

The Fish Mummy galloped at Bab and leaped straight onto his lap. Bab tried to scream, but nothing came out except a husky whimper.

The fish's huge green eyes stared into Bab's face. The creature stank of tombs. The hook in its lip gleamed in the moonlight. It opened its bony mouth as wide as it could go and, with an awful **HISS**, coughed up a big hunk of something from the back of its throat. The hunk of black gloop slapped onto Bab's face and slid down until it dangled from his chin.

Bab grabbed for a weapon from his bedside

table, before remembering he didn't keep weapons on his bedside table. Or anywhere, actually. The only thing within reach was a dirty pair of socks. Better than nothing, he supposed. He used the socks to clobber the fish sideways and the mummy clattered onto the bedroom floor. It made a hideous sound as it gasped for air.

It was then that Bab saw the Ibis Mummy. It stood in the doorway in its dirty pink hat.

The ibis honked at Bab like an erratic goose, "Don't hurt her!"

Bab stared in horror at the bandaged bird. "Huh?"

"You smelly flesh-boy!" honked the Ibis Mummy.

*Smelly? That's rich, Bab thought, given these two smell worse than my socks.*

The ibis knelt over the collapsed fish and honked, "Scaler! Are you okay?"



The ibis seemed panicked. It grasped the fish in its curved beak and shook her until it looked like the fish's sewn-on legs might fly off around the room.

The shaking caused the Fish Mummy to cough up another object – this time a small silver box, which bounced across the floor. “Prong,” said the fish. “Stop shaking me.” Despite the shaking, the fish's voice came out flat and monotone like a sarcastic teenager.

“Right-o!” said the ibis, and released the fish from its beak, causing the fish to sail across Bab's room and crash through several piles of his books. “Phew! I think you're all right,” sighed the ibis.

“I *would* be all right if you hadn't thrown me at the wall, Prong,” said the fish flatly.

“Oh, **poor Scaler!**” cried the ibis, and pecked the fish's face with a shower of gentle kisses. “Do you need a drink? A fin massage? I can order you a dustburger if you like. I know! I'll take this box and fill it with a nice yellow cactus.”

Using one wing, the ibis scooped up the small silver box Scaler had coughed out earlier.

“Prong!” said Scaler. “That box contains the Beard.”

The ibis looked around, confused. “What beard?”

“You know, the beard we’ve been hunting for centuries? The beard we finally found this morning?”

“Ah, that beard.” The ibis nodded. “What beard?”

“The beard in that box, Prong.”

The ibis peered into the box with one bulging, bloodshot eye. “Nup! Nothing in here but a few hairs. Ooh, they look like my hairs! Short and black.”



“Prong,” said the fish patiently.

“One: You don’t have hairs. Two: You never had hairs, you had feathers. And three: What do you mean the Beard Box is empty?”

Prong shook the box out in front of Scaler. True to Prong’s word, a couple of black hairs drifted out but nothing else. The two mummies slowly turned

their gazes towards Bab, who was now cowering at the furthest edge of the bed.

“Er, why are you looking at me?” said Bab, shrinking into his pillows.

Above her eyes, Scaler the Fish Mummy had eyebrows painted onto her bandages. The painted brows creased into a frown. So *the fish can frown*, thought Bab. *And talk!*

Prong, however, relaxed her wings and said, “Phew! The Beard’s just attached itself to this flesh-boy.”

Bab shot a glance at the bedroom mirror. He could see that the gloop the fish had spat on him was still dangling from his chin. It was indeed a sort

of beard. It was dripping with stinky fish acid, and smelled like a thousand cans of tuna that had been out in the sun for a fortnight.



Could this stink-thing be the Pharaoh's Beard his mum had been looking for all these years? Bab had read an Egyptian legend that said the Beard was magic, and it had dark powers that had something to do with why the Pharaohs died out. But he and his mum always thought that was superstition. A good archaeologist believes in facts, not magic. Now Bab was terrified that this clump of hair could have a mind of its own and, worse still, had decided to attach itself to him. Who knew what else it was capable of?

"Flesh-boy," said Scaler. "Give us the Beard, and you can go back to sleep."

"I think my sleeping days are done," whimpered Bab.

Scaler and Prong began approaching Bab on bony feet. Prong started to honk a lullaby: "Go to sleep, little flesh-boy. Go to sleep."

"Okay, okay!" cried Bab. "I don't want this thing, have it back!" He grabbed the Beard and tried to give it to them, but it was totally attached. "I ... I can't get it off!"



Scaler groaned. “Right. Just hold still.”

She clasped one of her ostrich-like talons around the Beard and pulled with all her might. The Beard stuck fast. She pushed her fish face right up against Bab’s and inspected the roots of the Beard. “Yeah, this is a problem. It’s decided to attach itself to you for all eternity.”

Bab’s eyes widened. Looking so closely into the fish’s green eyeballs made him feel sick with fear. *What if this fish kills me? What if it claws off my lips and eats them? What if it breathes on me and I catch some horrible, ancient fish cold?*

But the fish didn’t do any of these things. It just looked closely at the Beard on Bab’s chin. “It’s

there forever,” Scaler continued in her flat voice. “You know what this means, Prong?”

“Yes,” honked Prong wisely. “We’ve got to find another beard.”

“No, potato brain.” Scaler turned back to Bab with a toothy grin. “This means the flesh-boy is the new Pharaoh. The Beard has chosen him. He must be really clever.”

Prong gasped. “Hail, Pharaoh!” She couldn’t decide whether to curtsy or bow, so she swapped back and forth between the two.

“I’m not a Pharaoh,” said Bab. “I’m just a kid!”

“Yeah, all the Pharaohs said that,” Prong told him. “Except for one. She was a piece of work, that lady.”

Scaler grabbed Bab by his T-shirt, saying, “Come on, Pharaoh, let’s go so you can do some ruling.”

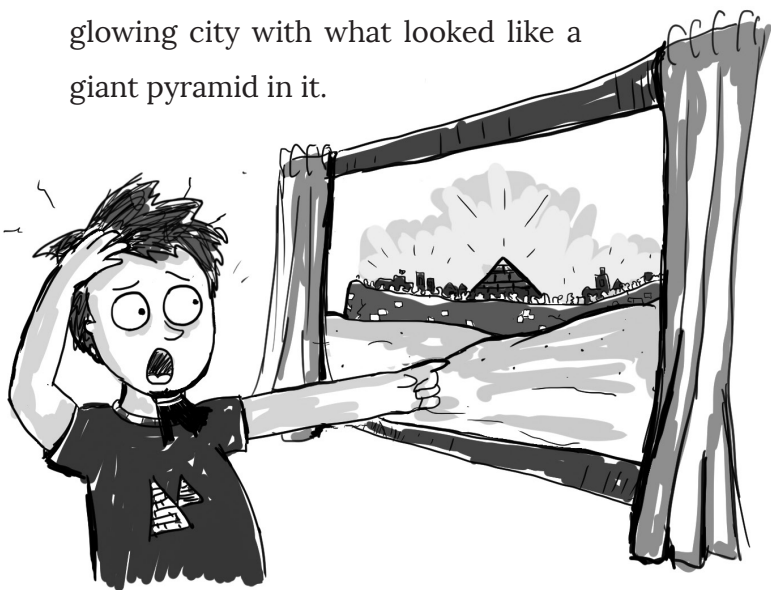
“Go where?” said Bab.

“There.” Scaler and Prong both pointed their decayed limbs at Bab’s bedroom window.

Bab couldn’t believe his eyes. Just outside the



dig site, where he'd been living all summer, was a glowing city with what looked like a giant pyramid in it.



"What?" spluttered Bab. "When? How did that get there!? There was never a city there!"

Scaler rolled her huge eyes. "No, never, except for the last four thousand years."

"It wasn't there this morning!" said Bab.

"You weren't touched by Beard magic this morning," Prong pointed out.

"I was sane this morning," said Bab.

"You have to come," Prong cried. "We need to show everyone the Beard. You'll love it in

our city! There's the Mummy College and Sandy Candy. Don't you want a little adventure in your life, flesh-boy?"

"No thanks," said Bab. "I'm pretty sure this is a dream, so ... goodnight, crazy dream mummies!"

He shut his eyes and lay back on the pillow. But just as quickly, his head jerked upwards again. The Beard seemed to have come alive with a mind of its own, and was pulling Bab by the chin!

"Good," muttered Scaler. "At least the Beard agrees with us."

"What beard?" said Prong.