



Out of the floor of the room, on powerful springs, arose two caskets. . . . In each of the caskets, which were supported on golden-onyx pedestals of carved mammoths, lying in repose, in elaborate costumes, were two figures.

Before the Ice Age

by Alfred Fritchey

Foreword

In reading this most amazing, yet truthful story, please remember that I am not a trained writer. I am only a tunnel and mineworker, and I've written down the things as I've seen them, therefore kindly excuse my English as well as grammar, as I am aware that neither is perfect.

I.

UP on a certain job they were putting a tunnel through a granite mountain. It was a big job and they were working day and night. They had cut through a vein of water, a vein of onyx and a vein of silver. The silver especially was particularly beautiful, being in the spreading out, branched form of an immense tree.

However the lead was not followed: for the tunnel was a power tunnel, designed to hold water; and as time was a big factor, and the expense of the project was colossal, such by-plays as silver mines were unimportant. Besides, it was the expert opinion that the silver tree in the tunnel was a mere pocket.

But they did strike something in that mountain that was no by-play. It was neither gold nor diamonds: though in the opinion of a certain professor it was a more remarkable find than either. And it halted the tunnel advance for three shifts, day and night. What then was the find: a find which made tunnel No. 10 in Bald Mountain so celebrated!

Let us review the affair. As I have remarked, they worked two shifts, a day and a night one. This left an interval between, as the shifts were eight hours each. This interval was split into two parts for a purpose, one part being allotted to each shift. Drilling as they did during the working hours, and putting in the charges just before quitting time, it was customary for the shift boss of the retiring

shift to set off all the explosions he had arranged, immediately after work. This left a period for the air to clear before another shift came on.

Of course it was necessary to keep an accurate count on the shots heard; otherwise the next shift going in was in danger of their lives. That's why the shooting was allotted to the shift bosses. Even with such precautions, it was not always possible to be certain of the tabulation; for in spite of efforts to prevent it, two shots sometimes came at the same time. A very loud blast was occasionally put down as two shots; but this was mere guess work. And when lives depended on it, it was the worst of judgment to come to such a conclusion.

There are persons of the opinion, however, that the explosion which wrecked tunnel No. 10 was not due to an unexploded shot. How else then do they explain it? They claim there was some kind of an explosive in the chamber which was revealed by the blast.

However, let us observe the shift working at the time of the explosion and see what we may see. This particular night, Dan Parker was the shift boss. Daley of the day gang had reported all O.K. So Parker and his crew rode into the tunnel with no apprehension whatever.

This fellow, Parker, was a red-faced man, jovial, puffy and fat. He wheezed continually, as if he had the asthma. Claimed he got it from being gassed in the World War. He was a good shift boss, tolerant, resourceful and good-natured.

This night there was a fellow, named Reno Bob, as one of the miners. They worked three miners with each shift, each miner having a helper. Then too there was a crowd of muckers; fellows who shoveled up the mud, dirt and rock into the miniature train which hauled out the debris.

Reno was not a regular nightshift man;

he belonged to Daley's gang. But a rock had fallen on one of the miners, and the management wishing to lose no time, and expecting a new man every minute, had shifted Bob over to Parker's crowd.

This Reno Bob was built like Hercules. He had a dark, saturnine face and coal black eyes; a very devil of a handsome fellow. He was not especially pleased to hear he was put on the night shift, for he had been in the habit of taking Mrs. Parker, Dan's wife, to the movies down at the pavilion in the evening, and this change would cut him out of such diversion. However, this was not unknown to Dan. Reno was a welcome visitor to the Parker home, whether he worked days or nights, being a great friend of the night shift boss.

Mrs. Parker was a very pretty woman with a flood of yellow hair, and fascinating green eyes. No one would have ever thought her likeness was behind that thin stone wall which Parker and Reno Bob faced when they came on shift that fatal night. But so it was.

The story is almost unbelievable for weirdness. Talk about King Tut and his tomb. His place wasn't in it with what they found up on the Bald King Mountain. And so many things happened afterward that couldn't be explained by any modern methods. But I anticipate my story.

You see, the watchman at the tunnel mouth always gave the new shift coming on the result of the last boss's tabulation. This night he merely said: "Everything to the good." Now if Daley had missed a count, he should have said so. No one would have blamed him for that. That's merely human nature; not always to be sure. Anyhow Daley had orders to report so, if he hadn't caught a full count. And he certainly failed to carry out orders.

THE new shift rode to their working place in a long string of dinkey cars, run by a fellow

whose long legs were nearly in his face as he drove the tiny electric locomotive which pulled the train. This fellow's name was Mat; probably an abbreviation for Matthew; but he is of no interest in the story. Anybody else could have pulled the train. I know I could.

They came to the place which halted them; the place where the fallen wall surface was piled up on the tracks. Of course the muckers all had high hip boots. So had the miners. They had to have. There was water in the tunnel. No river of water, but great drops which oozed languidly out. And the floor was as slippery as the devil.

The night crew jumped from the cars—not carelessly but with one hand on the side; otherwise he's liable to be on his seat in the mud, sprawled out and slightly damp to the skin. For the place was usually sopping wet. It was a humid, stifling place to work in, in spite of a ventilating fan, which theoretically cleared away the foul air.

But the muckers began shoveling; not briskly and as if their lives depended on it, but with the measured ease of men accustomed to the shovel, and also to mines; a stroke about half between that of a Harp (an Irishman) and a Mexican. Still they had Mexicans working here too; but they were not like the ones I refer to.

So the miners set their jackhammers and began pounding into solid rock. Ever see a jackhammer? Well, it's like a long drill, much larger of course, than what a dentist uses. It's worked the same; both of them use electricity. But the jackhammer gets his from a longer distance. Still I don't know. Maybe the power the dentist uses comes from the same mountain.

The muckers had cleared away most of the fallen matter. And the jackhammers had drilled one or two holes already. It seems Dan Parker had stopped by Reno to ask him about the show down at the pavilion. He says so himself. And it's reasonable. It isn't Reno tells

it. Reno's gone flooey.

Parker says he had just shouted in Reno's ear about the show; heard Reno reply something about Love's Reward—that was the show, you see—and had just turned away, when the blast came. It must have been Reno's jackhammer; for he's the only one went flooey. Besides any other man who had drilled into dynamite would have known it. Shocks like that ain't forgotten. Well, the blast caught them all. There was a mess, I tell you, in that tunnel. I wasn't there myself but I heard Jonny Tinker tell what he saw. Jonny said it was worse'n a plane bomb in the World War. Jonny was in that war, so he ought to know.

Well, there was that blast. The train driver, Mat, you recall, who was just running a string of loaded cars out, caught the sound at the tunnel's mouth and he had an inkling of what it meant. He shifted his string; caught up a bunch of empties, took on the watchman and raced into the tunnel.

But he had to stop before he came to the place. There was some kind of an odor neither of them ever smelt before. This odor made the air almost impossible to breathe. They had to come out again.

By this time there was a crowd of men about the entrance. You see they never shot their blasts off at night. It was always morning, when the night crowd came off shift. So anyone who heard the blast on that particular night knew something unusual had happened.

Seeing that Mat and the watchman were stopped by foul air, the emergency apparatus was brought out; and several of the men being rigged up, Mat forever lost his chance to see the result of the explosion; for Charlie Bates took his place.

Of course, the lights were put out of commission by this shock; weren't usually though, which only goes to show it was no ordinary blast. So they had to take in torches;

you know the kind! They call them carbide; fill them with a white powder and run in water. Then they light a little hole where the gas comes through. They're not bad lights.

When they got up to the wreckage, they found only debris and darkness. Flashing their torches toward the wall they were cutting through, they saw a great jagged hole exposed by the blast, going into a cavity. But, although this surprised them, they were not there to explore cavities; they were there to save lives. And they got to work looking for the missing men.

One by one they pulled them out. Four of them were dead and one man was permanently locoed. That was Reno. I guess anybody would have been locoed who ran into a similar bit of shaking up. I know I wouldn't want to. The rest of the night crew were O.K. They were unconscious for a time but they came around nicely. Harry Getz says he dreamed of chasing ostriches down in South Africa. If he did, I'll bet he never caught any of them, for Harry is too slow even to catch a cold.

Well, they knocked off work for the day; let the air in for the tunnel to ooze off its poisonous fumes. Next night they went in again. Not the regular crew remember. Men ain't no fools. Most of the regular crew who were capable of moving on their legs were down the hill by this time. You'd be surprised the way a few dead men will change the working crew of a mine. But it does.

Parker still was along however. When a man's married, he can't just go and jump his job because of some unexpected explosion. The job of supporting a family is a more serious affair often than even T.N.T. blasts. And you know they're some blasts.

II.

THEY came to the ragged hole. They poked in their torches. Finally Parker, who was a brave

man, being as he was in the World War, went into the cavern and explored. He came back and his face was white.

“For God’s sake!” said he to Dick Combs. “Come in here and see if you see what I see!”

In the cavern in which Parker and Combs found themselves was a heap of skeletons, clustered near a peculiar, wonderfully embossed, little bronze box, the lid of which had been broken open, probably by the explosion; this lid had a tiny hole, the mouth of an octopus head, with which it was adorned.

The cavern curved away from the line toward which the tunnel was being driven; so that work was only temporarily halted because of the find. But at the other end, along a walk of leopard spotted agate, was a figure in mosaic, which held them spellbound. It was of heroic size; and seemed to represent a woman’s head on an immense snail’s shell; the woman’s eyes were large rubies and her headdress, somewhat like the Grecian statues of their goddesses, was a helmet, made up of innumerable flakes of moonstone. The woman’s face seemed remarkably lifelike; colored as it was with some shining enamel, which seemed to match the glow of health.

Dick Combs said it was enough to startle one; the head standing out as it did away from the wall and seeming so real. But what was the explanation of the skeletons? No one could guess. It seemed a mystery beyond the knowledge of simple miners and those who know even less than miners; the weak headed muckers.

Parker and Combs returned; and work was resumed. However, work was immediately halted when Dan went to the mouth of the tunnel and telephoned headquarters. That’s where they showed good sense. How’d they know but it might be something of great importance. Old Addington, the sup., certainly deserved credit

for stopping work till some of those university guys had a peep. Remember, this was in a solid mountain; and heaven knows how long it might have been there.

Professor Eddy came down. He seemed like a very capable man to us people, whose only glimpse of education is the Schoolmarm up at No. 2 and the Parson at No. 7. He could talk about eocene and pleocene till he had us all woosy. I’ve studied a few of the ’cenes myself, being interested in geology; but I never had any pleosaurus or broncosaurus eating out of my hand like that guy had. He knew everything that was to be known and some which wasn’t.

Well, he went up to the hole in the tunnel wall; gave a look at the snail lady and gasped. Even his expert knowledge of such things failed to classify her. He was flabbergasted. He was nonplussed. He was absolutely speechless, something queer in a professor.

He sent for a cmony of his back at the big school where they both taught; and there never before was such English used as these two delvers-in-the-ground used when they looked in the place exposed by Reno’s shell.

Professor Eddy explained the pile of skeletons in the old cavern in front of the snail lady, as persons sacrificed to her. Then Professor Monk took a peep at the little bronze box, and allowed his colleague had a shot of dope. He said: “The box is in ancient Aramaic; and the inscription thereon says that it contains a volatile poison which shall guard the inner chamber ever from profanation.”

Professor Eddy says: “How does it come we are here?”

This of course was a poser for the man who read Aramaic; but some of the boys came to the fellow’s assistance and told of the terrible smell immediately after the explosion.

“That explains it perfectly,” contended Monk. This was a protection against vandals only till an explosion occurred. It was a very

delicate apparatus; probably an invention which has never since appeared on the earth. And the blast broke the small quantity liberation of the gases and made the poisonous odor which was remarked just after the catastrophe.”

I must say Monk reasoned much better than his name sounded. Then the two savants went back and looked at the snail lady.

“What do you make out of it ?” asked Eddy.

“It represents Patience,” was the reply.

That fellow Monk was always good at replies. He seemed to have accumulated a lot of sense with his years.

However, Professor Eddy didn’t quite like the interpretation of his colleague. “Your mistake is natural,” he said.

“I don’t acknowledge I have made one—yet,” replied the redoubtable Monk.

“Then I will show you,” remarked Professor Eddy. “Your solution is merely a superficial observation. If you study the hybrid’s form closely you will find the snail shell is not a snail shell, but the shell of the nautilus. Now the nautilus from earliest times has symbolized a rising spiritually. This figure faces a death chamber; because the woman’s head on the nautilus shell symbolizes resurrection. Am I right, my dear Professor?”

DOCTOR MONK admitted that should excavation disclose another chamber behind, Professor Eddy’s theory might be the correct one. “What is your, theory for the reason such a high spot was selected for the tomb?” asked he then, with the look of a man who has propounded a poser.

“High spots were the sacred ones,” answered Eddy, the learned, easily, and as if he had instantaneously solved it.

Doctor Monk shook his head. “Do you know why this place is where it is?”

“Not if my theory does not suffice.”

“It is where it is because of a

catastrophe. It was, that is the mountain, of a much lower elevation—it may even have been only a hill—but some incomprehensible power lifted it to its present eminence.”

“What is your proof?” asked the other doubtfully.

“This!” And Professor Monk exhibited a small whirled shell in the palm of his hand, which he called a whelk.

“Where’d you get this?” asked Doctor Eddy. “And what does it signify?”

“I got it on the mountainside, half a mile down, dug it out of a lime bed. And it signifies that the place where it came from was at one time under water.”

“But how do you know that wasn’t before this place was used as a sepulchre?”

“Because,” answered Professor Monk, “the little bronze box there refers to this sacred tomb guarded by the volatile poison, as an island.”

“I don’t doubt you,” remarked Doctor Eddy, “but I wish I read Aramaic also.”

“That wish is only natural; but surely you don’t in the slightest way question my reading, my dear professor?”

“Not at all. Your reading is eminently reassuring to me. But to the public, you must remember, two savants’ reading would be conclusive.”

III.

SHOVELS and picks were brought up: and a certain number of laborers supplied to the two professors. I had been assigned to them from the first, that’s why I can relate so much of their conversation. They interested me and they were worth listening to.

The whole figure of the snail lady was carefully removed from the wall, so that it could be reconstructed in a museum. And it was found to be only a veneer, put up in flakes on a suitably chiseled out place in the solid rock. All of the pieces were said by the

professors to be semiprecious stones. Of course to the average mineworker this meant nothing at all. Even the most experienced were merely familiar with quartz, granite, limestone and the various ores. While the muckers knew nothing, some of them disputed things, accepted as true for the last half dozen centuries.

Now the door, or what they believed was the door, was found to be in the shape of a truncated pyramid: that's what Professor Monk called it. And Doctor Eddy gave it as his opinion that it could not be battered in, because the inside was smaller than the outside. Dick Grebs, who was a miner, temporarily loaned to the university guys, was for drilling a hole and putting in a light charge of dynamite; but both the doctors vetoed this move. No telling what's inside, they said.

So, instead of a shot being fired, a hole was drilled clean through the door. Do you know that door was a foot thick? Well, it was. We measured it. After the hole was drilled, a stick was gotten the same size as the hole. Pete Miller went out and got it. They were near the west entrance here, an entrance drilled for air, and Pete says he had to climb a tree to get it.

Then they made little holes at the end of the stick and put in little springs which would be compressed to fit the hole but which would spring out as soon as they got on the other side of the door and so give us a leverage. It worked all right. Five of the boys removed the door easily.

The air inside nearly blew out our lamps. We had to wait an hour before we could enter. I didn't care. You see, I got paid just the same. Our time went on. We weren't hired by the profs. We were merely loaned to them. Well, we hung around the West Entrance (it was no entrance at all, as I told you, but an air shaft) all that time and then, Professor Eddy testing the air, said it was O.K. So we trails in.

There was a sight in that room almost made my heart stand still with wonder. A lamp, in the shape of an icicle, with a beautiful blue globe, hung from the ceiling; and it gave a brilliant and weirdly penetrating light.

The first thing which struck us as strange was the appearance of a man; a big muscled fellow, a fellow even larger and more powerful than Reno Bob, standing to the north at a niche in the wall. We couldn't mistake this: for there were lights back of the fellow, so that he shone vividly before us. He was a real man. He held toward us menacingly a black tube of five barrels, which had a curious arrangement at the other end, as if it might be some kind of a gun.

Now everybody saw this: all the boys and the two professors. We just looked at the fellow and gasped, as one would do who came on a live man in a tomb, The next moment we looked and the fellow was gone. We went over to the wall and looked at the niche and there was none there. Instead there was a plate of what seemed like frosted glass.

Now did you ever hear anything like that? A man standing lifelike before you to disappear while you looked! Professor Monk cried to the Doctor: "Did you notice his classification? He is pre-glacial!"

"What gave you such conclusion?" asked the other doubtingly.

"His robe. It was made of mammoth hair."

"But was it a man?" demanded Eddy.

"It may only be some kind of a projection: some method of throwing up on an apparently blank surface some image of something. Maybe we stepped on something which caused the thing to appear."

So we had to trail out again and practise over our entrance to the place. No use. We couldn't tramp exactly right, it seemed. We never saw the pre-glacial man again.

But say! You ought to have seen that

wall. It was made up of an infinite number of squares, so that the roof was neither round nor square, but a kind of a compromise between. And on the walls! There were pythons and dinosaurs in wondrous color, together with gorgeous butterflies, much larger than any now known, and a funny bird which Doctor Eddy announced as a “near relative of the pterodactyl.” It was quite a funny looking bird. (Only the pterodactyl was not a bird but a flying saurian reptile.—Editor.)

Then, our attention being attracted to a great golden lizard—he must have been the god of all lizards, for he was colored like it—had fire in his mouth, a great golden head, flakes of blue, scarlet and orange on his back, which seemed outlined on what appeared to be a row of shells around the whole room.

PROFESSOR MONK looked at an inscription; took down what seemed like a piece of cardboard, and we all looked. It was light and you couldn't see through it: and it seemed like some kind of a chart. In fact, in red outlines, on a dull gray surface, were some maps of something. But I never saw such maps. There isn't anything on the earth's surface now like those maps showed. They were awfully funny.

But Professor Monk gave an exclamation as if the source of life were discovered. Then he cried: “The land surface of terra firma before the last Glacial Epoch.”

But somebody trod on something which nearly gave us heart failure. Out of the floor of the room, on powerful springs, arose two caskets. Pete Miller was bowled clean over by one of them. But nobody laughed. It was too solemn a sight. In each of the caskets, which were supported on golden onyx pedestals of carved mammoths, lying in repose, not a hue different from in life, in elaborate costumes, were two figures. The one on the right was that of a woman. Strange to relate, too, it had a similar appearance to Dan

Parker's wife. Now don't get me wrong: there's nothing at all to this likeness, save what some fools like to give it. There were people who weren't friendly to Dan or to Reno, who would like to infer that Reno wasn't just what he should have been, because some idiot noticed that one of the figures resembled the lady in the Parker home. But I, who saw the caskets, say they don't know what they're talking about. It was only a distant likeness. The woman lying in that room had a long drawn face—dolichocephalic, I think the professors called it—and her eyes were wonderfully formed, even when closed—like an angel's, it seemed to me.

Whereas the man was dark and ferocious looking. He had a moustache somewhat like the Norsemen; and his body was encased in what looked like silver mail; but not in plates, rather it was like fine chain, closely woven together. On his head was a gold crown of filigree gold-work; the thing being a continuous circle of heads of the mammoth.

The woman had on a dress of such fine texture that her body could be seen through it. It looked as if made from spider's silk. Maybe in the period when she lived, they paid more attention to spiders and had developed them to a greater degree than any living spiders these days. Her feet were clad in moccasins of rattlesnake skin. While the tiara—I thought it was a crown, but the Professors called it a tiara—was of gold filigree work, representing a circlet of butterflies, large sapphires being the wings, and making them blue butterflies.

But this was not all.

There were ten little gold boxes, arranged in a circle around the room; standing on pedestals of white marble, the slabs, under the little gold boxes, differing and being semiprecious stones like sagenite, jade, moonstone, sardonyx, bloodstone and stones even the professors could not recognize.

What these boxes were nobody knew. They had a little peephole and a glass somewhat like a lens inside, while behind was another glass piece which seemed frosted. But there was only darkness when one looked in these boxes. The professors puzzled their heads in vain, but could not make out what these boxes were. It was plain they were something important; or they would not have been arranged with such care, or been around, adorning, as it were, a king and queen.

Professor Eddy stood at the casket of the queen, studying the lace collar she wore, an exquisite thing, made almost of thistledown, it seemed, when he gave a little cry of surprise.

“What is it?” asked Doctor Monk.

“The secret of the boxes!”

“Where?”

“On the floor here.”

Professor Monk looked and saw a number of golden squares arranged in a mosaic, around a central dove. “I don’t see the secret,” he confessed. “Explain it.”

The other pointed to the floor and said: “Notice the dove is in the shape of a turn button.”

“What of that?” demanded Doctor Monk, incomprehensively.

“Turn it,” suggested the other.

Monk did so. There was the instant shining of light seen in the little gold boxes. Each of us, the professors as well as the workmen, selected a box and looked in. In that tiny box, in each of them, in fact, was an inner eight sided wheel, each side of which contained a picture, which the front lens made real, of some grand scene of the recumbent monarch’s reign. Now don’t get the idea it was like present-day moving pictures. It was far more natural. It was so made that not only were the scenes in their exact colors, but there was also some arrangement by means of which the figures seemed to stand out like in real life, instead of being flat like moving

pictures are. Here they had some knowledge which the present-day moving picture industry would have given thousands of dollars to obtain; and they had it maybe ten thousand years ago.

BUT the thing which excited Professor Monk most was a fantastic bronze colored box set on a shelf at the feet of the caskets. It had in it little plates of some light material; the surface of the plates containing little squares, maybe half an inch each and a quarter inch apart. Twelve of these plates had a ring through corners at top and bottom; uniting the plates. Monk looked at these through a magnifying glass and uttered an exclamation.

“What is it?” asked his friend.

“The history of the world ten thousand years ago.”

“You don’t mean it!” cried Eddy, his face filled with joy. “Now I must study Aramaic. I know I must.”

“Think of what it means to mankind!” observed Doctor Monk. “Maybe the secret of the earth’s shifting of its poles can be learned.”

Doctor Eddy picked up one of the plate books. “How much writing is on one plate?” he asked.

“As much as is on about twenty-five pages of an average book. Each of these squares is a page. Look and see!”

Professor Eddy gazed through his friend’s magnifying glass. “Wonderful!” he cried. “We are looking at the first book, Doctor.”

As it was now time to knock off work for the day, the professors and everybody else left the cavern and returned to camp, thinking nothing would be molested: as one would naturally think in the mountains where even doors are left unlocked.

But they reckoned without taking into consideration the stupidity of some corporations. It is true the power part of the

tunnel was the primary concern of those at the top. But—they might have taken a bit more interest in the excavation still going on. If they had done so, such an irreparable loss would not have taken place.

The night shift, which had been at work when the opening up of the secret chamber had been carried out, asked no questions as to whether explosions would in any way affect the discoveries made. Instead, when Parker—and I blame Dan for this—came to leave the hole, he touched off the holes he had drilled.

Professor Monk gave a gasp and nearly fainted when he heard the shots.

“What’s wrong?” asked Professor Eddy.

“Nothing,” answered the other, “but they might have told us.”

“Who?”

“Whoever set off those shots.”

“You’re right!” exclaimed Doctor Eddy. “It might have ruined those caskets. They looked like glass to me.”

IV.

PROFESSOR MONK was so wrought up he could not sleep that day. You see, he had been on the night shift opening up that chamber of mysteries. So he went and got Professor Eddy, who was also awake, and the two went up to have a look.

Now I wasn’t along this time, so I’ll

have to give hearsay: and hearsay, as anyone knows, is unreliable.

When the two savants came to the room of their wonderful discoveries, they were aghast. And well they might be. There was not a thing to be seen of all that list of wonders. Professor Monk tottered. “You will not have to learn Aramaic now, Professor Eddy,” he said brokenly.

“Why?” asked Eddy, stunned and not knowing what he said.

“Nothing to read.”

“Where are the tablets?”

Doctor Monk picked up a handful of sand at the foot of the pedestal where the book sheets had reposed. “This is all that remains of them,” he said. “They were made of glass.”

“But the caskets!” cried Eddy. “Where are they?”

Monk picked up a handful of sand from a heap at the foot of the carved mammoths: “This is part of them!” he said.

“But the bodies!” interposed Eddy.

“You don’t grasp the nature of our discovery,” explained Monk. “They were not bodies. They were glass replicas of the original. They were wonderful likenesses.”

“I’ll say they were,” said Eddy. “And the maps and histories?”

“Glass, all glass!” whispered Monk hollowly.

“No wonder nothing remains of that age,” remarked the other. “Nothing of the pre-glacial age! It was an Age of Glass!”