Kryptos 8, Challenge 2: Solution

A few observations:

- The plaintext most likely has something to do with Stephen Hawking.
- The invitation mentions a "grille", which may look like a typo but a grille is a method of encipherment. In particular, there is an enciphering device called a turning grille.
- The grid is divided into four symmetric regions with each region containing cells numbered 1 –
 16. If the grid is rotated 90 degrees (or 180 or 270), the cell numbers match up. This provides
 further evidence that a turning grille may have been used.
- The "map" has three copies of the shape of the "grid" and if one looks closely, they appear to be numbered 1 [upper left], 2 [lower left], and 3 [right]
- All letters inside these three shapes are in uppercase, leading one to believe they are the ciphertext.
- The directions "1, 1R, 2RR, etc." could refer to which shape to place the grille over and how many times it should be rotated in order to read the plain text.
- Looking at shape #2, the third and fourth lines appear to contain "Stephen" and one can also find the letters in "Hawking" later in this same shape.

Goal: We expect some sort of turning grille was used, so we need to decide which of the cells in the "grid" are removed so the plain text shows through when the grid (or grille) is placed over top.

Procedure:

- 1. Focusing on shape #2, which the directions say the grille will be placed with no rotations, there are many ways to construct "STEPHEN" reading left to right (top to bottom, as usual). So, let's begin with "HAWKING".
- 2. There are a couple of "W"s followed by a couple of "K"s followed by a couple of choices for "I" and then possibly just one choice for "N" and "G".
- The "N" and "G" are in cells marked 7 and 6. One can choose a "W", "K", and "I" in cells marked 3, 14, 18 respectively. This is promising as we know Hawking died on 3-14-18 at the age of 76. Thus we expect that the grille has the following cells removed:



- 4. If we lay this grille over grid #1 these cells correspond to "STARS", which looks good.
- 5. One can now try different cells to remove so we get "STEPHEN HAWKING" in grid #2, while simultaneously getting reasonable plaintext in grid #1. With the cells highlighted below removed, one can get "STEPHEN HAWKING" in grid #2 and "OKUPATTHESTARS" in grid #1:



- 6. One can guess the first two letters in grid #1 to produce "LOOK UP AT THE STARS". Yielding the grille:
- 7.



- 8. Placing the grille over Grid #3 produces "ONLY A DISCIPLE OF R".
- 9. Since the directions start with "1, 1R, 2RR, ...", our plaintext begins with grid #1 (no rotation): "Look up at the stars".
- 10. If we rotate the grille clockwise 90 degrees and place it in grid #1 (the interpretation of "1R" in the directions) and start to read left to right (and top to bottom, as usual), one does not get anything promising. However, if you read down columns from right to left one sees: "and not down at your".
- 11. Rotate the grille through two 90 degree rotations and place over grid #2 (2RR) and read up the columns from right to left we get "shoe science is not".
- 12. No rotations over grid#3: "only a disciple of r".
- 13. Three clockwise rotations in grid #3, reading up left to right: "eason but also one o".
- 14. Two clockwise rotation in grid #1, reading down right to left: "f romance and passi"
- 15. No rotations grid #2: "on stephen hawking"

Plaintext: Look up at the stars and not down at your shoe science is not only a disciple of reason but also one of romance and passion stephen hawking.

These are two quotes attributed to Stephen Hawking, although the first quote is not a direct quote (the plaintext uses "shoe" where Hawking used "feet") in order to make sure the encryption method was fully understood and one did not just google familiar Hawking quotes.

Note: The final grille has a lower case "h" that can be seen, similar to the watermark on the invitation.