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Suddenly Matthews came to life. There was a way to end this mystery. It was the way of science. He raised the hammer—



*The Mystery remains—
—ageless as time itself—*

Within the Pyramid

by R. DeWitt Miller

GARVIN MATTHEWS, of the International Anthropological Society, stared unbelievably at the giant white pyramid poised on top of the sheer ridge. It seemed utterly unreal. The fading sunlight gleamed on

the pure-white sandstone of its sides, making it stand out in sharp contrast to the dark green of the Yucatan jungle which struggled for a foothold on the sides of the ridge.

Somehow Matthews couldn't force

himself to believe that it was man-made. But those sure, straight lines were not the chance of nature. It must have been built by human beings. But how—and why?

Black clouds, forerunners of a storm, drifted slowly behind the apex of the pyramid. The daylight was dying rapidly. He shook himself free from the spell of unreality and turned to the old man beside him.

"This will be the greatest scientific discovery of the century," he said. "When I make my report the society will immediately equip an expedition to make a thorough exploration."

Professor Phinias Hexter shifted uneasily.

"It's really not so large," he declared. "It's the first impression that makes it seem huge."

"Don't be foolish," Matthews replied. "I've done some work in Egypt. This thing makes the Great Pyramid of Cheops seem like a dwarf."

Hexter glanced at the tenuous arms of the black clouds which were gradually blending into a single dark curtain.

"It will storm in a few minutes," he said. "Don't you think we'd better wait until to-morrow to get a closer view?"

"Not on your life. I'm going to get inside that thing to-night—that is, if there's an entrance."

"Yes," Hexter replied slowly, "there is. But it's on the other side. It will be dark by the time we reach it."

Matthews glanced at him sharply.

"What's wrong with you? You act as if you're afraid of the thing."

"No," Hexter muttered, "not afraid. I've seen that pyramid too long to be afraid of it. It's what it stands for that has—"

His voice dropped into silence.

"I think you'd better do all you can to aid my expedition," Matthews said meaningly. "Remember, I don't have to tell the world what you've done—if I don't want to."

"Whether you tell them or not is of no consequence to me."

Matthews looked wonderingly at the gaunt, sun-bitten old professor.

"Why did you keep quiet?" he asked suddenly. "You've known of the existence of this pyramid for years—and you've told no one. This is the toughest place to get to on the American continents. There isn't a chance of seeing the thing unless you get into this valley. It's only visible from above. Do you realize that if I hadn't happened to stumble on it, it might have been centuries before it was found?"

"One century more will be long enough."

"I don't know what you're talking about—and I don't much care. What I want to know is why you didn't tell the world of your discovery—and what you're doing camping here alone?"

"As to the first question," Hexter said quietly, "I don't care to answer it now. As to the second, I am here to make explorations, just as you are."

"But you are connected with no society?"

"Does a man have to be connected with a society to be a scientist? I had an idea when I first saw this pyramid. It's an idea that's been in the back of my mind ever since I started archæology thirty years ago. On my first exploration here I found enough evidence to indicate that I might be right. It has taken ten years and five trips to prove it."

"What is your theory?"

"I think facts will be more potent than my arguments."

"Then let's get on. What's the best way to reach it?"

"You're determined to go to-night?"

"Certainly. What did you expect me to do?"

"Yes," Hexter said half to himself. "I suppose I would have done the same thing at your age. Have you a carbide lamp?"

"Two of them."

"Good. If you'll follow me, I'll bring you to the entrance in fifteen minutes."

WHEN they came close to the side of the pyramid, Matthews was stunned by the sheer immensity of the thing. As they walked parallel to the wall he studied the construction. It was unbelievable. The blocks fitted with the precision of the finest Egyptian workmanship. Only these blocks made those of the Egyptian pyramids seem puny.

Halfway along the farther side, Hexter stopped and pointed to a barely discernible set of steps in the stonework.

"These lead to the entrance of the tunnel," he said.

They climbed steadily for perhaps a hundred feet. Here the steps widened out into a broad ledge. In front of them was the entrance of a passage, slightly higher and wider than a man, which led into the heart of the pyramid.

"Something similar to the Egyptian pyramids," Matthews murmured.

"They were little copies," Hexter said. "The idea was handed down from this one, an almost universal legend of the days when *they* were alive."

"Who do you mean by 'they'?"

"Later," Hexter muttered, "later. First we will go to the conventional burial chamber."

Taking one of the carbide lamps, he led the way into the passage. Matthews lighted the second lamp and followed.

The passage ran level for a distance; then it slanted sharply upward. There was a damp, musty smell, the stale odor of things long forgotten and unused.

Suddenly the dark walls about them receded. Matthews realized that they had entered a small room. He held his light above his head. The room was perhaps twenty feet square. It was lined with hard, pink sandstone blocks, so beautifully fitted together that his eyes could scarcely make out the joints.

In the center, on a raised dais, were

four elaborately carved sarcophagi.

With a sudden cry, Matthews stepped forward and struggled to lift the lid of the nearest sarcophagus.

"You will be disappointed," Hexter said. But he helped wrench off the massive stone slab.

The blue-white flame of the lamp cast long shadows into the open sarcophagus. By looking closely, Matthews could make out a few bits of what might once have worn human form. Some whitened pieces of bones, several odd bits of metal, and something resembling fabric, which fell to dust at his touch.

With a curse of disappointment he turned away.

"The others are the same," Hexter said. "That was their masterpiece. No one would ever look farther than this room. It is all so perfectly obvious. It was the legend of the gigantic burial place which was carried over into Egypt."

"Hexter," Matthews said harshly, "are you going to quit talking nonsense and help me get the lids off the rest of these boxes? Or am I going to have to wring whatever you know about this place out of that scrawny neck of yours?"

FOR A MOMENT the old man did not answer. His lamp, held below his face, made his features seem grotesque. Finally he shrugged wearily.

"You are determined to report this find?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Then a great expedition will be sent. This whole place will be gone over almost with a microscope, in hopes of finding secret passageways. Finally the tourists will come."

"And why not? What are you afraid of? Are you a scientist or an old woman?"

Again Hexter did not answer for a moment. At last he seemed to reach a decision.

"I'm trusting you," he said slowly. "After all, you are a man of science. You have a good brain. If, after I am through, you decide to go on with your original plan; there is no way I can stop you."

"Well, if you are going to show me something, get at it."

"Not yet." Hexter sat down on one of the unopened sarcophagi. "I would like to ask you a few questions."

"What is this? A game?" Matthews said sarcastically.

"Perhaps—but it is my game. And in the end I promise to show you something that will change your whole conception of the history of the Earth."

Matthews sat down on another sarcophagus.

"All right," he said, "but don't be too long."

"You're an Egyptologist," Hexter began slowly. "Didn't you ever wonder what was back of the old civilization, and what it was that we keep seeing dimly in the legends and folklore of all people?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose you wouldn't. One has to blast his mind out of its conventional ideas before he can ever conceive the truth. But when you get the key, it all fits together. First, let's suppose that thousands of years ago, when man was still only half civilized, the Earth was visited by creatures from another world."

"Shall we tell ghost stories now?"

Hexter ignored the remark.

"I am merely making a hypothesis," he said, "just part of my little game. But to continue—say that some astral body similar to the Earth chanced to pass near our planet. That would account for the floods in all legends, and for the seven days of darkness in Egyptian and Jewish writings?"

"It might."

"It's more than guesswork," Hexter declared. "You must have heard of

Kobal's theory, based on the eccentricities in the orbits of Neptune and Pluto, that there is a body with about the specific gravity of the Earth which pursues an orbit similar to a comet."

"I've read something about it."

"Very well. Say further that intelligent beings on this astral body sent an expedition to the Earth. Perhaps their world was running out of natural resources, or it was overcrowded. Whatever the reason, certain brave members of their race decided to make the attempt to establish a new home."

"I wish you'd get to the point," Matthews said wearily.

Hexter paid no attention.

"Perhaps," he continued, "after the expedition reached the Earth, they discovered that its climate was incompatible with their type of life. They took a gamble, and they lost. Some essential element—perhaps a gas in the atmosphere or a necessary part of their food—was lacking. Even spectroscopy analysis leaves you pretty much in the dark as to the true conditions on another planet. Say, for argument, that such a state of affairs occurred and you, Matthews, were a member of the expedition, what would you do?"

MATTHEWS looked away at an inscription in Mayan on the wall of the room, but he seemed slightly more interested in the conversation.

"Die," he said after a moment. "What else would there be to do?"

"Nothing—unless. Even our crude science has practically succeeded in producing artificially suspended animation. A more advanced science should be able to do that, shouldn't it?"

"It's possible."

"I'm glad you admit that much. At least, you must grant that it's an interesting hypothesis. Let us follow it through for a moment. Say you could suspend your life—by the use of some

anæsthetic—indeinitely, what would you do then?"

"I'd suspend it and wait. At least it would be better than simply dying."

"Not only that. It may be that my hypothetical expedition had some definite reason to hope that if they could suspend their lives long enough, there would be a chance to escape. But passing over that possibility—before you suspended your life, what would you do?"

"I'd arrange to protect my body so that it would be still in existence if a

expedition landed, man hadn't yet built anything large enough to be seen far out in space. Therefore it would be necessary to prove that your expedition hadn't perished immediately."

"I suppose so."

"I know so. There is one thing nature does not create: a straight line. A gigantic pyramid, placed on a bare ridge, would stand out as an eternal proof of the existence of intelligent beings. No other form or architecture so completely demonstrates the existence of a guiding mind. A pyramid is all straight lines."

chance ever occurred for me to resume normal life."

"Then if you had access to super-science by which you could build a greater structure than any which puny man can create, you would construct a giant edifice that would protect your body during the dormant period."

"It at least sounds logical—which is more than I can say for most of your ideas."

"All right—there is only one more step. If you still had hope that the people of your world might send another expedition after you, it would be necessary to make sure that they knew you had been successful in living for at least a time on Earth. Remember, the inhabitants of this other world probably wouldn't believe there was any intelligent life on Earth. At the time their

"A most interesting theory," Matthews said with a short laugh, "but how about the facts?"

"That," Hexter declared, "is the next step."

He crossed the room, made a swift computation, and selected one of the giant stone blocks. He threw his weight against it. Noiselessly it slipped inward.

"A piece of balance that our science cannot duplicate," he said simply. "The concealment is marvelous, too. It took me months to find it."

The block had completely vanished now. The passage it revealed was smaller than the one by which they had entered the pyramid.

AGAIN Hexter led the way. The passage descended endlessly. Matthews calculated that they must have reached a

point below the surface of the ground when the passage broadened into a room. It was slightly larger than the burial chamber, but there was none of the ornamentation. There were no inscriptions on the walls.

In the center of the room were four caskets. They gleamed dully in the flickering light. Apparently they were composed of some metal, but it was not one with which Matthews was familiar.

"You see there are the same number as in the room above," Hexter said. "That was their great deception. Several beings existed for a short while on Earth. While they were alive they built a giant burial chamber.

"Then these four other-world people apparently died. One or two must have remained active to arrange the thing. Anyway, four bodies were solemnly buried in the upper chamber. But they were really human beings, killed, and disguised to resemble the other race. After a few years in this climate no one could tell the difference anyway. They would look no further than that upper burial chamber. The whole thing became a religion. It was a burial cult when it reached Egypt."

But Garvin Matthews did not hear. He was staring into one of the caskets. His mind was struggling with the thing that he saw. It didn't square with reason. It was utterly alien to every conception he had ever known—and yet it was there.

The casket was covered by a transparent material resembling glass—and yet not glass. Lying within the cushioned interior was the nude body of a young woman.

But the ghostly calm of death was not on the chiseled, aquiline features.

She was merely sleeping there. Death seemed completely apart from this lovely creature.

Slowly another idea was fighting its way into his mind. That strange pastel tint which suffused her skin! It was a

light, delicate green—not the ghastly hue of death. Somehow it seemed natural to her, as natural as the pink flush of human skin.

"Notice the hands," Hexter said softly.

Again Matthew's mind refused at first to admit the idea. Finally it broke through.

Each of the slim, delicate hands had six fingers!

"You see," Hexter said softly, "not of this world——"

And suddenly Matthews came to life. There was a way to end this mystery. It was the way of science. He jerked loose the heavy geologist hammer that swung from his belt, raised it above his head.

With a quick movement Hexter grasped his upraised arm. There was a remarkable strength in the frail body of the old professor.

"Not yet," he said. "There is one thing more to show you. After that, if you wish to break open the caskets, it is your affair."

Slowly Matthews lowered the hammer.

"What difference will it make?" he asked.

"Those caskets were sealed for a purpose. They were meant to be opened only by scientists of their own race. Before you decide to do anything, let's go back to the upper chamber."

"How do I know you will show me the secret of the sliding block?" he asked.

"I will leave the stone displaced," Hexter said quietly. "But first look in the other caskets."

MATTHEWS went slowly to each of the three metal coffins. Each contained a body—sleeping—but not the sleep of death. There was another young woman and two young men.

When Matthews had finished his observations, Hexter led the way back

through the passageway to the outer room. He pointed to the Mayan inscription.

"You can skim over it," he said, "except the last line. Of course, they wrote in the language of the country."

Matthews deciphered it quickly, keeping an eye on the open passageway to the inner chamber. The inscription was a conventional curse, calling down the wrath of the gods on whoever should desecrate the tomb.

"The last line," Hexter repeated.

Matthews read the line, read it again, a queer look on his face.

"But there's something wrong," he said. "The old boys must have made some mistake. There's a date in this last line—but it is still in the future. It seems to be the date when the curse ends. According to our calendar, it would be 2040."

Hexter spoke with slow emphasis, each syllable distinct.

"If this astral body or planet does pursue some sort of elongated orbit about the Sun, it will come back some time—say in 2040."

"What do you mean?"

There was a queer, soft note in Hexter's voice.

"Don't you have any admiration for these people? Think of them refusing to accept fate, struggling against the cos-

mos for a chance to live. It took supreme intelligence to figure it all out—and it took faith to lie down quietly in those caskets, in the forlorn hope that they would be safe through thousands of years. How about the ones that stayed outside to seal the caskets, and tend to the burial? They died calmly that others might live. Do you want to wreck it all now—less than a hundred years from the date they are waiting for?"

Matthews did not look at Hexter. He stared at the Mayan inscription—but he did not see it.

Hexter spoke again, but this time his voice was hard, driving.

"What if the creatures who built this pyramid, that makes our modern buildings seem like doll houses, should come back and find those caskets broken open, and the members of their ill-fated expedition dead and in our museums? It would not be well for man and his civilization in that hour."

There was silence in that room of the duny dead. The dank smell of age-old things seemed a tangible presence. Faintly from outside came the roar of the storm which had broken over the Yucatan jungle.

Matthews' face was hard, like old, weather-stained ivory. His breath was short, gasping. At last he said, "I shall report, but—I will omit the pyramid."