

*Excerpt from Jagger Jones and the Mummy's Ankh*

Chapter Two:

I WANT MY MUMMY!

Jagger bit his lip, hard, then followed his sister down toward the voice, pulling out his phone and selecting the flashlight app. The smell of old, unwashed socks hit him as he descended.

He slipped past Aria into the narrow hallway that stretched behind her, shining his light on the walls. They were covered, floor to ceiling, in artwork. Brilliant, awesome, incredible artwork.

“What’s that?” Aria pointed at the strange character illuminated by Jagger’s phone.

“It’s not a what. It’s a who,” he breathed. “That’s Egypt’s fanatic pharaoh, Akhenaten.” Jagger spotlighted the figure etched deeply into the bedrock as he ran his hand over it, entranced by the grooves some artist had carved thousands of years ago. Art from the Amarna period was completely different from the predictable look of Egyptian art from all other periods, like a colorful cubist painting stuck in a gallery of black and white photographs.

Akhenaten, tall and gangly with an egg-shaped head and a bare belly bulging over his kilt, stared down at them. He wore a towering, rounded hat and a gaudy necklace. Four women lined up behind him. The queen was nearly as tall as he was, with a

transparent dress that revealed her arms and legs. Three princesses followed her, all wearing chunky necklaces like their dad's and all bald but for ponytails that stuck out of the side of each girl's head.

“And that,” Jagger said as he moved the light up and inched forward. “Is the royal family's sun god.” A giant disk dominated much of the wall. Its rays ended in claw-like hands that reached toward the family members, looking as though it wanted to pat them on the head, or, more ominously, catch them in its claws like toys in some vintage, arcade game.

“I thought Egyptian gods had animal heads.” Aria reached out and placed both palms against the etched rock.

“You need to pay more attention in social studies. Egyptian gods—”

*Jagger Jones! Come!*

Jagger pivoted toward the voice. He wiped his sweaty hands on his pants, glancing at Aria. No reaction. But he *couldn't* be imagining it. His imagination couldn't lead him to a buried tomb! He aimed his flashlight down the hall. He felt jingly, like he'd just stuck his finger in an outlet.

Aria nudged him, and he moved forward, holding his phone in one hand and pulling his sister with the other. Tomb discovery was equal parts thrilling and terrifying; he wanted her close. The air grew staler as the crept farther down the hall.

“Noooo!” Jagger moaned when his flashlight illuminated a problem about fifteen feet in.

A giant boulder blocked the hallway.

He banged his hand against the oversized rock, his stomach churning with disappointment.

*Jagger Jones!*

Mystery Girl was on the other side. She must be in the tomb chamber. The mere thought of an undiscovered tomb chamber sent his pulse racing. Bracing his back against the wall, Jagger shoved the boulder to one side and then the other. The rock wouldn't budge.

"Open already!" he muttered. He needed to get into the room that lay beyond this stupid rock.

Aria flashed him her you're-annoying-but-I-feel-sorry-for-you face. "Let's go get Mom." She yanked on his sweaty T-shirt, then grimaced and wiped her hands on her leggings.

He really must be losing his mind if Aria sounded like the rational one. Still, he wasn't ready to admit defeat. He'd have to take Aria back to Mom then return alone. He sighed. Resolved, he turned to light their way out, anxious to lose his sister so he could figure out how to get into the tomb chamber without the distraction of Aria buzzing around him.

*Jagger Jones!*

Jagger turned back to give the boulder one last glance. "Whoa!"

It had shifted, leaving a gap big enough for them to sneak through. Darkness poured out from the other side. The velvety darkness seemed tangible, like something one could touch and taste. It even *smelled* dark.

*Jagger Jones! Come!*

Her voice drifted out, oozing toward him like a renegade cloud.

“Aria, do you see this?” He spun his sister around.

“Creepy.” She budged closer to him. Then she leaned forward, drawn to the gloom. “Let’s go in!”

Jagger held onto her, hesitating. He needed to keep going, but Aria should be back in the rental house with Mom.

“Come on.” She yanked her arm, but he held her fast, weighing his options.

The urge to see what was in that room, to meet the girl who’d been calling out to him, was too strong to resist. He pushed Aria behind him, took a breath, and slipped past the rock, shining his flashlight around and gasping in awe.

The room glittered with gold. By some miracle, the tomb had escaped the notice of both ancient tomb robbers and modern scholars. He’d be a hero to geeks across the globe.

His breath quickened as he inched forward, trying not to step on any priceless objects. There was a chair with lion paw feet, a gold chest, a broken chariot with gem-studded wheels, loads of gold and alabaster jugs, and more ancient knickknacks than his big brain could process. Centuries of dust couldn’t hide the beauty, and fortune, stuffed into this small room.

“Are we rich? We’re rich, aren’t we?” Aria babbled.

He ignored her, captivated by the open, stone box that stood at the far end of the room, flanked by two larger-than-life dog-headed statues. They were made of black stone and embossed with more gold. They gave him the heebie-jeebies. With a shiver, he shifted his attention back to the box. He knew it should contain a gold coffin built to

house the tomb's mummy. He also knew the dog-headed guards couldn't be watching him, but they felt alive nonetheless.

"It moved!" Aria pointed. "Did you see that dog thing's eyes? They moved."

"It's a statue." He shifted closer to his sister. "It can't move."

"Maybe we should get Mom." Aria eyeballed the guards as if she expected them to wake up and start searching for their next meal. Apparently, giant, gold, dog men were enough to make even Aria nervous.

*Jagger Jones!*

"One minute, lil sis," he croaked. "I have to see the mummy."

He couldn't admit it aloud, but the ghostly voice was coming from *inside* the stone box.

"Just do what you have to do, and let's go. Mom is gonna kill us when she finds out we discovered a tomb while she was asleep. Maybe we should take this secret to *our* graves." She jabbered when she was anxious. "Think we can keep it secret and still get rich off it?" Her eyes darted from a gold chest to a gold chair. "Because this looks like a serious Michigan Avenue shopping spree ..."

Jagger tuned her out, holding his breath as he moved past the statues. He peered into the box, stomach churning. The lid lay on the ground by his feet. Surprisingly, the lid of the golden coffin nestled inside the box was gone too, leaving the mummy exposed. The bandages were intact and still clean; they covered every speck of the small body, too big to be a child but not quite an adult either.

“No way,” he mumbled, staring at the large, gold amulet sitting on the mummy’s belly. Jagger knew immediately that the amulet was the source of the mysterious voice. What he didn’t know was how.

He gaped at the *ankh*, the Egyptian symbol of life, shaped like a cross with a loop at the top. The amulet was covered in gemstones that glimmered in the dim light. Something about the gemstones was off. They were transparent, more like holographic projections than real gemstones. And they seemed animated; colorful lights rattled inside them, as if fireflies were trapped inside. How did this explain the voice?

Wracking his brain for a scientific explanation, Jagger leaned in to get a better view of the fat, green chunk of malachite in the center of the *ankh*, bigger and sparklier than the other gemstones, just as Aria’s hand reached for it.

He froze, terrified. He couldn’t have said why, but he knew they shouldn’t touch that thing.

“DON’T!”

His yell was drowned out by a strong wind that whirled, suddenly, around them. He grabbed his sister as a vortex formed. Colorful lights danced in the wind, as if they’d escaped from the gemstones.

“What’s happening?” Aria clutched the amulet, eyes wide.

“Let go of it!”

He didn’t know if Aria didn’t hear him or if she was ignoring him. Either way, it was too late.

They *fell!*

Jagger clung to Aria's hand as their bodies spun, weightless, in empty space. Colorful lights swirled around them. It was like tumbling through fireworks. The silence was deafening, even more profound after the voice had reverberated through his head all morning. Aria's mouth was open wide. She was screaming, but he couldn't hear a thing.

With a sudden bump, Jagger felt the familiar comfort of solid ground beneath him as his stomach continued to tumble. Maybe he was sick, and this was all a dream. But how could that explain the plush carpet he was sitting on, or the bright light that streamed around him, or the unfamiliar smell wafting on the breeze that brushed his cheek?

Daring a panicked look around, Jagger gasped. "What the ..."

"Breathe," Aria whispered. That's what Mom said when unexpected things happened.

But this wasn't unexpected. This was impossible!