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**Moon Feathers**

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*To my wonderful wife Suzie...you mean the world to me!*

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## 3012: The Artifact

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3012: The Artifact

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# **3012: The Artifact**

**A Time Awaits Novel**

**By John M. Grier**

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## The Dig

“Jack! Jack! You’ve got to see this” Paul exclaimed as he rushed into the room, obviously very excited. Sweat ran down his face in rivulets in spite of the frigid temperature. By the look of his clothes he had been at the dig, alone, for quite some time this morning.

Jack had been sleeping in this particular morning and was always a bit disoriented when he first woke up. It was as if he had to remember who he was and where he was for a while before he could think of speaking. Paul, having worked with Jack for the past ten years, was well aware of this little personality quirk his friend had and waited with as much patience as he could muster.

Eventually Jack dragged himself kicking and screaming into full consciousness, enough to respond “Okay, okay, calm down, I’m awake.”

“You’ve got to come down and see what I found” exclaimed Paul as he excitedly danced around the room, apparently full of nervous energy.

Jack slowly pried himself out of bed, yawning and stretching, blinking the sleep from his eyes. “Okay, what’d you find?”

“You know that building that we thought might be a barn? Well, I finally broke through to it and you just have to see what’s inside!”

“Okay, I’d love to, but can I get some coffee first?” Since there were only three of them at the dig, and Janet certainly wouldn’t accompany anyone into the depths of the ice field, it was

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obvious that Paul had gotten tired of waiting and went down alone. It was strictly against the rules to descend to the dig site alone, but somehow Paul had gotten past Janet this time to have a go at it on his own.

He watched as Jack busied himself with his coffee. Every morning it was the same thing. Finally he said "Jack, you know you should go easy on that stuff. If Janet knew you were drinking actual coffee with caffeine in it, she'd have your head! Next thing I know you'll be asking for salt!"

"Yeah, yeah, I know. I keep forgetting coffee is illegal."

"How on earth can you forget something like that? Coffee has been illegal for hundreds of years because of the stimulant it contains. I certainly don't care, but be careful around Janet. She's a stickler for the rules. I don't know how you ever got the habit anyway."

"Okay, okay, give me a break" he replied. He took a sip of the dark, rich smelling brew and smiled in satisfaction. Pleased with himself, he said "And you should try salt sometime before you go knocking it too."

Paul just rolled his eyes. Sometimes he could never tell when Jack was serious. Salt, indeed! "*What's next*" he wondered "*consuming animal flesh?*" He shivered at the thought.

The vast majority of people these days are vegetarians, and Paul was no exception, although to be perfectly honest, he simply knew of no other way to be. The world of 3012 was much different from anything in the past, but it had been like this for many centuries. The people these days simply didn't know of any different way to be. No one ever thought to eat an animal any longer. Even Paul, an archeologist, never seemed to consider things such as diet when looking at an ancient civilization. On those rare digs when evidence of people eating animals was found, it was simply chalked up to primitive people who weren't enlightened enough to know any better.

As he thought of these things, Jack pondered just how different things were these days. He considered Paul and wondered how, at six foot three with an athletic build, he managed to maintain

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his muscle mass with only a vegetarian diet. The fact that he was considered very handsome by his female acquaintances didn't make Jack feel any better.

He looked in the mirror and considered himself. His hair was going to gray, although there was still enough dark brown in it to appease him of some semblance of youth. He patted his ample stomach and realized he always had a bit of a pot belly and at his age, probably would continue to have it. With a big sigh, he decided he was as ready to start the day as he was going to be. He turned to his friend and said "Okay, let's go see what you found." He followed Paul to the control room and the hole.

The hole was just that. A hole carved in the ice. The pair of adventurers geared up and descended in the small elevator they had rigged in the hole. The trip to the bottom took several minutes and as always, Jack took particular notice of the many thousands of ice rings, or layers of ice as they descended. "How many ice rings do you suppose there are in this hole?" Jack asked as they slowly dropped through the ice.

"Oh, I don't know, several thousand, for sure. Why?"

"I was just wondering. No big deal" said Jack as he leaned against the safety rail of the elevator and watched layer after layer of ice pass by on his way to the bottom of the hole.

"You know that's how we date the find. We estimated ten thousand years as the time frame for this dig because of the thousands of years of annual rings we see here. Why is it you always ask that same question every time we descend?"

"Well, to be honest, I don't think the rings are annual, that's all. The barn we're digging into just doesn't seem to be ten thousand years old." He paused as he studied the rings closer. After a moment he said "Did you ever think the rings may be periods of melting and freezing, instead of annual rings? I mean, when the temperature is near the freezing point, snow and ice can melt and freeze several times a day, each time creating a new 'annual' ring."

Paul looked at his friend with the same look he seemed to always have, one of surprise at Jack's insight into how things are and the way things work. He certainly seemed to have a knack for

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figuring stuff out. “Well, we certainly have no other way to date it, that I know of.” The small elevator came to a halt a few inches above the icy floor. “Anyway, we’re here, finally.”

“Okay, show me your barn” said Jack, feeling like an ice miner on some frozen planet in an old Sci-Fi movie. They made their way through the tunnels they had dug to the barn doors. With a smile on his face, Paul opened the doors to the barn and Jack was astonished to see that it was not only intact, but free of ice inside! Paul was so excited that he didn’t know where to begin. Jack, however, just stood there with his mouth hanging open, and not moving.

“What’s the matter, Jack?” Paul asked. “You didn’t expect to see such a pristine find, did you?” In fact, the barn looked like it had been left recently, not the centuries it must have been buried under the Canadian ice.

“As a matter of fact, no, I did not. This is amazing!” Usually, in finds like this, everything had been crushed under the weight of the ice above them. This time, however, something was different. Jack looked at the ceiling and the structure of the old barn and was astonished that the building was still standing, let alone holding the weight of all that ice above it. Something certainly was strange here.

As they slowly made their way around the barn, Paul would pick up things and wonder just what they were used for and Jack wouldn’t say a word. Eventually, Paul noticed that Jack was quieter than usual. “Why so silent?”

The question seemed to shake Jack out of whatever daze he had been in. “Huh?”

Paul laughed, apparently still on some sort of high from discovering such a treasure trove of archeological wealth, and continued his quest to discover all he could about the mysterious items all around him. And they were in such remarkable condition! As he kept looking at things, he would ask “What do you think this thing is, Jack?”

Even though he seemed oddly preoccupied, Jack always had an answer. That was one of the things Paul liked about him. He never hesitated, but would offer his opinion as if he had known all along

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what it was. He would say something just as quick as you please, such as “hammer” or “socket wrench” seemingly without any thought whatsoever, as if he had always known what the odd items were used for.

However, Paul picked up one item that really threw him when Jack offered his opinion as to its purpose. He picked up a steel tool, with arms going off in four directions and what appeared to be hex head wrenches of different sizes on each end. Jack immediately said “That’s a lug wrench, Paul.”

Paul, caught by surprise, asked “What’s a lug and why would it need its own wrench?”

Jack had an unusual look on his face and thought a bit before responding. Finally, he said “I must have read somewhere about those automobiles they used to travel in. As I recall, the bolts that held the wheels on were called ‘lugs’, and the wrench used to remove them was called a ‘lug wrench.’ That is a lug wrench.”

Having made his little speech, he walked over to the far corner of the barn and peeked under a large, filth encrusted tarp. Smiling, he began removing the tarp. “Give me a hand with this, if you don't mind.”

Wondering what Jack was up to, Paul obliged. When the tarp was removed he was astonished to find a vehicle, such as the one they had just been discussing. And, it seemed to be completely intact!

As Jack looked for a way into the vehicle, Paul stood by just trying to take it all in. Once again, he was shocked at his friend’s ability to overlook the absurdities of the past and dive right in as if he knew exactly what he was looking for. With a squeak and a groan, not to mention a good bit of elbow grease, Jack got a door opened. He surprised him again with a question of his own. “Do you still think this find is ten thousand years old?”

“Yes, why would I think any differently?”

“Well, for starters, this vehicle is most certainly NOT ten thousand years old. I grant that it may be a thousand years old or so, but certainly not ten thousand. What messes with everyone’s mind is this crazy way you now have of marking the years. This is

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year 847, correct? That assumes that 848 years ago, they used a different calendar. Do you know what year, based on the old calendar, they changed it?"

"Not really, but I can look it up when we get back on top. Why do you ask?"

"Well, if you knew the exact date, based on the old system, I could tell you how old it is. This vehicle is a passenger van, manufactured in the year 1984 by Chevrolet, and it may have been in this barn for many years before the ice covered it. Now, I'm not an expert in date conversions, but I assure you this was not made ten thousand years ago."

"How do you know when it was manufactured?"

"Right here on the inside of the driver's door, there is a plate that shows the date and place of manufacture as well as some other information that is largely useless to us." Paul peered at the small plate that was barely legible and shook his head at how easily Jack found it.

Jack dug around some more and said "Here you go, Paul, some money for your collection." He had pulled open a compartment, more a tiny drawer really, filled with coins. "If you notice the dates on these coins, it further verifies the age of this site, but then, as an archeologist, you certainly know that." He smiled as he noticed the look on Paul's face that indicated Paul had not, in fact, thought of that and should have.

"Wow, what a treasure! There must be fifty coins here, Jack! They seem to be in pretty good condition, too."

Jack was busy rummaging through a compartment on the other side, looking at some ancient bits of paper. He was muttering to himself, but the only word Paul could make out was Canada. Paul let it go, and started looking at items on the other side of the barn. But Jack kept looking through the van. In the back, under the rear seat, he found what looked like a briefcase. It was locked and Jack couldn't manage to get it opened.

Paul saw what he was looking at and came over to help investigate. Jack seemed confused and said "I think this case is much newer than everything else in this barn. The technology

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looks like it's from many years later, if you ask me. But, how would it have gotten in here?"

"I agree, Jack. That's the first thing here I've actually seen before. And you're correct; this find would date much younger than ten thousand years. This is from about the time when the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, took full control of the government. This would be from around the time the dates changed, I believe, approximately 850 years ago, or so." He paused in thought for a moment then said "Now you have me wondering about those annual rings, too."

"It's nice to know I'm not losing my mind after all" said Jack with a smile.

"I suppose we should be heading back to the surface" said Paul as he glanced at his watch. It felt like they had been in the barn mere minutes, but hours had passed.

As they ascended through the hole to the control room on the surface, Paul started thinking about how the people who once owned the barn and its contents lived, what they thought about and how they spent their days. He was never one of those guys who just accepted what was told to him without trying to see for himself why things worked the way he was told they were supposed to. Apparently, there was a time when people questioned everything but, with the exception of Paul and a very few people like him, those days were long gone.

In this day and age, you would have to go centuries into the past to find people like that. Paul was just a "throwback" so to speak, to an earlier age. Perhaps that's why he became an archaeologist. He, more so than most people, could really grasp what was going on. Most people would see just a bunch of old, broken stuff that had been discarded. Not Paul.

Paul would envision what their world must have been like and try to relate to the people. Take transportation, for example. Most people today would cringe at the thought of operating a vehicle with an internal combustion engine that was not controlled by a computer. But, history tells us that once upon a time that was the accepted norm!

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Absurd, most say these days, but here in this van, was the proof. Paul liked to take it a step further, however. He tried to envision what the people were feeling and thinking as they piloted these explosive contraptions at great speed, in large groups, and unassisted by a computer!

That was what made Paul good at his job, though. Most people in Paul's time enjoyed the fact that the government did most of their thinking for them. There's so much less stress when someone else makes all the decisions for you. Who wants to go around thinking all the time anyway? Many people in Paul's time would feel sorry for him and the few people that are like him.

Archeology had just about become a lost art. The relatively few people who still even bother with it at all are all colleagues, and all of them seem to be in trouble most of the time. No doubt from thinking too much! Thinking too much was, after all, discouraged by the government.

Paul's current expedition was on the arctic ice, digging down through tens of thousands of years of ice to a settlement of some kind in the distant past. Whenever he went on these expeditions, he took Jack along with him. Jack was older than Paul, average height and rather stocky build. He was perhaps sixty years old with salt and pepper hair along with a nearly white mustache and goatee. Paul liked Jack because he was just as weird as Paul was. They had been friends for about ten years now.

Jack pretty much kept to himself, but Paul liked him. In fact, Paul was one of the few people he would even talk to. For some reason, Jack had decided long ago to just keep his mouth shut. Apparently, his ideas were even stranger than Paul's. Birds of a feather, they say, not that anyone really knows what that's supposed to mean anymore.

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## The Secret Room

Janet was struggling, trying really hard to not let this stupid mission get to her. You see, none of this was her idea! She was the Government-Assigned Protocol Officer of this crazy expedition.

In addition to Paul and Jack, the government insisted on a third person to act as a Protocol Officer. The office of Government Protocol, as it is known, is one of the largest branches of government. Everything that gets done anywhere has a Protocol Officer attached to it to oversee the project and to make sure no laws are violated and all the proper taxes are billed.

The Protocol Officers that were usually attached to expeditions such as the one Paul and Jack were currently on considered the duty to be punishment for something. Most people accepted the Protocol Officers as part of their normal routine and would be uncomfortable without one present. Janet, in her own mind, had obviously done something to anger her superiors to be assigned to this insane mission.

“Why on earth would anyone want to go digging under a bunch of old ice? No one really cares what happened in the past. The past is past! Move on and forget about this old junk!” she spouted angrily, knowing that nobody was around for miles to hear her. “I don't understand how this mission ever got sanctioned in the first place!

She stalked around the Control Center in an angry huff. Needless to say, she was miserable. Paul and Jack certainly did not get along with her and she had no idea why. *“I'm a fun person to be around!”* she thought. *“I don't understand why they don't like me.”* All

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she could do was hope they found whatever they were looking for soon so she could go home.

Janet enjoyed a very active lifestyle, as did most government employees and was missing the social life she normally had while at home. She was very attractive, a bit on the short side with dark brown hair and a perky attitude when among her own people, namely, other government employees. She was pondering her nice warm apartment when Paul and Jack came up through the big hole, as she referred to it in her reports. They were very excited and kept babbling about something they had found.

Janet, however, was not amused, nor was she pleased. Once again, Paul and Jack had gone off without their communication headsets. This was a major violation! What would happen if they got hurt down there? How would she know? How would she complete her reports then? These archaeologists never seemed to grasp what everyone else knew and took for granted, that the Protocol Officer was the most important person on any team! How would the government know what was happening if not for the Protocol Officer?

She blamed Paul, since he was the team leader. *"Paul is obviously just a typically mean, self-centered person who has no idea of where his priorities should be"* she thought as she glared at the pair of grimy workers that emerged from the big hole. As soon as Paul popped his head up through the hole into the control room, Janet started in on him. "What's the big idea? You two know better than to go down there without being in contact with me!"

"I'm sorry, Janet, it won't happen again. It must have slipped my mind this time." Paul was still ecstatic about the pristine find in the old barn and was determined that Janet wouldn't ruin his great mood.

"How on earth can it slip your mind? We've been doing this for years and the law states that you must be in constant communication with the Protocol Officer, namely, me. I'm sure this will look bad in my report." Janet was furious at being denied her social life, not to mention the comforts of her apartment and was bent on taking it out on someone. Jack, as usual, remained

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silent around Janet and her conversation with Paul distracted her enough for him to quietly leave the control room with the briefcase he found before she could see it.

Eventually, Janet allowed Paul to leave. He made his way down the corridor to the common area shared by the three of them during their 'off' hours. Jack was there still trying to work the lock on the case. Paul had never seen an ancient artifact that kept Jack puzzled for very long. Sometimes it seemed like he had a special connection to the past in a way that even Paul, with his rather old fashioned ways could not fathom. But, on the other hand, Jack did appear to be much older. *"Maybe it has something to do with his age,"* thought Paul. Mentally switching gears, he said "I was just thinking of that vehicle down there. I've seen a few of them at digs before, but I don't remember ever seeing one that complete. Even the wheels looked like they would still work."

"The tires, you mean?" asked Jack with a bemused look on his rugged face.

Once again, seemingly without any thought at all, Jack had come through with an obscure term for an item that had long sense passed into the depths of history. "Yes, I suppose. That would be the rubber coatings on the metal wheels, right?"

Jack couldn't help but smile at Paul's unique way of looking at things. "Yes. They held air under pressure to make the ride smoother. And I agree, that van looked like it could be brought back to working order, if we had the time and access to a machine shop and some materials to work with. Why? Are you thinking of trying to restore it?"

"Janet would kill me if she thought I would even consider trying to start an internal combustion engine! The pollution off of one of those things is highly toxic, Jack!"

Jack laughed heartily. Finally, he said "It simply amazes me how the truth can be distorted over time. Do you really think people would have driven them all their lives if they were that dangerous? And, obviously, if they drove them, they actually had to start the engine. The pollution had to be rather minor, Paul. Think about it."

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