Patrick swallowed, he saw a man rather elderly with long and white hair, putting away his mobile and turning toward him with amazed and terrorized air, he noticed that he lifted up his hands and he was pleased about.

<<Don't dare to shout or call the watches>> the Canadian threatened with hoarse voice <<You are under fire. It is enough for me to press the trigger and I am sure to have killed you. Nevertheless, I believe that we can agree. >>

<<Who has sent you here in mission? Chinese, Japanese or Mexican even? >> the panic-stricken man stammered <<I have not done anything to your instigators, whoever are. Let me be, please... I am a simple scientist. >>

<<I had understood it>> the Canadian retorted, staring at him in the eyes with grim air <<I didn't want to talk to a soldier, of course. I need your help to go into the laboratory. Do you lend me a hand, or have I to kill you in order to use your thumb? >>

The scientist submitted in the face of the threats of the archaeologists. They ordered him to give them some white coats by which they could cover themselves not to get noticed, they got them without any objection and they wore them. Patrick guided the scientist toward the metallic door, aiming the revolver against his back, and he pointed out the hanging mini-computer on the wall looking threatening. He was amazed about how he could be so brutal and infamous without any scruple: he had surpassed himself. He felt a repugnant worm, but that situation asked for a similar behaviour.

“The end justifies the means, Patrick” he thought “It is true, indeed.”

He had even not to intimidate again: the old man approached his thumb to the electronic sensor. The computer warned on the monitor that the fingerprint was saved in the database, and this made the device work. The big metallic doors creaked, and they slowly opened. The archaeologists left the scientist on the threshold, and they went in surprised in that strange environment. The door was automatically closed behind them again.

An unthinkable shock

The four adventurers found themselves in a big rectangular room with walls covered again with steel. The laboratory was entirely painted in green; it had not a least small opening and was well-aired through some conditioners that automatically turned when a scientist came in. There were many small tables covered with microscopes and samples of mineral, eccentric equipments as molecular accelerators, pressurized bells made with glass and so many other objects. The archaeologists felt literally lost. None of them knew enough about science. The floor had some very long air intakes and some fan flowing air even too cold. Alicia pointed out, at the centre of the room, a big raised platform made with thick metal. This housed a big device with a cylindrical form and pointed on one of the two extremities.

“A nuclear missile” Mario thought incredulous “Why is a thing of this kind here?” That device was rather eccentric: it had a little door at the centre, where the explosive could be placed, and it had the coat of arms of the CIA close to the not acuminated extremity. Alicia noticed a plate on the base of the platform that pointed out the device as prototype of bomb XZ-547. She had never heard about it, but she didn't dare to speak a word, thinking about she was too ignorant in that explosives matter. The archaeologists also noticed a Plexiglas bell, rather ample, close to the base, surrounded by strange extensible mechanical arms. These were controlled by a panel of command placed close to a computer. The archaeologists went near to the transparent container and they gaped: they expected that this contained something stately and spectacular. They contrarily saw a slender and little fragment of meteorite whitish coloured - perhaps not even two centimetres long - which was

protected by another transparent container the inside. Mercedes noticed an inscription on the bell. "*Precious sample. Take due precautions.*"

<<Good heavens! >> she exclaimed <<A so small stone, what can ever represent... if it was a rare diamond, I could understand this message.>>

<<It is something with more value>> Patrick retorted with definite air <<If it is kept in this laboratory with the maximum secretiveness, that fragment has to be important. The CIA doesn't waste time defending the stones. >>

The archaeologists felt to be finally in front of a truth on the so many lies of the American government. They went closer to the computer near to the commands panel, they pushed the power button and they breathed a deep sigh. A series of files contemporarily opened on the monitor: articles and top secret reports of the CIA. Patrick noticed, among those so many documents, two noteworthy that had the elements that he looked for with curiosity. He read in a loud voice and articulated well the words. The archaeologists' faces changed, and they progressively changed expression till they became dark, frowning and horrified.

The object that Freedendall, Kempsey and Warner had discovered, it was finally disclosed to them: one little fragment of mineral composed by iridium-K14 that had to be the one kept in the near bell indeed. Some extra-solar space-probes discovered that this metal, unknown up to 2087, was very abundant in the Andromeda and Orion's galaxy, despite it was oddly completely nonexistent in our solar system and rare in the Milky Way. The space-probes analyzed carefully the structure of this new substance during their mission and they transmitted the data on the Earth in real time. The iridium-K14 was usually white, but it could emanate one of the seven colours of the rainbow each time it reacted with so many other substances in the laboratory. The scientists had called it with this proper name due to its unusual iridescent properties, but they had added one abbreviation to its name to distinguish it from the simple iridium. They were not certainly only these upsetting characteristics of the just discovered metal. Its atoms could also free a quantity of unusual high energy in the environment, even not

being particularly unstable. The Chileans knew about such theories, and they wanted to tear the fragment from those three archaeologists to try and build a new bomb. They had not been particularly fortunate: the Americans had nipped their malefic plans in the bud, and soon the element had reached the American soil. Unfortunately the intelligence and the members of the government, among which the governor McNamara, were not peace promoters, and disposed to use their loot for beneficent purposes. Some scientists, hired by them, had carried out in-depth studies and very precise calculations about the destructive potentiality of the metal. A ten kilograms iridium-K14 stone, treated by the methods of nuclear fission would have incinerated anything within a radius of eight hundred kilometres. In the stricken regions, such a violent impact would also have caused earthquakes, seaquakes or volcanic eruptions of great proportions. A uranium bomb would have been insignificant compared to it. Luckily, the little fragment available, which weighed few grams, would have had a bland effect owing to a nuclear detonation not getting enough mass to complete a slaughter. The scientists had not tried: it would have been foolish to waste such an only sample that could not be cloned. Machines that can reproduce a complex structure as the one of the iridium-K14 didn't exist yet, having as model too small particles.

Mario changed the file looking lost: he didn't succeed in believing in what he had learned and he felt more and more surprised: he knew that the CIA hid very important secrets, but he didn't think they were similar things. He noticed a report signed by an officer of the intelligence. As far as they knew, Freedendall, Kempsey and Warner knew very well all the results of this search and they could blab at any moment. Those perfidious agents of the CIA that we have often met in precedence, they had to sew his mouth at any cost to safeguard the secret of the iridium-K14 and they had succeeded in the intention. They were discovered by some civilians in mission nevertheless - just the archaeologists - and they could end on everyone's lips that would be questioned on the burning responsibilities of the government in their executions. McNamara invented a believable motive that circulated among the islanders and made the guilt of all fell on the poor agents. Later, these had been

eliminated by an experienced assassin, recruited by himself: they wanted to avoid that they could counter to the unfounded accusations the authorities addressed him. Alicia stared at Mario, looking disappointed.

<<I can't understand>> she shook her head <<I should consider myself lucky; however I cannot help wondering a thing. Why hasn't the government killed us as we are the witnesses of those three homicides? It would surely have been simpler for the CIA. >>

<<You are right, Alicia>> Mercedes started <<The intelligence is prepared to keep us alive rather than some members of its. Why should we be so important for the government? >>

Patrick tightened himself in his arms and cursed: he was seeing too many plots all at once and he felt to be pretty tired of this. Yet he kept on making searches by the computer: he felt that the Earth and the humanity were on serious danger by the planning of that new device. He stopped just to think over then. The fragment didn't represent a threat and other iridium-K14 didn't exist. He stopped to look at the projects of the device, which had the denomination of "bomb XZ-547" already, and it was ready to house a rock made of that precious metal. He cast a look on the small table and he noticed that prototype was next to the glass bell: thousand thoughts came in his mind. A layer had to exist somewhere otherwise the project of the terrible device would not have been next to its conclusive phase. Patrick didn't know a part of the history yet and he could not know the truth. He thought over about the strange location of the laboratory. A strange suspect came to his mind. He prayed God that it was not true, while the sweat dripped from his forehead. He fast read some lines, and he felt his heart in his mouth. He came to know of the origin of that fragment and understood where the rest of the material was before. He sank into the chair, casting a glance to his friends that thought he was taken ill.

<<We now know the whole backstage and we can toast to the apocalypse>> Patrick uttered with firm and definite tone <<The iridium-K14 is here, on Easter Island! >>

The silence in the room got even heavier.

Desperate escape

A sentinel walked slowly in the corridor of the undergrounds, looking sleepy. He could not help sneering, thinking about the unfortunate and poor men that he was going to take in the weapons closet. He would not have killed them, but his boss had recommended him to hurt them very much in order to dissuade them to retry a similar infiltration. He went near the door and noticed with big disappointment that it was misted up. He opened it and he aimed the sub-machine gun inside the dark room. There was not a soul to be seen. The monitor of the computer showed that his preys had guessed the secret question. The watch got surprised. He didn't think that four stupid archaeologists knew such a difficult answer. He absolutely had to find the fugitives now, to avoid more serious troubles. He took his radio out from his pocket, and he was on the way to get a connection with his colleagues, but his attention was attracted by some shouts coming from the corridor. He went away from the closet, he noticed an old scientist running toward him and he came to know all the information he needed.

“They are in the trap by now” the watch thought “They will never go out of the undergrounds.”

He made for the armoured door and he murmured a half word with a diabolic smile.

The archaeologists were dumbfounded in front of the neon of the laboratory: they looked one another looking coldly, and they felt a strange quiver that assailed them. It seemed strange that the Americans had purchased the island to such a high price. All now squared perfectly. The Canadian came back near the monitor of the computer; he found another document and individualized other

interesting details. The governor McNamara had illegally taken away the island to the Chileans. He had threatened the president of Chile to divulge the photos of their tortures inflicted to the three discoverers of the fragment, specifying to the mass media that only a simple find was the heart of the matter. The South American authorities could have spoken about the iridium-K14, but they would have been overwhelmed by a big scandal with the Americans that it was better to avoid for both countries. The Chilean president had so preferred to favour the Americans in the trading of Rapa Nui and to get out of cheats. The silence was suddenly interrupted by a sharp sound coming from the inside of the room. The archaeologists noticed that some warning lights flashed under the ceiling.

<<Damn, the old telltale has spoken! >> Patrick exclaimed, thumping the table <<We have to go out before it is too late! >>

The four left their positions and they made for the armoured doors, they pushed a button on the wall and noticed that it was opening. A line of armed watches on the other side of the corridor was coming closer. They threw themselves on the ground with perfect timing, hearing the shots of the sub-machine guns; they rolled in the room of the computers on the right and crawled behind the desk to shelter. They took out the revolvers with frowning air and visibly terrorized. They had suddenly blushed, they felt their heart beating madly, their legs trembled as electrified, their teeth chattered, and they perceived an unimaginable pressure on them. Any risked move could cost their life, and they knew it very well.

The archaeologists moved, they glimpsed two sentinels that had just come in the room and they were keeping still. Patrick slightly stretched out the gun and shot, missing one of the enemies' legs. Mercedes understood that was the moment to intervene, she came out into the open, rolling on the floor, she shot the tallest watch in his breast and she felt wrapped by a burst of bullets. She perceived a terrible burning in her abdomen and leg, she shut her teeth and tried to withstand how much more possible. She was almost about to burst into tears by the pain. She had the strength to aim her gun forward, and she shot in confusion toward the ceiling. She closed her eyes, prey to the torment and pain and she almost felt to have

finally found the peace in the obscurity of the void. A last lead rain shot her among the desperate shouts of her dearest friends. The sentinel that had killed her sneered with diabolic and very satisfied air. Alicia felt an inhuman anger attacking her and a terrible thirst of revenge. She went out of the shelter and she aimed against that man's head. She shot three deadly shots, she saw him collapse on the ground in a sea of blood and she went to stoop on her friend. She tried a cardiac massage, but she saw that she didn't come to life again. Patrick and Mario convinced her to leave the room before somebody else arrived.

The three survivors went in the adjoining room, they searched it with wary air, threateningly aiming the revolvers and they went out in the corridor. They started running in opposite direction to the armoured door. Behind their shoulders, some watches tailed them and shot some burst. The archaeologists lowered, they reached some staircases and crossed them, staying attached to the walls with vigilant look. They reached the porch of the principal entry at the ground floor of the building, they noticed some soldiers moving toward them, and they continued along a corridor situated on their left. They noticed that many offices were located at the sides of that passage, but they had not even the time to search them. They ran in a hurry, tailed by three soldiers. They intensely panted, and they felt not to have enough energy to run. Nevertheless, they shut their teeth and they succeeded in pushing themselves over the limit to be able to continue their run. The soldiers shot some burst from the distance. Patrick was wounded at his shoulder and hand, while Mario felt a sharp pain to both his arms and he realized that even his leg was bleeding. It was a miracle that they could walk, despite the pain. The two heard a terrible boom behind them; they heard a cry at the top of the voice and the noise of something that collapsed on the ground. They turned for some instant. Alicia was shot at her back and she was a prey to convulsions looking afraid and almost distracted. Mario perceived a thud in his heart: the tears had filled his eyes and ruled his face by now. He noticed that the watches were still distant in the obscurity of the long corridor, and he knelt close to the Australian. <<Go, go away>> she whispered in a very weak

voice, trying to caress his face for the last time <<Save yourself before it is too late, darling. >>

<<No! >> Mario exclaimed sobbing <<I don't want to leave you! I will stay here close to you even if it is the last thing that I do in my life. >>

Alicia tried to retort, but she felt that her last energy was exhausted by now. She bowed her head and she banged her head violently against the floor, looking drowsy. Mario cried his eyes out, and started despairing in the attempt to hold his unarmed woman in his arms. He felt that someone threw him by his sweater, and dragged him.

<<There is nothing to do Mario by now>> Patrick told him, looking very tired <<We can save ourselves only. >>

Some hail of blows overwhelmed the archaeologists. The two got off, and slipped away toward the end of the corridor, looking gasping. A wall stopped their run but some staircases on their left represented the salvation. They cast a glance to their shoulders, they saw the soldiers closer and closer, and they entered. They got on quickly, but other soldiers soon appeared in front of them. They stopped, turned back and noticed that the assassins of Alicia had stopped them. They found themselves trapped in a vicelike grip with about ten sub-machine guns aimed to them. They understood to have reached the end with big desperation with their hearts in their mouths. The soldiers came closer and closer, and they looked them straight in the eyes with hate and contempt. Mario closed his eyes and waited that the end took it away without suffering more. He wished he could be away from that horror and forget his pain. He felt something, like a cloth, grazing his lips. He remained stiff, he saw Alicia resurface from the waves of the sea calling him with a marvellous smile on her lips, he strongly inhaled and he understood to have reached her. Then, nothing more.

Mario Caruso slightly blinked, and he felt a strange shine above him. He heard the waves of the sea, cradling him softly.

“Oh my god, I am in heaven” he thought happy “Alicia, I am coming to you.”

He lifted his head stunned, and he realized he could not move. He fixed an image in front of him; he saw everything not very clear and blinked strongly. He slowly focalized; he fixed the moon above and understood where that splendid light came from. He moved his head and noticed that his hands and feet were tied with some ropes on a float next to the coast of Tahai. He still had tears in his eyes and he thought about being still too weak to be able to free himself. He tried to waves in the middle of the waves that started getting more and more threatening. The pleasant breeze coming from east blew too impetuous now. Mario was overwhelmed many times by the water, and he violently cursed. He cursed the CIA and the American government. The ropes, which held tied up, got drenched with water and they started to slacken.

Mario tried to use his teeth and he could easily free his right hand. He could dive soon. He faced the waves moving against the stream, he reached the coast and collapsed on the sand, exhausted. He thought of Alicia, to her tragic end, to the last words that she had told him and to her sweet look. He cried his eyes out, crossing quickly the plain of Tahai. He started running faster toward the hinterland, trying to avoid recalling his terrible adventure. He always saw the same scenes in front of the eyes, same pain and the same impotence in the face of the suffering. He collapsed on the ground, he remained sat under the clear moon, fixing the stars and looking absorbed. He was distracted by a ring, he understood that it was his mobile even too resistant to the water, he noticed who called him on the display, and he answered with happy air.

<<Patrick, it is really you! >> Mario exclaimed <<God, I am so happy you are alive. Have they left you in the grassland out of that damned building? You are lucky as always, my friend. You should see what an awful state I am in! See you then. I am coming to you.>>

The American put his mobile back, he remained looking at the stars for another half an hour, and he quickly started along an excavated path.

Jeffery McNamara, just in that moment, sipped a drop of whiskey sat behind the desk of his office in the palace of the governorship of

Hanga Roa. The agent Beta-Two was in front of him and stared at him looking pleased: he told him how he had stopped the two surviving archaeologists in the undergrounds of that building, and he explained him that he had put them to sleep by a cloth soaked with chloroform. He affirmed that a more animated awakening fell to one of the two, but he assured that he would not have dead, because the ropes, by which he was tied, were very weak.

<<Excellent! The archaeologists had already done it to my face, escaping from my genial trap>> McNamara exclaimed grinning <<I wanted to forgive them again, but I could not allow anymore to keep them all alive, when I have known that they have violated the laboratory. We have saved the Canadian and the American because they are the more useful ones of the whole team. >>

He took another small glass on the desk, he filled it with whiskey, he handed it to Beta-Two and he toasted: everything proceeded very well by now, and he was sure that the iridium-K14 would have been in his hands soon. Nobody could stop his diabolic plans anymore: McNamara had the situation in his grasp.

Revealing word

Mario stared at the Venetian blinds of the window in Patrick's study with absorbed look. The clock told a quarter past seven in a very warm afternoon. The American went only an hour before to the appointment with the Canadian; he really had promised to call him in that night, but he had fallen asleep under the stars exhausted, and he woke up only around midday. The two friends had discussed not very much about their unhappy adventure and they still looked very upset.

Patrick had explained not to want to blab the secret of the iridium-K14. The press, enough inclined to gossip, would have also believed to a similar story without irrefutable evidence. Such a move would have revealed useless nevertheless, and it would have certainly not stopped one of the most powerful governments in the world in the experimentation of the new device. Besides, Patrick feared very much that some agent of the CIA also could have killed him before a so shocking revelation. He now looked rather tired to have to think about the plots and the sinister plans of the government agencies: he only wanted to concentrate on his work and to succeed in disclosing the enigmas and the secret of the archaeology. Mario had understood and approved Patrick's reasoning: doing so, he could finally let the ghosts of the past behind him. He looked very convinced to work again, honouring Mercedes and Alicia's memory; they would have certainly not wanted to see the two survivors of the team surrender just now. The interpretation of the last tablet had not to be so impossible: the mystery of Easter Island was waiting at some point in Rapa Nui.

The Canadian had the computer to hand, and he read the translation of the final sign, looking thoughtful and in a low voice, while the other listened, despite his head was hurting.

Run near the old and abandoned temple of the fast gull, where its influence and its impetus will always reign uncontested. That zone is and will also be always laughing in dark times: the fields, which drought never impoverished, prosper with wheat. The beach houses a lot of boats, since all the sailors leave and return from every trip without ever being shipwrecked. Look carefully, and don't let your eye deceive you. You follow the hidden and old way of the sun in direction of the wide mouth with enthusiasm and grim. Find the right point where this was cut by the new way of the darkness, and the impiety with shrewdness. You will feel the touch of the blind fortune under your foot. The mystery is waiting impatient for you there.

The two archaeologists doubted to be able to get it off, but they racked their brains, trusting and trying to interpret at least some line. The tablet advised to look on the outskirts of the temple of the fast gull. Patrick suddenly heard some words echoing in his mind. Mercedes had suggested that this figure could be a sort of divinity or at least a hero of the old Easter Island past. The Canadian didn't believe in this story, knowing quite a lot mythological characters of the island, but he decided to try looking for something about this with humility anyway. He hoped as never to have forgotten someone of them. He stood up from the chair behind his desk, he snatched some books from the library behind him and he turned over the pages of index. Mario followed him curious with his eyes. Patrick let his finger slip on the interested pages, and irritated, he closed the volumes again little by little. The American addressed him a confident look, and he asked to the Canadian how many ancient temples he knew. He wanted to be well informed on the exact location of each one in the past. Patrick explained that only place of cult in the open existed, and that only one of these was known: the one near Anakena; besides he affirmed that, in his opinion, their number and name had to be also undetermined in the more accurate historical sources. Several different places could represent very well the place of cult of the fast gull without their knowing it. Patrick

also tried to make a rapid search in the database of the archaeological centre, hoping to find a denial to his hypotheses, but he ascertained to be right once more with great regret. Mario thumped violently the table, looking too angry. Recognizing the place of the mystery, thinking over the beach full of boats and the field full of wheat, it seemed impossible: surely devastations, wars and natural changes had damaged this so pleasant landscape. The Canadian affirmed that at least they knew to have to look for the mystery close to the sea. Poor consolation, after all. The perimeter of an island like Rapa Nui was surely very wide.

The American suggested stopping on other details of the tablet. The author of the tablet advised to follow the way of the sun in direction of the wide mouth and to stop when this intersected the way of the darkness. The description sounded difficult to understand, but something could be got according to Mario. He supposed that the paths described by the priest could be mentioned in ancient archaeology texts. He hoped that someone had discovered them before, making their mission easier. Patrick tried to look for by all the means he got, with little hope to know an answer: he didn't even find a new starting point to formulate another hypothesis. He violently thumped on the desk and he turned his gaze toward the monitor of the computer; he would have liked to break it in thousand pieces by the anger, but he understood that it was still useful. He thought that he could not suppose the nature of the place described in the tablet by so surreal elements. The author could have clarified at least on the destination of the way of the sun; he spoke only about a wide mouth instead. Even this could be a monolithic stone or a rocky incision. No, Patrick felt that it was a different solution. He half-closed his eyes and started meditating. He was sure to have read about the wide mouth already somewhere, but he could not remember what it was precisely. He tried to reason in a loud voice, and he saw Mario that hung on his words. He needed a sign that enlightened him. He explored the meaningful places of the island with by his mind, paying attention to the sites of major interest, and he stopped particularly on one with curiosity.

"Wide mouth" Patrick thought "Damn, why haven't thought about it before!" he starter and cried for joy. He didn't even imagine being

able to get a so important and concrete information. He was amazed of the individualized zone and he thought that he expected even to have to look for the mystery at the other side of the island. The searches of the archaeologists seemed simpler. The adrenaline and the enthusiasm grew and they became uncontrollable. The fog was clearing and the road, leading to the mystery, seemed to finish by now.

The big courtyard of the government palace of the chief town was overcrowded of soldiers. They had not been seeing so many soldiers together for long time on the island. The sun was set by now and the thirst of blood among the Americans could be scented already. The general Blackwell watched standing the show from the Venetian blinds from his office. Behind him, the governor McNamara seemed dumb, but enough satisfied. He imagined being able to count on a charismatic officer as Blackwell and he had been repaid of his trust. The natives would have been wrong footed once and for all very soon; the last obstacle that could have hampered his searches of the iridium-K14 was about to collapse inexorably. McNamara strongly hated Easter Island people, even more than before; they had humiliated the glorious American army very easily in the north of the island and maintained their positions along the confinements of war with order and tenacity.

McNamara felt that he would have abandoned the island and the role of governor in few days with another success in his hands, the more important one. He would have delivered to the CIA and the president of the United States the new bomb XZ-547 looking proud: he surely would have been promoted and he would have become one of the most influential personalities of America and the whole planet. In fact, McNamara had learned that the searches proceeded very well, despite some drawbacks and that could end shortly. He had not believed to a similar story first, but then his mind started day-dreaming about the consequences. The bomb XZ-547 would be introduced without notice to the world, it would have torn the skies of a nation that perhaps swarmed of human beings as in any part of this planet and destroyed the rival nation of the United States. No mercy, no remorse or scruple: only death and

destruction. McNamara foretasted the background and imagined everything as real in front of his eyes. He was distracted by a sudden trill. It was his mobile: the governor was constantly well informed by a trusty man about the developments.

<<Hello, Beta-Two, what a pleasure to hear you again>> Jeffery answered in a low voice with enthusiastic air, going away toward the exit <<Are you saying seriously? You could not give me more beautiful news. The location of the layer has finally been discovered. Finding the right point won't be so difficult now. >>

He put his mobile back and he turned. Blackwell was still turned toward the window: he had to know nothing.

A deadly surprise

John Blackwell crossed the stairways that led to the ground floor with determination and a decision. He held his mobile to keep constantly in touch with two very smart subordinates of his. He addressed a fugitive glance to his watch. It was ten o' clock in a pretty and sultry summer evening.

Around half hour before, he had leaned out the window of his office, and he had spoken to all the soldiers gathered there. He had specified to want to redeem the poor figure towards Easter Island people in the past, and to be convinced that everything would have been ok. In his opinion, those natives were too weak and unorganized. They would finally have found the American army in good form on their walk, and with the moral sky-high. They would inexorably have given in and repent for their arrogance. Blackwell had recommended to his men, above all, not having mercy towards the adversaries, because these would never have had it for them. He secured himself to remember only a word: blood. He wanted to see the blood of the enemies scattered on the whole Rapa Nui and enjoy in gazing their atrocious suffering. The soldiers had acclaimed their commander and they were split in contingent.

The two, composed by five hundred men, were ready to reach their starting bases for the raid in hostile field by now. Wellington's troops had been reaching the foot of the Tuutapu for more than a quarter of an hour, while Wilkins was just reaching Punta Angamos with his men. The first one of the two colonels would have had the task to invade the hostile zone and to aim toward Anakena, getting on in the hinterland. He would have met the other in that village at the end of his mission. It would not surely have been an exercise, despite his soldiers tended to consider it so. Never underestimate

the adversaries: the colonel Mark Wellington had been repeating the same thing for half of an hour.

He addressed look to the five hundred militiamen lined up in a plain in the south of the Tuutapu, and he saw them anxious as never before starting their operation. The infantrymen firmly aimed their sub-machine guns, some imposing tanks protected them, and the artillerymen waited for a signal from the back of the line. The advance of the American army immediately started. The cries of the soldiers were heard distant for many kilometres. Mark Wellington's troops felt that the moment of the truth had come: everyone felt like covering themselves with honour and to come back in country with some native's head. They crossed the border with the Mount Tuutapu on receiving the signal, and they conducted a great operation in hostile camp. They advanced among some hills with boldness and they demolished some artillery, mainly howitzers and battered guns. They slaughtered few warriors without remorse, despite many of these surrendered. They didn't believe to find such an unprepared defence. They immediately thought about being able to reach easily Anakena, and they foretasted the sweet taste of the victory. A contingent of about six hundred Easter Island warriors waited for them, ready to the challenge almost halfway between the Tuutapu and the Puhi: it came from a fortitude well hidden in the east of Ahu Akivi. The infantrymen showed off, in the first line, sub machine guns while the cavalry, armed with automatic rifles, waited impatient from behind with the cannons. The battle whooped up in few instants. The infantries brutally ended up to clash one another.

Easter Island people fought hard and pushed to a closer fight. They unfortunately didn't succeed in opposing adequately their adversaries: these last ones were too motivated, they waited for revenge from too much time and fought looking gritty unequalled. Some Easter Island infantrymen ended up surrendering, crushed by sub machine guns burst. Others, the veterans in particular way, used the craftiest techniques of their military experience to withstand. They could not last for a long time: they needed a push from the back areas. The native cavalry were in trouble again. It was often assailed by rains of long range bullets shot by the howitzers of the enemies, and it was forced to stop the advance. The native troops

on the oriental coast were not good either. They came from fortitude at the foot of the Cerro Puhi and they were around five hundred under the guide of Rokahu Movaku. They were trying to stop Wilkins' troops with the support of the mortars. They looked more demotivated than their fellow soldiers in the hinterland, and they lost more and more men among their own line.

The commander understood that he had to find fresh troops as soon as possible to send on both the fronts as a support. Movaku left his warriors, and he left with his warhorse and with some trusted riders to Cabo Norte. He would have met one superior of his that would surely have helped him. He came back in short time on the battleground, but he didn't bring any support with him. He ordered to all his men to retreat without delaying a second more, and he explained that the same thing was also happening in the hinterland. Easter Island warriors didn't object, but they were very annoyed by this choice. They could not believe that they could surrender and resign themselves on both fronts after having spent so many energies to make life difficult to the enemies. They surely could not compete against the American war material that was progressively destroying them, despite their numerous efforts. But they could not fear a bloody clash and a possible ruinous defeat: they cared very much of their honour as warriors that would have been marked forever by two so ashamed moves. Movaku went away from the battleground with his warhorse and remained to look at his own warriors that reached him. By his expression, the bitterness of a defeat didn't shine through; on the contrary, the commander had a diabolic giggle and he shut his fists as gesture of exultation.

Henry Wilkins, absorbed in the obscurity of the beach on the oriental coast, directed toward Anakena with his soldiers, looking absorbed. He could not believe that the enemies had abandoned the battleground, and he was furious because his men had not succeeded in stopping them during the withdrawal. Everyone, among his line, had joked about the cowardice shown by Easter Island people. Wilkins, suspicious man by nature, knew that a well valid motive existed for this move. His convictions were strengthened even more after Wellington's phone call, who had also

communicated a similar episode on his front. Four hundred native warriors escaped death in the hinterland with big ability, while three hundred had escaped the American war material on the oriental coast.

Wilkins kept on continuously turning over in his mind, asking to himself what those running wild warriors could do, some of which were wounded. He finally saw Mount Puha and understood to be to the south of Anakena. He went for a walk around the high ground from the cliff to the sea, and he went in a desert village, crossing an excavated layout. He could see some empty rustic hovels. Brush woods and dry leafy branches soaked with a strange resin covered the territory. The ground was burnt and one could still smell something burning in the air. Some torn and disembowelled dead bodies stood out in the middle of the village. Quite a lot soldiers directed toward the beach where there was the Ahu Naunau's place to scour it. They came back one minute later, and they explained that it was calm anywhere. They heard the noise of some steps in the distance. The troops were immediately alarmed, they formed a line up in few instants and they aimed the weapons, waiting for a possible enemy. They lowered them, seeing Mark Wellington with four hundred surviving soldiers coming. The young colonel smiled on seeing that the other colleague had about fifty soldiers more and he went closer looking relieved. He let intend that he would have expected a greater resistance, but he didn't care the way how he had won: only the result was important.

In the meantime, some shades scanned silent the meeting with threatening air, and they observed the situation. Others had just gone out of the sea, and they waited on the beach. Quite a lot figures stood out in the moonlight to the western and northern border of the village. The signal finally arrived. A series of long range bullets started falling inside the village of Anakena, overwhelming about fifty American warriors. Wilkins could escape in time, avoiding the bullets rain, throwing himself on the ground and he cursed. He cursed that island and the natives. He finally understood the terrible plan of the natives and he was shocked.

During the clash with Wilkins on the oriental coast, Movaku had left his men to ask for fresh troops to the commander Takapu Matari -

the man that had conducted the last Easter Island people expedition of conquest to the north of the island. He had shortly well informed him about what was happened during that evening and about many details regarding two American advances. Movaku had explained that the whole fortitudes of Ahu Akivi and the Cerro Puhi had mobilized, but all this could not absolutely be enough against so strong enemies. Matari was not a big comfort to him, and he had explained that the men of his fortitude were only three hundred. If he had divided them between the two fronts, or unfolded only on a battleground, his men would not have made the difference against so crafty and strong enemies. No, Matari didn't like to risk and lose men with so few possibilities of success: the stakes were high. His friend had suggested him to recall a part of the so many troops from Rongo under his command to be able to have a meaningful help in the hinterland. Matari had expressed all his disappointment. A move of that kind would heavily have left unprotected the zone of the royal palace. This could have become prey of easy conquest if the Americans had possessed a good attack contingent located in Hanga Roa. Matari had explained that it was necessary to organize a valid strategy, and surprise the enemy with a copybook tactical move. He luckily had a lot of experience about war and a big repertoire. He thought of a plan, based on the strategic withdrawal, and he had explained all to Movaku in the least details. Wellington's troops in the hinterland moved toward northeast, while Wilkins's ones on the oriental coast directed toward north. Only one important village existed in that direction, and acted as base for other raids toward the Terevaka and Cabo Norte. Easter Island people would have done better to abandon the two battlegrounds to save as many warriors as possible, to take a parallel road to the Americans' one and reach Anakena in advance. They would not have had any problems to reach the destination first. Their enemies had to face some defensive positions, from which howitzers and mortars shot, and they would have wasted a lot of time. At the same time, the troops, coming from Cabo Norte, would have met Easter Island legionaries in Anakena coming from the two battles in the hinterland, on the oriental coast, and they would have increased their number. The

natives would have waited secretly the Americans in that village and make them an ambush.

Wilkins stood up again and started crying. He ordered to his men to spring and prepare the howitzers, guns and mortars, looking raging. His hands trembled. He could not believe in the shrewdness of that Polynesians.

“Oh Christ, they pulled our legs and we are among the best officers coming from West Point” Wilkins thought “we fell into a trap like stupid men.”

Easter Island people kept the Americans hemmed in on all sides, and they seemed to remain lined up, immovable, waiting for one answer of theirs. The contingent, coming from Cabo Norte, was the most silent behind the grove surrounding the place of Ahu Naunau. The Americans didn't keep them waiting, and they carried out to the letter the orders of the most experienced colonel. They shot four burst of bullets with their artillery, trying to reduce the number of around thousand besiegers considering a frontal clash. Some Easter Island people were inexorably stricken among their line; the three native commanders invited their warriors not to move even in the case that a rock was killing them. It was more important to maintain the battle array compact and together than the life of every single man.

Movaku noticed that the obstruction of artillery of the enemies was concluded and turned a diabolic glance to his artillerymen. They seized from their backpacks some incendiary bombs; they threw them in the air by some cannon with great ballistic precision. The artillerymen of the other Easter Island battles array followed their example too. The devices reached the heaps of soaked brushwood inside the village, which quickly set on fire. Some American soldiers found themselves again closed among the flames, and they waited for their end resigned. Others suffered the fire; they set on fire and started walking along the field, howling with desperate air. They desired the death more than every other thing, being able to free of that terrible burning and pain only in that way. They ended to collapse on the ground and to be charred while the flames kept on devouring them.

The Americans were six hundred by now, but had difficulty to recompose the battle array. Easter Island people understood that it was the moment to invade. Under a bullets rain, shot by their fellow soldiers from the near Mount Puha, they went in the village decided to slaughter. Their numerical and emotional superiority was evident by now. They advanced in such way to unfold in circle, and they closed all the enemies in a terrible vice. The battle immediately became bloody. It was easy to see soldiers torn to pieces, and others stricken to their head or their nape. Many others were found perforated only by a bullet; they hardly succeeded in grasping the weapon and collapsed on the ground a pray to violent spasms and appalling burning, aware of their end. They didn't arouse pity to anybody: the enemies aimed at them with more hate and they ended them with a burst of bullets. The American soldiers were losing the battle and they could not find any solution to change this condition of clean disadvantage. Wellington kept on shooting in vain with his sub-machine gun: he killed an adversary and he had another one on him. He suddenly felt a terrible burning at his abdomen that was exhausting him, and he understood he was shot by a bullet. He fell on the ground in a sea of blood, shutting his fists. A hostile infantryman went close to him, he took out a gun from his uniform and he killed him: the bullet broke down his right lung. Mark Wellington howled with desperation and was firm for some second with his eyes raised to the starry sky. Then obscurity swallowed him. Wilkins kept on fighting by his side. The Americans were reduced less than a hundred men, against three hundred ones bloodthirsty. They had tried to withstand that night, but the tactical choices of the adversaries had annulled their good wish, shown on the battleground. Wilkins felt that Easter Island soldiers' circle tightened around him and to the last survivors of his army. He saw the natives aiming threatening the sub-machine guns toward their preys. He said his last desperate prayers and raised upward his hands: there was nothing to do anymore. He waited, unarmed, for the death. A burst of bullets lacerated his body. In one instant, the dreams of a very skilled colonel, destined to a military career abandoned on the laurels, vanished. The battleground got a big cemetery. Torn to pieces and disembowelled dead bodies anywhere: they could not be

recognized anymore. Movaku crouched on the naked earth with his head folded on his knees, and he hardly held back tears of joy.

<<Incredible, we have done it>> he said to himself, being in the seventh heaven <<This is only a little step toward the revolt. >>

He felt a slap on his shoulder and he turned.

The commander Matari stared at him in the eyes. <<We will not only give a lesson to the Americans because they have hurt us>> he retorted, smiling. He approached his ear to his friend's one, and he pronounced a sentence sneering. <<We will come back very soon to take possession of the sanctuary in which the mystery is buried.>>

Movaku stared at him, looking confused, and he saw Matari showing him a leaf of toromiro that had tattooed on his breast. He finally nodded and understood. That commander was the descendant of one of the ancient priests that knew the real sanctuary of the mystery. A strange thought crossed his mind. Being in territory of American influence, that place could have been discovered already. Movaku horrified, but his superior explained him that a similar thing was not possible. They didn't know that someone, in the chief town, was very close to the solution of the whole enigma.

A document set aside too soon

Mario stared at his friend that thought over in front of his laptop, drinking a good cup of coffee with pleased air to the light of a small desk lamp. The clock told a quarter past one in the morning. The American bowed his head on his chair and turned a glance to the Venetian blinds placed behind him, from which the obscurity of a pretty animated night shone through. Patrick had found the solution for the word “wide mouth”, on which he had wasted so much time, and he found a more limited field in which to carry out the searches. Easter Island people often associated the crater of a volcano to a big mouth in the spoken language: a similar thing also happened in some other more evolved and known language of the planet. The priest had exploited the coincidence of names as he liked, and he tried not to make understand the less obvious one to the term, using right hieroglyphic. He surely hoped to make life of the seekers more difficult. He would surely have forced them to abandon the game. Unfortunately for him, Mario and Patrick looked very tenacious: they would not have surely dreamt to give up the searches for nothing in the world anymore. The term had now become “wide crater” through this substitution made by the Canadian in base to the finished reasoning. Patrick had read in a loud voice the term with pleased air again, he opened the digital dictionary on the computer, and invited his friend to look for the two words in Rapanui language, aware of the great discovery. He had seen Mario turning pale and starting, looking joyfully. Rano Kau was the solution to the enigma, it literally meant “wide crater” and it pointed out the whole volcano for contiguity of meaning. Mario was still considering to this unbelievable solution with great enthusiasm: it was the good time for the archaeologists.

Patrick thought over about the other elements that could show the right point where to look for. He half-closed his eyes and imagined the landscape at the foot of the volcano. Had he ever seen signs that could make think about the existence of a temple over there? No, he had not the least doubt. He didn't even succeed in imaging the imaginary way to the sun. What could it be? Maybe a simple little road. Otherwise, this word would have recommended to the archaeologists to follow the rays of sun toward the volcano. The seekers would have stopped at the intersection with the way to the darkness; this could be represented very well by the shade of the cone that started darkening the diurnal light on the ground. No, this reasoning didn't convince Mario and Patrick, who felt that the solution was very simpler than the expectation. The American understood to have to stop a little on the landscape of the Rano Kau of some centuries ago, in order to understand it clearly.

The volcano was a place of cult for the short ears. Each of the twelve tribes, in which these were gathered, introduced a young man to an annual tournament in honour of the god Makemake, chosen among the strongest and skilled ones. The participants in the competition had to gather on the Rano Kau, dive into the water and reach swimming the near islet of Motu Nui. The most of them didn't arrive there: they died, torn to pieces, by the sharks or dragged by the strong oceanic streams during the crossing. Who, among the survivors, succeeded in taking and bringing back a *manutara* egg first, Easter Island gull, he won the challenge and was proclaimed bird-man. This high office allowed the clan of the champion to get the monopoly on the resources of the island. The competition had the goal to avoid struggles for the division of the provisions in centuries of serious shortage, and it was the mean to have peace and order after the war against the long ears. Nevertheless the winners of the tournament almost always belonged to the clan of the monarch; he granted them the privilege to be exempted from the army or the work in the fields for a long period to exploit for the trainings by the sea. Despite they were not relatives of the sovereign some years, they were always kept under control by the troops of the king. Easter Island priest of the signs, who belonged to the group of the long ears, held barbaric and rough

whatever tradition of his harshest enemies. He had always emphasized his contempt towards the short ears.

Mario started and explained to his friend that remembered of a document in Marquesas Islands language able to cast light upon their problem. The few surviving long ears priests compared, in this inscription, the ritual of the bird-man to one ancient and glorious ceremony of theirs, with grisly terms. Doing so, they brought out the superiority of their traditions. Patrick was perplexed. He still had the strange document turned in English in the hard disk of his laptop, but he didn't believe that this could help them to discover something important. He remembered that he had seen only a series of senseless metaphors in the translation and nothing else; he was so angry that he had not dared to open that files anymore. Patrick understood to have to try all the possible solutions to interpret the elements of the last sign on the mystery, and he considered the hypothesis of his friend. He opened the document, he attentively read in a loud voice with his eyes fixed to the monitor, and he was dumbfounded after he had found the most interesting part of the story. Unbelievable, it was the same metaphors used in the tablet marked by the leaf of toromiro. Patrick sank into the chair and looked at the colleague, who was prey to a pretty eccentric exultation. He could not believe in what was happening.

"We have located the right place!" he thought "We did it! The dream of a whole life has come true!"

His eyes let an uncontrollable joy shine. He shouted a superhuman cry that lasted different seconds. He didn't break the glasses of his study for little decibels. He explained to Mario that there was no time to waste and he asked him immediately to run to the destination, in order to take possession of the mystery once and for all.

Not very distant, Beta-Two was wrapped in the obscurity of his room. He wore a pair of headphones, and he drank a sip of whiskey with triumphant air. He knew that all would have ended soon in the best way, and he felt like laughing to the idea of what was happening. He took his mobile out from his pocket of his battle dress, and he dialled a number.

<<Hello, here we are! >> he exclaimed, looking radiant <<I have heard everything to perfection and I have to say that those bugs are fabulous indeed.>>

Beta-Two told the whole history and it felt his interlocutor nodding to all the passages of his speech.

<<You were perfectly right. Everything was going off smoothly, and finished just in time>>Beta-Two added <<What? Are you here around? How lucky! Okay, good work then! See you in the prearranged place with the loot in three hours. >> Beta-Two put his mobile back and he remained to fix a point in the void, looking absorbed.

A bolt from the blue

John Blackwell even didn't get tired an instant to incite and howl to his men. Four hundred American soldiers fought furious in the plain one of Ahu Tahai, trying to get on among a "human wall" composed by seven hundred enemies. The clock told half past two in the morning. Kohau thought those hours never passed. He tried to dam the most violent raid, which he ever seen in his life, in the best way he could. Despite he had done his best, he felt a strange discouragement and a sense of exhaustion to every burst that he shot. It seemed to him that for each dead American, three of them resuscitated during the crucial clash. As a matter of fact, Blackwell's soldiers behaved better than the ones sent in the hinterland.

They had left Hanga Roa at half past eleven, as the General convinced that the warriors of Rongo had left their fortress to defend the inland. Six hundred American soldiers came closer to their goal furious, and they burst in the village of the monarch. They had found around thousand enemies to stop their advance along the main excavated route that led to the royal residence. Others four hundred or three hundred Easter Island units, some artillerymen and some snipers, were positioned in the outskirts with the purpose to exploit the tactic of the guerrilla against the dangerous adversaries. Blackwell was aghast: he could not believe the village of Rongo was still full. Nevertheless he looked convinced to be able to win anyway, despite the clear numerical inferiority of his troops; he trusted on the intelligence on the most advanced weapons that he had and on his use of tactics. He had prepared the American soldiers in an array with rectangular form. The infantrymen, provided with machine gun, were assembled toward the most external part of the figure, protecting the artillerymen that were at

the centre. These ones, supported by the tracked vehicles, had effectively opposed the suffocating guerrilla and broken the encirclement of the guns very easily. The American infantrymen had not immediately succeeded in containing as good the thousand Easter Island people drawn up on the road by Kohau and they had to withdraw as far as the plain of Tahai with around one hundred fifty units less.

The natives still enumerated more than thousand men among their lines. Kohau had thought to launch the final attack without minding too much the tactic; he was sure to have all the papers in order to win and he confided on the ability and the thirst of blood of his troops. The Americans were now routing them with extreme facility, exploiting their best cohesion. Fifty Easter Island people died in ten minutes, while only about ten Americans on the other front. Blackwell wanted to finish the game as soon as possible and he waited confident a decisive help from the colonel Morrison; he had to reach him with his north reinforcements, according to the initial plans. The American general already foretasted the taste of the victory. Unfortunately he could not even imagine that something in the shade was about to change the fates of the clash. Some burst of sub-machine guns echoed distant in the obscurity. Rolls of drums became more and more insistent. Dreadful shouts echoed again meaning nothing reassuring. John Blackwell saw his men looking toward north with surprised air. He followed them with the look. Around three hundred furious Easter Island people brandished their weapons with boldness and they beat their feet violently on the ground, one hundred meters far. Unbelievable, they were the survivors of the battle of Anakena and some sentinels that garrisoned the north of the island. Their morals were sky-high, and the desire of blood was palpable. Blackwell horrified: no, he could not believe to his eyes. He cursed the awful fortune of that natives and the day when he had decided to deal with that island. All the plans and the good intentions were vanished in an instant.

The young Morrison's men had taken the way to the sea, when Blackwell had left the chief town with his men. They resurfaced in Tepeu, a coastal installation of Easter Island people, near Punta Espolon. They had found a bunker there, defended by three

hundred enemies and they had been forced to besiege that structure on the side to north. The natives had not dared to face the Americans in the open field, being less in number, and they had remained hidden among the boundaries. The artillerymen had found many strategic points from which striking on the bastions of the building. A hundred Easter Island infantrymen and snipers had protected the artillery and avoided that the American soldiers tried to climb over the boundaries. Easter Island people defended themselves with boldness. Unfortunately the only charisma had not been enough against those terrible enemies. The battle turned precise in a while, and many howitzers had seriously been damaged or destroyed by the continuous hits of mortar flung by the of American soldiers crowd. The blockhouse would not have resisted for long time. The resistance of the natives quickly lowered. Just in those difficult moments, four hundred furious Easter Island people had suddenly appeared from the obscurity and they threw themselves against the besiegers. They had massacred in less than half an hour, supported by the fellow soldiers positioned on the fortitude. The Americans, closed on both the sides, fell victims of the Polynesian fury. Dave Morrison had been one of the first ones to die. No American soldier moved more when it was two o' clock in the morning. Three hundred Easter Island people found themselves brandishing their weapons as sign of victory again. Their mission was not finished: they had still to shed other blood that night.

About thirty Easter Island howitzers started flinging long-range bullets toward the crowd in the middle of Tahai plain. The reinforcements coming from Tepeu threw all together against the Americans, shouting like mad persons: few of them were stopped in the advance by the hostile fire. Less than thousand natives in total faced, without fear, about four hundred American soldiers. They would have fought decided not to stop before the total exhaustion. The clock told a quarter to three in the morning. A decisive battle was starting for the fates of the war, the most important in the history of Rapa Nui. None of the two arrays would easily have surrendered in similar circumstances. On the other hand, the stakes was too high.

King Hotukau sat on his throne looking thoughtful, turning his thumbs to the light of some lanterns. The events of that strange night had upset him very much, but he plucked up courage as always, confiding in the ability of his men. Ten priests were in front of him, standing and stared at him curious. They wore a beige jacket covered by ideograms of various kind. Hotukau had assembled them to report an important thing. He cleared his throat and swallowed.

<<My Sirs, this is the last occasion that we have for conquering again the whole island>> the monarch explained, looking decided <<Tiring battles have overwhelmed different fronts. The situation is critical by now, but we have to hope in a possible counteroffensive at all costs this evening. We cannot waste more time. >>

The priests stared at Hotukau, looking interrogative. A pretty sinister figure emerged from behind the throne, a rather dark zone of the room, looking worn-out and very upset. He wore white suits from the head down to his toes. Armour on which there were the same writings, represented on the dresses of the priests, and a pretty long mantle. He had a secret gun put in a sheath tied around his waist. The expression of those ten men suddenly turned into amazement. A strange quiver of terror suddenly caught them, and made them curse. The strange warrior had been arriving to the royal palace for ten minutes with his warhorse. Hotukau invited him to tell the same history that had heard a little before. The priests imagined what it could be, but they held back their breath, hoping for something different. They carefully listened to all, shutting their fists with anger: they unfortunately ascertained they didn't imagine anything wrong. Hotukau seemed even more frustrated. He took his head between his hands.

<<We have nothing more to do>> the native monarch explained <<An ace against the time. I immediately reach Kohau and I help him in his battle. Time is short by now. Since the beginning the main goal of the war, besides honouring us, has been to assure the control on the sanctuary of the mystery. This time, such priority has never been so urgent. >>

He clapped his hands, he called some valets, he asked them to bring his splendid war armour, he wore it on the jacket and he went toward the exit. His warhorse waited for him in the courtyard. He went out of the room looking decided and proud. The Americans could not take the mystery away.

Lethal vicelike grip

More than two hundred Easter Island civilians were going beyond the border with the Rano Raraku. They were some farmers and shepherds of the hinterland with their own families. They had left the inland just after the end of the battle against Wilkins and Wellington. They wanted to save a little of work to the army and to occupy the southern zone of the island; this was almost entirely bare of hostile units. The Americans had other more important fronts to take care. The civilians were armed with guns and knives, they had taken the flag of the red rimiro, and they had undertaken the challenge with great patriotic spirit.

At that time they reached Ahu Tongariki, singing a tune at the top of their voice. The women beat some drums in the last line. There was not even a soul to be seen. The civilians continued toward west, coasting along the waters of the ocean. Some roadblock, not so distant, waited for them, but it was not anything important. They would have reached their destination, Cabo Sur, in less than an hour by now.

The battle of Tahai whooped it up in few instants. The American soldiers tried to defend themselves the best they could, hoping to be able to reverse the clean numerical inferiority. Some Easter Island people were riddled with holes again by hits of revolver and few others hit by burst of insistent bullets; some native was disarmed, knocked down by the tactics of martial arts moves and stricken unarmed. Few natives were seriously wounded and they kept on brandishing the weapons with malefic smile. Easter Island warriors didn't let themselves demoralize by few similar episodes, and they answered well soon, overwhelming their enemies with fury and

determination. Quite a lot American soldiers remained pierced by the bursts of three machine guns, having to face more than two enemies at a time, some of them were pierced through their back by treachery, and others were even beat in cold blood. A lot more were riddled with holes by the rifle shots that the experienced riders shot. These were directly commanded by Kohau and they could profit of his suggestions more than the infantrymen. They often made their steeds rear to strike the enemies with the anterior legs or they spurred them to run over the adversaries in the most opportune moments. The Americans were reduced to less than two hundred by now, and they had to face eight hundred enemies.

Blackwell was shot by a bullet to his right shoulder, he let his rifle sub-machine gun fall prey to a terrible burning and he was immobile, with his left hand leaned on the wound. Two enemies came forward, ready to kill him. The American general looked done for. He suddenly took a pistol out from his small pocket, and he pressed the trigger against the aggressors. He hit them completely. Kohau followed the scene with astounded air, on the back of his horse, at a distance of twenty meters. He shut his fist, and beat it on the mane of his steed with anger. He understood that the moment to face the opposing general in person had come. Unfortunately he saw him vanishing in few instants in the zone more covered by American soldiers.

<<Damned Blackwell, where the hell are you? >> he shouted, looking angry <<The matter is closed by now, you have lost. You could have the courage to fight with honour for once, at least in the death! >>

A very loud voice echoed distant.

<<Who has told you that I am done for! >> the American general sneered with bold air <<How do you hope to beat me, dirty native. You, Easter Island people, are inferior nonentities. I think you don't know the thousand resources of my men. >> Blackwell was not as sure of himself as he wanted to show. He understood he had to try the last despaired move. He felt a terrible shame only to imagine a similar thing. He had not any other better plan at that time. Time tightened like a slipknot around the neck. He ordered to his men to retreat toward Hanga Roa, where he would have stood up to the

enemies with the guerrilla. The American soldiers tried to go out of the battle, but they were gripped soon in a vice. Kohau, purple from the anger, instigated his men, and he recommended them to have no mercy. He saw king Hotukau reaching the battleground, but he didn't ask him questions at that so delicate time. Easter Island people massacred the more enemies they could. Some of them riddled with holes some American soldiers in their breast, abdomen and head, set fire to the point of some batons and burnt other hostile infantrymen that were already seriously wounded on the ground. Kohau was not less than them. He got down from his steed, he joined the fight, and he fought like a mad person. He took some other American, he disarmed him, he folded his arms backwards and broke them; then he shot to his stomach with caution so that to make him bleed to death some minute later a prey to atrocious sufferings. The bloodiest battle, from the beginning of the American occupation, finished shortly. No American was at stake anymore.

Blackwell had been saved for the time being, but he had serious ugly wounds in his head and abdomen. Blood went out of his mouth, and he panted with his eyes turned to the sky, and looking very confused. Hundreds of sub-machine guns encircled his neck by now. Kohau got on through those weapons, he aimed a long knife to his throat, and he looked at him with pleased air. He laughed in a very coarse way.

<<We have finally got the rendering of account, bastard! >> Kohau shouted <<What's up? Don't you feel terribly self-confident anymore, eh? You have picked on the wrong people, worm; you will suffer the consequences of it. I am laughing this time, as you can see. >>

He fixed the blade of his large knife, looking so diabolic, he saw Blackwell closing his eyes trembling, and he dealt a violent blow with all his disdain. He cut his head and he saw him falling on the ground with his head on one side and his body on the other. The clock told four in the morning. Easter Island people shouted with joy, and they paid homage to Hotukau that they could not greet before the clash. The monarch specified that it was not the moment to celebrate yet, and he shortly well informed everyone about the

last developments. He proposed to his men to reach the sanctuary of the mystery; he didn't interest him to keep it secret as his predecessors did by tradition anymore. The army would have garrisoned the sacred place and looked for the thieves if they had already run away with the precious loot. Kohau, who knew well the destination as well as the king, showed to the warriors to direct toward south. He stared at the monarch looking visibly worried, he reassured and left with him.

“This time, the Americans went too far” Hotukau thought “It doesn't suit them to be seen around the sanctuary. They could pay dearly the consequences.”

The truth of the mystery

Mario made his jeep squeal off on the dirt road that seemed really not very safe. Patrick, sat on his side, could not realize yet about the great discovery that they were about to do. He stared at the moon on the horizon, looking drowsy, and he didn't stop speaking an instant: his mouth seemed a motor. Mario didn't take any account of what he was telling him: he didn't even listen to him. The enthusiasm had made him concentrate only on his new mission.

The two archaeologists had reached the foot of the Rano Kau by now. They took an hour and half before reaching the destination, because they made sure about to equip themselves with the proper tools. They had brought rubber boots, a camouflage completely black, some very thick picks and hammers of various types and dimensions. It was not easy to find everything in the store of the centre and they had to ransack in the wine cellar among trunks and various trash.

Mario went down from his car and breathed deeply. Patrick did the same. They were in the middle of a grassy place. The volcano rose imposing on their right and it was drop from the cliff to the sea, distant about fifty meters. Caleta Ovahe beach was really wonderful with its fine sand. The two archaeologists would have stretched gladly there on it. They heard the old priest's words in their mind.

Run near the old abandoned temple of the fast gull, where its influence and impetus will always reign uncontested.

Patrick's document, which had disclosed the whole enigma, described the place of solar and shining cult of the first prince close to a gull, engraved on a wall of the wide mouth. This character was King Hotu Matua's first child, very good in racing and astute in the duels. Mario ran toward the beach without wasting other time,

followed by Patrick. He reached the wall of the volcano that closed the eastbound beach, and he found the looked for engraving. He still heard the words of the last sign echoing again in his mind.

That zone is and will also be always charming in dark times: the fields, which drought never impoverished, prosper still with wheat.

He looked toward the hinterland and imagined crops and pastures behind that beach. He brusquely turned, and he started staring at the small waves of an incredibly calm sea that rippled on the sand. It was perhaps a sign of divine power indeed.

There are a lot of boats on the beach, since all the sailors leave and return from every trip without ever being shipwrecked.

Yes, he still felt that peace and calm, described by the ancient tablet, which reigned many centuries ago in that so sacred place. Patrick pointed out a multitude of rock-cliffs on the right of his friend; these coasted along the volcano in its whole width. The Canadian observed them with confident air.

Look carefully and don't let your eye deceive you. Follow the hidden and old way of the sun, in direction of the wide mouth with enthusiasm and grim.

Mario looked more self-confident than his colleague. He took a torch out from his pocket, he saw his friend doing the same, and he hinted with the hand to follow him. The document of the metaphors talked about a bright passage in the middle of so many black rocks, which led to the wide mouth. Mario found that so wanted path, hidden among the rock-cliffs, and he was literally amazed. The light not only showed superiority, but also whiteness in this case. The way was paved with marble of white coral and reflected even the light of the sun in particular circumstances. It was very tight and eroded by the action of the time by now. The two took it with caution, trying not to slip. They hardly got in, but they continually had the impression to be able to get stuck at any moment.

Find the right point where this was cut by the new way of the darkness and the impiety with shrewdness.

The other document explained that the maritime way of who didn't trust in the old men of the glorious ones, it was very dark and dangerous toward the islet of Motu Nui. Mario scanned the top of the volcano above him, and he continuously thought about some

second; he started running among the rock-cliffs, some meters far from the water. He finally reached the foot of the place from which the short ears swimmers dived, which was located a hundred meters aloft. He saw the sea and Motu Nui in distance on his left. The paved road finished there, leaving the place to the deep waters of the ocean; nevertheless, the way of the sun continued on the right, entering a cave drop from the cliff to the sea dug in the rocky walls of the Rano Kau.

“Here we are! The crossroad is there inside” Mario thought excited “The prophetic moment has come.”

The two archaeologists dived, and they started swimming in the direction of that cavern seemingly without depth. It had a pretty narrow entrance; nevertheless Mario and Patrick had not to lower their head to go beyond it. They noticed some clear crystalline water that reflected a characteristic blue colour on the walls of the cave, because of the refraction. A rocky bank pretty narrow was on the other side of the cavern, and it allowed reaching some stairways illuminated by two rudimentary torches on the wall. A very particular object stood out from a rocky and pretty wide base located in the middle of the waters. Mario rubbed his eyes, while Patrick blinked: were they dreaming or any had some flash blinded them? That so unusual thing was a white rock with a colour similar to a glacier, which seemed to reflect other colours too. It had a rectangular shape with contours pretty shredded. The archaeologists swam faster, they reached the base soaked to the skin, and they stooped in front of that strange rock. They remembered what the last sign told, and they ascertained that it was the truth.

You will feel the touch of the blind fortune under a foot.

They strongly trod that ground and with joy. So close, the boulder looked like having been cut in pretty clean way on the left edge. It has a series of symbols and hieroglyphs that seemed telling a precise history. The Canadian attentively gazed them. The rock still seemed to reflect other colours of the rainbow at times. A last detail unfortunately made them get dumbfounded. Mario horrified, and then he went on his knee between a mixture of emotion and anger. He didn't know what to think anymore. Patrick followed him with the look and nodded, looking sad.

<<The mystery of Easter Island is here>> the American affirmed <<A meteorite with sensational characteristics, because made with iridium-K14. The government of the United States just looks for the archaeological find more coveted perhaps ever. It had only a mean to find it: keeping us alive and hoping that we could localize it. >>

A grim voice and full of resentment echoed again behind the two men, lowered on the mystery. The American recognized that tone and remained almost frozen: he could not believe that, just him in person, could have played him such a nasty trick.

<<Exactly, Mario! >> the sinister man thundered <<I see that you are smart. You have to recognize that my plans are genial indeed.>> The two researchers turned, they slowly stood up and stared at face the Rapa Nui governor, Jeffery McNamara, who threatened them with a gun in front of them with sinister look. They saw that their aggressor made them sign to lift their hands, and they didn't hesitate to do it.

<<I have been really a big. I believed I got your friend, Mr. Governor>> Mario added, looking ironic <<It was logical that I was wrong. >>

<<More precious things than friendship exist>> McNamara snickered <<I think you know how much the mystery is worth. You should have learnt it, during your tour in the undergrounds of the building to Hanga Roa. I swear that I would have let you kill like a dog! >>

Patrick asked to the governor how he could know that he was reaching the cave with his friend. McNamara swallowed, and he stared amazed at his interlocutors. He gave a pretty evasive answer and he affirmed to have ears and eyes anywhere. The Canadian addressed a disgusted glance to him.

<<A detail is not clear to me yet>> Mario brusquely intervened <<It's a personal curiosity that I believe it doesn't cost you anything to satisfy. How did you know since the beginning what it is really the mystery and of which material it is done? >> McNamara nodded, he told that it was right to tell it to his victims and he took stock of the situation.

Freedendall, Kempsey and Warner had found a casket during their expedition in the desert of Atacama. This contained that small

fragment of the meteorite that was in the secret underground laboratory in the chief town. That was not all. The three men also found an ancient diary bound by a very rudimentary way, and they immediately discovered that it belonged to the English buccaneer Edward Davis, the first one to have sighted Easter Island in the 1668 according to little precise historical sources. The sailor's memories disclosed incredibly a particular and unpublished work; this character also disembarked to Rapa Nui. The natives warningly welcomed him, not being used to have guests coming from the west, and they associated him to a divinity of their pantheon. They showed him the mystery explaining that it had been flung off Rapa Nui by the old God Movaneke centuries before; they let Davis cut that piece of it with honour. The buccaneer left soon the island and decided to come back to his beloved England to inform the king about that so precious rock. He was shipwrecked off northern Chile, because of a terrible storm, some days later, he could save himself and he started wandering for the desert of Atacama without a destination. No one had news of Davis. He could very probably bury the casket at the point of death.

The archaeologists nodded, and they were amazed by that fresh history. The governor approached his gun, looking grim, to his victims and he ordered them to load the mystery on his boat. The archaeologists looked at him with interrogative air. McNamara took a small device out from the pocket of his jacket and he clicked a button. A strange submarine surfaced and stopped in front of the base. It had transparent walls, the shade of a boat and it was well sealed; nevertheless it could be also folded and used as a motorboat. The motor was very silent, and particularly suited to follow furtively someone as the governor did. The archaeologists stared at impatient face of their aggressor, who kept on aiming the revolver against them with anger. Mario wanted to shout, explaining he could not lift such a heavy rock, but the Canadian hissed him and winked. The two researchers made the mystery drag with effort out of the base, they saw that McNamara was folding back the hood of his vehicle, and they pushed the last time. The mystery lay down on the back seat of the strong boat, making it totter only for some instant.

<<Perfect! No one can stop me now! >> the pleased governor snickered <<Easter Island people believe to have won against me. They don't even imagine that they are about to receive the most bitter disappointment. I can finally clone iridium-K14 with a similar rock and I will build about ten bombs XZ-547. >> he got his breath back; he swallowed and stared at his victims, looking evil. <<I can eliminate my worst enemy: the China. Imagine what only a device of this kind could do in the zone of Shanghai and in the fertile Chinese lowland. At least, fifty million people would be incinerated in less than a second. >>

Patrick turned a grim glance to the governor with repulsed air. He blushed with anger, and he felt he was about to explode like a volcano in eruption.

<<Bastard, you have to get a lot of troubles. I curse you and your entire race! >> he thundered <<I hope you have a heart attack before the infernal dreams come true. I would like to see you screaming like a donkey prey to a collapse. I would split with laughter, filthy worm! >>

McNamara looked to have lost the patience. He loaded his revolver and was ready to shot. His face was more relaxed than one could suppose.

<<I kill you both with just one shot>> he said, looking diabolic <<You won't tell the story that you have heard to anybody. >>

Some shouts echoed again in the cave and they made the governor dissuade from the execution that he was doing. The archaeologists cast around a curious glance. Hundreds of Easter Island warriors came out from the end of the cave, going down the stairways looking furious, and they reached the small rocky bank. Infantrymen and snipers were ready to shot. They shouted and sang some not very reassuring tunes. Their eyes shone of a red blood. McNamara understood he had immediately to slip away. He put the gun back and he jumped on his boat. The Polynesians started shooting bursts hoping to strike the three western men. The archaeologists threw themselves on the ground at the right time. Some bullets hit the back of the boat and damaged the motor. The governor tried to start it in every way, but there was no way. He dodged a series of shots; he threw himself in the icy waters of the cave with furious air

and started swimming under water. Mario quickly rose from the ground and he took a plunge rather acrobatic. That criminal could not escape. He slightly turned his head, reaching the mouth of the cavern. He was aghast looking at a show that he would ever have liked to see. Patrick was succumbing under a rain of bullets in the attempt to reach his friend. He fell on the ground and he exhaled his last breath among the satisfied looks of his jailers. He had his abdomen completely devastated and he kept on bleeding. Mario cried deeply moved. He could not surely come back. The natives were diving into the sea. The archaeologist pushed his head under the water; he strongly beat his feet and crossed in apnoea the access to the cave with striking rapidity. He reached the zone of the rock-cliffs, he resurfaced and he noticed that the governor was few meters in front of him. He had anticipated him. He knew very well that his hated enemy could not compete against his aquatic instinct. Unfortunately the dry land was too close. There were a lot of ways to escape, perhaps too many.

The last challenge

McNamara directed toward the beach, he swam faster; he resurfaced and started running toward the hinterland. Mario followed him. He felt to be laughed at by that worm and he could not escape, at any costs. Despite the mystery was in Easter Island people's hands, he feared that the governor could retry to steal it in the future. He had to punish him somehow: those apocalyptic plans could not go on. McNamara luckily found a red-fire coloured jeep, parked at the foot of the Rano Kau and he took a path that led on the top of the high ground. Mario could not stop him from leaving, and he shut his fists angry. He looked around with thoughtful air. He noticed that his car was still parked at a distance of fifty meters on his right and he didn't waste time to reach it. He violently pushed the accelerator to reach the fugitive as soon as possible. He crossed a series of dirt lanes that led on top of the Rano Kau. He shortly sighted his prey, and he started tailing him.

<<McNamara, you won't escape this time! >> he shouted with all his disdain <<You have lost by now, accept it! >>

<<Damn, I thought we were friends. You want me as enemy and you will suffer the consequences of it>> the other sneered a bit distance, looking diabolic <<Nobody can help you. You won't go out alive from here, Mario. Easter Island will be your grave! >>

The governor proceeded quickly along a steep little road that was could not be praised for the maintenance. He looked really very calm, despite the other was gaining ground. He saw him close to his jeep, and he understood to have to react. He decelerated for few instants, looking amazed. Mario passed nearby him. McNamara suddenly steered toward his adversary. He wanted him to fall in the crevasse on his left. The archaeologist skidded and he was slightly

hanging in space with the anterior part of the jeep. He had been more than lucky in that circumstance. He thumped the handlebar and cursed. No, he could not give up just now. He reached the back seat, he jumped out of the car, he threw it out of the chasm and he came back to the driver's seat. He could catch his hated enemy still. A strange light shone in his eyes, from which only grudge shone through. Mario desired the sweet revenge and nothing else in the world. He set on the right track again, he climbed along the slant of the high ground and he found the governor with his look many meters higher up. The caldera was near now. McNamara looked through the small mirror, and it seemed him to see a ghost.

"Damnation, he is still alive!" he thought with malefic air "Well, he will regret not to have fallen from the ravine.

His diabolic laughter echoed at a distance of some meter. Mario had perhaps heard it. McNamara aimed his gun out of the cabin with his right hand, and he shot some shots. The archaeologist was lucky: he could dodge some bullets, while others missed the mark.

The two cars reached the top of the volcano. They started crossing flat out, coasting along from a side the edge of the caldera - covered by a muddy little pond - and the crevasse from the other. Such an uneven track could reserve thousand unforeseen events and it seemed really the ideal scenery for a pursuit of the kind. Mario pushed decided the pedal of the accelerator with a burst of anger. He was not so prudent, knowing to have anything to lose by now.

<<McNamara, you have finished to be an idiot>> the archaeologist shouted <<I will send you straight where you deserve to be... to hell! >>

<<A "little boy" like you would like to give me a lesson>> the other, ironic, sneered from his cabin <<I am already trembling. >> Mario replied surly. <<You have to tremble, however I would not laugh if I was you. >>

He almost was grazing the back part of the jeep of the governor. He steered strongly and lined up his car to the other; he kept the same speed like McNamara for hundred meters gradually approaching to him. He paid attention to avoid and overtake him. He checked the commands and put on the autopilot, which could be very useful to him along the straight stretch. He got on the hatch of his jeep and

directed his arms ahead in the attempt to throw himself in the car of his adversary. McNamara followed him very amazed, looking out of the corner of his eye. He kept on staring at the road. He suddenly steered when Mario decided to jump. He wanted to take away to him a soft and enough sure landing. He had almost thought about having succeeded in making him fall on the ground. He turned his head back, looking pleased. Mario seized the spare wheel that was attached on the back of the governor's jeep. McNamara started cursing: the fortune of his pursuer was amazing. He took the road again and started laughing heartily: he knew how to deal with the "tough nuts". He suddenly steered. Mario slackened his hold, but he held tight the other on the tire, in a position of very precarious equilibrium. His left foot hardly held on the bumper, while the right one was suspended in air. He shut his fist and he tried to do all the possible to withstand. He succeeded in finding again well soon the stability and he also grabbed the wheel with the other hand; he could finally climb over easily and he jumped on the back seat of the small folded cabin. Also McNamara connected the autopilot and left the commands horrified; he suddenly turned toward his aggressor and he aimed his revolver against him.

Mario grabbed the hands of the other man, which were firm to the handle of the weapon, and he pressed; the barrel of the gun slightly diverted toward right - as much as was enough to miss the mark. In fact three bullets were shot and directed into space. Then, they didn't hear even a shot anymore. McNamara had finished his shots. He had to resort to the bare hands to defeat his adversary. It was not a problem: he had undisputed qualities in the catch-as-catch-can and he fought during his free time. He immobilized Mario's right arm and he turned him; he folded the other arm on his back, pulling it strongly. The archaeologist was getting a prey to an unbearable pain. He heard McNamara sneering with such wickedness to upset the stomach. He had to react before finding himself with his arms broken. He kicked back, trying to hit the shin bones. The governor left him. Mario suddenly turned; he landed two fists to the temple and one deadly to the stomach of his enemy. He noticed that he was still standing. McNamara had his back folded up in direction of his legs, he had his arms folded on his abdomen and he made grimaces

of pain. The archaeologist, pitied not at all, completed the work. He landed a kick on his face and one on his back that made him finally fall on the seat of the car. The governor fell on his back: he had his head in a sea of blood. Mario was on him and stared at him pleased, snapping the fingers of his hand. He could not enjoy that show much longer. Something else diverted his attention.

The off-road vehicle was directed straight toward the ravine high speed. The brakes were damaged, and the autopilot could not be defused. The commands seemed blocked. There was nothing to do. Mario cursed: the precipice was less than thirty meters far by now. He leaned out toward the outside of the car, he looked at the ground under him and he understood he had to have courage.

“You have to do it. You have no much time at your disposal if you care your life” he thought firm “Now or never.”

He jumped on the door and threw himself out of the cabin. He wallowed in the muddy earth for some second, and then he saw the moving jeep falling in the crevasse. Some shouts echoed again for some seconds. Mario stood up again, looking stunned and incredulous. He could not believe he saved himself.

The clock told five in the morning. The sky was quite illuminated by now. The boy directed toward the ravine, and he observed the rock-cliffs under him. The crumpled up and broken car was setting fire, as the gasoline tank exploded. It seemed to him also to see a dead body covered of blood, standing out among the plates and he was to be devoured by the flames. The governor of Rapa Nui had ended to plan and plot in the shade against the Chinese colossus.

He would not have made damages anymore and planned slaughters of innocent with the support of the secret services. Nevertheless few people would so energetically have fought like him for the supremacy of the big America, which was questioning in the last times after centuries of innumerable victories. The greatness manias of a nation you were swallowed by the obscurity with him. Mario still looked enough shaken on seeing that wrecks. A strange shuffling made him start.

<<I have seen that you are very sharp, my boy>> a grim voice behind him resounded <<Unfortunately you have no hope to get off by now. >>

The archaeologist turned very slowly, looking trembling. A very corpulent white man brought a sub-machine gun, and he aimed it against, looking inflexible. He wore a black camouflage uniform and some dark boots. He wore a cowboy hat of the same colour with the peak lowered on his forehead and a pair of sunglasses that let something of very anxious shine through. That guy was the merciless Beta-Two.

<<The curtain falls also for you tonight, my friend. You won't tell to anybody what you have learnt about the mystery of Easter Island>> the nasty performer added <<You can forget to thwart the future plans of the CIA. >>

<<The meteorite is the natives' hands>> Mario answered with a hoarse voice <<the government will never have it. >>

Beta-Two made a sarcastic giggle. <<The United States will become the greatest military power of all time. The governor is really dead in peace. His memory will be remembered this way. He will get instantly his revenge too. >> Mario already fainted. He felt his stomach turning and his heart beating madly. He closed his eyes and waited. He had not to wait long. Beta-Two riddled him with bullets. The archaeologist fell backwards in the crevasse in a pool of blood: he had his abdomen completely torn to pieces, his breast riddled with holes and his face disfigure. Mario Caruso knew that he would have seen that island at the end of its days. He didn't imagine so soon. His adventurous and warlike spirit was now appeased. He could perhaps have met his friends and his wonderful companion in another dimension, what he wished more in the world. Unfortunately all this risked to be only the last illusion of a broken life in a very brutal way.

Beta-Two put the sub-machine gun back, and he remained to stare at the horizon, looking absorbed for some instant. He could not wait to come back in the chaos of his beloved New York City. He had a fugitive look to the watch. In a short while he should have left with his aircraft. Nevertheless, he wanted to enjoy one minute of that scene more. He suddenly heard his mobile ringing, and he thought that it was some superior of his that phoned him from the centre of the intelligence. He took his mobile out from the pocket and he answered with radiant air; he was even more enthusiastic

coming to know that it was somebody else, a person that he would ever have expected to hear at that time.

Exemplary purification

A grim-looking man waited on the shore, looking impatient, staring at the little rough sea of Cabo Norte. He was enjoying the first slim lights of the dawn on 18th January and the fizzy air of that place. He smoked a cigar, he had his hand in his pocket and he kicked the sand. He heard the shuffling of some steps and he suddenly turned: it was really Jeffery McNamara.

He had a series of scars on his face, but he was incredibly still alive. In fact, while the off-road vehicle fell in the crevasse, it had struck a prominence along the slant, which had slightly diverted its trajectory and hurled the governor out of the cabin. Despite the car had struck the rock-cliffs anyway, McNamara fell into the waters of the ocean, which were very deep in proximity of the Rano Kau. He had not passed out, he swam the most of the time under water, and he quickly reached the beach near the volcano. He had phoned Beta-Two from there to reassure him about his conditions and make a date at Cabo Norte, a zone that was very proper for a meeting. Then he went near Mataveri, trying not to be discovered by the patrolling natives, he had taken his personal aircraft, which was always parked there, as usual, and he reached the north of the island.

McNamara was waiting for his trusted performer now, and he was pleased on seeing him arriving with so much sense of timing. Beta-Two shook his hand, he turned a smile from which a lot of malice shone through, and he explained him that he was very happy to see him safe and sound again.

<<My friend, you have rendered a great service to your country>>
McNamara sad, looking firm <<America will be always grateful to you. You have planned genial backup plan indeed. >>

<<I have only limited myself to do my duty>> the secret agent swallowed <<I suddenly had this idea and I decided do it, as it was to be. >>

<<Right! Those natives have been really idiots to go away>> the governor added<<They perhaps believed that you were scouting. >>

McNamara personally had cared to provide the most of the archaeological centre with very sophisticated micro-spies; besides he had entrusted Beta-Two to report him whatever worthy news on the mystery. The merciless executioner started telling to the other what had happened to him, since he well informed him about the sensational discovery three hours before, an episode that he had already mentioned him by mobile, when he was on the volcano Rano Kau. Beta-Two rushed to the cave of the meteorite before everybody. Some armed watches, dressed with a white mantle, protected the relic there. The secret agent got on by a prototype laser sub-machine gun of which only the agents of the CIA could prepare in particular cases, with incomparable astuteness. Two surviving sentinels had decided to abandon the zone and escape; only doing so, they could divulge the news to the outside and do something to avoid that the relic was stolen. They still had a lot of time available: it was not so easy to take a similar meteorite away. Beta-Two didn't explain what he had done during the absence of the watches; he limited to take a wrap out from his small pocket, and he handed it to McNamara that snatched it and smiled, looking harmful. Beta-Two only added that he had gone out of the cave after few minutes. His interlocutor would have thought then, to haul the mystery as agreed three hours before and to take it away from the island.

<<Yet I have not foreseen that Easter Island people could have come back very soon to the cave and framed you>> Beta-Two explained, looking embittered <<I didn't even imagine, besides, that the native army would have won with such rapidity against Blackwell and rushed there. I would have warned you about the ranger, if I had known all this. >>

<<It was a fatality>> McNamara, looking satisfied, said <<It doesn't matter! We have carried it through. This is more important than any other thing. Now stop speaking. >>

The governor shook from his back a backpack off, he opened it, he seized a good bottle of champagne and two very long plastic glasses. He filled them almost up to the edge, and he handed one to the other, looking cordial.

<<I invite you to toast to our great victory>> he smiled <<The first of a long series. Life will still give us a lot of beautiful surprises.>>

The two approached the glasses and they drank all in one breath. Beta-Two swallowed, he threw the container on the sand and paid compliments for the good champagne.

<<Yes, but I don't believe you will congratulate with me after I have told you the truth on this whole story>> McNamara explained, laughing heartily <<Nevertheless you won't even have any time and strength to attack me, my friend. >>

He started narrating in details, looking firm and amazed. He saw that his interlocutor horrified, as soon as staring at him, looking irritated and impotent. He took a liking to see him reduced to that condition. Beta-Two tried to rebut and insult the other, but he could not do it. His head was spinning, and he felt weak. He collapsed and leaned his knees on the ground. He perceived a strange burning at his throat, and he moved his hands to his neck. His heart slowed down faster and faster and a collapse was close. Beta-Two breathed with difficulty. He missed oxygen. He opened his mouth in the attempt to expel something. He had his eyes wide open and looked cyanotic. <<I have given you a very powerful poison>> McNamara explained, fixing him pleased <<I had imbued the bottom of your glass just before our meeting: my last gift for your services. >>

Beta-two ended collapsing exhausted with his breastbone on the sand among the laughter of the other. He started flinging for some seconds, a prey to terrible spasms and convulsions. He vomited and remained with his open mouth and his look lost into space.

A strange buzz suddenly aroused him. He quickly stood up. A not very clear image was obvious.

“But where the hell am I?” Beta-Two thought “What the hell did it happen to me?”

He recognized the noise of the waves that broke on the sand. He saw that all around became clearer and clearer. The dark was growing in the beach of Cabo Norte by now. The secret agent had been unconscious for the whole day. He picked himself up off the ground with little difficulty, and he shook the sand on him. He had not swallowed a fatal dose of poison, but he looked not very happy of his stroke of luck. McNamara's words burned inside and they were consuming him more than cyanide.

“No, something like this cannot happen” Beta-Two thought, taking his face between his hands “Oh my God, how I could I be a party of that repugnant worm and contribute to his victory.”

He wanted to come back to America and tell everything to the authorities. Few people would have believed him; in every case, McNamara was surely far away. Nobody would have succeeded in stopping him in time. Everything was lost. Beta-Two started running at breakneck speed toward the hinterland. He crossed grassland looking like a mad and exasperated person. A strange folly was pervading his mind. He brought a too big burden and he could not stand it. He wanted to free himself of it, as soon as possible, in the way that he thought correct. He aspired to an exemplary purification for his naivety. He would have suffered. Nevertheless, what there was later could make him smile. Beta-Two saw in the obscurity his last comfort, his hope of peace and calm.

He reached the feet of the Cerro Terevaka, the highest mountain of the island, he took a mule track, he climbed in record time, and he was in front of the crevasse. He shook from his back his backpack off; he opened it and took a well sealed container. He always brought it with him in case of need. He would never have imagined having to use it that way. He took the cap away and drew the tank to his nose. Gasoline treated in particular way and recommended above all for off-road vehicles. Its usual pungent odour reassured him. Beta-Two pulled up his shirt. He had some tattoos that had the same theme on his mighty shoulders, on his breast and on his arms. American flags, the coat of arms of the armed forces and the most important dates of the American history. The secret agent lifted his

arms to the sky, and he whispered something. They perhaps were his last prayers or they were only blasphemies.

Beta-Two understood that the prophetic moment had come. He knocked the content of the tank over, and he sprinkled himself with gasoline from his head down to his toes. He snatched a lighter from his backpack and a piece of a pretty showy wood that he set on fire on the top, and he opened his arms. He held the torch in his right hand. He had been waiting for some second. He suddenly drew it to his abdomen and he set fire to himself. The flames quickly enveloped him in a lethal embrace. Beta-Two shouted in inhuman and desperate way, prey to atrocious pains. He saw the fire consuming him, looking distracted. He fell unarmed backwards. Death had finally smiled at him.

At the end

The clock told eleven o' clock on 19th January 2099. The dark sky of that evening didn't seem to darken the view of a so magnificent urban landscape. That metropolis was illuminated by a myriad of lights and it swarmed of people in every corner. It was the most populous on the planet at that time: it counted thirty million souls. Europeans, Australians and even quite a lot Americans lived there: it would have been unthinkable indeed till few decades before. A very brand new port and some boats with a good looking, to say the least eccentric, were the frame to the executive centre of the city, which introduced a myriad of imposing buildings with a very futuristic looking: the signs of an exceptional economic boom.

One of those skyscrapers housed a famous luxury hotel with marvellous rooms. Jeffery McNamara sat on an armchair in his suite: he stared at panorama from the wall glass door that was opposite, looking absorbed, sipping a cocktail. He looked at the clock, looking impatient and he understood that the moment had come. He stood up and went close to a ledge on which he had placed his backpack. He looked at it with shrewd air. He could not even believe that he had put back something so precious and the effort of all his strain in that poor container. He breathed deeply.

"You are great, Jeff" McNamara thought "Simply a myth. This story could not finish better than this way."

He took a telephone, he dialled a code that assured a secure line against the interceptions and he dialled a number. He didn't hold the line long.

<<Hello! Jeffery McNamara speaking. Everything had gone off smoothly. Yes, Beta-Two have detached a piece from the meteorite using the ray of a laser weapon. He has done all this fearing that I

had not succeeded in taking away the whole rock. The fragment is a rock with a rectangular shape: it is long around ten centimetres; it has a height of six and a thickness of five. According to the calculations, it has the proper structure to be reproduced endlessly in the laboratories. It will be the source of our invincibility. >> McNamara burst in a roaring laughter that let too much perfidy shine through, perhaps inhuman. <<Now I am already in Shanghai with the loot in the fixed place for the meeting with his collaborators, president Wu. I am waiting for them: I cannot wait to receive the agreed remuneration of ten billion dollars; nevertheless, I assure you that I am more anxious to help you on building the new bomb XZ-547. China will become the universal power that the history has ever known. The planet is prostrated at its feet, till the end of the time. >>

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