
Fountain

by John Medler

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To the Wood Family

CHAPTER 1. LEGEND

May 1499. Veragua (modern day Belize, Central America).

ELDER KINICH KAKMO, the strikingly tall wise man of the tribe, sat on a log by the fire, making pictures in the sand with his sharpened wooden stick. The orange flecks of fire danced upward silently from the beach fire pit, twirling and disappearing into the night air. Once a year, he gathered the children of the tribe together to tell them the story of the Popul Vuh, the Mayan Creation story, and of the cleverness and guile of the Mayan Hero Twins. It was an important job, for these children had to understand their connection to the tribe's ancestors. Kakmo had a long, narrow, unkept gray beard, which only dangled from his chin, and not from his cheeks. He was very old, over 110 years old, according to his count. Fifty Mayan children, dressed in loincloths, sat around the fire on large flat stones and logs, looking up at the tribal elder with their innocent brown eyes, anxious to learn of the ancient ways. The wise man spoke to the children in K'iche', the Mayan dialect of the tribe. Elder Kinich Kakmo's deep voice, set against the crackling of the fire and the rhythmic rushing of the nearby waves, mesmerized the small children.

"This is the story of the Popul Vuh," he began. "Back before time, the gods created three realms—the Upper World where the gods live, the Middle World where we live, and the Underworld, where the demons live. Just below the surface of the Earth, in the Underworld, there is a horrible City of Death called Xibalba. Xibalba was ruled by the twelve demons of the Underworld called the Lords of Xibalba. The terrible Twelve Lords wished nothing but the destruction of mankind and the capture of their souls. The demons were led by the High Evil Lords Hun-Came, also called One-Death, and his brother Vucub-Came, also known as Seven-Death. These demons ruled over the lesser Lords of Xibalba, who worked in pairs. They included Xiquiripat, which means Flying Scab, and Cuchumaquic, which means Blood Gatherer, who both poison the blood...." The wise man drew pictures of the demons in the sand. The children looked terrified.

"Another pair was Ahalpuh and Ahalgana, the demons of pus and skin yellowing, who make people sick; Chamiabac and Chamiaholom, the skull and bone demons, who make people thin and take the meat off their bones, turning them into skeletons...." The wise man pointed his

wooden stick at a small child sitting next to him, and touched the child's neck with the stick. Then he drew a picture in the sand of a skeleton. "Ahalmez and Ahaltocob were the demons who hide in the unswept corners of people's filthy huts, and then jump out and stab them until they die. Xic and Palan, the nemesis of travelers, cause people walking on the road to cough up blood and die."

The children shivered at the sound of these horrible demons, and several made mental notes to make sure to clean up any dirt in their huts.

"Now these twelve demons did not like to be disturbed. One day, a young man named Hun Hunahpu was playing racquet sports with his brother Vucub Hunahpu and woke the Lords of Xibalba. The Lords invited them to their ball court in the Underworld for a friendly game. But the Lords of Xibalba tricked the boys. The balls in the game had hidden razor blades, and the heads of the two boys were sliced off. Unbeknown to the Lords of Xibalba, however, Hun Hunahpu had a clever wife named Xquic. Xquic spoke to the decapitated head of her husband Hun Hunahpu." The wise man lifted up a coconut, showing it to the children, and spat on it. The old man continued, "The skull spat on Xquic's head, and as a result, two twin boys were conceived in her womb. Those boys were our ancestors, the Mayan Hero Twins, Hunahpu, which means 'One-Blowgunner,' and Xbalanque, which means 'Jaguar Sun.' They are the greatest two men to have ever lived, and they are the reason we are all here today. Ultimately, the boys would grow up to avenge their father's and uncle's death and conquer the Lords of Xibalba, thereby saving humanity."

"Where is Xibalba?" asked one child.

Elder Kinich Kakmo extended his stick out into the Atlantic Ocean. "It is not far from here," said the Wiseman. "Perhaps one or two days' journey by boat, on an island we call Boyuca, the Evil Place, and others call Ananeo. It is an evil island, guarded by evil people. On the island is a cave, and that is the entrance to Xibalba. You must never go there, for to go there means death. For in the many thousands of moons that have followed, the Lords of Xibalba have managed to return. They continue to wreak their havoc and destruction on the Middle World. Until Hunahpu and Xbalanque return, we will always suffer at the hands of the Lords of Xibalba."

"When will Hunahpu and Xbalanque return?" asked one child.

"No one knows," said Kinich Kakmo somberly, stroking his beard.

“But the legend says that their faces will be white, and that their beards will be long and white, for they will have entered Xibalba and faced Vucub-Came, whose icy hand of death will have partially touched their souls. It is also prophesized that the monkeys in the trees will howl, for the Hero Twins also made enemies of their wicked step-brothers by tricking them into climbing tall trees and then turning them into howler monkeys.” The children looked over at the trees in the jungle with concern. Were the howler monkeys there now?

Elder Kinich Kakmo continued on with the legend of the Mayan Hero Twins for another hour until all the children were fast asleep by the fire. Then he summoned their parents, who thanked the wise man, and carried their children to bed.

Later that night, the wise man had a vivid dream that Hunahpu and Xbalanque had entered their village on a huge, winged, ocean chariot. He dreamed that the villagers, frightened by the heroes, attacked them with bow and arrow. The Hero Twins, in anger, burned their entire village to the ground. The wise man woke up with a feeling of dread. He slowly got up and opened the door to his hut. The wind was whipping fiercely. Just then he heard the howling—the howling of the monkeys.

He ran outside into the dark night. His face was hit with the blowing spray of rain. Despite the downpour, he ignored the rain and ran down to the beach. Off in the distance he could see the masts of a great vessel, the biggest ship he had ever seen. It was bigger than a hundred canoes! The ship was being dashed by the large waves, but appeared to be heading toward their shores. The howling of the monkeys came again. “By the gods...” he thought. “It is Hunahpu and Xbalanque! We haven’t a moment to spare!” He sprinted back to the village to find the tribal chief.

CHAPTER 2. ACCIDENT.

Present day. Atlanta, Georgia.

CHARLIE WINSTON PULLED the black Dodge Ram pickup truck in front of Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School in suburban Atlanta. Today, he was taking his son to a fifth grade football game at another rival school. Roosevelt was in a fairly wealthy, primarily white neighborhood, and his ten year-old son Teddy was one of the few blacks in the school, but Charlie Winston did not care. Most of the other kids at school treated Teddy very well. And it was the education which was important. He and his wife Murielle had moved to this area of Atlanta because it was in the best public school district. Winston was an educator himself, so he knew the value of a good education. He had finished his lectures at Emory University an hour before. He was a Professor of American History at the university.

As the throng of students poured out seconds after the bell rang, he looked for his son in the crowd. He did not see him at first, but then the crowd thinned out and he saw him—the young boy in the wheelchair. Teddy had his book bag in his lap, and was rolling himself over to his dad’s truck. Winston got out to help put his son’s wheelchair in the back of the truck, when his son objected.

“Dad, I can do it by myself.”

“Sure you don’t need a hand?” asked Winston, concerned that his son might fall.

“You know, some day I am going to drive myself. When that happens, if you modify the truck so I can drive with my hands, I am going to need to get in all by myself without you being there. You have to let me do it, okay?”

“Sure son, okay,” said Winston, getting back into the black truck.

Teddy rolled the wheelchair to the passenger side of the truck and pressed a button. A small platform came down, and Teddy transferred himself, scooting his rear end from the wheelchair to the platform. Then, using a joystick, he maneuvered the small crane installed on the back of the pickup. Hooking the hook from the crane to the back of his wheelchair, he pushed another button and the crane lifted the wheelchair up in the air. Using the joystick, Teddy maneuvered the wheelchair through the air, where it was deposited into the back of the truck. Then he scooted himself from the platform to the passenger seat and closed the door.

“Let’s roll,” he said.

“What time is the game?” asked Winston.

“Three o’clock, but it’s across town, so let’s hurry, because I want to beat the bus.”

Teddy was the team’s numbers man, responsible for keeping all the stats of the football team. It was a job he really enjoyed. After the game was over, he would input the stats into a computer program he had created for the coach. The team let him wear a green and white football jersey like the other boys.

Charlie Winston drove the truck onto the interstate.

“How was school today?”

“Good, but Leon’s got a new girlfriend. He changed his Facebook status to ‘In a Relationship.’ Makes me want to puke.”

“Fifth grade, that’s a little young to be having girlfriends, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, personally, I think the girls in my class are gross, but you know Leon. He has had crushes on girls since the second grade.”

“Is the girl foxy?” asked Winston, purposely using an outdated slang term which he knew would drive his son crazy.

“Yeah, Dad, real ‘foxy.’ I think ‘foxy’ went out with the hula hoop. I guess it makes sense you are a history teacher. Everything you know about is from ancient history. What is this you are listening to? Sounds like elevator music. Can I change the station?”

“Sure,” said Winston, as Teddy turned the dial to a rap station. “That’s better.”

“Hey, I noticed you haven’t ‘friended’ me on Facebook,” said Charlie.

“Dad, I am not going to ‘friend’ you, because then you will start posting all kinds of weird stuff on my page, and mom will do the same thing. Facebook was not invented for parents, you know?”

“What weird stuff? I am not going to post weird stuff.”

“Dad, I saw your post on Uncle Sal’s page. It was something about newly discovered writings of John Adams. That’s weird. I do not want that on my page.”

“John Adams was very important. Good grief! What are they teaching you at that school? Are your friends doing anything this weekend?”

“Yeah, there is a girl named Mandy who is having a big birthday party at Skyzone, which is that trampoline place. Just about the whole class is going.”

“ ‘Just about...’? Are you going?”

“I didn’t get invited. Leon’s new girlfriend knows another girl who knows the kid. She said I didn’t get invited because they didn’t want it to be a ‘Pity Party.’ Some people are real jerks, you know what I mean? I wouldn’t want to go to her dumb party anyway.” Teddy looked out the window. After a few seconds of awkward silence, Teddy asked, “What time is it? Are we almost there?”

“Sure, son, almost there.”

Charlie Winston looked at his brave son and his legs. For a moment, he thought back to that day two years ago...

It was a rainy night in December. The Falcons were playing the Rams on Monday Night Football. Eddie Reznó, a boy in Teddy’s class, was going to the game with his father, and had invited Teddy along. Murielle was against the idea. It was Monday, a school night, and their hard and fast rule was that no one could go out on a school night. But this was Monday Night Football, after all, and Teddy loved football. Charlie Winston intervened and prevailed upon his wife Murielle to break the rule, just this once. Their son had gone off to the game, while Charlie and Murielle enjoyed a quiet night of reading books by themselves on the couch.

Charlie had gotten nearly halfway through a biography of Frederick Douglas when his wife told him to stop reading. The game had been over by 11:00 p.m. It was midnight, and their son was still not home. Murielle began making phone calls. She called the Reznó’s home, but Mrs. Reznó had not heard anything. Mrs. Reznó had tried her husband’s cell phone, but no one was answering. She was worried, too. Charlie assured his wife that Mr. Reznó had probably taken the boys somewhere after the game, maybe to get burgers or ice cream or something. Murielle was not buying it, but she decided to sit tight for a little while longer before she started calling the police. At 1:00 a.m., the Winstons got a call from a nurse at the Presbyterian Hospital. There had been a terrible accident. An eighteen year-old boy had crossed the center line in the rain. Mr. Reznó had tried to swerve out of the way, but the oncoming car struck the side of the car behind the driver, right where Teddy was sitting. He was now in intensive care. No, the nurse did not know any other details.

Charlie and Murielle Winston, terrified, drove at high speed to the hospital. All the hospital staff would tell them was that Teddy was in

intensive care, and the doctor would be out as soon as he could. They were soon joined by Mrs. Rezno in the waiting room, who had learned that Eddie had a broken arm, and would recover without incident. Mr. Rezno had a fractured pelvis, three broken ribs, and a ruptured spleen, but would ultimately make it. There was still no news on Teddy.

After another hour, the spinal surgeon, Dr. Ben Wolff, came out of the operating suite.

“Mr. and Mrs. Winston, your son Teddy had had a very serious spinal cord injury at the level of the tenth thoracic vertebra.”

“Is he going to live?” asked Murielle Winston.

“Yes, Mrs. Winston, but the spinal cord has been compromised.”

“What does that mean, ‘compromised?’” asked Charlie Winston. “Is it severed?”

“No, it is not severed, but there is a tremendous amount of swelling around that level of the cord as a result of the accident. We won’t know his prognosis for a few days. But right now, he has no feeling beneath the belly button.”

“Oh my God!” exclaimed Murielle. “You mean he is paralyzed?”

“We do not know that for sure yet. But if he does not regain his feeling below the waist within a few days, then it will probably be a permanent injury, yes, ma’am.”

“What are the chances he will regain the feeling below the waist?” asked Murielle.

“I cannot give you chances,” said the doctor. “For Teddy, it is either 0% or 100%. We just don’t know.”

Murielle became irritated by this response. “Doctor, I know you are doing everything you can, but please, do not patronize me. I am a scientist. Can you just give me what his chances are?”

“Again, Mrs. Winston, I just cannot say at this time. We will know more in two or three days, when the swelling has had a chance to die down. It is possible that the swelling could die down and the spinal cord could regain its full function. The spinal cord is a finicky animal. We just do not know at this point.”

“Okay, thank you, doctor,” said Murielle. When the doctor had left, Murielle groused, “Finicky animal? That’s the best he can do?” Murielle’s lip began trembling, and she collapsed into Charlie’s chest. Murielle was

accustomed to keeping cool under pressure as a result of her job. But this was too much. She broke down sobbing and was inconsolable. Charlie took his wife down to the hospital chapel to pray. For the next three days, they prayed at the hospital. They made every promise to God they could think of if only He would let their son be able to walk. But Teddy's condition did not improve. Unfortunately, they would later learn that Teddy's condition was permanent. He would never walk again.

The next year was almost unbearable, as Teddy learned to adapt to his new world. He would learn incredibly difficult regimens for urination and defecation. He would learn to power his wheelchair over high curbs and get himself up and down stairs. The entire home had to be remodeled with ramps and special toilet facilities. They set up his own kitchen area with microwaves and other appliances built low to the ground. Life as Teddy previously knew it was over.

Charlie had taken a leave of absence of six months from Emory to help his son through the rehabilitation process. It was a grueling time, with nighttime "accidents" happening frequently. Winston felt like he had washed all the sheets of defecation in the middle of the night almost one hundred times. He felt so badly. The worst part was that at times, he blamed himself for letting Teddy go to the game on a school night.

He tried not to look down at his son's legs, but he could not help himself. He wished there was some way to wave a wand and bring his legs back. The truth was that Teddy had adjusted to his new life much easier than Charlie Winston and his wife. Charlie and Murielle Winston had spent the last two years researching potential cures for their son's illness, but they had found nothing.

When they got to the rival school's football field, Winston waited as his son used the crane to swing his wheelchair down to the ground.

"It will be great when I can drive," said Teddy. "Then I will not have to drive like an old Granny like you."

"Granny? Who are you callin' Granny?" asked Winston.

Teddy laughed, and hopped into his wheelchair.

"Hey, hand me my book bag, Granny," joked Teddy.

Charlie Winston bent over with a stoop, like he was a hundred years old and squinted at his son. "Why, I cannot find the book bag," he said, mimicking an old lady's voice. "Where is that blasted book bag?"

Teddy laughed and grabbed the book bag himself, and wheeled off to the field.

“See ya, Granny,” he said. Charlie Winston smiled and walked toward the field to watch the game.

CHAPTER 3. CABOT.

May 1499. Veragua (modern day Belize, Central America).

JOHN CABOT, ONE of the greatest explorers of the modern world, and the first European to set foot on the American mainland since the Vikings, was steering his ship *The Matthew*, named after his wife Mattea, to the shores of Veragua to wait out the storm. Father Giovanni Antonio de Carbonariis, his trusted companion, stood near Cabot as he maneuvered the steering wheel of the large ship. The priest was not only a man of the cloth but also a doctor, and he was the only other Italian on the English ship. Cabot was a tall man, with a great white beard, which was matted down from the sheets of rain pouring into the boat. He wore a black velvet mariner's hat with a large ostrich feather, which was also not fairing well in the blowing rain. Father Giovanni, small, bald, and portly, wearing a brown hooded monk's robe tied with a white rope around the waist, held onto a barrel to steady himself from the pitching ship.

"I hope we get to shore soon. This storm is terrible," said Father Giovanni.

"Well, this ship has a holy man here, after all, Father Giovanni, so I am sure God will spare us on the sea." Cabot laughed heartily and yelled out orders to a sailor to secure the pickle barrels, which were sliding on the deck. Cabot managed to steer the ship into a small cove, where he pointed the ship toward the shore.

"We will put the ship ashore here until the storm passes over," said Cabot.

"Look there!" yelled Giovanni, peering over the rail. "Those are boats!" Cabot looked where the priest was pointing, and stared in amazement when he saw the four outrigger canoes heading towards his ship. Cabot took out his looking glass and peered over the water at the canoes.

"They are not bearing any weapons," said Cabot. "It looks like they have ropes!"

Sure enough, the Veraguan natives were coming with ropes to help secure the boat and bring it safely to the shore. But before Cabot could explain this to his men, several crew members rushed the side of the boat, with guns drawn, ready to fire on the Veraguans.

"Hold your fire!" screamed Cabot. "They come in peace. They are bringing ropes to help us. Don't fire! Put down your weapons!"

“Captain, how do we know they mean peace?” asked his first mate, Wilson Henry. “They are savages.” Henry was tall and white-bearded, like the Captain. Many of the men joked that they looked like brothers. But Henry was considerably bigger and stronger than the Captain. Henry was a man of action who tended to act first and ask questions later. Cabot was wiser than his first mate. Cabot was not shy about using a firearm. He could kill an enemy if it came to that. He just chose not to start a battle when it was unnecessary.

“Wilson, take my glass. Look at their boats. They are bringing us ropes.” Henry took the Captain’s spyglass and performed his own inspection. He agreed that the natives did not appear to be armed. The first mate lowered his weapon.

Soon the outrigger canoes met up with the ship and waved to the members of the crew in friendship. They threw up ropes to the members of the crew, who eyed the natives warily. But no attack occurred. The natives were truly trying to help. Within an hour, the ship had safely landed on the shore near the Veraguans’ village, safe from the storm. There was a loud trumpet from the shore, and dozens of natives came down to meet the great ship. Cabot instructed Father Giovanni and his first mate Wilson Henry to accompany them onto the shore to meet the natives. Henry was skeptical but obeyed. However, he kept his loaded firearm beneath his coat, ready for action at a moment’s notice. As the ship came closer to the shore, the rain suddenly died down, and was now only a light drizzle.

Their group was met in the surf by a large fat man who appeared to be the tribal chief. He wore a loincloth but was adorned with a cape and a headdress of red and yellow macaw feathers. Next to the chief was an extremely tall, but very old man, also with an elaborate headpiece. John Cabot would later learn this was the tribe’s elder wise man and principal advisor to the chief.

As soon as the wise man looked through the darkness and saw John Cabot and his first mate, both similar looking tall men with white faces and long white beards, the wise man became more convinced than ever that the strangers were the reincarnations of Hunahpu and Xbalanque. He advised the tribal chief, who seemed to agree. These strangers would be treated with every hospitality which their small village had to offer. The chief greeted Cabot, and was surprised to learn that neither he nor

his white-bearded brother appeared to be able to speak their language. Nevertheless, he managed to use gestures to welcome him into the tribal circle by the beach. A great fire was started and the men brought in a large wild boar attached to a spit and began roasting it over the fire. Cabot, Henry, and Father Giovanni rested on logs by the fire, warming themselves. After quite a while, the meat was ready.

John Cabot had never eaten wild boar. It was actually quite good. The boar reminded him of the pork roast his wife used to cook back in Bristol, England, the place where his voyage had begun. He used his teeth to slide the meat off the kabob and gave a welcoming smile to the Indian chief, who nodded happily, thankful that Cabot liked the meal. As the meal wore on, the clouds cleared. The fire crackled on the beach, under a full canopy of stars, as curious natives crept up closer to Cabot to marvel at his strange clothing, white skin, and white beard. They wondered why he would cover himself up with cloth when it was so hot. And why did he speak in such a strange tongue? Cabot smiled at the natives and devoured the boar meat with gusto. The Veraguan natives seemed amazed at the size and craftsmanship of his ship. Several of the islanders were swimming in the water, putting their hands on the hull of the large ship. The rest of Cabot's crew remained back on the *Matthew*. They were afraid to interact with the natives, fearing they were savages who meant them harm. Cabot never understood this distrust. He had heard reports of the Spanish explorers slaughtering natives. Why kill a completely harmless, even friendly, group of people? Cabot could not understand it. The men on his ship stood on the decks, uneasily watching the captain from the rails. He was a kind and wise captain, that was for sure, but they believed his kindness would ultimately be their undoing. When the captain ordered the men to bring a small barrel of rum ashore to share with the natives, the Bristol sailors went absolutely apoplectic. That was their rum. They needed it for the long voyage. What purpose would be served in giving away their supplies (especially the rum!) to ignorant savages? Wilson Henry was also concerned and whispered his disagreement to the captain. Cabot heard their grumbling, but assured them that a good Christian returns kindness with kindness. After some discussion, the men reluctantly obeyed the captain and rolled the small barrel ashore.

Cabot took a cupful of rum and handed it to the chief. The chief looked at the clear liquid and smelled it. It smelled strange. The chief

handed the cup back suspiciously. Cabot smiled and took the cup, drinking the rum himself. Then he poured another cup for the chief. The chief, mollified, drank the rum. He was surprised at the strong taste, but then felt the burning in his stomach. He laughed and handed the cup back, asking for more. Soon, the chief was quite drunk.

Cabot watched the chief as he spoke to his tribesmen in their native tongue. The chief gave a command, and, after a few minutes, male and female dancers, wearing boas of green feathers, appeared by the fire. One Veraguan performed a fire dance, spinning a flaming rod around in front of the spectators. Another native brought forth a bow and sent flaming arrows shooting down the beach. After the entertainment, the chief got up and started walking into the surf towards Cabot's ship. He put his hands along the wood, marveling at how smooth the curved wood was. These men surely were the Mayan Hero Twins. The chief thought about why the Hero Twins had come to his village. Their purpose, he thought, must be to re-conquer the Lords of Xibalba, to end the sickness and death that the Lords of the Underworld brought to the Earth every day. They will want to know how to get to the entrance to Xibalba. It had been many years since his ancestors had first traveled here from the Island of Boyuca, but he had a map to show the Twins the way. The tribal chief suddenly yelled out orders in K'iche' to his kinsmen, and one man came forward with a large, rolled up parchment. The chief unrolled the document by the fire and looked to Cabot, pointing to the map.

The map showed the coast of what is now Central America and the top part of South America near Venezuela. The tribal chief pointed with a sharp stick to an island with a picture of a flower on it. Near that island, the chief then pointed with the stick to a marking on the map showing two large stone outcroppings coming out of the sea. Near the outcroppings, there was another drawing of an island. The chief pointed to that island with the stick and said "Boyuca." As soon as he said the name, many of the young islanders, cringed in fear and moved slightly back. They were obviously afraid of the place. Then the chief unrolled a second map, which appeared to be a map of the island of Boyuca. There were drawings on the map and strange words. Cabot could make out a picture of a cave, a scorpion, a chair, six houses, a man with a spear, some kind of sports ball court, and finally, a picture of a pool of water. The chief pointed to each place and gave it a name, which meant nothing to Cabot. But

when he got to the pool of water, called "*Xaxtzintzoj saqloloy*," the chief became very animated. The chief began speaking very fast, but Cabot could not understand a word of it. He gave the chief a facial expression which conveyed that he had no idea what the chief was saying. Frustrated, the tribal chief yelled out an order and a bare-breasted woman, wearing nothing but a loincloth over her genitals, was brought forward. The chief barked out another order and a man came forward with a wooden bowl filled with water. A second young man came up and handed the chief a large sword. As soon as that happened, one of the crew, fearing they were under attack, charged down the gangplank and ran down the beach, pointing his firearm at the chief. Then several tribesmen charged forward with bows and arrows, pointing them at the crew member. They were at a standoff. The chief put his hand over the arrows, directing his men to lower their weapons. The chief then took the young maiden's arm, and cut it with the sword from her elbow to her wrist. The woman shrieked, and blood spurted from the open wound. Wilson Henry flinched, apparently ready to shoot the chief. Cabot put his hand on Henry's weapon, telling him to stand down. The man with the bowl of water rushed forward and the chief used a ladle and poured water onto the wound. Then, the chief dropped the woman's wet wounded arm, and pulled up her other arm. The chief showed Cabot the second arm, which was untouched. Then, the Chief pulled up the cut arm again, pointed to that, put it down, and brought up the clean arm again. The chief looked at Cabot, seeing if he understood.

Father Giovanni was the first to understand. "Zuan," he said to Cabot in Italian, "Don't you see? He is telling us that there is water that will heal her arm." Cabot thought about that. He turned to the chief and took the woman's cut arm. Repeating the actions of the chief, Cabot poured water on the cut arm, and then pointed to the woman's clean arm. The chief nodded enthusiastically. Healing water? Cabot had never heard of such a thing. He gestured to the bowl of water and then pointed to the map. Could the chief tell him where he could get this water? The chief pointed again to the island on the map called Boyuca. "Boyuca," said the chief. Then he pointed to the second detailed map of the island, showing the picture of the pool of water. "Xibalba!" said the chief. "Xibalba!" yelled the wise man. And at that, all of the villagers began chanting "Xibalba! Xibalba!" The wise man walked up to Cabot and shook his hand, grasping Cabot's forearm. He raised Cabot's arm in the air, like a referee declaring

a boxing champion. “Hunahpu!” he said to the crowd, smiling. Then he grasped Henry’s wrist, raising it, saying to the crowd “Xbalanque!” The natives all began chanting loudly, like spectators at a football game. “Hunahpu! Xbalanque! Hunahpu! Xbalanque!” Cabot and Henry had no idea what the Veraguans were talking about, but they were both interested in water that could heal a cut arm. If the map showed him where to get such water, then that is where they would go next. Cabot, Henry, and Father Giovanni thanked the chief and the wise man and returned for the night to the ship, where they told the other crew members of their adventures. In the morning they would sail for Boyuca. When the Captain and Father Giovanni retired to the Captain’s chambers, the priest asked to look at the first map again.

“With all this talk of the island and the healing water, I wonder if you noticed the lower part of this first map,” said the cleric.

“Yes, I did,” said Cabot.

“From this map, it looks like there is another ocean to the west!”

“I noticed the same thing,” said Cabot.

“It appears we have many adventures ahead of us,” said Giovanni.

“Yes, we do,” said Cabot. “Now get some sleep.” Cabot went to bed, thrilled to think of all the exciting new discoveries to come.

CHAPTER 4. CDC

Present day. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Atlanta, Georgia.

MURIELLE WINSTON WAS at the lab by 6:00 a.m., already having run three miles, having worked out at the gym, and having drunk what any normal person would view as a disgusting concoction of kale and eleven other vegetables from her juicer machine. She got her morning coffee with two blue Equal packets, and met her co-worker Jacob Roessler for the morning roundup.

“Morning, Jacob,” said Murielle.

“Good morning, Murielle,” said Jacob.

“What have we got today?” asked Murielle.

“We have 162 people confirmed with hepatitis A after eating Fledgling Farms Antioxidant Blend in ten states. We have 23 reported cases in Arizona, 79 in California, 28 in Colorado, 8 in Hawaii, and 11 in New Mexico. Sixty percent were women, ages were all over the board. Illness onset was from 1/31 to 2/15 of this year. All purchasers bought it from Costco. This virus relates to Genotype 18, which is rarely seen in the United States, and mostly appears in the Middle East and Africa. Here is the draft report.”

Murielle read through the report for about twenty minutes and then turned to Roessler.

“Did you isolate it?” asked Murielle.

“Yes, I did a traceback analysis and the most likely cause is pomegranate seeds from a company in Turkey, called Modbur Foodstuffs. So if you approve, we will put out a recall on that this morning and ban import of the pomegranate seeds.”

“Are Costco and Fledgling Farms cooperating?”

“Yes, they have issued a recall notice and are fully cooperating.”

“Great,” said Murielle, signing off on the report.

“How are you coming on that paper about antibiotic-resistant multiorganisms?”

“I can have a rough draft for you in a couple days. I am just waiting for some final data to come in.”

“Great, because Bjorn has been on my back about getting that out.”

“Are you going in the Oven later this morning?” asked Roessler. The Oven was their term for the Hotzone, the Level 4 Biohazard Lab where

the most dangerous pathogens in the world were stored.

“Yes, I have to. I am going in right after I make a phone call. We got those samples in from Sudan that we need to analyze. Care to join me?” asked Murielle.

“It’s a date,” said Roessler.

Murielle Winston walked down the hall to her office and shut the door. It was the morning after Teddy’s football game. She called her husband Charlie, who was taking Teddy to school on his way to the university. Charlie put his wife on speaker.

“Good morning, you two.”

“Morning, Mom,” said Teddy.

“Good morning, Murielle,” said Charlie Winston.

“Listen, Charlie, the pharmacy will open in about ten minutes. Would you mind picking up Teddy’s prescription on your way to work? It should be all ready.”

“Sure, honey, happy to.”

“And Charlie, you kept me up all night last night with the History Channel blaring at full volume. Can you turn the television down at night when I am sleeping?”

“Sorry, honey. I was watching *U-571*.”

“What is *U-571*?”

“It is a movie with Matthew McConaughey about submarine commanders in World War II who capture a German submarine in order to get the German Enigma cipher machine.”

“I see,” said Murielle. “I can see how that was an urgent thing to do at one in the morning.”

“It’s a really good movie, Murielle. Important American history, you know.” Charlie Winston winked at his son.

“Teddy, are you ready for your Science test today?”

“Yes, Mom, and thank you for helping me study for it.”

“Well, I wouldn’t be much of a scientist if I couldn’t help you with science.”

“Well, honey,” said Winston, winking at his son, “You know, Teddy was just telling me that Science is really not his thing, he is much more of a History guy.”

“Oh, is that so?” asked Murielle.

“Actually,” said Teddy. “I don’t like Science or History. I like Music.”

Which is why I need Dr. Dre BEATS Headphones.”

“Well,” said Murielle, “when we find our Money Oak in the backyard, we will get you some of those. Five hundred dollars for headphones! What is the world coming to? Anyway, have a nice day at school, sweetie. And don’t eat junk after school. I am making lasagna.”

“Mmmm, lasagna. That sounds good. Thanks, Mom. Don’t bring home any super-germs.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t. Talk to you two later.”

She hung up the phone and thought about her young son. All her expertise in science and there was nothing she could do to cure his paraplegia. Every morning at about this time, she ran a quick Medscape scan for any new articles on potential cures for paraplegia. There was an article published by a Chinese researcher about some kind of herb. Probably bogus, but she made a mental note to pull the article later today. Murielle Winston wrote herself a note about the ingredients she would need for the lasagna.

She then walked down the hall and entered the decontamination chamber, where she would spray herself with strong antimicrobial soap before putting on her RACAL space suit and entering the Oven. Ten minutes later, dressed in her space suit, she entered the Hotzone and connected the spiraling yellow airhose to her suit. The oxygen pumped in. She walked carefully. Even though she did this hundreds of times a year, she was always careful. One cut to her suit could mean exposure to a fatal disease.

CHAPTER 5. CAVE.

Present day. Mahale Mountains, Western Tanzania.

“**D**OGO, LOOK HERE!” exclaimed 12-year-old Akili to his ten year-old brother. “I have found a new opening!” Dogo and Akili lived in a small Watongwe village near Kasiha in western Tanzania, on the white shores of Lake Tanganyika, the world’s longest fresh water lake. The two boys were natural adventurers, and spent most of their days exploring the forests of Mahale Mountains National Park in search of some of the nearly 800 wild chimpanzees that claimed the region as their monkey home. The Mahale Mountains chimpanzees became accustomed to humans after Japanese primate researchers first began exploring the area 50 years ago, so it was not that difficult to get a good view of one of the chimps. Today, however, was different. The boys were not wandering the forest today, but were inside a cave in Mount Nkungwe, the park’s largest mountain, which towered over 8,000 feet above the lush, green trees below. Two days ago, Dogo had found a small hole in the mountain wall. When the two boys entered the hole, they were surprised to see that it opened up into a large limestone cave. For the last two days, the boys had spent all of their daylight hours spelunking with torches, staring in wonderment at the stalagmites and exploring every inch of the cave. This morning, Akili had cut the bottom of his right foot on a sharp rock inside the cave, and was hobbling a bit. The laceration had not dampened his spirits, however, and he enjoyed himself immensely exploring the cave.

Dogo, having recently lost his two front teeth, gave a broad, gummy smile to his older brother. Dogo’s huge Afro bounced as he scooted through the dark cave tunnel to the place where his brother was standing. Akili did not understand why his brother wore his hair so wild and long. He looked nothing like any of the other men of the Watongwe tribe. Dogo was always a goofy little kid. Dogo said he liked his hair like that. Akili, whose name meant “wise one” in Swahili, was proud to wear his hair short like the other men in the village. Dogo shivered, using his hands to rub his shoulders. It was much colder in here than he was accustomed to. Dogo was wearing an orange and yellow Disney Lion King t-shirt which

had been given to him by a primate researcher several months ago. Dogo liked the picture of Rafiki, the baboon, and wore the shirt constantly.

Dogo gave a mischievous look to his older brother. “Akili, that hole looks very small. Do you think you will fit? You eat too much ugali, you know. You are very fat.”

Akili gently shoved his brother, hitting him in the shoulder. “What do you know? You scare the fish with your hair! That is why you are so skinny.”

Dogo laughed, and shoved his brother out of the way, scrambling into the newly-found cave opening in the wall. “I will go in first, because I am Rafiki, brave and strong. You can follow me!”

Akili grabbed his brother’s ankle as he scampered into the hole, pulling him back out of the opening, and shoved him backwards, taking the opening for himself.

“Hey!” said Dogo. Akili climbed through the small opening and looked back to his brother.

“Dogo, hold my torch!” Akili passed his torch back to his brother. Curling himself around the rock, Akili came out into a clearing on the other side. It was definitely big enough to stand in, but beyond that, he could not tell anything. His feet felt squishy, like he was standing in mud. It was as black as ink in here. “Dogo!” exclaimed Akili, reaching his head back into the opening and stretching out his arm. “Pass me the torch!” Dogo did as he was told.

“Now take mine!” said Dogo, handing through the second torch to his brother. Dogo quickly scampered through the opening to join his brother and regained his torch once he went through.

“Yuck!” said Dogo in disgust, “What are we stepping in? It feels like caca!” Dogo giggled at his joke.

The two brothers turned around. This inner area felt like lying in the fish freezer. As their eyes strained to make out shapes in the darkness, Akili lifted his torch high over his head, and the two gazed upward. There was a rocky ceiling to this small room, maybe ten feet high. Along the ceiling were hundreds of little dark blobs. What were they? Akili thought at first that they might be some strange kind of black rock, but then his brain made the connection. Some of the blobs were moving!

“Bats!” screamed Akili.

Dogo and Akili did not have time to react to the giant wind-

thrushing and the vicious fluttering in the air. Hundreds of cave bats descended on the two young boys, causing them to drop their torches, and sending them screaming in terror back through the hole. Akili made it back through the hole first, leaving poor Dogo to fend for himself with the bats for an interminable extra few seconds. Dogo screamed, "Akili! Help!" Akili then pulled his brother back through the hole and the two ran down the cave passageway blind, with the swarm of bats following all around them. The two boys swung their arms wildly to fend off the swarm of airborne creatures. A few seconds later, Akili and Dogo saw the flurry of bats swing ahead of them, bound for the cave entrance, wherever that was. Akili and Dogo hit the floor of the cave, letting the bats pass overhead. Akili then held his little brother's hand, feeling along the rock wall and retracing their steps silently and slowly back to the cave entrance.

"Akili, I want to get out of here! I don't like caves anymore!"

"I will help you out, Dogo. Do not be afraid!" He only made one wrong turn, and, with his innate sense of direction, Akili managed to find the entrance of the cave where they had come in. They both squinted into the bright sunlight. After holding up his hand to ward off the sun, Akili's eyes soon adjusted to the bright light. He looked at his own body. His feet were covered in black bat guano, but he appeared to be unharmed. He could not see any marks on Dogo's body but Dogo assured Akili he had been bitten. Dogo began crying.

"It's OK, Dogo. The bats are gone! Dogo, I do not see any bite marks on you. If they had bitten you, I think there would be teeth marks."

"It hurts!" cried Dogo. "I know I was bitten! I could feel it! I do not think I can make it home!"

"Akili, you are being a baby. You must come with me. No one even knows where we are. We have several hours to go in order to get home before dark. Come on. I will help you." Akili gave his brother a drink of water from a small army green canteen at his waist and then put his arm around him for support.

"Let's go."

Akili and Dogo walked along the forest floor, passing half-eaten fruit and chimpanzee dung piles. Normally, this would be cause for excitement, an indication that monkeys were in the area. Now, all they could think

about was getting home. They followed their way along the streams, using the sausage trees, baobabs, and other landmarks for orientation. Akili's cut foot really made it difficult to travel, but he pressed ahead. By the time they arrived in their village two hours later, they were dehydrated and exhausted. Their mother was dismayed at their condition, and took them immediately inside their hut.

CHAPTER 6. ETHIOPIAN.

May 1499. Island of Boyuca, Bay of Honduras.

CABOT LEFT THE Varaguan natives and had set sail the next day for the island of Boyuca. Using the coordinates on the Veraguans' map, after a half-day's voyage, Cabot was able to find two huge stone promontories sticking up out of the ocean like statues. From there, he sailed on and was able to find the Island of Boyuca, the Evil Place. The scouting party, consisting of twelve men, had left the main ship in a small *lancha*, or Spanish longboat. Ten of the men, including Wilson Henry and the man the captain called "the Ethiopian," would go ashore and search for the healing spring. The other two men would wait on the shore with the *lancha*. Cabot remained on the ship. After four hours, the men had not returned. That was not particularly unusual. It would take some time to search the entire island. Cabot was patient. He decided to go below deck and complete his captain's log. By nighttime, the men still had not returned.

The Ethiopian rested his large back on the floor of the jungle, staring up through the densely packed palm trees into the starry sky, clenching every muscle tightly. He controlled his breathing so that it was slow and silent. He had to make sure he did not make the slightest sound. The cannibals were all around him, he was sure of that. He listened to the whining cries of the scarlet macaws and the rustling overhead of the spider monkeys darting from limb to limb in the darkness. He strained his ears for the slightest break of a twig or movement of vines that might signal the presence of a human. He heard nothing.

The Ethiopian was not really from Africa. He was an Amarak Indian from Cuba. However, his dark skin, muscled chest and shoulders, bald head, and fearsome expression earned him his nickname from John Cabot, who was waiting for him on board the *Matthew* in the bay several hundred feet off the shore of the island. The nine other men in his scouting mission had been killed on booby traps set throughout the jungle by the cannibals. The Ethiopian knew he was near his goal. According to the map which they had been given by the captain, he was almost right on top of it. But he had to be patient. If he was too rash in his movements, they would be on him immediately, like mosquitoes on a sweaty back.

The Ethiopian had been chosen by John Cabot for this mission for a reason. The Ethiopian was the best hunter of the Arawak tribe. It was said the Ethiopian could catch a jaguar with his bare hands before the animal was aware he was there. If anyone could find the treasure on the map it was he. John Cabot had met the Ethiopian as he came down the coast from Florida toward Hispaniola. Cabot had established good relations with the tribe and had traded tobacco, cloth, and dyes for tropical fruit and supplies for the voyage. Cabot was so impressed by the Ethiopian's skill as a tracker and hunter that he had invited him to join the captain on the voyage. For his part, the Ethiopian was surprised at the captain's friendliness, for he had heard from other tribe members that the white-skinned explorers were ruthless cutthroats. The Ethiopian, in the end, was a man of adventure, and nothing sounded more exciting to him than a sea voyage. He had been sea sick for the first few days of the trip, but after a while had gotten his sea legs.

The captain had advised the Ethiopian that the scouting party was to look for a pool of clear, cold spring water on the island and to fill the water in several wineskins. According to the hand-drawn map given to them by the captain, the pool was located in the densest part of the jungle, near the top of a mountain. Scaling up the mountain would be long and arduous. The captain did not explain why he needed this water. They had passed numerous pools along the way. Water is water, the Ethiopian thought. But Captain Cabot was a thinking man. The Ethiopian, on the other hand, was not a deep thinker. If the captain wanted this water, he was going to get it for him.

The Ethiopian waited for about a half hour and, hearing nothing further, crept like a panther along the ground, his night eyes searching the blackness for the slightest hint of trouble. He stopped several times, smelling the air. Just ahead was another small hill. Readjusting the wineskins, the bow and arrows, and his hunting knife, the Ethiopian crept hand over hand up the hill of matted banana leaves. As he made it over the top, he walked another ten feet through the palm trees and there was a tiny clearing. In the middle of the clearing was what appeared to be a deep pool of black water which was about thirty feet across. Directly above the far end of the pool was a wall of stone which went up about sixty feet. The Ethiopian could not tell what lay above the top of the stone wall. The Ethiopian smelled the air again. He thought at first he had caught

the whiff of something. Human body odor maybe. If he had any hair on the back of his neck it would be sitting erect. He could not see, hear or smell anything, but his sixth sense was telling him people were nearby. Waiting another ten minutes and hearing nothing, the Ethiopian slowly crept across the clearing to the pool and lowered himself in.

His first thought was how cold the water was. It was invigorating after this itchy, sweltering trip through the island brush. He let the cold water silently pour over his bald head. He drank some of the water. It was fresh water, not salty. The Ethiopian, believing this body of water to be the water pool listed on the map, filled up the first of his leather wineskins. As he was just about to fill the second sack, he felt something slide and coil around his leg. Then, he felt something touch his other leg. Snakes!

He quickly dove out of the pool onto the ground, and let out a small sound of revulsion as one of the thick purple snakes from the pool slithered off his leg and back into the pool. The snakes had not hurt him but they had certainly given his heart a start. As he bent to stand up, he heard a rapid whistling sound. He looked down and saw a sharp piece of wood sticking out of his left pectoral muscle. Seconds later he heard two more whistles and felt sharp pains in his right shoulder. The cannibals were here! They would be on him in seconds! He could not run down the mountain the way he had come. There was only one other option. As frantic human shouts and the bristling sounds of running feet filled the air, the Ethiopian decided to make a run for it. Strapping the filled wineskin over his shoulder he sprinted directly ahead through the jungle, running as fast as he could away from the sounds of the men with the poisoned darts and arrows. The pain in his chest and shoulder were excruciating. Whistles of more bamboo shoots flew all around him as he dodged left and right through the trees so that he would not make an easy target. There were more whistles of wind, and three more sharp pains shot from his back. He feared he would not make it. But just then, up ahead, on the path which sloped upward, he saw blue sky! Like an Olympic sprinter off the blocks, the Ethiopian plunged ahead with a final burst of speed into the clearing.

And then he began falling. He had literally run off a cliff. As the screaming, frustrated cannibals yelled from the precipice, the Ethiopian fell in an arc downward several hundred feet to the water and rocks below.

That night, back on the *Matthew*, Captain John Cabot was growing

impatient. It had been several days. The wind did not feel right to him. It felt like a storm was coming in from the east. They had to move south soon. Down below decks, his black stallion Marietta apparently felt the same way, for she was neighing loudly and moving around, clomping her hooves and kicking the walls. He had brought the horse so that when he landed in new territories, he could ride into the villages on horseback in a parade, waving like a god, demanding their respect. It had seemed like a good idea at the time he had loaded her on the ship, but at times like this, he wished that he had left the animal at home. Plus, that animal could certainly eat a lot. Cabot bit into a lime and spit out the skin. A distant yellow lightning bolt crackled at the edge of the eastern horizon. Where were his men?

As Cabot looked out across the water toward the shore, he could barely make out a small light. He called Father Giovanni to join him on deck. The two men watched as the small light flickered this way and that and slowly got closer. After a few minutes they realized they were looking at a torch floating toward them. Giovanni pointed toward the approaching light.

“Captain, it looks like the *lancha* is returning, and they have lit a torch for us to see them.”

Cabot wasn't so sure and grunted back to the priest. “We'll see.”

A few minutes later they saw the *lancha* coming closer. There was a pole sticking up in the middle of the boat, but it did not appear that anyone was piloting the small longboat. As the boat approached the *Matthew*, Cabot and the priest strained their eyes. There was definitely something in the boat.

Giovanni, using the Captain's spyglass, saw it first. “My God! That is Wilson Henry and Sebastian. Their bodies have been butchered!” The priest crossed himself and put his hand over his mouth. In the boat were two men's bodies, which appeared to have been sliced up with machetes. There was red blood all over the boat. Just then Giovanni saw several heads bob to the surface on either side of the boat. Before his brain could register what was happening, six bamboo shoots hit the wooden post inches away from his face and neck. Giovanni screamed and dove onto the deck. The Captain, however, had quicker reflexes and dove back just in time, the shoots flying over his head.

“Men! We are under attack by savages! All hands! All hands!” Cabot's

men came pouring onto the ship deck, armed with “*arquebuses*,” the long, muzzle-loaded firearms manufactured by the Spanish. The men fired volley after volley into the water at the cannibals. Spooked by the strange weapons, the cannibals ducked under the water and swam back for the shore. Within ten minutes, the cannibals were gone. However, a half hour later, some of his crew noticed dozens of long canoes disembarking from the shore. The cannibals had brought reinforcements and they were headed toward the ship. Cabot had seen enough. He ordered the anchor pulled and the sails lifted. He knew it was risky around these reefs to sail at night, but he was not taking any more chances on cannibal attacks. He felt a slight bit of guilt over leaving the Ethiopian and the other men from the scouting party, but judging from the remains of Henry and Sebastian, he was sure they were all dead. Within a short time, the *Matthew* sailed away from the island of Boyuca, never to return again.

The Captain turned over the wheel to one of the members of the crew and retired to his quarters below deck. In his personal chamber, the Captain worked in the dark with a quill over a small table, with a small white candle as his only source of illumination. Navigational maps were spread out across the table. The Captain made additional entries in the ship’s log. Cabot folded the Veraguan native’s map until it was a quarter of its original size and tucked it inside the pages of his ship’s log. He sketched a drawing of the longboat approaching the ship in the distance. He was quite a good artist. Cabot then made a note on their navigational maps as to the location of the island. He finished the evening’s work with a diary entry, briefly noting the terrible encounter with the cannibals of Boyuca. Truly this was an evil place, he thought.

Back on the island, on the bank of a small stream, the Ethiopian was sprawled on the rocks. Fortunately, his back had landed in water. His shins were not so lucky. One of his legs was broken. He was in excruciating pain. He knew it was a matter of time before the natives found him. He just hoped that maybe Henry and Sebastian could find him. He reached over to the wineskin and drank its entire contents. Then he passed out, delirious from the pain, with six curare-dipped arrows sticking out of his chest, shoulder, and back.

An hour later, he woke up again. He did not understand how he was still alive. He felt the light wood of the arrows sticking out of his body. They were still there. He reached for one of the arrows with his hand,

intending to pull the arrow out. But as he did so, he looked at his hand. The skin was smooth. There were no calluses. Come to think of it, even though he was in pain, the pain was not as bad as before. He felt strong as an ox. He looked down to his leg. His shin bone was still hurting, but he felt better, much better. He tried to stand, and, incredibly, was able to stand on the other leg, albeit with some pain. If he could just get to the beach, maybe the men could save him. He looked around, trying to orient himself. As he came around a wall of rock, he looked out into the bay. With dismay, in the distance, he saw that Cabot's ship was gone. They had left him. He limped about twenty more yards and then walked around another large gray rock. As he cleared the rock, he looked ahead. There, coming out of the jungle trees, were over two dozen natives walking toward him, armed with barbed spears.

CHAPTER 7. CLASSROOM

Present day. Emory University. Atlanta, Georgia.

“GOOD MORNING, CLASS,” said History Professor Charlie Winston, bending his tall frame over his Mac Book, which contained photo JPEGs for today’s discussion.

“As you know, this class is called ‘Who Owns the Past?’ Many times in our classes together, I have pounded again and again on my thesis that the ‘Winners’ in life—and by that I mean the rich people, the powerful people, the vanquishers, and often times the successful oppressors—create history in their own vision, often distorting the true events of the past and white-washing over their own crimes and misdeeds. Nothing could be a better example of that thesis than our topic of discussion today. Today is October 12, a day we celebrate as the anniversary of the day in 1492 when Christopher Columbus was supposed to have ‘discovered America.’” Winston clicked a slide on his Mac Book and a picture of the explorer appeared on the screen.

“And when we finish today, I would like you to ask yourself about this winner—Columbus—and whether American History has been badly re-written to accommodate him.”

“Now, of course, we were all taught in grade school to remember the names of Columbus’ three ships. What were they, Ms. Wallach?”

A young blonde woman with wet hair and a look which said, “Hey, I just woke up,” focused her groggy eyes toward the professor and said, “The *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria*.”

“That’s right!” exclaimed the energetic professor. He looked down to his computer, punching another slide showing the three ships.

“And can you tell us the rhyme about Columbus’ discovery of America?”

The young woman, who was not very bright, lightened up. This class was going to be easy. That’s two questions I already know the answer to, she thought. “In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”

“Ha ha! Right again!” exclaimed Winston, hitting his fist on the desk. He put his pencil over his ear and looked out over the class.

“Now if we really wanted to be accurate, we would say this rhyme instead:

*In fourteen hundred eighty-six
Columbus up to dirty tricks
Welcomed five men from the squall
Stole their maps and killed them all.”*

Morse looked around the class. He loved this part of the lecture. Columbus a murderer? The students were speechless.

“Yes, the story of Columbus begins in 1486, not 1492. In that year, Columbus was living on a small island off the western coast of Portugal called Madeira. In that year, a trader named Alonso Sanchez de Huelva left from Spain toward the Canary Islands in order to obtain sugar. A terrible sea storm blew his ship far off course to the west. De Huelva got lost and wound up in Santa Domingo, which he accidentally discovered a good six years before Columbus. The storm was devastating to the crew, and they lost twelve men from the original crew of seventeen. On de Huelva’s return home, the crew managed to reach Terceira, one of the Azores Islands just west and north of Madeira.” Winston clicked the air mouse, and showed a map depicting the Azores Islands. “From there, they had limited rations, and some of the men were sick, so they sailed on to the south and east to the next island, which was Madeira. De Huelva knew Columbus from his reputation as an ocean pilot. We know that de Huelva brought with him certain maps in which de Huelva had charted the lands in the New World which he had just discovered. De Huelva told Columbus about the maps. That night, Columbus had a huge banquet for the men. They ate and drank and told stories from their ocean voyage. Plying them with wine, Columbus pumped the men for all the juicy tidbits of information related to their trip to the New World. We learn next from a reputable sixteenth century historian that, quote, ‘*They arrived so enfeebled by hardships that Christopher Columbus could not restore them to health despite his attentions, and they all died in his house, leaving him the heir to the hardships that had caused their death.*’ So let’s see.... Five men come to his house. They spend the night drinking and eating and story-telling, and the next day all five men wind up dead, in his house, and they have conveniently all bequeathed their valuable maps of the New World to Columbus. If you were a Homicide Detective, would you buy that

story? That sounds like Colonel Mustard with the Rope in the Library to me.” Winston looked out into the crowd, hoping for a laugh. No one apparently had heard of the board game Clue. These kids were hopeless.

“Anyway, it certainly suggests the possibility that Columbus murdered them all and took their maps in the morning.” The professor eyed a student in the back row. “Mr. Morse, what do you think of that?” Zach Morse was the son of the famous UCLA history and anthropology professor, John Morse, who had startled the world with his discovery last year of the lost Nostradamus prophecies. Zach had been involved with his father’s adventures and was somewhat of a celebrity as well. Zach was in the back row, leaning back his desk against the wall, closing his eyes, and jamming to some music in his ear phones. Professor Charlie Winston, looking over his glasses, scowled as he looked at the young Morse, realizing that he was not paying attention. Charlie Winston then reached into his desk, and rewarded the other students with a trademarked move for which he was known all over campus. He removed a Georgia peach from the desk, and held it up to the class, smiling. The students all laughed, knowing what was coming next. With the accuracy of Nolan Ryan, Winston whipped the peach at the long-haired teenager, hitting him in the head.

Zach Morse put down his desk, stunned and surprised by the projectile’s direct hit. “Hey! WTF!” The other students laughed. Zach Morse, with his California blonde-streaked hair covering his blue eyes and knockout smile, was well-liked by most of the students...well, at least by the female students.

“Mr. Morse, may I ask you to put away your music and listen to the lecture, please?”

“Sure, no problem, sorry,” said Zach, taking out his ear plugs.

“Mr. Morse, what would you say if you learned that five people came to Christopher Columbus’ house seeking shelter from a storm; that the next morning, all of them were dead, and that all of the men’s valuables had been fortuitously bequeathed to Columbus?”

“I’d say he whacked ’em all,” said Zach.

“I think you are right, Mr. Morse. And tell us why you think that?”

Zach Morse replied, in an innocent tone at first, “Well Professor, I guess I’d say...” Morse began to smile. He put on his sunglasses. He loved showing off in front of the other students, and enjoyed beat-boxing and making up spontaneous rap lyrics. He stood up and sung:

*“Oonce, oonce, oonce.
Five dudes comin’ and they’re all actin’ tough
But Chris C capped ‘em, and took their stuff,
Then to the Po-Po, he told a little fib,
Said they all died sudden right there in his crib.
Oonce, oonce, oonce.”*

The students all laughed hysterically, and Professor Winston raised his hands to calm them down. Winston did not like being upstaged.

“You call that a rap?” asked Professor Winston. He was not going to be outdone by this kid, no matter how popular he was.

“Straight up,” said Zach.

With that, Professor Winston pulled out his own sunglasses and put them on.

“Ooooooo!” said some of the girls in the class, clearly sensing that the Professor was throwing down the gauntlet.

Professor Winston adjusted his Mac Book, made a few clicks, and then played some loud rap music from his computer.

*“There once was a teacher, who tried to teach a course
But he kept getting’ hassled by this kid Zach Morse,
No matter what he did, this kid don’t pay attention,
So that’s why he’s goin’—right off to School Detention!
Ooonce, ooonce, oonce!”*

The class went wild clapping and yelling “You’ve been served!” and “He got you, Zach!” Professor Winston took off his glasses and smiled, taking a bow.

Zach Morse said, “That’s lame!” under his breath, unhappy with the detention comment and not sure if the professor was really going to give him detention. In fact, Zach wasn’t even sure if they had detention in college. But he had to admit to himself that it was a pretty clever comeback.

“OK, where was I?” asked Professor Winston. “Oh yes, Christopher Columbus whacked his five guests and took all of their maps. The next thing that happens is that Columbus takes these maps from de Huelva to the King of Portugal and demands that the King pay him a healthy ransom to go ‘discover’ these new lands for Portugal—the lands that de

Huelva already discovered. But the King of Portugal knew Columbus. He knew that Columbus was an untrustworthy pirate. So he turned him down, and that's how Columbus wound up going to the King and Queen of Spain instead."

One of the students, a preppy, skinny eighteen year-old with wire rim glasses, wasn't buying it and raised his hand.

"Yes, Mr. uh..."

"Jasper," said the young man.

"Yes, Mr. Jasper."

"It sounds to me like your evidence is a little thin to call him a murderer. I mean, you said the crew became sick as a result of their encounter with the storm and the long voyage. Isn't it possible they all just died of sickness? You don't know for certain that Columbus was a murderer, do you?"

Morse enjoyed it when his students participated in the lecture. "Mr. Jasper, I would answer your question 'Yes and No.' No, we cannot say beyond a reasonable doubt that he murdered de Huelva's men, although it looks very suspicious that he did, but I can tell you without question that Columbus was a murderer. In fact, I would go beyond that and suggest to you that he was a mass murderer of thousands of people." The class was silent and skeptical.

"That's right, I said thousands of people killed. When Columbus first landed in the Bahamas in 1492, the *Santa Maria* had sunk in the harbor. But the Taino and Arawak Indians were there to help. For hours, they helped the men on the sunken ship get their supplies to the shore. Columbus noted in his diary that these Indians were a 'kind people,' and the gentle Arawaks *offered to share with anyone and when you ask for something, they never said no.*' He remarked that their *eyes are very large and beautiful.*' The Indians possessed no weapons. Columbus writes in his ship logs that the Indians did not even know what a sword was, and they tested it by handling the sharp end in their hands, accidentally cutting themselves out of ignorance. They were hard-working and friendly. Columbus rewarded them by enslaving them all and putting them to work to mine precious metals.

"Some historical scholars put the original Taino population on the island of Hispaniola to be just under eight million. That's probably too high. The historian Kirkpatrick Sale put the number at three million.

The real number is probably closer to two million. In any event, by the year 1500, that number had dropped to 500,000. By 1516, only 12,000 Indians remained. Soon after that, there were none at all. That is two million people wiped out in the span of twenty-four years. How did they all die? While it is certain that many Indians died from diseases brought by the Europeans, such as swine flu from the pigs Columbus brought to the island, the numbers of dead cannot merely be explained away by pig disease, and it is historically certain that hundreds of thousands, and probably millions of Indians, were murdered by Columbus and his men. We know this from the logs of Columbus himself, from Columbus' son's writings, from an excellent tome called *History of the Indies* by Catholic priest Bartolomé de las Casas, and from other historical sources.

“After arriving on the island in 1492, Columbus saw that some of the natives had pieces of metal in their noses and around their necks. He believed that somewhere close there was a native king who possessed a substantial amount of gold. In an effort to find this gold, Columbus quickly began a campaign of abusing the Indians. If an Indian resisted, Columbus would cut off his nose or his ear. Soon, the Indians tried to revolt, with pitiful weapons like stones and sticks. Columbus construed the meager revolt as an act of war by the Indians and decided that the revolt was a sufficient basis to conquer and subjugate everyone on the islands. He kidnapped twenty-five Arawaks and brought them back as slaves to Spain to show the king. The King of Spain was impressed, and authorized a substantial return trip to the islands. Although Columbus once bragged that he could subdue the entire island with fifty armed men, he brought much more than that. On his second voyage in 1493, Columbus brought seventeen war ships fully loaded with over fifteen hundred soldiers, a unit of cavalry lancers and horses, canons, and vicious attack dogs. When they returned to the islands, Columbus and his crew began slaughtering Indians. In a biography of his father, Christopher Columbus' son Ferdinand wrote (Winston clicked the air mouse to show the quote on the screen):

‘The soldiers mowed down dozens with point-blank volleys, loosed the dogs to rip open limbs and bellies, chased fleeing Indians into the bush to skewer them on sword and pike, and with God’s aid soon gained a complete victory, killing many Indians....’

In 1495, having found no significant amount of gold yet, Columbus decided to bring slaves back to Spain. He rounded up fifteen hundred Arawaks, then selected the best five hundred physical specimens and brought them back to Spain as slaves. One eyewitness described it this way:

Among them were many women who had infants at the breast. They, in order the better to escape us...left their infants anywhere on the ground, and started to flee like desperate people....'

Columbus wrote letters to the King and Queen of Spain bragging about the number of slaves on the way.

“Frustrated, however, by the lack of gold, Columbus instituted a tribute system among the Indians. Columbus’ son Ferdiand described the system. Columbus required each native over the age of fourteen to fill a hawk’s bell full of gold from the gold mine in Cibao every six weeks. If an Indian was successful, he received a brass or copper token which he was required to wear around his neck as proof of payment. The token would immunize the Indian from penalty for three months. If an Indian, however, did not deliver his quota of gold dust by the deadline set by Columbus, Columbus would order his soldiers to cut off the man’s hands and let them hang off the arms by the skin, or tie the hands around the native’s neck, as a lesson to the others. It is not surprising that once amputated, many of these Indians died of lack of blood, infection, or disease. If a native tried to escape, Columbus would hunt him down and burn him alive. There are some reports that when Columbus’ crew ran short of meat for the dogs, the soldiers would actually butcher Arawak babies for dog food. One group of one hundred Indians was so terrified by the violence that they committed mass suicide to avoid the torture and brutality. The historian Bartolomé de las Casas, wrote in his *History of the Indies* that the men following Columbus would make bets as to who could cut a native in half with one swing of the sword. De Las Casas personally witnessed Columbus’ soldiers, dismember, behead or rape over 3,000 native people.”

“Columbus himself was an avid slave trader. He allowed young native girls nine or ten years old to be given to his men, who raped them.” Professor Morse clicked the air mouse again, showing a new quote. “Columbus seemed utterly devoid of conscience when he wrote in his diary that *A hundred castellanoes are as easily obtained for a woman as for a farm, and*

it is very general and there are plenty of dealers who go about looking for girls: those from nine to ten are now in demand.' When Columbus and his men had utterly wiped out the Indian population through murder, and they needed more slaves, they turned to black slaves. In fact, Columbus' son became the first American slave trader of Africans in 1505." Several black students looked at each other, surprised and skeptical of the revelation.

"Columbus' atrocities were so well known that Governor Francisco de Bobadilla arrested Columbus and his two brothers, shackled them in chains and sent them to Spain to answer for criminal charges related to the treatment of the Indians. But when the King and Queen of Spain saw their coffers from the New World filling with Columbus' gold, they pardoned him, allowing him to return and pillage more Indians. One famous historian once quipped that *'a ship without compass, chart or guide, but only following the trail of dead Indians who had been thrown from the ships could find his way from the Bahamas to Hispaniola.'*"

"And this is the man that we name our national capital after. This is the man after whom we name cities in Ohio and South Carolina. This is the man to whom we dedicate a national holiday every year and treat as a hero." Charlie Winston, clicked an air mouse, showing pictures of Present George Herbert Walker Bush, President Bill Clinton, President George W. Bush, and House Speaker Nanci Pelosi. "In 1989, President George Herbert Walker Bush praised Columbus as a hero, saying: *'Christopher Columbus not only opened the door to a New World, but also set an example for us all by showing what monumental feats can be accomplished through perseverance and faith.'* In 1999, the Clinton Administration established a Millenium Fund which donated American funds to restore Columbus' home in Genoa, Italy. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, an Italian American, was present, and gave glowing remarks about the importance of restoring Columbus' house. On October 9, 2002, President George W. Bush issued a presidential proclamation celebrating *'Columbus' bold expedition [and] pioneering achievements,*' directing that *'the flag of the United States be displayed on all public buildings on the appointed day in honor of Christopher Columbus.'*"

Winston clicked the air mouse again, showing the picture of Christopher Columbus. "Columbus was a Winner in History." Unfortunately, however, Native Americans, and ultimately, all Americans, are the losers. And that is our lecture for today. Happy Columbus Day

and may God Bless America!”

All the students clapped. Zach Morse went up to the professor after class.

“Are you really sending me to detention?”

“No, I will give you a stay of execution this time. But next time, no more raps in class, OK?”

“OK, sure,” said Zach. Zach began to walk out of class, holding his history books under his arm, but then turned back to face the professor.

“Hey, Professor Winston.”

“Yes, Zach?”

“That was a pretty good rap.”

“Thanks, Zach. Yours was pretty good too.” The professor pulled out another Georgia peach and underhanded it to Zach, who caught it mid-air.

“Eat your peaches, Zach. They have lots of Vitamin C.”

Zach Morse smiled and left the classroom.

CHAPTER 8. BAT

Present day. Tanzania.

“LOOK AT YOUR feet!” Akili and Dogo’s mother Neema scolded. “You are filthy! Where have you boys been? We have been so worried about you!” Their mother shepherded the boys over to some blankets on the floor of the hut. She looked first at Dogo, feeling his forehead. He was sweaty, but he did not feel as if he had a fever. She could not see any cuts or wounds besides the cut on his foot.

“Mami, I was bitten by bats!” whined Dogo.

“Akili, what is this? Is this true?”

“We were in a cave, Mami, and we got attacked by bats! They were all over us! But I don’t think Dogo got bitten. I do not see any marks on him.” Akili whimpered, trying not to cry. “They came after me, too, Mami!”

Neema looked at the younger son’s skin with grave concern. Then she looked at Akili with scorn, waving her index finger in his face.

“You were supposed to look out for little Dogo! And you took him into a cave? What were you thinking? You both could have been killed!”

“I am sorry, Mami! Dogo found the cave, not me.”

“Oh, so that makes it okay?”

“Well, it did not look dangerous at first. Just a bunch of rocks. I didn’t think we would get hurt.”

Neema laid her youngest son down on the ground and put his head on a pillow.

“That’s no excuse, Akili! You know better than that. Now you lie down here next to Dogo and I will get your father.” Neema washed off the bat guano off the boys’ feet, and bandaged Akili’s foot. She then left the hut to find Joséph, the boys’ father.

Joséph Nagatabu and his brother Elvis were down by the pier. Joséph was standing in his metal longboat, dressed in a bright red shirt and tan shorts, with flopping, silver-scaled fish piled all around his bare feet. Last night had been a good night for fishing in Lake Tanganyika, home of over 350 types of different fish. Elvis, dressed in his brown shirt and yellow, green-striped sweatpants, was talking a good game to the crowd of potential purchasers, some of whom were native Tanzanians and others who had come to the lake from foreign countries.

“Look at these big ones! Perfect for a king’s feast! Reasonable prices! Step over to the boat, please!” Elvis was able to fluently speak both Swahili, the native language of Tanzanians, and English, the country’s second language. He went back and forth with his sales pitch, first in Swahili and then in English. Joséph and Elvis made a good pair. Joséph was a skilled fisherman, while Elvis, with his big smile of white teeth, and a hearty penchant for exaggeration, was the natural salesman. Elvis grabbed a big silver fish solidly in both hands and turned to talk to a customer. Looking over the customer’s shoulder, Elvis saw his sister-in-law running down the pier frantically.

“Joséph! Elvis! You must come quickly! The boys were attacked by bats! Dogo says he was bitten!”

Elvis threw the fish back into Joséph’s boat, and grabbed Neema’s shoulders, fixing his hands on her red and white-flowered khanga, a traditional, full-length Tanzanian cotton robe.

“Wait, wait, slow down! How could bats have bitten them? Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am sure! They found a cave, and a swarm of bats attacked them. Dogo says he was bitten by the bats!”

“Well, did you see any bite marks?” asked Elvis.

Joséph bounded out of the boat, handing the rope line to his brother.

“Elvis, when a bat bites, you can barely feel it. It is like a pin prick. Even if Dogo was bitten, there may be no marks on him. Don’t you remember when Uncle Tamba was bitten by a fruit bat? He did not have any mark on him but he was sick for weeks. Elvis, you will have to sell the fish on your own. I am going to take the truck back to the village. At sunset, I will come back to pick you up in the truck.”

Elvis reluctantly agreed and went back to peddling fish.

Joséph ran with his wife back to their beat-up 1978 aqua-green Chevy pickup truck and jumped inside. Joséph gunned it out of the parking lot. As they drove back the two miles to their village, he questioned his wife about the incident.

“Did they say where the cave was?”

“No, I never asked them that. I was too concerned about the bats, so I ran here.”

“Akili knows better than to take his little brother into a dark cave by himself. What was he thinking?”

“I already told him the same thing. He will need to be punished. But for now, we have to make sure they do not get sick.”

The tan dust cloud kicked up from the dirt road all around them as they raced back to the village. The truck peeled through forest vegetation on either side. When they got to the village, Joséph ran inside the family’s hut, holding his fishing net and metal fish-spear. His two boys were lying on a pile of colorful blankets. Joséph asked Dogo to stand up. Joséph slowly looked at his son’s body. He could see what looked like spider bites on Dogo’s right calf, his left arm, and his left thigh.

“These could be bat bites, I don’t know.”

“Dadi, my neck hurts!” said Dogo, putting his hand back near his neck and moving his big Afro around in a circle. Joséph put his net and spear down on the ground and inspected his son, lifting up the back of Dogo’s Afro to inspect his neck. To his surprise, he saw a dark, gray mass, about the size of a large clam, stuck into Dogo’s neck, just under the hairline. Joséph reached his hand over to pull the foreign object off, while his wife, leaning over his shoulder, put her hand over her mouth, worried what the object might be. The object seemed stuck. Joséph applied a little more pressure with his fingers, when suddenly, the object moved quickly, changing its shape and fluttering violently just past Joséph’s face.

“What the fuck!” Joséph yelled, cranking his head back quickly away from the fluttering object, ducking down on to the blankets. Neema, Akili and Dogo all screamed and dove for the ground. “What was that?” asked Joséph. A few seconds later, he knew. It was a bat from the cave.

“Kill it! Kill it!” Neema screamed.

Bats are able to curl their bodies into tight balls. It appeared that the bat had hitched a ride under the bottom of Dogo’s Afro all the way back to the village. Now the bat was flying around the inside of the hut, smashing into walls, and causing everyone to duck for cover. Joséph regained his senses and his courage moments later, grabbed his fishing net, and after a few tries, ensnared the small creature. He took the net with the captured bat and slammed it into the floor of the hut violently, stunning the bat. He was about to crush the bat with his big boot when Neema screamed again.

“Stop! Don’t kill it in here! We will have bat blood all over the hut! Get it out of here! Get it out of here!”

Joséph quickly took the bat in the fishing net out of the hut and

walked down to the forest tree line. He thought about killing the bat right here, but then he paused to think. What if Dogo had rabies from the bat? Would the doctors need to know what kind of bat it was before treating him? What if the type of treatment depended on what type of bat it was? The more he thought about it, the more he thought it was wise to keep the bat trapped but alive. He walked back to the back of his hut, where he kept some small wooden animal traps. He put the net with the bat inside the wooden trap and closed the lid. They could decide later what to do with the bat. He hid the trap in the weeds so no child coming by would discover the bat and get bitten. Just before he left the trap, he peered inside the trap at the bat. He wanted to see if there was any white frothing at the mouth. He wasn't sure if bats got rabies, and if they did, whether bats frothed at the mouth, but he decided to check to make sure. He did not see anything white around the bat's mouth. Joséph tapped his spear on the top of the trap. The bat was motionless in the trap. He was an ugly little thing.

That night, Neema served the boys a healthy serving of ugali, a Tanzanian corn mash, some rice pilau, and plantains. Exhausted after a long and terrifying day, the boys went right to sleep.

CHAPTER 9. OCEAN.

June 1499. Jungles of modern-day Panama.

HAVING LEFT THE island of Boyuca, John Cabot set his sights on the next point of interest on the Veraguans' map: the ocean to the west. According to the map, there was a small strip of land separating the two oceans. If he could take an expedition across that strip, he might find the western ocean, and the passageway to the West, on the other side. It had taken a week to sail south to the correct point on the map. And as of today, it had been twenty-two days since they began their southwestern expedition into the jungle. His men, eighty in number, were beginning to doubt the tale of their Indian guide, who had promised a great sea brimming with pearls and a temple of gold. John Cabot slashed a patch of banana leaves with his machete and forged upward through the dense foliage toward the top of the jungle mountain. His longtime friend, Father Giovanni, who was both a friar and a doctor, walked behind Cabot, doing his own job hacking away at the vines and leaves. The friar, one of the few men on board the expedition who, like Cabot, was originally from Venice, spoke to Cabot in Italian, and addressed him by his Italian name, Zuan Chabotto.

"Zuan, how much further do you think it is? I hear the men grumbling every night. We have lost three from this terrible heat and twenty from the last battle with Cacique Ponca and his tribe. Many are coming down with malaria. The men want to be back on the ship. I hear them say this is a fool's errand, like our trip to Boyuca."

Cabot was annoyed. These English men were lazy. They drank ale from the barrels every night and unnecessarily exhausted the food supplies. They had no discipline. They always wanted immediate gratification. Didn't they understand that no great deeds were ever established without hard work? Cabot looked ahead to their young Indian guide, a Taino who had defected from Cacique Careta after being promised a pig and a barrel of ale if he could successfully lead them to the South Sea and temple of gold. Cabot wasn't sure if he trusted the Indian either.

Cabot took out the Veraguan map and studied it. Were they off course? Cabot grabbed the elbow of the Indian and pointed to the map. Cabot held up his hands in obvious frustration. The Indian understood. Cabot was irritated that instead of riches, they had only encountered

snakes, mosquitoes, and mud. The Indian babbled something in his native tongue with some urgency, and kept pointing to a symbol on the hand-drawn map. The Indian pointed to the top of the mountain they were climbing. Cabot looked back to the friar.

“I think he is saying it is at the top of the mountain here. Just a little further.”

Cabot was happy he had decided to leave his armor on the ship. It was just too hot. Luckily, the resistance from the local Indians had been modest, and his men were more than up to the task. But even without armor, he still felt like he was walking through an oven. A very wet oven. Cabot trudged up the muddy mountainside, his clothing soaked through. The air under the canopy of leaves was so saturated with moisture, it felt like the wet fog he had often encountered back in Bristol. Cabot passed a bush loaded with black berries. He took out his hunting knife, cut off a small branch and was about to put the berries in his mouth when the young Indian turned and grabbed his wrist fiercely. “No!” yelled the Indian, repeating one of the few English words he had learned. Cabot was surprised by the Indian but put down the berries. They must be poisonous. Cabot passed the word back to his crew not to eat the berries.

They walked for another hour up the mountainside, following their guide, until the Indian suddenly became agitated, jumping up and down and pointing ahead. It looked like they were very near the top of the mountain. Cabot hacked through a final set of small trees and bushes and came out upon a grassy clearing near the top of the mountain. He walked to the apex and looked south and west. The Indian stood next to him, pointing off toward the horizon.

Cabot first saw miles of jungle in front of him below but then, as he looked toward the horizon, he saw it. A ribbon of blue stretching as far as the eye could see. Another ocean. The friar joined him at the mountain top. The priest crossed himself and said a silent prayer. Cabot and his friar were the first two Europeans to see the Pacific Ocean.

Cabot yelled with his enthusiasm to the rest of his men, who ran up the mountain in anticipation, wanting to know what was ahead. When the men crowded into the clearing, they gazed in amazement at the new sea and then cheered and slapped each other’s backs. They were all going to be rich. It looked like the Indian would get his pig.

CHAPTER 10. ILLNESS.

Present day. Western Tanzania.

THE NEXT DAY, Akili and Dogo rose early in good spirits and seemed healthy and happy. However, their mother did not want them adventuring by themselves for a while. In addition, she had to punish the boys for going into a cave by themselves, so she sentenced them to helping their father at the pier with the fish, a chore the boys hated. As Dogo sat at the end of the pier in the hot sun, cleaning the piles of fish, he groused at his brother:

“If you hadn’t gone in that stupid hole, we wouldn’t be here right now!”

“You were the one who found the cave to begin with!” retorted Akili.

“Yes, but I just wanted to look around, not get attacked by bats! Now look at us, we will stink like fish all day!”

“Stop being such a crybaby! Oooh, they bit me! They bit me! I don’t see a single mark on you! You made it sound like your hand was bitten off by a lion!”

“I am telling you I felt them bite me! You wouldn’t know, because you went into the hole first, leaving me all alone in the cave with all those bats. They were everywhere!”

“Well, it’s all over now, just clean your fish quickly so we can get out of here.”

The two continued to blame each other for the previous day’s events and their current punishment, and, as children do, spent more time complaining about the job than actually doing it. Finally, their father got frustrated by their sloppy and lazy work and sent them home to their mother.

For the next six days, the boys continued to work down at the pier. On the seventh day, however, neither Akili nor Dogo wanted to get out of bed, and both complained that their backs were hurting. Their father, disgusted by their laziness, and sensing the boys were faking to get out of work, scolded them harshly, yanking them out of bed and hitting their bottoms.

“Get dressed in five minutes and get in the truck, or there will be no supper for you.”

“But Dadi, my back really hurts!” complained Dogo.

“Your back is going to hurt a lot more if you don’t get dressed and

get in that truck!” yelled their father.

As the day wore on down at the pier, both Akili and Dogo started to feel faint and nauseous. Joséph came up on the pier from the boat and looked at his boys. Dogo was sitting in a pile of fish, but he had stopped cleaning the fish. He swayed back and forth for a few seconds and then vomited all over the pile of fish. His father was angry. He didn’t want to throw the fish out. That was half a night’s labor! They would just have to re-clean all these fish in order to sell them.

Elvis was also disgusted. “Ahh, look at this mess! Joséph, get these kids out of here!”

Joséph took both of his boys by the arms and took them back to the truck, while Elvis took pails of lake water and washed the bodily fluids off the pile of fish. As Dogo got to the truck, he vomited again on the gravel of the parking lot. Akili, who also felt ill, helped his brother get into the truck. Joséph felt bad that his children were sick, and felt guilty he had made them get out of bed this morning. When he got to the village, he took Dogo in his arms and held him over his shoulder. Akili walked sluggishly behind his father towards their hut. As he got back to the front of the hut, Dogo vomited again, all down his father’s back.

“Aaaagh!” groaned Joséph, disgusted by the mess.

“What is happening?” asked Neema, coming out the door and taking Dogo.

“Both of the boys got sick down at the pier. I had to get them out of there. Dogo vomited on a whole load of fish. Ruined the whole lot!”

“Akili!” Neema yelled, looking over her husband’s shoulder at their older son, who had just passed out on the ground.

Joséph and Neema went back to Akili. Joséph took him in his arms and took him into their hut. They laid both boys down on their cots. Neema felt their foreheads. They were running a high fever. Akili had a large rash on his leg as well as the ankle of the previously-cut foot. Neema felt their throats. Both boys had enlarged lymph nodes, a sure sign of infection.

“Joséph, we must take them to the hospital!”

“But the nearest good hospital is Kigoma Baptist Missionary Hospital, and that is two hours away. I will miss a whole day of work. Plus, there is the money for gas to get there and whatever the hospital will charge us. How do we know they don’t just have the flu?”

“They don’t have the flu! I know my boys. They are very sick. They might have rabies from those bats!”

“You know that is a missionary church. We are Muslims. You know what they think of us. Elvis went there once and they tried to convert him to Christianity! Jesus this and Jesus that! Their mission is to convert us!”

Neema’s eyes flared. “Joséph, I hope your faith is strong enough that you will not convert to Christianity because you meet a Christian doctor. We are not going for religious instruction. We are going for medical help. You knew those boys were sick this morning and you made them go to work! Now they are very ill! I don’t care how far away it is, or how much it costs us, or what religion the doctors are, we need to drive them to the hospital! Now!”

“Okay, okay! Let me get my things together.”

Ten minutes later, the family boarded the pickup truck and sped down the road to the hospital in Kigoma.

Near Kasuha, Tanzania. Fishing Pier.

BACK AT THE pier, Elvis had finished washing the vomit off the fish. He stared down at the pile of silver fish. He should probably throw them out. But it was almost a whole day’s catch! Surely if he cleaned the fish thoroughly, no one would ever notice. He bent over the pile with his brush, taking extra care to clean the fish well. Later today, he would pile them in with another load. No one would ever know the difference...

CHAPTER 11. HOSPITAL.

Kigoma, Tanzania. Kigoma Missionary Baptist Hospital

DR. ALI EL-MOHAMMED Beladar was a graduate of University of Dar es Salaam Medical School. Dar es Salaam was the largest city in Tanzania. Although Dr. Beladar was a Muslim, he did not mind working at a hospital with a Christian mission. Dr. Beladar cared about his patients. What religion they practiced was none of his concern. Tall, thin and handsome, with wire-rim glasses, Dr. Beladar was like many doctors—intelligent, cool under pressure, unemotional, able to sleep only four hours a day, and short on ebullient personality. He was a specialist in emergency medicine, and handled the very worst which Tanzania's deserts, jungles and mosquitos had to dish out. He had treated many patients with AIDS, a disease which was unfortunately all too prevalent in Tanzania. Yellow fever, malaria, cancer, gunshot wounds—he had seen it all. At least he thought he had seen it all, until this morning.

When the frantic parents brought the two little boys in, the Emergency Admitting Nurse, Dr. Beladar's current girlfriend, Marietta Gondube, was quick to realize the boys had no simple flu. Their eyes looked transfixed like zombies. For that matter, the boys acted like zombies. They seemed distracted and "out of it," like they were thinking of something far, far away. Both of their noses continued to bleed out of both nostrils, and the blood looked shinier than normal. Nurse Gondube tried to stop the blood by having the boys lie down and lean back, while she pressed wet cloths against their nose cartilage and their gums. It did not seem to be working. The washcloths were filling up with shiny red blood. The boys' skin was swollen with dark purple splotches. But the thing that scared Nurse Gondube most was the red eyes. The whites of both of the boys' eyes were pinkish red, as if they were bleeding out through their eyes. She had never seen anything like it. She quickly put both boys on wheeled gurneys and rolled them into a separate isolation room, yelling for an orderly to fetch Dr. Beladar. She was taking Dogo's temperature when Dr. Beladar walked in.

"What do we have, Marietta?"

"Dr. Beladar, this one here is Akili. He is twelve. His brother is Dogo, who is ten. They report symptoms of back ache beginning this morning. They went to work with their father, gradually got worse during the day,

and both began vomiting. The mother reports their vomit to be very dark, like they are coughing up blood. As they drove to the hospital, the boys got worse. Akili has a temperature of 104. Dogo is 103. The mother explains that the boys were attacked by cave bats about seven days ago. In fact, the father has one of the bats who bit the child in a cage out in the hall, in case you wanted to see it. I told him I did not think that would be necessary.”

“Any abdominal pain reported?” The nurse shook her head no. Dr. Beladar rubbed Dogo’s stomach.

“Does this hurt?” he asked. Dogo did not respond, but it looked like he was in pain.

“Rabies usually takes about two months, not ten days, although there have been reported cases in which the virus took over in days rather than months.” The boys’ mother and father came into the room.

“Doctor, do you know what it is?” asked the mother.

“Have either of the boys had hallucinations?”

“No.”

“Have they had strange phobias, like a fear of air or water?”

Neema looked at Joséph quizzically, as if to say, “Is this guy a real doctor?” They did not know that hallucinations and phobias to air and water were sometimes linked with rabies.

“No, Doctor, nothing like that.”

Dr. Beladar was wondering why the boys’ noses kept bleeding.

“Did either of them get hit in the nose?”

“No,” said Neema.

“Have they ever gotten nosebleeds before?”

“No,” said Neema.

Dr. Beladar had also never seen eyes that red before.

“Are they allergic to anything?”

“Not that I know of,” said Neema. Joséph looked at his boys, shaking his head, clearly worried.

“Nurse, let’s get some blood samples from the boys right away.”

Nurse Gondube wrapped a brown rubber cord around Dogo’s wrist, took a syringe and prepared to take some blood. As soon as she stuck in the needle, blood shot out from the puncture mark. The nurse was clearly surprised and moved back a step. Just then, Dogo’s eyes began rolling around in the back of his head, he groaned loudly, and he bent over the

edge of the bed. The nurse went to hold him so he would not fall out of the bed, but just as she caught his arm, Dogo opened his mouth and poured a bucket of hot, pitch-black vomit all over the nurse's neck, chest, and the hospital room floor. Nurse Gondube stepped back in shock, and Dogo rolled onto the floor, which was covered in hot blood and black vomit. His mother Neema screamed and put her hands over her mouth.

Before Dr. Beladar could react, Akiri's sweaty, hot body went entirely limp. There was a huge ripping sound coming from Akili's stomach and Akili began convulsing, with black blood pouring out on the sheets from under Akili's body. Dr. Beladar turned Akili's body over, and as he did so, he saw that black blood and pieces of intestine were pouring out of Akili's ripped anus. Dr. Beladar's arms were elbow-deep in black blood and tissue.

Beladar had not seen this ever before. "Crash cart! Now!" he yelled into the hall. But before another nurse could bring the cart down the hall of the hospital, it was all over. Dr. Beladar felt the pulses of both boys. They were both dead. Dr. Beladar quietly took a step away from the boys, disappointed at the bad result, and thinking somberly about the ramifications.

"No! Save them! Do something!" The parents came over to hold their boys, but were surprised when Dr. Beladar harshly told them to get back.

"Those are our boys!" retorted Joséph angrily.

"Yes, and they may have a very contagious disease," yelled Dr. Beladar, "which you can catch if you get too close! Now, please, for your own good, stand back against the walls."

Neema began sobbing and put her head in her husband's big chest. Dr. Beladar looked at them sadly, feeling bad about their children. But he knew there was nothing he could have done to save them.

"We have to leave for a moment, but please, I beg you, do not try and go over to hold the boys. There is nothing you can do now. We will be back as soon as we can."

Both Dr. Beladar and the nurse left the isolation room, into a scrubbing area, where they removed their bloody clothing, scrubbing themselves down with anti-bacterial soap. They each changed into new doctor's scrubs.

"Marietta, there is a chance that these boys had something very contagious. I need you to stay here, and not go back into the admitting

room. If anyone comes in, tell them to leave. We have to institute barrier protocols until I find out what that thing was that killed those boys.”

“Contagious?” she said. “I had that kid’s puke and blood all over me! What do you think it is?”

“I am not sure. I have to go quickly and do some research, make some phone calls. Then I will know more. But for now, sit tight.”

“Ali?”

“Yes?”

“I am scared.”

“No reason to be scared yet. Sit tight.” He kissed her on the forehead and left.

Dr. Beladar did not want to admit it, but he was a little scared too. He went to the second floor of the small hospital and entered his office. He locked the door and went to his computer. He quickly began doing searches in a medical database. He was pretty sure it was some kind of hemorrhagic fever, based upon the black vomit, the red eyes, the bloody noses, and the purple splotches under the skin. It looked like the boys were bleeding from the inside out. As he punched in the symptoms, the results did not look promising: flu, yellow fever, dengue fever, Marburg virus, Ebola. He could have something very dangerous on his hands here. He decided to take vials of the boys’ blood and send them to Italy’s *Instituto Nazionale per le Malattie Infettive Lazzararo Spallanzani*, a Level 4 Biohazard lab which was the Rome equivalent of the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. He could get quicker results going to Rome versus Atlanta. If he did catch something from those sick boys, Dr. Beladar wanted to know sooner rather than later.

The next four days were the longest days of Dr. Beladar’s life.

Ujiji, Tanzania

UJJI WAS A coastal city along Lake Tangayika about ten miles south of Kigoma. The city served as the base camp for American primate researchers, Professors Bill and Kelly Monahan. They had visited cities all along Lake Tangayika and had explored the Mahale Mountains for native chimpanzees. Bill and Kelly were writing a paper for the University of Michigan on the food gathering habits of the Tanzanian chimpanzee. They

had been “in country” for three months and it was their last night here. The new semester was starting in September and they had to get home. Tonight, they were going to a local restaurant, The Ujiji Fish House, to try out the North African catfish. Lake Tangayika had a wide variety of fish, and Bill and Kelly had had a lot of fun sampling as many types of dishes as they could find. They washed the meal down with “konyagi,” a Tanzanian alcoholic drink which was similar to gin. The proprietor, Sunny Temoha, having just handled some of the new fish in the kitchen, wanted to meet the Americans. He wiped his hands on his apron, wiping off the fish goo, and greeted the Americans, shaking their hands. He sat down with them, going over their album of chimpanzee photos.

“Your photos are truly amazing, Professor. How did the monkeys let you get so close?”

“We have very big telescopic lenses. We can shoot this from 100 feet away and the chimps do not even know that we are there.”

“I like this one here with the two monkeys high-fiving each other. What a great shot!”

“Yes, I don’t know what they were doing there,” said Kelly Monahan, “We were quite surprised when they did it. But these monkeys have been around humans since the early 1960s, so maybe they have picked up a few of our bad habits!”

“Yes, I suppose so. What did you eat tonight?”

“We had the North African catfish,” said Bill Monahan. “It was delicious.”

“Just caught last night,” said Temoha. “As fresh as you can get.”

“We just love the fish in this area. There is much more variety than in the United States. There, all you can get is sea bass and swordfish. We had so much fun at your restaurant trying all of the different types out.”

“Well, we trust that when you return to Tanzania, maybe next year, you will visit us again, OK?”

“Absolutely,” said Kelly. “And thanks again.” She talked with her husband for a few more minutes, finished her drink, paid the tab and left for the hotel. It would be nice to get back to Michigan.

What Kelly Monahan did not know is that a tiny stowaway, many million times smaller than a pencil point, would be traveling with her back to America.

CHAPTER 12. VESPUCCI.

August 1499. Coquibacoa, Venezuela.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI WAS concerned. He stood by the aft deck railing, looking out over the calm waters of the Gulf of Venezuela. He had been on this voyage for three months now, and he could not wait to be finished with it. The problem, he thought, was with the captain. The 29 year-old, black-bearded, Spanish Admiral Alonzo de Hojeda was out of control. The man just killed anything or anyone that got in his way. He was an animal. He was not going to hear any dissension from Vespucci. Vespucci was a wealthy banker and an aristocrat. While he enjoyed a good adventure—he was on this voyage, after all—Vespucci was a man of class and sophistication. He liked a good glass of wine, a nice book, an Italian opera with soothing tones to ease the mind. This de Hojeda was something quite different. De Hojeda was a vulgar brute, prone to cursing, never clean shaven, dark black soulless eyes, a scar on his cheek from some bar brawl, and a violent disposition. Hojeda seemed to take great joy in violence, and bullied the weaker men of his crew just for sport. If he were not on Hojeda's boat, Vespucci would have nothing to do with the man.

De Hojeda walked up to Vespucci from behind and put a knife to his throat.

"Amerigo! I will kill you!" De Hojeda held the knife there for a few seconds and then released it, flipping Vespucci around so that he was facing him.

Vespucci nearly jumped out of his skin. Then de Hojeda pounded him in the gut with his rough fist, laughing.

"Ha! I am just kidding. You have always got to be ready, my friend. The savages are everywhere!"

Vespucci gave the captain a withering look, obviously not finding the joke funny. The captain continued laughing and walked away from Vespucci towards some of the other men.

They had started this journey in May 1499, from Cadiz, Spain, with four well-equipped caravels. Vespucci knew that there were fortunes to be made in the uncharted New World, and if there was one thing that Vespucci possessed, it was a nose for wealth and business opportunity. No one had found the spice route to the west, but it was a matter of

time before someone did, and Vespucci wanted to be on the first ship to Cathay. Dressed in the finest Spanish silks, Vespucci made a striking appearance—handsome, well-groomed and polished. But he hated this captain.

The first sign of trouble came shortly after they left port from Cadiz. De Hojeda did not like how one of the caravels was handling. It was too slow. De Hojeda turned the entire party back to port, stole another vessel, leaving his unsatisfactory ship in its place. Vespucci noted that there was not a bit of guilt in the man. De Hojeda did as he pleased without the slightest concern for anyone else.

On the sixth day after the four ships set sail a second time, they reached the Canary Islands off Portugal. There, de Hojeda decided to rejuvenate his ship's supplies. De Hojeda ransacked and robbed the home of Dona Ines de Peranza, who was the daughter of Christopher Columbus' mistress. Most of the crew members were astonished by this audacity. Christopher Columbus, by this point, was revered among the sailors of Spain as a hero, the best navigator on the globe. To rob his daughter's house—that would surely get the entire crew in trouble, perhaps from the King of Spain, perhaps from Columbus himself. Vespucci was not about to be charged with robbery or blamed for any of de Hojeda's crimes. No, Vespucci would testify against the Spanish cutthroat in a minute if he had to. Vespucci was a man of class. He was not a common thief.

De Hojeda sailed across the Atlantic and continued to plunder with abandon as they sailed west. On their route to the Caribbean, they had passed another Spanish ship. De Hojeda raised the flag of friendship, took a small party of men on a rowboat to the other ship, and boarded. Once on board, de Hojeda killed the captain, and murdered ten more of the crew until finally the remaining crew members surrendered, turning over to de Hojeda all the gold and trinkets they had on board. As he left, de Hojeda set the other boat on fire, leaving the sailors adrift in the ocean with a damaged and burned ship. De Hojeda mocked the cowardice of the remaining crew members as he left, calling them "teredos," the name for the small burrowing sea worm which frequently infested the rotting wood of ships. Vespucci had been absolutely astonished that de Hojeda would kill his own countrymen, but there was no sheriff on the High Seas, so bold men simply did as they pleased.

When they had arrived at the islands of Trinidad and Tobago,

discovered by Columbus only a year earlier, Vespucci was amazed. He stood aghast, staring at the native island women, who all walked around with their breasts exposed. He had never seen anything like that. All of the native islanders had been quite friendly when they arrived, and Vespucci had been interested in learning more about the strange dark-skinned savages. But he never got the chance. De Hojeda had not been interested in sparkling conversation with the islanders. As soon as he saw the women, he took a rowboat to the shore, and began raping the women at gun-point. Vespucci saw de Hojeda rape native women on the beach, in full view of his entire crew and the other islanders. A few island native men, identified as the probable mates of the women being raped, had dared to raise a voice of protest. De Hojeda immediately brought down the level of his matchlock gun and shot them, and quickly followed that act of barbarism by severing their heads from their bodies and placing the severed heads on pikes planted into the beach sand. After that, the islanders did not protest very much. They quickly gave de Hojeda pearls, parrots, and tropical fruit. For ten days they stayed in port in Trinidad so that de Hojeda and a few of his despicable crew members could get their fill of the island women. As they pulled anchor to sail further west, de Hojeda took two terrified thirteen year-old island girls on the boat as slaves. Vespucci was completely astonished and disgusted at this behavior. But Vespucci was no courageous soldier. If he protested, he would surely find his own head severed and placed on a pike. He decided that the politically astute move was to just keep his mouth shut.

De Hojeda, for his part, detested Vespucci. He dressed like a girl and always seemed so concerned about his appearance. He acted like a coward, dressed like a coward, moved like a coward. And he had that air of snobbery. Vespucci always appeared like he thought he was above everyone else, de Hojeda thought. De Hojeda would tolerate the banker for now, because his financial backers were helping to finance this journey. But that did not mean that de Hojeda had to be Vespucci's friend.

What Vespucci did not know was that de Hojeda had been given virtual immunity for anything he did on the High Seas. This discovery of a trade route to Cathay was serious business for Spain. The King of Spain first sought the assistance of Pope Alexander VI, a Spaniard, who issued a papal declaration, or Bull, that the islands and countries in the New World were the property of Spain. In 1494, in the Treaty of

Tordesillas, Spain got Portugal to agree to its terms, drawing an imaginary line down the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and declaring the lands to the east of the line as Portuguese territories and the lands to the west of the line as Spanish territories. Unfortunately for Spain, however, the other European countries like England were not bound by the treaty or the papal declaration. In the discovery business, England was serious competition. The King and Queen of Spain decided to block off any attempt at any further English exploration, but they had to do it in a way that left no fingerprints. The last thing the King needed was a war with England. So King Ferdinand had dispatched Bishop Juan de Fonseca to talk to de Hojeda, and convince him to captain this voyage. De Hojeda had been told by the bishop that he had to stop the English explorers at all costs from acquiring new territories. De Hojeda was not to start a war with England, of course, but just about anything short of that would be given the King of Spain's blessing. De Hojeda did not have to be told twice. He would stop the Englishmen, with no witnesses, and, in return, he would be handsomely rewarded by the King.

De Hojeda cruised south, exploring the upper part of South America. He had learned from Indians on several stops to the mainland of South America that English ships were somewhere a little north of their present position, so he continued up the coast north and west. Soon they approached an area where the little native huts along the shore were nestled on raised stilts coming out of the water. The huts reminded Vespucci of his native Venice, so he named the place *Venezuala*, or "Little Venice." De Hojeda had anchored his ships here in the Gulf of *Venezuala* for several days now, certain that he would run into the English ships sooner or later. Just to the south of this gulf was a large fresh water lake called *Coquibacoa*. It was a perfect refuge for re-stocking and resting before a long voyage back to England. If de Hojeda did not find the English ships here soon, he would move further north along the coast and then head back towards *Hispaniola*.

Vespucci enjoyed the rest here at *Coquibacoa*. The weather was beautiful, the seas were calm and beautiful, and he had a level table to write his letters to his friend back in Italy. It had been over a week since de Hojeda had killed anyone, and that had been a welcome change. He also loved the food here. He had feasted on island fruits like bananas and pineapples. And he wrote in his letters and logs about the small monkeys,

colorful snakes, and beautiful birds. On a recent inland expedition, some members of the crew had encountered a huge twenty-foot long snake, and it terrified them. Vespucci found the news exciting and he recounted the stories of the sailors in his memoirs.

The peace and quiet also gave Vespucci time to contemplate the navigational problem that had vexed him since the beginning of this voyage. Vespucci was also a student of science. He had been trying to determine a way to measure longitude, or the position of a ship along the meridian lines running from north to south. Latitude was easy. A simple astrolabe could figure that out. However, the problem of longitude had puzzled mariners for decades. Two nights ago, August 23, 1499, Vespucci had found his answer. The night was calm and beautiful, a great night for star gazing. The astrological almanac he had brought with him showed that on that night, just before midnight, there was to be a conjunction of the Moon and Mars. By determining that Mars at Vespucci's location was actually three degrees to the east of the Moon, Vespucci was able to come to a rough approximation of longitude. Of course, this method had problems. It depended on a known astrological conjunction and an astrological almanac with the dates and times of predicted sightings. It required measurements with a stable viewing platform, something very difficult on the rolling deck of a ship on the High Seas. However, it was a start. Vespucci continued to scribble notes about his newfound theory, and puzzled about ways to make his new longitude-determining method more precise.

On this afternoon, Vespucci was puzzling over the longitude question when his attention was diverted by yells from the crow's nest far above him.

"An English ship!" yelled the sailor.

All of the sailors on de Hojeda's ship scrambled to the top deck to see what the commotion was all about. As they looked to the west, they could see one ship bearing an English flag heading towards them at a fast clip. Admiral de Hojeda looked through his captain's glass at the horizon and smiled broadly. It was John Cabot's ship. He was certain of it. He was going to be rich.

CHAPTER 13. ATTACK.

August 1499. Coquibacoa, Venezuela.

DE HOJEDA CALLED the entire crew together to give them instructions. After hearing de Hojeda's plans, Vespucci became alarmed. De Hojeda planned on a siege similar to the previous attack on the Spanish ship, by feigning friendship, and then slaughtering the crew after boarding. Aside from being sickened by more violence, Vespucci was afraid that the plan might lead to an all-out war between Spain and England. If that occurred, they could all be hanged. He pulled Admiral de Hojeda aside and spoke to him privately.

"Admiral, I admire you for your bravery, but I think this planned attack is foolhardy," said Vespucci. "If we attack an English ship without provocation, it could lead to war."

"You are scared? Is that it, Vespucci?" de Hojeda laughed, mocking the older and taller Vespucci. "No backbone in you? Do not worry. You do not have to fight. We will do all the fighting."

"Admiral, with all due respect, these Englishmen have done nothing wrong. Why must you attack them?"

"Done nothing wrong?' Amerigo, surely you are aware of the Treaty between Spain and Portugal? All of these western lands are Spanish territory. These Englishmen are trespassing in our waters. They must be punished. They have taken gold that belongs to Spain, and I aim to get it back."

"The King will not want this. It will start a war. We could all be hanged."

"Amerigo, do not be afraid. I have it on good authority that the King will back anything I do here with these Englishmen. Perhaps you are squeamish because the captain of the English ship is an Italian like you."

"An Italian?"

"Yes," said de Hojeda. "I am almost certain that the ship is being captained by Zuan Chabotto, or as the English call him, John Cabot. They say he is originally from Venice."

Vespucci did not care if he was Italian. He just wanted no more bloodshed. He considered the matter.

"Admiral, if, in fact, this captain is Italian, then you will need someone to communicate with him who speaks Italian. Let me go with you on the

boarding party and speak to him, and I can translate for you.”

De Hojeda considered the matter. They would have to get onto the boat for their plan to work. The English would need someone they could trust. Yes, it seemed like a good idea.

“Very well, you and Juan will accompany me and some of the other men on the boarding party. Try and get their trust. Tell them we come in peace. Then, when the time is right, and they are not ready, we will take them.”

“Admiral, from what I understand, John Cabot has sailed many leagues. He may have discovered lands no Spaniard has yet seen. His nautical maps would be worth a great deal to Spain. If we act too rashly, all of the maps could be lost. Perhaps we could just barter with the Englishmen without attacking them. They agree to let us look at their maps and we agree to leave them in peace, unmolested.”

De Hojeda looked at Vespucci. This coward was really irritating him. He was not about to bargain with anyone. A real man took what was his, and that was that. But Vespucci made a good point about the maps. Those could be worth something. He decided it would be better to keep Vespucci in the dark until the last minute.

“Amerigo, I like your plan. We will gain the Englishmen’s friendship, and then we will bargain for the maps. Now get ready. We board in a few minutes.” The men scurried around the deck making arrangements. Vespucci went to the other side of the ship and watched as the large English ship came closer. The ship had extensive damage. It was covered in teredos and barnacles. The main mast had extensive damage.

As the ship came towards them, Amerigo stood on the railing and called out to the captain of the other ship in Italian.

“Ho, there, Captain. This is the *Esperanza*. We are from Spain. We come in peace. Do you need help?”

The other captain stood near his own railing. “If you are from Spain,” said the captain, “Why do you speak Italian?”

“Like you,” said Vespucci, “I travel with friends who are not my countrymen.”

John Cabot seemed satisfied. There were no outward signs of aggression from this ship, and, after all, one of their crew spoke Italian. That had to be good. In addition, his ship needed repairs and supplies. Perhaps these foreigners could help. But Cabot was also somewhat suspicious.

The Spaniards had a long history of conquering first and asking questions later.

“Why don’t you come over with your captain and a small party and we can talk?” said Cabot.

“Very well,” said Vespucci.

“What did they say?” asked de Hojeda.

“They want you and I and a small group to come over and meet their captain. And you were correct, that is John Cabot.”

“Excellent,” beamed de Hojeda. “Men, get the rowboat!”

Vespucci went to speak with Juan de la Cosa, the ship’s cartographer and second-in-command. De la Cosa would be accompanying them on the rowboat. De la Cosa had been the captain of the *Santa Maria* on Columbus’ 1492 voyage to the New World.

“Juan,” said Vespucci. “You realize this is a very delicate situation. We cannot attack these Englishmen unless they attack us first. If we do, we could start a war.”

“I know, Amerigo. Everything will be okay, don’t worry.”

“Okay, well, whatever you do, don’t start firing. Let’s try to handle this diplomatically. If they will let us look at their maps, that alone could be worth a small fortune. If we kill them all before we learn anything... well, you know what the pirates say. Dead men tell no tales.”

“Quite right,” said de la Cosa.

Vespucci, de la Cosa, de Hojeda, and six other sailors boarded the small rowboat and sailed over to the English ship, where they were brought aboard by the English crew. Vespucci looked at some of the crew members on the English boat. They looked terrible. Many of them looked sick with malaria. Some looked haggardly and exhausted. Obviously, this had been a very difficult voyage. The captain, on the other hand, looked fresh and buoyant.

“Hello, my friend,” said Cabot in Italian. “This is my doctor and friar, Giovanni Antonio de Carbonariis. He is also Venetian. The rest of my crew is from Bristol. Have you been there?”

“Yes,” said Vespucci. “Many times. The cod trade there is very good.”

“Yes,” said Cabot, “I used to work on the docks of Bristol, hauling in and cleaning the cod as they came in off the ships. That’s a smelly business, I will tell you.” Cabot laughed.

De Hojeda whispered something to Vespucci.

“Ah, Captain Chabotto, this is our captain, Admiral de Hojeda. And may I also introduce Juan de la Cosa, captain of Columbus’ *Santa Maria*, and these are some of our other men.” Vespucci made the rest of the introductions and the men shook hands.

De Hojeda spoke next, in Spanish. “Captain, I would like to welcome you to Spanish waters. As you know, by Papal decree, all of these waters belong to Spain. You are a Roman Catholic, sir, as I understand it, so surely you are aware of this decree by His Excellency. You are our most welcome guest.”

Vespucci looked nervous and translated for de Hojeda. Cabot looked tense and uncomfortable, and responded in Italian.

“Thank you, Captain. I am most certainly a Catholic, and I would always respect and obey the commandments from the Pope on matters of religion, but on matters of exploration and national sovereignty, I believe the Pope may be speaking outside of his area of authority. We recognize the natural law of discovery, recognized by mariners everywhere, which holds that he who discovers a new land may claim that land for his own country or kingdom or prince, as your most noble Christopher Columbus and Captain de la Cosa here have done in claiming Hispaniola for Spain.”

Vespucci translated again, fearing that this conversation was going south quickly. He saw de Hojeda give a grimaced smile. Clearly, the man was ready to blow. Vespucci turned to Cabot.

“Captain, they cannot understand what I say to you now because they do not speak Italian. But let me assure you that this man you are dealing with here is a most violent and ruthless man. You do not want to anger him. Might I propose that we retire to your quarters and attempt to negotiate a truce peaceably? I assure you that I am the most reasonable man on this ship.”

Cabot looked at de Hojeda, sizing him up, and then turned back to Vespucci and nodded.

De Hojeda turned to Vespucci. “What did you say?”

“I told him that Spain is asserting her rights under the Papal Decree and he had better listen to us or he would be sorry. He has agreed to take us to his quarters to negotiate.”

De Hojeda grumbled. He did not like negotiating. They had wasted enough time already. Once de Hojeda saw the condition of these Englishmen, he knew that his men could kill them easily. He was not

going to negotiate anything.

When they got to Cabot's quarters below decks, Cabot, his friar, and his cartographer sat on one side of a large wooden table. Vespucci, de Hojeda and de la Cosa sat on the other side. The captain brought mugs of ale and some cooked rabbit stew. It was delicious. Vespucci wondered where Cabot had obtained rabbits. De Hojeda was friendly, and regaled the other captain with tales from their voyages, with special emphasis on the naked women of Trinidad. Vespucci could see what de Hojeda was doing. He was buying time, waiting for nightfall.

Vespucci started thinking fast. If he did not do something quickly, as soon as night fell, all of these men would be slaughtered. Over the next hour, Vespucci hatched a plan to save the members of the English ship.

Vespucci spoke in Italian to Cabot. "Do not show any alarm on your face as to what I am about to say. Captain, do not be fooled by these men. They are going to kill you and everyone on your ship in a matter of minutes." Cabot instinctively put his hand on his sword under the table and grimaced, but tried to stay calm. He knew his men were outnumbered and were too weak to endure an attack from the Spanish ship. But maybe this Italian, whatever his angle was, could help them. Vespucci continued.

"I am trying to help you because I do not want to start a war between Spain and England. Captain, all these Spaniards care about is gold. So you have to convince them that you know where a great treasure trove of gold is. Tell him that you recognize that these are Spanish waters, and that you will take them to the place where the gold is. And then somewhere along the way, you must try to escape. That is your only hope."

"What are you saying?" asked de Hojeda in Spanish.

"I told them again that these are Spanish waters and that they are to turn over all of their gold and treasure to you."

De Hojeda seemed satisfied with that.

Cabot got ready to begin his fish story. He pulled a large map from a cabinet and placed it out on the large table. Vespucci translated as the captain spoke.

"Captain de Hojeda. We recognize your claim to these waters, as you say. And we are happy to point you to an incredible place that the Taino Indians call The City of Gold. In this city, the walls and temples are all made of gold. It is the greatest treasure the world has ever seen. It is here."

Cabot drew an X on the map in the middle of the Bay of Veragua, near the location of the island of Boyuca. Cabot's hope was that de Hojeda would meet the same fate as the Ethiopian. De Hojeda's eyes lit up as he studied the map. Now that is a place he needed to see.

Cabot could see the calculation in de Hojeda's eyes. All de Hojeda needed was for the *captain* to lead him to this city of gold. De Hojeda would have no need for Cabot's crew. Cabot had to make his own crew indispensable too.

"Captain de Hojeda, there is so much gold there that your one ship would not have the space to carry all the gold. If you help us fix up our ship, then you will be able to haul twice the amount of gold back to Spain. We would help you, provided that you gave us a fair percentage of the gold, of course. Say, one-quarter?" Cabot almost coughed on these words. Had there really been a city of gold, he would no more give it to this pirate than spit on his own grandmother. But he sensed that the pirate would be blinded by greed. Perhaps the Italian's plan would work?

"No," said de Hojeda, calmly walking behind Cabot. "That percentage is unacceptable." Before Vespucci could say another word, de Hojeda took out his dagger and sliced the throat of Cabot's doctor, killing him instantly. Cabot was shocked, as this friar was his lifelong friend. De Hojeda quickly stabbed Cabot's cartographer in the throat, sending blood spurting out on the floor as he grasped for his throat. Then de Hojeda turned his bloody blade on Cabot. Instinctively, de la Cosa drew his sword and, in support of his captain, aimed it at Cabot.

"Captain, your percentage will be zero. Now, gather up all your maps and logs, and quietly walk with us to the rowboat. If you mention a word to your men, we will butcher them all, one by one in front of you, and then we will kill you after you have witnessed the killing of your last man. If you cooperate, we will spare your crew. We are going to take a little visit to our ship."

Cabot stared at de Hojeda in hatred. The friar was his best friend. Ruthlessly murdered. Cabot did not care now if he lived or died. He would give this Spaniard nothing. Vespucci was disgusted. His plan to save the Englishmen had failed. Vespucci felt guilty and looked at Cabot as if to apologize. Cabot did not return his gaze. Vespucci gathered up Cabot's maps and logs and the four men walked silently in the night air, lowering themselves into the rowboat. When they were safely on board

the Spanish vessel, de Hojeda locked Cabot in the ship's hold. Then, abandoning his pledge, he instructed his men to open fire on the damaged English ship. Within a matter of minutes, John Cabot's ship was on the floor of the Gulf of Venezuela.

Over the course of the next seven days, de Hojeda turned his course to the Bay of Veragua, or what is now known as the Bay of Honduras. During that time, he tortured Cabot every day, trying to get him to pinpoint the exact location of the City of Gold. Cabot stubbornly refused to say anything. By the seventh day, Cabot had lost one eye, had burn marks all over his torso, and two knife scars on his cheek. De Hojeda eventually became convinced that Cabot had made the whole story up. Disgusted, he brought the captain to the top deck, with his hands bound with rope. He gave Cabot one more chance. When Cabot refused, he stabbed Cabot in the gut with his knife and then kicked him overboard.

There was nothing Vespucci could do but look on helplessly as the Englishman floundered in the choppy waves. Vespucci looked off in the distance and saw an island. Perhaps Cabot could make it to shore? Vespucci was skeptical of Cabot's chances. The blood from that wound would draw every shark within five miles. Vespucci grimly looked over the waters and watched Cabot desperately attempt to get free and swim. It was monstrous. Vespucci felt a chill of guilt run through his spine. Yet really, he thought, there was nothing he could do.

CHAPTER 14. FILOVIRUS

Present day. Rome, Italy.

FOUR DAYS AGO, the tissue and blood samples, air-shipped by a medical overnight delivery service from Tanzania, had arrived at the canary-colored building on the Via Portuense in Rome called the *Istituto Nazionale per le Malattie Infettive Lazzarro Spallanzani*. Matteo Graciano was the Level 4 Biohazard Lab Manager at the *Istituto Nazionale*. The doctor at the hospital in Kigoma who had called had been most adamant when he expressed his concern that they might be dealing with a very serious viral hemorrhagic fever. The symptoms were consistent with a VHF: fever, dizziness, head ache, bleeding under the skin, bleeding from orifices, bright red eyes, an expressionless face with a mass of subcutaneous bruises, hot black vomit. Graciano had heard this before at the Institute, of course. In his twelve years working at *Istituto Nazionale*, he had only seen one of these scares turn out to be the real thing. However, in dealing with potential biohazards, every sample had to be treated as if it were a Level 4 pathogen. Four days ago, Graciano had gone to work immediately, unwrapping the specimens from the biohazard container.

Graciano had first performed a series of simple tests for a host of more common diseases like malaria and typhoid fever. These had come back negative. Then Graciano used a testing methodology developed at Columbia University called the Greene Mass Tag Panel VHF, which could simultaneously test for viral hemorrhagic fevers like Ebola Zaire, Ebola Sudan, Ebola Cote d'Ivoire, Ebola Bundibugyo, Marburg Virus, Lassa Virus, Rift Valley Fever, Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever, Hantaan, Seoul virus, yellow fever, and Kyasanur Forest disease. The Greene Mass Tag Panel used a technology called "real-time" RT-PCR. This test involved taking a tiny DNA sequence and amplifying it into billions of copies. The process was called "real time," because it used to take days and now could be done in "real time," or just hours. Once the sequence of DNA was copied billions of times, the analyzing machine could then chart whether specific gene sequences found in existing forms of Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers were present in the sample. Graciano removed a 64-well yellow plastic microtiter plate which contained sixty-four tubes with snap-on lids. With a six-inch long pipette, he plunged into each of the sixty-four tubes some serum taken from the boy in Tanzania. Then he followed

a painstaking recipe, which involved placing various chemicals into the tubes and incubating them at various temperatures.

This was painstaking work, but Graciano was up to the task. Ever since he was a young boy, he and his two brothers had been interested in viruses. It was an agricultural virus which had ruined his father's business. Graciano always felt that he was getting a little vengeance for his father every time he saved the world from one of these dangerous little bugs.

Graciano inserted into the mixture a fluorescent "probe." The probe was a tiny piece of DNA, which contained a fluorescent marker. After billions of copies of the molecule were made, the lights could be detected, like an airplane pilot viewing the thousands of candles at Lady Diana's night vigil. A computer detected the light and registered it on a read out.

Graciano was not surprised when the results of this initial real-time RT-PCR test were negative for any form of known Viral Hemorrhagic Fever. In all likelihood, the African doctor's diagnosis was incorrect. This could even be something as simple as the flu. After all, it would not be the first time that someone in a third world country died of the flu. However, the existence or non-existence of a Level 4 pathogen was not determined with only one test. Graciano had several more tests to complete. Because this new sample did not appear to be a VHF, Graciano put the remaining tests off for a while, so that he could complete more pressing work in the lab.

Graciano was working on a report for his boss, who was scheduled to speak at the World Health Organization in a few days. The subject was potential cures for some of the world's most dangerous diseases. Graciano had been in touch with research labs all over the world to find the most up-to-date answers on curing these dangerous viruses. The Powerpoint was nearly complete. Graciano enjoyed working later hours, in the deathly quiet of the Italian lab. It gave him time to think. He had a lot of personal demons, and the quiet gave him comfort. He pulled out a recent study from Belgium and summarized the contents on his Powerpoint slide. After the presentation was completed, he returned to testing the African samples.

Graciano had removed the Tanzanian samples and proceeded to test them with the Ebola virus and Marburg virus "antigen capture test." The antigen was the unique and distinctive part of the foreign invading target which had entered the body. The antigen capture assay test was a simple test in which the bottoms of the wells of a multi-well microtiter plate were

coated with specific Ebola virus and Marburg virus antibodies. Then the blood of the infected boy was inserted into the coated wells, and Graciano would observe whether any of the specific Ebola and Marburg antibodies would “bind” to any antigens in the blood samples. If the result was positive, the well would be colored. If the test was negative, the result would be clear. When Graciano finished this test several hours later, all the wells were clear.

Graciano completed the third test on the samples just before dinner. The third test was the IgM and IgG ELISA assay test. “Ig” stood for immunoglobulin, one of the main types of antibodies comprising the body’s immune system. The antibodies were the body’s police force. When a foreign substance harmful to the body enters, these Y-shaped structures latch on to the invading criminal and put him behind bars. If these young Tanzanian boys had been infected with a viral hemorrhagic fever, the body’s white cells should have been in overdrive trying to produce more anti-Ebola or anti-Marburg police officers. Graciano expected this final test to be negative as well. When Graciano ran this test, and plunged the chemicals from the IgG and IgM assay test into the wells of the boys’ blood, he was shocked by the result. Although the wells for the antibodies of Marburg virus, Ebola Sudan, Ebola Reston, Ebola Ivory Coast, and Ebola Bundibugyo were clear, every well with Ebola Zaire antibodies was colored! That did not make any sense. He repeated the test again and got the same results.

Now he was stumped. How could the body of this boy be producing Ebola Zaire antibodies, but the antigens for Ebola Zaire were not present, and the real time RT-PCR test showed no sign of Ebola Zaire? Unless.... His next thought concerned him greatly. Could this be an entirely new strain of Ebola that was, perhaps, similar to Ebola Zaire but with a different chemical structure? Graciano recalled something similar with the CDC’s investigation of the newly-discovered Ebola Bundibugyo Virus in Uganda in 2007. Graciano went down to his office and opened a black filing cabinet. Pulling out a file marked “Ebola Buggy,” Graciano removed from the file a November 2008 article from the *PLoS Pathogens* Journal. He spent twenty minutes scanning the article. As he finished the article, he was sure he was on to something. There, as here, the initial RT-PCR test had been negative, but the IgM and IgG tests had been positive. This must be a new strain of Ebola!

However, Graciano could not make a firm diagnosis with such equivocal results. He would ultimately need to get this blood gene-sequenced. But first he needed to look at this “bugger” up close and personal. Graciano could not go to sleep now. He went back to the biohazard container, and removed the small tissue samples from the Tanzanian boy’s spleen. He crushed them on a table with a mortar and pestle, and dropped the bloody mess into a flask with human kidney cells. He did the same for the boy’s blood cells, repeating the process until he had a rack of flasks. Then he put the flasks into an incubator, letting them “cook.” While the flasks were in the oven, he pulled out some more articles on Ebola Zaire from his filing cabinet and read them. He fell asleep at about 2 a.m. at his desk.

CHAPTER 15. VIRGIN.

Present day. *Archivo General de Indias*. Seville, Spain.

SEVILLE, SPAIN, IS home to the Spanish General Archives of the Indies, built in 1572 to house over 80 million pages of documents relating to the Spanish exploration of the world, including the exploits of Spanish conquistadors, the Papal Bull which divided the world between Spain and Portugal, the journals of Christopher Columbus, and the exploration of the New World by dozens of explorers. Emory University History Professor Charlie Winston had been pouring over the archives for the last week. He was writing a book about the father-and-son explorers John and Sebastian Cabot. His recent interest related to the 1531 trial of the son, Sebastian Cabot.

In Spain, the highest title for a navigator was *Piloto Major*. The *Piloto Major* was in charge of all navigation to the New World. When any captain wanted to embark on a new voyage to the New World, he had to first get the permission of the *Piloto Major*. After a voyage was completed, the captain had to report to the *Piloto Major*, turn over his maps, and, under oath, give an account of the voyage. The title *Piloto Major* was first created for Amerigo Vespucci, the man after whom America was supposedly named. Vespucci served as *Piloto Major* from 1508 to 1512. After Vespucci's death, the title was given to Juan Diaz De Solis, who kept the title for several more years. After De Solis, all the Spanish navigators assumed that King Ferdinand would give the post to Juan Vespucci, Amerigo's ambitious nephew. Instead, however, the King surprisingly gave the title to Sebastian Cabot, son of John Cabot, who had recently come to Spain from England. This greatly incensed not only Juan Vespucci but all of the Spanish navigators, who thought it beneath them to get permission to sail from a foreigner. Over the six years in which Sebastian Cabot served as *Piloto Major*, Cabot's popularity among his peers dwindled by the day. In 1527, Cabot decided to "get out of town" and embarked on a new voyage to explore the lower regions of Uruguay. The voyage was a complete disaster. Cabot marooned some of his crew, who had formed a mutiny. Over three-fourths of the members of Sebastian Cabot's crew died on the voyage. When he came home, there was practically a lynch mob waiting for him. Pressured by members of his crew who hated Cabot and made up vicious lies about what transpired

on the voyage, as well as mothers of the fallen crew in the port of Seville who were angered that their sons had died, officials put Sebastian Cabot on trial for dereliction of duty. Charlie Winston, who was one of the leading experts in the world on John and Sebastian Cabot, was interested in this trial. Fortunately, the Seville archives had several volumes of the trial transcript, as well as diaries from some of the witnesses at the trial. Winston had been pouring over these transcripts and diaries. He had not found anything earth-shattering, but there was enough good material for his book chapter on the Cabot trial.

Charlie Winston loved American History. At six foot three inches, the African-American educator was one of the tallest professors on the Emory University campus. Even though he wore glasses, he could still make the young female Emory students swoon. The attraction between students and teacher only went one way, however. Winston was in love with his wife Murielle, his high school sweetheart whom he met when the two grew up in Atlanta. She worked at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, the place where the most dangerous diseases in the world were logged, studied, tagged and bagged. The CDC was the country's first line of defense in the war on germs, viruses, bacteria, and other really tiny things that could kill a person. Winston poured over the transcripts. He loved contemporaneous accounts like these. It almost made him feel like he was there, 500 years ago, when the greatest navigators in the world were telling of their exploits.

The trip had been tough on Winston's family, of course. These scholarly jaunts always put lots of strain on Murielle and their ten year-old son Teddy. Winston had tried in his mind to forgive the young eighteen year-old who had weaved across the center line to hit the SUV, but forgiveness was hard business. Watching his son every day struggle to make it into the car, helping him with his self-catheterization every four hours to relieve the urine from his bladder, seeing his frustration with his inability to perform the simplest tasks—Winston wanted to kill that eighteen year-old on most days. On other days, he was just happy his son was alive. For his part, Teddy had seemed to adjust well enough to the injury. Winston secretly believed that Murielle harbored resentment towards him for allowing the accident to occur. She had never said that, of course, but he could see it in her face. Sometimes, these journeys to foreign lands on the University's dime were a welcome relief for Winston,

who could absorb himself in the past and temporarily forget the real problems that awaited him at home.

It was frankly amazing, Winston thought, that Teddy had been injured in a car. Winston had always thought that if his family was going to get hurt, it was going to be from a pathogen that his wife had brought home from the CDC lab. She worked as a scientist in the CDC's Level 4 Biohazard Lab, the place where deadly viruses like Ebola were stored in a freezer. Winston had seen the movies—just one cut of the biohazard suit and his wife could catch a fatal disease. It was mind-numbing to think about, so Winston and his wife tried to ignore the ever-present danger. Winston liked the TV show *The Office*, and would pretend in his mind that his wife was going off to work at the Dundler-Mifflin Paper Company, and not at an ultrahazardous bio lab.

He had not been able to hit the pool here in Seville, as he had been too excited once he had gotten his hands on the centuries-old transcripts. Winston was reviewing a diary of the trial written by Francisco De Rojas, a member of Sebastian Cabot's crew who was the prosecution's lead witness. Winston had spent several hours reviewing the diary, making notes. When he finished the last page, he saw a folded letter pressed like glue against the back page. Winston took out his magnifying glass to inspect the page. Removing his pen knife, he gingerly eased the stuck letter from the last page of the diary, and, placing it on a sheath of white gauze, gingerly attempted to open the letter with a pair of tweezers. Wearing white gloves, Winston patiently opened each fold of the paper until the entire sheet was laid out in front of him.

It was definitely a letter. Some of the ink was too faded to read. The letter was dated January 5, 1531 and it was signed by Juan Vespucci. From his prior research, Winston quickly identified the signature as appearing to be the signature of the real Juan Vespucci. The letter was addressed to the trial witness de Rojas. The letter was written in Spanish and read:

Francisco:

I hope the trial is going well. I hope that Chabotto will be punished for his gross incompetence on your recent voyage. As you know, I have been against the cause of this English usurper since 1518, when our King foolishly decided to put

us under the thumb of a foreign Piloto. To think, Spanish pilots would have to bow down to an Englishman and ask his permission where to sail! In that year, fearing that the foreigner might gain control over all Spanish nautical maps and journals, I hid the earliest of my unclé's journals and maps [ILLEGIBLE].... When I became Piloto Major, and Chabotto went on his long journey, I felt it safe again to return the documents to the archive room for the Padrón Real. As you know, Chabotto's trial [ILLEGIBLE].... If Chabotto is acquitted, he may make things difficult and seek his former post from the King. I think it better that I find a permanent [ILLEGIBLE].... I have hidden them behind the place where Columbus, Pinzón, and Uncle Amerigo stand together. If anything happens to me, please make sure the documents are kept safe. May you have God's providence at the trial and may the Virgin watch over you.

Juan V.

New journals and maps! From Amerigo Vespucci himself! This was quite exciting for Charlie Winston. Wait until he told Murielle and Teddy! He could add this to his next class lecture. If he could actually find those maps, his next book might actually sell more than a thousand copies. The place where Columbus, Pinzón, and Vespucci all stood together...where was that, he wondered?

Where did all three stand together? Vicente Yáñez Pinzón was captain of the *Niña*, one of the three boats in Columbus' first voyage, and his older brother, Francisco Martín Pinzón was first mate of the *Pinta*. But Vespucci was not on that voyage, so that didn't fit. Winston made a note to hit the computer tonight and do some research. Winston made a photograph of the document using a special filter so that the camera would not damage the document, and then reported his finding of the Vespucci letter to the Sevillian Chief Archivist. It took some time to explain the significance of the finding to the Chief Archivist, as well as the need to treat the document with the greatest of care for future inspections. At about 2:00 p.m., Winston was finished with the Archivist, and went out into the bright sun outside the General Archives Building. He looked up

at the swaying palm trees. It sure was beautiful here. He called his wife's cell, but she did not answer, which was not unusual. He called his son Teddy's cell and roused him out of bed to tell him about his discovery.

"Dad, why are you calling so early?" Teddy groaned.

"Sorry. I forgot it's six hours earlier there. Has Mom gone to work?"

"Yes, lately, she has been getting to work really early."

"Teddy, you'll never believe what I discovered here. I found a lost letter which had a reference to lost maps and journals by Amerigo Vespucci!"

"And I care about this—why?"

"Oh, Teddy, we really have to go over your History books when I get home. Amerigo Vespucci, one of the most famous explorers in the world. Oh well, never mind, I will tell you about it when I get home."

"You're coming home soon?"

"Yes, I leave Seville tomorrow."

"Good, 'cause Mom's getting crabby with you gone."

"Did you tape the ESPN Lumberjack Contest?"

"Yes, Dad. I don't know why you like seeing men race each other to cut down trees."

"I like ridiculous sports contests. What can I say?"

"Well, listen Dad, great talkin' to you and all, but can I go back to sleep?"

"Sure, punk. I will see you when I get home."

"Love you."

"Love you."

Winston still had an hour or two to kill before going back to the Hotel. After that discovery of the letter, he was finished with his work here. He could not wait to get started on his new book. Winston decided to go next door to sight-see at the Alcazar of Seville. The Alcazar of Seville is a royal palace in Seville, Spain. Built in the eighth century by Arabs as a Moorish fort, and subsequently expanded by Spanish kings, the Alcazar features shimmering, reflecting rainwater baths, a shrub maze, palm tree-dotted gardens, and lavish tiled reception halls—a perfect and picturesque place for Winston to spend an hour or two relaxing. Winston looked around the shrub maze for a while, and toured the beautiful baths. After learning about the baths from a tour book, Winston strolled into the Patio de la Monteria of the Alcazar, which contains the site of the former Spanish "Casa de Contratación," or House of Trade. Winston was interested in

the Casa De Contratación because it was in this room where the master navigational map of Spain, called the Padrón Real, was formerly kept. The original of the Padrón Real had been lost through time, but a decent replica of it, which Winston had seen before, still existed in the Vatican Archives. When navigators returned from a voyage, after giving details of the trip to the Piloto Major, the places visited by the navigator would be plotted on the master map. Winston looked at his tour book. The Casa, according to the tour book, also included a chapel called the Hall of Audiences, a room where Christopher Columbus himself once had an audience with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella for the financing of his second voyage to the New World. Winston thought that sounded interesting, so he went to see the chapel.

As Winston looked around, he saw a small Christian altar, and hanging on the wall just behind the altar was a painting. A tour guide was talking to a group of people nearby.

“*The Virgin of the Navigators*”, painted by artist Alejo Fernandez in 1531, was commissioned at the request of officials from the Casa, one of whom was Juan Vespucci, the nephew of Amerigo Vespucci.” The painting looked like this:



The tour guide continued. “The painting depicts the Virgin Mary casting the folds of her gown over the navigators of Spain and protecting them. The protected individuals include Ferdinand II, Emperor Charles V, Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and one of the Pinzón brothers. The Virgin straddles the Atlantic Ocean and sailing ships at the bottom of the painting, protecting the sailors on the perilous journey across the ocean. It is the earliest known painting depicting the discovery of the Americas.”

Winston stared at the painting. The painting was painted in 1531, the same year as Vespucci’s letter to

De Rojas. Columbus, Vespucci, Pinzón, all standing together! Winston thought of the last line of Juan Vespucci's letter: "May the Virgin watch over you." The pieces were all falling together. Winston looked up at the painting in awe and bewilderment. The lost journals and maps of Amerigo Vespucci were here, behind the painting, preserved for over five hundred years! Winston sprinted down the Hall of Audiences back to the Seville Archives to speak to the Chief Archivist. He would be staying in Seville a few more days longer than he had planned.

CHAPTER 16. WORMS.*Rome, Italy*

THE NEXT MORNING, Graciano woke at 7:00 a.m. on the floor of his office. He was cold and had muscle aches on his right flank where he had slept on the hard floor. Graciano went back to the room with the flasks and looked at the solution. The solution did not look right. It was the color of milk. Many of the cells looked blown away and destroyed beyond recognition. There were small black dots like pepper in the mix that he did not immediately recognize. He extracted small clumps of cells from the bottom of the flasks, placing them each in tiny green plastic plugs. Graciano took the plugs to the Crewe SF-7, the latest, most state-of-the-art electron microscope in the world, with margins of error less than 50 millionths of an inch.

Wearing blue surgical scrubs, surgical cap, two sets of rubber gloves duct-taped to his scrubs, and a surgical mask, Matteo Graciano carefully removed from the glass case the tiny dot of human spleen cells taken from the younger Tanzanian boy, marked TZ-2. The collection of cells was the size of a period at the end of a sentence and was embedded in a small piece of green plastic. He removed from a locked container the one-inch long, razor-sharp, diamond-tipped cutting knife and inserted it into the large cutting machine, being careful not to touch the tip with his fingers. This instrument had the sharpest cutting surface of any instrument on the planet, and could cut through a finger as easily as a chain saw through butter. The diamond knife was pivoted like a pendulum back and forth by the cutting machine, acting like a supermarket roast beef slicer, slicing the dot of cells into a myriad of tiny circular pieces. Each newly cut slice of cells landed atop a small water droplet. When Graciano was finished cutting the slices, he took a small wooden stick, which had a woman's eyelash glued to the tip. Using the eyelash, and fixing his brown eyes through the lenses of the microscope, he gently separated the clumped cell slices on the water's surface, spreading them out across the pond in his view scope. Next, again peering through the microscope, he slid under each sliced batch of cells a tiny piece of copper mesh, catching the slice like a ladle picking up soup. Using a pair of tweezers, he then inserted the copper mesh into a small box, which he placed into the fitting arm for the eight foot-tall, two-ton electron microscope. Locking the arm in place,

Graciano turned on the machine, which hummed rhythmically. In the center of the machine was a viewing screen, which emitted a green light. Graciano's soft brown eyes, tucked under a curl of wavy black hair, peered into the viewing screen. He scanned across the tiny world which now flew up at him from the viewing screen. Looking through the view scope of the electron microscope always reminded Graciano of Dr. Seuss' story, *Horton Hears a Who* —a tiny world similar to our own, with all its complexities, resting just under the wisps of clouds on a tiny dust speck. Seeing this world inside a world always amazed Graciano and filled him with awe for the beauty of creation. He scanned across the landscape of cells and pieces of cells, looking at nuclei, mitochondria and organelles. As he focused on different parts of the screen, he saw a group of cells that had been blown to bits. He zoomed in the magnification on the group of destroyed cells.

He heart caught in his throat when he saw what was inside the remnants of these cells. Worms. Lots of worms. Like maggot worms crawling over rotten beef. There was only one type of virus in the world that looked like that.

The thirty-five year old scientist pulled out his head from the scope quickly, breathing in heaves, and repressing a gag reflex. He ran from the electron microscope down the hall to his desk and pulled out his Microbiology textbook. He quickly scanned to the page on Filoviruses. There were two pages of the wormy viruses. Each looked like a small thread with a pinhole or circle at the top. He put his finger in the page and ran with the book back down the hall. He went back to his chair in front of the viewing scope, looking first at his textbook and then at the scope. It was a filovirus all right. Judging from his prior tests, it must be something new, something very similar to Ebola Zaire. Ebola Zaire had a 90% fatality rate. But the one thing about Ebola Zaire that you could count on was that it was not an airborne virus. You could only contract the disease by having contact with blood, bodily secretions, vomit, possibly saliva. But it did not fly through the air. Then Graciano got a terrible thought. This thing was new. What if it was airborne? He backed his chair away from the microscope. He felt his head for a fever. That was stupid, he thought to himself. The incubation period for a filovirus was usually something like ten days. He would not have anything yet. How had he handled the samples? He thought back. Yes, he had worn two sets of gloves and a mask the entire time he was near the samples. He had not put his nose into the

flask to smell it. Even if it was airborne, he should be okay. God, what if he was infected?

He hit the button on the side of the machine, and a few minutes later, 8×10 glossy photographs slid out of the machine into a rack. He held up the photographs and looked at them. It sure looked like Ebola Zaire. He looked back through the viewing screen of the machine, inspecting the specks of pepper he had seen before in the flask. He now realized what these were—“inclusion bodies,” or big bricks of virus, like thousands of black carbonated worms packed tightly in a soda can, ready to explode the minute the tab top was released. Graciano removed the small box from the electron microscope, put it in a sealed biohazard bag, and went back down the hall. He needed to compare the Tanzanian boy’s blood with known copies of existing versions of Ebola. Then he could be sure this was something new. But that would require a trip into the hot zone.

At the end of the hall of concrete, non-descript walls was the Level 4 changing room. He put his clothes and underwear in a locker. He went to a sink and re-scrubbed, like a surgeon going in for an operation. He put on a new set of surgical scrubs, tying the pants at the waist. Graciano opened a door into a second room, which contained a shower area. The entire room was bathed in blue ultraviolet light. He noted the time on the wall and proceeded into a third room, which contained his orange biohazard space suit. First he applied baby powder to his hands, and put on two pairs of latex rubber gloves. Then he taped his gloves to the sleeve of his scrubs and his scrub pants to his socks. Removing the Chemtursion space suit from the hanger, he put his feet and then his arms in, finally closing the tall face helmet over his head. As the space suit sealed over his body with a zip sound, his air was cut off and his helmet fogged up. But Graciano did not panic. He had done this hundreds of times before. He calmly took the coiled yellow air hose from the wall and plugged it into his suit, which pumped in clean, wonderful oxygen. He could breathe again. Then he took a pair of big yellow rubber rain boots and slid the feet of his space suit into the boots. Properly suited up, he opened the airlock door to the small Decon Room, which contained numerous shower nozzles in the wall and was designed to give a decontamination shower to anyone leaving the Level 4 Suite. Proceeding to the far side, he opened the second airlock door to the Biohazard Level 4 Suite. Once inside, Graciano moved down the hall, walking slowly and making sure that he did not rip his

space suit. He had heard horror stories of Level 4 workers ripping their suits, and he was not going to let that happen to him. Proceeding down the hall, he first went to the air-locked wall cabinet which temporarily housed the stoppered flasks of samples which had arrived from Tanzania. He took the flasks and placed them in a room which looked like a walk-in closet. The only thing in the room was a chair, a table, and a microscope. As he walked in the room, he had to disconnect his curled yellow hose from the ceiling, and reconnect with a different yellow hose in the closet. Graciano walked in the closet and left the Tanzanian samples on the table. Then he left the closet, switching back to the first yellow hose. He was now ready to go to the freezer. Graciano approached the *Instituto Nazionale* Level 4 Freezer room, where the most dangerous blood samples in the world were stored. Using his ID card, he scanned his ID, opened the door lock, and, after entering a six digit code, opened the freezer door for the six dangerous frozen blood serum samples—one named “Mayinga” (for a nurse who was infected with Ebola Zaire), one named “Musoke,” (for a doctor who was infected with Marburg Virus); one named “Boniface” (for a man who had died from Ebola Sudan); one named “Jibinino” (named for a man who contracted but survived the most recent Ugandan Bundibugyo Ebola strain); one named “Cote” (for the Swiss chimpanzee researcher who contracted but survived the rare Ivory Coast Ebola strain); and one named “Monkey O53” (for a lab monkey shipped from the Philippines to a lab in Reston, Virginia, which had been infected with a strain of filovirus called Reston, a virus which was similar in structure and appearance to Ebola Zaire but which was only lethal to monkeys). He took the six serum samples down to the walk-in closet, again switching air hoses. Closing the door of the closet behind him, he switched on the light. Taking care, he gingerly took a pipette and placed some of the cells taken from the boy in Tanzania onto six glass slides. He applied chemicals so the cells dried on the slide. Then, proceeding carefully, he placed a drop of serum from the Mayinga sample, putting it on the first glass slide over the dried tissue cells. He did the same procedure for the other five blood samples. Then he placed the first slide under the microscope. He turned out the lights, plunging the closet room into darkness. The room was now as pitch black as the heart of a cave. If the Tanzanian boy had been infected with one of these six viruses, there would be a faint greenish glow on the slide. Pressing his face and nose against the glass of the space suit, Graciano peered into

the lenses of the microscope. As he looked inside, he switched from slide to slide. He was puzzled by what he saw. The Marburg slide did not glow. The Ebola Sudan slide and the Reston slide did not glow. The Ebola Ivory Coast slide and the Ebola Bundibugyo slide were glowing very faintly. But the Ebola Zaire slide was glowing brightly!

That supported the young scientist's conclusion that the virus was a new strain very similar to Ebola Zaire. The final test could not be done in his lab. The samples' nucleotides had to be sequenced, a process which was similar to determining the virus' "serial number." Instead of numbers, however, this virus would be composed of a combination of four letters: "A" (for adenosine), "C" (for cytosine), "G" (for guanine) and "T" (for thymine). A chemical formula might look like this: AAAGCTTTACCGGTTATGGCGCG... and so on. Each virus had a different serial number, or a different combination of A's, C's, G's and T's. There were DNA Sequencing Labs in Switzerland, California, and England which could easily perform the job quickly. Graciano turned on the light in the Microscope Closet and placed all six Tanzanian samples in the Destruction Unit. The scientist then returned to the air-locked wall storage cabinet and removed all of the flasks, blood tubes and tissue samples which came from Tanzania. He placed all of the material in the Destruction Unit, incinerating them all.

Graciano left the Level 4 Suite, removed his space suit, and took a decon shower, pondering the possibilities as the liquid ran down his body. After he towed off, he hustled back to the locker room, where he put on his gray T-shirt, jeans, and tennis shoes. He took the photographs of the filovirus from the electron scanner with him and went back to his desk, where he put the photos in his briefcase. He opened a file cabinet drawer marked "Filoviruses" and removed files marked "EHF—General," "Ebola Zaire," "Ebola Sudan," "Ebola Buggy," "Ebola Cote d'Ivoire," "Reston," "2003 Trials," "AVI BioPharma," "AVI-6002," "AVI-6003," "PMOs," and "Antisense Therapies," shoving the files into his briefcase. He opened another file cabinet drawer marked "Africa" and removed a number of maps, including a map of Tanzania, and a Swahili-to-American dictionary, which he put in the briefcase. He clicked the briefcase shut and put it on the floor. Sitting at his desk, Graciano nervously tapped his pen and pulled out the legal pad with the name of the local doctor from Kigoma. He would be delivering some very bad news.

CHAPTER 17. SHARKS

September 1499. Bay of Veragua (modern day Bay of Honduras), near the Island of Boyuca

AS DE HOJEDA'S caravel floated away, John Cabot saw Vespucci give him a forlorn look over the railing, as if to say he was sorry. Cabot floated in the water on his back, his hands bound by ropes behind him and his legs tethered by ropes at the ankles. He grimaced from the pain in his stomach where de Hojeda had cut him. His mind raced. He had to stay alive. He thought of his three boys, Lewis, Sebastian and Sanctus. Young Sebastian he missed the most. He was almost as good a navigator as his father. He had to see his boys again! As soon as de Hojeda's ship was far enough away, Cabot began wrestling with the back of his tunic. He had learned a trick long ago from a thieving dock hand named Robert Gibson. Cabot had tied Gibson with his hands behind his back and had locked him in the ship's hold after Cabot had caught Gibson stealing fruit from the other members of the crew. Later that night, however, Cabot had seen Gibson under a cover, drinking rum in one of the rowboats. When questioned how he had escaped his rope bonds, Gibson finally admitted that he had sewn a small knife in the back of his tunic for just such an occasion. Gibson had expected the captain to be angry, but Cabot had laughed, impressed by the sailor's ingenuity. Gibson's only punishment was to sew a small knife into the back of Cabot's tunic. As blood poured out of Cabot's gut wound, he secretly thanked Robert Gibson for his cleverness.

Cabot poked the knife tip against the fabric until he had made a small hole. He kept ramming the blade through the small hole in the cloth until the hole widened. The one thing he had to make sure of was that the knife did not slip out of his hands into the water. If it did, he would be dead for sure. Rotating back and forth so that he could keep his head above the small waves, Cabot wiggled and thrust the small knife again and again until it finally came free of the tunic. Seizing it with his right hand, he began to saw at the rope bonds.

He tried not to panic. He was losing a lot of blood. He looked into the clear blue sky and momentarily thought of his wife Mattea, whom he had married as a young lad while still in Venice. With her long brown wavy hair and deep brown eyes, she was as beautiful as Venice at dusk.

He had not seen her in ages. She was a good wife, understanding of his need for adventure, and she was good with the boys. He managed to saw through most of the cords of the rope, but the bonds were still not giving way. He strained with all his strength to break the rope but it was still hanging on. He cried for a minute in desperation, worried he was going to die here. All of that work, a life full of discoveries, and no one would ever know that he had found the western ocean! It was not fair! De Hojeda! Cabot screamed in rage. I will kill him, he thought. If it was the last thing he ever did he was going to kill that worm and laugh as he put a bullet in his head.

Cabot caught himself. He was embarrassed that he had momentarily cried. He was a man. He was a captain! He was NOT going to die here. He focused all his mental energy on the knife and sawed furiously. With his last saw strike, he managed to cut through the last cord. His hands were free. Rotating, he tried to bend down, sticking his head temporarily in the water to reach his feet, but each time he bent, pain seared from his stomach wound. The water all around him was bright red. He thought of the sharks. Surely there were sharks in these waters. He had heard that a shark could smell blood in water from over a mile away. He looked out over the waves. He did not see any triangular fins. In his travels, he had read a little bit about sharks. While it was true that they liked blood, there were only a few species of shark that would ever come near a human in the water, much less attack it. He was just going to have to pray that no sharks of the right species were in the neighborhood. But the thought of sharks gave him resolve. No matter how much it hurt, he had to cut the ropes on his feet or he would not be able to swim, and he had better do that before the sharks came.

Using every bit of courage he could muster, he clenched his teeth, held his breath and put his head under the water, sawing on his leg ropes furiously. On the third effort under the water, he thought he would pass out from the pain. But his feet were wiggling. The bonds were loosening. That's when he saw it—three triangular fins off in the distance. The sharks had finally found him! He panicked and began sawing like a lumberjack, diving up and down under the water until he had his feet free in about a minute. As soon as he got free, he swam like an Olympian, thrashing about with strong strokes, despite his stomach wound, trailing blood behind him. He was only a hundred yards or so from the shore of the

island now. Only a little more and he might make it. He went into an all-out sprint for the shore, gasping for breath on every third rotation of his arms through the water. As he put his head under the water again, he felt something hard bump him. The sharks were here. He stopped swimming and treaded water, looking around him. They were circling him, obviously crazed by the blood but seemingly unsure of what to do next. He was only fifty yards from the shore. He slowly treaded water toward the shore, like a lion tamer eyeing a lion, wary of the bite but trying to show confidence. Surprisingly, two of the sharks seemed to suddenly swim away, but the third shark swam around him. Cabot kept edging toward the shore slowly, hoping that the waters would soon be too shallow for the shark. As he saw it swim through the water next to him, he thought it looked like a tiger shark. Suddenly, the shark's head darted to Cabot's leg and bit, taking out a pound of flesh. Cabot screamed the loudest agonizing wail of his life, writhing in the pain now stabbing at his calf. The shark, for his part, seemed satisfied and swam back into deeper waters. Cabot grasped at air, flailing through the last waves into the beach surf and flopped up on the sand, bleeding badly from his stomach and his leg. Covered in wet sand and pummeled by the whitewash of the surf, Cabot looked at his leg. Half his calf was missing and he could see the white shaft of his fibula. He knew that infection would set in almost immediately. He was going to die on this island for sure. Exhausted, Cabot passed out in the sand.

Hours later, John Cabot found himself lying with his back on the tall grass. He opened his eyes and saw the blue sky above. Out of his peripheral vision, he could see that he was no longer on the beach, but in some kind of forest or jungle. He leaned up on one elbow. Where was he? Directly in front of him was a skinny, Hispanic-looking native man with bone earrings, who was huddled over a small smoldering fire, poking the embers with a stick. The native appeared not to notice Cabot. Cabot tried to get up but felt immediate pain in his gut and leg. The native looked over. Cabot looked down at his body and was amazed. The wound in his stomach was almost completely healed, although it hurt like hell. His calf looked gnarled and brown but it was essentially healed. He could no longer see the bone and there appeared to be no outward signs of infection. Did he get taken to a doctor on the island? How could his wounds possibly be healed? Was he in heaven?

If he was in heaven, God certainly needed to spruce the place up,

Cabot thought. Cabot smelled himself, and he smelled bad. He looked over to the native and said “Hello” in Italian. The native man ignored Cabot and pointed with a stick which had been put in the fire. The end of the stick was red and smoking. The native man pointed to the entrance to a cave some fifty feet away. John Cabot stared in confusion. The native man helped Cabot struggle to his feet, and then pointed to the cave with the stick. He pushed Cabot on the back and pointed his finger to the cave, and said, “Xibalba!” Cabot realized that the native wanted him to go into the cave. Just then, two dozen heads appeared from the jungle foliage. Many of the islanders carried spears and did not look happy. Several of the men began yelling and wielding their spears in the air in anger. “Xibalba!” they yelled. Cabot could take a hint. Going into the cave was better than staying out here with these savages. Cabot went into the dark cave. It was the last place he would ever explore.

CHAPTER 18. NEWS.

Present day. Rome, Italy.

THE PHONE RANG a few times before an African woman answered:

“Kigoma Baptist Missionary Hospital.” Fortunately for Graciano, the people of Tanzania spoke either Swahili or English, and this woman obviously knew English. Graciano was fluent in English, so there would be no language barrier today.

“Dr. Beladar, please.”

“One minute, please.” A few minutes later, a voice answered on the other line.

“Dr. Beladar speaking.”

“Dr. Beladar, we spoke last week. This is Matteo Graciano with the *Instituto Nazionale* in Rome.”

“Have you gotten the results yet?”

“Yes, I have, Doctor. Doctor, are you in a private place right now?”

“Not really. If you like, I can call you direct from my office.”

“Yes, please do. You can reverse the charges if you like.”

“Very well.” Dr. Beladar hung up, terrified by the tone of the Italian scientist’s voice. Dr. Beladar had delivered bad news to patients before. When you asked a patient to go to a private place to talk, it was invariably very bad news.

His hand trembled as he dialed the international number.

“Dr. Graciano.”

“Yes, this is Dr. Beladar, calling from my office. What is the news?”

“First, Doctor, I need to tell you that this matter needs to be kept in the strictest of confidence. Can I count on you?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Dr. Beladar, before I tell you what we found, I need to know if you have told anyone else about this?”

“No. Other than my nurse, you were my only call.”

“Have you sent samples to anyone but our lab?”

“No, just the lab in Rome.” Graciano was happy with the answer.

“OK, doctor, I believe your initial suspicions may have been correct. We may be dealing with a hemorrhagic illness, possibly a filovirus, but the chemical construction of this virus is very new. I will need you to send some additional samples to the Americans.”

Dr. Beladar's hands began shaking when he heard "filovirus." He knew what that meant.

"Filovirus? You mean like Ebola?"

"Probably something like that, but I must stress that it is too early to tell."

Dr. Beladar's hands began to shake, and he felt faint. He knew very well that Ebola had an extremely high fatality rate. The blood from the boy's anus had washed all over him. And Marietta had received a bucket full of black vomit all over her body. They were clearly exposed to the virus and most likely infected.

There was a few seconds of silence. Graciano worried that he had lost the connection.

"Dr. Beladar, are you there?" asked Graciano.

"Yes, I am sorry. I am just shocked and terrified, quite frankly. That is terrible news. Are you absolutely sure?"

"We need to run more tests. The CDC has a special, brand new Level 4 Pathogen gene sequencing laboratory in Mexico. I will need you to send additional blood and tissue samples to them. Send me samples from the two boys, the parents, the uncle, you, your nurse, and anyone else you suspect may be infected. If you do not know, err on the side of sending the sample. In the meantime, I am assembling a team right now and we will be on the ground in Tanzania tomorrow to talk with you personally."

"OK, what is the address for the CDC lab in Mexico?"

"Address it to: CDC, Camino de Canario No. 5823, Undécimo Piso, Col. Polanco, Mexico City, 11560, Mexico."

Dr. Beladar wrote down the address.

"Dr. Graciano, is there any cure for Ebola?" asked Beladar.

"Yes, there may be. Until recently, there had been no known cure for Ebola. However, a research firm in America called AVI Biopharm has had some incredible success with a new drug called AVI-6002. In their tests with monkeys, the drug has had a 75% cure rate. The FDA has just licensed additional trials of the drug. We may be able to fly some samples of the drug to you from AVI and see if it works. But I need to know how many people have possibly been infected. You think the disease started with these boys, correct?"

"Yes, we are almost sure of it. They were bitten by a swarm of bats in a cave here, and about seven days after that, their symptoms began. They

live in a very small village out in the forest, only thirty or so people, very secluded. The parents brought the boys to the hospital. I do not believe they have had contact with anyone else other than the people in their village and possibly people at our hospital. We kept them in the hospital, but their symptoms quickly got worse. As you know, they have both died. Both of the boys' parents and their uncle are now at the hospital with similar symptoms, and we think they will succumb soon."

"Is there anyone else that you know of who has symptoms?"

"A nurse and I took care of the boys when they arrived, and one of the boys aspirated bloody, hot black vomit all the nurse. Some sprayed in her face. I had my hands in blood which had ejected from the boy's anus. We do not have symptoms yet."

"What is the nurse's name?"

"Nurse Marietta Gondube. She is here at the hospital today."

"How many other nurses or hospital personnel helped treat the boys?"

"Just us two. Almost immediately, when I saw the boys' bright red bulging eyes, yellowish skin, red starlike face speckles, massive heaves of black, bloody vomit, and a fever of 104 degrees, I began to suspect a hemorrhagic fever. I quarantined them in a separate room about an hour after they arrived, and only allowed in the parents, and later when he arrived, the uncle. I instructed the hospital staff that only myself and Nurse Gondube were to be allowed in the room to treat them. Then, when the boys died, I sent those tissue samples and blood samples off to you. And Nurse Gondube and myself have not treated any other patients at the hospital since this started. I instructed another nurse to treat the other patients. So we believe our barrier nursing protocols were quite effective."

"That was quick thinking, Dr. Beladar. What is the status of the parents and the uncle?"

"Their eyes are all bright red, they have high fevers. Their faces are covered in purple blotches. They vomit frequently. The uncle looks like he is about a day behind the parents in terms of symptoms. I feel like they are going to die very soon. We are just trying to keep them comfortable. We tried antibiotics, but that had no effect."

"Dr. Beladar, have you or Nurse Gondube had any contact with anyone else since you first saw the boys?"

"Dr. Graciano, you should know that Nurse Gondube is my girlfriend."

We live together by ourselves. We have no children. We have no pets. And since this all occurred, the only place we have been is our house and the hospital. We have not gone to the market. We have not gone into town. Frankly, we have been too terrified to go anywhere. We have spent most of our time on the Internet, trying to figure out what this thing is. That's how we found you."

"Have any patients been discharged since the boys came into the hospital?"

"Um, I do not know. I will have to ask Nurse Gondube."

"OK, that is enough information for now. I am getting on a plane tonight and will be at your hospital in the morning. Here is what I want you to do. None of those patients gets discharged until I give the OK. No family members are to be allowed into the hospital until I give the OK. Make up whatever you have to, but do not tell them this is a hemorrhagic virus or you will have a massive panic on your hands. I need you continue to stay away from the other hospital staff and patients. I need you to call a meeting of the entire hospital staff tomorrow morning at 9 a.m. Everyone must attend. No exceptions. I will give them instructions when I get there. In the meantime, I want you and Nurse Gondube to remain at the hospital. Do not go back to your house. Do not go to the market. Do not go anywhere or you will risk spreading this thing. And Doctor, whatever you do, do not call anyone outside the hospital on your telephone. This must be absolutely confidential. I will make the necessary contacts with the CDC and so on. Make sure you get those samples out to Mexico today. In the meantime, I will contact AVI about getting you some of the AVI-6002, and I will contact you sometime late tonight from the air when my team is airborne. OK?"

"Yes, that sounds fine. Doctor, how quickly do you think we could get the drug?"

"I do not know. All I can tell you is that we will move heaven and earth to get it there for you in time."

"Very well. I will see you later. Oh, Dr. Graciano, one more thing."

"Yes?"

"What should we do with the bat?"

"The bat?"

"Yes, the father brought in a cage with the bat that bit his son. It is here at the hospital."

Graciano thought about the ramifications of that new discovery.

“Dr. Beladar, whatever you do, do not lose that bat!”

Dr. Matteo Graciano hung up the phone, grabbed his briefcase, and went downstairs to the break room. Two of his lanky research subordinates, Guido Macchione and Antonio Paciello, were huddled around the coffee machine. Graciano stuck his head in the doorway.

“Guido! Antonio! You have thirty minutes to get your RACAL Fieldsuits and your HAZMAT gear and meet me at the airfield. We have a Hot Level 4 Filovirus in the Field! We are flying to Africa tonight! Do not tell ANYONE, not even your wives, where you are going. We’ll be gone for three or four days probably. Don’t forget your duct tape!”

CHAPTER 19. DISCOVERY

Present day. Archivo General de Indias. Seville, Spain.

THE CHIEF ARCHIVIST of Seville, a portly man named Pedro Alonso de Bartón, and the Chief Curator of the Alcazar, a thin, gray-haired man named José Suarez, had both been against the idea of doing anything to harm the walls of the Alcazar. The building was ancient, dating back over 1200 years. Notwithstanding the new document found by Charlie Winston, it was utter speculation that anything was indeed hidden behind the painting of the Virgin of the Navigators. The men compromised, however, when Charlie Winston proposed that they scan the walls with his portable scanner. Winston brought out of his bag a DeWalt DCT 418 scanner, a yellow and black hand-held scanning device similar to a wall-stud finder. This device had the capability of showing on a 3.5 inch liquid crystal display a visual image of anything behind a wall, including metal pipes, PVC pipes, holes, wooden objects, and metals. The device used radar waves to detect the items behind the walls, and then sophisticated algorithms inside the machine allowed the machine to detect not only the shape of the item behind the wall but also the material of which it was composed. The device could penetrate up to three inches through drywall, plywood, concrete, plaster, ceramic tile and even marble. The Curator brought several workmen over to help gently remove the painting and set it aside. The wall behind the painting appeared to be plaster. Winston brought out his scanning device, got on a ladder, and, beginning in the area in the approximate middle of where the painting had been, he passed the device from left to right across the wall. Then he began to pass it back from right to left again. As he did so, the scanner read that the material was indeed plaster. As he passed over wooden wall studs, the readout showed a small tree icon, meaning wood, and the readout showed a wooden stud behind the wall. He continued all the way back to the left but did not find anything unusual other than wooden studs. He decided to try two feet higher. Again, he passed the device left to right and then back again right to left. Again, the readout showed nothing but wooden studs. Finally, Winston went two feet below the middle of the place where the painting hung. He scanned from left to right, but as he began to pass back from right to left, the readout showed something very interesting. There was a rectangular hole behind the wall,

about four feet off the floor, toward the left side. The hole was about four feet long and about three feet high. And nestled in the middle of the hole was something roughly square. The scanner showed the tree icon as well as the icon for ferrous metal. The box was made out of wood and metal. Winston showed the readout triumphantly to the Chief Archivist and the Chief Curator. The treasure chest was real! Winston spoke with the two men about the procedure for opening up the wall, and was assured that it would be a long process, due to the fact that the palace was so ancient and historic. Winston left his information with the Curator, and got on a plane headed back to Atlanta.

The next three months were filled with bureaucratic red tape, as Winston filed numerous requests with the Spanish Committee for Historic Preservation and other Spanish government officials to get permission to cut open the wall behind the painting. Finally, after Emory University agreed to make generous contributions to the Spanish Committee for Historic Preservation, the Spanish Archives, and the Alcazar Preservation Fund, a contractor who was paid by Emory and hired by the Alcazar, together with a team of architects, cut a small section from behind the wall of the painting and removed a wooden chest with metal hinges. Charlie Winston was present in Seville a second time when the chest was finally opened. At the direction of the Chief Archivist, the documents and maps found inside the chest were laid out on a series of long tables in the Seville Archives Map Room. Winston was the first historian who was allowed access to the documents.

The treasure trove contained a large collection of fifteenth and sixteenth century navigational maps and ship logs. The trove contained ship logs of Amerigo Vespucci, John Cabot, Sebastian Cabot, Juan Diaz de Solis, and other navigators. The first great discovery was the long-lost original of the *Padrón Real*, the “master map” used by Spanish explorers. That map, in and of itself, was an incredibly valuable historic find. The *Padrón Real* was undated, but showed Hispaniola, Cuba, the eastern coast of present-day America, Central America, and South America. Winston was excited, and thought of comparing that map to the copy of the *Padrón Real* in the Vatican Archives. Although Winston did not realize its significance at the time, the trove also contained a small handwritten map given by the Veraguan natives to John Cabot, showing the directions to the Island of Boyuca, and the more detailed map of the Island of

Boyuca, with legends written in the Mayan K'iche' dialect. Because those maps were in a language foreign to Charlie Winston, he passed over those quickly.

What Winston was most interested in, however, was a map of the New World which was dated August 1499. It appeared to be written in John Cabot's handwriting. Scribbled sideways from about Florida to North Carolina was one word: "America." At the bottom of the 1499 map was a handwritten dedication, in which Cabot appeared to be thanking his patron for the voyage. The name on the dedication was one which would change every American elementary history book, and which would forever tar the name of Amerigo Vespucci.

CHAPTER 20. TERRORIST.

Present day. Kigoma, Tanzania.

GUIDO MACCHIONE WAS alone with his thoughts as the minivan rumbled along the beat up rocky road to the Kigoma Missionary Baptist Hospital. He was very nervous. He had never seen a hot Level 4 in the field before. He was engaged, and his wife back in Rome was expecting. He did not want to die without seeing his child. He kept telling himself that his orange RACAL suit and his multiple layers of clothes would protect him, but part of his brain warned him to get the hell out of this minivan right now and run for it. He checked the duct tape on his wrists and ankles again and looked over his space suit for rips. Graciano could see the anxiety on his subordinate's face.

"Guido, as long as you follow the procedures with your suit, nothing can hurt you," assured Graciano. "I already checked out your suit. You do not have any tears."

"Yeah, I know, but this thing really scares the hell out of me."

"It is perfectly natural to be scared, but let's not forget we are here to do a job."

"Sure, boss. I will be okay."

"Can't you turn on some AC in this bucket? I am melting in here!" yelled Antonio Paciello to their driver. With his long hair and glasses, Paciello was suffocating in the RACAL suit and the 100 degree Tanzanian heat. Their driver, a small dark-skinned man with several gold teeth, motioned to the men in the back seat.

"I am sorry, the van does not have air conditioning," said the driver.

"Antonio, relax," said Graciano, "We are almost there." Graciano looked at his map. The hospital should be about a mile away.

"OK, now we are going to go to oxygen in about one minute. You know the hand signals. Let's check the tanks now."

Graciano instructed the driver to wait a block away until they were finished. The three investigators made a few checks of their oxygen tanks and they all seemed to be working. They instructed the driver to pull them around the back of the hospital so as not to attract attention. Graciano slipped on his helmet, and his oiled chest-zipper slid up, sealing his body inside. The oxygen tank went on immediately. They would have about three hours on the tank.

11:00 a.m. Mexico City, Mexico.

HECTOR RAMÓN HAD the best job in the world. He was the only employee of the *Corporación Diversificada Colosal* on the Eleventh Floor of this suburban office building. He had answered an online advertisement a year ago. He had no idea how or why he had been hired. His only two previous jobs were as a maintenance man, and he had been fired from both of those, once for sleeping on the job and once when his porn collection was found in the janitor's closet. His only job here at the company was to check the mail every day and if anything came, to notify his boss with an e-mail. Nothing interesting other than junk mail ever came to this office, so the job was easy. And for some reason, no one had de-activated the porn-searching feature of his company laptop, so his days were spent researching such interesting sites as "BigBoobs.com," "BarelyLegal.com," and "LatinSluts.com." Occasionally, if he was in the mood, he would play Call of Duty. Yet, for some reason, he got a 5,500 peso paycheck every week, signed by a mysterious "Jerome Brown," probably an American. He had no idea what the company did or who Jerome Brown was. He had never met the man. Hector had once tried to research the company on the Internet but quickly became bored. Who cares what the company did? It was none of his business. Five thousand, five hundred pesos for sitting here eight hours a day in these swanky offices, watching porn, and answering the mail? Life was good. Hector was a lazy man, with curly, uncombed black hair, unkept, grizzle hairs on his chin, and slitty eyes. He was short and stocky, and his gigantic beer gut hung over his jeans like a fleshy beach ball. He was clearly not qualified for many jobs. How he had landed this one was anyone's guess.

Moments ago, FedEx had delivered a large package to the office, which he signed for. He looked at the marking on the outside of the package. "Tanzania?" Where was Tanzania? He searched his memory for any reference, and all he could come up with was that brown cartoon guy on Bugs Bunny that spun around in a tornado and growled at people. Wasn't he called the Tanzanian Devil? Or was it Tasmanian? He couldn't remember. He laughed for a minute, thinking of the cartoon. He looked at the box. It looked like a cooler of some kind. What could be in there, a dead head or something? He laughed at himself again. He sure thought he was funny. Well, he better call this one in. It was probably important. He

popped the cooler on top of his small desk and sent an e-mail to Jerome Brown, advising him of the arrival of the cooler from Tanzania. An hour later, Hector Ramón was dead of a gunshot wound to the forehead and the cooler was gone.

10:00 a.m. Kigoma, Tanzania.

WHEN THEY ARRIVED at the hospital, Graciano, geared up in his space suit like Neil Armstrong on the moon, greeted Dr. Beladar and his nurse at the door of the hospital. Graciano handed them each a sheet of pre-written instructions, advising them to remain in the quarantined room of the hospital. By writing on a legal pad and questioning Dr. Beladar, he was able to confirm that Dr. Beladar had sent over a dozen blood and tissue samples to Mexico City yesterday afternoon. Graciano's two assistants then proceeded to the main ward of the hospital, going bed to bed taking blood and tissue samples from the patients. The patients were terrified when they saw the two men in the space suits, but the Kigoma medical staff was able to assure the patients that these men were just here as a precautionary measure. While the assistants were in the main ward, Graciano remained with Dr. Beladar and his nurse in the quarantined room, where he answered some of the doctor's questions about the AVI drug. After a few minutes, the young head of Italy's Level 4 Pathogen Research Lab left the quarantined room and walked down the steps into the basement of the hospital, looking for the furnace room. Shining a flashlight, and brushing away the cobwebs in the dark utility room, Graciano traced the natural gas service line where it entered into the building and ended at the furnace. He checked the furnace pilot light. It was not lit. That was good. Taking a hacksaw from his duffelbag, Graciano sawed through the service line, making sure he did not nick his space suit. Once he got almost all the way through, he yanked on the service line with his hand, pulling it apart, and allowing the natural gas to pour freely into the room. He was not asphyxiated by the odorless natural gas because his HAZMAT suit had a self-contained oxygen tank. Graciano next took a thermos out of his duffelbag which was filled with gasoline. He laid a trail of gasoline from an area just below the sawed-off natural gas line, down the floor, and up the steps to the floor of the hospital above him. The trail led all the way to the front door. Then Graciano went back

into the main ward of the hospital, helping his subordinates take blood samples from the other patients.

During the next hour, the natural gas levels built up in the basement of the hospital. Every five minutes, Graciano walked out in the hall away from the two other scientists and pulled out of his pocket a yellow gas-to-air meter that he had brought with him. When the meter read that the levels of natural gas were approaching the lower limit of flammability, Graciano went into the doctor's staff room. Kigoma Missionary Baptist Hospital had one other doctor on staff. This attractive young, black doctor was about the same height and weight as Graciano. Graciano looked at the doctor's name tag.

Graciano wrote on a legal pad: "Dr. Haane, may I have a word with you in private please?" Graciano picked up his blue duffelbag and led the doctor out of the hospital. Once he was outside the hospital, Graciano took off his space helmet.

"Let's go to the other side of the street where we can talk." Once they were safely on the opposite side of the street, Graciano turned to the young doctor.

"Doctor, no one has been giving your team much information, so I wanted to take a minute to level with you to tell you what we are dealing with here. We have a Level 4 Hemorrhagic Fever Virus, similar to Ebola Zaire, in your hospital."

"Seriously?" The doctor looked terrified. "Are we exposed?"

"It does not appear that any of your staff other than Dr. Beladar and his nurse were exposed to the virus. We have quarantined the patients who are suspected to be infected in the quarantine room. But we have one problem. All of your patients have agreed to submit blood samples except for one. You have a patient in there in Bed 17 who refuses to submit to a blood test until you tell him that it is OK. He is your patient. I want you to go in there, but frankly, I am concerned for your safety, so I thought I would pull you out here, give you the facts and see what you want to do. I have one extra HAZMAT suit in my bag here. It is very easy to operate. If you want, we could suit you up, you could go in the ward, and assure your patient that it is OK to give us a sample. What do you think?"

"Can I just write something down for you to take to him?"

"No, he is insisting on speaking with you in person."

"Is there any danger if I am in the suit?"

“None at all, as long as you do not cut your suit. And even if you did cut your suit, I do not think you need to worry. You have been around the patients in that ward earlier this week and you do not have any symptoms yet. I do not think this thing is airborne. Ebola is traditionally not an airborne virus, so the likelihood of you being exposed is very slim.”

The young doctor thought for a moment, but his sense of duty to his patient won out.

“OK, I guess so, if you can show me how to get into this thing.”

“Great,” said Graciano.

Graciano showed the doctor how to get into the space suit, zipped him up and led him back into the hospital. Graciano pointed to the ward and gave the doctor the thumb’s up. With some trepidation, the doctor in the orange space suit entered the ward of the hospital toward Bed 17. As soon as that occurred, Graciano grabbed his blue duffelbag, walked out the front door of the hospital, closed the double doors, and inserted a tire iron through the two door handles. Then he took out a second thermos, and poured a trail of gasoline fifty feet down the street. Graciano ducked around a corner, took off his space suit, throwing it into his duffelbag. Then he took out a cigarette lighter, lighted the trail of gas, and ran as fast as he could away from the hospital. The flame quickly sprinted in a line down the sidewalk and into the front door of the hospital. Five seconds later, the line of flame reached the natural gas in the hospital basement, and the entire hospital exploded, leveling the entire block. When the very unskilled Kigoma Fire Department later investigated the explosion, they would conclude that there had been a gas leak, which killed the three nice investigators from Rome.

Matteo Graciano got a quick taxi to the airport, where, with a fake passport, he would get a flight to Morocco. From there, he would spend two weeks on a freighter vessel bound for Mexico, where his new life as a biological terrorist would begin. Also riding on that freighter, in a small cage, was one very important bat.

CHAPTER 21. MACKINAC

Mackinac Island, Michigan.

MOST PEOPLE CAN identify the State of Michigan's famous Lower Peninsula, with its characteristic "catcher's mitt" appearance, but few remember that Michigan also has a second peninsula further to the north and west. The long-ignored Upper Peninsula, which looks like a diving board off the State of Wisconsin, runs east-west like an eyebrow over Lake Michigan and comes close to touching the middle finger of the catcher's mitt—but not quite. There is a small waterway separating the two land masses called the Straits of Mackinac (pronounced "MAK-in-naw"), which also separates Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. Nestled just to the right of the Straits of Mackinac, like a stepping stone between the Upper and Lower Peninsulas, is the tiny island of Mackinac. The Native Americans living in the area hundreds of years ago called the island "*Ojibwe mishi-mikinaak*," which means "big turtle." The name is quite appropriate because nothing ever moves fast on the Island of Mackinac.

Local ordinances on the 3.8 square-mile island prohibit nearly every form of motor vehicle. Travel around Mackinac is by bicycle or horse-drawn carriage. With its bright white Victorian Grand Hotel, its famous fudge shops, and its topiary rose bushes shaped like colossal horses, the Island of Mackinac looks like a picturesque postcard from 1910. Blue jays, yellow warblers, crimson cardinals, and the black-and-orange American Redstarts dot the trees in late summer, while foxes, raccoons and rabbits peek in and out of lush bushes and forest trails. The island is also home to over six hundred species of plants, including Violets, Forget-Me-Nots, Buttercups and the zebra-patterned Jack-in-the-Pulpits.

For Bill and Kelly Monahan, the African chimpanzee researchers, nothing topped off a summer of primate research better than some breezy, autumn days spent on the Island of Mackinac. They would spend a week here before they returned home to Ann Arbor to begin the new school season teaching at the University of Michigan. It had been six days since the Monahans had eaten in the Ujiji Fish House in Tanzania.

The primate researchers, tired of months in the bush, decided to pamper themselves at the Victorian Grand Hotel. Proper attire, meaning jackets and ties for men, dresses for ladies, was a requirement at the Grand Hotel. The Monahans relaxed in their green and white striped easy

chairs, dining in the cool night breeze on the half-mile long patio, while tuxedoed waiters walked across the polished wooden deck and served them perfectly grilled steaks and roasted herb-encrusted chicken. They were animal lovers, it was true, but they were by no means vegetarians. The night would be topped off with a visit to the Fudge House. What a feast!

The next morning, Kelly Monahan woke up with a splitting headache and back ache. She was in pretty good shape, so this was surprising to her. She was only 45. She wasn't that old to be getting back pain from just sleeping. At least she hoped not. She went into the bathroom in her hotel room, hoping to find the Motrin she had brought with her in her straw purse. She found the bottle and poured three orange capsules—hell, make it four capsules, she thought, this headache was terrible—and downed them with a glass of water from the faucet. She looked up at her reflection in the mirror and was surprised to see that her eyes were bloodshot—in fact, more bloodshot than she could ever remember. That was strange. She searched her purse for some Visine. She hadn't brought any. She returned back to bed to talk to Bill.

“Honey, did you bring any Visine? My eyes are really bloodshot this morning.”

Bill said nothing and was facing the other way.

“Bill?”

Bill said nothing.

Kelly went onto the bed and shook her husband's shoulder, trying to rouse him from his deep sleep. He wasn't turning over but she could hear him give a deep groan, as if he was in pain.

She was concerned now. She rolled her husband over by his shoulder. Those eyes! His glassy, unfocused eyes were bloodshot, too! And his face was covered in sweat. She looked at his blue Wolverines shirt, which was drenched. Suddenly, Bill darted out of bed and made a dash to the bathroom. She could hear a retching sound coming from the bathroom.

“Ohhh, God!” Bill moaned from the bathroom. She went into the bathroom to help him. Bill was bent over the toilet.

“God, I feel like death!” exclaimed Bill, still bending over the commode.

Kelly went over to feel her husband's forehead. He was burning up. He threw up again.

“God! What is wrong with me?” Bill pleaded. That is when Kelly noticed Bill’s face. It had purple star-like welts or splotches on it. She knew then she had to get him immediately to the doctor.

“Come on, Bill. I am taking you to the Emergency Room!”

“Does this place even have a hospital?” asked Bill.

“I hope so, because I do not think you are going to make it to the mainland.”

Kelly Monahan was right. There was a hospital—the Mackinac Island Health Center, a three-story white-clapboard structure near the center of the island. Unfortunately, however, the trip to the emergency room took much longer than normal because there were no cars allowed on the island. The fastest mode of travel for a sick person was the golf cart, but on this beautiful autumn day, all the hotel’s golf carts at the moment were ferrying golfers down to the hotel’s Jewel Golf Course. It took twenty minutes to finally get a hotel staffer named Cedric to bring a golf cart over to take the two researchers into town to the emergency room. Bill was seated in the front next to Cedric and began coughing violently. Cedric regretted his decision to help these two guests within the first two minutes of the drive. He frequently had to stop along the side of the road for Bill to throw up.

When the Monahans arrived at the hospital, the nurse at the reception desk looked at Bill Monahan, and saw he looked very sick. After taking their insurance cards, she relayed the Monahans to the Triage Nurse, instructing them to bypass the hospital waiting room. The Triage Nurse also could tell this was a serious case and immediately called over the intercom for the emergency room doctor on staff.

Dr. Boyd “Buzz” Adams, nicknamed by his parents after a handsome transport plane pilot in the play *South Pacific*, was the Emergency Medicine doctor on staff at the time the Monahans arrived, and that was not a good thing for the Monahans, as Buzz was not the brightest star in the medical firmament. Buzz had taken this post because it was easy. Hardly anyone ever got sick on the island. If they did get sick, it was usually nothing more difficult than poison ivy or sunburn. And then there were the hot young girls who would come up with their rich parents, bored with nothing to do in this Victorian town. Dr. Buzz knew how to entertain, all right. In fact, drinking and entertaining women were probably the two things at which he excelled the most.

When the Monahans came in, even Dr. Buzz Adams could tell the husband was very sick. What was with those red eyes? Dr. Adams eyed the wife. She was in good shape all right. What a mismatch with the husband! She probably had a lot of pent-up sexual frustration, he thought. Dr. Adams began taking a history from the husband, but most of the time, he was smiling and staring at the wife. She had pretty good legs, a good enough rack. Yeah, he would do her for sure, he thought.

Dr. Buzz Adams went through a long line of questions with Bill Monahan. When had he first started feeling bad? When did the fever start? How high was his fever? Did he have a history of blood disorders in his family? Did he have blood in his stool? Had he eaten anything strange recently? When did he first get the purple lesions under his skin? Did he have any food allergies? Had the Monahans recently traveled to the Southwest, like in Arizona or New Mexico? And on and on. But the one question Dr. Buzz Adams did not ask was whether the Monahans had traveled out of the country recently. That standard question would have yielded critical information for a proper diagnosis.

Dr. Adams went through the possibilities in his mind. Bill Monahan either had a bleeding disorder, a hematological problem, an allergy, an infection, or some kind of G.I. problem going on, like food poisoning, cholera, salmonella, something like that. The doctor ordered numerous blood tests, including a CBC, an ESR, a CRP, and coagulation studies. He ordered a chest X-ray and a urinalysis. The doctor would have liked to get an Infectious Disease Consult, but unfortunately they did not have an I.D. specialist on the island. If he wanted that, he would have to transfer the patient to the mainland. For now, he would wait and see how the tests came back. He left to see other patients, confident that the tests would tell him something. He told Kelly Monahan that everything would be okay and then flashed her a smile and a wink as he left the room. Kelly Monahan was disturbed by the doctor's wink. "Could he possibly be flirting with me when my husband is here for medical treatment?" she wondered.

Another nurse, a young woman, came in to draw blood and take the urine sample. She was surprised to see purple lesions under the skin of the man's arms. She had never seen that before. When she stuck in the needle, blood shot out several inches, landing on the nurse's arm. She was surprised. That had never happened here on the island before. She tried

to act like everything was normal. She cleaned up the blood with a towel. When she left the room with the samples, she quickly went to a wash basin and washed herself thoroughly with antibacterial soap. Whatever that guy in there had, she was determined she would not get it. Another orderly, a male, entered the Monahans' room about a half hour later, and wheeled the husband down to have his chest X-ray performed.

While they waited for the results, the Monahans each rested somewhat uncomfortably on hospital beds in a room in the Emergency Ward. Kelly Monahan thought about what the illness could be.

"Do you think that fish was bad at the Ujiji Fish House?" she asked her husband.

"The fish wasn't raw. They cooked it. I would think whatever was in there would die when it was grilled," said Bill.

"Yeah, that's what I would think, too," replied Kelly. "Maybe we caught something from one of the monkeys."

"Yes, I suppose that's possible. But we didn't handle their blood or their feces or any cadavers. We spent most of the time observing and photographing. I just cannot imagine getting anything from the chimps," said Bill. Bill then groaned and held his stomach. "Whatever it is, it is killing me, I can tell you that."

"Bill, don't talk that way! I am sure you will be fine."

"I feel like I am being gnawed from the inside out. Could it possibly be a parasite?"

"I guess anything is possible," said Kelly, "but I always thought parasites entered you through your feet, and we always had boots on unless we were sleeping."

"No," said Bill. "I think you can get parasites all kinds of ways. We should ask the doctor when he comes back if it could be a parasite."

"We can ask him, but I did not get the feeling that guy knew what he was talking about. I think he was trying to flirt with me—in the emergency room! I would feel a lot better getting to a hospital back in Ann Arbor. We have to get out of here."

"I agree," said Bill. Then he buckled over the table. "Oh God! I don't think I am going to make it to Ann Arbor!" He ran in the bathroom to be sick again. After about a minute in the bathroom, Bill called for his wife. "Kelly! Can you come in here?" Kelly came into the small bathroom. Bill looked absolutely miserable. "Sorry to call you in here, honey, but I am

getting worried. Look at that.” She looked into the water and saw that his vomit was pitch black, the color of tar. Kelly recoiled at the site, holding her hand over her mouth.

“That can’t be good, can it?” asked Bill.

“I have heard of blood in your vomit, but I have never heard of black vomit. What did you eat last night?”

“I had a steak, beans and mashed potatoes. That’s it!”

“Don’t flush it just yet, we need to show the doctor,” said Kelly.

She went back to the Triage Nurse and asked for the doctor. He was nowhere to be found. The Nurse said not to worry, that he would be back soon. After waiting ten minutes with no doctor, Kelly decided to act.

Kelly was, after all, a scientist. She did not like having unanswered questions. She decided she would research her husband’s condition online. She had not brought her laptop with her, but she did have her cell phone, which had Internet access. She would look it up on her phone. Unfortunately, however, the cell phone reception in the hospital, as in many hospitals, was very poor, and she was unable to connect to the Internet. She went to the door of the bathroom and told Bill she was going to go outside the hospital for a minute, and he seemed disinterested. He cared more about the world war going on in his stomach. Kelly walked past the Triage Nurse’s desk and the receptionist’s desk and went outside into the bright sunshine, where she hoped to find more answers.

Dr. Adams was down the hall at the time checking on another patient. Poison oak. When he finished checking in on that patient, he went into his private office and updated his Facebook page until the tests came back. When the test results finally arrived, Dr. Adams noticed that the “sed rate” and the CRP did not seem to indicate that the cause was an infection. That was strange. He thought for sure it was some kind of bacterial infection. The coagulation studies did not seem to indicate a bleeding disorder. The chest X-ray was inconclusive. The urinalysis did not show a urinary tract infection. What in the world could this be? He made a mental note to check back on the patient in about an hour.

CHAPTER 22. FACTORY

Guadalajara, Mexico.

THE FACTORY RESIDED within a large abandoned warehouse in Guadalajara. From the outside, it looked like a beat-up dump of a building with crumbling brick and rusted corrugated metal. Big piles of automobile tires and rubbish scattered around the lot of the Factory made the site look unused and unassuming. The Factory was surrounded by a padlocked chain link fence on all sides. Although no one would know it from the outside, security at the site was top-notch. Dozens of well-trained mercenaries with automatic weapons and night-vision goggles walked the fence perimeter. The owner had paid off the local police not to come around. In Guadalajara, police knew better than to ask questions when that much money was being thrown around.

Inside, the Factory was divided into four sections: the Monkey House, the Cooler, the Lab, and the Plastics Department. The Monkey House took up over half the space in the Factory. Sealed and temperature-controlled according to rigid specifications established by the scientists, the Monkey House contained over two hundred bays of spider monkeys shipped in from the Philippines. Unfortunately for the monkeys, their ultimate destination was not a zoo. Each one of the monkeys would die in the Monkey House, their bodies sacrificed, to be used as fertilizer, as a host and breeding ground for a brand new Tanzanian strain of the Ebola virus. The monkeys would be injected with the virus, and then, somewhere between seven and twelve days after injection, they would be euthanized. Lab workers, previously inoculated with the recently-perfected vaccine from the Tanzanian host-bat, would transfer the monkey cadavers to a processing station, where the monkey blood and tissue would be extracted, pulverized, chemically treated, liquefied, centrifuged and processed for storage in the Cooler. The Lab, a decent rival to any Level 4 Biohazard Lab around the world, was the place where the owners conducted their experiments. It was here in the Lab where the brothers, working tirelessly for the last three weeks, had finally perfected the antidote, made from the antibodies found in the blood of the bat taken from Tanzania. The final section, the Plastics Department, was an assembly line where the plastic spray bottles were being assembled. The spray bottles would be used to spread the virus.

The brains of this operation were Matteo Graciano and his twin brother Dominic Chastain. Each had extensive training at Level 4 Biohazard Labs, Graciano in Italy and his brother in Germany. The two scientists were not interested in the ultimate ransom money which the Americans and Dutch governments would surely pay. They were interested in one thing only: revenge for the murder of their parents and little sister. Whether the ransom was paid was irrelevant to them as long as the parties responsible for the atrocities in Bosnia paid for their crimes. Even though the brothers wanted this operation to be merely a matter of principle, they were also realistic. They knew a project of this size would take lots of money and a substantial security force. So five years ago, while on a fact-finding mission for the World Health Organization, Graciano took a detour to the heavily guarded estate of Julio Cezanne, Mexico's biggest cocaine and heroin dealer. When Cezanne heard the plan, he was immediately on board. Cezanne would pay for the Factory and the Security Force. He would supply the cheap labor for the Factory. He would supply the guns. And when the ransom demand for the antidote was paid by the Americans and the Dutch, he would be paid handsomely. He hated the Americans already. Their DEA had more than once arrested some of his supply chain operatives and had destroyed much of his product. He was more than happy to have Uncle Sam cut him a fat check. The Dutch, he didn't care about. He did not understand why the scientists hated the Dutch too, but he didn't care, as long as Cezanne got his money. Although the scientists and the drug dealer had different motives, together they formed a formidable team.

Cezanne, who had already been inoculated with their newly-developed vaccine, did not need a Biohazard suit to walk through the Monkey House. Wearing a pair of black slacks, polished black loafers, and a blue and white short-sleeved Hawaiian shirt over his substantial gut, Cezanne peeled a banana and ate it as he walked between the bays of monkeys. He had slick black hair which went to the back of his neck, pig eyes, skin long ago ravaged by acne, and a scar from ear to chin caused by the slice of a rival drug dealer's stiletto. He had very white teeth, though, the result of a visit to an expensive cosmetic dentist. Cezanne held the banana just out of reach of a hungry, virus-ridden monkey.

"Hey, you want this, little Poppy? Heh?" The monkey's eyes were swollen and red, and it screeched. Cezanne laughed and stuck the monkeys

through the cage with his walking stick.

“Get back in there, you little shit!”

He walked down the aisle, throwing the banana peel over his head behind him, where it landed on the roof of the monkey’s cage, causing the animal to howl in frustration, the peel just out of his reach. While two heavy-set guards with automatic weapons walked behind him, Cezanne walked through a door lock, and down another hall, where he entered a security code on a numerical pad. When the red light changed to green, Cezanne and his guards walked into the Plastics Department. An assembly line, as long as half a football field, stretched out away from the door. Dozens of Mexicans in jeans and t-shirts worked at different stations along the line. The assembly line resembled in some respects a soda bottling plant. Snaking along the assembly line like little toy soldiers were the white plastic water bottles, which were each about one foot tall and appeared big enough to hold about twenty-four ounces of fluid. At a later station, the label applicator applied the heated label to the side of each bottle. There were dozens of different labels, consisting of the flag of each of the countries in the tournament. Then, stenciled beneath the flag, were the words FIFA World Cup. At a subsequent station down the line, a lid, which looked like a plastic soccer ball split in half, was screwed by workers onto the threads of the water bottle. At the final station, other assembly line workers inserted a spray nozzle into a hole at the top of the soccer ball lid and then put the finished product into a cardboard shipping box. Cezanne went to the end of the assembly line and pulled out a soccer ball water bottle sprayer from one of the boxes. He took the bottle—this one with an Italian flag—over to a nearby sink and filled it with water. Then he screwed the soccer ball lid back on and sprayed himself with water in the face. A cool spray of water vapor hit Cezanne’s face and water dripped down his neck.

“Ha Ha!” he exclaimed. “Carry on!” Pleased with himself, he went further down the line and opened a door to a conference room. Graciano and Chastain were already in the room.

“Hello, boys. How are we doing? Are we on schedule?” Cezanne pulled out a cigar and bit the end, spitting it out. He lit up and took a big puff, exhaling.

Chastain, wearing a white lab coat, gray t-shirt and jeans, faced Cezanne. It was clear he was disgusted by the vicious drug dealer, and

saw him only as a necessary evil.

“We are on schedule. We will be ready when the Cup starts. Did you get the licenses?”

Cezanne reached into his pants pocket, pulling out a folded piece of paper. He put the paper on the table and then threw onto the table ten light blue neck lanyards with plastic vendor’s passes attached to the ends.

“Child’s play. There is nothing in that town that money can’t buy.” Cezanne took a puff on his cigar. “And the Director of Vendor Licenses also has a son who is an excellent soccer player. I do not think he wants his boy coming home with two broken legs,” laughed Cezanne. “Have you started the human trials yet?”

“I told you, Cezanne, there is no need for that,” said Graciano. “I have been in Tanzania. I have seen what this virus can do to humans up close. There is no need for human trials.”

Cezanne went up to the scientist, snarling, and put his face within an inch of the other man’s face. Graciano looked back, nervous. Cezanne paused, as if choosing his words carefully, and then smiled. “My good doctor, if I say we need human trials to be certain, then that is what we need. It is my money at stake here. I am sure you do not want to waste my money.”

“It is just a waste of life for no purpose whatsoever.”

Cezanne grabbed the doctor by the shirt collar. “No purpose?! No purpose?! You came to me with a plan to murder millions of innocent Americans for your own agenda. What is the purpose in that? Don’t give me your sanctimonious bullshit, Doctor! You and I are just the same! And if I say we are going to do something, then that’s what we are going to do, get it?”

“Sure, Cezanne, whatever you say.”

“That’s right. It is whatever I say! And don’t forget that again or you are going to find yourself thrown off a bridge with a boat anchor tied to your feet!”

The two scientists looked at each other, wishing that they did not have to involve Cezanne in their plans.

“How many canisters have we filled with virus-water?” asked Cezanne.

“We have prepared ten samples that we have been using for animal testing. The mist is working. The monkeys came down with the illness just as if they had been injected.”

“Bring me one of the canisters now.”

The scientists looked at each other quizzically, wondering what Cezanne had in mind.

“I said bring one NOW!” he roared.

The two men left the conference room and went to retrieve the spray bottles. When they were alone back in the lab, Dominic Chastain turned to his brother.

“Cezanne is totally unstable. He could bring this whole thing down at any moment.”

“I know. But we are in this far. There is nothing we can do.”

“We could just get on a plane tonight and forget this whole thing. The world thinks we’re both dead. There are lots of places we could go,” suggested Chastain.

“What? And leave those Serbian bastards still walking around after what they did? There is no way I can do that. I do not care if I have to go to Hell. I do not care how many people I have to kill or what type of scumbag I have to befriend. I would make a pact with the Devil himself to avenge Marastina.”

Chastain looked at his brother sympathetically. “I think that’s exactly what we’ve done.”

“As long as Marastina has justice, I don’t care.”

“OK, well let’s get going, he’s probably going to erupt if we are not back soon.”

Dr. Dominic Chastain brought one of the finished spray bottles with an American flag on the side. It was filled with water and a small bit of liquefied monkey tissue infected with the new strain of airborne Tanzanian Ebola virus. They went back to the conference room and Chastain handed the canister to Cezanne. Cezanne grabbed the bottle and walked briskly out of the room, heading back toward the Monkey House. The two scientists walked behind Cezanne, wondering what he planned to do with the water bottle. The scientists gasped when they got near the end of one of the bays of monkeys. There, strapped with ropes to floor-to-ceiling posts were twenty Mexicans, ten males and ten females. They looked poor and dirty. The scientists guessed they might be vagrants. They were all crying, confused, and pleading to be released. Cezanne went to one of the two men standing guard over the prisoners.

“Are they clean?”

“All of them are homeless. Bums off the street, boss. No traces.”

Cezanne was satisfied. He grabbed the water canister and went up to the prisoners, smiling.

“Are any of you thirsty?”

Many of the vagrants nodded.

“Would you like some water?”

“Yes!” many of them said.

Cezanne went to the first man and sprayed the infected virus water directly into his face. The man seemed relieved, although a little confused as to what was happening.

“Open up!” he said. The man opened his mouth and Cezanne shot water directly into his mouth. He did the same with each of the twenty guinea pigs. Then he tossed the bottle to Chastain.

“Now, we will be certain! Begin the human trials immediately.”

The twenty vagrants looked confused as the drug dealer trounced out of the Factory with his bodyguards. The two scientists looked at each other. The matter was now out of their hands. The trials would begin.

CHAPTER 23. OUTBREAK

Present day. Mackinac Island, Michigan.

MEANWHILE, KELLY WAS growing increasingly frustrated at how long it was taking to research the condition over her phone. It was almost as agonizing as dial-up. She wished she had brought her laptop. She checked some medical sites like Web MD which were not very helpful. Then she typed a Google search for “purple splotches under skin” and got a lot of unrelated skin conditions. That didn’t help. Finally she typed in “ruby red eyes black vomit fever”. She got three important hits: Marburg Hemorrhagic Fever (Marburg Virus), Yellow Fever, Dengue Fever. She also got a hit for Richard Preston’s book *The Hot Zone*, a true story about the release of the Marburg Virus in a Virginia monkey research lab. Monkeys. Oh, God. She clicked on the links and learned that these diseases had no cure and were typically fatal. Fatal!

She ran back to the Triage Nurse and frantically told her that it was imperative that she find Dr. Adams immediately. The nurse looked up from her Oxygen magazine.

“He is busy seeing other patients right now, ma’am, is there something I can help you with?”

“Unless you know how to cure the Marburg Virus, Yellow Fever, or Dengue Fever, I suggest you find the damn doctor right now!”

“Ma’am, you do not need to use that kind of language with me! The doctor is busy now. I will try and find him soon. Now please return to your room.” The nurse returned to her magazine.

The hell I will, thought Kelly Monahan. She began fast walking down the hall, poking her head into rooms looking for the doctor. This place was not that big. She would find him eventually. When the Triage Nurse noticed what Kelly was doing, she ran after her. “Ma’am! There are other patients back there! You are not allowed to go back there!”

After checking all the way down the hall, with the nurse at her heels, Kelly Monahan finally found a door with a name plate for Dr. Adams. As she began to pound on the door, the nurse grabbed Kelly’s arm.

“Ma’am! That is the doctor’s office!”

“Get your damn hand off me!” screamed Kelly.

“Ma’am, you need to return to your room!”

Kelly yelled through the door. “Dr. Adams! Dr. Adams! It’s an

emergency!”

A moment later, Dr. Buzz Adams opened his office door.

“Hey! Hey!” said Adams, trying to calm the two women down. “What’s all the fuss?”

“Doctor, this woman stormed down here and tried to barge into your office,” protested the nurse.

“That’s because you would not stop reading your magazine and get the doctor. Doctor, we have an emergency!”

“OK, nurse, thank you, I will take it from here.”

The doctor started to walk in the direction of the husband’s room, and in so doing, put his hand on Kelly’s shoulder, to turn her back in the right direction. “What’s going on?”

Kelly moved her shoulder away from the doctor’s hand, clearly uncomfortable—although she was probably more uncomfortable that he was patronizing her than flirting with her.

“Doctor, my husband is vomiting black blood. And I have done some Internet searches, and it seems to me that my husband may have something like the Marburg Virus or Yellow Fever or Dengue Fever.”

The doctor smiled, again in a patronizing manner. These stupid women, he thought. “Kelly,” said the doctor. “We doctors have a saying. If you hear hoof beats behind you, it is probably a horse and not a zebra.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means that when a patient presents with symptoms, it is usually the more common illness and not a rare or bizarre illness. The Marburg Virus is like Ebola. It has never appeared on American soil before.”

“That’s not true,” said Kelly. “Didn’t you ever hear about the Reston Virginia Monkey House? Marburg was released there from monkeys and they were able to contain it. My husband and I are primate researchers. We are around monkeys all the time.”

“Kelly, that strain of virus came from the Phillippines. It was only harmful to monkeys, not humans. No humans ever died from it. The chances of your husband having the Marburg Virus or something like that is more than a million to one.”

“Doctor, what if this is a real zebra? You can’t just assume every time it’s a horse.”

By this time, the two were nearly back at the husband’s room.

“I assure you, Kelly, we are taking every step we can to find out what

this illness is.”

Kelly opened the door to her husband’s room. He was bent over the toilet.

“Look at this, doctor.” She showed him her husband’s black vomit. “Have you ever seen anything like that? What is that?”

“I will have the nurse come in and take a sample of that. In the meantime, let me finish up with the test results and we will see what we have. Bill, how are you feeling?”

Bill looked up with his red eyes, flabbergasted. “How do you think I feel? I feel like I have been run over by a cement truck.”

“OK, well, sit tight, we should know more information soon.” The doctor took his clipboard and left the Monahans in their hospital room. Black vomit. He had to admit he had never seen anything like that before. But Marburg Virus? In the United States? Surely that was wrong.

Buzz Adams had one conclusion: he was in over his head. He had three choices: first, keep the patient here, and get a G.I. Consult from Dr. Som Depak, who spent summers on the island; second, send the patient to Cheboygan Memorial Hospital; or third, send him to the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor. Cheboygan was just across the Straits. The patient could be there in no time. But it wasn’t the cream of the crop as far as hospitals go. On the other hand, the University of Michigan Hospital was ranked the fourteenth best hospital in the entire country. They had a Life Flight Helicopter which could get here within two hours. They had dozens of specialists in every field. But was the case that serious? He didn’t know. He ultimately decided to call Dr. Depak.

After an hour, or what seemed like three days to the Monahans, Dr. Depak showed up. He was an Indian man, short and bald, with a friendly smile. When he arrived at the Monahans’ room, he was wearing green doctor’s scrubs, a doctor’s mask pulled down under his chin, a green cap, and latex gloves.

“Hello, I am Dr. Depak. I am a gastroenterologist. I understand we are feeling a bit under the weather?” He smiled.

“It is a lot more than that, Doctor,” said Kelly. “And I have to say, in the last hour, I have begun to feel nauseous too. I may have what my husband has.”

Dr. Depak took another history, which the Monahans found quite irritating. Why did they always have to tell their story multiple times?

“Doctor, I think there is a possibility this might be Marburg Virus or Yellow Fever or Dengue Fever.”

“Why do you say that?” asked Dr. Depak. “Have you recently been to Africa?”

“Yes, we have. We are primate researchers. We spent the entire summer in Tanzania.”

“Did you ever do any cave exploring? Were you ever around bats?”

Kelly thought the question was strange. “No, no cave exploring. No bats. Why do you say that?”

“Although we are not certain, some scientists believe that the original carrier for some hemorrhagic fevers like Marburg and Ebola is the African fruit bat. Other fevers, though, are spread by ticks and mosquitoes. I am certain you probably encountered some of those on your trip?”

“Mosquitoes, definitely. I do not recall any ticks, but I suppose it is very possible.”

“Well, I sincerely doubt that is what your husband has, but it is good to have the information. Thank you.”

Dr. Depak looked at the husband’s glassy, almost zombie-like red eyes, purplish skin, and sickly pallor. He was definitely very sick, that was for sure. Those red eyes and purple star-like skin lesions—he had never seen that before.

“OK, we need to have a look and see what is going on up there, so I will be performing a small procedure called an endoscopy, where we put a snakelike scope up the rectum and we photograph what’s going on up there. Mrs. Monahan, you will need to wait outside in the waiting room. We will be ready to go in about fifteen minutes.”

A nurse came in and brought a four foot tall stand with a monitor on the top, and various cords winding around from the monitor. Bill got back on the bed and was told to roll over. A local anesthetic was applied, and Bill waited a bit for the anesthetic to take effect. As he waited on the bed, facing downward, his fever began spiking. He began to feel panicked, like he might die. The pain in his gut was excruciating. He tried to move back and forth to get comfortable, but nothing felt right. He suddenly had a bout of excruciating gut pain. He didn’t think he was going to make it. After an interminable wait, Dr. Depak came in and, after sterilizing Bill Monahan’s anus, took the snake-like endoscope and began the process of inserting the probe through the anal sphincter and into the colon. The

insides of the colon would be shown on the monitor. If there was some kind of parasite up there, Dr. Depak would find it.

However, as soon as Dr. Depak inserted the probe, thick, black blood squirted out in a jet all over Dr. Depak's face and neck. He recoiled immediately in shock. Black blood started pouring out of Bill Monahan's anus. Bill Monahan screamed in agony, his anus split, and hot black liquid and parts of intestines began pouring out all over the floor. Bill started heaving and his whole body went into seizure. His heart rate spiraled and crashed. Dr. Depak was stunned and called a Code Blue. Dr. Adams frantically rushed in with the crash cart.

"Clear!" They tried jumpstarting his heart for about five minutes, but it was useless. Bill Monahan died in his hospital bed. His wife was overcome with grief and anger when she was informed by the doctors in the hallway. She called the doctors bastards, accused them of killing her husband, and promised a malpractice suit. But anger and grief was not all that was going through Kelly Monahan's mind that day. She also had feeling of foreboding, for in her bones she knew she had the same illness as her husband, and it was only a matter of time before she died as well. She pleaded with the doctors to order her a Life Flight helicopter from Ann Arbor. The doctors agreed. Transfer was the best option.

Mackinac Island did not have a coroner. No one had ever died under such strange circumstances before. There was a very tiny morgue at the hospital, which had a locker sufficient to hold two bodies. Bill Monahan's body was placed in one of the lockers until the hospital personnel could figure out what to do with it.

Dr. Adams and Dr. Depak were concerned. Would she really file a malpractice suit? What could they have done differently? Surely there had been no time for the husband. Even if they had called a helicopter the minute Bill Monahan arrived, it would have taken the helicopter two hours to get to the island from Ann Arbor and then another two hours back to Ann Arbor. He would have surely expired before then. But there was a good chance the wife had the same thing. The doctors were determined to get her to the best medical facility they could find.

While they waited for the Life Flight helicopter, Dr. Depak performed Internet research and looked through medical textbooks. This really could be something like Ebola, Yellow Fever, Dengue.... The man had sprayed black blood which was full of virus all over him during the endoscopy.

Even if the disease did not spread by air, it would probably spread by bodily fluids. Dr. Depak began to panic. He was probably infected, too. He discussed the matter with Dr. Adams and the nursing staff. He learned about the nurse who had taken the man's blood and had been sprayed with blood. They should order two helicopters from Ann Arbor. Kelly Monahan would go on one. Drs. Adams, Depak, and the three nurses who interacted with the Monahans would go on the second one. They were not going to take any chances.

Dr. Depak took blood samples, vomit samples, and tissue samples from Bill Monahan and packaged them in dry ice. After contacting the Atlanta Centers for Disease Control, he was given the precise protocol on how to package the samples and send them off. Within twenty-four hours, those samples would be under a high-power electron microscope in Atlanta. Late that night, the two Life Flight helicopters landed and the entire medical staff for the island plus Kelly Monahan, left Mackinac. Bill Monahan's body stayed behind in the freezer.

Seven days after that, Cedric, the kid on the hotel golf cart who drove the Monahans to the hospital, drove himself to the hospital. He was very sick. He was surprised to see that no one was working at the hospital. He left the hospital and went to the town grocery store and bought some orange juice and fresh fruit, where he interacted with the cashier. The cashier had never seen eyes that red before.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia.

TWO DAYS AFTER the specimens arrived at the C.D.C., on the Biohazard Level 4 Floor, Jacob Roessler, the young pathogen researcher, wearing blue jeans, tennis shoes, an Atlanta Braves hat and a white lab coat, sprinted down the hall to his boss' office, holding test results and a color 8x10 glossy photograph. He burst into the office, interrupting a meeting. Roessler's supervisor, Bjorn Jendel, was irritated.

"What is it?"

"Boss, we need to talk immediately."

The guest in Jendel's office excused herself and Jendel shut the door.

"Now, what is so important that you had to interrupt my meeting?"

The researcher fidgeted, with an edge of panic in his voice. He held up a picture of a long thread with a hoop at the end.

"The Ebola Virus is in Michigan!"

Fredericktown, Maryland. Phone booth.

“I JUST HEARD some very disturbing news,” said the first male voice on the international phone call. “Our very small friend is already in America.”

There was silence on the other end.

“Did you hear me?” the first voice repeated.

“I heard you. I don’t understand. How could that be? I was told that the entire facility was destroyed.”

“I don’t know. I am telling you. Our small friend is in Michigan.”

“Michigan? How on earth did he get there?”

“You didn’t send him?”

“Of course not. That wasn’t the plan.”

“Well, I know that. Could there be another group doing the same thing?”

“I cannot imagine that.”

“How far has our friend traveled?”

“I don’t know, but I do not think very far. They are taking steps to isolate him.”

The man with the second voice thought a minute.

“That’s not good. They will increase security, put hospitals on alert, and get a head start on trying to find a remedy.”

“I know.”

“Well, it is a setback, but it is nothing we can’t handle. Keep me posted on what the Americans do.”

“I will. Have you confirmed whether our friend will be available for air travel?”

“Yes, it appears he will be a frequent flier.”

“That is very good indeed.”

“Have you found a remedy for our friend’s ailment?”

“Yes. Using the test animal, we have made a vaccine.”

“That is good. I have to go.”

“Talk to you later.”

“Bye.”

CHAPTER 24. NATIONAL SECURITY

USAMRIID, Ft. Detrick, Maryland

WITHIN 24 HOURS after Jacob Roessler from the C.D.C. determined that a new strain of the Ebola virus was alive and well in the State of Michigan, conference calls were frantically arranged between the scientists at the C.D.C. and the scientists and military brass at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases, or “USAMRIID,” the military’s Level 4 laboratory at Ft. Detrick, Maryland which was responsible for assisting the U.S. Army in defending the homeland from bioterrorism. The first debate concerned the question of whether to treat the Mackinac patients at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor or to quarantine them on Mackinac Island or at USAMRIID.

Bjorn Jendel, Senior Level 4 Director of Research for the C.D.C., a tall, blonde Swede with black rectangular glasses, was adamant that the patients remain at Ann Arbor.

“Gentlemen, I am one of the few people on this conference call who has actually seen the Ebola virus up close and lived to tell about it. When the Bundibugyo strain was found in Uganda, I went into the huts where the villagers had died, only wearing a cotton mask, long sleeves and rubber gloves, and I never contracted Ebola. That’s because every strain of Ebola found to date has been blood-borne, or borne by bodily fluids and secretions. It has never been airborne. Those patients have the best chance of surviving if we keep them at a top-notch hospital, with top-notch specialists, and maintain strict barrier protocols.”

Army Col. Dennis White with USAMRIID, a white-haired colonel with a tan complexion, was hundreds of miles away in Maryland, staring at disbelief into the speakerphone. White’s job was to protect Americans from terrorist bioweapons attacks. “Dr. Jendel, I could not disagree with you more. You haven’t finished running your tests yet and we will not know until tomorrow or the next day as to whether this bug is airborne. If it is airborne, and it goes through the ventilation shafts, it could hit everybody in that hospital. Hell, it may have hit people in the hospital already. If we have one relative in that hospital who catches this bug and boards a plane, we have a nationwide epidemic on our hands!”

“Col. White, let’s look at the facts,” said Jendel calmly. “We think

this bug came from Tanzania from these two monkey researchers. They boarded a plane in Tanzania and landed in Rome. We have no reports of patients with similar symptoms in Rome. Then they landed in New York. We have no reports of the virus in New York. Some of the people on that international flight to New York then boarded other planes to their hometowns. So far, the FBI has tracked about half of the passengers on that plane to their home towns. Neither those passengers nor anyone in their towns have reported symptoms indicating that the virus is present. The monkey researchers then traveled to Detroit. Again, the FBI tracked the passengers on that plane. No symptoms yet. No symptoms in Detroit. Then they went to Mackinac, where they got sick and vomited on the gastroenterologist and bled on the nurse. The emergency room doctor, Dr. Adams, went into help the gastroenterologist when the husband began crashing and undoubtedly came into contact with the black discharge from the husband's anus. His foot covers were drenched in the black stuff. The blood tests from the gastroenterologist, the nurse, and the emergency room doctor show that all three are infected with the virus. That indicates to me that this strain of Ebola, just like all other strains of Ebola, is borne by bodily fluids."

Jacob Roessler, who was seated next to his co-worker Murielle Winston, and down the table from Dr. Jendel, passed a note to Winston which read, "He doesn't know that!! We are still running tests!!" Murielle Winston passed the note back, and gave Roessler a facial expression which said, "I know, but what can we do?"

Dr. Ivan Berkhoff, a fifty year-old Infectious Disease specialist at the University of Michigan, was also hooked up on the conference call. "Gentlemen, this is Dr. Berkhoff. I am in charge of Infectious Diseases at this hospital. One thing you should know is that we have a special quarantine wing set up just for a scenario like this. Each of our ten rooms has its own ventilation system. The rooms are not connected with ventilation shafts. Even if this virus was airborne, it would not be spread to the rest of the hospital. When the Life Flight helicopter was in the air, the doctors on the helicopter called in and spoke to me and described the symptoms and the wife's concern that this might be a hemorrhagic virus. When the patients arrived on the helicopter, they were sent immediately to the quarantine wing out of an abundance of caution. Only myself, an emergency room doctor here at the hospital, and three other nurses

interacted with these patients, all while wearing surgical scrubs, cotton face masks and latex gloves. The C.D.C. folks got up here almost immediately, within a day of the patients' arrival, and kind of took over from there. They brought with them some kind of field test kit which allows us to test for the virus rather quickly through a blood test."

Jacob Roessler boldly spoke into the speakerphone from the C.D.C. "Where are the crew members from the helicopter?"

"They were tested and they show no signs of the virus."

"Dr. Berkhoff, have you and your team been tested?" asked Roessler.

"Yes, thank God, we have no signs of the virus in our blood. Thank you for asking."

Captain Roger Tsung, M.D., a young Asian scientist at USAMRIID, was with his boss. "Dr. Jendel, let's assume that this strain of Ebola IS airborne. Let us further assume that this strain is not contagious within a certain number of days, let's say the first seven days as an example. That would explain the lack of reports of sick people with the virus in Rome, New York, Detroit, and so on. The patients did not become contagious until day seven. Then they breathed on the Mackinac hospital staff, infecting them. Because the Ann Arbor staff wore masks, they did not get infected. If that were the case, that would explain all of our results, yet the pathogen would be airborne. Is that possible?"

Dr. Jendel considered. "Certainly, Dr. Tsung, that is a possibility, but I sincerely doubt..."

"And, Dr. Jendel, there is simply the possibility that there are infected people in other locations, and the doctors there have no idea what they are dealing with," said Tsung.

Murielle Winston spoke up next. "The C.D.C., upon learning that this was a strain of Ebola, sent an immediate e-mail and fax to every state health center, so I would think our health centers would at least be looking for this."

The President of the United States, Anna Scall, was present with the USAMRIID staff at Ft. Detrick and was listening to the dialogue and opinions.

"Has the Michigan Highway Patrol locked down Mackinac Island?" asked the President.

"Yes, Madame President," said Michigan Highway Patrol Director Ben Needles from his office in Michigan. "No one is getting in or out.

Those people are pretty unhappy up there. No one has told them what's going on. We are just saying it is a matter of national security."

"How soon until the C.D.C. finishes the tests to determine if the virus is airborne?" asked the President.

"One or two days," said Jacob Roessler at the C.D.C.

"Make it one," said the President. "We need those results immediately. Whatever resources you need, let us know, and you will get them."

"Absolutely, Madame President," said Roessler.

The President turned to Sheila Simms, the Director of Homeland Security, who was present with him in the conference room at USAMRIID. "Sheila, has the FBI interviewed this Monahan woman yet? Do we know for sure that this is not connected to terrorism?"

Simms looked at a file. "No, the FBI has not interviewed her yet because we have been trying to accumulate a file on her. That should be done within the hour. What we do know so far is that Kelly Monahan and her husband are in their fifties. They are legitimate chimpanzee researchers. They have written a few books. They have been teaching at the University of Michigan for over twenty years each. They have no criminal background. They are Lutherans and appear to have no ties to Al-Qaeda or any terrorist organization. The finances report is almost done but from what I understand so far, they are not in any financial trouble. They have a couple kids, all upstanding citizens. The only place they have been overseas, according to their passports, is Tanzania. From everything we know from interviews with their neighbors, they are a normal, boring, middle-aged couple. In short, I see nothing to suspect that they got this virus deliberately or intended to infect others as some form of terrorism."

The President seemed bothered by the answer. "Sheila, this woman has a fatal disease. She could be dead within an hour or two, and any information she has will be lost. Don't worry about having your file complete. Get someone over there immediately to interview her."

"Yes, Madame President," said Simms, perturbed that the President was schooling her in front of the others on the conference call.

"Where are we on a possible cure for this thing?" asked the President.

Jacob Roessler from the C.D.C. spoke next. "Mr. President, in July 2010, AVI Biopharma won a \$291 million DOD contract through the Transformational Medical Technologies Program to begin development of a possible cure for hemorrhagic viruses like Ebola and Marburg. The

drugs are called AVI-6002 and AVI-6003. In August 2010, trials were performed on rhesus monkeys. Sixty percent of monkeys infected with the Ebola virus and eighty percent of monkeys infected with Marburg were completely cured within fifteen days. I should mention that the Ebola strain used in the tests was the Ebola Zaire strain. As we know, the strain in Michigan is entirely new. AVI-6002 and AVI-6003 have not yet been tested on humans because they have not gotten FDA approval yet. However, in February 2011, AVI successfully completed the Rapid Response Exercise supported by TMT under the U.S. Department of Defense Chemical and Biological Defense program through Defense Threat Reduction Agency contract HDTRA1-09-C-0046. During that test, AVI designed and manufactured a novel RNA-based drug candidate against dengue virus in only 11 days. In May 2011, Phase 1 trials began to make sure the AVI drugs were not harmful to humans, and preliminary results from those tests are very good. For obvious reasons, no actual live tests on humans have occurred yet, but now may be the perfect time. If we could get a Fast Track waiver from the FDA, we could have AVI-6002 and AVI-6003 in the hands of the Michigan doctors overnight.”

“What does the C.D.C. think of these new drugs?” asked the President.

“We are very hopeful they will be successful, Madame President, and to date we have seen no harmful side effects,” said Jendel.

“That’s good enough for me. Sheila, get the FDA Director on the line with me after this call. We need a waiver for AVI immediately.”

“Yes, sir.”

“OK, we are going to get you those drugs. Administer them to the infected patients in Michigan, and then let me know immediately whether they get better. In the meantime, since Ann Arbor seems to have this thing locked down tight, I see no need to move these patients. In fact, I see more danger in moving them. No one who is infected gets out, and we try the best we can to cure anyone who is infected.”

Needles, the Highway Patrol Director from Michigan, spoke next. “Madame President, how long are we going to keep those people in Mackinac locked down up there?”

“As long as it takes. Bill, are you on the line?”

Bill Swift, the Governor of Michigan, stepped into the screen on the teleconference. “Yes, Mr. President, I am here.”

“Have you called out the Guard?”

“Yes, sir. The Michigan National Guard is already assisting law enforcement. Right now, they are making sure no one gets off the island and they are providing extra security at the hospital. But they await any additional orders you have.”

“Jacob,” asked the President. “If someone contracted this virus yesterday, could you tell that with a blood test today, or do you have to wait a certain number of days for it to show up?”

“Generally, within three days of contracting the virus, we can catch it in our field blood test.” The President considered that.

“Bill, how many people are on that island right now?” asked the President.

“We have about 500 permanent residents, and we estimate about 15,000 tourists,” said the Governor.

“OK, Sheila, what plans do we have to get out of this mess?”

Sheila Simms cleared her throat, and handed the President a folder with a Top Secret report inside.

“Madame President, we have developed a detailed plan for the people in Mackinac.

Step 1. Security. We maintain the National Guard and Highway Patrol lockdown of the island, letting no one in or out until further notice. We lock down the quarantine wing at the hospital. Again, no one but CDC and USAMRIID personnel, and the few Ann Arbor doctors previously mentioned, gets in or out. Anyone who has any contact with those patients is locked down in quarantine at the hospital.

“Step 2. Medications. We get the FDA Director to give an Emergency Fast Track Approval for the AVI drugs. We air ship them to the doctors in Ann Arbor. We have our CDC personnel in HAZ suits administer the medications to the patients at the hospital and see how they respond. If the results are positive, then we tell AVI to implement their Emergency Response Protocol and start producing as much of these drugs as we can.

“Step 3. Blood Testing. I think we have no choice but to blood test every single person on that island. We do not know who has been infected, whom they have infected, and whom those people have infected. Whether this is airborne or not, no one can leave the island until they have been tested and cleared. The problem, as you have pointed out, Madame President, is that you might have the virus for a few days before

it shows up in a blood test. So if we tested you, it might come up clean, when you really have the virus. So here is what we would propose: we send in USAMRIID and CDC personnel, as well National Guardsmen in HAZ suits to the island, and explain what is going on to residents. Then we set up two secured sites, one on the north side of the island and one on the south side. The southern site will be Fort Mackinac. It is an old eighteenth century fort with lots of buildings which is easy to secure. Each person on the island will need to go to Fort Mackinac for their first blood test. If they are infected, they are airlifted by helicopter out of the fort to Ann Arbor and treated like the other patients. If their test is negative, they are taken by ground transport by Guardsmen to Port Aux Pins on the northernmost edge of the island. We will set up temporary MASH tents there and secure the northern site. Anyone who has passed Test #1 is quarantined for seven days at the northern site. At the end of the seventh day, they get a second blood test. If they are clean, then they are taken by boat off the island. We continue this process until everyone on the island has been processed and is determined to be either infected or clean.

“If the person being tested is a local resident, they must first leave the island after being tested. Then, after the entire island has been cleared, they can return back to the island.

“We will also need HAZMAT teams to clean up the mess and all bodily fluids left at the Mackinac Hospital.

“Step 4. National Security. We need to make sure no one else enters the country with this virus. Therefore, we are recommending a quarantine of all persons coming into the country who have been in Tanzania. We also need to make sure all hospitals and clinics across the country are made aware of the symptoms and signs of this new virus and to contact the CDC immediately if they see any sign of the virus in any other part of the country. And then, Madame President, it will be up to you to decide what, if anything, you want to tell the nation about what has happened. My own feeling is that with all these people involved, the word is going to leak out eventually. I think it would be better if you addressed the nation so that they have all the facts. Again, that’s up to you.”

“Thank you, Sheila,” said the President. “Does anyone have any comments, criticisms, or suggestions regarding this plan?”

No one answered. “OK, I think this is as good a plan as any. Let’s implement Sheila’s plan immediately. I want to set up another conference

call tomorrow afternoon to discuss the CDC's tests on whether this is airborne. For now, you all have your assignments."

The President terminated the teleconference and turned to her Director of Homeland Security, whispering, "This is a real shit storm."

CHAPTER 25. TUNNEL

MATTEO GRACIANO, THE lead scientist on the terrorist team, went back to his lab to study the tissue samples under the microscope. He felt dull and cold. He knew the world would someday call him a monster, but he didn't care. His soul was dead. It had died a long time ago when he was just a child. His dark resolve was reprieved by a quick happy thought of the days when he was young. Graciano thought of his two brothers and sister, playing in a beautiful vineyard many thousands of miles away.

Three happy boys, laughing, stomped again and again in the wooden cask. Their feet were caked with wet, lime green mush, and grape skins stuck to their calves like leeches. They each wore no shirts, and little khaki shorts. Two of the boys were twins. The other brother was a year older. One of the twins shoved his doppelganger, throwing him into the green mush at the bottom of the cask. The fallen brother laughed, got up and wrestled his twin until he too was covered in juice. Their mother Liliya watched from their front porch, smiling and knitting. Their sister Marastina sat at their mother's feet, twirling a daisy in her fingers and basking in the sunshine of this beautiful day. She was the little princess, everyone's favorite, with long, curly black hair, dimples and big, blue eyes. The boys would run through the fields with their sister and play hide-and-go-seek. They would pull wildflowers and daisies and put them in her hair. There was nothing they would not do for her.

Graciano's resolve tightened again when his thoughts of happier times were interrupted by memories of the cruelty of the Serbian soldiers. He went back to his methodical work in the lab. He had to finish the work on the samples.

Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. 1991.

THE SOCIALIST FEDERAL Republic of Yugoslavia, a communist country established in 1963, was formerly located along the Adriatic Sea just across from the east side of Italy, with Greece to the south and Austria to the north. It was composed of six Socialist Republics, from north to south along the Adriatic coastline: SR Slovenia, SR Croatia, SR Bosnia and Herzegovina, SR Montenegro, SR Serbia and SR Macedonia. In 1984, the country's capital city, Sarajevo, was on the world stage as host

of the Winter Olympics. But in the years that followed, the country's pre-existing ethnic and religious conflicts came to a boil. The country had three principal ethnic groups, each of which hated the others: the Serbs, who were primarily Orthodox Christian like their Greek neighbors, and lived mainly in the south, the Croats to the north, who were primarily Roman Catholic, and the Bosniaks in the middle, who were primarily Muslim.

In June 1991, the northernmost province, Slovenia, declared its independence from Yugoslavia, causing a civil war. Shortly thereafter, Croatia, the next province to the south, declared its independence. In the Catholic country of Croatia, Serbs made up about 12 percent of the population. Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian leader who controlled the Yugoslavian Army, attacked Croatia, ostensibly to "protect" the Serbian minority living within Croatia.

None of this conflict had yet impacted the life of Yuriy Gurdic, a Catholic Croat, who lived with his wife and four children on a small farm in Makarska, a beautiful Croatian coastal town, nestled between the Adriatic Sea and the grand Biokovo Mountains. In 1991, Yuriy lived a peaceful and happy life with his family, growing grapes for a local vineyard. This area of the Mediterranean had warm, humid summers and mild winters. The weather, along with the rich red soil in the shadow of the Biokovo Mountains, was perfect for growing grapes. In fact, Croatia was the original home of the very first Zinfandel. Gurdic's sweet grapes were only used for white wines, and he was excellent at his craft. He taught the skill to his oldest boy, Debit, the twins Gegic and Rkatsiteli, and his daughter, Marastina. His four black-haired, big-eyed children were named after varieties of Croatian grapes.

Yuriy loved to stand out in the fields with his boys, looking at over a mile of wooden stakes and winding vines, with the big mountain rising on the horizon under a bright blue sky. He felt the vines in his hands and rubbed the soil between his fingers. He felt like he knew these plants as if they were family members. When he finished spraying the leaves with water, he would sit down among the plants, watching the pellets of water lingering on the leaves, lying there waiting to be absorbed into the veins of the shiny green leaves. His boys would love to smash the white grapes under their bare feet, pushing and shoving each other in the wine barrels, falling in the gooey grape mush below. Far away on the porch,

his wife Liliya would watch, with Marastina at her feet, knitting socks in her rocking chair.

For eight year-old Debit, and the seven year-old twins Gegic and Rkatsiteli, life in Makarska was a wonderful adventure. When they weren't helping their father, they liked to run. They would start out early in the morning, just as the sun peaked over the mountain, and run up into the hills. They hoped someday to be on their country's Olympic Marathon team. Debit sometimes ran by himself because he did not like the other two slowing him down, but running was a lonely sport, and it was nice to have his brothers along. Debit would often pick a seven-mile wooded route, which included a two-mile detour around a sunflower field. His brothers would run the five-mile route, without the detour, and the three would have bets between them as to who could finish first. Unlike most children their age, all three were very healthy eaters, enjoying the fish their father would bring home from the market. In the afternoon, they would help their father in the fields, and at night, they would listen around the fireplace as their mother told stories about Greek heroes. Debit was excited about his Communion ceremony, which was to take place in the fall. He had begun studying the Bible with his mother at night, preparing for the big day. Dinner was always accompanied by a bottle of wine. The boys had begun drinking wine at an early age.

The scientist who came to the fields in June 1991 called it the Grapevine Fanleaf Virus or GFLV. The scientist told Yuriy that GFLV is a virus which attacks grape leaves. It is spread by a small parasitic roundworm called a nematode. Yuriy Gurdic had never heard of this tiny creature or its virus. Years later, he would reflect that it was remarkable that a creature so tiny could be single-handedly responsible for wreaking devastation on his whole family and way of life. In 1991, the virus wiped out his entire crop. Although it was obviously not his fault, Yuriy was fired by the vineyard, and no one else in the town would hire him. Gegic, Rkatsiteli and their younger sister did not understand what it all meant, but Debit knew right away. It meant their family would not be able to eat. Debit was frustrated that there did not seem to be anything he could do to help his father. He had no idea how to cure a plant virus. Each night, he would watch his father's long face and hear his heavy sighs. Debit was distressed. There was nothing he could do to help his father. His mother often cried when she thought no one was looking.

Desperate for work to support his large family, Yuriy sought work in neighboring towns. He was unable to find a decent job until August 1991, when Yuriy's brother told him about a construction company that was hiring in Sarajevo, which was located in the neighboring province of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yuriy took the family's pickup truck, and towing a trailer of their worldly goods behind them, made way for Sarajevo. Debit, riding in the back of the pickup with his brothers, his wavy black hair blowing across his forehead, looked with longing at the green hills. Gegic and Rkatsiteli had long faces, too. They would not be able to run the hills anymore. They would have to leave all of their friends. Marastina huddled under a blanket in her mother's lap in the front seat and closed her eyes, afraid of what was ahead. Gegic started to cry, and Debit told him to be quiet. It would all be okay, he assured him.

Yuriy would be taking his Catholic family to a town filled with Muslims. His wife had never met a Muslim before and heard horrible stories from her own mother. But Yuriy assured her that Muslims were no different than anyone else. Yuriy did not fear reprisal from other ethnic groups in Sarajevo because Sarajevo long held the reputation as a center of religious and cultural diversity, and was once called the Jerusalem of the Balkans. If there was anywhere where multiple ethnic groups could live and work in peace, it was Sarajevo.

Yuriy got a two-bedroom apartment in the city, and he got a job as a carpenter. The boys did not like living in the city. There was nowhere good to run. The city streets were paved, and running for long periods on the streets gave them shin splints. The city was smoggy and dirty. They enjoyed the countryside, where they could run and play, and the sea, where they could swim and look for shells. But Marastina, their sister, liked Sarajevo enough, and enjoyed going on long walks through the city with her mother. Yuriy was like his sons. He missed the fresh air in his nostrils, the rich soil in his toes, and the feel of the grape leaves. This job was sheer drudgery. It was also frustrating building other people's homes when Yuriy could not afford a decent home for his own family.

During this time, Debit became convinced that the way to get out of Sarajevo and return back to their home in Makarsa was to solve the problem of the plant virus. He was convinced that if he found a cure for the plant virus, they could simply return home in the spring, spray some kind of insecticide, and then replant new grapes. So he obtained books from

the Sarajevo Public Library on biology, viruses, plants, and agriculture. Many nights he stayed up late, reading the books by candlelight, trying to figure out a way to cure the plant virus for the next year's crop. He ran in the mornings, but his stamina was not nearly as good as it used to be. The small family stayed in Sarajevo for seven months until the political landscape drastically changed.

On March 3, 1992, the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence from Yugoslavia, and all hell broke loose. Milosevic, citing the need to "protect" the Serb minority in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a province which was 32 percent Serb, sent his armies throughout Bosnia, on a quest to kill every Croat and Bosniak Muslim who was encountered. One of the first stops of Milosevic's army was Sarajevo. By early March, Serb paramilitaries reporting to Milosevic had established barricades and sniper positions near Sarajevo's parliament building, with the hope of assassinating Bosnian leaders. On April 5, 1992, Yuriy Gurdic, his wife Lilya, and his four children joined a crowd of 75,000 pacifists composed of all ethnic groups, and took to the streets of Sarajevo to protest Milosevic's actions. They waved banners and chanted for freedom and independence. As they got near the parliament building, Milosevic snipers who were perched in a tall building gunned down two of the peace marchers, Suada Dilberović and Olga Sučić, in cold blood. The crowd panicked and began dashing everywhere. Debit and Gegic got separated from their parents in the mad crowd. The two boys dove behind some construction barrels and hid for three hours, with the sound of gunshots ringing out over their heads. Yuriy and Lilya found their terrified youngsters just before dark and took them home. From that point on, the children were terrified to leave their apartment, and spent much of their time huddled in their bedrooms.

The international community was outraged by the sniper attack. On April 6, 1992, twelve European nations recognized the sovereign independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The United States followed the next day.

Undeterred by the international coalition of revulsion against him, Milosevic directed his army to press on, and began a siege of the capital city. Members of the Bosnian Army living in Sarajevo who were of Serbian descent abandoned the local military and formed a new army loyal to Milosevic called the Bosnian Serb Army, or VRS, which was placed under the control of a vicious and violent general named General Ratko Mladić.

Mladić's forces then captured the Sarajevo airport. On May 2, 1992, the new army established blockades of every entrance to the city of Sarajevo. They cut off roads, interrupted shipments of food and medicine, and shut off all water, electricity, and heat. The initial plan was to invade and conquer the city, but opposing forces inside the city were too great, so Mladić decided instead to wait out the occupants of the city, cutting off their means of support, forcing them to live in deplorable conditions, and shelling the capital city with hundreds of mortar shells each day. No building was safe. Walking in the streets risked slaughter from a mortar shell or a sniper's rifle. Certain streets were known by residents as "sniper alleys." No one could safely go to work, religious services, or school. Citizens were trapped like prisoners in their own homes, uncertain when a random mortar shell would hit their own house or apartment. Signs with the warning, "*Pazite, Snaiper!*" or "Beware Sniper" began appearing all over the city. One couple who was friends with Yuriy and Lilya Gurdic, Admira Ismić and Boško Brkić, were gunned down in the street by snipers when they attempted to cross barricades to get water.

Yuriy was one of the few people in the city who still came and went to a job. Because he was in the construction business, he was often called upon to work stabilizing buildings which had been attacked by mortar fire. For this hazardous work, the government gave him some limited food, usually some vegetables grown in gardens within the city. So he was able for several months to keep his family from the brink of starvation, but just barely. He could see families dying all around him. The city would not last much longer. His wife was growing increasingly desperate. When he returned home, he found his wife crying and his four children lying on the floor, dirty and exhausted from malnutrition. He had to do something.

One day in December 1992, Yuriy was working on the eighth floor of a building in the Dobrinja neighborhood, near the airport, on the outskirts of town. He was working aloft on a girder. This entire section of building had been blown apart by a mortar shell. One wrong move and he would fall eight stories below, but Yuriy had grown used to working at heights. The cold wind hit his cheeks. He was an iron stump of a man, solid, well-built, with big arms, buzz cut and a manly nose. Cold winds did not bother him. He reached in his pocket for his only food for the day, a handful of grapes. A soot-filled cloud of smoke enveloped the entire

town. What a great city this once was. He could not believe that his own President would attack their capital city. He put his hand on a blown out section of drywall, inspecting the work that needed to be done. As he stood on the beam, he could see all the Serbian tanks perched on the edge of the blockade barrier. As he scanned across the Sarajevo Airport below, he saw at the far end the rooftops of the neighboring village of Butmir. The Airport in the last few months had been won back from the Milosevic's Yugoslavian People's Army by the United Nations Protection Force, so the airport was safe, neutral ground. If he could just cross the airfield and get to Butmir, his family would be safe. The only problem was that the only route to the airport was across a large open meadow that was regularly targeted by dozens of Serbian snipers. Yuriy had heard of families trying to cross the field to avoid starvation who were gunned down by snipers, but a few people had made it at night. Ultimately, Yuriy knew he would have to cross that field some night with his family. He did not know how he would cross with a woman and four children and avoid getting shot.

He put the sour grapes in his mouth. They were terrible, nothing like his grapes. He thought of the warm, red soil in his home town, of tilling the earth with his plow. No wonder these grapes were bad. The soil here was probably terrible. Yuriy looked at the open meadow below, trying to figure out how to cross it safely. Then a synapse triggered. The soil. Digging the soil. What if they could build a tunnel under the field to the airport? What if he tunneled under the field and the airport runway all the way to Butmir? It couldn't be that far, could it? Yuriy was used to measuring distances, both from his work in construction and his experience in the vineyards. He gazed out across the runway again from his eight-story perch. Hell, it wasn't even a mile. Maybe three thousand feet from the edge of the field to the back side of the runway. Yuriy did some mental math. If they could get enough volunteers, the digging would probably take six months, tops. And if they could get some friends on the Butmir side to dig from there, it might only take four months. Where could they go in? Yuriy looked down. There, near the edge of the field, was a small two-story apartment building at the end of a dirt road. If they put the entrance to the tunnel in his garage, no one would see them working. They could bring out the dirt in wheelbarrows, just like *The Great Escape*, one of Yuriy's favorite movies. He could be Charles

Bronson, the Tunnel King!

Excited, Yuriy ran down the steps of the damaged building, out the entrance and down the street to his apartment building. Grabbing out some butcher block paper, he began to sketch plans for the tunnel's construction. Debit asked him what he was doing, and Yuriy explained his idea to his son, showing him the penciled-in plan for the tunnel's construction. Debit looked at the two entrances to the tunnel, one on their side of the meadow and the other on the far edge of the airport runway. Yuriy had drawn a straight line between the two points. Debit thought about the map for a moment and bit his lip. He was a very bright boy, and loved a good puzzle.

"I don't think you should have the tunnel go in a straight line like that," said Debit.

"Why not?" asked Yuriy, frowning. He was very excited about his idea. What did his son know about construction?

"Well, what if the Serbs find out about the entrances to the tunnel?" asked Debit. "Won't they figure the tunnel runs in a straight line, and then bomb along here to cave in the tunnel?" Debit took the pencil and drew X's along the line. "What if you built it like this?" Debit drew an L-shape, with the line going out wide from the first entrance at a 45 degree angle, and then back to the far entrance.

Yuriy looked at his drawing again. If they did not build the tunnel in a straight line, it would take much longer to build. But Debit had a point. The Serbs were bound to find out about the tunnel sooner or later. Yuriy took his pencil and erased the line he had drawn before. He rubbed his son's head of black hair and smiled at him.

"You are so smart! I like your idea! This is what we will call it. Debit's Tunnel!"

Debit glowed with pride at his father's praise. It was one of the happiest moments of his life. Yuriy finished the sketches and then turned in for the night.

Two nights later, in the kitchen of a small home near the airport, there was an important meeting. Tito Rahmanovic, Colonel of the *Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine*, or Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AbiH), liked Yuriy Gurdic's plan. He looked at the large map spread out across the wooden table. Wearing green army fatigues, a light blue shoulder patch with crossed swords, and a black beret, the white-

haired colonel pointed to a spot on the map on the far side of the runway.

“This is Bajro Kolar’s house.” He marked the spot with an X. “It is the closest house to the airfield. He has a wine cellar which is very big. That will be a perfect entry point from the far side. Three of our troops snuck across the field last night and spoke to Mr. Kolar and his eighteen year-old son. They are quite enthusiastic about the idea. It seems they have friends in the city, too. The ABiH can collect the wood and steel you need. Our soldiers have all agreed to work in eight-hour shifts, around the clock, to get this job done.”

Alija Izetbegovic, the President of the new Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was seated at the table in his wheelchair. He liked the idea, too. But would the tunnel fit a wheelchair?

“We need to make sure the tunnel is wide enough. You have a height of 1.5 meters. I think that should be sufficient. But your width is only 0.75 meters. That will certainly not fit a wheelchair. Some of our citizens are disabled. How will we get them out? And if we could fit the tunnel with wooden or metal rails, that would help. If we are going to ship supplies back through the tunnels, we will need to roll them on carts. If we have a rail system, it will make transport of supplies through the tunnel easier.”

The Colonel considered the request. “I think what you are saying makes sense, Mr. President. Dado, what do you think?”

The tall, skinny engineer with wire-rimmed glasses looked at the cross-sectional drawing of the tunnel. “Yes, of course, we can widen it to one meter, that will be fine. But there is a reason I made it only 0.75 meters. Just before you get to the half-way mark of the field, there is a live electric wire with tens of thousands of volts running through it. And on the other side is an oil pipeline. We do not want to get our people electrocuted or have the tunnel flooded with oil.”

The Colonel considered the problem. “Is there a way we could shield those without sacrificing the full one meter?”

“No, not really.” said the engineer. “We can put up a thin sheet of plywood barricading the cable, but it is still going to be very dangerous.”

“Any other place to go?” asked the Colonel?

“No, that’s it,” said the engineer.

“OK. We will just have to put huge warning signs there for people,” said the Colonel. “I have a tactical question,” said the Colonel. “You

have the tunnel going to the left here and then cutting back to the right. Why don't we have a straight line from the apartment complex to Kolar's house? It will take more time to build it your way."

Yuriy spoke up. "Here is why I drew it that way. We are going to keep a lid on this thing for as long as we can. But eventually, the JNA is going to figure out we have a tunnel. They are going to assume, as you just did, that we have a straight line from point A to point B. So they will shell the field at every point along that line, in the hopes of caving in the tunnel. If we go out to an angle like this, they will miss the tunnel."

The Colonel nodded his head. "I like it."

The men continued to talk about specifics of tunnel construction.

For the next four months, Yuriy, members of his construction crew, volunteers from the ABiH, and other strong, male volunteers from the town worked in eight-hour shifts digging the Sarajevo Tunnel, installing metal supports, shoring the sides with wooden timbers, and installing the metal rails along the floor boards. Gasoline lanterns hung on posts through the tunnel. Work on the far side proceeded at a slower pace, because volunteers intending to work on the tunnel from the Kolar cellar could only cross the field and the airstrip at night. The volunteers would dash about twenty feet and then hit the dirt, as beacons of light shined over their heads. Then they would dash another twenty feet and hit the dirt again. On two occasions during the four months that followed, volunteers were spotted with the lights crossing the field and shot with machine gun fire.

One night in early April 1993, Yuriy was working on the tunnel from the Dobrinja side, hacking away with his pick axe, when he heard a scraping noise. He stopped for a moment and looked at the wall of black earth in front of him. Suddenly the tip of a shovel thrust its way through the dirt towards him. Yuriy jumped back, astonished. He saw a small hole and heard noise from the other side. He yelled, "Is that you?"

"Yes!" the voice from the other side shouted. Furiously, the two men began scraping away the thin wall of dirt that separated them. Within twenty minutes, Yuriy was staring at another man with a shovel, covered in dirt. They gave each other a huge bear hug in the small space.

"Comrade, I have never been happier to see anyone in my whole life!" smiled Yuriy.

"And I you!" said the other man, laughing.

The two men shored up the remaining space with timbers. Yuriy then exited the tunnel on the Butmir side and walked all the way into the wine cellar. As he came out of the entry into the wine cellar, Bajro Kolar handed him a glass of white wine.

“Welcome to Butmir!” Kolar grinned. Yuriy tasted the white wine, which was far inferior to any wine he had ever made in his home town, but no wine ever tasted better than the wine he drank that night in Bajro Kolar’s cellar. Yuriy made small talk with Kolar for a few minutes and then walked back for an hour through the tunnel to the Dobrinja side. Excited that the tunnel was finished, he headed home to see his wife and children.

Guadalajara, Mexico.

TERRORIST MATTEO GRACIANO looked up from his microscope and smiled, as he remembered proudly his father’s work on the Sarajevo Tunnel and his brother’s hand in the design. Graciano was a better person then, he thought, a more moral person. He thought about his First Communion ceremony which had never come to fruition. He had never gotten to take the host in his mouth. Graciano thought of Jesus—healer, preacher, protector of the innocent. Innocent. Graciano thought about the word “innocent” as he went back to his work. The thoughts of guilt returned, but he pushed them back into a far corner of his brain.

CHAPTER 26. BRISTOL.

Clifton Antiquarian Club. Bristol, England.

CHARLIE WINSTON WAS buzzing with energy. He was going to be very famous soon, as his discoveries would reverberate around the country and the world. Today, he was in Bristol, England, where he would be giving his first lecture on the subject of his discoveries to an audience of scholars. When this speech was over, he would publish his findings in a new book. Doubleday had already given him a very healthy advance for the manuscript. Many of his friends were here, and this would be an entertaining weekend of scholarly discussions about American History. Winston was seated at the head table next to the podium, waiting for the Club's Chairman to introduce him.

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am John Waithe, the current Chairman of the Clifton Antiquarian Club, and it is with great pleasure that I welcome each of the scholars in this room to what I believe will be history in the making.” The sixty year-old Englishman was tall and thin, with a healthy head of white hair. His round, gold-rimmed glasses rested down on the edge of his sharp nose, giving the impression that the speaker could not decide whether he wanted his glasses on or off. He wore a tweed jacket, a slightly wrinkled blue-and-white pinstriped shirt, and a blue bow-tie. But what distinguished him today was his big smile. He did not seem to mind that his teeth were orthodontically imperfect and slightly yellow or that he was in the early stages of gum disease. He did not mind that the wrinkles around his eyes furrowed more when he smiled. Today was not a day to hold back. For a lover of ancient and antique things, especially antique things involving Bristol, today was a wonderful day.

Charlie Winston sat in the front row with his program, excited about the day's events. Each of the fifty-three scholars in the room had been invited to attend a “pre-viewing” of important new documents recently discovered by Charlie Winston in Seville behind the wall of the *Virgin of the Navigators* painting. The purpose of the meeting was to have the documents verified and interpreted by scholars before a public announcement was made to the rest of the world.

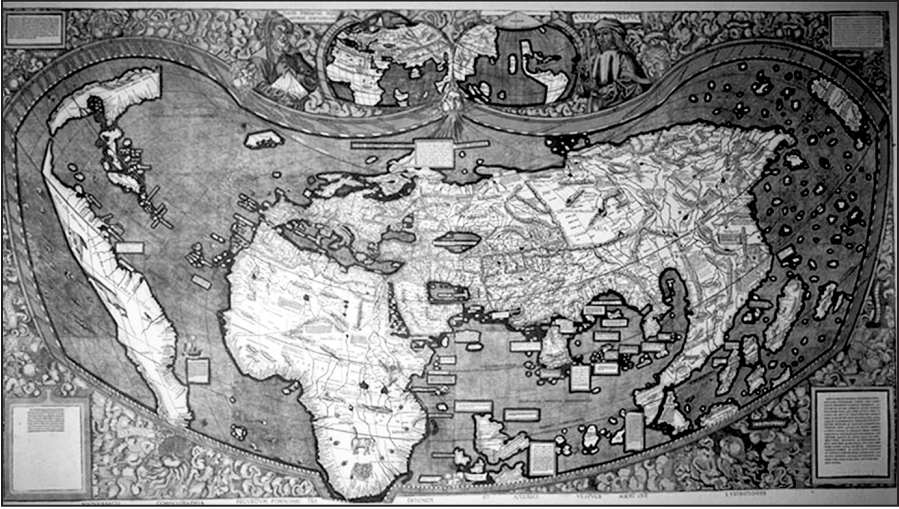
“As you may know, our Antiquarian Club was founded here in Bristol in 1884. Since that time, our society has been dedicated to the search for truth in history, especially when that history has anything to

do with England, or more particularly, Bristol. And today, we have a real treat—proof that our great little city of Bristol was the true birthplace of the Americas. We have been waiting for this day since 1908, when our former Antiquarian Club Chairman Alfred Hudd first posited the theory that Bristol was intimately connected to the discovery and naming of America. Over one hundred years after Alfred Hudd's first postulation, Emory University Professor Charlie Winston, in the great tradition of Indiana Jones, found a treasure trove of documents hidden behind a painting in the Alcazar in Seville, Spain. Those documents will prove, once and for all, that our history books have it wrong. But the full telling of the story belongs to the discoverer, so I would like to proudly introduce to you our good friend, noted scholar, and the man who is going to put Bristol back on the map, Emory University Professor Charlie Winston!"

The room erupted with applause. Charlie Winston took the podium, armed with his Mac Book Pro and some index note cards.

"Welcome distinguished scholars and thank you for inviting me here today. This is a story about a brave explorer, a wealthy benefactor, a violent murderer, and a sneaky schemer, all of whom played a part in the discovery and naming of America. Could we please turn down the lights?" The lights were dimmed and Winston began a slide show from his laptop. Winston tapped the microphone to make sure it was working, and then began the lecture.

"Our history books tell us that America was named after Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci. Why?" Winston paused for a few moments. "Why? There is only one document in the annals of time upon which this entire thesis is based. That is the so-called 'Waldseemüller Map,' written in 1507 by a German monk named Martin Waldseemüller. The map today sits in the Library of Congress, and it has puzzled historians for centuries. Here is a copy of it." Winston clicked his air mouse and a large black and white map appeared on the screen:



“This 1507 map, for the first time, lists the name ‘America’ on the South American mainland:



“When the monk Waldseemüller published the 1507 map, he included an engraving in which he wrote this glowing accolade of Vespucci.” Morse clicked the air mouse again:

Now that the regions are truly and amply explored, and another fourth part has been discovered by Amerigo Vespucci (as will be heard later), I do not see why anyone can prohibit its name being given the name of its discoverer Amerigo, wise man of genius, Amerigen, that is, land of Amerigo, in other words America, since Europe and Asia also took their names from women. Its location and customs of its people can be known easily in the account of Amerigo's four voyages that follow.'

Keep in mind that a monk in France living in a monastery would have no idea who discovered what. The only explorer hanging around the monastery giving an account of events was Vespucci, and no one was there to contradict him. Columbus was dead. John Cabot was dead. Why should the monk not believe Vespucci was telling the truth?”

“So what is strange about this map? Well, the first thing that historians have noted is that it would be quite bizarre to name a new land ‘America’ after someone whose first name was ‘Amerigo.’ The general rule of naming lands was that lands were named after the first name of royalty—for example, Charleston, Georgetown, Jamestown—but after the last name of a commoner. Vespucci was not royalty; like Columbus, he was a commoner. Why would anyone name a land discovered by a commoner after his first name instead of his last name? Let’s remember, did we call the district where our nation’s capitol sits the District of Christopheria? No, we called it the District of Columbia, after the last name of Columbus. So that naming has always seemed odd. If Vespucci really wanted the mapmaker to name the new land after him, why didn’t he suggest that he call it ‘Vespuccia’?

“The second strange thing about the Waldseemüller map is that it pretty accurately shows the Pacific Ocean, which would not even be discovered by Balboa until 1513, some six years later! How could a German monk who had never traveled to the New World so accurately depict the western coastline of the Americas and the Pacific Ocean when no one had ever traveled there before? There is only one logical answer. Balboa did not discover the Pacific Ocean. Someone else did, and it was

not Amerigo Vespucci.

“So how do we explain these two oddities on the Waldseemüller map? The answer that I have postulated for many years is that the famous explorer John Cabot was the one who actually discovered the Pacific Ocean, in 1499, some fourteen years before Balboa. I have suggested that Cabot wrote the name ‘America’ on his own maps, for reasons we shall discover shortly, and then Vespucci, in an act of thievery on the high seas, stole Cabot’s maps. Then when Waldseemüller saw the maps given to him by Vespucci, which were stolen from Cabot, the monk must have asked Vespucci about the name ‘America’ on the map. Vespucci, thinking quickly, and desiring to weasel his way into history, lied to the German monk and told him that the lands were named ‘America’ after him.

“Farfetched? Some historians said so when I first espoused this theory some ten years ago. But in the meantime, recent discoveries of centuries-old documents have finally proved this theory correct.

“Now, with your indulgence, I would like to set forth my own view of what truly happened. In the 1470s, Bristol was a fishing town, and the fishermen caught cod in the waters near Iceland. In 1475, seventeen years before Columbus’ famous voyage, the King of Norway issued a declaration prohibiting British fishermen from fishing for cod in Icelandic waters. This forced the men in Bristol to seek additional fishing lanes further to the west. In 1479, four Bristol merchants received a royal charter to find another source of cod. Two ships, the *Trinity* and the *George*, were launched in 1480 in search of cod in the Western Atlantic. There is evidence that these fishermen, between 1480 and 1491, landed on a small island off Newfoundland which they called ‘Hy-Brassyle,’ or sometimes just ‘Brassyle,’ named after the brazil wood which they found there. Today, we actually have a 1481 letter from a Bristol marine merchant with the initials ‘R.A.’ advising that he will be sending salt to his fishermen ‘at *Brassyle*’ to salt the codfish.” Winston clicked the air mouse and a picture of the 1481 letter appeared on the screen. “This certainly suggests that the Bristol fishermen had found Hy-Brassyle in America by 1481. There is additional evidence of this discovery. In 1490, the earlier ruling of the Danish King was reversed and the Bristol fishermen were once again allowed to search for cod near Iceland. But instead of returning to Icelandic waters, the Bristol fishermen declined the offer, telling the King of Norway that they no longer needed to fish for cod near Iceland.

That probably means that the fishermen found a more abundant supply of cod in the Western Atlantic.

“Now that brings us to the hero of our story, Venetian explorer Mr. Zuan Chabotto, or as he is known by his Anglicized name, John Cabot.” The professor adjusted his blue bow-tie and took off his blue blazer, putting it over a chair. He clicked the air mouse for another slide, and John Cabot’s picture came up.

“John Cabot was a great person. Now there is a man we should name a holiday after. John Cabot was born in Genoa, Italy. Cabot’s family moved to Venice when he was a small boy. Venice at that time was the epicenter for sailors. If you wanted to learn how to be the pilot of a ship, this is where you learned. John Cabot was a poor young man from a poor family, but he excelled at navigation and ship piloting. Cabot’s hero was Marco Polo, and he longed to find a passage to the west from Europe which could lead all the way to the island of Japan, where he believed there would be gold and spices galore. In 1480, at the age of 30, he moved with his wife and three children to Bristol, England. Now Cabot couldn’t sail a ship in Bristol right away because he didn’t have any money. So he worked for a rich Bristol cod merchant named Richard Amerike. Remember that man who wrote the letter in 1481 about salting the cod, who had the initials R.A.? Well, that’s him. That was Cabot’s boss, the man who was signing the paychecks.”

“How do we know that Richard Amerike was Cabot’s boss? In 1908, Alfred Hudd, then the Chairman of this Clifton Antiquarian Club where we sit today, found pension records kept in Westminster Abbey which affirmatively show that Amerike paid Cabot’s pension. So that is an established fact.

“Cabot worked for this cod merchant in Bristol down at the docks, loading the smelly cod fish off the boats, grinding it out, day after day for eleven years. Now you can be sure that in those eleven years, as he is working down at the docks elbow to elbow with the Bristol fishermen, he hears their stories about this place called Hy-Brassyle, this new land across the Atlantic Ocean. He is dying to emulate his hero Marco Polo and take a ship over there to check it out. Finally, in the eleventh year, in 1491, he finally saves enough money to build his own ship, called *the Matthew* after his Venetian wife Mattea. After one unsuccessful trip in 1491, he began his voyage to the New World in 1494.

“We know, of course, that Christopher Columbus set sail in 1492, as our grade school textbooks told us, but—and here is the important part—he did not land on the American mainland. He landed on Santo Domingo (the modern day Dominican Republic), on Cuba, and on some of the Caribbean islands. Assuming de Huelva did not get there first, Columbus can take credit at most for being the first European to land on those islands in the Caribbean Sea—but that’s it! He cannot claim credit to being the first European since the Vikings to land on the American mainland, because he wasn’t. The laws of discovery at that time were that when a navigator discovered an island, that entire island belonged to that navigator’s country. So Santa Domingo, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands, being discovered by Columbus, became the provinces of Spain. But by 1492, Columbus had never reached the mainland of America, so that ‘island’ did not belong to Spain and was still fair game. In fact, Columbus would never hit the American mainland until his third voyage in 1498. In the meantime, John Cabot beat Columbus to the American mainland by landing in Newfoundland in 1494. So it was John Cabot, not Columbus, who can lay claim to discovering America.

“After Cabot returned to England after his 1494 voyage, he decided upon a more ambitious voyage to chart the eastern coastline of this new land to the west. So he applied to the English King Henry VII for a Royal Charter. King Henry VII granted the Charter in 1496, but there was one catch—the King would not finance the journey. Cabot would have to pay for the trip himself. In order to get funding for the brave new venture, which would involve sailing much further than ever before, Cabot had few choices. He did not know any wealthy bankers. The most reasonable explanation is that Cabot turned to his wealthy cod merchant friend and former employer, Richard Amerike. Amerike was happy to finance the journey because it could have led to information about additional fishing lanes. I postulate that Cabot, an honorable man, must have agreed to name any new lands which were discovered after his friend Mr. AMERIKE.” Winston clicked the mouse and a slide with the name “AMERIKE” in capital letters appeared. Winston clicked the mouse again. “Is the name ‘Amerike’ sounding familiar? This is a drawing of Richard Amerike’s merchant seal.” A circle appeared on the screen. Inside the circle, were letters going around concentrically. The letters around the merchant seal spelled “A-M-E-R-I-C” and then returned to the same “A.”

“AMERICA,” said Winston triumphantly. “There it is.” The professor paused a few seconds for effect. “America. America was named NOT after Amerigo Vespucci, but after the wealthy cod merchant Richard Amerike.”

Charlie Winston looked out on the crowd, expecting to see surprised and impressed looks. Instead, he saw a lot of frowns. Most of the scholars were not buying it. Well, truth is stranger than fiction, he thought. He would just have to convince them.

CHAPTER 27. SREBRENICA

April 1993. Sarajevo.

THE NIGHT AFTER Debit's father completed construction of the underground tunnel, Debit was sleeping on an old mattress laid out of the floor of the apartment. Next to him on other mattresses were his two twin brothers and younger sister. Suddenly, he felt a firm pushing on his shoulder.

"Wake up!" his father whispered.

"What? Huh?" asked Debit, confused.

"Debit, get up!"

Debit sat up in bed. His brothers and sister sat up on their mattresses, too, confused. It was 3:00 a.m.

Yuriy handed each of the children a knapsack. "Each of you fit some clothing into these sacks. You should have at least three changes of clothes and underwear. Only bring what is absolutely essential. We are leaving Sarajevo tonight!"

"Tonight?" asked Debit. "Are we going through the tunnel?"

"Yes, we are going out tonight with the President himself! Because the tunnel was my idea, the President is letting our family go out of the tunnel first. It will be dangerous, but if we make it to Butmir, then we will be free again!"

Marastina put her arms around her father's neck. "Daddy, can we bring B.J.?"

B.J. was her pet turtle. Yuriy looked at his daughter lovingly. They shouldn't bring a pet. It would only get in the way. He started to say no, and then his daughter said, "Please, Daddy! B.J. will be too scared if we leave him all alone here." Yuriy looked at his daughter's big brown eyes and turned to putty.

"Of course we can bring B.J.," said Yuriy, smiling. But I want you to know this journey will be very difficult, so we may have to leave B.J. somewhere along the way. But if we have to leave him, we will give him to a nice family, so that he is not lonely."

His daughter smiled and hugged her father tight. The boys began packing immediately, and Lilya packed her daughter's things. When the family was ready with their backpacks, Yuriy tucked a gun into the back of his waistband. Lilya looked at her husband, frowning, but knew that

it might be necessary. When they closed the door of their apartment, it was dark and cold. Other than an occasional gunshot in the distance, the city was quiet as a tomb. The family of six quietly hiked their way across the paved streets, being as careful as they could to avoid sniper alleys, and hugging the sides of buildings. When they had to cross a street, Yuriy held his daughter close to his chest and dashed across the street, pausing to stop on the far side. He asked his daughter to please be as quiet as a mouse, because it was very dangerous. Marastina tucked her head into her father's chest, afraid to look. After going about a mile, while they waited in an alley to cross the next street, they heard a gunshot ring out about a block from them. Then they heard a scream. The twins were terrified. Yuriy looked down. Rkatsiteli was crossing his legs, holding his manhood. He had wet his pants and looked embarrassed. Yuriy put his daughter down and hugged his son. He looked him in the eye, and said, "It is OK, Telly. Do not be afraid. Daddy will protect you."

"I peed in my pants, Daddy."

"That is OK, son. Grown men do that, too. We will get you changed later tonight. Right now, you have to focus and be brave, can you do that?"

"Yes, Daddy." Rkatsiteli stuck out his chest like a little soldier.

"That's my boy."

Yuriy picked up his daughter again and the family dashed across the street to the next alley. Yuriy thought of the *Sound of Music*, one of his other favorite movies, and thought for a moment that he felt like Captain Von Trapp evading the Nazis. As they got to the end of the next alley, a young man met them, and escorted them down the dirt road to the small apartment where the tunnel entrance was located. When they got inside, the President of Bosnia, in his wheelchair, and his wife, were waiting for them, along with about ten other families and about forty loyal Bosnian troops. Yuriy introduced his sons and daughter to the President, who greeted them with strong handshakes.

"Debit, what we do tonight we do for our country. I am proud to have you with me on this journey."

"Yes, sir," said Debit, star-struck at meeting the President.

Some of the Army soldiers went in first, followed by the President and his wife, and then Yuriy's family. The tunnel, which looked like a coal mine with its thick wooden timbers framing the pathway every

five feet, glowed from the red gasoline lamps hung on wall hooks. The tunnel angled downward at a slope, which was difficult for the President's wheelchair, but a strong soldier held the back of the wheelchair, making sure it did not go careening down the shaft like a rollercoaster car out of control. After a ways, the tunnel straightened out. It was stiflingly hot in the tunnel. Yuriy's family quickly stripped off their coats and carried them. Marastina carried her turtle in front of her, assuring B.J. that everything would be okay. The tunnel was only 3,000 feet long, less than a mile, but with the slow pace of the President's wheelchair, and the occasional stops to make sure they were not making too much noise, it took over an hour to get through the tunnel. By the time they got near the exit, Yuriy was drenched in sweat. Debit and his brothers, who had good endurance from their lifetime of running, were holding up fine. When they finally took their first steps into the wine cellar on the far end, Lilya was elated and hugged her husband. For the first time in a very long time, she saw real hope for her family.

The group ascended the stairs and, with soldiers keeping a careful lookout, walked into the windy streets of Butmir. Debit noticed that none of the buildings were damaged, and he took this as a welcome sign. Yuriy's family, along with the other ten families, walked to the far edge of Butmir, where they met a farmer with a large open-bed truck for carrying produce. He was going to transport them safely away from Sarajevo. The men, women and children got into the back of the truck, and the farmer covered them all with a burlap cover. The truck rumbled north and east through Bosnia for several hours. Yuriy's family was finally free!

When they stopped for gas, the farmer went to the back of the truck and took off the cover. He was convinced they were in a safe area now. Yuriy asked the farmer where they were going.

"We go to Srebrenica," said the man. Yuriy was worried when he heard the destination.

"Srebrenica? I heard that the Serbs have attacked there."

"Yes, there have been many attacks, but three days ago, the U.N. declared the Drina Valley of Bosnia a 'safe area' under U.N. protection."

"The U.N., have they sent soldiers to protect Srebrenica?" asked Yuriy.

"Yes. You can recognize them by their light blue helmets."

"Are they Americans?"

“No, mostly Dutch at this point, although we hear on television every day that President Clinton will be protecting us. When he ran for President, he promised he would protect Bosnia, but so far all we have heard is a lot of talk. Bush, Clinton, they are all the same, these Americans. A lot of talk and no action. Same goes for the British. We have almost three hundred towns in northern Bosnia wiped out by the Serb Army. These Serbs, they are animals. They rape the women. They take the men and boys, line them up and slaughter them all with machine gun fire. They are as bad as the Nazis.”

“How many are in Srebrenica now?”

“Over 50,000. People are coming here from everywhere.”

“We are from Makarska in Croatia. Is there any way we could get transport there?”

“Not unless you have a death wish,” said the farmer. “The Serbian Army is everywhere. They have every road closed. Srebrenica is the only safe place to go.”

Yuriy went to the back of the truck and told his wife the news. He assured her with a smile that everything was going to work out, but inside he was not so sure. A half hour later, when the big produce truck finally rumbled into Srebrenica, Yuriy was shocked at what he saw. The village was in ruins, the result of months of mortar shelling. People lined the streets everywhere. Dirty people with filthy faces and filthy bodies. Debit looked around and was distraught.

“Father, I thought we were finally going home? What is this place?”

“This is only temporary, Debit. Soon, the Americans will come and save us.”

“How long do you think we will have to stay here?” asked Debit. Lilya looked at her husband for the answer. She did not want to stay either.

“A month or two, I would think. Pretty soon the Americans will get involved, and when that happens, Milosevic will retreat. The Serbs would be no match for the American armies. They are the best in the world.”

Yuriy and his family stayed in a burnt out building, with no rooms, no furniture, no appliances, no electricity, and no running water. There was no work to be had. Yuriy’s family, like the other refugees, relied on donations of food and water from the U.N., the Red Cross, and humanitarian organizations. B.J. the turtle died within the first month at

Srebrenica. Within the next month, Serb forces began cutting off supplies to the city. Relief donations came in shorter and shorter supply. There was no way in or out of the city.

Yuriy and his family lived in poverty and desperation within Srebrenica for the next eighteen months. Lilya complained bitterly and often to Yuriy that they should have never left Sarajevo. They should have never left Makarska, for that matter. For his part, Yuriy's once bright outlook turned dark and bleak. Like his wife, he too, had a bitter outlook. It was not his fault they left Makarska. It was that damned virus. If it weren't for that little bug, his family would be living the high life in Makarska. And Yuriy, becoming ever more cynical, blamed the Americans. Those goddamn Americans. They knew the situation here. They had satellites, for Christ's sake. What was taking the Americans so long? He prayed every day that the Americans would get involved. He saw that as their only hope. Debit often heard his parents' complaints. Although he did not understand much about Americans, he learned from his father that Americans were to blame for all of this. Them and that stupid virus.

Debit spent his days running across the city, looking in vain for food. Occasionally, he arrived just as a new shipment of food would arrive. Debit would stand by the truck with over a thousand other young boys and men and dive for the chunks of bread being thrown from the truck by the Dutch soldiers. When he snagged a few pieces of bread, he would sprint madly back to the building to give the food to the family. For Debit, he hated these Dutch U.N. peace keepers much more than the Americans. He would often hear them talking by their trucks, smoking cigarettes. "No teeth? A mustache? Smells like my ass? Meet Miss Bosnia!" Graffiti on the walls sprayed by the Dutch said things like "Bosnian women smell like pigs." He was convinced that these Dutch soldiers did not give a damn about the people starving in the town.

On July 11, 1995, the Serbian Army began massing at the edge of town. The Serbian Army, directed by General Ratko Mladic, marched into Srebrenica, determined to exterminate the Bosniak Muslims in the village. While Yuriy and his family were Catholic Croats, he knew the Serbs would make no distinction. Yuriy quickly gathered his family and, along with 20,000 to 25,000 Bosniaks, fled to the nearby town of Potocari, where the U.N. had established a supposedly protected refugee camp. The July heat was stifling. There was very little room. Panicked

civilians smashed their way against the soldiers, hoping to be protected.

Yuriy gathered with his family and hundreds of other refugees behind an equipment shed inside the compound. Debit, the twins, and little Marastina were huddled together, absolutely terrified. That night, Serbian soldiers with guns went through the crowd, grabbing men and boys away as their wives and daughters screamed and pleaded. At 2:00 a.m. that night, Debit saw haystacks only a few hundred feet away which were burning. He crawled away from his parents to the edge of the equipment building to get a better look. In the light from the haystack fires, he saw rows and rows of men being led out into a field. What were they doing out there? Why were they all standing in a line? Then he heard a volley of machine gun fire, and all the men went down. Then he saw the Serbian soldiers walking away, laughing. Standing about fifty feet away from the Serbian soldiers were three Dutch peacekeepers, standing there smoking cigarettes and doing absolutely nothing. Debit had never seen violence that up close and personal before. Shaking, he sprinted back to his father and told him what had happened. Yuriy told Debit not to leave his side again.

The next day, on July 12, 1995, stories began spreading through the camps. Did you hear about the two Serb soldiers who took a Bosniak woman's legs, raised them in the air, while a third soldier began raping her? Yes, a fourth one put a rag in her mouth and took his turn. And the Dutch soldiers were just laughing! Yes, and what about those three boys found shot to death behind the red barn? One woman, Ramiza Hotic, told the story of a young woman with a baby on a bus to Potocari. The baby cried and a Serb soldier told her that she had to keep the baby quiet. The baby kept crying so the soldier grabbed the baby and slit its throat! Another woman, Zumra Sehomeric, told how Serbian soldiers had raped a nine year-old girl, and when her mother complained and tried to fight, they shot her in the head and cut her head off. Zumra had been in shock all morning after seeing the incident. These type of stories continued all day. Later that day, word began to spread about something called the White House, where men were taken in mass groups to be shot.

Yuriy could not believe the Americans would allow this! Where were their planes? Where were their soldiers? Yuriy tried to rack his brain to think of a way out of this. The edges of the compound were covered in chicken wire. He could probably get through the fence, but there was a good chance he would get them all shot. He could try and kill a Serbian

soldier and steal his uniform, and drive out, but that, too, was incredibly risky. He decided to wait out one more day to see if a more strategic alternative presented itself.

That night, while his parents slept, Debit, Gegic, and Rkatsiteli decided to go on a scouting mission. They were too terrified to sleep. Debit figured if they snuck around the camp, they might be able to find a way out. The three boys were fast runners, so they could speed across the streets and fields quickly in the dark without being seen. Over near the southeastern edge of the camp was a place where there was a little hill which dipped down and then up. The chicken wire went straight across, leaving a small gap at the bottom of the wire which Debit was sure they could crawl under. Serbian soldiers guarded the fence, but this area appeared to be a blind spot between sentries. The three brothers silently crept on their bellies under the wire and then sprinted across a field another two hundred yards to the edge of a forest. Debit became convinced that this was their family's way out. He motioned to his brothers to be quiet, and the three boys ran back to the spot in the fence. Just then they heard, "Who's there?"

They hit the deck and pressed their bodies to the ground. Each of the boys suppressed his breathing so as not to be heard. A flashlight went over their heads a few times as they heard the sound of footsteps coming toward them. They stayed deathly quiet and heard nothing but crickets. They waited what seemed like an eternity to make sure the guard was not standing near them. When Debit was confident the soldier was gone, he silently led his two brothers back under the wire and across the field back to the place where his parents were sleeping. It was still dark when they got back. As they crept to the edge of the equipment shed, Debit peered around the corner and saw soldiers talking with his father. Debit immediately pulled back around the corner, his back pressed against the corrugated metal of the shed. "Shhh!" he whispered to his brothers.

Both Serbian soldiers wore green military fatigues and black berets. Each had a rifle slung over his shoulder. The first man was skinny and tall, over six foot, with a mangy brown beard and a gourd-like nose that looked crooked. The second man was shorter, maybe five foot ten, with a baby-like face, squinty eyes that were set far apart, and a gap between his front teeth. Yuriy was slumped down against the wall of the shed under a blanket, holding his daughter quietly in his lap. Lilya leaned against his

shoulder. Yuriy did not look up, afraid to make eye contact with the men. The tall soldier said, “You, Get up!”

Yuriy did not move, pretending not to hear the soldier. The tall soldier smashed the butt of his rifle into Yuriy’s shoulder, making him wince.

“You Muslim pig! I said get up!”

Yuriy put his daughter in Lilya’s arms, stood up and faced the soldiers. “I am not Muslim. Our family is Catholic.”

The smaller soldier slammed the butt of his rifle against the side of Yuriy’s head, then he talked close to Yuriy’s face.

“Did I ask you to talk, you filthy Muslim piece of shit?”

Yuriy’s rage boiled to the surface. He wanted to snap the guard in two, but he knew if he did, it would not end well for his family. Around the edge of the shed wall, Debit and his brothers watched in anger as their father was mistreated. But they were too scared to move.

“No, you didn’t,” said Yuriy, gritting his teeth. The tall soldier tied Yuriy’s hands together with a small rope, while the other soldier held a gun to Yuriy’s head.

“You’re coming with us,” said the tall soldier, grabbing Yuriy by the neck of his shirt. Lilya knew what that meant. He would be taken out and shot. She had to do something. Lilya knew what perverted pigs most of these soldiers were. She had heard the tales of rapes in the camp. If she had to be violated to save Yuriy and Marastina, it would be a price she would have to pay. She looked her small daughter in the eyes and told her to close her eyes and go to sleep. Marastina did as her mother told her and curled underneath the blanket. But she wasn’t asleep. Lilya stood up and faced the soldiers walking away with her husband.

“Wait! I will make a deal with you for my husband’s life.”

The two soldiers turned around and looked at the woman. The taller soldier left the prisoner with his comrade and walked back to Lilya. He looked her up and down and then put the back of his hand on her cheek.

“Lilya, no!” yelled Yuriy. “I will be okay!”

“Well, said the tall soldier, she is filthy and disgusting, but if she needs a real man to satisfy her, who am I to deny her?” He grabbed her around the waist and put his scratchy beard on her cheek, laughing. Then he grabbed her by the hair and started to walk towards the edge of the shed where the three boys were waiting. When Yuriy saw that, he exploded. He kned the small guard in the groin, who doubled over and dropped

his rifle. Yuriy dove for the weapon on the ground and tried to focus the gun to shoot it, but his hands were tied together. Before he could get off a shot, the tall soldier pulled out his rifle and put two slugs into Yuriy's mid-section. As Yuriy lay on the ground holding his chest desperately and coughing up blood, the tall soldier walked over and stood over Yuriy, and put one final rifle shot into Yuriy's face, killing him.

Liliya said nothing. She could not think. She was dazed. She ran over and dove on the ground near Yuriy's fallen body, running her hands through his blood-drenched hair. She wanted to say something, like "No!" but her vocal cords were paralyzed. She loved her husband so much. He could not be gone.

Around the corner of the shed, all three boys had seen what had happened to their father. Gegic started to cry out, but Debit clamped his hand over his brother's mouth to silence him. The boys were also in shock. Their father was gone. All Debit wanted to do was to shoot a bullet into that soldier's brain.

Liliya began to cry, but the tall soldier was not finished. "Now that you don't have a husband, you Muslim whore, I would like to take you up on your offer." With that, the tall soldier grabbed Liliya's arm. Liliya was enraged and tried to scratch at the soldier's face but he punched her hard in the face. "You don't touch me, you bitch!" He held her down on the ground and pummeled her in the face several times. When Marastina, peeking from her blanket, saw that, she ran over to her mother, yelling "Mommy!" The soldier wheeled around and struck Marastina in the head with the butt of his rifle. She fell back to the ground and did not move.

"MARY!!" yelled Liliya. She fought and struggled as hard as she could but the soldier was too strong.

Debit and his brothers began crying when they saw that. They knew if they tried to help their sister or their mother, they would be shot. There was nothing they could do.

Then the soldier began dragging Liliya toward the edge of the equipment shed. He was obviously planning to rape Liliya. If the boys did not move quickly, they would be seen. There was a large oblong metal tank here, possibly for water or gas. The tank abutted the wall on this side of the shed. Debit pointed and the three brothers dove behind the tank just as the soldier rounded the corner with their mother. He walked about ten feet, right toward the tank, and then threw Liliya down on her

bank so that her head hit the side of the wall. When Liliya hit the dirt and turned her head to the side, she saw her three boys behind the tank only feet away, and her eyes grew wide. Debit made a motion to his mother as if to say he was going to help her, and Liliya immediately furrowed her eyebrows, as if to warn them no, don't move! As the soldier took off his belt and pants and bent down to lie on top of her, he laid down his rifle to the side, where it sat on the grass about five feet from where the boys crouched. The soldier smashed Liliya in the face again and entered her.

This was too much for Debit. He crept behind the edge of the tank, only feet from the soldier. Silent as a grave, he picked up the rifle, turned off the safety, snuck two steps behind the soldier and shot him twice in the back. The soldier made a gurgling noise and fell on top of Liliya, bleeding. Debit stood over him and plugged him one more time in the head, just as the soldier had done to his father. Moments later, the shorter soldier came running around the edge of the shed and Debit shot him in the chest, knocking him to the ground.

"Come, Mama!" said Debit, "We know a way out! We can get there if we hurry!"

"I must go back for Mary!" cried Liliya. "Debit," she said, holding her son's shoulders. "Marastina and I are not going to make it. We are too weak. We will get you killed. You are all fast runners. Run as fast as you can away from here and don't look back. You are my babies. I love you so much! Now go, quickly!"

"Mama, we cannot go without you!" sobbed Debit.

"You must! Now go!"

Debit wiped his tears, watching his mother limp around the edge of the shed in search of their sister.

Rkatsiteli looked at his older brother. "What should we do, Debit? I am scared!"

Debit was the man in the family now. "We must run, Telly. Let's go!"

The three boys sprinted through the darkness towards the place in the chicken wire wall where they had found an opening. Waiting first to make sure the coast was clear, they dashed with beating hearts across the open field into the woods, trying to forget what they had just seen. They ran for three straight hours that night, never stopping and never looking back, afraid, like Lot from the Bible, that if they turned around

for even a second, they would be turned into a pillar of salt. They spent the next three months running, hiding in sheds, dodging behind fences, and camouflaging themselves in the high weeds as tanks and transports rumbled by them on the dirt roads. In October 1995, the boys made it from Bosnia into Croatia. Once inside Croatia, they found an abandoned house with food, and this sustained them for several weeks. In November 1995, a peace accord was signed and the war was over. The boys heard the news over a radio in the house. They walked twenty miles to the closest town and asked if anyone knew of a Catholic church nearby. When they found the church, they explained their plight to the priest. Within two months, a Catholic charity working in Croatia helped the boys to obtain refugee status and flew them to Tennessee in the United States. A social worker interviewed the three boys and explained to them that they were going to be separated and placed in foster homes, with the hope of later being adopted. Debit strongly objected. His brothers were all he had left. He could not leave them, but the social worker explained that they did not have anyone who would adopt all three of them together. The only way to remain in the United States was to be split up. The next day, the vans would come to take the boys away.

In their last night together, the three boys huddled together in the refugee dormitory in Memphis. Debit had a plan. In seven years, on Christmas Eve, when the twins were eighteen, and Debit was nineteen, they would all find a way to get back to Memphis. Where would they meet, Rkatsiteli wanted to know. The only place Debit had heard of from the social workers in this place was something called “Graceland.” Debit did not know what that meant, but he knew it was somewhere here in Memphis. On Christmas Eve, they would come back to Graceland. And they would be together forever after that.

Debit was placed for adoption with a family in Seattle. Rkatsiteli went to Cleveland. Later, his adoptive father relocated due to his job, and the family moved to a small town in Germany. Gegic went to St. Louis. They learned to speak English, read every book they could get their hands on, and learned how to work computers. They each excelled in school, but even though their adoptive families were all quite nice, each of the boys harbored an incredible amount of rage for the people responsible for what happened to their father, mother, and sister. And they would never forget.

On Christmas Eve, 2002, the three boys met in Graceland. In the long seven years they had been apart, Debit had channeled his rage into a plan of revenge. When he shared the scheme with his brothers, they agreed to the plan—a plan involving a virus far more lethal than the crop virus that had changed their lives.

CHAPTER 28. CONTAINMENT

Present day. Mackinac Island, Michigan.

CEDRIC MURPHY WAS panicked. He had driven those sick people to the hospital seven days ago. The man had been coughing and throwing up all over the place, and Cedric had been the one to hose out the golf cart. He surely had contracted the virus. What else would explain his red eyes and symptoms?

The government had begun testing at Fort Mackinac. Cedric had received his number for testing. Judging by how high his number was, and how slowly the testing was going, he would not get seen for two or three more days. Cedric was certain that would be too long. He was convinced that he was infected and needed immediate medical help. He tried to convince the government workers in the HAZMAT suits at Fort Mackinac that he was infected and needed to go to the head of the line, but they had their procedures, and some scary looking Army guys with guns had told him to back off. He had to wait his turn.

Cedric was not going to die sitting here on this rat hole of an island. Why had he taken this stupid job to begin with? His mom thought he might meet a respectable girl on the island. What he had met, instead, was the Ebola Virus. Of all the luck, he thought. The one person in a zillion who contracts the Ebola Virus on American soil chooses his golf cart to go to the hospital. What are the odds of that? Gotta be smaller than getting mauled to death by rabid gophers, he thought. He laughed for a moment. Rabid gophers. That would be funny. His matted red hair stuck to his forehead. It was hot. How could he get off this fucking island?

Then he thought about the Wave Runners. The hotel had six of them down by the docks. And he, Cedric, was one of the few people with access to the keys. The more he thought about it, the more convinced Cedric became that the Wave Runners were his only way out. He would ride across the Straits to the mainland and then go to a hospital. They would have to treat him if he got that far. Cedric coughed and a spray of blood hit the dirt by his feet. He felt like his guts were melting from within. His stomach felt red hot.

That night, Cedric, dressed in a black shirt, black baseball cap worn backwards, and black Adidas sweatpants, silently crept down to the marina. He used his keys on the padlock by the chain link fence and then

walked down to the docks. The Wave Runners were tied to the docks, in a series of slips. The keys were kept in a padlocked wooden locker bolted to a post by the third slip. Cedric used his keys to open the locker and took a set of Wave Runner keys. Then he went to the blue Wave Runner and checked the gas. There was a full tank. Cedric slid the ropes off the posts on the pier and jumped on the blue Wave Runner. As he gunned the motor and pulled away from the marina, he heard some commotion and yelling far away on shore. He didn't stop to look back, but gunned the Wave Runner to full throttle and took off into the channel. It was hard to see at night, but Cedric had ridden the Wave Runners at night before.

Cedric rode for about ten minutes until he got to the opening where the bay dumped into the Straits of Mackinac. He drove for about a half hour more when he saw the Mackinac Bridge. He pointed the Wave Runner straight to the shore. He looked at his fuel gauge. He did not have much left, but he would probably make it to shore. As he gunned the vessel forward, when he was several hundred feet from the shore, he again saw movement along the shoreline, and within a short time, saw a blue police strobe dart from the docks. He soon recognized that this was a U.S. Coast Guard or Michigan Water Patrol motorboat. He knew the motorboat was faster, but he had a significant head start. He powered the Wave Runner at full throttle, smashing up and down along the waves, and kicking up a considerable wake. As he got close to the shore, he heard a loudspeaker and wailing siren behind him.

"Stop! This is the Michigan State Water Patrol! Do not proceed to the shore! Surrender your vessel immediately!"

He ignored the warning and continued his sprint to the shore.

"I repeat, stop! If you do not stop, we will shoot you!"

Shoot me? The police are going to shoot me? For riding a Wave Runner at night? That's stupid, they are not going to shoot me, he thought. Cedric powered the Wave Runner with another thrust, now only twenty feet from the docks.

"This is our last warning! Stop or we will shoot!"

Cedric continued forward and two shots rang out, hitting him in the left shoulder and neck. He fell off the Wave Runner, sinking down into a red pool of death. The official cause of Cedric Murphy's death listed by the coroner the next morning was drowning. No one would ever know that he was executed by his own police force.

White House. Washington, D.C.

“YES, MADAME PRESIDENT, we can confirm that this strain of Ebola, which we are calling Mackinac Ebola, is definitely airborne.”

“You are joking me.”

“No, ma’am, I am not,” said Jacob Roessler, from a speakerphone at the C.D.C.

“I thought Dr. Jendel was certain that Ebola is never airborne,” said the President.

“Madame President, this is Dr. Jendel. Obviously, Madame President, I was wrong. This is a unique strain we have never seen before.”

“This is a nightmare. Are you absolutely sure?”

“As certain as we can be, yes, ma’am. We conducted animal studies and the disease was able to spread through the air.”

“How easily can this spread? How close do you have to be to get it?”

Jacob Roessler spoke up. “If you are in the same room with someone, and you are standing a good distance away, you probably will not catch it. If you are wearing a mask and gloves, you probably will not get it. So, for example, we have determined that there is a possibility, but not a high likelihood, that the disease can spread through an air duct, for example. Most air ducts have filters, and these molecules are stopped pretty easily through filters. It spreads kind of like the flu. If someone coughs on you, or breathes on you very close, or if you shake their hand or something, you can catch it. Obviously, it also can spread through bodily fluids, as we have seen.”

“Then why do we have no reported cases in New York or any of the other cities?” asked the President.

“It is what Captain Tsung suspected. The disease is not contagious in the first seven or eight days. After that it is highly contagious,” said Roessler.

“The good news, Madame President,” said Colonel Dennis White of USAMRIID, “is that we have successfully isolated this thing to Mackinac Island. Thank God those chimp researchers went to an island for their vacation, or we could be looking at a global epidemic.”

Sheila Simms, the Director of Homeland Security, opened a file. “Madame President, we know this thing started in a small town in Tanzania. We have successfully locked down all flights coming into the

U.S. from Tanzania. Our European Allies have done the same thing.”

“So we have no reports of this virus anywhere else but in Mackinac Island and in the hospital at Ann Arbor?” asked the President.

“That is correct,” said Col. White.

“What about the people in Mackinac? How many are infected?” asked the President.

Governor Bill Swift of Michigan spoke up. “We have had only ten reported cases, and all of those patients have been flown to the hospital in Ann Arbor and are in the quarantine wing there. Blood tests are proceeding on schedule, and it will take another two or three days to finish those, but I think the numbers are going to be small, Madame President. We did have one unfortunate eleventh case last night. It appears that a hotel employee who had contracted the virus got impatient and stole a hotel Wave Runner, trying to make it to shore. He was stopped before he got there.”

“What do you mean stopped? Where is he now?” asked the President.

“The Water Patrol shot him, Madame President. He was twenty feet from shore. He ignored police commands to stop. If he got away, he could have caused an epidemic in our state. We had no choice.”

“You shot him?! Oh my God, you have to be kidding me! Where was the security at the hotel? Listen, Governor, I want you to secure and confiscate every motorboat, Wave Runner, pontoon boat, rowboat, kayak and paddle on that goddamn island right now! I thought we were clear on this—no one gets in or out. Jesus! He was shot! What have you told the relatives?”

“The coroner has listed his cause of death as drowning,” said the Governor.

There was a pause in the room. A cover up was obviously not good. But shooting one of our own citizens? The President thought for a moment, and decided, as a politician, that she would let this one sit in the Governor’s lap. If it blew up, it was his mess. He was a Democrat, after all. The President said nothing and changed the subject.

“Where are we on confirming that this has no connection to terrorism, Sheila?”

“Our agents have talked to Kelly Monahan before she passed, and she confirmed what we thought. She was a chimpanzee researcher. She had no connections to terrorist groups. It seems clear that she contracted

it from an infected monkey. But we have boots on the ground and assets in the air right now en route to Tanzania. We will conduct a thorough investigation so we can make sure this bug never gets to our shores again.”

“How are we on a cure?”

“Madame President, this is Dr. Berkhoff, Infectious Disease Specialist at University of Ann Arbor. After we got an FDA Fast-Track for the experimental drugs, we have been treating the infected patients with AVI-6002 and AVI-6003. For the one patient who was in Day 2 of the disease, the drugs were a complete cure. For the four patients in Day 7 and over, the drugs provided no help whatsoever. For the five patients who were in Days 4, 5 and 6 of the disease, the drugs at first appeared to provide some help, and then after several days, the virus won out, and the patients succumbed.”

“Is there a vaccine we could develop which would immunize everyone?” asked the President.

“I don’t know. You would have to ask the drug company. But I think it would take quite a bit of time to develop.”

“Sheila, we need to get the researchers from AVI Biopharma on the line and get them working on a vaccine. I want a vaccine that we can use on everyone in the country.”

“Yes, Madame President. Will you be addressing the nation any time soon?”

“I want to wait two or three more days until the testing in Mackinac is done. Then we will know where we stand. If the crisis is over by then, I will be able to reassure everyone.”

“Madame President, I don’t mean to second-guess you,” said Col. White, “but we need to know right away if anyone has caught this thing in any other city. If you address the nation now, and if someone in Omaha or wherever has this thing, we can quickly get them treated with the AVI drugs before it spreads. If we wait, who knows what we could be facing.”

The President considered White’s comments. He had a point, but the best evidence now was that the disease was contained in Mackinac and Ann Arbor. If she waited, the crisis could be over by the time she addressed the nation. It was a tough call, but she decided to wait.

“Thank you, Col. White, I always welcome contrary opinions. But my decision stands.”

The President disconnected the call and then privately met with

Sheila Simms in the Oval Office.

“Madame President, this kid on the jet ski that they shot. That concerns me.”

“It concerns me, too, Sheila, but I think the Governor can probably defend his men’s actions, considering the crisis and the possibility of a nationwide epidemic. I think most Americans are going to sleep easier knowing that the kid never made it to shore. On the other hand, if worse comes to worst, I am throwing the Governor under the bus. Those were state Water Patrol agents, not the U.S. Coast Guard. No way I am taking the blame for that.”

“I see what you mean,” said the Director of Homeland Security.

“Who do we have on the ground in Tanzania? Do we have a good team?”

“Our CIA Field Office in Egypt already sent three men and they are in country in Tanzania right now, keeping their eyes open. Then today, we will be sending a special team consisting of Jacob Roessler, Bjorn Jendel and Murielle Winston from the C.D.C., Captain Roger Tsung from USAMRIID, and Senior Agent James Pond from CIA.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding me,” said the President.

“What?”

“He is a spy for the CIA and his name is James Bond?”

“It’s Pond, with a P. And yes, he has obviously heard that joke before many times. His friends in the Agency call him Double-0-7. He goes by Jimmy, not James. Anyway, he is black, 6 foot 4, 32 years old, born in Uganda, nothing but muscle, speaks English, French, Spanish, Arabic, and Swahili, as well as the native Indian language of Gujarti. Has six years of field experience in African countries. He is the best man for this job.”

“Why no Special Forces?”

“At this time, there is no indication of terrorism at all. So really what we need is not soldiers but investigators and scientists. We need to know where this thing started, how far it has spread, and what is the best way to contain it. We believe this team will be able to handle it. If we need more forces later, we can always add them.”

“Does Col. White like the team?”

“Yes, he does, Madame President.”

“OK, that’s good enough for me. When will they be in Tanzania?”

“They are going out this afternoon on by jet. When they get near

Tanzania, they will go in by helicopter. They should be on the ground very late tonight.”

“OK, I want round-the-clock updates on everything, Sheila.”

“Of course, Madame President.”

“And can you get me an executive summary regarding everything we know about the Ebola virus. I want to be fully educated about not only Mackinac Ebola, but all kinds of Ebola. I have a feeling in the days ahead, I am going to have to answer a lot of questions about this thing, and I want to know what I am talking about.”

“Yes, Madame President, right away.”

The President looked out the window, lost in thought. “I have good friends in Michigan. I pray to God this crisis will be over in a few days.”

Skype call between a laptop in the United States and one in Guadalajara, Mexico.

“IT LOOKS LIKE our friend is not leaving Michigan.”

“That’s very good news.”

“It appears there is some help for our friend in the first two days, but after that, he is out of luck.”

“That is also good news.”

“But they are working on a permanent solution.”

“How long ‘til they get it?”

“I would guess at least four to six months, maybe a year, but I would not delay. For everything to work, we must act fast.”

“That is no problem. We have our own solution here. And it has been successfully tested. We are in production now.”

“Will we meet the deadline?”

“Absolutely. We are on schedule.”

“I have to go.”

“See you soon.”

CHAPTER 29. SCHOLARS

ONE OF THE professors seated in the front row raised his hand.

“Yes, Jim?” asked Winston.

“Charlie, we’ve heard these conspiracy theories before. While I agree with you that the Waldseemüller Map is puzzling, where is the evidence that Vespucci stole Cabot’s maps?”

“Well, Jim, we know from ship logs that Vespucci accompanied de Hojeda on his voyage to the New World in 1499. In August 1499, de Hojeda reached the Gulf of Coquibacoa, or what we now know as the Gulf of Venezuela, and it is here that de Hojeda’s ship logs reveal that they encountered ‘*certain Englishmen.*’ Since John Cabot and his crew were the only Englishmen at that time cruising around South America, we can be relatively sure that the Englishmen which were encountered were John Cabot and his crew.

“The next piece of evidence is the Juan de la Cosa Map from 1500, which many of you have seen before.” Charlie Winston hit the air mouse and a new green and tan colored map appeared on the screen. “Juan de la Cosa was the cartographer on de Hojeda’s ship. The Juan de la Cosa 1500 Map shows the eastern coastline of the present-day United States, and all along the coastline, there are English flags. We actually have the de la Cosa Map because it was rescued by Napoleon from the Vatican Archives, where it had been hidden for over three hundred years. But the pressing question is: How did Juan de la Cosa know about the Northern settlements in 1500 when none of the Spaniards had ever been there before? How did he know about those settlements when the only person who could have known about them was John Cabot? There is only one reasonable explanation. De Hojeda captured Cabot’s ship, and then de Hojeda, Juan de la Cosa, and Amerigo Vespucci took Cabot’s maps.

“And then we come to the documents recently discovered in Seville. There are two pieces of evidence there which are relevant. The first is a page of a shipping log written by Amerigo Vespucci, which seems to corroborate the theory that de Hojeda murdered Cabot.” Winston clicked the air mouse again. “In this log, Vespucci writes:

Today we encountered an English ship piloted by Zuan Chabotto, a Venetian. As he was Italian, I acted as interpreter. After frank discussions with Captain de Hojeda, the

Englishman graciously gave us copies of all of his charts and maps, for which we are profoundly grateful. Chabotto's ship and crew looked quite ragged, and I would not be surprised if they never made it back to English port."

And then several days later there is this entry:

Today we reached the Island of Boyuca in the Bay of Veragua. One of the men became ill in the mind and jumped overboard. Unfortunately, we were unable to save him.

"Really? Cabot just turned over all his navigational maps, just like that, to his Spanish competitor? And what were these frank discussions with de Hojeda? De Hojeda was many things, but an orator and a diplomat he was not. He knew one thing, and that was violence. And what about this mysterious crewman, never named, who suddenly goes insane and jumps overboard? Really? Does that sound believable to you? The more likely story is that de Hojeda killed Cabot's crew, stole his maps, and then dumped Cabot overboard.

"But the final clincher is the August 1499 Cabot Map, part of our discoveries in Seville." Winston clicked the air mouse. "This is the Cabot Map. We have carbon-dated the document and experts have performed a handwriting analysis. It is genuine. This handwritten map was written by John Cabot in August 1499. And as you can see, for the very first time, we have the word 'AMERICA' written on the North American coastline, scribbled from Florida to North Carolina, as well as on the South American continent. And down at the bottom of the map, there is this dedication:

'With all allegiance to R. C. O. R. Ameryk, patron of the Matthew.'

"R.C.O. stands for Royal Customs Officer. Richard Amerike, also spelled Ameryk, was a Royal Customs Officer. *The Matthew* was the name of John Cabot's principal ship which was used to sail to the New World. We now have affirmative proof that America was not named after the schemer Amerigo Vespucci. In fact, as our Antiquarian friend Alfred Hudd suggested over a century ago from the halls of this very society, America was named after the Bristol fish merchant and Royal Customs Officer Richard Amerike. And you will also all note that this 1499 map

also shows the Pacific Ocean on the western side of Panama and South America, proving once and for all that John Cabot, and not Balboa, discovered the Pacific Ocean.”

One of the scholars raised his hand.

“Charlie, what is your theory as to how these maps got behind the wall of the Alcazar?”

“Amerigo Vespucci was obviously pulling a fast one on the monk Waldseemüller. He didn’t want the monk to see the original of the Cabot Map, or that might expose him as a liar. So he took the 1499 Cabot Map, the Vespucci ship logs, and other important documents and entrusted them to his nephew Juan Vespucci, who hid them. At the time of Juan Vespucci, John Cabot’s son Sebastian was on trial for dereliction of duty. If he was acquitted, he might be returned to his post as Piloto Major, and, as such, would have the right to review all charts and maps, as well as the original of the Padrón Real. Juan Vespucci knew that Sebastian Cabot would be most interested in learning the part that his father John Cabot had played in the naming of America, his discovery of the Pacific Ocean, and his death at the hands of de Hojeda and Juan Vespucci’s uncle. If Sebastian Cabot got his hands on those records, his uncle would be exposed for the map thief that he was. And Cabot, the foreigner, instead of his uncle, would get the credit for naming the New World. So Juan Vespucci had the records hidden, in a painting that he commissioned. And they have remained behind that wall for over five hundred years.”

Another scholar raised his hand.

“Yes, Manny?”

“Charlie, your theory obviously relies upon the notion that Vespucci was, at the very least, a complete liar. Do we have any evidence in the record that Vespucci was less than trustworthy?”

“Yes, Manny, plenty of evidence. We know from Vespucci’s book as well as de Hojeda ship logs that Vespucci went along with de Hojeda in 1499 and visited Hispaniola, Trinidad, and Venezuela, all of which had been previously visited before by Columbus. There was nothing special about this trip in terms of discovery. But Vespucci sent letters back to Florence, falsely claiming that the 1499 voyage had been two years earlier, in 1497, a blatant lie which was intended to give him credence as one of the early discoverers of land in the New World. However, his lie was exposed when the bloodthirsty pirate captain, de Hojeda, admitted under

interrogation that Vespucci was lying. That's pretty sad when even the murdering pirate is more honest than you. Other claimed voyages by Vespucci were also shown to be exaggerated or complete forgeries. For example, of the four supposed voyages of Vespucci to the New World, Vespucci tells us in his book that two were under a Spanish flag and two were under a Portuguese flag. For the two voyages under the sponsorship of Portugal, there is not a single mention of any of the voyages of Vespucci in any of the Portuguese archives. One historian noted that in the 82,902 chronological records and in the 6,095 chest-records, there is not a single reference in the Portuguese records to a voyage of Vespucci. So he was lying about those voyages. With that kind of credibility record, is it any wonder that he lied to the German monk and hoodwinked him into telling the world that America was intended to stand for Amerigo Vespucci?"

The same professor in the audience spoke up again. "Charlie, what do you make of Waldseemüller's later map in 1516? That one omits the name America and calls the territory Terra Nova and Terra de Cuba. And the Pacific Ocean is omitted. South America is shown joined to Asia. That is a pretty big reversal by the monk in nine years. What do you think happened?" Winston had an answer for that, too.

"To give him credit, the monk Waldseemüller appears to have later figured out that Vespucci was an exaggerator. As Manny correctly notes, the monk made a new map in 1516. This map omits the name 'America,' calling the lands Terra Nova and Terra de Cuba, which I believe was an attempt to strip Vespucci of naming rights. In the writings accompanying the 1516 map, Waldseemüller appears as though he has seen the error of his ways and is correcting the earlier map. We can see what happened here. Waldseemüller was probably made aware that Vespucci was not giving him the whole story and was exaggerating his role in different discoveries. Believing, then, that everything Vespucci had shown him—even the part about the Pacific Ocean—had been false, Waldseemüller 'corrects' the map and tries to eliminate the errors, not realizing, of course, that the part about the Pacific Ocean was actually correct.

"And although Waldseemüller tried to blot out his error, since so many copies of the first map had already been published, the name 'America' had stuck in the public lexicon. And forever more, the two continents would be known as America."

"But in our history books, we never see anything about this treachery

of Vespucci and his blatant attempt to steal the naming of America away from John Cabot and the cod merchant Amerike, and that's because Vespucci was successful in getting history re-written to suit his own selfish purpose. Are there any other questions?"

There were no other questions. Waithe took the podium again and thanked Winston.

"Very well then, I can see that our ancestor Alfred Hudd was finally proved by history to be correct. I encourage you all to review all the materials and give us your comments." Waithe stepped down from the podium and went down to greet each of the professors who had attended the meeting.

The scholars each went to the main table to pick up their zip drives. Each had brought a laptop and was given space at a long table to review electronic copies of the documents which were on display in the cases. After about an hour of review, the parties broke for lunch, and the Antiquarian Club served—appropriately—Bristol cod. Winston chatted about the new discoveries with excitement as the scholars munched on cod, a vinaigrette salad, and green beans.

After lunch, as Winston was mulling around shaking hands, he was greeted by UCLA Professor John Morse. Morse had thinning gray hair, a salt and pepper beard, and kind brown eyes. Morse handed Winston a Georgia peach. Winston looked at his hand, perplexed, and then looked back at Morse with a quizzical expression.

"My son says you are fond of fruit!" joked Morse.

Winston made the connection. "Ahhh, John Morse in the flesh! You know, when your son Zach is awake in class, he is pretty smart. Must take it from the old man," Winston laughed. "I read with great interest your Nostradamus book. Did all of that really happen?"

"You know what they say," said Morse. "Truth is stranger than fiction. Like your discovery of those logs in the Alcazar. What an exciting discovery."

"I guess we both have a little Indiana Jones in us," said Winston. "By the way, did your son tell you that he and I had a 'rap-off' in class? I think I won, but Zach is plotting his revenge."

"He drives me crazy with those things," said Morse.

"Well, the boy has talent," said Winston, laughing.

"Charlie, I was thinking of taking Zach with me on another adventure,

and I wondered if you would be interested in tagging along.”

“Oh really, what kind of adventure?”

“Well, I got the idea after reading some of the material discovered in Seville. I would rather not go into it here. Can we have dinner tonight and discuss it?”

“Well, sure. But you can’t leave me hanging until dinner, John. Give me a hint. What’s this all about?”

Morse smiled like a happy grandfather about to give his grandson a Christmas present. “I can’t tell you. But it is every bit as interesting as the naming of America.”

Winston was intrigued. “OK. Let me get my coat.”

CHAPTER 30. HOT ZONE

Helicopter. Somewhere over Africa.

SEATED ON BENCHES in the back of the Boeing CH-47 Chinook were Jacob Roessler, the dark-haired Italian-looking C.D.C. scientist, who was wearing khaki shorts, tennis shoes, and a plain brown T-shirt; Captain Roger Tsung, the tall and thin Asian scientist from USAMRIID, who was wearing green combat fatigues and Army boots; Bjorn Jendel, the Swedish, long-haired, blonde Senior Level 4 Director of Research at the C.D.C., who was wearing a short-sleeved button-down white Oxford and khaki shorts; Murielle Winston, who wore jean shorts, an olive green tank top, and dark green CDC ballcap; and Jimmy Pond, the muscular black C.I.A. agent who was leader of this Task Force, who was wearing black Adidas gym shorts and a bright Royal blue soccer jersey. Royal blue was the color of the Tanzanian national football team. At each person's feet was a duffel bag of gear, including an orange RACAL Field Suit. The thundering reverberations from the Chinook's rotors made it difficult to hear, so the team members had to raise their voices when addressing each other.

"Doc," yelled Pond. "Tell me about this new bug. How easy is it to catch?"

Dr. Jendel disliked having to talk loudly, but he obliged. "Dr. Winston and Dr. Roessler here are our resident experts. Murielle, why don't you answer that?"

The brainy investigator pushed back her wire-rim glasses on her nose and addressed the team. "This new strain is different from any other strain of Ebola we have seen. All other versions of Ebola were spread with bodily fluids like blood and saliva, or transmitted through sexual relations. But we believe this new version can spread through the air, much like the flu. If you have any kind of mask on, and you do not touch an infected person, you probably will not catch it. But we are not taking any chances. If we find a hot zone, we are going in with full suits."

"I understand it is not contagious for like six or seven days, is that right?" asked Pond.

"Our evidence on that is merely inferential," said Winston. "We infer that from the fact that there have been no reported cases of the disease spreading at any of the places the chimp researchers went on their way home, but it did spread once their disease was full blown. But the best

evidence we have right now is that is correct.”

“My arm feels like a pin cushion from all those immunization shots I got. What were all those?” asked Pond.

“We had the shots, too. We have tried to immunize ourselves from diseases we know about in Africa, but we do not have a vaccine for Mackinac Ebola yet, unfortunately. But we have brought along bottles of AVI-6002 and AVI-6003. According to the minimal data we have, there is a good chance that these drugs can arrest the disease within the first two days of contracting it, but after that, no such luck.”

“You ever been in a Hot Zone, Doc?”

“Yes,” said Dr. Jendel. “When the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola hit Uganda in 2007, I was on the team that went into the Hot Zone. Entire villages ripped apart by this thing. It was like they were hit by an invisible bomb, but all the huts were still standing. We went in with just paper masks and rubber gloves and we were fine. Buggy Ebola—that’s what we call the Bundibugyo strain—is not airborne. This new bug is like Buggy Godzilla. There is no scientist in the world who has ever walked into a Hot Zone with an airborne Ebola.”

“Are you scared, Doc?”

“I am scared shitless, but as they say, that’s why we get paid the big bucks.”

Jacob Roessler laughed. He knew their salaries were incredibly modest.

“What about you other guys? Have you ever been in a Hot Zone?” asked Pond.

Roessler shook his head. “No, I have never walked into a Hot Zone in the field, but our C.D.C. Research Labs have Level 4 pathogens like Ebola, so our labs are Hot Zones. You talk about being scared. Last year, I was handling a slide under the slicer, and my hand slipped, the bit on the slicer went clean through my suit, and both layers of gloves, cutting my hand. I was absolutely terrified, but nothing happened. I had myself checked and I was fine.”

Tsung nodded his head. He had never cut his suit or any part of his body. Tsung liked to pride himself on his precision. While the pathogens scared him, he knew that rigid adherence to protocol was his best line of defense. Tsung was a quiet person, and chose not to speak.

Roessler was equally interested in Pond. “So your name is James

Pond and you're a spy. How many jokes have you gotten over your name?"

"Too many to count," said Pond. "And I don't ride around in underwater cars and kill super-villains with ray guns on tropical islands. Most of what we do is pretty routine stuff."

"Have you ever had to kill anybody?"

"Well of course," Pond laughed. "How do you think I got my 'Double-0' rating from Her Majesty?"

Roessler and Winston laughed at the joke, and Roessler decided not to press for a real answer.

"Where are we going once we hit the ground?" asked Winston.

"Ujiji. It is a coastal city along Lake Tangayika about ten miles south of Kigoma. Ujiji was the base camp for the Michigan primate researchers Professors Bill and Kelly Monahan. We are going to find their base camp and start from there. The woman also told one of our agents that they ate at a fish restaurant called the Ujiji Fish House. We will want to check that too. They probably got this disease from an animal. Chimpanzee is the best bet, but you never know."

"I have never heard of Ebola spreading from a fish," said Jendel.

"For that matter, I have never heard of it spreading from a chimpanzee," said Roessler. "Our most active hypothesis is that Ebola comes from the Egyptian fruit bat. I suppose it is possible that a bat bit a chimp. Since we know it is airborne, I suppose a sick chimp could have breathed on one of the researchers."

"Funny thing, though," said Agent Pond. "We asked Kelly Monahan about sick chimps, and she said all the chimps they interacted with were healthy, and they did not handle any chimpanzee cadavers. We also asked if any of the chimps bit them and she said no."

"Well, it's as good a place to start as any," said Tsung.

Just then, their helicopter pilot waved his arm, motioning to the men that they would be landing soon. Just below them was a soccer field outside the city limits of Ujiji. The Chinook was heading down.

Their first stop in Ujiji was the Monahan base camp. The secluded camp was desolate. They looked around and could find nothing of scientific value. Agent Pond bribed some locals to trap some chimpanzees. For the next four days, the scientists anesthetized chimpanzees and then tested their blood for the Mackinac Ebola virus. All of the tests came back negative. This, of course, told them nothing. There were thousands

of chimpanzees in the mountains. Just because these forty came back negative did not mean that there wasn't a carrier monkey running around with the virus. The scientists also looked for any caves nearby the Ujiji camp where bats might nest and they could find none.

While the scientists continued testing chimpanzees, Jimmy Pond went to the Ujiji Fish House and was surprised to see that it had closed. Pond talked to some of the locals and learned that the owner of the fish house had suddenly disappeared. After dozens of interviews, Pond was finally able to find one citizen of Ujiji who knew where Sunny Temoha, the owner of the fish house, lived. As he approached the ramshackle wooden structure with blue-painted wall boards and the tin roof, and opened the front door a crack, Pond encountered an incredible stench. He had smelled that smell before. Swarms of flies circled around him. He shined his flashlight across the walls and finally onto the floor. There, in the middle of the room, was a grossly disfigured and decayed dead body. The dead eyes were completely blood red, staring out in a trance. Thick black vomit covered the floor. Pond immediately slammed the door closed and grabbed his radio.

"Unit 2 to Unit 1 over."

"This is Unit 1," said Roessler on the other end.

"We've got a live one."

"Where? In Ujiji, a few blocks from the fish house. Meet me at the fish house and I will take you over. Bring your suits. I think we have found our Hot Zone."

While he was waiting for the scientists to arrive, Pond found the first man who had steered him to the Fish House owner's house. He spoke to him in Swahili. The man was skinny and old, with a face full of wrinkles and a friendly smile.

"Was Sunny the only one who worked at the Fish House?" asked Pond. "Did he have employees?"

"No, only Sunny."

"Where did Sunny get his fish from?"

"From Lake Tanganyika."

"OK, sure, but the lake is very big. Where specifically did the fishermen get the fish?"

"Kasiha."

"Kasiha? OK." Pond took out his map and studied it. He found a

small town called Kasiha on Lake Tanganyika.

“Here?”

“Yes,” said the old man, smiling.

“Who did he buy the fish from?”

“There are many fishermen. Whoever had the best price.”

Pond calculated the distance. He would need a Jeep. He radioed the CIA operatives from the Egypt Field Office who had already made it to Ujiji. He asked them to pick up the scientists and bring two Jeeps. He also told them to bring some gasoline, matches, and shovels. They said they would be there within the hour.

Pond turned back to the old man.

“Did Sunny cook all the fish all the way through? Or did he serve some fish raw?”

“No raw. Cooked.”

OK. That was weird. Pond was not an expert on tropical viruses, but he thought that if a fish had the virus, cooking the fish over a grill would kill the virus. Murielle Winston had educated Pond about about “ciguatera,” a food borne illness caused from eating certain reef fishes, such as grouper caught in the warm waters of the Caribbean. Supposedly, one could contract ciguatera regardless of how well the fish was cooked. Maybe this virus was like that.

“Did Sunny have pets?”

“No pets.”

“Did Sunny ever complain about getting bit by an animal?”

“No bite.”

“Are there any bats in this area?”

“No bats.”

When the scientists and the two Egyptian field agents arrived a half hour later, Jimmy Pond took them to Sunny Temoha’s house. Roessler, Jendel, Winston, and Tsung suited up in their orange RACAL suits. Jendel did not seem as nervous as he should be. Roessler and Winston were very scared. Murielle Winston questioned herself about what she was doing here. Charlie and Teddy needed her at home. She did not need to get herself killed. Tsung was terrified but was keeping a cool exterior to the others. Jendel gave the team members one last pep talk.

“Now remember, there is no hurry. We have all the time in the world. Walk slowly. No sudden movements. The one way to cut your suit is if

you act rashly. If you have a panic attack, and it happens, walk slowly out of the room. Obviously, this goes without saying, but do not, under any circumstances, take off your suit inside this house. Are we ready to proceed?”

Roessler’s heart was beating fast as he breathed in slow measures through the suit’s self-contained breathing apparatus. Like astronauts slowly jumping onto the moon’s surface, the four scientists entered Temoha’s house. They examined the body. All three were convinced the man had the Mackinac Ebola virus. They took blood, vomit, and tissue samples and sealed them in vials, then double and triple sealed them again in HAZMAT bags. They looked around the small house looking for any evidence of animals, including bats, and saw none. While Winston and Roessler continued taking samples, Tsung could not control his heart beat. He felt like he was in a coffin and dirt was being poured on top of him. His temperature skyrocketed. He could hear his own breathing. This was nothing like any of the labs he had ever been in. He had to get out of here. Panicked, Tsung quickly walked out the door and out into the street, where he took off his helmet and breathed huge doses of fresh air.

“You freak out in there?” asked Pond.

Tsung said nothing. He was embarrassed that he had to leave the house.

“C’mon, Tsung, it’s nothing to be embarrassed about. You don’t see me goin’ in there, do you?”

Tsung sheepishly answered, “It was very hot in there. I thought I might throw up in my suit. I had to get out.”

“Course you did, don’t sweat it,” said Pond.

Ten minutes later, the other scientists emerged. Jendel went to the two American agents from the Egyptian Field Office. “Burn it to the ground. Everything must be ash. And keep the fire contained so it doesn’t spread. Can you do that?”

The field agents agreed and began digging trenches around the house and created a barrier so that the fire wouldn’t spread. Then they took the gasoline cans and burnt the house, with Sunny Temoha’s body, to the ground. Villagers in Ujiji came out to watch the commotion and looked on with suspicion and fear, but said nothing.

Pond and the scientists took the second Jeep and headed towards the Kasiha pier. When they arrived, they saw men in colorful shirts loading

fish out of boats, and men on the shore hawking their wares to prospective buyers. Pond went up to one of the men, who was wearing a Tanzanian football shirt just like his. After sharing pleasantries in Swahili about the football team, Pond asked him about the fish.

“Have you had any problem with food poisoning from the fish?”

“No, these are all Grade A quality fish, taken straight from the Lake. No food poisoning.”

“You aware that a lady up in Ujiji got very sick from some of the fish caught here and died.”

The fisherman was nervous now.

“Are you with the Fisheries Office?”

Pond thought for a moment. He might get more from the man if he thought Pond worked for the Tanzanian Government.

“No, TDH.” That was the Tanzanian Department of Health.

“I don’t sell to Ujiji. He sells to Ujiji.” The fisherman pointed to another man on the pier who was wearing a bright red shirt and a red headband.

“What about you? You sell to Ujiji?” The man in the red shirt looked afraid.

“I only sell for a few days. I replace Elvis.”

“Elvis?”

“Yes. Elvis and his brother Joséph. They sell to Ujiji.”

“Well, where are they?”

“We have not seen them in weeks. Or their boys.”

“Their boys?”

“Yes, they have two little boys who help them with fish.”

“What are Elvis and Joséph’s last names?”

“I don’t know.”

Jimmy Pond asked the other men on the pier and no one knew their last name. But one of the men knew where they lived, in a tiny village about five miles straight south of Kasiha. He showed them the road on the map.

“When is the last time you saw them?” he asked the man in the red shirt.

“Maybe two weeks ago. Joséph’s boys, they get sick, and he has to take them. Then Elvis suddenly leaves. That’s all I know.”

Now we are getting somewhere, Pond thought. He thanked the men

and then returned to the jeep.

“Village, five miles south of here, on this road here.” He pointed to the map.

“Two fishermen have suddenly gone missing. Their boys were sick just before they left. And they sold fish to the Ujiji Fish House.”

“Then that’s where we need to go,” said Jendel. Jendel gunned the Jeep, as gravel spun out and created a small dirt cloud. Jendel’s fine blond hair blew in the breeze as he turned the Jeep onto the road towards the small village.

CHAPTER 31. GROUND ZERO*Saint Ignace, Michigan*

THE BODY OF Cedric Murphy created a small problem. Michigan Water Patrol Officers had shot him in the neck and arm. Because his body was in Day 7 of the disease, his blood was highly contagious. None of the Water Patrol Officers was going to dive down into the blood-drenched water and pull up his bloody remains, thereby exposing themselves to the virus.

One hundred and twenty five miles away, near Traverse City, Michigan, is a series of gigantic sand dunes rising above Lake Michigan called the Sleeping Bear Dunes. There is one particular sand dune in the Sleeping Bear Park which is a mountain of sand, descending hundreds of feet below to the Lake at a steep angle of over sixty degrees. It was on this sand dune where one of the Navy Seals teams was training today. The Seals, landing on the beach in a gray rubber raft, dove out and stormed the beach with guns on their backs, and then humped up the huge sand dune like mountain goats. When they reached the top, they were thoroughly exhausted. Their leader was about to tell the men to run down the dune and do the drill again when he got the call from the General. His men were wanted. A chopper lifted the Seal team out and they were flown three hours away to the tiny harbor town of St. Ignace. Wearing specially fitted water suits with triple-sealed gloves, the Seals dove for Cedric Murphy's body. When they had successfully extricated the body and dumped it on shore, HAZMAT teams from USAMRIID burnt it to ashes right on the shore. Then dozens of gallons of bleach and solvents used by petroleum companies for cleaning up oil spills were dumped into the water, with the hope of killing whatever lingering virus might be lurking in the waters off shore. Subsequent testing of the water at multiple points a week later by the C.D.C. and Michigan Department of Natural Resources would show no virus. Now all they had to do was figure out what to tell Cedric Murphy's mother, who was waiting in the St. Ignace coroner's office for an update.

Watongwe Village, five miles south of Kasiba, Tanzania.

WHEN THE JEEP rolled up to the town, the three scientists and the CIA agent jumped out to survey the scene. There were about twenty small Watongwe huts set in a semicircle around what appeared to be a central meeting place for the villagers. What all four men noticed immediately was the silence. It was quiet as a grave here. There were no villagers to be seen. There was no smoke coming from any of the huts. Like the fish house owner's hut, the flies were buzzing everywhere.

"Guys, I don't like the looks of this," said Roessler.

"I don't either," said Jendel. "Jimmy, you should wait in the Jeep. We are going to suit up."

"Fine by me, Doc. Knock yourself out."

The four researchers donned their orange space suits and began walking through the village. They knocked on the door of the first hut and heard nothing coming from within. Tsung, wanting to redeem himself from the morning, was the first man in. He had to control his nausea when he entered the room. There were three bodies in the cots. All three were dead, with a blank stare of ruby-red eyes. Vermin had begun to eat the flesh off the bones. The other two scientists walked in, and all three nodded to each other with grim expressions. Their trips to the other huts was the same—dead bodies ravaged by disease in each one. In the last hut, the one closest to the forest, they found no bodies. As they walked into the room, they heard a blood-curdling scream only five feet away coming from underneath a table. An elderly woman stood up and began screaming at them in Swahili. It was obvious that she was frightened by the men in the orange suits. Suddenly, she grabbed a kitchen knife and pointed it menacingly at the men.

All three scientists stood frozen. Setting aside the possibility that she could stab them all to death, if she even nicked their suits with that knife they could all be dead.

Roessler held up his hands in the air, showing he had no weapon.

"No! Friend!"

She did not understand them and held the knife out again.

"Jacob and Murielle," said Jendel in a very calm voice. "I want you to very slowly back up towards the door. Roger, you need to do the same. Very slowly. We are going to walk out of here, and show her we mean no

harm.” Roessler and Winston backed up as they were told, and opened the door of the hut. Roessler went out first, then Winston, then Jendel. The woman took two more defiant steps forward towards Captain Tsung. All Tsung could see was that knife. He quickly tried to back up, but he tripped going through the threshold, falling down in his suit. With dirt covering his orange RACAL suit, Tsung jumped up in a panic, and shot off like an Olympic runner to the Jeep. When he got to the Jeep, Roessler and Jendel were right behind him. Tsung took off his helmet.

“Is my suit cut? Oh my God, is my suit cut?”

Pond looked his suit over from all angles. “It looks intact to me, Roger, I think you are fine. What happened? You guys see a ghost?”

Tsung was as animated as ever now. “Everyone is dead from the virus. But there was an older woman who was alive in the last hut. She came at us with a knife, and almost cut us. We did not know how to speak with her.”

“Let me try and help,” said Agent Pond. Pond took out a bullhorn from the back of the Jeep. In Swahili, he made the following announcement:

“We are not going to hurt you. We are here to help you. Please come out of your house. It is safe. The men in the orange suits are wearing those so that they do not get sick like everyone else in the village. Please come out.”

After thirty seconds, the door on the last hut slowly opened and the woman peeked her head out. This time, she had no knife.

“Agent Pond, you need to immediately get at least a scrub mask and rubber gloves on. We will stand between her and you.”

Jimmy Pond spoke into the bullhorn again. “Come to the Jeep please. We need to check your blood to make sure you are not sick.”

The woman walked hesitantly over to the Jeep and looked at the strange men in the orange suits. Dr. Bjorn Jendel took out a syringe, at which point the elderly woman backed away violently, afraid of his intentions.

“No,” said Pond in Swahili. “It is safe. He just wants to take some blood to see if you are sick. It will not hurt.”

The woman returned again and stuck out her arm. She had had a shot once before. Jendel took some blood into the syringe, being incredibly careful not to spill blood on himself or to puncture the suit with the hypodermic. Jendel placed the blood into the field test tubes. While they

waited for the test results, Pond, from a safe distance, questioned the woman.

“How did this happen?”

“The boys get us all sick,” said the woman. “Boys are evil.”

“What boys?”

“Dogo and Akili. They go to mountain and their Mother say they get bitten by bat. Then everybody get sick and die.”

“How did you survive?”

“I no go near the boys. I stay in my hut. I talk to no one. The boys are evil.”

“Where are the boys now?”

“Joséph and Elvis take the boys to the hospital. They have truck.”

“Who are Joséph and Elvis?”

“Joséph is the father. Elvis is the uncle.”

“What hospital did they go to?”

“Kigoma.”

“Which hospital in Kigoma?”

“Kigoma. Hospital.”

“Are you the only survivor?”

“Yes. Do I need to go to hospital?”

“We will know in a few minutes. Where is the boys’ mother?”

“Hospital. Kigoma.”

“Has anyone from the village gone anywhere else?”

The woman looked confused. “We no have truck. Joséph has truck. Kigoma. Hospital. We no have truck. We stay.”

They continued to question the woman for another ten minutes, asking her every question they could think of. No, she did not know where the bat came from. She did not know of any caves. She did not know which boy was bitten. She did not know their ages, just that they were small and evil. No, the boys and their parents never came back. No, Elvis never came back.

When the questioning was complete, Jendel pulled out the results from the field lab test. It appeared that this woman was not infected.

“You are not sick,” said Pond.

“Ohhhh?” said the woman, smiling a broad grin. She seemed relieved.

“Come on, we will take you to Kasiha where you will be safe.” The men drove the woman into town and dropped her off with a friend. Then

they drove back to the small village and burnt the village to the ground.

As they drove toward Kigoma, Agent Jimmy Pond pulled out a powerful satellite phone and called his contact at the airbase. From there, the pilot relayed the call overseas to Washington, D.C. where Pond was later connected to the President of the United States and her Homeland Security Director.

“Agent Pond, what is the situation in Tanzania?” asked the Homeland Security Director.

“Director, this is Agent Pond. We have tracked the source of this virus to two small African boys, names Dogo and Akili, those are first names, we have no last names. They apparently got bitten by a bat and contracted the disease. We believe they are the first victims. They live in a small Watongwe village five miles south of Kasiha, Tanzania, on the western side of the country. Their whole village, with the exception of one woman, was wiped out. The old woman gave us an account of what happened. The boys’ father and uncle, names are Joséph and Elvis, we have no last names yet, worked on the docks in Kasiha as fishermen. Sometimes, the boys would work with them at the docks. We believe the boys, their father or their uncle somehow infected some fish. Maybe they bled on them; maybe they vomited on them; maybe they breathed on them; we don’t know. But the fish were taken to a restaurant in Ujiji, a short distance away. The restaurant was owned by an Ujiji man, one Sunny Temoha, proprietor and sole employee of the Ujiji Fish House. He also contracted the disease and died. According to a man in town, the proprietor did not serve the fish raw, but cooked it. I do not know how the virus was not wiped out during the cooking process, but somehow, the virus remained active. The Monahans, the chimp researchers, ate at the fish house and ate the infected fish from Kasiha. Then they carried the disease back to the United States. Meanwhile, the two boys, their parents, and their uncle went to a hospital in Kigoma. That is where we are heading now.”

“So at this point, it definitely does not look like terrorism?” asked the President.

“I think we can confidently say at this point, Madame President, that this is not related to terrorism,” said Pond.

“What did you do with the dead bodies?” asked the Director.

“We burned them all. I have conducted a number of interviews in

Ujiji and Kisohe, and we have not found any victims other than what I have told you. But we do not know what we will find in Kigoma.”

“What about this bat?” asked the President. “Is there any way to figure out where the bat came from? What if it infects other people?”

“We believe the boys went cave exploring. That is how other strains of Ebola first were realized—from contact with cave bats. I doubt that others would be exposed unless they too went cave exploring in the same cave and were bitten by the same type of bat,” said Roessler.

“If we were to find this group of bats, could we use them to make an antidote or a vaccine?” asked the President.

“Yes, that is certainly theoretically possible,” said Jendel, joining the call. “But it is highly unlikely. For example, we know that an Egyptian fruit bat in Kitum Cave in Kenya is probably the source of the Marburg virus, and we have had researchers in that cave for years now and we have never found the bat with Marburg. So I think that is going to be a little bit like looking for a needle in a haystack, Madame President.”

“OK, good work, Agent Pond, Dr. Jendel, Dr. Winston, Mr Roessler, and Captain Tsung. Please keep us informed the minute you find out what is going on in Kigoma.”

“Yes, Madame President, we will.”

Agent Pond hung up the sat phone, and the four men and one woman buckled up for the ride to Kigoma.

CHAPTER 32. CUP.*Natal, Brazil.*

NATAL IS A port city in Brazil. Natal is the easternmost city in Brazil, at the far-right edge of the Brazilian triangle jutting into the Atlantic Ocean. If you want to take a boat from Brazil to England, Natal is your launching point. Gegic and Telly Gurdic, known to the world by their adopted names, Matteo Graciano and Dominic Chastain, sat at the Conquistador Bar in Natal, drinking bottles of Skol beer. It was eighty degrees, which was cool for Natal. In January, Natal was frequently over 100 degrees.

“He’s late,” said Graciano. “Figures.”

“Let’s give him fifteen more minutes and then we’re out of here,” said Chastain.

Behind the bar, a television was blaring in Portuguese, the most spoken language in Brazil. The ESPN commentator was standing in the newly expanded Estádio do Maracanã in Rio de Janeiro.

“Rick, I am standing here in Estádio do Maracanã in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This football stadium is the eleventh largest football stadium in the world. Although the official capacity, after renovation, is just over 84,000 spectators, in the final game of the 1950 World Cup, the paid attendance was 199,854. That tells you how many people can fit into this monster of a stadium. This year, the stadium will be host to the final soccer match in the FIFA World Cup. Stadium employees here are frantically preparing for the World Cup, to be held in Brazil in twelve different host cities between June 12 and July 13, only a month and a half from now. Rick, according to Brazilian officials I spoke with here, this year’s World Cup is expected to draw the single largest television audience ever for a single sporting event, possibly as many as 1.2 billion viewers worldwide. To put that in perspective, Rick, the viewing audience for Superbowl XLV in 2011 was 111 million viewers, so that is roughly ten times the audience of the most watched United States Superbowl. That’s a lot of viewers.”

“Manny, what event holds the current record?” asked the ESPN anchor from the studio. “The current record,” said the on-site reporter, “is the 2011 World Cricket Semifinal between India and Pakistan, which drew just under a billion viewers.”

“Hummm. That’s funny. Who knew that many people liked cricket?”

“Ha ha. Yes, that was news to me, too. Teams from around the world have been competing for three years to be included among the 32 teams to duke it out in the FIFA World Cup Tournament. The United States Mens Football Team, ranked thirteenth in the world by FIFA prior to the Tournament, has successfully qualified again, so we will be looking to see those Americans give it their all. And we will be bringing all of those matches from the World Cup live on ESPN. This is Manny Tomas, ESPN, reporting live from Brazil.”

Just then, Davy Branco, the Brazilian cousin of their Mexican drug lord partner in Guadalajara, sauntered into the bar, oblivious to the fact that he was considerably late for the meeting. Like his cousin, he was fat, and he wore a white wife-beater under an unbuttoned, cheap, yellow short-sleeved sports shirt. He took off his straw fedora, put his Ray-bans on the table, and wiped the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief. Branco recognized the two men from their pictures immediately and sat down on a bar stool next to them.

“You Davy Branco?”

Davy nodded. “You the geniuses my cousin sent to me to make us all rich?”

Graciano smiled uncomfortably. “Yeah, something like that.”

“How’s the shipment?” asked Chastain.

“I was just down on the dock. Oversaw the unloading myself. The merchandise is on an 18-wheeler now heading to the warehouse.”

“Nothing got inspected?” asked Chastain.

“No, I told you guys not to worry. They never inspect anything down here. And even if they did, I know half the guys on the dock. Like shootin’ fish in a barrel. I still don’t get why we are doing this in Natal. You could make a much bigger splash in Rio. The attendance down there will be ten times Natal.”

“And the security will be ten times tighter there, too,” said Chastain. “Plus, this is the only place where we can guarantee a lot of American and Dutch spectators.”

Davy Branco looked confused. “Dutch? What the fuck do we care about the Dutch? They don’t have any money. All they got is fuckin’ windmills and tulips and people stickin’ their fingers in dikes or up their asses. Why do you give a shit about Dutch?”

Chastain looked at his brother. “We have our reasons.”

Branco was still confused. “And how do you know you are going to get a lot of Americans and Dutch here?”

Chastain took out a copy of the World Cup brackets and laid it on the bar. “First of all, the American team rarely ever gets past the quarterfinals, so most of their matches are going to be in the Round of 32 and the Round of 16. Take a look at the brackets. In the first round of play, the Group play, the list of 32 teams is split into eight groups of four teams, who play a round-robin. Teams with the highest number of points, judged by the number of wins, draws and losses, proceed into the next round. In each group of four teams, the teams with the two highest point totals advance, thereby reducing the total to sixteen teams.”

“Hey, Dr. Strangelove. I know how the fuckin’ tournament works. I live in fuckin’ Brazil, for Chrissakes!” said Branco.

“Well, this year,” Chastain continued, “the United States team (ranked 13) was bracketed in Group A with Germany (ranked 2), Ghana (ranked 23), and Portugal (ranked 14). Four of Germany’s star players are out with very recent injuries, so their high ranking is deceptive. The easy money says that, despite Germany’s ranking, the United States and Portugal would be the likely teams to advance from Group A, with the United States being the winner. The Netherlands (ranked 8), was bracketed in Group B with Spain (ranked 1), Chile (ranked 12) and Australia (ranked 57). The experts’ projection is that Spain and The Netherlands will advance, with the Netherlands being the runner-up. In the Round of 16, the tournament pits the winner of Group A against the runner-up of Round B. The most likely pairing in the Round of 16, then, has the United States going head-to-head with The Netherlands. And that game,” concluded Chastain, “will be played in the lovely Brazilian city of Natal on June 29.”

“Man, you scientists, you make football sound like fuckin’ arithmetic. You’re suckin’ all the life out of the sport. Me, I got my money on Brazil again this year. I think we are going to do it this year, if we can get by Spain.”

“Is security set up at the warehouse?” asked Graciano.

“Yeah, we got some good locals, real discrete. And the cops who walk the beat in that neighborhood are on the payroll. Shouldn’t be any trouble.”

“OK, well, we will be over tomorrow to set everything up,” said

Graciano. “Do you have the map showing where all the vendor stands will be? We wanted to do a drive-by later today.”

Davy Branco looked around first to make sure no one was looking, and then he spread out a map on the bar. “This is the new Natal Stadium here. It seats about 45,000 people. There is going to be a long walkway, here, going down to the stadium. The booths will be all along here. Your booths will be right here. He drew a small X on the map. We’ll have your uniforms printed up in the next two weeks. We should be ready in plenty of time.”

“Thanks, Davy,” said Chastain.

“Sure, no problemo. Anything for a good cause, as long as that cause makes me a lot of money!” He laughed and slammed his hand down on the bar, obviously believing himself to be much funnier than his co-conspirators. “Hey, you guys need any girls tonight? I have some really tasty treats here in town. You can pay them practically nothing. Hell, they’d probably fuck for a new pair of jeans. I could send them to your room?”

“No thanks,” said Chastain. “We’re good. Big day tomorrow.”

“OK boys, whatever you say. If you change your mind, let me know. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to go down to talk to the Natal Football Commissioner. Score me some seats for this weekend.”

The brothers waved goodbye. He should visit the Natal Stadium now, while everyone is healthy, Graciano thought, because next month, most of the spectators will be dead.

CHAPTER 33. FOUNTAIN

Rockfish Grill and Seafood Market. Bristol, England.

THE ROCKFISH GRILL and Seafood Market was one of Bistol's finest seafood restaurants. Located near the Bristol docks, the chef's motto was "Fish so fresh, tomorrow's is still in the sea." After the mediocre meal at the Clifton Antiquarian Club, Professor Charlie Winston and his friend Professor John Morse were ready for some good seafood. Winston and Morse split the fare of the cabbie, who dropped them off in front of the restaurant, with its teal exterior and large white wooden letters spelling "Rockfish Grill," with the "O" shaped like a white fish. Blue fish nets, wooden barrels and white-and-red rescue life rings met them at the door. Winston requested that the waitress seat them in the unoccupied back room, so that the professors could spread out with their laptops and papers to discuss the day's events in privacy. The booths were a smoky green leather, with rows of wine bottles stacked along the back of the booth. Charlie Winston loved the variety on the menu, which boasted such dishes as "cuttlefish cooked in its own ink with fried polenta" and "roasted wing of Devon ray with sherry and capers." John Morse was not so sure, and stroked his beard, figuring out what he could find to eat. He was more of a meat and potatoes man, and his appetite was not that adventurous. The two started with some oysters. Winston liked his with a bottle of hot sauce. Morse ate his plain. While the two were waiting for the main course to be served, Morse pulled out his laptop and fired it up.

"Charlie, thanks for cutting out of there with me. Let me tell you what's on my mind."

Morse opened his laptop and pulled up scanned copies of the Amerigo Vespucci ship logs which had been rescued from the trove of documents behind the Virgin Mary painting.

"The first important entry is from Vespucci's newly found logs where he discusses what transpired about a week after de Hojeda's ship met Cabot's ship." Morse read the English translation:

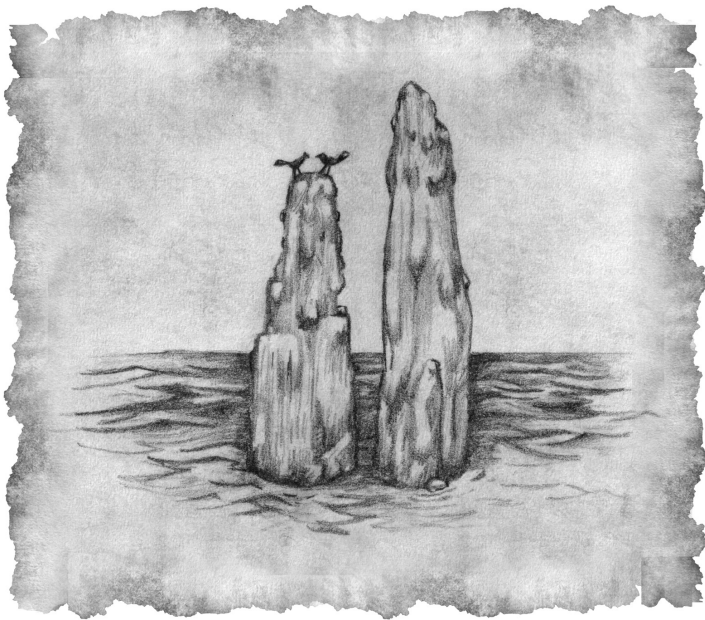
*Today we reached the Island of Boyuca in the Bay of Veragua.
One of the men became ill in the mind and jumped overboard.
Unfortunately, we were unable to save him.*

“Charlie, you have speculated that this ‘ill man’ was probably John Cabot, who de Hojeda dumped overboard to die. And I agree with you. Vespucci was trying to explain away a man being thrown overboard in case one of the other crew members mentioned it when they got back to Spain, so he made up the story about the crew member being ill in the mind. This suggests that de Hojeda marooned Cabot near or on the Island of Boyuca.”

Winston was waiting for the punch line. “Okay....?”

“There is another set of log entries written by John Cabot back in May 1499 relating to a trip to the island of Boyuca.” Morse then translated the next few entries from the original Italian:

May 25. At sea. Today, we sailed to a point 14 leagues directly east of Veragua, two leagues north of Flower Island. There was a beautiful pair of rock pillars which rose from the sea to the sky. The pillars looked like this:



Giovanni said they reminded him of the Pillars of Hercules. Two white birds sit on top of the Pillars, like sentries.

May 27. Today, after traveling 9 leagues east and 3 leagues north from the Pillars, or a total of 325 leagues from Hispaniola, we arrived at the place the Veraguans call Ananeo or Boyuca, which means the Evil Place. It is green and lush, with a mountain on the east side. There is white lightning on the horizon.

May 31. Today we were attacked by cannibals. Wilson Henry and Sebastian were brutally killed, and ten more of our crew were lost on the island. We left the island, headed south.

“Did you get a chance to look at these logs?” asked Morse.

“Sure, I have read these,” said Winston.

“These entries reference again a place called Boyuca or Ananeo. Do those names mean anything to you?”

“No, should they?” asked Winston.

“According to sixteenth century Spanish historian Pedro Martir de Angleria, or, as he is known in his Anglicized form, Peter Martyr, there is an island off the coast of Central America known as Boinca, also called Boyuca or Ananeo, on which the legendary Fountain of Youth is located.”

Winston stopped eating his oyster as it was an inch from his mouth. He stared at Morse, speechless.

“You’re putting me on,” said Winston, putting down his oyster.

“I am very serious,” said Morse. “Listen, Charlie, I know it sounds crazy, but it’s true. When I tried to tell everyone about the lost prophecies of Nostradamus predicting future terrorist attacks, the government—and every scholar I know for that matter—thought I was a loon. Hell, I thought I was a loon for a while. But it turned out to be right. Sometimes, crazy things just happen.”

Winston laughed. “I have to admit when I first heard about the Nostradamus thing, I thought you had smoked too much of that California weed. To this day, I still cannot believe all of that really occurred, but you lived to tell the tale.”

Just at that point, the waitress returned and the two ordered their entrees. Charlie Winston went with the “cuttlefish in its own ink.” Morse, who suppressed an urge to vomit, ordered the shrimp scampi. Anyone who orders cuttlefish in its own ink must be crazy, thought Morse. Morse

continued:

“Peter Martyr wrote a book called *Decades de Orbe Nova*, which chronicled the European voyages to the New World. In his Second *Decade*, he recounts the voyage of Juan Diaz de Solis in 1507, eight years after Cabot and Vespucci visited the area, stating:

Beyond Veragua, the coast bends in a northerly direction, to a point opposite the Pillars of Hercules; that is, if we accept our measures certain lands discovered by the Spaniards, more than three hundred and twenty-five leagues from the north coast of Hispaniola. Among these countries is an island called by us Boinca (later Boyuca) and by others Ananeo; it is celebrated for a spring whose waters restore youth to old men.

“Hispaniola, as you know, is the area now shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti. A Spanish ‘league’ is about 3.2 nautical miles, so 325 Spanish leagues is 1,040 nautical miles. 1,040 miles east of Haiti puts you right in the Bay of Honduras. At the time of these travels, Juan de Solis was traveling in the area that is now the Bay of Honduras.”

“Hmmm,” mumbled Winston, stroking his goatee.

“Previously, scholars did not know what to make of Martyr’s account, because he synchronized the location with the Pillars of Hercules, the two promontories which flank the Straits of Gibraltar between Spain and Morocco. Using the Pillars made no sense geographically. But now that we have these Vespucci and Cabot logs, we can see that the sailors were not referring to the traditional Pillars of Hercules, but to rock outcroppings in the Bay of Honduras which reminded them of the Pillars of Hercules. With this new information, the reference to the Pillars of Hercules makes perfect sense.”

Winston considered this for a minute. “I have never heard of Juan Diaz de Solis being involved with the Fountain of Youth. I thought Ponce de Leon discovered the Fountain of Youth. And I thought the Fountain was in Florida.”

John Morse waved his hand and shook his head, laughing. “No, Charlie, the history books once again have it all wrong. Ponce de Leon had absolutely nothing to do with the Fountain of Youth. He did not discover it. He did not know about it. He did not even look for it. We have Ponce de Leon’s nautical logs. In his seven months traveling through

the Bahamas, Ponce de Leon mentions twelve islands. None of them bear the name Boinca, Boyuca or Ananeo. None of the logs mention the Fountain of Youth. None of the logs mention him even trying to find a Fountain of Youth.”

“Then why do all the history books connect Ponce de Leon with the Fountain of Youth? There must be some basis,” said Winston.

“Hah! Coming from the man who refuted all the history books which reported that America was named after Amerigo Vespucci! As you know well, Charlie, our childhood history books often get it wrong.”

“Well why did Ponce de Leon ever get connected with the Fountain of Youth?”

Morse smiled. “Professor Doug Peck has an excellent article on this which I will e-mail you that explains all of this. There was a famous Spanish historian named Gonzalo Fernandez de Oveido. Ponce de Leon’s family and Fernandez’s family were rivals for the favors of King Ferdinand in the royal court. Oveido did not like Ponce de Leon and believed him to be arrogant and obnoxious. Oveido published a historical account of voyages to the New World called *Historia General* in 1535. In that account, Oveido talked about Ponce de Leon’s vanity, saying that he was probably looking for the Fountain of Youth as a cure for his *el enflaquecimiento del sexo*, or sexual impotence. This was a back-handed crack on Ponce de Leon’s manliness, but by the time it was published, Ponce de Leon was dead and could not defend himself. Oveido was the official historian of the Court, so his word was accepted as true. It was this one unfounded, baseless attack on Ponce de Leon’s manliness that serves as the entire basis for later reports that Ponce de Leon was looking for a Fountain of Youth.”

The waitress came up and served the men their entrees. John Morse dug into his shrimp scampi, which was delicious. The cuttlefish which Winston ordered looked surprisingly good on the plate, but Morse could not imagine what “scuttlefish ink” tasted like.

“Charlie, you should know that Ponce de Leon did not have impotence. Quite to the contrary, he was kind of a macho man. During the period Oveido calls him impotent, he had four children with his wife Lenore. He took his mistress, Juana Jiminez, on the voyages with him. And he was only 39 at the time he went on his discovery voyage, not in his 70s as some historians have claimed. So the crack about his impotence was obviously made up by Oveido as an insult. It was Juan Diaz de Solis,

not Ponce de Leon, who was looking for the Fountain of Youth, and its location is in the Bay of Honduras, not in Florida. And he was looking for the island where the Fountain of Youth was located. He already knew about it because it was on Cabot's maps, which Vespucci had stolen. But Charlie, your most important discovery, which got no attention today, was this so-called 'Veraguan Map,' which was found among Vespucci's logs." Morse laid out the map on the table.

"I saw that," said Winston, "but I could not make heads or tails of it. It speaks about a Road to Xibalba, which is the Mayan Underworld."

"Yes, Charlie. The Mayans believed that Xibalba, the Mayan Underworld, was guarded by twelve demons who set up a series of traps, challenges, and riddles for the unwary. Failure to solve the challenges meant death, and another soul for the Lords of the Underworld. According to Mayan tradition, only the Mayan Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, were able to solve the challenges and reach the finish line, where they defeated and killed the Lords of the Underworld. This map appears to set forth the path through Xibalba, and highlights the challenges the Hero Twins had to overcome. But the most important thing on this map is the '*xaxtzintz'oj saqlol'oj*.' That is a Mayan phrase in the K'iche' dialect. It means 'pool of clear water.' Charlie, the 'pool of clear water' is the Fountain of Youth. And this map tells us how to find it."

Winston put his fork down and considered the matter. It was certainly an interesting theory. "OK, so you now have these ship logs and maps. What do you plan to do with this, write a book about the Fountain of Youth?"

"No, now that I have the exact coordinates from these logs, I am going to find the Fountain of Youth!" exclaimed Morse. "And I want you to help me find it!" With that, Morse dug into his entrée, devouring it with abandon. Winston looked at Morse, unsure if he was serious.

TWA Transatlantic Flight, somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean.

CHARLIE WINSTON TOLD Morse he would think about his proposal. But the truth was, Winston did not think he could take another trip this year. The History Department had already spent a lot of money for his trips to Seville and Bristol. It was unlikely that the History Department was going to fund a trip to look for the Fountain of Youth. The Department

Head would think he was crazy. Before Morse left on his flight back to California, however, he had given Winston a book on the Fountain of Youth to read on the plane. Still curious about Morse's tale about the Fountain of Youth, Winston read the book during the flight. He learned about the historian Herodotus and his account of an Ethiopian Fountain of Youth in 530 B.C.; a Muslim folk tale about Alexander the Great's cook, whose name was Al-Khidr, and who supposedly found the Fountain of Youth at the "end of the earth;" a Biblical account in John 5:2-4 of the legendary Healing Pool of Bethesda which was touched by an angel and cured the lame; and a mythical island called "Beniny" believed by the Taino Indians to contain great wealth, and which Spanish historians inaccurately associated with a fountain of youth. He also read about Ponce de Leon, and history's false association of the explorer with the legendary healing spring. And he read with great interest historian Peter Martyr's account of a Fountain of Youth pursued by explorer Juan de Solis in the Bay of Honduras. When he read the passages about De Solis, he re-read from his laptop the scanned images of the ship logs which he had found behind the *Virgin* painting in Seville.

Winston put the book down and took off his glasses, rubbing the bridge of his nose. He thought the stories in the book quite fantastic. Still, the reference to Boyuca was intriguing. Fortunately, this flight came equipped with Wi-Fi access. Winston powered up his MacBook and checked his messages. His wife had left him an e-mail.

*Returning from Africa soon. Had a scare out here in the field.
Don't worry though. I am OK. Have much to tell you. Hope
your lecture went well. M. ☺*

A "scare in the field." Winston wondered what that could mean. He hoped his wife was safe. He checked the messages from his son. He was doing fine. His grandmother was watching him. Winston smiled, turned off his phone, and pulled a blanket up. He decided to catch some sleep for a few hours. Meanwhile, his wife was on the trail of a deadly virus in Africa.

CHAPTER 34. KIGOMA*Kigoma, Tanzania.*

AFTER ARRIVING IN the small African city of Kigoma, C.I.A. Agent Jimmy Pond spoke to some local citizens and learned the location of the Kigoma Missionary Baptist Hospital. One of the citizens had mentioned that the hospital was “gone.” Pond had a hard time understanding the citizen until he drove their small SUV over a beat-up and potholed asphalt road and cleared the crest of a small hill. Below their location about a half mile away were the black-charred ruins and burnt timbers of a previously-existing structure. Murielle Winston was aghast.

“If that is what’s left of the hospital, I think we are in big trouble.”

Pond pulled the SUV up to the site. Two men clearing up debris told the team that the hospital had exploded about a week or two beforehand. When Pond asked the cause of the explosion, the men told him that the hospital had been leveled by a natural gas explosion. Yes, many patients had died. Yes, some foreign doctors had also died. The men directed Pond to the fire chief’s office down the road.

The team pulled up to a small one-story house and entered the office of the fire chief, Chief Wengi. The short, skinny bald African fire chief was sitting at a small desk, wearing khaki shorts and a khaki shirt. Pond looked on the wall, seeing numerous certificates, and put together that the fire chief also doubled as the police chief, the health inspector, and the game warden. Pond introduced himself as an American health investigator from the CDC and flashed the chief a fake badge. The other members of the team entered the small office and flanked around Pond. Pond addressed the chief in Swahili, which the chief seemed to understand.

“Chief, these are my associates from the Centers for Disease Control in America. We are investigating a potentially dangerous virus which originated in a Watongwe village about five miles south of Kasiha. There were two youngsters who contracted the virus. We have learned that their parents took them to the Kigoma Missionary Baptist Church. What can you tell us?”

“Yes, the sick boys. I heard about that. Some of the people in our town are very superstitious, and they did not understand when they saw the doctors walking around in their suits. They looked like they were from

outer space. I got a lot of calls.”

“How did the hospital explode?” asked Pond.

“Natural gas explosion. Must have been a leak.”

“Has any team explored the site to determine cause and origin?”

The chief did not understand what he meant by “cause and origin,” but after Pond explained, the chief laughed.

“Inspector Pond,” said the chief, “We do not have dedicated teams of fire investigators just sitting around waiting for an explosion, like you do in America. I am the police chief, the fire chief, the health inspector, and the game warden. We have limited resources.”

“Have you done *any* investigation?” asked Pond. “Because I can have a team here by tomorrow morning to go through everything—with your permission, of course.”

“The Italians have already sent a team of people. They are down at the site now. But you are welcome to bring your own people if you want.”

“Where are the bodies?”

“The bodies?”

“Of the people killed in the explosion.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” said the chief. “We have them in wooden coffins behind the boat house. We have not had time to sort through them yet.”

Murielle Winston stepped forward. “The bodies were not kept in cold storage?”

The chief looked at her with skepticism. He was not used to taking criticism from a woman. “Miss....?”

“Agent Murielle Winston.”

“Ms. Winston, we have no refrigeration systems here. We are used to the heat.”

Agent Pond shook the chief’s hand. “Chief, we are going to need your help. We are concerned that this virus could spread to Kigoma and beyond. Do you have any other deputies or officers?”

“Yes, we have about twenty men who act as volunteers.”

“OK, I would greatly appreciate it if you could get your men to form a perimeter around the city, and prevent anyone from getting in or out until we sort this out.”

“That will create a lot of chaos and make a lot of people angry. What will I tell them?” asked the chief.

“Tell them the truth. Tell them we have a deadly virus which could

kill them, that everyone should remain in their homes for now.”

The chief looked skeptical and shook his head, unsure of what to do.

Bjorn Jendel spoke next. “Chief, this is one of the deadliest viruses the world has ever seen. It is an airborne form of Ebola. We have no cure for it. If you catch it, it will kill you. Our plan is to set up a testing site on the north end of Kigoma. Then we can have your villagers come to the tent one at a time and we will test them for the virus. This will take some time, but it is the best way to ensure that no one has contracted the virus.”

The chief considered. He knew his citizens would object to the quarantine. On the other hand, he did not want anyone to die.

“OK, I will do it. But you need to make sure that your testing goes as fast as possible.”

“Chief, we will also take you up on your generous offer to allow our fire investigation teams and forensic examiners to check out the site and the bodies from the explosion. In the meantime, we will go down to the hospital site, and take a look at the remains of the bodies ourselves. Thank you for your help.”

The team exited the small office and huddled around for a quick meeting.

Bjorn Jendel spoke first. “Our first duty here is to make sure that this virus does not spread. Therefore, I am going to take responsibility for the testing site. Jacob, help me get some tables and a tent set up. Murielle, I need you to start talking to villagers to see what they know. Go with Agent Pond, because he speaks the language. Did the boys and their parents stay at the hospital the whole time? Did anyone leave the hospital? We need to know if this has spread.”

Captain Roger Tsung had a different angle. He was on this task force to make sure that terrorism was not involved. He thought that the convenient timing of the explosion was suspect. “I am going to talk to the Italian teams down at the explosion site. I will meet up with you later. In the meantime, I am going to call my contact at the FBI and get an FBI bomb and arson investigation team, an FBI medical examiner and forensics team, and appropriate facilities to store and transport the bodies.”

Tsung left the group and walked down the dirt road towards the hospital site. As he walked, he made dozens of calls back to Fort Detrick and to the FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C. After Tsung relayed his

instructions, preparations were made to send reinforcements that evening by Chinook helicopter to Kigoma. Tsung then called a contact at the DIA and requested an interpreter who spoke Italian to get on the phone with him immediately. After ten minutes, Tsung received a call back. An interpreter was on the line to help him speak to the Italian investigators already on site.

Tsung walked with his iPhone in hand over piles of twisted black debris and spoke to an older man wearing jeans, hiking boots, and a green T-shirt. Through the interpreter on the phone, Tsung shook the Italian investigator's hand and identified himself:

"I am Roger Tsung. I am with the American Centers for Disease Control," he lied. Tsung did not want to announce to the other man that he was with the military.

"I am Fire Inspector Paulo Pogrizi."

"I heard you had some doctors on site here," said Tsung.

"Yes, we did," said Pogrizi. "All dead. We had three scientists. We found three burnt bodies inside the remnants of RACAL suits, with charred oxygen tanks strapped to their backs."

"How about the other people in the hospital?"

"We have a total of twenty-five bodies or parts of bodies, including the three Italian doctors."

"This look natural to you or was there any sign of foul play?"

Pogrizi looked at Tsung nervously, as if he was unsure whether he should give this information to a foreigner. Then again, Italy and the United States were allies, and it was in both of their interests to get to the bottom of what happened here. Pogrizi decided to give Tsung the information, and walked him through the black debris over to the remains of the staircase to the basement.

"Careful walking through here. Fire started in the basement, no question about that. Burn patterns show that. It was definitely a gas explosion, but it looks to me like someone sawed through one of the copper gas lines in the basement."

Pogrizi walked over to a cleared area and showed Tsung a table with some items laid on the top. On the table was a piece of copper tubing. Pogrizi picked up the piece and showed the end to Tsung.

"You can see the hacksaw marks right here. These marks were not made as a result of the explosion. These are saw marks, no question about

it. And take a look at this.”

Pogrizi picked up a charred tire iron off the table. “We found this inserted between the two metal handles of the front doors to the hospital. I think we have an arsonist who put the tire iron through the door handles to prevent anyone from coming out.”

Tsung looked at the evidence. It definitely looked like arson. Pogrizi then walked over to the street, where a fluorescent orange painted line ran down the street away from the hospital. Another Italian investigator was taking pictures of the orange line.

“And look at this. This is a narrow, burn trail leading away from the hospital, which turns a corner and goes behind the alley up there. We had it marked with orange paint to delineate it for evidentiary purposes. This is the classic calling card of the arsonist. Our team has concluded that the arsonist disconnected the gas service line, waited until the gas levels built up in the basement, and then poured a gasoline trail leading from the basement, out the front doors and down the street into this alley. He lit the trail of gas with a match and then walked away.”

Tsung nodded his head. It seemed conclusive.

“Any suspects?” asked Tsung.

“That’s not my job, but we have some other team members going door-to-door taking a canvass. In my mind, though, I would look to some Tanzanian local, who heard about the virus and then became frightened that the virus would spread. I figure he got spooked and thought burning the place down was the only way to stay safe.”

“Makes sense. But if he was that afraid of the virus, why would he go into the hospital to cut the gas line? He would be risking exposing himself to the virus.”

“I don’t know. This thing really angers me,” said the Italian investigator. “Three of our scientists were flown here specifically to help them. It kind of makes you wonder why we help people in other countries.”

Tsung nodded, not saying anything in response. Tsung was a soft-spoken man of few words. He preferred to keep his thoughts and opinions to himself. Tsung took pictures of the copper line, the tire iron, the orange line, and the other pieces of evidence, as well as the charred ruins left by the blast. Tsung asked the Italian man if he had a list of the names of the dead. Pogrizi directed him to another Italian team member, sitting on a piece of plywood and working on a laptop. The assistant handed Tsung

a list of names. Tsung surveyed the list and frowned. Something did not look right.

“Where did you get the names for this list?” asked Tsung.

“The patient records for the Kigoma Missionary Baptist Hospital are kept on a common computer server with a sister hospital in Dar es Salaam. The server is located in Dar es Salaam. We were able to access patient records from that hospital’s database to come up with a list of the sixteen patients. That figure includes the two brothers who contracted the virus and the two parents of the boys. The Chief of Police told us that there were four nurses and two doctors. That makes twenty-two. Then we have the three Italians from the Institute Nationale—Guido Macchione, Antonio Paciello, and Matteo Graciano. That brings the grand total to twenty-five.”

Tsung studied the list. “I think you are missing one,” Tsung said to the assistant, comparing the list the assistant had given him with the e-mail from the CDC. “Where is the uncle?”

“What uncle?”

“There was an uncle.” Tsung took out his handwritten notes on a legal pad. “The boys had an uncle, whose name was Elvis, who also came to the hospital.”

“If he was a patient, his name would be in the system.”

“But what if he wasn’t sick yet? What if he wasn’t logged in as a patient yet because the staff was busy with the other patients?”

“Well, if the uncle was there,” said the assistant, “Then where is his body?”

Tsung thought about that. It was possible that the uncle had never made it to the hospital or had left the hospital. It was also possible that his body was so close to the blast at the time of the explosion that his body was simply burnt to ash. Neither of those possibilities seemed likely to Tsung.

Tsung thanked the assistant, and then returned to speak with the fire investigator, Paulo Pagrizi. “Paulo, I have one more question for you.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“It was reported to us that the boys became infected after being bitten by a cave bat, and that the parents brought the cave bat with them in a metal cage to the hospital. Did you see the bat, a bat skeleton, or the metal cage?”

“No bat. No skeleton. No cage.”

“You’re positive?”

“Yes, if one of my men or I had an animal cage in the hospital, that would have been evidence we would have separated, photographed and catalogued, because we would have been worried that the virus could be spread by an animal. Trust, me there was no bat; no bat skeleton; no bat cage.”

“OK, thank you, Paulo.”

Tsung thanked the assistant and called his boss Colonel Dennis White in Fort Detrick, Maryland, giving him an update. White was worried.

“So we have an arsonist who blew up the hospital, killing twenty-five people. We don’t know who the arsonist is or whether he or she has been infected. And we have a missing body from the wreckage.” said White. “Hmmm.”

“The most troubling thing for me, Colonel,” said Tsung, “is that the bat’s cage is missing. I suppose that our witness could be incorrect about the parents bringing the bat to the hospital, but if she is right, then that means the most likely answer is that the arsonist took the bat and cage from the hospital before he blew it. And why would anyone do that, unless....”

White finished his sentence. “...unless he is a terrorist.”

Tsung let the silence hang in the air. It was certainly a possibility. He would phone Murielle and have her ask the neighbors in the canvass if they had seen a bat in a cage.

CHAPTER 35. CORONER

Kigoma, Tanzania

MURIELLE WINSTON RECEIVED Tsung's latest call as she was about to speak to the eleventh neighbor in her canvass, a Fatuma Haane, wife of the other recently departed hospital doctor. With Agent Pond translating, Murielle, wearing a surgical face mask, identified herself as an American doctor from the Centers for Disease Control and asked if she could have a word. The widow opened her door and welcomed Murielle Winston in. She was dressed all in black, and, judging from the red, swollen eyes and red, runny nose, she had obviously been crying. Haane led the American scientist and the CIA agent to the kitchen table.

"I understand your husband was one of the two doctors at the hospital?" asked Murielle.

"Yes, he was."

"I am very sorry for your loss."

"Thank you, ma'am. Why are you wearing masks? Are we in danger of catching something?"

"We are here because the doctors in the hospital were treating a very dangerous airborne form of virus."

"Virus?" The widow gave a frantic expression. "I thought it was a gas explosion."

"Yes, there was a gas explosion, but coincidentally, on the same day as the explosion, your husband was helping to treat some sick patients who had been exposed to this virus."

"Do I have it?"

"We don't know that yet, but I do not think so. We are going to be conducting tests this week. But if you had contracted the virus, you probably would have symptoms by now."

"What kind of symptoms?"

"Red, bloodshot eyes, purple lesions under the skin, terrible nausea, hot black vomit, things like that."

"Red eyes?" asked the widow. She ran over to a mirror. "Why, I have red eyes!"

"No, ma'am, we are talking about red eyes where the red takes up almost the entire white part of the eye. Your eyes just look a little red from crying. And you do not appear to have any other symptoms."

“OK,” the widow said nervously. “When can I get tested?”

“Right away, very soon. Now tell me, Mrs. Haane, did you see your husband on the day of the explosion?”

“No, I did not. He was at the hospital early that morning and I did not see him all day.” When the widow began thinking of the terrible day, she started whimpering again, drying her wet eyes with a handkerchief.

“Did you talk to him that day?”

“Once. He called me on the phone and told me to stay inside today. That’s it.”

“Did he say why?”

“No, but I was not planning to go out anyway, so I did not pay much attention to it. So you’re saying he was trying to warn me about this virus?”

“Yes, that’s probably right,” said Winston.

The widow began sobbing again. “That is so like him. He was such a good man, and a good father. He cured people and saved people’s lives every day. People loved him so. My God, I miss him already. I look around the house and I keep expecting him to walk through the door, you know what I mean?”

Pond put a reassuring hand on the widow’s shoulder. “Yes, I know what you mean.”

“Did your husband mention anything about seeing a bat or a bat cage?” asked Pond.

“No, nothing like that. Why do you ask?”

“There was a report of a bat at the hospital. We were just checking out that lead.”

“Have you seen anyone else in town who appears to be very sick?” asked Winston.

“No,” said the widow. The widow poured herself a glass of water from a pitcher.

While Murielle was questioning, Agent Pond was walking around the room, looking at family photos and gathering whatever intelligence about the doctor he could. Pond noticed a certificate on the wall from the Tanzanian Army.

“Was your husband in the military, ma’am?” asked Pond.

“Yes, he was, as a military doctor. Four or five years ago, there was a civil uprising, and many of the doctors were called up for service. My

husband treated the soldiers. He even got a medal for being injured in the line of duty.” The widow seemed particularly proud of this accomplishment of her late husband. She went into a nearby desk, pulled open a drawer, and pulled out a ring box. Opening the box, she showed the investigators her husband’s medal.

“How was he injured?” asked Pond.

“Shot in the leg when he was bringing in an injured soldier off the field. He always walked with a slight limp after that.” The widow looked at a photo of her late husband. “I remember when he came home I asked him about it. He shrugged it off. But that’s just how he was. Unselfish.” She began crying again. “He was such a good man.”

Murielle Winston, convinced they had garnered enough information from the woman, looked at Pond and gave him a head nod, signaling it was time to go. The two investigators thanked the doctor’s wife and told her they would be in touch. They proceeded on to their twelfth house in the canvass.

Identifying bodies which had been charred beyond recognition was usually the work of the forensic dentist. However, the Kigoma team quickly learned that very few of the villagers in Kigoma had ever seen a dentist. In fact, there was only one dentist in town. A search of his records revealed no matches with any of the hospital patients. Identification of the remains without dental records was going to be more difficult. The morning after the CDC team had shown up in Kigoma, an FBI Arson Team and a Crime Scene Forensic Team showed up on site. With help from the Italians and some of the villagers, the team set up a series of tents about a half mile from the bomb site. In one of these tents, which they dubbed the “Coroner’s Tent,” the FBI team set up a series of long foldout tables. They carried the bodies from the Kigoma Boathouse to the Coroner’s tent and set each body on a separate table. Alice Strong, the six-foot tall, red-haired FBI Forensic Coroner and Pathologist, had flown in last night on very little sleep and very little advance notice to examine the bodies. While she was on the FBI Gulfstream Jet, she had reviewed the patient records which had been uploaded to her laptop from the servers at Dar es Salaam. She had reviewed the information on the plane. She had begun her examination at about 8:00 a.m. that morning.

At 1:00 p.m. that afternoon, Agent Pond walked over to the Coroner’s Tent. It had drawings of skull and cross-bones in fluorescent

orange paint and warnings in several languages to keep out. The coroner's tent was covered in plastic. Pond suited up to pay Strong a visit in the tent. He wore an orange RACAL suit and several layers of latex gloves. As he entered the tent, Strong, wearing her own RACAL suit, heard Pond approach from behind and spun toward him, gesturing for him quickly to get out of the tent. The two exited the tent and went outside, walking fifty feet away into another tent. Both Strong and Pond took off the top of their suits and immediately put on cotton surgical masks.

"I'm Agent Pond," he said. "I am working with the team from the CDC."

"I don't care if you are the President of the United States. Do not sneak up on me like that when I am in the quarantine tent. I am working with scalpels and blood in there. We have a Level 4 biohazard in that tent, and I do not want to cut my suit. You scared the shit out of me!"

"Sorry, Doc. Didn't mean to scare you. We're trying to get an update. How's it going?"

"Slow," said Strong. She shook his hand, "Alice Strong, by the way." She grabbed a bottle of water from a table and drained it. "It feels like I am working at the center of the earth, it is so damned hot in there."

"Have you had any luck identifying the bodies?"

Strong shook her head. "Without dental records, this is a challenge. But we have made some progress. We have identified three bodies which had portions of their RACAL suits and oxygen tanks attached. Those are obviously the Italian doctors from the Instituto Nazionale. Next, I tried to find the Kigoma hospital medical doctors. There were supposed to be two doctors, according to the list I got. One of the two doctors had the remains of a stethoscope around his neck, so he was easy to identify. I did not find the other one. We have sixteen patients. Each had a plastic patient identification wristband. I found fused plastic on the wrists of sixteen cadavers. Two of those were the remains of children, so I am guessing those are the two who started the virus. There were three adult bodies on top of the children's bodies. One female and two males. Two of the three—one male and one female—had wristbands of their own on. The third body, a male, did not have a wristband. I am making an educated guess that the two with their own wristbands were the parents. The third body located near the children was probably either the second doctor, or the children's uncle. Once we eliminate all of those, we found

four other bodies, all female. I am assuming those were the nurses. We can also separate them out a little better by height and blood type, but I have not had time to do that yet.”

Pond got out a pad. “OK, so 3 Italians, 16 patients, 4 nurses, 1 doctor with a stethoscope. That makes 24. And then we have one more body, who is either the other doctor or the children’s uncle? Is that it?”

“Yes, that’s it.”

“Hey, doc, is it possible that a body could just get incinerated and leave no trace, no bones, no nothin’?”

“It’s possible, but not likely. Bones are very strong. Usually, you will find some remains of a skeleton in an explosion like this, unless the person was literally standing at ground zero. Of course, you have a big mess down there at the site. They are still sifting through the rubble. Who knows what body remnants are still at the site.”

“OK, doc, let me know what else you find. I am really interested in that last body, the one that could be the doctor or the uncle. If the uncle was infected, and left the hospital, he could be walking around Kigoma right now, infecting everyone in sight. It is important to get a lead on that right away.”

“I am goin’ as fast as I can, Agent. You don’t want to rush when you are putting your hands into a Level 4 biohazard.” She downed another water bottle, put on her suit helmet, and went back into the tent to investigate the dead bodies.

As Alice Strong went back in the tent, she breathed deeply at the precipice. She eyed the bodies of the two small children laid over on tables near a corner. Those were undoubtedly the most dangerous of the corpses in the tent. Strong knew that just under the surface of the black skin of those children could be a microorganism waiting to feast on her flesh and kill her from the inside out. Maybe the explosion had killed all the viruses in these dead bodies, but maybe it hadn’t. Strong was receiving hazard pay for this assignment, but no amount of pay would be worth having her body devastated by disease. She shuddered for a moment, then realized that her suit protected her, that there was nothing to fear as long as she worked slowly and meticulously and did not cut her suit. She went back over the bodies again, this time starting with the nurses, then the doctor with the stethoscope, then the sixteen patients, then the unidentified body, and finally the three Italians. She looked at the Italians

grimly. They had been in space suits just like hers only a few weeks ago, assuring themselves that nothing would go wrong, and here they were. Corpses on a table. Long skeletons with just fragments of remaining flesh. Alice Strong wondered for a minute what her own skeleton would look like. She pictured her own femur bones, her hip bones, the ribcage, and her skull—all laid out on a table like these bodies. What would her skull look like? As she passed by the three bodies of the fallen Italians, thinking of the shape of her own skull, she had a troubling thought. She looked at the three Italian corpses again. Wait a minute, she thought. Something didn't look right.

Jacob Roessler, the dark-haired Italian-looking C.D.C. scientist, and his boss, the blonde long-haired Swede Bjorn Jendel, were busy calming the nerves of a line of Kigoma villagers which stretched over a half mile down the main road out of town. Since 9:00 a.m., the two had begun giving blood tests to everyone in the village. The encouraging news so far was that no one seemed to be infected with the new virus. Even relatives of patients and medical personnel at the hospital were showing up clean. Roessler and Jendel gave each person in line a leaflet containing information about the virus, symptoms to look for, and messages to contact their team if they saw anyone who might be infected or who appeared to be very sick. Both men wore surgical scrubs, multiple pairs of latex gloves and cotton masks. As Roessler swabbed a patient's arm and began to take a syringe of blood, he asked Jendel whether they should be wearing RACAL suits.

"No, I don't think so, Jacob. We know this thing has an incubation period of around a week during which time the patient is not contagious. All of these patients here look fine to me, so they are either not infected or they are in the incubation period. What we have to worry about is if we see anyone in these lines who looks very sick or who has the classic symptoms of the virus. If I look down the line and see that coming at me, believe me, I will be in a RACAL suit faster than you."

"Do you think the virus got out past the hospital?" asked Roessler.

"The patients were quarantined by Doctor Beladar and one nurse as soon as they came to the hospital according to the reports we have, so I do not think the other nurses or the other patients became infected. Then we have an explosion which nuked everything, so it is pretty unlikely, but you never know. I would think if the virus got outside the hospital, we

would be seeing more villagers infected, and so far we have not seen that.”

“I hope we can contain this thing,” said Roessler.

“Me too,” said Jendel, swabbing another patient’s arm.

“That explosion seemed a little convenient to me,” said Roessler. “Any chance it was one of our people, like CIA or something?”

Jendel eyed Roessler. He liked the young scientist. Jendel had to admit that he too had thought the timing rather convenient. “I suppose it is possible. That’s a lot of people to kill. I don’t know. I would like to have more faith in my government than that.” Jendel looked up at the large, fat, black woman in front of him. He was having trouble finding a vein. After the third try, he got it and plunged in the needle.

Roessler seemed convinced of his government conspiracy theory. “Have you talked to Tsung? He has been gone a while and I have heard nothing back from him.”

“He’s military,” said Jendel. “You know how they are. They report to their chain of command and we civilians often get left out of the loop.” Jendel looked up and saw Alice Strong coming toward him wearing blue surgical scrubs, wearing a mask around her neck but not tied over her mouth, and carrying several 8×10 glossy photos. Roessler tried to see what was on the photos but he could not make it out.

Strong motioned for Jendel to come over to her. Jendel got up from his folding chair and walked to Strong. “We need to talk privately,” said Strong. Jendel turned back to Roessler.

“Jacob, can you handle this alone for a moment?”

“Sure, Dr. Jendel, no problem.” Strong and Jendel walked into another tent where they could have privacy. Strong trusted Jendel more than anyone else on this assignment. They were both experienced government scientists. Strong felt more comfortable talking with him than the CIA and military agents swarming the compound. When they were alone, Strong showed Strong the photographs.

“Bjorn, we have a problem,” said Strong.

“What is it?”

“Take a look at these photographs. These are photographs of the skulls of the three Italians from the Instituto Nazionale. We had thought that these were the Italians because the bodies were found in remnants of RACAL suits with the remains of oxygen tanks on their backs.” Three photographs of skulls were spread out on the table. “The first photograph

is Skull #1, which I will call Larry. The second is Skull #2, which I will call Curly. The third photograph is of Skull #3, which I will call Moe.”

“I didn’t know any women liked the Three Stooges,” smiled Jendel.

“I am one of the few,” deadpanned Strong. “Notice anything different about these three photographs?”

Jendel looked at all three. They just looked like skulls to him. “No, I don’t notice anything unusual. What am I supposed to be looking at?”

“The first two skulls, Larry and Curly, have skulls with a flat profile on top. The jaw is prognathic, which means it sticks out a little. Look at the nasal cavity on the two skulls—a narrow triangle. In this area between the eyes, which we call the nuchal ridge, the space is long and thin. The nasal aperture is silled. The eye orbits are angular and sloping. These are the classic signs of a Caucasian skull. Now look at Moe. The top of the skull is more pointed instead of flat. There are no nasal sills. There is a broad, round nasal cavity. The nuchal ridge space is wider. The palate is horseshoe-shaped. The eye orbits are rounded and non-sloping. Moe has an African skull.”

“So you are telling me that two of the Italians were white and one was black?” asked Jendel.

“Probably so. Now this is not an exact science, of course, but if I had to put money on it, I would say that Moe was black. According to representatives of the Instituto Nazionale, who I just called, all three Italians were white.”

Jendel stared at the photographs. He looked up at Strong, confused by the implications of her findings. Jendel adjusted his eyeglasses. “If Moe is not an Italian scientist, who is he and what was he doing in the RACAL suit? And where is the missing Italian?”

“Right,” said Strong. “All good questions.”

“Who have you told about this?” asked Jendel.

“Just you so far. Why, do you want me to keep a lid on this?”

“For now. Let me talk to my superiors back at Washington and see how they want to proceed.”

“OK,” said Strong. “But if you learn anything important on your end, let me know.”

“Sure,” said Jendel.

Strong took her photographs and walked back to the Coroner’s Tent to do more work. Half an hour later, working in her space suit, Strong

had taken blood samples from Larry and Curly, the two bodies of the men Strong believed were white Italian scientists. Strong put the specimens under a microscope on a glass slide. After running several antigen tests, she determined that the blood type of Larry was Type A+. The blood type of Curly was Type AB-. The blood type of Moe was Type B+. She then returned to her own tent and began sending e-mails to her contact at the Istituto Nazionale. She needed to know the blood type of all three Italian scientists. After two hours, Strong received a response e-mail from her contact. Guido Macchione was Type A+. Antonio Paciello was Type AB-. Matteo Graciano was Type A-. That meant that Guido Macchione, deceased, was the body identified as Larry; Antonio Paciello, deceased, was the body identified as Curly. Whoever Moe was, he certainly was not Matteo Graciano. Moe was probably the second Kigoma hospital doctor. Why the hospital doctor was in the Italian's RACAL suit, Strong didn't know. But one thing was certain. Matteo Graciano, Italian Level 4 Biohazard Scientist, was not among the dead. He was Missing in Action.

While Strong was in her own personal tent checking e-mails, a person dressed in a RACAL suit silently snuck into the Coroner's tent. Pulling out a hand-held bone saw, the stranger walked over to the table where the body known as Moe was lying. Moments later, Moe's skull was sawed off and placed in a nylon bag. The stranger quickly exited the Coroner's tent, placed the RACAL suit back on the hanger, and walked out.

Two hundred feet away, in her own tent, Dr. Alice Strong took another sip from her Aquafina water bottle. After a few minutes, she suddenly felt a tightening in her chest. What was that, she wondered. Then it got worse. She felt as if she were going into cardiac arrest. She desperately ran for her book bag, hoping to find baby aspirin or something to stop the grip on her heart. She lunged out in one final desperate grab, but found nothing, her mouth wide open in surprise. Knocking the small foldout table over, she collapsed onto the dirt floor in silence. Ten minutes later, a head peeked into Strong's tent. Seeing Strong on the ground, the stranger ran to her body and felt her pulse. She was gone. Regrettable, the stranger thought, but necessary. The stranger looked for the Aquafina water bottle, pocketed it, and then replaced it with a half-empty bottle the stranger had brought into the tent. The stranger did a quick scan on Strong's laptop. Scanning for dangerous e-mails, the stranger found nothing that worrisome. Two e-mails relating to blood types were deleted

from the laptop, however. Making one more quick look around the tent, the stranger was satisfied and left into the humid night air.

The next morning, a young, black Army soldier yelled from the direction of Strong's tent that there was an emergency. Strong's body had been discovered. It appeared that she had suffered a heart attack. But there was no other medical examiner here in Kigoma. One would have to be sent for from the United States. That would take at least a day or two. The soldiers gathering in the tent agreed the best course was to leave Strong's body in the exact position they found it, without disturbing it until a new medical examiner could be summoned.

Jendel was anxious to begin the lab work on the blood samples they had collected from the cadavers in Kigoma. He decided to take his CDC crew, including Jacob Roessler and Murielle Winston, back to Atlanta to begin their work. They could train other Army doctors to administer the remaining blood tests to the villagers. Jimmy Pond from the CDC and Agent Tsung from USAMRIID would remain behind in Kigoma to make sure the disease had not spread. If they reported back a spread of the disease, Jendel and his team would be back.

Murielle Winston and Jacob Roessler were happy to go home. As they boarded the Chinook, they began speculating among themselves regarding possible reasons for Strong's sudden death. Murielle texted her husband Charlie, letting him know she would be home soon. Roessler lived alone, so he had no family to call. He was happy to take a bunk on the helicopter for some shut-eye. It had been a long week. Jendel was the last to board. Before he got on the Chinook, he paused to give a text message to Roger Tsung:

Roger, watch yourself. One of three bodies in RACAL suits was black man. All three Italian scientists white. Fear Dr. S death not an accident. Keep me posted. BJ.

CHAPTER 36. HOT DOGS

Atlanta, Georgia

TWO DAYS LATER, Charlie Winston was back in Atlanta with his wife and fourteen year-old son. His son's wheelchair stood next to the sofa. Teddy Winston was sitting on the couch in an Atlanta Falcons jersey and gym shorts, holding a huge bowl of potato chips. His father Charlie Winston, also wearing a Falcons jersey, as well as an Emory University baseball hat on backwards, came in from the kitchen, holding an orange soda in his hand, and plopped down on the couch next to his son.

"Has it started yet?" asked Charlie.

"Not yet," said his son.

On the coffee table in front of him was an entire tray of at least thirty cooked hotdogs.

"Did you do your gut exercises, son?"

"Yes, Dad. I've done this before, you know."

"OK, so you do know that you are going down today? I am taking back the crown?" asked Charlie Winston.

"Do I look nervous? This will be a walk in the park."

"Hmmm. OK. Talkin' smack to the old man, heh? Well, we will see."

Just then a thin green snake slid its way along the sofa behind Charlie Winston's neck. The snake slid over Charlie Winston's right shoulder and was halfway down his bicep, when Winston jumped up in fright.

"What the...?"

The snake landed on the ground and then curled itself by the base of the television.

Teddy Winston burst out laughing.

"Teddy, I told you that you do not let Igor out of his terrarium. He is not a dog! He can't just have free reign of the house!" Charlie Winston picked up the green snake and gingerly placed it back inside its terrarium. He looked at his son, who laughed again.

"You should have seen your face! 'What the heck? I am sooo scared.' You almost pooped in your pants!" The ten year-old rolled on the couch, laughing harder.

"Oh, really?" said Winston. "Well, I do not know if you heard but I picked up an invisible cobra today at the snake store. Here it is." He

cupped his hand and acted as if he was carrying an imaginary snake. “Only thing the guy at the snake store said was to watch out for kids, because the cobra has a thing for them, so I said..... Woah!” Winston acted like the imaginary snake was getting away from him and he jumped on his son, tickling him. “Hang on, son! I’ll save you from the cobra!” Teddy couldn’t breathe he was laughing so hard.

“Stop!” he laughed.

“Acckkhh!” Winston made a sound like a cobra shooting venom and dive-bombed his son again with the imaginary snake. After a few minutes of tickling and laughing, the two sat back on the couch.

Teddy Winston loved snakes. He had no idea when his love for snakes started, but he just was fascinated by them. He had four snakes as pets: a green snake named Igor, a brown snake named Wolfman, and two orange snakes named Dan and Marino. He kept them all in separate terrariums in his room. Occasionally, he would let them run wild in the house, until he heard his mother or father suddenly scream. Then he would laugh and roll his wheelchair over to retrieve the snake.

Despite the car accident that took his legs, Teddy Winston was a happy child with two great parents. He made friends easily at school and was very outgoing. His teachers loved him. The only thing he didn’t like were those heavy sighs and looks of pity his mother or father would occasionally give him, for they were signs that he wasn’t normal, that his parents wished something more for him. He knew he could never walk again, and had accepted the fact very quickly. He wished his parents could move on as easily as he had. There was more to life than legs, he thought. He may not be a track star, but he certainly had a lot to contribute to the world. Deep down, his parents knew that, too, but they felt the guilt that all parents feel when they believe their child is suffering. Teddy was happy for his parents to be back from their international trips. He got bored when his grandmother was staying with him, because she did not know how to play video games and was generally ignorant about any modern technology.

Today, the television was set to ESPN for the annual Nathan’s Hotdog Eating Contest on Coney Island, where the world record-holding champion would be competing against challengers to try to eat the greatest number of hot dogs. The ESPN announcer, prior to the start of the contest, announced the results of an ESPN poll in which viewers

were asked whether competitive eating contests constituted a “sport,” to which 86% responded in the negative. Today’s returning champion, Joey Chestnut, an engineering student from San José, California, would be competing. Chestnut held the record for the last four years, successfully knocking out the prior champion, Takeru “Tsunami” Kobayashi in 2007 by eating 66 hot dogs and buns in twelve minutes—a record which he topped in 2009 with 68. Chestnut not only held the hotdog eating record, but also the record for eating fried asparagus (9.3 pounds); pork ribs (9.8 pounds in twelve minutes); steak (4.5 pounds, plus sides, in 8 minutes); chicken wings (241 wings); Krystal burgers (103); and Matzoh balls (78 in eight minutes).

“Oh, I see Eater X is back,” said Winston.

“Yeah, but he doesn’t have a chance,” said Teddy.

Tim “Eater X” Janus, the third-place finisher from 2011, wore a mask like Racer X from the Speed Racer cartoon.

“They have that gross guy back again this year,” said Teddy.

“Deep Dish? Yuck.” Pat “Deep Dish” Bertoletti, a fat man with a brown mustache, beard and scraggly hair, was the second-place finisher in 2011, and liked to wash his dogs down with some kind of red fruit punch. The result was that during the contest, he looked like Jeffrey Dahmer, a crazed serial killer awash in blood, devouring his victims’ flesh. Charlie Winston was convinced his strategy was to make his opponents throw up, which would disqualify them.

“Is Notorious B.O.B. back again?” asked Charlie Winston.

“Oh, yeah. But he didn’t even break 40 dogs last year, so he ain’t goin’ nowhere.”

“Yep.”

“What about you? You think you got what it takes?”

“Not even gonna break a sweat,” said Teddy.

A few minutes later, the ESPN play-by-play man announced the start of the competition and rang the starting bell. At the sound of the bell, Charlie Winston and his son began devouring hotdogs. A few times, Teddy bugged out his eyes and tried to make funny faces to make his dad spit out his food, but it didn’t work. For twelve straight minutes, they crammed food into their mouths. When it was over, Teddy Winston had eaten 33 dogs, his father 28.

“You are an eating machine!” Charlie Winston exclaimed, giving his

son a high-five. On the screen, Joey Chestnut had won again, keeping his crown.

Just then his wife Murielle walked in. She was happy to be back from Africa, but really hated this annual tradition. She was always afraid her son would choke to death.

“Charlie, I told you that over-eating is not good for Teddy. He could choke! When are you going to stop all of these eating competitions? Teddy, you are going to grow into a giant fat tub of lard like your Auntie Emmie if you keep this up.”

“Hey, my sister’s not a tub of lard,” said Charlie Winston.

“Um, yes, she is,” said Murielle, hitting him with a dish towel. “She cannot even fit into her car. She uses a moped to go around the grocery store.”

“She’s just big-boned, that’s all,” smiled Winston, hugging his wife.

“Uk! You smell like hot dogs,” she said, backing up and waving her hand over her nose.

“C’mom baby, give Charlie a hug.” Winston then gave a loud burp, belching hot dog breath in a five foot radius.

“Oooh! You are so gross!” she said, smiling. “Get away from me, Hot Dog Breath!”

“C’mere, baby, Charlie wants his hot mustard.”

Teddy laughed as Charlie Winston ran around the couch chasing his wife. He finally caught her and gave her another kiss on the cheek.

“Teddy, why don’t you watch TV for a little bit while I talk to mom? And don’t barf up those hot dogs!”

Teddy agreed, and switched the TV station to re-runs of Family Guy. Charlie Winston smiled at his son and then pulled his wife in the bedroom to talk to her.

“We didn’t get a chance to talk last night when you got in. How was Africa?”

“You know I can’t talk about that, Charlie,” said Murielle. “But let’s just say it was not the typical day at the office.”

“Should I be worried?”

“No, I am fine,” she lied. The truth was that the scares with the Ebola virus in the field had terrified her. “But I may have to go back there in a few days. They needed me back in the lab at the CDC.”

“You said you had a scare in the field. What was that all about?”

“Oh, it was nothing. You know how it is in my field, when you are dealing with deadly viruses, every day is terrifying.”

“You are lying to me. Something bad happened. What was it?”

Murielle turned away. This was the part of her job that she hated, keeping secrets from her husband. “Charlie, you know I can’t talk about it. But I am fine, I really am. Now tell me about you. How did your speech go in Bristol? Were you hailed as a conquering hero?”

“It was a lot of fun. I think my book on this subject is going to do fantastically well. There was even a CNN lady there. I think a lot of people are interested in this whole ‘naming of America’ thing.”

“Well of course they are,” beamed Murielle, hugging her husband, “Your research is brilliant.”

“Thanks,” said Charlie Winston. “You know, I had an interesting dinner with a UCLA professor named John Morse. You may remember, he was that guy who did all the research on Nostradamus last year. His son is in my class.”

“Don’t remember him,” said Murielle.

“Anyway, he found something in the ship logs that I found in Seville that no one else has spotted yet. According to John, these logs pinpoint the exact position in the Bay of Honduras where the legendary Fountain of Youth was located.”

Murielle Winston was a woman of science, not fantasy. She looked at her husband, unsure if he was really buying into this story.

“You’re kidding, right?”

“No, I’m not. He had all kinds of historical records pointing to the Fountain of Youth being located in the modern-day Bay of Honduras, and the ship logs I found were apparently the final piece of the puzzle. He says he can find the island where the Fountain is located. He wants me to come with him to find it.”

“To the Bay of Honduras?”

“Yes.”

“You have some boat that I don’t know about?”

“No, we’d obviously have to rent a boat.”

Murielle was silent. “You said ‘we.’”

“Well, yeah, I mean, if I decided to do it. But I am not doing it.”

“Charlie, we have a disabled child. You know I have to go back and forth to Africa and Washington D.C. I need someone to watch Teddy.

You cannot go traipsing off to some jungle island in search of a fantasy. You have responsibilities.”

“No, I know, you’re right. Plus, there would be no way the History Department would approve funding for a third trip this year. Still, you have to admit, it would be fun.”

“Sure, it would be real fun when you drown in a storm at sea or get eaten by cannibals. Then I have to take care of Teddy all by myself. That would be really fun.”

“Look who is talking, Mrs. Level 4 Biohazard. You encounter more danger and death in one day than I will in my whole lifetime.”

“I know, Charlie, but what I am doing is important. It is saving lives.”

Charlie looked at his wife, hurt. “Oh, so what I am doing is not important?”

Murielle sighed. “No, I did not say that. What you are doing is great. When you went to Seville, that work will be known for generations because it helps us know how our country was founded. But the Fountain of Youth? Come on? Why would you waste your time and our money charting a boat into the wilderness to find something as ridiculous and non-existent as that?”

Charlie did think such a trip was a bit quixotic. Nevertheless, something inside him yearned to find out if the fountain was real. There was no further point fighting with his wife. The University would never approve the trip anyway, and he could not take that much time away from his classes if he wanted to keep his job at the University. He decided to let it go.

“Well, I guess it is kind of silly. Maybe you are right. When do you go back into the field?”

“They don’t know. I am on call. I expect I may go back soon. In the meantime, we are out of milk and orange juice. Can you pick some up?”

“Sure.”

“And no more hot dogs!” smiled Murielle. Winston chased his wife into the bedroom, trying to breathe on her again.

CHAPTER 37. FUNDING

Bel Air, California. Home of Actor Skip Drame.

THE GATED, GLASS-AND-STEEL mansion was enormous. Professor John Morse had met actor Skip Drame on the movie set of *The Nostradamus Prophecies*, an action-adventure movie based upon Morse's book last year about his travels to Europe to find the missing prophecies of Nostradamus. Drame had originally been hired to play Morse, but half way through filming, Drame had been fired when he showed up for work one morning bouncing off the wall from doing seven lines of cocaine. He was an excellent actor, when he was sober and clean, but the hard part was keeping him that way. When he went on a drug binge, he was prone to say ridiculous things. That morning, he had claimed to be Nostradamus and had infuriated the director when he issued a prophecy that the director would be "his future voodoo witch bitch," whatever that meant. Filming had stopped and Drame, despite his fame and money, was on the blacklist in Hollywood. He was toxic. No one would hire him until he made a firm commitment to a substance abuse program. Unfortunately for Drame, he did not like being told what to do, so he had spent the last month since the firing speeding around Hollywood in his yellow Ferrari antagonizing every policeman he could find. His lawyer currently had seven scheduled court dates for Drame, ranging from possession of a controlled substance, to driving over 100 miles per hour on Sunset Blvd., to assaulting a photographer. When Morse rang the doorbell, Drame's doorman—fired the day before by Drame for allegedly "trying to play your sneak attack Ninja racquetball games in my head"—did not answer the door. Drame answered the giant walnut door himself, wearing blue pajama pants and a purple Lakers jersey. His black hair was pushed up in the middle. Morse was unsure if this was some Beckham hairstyle or if Drame merely had just rolled out of bed.

"Johnny! *Que pasa, bro?*" said Drame, opening the door and welcoming Morse in. Drame walked past an exercise bike turned upside down in the front hallway. "Hey, sorry for the mess. I just fired the cleaning lady." The cleaning lady, who had been fired the day before for—in the words of Skip Drame—"goin' Martha Stewart up my ass," joined the doorman in the line downtown for unemployment benefits, baffled as to what she had done wrong to deserve her termination. She figured Drame

would probably hire her back in the next week.

Drame welcomed Morse into the kitchen, where Morse sat down at the huge wooden kitchen table. Drame walked behind the butcher block, making himself a nutrition drink in a blender, pouring in bananas, whey protein, flax seed, and something green. He blended the ingredients together, poured it into a cup, and started drinking it. He grimaced. “Ah, fuck this! Staying healthy sucks.” Drame poured the rest of the health drink down the sink. “I am sick of this health shit. Fuck it. I’m making a Bloody Mary. You want one?”

“It’s a little early for me,” said Morse, smiling.

“Suit yourself,” said Drame, pouring in Worcestershire sauce and adding a long, firm celery stick. “You know, whatever happened to the fuckin’ celery stick, John? The fuckin’ fantastic celery stick? Lately, all you get is pearl onions or those stupid mini pickles or olives or something? A Bloody Mary is nothing without the fuckin’ kick-ass 100% genuine celery stick.” Drame stirred the ingredients in the glass around with the celery stick and then sat down at the table. “Now, John, what brings you to my table, Kemo Sabe?”

“I want you to fund a trip I am making to the Bay of Honduras to find the Fountain of Youth.”

“I’m in,” said Drame, nonchalantly. There was a pause, as Morse was speechless.

“Wait. What?” asked Morse.

“I’m in.”

Morse hesitated a few seconds before speaking. “I haven’t told you anything about it yet.”

“Don’t need to know. I love this Indiana Jones shit, Johnny. And, as you know, I just got fired from Paramount so I don’t have anything to do for a while. If we don’t find anything, then I get a good tan. If we do find something, I will be on the cover of *People Magazine*. What’s not to love?”

“OK, but you know it is extremely unlikely that we will find anything?”

“That’s what you said about Nostradamus, John. I’m in. Now, of course, I have a few *quid pro quo*’s.”

“OK,” said Morse, anticipating trouble.

“First, I’m coming on the trip with you, of course. Second, I get to bring two dates, so I don’t get lonely. Third, you don’t give me shit

about any drugs that I might do on the trip. Oh, and Mountain Man is coming.”

“Who is Mountain Man?”

“He is a friend of mine. This guy is totally League of Shadows, man, knows rappelling off mountains, bow hunting, and all that shit. And he’s totally MacGyver, you know? Put him in the middle of the woods with twenty grizzly bears, and he will fashion a rocket ship out of a pine cone, know what I mean? He’s a good man. Oh, and one other thing.”

“Yes?” asked Morse.

“If we find the Fountain of Youth, I get to use it first and I go 80-20 with you on the patent.”

“How about 50-50?” asked Morse, smiling.

“60-40,” said Drame.

“Done,” said Morse, and shook Drame’s hand.

Drame got excited. “Man, this is going to be kick-ass! I’m going to R.E.I. today and getting’ some Hunger Games shit. I’m gonna be Katniss Everdeen! OK, well, she’s a girl. Whatever that fuckin’ guy’s name in Hunger Games was, the guy who shot rabbits with a bow and arrow, the good lookin’ dude, you know. Thor’s brother. That’s who I am gonna be. Oh, man, this is goin’ to kick ass! I gotta call Mountain Man!”

Atlanta, Georgia

AFTER MORSE CALLED Charlie Winston and told him that Morse had secured funding for the voyage, Winston was tempted. He had rejected the idea when he knew the University would not approve the funding, but now that obstacle was cleared. He could probably get a substitute teacher for a week or two. He had tenure, after all, so if he only missed a week or two, that should not create too many waves. He just had to get the idea past his wife. He just had to convince her to let him leave their wheelchair-bound son with his mother while he boarded a yacht with an insane, crack-addicted actor and his two scantily-clad girlfriends in search of a mythological ancient relic. Winston silently groaned. This was not going to be easy.

“Honey,” he said as he snuggled with his wife in bed that night. “I got an interesting call today.”

Murielle Winston sat up in bed, suspicious. “Call? From whom?”

“From John Morse, that UCLA Professor. Turns out, he was able to get that whole voyage to search for the Fountain of Youth paid for by an actor in Hollywood.”

“Actor? What actor?”

“Skip Drame,” said Charlie Winston sheepishly.

“Skip Drame? The crackhead? That guy is totally insane. Why would he agree to pay for the trip?”

“I don’t know. But he said as long as he gets to go along, he will pay for everything—the boat, the supplies, the crew, the whole deal.”

Murielle Winston looked at her husband suspiciously. “Oh, no,” she said. “You told him you were going, didn’t you?”

“No, absolutely not, honey. I said I would talk about it with you.”

“But you didn’t say you couldn’t go?”

“Well, no, I didn’t say that. I wanted to talk to you about it.”

Murielle Winston looked at her husband with tight, dissatisfied look. “Well, you’ve obviously already made up your mind, so go.”

“I haven’t already made up my mind, that’s why I am talking to you, honey.”

“How are you going to miss that much time from classes?”

“I have a Teaching Assistant who can cover for me for a week, and I think a week is all it will take.”

“A week? What if it lasts longer? And where would you stay?”

“Well, we would stay on the boat. Drame is getting a big yacht, there is plenty of room for all of us.”

“All of us? Who’s all of us?”

“Well, there would be me, and John Morse, and his son Zach Morse, who is a student in my classes. Then we have a captain of the boat. And then John Morse is bringing along a local Mayan guide to help us with any strange terrain or Mayan languages. And then there would be Skip Drame’s friends.”

“How many friends?”

Winston looked suspiciously innocent. “Um, I think he said he was bringing three people.”

“Who are these three people?”

“Um, I think there is a guy called Mountain Man Pete, who is kind of a survival expert.

And then Skip has two girlfriends, as I understand it.”

Murielle Winston stood up and turned on the light. “Girlfriends?”

“Well, honey, Skip Drame is financing this whole thing, right? So I do not have a lot of say in what goes down, baby, because he can just pull out at any time, right?”

“Who are these girlfriends?”

“Not sure exactly.”

“Wait a minute! I’ve seen those women on E! The blonde with the big boobs and the eight-foot tall black woman?!”

“Honey, I have no idea what their bodies look like. All I know is...”

“The hell you don’t!” she yelled. “So you are planning to shack up with two strippers while I stay here and clean up Teddy’s bowel movements, clean the house, go to work, and save the world from Level 4 viruses? Come on, Charlie!”

“Um, well, when you put it that way, I see what you mean, but I am pretty sure it is a pretty big boat, so I can stay pretty far away from them most of the time.”

“Hell no!”

“Honey, this thing is all planned! I can’t back out now.”

“I am not having you surround yourself with whores for two weeks while I am here by myself. No way!”

“Murielle, the only reason I am doing this is if we find this Fountain, you never know, it might cure Teddy’s paralysis.” Murielle snarled.

“Now, that is as low as it gets. You are not doing this for Teddy. You are doing it for your own ego, so you can write another book.”

“That’s not true. But think of it, Murielle. What if there was something that could cure him. Wouldn’t that be worth it?” Charlie Winston knew he was stooping very low, throwing the guilt of their son’s condition and a possible cure as a reason for letting him go on his excursion.

Murielle Winston hesitated. All she wanted in life was a cure for her son. But this was ridiculous.

“Look, I did not want you to go to England and you went there. And now you are going to traipse off with these whores and spend more money. We have bills here, you know?”

“I know. Everything is paid up. My advance for my book is coming soon. We won’t owe bills for another few weeks, and before you know it, I will be home and can pay them then. On this trip, Skip is paying for everything.”

Murielle said nothing.

Winston put his hand on her chin and lifted it up, as he looked in her eyes.

“Murielle, the minute I saw you, I knew I would always love you. You are the only woman I think about, baby. I am not lookin’ at any white girl half my age or any black woman twice your size. I just want to do this for Teddy. It might turn out to be a wild goose chase. In fact, the chance of that is almost 99%. But what if it doesn’t? What if there is some kind of cure there? I would always regret it if I did not take the chance. We have a brief window to do this before other people find out. Will you trust me?”

Murielle looked at her husband with trusting eyes.

“OK, I will trust you. But I am doing this for Teddy, not you. And if you don’t come home with a cure, you better be bearin’ jewelry!”

“You got it baby. You are the best!” He kissed her.

“Uk! You still have hot dog breath.”

CHAPTER 38. YACHT

Cancun, Mexico.

THE GROUP HAD decided that because Zach Morse was already in Atlanta at school, Professor Charlie Winston would fly with Zach to Cancun, where they would meet Zach's father John Morse, Drame, and the rest of the entourage. After an uneventful flight on Delta from Atlanta to Cancun, Charlie Winston and his student Zach Morse drove the rented Ford van into the Breezes Marina and parked in the parking lot. Winston took out a four-wheeled flatbed dolly which contained his clothing, food, supplies, photography gear, maps, lanterns, flashlights, raingear, GPS equipment, a terrarium for any small animals or reptiles found on the island, flasks for plant samples found on the island, work gloves, insecticide, and other gear. He pushed the flatbed dolly down the pier towards the boats. At the end of the ramp, he saw John Morse, dressed in khaki shorts and a Georgetown T-shirt. Morse gave a warm hug to his son, whom he had not seen in a month. Wearing iPod earbuds snaking in white cords from the ears, and tossing to the side his sun-bleached, California wind-swept hair, Zach Morse sauntered down the pier carrying only a black backpack. Zach hugged his dad when he saw him. "Hey, Pops," he said. When he got near the end of the pier, Zach Morse stared at the big yacht in awe.

"Whoa! Is that it? That thing is humongous!"

Near the end of the pier was a huge 150-foot white luxury yacht, with three decks, each deck smaller than the deck below it. A white mast jutted out backwards at an angle from the top deck, with radar equipment jutting out on either side. The side of the ship contained a white makeshift banner, with the name, "The Awesome Slut from Outback II."

Walking down the pier towards them was Skip Drame, the athletically built and tanned 45 year-old movie star with a slightly receding hairline of fine black hair. He had an Italian look which would normally make him quite handsome if it were not for the wrinkles and age lines which came from a life of too much cocaine use, cigarette smoking, and all-night partying. Drame was wearing a ridiculous looking African safari hat, no shirt, and blue and orange Hawaiian-patterned swim trunks. Walking next to Drame were two women. The first woman, short and thin, with feathered blonde hair, appeared to be half Drame's age, and was sporting

a purple bikini. The second woman, a seven-foot tall black woman, was wearing Chanel sunglasses, a cotton white cover up, and a look that said she couldn't care less.

"Professor Winston, I presume?" Drame tipped his safari hat.

Winston shook his hand. "Hello, Skip. Call me Charlie. I think you know John Morse. This is his son Zach Morse, who also happens to be my student at Emory University."

Drame shook each of their hands, and turned to Zach. "Your dad's a good man, Zach. Glad to have you aboard. This is Brenda and Bolinda." The women shook everyone's hands.

Zach looked at Skip Drame, sizing him up. "I noticed the name of your ship, Mr. Drame. What does it mean?"

Drame laughed. "Well, when I broke up with my last wife, the She-Bitch caught me fooling around with a waitress from Outback Steakhouse. My ex-wife called her the Slut from the Outback. I have a yacht similar to this in Newport Beach. When it came time to split up our property, I did not want to lose the boat, so I renamed it the 'The Awesome Slut from Outback.' I knew she would never want the boat if it was named that, so she took the house instead. This boat is pretty similar, so I named it the Awesome Slut from the Outback II."

Charlie Winston laughed nervously, glad his wife was not here to hear that story.

"Skip, were you able to get everything on the boat I requisitioned?" asked Charlie Winston.

"Well, just about. I know you wanted that Peco Brush Blazer." The Brush Blazer was a giant push mower that mowed down small trees and brush. "Unfortunately, I couldn't get that done in time. But we have machetes, so that will have to do. But hell, with these guns, we'll have that brush cut down in no time." Drame flashed his biceps for his girlfriends. The smaller woman smiled. Although Morse could not see the look of the taller woman behind her sunglasses, he was picturing her rolling her eyes.

Winston was very disappointed about the brush blazer. This decision was going to make their forging through the brush of the island much more arduous.

"What about the other items?" asked Winston.

"Got 'em all. GPS stuff, lab gear, rappelling ropes, the works. Come on, I will show you everything on board."

Drame put his hand on Charlie Winston's shoulder and led him towards the ship. Two burly men with black collared t-shirts, white gym shorts and sun glasses came up behind Drame and brought Winston and Morse's luggage up the gang plank and on board the ship.

When they got to the edge of the gangplank, Drame and his girlfriends walked up first, followed by Zach Morse. Charlie stayed behind to have one last cell phone chat with his wife. He dialed her number in Atlanta and assured her he was going to be safe.

"Don't worry baby, trust me. Everything is going to be fine."

"I trust you. It's those sluts I don't trust," said his wife on the line.

"Now, remember, baby, there is not going to be cell phone service out there, just the ship's radio. We are going to stop for a day in Belize, and I will call you then. After that, we will be out of cell range for a while. But as soon as we can get a cell signal, I will call you, okay?"

"Will you be safe?" asked Murielle. "I cannot take care of him by myself, you know."

"I know, I promise you. Nothing will happen. I will be back in a week."

"OK, when you get home, you are my slave."

"That's a promise, sweetie. I will see you soon. I love you." He then asked to speak to Teddy.

"Teddy, you are the man of the house now for a little while. You take care of your Mommy, okay?"

"Sure, Dad. I will be good. Hey, Dad, will you try and get me a new snake, maybe one from the island?"

"I will do my best, Teddy. That's assuming we even find the island."

"I know you'll do it, Dad."

Charlie Winston air-kissed his son over the phone, hung up, and walked up the plank to the deck of the yacht.

Skip Drame took Charlie Winston and Zach Morse around the ship, introducing them to other passengers. There was the Captain Ben Z. The gray-haired, bearded captain apparently had a long, unpronounceable Czechoslovakian name beginning with Z and ending in "ski." He had a firm handshake and gave Winston and Morse a quick tour of the captain's deck. There were the two solidly built security guards, whose names were not disclosed. They stayed close to Skip Drame at all times. Charlie Winston wondered if they had guns. There was the expert on mountain

repelling, who Drame referred to as Mountain Man Pete. Mountain Man Pete had a long ZZ-Top beard and a red Jimmy Buffet t-shirt which read “Salt, Salt, Salt” on the front and had a drawing of a parrot on the back. When Winston met Pete, he was sleeping in a hammock on the second deck. Drame had also brought his own personal French chef, Robert (pronounced “Ro-bear”), who would be responsible for keeping everyone on board well-fed. He greeted them from the kitchen and showed them where to get snacks or late-night food if they ever needed it. John Morse also introduced everyone to Ka’an, a short, stocky bald Mayan with narrow eyes, a short-cropped beard and a friendly smile. Ka’an would be their interpreter on the trip. He was fluent in most of the Mayan dialects, as well as Spanish and English. He lived in Los Angeles, but he was originally from Santa Catarina, Guatemala. He had been the cheapest of the labor on the voyage.

Drame also had a personal assistant named Mindy Bryant, a short, skinny brunette with short hair who always seemed to be carrying a clipboard or talking into a Blackberry. Drame left Winston and Morse in Mindy’s capable hands and returned to his two female friends. Mindy went over the itemized checklist of items Winston had requisitioned, making sure they had everything which had been ordered. Satisfied that the list was complete, Mindy went to talk to the Captain and advised him that they could take off. Winston felt a little guilty. He knew this whole trip was probably going to be a waste of time, but he was simply dying of curiosity. With his family on his mind, Winston went to his cabin below deck and took a nap.

At a cruising speed of about twenty miles per hour, Drame’s yacht had only traveled about two hundred miles by dinnertime. Charlie Winston woke up and showered, changing his clothes into jeans, a gray t-shirt and a black hooded sweatshirt. He went up to the main deck, where he found the rest of the passengers gathered in a luxurious leather-chaired room. Zach Morse was playing backgammon with the Mountain Man. Mindy was seated at a desk, looking at something on her laptop computer. The two women, one short and one tall, were seated at a bar with Skip Drame, downing cocktails. The two security guards were standing at attention at the door to the room, with their arms crossed, not speaking. Charlie Winston and John Morse took seats in leather chairs near a coffee table in the middle of the room, next to Ka’an, who was reading a Spiderman

comic book. When Drame saw Winston and John Morse come in, Drame, Brenda and Bolinda brought their martinis over to the leather couch and took a seat.

“So, Johnny, tell us more about this island with the Fountain of Youth,” insisted Drame.

Brenda, the short blonde, smiled at Morse. “John, you have to promise me I get the first drink from the Fountain.”

Drame turned to Brenda. “No way, it’s old farts like us who need the fountain water, right Charlie?”

“Right,” said Winston.

“What does the fountain look like?” asked Brenda. Morse was clearly the expert on the Fountain, so he gave the lecture.

“Well, it is probably not a fountain at all,” said Morse. “The references in the historical texts are to a healing spring, so I suspect it will be either a stream or a pool of water, if it exists.”

“Will it make you like ten years younger or twenty years younger or what? I mean, could I turn into a baby if I drank from it?” asked Brenda.

“I don’t think so,” laughed Morse. “The references are just to a healing spring that makes men young. I would guess that it makes you healthier, and maybe it can even cure some disease. And if it eliminates aging, I doubt it would turn you into a baby.”

“How do you know where to look for it?” asked Brenda.

John Morse took out a nautical map and spread it out over the coffee table.

“Right here where this part of the bottom of Mexico juts out into the Gulf of Mexico, that’s Cancun. Just below that is Belize. And right here to the right of that is the Bay of Honduras. That’s where we think the island is located. According to the ship’s logs we recovered from explorer John Cabot, the starting point is a place called Veragua. Unfortunately, that does not help us much, because the name Veragua was given to a great many places in Central America, including parts of Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Panama. But we know that 14 leagues off of Veragua is a place called Flower Island. A Spanish league is about 3.2 nautical miles. So 14 leagues is about 45 nautical miles. Therefore, we need to find an island which is somewhere in the Gulf of Honduras about 45 miles off the coast which could be called Flower Island. And there we are lucky, because about 45 miles off the coast of Belize, located right here on our map,

there is a tiny island called Xochipilli.” Zach Morse and Mountain Man Pete had stopped playing backgammon and were now crowded around the map.

The two girlfriends and Drame looked confused. Zach was confused, too.

Bolinda Jeffries, the striking seven-foot tall model, finally spoke up. “What is Xochipilli?”

“Xochipilli is the Mayan word for an Aztec god called the ‘Prince of Flowers.’ Therefore, if my hypothesis is correct, Xochipilli must be what the Spanish explorers called ‘Flower Island!’”

Ka’an made a snorting sound of disapproval.

“What is it?” asked Winston.

Ka’an frowned. “Xochipilli is not just the god of flowers.”

“What else is he?” asked Zach.

Ka’an looked disgusted and refused to say, shaking his head no.

“I suspect what our friend is trying to say,” said John Morse, “is that Xochipilli is also the Mayan god who is the patron of male homosexuals.”

Drame patted Ka’an on the back. “Oh, is that all? No need to get stressed, Ka’an. Don’t be a hater, baby.”

“Skip,” said Morse, “You may also be interested to know that Xochipilli is also the patron of hallucinatory plants like cannabis and peyote.”

“Now, you’re talking,” said Drame. Drame paused, then raised his finger as if to say something, and then looked at the ceiling. “You just made me think of something.” Drame left the group for a moment, intent on finding his marijuana bong.

Zach looked at the maps again. “So what do we do when we find Flower Island?”

John Morse pointed to the map. “According to Cabot’s log books, if we go two leagues, or 6.4 miles north of Xochipilli, we should find two large rocks rising out of the water like pillars. If we can find the pillars, then we go nine leagues, or 28.8 miles east, and three leagues, or about 9.6 miles north, where we will arrive at the fabled island of Boyuca, also called Boinca or Ananeo. And that island is where we may find our Fountain of Youth.” Morse put a dot on the map and circled it in red.

“Once we get to the island, how will we find the Fountain of Youth?” asked Zach.

Morse pulled out a Xeroxed copy of a second map, which he had photocopied from the documents in Bristol. “We have this map thanks to Charlie’s recent discovery in Seville. I believe this to be the hand-drawn map from the Mayans in Veragua, given to John Cabot:



“And it is this map which will lead us to the Fountain of Youth.”

CHAPTER 39. XIBALBA

Gulf of Mexico

THE MEMBERS OF the expedition crowded around the table to get a good look at the Veraguan map. “This appears to be a map to the Mayan mythological realm underneath the Earth called ‘Xibalba,’” said Morse. “It looks as though we have to pass through the ancient Trials of Xibalba in order to find the ‘*Xaxtzintzoj Saqloloj*,’ or ‘pool of clear water.’”

Ka’an was suddenly interested again. “Ahhh,” he said, looking intently at the hand-drawn map.

“What are the Trials of Xibalba?” asked Zach.

“Ka’an, you are probably more familiar with this than I. Would you like to explain?”

“Yes, of course,” said Ka’an. “This is one of the oldest myths from the Mayan *K’iche’* people, found in the *Popol Vuh*, which is similar to our Creation Story, much like your Genesis from the Bible. The story concerns two Mayan hero twins, called Hunahpu and Xbalanque, who were athletes like their father Hun Hunahpu and their uncle Vucub Hunahpu. The story concerns the fight between the hero twins and the Xibalba. The Xibalba were the Lords of the Underworld, and lived in a land just underneath the Earth. Many years earlier, the Xibalba had summoned the twins’ father and uncle to the Underworld to play a sport against the Xibalba.”

“What was the sport?” Bolinda asked, suddenly more interested. Bolinda Jeffries, before going into modeling, had been the star center of the women’s basketball team at NC State, and had even played in the Finals of the NCAA Tournament in her senior year in college.

“It was kind of like a combination of racquetball and basketball,” said Ka’an. “It was played with a rubber ball. Scores could be made either by hitting the ball against the front wall and out of reach of the opponent, or by throwing the ball through a tall stone loop much like a basketball hoop turned on its side. Anyway, the father and uncle lost the match, and the Xibalba killed them. One day many years later, the two Mayan hero twins found their father’s sports equipment, and began playing in the ball court. Their noise awakened the Lords of Xibalba, who summoned them to the Underworld. The twins accepted the challenge, because they badly

wanted to avenge their father's and uncle's death. Their mother begged them not to go, but they went anyway."

"So what does that have to do with the map?" asked Zach, not following.

Ka'-an continued. "The map appears to depict the traditional challenges of the twins when they reached Xibalba. The road to Xibalba was very hard. The twins had to cross many challenges, including a river of blood, and a river of pus, and a river of scorpions."

"Pus?" winced Brenda, making a sour face. "That's disgusting."

"You can see on this map there is a drawing of a *zinaan*, which is the Mayan *K'iche'* word for scorpion. The map uses an older, alternative spelling of *xinaam*."

"So it appears," said Charlie Winston, "that our first challenge to the Fountain will be a river of scorpions."

Brenda looked at Bolinda. "I think I am going to wait on the boat when we get to the island," said Brenda. "You guys can handle the pus and the scorpions all on your own."

Bolinda disagreed. "I think it sounds fun. You guys mind if I go, too?"

"The more the merrier," said Ka'-an.

Ka'-an was animated as he studied the Mayan map. "The next challenge to Hunahpu and Xbalanque was the '*cahib xalcat be*,' or four bridges. These bridges were able to talk. The bridges were supposed to trick people into taking the wrong path.

"After that, there is the '*sia kanche k'ak*,' the hot stone chair. The Xibalba invited the twins to sit down on a chair which was really a hot cooking stone. But the twins were clever and realized the trick, and refused to sit down on the hot chair, disappointing the Lords of Xibalba. During the meeting, the Xibalba demons were seated on their own chairs, but they brought in wax mannequins who looked just like them. If the visitors could not tell which Xibalba demon was real and which was a fake, they would be put to death. The twins avoided this trick by sending ahead magic mosquitoes, who figured out which were real Xibalba demons and which were the mannequins."

"Ahh, I see," said Zach, laughing. "So when we get to that one, all we will need is some magic talking mosquitoes."

"On the map you can see there is a picture of a stick figure carrying a

spear,” said Ka'-an. “Next to the picture it says ‘*xepo' t' oit ik jolom*,’ which means ‘wax soldier.’ Those must be the wax mannequins from the story.”

“The next trial of the Xibalba,” continued their Mayan guide, “was the Six Houses: the *Ak'ab Na* (Dark House), the *Sis Na* (Cold House), *Balam Na* (Jaguar House), *Sontz' Na* (Bat House), *Ch'am Na* (Razor House) and *K'ak Na* (Fire House). The twins had to use their wits to enter and exit each house without getting killed.”

Drame walked back in, carrying a small nylon bag, which presumably contained his marijuana bong. “Wait a minute. I missed it. Where are we now?”

“I was just explaining the Trials of Xibalba and we are nearing the end here on the map. The final trial was the *Tuj*, or the Oven. The twins had to enter a fiery oven. When they entered, they were immediately burned into ash. The Lords of Xibalba, who were happy that the twins had been killed, then spread their ashes in a river. However, the twins used magic to transform themselves from ashes into catfish, and then finally back into humans. Then, in disguise, they returned to the Xibalba and killed the demons, finally getting their vengeance.”

“What is this thing on the map that says ‘*Perik' Ok*?’” asked Zach.

“That means ‘ball court’ in *K'iche*,” said Ka'-an.

“Judging from this map,” laughed Winston, “it appears that after we fight our way through the trials of Xibalba, we are going to have to beat the natives in a little Hoop.”

“I’m down with that,” said Zach, excited.

“Well, now we have to bring Bolinda,” said Drame. “She was the star of her basketball team at NC State. I think she could come in handy.”

“But how are we going to get through the oven?” asked Zach Morse. “Last I checked, I do not have the power to turn myself from ash into a catfish.”

Zach’s father laughed. “I don’t know, Zach. That remains to be seen.”

Skip Drame opened his bag, and took out his green plastic marijuana bong. “Hey, we got about twenty minutes before Robert’s steaks are ready. Anybody want to share? This shit is really good.”

“That stuff will kill ya,” said Mountain Man, grousing in the corner.

John Morse and Charlie Winston were irritated. They were not about to get arrested for being around someone using illegal drugs. And young Zach was here.

“No thank you,” said Morse. “You really should stop that,” said Morse. “It is not going to do you any favors.”

“Spoken like someone who has never done it,” said Drame. “But I know what you mean. I am going to quit one of these days, as soon as I quit alcohol and cigarettes and women.” Drame laughed. Zach said nothing. Even if his father was not standing five feet away, there was no way Zach was going to do marijuana. As a gifted runner on the Emory University cross-country team, inhaling marijuana smoke was the last thing Zach was going to do.

The blonde woman, Brenda, took Drame up on his offer, while Bolinda retired to her own room. Bolinda Jeffries wondered why she put up with Drame. She could do so much better. But he was definitely helping her with her modeling career, and that is what paid the bills. As Brenda and Drame went to a lower deck to get stoned, Winston, John Morse, his son Zach, and Mountain Man Pete went upstairs to the upper deck to get some fresh air before dinner. Ka’an remained in the lounge, studying the Mayan map.

Winston, Morse, Zach, and the Mountain Man stood by the railing and looked out over the choppy waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

“Pete, tell me about you,” said Charlie Winston.

Pete grabbed the deck railing, anxious to get on dry land. “Grew up in Colorado, been there most of my life. My dad got me in to mountain climbing. I have climbed the Rockies, of course, but I have been all over the world—Kilimanjaro, Fuji, you name it.”

“Ever climb Everest?” asked Winston.

“Na, too damn cold. I mean, I am okay with snow and ice, but 50 degrees below, that ain’t for me. You guys ever been rappelling?”

“No,” said Zach.

“No,” said Winston. “Is it fun?”

“Oh, it’s a blast. I hope this island has some places to rappel. I would love to show you guys.”

The wind whipped Pete’s beard to one side. He shivered and zipped up his windbreaker.

“I will be happy when we hit the island.”

“How do you guys know each other?” asked Pete, pointing to Charlie Winston, John Morse and his son.

“Zach’s father is a professor and a colleague of mine. I teach at the

Emory University, where Zach is my student.”

“Oh, a little extra credit, I get it,” smiled Pete.

“He only gets extra credit if he finds the Fountain,” laughed Winston.

“You think it’s really out there?” asked Pete.

“No,” conceded Winston. “But I guess that’s one reason I am really happy someone else is paying for this trip. My wife is not too crazy about me going on this boondoggle.”

“Be happy you have a wife,” said Pete. “I treated my Christine badly and I never even got the chance to say I was sorry before she was killed. I have regretted it every day of my life. Sometimes, when I get to the top of a mountain, and I stare out over the Earth below, I feel a little closer to her.”

“You’re right,” said Winston. “There is nothing better than a good woman.”

Zach was suddenly quiet. The talk of Pete’s wife made him think of his mother, who had been killed in the 9-11 disaster. He missed her terribly. Zach took out his iPod and ear pods and plugged in some music. “I will see you guys at dinner. I am going to walk around the deck and chill for a bit.”

“OK,” said Winston, wondering what was wrong with his young student. Teenagers were always moody like that, he thought. Ten minutes later, the entire group gathered for dinner, and Charlie Winston had one of the best steaks of his life. He wished his wife and son were here to enjoy it. During dinner, Charlie Winston told the story of how Zach had livened up his classroom with his on-the-spot rap music. Zach finished the story, telling everyone how Winston had put Zach in his place with his own rap.

“Of course, we all know,” bragged Zach, “that I could have come back with another rap, but I didn’t want to embarrass Professor Winston in front of the whole class.”

“Ohhhh,” laughed Winston. “So we’re throwin’ down the gauntlet now, are we? So you think you are a better rapper than me?”

“Well, with all due respect, Professor, you’re kind of an old timer. My raps are fresh.”

“You gonna take that, Charlie?” asked Drame, laughing.

“You’re talk is big, boy, you want to prove it?”

“Damn straight,” said Zach.

“Rap off! Rap off! Rap off!” chanted Drame and Brenda.

Zach went over to a table and put his iPod in a small dock. He scrolled through several songs until he came up with some background rap music, which bellowed out the speakers on the deck. The dinner party guests all put their glasses in the air and encouraged Zach and Charlie to get up in front of the table for the competition.

“OK, said Drame. “Zach, you go first. Then Charlie has to rhyme Zach’s line, and then Charlie sends another line back to Zach. First stupid line loses, OK?”

“Got it,” said Zach.

“You’re on,” said Winston. Zach took out a ballcap, and turned it sideways on his head. Winston had no hat, so he took Drame’s safari hat and put it on his own head. Zach started off, beat-boxing to the music.

Zach: *Today, no delay, we be cruisin’ in this boat...*

Charlie: *This rig is so big, it’s amazin’ it can float,
I know I can beat you with my fly rap song...*

Zach: *I think you be smokin’ off Skip’s big bong,
When rappin’ is a happenin’, little Zach-ster is the king...*

Charlie: *Your raps are just fine, but they ain’t got zing,
When this is all over, little Zach-ster will be cryin’...*

Zach: *Oh no, I’m the best, you can even ask the Mayan (Zach grabbed Ka’an by the shoulders) Or maybe take advice from Mountain Man Pete...*

Charlie: *I’m sorry, little Zach, just admit defeat,
When I’m on my game, all my fans make a fuss,*

Zach: (straining for a rhyme for one second) *Look out tomorrow for
a river of pus,*

’Cause that’s where they’ll throw you when they hear your raps...

Charlie: *When you sing, my son, they all be takin’ naps,
When Charlie’s a rappin’, he will always beat ’em all...*

Zach: *Man, you’re as old as a Neanderthal,
What you really need dude, is a Fountain of Youth...*

Charlie: *One more word like that, and I’ll punch you in the tooth,
’Cause when Charlie’s rappin’, he don’t take no prisoners...*

Zach: *Uhhh, instead of Skip, I wish I was kissin’ her....* Zach grabbed Brenda’s shoulders.

Drame gave a loud buzzer noise. “Wait a minute. ‘Kissin’ her,’ that’s weak. I’m callin’ Charlie the winner. “

“Hey,” said Zach, laughing, “Let’s see you try and rhyme ‘prisoners.’”

Charlie gave Zach a slap on the back. “Nice try, son.”

“Next time we do this, I am going to use ‘hippopotamus.’”

“Sour grapes, sour grapes,” said Winston.

“Well that does it for me,” said John Morse, putting down his empty wine glass. I am going to call it a night. “Come on Zach,” said Morse, putting his hand on his son’s shoulders. “We can get a re-match with Charlie in the morning.”

The group disbanded and went below-decks to get some sleep. As the guests retired to their bedrooms, the large yacht glided forward in the warm waters. Tomorrow they would reach Flower Island.

CHAPTER 40. POLICE

Natal, Brazil.

INSIDE THE EMPTY Natal Football Stadium, Officer José Manuel Dodaz sat in a red stadium chair watching his Brazilian football team practice below. The Natal Police Department was in charge of security at the stadium. One of the perks was that he got to come here on Sundays and watch his team practice. He was also certain to get stadium duty during several of the games in the early rounds of the FIFA World Cup. He was proud to be a Brazilian on any given day, but on days when his football team played in the World Cup, he was especially proud. After Five World Cups, no one could dispute that Brazil was the best in the world. But this year would be a milestone: winning the Cup before the home crowd. That would be something. And that would be followed two years later by the Summer Olympics in Brazil. Despite its greatness, Brazil had never won Olympic gold in football. 2016 would be the year, again in front of the home crowd. What they said about the Brazilians and football was true: “*Os ingleses o inventaram, os brasileiros o aperfeiçoaram,*” or “The English invented it, the Brazilians perfected it.” Officer Dodaz had two children, both boys, aged eight and ten. They were football fanatics like he was. He would not be able to get them tickets to the games, but they would watch them with their friends on television. He had already bought them little yellow and green jerseys with their favorite players’ names embossed on the back.

Dodaz looked around the empty stadium. The games next week were going to be great. He just hoped no one did anything stupid to spoil the fun. He took one last look around the stadium, checking for anything suspicious. He had checked air vents, janitor’s closets, food vendors’ snack kiosks. Nothing looked out of order so far. He had already been given training in spotting counterfeit tickets. He knew the black market was already churning out false tickets to sell to unsuspecting tourists. He was also one of the officers in charge of checking vendor licenses. Brazil had to make sure that no terrorist posing as a vendor snuck into one of the events.

After his tour around the stadium was complete, Officer Dodaz left the stadium through the front gate and walked to the special police lot near the stadium where he met his partner. The two talked about

security at the stadium for a few minutes before getting in their police car. Officer Dodaz, along with his partner Officer Rejinaldo Rodriguez, began patrolling his regular route around the streets of Natal. The construction throughout the city was intense. Brazil had made a massive infrastructure commitment in order to host both the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics. Roads were being re-routed every day as the construction pressed through the summer.

“I hate this construction,” complained Dodaz.

“I know, it seems like the road goes a different way every day. Hey José Manuel, have you got your stadium passes for the first round yet?”

“Not yet, you?”

“No. They should be coming this week I think. Too bad we are not going to get to see Brazil play. But we might get to see the Americans lose, so that’s something, heh?” joked Rodriguez.

“They sure suck every year. You think with all that money, they could field a decent team, but every four years they come back, and every four years they lose.”

“Their problem,” said Rodriguez, “Is that they are not Brazilian. Hey pull over here, I want to get some *acarajé*.”

“Reji, how can you eat shrimp in the middle of the day?”

“Stop, stop, you are passing it. The vendor is right there. I will only be a minute.”

A few minutes later, Rodriguez got back in the car, unrolling the aluminum foil wrapper given to him by the street vendor and cramming the snack into his big mouth. As the two policemen sat waiting in the car for Rodriguez to finish his makeshift lunch, Dodaz saw a familiar figure walk down an alley up ahead.

“Check it,” said Dodaz, pointing in the individual’s direction. A large man, wearing a yellow short-sleeved collared shirt and jeans, walked away from the patrol car, heading down an alley between two buildings.

“That Davy?” asked Rodriguez.

“That’s our boy. Wonder what he’s up to on a beautiful Sunday afternoon?”

“One way to find out.”

Dodaz nodded and drove around the block, waiting for Davy Branco to appear from the other side of the alley. Branco was a known criminal, but always seemed to be one step ahead of the law. Dodaz and Rodriguez

suspected he had friends in the District Attorney's Office who were cutting him favors. Branco was known to be a blood relative of Cezanne, one of the biggest drug lords in Mexico, so the police often kept an eye on him from time to time.

"Keep back a little," said Rodriguez to Dodaz.

"Hey, Starsky, this isn't my first day on the force. I know how to tail a suspect."

They watched Branco walk up a block, cut down two streets and then call for a cab in front of a hotel. Dodaz tailed the cab, staying several cars back. Branco got out of the cab, then walked into a flower shop. The officers waited three minutes. When Branco did not come out of the flower shop, Rodriguez said he was going in. Rodriguez went into the shop and came back to the patrol car moments later.

"He went through the shop and out the back into the alley. Go up two blocks and take a right and we will head him off." Dodaz gunned the patrol car up two blocks, made a right down a narrow alley, and then came out on a large street. The two officers scanned the wide boulevard for a few moments. Dodaz was the first to spot Branco.

"There." Branco was up the boulevard another three blocks away and was hopping into another cab.

"What's with the *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* routine?" asked Rodriguez. "You ever see him do that before?"

"Nope. He has either spotted us and is trying to lose the tail, or someone has told him to take roundabout ways from getting from Point A to Point B so that he is not followed. Either way, that means he is up to no good." The two officers followed Branco's cab and watched it enter the expressway. They followed the cab for the next several minutes, again staying back so as to avoid being spotted.

"I don't think he spotted us," said Dodaz.

"Why do you say that?"

"The cab hasn't sped up or taken any evasive maneuvers. You would think they would have swerved off on an exit or something if he knew he was being followed."

The officers continued to follow Branco's cab as it made its way across town and finally stopped in front of a large warehouse near the docks. Dodaz parked the squad car while Rodriguez got out binoculars. They watched Branco knock on the door of an establishment. After a few

minutes, a large man wearing sunglasses and all black opened the door, spoke with Branco for a moment, and then let Branco inside.

“You see the sign over the door?” asked Dodaz.

“Wells Beverage and Bottling. Means nothing to me,” said Rodriguez.

“You know of Davy owning a beverage company?”

“No, I never heard that before. Import/export, I thought that was Davy’s racket.”

“Right, that’s what I thought.”

“Hmm.”

“Did you see the guy who opened the door?” asked Dodaz. “All black clothes, big guy. Did you see he was wearing a shoulder holster?”

“Yeah. So?”

“What does a beverage and bottling plant need with armed security?”

“Hell if I know. Maybe it is really, really good soda.”

“So we have a known criminal, who walks through a florist shop and out an alley, takes two different cabs so he won’t be spotted. He sneaks into a soda bottling factory where an armed guard answers the door. That sound suspicious to you?” asked Dodaz.

“Yeah, it does. Maybe I should call it in.”

Dodaz considered that a moment but then decided against it. “We don’t have anything yet. Why don’t we take a quick look around the back?” The officers snuck to the side of the building, careful not to let the armed guard spot them, and tried to look through the windows, but they were all painted black. Dodaz saw an open window on the second floor.

“Let’s push over that dumpster,” said Dodaz.

The two officers pushed a big brown dumpster so it touched the side of the metal corrugated warehouse. Both policemen climbed on top of the dumpster.

“Give me a boost,” said Dodaz. Rodriguez was the more burly of the two officers. The tall, athletically built Dodaz climbed on his friend’s back, and then gingerly stepped on his friend’s shoulders, shoving off to grab the sill of the open window. Forcing himself up and over, Dodaz piled through the open window, landing with a thud on the second-story floor. He looked out the window at Rodriguez, motioning for him to keep his shoulder radio channel open in case Dodaz need him. Rodriguez took a position near the corner of the building, so that he could keep one eye on the window Dodaz had used, and another eye on the front door of the

building. Rodriguez drew his weapon.

Inside, Dodaz was in a small office on the second floor, which looked like it hadn't been used in years. Dodaz knew that his presence here was illegal, and that he needed a warrant to be in this building, but he figured if he could find out what was going on inside, then they would have the information they needed to convince their boss to stake out the warehouse and catch Branco doing whatever criminal act he was doing. Dodaz just had to make sure he didn't get caught up here. He crept with his weapon drawn over to the door of the office, checking through the glass of the door. He saw nothing. Pulling the door open silently, he stuck his head quickly out into the hall, looking both ways. He could hear talking below but he could not see anything. The hall was a long metal platform with a railing. Moving on his belly, Dodaz snaked his way over to the edge of the railing, and looked down to the warehouse floor below. There were dozens of workers, loading cardboard boxes on a long conveyor belt. He could not see what was in each box. The operation seemed to be supervised by two tall men with dark hair wearing white lab coats. They had notebooks and appeared to be checking items off and inspecting the boxes. Dodaz stayed in this position for what seemed like an hour, but was really only about twenty minutes. It was stifflingly hot in here. No air conditioning.

Suddenly, he saw the two men with lab coats walk over to a door and open it. He could see Davy Branco just inside the door. There was a glass window in the wall, so he could see the three men in the small office talking around a small conference table. He had to get down there and find out what they were talking about. He went to the back end of the metal platform, away from the area where the men were loading boxes, and walked down a set of metal stairs to the ground floor. Donning a dark blue worker's coat from a nearby dirty clothes bin, Dodaz walked towards the warehouse floor and took a place next to another worker near the end of the assembly line. Keeping his head down, Dodaz began unloading the cardboard boxes with the other workers. After a few minutes, he bent down to place a box on the ground, and quickly popped the top for a view inside. He was surprised at what he saw. The box contained water bottles, about a quart in size, with a half-sphere lid, shaped like soccer ball cut in two. On the side of the bottle was a flag with three horizontal stripes—red on the top, white in the middle, and blue on the bottom. Was that France? thought Dodaz. No, their stripes were vertical. Dodaz

didn't think it was Russia. Netherlands, maybe? The water bottles had a small fan and handle. It looked like one pressed the handle and the bottle would blow a water mist spray on the user. He put the tabs of the top of the box back together after his quick look. These looked like bottles for spectators at the World Cup. What was Davy Branco doing making souvenir water bottles?

Dodaz became momentarily concerned. This looked like a legitimate business. What would he say to his boss about breaking and entering into a warehouse with no search warrant to spy on a legitimate business? He looked around. None of the other workers appeared to be looking at him. Strolling across the floor, he started for the door where the two men in lab coats had gone through to speak with Davy Branco. As he got near the door, he could see through the window that the men were getting ready to leave the room, apparently having completed their meeting. He dove for the wall, where there was a water fountain, and bent his head down to take a drink so the men would not see him. As the three men came out of the conference room and back out onto the warehouse floor, he heard one of the men in lab coats say something about an "incubation period." Then he heard Branco laugh and say, "Those fuckin' Americans will never know what hit 'em until it's too late." Incubation period? What could that mean? Dodaz' mind raced. Were these guys planning on releasing a biological or chemical agent of some kind? Was this a terrorist thing? That's all he could think of to fit the facts. Just then he heard Branco say, "Hey, shithead!" Dodaz kept his head down by the water fountain.

"Hey shithead! By the water fountain. You've taken enough of a break, get the fuck back to work!"

Keeping his head down, Dodaz nodded, and returned to the conveyor belt to continue loading boxes. He had to get out of here and tell Rodriguez to send the troops. Twenty feet away, Davy Branco was staring at the tall factory worker in the blue coat that was too small for him. What was that bump on his shoulder? This guy looked a lot fitter and more athletic than most of the other grunts working on the assembly line. He looked out of place. Branco looked at the man's feet. Casual black loafers, not tennis shoes. Those looked like cop shoes. Wait a minute, thought Branco. Something clicked in his brain and alarm bells started to go off in Branco's head.

Dodaz tried to nonchalantly grab a box and move it to the far end

of the assembly line to make his escape. As he got about twenty feet, he heard “Freeze, motherfucker!” in a menacing voice. Dodaz stopped but didn’t turn.

“I’ve got a .38 aimed at the back of your head, motherfucker, so if you don’t want your brains splattered across this floor, you will put the box down slowly, turn around slowly and put your hands in the air.”

Crap, thought Dodaz. He couldn’t radio Rodriguez because his shoulder mike was underneath the dark blue factory worker jacket. Dodaz put the box down slowly, and turned around with his hands over his head. Branco approached him with a gun pointed straight at his heart. With his free hand, Branco unzipped Dodaz’ jacket, showing the police uniform underneath. The men in the white lab coats, their faces showing concern, came up behind Branco.

“Cop, as I suspected.”

“Branco, you’re making a big mistake. I have half the Natal police force on their way here. They find a dead cop, it’s not going to go well for you.”

“You know one thing I hate about fuckin’ cops,” snarled Branco. “They’re always fuckin’ liars.” Branco fired his gun, shooting Dodaz in the forehead, and sending his body crashing back toward the base of the conveyor belt. The other workers on the factory room floor were horrified, and stood paralyzed with fear, unable to process what they just witnessed. A pool of thick, crimson blood poured from the officer’s head wound and collected around his head on the factory room floor. The two men in lab coats appeared equally frightened, but walked away. Branco holstered his weapon, and told several security guards pouring into the room to clean up the mess. Branco told the head of his security team to check the perimeter. If there was one cop here, he probably had a partner. He told another guard to monitor the police band to see if there were any calls to come to the warehouse.

Outside, Rodriguez heard the gunshot. One shot, not many. That couldn’t be good. They probably had a dozen security guards in there all armed with weapons. If Dodaz was fighting his way out, there would have been a barrage. One shot probably meant they had killed or wounded his partner. He had to get inside. Just then, three security guards poured out the front door, armed with AK-47s. They ran straight toward the parked police car, shelling it with multiple rounds of bullets. When the guards

got to the car, they saw that no one was inside. Now was his chance. Rodriguez sprinted toward the front door of the warehouse and made it inside before the three security guards standing by the police car spotted him. There was no one inside the small room just inside the front door. He put his head to the glass at the top of the door to get a look. He did not see anyone. He smashed through the door with guns blazing, but didn't get more than a foot inside the room when a hail of gunfire rained down on his position. He quickly retreated back to the room he came from, shutting the door. He took one step back outside the warehouse door and heard the cocks of multiple weapons at his head.

The security guards grabbed his pistol, pushed his hands behind his back, and used his own cuffs to cuff him. With the butt of their gun, they hit Rodriguez from behind and shoved him back into the room with the assembly line. As the bound officer came into the large warehouse room, he saw his dead partner lying on the ground in a puddle of blood.

"You fuckers! You are all going to die, I swear to God!" he screamed, as the burly security guards held his arms. Davy Branco came over to Rodriguez and sized him up.

"Did you radio your location to Dispatch yet?" asked Branco.

"Fuck you!" yelled Rodriguez defiantly.

Branco put a gun in Rodriguez' face. "Officer, you can either wind up like your partner here, who chose not to cooperate, or you can answer my question. Did you radio your location to Dispatch?"

"Yes I did, Davy." said Rodriguez. "And when they arrive in a few minutes, and you go to jail, I'm goin' to be in that little room watching them give you the needle, you piece of shit!"

Davy Branco looked into Rodriguez' face, trying to see if he was lying. He turned to the guard monitoring the police chatter on the radio. "Anything on the radio?"

"Nothin,' boss."

"Kill him," said Branco to his men. "Then put both of their bodies in the back of their squad car, and dump the squad car in the lake at San Juan Park."

"You got it, boss." The burly guards dragged the bound officer out into the street. Branco could hear his screams as they took him outside. A few moments later, Branco heard another gunshot. He frowned. He did not like all these cops around. He wheeled around to stare at all the

workers, who were staring in disbelief.

“Get the fuck back to work, you cockroaches!”

CHAPTER 41. INVESTIGATION

Kigoma, Tanzania.

ROGER TSUNG WAS concerned when he received Dr. Jendel's e-mail. If Dr. Strong had been murdered, then he and everyone else on the ground here was in danger. Tsung needed to look at the dead bodies to verify what Jendel was saying. Donning several pairs of white gloves and slipping on one of the orange RACAL suits, Roger Tsung then used several layers of duct tape to seal together the spaces at his wrists and ankles. He wasn't taking any chances. Hooking up his helmet and airline, he took a deep breath and went into the quarantine tent. Moving over to the bodies of the three scientists, he looked at each cadaver from head to toe. Tsung was surprised to see that the skull of one of the scientists was cut off at the neck. What could that mean? He started with that body because it was the most suspicious. The feet were largely intact, with charred black flesh clinging to the bone. He made his way up the tibia bone until he got to the tibial plateau, the top part of the tibia just underneath the kneecap. Using a scalpel, Tsung carefully cut away some of the charred flesh until he saw two small metal plates, and a series of six metal screws implanted into the tibial bone. This man who had once owned this body had previously been wounded in the leg, and the leg had been surgically repaired with an ORIF—open reduction-internal fixation. Tsung took photos of the plates and screws with an overhead camera.

Tsung then moved onto the second scientist's body. He started again, moving from head to toe, looking for anything out of place, like maybe a pacemaker or an implant of some kind. He saw nothing. He repeated the procedure for the last body. This body had a silver chain around the neck. He took out a pair of clippers and cut the metal chain. Then he took out a measuring tape, and measured the height of each of the bodies, taking photographs of the tape from the overhead camera. Finally, he took a drop or two of blood from each cadaver, being careful not to get any blood on himself. The blood was placed in separate plastic vials.

He slowly and methodically left the quarantine tent, being careful not to cut his suit. When he got in the dressing tent next to the quarantine tent, he removed his suit, taking in big gulps of fresh air. It was stifflingly hot in there. He removed the suit and doused his entire body in antiseptic

soap gel, being careful to scrub the edges of his fingers and fingernails. After a hot shower, he exited the dressing room, proceeding to a small lab tent, which had medical supplies and laboratory equipment. He took the religious medal from the third body and examined it under a microscope. It was a medal of St. Anthony, and on the back it read, "Happy Anniversary Tony 10/21/1979." Tony. As in Antonio Paciello. He put in a flash drive from the quarantine room's camera into his laptop and uploaded the photographs he had taken of the bodies. Calling back to his contact in Fort Detrick, he advised them that he needed a contact at the Instituto Nazionale right away. After about a half hour, someone from Fort Detrick called Tsung, and gave him an e-mail contact.

Tsung sent an e-mail to the contact at the Instituto Nazionale. His e-mail read:

Need to know:

1. *Were any of the three Italian scientists sent to Kigoma married on 10/21/1979?*
2. *How tall were each of the three Italian scientists?*
3. *What were their blood types and RH Factors?*
4. *Did any of the three Italian scientists previously have an open reduction-oral fixation surgery to their tibial plateau?*

While he waited for a response, Tsung took out the sealed plastic blood vials, and performed tests to determine the blood type and RH factor for each.

An hour later, Tsung received the following e-mail response:

1. *Yes, Antonio Paciello.*
- 2.3. *Antonio Paciello – 6'2" Blood Type: AB–*
Guido Macchione—6'1" Blood Type: A+
Matteo Graciano—5'10" Blood Type: A–
4. *No, not to our knowledge.*

Tsung looked at the photograph documenting the third cadaver's height. The cadaver was just under 6'2". That matched Antonio Paciello. And Paciello's anniversary matched the date on the medal on his neck. And the blood type of the third cadaver was AB–, the same as Paciello's blood. That was a positive match. The middle cadaver measured just under 6'1". That matched Guido Macchione. And the blood type was A+.

Another match. But the first cadaver—the one with the skull mysteriously sawed off, that was a different story. First, no height could be determined from the cadaver because the skull was missing. But the blood type did not match. And there was no record that Matteo Graciano had ever had a tibial injury or surgery. And Bjorn Jendel had said in his text message that one of the cadavers was a black man. It did not look like Matteo Graciano was the third cadaver in the RACAL suit. And if that was the case, why was someone else in the space suit, and where was Graciano?

Tsung walked down to Jimmy Pond's tent and filled him in on what he had learned. Pond was connecting the same dots. When Tsung mentioned the tibial injury, Pond got out his notes from his canvass with Murielle Winston.

"Dr. Haane. Wife is Fatuma Haane. She says the doctor was in the military and he received a medal after he got shot in the leg. And, as you probably guessed, Dr. Haane is black."

"Let's go talk to her right now," said Tsung.

The two agents drove a Jeep down the main road of town until they came upon Mrs. Haane's small, brown house. Jimmy Pond took the lead.

"Mrs. Haane, sorry to bother you again."

"Yes, young man, what is it?"

"Your husband, you said that in the war he received an injury to his leg. Where on his leg was he hurt?"

"I think it was right near his knee."

"And was that leg ever operated on?"

"Oh yes, in fact one of his friends, an orthopedic doctor, operated on him. He told me he had plates and screws in his leg. He was always grateful for his friend. Said if it weren't for him, he wouldn't be able to walk."

"And how tall was your husband, ma'am?"

"He was 5 foot 6 inches tall."

"Do you by any chance have any of your husband's health records. We need to be able to determine his blood type."

"No need for that," said Mrs. Haane.

"And why is that?"

"Because I know what it is. He was B+, just like me."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Absolutely."

“OK, thank you so much,” said Pond.

“What’s this all about?” asked the widow.

“We are just trying to identify which body is which. It is just standard procedure. Thank you, ma’am. Sorry to have bothered you.”

As the two agents left the widow’s house, they paused when they got to the street.

“What blood type was the cadaver with the missing skull?”

“B+,” said Tsung. “And the cadaver looked shorter than the others. Too hard to say without a skull, but 5’6” looks about right.”

“So,” said Pond, “We have a hospital of people loaded with a Level 4 virus. The hospital is intentionally torched by someone, who knows full well that this will mean murdering dozens of people. The door is locked with a tire iron so they cannot get out. Of the three scientists who are supposed to be in RACAL suits treating the patients, one of the three, Matteo Graciano, is not in his suit, and one of the doctors from Kigoma, Dr. Haane, has taken his suit. The other two scientists are burned to death in the explosion but Matteo Graciano, Level 4 Biohazard scientist, is missing and not among the dead. And the bat which started the whole epidemic is missing from the hospital. That about cover it?”

“Yeah,” said Tsung. “So our Italian scientist, Matteo Graciano, who is secretly a bioterrorist, takes the blood samples from the sick patients, convinces a patsy to wear his RACAL suit so everyone will think he is dead, he murders everyone in the hospital so he has the only copy of the virus, and he even takes the bat to possibly develop an antidote for the thing. Maybe he plans to blackmail the United States and use the antidote as the hostage. Either Graciano or one of his associates here in Kigoma learns that Dr. Strong is on his trail, so he saws off the skull so no identification can be made, poisons Dr. Strong, and takes off.”

“And you forgot one thing,” said Pond.

“What’s that?” asked Tsung.

“Assuming he is working with an associate in Kigoma, and he is not still here, he has a head start on us of at least a couple weeks, maybe over a month. He could be anywhere right now.”

“I’m calling this in,” said Tsung. “Let’s get a secure uplink and we can get a conference call with Washington.”

CHAPTER 42. KIDNAPPED

Natal, Brazil.

BRANCO HOLSTERED HIS gun and walked back down the floor to his private office. Branco picked up the phone and called his cousin, Julio Cezanne, who was on his private jet heading from Guadalajara, Mexico to Natal, Brazil.

“Julio, we got a little problem,” said Branco.

Cezanne took his cigar out of his mouth, annoyed.

“What kinda problem?”

“Got a little infestation problem. Two stray cats got into the warehouse. We had to put ‘em down.” Branco thought this code language was stupid. They were on an encrypted phone, after all. But Cezanne insisted on it.

Julio Cezanne was angry. “Davy, you know how much I got ridin’ on this? How did you let ‘em get into your warehouse? Don’t you have any kinda security down there? Jesus fuckin’ Christ, Davy, I trusted you with the simplest part of this fuckin’ operation.”

“We don’t have a big security perimeter because we are trying not to attract attention.”

“How did the, uh, cats get in?”

“They showed up right after I made it back to the warehouse, so they must have just tailed me back.” Davy was nervous. When his cousin got angry, people got dead.

“Jesus fuckin’ Christ, Davy, what are you, in third grade?”

“I did everything you told me. Somehow they followed me the whole way, I guess.”

“Is the factory getting any complaints for noise disturbance?” Cezanne was worried neighbors might have heard the shots.

“No. We are in a warehouse district. There is nothing down here. No way anybody hears anything down here. That’s not a problem. And we monitored the radio. Nothing.”

“But what happens when the owners of these cats find them missing? What are you doing about that?”

“Not a problem. I gotta guy who thinks that’s under control.” Branco had an associate who was former Brazilian police. Branco knew that most of the older police cars did not have GPS, and the car they had shot up

appeared to be an older one.

“He thinks? He thinks? Davy, you gotta know. I am not restin’ my whole operation on what one of your monkeys thinks.”

“He knows, Julio. He told me he is sure and I trust him. We’re good.”

Julio Cezanne chewed on his cigar. He didn’t like this. If the police found that warehouse, the whole operation would go up in flames, and he didn’t trust his cousin not to give him up.

“God damn it, Davy! When I get down there, I am going fuckin’ kill somebody! This is a fuckin’ disaster!” Cezanne paused to consider his options. “You got anybody inside?”

“One or two guys. But I don’t want to call them, because they are not going to be happy. I wouldn’t trust them with this.”

“How many units are ready to go?”

“We got about one hundred boxes. Each box has 24 units. So that’s 2400. That should be plenty.”

“What about the workers there? Do they know anything?”

“We got about twenty workers. They don’t know anything about the units, but unfortunately they all saw the cat get exterminated.”

Cezanne thought his head was going to explode. “What the fuck?! Are you kidding me? Davy, what kinda marbles are in your head? I want a plan to fix this, and I want it by the time I land!”

Davy Branco was getting very nervous. If he didn’t fix this, he was going to be included within the body pile.

“Look, I can fix this. I will explain it to you when you get here.”

“Davy, listen to me very closely. I want you to pack up that operation and go underground. When I land, send someone you trust to let me know your location. Other than that, no further communication by anyone, anywhere. Total silence, you get me? Clean up whatever pest infestation you have at the warehouse, and leave that place clean, you got me? I will see you in a couple hours.”

“Got ya.” Branco hung up. He had a couple of metal storage containers down by the docks. The storage containers were owned by dummy corporations, which could not be traced back to Branco. He could get rid of all the workers here in the warehouse, drive them in a truck to the docks, and then dump the bodies in the storage containers. By the time anybody found them, he would be long gone. Then he would torch the warehouse.

Up on his Gulfstream jet, Cezanne was furious. There were a hell of a lot of loose ends now. He never should have trusted this operation to his cousin. Cezanne made a few more calls on his encrypted phone. He wanted to know which detective on the Natal Police Department would be assigned the case of looking into the mysterious disappearances of the two police officers. He needed some leverage, and he needed it quickly. Cezanne could not believe how badly Branco had fucked things up. Cezanne would have to get rid of him eventually. It was a shame. The kid meant well, but business is business, he thought.

The following day, 55 year-old Natal Homicide Detective Manuel Rosario stood on the edge of San Juan Lake, watching a crane lift a bullet-riddled police car out of the water by the rear bumper. Water poured out of the bullet holes like a sieve. AK-47s, most likely. Rosario frowned. The two officers had not called in after their last reported position near the Soccer Stadium. Rosario was grim. He knew both men and their families. The bodies of both men had bullet holes. Rosario thought of the patrolmen. Each had young children. Anger welled within him. Rosario would find the killers who did this. The crane lowered the police car on the bank, and then a police mechanic unhooked the large yellow hook from bumper. Rosario went over to the vehicle and peered inside.

Rosario was tall and thin, with short curly black hair and green eyes. He was a runner, which was how he stayed in shape. His first wife had died several years ago from ovarian cancer. His teenage daughter Amy was all he had left. He was only ten years from retirement, and he couldn't wait. He was sick of the drug dealer killings and the gang violence. He was happiest when he was helping his daughter with homework or attending her soccer games. But recently, the volume of work was interfering with his parental plans. And he knew this case involving the missing officers was a round-the-clock operation. The Chief was not going to let anyone rest until the officers were found.

Rosario had a mechanic jimmy open the trunk. Nothing in there either. Rosario inspected the bullet holes in the seats and pulled out multiple slugs. They appeared to be AK-47s, as he had suspected. But no blood anywhere. Even after being in the lake, the car should have some blood residue if the officers had been shot in their car. Rosario thought that the absence of blood was odd. Why shoot up the police car if no one was inside it? Perhaps the shooters thought an officer was inside, but the

officer had already left the vehicle. Then they shot the officers and put the dead bodies back in the police car.

Rosario thought about fingerprints. Would they survive in the lake water? He walked over to speak with Denny, his fingerprint technician.

“What do you think? Can we get prints after it has been submerged in lake water for a day?” asked Rosario.

“It’s definitely possible. I just read an article from some lady at Quantico. They were able to pull prints off a gun submerged for 70 days. The longer the print is submerged, and the warmer the water, the worse it is. This lake is pretty warm, but it has only been underwater for a day. So I say it is worth a try.”

“OK, thanks Denny.” Rosario was surprised. He thought water washed off prints. This would probably be a dead-end, though, he thought. No one with half a brain kills a cop and then leaves prints behind. Rosario thought for a moment about who would do this. It would take brass balls to take down two cops, he thought. Even the local drug dealers he knew wouldn’t kill a police officer. Brings on too much heat, he thought. He pondered the World Cup matches coming up. Could it have something to do with that? The officers’ last call-in position was near the Soccer Stadium. Maybe they saw something there they shouldn’t have. But why hit Natal? Surely the matches in Rio de Janeiro would be bigger. It didn’t make sense. After supervising the crime scene for another hour or so, Rosario decided to go have a talk with each of the officer’s wives. Maybe the officers had contacted their wives shortly before they went missing. Rosario hopped in his squad car and drove through the streets of Natal to the home of the first officer. As he got on the freeway, he called his fourteen year-old daughter Amy on her cell phone. He wanted to tell her that he was not going to make her soccer game later today.

Amy Rosario, tall and slim like her father, with long black hair pulled into a pony tail, dressed in a blue and green plaid Catholic school jumper, was riding her ten-speed Giant blue bicycle home from school. She was in a hurry today, because her English teacher had made her stay a little late today to go over her recent absenteeism problem. Now she was going to be late for her soccer game. It was against St. Ignatius, their school rival. Amy wanted to beat them, and the team was counting on her for a goal or two. Amy Rosario was the starting right-winger for her team. She loved soccer. Her father had promised her tickets to the upcoming World Cup

matches in Natal Stadium. She enjoyed spending every possible minute she could with her dad. He was all she had left, after her mother died of cancer. As she was a few blocks away from her house, her dad called her on her cell phone.

One block behind Amy, the snatch team was waiting in a weathered butter-yellow van with the name “Pollos Plumbing” stenciled on the side. One of the men was looking at an 8x10 photograph, blown up from Amy’s picture in last year’s yearbook. “That’s her,” the stocky man behind the driver’s seat said. The tall man in the passenger seat and the bald man in the middle seat both nodded. They knew what to do.

As she coasted on her bicycle, Amy Rosario listened to her father on the cell phone explain why he would not be able to make the soccer game.

“OK, dad, whatever. I know your work is important.” She was trying to be polite, but she was definitely disappointed that her dad would not be coming. She liked him proudly hugging her after a game. She liked his thumbs-up to her from the stands when she scored. Mostly, however, she liked the blue Slurpee he would buy her after the game.

“I feel badly, sweetie, but this case is going to take all my time for a little bit.”

“I guess it’s another week without a blue Slurpee, then,” joked Amy.

“Next week, I will buy you two blue Slurpees,” said her dad.

“OK, that’s a deal,” said Amy. “but Dad...AHHHHHHHHH!”

Detective Manuel Rosario heard his daughter scream. “Amy?”

“Help!” he heard her scream.

“Amy? Amy? Are you there? Amy?”

Amy Rosario tried to scream again but the burlap bag over her head muffled her sound, as the two burly men manhandled her into the yellow van and tied her hands roughly behind her. As the yellow van peeled down the subdivision street, Detective Rosario tried in vain to get his daughter to respond. On the highway, Manuel Rosario, violently yanked his steering wheel hard to the right, sending his squad car careening and skidding across three lanes. He punched the accelerator down the exit ramp, and at the bottom, slammed on the brakes, circled under the highway, and hit the pedal to go back the way he came. Rosario was scared to death. His daughter was in trouble. He punched the accelerator to the floorboard, hit the police siren, and barreled down the highway towards his house, driving faster than he ever had before.

CHAPTER 43. LEADS

Washington, D.C.

AFTER BOTH TSUNG and Pond had called in the information to their superiors, a video conference call was quickly arranged between members of the White House, the CDC, USAMRIID, the CIA, the FBI, and the NSA. President Anna Scall spoke first.

“Sheila, where are we in Michigan?”

Sheila Simms, Director of Homeland Security, addressed the President’s concerns. “The blood tests are running very smoothly and we are almost finished. So far, we have about 80% of the people on the island through the first round of tests, and about 50% through the second round of tests. So far, we have identified only four people on the island who have contracted the virus, and they were immediately flown to Ann Arbor. Each of those people was past five days from exposure, so it is unlikely that they are going to make it. The two doctors in Michigan contracted the virus, and they didn’t make it, but the nurses all survived. We had one helicopter pilot who contracted the virus from the Monahan woman, but he was successfully treated with the pharmaceuticals. So including the kid who died on the Wave Runner, it looks like we will have nine or ten as the final death toll. That’s assuming we do not find any more exposed with the remaining tests. We instituted a new procedure on the island to let anyone with certain symptoms to be put to the head of the line for testing, so that we don’t have people infected with the virus infecting others while they are waiting for the blood test. So it appears for now anyway that we will have this thing contained.”

“That’s a relief,” said the President. “Anything new concerning the kid on the Wave Runner?”

“The mother was told that he drowned, and she does not appear to be making any complaints at this point.”

“What do we know about this Graciano person?” asked the President.

Hank Armstrong, Director of the C.I.A. spoke next. “Madame President, we have assets on the ground in Rome, and the Italians are cooperating. We have the Italians’ file on Matteo Graciano, and the FBI has compiled its own record. On your screen, Madame President, is a photo of Dr. Graciano. He has been working for the Instituto Nazionale for twelve years. Grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. Mom’s a lawyer for a big

defense firm, makes a good salary. Dad's a heart surgeon. M.I.T. graduate, majored in biology. Medical school at Harvard. PhD in Immunology and Virology. Worked for the C.D.C. for one year, then accepted the job in Rome. Excellent service record, promoted multiple times. Ran the Instituto Nazionale's Research Division for their Level 4 Biohazard Lab. We have letters in his service file in which he asked to be assigned to Level 4. That's interesting. Single, no kids. No money problems that we can see. No criminal record, except a couple of speeding tickets. Originally born in Makarska, Croatia. Family was killed in the Srebrenica Massacre in the 1990s. He was a refugee and was rescued by a Catholic charity, which arranged for his adoption by a family in St. Louis. His visa shows previous travel for work all over Europe and Africa, a few trips to Mexico and South America. All routine work stuff, at least on paper. Went to a few international conferences. We have no ties between him and any known terrorists or terrorist groups. No clear motive to engage in terrorism that we can see so far. We have some human assets in Serbia and Croatia trying to dig up more information on his early years. The FBI, I am told, has agents in St. Louis now tracking down the parents."

"What are we doing to find him?" asked the President.

Sheila Simms spoke next. "He has been added to the No-Fly List and his picture has been sent to just about every security organization across the world. England, France, and Italy all have task forces looking for this guy. We have no record of him flying out of any airport in Tanzania. We are running airport security tapes through our facial recognition software, but it will take time. The Italian police have contacted his known friends and associates in Rome, with no luck. He has obviously gone underground, but we will find him."

"What I don't understand is why he needed to kill all those people," said the President. "He ran the Level 4 Biohazard Lab in Rome. Why not just steal the Ebola Virus from the freezer in Rome and walk out with it?"

"I think I can answer that one," said Dr. Jendel from the C.D.C. "All Level 4 Biohazard Labs in the world have the strictest security protocols you can possibly imagine. As soon as one of the Level 4 biohazard containers is accessed, notification is sent throughout the facility. It is like Fort Knox. There is no way I can think of that any scientist, even someone in charge of the lab, could get by all the security and walk out with a Level 4 Biohazard in his pocket. However, if you are in charge of

the Research lab there, you are the one on the frontlines who will be called if there is a reported biohazard threat somewhere in the world. And if that happens, he could make sure that he was the captain of the first field team on site to collect the pertinent samples. So it was simply a waiting game. He waited until a serious enough threat was reported to his facility, and then he acted.”

“So he’s wandering around somewhere out there with a plague that can kill us all, and right now we have no leads?”

There was silence on the line for a moment. Then Dr. Jendel from the C.D.C. addressed the group from his conference room in Atlanta. “Madame President, I have with me here a member of my team, Murielle Winston, and I think she has an excellent suggestion. Murielle?”

“Hello, Madame President. It occurred to me that if this terrorist wanted to transport the tissue or blood samples of the virus, it would be difficult to simply walk through an airport metal detector or drive through a customs border with a cooler of dangerous materials. The easiest way to get the samples to the final destination would be to simply mail them. We have people mail us samples all the time. So, in all likelihood, the terrorist took the cooler of samples and mailed them to a conspirator. He might have done the same thing with the bat. So I figured if the FBI could subpoena FedEx and the other international mail delivery services, and check for all packages coming out of Kigoma, Tanzania or nearby cities, maybe you might get something.”

“One step ahead of you,” said Rudy Montana, the stocky but diminutive FBI Director. “We used the Patriot Act to subpoena all the international mail carriers in the United States, and we got a good hit. Shortly after those boys showed up at the Kigoma Hospital, FedEx records show a refrigerated package weighing less than one pound was sent from a Dr. Beladar to the C.D.C.’s Mexico office located at Camino de Canario No. 5823, Undécimo Piso, Col. Polanco, Mexico City, 11560, Mexico.”

Dr. Jendel was perplexed. “Director Montana, the C.D.C. does not have an office in Mexico City at that address.”

“Yes, we know that,” said Montana. “The office is in a large office building in Mexico City. Here is a picture of it on your screens. The office on the eleventh floor is registered to a Corporación Diversificada Colosal, initials ‘C.D.C.’ We checked the Mexican corporation registries, and the company was formed by someone using a phony name and address. We

had the Mexico City Police raid the place this morning and they found a badly decomposed dead body belonging to a Hector Ramón. Here is a photo of Ramón's body on your screen. Not a pretty sight. Two slugs to the head. Looks professional. We have a team down there going over the place now. Judging from dust patterns on his desk, it looks like he had a laptop there, which was removed by whoever killed him. We have checked out Ramón. Worked low-paying jobs his whole life, he lives in a beat up apartment, lots of porn magazines lying around. Typical low-life. We are checking his bank records now. So, from what we can tell, Graciano must have convinced Dr. Beladar to send tissue or blood samples to this phony C.D.C. address, where they were signed for by Ramón. Ramón probably did not even realize what he was signing for. Graciano's accomplice in Mexico City then kills Ramón, takes the blood or tissue samples, takes Ramón's laptop and heads to the hills. So best guess, our terrorists are somewhere in Mexico."

"You're telling me that a Harvard-educated terrorist with expertise in the handling of deadly viruses has an airborne strain of the Ebola Virus and is growing it only hundreds of miles from our borders? And the best we know is he is 'somewhere in Mexico'?"

"That about sums it up, Madame President," said Montana unflinchingly. "But we have all of our resources on this. We'll find him."

"Dr. Jendel," said the President, "If someone wanted to grow this virus to make a bioweapon, what would they need?"

Dr. Jendel thought about the question. "Well, the first thing you would probably need is animals, most likely monkeys—and lots of them. You would need animals to infect with the virus. The monkey bodies would act as Petri dishes for the growth of the virus, where it could replicate. You would need RACAL suits and a complete biohazard lab, which would not be cheap. You would probably need things like electron microscopes and other scientific equipment."

"If you wanted to set up that whole lab, what is the smallest area you could do it in? For example, could you set it up in the trailer of an 18-wheeler, like a mobile lab?"

"I sincerely doubt that," Madame President. "Murielle, what do you think?"

"No way," said Murielle Winston. "You would be looking for something much bigger than that. Maybe a warehouse, something like

that.”

“OK,” said the President. “So most likely, we are looking for someone who has imported lots of shipments of monkeys, lots of scientific equipment, and has a security force to protect it. He has leased a large warehouse somewhere in Mexico. He knows Matteo Graciano. And he has enough wealth to pay for all of that. That should narrow it down, I would think. Let’s get on it and find this guy. I want him found by the end of the week before he kills us all.”

“Yes, Madame President,” echoed the Directors.

The following morning, Sheila Simms, Director of Homeland Security, had a meeting with Tom Irvine, the lanky, gray-haired 60 year-old Director of the NSA. Irvine led Simms into a screening room, where one of his analysts was waiting.

“Sheila, this is Special Agent Bobby Fils, one of my analysts. Bobby’s been going over the airport tapes all night. Facial recognition has a match for us. Take a look at this.” On a large monitor, Fils put up a black and white video of a man going through a metal detector.

“It’s kind of grainy,” said Simms. “Is this the best resolution we can get?”

“Yes,” said Fils. “But we are pretty sure it is him. Facial recognition gives it a 92% probable match. Notice he is not carrying any luggage. The passport says this person’s name is Matteo Barcelli, same first name. The day after the Kigoma hospital exploded, this Barcelli gets on a Precision Airlines flight from Kigoma to Dar Es Salaam. He then gets a connecting flight on Qatar Airways from Dar Es Salaam to Marrakech, Morocco. Qatar Airways confirmed for us he was on the flight manifest. This is a video we just got in from the authorities in Marrakech.” A color videotape showed a handsome man with dark hair going through customs with no luggage. The videotape then switched scenes and showed the man walking in the baggage area. “Now watch this,” said Fils. The videotape showed the man taking a furtive glance over his shoulder, as if worried that someone might be watching him, and then took a set of surgical gloves out of his pocket and put them on his hands. He then took a surgical mask out of his pocket and placed it over his mouth. Then he picked up a small black carry-on bag from the baggage carousel. The man then quickly walked toward the exit of the airport and left.

“What were the gloves and mask for? And why didn’t he carry that

bag on the plane with him?” asked Fils. “It was certainly small enough. That would have saved him time waiting in the baggage area. Because he knew that his carryon bag would be screened and he would have to explain why he was carrying a bat in his bag. That’s why he put on the gloves and mask before he picked up the carry-on. He was just being extra cautious.”

“So we have traced him to Morrocco,” said Simms. “Did he get on a plane after that?”

“Not that we have been able to find, but tape is still coming in,” said Fils. “Best we can tell, he probably took some other form of transportation, maybe train, car, boat. Marrakech is a port city. Since we suspect his ultimate goal was Mexico, my guess, he hitched a ride on a boat to Mexico. We are pulling the records now.”

“Good job. Keep me posted,” said Simms. “I will advise the President.”

St. Louis, Missouri.

BIGGS & BIDDLE was one of the largest defense law firms in St. Louis, Missouri. There were over 200 attorneys and over thirty partners. Ann Graciano was one of those partners. She had dark brown, almost black hair, an olive complexion, and, thanks to her healthy eating and vigorous exercise regimen, she did not look anything like her 52 years. She was proud of her accomplishments representing large corporations, and was one of the first women to be made partner in the firm. Today, she was defending Ford Motor Company in a rollover case in which a young woman had died when her Ford Roundabout flipped over. Her job was to defend the Vice President of Engineering in a deposition in the law firm’s offices. The conference room was all glass and looked on with a breathtaking view of the St. Louis Arch.

“So tell me, sir,” said the plaintiff’s lawyer across the conference table, “Were you even aware of the Liverpool study on the rollover propensities of the Ford Roundabout?”

“Object to form, vague,” said Ann Graciano. “What time frame are you referring to?”

“At any time,” said the Plaintiff’s attorney.

“Yes, I was,” said the engineer.

“When did you become aware of the Liverpool study?”

Ann Graciano was momentarily distracted as she looked through the glass walls of the conference room and saw two men in suits and overcoats, and two other large men in blue FBI windbreakers, walk briskly past the receptionist, charging towards her conference room. The Plaintiff's attorney wheeled around to see what was happening, as the four large men burst into the conference room.

"Are you Ann Graciano?" asked one of the FBI agents.

"Um, yes," said the attorney, surprised.

"Ma'am, you need to come with us immediately."

"What's this all about?" asked Graciano.

"Ma'am, we have a warrant here. You will need to come with us immediately." The men in windbreakers escorted her out of the room. As she walked out of the conference room, she got a text message from her husband, the cardiac surgeon. The message said, "*FBI agents here at hospital, arresting me. They are taking me to FBI Field Office on Clark Street. Get me a lawyer and come down here.*" One of the FBI agents grabbed the phone out of her hand.

"Hey!" she protested.

"Ma'am, your phone is covered by our subpoena. Please do not make this difficult or I will put you in handcuffs." She was dumbfounded, but did not protest further. As she was led down the hall, she saw a team of other FBI agents heading down the hall towards her office. What on earth was going on?

Dr. Anthony Graciano was absolutely apoplectic. He was in the middle of speaking with a patient in his office when FBI agents had barged into his office and roughly escorted him out like a common criminal. How dare they? His taxes paid their salaries. Those incompetent morons. He would get his wife to sue these idiots. It must be some kind of mistaken identity or something. And he had been in here for a half hour in this stiflingly hot room at the FBI Field Office with no one explaining what was going on. The delay was due to the fact that the agents had first attempted to question the doctor's wife, but like a typical lawyer, she had refused to answer any questions. So, after striking out with Mrs. Graciano, the agents took a crack at her husband. The two agents, both in crisp starched white shirts and ties, one bald and the other almost bald, entered the small room. One of the agents placed a file on the table. The two agents took seats across from the doctor.

“Hello, Dr. Graciano. I am Agent Green and this is Agent Wilcox.”

The doctor showed his irritation. “Well, agents, you better have a real good reason for taking me out of my office this morning. I have rights, you know. You can’t just hold someone against their will. What are you charging me with?”

“Doctor, relax. We are not charging you with anything, yet. Tell us where your son Matteo is.”

“Matteo? He is in Italy.”

“Has he contacted you recently?” asked one of the agents.

“No,” said the doctor.

“Doctor, one of our rules here is we do not tolerate people lying to us. If you lie to a federal agent in the course of an investigation, that is called obstruction of justice. It is a crime and you can go to jail for that. So let’s try this again. Has your son contacted you recently?”

“Well, maybe a few months ago. But you said recently.”

“What did he say the last time you talked to him?”

“Not much, just the usual small talk, you know. He told us about his job. We told him we were worried about him working in that dangerous lab with all those viruses and so on. You probably know he works at the Italian equivalent of the C.D.C. He asked us how we were doing and we told him about our lives. You know, that kind of thing.”

“Did he seem angry?”

“No.”

“Did he mention anything about frustrations with his job, bitterness about anything, anything like that?”

“Not at all. He seemed pretty upbeat actually. He asked us if we ever wanted to visit him in Rome.”

“So no suicidal thoughts, nothing like that?”

“No.”

“Did he ever express any resentment about the American government?”

The doctor paused. The American government? What in the world? Did they think Matteo was involved in some kind of treasonous act or something?

“Um, what is this all about, detectives?”

“Doctor, we have reason to believe your son is planning a terrorist attack on the United States.”

“What?! That’s crazy. My son? He is a Harvard-educated scientist, one of the most brilliant minds of his generation. He is working to save

people from deadly viruses, not infect people with them. Where would you get the idea that he is a terrorist?" asked the doctor.

"Doctor, he blew up an entire hospital of people, making it look like a natural gas explosion. Then he stole a deadly strain of the Ebola virus. And he has now fled to parts unknown. We have reason to believe he plans to turn that virus into a bioweapon."

"Agents, I don't know what to tell you other than you are wrong. I know my son. He would never do that."

"Well, before he was your son, he was someone else's son, wasn't he?"

"Um, yes, we adopted Matteo when he was about eleven years old."

"Were you aware his first parents were killed in the Bosnian conflict?"

"I did not know the reason for their deaths, but I knew Matteo was an orphan refugee of the Bosnian wars. That's all I know."

"Doctor, do you still have the paperwork from your adoption of Matteo, like the home study, the adoption agency's reports, that kind of thing?"

"Um, I don't know, I might have it somewhere in my study at the house. I had a big folder on all that, but it has been almost twenty years since I have looked at that."

"Well, we are going to need to look at that. Can we have your permission to search your house to find that file?"

The doctor did not trust the agents. "Well, I don't know. I would have to ask my wife, she is the attorney. I am not sure what I should do here."

"Doctor, aiding and abetting a terrorist planning an attack on the United States is treason, even if it is your own son."

"I am not aiding and abetting him, I just said I need to talk to my wife about our rights, OK?"

"Doc, we really don't need your permission. A judge is signing a warrant for your house right now, so we can do this the hard way or the easy way. You just let us know." With that, the two agents left the room.

When they were out in the hall, the bald agent turned to the other agent. "Think this guy knows anything?"

"No, not a chance. But I would like to get my hands on that adoption file. Something tells me that the skeletons in Matteo Graciano's closet were formed before he ever met the good doctor."

"I agree," said the other agent. "Let's get that warrant."

CHAPTER 44. BODIES

Natal, Brazil.

DAVY BRANCO LOOKED at the back of the last storage truck. The last shipment of canisters was packed onto the truck and ready to go. He had sanitized the warehouse, so that there was no trace of him or his crew. He hit the side of the back of the truck, signaling to his driver that he could take off. His cousin was going to be here this afternoon. He had to make sure all the loose ends were cleaned up before Cezanne got here. Branco went around the side of the warehouse, where one more truck was waiting for him. It looked like a produce truck carrying heads of lettuce, but underneath the vegetables were twenty-two dead bodies, the bodies of the workers in the factory who had witnessed Branco shoot the police officer. Each body was wrapped in a burlap bag. Branco grimaced. He hated loose ends like this, but it had to be done. He couldn't have any of those workers fingering him.

He hopped in the passenger seat of the truck, and his bodyguard and driver Nate drove the truck down to the dock area. He figured it was better to go in broad daylight than at night. The police were more likely to stop him if he drove slowly down in the dock area at nighttime. When he got near the big red storage container, he punched in the combination on the lock, and slid the bar back. The end wall of the container came crashing to the ground with a clank and a thud. Branco looked around. No one was anywhere near them. Not a soul was at this end of the docks. He gave the signal to Nate and the two of them began unloading the sacks of bodies and throwing them into the metal storage container. After they had safely unloaded fifteen of the bodies, a man driving a forklift with a wooden crate held by the forks came driving toward them on the docks.

Damn it, thought Branco.

The man on the forklift drove over to the produce truck.

"You guys need a hand unloading your stuff?" asked the man.

Great, the one Good Samaritan on the docks who wants to do work for free, and he is hassling me. "No, we got it, but thanks."

"OK, sure," he said. He started to walk back to his forklift, but then started to turn around again. Davy slowly put his hand on the grip of his gun.

"Say, you got a smoke?" asked the forklift operator.

“Uh, yeah, here you go,” said Davy. As Davy handed the operator a cigarette, the forklift operator noticed blood on Davy Branco’s hand and sleeve.

“You cut yourself?” asked the forklift operator.

“Oh, yeah,” said Branco. “Cutting up the heads of lettuce, you know, I cut myself.”

The forklift operator looked at Branco strangely, like he didn’t believe him, and then started to walk back to the forklift.

“Fucker,” Branco muttered under his breath. Branco took out his gun with a silencer and shot the forklift operator in the back of the head twice as he walked away.

“What the fuck?” asked Nate, Branco’s driver. “Why did you do that?”

“Sonofabitch made me. He was gonna rat me out. I had to take care of him. Here, get him into the container with me.”

Nate was concerned, but helped Branco move the forklift operator’s bloody body.

“What are we gonna do when his boss comes looking for him?”

“We’ ain’t gonna do anything. You are gonna drive that damn forklift a half mile down the docks where no one will suspect any connection with our storage container. Now help me get the rest of the sacks.” For the next ten minutes, Branco and his driver Nate loaded the remainder of the bodies into the storage container and locked it up. Branco used a handkerchief to wipe off any fingerprints.

“Let me borrow that,” said Nate, “I got blood all over my hands.”

“Take the forklift and drive it over by that black ship. I will pick you up over there in the truck.”

Nate drove the forklift as instructed, and parked it down the docks where it would not draw attention. Then, taking care to wipe down any fingerprints on the forklift, he joined Branco in the truck and drove off.

Minutes later, inside the darkness of the storage container, one of the burlap sacks moved. Small fingers edged their way out of the top of the sack and loosened the grip. After prying the sack open wide enough, young eight year-old Tanya Gomez climbed out of the sack with her dead mother in it. Her mother, not having any child care, had taken her daughter to work, without telling her employer. The child had hidden that day behind the machines, staying out of sight. When her mother

was murdered, her only escape was to hide in the sack with her mother's dead body. Having freed herself from the burlap sack, she stared into the darkness. Dead bodies surrounded her in the darkness. She was petrified. She began banging loudly on the interior wall of the storage container, hoping that someone would hear her.

Natal, Brazil.

THE AMERICAN MEN'S soccer team arrived at the newly constructed football stadium in Natal at 6:00 a.m. for their warm-ups. Today, they would face off against Ghana. It should be a relatively easy match for the Americans, but you never knew in the World Cup. One or two lucky goals and they could lose. The Americans were not taking any chances. The goalie for the American team, nicknamed "The Cat" by his teammates, looked around the huge stadium. There were no spectators in the stands at this hour. Later this afternoon, it would be standing room only. The Cat had gotten his Puerto Rican girlfriend front-row box seats. He tried to figure out where she would be sitting. The Cat wondered how many people would be watching this game on their television sets around the world. This was going to be fun.

CHAPTER 45. BOYUCA*Bay of Honduras.*

TWO HUNDRED FEET below the surface of the blue waters of the Bay of Honduras, the man called Mountain Man Pete, in full black rubber scuba gear, silently flipped his way downward to colder waters. The group of explorers had spent the previous day investigating the island of Xochipilli. Charlie Winston had taken some samples of the flora and fauna, and had even managed to capture a small red snake for his son Teddy. Today, the party was at sea again. The Mountain Man was assigned the job of underwater exploration, because he was the only one who had received scuba training. Pete reflected on his life as he pumped his strong legs back and forth through the water. He liked the quiet ocean world almost as much as the high summits of the Rockies. He liked anyplace that was peaceful and showed the grand and beautiful hand of God in nature. He felt a closer connection to the spirit of his departed wife during these times. A school of bright yellow angel fish suddenly moved in front of Mountain Man Pete, darting right and then quickly left. It startled him, but he quickly regained his attention. The only thing he was a little bit worried about was sharks, but fortunately, he had seen none of those. He had seen a few manta rays, though, and some parrot fish. The variety of fish down here was staggering. He had observed huge schools of the three-striped black and white damselfish, the tiny, spiny yellow tang fish, and even a few orange striated frogfish. He adjusted his blue mask and moved the yellow fins on his feet back and forth, and powered farther north. The water here was very clear, but as he moved forward, it looked like it got a little darker up ahead. Perhaps it was a large coral reef of some kind. As he got closer, however, it looked bigger than a coral reef.

Closer and closer Mountain Man Pete went, and as the black blur coalesced into view, he realized what it was—a rock—a very big rock, almost like a skinny mountain under the surface of the water, sticking up from the ocean floor like a stony monument to Poseidon. It was huge, maybe the size of an eight-story building. The rock structure did not go all the way up to the surface. It stopped about 100 feet below the water. He had never seen anything like it. As he swam in to get a closer look, Mountain Man Pete was dumbfounded. There was a second pillar of

rock directly behind the first one. Yes, a pillar, that was the word for it. It looked like one of those Greek columns at the Parthenon. What had Professor John Morse said—the Pillars of Hercules? These must be them! Mountain Man Pete pictured the rocky undersea pillars hundreds of years before, at the time of the explorers Juan De Solis, Amerigo Vespucci and John Cabot. Is it possible that at that time, the pillars jutted out of the water? Could these pillars be what Cabot and his sailors saw? Pete was certain that must be the case. Satisfied, Mountain Man Pete took a few pictures of the pillars with his waterproof underwater camera and then swam toward the surface to alert the others as to his discovery. Now that they had found the Pillars of Hercules, they only had about forty miles to reach the island of Boyuca.

Island of Boyuca, Bay of Honduras.

FOLLOWING THE DIRECTIONS from the map, Captain Ben Z steered Skip Drame's ship 28.8 miles east of the underwater pillars and then 9.6 miles north, and, not surprisingly, found nothing but open blue water. After a brief powwow between the captain, the two professors, and Drame, the consensus opinion was that the captain should use this point as a midpoint of a circle and then search for any island in a five mile radius of the midpoint. If that proved fruitless, then the circle could be expanded to ten miles. After only one hour of searching, the captain located a small island approximately one mile north of the midpoint. The island was not on the captain's nautical maps. Charlie Winston and John Morse saw this as a good sign. If it was not on any map, then there was a good chance this was the island they were looking for. The captain anchored the big ship about one hundred feet from the shore, and the members of the crew made plans to form a landing party with two inflatable rubber rafts. Brenda decided to stay on the ship, along with the rest of the staff. When they got to the shore, Charlie Winston handed out the machetes, and the party of seven—Charlie Winston, John and Zach Morse, Mountain Man Pete, Ka'an, Skip Drame, and Bolinda Jeffries—bounded over the sand and entered the thick foliage of the island jungle.

It was slow going, of course, because there were no trails. The Mountain Man volunteered to go first down the trails, hacking his way through the denser areas with his machete. The heat was stifling and

the mosquitoes seemed to be on steroids. Charlie Winston bagged a few interesting looking red tree frogs along the way. Zach Morse was thinking this trip was a lot more fun when they were on the boat.

“So what are we looking for again?” asked Zach, grabbing his father’s hand and pulling himself up a small muddy incline.

“A river of scorpions or a river of blood should be the first clue,” said his father.

“Oh, that’s all,” scoffed Zach. “Hey, Pops, just make sure you don’t stroke out here in this sun. You’re not in the greatest shape, you know.”

“Oh, I’ll be just fine,” said Morse, smiling and forging forward.

Mountain Man Pete hacked away a section of leaves and the party came upon a small stream. “Well,” said Pete, “It don’t have no scorpions in it, but at least it looks cold and wet.” Pete kneeled down beside the stream and cupped his hands, throwing cold water into his face. He tasted the water and it was good. Pete filled up his canteen and encouraged the others to fill up their water bottles. Pete took out his compass, and charted their bearings.

“Let’s go a few more hours north, and then we can pitch tents for the night, and circle back to the boat tomorrow afternoon,” suggested Pete.

That sounded like a good enough idea to everyone else. The team continued to forge through the jungle, at times pausing to listen to the sounds of the island. So far, they had seen nothing more menacing than mosquitoes and a few non-poisonous snakes. Zach noticed that Ka’-an seemed particularly nervous as they walked along.

“Hey Ka’-an,” said Zach. “What are you looking at? You keep gazing around like you have seen a ghost.”

“This place gives me a bad feeling. It is called the Evil Place. It must be called that for a reason. I keep feeling like we are being watched.”

Zach looked around into the trees. “Well, if someone’s watching us, they are sure being quiet about it. I don’t hear anything.”

“That’s what concerns me,” said Ka’-an. “It seems almost too quiet.”

“So what’s your story, Ka’-an?” asked Zach, ducking to avoid a tree branch snapping back at eye level.

“Not much to tell,” said Ka’-an. “I am the oldest of eight children. I was born in a small village near Guatemala City. I work as a tour guide. When this opportunity came up, I jumped at the chance. Not every day you get to get paid to go on a yacht with a movie star. What about you?”

“Dad’s a professor at UCLA. I am in college at Emory. Charlie Winston is one of my teachers. I have a sister named Zoey. And I have no idea why I went on this wild goose chase, but the last adventure I had with my dad was pretty fun, and Professor Winston is giving me extra credit for going.”

Ka’-an laughed. “Your father is a very smart man. I read his book on Nostradamus.”

“Thanks,” said Zach. “So you think we’ll find anything on this island?”

“I don’t know. But it sounded interesting, didn’t it? Maybe I will get a part in your dad’s next book?”

Zach smiled and pushed his way through the forest, brushing aside a large spider web.

“I hate spiders.”

“Come on,” teased Bolinda, trudging forward. “Man up.”

Zach laughed and shook his head.

After a few more hours, the party of seven had not found anything of particular interest on the island. They broke out their tents and began searching for firewood. Zach and Ka’-an gathered the firewood, and Mountain Man Pete started the fire. Drame volunteered to make the baked beans and hot dogs for their meal. When the meal was done, the six men and one woman sat on rocks around the campfire. The night air was chilly and the stars were out in full force.

“Let’s have a story,” said Zach. “Ka’-an, tell us more about the Mayan Hero Twins.”

“Yes, Ka’-an,” tell us more,” said Winston.

Mountain Man Pete, who was busy with his Army knife whittling a piece of wood, was also interested. “Yeah, Ka’-an, tell us a story.”

Ka’-an pulled out a cigarette, which he lighted in the embers of the fire, and took a long drag. “There are many stories of the Mayan Hero Twins before they entered the Underworld and faced the Xibalba. Would you like to hear the story of how monkeys were created?”

“Yes, that sounds good,” said Morse.

“Hunahpu and his brother Xbalanque were created when their mother Xquic called out to the decapitated head of her dead boyfriend Hun Hunahpu. The skull of Hun Hunahpu spat on Xquic’s head, which resulted in the twins’ conception.”

“This is great stuff,” said Mountain Man Pete, a fan of the Grateful Dead. “Son of a Deadhead.”

Ka'-an continued. “Having no money, Xquic asked her mother-in-law, the twins' grandmother, to take them in. The grandmother begrudgingly took them in, but she never treated the twins well. She much preferred the twins' older half-brothers, One Howler and One Artisan. The older boys always got to eat first, while the twins were required to labor in the fields every day.”

“Sounds like Cinderella,” said Bolinda.

“Right, very much like Cinderella. Anyway, one day, the twins returned home from the field without any food to eat. When they were questioned by their grandmother, the twins claimed that they had shot several birds but the birds were both trapped in a high tree. The older boys went to the tree and climbed up to find the missing birds. As they did so, the twins used their magical powers to make the tree grow taller and taller. Hunahpu told the other brothers that the only way down was to remove their pants and tie them around their waists. When the older boys complied, their pants became tails, and they were transformed into monkeys.”

“Is that it?” asked Zach.

“That's it,” said Ka'-an, shrugging.

“It seems like something is missing from that story. Like why did removing their pants make them monkeys?”

“I don't know. That's just the story,” said Ka'-an.

“I don't get it,” said Zach.

The men laughed and shared stories for another half hour before retiring to their tents. Ka'-an had trouble getting to sleep in his tent, and kept one eye open most of the night.

In the morning, it was surprisingly chilly for a tropical island. Mountain Man Pete and John Morse were the first ones up. Pete started a fire and boiled some hot water so the two could share a pot of coffee.

“Couldn't sleep a wink last night,” said Morse. “Too hot. And then this morning, it was suddenly so cold.”

“I couldn't either,” complained Pete. “I think I set up my tent over a tree root. My back is killing me. We're both getting' old. Say, if we find this Fountain of Youth, I get the first swig.”

“I'll be fighting you for it,” said Morse.

“You got any idea where to start looking for this thing?” asked Pete.

“Not really. I guess I was just kind of hoping we would bump into a hill of scorpions or a river of blood and pus or something. You know, something from the map.”

“The map doesn’t give us any clue where to start, does it?”

“No. My first thought was that if there was some kind of rejuvenating pool of water, it might be a hot spring of some kind, maybe formed by an old volcano. There is a decent sized mountain on the island. I don’t know. I am really just wildly speculating.”

“We have some of them hot springs in Colorado. But when I went in ‘em, I kept expecting it was gonna be like a hot tub, you know, like super hot. They were luke warm at best. It was kind of disappointing.”

“Yes, I know what you mean,” said Morse. “Perhaps it might be a unique kind of plant on the island which has curative properties, something like that. That is why I think it is important to take specimens of any unique plant and animal life we see.”

“Yeah, I guess so. Charlie Winston was telling me last night that this map got discovered in a secret vault behind a painting in an old Spanish castle. Is that true?”

“Yes, it is true. I am constantly amazed at the ways History finds ways of revealing herself to us.”

“How do you like your coffee, John?”

“Ummm.” Morse looked over Mountain Man Pete’s head to the sky and pointed.

Pete looked around and stared in the sky to see what Morse was looking at. There, over the trees, a red signal flare burst upward into the morning sky.

“The boat! The captain must be in trouble!” exclaimed Pete. “Everybody get up! There’s trouble back at the boat!”

Pete roused everyone from their tents and the party quickly packed up their tents and jogged back the way they had come toward the beach. It took nearly a half day to trace their steps all the way back to the shore. As Pete cut his way through the last group of branches into the beach clearing, he stopped in his tracks. The other men came quickly, scrambling past him onto the sand. All the men were speechless. There, in the sand near the surf, were six wooden poles. On top of each was an impaled human head.

“Look,” said Winston, crestfallen. He pointed past the poles to the ocean water. The shallow water between the beach and the yacht was tinged bright red. “The river of blood,” mumbled Winston.

CHAPTER 46. RAID*Guadalajara, Mexico*

IT WAS TWO in the morning, Mexico time. Special Agent Jimmy Pond was dressed in black, his brown face painted black with grease paint. He squatted behind a large rock. Lying on their stomachs in black clothing next to him were Roger Tsung and five Navy SEALs. Pond took out his digital binoculars and scanned the area beyond the chain link fence. Everything was quiet.

The NSA and CIA had been hard at work during the last week. They had tracked all ships which had traveled from Marrakech to anyplace in Mexico. There had been six such ships in the last few weeks, but none listed the Italian scientist as a passenger. Field agents had spread out in Marrakech, showing the scientist's photograph to workers on the docks. But the Muslim dock workers in Morocco were generally suspicious of men they suspected to be American spies. Even if they had seen a dark-haired Italian man carrying a cage with a bat in it, no one was about to tell the Americans.

However, the search for monkeys proved to be more fruitful. With the assistance of the Mexican government, the NSA was able to locate ship manifests for dozens of crates of spider monkeys sent from the Philippines to Puerto Vallarta. The purchaser was a corporation called Vortex, Inc. Once again, the organizers of the corporation had false names. The address listed for the corporation was non-existent. But the timing of the animal shipments was right. The monkeys had been shipped from the Philippines only days after the explosion of the hospital in Kigoma. That evidence pointed to the likelihood of a lab somewhere in or near Puerto Vallarta. CIA Agent Jimmy Pond hit the docks in Puerto Vallarta, but no one there remembered anything about Vortex or the animal shipments.

Using the Vortex lead, the Mexican government served subpoenas to Telmex, the country's largest telecommunications provider, asking for any records relating to the company. Vortex, Inc. had set up Internet service with Telmex at a small office in downtown Guadalajara. Guadalajara was close to Puerto Vallarta, so that fit. The Mexican police raided the office, but whoever had been there had cleared out. FBI agents assisting the Mexican police dusted for fingerprints but found nothing.

Working on the assumption that the monkeys had been shipped to

Guadalajara, analysts at the NSA, for the next several days, had begun a painstaking search of satellite photos of warehouses in Guadalajara. Agents from the FBI conducted a computer search of Mexican land records to find the most likely warehouses in Guadalajara where the terrorists might be conducting operations. Warehouse properties which were owned by well-recognized American or Mexican corporations were eliminated from the search as being unlikely targets. The search resulted in 52 possible locations. It was Agent Bobby Fils at the NSA, at 1:00 a.m. the previous night, who had finally found the connection to the warehouse in Guadalajara where Jimmy Pond was now observing through binoculars.

Fils went with his boss into the office of Tom Irvine, Director of the NSA. Fils' boss told Irvine that Fils had found something urgent on the bioterrorist search.

Fils put his laptop down on the Director's desk. "Look at this," he said. "This is aerial reconnaissance of a warehouse in Guadalajara on Tecadal Street. It is on the western edge of the city. It is in a secluded location. The property is owned by a bunch of shell companies, but when you trace it all back, the owner is a Mexican trust. The sole beneficiary of that trust is Julio Cezanne."

"The drug dealer?" asked Irvine.

"Yes," said Fils.

"Why is a drug dealer interested in bioterrorism?" asked Irvine.

"I don't know," said Fils. "But I went back and looked at satellite images of the property for the last several weeks. Look near the edge of the property. This black line is a fence surrounding the property. The first thing you can see is that there are men posted along the fence line."

"Security," said Irvine.

"Right. Now this is a shot taken four days after the Kigoma explosion. These are trucks coming in through the gate. I freeze-framed this shot here. Look at the side of the truck."

Irvine tried to make out the lettering. "It's very grainy. Can you punch it up a little more?"

Fils hit a button on the computer. "That's as good as the image gets. But I am pretty certain that the word on the side of the truck is Vortex."

Irvine squinted at the image. "I can see the 'V,' but it is hard to make out the rest."

"Now look at this," said Fils. He pressed fast forward to a clip on the

video and then hit Play. “They are unloading crates. Look at all the holes in the crates. I think those are animals in there.”

“Hmmm,” said Irvine, straining to see the image on the video. “Maybe. I don’t think the Mexicans would even have enough for a warrant based on this. But I agree it is as good a place to start as any. Thanks, Bobby. I will get on it.” Irvine got on the phone to his contact at the CIA.

The next day, the infiltration operation was planned. The team would consist of five U.S. Navy SEALs. Jimmy Pond, who had prior experience relating to the Kigoma operations, would also be part of the team. In case the Mackinac Ebola Virus was on site, Roger Tsung from the United States AMRIID would also be part of the team. The team flew on a military jet into Guadalajara in the evening and had spent the last several hours performing a recon of the perimeter. It did not appear that there were any security guards near the fence. Infrared sensors picked up no heat signatures on the property.

The SEAL Team Leader motioned them forward. Using bolt cutters, the Special Forces soldiers made quick work of the chain link fence. The team stealthily made their way over to the warehouse door, dodging back and forth behind piles of tires and other debris on the property. The team scanned the warehouse building again with infrared and saw no heat signatures. One of the SEAL members managed to pry open a painted-over window on the side of the building and inserted a scope. The interior looked like a laboratory from what he could tell. He did not see anyone inside the building. “Clear,” he radioed into his mike. Another member of the SEAL team by the front door inspected the doorway for booby traps or tripwires, and could find none. He motioned the thumb’s-up sign to his Team Leader, and the team put on their night-vision goggles. The team then donned gas masks in case the virus was in the warehouse. After giving the Go signal, the team silently went through the front door scanning right and left. The smell was terrible in here. It smelled like a barn where someone had died. They fanned out throughout the warehouse, pointing their assault rifles. After moments in the dark, the Team Leader was convinced that no one was here, so he gave the signal to remove night-vision. One of the soldiers found a light switch and lit up the interior of the warehouse.

Jimmy Pond and Roger Tsung looked around and frowned. They did not like what they saw. Roger Tsung quickly advised all members

of the team not to remove their gas masks, and told everyone to leave the warehouse immediately. He went outside the warehouse, and took a RACAL suit out of his bag. He took ten minutes to suit up. After checking his duct tape, he went back inside the warehouse. He used his radio uplink to speak to Sheila Simms, who was in the Situation Room with the President and was monitoring their channel.

“This is Foxtrot One, over.”

“Go ahead Foxtrot One.”

“We have a bad situation here,” said Roger Tsung. “We have laboratory area with about 100 animal cages. Each cage has the remains of a spider monkey. The monkey cadavers look ravaged by disease. Their eyes are bloodshot. Many have exploded intestines. It looks like a slaughterhouse in here. There are also about twenty human corpses here, lying on the ground in a back room here. Can you see this? I am sending you the video link. Judging by the looks of them, they have been dead for over a week. Each of them looks like they have been exposed to the virus. Same symptoms as the monkeys. I am going through their pockets now to see if they have any I.D.” Carefully, with gloved hands, Tsung reached into the pants pockets of each of the dead bodies. After a few minutes, he spoke again.

“No luck. No I.D. on any of them, but judging by their clothes and their appearance and their lack of I.D., I would hazard a guess that they might be beggars or homeless people. I am walking into another room now.” Tsung went into another room, which was equipped with sophisticated electron microscopes.

“This room has electron microscopes, big ones. And I see two orange RACAL suits on a coat hooks. The have what appears to be a decontamination shower here.”

“Any computers or files?” asked the voice on the other end.

“No computers or files yet,” said Tsung. “I am going into what looks like the production area now.”

“This looks kind of like an assembly line of some kind. I am sending you a video. Can you see it?”

“We have it.”

“It almost looks like a bottling plant, like a soda factory or a bottled water plant or something. They have a little conveyor belt which kind of snakes around.”

Sheila Simms, back in Washington, D.C. in the Situation Room of the White House, gave a worried look to the President.

“Are there any bottles or containers left? Anything with a label?”

“Checking.” Roger Tsung walked around the rest of the factory. He did not see any bottles or labels. “Negative. Looks like everything has been cleared out. No computers. Filing cabinets have nothing in them. Nothing in the desks but a few pieces of paper and a couple paperclips.... Wait. Cancel that. I found something.”

“What is it?”

“It is a computer printout from two days ago. Shit.”

“What is it?”

“It is a Mapquest printout. It says on here it takes 17 hours to drive to Dallas.”

Natal, Brazil

JULIO CEZANNE WAS pleased with himself for leaving the Mapquest directions at the warehouse. That had been a last minute improvisation. Cezanne figured that if the Americans found his warehouse, the Dallas wild goose chase would give him at least a couple days. And a day or two was all he needed. Earlier in the day, the Americans had crushed Ghana 7-0. As predicted, The Netherlands had beaten Australia. Tomorrow, the Americans would face off against Portugal in the morning and Germany in the afternoon. In two days, if everything worked as the scientists had planned, the big match between America and The Netherlands would occur. And that's when they would strike.

Cezanne and his cousin Davy Branco were in the stadium watching The Netherlands beat up on Chile. It was already 3-0 and there was forty minutes left to play. Cezanne was eating a soft pretzel, which was a new addition to the Brazilian concession stand. The crowd was roaring. No group of people loved football more than the Brazilians.

“I hate these pretzels,” said Cezanne. “They taste like cardboard.”

“That's what you get for ordering fuckin' German food in Brazil,” said Branco. “How 'bout a little pepperoni sandwich or maybe a *feijao tropeiro*, eh? Eat like the Brazilians.”

“Look at that Number 10 from Chile. What kinda haircut is that?” remarked Cezanne. “Do they even have footballs in Chile?”

Davy Branco scowled. His cousin was in a bad mood. They watched a Dutch footballer dribble down the right sideline and shoot the ball over the crossbar.

“Ah, almost. So, Davy, how are we doing?”

“Good. We got the stands set up early this morning. People are buying the things like hotcakes.”

“You haven’t sold any yet with American or Dutch flags, have you?”

“No, we keep tellin’ ‘em they’re coming two days from now.”

“Good. What about our infestation problem?” asked Cezanne.

“Taken care of. No traces to the warehouse in Natal. The merchandise has been moved. And the workers... um...received their final paychecks.”

“What about the locals, any trouble?”

“Not yet, but we got ourselves an insurance policy just in case.”

Cezanne looked at Branco with a worried look. “I don’t want to know about that. Where is the merchandise now?”

“It is safe, and the Geniuses are gonna give everything a final onceover to make sure we are good to go.”

“Where are they now?”

“We got ‘em holed up in a hotel in town.”

“Davy, when this is all over, you know we’re going to have to do something about those boys. No loose ends, you know what I mean?”

The Netherlands scored again and the crowd all stood, erupting with applause.

“Sure thing, Julio,” said Branco.

CHAPTER 47. BIOWEAPONS

Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, one mile from the Texas border

AGENT JIMMY POND sat on the hood of a Texas Border Patrol Suburban, which was parked on the dirty scrub on the side of Route 35, the highway running from Guadalajara, Mexico to Dallas, Texas. As he scanned the highway with binoculars, he spoke into his Bluetooth headset.

“Bobby, you got anything at any of the other stations?”

Special Agent Bobby Fils spoke to Pond from Washington.

“No, we have beefed up security and roadblocks set up where you are, and near Ciudad Acuna, Piedras Negras, Reynosa, and Matamoros. Those would be the likely entrance points from Guadalajara. So far we got nothing. And we are inspecting every car and every truck coming through.”

“Maybe we should just shut the border down altogether.”

“The President was given that option, and she declined. All we have is a scrap of paper from the warehouse. It could mean nothing.”

Pond thought. The lack of any information was troubling. “They might have taken another route, maybe through Big Bend National Park. Are we covering that?”

“Jimmy, we have agents walking every inch of that border. If someone is bringing something through, we will find it.”

“Unless they already got through,” said Pond soberly.

“There is that,” said Fils.

“Any word from the Texas hospitals?”

“All quiet on the Western Front.”

“It is strange that the Mapquest paper was the only evidence left in the warehouse. If you are clearing everything out, why would you leave that?”

“Maybe they got careless,” suggested Fils.

“Or maybe this is one giant wild goose chase, meant to divert our assets and attention from the real target.”

“Yeah, but what is the real target?”

“I wish I knew,” said Pond. “Let me know if you hear anything.”

“Roger that.”

Pond looked through his binoculars at the long line of cars and trucks. Where were those bioweapons and just how much time did they have?

Natal, Brazil. 11 a.m.

THE TWO SCIENTISTS stood at their vending booth, wearing jeans, official green and yellow FIFA World Cup Brazil shirts, and the lanyards secured for them by Davy Branco. Both of the brothers wore aviator sunglasses. The matches had gone as the scientists expected. Today at noon was the big showdown between The Netherlands and the United States. The twenty-foot counter was filled with plastic water bottles, containing a half-soccer ball as the domed lid. At the top of the lid was a small fan, as well as a hole for a plastic straw. The sides of the bottles bore the flags of either the United States or The Netherlands. Inside each bottle was the deadly virus which had traveled all the way from bat guano in a cave in Tanzania. The scientists were good sellers and their booth was in a prime location along the walkway to the stadium. They offered the bottles for a very low price of six Brazilian reals, or about three United States dollars. In comparison to all the other high-priced merchandise along Stadium Way, these bottles were a bargain, and American and Dutch tourists were eagerly buying them up. As he sold another bottle to an American tourist, Gegic and Telly Gurdic, known to the world as Matteo Graciano and Dominic Chastain, smiled to each other.

“This is going to be a great day. I think we have sold almost 500,” said Graciano.

“There is no way they will be able to contain them all,” said Chastain. “They will have no choice but to give in to our demands.”

“Do you think the Americans will be able to find all of the people on our list?” asked Graciano.

“I don’t think that is going to be a problem. The Americans have spies and killers all over the world. If they think their whole country is at stake, believe me, they will find them.”

“What about Clinton? You think they’ll give him up, too?”

“No, probably not. But if I get even half the people on our list, I will be satisfied.”

“I cannot wait to see the look on the face of that asshole that killed Popi. He is going to die a slow death.”

“I just hope Branco and Cezanne don’t screw things up.”

“Once they get their money, they won’t care.”

Graciano made another sale to a Dutch tourist. The tourist tried to

haggle for a lower price, but Graciano said no, the prices were fixed. The tourist, miffed, walked off without making a purchase, not realizing how his frugality had just saved his life.

“These Dutch pigs. I cannot wait to see their government pleading for mercy. Then they can see how ‘neutral’ we are going to be,” said Chastain. “They are as bad as the Serbians.”

Inside Natal Stadium, fans began preparing for the start of the big football game. Over 500 sports fans were already drinking virus water and spraying it on their faces. By the end of the day, a total of 2,327 American and Dutch citizens would become infected with the Mackinac Ebola Virus.

Twelve miles away, in an abandoned warehouse in Natal, Amy Rosario, daughter of the Natal police detective, was handcuffed to a radiator. Her mouth was gagged with a blue cloth which tasted foul, almost like gasoline. She was desperate. She did not know when the horrible men with the bad breath would be back to kill her. She yanked on her handcuff. Neither the handcuff nor the radiator was going anywhere. She tried to yell as much as she could through the cloth. Who was she kidding? No one was going to hear her down here. Her mind raced, as she tried to think of a way out. And then she thought of something her dad had taught her.

CHAPTER 48. HOLE

Island of Boyuca, Bay of Honduras.

THE MEN RELUCTANTLY went down to the water, cringing as they got close to the six crimson-stained bamboo poles. The first head belonged to Robert, the ship's French chef. The second looked like Mindy, the administrative aide to Skip Drame. The third head was Captain Ben Z. The fourth looked like Brenda, the blonde girlfriend. The fourth and fifth head belonged to the two security guards. The sixth belonged to the captain's assistant. Zach Morse started tearing up, and had to walk down the beach, away from the group. He held his hands over his head with his elbows bent, like a sprinter working off a cramp after a grueling race. His father John Morse felt ill, and was bending over trying to regain his composure. Bolinda was horrified, but she was silently glad that she had not remained on the boat. Drame had just lost many people very close to him, and was taking it the worst, screaming and throwing up his hands, yelling "Those fuckers! I'll get those fuckers!" Mountain Man Pete was the first to speak.

"They were cut clean off, probably a machete. Um, Professor Winston, if it's all right with the group, I vote we get the hell out of here."

"I second that," said Bolinda. "I didn't sign up for getting killed."

"Wait a minute," said Winston, thinking. He looked at the six heads closer, inspecting the bugs and vermin crawling on the flesh. He took out a tweezers and pulled something small off one of the heads. "These are hatched blowfly eggs."

"Huh?" asked Bolinda. "What are you doing, Charlie? That's disgusting."

"Blowfly eggs take 22 hours to hatch. That means these six have been dead for over 22 hours."

"How on earth do you know that?" asked Bolinda.

"Read it in a book," said Charlie.

"Remind me never to go with you to Barnes and Noble," said Bolinda.

Zach Morse walked back to the group, suddenly interested. "So, if they have been dead for over 22 hours, what does that prove?" he asked.

"When we went to shore," said Winston, "The only other people left on the ship were Mindy, Robert, the captain, the captain's assistant, Brenda, and the two security guards—in other words, the six that we see

here. That red flare we saw was shot only a few hours ago. If the six people left on the ship were already dead, then who shot the flare?" The men were silent for a few moments.

John Morse thought of the implications. "It must have been shot by the people who did this to our crewmates. And the only reason to do that would be to lure us back to the boat."

"Why would they want to lure us back to the boat?" asked Zach.

"To kill us," his father responded grimly.

"Does anyone have a gun?" asked Mountain Man Pete.

"Left it back at the boat," said Drame, cursing himself. He had just assumed that the security guards would protect him.

"Look!" said Zach Morse, pointing out to the yacht.

Several hundred yards off the shore, a dozen outrigger canoes emerged from behind the yacht, around the bow of the ship. They were headed towards the shore. Morse and his friends looked for an escape, and turned back to face the jungle.

"Let's head back toward the jungle, and take cover," said Drame.

At that moment, from all sides, hordes of Mayan natives, wielding spears and bows, came charging out of the foliage onto the beach, screaming what sounded like war cries. Within moments, the party of explorers was surrounded in the surf. One large native, wearing ornamental clothing and a headdress of birds' feathers, approached the group menacingly with a machete. John Morse thought quickly, and whispered something into Ka'-an's ear. The small-statured Mayan guide lifted up his hands, and yelled the word for "Stop" in the Mayan *K'iche'* language:

"Tani'k!"

The natives momentarily paused, apparently surprised that someone was able to speak their language. Then Ka'-an began gesticulating and talking very fast in the Mayan language. The other men had no idea what he was saying, but at one point Ka'-an grabbed John Morse and Charlie Winston by the arms and brought them forward.

"Hunahpu and Xbalanque!" Ka'-an exclaimed triumphantly.

Winston eyed Morse. "Did he just say you and I are the Mayan Twin Heroes?"

"Yes, I think so," said Morse, smiling and waving to the natives.

"Um, does he know we look nothing alike?" asked Winston.

"We're improvising," said Morse.

The natives were hesitant. The tall one pointed the tip of his machete at Morse's chest, and then at Winston's chest. Then he walked over and skeptically put his finger on Morse's face. Then he did the same to Winston's face, and then called out something long in Mayan, to which many of his fellow warriors agreed, as they raised their spears in anger.

"What's he saying?" asked Morse.

Ka'-an tried to keep his poker face. He says you two cannot be the Hero twins because you look so different.

"Tell them that we are using magical disguises," said Morse.

Ka'-an did so. The native asked something else.

"He wants to know who the rest of our group is," said Ka'-an.

"Tell him that they are our servants, and that we are furious that they have killed these other six, and that we demand a sacrifice for their deaths."

Ka'-an looked nervous, as he stared out at the nearly two hundred snarling natives. "You sure that's how you want to go, boss?"

"I am sure," said Morse. "Tell him." Morse looked at Winston, "Charlie, put on your angry face." Winston, scared senseless, switched from waving and smiling to crossing his arms and furrowing his brow. Zach Morse, at the corner of the group, looked at Winston's terrible acting and was convinced they were all going to die.

Ka'-an complied with Morse's request, and told the leader of the Twin Heroes' displeasure with the killing of the six servants. The tall islander looked surprised, and then hesitant. He obviously did not believe them, but what if they were telling the truth? If he angered these gods, he would be the first one they would punish.

He consulted with several of his men for a moment, and then returned. He put the tip of his machete onto Morse's hand and made a small cut. He wiped Morse's blood onto his hand and showed it to the other natives.

Ka'-an said, "He thinks you are lying. He said you bleed like any mortal man."

Morse took out his iPhone. It had a little bit of charge left. He quickly took videotape of the leader of the natives and his men. He held up the iPhone for everyone to see.

"Tell him I have trapped all of their souls in this device and I will not release them until we are freed." Ka'-an quickly gave the translation.

Many of the men recoiled in dread. They had never seen a home movie of themselves before and did not know what to make of it. The Leader was troubled too, but in his gut, he was sure this was some kind of trick. The Leader consulted with two other men briefly. Then he said something in *K'iche'* which ended in the word "Xibalba" and the crowd of warriors erupted in agreement. With that, the islanders charged Morse and Winston and the rest of their party, binding the party of seven with ropes at their wrists and ankles. As they were carried off on the islanders' shoulders into the jungle, Drame asked Ka'-an, "What did he say?" As Ka'-an's head hit a tree branch going into the forest, he replied, "He says if we are truly the Hero Twins, then we must face the Trials of Xibalba!" Morse looked at Winston. Well, at least the ruse bought them some time, thought Morse.

A half hour later, after being dragged by the islanders at a rapid pace through the mosquito-infested jungle, they were all dropped roughly down on a patch of dirt near the side of a rocky hill. The island's large mountain loomed in the background. The natives quickly brought out their knives and cut the binds, freeing the men. A semicircle of natives surrounded them with spears and began poking them.

"Hey!" said Zach, annoyed that he had just been cut in the stomach.

They forced the men back to the black stone wall. Ka'-an spoke briefly with the leader. "They want us to go in there," said Ka'-an. The men turned around to see a small hole cut into the side of the rock wall. It looked slightly bigger than a manhole lid.

"What? In there?" asked Mountain Man Pete. He was much bigger than the other men, and it looked like squeezing into that hole would be a tight fit. One of the islanders stabbed Pete in the shoulder. "Hey! OK! OK!" Pete looked at John Morse and Charlie Winston. Pete realized that if he went in that hole, he might never come out. In a low tone, he spoke to the other men. "No way I'm goin' in that hole, guys. I say we each grab the nearest islander, take his spear, and try and make a run for it. What do you think?" The other men nodded. Their odds were low, but going into a tiny cave hole did not look smart. Pete made a feint as if he was going to go to the hole, and then he whirled around and grabbed the spear of the nearest islander. Tossing the man roughly aside, he stabbed the next closest native with the spear. At the same time, each of the men tried to do the same. Zach was successful in grabbing a spear and dodging

past the natives next to him, sprinting into the jungle. But Winston and John Morse were academics, not experienced fighters. They were subdued within seconds. Bolinda was also quickly captured, although she put up quite a fight. Skip Drame, for all of his experience in action movies, also posed no threat, and was tackled by several natives quickly. Pete and Ka'-an did a fair job of fending off a few of the natives, but after a few minutes of fighting, they were outnumbered and brought down to the ground. The tall native was furious at the betrayal, and began yelling harshly. A phalanx of six men roughly grabbed Mountain Man Pete from all sides and threw him like a torpedo into the cave opening. John Morse, Charlie Winston, Bolinda, and Ka'-an were next. Winston went into the mouth of the cave and was surprised that it quickly angled downward like a water park chute into a subterranean room. Winston landed with a thud on top of Morse and was hit in the head seconds later by Bolinda and Ka'-an falling on top of him. Everything was black, except for the light coming from the chute they had just traveled through.

Morse thought about his son Zach and hoped he had made it back to the yacht. That question was answered about a minute later when Zach came flying down the chute with his backpack into the room. Zach quickly collected himself and stared at the light emanating from the top of the chute. Could they just wait this out and go back up the chute later? Just then there was a loud scraping noise, and the light at the top of the shaft was blotted out. No, going back the way they came would probably not be an option. Zach looked at Bolinda and at the other men, who had equal looks of panic and dread. The Trials of Xibalba were about to begin.

CHAPTER 49. CAPTIVES*Natal, Brazil.*

LITTLE TANYA GOMEZ, after being locked in a storage container for hours, was finally heard by a dock worker, who had been walking by the metal storage container on the way to a job. He quickly called the police and fire department. Unable to locate the owner of the storage container, the fire fighters decided to cut their way in. With the assistance of arc welding equipment, they were able to cut a large hole in the side of the container. When the first responding fireman stuck his head into the inside of the storage container, his nostrils took in a horrible smell. He had smelled that smell once before and it wasn't good. He flooded the interior with the light of a flashlight, and was surprised to see a dirty little girl crying and clutching a small pink doll, crouching in the corner of the container next to over a dozen decayed and rotting dead bodies.

Across town, the lead detective who would normally handle such an investigation, Homicide Detective Manuel Rosario, heard the report over his car radio. He had never heard of such a large massacre in his city before. What was going on? Although he possessed the best investigative skills in the Department, he would have to hand off the job of investigating the newly discovered bodies to other members of his team. Rosario was busy looking for his kidnapped daughter.

He had found her blue bicycle. There were no prints on the bike. A canvass of the neighborhood led to one eyewitness. She was an elderly lady and had seen the abduction from her kitchen window. However, the distance from her kitchen to the street was pretty far. All she could say was that there were two large men, and they had put a bag on her head and had thrown her into a faded yellow van. She could not remember any markings or words on the van, and she had been too far away to see a license plate. Detective Rosario had every officer in the city looking for a faded yellow van. He had one boot print in the mud. He had made a plaster cast of the boot print and sent it to a police lab in Rio de Janeiro. He was waiting for their report. Other than that, there was no other physical evidence. Minutes ago, he had just received a call from the Stolen Property Division. A plumbing company called Pollo's Plumbing had just reported that their van was stolen. And it was yellow. Rosario stepped on the gas. The address of the plumbing company was just a few miles away.

Atlanta, Georgia. Offices of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

MURIELLE WINSTON AND her associate hurried down the hall of the CDC with their laptops. They were late for a meeting with their boss, Director Bjorn Jendel. When they arrived, Jendel scowled at them, obviously annoyed that they were late.

“Come, sit,” he said. “What do we know?”

Murielle Winston spoke first. “We have finished processing the tissue samples taken from the warehouse in Mexico.”

There was a pregnant pause. “And?” asked Jendel.

Winston slid a color 8x10 photograph of a what looked like a worm. “It’s not good. It’s Mackinac Ebola all right. Perfect match.”

Jendel looked at Roessler grimly. “You concur?”

“Yep. It’s Mackinac.”

“The reason I ask,” said Jendel, “is that once we tell the President about this, she might close down all traffic coming into the United States. That’s air flights, cars, trains, everything. If we are wrong, that is going to be a lot of egg on our face. You both are positive?”

“Positive,” said Winston.

“Positive,” said Roessler.

“Who knows about this?” asked Jendel.

“Just the three of us,” said Murielle Winston.

“OK, keep it that way. I am going to try to arrange a conference call with the President one hour from now. Be back in my office then with all your data. We’ll do it in the conference room on Ten. That has the big screen.”

“OK, boss,” said Roessler.

As they left their supervisor’s office and walked down the hall, Roessler turned to Winston. “Murielle, I am a little freaked out. If somebody gets across our borders with that virus in them, and we do not track them down in time, this could kill a lot of people.”

Murielle Winston looked gravely at Roessler and stopped in the hall. “Jacob, this virus could kill everyone on Earth.”

Roessler looked at Winston soberly. “Um, how do you want to present this?”

“Send me the Greene Mass Tag data, the RT-PCR, the antigen capture. I have the igM and the nucleotide sequencing. Make me some

side-by-sides, showing the photos from Mackinac and the ones from the lab. I have the video from Tsung. I will cut that up and make a Powerpoint. Hopefully, we can have something ready in an hour.”

“You going to present it to the President’s team or should I?”

“I’ll do it. Let’s just pray they take our advice to shut down the borders immediately.”

Murielle Winston thought about her husband. Shutting down the borders was the right thing to do, but how would Charlie get back into the country? She tried to call him on his cell, but as expected, got no response. She should never have let him go on this foolish adventure. She left him a message saying that it was urgent that he return home now.

Natal, Brazil.

AMY ROSARIO COULD hear the two sweaty men with the bad breath upstairs whooping cheers while they watched television. The Netherlands was beating the United States, and the men were obviously happy. As soon as the game was over, they would come get her again. She had to get out of here. She looked at her right wrist chained to the bottom of the radiator. The handcuffs. She remembered the time her dad was stabbed in the shoulder in his squad car by a murder suspect who had escaped from handcuffs in the back of the police car. After that, Amy’s father had successfully petitioned for funds to get cages installed between the suspect area and the front seats of squad cars. Amy had been fascinated by the handcuff escape, as she had believed that no one but magicians could escape from handcuffs. Her father had told her that the sad truth was that most police handcuffs were based on a design from 1912 and could be easily picked with a simple bobby pin. He showed her a YouTube video in which a fourteen year-old escaped from police handcuffs in under seven seconds. Amy had asked her father to teach her to escape from handcuffs. That father-daughter bonding moment was going to come in handy today.

She looked at the bottom of the handcuff. Handcuffs either came with a “single lock” or a “double lock.” There was a small hole on the right of the cuff where the handcuff key was inserted. That was the first lock. And then, on the left of the cuff, there was a little open hole shaped like a bar, with a notch of metal in the middle. If her captors used the double lock feature of the cuffs, they would need to turn the handcuff key over

to the opposite side, where there was a small nub on the backside of the key. The nub was inserted into the bar hole, and used to slide over the notch, creating the second lock. She inspected the bar hole, and the notch of metal was still in the middle, meaning that her captors had only used the single lock mechanism. Good news. This should not be too difficult, if she could remember how to do it.

Luckily, she had used bobby pins to put her hair back today for the big game. She used her free left hand to grab one out of her hair. She took one end of the bobby pin and removed the small plastic cap at the top of the bobby pin. Then she inserted the bobby pin into the keyhole of the cuffs, sticking it through about half way. Then she pushed hard and bent the edge of the bobby pin inside the cuffs. She took the bobby pin out and inspected her work. She had successfully bent the top of the bobby pin into an “S” shape near the top. Now it was ready. Using her free left hand, she inserted the bobby pin into the keyhole, and pressed it under the latch mechanism. Then, turning upward, she released the cuff and it came free.

She tried the door but it was locked. There was a window, but it was boarded over.

She ran across the room and pulled her soccer jacket off the back of a chair. She searched frantically for her phone. It wasn't there. The men had taken it. The only thing left in her jacket was the black marker she was going to use for her team poster. It was Seniors' Day, and the underclassmen were making posters for the seniors on their last game. That gave her an idea. She took the marker and wrote in Portuguese on the back of her soccer jacket: “Help! I am kidnapped in this building. Call my dad Detective Manuel Rosario.” Then she added her dad's phone number. She went over to the boarded-up window and tried pressing against the boards, but they were nailed tight. She would have to kick them in. She climbed up on the window ledge. She reached up and grabbed an overhead pipe and then swung her whole body forward kicking through the space between the bars. She needed more leverage. She scanned the room. There was a couch in the room. That might work. Using all her strength, she turned the couch upright, so that it was standing tall on its side. She used her leg muscles, and starting low to the ground, slid the tall couch over to the window ledge. Then she pushed a desk over to back up the couch. That ought to do it. She climbed back on the window ledge and put her back against the tipped-up couch. Then, using her

thigh muscles, she kicked at the board with all her strength. There was a creak! She tried it again and it looked like the board was loosening. With one final smash, she kicked out the board. Unfortunately, she also kicked herself back onto the couch which tipped over and went crashing to the ground, making a large bang. The men would certainly hear that. She quickly ran to the window and looked out. She was in an old warehouse district. This window was three stories up, too high to jump. She grabbed her marked up soccer jacket and threw it out the window into the wind. At that moment, one of her captors, a tall stocky man wearing a yellow Brazil football shirt, burst into the room. "Hey!" he said.

He ran over to Amy Rosario, who tried to dash around him, but he was too quick. He easily tackled her to the ground. He stuck a knee in her back, and pulled out another pair of Zip-ties, tying her wrists behind her back. "How did you get out of those handcuffs, you little shit?" Amy tried to scream, but he put his big sweaty palm over her mouth. She bit him, and he cursed, and then back-handed her harshly across the mouth, sending her crumpling to the floor, crying. "Little bitch! Just for that, no food for the rest of the day!" This time, he hog-tied her, bending her legs back behind her, and securing them to her hands behind her back. "Let's see you get outa that!" he snarled, and slammed the door behind him.

Amy Rosario looked across the dirty floor desperately, crying from the pain to her head and mouth. She looked at the broken board. He hadn't noticed it. Hopefully someone would find her jacket. "Daddy!" she whimpered. "Please find me!" Exhausted and hungry, she tried to think how she could escape a second time. She couldn't think of anything.

TOM BERGMAN, AN architect from Minneapolis, Minnesota, worked for a firm who had helped with the construction of the new Natal Football Stadium. As a perk, he and his wife had gotten free seats to the game between The Netherlands and the United States. His wife had been thrilled to get a free vacation paid for by the company, but Bergman was tired of being in Brazil. He had been here for three months and was anxious to get home. And the place was so blasted hot. He had been told that in the summer months it was supposed to be colder in South America, because their seasons were reversed. Obviously, the weather man did not get the memo. Bergman had sprayed himself all afternoon with one of those water sprayers they sold outside the stadium, but he was

still covered in perspiration. The game was almost over, but he could see the United States was going to lose. He preferred to beat the traffic back to the airport. Although his wife was disappointed that he was cutting the vacation short, Bergman and his wife left the game and headed for the airport. If they made good time, they might be able to catch the earlier American Airlines Flight back to Dallas, and then he could get a connection back to Minneapolis tonight.

CHAPTER 50. SCORPIONS

MOUNTAIN MAN PETE pulled out his Cree LED flashlight from his pack and scanned the small chamber. Torches were mounted on brackets affixed to three of the walls, but they were unlit. “First thing we need to do is get some light in here,” said Pete. He took out some dry matches from a Ziploc bag in his backpack and lit the torches. Surprisingly, they lit up. Pete handed a torch to John Morse, Zach Morse and Charlie Winston, and kept his flashlight.

Drame was sitting on the stone floor, stunned. “Shit, we’re going to die in here,” said Drame, suddenly realizing their predicament.

“You’re just realizing that?!” screamed Bolinda. “No shit, genius! If you would get your head out of your marijuana bong for five seconds you would have realized that! Why did I let you convince me to go on this fucking trip! I had a photo shoot in Greece I gave up for this! God damn it!” Bolinda, who normally seemed pretty tough, crumpled in a corner, with her head in her knees, and began crying. Drame looked at her, feeling bad.

Morse felt guilty. He was the one who had convinced everyone to go on this trip. All those deaths would be his fault. He was always optimistic, but he agreed that things were looking bleak. He looked over and saw that his son was trying to fight back crying. “Look,” he said, “We have to try. The only way to go is forward, so let’s move on and see if we can get out of here.”

Winston was also feeling guilty. He was not so much afraid of his own death as he was of the devastating effects this would have on Murielle and Teddy, who needed him. He thought of Teddy, paralyzed and now losing a father. It was too much to bear. He had to stay positive.

As the glow of the torches lit up their surroundings, they could see a passageway leading into the heart of the cave. Seeing nowhere else to go, the group sullenly went forward. Zach helped Bolinda up, telling her it would be okay. After about three minutes walking down the small passageway, their path suddenly opened up into a large cavern. As the torches lit up the room, they could see that the room was about seventy feet high, or about the size of a six or seven story building. Pete shined his flashlight around the room. There were no cave openings or doors or other passageways out. Pete looked upwards with the flashlight. There,

on the far wall, was a painted picture of a giant scorpion. At the top of the scorpion's tail, on the far wall, in the corner, near the very top of the cavern, seven stories up, was a small cave opening. It looked like that was their only way out.

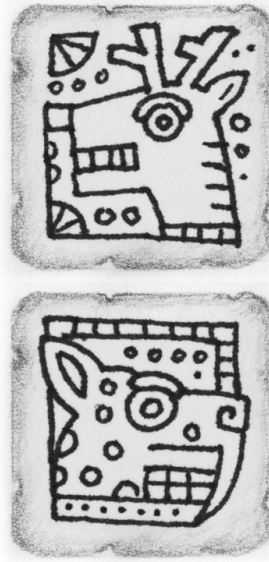
The other members of Morse's group were dejected when they saw the lofty exit, but Morse was excited. If this was truly the room of the scorpions, then the natives were putting them through the equivalent of the mythical Trials of Xibalba. This meant two things—that there may really be a Fountain of Youth, and there may really be a way out. All they had to do was to be as clever as the Hero Twins.

"If only I had brought my climbing spikes," said Pete, disgusted with himself. The wall looked almost sheer. There was no way he was going to just climb up it without spikes. "So if we can't climb up it, how do we get up there?"

Pete continued to scan the room with the flashlight, scanning it across the stone floor. As he did, it looked like the light passed over something with a vague human shape on the ground. "What the hell is that?" He focused the beam. There, not twenty feet in front of them, was a skeleton wearing the remnants of long-deteriorated clothing. Bolinda screamed. Disturbingly, a sharp wooden pole was driven side to side through the skeleton's ribcage. The torn remains of buckled shoes were on the skeleton's feet. A metal necklace snaked around the skeleton's neck. A ring was on one of the skeleton's fingers.

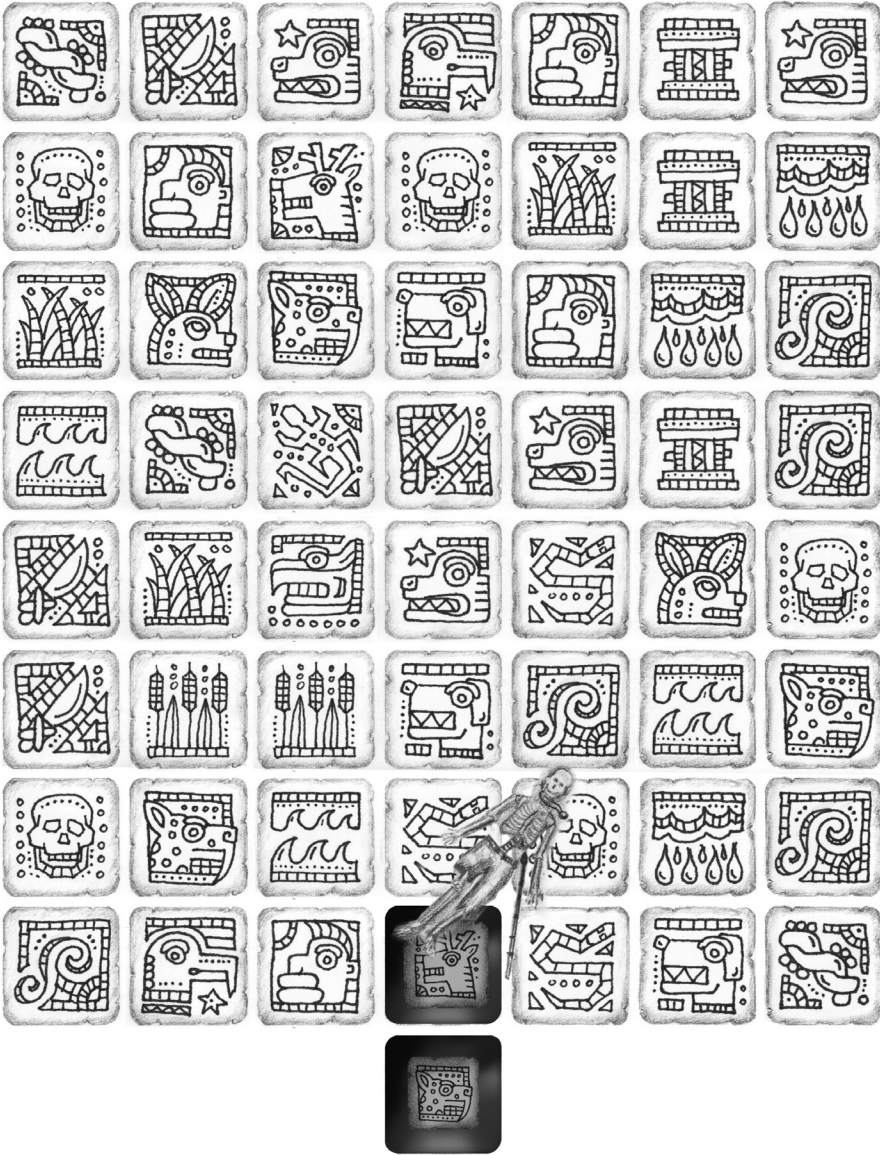
John Morse, fascinated, started to walk forward to inspect the skeleton, when Pete grabbed Morse harshly from behind, pulling him back. "Hold on there, Professor, be careful. Look." Just in front of Morse was a rectangular hole, which looked like it plunged downward into darkness about twenty feet. The skeleton was just on the other side of the hole.

"Thanks, Pete. Bring those torches over here." They brought the torches over and, along with Pete's flashlight, peered into the hole. At the bottom of the hole were two square stone tiles, one closer to Morse and one further away. There were two images painted on the tiles. One looked like some kind of spotted animal. The other looked like a deer. The square tiles at the bottom of the hole looked like this:



The tile with the deer head had a slightly higher elevation, maybe three feet higher, than the tile with the spotted animal. Pete then took his flashlight and shined it back on the skeleton. The skeleton was just past the hole.

“Wait a minute,” said Charlie Winston. “It looks like there are markings all over the floor.” As Pete shined the flashlight past and around the skeleton, he could see that the entire ground floor of the cave was covered with painted square rock tiles. The floor looked like this:



“What does it all mean?” Zach asked his father. “I don’t know, Zach, but understanding those patterns on the floor is obviously the key to getting out of here. But first, I need to get a look at that skeleton. There is something very familiar about it.” Morse walked over to the square tile of what looked like a man with a mohawk haircut. Stepping on the stone, and reaching just past the hole, he grabbed the remains of the skeleton in his arms. Suddenly, there was a loud crunching sound, and the square tile on which he was standing started to fall downwards. Morse quickly threw the skeleton back toward his friends. As the square column below his feet fell downward, Morse tried to grab for his son Zach’s hand, but his hand slipped, and he went along with the descending floor downward until the floor seemed to lock into place.

“Are you okay?” Zach called into the hole.

“Yes,” called Morse from the bottom of his hole. “Just a little scared, that’s all.” Morse looked downward and noticed that the tile on which he was standing, the one with the guy wearing the Mohawk, was about three feet higher than the tile next to him with the deer head on it. The significance suddenly dawned on him. “Hey!” yelled Morse from the bottom of the hole. “I figured something out.”

Morse saw the heads of several of his friends peeking out from the top of the hole. “What is it?” asked Zach.

“It’s a staircase,” said Morse.

“A staircase?” asked Pete.

“Yes, each tile that we land on correctly goes about three feet higher than the last tile. Eventually, the columns will start rising out of the ground, to form a staircase, which, if I miss my guess, will lead us to that cave opening at the very top of the far wall. All we have to do is pick the right tiles.”

“Here, let me get you out of there,” said Pete. Pete took out rappelling rope from his backpack, and sent it down to Morse. In a few minutes, they had pulled him with the rope out of the hole. Morse brushed off the dirt from his clothes.

“I think you’re right, John,” said Winston. “That’s probably what happened to our skeleton friend here. He stepped on the first tile, the one with the spotted animal. His first two picks were correct, but the third tile he picked was the wrong choice. He was punished for his choice, and that’s how he wound up with a spear in his ribcage.”

“Where did the spear come from?” asked Zach.

Bolinda thought of this question, and then picked up a fairly large rock. Without further discussion, she shot-putted a large rock out into the center of the tile floor. As soon as the rock landed, there was a fast whistling noise, as three wooden spears shot at lightning speed from a hole in the sidewall across the middle of the room, striking the stone wall on the other side.

Bolinda borrowed Pete’s flashlight and shined the light on the left sidewall. “That’s where it came from.” Embedded in the left hand sidewall were dozens of small holes, each with a diameter of about three inches.

A further realization dawned on John Morse. “The sting of the scorpion.”

“What?” asked his son.

“The sting of the scorpion. Those spears are probably tipped in poison. Anyone who misses in this room gets a poisoned spear in the gut, just like the poisonous sting from a scorpion’s tail.”

Charlie Winston had one of the torches and had been busily inspecting the skeleton. “Oh my God,” he whispered. “John, you are gonna want to see this.”

The other members of the team crowded around the skeleton. “Look at the necklace,” said Winston to Morse. “Does that look familiar to you?”

“Not particularly,” said Morse.

“The Lion of St. Mark, the classic symbol for the City of Venice. Ring any bells?”

Morse thought. “What’s a Venetian navigator doing in the Bay of Honduras? Unless... No.”

“Yes,” said Winston triumphantly. “Look at the inscription on the ring: ‘*Tutto Il Mio Amore Mattea.*’ That means ‘*All my love, Mattea.*’ John, we’ve found the remains of John Cabot.” Morse was speechless. It certainly looked that way. This was like finding Christopher Columbus’ bones. It was incredible.

“This will be one of the greatest finds in history,” said Winston. “That is, if we ever get out of here to tell the tale.” Morse instinctively took out his iPhone to take a picture, but it had died long ago. He knew he couldn’t take the entire skeleton with him, but he was going to take as much as he could. After consulting with Winston, they agreed to remove the skull, and to take the ring, the necklace, some small pieces of bone,

and some tattered pieces of the clothing, putting them in Ziplog bags in their backpacks.

"It is a shame we cannot take the entire skeleton," said Morse.

"I know," said Winston. "The ramifications of this are incredible. So if Cabot got marooned here, that supports the thesis that de Hojeda and Vespucci dumped him overboard and abandoned him, and then covered it up on the ship's logs by claiming that he was a crew member who was mentally ill and jumped the rails."

"Listen," said Bolinda. "I know you professors are all excited about this skeleton, but I think we need to spend our time figuring out how to get out of here. Now we know what happens when we step on the right tile, and we know what happens when we step on the wrong tile, but how do we know which is the correct tile?"

"Hmmm," said Morse, loving the challenge of a good puzzle. Let's see what we have so far. The first tile appears to be a cat with spots, perhaps a leopard or an ocelot, something like that. The second tile is clearly a deer."

"Wait a minute," said Ka'-an. "Did you say ocelot?"

"Yes," said Morse. "It's also called a dwarf leopard."

"I know what an ocelot is," said Ka'-an. "Oh, and a deer. Oh, I see what it is. That guy with a Mohawk, that's a Monkey."

"Really?" asked Zach, staring into the hole. "That doesn't look like a monkey to me."

"Yes, it's a monkey," said Ka'-an. "These are the Aztec astrological symbols. Mayans use a system almost identical to this. It is very similar to your zodiac, or to the animals for the Chinese new year. I do not know why I did not see it before. Of course, that's what it is."

"Great," said Winston. "So tell us what each of these tiles mean."

"Each of these are 'day-signs,'" said Ka'-an. "The Mayans start with the crocodile. Then they go in groups of four. The first four are Crocodile, Wind, House, and Lizard."

"I see the crocodile," said Zach looking across the stone floor. "And the House, and the Lizard, and the Wind."

"The next four," said Ka'-an, "are Snake, Death, Deer, and Rabbit. Death is the one that looks like a skull. I think the other three are pretty clear. The next four are Water, Dog, Monkey, and Grass. Water is the one that looks like waves. The Monkey is the Mohawk guy, Dog and Grass are pretty clear. See them over there? After that comes Powerful Reed,

Ocelot, Eagle, and Vulture. The Powerful Reed is the one that kind of looks like a cattail reed. The Vulture is the bird showing his teeth, and the Eagle is the other bird. The Ocelot is the spotted one. After Vulture comes Earthquake—that's the one that looks like one boomerang on top of another boomerang—then Knife, Rain, and Flower. You can see Knife over there. Rain is the one that looks like water drops. Hmmm, I don't see the Flower sign. That's it. There are twenty signs in all."

"OK, I did not have time to memorize all of those," said John Morse, "but I noticed from what you said that the first tile is not the Crocodile. If we are going to go in order, you would think that the Crocodile would be the first tile."

"Yes, the first tile is the Ocelot," said Ka'-an. "If we were going in order, the next tile would be the Eagle, but instead the Deer is the next tile. So I don't think the solution is to go in order."

Morse looked at the tiles again. "So the first three are Ocelot, Deer, Monkey. What do those have in common?" Morse bit his lip, studying the tiles, trying to discern some pattern. The group stared silently, unsure what to make of it all. "Let's see. If our staircase goes from Ocelot, then to Deer, then to Monkey, then we have to figure out the next step. The only tiles touching the Monkey are Water (going straight ahead) and Eagle (going to the left). The Snake touches on the diagonal to the right, but John Cabot, our skeleton friend, picked that tile, so that has to be wrong. There is another Ocelot on the diagonal to the left. My intuition, though, is that this is a continuous staircase, and that going on the diagonal is probably wrong, but, of course, I don't know that for sure. So if I were a betting man, I would think that the most likely choice is either Eagle or Water."

"So we have a 50-50 chance of dying," said Zach, not that impressed by his father's detailed analysis.

Charlie Winston felt that they needed more information. "Ka'-an, tell us everything you know about these astrological signs."

"Well, Mayans have a 260-day astrological calendar, based upon the system used by the Aztecs. Two hundred sixty days is 13 repetitions of the 20-day cycle. Each sign represents one of the twenty days. Much like the zodiac, if you are born on a particular day, the sign for that day rules your destiny—your character, your profession, the type of mate who would be good for you. In ancient times, part of a Mayan child's name would be

the name for that particular day. For example, Eight-Deer is the name of one Mayan hero.”

“Why are they in groups of four? What is the significance of that?” asked Winston.

“Well, each of the day-signs is assigned a direction,” said Ka’an. “So persons born under an East sign, like the Crocodile, are aggressive, outgoing, energetic, creative. People born under the North signs are idealistic and romantic, and so on.”

“Directions,” said Winston triumphantly. “Well, there it is! North, south, east, west. We just figure out which way in this cave is North, and then we use the tiles to point us in the right direction, climbing the staircase to the top.”

Bolinda eyed the holes on the side walls as she put her foot near the edge of the tile floor.

“You guys better not be wrong,” she said.

CHAPTER 51. TRAIL

Natal, Brazil. Metropolitan Tow Lot. Warehouse District.

HERE WAS A heavy cross wind on the day Amy Rosario threw her soccer jacket out the warehouse window. The jacket blew a block away to an automobile tow lot, surrounded by a chain link fence. The bright green jacket caught on one of the top posts, lightly ruffling like a flag on a battlement. For eight and seven year-old brothers José and Juan DiCarlo, this lot was their playground. They pictured themselves being professional race car drivers. When the big man who brought the cars into the lot wasn't looking, they would jump in the cars and pretend to drive like Indy 500 racecar drivers. José was inside a Ford Tempo, in the driver's seat, grabbing the steering wheel with both hands, wildly jerking the wheel right and left. Juan was the policeman trying to stop the criminal driving the getaway car. He dove onto the hood of the Tempo, ordering his brother to stop the car. His brother ignored the officer, peeling down the highway, swerving to make his brother fall off the hood. As Juan pretended to slide off the car, he looked up and saw something bright green fly through the air like a kite and land on the top of the auto lot fence. Curious, he told his brother, and the two scrambled over the cars to the fence. Juan climbed the fence quickly, like a monkey, as he had done this many times before. He got to the top and took the soccer jacket off.

"Toss it down," said his brother.

"OK, but it's mine when I get down. I found it."

"OK," said his brother.

Juan threw the jacket down to his brother, climbed down the fence, and then inspected the jacket. It was nice. He put the jacket on. It was a little big for him, but it felt good.

"Look at me. This will be my racing jacket."

He put on the jacket, and modeled for his brother. "Hey, can I wear it sometimes?"

"Sure," said his brother. The two continued to play race car driver for the rest of the afternoon. At the end of the day, they finished their play and went home.

When they got home, Juan quickly ran through the door towards his room. He did not want his mother to see the jacket. She was very religious. She would think he stole it and make him give it to the church.

“Wait a minute!” yelled his mother. “Have you boys been playing in that auto lot again? Let me see your hands. You need to wash up before dinner.”

Juan took off his jacket, threw it on the bed and then ran into the kitchen.

“I saw you wearing something green when you came in. Where is it?”

“Oh, it’s nothing, Mama. Just a jacket I borrowed from a friend.”

“A friend, eh? Let’s see the jacket.”

Juan sheepishly showed his mother the jacket. This was a very nice football jacket. None of his friends would give him such a nice jacket.

“Where did you get this, Juan?”

“Mama, it just flew through the air to us. Someone must have been throwing it away. Can’t I keep it? I need a professional racecar jacket.”

Juan’s mother inspected the jacket, and saw the writing on the back. Immediately realizing the implications, she kissed her son’s forehead.

“Juan, you have done a very good thing today.” She took the jacket and went into the living room to make a phone call. Juan wondered what he had done which was so good. As long as he got to keep the race car jacket, he didn’t care.

The White House, Washington, D.C.

ANNA SCALL, PRESIDENT of the United States, had just finished her conference call with representatives of USAMRIID and the C.D.C. The PowerPoint of Murielle Winston and Jacob Roessler from the C.D.C. had been chilling. Terrorists had the Mackinac Ebola Virus and had already developed a distribution channel. The virus could already be in the United States. Reports from various state health agencies reported no outbreaks yet. They had little time to act. Roger Tsung from USAMRIID had been adamant. The borders—all of them—had to be closed. The decision would be very unpopular. International business would grind to a halt, throwing hundreds of thousands of Americans out of work. American tourists and business people who had gone on international trips would simply be stranded in the country where they were visiting. But what else could she do? If she didn’t shut down the borders, everyone in the country could be killed. This was one of those times when she wished she wasn’t the President.

Her chief-of-staff had scheduled a press conference for 9:00 a.m. the next morning. She had told the Prime Minister of England. Other than that, she was not giving a head's-up to any other international leader. Her phone would be burning up tomorrow. The borders would be closed as of midnight tonight.

Dallas, Texas

TOM BERGMAN'S INTERNATIONAL flight from Brazil landed in Dallas at 9:00 p.m. that evening, just under the cut-off. The other Americans who watched the end of the game at the stadium that day would be stranded in Brazil due to the President's lockdown of the border. On the plane with Bergman were twenty-seven other infected Americans who had attended the soccer game with The Netherlands and had left early for the airport. Bergman and his wife looked at the Flight Board in Dallas. Their connecting flight to Minneapolis was in forty-five minutes. They had better hurry.

Natal, Brazil, Warehouse District.

THE FOOTBALL GAME was over. The Netherlands had beaten the Americans. One of the men had taken the call from Davy Branco to tie up the loose ends with the girl. She was not needed anymore. They were getting out of town tonight. The man who took the call opened the door to the room where they were keeping Amy Rosario. As she tried to scream through the gag in her mouth, he carried her to the back of the pale yellow plumbing van and threw her in the back. They were going to kill her now. That was certain. She frantically went through options in her head as to how to escape. She could not think of anything. One of the men started the engine and the second man got in the passenger seat.

"Where are we going?" asked the man in the passenger seat.

"We got the call from Davy. The stadium job is done. We're supposed to tie up loose ends and get out of the country."

"When are we getting paid?"

"Davy's paying us tonight at the drop point."

"What are we supposed to do with Tinkerbell here?"

The driver ignored him, looking back at the girl. "Let me figure that out." The van started to pull out, when it was rammed at high speed

from a fast-moving police vehicle. Manuel Rosario and a team of officers stormed the plumbing van, pointing sawed off shotguns at the two men in the van.

“Drop it, motherfucker!” yelled Rosario. The two men held their hands up in surrender. One of the female officers went to the back of the van and found Amy.

“I’ve got her, Manuel.” The officer took the gag out of her mouth and cut the Zip-ties.

“Honey, are you okay?” asked Rosario, with his eye and his shotgun still on the driver of the van. Amy started crying. “I’m okay,” she whimpered, getting out of the van.

Rosario took out the two henchmen from the van and put them in handcuffs in the back of another officer’s squad car. As he did so, he smashed the driver of the van in the head with the butt of his rifle, causing an orbital fracture. These two were going to pay. “Take ‘em downtown,” he said to one of the other officers. He hugged his daughter and apologized for her ordeal. “I’m going to drive you to your grandmother’s, and then I am going to deal with these men.” Amy nodded her head and got into her dad’s car.

She drove with her father in silence for a few minutes. Then she told him how she had escaped the handcuffs. He was impressed. Rosario thought about that for a moment. If he had not taught her how to escape from handcuffs, she would probably be dead right now. He looked at his daughter. She was obviously shaken up, but she looked like she was regaining the color in her cheeks.

“Dad,” she said. “When they started to drive away, they mentioned that they were getting paid by someone named ‘Davy,’ who was getting out of the country, because the ‘stadium job’ was done. Does that help you at all?”

Detective Rosario frowned. He knew who “Davy” was, but he had not heard of “the stadium job.” That sounded ominous. Rosario got on his police radio and asked the dispatcher if there was anything unusual reported at Natal Stadium. No, he was told. He told the dispatcher to put out an APB for the arrest of Davy Branco for kidnapping, and to connect him with the head of security for the stadium. What could possibly be going on at the stadium?

Atlanta, Georgia.

MURIELLE WINSTON RETURNED home to her paraplegic son after a long day at the office. As she pulled her Taurus into her driveway, she winced. Her gut was filled with acid. She grabbed a Tums from the glove compartment. If she was right about the virus, then the entire world was facing a cataclysmic plague, and her husband was trapped outside the safety of the United States. If she was wrong about the virus, then the President just shut down all international borders on her say-so. That would mean the end of her career for sure. And her long hours had kept her away from Teddy a lot this week. What if there was an emergency and he needed her? She tried texting and calling her husband Charlie multiple times. If he could just get a flight back tonight... Still no answer.

CHAPTER 52. STAIRCASE

“DIRECTIONS. OF COURSE,” said Morse. “I think you’ve got something there, Charlie. Does anyone have a compass?”

“You think I’d climb mountains and go through jungles without a compass?” asked Mountain Man Pete. He looked in his bag and quickly pulled out a compass. “Let’s see....From where we are, north is toward the far wall; west is to the left sidewall; east is to the right sidewall; south is back down the cave passage the way we came.”

“OK, Ka’an,” said Winston. “So if we start on the Ocelot, what direction is he?”

Ka’an replied, “The astrological symbols go east, north, west, south, in that order. So let me see... Crocodile is east... That means Ocelot is North.”

“Are you sure?” asked Zach.

“Yes, I am sure,” said Ka’an.

“Look,” said Winston. “That makes sense. Cabot started with the Ocelot, then went north to the next tile, which is correct. The next tile was the Deer. I am hoping that the Deer is a West sign. Ka’an?”

“Let’s see.... yes, you’re right. It is. Here, let me write it on paper. Ka’an got out a piece of paper. Shine the light over here.” Calculating, Ka’an wrote up the following on the scrap of paper:

EAST—Crocodile, Snake, Water, Powerful Reed, Earthquake

NORTH—Wind, Death, Dog, Ocelot, Knife

WEST—House, Deer, Monkey, Eagle, Rain

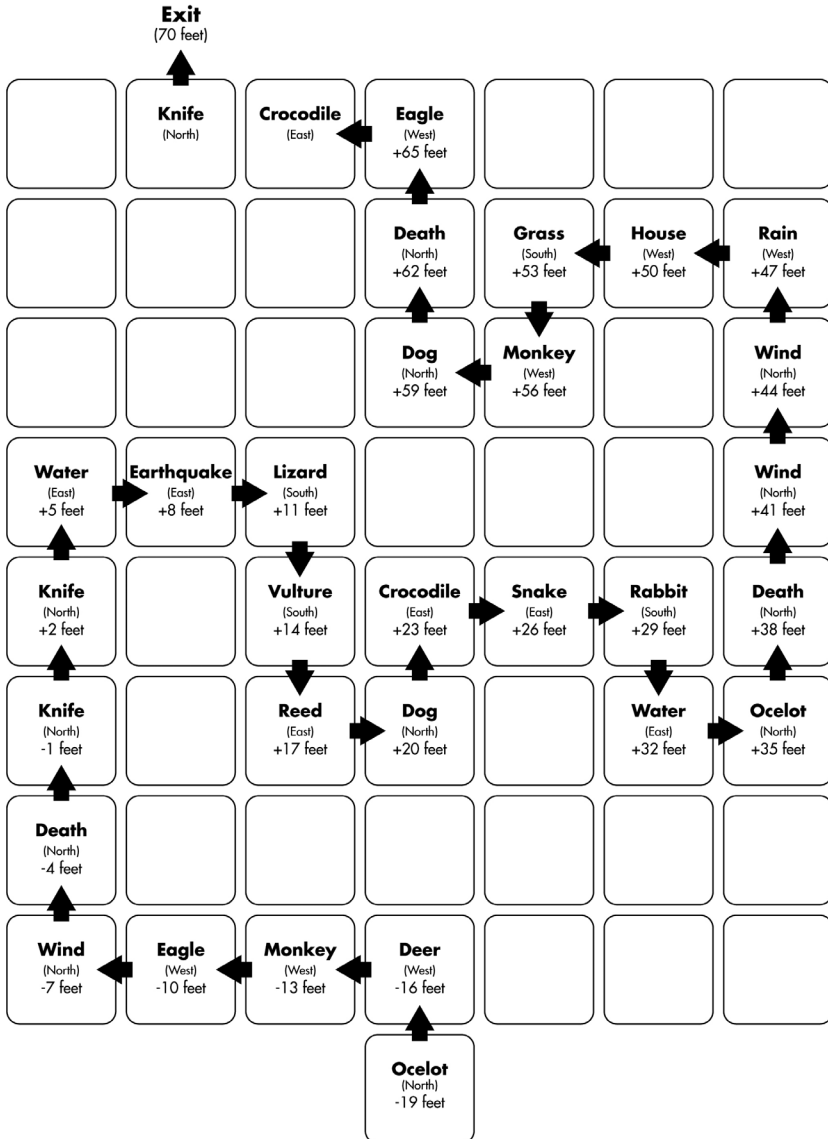
SOUTH—Lizard, Rabbit, Grass, Vulture, Flower

Ka’an studied his list. “So the Ocelot sends us North to the Deer. The Deer sends us West to the Monkey. The Monkey is a West sign, so that sends us West to the Eagle. So are we all agreed that I should step on the Eagle?”

Winston studied the list, just to make sure. “Looks right to me. Just to be sure, let’s tie a rope around Ka’an, and then if something bad happens, we can yank you back. And when you step on the tile, I would crouch down as much as you can, so if those spears come flying by, they might go over your head.”

“That’s comforting,” joked Ka’an. Ka’an walked over to the Eagle tile. Crouching down, he gingerly stepped on the Eagle tile. Again, the loud crunching sound bellowed through the cavern, as the column of stone beneath the tile quickly descended beneath Ka’an’s feet, finally locking just above the Monkey tile. Ka’an was standing about ten feet down in the hole. His friends pulled him back out with the rope.

“What’s next?” asked John Morse.



“The Eagle is a West sign, so we go West again into the corner, on the Wind tile.” Again crouching low, Ka'-an jumped onto the Wind tile, and again the stone column beneath him descended, this time to a point about seven feet below the ground.

“We're making progress,” said Morse. “This is excellent.”

“Ka'-an, stay where you are. I am going to jump,” said Zach. “Wind is a North sign, so the next move is North to the Death sign.” Zach Morse leaped across Ka'-an's hole and safely landed on the Death sign, crouching low. Again, the ground crunched a loud groan, and the stone column beneath Zach's feet lowered, to a point about four feet above the surface. Zach lowered the rope from his square, and brought Ka'-an ' up to his tile.

“Your turn,” said Zach, gesturing.

The group continued following the directions on the tiles, until the staircase actually began to rise above the ground. Ka'-an turned to his colleagues. “John, your theory is correct. We are going up.” Zach and Ka'-an continued to lead the way, as the staircase rose and wound through the cavern. In this way, the group of adventurers made its way up a twisting and turning staircase that stretched almost seventy feet high.

As they neared the cave opening in the northwest corner of the cave, Zach and Mountain Man Pete stood on top of the Eagle tile, 65 feet above the cave floor. The Eagle sign instructed them to go west. They had only two more tiles to go. The rest of Zach's companions were on the staircase below him. Zach prepared himself to go down again, lowering himself on the rappelling rope, with Pete holding him from above. Ka'-an, who was standing on the step below Pete, was leaning over, looking at Zach's progress. As he looked down, he saw Zach descending the 65 feet to the Crocodile tile below. Crocodile tile. Something about that didn't look right. Ka'-an quickly checked his map. The Crocodile was an East sign. That would send him back to the square Pete was on, resulting in no progress. That couldn't be right. Zach went lower still, and he was about ten feet from the surface. Something is wrong, Ka'-an thought.

“Wait! Stop!” Ka'-an yelled. Pete held on to the rope. Zach's feet were about three feet from landing on the Crocodile.

“What's going on up there?” asked Zach.

“It's a trap!” exclaimed Ka'-an. “Bring him back up!” Pete groaned. Bringing him back up was easier said than done.

“Hey, Zach, sit tight for a minute!” yelled Pete. “Hey, Ka'-an, what gives?”

Professor Morse was concerned. He did not want his son in danger. “What is it, Ka’-an?”

“He is about to land on the Crocodile. That is an East sign. East would send him right back the way he came to the tile Pete is on. You can’t have one tile pointing west and then the next tile pointing east. It results in no solution, so it can’t be right.”

“I see your point,” said Morse. He thought for a minute. “There’s only one answer I can think of,” said Morse. “You have to skip the Crocodile square, and land on the next square to the west. The next square west is a Knife sign, which is north, and that puts us north right into the exit. That has to be the answer.”

“You sure about this, John?” asked Pete, groaning under the weight of holding Zach.

“I am pretty sure,” said Morse. “But I don’t want him getting hurt. Zach!” he called down to his son. “Do you think you could throw your backpack onto the Knife square?”

Zach looked over. “Yeah, I think I could do it.”

“OK, Pete, here’s what we’re going to do. On three, Zach throws his backpack onto the Knife square, and at the same time you yank him upward as hard as you can.”

“OK,” said Pete.

Zach eyed the holes in the cave wall nervously. If they were wrong...

Ka’-an called out the command. “One, two, ...three!” On the count of three, Zach threw the bookbag and it landed on the Knife square. Pete yanked him up hard, but no spears came out of the walls. Instead, a column of rock beneath Zach’s bookbag started to rise out of the ground, finally coming to rest two feet below the cave exit. Pete, with the help of the other men, used the rope to hoist Zach up from his position near the ground. Collapsing on the stairway in perspiration, the men took a deep breath, happy that the gamble had paid off. Now they just had to get across to the last stair, somehow leaping across a four foot chasm, to a spot three feet higher than their current position. It might be possible, with a strong running leap, to catch the top of the stair on the other side. But there wasn’t much space on each tile to get a running start, and a chance of a miss was pretty high.

The men sat down on the ground, looking through their book bags and trying to think of a way to fashion something to get across the divide.

They threw out ideas for several minutes, but nothing seemed promising. Fashioning a grappling hook from John Cabot's bones was the most they had come up with after ten minutes. As the men debated, Bolinda stared from the edge out over the divide. She was a star basketball player back in the day. She had the leaping ability. One strong leap. She could do it. Just as she got the courage to try the death-defying leap, she looked downward, seeing just how far she would fall before she died. As she looked downward, she noticed something strange. The crocodile was not there anymore. Sixty-five feet below her there was a new tile there now, depicting the Flower sign. Where did it come from? Did it slide out of the wall? She called over to the men.

"Hey, I think you guys need to see this. Look down there. The Crocodile has changed. It is a Flower now."

"She's right," said Ka'-an. "Lower me down. I am going to check it out."

"What if you're wrong?" asked Zach. "Those spears could come out of the wall."

"I don't think that is a problem," said Ka'-an. "When that column over there by the exit went up, that created a wall. Even if the spears came out of the wall, that column of rock would block it." The men agreed that was a good idea. Pete lowered Ka'-an on the rope down to the tile that used to have a Crocodile on it, and now had the Flower sign. When he landed on the tile at the ground level, nothing happened. The Flower tile was a South sign, so Ka'-an went south one square. He stepped on a Deer tile and nothing happened. He was still at ground level. The Deer is a West sign, so Ka'-an went west. Nothing happened again as he stepped on a tile with a Monkey on it. The Monkey tile was another west tile, so Ka'-an went west again. He gingerly stepped on the next tile, a Death sign, and nothing happened. The Death sign directed him north. He was now on the opposite side of the column of rock which had risen to the exit, so he could not see his friends any longer. As he looked at the column of rock from the opposite side of where his friends were, he noticed hand holes in the rock proceeding upward. He put a hand in and pulled himself up. He looked around. Nothing happened. He put his foot in one of the holes. Using the hand holes, he climbed up the face of the rock column, 68 feet up to the top. As he crested the top, he saw his friends on the other side.

"Hello!" he called out.

"How did you get over there?"

"I climbed up. There are hand holes on the other side of the column."

Pete called out, "Is there anything in the cave exit that you could tie a rope around?"

"Let me check," said Ka'-an. Ka'-an looked out the cave exit. He saw a strong tree just outside the cave. He ran back in.

"Yes, there is a tree up here. Throw me the rope."

Pete heaved the rope across the divide and Ka'-an caught it. He went outside the cave and secured the rope around a strong tree. As he crossed the threshold back into the cave, he stepped on a large, flat rock which seemed to depress and click as he went across it. He stopped for a second, puzzled, and ran back into the cave. Just then, some of the rock columns began to move. The ones near the front of the cave which had gone downward were now starting to go up. It looked like the entire room was "re-setting," starting from the beginning. Pete went into action, running the rope around each person's waist once. John Morse was wearing a belt, so as a precaution, Pete put a carabiner through his belt and latched it onto the rope.

"We're going to jump. Hang on and don't let go! Ready, 1, 2, 3!" All six of the remaining group dove off at the same time, and the rope went swinging to the opposite side, with each member banging their shoulder into the rock wall. Pete's boot scraped against Bolinda's hand, causing her to let go of the rope with one hand. Zach grabbed her, though, and the group of six dangled in mid-air, flailing, and holding onto the rope for dear life.

"OK," said Pete, "Now move your feet against the rock wall like this." Pete showed everyone the position. "Now using your arms, climb up like this." Pete showed everyone the maneuver. He was the fastest one to the top, so he was able to help pull up on the rope to bring everyone to the top. As each man got over the ledge, he grabbed onto the rope to pull up the next person. John Morse was the last one, and he was having trouble. This was more strenuous exercise than he was used to. Zach looked over the edge with concern.

"He's not going to make it, Pete."

"I'll get him," said Pete. Pete quickly put on his harness, re-secured the ropes, and went over the edge. Suddenly, John Morse lost strength and plummeted toward the ground. Zach gasped. The carabiner on John

Morse's belt caught him, however, leaving him dangling precariously in mid-air. Pete went down the side of the rock wall like Spiderman, and clipped onto John Morse.

"Hold on, John."

John Morse, ashen-faced from his fall, desperately grabbed onto Pete's shoulder. Using his bear-like strength and his mountaineering skill, Pete, with the help of the other men at the top of the ledge, managed to muscle the professor over the ledge. The group of seven smiled. They had just passed the first of the Trials of Xibalba.

CHAPTER 53. SUSPICION

International Airspace. Above the Atlantic Ocean, North of French Guiana.

JULIO CEZANNE'S LEAR Jet banked to the northwest, headed for Piarco International Airport. in Trinidad, a tiny island in the West Indies just north of Venezuela. On board were Cezanne, his cousin Davy Branco, the two scientists Matteo Graciano and Dominic Chastain, and four security guards, who were armed with assault weapons. Cezanne had paid off the man working the air traffic control tower at the Trinidad Airport. There would be no record of Cezanne's plane landing in Trinidad. Branco was just getting off the phone, receiving a report from an associate in Brazil.

"Hey, bad news, Julio. Two of our guys were just picked up. And there's a warrant out for me," said Branco. Cezanne was livid.

"A warrant? For what?" asked Cezanne.

"Kidnapping."

"Kidnapping?! Davy, what did you do?" asked Cezanne.

"Well, remember when I told you we had some cops poking around the warehouse that we had to dispose of? Well, the lead Detective lookin' into those cops was a guy named Rosario. Real Do-Goooder. Nothing we could do to turn him. I was concerned we needed a little insurance policy, so I had our guys snatch his daughter."

Cezanne was apoplectic. "You snatched his daughter? Are you fuckin' nuts? We didn't need that! Now, the whole fuckin' Brazilian police force will be after us!" Cezanne slicked back his black hair with his hand. The veins on his neck looked like they were going to erupt. "You stupid fuck!" Cezanne slapped Branco hard across the face.

Cezanne got out his gun and pointed it at Branco's head.

"Whoa, whoa, Julio, cool down."

"Say, 'I am a stupid fuck.'"

"Julio, please, chill out."

"SAY 'I AM A STUPID FUCK' or so help me God, I will put a bullet through your eye!"

"OK, OK," stammered Branco. "I'm a stupid fuck. Sorry, Julio."

Cezanne slowly put down his gun. "That's the last mistake you make, Davy, you understand?"

"Got it, got it. Jeez, Julio, take it easy."

Matteo Graciano looked at his brother. They were nervous about working with Cezanne. What would happen the minute they made a mistake?

“Um, Julio,” said Graciano, trying to break the ice. “I talked to our computer guy on the island. The uplink is all set for the recording. He’s got the whole thing masked so they won’t have any idea where the transmission came from.”

“Which one of you geniuses is going to make the recording?” asked Cezanne, waving his gun precariously back and forth between the two brothers.

“We’re going to do it together,” said Graciano.

“OK, well as long as you have the wire transfer instructions right, that’s all I care about.”

“Have you decided on a number?” asked Graciano.

“I think \$25 Billion has a nice ring to it,” said Cezanne.

Graciano nodded. Cezanne was insane, that was certain.

“Did the boxes ever make it to Mexico City and Victoria?” asked Chastain.

“Zipped up tight as a bug in a fuckin’ rug,” snarled Cezanne.

In two large warehouses, one in Mexico City and another in Victoria, Canada, were over two hundred large cardboard crates containing the antidote to the Mackinac Ebola Virus, created from the antibodies in the blood of the bat rescued from the cave in Tanzania. If the American and Dutch governments acceded to the terrorists’ demands, they would get the location of the two warehouses. Otherwise, there were going to be a lot of sick people.

NSA, Washington, D.C.

SPECIAL AGENT BOBBY Fils had started a special investigation into Julio Cezanne, the owner of the Guadalajara warehouse where American Special Forces had found the diseased monkeys and dead bodies. He had files spread all over his desk containing known Cezanne associates, hideouts and mansions owned by Cezanne, locations of his drug processing plants, and so on. He picked up a file, which contained information on Cezanne’s family. He saw that Cezanne had a cousin named Davy Branco, who lived in Brazil, and was renowned to be a small-time thug and drug

dealer. Out of curiosity, he called the CIA case officer in Rio, and asked him if there was anything new on Davy Branco. After a few hours, the CIA case officer, T. Martinez, got back to him.

“Yeah, we got something new on this Branco character. There was just a warrant issued for Branco’s arrest for the kidnapping of an Amy Rosario. Turns out that’s the daughter of Natal Homicide Detective Manuel Rosario. They’ve had a lot of activity up there. Two cops just turned up dead. Their shot-up squad car was found in a lake. Rosario was the lead Detective looking for the killer of the cops. And down by the docks, a whole storage container of dead bodies was found just yesterday.”

“Dead bodies?” asked Fils. “How did they die?”

“All shot. Maybe twenty of them. All adults, and one little girl, who miraculously made it out alive. You get the feeling that somethin’ big is goin’ on up there. You don’t kill twenty people and stuff them in a storage container unless you have got something really bad to hide,” said Martinez.

“Any reports of a lot of sick people in that area?” asked Fils.

“No, I didn’t read anything about that.”

There was suddenly a lot of noise on the other end of the line.

“What is that?” asked Fils.

“Hey, shut up, you idiots!” yelled Martinez. “Guys down here, they’re all betting on the Brazil game against Mexico.”

“Hmmm,” said Fils, who was not a sports fan.

“You watchin’ the Cup?” asked the Case Officer.

“No, I don’t follow soccer very much.”

“That’s all they talk about down here,” said Martinez. “Too bad the United States lost today. I lost a lot of money on that one. They were playin’ up there in Natal, right where that girl got grabbed.”

Fils suddenly made a connection.

“Martinez, when was the game in Natal?”

“Started at 1 p.m. It’s been over now for about four or five hours.”

“Thanks,” said Fils. “You’ve been a big help.”

Fils panicked for a moment. He did a quick Internet search on the World Cup and learned everything he needed to know about the games in Natal. Then he made a call to Detective Manuel Rosario. After multiple transfers, and waiting on hold for what seemed like an eternity, he was finally routed to Detective Rosario.

“This is Detective Rosario.”

“Detective Rosario, this is Special Agent Bobby Fils from the NSA here in Washington, D.C. We have been tracking a terrorist named Julio Cezanne and we understand that you have had some contact with his cousin Davy Branco.”

“Terrorist?” asked Rosario. “Cezanne is a drug dealer, that’s for sure. But I did not know he was a terrorist.”

“Detective, what can you tell me about Davy Branco?”

“Well, I can tell you that the sonofabitch kidnapped my daughter, and I am looking for him now.”

“Why would he do that?” asked Fils.

“I don’t know, but trust me, I am going to find out. Have you guys tracked Branco down or something?”

“No,” said Fils. “Is your daughter okay?”

“Yes, she’s shaken up, but she will be okay. Thanks for asking.”

“Did your daughter say anything about her kidnappers or about why they took her?”

“Well, now that you mention it, she did say something strange. She said that the guys who were holding her hostage made a comment that they had to get out of the country because the stadium job was finished.”

“The stadium job?” asked Fils.

“Yes. I assume they meant Natal Stadium, where the big football matches are going on. So I called the Head of Security down there, and asked him if there was anything suspicious, and he said no. After the game between the USA and The Netherlands, we shut the stadium down and did a full sweep. There were no bombs, no guns, nothing suspicious that we could find.”

Fils remembered that the abandoned warehouse with the monkey cadavers looked like some kind of bottling plant. Fils thought for a moment.

“Detective, were people at the stadium allowed to bring in bottles?”

“No, no glass bottles or anything like that were allowed in. And they check everything when you come in, pockets, purses, the whole deal. They had to buy refreshments at the stadium. We’ve gotta make some money down here, you know?”

“Is there any type of bottle with liquid in it that they sell outside the stadium?”

Rosario thought for a minute. “Well, there were guys selling these water sprayers, you know? It gets hot down here. You could bring those in, I think. Why, what are you thinking? Did they poison somebody?”

“Agent Rosario, do me a favor. I need you to check the vendor licenses of every person selling bottles of anything outside the stadium. I will call you back in an hour.”

“Okay. But it would be helpful if you could tell me what you know.”

“When I know, I will,” said Fils.

Fils grabbed his Cezanne Family file and some sheets off the printer, and ran down the hall to talk to his boss. Within an hour, Agent Jimmy Pond was in a jet and on his way to Natal, Brazil.

Piarco International Airport, Trinidad

MEANWHILE, CEZANNE, HIS cousin Branco, the two scientists, and their security guards made their way easily through Trinidad Security at the Airport. The plane was stashed away in a hangar at the airport, known only to a few individuals who had been bribed. The terrorists made their way in a green Hummer to the safe house. Cezanne looked out the window. The sun was shining, and it was a beautiful day.

Wernigerode, Germany

AT TWO O’CLOCK in the morning, Hans and Gertrude Chastain were woken up from a cold sleep and taken in their pajamas to the local police station, where they met field agents from the “*Bundeskriminalamt*,” or BKA, the German equivalent of the FBI. Gertrude Chastain was separated from her husband and roughly thrown into a chair in a police interrogation room.

“Fräulein Chastain, where is your son Dominic?” asked the agent, a thin man with an even thinner moustache, who was wearing a black trench coat and smoking a cigarette.

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean, you don’t know?”

“He called me about a month ago and said he was going on a long trip and would not be able to talk to me.”

“Where was he going on this trip?”

“I don’t know. I asked him that, and he said it was better that I don’t

know.”

“What does that mean?”

“I don’t know for the life of me. What is this all about? Is he in trouble with his job or something?”

“Ma’am, do you know your son works for the Robert Koch Institute here in Wernigerode?”

“Yes.”

“And are you aware that is a Level 4 Biohazard Lab, that handles deadly viruses like the Marburg virus and the Ebola virus?”

“Yes, I am aware of that. I don’t know why he ever wanted to do that, but yes, I knew he worked there.”

“When did he leave the Institute?”

“I didn’t know he left.”

“Ma’am, your son just left the Institute, and he has not been seen in over a month. And several of the biohazard suits and certain equipment from the Institute are missing. You know anything about that?”

“Ma’am, give me your cell phone, please.”

Gertrude Chastain, confused, handed over her cell phone. The officer looked through the phone. There had been no calls or texts in recent weeks. He looked up the son’s number in the directory and called it. There was a recording saying the number was no longer in use.

“When did he turn off his phone?”

“I don’t know.”

“Ma’am, is he using another number to call you?”

“No, unless he calls our landline.”

“What is your landline number?”

She gave the officer the number. The field agent would be putting a tap on that line later this afternoon.

“Ma’am, we know your son is a terrorist. We just want to know what his plans are.”

“A terrorist? That’s ridiculous. My son’s not a terrorist! Why he just gave me flowers two months ago. He’s a very nice boy. He couldn’t hurt a fly.”

“Ma’am, I am going to ask you again. What are your son’s plans?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“Tell me about your son’s upbringing. He’s adopted, as I understand it?”

“Yes, a victim of the unfortunate Bosnian conflict. We got him when

he was just eleven. Poor thing. Lost his birth mother and father and sister. It took him a long time to recover from that.”

“Perhaps he never recovered,” suggested the BKA agent.

“What do you mean?”

“Did he ever express the desire to hurt any group of people?”

“Well, I am sure he harbored anger at the people that killed his family, if that’s what you mean.”

“Yeah, that’s what I mean.”

“But he wouldn’t kill anybody.”

“Ma’am, stay here, we’re going to talk to your husband for a bit.”

The field agent closed the door. His gut told him that this nice lady was telling the truth. She had no clue, but her son was a terrorist, that was certain. The agent went down the hall to talk to the father.

NSA, Washington, D.C.

AT AROUND DINNERTIME, Detective Rosario called.

“Bad news,” he said. “The License Office is closed. The guy who runs it cannot be found. He is not due back until the morning.”

Agent Fils was distressed at the news. “Detective, this is a matter of life and death, for both your country and ours. You absolutely have to find that guy that runs the License Office, wake him up, do whatever you have to do. But we need to see those records tonight!”

“Agent Fils, you have got to give me more than that. What is going on?” Agent Fils considered the matter. This was a high level security matter, but he needed to secure the Detective’s cooperation.

“Detective, have you ever heard of the Ebola Virus?”

“Yes.”

“Well, we have a suspicion that terrorists, possibly led by Davy Branco, were putting the Ebola Virus in water bottles and selling the bottles to people at the football match. If we are right, there could be a worldwide epidemic. We need to know if Davy Branco or Julio Cezanne had any of the vendor licenses to sell bottled water inside or outside the stadium.”

“Oh, my God. I’ll do my best,” said Rosario.

Detective Rosario started making calls to his patrolmen to find the man in charge of the License Office. They would find him tonight, no matter what they had to do.

CHAPTER 54. BRIDGES

Island of Boyuca. Bay of Honduras.

THE SEVEN TRAVELERS left the cave and squinted as they walked into the bright sun. They were on a high rocky ledge, and the ground sloped off on either side of the narrow walkway. Skip Drame looked over the edge and saw that they were pretty high up on the mountain. The walkway continued up a stone stairway. There was no other way to go, so the group trudged upward, unsure of where the path was taking them. When they got to the top of the stairway, the path went straight about fifty feet and then ended at the edge of a cliff. At the top of the cliff were three long bridges, spanning a two hundred foot chasm to ledges on the other side. The first bridge was made of wood, with wooden floor boards and wooden rails, and looked fairly sturdy. The second was green and leafy and made of vines. The third bridge looked to be the most precarious and was made of rope. Each bridge terminated into a different cave opening in the face of the mountain on the far side. John Morse told his son Zach not to get too close to the edge.

“Hey,” said Zach to his father. “This is just like the story you told us about the Xibalba. You said that after the river of blood and the river of pus and the river of scorpions, the Hero Twins had to cross bridges.”

“That’s right,” said John Morse.

“But I thought you said when we were on the yacht that there were four bridges, not three.”

“You’re right,” said Ka’an. “The story is four bridges, so I don’t know why there would only be three.”

Mountain Man seemed happy. He liked high mountain passes and great views. From here, they could see the yacht below in the bay. They had a good view of most of the island. Pete peered over the edge of the cliff. It was hundreds of feet down to the bottom. If they tried to cross any of the bridges and the bridge failed, it would mean certain death.

Seated off to the right of the bridges behind a column of rock, was a frail old man, sitting on a mound of dirt. His face was worn with wrinkles. His gray hair, blowing wildly in the wind, blew across his face, but he didn’t seem to mind. Wearing a simple, green ceremonial garment, the old man appeared oblivious to the Americans, happy to puff on his long pipe, staring out into space with a wise but happy look. Pete decided the

man looked harmless enough, and said hello. The old man turned to him and said nothing. Pete, using Ka'-an as interpreter, asked the old man if he could help advise as to the safest way to cross the bridges. The old man, speaking in *K'iche'*, recited something that sounded like gibberish, and Pete turned to Ka'-an for translation.

“He says, ‘*The certain man will cross, but the doubtful man will live.*’”

Pete looked confused. “I’m sorry, sir, what does that mean?” Ka'-an translated for Pete.

The old man repeated the same sentence again, and then pulled out a thatch basket of fruit, offering each of the group a mango. All seven were very appreciative, as they had not eaten or drunk anything in a long time, and they thanked the old man, who nodded. The old man then opened a second basket, which contained a few foul-smelling dead animals covered in flies. Pete looked in. There was a dead armadillo and four or five dead rats. The stench was terrible. Pete recoiled and thought he was going to be sick. The old man looked confused. He was obviously trying to be friendly. After a few more questions, translated by Ka'-an, it became clear that the old man was not going to offer anything more helpful. Pete walked over to the three bridges, seeing if there was anything there which could give him a clue. As he did so, he thought for a moment that he heard a low sound, like the whispering of human voices.

He inspected the wooden bridge closer. On the wooden post of the first bridge was a long, narrow, curving, cream and pink animal horn or shell with a wider opening at the top. Pete picked up the horn/shell and lifted it to his ear. He heard human voices coming from the horn, almost like a telephone. The voices were in a strange language, probably the Mayan dialect of the islanders. Startled at first, Pete dropped the horn. The voices continued from the horn as it lay in the gravel. Pete picked it up again and saw that there was a small hole in the smaller end of the horn, and connected to that was something that looked like a cross between rubber tubing and a vine. It was green and plantlike, but bendable like rubber, and it looked like it might be hollow. The rubber-like vine snaked over the edge of the cliff.

“Check this out,” said Pete, handing the horn to Drame, who listened to the voices emanating from the horn.

“Helllllooooo,” said Drame, speaking into the horn. The strange voices continued. “Hey, Ka'-an, I think we need a translation here.”

Ka'-an picked up the horn, and listened intently to the voices.

"It says, '*Beware the great white eater, whose voracious appetite can bring down giants.*'"

Skip patted Pete's stomach, and cracked, "The Great White Eater. Hey, Pete, I think they're talkin' about you!"

Pete smirked, brushing off Drame's hand from his stomach. "Come to think of it, I am pretty hungry. That mango was good. What I wouldn't give for a good steak right now."

"Grab the horn for the second bridge, the one with the vines," said Drame. "What does that say?"

Ka'-an listened, putting the horn close to his ear.

"It says, '*Beware the Queen's angry sons, who guard the gold in the labyrinth where no man walks.*'"

"What the hell does that mean? And who is the Queen?" asked Drame.

"I have no idea," confessed Ka'-an.

Zach Morse grabbed the horn in front of the third bridge and handed it to Ka'-an. "What about this one?" Ka'-an took the horn from Zach and listened.

"It says, '*Beware the bright colored one with the sharp bite, the creation of Tohil. He has tongues but cannot taste. He can be savior or destroyer.*'"

Before they could figure out what that meant, there was movement on the other side of the chasm.

"Look!" yelled Zach, peering across the gulf. At the end of the wooden bridge, walking out of the mouth of the cave opening, were three albino panthers. The three animals, with mangy white fur and disturbing bright blue eyes, walked menacingly around the mouth of the cave. On the far side of the wooden bridge, standing like gateposts at the end of the path, were two large dirt-colored pillars. One of the panthers walked between the pillars and took a few steps out onto the bridge. The animal looked around and then appeared to think better of it, apparently unsure if the bridge would hold the weight. He retreated with the two others. The three animals walked silently near the cave entrance, with their eyes locked on the travelers on the other side. One of the panthers made a loud growl which could be heard all the way across the chasm.

Moments later, six burly natives, wearing no shirts and semicircular neckpieces made of gold, came out of the second cave opening, at the far

end of the vine bridge. Pete took out binoculars from his pack and looked across the chasm at the natives. Each wielded a long spear. He saw a glint of sunlight on the face of one of the natives. "What is that?" he thought. Probing closer with his binoculars, he saw what was causing the flash. The guards all had gold teeth. For now, the natives did not appear to be coming across the bridge towards them, but, on the other hand, they did not look like a particularly friendly welcoming party.

Scanning to the right, Pete looked through the binoculars to the cave opening by the end of the third bridge, the one made of rope. There was a clump of something orange or pink near the mouth of the cave. Adjusting the focus, he saw what it was. Snakes, lots of them. He gave the binoculars to Charlie. Due to his son Teddy's fascination with snakes, Professor Winston was somewhat of an expert on snakes.

"There is only one snake in the world that looks like that," said Charlie. "Those are copperheads. And they are poisonous."

The six men and one tall woman looked out over the bridges. They had to get across a two hundred foot chasm, on bridges that were weak and may fail, and if they got to the other side, they were facing panthers, soldiers and snakes. This was going to require a plan.

CHAPTER 55. RIDDLES

Island of Boyuca. Bay of Honduras.

AFTER CONSULTING FOR a moment, the group decided that the bridge leading to the snakes appeared to be the best option. Charlie Winston had assured the group that copperheads, like most snakes, usually did not attack humans unless directly provoked. And although their bite was poisonous, Winston advised that there were hardly any reported human deaths from copperheads. The bite of a copperhead would, at most, cause a lot of pain, but it probably wouldn't kill you. This did not seem to mollify the group, especially Bolinda, who was deathly afraid of snakes. Winston assured them, however, that if they could just walk around the snakes, they could probably avoid getting bitten. John Morse, although he trusted his friend Charlie, felt like they needed more information. He suggested that they should study the riddle, because it obviously held clues to crossing the bridge.

John Morse repeated the riddle for the rope bridge. "*Beware the bright colored one with the deadly bite, the creation of Tohil. He has tongues but cannot taste. He can be savior or destroyer.*" Charlie, do snakes have a sense of taste?"

"No, they don't," said Winston. "Believe it or not, they use their tongues for smell and touch, but not taste."

"OK, well that fits," said Morse. "But it says this thing has tongues, plural. Snakes have only one tongue, so that doesn't seem to fit."

"Well," said Charlie, "the copperhead, like many snakes, has a forked tongue, so you could consider that two tongues." Morse did not seem convinced.

"Who is Tohil?" asked Morse to Ka'-an.

"Tohil is the *K'iche'* sun god. He is carried across the sky in the mouth of Q'uq'umatz, the Mayan feathered serpent god who helped create all of humanity. Q'uq'umatz is similar to the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl. Some say Tohil and Q'uq'umatz are the same god."

"OK, well, if Tohil is a feathered serpent god, then his 'creation' would probably be a snake, so that fits, I guess," said Morse. "But how is a snake a savior or a destroyer?"

"I think I can answer that," said Winston. "Snakes are a vital part of the balance of nature. Without snakes, we would be overrun with mice,

rodents and insects, which are harmful to crops. Snakes also serve as a food source for animals like hawks and eagles and owls. And believe it or not, snakes can also help with human ailments. There's a very interesting story about that."

There was a pause. No one really wanted to hear this story. "I guess we are going to hear this interesting story?" asked Zach sarcastically.

"Well, if you really want to know," said Winston. "The snake is called the Chinese water snake, or *enhydris chinensis*, that secretes an oil which can treat joint pain. In the 1860s, Chinese laborers were brought in to help construct the First Transcontinental Railroad. They brought with them their traditional herbs and medicinal treatments, including the oil from the Chinese water snake. Competing medicinal salesmen at the time, intent on selling their own products as cures, ridiculed the home remedies of the Chinese as quackery, when in fact they were not. And that is how, ironically, we get the term 'snake oil salesman,' meaning a person who is selling something of dubious legitimacy. So I guess that is how a snake could be a savior. It can cure human illness."

"And a snake can kill you," said Zach. "So I suppose a snake can also be a destroyer."

Morse considered this. "I don't know. It just doesn't feel right to me. I think we are missing something."

Bolinda was afraid of snakes, but she figured she had a better chance with a snake than with a panther or a soldier. She went over to the rope bridge and pulled on the chest-high rope handrails. They seemed fairly solid. She bent down on her knees and yanked on the ropes which formed the floor of the rope bridge. They didn't fall apart. It would probably hold her weight, she thought. As she began to stand up, she crinkled her nose. What was that? Something smelled bad. It wasn't overpowering, just a slight malodorous scent in the air. She couldn't put her finger on it, or rather, her nose on it.

"I think I am going to give it a shot," said Bolinda. "Pete, if you could secure me with the rope, that would help. Then, if this whole thing falls apart, or if the snakes come after me, you can yank me back to safety." Pete looked at Bolinda. She was tall, but she probably didn't weigh that much. It was a pretty sensible idea. Pete got out his climbing rope and secured a harness around Bolinda. Then Pete secured the line back to a sturdy tree at the top of the cliff. Pete held the rope and wedged himself

behind a large rock, giving himself leverage if he had to grab onto Bolinda in an emergency.

Bolinda, fastened in the harness around her waist, slowly started to walk across the rope bridge. The bridge was swaying in the wind, which made the passage difficult. She took the trip very slowly, one foot at a time. She was about half way across the bridge when that smell hit her again. What was that? She had a flashback to pumping gas into her BMW at the Shell station back in Los Angeles. Yes, that was it. Kind of a gas or oil smell. But why would there be an oil smell? She looked down at her hands, which she had been using to steady herself on the rope handrails. There was a clear, oily film on her hands.

Back on the cliff, John Morse was still thinking about the riddle. He was convinced that the riddle did not mean a snake. What had multiple tongues, he wondered? He could not think of an animal with multiple tongues. What else has a tongue? A shoe has a tongue. Maybe the word “tongues” was a metaphor of some kind. Like tongue twisters. Or speaking in tongues. Languages, that was another word for tongues, could that be it? What else was there? Tongues of fire, or something? Wait a minute, he thought. Fire. Fire was bright colored. Fire had a sharp bite. Fire could be a savior for a man in the dark, or a man walking in a freezing cold forest, or a man who needed a fire to cook food. It could also be a destroyer. What about Tohil? Tohil was the sun god, Ka'-an had said.

“Ka'-an,” said Morse. “Was Tohil also the fire deity?”

“Deity?” asked Ka'-an.

“God. Was he a fire god?”

“Yes,” said Ka'-an.

Morse pondered. That could only mean....Just then, there was a whistling sound, and Morse turned in time to see three flaming arrows, shot from somewhere beneath the bridge. Each arrow stuck into a different part of the rope bridge. Bolinda, seeing the oil on her hands, panicked, realizing what was happening.

“Bring me back! They are going to burn the bridge!”

With that, ten more flaming arrows shot upwards from somewhere below them, striking the rope bridge. The fire on the arrows stuck in the bridge, igniting the oil rubbed on the ropes. Within moments, there was a wall of flame blocking her passage back to Pete, and a fire rising on the other side, preventing her passage to the far side. Within the next thirty

seconds, she would either be burned to death or jettisoned into the chasm when the bridge was destroyed. “Jump!” yelled Pete. “I’ll catch you when you swing off!”

“I can’t!” screamed Bolinda.

“You have to jump! The bridge will burn you alive in seconds!”

Bolinda looked and the fire started to slither its way like a snake across the floor of the rope bridge towards her. There was no other choice. “You better catch me, Pete!”

“I got you!” said Pete. “Jump!”

Bolinda dove off the bridge, on the far side away from the bridge made of vines. She dropped immediately, and she screamed as she started to go down. Pete held on with all his might. The other men pitched in, grabbing the rope. Pete and the other men started pulling back on the rope, as Bolinda swung precariously back and forth over the chasm. The big concern now was that the rope was in the flames. If the rope burned through, that would be it for Bolinda.

“Quick!” yelled Pete. “The rope is on fire! We have to get her up fast!”

The men gave a heave-ho on the count of three, and then pulled again in unison every three seconds. The flame continued to scorch the sturdy climbing rope, singeing it black. Step by step they yanked back, and Bolinda started the climb back to the top of the cliff. As she was about three feet from the top, several cords of the climbing rope, scorched from the fire, unwound and snapped, causing a ripping sound. As Bolinda looked up in horror, fearing a plunge to the depths below, an arm came over the top of the cliff and grabbed her forearm just as the rope snapped. It was Skip Drame. Bolinda screamed.

“Don’t let go!” Skip yelled. “I’ve got you!” With the help of the other men holding onto Skip, he was able to pull her over the top to safety. As she rested in the dirt at the top of the cliff, she saw the entire rope bridge fall apart in a ball of fire.

“The bright colored thing with a sharp bite and many tongues was Fire,” said Morse, smiling, obviously pleased with himself for solving the riddle, albeit a little too late.

Bolinda looked at Morse, put out. “It might have been nice to know that before I was almost burned alive!” Morse suppressed a laugh. The group looked across the chasm. The snakes seemed oblivious to anything on the other side. The white panthers and the armed soldiers were still there.

“Well, I guess we chose the wrong bridge,” said Morse.

“Thank you, Captain Obvious,” said Drame.

“Our only problem now,” said Pete, “is that we only have half a rope, and the remnant we have is pretty singed. I don’t know how strong it will be.”

“What if there was a way to get those panthers to cross over to our side?” suggested Morse. “That way, if there is something wrong with the bridge, we don’t get killed trying to cross. If the panthers make it safely across, then presumably we could cross, too. And if we lure the panthers to our side, then we can cross and then we will have no opposition on the other side.”

“I think you’re forgetting something,” said Charlie. “Assuming we can lure them over here, how do you plan on defending yourself from hungry panthers?”

“Food.”

“Food?” asked Charlie.

“Yes, we get some kind of food, lure them over with it, and then throw the food back toward the cave with the Scorpion. When they go for the food, we dash for the bridge.”

“What if the panthers decide we are better food?”

“Well, we have to get some kind of food that the panthers will not be able to resist. I have not figured that part out yet,” said Morse.

Pete thought about that for a moment, and he remembered the animals in the old man’s basket. He walked back over to the old man with Ka’an, and, after a moment, came back with the dead armadillo and rats. Pete was not sure if a panther would like armadillos or rats, but it was worth a try. Taking out a small bandana from his backpack, he wrapped up the dead animals in the bandana, and then tied the bandana to the end of his rope.

“Yes, that could work,” said Morse.

Pete stepped on the edge of the first bridge, the wooden one. As he did so, he heard more voices coming from the telephone shells. He could not make out the words, but it sounded like a warning. He tentatively started to walk across the wooden bridge, one hand on the railing and one hand on the bandana full of bait. As he got near the middle of the bridge, he heard a creaking sound. He decided he had gone far enough. He threw the bandana in a high arc, where it landed on the ledge on the other

side. The white panthers noticed immediately. Smelling the meat, they moved toward the bandana for an inspection. Quickly, Pete, standing mid-span, pulled back on the rope, and the bandana landed on the end of the bridge. The three big cats went after the bandana and Pete pulled back again, bringing the bandana further back towards himself on the bridge. Pete started to edge back to his own side of the bridge, bringing the bandana towards him. The white panthers quickly leaped onto the bridge. Heading straight towards Pete. Within seconds, it became clear that the lead panther was now more interested in attacking Pete. It growled loudly. Pete, deciding to abort the plan, turned to run back to his friends.

“Look out! Here they come!”

The lead panther sprinted. In three large bounds, it had almost made it to the half-way mark on the bridge. As it took its last bound into the air and landed on the bridge, only a few feet behind Pete, the bridge crumbled and cracked beneath the panther’s feet. The panther scrambled to hold on, but the bridge flooring collapsed, and the panther went flying into the chasm below. The second two panthers paused, unsure of what to do. They walked near the edge of where the bridge had collapsed, and there was another creaking and splitting sound, and the flooring beneath the second two panthers collapsed, sending them into the chasm. Pete turned to look, and was initially pleased, but then realized that the whole bridge was collapsing. He dashed as fast as he could back the way he came, with the bridge collapsing in pieces behind him. He made one final leap to safety. His friends helped dust him off, and, like Bolinda, Pete was happy that he had narrowly escaped death. There was still a five foot remnant of the bridge left. John Morse cautiously leaned over the edge and cracked off a piece of the wooden bridge in his hand. As he inspected the wood closely, a smile broadened across his face, and he held up the wooden fragment triumphantly.

“The great white eater!” he proclaimed.

“John, what are you talking about?” asked Winston.

“Look at this piece of wood. It’s covered in termites. Termites are also known as white ants. That’s the great white eater. And termites have the ability to bring down a large tree. They *bring down giants due to their voracious appetite*. The voices were telling us to beware of the bridge, because it was infested with termites!” John Morse was very pleased with himself, but Pete and Bolinda did not appear amused or impressed.

“You know, John,” said Pete. “It would be nice if you could solve these riddles before we risk our lives crossing them.”

“Quite right,” said Morse. “Quite right, indeed. Very sorry. I think I have it now. Each time, we were led to believe that the thing to watch out for was the danger lurking on the other side of the bridge. With the rope bridge, we were led to believe the danger was snakes, and we overlooked the danger of the bridge being destroyed by fire. The second time we were led to believe that the great white eater was the panther, when it was really the termites on the bridge. Therefore, the second bridge, the one made out of vines, must be the same. The real danger is not those soldiers with gold teeth on the other side. The real danger is something on the bridge itself. The final bridge riddle is: *‘Beware the Queen’s angry sons, who guard the gold in the labyrinth where no man walks.’* Whatever that danger is, it is on the bridge itself.”

“OK, but what is the labyrinth where no man walks?” asked Zach. “And if the ‘Queen’s angry sons’ are not those guys with the spears, then who are they?”

“I’m not quite sure,” said Morse. “But I think the labyrinth is the key. What on that vine bridge looks like a maze or a labyrinth?” They all looked over the cliff at the bridge. They saw vines and flowers but nothing that looked like a maze. Morse felt badly about solving the riddles too late before.

“I will volunteer to take the last bridge, because I think I will know it when I see it.”

“OK,” said Pete, “We can secure you with the rope, but it will only take you about half way across the bridge. At that point, you will have to come back. We cannot risk losing you into the chasm.”

“That sounds agreeable,” said Morse.

“Dad, are you sure?” asked Zach.

“Yes, Zach, I’ll be fine.”

“John,” said Pete, “take my Bowie knife. If the natives over there get restless, at least you will have something to defend yourself.”

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” said Morse.

“John, I insist,” said Pete, tucking the blade into his friend’s waistband.

“OK,” said Morse. He put on the harness, fastened himself to the rope, and started to walk precariously across the vine bridge. Surprisingly the vine bridge was fairly sturdy, and seemed to hold his weight. As he

started to cross, he noticed that the natives on the opposite side looked agitated, as if they couldn't wait for a fight. They began chanting and hooting at Morse from across the chasm.

Morse stopped on the bridge for a moment and closed his eyes, ignoring the natives, and trying to focus on the riddle, "the labyrinth where no man walks." As he concentrated, he thought momentarily of the old man. What had he said? *The certain man will cross, but the doubtful man will live.* So far, they had proceeded across the bridge confidently, and they had been punished each time. What would a doubtful man do? Morse wondered. He thought for a moment. A doubtful man would get half way across the bridge and then turn around, uncertain that his path was correct. The doubtful man.... Morse opened his eyes, and turned around again towards his friends. As he did so, he looked at the cliff wall beneath where his friends were standing. Just twenty feet below where his friends were standing, there were rungs of a ladder embedded into the rock, heading down the face of the cliff! Morse tracked the path of the rungs with his eyes down to a cave opening about 200 feet down. Interesting. It was plain as day if you were facing the wrong way on the bridge. Only the doubtful man would see the bridge—the fourth bridge from the Mayan folk legend (!)—heading down the face of the cliff to the cave.

Morse was ecstatic. "I've got it!" he yelled back to his friends, pointing at the face of the cliff. "The fourth bridge!" He took three steps back when his right foot went straight through the flooring of the vine bridge and into the top of a beehive, which was attached to the bottom of the bridge. Morse was wedged at his chest, halfway above the bridge and halfway below it. A swarm of bees came buzzing angrily out of the hive and descended on Morse. At that moment, the natives on the far side began throwing spears. Morse had not noticed before, but there were dozens of beehives nestled into the sidewalls of the vine bridge. The natives were not aiming at Morse. They were aiming for the hives. Within seconds, the natives had skewered the beehives with their spears, causing the sky to blacken with swarms of the angry insects. As the bees descended on Morse, he quickly realized the solution to the riddle was bees. All the drones and worker bees were, of course, the angry sons of the queen bee. And they guarded the gold—honey—in the beehive, which is the labyrinth where no man walks.

Morse's face and arms were covered in a swarm of stinging bees. His right leg, stuck in the beehive, was black because it was covered with so many bees. His friends tried to pull the rope, but he was wedged. There was only one way out. Using Pete's Bowie knife, Morse, with his eyes shut, sawed the vines just past him on the bridge, cutting the bridge in two. It was hard work, made more difficult due to the swarms of bees attacking him, but he soon had sawed through the last vine, causing Morse's half of the bridge to go swinging in mid-air back towards the cliff wall. Morse hit the cliff wall hard, smashing his shoulder, but the impact with the wall also caused the beehive on his foot to fall off. The impact also loosened the vines around his waist. Still fighting the last of the swarming insects, Morse pulled himself out of the entangling vines and held onto the rope for dear life.

"Pull me up!" he yelled. His friends again cooperated and within moments, Morse was pulled up over the side. Zach ran to his father.

"Dad! Are you OK?"

Morse's entire face, neck and arms were covered in blisters and bee stings. His right leg, however, looked really bad. It was red and blue and swollen to twice its size.

"I don't feel so good," he said, lying down.

"I've got something for that," said Pete. Pete pulled out some baby aspirin from his pack. "I've got a bad ticker. My ex-wife always made me bring these in case I was having a heart attack. Hand me your canteen." Zach handed him a canteen of water. Pete took out a number of the baby aspirins and spread them over John Morse's face, arms, and leg. He added some water, and ground the aspirins into the water, making a paste on Morse's skin.

"A wet aspirin tablet works as an anti-inflammatory. John, you're not allergic to bee stings, are you?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Good. Well, you're going to be in some pain for a while, but if you take it easy, you'll be OK. Now what were you saying about a fourth bridge?"

"Just beneath us, about twenty feet down on our side of the cliff, are a series of stair step rungs that lead down to a cave. That's the fourth bridge from the Mayan legend. The old man told us that the doubtful man would survive, so I figured a doubting man would turn around and

come back the way he came. When I turned around, I saw the fourth bridge and the cave below.”

The group turned to look at the old man, but he had vanished in the commotion.

“Where did he go?” asked Zach.

“I don’t know, maybe he headed back the way we came,” said Pete. The men helped Morse up, and he limped a little because his right foot was still swollen and painful.

“Hey Dad,” said Zach. “I think I know what the labyrinth where no man walks is.” He smiled at his father, and the rest of the group laughed. Morse now knew what it felt like to wish that cleverness had come sooner. The rope appeared to be just long enough to lower someone to the first rung of the cliff wall. There was only one problem. If all of them wanted to go down the cliff, they were going to have to leave the rope behind. They all agreed that was a necessary evil. Pete tied the rope securely around a tree near the top of the cliff. Then the group slowly descended down the rungs of the cliff bridge, until they came to the mouth of a cave two hundred feet below.

As the last man, Mountain Man Pete, lowered himself to the bottom, the group re-lit their torches and their flashlight and entered the cave. Just inside the cave opening, there was a tall narrow opening, almost like a crack in the rock, which allowed them passage. They had to turn sideways, and edge to the right, sidestep by sidestep, to proceed. After all seven had inched their way into the narrow corridor and had traveled about fifty feet, there was a loud grinding noise, like stone being moved on stone. Bolinda, who was the last to enter the narrow passage, looked back to her left.

“Um, guys, they just sealed off the passage behind us.”

Zach, who was the first one to enter the passage, was not that troubled by the news. They had no plans to go back the way they came anyway. Zach continued to snake his way along the tall corridor, sidestepping to the right. It was slow going. After about ten minutes, Zach stopped suddenly. He looked to his right, which was the passage ahead. There was a wall of rock. They were at a dead end.

“Um, guys....” said Zach.

CHAPTER 56. SHUTDOWN

Outside Natal Stadium, Brazil. 10:00 p.m. Brazil time; 9:00 p.m. EST.

AGENT JIMMY POND was dressed as a sanitation worker. He wore rubber gloves, duct taped to his wrists, and rubber boots, duct taped to his ankles. The other sanitation workers wondered why he was wearing a hospital mask, but they figured he was just a wimp who didn't like the smell of trash. Pond carried a large plastic trash bag, inside which was hidden a biohazard containment bag. For the last hour, he had been collecting every bottle and liquid container he could find in or near the stadium. Inside the bag were several of the water sprayers which had been sold by the terrorist brothers earlier that morning. When he had collected a large number of samples, Pond secured the bags and then drove them to Augusto Severo International Airport in Natal, where he met an Air Force pilot from Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City, Florida. The pilot would take the bags in his F-15 Eagle back to the CDC in Atlanta. Traveling at 1,875 miles per hour, it would take the pilot a little over two hours to get back to Atlanta with the samples.

12:00 midnight in Natal. 11:00 p.m. EST.

ON THE OTHER side of the City, Detective Manuel Rosario was pounding on the door of the man in charge of stadium vendor licenses.

"Police, open up!" he yelled.

A few minutes later, the license inspector opened the door in his pajamas, confused as to the meaning of the interruption.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"Roberto Diaz?"

"Yes."

"Do you have access to the records relating to vendor licenses at the stadium here at your house?"

"No, those are kept at the office."

"Then get your shoes. We need you to come with us immediately!"

"What's this all about?"

"We will tell you on the way. It is most urgent. Get your shoes. And bring your keys to the office."

As they drove in Rosario's police car, Diaz was irritated. He was a

public official. Who was this detective to roust him out of his sleep at this hour?

“Detective, I am sorry. But the office is now closed. I am going to need to know more before I just open the office for you, unless you have a court order.”

“Mr. Diaz, we have reason to believe there may have been a terrorist attack this morning at the stadium, involving poisoned water bottles. We need to know who was selling those bottles.”

“Detective, I assure you, we go through rigorous background checks when we issue those vendor licenses. I highly doubt that any of our licensees is a terrorist.”

“Mr. Diaz, I appreciate your position. Needless to say, if there is a possibility of terrorism, we need to check it out immediately, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Well, I guess so. This is just highly unusual.”

Rosario thought of a few choice words to say to this imbecile but decided that discretion was a better choice. When the Detective’s car pulled in front of the license office, the inspector led him up the stairs and unlocked the door. Within a few minutes, the license official had powered up one of the computer work stations, and typed in a search for the vendor license holders.

“What are we looking for?” asked the official.

“Start by printing me a complete list of everyone who has a vendor license.”

“That’s over 200 individuals and companies.”

“That’s okay. Just do it.”

The official put in a search command and then printed out the list for the Detective. Rosario scanned the list. None of the names of the individuals and companies jumped out as being unusual.

“These companies on here—is there a way to figure out who owns each of those companies?”

“Well, I am sure there is some way to do it. We do not have that in our database. But each company has to have a designated representative, and they have to list all the employees who will be selling. We have the names and pictures of all of the representatives and employees of each company in our system. But that would be a pretty big list, probably close to 2,000 people.”

“OK, can you put that all on a flashdrive for me?”

“Sure, do you have a drive?”

Rosario handed him a small plastic drive. After a few minutes, the official had downloaded all of the names and photos onto the drive.

“What about the photos of the representatives of each company. That should be a manageable list. Can you print that off?”

“Sure.” The official ran another search and printed off a list of each company’s representative. There were 182 companies on the list. He focused on the photos only, because he figured that whoever applied for the license was probably using a fake name. As he got near the end of the list, he saw a familiar face. It was Davy Branco.

“This guy here, he’s with a company called Vortex, Inc. Can you pull that up?”

“Here you go.”

The screen showed Davy Branco, with an alias. There were five employees listed. Send the complete file on Vortex to me in an e-mail.” He gave the official his card. “My e-mail address is on here.” Rosario looked at the screen for more information.

“Does it state what they were selling?”

The license official hit another search button and a screen came up showing a photo of the water bottle with the soccer ball lid and fan on the top.

He quickly called Agent Fils in Washington, D.C. who answered on one ring.

“Agent Fils.”

“Agent, this is Detective Rosario in Brazil. I think we may have something here. The License Office gave a vendor’s license to a company called Vortex, Inc. The representative of the company is under an alias, but I have the photo. It is definitely Davy Branco. That’s the guy who kidnapped my daughter. Give me your e-mail address, and I will send you the files.”

“I need the photos of all the salesmen,” said Fils.

“It’s coming to you now,” said Rosario.

After a few minutes of waiting, the files hit the servers in Washington, D.C. Fils stared in dread when he saw the photos. One of the salesmen was Dominic Chastain; the other was Matteo Graciano.

“One minute, Detective.” Fils quickly switched lines, and called his

boss, telling him that he had important information and he would be down in his office momentarily.

“Detective, can you upload all the information you have on Vortex, their employees, what they were selling, and so on. I need you to wake up a judge, and get a warrant issued for each of the men working for Vortex.”

“We already have a warrant out for Davy Branco. I will get working on the other ones.” “The other three salesmen I do not recognize,” said Fils. “Do you know who they are?”

“No, but I suspect they work for Davy.”

“OK, I will run them through facial recognition here. In the meantime, you look at your records and try and figure out who they are.”

A few seconds later, the information appeared on Fils’ screen showing the type of water bottle being sold.

“How many of these did they have authority to sell?”

Rosario turned to the license official.

The official looked at his computer screen. “It says they have 3,000 bottles.”

Fils was deeply concerned. “Three thousand?” That could wipe out everyone on the planet, he thought.

“Detective Rosario, I need you to keep in constant contact with me. I am going to give you my personal cell. Give me your private cell and e-mail; the same goes for the license official you have there. Detective, I am going to bring this matter to the President of the United States. She will be calling your Brazilian President. Detective, you need to get your President to immediately close your airport; and shut down all transportation in and out of the city. If you don’t, we could have a worldwide pandemic. And your Health Department needs to be notified, as well as all of your hospitals. I will be in touch with my superiors, who will give you additional advice. I cannot urge this enough. Stay in contact with us and keep all lines of communication open.”

“Sure,” said Rosario, feeling numb.

The License Official was very nervous. If people died, everyone would blame him for issuing the license. How could they have missed a known criminal in a background check? They must have someone on the take working in the License Office, he thought. He would call an emergency meeting in the morning and get to the bottom of this.

Agent Bobby Fils printed out the computer files on Vortex and ran down the hall to see his boss.

Atlanta Georgia. 4:00 a.m. EST

MURIELLE WINSTON AND Jacob Roessler had been called back into the office by their boss. Working on little sleep, they had spent the evening testing the samples taken from the stadium by Agent Pond. The first forty bottles they inspected had turned up nothing in terms of the virus. At about 2:00 a.m., their office received an urgent e-mail from the NSA, which contained a JPEG file attachment showing a water fan sprayer with a soccer ball lid and a fan on the top. They were told to focus on those type of sprayers for now. There were five such bottles in the bags turned in from the Air Force pilot. Two of the bottles had American flags painted on the side; one had the flag of The Netherlands; one had a Brazilian flag; one had the flag of Cameroon.

Wearing RACAL suits, the two had spent the last two hours in the Level 4 Hot Room analyzing the samples. They were surprised to find that the water in the two bottles with the American flags and the one with The Netherlands flag tested positive for the Mackinac Ebola Virus. The water from the bottles with the flags of Brazil and Cameroon, however, did not. This was puzzling. They re-checked their data and re-confirmed the results.

Brasilia, Brazil. 5:00 a.m. Brazil time. 4:00 a.m. EST.

THE PRESIDENT OF Brazil, Mariana Oliveira, had convened a conference call. She did not want to speak to the American President until she knew from her own people what was going on. On the phone were Detective Rosario, the detective who had discovered the terrorist plot; Lucas Cavalcanti, Head of the Ministry of Health; Gustavo Almeida, the Mayor of Natal; Gabriel Souza, Head of the Brazilian Department of Aviation; João Silva, Head of Security at Natal Stadium; and Felipe Martins, Head of the American CDC Office in Brasilia. Brazil did not have any Level 4 BioHazard Safety Labs in the country; the American was probably the best expert they could get on short notice.

The President of Brazil addressed the group first.

“Detective Rosario, please fill us in with the latest information that you have.”

“Yes, Madame President.” A picture of Matteo Graciano appeared on the large screens in the Brazilian President’s conference room. This

is Matteo Graciano, an Italian scientist who used to work at a Level 4 Biohazard laboratory in Rome. According to the Americans, a few months ago, Graciano was able to obtain a strain of the Ebola virus from some infected boys in Africa. The Americans are calling this the Mackinac Ebola virus. Matteo Graciano is working with this man, Dominic Chastain, a former employee of the Koch Institute, a Level 4 Biohazard laboratory in Germany.” A picture of Chastain appeared on the screen. The two scientists are apparently conspiring with these two men, Julio Cezanne, and his cousin Davy Branco. Cezanne is a known drug lord in Mexico; Branco is a small-time hoodlum and illegal narcotics distributor working near Natal, Brazil. A short time ago, two of our officers in Brazil were killed, and we found their shot-up squad car in a lake. I was appointed head detective on the case of the missing detective. Shortly thereafter, Davy Branco’s men kidnapped my daughter Amy.”

“I am so sorry to hear that, Detective,” said the President. “Is she okay?”

“Thank you, Madame President. Yes, fortunately, we were successful in locating her and bringing her to safety. My daughter advised me that the men who captured her made reference to being finished with a ‘stadium job,’ and that they were going to get paid by Davy Branco. At around the same time, I was contacted by an American representative of their National Security Agency, named Agent Bobby Fils. He informed me of the likelihood of a terrorist attack at the Natal Stadium involving potentially poisoned water bottles. It is believed that the water bottles contained the Mackinac Ebola Virus. We checked with the licensing office, and indeed, Davy Branco, working under an assumed name, had been given a vendor’s license to sell water bottles. Two of the men working for Branco selling the water bottles were the two scientists, Graciano and Chastain. Samples of bottles from around the stadium were taken by American agents and transported by jet to the American Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. We are waiting for those results now.”

“How many bottles did they sell?” asked the President.

“They were authorized to sell 3,000, and we have to operate on the assumption that all were sold. The good news, if there is any, is that they were only sold this morning. Well... let me correct that. It is 5:00 a.m. now, so I guess I should say yesterday morning, less than 24 hours ago. So there might be a possibility of containment if we act quickly.”

“Gabriel, have any flights left Natal since the football game ended?”

“Yes, Madame President. There was one flight that left for Dallas, Texas. There was one flight that went to Atlanta. There was another flight that went to Los Angeles and another that went to Chicago. There was a flight that went to Paris, another to London, and another to Amsterdam. And then, if you want to talk about flights within the continent of South America, there were two flights to Rio, one flight to Brasilia, and twenty-two flights going to different cities in South America. I am sure there were trains as well.”

“Mr. Martins, what can you tell me about this virus?” asked the President.

“Madame President, my government, unfortunately, has not yet released any specific information to me, although I expect that situation will change very soon. I had heard through the news outlets that there was an outbreak of some kind on the island of Mackinac, Michigan. It is a tiny island near the northern edge of our country near Canada. From what I understand, they were able to contain the outbreak in time. If this is a strain of Ebola, I can tell you that Ebola is a Level 4 biohazard, the most dangerous type in the world. Ebola is not typically airborne, however. But there are new strains all the time. If you talk to the President of the United States, I would ask her if she can tell you if the strain is airborne, because that would be much more of a problem. Also, we do not know how many days it takes to go from being infected to the presentation of symptoms, and during what period a person is contagious. So those are other questions to ask. But if they sold 3,000 containers of virus, you are going to have a major outbreak in Natal almost immediately. I would strongly advise you to shut down the airport and all means of transportation in and out of Natal. I would put up roadblocks on all roads and highways going out of Natal. If that virus has already escaped to other cities, there could be a worldwide pandemic.”

Gustavo Almeida, the Mayor of Natal, disagreed. He did not want the chaos and fear that would spread once his city was shut down.

“Detective Rosario, how can you be so certain that those containers had virus in them? You said that the bottles are being tested now. Maybe they turn up nothing. Why don’t we wait until after the Americans give us the test results?”

Lucas Cavalcanti, Director of the Ministry of Health, was concerned on the ability of hospitals to treat this virus. “My God, Gustavo. That

could be too late. Why would you risk spreading this thing? Mr. Martins, have the Americans come up with a vaccine for this virus? Is it treatable? What will my people be facing out in the field?"

Martins shook his head. "I am sorry, I just don't know right now. When our office in Atlanta contacts me, I will let you know what they tell me. For right now, I have no answers. I can tell you that Ebola patients may present to the hospital vomiting a pitch black blood. Their blood and bodily fluids are obviously highly contagious. Your hospitals need to start right now enacting strict barrier controls. Anyone who comes in with very bright bloodshot eyes, feeling nauseous, perhaps lesions on their face, should be quarantined immediately, and all hospital staff should wear gloves and masks at all times. I will send you a list of the common symptoms of Ebola, and you can fax that to all your health centers to tell them to watch out for those symptoms. In the meantime, Madame President, I would get on the phone with the leaders of any city or country which had a plane land sometime in the last 24 hours coming from Natal. Everyone needs to be warned."

"I have heard enough," the Brazilian President said. "Gabriel, I want the Natal Airport shut down immediately. No flights in or out. I want you to get in touch with the Minister of Transportation, and tell him the same thing goes for trains. I want Federal Police blocking every exit in and out of Natal. Gustavo, your local police should assist in the effort. No cars leave or get in. Lucas, get notices to all the health centers in Brazil to be on the lookout for symptoms, and quarantine anyone who comes in with suspected symptoms. Gabriel, get me a list of those flights. I want the flight numbers, the time they left, the airlines, the cities where the planes landed. I want you to get me a representative from every airliner going in and out of Natal, and explain to them what is going on. Every plane which left needs to be quarantined in whatever city it landed. Mr. Martins, call your friends at the CDC and get us more information on the virus. And Detective Rosario..."

"Yes, Madame President?"

"You need to find those bastards."

"Yes, ma'am."

The President of Brazil then turned to her Chief of Staff.

"I want a press conference set up this morning in one hour. And then get me the President of the United States."

Paris, France. 10:30 a.m. Paris time. 4:30 a.m. EST.

THE DUTCH SOCCER fans were exhausted. It had been a long 11-hour flight on Air France from Natal, Brazil. They had left the previous day at 6:00 p.m. Brazil time. The French pilot, Gilbert Babineaux, was irritated that the tower had not given him a gate destination. He was stopped on the runway, waiting for direction. Babineaux was tired from the long flight, and had a rendezvous with his bed planned. These idiots in the tower were taking forever. Suddenly, French military soldiers in jeeps and military trucks surrounded the plane.

“What is this?” he demanded of the tower into his radio.

“Flight AF 290,” said the voice from the tower. “You are directed to proceed to Hangar Zed-Un on the far north side of CDG. Do you copy?”

“Zed-Un? Why would I go there? What is this?”

“Flight AF290, I repeat again. Proceed to Hangar Zed-Un or those military personnel will have authority to shoot your aircraft. Do you copy?”

“Um, sure. OK. Can you tell me what this is all about?”

“Your flight is in quarantine, AF290. You will be given further instructions shortly.”

“What am I supposed to tell the passengers?”

“Tell them that you are making a brief detour, that there is going to be delay. And you will let them know as soon as you have instructions, do you copy?”

“I copy.” Captain Babineaux was scared. He had never been met at the airport by soldiers before. Was there a bomb on the plane or something?

Air space over The English Channel, between France and England. 10:30 a.m. London time. 4:30 a.m. EST.

JOHN PERCIVAL WAS the pilot of American Airlines Flight 89. Today, he had flown from Rio De Janeiro to Natal, and now was making his way from Natal to London’s Heathrow Airport. He only had a half hour left of the flight. Suddenly, as he looked out his window, he saw English fighter jets on either side of his aircraft.

“AA Flight 89, do you copy?”

“Yes, I do. Who is this?”

“This is Captain Thomas Berry of the Royal Air Force. I have been

instructed to advise you that by order of the U.K. Civil Aviation Authority, we are denying your entry into Great Britain, and we have been instructed to escort you to Amsterdam Airport Schiphol. Do you copy?”

“Roger that. My screens show good weather. What is the problem?”

“I don’t have that information for you, sir. Please change course immediately and we will bring you in.”

Captain Percival was confused by the direction. “You sure you don’t want me to take this flight to CDG? That would be closer.”

“Sir, we have our orders. Please head towards Schiphol right now.”

Captain Percival shrugged his shoulders, turned the stick, and set course for Amsterdam.

Minneapolis, Minnesota. 5:00 a.m. CST.

FBI FIELD AGENT Ben Boaz loved to fish. He was not due in to work for a couple more hours. He loved his time fly-fishing on the creek behind his farm. It was so serene, free from the noise of cell phones and computers and electronic equipment that took up most of his life. He received a buzz on his cell phone. So much for serenity, he thought. He checked the text message. He was supposed to go to the house of Tom Bergman, local architect, and make sure he and his wife didn’t leave the premises until further instruction. That was strange. If they were wanted for questioning, why would he keep the suspects at their house? It didn’t make a lot of sense. Anyway, it didn’t sound that urgent. He would finish up his fishing and go look in on the Bergmans in a few hours.

At that same moment, Tom Bergman was in the shower, getting ready for some fishing of his own. This was the weekend when he went bass fishing with his three friends from the office. He had five vacation days left this year, and he wasn’t going to waste them. Within the next half hour, he had packed up his rods, bait, and other fishing equipment and was on the road.

FBI Field Office, Dallas, Texas. 5:30 a.m. CST.

IN THE DALLAS FBI field office, on a large wall, was a map of the United States. The Deputy Director of the F.A.A., Martin Fuchs, had the podium.

“Each of you has a binder summarizing all of the facts we have so

far on these terrorists. I am here to tell you about the efforts of the F.A.A. We hope to coordinate with the FBI in tracking down the terrorists and eliminating the threat from the virus. The first thing we did is track all Direct Flights from Natal into the United States at any time within the last twenty-four hours. Let's start with the flight to Dallas, Flight 1172, that landed at 9:00 p.m. in Dallas. There were 46 passengers. We do not know how many of them were infected. Twenty-five of those passengers were unable to make their connecting flight. The airlines typically give out vouchers to only a few hotels, so we were able to track all 25 down. Because the virus does not become symptomatic for several days, if any of the 25 were infected with the virus, we do not believe they were contagious. Therefore, we do not believe any of the hotel staff were at risk. Those 25 are in quarantine at the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base at Carswell. The remaining twenty-one caught connecting flights to eleven cities. The names of those individuals and their destination cities are in Tab 1 of your binders. The cities are Los Angeles, Portland, Reno, Kansas City, Tulsa, Nashville, Minneapolis, New York City, Boston, Raleigh, and Trenton. FBI Field Officers in each city have been instructed to quarantine each individual in their homes until further notice. Fortunately, all of the flights got in very late, so most people will probably go straight to bed and we will catch them in the morning before they go somewhere. We are waiting on reports from the field offices as to whether the quarantines were successful.

"We did the same thing for the direct flights coming into Atlanta, Chicago, and Los Angeles. In total, we are tracking 112 passengers, and 52 are already in quarantine at a military base. We are waiting on word from the other sixty."

"What about the non-direct flights?" asked one of the agents.

"That is a little more difficult," said the Deputy-Director. "We have tried to match passenger manifests for anyone leaving Natal and going to another country first, and then seeing if those persons tried to get connecting flights to the United States. We have two passengers who flew into Mexico City, and then got a connecting flight to San Antonio very early this morning, under the deadline. But they had a significant layover, which gave us time to get to the airport in time. We were waiting for them when they arrived, and they are now in quarantine. There was one flight which went to Paris which was quarantined at the airport. There was

another flight to London which was re-routed to Amsterdam, along with another flight. Unfortunately, the Dutch police failed to act quickly, so everyone on the two planes which landed in Amsterdam got out. Police in The Netherlands are trying to track those passengers back to their homes, but so far, we have not heard anything from them yet.”

“What’s going on in Natal?” asked another agent.

“The Brazilian President has fortunately shut down the Natal Airport and has shut down trains and planes going in and out of the city. She has also set up roadblocks preventing anyone from leaving the city. So we are hoping to contain the situation there, but of course, we are depending on the security of a foreign government to make that happen, so we are crossing our fingers there.”

“Thank you, Mr. Deputy Director,” said the Director of the FBI Field Office. “Agents, you have your assignments, let’s get to work.”

Boston, Massachusetts. 6:30 a.m. EST.

RON FIELDING, JR. was 26 years old and worked for the Bank of Boston. He was an avid soccer fan. He lived at 17 Deerfield Road. A different Ron Fielding, Jr. was 54 years old and worked for the I.R.S. field office in Newton, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. He lived at 1707 Deer Creek Lane. He did not like soccer. The first Ron Fielding, Jr. had just spent the last few days in Brazil enjoying the United States play in the World Cup. The second Ron Fielding, Jr. was quarantined in his house, baffled as to why the government was imprisoning him in his own home.

International Call. 6:35 a.m. EST.

“What’s happening down there?”

“The preliminaries are finished. We will send the message in five days.”

“We have hit a little snag on our end.”

“What do you mean?”

“They’ve put it together. The borders are going to be shut down this morning.”

“Crap. Are you sure?”

“Yes. Watch your television this morning.”

“There must have been people who got through.”

“Yes, there were. Over a hundred. But they are all being hunted down and

quarantined by the FBI. They have a drug that will work if it is administered in the first day or two of exposure.”

“Do you have the list of the ones who got through?”

“No, but I think I have a way around that.”

“What are you thinking?”

“I can’t say now. But I am working on something. I will let you know tomorrow if it works.”

“Okay. Keep us posted on your end.”

Washington, D.C. The White House Press Room. 7:00 a.m. EST

THE PRESS SECRETARY announced to the room, “Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States would like to make a brief statement, after which there will be no questions. Madame President.” Anna Scall, wearing a stylish bright red suit, approached the podium, and put on her reading glasses.

“My fellow Americans. It is with great reluctance that, effective immediately, all borders of the United States will be temporarily closed.” A murmur of concern went through the press corps.

“There has been a confirmed report of an attempt by terrorists to smuggle into the United States a biological weapon—a virus—which could harm Americans. The potential attack is imminent. The only way to ensure the safety of all Americans is to shut down our borders immediately until this threat is neutralized. We know who the terrorists are, and I can assure you, we are very close on their trail. Let me reassure everyone, however, that there have been no confirmed reports of the terrorists’ virus appearing anywhere within our country.

“This executive order means that all air travel into and from the United States is temporarily suspended. All vehicle and passenger train travel to and from the United States is suspended. All travel to and from the United States by boat is suspended. International cargo and goods shipped into the United States by vehicle, train, or boat is temporarily suspended. Any American citizens currently abroad with travel plans to enter back into the United States any time in the next month are directed to contact the American Embassy in the country where they are traveling. We hope that this crisis will not take long to resolve, and then these orders can be rescinded. The American people should know that we are

taking every single effort within the power of our government to ensure the safety of the American people. More details will be available in the next few hours. Thank you for your patience during this difficult time. And may God Bless America.” Many of the reporters began screaming questions, but the President ignored them and went off stage back into the West Wing. One of the questions was, “Have the terrorists made any demands?” As President Scall made her way back to the Situation Room, she wondered herself why they had not heard anything from the terrorists.

Within minutes of the President’s announcement, the United States became a different place. Mothers and fathers kept their children home from school and locked their doors. Grocery stores had runs on food and water, as petrified Americans stocked up on supplies. Stadiums and places of entertainment were empty, as Americans feared coming into contact with strangers who may have the virus. The very rich updated their passports and took long vacations to Australia, hoping to wait out any plague. The very poor continued to go to work and do their jobs, but they interacted far less with co-workers. Hospitals ran out of surgical masks. People stopped shaking hands. And the press screamed for more information.

CHAPTER 57. MANNEQUINS

Island of Boyuca. Bay of Honduras.

“IT’S JUST A test,” Morse assured his friends. All seven stood side by side in the narrow crevice, with a wall of rock a foot from their faces, and another wall a foot from their backs. There was no exit on either side. They had been standing like this for over an hour, searching with their hands for any hidden compartments which might lead to a way out. They had found nothing.

“John, this doesn’t feel like a test,” said Bolinda, fighting back tears. “This feels like a tomb.”

Zach was also scared. “They wouldn’t just trap us in here, right, Dad? I mean, what would be the point? They could have killed us ten times already if that was what they wanted to do. This has to be another puzzle of some kind.”

“If I could just sit down,” said Skip. “This is worse than a bad acid trip. I need a cigarette.”

“How much oxygen do you think we have in here?” asked Bolinda. She didn’t feel short of breath, but there had to be only a limited supply of oxygen in here. She moved her feet up and down to give them circulation. Her feet were tired.

John Morse looked upwards, searching for a way out. Maybe they had to stand on each other’s shoulders or something. The ceiling of this narrow room was about twelve feet high. Morse looked towards the ceiling. He did not see any markings or cracks or anything pointing to an exit. Maybe it’s not up, but down, he thought. He took one of the torches and shined it down towards his feet. He noted that the floor, although it was a gray color, did not feel like it was made of stone. He slammed the floor of the chamber with his foot as hard as he could. It made a loud reverberating sound—the kind of sound that would not be made by slamming one’s foot down on a stone floor. It almost sounded like pounding on a hollow wooden door.

“I think I have something here,” said Morse. “I need everyone to get their feet off the ground. Try and wedge your back against the back wall and put your feet on the other wall, so you are not touching the ground.” Everyone looked at Morse like he was crazy, but anything was worth a shot. Everyone but John Morse climbed up on the walls, suspending

themselves in mid-air above the floor. Morse then went to the far end of the chamber. Pressing his back against the wall at the end of the chamber, he pushed his feet outward on the ground. At first nothing happened, but then suddenly, there was movement in the floor, and the gray floor slid away from Morse, revealing stone rollers underneath the floor.

“Sweet!” yelled Drame. Morse looked up, smiling. Sitting down on the rollers, with his palms outstretched behind him, Morse used his legs to push the ground sideways again. He continued to do this, as his son and friends strained their backs and legs holding themselves in the air between the rock walls. The pushing was now getting easier. Morse was on his knees on the rollers, pushing the sliding floor with his hands. Soon, he was kneeling directly beneath the other six, pushing the floor away from them. As he got near the end of the chamber, he gave the floor one last heave, and it slid out of sight under the rock, revealing a gaping hole in the floor big enough even for Mountain Man Pete. Everyone jumped down from the walls and peered into the hole.

“I never thought I would be so happy to see a scary black hole,” said Bolinda. “John, you’re going in my will for this one.”

“Frankly, I’d rather be in Skip’s will,” joked Morse. “Bolinda, would you like to do the honors? Ladies first.”

Bolinda happily jumped at the chance, and lowered herself into the hole, which led to sliding chute into the heart of the mountain. Bolinda landed with a crash onto a real stone floor this time, and her friends came tumbling after her moments later. They re-lit the torches. There, along a wall, was a stone bench. Bolinda was happy to see that. Her long standing marathon in the crevice had worn out her feet. She walked over to sit down on the bench for a minute, when Zach Morse screamed, “Stop! Don’t sit there!”

Everyone looked at Zach.

“Dad, don’t you remember the Xibalba story Ka’an told us? The Hero Twins are offered the chance to sit down on a chair, but it turns out to be a cooking stove intended to burn them. I bet that was the point of the narrow room up there—to get us tired of standing, so that we would sit down on the bench.” Zach went over to the stone bench, with Bolinda nervously looking on, and held his hand over the stone. It felt hot like a stove.

Zach spit on the bench and his spittle sizzled. Zach was right. Bolinda had narrowly avoided getting burned.

“Good one, Zach,” said Winston, rubbing Zach’s hair back and forth. “John, he’s a chip off the old block. Zach, I am glad to see you listen to your elders.”

“Well, if I can’t sit on the bench,” said Bolinda. “Let me sit on the ground for a minute. My feet are killing me.” She collapsed on the ground, weary from her several brushes with death. The group agreed to take a ten minute break. After resting and having some water, the group got up again, and headed down a passageway to the right of the stone bench. They wound along the passageway, shining their torches and flashlight ahead into the dark. As they walked down the path, Skip Drame, who was in the lead, noticed that there were ten spears stacked along the wall.

“Check these out,” said Drame. He picked up two of the spears and then handed the rest to the others. Drame walked another fifty feet and saw light ahead. When he got to an opening to another large underground chamber, Drame gasped, and leaped back, pointing his fingers at what he saw in the room, and motioning with a finger to his lips to be quiet. Each member of the group took turns peeking around the corner to look into the room. The room was fairly dark, with only the brief flicker of light from a few torches set against the far wall. Spread out across the dark room were sixteen large natives, each one wielding a weapon. Strangely, none of the natives moved, and were frozen in a menacing stance, like wax statues. One native had an open mouth and held a machete over his head with his right hand, as if he were ready to strike. Another held a spear, ready to thrust. A third had a notched arrow in a stretched bow, ready to shoot. All were in some kind of attack position, but none moved. The light from the torches danced over the natives’ angry faces, making the macabre scene even more frightening. Across the room was another cave opening. It appeared that the object was to get across the room without being killed by the natives.

“Zach, this is just like the Xibalba story,” whispered John Morse. “Some of those are probably mannequins and some are probably real men. If we can just avoid the real natives, we will be fine. But I am guessing that if we mistake a real man for a mannequin, we will pay the price.”

“All we need are those magic mosquitoes,” whispered Zach.

Drame motioned for everyone to go back down the corridor so they could talk. When they had traveled out of earshot, they puzzled over a battle plan. Winston spoke first.

“They have given us ten spears. There are sixteen men in there. So my guess is that eight are real, and eight are fake. We have ten spears. If we throw a spear at a real native, we will presumably take him out of action if our aim is good. If we hit a mannequin, the spear will sink into the mannequin, assuming it is made of wax. If it is made of something else, the spear will bounce off. Either way, we will have wasted a spear.”

“Did anyone spot a way to tell the real ones from the fake ones?” asked Morse.

There was silence, and several members of the group shook their heads. Morse continued.

“Well, if we cannot tell which is real and which is fake, then assuming the law of averages, we are just as likely to guess right as guess wrong. So the greatest likelihood is that we will hit five real men and five mannequins, leaving three real men to kill us. And seeing as we are not trained spear throwers, there is also the additional possibility that we will miss and not hit anything with a spear. Each miss means another native who can kill us. If we leave any of the natives with a spear, they will most likely kill one or more of us, since they are probably trained to use their weapons. So we need a way to expose each of the natives as being real, so we do not waste a single spear.” Mountain Man Pete thought about that.

“I think I know how to do that,” said Pete. “My flashlight. I doubt they have ever seen one before. If we shine it in their eyes, they might blink. Or at the very least, their pupils should react. If they blink, or if their pupils react, then they get hit with a spear.”

“OK, here’s a thought,” said Zach. “What if all of our theories are wrong, and the second they see us, all of them come running at us with weapons? What do we do then?”

“If that happens, we retreat into the corridor, where it is narrow,” said Pete. “That will force them to come at us one by one, and we use our spears to protect us.”

“Swell,” sighed Zach, unconvinced of the wisdom of the plan.

Pete led the group back down the corridor and quietly entered the room. None of the natives moved. Pete pulled out his flashlight and shined it at the first native’s eyes. There was no reaction. It was probably a mannequin. Holding a spear in one hand and a flashlight in the other, Pete cautiously crept toward the second figure. There was no reaction from any of the men in the room. Pete suddenly realized that they may

not have to throw the spears after all. They may be able to strike at close range. Pete turned off the flashlight and then, standing only a few feet away, shined his flashlight at the native's right eye. There was no blink, but even in the dim light, Pete saw the native's pupil constrict, getting smaller. In a flash of movement, Pete stabbed the native in the gut with the spear. Blood poured out of the wound, and the speechless native fell to the ground, mortally wounded. Skip walked over and handed a spear to Pete. Drame held a spear in his own hand. Zach recoiled, worried about Pete's violence. Pete walked to the next figure, a tall native with a spear held high over his head. He shined the light in the native's eye, and the pupil got smaller. Pete started to thrust, but the native sprang into action, blocking the thrust. But Drame was ready, and speared the native in the back with his own spear. Two natives and two spears down. Eight to go. The next native was crouched behind a large stone, holding a bow and arrow. Pete tried to shine the light but the angle wasn't right because the figure was too far behind the stone. We can't take any chances, thought Drame. Drame dove over the stone and impaled the figure with his spear. Unfortunately, the figure was made of wax and the spear wedged into the mannequin. Their first wasted spear.

Pete and Drame, disappointed, walked over to the next figure. He was bent at the knees, wielding a large knife. Winston tossed Drame another spear. As Pete faced the figure with the knife, directly behind his back was a tall muscular second figure, with a raised ax. He couldn't look at both figures at the same time. Drame decided to go back-to-back with Pete, each one wielding a spear. Pete shined the flashlight at the shorter figure with the knife. He didn't make out any changes in the figure's eye. Drame, standing behind him, was looking at the tall muscular native's face, trying to glean something showing his humanity. Suddenly, in the dim flickering light, he thought he saw an evil smile curl on the lips of the figure with the raised ax.

"Look out!" he cried. The ax came flying down, barely missing Pete and Drame. Pete swung his burly elbow into the native's cheek, and the native went toppling over. Drame tried to finish the job with his spear, but the native swung and knocked the spear out of Drame's hand. Turning, the native raised the ax again over Drame's head to kill him. Just then, a spear came flying through the air into the native's neck. Bolinda's spear had been on target. With a spurt of blood, the native went down.

“Thanks,” said Drame. “I owe you one. Nice shot.”

In the middle of the room was a figure wielding a large stick with a blade on either end. The figure had a large mask over his head, so the flashlight was not going to work. Drame didn't waste any time. Grabbing a spear from John Morse, he stabbed the figure in the midsection. Another mannequin. He tried to get the spear out but it wouldn't budge. They had successfully killed three natives and wasted two spears on mannequins. They had five spears left. And five real natives. There were two figures standing tall, next to each other. Each one held a knife, with arms crossed, looking stoic. Both figures had their eyes closed. Drame hesitated this time. His last two guesses had proved wrong and they did not have a single spear to spare. Drame and Pete decided to pass on these two for now. Pete and Drame continued to walk near the exit, where two figures with raised spears, and a figure in the middle with a blowgun, blocked the path. Pete shined the light into the eye of the native with the blowgun. The pupil contracted. Pete tried to swing the spear, but the native blew the poisonous dart from his blowgun quickly, stabbing Pete in the neck. Pete grabbed for his neck and dropped the flashlight. Drame stabbed the native with the blowgun in the chest, but just then, the two natives with their eyes closed who had been previously passed over rushed Drame from behind. Zach Morse and Charlie Winston ran towards the natives and heaved their spears. Each one impaled the natives in the back, sending them crumpling to the ground. Zach picked up the flashlight and quickly shined it on the two figures who had been on either side of the native with the blowgun. Both were fake.

Bolinda rushed over to the ground to care for Pete. His eyes were rolling in his head and he was having a seizure. His mouth began foaming. For several moments, his entire body shook with tremors, and then it went rigid and silent. Bolinda felt for a pulse. Bolinda looked up forlornly at the others. Their friend Mountain Man Pete was gone. Drame was upset. Pete was a very dear friend to him. They all quickly realized, however, that they were not out of the woods yet. There were five figures which they had not yet encountered. Two of the five were real natives, and they had two spears left. Drame went up to the first figure, which was crouched low on the ground with a knife in its teeth. Drame tried to shine the flashlight, but the battery was dying and the light was very dim. He couldn't tell for sure. He looked at the native an inch from his face. He was furious that

Pete had been killed. Then he yelled “Boo!” and the native pounced on Drame, putting the knife to his throat. Drame managed to roll and kick the native over him. Drame picked up his spear and turned into a wild savage himself, lunging at the native and smashing him with the spear until the native was backed into a wall. The native threw his spear and hit Drame in the shoulder. Drame, momentarily stunned by the wound, then drilled the spear straight through the native’s windpipe and into the wall. The native, with his hands to his neck, fell down dead.

There were four figures left, one native, and one spear. All four were standing next to each other. John Morse gave the spear to Winston, and told him to get ready.

“Zach, may I borrow your shirt, please?” Zach, confused, took off his shirt and gave it to his father. John Morse went over to Pete and took off his shirt and tied it to Zach’s shirt. Then he took off Pete’s trousers and tied the trousers to the shirts.

“May I have the torch, please?” Morse asked Bolinda. Morse then ignited the clothing, and threw the fiery line of clothes at the feet of the four figures. And then they waited. Within a minute, three of the figures began to wilt and melt. The fourth figure, the real native, dove from the fire and tried to attack John Morse. As the native pinned Morse to the ground, he took a knife from his waist and raised it to cut Morse’s throat. Zach did a flying tackle on the native, knocking him off his father. Winston threw the spear and missed. The native picked up the spear which had been thrown at him and charged Winston. Drame, still bloody from his shoulder wound, in one last act of aggression, charged the native and knocked the native flying into the ball of flame engulfing the mannequins. The native, covered in fire, went screaming toward the exit, but collapsed before he could make it. All of the natives were dead.

The group went back over to Pete. They wanted to carry him to give him a proper burial, but he simply weighed too much, and Drame, with his shoulder wound, could not help carry him. Winston took off his shirt, and Bolinda wrapped his shoulder wound as best she could. Skip brushed off the wound and bent over Pete’s body. Skip Drame said a few kind words and a prayer for his friend, and they left through the cave exit.

As they walked out the cave exit, they were back in the sunshine. There was a fresh creek near the mouth of the cave, and a lush valley which wound along the banks of the creek. The party stopped to refill

their canteens and get some good water to drink. They walked along the creek banks for a while, and then came upon a wooden bridge crossing the creek. Having had their bad experiences with bridges, they tested the bridge first to make sure it was stable, and it was. They crossed the creek and proceeded slightly uphill along a path. As they walked, there were some smiling native children standing along the path, who pointed toward the strangers. The children were very excited and began chanting, “Hunahpu! Xbalanque!”

As the group walked along the path, the sides of the path became crowded with islanders, both young and old. Evidently, no one had ever made it this far through the Trials of Xibalba. The crowd seemed friendly and appeared to be encouraging and cheering on the six weary travelers. The gravel path ended in a wide, circular gravel cul-de-sac of sorts. Around the edges of the circle were six small stone huts. Everyone in the group knew that these huts were the famous Six Houses of the Xibalba: *Ak'ab Na* (the Dark House), *Sis Na* (the Cold House), *Balam Na* (the Jaguar House), *Sontz' Na* (the Bat House), *Ch'am Na* (the Razor House) and *K'ak Na* (the Fire House).

The six Americans entered the middle of the circle and were surrounded by a large crowd. Charlie Winston looked at John Morse out of the corner of his eye.

“What do you think is going to happen now?” asked Winston under his breath.

Morse looked down the road they had came. Coming up the road was a Mayan chieftain.

“I think we are about to find out,” said Morse.

The elderly man was tall, maybe six feet, four inches with broad shoulders. He had long gray hair to his shoulders, but no facial hair. He wore a green and gold striped, semicircular neckpiece, gold wrist and ankle bands, and a headpiece with brightly colored bird plumes. The chieftain, carrying a long wooden staff which was also topped with bright bird feathers, approached the group and began speaking slowly in the *K'iche'* dialect. Ka'-an stepped forward to translate. Ka'-an turned to Morse and Winston.

“He wants to know if you are really Hunahpu and Xbalanque.”

“Tell him we are,” said Morse. Ka'-an nodded.

The chieftain looked at them for a moment, and then went to John

Morse and grasped his forearm in a strange kind of handshake. Morse shook back and smiled. Winston did the same. The chieftain nodded, apparently satisfied. The chieftain walked over to Skip Drame, and saw that he had been injured. He inspected the wound with his finger. He looked at Drame briefly, and then called a young, bare-breasted native woman from the crowd, who came forward with a purple jug. The chieftain motioned Drame to lie down on the ground, and Drame obliged. The chieftain took Drame's shirt and ripped it open, which initially frightened him. The chieftain motioned for Drame to relax, and then took the purple jug from the young woman. The chieftain took out a split coconut shell which contained a honey-colored gel. Then he poured water from the jug into the coconut shell. Mixing the two substances with his fingers, he gently rubbed the solution into Skip Drame's wound. At first nothing happened. And then, miraculously, the wound began to close up and heal, eventually forming scar tissue. Skip Drame rolled his shoulder around, and it didn't hurt very much. He squeezed his hand into a fist. It was incredible. The water had completely healed the wound.

John Morse, seeing the miraculous healing power of the water from the jug, eyed the purple water jug like a child opening Christmas presents. The Fountain of Youth really existed! He looked to Winston, who was nodding, thinking the same thing. Morse wanted to ask the chieftain if he could take some of the water, but before he could speak, the chieftain spoke again for several minutes.

Ka'-an said, "The chief says there are two more tests before it can be shown for certain that you are Hunahpu and Xbalanque. We must survive one night in the six houses. Each one of us will be selected to spend the night in one of the six houses. In the morning, if we are still alive, then we must face The Oven. That is the final test. If we can survive that, then there will be no doubt you are Hunahpu and Xbalanque. He didn't say, but I am guessing that if we make it that far, it is going to be very good for us. They are all doing a lot of smiling now. Many of the people in the crowd believe that you are the Mayan Hero Twins, and they are excited. The chieftain did say, though, that he does not understand why you look so different if you are twins."

"How do we decide who stays in which house?" asked Morse.

"He is going to have you draw straws. Each straw has a painted symbol on the bottom, for one of the six houses."

“Is there any way he will agree to just letting us leave the island now?” asked Morse.

“Definitely not. I get the impression that if you don’t follow through with the last tests, we will all be killed. Look over there.” Off to the right, at least fifty warriors had walked up, brandishing weapons. They did not look as happy as the rest of the crowd.

“So be it,” said Morse. “We have survived this far.” Morse turned to the group. “Just remember, no matter how frightening this seems, there is always a way out. This is a test of wits and courage, nothing more. Don’t let fear get the better of you. Think and don’t panic, and we can all get out of this.”

The chieftain walked up and held the wooden “straws” in his large fist. Zach picked first. He picked the symbol for the Cold House. John Morse seemed relieved for his son. Of the six houses, that one did not seem as bad as the rest. Morse saw that his son had no shirt, and he immediately regretted taking his shirt back in the cave. Zach would be very cold without a shirt. John Morse quickly took off his own shirt and gave it to his son. Charlie Winston did the same. Zach put on both shirts. Zach was not very thrilled with the choice. He was a California kid, and he did not like the cold.

Ka’an picked next. He chose the Bat House. Bolinda was the third up. She picked the Jaguar House. When she saw her straw, Bolinda fell to the ground and burst out crying, shaking her head back and forth.

“I don’t want to die,” she sobbed. Charlie Winston knelt down to comfort her.

“Jaguars are not known to kill humans,” he whispered. “Whatever you do, do not run when you see them. If you do that, it will trigger an instinct that you are prey. Stay still. And don’t look them in the eye. They see that as aggressive behavior. If they should try and attack you, raise your hands and scream and try to seem big and large, and they will probably back off.”

“How could you possibly know what to do if a jaguar attacks? Did you work at a zoo?”

“I read a book about a lion tamer. But it is probably the same as a jaguar.”

“Your turn, Charlie,” said Ka’an.

Winston selected a wooden straw. The Razor House. He did not like

the sound of that. Drame was next and picked the Dark House. Drame looked relieved. That left one straw for John Morse—the Fire House. John Morse eyed the straw grimly.

The chieftain led Drame to the Dark House, and then said something else.

Ka'-an said, "He says the each house has a small hole in the roof which lets you see the sky. That way you will know when it is dawn. When the sun rises, the doors will be opened." The chieftain ushered Drame inside the Dark House and locked the door. Zach was next. When it was Bolinda's turn, she started screaming "No" and refused to go. The chieftain looked angry and yelled "Balam Na!" Several warriors came through the crowd and grabbed Bolinda and threw her forcefully into the Jaguar House. The chief locked the door. The other members went willingly into their respective houses and the doors were locked. The Trial of the Houses had just begun.

CHAPTER 58. WORRY

Atlanta, Georgia. Home of Charlie Winston.

TEDDY WINSTON SAT with his grandmother on the couch and listened to the President's speech about closing the borders.

"Grandma, what are they saying?"

"They're saying that no one can come into the country right now, because they're worried that people might be sick, and if they come into the country, they could get more people sick—people like you and me."

"But Daddy is out of the country, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is."

"Are they going to let Daddy back in?"

"Eventually they will. I think this is only a temporary thing."

"When will they let Daddy back in?"

"I don't know," said the grandmother.

"Will he be able to see my award ceremony for Best D.A.R.E. poster?"

"I am not sure honey, I hope so. But if he cannot get back in time, I am sure your mother will tape it, and Daddy can see it when he gets back."

Teddy slid himself from the couch into his wheelchair and rolled himself over to his snake terrarium. He poked with his finger on the glass, staring in silence at his bright green snake.

"You think Daddy will get me a new snake?"

"I'm sure he will if he can, sweetie. Now come with me and let's get you into bed. That's enough worrying for one night." Teddy turned in his chair, and rolled himself into his bedroom. He transferred himself from the wheelchair to the bed, and his grandmother helped lift his legs under the covers. Teddy pulled up the covers to his chin. His grandmother knelt over the bed and kissed his forehead.

"You think Daddy's gonna be okay?" he asked.

"If I know your father, he is going to be just fine."

"Why is Mom always working so late now?"

"Your mother has an important job, Teddy. She helps make sure people in the country don't get sick. And right now, there is a big worry that people might get sick, so they need your mom a lot now, because she is really smart and can help people."

"I guess so. Will I get sick?"

"Of course not. Now you get to bed now, you hear?"

“Yes, Nanny.” The grandmother went to turn out the light.

“Teddy?”

“Yes, Nanny?”

“Are all those slimy snakes in their cages? Those things scare the life out of me.”

“Yes, Nanny, except for this one!” Teddy threw a white sock at his grandmother, who held her hand to her heart. She laughed at his joke.

“You are a terrible, terrible child. Now good night now.”

“Good night, Nanny.”

CHAPTER 59. BETRAYAL

Suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia. Home of Jacob Roessler. 11:00 p.m.

MURIELLE WINSTON AND Jacob Roessler had spent the entire day speaking with government and health officials around the country and around the globe, advising them of the symptoms of the Mackinac Ebola Virus, the available but limited means of treatment, ideas on potential cures, methods of containment, barrier control protocols, and similar issues. They had also been on conference calls with research scientists in Portland, Oregon and another team in Baltimore at John Hopkins who were working on ideas for a vaccine. Roessler and Murielle Winston were putting in sixteen-hour days, and they were both exhausted. Roessler's beat-up Honda had finally broken down that morning and was in the shop, so Murielle had agreed to give him a ride home.

"Thanks for giving me a lift," said Roessler, closing the passenger door. Roessler put his head back in the passenger window and smiled. "Can you come in for a nightcap? It would be nice to unwind with someone for a half hour."

"Oh, I can't drink at this hour. I have to get home to Teddy. I haven't seen him very much the last few weeks, and Charlie's out of town. But thanks."

"How about a coffee, then? Just for a half hour. I am so stressed out by all of this. There is just no one to talk to."

Murielle Winston looked up at the brick townhouse. Well, she thought, Teddy is probably already in bed. A half hour wouldn't hurt. And with Charlie gone, she did not have anyone to talk to.

"Okay, maybe for a half hour, but then that's it. I will have to get home."

"Great." Roessler went over and opened her door.

Murielle looked at the young research scientist with the black wavy hair. He was ten years younger than she was. She hoped he was not flirting with her. She was happily married, but he seemed harmless enough. He probably just wanted to talk. The two walked up the brick staircase, and Roessler grabbed a spare key from under the mat and opened the door.

"Left my house key on my key ring at the auto mechanic's shop. Good thing I kept a spare." Jacob Roessler took off Murielle's trench coat and hung it on a hook on the back of the door and then led his co-worker

into the kitchen, where he made a batch of coffee.

“Regular or decaf?” asked Roessler.

“Give me the strong stuff.”

“Strong stuff cominn’ up.”

“And two Equal’s if you have them.”

“Two Equal’s coming up.”

While Roessler made the coffee, Murielle walked into the small room adjacent to the kitchen, which appeared to be a small family room of sorts. The room had four or five bookshelves, filled with books. Murielle, like any scientist, loved books. She looked with curiosity as to what Roessler had on the shelves. There were dozens of books on virology, medical textbooks on hepatology and autoimmune diseases, anatomy texts, zoology treatises, and stacks of scientific journals, including the *Journal of Virology*, the *Journal of Bacteriology*, the *PLOS Journal of Neglected Tropical Diseases*, *The Lancet*, and bulletins from the CDC. Curiously, she also saw books on wine making.

“I didn’t know you were a wine aficionado,” said Murielle.

“When I was young, my birth father owned a vineyard. It has been something I have enjoyed since I was a boy. I am quite a wine expert, you know. If I hadn’t gone into virology, I probably would have been a sommelier. I have a whole wine cellar of unique bottles in the basement.”

“Birth father? So you are adopted?”

“Yes, both my parents died when I was very young. Car crash. Then I was adopted.”

“Oh, I am so sorry to hear that. I didn’t mean to pry.”

“Oh, no, it’s okay,” said Roessler, pausing, thinking for a moment about his parents. The moment was gone as quickly as it came, and he smiled and offered Murielle her steaming mug of coffee, sitting next to her at the kitchen table by the bay window. Murielle emptied her blue Equal packets and left the empty packets on the table next to the saucer. The coffee tasted good.

“Well, what about you? Charlie has been out of town for a while, hasn’t he? What’s he up to?”

“He is on a long, top-secret voyage near Belize. It’s kind of an Indiana Jones thing. You know how he is, always looking for the next great discovery. I think that’s why we get along so well, you know. I am focused on the reality of life, the really ugly dangers we are facing in the here and now. Charlie is the dreamer, always focused on the beauty of life

and how we can make the planet better. He gives me hope and lets me escape life a little bit, while I keep him grounded. I think if I weren't there, he would forget to buy food."

Roessler laughed. "And how's Teddy?" Roessler knew her boy was paralyzed.

"Oh, he's doing fine. You know, he treats his disability as if it is not even there. Fortunately, he has his father's happy outlook on life, and that helps him get through all of the hardships he needs to face with his paralysis. I just feel so bad about it all. I am one of the brightest scientists in America, if I do say so myself, and there is nothing I can do to bring him his legs back."

"Don't beat yourself up about that. He's a good kid. He has a great attitude."

"I know. He's crazy about snakes, you know. We have four of them in the house. Sometimes he lets them run free and I almost step on one when I am going to the bathroom. Scares the hell out of me, but I feel too guilty to take them away from him. I just want to give him whatever he wants, you know?"

Roessler sipped his coffee. "Yes, I know."

"I have hardly seen him in the last three months, though, with all this terrorist stuff. Now that they've shut down the borders, I am not sure when Charlie will be able to get back."

"I am hoping it will be temporary."

"I don't know. It all comes down to whether anybody got in before the shutdown, and whether the FBI can track down immediately everyone who did get through. If even one person gets through, it's going to be very bad. Did you read that bio profile on the terrorists that NSA sent over this morning?"

"Yeah, I read it. Looks like they are twins," said Roessler.

"Graciano and Chastain were their adopted family names. Did you see their birth names? 'Gegic' and 'Rkatsiteli.' What weird names."

"Must be family names, I guess," shrugged Roessler.

"What kind of parent names their kid a weird name like that? It's like Kim Kardashian and Kanye West naming their baby North West. If my parents named me that, I'd shoot them." Jacob Roessler thought of his parents being killed by the Serbians, and he became immediately tense and irritated.

“You shouldn’t talk like that. You don’t know anything about their parents.”

Murielle Winston sensed that a pall had come over the room. What had she said that offended him?

“Um, yeah. No, you’re right, of course. Who knows what kind of names are regular names in Croatia, right?” Roessler was silent, sipping his coffee. Murielle decided to change the subject.

“So I never asked you—are you from Atlanta?”

“No, grew up in Seattle, actually. Dad’s a lawyer, mom’s a dermatologist. He wanted me to go to law school. She wanted me to go to medical school. So I decided to disappoint them both.”

“I know what you mean. My parents do not understand why I want to work around lethal diseases. Why did you decide to do it?” Roessler paused, reflecting, and seemed sad.

“After my birth parents died, I was afraid of everything, you know. Always hiding under the bed, night terrors, the whole nine yards. I went to see a therapist, and she suggested that I try and pick a career where I had to face something truly terrible. Like be a lion tamer, or something. Then, if I was able to face my fears there, I could do almost anything. Her idea worked. I started getting into the study of deadly viruses. And when I work in the Hot Room now, I am not nervous at all. I am eerily content and happy, because I have faced the worst that nature has to offer and I have lived to tell the tale.”

“I decided to do it to save the world,” said Murielle. “Originally, I was into cancer research. I was going to create a cure for cancer. But the job opened up at the CDC, and it paid good money, so I took it. At first, I was nervous about working around deadly viruses. But now I see it as kind of a superhero thing, saving all of humanity from evil. That kind of thing.”

“Well, you’d look good in tights, that’s for sure,” laughed Roessler.

There he goes, flirting with me, thought Murielle. I really should leave, she thought. This is getting weird.

“Well, you know, I really should be getting home. I am tired, and we are going to have another long day tomorrow.”

“Sure, no problem,” said Roessler. “Before you go, do you want to see my wine cellar? It is my pride and joy.” Murielle hesitated. The invitation sounded a little creepy. “Come on. It will just take a second. You can’t miss

this.” He ushered her over to a narrow door. He opened the door, turned on the light, and went down the steep stairs. Murielle followed behind him, ducking her head as she went down the stairs. When she got to the bottom, she saw fifteen rows of wine bottles.

“It is all temperature controlled, depending on the type of wine. I have my reds over here. Here are the Merlots, the Cabs, the Syrahs. And then, most of the bottles in my collection are whites. Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Moscato, Pinot Grigio, Gewürztraminer, Riesling, and then I have some other varieties over here.”

“Gewürztraminer? I have never heard of that? Is that a German wine?”

“Yes, it is from Alsace, Germany. It goes great with Asian food and pork. I even like it with sushi.” Roessler started to move closer to Murielle in the narrow space between the rows, and Murielle became convinced that he had lured her down here to start something. Murielle ducked around him and went to the next row over.

“What are these?” asked Murielle, pointing to the next row of whites.

“These are some unique finds from different countries. I have wines from all over the world here.”

Murielle started to look through the wine bottles, trying not to look Roessler in the eye. She was just about to announce that she had to leave again when one bottle in particular caught her eye. It was a bottle from the Finger Lakes Winery. It said at the bottom “Rkatsiteli 2011.” She looked at the bottle. She froze. Something clicked in her brain, and she looked back at Roessler, pretending she had not seen the bottle. He looked at Murielle suspiciously, and then looked back to the bottle, reading the label.

“This was so nice of you giving me the tour,” she said. “But I do really need to go.” She walked past Roessler, and headed for the stairs. Roessler sighed.

“I can’t let you do that,” he said.

“What?” Murielle said. She turned to look at him, and he was pointing a gun at her.

“Why did you have to see that bottle, Murielle? You’re always such a nosy body. But you’re not a very good poker player. I could spot you a mile away.”

“Rkatsiteli is the name of a white wine grape, isn’t it?” asked Murielle.

“Yes, it is, Murielle. In fact, the Rkatsiteli was Mikhail Gorbachev’s favorite dessert wine.”

“And when I asked you about those names upstairs, you knew that Rkatsiteli was the name of a white wine grape?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Is Gegic also the name of a white wine grape?”

“Yes it is, a very excellent grape from Croatia.”

“And are you named after a grape, Jacob?”

“Yes, I am. In more ways than one. When I changed my name, I named myself after Roger Roessler, a famous wine maker. But my birth name was Debit, which is another kind of Croatian wine grape.” Murielle Winston stared at the gun again, and began shaking.

“So the terrorists—they are your brothers?”

“Yes, they are, Murielle. And unfortunately, now that you know my secret, I cannot let you leave.”

“Jacob, my son is paralyzed. Charlie won’t be home for weeks, months maybe. My son is going to need me.”

“I am sorry, Murielle. They are just going to have to manage.”

“Jacob, people will miss me. They are going to go looking for me. Don’t you think it will be suspicious if the lead research scientist on this new Ebola Virus suddenly disappears in the middle of the crisis? Jacob, they will know it is you. There is no way you can get away with this.”

“Murielle, I only need to get away with it for a week. And no one, even you, is so important that people cannot do without them for a week.”

“Jacob, why are you doing this? You have worked your whole life preventing people from getting sick from these viruses. You cannot possibly want to kill people, innocent people, with a virus that could wipe out the whole planet? Why would you want to murder millions of people?”

“Unfortunately, Murielle, I cannot share my reasons with you.” There was a sudden noise like a car backfiring, and Murielle Winston felt immediate pain in her left shin. Roessler had shot her. She fell down to the ground.

“Murielle, I am very sorry to do that. I like you a lot, I really do. And I am not going to kill you. But I cannot let you escape, and if you are running around, you could expose what we are trying to accomplish.”

He quickly pulled a small knife and cut a piece of rope which was bound around a wine crate. He used the rope to tie Murielle’s hands behind her back. He used another piece to bind her legs. Murielle cried from the pain in her left leg. Good God, she thought, I am going to be paralyzed

just like Teddy. Then he got out a rag from a drawer, and tied it around her thigh tightly. She screamed when she did this and he put his hand over her mouth. He tied a tight knot, cutting off the blood supply to her tibia. Hopefully, this tourniquet would prevent her from bleeding out. He got out another rag and placed it in her mouth. Then he took her under the arms and put her in a smaller wine room, which was much chillier.

Murielle tried to protest, but the rag prevented her from speaking. She waved her head back and forth hysterically. Then he reached in her pocket and took out her cell phone, putting it in his own pocket.

“I’m sorry again,” he said. “I will check in on you later. Try and get some sleep.” He closed the wine room door and locked it with a key. He regretted doing that to Murielle. He really did like her. As he walked up the stairs, he kicked himself for his decision to hit on Murielle in the basement. He should have just stuck to the plan. Now he had this headache to deal with. He went to the top of the stairs to call his brothers in Trinidad.

CHAPTER 60. TRAPPED

Minneapolis, Minnesota.

WHEN FBI AGENT Ben Boaz finally got on the road after his morning fishing, he turned on the radio and learned about the President's shutdown of the borders. He immediately began to panic, as he realized his assignment was related to the quarantine. He was annoyed that his superiors had not given him more specific instructions. How was he supposed to know there was a deadly virus on the loose? When he finally arrived at the Bergman's household at 10:00 a.m., he learned from Mrs. Bergman that her husband had gone with three friends fishing. He asked for Mr. Bergman's cell phone, and learned that it was the practice of the men to turn off their cell phones during their fishing trip so as not to be disturbed. The wife had no idea where they had gone, but knew it was somewhere in Minnesota. He asked if he could look through her house, and she obliged. Boaz was able to find photos in a photo album of the husband fishing, but there was no indication of the location. He called for backup to have Mrs. Bergman quarantined, and then made off to visit the homes of the other three fishermen. Unfortunately, none of the other wives knew where their husbands were going either. He arranged with local police to have an APB put out on Mr. Bergman and his three friends, and gave the police a description of their car. He only had a few days to find the men before Mr. Bergman became symptomatic and contagious. If that happened, who knows how many others he could infect. He contacted the local game and fisheries warden and asked what the best places were for fishing this time of year. He got a list, but it was overwhelmingly large. Minnesota was officially known as "The Land of Ten Thousand Lakes."

Atlanta, Georgia. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Day after the Border Lockdown. 7:00 a.m.

BJORN JENDEL WAS livid. They were in full crisis mode at the CDC and Murielle Winston had gone AWOL. He had called her home, and the grandmother stated that Murielle had not come home last night, which was not like her. He had tried her cell and all contact numbers for her, as well as e-mail. He had also tried Charlie Winston's phone, which

was not answering. She better be dead in a ditch, he thought. Every one of the 112 Americans who had entered the country from Natal before the lockdown had to be quickly administered the AVI drugs before they became symptomatic and contagious. That was a daunting job, as there were not many nurses volunteering to give shots to a person infected with a new strain of the Ebola Virus. Because there were so many infected people, the decision was made to airlift them all to one of three military bases. A select handful of CDC and USAMRIID employees were selected to administer the AVI vaccines. Jacob Roessler had been selected to go the military base in Dallas. Murielle was to go to Boston. And Roger Tsung was to go to Los Angeles. Now that Murielle was absent, Jendel had to find another replacement on short notice. He was busy going through personnel files at the CDC to find the most skilled of his employees.

Trinidad. The day after the lockdown of the borders. Noon.

JULIO CEZANNE WAS furious about the early lockdown of the borders. The whole plan could fall apart, and he had invested a lot of money in this project. Cezanne had one of his men pay a visit to an Operations Manager at World Airlines in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The manager had a cocaine problem and a gambling problem, and was cheating on her husband with a co-worker. Cezanne's man threatened to expose her unless she helped. Within a short time, the Operations Manager had produced a list of the passengers on the flights who had gotten through. Roessler had said that the FBI was busy tracking down these passengers. The object, thought Cezanne, was to get to some of those 112 before the FBI did. But which ones?

Cezanne had a decent sized distribution network in Trenton, New Jersey, a city where two of the 112 had flown after arriving from Natal. He would start there. He looked at the airline list. There were two women on the list with the same address in Trenton. They were probably lesbians, Cezanne thought. Then he had an idea. He could use his own distribution network to spread the virus. He called one of his major distributors in Trenton, Benny Boglio, and told him that the two Trenton soccer fans, Connie Lewis and Deb Brueger, were drug mules who had kept some of his cocaine stash. Cezanne said they were currently in witness protection with the FBI, but probably only had one or two men guarding the house.

Boglio was to capture the two drug mules, alive, and bring them to their safe house in Trenton, and await further instructions. Anyone who got in the way, FBI included, could be terminated with prejudice. Boglio agreed. Cezanne mentioned nothing about the virus, and he did not tell any of his men to wear masks.

At 1:00 p.m., a black Chevy Suburban pulled up in front of the small ranch home of Connie Lewis and Deb Brueger. Three men in blue FBI windbreakers and blue ball caps got out of the car. As they walked up to the front of the house, there was an FBI agent in plain clothes standing by the front door, wearing a hospital face mask and plastic gloves. His weapon was holstered.

“Are you guys the ride to Boston?”

One of the men in windbreakers looked at his friend.

“Yeah, right.”

“Hey, where’s your facemask? Didn’t they tell you about these people?”

“No, we didn’t hear nothin’ about that,” said the windbreaker man, confused.

The FBI agent with the face mask opened the front door and let the men in the windbreakers inside. As soon as they were inside the door, the FBI agent with the face mask was shot with a silencer in the back of the head. A second agent, oblivious to what had happened, came out of the kitchen into the hallway, carrying a cup of coffee. There was a ping noise, and the bottom of his coffee cup exploded. The FBI agent, confused and howling from the burning coffee, suddenly registered that he was in danger. Before he could draw his weapon, he was shot, once in the forehead.

The three men in the windbreakers with the silencers then dragged the dead FBI agents into the kitchen, and then went up the stairs. As they neared the top, a short, gray-haired woman in her late fifties, wearing a hospital surgical mask and rubber gloves, came out of a bedroom.

“Oh, hello. Who are you?”

“We’re your ride,” he said.

“Oh, OK, let me get Deb. Deb, our ride is here!”

Another woman, also in her fifties, with short brown hair, also wearing a mask and gloves, came out of a bedroom carrying two travel bags.

“Okay, ready to go. What kind of plane will it be?”

The lead man in the FBI windbreaker said, “I cannot give out that information, ma’am. Now, if you’d please come with me.”

The FBI impostors led the two women down the stairs. As the brown-haired woman turned to lock her door from her front porch, she looked down the hall and saw a long streak of red blood near the end of the hall.

“Hey, wait a minute,” she said.

At that point, her roommate was already in the back of the Suburban. The man in the windbreaker grabbed the second woman’s elbow violently.

“Come with me, ma’am.”

“Hey!” she yelled. The man in the windbreaker then pulled out his gun and stuck it into her ribcage, smiling.

“Ma’am, I’m going to ask you nicely to get the fuck in the car, or I am going to clip you right here in front of your girlfriend.”

The brown-haired woman, terrified, said nothing further and escorted roughly into the back of the Suburban. The three men in windbreakers took off down the Suburban street.

In the back of the Suburban, Connie Lewis, now handcuffed, addressed her kidnappers.

“Hey, can you just tell us what this is all about?”

One of the men in the front seat spun around and pointed a gun at her.

“You know damn well what this is about, you fuckin’ mule. Maybe next time you won’t put your hand in the honey pot and keep a little for yourself. My boss don’t like that too much.”

The two handcuffed women looked at each other, puzzled. “Mules? Honey pot? I don’t have any idea what you are talking about.”

The man in the front seat, irritated by the woman, put his silencer into the surgical mask, forcing the tip of the silencer into the woman’s mouth.

“I don’t like your smart mouth. No wonder you have a mask on, to cover up that smart mouth of yours.” Connie Lewis’ eyes bulged as the tip of the gun went into her mouth.

The other woman, worried for her girlfriend, tried to be calm.

“I think you all have the wrong people. We are not drug mules. Look at us. We are in our fifties. Do we look like drug mules to you?”

“I’ve seen ‘em come in all types, lady. Now shut your mouths or we are going to shut them for you.”

Connie Lewis and Deb Bruege looked at each other. If they didn’t get that vaccine soon, they would die. But if they tried to protest further, these goons would shoot them. The man in the windbreaker turned up the radio, and the Suburban headed down the turnpike toward the safe

house in Trenton. When they stopped for gas, he called his boss from a secure cell phone. Then his boss called Cezanne.

“The two mules are in the barn,” was the message. Cezanne was pleased. He now had his insurance policy.

Atlanta, Georgia. Home of Jacob Roessler.

MURIELLE CEZANNE HAD managed to knock over several of the wine bottles. Using the sharp glass, she had cut the cords around her wrists and ankles. Unfortunately the door was another matter. It was a heavy refrigerator door and it was locked. For now, Murielle Winston was trapped.

CHAPTER 61. HOUSES

Island of Boyuca, Bay of Honduras. The Dark House

SKIP DRAME ENTERED the pitch black stone hut. They had said that each of the huts had a small hole in the roof, which would allow one to see if it was day or night. But Skip did not see any hole. All he could see was darkness. Of all the straws to pick, he certainly picked the best one. A dark house. Whoa. Spooky. All he had to do was take a nap and it would be morning. He felt guilty that his friends were facing jaguars and razor blades and other dangers, but he was secretly glad for himself.

Drame gingerly felt the soft tissue near his shoulder. He had thought he was going to die from that wound. That water was truly amazing. He could not believe they had come all the way here on what he thought was a fun wild goose chase, and had actually managed to find the Fountain of Youth. If he and his friends could just get out of here, and get some of that water, and get back to the United States, think how much money they could make. Then who would be laughing at him then? He pictured the People Magazine covers. “Skip Drame, the new Indiana Jones.” “Skip Drame, the next Louis Pasteur.” “Skip Dame, elusive billionaire.” “Skip Drame: How does he look so young?” All of them had good rings. His celebrity would skyrocket. The endorsement deals would fly in. And he could tell those studio executives who fired him on his last project to go suck it. That would be the best part of this whole trip. All of these thoughts were getting Skip very euphoric. He rested on the stone floor and thought about where his life would go from here.

It was so dark in here, like heart-of-a-cave dark. It was almost as if the darkness had layers, like you could reach out and put your hands in rolls of black velvet. He reached out his hands, and it felt as though he was rolling in black wave, like a man swimming in the ink of an octopus. For a moment, he thought he even saw an octopus. And then, sure enough, there it was. A large purple octopus, with one large eye, and suction cups all over its tentacles, was staring at him. The tentacles were floating now, floating all around him as if he was underwater.

Wait a minute, thought Drame. He wasn't underwater. An octopus wouldn't be in a stone hut. What the fuck was going on? It was almost as

if he was on acid or something.

“Ahh, I see what they’re doing. I am on drugs. They must be pumping in peyote smoke or fumes through the walls or something.” Drame felt along the walls. After some searching, he found some small metal holes cut into the walls. That must be where they are sending in the peyote, he thought. Drame looked around the room and it seemed as though there were different colored lights, so rich and full of texture that he could almost touch them. He had seen lights like that before when he was on ‘shrooms. And then Skip Drame began laughing hysterically.

“Of all the people in the world to try and scare with a bad drug trip, they picked the one guy who has done more drugs than anyone on the planet!” he exclaimed aloud. This is going to be a walk in the park, he thought. Just then, Skip Drame heard a hissing noise coming from about five feet away from him. He did not make a move. He felt something move over his leg. That was no dream, he thought. That is real. The snake coiled around his leg but did not tighten. Skip thought he saw a huge serpent, almost like the one in Harry Potter, materialize in front of him, but then it got wide and misshapen like he was looking at a cobra in a funhouse of mirrors. Another snake moved over his shoulder. He suddenly began seeing venomous snakes everywhere about to eat him. They seemed real, but Skip knew he was on drugs. He tried to calm himself, thinking that this was just another test. If they wanted to put poisonous snakes in here to kill him, they could do that and there would be nothing to stop them. They must be non-poisonous, he thought.

Drame had been on many bad drug trips in his life, and he had learned through trial and error of many drugs, that the best thing to do was to just “go with it.” Sit back and enjoy everything, no matter how scary or unreal. So he made himself relax, and he laid back, staring into the darkness. When snakes moved over him, he smiled, thinking of the snakes as pets and his friends. “Hey, there, Snakey, Snakey,” he said. Then the octopus came out again, and it started speaking to him. Skip laughed and began talking to the Octopus as if it were his friend. The Octopus got mad and a tentacle went shooting around Skip’s neck. Skip relaxed and smiled, and gently reached for the large snake that had coiled around his neck. He placed it calmly on the floor of the hut. And for the next two hours, he smiled at the kaleidoscope of colors, and talked to the snakes, and told jokes to the Octopus, and generally had a very good time.

He had no idea how much time had gone by, but he woke up in the darkness, his clothes drenched in sweat. He was incredibly thirsty. He felt like he could drink an ocean. He suddenly looked up and saw a small shaft of...well, it wasn't light exactly, but it was lighter than the total darkness of the hut. He stood up and felt a couple damp things fall from his legs (snakes?) and walked to the middle of the room. There was a hole in the ceiling now, and he could see up to the sky. It was still dark outside, but he could see some stars. His eyes had become accustomed to the dark now. The small amount of exterior light created just enough brightness to see the floor of the hut, which was covered in small green snakes. He looked at the heads of the snakes. They were not triangular, like the head of a rattlesnake. Poisonous snakes had more triangular shaped heads, because they had to store their venom in glands near the head. Non-poisonous snakes had heads shaped like spoons. These green snakes looked like the non-poisonous type.

Skip Drame had a throbbing headache. That was some kind of trip! He had never seen an octopus before on any of his prior trips. Now, he just had to wait it out until morning. It looked like the hard part (or for him, the fun part) was behind him.

The Cold House

ZACH MORSE WAS surprised that indigenous islanders on a hot tropical island could figure out the mysteries of refrigeration, but somehow they had managed it. He was actually in a meat locker. All around him, hanging from the ceiling on hooks, were the frozen cadavers of various types of skinned animals, wrapped in brown bags. He wasn't sure what type of animals they were, and he didn't want to guess. For all he knew, these islanders might be cannibals. These could actually be people strung up here in the bags. What he did know was that it was freezing in here. He rubbed his hands together and breathed. He could see his own breath.

Zach hated the cold. He had lived in California all his life, and enjoyed the ocean and the beach life. When it came time for college, Emory was not his first choice, but at least the temperature was warm. He had not gotten into UCLA or USC, so he had gone to Emory. His dad had known Charlie Winston, and that had helped him get in.

Zach searched for the warmest spot to sit down, and could not find

anything ideal. Every place he tried seemed very cold, so he chose a spot in the corner and sat down. He wondered why he always let his dad talk him into going on these dangerous trips. The last trip he went on with his dad involved the search for the lost prophecies of Nostradamus. That trip almost got him killed several times. He had thought this trip would be nothing like that, a fun trip on a yacht with a famous movie star. A few “Days in the Rays.” If he had known the trip would involve his friends getting their heads chopped off, and encounters with panthers and snakes and spear-wielding savages, he would have never agreed. His dad seemed to have a knack for getting him in trouble. On the other hand, if he survived it, the stories would be pretty good. They were making a movie about his dad’s first book. Maybe they would make a movie out of this trip.

The first hour in the Cold House was not too bad, but time seemed to go by like a glacier. In fact, he felt like he was on a glacier. He looked out through the glass pane in the top of the hut and it was still daylight. How was he going to make it a whole night in here?

He decided to pass the time singing, but after an hour of that, his voice was shot. He looked at his fingers. He could not feel them anymore. His toes also had no feeling in them. He went over to the burlap sacks of meat hanging from the ceiling and ripped some of the bag off. He fashioned a hat out of the burlap, and tied it around his head to keep his head and ears warm. He tried running in place to keep his blood moving. He was a runner at Emory, so he was in pretty good shape. He decided to time himself, and see how long he could run in here. The exercise was good, and kept his heart rate up and delivered a little warmth to his body, but he could only exercise for so long. He looked up at the hole in the roof. He was maybe an hour from sunset. Then it would really get cold.

He remembered when he was young, his Dad had taken him skiing in Vermont. There was a blizzard on the weekend he went, but his dad had already bought the lift tickets, and insisted that they ski in the blizzard. At the end of the day, they had gone down the mountain and when they left the slope, the car wouldn’t start. They had to wait two hours for a tow truck. He never remembered being so cold. When he finally got back to the ski chalet, his Mom had hot mugs of hot chocolate waiting for them. Nothing had ever tasted so good. Zach started to think of his mother, who had died on 9-11 in the terrorist attacks on New York. He missed her terribly. He wondered if he died in here if he would see his Mother

again. That gave him some comfort.

No, he couldn't think like that. He had to fight the cold, not give into it. That's how people died in the cold, was giving up. His lips were blue now. He had the entire night to get through. If he was this cold now, how could he possibly make it through the night?

He again decided to try and get his mind off the cold. Zach decided to make up a rap. That always got him in a good mood. After a few minutes of thinking, he laid down a beat for himself:

*Oonce, oonce, oonce.
 Daddy said Zach, let me get you outa class.
 Fly to Cancun, and don't give me any sass.
 Zach, you're my boy, and it sure would mean a lot,
 Plus we be ridin' on this big-ass yacht.
 The owner, he's my buddy, and he sure got game,
 An actor in the movies, he's my friend Skip Drame.
 A Professor named Charlie who just can't be beat
 And then there's my boy named Mountain Man Pete.
 There's a dude named Ka'an, who will speak on our behalf
 And a chick named Bolinda, who is tall as a giraffe.
 We go to the island, and we're havin' quite a ball
 'Til we find all these heads, see the natives killed 'em all.
 And then they catch us, and we're all about to die,
 When Daddy says, "Dude, give us one more try.
 You see, we're the Twins, Xbalanque howdy-do,
 And me, I'm a god, and I go by Hunahpu."
 So they threw us in a cave, and we made it up a wall
 And then these three bridges just about gave us a fall,
 We soon found ourselves in this tiny little crack,
 And a hole in the floor helped us all get back,
 And then was a room with the sum of all fears
 A bunch of scary dudes, and they all had spears,
 Got past that, Zachster's feelin' pretty bold,
 But then he was thrown in the House of Cold.
 And even though Zach is so fly that he's killin'
 This is one time in life when it sucks to be chillin'
 Oonce, oonce, oonce.*

He laughed at the last line. He tried to make more raps, about his favorite movies, like *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*. But after a while, the cold was numbing his brain. He couldn't think anymore. His body was shutting down from the cold. He had to get warm or he wasn't going to make it. He didn't have any matches, and there was nothing in here he could see to start a fire. He started thinking of books and movies where people were cold, like Jack London's *Call of the Wild*, about the Alaskan sled dog. He thought of *Alive*, the movie about the rugby team stranded in the Andes mountains and forced into cannibalism. Zach shuddered when he thought of that, and looked at the hanging bodies in this meat locker, wondering if any of them were humans. Then he had a memory from *The Empire Strikes Back*, when Han Solo places Luke Skywalker into the body of a Tauntaun to keep him warm and prevent hypothermia. That gave him an idea.

He approached one of the burlap sacks and took it down from the roof hook. A large carcass came sliding out onto the floor. Zach eyed the burlap sack. That could provide insulation for sure. He took down three, then four, then five of the burlap sacks of meat, emptying the meat onto the floor. He tied the five burlap sacks together at each end. The first and last sack he hung back to the hooks on the ceiling, fashioning a hammock. Then he went through the hut, removing all the meat from the sacks. He threw ten of the burlap sacks into his makeshift hammock. Then he hoisted his body into the hammock. The hammock held. Satisfied, Zach put his legs into one of the sacks like a sleeping bag. The stench was terrible, and it was a little damp, but it was better than nothing. Then he put that bag in another bag and another bag until he was wrapped up like a cocoon. Snug inside the hammock and the burlap bags, he felt some warmth coming back to his body. Shivering, he closed his eyes and tried to sleep through the cold. Within minutes, he was asleep.

He did not know what time it was, but it was very early in the morning, maybe three or four o'clock. He was absolutely frozen and was concerned he was not going to make it. He had woken up to the sound of glass breaking. Then he heard a loud crash as something came falling through the ceiling. He looked up and saw that the glass window pane in the roof had been shattered. Then he could have sworn that he heard his name. Was he having auditory hallucinations? He had no feeling left in his hands or his feet. He was sure he had frostbite. He got out of the

burlap sacks and fell on his shoulder to the ground, as his feet had no feeling left. He felt his hair. It was frozen. He crawled over to the broken glass on the floor and looked up. All he could see were the stars, but the skylight had definitely been broken. Beneath the skylight on the ground was a pile of semi-charred wood and a Ziploc bag of dry matches. It was like a gift from the gods. Zach did not know what to make of it, but he did not have to be told twice what to do with the wood. He stacked the wood, making a bonfire beneath the burlap sack, and then lit the wood. Soon he had a good fire going. He warmed his frozen hands and feet over the fire and it felt wonderful. When he had thawed a little, he got back in the burlap sack, with the fire burning underneath him. He quickly fell asleep again, now certain that he could make it to morning.

The Jaguar House

BOLINDA JEFFRIES LIFTED herself up, having been thrown roughly into the stone hut. She looked around the hut. There was a torch on the wall near the door where she had come in. She immediately grabbed that, feeling some comfort. Jaguars probably didn't like fire. Her knees were knocking and her teeth were chattering. She was absolutely terrified.

She thought for a moment about her friends, and she couldn't think of anything but contempt. Five men, and not one of them agreed to switch straws with her. Chivalry was dead, that was for sure. Out here in the jungle, it was every man, and woman, for himself/herself. Charlie Winston had offered her advice on facing the jaguars. If he knew so much about it, why didn't he switch places with her? She was disgusted with the men, finding them to be contemptible cowards. Well, she had grown up on a small island in the Caribbean, without a dollar to her name, and she had made it this far. She would just have to face her own battles alone again.

She stood silently against the wall near the door, and held up the torch. The back part of the hut was covered in darkness and shadow. The torch did not light up that area of the room. Then she saw the set of yellow eyes, focused on her.

"Oh God, Oh God, Oh God, Oh God," she mumbled under her breath again and again. She told herself not to act panicked. She did not want to look like prey. What had Charlie said? Don't look them right in the eye. She tried not to, but it was damned hard. What if she was looking

away when the creature lunged at her?

Within a few moments there was a second set of yellow eyes in the darkness, and then a third. How many of them were there? She saw movement, slight movement, and one set of eyes began moving. Suddenly, the head of the black jaguar came out of the shadows, staring at her. The creature stopped, made no sound, and looked around, as if it was bored, and then walked back into the shadows. Bolinda could not breathe, she was so scared. She continued staring into the shadows of the far side of the hut. There was no sound. Had they gone to sleep? She stayed exactly where she was, not moving an inch, holding the torch out from her a little bit to see if she could cast more light in the hut. Suddenly, she heard a wild jaguar growl, and she jumped. Two of the jaguars were down on the ground now, and had come out of the shadows, walking back and forth in front of her. She bravely held the torch out, as if to warn the creatures that she would fight back. Urine went down her leg. She knew that had to be a bad sign. These creatures had incredible powers of smell. Surely that would signal weakness. She cursed her bladder, standing up as straight and tall as she could. At nearly seven foot, she was toweringly tall, and she tried to use it to her advantage in these cramped quarters, making the jaguars think she was big and powerful.

“Nice kitty, kitty, kitty,” she peeped. One of the jaguars lay down in the corner where she could see him, and put his head on his forepaws, licking his mouth. He sat there looking at her for a minute, and then closed his eyes. The second jaguar went back into the shadows. Well, so far, the creatures had not decided to eat her. Maybe Charlie Winston was right. They just didn’t see humans as prey. Bolinda did not want to sit down. She was afraid she would fall asleep and the creatures would then perceive weakness and attack her. But it was tiring standing for so long, holding the torch. She put the torch carefully back in its bracket on the wall, so that she could give her right arm and shoulder a rest.

After another hour, she couldn’t stand anymore. She grabbed the torch again and then slunk down to the ground, with her back against the stone wall. She still saw the yellow eyes in the darkness, and the sleeping jaguar that she could see was only ten feet away. She held the torch between her legs. After a while, she suddenly realized she was asleep and she darted her head up, terrified that the animals knew she was asleep. But the situation was the same as before. She could not do that again. She

could not sleep.

As she sat on the floor, she remembered her near death drop on the rope bridge, and she thought of Pete, who had saved her life. He was dead now. He probably had people who loved him, and now they would never see him again. She thought of who would mourn her loss if she died here in the Jaguar House, and she could not think of many people. She started to cry, mainly out of sheer exhaustion, but she made no sound. When she thought of the rope bridge, she kicked herself for not realizing the oil smell when she went out on the bridge. It was so obvious now. And at that moment, her nose crinkled again. It was the same smell. A very slight oil smell somewhere in the room. Was her mind playing tricks on her? No, there it was. She smelled it more when she was closer to the ground. What could that be?

She looked into the middle of the hut, close to the point where the light met the shadow, and there, on the floor, was a one-half inch crack-line that ran the length of the room from wall to wall. It looked almost like the space between panels of a sidewalk. Could there be oil in the crack? If there was, she could make a wall of fire between her and the jaguars.

Just then, two of the jaguars came into the light in front of her. She stared at them intently, looking them in the eyes. Her torch fell to the ground between her feet. She was afraid that they might spring at any moment. She instinctively kicked the torch, which slid across the floor toward the jaguars, and caught on the oil in the crack. Instantly, there was a line of flame going across the room. It was not a wall of fire. The fire went up only about a foot in height. But it was enough to create a barrier. The jaguars immediately began growling. The jaguar that had been sleeping near her on the far wall leaped over the flame towards the other animals. Now that the fire was up, the room was filled with light, and Bolinda could see that there were six black jaguars on the far side of the flame, all lying or standing on a wall of large rocks. Bolinda slowly inched herself into a standing position. The jaguars were definitely angered by the fire barrier, but on the other hand, they were definitely not crossing the line. After a few minutes, most of them stopped stalking and walking and went back to lying down.

Pleased with her success, Bolinda slowly edged her way across the room and picked up the torch again. Then, step by step, making sure she did not retreat too fast to look like running prey, she made her way

back again to the door. Now she could see them all. Bolinda stared at the jaguars and the wall of fire, saying nothing and trying to think of nothing. The small hole in the roof told her that it was past sundown. She just had to last the night. Right now, the jaguars were silent.

She started reciting the Presidents in order to pass the time. Then the state capitals. Then the Books of the Bible. By midnight, despite her best intentions, she had fallen asleep. The yellow eyes stared out over the line of fire at the strange tall creature on the other side. At four in the morning, before the dawn, the fire went out. The jaguars, curious, began to walk toward a sleeping Bolinda.

CHAPTER 62. QUARANTINE

Northern Minnesota. Three days after the government border lockdown.

IT HAD BEEN a great weekend for fishing. The men had feasted on fresh fish cooked over a campfire. Bergman and his friends shared stories about their nagging wives and their love of hunting, fishing, and Minnesota Twins baseball. No cell phones, no faxes, no e-mails, no news. Just four men in a couple of tents enjoying the great outdoors. In a few days, they would head home, back to their dreary lives. But for now, they could look out on a sky of thousands of stars and feel free.

Boston, Massachusetts.

RON FIELDING, JR., soccer fan, microwaved some Lipton's soup in the small Bank of Boston break room. The bank had been busy that morning, and he would only get a half hour for lunch. As he enjoyed his soup, he watched the television on the wall which was airing breaking news from CNN.

"Wolf, we have just received news from the White House Press Secretary that the terrorist attempt occurred in Brazil. The White House is confirming today that there is good evidence that the virus was released at a World Cup soccer game between the United States and The Netherlands in Natal, Brazil. Apparently, the terrorists were hoping that soccer fans returning to the United States would bring the virus home with them. So far there have been no confirmed reports as to exactly what kind of virus this is. However, our Dallas Bureau is reporting today that several dozen Americans who attended that game are being tested at a military base in Dallas, to make sure they have not contracted the virus."

Fielding, panicked, stopped eating his soup and turned up the television.

"Mandy, have the terrorists made any demands?"

"No, Wolf, there have been no confirmed reports of any demands from the terrorists, or indeed, even who these terrorists are. We do not know if this is related to Al-Qaeda or some other group."

"Mandy, how many people from the United States attended that game?"

"Several hundred, Wolf, but 112 people actually made it back into the United States before the border lockdown. The FBI has located all 112

of those people and has them quarantined at one or more military bases. The White House is assuring us that all 112 people are accounted for and that this virus is going to be contained.”

Fielding was puzzled. Why hadn't anyone contacted him?

“What about the Americans who were not able to get out of Brazil before the lockdown?” asked the news anchor, Wolf Blitzer.

“Wolf, there are a few hundred Americans who are being quarantined at a special facility in Brazil, but so far we have no further details on their identities or where they are being kept.”

“Is the White House saying how the virus was released?”

“We do not know that, Wolf. All we are being told is that the virus was released at a soccer game in some fashion. Perhaps it was in food, or water, we just don't know at this point.”

Fielding took out his phone and looked up the number for the FBI. After waiting on hold for fifteen minutes, and being transferred dozens of times, he finally reached a Public Relations Liaison for the FBI. The Liaison, reading from her talking points memo, assured him that all 112 people who were at risk for obtaining the virus had been quarantined at military bases.

“Yes, but I went to Brazil,” said Fielding. “I attended that game, and no one quarantined me. Am I at risk?”

The Public Liaison officer had nothing about that on her talking points memo.

“Sir, as I assured you, everything is under control. The public is not at risk. The FBI has this matter well under control.”

“Well, what if I am infected? Should I see a doctor? Is there a vaccine for this thing?”

Just then, Fielding's supervisor came into the break room.

“Ron, there you are. Your lunch break was over ten minutes ago. Get back on the floor.”

Frustrated, Fielding hung up. He worried about the virus the rest of the afternoon.

Atlanta, Georgia. Centers for Disease Control.

BJORN JENDEL WAS concerned. It had been several days, and Murielle Winston was still missing. It was not like her. Something was wrong.

Jendel began to fear that the terrorists had somehow kidnapped or killed her.

Jendel spun in his chair and hit the conference call button on his phone. On the call were Jacob Roessler in Dallas, Roger Tsung in Los Angeles, and a third employee in Boston from the CDC who had replaced Murielle Winston. Jendel began the meeting.

“How are the shots coming?” asked Jendel.

“About 45% of those who were in Brazil have contracted the virus. Everyone has been given AVI-6002,” said Roessler. “We are waiting to begin the tests to see if the AVI-6002 shots clear the virus.” Roger Tsung spoke next.

“Our figures are a little less than 50% of the soccer fans returning to the U.S. who are quarantined at the L.A. location have contracted the virus. Everyone here has been given AVI-6002. We are also waiting to see the results.”

The representative replacing Murielle then gave her report.

“Our results in Boston are similar to L.A. 45% contracted the virus, and we are awaiting the results of the 6002.”

“OK,” said Jendel. “And the barrier protocols, are they working? No one has been allowed to come into contact with these people, right?”

“Right,” said Roessler. Tsung and the Boston representative agreed.

“I’ve spoken with the President,” said Jendel. “We are not taking any chances with this group. They get quarantined for 21 days, and they have to be clean on Day 21 or they don’t get out.”

“Twenty-one days seems like overkill, don’t you think?” asked Roessler.

“Not when the lives of hundreds of millions of Americans are at stake. Those people will just have to endure a little discomfort for a few weeks.”

“What is happening with the Dutch?” asked Roessler.

“That is a total nightmare. They have not had any reports in hospitals yet, but we are only three days out. They have not tracked everyone down from the two planes that landed there. We will have to wait and see. England has several teams helping them and the President is considering sending our own team over there. If they get an outbreak, Jacob, I may have to send you to Amsterdam. By the way, has Murielle contacted you in the last few days?”

“No,” said Roessler. “And that is not like her. I am worried she might have met with foul play.”

“Well, keep an eye over your shoulder, Jacob. I do not want any more of my best people going missing.”

“Sure thing, boss. What’s the word from Brazil?”

“A lot of people are going to die there, I am afraid. There were tens of thousands of people at that soccer game, most of them locals. The good news is that they have shut down all the borders, and the hospitals are ready. They are telling people who went to the game to get their shots immediately, but it is a race against time, and there is only so much AVI-6002 to go around. AVI Biopharma is working around the clock to make more. We just have to hope no one makes it out of Brazil.”

“Any word from the terrorists?” asked Roessler.

“Nothing,” said Jendel. “Have any of the patients exhibited full-blown symptoms?”

“None yet,” said Roessler.

“Nothing here,” said Tsung.

“Nothing in Boston.”

“Okay, everyone keep me posted. Let’s have another conference call tomorrow, same time.”

CHAPTER 63. VAMPIRES*Island of Boyuca. Bay of Honduras**The Bat House*

KA'-AN WASN'T WORRIED when he entered the Bat House. He felt confident that he had the easiest of all the houses. Rabies was the biggest worry about bats, but he had been vaccinated for rabies as a teenager. Ka'-an knew that many varieties of bats didn't even come near humans, choosing instead to eat fruit and insects. The only bat known to attack mammals was the vampire bat, which needed to ingest blood every two days. These bats were common in South America, and in Central America where Ka'-an was born. They were known to bite the ankles of cattle and other mammals. But even if a vampire bat bit him, the most it might do is cause an infection. If he could get off this island quickly enough, he could get antibiotics and he would be fine. It certainly wasn't as tough as facing jaguars.

Ka'-an started by taking out Pete's flashlight from his pocket. When the party left the Mannequin Room, Ka'-an had taken extra flashlight batteries out of his pack and inserted them into the device. He shined the light near the ceiling. He was disgusted and slightly startled by the swarms of bats hanging off the ceiling. The bats were equally startled by the light, and flew away toward the back of the stone hut to get out of the light. He shined his light on a few of the bats, taking note of their appearance. These definitely looked like vampire bats.

He wished he had long pants and long sleeves. The T-shirt and shorts were going to leave the warm flesh of his arms and legs and neck an open target for the bats. But he had a solution for that. Duct tape. As soon as he learned that he was going in the Bat House, Ka'-an had quickly slipped the roll of duct tape from his pack and into his right pocket. He pulled his white tube socks as high up on his leg as they would go, and then fastened a piece of the gray tape so that the top of the sock was fastened to his shin. Then he rolled the gray tape around and around his leg, all the way up to his groin, wrapping himself like a duct-taped mummy. He did the same thing on his other leg, and then on his arms. Finally, he wrapped his neck in the tape.

Then he took the bandana from his head and tied it around his nose

like a Wild West bandit. Then he curled on his side, with his face facing the stone wall. As a final measure, he stood the flashlight on its bottom end, facing toward the ceiling. A beam of light shined from the flashlight to the ceiling. Ka'-an knew that vampire bats only fed when there was total darkness. The flashlight should ward them off until the new batteries went dead. Then he hoped that the duct tape would protect him.

Surprisingly, Ka'-an was able to get to sleep right away. At about two in the morning, the flashlight went out. The feeding instinct of the vampire bats kicked in. Able to sense the best place to bite Ka'-an's body with the thermal infrared receptors in their noses, the bats all swarmed in the air and landed on the ground by Ka'-an's feet. Doing an odd kind of hopping dance, the vampire bats approached Ka'-an. Within minutes, Ka'-an was covered in bats.

Ka'-an, oblivious to the attack, continued sleeping for several hours. At about five in the morning, Ka'-an had an urge to urinate, and this disturbed his sleep. He felt itchy, like something was itching on his face, and he moved his hand to his face to scratch it. His hand felt something hairy and strange. A neuron fired in Ka'-an's brain, and he yelled, jumping up to his feet. He was covered in vampire bats, which were clinging to every part of his body. He shook furiously, like a dog shaking off the water after a good bath. The bats, for the most part, scattered and flew back to their roost in the ceiling on the far side of the cave. Ka'-an felt himself in the dark. He had little painful pinprick sensations over his entire face and neck. He noticed, even in the darkness, that the sweat from his skin had worn off the stickiness of the duct tape in several places on his body. He also felt a little bit of stinging pain in the groin area. He had a momentary ugly thought, and put his hand down his pants. There was something clinging in his pants. Disgusted, he moved his hand all over his scrotum, and three bats flew out of his pants. He thought he was going to vomit.

He tried to get the flashlight to work again. He took out the batteries and re-inserted them. This turned on a faint light for about ten seconds. He quickly inspected his body. While he couldn't see much, he could see tiny red cuts on his hands. "Don't worry about it," he thought. "They are just cuts. I'll get out of here, and everything will be fine." For the next hour, until the wooden door on the stone hut finally opened, he stood with his back to the wall, waving and kicking off bats until he was spent from exhaustion. He wondered how the others were doing.

CHAPTER 64. RAZORS*Island of Boyuca, Bay of Honduras**The Razor House*

CHARLIE WINSTON WAS not very happy with his choice of straws. He had no idea what to expect in the Razor House. He was given a lit candle by the natives, but after he entered through the door on the eastern side of the hut, he realized that he did not really need the candle now due to the hole in the roof, in the middle of the chamber, which allowed daylight into the room. The hole in the roof was about six feet long and three feet wide, with wooden cross beams in a tic-tac-toe pattern across the hole to prevent escape. Winston decided that he might need the candle more at night time, so he extinguished the flame and put the candle in his pocket. Winston took a look around the room. There was nothing in the hut at all. Upon further inspection, however, he noticed grooved lines cut into the stone floor, each about an inch wide, on the far western side of the chamber. The cut gooves ran from the northern wall to the southern wall of the hut, about two feet apart. He wasn't sure what to make of it, but he was getting a very bad feeling. He looked at his red digital watch. It was 1:59 p.m. Winston bent over to inspect the grooved lines more closely. At 2:00 p.m. exactly, there was a shrill high-pitched noise. Near the far end of the hut, out of an opening in the roof, a huge metal guillotine blade as wide as the hut itself came crashing down to the floor groove below it and locked into place, missing Winston by less than six inches.

“Holy shit!” yelled Winston, diving back. He had narrowly missed becoming an amputee. At the same time, on the other end of the hut, twelve circular timber-mill buzz saws, each about four feet in diameter, came out of slits in the northern and southern walls and locked into place, parallel with the floor. As soon as he saw the buzz saws, Charlie Winston dove for the floor. A second later, the buzz saws turned on with a whine and spun at frightening speed.

“Shit shit shit!” yelled Winston, with his hands laced over the back of his head, ducking for cover. His eyes darted back and forth wildly, looking for more blades. The circular saws spun for another minute and then stopped. Each saw protruded from the wall on a metal post which

was attached to a circular nub in the middle of the blade. Moments later, the metal posts retracted back into the wall, bringing the circular saws back into the wall cavity.

Winston waited for a full two minutes and then slowly got up, not sure if the ordeal with the blades was over. He inspected the giant guillotine blade first. It went from wall to wall near the far western end of the hut. Winston tried to move the blade upward with his hands and shoulder, but it did not budge. It was locked into place in the floor. Winston walked over to the side walls of the hut to inspect the openings in the northern and southern walls where the circular saws had emerged. The six slits on each wall resembled a pyramid and looked like this:



The last slit for the saw blades ended near the middle of the hut. Winston immediately recognized his problem. If he stayed on the eastern side of the hut, he could be sliced in half by the timber-mill circular saws. If he stayed on the western side of the hut, he could be chopped in half by the guillotine blades from the ceiling. Where would he be safe?

He found it interesting that the guillotine blades had begun falling and spinning at exactly 2:00 p.m. That could not be a coincidence. He went over to the guillotine blade again and inspected the grooved lines in the floor. Each of the grooved lines was parallel to the guillotine blade. There were seventeen grooved lines in all, running north to south. Why seventeen? Winston thought about that. His task was to remain in this hut until sunrise. What time was sunrise? Maybe 6 a.m.? If a new blade fell every hour, then the seventeenth guillotine blade would fall at 6 a.m. Assuming that the guillotine blades fell in order from west to east, instead of randomly, he could stay alive by staying to the east of the falling guillotine blades and to the west of the buzz saws, until he got to 6 a.m.,

at which point he would be out of space and out of luck. That was a big assumption, of course, but it was all he had to go on now.

Nothing happened for the next hour, and Winston became more and more nervous as he waited for three o'clock. Winston tested his theory by remaining on the west side of the hut, making sure to stay away from the next guillotine blade line. Sure enough, at exactly 3:00 p.m., the blades went into action again. The next guillotine blade to fall was the one just east of the last guillotine blade. Winston now was certain his theory was right. Even though the situation was perilous, Winston at least felt some comfort in knowing the pattern of the blades. That just might keep him alive. After the buzz saws from three o'clock retracted back into the wall, Winston re-focused on the problem that would await him at 6 a.m.

Could he get under the guillotine blades? He went over to the west side of the hut, and laid down on the ground on his stomach, with his head directed toward the southern wall. He measured his body against the wall. The slit for the saw was too low. He would not be able to crouch under the last blade for the final encounter.

Winston checked the walls. Perhaps there was a ledge near the top of a wall where he could lodge himself while the blades were spinning. Upon inspection, however, Winston found that all the walls seemed very smooth and contained no ledges near the tops. He was running out of ideas. Winston thought about his son Teddy and his wife Muriel. He did not want to die in here. Muriel would have an impossible time raising a paraplegic boy all by herself, especially with her demanding job. Winston thought about his own funeral, with his sad son crying from his wheelchair. Winston thought of the eulogies that would be given by his friends and relatives. What would people say about him? He had to put those thoughts out of his mind. He was not going to die in here, he told himself.

He sat down and rested for a moment, sitting on the eastern wall near the door. He was bone tired. He thought about the road that had taken him here, and all the dangers they had narrowly survived. It was amazing that they had made it this far. He wondered if the others would make it in their houses. The Dark House did not seem so bad, but the Jaguar House, that was not going to be easy. He thought of the yellow eyes of the jaguar, piercing in the darkness. Within a few moments, Winston dozed off to sleep.

A high-pitched sound occurred, and a tiny synapse in Winston's

brain began ringing fire alarm bells of warning in Winston's ear. Wake up! Winston bulged open his eyes and cleared his head. "What?" He suddenly realized it must be four o'clock, because the buzz saws were coming out and he was on the wrong side of the hut! He had only moments to react. There wasn't time to get across the room. Winston stood up as one circular saw came toward him from the left and another came toward him from the right. There was nowhere to go but up. Winston jumped up high and landed on one foot on the center nub of one of the circular saws. He balanced himself precariously, raising his other leg like the Karate Kid preparing for the final Crane Kick, as the ferocious buzz saw beneath his foot began whirring at dizzying speed. One slip of his foot and Winston would be dead, his femoral artery severed like straw. He prayed for the saw to stop. The minute it took for the blade to stop seemed like an hour, as Winston's thigh began aching from the strain. When the blade stopped and began to retract, Winston dove for the ground and collapsed in relief. That had been a close call. He was definitely not going to sleep again.

Winston went back over to the middle of the room and stared back up at the hole in the middle of the roof. A thought dawned on Winston. If he could find a way to secure himself to the boards criss-crossing the hole in the roof—maybe with his belt or the rope?—then he would be out of the way of the guillotine blades and the buzz saws. That would be perfect. But how could he get up there? He had a rope but no way to get it up to the hole. He needed a heavy hook of some kind. He looked through his pack. The only thing close was his Swiss Army knife. That might work. He took out every one of the attachments, including the corkscrew, and then fastened the rope around the middle of the knife. Then he went under the hole and threw up the knife attached to the rope. After about ten unsuccessful attempts, the knife finally went through one of the openings between the wooden boards over the roof hole. Winston tried to pull back on the rope gently, hoping that the knife would fall back through a different opening and come back to him. That did not happen. Instead, a few moments later, he felt tugging on the other end. What in the world?

Winston pulled harder, and something on the other end pulled back. There was some laughing up above on the roof. Suddenly, Winston saw the young faces of five native children staring back at him through the hole in the roof. They were smiling and pointing at him.

“Hey! Kids! Hi! Hey, can you throw me the knife back down?” Winston cursed himself, as he immediately realized the native children would not speak English. As he looked closer, he could see that the children were undoing the knife from the rope.

“No, no, no! Don’t do that!” But it was too late. The children threw the rope back down, taking the valuable and interesting Swiss Army knife with them.

“Hey! Hey!” Winston called out again, but the children had gone.

Now he had no way of getting the rope back up to the hole. He searched the hut for large rocks but could find none. As he crouched near the ground, looking for rocks, his head was near the slit in the wall containing the buzz saw which had almost cut him in half an hour ago. He looked at the pattern of the slits in the wall, almost like a staircase, with three different levels. A staircase..... That gave him an idea. It was a crazy idea, an idea that, if he proposed it to a group of people, nine out of ten would tell him it was stupid and to forget it. But at this point, he was getting desperate. Stupid ideas were better than nothing. In a few hours, he would be in darkness, and he had to find a way to make sure he would not be sliced in half in the final hour in this hut.

He waited on the eastern side of the hut, near the door, until it was almost five o’clock. He had taken off his backpack, placing it near the door. He had also taken out a length of rope and looped it around his waist, tying it tightly. The remainder of the rope was looped around his neck. At exactly five o’clock, the buzz saws came out from the wall. Winston was counting on the fact that a few seconds transpired between the time the saws came out, locked in place, and began spinning. Before the first buzz saw, which was lowest to the ground, could lock in place, Winston jumped onto the center nub. Using his basketball skills, Winston quickly leaped in the air toward the next highest saw, landing again with one foot on the center nub and another foot on the top of the blade. Fortunately, the second saw had not quite started spinning. With one final push off, Winston leaped toward the third saw, landing solidly on one foot, using his hands to balance himself. Then he put one hand on the wall to steady himself. He had made it. The third circular saw began violently spinning, only inches below Winston’s foot. Winston waited the full minute until the third saw stopped. Then, before it could retract into the wall. Winston put both feet on the top of the saw and lunged in an

arc toward the wooden boards covering the hole in the roof. There was a slight creak as Winston's left hand grabbed onto one of the boards, and he quickly swung his other hand over to grab another board. Hanging from the ceiling boards, he swung his entire body forward and then backward, building momentum, until he was able to swing one leg through the boards. Using one hand, he took the rope looping around his neck and fished it up through the opening and then back through another opening. With one hand, he tied a knot in the board. Switching hands, he then held on with one hand as he looped the belt of his pants through the openings in the boards and back down again, fashioning a harness for the back of his head to rest. He continued this procedure, securing various parts of his body to the wooden boards, until his entire body was suspended mid-air from the rafters by ropes. Tentatively, he let go with both hands and found that his entire body was suspended successfully. He pulled on the rope at various places, making sure that the boards were secure. He rested in the new rope harness, finally secure that he was free from the razor-sharp blades of the saws and the guillotines. After another hour, he fell asleep.

Just before five o'clock in the morning, the boards covering the roof cracked, sending Winston falling ten to twelve feet to the hard stone floor below. He tried to land as best he could, but he fractured his right tibia and fibula in the fall. Winston winced from the pain. He looked down at his leg. There was a huge knot over the shin area. As he did so, he noticed in the very dim light that his injured leg was draped across both of the two remaining grooves cut into the floor. There was a high-pitched noise that he had heard before. The guillotine was coming. He desperately tried to move his leg but it would not obey his mental command. He used his hands and desperately moved the leg over just a little, but his left hand fell back to the ground, just as a huge metal slicing blade came falling from the ceiling, slicing off the top inch of all four of the fingers on Winston's left hand. Blood spurted from the wound as Winston shrieked out in pain. He fell back to the ground in the darkness, with the sound of whirring buzz saws just a foot or two away. He took off his shirt and wrapped the hand with the amputated fingers, trying desperately to stop the blood. Just then he heard a strange metal crunching sound. In the darkness, he saw sparks all over the hut as something metal slammed into the stone walls again and again. In a few seconds, he heard a metal clanging, followed a minute later by the sound of the saws slowing and

retracting back into the wall. Winston grabbed the candle and a dry match from his pocket and lit the candle. As the tiny candle lit up the room, he saw what was making the sparks and the clanging noise. The highest buzz saw had come off its bracket, probably because Winston had broken it when he jumped from the saw to the ceiling. The metal circular saw and its deformed and damaged metal post bracket were lying on the floor of the hut. Winston did not want to look at his hand, but he knew it was badly damaged. The pain from his fingers and his shin were excruciating. He looked at his watch. He only had one more hour to go. His body wanted to give up and pass out so as to avoid dealing with the pain, but he knew that would be suicide. He willed himself to stay awake. There was nowhere to go now. His injured body was laying over the one remaining guillotine groove in the floor. He would either be killed by the guillotine or the buzz saws. This is how it would end. Winston began to silently cry. He wanted to see his son again. He was too weak to jump on the buzz saws again. There was nowhere to go.

Then, with his candle, he looked over at the damaged buzz saw blade. He left the candle on the floor and then used his elbows, snaking his body across the floor toward the damaged blade. It was slow going, because he was losing a lot of blood. When he got to the blade, he slid it with him back towards the middle of the hut. Taking the four-foot, circular blade in his non-damaged hand, he turned it upright and inserted it into the groove for the guillotine. The blade lodged into the groove, sticking upright into the air. Winston tried to get out of the way further, but his pant leg caught on one of the sharp cut pieces of the circular saw. He was stuck. Everything started to get bleary and out of focus. Winston passed out again, his damaged leg draped across the guillotine groove. At six o'clock, Winston woke up to the high-pitched sound again. He panicked. This was it. Just then, the heavy wall-to-wall guillotine blade came crashing down from the ceiling. There was a clink of metal hitting metal, and the buzz saw blade which was wedged into the floor groove stopped the path of the guillotine blade. Winston opened his closed eyes. The guillotine blade was inches from his nose. Winston started laughing. He could not believe that had worked. Ten minutes later, the door of the hut opened, and the interior was flooded with light. In the darkness, Winston felt people pulling him along the floor out of the hut.

CHAPTER 65. RESISTANCE

Trenton, New Jersey. Warehouse district.

CONNIE LEWIS AND Deb Brueger were each tied to a chair in an abandoned plastics factory in Trenton, their mouths covered in duct tape. Right now, there was only one man guarding them. He was a skinny, ugly man, with pockmarked skin and bad teeth. He was wielding an assault rifle. The two women were desperate. They had to get out of here or the virus was going to kill them. Connie Lewis began making desperate loud sounds from behind the duct tape. The guard was irritated that the women were not being quiet. He ripped off Lewis' duct tape and asked her what the problem was.

"What do you want?" the man barked.

"I want to make a deal," said Connie.

"Oh yeah? What kind of deal?" asked the ugly man.

"Leave my friend for your boss, let me go, and I will have sex with you."

Connie's girlfriend Deb was at a loss over this betrayal, and began her own noise-making from behind the duct tape.

The ugly man took the tip of his gun and put it between the buttons of her shirt. He yanked upward violently.

"I got a better idea," said the man. "You and I have sex, and then if the sex is good enough, I will decide whether to let you go or kill you."

"Deal," said Lewis. Brueger was horrified by the bargain, and tried to pull free, but her wrists and ankles were firmly bound to the chair. The guard shrugged, surprised that she had agreed to the proposal.

The guard untied Lewis' ankles and stood her up, leaving her wrists tied. He pulled her close to him. Lewis was suppressing the urge to vomit. The man was completely disgusting, but she put on the best act she could. Lewis put her mouth on the guard's mouth and began deeply and passionately kissing him. The guard liked that. Then Lewis spit in the guard's face.

"You fucking bitch!" screamed the guard, who smashed the butt of his gun into Lewis' face. When she was on the ground, the guard kicked her hard in the stomach three times, causing her to cough up blood. Then he tied her up again.

"Why the fuck did you do that?"

"Guess what, genius? Now you are infected too!"

“Infected? What do you mean ‘infected’?”

“Well, I guess you never listen to the news, Einstein, because if you did, you would know that each of us is carrying the Ebola virus. Unless treated immediately, it is lethal and will kill you in seven days. You just kissed me, which means you have it now, too.”

“Bullshit.”

“Really, why don’t you turn on CNN and get educated. You are now going to die in a week, unless you get treated at the hospital. When you go to the hospital to get treated, they are going to ask you where you got the virus from. And it is not going to take the detectives long to figure out you and your men have kidnapped us. So your only hope is to let both of us go, we all three get treated together, and we tell the cops you cooperated. That way, maybe you get a reduced sentence.”

The man came over and hit each of them again in the head with the butt of his gun, knocking them to the ground in their chairs.

“Bitch!” he snarled. Then he stomped off to the break room to try and find a TV.

Natal, Brazil

THE FIRST PATIENT infected by the Mackinac Ebola Virus who had not seen the warnings on television to get treated at the government center was a taxi cab driver, who showed up at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in downtown Natal. The intake nurses, all wearing full scrubs, duct-taped wrists and ankles, and respirator masks, immediately took the man into a separate quarantine room to inquire about his symptoms. When they saw the bloodshot eyes, they immediately left the room and locked the door, calling the government hotline, as instructed. Within twenty minutes, a military ambulance arrived at the hospital and took the taxi cab driver to the government quarantine center. He would die within twenty-four hours. The message was delivered to the President of Brazil. The first casualties were arriving.

Memphis, Tennessee

FBI AGENTS GREEN and Wilcox knocked on the door of the Bundle of Joy Adoption Agency. An elderly woman with gray hair wrapped in a bun answered the door. She was dressed in a long, plain gray, cotton

T-shirt, jeans, and flip flops. She opened the screen door with a friendly smile, and her blue eyes greeted the Detectives behind her pink plastic glasses held on a chain around her neck.

“Mrs. Champion?” asked Agent Green.

“Yes?”

“We’re the two FBI Detectives. I’m Agent Green. We spoke on the phone earlier today.”

“Oh, yes, Detectives, come right in. Sorry about the mess, you know. I have been so busy.” The woman picked up some children’s toys from the floor and put them in a wicker basket. She led the two men to her kitchen table.

“Can I get you some tea?”

“No thank you, Ma’am,” said Green. “Did you get the subpoena that was dropped off yesterday?”

“Yes, Detective. I have pulled all the files you requested. These type of files are normally supposed to be confidential and all, but I guess if you have a warrant or whatever you call it, it is okay with me.”

“We’re looking for information on three young Croatian boys who were initially placed with your agency in January 1996. Their names were Debit, Gegic, and Rkatsiteli Gurdic. The older boy was Debit, who was twelve when he was placed; the other two were twins, and were each 11 years old.”

“Yes, Detective, I remember those boys well. Incredibly intelligent, those three. Many of the other adopted children we see have profound learning disabilities—usually the result of institutionalization, malnutrition, or lack of parental involvement. But these three tested off the charts. None of the games here were a challenge for them. I had to go out and buy them crossword puzzle books.”

“How were they socially?” asked Agent Green.

“Not good. They were very withdrawn, spoke only to themselves. They would not socialize with the other children. They resisted authority fiercely. They could cause quite a tantrum if you tried to tell them to do something they did not want to do. The oldest one, Debit, I thought I would never get him placed.”

“Did any of the boys ever express dissatisfaction with being in America?”

“Now that’s an odd question. No, I cannot say I remember that.”

“What can you tell us about their life before they were placed with your agency?”

“Well, it’s all spelled out there in that folder. They were born in a small Croatian village by the Adriatic Sea. The father owned and managed a vineyard. The mother was a homemaker. They had one younger sister. The father’s business failed, and the father had to seek work in Sarajevo. They were caught in the wars then. It was a very hard time. The family managed to escape Sarajevo, and in 1995, the family made it to Srebrenica, which was supposed to be an established, U.N.-protected refugee camp. But unfortunately, things got very bad there.”

“What do you mean they got bad?” asked Agent Wilcox.

“Have you ever heard of the Srebrenica Massacre?”

“No,” said Green.

“The Serbian Army slaughtered tens of thousands of people there in the summer of 1995. Most of them were Muslims, but some were Croat Catholics like Gurdic’s family. The United Nations had sent a small contingent of peacekeepers. Most of them were from The Netherlands. But many of the Dutch peace keepers did not like Muslims. In fact, some Muslims complained that the peace keepers were as bad as the Serbian soldiers. Eventually, Bill Clinton got the Americans involved, and we started air bombing the Serbs, but it was too late for the people in the Srebrenica camps. I don’t know the specifics of what happened to the mother and sister of these boys, but I can tell you that the father was killed. The mother and sister never got out of the camps, and they were presumed dead. But the three boys escaped, running into the woods. They were eventually rescued by missionaries, and then they were placed here with our agency in January 1996.”

“So this Gagic,” said Wilcox, “He went to St. Louis, as I understand it?”

“Yes, Gagic went to St. Louis. Rkatsiteli went to Cleveland. And Debit went to... let me see. Yes, Debit went to Seattle.”

“Why weren’t they placed all with one family, if they were brothers?” asked Wilcox.

“Ah, Agent Wilcox, I can see you do not know much about adoptions. Placing a teenager with a new family is hard enough. Most parents want to adopt infants. There are fewer problems that way. When you adopt a teenager, who knows what baggage you are getting yourself into? Then there is the fact that the boys are foreign. Right there, you eliminate all the

parents who only want American children to adopt. Then you have the multiple-placements problem. Hardly any parents want to adopt more than one child at a time. So placing three international children who are 11 and 12 years old all with one family would be close to impossible. We were lucky that we placed them at all.”

“Separating from your brothers like that, after you have already lost your father, mother, and sister—that must be traumatic?”

“Yes, indeed. These boys were absolutely despondent over being separated. But there was nothing else we could do.”

“Can you give us the information on the families who adopted Rkatsiteli and Debit?”

“Sure, it is all right in the folder. Can you send me a Xerox of that back? That folder is my only copy of those records.”

“Absolutely. We thank you for your time, Ma’am.” Green took the folder, and, as they left the adoption agency, Green turned to Wilcox. “We gotta find those other two brothers.”

Wilcox nodded and the two got back in the car. On the way back to the airport, Wilcox made arrangements for two flights to Seattle.

CHAPTER 66. FIRE

Island of Boyuca. Bay of Honduras.

The Fire House

JOHN MORSE WAS apprehensive when he drew the Fire House, but he believed that every test on this island had a way out. It was just a matter of maintaining composure and using one's wits. The difficulty with this theory, however, is that it is hard to maintain your composure when you are being shot at with a flame thrower.

At the far end of the hut, a metal nozzle protruded from the wall, which had a small blue flame emanating from the tip. Morse had only an instant to dive out of the way before a ray of flame shot from the nozzle at him from across the room. Morse looked back, and flame was covering the wooden door. Morse ran away from the door toward one wall of the hut, hoping to escape the flame. The nozzle with the blue flame on it pivoted towards Morse. Morse dove out of the way again, as another ray of flame shot at him from the nozzle. Morse noted that the nozzle with the flame stood out from the wall a good six inches. Morse figured that if he went to the far wall—the wall containing the nozzle—and crouched along the wall near the corner directly next to the nozzle, there would be no way for the nozzle to pivot to shoot him. A few moments later the nozzle pivoted again, at as sharp an angle as was possible, but as Morse suspected, he had found the blind spot on the flame thrower. The flame could not hurt him from here. Morse crouched in the corner as flame shot past him into the wall.

A few minutes later, the flame thrower stopped, and Morse could rest in the corner. He looked across the room. A few flames were still flickering on the wooden door, which went out after a few minutes. Morse looked at the walls of the chamber, looking for more nozzles, and worried about the next test to come. Morse rested for the next six or seven hours in the corner, shifting uncomfortably on the stone floor. He was happy that nothing more was happening, but he was determined not to fall asleep.

After the light from the small hole in the roof gradually became more dim, and then non-existent, Morse determined that it must be night. Morse thought about his son. He was hopeful that Zach could withstand the cold of the Cold Hut. After another hour, the nozzle with the blue

flame was back, sticking from the wall only a few feet from Morse's head. It pivoted right and then left as if searching for a target. Morse got an idea. Lying on his back, he used the power of his thighs and kicked at the nozzle from below with his hiking boot, hoping to bend the nozzle out of commission. Fire erupted from the nozzle and Morse dove back, as fire shot upward to the ceiling. Morse had not succeeded in breaking the weapon altogether, but the flame was now shooting upward.

Just then, Morse saw a second blue flame, on the far side of the hut near the door. His brain had only a second to put it together—they were going to shoot at him from both sides. He dove to the right, narrowly missing the stream of flame coming to him from the side of the hut near the door. He began sprinting along the wall, and dove into the corner as flame shot over his head. With only seconds to spare, he managed to get in the blind spot of the second nozzle by crouching against the wooden door. The wood on the door felt a little hot. It had been charred a little from the first shot of the flamethrower. That gave Morse another idea. Taking out a spare shirt from his backpack, Morse lifted the shirt up to the blue flame coming from the nozzle by the front door. Once the shirt was on fire and drenched in the fuel from the flamethrower, he tossed it near the wooden door, and, using his feet, kicked it under the door. It was slow at first, but the dry wood of the door was soon engulfed in flame. Morse stayed in the blind spot of the nozzle, watching the door burn for the next half hour. When the flames had finally died down, the door was black and charred and covered in ash. Morse stood in front of the door, and with a mighty kick, cracked the door in the middle, dislodging a large piece of wood. Just then, Morse turned around and saw five more blue flames stick out of different points in the wall. A feeling of dread swept over Morse. He only had seconds. He kicked the door again viciously and it cracked a second time. Out of the corner of his eye, Morse saw flame starting to erupt from one side of the hut. He slammed his shoulder with all his weight into the door, and it came crashing down with him on top of it, as flame shot in the air above Morse. Just outside the door was a small stone passage to the outside air, about five feet long. Morse crawled to the end of the passage. Flame came at him, but it fell just short of harming him. Morse took a moment to breathe the cool night air. He had almost been incinerated. Morse sat at the end of the passageway, as fire shot out throughout the interior of the hut for the next few minutes. Morse went to sleep for about

an hour, and all was quiet. There was no more fire in the Fire House. He supposed that they had given up on him. Morse peeked out around the outer edge of the wall. No one was up. The area around the six huts was quiet. The only sentry was the large white moon.

Morse did not want to leave the Fire House, because the challenge was to stay in the house all night. He was concerned that he might be disqualified if he left the hut, but he was more concerned about his son freezing in the Cold House. Morse gathered some of the charred wood from the door of the hut. He also took out a Ziploc bag full of two packs dry matches. Creeping silently from house to house, he found the Cold House. Climbing a nearby tree, Morse landed on the roof of the Cold House and immediately walked to the hole in the roof, which was covered with a plate of glass, a measure apparently intended to keep in the cold. Using one of the pieces of wood, Morse slammed the wood into the glass plate, shattering it. Morse then threw in the wood and the matches, and loudly whispered his son's name. Then he high-tailed it back to the outer passageway of the Fire House, where he crouched against the stone wall until sunset. He waited until he saw the tribal chieftain finally coming towards his hut, and then he went back inside, pretending that he had been inside the hut all night.

CHAPTER 67. RANSOM

The White House, 8 p.m. EST, three days after the border lockdown.

SHEILA SIMMS, DIRECTOR of Homeland Security, walked briskly down the hall to the Situation Room, where President Anna Scall and other high-ranking officials were waiting.

“Madame President, we have had contact from the terrorists.” Simms took out a disk.

“How did you get the disk?” asked the President. “Was it mailed to the White House?”

Simms looked grim. “It’s on You Tube, Madame President. It already has over 500,000 hits and that is growing by the minute. This thing will be everywhere in the next hour. They obviously timed it so that it would get on the nightly news.” Simms put the disk in a laptop, and the image played on the gigantic flat screens in the Situation Room.

The video showed two good looking black-haired men wearing white lab coats, both seated at a table. Behind the men was a large flat screen television on a metal stand of some kind, and behind that was a black sheet, which blocked the rest of the background.

“Good evening, Madame President. A new airborne strain of the Ebola Virus is now in America, The Netherlands, and Brazil, and within the next few days, tens of millions of Americans, Dutch, and Brazilians will be infected and die, unless you meet our demands and take immediate action.

“My adopted name is Matteo Graciano, but my birth name is Gegic Gurdic. I am the son of Yuriy and Lilya Gurdic. I was born in Makarska, Croatia with my two brothers, Rkatsiteli and Debit, and my little sister Marastina. This is my twin brother Rkatsiteli.” The other brother nodded.

“You are probably asking yourselves, ‘Why are they doing this?’ And the answer, Madame President, is justice—justice for my father, my mother, and my sister—who died cruel and horrific deaths due to the apathy of Americans, the cruelty of the Dutch, and the savagery of the Serbs. Most Americans know practically nothing about anything happening elsewhere in the world, but tonight, Americans will get an important history lesson, and they will not forget now what happened in the 1990s in Bosnia-Herzegovina.”

Graciano then recounted the history of the Bosnian conflict, and his

family's history, from the tiny village in Makarska, to Sarajevo, and finally to the camps near Srebrenica.

“When your President Clinton was running for office in 1992, he criticized President Bush for not intervening in Bosnia. Yet, when Clinton became President in January 1993, he did virtually nothing for over two years. Despite well-publicized photographs and news journal articles showing the atrocities in Bosnia, very similar to the Nazi concentration camps, Clinton was slow to act. By the time he intervened in late 1995, my father was shot to death, my mother was raped, and my baby sister was bludgeoned by Serb soldiers. And while we were waiting for help from the Americans, we were supposedly protected by the U.N. peacekeepers from The Netherlands. Peace keepers? What a joke. The Dutch were as bad as the Serbs, standing by and laughing when our people were brutally murdered, shot, raped; when thousands were buried in mass graves; when men and boys were taken out behind a barn and shot by firing squads, and when even babies were not safe from murderers and cutthroats. And so we condemn the Americans. We condemn President Clinton. We condemn the Dutch. And that is why we focused our attack at a soccer game between the Americans and the Dutch. And that is why your people will suffer from this virus, in the same way our family suffered at the hands of a virus which destroyed everything we had.” Graciano began tearing up, thinking of his family. He wiped his eyes and continued.

“This virus has a cure. From the cave bat which was the host for this Mackinac Ebola Virus, we have created a cure. There are thousands and thousands of syringes sitting in two warehouses somewhere in the world which can cure every man, woman and child affected by this virus. And we will give you the locations of these warehouses if you comply with our demands within 72 hours.”

Dominic Chastain then pulled out a list.

“Madame President, here is our first demand. This is a list of fifty-two Serbian and Dutch war criminals that we know of who are still alive today. We will provide those names to the FBI via a secure e-mail which we will provide. The top two names on the list are individuals directly responsible for the death of my father. Each of these men must be killed, and video confirmation of those killings must be sent to a secure website which we will provide. Our second demand is for President Bill Clinton to make a public apology, on YouTube, in which he apologizes to the

victims of Bosnian genocide, and in which he takes full responsibility for the American delay in getting involved in the Bosnian conflict. Third, we want \$25 billion wired to an account which we will send to you via a secured e-mail. This amount is not for us, but for an unnamed party who has assisted us with this Plan. The quicker you act, the greater chance Americans, Dutch, Brazilians, and other infected persons will be cured of the virus. If you fail to act within 72 hours, we will not provide the location of the cure, and tens of millions of your citizens will die. When our demands have been met, and justice has been achieved, we will surrender ourselves to the authorities for prosecution. Good night.”

President Scall was horrified.

“Has Bill Clinton seen this yet?” asked the President.

“Yes, Madame President,” said Simms. “He was in D.C. for a fundraiser for his wife. He and Hillary are on their way over to the White House as we speak. And we have added extra security for Chelsea.”

“Rudy, what do we have on these two terrorists?” asked the President.

Rudy Montana, Director of the FBI, addressed the President.

“Madame President. We know that both of the terrorists are working with Julio Cezanne, a Mexican drug dealer, and Davy Branco, his cousin. Cezanne is probably the unidentified person who wants to obtain the \$25 billion they just mentioned. We know they recently left Brazilian airspace in a private jet. We know they are somewhere in the Caribbean, but we have not locked down a location yet. We are tracing the YouTube post now. You heard them explain their upbringing. Victims of the Bosnian conflict, they lost their father, mother, and sister, who were all killed in a concentration camp. They managed to escape, along with their older brother, and were placed with a Tennessee adoption agency. From there, Gegig Gurdic, also known as Matteo Graciano, was placed with a family in St. Louis. The adopted mother is a lawyer; adopted father is a doctor. Neither knew any of this, and they seem as surprised as anyone else. The other twin, Rkatsiteli Gurdic, known as Dominic Chastain, was adopted by a family in Cleveland. They relocated to Germany, and he went to work at Germany’s Level 4 Biohazard Lab. Again, the German parents knew nothing about it. We know of no other accomplices. It looks like Graciano obtained the virus in Tanzania, shipped it to Mexico, and then he and his brother cooked up the virus somewhere near Guadalajara. Cezanne provided security and all the testing labs. Presumably, this is

where they also manufactured the cure, if you can believe them. The virus was distributed in water sprayers at the soccer game in Natal.”

“They made it sound like they were sure the virus was out in America. I thought we had that all locked down,” said the President.

“There were 112 Americans who made it through before the border lockdown. 109 of those are in quarantine and did not infect anyone else. There is one gentleman in Michigan...” An aide tapped the FBI Director on the wrist and whispered to him. “Excuse me, not Michigan, Minnesota. There is one gentleman in Minnesota who we missed by about an hour. He went to parts unknown with three of his fishing buddies to go fishing. The wife knows he is somewhere in Minnesota, but they do not have cell phones, and they have not used their credit cards. We hope to grab him tomorrow possibly. There are two other women from New Jersey who were scheduled for FBI pickup, when a group of gangsters murdered our team, and, posing as FBI operatives, kidnapped the two women. We do not know who kidnapped them, but it is important to note that, according to the DEA, Cezanne has a drug distribution network in New Jersey. Perhaps he instructed his men to kidnap these two women in order to spread the virus. We have a dragnet set up all over New Jersey to try and find these women, and we hope to have results for you soon. Other than that, everyone is accounted for.”

“It seems weird to me that they would act so cocky about the virus getting out, don’t you think? Are they bluffing?” asked the President. Montana nodded.

“Unless they are relying on the New Jersey women, it would seem to me, Madame President, that they are bluffing,” said Montana. “It is highly doubtful that they would know about the gentleman in Minnesota. Now it is definitely true that we are going to have problems in Brazil, and probably problems in The Netherlands. But I believe we are safe in America.”

“Has anyone gone through this list of supposed war criminals, Sheila?”

“Not yet, Madame President. But I have several teams working on it now. And we have Hank Armstrong from the CIA helping as well. We hope to have dossiers of each person on that list to you within 24 hours.”

“He only gave us 72 hours, so kick some people in the rear down there. We need this ASAP.”

The Secretary of Defense spoke next. “Madame President, have you given any thought as to whether you are going to sanction the elimination of these fifty-two targets? I know we do not make deals with terrorists, but if millions of American lives are at stake, I wouldn’t lose a lot of sleep over fifty dead Serbs.”

The President’s Chief of Staff was disgusted. “They are not targets, they are people, for crying out loud. The President is not going to sanction the murder of fifty-two innocent people.”

The President looked at her Chief of Staff, giving her the subtle look to be quiet. The President was definitely considering the elimination of those fifty-two people.

Hank Armstrong, the Director of the CIA, had an idea. “Madame President, if worse comes to worst, I could reach out to some of our friends in Hollywood. If we needed to simulate a death, without actually doing it, that might be an option. Graciano only said we had to post the video of the killings to a website. If we did it expertly enough, he might not ever know. That could buy us time to find him.” The President liked that idea and told Armstrong to look into it.

“What about President Clinton?” asked Simms.

“Have him come straight to the West Wing as soon as he hits the grounds. We need to talk. In the meantime, fellas, find these guys. Okay?”

The meeting with the President was adjourned. As she left the room, Sheila Simms wondered if her boss was really going to ask Bill Clinton to apologize on You Tube.

CHAPTER 68. POOL

BOLINDA JEFFRIES OPENED her eyes wide. Less than two feet above her head were the faces of three jaguars, staring at her with fierce yellow eyes. Bolinda froze. Don't move a muscle, she thought. Just then, the door to the hut burst open and the jaguars scattered. Skip Drame came in and picked up a terrified Bolinda from the floor.

"Hey, girl! You made it! I thought you were Catnip. How'd you do it?"

"Is it dawn yet?" asked Bolinda, dazed.

"Yep. Natives just opened up my hut. Zach's outside. He's frozen as a Popsicle. I think he might have some frostbite issues on his legs. Let me get you outa here." Drame held Bolinda's arm and escorted her from the dark hut into the early morning light. Bolinda felt good to be outside, away from the jaguars. The tribal chieftain was waiting for them, along with dozens of smiling island children, who all seemed excited that the group had made it safely through the night. The children gathered around Drame and Jeffries, touching their hands and clothes like they were gods. Jeffries was still shaken from the evening with the jaguars, but she was starting to lighten up.

"Hey, next time, I'll take the Dark House, okay?" laughed Jeffries. "Wow, what happened in there? Did you cry for your nightlight?"

"It was awesome. They pumped peyote in through the walls. One of the best trips I ever had. I saw an octopus."

"Oh, that's great." The two walked down the path and joined Zach, who was shivering under a wool blanket. His face looked pale and he had the pallor of a cancer victim. Drame put both of his arms around Zach tightly. "How's it going, little man? You going to make it?"

"I don't feel so good," said Zach. "I cannot feel my foot."

"Let me check it out," said Drame. "Here, sit down." Drame knelt down and took off Zach's tennis shoe and sock from his right foot. All of the toes on Zach's foot were black. It did not look good. "Let me see your other foot." With Zach in obvious discomfort, Drame pulled off the shoe and sock from the left foot. It looked just as bad. The toes and ankle were all black, and there were little red blisters everywhere. Drame was concerned that Zach would never regain sensation in his feet again. It was not a good condition for a runner. But Drame wasn't a doctor. Maybe some time in the sun would get the feet back to normal.

"What was it like?" asked Drame, as the three made their way to the

next hut.

“I was in a frickin’ meat locker. I have never been so cold in my entire life. Fortunately, at about four in the morning, the glass ceiling pane shattered and someone threw in a bunch of firewood and some matches. If it weren’t for that, I am sure I would have died in there. Have you seen my dad?”

“He’s up here. We’ll see him soon.”

The chieftain opened the door of the Bat House, and Ka’an came out. He had blisters and bites all over his face. His face looked sunburned. Ka’an also looked sick.

“That was a night I will never forget,” said Ka’an.

“You don’t look like you are foaming at the mouth or anything,” volunteered Drame hopefully.

“Skip, I was attacked for several hours by vampire bats. How was your night?”

Drame felt guilty again that he had the easy house. He decided not to mention the octopus.

Several natives pulled and dragged Charlie Winston from the Razor House. He was covered in blood. Drame and Jeffries rushed up to him.

“Charlie, are you okay?” asked Jeffries, concerned.

Winston could barely speak. He held up his wounded hand. “I lost all my fingers,” said Winston, crying softly. “I was about an inch away from a guillotine slicing me in half.” Jeffries felt Winston’s forehead.

“You are burning up with fever, Charlie. We have to get off this island and get you to a hospital. What happened in there?”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” said Winston, trembling.

“Can you get up, Charlie?” asked Drame, hooking Winston’s arm around Drame’s shoulder.

“I’ll try,” said Winston. “I broke my leg, too.”

The group went on to the last hut. The chieftain noticed that the door to the hut was in shambles. He kicked open the remaining pieces, and John Morse walked out unscathed. He looked like he had just spent a pleasant evening in the hut. The chieftain was amazed. He looked at Morse in awe, wondering how he had survived the night. The group clapped when they saw Morse, happy that no one had perished. Morse immediately ran over to his son Zach.

“Zach, how are you, son?”

“Not so good, Pops. I can’t feel my feet.” Morse inspected his son’s feet. He was upset when he saw the damage to his son’s feet. He would never be a runner again. He decided not to tell him the bad news.

“It looks okay, Zach. We just have to get you out of here and to a hospital, and your feet will be fine.”

“Hey, Dad, was that you that visited me last night?”

Morse motioned for his son to be quiet, and then winked at him.

“I have no idea what you are talking about, Zach.”

The tribal chieftain began speaking loudly, and Ka’an translated.

“He wants us to follow him.” The chieftain, with hordes of island children following the group, made their way from the six houses up a winding trail, which went up the side of a mountain. Finally, near the top of the mountain, the chieftain arrived at another cave opening, and beckoned the group of six to enter the cave.

“Ka’an, can you tell them that we need to leave the island and get Zach and Charlie and you to a hospital for medical care?”

Ka’an translated, and the chieftain seemed to get angry and began yelling at Ka’an. “Um, let’s just say the answer was no,” said Ka’an. “But he says that this is our last test, the final Trial of the Xibalba. If we pass this test, then there is no question that we are Xbalanque and Hunahpu. My guess is that we can call the shots after that.”

With Winston being supported by Drame, and Zach being supported by his father, the group of six limped into the cave. As soon as they were inside the mouth of the cave, the chieftain yelled out a command, and rocks began falling, covering the mouth of the cave. There was no turning back. The pathway went on for several hundred feet and then went up a stone staircase. A solid metal door was framed into the stone. When everyone had made it to the top of the landing, Bolinda Jeffries turned the metal handle. They were in a small room. On three sides were stone walls. On the far side, there was a large opening in the rock. The group of six went to the opening. They could see a good part of the island from their lofty perch. Morse looked down. Down below them over a hundred feet below was a large pool of water. John Morse became excited. “The pool of water,” he mumbled to himself. Just then, there was a rushing sound, and, from a groove just in front of their feet, fire shot up. All seven dove back to avoid the flames. Soon, there was a wall of fire where the cave opening once was. The flame went up to the ceiling, some fifteen feet

high in the air. John Morse suddenly remembered with dread the writing on the map which he had shown the others on the yacht. The final Trial of the Xibalba, he thought. “Welcome to the Oven,” said Morse, staring at the fire.

Charlie Winston collapsed to the floor. He was very weak from loss of blood. He curled up on the floor of the oven room, fire swirling all around him, and thought of his son and his wife. He was never going to see them again. Why had he ever come on this Godforsaken trip? Murielle would never know what happened to him. She would probably spend the rest of her life searching the Bay of Honduras for him. As he began to lose hope, Winston looked at the floor next to his cheek. He noticed that there were grooves along the floor. Winston remembered the guillotines and the buzz saws from the Razor House.

“Oh, hell no!” he said. He crouched up and looked into the grooves, searching for a blade or a saw but he saw nothing. Bolinda Jeffries saw him inspecting the floor. She had seen something like this herself in the Jaguar House—the groove in the floor which contained oil for the fire separating her from the jaguars.

“Watch out, guys. I think there are saws that are going to come out of there,” said Winston.

“No, Charlie,” said Jeffries. “I think it is a track for oil. They had one like this in the Jaguar House. They pour oil down the groove and the fire spreads down the line.” Twenty minutes later, Bolinda Jeffries was proved correct, as fire slowly erupted along the groove line, and began to spread down one of the groove tracks closest to the door where they had come in. Morse looked up at the ceiling, but he could see no way out. Drame took off his shirt, as it was sweltering in this room with the flames all around them.

“Can you see what they are doing?” asked Jeffries. “The fire is going to keep spreading, going line after line, until we have no way out of here and the whole room is covered in fire. We have to get out of here!”

Morse inspected the lines in the floor. She was right.

“Man,” said Zach. “First they freeze me to death, and now they want to burn me alive. Like, make up your mind, you know?”

“There has to be a way out,” said Morse under his breath. “We cannot panic. This is our last test. There is always a way out. We have seen that with every test so far. We just have to use our heads.” But try as he might,

Morse could not think of anything.

“We have nothing to put the fire out with,” said Morse, talking out loud. “There is no door that I can see. There is no way to go up. It is almost as if the only way out is through the fire.”

“Now there’s a brilliant idea, John,” scoffed Bolinda Jeffries. “Let’s just run right through the fire.”

“That’s it!” exclaimed Charlie weakly from the ground. “We run through the fire! We’re the catfish!”

Everyone turned to Winston on the ground, and gave him a look like he was a raving lunatic. Winston leaned up on one arm.

“No, no, think about it. Remember the story Ka’an told us on the yacht,” said Winston. “When Xbalanque and Hunahpu were put into the oven, they were consumed by fire, and then their ashes were thrown into the river, where they turned into catfish and eventually escaped to return and defeat the Xibalba. If they were victorious by entering the fire, then that is what we have to do!”

Morse thought about it. The more he thought about it, the more it made a perverse kind of sense. “I think Charlie may be right,” said Morse.

Zach thought everyone had lost their minds. “Um, hello? Last I checked, none of you could turn yourself into catfish. We have bone and skin like any other human. And that will burn, Dad. You go through that fire, and it is sure suicide.”

“Maybe they are watching us right now,” said Morse, “and the minute we run for the fire, they somehow turn the fire off, and we thereby prove ourselves as the Hero Twins.”

“Or maybe these are backwoods natives,” said Zach, “who believe in a bunch of crazy things like talking mosquitoes, and they are waiting to see if you have some kind of magical power that prevents you from getting burned and allows you to turn into a fish! Dad, don’t do it! This is crazy talk.”

“Look at those lines in the floor. We are going to get burned in here eventually if we do nothing. I do not see another way out,” said Morse. “Do you?”

“What if we just wait it out and ultimately they turn the fire off? Maybe it is a test of our nerve to see how long we can last,” said Zach.

“I see your point, Zach,” said his father, “but that does not fit with the Hero Myth. I think that everything we have seen so far matches the

Hero Myth—the river of blood, the room with the scorpion, the riddle of the bridges, the stone chair, the mannequins, the houses. It all fits, don't you see? This HAS to be the way!"

"I know one thing," said Winston. "If I stay on this island much longer, I am going to die of infection or sepsis from my hand and leg injuries; Zach is going to lose his feet to frostbite; and Ka'-an is going to go into toxic shock from those vampire bat bites, or we can simply sit here and get consumed by fire. I am in favor of risking it."

"I am with Charlie," said Morse.

"I am in favor of not risking it," said Zach Morse.

"I am with Zach," said Drame.

"Me too," said Jeffries.

"Me too," said Ka'-an.

John Morse helped his friend Charlie Winston up from the ground.

"Well, Charlie, what do you think?" asked Morse.

"I think I will see you chumps on the other side."

Winston held on to John Morse's hand and they faced the wall of fire. Morse and Winston borrowed some clothing from their friends and held it over their faces and necks.

Zach was panicked. "Dad! Seriously! Don't do this, Dad!" He ran to his father and grabbed his arm. "Dad! Don't leave me! You will die if you run in there."

John Morse hugged his son. "I love you, Zach. No father was ever more proud of a son that I am proud of you." Morse kissed his son on the cheek. "But I have to do this." He eased his son's hand away and then looked at Winston. "On three."

"One, two, three!" Morse sprinted and Winston hobbled toward the wall of flame.

Instantly, John Morse felt himself falling off the cliff. But that feeling was immediately overwhelmed by the massive pain all over his body. His whole body was engulfed in flame, and it was burning him. Zach had been right. He was going to be burned alive. After two seconds of excruciating pain from the fire, he felt himself hit something below. He had fallen into the pool of water. Morse went unconscious, his charred body floating toward the bottom of the pool.

Back up in the Oven room, the wall of flame had subsided to less than ankle height. Apparently, after Morse and Winston dove through the

flames, the natives had somehow turned down the flames.

“Dad!!” Zach screamed. He went to the edge and looked out. Where the fire once was the opening in the cliff wall was now clear. From here, he could see the entire island. Far below him was the large pool of crystal blue water. He looked down for his father and his professor, but he could not see either one. “Dad!” he screamed again. Zach dove from the top of the cliff towards the water below and landed with a splat into the pool. Where was his father? He dove down into the water. He was quickly surprised by slithering, slimy things around his legs and body. This pool had snakes in it! But snakes were the last thing on Zach’s mind right now. He dove down frantically looking for his father. A moment later, three more giant splashes hit the water as Ka’an, Bolinda Jeffries, and Skip Drame came plummeting into the pool. Drame dove down and found the burned body of Charlie Winston and pulled him to the surface of the pool. Zach found his father, and pulled him up as well.

“Dad! Are you okay? Breathe, Dad! Oh, God, Dad! Don’t die!” Zach pulled his father to the edge of the pool. John Morse was unconscious, but his face was covered in third degree burns. Zach tried to take his father to the edge of the pool to get him out of the water and give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but he was met by an islander who pushed him back into the water.

“You son of a bitch!” yelled Zach. “He’s dying, let him out, motherfucker!” But the islander pushed Zach and his father back in. Zach was crying, begging his father to wake up. But suddenly, an amazing thing happened. The burns on John Morse’s face started to heal themselves. What was previously a bloody pulp of red burns was now starting to look like a bad sunburn. Zach also felt something amazing himself. He was getting feeling back into his feet. He lifted his father out of the water a little bit and looked at his father’s chest. It was beginning to heal. Ten feet away, Skip and Bolinda were helping Charlie Winston.

“Hey, Zach,” said Drame, mesmerized. “Take a look at Charlie’s hand.”

Under the water, it appeared as though Charlie Winston’s fingers were regenerating, like a lizard re-growing a cut tail. Almost on cue, both John Morse and Charlie Winston started coughing and sputtering.

“Dad!” yelled Zach from the water. “Dad, are you okay!”

“Ahhhhhhh!” yelled John Morse in agony. “I’m on fire! I’m on fire!”

Zach shook him by the shoulders.

“Dad! You’re not on fire anymore. This water healed you. You are okay!”

“Huh?” John Morse looked at his arms and they were not scalded anymore.

“What do I look like? Am I burned?” asked Morse.

“You were a minute ago, Pops, and then this water healed you. Don’t you see, Dad? This is the mother-freakin’ Fountain of Youth! We are swimming in it!!”

Winston inspected his own body and was astounded that his fingers had regenerated. He looked at his arms and torso. He was not burned. He felt his broken shin. It was healed as well.

“Hey, what’s that by my legs?” asked Winston. He reached down and pulled up a purple snake out of the water. “Well, what do you know? We landed in a snake pit.” Noting the shape of their heads, Winston said, “Don’t worry, boys, I don’t think they are poisonous.”

Zach rolled onto his back and took off the shoe and sock on one foot. He held the foot out of the water. His toes were pink and moving just fine!

“Hey, Dad! Look, no more frostbite!”

“And look at me,” said Ka’an. “Those bat bites are all gone.”

Bolinda was busy treading water in the pool. She was happy that her friends were healed. “Well, I am glad you are all okay, but the important thing is, do I look any younger?”

“As a matter of fact you do,” said Morse. And while he was kind of joking, as he looked at Bolinda, she actually did look pretty good. Now that he thought about it, he was feeling pretty good himself. The six travelers laughed and dog-paddled to the edge of the pool and walked out onto the lush grass. This time, the islander helped them out of the pool. Zach now realized he had kept them in the pool for the healing process to finish. The five men and one woman walked over a small crest, and there below them were thousands of islanders, who immediately gave a mighty, happy cheer. The islanders applauded and began chanting, “Xbalanque! Hunahpu! Xbalanque! Hunahpu!” John Morse turned to his friend Charlie Winston, who had one of the purple snakes draped around his neck as a souvenir.

“Well, I guess I now know what it is like to be a catfish!” joked Morse.

“Ha! You got that right!” said Winston.

Zach came up and hugged his dad and looked out on the crowd.

“Dad, don’t ever run into a wall of fire again. That was really stupid.”

“Ha ha, Zach. Don’t you know that your Father is always right?”

As the tribal chieftain made his way up a set of stairs to reach them, all six members of the party turned back to the crystal blue pool. They were definitely going to get some of that water. No one back home would ever believe that they had actually found the Fountain of Youth.

CHAPTER 69. TARGETS

Trinidad

AFTER THE RANSOM video was uploaded to You Tube, Cezanne broke out cigars for his cousin and the two scientists.

“Well done, boys. Now we sit back and wait.”

Graciano declined the cigar. He was not particularly excited about killing millions of people. He hoped that the President ordered the roundup of the Serbian and Dutch war criminals. That’s all he cared about. Graciano looked at Cezanne. The man disgusted him.

“Out of curiosity,” said Graciano. “Julio, assuming that the United States gives in to our demands and wires \$25 billion to this account—and that is a big assumption—how in the world are you ever going to hope to keep that money? You know that they are going to trace that money wherever it goes.”

“One thing you need to know about drug dealers, my friend, is that they hire the smartest bankers and lawyers in the world. This wire transfer will hit banks in Cyprus, Panama, the Bahamas, Nevis/St. Kitts, Singapore, Venuatu, and Luxembourg, before it comes to rest in the Isle of Mann in the Irish Sea.”

“Where is Venuatu?” asked Graciano. “I have never heard of that.”

“It is a tiny island near New Zealand. And it has some of the best tax laws in the world. Each of the bankers in those countries take a two-percent administrative fee. For a transfer of \$25 billion, that’s \$500 million for each country. I have an arrangement with a man in the bank in Venuatu. He gives me 80% of the \$500 million dollar administrative fee, and he keeps 20% for himself. I walk away with \$400 million in cash, and then I kill the banker in Venuatu. The United States Government chases its tail tracking down the money in all those islands, and by the time they figure it out, I am long gone.”

“So no one ever picks up the money in the Isle of Mann?”

“Right.”

“Wow, that’s ingenious. You think it will work?”

“Of course it will work. As long as this virus does what it is supposed to do. Have you heard from your brother?”

Graciano and Chastain looked at each other nervously.

“What, did you think I didn’t know about your brother Debit at

the CDC? Boys, I don't invest this much money in an operation without knowing who I am dealing with."

"We haven't heard from him in several days," said Graciano.

"Well, I would try and reach him if I were you," said Cezanne. Cezanne took out a pineapple and put it on the wooden table in front of them. With a large machete, he cleaved the fruit in half with a vicious blow. "Pineapple?" he asked, offering the scientists a skewered piece.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

AGENT JIMMY POND looked through his infrared binoculars. The 62 year-old target was in the kitchen. No one else was home. "Go," said Pond to his driver. Pond's driver slowly pulled the dark telephone van in front of the house, and opened the side panel. Pond rang the doorbell. A man in pajamas answered a minute later, holding a half-eaten banana.

"Can I help you?"

Before the man in pajamas could register what was going on, Pond hit him with the TASER. The man collapsed in Pond's arms, dropping the banana. Pond took out a syringe and shot it into the man's bicep. Lifting the man in pajamas over his shoulder, Pond threw him into the back of the van and closed the door. Target Number 14 of the list of 52 was now in the bag.

The White House. Washington, D.C.

"HOW ARE WE on the list?" asked the President to CIA Director Hank Armstrong.

"Fourteen are at dark sites. Twelve were already dead. That leaves twenty-six to go."

"Will we make it?" asked the President.

"My guess is we will end up five or six short," said Armstrong. "There just is not enough notice to plan these ops properly. These snatch-and-grabs are exposing our people in the field. It is not how we normally operate."

"Okay, can we find look-alikes for the people we cannot get?"

"I am working on it, Madame President."

"How are we on tracking the bank account where the money is going?"

"It is in the Isle of Mann in the Irish Sea. Anyone tries to pick that

up, we will be all over them. But we are ready to make the transfer if it comes to that.”

“Good. I do not want these guys winding up with that money. Is it Cezanne?”

“We have not confirmed that, but we believe so.”

“Have you been able to trace the You Tube post?”

“Yes, it came from the Caribbean island of Trinidad, but by the time we got a team there, they were long gone. No idea where they are now, but we are working with the Trinidad government to isolate flights out of the country. Their equivalent of the FAA there is more like three guys and a spiral notebook, so it might be difficult to trace. But we are on it. We have boots on the ground there. It is a matter of time. ”

“What’s going on in The Netherlands?”

“It is not good. The virus is out. They got twenty patients today at different hospitals. It is going to be tough to contain. Brazil is worse. Two hundred suspected cases today.”

“Good God, this is a nightmare,” said the President.

“I know.”

“Keep me posted, Hank.”

“Will do, Madame President.”

CHAPTER 70. RETURN

Bay of Honduras, Skip Drame's Yacht.

AFTER BEING REVERED by the islanders as the second coming of Xbalanque and Hunahpu, Morse and Winston had been treated like royalty. The islanders agreed to give them two huge clay vessels of the miraculous water from the healing pool. Charlie Winston got to keep one of the purple snakes from the pool to give to his son. They had also been given a fireside feast, in which they had dined on roasted boar and fresh fruit, while watching fire-eating, dancing, and other entertainment. The tribal chieftain had been despondent over his men's treatment of the ship's captain and the other passengers on the yacht, stating that he had no idea at the time that Morse and Winston were, in fact, Xbalanque and Hunahpu, and he had begged for their forgiveness. The next morning, the chief had sent them back to the yacht on outrigger canoes, and re-equipped them with supplies and food for the voyage home. It had taken the group of six considerable time to figure out how to raise the anchor and operate the huge yacht, but after a little trial and error, they had managed it. They were now back in the Bay of Honduras, chugging towards Cancun. They still had no cell or satellite service, but Drame had promised to change that once they arrived in Cancun.

In the ship's refrigerator, Drame actually found some steaks, and Winston had volunteered to act as Chief Barbecuer. Bolinda found some red wine in the galley. That evening, they all gave toasts to Mountain Man Pete and the other fallen, and Drame agreed to contact the relatives of those who were killed and explain the circumstances of their deaths. It was a sobering moment. But the conversation quickly turned to their harrowing escapes from death. Charlie Winston gave a particularly exciting tale of his encounter with the blades of the Razor House, and John Morse finally explained how he had escaped to give firewood to his son. For the next two hours, the group of six sat around a table relaxing and sharing stories from their adventures. They were all thrilled to be going home.

When they got to the harbor in Cancun, it was near midnight. Drame became concerned. He could put the yacht in "drive," but parking it in a harbor in the dark was another matter. He radioed the harbormaster and explained their plight. The harbormaster agreed to send them assistance in the morning, so the yacht was anchored for the evening. Late that night,

at about three in the morning, one of the passengers of the yacht silently snuck down to the hold where the large clay vessels of healing water were being stored. Lowering several plastic bottles into one of the vessels, the passenger removed some of the healing water.

The next morning, a small contingent of dock employees rode out to meet the yacht in a Zodiac raft. They boarded the yacht and helped steer it into the harbor. Everyone was pleased to be getting off the boat onto the Mexican mainland. John Morse went with his son to get Mexican food. Bolinda Jeffries went by herself to get her hair done and buy some new clothes and makeup. Ka'-an went to a local bar to have a drink. Charlie Winston went to buy a cell phone charger so that he could call his wife, and Drame went into town to call his agent. While the passengers were ashore, the passenger who had surreptitiously removed some of the healing water into plastic bottles went to an Internet café in Cancun. The passenger downloaded and printed certain documents, signed them, and then went to a UPS store. The passenger mailed the water bottles, the signed forms, and the handwritten, signed instructions to his associate in the United States. The mailing address was in Washington, D.C. None of the other passengers would learn of this transaction until much later.

After several hours, all the passengers returned to the yacht. Charlie Winston charged his phone. Once the phone was charged, Winston noticed that his wife had tried calling him dozens of times. He listened to the messages and was shocked by the news. Terrorists had introduced a strain of the Ebola virus into the United States and all the borders were locked down. He would not be able to get back into the United States. He called his son Teddy, who answered on the first ring.

“Daddy! Are you okay? I am so scared. Where are you?”

“Hey there, big man. I am sorry I have been gone so long. There was no cell service where we were, and things got a little more complicated when we got to the island. Is your Mom home?”

“No, Daddy. That’s the thing. Mom has gone missing. Grandma was babysitting and Mom never came home from work. That was a few days ago. She hasn’t called, and no one at her work knows where she is. I have been staying with Grandma.” Winston was very concerned.

“Let me talk to Grandma.”

“Grandma!” yelled Teddy. “It’s Daddy on the phone. He wants to talk to you.”

“Charlie?” asked the grandmother.

“Hey, Mom. Where is Murielle?”

“Charlie, nobody knows. Several nights ago, she just never came home from work. She has been out of town and working late a lot because of this virus thing, you know? But it is not like her to just not come home. Did you two have a fight or something?”

“No, Mom, I have been out of the country. I haven’t even had a chance to talk to her. Where was the last place someone saw her?”

“She was with that Jacob fellow at work. He says he has not seen her. Her boss called here, really mad, wanting to know how she could just leave in the middle of this crisis. You know that Murielle always was kind of a flake, Charlie. I mean, I had to miss two appointments to stay here with Teddy. I know it’s not something that you want to face, Charlie, but do you think she has left you?”

“Mom, you are bugging me right now. Murielle did not leave me. Something is terribly wrong if she has not come home and has not contacted you. So you haven’t gotten a text message or a voice message or e-mail, nothing?”

“Nothing, and Teddy hasn’t gotten anything either. Charlie, I am an old woman. I cannot lift this boy when he needs his transfers from the wheelchair. This is too much for me. You have to come home.”

“I am on my way right now, Mom. Just sit tight. Have you contacted the police?”

“No, I wasn’t sure you wanted me to call them. What if Murielle was leaving you? Then it would just be embarrassing for you.”

“Mom, call the police. Murielle would have come home. Something is wrong. With this border lockdown, it is going to be hard for me to get back in the United States, so you are going to have to do it, Mom. Call the police. Now.”

“OK, Winston. I will. You be careful, son.”

“I will, Mom.”

Winston called Bjorn Jendel, Murielle’s boss, at the C.D.C.

“Bjorn, this is Charlie Winston. I have been out of the country, without cell phones or newspapers, for the last week. I just learned about Murielle being absent. What can you tell me?”

“Charlie, she just went AWOL. We are right in the middle of the biggest crisis the CDC has ever seen. She is one of our top scientists, and

she just disappeared. She went to work one day, and then after work, no one has seen her since.”

“When was that?”

“Three days ago, I think. Do you have any ideas of where she would go, Charlie?”

“Bjorn, you know Murielle. You know how committed she is to her job. If she thought she could help people in this crisis, she would never abandon her post. I think she has met with foul play, Bjorn. Who was the last person to see her?”

“Jacob Roessler. I think Murielle gave him a ride home because his car wasn’t working. You might want to contact him. Do you have his cell? He is in Dallas right now.”

“Yes, I’ve got it. Thanks, Bjorn. Hey, I am on a boat heading towards the Gulf of Mexico. Tell me about this border lockdown. Is there any way to get through?”

“No, Charlie, the border is sealed until further notice. No way to get in.”

“So what are travelers supposed to do?” asked Winston.

“Sit tight, I guess. There is no way to guarantee the safety of Americans from this virus unless the border is shut down.”

“What kind of virus is it?”

“I can only tell you what’s in the public domain, Charlie. This is all top secret. But according to news reports, terrorists released an airborne strain of the Ebola virus at a soccer game in Brazil between the Americans and the Dutch. The President immediately locked down the borders once she learned of the threat but 112 Americans got through before the lockdown. All 112 of those people have been quarantined, so we think this is under control, but you never know.”

“How long do you think before we will be able to re-enter the country?”

“Hard to say, Charlie.”

“Bjorn, do they have a cure for this thing?”

“Again, I am just giving you what is in published news reports. The government has a drug which is about 60% effective if you have been exposed within a few days. Longer than that, it doesn’t work and you die.”

“Bjorn, I may have something that could help you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I cannot go into it over the phone, but if you can help us get into the country, I could show you.”

“Charlie, I am not into playing guessing games with you. If you have something that will help us, let us know.”

Winston thought about it, but his gut was telling him not to go into the details of their discovery over the phone.

“Is there any way you can get us into the country, Bjorn?”

“No, Charlie, it is total lockdown. No exceptions. I couldn’t even if I wanted to. Now, if you are able to find Murielle, please have her call me, okay?”

“Okay, Bjorn.” Winston hung up, disappointed. Where could his wife possibly be?

Charlie Winston called Jacob Roessler on his cell phone multiple times but he got no answer. Winston never liked Roessler. He always had the vague sense that Roessler was hitting on his wife.

Charlie returned to his friends on the yacht and explained the border lockdown. If they were going to get back into the country, they were going to have to sneak in. Skip Drame, Bolinda Jeffries, and Ka’an were not anxious to get caught sneaking into the country. Ka’an was working his way to become a United States citizen. Getting caught could get him deported. Bolinda Jeffries had seen enough danger for a lifetime. She would prefer to just sit on the yacht in the Gulf of Mexico and take a vacation until this crisis was over and the borders were opened. Skip Drame felt the same way. He did not have any pending movie or TV deals. He had plenty of money and nowhere to go for a while. He also preferred to wait it out.

But Charlie was not going to wait. His wife’s life was in danger and his paralyzed son was all alone. In addition, he was hoping that some of the water from the Boyuca healing pool might help his son. John Morse also wanted to get back into the country immediately, but for a different reason. He felt an obligation to help the country. They had curative waters which might help people infected by the virus. It would be irresponsible to wait here while people died. Morse also did not want to abandon his friend Charlie. Zach Morse, for his part, was going to go with his father. So the group agreed to split up. They would steer the yacht through the Gulf of Mexico, where they would anchor it several miles off the coast of Gulf Shores, Alabama. Drame, Jeffries, and Ka’an would remain on the

yacht. John Morse, Zach Morse, and Charlie Winston would take the Zodiac raft and try to enter the country at night. If they got caught, they would just return to the yacht. It was agreed that Morse and Winston would take several canteens of the Boyuca healing water with them, while the rest of the water would remain on the yacht. Winston was not too worried about their attempt to enter the country. They were American citizens, after all. Probably the worst that would happen if they were caught would be that they were turned away. Although John Morse was not very happy about it, Winston also planned on bringing the purple snake on the journey. Winston had secured it in a small cage with holes at the top. Their plans finalized, John Morse, Zach Morse and Charlie Winston got such much needed sleep.

A day later, the yacht made it to Alabama.

Somewhere in Minnesota.

THE FOUR MEN were on their way home. It had been a great trip. Iced-down bass was loaded in the coolers in the back, and there were still a few cold ones for the ride home. But for the last hour in the car, Tom Bergman was not doing well. He was feeling very nauseous. When they were about three hours from his house, he pulled off the highway and pulled into a service station. While his friend pumped the gas into the car, Bergman went inside the station to get some Tums. He waited in line behind two other patrons, a man and a woman. Then he coughed deeply. After exchanging money with the service station manager, he pocketed the Tums. The station manager thought the man looked very ill.

“You okay, buddy?”

“Yeah, just some stomach flu, I think.” Bergman went back to the car.

“Hey, one of you guys want to drive? I am not feeling so good.”

“Sure,” said Bergman’s friend, taking the wheel. Bergman lay down in the back of the car, his head resting against his friend’s shoulder. Twenty minutes later, the friend who was driving pulled the car over to the side of the road, so Bergman could get out and vomit on the shoulder. When he finally arrived home an hour later, there were men in silver suits and agents wearing FBI windbreakers waiting in his driveway.

Meanwhile, the two patrons who had been in front of Bergman in line at the service station—a husband and wife—got back in their

minivan with their two children and finished their drive home to suburban Chicago.

Boston, Massachusetts

RON FIELDING, JR. had a terrible morning. All day, his stomach was killing him. He had remained at his post as a teller, however, handing out bills and accepting deposits at the Bank of Boston. He had probably interacted with two hundred people that morning. One of his co-workers came over to change a one hundred dollar bill out of Fielding's drawer. The co-worker noticed that Fielding looked pale and sweaty.

"Ron, you don't look so good. You should take a break." Fielding agreed, and put out the sign shutting down his window. His boss asked him where he was going and he said that he was sick and that he was going to the bathroom. Fielding made it down the hall and into the bathroom, before violently throwing up in the stall. His vomit was a pitch black. He had never seen anything like that before. He continued vomiting for several more minutes. Then he went to the sink to wash his hands. He looked in the mirror. His eyes were bloodshot red. There was a purple welt on his neck. He was burning up with fever. He remembered the television broadcast about the virus from Brazil. He had a moment of panic before a wave of nausea hit him again, and he passed out on the bathroom floor. Another male co-worker found him in a pool of black vomit twenty minutes later and called 911.

Massachusetts General was ready for him when he arrived, and immediately quarantined Fielding. The Hospital Infectious Diseases resident on call, who had been previously prepped by the State Health Department, recognized the symptoms immediately as Ebola, and called the CDC in Atlanta. The call eventually made it to the desk of Bjorn Jendel, who was distressed. How did someone get out of quarantine? He contacted the hospital and obtained the name of the patient and checked it against the list of 112. There was a Ron Fielding, Jr. on the list.

"What is the address and DOB of the Ron Fielding, Jr. in your hospital?" he asked the ID doctor in Boston.

"17 Deerfield Road. DOB 4/12/87."

"You sure it is not 1707 Deer Creek Lane?"

"Yes, I am sure," said the ID doctor. "17 Deerfield."

“How old does the patient look?” asked Jendel.

“Mid-twenties.”

“Oh no,” said Jendel. “Doctor, keep him quarantined, and don’t let anyone else near him. Where do your records say that he works, by the way?”

“Umm, let’s see. Um, co-worker brought him in and said he works as a teller at Bank of Boston.” A teller. He probably interacted with hundreds of people this morning, thought Jendel. He made some quick calls to Mureille Winston’s replacement at the Boston quarantine center. She confirmed that the Ron Fielding, Jr. in quarantine was in his fifties and worked at the I.R.S. And he had never been to Brazil.

Jendel went into the hall to speak to his secretary. “Get me the White House,” he said.

An hour later, representatives of USAMRIID entered the Bank of Boston in full HAZMAT gear. Everyone in the bank was quarantined on the upper floor of the bank, while thirty FBI agents in facemasks and rubber gloves went through bank surveillance tapes and records of deposits from earlier that morning to identify every person who had been inside the bank that day.

Gulf Shores, Alabama.

WEARING DARK CLOTHING, Charlie Winston, John Morse and Zach Morse boarded the small rubber Zodiac raft and Winston started the outboard motor. Initially, they saw no signs of the United States Coast Guard, United States Border Patrol, or Alabama Water Patrol. With all the people unhappy about being stranded outside the United States, there must be a lot of Americans trying to sneak back into the country. Winston imagined that the patrol services must be stretched to their limits keeping everyone out. When the Zodiac was about a half-mile from shore, they saw a fast-moving yellow light on the horizon and Winston cut the outboard motor. All three passengers ducked down into the boat and remained breathlessly quiet, hoping not to be spotted. John Morse could hear the slithering of the purple snake in the cage next to his head. Morse gave the “be quiet” finger-to-the-lips sign to Zach. The yellow light darted all over the water, like the tower beacon at a prison. Soon, the light seemed to be going in the opposite direction. The trio waited until the

light disappeared from sight before starting the outboard motor again. Within twenty minutes, they had reached the shore. They whisked the Zodiac boat up over the sand and hid it behind a dune. Removing their gear, they crouched behind the dune, making sure they had not been spotted. After waiting for a while and hearing no sound, the three men walked over the sand to the small city road going through the popular beach town. They walked to a nearby Holiday Inn, where they stayed the night. In the morning, they got a cab to the airport and rented a car from Avis. As they drove down the highway, Winston tried his wife's cell phone again multiple times but had no luck. He decided to try and reach Roessler again. This time he was lucky.

"Jacob?"

"Yes, this is Jacob Roessler, who is this?"

"This is Charlie Winston. Jacob, where is my wife?"

"I have no idea where she is, Charlie."

"You were the last one to see her, Jacob. She took you home, right?"

"Yeah, my car was having problems and she drove me home. I thanked her and she drove off. That's it. I don't know where she went after that."

"In the middle of an Ebola virus crisis, you think she would just walk off the job, Jacob?"

"No, I don't. I agree it sounds suspicious to me. But I have no idea where to look."

"She is nowhere at the C.D.C.?"

"No. We have looked everywhere. We checked the morgue, checked the hospitals, checked with her friends. No one has any idea where she is."

John Morse was making signals to Winston, pointing to their bottles of healing water. Morse wanted Winston to tell Roessler about the water.

"Listen, Jacob, we are on our way to the C.D.C. now with something that I think might help cure this virus." Roessler did not like the sound of that.

"What do you mean?"

"Jacob, we have made a truly miraculous discovery. On an island in the Bay of Honduras, we found a natural healing spring that can regenerate severed limbs; it can eliminate third degree burns as if they never occurred, and it can reverse the effects of frostbite. It's like a miracle drug. I feel confident that it will help your team cure this virus. We are bringing it directly to the C.D.C. now. We should be there by about

3:00 p.m. today. When we get to the C.D.C., who should we call?” Roessler thought for a minute. He looked at his watch. If he got a quick flight from Dallas, he could make it to Atlanta before Winston.

“Um, Charlie, I am actually on my way back to Atlanta this morning. Why don’t I meet you at the front entrance of the C.D.C., and I will look into your discovery personally. Would that be okay?”

“Absolutely,” said Winston, with Morse nodding enthusiastically in the passenger seat. “We will see you there at about 3:00 p.m., okay?”

“Sounds good, see you then.” Roessler hung up and immediately dialed Southwest Airlines. He had to get to Atlanta immediately.

CHAPTER 71. DECISIONS

Trenton, New Jersey.

SMALL-TIME HOOD MICKEY Kowalski didn't like what he heard on the news. Those bitches were right. She had probably given him that fuckin' virus when she kissed him. Never trust bitches, man. They are all nothin' but lyin' whores, Mickey thought. What was he going to do? He had to get tested. That was for sure. He decided to go to his regular internist, a last-in-his-class quack named Dr. Bernard McGuire, whose office was in the floor above a local taxidermist's shop. He was escorted that morning by the receptionist into a small examination room, where he was asked to take off his shirt and sit on a padded table covered in butcher block paper. A few minutes later, the doctor, bald and overweight, came into the small room with a clipboard.

"Mickey, you never call. You never write. It's been like two years since you have come in for a visit. What gives?"

"Hey, Doc. Let's cut the small talk. I got a situation here. I think I caught something from this lady."

"A lady, heh? Listen, Mickey, don't worry. We will do a blood test, and if you caught a venereal disease or something, it will show up and we can take care of it."

"Um, no, Doc, it's not like that. It's not a venereal disease. It is something much worse, like cancer."

"Mickey, you cannot catch cancer from someone who has it."

"Um, yeah, I know that, Doc. It's not really cancer, you know. It's something really bad."

"What are you trying to tell me, Mickey?"

"Hey, Doc, have you heard about this Ebola virus thing on the news?"

"Yes," said the doctor suspiciously.

"Well, Doc, I think it might be that." The doctor looked at him skeptically.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, Doc, it's like this. I really can't say. But supposin' that's what it was. Could you give me a pill or medicine or somethin' for that?"

"No, Mickey. I would have no idea how to cure that. But I am sure you don't have that. They said on the news that the virus came from Brazil. Have you been in Brazil lately?"

"No."

“Well, then what do you have to worry about? It is probably just a stomach flu or something. Listen, you sit tight and I will have the nurse take some blood, and we will take from there, okay?”

“Sure, Doc.”

“And when are you going to get me Jets tickets again?”

“Soon, Doc, I promise.” The doctor left, and Mickey waited for a few minutes, until the nurse came in and took several vials of blood. After getting a cotton swab and a Band-aid, Mickey Kowalski left the doctor’s office and drove back to the warehouse where his two captives were being held. He was going to keep his distance from those bitches this time.

Atlanta, Georgia. Jacob Roessler’s House.

MURIELLE WINSTON HAD tried everything to get out of the locked refrigerator. Her only sustenance was the bottles of wine. She had nothing to eat. After several days, she collapsed from the gunshot wound to her leg, the lack of food, and the cold temperatures. Unless someone rescued her soon, she was going to die in here. Where was her husband Charlie, she wondered?

Washington, D.C. The White House Situation Room.

IT HAD BEEN 48 hours since the terrorists’ demands were posted on You Tube. There was not much time left. At 6:00 p.m. that evening, the President had another meeting in the Situation Room. Sheila Simms, Director of Homeland Security, addressed the President.

“Madame President, unfortunately, we have some very bad news. It appears as though one of the 112 people who entered the country from Brazil before the border lockdown was Ron Fielding, Jr, a 26 year-old bank teller from Boston who had been to the soccer game. There is another Ron Fielding, Jr., who is in his fifties, who works for the I.R.S., lives in Newton, Massachusetts, and has a very similar sounding address. The individual we put in quarantine was the Ron Fielding, Jr. from the I.R.S., not the Ron Fielding from the Bank of Boston. This morning, the Ron Fielding, Jr. who had been to Brazil showed up at work with full-blown Ebola symptoms, and worked all morning, where he probably came into contact with over 200 people.”

“Oh my God,” said the President.

“We were notified of this discrepancy by the C.D.C. this afternoon, after they received a call from Massachusetts General Hospital, where Mr. Fielding was taken for treatment. Agents from USAMRIID and the FBI are on the ground in Boston. We quarantined every person in the bank that we could find, and our agents are now combing through surveillance tapes and bank records to find everyone who interacted with Fielding this morning. But the terrible truth, Madame President, is that due to this error, it is possible that the Mackinac Ebola Virus may be out.”

“I’m speechless.”

“It gets worse. Our friend from Minnesota, Tom Bergman, was admitted to a hospital in St. Paul tonight with full-blown Ebola symptoms. You may remember that this is the gentleman who immediately went on a fishing trip after returning from Brazil. This morning, he came into contact with several service station employees along his route, and perhaps other customers. Two of the three service stations where he stopped did not have surveillance cameras, so we have no way of identifying persons with whom he may have made contact. And our two kidnapped women from New Jersey still are missing. That is a lot of loose ends, Madame President. With the terrorists’ ransom only 24 hours away, I want to make sure you are aware that there is now a very real possibility that this virus could get out into the population and kill millions of our citizens. Here is a simulation, Madame President.” On the board was a map of the United States, which showed a few red dots in Boston, one in Trenton, and one in Minneapolis. “Here is the situation now. Here is what we could be looking at in one week. This is one month. This is six months.” The President stared at the screen as the number of red dots multiplied. “As loathsome as the option may be, Madame President, I think you should think strongly about giving in to the terrorists’ demands. If we can get the antidote into the hands of hospitals quickly, we could contain this thing.”

The President’s Chief of Staff, Amy Miller, was irritated. “Sheila, complying with the terrorists’ demands means murdering 52 people in cold blood, on video.”

Sheila Simms was unruffled. “Twelve of those 52 are dead. So it’s only 40 people. And as unpleasant as that may be, I would rather have 40 dead Serbs than millions of dead Americans.”

“Madame President,” said Miller, “Have you talked to President Clinton? What does he have to say?”

“He is really annoyed by this whole thing because he said that he advocated for intervention in Bosnia ever since 1992 but he couldn’t get Congress to go along with him. He thinks that blaming him for the delay in intervention is ridiculous. But on the other hand, he doesn’t want millions of dead Americans, either. While he did not say so explicitly, I get the sense from him that if our backs are up against the wall, and it is the only way to save everyone, President Clinton will come through for us.”

“What about these forty so-called war criminals?” asked Miller. “I cannot imagine we can grab forty citizens of other countries off the streets in the time we have available.”

“It’s not going to be a problem,” said Hank Armstrong, CIA Director, from across the room.

Everyone looked at Armstrong nervously.

“You have all forty men?” asked Miller.

“As I said, Ms. Miller, let’s just say it is not going to be a problem.”

“But we don’t even know if the terrorists are telling the truth when they say they have an antidote. It could all be a lie,” said Miller.

“That’s true,” said the President. “And if we asked them for a sample of the antidote as a show of good faith, they would deny us, because they would know we would replicate the sample on our own. So we really have no way of knowing whether they are telling the truth about the antidote. On the other hand, we have surveillance tape of Graciano taking the bat in a cage all the way from Tanzania. He already had the tissue and blood samples. He didn’t need the bat. He went to a lot of trouble to bring the bat half way across the world. That tells me that he was trying to develop the antidote.”

“That’s a pretty slender reed on which to rest a decision to murder forty people,” said Miller.

“Amy, that’s why I get to make decisions like these. Is there any hope for an antidote of our own, other than what we have from AVI?”

“We have our lab and five labs across the country working on it. Nothing so far,” said Bjorn Jendel, who was standing by live on a satellite feed.

“We just have to find them. Hank, Sheila, will you please find these sons-a-bitches? Let’s reconvene here in an hour.”

The President walked out of the Situation Room and headed to the Oval Office to do some thinking. Her time was running out.

CHAPTER 72. CURE

Atlanta, Georgia. Headquarters of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

IN THE LOBBY of the curved blue-glass headquarters for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Charlie Winston, John Morse, and Zach Morse sat in the tan leather chairs, waiting for Jacob Roessler to meet them. Winston and John Morse each had Styrofoam cups of coffee. Winston took out two packs of sweetener and stirred them in the coffee cup with a red straw, swirling the white powder around. Zach Morse had found a blue PowerAde in the soda machine. Winston checked his watch. They had been waiting for fifteen minutes. Winston took out the two plastic water bottles containing the oily water from the Boyuca healing pool. After ten minutes, Roessler stepped off the elevator in jeans and a white lab coat. He passed by the security desk and greeted Winston.

“Charlie, it’s good to have you back.”

“Thanks, Jacob,” said Winston. “Jacob, let me introduce some friends of mine. This is John Morse, who is a professor from UCLA. And this is Zach Morse, his son, who happens to be a student of mine at Emory. These two accompanied me on our little island excursion.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Roessler, extending his hand for a shake.

“Same to you,” said John and Zach Morse, shaking his hand.

There was no one near them in the corner of the lobby where they met, but Winston nevertheless kept his voice low.

“Hello, Jacob, thanks for meeting with us on short notice.”

“Anything for the cause, you know. How did you get back into the country with everything on lockdown?”

Winston looked at Morse cagily. “We’ll tell you that some other time.”

“Okay,” shrugged Roessler. “Now tell me about this discovery.” Winston showed him the water bottles.

“Jacob, this water is absolutely incredible. And I believe it might be able to cure this virus.”

“Why do you say it is so powerful? It just looks like oily water to me.”

“Jacob, on our trip, I had the tips of the four fingers on this hand sliced off by a blade, all the way up to the first knuckle. There was no hospital for treatment. I had lost a lot of blood. I had fractured my tibia. Then, I was burned. Jacob, I was literally on fire. My face, my torso, my

arms, everything was burned. I fell into a pool of this water, and all four of my fingers spontaneously regenerated. Here, you can see the scars across my fingers where the cut was made. My burns went away as if nothing had ever happened. You can barely make out any residual damage. My tibia was healed. Zach here had frostbite so bad on both feet that we thought for sure he would never be able to run again. One dip in that water and his feet are good as new. Jacob, we would have to test this, but this water might cure cancer. It might cure paraplegia. Who knows what it could do?”

Roessler looked at the bottles skeptically. “Charlie, sorry, but I am a little skeptical. A Wonder Drug? This sounds like a fish story to me. You say Zach got frostbite? On a tropical island?”

“I was put in a meat locker for an entire night,” said Zach. “Trust me, it happened.”

“So primitive islanders have mastered the art of refrigeration? Charlie, you are not ‘punking’ me, are you? Because if you have a camera on me or something, this is not very funny. I have a lot of work to do.”

“I thought you would say that. I knew the only person who would believe me is Murielle. But since she is not here, you are the next best thing, Jacob.”

John Morse saw they were getting the cold shoulder, and took a stab. “Young man, I understand your skepticism. As a respected scientist, naturally you should be skeptical. But what does a scientist do? He starts with a hypothesis and he collects data to prove or disprove the hypothesis. Your hypothesis is that this water is plain, old, ordinary water with no curative properties. So let’s put your hypothesis to the test and get you the data you need.” John Morse then took out a pocket knife and cut the outside of his forearm down the middle, leaving a four inch gash. Morse winced at the pain as blood gushed from the wound.

“Hey! What did you do that for?” asked Roessler.

“Charlie, will you do the honors, please?”

Winston quickly took out a handkerchief, dabbed it on the wound to stop the blood, and then poured a small amount of the healing water onto the cut. Within a few seconds, the wound cauterized. The water bubbled and fizzled along the cut line. Soon there was a barely visible scar. Roessler was amazed.

“Charlie, that is truly incredible. I will get this up to the lab right

away. How much of this water do you have?”

“Just these two bottles,” said Winston. Morse gave him a frown, hinting to him not to give up too much information. Winston decided not to reveal that more water was back on Drame’s yacht. “Yes, that’s it.”

“Okay, I will take these two, run some quick tests on them, and then get them back to you.”

“Well, Jacob, here’s the thing. I would like to keep one bottle, you know, for safekeeping.” Winston was really thinking that he wanted to try this water out on his son’s legs. Roessler pulled the second bottle back.

“Charlie, there are lots of tests we need to run. There are millions of Americans who could be saved by this. If I run out of water after testing the first bottle, I don’t want to have to wait while you get all the way back down to the CDC. We are on the clock. But trust me, I won’t use it all. I am thinking maybe a bottle and a half. And I should be finished before midnight tonight. If this works, then we will analyze the chemical composition, and we can synthesize more of the water.” Winston did not like this plan, but he knew time was of the essence, and the entire country could be killed by this Ebola virus.

“Okay, but here’s my cell. You call me the minute the tests are done, day or night, and I will be back down here. And don’t use it all, okay? We worked very hard to get that.”

“No problem, Charlie. And thanks again. And good luck finding Murielle.” Roessler looked down at the table and paused. “That’s funny,” said Roessler.

“What’s funny?” asked Winston.

“Your coffee, you have two packets of Equal. That’s exactly how Murielle takes her coffee.”

“I guess if you’re married long enough, you even start to look like each other,” said Winston. “Call me later.”

Charlie Winston went out into the parking lot and took out a cigarette before getting in the car. He took a large drag and blew smoke into the air. John Morse noticed that he wasn’t getting into the car.

“What is it?” asked Morse. Winston looked off into the distance, pensive.

“That comment about the coffee,” said Winston.

“What about it?” asked Morse.

“They don’t have a coffee machine on their floor at the C.D.C.

Murielle always complains about it because she frequently has to work late. And she doesn't drink coffee in the morning or at lunch, only when she is up working late. I find it odd that Jacob would have ever seen her drink coffee, much less know how many packets of Equal she uses."

"Maybe she got coffee from the cafeteria, or on a different floor, or brought it in from Starbucks. There could be a million explanations for that."

"I guess so," said Winston reluctantly, stamping out his cigarette and getting into the car. He dropped off Morse and his son at a downtown Marriott near the University, and then returned the rental car to the Atlanta airport. From there, he got a cab home.

Back at the C.D.C., Jacob Roessler began testing the miracle water. He looked at several drops under a microscope and it looked like something from outer space. He had never seen a chemical composition like it. It seemed to change chemical compositions back and forth, like it couldn't make up its mind. He took the water to the Level 4 Biohazard lab and suited up. Once inside, he removed cages containing three white rabbits—one which had been infected with the Mackinac Ebola Virus eight days earlier, another which had been infected six days earlier, and a third which had been infected four days earlier. All three were showing clear signs of the disease. Using a syringe, he carefully injected some of the healing water into each rabbit, and then returned the animals to their cages.

He also took some of the water and, with a pipette, applied the healing water to a glass dish containing monkey pancreas tissue which had been ravaged by the Mackinac Ebola Virus. He took a tiny sample of the tissue with the water sample applied, and put it under the electron microscope. He did not expect the water to act so quickly, but under the enhanced magnification, it looked like the black clusters of virus-filled cells appeared to be dissolving. He was astonished. He had never seen anything like it. For a moment, his good angel got the better of him, and, thinking as a scientist, he thought of all the diseases that this water could cure—epilepsy, cancer, Alzheimer's. He was as excited as he had ever been. But then he thought about his mission. He thought about his sister and his mother and father. He was not going to give up on his mission now when they were so close. The tendrils of revenge swirled their way around his conscience, urging him to take the evil path.

He left the Hot Zone and removed his Biohazard suit, washing in the

antiseptic shower. He decided to perform some work for an hour or two. When he returned to the Hotzone two hours later, he couldn't believe his eyes. All three white rabbits were healthy and active. The water was a total cure. He took samples of blood from each rabbit and looked at the blood stained slides under the microscope. The blood looked just about normal.

It wasn't possible. Roessler repeated the tests again, this time with infected pigs and infected spider monkeys. By 10:00 p.m. that night, he had his answer. Every mammal was cured with the wonderful new water from the Island of Boyuca.

Seattle, Washington.

FBI AGENTS GREEN and Wilcox knocked on the door of attorney Gene Gerstein and his dermatologist wife, Dr. Sarah Stone. Gerstein answered the door in jeans and an Oregon University sweatshirt, holding a coffee mug.

"Sorry for the late hour, Mr. Gerstein. We called before. I am Agent Green and this is Agent Wilcox. We are from the FBI."

"Yes, of course, Agent. Come right in." The agents were ushered into the family room and onto the black couch. The doctor came down the stairs in short order and took a seat in a black leather chair.

"What's this all about?" asked the father.

"We are here inquiring about your son," said Green.

"You mean Levi?" asked the father.

"Yes, that's right."

"Has he done something wrong?" asked the mother. "Levi, get down here!" A moment later, a lanky teenager, about sixteen years old, came down the stairs.

"What is it, Mom? I'm doing homework."

Agents Green and Wilcox looked at each other.

"Is this your only son, ma'am?" asked Wilcox. The two parents looked at each other nervously, and then told their son to go back to his room.

"What is this all about, Agent?" asked the father.

"I am not at liberty to say, sir. All I can say is that your son has become a very important witness in a federal investigation," said Wilcox. "Now, do you have another son?"

"Yes, Agent Wilcox, we have another son. But he has not been home in many years."

“What was his name?” asked Green.

“Jacob. Jacob Gerstein.”

“Was he adopted?”

“Yes, Detective, he was.”

“Where is he now?” asked Wilcox.

“I am sorry to say this, Agent Wilcox,” said the mother. “But we don’t know. Jacob was a very difficult boy. He was born in Croatia, and his birth mother, father and sister were murdered in the Bosnian conflict. And then he had to separate from his brothers, who were the only ones he had left. He had so many psychological issues. He would have night terrors and wake up crying and wetting the bed. Then he would be moody and aggressive. We just could not handle him. He would get into fights with the other boys. He was abusive and rude. My husband and I do not tolerate that kind of behavior. We believe children need rules, and Jacob just did not want to live by the rules. Finally, when he was sixteen, he asked to move out on his own.”

“So he ran away?” asked Agent Green.

“Not exactly. He was determined to leave no matter what we said, mind you. There was no changing that one’s mind.” The mother began crying.

“My wife and I make quite a bit of money,” said the father, “and I did not want him to turn to crime or wind up in a gutter somewhere, so we set up a trust with a local bank. And the bank representative is the trustee. Jacob can access the trust whenever he wants, as long as he gets the approval of the trustee. The trust also conditioned receipt of funds on Jacob getting psychological treatment. So Jacob moved out, went to New York, got an apartment, and finished up high school there. The apartment and his schooling were paid for by the trust, of course.”

“We had a subsequent conversation about two years later with his psychologist in New York. He told us that Jacob responded very well to treatment, and ultimately seemed to come to grips with his childhood trauma. We learned from the psychologist that Jacob’s birth father’s crop was wiped out by some kind of virus, and it was that event which resulted in his family having to move, and ultimately wind up in the Srebrenica concentration camps, where his birth mother and father were killed. That seemed to make sense to us, because Jacob used to spend long hours in his room reading books on biology. I guess he was trying to make sense

of what happened to his family. Anyway, the psychologist said Jacob had changed his name, and then went on to college, where he apparently did very well.”

“What is his new name?”

“Jacob was insistent that we not know it. He felt abandoned by us and he wanted nothing to do with us. A good friend of ours saw him on the streets of New York about six years ago and said that he looked very good. He grew up to be a handsome young man.”

“What is his job now?”

“I really couldn’t tell you,” said the mother.

“Who would know his new name now?”

“The bank trustee.”

“What is his name?” asked Green.

“I don’t recall, but I have his card. I will go get it for you.” The father went into his den to retrieve the card.

“Could you do me a favor, Detective?” asked the mother.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“If you do find him, could you tell him that we love him and that we are sorry and we would really like to talk to him again?”

“I will certainly give him that message if I see him, ma’am,” said Green.

“Thank you.”

The FBI agents took the card and left the house. They would not be able to talk to the bank representative until the morning. Then they would learn the identity of Jacob Roessler.

CHAPTER 73. PANIC

Washington, D.C. The White House Situation Room.

WITH SIX HOURS left on the terrorists' deadline, the White House received a call from a cell phone. The callers claimed to be the terrorists Matteo Graciano and Dominic Chastain. The call was immediately patched into the Situation Room where the President was already meeting with her advisors, and NSA technicians began scanning for the origination point of the cell phone making the call.

"President Scall, you have six hours left. Have you rounded up the war criminals?"

"How do I know this call is truly from the people who unleashed this virus?"

"Would you like to ask me a virology question, Madame President?"
The President was satisfied.

"No, that won't be necessary."

"What about the war criminals?"

"Ten of them are already dead," said the President.

"Which ones?" asked Graciano.

An aide to the President read out the list.

"What about the others?" asked Graciano.

"We are making good progress, Mr. Graciano, or should I say Mr. Gurdic. Which do you prefer?"

"Mr. Gurdic is fine. That is who I am."

"Mr. Gurdic, you have set your sights on killing millions of Americans. None of them ever hurt your family. Why are you taking your revenge out on so many innocent people?"

"We were innocent too, President Scall! We were just little boys. And we had to witness our mother being raped, our sister being beat to death, our father being shot in the head, and so many others killed—all because your President failed to protect us. Now you will know what it means to suffer!"

The President gave the signal, and then there were two new voices on the line.

"Matteo, is that you? This is your mother." Ann Graciano strained to hear her adopted son's voice. She was on a linkup from St. Louis. There was a pause on the other end.

“Mom, stay out of this. This does not concern you,” said Graciano.

“Doesn’t concern me? My son is accused of being an international terrorist and murdering millions of Americans—you don’t think that concerns me?” yelled Ann Graciano.

“You are not my real mother! My real mother was in Croatia! I seek vengeance for her! Now stay out of it and put the President back on the line!”

There was another pause and Dominic Chastain’s adoptive mother from Germany came on the line.

“Dominic? Dominic? Answer me. Are you there?” There was no response.

Graciano seized back control of the call.

“It was a nice try to put our mothers on, but it is not going to work!” said Graciano. “Now answer our questions or this will be the last call you ever get!!”

“Okay,” said the President. “What is it that you want?”

“I want to know how many of the war criminals you have killed.”

“We haven’t killed anyone, Mr. Gurdic. But we know where everyone on your list is. What if we just give you the list of their locations, and you can do the killing? You give us the antidote location, and everybody wins.”

“Madame President, I think you are under the delusion that this is a negotiation. This is not. This is merely a status call to find out how you are coming on our list of demands. If you have not completed our demands within six hours, there will be no antidote, and you can live with the blood of millions of Americans on your hands.”

“Oh, I don’t think that’s going to happen, Mr. Gurdic. Our FBI agents have successfully rounded up everyone who got through before the border shutdown, and they have all been quarantined. This virus is not going anywhere, at least in the United States.”

“President Scall, I think there are some people in Boston who would disagree with you. It is a matter of days before you will have a full-scale epidemic on your hands. This is your last chance. Are you going to execute the war criminals or not?”

“We just need a little more time to sort this out, Mr. Gurdic,” said the President.

“I have my answer, Madame President. Goodbye.”

“Wait!” It was too late. Graciano had hung up.

“Where is he?” asked the President.

The face of the NSA Director appeared on the big screen.

“It says the signal is coming from somewhere in Europe.”

“Find them!” yelled the President.

For 150 Bank of Boston customers, a couple and their two kids in suburban Chicago, a gas station attendant in Minnesota, two scared kidnap victims in Trenton, and dozens of other Americans in quarantine, the answer could not come soon enough.

Atlanta, Georgia.

“GUESS WHO’S HOME?” yelled Charlie Winston, as he came into his house with his bags.

“Daddy!” his son squealed from the family room couch.

Winston came over to the couch and picked his son up, hugging him deeply.

“Oh, buddy, I missed you so much. For a while there, I thought I would never see you again! It is so good to see you! Plant one on me right here!”

His son giggled and gave him a big kiss on the cheek. He put his son back on the couch and came around to sit down.

“Did you get me any presents, Daddy?”

“Now, do you think I would go half way around the world and not get my son something special?” And with that, Winston pulled out a cage with a kitchen rag covering the top.

“Ta-da!” His son gasped when he saw the beautiful purple snake.

“Oh, Daddy, it’s awesome! Did you get it on the island?”

“Yep. It comes from the Island of Boyuca. They call it The Evil Place. Ooooooh. Spooky.”

“I’m going to call him Grapey, because he is purple.”

“Grapey? Hmmm. Okay. I guess that will work. Do you want to pet him?”

“Can I? Can I get him out?”

“Sure,” said Winston. “He is not poisonous. But all the same, we should keep him in a separate cage from your other snakes.” Teddy took out the purple snake slowly, wrapping him around his neck and letting the snake slither down his arm.

“Oh, Daddy. He is just great! Wait until my friends see him. So tell me about your trip. Did you find the Fountain of Youth?”

“Teddy, you have to promise me you won’t tell anybody this.”

“I promise.”

“Teddy, I found it. The real Fountain of Youth. It’s incredible. I cannot wait to tell you the whole story.”

“Do you think it will cure me?”

“I don’t know, Teddy. But there is more of a chance now than there ever was. We will test it out tomorrow. But right now, you have to get to sleep.”

He picked up his son and brought him into his bedroom. Winston pulled the covers up to Teddy’s neck and kissed him good night.

“Daddy?”

“Yes, sport?”

“Are you gonna find Mommy?”

“You know I am good at finding things, right? If I can find the Fountain of Youth, don’t you think I can find one pretty Mommy?”

“That’s what I thought,” said Teddy.

“Good night, son.”

“Good night, Daddy.”

Winston went into the kitchen to speak to his mother, who had woken up after hearing all the commotion. He gave her a synopsis of the events and then asked her to stay with Teddy one more night. He had to return to the C.D.C. tonight, and then he had to find Murielle. The grandmother agreed, happy to have her son Charlie home.

Winston unpacked his gear, took a shower, and then wolfed down some macaroni and cheese. Refreshed, he got in his car and headed back to the C.D.C.

You Tube, an hour later.

THE VIDEO SHOWED Davy Branco standing outside a building in Mexico City. The voice of Julio Cezanne played in the background.

“This is Julio Cezanne. I am here tonight to tell you how your President has lied to you. She told you that the virus has been contained and quarantined. That is a lie. As we speak, thousands of you do not realize that you have the virus. That number will double and triple in the

coming days. Soon, there will be millions with the virus. The Government has no cure. And all of you will die. Already, thousands in Brazil and The Netherlands are dying. And we gave your President a choice—kill a few despicable criminals, make a simple apology, and wire me \$25 billion, or let everyone in America die a gruesome death. She was given a deadline. And she decided to ignore the deadline. Very well. This is what happens when you ignore me. The man you see before you is standing in front of one of two warehouses filled with thousands of syringes of an antidote for this virus.” The next scene showed Davy Branco lighting a torch to a line of dynamite and then running away. Seconds later, there was a massive explosion and the warehouse was decimated in a ball of fire.

“Please tell your President not to ignore us again.” Within an hour of the You Tube posting, the White House switchboard was overloaded with tens of thousands of calls from across the country. The country was in full-blown panic mode. Where was the virus, and who was infected, citizens wanted to know? Why was the President lying? And why wasn’t the CIA killing these fifty-two Serbian criminals? And where was Bill Clinton? It was the one time that media analysts could recall that commentators from MSNBC and Fox News had the same message—do whatever the terrorists wanted, just get the antidote.

CHAPTER 74. GRAPEY

WHAT JACOB ROESSLER'S adoptive parents did not know was that Roessler continued to have a secret relationship with his brother Levi in Seattle. Although Levi was only two when Roessler had left home for New York, Levi was good with computers, and managed to figure out Roessler's identity. A few years before, Levi had tracked down Roessler's e-mail address and asked him to Skype. The two became friends. Roessler thought it was a good way to keep tabs on what his adoptive parents were doing. They may, for example, decide some day to cut off the funds in the trust account. Tonight, as Roessler sat at his desk worried about what he was going to tell Winston about the healing water, his brother sent him a Skype request.

"Dude, what are you doing down there in Atlanta? We had FBI agents at the house looking for you."

"What? What did they want?" asked Roessler, concerned.

"They wanted to know your name and where you worked."

"Did you tell them anything?"

"Hell no. Snitches get stitches, bro. Plus, they never asked me."

"Did Mom and Dad tell them anything?"

"Jacob, they still don't know your new name. But they told him that the guy at the bank knows where you are."

"When was this?"

"Tonight, maybe eight o'clock. They said they were going to talk to the bank guy tomorrow morning."

"Thanks for the head's up, Levi."

"No worries, dude. Hey, are you into some kind of dangerous shit, man? Why is the FBI interested in you?"

"You know about this virus on the news? They are just investigating everyone at the C.D.C. It is just government paranoia, you know? Make sure nobody working for the good guys is working with the terrorists."

"Oh, okay. Hey listen, where is this virus, dude? Is it anywhere near Seattle?"

"Levi, I cannot tell you that, but don't worry, okay? As the President said, we have this thing contained."

"Okay, that's cool."

"Listen, Levi, I really have to go, okay? We are working 80-hour

weeks here, you know?"

"Right on, dude. Stay in touch, okay?"

"Sure thing."

Roessler hung up and rubbed his temples. If the FBI learned who he was, they would immediately assume that he was working for his brothers, the terrorists. They would figure out Murielle Winston was in his basement. And what was he supposed to tell Winston tonight? It was all over. He had to get out of the country. It was time for Plan B.

Roessler and his brothers, however, were long-term planners. He had prepared for just such a contingency. He opened a safe in his office and removed a fake passport, a credit card with a fake name tied to an account in Luxembourg, and 50,000 Euros. He had to get to the airport fast. He checked flights on Expedia. There was a midnight flight leaving for Paris. He should be able to make that if he hurried. He pocketed the remaining plastic bottle of water from Boyuca and ran out the door. He knew that international travelers without luggage always attracted attention, so he decided to run home quickly to pack a carry-on suitcase.

Roessler ran up the stairs and went into his bedroom. While he was packing the suitcase, he heard muffled noises coming from the basement. She must still be alive down there, he thought. "By the time they find her, though, I will be long gone," he thought. He pulled the handle out on the black suitcase, put it on the floor of the bedroom and rolled it behind him as he walked out in the kitchen to leave. There, standing in the open doorway, was Charlie Winston.

"Hey, Jacob," said Winston grimly.

"Hey, Charlie."

"Never heard from you tonight. I thought you were testing our water."

"Yeah, well, I just ran out of time, Charlie, I am going to finish that off in the morning."

"So the water is at the lab?"

"Yeah, it's at the lab."

Winston motioned to the suitcase.

"You goin' somewhere, Jacob?"

"Yeah, boss wants me to be ready to go first thing tomorrow morning back to Dallas, so I am just getting my bag ready."

"Jacob, why don't you cut the bullshit and tell me where Murielle is."

“I don’t know what you are talking about, Charlie. I don’t know where she is.”

“Really? My phone says different.” Winston held up his own iPhone. “You know, this phone has a handy little feature on it called ‘Find my iPhone.’ Took me about ten minutes to track Murielle’s phone to your house.”

“So your phone says that Murielle’s phone is at my house?”

“Should we test it, Jacob?” Winston dialed Murielle’s number and an iPhone on Jacob Roessler’s kitchen table started playing Steve Wonder’s “Isn’t She Lovely.”

“‘Isn’t She Lovely.’ That’s our wedding song, Jacob.” He walked over to the kitchen table and picked up Murielle’s phone. It was next to a coffee cup and saucer. “And looky here. Two packs of Equal, just like you said.”

“Charlie, she was here, okay? But she left. She must have left her phone.”

Just then, Charlie heard a muffled scream coming from the basement.

“What’s that, Jacob? You got some mighty loud rats down there. Why don’t you get your ass over here and take me down into the basement?”

“Not gonna happen, Charlie.” With that, Roessler pulled out a gun from his pocket and aimed it straight at Charlie Winston.

“What? You gonna kill me, now, Jacob?”

“Well, I am already guilty of kidnapping and treason and terrorism. What’s one more life sentence for murder going to do?”

“Jacob, you think I am stupid enough to come over here all by myself without backup? I have Atlanta PD just waiting outside.”

“Yeah, Charlie, I think you are that stupid.” With that, he shot Winston in the stomach. The bullet passed through Winston and lodged into Roessler’s front door. Winston crumpled to the floor in surprise and confusion. Maroon blood started pouring out onto Roessler’s wood floor. Roessler walked over to Winston.

“You know, Charlie, you really should have called the police first. Oh, by the way, that water you gave me. It’s miraculous just like you said. Real Fountain of Youth. Cures the Ebola Virus and everything.” Roessler sat down next to Winston on the floor.

“You know, Charlie, all this terrorism stuff. It’s tiring, you know. I am really feeling my age these days. But it’s nothing that some of that miracle water can’t cure, right?” Roessler pulled out Winston’s last bottle

of Boyuca water from his bag and drank it down, while Winston looked on helplessly. “Ahh, now that’s refreshing. I feel like a new man!”

“You’ll never get away with it,” Winston whispered through labored breath.

“Sure, I will. Fortunately, Charlie, you and I are about the same height. So I am going to give you my old wallet with my ID, my religious medal with my initials on it, my watch, and my car keys.” He put the wallet and keys in Winston’s pocket, the medal around his neck, and the watch on his wrist. “Then I am going to take your wallet, and your watch, and your car keys, and drive off in your car. That way, when my house burns down, and all that is left is your body and Murielle’s body, they will think you are me. And then all I have to do is plant some evidence at your house, and voila, you are the angry husband who found out that his wife was having an affair and murdered his wife and her lover, and then went on the run. Simple stuff, don’t you think?”

Roessler pulled out of the kitchen cupboard a brown bottle of white powder, a test tube clamped on an upright rod, and a pack of gummy bears. He placed the rod with the test tube near the kitchen drapes in the kitchen. Using a spoon, he put some of the white powder into the test tube and heated it up briefly with his cigarette lighter. Roessler put his head down near the floor where Winston was lying and bleeding.

“You like gummy bears, Charlie? Here, have some gummy bears.” Roessler put the sweet candies in Winston’s mouth. “Charlie, you see this white powder? That’s potassium chlorate. Did you know what happens when you add gummy bears to potassium chlorate? Roman Candle. It’s good stuff. I’ll see you around, Charlie.”

Roessler threw in a few gummy bears into the test tube and it immediately ignited like a hot road flare. Roessler chuckled and rolled the black suitcase out of the house, closing the door behind him. The flare from the test tube was getting hotter and higher. Within thirty seconds, it had ignited the curtains and was spreading to the ceiling. Winston could hear his wife screaming for help in the basement, but there was nothing he could do. He was shot and couldn’t move. He and his wife were going to die here for sure. After everything he went through on the island to get back here. His son would lose both of his parents tonight. Teddy, he thought, as the smoke started to engulf the room. Teddy...

He passed out for what seemed like only a few seconds. In the smoke

he thought for some strange reason he saw his son Teddy running towards him. That couldn't be true, of course. Teddy was paralyzed. It was just a nice dream. That meant he was surely dying.

"Daddy!"

Now that definitely sounded like Teddy, he thought. He squinted through the smoke.

"Daddy, I can walk!"

"What?" Winston started laughing. It hurt terribly with his gunshot wound, but it felt good all the same. He started crying. His boy was standing and kneeling over him. He could really walk! "How is that possible?"

"Daddy, be still now and don't talk. I am going to help you. It's Grapey, Daddy. Grapey is a magic snake!" He took out the purple snake and put it on his father's stomach where the bullet hole went through the front and out his back.

"What the...?" asked Winston.

"Daddy, shhh. Grapey is magic. Just wait...."

Meanwhile, the fire was spreading across the ceiling and was covering one wall. Winston looked down and the snake appeared to be secreting a filmy brown oil. The oil oozed its way over the bullet wound. For a moment, Winston thought he felt a little better. Then he felt a lot better. He looked down at the purple snake, which was coiling over his torso, and the bullet wound was healing!

"Hey, hey, hey! Look at that! It is getting better!" Within another thirty seconds, the wound was closed up enough for Winston to stand up. Teddy put the purple snake back around his neck.

"Teddy, get out of the house, now! I am going to go get Mom!"

Teddy obeyed and ran out of the house. Yes, he "ran" out of the house! Winston marveled at his son. He paused for only a moment to see the wonderful sight, and then dove into the basement to find his wife, with the flames quickly engulfing the first floor. Quickly, he located the key to the wine cabinet and opened it up. There she was, on the floor, suffering from cold, malnutrition, dehydration, and a gunshot wound to the leg.

"Charlie! Thank God! Is Teddy okay?"

"He's more than okay. Wait until you see him. Now, we have to get out of here."

Winston ran up the stairs, carrying his wife, but a wall of fire greeted him at the top of the steps. Winston turned and looked back down the stairs. In the corner of the room, he saw a small window near the top of the wall. Using a piece of loose wood in the basement, he smashed out the window. Clearing the glass fragments, he shoved his wife out through the hole. As he turned around, the fire had spread down the wooden basement staircase. Soon every one of those wine bottles was going to go up in flames. He pushed his wife out as fast as he could. Then he dove on top of the washer-dryer and lunged into the open window. Grabbing on to the window ledge, he pulled himself up and out onto the lawn. His wife was lying on the lawn, exhausted. Teddy came running over and knelt down next to his Mom.

“Mommy! Are you okay?” Murielle just stared at her son in disbelief, not comprehending how he could be walking. “Am I in heaven?” she asked.

Winston grabbed his wife up and sprinted across the yard. “C’mon, Teddy let’s go!” Winston ran across the yard, carrying his wife, and Teddy ran behind him. They went across the street, resting behind a parked car, as the Roessler house exploded in flames. Murielle Winston cringed in shock at the explosion. Teddy Winston put the purple snake back in his cage and then grabbed onto his dad’s shoulder.

“Mommy, did you see what Grapey did? I can walk! I knew Dad could find the Fountain of Youth! I just knew it!”

“What? Charlie, you found the Fountain of Youth, and Teddy can walk? Am I in a dream?”

“Every day is a dream with you, baby! I’m just so glad that you are safe. I missed you so much! Now let’s go home and we’ll tell you all about it. Wait a minute, we can’t go home. Jacob took my car. That reminds me, Teddy, how did you get here?”

“I took him,” said the smiling grandmother, who walked up behind the family. “A short time after you left, Charlie, I heard a scream coming from Teddy’s room. I ran in there, and that purple snake was crawling on him. I thought he had been bitten by the thing. I almost killed the thing when Teddy started screaming, ‘I can wiggle my toes! I can wiggle my toes!’ And as God is my witness, his toes were moving. I just couldn’t believe it. I was so excited I tried calling you on your phone, but I couldn’t reach you, and Teddy said there was a doo-hickey on his iPhone that could help him find you. So that’s how we got here. And while I was

getting dressed to drive Teddy over here, I looked up, and there was Teddy, standing in my doorway with a big goofy grin on his face. And I tell you, Charlie, I have never seen such a beautiful sight in all my life. That is, until right now!”

Winston could hear the sirens in the background. As Winston and his family walked down the street to the grandmother’s car, they were surrounded by police cars. Although they tried to explain that they could not wait around to answer questions, the police were adamant that they remain. They stayed on the street, wrapped in blankets, speaking to the police for the next hour. Winston left out the part about the snake and the miracle cure, and getting shot. The police were initially suspicious when Winston produced Roessler’s wallet, and no identification, but after Winston gave the explanation, the police seemed satisfied for now.

When they were finished, Murielle phoned Bjorn Jendel and gave him the news. After some time, Jendel was able to get through to the correct parties at the FBI, but by that time, Roessler was gone. However, Charlie Winston’s description of Roessler carrying a black bag helped. That meant that Roessler was probably on a plane, and there were very few planes which left that late from Atlanta at night—only three in fact. One went to New York City and had already landed in New York. One went to Berlin. And a third went to Paris. They hoped he had not gone to New York. Agents from the CIA waited in Paris and Berlin. Jendel had sent over a photo of Roessler. If he had boarded one of those international flights, they would find him.

CHAPTER 75. CAPTURED

Washington, D.C. The White House.

THE PRESIDENT WAS nervous. If the last warehouse was destroyed, they would have no way to cure infected Americans, and there was no guarantee now that the virus was not going to get out. Sheila Simms recommended that they pay the money, but not kill the Serbians and Dutch prisoners or have President Clinton apologize.

“Madame President, it looks to me like the scientists and Cezanne have completely different agendas. Cezanne obviously just wants the money. The scientists care about killing the war criminals and getting Clinton to apologize. Judging from the video, Cezanne and his cousin have control over the warehouses. If we pay him what he wants, it is highly unlikely he will care about what happens to the Serbians and Dutch people on that list, or whether President Clinton apologizes. We tell the terrorists that the money is being deposited in the requested account, and as a show of good faith, they must give us the address of the last warehouse. Then we say we need more time, another 48 hours, to round up the people on the list. That puts Cezanne and the scientists at odds. Cezanne won’t care about the list, and he won’t want to wait 48 hours for the money. He’ll give up the warehouse even if the scientists object. We get the antidote, get everybody cured, and then all we have to do is trace the money. We trace the money and we find Cezanne. Then we cut a couple years off his sentence if he gives up the location of the scientists.”

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs disagreed. “Madame President, you agree to that, and you are violating the established doctrine of the United States that we do not negotiate with terrorists. Once terrorists around the world see that we are giving in, it will be open season on American citizens. Just hijack a bus of school kids and demand a billion dollars. They’ll pay it. We cannot, we must not, give in to this blackmail.”

“If we don’t give in,” said the President, “there won’t be any school kids because they will all be dead of the Ebola virus. We simply can’t risk it. I am confident that our financial people will be able to trace the money. We will find him eventually. Right now, we need that antidote, and neither the C.D.C., nor USAMRIID, nor any lab in the country, has an effective cure right now. Sheila, arrange for the wire transfer, and make sure the money is tracked.”

Sydney, Australia.

JULIO CEZANNE HAD traveled from Trinidad to Peru and then to Australia on Qantas Airlines. He wanted to be near Venuatu in case the President gave in and transferred the money. An hour ago, he had received a message from the Government of the United States on the digital bulletin board of a pre-arranged Internet dating site. The e-mail read:

“Funds are ready to be deposited upon receipt of the address of the warehouse. As a show of good faith, ten per cent is being deposited now. The remaining ninety percent will be deposited upon confirmation on our end that the cure is effective. As far as the other demands, we need more time, at least another 48 hours. We have not located everyone on the list, and PC is traveling internationally. Please post the address and the wire can proceed quickly.”

Those dumb-shits are actually going to pay the money, thought Cezanne. Cezanne called the banker in Venuatu.

“Cezanne, you are not going to believe it, but they sent some of the money. \$2.5 billion! I siphoned off the \$50M processing fee. Is the rest coming or not?”

“I’m working on it,” said Cezanne. “I will call you back.”

Cezanne posted on the dating site:

“It’s in Canada. Now post the next ten per cent and you will get more information.”

The United States wire transferred another \$2.5 billion. Then they posted:

“Where in Canada?”

A half hour later, Cezanne was absolutely giddy when he heard the additional money had been transferred. He posted on the website:

“British Columbia. Transfer another ten percent to get the city.”

The reply from the United States:

“We will get back to you soon.”

Washington, D.C. The Situation Room. 4:00 a.m. EST

“WELL,” SAID THE President. “Sheila’s theory is correct. He is selling out Graciano. He is supposed to call us in an hour so let’s focus on Vancouver and Victoria and every other big city in British Columbia. We have to find that warehouse.”

“Madame President,” said the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. “You realize that it is just as likely that he is lying about the location of this warehouse? It is also quite possible that this warehouse of antidote syringes does not even exist. This could be the biggest con job in history.”

“Yes, I realize that,” said the President. “So how about somebody get me something we can actually use?”

Just then, an assistant to the President’s Chief of Staff entered the room. “Madame President, we have Bjorn Jendel from the C.D.C. on the line, and he says that he has crucial information to share with you.”

“Yes, Mr. Jendel. Give me some good news,” said the President.

“Madame President, I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that we have located a mole in our organization who was working with the terrorists.”

“A mole? Who is it?”

“It’s Jacob Roessler, one of our Level 4 Scientists. He has been on conference calls with you, Madame President. He is—believe it or not—the brother of these two Croatian scientists.”

“What?” yelled an exasperated President. “How the hell did we possibly miss that?”

“He had his background very carefully scrubbed, Madame President. He had changed his name, new Social Security card, the works. No one ever put it together.”

“Rudy, how the hell did we miss this?” asked the President to the FBI Director. The diminutive, but sturdy Director of the FBI, was embarrassed, but quickly recovered.

“Madame President,” said Montana. “We have two agents who visited the childhood home of this third brother in Seattle. The agents spoke to his parents tonight. The parents did not know his changed name, but we were literally hours away from obtaining it. We would have had the name by nine o’clock tomorrow morning. But as to how he made it through the security clearance process at the C.D.C., I cannot help you there.”

“Madame President,” said Jendel. “Trust me, we will be looking into that issue, and there will be a full investigation. We discovered his involvement this evening, when it was discovered that Roessler had actually kidnapped Murielle Winston, one of our other scientists, and tried to murder her and her husband.”

“Good God, is he in custody?” asked Simms.

“No, sometime tonight he left for the airport. According to the FBI agents I spoke with about an hour ago, Roessler either got on a flight to New York City or Paris or Berlin.”

“Hank, will you have someone getting him when he gets off the plane?” asked the President.

“Of course, Madame President. This is obviously hot off the presses. I have not yet had time to be briefed on this.”

“Well gentlemen, I suggest you get your acts together, because we need information here the minute it comes in.”

“Mr. Jendel,” said Rudy Montana into the speaker phone. “You said you had some good news.”

“Yes, sir, the best news you could possibly imagine. Believe it or not, Madame President, we have a cure.” There was a loud round of spontaneous applause.

“What do you mean, a cure?” the President asked.

Jendel proceeded to tell the long story of the magical properties of the purple snake, of Charlie Winston’s adventures, and of the cure of his boy’s paraplegia.

“This is truly fantastic news, Mr. Jendel,” said the President, “but again, I have to ask, why am I only hearing about this now? It would have been nice to know this a few hours ago before the United States paid out \$5 billion to a terrorist.”

“We had to run tests, Madame President. Murielle Winston had been in our labs for the last several hours, and I called you literally the second we had positive results to report. There is no doubt about it. This drug will cure the Mackinac Ebola virus. And while we are at it, Madame President, I am thrilled to tell you that the oil from this snake is going to treat and cure a lot more than the Ebola virus. It can heal cuts. It can reverse burns. It can cure frostbite. It can heal fractures. And that’s all we know so far. Who knows what other ailments it can cure?”

The President was ecstatic over the news, but was still skeptical. “You

said you only have one snake. Will that be enough?"

"I hope so. We are trying to synthesize a similar compound in the labs now. But now we have something to work with. If we have our five research labs across the country all working on this at the same time, I am very hopeful."

"Can we get more of these snakes?" asked the President.

"You would have to ask Charlie Winston that. I am busy right now with every scientist I have trying to synthesize a copycat compound of this oil, so we will know more in 48 hours."

"Mr. Jendel," said the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. "What is your operational security there? This one snake could be the key to the safety and health of millions of Americans. It would obviously also be worth billions. We have to worry about theft, sabotage, that kind of thing."

"We just have a skeleton security crew here now," said Jendel. "We could use any security help you could give us."

"Madame President, with your permission, I would like to send troops immediately to Atlanta to ensure the safety of the doctors there doing their work and to make sure that the snake does not get into the wrong hands." The President agreed and authorized the security measures.

"Mr. Jendel," said the President. "Here's what I need to know. Give me your best educated guess. Do you believe that with the snake, and the resources you have at your disposal, you will probably have some kind of a vaccine to put into the hands of our hospitals before this virus gets out of control and we can't stop it?"

"I think so, Madame President."

"That's what I needed to know."

When Matteo Graciano called the White House a half hour later, he was puzzled and panicked that the President refused to take his call.

Paris, France. 5:00 p.m. Paris time.

JACOB ROESSLER, NOW with a new identity, walked off the plane into Charles De Gaulle Airport. He was pleased to see that no police were waiting for him at the gate. Before he left from Atlanta, he had managed to send an emergency text message to his brothers, notifying them to meet him in Paris. The twins had been sending their most recent messages to the President from a hotel in Zurich, Switzerland. When they got the

message from Jacob, the twins knew it must be trouble. They had boarded a train to Paris in the morning, and were waiting for their brother at an apartment building in southern Paris. As Roessler walked through the concourse toward the baggage terminal, a well-built black man collided with him.

“Excusez-moi,” said the man.

Roessler was annoyed but kept walking. Little did he know that CIA Agent Jimmy Pond had just placed a homing and listening device under the lapel of Roessler’s jacket. The CIA had three teams waiting to trail Roessler when he left the airport. Roessler left the terminal and got in line for a cab. While he was in line, Roessler pulled out a phone, and made a quick call. The CIA agents in the van heard Roessler’s end of the call loud and clear.

“I’m in town. Can you get me?”

The person on the phone said something. Roessler responded, “I don’t think so.”

The person on the phone said something else. “Got it.” Roessler threw his phone to the ground and smashed it with his foot.

“This numbskull has no idea he is being recorded,” said one of the CIA agents, laughing in the van. Jimmy Pond pulled up and entered the back of the van.

“Got anything good yet?” asked Pond.

“Yeah, he is meeting his friends.”

“Great, don’t lose ’em.” said Pond.

“This ain’t my first rodeo, boss.” The van sped off chasing Roessler’s cab, which was being driven by another undercover CIA agent.

Roessler wasn’t sure whether he was being tailed, so he switched cabs three times, got out and walked across Le Jardin du Luxembourg, walked through the lobby of a hotel and out through the kitchen, and took one more cab. The three CIA teams successfully followed him the entire way. Confident that he had eluded anyone following him, Roessler advised the cab driver to take him to an apartment in the Fourteenth Arrondissement. Taking one more look over his shoulder, Roessler wheeled his carry-on suitcase into the building and headed to the elevator. Pond’s team was close behind him in the blue van. Pond dove out of the van and sprinted to the lobby of the apartment building. He saw the elevator door close on Roessler just as he got to the lobby. Pond watched the lighted numerals

over the elevator. According to the lighted numbers, Roessler got out on the fifth floor. Pond returned to the van to make preparations.

“Fifth floor. Can you get a signal?”

“Oh, yeah, no problem,” said the other agent. “But they have the MP3 player on kinda loud.” Pond listened to the conversation through the loud French pop music.

“Why did you leave?” said a male voice.

“My cover was blown,” said Roessler. “They were on to me. It was a matter of hours before they got me. Did the President agree to get the men on the list?”

“She is not returning our calls,” said the male voice glumly.

“What do you mean, she’s not taking your calls? On the last conference call I was on, they were having panic attacks. The virus got out in Boston. Jendel told me that. Why would they risk everyone’s safety like that?” asked Roessler.

“I don’t know,” said a different, but similar sounding, male voice. He also sounded grumpy.

“What did Cezanne say?” asked Roessler.

“He’s not taking our calls either,” said the male voice.

“So he sold us out? Well that figures. Well, if they don’t take our calls, they won’t get the antidote. It’s their funeral,” said Roessler.

“Why isn’t she taking our call, Debit?” said the first voice, now extremely agitated. “Did you cut a deal with them? Are you wired?”

“Of course not! Don’t be ridiculous. Here, look.” There was a pause. “I would never rat you guys out. You’re my brothers, for Christ’s sake.”

In the van on the street, listening in on headphones, Pond said, “Bingo.” Wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and a black jacket, Pond went into the lobby and up the elevator to the fifth floor. He went door to door until he heard the same loud pop music. Sticking a bendable coil camera under the door, he was able to make out Roessler and both of his brothers. None of the brothers were armed. Pond radioed the van. “I have positive ID on all three brothers. No one else in the apartment. They are unarmed from what I can see.”

The agent in the van radioed Langley. “We’ve got all three brothers,” he said. “We’re getting ready for an extraction.”

Within the next hour, Pond and his team, dressed in jeans and light jackets, kicked down the door. The brothers were too surprised to react.

Pond made it across the room in two seconds and TASERed the first brother before he could scream. His teammate did the same to the twins. Within seconds, the brothers were in flex cuffs and gags. Pond took out three syringes and shot each of the three brothers, who passed out. Pond lifted Graciano over his shoulder. Two other members of the team took the other two. Checking the hallway first, Pond walked briskly to the stairs. A teammate on the landing below, gave him the “all clear” sign. When the three agents got down to the bottom of the steps with the men over their shoulders, they looked into the lobby. They had one man near the front door, who was watching the lobby and the street. He gave another “all clear” and Pond and his team sprinted to the waiting van with the brothers over their shoulders. Once all three men were safely in the van, the lookouts scattered. No one had seen them. The extraction had been successful. Pond and three other agents had the three brothers on a Lear jet by 11:00 p.m., heading back to the United States. On the way, Pond was tasked with obtaining information on the whereabouts of Julio Cezanne. After about an hour of flight time, the brothers began to wake up from their sedative.

“Where’s Cezanne, Matteo?”

“Huh?” When Matteo did not answer, Pond broke two of his fingers.

“Let’s try this again. Where’s Cezanne?”

The three brothers were scientists, not soldiers. Pond knew there was no way they would last long. In fact, torture on Graciano lasted only three minutes before he gave up Cezanne. He told Pond about Cezanne’s plan to skim off the money in Venuatu. Pond promptly notified Langley. He hoped they were in time to catch Cezanne.

CHAPTER 76. VENUATU

Island of Venuatu, near New Zealand.

JULIO CEZANNE WALKED into the ACL Bank. His partner in crime, Don Rogers, smiled from behind his desk when he saw Cezanne come into the bank. Today, the banker on the remote island was about to become very rich.

“Hello, Mr. Rogers. I would like to make a withdrawal. I called ahead. Is the package ready?”

“Yes, Mr., uh, Santiago. If you could just sign some paperwork, we will be ready for the transfer. Sign here, and here, initials here, and then twice here.”

Cezanne complied.

“Now, if you could just wait a moment, I need to get some approvals from my manager. This should just take a moment.” The banker left and went into a back office. Cezanne could see the banker through the glass window talking to another man. The supervisor looked over, nodded, and looked back to the banker. After what seemed like an interminable minute, the banker left the office with the paperwork. Everything is all in order, Mr. Santiago. Let me call to get the suitcase.” The banker made a call, and after several more minutes of waiting, two uniformed bank security guards walked from the back area over to the banker’s desk. One of the guards was carrying a large black carry-on suitcase.

“Would you like to count it?” The stash was in British pounds. Even after a lifetime of drug dealing, Cezanne had never seen so much money in his life.

Cezanne thought about that. In any deal, you had to count the money. Not counting the money was the easiest way in the world to get ripped off, but time here was more important. Counting the money would mean going into one of the safe deposit rooms and killing another ten minutes. He couldn’t risk it.

“No, that won’t be necessary.” He took out a small deposit slip and wrote an address on the back and handed it to the banker. Both men gave knowing smiles.

Cezanne took the suitcase and rolled it out of the bank, putting on his aviator sunglasses as he went through the door. He half-expected to be tackled by American agents the minute he walked out the door, but

there was no disturbance. Pleased, he took a cab to a small motel about ten miles away. This was his prearranged meeting place for the banker to get his cut. Only one more loose end to tie up and he was home-free. The hard part was over. He called ahead to the pilot and told him to be gassed up and ready to go. The pilot of the small Raytheon Premier One jet agreed. He was getting paid a lot of money for this flight.

After a half hour, the banker showed up at the motel. He knocked on the door. Cezanne answered it and looked around suspiciously.

“Were you tailed?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Take off your jacket and your shirt and your pants.”

“What?”

“Just a precaution, relax. I have to make sure you are not wired. Take them off now.”

“This is most unusual,” said the banker, who began undressing. Cezanne went through his garments, searching for any listening or homing devices.

“Did you bring a phone with you?”

“Yes, it’s one of those new Smart phones, as you Yanks say.”

“Give it to me.”

Cezanne threw it on the ground and smashed it with the heel of his shoe.

“Hey! That cost a lot of money.”

“Mr. Rogers, you are not going to need to worry about money.” Cezanne looked through the electronic fragments of the phone, and convinced himself that there were no devices on the man’s phone.

“Did you tell anyone about our arrangement?” asked Cezanne.

“No, of course not.”

“Nobody down in your car below?”

“No, I came all by myself.”

“Good, all right. Your share is in the backpack. He pointed to a backpack sitting on the bed.”

“Can I get my clothes back on now?”

“Sure,” said Cezanne. Cezanne looked out the cheap window curtains to see if anyone had followed the man. The parking lot was empty. After putting his clothes back on, the banker went over to the backpack and began to open it. In a rapid movement, Cezanne snuck up behind him

and pulled out a piece of wire. Before the banker could speak, Cezanne had the wire wrapped around his neck. The banker tried desperately to release Cezanne's hold, but it was no use. Cezanne continued squeezing until the man was dead. A red cut line started bleeding across the man's Adam's apple. Cezanne dropped the banker on the floor. First, he removed the banker's car keys. Then he took the forest green bedspread off one of the beds and laid it on the floor. He threw the body of the banker onto the bedspread with a thud, and then rolled up the body inside it. He made sure there was no one looking, and then he carried the bedspread with the body inside it over his shoulder behind the small hotel, and dumped the body inside the dumpster, closing the brown metal door. Then he returned to the motel, washed the blood off his hands, and took out his special makeup kit. With spirit gum, he applied a fake beard and moustache. He changed into a white jacket and dark slacks and put his sunglasses back on. Checking the window one final time, he rolled his suitcase out of the room. He hit the sensor on the banker's keys, and the lights of a black Audi went off and on. Good, he would have a nice ride to the air strip. Cezanne peeled off in the Audi, intent on taking his new fortune to greener pastures.

Sydney, Australia.

GENERAL MARCY "MOE" Merck was the Commander of the Royal Australian Air Force, or RAAF. Every three years, his elite pilots performed joint training exercises with the American "top guns" in Melbourne, so he was very friendly with United States General Huey De Silva, Commander of the Pacific Air Forces, or COMPACAF, for the United States Air Force.

"General Merck, this is General De Silva. How have you been?"

"Good, Huey. Nice to hear from you. We're going to kick your boys' butts this year. We have some new maneuvers in the works."

"That'll be the day, Moe. Listen, Moe, I need a favor."

"What favor?"

"I need you to terminate a terrorist for me, with extreme prejudice."

Somewhere over the Pacific Ocean

CEZANNE HAD NEVER been more pleased with himself. How could those Americans be so fuckin' stupid? It was like takin' candy from a baby.

His cousin Davy Branco had been calling him all day, probably wanting to know when he was getting his cut of the money. Fortunately, now that the banker was dead, there would be some money for Davy. As long as that idiot keeps his fuckin' mouth shut, he thought. Cezanne's jet had Wi-Fi, so he decided to pull up the Internet dating site where he had contacted the President, and check in. The last entry was from the U.S. Government, and read, "What city?" Cezanne decided to have some fun.

He entered the site and typed in, "The name of the City where the warehouse is located is Victoria. The combination to the building is 2668. And the address is 6250 YourefuckedandIhaveyourmoney Drive." He hit "Enter." He laughed at his own joke. He never had so much fun.

He was about to log off and close the laptop when he was surprised to see a quick posting in response.

"You know who this is. Thank you for the location of the warehouse, but we already have our own cure. We found your cousin Davy. Unfortunately, his forehead ran into a bullet. What a shame. Your scientist friends are in Maximum Security Prison in New York and they say 'hi.' By the way, they were the ones who told us you would be in Venuatu. We left you a message in the suitcase. Enjoy. ☺"

Cezanne began to panic and he unzipped his suitcase. At the bottom of the bills that he failed to count was a turkey sandwich and a pickle wrapped in wax paper. There was a typed message inside the wrapping which said, "Please enjoy this last sandwich and pickle, courtesy of the American taxpayers. You may want to wash it down with a Hellfire missile."

"Mr. Santiago," yelled the pilot. "We have company."

Cezanne ran up to the cabin in time to see a RAAF fighter jet shoot a missile straight toward his plane.

"Shit," was Cezanne's last word on Earth before the jet exploded.

CHAPTER 77. WAR

Atlanta, Georgia.

CHARLIE WINSTON WAS having a great time relaxing with his son Teddy. Murielle was given one day of rest, but then was ordered back to headquarters again to finish up her work. The C.D.C. still had a lot of work to do in synthesizing a virus from the snake's oil. Teddy hated to give up his purple snake, but now that he could walk, he was much more interested in playing baseball. All day, Winston had been at the park with Teddy, marveling as he hit the ball and ran around the bases. Winston had never been so happy. After a long afternoon of catch with his son, Winston drove his son to the supermarket. Tonight, they were going to celebrate with some steaks. He couldn't wait. He had not tasted good food in weeks. He drove home and fired up the gas grill on the back patio. He grilled up the steaks and even added his own recipe special sauce. Wearing an apron over his gray Atlanta Braves T-shirt, he carried the plate of steaks into the kitchen. "Grub's on!" he yelled to Teddy. Teddy ran from his room to help set the table. Before he could sit down to eat, however, the doorbell rang. Two FBI agents wearing dark sunglasses and unpleasant faces were at the door.

"Mr. Winston, you need to come with us, sir," said the agent.

"Ah, hell no! C'mon! We are just sitting down to dinner. I already told everything to you guys and my wife has, too. We gave you the snake. What more do you want?"

"Sir, my orders are to take you into custody. Please come with me."

"Am I being arrested?"

"Sir, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. You and your friends entered the country illegally in violation of a Presidential Order. That's a federal crime. Now, we don't want to arrest you. We just need to get some information. But if you give us a hard time, we can break out the cuffs. Your call."

"Oh, man. I cannot believe you are complaining about that. I helped save the whole country, for cryin' out loud. I am here with my boy, and I do not have a sitter. Can I at least make arrangements for my mom to come over?"

The first agent looked at the other and they nodded. "Sure, we will wait. But be quick."

Teddy was disappointed. His first night with his dad after he could walk. And now he would be alone again.

“Sure, Daddy, I understand,” he said glumly. “But can you call Tina to babysit? Grandma’s cooking is terrible, and her feet smell like cheese.”

“Sure thing, buddy, I will give her a call.” Winston made arrangements for the sitter and text messaged his wife to let her know what was going on.

“While we are waiting for the sitter, you guys want some steak?” Winston asked the agents.

“No, sir. We are on duty.”

Once the sitter arrived, Winston was escorted into the back of a black Suburban, where he was surprised to find John and Zach Morse.

“They picked you up, too?” asked Winston.

“Yes,” said Morse. “You think this whole thing relates to us sneaking back into the country?”

“No,” said Winston. “I imagine it is much more than that.”

The three exchanged stories during the car ride. The Morses were stunned to hear about Teddy’s paraplegia being cured, and congratulated Winston. The three men were brought to an FBI Field Office in Atlanta, where they were taken into three separate interrogation rooms. For the next three hours, FBI agents interrogated Winston, John Morse, and his son about their adventures in the Bay of Honduras. The FBI agents seemed to be most interested in the fact that the islanders had beheaded American citizens. They also went into great detail concerning the exact location of the island. After the de-briefing, the three men were left alone in the stifling heat in their interrogation rooms for several hours.

Washington, D.C. The Oval Office.

THE PRESIDENT TURNED to a six-foot tall, lanky attorney named Chris Bieterman, who was the White House Counsel.

“Chris, what legal basis would we have for getting the rest of these snakes?”

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs interrupted. “Madame President, if I could just interrupt. We are in a crisis mode here. We need the rest of those snakes now. Once word gets out, every country, every pharmaceutical company, and every terrorist on the planet is going to be swarming to that

island. We only have a brief window before everyone finds out. Excuse me for saying this, Madame President, but it's a piece of dirt in the middle of the ocean with a bunch of natives with sticks. Not much of a resistance force. Who is going to care and who is going to know? We will overrun that place in ten minutes. It is not like we are invading Iran or something."

"I'd still like to know if there are legal options. Chris?"

"Well, Madame President. Because the island is autonomous and not part of any established country, I think we can safely call the Island of Boyuca its own country. Now, American citizens were killed on the yacht. That is international waters. Under international law, that could not be construed as an act of defense. Rather, it was an act of aggression. And if we assume that the acts were sanctioned by their tribal leader, which I would equate with their country's president, then we could argue that the murders constituted an act of war. With Congress' approval, I think we would have the legal basis to attack their country in retaliation. And in war, Madame President, to the victor go the spoils. In any event, as we used to say in law school, possession is nine-tenths of the law. I say we invade now, get the snakes, and let us worry about the legal justification. We believe we can put together a justification paper which would withstand international scrutiny."

"That works for me," said the President. "Let's have an invasion plan put together in the next hour. Oh, and by the way, Chris, I am not going to get the approval of Congress first. There are just too many loose lips down there on Capitol Hill. As the Commander in Chief, I can rationalize unilateral action first due to the fact that this will be a surprise attack. However, after we are in the air and literally over the target, we can talk to some of the Congressional leaders. Until then, mum's the word." She turned to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. "How are you going to find the island?"

The Chairman replied, "We are going to take Winston and Morse with us."

The President did not like the idea, but agreed that it was the only way.

Bay of Honduras.

TWELVE HOURS LATER, Charlie Winston and John Morse unwillingly found themselves on an Apache attack helicopter, wind rustling through

their hair, the sound of deafening rotors overwhelming them. Morse looked white as a sheet. He had never flown in a helicopter with the door open before. They had successfully retraced their steps through the air to get back to the Island of Boyuca. When they got over the island, Winston showed them the spot near the top of a mountain on the island where the healing pool was located. Winston and Morse had been told that this was just a mission to obtain the remainder of the purple snakes, in order to help the scientists develop a synthetic compound analogous to the snake's oil. They had no idea that they were part of the spear tip of a combat attack force.

"That's strange," said Winston to Morse, looking out the open door.

"What is?" yelled Morse over the sound of the rotors.

"I do not see anybody down there. Do you think they are all hiding?"

"They have probably never seen helicopters before," said Morse. "Remember, they had never seen an iPhone before. I bet a helicopter looks like a giant flying monster. They are probably all in the caves."

Winston gave directions, and their helicopter hovered over the healing pool. Rope lines were lowered, and United States Marines in full combat gear slid down the lines to the ground below. They did a sweep of the area where the pool was and quickly reported that no one appeared to be in the area. Several of the Marines were in wet SCUBA gear. They slid down the lines next and made their way over to the healing pool. Using glowsticks, they dove into the pool. The three Marines in full SCUBA gear were underwater for five minutes. Soon, they emerged back on land. One of the dry Marines let his partner in the SCUBA suit borrow his helmet mike.

"There are no snakes down here," he said.

"Roger that," said the pilot. The leader of this mission leaned over to speak to Winston and Morse.

"They are saying there are no snakes in the pool. In fact, they do not see any purple snakes anywhere. Are you sure this is the right place?"

"Positive," said Winston. "Test the water. Have someone give themselves a cut, and then pour the water from the pool over it, and see if it heals."

The leader called down to his forces. One of the Marines gave his hand a small cut and then he dunked it in the water. After two minutes, he reported that nothing was happening. It was not healing.

“You sure that is the only location where the snakes were?” asked the leader.

“Positive,” said Winston, and Morse agreed.

“Okay, guys, let’s do a search and sweep. Find me anyone that is moving.”

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., the President was announcing to members of Congress that she was declaring war on the Island of Boyuca. When the members of Congress were explained how the snake oil was such a miracle drug, there was a quick evening vote. Only one member of Congress dissented. Every other Congressman was picturing some way he or she could cure someone they knew, or make money on the deal. A formal declaration of war was entered in the record and signed by the President. The Members of Congress signed on to the White House Counsel’s rationale that American lives had been taken in international waters, at the behest of the Boyuca’s leader.

For the next day, Marines poured out onto the beaches of Boyuca. The soldiers found two or three dozen natives. With an interpreter, they tried to learn where the purple snakes had gone. But none of the natives seemed to know. Try as they might, they could not find a single purple snake. While they were there, John Morse asked permission of the Marines to bring back the full skeletal remains of John Cabot. The mission leader thought the request was funny, and gave Morse the green light. Having found no inhabitants, the mission was scrubbed, and the helicopters returned to America.

Winston looked to Morse in puzzlement. Where had everyone gone? The team leader gave the signal, and all of the attack helicopters left the airspace of the island, heading for home. As they rode back, Morse spoke with the team leader again.

“This looks like a lot of helicopters just to get a few snakes from a couple of island natives. Why is there such a large force?” The team leader smiled, lighting a cigar.

“As of an hour ago, Congress concurred in the President’s decision to declare war on Boyuca.” The team leader puffed on the cigar and laughed. “John, you are witness to the shortest war in American history. Ten minutes and no casualties. You want a cigar?”

“No thanks,” said Morse.

Washington, D.C.

THE NEXT DAY, the President learned from the FBI that they had successfully found Tom Bergman and his fishing partners in Minnesota. Bergman was treated at a secure military site in Minnesota. Even though he was in the full throes of the disease, the snake oil sent from Atlanta cured him. The FBI agent also located the gas station attendant Bergman had infected, and he, too, was cured by the snake oil.

The President also received a report from the FBI Field Office in Trenton, New Jersey. The DEA had known of a certain doctor named Dr. Bernard McGuire who was friendly with certain underworld figures. Having placed a phone tap on his line, they were able to retrieve the conversation between a low-level member of a drug gang named Mickey Kowalski and the doctor, which provided valuable information regarding the kidnapping of the two women from Trenton. Working with the DEA, the FBI located the warehouse where the two women were being kept. Unfortunately, by the time they arrived, the two women were dead. Mickey Kowalski, on the other hand, was still there. They quarantined all the men at a local military base. All of the men were in the very early stages of the disease. The men were held for questioning for several days. When they began to complain of feeling sick, they were ignored. Within days, they developed full-blown symptoms from the virus. Unlike Tom Bergman, however, these men were not rescued with any snake oil. They died in captivity.

The only area of concern left in the United States was Boston. Extensive media coverage there had sent nearly a fifth of the city in for testing. Nearly every one of those tested came up negative, and the two dozen or so who were positive were caught early enough to be cured with the wonderful snake oil sent from Atlanta.

The President was surprised to hear of one more report from Chicago. A woman had taken her two children in for routine checkup, and their blood work came back strange. The observant pediatrician, on a hunch, had requested a field test for the Ebola virus. When the children came back positive, the family, as well as the pediatrician and her staff, were quarantined. Snake oil sent from Atlanta cured the family and they were eventually released. The doctors' staff had all come back negative.

After waiting several more days, there were no new reports and everything looked clear. The President lifted the border lockdown, except

for flights and shipments coming from Brazil or The Netherlands. Those countries were still having problems. The United States was sending them some of the snake oil, but one snake could only produce so much oil. A synthetic copy was being tested, but final development was not yet complete. Businessmen and women rejoiced as their products could now be imported into the United States. The Japanese were especially happy, as Hondas and Toyotas began hitting American shores again.

When the smoke cleared, over 2,000 Brazilians, over 500 Dutch, and 237 Americans had died of the Mackinac Ebola Virus. There was a great debate as to what should be done with Roessler, Graciano, and Chastain. Many Americans argued for summary execution; some argued that the men be treated as enemy combatants and be given a military trial. In the end, because all three men were American citizens, the President agreed that the three should be given a trial in an American courtroom. No attorney would agree to represent Chastain or Roessler, and their adoptive parents had refused to pay for a lawyer, so the District Court had appointed two young lawyers from the District of Columbia to represent them. Graciano was represented by his adoptive mother. The trial was many months away, and was already getting more media coverage than the O.J. Simpson trial.

The President, intent on retaining all rights to the snake oil from Charlie Winston's snake, as well as from any synthetic compound which was developed to copycat the oil, had the White House Counsel retain patent lawyers in Washington, D.C., so that no one else could use it without being licensed by the United States. The President was shocked when the patent lawyers reported that the snake oil had already been patented with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office by a company called Boyuca, Inc., with offices in Los Angeles. The date on the registration was actually prior to the date that Charlie Winston landed back in the United States with his purple snake. The company clearly had a prior claim. And the patent covered not only the original oil, but any synthetic compound with a similar molecular structure. This Boyuca, Inc., whoever it was, was going to have the rights to everything. The President barked at her patent lawyers to look into it. There must be some way around this thing. She asked who owned Boyuca, Inc. The patent lawyers advised that according to the patent application, the President and CEO of Boyuca, Inc. was listed as the actor Skip Drame from Los Angeles.

CHAPTER 78. REUNION

Bel Air, California

IN THE DAYS after John Morse had returned on the government helicopter from the Island of Boyuca, he and his son Zach had returned to their home in Los Angeles. On a bright sunny Sunday, Morse drove his Suburban to LAX to pick up their friends Charlie Winston, Murielle Winston, and Teddy Winston. All five had been invited to a party at the million-dollar glass-and-steel mansion of Skip Drame in Bel Air, California. Morse helped Winston load the bags in the back, and then steered the Suburban onto the Interstate towards Bel Air.

“Did you have a nice trip?” asked Morse.

“It was very nice,” said Murielle. “This is the first rest I have had in months.”

“I heard about that business with Jacob Roessler,” said Morse. “Just terrible. I am glad that you are all right.”

“Sounds like Shorty here saved the day,” said Zach, rubbing the top of Teddy’s head.

Teddy laughed and rubbed the top of Zach’s head.

“Do you think you will be called as a witness against him in the trial?” asked Morse.

“I imagine all of us will,” said Murielle. “What a circus that is. We already have people camped out at our house 24-7.”

“So, John, did you ever figure out what happened to the chief on the island?” asked Charlie. “And where are the other purple snakes? There were dozens of them when we were first there.”

“I have no idea,” said Morse. “By the way, Teddy, congratulations on your recovery,” said Morse. “You look absolutely great.”

“Thanks,” said Teddy. “Yesterday, I went to a water slide. It was really fun.”

Murielle smiled at her son and then at Morse. “It is just so miraculous, John, I cannot tell you. I thank the good Lord every day.”

“You ever been to Drame’s pad before?” asked Winston to Morse.

“Once, on the day I asked him to fund our adventure. It is quite a spread, let me tell you.”

“This should be fun,” said Winston. The Suburban wound through Los Angeles, but as always in this City, it was slow going due to all the

traffic. After about an hour, they made it to Drame's mansion.

"Wow," said Teddy. "Is this where he lives? It looks like a castle."

"Yes, Teddy, this is it," said Morse. Morse pulled the Suburban up, where they were greeted by a valet, who took the car, and a bellhop, who took their bags. The group of five walked to the front door, where they were greeted by a young Hispanic female wearing a traditional island dress of many colors. The woman looked somewhat familiar.

"Welcome," she said. "This way." She led the group through the massive halls of the mansion and into the back yard, where Morse and Winston could see many people and lots of activity going on, and a large white tent erected over a huge, lush green yard. As they walked toward the tent, Skip Drame came running up to meet them, again wearing his safari hat.

"John-boy! Charlie! Zach! Welcome to my humble abode! And this must be Teddy, the superhero we have been hearing so much about." Drame put down his safari hat and picked up Teddy, putting him over his shoulders, with one leg on either side. "And I imagine you are Murielle," said Drame.

"Nice to meet you," said Murielle.

"I have heard so much about you. On our trip, all Charlie did was whine about how he missed you so much."

"See, baby?" said Winston. "What'd I tell you?"

Murielle nudged her husband in the ribs with her finger. "Oh, yeah, you did nothing but pine for me. I believe that," she grinned. "I think you boys had the time of your life on that island."

Winston thought of being chased by islanders, losing his four fingers, and being covered in burning flame. "Well, I would not exactly say that," he said.

"Guys, I have some people who I am dying for you to see. Come this way."

As they made their way under the tent, Morse and Winston were dumbfounded to see their friends from the yacht—Brenda, Captain Ben Z, the chef Robert, the administrative assistant Mindy Bryant, and the two security guards. Brenda came up and gave John Morse a hug.

"Great to see you, John," smiled Brenda, the blonde from the yacht.

"Wait a minute," said Charlie Winston. "How is this possible? We saw your remains. We thought you were murdered."

“That’s what the islanders wanted you to think,” said Brenda.

“Then what were those heads we saw on the beach?” asked Winston

“Wax heads. We heard about your encounter with the mannequins in the cave,” said Brenda. “Apparently, these islanders are very good at making wax creations. The blood was from a butchered boar. They did that to scare you so that you would leave the island.”

“Then where were you?” asked Morse.

One of the security guards spoke next, embarrassed that he had failed in his duty of protection.

“I am really sorry about that,” said the guard. “Our job was to protect you guys. But honestly, they attacked at night with no warning. They were like ninjas. They had knives to our throats and took our guns. We were surrounded. There was nothing we could do.”

The Captain joined in the story. “There is a large hold for storing equipment in the bottom of the yacht. They put us in there and locked the door. To their credit, though, they did leave us with a bunch of food.”

“The blood on the boat was there to convince you to leave,” said Brenda.

“But what about all that business about blow-flies, Charlie?” asked Zach. “You were estimating the time of death from the blow-flies on the heads.”

“I don’t know,” said Charlie sheepishly. “I guess blow-flies like wax, too.” He laughed, embarrassed of his mistake.

“So I guess the intent all along was to make us leave,” said Morse. “But when I convinced them that we were Xbalanque and Hunahpu, they decided to put us through the Trials of Xibalba.”

“How did anyone ever find you?” asked Winston.

“I heard the motors on the ship running,” said Captain Ben Z. “We started banging on the doors like crazy, but you guys didn’t hear us.”

“After I dropped you guys off in Alabama, Charlie, I got hungry,” said Drame. “I went around the ship trying to find more food, and when I opened the hold, I saw all these guys. I have never been more surprised in my life,” said Drame. “Now, I would like you to meet some other friends. Come this way.”

Skip Drame took the group away from the tent and below a hill, where he had a full-length basketball court.

As they headed toward the court, their friends Ka’an and Bolinda

Jeffries, along with a familiar-looking elderly Hispanic man wearing a Lakers T-shirt and black Adidas pants, came up to greet them.

“Ka’-an!” said Morse and Winston at the same time, happily, shaking his hand. “Bolinda!” they said, hugging her. Winston looked at the elderly man. “Is this the chief?”

“Hello. Nice to meet you again,” said the Chief, in very broken English.

“I have been giving them all English lessons,” said Ka’-an.

“Take a look, Charlie. The bellman, the doorman, the valet—they are all from the Island of Boyuca.”

“You are kidding?” asked Morse, now piecing together that the woman who had greeted them at the door. “How on earth did you get them all here?”

“The Captain and I decided to go back to the Island of Boyuca. My concern was that as soon as Charlie gave everyone his magical snake, the Government would immediately try to invade the island. They would take all these people and steal the one resource that they owned—these magical snakes. You know the Government, Charlie. The minute they got their hands on those snakes, all those greedy Congressmen would get involved, and the next thing you know, this miracle drug would be in the hands of evil rich people with very bad agendas. Sorry, I know you work for the government, Murielle, but I just don’t trust the Government like you guys do. I couldn’t let that happen, not after I learned that the islanders had really not hurt our friends. I wanted to make sure that the island people were safe, but at the same time ensure that a lot of sick people got the benefit of this miracle drug. And if we made a little money in the process, I could live with that. So we went back and, using Ka’-an as interpreter, I explained to the Chief that very bad people would be coming soon to kill him and take his purple snakes. He would normally not have believed me, but after all, I was the attaché to their mythical gods Xbalanque and Hunahpu. They knew I was telling the truth.

“So the Chief and maybe ten of his best people all got onto my yacht. We loaded all the purple snakes into the yacht’s fishtank and headed for home. We sailed through the Panama Canal back around towards Los Angeles. Meanwhile, I called my immigration lawyer, Benny Ortiz. This guy is the greatest immigration lawyer on the planet. He started the paperwork right away while we were still coming through the Canal. He

got every one of these people O-1 non-immigrant visas by the time we got to port.”

“What’s an O-1 non-immigrant visa?”

“If you are in the entertainment field, like I am, you can bring in people that are skilled in the arts and entertainment. I immediately advertised that my production company would be filming a movie based upon our exploits on Boyuca. I signed lucrative acting contracts for the chief and three of his island people. We got the Screen Actors Guild involved and they signed off. Two people we got in as wax sculptors. I might even have a shot at getting some more of those islanders in as basketball players. This lawyer is unbelievable, man. While we are producing the movie, they are all going to stay with me. In the meantime, my lawyer tells me we have a pretty good case for getting them all granted asylum.”

“What do you mean, asylum?” asked Winston.

“Well, every one of these people has a legitimate concern that they would be persecuted and attacked on their island based solely on their unique Mayan heritage. After all, the President declared war on their tiny island for no reason at all. Her stated reason—that Americans were killed in international waters—is obviously bogus. You can see that no one was killed in international waters. And if asylum doesn’t work, this lawyer has got thirty other tricks up his sleeve.”

“On Boyuca, as you recall, they have a sport very similar to basketball. It is kind of a combination between racquetball and basketball, and the hoop is turned sideways. But trust me, their skills easily translate. I talked to a Lakers scout today who wants to go back to the island and check them out.”

The chief smiled again and said, “Hello, nice to meet you again.” They all laughed at that. Apparently, that was the only thing Ka’an had taught him so far.

“So where are the snakes?” asked Charlie.

“Well, my friend, that is a very well-kept secret. I can only divulge that information to a shareholder of Boyuca, Inc.”

“What is Boyuca, Inc.?” asked Bolinda Jeffries.

“Boyuca, Inc. is a holding company my lawyers created on the day our yacht landed in Cancun. I never told you guys this, but I took some of that snake water, and I overnighted it to my patent lawyers in Los Angeles. Within twenty-four hours, the snake oil, and any synthetic oil with a

similar molecular structure, was patented and owned by Boyuca, Inc.”

Winston and Morse looked at each other, surprised at their friend’s deception.

“So you just registered that without telling us?” asked Winston, annoyed.

“Like I said, Charlie, I was worried the Government would steal it all. That’s why I created Boyuca, Inc.”

“So who is the owner of Boyuca, Inc.—you?” asked Winston, arching an eyebrow suspiciously.

“Well, that was part of my deal with the Chief. On behalf of himself and all of his countrymen, he owns 40% of the new company, which includes the licensing rights to the snakes and the snake oil. The other 60% are the ‘Drame shareholders.’”

“Who are the Drame shareholders?” asked Morse.

“Why, you guys, of course!” The Winstons and Morses looked at each other, confused.

Just then, butlers came down to greet the group. The butlers presented large packages to John Morse, Zach Morse, Charlie Winston, Bolinda Jeffries, and Ka’an. “Inside those packages,” said Skip Drame, “are stock certificates in Boyuca, Inc. We all own 10% of the stock. I am the CEO and President and my salary will depend on sales. But guys, I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that this company is going to be worth billions, with a B.”

The Winstons looked at each other, thrilled. Zach Morse, who was just a college student, and had a bank account of \$72, was the most thrilled of all.

“And don’t worry about the others,” said Drame. “In lieu of stock, we already gave financial packages to Brenda, Captain Ben Z, the security guards, Mindy Bryant, and the chef, and they are all pleased as punch. Oh, and we also got some money to the two brothers of Mountain Man Pete, and they were very grateful.”

“How will you disperse the snake oil?” asked Murielle. “I am concerned that there will be poor people who are very sick who will not be able to afford the medicine.”

“That’s why, Murielle, we are making you Director of Scientific Operations for the new company. I think that, given your background, there is no one I can think of who could balance the need for our company

to make money with the needs of sick people to be cured. The Board of Directors Resolution gives you carte blanche to decide our policy on that. I wanted to have someone in that position who was a hell of a lot more ethical and civic-minded than me. I would just get greedy after a while. Will you help us, Murielle?”

Murielle looked at her husband, smiling. She did not have to give it a second thought. “Absolutely! But wait, would we need to move from Atlanta?”

“Yes,” said Drame. “Our headquarters are here.”

“But what about Charlie’s mother?”

“Ah, hell, don’t let that stop you. We can hire her too, if you want. Buy her a house here, you name it.”

Winston looked at his wife. “It sounds wonderful.”

“Hey John, do you think you might be able to pull some strings to get me a teaching job with you at UCLA?” asked Winston.

“Ha ha. That’s a great idea. I am absolutely confident I could help you with that, Charlie. We would love to have you aboard.”

“And one more thing,” said Drame, turning to Teddy. “I would like Teddy here to be the marketing spokesperson for our company. I am picturing ads with Teddy and his snake, telling people how he came out of a wheel chair and walked thanks to this new miracle drug.”

Murielle was concerned that this was all going too fast. She did not want her boy to be exploited.

“Well, I don’t know about that, Skip,” she said.

“No pressure,” said Skip. “I understand. If you don’t want to, that’s okay, but I think it would be great for the world to hear Teddy’s story.” Teddy spoke up, finally interested that people were talking about him.

“Mr. Drame, Daddy said that the President took Grapey. Do you think you could get Grapey back for me?”

“No, Teddy, I cannot do that,” said Drame, smiling, and rubbing Teddy’s head. “But Grapey has a bunch of brothers and sisters, and I think you might be able to visit them from time to time.”

“I’d like that,” said Teddy.

“Also, I could probably get you some autographs from those basketball players down there. They are going to be famous some day.”

“Cool!” exclaimed Teddy. His parents laughed. There were a few moments of awkward silence when no one spoke. Everyone was just

contemplating their wonderful futures ahead.

Suddenly, Zach, who had been quiet until now, spoke up.

“So, ahh, the gist of what you all are saying here, is I am going to be stinkin’ rich?” asked Zach, grinning from ear to ear.

“It looks that way,” laughed Drame.

CHAPTER 79. THEFT*Bel Air, California*

AGENT JIMMY POND had received his directions directly from the CIA Director Hank Armstrong. This mission was critical. The President's patent lawyers had come up empty-handed. There was no way around it. This new Boyuca, Inc. had full control over the patents to the snakes, their oil, and any synthetic developed. The President was not going to stand by and let one company own the entire rights to what would be a miracle cure for multiple different diseases. So, with some reluctance, she settled on a simpler idea proposed to her in secret by Hank Armstrong—they were just going to steal the snakes. Technically, the CIA had no jurisdiction to operate within the United States, and theft was still very illegal, so getting caught was not an option, and could lead to a scandal bigger than Watergate. Jimmy knew the President was depending on him.

But the CIA had overlooked some important information in Jimmy Pond's file. Jimmy Pond had grown up in Uganda, during the brutal reign of Idi Amin. When he was only fourteen, his entire village was hit by yellow fever, a rare tropical illness. His mother and father were both killed by the disease. Pond later learned from a Red Cross volunteer that a truck from the World Health Organization containing yellow fever vaccines, a medication which had been available in developed countries for decades, was only ten miles from the village when it ran into a military blockade. The militants had demanded money to allow the truck to proceed. When the volunteers could not come up with the bribe money, the truck was not allowed through the blockade. Young Jimmy Pond was outraged that someone would stand in the way of potential life-saving cures only for their own greed. After his parents died, Jimmy Pond had subsequently gone into foster care, where he was luckily adopted by American missionaries. Once he arrived in America, he had thrived, and he had decided to dedicate his life to the country which had given him a second chance. However, he had a special place in his heart for those suffering from illnesses, especially in undeveloped regions of the world.

Jimmy Pond was particularly disgusted by the Mackinac Ebola Virus affair. He could not believe that terrorists would purposely try to infect innocent people and then demand a cure as a ransom. And he was also

irritated that this actor in California would try and make money off this new life-saving cure. The snake oil found on Boyuca could save millions of people, including thousands of poor people in his home country of Uganda. But that did not mean that he was excited about the President's agenda either. If the plan was to steal the snakes, then obviously the President could never reveal that the United States had taken them. In all likelihood, the snake oil would be secretly militarized, with the oil being used exclusively by soldiers on the battlefield and agents working dangerous missions overseas. And given the greed of Congressmen, there is no question that somehow some greedy friend of a Congressman would be making money off this cure. Jimmy Pond reflected fondly on the World Health Organization which had tried to save his birth parents. Pond believed that the WHO was the only organization which could be trusted with this new life-saving discovery. So he planned to carry out the President's order to steal the snakes, but he would be double-crossing the President, and turning the snakes over to WHO.

He had re-conned the Drame home for a week now. After some investigation, he determined that the snakes were contained in a six foot by three foot metal water tank in the basement of Skip Drame's home. He had two retired police officers guarding the grounds, and a fairly rudimentary security system. This would be a very soft target.

He waited until Drame went off to work in the morning. Dressed as a Coca-Cola truck driver, with a red and white striped shirt and black trousers, and a red hat which said Coke, Drame pushed the Coke hat far down on his head so that his face could not be seen. On the front porch of Drame's home, he sprayed black paint into the security monitor and then went up to the doorbell and rang it. The first off-duty policeman answered the door and Pond hit him with a Taser, pushing him back into the house on the ground. Grabbing a syringe out of his pocket, he quickly plunged the needle into the man's arm, shooting him with a tranquilizer. One guard down. Moments later, the second off-duty police officer walked down the hallway, and Pond shot him quickly with a volley of rubber bullets. The President had been clear in her instructions that no lives were to be lost. Pond dove on the second guard and hit him with a syringe. Pond went through the house and found a butler, a maid, and a valet, none of whom spoke any English. He pointed a gun and directed all of them to go into the laundry room, where he tied them up and put

gags in their mouths. He also hit them with tranquilizers. He went into the small security office near the kitchen and erased all of the security tapes for the morning. Then he turned off the system. Satisfied, he took a few minutes to survey the rest of the interior. No one else was here. He went back to his Coke truck, parked in the driveway, and brought in on a large two-wheeled dolly a stack of ten cases of Coca-Cola cans. He parked the dolly at the top of the stairs to the basement. Pressing a button, he unlocked a lid on the load, which looked like a stack of soda cans, but was, in reality, a cleverly disguised rectangular tank of water. The lid swung open, showing the clear water contained in the container. Going into the basement, he tried to open the steel water tank containing the purple snakes, but was surprised to learn that it had a combination lock on it. Running back upstairs, he went into the upstairs hall. Taking out a canister, he sprayed a light film onto the keypad of Drame's security system. Wearing special goggles, he was able to pick out pink smudges on the buttons regularly hit by Drame. 4554 was the combination. Chances are it would be the same combination on the snake tank. Running back downstairs, he tried the four numbers and the snake tank opened. Reaching his hand in, he grabbed four of the purple snakes in his arms and brought them upstairs, placing them into the fake Coca-Cola water tank. He made ten trips until all forty snakes were inside the container. Then he locked down the fake Coca-Cola water tank and carried the load on the dolly out the front door. It took him only moments to load the tank next to dozens of other packs of Coca-Cola stacked in the back of his soda truck. With a tip of his hat to the Drame residence, Jimmy Pond was on the road.

CHAPTER 80. STORM.*Atlantic Ocean*

JIMMY POND STOOD on the deck of the freighter, looking out over the increasingly choppy green and black waves. The night sky was filled with a ceiling of black storm clouds. He zipped up his black Northface coat, bristling at the harsh, wet wind blowing across the bow. Down below decks, the snakes and the fake Coca-Cola water tank were wrapped up safely inside a shipping crate with dozens of other cases of soda. He was not supposed to check in with Hank Armstrong at the CIA for another two days, so he did not believe that anyone would be tracking him yet. He had made arrangements with his contact to meet him in Marseille, France when the freighter arrived the day after tomorrow. He would be bringing the soda truck. Using one of his many false passports, Pond would drive the load with his French contact to Geneva, Switzerland, the headquarters of the WHO. There, he would deliver the life-saving snakes to the Director of the WHO herself. What a great day that would be.

Pond knew his life in the United States and as a CIA agent was now over. His change of plans could easily be described as treason. Once the President and the Director learned of his betrayal, he would be a marked man internationally. It would be a matter of time before they sent assassins to kill him. To his credit, however, Agent Pond did not accept a dime for the delivery of the purple snakes. In his mind, the sacrifice of his own career, his reputation, and perhaps even his own life would be worth the price to save so many people across the world.

He had no specific plans after he got to Switzerland. He told himself that he would come up with a plan on the long voyage across the Atlantic, but so far, nothing seemed very interesting. He had not spent much time in South America. That was a possibility.

On the captain's bridge, the outlook was much more gloomy. The Captain's radar-man had some very bad news. The National Weather Service had just upgraded the tropical storm to a full-fledged hurricane, called Hurricane Nancy. Nancy was getting bigger and bigger on the screen. The freighter, unfortunately, was headed right towards it. The Captain tried to play out alternative routes on his maps. What if we were to go further north? The radar-man said it wouldn't do much good.

The hurricane was too close to them and too big. It would catch them whether they went north or south or straight ahead. There was only one hope. They would have to reverse course and go back towards Charleston where they had started, in an effort to outrun the hurricane. The Captain's engineer plotted their course if they went at full speed. It was going to be dicey, and depended on how fast the hurricane moved. The Captain was worried. He sent a ship-to-shore message to his shipping company, and another to his wife. He gave the order to reverse course and proceed at full speed.

Jimmy Pond, back on the deck, saw the freighter turn. He thought perhaps it was a slight alteration in their course until he saw the ship do a complete "180" and head back the way they had come. Something was wrong. Had the CIA figured out his double-cross? Was he going to be arrested? He went up to the Captain's bridge, where he was met at the door by one of the Captain's assistants, who was refusing Pond's entry to the bridge.

"This area is restricted," said the assistant.

"Why are we turning around?" asked Pond.

"Some bad weather up ahead," said the assistant. "It's coming right at us. We need to backtrack a little and wait out the storm. Then we are going to be proceeding as normal. Please return to your quarters."

"Sure, no problem," said Pond. Bad weather, my ass, thought Pond. He needed information, right away, but there was no Internet service in the middle of the Atlantic. Pond went below decks and headed for the engineer's room. There was a small bathroom next to the engineer's room and he went inside. Inside, one of the engineers was washing his hands. He went up to the dockhand and pressed two hundred dollar bills into his hand.

"Hey, listen, man, can you do me a favor?"

The dockhand looked at the money in his hand, and then eyed Pond suspiciously. "Sure, what do you need?"

"The entire ship just turned around and is heading back to the United States. I need to know why. I have a very important shipment that needs to get to Europe immediately, and any delay is going to kill my company."

"Sure," said the dockhand. "No problem."

Pond waited outside the engineer's room, while the dockhand went back in to talk to his boss. A few minutes later, he came out.

“Hey, don’t tell anyone else on the ship, but there’s a hurricane called Hurricane Nancy headed straight for us. Captain’s trying to outrun it.”

Pond considered this. Well at least the President wasn’t trying to have him arrested.

“Will we make it?”

“We better,” said the dock hand. “My girl is waiting for me back in Charleston and she would be pretty disappointed if I died at sea,” the hand joked. Pond smiled. Evidently, the dockhand had no idea what their chances were.

Pond had a moment of indecision. What if they didn’t make it? Those snakes would be lost to humanity forever. What could he do? As a CIA Agent trained to solve problems on the run, Pond was used to controlling his own destiny. He did not like trusting his fate to other people. But after a moment, he realized that there was nothing he could do. He would simply have to hope they rode out the storm. He went back to his bunk to get some rest. Sleeping was impossible. Pond stared at the ceiling, hoping that they would make it.

Unfortunately for Pond and the rest of the freighter’s crew, Nancy was quite a sprinter. Within the hour, the storm was right on their tail. The radar man gave the Captain the bad news.

“Captain, this thing is huge. It’s right behind us, approaching fast. . . . Oh, shit. Captain, you need to take a look at this.” The radar man took a gulp and had a look of dread. The Captain looked grimly at the radar man after viewing the screen. There was a thick green line coming right at the rear of the boat. Coming right behind them was a massive wave. It was a ship killer.

“Gentlemen, it has been an honor” were the Captain’s last words as the monstrous tidal wave swept over the freighter and buried it under the water, sending Jimmy Pond, the ship, and all of its cargo to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

Washington, D.C. The Oval Office

“MADAME PRESIDENT, I have some very bad news,” said CIA Director Hank Armstrong.

“What now?” asked the President.

“Well, our agent, Jimmy Pond, was successful in retrieving the purple

snakes from our actor friend in California, although the Bel Air Police Department now has an artist's sketch of Pond as the thief. Apparently, he tranquilized two of their security guards and a number of household staff. But the really bad news is that it appears that Pond had his own agenda. We don't know if his plan was to sell the snakes to the highest bidder, or what his exact plans were, but we know he loaded the snakes onto a freighter called the *Dominance*, which left Charleston, South Carolina several days ago and was headed for Marseille, France."

"Okay, well just intercept the boat and get the snakes back. What's the problem?"

"The problem is Hurricane Nancy, Madame President. The *Dominance* went right into the hurricane and is presumed lost in the storm. They have lost all radio contact."

"Lost? What do you mean lost?"

"I mean, it is probably at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean."

"Well, what are we doing to get it, Hank?"

"You are going to need to call out the Navy, Madame President, as soon as the hurricane passes, and have them perform a search and rescue operation. It is possible that the container which held those snakes is still intact."

"Or maybe Pond put it on another ship, or maybe Pond has it stashed somewhere else, or maybe he has already sold it to terrorists, or one thousand other possibilities! Jesus, Hank, don't you vet these guys? This is the second mole we have discovered! You have got to plug the leaks in your Agency! These snakes could cure the diseases of millions of people! We could have just lost the greatest discovery mankind has ever seen. We absolutely have to find that boat!"

"I would agree," said Armstrong.

The President called in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and had him advise the Navy to begin the search operation.

Atlantic Ocean

IT HAD BEEN a day since the hurricane had passed. The seas were calm, the cumulus clouds were out in force, and the sky was a bright blue. Hundreds of feet below, on the ocean floor, lying upside down, in a watery tomb, was the cargo ship called the *Dominance*. On the lowest

deck (or what was now the highest deck), inside a heavy wooden crate, smashed and lying on its side, was the fake Coca-Cola water tank. The lid on the top had broken off on its hinges. Nothing remained in the tank. Near the top corner of the wooden crate was a six inch hole in the boards, caused when the crates were upended by the tidal wave. Forty purple snakes took turns slithering through the hole in the crate into the ocean water which had filled the interior of the ship. Slowly and silently, they undulated through the water, over crates, around posts, under ship engines, down passageways, until they finally found a two foot hole in the ship's hull. The snakes finally escaped the ship, and slithered silently away, looking for tropical climates.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JOHN MEDLER IS a trial lawyer and author. He lives with his wife Tammy and their six children in St. Louis, MO. *Fountain* is his second published novel, and is a sequel to *Quatrain*, a fiction thriller about the lost prophecies of Nostradamus. *Quatrain* was the #1 Book in Fiction and #1 Overall on *www.free-ebooks.net* in 2011. Connect with John online at:



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AUTHOR NOTES

WHEN RESEARCHING THE idea for this book, I stumbled quite by accident upon a journal article, “*Thief, Slave Trader, Murderer: Christopher Columbus and Caribbean Population Decline*” by Tink Tinker and Mark Freeland, which thoroughly laid out the case that Christopher Columbus was a genocidal murderer, a slave trader, and an altogether despicable human being. I subsequently learned that there are hundreds of articles published on the subject of Columbus’ genocide, and that there have been organized protests on the celebration of Columbus Day for many years. I guess I have been living in a cave, but I had never heard that argument before, despite years of elementary school art projects requiring the drawing of the Niña, Pinta and Santa Maria, and the glowing adulation of the Spanish navigator every October. I was quite convinced by the evidence laid out in this and other articles and books, which led to a more troubling question: if these many authors and historians are correct about the villainy of Columbus, how did our history books get it so wrong for hundreds of years? Why would we name our nation’s capital, cities in Ohio and South Carolina, and benevolent institutions like the Knights of Columbus after a mass murderer? It seemed unfathomable to me. This notion that carved-in-stone truths about our nation’s history may actually

be wrong served as the germ (no pun intended!) for this book.

This led to my discovery of an article espousing the novel theory that America was named not after Amerigo Vespucci, as the history books tell us, but by a Bristol cod merchant and Royal Customs Officer named Richard Amerike. I learned from the article that the idea had first been proposed in 1908 by Alfred Hudd, then Chairman of Bristol's Clifton Antiquarian Club. I learned for the first time of the mysterious Waldseemüller Map, which has puzzled historians for centuries. The article suggested that Vespucci may have stolen Cabot's maps, and that it was Cabot who actually discovered both America and the Pacific Ocean. For an excellent book on this subject, read Rodney Broome's book, *Terra Incognita: The True Story of How America Got its Name* (Seattle: Educare Press, 2001). Again, it hit me that much of what we learned as grade school children about our country may be completely false. I wanted to make sure that the book asked these important questions about our nation's history.

At the time I was writing *Fountain*, I was also preparing for an important trial. I am a trial lawyer, and when I am not writing books, that's what I do to put bread on the table. I represented a young man named Clayton who was rendered a paraplegic in a motorcycle accident. Clayton is the nicest client I have ever had the privilege to represent, and his parents, Sam and Christine, and his sisters Ashley and Taylor, are some of the nicest people that I have ever met in my life. Every day, as I worked on his case, I found myself wishing that there was some way for me to cure him and make him walk. Clayton was my inspiration for Teddy, and for the yearning for a magical cure. Let's hope that someday scientists find something as wonderful as Teddy's purple snake.

I would like to thank Professor Douglas T. Peck for his interesting article, "*Misconceptions and Myths Related to the Fountain of Youth and Juan Ponce de Leon's 1513 Exploration Voyage.*" In this article, Peck explained that Ponce de Leon's involvement with the Fountain of Youth myth was solely due to one back-handed wisecrack about impotence from historian and rival Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo in his *Historia General*, published in 1535. I thought this revelation was very funny, because one of my best friends is named Gonzalo Fernandez. Friends who know me will undoubtedly think that I made this name up, but nope, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo was a real guy. Professor Peck is the one

who explained Peter Martyr's important Fountain of Youth reference in his *Decade de Orba Nova*, wherein he recounts the voyages of Juan Diaz de Solis, stating that "*Beyond Veragua, the coast bends in a northernly direction, to a point opposite the Pillars of Hercules; that is, if we accept our measures certain lands discovered by the Spaniards, more than three hundred and twenty-five leagues from the north coast of Hispaniola. Among these countries is an island called by us Boinca (later Boyuca), and by others Aganeo [also referred to as Ananeo]; it is celebrated for a spring whose waters restore health to old men.*" Peck concludes that the location described is not modern day Florida, but rather the Bay of Honduras, where De Solis was traveling at the time. Peck suggests that the only confusion is the reference to the Pillars of Hercules, which I sidestepped by suggesting that at the time of these events, there were large outcroppings of stone rising from the sea which reminded the navigators of the Pillars of Hercules.

I read numerous scientific journals on the Ebola virus, but special thanks goes to Richard Preston, for his New York Times best-selling book *The Hot Zone*, in which he recounts the real-life hair-raising story of a close encounter with a deadly virus very similar to the Ebola Virus in a Virginia monkey house. Much of the information on the detection of the Ebola Virus at the Italian lab I learned from Preston's excellent and thrilling book.

As you can probably imagine, Charlie Sheen was my inspiration for Skip Drame. In early 2011, right after I published my first book, *Quatrain*, Sheen was on television and radio constantly, regularly talking about "Tiger Blood," "Adonis DNA" and "Winning" and a hundred other memorable and hilarious quotes. I knew then that I had to put a character like Charlie in my next book. For the 29 best Charlie Sheen quotes, see: <http://www.funnyordie.com/articles/8e4a8d6fd5/charlie-sheen-quotes-crazy-insane-winning>.

I would also like to thank Audrey Monahan, my wife's Drama and English teacher, for her final edits and suggestions on the manuscript, and Dan Monahan, my wife's History teacher, for his historical insights. Dan and Audrey directed the high school play *South Pacific*, where I met my wife Tammy when I was fifteen. In the play, I played the part of swashbuckling pilot Buzz Adams. I had one line in the play as I recall, "We're going out in waves tonight... Waves." No idea what that means. I couldn't resist putting him in as the idiotic doctor on Mackinac Island. By

the way, Monahans, sorry I killed you with the Ebola Virus!

Thanks to my high school friend Jerry McCabe for the excellent illustrations. They look truly Mayan!

And speaking of Mayans, our youngest daughter Wendi is a Mayan Indian, adopted from Guatemala when she was four. It was fun learning all the Mayan folklore. Wendi actually spoke the K'iche' Mayan dialect for the first three years of her life. When I was writing about Xbalanque and Hunahpu, Wendi, I was thinking of you!

I would also like to thank my six children: Ryan, Kevin, Cody, Natasha, Sabrina, and Wendi. With that many kids, you have to figure, based upon the law of averages, that one of them will grow up and be a writer. Finally, to my wife Tammy, who somehow has bottled her own Fountain of Youth: You make me forever young. I am so glad I discovered you!