

Star Wars: The Lost Mantra

Prologue

The galaxy flashed past, in a blur of incandescent lines of white light, before the ship jolted out of hyperspeed. With a gasp, the man in the padded seat was hurled forwards, before picking himself up off the dashboard, brushing his battered jacket down.



“I never get used to this.” He complained. “Shairi?” He called.

A tall blond woman made her way through the hatch, and stuck her head around the doorway, the light from the stars outside casting her face in shadow.

“Yeah?” She called, in a soft, accented voice.

The man smiled. “We make landing in just under two minutes. Be ready.”

“Sure thing Cap’n!” She laughed, before crossing over to lightly kiss him on the cheek. Her soft scent intoxicated him, and her long hair tickling his face tantalized him cruelly, and he inwardly sighed as she made her way out of the room to prepare herself for the landing. Turning his attention to the controls before him, he gently eased her down, sending the ship into a spiraling descent. In front of him, he could see the surface of Dantooine, and the smell of oil all around him made him fantasize of stepping out into the fresh air on the planets surface. The ventilation of the ship rumbled slowly, as the gases inhaled from planets afar made its way through the ship, and the man in the seat could hear the noises of Shairi in the back, fumbling with the clasps of the straps.

“All safe back there?” The man called, leaning behind him and inhaling a large amount gas from the ventilation systems above. He heard Shairi’s voice, somewhat muffled, echo out from behind.

“Sure thing Sasha!” Sasha nodded to himself, before slowly, before gathering speed, beginning the landing proper. The edges of the ship glowed with flame, the entrance into the atmosphere, the ships mechanisms keeping the flame from touching the surface of the ship. Sasha gritted his teeth, and piloted it down further, keeping the descent steady. No obstacles had been encountered yet, but a freighter had imploded around here recently, and with wreckage, you could never be too sure. The ship spiralled down, and Sasha saw the brown, agricultural surface of Dantooine getting ever closer, the farms and grasslands dotting its surface gazing at him from below. The world below him was wreathed in mist from this height, although he would soon break through the mist. Suddenly, there was a loud bang, followed by the screech of metal being wrenched from its position, and the ship shook, listing heavily to one side in a sudden moment. Hurlled from his seat, Sasha leapt up across the tilting deck, trying desperately to hold himself onto something. His heart skipped a beat as he

heard Shairi scream, and he hollered back, desperate to hear her reply, desperate to hear her give some indication she was safe. The ship was in free-fall now, plummeting down towards Dantooine at an alarming pace, and Sasha heard a loud roaring in his ears. Blood pumped through his veins, fuelled by adrenalin, as he hurled himself at the control board, stretching desperately to grab onto something, to anchor himself. He reached up and managed to get a fingers grip upon a metal bar, fixed to the control board, before the ship lurched backwards, hurling him across the floor once more. The sky outside the windows was now the brilliant blue of a Dantooine day, meaning that the ship was less than a minute away from impact on the surface. Howling with frustration, Sasha thudded into a console, and the wrenching sound echoed again, this time followed by another bang, and the roaring in Sasha's ears grew louder. Blood pumped through his ears, and adrenaline coursed through his veins, before there was a monumental explosion, and the world shattered in Sasha's eyes, being replaced with cold, black emptiness.

Hours later, Sasha slowly opened his eyes to complete darkness, and felt a splitting pain to his head, as well as being unable to feel his leg. He was in complete darkness, and his leg was trapped by a heavy piece of metal. The air was tight, and Sasha realized that he was sealed in. Dried blood on his head cracked as he raised his head, and he slowly tested his bodily functions for all signs of movement or injury. Apart from his leg being trapped, and his back damaged, Sasha found himself in working order, for the most part. Using his left arm to reach inside his jacket, he used the other to prop himself up, in the absence of his leg. Reaching inside his jacket, he drew out a survival implement used to light up such areas as this, and flicked it on. The darkness was banished to the furthest corners of Sasha's prison, and Sasha looked around. Dust motes filled the air, drying on his skin and covering his black hair with a gray coating. Looking around, he saw his leg had been trapped by a large metal girder, and seeing the injury brought on a swift wave of pain, causing him to cry out in agony. Surveying the rest of the prison, he found himself to be sealed in tight. He still had no recollection of how he had reached such a predicament. Reaching out, he pushed at the girder, but was rewarded with little apart from disturbing the dust motes that had settled upon the girder. Heaving again, he fell backwards with the effort, but was heartened to see that it had moved an inch or so. With another heave, he moved it slightly further, causing it to emit a screeching sound. That wrenching sound...

"Shairi!" Sasha gasped, sitting bolt upright. Grabbing the bar, anger and fear gave him strength, and he heaved the bar off his leg. With a loud bang it dropped from his leg, and he leapt upwards, before his previously trapped leg collapsed from beneath him. Sobbing with anger and frustration, he rose once more, only to the same result. Tears coursed down his grime smeared face as the image of his pregnant wife appeared before him, the soft swelling of her stomach apparent against the worn clothing of her clothes, her long blond hair straggly and wild, framing her high cheek boned face, with its tan, and her brown shining eyes. He remembered the beautiful smile on her face, the curves of her body that so fascinated him, and he remembered the small, unborn child cradled in her womb, and her dazzling personality. The image of her in his mind welled up inside of him, pressed against the walls of his mind, and filled him up with such a rage and power as he had never known. Roaring with all of the pain, frustration and anger that he felt in the depths of his heart, he rose up, ignoring the waves of agony that assailed his leg, and, raising one dust covered and grime smeared

arm, and he brought it down, the rage giving him strength, upon one of the walls of his prison. The debris and metal shook with loud crunching noises, dislodging a heavy new layer of dust and grime, further adding to the dirt on Sasha. Roaring with agony as his hands bled, and as his leg was assailed with new agony, red hot lances of pain striking at his main bodily functions, before he struck again and again, dislodging more and more. A red mist had descended before his eyes, and the roaring he had felt in the ship was apparent in his ears upon the ship had returned, his sole focus to be breaking out of his prison. Abandoning all attempts at beating at the prison, he tore at it with his bare hands, blood pouring freely. Debris was dislodged, and dust was stirred up inside the prison, yet rage had consumed Sasha, and he had lost all control. Finally, Sasha spotted a chink of light in the roof of his prison, and he struck at it, again and again, dislodging more and more, before throwing himself at it. His head and upper torso burst through into the Dantooine sunlight, his dust covered visage and body giving him the appearance of some sort of ghost, albeit a ghost bent upon revenge. With strength born from pain, he wrenched himself clear from the hole, and emerged, covered by blood and grime, his battered jacket stained and torn, large rips and rents through his clothing, before collapsing on his leg, his rage spent. With a gasp, Sasha's lungs inhaled deeply, the fresh, agricultural Dantooine air being incredibly rich after the stuffiness of that of the wreckage.

Turning his head, he felt the blood on his head crack once more, and winced with pain, before turning to survey the wreckage. He lay at the base of a large heap of smoldering wreckage, twisted metal and shattered plastic lying together, and the smell of combustion being heavy upon the breezy air. Smoke rose from the wreckage, rising in great plumes, as if some great beacon had been ignited upon the plains of Dantooine, and the avian population was avoiding the plains like the plague. Gazing upon the wreckage, Sasha gasped in dismay. His ship was destroyed beyond repair. Suddenly, it struck him, and he remembered his true purpose.

“Shairi!” He sobbed, agony striking him at the thought of her prospective death. Limping his way around the rubble, he searched, before leaping upon the wreckage itself and tearing at it in a rage. Sobbing, he fell down.

There was no sign of Shairi. Falling to his knees, he beat at the wreckage with his fists, before falling once more, his head bowed. The sun still shone wanly, the clouds having moved in, and the plume of smoke was as high as ever. Beating the wreckage with his fists, he collapsed, the blood loss finally getting to him.

The world swirled, and darkness enveloped all. Sasha was free of time, of place, of meaning, and of being. The currents of thought, time, being and philosophy were combined, swirling around Sasha in a whirlwind of emotion. As he slipped from nightmare entangled dream to nightmare entangled dream, Sasha eventually awoke, feeling the cool, Dantooine night air upon his face, the soft wind caressing his troubled face. As he awoke, he felt cool hands upon his brow, slowly stroking and caressing him, and singing to him in a sweet, melodic voice, which seemed to carry along the wind and enchant the creatures of Dantooine from their homes. It lulled Sasha's troubled mind, sending his mind wavering free from his hurt body and traversing the silent night plains of Dantooine. Suddenly, the realm of consciousness reached its unforgiving fingers, and reclaimed Sasha's wandering soul, and

summoned him back to the world of the conscious, his soul being powerless to deny the calls by which it faced. Wrenched back by the cold, unfeeling hands, his eyes flashed open, the black night sky of Dantooine staring back at him mercilessly, and Sasha sat bolt upright, screaming one word.

“Shairi!” The scream echoed out across the silent plains of Khoonda like the bark of a Kath Hound. The moon shone its silver eye upon the figure, sitting bolt upright, his eyes shining. As Sasha stared, wild eyed, he felt soft hands pressing him slowly back down, and a soft, female voice whispering to him, caressing him, gently wiping the sweat from his brow. Gratefully sinking back down, he looked up through his eyes, hazy and hard to see by. Through dim eyes, he saw the figure leaning above him, her hair shrouding his face like a curtain, locking the two in their own private world. “Shairi!” He whispered, as recognition dawned. She smiled, and pressed a finger to her lips before kissing him softly upon the mouth, to silence him. Relaxing into it, Sasha closed his eyes, and basked in the familiar taste of her mouth, the familiar feel of it upon his lips and the contours of her face, as he brushed it softly.

“You’re alive!” Was all he whispered. The two words seemed to sum up everything, the bond between the two people strong enough for that. Shairi smiled. “Yes.” She whispered. “I’m alive.”

Dawn broke early upon the plains of Khoonda, the light blue eye of the morning shining wanly upon the planes, lighting up the rocks and ruins that dotted the surface. The Kath hounds rose from their lairs, and stepped out onto the plains, stretching luxuriously before setting out for the early morning hunt. The avian population of Dantooine took to the skies, beginning their recital of the dawn chorus and patrolling the lands presumed by their primitive minds to be their territories. The cry of a hunting bird echoed out over the plains, and the subsequent squeak of its prey as it was devoured followed. The clouds were slowly spiraling above the planet, and the sun shone wanly upon a large rock feature, a large promontory which stuck out over the plains. A sheer rock face protected the front of the promontory, and the still smoldering wreckage the back. It was the burning wreckage that had kept the Kath hounds away from the two figures lying in front of the smoldering wreckage, curled in fetal positions for protection. Light slowly shone upon the faces of the two, of the blond, grizzled mane of the man and upon the cascade of golden hair belonging to the woman. In the throes of his sleep, the man rolled over, onto a piece of sharp metal, and was awoken from his troubled slumber, and he rose, his battered jacket smeared with soot and grime, his leg buckling alarmingly beneath him, before a presence of great mind and resolve held the leg, and the mans face contorted with pain as he gazed down at the blood that had stained his trousers.

Resolve hardened his features, and the wind softly blew, sending his mane of golden hair blowing softly behind him. Stepping slowly forwards, testing his weakened leg, he slowly made his way to the front of the promontory, and gazed down upon the plain beneath him, staring at the brown grass, dried by the sun, the silvery rivers that writhed through the landscape like silver snakes, and at the Kath hounds, their young ones gamboling around soft grassy slopes and playing games of chase amidst the Rakatan ruins. Sasha’s gaze strayed to the lands owned by the Sandral families in times past, now held by the custodians of Khoonda of old; the settlement which had collapsed shortly after the Jedi Exile’s visit. Slowly, Sasha’s gaze turned, taking in the

agricultural landscape about him, the homesteads and farmsteads, the smallholdings and farms, and the promontories similar to his own. He spotted kinrath roving the plains below, and he watched the avian population of Dantooine wheeling its way across the sky. His grizzled mane swayed once more, the soft wind spiralling its way across the sky, as Sasha turned, feeling a hand upon his shoulder. Shairi stood there, her face illuminated by the early morning sun, her hair cascading down her back like a golden waterfall, her high cheekbones and soft neck shone upon by the sun. Turning, Sasha embraced her, whispering to her.

“I thought I’d lost you.” Shairi nodded sadly.

“I too thought that for some time.”

“Yet you survived. How?” Sasha replied, genuine concern obvious on his face. Shairi turned to face the plains, her eyes roving the plains.

“I was lucky. I was thrown from the ship in the crash, and ended up on the outside of the wreckage, near the top of the wreckage somewhere. I was unscathed.”

Sasha smiled at such good tidings, before concern returned to his face.

“And the baby?” He whispered, hardly daring to speak. Shairi placed a protective hand over her swollen stomach, comforting the small figure inside her womb. The fetus slowly responded to her touch, its small, under developed feet kicking out, and Shairi smiled.

“Alive and kicking.” Sasha smiled with genuine relief, his tired face happy at this knowledge, before anger replaced his calm, relieved features.

“Who did this?” He asked, his voice low and dangerous. Shairi’s face darkened.

“Who do you think? It was him of course. I found this in the wreckage.” Removing her hand from her stomach, she pulled a piece of warped and burnt metal from her jacket. “A bomb.”
Sasha swore violently.

“Surely his peers have noticed his vendetta against us? His quest for vengeance?”

“They have far more pressing matters at hand than the case of a corrupt officer. The Pirates are getting unruly, and the galaxy is filled with rebels. It’ll be sometime before they can settle down control their Empire.” Sasha nodded at her sensible words, yet he felt only a burning desire for vengeance.

“He could have killed you, the baby, and all I hold precious!” Sasha raged, angry at being so powerless to fight.

“I know.” Said Shairi simply, her hand stroking her swollen stomach once more. Turning his attention once more to the plains, Sasha watched the sun slowly crawling its way across the plains.

“So, what now?” He asked, turning to look at the wreckage of what was once his ship. Shairi looked at it also, her face sad as she looked at the ship that had been their home for the last five years.

“We must continue with what we came for. If Stryker and the others don’t get it, they’re doomed if a war starts.”

Sasha turned to face her incredulously.

“Shairi, we almost died! You have an unborn baby inside of you, and I have an injured leg, and you still believe this is the right thing?”

Shairi nodded.

“Stryker would expect no less.”

Sasha kept his reservations about the subject hidden. He would try his utmost to protect Shairi. He knew what it felt like without her.

Trekking across the plains of Dantooine was hard work. The sun shone upon the long, brown grass, drying it, as the wind rustled through the grass, setting it blowing and rustling. Sasha and Shairi were making good progress, Sasha being a seasoned veteran of such travels, and Shairi being naturally strong, despite the limitation of the child inside her. Shairi led the column, intermittently turning to point out some feature of nature to Sasha, who followed up behind. The calling of birds echoed out through the plains, and the sea of grass was broken only by rocks and geographical features, which frequently burst from the ground like huge inanimate fingers, pointing accusingly at the sky. The sun shone down upon the plains, and Sasha was protecting his head with a wide brimmed leather hat, whilst Shairi used a small hat of the same style as Sasha’s, yet with less of a wide brim. Her soft hands brushed the ears of the grass as she made her way through it, and she gazed around, taking in the beauty of Dantooine.

“Sasha?” She called behind her.

Sasha looked up, his face worried as he thought of her being in pain.

“I’m fine. Sasha, which way should we be heading to the Enclave?” She asked. Sasha looked up at the sun, before looking in front of him.

“You see those rocks?” He queried.

Shairi nodded, her blond hair bobbing up and down.

Sasha continued.

“Over there and down in the valley. That’s where it is.”

Shairi nodded, satisfied. The sun was still only just above them, meaning they’d be able to get in and out of the Enclave in that very same day. Smiling, Shairi tossed her head back, allowing the wind to throw her hair. Nothing could be better.

The cold, grey flagstones that marked the Jedi Enclave were cracked and shattered, lying broken after many years of disrepair, which had happened after the death of the Jedi masters during the time of Jedi Exile. The Exile never returned to become mistress of the academy, and so it fell into disrepair, being looted continuously, for the artifacts it held inside. Sasha gazed up at the dilapidated building before him, at

the crumbled and broken main wall in front of him, and he reflected upon the years of the Jedi on Dantooine. The wind blew hard, sending clouds scudding across the sky and making Sasha's hat flutter in the wind. It whistled through the Enclave like a ghostly whisper, like the moan of the Jedi that had died behind its walls in the attack of Darth Malak. A cloud spread over the sun, darkening the sky to a dark, oppressive gray, and the wind picked up once more. Turning behind him, Sasha turned to face Shairi, whose hair was blowing out behind her in an unruly fashion.

"You're sure you wanna do this?" He asked her, concerned.
Shairi nodded determinedly.

"I'm sure."

Sasha merely nodded, and made his way across the cracked flagstones to the main doorway towards the side. He still held enough respect of the dead Jedi to refrain from clambering over the ruined front wall. The two adventurers passed by an old fountain, long since dried up, and filled with the bones of some unlucky creature. The fountain had a deep crack down one side, from the bowl to the pedestal it stood upon, yet the engravings of numerous Jedi could just be discerned, even after the long years. Reaching the courtyard before the Enclave, Sasha looked around. The flagstones were cracked or missing, and weeds were abundant, growing up from the underneath and working the flagstones up. Surveying the door, Sasha found only a pile of broken rock and masonry; the original doorways, made of soft fabric, had been stolen years ago. Turning to Shairi, he held his hand out melodramatically.

"Madame, I present to you the Jedi enclave."

Shairi laughed, but Sasha's heart contained nothing of the happiness that his jest had implied; he feared for the safety of Shairi and their unborn child. The sure footed Shairi clambered her way up the rock, before disappearing over the top. Sasha followed suit, climbing to the top of the rock, before turning to gaze out across the plains. The plains were spread out beneath him like a map, yet the new, gray weather conditions had lessened his extent of visibility. Gazing at the horizon, he could just about make out the promontory that they had set out from that morning and, with one last look, he two clambered down into the enclave.

The two emerged in a short passageway, where the remains of a droid were still imminent. The droid was the subject of much looting; all of his inner workings were missing. It was some sort of protocol droid, from what Sasha could discern, and Shairi was examining it closely. She looked up as Sasha climbed over, and smiled encouragingly. The smell inside was one of mildew, damp, dust and decay. Weeds had overcome all that was stone, and had rotted all that was not. Sasha started as he heard a noise, yet it was just the screeching of a bird, wheeling its way high over the ruin, with no sense of the knowledge stored beneath it. There was very little in the Jedi enclave of any value. The enclave had been plundered countless times, and was now a mere husk of what it had ever been. Thinking this, Sasha turned to Shairi, and inquired:

"You're sure this is the place?"

Shairi gave a soft laugh.

“Sasha, you saw the evidence on Ryloth yourself! It’s here.”

Sasha nodded uneasily. He still wasn’t comfortable with Shairi’s idea to come. The idea of something happening to her filled him with dread.

The two adventurers carried on down the passageway, with Shairi intermittently pausing to examine some feature of history or craftsmanship. Sasha was on the edge. His normal reckless persona had been disrupted by almost losing Shairi, and he constantly feared for her safety. Their footsteps rang around the passageway, the sound bouncing off walls and echoing again and again. The Jedi enclave seemed to enforce a nature of reverence; Sasha and Shairi only spoke in hushed whispers. Eventually, they reached the main courtyard, emerging into the light once more. The sun had come out once more, and shone down through the gaping hole in the ceiling. The main courtyard was filled with a large, circular pond, the water covered in algae and other bacterial plants. From this pond, there rose a large, stone, circular, raised structure, with a small ramp leading up to its center. The rock was grey and covered with lichens, as well as being overgrown on all except the path. Nothing at all had grown upon the path that led to the center. Sasha gazed at the circle, looking at their reason for coming, and a smile crept over the face of Shairi next to him.

“This is it!” She whispered.

Sasha nodded.

“You remember the instructions?” He asked Shairi, gazing at her wonder filled face.

“Yeah.”

She whispered, slowly walking up the ramp. The ramp gave soft cracking noises as she walked over it; the stone here was particularly weak. Reaching the top, the level walkway of stone, she trod her way into the middle; she had reached the centre. From her jacket, she drew a small golden chain, with a small pendant attached to the end. Falling to her knees, she scabbled at the rock, removing all lichen that had gathered. The wind blew again, and the circular courtyard in which they were in whistled, the wind rushing through it, sounding like a ghostly choir giving a performance. Sasha stayed where he was, at the base of the ramp. Suddenly, he heard Shairi cry out, a triumphant gasp.

“Sasha! This is it!”

With hesitating fingers, Shairi fumbled with the pendant, before finally managing to insert it into the small orifice she discovered, beneath layers of lichen. As she inserted it, she heard a soft click. Sasha started forwards, thinking nothing had happened, but leapt back at the sound of a loud grinding, of rock upon rock. Shairi stepped back from the pendant; stepping back onto the top of the ramp, as the circular ending of the leveled end of the ramp slowly rose in a spiraling motion, higher and higher, shaking off hundreds of years of lichen and mould as it did so. Sasha gasped and stumbled back as the huge monolith grew higher still, and Shairi gasped with excitement, her

eyes wide as she hungered to lap up the spectacle before her. With a loud bang, the movement suddenly stopped, and Shairi moved forwards. Slowly and hesitantly making his way up the ramp, Sasha looked at the huge structure before him. A huge stone statue stood before him, built in the likeness of a robed Jedi, his lightsaber raised in front of his face in a guard motion, his hood thrown up above his head, shielding his face. His long robe extended down to his feet, covering every part of his body bar the hands. Shairi gasped in wonderment; their entire fruitless search hadn't been for nothing. Turning to Sasha, she grabbed at his hands, and embraced him firmly.

“We've done it!” She whispered, kissing Sasha firmly. “We found him! The search on Ryloth worked!”

Sasha responded to the kiss with equal measure, smiling as he gazed upon the exuberant face of Shairi.

“But now what?” He asked.

Both figures turned back to look at the statue, examining the robes for any sign of an entrance way. Walking over, Sasha examined the robes at the base closely, before making his way around. His searching was not fruitless. His cry of success was carried by the wind, which chose to blow at that moment also, around the statue to Shairi, and she ran over to him excitedly. She found Sasha staring into a small staircase, leading down into the statue. As she looked down, a cold blast of wind swept up, carrying with it an even stronger sense of rot and decay, and an oppressive icy feeling.

“This is it.” She whispered, her voice snatched away in a blast of wind.

Sasha managed to hear her whispered comment and nodded. “Yes.” He replied simply. “This is it.”

The flame held in Sasha's hand held the only form of light inside the structure; they had discovered that no electronic equipment had worked, and were forced to use the old torches they found in brackets at the foot of the stairway. The flames danced in the still air, their light bouncing around the walls, both banishing and lengthening the shadows in equal measure. The floor was damp and covered with water, and the soft splash of the two adventurer's feet descending into the water provided the only sound. The smell of decay was even worse down here; to say it was filled with mildew and dampness would be to make an understatement. Shairi shivered with fear.

“It feels like a tomb.” She whispered.

Sasha didn't reply. He didn't need to. At the base of the steps, they had discovered only another long passageway, which wound its way up through the statue, to the top. They hadn't been traversing the passageway for long; they were only about half way up. Sasha led, and the constant dripping of water was heard intermittently through their journey. The two made no stops. Both feared that, should they stop, they wouldn't be able to start up again. As Shairi slowly walked forwards, she examined the walls alongside. They were blackened by time, and had seen countless years. Brushing her

hands against the wall, she suddenly encountered the texture of something hard and tough; slowly moving to get a view of it in the light, she caressed it slowly. As the light swung round to illuminate the scene, the grinning, lifeless and warped face of a skeleton stared back at her, its hands outstretched as if trying to escape some terrible fate. Shairi screamed in horror, and leapt forwards, smacking into Sasha's back and knocking him down. There was a loud crash as the two fell, their limbs entangled, and the torch in Sasha's hand rolled into a pool of water, being doused instantly with a loud hiss. Swearing, Sasha stood up, slowly lifting Shairi up with him. Reaching out, he fumbled for the torch, but felt only a hard, wooden and gnarled texture. Reaching up, he felt the object before him with a sense of foreboding. With a clang, his hands struck something metal; reaching out, Sasha pulled it, and the door, for that was what it was, swung open with a creak, the hundred years of its vigil showing in that one sound. The corridor instantly lightened, as the chamber beyond was filled with torches, illuminating the room spectacularly. Shairi's earlier ideas had been correct; this was a tomb.

The stone tomb before them spoke of thousands of years of age. The carefully scratched markings that had once described it and its inhabitant were gone, worn away by the water that dripped from the ceiling, and the fantastic works of stone statues that had been there warped and twisted by the powers of erosion. The two gazed at the object of their search in wonderment; this was the object for which they had come on Dantooine. The light in the chamber shone eerily, lighting up the coffin but little else, giving the room an appearance of mystique and eeriness. The light bounced off the walls, illuminating the room and the coffin, and the look of hunger upon the face of Shairi. Her face, illuminated by the glow, was drawn to the coffin, and her eyes hungered to take in every last bit of it. Striding over, she examined the lid more closely. In built into the stone was a small compartment. Eagerly, Shairi reached inside, and drew from it a small wooden box, the box that was the target of theirs. She turned to Sasha, who had hung back, the light in her eyes gleaming, as she held the box aloft.

“We've done it!”

She cried, running over to him, embracing him and then passing him the box. Sasha allowed himself a smile as she celebrated, and the light seemed to fluctuate in agreement with their success. Turning to face the doorway, Sasha slowly examined the box, not daring to open it until they were out of the tomb. The soft mahogany wood had been sanded masterfully; as Sasha's fingers moved up and down, he didn't receive a single splinter. Turning back to Shairi, he called her name, finding her still poring over the tomb.

“Shairi?”

Shairi didn't respond. Sasha turned to look at what she was doing, and suddenly his heart froze. The wind seemed to blow, blasting his voice back down the tunnel as if it didn't ever want the message it carried to reach its designated recipient, as Shairi slowly began to push the lid of the coffin off. Time slowed for Sasha, and it seemed that he was in a different universe, as he roared the name of his wife once more. Finally, his voice reached her, and she looked up at him with a bemused smile. Leaping at her as she pushed the coffin lid off, he was too late. The coffin lid fell off

with a bang, shattering in two and disturbing century's worth of dust. Turning to him with another bemused smile, Shairi asked:

"Now, what was so bad about that?"

Sasha's look of shock froze and momentarily relaxed, before the coffin was lit up with an eerie, incandescent blue light.

"Shairi!" Sasha screamed, leaping at her, his body traveling through the air aerodynamically.

There was a hiss, and Shairi screamed as the blue light engulfed her, and raised her bodily. There was a hum, as Shairi slowly rotated, and the smell of cordite wafted throughout the chamber. Sasha screamed again and leaped at Shairi, yet she was too high. His heart froze as her arms were flung out from her sides in a cross like position, before the very air shattered. Sasha was hurled backwards, and the light engulfed the whole room, the statue exploding outwards, chunks of broken masonry and rock falling in a huge cascade of stone. Sasha was hurled from what remained of the tower, and fell into the pool below, assuming a dive position and breaking his fall. Water engulfed him, filling his eyes, ears and nose, it's cold, wet fingers holding him down as he fought to reach the surface. There was a splash as he broke the surface and wrenched himself from the water. The smell of cordite had engulfed the courtyard now, but the danger had passed. Wildly, Sasha looked around.

"Shairi?" He screamed. "No!" he gasped, as his view traveled to a pile of shattered masonry about ten feet away. "No!" He roared, sprinting to the area.

Shairi lay at the bottom of it, her hair slung about her face and her limbs askew, her face locked in a silent scream in its death throes. Sasha's heart splintered as he gazed at her body, so impossibly fragile, shattered at the foot of a huge stone statue, her child – *their* child – forever dead, never to see the day. Her beautiful face was broken and scarred, and blood ran freely down it.

"No!" Sasha sobbed, his agonized mind refusing to comprehend what his eyes told him.

"No!"