

The Find at Al-Sijn Mustatir

by

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“Where the fuck are you!”
Samir glanced at the text message, then set the phone back down on the laminate tabletop. He rubbed his eyes, tired from staring at ancient script under fluorescent lights for...who knows how many hours?

Shit! He was supposed to meet Janah at the cemetery. His guilt at missing the anniversary of Layla’s death manifested as a twinge in his stomach and a catch in his throat. He knew Janah wouldn’t understand, but what he did now was *for* their daughter.

Samir turned his attention back to the record, recently uncovered during a dig at Al-Sijn Mustatir in the Rub’ al-Khali Desert. The largest sand desert in the world, its name meant the “Empty Quarter.” He translated the account from Sabaic, an ancient language in the region:

I passed between lines of skeletons until I came upon the dead...

“No, not ‘dead,’” Samir mumbled to himself. “‘Frozen.’ No, that’s not right either. ‘Still.’ That’s it!”

...still body of my companion. He stood as a statue, unmoving, unblinking, but alive. “Adi!” I called his name, but he did not respond. Did not flinch. Again, I called out and touched his chest and felt his breath. His heart beat, and he yet breathed, but he truly was as a living sculpture.

The pen vibrated in Samir’s hand as he wrote:

I looked around the vast chamber. It was carved from the very mountain and bereft of contents, save for hundreds of skeletons, left to lay where they fell, and a stone altar hewn from the stone of the far wall. Upon the altar sat an iron box, the only item in the barrow...

Again, Samir paused. “Barrow’ isn’t right. ‘Prison’? Not exactly. Something like ‘place of exile.’” He lifted his head in revelation. “That’s why earlier accounts were so off! They translated incorrectly, interpreting it as a burial mound.”

He continued:

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Examining the many piles of bones, I wondered what manner of creature could have done this. Was the Wish-Granter protected by a guardian? Or, perhaps, a warden of its exile.

Samir's heart raced faster. "Wish-Granter! This is it! This is what I've been looking for." His breath came more quickly, and he wiped the tear from the corner of his eye with the back of his hand.

I can bring Layla back!