Andrew Correll

Mummies in ‘Rica

**Chapter 1: A Solitary Lecture**

Doc stood in front of a room full of 200 medical school candidates as he walked up to the computer where his powerpoint slides were pulled up.

“Alright, we should probably start class. It has been a pleasure covering the psychiatric section these two weeks for the step 1 exam you guys have coming up. I just want to say that it has been an absolute honor to be able to teach you all. I got into this psychiatrist business because I had pretty bad anxiety in undergrad and, through some therapy, got much better and wanted others to feel the same way. Hopefully you all feel encouraged to maybe become psychiatrists yourselves, but you have some time until you have to choose a residency. My goal was that you guys could also get something out of this for yourselves with all the resilience exercises I talked about. They are not only fantastic for you to advise your future patients to do but also great for you if you decide to do them. We’ll start with mood disorders, progress to anxiety and panic disorders, then psychotic disorders, and we’ll end with substance abuse disorders with nuanced topics scattered throughout. Today’s lecture is on depression, so despite the rather gloomy topic I need some hype in here. Let’s do the wave!”

Doc ran from the computer at the far end of the room all the way over to the other side of the lecture hall pointing with both hands at students who, timid at first, joined together in successively raising their hands and letting out “Ohh” as he went by. Doc went back the other way for one more run—for good measure.

“Research shows purposely being goofy can decrease norepinephrine levels by 15% and boost serotonin by 20% for thirty minutes afterwards. Write that down, that’s a test question for sure. Before we get going. Are there any questions anyone would like to ask?”

A student raised his hand. “Is that test still two days from now?”

“Oh yes. Still two days from now. Any other questions?”

“Okay then. I will send out an email sign-up list for people bringing food trays to the lectures. Adequate glucose supply to the brain is important for you guys to perform at your best, and I am already hungry so I regret not setting this up earlier. Everyone think about your brain. It’s a gelatinous mass of convoluted electrical-firings consisting of 100 billion brain cells called neurons that collectively make up the most complex working machine in the universe. We can make robots that can more precisely make incisions than the most steady-handed surgeons in the world, make AI that can read your emails like Gmail and suggest better responses than you sometimes, but we cannot make something that can do it all at once. We can make a ping-pong playing robot and a grammar checker but we can’t put it al together, which is how special a brain is. It’s a package-deal. It can process environmental sounds and give them meaning; produce coherent language on a predefined system of rules; coordinate physical movements from a jump to raising one’s arm up to flexing the tricep and radiocarpal joint in just the right order and timing to serve a tennis ball at 90 mph and then comment on how good it was—all caused by one working entity, the brain. It doesn’t need anything or anyone else to function. It is a solitary, self-functioning thing that doesn’t need anything else except food and water for it to work. How cool is that!

This is a good segway into mood disorders. I have seen many, many people with depression, and you future Doctors will encounter many people with depression in your practices no matter what you end up doing, nephrology or otolaryngology." Doc went over all the signs and symptoms that are consistent with the various types of depression and continued for the rest of the hour lecture.

**Chapter 2: Emails at the Office**

Doc heard the sound of Walmart plastic bags shuffling down what should have been an entirely vacant hallway. While all the students of Wright State were sitting at home with feet reclined and hot chocolate in hand on winter break, Dr. Andrew Barrymore (Doc) was typing away in his tiny alcove of an office deep in the medical school listening to some Bob Marley. He was working on some emails, the kind you send out just as a courtesy to the parents of kids on the trip so they aren't too worried. Of course, none of the students cared about being prepared. Heck, a huge part of the reason they were going on this trip was because it was unexpected, something *adventurous.* At least that was the word in bright-green leaf-font on the FedEx office flyers he had printed off and hung up for all to see on any free bit of University-owned cork advertisement board he could find; you know, the ones littered with advertisements about anything from Latin dancing to the gaming club?

Doc heard this noise right when he was contemplating what funny spin he could put on the all-too-boring packing lists and obligatory waivers. His office was deep in the heart of the medical school, in the convoluted "coronary arteries" of the building (the offices were separated by a hallway that was way too small and was always getting clogged, plaque-like, with people). Since it was the holidays he hadn't seen anyone else in the building all day except for Bill the janitor he said hi to that morning and joked about his crappy fantasy football team with.

In all probability, the shuffling was Bill or some med students trying to get into the break room to play some ping pong, but just the chance of some ping intrigued Doc because he prided himself with his ping pong skills and challenged students who thought they were the best (only to show them up with crowds "oohing" and "awing," offering dog-house cheers occasionally for good shots, which mostly came from Doc).

However, Doc's eyes were getting a little strained and his throat a bit dry, so why not go check out who might be wandering around?

Doc closed his laptop, slid out his chair, stopped the reggae music, put on his flip flops (he is always more productive barefoot), and walked out into the hallway. The lights started turning on progressively down the hallway as he walked (cost-saving measures…got to save the bottom line along with the polar bears) and after he walked by the break room, no one, then the water fountain, no one, he forgot about the shuffling and went on back to his office.

He started emailing and typing again, explaining all the wonderful medicinal things he was going to point out about the common flora of Costa Rica and how it would be such a "mind-expanding experience" to have a high chance of getting the "booty demons" (the colloquial term for the two-day-long heart-to-heart almost everyone going to Central America gets when they eat anything fresh, like salad), malaria, dengue fever, a brain-eating amoeba (*Naegleria fowleri*), and snake bites.

So why in the world would anyone in their right mind (and on their meds) want to go on this trip? Doc copy-and-pasted (professors can use this too, okay) a quote from Helen Keller into his way-too-long word document, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." Awww, that's nice, Doc thought.

Soon, the lights in the hallway shut off again.

After some vague amount of time had gone by, Doc heard that stinkin' shuffling again. What in the world? So he closed his laptop again, stopped the reggae music again, put on his flip flops (his routine), and went to the door. This time, some of the lights at the end of the hallway were on, but there was a definite gap of darkness between his office and the lighted section. Doc was a little unnerved at the similarity to the SpongeBob episode of the hash-slinging-slasher he had watched last week, but, despite this apprehension, Doc clambered down the hallway (inadvertently turning on all the lights again). He knocked on some of the office doors around where the lighted section of the cramped hall ended, trying to see if anyone had gone into their office. Right after the first knock a man in a suit turned the corner at the end of the hallway.

"Hello, my friend," the man said with an accent straight from deep, deep Mexico.

"What's up?" Doc said, trying not to imitate his accent because he loved doing accents whenever he could with friends.

"I just had a couple of questions for you about the upcoming trip to Costa Rica. Do you mind if we talk about them in your office? They are somewhat personal," the man said.

"Sure," Doc said, and the two of them headed down the rather long hallway back to his office. When Doc sat down at his desk, the man closed the door. Doc thought, "Just how personal are these questions going to be?" He remembered this time when he was in this Bible study at a friend's house and they were asking for prayer requests and one guy, who he had actually known for a pretty long time, said, "I just had to kind of get this off my chest because I know that Pastor has been talking about the importance of being real with others." In the way any Bible study

leader in the history of Bible studies would have said it, the leader said, “Sure, what is it John?” The other guy was like, “I killed a man.”

Let’s just say Doc politely excused himself soon after that. So yes, things can get *too* personal.

After Doc’s momentary traumatic recollection, the man with the accent closed the door and took off his jacket. His slim dress shirt couldn’t hide his enormous chest muscles as he sat down.

“Let’s make this easy. You should really reconsider the offer we gave you, my friend,” the man said.

“If this is about Sancho, no way buddy. I am finding this all by myself. I don’t want anything to do with you outlaws,” Doc responded.

“*Pero,* are you sure?” the man asked.

“Positive,” Doc said.

“That was the easy way. Looks like I have no other choice,” the man said as his face morphed into a grimace. He stood up, leaned across the desk, and threw a punch right at Doc’s head.

**Chapter 3: Unexpected Jujitsu**

Doc was ready for such a thing, though. Something was off about this whole encounter, and people have tried to hurt him before. He dodged his head to the right, missing the closed fist of the man’s right hand and, after a moment, landed an uppercut of his own right to the man’s stomach. The man immediately lunged for Doc's neck.

The fight went to the ground when the man with the accent judo-throwed Doc. Thankfully Doc landed somewhat softly on the floor and defended himself from the man’s

punches aimed straight at his face by pulling himself closer to the man (whom he now had deemed the man) to minimize the distance between them.

He didn't take that jujitsu class at the Y for nothing.

Doc knew he needed to end this ridiculous exchange as soon as possible, so he used all the leverage he could muster and pushed off the wall with his leg to flip himself over so that he was on top. Fortunately, this plan worked, and Doc threw some punches of his own. These landed with serious force, but the man used Doc's own trick against him and pushed off the wall, flipping them over so that his punches had the added 9.8 $m/s^2$ acceleration behind them as they careened towards Doc's 0 m/s face. Doc absorbed three heavy punches, the last cutting his lip, and through some jujitsu magic Doc ended up getting the man's back for more control (and so he couldn't be punched). Doc quickly got him in a chokehold.

When the man passed out for a couple seconds, Doc moved him to the chair opposite his desk, whipped out some duct tape (because duct tape is something that Doc always had on hand, along with chewing gum), and tied both his arms to the chair opposite his desk. The man did not take long to come to, so Doc had barely sat down when the man's eyes opened again. A lamp in the corner illuminated the man*'s* dazed face as he blinked and looked around. Doc was smiling with those eyes people put on when they are amused or see their grandchildren, but Doc felt neither amused nor did the man look anywhere near related to him. Doc was surveying him, noticing his athletic build and feeling lucky that he brought the fight to the ground because this guy was at least 6 foot 6 and would have been tough on his feet. Why did a man just try to hurt him on a day where the most interesting thing that happened was…well, nothing—this day had been one of the most boring on record? Doc noticed the man staring at his cheap desk, a true

Walmart special, three regular-length but skinny metal legs with the fourth leg standing on top of a hockey puck so that the table wouldn't wobble.

"Yeah, I like staying grounded. Fancy desks feel gross to me," Doc said in response to the man's staring. "Moving on though—what was all that about?"

The man*'s* eyes were still flickering open and closed, but he remained silent as he looked down at the duct tape holding him down.

"Alright. That's how it's going to be," Doc said, and right then the man pulled up on his taped-down arms on the chair—to no avail.

"Good luck," Doc said as he grabbed a smarties from his desk (he had a hankering for candy every now and then) and stood up and wandered over to his left, the man's right, toward the bookshelf on the opposite wall. He held the candy cylinder as he would have a cigarette, between his index and middle finger, and looked pensively at the books, his back turned towards the man. He fake-puffed and did that thing where people wave their cigar on important points to look cool.

"So, you are working for that fat 'ole Sancho character. He must have sent you to try and scare me, rough me up a bit or something. No surprise there—that is how you creeps work. If you don't get your way, you use scare tactics to try and create this attitude of fear, but it isn't going to work on me. No way Jose," Doc said.

While Doc was talking, the man continued to struggle against the tape, which Doc assumed wouldn't budge. However, right as Doc finished talking, the man managed to slide his arms out from under the wrappings by shear force, arm hair against sticky-glue-stuff, and lunged toward the hockey puck underneath the table leg. The ripping of arm hair made such a strange

noise that Doc turned around just in time to see an arm cocked and ready to throw a black, tooth-breaking hunk of pain.

Doc threw his arms up over his face in instinctive self-protection, like how dads in America's Funniest Home Videos always cover their nether regions after taking a square-on plastic baseball bat groin shot like they are protecting themselves from any future blow (despite the damage already done). Like those unfortunate Y chromosomes, Doc was too late and ended up taking a hockey puck straight to the ribs. And the man sprinted out the door.

In gut-wrenching pain, Doc bent over his knees for a second trying to catch his breath while experiencing this pain akin to stubbing one's toe in the middle of the night on that corner the architect of your apartment just HAD to make you walk around on the way from your bedroom to the bathroom each 1 A.M. pee trip. Doc quickly regrouped and went after his attacker, sprinting all out after the man down the office hallway and into the larger hallway of the medical school with classrooms on each side. The man headed down the stairwell and down another hallway only to see Bill between him and the door mopping the smoothed, modern-concrete floor. Doc saw him and shouted "Bill, stop that man."

Bill's eyes grew twice their original size with excitement, and Doc saw skinny ole Bill pick up his broom halfway down the shaft and run towards the man, twirling his broom kind of like Darth Maul, Doc thought, and yelling "Aaaaah."

Despite his efforts, Bill completely whiffed with his broom as the man ran by and purposely pushed over Bill's tub of dirty-mop soap so that the whole floor became a slippery, 20-foot-radius ice rink. Doc saw Bill's failed attack and tried his best in the split second he had to avoid running straight into Bill, but he couldn't steer away in time. Doc jumped, but mid-air,

with Bill underneath, Doc saw the suds he failed to accommodate for and ended up having an epic wipeout on the floor as his flip flops had absolutely nothing to grip when he came down.

Doc looked up, splayed on the floor like a wet dog at the pet salon, and saw the man throwing the front door of the medical school open and heading toward a tinted-window getaway car. He knew he had been given the slip now, quite literally.

**Chapter 4: No Love at the 'Potle**

The next morning Doc was standing in line at Chipotle perusing Pinterest on his phone. Christmas music played overhead as the bells on the front door jingled and a dapper-looking young man in a slim, blue collared shirt and well-fitting dress pants strolled in. He nodded to Doc and quickly walked over. They were opposites in a lot of ways, which is part of the reason they had become such great friends. Mark's combed, black hair and Eddie Redmayne-esque small, tight face contrasted with Doc's I-just-got-off-a-rollercoaster James Dean-esque slicked-back blond hair and fuller, freckled face which gave him an eery resemblance to Bear Grylls. Instead of zig-zagging all the way through the car seatbelts that made up the waiting line, Mark slipped through an opening since he, like Doc, was as skinny as a bean pole (some would say too skinny) and stood next to Doc. Doc was still wearing grungy sweat pants and a sweatshirt from his morning run as he raised an eyebrow and said, "We are in it."

"How deep?" Mark said.

"Knee level," Doc said.

"Really, already? That typically takes us at least a week," Mark said while peering at the billboard of a menu and trying to decide if he was feeling more chicken-y or steak-y that day, more white or brown, more black or pinto.

“You emailed me about those demon doll babies like *two days* ago,” Mark said.

“Let’s just say things got too interesting yesterday,” Doc said, and he caught him up on the previous day’s rather rude interruption in his office.

“So, what’s the next step boss?” Mark said.

“I really need to talk to Joe. Like talk, not yell,” Doc said.

“That will be hard. That guy hates your guts,” Mark said.

“The feeling is mutual, I assure you, but he should be here at 10:30,” Doc said.

Mark looked down at his watch and saw Mickie Mouse’s index finger pointing to six. Mark looked up again and stared shell-shocked right at Doc for a second, blinking several times. “That’s like any moment! Are you kidding me? How in the world did you get him to agree to meet with you?” Mark said incredulously.

“Pff! I went online to his department website and found the name of the chair of his department, which took me like two minutes. Three more minutes had me with a dr.timothy.freemont@gmail.com account and the rest is identity fraud history,” Doc said.

“Impressive, I’ll keep my credit card closer at hand from now on. That plan is a little sketchy, though. He might still not want to talk to you at all,” Mark said.

“That’s fine. All I need is for him to hear my idea because he won’t be able to resist. It’ll be like a bowl of sweet, fresh blueberries, a freshly-peeled and cold-from-the-fridge orange, a bunch of washed grap...”

“Vegans...” Mark said as he rolled his eyes. “Do you ever feel a longing for the sour cream over there?”

Doc looked. “I won’t lie—that looks pretty good...alright very good...alright that looks unbelievable. But no, I have *morals* buddy, unlike all you meat-eating Neanderthals,” Doc said with a British accent and his nose jokingly turned up.

Mark said, “Ha! Your life must be full of unfulfilled desire. You see these people in line behind us? The only reason they are here is for the sour cream. I would order it plain if people wouldn’t judge me. The other food is only here because it is an excuse to eat the sour cre...”

Before Mark finished the door opened and in walked Joe’s boulder-like shoulders in a bodybuilding.com shirt one size too small. The moment Joe had taken one step into the door, Doc and his eyes locked. Joe’s serious facial expression on his Italian face snapped to one of disapproval and *are you kidding me*?

Joe paused mid-step, quickly scanned the room (probably looking for his department chair), and said, “Oh heck no!” as he pulled off a 180-degree half turn, mid-door mind you, and went towards his car.

Doc frantically slipped under the seatbelt of the waiting line and followed Joe who was now almost at his car again.

Doc said, “Hey, I know this looks bad, but can you listen to me for a moment?”

Joe didn’t say anything or even glance as he opened his car and sat down. Doc tried to get to the car door before Joe closed it but he was a moment too late.

Doc took out his iPhone and placed it flat against Joe’s front windscreen.

“I have coordinates,” Doc said as loudly as he could so that Joe could hear him inside the cocoon of his car. Joe *maybe* glanced (if so, for a millisecond) but didn’t make any indication he saw the phone as he turned around and backed his Mustang out of the parking space.

Doc gave up and went back inside to the back of the line, which had since grown substantially (somehow).

“That was a lovely conversation!” Mark said as he walked toward Doc with a bag of food in his hand.

Doc said, “Wasn’t it? I couldn’t believe how much we got to catch up there! I had no idea he had earned a new master’s degree in being a complete rear-end! Uh…you stayed in line and got your food already?” Doc said as Mark stood next to him.

“Yeah. I would have helped out, but they rapid-fire asked me all those quiz questions and I had to focus,” Mark said.

“Well, gee, thanks for the moral support,” Doc said.

Mark smacked down on his sour-cream-smothered burrito and after a long bit of silence, Doc said, “This place was definitely designed by a dude. It looks like the wood aisle at home depot.”

Mark glanced at the plywood on the walls, the tin roof held up by metal struts, and the two piece, completely-flat metal chairs destined to give chiropractors business.

“You are right. I will say, though, the designers of this place had more of a plan than you did today,” Mark quipped.

**Chapter 5: A mentor is good for what?**

The next day, Doc got in his F-150 and set out for Englewood, a typical 25-minute drive to the northwest (with no traffic and a heavy foot) that could sometimes turn into a 35-minute drive when you're behind a person who's listening to an audiobook on destressing. Doc was going to get some advice, counsel, guidance, instruction, recommendation, opinion, help or whatever you want to call it.

Doc's truck was a Kuwait oil pump on fire going down the road, but he had long-since lost the associated guilty conscience. The morning was foggy when his truck's V8 growled in the driveway of a squat single-story, gray house at the end of a cul-de-sac. Doc knocked on the door.

The tiny piece of metal that called itself a door handle made a hollow and altogether unsatisfying "dink" noise every time it collided with the metal back plate holding it on the door, which annoyed Doc on the inside. Doc then got annoyed that he was annoyed at the door handle in the first place, because this meant he was losing his cool—even though he was physically warm this winter morning standing on the door step. His muscles were a bit taught and his mind idling noticeably higher (the usual indicator he was stressed). The door didn't open when he tried it, and after a little while of contemplating whether he should come back another time, the thin wood door slid back to reveal a short, rotund, old man whose cheeks rose up to a smile the moment his eyes locked with Doc.

"Long time, no see!" the man said in a slight Irish accent as a balloon of smoke obscured Doc's vision.

"Too long for sure! Looks like you kept the weight on Sid," Doc said as he stepped in the door and gave him that palm-and-interlocking-thumb one-hand handshake-and-hug all the millennials

did (Sid may have been 75 with gray hair and the smallest circular pair of glasses you have ever seen, but he fancied himself on keeping up with the young folk's trends and mannerisms).

"And you are just as ignorant as ever," Sid said with chuckle.

"Man, I thought it was the cold air making that cloud of smoke, but it smells sweet. Are you smoking e-cigs now?" Doc said as he walked in to the living room, kicked off his shoes, and sat down on the couch that was straight out of the 70's.

"Oh, don't get on me now, boy. I've been reading the literature and they say these things are better for you than the 'all-naturaaaal' ones."

Doc raised an eyebrow and said, "Well neither are the fountain of youth."

Sid shot him a glance and said, "I'm still looking for that boy. Don't be using that in some cliché expression. I have leads in Pan…"

"Look, I would love to talk about this some other time, but I have something a lot more concrete to talk about," Doc said.

"Ok, fine, it exists somewhere, though. That I can tell you for certain," Sid said as he grabbed a half-eaten hot pocket from the table and plopped down on the couch across from Doc.

"I've got a lot going on. I was relaxing to some music, minding my own business in my office…"

"How's the reggae working for the uptightness?" Sid asked.

"Like a charm. Thanks for the tip."

“I learned that from my friend Glenmore, the most relaxed man I have ever met. He was the best steel drum player I ever saw, too. Played at a pub in Kingston I frequented back in the day,” Sid said.

“Anyway, I was saying I was attacked in my office.”

Sid’s face showed little sign of surprise or emotion.

“Isn’t that a little surprising?” Doc asked.

“Not really; do you know how many times I was attacked as a nationalist in Northern Ireland in the 90’s?” Sid responded matter-of-factly.

“Well, yeah, but that doesn’t happen every day here in Midwest Ohio,” Doc said.

A little taken aback by Sid’s lack of interest in what had happened, Doc gradually forgot about it and the conversation moved towards sports, politics, and the usual topics they discussed before Doc said, “Do you remember about that trip to Costa Rica? I told you about it a while ago, remember? The one with the mummies?” Doc said.

“Oh, not that business again!” Sid said as his hand hit his forehead in grief.

“I think the trip was the reason I was attacked, but I have a much better lead on it now,” Doc eagerly replied.

“There is no way in this wide world where there are living…(munch and swallow) breathing creatures and a particular mammal that has the ability to think rationally and coherently… (munch and swallow) that you found the freakin’ location of that picture which was probably taken...(munch) on a Nokia flip phone at dusk...in the rain...probably with a fingerprint smudge on the lens. You showed me that a month ago when I was starting that keto diet and I don’t want

to talk about it now just as much as I didn't want to talk about it back then," Sid said in between bites of his hot pocket.

"Well do you believe this? Ten point six eight zero three nine zero three latitude and negative eighty-three point five eight one three blah blah blah longitude," Doc recited off his iPhone.

"Seriously?" Sid said.

"I went to the computer assistance guys down in the tunnels at Wright State…"

"And…" Sid said.

"I talked to some obvious hardcore gamers with some deep computer knowledge, and after a little bit of them fiddling with the source code and hand-wavy magic they found the phone's location when the picture was taken."

"Well, there you go; you know its exact location. You don't need my help at all. Let's talk about something different," Sid said.

"Not exactly where. Those numbers I listed off were of a Wi-Fi hotspot the phone was at ten minutes before the photo was taken, so I've got a pretty good idea but not a great idea of where this find is. They also adjusted the brightness and sharpness of the image in photoshop and you can now definitely tell it is a mummy in the photo," Doc said with excitement.

"Humph! Doubt it. Let me see the picture," Sid said, and Doc handed him his phone. Sid looked down at a slightly-less blurry photo of an ear and the faintest silhouette of a nose and a chin but the whole thing looked wrapped in a cloth of some sort, so it was impossible to tell exactly what you were even looking at.

“That is more promising, I will give you that,” Sid said with a very Irish “that” as he handed the phone back to Doc. “What can I do to help?”

“I need all your knowledge on Costa Rica. I’m leading a group of med students for a week, so that’s kind of an obstacle, but I got a free plane flight out of it. All I need to do is show them which varieties of leaves are okay to wipe yourself with and which aren’t when you are in a pinch. After that week, all my energy will be towards finding those mummies. Do you know what a legendary find this could be? This could bring in so much money for the school. Outside of Peru and Egypt, mummies like this are unheard of,” Doc said with big eyes.

“Sure thing, sonny. I am quite familiar with the place from three excursions in ‘87, ‘89, and ‘92, I think, it might have been ‘93. Anyways, the place is by far the nicest country for us Americans to travel to out of all the Central American countries. They run on entirely renewable energy!” Sid said.

“Thanks tour guide, but I already know that stuff. I need to know more practical things...where to stay...local museums...universities...local anthropology gurus…” Doc said.

“Let me fetch my travel logs,” Sid said as he leaned back a little bit on the couch and lunged forward for momentum to stand. As he left the room, Mary, Sid’s wife, leaned into the doorway and said, “Not that I was being a fly on the wall, but did I hear Costa Rica is the next spot?”

“Yep,” Doc said.

“Do you need the usual?” Mary asked nonchalantly.

“And more. The trail is a bit hot. I might not be the only one looking this time,” Doc replied.

“Gotcha,” Mary said with a grandmotherly smile as she leaned back the way she came.

Sid came back and for the next hour Sid gave Doc any tips he could possibly remember about good places to stay, old friends to connect with, and good pubs (Sid insisted on this) all around the town of El Guapote, where the GPS coordinates were. And so went the rest of the afternoon…

Mary was a legend at travel research and within two days sent Doc a 100 mb email full of plane ticket info, pictures, and research articles on any known pre-Columbian civilizations she could find. Sid's adventure days may have been over, but he wasn't against helping a good friend with his own exploits (and hearing about it later). So, Sid helped Mary pack a big hiking bag replete with everything from bug repellant to tubs of peanut butter (any good hiker knows this secret) and dropped it off at Doc's front door outside his little apartment (within walking distance of Wright State's main campus, of course).

**Chapter 6: At the airport**

Doc stood with a massive backpack full of gear right next to Mark with a similar-sized backpack at the front entrance of the Cincinatti airport. They stood still as they looked ahead at every visible queue line chock full of people all trying to get their tickets. Mark slowly turned his head towards Doc and said, "Wow."

Doc kept looking forward, for some reason not feeling the urge to move, feeling just kind of like time had stopped.

"If I get through that line and find I have to pee right before we get to the front, I am just letting you know up front I am gonna have to wet my pants," Doc said, still looking forward in a strangely dramatic way.

"In that case, I hope Mary didn't book my seat next to yours," Mark said.

When they finally got up to the front of the line with no potty breaks needed, they got their tickets and headed to the TSA line.

“The nerve they have to ask obese Americans to remove their belts and put their hands up,” Doc said to Mark right after the TSA man, who obviously had someone pee in his corn flakes that morning, had checked their ID’s and tickets.

No pat-downs occurred as they went through the line and entered the “safe zone” of the airport where everyone and everything had been checked for anything pointy. They had thirty minutes to spare before their 11am plane boarded, so they found a café, sat down, and ate some sandwiches. Doc, being the vegan he was, ordered three BLT’s (bacon, lettuce, and tofu) sandwiches while Mark ate one normally-defined BLT.

They chatted about the Cavaliers, the financial situation at Wright State (a little sketchy), and were getting around to the ATP tennis rankings when Doc said, “Hey Mark. I don’t want you to turn around or anything but there are two people across the way I am a bit suspicious of. I kept making awkward eye contact with one of them while we were waiting in that huge ticket line, and I thought nothing of it then but they are sitting across on the other side of the terminal hallway at the Starbucks now. Do you want to try moving and seeing if they follow?”

“Umm. Sure thing, but don’t you think that is a bit paranoid of you? I don’t care where we eat but I don’t wanna be walking around like a wanted person,” Mark said as he tried to corral his sandwich, bottle of iced tea, and banana.

“Look, you aren’t the guy who got randomly attacked in his office,” Doc said as they both moved into the hallway and tried to find another restaurant farther down the terminal.

They had about 15 minutes left until boarding, so they ended up looking at one of the bookstores where you can buy a book and then return it after the flight.

Sure enough, though, Doc noticed the two men walking by the bookstore and sitting across the way at some chairs people sit in to get onto their flight in. They were much farther away than before, but they still were in direct line of sight, which made Doc uneasy.

“They are still there,” Doc said.

“Chill man, it’s probably all in your head. Coincidences happen,” Mark said. “Let’s move one more time and see if they follow us, just to make you feel better.”

They went the other way back towards the gate where their actual plane was.

The call came out for diamond class to board, then platinum, gold, silver, bronze, wood, and plastic. As Doc and Mark got in the boarding line with the common serfs, Doc spotted the two men from a distance coming down the terminal.

“Tickets please,” the lady at the desk asked Doc in a somewhat stern voice.

“Oh,” Doc said as he turned back to the lady and gave her their tickets.

Once they had their tickets checked, Doc glanced back and saw the two men heading toward the line he was now leaving. All while Doc went through the twinkie that extends out over the airport tarmac his mind was racing as to what this could mean and what he should do next. He stepped into the plane and found his seat right next to Mark’s in the aisle with the extra leg room (the work of Mary). Are you willing to assist in an emergency? Oh yes.

The two fair-skinned men, one tall and stocky and the other short and skinny, brushed past Doc in the aisle seat (who had one eye taking special notice of them, metaphorically speaking that is because it is medical impossible to just move one eye without amblyopia).

Doc was not feeling well. He didn't know why he was getting so worked up about seeing these two men. He closed his eyes and tried a mental imaging technique he had taught his students a couple of days ago. He thought of a beach. A Floridian beach. Aah…. yes. Palm trees, the sound of ocean waves slowly lapping up onto layers of sand that time had slowly sifted one on top of the other. Sitting on your beach towel in the warm sun (with sunscreen on to prevent skin cancer, of course). Your hand reaches for freshly-squeezed lemona…

"*Ding*!"

Doc startles and then hears, "*This is your captain speaking. Welcome aboard Serenity Airlines flight 99 to New Orleans*."

Where were we? Oh yes. Lemonade, a cool breeze, sea gulls…

Before Doc knew it, he was much calmer than before. He opened one eye and looked at Mark who was playing candy crush on his phone. The rest of the flight consisted of much of the same, and eventually Doc woke up to Mark nudging him. "Come on, we got to go."

At the New Orleans airport Doc and Mark gave their tickets to the lady at the counter of their gate.

"Sorry, these don't work," the lady said.

"What?" Doc replied.

The lady leaned forward. "The system says…let me see here…"

After a few more clicks, she went on, “The tickets have been reported stolen apparently, so you should call our central customer service line and they should help you out.”

Thoroughly confused, Doc looked at Mark and then back at the lady. “There must be some kind of mistake,” Doc said incredulously.

“I am just telling you what our system says, sir. This is a problem I can’t really change anything about myself. You will have to call our customer service line or go to our airport headquarters in terminal D.”

“But we are in terminal A,” Mark said, looking at Doc with a bit of worry.

“Sorry gentlemen,” the attendant said.

So, Doc got out his phone and called their customer service line. It took 5 minutes to get off of hold and talk to someone. When he had described his problem, the person redirected him to another division. By the time Doc started listing off digits of his social security number, giving his address, and highlighting details about his overly-personal security question—where is your birthmark?—10 minutes total had gone by and the attendant wasn’t even at the counter anymore.

*I’ve handled worse before*, Doc thought. After answering many more questions, Doc listened to an explanation of the company policy for all issues of theft and forgery to undergo a process of in-person validation of an I.D. card. This meant Doc needed to personally go to terminal D, at least a 15-minute walk away, and this would mean he would miss his flight. When they got to Serenity Airlines’ airport headquarters, they talked to a man with a large walrus-like mustache who apparently was running the show around there because people were asking him questions about random stuff.

“So, it looks like we got a call saying that the tickets were stolen at about 12am yesterday. Do you mind showing me some I.D.?” the man said.

Doc and Mark got out their driver’s licenses and handed them to him.

“Hm. Looks good, the man said. He verified several other bits of info about the debit card that was used and the telephone numbers on the account and said, “Looks like it all checks out, but for some reason I still can’t access the debit card information. I can get you fellas on the next flight we have to San Jose, Costa Rica. That looks like it will be in three days, unfortunately.”

“Do you have anything closer? We really need to get there fast,” Doc said.

“All our earlier flights have been canceled due to the snow that is falling and is expected to keep going for the next two days. Well, we do have a plane going to San Jose that leaves in 2 ½ days, would that be better?”

“No not really,” Doc replied. “I’ll come back in a second. I need to think for a second.

Dog and Mark went to the nearest coffee shop and sat down at a table. OK, I schedule this thing so we have a week to study these moments before the students come. So…

Doc looked outside at the snow accumulating on the ground, what the weather channel on the TV in the coffee shop said was the most snow in Atlanta they have had in 10 years, a record 3 inches.

“Oh, that is nothing, 3 inches? In Ohio we wouldn’t even delay school,” Doc said to Mark as he glanced back-and-forth at the TV.

Doc quickly learned his debit card had been flagged for being part of the airline theft situation, so his debit card did not work, to his surprise, when he paid for his coffee. After a quick call to

the bank, he learned to his dismay that he needed to be in Ohio in order to go to his bank (which only had one location since it was a family business) and verify his identity in person.

“Good thing I always keep money in my shoe,“ Doc said to Mark.

When Doc looked down at his shoes, he realized that he had the wrong pair of shoes on. He freaked out, because he had just put, right before they left, $600 under the insole.

“You are not serious are you?” Mark asked after he learned about what had happened.

Doc must have put on the wrong pair in the TSA line, because even though the shoes looked eerily similar to his own he was normally a size 12 ½ and these were 11½.

“There is no way…“ Doc said incredulously at his shoe in the hand.

“How is it possible you could not tell that you had the wrong shoes on?“ Mark asked.

“I don’t know! How are we going to get to Costa Rica this way? My debit card is locked, and the bank is being pesky about it. How much do you have in your wallet?” Doc asked Mark who was sipping on his coffee.

“I have about 100 in cash,” Mark said.

“I think I have…” Doc said as he pulled out his wallet. “I have about 20, 40, 60, 80, plus a 10, so I have 90 bucks.”

“That’s not much, but something,” Mark said. “I like coming on these trips with you for the adventure, so heck, let’s see if we can get to Costa Rica on 200 bucks.”

“Wow, you’re optimistic. I’m not giving up that easy. I’m gonna call the bank some more,” Doc said.

“Yeah, but we were on the phone for like 30 minutes, so all the time we spend here is time we could *be on the road*,” Mark’s said with eyebrows high.

“Driving would take forever, you can’t be serious. We would lose the extra week I planned in, so I’m still calling, sorry buddy,” Doc said.

“Well, follow me then. The airport can’t help us anymore,” Mark said as he walked away and Doc followed.

They went to the car drop-off area while Doc waded through phone-tree hell. They hailed a taxi and when the driver asked where they were going Doc began to speak when Mark interjected—“ can you take us to the harbor?”

“Sure thing,” the mustached driver said. Doc shot Mark a confused glance but Mark said, “Don’t worry I have an idea.” Before Doc could respond, he was asked a question on the phone tree and got distracted.

**Chapter 7: Aquatic hitch-hiking**

When the taxi pulled up to the harbor, Doc was still on hold and so he sat down at a bench while Mark walked around to see about his idea. Mark saw yacht after yacht but finally came upon a section where there were a lot of chartered fishing boats. A lot of them advertised deep-sea fishing, $150 for the day. Mark thought that was a ton of money considering their current financial plight of 200 bucks.

He kept searching for the industrial parts of the dock where more commercial ships were and finally came upon vessels that were roughly 150 feet long, which intrigued Mark because he figured those went a longer distance than the fishing boats he had been seeing up to that point.

Mark was thinking that if they could hitch a ride on one of these smaller cargo ships they wouldn't charge much (or mind) them coming along, and this could solve the whole dilemma. Mark walked to the first vessel he saw, hailed down the captain (or the guy he thought was it based off his strange hat he was wearing), and asked him, "Where are you headed to?"

"Tip of Florida, why?"

"Just wondering…uh, I guess, do you know of anyone that might be heading more South.,.Southwest that is?"

The rough-voiced captain replied, "Well, 'da rest of these ships in this part of the harba' routinely come in and out, don't go out much more than a day. I don't know why your asking, but with that big 'ole backpack you got there I am suspecting you're trying to get a ride somewhere. These are all commercial vessels buddy—doubt they would let some young vagabond come along against company policy. I would look somewhere else kid,"

"All right," Mark said with an air of dejection. The captain went back to what he was doing and Mark tried the next vessel, to a strangely similar response.

Mark went to more ships and did his best to talk to the captain in each. For three of them, he actually talked to the captain, but each time they said something like, "rules, not enough room, illegal,"—all that kind of stuff. Mark walked back to Doc (still on the phone) and sat down next to him on the bench with a big sigh. Mark started to question coming on the trip, because this seem to be going nowhere fast. He liked coming on trips like this with Doc, and he had had a lot of fun in the past, but this trip had gotten off to a pretty pathetic start. Thoughts about the research he was missing while being halfway stranded down here started to pop into his bead. As Mark looked out over the blue water, the beautiful sun shining down on sailboats, glistening off

their sides, the breeze blowing gently and causing the flags on some of the birds to gently flap, Mark noticed a man far to his left walking kind of fast towards them. There were occasional passerby's, but this person stood out because he was walking so fast. Before he knew it, he heard a "Hey!" and when he turned and looked the man was waving his arms in the air.

Mark stood up and gave the all too common greeting, out of habit—"How's it going?"

"Just fine, thank 'ee," the man replied. "I wanted to come over here to talk to y'all about what I overheard."

"Yeah, we are looking for someone going south," Mark replied.

"My rear-end of a captain said you guys couldn't come with us, but I was thinking, since I saw your backpack and everything, and thought about how when I was a young buck like you I wanted to travel the world and see places," the man said with hands on his hips. "Our boat has some room in the cargo hold, and I think, if y'all wanted to, you could camp out there during our gig carrying some oranges over to Cancun," the man said.

"Seriously? That would be amazing! What's your name?" Mark asked as he rushed over to shake his hand.

"Sandy, third mate on the world-renowned cargo boat *Catch-22*."

"Ha! Nice boat name," Mark said. "What about what the captain said?"

"Well, that old fart doesn't come out into the wild but for an hour three times a day during holy times—breakfast, lunch, and dinner. As you could probably 'tail, he make sure he don't skip a meal. Ha! As long as you steer clear of him and lay low during those times, you two 'a be fine and dandy. If he figures out you're there I'll take the heat, but I just remember being your age

and wanting to do what you're doing. It's worth the risk to me. My family is part owners 'o the boat anyway. The captain couldn't fire me if he wanted to. Plus, we'll be in the middle of the big blue, so if he figures out ya'll are there he couldn't do much 'cept throw you overboard Jonah-style," the man said with a smile.

Somehow the suggestion of being thrown overboard made Mark a little uneasy, but he replied, "Sandy, you are the best," as he walked over and gave him a big hug that had extra momentum from the sizable hiking backpack Mark had on.

Doc was still on the phone but gave a nod and a smile to Sandy. Sandy was fair-skinned with blond hair, was a bit overweight, seemed to be about 50 years old, and had the most jovial smile you have ever seen—rosy, round cheeks below a pair of thick glasses that gave off a bit of a bug-eyed impression.

"Aah! No more of that silliness. I have had my fair share of phone trees," Doc said as he put his cellphone in his pocket and walked up to Sandy.

"And who do I have the pleasure of meeting?" Doc asked with a smile as he offered Sandy his hand.

"Sandy's the name. Just talking to my buddy Mark here. I was telling him he would be welcome on our cargo ship en route to Cancun."

Doc's face portrayed a momentary puzzled expression. "Oh, well, *interesting*. I appreciate the offer, but we aren't sure if we can do that."

"Oh, come on Doc! I practically said yes already," Mark said as he pushed his shoulder.

"Pardon us a second," Doc said as he pulled Mark about twenty feet from Sandy.

Doc leaned in close and whispered, “Look man. I don’t know what you are getting us into while I was on the phone but there has got to be a better way. We don’t have much extra time,”

“Well,” Mark said, “do you have any better ideas?”

“Yeah! We should keep calling my bank and the bank until we get all this figured out!” Doc said tapping his phone.

“You were on the phone for like two hours!” Mark said.

“I was making progress. Albeit not much, but some! I think another solid hour will get us in the clear. If that doesn’t work, we do have some money. Maritime hitch-hiking or whatever you think this Sandy guy is going to get us into doesn’t sound incredibly appealing to me right now,” Doc said.

Mark shook his head. “We don’t have *money*. This is free! Did you hear that? F…R….E…E—every broke college kid’s favorite word.”

Doc patted his wallet and shook his head. “You may have a point with the money thing, but there has got to be a way to solve this whole fiasco easier than your plan, no offense.”

“Alright, let’s compromise. Let’s go ask Sandy when they are leaving. Up until they leave why don’t you try making some calls and see if you can get an amiable person on the phone to let you verify stuff without being there in person,” Mark said.

“Deal,” Doc said as they walked back over to Sandy.

“When is your ship departing?” Mark asked.

“We are pushing off at about 8pm, gives the delivery trucks plenty ‘o time to get to us and let us load things. Ya’ll make ‘ur minds up yet?”

“We won’t know for at least a couple more hours,” Mark said while looking at Micky on his watch that pointed to 2pm while his foot stomped to the beat of time ticking away.

“All right, well, I’ll be loading things all afternoon so just come over and give me a holler when you don’t see the cap’n around if ya’ll wanna come along,” Sandy said as he walked back the way he came.

**Chapter 8: Sitting on the dock of the bay**

Doc sat back on the bench and got back on the phone. He put it on speaker so that he would reduce the distance between his water-filled and radiation-absorbing head and the radiation-emitting and potentially cancer-causing cellphone. Mark sat down next to him on the bench, conveniently located under a tree that made Mark comfortable temperature-wise and protected Doc from the sun’s damaging rays. Doc stared out at the bay listening to elevator music and thought about how the world seemed out to get him sometimes. Doc knew this wasn’t the case, but man, it felt like it sometimes. This was *classic* anxiety. He had seen it in countless patients, but it was a feeling he hadn’t felt before in a long time. For some reason, lately his symptoms had been flaring up. He pushed the worry about it taking him over out of his mind.

He stared at the leaves gently swaying back and forth on the tree limbs above him.

He thought he might know why he felt this way. On all the other anthropology adventures he had gone on, the stakes had been low. Even when people were paying him to find certain stuff and got a little demanding with the timeline, there was still never any premeditated violence. There had been scruffs and tussles before, but the whole attack in his office was a first for him.

Doc flipped the phone around in his hand.

The man was obviously with Sancho (he had asked Doc to reconsider finding the mummies for him), but that meant that he traveled a super long way, which meant that Sancho had connections and that he cared a lot about this for some reason. If he sent someone all the way to the U.S. from Costa Rica, all just to try and intimidate/convince/pressure him, what *else* would he be willing to do? This thought prompted many more in Doc's mind while he stared off into the distance.

The muffled ringtone music shifted to a different song. Doc felt a cold breeze come over him.

Mark, too, stared out at the bay and the ripples of water that played with the afternoon light. The sun shone brilliantly and reflected off the many boats in the harbor which made Mark grateful to be alive. Mark was feeling pretty good about himself after finding a boat willing to let him and Doc come along. The solution he had found retroactively made him a bit ashamed of himself, though, for thinking earlier on that he shouldn't have come on the trip in the first place. Something Mark really took seriously was loyalty—infused in him thanks to his dad—and Mark felt that he had momentarily mentally-bailed out on Doc right after the taxi ride.

It disturbed him more because Doc was Mark's idol. They had met at a research conference that Mark had been required to go to (and get someone to sign his pamphlet to show that he had actually gone). He was lured to Doc's presentation because there was just something *different* about him that intrigued Mark to the core. Doc had this vibrant energy, this full head of steam when he spoke, that resonated with Mark as he listened to the 15-minute presentation (with about 30 others), one of about 15 such presentation he would see that day. At the time Mark was looking for someone to do research with (since it was required as part of his post-bac program), so when Doc had finished his presentation Mark came up to him afterwards and asked if he was accepting any extra hands in his lab. After learning the ropes in the lab, and once Doc learned Mark played tennis, they struck up a vibrant friendship from then on and had been going on

occasional archaeological trips together. Mark had known Doc for three years now and one thing Mark really appreciated about Doc was how he had always treated him like an equal. “What’s up man?” was the typical greeting Doc gave him whenever Mark would walk into the lab—a far different interaction than he had had with any other professor.

A robin gently flew and landed about ten feet from their bench. Mark smiled.

Mark glanced over to Doc who had a kind of blank look on his face as he looked out of the harbor.

Mark thought about how Doc hadn’t been doing very well lately. Doc was typically vibrant and optimistic but for the last month or two he had been just a tad reserved, a bit pessimistic. Like it was strange for Doc to get so flustered by the TSA check, to the point of putting on someone else’s shoes! How does that even happen? And why would you put so much money in your shoe in the first place? If you ever wanted to pay for something you would have to pull out a soaking-wet ball of green cotton that reeked of foot-stank. Mark wanted to help out with whatever was going on but it was harder than it seemed. He didn’t want to seem too pushy and just go out upfront and say, “Do you need help?” He was comfortable with him but not *that* comfortable.

Hours passed and though Doc reached several operators each time they demanded he go to his home bank and verify his identity in person. Doc was now very aware of his mistake of switching to a local bank that was right next to his apartment and apparently had no other locations.

**Chapter 9: Clandestine cargo**

“Well, it’s 7 PM. What do you think we should do?“ Mark said as he looked at the sky turning menacingly dark.

“I still want to keep trying,” Doc said.

“All right, whatever you think, but a spot in a cramped closet going closer to where we need to go sounds a *lot* better than spending a third of our money at some cheap motel for the night here in the *same* town,” Mark said as he stood up to stretch his legs. He had been taking a nap in the grass and his right leg had fallen entirely asleep.

After about 30 more minutes of pleading and holding (Doc had now spoked to everyone in the bank), Mark decided to go walk back to where *Catch-22* was to check on things. The large, gray container ship (big for a normal boat but very small as far as container ships go) was about a five-minute walk from where they were seated all afternoon. Mark felt a creepy feeling walking in the dark as the harbor had all kinds of floating dark objects moving up and down ever so slightly (obviously boats but nonetheless slightly intimidating out of the corner of your eye). Lamp posts sparsely populated the sidewalk, but Mark found his way to *Catch-22*. Mark squinted in the dark to see the outline of Sandy on deck but couldn’t see him. He saw a couple deck lights turned on and some people walking around but none of them looked anything like the tall, hulking figure of Sandy. Mark time his walk on the gangway (a metal bridge from the dock to the ship) so that he wouldn’t be seen by any crew members. He went in the first door he saw and thankfully it was a darker room. Mark knew that if he encountered the captain this whole plan might be over, so he looked around the room for another door but all he saw was a bunch of crates of food stacked up on each other as high as the ceiling. He walked around and eventually found another doorway that went into what looked to be a kitchen since it had a small dining table and a couple barstools bolted to the floor (how rough did the seas really get?). Doc kept walking forward until a man suddenly appeared in the room. The dark-skinned man was really short with bulging biceps and a dark, full beard that wrapped around his face.

“Who are you?” the man asked Mark with a puzzled look.

“I am looking for Sandy, do you happen to know where he might be?“

“Ah, he told me at dinner to keep my eyes out for a young kid looking lost. He’s down below deck checking all the crates to make sure we’re balanced and don’t tip. I’ll take you there,” the man said as he gestured for Mark to follow him.

They went down a spiral staircase and through some passageways before coming into a larger room stacked with crates to the ceiling.

“So what’s your name?“ The man asked.

“Mark, what about you?“

“Jabbar, but you can call me Jab, that’s what all the guys around here call me.”

The man turned a corner and Mark sped up a little bit to keep up because he wasn’t entirely sure he could find his way out again in the maze of black crates. Before long they saw Sandy bent over what looked to be a scale of some kind that a crate was on top of.

“Howdy!” Sandy exclaimed after seeing Mark. “Y’all want to come along now? If so, better hurry up. I talked to the captain and we’re leaving in 5 minutes sharp.”

“Really? That’s 15 minutes early. But yeah, we definitely want to come, I’ll be right back with Doc and our stuff,” Mark said hurriedly.

Sandy shook his head, “Well don’t just walk up on the gangway, I hope you didn’t do that getting on the boat just now. Leave your stuff on the dock and I’ll come and pick it up for you. I just don’t want Captain seeing you,” Sandy said.

“Then how do we get ourselves on?” Mark asked.

“There is a ladder on the port side of the boat away from the dock, I would try and climb that thing because it’s out of sight of Cap’n steering at the front.”

“Ok,” Mark said as he left back the way he came to go get Doc. Instead of going back on the gangway, Mark long-jumped to get back onto the harbor. He sprinted all the way back to the bench with about two minutes to spare and shook Doc who was still on the phone.

“We need to go!“

“What? It’s not 8 yet?” Doc said.

“They’re leaving early, let’s just go! Forget trying to fiddle with that anymore.”

“All right, I’m sick and tired of being on hold anyway,” Doc said.

Doc and Mark grabbed their big backpacks and ran bouncing and jostling all the way back.

They made it to the ship right at the time that Sandy said they would be leaving. A man waved at them in the dark, which they assumed to be Sandy, so they dropped their bags a good fifty feet from the ship. Sandy jumped from the boat to the harbor and picked up their bags. Sandy put their hiking bags in some trash bags and threw them back into the ship. As Sandy was doing this, Mark pulled Doc to the back of the boat.

“Ready to go for a swim?” Mark asked.

“Are you serious?” Doc asked.

“There is a ladder on the left side and Sandy said that would be the best way for us to get on the ship so that the captain won’t see us,” Mark said, a bit out of breath from all that running.

“All right man, I’m trusting you, let’s go,” Doc said as he went towards the edge of the dock.

Doc and Mark quietly jumped into the water and swam over to the ladder. The water was warm and counteracted the eerie feel of sea weed brushing against their limbs. When they got to the ladder they started climbing the 15 feet to the deck. The metal ladder was extremely slippery since it was slathered in algae, but Doc and Mark made it. Shortly after a loud, deep boat horn went off announcing the ship was setting off. They slid in between two large metal containers and plopped down soaking wet and smelling like fish.

“Those were the most slippery stairs I’ve ever been on,” Doc said.

“Yeah,” Mark said as he looked around the corner of the metal containers to see if anybody was nearby. They waited about three or four minutes until they could hear footsteps coming their direction.

“Quick, hide!” Mark whispered.

They backed up against the wall so that an electrical transformer hid them from the view of someone looking straight down the alley. When the blonde hair of Sandy went by, Mark whisper-yelled, “Sandy!”

Sandy turned around, smiled, and went up to Mark and Doc.

“Glad you guys could make it!”

“Yeah me too, we almost got left behind,” Doc said.

“Where should we stay during this trip?” Mark asked.

“Down in the hold with the shipment of Oranges we are hauling,” Sandy said as he led them to a ladder to go below deck. “I put your gear down there already.”

Doc had to duck several times because of the low metal bars he didn't want to leave a forehead imprint on. Soon they came into a big holding area, the same place Mark had been earlier, and Sandy led them through the maze to a little 10ft x 10ft recession in the crates that hopefully was secluded enough to hide them even if the captain abnormally ventured out of his cabin. Sandy reiterated that, just to be safe, they should stay here during meal times when the captain showed his face, but any other time they could walk around where they pleased.

"Thanks so much Sandy," Doc said.

"No problem, I always wanted to go on some kind of travel excursion like y'all are doing so I am glad I could help."

When Sandy left, Doc and Mark pulled out their hammocks from their hiking bags and strung them across the crates so they had a place to sleep that night. The smell of oranges was thick—every crate was chock-full of them.

"Better than being stuck on a ship full of pigs," Doc said.

"I concur, an extended period of time around that much manure might cause permanent nose scarring," Mark said.

The hum of the ship's engine could be heard clearly from their little alcove, but Doc and Mark were quickly able to fall asleep after the long day.

**Chapter 10: On a boat**

The next morning Doc woke up to Mark snoring. He couldn't really tell what time of the day it was because the storage room they were in was always dimly lit by some incandescent bulbs located every now and then on the ceiling. The undersides of their hammocks were cold, making

it a little bit difficult to sleep, but the white noise from the engine helped Doc calm his mind so he felt a renewed sense of energy that morning.

Doc was excited. He would have preferred a plane ride, but this felt like his college days when he used to vagabond around with Sid, days he had long since missed in exchange for the comfort and security of university life. Even the archaeology trips him and Mark had done were always planned with comfort in mind, thanks to Mary's amazing planning skills, so the rugged, orange-scented accommodations was a nice change for him. He felt iffy about Mark's idea to jump into the harbor and climb the ladder but now, lying with his hands behind his head looking up at the ceiling, he was glad he jumped into the water. Sometimes in life you just need to go for things.

It was probably his fault for choosing a bank that only had one location and no online service, but he had got a heck of an interest deal. Three whole percent! That's ridiculous, how could anyone pass that up? They could have taken the money they had and drove home from New Orleans, fix the whole situation, and got plane tickets back to Costa Rica in time for the students to arrive (and forfeit their week of searching for the mummies), but getting a ride on this boat was a major windfall. Even though they will be a little delayed (boats are slower than airplanes), they will still probably get in a solid three or four days of searching.

Doc tried to roll out of his hammock with finesse but ended up nearly falling on his face as the hammock rolled in a unpredictable way. Doc's near face-plant woke Mark up.

"You ok there?" Mark said as he rubbed his eyes and saw Doc on the ground lying on his side.

"Nothing to see here, keep on snoring—I mean—sleeping," Doc said with a laugh, a slightly pained laugh.

Mark turned to the other side and tried to catch some more zzz's.

Doc looked at his watch and saw it was 7 AM, but he didn't know when they were eating breakfast (he should've asked Sandy the night before), so he walked around a little bit. He maneuvered his way through all the crates and ended up walking through a door that led to the ladder that Sandy led them through the previous night. Particles of dust (and who knows what else) glinted in the air as the sun shone through the hole in the ceiling. Doc climbed the ladder and went out onto the bright, sunny deck. He walked around a little bit on the side of the ship (careful to not run into anyone). They were far away from shore (Doc couldn't see land from the side of the ship he was on) and the sea was calm and glass-like as the boat plowed its way through at a pace that seem to be about 10 miles an hour (Doc wasn't sure what that would be in nauts). At this pace, Doc calculated, the roughly 2000 miles or so would be covered in 200 hours, about eight days, which was a little slow for his liking because he wanted as much time as possible for searching. All he had was a week before the students arrived, so he made a point to figure this out later. Doc walked around a little bit more and soon begin to approach the kitchen that Mark encountered the previous evening. Doc could smell food from where he was and immediately turned around to head back towards the cargo room where they stayed that night, remembering Sandy's advice to stay clear of times when folks were eating.

Doc and Mark chilled until about 9am when they both walked around a bit. Sandy talked to them some and said that everyone else on the ship wouldn't mind them hitching along, so Doc walked around looking for someone to talk to. Doc ended up in the engine room and saw the buff, bearded man Mark had encountered the night before. He had two differently-sized wrenches in his hands as they introduced themselves. Jab explained he was trying to fix some kind of line leak, and Doc tried to hold and retrieve parts for him as best he could. Doc and Jab ended up talking for a good long time about all kinds of things. Doc learned that Jab used to be an amateur

boxer until he got fed up with how he was getting injured so much for so little money and took up car mechanics. His knowledge on motors landed him this job that paid about 50% more than working on cars (because everything on boats is a little bit more expensive) and has been working for this company for 15 years. Doc ended up mentioning the mummies and Jab's eyes immediately lit up.

"You are looking for what?" he asked.

"Mummies, like preserved children, and some adults, often buried with ornate jewelry, like *gold* jewelry," Doc said.

"I thought those were in Egypt," Jab said.

"No, cultures around the world have tried to preserve their dead so they can remember them. The Incas in Peru, for example, preserved their dead and placed them back in their home in the corner of their houses so that they were watching over them, even though, of course, they weren't able to respond or do anything," Doc said.

"Wow, that would be disturbing to the children," Jab said.

Jab went back to working. "I wish I could get my hands on some gold myself so I can quit this job and retire," Jab said.

"Well, I guess everyone wants something," Doc said as he leaned back against the engine casing, crossed his arms, and looked at all the tools laying on the ground.

"What is it that you want?" Jab said as he leaned farther into some compartment while Doc heard the clanging of some tools.

“What do you mean?” Doc asked a little taken aback. Usually he asked deep questions like this, so it was weird for someone else to ask him something like this.

“Why are you on this boat right now? I know why I am, I’m trying to get my money, move to Florida with my wife, and live happily ever after sippin’ orange juice,” Jab said.

“I wouldn’t mind orange juice myself after being around oranges all last night,” Doc said laughing. “I guess I just want to have some fun. It’s kind of like a hobby for me, searching for hidden treasure, finding something no one has ever found before, that kind of thing.”

“Huh, can’t say I’ve ever heard that before,” Jab said in muffled voice from inside the metal compartment.

Doc frowned, slightly unconvinced by his own answer.

“I’m going to go out for some fresh air, see you around,” Doc said as he left the engine room to go up to the deck. He spotted a lawn chair propped up against the wall in one of the rooms so he pulled that out and went to the back of the ship to make use of it. Doc had a wonderful nap reclining in the lawn chair and resting his legs up on the ship railing until a hand tapped his shoulder and woke him up.

“You look comfortable, do you mind if I join ya?” Mark said as he pulled up another lawnchair.

“Sure thing, is that food I smell?” Doc asked.

“You betcha, courtesy of Sandy,” Mark said.

“Sandy is a saint,” Doc said as he took the chicken fillet and potatoes in a Styrofoam bowl from Mark. “I don’t even care if I have to eat this chicken, I’m starving.”

They sat and ate while looking at a beautiful ocean and a partly cloudy sky that made all kinds of weird shapes. Doc tried to classify the clouds into what they most looked like. The rest of the day went like this, except for 12 PM and 6 PM when they would go back to their sleeping quarters so the captain wouldn't see them.

The next day, Doc found Jab and asked him, "is there a way you could potentially make us go little bit faster?"

Jab thought for a moment and said, "Hm, I think I could arrange that. We couldn't go too much faster because captain has the controls, but I can slowly rev up the engine and see if he doesn't notice. I myself think we go slower than we need to most of the time."

Doc smiled and fist-bumped Jab, "That would be awesome!"

Three days of lots of thinking time and relaxing went by. One day, sitting in their lawn chairs, Mark said, "It kind of feels like a cruise. Free food, great view, what more can you ask for?"

"I totally agree, great idea taking us on this thing. I almost prefer this to flying—almost, that is, because this is taking us longer, but I got Jab to work on the engines so we should gain some time that way."

Doc and Mark learned to attract some seagulls by throwing some bits of bread off the side of the boat. They had them trained to catch the bread chunks midair, doing all kinds of acrobatic twirls and twists to catch the pieces that rarely dropped to the ocean and to the sharks (if sharks ate bread). During the trip they ended up meeting all of the quite friendly crew that totaled eight people (excluding captain grumpy pants). One crew member, however, gave them suspicious looks every time they walked by his area in the heart of the ship while he typing away on his computer. Doc asked one day about him and Sandy said, "Oh don't worry about him, he needs to

get out more and feel some fresh air. Accounting can really suck the life out of 'ya—glad I don't have to do that kind of work all the time." Sandy's empathetic viewpoint struck a nerve with Doc.

Doc ventured to the front of the ship to ask the guy that typically drives it during the day, Bob, their location at the moment. Bob told Doc they were about one day out from Cancun, which made Doc really excited because this meant they had gained a full three days' time over what they were schedule to arrive in. Jab must have really increased the speed (later Doc learned that Jab had turned the engines up just slightly at night but significantly during the night, just to help Doc and Mark get to Cancun faster). Doc was really intrigued with all of the gauges and dials around the ship's steering wheel and started asking Bob all about them. Before long, Doc had lost track of time and it was quickly approaching 6 PM. When Captain Buford walked up behind Doc, it was a complete surprise.

"And who are you?" A fat man with a mustache and round glasses said as Doc's eyes met with his.

"Oh, hi! My name is Doc, what's your name?"

"That's none of your business, what *is* your business is why you are here on *my* ship," the man said with wrinkled brow.

"Well," Doc said as he stumbled about for a good answer. He didn't want to throw his good pal Sandy under the bus, so he said, "We just decided to tag along."

"Just decided to tagalong, that is your answer? Are you aware that I could have you seized and detained for unwarranted trespassing on Quality Transport property? The ship you are standing on is their exclusive property according to international maritime law."

“No sir, I was not aware of that,” Docs said awkwardly. This situation was about to get unpleasant if something did not happen quick. Doc thought about something else he could say before he was handed over to the police.

“I am a psychiatrist sir, could that be of any help?” Doc said, kind of as a last-ditch effort.

“What does that have to do with anything? Head to my quarters immediately. We must discuss what I should do with you trespasser. People like you leach off of welfare, drain the government of our resources. And I have to deal with you verm...” He said as he motioned for Doc to follow into a passage way. The captain continued his angry rant all the way until he reached the end of the passage, opened a door, and held it waiting for Doc to come through.

“Lousy, no-good piece of...” the captain said as Doc walked into the room, fearful of what might happen next.

Mark, meanwhile, was reclining in a lawn chair sipping some orange juice-lemonade concoction that Sandy, coincidentally the cook for the ship, had whipped up. Out of all the people to meet first on a ship, the cook was *definitely* the best to connect with.

Mark heard some of the shouting on the boat (the boat wasn’t too large, maybe about 150 feet long) and went to investigate. As he got closer to the front of the ship, Bob stepped out, made eye contact with Mark, and shook his head slowly from side to side. Mark got the message and headed back to the ‘bat cave,’ what he had dubbed their little alcove amongst the crates.

Back in the captain’s cabin, Doc sat down and the captain closed the door. The captain listened for a second at the door and then turned to Doc.

“Look, sorry about the shouting and the swearing,” the Captain said.

“Ok...” Doc said, a little confused.

“I think you are actually a God-send. I hate this job, the people here are just horrible. They won’t work or do anything for you unless you lay the law down, which I try my best to do so that they don’t slack around,” the Captain said.

“Oh, I see,” Doc nodded and said.

“I needed to keep up the impression that this is a tightly-run ship and that I don’t take buffoonery lightly. Did you say you were a psychiatrist back there? Is that like a therapist? I was baffled when you first said that because it was so random,” the Captain said.

“Why thank you, I pride myself on my quick wit,” Doc said jokingly.

“But I think I could really use you,” the Captain said as he got up, put his ear up against the door, and then finally opened the door.

“Hey! Get back on the job! I didn’t say you could take a break and eavesdrop like hooligans,” the Captain yelled at someone in the hallway.

“Sorry sir,” Sandy’s distinctive moping voice said.

The captain closed the door and went back to his seat. He leaned forward and said somewhat quietly with a solemn face, “I think I am depressed.”

“Oh, I am sorry to hear that. Sandy mentioned you don’t get out of your cabin much, is that part of it?” Doc said.

“I just can’t get out of bed in the morning. When I finally do, I just end up waddling over here to this little cabin and sludging through the paperwork the company forces me to do. It is all so soul-sucking,” the Captain said as he put his face in his hands.

The Captain went on for a good ten minutes about all his attempts to spice up his life, give himself some energy, and how it all has ended in him eating way too much food. Food seemed to be the only thing that filled him with joy.

After hearing all this, Doc felt compassion for the guy. The frustration from the democrat-esque insults thrown at him had gone away and Doc was now genuinely wanting to help this guy out. He realized how fortunate he was to be in this situation after having been caught loafing on a cargo ship. “Well, in answer to your question, I do think I can help. I do a lot of psychotherapy back in Ohio, so that could be really helpful for you if you would like to go through that. I also give out medication but I don’t have access to any in the middle of the ocean. I am sorry that my friend and I trespassed on your ship, but as repayment I would like to offer my services free of charge for the remainder of the trip,” Doc said.

“For the record, I do not approve of people like you trying to ride the coat tails of hardworking people just so that they can get a free ride in life and enjoy the comforts of hard work without any of the sweat and tears that true work...” the captain said in a long rant that Doc was afraid would go on for ages and end up in the Captain not accepting his compromise. Doc needed to distract the Captain, and fast. On the wooden wall of the cabin was a stuffed Brown-headed cowbird (which Doc knew from an ornithology class he took a long time ago), so Doc decided to make a comment on it. Even though Doc thought it was weird to hang up one of the ugliest birds known to man very proudly in your cabin, he really wanted to end this rant.

“You know who really loafs off others? Brown-headed cowbirds. Did you know those no-good losers lay their eggs around in other bird’s nests? The parents then end up raising a chick that is not even theirs, grows faster than the other baby birds, and ends up pushing them out of the nest as insult to injury.”

“Well, I never knew that,” the Captain said as he looked quizzically over at the stuffed bird on the wall. “It is strange my son would give me a model of a bird that it such a despicable creature…”

Doc panicked. “Oh, no. Maybe I was thinking of another bird. The head is quite pretty, if you really think about it. Brown is the color of lots of gorgeous things, like trees, stones, and…uh… rivers. *Have you* ever seen the *Ohio river*?”

“No, actually, I haven’t,” the Captain replied.

“Well, it is a stunning brown. Good choice of bird to hang up,” Doc said.

The Captain said, “Well what you mentioned about its egg-laying behavior has disturbed me. I…”

“Oh, don’t worry about it, but can I provide some counseling in exchange for you not turning in my buddy and I?”

“You have a buddy?” the captain asked.

”Well, yeah,” Doc said.

“Oh, that is ridiculous. What were you thinking coming on this boat?!”

“I am honestly very sorry, we had a money issue and got our flight canceled and there’s no good excuse really, I am terribly sorry, but I really think a couple solid counseling sessions would do wonders for you. It typically does with the patients with depression that I see,” Doc replied.

“That would be incredible, sounds like a deal. I won’t turn you guys in if you help me out. That leaves us four whole days,” the Captain said.

Doc then thought about how he had Jab turn up the speed on the boat, so that really might be one more day. Still, a little therapy could probably help this guy out a lot.

“Yep, when do you want to start? How about after dinner?” Doc asked.

“That is one of the best ideas I have heard in a while,” the Captain said as he stroked his mustache and stood up, his belly protruding fat over the desk in his office.

After a couple of strange looks from the crew seeing the captain in a good mood walking into the dining room with Doc, they all had a wonderful meal of pasta and lasagna (of which Doc chose pasta because it was vegan).

Sandy was talking about his chickens back at his farm in New Orleans and how amazing it was to cook fresh, warm out of the hen eggs when Doc had a brilliant idea.

“Hey everyone, do you mind if we all have a group talk about something?”

Nervous glances were exchanged around the room.

“When was the last time you guys really enjoyed this job?” Doc asked the people around the table.

“Every day I enjoy this here job,” Sandy replied.

Everyone else gave nervous glances around the room.

“Jab, what about you?” Doc asked.

“To be honest with you, I have not enjoyed this job in a while. I feel trapped up in the engine room—I’ve been doing the same thing for ever,” Jab replied with solemn eyes.

“Does anybody else feel similarly?” Doc asked.

Bob shook his head and said, “Yah, it’s a little difficult being up at the wheel all day. The views of the ocean are beautiful but it gets pretty boring at times, like *real* boring. Also, uhhh, how do I say this…”

Bob, perhaps spurred on by the openness of Jab a minute before, looked at the Captain nervously and said, “At more moments than I would like, not all the time mind you, I feel like I am kind of *watched*.”

“What do you mean?” Doc asked.

Doc noticed that the room noticeably grew tense as people waited for what Bob was going to say.

“No offense, Captain, and I mean this with the utmost respect, but I feel like you could trust us a bit more with things around the ship.”

“I am confused,” the captain said.

“Thank you for your comment Bob. That was very strong of you,” Doc nodded and said. “Does anyone else want to add to what Bob said?”

“Yeah,” a white-haired old man, whom Doc and Mark had learned was colloquially called ‘Anchovy,’ said. “Whenever Captain checks on me doing the loading, which isn’t often I must admit, he always implies something like I wasn’t working very hard until he showed up.”

Feeling a release of tension, other people begin to share similar stories of how the captain was insinuating hurtful things about the crew. To all this the Captain didn’t say much and just kind of looked ahead at the salt shaker in a plastic holder that was glued to the table (so the rough seas wouldn’t roll it off). Doc said, “what do you think about all this Captain?”

“Bunch of baloney! And not the kind you make Sandy, because that stuff is good,” the Captain said with his hands up in disgust.

Audible grunts were made around the table.

“Now captain, it seems like there is a theme to what everyone said. You seem to think people aren’t working hard,” Doc said.

“And that’s not true!” Jab said with enthusiasm. “I may not like this job, but I *work hard* at it, and so do the rest of the guys. I see them myself!”

Noticing the tension building up, Doc tried to cool it down.

“Let’s not get too riled up, from what I have seen, Captain, you *do* highly value people working hard. I *have* noticed, though, you seem to have a very hard-working crew.”

“Maybe, but that’s only because I keep a tight reign on them,” the captain said as he grabbed another biscuit, put some with honey on it, and walked away.

“Great talk guys!” Doc said as he continued munching on some food.

The evening went like normal—Doc and Mark chilling in their lawn chairs looking out over the ocean. Sandy had got to joining them on these evenings after he had cleaned up all the dishes from dinner.

**Chapter 11: Landfall**

The next morning Doc and the captain met.

“Let’s talk about yesterday,“ Doc said to begin a long session of talking things out that lasted over three hours (until lunch, something Captain didn’t want to miss).

Before the day was over land was in sight. The boat docked in the harbor that night and Doc and Mark said their goodbyes to Sandy, Jab, Bob, the Captain, Anchovy, and all the other guys they had met on the ship.

Doc was glad to get off the boat—he had since decided his legs functioned best on solid ground. He was more thankful to be on good terms with the Captain, who seemed to be in a sober mood after lots of crying and talking things out, because hanging out in a Mexican prison for a random trespassing charge wasn't high on his list of things to do.

Doc and Mark were in Cancun, Mexico some 2000 miles closer to Costa Rica then they were before in New Orleans but *still* 1400 miles from San Jose. Doc and Mark went to the local airport to try and find a cheap ride that could go that far. If they were to take a road all the way it would take 59 hours, but a plane would only take three hours, and Doc had a plan in the works. When they got to the municipal airport via taxi they strolled around the tarmac after going through an open fence gate.

"Do you really think that someone's gonna take us all the way there for only like 300 bucks?" Mark said as they looked at plane after plane.

"Just trust me. Look for a plane with red racing stripes on the side," Doc said.

"Red racing stripes? Don't we want a conservative pilot?"

Their sea legs began to wear off walking around between the hangars, which was a bonus, but they couldn't find a plane with that description.

"Why are you looking for a plane with red stripes?" Mark asked.

“I wasn’t just on hold that whole time. I talked to Sid about whether he knew any buddy in Cancun that could help us get to Costa Rica quickly, since I remembered Cancun was Sid and Mary’s favorite vacation destination,” Doc said, continuing to scan around at the planes. “Sid said that he knew a guy that owed him a favor at this little airport, something about how Sid got him out of some embarrassing situation.”

“You know, instead of trying to locate this plane ourselves, we could just ask the front desk about the plane,” Mark said pointing to a low brick building in the center of the long runway they had been on walking between the hangars.

“Yeah, good idea, Doc said.

They walked on over and entered the building to see a man behind a desk leaning back against the wall with his arms crossed and a facial expression that implied he didn’t care too much about them walking in.

“Do you know a guy who runs an airplane with red stripes on the side?” Doc asked the man.

The man walked over to a doorway leading to a back room and yelled in Spanish. A petite woman in a dress came out and said in a very loud voice, “Sorry, he doesn’t speak a lick of English. I’m the resident Texan, former Texan that is. What do y’all need.”

After Doc explained, the lady said, “Nope, doesn’t ring a bell. You must have outdated information. Do you know the guy’s name?”

Doc struggled to remember what Sid had said, but right as he about to say “I don’t remember” the woman said, “Right there’s a plane with red stripes on it,” as she pointed to a small plane that was moving at a pretty good clip on the runway, speeding up like it was going to take off.

“Oh yeah,” Mark exclaimed as they ran out of the building flailing their arms around. They were too late though, and the plane took off. They walked back into the building to learn that the plane wouldn’t be back, according to the flight logs, for a solid three hours. They did learn, however, that the man was named Chad and was a retired pilot who used to do scenic flights over Cancun for a living and was just taking his plane on a cruise for the heck of it.

After waiting in the lobby all morning perusing airplane magazines, Doc and Mark were happy when they saw the plane land. When a man with a huge, gray beard and a cigar walked into the building, Doc and Mark walked up to him.

“Hi there,“ Doc said as he walked up and offered his hand. “Are you Chad?“

“Depends on who’s asking,” the man said with a chuckle. Doc wondered whether all of Sid’s friends were sketchy.

“Do you remember a man by the name of Sid Edwards?” Doc asked.

A strange look of surprise mixed with something else (Doc couldn’t figure out what) came upon the man’s face.

“Is that a fat Irish bloke who can’t stop talking if he tried?”

“I think we are talking about the same person,” Doc said with a smile and a glance toward Mark. “Any chance you could give us a lift to San Jose Costa Rica?”

“What does that have to do with Sid?” hte man said.

“Well, we’re a little short on cash, and Sid mentioned something about how you wouldn’t mind lending us a hand,” Doc said.

“Oh,” the man said with widened eyes, nodding his head. “Do you know about the wedding?”

Doc maintained his smile and didn't respond, not admitting he knew what he was referring to or denying he knew about it.

The man rubbed his head with his hand and Doc could detect, using his psychiatric spidey-sense, a slight flush in his cheeks like he was embarrassed.

"Wow, that's a blast from the past. I guess I do owe that man a lot. Sure thing, when do you want to leave?"

"The sooner the better," Mark replied as he grabbed his backpack off the floor.

"Hold your horses, it will be at least another hour until my plane fills up with fuel again, but sure I can take ya. What's the hurry though?" the man asked.

"I am leading a trip and need to get down there as soon as possible," Doc answered, thinking that was easier to explain than mentioning they were looking for mummies.

"Ok," the man said as he said something in Spanish at the man they had first encountered. The man bent down and opened the mini fridge and tossed Chad a can of Bud light. Chad said, "Let's leave in an hour."

Doc and Mark exchanged glances but said nothing until he had left. "How long does it take alcohol to get out of your system?" Mark asked.

"Let's just hope that was the only one he was planning on drinking," Doc said as he went back to the magazine rack in the waiting room. "You have got to see this article on the best types of landing gear. It is genuinely very interesting!" Mark read it, too, since there was not too much to read. It actually was really good.

After another hour of waiting they packed their big hiking bags into the back-right seat of the four-seater plane. Mark took the shotgun seat next to Chad, and Doc slid into the back-left seat next to the bags. Things were cramped but everything fit, which was what mattered.

“So Chad, any special precautions going over so much ocean like we’re going to do?” Doc asked from the back seat as they were taxiing down the runway.

“No, we have an extra hour of gas, should be fine. I’ve got an inflatable raft, but we shouldn’t need to use that,” Chad said with a laugh. Doc wasn’t feeling super hot about this, but once he slipped into his happy place and imagined he was on a beach somewhere with his usual lemonade in hand he was fine.

After an hour of flying, Chad and Mark sparked up a good discussion about the merits of landing gear, the article being fresh on Mark’s mind. After a surprisingly intricate conversation, Mark turned around and asked, “What do you think Doc?”

“In the happy place man.”

“Ok,” Mark said, turning back around and looking out the window at the ocean far below him on the right.

After some more time, Doc was thoroughly asleep. Mark began to nose off himself when he felt a nudge on his shoulder. Chad was leaning over and said into his headset mic, “Have you ever done a roll before in an airplane?”

Startled, Mark said, “No.”

“Want to spook the guy in the back?”

Mark turned at around and looked at Doc drooling over one of the bags he was resting his head on. Mark was always for having some adventure, so he didn't immediately dismiss the idea.

"Well," Mark said as he pondered this over. They were plenty high up, so if something wrong happened they would have plenty of time to fly level again. "Let me make sure he's strapped in."

Mark leaned back and tightened the fabric seat belt around Doc. He had his doubts it would hold all his weight, but, after a solid tug, he thought it would hold.

"Let's do it," Mark said with excitement.

Chad pulled the stick back and to the right and the plane began a slow roll. Mark was pushed on his right side up against the plane fuselage, so he tried to push back and prop himself up with his hands. Mark thought he heard Doc stir in the back at this moment, but when the plane was completely upside down and Mark's hands were both up against the roof trying to hold himself up (Mark was thoroughly enjoying himself at this moment), he heard a, "Hey, what's going on?" from Doc in the back.

Mark turned around at a straight-faced Doc with his arms folded across his chest and his knees held up, his whole weight supported by his cloth seatbelt. Mark laughed as the plane went from completely upside down to rolled over 90 degrees to its left. Mark could hear the sound of bags moving (and pushing up against Doc and the fuselage) as the plane completed its roll and went back to normal, upright flight.

"Ha ha real funny guys," Doc said with a hiking bag upside down on his lap.

"Woo hoo!" Chad exclaimed as he high-fived Mark who said, "That was awesome!"

"Just give me a warning next time you wake me up from my beauty sleep like that," Doc said.

Everything was upright for the remainder of the flight. When Mark saw land way ahead of and below them, he was relieved inside (they wouldn't need that inflatable after all). After a while longer, they landed at the San Jose airport. Despite maybe being a bit tipsy, Chad landed the plane surprisingly softly.

They had gained an hour during the flight, so it was only about 3 pm there, enough time to catch a hotel and have some time to relax afterwards. Doc realized, though, he didn't really have time to explore much for the mummies before the students came.

"What do you think, should we push on and try to get a day of exploring in or wait for the students?" Doc asked Mark.

Mark said, "Well, typically I'd like to get as much in as possible, but it's probably a good idea to just wait here."

**Chapter 12: With the students**

So the next couple days passed until it was time the students were supposed to arrive. There were 12 of the students on the trip, all medical students from Wright state, and they were going to travel around and primarily learn about alternative, natural medicine. They also had some door to door clinic time in under-served communities scheduled, which Doc was going to lead them in doing.

When the students came, things went very smoothly as they had a driver Jorge that knew his way around and a very rugged and durable off-roading van that could navigate the occasionally treacherous Costa Rican roads (notorious for being extremely bumpy). The first day was all road travel to a conservation area called La Selva, famous as one of the most protected areas of

pristine lowland rainforest in Costa Rica. The second day they had a hike scheduled bright and early so they could see as many birds as possible.

There was a Costa Rican guide at La Selva who led them around and pointed out all kinds of things from iguanas sitting on large tree branches overhanging the river to a brood of bats hanging out underneath a tree limb. The guide, after a little bit more walking, put his hand up as frog noises became audible. He pointed over to the bushes and, lo and behold, there was a frog about an inch and half wide that had dark blue and red coloring. The guy pointed out that it was not one of the most poisonous species of tree frog, but still a frog that could make you "puke your guts out" (he enjoyed scaring the tourists whenever he could). A toucan flew overhead the party of people and many butterflies, mostly black in color, fluttered about. Once when the group had stopped to look at something, Doc noticed a bullet ant crawling up the outside of his pant leg. He did a quick little jerk and thankfully knocked the ant off (they have one of the most painful bites known to man), but when people looked at him he tried to play it off—"Nothing to see here, all good."

Mark brought his camera and was snapping pictures right and left of all that he was seeing. He had a sound recorder too so he could record all the cool facts the tour guide was spewing out. The tour guide pointed over to a patch of bushes and said, "Ok everyone, I want you to look really closely and find a snake for me."

Everyone looked around but nobody could see anything. Then the tour guide pointed out a small yellow bundle on a large leaf about 3 feet off of the ground. Everyone gasped when he said that it was a eyelash pit viper, the bite of which could easily kill a human (Doc thought he enjoyed saying this a bit too much).

“Man, I would be a goner. That is almost impossible to see,” Doc said to Mark as he walked along.

“All right everyone,” Doc said, “nature is incredibly rejuvenating and can be as effective as therapy in a lot of situations for your patients. I always try and recommend nature walks for any patient I have with depression because there is something magical about the outdoors—study after study has demonstrated it. Also, if you look to your right, that red plant can be turned into a tea jam-packed with antioxidants.”

The next day they went to a smaller farming village where the students walked around with a medical cart to provide any needed assistance. Doc escorted them and showed them the ropes for the first few houses, two of which had people with recurrent infections they gave them multiple tubes of antibiotics to. After it was clear that the students knew what they were doing, Doc took a couple other students who were thinking about going into psychiatry one day and went door to door screening for any psychiatric problems.

They ended up talking with a lady with schizophrenia, a man with a phobia of going outside, and a lady who was depressed. Doc made use of a translator because his Spanish was just so-so, and he frequently talked shop with the students (more than usual because of the language barrier) explaining his screening process and questions to evaluate what was actually going on. The medicines the group had taken along in the medicine chest included a couple psychiatric medications, so Doc was able to provide a solid three month’s supply of some mixed-mechanism antidepressants and an antipsychotic in one case, not his favorite because he would prefer to do more extensive therapy but this was the best they could do since the group needed to be moving the next day.

The days went on like this for a good while, and Doc got to see many pretty birds that were vastly different from the typical Ohio birds he was familiar with. Doc was really glad he brought his good pair of binoculars so he could zoom in on any black moving dot and give it an identification (when he could, that is—often he had no idea since the biodiversity was so high in Costa Rica).

All of the field stations they stayed at had rice and beans to eat, which was perfect for Doc who ate a lot of this anyways back home in Ohio (staples of a plant-based diet). For some reason they ate lots of watermelon and pineapple, fruits that Doc rarely ate back in Ohio but grew to like on the trip. At the airport on the day that everyone was going home, Doc turned to Mark.

"Now the tough decision. Should we go back to warm showers in Ohio or stay here and start looking for these mummies?"

Mark looked down. "Are you able to take off some time from work? You are my research manager, so you are the one who tells me when I work."

"All I need to do is write some grants, and nothing is pressing as far experiments go. We have a month until we scheduled participants for that gratitude journaling intervention. And I don't have any classes to teach," Doc said. "I *would* really like to investigate the location of these at least a little bit since we are here."

"Let's do it then," Mark said.

Doc and Mark said goodbye to all the students after two weeks of trekking all around. Doc had had a wonderful time with the students but was ready to do something a bit less structured since just about everything they had done the past two weeks had been scheduled in advance…and

payed for in advance (something that Doc was grateful for because Doc and Mark did not have much money to burn at all).

“We need a good guide who knows some quality Spanish to lead us around to these coordinates. My Spanish has improved since we have been here, but it is far from where it needs to be if we are going to be moving all over the place,” Doc said to Mark.

“Do you want to try and ask the van driver we had for the last two weeks? He seemed to know his way around really well and probably wouldn’t demand too much money,” Mark asked.

“Man, if we could get some money that would be great. You know…” Doc said.

“Yes?” Mark said with a bit of excitement.

“I could phone the university and have them maybe send down some money they could ear-mark as extra unexpected expenses of the trip, but I am not sure that will fly,” Doc said.

“Interesting, worth a shot,” Mark said.

So, Doc bit the bullet with the long-distance minutes charge and used his cellphone to call the accountant he used to help pay for all the things. After a bit of explaining (okay a lot of explaining, and promising to pay it back), and a lot of lag in the phone line since they were so far away, Doc was able to get about 1000 bucks procured that he had to pick up at an international bank under Wright State’s name. It was not much, but it was the maximum that Wright State allowed in emergency expense funds for such trips and would help.

“Better than nothing, for sure,” Doc said as they left the bank with a big wad of colónes.

Doc took out a piece of paper on which he had scribbled the phone number of the van driver and gave it a call. The driver, named Jorge, was skeptical at first.

“I can give you 500 bucks up front and then more later on,” Doc promised with a pleading voice.

“Make it 700 and I’ll take you wherever you want-go, gas and everything,” Jorge said in broken English.

Doc felt the wad of bills in his hand with a twinge of “ooh, that hurts,” but agreed. Before long they were riding in Jorge’s van to the town of El Guapote, where the coordinates were.

It was a long, arduous, and very bumpy ride. The rainy season had ended in mid-November but the crews had not had enough time to get to all of the deep ruts left by many gallons of rushing, eroding water that fell in torrential downpours in this tropical country. Hence the bumps. It would take at least two days for them to get to the town, so at the end of the day (as it began to get dark) they stopped by a small town that had a wooden, swinging sign with “hostal” in yellow, painted letters. Jorge knew the owners and said this town threw great *fiestas*.

It was drizzling and foggy when they walked out of the van that Jorge parked. They walked into the hostel and saw a restaurant kind of area on the left and a fairly large room with bunk bed after bunk bed on the right. Jorge talked to the person at the front desk and before long they were sitting eating rice and beans. Jorge had a quart of foaming corn beer he worked on as he dived into a sizeable plate of beans smothered in hot sauce.

“Why you no drink beer, amigo?” Jorge asked.

“Bad for the liver,” Doc replied.

“But bueno for the heart,” he said with a big smile as he took another swig.

“And bad for the brain,” Doc said. Mark smiled at him and gave a nod acknowledging that it was true, but secretly Mark wanted Doc to lighten up a bit. Mark didn’t care about whether he

*actually* had a drink, but to point out what was wrong with it in front of Jorge who was eating it was a bit negative.

After their blood sugar had thoroughly gone up, they decided to check out the music that was playing across the street. It ended up being a happenin' party at a bar across the street. Mark and Jorge joined in the fun but Doc decided to head on back to the *hostal* after the meal to relax and unwind, himself feeling that he was a bit high strung from the long day. As Doc was walking across the street he looked at the bright, full moon. The stars shone brilliantly overhead, brighter than any he had ever seen in Ohio. He thought about how thankful he was for his life. How nothing was there to hurt him, despite what he thought at times—how everything was going to be okay. He continued his way back to the bunk bed room to catch some much needed shut-eye.

The next day Mark and Jorge slept in after their long night of partying and salsa dancing while Doc went for a walk. The town was only a short walk from a coffee plantation so Doc headed that way. The sun was still rising when he went on a path through the coffee bushes/trees (not sure himself what they were). He held a cup of some very fresh coffee in his hand from the *hostal*, potentially from the very grove he was walking through. He waved at several of the workers that walked on by and occasionally stopped to look at birds through his binoculars. When he got back to the *hostal,* Jorge and Mark had woken up and were eating a breakfast of, you guessed it, rice and beans as Doc sat down at their table.

"How was the party last night?" Doc asked.

"The best!" Mark said.

"Your friend here, Doctor, is a *great* dancer," Jorge said with a smile. "He had all the ladies wanting to dance with him."

“I had a good teacher,” Mark said as he gestured to Jorge.

“Nice, glad you guys had fun. How far away are we from El Guapote?” Doc asked Jorge.

“I would say 3 *horas*. We be there noon,” Jorge responded in broken English.

“Perfect,” Doc said as he finished his coffee and looked out the window. “Did you guys notice any creepy-crawlies on you last night? I noticed a couple on me.”

“What?” Mark said.

“Never mind,” Doc said trying to not upset him. Mark was probably too tired to wake up and notice last night, and they were just little beetles, nothing too disturbing so why focus on it?

They were soon packed up in the van and off on their way. Large open-trailer trucks carrying all manner of things—animals, crates, wooden beams—passed by them at alarming speeds.

“I am trusting you Jorge. This is some dangerous driving,” Mark said from the back seat of the van.

“You are in good hands my friend. I have never crashed and never will, knock on wood,” Jorge said as he rapped the dashboard with his knuckles, which surprised Doc who didn’t know that was a colloquialism in Costa Rica, too. Jorge was about 6 foot 6, 240 pounds—a big dude—with medium-length black hair that he did his best to comb but often went flying astray. Doc had really grown to like him on the trip with the students and was glad that he was willing to keep driving them around. Anyone could tell he was a genuinely nice guy and really enjoyed his job of driving people around and talking with people from all around the world. Doc thought about his own job back in Ohio. Was he that happy with his own work? This occupied Doc for a little bit as they went up a mountain incline. Jorge shifted the van into lower gear as they ascended a

bumpy, gravel road that overlooked a beautiful mass of trees below between the two mountains. A circle rainbow could be seen far in the distance.

"Whoa, look at that!" Mark said as he got out his camera. "That's incredible!" Doc was glad that Jorge didn't look because the drop off to the lest was substantial.

They kept driving and after a little while longer Jorge slammed on the brakes. "*Perezoso*!"

"A sloth?" Doc said, doubting his high-school recollection of Spanish. They got out of the van and looked up in a tree to the right of the road and, sure enough, there was a brown sloth up in the tree. Doc got his binoculars out and said, "I think it is a three-toed."

"I am glad I saw it. I have only seen a handful of them in my life. You guys are lucky I got a new pair of glasses three months ago," Jorge said jokingly as he strolled back to the car and Mark hurried the opposite way towards the sloth with his DSLR camera.