

The Desert Fox
by Christian O'Kane

The first thing Misha felt when he stepped off the transport plane was the heat. A blast of hot air assaulted him like he had just opened the door to an oven. The hero stepped out into a world of sand and sand blasted rock all beached bone white by the blazing sun.

"Ambient temperature is 110 degrees," the nanites in his body announced. "Increasing cooling systems by 75% Try not to over exert in this heat."

"Doing anything in this heat is over exerting," The fox superhero commented silently. The tall fox man was dressed in plastic and alloy armor from the tip of his vulpine ears to the pads of his paws. Even his long bushy tail was protected. He was already grateful for the suits built in cooling system.

The first person that greeted the superhero was Caesar. A life sized marble statue of the long dead Roman emperor was staring down at him from a marble plinth. Behind it was the tall, weathered stone walls of a small fort.

"Welcome to Egypt!" The voice belonged to a tall woman dressed in army fatigues. Her loose fitting camouflaged fatigue uniform had been once covered with tan and brown spots but had faded to a bland tan that blended in perfectly with the harsh desert around them. Every part of her had some sand or dust on it even her face and hair had a fine, even coating. Misha knew from long experience that the biggest enemy they faced here was the desert itself. The desert had a million ways it could disable a vehicle, jam a weapon or kill a soldier. Sand could turn a small injury into a major, septic ulcer if a person wasn't careful.

"Thank you!" Misha responded. "Where am I?"

The woman smiled and laughed. "This is Tel Baren. Once home of the Third Legion but now Camp Ridgeway." She extended her hand. "I'm Second Lieutenant Martinelli."

Misha clasped her hand and shook it. "Staff Sergeant Brightleaf but just call me Misha." On his eyesight the nanites displayed a brief history of the entire third legion. With a thought he pushed the information aside intending to looking at it later when he had time to relax. The nanites displayed more useful information - diagrams of the forts layout including satellite photos in real time. He noticed no less than four antiaircraft gun emplacements and a pair of surface to air missile launchers. All fully crewed and at the ready. On the walls he noticed soldiers on guard and in the four corners were machine gun bunkers. He also spotted several good sized minefields.

"There is sure to be an extensive underground complex," the nanites commented.

"But it's very well hidden."

"If you'll follow me we'll get you out of the heat!" The lieutenant ordered.

The two walked past the statue of Caesar and up to the stone archway behind it. The entrance was guarded by two soldiers in full powered armor.

"Why are we set up in a roman ruin?" The super hero asked. "Shouldn't we be somewhere less conspicuous."

"Not our idea. The Egyptian government decided on this site," she said as they walked through the gateway. The darkness of the tunnel was a shock after being in the bright sunlight. In moments they were into the courtyard and back into the light.

The area inside the walls was surprisingly large; at least a score of buildings filled the area each separated by at least three meters of ground. Most of that ground was simply hard packed dirt or stone. But scattered about were some attempts at a garden with some (very) hardy plants. The buildings themselves were made of wood, plastic and metal and were mostly just four walls, a ceiling with a few windows. Misha noted that every building had an air conditioner. Everywhere Misha looked he saw soldiers going about various tasks. Misha saw that they were all armed.

"Ah!" He exclaimed. Not all governments were happy about having the American army in their territory. Many showed their displeasure by placing the Americans in the most awful and desolate places imaginable. "Just how far out in the desert are we?"

"The closest town is sixty miles away. But we're not here for tourism. We're here to keep an eye on what's happening in East Africa."

Misha and the officer walked through a doorway guarded by two soldiers and onto a flight of steps that seemed to lead deep into the earth. Each of the steps was time worn and he had to move carefully. With each step it grew cooler much to the vulpine's relief. Soon the steps ended and Misha found himself in a large room whose walls, floor and ceiling were lined with the same plastic/alloy material that Misha's armor was made of. The room itself was filled with a wide array of electronics and equipment. A very large computer display screen was resting against one wall. At the moment it was displaying a bland map of the middle east that had no real details on it. It was called a sanitized screen to keep any casual viewers from seeing secret information.

A captain dressed the same as the lieutenant walked up to the pair. He had the tanned look of a person who had spent long months in the desert.

"Misha, this is captain Doyle, commander of Task force Hobart," the lieutenant said in way of introduction.

He grasped the offered hand of the captain and shook it vigorously.

"Good to have you here," Doyle commented. "My orders concerning you were a bit vague."

"I'm tracking the raiders who attacked Aberdeen," Misha responded. "But any possibility of disrupting Raider activity is always welcome."

"There has been a lot of Raider activity in the region recently," the captain explained. "We believe they're trying to carve out a small kingdom for themselves."

Misha shook his head. "No chance of that working. No outsider has had any luck controlling this area for long."

"Even the locals have had a hard time doing that," the captain commented. "The whole region is unstable politically and the Raiders are making it worse. They've been hitting the Ethiopian army hard lately. They made a raid on Addis Ababa last week."

"Have they hit here?" Misha asked.

"Twice," the captain answered. "And we burned them hard both times."

"They're sure to try again," the vulpine hero responded.

"And again and again," the lieutenant added.

The officers turned to the large map and it zoomed in to show just northern Africa including Egypt, Sudan and east Africa.

"Most of the Raider activity has been to the south and east but recently we've seen them moving to the west and north. Into the deep desert," the captain explained. "At first it was small raiding parties and a few reconnaissance patrols. But in the last week we've seen a pattern of heavy cargo VTOL's and Sky Skiffs moving to the same area." The map shifted and a red dot started blinking on it. Misha noted it was in the deepest and most desolate part of the Sahara desert. A place even the local Bedouin avoided.

"What are they doing in that god forsaken spot?"

The captain shook his head. "No idea. We've had no luck locating exactly where they're headed. And the last satellite we sent over was shot down."

"I bet Space command was not happy about that," Misha commented.

"No they weren't," The captain answered. "And two over flights by recon planes has resulted in two big battles. Whatever is there the Raiders do not want us seeing it."

"It's probably another base," the lieutenant commented. "As it's too much activity for just a raiding party."

"I'll start my search there," Misha commented. "I'll run a methodical sweep of the area until I find something."

The trip was not pleasant. Instead of flying high up in the air Misha flew close to the ground to avoid being picked up by enemy radar. This put him right down in the blowing, stinging, sand filled air. Soon he was covered with a fine layer of sand that worked its way into his fur, ears and mouth. Very quickly he remembered why he hated the desert.

The wind started blowing harder until he couldn't see and was taking in more dust than air with each breath. He had to land and take cover in a large outcropping until the storm let up. The old, weather stones giving him protection from the stinging sand. As he examined the small area Misha discovered that scratched into the rocks were pictures.

Misha looked closely at the images carefully worked into the stones. Although simple it was easy to pick out a herd of gazelle, (the curved horns were easily recognizable), and then some ostriches, lions and a pair of cheetahs. All were walking along on a grassy plain with tall, wide trees in the background.

"Ancient pictographs! How old are they?" Misha asked.

"These must have been drawn before the Sahara became a desert," The nanites commented. *"That would date them to at least 8000BC."*

"It reminds me of the Serengeti in southern Africa," Misha commented. He looked at the images of the Sahara of the past. A place filled with trees, lush grass and abundant wild life. Then he turned around and looked at the Sahara of today. A place of lifeless rock, sand and searing heat. "It's hard to imagine this desert once being so full of life."

"Could there be more nearby?"

"There is a 55.234% chance of more being nearby."

"We must search for more!"

"We have a mission to finish first," the fox countered. "But perhaps we can spare a few minutes in the name of science."

What most amazed Misha as he flew was the sheer scale of the desert. No matter how far or fast he flew the Sahara stretched onward endlessly in all directions. There seemed to be no end to this ocean of sand and rock. What surprised him even more was the presence of life. He spotted a herd of camels, several types of gazelle, rabbits and countless reptiles and insects. All of which the nanites dutifully located and indentified.

A shape on a ridge like caught Misha's attention and he spotted an irregular shape on top. The shapes looked a little too regular to be natural. The fox headed towards the unknown object. As he got closer more things came into focus. What had looked like a mound of rocks was actually a low wall made of stones roughly piled up.

"Someone built something up there," Misha slowly made his way up the ridge. As he got closer he could make out more walls some of stone and others of sandbags. "This was a combat position. Someone was trying to defend this spot."

"There? Why? It's in the middle of nowhere," the nanites asked.

Misha shrugged. "It's not what's here but what lays behind it. It's a no where on the road to somewhere else. El Alamein is a worthless rocky ridge and yet the largest battle of the desert war was fought there. Why? Because it was between the Germans and the Suez canal."

"No records for this exact location but there was fighting here during both world wars, the Anglo-Egyptian war in 1882, the Mahdist Revolt in the late 1880's and the defeat of the Mahdist's in 1898. And at least a dozen skirmishes and two civil wars since then."

Misha moved slowly, placing each paw carefully, avoiding the loose stones. "And let's not forget the Romans, the Greeks, Alexander the great, the ancient Egyptians, the Nubians and God only knows who else. This land is drenched in blood."

"STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP!" The nanites shouted frantically.

Misha pulled out his bow and nocked an arrow. He spun about looking for an enemy but found only empty desert and rocks. "What's wrong?"

"The reports for both world wars mention the liberal use of mines."

"Mines!" The vulpine hero looked down at the ground around him. "Those must be over seventy years old! They can't still be dangerous."

"Oh yes they can! The dry desert air preserves everything. Including explosives."

"Several hundred people a year are killed or wounded by world war two mines here."

"Mines are nasty, evil little things." Misha worked his cybernetics for a moment and then slowly rose off the ground. Not too high, just a foot or so about the rock and sand. Just high enough to avoid the mines. "In Asia there are thousands killed or maimed by mines all the time."

Slowly he moved forward and up the ridge. Misha spotted the first mine easily. He saw a metal disk shape sticking half out of the sand. He soon spotted a half dozen more scattered around it. Moving carefully the vulpine superhero made his way to the top of the ridge. There he found a squat bunker made of rocks and some rare bits of wood. The hero came to a halt next to the old structure and got a closer look. Sand was piled up around the stones which were faded by sunlight and blasted by the sand into a patina that matched the desert itself far better than any camouflage scheme man could create.

Scattered all about were other piles of sandbags, spent cartridge cases and bits of metal and debris. Most was unrecognizable but some were clearly parts of vehicles. Misha gently placed a hand on the rampart of sandbags. Although faded by years in the blazing sun the wall was as solid as when it had first been built.

Looking left and right Misha picked out more positions like the first one along the top of the ridge. "There was a good sized unit here. At least a battalion." The archer pointed to a pile of sandbags which were scattered about. "An artillery shell hit there. There was certainly a wild fight here."

He spotted something a hundred meters off to his left. It was a straight line in the sand that had caught Misha's attention. There were no straight lines in nature. He moved closer to it. There poking through the sand drifts were large pieces of steel.

Misha landed next to the newly found object and examined it closely. Sticking out of the sand was parts of a round sided, flat topped turret on tops of slabs of armor plating. All had been blasted clean of any paint by the blowing sand leaving only the bare metal. Thin wheels poked out of the sand at the four corners of the pile. "Is this an armored car?"

"88% probability it's a Rolls Royce armored car. Either WW1 or 2," the nanites responded.

"An armored car?" Misha asked. "Here?"

"Undoubtedly left over from the first world war."

"Not necessarily. The same car was used in the early part of the second world war. We'll mark the location for retrieval of the car later and removal of the land mines."

"Roman ruins, ancient pictographs, world war one and world war two wreckage. This desert is full of history!" The fox commented.

"This desert IS history!"

Paragon city has many places to enjoy food and with so many different cultures there was a wide variety to choose from. So it was that the cheetah super hero was in a small local bakery. The smell alone of all the fresh baked goodies had drawn the feline into the store. When he stepped inside Stealth found himself face to face with an astounding array of foods as the delightful smells assaulted his nose. Finally after much looking he chose a bear claw. The sticky pastry had sugar on top and was filled with raisins and apples. He savored the sweet smell of the pastry glad that his sensitive cheetah senses allowed him to enjoy it even more.

"There's a bank robbery in progress!" The nanites announced suddenly.

"Why am I always interrupted in the middle of a meal?" He snapped. "It's like some sort of running gag."

"Well it's not our idea. You're the closest super."

"Where?" Stealth asked as he reluctantly put the pastry back into the bag.

"122 Carlisle Ave, Two kilometers north east of your position. There's at least one super involved."

The cheetah hero dropped to all fours and raced off down the street racing past cars and trucks as fast as his cybernetic cheetah body could go. "Any details?"

"Alarm was tripped twenty minutes ago. The first responders reported a dozen, heavily armed gang members backed up by a super powered villain."

It wasn't hard to find the camp. In broad daylight a massive VTOL transport descended from the sky and settled down on the desert a short distance away from Misha. Its massive engines throwing the sand up in huge clouds that billowed high into the sky. Even without cybernetically enhanced eyesight the sand cloud was visible miles away.

He headed to the landing site and soon found himself looking down on a small camp site. A large number of sand colored tents were arraigned in a circle. Mixed in liberally with the tents were a half dozen shipping containers and countless piles of boxes of all shapes and sizes. There was a score of people in the camp, standing guard, walking patrols, and sorting through various things. Off to one side was the plane. The hero watched as the transport disgorged a mass of equipment and supplies before lifting off.

At the center of the camp was a deep hole in the ground that was surrounded by a chain link fence and guards. Parked inside the fence was a back hoe. The large, earth moving machine was parked near the only gate.

"Why are they digging holes in the sand? I see at least eight people on guard around that hole and a dozen more in the rest of the camp," Misha commented.

"Must be something important."

"Let's find out what they're digging up!"

"We've contacted task force Horbart and they're sending a strike team. ETA two hours. The navy is sending a pair of F18's. ETA 1 hour."

Misha stood at the edge of the hole. Behind him much of the camp was burning, the rest was wrecked. The people guarding the camp had put up a good fight but there had only been a small handful of them and he'd killed most of them and sent the rest fleeing into the desert.

The hole itself was deep but narrow and seemed to have been cut with great haste by the back hoe. He slowly and carefully made his way to the bottom. There, cut into the rock wall of one side of the excavation was a doorway. As he got closer Misha could see the pictures and stick figures carved into the lintel over the door.

"Those are hieroglyphics! It's a real, ancient Egyptian tomb!" The nanites exclaimed excitedly.

Misha made a yip of laughter. "It really is a tomb." He peered into the darkness that lay beyond. "It seems the Sky Raiders have become tomb raiders." The archer stepped through the doorway and into the tunnel that stretched downward into the darkness. He sniffed the air and it smelled dry and musty like old clothing left in an attic trunk for decades. There was also the faint trace of the scent of several humans.

Slowly the hero moved down the corridor. The walls and ceiling were covered with countless frescoes of people in all sorts of poses. Misha saw a tall man wearing only a kilt and sandals and holding a large golden staff. Other pictures showed men and women harvesting grain, herding cattle, and hunting.

Dah dah da! Dun dun dun dun dun! Soft music started to play a familiar tune that Misha couldn't quite recognize. "Are you guys playing music?" He asked.

"It's the music from the Indiana Jones movies."

An image came to him suddenly of a huge group of tiny little guys sporting microscopic pith helmets and monocles. All except one - who was wearing a battered fedora and carrying a bullwhip.

"That's Wilbur he's our expert on archeology!"

The bank wasn't hard to find. It was surrounded by a dozen police cars and a score of officers, Overhead a helicopter was slowly going by. In front of the bank was the burning remains of two police cars. Stealth slowed down to a walk and then stood up onto two legs. A police officer dressed in armor waved to him and Stealth made his way over to the man.

The police officer was dressed in full combat armor that differed from the standard army issue in color only. This was painted blue and had the word POLICE painted front and back. "Good to see you!" He said earnestly. "I'm captain Graczyk."

He shook the policeman's hand firmly. "I'm Stealth. what's going on?"

"A bank robbery," the officer responded. "We've confirmed at least one super villain inside."

"What are they doing inside? It doesn't take half an hour to rob a bank."

The officer shrugged. "No idea. They seem to be taking their time about looting the place."

The feline walked towards the bank. He skirted around one of the burning cars and several pools of blood and made his way up to the doors.

Pandemonium greeted Stealth as he stepped into the bank. Shouting screaming and random bursts of gunfire and explosions. The air was thick with smoke and the smells of blood and fear. The lobby was filled with a dozen people, mostly employees and customers. Mixed in with them were a half dozen men dressed in pinstripe business suits and carrying an impressive array of submachine guns, pistols and shotguns. Without hesitation he leapt into the air and crossed the distance between him and the robbers. His swords were swinging and the blades bit deep into the flesh of two of the robbers as blood and gore sprayed everywhere.

A bullet sliced through the feline hero's fur leaving a long slice of raw flesh and blood but Stealth was too pumped with adrenaline to notice the wound. He touched the floor for the briefest of moments and leapt upward again as his swords sliced through a submachine gun and the chest of the robber firing it. With all the grace of a feline Stealth landed on the floor lightly, avoiding the pools of blood and shell casings easily.

The main lobby of the bank which had been so crowded and hectic was now surprisingly empty. Most of the employees and customers had fled by now leaving the feline superhero alone with a half dozen thugs. None of who were in any shape to do any more fighting.

He slowly made his way through the bank checking each room and hall as he went. He encountered more of the robbers, scattered in small groups all over. He came upon two energetically trying to smash open an ATM machine. They didn't know he was there until his

blades were already slashing through the air. He came upon two others just standing in a hallway. They didn't last much longer than the previous pair.

Stealth walked up to a doorway once closed off by steel bars. All of those had been sliced apart. He stepped through the opening in the bars and into space beyond. This room was devoid of any furniture and he noticed the walls were concrete lined. Past another set of bars sliced open he spotted the large vault door on the opposite side of the room.

Training and lightening fast reflexes saved him. Something rushed at him and his blades were out and in front of him. There was the loud ringing of metal striking metal as his weapons. His own swords blocking two others that had were millimeters from cutting off his head. He got a good look at the person trying to kill him.

"You again?" Stealth snarled. "I thought I killed you before."

"Argh!" Misha snarled. "That's the tenth time you've played that same tune! How about some different music."

Suddenly he heard the sounds of the Bee Gee's playing a disco tune.

"Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Staying alive! Staying alive!"

Misha let out a deep sigh. "I HAD to ask for different music."

The tunnel suddenly leveled out and opened into a small room. He stepped into a room filled with an assortment of boxes and crates. Some were sealed but others were open with packing material stuffed inside.

Misha looked into one of the crates, pushing aside the sheets of bubble wrap. After a moment he pulled out a pair of foot tall pottery jars. They were simple, clay jars but were over three thousand years old and would easily sell for thousands of dollars each. Displayed right onto his eyesight by the nanites was a host of information about the jars. Size, dimensions, estimated age, use, materials it was made from. All appeared instantly courtesy of the nanites.

He weaved his wave through the boxes and clutter looking about as he did. The nanites were working hard trying to catalog and identify everything. The fox stopped at a large pile of wooden items and picked out a pair of large wheels. The vulpine recognized it as a disassembled chariot moments before the nanites did. In seconds the nanites scanned all the pieces and had a hypothetical reconstruction displayed on a small portion of his eyesight.

"Astounding! This tomb is intact!" The nanites commented. *"It's even better than Tutankhamen's tomb."*

"Certainly larger."

"Dr Hansala in Cairo estimates it to be middle kingdom. Perhaps First Intermediate period."

"Dr Farber believes it might be a pharaohic tomb but which he is unable to ascertain."

"Professor Mueller in Berlin agrees and thinks it is probably 11th or 12th dynasty."

Misha stopped. "Dr Hansala? Dr Farbar? Professor Mueller? Just how many people did you tell about this?"

"Aside from the military? Only a small number."

"How many?"

"Twelve."

"So my supposedly secret mission is public knowledge?"

"This tomb is a world treasure and it must be known to the world."

"And secrecy is what the Raiders want."

Misha nodded slowly. "True. But I hope you're at least keeping me a secret."

"Of course! But they are asking for the exact location. Farber is booking reservations for a flight to Egypt and Mueller is already organizing an official expedition."

"No one is exploring this tomb," Misha commented. "Until I get rid of all these tomb robbers."

Painted on one wall of the room was the image of a door. Flanking that image was a pair of jackal headed statues, each holding a long staff.

Misha walked up to the wall and examined the painted image carefully. He found a small hole about the size of his fist. Peering in he saw an empty space beyond. "This isn't a false door. It's a real one! They just put a layer of plaster over the door."

"What's behind it?" The nanites asked. *"You can't just run around smashing doors down like a bunch of tomb robbers."*

"True, there's been too much of that already!" Misha responded as he peered through the small opening. "But I do see a good sized room with all sorts of objects. But the hole is too small to really see anything."

"Too bad you didn't bring along one of those small, fiber optic cameras," the nanites commented.

"I didn't plan on exploring tombs, but I'll add a camera to my gear next time." He touched the hole with his right hand. "An arrow would fit. You could put some nanites onto the end of an arrow and shoot it through the opening. Once inside they could report back what they've found!" Misha said excitedly.

"Go in there? It's dark! And creepy!" The nanites complained.

"It's FULL of BEES and SPIDERS!!!"

"What would Indiana Jones do! He'd be brave!" Misha commented. "It's not dangerous. You'll be moving at high speed. It'll almost be like flying in a plane!"

"OH! In that case I want to be in first class with the cute stewardess and the good food and wine!"

"Why should YOU get first class. That's expensive! You'll take tourist and like it!"

"What's the in-flight movie?!"

"OH! I want a window seat! I want a window seat!"

"Since WHEN do they put WINDOWS in arrows?"

"Depends on the Server!"

"Quiet you!" BONK!

"Bonk?" Misha asked.

"There was a Three Stooges marathon on TV last night."

"And I was stupid enough to let you watch it! It seemed liked a harmless thing at the time! Why couldn't you watch the Indiana Jones movies. He's brave!"

"Snakes! Could there be snakes in there?"

"There are 90 known species of poisonous snakes in Africa."

"Impressive that anything can survive in these conditions. The DNA would make for an impressive hero. We need samples!"

"You're nanites," Misha commented. "You can't be poisoned."

"Oh yeah!"

Misha sensed something behind him. The bow came up as he spun around and found himself face to face with the one person he didn't want to meet in this tomb. Its occupant. A large sarcophagus was resting against one wall. The lid had been removed and its occupant removed and stood upright leaning against the wall.

The figure itself was covered with wrappings of linen and cloth that had aged to the color of baked bread. The dust and dirt of three thousand years covered it completely. On his head was an equally dusty headdress of alternating blue and gold horizontal stripes. In each hand was a sword. Each of the swords blades had a deep, sickle like curve on the end. In spite of having turned green with age the khopesh blades still possessed a deadly sharp edge to them.

Misha relaxed and lowered his weapon. Then he bowed to the ancient figure. "My apologies Sir."

"He's in excellent condition considering he must be at least four thousand years old."

"He doesn't look a day over three thousand."

"The raiders must have removed him from the sarcophagus but not gotten the chance to properly loot it," Misha said. "Thankfully I got here in time to stop that."

He heard voices and turning to the sound Misha spotted a doorway. Moving slowly and carefully he made his way through it. Misha found himself in a large room filled with tall columns that stretched off into the darkness. This room was as empty as the previous room had been cluttered and filled.

In spite of the darkness Misha could see well. He adjusted his sight to thermal imaging and to low light. Each overlaid onto his eyesight. The thermal picking up the slightest changes in heat and the low light working off the very faint light in the vast hall. Off to his left the hero caught a flash of a heat bloom. Just a brief flash of red and yellow that told of the body heat of a living person. The size shape told him it had to be several. His own built in computer identified at least six separate people, undoubtedly human.

Misha gave a mental command to his computer and the camouflage suit he was wearing activated. The small built in cpu worked with the countless tiny cameras to scan his surroundings. The it sent images to the LCD's that made up the covering. Misha seemed to shimmer and then vanished, made almost invisible. Only a faint, shimmer in a humanoid shape betrayed his presence.

He looked at himself or where he wasn't. Misha felt a real thrill looking down at where his legs were and not seeing anything. The cloaking device as it was called was still an experimental

system and this was its first real field test. The original testing had been interrupted by the Sky Raider attack on the army base at Aberdeen. The soldier spent several moments checking the various settings and to be sure the cloak was working fine.

The fox moved slowly trying to be as silent as possible, aware of the fact that his enemies might not be able to see him but they could hear him. As he got closer he could easily identify the figures as raiders. Eight of them were standing together with their weapons drawn and ready for a fight.

Misha took an explosive tipped arrow from his quiver and nocked it. His powerful cybernetically enhanced muscles easily pulled the bow string back. He took careful aim at the group of raiders aiming for the center of the group so that the explosion would have its maximum effect. Then he saw the large vase resting against a column and the enameled boxes scattered around it on the floor. His explosive grenade was sure to kill the raiders, but it was also sure to destroy the vase and the boxes too. Reluctantly he removed the explosive arrow and replaced it with a regular one. The fox picked out a figure who was obviously giving instructions and loosed the arrow at the man's head. He nocked and loosed another arrow and then a third before the first one struck. The Raider let out a yelp and stumbled backwards. The whole group erupted in a firestorm of weapons fire, most of aimed in the wrong direction but bullets pinged off of Misha's armor and he ducked behind a stone pillar.

The hero pulled a small grenade off his belt and after pulling the pin he tossed it in the direction of the Raiders. It hit the floor and rattled around for a moment. There was a soft pop and clouds of green smoke billowed out obscuring everyone's view. He took advantage of the cover and raced from one pillar to another. Misha paused in mid stride and snapped off an arrow at the raiders before taking cover.

He heard a loud whooshing noise behind him and he turned around just as a flash of light lit up the hall. When the light faded a fully armed Sky Raider was standing there. Even in the semidarkness his dark blue jumpsuit was plainly visible. He raised his arm over his head. The machete in his hand had a razor sharp edge. Misha jumped backwards as the blade sliced through the armor on his shoulder and cutting deeply into the flesh behind.

The super leapt off the floor and kicked the man in the chest with his legs. Then with his unwounded arm he pulled out a pistol and shot the raider several times.

"Damage is limited to the flesh and muscles. Instituting repairs."

Without hesitating Misha spun around saw two more raiders charging straight at him. He put three bullets into the first one. The second slashed at him with a large machete which Misha

dodged easily. He lashed out with his fist punching the raider hard in the chest. His cybernetic fist sending the man stumbling backwards. Two shots from his pistol ended the fight.

Misha paused to look at his shoulder and saw the wound already closing up and then the armor repairing itself. He picked up his bow from where it had fallen onto the floor. The fox had to wait a minute while the nanites finished repairing the last of the damage. Then he nocked an arrow to his bow and slowly made his way off into the darkness.

Standing in front of the feline hero was a tall, thin man dressed in an armor made of thin metal strips each about the size of the palm of his hand. They were arraigned horizontally, like the bricks in a wall making for a flexible armor. Protecting him complete from neck to toe.

"Didn't I catch you trying to rob this same bank a few weeks ago?" Stealth snarled. "Didn't you get the point that time?"

The man pointed both of his blades at the hero. "I will get revenge for that. I'll flay the skin off your bones."

"Talk, talk, talk," Stealth snapped sarcastically. ""You threatened to do that the last time and failed. Do you still call yourself the Howling Blades of Death? That sounds like the name of a rock band!"

The man touched the two blades together with the ringing like two bells. Then he leapt into the air somersaulting and twist with the blades flashing air in a deadly ballet of death. He landed back where he had start still moving the weapons in complex patterns.

Stealth stood a short distance away - out of range of those wickedly sharp swords. His arms were folded and his swords sheathed. He had not moved at during the entire display. "Still a show off I see," he snapped sarcastically. "Now if you're done dancing let's get down to business." The feline reached over his shoulders and drew the two swords. Their bronze blades glistened in the light.

The feline raced straight at the man, closing the distance between them in seconds. He was holding the blades low and swung them both upwards in a X pattern. The villain's blades moved fast and there was the ringing of metal upon metal as he parried both attacks.

Stealth leapt upwards to avoid the two blades aimed at cutting off both his legs and lashed out with his own blades clipping the hat off the man's head.

The man leapt up and completely over Stealth who had to duck down to avoid losing his head to the man's blades. He landed deftly behind the feline.

Stealth spun around to face his onrushing opponent. His blades rang loudly as they blocked the sword strikes meant to sever his spine.

"He's faster than last time!" The feline shouted as a blade sliced through his shirt and the skin underneath.

"His reaction time has increased 26% over the last encounter."

"I just said that," Stealth snarled as he lunged at his opponent. "Tell me something useful!"

"FASTER! Improve reaction time to maximum."

"His heart rate and body temperature just went up 43% in the last two minutes. He is obviously using some sort of boost. He cannot maintain such levels for long."

"I can't either." Stealth leapt off the floor and kicked the man hard in the chest with both legs. The villain stumbled backwards, stunned. The hero rushed forward pressing his advantage with a flurry of slashing blows that the man was slow to block. He felt the blades shiver as they sliced through flesh and bone.

Howling Blades made a wild slash with his blades and the cheetah hero had to jump backwards to avoid the blow. The feline could see his enemy was bleeding from a half dozen wounds but if they bothered him he didn't show it. The villain was moving as fast and agile as he had always been.

"Why don't you die?" Stealth snarled.

The villain touched one of the wounds on his chest. "You'll pay for that you stinking furry."

"You keep saying that," was the response. "But it still hasn't happened!"

The two supers rushed at each other and the fight continued.

A burst of machine gun fire made Misha duck behind a pillar for a moment. The bright streaks of tracer fire lit up the area., It also told Misha where his attackers were. The raider was hiding behind an open doorway. He would pop out for a moment, fire a burst and then duck back putting the stone walls between him and Misha. The fox rushed forward as bullets ricocheted off the floor around him. From his belt he took a small cylindrical grenade from his belt. A high explosive grenade would make short work of the man but it would also damage or destroy

everything in the room. But Misha carried more than the normal H.E. The fox tossed the grenade through the open doorway and ducked back behind the pillar. A moment later there was a blinding flash followed by an ear splitting explosion. Without hesitating Misha rushed out from behind the pillar and across the open space to the door. When he ran through the doorway he found a raider on the floor with his hands clutched to his ears. Still dazed by the stun grenade the Sky Raider only suffered for a moment before Misha killed him with two arrows.

Looking around Misha saw small bits of the grenade scattered about smoldering. He rushed about frantically stomping out the small fires before they could spread and destroy everything in the room. With the threat of fire removed Misha finally got a good look at the room and its contents. Everywhere he looked Misha saw gold, silver and objects of the finest artistry. Gold statues stood next to carved furniture and massive jars and boxes. In front of him was a large ornately carved box about two meters long and a meter high. Resting on top of it was a statue of a black jackal. The wooden canine had gold around the eyes that seemed to be staring at him.

"That's Anubis. Guardian of the dead."

"Looks like he's slacking off! Why isn't he defending this place instead of us."

"Maybe he took the day off?"

He looked at the statue. "You know I could use your help here."

"Maybe Misha is the way Anubis is defending this tomb?"

"Anubis is a mythical figure. He cannot possibly be real."

"Why not? Because he does seemingly impossible things and has super powers?"

The god Anubis could be based on an ancient Superhero."

"An interesting theory and an old one. It's been brought up many times before."

"I have an idea! What if we have Anubis pay a visit?"

"How? We don't know how to summon an Egyptian god."

"We can make one!"

It was never easy being a Sky Raider. The promises of glory and excitement he'd gotten when he joined never seemed to happen. Instead he had been in the desert for over a year and all he had seen was sand and sun and more sand. All he had gained was sunburn and blisters. Now with this Super attacking he had more excitement than he really wanted.

The raider slipped furtively into the dark room, eyeing the Anubis statue seated on a golden throne. He didn't remember there being a statue here before-

The statue opened its eyes, revealing glowing white irises, and rose to its feet. It pointed its finger at him and intoned in a voice like thunder, "YOU. ARE. TRESPASSING!"

The man soaked his pants in urine as he ran screaming from the room, down the hall, and out of the tomb. He vanished into the desert still screaming.

Behind him in the tomb the figure of Anubis shivered a moment and suddenly reverted to the image of Misha who was wagging his tail and laughing. "Now that was a use of the Cloaking device the developers never considered!"

"It was a simple matter of altering the image the cameras are projecting."

"Sending an update to Captain Liu right now."

Misha saw one vase that was sitting near the doorway that had been hit and several pieces broken off. He moved up to the ancient jar and noticed that there was a spiderweb of cracks running throughout the top of the jar.

"We have a problem. There are a pair of Sky Raider VTOL headed here. Along with at least four Sky skiffs."

"Can the navy intercept them?" Misha asked. He picked up the broken pieces and carefully put them back in place. The nanites set to work and in a moment they had repaired it and there was no trace of any damage to the pottery. Displayed in his eyesight was a complete chemical breakdown of the jar, its age and four suspected places of origin based on the composition of the soil and the water used to originally create it.

"The F-18's did, these are the ones that got past them."

Misha looked at the room filled with its priceless treasures. The idea of all this in the hands of those greedy Sky Raiders made him shiver. "The Raiders aren't getting any of this. I don't care how many people they bring."

A soft shuffling noise made Misha turn and he found himself looking at a person who was headed towards him.

The figure was covered with wrappings of linen and cloth that had aged to the color of baked bread. The dust and dirt of three thousand years covered it completely. On his head was an equally dusty headdress of alternating blue and gold horizontal stripes. In each hand was a sword. Each of the swords blades had a deep, sickle like curve on the end that glistened in the light. The figure was slowly walking towards him. His arm raising the khopesh in his hands over his head.

It took several seconds for the realization to sink in. To understand what he was seeing was no trick of the light or an illusion created by advanced cameras. "It's the mummy. AND HE'S MOVING!!" Misha shouted as a chill of fear ran down his spine.

"He can't be moving!"

"He IS moving."

"The figure has no thermal signature, no heartbeat and he is not breathing! Technically he is dead. We cannot detect any hidden mechanisms or equipment. He's not generating any energy. No external interference. He shouldn't be moving."

"Tell him that!"

"He's undead!" Misha nocked an arrow and aimed it at the creature. There was a deep and primal fear rising in him and he had to work hard keep from bolting and running away in a blind panic.

The undead creature stopped for a moment and his gaze lingered on the fox for a long time. His eyes although now just gray, dusty material gazed at him with an amazingly clarity. Misha had no doubt that this person was analyzing and judging him. He shivered violently and any thought of shooting at this thing was forgotten.

Then the mummy turned its head forward and shuffled past him without so much as raising a finger to harm him.

Misha stood there, dumbfounded as the undead person shuffled across the room and out the door. Slowly the fear subsided and then vanished. "What just happened?"

"He . . . "

"It . . . " The nanites seemed as unsettled as Misha was. *"It evidently doesn't see you as an enemy."*

"Why?"

"Searching databases for more information. Information on the undead and magic is limited."

"There is lots of information on the undead but very little of it useful."

"Why he is active is easy enough to explain," Misha commented. "Strangers are in his tomb stealing everything. But why didn't he attack me?"

Suddenly the sounds of weapons fire mixed in with shouting and the dull thump of explosions came to him from the direction the mummy had taken.

"He's protecting his tomb and so are you."

The sounds of combat grew in intensity.

"Figure out why later. There's a fight to finish." Misha turned and followed the path his dusty ally had taken. Moving across the hall he came to a bloody mess that was barely recognizable as having once been a Sky Raider. Weaving his way through the ancient hallways and rooms Misha headed back towards the surface. Along the way the hero came upon the shattered metal and plastic remains of a Raider jumpbot. The combat robot had been reduced to pieces. Small pieces.

He followed the path of destruction the mummy had left behind and wound his way back towards the entrance he had come in by. The hero moved upwards and into the sunlight, weapons ready. At the entrance he was greeted by the bloody remains of a dozen men that lay scattered around amidst twisted and burning wreckage. Misha spotted a shattered wing and realized that the mummy had destroyed a VTOL that must have landed with a load of troops. A moment later he spotted the mummy. The ancient man was surrounded by a dozen raiders who were blazing away at him with every weapon they had.

Misha didn't hesitate a moment. Instead he nocked and loosed an arrow. Sending the projectile into the chest of a Raider. The man stumbled backward and collapsed to the ground.

A trio of the Raiders turned in his direction and unleashed a storm of weapons fire. The bullets slammed into the dirt around him and into the chest plate of his armor sending the superhero stumbling backwards for a moment. He hastily put three arrows to his bow and loosed them at his assailants. One fell to the ground writhing in pain as another grasped at the arrow in his stomach. The third turned and started running away. Two quick arrow shots and the wounded raiders were finished off. Then he turned to the third and calmly ended the man's flight with an arrow into the back.

A line of bullets ripped through the sand between his legs spraying them with rocks but leaving Misha untouched. The vulpine looked calmly and saw the ungainly looking form of a sky skiff. The gunship was hovering a hundred meters away with all of its rockets and cannons aimed at him. He looked down at the bullet holes for a moment. "You missed!" He swiftly nocked and loosed an explosive arrow at the skiff. The projectile slammed into the cockpit of the vehicle and it exploded with a roar sending parts of the skiff and its pilot flying in all directions. One piece landed at his feet, still smoking as it bounced several times. "I didn't."

He caught sight of movement off to his left and turned just in time to see a dozen rockets screaming towards him. There was a flash a roar as the projectiles exploded all around him. Misha felt the searing heat and pain as his body was riddled with shrapnel. Dazed, the hero lay on the ground where the blast had thrown him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the mummy.

The ancient man out stretched one arm and then slowly brought it upwards. A tall pillar of sand at least three meters wide rose up out of the sand. The mummy clenched his ancient fist and dropped his arm violently. The top of the sand pillar bent over and slammed down on the sky

skiff in a cloud of sand, flames and debris. The sand dropped down to the ground. The only trace of the sky skiff was some debris that poked out of the sand and a few puffs of smoke.

Very impressive!"

Misha lay there for a moment letting the nanites in his body heal the worse of the injuries. "I'm glad he's on my side." He looked at the pile of sand and wondered if the wreckage of the skiff would still be there in three thousand years. What would the people then make of it?

Stealth leapt upwards into the air and came down with both blades aimed at the villain Howling Blades.

The man easily dodged the two blows aimed at him as the felines blades only sliced through empty air. The man's own blades were moving fast and one of them cut through the felines shirt opening up a small wound in the flesh and fur beneath. Stealth landed for only a moment. His paws had barely touched the linoleum covered floor when he leapt upwards again. Leaping completely over the man he landed behind the villain.

Howling Blades spun about with his arms outstretched. The blades he was wielding slashed through the air barely missing Stealth.

The feline hero ducked under the blades and lashed out with the hilt of his sword catching the man by surprise and sending him stumbling backwards a few steps. Without hesitating the villain charged straight at the hero. There was a deadly gleam and his blades were swinging hard.

His own blades blocked the man's deadly weapons. Stealth twisted his wrists and the villain's blades slid harmlessly upward missing the cat completely. The feline moved back a step as he twisted his blades and sent them sliding towards the man's legs. One of the blades missed but the other bit into the armor on the man's leg.

Howling Blades cursed loudly and lashed out with his own weapons and Stealth leapt backwards and upwards to avoid being disemboweled and having his legs cut off at the knee. He did a somersault in the air before landing deftly on his feet.

The two combatants stood a short distance apart. Each just out of the reach of the other's blades.

"You set this up," Stealth said and waved his arms about. "All of this. You faked this bank robbery just so you could get revenge on me."

"My revenge for you humiliating me will be perfect. Your blood will taste sweet as it spills all over the floor," the man snarled.

"If you used your swords half as well as you used your mouth I might actually be worried!" Stealth snarled. He charged the man with his blades already moving.

The two fighters moved with lightening speed and their weapons were just a blur of motion. The ringing of the weapons striking each other blended into one constant sound. Stealth stopped thinking and was moving purely on instinct and training. He shut out the rest of the world and concentrated solely on the fight. Dodging, twisting, jumping, swinging, slashing with all his speed and strength. He didn't feel the pain as he was cut in a dozen different places. He concentrated on the fight to the exclusion of all else. Stealth could hear the nanites chattering in his mind but he paid them no notice. Gone was the subtlety and maneuver of earlier and the fight went down to a straight bloody brawl. The rest of the world vanished. All that mattered was the two of them and the deadly blades that were slashing through the air between them. His world was reduced to raw reflexes and flashing steel blades. He was slowing down. In his eyesight he could see all sorts of red flashing messages which were the nanites warning him of many things. Even in this state he could tell his body was moments from collapsing.

After what felt like a long time the two parted. Each moving backward a few steps at the same time. They stared at each other and Stealth lifted his lips and snarled silently. His opponent had a blank stare on his face for a moment. Then he stumbled backward a step and collapsed to the floor.

The feline stood there a moment as the adrenaline surged through his body and his heart was racing. Slowly it sank in that the fight was over and the adrenaline high left him. Stealth sat down as his legs suddenly lost their strength. A massive wave of heat swept over him and the floor felt ice cold to his overheated body. He lay down and let the coolness of the floor slowly sink into his body, cooling and refreshing it.

"Enacting emergency procedures. Lowering vital systems back to normal levels."

Blood pressure and body temperature are returning to normal," the nanites commented. "Can you hear us now?"

"Yes I can," Stealth answered slowly.

"Good. Lay there and rest. You've pushed your body too hard. You need to recover."

"That was amazing! We didn't know you could move that fast!"

Stealth gave a small laugh. "Neither did I!"

The fight was over by the time Misha heard the welcome sound of helicopter blades that heralded the arrival of reinforcements. In moments a pair of sleek, armored, assault transports

roared in and dropped to the ground. A score of heavily armed and armored soldiers poured out of each and quickly spread out.

One soldier separated from the group and walked up to Misha and he recognized it as Lieutenant Martinelli. She looked around at the ruined camp. The only things still standing were themselves. "Looks like we missed the party."

Misha nodded. "You're just in time for the cleanup. We smashed the main resistance but there still might be stragglers around."

The officer nodded and turned to the troops. "Spread out. Secure the perimeter and conduct the sweep as we planned. Rodriguez put a squad out to defend the tomb entrance but stay out. No telling what booby traps they have in there."

A dozen soldiers quickly spread out around the excavation moving under the direction of a tough looking sergeant. Two of them took up guard at the entrance. One of them was watching for anything trying to enter the tomb. The other for anything trying to leave.

"Is it as rich a tomb as the reports say it is?" the officer asked.

"Oh yes!" Misha answered as he nodded his head for a moment then stopped. Then his eyes widened in surprise. "Reports?"

"Well," she said slowly with a pained expression on her face. "You're already on TV and the radio."

Misha shook his head and growled.

"National Geographic has a team heading here already," she added.

"Wonderful! There goes the secrecy of the whole operation."

"So what happens to this place?" Martinelli asked. "This tomb is a global treasure. We can't just leave it here. The Raiders will eventually come back."

"Why don't you ask the owner?" Misha asked.

"And who is that?"

Misha pointed to the mummy who was standing off to one side. Silently watching everything. "Him!"

The EMT technician insisted on giving Stealth a full check before letting him go. "You'll need a full days rest at the least," the man ordered sternly.

Stealth looked at the man he had just fought. The villain known as the Howling Blades of Death was hand and leg cuffed and being lead away.

A police officer walked up to the hero. "This is yours." He dropped a small paper bag into Stealth's lap.

The feline opened the bag and pulled out his pastry and examined it. "Undamaged." He bit down into the pastry enjoying the rich sweetness. "Still warm too!"

Misha heard something walking towards him and he turned about. Standing in front of him. Just a mere hands breadth from him was the mummy. The ancient creature looked at him a moment. Then he smiled revealing teeth that looked straight and strong in spite of being several millennia old. The ancient man extended his right hand and in it was a bow and quiver. The bow was made of wood covered with a black lacquer that was still shiny in spite of the millennia of age.

Hesitantly Misha took the offered weapon. It felt light in his hand but the wood felt strong and limber. Misha bowed. "Thank you!"

The End