

Mind Travel is a ride through the history of man written in the chromosomes of mankind. At all levels it is two tales pitting opposites, ancient and modern, greed and understanding, interwoven and conflicting until they finally merge to one.

Mind Travel

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# **Mind Travel**

**Michael Pauszek**

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ISBN 978-1-60145-769-1

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2009

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### **Chapter 3**

Egypt, A Pharaoh's Grave, 2589 BCE

For hundreds of years and through the first three dynasties, the Pharaohs of L-Khem were buried with their personal belongings, household items and riches for their eternal afterlife as gods. This would continue for another 2200 years until L-Khem would be conquered by Alexander and renamed Egypt.

Snefru, first Pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty had just died. At the moment of Snefru's death, Khufu, his oldest son, became the second Pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty. Getting the gig had been easy; he was the legitimate heir of Snefru, the first-born son. But filling the sandals was a challenge; Khufu had never met his father.

"But Hemiunu, I've hated Snefru my whole life. I know I hated him even when I lay in my mother's belly."

It was late in the afternoon. The sand of the Nile valley that percolated under the relentless sun was cold compared to the anger now raging within young Pharaoh Khufu.

Hemiunu stood at the foot of the Pharaoh's throne. "Yes my king, but you have no choice. As the new Pharaoh, it is your duty to see to the burial of your father." Hemiunu, the new vizier of the new Pharaoh, crossed his arms over his chest, lending body language to his message. He wouldn't budge on this issue. It would've been a brazen gesture, possibly suicidal, for anyone but Hemiunu. In L-Khem, the Pharaoh held the power of death. But Hemiunu and Khufu had been friends since childhood. Hemiunu knew his friend and knew that Khufu trusted his judgment. It was his duty to act as advisor to Khufu.

Hemiunu continued. "It's most important that you honor Snefru, my lord. He is now a god of L-Khem. My king, when you pass, you too will want to be sent to your grave by your son and honored as a god. To honor him now is necessary to assure your own eternity."

"I know you are right, my friend. But I hate him. He's no god to me! I'll never forgive him for what he did to my mother."

"I know you feel you are right my king, you've told me the story many times. But right sometimes doesn't matter."

“It’s not a story, Hemiunu, it’s history!”

Pharaoh Huni, the last Pharaoh of the Third Dynasty, had taken Snefru’s mother, Meresankh, as his wife when Snefru was three years old. A year later she gave birth to a daughter Hetepheres, the first-born child of Huni and Snefru’s half sister. Meresankh died of puerperal sepsis just three days after giving birth. Hetepheres survived. Despite having two other wives, Huni died without a surviving male heir, thus ending the Third Dynasty.

At the time of Huni’s death, Snefru seized the moment and claimed the throne of L-Khem. To lend his claim of the throne some legitimacy, he linked himself to the Third Dynasty by taking his half sister Hetepheres as his first wife.

It wasn’t a pairing of love. Five days after their bonding and just three mornings after Khufu’s conception, Snefru abandoned his pregnant wife/half sister, Hetepheres. To escape the Third Dynasty’s bureaucracy and his new wife, Snefru moved his capitol from Memphis to Dashur leaving Hetepheres behind.

Snefru never returned to Memphis. He never again saw his wife, Hetepheres, or his first-born son, Khufu. As the new Pharaoh, Khufu was only summoned to Dashur upon Snefru’s death.

In his capacity as the new vizier, the chief advisor to the Pharaoh, Hemiunu was now reiterating for Khufu the nature of every Pharaoh’s first official duty. It was Khufu’s responsibility to order the ritual of final preparation and the burial of his predecessor, Snefru.

Though it only took a word from Khufu to begin Snefru’s burial process, the actual burial preparation for a Pharaoh takes years. A Pharaoh’s burial is their second official duty.

In the second year of his reign, Snefru had ordered the construction of his burial chamber. It was built and decorated by the most talented of artisans of L-Khem. Snefru visited the site many times, overseeing personally to the details.

Right after his death, in preparation for eternity as a god, Snefru’s body cavities were opened and the large organs removed. They were preserved in four jars. The body was rubbed with scented

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oil and the cavities packed with salt. For four moon cycles the body was then dried in the heat of the desert. But it still took the new Pharaoh's order to begin the burial ceremony.

"Nevertheless, my lord, it is your duty."

Khufu nodded. "See to the arrangements for his burial Hemiunu."

Hemiunu smiled, dropped his crossed arms and bowed. "Yes my king." Hemiunu left the chamber and Khufu to his anger. The linen cloth that screened the throne area rustled slightly as he left. Hemiunu wondered. *Was it a dust swirl or the heat of Khufu's anger that caused the linen's movement?*

After Hemiunu left, Khufu sat, without moving, on the throne. *Why am I here? Could I just have said no?* Now that he was Pharaoh of L-Khem, a living god, he even had servants watching his defecation. *I miss my freedom and life in Memphis.* His life was no longer his own.

Only fifteen sun cycles earlier, Khufu's life had been simpler and in his mind, better. In subsequent days Khufu would mentally retreat to that day whenever he needed relief from the present. He and Hemiunu had spent that last day of freedom in Memphis' market. Returning to his mother's home in the late afternoon, they rested at the door. Khufu remembered laughing as he looked at his and Hemiunu's robes covered with the dust of the street. The dirt on Hemiunu's head iced from drops of sweat that had run down and then evaporated. He laughed again, at Hemiunu's head. "You should go stick your head in the river"

Hemiunu pointed back at Khufu's own shaved head. "After you."

It was a perfect day until an old man walked up and stopped before the two young men. Khufu thought, *I haven't laughed since that day.*

The old man bent and sat down in front of Khufu and Hemiunu. "I am Kagemni, the vizier of Snefru."

That was the wrong thing to say as an introduction to Khufu. "Why care I?"

“You care, my lord, because your father, the Pharaoh Snefru, is now dead. Are you not, Khufu his eldest son, the son of his first wife Hetepheres?”

Khufu looked down at the man’s feet and responded coolly. “Yes, I’m the son of Hetepheres, I do not know my father.”

“You are now Pharaoh my lord.” The old man stood back up, knelt again before Khufu and bowed his head to the dust at Khufu’s feet.

Khufu, initially stunned by the man’s statement, recovered quickly. He turned to Hemiunu. “Did you bring this old man here to do this, to taunt me?”

Hemiunu shook his head.

Continuing with what he thought was a ruse, Khufu said. “If I’m to be Pharaoh, then you will have to be my vizier, Hemiunu.”

The old man looked up, his face now covered with a mask of dust and dismay. “Bu!” He stopped before completing that first word. It was not his place to question a living god. When Snefru died Khufu became a living god, the new Pharaoh. “It will be as you command my Pharaoh. All decisions now are yours alone. If you please my Pharaoh, you must now come to Dashur, the capitol of your father. Your royal vessel awaits you.” He stood and again bowed low. Standing for a final time, he backed away three steps, turned and walked in the direction of the river.

Now two weeks later, Khufu scowled and remembered. As he watched Kagemni walk away he still believed that it was all a hoax. But he liked a good joke. He believed that Hemiunu was involved. Poking Hemiunu in the ribs, Khufu chuckled and they followed the old man as he walked toward the river. *I wish now that I had listened to Hemiunu when he denied that he knew anything.* Khufu stopped smiling when he reached the shore of the Nile. It was also the last time he remembered laughing.

As the two young men stood on the shore and watched, Kagemni waded out toward a sailing vessel anchored in the shallows. But it wasn’t just any Nile River dowry. As Khufu watched, Kagemni waded out to a vessel as long as four river dowries. It was painted bright blue and topped with a small cabin gilded in gold! In the late

afternoon light the color of the cabin seemed to shine as bright as a glowing lantern. The vessel's mast, shaped like an obelisk, appeared to rise right out of the cabin. The last twinkle of humor disappeared from Khufu's eyes as Kagemni reached the vessel and was pulled up out of the waist deep water onto the vessel's deck.

As they stood there on the shore, Khufu could see Kagemni motion to two men on the deck. Those two jumped down into the water bearing to the shore a litter trimmed in gold and blue just like the vessel.

"That is for you Khufu." Hemiunu said. "Do you not see now that this is real? Can I really be vizier?"

Khufu didn't respond. This was all horribly real.

The two men bearing the golden litter emerged from the river. They set the litter on the ground before Khufu and prostrated themselves to him. Khufu looked at Hemiunu who motioned for him to sit down. Khufu knew that at that moment he should have turned away from the water and raced back up the bank to his mother's home. But instead, he trusted Hemiunu's direction and sat down.

After sitting on the litter, he started to get back up but Hemiunu put his hand on Khufu's shoulder. The two bearers rose and without a word they lifted the litter and carried Khufu above the water to the vessel. Hemiunu walked along side his friend, his hand still touching Khufu's shoulder. Kagemni helped Khufu board the vessel.

"Yes, you'll be my vizier." Khufu said as he sat with Hemiunu before the cabin. The sail had been raised and they were headed north, carried by wind and the current of the Nile. That brief time aboard the vessel and feel of the breeze would be Khufu's last bit of emotional peace.

"This place even smells of Snefru, Hemiunu. I want to go back to Memphis." The friends were in Snefru's royal quarters, now the rooms of Khufu.

"But my king, we must stay here at least until Snefru is entombed. Then if you wish, you may move your capitol anywhere, even back to Memphis. For now you have to honor him as a god."

"I know, I know please do not tell me again." Khufu turned away and closed his eyes so that Hemiunu wouldn't see the tears that ran down his cheeks. He wiped his face on his tunic. When he turned back to Hemiunu, Khufu nodded but kept his eyes closed. He would endure. But at that moment it felt more like it was his life that had ended. At times he wished that it were he who was about to be buried.

For the next four moon cycles, time for Khufu moved slower than a desert tortoise at midday. Four cycles and four days after his arrival in Dashur, Khufu finally presided over the burial of Snefru.

The burial of a Pharaoh is traditionally a ritualized three-day ceremony. Fortunately for Khufu, his involvement as the new Pharaoh would be limited only to the third and final day.

On that third day, after completion of the last ceremony, Khufu and Hemiunu stood together on the north side of Snefru's burial monument. They were standing directly in front of the opening that led into Snefru's burial chamber. Though he hated the entombed Snefru, when Khufu looked up, he admired the monument's majesty. The red rays of the day's fading sun were striking obliquely across the north surface of the structure. Those rays added depth to the stone's essential color.

Called the Red Pyramid because of the color of the limestone at Dashur from which its blocks were carved, to date it was the largest and most spectacular structure ever built by man. The pyramid had taken seventeen years to complete in preparation for Snefru's eternal life.

"Is it not magnificent my lord? Snefru's grave is the finest pyramid ever erected in L-Khem." Then with a little familial pride he continued. "You remember, Khufu, Imhotepp is my ancestor. He built the very first pyramid, the Step Pyramid. It too is magnificent. But this Red Pyramid of Snefru has the perfect pyramid shape.

"Thank you for herding me through the last four moon cycles Hemiunu."

"I am your vizier, my king. It is my duty. But you're not a sheep. I merely reminded you of what you already knew. You may not have been serious when you asked me to be your vizier but I'm here to

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serve you. My lord, you have truly honored yourself today by presiding over Snefru's burial."

"It doesn't change my anger for him. But now I'll make that anger serve me. I'm determined that I will triumph over he who I have hated for so long." He looked at his friend. "And you will have to help me Hemiunu. I will triumph because you the descendant of Imhotepp will make my tomb even grander than the Red Pyramid."

"Yes my lord. I'll see to it."

Two days after the completion of the burial rite for Snefru, Khufu returned to Memphis. He had decided to make it his capitol. Khufu never again saw Dashur. Back at Memphis, he and Hemiunu were kept busy administering L-Khem. Though he was glad to be back in Memphis, Khufu's life settled into a routine but it wasn't of his choosing. For Khufu happiness would be as elusive as peace in the Middle East five thousand years into the future.

One year and two moon cycles after returning to Memphis, vizier Hemiunu finally had a plan. To emphasize the importance of the moment, he formally appeared before Khufu's throne. "My lord, it's time to prepare for your eternity. You too will have a pyramid." He gave the idea a few moments to settle in. "I would build it at Giza, behind the Sphinx. I've been there. It's a truly regal site, much better than Dashur." He knew that was a good point to make.

"The limestone bedrock there is only a few feet below the sand surface. And it'll be easy to quarry." He laid a drawing on the floor before Khufu. With the Sphinx in the foreground, the pyramid did appear majestic.

Khufu studied the drawing. "Is it larger than the Red Pyramid? It must be grander than his pyramid."

"Your pyramid will be the largest and greatest ever built, my king. It will symbolize forever your people's love of their Pharaoh and god Khufu."

Khufu smiled and put his hand on Hemiunu's shoulder. "Make it so my vizier."

The Nile Valley kingdom of the Pharaohs is flanked to both the sunrise and sunset by inhospitable desert. The desert is a nearly perfect defense. This was fortunate for the Pharaohs. Had defense been a resource priority, elaborate tombs for dead Pharaohs wouldn't have been an option. But the Nile Valley was so isolated, that not even the L-Khem written language, hieroglyphics, bore any resemblance to the earlier Sanskrit that had spread from the sub continent's Indus valley to the nearby Middle East.

But great natural defense didn't resolve the challenge for Khufu of his own postmortem security. Dead Pharaoh tomb security had always been a problem in L-Khem. Just two weeks after Hemiunu presented his plan for Khufu's pyramid, word came from Dashur that the tomb of Snefru had been desecrated. Its burial chamber had been looted of all valuables. That meant that the god, Snefu, would be impoverished for eternity. This was a dichotomy for Khufu. He was simultaneously delighted and dismayed at the news. It was much too easy to rob a Pharaoh tomb.

Khufu knew that he too could be robbed of the riches and comforts he wanted for his eternal after life. He didn't consider it relevant that a few days later many of the gold objects from Snefu's tomb could be found in his treasury in Memphis. His dislike for Snefu was unchanged; but he didn't want to suffer a similar fate.

Khufu immediately summoned his vizier to the throne room to discuss the problem. "Hemiunu, I must have more than the greatest of all pyramids. I want to spend my eternity in comfort and safety. My tomb must be safe for all time. I don't want my burial chamber defiled by robbers."

Hemiunu looked distressed. "That will be difficult my king. We can't hide a pyramid." He stood and stroked his head with his hands moving them back from his forehead to his occiput. Then he laced his fingers together behind his neck. "But I'll find a way."

Hemiunu's smile assured Khufu that he could solve the problem.

Hemiunu truly agreed with Khufu. Building a monument like the Red Pyramid and protecting the burial chamber entrance by only piling in sand and rock was foolish. He had to find a way to protect

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the mummy and treasure of Khufu. He wouldn't repeat this mistake of the past. He turned and left the throne room. This would take some thought.

Three months later he had a plan. He returned to Khufu and bade him to follow, away from any prying ears. They walked to the east, leaving Memphis in the distance. Hemiunu had brought a walking staff and as he spoke he diagrammed his plan in the sand.

Khufu attentively watched and listened. Whenever Hemiunu paused Khufu motioned for him to continue. "Tell me more."

Hemiunu continued, finally completing the description of his plan.

"My lord, we will conceal your real burial chamber with its passage to the heavens above the designated burial chamber. The designated chamber with its stone sarcophagus will be built as planned. It will be used as an entry point to the true burial chamber. You will be hidden away in the real chamber for all eternity."

"When the time comes to place me in the chamber for my death journey you think I will be safe?"

"My king, it will be known only to me and I will also be gone." He didn't want any permanent record and he smeared the drawing with his foot.

Khufu was pleased with the proposed plan. He slapped Hemiunu on the shoulder. "A most wise plan my vizier. Let the construction begin."

At the beginning of the next dry season, work commenced on what would become the Great Pyramid. It began just four days after the second anniversary celebration of Khufu's reign. Hemiunu gathered a large group of laborers at Giza. Now the real genius of Hemiunu, his engineering expertise, was most apparent.

Under Hemiunu's personal direction, an area of the Giza plateau to the west and north of the Sphinx was cleared of sand down to base rock. A level foundation had to be prepared for the largest structure ever built by man. To accomplish this precision, Hemiunu used the water of the Nile, L-Khem's river of life.

He directed that a series of interconnected parallel channels be carved in the base rock over the entire area to be occupied by the pyramid. The carved channels were then filled with water from the Nile. Using the water's surface as a leveling guide, the remaining stone could be chipped away. The resultant rock surface was now perfectly level and nearly smooth.

Once the site was prepared, Hemiunu returned to Giza from Memphis. He stepped out the rough dimensions of the pyramid. Satisfied that the site was ready, it was time to commit to building. Hemiunu began on the north side, the most important of the four surfaces. It was aligned to face the only fixed structure in the night sky, Polaris. Finally, using simple geometry, he etched into the limestone base rock the limits of the other three sides of the structure. It was immense.

Then, beginning in the middle of what would be the north wall, Hemiunu scratched dimensions for a tunnel. It started at the north wall line and ran to the center of the pyramid. It was narrow, only slightly wider than Hemiunu's own shoulders. Hemiunu directed his stonecutters to begin there at the north wall line and steadily deepen the tunnel as it extended toward the center. The tunnel was to be his height and reach a maximum depth equal to thrice Hemiunu's height. Just before ending near the center of the pyramid, the bottom of the tunnel was to grow rapidly shallower, ultimately climbing to a depth of twice Hemiunu's height.

Finally, at the center of the pyramid space, at the southern end of the conduit, Hemiunu scratched in the bedrock the dimensions marking a subsurface chamber. It too would be carved to twice his height. It measured thirteen strides long and six strides wide. Satisfied that his site manager understood the plan, he went back to Memphis.

When the excavation was completed, he was summoned back to Giza. He could see with satisfaction as he approached the plateau the tunnel opening at the north wall and the open top of the subterranean room. Once at the building site the quality of the work was apparent. The carved surfaces of the channel and room had been carefully smoothed and plastered. Hemiunu walked down the passage and then up, his head nearly brushing the top. Entering the subterranean room

he looked up at the blue sky. He knew the space was enjoying its limited moment in the sun. Soon it would be covered forever.

At the west end of the subterranean space, near the wall, a long stone box rose from the floor. It had been meticulously carved from the bedrock. The box was to be Khufu's sarcophagus and this room, Khufu's burial chamber. *At least that was what the people of Khufu's world were being led to believe*, thought Hemiunu.

Satisfied with the excavation, Hemiunu stayed to supervise the setting of the first layer of limestone blocks. The work started on the north wall, directly adjacent to the sides of the tunnel opening, now referred to as the royal passage.

Thus far Khufu's pyramid layout was very similar to the Red Pyramid, nothing revealing the real plan. "If it looks just like other pyramids no one will think to look for another chamber." Hemiunu had told Khufu.

Given his plan's complexity, it'd still be many layers of block before the real burial chamber of Khufu was constructed and covered.

After the precise setting of the north wall blocks, Hemiunu was confident that the exterior of the structure would progress without problem. Hemiunu remained at Giza until the burial chamber ceiling stones arrived from the quarry. Then he met with the construction manager who was confused when he saw the 8 massive stones, seven weighing three tons, and the last, much longer, topping 5 tons.

"The ceiling of this burial chamber will be arched not corbelled. The north and south walls will lean in at the same angle as the pyramid's surface."

"It would be easier to make it corbelled my lord."

"This is not the Red Pyramid. I know it would be simpler to stack stone in that narrowing sequence but I don't want the ceiling to look like the underside of a staircase. I want the ceiling to be arched just like the pyramid."

The manager looked puzzled. Hemiunu knew that the manager to be a fine man and meticulous in his attention to detail. But it was obvious that he didn't know how to accomplish what Hemiunu was requesting. But Hemiunu had a plan. The solution, like every other great idea of man, was brilliantly simple.

"I have given this much thought." He drew on papyrus as he spoke. "Carve a groove above the north and south walls of the room to the size and depth of your fist. Then fill the room and royal passage with sand from the desert. Stand these eight ceiling stones upright along those two grooved sides. That stone", he pointed to the ceiling stone that was much longer, "goes at the west end of the south wall, above the sarcophagus. You will have to cut away more bedrock behind the chamber wall in that area so it will be only as high as the others when it stands. Also, cut a groove in that stone at the same length as the other stones." Hemiunu continued to diagram what he was wanting. "Do you understand?"

The man nodded.

"This arrangement, especially the placement of that last stone, is crucial. Once the eight stones are in place, stack blocks along the top of the east and west walls to completely enclose the area above the chamber. Then fill the chamber and the area within the stones with more sand. When that is done I will return."

The construction manager was bewildered. He understood the how but not the why of the plan. He thought it all a waste of time. "It will take us fifty eight-sun cycles to accomplish what you ask".

Hemiunu looked at the manager who was many years his senior. He nodded that he understood but was not impressed that this would delay construction. It had to be as he instructed. "I believe that you are right." He left for Memphis.

When the stones were in place and the space was filled with sand, Hemiunu returned again to Giza.

The construction manager stood before Hemiunu. "What do you wish for us to do now mighty vizier?"

"Begin removing the sand through the tunnel. As the sand level begins to fall, press the top of all eight of the ceiling stones forward toward the center of the chamber."

The manager rubbed his baldhead through his vegetable fiber wig. "As you command lord."

As the sand level fell, the eight stones were tipped slowly inward. The construction manager watched as the eight opposing stones of the ceiling arch came to rest against each other, forming the

room's arched ceiling. Then held in place by their weight against each other and not slipping because their lower edge was in the stone grove, the ceiling was secure. The placing of the ceiling stones had added three months to the total construction time of Khufu's tomb. This had confused the builders, but all were pleased with the result.

In all previous pyramid construction, four small passages, called gateways to the heavens, were carved into the south wall of the burial chamber. They always extended upward and opened on the four pyramid sides near the apex. They are to allow the Pharaoh god freedom of movement into the heavens. The rest of the space inside of the pyramid above the burial chamber is filled with imperfect stone, sand and rock. But Hemiunu's plan was much more complex. He had the four passages carved into the south wall of the subterranean chamber but none extended more than the length of a man. His only answer when questioned was "They will be completed later."

The work directly above the arched ceiling progressed slowly. Fortunately Khufu accommodated his tomb builders and remained physically healthy.

In addition to the challenges of the construction, an even greater challenge for Hemiunu was security. How does one create a secret burial chamber and place a second stone sarcophagus in the pyramid, as it is being constructed on the plateau of Giza, in plain view of all and still avoid alerting the whole of L-Khem to the secret? Hemiunu's solution was to have the real sarcophagus carved from one of the pyramid's discarded blocks. One moonless night, weeks after the end of the building season, he had the real sarcophagus placed on the growing pyramid, directly above the designated chamber. It was inverted and partially covered with sand. During the next building season, to the poor souls who labored to drag the building stones up ramps of debris, it looked like a stone had simply been left behind.

Construction continued under Hemiunu's direction for twenty-four years, the pyramid by then dominating the Giza plateau. Then in the middle of that building season Hemiunu fell ill and died. But before he died, knowledge of his plan and the task of completion of the Great Pyramid passed to his successor, his eldest son, Alaz, the next vizier of Khufu, chosen by Hemiunu for Khufu.

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It was very fortunate for Khufu that the secret of his pyramid was passed from father to son. Khufu, who would be honored thousands of years later as the builder of the Great Pyramid but whose only contribution was to approve the plan of another, suffered from his parent's royal inbreeding. He developed dementia in the twenty-first year of his reign. By the time of Hemiunu's death, Khufu didn't even remember that he was Pharaoh. On that day sitting at his mother's door he had made the perfect choice in Hemiunu. It was also fortunate for Khufu that Alaz was an equally fine person and engineer.

The world's greatest building project depended on two men, a father and son who history would never credit. Hemiunu's true creative genius, the secret burial chamber, would remain unknown as long as the Khufu's grave remained secure.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Emperor Is Dead, Long Live The Emperor**

The “bat phone” rang, adding its unique irritating quality to the noisy background drone in the George Washington University ER. The ring meant that more work was on the way. It was never a pleasant prospect.

Michelle, the shift charge nurse, was working triage. She answered the bat phone before the third ring. As she stood at the counter where the phone sat, she shifted from one foot to the other, like a thoroughbred ready to break from the gate. She had trouble standing still. All shift she’d been involved in a minimum of three simultaneous crises. She needed to move; the adrenaline was flowing.

Despite her simple, loose fitting scrub outfit, she still looked shapely. She had no need to jog; she ran around the ER for hours every shift. Her straw blond hair was pulled back tightly off her face and forehead to keep it out of the way. This nicely accented the sweep of her cheeks back to her comely ears. At twenty-seven, she was still quite youthful and looked even younger, way too young to be a seasoned nurse. But that look only confounded the losers that tried to take advantage of Michelle. Just four years earlier she had been a naive graduate from nursing school without any ER experience. In those four years, faced with the challenge and fire in the trenches, she had matured. Now she could handle any medical crisis. More important to her psychological survival, she could emotionally handle the bouquet of social problems that flowed into the department. A year ago she had become shift charge. Today she had regrets. The flow into the ER had grown to be a tsunami.

Back in the late 1980’s, in a move to humanize psychiatric health care, many long-term psychiatric facilities were closed, mainstreaming all those people that had been kept locked away from society for years. That shifted those patients’ psychiatric care to the outpatient arena. Then in the 1990’s the problem exploded. The federal financial support for health care withered. Many of those former cloistered psychiatric patients moved to the street, incapable

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of dealing with the normal activities of self-care and uncomfortable with the structure in the available supervised housing. ERs all over the country were suddenly burdened with a large dysfunctional and insolvent population. George Washington's Emergency Department in the nation's capitol got a very large slice of that sour grape pie. GW ER now evaluated more than ninety thousand patients with their medical and psychosocial dilemmas each year. Thousands of those patients lived on the street, complained of chronic pain, were drug seeking or had borderline personality disorder. Many had all of those problems. None of them would ever get better and all of them frustrated health care providers.

By the end of every shift Michelle's feet hurt and she felt as though her intelligence had been sucked from her brain.

"GW ER, this is Michelle, go ahead."

The bat phone was a name given to the dedicated phone line that received reports from medic units. The phone was flat and black, mildly resembling the caped crusader's telephone in the television series, Batman. It's greatest similarity to that TV phone was that it only rang with bad news.

"GW, this is medic 25. We are on route to your facility with a Caucasian male, estimated to be in his early forties. We were called to his residence by his wife. He had returned home from work babbling about killing the emperor. On the scene the wife reported to us that he had no history of similar behavior and no history of psychiatric disease or drug use. At present he isn't giving us any other information. His vital signs are pulse 108, blood pressure 136 over 84 and biox 100%. Our ETA is 12 minutes. Do you request any further?"

"Medic 25, have you administered any treatment and what's his glucose."

"That's a negative for treatment, GWER and we haven't yet checked a blood sugar. We'll have that for you on arrival and will call if it's abnormal. Anything further GW?"

"No medic 25, we'll await your arrival in trauma 3. KWH 277 clear."

"Medic 25 clear."

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Michelle hung up the phone. She walked over to Barry the nurse assigned to the trauma rooms. "We've got an incoming crazy."

He looked up from a chart. Both wore light blue scrubs, the designated color for the emergency area at George Washington. The color-coding of clothing by department made it easy for the administrators to distinguish, at a glance, where an employee worked when they were walking in the hall or in the cafeteria line. It wasn't an effective security measure.

Barry was seventeen years older than Michelle but still only forty-four. The pace in the ER tended to attract the young and encourage maturing nurses to migrate toward administrative jobs or elsewhere in the hospital. For that reason, at forty-four, Barry was the oldest nurse working today.

"What else isn't new, that's all we've had today!" Barry is well seasoned and has excellent nursing skills. He had trained and served as a nurse in the military before returning to civilian life. While in the military he had been based in Germany and Texas. He had a wealth of experience and stories. As was his nature, with each repeating of one of his tales the story grew ever longer and ever more detailed. To describe Barry in one word would be to say he is colorful. He had been born in Indiana but fancied himself a descendant of Plains Indians. He wore a piece of Elk antler on a rawhide strap about his neck and frequently sported a feather in his ponytail. He is a part of the new breed of nurses, men in a female dominated occupation. He wouldn't ever be a charge nurse though, like so many other men in nursing, he'd never been able to suppress his tendency to verbalize what he was thinking. These nurse men brought all of their male blue jay limitations with them to a profession that had always been dominated by nightingales. But even with those gender limitations and lack of a verbal filter, Barry had always been very caring. The unit manager liked Barry; she just wished that he'd never gone to man camp.

Barry had continued to work in the ER because he liked the challenge of seeing acute medical and surgical diseases. But he didn't like psychiatry. In the environment of concise disease identification

and treatment, along with the “treat and street” emphasis of the ER, psychiatric problems were a pain in the deep south of the lower back.

Nevertheless, despite the distaste for psychology, it was now the ER that was the arena in which much of the craziness of humanity played out.

So Barry was ready for a screaming, raving maniac when Medic 25 pulled into the ambulance bay. But rather than what he expected, on arrival medic 25’s patient was sitting on the transport cart, calmly talking to the medic. Dried salt streaks marked his cheeks, evidence that he’d been crying. Without protest, he quietly moved to the hospital cart when the medics held their gurney next to it. No ranting. No raving. No cursing. But he did look resolute.

“This is bad Michelle.” Barry said as he walked past Michelle. “This one is quiet and looks determined. At least when they’re bubbling with profane verbiage they’re predictable. Kind of like a firecracker on an open hand. This guy looks more like a firecracker in a closed hand. When he goes off he’s going to cause a lot more destruction.”

Was the man sitting in front of Barry on the ER gurney really a firecracker in a closed hand? Maybe.

The man sat, wearing a somber mask, seeming to be occupied elsewhere. He wore a button down blue sport shirt and khaki pants. The clothes looked to have been freshly laundered. He had recently shaved. He didn’t speak unless answering a question. His voice was calm as he answered questions.

After watching Barry make the patient comfortable, the medics moved their stretcher out of the room toward the ambulance bay. Barry excused himself from the patient and followed the EMT and Paramedic out into the hall.

“Do you have anymore information?”

“Only his name, Martin Mathis. His wife told us that. He just kept repeating that he killed Emperor Commudus!”

“Really! That’s pretty crazy! I have never heard that one before. Be careful out there guys, it’s a jungle.” Barry walked back into the trauma room.

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“Mister Mathis, I’m Barry, one of the nurses. What happened to you?”

“I killed the Emperor!”

“I don’t understand?”

“I killed the Emperor!”

“We don’t have an emperor. Mister Mathis.”

“I know we don’t have an Emperor, Barry, I’m not stupid! But I killed Emperor Commudus!”

“Who is Emperor Commudus?”

“I didn’t know him personally but my commander, General Lucius Septimus Severus, ordered me to kill him!”

“I don’t know who? What did you say?”

“I said I was ordered to kill him by General Lucius Septimus Severus the commander of the Army of the Rhine, the northern army.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“I’m part of the northern army of the Roman Empire, commanded by General Severus. Commudus was a corrupt emperor. General Severus ordered me to eliminate him!”

Barry knew that this line of questioning was going nowhere. He would just leave it for the doc. “Okay, what is your first name?”

“Martin.”

“Do you have any health problems?”

“No.”

“Are you allergic to any medications?”

“No.”

Barry was puzzled. All of Martin Mathis’ other answers seemed rational and appropriate except for his chief complaint. “Do you know what year it is?”

“2005.”

“I don’t understand. If you know your name and the year, how can you believe that you killed an emperor? We don’t have any emperor.”

“I know that! This is America not Italy!”

“Then how is it that you think that you killed an emperor?”

"I did, I can't explain it but I just did!" For the first time Mathis was becoming mildly agitated.

Barry too was getting frustrated. He surrendered the questioning. He repeated Martin's vital signs and then passed his chart to the attending physician, Dana Gaston, the Medical Director of GW ER.

"I'm glad you're here today Doctor Gaston. This guy's confusing." Barry rolled his eyes. "He seems appropriate in all ways except that he is convinced that he killed someone he says was the emperor!"

"What!"

"I'm not kidding! He thinks he killed Emperor Commudus!"

Dana Gaston M.D. would have been of average height in 1956 when he was born, but at 5'8, he was now short by American male standards. Still, despite his stature, he had few equals in the realm of patient care. Like many others in medicine, his life course to his present position had been circuitous. Beginning college as an engineering student, he quickly became bored. He switched to a premed track. After completing medical school, he started an Internal Medicine residency but was again disillusioned. After completing that residency he switched to Emergency Medicine. By then he'd begun to wonder if he, himself, was a chronic malcontent. But Dana found himself in Emergency Medicine. It fit like a powdered exam glove. The cliché of moving forward and never looking back applied to Dana. Last year the medical students at George Washington University voted him teacher of the year.

"Barry, while I start seeing the patient would you please call the crisis team and security? We can't ignore a confession of murder, no matter how bizarre."

After Barry left the room Martin Mathis looked about the exam room. The monitor on the wall above his head beeped softly. An overhead spotlight was tucked up against the ceiling. An x-ray viewing box hung on the wall at his feet, next to the room's door.

Doctor Gaston went into the trauma room and introduced himself to Martin Mathis. Highly trained in medical observation, even as he did his introduction, he began his patient assessment. Dana noted that the patient was clean, his hair neatly combed and he was

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well dressed. His shirt was not rumpled and was properly buttoned. Getting the buttons wrong is common when people are agitated. His respiratory rate was normal and the monitor counted his heart rate at a boring seventy-six. He didn't look like the typical psychotic patient to Dana. He pulled a chair up to the side of the cart and sat down. To keep the situation calm he placed his own eyes at a level below those of Mister Mathis, in a sense surrendering the high ground.

"Good evening Mister Mathis, I'm Doctor Gaston. What happened today that you were sent to the ER?"

"I was upset and that upset my wife."

"Was there something in particular that happened?"

"I walked into the house, put down my briefcase and told my wife I'd killed Emperor Commudus."

"Where is Commudus Emperor?"

"In Rome."

"When did you kill him?"

"In 192 AD."

"Why do you think you killed the Emperor?"

"I was ordered to. Conservo Imperium!"

"What?"

"Save the Empire!"

"Do you know Latin, Mister Mathis?"

"No."

Intrigued, Doctor Gaston pursued it a little further. "Did you ever use that expression before today?"

"No."

"Ever spoken Latin before today?"

"No."

"Why were you told to kill the Emperor?"

"Commudus was corrupt. He needed to be eliminated so that General Severus could replace him."

"How do you know someone in 192 AD?"

"I am..." Martin looked around the ER room again. "I was a centurion in Lucius Septimus Severus' Northern Army of the Rhine."

"What year is it now?"

"2005."

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“You seem logical and appropriate, how is it that you could be a centurion in 192 AD and be sitting here in Washington in 2005?”

“I don’t know.”

“That Latin phrase, where did you hear it?”

“It was the command from General Severus himself.” Martin Mathis moved his hands to his face and began to whimper softly.

Dana was now as confused as Barry. Martin didn’t appear to be psychotic. Doctor Gaston had seen many schizophrenic patients. They all had elaborate delusional support structures involving all areas of their lives. Martin was delusional but his delusion was very narrow. Dana stood up.

“I’m going to examine you now, Mister Mathis.”

As Dana listened to Martin’s heart, a registration clerk came into the trauma room. All of the staff and support team working with Doctor Gaston felt comfortable around him. He encouraged them to enter the room and to do what they needed even when he was with the patient. This way his patients were registered more quickly and their workup expedited. After all, nothing happened in health care until patients were registered and a computer number generated.

“Hello Mister Mathis, I’m Marsha from registration. I need to get some information from you and your consent to be seen here in the ER.”

He nodded.

“Are you married?”

“Yes.”

“What is your wife’s name?”

“Suzanne.”

“Have you ever been here before?”

“No.”

“Do you have an insurance card?”

“Yes, its in my wallet.”

“Where do you work?”

“McFarland Pharmaceutical Research.”

That last response got Doctor Gaston’s attention. He interrupted Marsh. “What do you do at McFarland?”

“I’m a pharmacist, I do research in neurologically active drugs.”

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“That is very interesting. What have you been working on recently?”

Mind Travel is a ride through the history of man written in the chromosomes of mankind. At all levels it is two tales pitting opposites, ancient and modern, greed and understanding, interwoven and conflicting until they finally merge to one.

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