

# Jackfruit: A Bicycle Adventure Through Latin America

David E.X.N. Nghiem

*Jackfruit: A Bicycle Adventure Through Latin America*



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For Tito

# Preface

I lay sweating on my back in the tent, naked, my diving knife clutched in my right hand, and a can of pepper spray in the other. The strong wind rattled my tent, shaking the flaps, poles and ropes so violently the nylon fabric popped, sounding like sporadic gunfire. I stared at the dark, domed ceiling and shook with terror as a high beam from a vehicle slowly lit, and then left my tent. Could it be a bandito, a murderous ex-contra prowling the hills and valleys that lay in the shadow of a live volcano in the distance? Or was it a land squatter searching for a quiet place for a home and hearth? I didn't know. I didn't care. In the depth of my fear, I was ready to stab anyone who entered my tent.

I closed my eyes in the dark, only to confront an even deeper darkness. Why was I doing this? What sort of thing drove me to commit this mad, lonely act, to ride a bicycle across Latin America? It seemed so simple at first. It was supposed to be a leisurely three-month joyride across South America from Lima, Peru to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Instead, I was on the side of a road in an desolate stretch of north western Costa Rica, hiding from vagrants and highwaymen, perched on a cliff in front of a volcano, worn from my inability to sleep, and scared out of my mind.

I put the cold, steel blade on my bare chest, and wiped away a tear. I was thousands of miles from home, in an alien, hostile place, alone, exhausted, and overwhelmed from seven months of intense trials through three third-world countries.

A confluence of unforeseen events had forced me to extend the length of my trip several times. And then there were the three mysteries that entrapped me: my strange intuitive desire to come to Latin America, a visit to a forbidden, sacred, symbol-laden site that almost killed me, and a new personal interest – borne from September 11th - in the geopolitical interaction between the USA and Latin America. These three subjects became my inexorable obsessions, and as with any

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irrational desire, my path was dangerously full of pitfalls and obstacles.

I held the cool, slim tube of the pepper spray, and checked the nozzle. I looked at the door of my tent as it shook. I glanced back at my watch, as the hour hands glowed a dim green. It was three in the morning, and I hadn't slept at all. I had just two more hours to endure before I could greet the sun, and the security and relief that it represented. I covered my eyes with my knife arm, and touched the cold metal tubes of my bicycle frame. I reminded myself that survival wasn't just enduring the elements, it was also about enduring my own emotional obstacles.

And it would be two more months before I would find the link in El Salvador that would help me resolve the mystery of the symbols.

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# North America



# Chapter 1

## The Fortune Teller

I rode my bicycle down Mt. Auburn St. into Harvard Square. The day was warm enough for a green tank-top and shorts, but the leaves were already changing color to warm browns and reds. Piles of leaves whipped around the streets as cars drove by. I sniffed the air, and smelled the aroma of hot dogs, fried dough, and pizza, as the crowds slowly meandered through the street next to the Wordsworth bookstore. It was Oktoberfest 1999, and I'd taken a break from my engineering homework to relax in the party. I locked up my bike at the bus stop, put on a blue bandanna, and walked around.

I was a part time biomedical engineering student at Boston University, recently laid off from my job as a systems analyst in the Genetics Institute. I used that time to finish my degree as quickly as possible.

As I walked through the square, a distinctive sound caught my attention. It was a pan flute of a Peruvian band, Inca Son, and they played music that I'd never heard before. I went to the crowd around them, and listened. It was an exotic sound, yet as I listened to them play, I felt an odd feeling inside, as if I'd known that music for my entire life. I dismissed the feeling, and bought a CD from them.

"Peru, that's in South America, right?" I asked one of the band members. Their faces were painted, and their skin was reddish brown. They wore rainbow colored outfits that reminded me of Native Americans.

"Si, it is in South America," said the man as I gave him the fifteen dollars, "have you ever been there?"

"No."

"You should go one day. It is beautiful. Have you ever heard of Macchu Pic-

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chu?”

“Yes! I’ve read about it.”

“Good. I know you will go soon.”

“Sure, sure, hey, thanks for the CD.”

I will go to Peru soon? It wasn’t a bad idea, but I had no desire to go to Peru. I was too caught up in finishing my diploma, my NASA rocket project, and I was dating Ann, a pretty, athletic, Cuban Jewish girl I met in the gym. Go to Peru? No. What I wanted was to become an astronaut. It was the reason I went to work on the project in the first place. In fact, my identity and existence morphed into my participation in the NASA rocket project.

In 1996, I, a junior, and four freshmen, with plenty of guidance from Dr. Chakrabarti, founded the SPECTRE project, which stood for the Student-run Program for Exo-atmospheric Collecting Technologies and Rocket Experimentation. We were one of the few groups to get the NASA grant as a bunch naive, undergraduate students. Naturally, it was my pride, joy, passion, suffering, and it was my identity.

I lost my scholarship to work on the project, and I fought with my parents to stay in Boston, when they tried to persuade me to go home and recuperate my GPA at another university. Because of that, I refused to acknowledge them for years afterward. I hated them for their stereotypically Asian parental response. SPECTRE was my dream, and I was willing to do whatever it took to stay in Boston to continue the project. At one point, after several months of looking for a job, I applied as a waiter in a restaurant, just to have money to stay in town. Luckily, through a friend, the Genetics Institute hired me as an analyst. I built and administered computer systems to sort genetic sequences for protein discovery. The Genetics Institute helped pay for my degree, and they even gave me time to continue with SPECTRE. It was the best possible solution for me, but my resentment towards my parents would fester for years afterwards.

As of October, SPECTRE had run her course, and would soon launch. I was laid off with just two more courses to go for my diploma, and I had enough of a stipend to focus my energies on my school work, and my relationship with Ann. All I wanted was to finish my degree, launch, and go to NASA.

As I walked through the fair, I sampled some jewelry, a jade colored neck choker, when I heard a female voice call out to me, “hey you! Hey handsome!”

I looked to my right, where a pretty woman in her twenties, held a smoking cigarette in her hand. She sat behind a table with some tarot cards laid on it, and

she wore a black bandanna. We were in front of Wordsworth, and she looked at me with a beckoning smile.

“Want a palm reading?” I winked at her and smiled.

“No, I’m kind of skeptical. But thanks for the offer.”

“You’ll come back. Think about it.” She winked at me.

I went through the square to Au Bon Pain, a café and sandwich bistro, and watched a German group perform their traditional dances, complete with green hats and knickers. The day was winding down, and it was late afternoon as people started to close up shop. As I headed toward my bicycle, something inside me propelled me to the fortune teller. It was near the end of the day, so I decided I could use some entertainment. I walked back to the fortune teller’s table.

“I knew you’d be back.”

“Well, I feel like being a sucker today.” I said as I sat down.

She looked at me haughtily, smiled, took a drag on her cigarette, and then took the cigarette out of her mouth. She offered her hand, and I extended my hand into it. She held my hand for a few seconds, softly massaged it, and then she spoke.

“You’re the kind of guy who can do anything he puts his mind to.”

“That was generic.” I thought to myself.

“Your friends are not your friends, be careful of them, but you do make friends very easily.” She paused, and then said, “I see you going far. I see much travel.”

Then she asked me a question. “Do you have a girlfriend?”

“No.” I lied. She immediately squeezed my hand, and fiercely applied a discomforting pressure on the palm.

“The one you’re with now, you just met her a month ago?”

“Yes!” I said in astonishment. I did meet Ann a month ago.

“She’s not the one. Next year, you’ll meet someone... someone very important. She’s your lifetime companion.” As she said that, the hairs on my back stood on end, as an electric current went up my spine. I didn’t know why, but my eyes started to tear. I looked into her eyes, and her gaze never wavered. She had a sly smile on her face, as I unconsciously took out my wallet, and gave her the ten dollars for the reading. As I stood up, she said,

“Still a skeptic?”

“Uh, no. I think.” I stammered.

“Bye handsome. Remember what I said.”

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I was miserable, and I felt awful, as I sat in the Amtrak train in 30th Street station, Philadelphia. I was on the northeast corridor train, headed for Boston, and it hadn't departed. I looked at my watch. It was still ten minutes till departure, and I looked out onto the other train platforms in the station. The shiny steel hulls of the trains reflected the harsh glare of the fluorescent lights overhead in the tunnel bay. I sat back in the seat, and lowered it as I closed my eyes.

I spent the Thanksgiving holiday with my parents. We didn't talk much, but they didn't insist either. I almost completed my degree, and since I paid for half my tuition by working full time, my father didn't try to say anything to me. His only dream was for his four sons to complete their degrees. My mother insisted that I look into medical school, and be a doctor. I failed a course when we won the project, and for me, my dream was space, NASA, and the stars. I had no desire to torture myself any longer doing premedical courses, which I fared poorly in, and had a strong distaste for. She stopped when I told her to leave me alone and to let me live.

But that wasn't the reason I was miserable. Three weeks earlier, I had a bad break up with Ann. We broke up in the Student Union that night, when I went to see her hip hop dance performance. She told me that I had issues. I was so angry after the break up that I went to the Boston Common, and I railed in anger at Fate. My tears came out as I cried out in fury.

"You fucker! You've been fucking with me my entire goddamn life! From elementary school till now, you just don't quit! Huh?! You goddamn fucker!" I screamed as nine years of pent up frustration and anger boiled into an explosion. Several dogs came barking at me, and I roared at them. They turned around and ran, yelping back to their owners. As I walked out of the Common, a police car pulled up next to me, its lights flashing, as I heard the intercom blare through the static, "there's a disturbance in the park... unidentified male, race unknown, is there causing a disturbance."

I didn't bother to look at them. I didn't care if they arrested me. I didn't give a damn, and I kept walking to the harbor, where I laid down on the water's edge, and looked up at the stars.

When we broke up, I felt like all of white American society was driving a wedge between us, even though nothing substantial had happened. I felt like all the crap I dealt with as a minority, of Vietnamese descent, growing up and going from lower to middle class in a white, Jewish suburb in southern New Jersey, outside of Philadelphia was about to spill out. I felt like we were taboo together, and there was

a subconscious reaction from white, Boston society to us. It was ironic, because in New Jersey, most of the Asian guys I grew up with eventually married non Asian women. But this was Boston, a “progressive” town, where I heard a racist slur every two to three weeks, and a white taxi cab driver intentionally rammed his car into my body, while I crossed the street when the signal indicated to cross. He waited until I was right in front of him, revved his engine and hit me. This was on my second day at the University. When I was out with Ann, white men stared at us in disgust. Ann never noticed it, but I did. Unfortunately, by acknowledging them, I internalized my anger, their anger, and I was erupting inside. It was my fault for permitting those assholes and society to control me, and I knew it.

I looked out the window. The train started moving. A middle aged white man sat down beside me. We introduced ourselves, and he also was a Philadelphian. We talked about the differences between Boston and Philadelphia. I was born in, and I grew up in, until I was seven, a ghetto in West Philadelphia. Up till then, I never encountered any problems with the other kids. My playmates were white, black, and a few Hispanic. It wasn't until my father's job moved to the suburb of New Jersey that I became hyper aware of my race. Because I was a native of Philadelphia, the gentleman and I got along well. We weren't fond of the cold rudeness of the Bostonians. I didn't talk about race with him.

I sat back in my chair, and my mind drifted to the incident in Oktoberfest, to the soothsayer's words, *“next year, you'll meet someone important. She's your lifetime companion.”*

I always carried a drawing pad with me when I traveled, and I drew cartoons, comic book characters, and body builders. It was a hobby I did maybe once or twice a year. I also drew portraits, but I could never do them without a photo. I couldn't even do them with a person in front of me. I was an amateur and self taught. “A lifetime companion.” I thought to myself. What would she look like? What would she feel like?

I put the pad on the fold out table, and held the pencil in my hand. I closed my eyes, and cleared my mind. I went inside myself, and I felt myself sink, deep into my heart. I settled into a dark and warm space. Slowly, a wave of electricity coursed through my veins. It grew, until it crested through my body. Then, my eyes half opened in a trance, barely conscious, my hand and pencil started to move across the pad. First, an oval appeared. Soon, the eyes revealed themselves, and later, a nose. Lips and ears came to life, as well as eyebrows, a neck, and cheekbones. Soon hair grew, and my pencil worked across the board, faster, and faster. Then, my fingers

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touched the face, and worked, adding shade, tone, and dimension. I licked my index finger, and outlined depth as I smudged grays and blacks into place. Finally, with the tip of the pencil, I gave her eyes life.

I opened my eyes fully, and was shocked at what I saw. For the first time, and the last time, I drew a face that jumped out from the page with life. It looked so real and alive.

“How did I do that?” I asked myself. Every attempt I ever made at drawing a person’s face, a human face with no reference, no photo, or even an appearance, always looked like a cartoon. Yet, on my pad, was a person who could possibly exist. The gentleman next to me looked at the picture, smiled at me, and said, “Is that your girlfriend?” I looked at him, stunned.

“She’s . . . a friend.” I stammered back.

No she wasn’t. It was just a picture, and a hand made drawing. That was all. How could she be a friend, let alone a lover, when I never met, saw, or encountered anyone with the likeness of the picture? I closed the pad, and went back to ruminating about Ann and the breakup, as the train raced through the Northeast, among forests of trees bare of their leaves.



## Chapter 2

# SPECTRE

“10... 9... 8... 7... 6...”

“Five!” We said, as we started chanting with the flight tower announcer.

“4... 3... 2... 1...”

“Ignition.”

A loud electronic beep came from inside the gray, block control house. A spark came from under the twenty five foot, two stage rocket, a Nike Orion missile, which pointed at an angle into the clouds of the overcast sky over the Middle Atlantic.

“Boom!”, ”Fwooosh!” A blue flame erupted underneath, as a thick ring of dust spread out in a shock wave, which hit us, eight hundred meters away in the outdoor observation platform. I felt the sonic wave enter and pass through my body, and suddenly, the rocket slowly rose, and then shot like a bullet into the sky.

“Woo hoo hoo!!” I whooped as I hugged Terry, a Greek American kid who was one of the founders of the project, and Julia, another founder and a fellow Philadelphian. We were reunited to finally see the rocket fly. Terry whooped in glee, and Julia jumped and clapped her hands in delight. In the sky, we heard the sonic boom reach us, as the rocket broke the sound barrier. In the horizon of the ocean outside Wallop’s Island, Virginia, we saw a tiny object hit the water with a thunderous boom, and a giant crest of a splash. The second stage was off, and the final stage was close to sub-orbit.

We screamed in delight, and four years of passion, suffering, long nights, dreaming, effort, the team work of many electrical engineering students in Dr. Ruane’s project class, with Dr. Chakrabarti’s assistance, of George, the Hungarian programmer from Thailand, Jack, the genius from Wisconsin on the subsystems,

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John, the 40'ish college dropout who came back to mastermind the computer system and finally get his electrical engineering degree, Rick, the Alabaman whiz kid on the electronics, Jenny, the southern speaking mechanical engineer who built the hull, and of countless other BU and NASA staff, it all finally culminated in a beautiful, glorious moment where our dreams, our teamwork, and our efforts, took off into space.

For me, the project was my redemption for almost failing out of school. I sat back on the bench of the viewing platform, under the overcast sky. A calm ocean wind blew our hair as we walked down to greet and shake hands with Dr. Ruane and Dr. Chakrabarti in congratulations. We took pictures, and celebrated at a restaurant in Chincoteague Island later that afternoon, and then in the evening, we went swimming off the island's waters. All through it, as we talked and cheered the finish, I felt hollow inside. For four years, my identity and my life, was carried in the aluminum hull of the rocket, and the project was done.

Earlier that year, I graduated on January, 2000, which fulfilled my father's dream. The rocket took off on June 13th, the day before my birthday. It was the perfect birthday gift, and a month earlier, I was hired by a medical school on Longwood medical campus in the center of Boston as a systems analyst. I needed to pay my bills, as my stipend had run out. I had nothing to look forward to anymore. All the long nights, the daily dreaming, was done. My dream was done, and my role as the project coordinator was over. My identity was gone.

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I was home for the weekend, one warm August afternoon, and I had lunch with my family. "You're depressed, David." Said my father as we ate pho the traditional Vietnamese noodle soup.

"You truly are depressed with the way you sound." He said. I looked into my bowl, and fished in the rice noodles with my chopsticks. The smell of cumin, anise seed, hoisin sauce, and cinnamon filled my nostrils as I ate. I looked out the dining room window at the two eighty year old maple trees, and a large oak tree, in the backyard. I called the trees the "Three Brothers", since they were so close to each other.

Depressed? I was depressed? I looked at my father. His gray beard and mustache were stubble, and my mother sat down with us. They talked to each other in Vietnamese, as I listened to the familiar, yet foreign phrases. I understood a little,

since I grew up speaking it until I was six. After that, I went to school, where I had to speak English. They got up and left the table to go upstairs.

I looked outside at the trees. The leaves hadn't fallen yet, but they were starting to change color. I took a bite into the fried, textured soy protein that my mother flavored to taste like beef. It's meaty taste spread over my tongue. I looked across the table at the statue of a Quan Yin Bodhisattva on top of the dark, worn, cherry wood bureau. I wanted to leave, and I was tired. The next day, I took the train back to Boston.

Nothing meant anything to me anymore. I was finally getting over a bad break up with Jenny, an Italian girl I met during a Spring Break trip to the Dominican Republic back in February. In addition, without SPECTRE, I became aimless. My days consisted of getting up, bicycling to work, handling computer problems and user issues, biking to the gym, working out on the weights, and then home. It was mind numbing.

Later, in October, I became disillusioned with the Space movement and with NASA in general, after going to a conference in Los Angeles, California. I discovered just how disconnected the people were with the needs of society. My friend, Navroop, a Punjabi American, and I presented a business idea to a board of directors, with the hope that we'd be able to pitch to venture capitalists later on. They shot us down, citing that we were too young and inexperienced.

Later that month, I broke Sonja's heart, a German exchange student I'd started seeing in August. During our time together, I felt that maybe she wasn't interested in dating anymore, and wanted to be friends. I misread her feelings, and one night, I made the mistake of showing up at her friend's house with an ex to go dancing for the night. Sonja, suddenly showed up, saw the two of us, and said with a shaking voice, "Zu are still friend vith your ex?" She quickly left for Germany after that. I felt worse when I learned from a mutual friend that the reason she left Germany was to get away from a broken relationship, only to meet me.

At work, I got into fights with the M.D. Ph D's whose egos couldn't fit through the door of my office. I didn't work for them, but their demands on me were straining me and my boss. Everything was wearing down on me.

Still, I did what I could to keep a level head. My friends Tracey and Laura hung out with me at restaurants and cafes, where we ate, and they listened to my relationship crashes. Tasnim, a Bahraini girl who I met in the local ballroom dance club, frequently listened to me bitch about my relationship troubles. Mistrani, an Indian Muslim doctoral student, who was like my older brother, took me out to

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the movies, and events around town. Maria, a Salvadorian girl would scold me and lift my spirits up about how relationships weren't always all that. I kept going to the gym, and the guys there were like family. We worked out, and sometimes commiserated. I practiced and taught kick boxing at the University Kung Fu club, and they too were like family. They all helped me keep some semblance of sanity in a world that was steadily dulling, and dying in monotony.

I kept my mind active, reading books about lost cities and cultures, and ancient, strange mysteries. I spent many Sunday evenings in the tea shop in Harvard Square, reading magazines. But it wasn't enough. The year 2000 was wrapping up, and it was the end of the Millennium. I knew something wasn't right with me. Intuitively, something inside of me was screaming to emerge, but I couldn't figure out what it was.

Everyday, I read reports about earthquakes, global warming, and solar system events. It felt like everything was building up to something unprecedented. Each day, there was another earthquake in an odd place off the US Geological Survey, or a new climate temperature record being set. As I continued my daily life, I tried to ignore the feeling. I tried to ignore the feeling that inside of me was another being, struggling to emerge. I closed myself off inside with walls of rationality, skepticism, and logic. I shielded myself in my ignorance, but the feelings couldn't be denied.

Everyday, they grew stronger, and they entwined my heart and gut. I couldn't escape it, and I threw myself into more activities to get away from it. I did ballroom dance, Argentine tango, went to nude drawing classes, rode with friends into the woods, and climbed rock walls with Aleks, an Olympic class rower who I befriended in engineering. I dated more women, and read trashy novels, but to no avail. Whatever it was, it wouldn't be ignored. It was emerging, and I couldn't do anything about it.

## Chapter 3

### Kendra

“Dave! Are you alright?!” Asked Mistrani, as I lay on his futon, writhing in pain, in his tiny studio in Brookline.

“No.” I moaned as I clutched my right rib cage.

“What happened?”

I pulled up my shirt, and revealed a dark, protruding lump between the bones of my ribs.

“That’s gotta hurt! Let me get some ointment for you.” Mistrani grabbed a bottle with Urdu writing on it, and slathered the stuff on my skin. It stung as he touched it.

“Ow!” I yelped.

“Man! You took that one pretty hard! What did you do?”

“Fell on the handle bars of my bike. I don’t know how I managed to do that.” I groaned. Mistrani sat down. I laid on the futon as my rib cage throbbed, and tried to remember what happened. I rubbed the lump on my head, and felt it throbbing with blood.

Earlier that evening, I went with the club to see a martial arts exhibition, in a theater in the heart of Boston. When the show was over, I walked outside to join my group, as crowds of people exited. There was a woman standing in front of me, and she was dressed in a long, dark skirt, which wrapped around her legs. She was elegantly dressed, and she had a dark red top on. She was slim, and her long dark hair was in a bun, with two sticks holding it together. Her eyes were dark, and they didn’t reflect the light. Her face seemed familiar, which startled me at first, since I’d never met her before. I looked at her, and she quickly looked away from me.

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“How odd.” I thought. I didn’t think much of her, since she was just another pretty face, and I was going out with another woman. Our club went to a restaurant in China Town for dinner. I sat down opposite of her, and decided to play with her eyes again, just to see if she would repeat her same reaction. I looked into her eyes, and she quickly looked down to the right, away from me.

“What an odd character.” I thought to myself. We ordered dinner, and ate. Later, she asked the group,

“Anyone want to try my dish?” No one answered.

“Is it vegetarian?” I finally asked.

“Yes.”

“OK, I’ll try some.”

I passed my dish to her. I didn’t bother to ask the rest of the group, since they knew my diet. As we ate, I glanced at her. I knew I never met her before, but for some odd reason, she looked familiar. I brushed off the thought, and joked with my friends. After dinner, we walked to the subway station.

“So what’s your name?” I asked.

“Kendra.”

“Kendra? Nice to meet you. I’m David.”

“Pleased to meet you.”

She was a freshman, and recently joined the club. Her father put her in a karate class when she was younger, and she hated it. So, he put her in a Kung Fu class, and she loved it. Her best friend’s violin teacher taught her about vegetarianism, which resonated deeply with her values. She was the only one in her family to practice it, and it was difficult for her, since they were Italian. But she managed to persevere for herself. For a woman from the South, she had a quick tongue, like a New Yorker. We departed at the subway station, and I had to get back, since I was expecting a call from Mia, the half Norwegian half Syrian woman I was dating.

As I biked back, I smugly said to myself, “The year two thousand is almost over. Just one more month and a half and I will win.” For all of that year, I was at war with the fortune teller. I was determined not to meet anyone who qualified for her prophecy. I didn’t mind dating someone, but in my heart, I kept it inconsequential. Even though I sometimes got emotionally involved, in the inevitable break up, I used that as an excuse to recover quickly. I met Mia in 1999, so she didn’t count. All I had to do was get to January 1st, 2001, without any substantial relationships, and I would win. As I biked through the Boston University campus, an errant thought appeared in my mind.

“Do you suppose it’s Kendra?”

Abruptly, I crashed into a high curb, and uncharacteristically, I flew up and slammed into my handlebars. The round metal punched in between my ribs, and I came down in a heap on the bar. It was a miracle that nothing broke. My head slammed into a concrete block on the sidewalk, and I was stunned. I looked up, dazed, and saw stars. I closed my eyes, looked up again, and a blurry image of the Warren Towers student dormitory came into view. The pain was numbing, and my eyes kept flashing.

“Oh fuck.” I thought. The pain was excruciating as I regained my feeling. Did I break something? I felt my ribs. I didn’t break anything. Well, I couldn’t tell, and some students who saw the accident helped me up. I managed to hobble to Mistrani’s apartment, where he helped to alleviate some of the pain.

Later that night, after a painful bike ride to my apartment, I checked my voice messages. An irate Mia left a message about not calling her. I decided not to call her back, and collapsed in my futon. My side ached, it was late, and I was in pain.

Mia decided to give me one more chance, and I saw her once more at a Bhangra competition. Bhangra is a style of Indian dance from the Punjabi region of India, and I was a dancer in Navroop’s bhangra squad as a heavy lifter. I squatted and lifted three men on my shoulders, and danced. The night of the competition aggravated my injury, and an argument with Navroop kept me from seeing Mia. I never saw her again after that.

But, it was 2001, and I also didn’t see Kendra, so I was thrilled. I’d won against the fortune teller. My destiny, my Fate, was once again in my own hands. My world was whole, and it was the way I wanted it to be.

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## Chapter 4

### Omens

There was very little snow that winter of 2001, which was strange. Boston typically received a lot of snow, but for the last few years, due to global warming, it was scant. I walked into my apartment in Watertown, after a heavy routine in the gym. I sat down, and on a whim, decided to draw something. It'd been over a year since I last drew anything. I grabbed my drawing pad out of the book shelf, and flipped through the pages. There were pages of body builders, fitness women, cartoons, comic book characters, and portraits. I flipped to the last one, the one I did on November 27th, 1999. I looked at the picture, and I thought to myself, "I remember how I drew that. I didn't have a photo, a person, nothing. I did a good job."

I looked at the drawing, and noted the shining of the eyes. The face was beautiful, and the gaze was one of intense focus, but the softness of the eyes showed a deep undercurrent of compassion and caring. As I looked at the picture, some questions come to my mind.

"I wonder why she looks so... familiar. Wait. It's familiar because I drew it. That's why." I looked at the picture and studied it. I drew that picture on the train, and it came from nowhere. How can a picture from nowhere be familiar? As I studied the drawing, in my mind was a list of names and faces, which it began to match with, and, slowly, I began to realize who it was.

"No. It's not. It can't be. That can't possibly happen. That's impossible." I slowly said to myself. I knew where I saw that face. I knew why the picture looked so familiar. I knew who it was, and I did not like it at all. "This didn't happen." I said as I put the pad away.

When I realized what the picture was, and who it could possibly be, and most

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importantly, what it could mean, it became a key which unlocked a door in my psyche. Immediately, I stopped the door from opening, and slammed it shut, fearful at what the greater meaning was. The force behind the door, pounded into my psyche, into my mind, and I kept trying to deny it. The pressure was ready to blow, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

I hadn't seen Kendra in months, since she rarely showed up to the club's practice sessions. She did show up once, and we worked out together, but she kept glancing away from me. Yet when my back was turned, I could feel her eyes pierce into me.

In March, I woke up on a Wednesday, with a powerful, almost overwhelming urge to go as far south as possible. I couldn't understand it, and I didn't understand why. I packed up my bags, called in sick, and left on a train for Miami. I had a layover in Philadelphia, so I stayed at my parents. My mother asked if I was off to rescue someone. In Miami, I immediately went to the airport, to find a ticket to South America. I was going mad. Why was I doing this? What was calling me? Who was calling me? I just knew I had to somehow, touch down in South America. The feeling was powerful, and I was undeterred, until I saw the ticket prices.

I took a return flight back to Boston on Sunday. All during that time, I couldn't stop the feelings. Something was going to happen.

In April, I went to visit my parents for the weekend. I sat down to brunch with my father. My mother was preparing pho in the kitchen, and the smell of soup filled the air with an aromatic spice. Ginger sizzled in the blue flame of the range. My father was reading one of his engineering technical reports, and I was reading a science fiction novel, when we suddenly heard a "tap tap tap" on the sky light. We looked above our heads, and a dark bird outside, tapped on the glass. It tapped once. Then twice. And then on the third tap, the bird flew through the glass. It flew into the dining room, then back to the skylight, tapped it with its beak, and then flew into the kitchen, where it landed on some hanging herbs and chirped. The skylight was intact.

"Dave's friend is here." My father calmly said. I practically leaped out of my skin.

"My God! Did you see that?! It flew through the freaking window!"

"David! You always make such a big deal out of these things." Said my mother.

"Dad! You saw it! You saw it fly through the window!" He shrugged his arms, and laughed with a smile.

"Mom! I swear to God, We saw that bird fly through the goddamn window!"

“David! Watch your language!”

“Dad! You saw it too!”

“Don’t worry about it.” He said.

“It flew through a solid glass window like it wasn’t even there, and you guys are acting like this?!”

My brother Jeff opened the kitchen window, and let the bird fly out. “It’s a blue bird, and not a black bird, so it isn’t bad luck.” He said, as he tried to reassure me. I ran around the house to check all the windows, to make sure I wasn’t seeing things. They were all closed. The bird came in through the sky light, and nowhere else. I was going mad. I knew what I saw, and my Dad saw it with me. I went back to Boston the next day, feeling disturbed. I walked into my apartment, and on the floor, was the drawing pad. It fell out of the bookcase, but no one was there.

“How did this get out here?” I mumbled as I walked to it. I picked up the pad, and opened it. It opened right to the picture. I tore the picture out, and looked at it again. I contemplated throwing it out, but the voice inside said not to. Then, it took over me, and I rolled it up, and went to a framing shop. I had the picture framed in a dark, exquisitely carved, wooden frame. I put the picture back on the shelf, and looked at it.

“Impossible.” I said. Little did I know, the door that I closed inside of me, had been blown wide open by the bird’s entry. Everyday, for the next few months, I looked at the picture. It became a curse to me. It was a window to a possibility that I refused to consider. It was a window which destroyed the foundations that I built my world out of, a world where everything happened logically.

In April, the club had a party and she was there. Mistrani, I, and my roommate went, and we watched a B Kung Fu movie for entertainment. Afterwards, my instructor, who observed Kendra and I in practice, “volunteered” me to walk her back to the campus. We walked and had a light conversation. I didn’t mention the picture, since I wanted Mistrani to confirm if there was or wasn’t a match. Kendra had her glasses on, and I learned that she was a biology major. Also, she was interested in Buddhism, and a lover of animals. I saw her try to woo our friend’s pet rabbit. The next day, Mistrani came over to look at the picture. I put my glasses over the eyes.

“Holy schmoly.” He said in awe.

“Please no,” I replied.

“I’m sorry. No, I’m not kidding you, man. The drawing matches her.”

In May, I saw Kendra one more time. I was getting tired of being aggravated

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with the picture. We talked some more, and agreed to write to each other. I still didn't say anything about the picture, but I had a plan. I had one more shot at beating Fate, and I figured it would be the Ace in my hand.

I had a difficult time in my work place. One M.D. PhD, Dr. Rodentsky, came in one morning yelling at me for no reason. I considered it harassment, and threw him out of my office. I then called the cops on him. My boss was on my side, but his superiors pressured him to force my resignation. It was just as well. The urgency inside of me to go to South America was overwhelming. The door inside was wide open, but I couldn't see beyond it. All I knew, was I had to walk through. So, I made a plan.

I bought a ticket to Lima, Peru, and a return ticket three months later from Buenos Aires, Argentina. I bought panniers for my bicycle, and with the help of my friend and fellow engineering major, Aleks, we prepared my bike. I bought survival equipment, and a tent. I closed my lease on the apartment, donated some of my things, and stored the rest. I figured on returning in three months. That would be enough time for me to discover the hidden reasons for going to South America. I had enough money saved up, by living thriftily to last for at least eight months of living expenses if I needed to return to Boston.

Everyone thought my plan was insane. What kind of a maniac bikes across a continent? I looked at a road map of South America. It didn't look too big, and three months would be plenty of time to get to Buenos Aires. Everyone was against it. I argued bitterly with my mother over the phone. She tried to have my brothers convince me not to do it. They said it was cool what I was doing, but probably insane. Tasnim, and her boyfriend questioned what could possibly compel me to do such a thing. Her Colombian friend, Lina said I would be kidnapped, robbed, and probably raped. She thought I was insane. No one believed I was serious about it. Maria, a Salvadorian friend from the club called me up one day to question me, and to see if I was serious.

"So you're definitely doing this, Dave?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know why. I just know that something big is going to happen. Something that's going to affect all of us, and change everything. All I know is that I have to get out of here, quickly, and that there's something, and someone I have to find in South America." She was silent on the phone for a moment.

"Wow. So you are serious."

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Well, stay alive and send me an email.”

“OK.”

The conflict inside and outside of me created an internal war. One side of me, my rational part, said I was insane to follow my intuition on this mad plan. My other side, my intuition, calmly said I had to go, that it was imperative that I went, and that I had to find something, and meet someone down there. I was on the cusp, and I would have to decide soon.

In July, I submitted my resignation letter and my two week notice. My roommate of four years, Nate, an Armenian friend, helped me move my stuff into storage. On the last day, I had lunch with Walid in his restaurant, Sepal, where he and his wife wished me good luck, and to be careful not to destabilize the planet. We laughed about it. His wife said that my trip would be a spiritual one. After lunch, I put my panniers on, loaded my bicycle, and biked to South Station, where I took the Amtrak train home. I also took the picture with me. When I arrived home, I mailed the picture to Kendra, as well as a letter explaining the story.

When I came home, I was a festering boil of conflict. My brother, Jeff, said that I brought a war home. I knew I was in for a fight. At the dinner table, I argued with my parents again, and the argument turned into a shouting match, when suddenly my nose started to bleed. My mother stopped in frustration. The next day, we fought again, as I loaded my things into the car.

“I’m not driving you to the airport. Go find someone else.” She said.

“What the hell?! I don’t believe this. Look, there’s nothing you can do that will stop me, mom. It’s my goddamn life! It’s mine!”

I watched her stare ahead. A minute passed. Finally, she turned on the ignition. At the airport, I got out of the car, and unloaded my things. “Bye mom.” She didn’t say anything. She didn’t look at me and drove off.

I breathed a sigh of relief, and went into the airport where the check in representative greeted me with a smile. He helped me put the bicycle in a box, and gave me the passage for the bike for free. I checked in my bags, and went to the departure area. It was the afternoon of July 31st, 2001, and I would arrive in Lima Peru, on August 1st.

I didn’t know why I had to go. I just had to, but at the same time, I could use it to defeat the prophecy. My hope regarding Kendra was for the picture and story to shock her. In my eyes, I considered most American women to be paranoid of anything that resembled stalking or obsession. I figured I could use that trait to

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my advantage; hopefully she would throw the things away, and my victory over Fate would be assured. Whatever the case, it didn't matter, the picture was in her hands now, and I was leaving the country for a while. Three months would give me enough time to accomplish my crazy plan, give me time to think, have some fun, and see another part of the world. After three months, I would be back in Boston, I will have beaten Fate, and if everything went well, I'd be working as an analyst again in my logical and rational world.

## **South America - Peru**





## Chapter 5

# Bewildered in the Nazca Desert

“Welcome to Lima International Airport.” Said the stewardess’s voice over the intercom, as the plane taxied into the terminal. My flight was finally over. For several hours into the night, I flew over the inky black ocean of the Carribean, and then over land where I didn’t see any lights. A cluster of lights was an island, and then there were stretches of darkness. A single light was a ship. Over the darkness of the Amazon, a cluster of lights was a village. I arrived into an unknown with a language where I knew at most, fifty words, thirty of which were for flirting with women, thanks to Maria’s lessons. The rest I gleaned from a cram session on the plane, and I memorized a routine conversation for getting a taxi, and finding a hotel.

During the plane flight, I thought about what I’d do when I arrived. I had a road map of Peru, and all of Southern South America. While analyzing the map, I noticed my lonely light in a dark, slumbering cabin. Nervous, and hyper, I drank five cups of coffee. Then I went to the bathroom four times, and smiled at the stewardesses each time.

“Too much coffee?” She asked me.

“Yes.”

When the plane landed, I was anxious to get off. After customs, I washed up in the bathroom, and smiled to myself in the mirror. “I did it!” I said to myself. I hurried to the baggage claim, and grabbed my bags, but my bicycle box wasn’t there. Thirty minutes later, a reddish brown man came in with a cart, and a big box. I picked up my bicycle, and carted everything to the tariff zone.

“*How much is the bicycle?*” Asked the officer. I looked at her, then the box, and then back at her again.

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*"Fifty dollars."*

The custom's officer looked at me curiously and said, *"that's it?"*

*"Yes. It's an old bike."*

*"OK."*

I walked through the exit gate, and looked around. I was surrounded by a large crowd of brown people looking at me as I walked through. Some held signs, that said, "Satori", or "Yamaguchi". They looked at me in anticipation, but when I didn't say anything, they returned to scanning the passengers leaving the gate. As soon as I walked out the door, eight cab drivers approached. One man, a short man with a baseball cap, stood next to a station wagon. It was big enough to carry the bicycle. He asked me, *"how are you buddy! Need a cab?"*

*"Hello! Good hostel, know where?"* *"Yes. Let's get your things in the car first."* I got in the car as he loaded my things into the bay, and we drove into Lima.

*"Is this your first time in Peru?"*

*"Yes."*

*"Are you Japanese?"* I looked at him funny, and felt a bit annoyed.

*"No. I'm not Japanese. I'm north American."*

*"What? You look Japanese."*

*"No, no, Vietnam."*

*"Vietnam?"*

*"My parents are. I am American."*

*"Well, now that you're talking, you do sound like a gringo."*

We drove through San Miguel, one of the many neighborhoods of Lima. Bright lights of neon signs lit up the road way, as people hurried to strip malls, shops, and cafes. Motorcycles outfitted to look like tiny cabs whizzed by, and the traffic clogged the streets. Small, Japanese minivans equipped with extra seats, stuffed full of people, called "micros", honked and aggressively pushed for space near the sidewalks to pick people up.

*"Ahh, here we are!"* He said as we pulled into a small building on a quiet road. We unloaded my things, and Edgar, the hostel's assistant, helped carry my equipment into my room. After tipping the driver, and registering in the hostel, I collapsed on my things.

I woke up midmorning, left to eat, and after lunch, I wandered in circles around the city of Lima for the next two hours, asking people if they knew where Hostal Franchia was. No one knew. Trying to recover my bearings, I wandered through the city blocks, into a small plaza nearby a university, where a crowd of people

gathered around a sign in a protest. A sign in the center showed the face of Alberto Fujimori, the recent president of Peru, in a gorilla suit. They chanted anti-Fujimori slogans. I walked up to a lady in the crowd, and asked, *“what’s this about?”*

She suddenly leaped up in excitement, grabbed my arm, and started dragging me into the crowd. Bewildered, I tried to say, *“what are you doing!”*, but she didn’t hear me, because she was yelling out, *“make way for this Japanese guy! You see! Even the Japanese know that Fujimori is a criminal! Make way for the Japanese guy! It’s important that he sign the petition!”*

She planted me in front of the crowd, and pointed proudly to the pad as the crowd enclosed in on me. Her smile was bright; I looked to my left, and then my right, and saw many eager eyes in anticipation.

*“Will he sign in kanji?”* Asked a man next to me. At that moment, it dawned on me what was going on.

*“Uh, I’m north American.”* I said.

*“What? You’re not Japanese?”*

*“No. My family is from Vietnam.”*

*“Ah crap, a damn gringo.”* Said the man who was looking for the kanji script. The crowd, as quickly as they came, departed as I added my signature.

*“So your signature is worthless.”* Said the woman.

She sighed as I asked her where the hostel was. She didn’t know, so I asked her directions to the central Plaza. Since I was lost, I made the most of it. At the plaza, I asked a girl for directions to a good vegetarian restaurant. Luckily, she knew one that was nearby, “Restaurante Natur Vegetariano.” When I found it, the owner, Mark, greeted me warmly, and he spoke English, so we conversed as I ate his “ceviche de soya”. I recounted the incident at the protest, as he laughed.

*“Well Dave, you do look Japanese.”*

*“I don’t like that! I’m not Japanese!”*

*“Is that so bad? My brother in law is Japanese. My great grandfather was Japanese.”*

*“I didn’t mean to insult you, I mean I’m being called something that I’m not.”*

He laughed, and patted me on the back, as he said, “welcome to Peru, my friend. Here, people have many ancestries, and we appreciate our bloodlines. When we call each other “Japanese”, or “Chinese”, it’s meant to affectionately. Not insultingly. We are an affectionate people.”

*“Oh. I didn’t know that. Thank you for the information.”*

*“It’s not a problem. Remember, many Peruvians are of Japanese and Chinese*

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descent, so when they call you Japanese, most likely they will think of you first as a Peruvian.”

“That’s not how that lady reacted.”

“There are a few like her, but she is a minority.”

“Ah, I didn’t know that.”

I asked him if he knew where my hostel was. He didn’t know, so we found the hostel in the Yellow Pages, and called the owner. Speaking in Spanish, Mark wrote down the directions.

When I got back to the hostel, the owner smiled at me, and said, “so you lost?”

“Yes.”

“We have map.” He held it up with a smile.

The next day, I went to the South American Explorer’s Clubhouse, an organization dedicated to the exploration of the unknown areas of South America, and a gathering place for explorers and travelers. I walked in, and while signing up for a membership, someone tapped my shoulder. I turned around to see a short, stout, blond haired woman with a big grin on her face.

“I knew I recognized this gringo!” She said with a grin.

“Marie!” I exclaimed. We hugged each other. Marie was the past president of the Boston University Kung Fu Club. Marie was an archeology major, and she worked in the south of Peru, near Tacna, in an excavation dig. I sent her an email before I left, telling her that I’d show up, but I had no idea she was in town.

“This is Jamie.” She said as she introduced me to a taller girl, who had native American cheekbones and eyes. She had blond, brown hair, and stood nearly a head taller than Marie.

“So what’s your plan Dave?” Asked Marie.

“You know some of the details. I’m biking to Buenos Aires.”

“Damn! That’s a long way. Have you looked at the map?”

“Yeah, it looks doable in three months.”

“I think you need to look at one of these maps, Dave.”

We went to the map room, and Marie pulled out a large map. It was much bigger than the road map that I had. And the scale was much more accurate.

“Are you going to Cuzco?” Asked Marie.

“Cuzco?”

“In the Andes. You’re going to Macchu Picchu, right?”

“Yes.”

“Good, because we bought you a plane ticket.”

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“What? I was going to bike there! I was planning to meet you there.”

“Are you insane, Dave? Oh wait, this is you we’re talking about.” She shrugged.

“What do you mean?”

“Dave, look at the map. It’s 4000 meters in altitude in some places! That’s 13,000 feet high, and you haven’t even acclimatized yet. You’re going to do that in seven days? We gotta get this guy some coca tea.”

“You’re kidding me.” I said as I looked at the map.

“You want to die?” Marie said.

“Not really.”

“Then you’re coming with us.”

Marie had a good point. I didn’t know what I’d encounter, and it was best to familiarize myself first with the local terrain. Later that day, Marie and Jamie took off for Iquitos, a city deep in the Amazon Region of Northeastern Peru. We arranged to meet back in Lima in a few days. I took a bus to Ica to see the Nazca lines. Nazca intrigued me; I read about the gigantic petroglyph’s that could only be seen in the air, and I wanted to get some sand boarding in. I was an avid snow boarder, and sand boarding appealed to my desire for a variation on the theme.

The bus dropped me off at night in the quiet desert town of Ica; in the floodlights of the empty bus lot, I reassembled my bike, put the panniers on, and biked eighteen kilometers into Huancachina, an oasis resort amongst the giant sand dunes of the Nazca desert. At the center of Huancachina was a large pond full of fish. Most of the hostels were filled, but the last one had a bed available, and I shared a quarter with Michael and Jenny, a British couple.

In the morning, I took a micro, to the Nazca lines. I rode the bus with the locals, and noted their reddish brown skin, almond shaped eyes, and strong cheekbones. When I got on board, they looked at me, smiled, and said hello. I smiled and greeted them in turn. Every person who boarded, was greeted with a hello, and I was not used to it, but I enjoyed the custom. Still, never before in my life was I amongst a group of people whose skin was so red. I grew up amongst Asians, blacks, Indians, white, and Hispanics. The Hispanics were from Puerto Rico, or the Caribbean; I knew the tones of yellow, black, brown, and white. Red was new for me. Their eyes and faces made me think of my sun burnt cousins in the summer, when we surfed the waves at the New Jersey Shore.

We didn’t talk much, but with my limited vocabulary, and some sign language, I managed to communicate traveling. We smiled at each other when he understood. Then he tried English.

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“Go Nazca?”

“Yes, see lines.”

“Oh! Beautiful! Mystery. Many sand storms. No cover.”

The Nazca lines were still a mystery, one of many in South America. Made famous by Erich Von Daniken, who linked Extra-terrestrials with the lines, the lines themselves were an enigma. The lines were a few inches deep in the desert, and sand storms often covered the area. Yet, somehow the lines were never buried. If someone was cleaning up the lines, they deserved commendations, especially regarding their secrecy.

In a small, poorly maintained Cessna single propeller plane, I took off above the lines to 5000 feet, where I saw the designs in their full glory. We flew over several square kilometers of designs, and between the choking of the engine, and me choking on my own stomach upheavals, I saw giant glyphs of whales, spiders, the world famous “owl man”, which didn’t even look like an owl’s head, and a monkey with a perfectly formed spiral tail. The owl man was the definite give away for why Von Daniken thought of extraterrestrials. It looked like a large gray alien that was so famously propagated in the media. But that wasn’t that interesting to me. The monkey and the spiral caught my attention. I looked at the spiral, and felt a shiver go through me. Finally, after looking at the giant spider glyph, I felt that I had enough. We landed, and when I recovered, the pilot educated me on the poor maintenance of the planes.

“So what do you do?” He asked.

“I’m an engineer.”

“You are? We need help here! Can you get service manuals for our planes? We need them!”

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Over the pits of the ancient Nazca necropolis, I stood in the harsh sunlight, staring into the empty eye sockets of a five year old kid. His, or her brightly polished skull reflected the harsh sun light. It had a crooked smile, and the rest of the body was wrapped in a lama cloth bag. It looked like a skull and neck bone stuck into a sack. As I wandered the desert site, I looked at the other, open air mummies, some with hair still attached, and they sat in the same position as they were buried. The aridness of the desert lent itself to natural mummification, and the mummies were thousands of years old.

My tour group went to a cistern, fed by an enormous aqueduct system in the Andes. In the high Andean mountains, the Nazca built a network of spiraling cisterns, and each one had a spiral like stair case that went down the hole. The cisterns were lined with stone, and like capillaries to veins, they fed a network into a large main duct, lined with stone, which extended for kilometers from the high Andes all the way into the Nazca desert. The entire aqueduct was amazingly, underground. The pipes fed an enormous underground reservoir system, which supplied water into the city of Nazca.

The fields were a unique synthesis of sustainable agriculture and hydrological technology. A combination of rain water and field water filtered through the soil during crop irrigation, and fed the cisterns. Around the cisterns, fine soil and sand removed impurities, and even microorganisms. The cisterns formed a network connected to the main pipe. The system was at least a thousand years old, and of the 40 conduits discovered, 29 were still in use by the city of Nazca.

If this tiny remnant of the Nazca civilization was capable enough to serve the needs of thousands of residents in a modern city, what other hidden treasures of technology did they have to offer? What other secrets were there? Water is central to life, and modern civilization doesn't provide a way to reuse and renew resources; it mainly consumes and disposes. This isn't sustainable in the long term. In addition, to even build a system like the Nazca aquifers, required hundreds of years of expertise, insight, research, design, quantum leaps, and accumulated knowledge. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that the hydrological engineering, and the Nazca lines which defied the elements were just the tip of the iceberg of an enormous reservoir of highly advanced, lost civilizations. We drank some of the water straight from the cisterns without filtering or adding iodine. I didn't get sick afterwards, and I praised the ancient engineers, scientists, and laborers who built the system.

After a tour of Ica, I went sand boarding. I walked out of my room with my sandals, board, and hooded baseball cap for sun protection. I stepped out the door, went around the corner of the hostel, and I stopped in my tracks. In front of me, were people, no bigger than ants, climbing up the monstrous dune. It was eighteen stories high, and half a kilometer long. At the top, the wind gently blew the sand and made a golden mist in the air.

"You've got to be kidding me." I said.

"Come on Dave!" Said Karen, an Israeli girl. I met her and Anita, a British South Indian girl in Ica when we went out for lunch.

"How do you surf that thing?" I asked her.

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"I don't know, but we'll do this together." She replied.

I watched Karen's slim figure, dressed in a sweat shirt and short shorts hike up the dune in the afternoon sun. She had a board in one hand, and a lit cigarette in the other. I followed behind. At the top, she got on her board, stomach first.

"That one's for my army friends!" she laughed as she slid down the slope. As she slid down, she hit a bump, fell off the board, and rolled down the dune. When she stopped, she burst out laughing.

"Your turn Dave!" She called out.

I didn't fare much better. I went down, surfer style, hit a bump, and then I went down head over heels into the soft sand, and tumbled down after Karen. For the rest of the afternoon, we went up, and surfed down the giant dunes. It wasn't as fast as snow, but it had its rewards. I ate sand instead of ice, and the sand was easier to fall in, as opposed to the packed ice on the slopes in Vermont.

Later that evening, I went out for dinner with Anita. We dined in a chifa, a Chinese restaurant. Chifa is the Peruvian term for Chinese food. With 150 years of immigration into Peru from China, about 15% of the population had Chinese blood or were of Chinese descent. Most of the immigrants were male laborers from southern China, and historically, they worked the railroads and plantations. With time, Chinese cuisine fused with the Incan, and pre Incan to form a totally new Peruvian cuisine.

As we ate, we talked about the events which led up to our journeys.

"Did you notice how everything just led up to making the trip easier?" She said.

"Well, except for the opposition from my parents, yes."

"That's obvious. Most parents are like that anyway. But look at the other things, like your job you resigned from, or how the airline staff helped you with the bike, and how quick and easy it was to get everything together. Do you know all the things that came together to get you here?"

"What are you getting at?" I asked.

"You were meant to come here."

"Aw come on, that was my decision to go."

"Are you sure? Things could've been much harder. You wouldn't be able to go if it wasn't your Fate."

"I don't believe in Fate." I retorted.

"You don't?"

"I believe that nothing is written unless I choose to write it."

"Ah," she said as she mysteriously leaned closer, smiled, and said, "you'll



learn.” Abruptly, she winced as she grabbed her neck. “Ow!”

“What’s up?”

“Oh bother, my neck is cramped. I slept without a pillow last night.”

“Turn around and let me take a look.” I said. She moved her seat closer to me, and turned around. I started massaging her neck muscles, when I felt something stiff.

“You definitely got something cramped back there.” I said as I worked the spot.

“Mmm, that’s better.”

“So what got you to travel down here?”

“I wanted to travel to Peru, Chile, and Bolivia. I’m working my way up to Venezuela.”

“Do you speak Spanish?”

“Yes, and you?”

“Just eighty words now. I picked up some more since I got here, but half of them are flirting phrases from my Salvadorian friend. She said to be careful of the locals though.”

“Oh come on! Sample the local delicacies.”

“Ha ha! And you? What was your cuisine?”

“I’ve had a Canadian and an Israeli.”

“What, no local?”

“No. I think you will have it better than us women. Your selection here is better. Go to a club, my god, watching Peruvian women dance is such eye candy.”

“Really? I used to do ball room dancing.”

“Oh, it’s much better here.”

We went back to the hostel, where Anita decided to help the bar tender mix drinks. I sat down next to Oad, a bearded Israeli, who was fresh out of special forces. We introduced ourselves.

“So what do you do, David?”

“I’m an engineer. Well, I used to be one. And you?”

“I was an army commando. Not anymore though, I don’t want to have anything to do with them.”

“Where have you been?”

“I was part of the wave. At anytime, a half million Israelis are traveling the globe. We start in Brazil, and then we go through the continent. I’ve been to Bolivia, Colombia, and here. I didn’t like Bolivia. It reminded me of the Palestinian

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refugee camps.” He looked off into the distance with a haunted look in his eyes. I didn’t pry further into it.

“Commando huh? I trained with an army guy in Kung Fu.”

“You know Kung Fu?”

“I was an instructor.”

“I can get you a job in Colombia.”

“Really?”

“Yes. We need a guy like you. Great pay, you get a beautiful house, lots of beautiful women, and lots of drugs, if you want. We can get that for you.”

“I can do without the drugs. Beautiful women, now we’re talking. What’s the job position?”

“Hand to hand combat training for body guards and mercenaries.”

“How much is the pay?”

“How much do you want? I can get you up to fifty thousand dollars. My friend and I are starting a personal guard company. We can use a guy like you. Here’s my card.”

“I’ll think about it.” I replied as I took the card.

“You know how to get in touch with me. Call me when you come to Cali.”

I started talking to Karen, and she finally convinced me that extending the trip was a very good idea. She saved up as a waitress and a bartender after her army service in Israel, before traveling for the past four months.

“Dave, three months is very short you know.”

“Yeah, but everyone in the states said that was a long time.”

“Pah! You Americans are all wimps! What is wrong with your people? Most of you don’t even leave your home town. At any time there are a half million Israelis traveling around the world long term. It is so important to travel!”

“Well, that’s why I’m here. To meet beautiful and charming women like you.” I replied with a smile.

“Well,” she smiled, “you are brave, and crazy to go on a bicycle. Three months is very short though. What can you see in three months? What can you do? You can’t change yourself in three months. You need at least six months to change.”

I heard a commotion to my right, and turned to see a Peruvian guy pleading with Anita. “You are so beautiful. Will you come with me on a date?” He asked her.

“No thank you.” She replied. I looked at Anita and grinned. “Got yourself a fan?” She rolled her eyes.

“Hey, what’s wrong with having an admirer?”

“I think he’s too much.” She said.

The Peruvian, after a few more attempts, left her alone. Karen went to sleep, and I played poker with Oad, as he tried to sell me on the benefits of being a mercenary defense instructor, when I felt a tap on my shoulder. Anita was rubbing her neck.

“Dave, could you massage that again?”

“Sure. Let’s go to your room.”

“OK.”

We closed the door behind us, and Anita didn’t lock it. She got on the bed. “Lay on your stomach, and put the pillow under you.” I said, as she followed the instructions. I started massaging her neck, and found the kink. While working the kink out, Anita moaned quietly.

“Mmmm, god that feels good. Can you get my shoulders?”

“I can, but your shirt is in the way.” She took off her shirt, and I worked her shoulders, squeezing then releasing the tender, smooth, and supple flesh as I worked my hands into her muscles.

“Lower please.” She gently requested, and I moved my hands down her back; I moved my hands in cup motions, pulling and squeezing the skin and back.

“Lower.” She said, softer than the first, and I moved my hands lower - suddenly, the door burst open, and Michael looked in. Startled, both Anita and I jumped up; she grabbed my hands, which were on her shoulders. Her bra sagged, and I pulled the strap up to keep it in place.

“Oh! Sorry! I didn’t mean to interrupt!” Said Michael, smiling with an open mouth.

“Uh. . . no problem. I’m just, ah, giving Anita a massage.” I said.

Anita glared at Michael in complete shock.

He looked at us, grinned broadly, and said, “cheerio David! Carry on!” as he closed the door. Anita looked at me.

“Oh god, we must have looked so dodgy.”

“You’re telling me.” I let go of the strap.

“My bra!”

“It was coming off.”

“Thanks for holding it up.” She said as she put the clasp back on.

“No problem.”

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We walked out of the room, with big grins and laughed about what had happened. I sat down with Oad, Michael, and Jenny, while Anita went to the bathroom. The Peruvian guy gave me a sour look.

“So the two of you were doing a little... chatting?” Michael joked.

“We had verbal intercourse.” I said.

“That’s a load of bullocks! Oh my god, verbal intercourse? You pulled, didn’t you?” Laughed Jenny.

“So, Daveed, how was it?” Asked the bar keep as she smiled knowingly.

“How was what?”

“You were in there for 30 minutes. We timed the two of you. How was it?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“Look, we told Michael to check on the two of you, and he came in, and her bra was off. And the two of you were in the bed! Poor Pablo over there is broken hearted.” She said as she pointed at Pablo. The Peruvian gave me an angry stare. “So tell me! Did you kiss her?”

“No, no, no.” I said as I shook my head, and then smiled.

“Liar! Come on, what did you say to her?” She demanded.

“I told her a sweet phrase.” I said as I decided to play along.

“What?”

“You really want to know?”

“Jes!”

I said with a sweeping flourish, *“your eyes are beautiful, and your lips are precious. And your face is prettier than the full moon.”*

“Agh!” The bar keep screamed as she grabbed her hair. “You are just like my ex boyfriend, that Chinese son of a bitch!”

“What?” I said in surprise.

She pointed a finger at me, and seethed, “You. You men.”

“Hey, hey! I’m not trying to pick you up!” I said defensively.

“It doesn’t matter. You men are all alike.” She said as she stared at me warily, and added, *“womanizers!”*

Oad sat next to me, and wanted to play a drinking game. I declined since I didn’t drink. “But we need one more person.” He whined.

“Let me get Karen.” I replied. I went to a dark room, number 107. “Was it 106, or 107?” I thought to myself. I couldn’t remember. I knocked on 107, and the door was slightly ajar. It opened gently, and I didn’t hear a thing inside, no snoring or even a breath. It was utterly silent. I turned back and walked to Oad.

"I guess she's not there." The bar keep stared at me in shock.

"You... you know what you just did?"

"No. Why?"

"You interrupted my brother while he was fucking his woman!"

"Huh?"

"Room 107 is his room! You just walked into them having sex!"

"No way."

Beside me, walked up a Peruvian man, with brown skin, about my height, with a bowl shaped hair cut. A lighter skinned woman accompanied him. They didn't look at me, and sat down next to me. They weren't smiling, and the woman lit up a cigarette.

"*One pisco sour, please.*" Said the man. He sighed.

"Did I just..." I started to ask.

"Jes."

"I'm so sorry." I quickly apologized, and added, "I was trying to find my friend."

He smiled, "it's not a problem. I was doing this," he said as he stood up, and thrust his pelvis rhythmically, "and when I heard the door, I went, huh?" He said as he suddenly stopped his pelvis inwards, and made a bewildered look.

"Oh man! I would never interrupt anyone having sex. I'm really sorry."

"It's OK." Said the woman.

"Well, I'm David by the way," I said as I extended the hand to the man. He shook it.

"Jose. It is no problem. There is always tomorrow." He said as he drank the sour. Karen came up to the table, and was rubbing her eyes when she said, "What's going on?"

"I think the Benny Hill show." I said, and then we started laughing.

As I went to bed that night, I felt the need to go. I made one person jealous, and I interrupted a couple's amorous night. That didn't make for good vibrations, and I didn't want to overstay my welcome. So, early the next morning, I took off for Ica. I had to catch up with Marie and Jamie. We were going to the source of my feelings, the place where the secrets inside of me would unfold, into the heart of the mythical, sumptuous, and legendary Incan Empire.

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## Chapter 6

### Cuzco

Cuzco is the navel of the Incan Empire, and it's referred to as the navel by the Quechua, the Inca's descendants. The empire of the Inca is known as Tawantinsuyo, or the four corners of the world, as it's translated from Quechua. Quechua is the Spanish transliteration of Qheshwa. The four corners consists of Chinchinsuya to the north, Antisuya to the East, Contisuya to the west, and Collasuya to the South. It's one of the oldest continuous major cities in the Americas, and it still functions as a center of commerce and culture for much of the Quechua. At 3120 meters in thin air, it's also a high city.

When we arrived in Cuzco, I noticed immediately that my head felt like it was swelling. We took a taxi to a hostel; at the hostel, I sat down on the bench, while waiting for Marie and Jamie to fill out the room forms. I held my head in my hands, as I felt the dull ache in my head. I imagined there must've been a vise grip around my temples, as the throbbing squeezed on my head. My sinuses felt full, and the feeling was like a sinus infection, without the infection.

"What's going on with me?" I groaned.

"Uh oh, Dave's got soroche. That's high altitude sickness." Said Marie.

"*Do you have any coca tea?*" She asked the hostel owner, Carlos, who was a short and kind man. His face was wrinkled, with a large gray beard and mustache. "*Yes, come this way.*"

We unloaded our things into our room. I struggled with my bags and the bike. What happened to my strength?

"You haven't adjusted to the oxygen levels here yet. Give yourself a few days, you'll be producing a lot more red blood cells." Replied Jamie. In the hostel

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kitchen, the owner, Carlos, poured me a cup of coca tea.

“Poor guy.” He said as he looked at me. My head was in my arms on the table, half dazed, as I sat.

“You will need a few days to get used to the height.” He said.

I grabbed the sugar bowl, and started eating large clumps of brown sugar. They were sweet, but they tasted metallic against my tongue. “Drink this.” Said the owner as he handed me a steaming cup with green coca leaves inside. The coca leaves steeped a greenish tint to the water, and I breathed in the steam. It was thirty five degrees outside, and the high mountain air was dry and cold. I took the cup in my hands, and took a sip. It tasted like spinach with sugar. In a few minutes, I felt my hand warm up, and the dull ache in my head began to release its clamp.

“That feels better.” I said, as I felt my body slowly stir awake.

“Coca tea really helps with the soroche.” Said Marie.

“Yeah, make sure you drink the coca tea. Up here, you need to be careful of what your body is doing. You don’t want to have AMS.” Said Jamie.

“AMS?”

“Acute mountain sickness. It can disable or kill you. The moment you start showing signs of it, we’re going to have to carry you down to the Sacred Valley in a stretcher.”

“What are the signs?”

“Well, it looks like you have some of the signs right now, but the moment you start vomiting, is when we start carrying you down.”

“That’s comforting.”

“How do you feel Dave?”

“I feel like someone stuck a clamp around my head, and everything feels loopy.”

“You’re fine then. We had it for a few days too. Wait till the third day, then you’ll feel like taking on the world. Your body adjusts really quick.”

I drank the cup, and poured some more sugar into my spoon, which I ate. “Why do I keep eating sugar?” I asked as I poured another spoonful.

“It looks like your body is adjusting instinctively to the level.” Said Marie.

I went to bed and slept for the next thirty six hours. When I woke up, I felt my body almost vibrate with energy. “Whooh! What the hell happened?” I said to myself as I got out of bed. I looked at myself in the mirror. I definitely felt better, the throbbing was gone, my sinuses felt clear, and I was anxious to get out and have a look around Cuzco. Jamie and Marie weren’t around. They were touring the Sacred Valley of the Incas.



“Ah! You look much better today!” Said the hostel owner as he waved at me. I walked out of the hostel, as a small, KIA taxi rumbled down the cobblestone road in front of me. The entire street was lined with a large and ancient Incan wall. The sun was bright, almost brilliant, as it cast harsh shadows on the ground. The air was crisp, dry, and mild. It felt warm at forty two degrees. I looked at the gray stones, and noted that not one stone was exactly the same length as the other, as I walked down the hill into the city. I gazed at the red roof tops of roofing tile, and it was a city unlike any I’d ever seen in my life. Nothing in the US, Europe, Africa, or Asia came close to its appearance. I’d never seen anything like it in any photo, documentary, or report.

Cuzco is a magical blend of the ancient and the colonial. Most of the Incan empire’s structures formed the foundations of the Spanish imperial constructions. There’s a certain poetic justice about the Incan construction. The Incans, the world’s premier masonry engineers, took stone masonry to a level unmatched anywhere else in the world. No stone was the same size, yet as I walked by the walls, the stones were perfectly fit in polygonal shapes. The fit was so tight, and they didn’t use cement, mud, or any other adhesive to hold the walls together. A benefit of the polygonal construction was their uniquely earthquake proof characteristics. Cuzco and the surrounding areas typically had earthquakes that could level San Francisco several times over. When the Spanish came, as a symbol of their might and the catholic religion, they destroyed as much of the Incan constructions as they could, and then they built churches and cathedrals on the rocks they couldn’t topple. The city gets periodic earthquakes, and sometimes they get one or two that really levels things. Every time that happened, the Spanish churches and structures were destroyed, while the Incan structures stood in silent vindication for centuries.

I walked through the central plaza. The local people greeted me with good mornings, or a merchant came up to me hawking wares for tourists. I continued down the cobblestone road for several blocks, as I passed by the giant, ancient walls, and the temple of Coricancha, known as the temple of the Sun and the Moon. A church was built on its foundations, but much of the ancient temple was preserved for the tourists. I headed for the South American Explorer’s Club branch in Cuzco, to get some information, and to get some bearings on where I was in South America. I knew I was here for a reason, and that I was supposed to meet someone. I didn’t know how I knew, or why, but there was something I had to learn here. I set aside three to four weeks to explore Cuzco, and Macchu Picchu. As I walked, I reminded myself to cancel my plane ticket, and to extend my trip for another 3

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months. I pulled out a slip of paper, where I wrote down the office address from the Lima branch. "1458, 1459, 1460. Here it is!" I said as I passed down the numbers in front of the homes.

I walked inside, into a living room, with walls full of books. It was shady and bright, from the harsh glare of the sun through the glass blocks and windows, and a brown haired British lady greeted me at the desk. She gave me a tour of the facilities. We walked through the library, map room, outdoor area, kitchen, and the explorer library. Marie was in the library.

"Dave! You're OK! Are you feeling better? You got through the soroche really quick." Said Marie.

"Yeah, I'm feeling a lot better. How was the sacred valley?"

"Gorgeous, we're going to the Pikallactay ruins today. Want to come?"

"Sure! Let me grab some breakfast first."

We walked out and went toward the hostel to Café Haylilly, where a pleasant woman, Luisa, served us hot fried potatoes, fruit salad, avocados, bread and butter. Afterwards, we took a taxi down to the ruin. The ruins were far lower in elevation than the city, and it was much warmer. I got out of the car, and stepped on the dry red soil. There were shrubs with giant thorns, and cacti. The air was warm and dry, and the sun was strong. I put my sun cap on.

"Be careful of the thorns. They can puncture a thick boot." Said Marie. We walked around the ruin, which looked like a village that'd been burned down. All that was left were the adobe brick walls of homes and a village center that once bustled with a large population.

"This is pre Incan?"

"Yes. The Incans are just the name of the empire, but the people who built the empire, they were once a republic, or a group of nations long before the Incans ever came here. The Incans were only an empire for a few hundred years."

The brick walls were red, like the soil. There were strange holes in the walls, and they didn't always match up with a hole opposite of it. Afterwards, we went to an ancient Incan wall further up the road. The wall was enormous, and it seemed to extend for miles off into the horizon into another mountain. It was partially buried by dirt, but the parts that were excavated impressed the engineer inside of me. Some of the stones were the size of a small car, and like the walls in Cuzco, they were polygonal, and they precisely fit within each other. Part of the wall seemed to be cut, and faced with stone, as if it was a kind of an entrance. I imagined that there were once guards here, patrolling the wall as the gatekeepers. We walked up the

wall to take a look at the top. The wall seemed to also function as an aqueduct, but I had some reservations, since the distance in between the sides of the opening was large enough for an eighteen wheeler truck.

Marie, Jamie, and I had an argument that started my conflict with the western archaeologists and anthropologist's. Their theories regarding the structures and peoples I met during my journey were colored with Western bias. I felt that something important was missing, and as I continued my journey, I found that I had allies, who were the local, red and brown skinned people.

"Where's the rest of the aqueduct?" I asked.

"What do you mean?"

"It looks like they just stopped on the two sides. Are you sure this is an aqueduct?"

"Yes."

"I don't know, it's starting to look structural to me. Wouldn't they at least finish the job?"

"They probably used something organic in between."

"What? After all that work with stone, and then they'd use something organic to bridge the gap? That doesn't make sense. That's like a half ass job."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"OK, they obviously are able to cut out this huge slab of stone," I said as I pointed to the big stone next to me, "fit it in, without mortar, so tight that my knife can't fit in it, and then you're going to tell me that they just left the top off without finishing it?"

"See, that's the difference between you engineers and us archaeologists."

"What's that?"

"You always try to see what the practical use of something is."

"Well, to build this thing, you'd have to think like an engineer. It takes engineers to build things. If you're going to spend that much energy to build something, you'd want to do it well, and you'd want to complete it. I would think the emperor would've thought the same way."

"Well, archaeologists try to find the why behind something."

"The why behind what?"

"Why did they build this?"

"It's a wall. The reasons are pretty obvious. But they wouldn't just leave an aqueduct incomplete."

After touring the ruins, we went back to Cuzco, and hung out in Mama Africa,

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a restaurant bar in the Central Plaza. We started talking about love, our past relationships, and about how most men were horrible at making a commitment. She wanted a house and kids. I wasn't too sure about what I wanted, but I knew that I wanted someone along the lines of a lifetime adventure and travel companion. Wait a minute, Marie with a house and kids? "And a white picket fence. Well, it doesn't have to be white." She added.

This was the same woman who traveled and worked in Morocco, Spain, and now Peru. Marie could slap a man around like a rubber doll. She was a former president of the Boston University Kung Fu Club. Marie had a soft side? This was new. We started discussing men's phobias to commitment.

I said, "if you think about it, if that person seriously was committed to anything, than he would either be planning the trip with the full intent of doing it, or already be there. He can't even commit to the most important person in his life. Himself. Face it. You can't ever lose your independence unless you choose to. All that crap about losing independence is an excuse for why they're not able to make their own lives worthwhile. I think it's important to be happy first. Making a commitment to yourself is most important, that's my opinion. Besides, if you decide that you need someone to be happy, you'll often just end up being miserable. Neediness isn't happiness."

"And what about you Dave?" She asked after I got off my soapbox.

"What about me?"

"How come you've never been in a long term relationship?"

"I have a bad habit of unconsciously breaking people's hearts."

"Oh. You're one of those kinds of guys."

"Yes, I'm a totally uncommitted bastard. But, right now I'm fulfilling a commitment to myself."

"Well, I want a boyfriend. I just don't want to see him." Said Jamie.

"How can you have a boyfriend and not see him?" I asked.

"There's the internet, video conferencing, and the phone."

"You sound jaded." I said.

"Well, what's so great about a relationship anyway? Nothing special ever happens when people meet, and all the guy wants is sex." She added.

"I dunno about the nothing special part when you meet someone. I have an interesting story, if you'd like to hear it." I said.

"What's that." They asked.

"Well, my friend told me that he knew of someone who drew a picture of a

woman he was told that he would meet. He never met the person before. So he drew it. Then a year later, that person appeared, the picture matched, and the two of them met. He said it was an event that changed his friend's life forever."

"That kind of stuff never happens." Said Jamie in a disdainful, unbelieving voice, as she stood up to go to the bathroom. When she left, I looked at Marie, smiled, and said, "it did happen. It happened to me."

"Who was the person?"

"Remember Kendra, from the Kung Fu Club?"

"Ah ha! I knew there was an odd chemistry going on between the two of you. I saw what was going on. Did you tell her?"

"Right before I left, I sent her the picture, and told her the story in a letter. I was hoping she would throw them away."

"So you just ditched her."

"I was freaked out! Think about it, what kind of stuff like that happens to a person? Have you ever heard of something like that ever happening?"

"No, I've never heard of something like that ever happening. Usually someone tells them that they're going to meet someone, and then they meet. But you're the first one I know who has physical evidence." Marie said, and then added, "although, you better be careful Dave, what you did might backfire on you. She might not throw it away, and she might keep it even closer to her heart."

"We'll see. As far as I'm concerned, I'm here, and she's there in the USA. That's a huge distance. What can she do? Nothing. What can I do? Nothing. That works well for me. Jamie's pretty jaded huh?"

"The irony, Dave, is that it's people like her who watch romantic movies, saying, 'oh god, how could they not meet? They deserve each other!' It's like they can believe it so fully in a movie, but they can't accept it in real life."

"Well, it happened in real life, to me. But, I want my adventure, and I have to satisfy my wander lust."

"And you're a totally uncommitted bastard." Marie added.

Later, Marie and Jamie went to tour Macchu Picchu. I continued touring Cuzco, exploring the alley ways, and parts of the city. I went to the central market, which was full of stalls, and reddish brown skinned Quechua women, who wore traditional skirts, and rainbow colored shawls. All the women had bowler hats, which was a left over custom from the colonial days when the Spanish imperial government forced the women to adopt some European customs and dress. I talked to the children who played in the streets, especially when they came up to me and asked

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me, “are you Japanese?”

“No, I’m north American. My family is from Vietnam.”

“Vietnam? Where’s that?”

“Asia.”

“You look Japanese. Can I practice my Japanese with you?”

It exasperated me that they didn’t seem to understand me, and I was adamant that they got my ethnicity correct. I knew it was wrong to expect people to be less ignorant about where people came from, but I still wanted it to be that way. I was still reacting as I always did, from what I used to deal with in the US. It would take me a while to eventually calm down, and for me to realize that racial perceptions were vastly different in Latin America.

I walked into art galleries, and fell into an addiction for churros, a Peruvian pastry deep fried in oil, and filled with sweet cream. I walked far from the tourist center to where only the locals went to get my churros, and soon, the cooks affectionately started calling me, “Chinito.” Café Haylilly became my place to go to for breakfast, and sometimes lunch, and the owner, Sally, and the staff, greeted me warmly. They even began cooking custom dishes adapted to my diet. I was slowly adjusting to my new surroundings, and making friends with the locals. Yet, each day, at breakfast, I opened my notebook, and looked at a question I’d written inside.

“Something inside of me told me to come here. Something told me that I’m going to meet someone important. Who is it, and what for?”

\*\*\*\*\*

In the South American Explorer’s Club, I read an explorer report about their bicycle trip from Lima to Cuzco. Marie was right, it took at least two weeks at a daily pace to get to Cuzco. I read the report about what the explorer encountered along the way. I pulled out another binder of trip reports into Macchu Picchu, and flipped through the write-ups from travelers before me.

“Are you looking to go to Macchu Picchu?” A warm, Latino accented voice said behind me. I turned around and saw a reddish brown man, with an eagle like nose, and slight smile. His face was wide, and he looked strong. He was my height, and took a look at the binder I opened. He told me about how special Macchu Picchu was, and how he used to be a guide there. And then the conversation took a curious turn.

“There are many ancient Incan temples and ruins on the Inca trail, yes. But there are also strange lights.” He said.

“Strange lights?”

“Yes. Who knows you might see them.”

“Tell me about these lights.”

“They come only at certain times.”

“Are there any cities, or towns there?”

“No.”

“Lighting storms, or thunder storms?”

“No. They appear during clear nights.”

“Where do they appear again?”

“From behind the mountains, to the east. There are no cities there. Nothing.”

I stopped and thought for a moment. “I’ve forgotten my manners. My name is David.” I said as I extended my hand. “I am Ernesto.” He said as he shook it. “So how long are you going to be here? Two weeks?” He asked.

“Two weeks? No, more like a month. I’m extending my trip.”

“That is good. Too many Americans like you come here for just two weeks. You cannot learn anything in two weeks, especially in a city as rich in history as Cuzco.” He grabbed his back pack, and started towards the door.

“Ernesto, do you come around here often?” I asked.

“Yes. You will see me again. Come talk to me if you have any questions.” He said as he left.

“Strange lights?” I thought to myself as I walked up to my hostel. The air was clear, cold, and crisp, and despite the light pollution from the city, I saw stars. Several attractive women approached me as I walked to a restaurant I frequented in the plaza. The girls came up to me, and handed out flyer’s for the local clubs and discos. I got to know one of the girls, Tammy, a pretty girl who was about nineteen, with shiny dark eyes and long black hair, who originated from Lima. She always wore a sweater, and a jacket, but her tight jeans accentuated her curves beautifully. My Spanish was improving, just from listening and learning, and every time I saw her, we went through our conversation again.

“*Daveed, how are you tonight?*” She would say sweetly to me. I of course, would smile, and say, “*I’m fine. Your eyes are precious tonight as usual.*”

“*Why thank you! You’re very sweet. So, are you going to Club Lobo with me tonight?*”

“*Well, I will. Just not right now.*”

“*Why not tonight?*”

“*I’ve got some things to do.*”

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*“Aye, Daveed, I know you’re a busy guy, eh?” She’d wink, and then say, “but please don’t forget me. Before you come to my club, come see me.”*

It was the same shtick. The women were paid to bring in patrons to the club, not to go on dates, and I knew this. Once the guys were in the club, the women would have them buy them drinks, since this was how the clubs made most of their money. I didn’t feel like falling into that kind of trap with them. I wanted to date a girl who didn’t think of me as the beer tap. I continued on to the restaurant to meet up with Kate, an American girl I met in the clubhouse. She hailed from Vermont, and was traveling through South America for three months. Kate had short cropped brown hair, and was a recent graduate from Dartmouth University. Kate traveled a lot during her years at Dartmouth. She spent nine months in Kenya, three months in Mexico, and was working on her Spanish skills in Peru for the last four months. So, we spent time talking about her travels, infectious mosquito borne diseases, bad anti malarial medicine which made her shake like an epileptic, adventure, and our cultural obsession with work.

After dinner, I walked into the local craft shops to buy a sweater. Ernesto’s words rang in my ears about the “strange lights”. Macchu Picchu was just a ruin, but the lights, to me, indicated that there was something living. As I browsed woolen textiles of colorful, hand woven ponchos, alpaca sweaters, and pullovers, an elderly Quechua woman came up to me. She spoke heavily accented English, and I bought a rough, wool sweater from her. I realized that she was an old Quechua, and maybe she’d know about the strange lights. She probably saw many things before Cuzco modernized during the last twenty years. We introduced ourselves. Her name was Kristine.

“Hello Kristine. A pleasure to meet you. Say, I heard about a strange thing around here, nearby Macchu Picchu. Maybe you know about it?”

“What is it?”

“A strange light was seen by my friend as he went to Macchu Picchu. Do you know what it is?”

“A strange light?”

“Yes, he sees it at night, when there is clear sky. There are no cities or towns nearby, and it comes from behind the mountains.”

“Ahh. That is Spiritual la Tierra. Only the *acclhaska* can see those.”

“The *acclhaska*? What’s that?”

“I don’t know the word in English for it. But the *acclhaska* is very special, only he can search these things. The lights show the way to lots of gold.”



“Gold?”

“Yes. But only the acclhaska is permitted to see the lights, and the gold.”

“Acclhaska, is that a Quechua word?”

“Yes.”

Acclhaska is a Quechua word, and I repeated its pronunciation. “Ack-la-haska.” Tired, I went back to my hostel. It was cold out, and the shower was out of propane for heating the water. The showers were outdoors, in a little wooden stall in the open. I chose to wash my face, changed into my long johns, and went to sleep thinking about Ernesto and the old Quechua woman’s information.

I spent more time at the clubhouse, and while browsing a book on the Incans, a pretty woman in her early thirty’s came into the clubhouse. She had red hair, and sharp eyes, and we saw each other instantly the moment she walked in. I became a mainstay at the clubhouse, and even helped out the staff while I was there, so I gave the lady a tour. Her name was Michelle, she was an American, originally from a Midwestern town, and she was looking for an apartment to rent in Cuzco. After showing her around, we sat down and started talking about her travels. She lived in Nepal for two years, learned the language of the Sherpas, and she was an entrepreneurial woman who traveled around the world, filmed places in video, and then sold the video. Her lifestyle seduced me, and I started dreaming about being an explorer, making money where ever I went.

We talked about how she saved for three years before taking off on a trip, and did things like scrounge dormitory halls for used toothpaste tubes, cook at home, and keep the goal of the journey in mind constantly. She was an investigative documentary maker, and after working around the world for a few years, she came to Cuzco to investigate the properties of the San Pedro plant.

“Dave, put your feelers out there regarding that plant, and let me know what you find out.”

“What exactly is San Pedro?”

“It’s a plant that has psychic enhancing properties. It’s a mind altering drug, to be blunt, but when used properly, it gives the mind access to other areas that you typically wouldn’t be able to access. Here’s the cool part. When I was in Tibet, they did a study where they gave some of the monks a small dosage of a mind altering drug, but it didn’t do anything to them! The monks naturally produced the chemicals in their minds as they meditated, and they were already accustomed to the chemicals. So, we’re all equipped with the same capabilities, but we’ve forgotten how to access those areas of our mind.”

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“Wow. So, by meditation. . .”

“You’re already accessing the 95% of the mind that you normally don’t access through day to day, or even intensive thought. Everyone only uses 5% of the brain, no matter how hard they try consciously. But in a state between conscious and unconscious, you’re accessing enormous areas of the mind. The question is how to get to that. In the East, in Asia, they typically do it naturally, except in isolated cases. In the Americas, they use the aid of plants and mushrooms to access it. The only problem with meditation is practice, and knowing the right method; if you know the right method, and practice it, your mind gets stronger. Plants are like a crutch; they’ll get you there, but they’re still a crutch, so you don’t get stronger.”

“So why do you want to know about San Pedro?”

“I’m building up documentation that the proper use of the plants, by the shamans, who regard them as sacred, gives the mind access to knowledge that westerners took 2000 years to figure out, whereas the shaman’s had their Gods explain it to them. You have to feed your mind with more than just knowledge. There are certain nutrients that, in small quantities, and used with respect, expand the mind.”

“Hello David!” Interrupted Ernesto as he walked into the club.

“Ernesto! I’ve been looking for you!” I said back, smiling.

“You were? Well, it’s a good thing I decided to come in today. I usually don’t come in, but something inside me said to come. So I am here. What can I do for you?”

“Those lights that you were talking about, I need some more information on them.”

“So you are now curious about the lights? That is very interesting. Most people don’t care about the lights, but you are.” He looked at me curiously, then added, “OK then, let me tell you about them.”

“Oh! I keep forgetting my manners again. Michelle, this is Ernesto, and Ernesto, this is Michelle.” I said as I introduced them.

“Why don’t we go to a café, and discuss this?” Asked Ernesto

“Good idea.” Said Michelle.

In a small bistro around the corner, over some hot tea and fresh bread, we sat down and started talking about the many strange mysteries in the Cuzco area, and how it related to us and our world. Somehow, we wandered into mathematics, and then into science, but more particularly, western science.

“The beauty of math is it’s such a universal language.” Said Michelle.

“That is true. You cannot mistake the interpretation of numbers of geometrical

forms.” Said Ernesto

“Well, I’d like to use science to figure out the ruins around here.” I said.

“Really?” Asked Ernesto

“Science, huh? Kind of like the stuff that came up with the atomic bomb?”

Asked Michelle.

I soon found myself in a corner defending western, reductionist science from the two. Both were adamant that western science itself was the source of all the problems of the world. Now, Ernesto and Michelle weren’t Luddites or ignorant. Both were well educated, and more importantly, well read. They were also quite good at mathematics. Both were also spiritual as well as contemplative. Still, something about science really bugged them.

I tried to get them to understand that to me, science, like spirituality, was truth. It just is, and it’s just how things work. However, man’s application of science, known as technology, and man’s application of spirituality, known as religion, is actually the reason the world has seen so many problems as well as solutions. I didn’t succeed in my goal, so we moved on to the characteristics of the strange lights.

“So, what exactly does the light look like, Ernesto?” I asked.

“It looks like there are two moons.”

“Two moons?”

“Yes.”

“And where did you see it?”

“On the third pass on the way to Macchu Picchu. I saw the lights five times, and I concluded that they are not Aurora, because we are too far from the poles and the light’s origins are too low in the sky. They come from the bottom up. They are not lighting flashes, because there are no thunder clouds, and in four of the cases, there were no clouds in the sky. It only occurs at night, and they fit into a strange pattern. At first I thought they were random, until I noticed that they had a pattern. It starts off small, in the beginning, and then the energy form expands until the entire mountain range is lit up. So, that would not be a city, or town, because it happens at once, and it covers the entire mountain range.”

“Do the locals know about it?”

“Not all of them. Only a few know.”

“What about travelers and tourists?”

“Most of the tourists stop to sleep in the hostel after the third pass. Almost nobody stays in the third pass, and even then, the lights are selective.”

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“How so?”

“I’ve gone with other people, sometimes in a group as large as ten. Five people saw it, and five others did not.”

“Did you ever try to locate the source of the light?”

“Yes, one time, a looter witnessed the lights. He followed a trail to the source, and found a large stone slab covering a hole in the ground. He had a metal detector with him, and scanned the area, and the detector registered large quantities of metal. So, he marked the spot, and returned with a group of men. They moved to slab, and found the area empty, as if the metal had “moved.” This frightened him and the men, so they ran.”

“What do you think it is Ernesto?”

“Some people think it’s El Dorado. Other’s think it’s Paititi. What do you think of it David?”

“I’m not sure. I won’t know until I witness it. Let me make a few expeditions, and find out.”

“OK. Well, why don’t I take you to a few places around here to introduce you to some of the problems that we have here? Who knows, maybe you might be able to find a solution, or put us on the right path to understanding the things around here.”

“What things?”

“There are many ancient ruins, and sites. I used to be an assistant to many white researchers, archaeologists, and anthropologists. Their theories that they come up with, write about, and eventually teach in their schools trouble me, because they never listened to me when I told them what we, the locals know about these things. They have always been very arrogant to us. Are you religious, David?”

“No, why?”

“What religion are you?”

“I don’t really hold onto a religion, but I am Buddhist in name. I don’t think you can call Buddhism a religion.”

“That is fine. You are an engineer, but you have another perspective. That is what we need here. I will call you next week, and then I will take you to some of these places.”

As we departed, Michelle said to me, “You’ll be around, right Dave?”

“Oh yeah. I’m not going any time soon. I think I just found what I was looking for.”

“Well, let me know. I’d like to see you again.”

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I was on the verge of a major bowel dysfunction. I was four kilometers away from the nearest toilet. On top of that, the Peruvian toilets typically didn't have toilet paper. I found myself in this compromising position when Ernesto took me out to some little explored areas to start my investigation. We were looking for tunnels in the mountains surrounding the Cuzco region.

One of the major local legends of the Cuzco area is about a major network of tunnels running underneath the four corners of the Incan Empire. The Incan Empire was as large, if not bigger, than the Roman Empire. Many true and not so true stories abound about the tunnel network. The true ones involved people going into the tunnels, and never coming back, or they came back stark raving mad and died immediately afterwards. The legends stated that the Incas hid a massive amount of gold in the network after the death of Altahualpa, the last Incan Emperor, to get it away from the murderous Spanish. Since then, numerous intrepid, yet poorly equipped treasure hunters have disappeared into that system. Due to the increase of missing adult reports, the government tried to seal up the entrances. They also must've mistaken the sewers for tunnels as well, which I found evident in the malfunctioning toilet systems.

The Peruvian government wasn't particularly thorough, because Ernesto and I found a major entrance to the tunnels on our first try. We went out on a crisp, cold, and clear night to explore the local ruins, sans tourists. I dislike tourists, despite the fact that most Peruvians considered me one. My grist with tourists is that most of them don't engage or try to make contact with the people and cultures that made a place special in the first place. The Quechua were the direct descendants of the Inca, and they're the ones who built these ruins. It made sense to get to know them. The tourists, especially the ones from Europe and Israel, always kept making references to "all these savages", which I found to be insulting. Surprisingly, the few American travelers I met didn't make such references, nor did the Canadians, or the Japanese.

When we got to the monuments, it was twilight. There is nothing more awe inspiring than seeing enormous, megalithic stone monuments in the glow of the Milky Way and a crescent moon. The Inca, or more likely, their ancestors who built the magnificent monuments must've had this idea in mind. I stood there with Ernesto, and I tried to get into the heads of whoever it was that built these structures. What were they thinking? What great and awesome purpose could have possibly motivated such a magnificent civilization to build such monstrosities?

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We first went to visit the Qenko monument in the pale moonlight. Qenko looked like someone took a 600 ton rock, plopped it in the middle of plateau, and carved a tunnel straight through the solid rock. On top, numerous altars and channels were carved into it. Upon exploring the cave, my mind began its first series of stomach twisting, mind bending, mentally headache causing thought processes. How this was done without even basic modern technology, let alone steel tools was mind boggling. Inside of the rock were smooth bore walls and altars, as well as an area that looked like a kitchen and a bathroom. Right angles from windows and cubby holes were carved out of the dense rock.

The rock itself is Andesite, which is a type of dense, hard, volcanic stone. The Andes are full of Andesite, considering that the Ring of Fire runs alongside the vast mountain range. The Incans had no iron tools, just copper alloy, or bronze tools. Strong, carbonized steel is necessary to do some basic stone work. If it was done with rocks, which was the prevalent theory on much of the older constructions, then how did they manage to cut straight angles into the stone? Cutting and forming sharp angles outside the stone is one thing, but cutting into it? On the outside was a ridiculously huge 200 ton pointed stone, also planted with an Incan wall surrounding it. Ernesto told me that Qenko wasn't well known to most tourists, because no one ever figured out how the thing was built, or what it really was for. What he did notice was that on the solstices of the year, there was a slit through the rock that was precisely 30 degrees off the moon, which would be compensated if the earth was rotated 30 degrees to put the rock in its place to match the solstices. It was a real mystery.

Ernesto then asked me, the present scientist and engineer, how it was possible. I simply said, "I don't know." Funny those three words, "I don't know." It wasn't until I uttered those three humbling words, "I don't know," that I really understood what it was that irked Ernesto and Michelle about science, and for that matter, the western approach to science.

The problem is humility. To be humble is to be able to suck it up, and say, "You know, I haven't a single clue." For me personally, I don't like being lied to. Science won't lie to you, because that is just the quest for truth in nature. The problem is the human aspect of science. When you ask a scientist something, you expect an answer. The problem is that option D, "I don't know," is missing from the vocabulary. We had this option as children, when we were all natural born scientists.

Kids are great. They're totally open minded, unbiased, honest, they ask tons of

questions to drive you nuts, and are willing to test things. Even I had fun with the fork and the electric socket when I was an impressionable four year old. Still, those are the hallmarks of good science. Yet somewhere in college and graduate school, everyone became pundits. Everyone's got to have some kind of answer. Whatever happened to the magic three words which often got most people out of trouble? Whatever happened to saying, "I don't know?" The beauty of those words is that they're honest.

Another problem with western scientists is that it consists of dissecting and separating everything so much that people in general can't connect to it. They're missing the whole. In fact, there currently is a battle brewing between the scientists of China, and Asia, for that matter, and the scientists of the West regarding the evolution of life. The Asian scientists are looking at things from a holistic view, and are putting the connections together. The western scientists in general, are continuing to dissect. This was really evident at a recent conference on evolution, where Chinese scientists were proposing another theory to evolution based on their studies of the fossils in the Mongolian region. What the Chinese scientists were seeing is a science of "harmony", or how things aren't so much competing in terms of natural selection, but somehow the competing traits were actually cooperating, and that another force other than genetic selection was at play. It'll be interesting to see how this current shouting match goes. The funny thing is a lot of people were relating to the Chinese scientist's viewpoints.

Those three magic words also connect to the 99% of the world who profess to some sort of spirituality or religion. Many people attach themselves to these beliefs out of a sense of the "I don't know" factor. For some, it gives them a sense of security, for others, a sense of awe. For me, it gave me a clear sense of my ignorance.

Our next site was the eerily named the "Ex-On" site. Ernesto told me how the locals had spotted tons of UFO's in the vicinity of the site. It looked like a 100,000 ton rock that was sliced and diced with a ginsu knife in some areas, like a mad chef carving a cake. I thought the name was cute, until I saw the multiple caves and tunnels lacing the outcropping. As soon as I saw the cave, I dove right in. The tunnels and crevices seemed endless. They went right through the Andesite rock, and what was even more amazing was the number of tunnels that were carved through the rock. What really perplexed me was that several of the entrances, had carved stone stairs that descended all the way down, to the dirt. When I scraped out some of the dirt, I found some more stair case. The stairs led down somewhere,

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but someone decided to fill the hallway with soil. So, I decided to follow one really deep tunnel as far as I could go, until I realized that for all the squeezing and squirming, I was stuck.

Suddenly, my body told me something strange. It started with a rumble in my stomach, and then a twitch in an unnamed area. “Crap”, I said, and I didn’t mean that in the expletive. Beyond me was a hole in the ground, marked by multiple altars indicating an important entrance to a vast underground network. At the time, I didn’t see it as an entrance. I saw something quite different. I saw the john, and I was seriously thinking about doing something sacrilegious, only because nature was calling.

“Are you alright in there, David?” Called Ernesto

“I’m stuck.”

“Oh my. Can you reach for the stairway?”

“Yes, hold on.”

I sucked in my stomach, and slowly crawled out of the tunnel.

“Please be careful, some of these places are still dangerous.” Said Ernesto.

“I will.”

After figuring out that my body wasn’t ready for the outhouse we headed to the Incan fortress temple ruins of Sacsayhuaman. It’s pronounced “sexy woman”, and from an ogling point of view, it was definitely worth a look. The enormous curved stones, the gorgeous geometry of the placements, and quite frankly, the hills and the valleys of the “sexy woman”, were indeed a sight to behold. At night in the crescent moonlight, she knocked my boots off.

Sacsayhuaman is best described as a gigantic terrace of stones. The bottom, leading terrace had the monster rocks; the centerpiece was a 300 ton, Andesite monolith. It wasn’t the only one, as next to it were stones that were on the order of 250 tons. If we multiplied the average, of say, 200 tons per stone, conservatively speaking, with about 100 stones for the first terrace, which is probably an underestimate; that brought the total tonnage of the first level, just the first level, of Sacsayhuaman to about 20,000 tons worth of stones. To present a relationship, the US aircraft carrier Nimitz weighs about 97,000 tons, the battleship New Jersey is 15,000 tons, a typical destroyer class ship is 5-7000 tons, and a 4 story nuclear reactor can be 670 tons.

But 20,000 tons was too much to even consider first. So, we examined the monster, the beast of the rock in the wall. At 300 tons, it was a stone that most modern day equipment would have lots of problems moving. In fact, there was



only one piece of equipment that could move it, and that was the cargo cranes in massive shipyards. On top of that, it was carved precisely into a polygonal shape and then set into the wall. I stood there gazing at her with my mouth wide open. Ernesto then asked me what I thought of the archaeologist's opinions about how the monstrosity was built.

"David, you're an engineer. You're the first engineer that I've worked with. Most of the people I've worked with were white, western, archaeologists and anthropologists. They never listened to me, or to the locals when we tried to tell them what our ancient stories were about this sight. You aren't white, you're an engineer, and you seem to have an understanding in two different systems of thought, so I would like to know what you think about this."

"Ernesto, let me be frank. Those guys are on crack. That's probably what they came here for, because I can tell you right now, any construction engineer is going to have problems with their theories."

The current theory is that the Incans built the wall using stones to pound them flat, placed the stone, lifted it up again to see the impression, and repeated the process to make it fit. I had a major problem with that theory. This was a 300 ton, Andesite monolithic stone, and it was just one of many. Andesite is a remarkably hard substance, which would make it a great building material, if it weren't so dense, hard, and heavy. The only way, to confirm that theory was to lift up the 300 ton stone, and see if there were any dismembered hands or bodies in that tight fit. Accidents were bound to happen with that technique, and I couldn't even get my diving knife into the cracks.

To top it off, no sources of Andesite were located in or around Cuzco. The Andesite was quarried in several sources, one at a source that was 35 kilometers away, in Rumiqlqa, and another that was 100 kilometers away, in the north. So, to present the problem, somehow, this 300 ton, Andesite monster was carved out of a quarry, transported up the mountain side, on Incan roads that were staircases, to the top of the mountain, carved, and set into the wall. The angle of the staircase heading up to Sacsayhuaman was, on average, 45 to 60 degrees, and there were several hundred meters of staircase, from the center of Cuzco, and it wound around the mountain. Sacsayhuaman was at the top of the mountain, overlooking Cuzco. And finally, repeat that 100 times, hope there weren't any accidents that would kill off the man power, and that was just for the first terrace. There are three terrace levels.

When I thought about it, I immediately threw out the obvious. I decided to use

the pyramids as a baseline, since so many people tried to theorize how the pyramids were built. One theory said that they used boats to float the stones up. How can a boat work on the side of a mountain that's 3400 meters in altitude? Another was that giant earthen ramps were built around the pyramids. So, someone's going to tell me that someone moved the equivalent amount of earth of a 3400 meter high mountain, that's several square miles wide, just to drag up the stone?

Another theory was that they dragged it up across the stair case, and Incan roads, which are on a 45 to 60 degree incline to the top of the mountain, up 3400 meters in altitude? Of course, they somehow, transported the rock across rope bridges, across canyons, through valleys, and then up the mountain! OK, let's give them credit, they would have to build a road, around the mountain, all several square miles of the mountain. That's like building a road around the sides of a volcano. Doable, but it was a hell of a lot of effort to boot. However, if the Incan roads were any indication, the spiral around the mountain would've been a staircase, not a smoothed road.

It was easy to see why I had problems with the archaeologist's theories. They didn't do their math. The best way to explain the construction would be to do the math. Archaeologists aren't particularly good at math, because after we worked it out, we looked at each other, and again in awe, professed our ignorance.

So, how come the math doesn't work out with the western archaeologist's theories? How could they have built the monument in the first place? Well, before you can ask the "how did they build it", you have to ask the, "how much?" as in "how much energy does it take to build this thing?" It's a very simple question, and one that anyone with a basic understanding of physics and engineering can do. The best part is that it doesn't matter what kind of structure you're looking at; the energy requirements are going to be the same regardless, simply because you cannot change the laws of nature.

First, you have calculate the amount of energy it would take just to cut out a stone of that size. Then you have to calculate the energy it takes to lift and move it there. This also has to take into account, the distance of the quarry, either 35 or 100 kilometers away, across dips, and valleys, canyons, rivers, up the staircase, up the mountain, up 3400 meters, to the level just above Cuzco. Then you have to calculate the amount of energy it takes just to cut the stone precisely. Then you have to calculate the amount of energy it takes to set it in place. And here's the part that most people seem to miss out, especially archaeologists, when it comes to engineering logistics. You have to calculate the amount of energy it took to

develop, harness, and construct the technology it took to actually do the work in the first place. You also need to understand that it takes experience, a fundamental understanding of strengths of materials, weights, and measurements, and you at least need some kind of established technology. Finally, you need to see what the established time frame is. Whether it's with sticks, stones, ropes, and men, to trucks, cranes, and lasers, the fact is you cannot ignore the laws of physics, energy, and nature. Those requirements are the same.

Unfortunately, that's what a lot of archaeologists do when they go around proposing that they know how the things were built. I would not trust an archaeologist to build my house. I'd trust a construction engineer. When it came to that 300 ton stone, which wasn't single or unique in the structure, I knew that a lot of people had some serious problems with the western archaeologists, and among them was Ernesto. He had many opportunities to work with them, and he considered them to be extremely arrogant.

The real question then, is not how it was built, or even why. It's how much. That is the basic, fundamental question that must be answered first before any kind of theory could even be set regarding the logistics, organization, and mechanics of moving the stone, and then do it a hundred times for the first level.

We decided that other than asking that basic question and doing some basic calculations, to also add an, "I don't know." The energy requirements were immense, and the area of Sacsayhuaman, at the top of the mountain, in that little plateau, was too small to have enough men, ropes, and sticks or logs, to support the building of that structure. We didn't even bother to calculate what kind of rope and structural support was needed, because even with multiple ropes, and really thick logs, it wouldn't have supported the weight, and the bulk of that material added even more mass, which required even more energy to move the thing and the machines themselves. My father was a mechanical engineer who always said, "engineers can do anything, as long as they have the right technology."

That night, both Ernesto and I professed our ignorance, and were awestruck as we watched the crescent moon, and the milky way, turn it's cosmic turbines over the monument of Sacsayhuaman.

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## Chapter 7

# The Strange Light

I was knocked out with a bout of the flu, as I sat in Café Haylilly in the evening, trying to nurse my body back to strength. My Spanish was still poor, but I had a vocabulary of about eighty words, and I struggled to explain to Sally that I needed ginger tea, and garlic. Finally, I gave up trying to ask her for ginger, and settled for chamomile tea instead. She did understand that I needed raw garlic, and gave me a clove. Sally was almost motherly, because when I tried to eat another clove, she said no, that I shouldn't take too much, and to let my body rest. While I had the flu, I tried to write in my notebook, and spent a lot of time pondering the mystery of the lights, and the enormous stone structures.

After a week, I had a bout with food poisoning for a day from some bad milk products. Never in my life had I ever seen so much stuff come out the other end, especially when I barely ate a thing. The flu was over in a few days though, and I coughed up green phlegm, as my system cleared itself of gunk. Soon, I felt better, and I was ready to see just how well acclimatized my body was. It was one thing to feel fine in thin air, but it's another thing to work the body at more than two miles high in altitude. I took my bike out for a ride through Sacsayhuaman, and the entire ruin. I saw them at night, and now I wanted to see them in them in the daytime.

Nature had a funny way of blowing the steam out of me. By the time I reached the top of Sacsayhuaman, I discovered just how far I had to go to acclimatize myself. As I ascended the staircase, I felt my body burn, knees creak, head spin, and my lungs were on fire. I knew I was out of shape from being sick, but I still wanted to push myself, and see if I could at least make it to Sacsayhuaman.

I made it to the top, sat down, took a breather, and then I toured the ruin.

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I wanted to take some pictures of the 300 ton monster which made up part of the wall. As I wandered the cyclopean stones, it dawned on me that everything I learned back in school, the states, and on TV, was wrong. What I learned came from a perspective that wasn't my own.

*"Hey! Hey you! You can't do that! You can't bring the bicycle up there!"* I heard a man yell out to me. I saw a Peruvian running to me with a badge. He pointed his fingers at me, and made quick motions for me to get off the terrace. I walked down the terrace, and then he yelled at me in Spanish.

*"Don't you know the rules? Don't you know you're not allowed to bring a bicycle in here?"* He said. I couldn't understand what he said, but I heard the word bicycle several times. While he berated me, two men, who were about five feet in height, stepped up to the man. They were dressed in spandex cyclist pants and shirts, and wore helmets and goggles.

*"He's with us."* Said one of the men. I looked at the guy.

*"Well tell him to obey the rules next time. And the two of you get your bicycles out of here!"* Said the man.

*"Ok, we will. Hey, we're Peruvians, so take it easy OK? The guy is obviously a foreigner. How would he know? He can't even understand you."*

The guard looked at me, and then said, *"oh. I thought you were Peruvian. OK, fine, fine, just go."* He thought I was Peruvian? We left the ruin, and walked down a road to where it split. The two started talking to each other, pulled out a map, looked at it, and then pointed down the road. The man who spoke for me waved a hand. They introduced themselves as Jaime and Jesus.

I joined them. The two looked unassuming, but they exhibited a fitness that made me feel out of shape. They effortlessly took off to ascend another five hundred meters up from Sacsayhuaman as if it was flatland.

We went from one ruin to another. We stopped at an Incan hydrological work of canals and fountains, where the Incans blended water worship and water production into one structure. The structure was built into the side of a small hill, and had several steps of fitted, polygonal stones, and aqueducts that ran from a reservoir located up the hill. Again, I got into trouble for jumping down the ruin, and Jaime had to come in and save my behind.

Then we stopped at the ruins of an Incan farm commune, with trapezoidal doors, stone walls, and walkways. It was roofless, but it epitomized one of the standard constructions of the Empire. It was a four walled structure, with a high, triangular stone form on two sides of a long rectangle that formed the structural

support for the roof.

Then we stopped at an Incan messenger outpost. The messenger outpost was a round, circular, stone hut, where the ancient couriers slept. In the four corners of the Incan Empire, which spanned from the north of Ecuador to the South of Chile, into the Amazon, and present day Argentina, legends said that a message took just three days to get from one end to the other, thanks to the network of runners. As we headed back into Cuzco that night, I learned quite a bit from them with my rudimentary Spanish.

Jesus was a pharmacist who enjoyed new age music, and Jaime was a watch repairman, and an inventor. He designed and built most of his outdoor equipment with pure practicality and functionality in mind. He built a convertible backpack, which turned into panniers for the bike, and could be assembled into a standard mountain backpack for mountaineering. I asked him if he could build me one.

When we arrived at their residence in Cuzco, the differences in how we grew up became apparent. I came from a country where anything can be had for a price. Even though Americans considered ourselves to be the most inventive people in the world, we forgot the fact that we're taking credit for the work that comes from a particular type of people who make the inventions. Those people were from developing countries who immigrated to the US, like Jaime. Most of our high tech industry was built on the backs of immigrants. It's been estimated that half of the entrepreneurs and inventions from Silicon Valley came from Indian and Chinese engineers, scientists, and researchers.

The immigrants come from a background full of problems that needed to be solved. I never had to worry about clean water and food, or working equipment. I just assumed it worked. Yet, the immigrants didn't, and they had to work inside boundaries to come up with new ways to do things. My father has that hallmark coming from Vietnam. If he even patented half of his nutty ideas, I wouldn't be surprised if he started several brand new businesses himself. As for me, I was a Philadelphia suburban kid. What did I have to worry about? School. Work. Mundane stuff. The only thing I have spent a lot of time tinkering with was my bike, and even there, Jaime was bubbling with ideas that the bike industry hadn't tried yet.

Jaime borrowed his cousin's apartment for the night. The apartment was down the mountain slope of the city, in a barrio of Cuzco, and with my crude Spanish and sign language, we communicated as we ate. Their food was basic, and consisted of bread, water, cheese, and some fruit which I shared with them

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After returning home that night, I was still hungry. I walked into a local restaurant, and made a major linguistic faux pas. I was dressed in my bicycle shorts, which were spandex, and they were skin tight to my body. I walked up the owner, and tired, I smiled and said,

“Yo tengo hombre, quiero comer.”

“Que?”

“Yo tengo hombre, quiero comer!”

“Mira, somos un restaurante decente. No quiero homosexuales aquí!”

“No no! No soy homosexual! Yo tengo, ah, mi estomago. Quiero comer.

“Quieres comer tu estomago ahora? Estas loco?”

“No! Quiero comer!”

Here’s the translation.

*“I have man, I want to eat.”*

*“What?”*

*“I have man, I want to eat!”*

*“Look, we’re a decent restaurant. We don’t want homosexuals here!”*

*“No no! I am not homosexual! I have, ah, my stomach, I want to eat.”*

*“You want to eat your stomach? Are you crazy?”*

*“No! I want to eat!”*

I was supposed to say, “Yo tengo hambre, que quiero comer.”

*“I have hunger, I want to eat.”*

I went to another cafe. The waiter came up to me, and he thought I looked like Bruce Lee’s son, Brandon Lee, and must have been a half brother somehow. This was probably the fourth time someone referred to me as being Bruce Lee, related to Bruce Lee, or being associated with Bruce Lee, which I didn’t mind at all. Bruce Lee was a man I greatly admired, who destroyed racial stereotypes, created a whole new industry in the movies, inspired millions of people, and revolutionized the martial arts. I hoped that one day I could do something revolutionary for humanity like he did.

As I ate, I felt the aches and pains in my body. I thought I was swallowing something, but I wasn’t sure if it was a loose organ or the meal. Of course, I’m a masochist at heart, so I told Jaime that I would join them for a hundred kilometer, monster downhill ride the next day. I went to sleep and dreamed of growing some new body parts.

The next day I met them at the Plaza D’Armas. In every town and every city in Peru, was a central plaza, which functioned as central square. Couples flirted and



kissed, families casually strolled, and it was a great area to relax. I met up with the two Peruvian supermen, as well as two Japanese cyclists who cycled around the world for the last three years. They were Yoshi and Kenji, and they came over to look at my bicycle. Kenji had a mustache, and he was slightly taller than me. Thin and muscular, he had a powerful handshake from thousands of miles of gripping the handlebars. He smiled warmly as we shook hands, and asked if he could take a look at my frame, and components. He gave me two thumbs up. Kenji circumnavigated the globe twice via bicycle, in a span of three years. Yoshi joined him a few months ago. They did the northern hemisphere first, and then the southern. Now they were doing the Equator, but Kenji was anxious to return to Colombia. I asked him why.

“He has a woman!” Joked Yoshi.

“My girlfriend is there. She’s Colombian, and it breaks my heart sometimes being so far.” Said Kenji.

“When did you meet her?”

“Four months ago,” laughed Yoshi, “look at him. He’s like a puppy dog when he talks about her.”

I smiled and laughed with them. It was interesting to meet them, because I figured that I wouldn’t meet many Asians, or Asian Americans traveling, or for that matter, traveling solo for extended periods of time. Yet, there were two other guys were Asian Americans, and the rest were white, Caucasian women. There were few, if any, white men, and if they were traveling, they were traveling with their girlfriends or they were there with a group for a short tour. I didn’t meet a single, solo, white male traveler. In my twenty nine days there, I met several cyclists. Almost all were either from Asia, or were Americans of Asian descent. The Americans I met of Asian descent were John, a Korean American investment banker who had enough with corporate life, quit, and backpacked alone through South America, and Jack, a Filipino guy who bicycled from Oregon all the way to Peru, sold his bicycle and trailer, and went into the Amazon to do some volunteer work for the next year. The other two were white: a Spanish guy, and an Australian woman.

In the States, the general media perception of Asian men was of the passive, boring, geeky, persona who didn’t do anything except stay on the sidelines. It was either that or the asexual, martial arts champ who was deadly serious, or a goof. And of course, in the films, he usually didn’t get the girl.

Yet I met these Asian American men who were having the time of their lives, with outrageous adventures, and just doing things that were totally opposite of the

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media portrayal. The stories they shared would make any adventure movie in the US weak. I was glad that I wasn't in the USA. The media is infectious, fake, and acutely pervasive. There's no way to escape it, other than to get out of the country, and find out who the person really is inside. The media's perceptions were so insidious, and molded a person's perceptions of self before that person even had a chance to form his own identity.

For me, the racial perceptions changed significantly the moment I crossed the Rio Grande. At first, on my first day, I was defensive, but as the days went on, numerous incidents began to tell me that the Peruvians, when I didn't open up my mouth, thought I was a Peruvian. In some cases, they would talk to me in Spanish, and then suddenly, stop, then say, "Oh wait, are you Japanese?" Which annoyed me.

In Peru, there's no such thing as "Chinese Peruvian", or "Japanese Peruvian." They're called Peruvians of Asian descent, chino, or chinito, which was an affectionate term for anyone from Asia. Peruvians rarely distinguished race, since it was always nationality that came up first. If a person spoke Spanish with the Peruvian accent and colloquialisms, regardless of their skin color and ethnic appearances, they were Peruvian first. In contrast, in the US, there was this obsessive need to segregate, divide, distinguish, hyphenate, keep, and maintain the races and ethnicities in different groups.

It was strange for me, but the camaraderie that I received from the locals, Jaime, and Jesus, endeared me to them. Of course, I could only hide my nationality for so long. As soon as I opened my big mouth, the locals would hear a strong accent, and then they'd yell, "Hey, American!" That became my name, besides all the Bruce Lee and Brandon Lee references. I'd never been called outright an American, until I got to Peru. It was a strange experience, and it would take me a while to accustom myself to it.

Jaime, Jesus, and I headed up to the top of the mountain. We bicycled through fifty kilometers of countryside, where I watched peasants working on their fields, tending their goats, or sheep, and herds of llamas. Winter time was passing through, which made the fields look barren. Mostly women and children tended the flocks, and the llamas went by us with red tassels in their ears. The children waved at me, and we waved at them in turn. The sun was setting, and we could see the deep red and yellow pigments bath the sky, as snow capped mountain peaks in the distance glowed at dusk.

*"We're almost there Daveed!"* Said Jesus with a smile. *"Are you good?"*

*"Yes. I'm good."* I wheezed.

*"Good, because here, we're going to go zoom!"* Cackled Jaime.

We were at the top of the mountain. I took stock of the situation. I was on a mountain bike, at two and a half miles up in thin air. I looked down from the summit, and before me, was an incredibly vast, steep, and winding highway going all the way down for forty five to fifty kilometers into the Sacred Valley of the Incas. Along the way were sheer cliffs, with drops of a thousand feet or more, no barriers and fences, sand piles, unpaved roads, paved roads, huge cargo trucks rumbling up towards us, road debris, and mountain upon mountain as far as the eye could see. We watched the headlight glow in the descending darkness. The sun was setting, and we had to move quickly. We had at most fifteen minutes of day light left.

With nothing more than my potential energy, I raced down the road at forty five to fifty five kilometers an hour, without pedaling. The wind raged in my ears; all I had to follow was the pale glow of the road stripe, if there was one. My nose was stuck to the handlebars for aerodynamics, and I felt the vibration of the road make my bicycle become resonant. The cycle shook, and I reminded myself of how Aleks and I worked to make sure everything was tight. As we went down, I felt the incline of the road get steeper, and steeper. Soon, it felt like my butt was higher than my head, which it probably was. The wind screamed in my ears, as we raced through a downhill of a roller coaster ride; night fell, and we were in the glow of a half moon and the milky way.

Sharp turns with drops to uncertain death met us at almost every corner. There were no barriers, no shoulders, and no margins of safety. As we sped down, we hit a patch of sand, and I struggled to control the bicycle as it fishtailed. The challenge was control as well as turning at the corners. I had to be careful of the pressure I applied on the brakes, because if I squeezed too hard, then I would fishtail out of control, or worse, fly over the handlebars.

We sped down the road, and I heard the rumble of a loaded eighteen wheeler coming towards us. I looked up from the shade of my helmet, but I looked up too high – suddenly, my eyes were blind – I struggled to control and quickly slowed the bike down, as I tried to blink the flashing blobs, the artifacts of a light in a dark adjusted eye, out of my eyes. Abruptly, I felt the front wheel hit something, and instinctively, I gripped the brakes and swerved the bike to the side, as I crashed and skidded. My body fell underneath the bike frame, and I felt the road slam into my thighs and calves. I came to a stop, and my foot touched a log on the side of the road. I crashed into a pile of wood. Luckily, I wore a pair of double lined nylon

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exercise pants, and the two layers slipped over each other, and helped protect my leg from the worst of the fall. A dull ache throbbed my leg, as I got up, and Jesus stopped to take a look at the wound,

*"You're fine Daveed!"* Said Jesus.

*"Yeah, it looks good. Not much blood."* Said Jaime. He pulled out a water bottle, and we doused the wounded area with it.

Then we took off again. Despite the sting on my leg, the trip was mesmerizing. My skills were good enough that on some of the less curvy sections, and I looked at the mountains on the side as we flew down the escarpment. They were huge black silhouettes, with dark gray clouds, glowing with moonlight.

From the escarpment of the mountain side, came a bright flash of light. For a few moments, as if time was suspended, the wind, the speed, everything became a blur, and then silent. All that existed was the light and I. In slow motion, I saw the light grow from behind the mountain side. Suddenly, I heard the rushing of the wind in my ears, felt the vibration of my bike, and I blinked into the darkness of the road.

At the bottom, near Pisac, I was surprised when Jaime said there was more road, on the way to Ollantaytambo, which was the farming village near the end of the valley. It's also the site of some spectacular ruins, which are even larger than Sacsayhuaman. So again we took off. This time, the way down wasn't as frenetic, but we had a new obstacle. Along the way, Peruvian dogs ran out at us, barking, and snapping at our feet, as they chased us either for fun, or to defend their territory. Peruvian dogs were territorial, but I grew tired of them trying to snap at us, so I developed a technique to scare them off. I biked straight at them screaming my head off which shocked them into a tail between the legs retreat. It worked. Jaime and Jesus adopted the technique, and late in the evening, through the valley, I was sure the Quechua villagers heard us.

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After biking several kilometers from Pisac, and being hounded by large groups of dogs, we looked at our watches, and realized that we still had a long way to go to Ollantaytambo. So, we did what many travelers did outside of the USA. We hitchhiked. Hitchhiking was still accepted as a valid form of transit, and in general, people didn't harass hitchhikers.

We stood on the side of the road, and stuck our thumbs out as several headlights passed by us. No one slowed down. So, Jaime and Jesus got serious, and exposed

their bare legs into the headlights of an oncoming car. It stopped, and I heard the radio of a police officer as a dark silhouette stepped out of the vehicle.

*"That's the ugliest bunch of ladies I have ever seen."* The officer muttered as he looked at us.

*"We're not women! We're Peruvian!"* Yelled Jaime.

*"What? You stuck you're legs out there like a woman. Ah hell. What do you want?"*

The officer looked at us, as Jaime approached the officer. After a few terse words, the officer told us to get in the station wagon. Unfortunately, there was no back door to the vehicle, so for twenty minutes, Jaime held onto the bicycles in the back, while Jesus and I held onto Jaime for dear life, as the car bumped, rumbled, and drove towards Ollantaytambo. My wrists were straining with the effort, and I could feel the burn of my muscles in the isometric position.

The officer dropped us off three towns away from Ollantaytambo, near the town of Calca, so we still had a small distance left to go. As we biked in, I looked up into the mountains, and from the corner of my eye, from behind the escarpment, came the flash of light again. It was bright enough to look like two moons.

*"What is that?"* I said.

*"Jaime!"* I called out.

*"What's going on?"* He replied.

*"Light! There!"* I pointed.

*"Where?"* He asked as we slowed down. I pointed again to the glow behind the mountain. The moon was directly overhead, so it couldn't have been the moon. It did look like two moons were there. They both looked in the direction that I pointed my hand. It was away from Cuzco, and Ollantaytambo, pointing towards the direction of the Amazon basin.

*"What light? Oh!"* Jaime and Jesus looked with me, at the strange light that glowed from behind the mountains. I looked overhead at the moon, and then back towards the light.

*"Is a city there?"*

*"No. It's mountain range, and then jungle. There are no people."*

As quickly as it came, the light disappeared. I looked at Jaime. He shrugged his arms, with a face of, "what was that?" Jesus looked at me as well.

*"See that before?"* I asked Jaime.

*"No. This is the first time I've ever seen it."* He said, as we resumed biking. What was that light? Was that the light Ernesto told me about?

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We headed into Ollantaytambo, the ancient fortress, agricultural outpost of the Incas. It was also the end of the road in the valley. On the Inca trail, Ollantaytambo was the last sight of civilization. For the next six days, the trail consisted of a hike through the ancient Incan highway to Macchu Picchu, or due east for six months into impenetrable rain forest. The escarpment is one of the great frontiers; it was full of enormous unexplored territories. In fact, the entire Amazon Basin is the size of the continental United States. It was incredible to believe, that in this day and age of satellites, modern technology and population density, large expanses of territory remained unexplored, and it was still full of human tribes that never had any contact with the outside world. I mulled about it as we biked into the Plaza D'Armas of Ollantaytambo.

Jaime's aunt lived inside of the fortress commune, which was seven to eight hundred years old. As we walked up the cobblestone steps, I saw the fortress loom in the darkness in front of me. It was enormous, looked like a castle, but it was built with the Incan style of stonework. Along the sides of the fortress were water channels, and I heard the flow of water. I inhaled, and smelled the scents of hay, flowers, and llama manure. I looked up, and saw the halo of the moon, and in it, the fortress cast a deep shadow to one side. I followed Jaime and Jesus up a dark alley to a great gate on the side of the commune. We walked across a small stone bridge.

Jaime knocked the great knocker on the door. Jaime's Aunt greeted us as she opened the door, and then took a look at me. She stopped, smiled at me, and then motioned for me to come inside. I smiled back.

*"Thank you."* I said as I kissed her on the cheek in the Peruvian custom.

*"For what? You are our guest."*

We walked into her part of the commune. It was like a small apartment, except the apartment was up a set of wooden steps that stuck out of the wall. Around me were small dirt bays where they grew flowers. His aunt led me to a hand pumped fountain.

*"Wash here."*

*"OK."*

After rinsing off, we ate some bread, fruit, and water. We tried to talk, and I noticed that I wasn't getting anywhere, until Jesus asked me, *"do you know martial arts?"*

*"Yes. I teach."*

*"Show me some."*

We walked into the tiny courtyard, where I showed them some basic Tai Chi movements, Kung Fu, and a few yoga movements. We laughed and joked as I got them to try the moves on me.

*“How did you do that?”* Asked Jesus when he found himself on the ground with his arm behind him. I did it in slow motion, and made sure to catch his back. I showed him it again.

*“What I really need Dave, is something to relax.”* Said Jaime. I heard the word for relax, so I said, *“do yoga.”* I showed him the mountain position, and then the tree. We laughed as Jaime tried the tree, and discovered that his sense of balance wasn’t as keen as his road sense. Finally, it was time to sleep. We all had smiles on our faces, and I felt better, since I imparted something of value to my hosts. I had wondered how I would pay Jaime and Jesus back for their hospitality. Jaime figured the yoga instruction was a good trade. Part of being a vagabond was knowing how to barter. So far, I was able to barter English lessons, Kung Fu lessons, Tai Chi lessons, basic yoga lessons, and even the occasional computer fix in the internet café, for kitchen privileges, food, free internet time, and in this case, room and board.

It was time to sleep, so Jaime’s aunt led us to our beds in the apartment. The whole place was open to the outside, and the wooden floor creaked as I walked in. I felt the breeze come through. We were at a lower elevation than Cuzco, so it was warmer in the evening, but the breeze felt cool on my skin. I laid down in my bed, and watched the moonlight stream through the glassless windows. The room was open to the outside, and I saw the mountains in the moonlight; yet, the llama blankets were warm enough to keep out the night chills.

I woke up the next morning to the crows of the rooster. Jaime went out with his two cousins, Lizbeth and Ola to help them with their business. The girls ran a tourist stand outside the train station, and they catered to the tourists who stopped on their way to Macchu Picchu. The stand was a small shack made of corrugated aluminum, and they sold sandwiches, snacks, pastries, and juice drinks. I washed my face, and listened to the town stir in the morning. All around me, I could hear the muffled sound of flowing water. Quietly, I opened the door, and stepped out of the commune, to see the beginnings of day to day life.

In the soft light of the early morning, about 7 AM, a line of school girls, probably between the ages of ten and twelve, walked to class. They were dressed in green and white uniforms, which contrasted with their dark brown, reddish skin, black hair, and they had backpacks on as they giggled and skipped on the way to

class. Then in the opposite direction, a group of boys, also about the same age, dressed in the dark blue uniforms, with back packs walked to class. The children hurried past men and women in traditional rainbow colored Quechua attire. The men had slacks, and fedora hats, but they had ponchos that were rainbow colored. Next to them walked women, many of whom were thick and strong, and they were dressed in long skirts, and loose blouses. They wore bowler hats, and carried goods to the market, or went to work in the fields with the men. Two cows, led by a gentleman in a sweater and a fedora hat walked down the street, and then several donkeys walked in the opposite direction. Soon, a herd of llamas with bright red tassels in their ears walked down the street as the small village was slowly waking up.

All over the streets were open aqueduct systems with rapidly flowing streams of water. The water rippled and flowed in the light, and I saw the sparkle of the liquid as it flowed, crystal clear. The Incans were obsessed with water, and their ancient plumbing still worked beautifully for the people, even after 800 or more years. As the sun rose up, the fortress ruins of Ollantaytambo on the steep mountain sides lit up. Ollantaytambo still used the ancient Incan constructions for its residences. Each city block was called a “concha”, which housed several families. The structures outlasted earthquakes and the ravages of the Spanish destruction. As I walked down the street, roosters crowed in people’s courtyards as children fed their chickens. Jesus woke up, and saw me walking down the street, so he joined me, and started to teach me some words. I would point at an object, and he said the Spanish word for it.

*“The cow”*

*“The chicken”*

*“The rooster.”*

*“The carburetor tuned motor engine block fed by diesel that pollutes the air.”*

*“What?”* I asked, confused.

*“Sorry. The car.”*

I repeated the words after him, and he corrected what I said. The air was crisp, and it smelled fresh, like the smell just after a rainfall. It was peaceful, and idyllic.

It was the site of one of the bloodiest, ferocious, and greatest battles of the Incan-Spanish war. The Incans, in a brilliant tactical move, rendered the Spaniard’s main weapon, the horse, useless. Using their plumbing, they maneuvered the canal gates to flood the valley around the Spanish, miring the horses. Without horses, the Spanish were helpless, and the Incans streamed out of the fortress to rout the



Spanish back to Cuzco. I celebrated the victory that morning with some waterworks of my own as I got routed to the outhouse.

Later that day, after spending some time for lunch with Ola and Lizbeth, we headed back into town to take the bus back to Cuzco. Back in Cuzco, we hiked up the mountain back to the center of the City, and as we walked, I noticed the behavior of Jaime and Jesus that I soon adopted for myself. Whenever we were behind women, they would whistle. Curious, I looked at the direction their eyes were in, where I noticed that they never looked at the head, the back, the shoulders, or the arms. No, these two looked at the most favored body part in all of Latin American culture, the ass.

As we walked up the street, and practiced our wolf whistles, Ernesto and a taller Peruvian, walked up to us. Ernesto introduced us, and the man's name was Marco. I introduced Jaime and Jesus. Ernesto spoke with Jaime for a bit. Then I turned to Ernesto, and said, "Ernesto, can you tell Jaime and Jesus that I said thank you very much for your hospitality, let me know if there's anything I can do for you?"

"Sure." Ernesto translated what I said to Jaime and Jesus. They both smiled brightly and shook hands before leaving. I turned back to Ernesto.

"By the way, I think I saw it." I said.

"You did?"

"Yes. Let's meet up later in the week. I have some ideas I need to put down on paper first. My intuition is telling me something that makes sense to me. I don't know how you'll take to it, but I need to clarify some of my thoughts first."

"OK. This Friday we will meet."

"Ernesto has told me about you. I would like to hear more about what you are investigating." Marco said.

"I'll be happy to enlighten you." I replied.

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A Letter to Ernesto: Hypothesis of the Megalithic Constructions

Dear Ernesto,

OK, based on some of the research I've done, and the places you've shown me, and now, finally, after witnessing the strange energy form, I'd like to lay the problem out.

1.) Macchu Picchu, Tiwanaku, Paititi, and Nazca are all pre Incan, and megalithic in nature, in other words, they are big, solid, and made to last the effects of time from the start of the original construction.

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2.) Each point seems to have unusual properties; the most telling is the Nazca lines ability to withstand being buried from sandstorms, based on the locals, and according to Marco's information, as well as Paititi's legendary disappearing and reappearing act. I don't have enough information on Tiwanaku, or Macchu Picchu.

3.) Sacsayhuaman does not look like the head and teeth of the Puma, but it is definitely the head, or a critical point of something.

4.) Cuzco is the navel, or the center point of some kind of something.

5.) Cuzco and Sacsayhuaman are also pre-Incan in origin, as well as composed of 200 ton plus stones. From what we can tell after exploring Cuzco, most of the megalithic structures are still there.

6.) Sacsayhuaman seems to be some sort of control point, and does not seem to be a ritualistic or map representation of any sort. It does not denote constellations, symbols, or anything that exhibits a pattern.

7.) It seems more likely that Nazca is some sort of user manual, and not a map, as several theories have posited. After inspecting the maps of Nazca, we are unable to trace patterns of repetition. However, there seems to be a mathematical representation. We are able to see repetition of math, like the spirals, the strange hand glyph, and a few other glyphs.

8.) There are legends of tunnels linking all four sites and Cuzco

9.) The sites seem to be in geometric distances from each other. There seems to be symmetry.

10.) There is a release of energy in the area in the form of light, which appears in areas where there are no cities, in skies which have no clouds and below the mountain. Aurora would not work because we are too close to the equator, and the light comes from the ground up. Something is accumulating, and then releasing energy, and that release is enough to create a glow like a full moon. That is the biggest clue for me.

Synopsis: My feeling is that the entire area of the four suyo's is some kind of "machine". It feels like a sort of planetary energy device. I'm not sure why, but my intuition is really strong in terms of viewing the structures in that perspective. The time and effort to build the megalithic sites is so immense, that to simply build them for ritualistic or representative reasons using 200 ton or more stones is impractical. As we calculated the lower level of Sacsayhuaman is at least 20-30 thousand tons of giant stones, close to the peak of the mountain. A tyrannical ruler would want to see a finished product. It took time to build the pyramids, and that was with 10-20 ton stones, and that was at sea level. These stones are at least 200 tons or more,

and they were hauled up to 3280 meters above sea level, from those two quarries, which are 35, or 100 kilometers away.

Whoever built these were damn good engineers, highly advanced, and had a functional purpose. To add to that, it once worked, and I believe it can be made to work again. In addition, unlike the pyramids, it is an active system. The pyramids were built as a passive computational system, in a seismically inactive area, where there are little to no earthquakes. The pyramids were built with the predisposition of regular, natural planetary and cosmic cycles that are easily observable, and it calculates periods of time. This we've read in several of the books at the clubhouse.

Cuzco, Sacsayhuaman, Ollantaytambo, and Macchu Picchu were built in highly active earthquake zones, using stones that are 20 times the size and weight of the stones that make up the pyramids. A lot of potential and kinetic energy courses through this area. Therefore to build such giant structures in a seismically active area would have to require the following:

- 1.) A good scientific understanding of the geological processes and cycles.
- 2.) Immense engineering knowledge of structural building to withstand earthquakes and other forces.
- 3.) A bona fide reason for wasting the time and effort to do it with 300 ton stones when it could be done more efficiently with 5-10 ton stones: 5-10 ton stones make sense to build temples, maps, and calendar systems. This we can see in the Coricancha temple, which is earthquake proof, and much more feasible and sensible to do with smaller stones. 300 or more tons are not logical for the use of a simple structure, or even a fortress. Any engineer is going to eventually realize this in the building process, because the logistical requirements in terms of man power, cargo load, and energy is too much for the altitude, angle of the mountain, and distance of the quarry.
- 4.) If there is a bona fide reason to do this in such an earthquake prone area, than the reason appears to be more functional than passive.

If I was the engineer who planned this, I would need a reason for such large tonnage. My hypothesis is that whoever planned these structures foresaw the need to build these things to last for periods of thousands of years, and to endure earthquakes that are as much as 10 on the Richter scale. If I had that as the criteria to fulfill, then I would need to fulfill the following requirements before I even build this thing.

- 1.) Build it with durable materials in such a way that it would always be present, could not be buried or toppled, and would endure all the natural destructive cycles.

The material would have to be crystalline and flexible, so concrete or quartz is out. That includes anything with calcium oxides, since they erode easily in carbonic acid, the same stuff that falls out of the sky in rain. Silicon oxide based rock is best. I would use something that's been melted and cooled, volcanic, vitreous, or granite type stones. I guess Andesite fills this requirement?

2.) Build it on an available, dependable, and accessible energy source, which can also endure the test of time for thousands of years. This rules out nuclear, electric, solar, wind, gas, coal, oil, biomass, and human power. Water and hydro geological, earth made steam, are also ruled out due to the need to build machinery which will break down. Since the whole site seems solid state, there are no moving parts to break down, that would also rule out volcanic or earth kinetic, like earthquakes. Both are highly chaotic and hard to control. What's left? The earth's magnetic field, and then there are the esoteric, yet detectable, unproven, and untapped energies. Yet they are documented, and have been known to be accessed by ancient cultures, and today are still accessed, especially in China and India. I know I'm stretching my mind to include these, so let us stretch, shall we? These include earth energies, ley lines/dragon lines, and the earth's life force energies. However strange and unproven to our modern day world, the energies just mentioned above would have all the characteristics which fit the requirements.

3.) Have a manual which is easily accessible, dependable, and readable. Do not use a written language since that can easily change in meaning. There is only one common language in the universe which exists; that is mathematics. Therefore, the user should have good mathematic skills, say up to basic trigonometry, geometry, and the ability to do matrix transforms, since we can transpose the coordinates of the structures into a basic matrix. Euler functions, nonlinear math, and anything which includes the mathematics of harmonics would be ideal, since we are dealing with energy, which consists of waveforms. Somehow, the math would have to be transcribed into either: symbols, geometries, codex's, or patterns which are identifiable, translatable, and when proven with probability, are proven to be 95% or better, as not being a coincidence. That means there's a 95% or greater probability that it was done on purpose.

4.) And finally, to make sure that the device is not accidentally turned on by accident, a key is required. The key is not some esoteric jewel, object, or thing which can easily be lost or destroyed in the ravages of time. The key, like the energy form, has to be something that is an inherent characteristic, sequence, code, or form that anyone can possess, or figure out using insight and understanding

based upon the mathematics of the manual.

Now, those are the criteria I'd need to fulfill to build these things. However, to get to the level where I can even begin to think about filling that criteria, let alone creating that criteria, I must have the following background.

I would need a good understanding of the geological processes, materials of construction, and possess the adequate technology to do so rapidly and efficiently. I would also need experience in prior construction on seismically active areas, a complete understanding of all the energy forms and how to harness those forms, the ability to make the system simple enough so that someone with a basic solid background in math and science as well as some insight can figure it out, and most importantly be able to operate it when the time is right.

That's actually the last key, which is to operate it when necessary. This is a huge device, which must harness and control immense amounts of energy. That sort of power is not something you want to be playing with. So that brings us to the last question. What is the right time, and under what circumstances?

So, we need to read the user manual, plug in the power source or sources, and then turn it on. Then we have to know how to operate it, and when. Whoever built these things were humans, and their descendants are the red skinned Quechua and Aymara. That much is obvious.

The biggest clue that the ancient builders of these structures are the indigenous is in the Aymaran language itself. The fact that the Aymaran language was used to create a computer program called Atamiri, by the computer scientist Ivan Guzman de Rojas is also a huge clue. Aymara is the only spoken language in the world which was proven to program a computer. On top of that, it is the only language, compared to C, C++, Pascal, et al. which can efficiently translate one human based language into another. No other language, artificial or human based can do that as well.

In addition, the characteristics of the Aymaran language consists of a yes, no, and an in-between modality. No other language is like this. Current computers are binary, using 1 and 0, or yes and no. There is no in between. However, quantum computers are molecular, and based on the spin state of a molecule, which is yes, no, and in between. Therefore, Aymara would be the ideal language for a quantum computer; this obviously raises several enormous questions.

What are the Aymara doing with a highly logical computer language as their form of communication? Why, is the Aymaran language so highly logical and efficient, in other words, it doesn't resemble the rest of the human based organic

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languages.

That is enough evidence for me to postulate that the ancient builders were advanced. Very advanced. Come to think of it, after learning Spanish, I'd better go and learn Aymara, and Quechua. Comisariqui!

Also, and I'm not sure why my senses are buzzing on this, but there is a significant metaphysical component to the device. Unfortunately, I haven't added these because I haven't completely made a connection: the sites relationships with the elements, Earth, Wind, Water, and Fire. The idea of Cuzco as a chakra point and Sacsayhuaman as the head of the chakra point, and as centers for energy collection and harnessing is a possibility. That would explain the strange lights that we've seen, since light is just a release of stored energy, or the conversion of one energy form into another. Now that I think about it more, and after writing it out, the above arguments make a lot more sense to me.

This is one hell of an engineering problem. It's a good thing I didn't have to do something like this in the University. The rocket project is peanuts compared to this. Can't wait to meet with you later this week to see what your thoughts are.

Later,

Dave

P.S. Why do I feel like I'm missing one more clue, and/or criterion?

\*\*\*\*\*

I sat down in Café Haylilly in the evening, after I sent the letter to Ernesto. The TV was on, and the Spanish version of CNN was talking about the election of Alejandro Toledo to the presidency of Peru. I asked Sally to turn the volume down, as I ran the criteria through my mind again. I wasn't feeling well, as my body was still recovering from the flu. However, my mind wasn't well either. My rational mind wanted to puke. How could I come up with such a nutty idea? Yet a strange, unsettling calm reassured me, and said it was the right track.

Was I insane? The hypothesis made sense to my intuition, but my rational mind was having a fit. Of course, it had an upset stomach when the picture incident happened, and it practically vomited when the bird went through the window. Yet through it all, my intuition kept saying, "You're on the right track Dave. This is normal Dave." How the hell was this normal? Then again, how could it be normal for me to just leave my family, friends, established routines, safety, and comfort of the States, to a complete unknown, and somehow, as if on cue, people appeared to

give me clues, and slowly, in front of my eyes, a mystery opened up like a flower, petal by petal. Each petal held a clue.

I was still missing something important. I sat in the café, as I re-read my criteria, over and over again. What was I missing? I needed the energy form, the key, and the book. As I read over my notes, Sally watched over me like a concerned mother. She knew I was ill, and earlier in the day, I hunted for ginger to make a tea for my throat. As soon as she saw it in my hand, she said, “Jinjibre!” I looked at her, smiled, and said, “*Tea please?*” She smiled broadly, and gave it to the staff to boil.

I was about to start my classes in the next week at the Latin American Academy in Spanish. With such an enormous mystery, and such a shortage of information in English, it made sense to get as fluent as quickly as possible to read the myriad papers in the libraries that were written by the local explorers. I was also tired of talking like a three year old.

Sally placed a large, steaming cup on the table, and I thanked her. I breathed in the vapors, and drank. The ginger tea worked its magic as my air passages opened up, and forced me to hack up more of the green goop clogging my airways. I spat into a napkin as I drank. As I drank, Sally started to close the wooden shutter doors on her establishment. It was 10:30 PM. I looked at her, and she said, “*no, you rest here. You can leave when you want to. You seem preoccupied.*”

“*Thank you.*”

I looked to the back of the room, and watched as she sat down with an elderly, white, bearded and bespectacled gentleman. Next to her sat down two ladies who looked Chinese, and the rest of the staff who looked Quechua. Sally herself looked like a blend of Chinese and Spanish. They started conversing with each other in Spanish, and I noted the fluidity of the conversation. As they spoke, several words caught my attention: *Atlantida, geométrica sagrada, energia sagrada.*

I coughed, and decided that it was time for me to go. I walked over to the table, and thanked Sally for the tea. She asked me what I was working on, and I mentioned the strange light and energy I saw in the sky. She and the people around the table wanted to know more, but I needed to rest, and would tell them about it tomorrow.

I waved to everyone and said good night. The elderly man watched me as I waved, and I smiled at him. He smiled back, and said, “*tell us more when you feel better.*” I nodded my head with a smile, as I withheld a cough. I walked out, and felt the cold dry air in my throat. I chomped down on a bit of ginger, and felt it mix

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with my saliva, and relieve my throat. My hostel was a few blocks up the mountain. Before going to sleep, I looked at the criteria again, and thought to myself, “was this the reason I was called down here?”

The next day, I sat in the Explorer’s Club, where I made an enormous batch of ginger tea. I went through the books and explorer reports in the library to see if there were any references of the strange lights. There was nothing. I sat down on the couch, and looked into my notebook. I was lost. What kind of an energy form would fit the first criteria?

“David!” I heard a voice call out. In walked Michelle, and she had her sunglasses up in her red hair. We hugged and caught up. She saw me walking by the Coricancha Temple with Jaime and Jesus. Michelle was busy preparing for her expedition, and scouted out a Yamaha dirt bike as a potential purchase. She also asked me if I heard anything about the San Pedro plant, and informed me that she was headed to the States for a week. She rented a cheap apartment in Cuzco, and needed to move her things from the States to Cuzco.

“When are you leaving?”

“Tomorrow.”

I sighed. “Well, let me know what happens. I’d like to know what your experience was like in Nepal.”

“Yeah man, I’ll bet you’ve got some stories to tell too. But looks like you’re going to have to get rid of that cold first.”

“Flu. I’m done. I’m just hacking up the green shit.”

Michelle laughed, and said, “it’s always like that when you get to a new place. The first thing you have to deal with are the new viruses. After that though, when you feel better, you feel a lot better. It’s not like the States where you just get well. Here, you get really well. So I heard from Ernesto that you saw that weird light.”

“Oh man, I’ve never seen anything like it. Over our head was the moon, so it wasn’t the moon. There were few clouds in the sky, but over the mountain, there were a few clouds. Get this, underneath the clouds was the light. But it came from an area where there are no cities, just mountain, or jungle. Then the light went away. Weird, huh?”

“That is strange.”

Michelle left the club after dropping off a few of her things for storage, we hugged and agreed to meet up again. I went back to reading another report, when I was interrupted.

“Excuse me mate, but did I just hear you talking about a strange energy form?”



I looked up, and on the gray couch was an older man, about mid fifties, with a long gray beard and mustache, with a small fedora that looked almost conical. He wore a thin pair of glasses, and smiled at me, as he said,

“I’d say that was an interesting bit of conversation I heard there.”

“Yes. I just saw it a few days ago. It’s weird, because the moon was over our heads, but the light came up from behind the mountain range, where there’s no cities, towns, or anything. It’s either mountains, or you’re headed into the cloud rain forest.”

“Go on.”

“Well, it seemed to spread out a baseline and then radiate up. So, it’s not a pinpoint light source, like a high beam. It looks like a large part of the mountain range was glowing.”

“Now that’s interesting mate. It looks like you’ve discovered something.”

“Me? Other people have seen it. I wasn’t the first to discover it.”

“No, mate, but you’ve seen it for the first time. It’s a discovery by you. And not everyone has had a chance to see it.”

“What do you know about the light?”

“I don’t know much about it, other than it’s selective. What’s your name by the way?”

“David.”

“Last name?”

“Nghiem.”

“Ah, you’re Vietnamese, aren’t ya?”

“That was impressive. Most people wouldn’t have figured that out.”

“That’s because I had many Vietnamese neighbors in Sydney. Good folks, nicer than sunlight. Always got a smile on their faces. Hard working too. So, tell me Dave, what brings an, American or Canadian?”

“American.”

“An American like you here? Crikey, you’re American? Born there or escaped to there?”

“Born.”

“Well, what brings you here?” It was the first time someone asked me that question.

“I was just here on a joy ride. I’m planning on bicycling to Buenos Aires, eventually. How about you?”

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“I got sick of day to day life in Australia, saved up, and I’ve been traveling the world for the last year. It’s been interesting for an old man like me.”

“Hey man, it’s never too late. You have to eventually make your dreams happen, otherwise, what’s the point of living?”

“That’s good someone young like you would realize that. I think I’m an example of too old smart.”

“So what brings you to Cuzco?”

“Well right now, I’m pumped up on antibiotics, so I’m just here for the medical treatment and to recover.”

“What happened?”

“My appendix burst while I was volunteering out in the rain forest. I was teaching a tribe some English. They flew me into Cuzco, and fixed me up, although I had a battle to see if my travel health insurance would pay. That was bloody hell, but the doctors were kind enough to stitch me back up. So now, I ‘m just relaxing here, and listening to some interesting things going on around here, like your energy conversation.”

He took a sip of tea, and then said, “about that light, have you met Marco?”

“I think so, why?”

“I swear, I think he’s a reincarnated Incan. Marco has a knack for finding ancient ruins that no one else knows about. He’s shown me a few. This place is full of them. The entire Andes and some of the cloud forests are full of them. If there’s anyone who’d know what to look for, that would be Marco. And speak of the devil. Ah well, there never was such a thing as a coincidence.” Said Geoff as Marco walked in.

Marco was taller than me by a couple of inches. He was brown and sturdy looking. He walked up to us, and we shook hands.

“Hello Marco.”

“David! Ernesto has told me much about you. I have many things I want to talk to you about.”

“What did he say?”

“He showed me your theory that these things are part of some kind of machine.”

“It’s a hypothesis, and it’s based on what I’ve observed. It’s not a theory yet.”

“Still, it is a good idea. A very good one. I have also worked with the western archaeologists and anthropologists, and I did not like what their theories were. They never listened to us.”

I looked at Geoff. He nodded in agreement.

“David, I also think that the westerners are missing something vitally important. Who knows, your Vietnamese background and perspectives, along with your training in the west, could make you a bridge. You could figure this out, where many others failed. I myself don’t agree with the westerners. They’re like me, from a white background. We’re missing too many important things, because of, who knows, ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, whitecentrism, racism, and God knows what else. We have too much baggage on us from history, from our own arrogance, and from what we did to the native peoples. You might get insights that others don’t.”

“Ok,” I looked back to Marco, and asked, “did you go over the email I sent to Ernesto?”

“Yes! It is very good, and I agree, many things are not practical if done from the other perspectives. But what you said, that it is more functional in design, and that there is an energy form - I too, have seen that energy form.”

“How did you see it?”

“Do you know the story about the looter who went to the source of the lights?”

“Yes.”

“I was part of the party that came with him.”

“So, why did you guys run?”

“Because, it was so strange. We knew there was a lot of metal in there. We had detectors. But then the metal moved. We have legends of people who wander the mountains, and disappear. We did not want to disappear, so we ran.”

“There was nothing under that slab of stone?”

“No. It was very strange, because we had four detectors, and two were new. How could all four detectors be wrong? We detected a lot of metal.”

“That is strange.”

“Yes, and that is why when Ernesto told me about your theory, he said that you were on to something.”

“Did they still detect the metal when you lifted up the slab?”

“No, there was no more metal.”

“And the slab wasn’t metal.”

“It wasn’t. It didn’t even register.”

“And no one changed the settings on the detectors.”

“Nobody.”

“I’ll say that’s a mystery. Marco, I’m missing some information for the theory, mainly I want to double check if the source of the rocks at Sacsayhuaman is correct.

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Are there any local sources of Andesite?"

"No. I will show you what the archaeologists say is the source, and you will laugh."

"OK. When do we go?"

"Let us go these weekend. I have much too show you. I showed the archaeologists, and tried to tell them what the locals know. They did not listen, so I've stopped showing anyone these places. Many are secret, ones that no one knows about. I did not show the westerners those, because I no longer trust them."

"Alright, let's meet up this weekend then. What time?"

"6 AM. We have far to go. Very far. It is a long walk. You will be amazed at some of the things that I will show you. You will be very amazed."

## Chapter 8

### Guidance

“David?”

“David, are you awake?” A loud knocking woke me up.

“Huh? What the. . .” I turned in my bed. I was stuck in my sleeping bag, as my long johns caught the nylon sides.

“David! It’s Marco! It’s 6 AM.”

“Ah shit! Sorry Marco! I forgot! Hold on, let me get changed.”

I got up and changed into my day clothes. I saw my breath in the air, and quickly washed my face. The water was freezing cold, and it rudely snapped me to attention. The rising sun was poking through the window as I rinsed my teeth. I opened the door, to see

Marco with a back pack and a walking stick.

“Hello Dave! Are you ready?”

“Yes! Give me a moment.” I grabbed my courier bag, and put in a roll of toilet paper. I had my basic survival kit, and some food I bought the day before. We left the hostel, and started hiking up the mountain, opposite of the city.

“We’re going in this direction?”

“Yes, because few people ever bother to go this way. There are many things around here. Most of what the tours show, is only the things that are known. But where we are going, there are places no one has ever bothered to explore, until now.”

“Why is that?”

“They did not think of them to be significant. Or the archaeologists ignored me.”

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“Man, every time I hear the two of you talk about them, it sounds like you both have an axe to grind.”

“Because they are telling the world about us, but they don’t listen to us. They are not us. Why should the gringo represent us, when he’s not us?”

“Good point.”

“It is bad enough what they did in the colonization. It was bad enough what they continued to do to us up until 1980’s. Now they have to talk about us?”

We continued up the mountain, far from Cuzco, and soon we entered farmlands, and a few forested areas of eucalyptus trees, which were brought in from Australia a hundred years ago. Few, large, hardwood trees could exist at the high altitude, and the eucalyptus proved to adapt well. Unfortunately, it’s an invasive species, introduced a hundred or so years ago from Australia, and although it provided wood, it changed the ecology in dramatic ways. One eucalyptus sucked up inordinate amounts of water, and many of the streams and springs that once fed the city were going dry.

We continued along an ancient Incan road, hidden in the canyon, and descended into a stream bed. In the middle of the stream bed was a large red boulder, which weighed about six hundred tons or more. Large rectangular incisions were carved into it, and the incisions were about 4 feet wide, by 1.5 feet deep, by 3 feet down. We climbed on top, where an ancient altar once stood. On the sides of the boulder, the ancient builders built an Incan wall into the boulder, and carefully meshed the polygonal stones seamlessly into the rock. On the top, several channels flowed to the river.

“This was the first strange place I showed to an archaeologist. He didn’t think much of it. What do you think?”

“Was this an altar?”

“Yes. The Incans had many altars. Whenever they conquered a nation or a tribe, they brought their gods here, and honored them equally. This gave respect, but also forced the nation to come here, to Cuzco to pay tribute. When the Spanish came, they tried to destroy every single one of the altars. Some of the altars survived, but even today, if they are found, Catholics will come out to deface or destroy them.”

“It’s still that bad, huh?”

“Yes. That is why those of us who know of the altars, we keep it secret.”

“I don’t blame you.” We continued down the stream. Soon, we came up to an enormous rock overhang. The face of the rock wall was about 40 feet, by 30 feet, and a large cross like incision was made into the rock wall. The incision was in the

form of a plus sign, but layered within each other. The cuts were 1.5 feet in depth.

“This is called the southern cross. It is an ancient religious symbol to the Inca, and the Quechua.”

I looked at the cuts, and noted how they were precisely in right angles.

“The Incans didn’t have any iron or steel tools, right?”

“That is correct. They had bronze. For stone work, supposedly they used stone.”

“For round stones, those are very precise angles cut into the wall.. although I’m sure with some practice they could get some pretty decent angles in. Although, I’d like to know how they made the incisions into the rock in the first place.” I said as I pointed at the incisions.

We continued down the river, and then up an ancient Incan staircase up the canyon. Soon, we were far above the city of Cuzco, on the side of a mountain, and we came up to another wall of rock. Again, there was the rectangular incision, and enormous one, that was about 15 feet long by 10 feet wide, and 2 feet deep.

“The archaeologists say that these is where the Incan got the stone for Sacsayhuaman from.”

“The giant stone?”

“Yes.”

I looked at the depth of the cut. It was only about 1.5 feet deep. The giant hundred ton stones at Sacsayhuaman was at least 4 to 5 feet in thickness, and there were others that were even thicker.

“Did they even bother to measure this before they came to that conclusion?” I asked.

“No, but he put it in his PhD dissertation. What do you think? Are you ready to laugh?”

“You have got to be kidding me.”

“Even worse, this is not Andesite. These are another type of stone. There is no source of Andesite within twenty kilometers of Cuzco.”

“You want to know what pisses me off, Marco?”

“What.”

“Those guys are the ones who put their bullshit up in the text books for kids to read, and into TV documentaries on PBS declaring that everything is solved. I mean, what the hell?! He could at least use a tape measure to confirm the thickness of this thing. That’s so goddamn basic.”

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“Now you know why Ernesto and I do not like them at all. I had many arguments with the gringos.”

“I don’t blame you. It pisses me off when they make presumptions about my family’s culture, most of which aren’t true, and then propagate that into society. That’s where the bullshit stereotypes come from.”

I looked at the incision, and said, “if they just used this as the source for their stones, why did they bother to smooth out and cut perfect angles into it?”

“That is a good question. There are no altars here.”

“Oh yes. David, I want to show you something very strange, later today.”

“OK.”

We continued hiking into another canyon and valley system. As we hiked, Marco explained to me about the foundations of the Incan Empire. The Incan Empire was just the latest in a long line of empires, and it only lasted for a few hundred years. Before that, the empire was known in another name. The empire was unique in the world in many ways. First of all, it was a confederation of nation states, who displayed loyalty to the ruling elite in Cuzco. It was monarchical, with an emperor, a leading family, and it had a house of lords, who were the noblemen, but they ruled via a federalist system. The economic system of the empire however, was socialist, where the people provided labor, and in exchange for the labor, everyone was fully fed, clothed, housed, and taken care of. The credo of the empire was, “No lying, no stealing, no laziness.” The architectural constructions, the water works, the sanitation works, the distribution system, the tracking system of goods, and the communication system were all a testament to this credo.

Their agricultural efforts were incredibly efficient, and they used micro-climates and genetic selection to produce thousands of varieties of potatoes, corn, quinoa, and other crops. Potatoes, one of the principal crops of the world, originate from the Andes. On the mountain sides, the Incans were able to produce enough food, in the smallest amount of land, for a population that was in the order of millions. Water was central to Incan society, and it was holy. Many of the major Incan water works are incredible feats of sustainable, reusable hydrological engineering, where water was collected, cleansed, and transported to the far corners of the empire in this mountainous region. In today’s world of consumption, recovering even a piece of that technology would solve many of the world’s food and water problems.

The Incan empire was unique in the world. When the Spanish came, the Incans had several forces working against them. So many people loved to glorify that all it took was a hundred and eighty men to conquer the empire in the 1500’s. This



is completely incorrect and inaccurate. The Spanish were allied with several tens of thousands of warriors from nations that the Incans had recently conquered, and they were hungry for vengeance. On top of that, the Incan Empire had recently suffered a civil war, and civil society was fracturing in all the Incan States. These factions allied themselves with the Spanish, bringing in thousands of battle tested warriors who spoke the language and knew the terrain.

Although many scholars would like to point out that small pox was a major factor in decimating the empire, the Incan army still had a well trained force of 80,000 men, who were experienced, combat ready, tough, and well supplied due to the highly efficient agricultural, production, distribution, and tracking system of the Incan bureaucracy, which despite the illness, still functioned well. In fact, the Incan war against the Spanish didn't end for almost forty years, thanks in part to the efforts and tactical abilities of several Incan army generals, Ruminahui, Zope-Zapahua, and Quisquis. It was not the rout that many people in the West portrayed it as. It was a long, bloody, and nasty war that went from large armies in the field, into guerrilla style warfare. Afterwards, the indigenous allies of the Spanish found themselves betrayed, enslaved, murdered, or worse by the Spaniards. Their lack of foresight got them their vengeance against the Inca, but in the end, their revenge boomeranged back on them, and they themselves were betrayed.

In Cuzco, what was once a glorious architecture, unique in the world, with clean streets, clean flowing water, and systems that quickly and efficiently removed waste, people who were fed and trained, was destroyed. The Spanish sought to annihilate everything they could. Soon afterwards, it was documented that what was once clean and efficient was now full of trash, human waste, and it was a stinking hole, due to the Spanish.

Yet, despite the colonization, genocide, ravaging, wholesale enslavement, subjugation, and rape of the Incan Empire, the confederation of nations that made up the Incan Empire managed to preserve much of their traditions to the present day. Using the guise of Catholicism, they were able to make the PachaMama incarnated as the Virgin Mary, among other things. Many of the old rituals were still practiced in secret, and during the 80's and 90's, a revivalist spark was running amongst them, due in part to white people traveling to Peru to seek out the ancient traditions.

It surprised the people who'd been humiliated and exploited for over five centuries. Suddenly white people valued their traditions, and many ancient stereotypes and perceptions were being turned on their heads. White people came to seek out

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shamans and ancient wisdom. Quechua men would talk about their latest conquest of a white woman, which surprised many people because for ages, the lowest rungs of society in terms of attraction were the indigenous peoples. For the first time in history, during the festival of *Inti Raymi*, an ethnic Quechua was finally in place as the symbolic head of the festival, as opposed to a white man. The Quechua were rediscovering their history and their pride. Interestingly, the indigenous peoples of the Americas, like the Asians, the Arabs, the Indians, the Africans, the Pacific Islands peoples, maintained the memories of the injustices, which were continuous from the 1500's to the present day. I wasn't at all surprised when I heard the loathing in the voices of Marco and Ernesto.

We continued down a small trail into another canyon that was hidden away. Inside the canyon, was a strange circular ruin, and it had an arch inside it.

"This, David, is an Incan ruin. Take a look. What do you see is unusual?"

"Well, it doesn't have the typical, earthquake proof, trapezoidal Incan door."

"Exactly. Yet, the archaeologists all say that Incans had no arch. Here, right here, where you and I are standing, we see with our own eyes an old ruin, with an arch."

"I can see why you get pissed off with them. Did you try to show them this?"

"Yes. They didn't want to go. It would interfere with their pet theory."

"And yet another piece of bullshit gets published, and my tax dollars pay for it," I mumbled.

"Did you see the tunnels with Ernesto?" Asked Marco.

"Yes."

"You only saw the small ones. I will show you a gigantic one, that shows how powerful the technology these people here possessed."

We hiked around the rim of the mountain, to an area that had the airport in view. As we rounded a corner, I came to a giant cave opening; it was 30 feet wide, by 15 feet high. It was completely walled up.

"El presidente Fujimori sealed these systems, because too many people were wandering in, and dying, or going missing. What do you think?"

"This wasn't a mine?"

"No, the cave entrance is too large. And there are no rail road tracks for mineral cars."

I looked at the parts that weren't covered with cinder block and concrete. The cave wall sides were smooth.

"Two years ago, in the newspapers, one man followed a tunnel all the way

through to the center of Cuzco. He was almost five kilometers away when he started. He came up through the grate in the Coricancha temple. He said that the tunnels were not natural. They are large, and smooth, so they are artificial.” Said Marco.

“That’s amazing! I guess that’s where the legends come from of Atahualpa hiding lots of gold in them.”

“I have something special I would like to show you now.” Replied Marco as he led me down a trail.

It was approaching the evening, and we’d been hiking for hours. The sun was setting, as Marco took me to an outcropping of rock. On the rock were several holes.

“Can you take a look at this, and tell me what you think?”

I put my hand in the hole, and started to feel around. At first I thought someone pounded a stone in to make the hole, until I noticed that the edges of the hole, as my hand went along its sides, went away from the opening. If someone pounded it, they apparently pounded it on the sides, creating something like a vase lip. As my hands traced the surface, I noted how smooth the surface was. They also made the effort to smooth the roughened surface as well. But, it was odd, because the surface was smooth, and perforated with many bubble like blister holes, that were too tiny for any kind of hand tool. The best way to imagine the hole, would be to imagine a Styrofoam board, and then to imagine pouring acid on the board. The acid would eat a hole away, and as it evaporated, it would leave smaller holes with sharp edges. That’s what the hole felt like.

“Dude, this doesn’t feel like someone pounded away at it with a rock.”

“Uh huh, and?”

“All these blister holes make me think of, the hell? Acid?”

“And?”

“Like acid? The heck? Did someone pour acid on this rock?” I looked at Marco, bewildered.

“What kind of an acid eats away at stone like this?”

He smiled at me, “No one believed me when I told them about this.”

“Holy shit, did the Incas use something else? Just how advanced were they?”

Marco kept smiling at me. I think he felt vindicated that someone else came to the same conclusion he did. I felt the inside of the hole again, and the texture of the blister holes in my finger tips. My mind was buzzing.

“There are legends that the shamans know of mixtures of juices from the rain

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forest, and when mixed together, the juices could dissolve rock.”

“Well, if these are calcium oxide rocks, like limestone, then that would make sense. But these rocks, aren’t these silicon oxide rocks? In the lab, to etch silicon wafers for computer chips, we use fluorine acid, and that stuff is nasty! It doesn’t dissolve your skin, but the vapor eats through your bone. What ever it was that did this, I wouldn’t want to mess with it.”

At nightfall, we headed back to Cuzco. The next day, we met up again in the Clubhouse.

“So what do you think of what I showed you?”

“Damn man, a lot of the stuff I read and saw on TV about the Inca is bullshit.”

“Now you know.”

“Yeah, tell me about it. At least we know now that there are definitely no sources for the rocks of Sacsayhuaman around here. And those cut out rocks don’t fit into Sacsayhuaman because they’re too thin. That means that the sources are still those two quarries that are thirty five kilometers and a hundred kilometers away. And we still have that weird energy form. Marco, we need someone who understands other energies.”

“Yes, we do. But who?”

“I don’t know. Let me go over my notes again, and see what I come up with. Anyway, we’re still at square one. We need the manual, the energy, and the key.”

“What would the manual be?”

“I don’t know, something symbolic I guess?”

“I know of a site, with many strange symbols. Again, they say the Inca had no writing, but that is not true. We must go to this site then, if that is what you need. There are many symbols there.”

“When can we go?”

“We must wait for the weather. It is a very dangerous place, almost 5500 meters high. It is also a secret site, and forbidden to outsiders. But you are my amigo, and so far, you have proven yourself to me. I will show you it. We are already acclimatized. It is difficult to get there, because of the weather. I will check with the airport to see what the predictions are.”

Marco left for work at the airport, where he worked in a control tower. I sat down at the table, and started outlining some of what we’d seen. So far, all we’d seen only proved that the source for the stones of Sacsayhuaman was distant, and there was nothing else that indicated anything close to fulfilling my criteria. I was still there with a mystery on my hands, and no real clues to even start with. On top

of that, I was dealing with an energy form that I had no idea about. I needed an expert in energy.

“Hello, is this the South American Explorer’s Club?” I looked up to see a blond haired lady, whose hair was pulled back, looking at me. She was slim, and looked like she was in her late 30’s. We introduced ourselves, and I gave her a tour of the club. Her name was Sara, and she was a Canadian. We sat down, and started talking about our travels.

“So what brings you to Cuzco?”

“A strange force, something, I can’t describe told me to come here.”

“You too?”

“What do you mean you too?”

For some odd reason, I trusted her enough to tell her about the strange events that led up to my journey to Peru. I told her about the bird incident, and my parent’s reaction.

“David, I’m not surprised that your mother acted that way, given her background. You said that her grandmother was a Buddhist shaman, right? I think in general, your culture is supposed to look at miracles as simply manifestations of the mind, and to not put such an enormous influence on them. Otherwise, it will distract you from your purpose. So, did you find what you were looking for?”

“What I was looking for?”

“The reason you came down here.”

“Well, I did get sucked in with this weird mystery. I came up with a hypothesis into the megalithic structures around here. There’s also a strange energy form that I witnessed, and right now, I’m trying to find someone who knows about energy.”

“Maybe I can help you. Let’s meet up for dinner later in the week and go over it.”

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Later in the week, I met up with Ernesto, and Marco. I told Ernesto about the phenomenon I saw, and described it as if there were “two moons.”

“Ah yes. That is exactly what I told you. It looks like two moons. You described it exactly right. It is very significant that you got to see it.”

“Well, now that I saw it, I’d like to make two or three more expeditions to these passes here and here to see if I can get a better idea of where it is.”

I pointed to two high mountain passes on the map. Both were in excess of 4000 meters.

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"I figure, if I can get two more coordinate points, than it's possible I can track down the source of the phenomenon. It might intersect here."

I pointed at a point on the map that said "unknown area." Peru's most current topographical maps had lots of "unknown areas."

"David, you know, the area you are planning to go to is unexplored jungle. You will encounter several tribes of Indians there, known as the Machenga. You will need their help to get through it."

"OK, I'm sure I can muddle my way through to do that."

"There's a catch though. There is a custom. You must have sex with one of the chief's wives. It is their way of saying hello. If not, they will kick you out, or they will kill you."

Marco stood straight up and grinned at the prospect.

Ernesto smiled and said, "Be careful. If there are no women, then you must fuck one of the men. That is the custom." Marco sat down really quick.

Ernesto continued, "Hm, yes. And the jungle has it's own set of difficulties too, much like the high mountains. There is the heat, humidity, and it is difficult to find food and water without a guide. There are insects that lay eggs in your skin, which gestate in your circulation to reappear out of your pores as flies. There are all the jungle diseases. Mosquitoes are horrible too. Supply lines and help are nonexistent. You must plan for at least a month in the jungle."

"I'm not that interested in entering the jungle. I just want to find out what this phenomenon is." I replied. Marco left the room. Ernesto subtly changed. It was like he was orating for someone.

"David. You do know that what you are looking for, is the lost city of Paititi."

"Paititi? You mean the city that those rich Belgian gringos couldn't find, despite all the satellite evidence, GPS, and massive amounts of equipment and money? I'm not interested in that. I just want to find out what the 2nd moon is. To me, that's alive. Macchu Picchu, Nazca, Tiwanaku are all dead monuments. Paititi is probably one as well."

Many expeditions set out each year from Cuzco to search for the lost city of Paititi. It's often mistaken for "El Dorado", The City of Gold. No one succeeded. The search for Paititi claimed lives, money, equipment, and time. Satellite reconnaissance had photos of man-made structures in the jungle, and yet when the expeditions went to those exact points, they found nothing. It was a strange mystery, and because there were so many failures, many people decided that Paititi was just a myth. That didn't stop the expeditions from trying each year though. Another one

recently left, armed with GPS, satellite recon, guides, canoes, and condoms. They didn't succeed. Some even died. "David, why are you so interested in the second moon? No one else ever has any interest in it. Yet you, you're the only one."

"Because, that is a phenomena that deserves investigation." I replied.

"Do you think it is Spiritual La Tierra?"

"I don't know. That's what that Quechua woman called it. We have a term called 'Gaia,' but that's a mechanistic term for the Earth's life process. You're talking about the 'The Spirit of the Earth'. Well, now that I've seen the lights of the second moon, I really want to know what it is. To me, that is far more interesting than any of the old, dead ruins around here. Then again, maybe Gaia does exist. She might actually be alive."

The "Gaia Theory" is a theory proposed by a NASA scientist, James Lovelock, about how the earth is a living organism. He was assigned to research methods into detecting life on other planets. He denied that he suggested that the earth was actually a living entity; he was simply saying that the processes essential for life are all part of a gigantic mechanism, and the mechanism is life itself. The carbon cycle, water cycle, organic compound production and waste digestion, and the retaining of heat are essential components for the Gaia Theory. It's the reason life can exist on our planet. They tested the theory on Mars, and Mars is so dead it can't even push up daisies.

On the other hand much of Asia, Africa, and the native Americans consider Earth to be a real living entity. They believe in a "life force", and according to the Chinese, they actually use this life force in acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, and health. So, it actually is a working force, and western science is still baffled at how it functions, despite India and China's use of it for several millennia. They also consider the "Gaia" to be capable of evolution. The ancient Europeans, Africans, and most of the world before "modern" times also believed this. Intuitively, I figured this tied into "Spiritual La Tierra" and the strange second moon that I saw.

Then Ernesto hit me with his main question.

"Why did you come here David?"

I looked at him. Ernesto now had a strange, searching, expression that I hadn't seen before on his face.

"You know, that's the same question my father asked me before I went. I told him - I told him that I didn't know. I just had to go."

Ernesto smiled. "It always starts that way. The legend of Paititi is that only

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those who are selected may see the city. Otherwise, it appears and disappears at will, confusing those who are not worthy. It is for those who come here beyond their own will.”

Beyond their own will? What the hell... I started getting a strange buzz up my back. It’s the kind of feeling that I would get whenever I knew that something major was up.

“David, do you think that you are the ‘Escogido’?”

“Escogido?”

“The name that the old Quechua woman called you was *Acclhaska*. Do you know what it means?”

“It means searcher, right?”

“No... It means ‘Chosen One’”

I was silent. “Very funny Ernesto I’m going to have strange dreams if you keep this up.” I smiled and tried to lighten the suddenly heavy atmosphere of the conversation. Ernesto looked very mysterious.

“I’m very serious. Do you think you have been chosen? Only those who have been chosen can see the second moon. No one else sees it. Yet, you have. That is incredibly important. So tell me, do you think you have been chosen?”

“Whether I have been chosen or not doesn’t matter to me. I just want to know what the cause of this phenomena is. When I’m done, I’ve solved the mystery for me, and then I’m off for Bolivia and Tiwanaku. It’s just a scientific interest.”

Ernesto had this odd smile. It was a smile that said, “I can tell this is far more than a simple curiosity for you. There is no escape this time David. You are bound to it. You cannot stop now. You cannot leave. You must solve the puzzle, at all costs. For my sake, for your sake, for all sakes. We have lived in an eon of darkness. Now, the mystery must be solved.”

A very distinctive and creepy feeling went up my back.

“Uh, well, at least that’s the plan. I also just want to see if my theory on the purpose of the four Suyos, Sacsayhuaman, and Cuzco are possibly workable. If everything is a gigantic energy device for the planet, then, we’ll see. But it’s just a theory. A crazy, crazy, muy loco theory.”

“But a very good theory. Better than the one that many of the archaeologists have proposed. Yet, once you have the knowledge, what will you do with it?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Say Paititi exists, and you are chosen to enter. The inhabitants teach you all that you are to know. Your past, your future, our past, our future. New ways, and



new technologies. Then what will you do with it? What will you do with that knowledge?”

I thought about that for a moment. I had no intention of looking for Paititi.

“To be honest, I don’t know. I usually share my knowledge, unless instructed otherwise. It... It depends.”

“Hmm... you see, perhaps you are not the Escogido. I am different. I think knowledge should be kept secret for those who are worthy. Knowledge, true knowledge transcends language, and passes without word to those who are chosen. That is why the Inca and those before them had no writing. Yet look at their achievements. Now, look at today. There is so much abuse. Do you think powerful knowledge should be shared?”

“I really don’t know. I won’t know until I know the situation I’m in.”

“Hmm... Let us say you had the money, and access to the resources you need for an expedition to find Paititi. Would you do it?”

“Of course. It’s only natural.”

“Hmm, then you are different. I think most people would spend that money for material things.”

“Whatever the case, I don’t think I’m ready for an expedition of the sort that you’re thinking of.”

“Really. I think you’re ready. I think you’ve been ready for a long time.”

That night, I went back to my hostel after dinner. I was uncomfortable with all this “Escogido” business. This was my vacation, time out, kick back, have fun, and have a good time. But then there were the things that drew me to Cusco, and there were too many questions that I needed to answer.

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I looked at my watch, and saw the date was September 10th, 2001. Sara and I dined in a vegetarian restaurant. She wanted to see my theory. Sara used to be a teacher in the northern parts of Canada, until she quit and started a natural healing store. She then left that because, like me, something beyond her will drew her here.

She was also knowledgeable in the “esoteric energy” spectrum. Speaking as a scientist, esoterica is frowned upon, because they are difficult to quantify. That’s the main reason western science has a problem with esoterica. The other problem is just plain academic prejudice.

Sara quietly tied her blond hair back, and put her glasses on. She had an elegant demeanor about her as she concentrated on my conclusions. I had trouble

containing my energy. When Marco and I explored a previously undiscovered and spectacular monument, I told him we needed an expert on energies to understand the device. Now here I was talking to one, and I badly wanted some answers. I told her about the second moon that I saw, and how I felt it was connected to all of this. I ordered some ginger tea for the lingering bronchitis.

“So, what do you think? I mean, the logistics and the methods needed for those stones is enormous. No one would put that much effort just for ritualistic, social, or political purposes. It’s just too much. Even a megalomaniac wants to see his structure done. No matter how you look at it, you still can’t change the laws of physics. This has to be functional.” I said.

“Your theory is logical actually. It is more of an energy device than a simple building. This whole place is just coursing with all kinds of energy.”

“You mean Life Force, right?”

“It’s the same thing.” She flipped the page.

“What you’re reading right now is what a design engineer would setup as requirements, if he or she were tasked to design an energy device to last several thousand years. It’s got to be the craziest theory I’ve ever had.”

“It’s not a crazy theory, and in fact, when you think about it, it’s quite logical. Are all the megalithic monuments on a grid?”

“Yes. Two librarians did an enormous amount of research on that. Their names are Flem-Ath, and they have a website and a book, called the ‘Atlantis Blueprint’. He shows that when you use the Giza plateau as the Prime Meridian, every single megalithic monument lines up precisely at equal distances from each other. It forms an entire planetary system.”

“Good, then we can go from there. You have an interesting section here regarding all the energy forms, eh?”

“Yeah, and that’s actually where I need your help. Part of the design requirements requires a constant energy supply. Nothing we have today can last thousands of years. Nuclear, hydrodynamic, electric, none of these is constant. The Earth’s magnetic field is too weak, and then there’s the “Dragon Lines”, or earth energy lines. Those would be the only constant sources I can think of. But that’s an area I have no knowledge about, and pretty much everyone in the west ignores it. There’s no research on it here, and I can’t read Chinese.”

“The magnetic lines aren’t weak. And they can shift, you do know that, eh? Not as in the poles will shift, but as in the entire crust of the earth shifts in the field, changing the polarity of the crusts.”

The Earth's magnetic field according to NASA is about 100 times stronger than the sun when measured from the earth. That field is the reason we're not glowing green from solar radiation. The interaction of the charged solar particles and the field generates huge amounts of electricity in an amount equal to several hundred nuclear power plants. Much of it gets funneled into the earth's core, and it does things to the core that we haven't figured out yet. A lot also gets funneled through conducting points on the earth's surface. That's why power stations and grids go out whenever there's a solar storm.

As for the pole shift, according to paleontologists, the rocks in the earth have different polarities corresponding to different periods. That meant that where the north was the south, and vice versa. This happened several times in the past. A lot of people argued whether the Earth's core simply flipped, or the crust itself flipped. Either one would have a person flip out once they knew what it would do to the planet. Floods, earthquakes, storms, and televangelist marathons of biblical proportions are usually the result. The televangelist marathons would be a nightmare. The rest would also be a nightmare, according to the cataclysmic geologists. Then there are the uniformitarians, who say that the Earth goes through ultra slow geological changes.

Both groups despise each other, but the fact is, both are right. The asteroid that killed the dinosaurs? That was a cataclysmic event, and it wasn't the only asteroid in history either. The live volcanoes erupting in Hawaii? That's a uniformitarian process.

"Yes, that is a pity that they don't look into earth energies, eh?" Sara grew up in the farm country, and nature was her teacher. Like Jane Goodall with the chimpanzees, she would meditate to connect to her surroundings before making her studies. She understood the very processes that were going on around her at a very deep level. She was like a geomancer, someone who could connect to the earth on a level most of us can't comprehend. Or at least, that's what they say. At this point in time, I wasn't sure what to make of things. My adventures were pulling me further and further into something far more bizarre than I had imagined.

"Dave, do you know how the energies of the Earth work?"

"No, I don't."

"I didn't I tell you why I came here, eh?" She asked.

"No. Do tell."

"I had several dreams. The first one showed the planet, and there was grid upon grid upon grid of energy lines. The other one was literally a command, to go

straight to Peru. I never had a dream like that before, so I immediately obeyed it.”

Once upon a time, I didn’t put much stock in dreams. Most of my dreams were too bizarre and strange to really make sense to me. I did have a couple that came true a few years later, in that strange sense of *deja vu*. Yet it wasn’t until two years ago that I had a peculiar sequence of events that concurred with my dreams and intuition. Then I finally decided to take them seriously. I learned that when it came to the esoterica, like dreams or intuition, to not belittle them. They could be far more important to life than any scientific analysis.

“The grids are several energy layers, stacked on each other. You do know that all matter is energy.”

“Yes. Einstein’s law states that. All you have to do is get it to the speed of light squared, and presto, enough gamma radiation to turn you green.”

“OK. Well, it’s not just what the scientists are saying though. You have matter, which has it’s own set of vibrations. Then you have mental vibrations, the intellectual layer. Your thoughts have an energy to themselves. Then you have a Life Force layer, the energy which keeps you alive. And then you have a high potential layer, the spiritual layer.”

“I didn’t think of it that way. I thought the Life Force and Spirit might be connected.”

“*Everything* is connected.” She replied.

“That’s what some of those people mean by four dimensions?”

“Yes. It’s not just three lines and time. That’s just one way of looking at it. But in a metaphysical way, four dimensions means you’re looking at the four aspects of being.”

“And these four layers, do they extend from a person?”

“Absolutely. Think of yourself as a being composed purely of auras, energy fields, or force fields if you’d like. Those fields extend far beyond you, and they effect your surroundings, others, and your very reality.”

“Does Gaia also have her own set of layers?” She thought about that one for a moment. A smile crept onto her face.

“You know Dave, it’s no surprise to me that you’re here. This place draws a lot of people here who are in tune within themselves, and who are very aware of their levels of being. But, you’re an anomaly. You’re a scientist, and yet you understand the other systems of thought. It’s no surprise that you’re of Vietnamese descent. I don’t think a fifth generation white American would be saying the things that you’re saying. Have you told anyone else about this?”

“Just Ernesto, Elio, Marco, and Sally. I don’t think most of the others would understand.”

“Because I will tell you that what you’re getting into is enormous. This encompasses the entire planet, and it’s important that you know who to talk to. Do you think you’re the only one on this?”

“I feel like it. I feel like I’m alone in figuring this out. It’s actually getting really scary. The sheer potential of this thing is enormous. This is the entire planet after all. Is there anyone who could understand what I am studying, without the academic bias?”

“Yes, there is a core group of scientists, Nobel laureates among them, who know that there is a lot more going on here than what science decides to dictate. They’re not on the fringes either. Some of them are deep in the academic world, but they don’t voice their views because of the hierarchy. I can put you in contact with them.”

“Great, because quite frankly, I need help. I really, really need allies.”

“Have you heard about the hundred monkey theory?”

“Like the eight hundred pound gorilla? I thought that was for smokers.”

Sara smiled.

“No, like the concept of critical mass.”

“Oh yeah. Once you hit critical, an enormous change takes place.”

“You do know what a collective conscious is, right? The human mind is incredibly powerful. It will mold and shape your realities. When they say that we can move mountains, really, they mean we can move mountains. I’ll give you an example. I recently saw a video from China using a branch of their medical system. What happened was a woman got on the operating table. There were two live video feeds, one using ultrasound, and another to measure time. In the ultrasound monitor was tumor in her ovaries. No instruments were attached to her. What happened next was extraordinary. The Chinese doctors, there were three of them, simply closed their eyes. In three minutes, the tumor began to quiver. In two more minutes, the tumor began vibrating at a high rate, and then it disintegrated. The woman got up, thanked the doctors, and left. Apparently, they treat thousands of patients this way.”

I didn’t know how to respond, yet, I trusted that Sara believed what she saw. I left the story open. I didn’t know whether to believe it or not. But then again, there are cases where patients were put on a placebo system, and were able to use their minds to get well. They just believed that they were getting well, and they got well.

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It didn't matter what disease they had. If this was true, than the Chinese doctors were able to advance their abilities to the next level, or they already had this skill for eons.

Sara continued. "When you have a critical mass of similar thoughts, or wills operating on a certain level, you will be able to make changes on an enormous scale."

"Oh yes. Which is why Hitler wasn't guilty. The entire German nation was guilty for collectively being behind him. We just scapegoated him."

"Absolutely. If you think about it, instead of thinking of God as a sentient being, which isn't really correct, it's more correct to think of Her as a Sentient Reality."

This was getting heavy now. "Sentient... Reality," I chewed on a piece of ginger as I let that sink in. The heat of the herb gave a bite to my words.

"Yes. It's a lot more accurate to describe her that way. The Reality shapes and molds at will. When you see her that way, suddenly, all the things that occur on this planet make a lot more sense. Realities bend and shape according to the will of the occupants in that reality. That's why I said, the human mind is incredibly powerful. Once you understand that it's more like a reality, than you can see how the layers of energy fall in place. Collect an enormous pool of consciousness, and the reality bends to the wills of the pool. Everything from the Big Bang, to the formation of life, to war, to peace, everything is done according to the will of those in that reality. The reality also reacts according to that will. Good, Bad, all of that makes the Sentient Reality. It's the Yin and Yang. Lao Tzu got it right."

"I think I get what you're saying. I've had my own name for it. I always called it the 'Field of Pure Potentiality.'"

"Correct. So if you think about it, you have non-animate matter, and then life force induced beings, starting with plants, sentient beings, like animals and us, then you have Gaia, the solar system, the local systems, then galaxies, and the cosmos. Each thing functions in the Sentient Reality. Everything is connected. Gaia isn't the only one manifesting herself."

"So then, the manifestation, and this planetary device..."

"is important because now, Gaia is expressing herself in the Sentient Reality." she finished.

I was silent.

"Have you considered making a website to pool similar minds into your concept?"

“No. I keep getting the feeling that someone is trying to keep me hidden. I can’t shake the feeling that I have a protector. It’s like there’s an opposing force that they don’t want knowing about me. I only send out my travelogues to a select group of friends who I intuitively feel I can trust with this. It’s strange actually. I can’t shake the feeling that I’m some kind of ‘genetic bomb’. It’s like someone’s using me as a wild card, but when the time is right. All I can do right now is continue my investigation, and figure out how to operate the device.”

“Listen to your feelings. That’s good. You’re a scientist, but you’ve learned to operate using your body’s feelings and perceptions as well. There are two kinds of scientists. The ones who are so rigid and narrow that they just push pencils. They can’t feel at all. They just add bits and pieces to the overall body of knowledge, and it doesn’t really do all that much for humanity. Then there are the ones who’ve been able to tap into the deeper, spiritual part of themselves. They’re the ones who can form quantum leaps in understanding.”

Sara sipped her mint tea. “When do you go to that marked ruin again?”

“This week, on Thursday.”

Marco and I planned an expedition was to go see a possible entrance into a mountain tunnel system. It was marked with a petroglyph. Marco discovered it last year, and kept it hidden. It’s never been seen before, at least not since the time of the Inca. The strange thing is that none of the cultures, Inca, or pre-Inca, had any evidence of writing. Yet there was a petroglyph. None of the other ruins, cave entrances, nothing had any markings of that sort. For that matter, nothing in Peru had anything like it, except for maybe the Nazca Lines. That meant that this ruin was unique to the area, and possibly the world. It’s been unexplored, and unknown to westerners until I stepped into the picture. My survey was to see if it would be possible for me to construct basic devices to move the eight hundred pound stones covering the entrance. To make things even harder, it was 5500 meters in thin air, through incredibly harsh, and steep terrain. That reason alone explained why it was undiscovered by others. I would have to take things a step at a time.

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## Chapter 9

### September 11th, 2001

It was the day everything changed. Monday morning in Cuzco. I got out of my hostel, and the sky was clear, and blue, and I walked briskly to the academy. As I walked, the city was alive with Quechua going to work, and the first diesel fumes were beginning to color the air.

I walked into the academy, and we started class. The class was about the use of the subjunctive. We had a break at 9:30, when Luis, a Peruvian who arranged tours for Macchu Picchu, came in to the conference room in a fit. I was chewing a piece of fresh bread when he burst into the room, and next to me were three Belgian women. We were talking about the trip to Macchu Picchu.

“We will fight back! This effects everyone! Peruvians, Chileans, Argentinians, everyone!” He said as he counted his fingers.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“The USA has been attacked!”

“What?! What the hell? Where?!”

“It is on the television!”

We ran upstairs, and there was a white couple were watching the TV. It was CNN. The couple was white, and blond, and the woman, who was American, was crying. I looked at the TV, and live, on TV, I watched as the second plane flew into the far corner of the building of the World Trade Center. I watched, numb, as much of the fuel erupted, and blew out the corner in a large, orange, black explosion. The TV then replayed the first impact, where the jet slammed smack into the middle of the towers.

I knew, from that moment on, that there was no turning back. I knew, from the

moment of the impact, that I had no choice. I watched, in disbelief, as the white woman screamed, *"whoever did this, had been well integrated into our society!"*

I've heard that statement before. That statement put honest Americans into prison camps during world war II, the Japanese Americans. They sacrificed their lives, were the most decorated military unit of all time, and they still weren't allowed to be US citizens until after Martin Luther King marched. That very same statement almost got the Chinese Americans, Americans, born and raised in the US, sent to China after the Chinese Communists won their civil war in the 1950's. That very same statement was hurled at any one who looked Indian or middle eastern during the Persian gulf war. It was uttered after Oklahoma. Ironically, it was a white American who perpetrated the attack. During this attack, many Muslims were in the Trade Towers. They died, and their families grieved for them, but did the rest of the country even stop to think about that?

I looked at her, and I wanted to yell out in anger at her, "It's racist motherfuckers like you that destroy everything!"

But I didn't. I couldn't. I had many Arabic and Muslim friends, and I feared for their lives. I knew how nasty and racist the States were. When she said that, my blood boiled, and my stomach began to churn. I knew she was in shock and anger, but the venom that came out was the same venom that was hurled at us after we bombed and incited our own set of terrorist activities in the Middle East. How much longer could this cycle be continued? I wanted it to end. I've endured plenty of racism and violence. I didn't want any of my friends to go through what I had to go through.

Instead, I looked at her, and said, and I wanted to cry as I said it,

"There's a lot of innocent Americans who are Muslim. They didn't do this."

She looked at me, and with a tone of nastiness in her voice that I never forgot, said, "They're your friends?"

"Yes." I said back in anger as I glared at her.

She didn't look at me. The blond man, who was British, gave me a dirty look, and went back to comforting his wife. I stared at the TV, in disbelief. An hour later, on the TV, something happened which threw me off completely.

I watched in disbelief, as tower 1 imploded in itself, and then tower two, where earlier, I saw much of the fuel erupt out the corner edge. I watched as the video provided close-ups, as puffs of smoke blew out on the corners, as if in sequence, and then the tower collapsed. The announcer, who was sitting on a building watching all of this, then said, "we have news that the Pentagon has been hit." I watched in

*September 11th, 2001*

disbelief as my intuition screamed out to me, “this is utter bullshit.”

I knew for sure, inside of myself, that the attacks were not Islamic. I knew that. This was far more insidious than any religious or political cause would engender. I watched as somehow, the events that occurred even defied the laws of nature, of physics itself. I watched, as a hydrocarbon fire melt or soften rigid, fire proofed steel, when to even soften it, required not just pure oxygen, but acetylene, and temperatures which exceeded 2000 degrees Fahrenheit and it had to be maintained at that ideal condition for several minutes. Hydrocarbon fires, even under ideal conditions where pure oxygen is being fed in, can only reach 500 degrees Fahrenheit. Yet, here, in a smoky, oxygen starved office complex, it was able to reach 2000 degrees? This information is easily found in any welder’s reference manual.

I watched a trillion dollar defense system, who, in the past, always sent up fighter escorts the moment any plane deviated off course, regardless of what happened inside of the plane, suddenly, and inexplicably, not follow it’s own rules and regulations, and even de-throttle their own jets. An F-16 at full throttle can cover the entire East Coast of the US in 15 minutes. Yet, there were three impacts, one 15 minutes from the first, and the other an hour and a half after the second!

I watched, and the more I watched, the angrier I became, when later in the day, the announcer on CNN said, “We have reports that World Trade Center 7, which was not hit by a plane, has been demolished by a bomb.”

I knew, from that moment on, that I was watching the biggest, staged massacre in history. That night, I sent off an email to some of my friends, where I said, “I don’t believe the Muslims have anything to do with this. I think our own government did this.”

Joe responded, “That’s damn bloody if our own government attacks our own people!” Mistrani responded, “Dave, I think that this will unite our country against a common enemy. As tragic as it is, perhaps some good can come of it.” Tasnim responded, “Dave, you don’t know how horrifically this has affected me!” Michelle sent me an email back from the states that said, “Dave, I’m stuck, this has been a fucking mess!”

I sent emails to see if any family was lost in the attack. My brothers reported back that so far, everyone was intact, but some friends were missing. I felt sick in my stomach, as the images went through my head. We weren’t attacked by some crazy hijackers, that I knew. I also knew that if I said anymore about what I felt, especially with the nation in hysteria, that I was destined to become a target. I’d just witnessed the American version of the burning of the Reichstags. It was the

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official start of the coming authoritarian rule of the USA. And that meant that what I was investigating, what I was learning, could put me in danger.

When I went to sleep, I prayed for my friends, the victim's families, and especially my Arabic and Muslim friends. I prayed for their lives, and for their families. I went to sleep, and prayed. Those who died, were dead. There was nothing I could do for them. Those who were alive, I prayed for them.

## **Chapter 10**

# **Strange Symbols, Strange Ruins**

This portion of the book is available in the print edition.

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## **Chapter 11**

# **Analysis**

This portion of the book is available in the print edition

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## Chapter 12

# Macchu Picchu

I arranged for a trip to Macchu Picchu, and I knew it was time to do the tourist thing. During my stay in Cuzco, I did things most tourists didn't do. I befriended the locals, went to see things far off the beaten track, dated a local girl, and I was invited to Peruvian parties. It was at one such party that I befriended Paulo, who was a local Spanish teacher, and Bill, a Philadelphia native.

Bill was an interesting white guy, and a libertarian. He grew up three blocks from where I lived, but he spent many years on a ranch in Texas as a cowboy and ranch hand. His fellow cowboys used to call him the crazy man, because he'd get up after a fist fight, adjust his jaw, and then say, "Let's try that again." He later became a white hat hacker, and analyzed computer security systems from his abode in Mount Shasta, California. Now, he was exploring Cuzco, and considered setting up shop in the city, hacking and improving networks for pay, while exploring South America.

Bill was the first white, male, solo traveler I met, and as a libertarian myself, we got along easily. We talked about his home in Shasta, about the interesting people the volcano and surrounding lands attracted, and about how independent minded the people were. Bill used to work with Vietnamese people in one of his odd jobs in Texas, and he even knew a few words of Vietnamese. He became good friends with a Vietnamese family, and admired their fierce independence. When September 11th happened, Bill didn't fall for the official theory, and he became even more suspicious of the government when he analyzed the reports.

"If them feds ever come out to Shasta, we got our own private militia, and mountain men. We can handle em. I'm tellin ya Dave, we can sure use a fella like

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you out there. We think alike, especially regardin the gov'ment."

It was a fun party, and I enjoyed getting to know Bill and Paulo better. Paulo, who was gay, introduced me to some of his female friends, saying, "David, you should meet some pretty girls, nice girls. Not the ones in the clubs. Good girls. You're the type who should have a nice, pretty girl friend."

"I'm flattered Paulo."

Paulo introduced me to Marita. Well curved, cute face, slender, with long dark hair and eyes, and a smile that was flirtatious, she gave me the eye for the rest of the night. We danced the salsa several times, while Bill cheered us on with his cowboy hat.

That night, after getting Marita's phone number, I walked to a small shop in the center. I was hungry, so I bought a packet of roasted macadamia nuts. I chomped down on one, and then another, and on the third, as I crunched it in my teeth, I smelled something that reminded me of an old sewer pipe. Before I knew it, I automatically swallowed it. Since I had to leave early the next morning for the Inca trail, I went straight to my hostel, and fell asleep.

The road to Macchu Picchu started with a train ride from the city to Ollantaytambo. We got out, and started our hike at the two day point from Macchu Picchu. Along with me in the group was a newly wed American/British couple, an Argentinean woman who was a biochemist in town for a conference, and two guys who were ex spooks of the Israeli army. We descended into the green, misty, mountain valley. There was moisture everywhere, and we were well below the altitude of Cuzco. As we hiked by the ancient, misty farm communes, the trail became steeper and narrower. The communes were built along the sheer sides of the mountains, and they were surrounded with many terraces. The plants and trees glowed with a thick, green lushness in the moisture. Rain began to fall, as we followed the trail.

In the afternoon, after lunch, I felt my stomach cramp. I dismissed it, and drank some water, before we continued our hike into the valley. Later, while resting in the ruins of an Incan relay post, I felt the cramp turn into an ache. Still, I held fast, and tightened my muscles.

We followed the trail from one ruin to another. All the ruins were made of a light colored stone, and the stones of each ruin were no bigger than 600 pounds. In each construction, they were set polygonally, which ensured their earthquake proof characteristics. The trapezoidal Incan doors withstood the tests of time. I contemplated the millions of people the empire once supported. With a record system

based on knots in colored strings, called Quipus, the Incas tracked the movement of thousands of goods and food stuffs. The quipus system provided both a database and a system of communication for the Incas. Unfortunately, because of the Spanish Inquisition, the knowledge of how to read the ancient libraries and records was lost.

Finally, in the evening, we reached the first base camp, and that night, we had a spaghetti dinner. My body felt better, and the cramps subsided, until night fell. I set up my tent at the bottom of the stairs of a small dormitory. I slept. Within an hour I felt my stomach grumble, and growl, and then a pressure on my backside began to erupt. Immediately, I leaped up, got out of my tent, and ran for the outhouse, only to find it occupied. After waiting an eternity, which was three minutes, I stumbled in.

A Peruvian outhouse is unlike any other. In the States, an outhouse is usually made of plastic, and a funny smelling truck frequently comes up to empty it out. When I went to Taiwan, I lived in a Buddhist temple. The outhouses were holes in the ground with foot places above, where a person would mount on the foot placements, squat, and listen to the sounds of shit falling. How were the outhouses in Peru? Well, they had places for my feet, but there were no holes in the ground. In fact, the Peruvians covered the holes with concrete. I couldn't figure out why they did that, since it didn't seem to make the outhouse more effective. Walking into one was like doing ballet in a mine field, but when my body wanted to empty the tank in a series of hurried squirts, the last thing I could think about was swan lake. I think I stepped on the Italian's lunch when I stumbled in that night. I refused to touch my shoes after that.

When I squatted, it came out like a water hose, and I listened to the splattering behind me.

"You've got to be kidding me." I muttered as I looked at the concrete sealed hole. All through the night, for another nine times, or one or two for every hour, I dashed to the outhouse, and squirted. I knew my condition worsened, since I lost a lot body fluid. In my tent, I used up my pack of handy wipes, since I ran out of toilet paper. I lay in on my pad, groaning, and cursed the bad macadamian nut that gave me a case of food poisoning. Finally, early in the morning, two Peruvians saw me collapse on the hand rail of the stair case. They picked me up, and took me to the infirmary. After a long night with my two best friends, Ciproflaxin and Metrodizole, and God knows what else the nurse fed me in the infirmary, I felt a little bit better. In the early morning, I felt strong enough to complete the trail and

see Macchu Picchu.

As we hiked, I watched the black mountains rise up like islands in the gray ocean of mists. We walked by water falls, and the mist draped like curtains aside us, and politely swirled out of our way as we walked past. As we approached the ruins, on the side of the trail was an enormous 500 ton or more monster of a crystal like rock, planted on the side, and surrounded with an Incan wall. It looked like an ancient temple guardian, who stood there to decide who went in, and who didn't. When I arrived at Macchu Picchu, it was blanketed in mists, and a single tree appeared amongst the giant, looming boulders of the Incan walls. After a moment's rest, the first thing I did when we got there was to head straight for Huayna Picchu, which was on the mountain behind the ruins. As I jogged there, I felt energized by either the site, or my own adrenaline. A German woman in a tour group loudly asked the guide, "Where is dat man going?" as I jogged by. I was in a hurry. I had no desire to go with a group guide. I walked through the gate, signed my name in at the guard hut, and scaled the spiral staircase that wound around the mountain to the top of Huayna Picchu. At the top, finally, in a fit of exhaustion, alone, I collapsed, rested, and then meditated until the mists cleared.

As I descended, I walked around the peak and found something that was never described in any of the guidebooks, or references. Pointing off into the Amazon basin, was a stone stellae, carved, it seemed, to resemble a man's face and head. It stuck out from the base, and the only way to see it was to go through some bushes that hid it. No one else knew it was there. I stared at the stellae, and looked off into the distance. However, before I could think about it anymore, I had to go to the bathroom.

I got to the modern toilets of a luxury hotel that was built next to the ruins. Of course, as with all things in Peru, when I got to them, an avalanche crushed the main water pipe. As a result, the men's room was locked and marked, "out of order." So, I walked into the ladies room. After a few screams and strange looks, I explained my situation, and the ladies were much more understanding.

"Now you know how we feel when there are no toilets for us." Said an American woman.

Afterward, I went back again to Huayna Picchu, and this time, I went down the mountain, to the temple of the moon. For an hour, I slept amongst the ruins. When I awoke, I walked further to the back of the temple, and saw a giant, Incan stair case that descended into the cloud forest. It was covered with detritus, and I walked down it. No one, it seemed, had ever bothered to excavate, clear, or restore

the staircase, and the stair went on for several kilometers. Finally, after about a kilometer down hill, I saw that the stair case seemed endless, and I didn't have enough time to continue. The Incan road went far out, into the mountains, and into the Amazon Basin. Was this the road to Paititi? I didn't know. I didn't have time. So, I went back to the main ruins of Macchu Picchu.

I had no desire to listen to the guide's explanation of where the rocks came from. I already had my own conclusions after seeing Sacsayhuaman. So, instead of the guided tour, I simply walked the ruins, and imagined myself as a Quechua, who was born, and raised in the ancient city, and tasked to taking care of the rituals and observances there. I walked amongst the giant stones, some which were as big as the 300 ton monster in Sacsayhuaman. Macchu Picchu probably had some of the finest stone masonry of all the Incan empire, as I walked to ruins where the organic shapes were formed with such precisely fitted stone work.

After the tour, I took the train ride back home. Back in Cuzco, after recovering for a few days, I met another traveler, Diane. Diane was a solo, 30ish, single American woman traveling through South America. We agreed to meet up in three weeks to go to Bolivia together. After all, we only had three weeks left before the winter was over, and the seasonal, daily down pouring would begin. The rains would leave the roads a muddy mess, and getting through it, either by bicycle, or by bus, would be hell.

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## Chapter 13

# Apologies to the Pachamama

Ernesto wanted to meet up with me at the clubhouse to go over the discoveries that Marco and I made. I was armed with fresh experience and information. First, everything started with the energy form that Marco and I experienced, on a level I felt was too personal. It's characteristics were as follows:

- 1.It is an energy form expressed in the electromagnetic spectrum, as light
- 2.It is intelligent, or the forces behind it are intelligent
- 3.It is capable of psycho synaptic response, in other words, it can appear in the neurons in our heads
- 4.It is also physically present in response, in other words it can appear physically outside the neurons in our heads
5. It expressed intelligence to us in prime numbers 2 and 3, which indicated that it was not a natural occurrence
- 6.It appeared in a seismically active area, where potential energy can be released as earthquakes, or in volcanoes
- 7.It definitely is not, as far as we can tell, the result of human activity, lightning, or static
- 8.It is expansive, since it seems to glow the entire mountain range. This indicates that it is not a point source of light, and would toss out any possibility of beams, or radiating beacons. It's more like a giant glow stick laid out along the mountain range
- 9.It comes from below, so that rules out any possibility of aurora, in addition, aurora is not possible to be seen from that latitude, since we're too close to the Equator.

10. It is capable of conversion into chemical potential, as shown by Marco's flashlight suddenly becoming "charged"

Ernesto looked at the notes, and said, "David, you forget, it can respond to you."

"What?"

"I was in the pass, and I was sleeping in my tent. Then, through the tent, the light came. I got out of the tent, and all around me, everyone in my party was sleeping. But all around me was the light. It is like being surrounded by the light. So, by now, I was accustomed to it. So, I tried to go back to sleep, but the light began to make patterns, like it was blinking at me. It acted like, 'Come Ernesto, come and play with me.' I said, 'No, I need to sleep, I am tired.' So, the light changed patterns, and it would try to get me up again. Finally, I said, 'OK, OK, I see you. But I am tired.' So, then, the light went away."

I put another note down. The light responds intelligently, it is curious, and playful. We looked at the characteristics of the light.

"Well, we have our energy form, or at least, one expression of it." I said.

"Yes, it is very good, your analysis. But tell me David, do you understand the purpose of the device?"

"Not really. I think it could do something mechanical, or convert energy into some kind of kinetic expression."

"No. You are forgetting something very important. You are forgetting the reason we as humans, exist."

I looked at Ernesto, as he made a one handed prayer salute, like a Shaolin Monk.

"You must realize that the Inca, and their predecessors, were deeply spiritual. We are here as expressions of spirit."

"What? You think the device..."

"No, I know."

"So, why would they use giant stones at the node points?"

"The stones are simply, like your theory on a possible energy of order, are there to advance consciousness. What is consciousness but the spirit? Like you said, David, in western science, we have, as an analogy to the West, the ability to break things down, in entropy. But that is all western science can do. There is no theory of ordered complexity which becomes consciousness. What is higher ordered complexity? Making something more complicated does not mean it becomes aware."

"That intelligent energy form, do you suppose it's..."



“You said it yourself, everything synchronizes with each other. As the quantum leaps occur, Earth, PachaMama herself leaps with us.”

“So, we start with intelligence, or an evolving intelligence.”

“Correct. David, when are you and Marco going back to the forbidden site? He told me about your ‘accident’ with the sea shell.”

“Yeah,” I said, embarrassingly, “ever since my mistake, this giant black storm cloud has enveloped the site. Marco keeps a daily look out on the weather from the airport, but it hasn’t left.”

Ernesto smiled, and said, “this is your first lesson in the way things are here. I would recommend you either find a shaman to bless the two of you, or that you make an offering to the PachaMama. Let me tell you a story. I was a guide for four European trekkers in Huaraz. We were going for several days, when we ran out of water in the high mountains. Finally, after much thirst, and time, we found a stream. The Europeans ran to the stream, drank, and gave no thought to how we had water. They even peed nearby the stream. The place where we found the water, was a sacred place, and I made an offering to the PachaMama before drinking to say thanks. Later, they got sick, but I did not. You must remember, always give thanks to those who give to you, even if you cannot see them.”

“Lesson learned.” I said.

“So, what do you plan now at the site?”

“Well, I’ve got a possible direction in terms of the symbols. But I want to document them better, and I want to meditate in the site.”

“Do you think PachaMama will talk to you?”

“I don’t know. She was the one who made contact with us. This time, I’m going to try and contact her. Maybe she’ll have some information we could use.”

Ernesto smiled, as he said, “The PachaMama’s secrets are never given. They must be earned.”

\*\*\*\*\*

It was our last chance. The Humboldt current, which flowed from Antarctica all the way to the Arctic, was driving the seasonal rains. Once the rains came, any access to the mountain would be delayed until the next winter. It was time for me to leave, since the rains would reduce many of the roads to mud. We had one more week left. Marco and I met up in the clubhouse, to go over our plans.

“This is it, man.” I said, as I looked out the window of the overcast sky. The days and skies in Cuzco were no longer blue and cold.

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“I know. The black cloud is steel there.”

“Then we have to take drastic measures. This Friday is our last chance, right?”

“Yes. After this week, any kind of mountain activity is very dangerous.”

“What do I have to do?”

“We must make an offering to the PachaMama.”

“How?”

“We must offer coca leaves, a sea shell, and holy water. These were valued as symbols of the PachaMama by the Inca, and the Quechua.”

We went to the market, and amongst open sacks of rice, corn, and stalls of vegetables and fruit, we found a coca leaf vendor. The coca leaf is an ancient, religious and spiritual symbol to the peoples of the Quechua, Aymara, and many other indigenous nations. It is non addictive, and the best analogy for it would be spinach with caffeine. It provides more biologically active calcium than milk, more protein than most other plant groups, as well as high concentrations of all the vitamin groups. The stimulant, which is an alkaloid, is one of 50-60 other alkaloids in the leaf, which the human body selectively uses. It is a medicine for soroche, stomach aches, and pains.

Cocaine is an invention of an Austrian scientist in the 1890's. It is the isolate of just one of the alkaloid compounds in the leaf. Because the active alkaloid in cocaine is present in such minute quantities in the leaves, it literally takes a kiloton of coca leaves, and a toxic brew of kerosene, methyl ether, and other toxic chemicals to produce just one kilogram of cocaine. Interestingly, the primary market for cocaine is the rich kids of the USA, and Europe.

Because Americans wouldn't take responsibility for their own drug problem, the American government poured billions of dollars into Peru, Bolivia, and mostly Colombia to eradicate the coca crop, train Para military groups, and support dictatorships. This created billions of dollars in revenue for herbicide companies, arms companies, and chemical industries. The chemicals destroyed landscapes, jungles, tropical rain forest, cloud forests, as well as contaminated water and soil. The toxic effects of the herbicides caused mutations, illnesses, and death in wildlife and humans.

As a result, the indigenous, in their own homelands, found their ancient cultures criminalized, and stigmatized. It was easy to understand why many of the indigenous peoples weren't fond of Americans.

I purchased a bag of coca leaves, and thanks the Quechua woman, who had bright red cheeks.

*“What are you going to do with it?”* She asked me in halting Spanish. For much of the Quechua, Spanish was a second language.

*“I have to apologize and make an offering to the PachaMama.”* I said. She nodded her head, and said, *“you must always respect the local traditions.”*

I nodded back. We purchased some periwinkle shells, some water, and chalk dust to gently fill in the carvings, large tracing paper to sketch on, and some charcoal. The day before, I fasted and meditated to purify myself.

As we ascended the mountain, at first, the sky was overcast, with a few patches of clouds. But as we got closer, we saw the black cloud around the peak. Closer, we inched to the top, only to feel the ferocity of the convection currents as they tried to swat us off the mountain.

*“We must do it now, David!”* Yelled Marco over the roar of the rumbling currents, *“put the leaves under a rock!”*

*“A rock, a rock.”* I muttered. I couldn’t find a rock! We were headed to a peak full of giant rocks, and I couldn’t find a single rock within twenty feet of me? The sides were almost vertical, and we gripped to the mountain, and held fast in the powerful wind.

*“Ya gotta be kidding me, where’s a freaking rock?”* I said to myself.

Finally, I found a rock, a big one, lodged into the side of the mountain.

*“Found it!”* I yelled. Marco was further up ahead, monitoring the black cloud.

*“Put the leaves under the rock, and then pour water on it!”* he yelled back.

I did as he said. Before I poured the water on, I put the water bottle to my forehead, recited a mantra, and asked to bless the PachaMama. I poured the water onto the stone.

*“Done! Now what?!”*

*“Put the seashell in the ground, pour water on it, and apologize!”* he yelled out. The roar of the currents was deafening as the air rushed past my ears.

I put the shell on the ground, put the water bottle to my forehead, closed my eyes, and repeated the mantra, and then said, *“PachaMama, if you can hear me, I am truly sorry. I did not know.”* I then poured the water on the shell.

*“OK! Done!”* I yelled to Marco.

*“Good! Let’s go!”* The convection currents got stronger, and as we clawed our way up the mountain, and the wind became fiercer. When we got to the rock wall, suddenly, the wind turned into a breeze. We looked around in astonishment. The sky was still overcast, but the black cloud lifted and turned gray. Marco looked at me, and smiled, *“PachaMama smiles upon you. But, are you ready?”*

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“Yeah.” I said, as I turned and looked around us, incredulous at how suddenly the peace came to what was, just minutes ago, a roaring, windy nightmare.

We walked to the circle of stones, and I sat down on my sleeping pad. Marco wandered off to see if there were any other ruins we might have missed. I closed my eyes, and relaxed. Slowly, I began to sink into myself, and into my heart. I felt something warm on my face, and opened my eyes. A single ray of sunshine, cut through a hole in the overcast sky, and lit my body up.

“You have got to be kidding me. I will never disregard local traditions again.” I said, as I smiled, and closed my eyes again. It made absolutely no sense to me scientifically, but as my father told me, “there are some things that you just don’t mess with.” As I meditated, I felt a surge of images, colors, and thoughts, pour into me. It was like drinking out of a gushing fire hydrant. It was overwhelming, and I couldn’t make sense of anything. When I came to, thirty minutes later, Marco came by.

“Finished?”

“Yes.”

“PachaMama is very happy. Let’s go trace the symbols.”

We gently poured chalk dust onto the carvings, taking care not to make any permanent, or embedded marks, and took photos. With the tracing paper, we charcoaled the glyphs onto the paper, and documented every symbol we could find. Thankfully, there were no bandits. When we got to the pit in the ground, and the tunnel, I got in and a two hundred pound stone fell near me. We decided not to clear out the hallway, due to the risk of more rock falls.

We also discovered some new petroglyph forms, including one that resembled a sperm and egg. We finished exploring, I repeated the mantra, and thanked PachaMama. We found an ancient abandoned Incan stairway on a side of the mountain that we hadn’t explored, and descended in that direction. As we left, the sun shone on us. We smiled and joked about what the possibilities were for the giant portal, and where it might lead to if it was ever opened. As we approached the bottom, we looked back up the mountain. We descended almost 1500 meters in altitude. At the top, the furious black cloud was back, and it covered the top. I saw a ferocious rainstorm, like a thick gray blanket that covered the peak. Marco looked at it, and said.

“PachaMama is cleaning away the chalk. She let us in. Remember that what you were given, is a gift, not a right. Even if we are chosen, we are still guests.”

## **South America - Bolivia**



## Chapter 14

# Lake Titicaca

“Comisariqui!” I said to the little Aymaran girl in her native tongue.

“Waliqui!” She replied back.

I knew just a few words of Aymara, as Diana and I toured the reed island, in the middle of Lake Titicaca, nearby Puno, Peru. Her face was red brown, and she wore a wide brim hat. The sky was clear, and I sat down in front of her on a mat, made from the totora reeds. She was dressed in a white smock, with rainbow colored sweaters and a white skirt, as she showed me her hand-made jewelry. We were on an island, made of mats of totora reeds, which gently floated on the still waters of the lake. There were many man made reed islands like this one. The Aymara of the lake, escaped the Spanish onslaught via these islands. Even the Inca couldn’t get the Aymara to submit to their empire, since so many of them lived on the waters of Titicaca. I watched as the little girl smiled at me, and said, “Konichiwa!” I grimaced, held my temper in check, smiled back at her, and said, “*thank you.*”

As I walked on the island, I felt the sponge-like feel of the ground, as it bounced and gave way to my weight, and I went from hut to hut, and eventually bought a medallion of the Sun Gate of Tiwanaku. The homes were made of woven reeds, supported with poles, and roofed with corrugated aluminum or plastic. Village life on the island consisted of making handicrafts for the tourists, harvesting trout or pejerrey, a native fish, from their aquaculture farms, and trading in Puno for foodstuffs, and other goods. Most of their economy was based on tourism.

In ancient times, they made reed boats to paddle around the lake. Today, they used aluminum boats. A stubborn people, they maintained their ancient culture, language, customs, and techniques, but they did adopt a few modern day amenities.

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Almost every home had a solar panel. I walked back to the boat, after finishing the tour, and looked at the fresh green reeds being prepared for another island.

“All done?” Asked Diana. I looked at her, and smiled. Diana struck an interesting figure, as an attractive, 30ish, Jewish American, New Yorker, with a leather cowboy hat, a north face jacket, and leather cowboy boots.

“Yeah.” I replied.

“Neat, huh?”

“Amazing. I’m surprised they’ve maintained their culture.”

“Yes, it is amazing, isn’t it? Let’s hope it stays that way. I’d hate to see them lose themselves in all this globalization.”

Diana and I traveled together for the last two days. We both left Cuzco just before the rains came in, and shared rooms and meals together. She had the ideal personality to travel with: laid back, easy going, take it as it goes, roll with the punches. I thought that was interesting, considering she was a New Yorker. Later that evening, we dined in a restaurant in Puno, and made plans.

The next morning, we parted company.

“I’ll keep an eye out for you, Dave,” she said, and then added, “just in case you get to me before I get moving.”

“Maybe on the isles of the Sun and Moon, we’ll meet.”

“Let’s meet in Copacabana, at the Hostal Americano.”

“Deal.”

I pushed my bike down Puno’s central road into the town market for supplies. I bought bread, cheese, and fruit, as well as some powdered fruit drink mix. The stalls were on push carts, with large umbrellas for shade, and the people smiled as I bought my supplies. Bread, cheese, and fruits were my rations, as well as an assortment of nuts. Looking at my map, I noted the distance between towns. It’d been a long time, and I’d have to take it slow on the bike.

There’s a certain majesty about the Andean landscape that fills the soul with wonder. As I biked down the road, alongside me were giant, snow capped peaks on black mountains, where clouds climbed the sides, and turned from white puffs into angry dark storm clouds. Because of the high altitude, the air’s thin quality made everything clear. Vast plains of brown, dry grass in the winter, rippled in the wind. There were no trees, as it was too far above the tree line for anything other than grass, potatoes, and the native high altitude plants to grow. Campesino women, Aymara or Quechua, dressed in gray or black skirts, and colored sweaters, with top hats or broad brimmed hats, crossed the road with their flocks of sheep or llamas,



and children honked horns on their old style, single speed, Chinese made bicycles as they passed by me on the way to school or home. Sometimes they asked me for money, other times, they waved a simple hello. Once, men ran alongside me, saying, “gringos have dollars!”

On one lonely stretch of road, a headwind pushed me off the bike, and I pushed the bike between two mountains to a sparkling, beckoning azure of Lake Titicaca. I stopped to eat and drink, and then to stretch my muscles.

I arrived in the town of Juli at 7:30 PM, where a family put me up in a lakeside room, above their family room. On a meal of rice, potatoes, tomatoes, ketchup, and salad, with cheese, I looked out of my second story window as a distant thunder storm lit up the lake, while above us was the clear, star studded sky.

The next day, I met a Peruvian bicycle traveler, and we exchanged tokens. I reminded myself to keep a collection of trinkets for exchange and memories for other bicycle travelers. Later, while crossing on a ferry through a narrow passage between Desaguadero and the border of Bolivia, I watched a sunset on the lake, and breathed in the cold air. I was out of shape, and spent the night in a hostel in a tiny township alongside the lake and the ferries. I sat down in the boat and felt my knees.

I arrived at the Peruvian Bolivian border, and I passed through to a road with a long line of vehicles. I looked at the cars waiting in line next to me. There were expensive Land Rovers, and sixties era European sports cars, little roadsters, and all sorts of old and new vehicles. It was a continental road rally, and to the chagrin of some of the drivers, I rode by them while waving my hand. I couldn't help myself. I was the non-petroleum powered vehicle, and I beat all of the drivers through the customs process to enter Bolivia. Nothing brings a more visceral response than riding on a fully loaded bicycle, pedaling through a dirt poor country, and passing by Land Rovers that cost more than the collected village's material possessions.

They perspired in the heat at the customs office along the border of Peru and Bolivia. After some hand shaking, picture taking, and some dinner invitations, I decided it was best to head off into Copacabana.

The road was made of cobblestones, so I got off my bike and pushed up the hill. After 3 miles of pushing into the evening, I came to a cobblestone downhill. I wasn't in the mood to decrease my sperm count, so I stood on the bike as it bounced and jostled down the road into Copacabana.

Many people think of Copacabana as a warm, sunny place in Brazil. Copacabana, Brazil, was actually named after Copacabana, Bolivia. The name, Copaca-

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bana, is a transformation from the Aymaran word Kota Kahuana, which means “View of the Lake.”

I found Dawn’s hostel in the center of town. I checked in, and found she already reserved a bed for me. She also left a note for me to meet her in a restaurant nearby. I walked into the cobblestone courtyard of the restaurant, and smelled the heady scent of fresh pizza.

“Dawn!” I said, as she got up from the table full of European travelers.

“Dave! You made it!” She said as we hugged.

“Hell yeah. Told you I would.”

I was introduced to the table, and ordered a pizza. She introduced me to Cornelia, a Norwegian, 25, and traveling mostly solo through Bolivia, Peru, and Chile. She was just at the start of her travels. We talked about travel as a form of therapy, and about the reasons we were traveling. I listened to each woman talk about their relationships and the problems with them that they were getting away from. Eventually, the relationship steered towards my reasons for my adventures.

“And what are you running away from, Dave? I mean, I know you’re on the track of something really interesting, with that planetary energy stuff, but how did it start?”

I told her about the picture, and Kendra. They were shocked, and intrigued at the events.

“And you what? You sent it to her, and then you just *ditched* her?” Said Diana.

“Hey, I was in this, ‘I can’t take Fate phase’. I’m still, sort of in that phase. I was hoping that she’d wig out with the story, and that she’d toss it away. Besides, I figured maybe she’d get freaked out that maybe I was stalking her. I hope she threw it away.”

“You don’t seem like the stalking type. I don’t know Dave, if I was her that would have me hooked for a long time, especially when you just *left*, and on top of that, *left the country*. If I was her, that would be the most beautiful, and intriguing thing to happen to me. I wouldn’t toss it away. If anything, I’d become obsessed. I’d start stalking *you*.” Said Diana.

“Yeah, just because you ditched her, doesn’t mean she’s going to toss it.” Added Cornelia.

“Will you two quit it with the ditching?! Great, just freaking great. Hey, you know? I’m here, she’s there, and I’m going to have an awesome time. That’s all that matters.”

As we finished a desert of apple pie and ice cream, Diana brought up the subject

of the importance of dreams and how they related to life. Diana and Cornelia were good at analyzing dreams, so I became curious. I had so many strange dreams that never made sense to me. I decided to have them analyze a few of mine, and the strange events that occurred during my journeys. It captivated them to realize that the strange events in my life and my dreams were so inextricably intertwined, that Diana said,

“OK everyone, remember your dreams tonight. Then we’ll talk about them, especially you Dave. I want to see what happens next that connects them. You have a very interesting life.”

“What exactly is a dream, anyway?” I asked.

“Dreams, are the 95% of the mind that you don’t use, that’s in operation. Think of it as the most powerful part of your mind. Dreams are a way that the 95% of your mind expresses solutions, events, and foresight of things to come.”

“Oh. So, it’s the subconscious?”

“More than that, it might even be the super-conscious.”

“The super-conscious? What’s that?”

“Think of the super-conscious as the collective unconscious of, I don’t know, everything and anything. Think of it like this. Your conscious mind, your day to day mind, is the driver in a car. That’s the minuscule 5% we use everyday. It’s still important, because it steers you, presses the gas, brakes, and directs you. Now, the 95% of your mind that is the subconscious, that’s the car, the engine, and the power. That takes you down the road. Now, the cool thing is, the road, the environment, and how everything interacts with you, that’s the super-conscious mind.”

“Cool. I never thought of it like that before.” I said.

“Not many people do. Very few people realize that in most of their lives, their reality is what they make of it.”

“So I can get rid of Fate, right?” I said, hopeful.

“Nope, you can’t.”

“Why not?”

“If you can get 6 billion people to work with you, then maybe you can get rid of Fate. But, it’s so hard to just get one person to work with you. Everybody’s mind has a part and a role in the super conscious mind.”

“Well, other than the Fate thing, this is too cool.” I said.

Later we watched the sunset on the horizon of the lake. The entire sky was blanketed in a dark red, and the blue waters became black, and reflective, and we saw the mirror image of the sunset.

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I couldn't move. I was absolutely helpless. Nothing about my body worked. My arms floated in front of me, mocking my former strength as I looked at them. I tensed my muscles, only to see that I was completely paralyzed. As I floated there in midair, I stared at the thing that I presumed was paralyzing me. It was a giant ball of light, spinning against a misty background of clouds. I tried to see with my peripheral vision, and I noticed that I was utterly naked, but I felt warm.

"What the hell is going on here?!" I yelled. There was no answer from the ball of light. "Why can't I move?! Who are you?!" I demanded. I tried again to twist around, to see what was going on around me to no avail. "Let go of me!!" I protested. Then a voice punctured the air. I felt like a giant ear as I listened to what it said.

"The quest is quite simple," said the strange, ethereal voice, "The quest is to find Gaia. That is the purpose of your journey. It is your mission. You must journey the world and find her. She is a planetary entity. She does not exist in one place. She is everywhere, yet now where. You must know her. But you must do it in such a way that you yourself do not harm her. By doing this, she will understand your true intentions. You have a long journey ahead of you, David.

Remember. You must see your own world before you can see another. Do not forget what she told you.

Find Gaia, David. You must find her. She's a very young entity. It's time for her to wake up. She should not awake to this current nightmare. No. You need to be there when she wakes up. Find her."

It started to draw me in closer, and my vision began to blur as the light blinded my eyes.

BOOM! My body jerked out of bed. A flash blinded my eyes. My head snapped to the window. I heard rain pouring outside. A lightning bolt flashed, as I felt another thunder burst explode through the sky. I put my head in my hands. My heart was racing.

"What the hell." I muttered. I glanced at my watch. Its iridescent hands glowed, and it reassured me that I hadn't lost any sense of myself. It was 5:30 AM. I moved the curtains aside and saw another lightning bolt illuminate a wall of water falling in the courtyard. "Where am I." I thought. I looked around the room. The dim outlines of my bike, bags, and a sleeping traveler made the darkness real. I was still in Copacabana. I lay back down in the bed, staring up into the ceiling. Another lightning bolt lit the room.

It was the first intense and memorable dream I had in a long time. My mind was blank. My head was still shaking from the dream. My body quivered as I realized that I could move again. I shook my legs and hands as I checked to make sure that I wasn't in another dream. The hot warmth of my body's skin against my hands was reassuring. My shorts were still on, and I wasn't as vulnerable as I was during that dream.

"Ugh," I thought, "this is just going to screw with my mind even more. I'm done with Cuzco and its sites. I did my job." I went back to sleep as the rain came down in torrents.

The next morning, I walked out to the landing dock with Diana and Cornelia. We had plans to take a ferry to the Island of the Sun, the legendary birthplace of the Incas. It was clear outside, and a brilliant, cloudless blue sky welcomed us at eight in the morning. As we got into the ferry, I sat down next to Cornelia.

"So, did you have any interesting dreams last night?" She asked me.

"Oh God. Next time I have a conversation with you two, I am not going to discuss dreams anymore."

"Why, did you have one?" Cornelia asked with sudden interest.

"Yes, and it's been a while since I've had a really intense dream. I had one last night. I think it's significant to this crazy adventure I'm in."

"Do tell." She said.

I described the dream to her, as I watched her green eyes widen.

"That's major," she said, "Fate or destiny is calling to you."

"Yeah, as if all the crazy adventures I've been having haven't been enough."

"Consider yourself lucky. You're in something that at least gives you some sense of purpose. Do you know how many people are out there wandering around without a clue as to what they want to do?"

"Well, yes. But it's not exactly something I wanted to do with my life."

I watched the azure waters of Lake Titicaca. The Islands themselves were sandy in color, with scrub bushes, some eucalyptus trees, and terraced sides for farming. Even though the population of the Island was at most 400 people, it required the resources of the entire island to sustain them, and that didn't include the tourists. Using the ancient farming techniques of the Incans, the islanders produced enough food for themselves, have a surplus for hard times and for us. Aquaculture farms produced trout and pejerrey, adding proteins to their diet. I watched the islanders go about in customs that were thousands of years old, but with modern technology, like their boats and solar panels. Sometimes I wondered about how modernization

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affected ancient cultures. In this case the cultural effects were benign, and for a small amount of change, they derived an enormous benefit.

I went for a hike with James and Brian, two British travelers. We hiked over enormous boulders that made up the bulk of the trail. They seemed set in place to make a giant, stone path to the northern point of the island. At the northern tip were ancient ruins of a temple, where the Inca went to worship the origins of their people. The ancient legends talked about the islands of the Sun and Moon as a place of great holiness, and from there, the first man and woman emerged, Manco Capac and Mama Occla, birthed by the sun god, and were given a golden rod. From the islands, the couple walked, until in Cuzco, the rod sank into the ground, thus forming the foundations of the Incan Empire. Manco Capac taught irrigation, cultivation of crops, and crafts to the men. Mama Occla taught spinning, weaving, and sewing, to the women.

We swam in the crystal cold waters, and at the highest point on the northern end, I watched a spectacular setting sun, and the crescent moon rose above the blue, red, black waters. Where ever the Inca originated, this desolate, beautiful place, was appropriate for its holiness.

Later that night I spent some time with Fernanda, a Brazilian woman I met on the island. We had a candlelit dinner next to the waves of the lake. The stars glittered over the waters. A light breeze danced on our lips as we sipped the coca tea. We conversed for a while about traveling the world, and what I thought about the USA's actions in Afghanistan. She had tears in her eyes when I told her my thoughts. I read about the Afghani's horrible turmoil four years before September 11th.

"Most Brazilians do not like the US. We think that they are the worst country in the world." She said.

"So I've heard. A lot of people think that way."

She paused before speaking.

"I hate your country. It is because of your country that my people are suffering. When that terrorist attack happened, at first I thought "good, they deserved it", but then I stopped the thought and prayed to God to forgive me for thinking that way. A lot of innocent people were killed that day."

"How can your country be suffering? I thought Brazil was supposed to be like China in its industrialization."

"Ha ha ha! Brazil is more like Bangladesh. Only a few people are benefiting, and they are the ones who have influence or American support. Our real (Brazilian

currency) is tied to your dollar. Whenever your financiers decide to play, is when our real drops. Your country also tries to extract so much of our resources without any thought to our country's people. They are like locusts. Our country is left with nothing when your country is done with us, and we're not the only one. Your country is destroying everyone."

I thought about the massive protests I saw in Peru regarding an Amazon highway to Peru's coastline. The protest wanted the highway, since it would provide more jobs, but it was backed mainly by American companies, who wanted the virgin rain forest lumber. A large percent of the Amazon was already clear cut, devastating the ecosystems, native tribes, and biodiversity. Large numbers of species were lost, due to our thirst for lumber. There were more productive and profitable ways to harvest the rain forest without destroying it, but those methods were ignored by the American corporations.

"I came here to Bolivia for a vacation, and I see how the American drug war is destroying these people. You Americans are so ignorant to how other people live and their way of life. You think that you can just come in and destroy someone to stop what is your own problem. It is your people that created the drug market, not them. These people require the coca to cope with the altitude and their working conditions. It is part of their sacred culture." She said.

The ignorance of the coca leaf was rampant in the States. As an example, the US senate authorized the drug war, but they were ignorant of the culture and the geography. One senator said, "we should have a carrier on the Bolivian coastline, and fly jet planes to bomb the coca plantations." Bolivia doesn't have a coastline; it's landlocked. The bombing part of his statement showed what the mentality was. It's simple and thoughtless to rely on high technology to achieve their goals. The USA thought of the world as an enormous video game. On CNN, I listened to the report of a US pilot describe the Afghan war effort as his place in the "Super Bowl". When I heard that, I listened to several British travelers, say, "God, those fucked up Americans."

The current drug war in Bolivia and Columbia was a dirty, nasty business. When the spraying was done and the crops were destroyed, the farmers were left with nothing. They tried rotation programs to grow food crops like yucca or corn, but the profits from those crops barely sustained a family. Tax subsidized factory farms from the US dumped their goods at below the costs of even the poorest farmer. There was no way he could compete. Growing coca for the US cocaine market became the only option, yet no one in the States knew about this. Several

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billions in tax payers dollars were going out of the States to solve a problem that we created ourselves, and it had no effect except to raise prices and increase cash flow to the parties involved in the drug war, which included the corporations who manufactured arms, chemicals, and food, and the US and the Colombian government. And as a taxpayer, I was indirectly responsible.

Fernanda opened her jacket, and revealed a t-shirt with the coca leaf on it. It said "Coca is not Cocaine."

"As a judge, I have to see so many cases of people who are suffering, and are arrested simply because they are poor. There is so much suffering. But they are poor because most of the time someone else is trying to make sure they stay poor."

"That's a lot like the US. Homeless people in Boston are put into jail simply because they're poor. Our president also got rid of the real estate tax. He effectively recreated an aristocracy. Even the richest people in the country, like Warren Buffet, opposed it. He said that what Bush was doing was taking away the meritocracy that rewarded effort in the country."

She watched me eat my fried potatoes in silence.

"You... you are strange. I have never met an American like you. You... are critical of your country."

"Look at my face. Do I look like a typical American? I've always been an outside observer, which was difficult, socially, but at the same time, it gives me perspective. I also try to see through things and people. I don't like being lied to, and I do believe in what my country originally stood for. I hate the fact that it's being a murdering hypocrite to the rest of the world. I don't like subterfuge, and I try to find my own truths."

Fernanda stared at me curiously for a few minutes, before talking again.

"I will go to Vietnam soon. Even though you were born in the US, you still retain much of your family's cultural characteristics, their intelligence and rebelliousness." She said.

"You will love the country and the people. Everyone I know says that out of all the countries of Asia they've been too, Vietnam and Nepal are their favorites. The Vietnamese people are very passionate about all kinds of things: politics, fighting, family, food, art, poetry, and love; especially poetry and love. Some of the greatest poets in Asia were from Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh himself was famous for his poetry. That's his other claim to fame, other than defeating the French and the Americans."

She sipped her tea as she contemplated the dark waters of the night time lake.

"I really admire your family's people and heritage. They've been fighting for



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freedom against oppressors for so long. First the Chinese, the Mongolians, the Japanese, the French, and finally the US. The US is a superpower country, yet the Vietnamese won. So many of us in South America admire that.” She paused before continuing, “come see me in Sao Paulo when you come to Brazil.” I looked at her when she said that. I could almost see the Milky Way’s reflection in her eyes.

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## Chapter 15

### On the Road to La Paz

I stumbled into Huajtajata, a little town that wasn't on my map, on the outskirts of Lake Titicaca. It was night time, and I was worn out and aching from the long ride. I walked through the tiny farm village. There were no lights, and all I could see was the shadows of rooftops through the starlight. My legs were soaked after falling into a ditch. I could smell the faint twinges of llama dung. All I wanted was to find some place to sleep, and maybe some cold water to give myself a sponge bath. My right knee quivered. I could feel the ligaments swelling. This was typical, since at about 10:00 PM, most villages were already asleep.

I knocked on the door of a farm house at the waterfront. I had enough with the wandering and pushing of my heavily laden bike. All I wanted was a small corner to prop up my tent and sleep. A woman's voice cut through the air.

*"Who is there?"*

*"Good evening Miss. My name is David. I'm looking for a hostel or a place for a tent."*

A small boy's face peeked out from behind the door.

*"Sir, there's a hostel over there. In front over there."* He said as he pointed.

*"Over there? But there are no lights over there."*

*"Yes, but you have to knock. Knock hard."*

*"Thank you."*

I walked a few blocks until I came to what could've been a parking lot, except it was concrete. There was a two story building, and its dark outline rose up like a tower in the little village of single story homes. I dumped my bike on a telephone pole and walked into the courtyard.

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*"Hello! Good evening! Is there anybody here?"* I yelled. All the dogs in the neighborhood started barking. A light turned on, and it cut like beacon in the pitch black of the lake and the village. As an elderly man walked down the stairs, I felt my knee give out. It held up for 80 kilometers, and now it was time to let it rest. I biked for almost five years, through longer routes than this, but the heavy load on my bike put added stress on my knees. I made a mental note not to get stuck in one place for too long. Two months in Cuzco deteriorated my body muscularly. In the high beam of a flood light, I saw a bright red face come out the door, wrinkled from the sun and age.

*"Hi! Please sir, I'm trying to find a room. Do you have one available?"*

*"Yes, yes."*

The old man let me in, and showed me my room in the two story, half finished hostel. There were no working showers. After getting the room and a bucket of water, I gave myself a sponge bath in the cold, and then slept. My body rested on the soft bed, and I felt the weariness of my muscles.

The next morning, I ate breakfast in the restaurant attached to the hostel. There wasn't a single traveler, tourist, or even any locals in the hostel. On the lake, the Aymara worked their nets catching trout. I sat watching the peaceful movement of clouds in the horizon.

I munched on a buttered piece of bread. The dog that barked at me the night before trotted up to me, and pawed me to pet him. Bolivian dogs were much friendlier than Peruvian dogs.

Bolivia is the 2nd poorest country in the entire western hemisphere. Yet, it was largely unspoiled, spectacular in its landscapes and people, and as a whole, it was peaceful. With a landscape that towered above 4000 meters, to lush, tropical rain forests, mountain cloud forests, and everything in between, I was in the Tibet of the Americas. The locals weren't pushy, and the dogs liked to be petted. I liked Bolivia. Its vibe was much more tranquil than Peru. It was also an adventurer's paradise, since it was still untamed, and occasionally, politically unstable.

As I ate, I felt my knee throb. I'd have to spend a day there just to heal enough to bike the next eighty eight kilometers to La Paz the next morning. I made a mental note to sell off the load of tools and spare parts that I carried, in La Paz. It was a lot of weight, and I figured I could travel for another week and a half on those funds. So far, every long term biker I met didn't need spare parts. I met a Canadian couple who were mountain bike touring through Bolivia, and they recommended keeping the parts clean and in good repair.

I walked around the restaurant, and browsed through the newspaper clippings on the walls. There was Thor Heyerdahl, the Norwegian scientist, rogue archaeologist, bane of academic archeology, and captain of the *Kon Tiki*, the famous balsa raft expedition to the Polynesian islands. Another clipping had Kitin Muñoz, a Spaniard who sailed a reed boat from Arica, Chile midway to Rapa Nui, also known as Easter Island. He sank in the torrid waters. There was an article on Phil Buck, an American explorer and navigator from Ashfield, Massachusetts, who successfully completed a reed boat voyage to Rapa Nui, and was planning another one to Japan, Australia, and the Polynesian Islands.

I looked around me, when I began to realize in astonishment, just where I was. I was in the home of Maximus Catari, chief engineer of the ancient techniques and arts of reed boat building, and he was, with all probability, the only expert in the world in those techniques. The possibility that ancient man was sophisticated enough to explore the world's oceans in these reed boats was captivating. That meant that the entire world was being navigated long before the current time of "academic theory", and by cultures that are traditionally put down as "primitive." My personal dream was to explore the other planets as an astronaut. That's been my focus for as long as I could remember. In truth though, I'm an explorer and a wanderer at heart. So there I was, a former engineer of a NASA rocket project, staying in the hostel of the engineer of some of the most daring expeditions that the world had ever known.

Mr. Catari spent part of the morning and the afternoon taking me through a tour of his little museum, as well as some videos of his crafts exploits. Although what I worked on was exciting, what he worked on was far more daring.

Mr. Catari made reed boats in a way that demonstrated a deep, and sophisticated knowledge. The boats weren't just clumps of reeds held together. They were wrapped in a special way, where the inside cross section of the reed became a sort of pontoon, with a shell of reeds around it. They would make several of these pontoons, each about a foot to two feet wide, depending on the scale of the vessel, making a boat that looked like a reed version of Noah's ark. We walked through his museum, and he let me watch a video of Kitin Munoz's voyage. As he showed me around, I noticed that Mr Catari had a contentedness about him, and it intrigued me.

He appeared to simply be the owner of a tiny hostel and restaurant, and yet he designed and built some of the most intrepid exploration devices known to man. He had fame, recognition, TV appearances, documentaries, everything. Yet, he

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was perfectly content living in this remote village, making tiny models of boats to sell to the tourists, and making five bucks off of me, the only tourist he's seen in months.

Mr. Catari didn't say much, when I tried to ask him how he felt about his exploits. He just nodded, and smiled, and left the room when I was done with the video. I spent the rest of the day resting, writing, and watching the sunset.

\*\*\*\*\*

La Paz is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. The city is situated inside of a canyon. When I rode on the Altiplano, I saw high, deserted plains, small villages on the sides, and enormous, bare mountains. It was a landscape high, harsh, forbidding, and at times, alien. As I approached La Paz, I still couldn't see it because it's inside the bottom of the canyon, and along the sides. First, I rode through the campesino slum of El Alto, the satellite city that bordered the high plains. Then suddenly, the clouds broke away and an enormous bowl of a city inside the canyon, with great mountain ranges and peaks shimmering in the distance, greeted me. La Paz, even though it's in a canyon, is still 3900 meters above sea level. Clouds and all sorts of micro climates form on the sides.

Sky scrapers stood along side the colonial buildings, while local campesino women populated the streets and markets in their traditional rainbow colored garb and bowler hats. Men with cows walked up the canyon to the markets in El Alto, while a brand new Toyota would drive down the road. It's a city where the ancient, colonial, and the modern have mixed together on all levels. There's a magical charm about La Paz, and it came out when I wandered through the streets and the markets. Maybe it was all the Aymara and Quechua folks dressed in their traditional outfits going to the market and daily life in El Alto, or it was the vibrant student population nearby Sopocachi, where the University of San Andres held classes, or it was the night life of the clubs and expensive restaurants in the warmer, higher air pressure Southern Zone. There was the ancient colonial section higher up the canyon from the city center. I didn't know, I couldn't put my finger on it. The air seemed cleaner, and the people were friendly and vibrant. I smiled, they smiled, everyone smiled! So, I stayed in town for a few days to take care of errands.

At an internet cafe, I found that my brother emailed me that the package of prints and film from the forbidden site had arrived. I initially sent several rolls of film, 2 packages of prints of the strange site, and 2 drawn pictures. When it arrived, he told me that there were no prints, and that the package had been tampered with.

## Chapter 16

# The World's Most Dangerous Road

“The World’s Most Dangerous Road... what a name”, I thought as I ascended the heights from La Paz to La Cumbre in the packed micro. I recently met up with two other travelers, Mitch, a British cyclist, and Joe, another American cyclist from Washington. We got together in a La Paz cafe, and then we decided to go and see for ourselves just how dangerous “World’s Most Dangerous Road,” was. We wanted to take the road for the next sixty kilometers to Coroico, the cloud forest’s emerald village which lay in the mountains at the edge of the Amazon.

The road from La Cumbre to Coroico claims about twenty six vehicles a year. That figures to about one vehicle every two weeks falling off the sides of the road to a definite death one kilometer below.

The road was the only route to Coroico and Rurenabague in the Amazon Basin, and there was no luck in trying to find an alternative route. As a result, most drivers took some time out to pray before heading off down the road.

Presumably, it was a lot safer to traverse the road on mountain bicycles, since bikes were tiny compared to the buses and trucks that drove through. The width of the road in some places was just wide enough for a single vehicle to pass through. Of course, if you’re stuck at on one of those sections, than you either got run off into the abyss below, or you flattened yourself on the side of the canyon, and hoped that your head didn’t get taken off with a side mirror. The attraction was the sheer downhill. Seventy kilometers of downhill meant several hours of high speed, white knuckle, and moderately technical riding.

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We got to the top of the road, where a few Bolivians were having trouble with a flat tire. Joe and I pulled out our patch kits and pumps, and did some dirty work to help repair their bikes. Then we went to the edge, had a lunch of bananas, tossed the peels over the sides, and looked down. We didn't see much, since there were clouds blanketing the entire way. Visibility was about six feet at most.

"Nice bit of pea soup we've got here." I said.

"Alright you girls, let's get going. Vamos." Replied Mitch in his London accent.

"Last one at the bottom is... alive!" I yelled back as I hopped on my bike. Joe laughed at that as he hopped on his bike.

We took off. As soon as I got on the bike, I noticed that we were speeding at about thirty five kilometers an hour, and soon we were flying at fifty five kilometers an hour. Soon, hail pounded our helmets and faces. Visibility was still just six feet, and at the speed we were going, sheer cliffs appeared in front of us instantly. It took some deft maneuvering to handle the curves. I felt like I was flying in a cloud, and my fingers started to freeze up. The first twenty five kilometers was tarmac and relatively safe, but the last thirty five was dirt and rock. Since it was cut into the side of a canyon, with widths in some areas that were just wide enough for a car, and tight tunnels, where any kind of vehicular encounter meant death, I made sure to yell out what was coming up.

We passed by many head stones with plaques, memorializing the numerous victims of the road. Three weeks before us, three cyclists fell to their deaths over a curve, since they couldn't see and react in the mists. Given the risks, we were dancing on the razor's edge.

We dropped about 500 meters in elevation, and I could feel the pressure change in my ears. Crickets made a cacophony around us as we entered the upper parts of the cloud forest. The hail turned into rain, and then a light mist. Mud caked us and our bikes.

As we descended, we looked around to see if the mist would clear. As we rounded a corner, we were able to see the mists clear just enough to see a vehicle on the canyon opposite of us attempting to go through the road. The vehicle moved slowly. Its wheels were right on the edge of the road, off a sheer cliff. I got close to the edge to see if I could see the bottom. I gave up after my eyes scanned down to about a kilometer.

I looked to the vehicle. Dirt and rocks were falling down from where the vehicle's tires were gripping the edge. I watched, and hoped that nothing would happen. Yet at the same time, it felt like watching those tasteless videos on television, where



you wanted to see a disaster unfold in front of you. We stood there, mesmerized and watched the vehicle make its way through.

Mitch decided to take off first towards the cliff, and I pedaled after him. There were sections where whole parts of the road were falling off into the abyss. Mitch tossed a rock down, and we strained to hear any impact sounds. Nothing.

"I'd say that's bottomless." I said.

"Shit. That's a bloody long way down." Replied Mitch.

We stared at the tire marks and tracks of vehicles that weren't so lucky. The skeleton of a tire loomed through the mist, and we got the shivers looking at it. We took off again, and this time I took the lead, and headed down the canyon gorge. We stopped at sections where a wall towered above us for hundreds of feet, and a waterfall at the top poured on us. All around us was verdant, tropical cloud forest, and flocks of parakeets. There were other birds, but we didn't see them. We heard them. Their sounds were unlike anything I had ever heard in my life. One sounded like a wooden drum and flute, while another made a "ra ta ta ta twaaaaan" sound. The sound reminded me of an electronic synthesizer. I got off my bike and walked a small portion of the road just to listen to the sounds. Later we saw the giant wing span of a condor, it had to be six feet wide, as it soared the thermals of the canyon. It looked like a Pterodactyl in flight, in our journey into a lost and prehistoric world.

After about four more hours of twists, cliffs, canyons, waterfalls, high speed descents, rocky road, and lots of mud, we came to a turn and saw below the cloud line. The town of Coroico poked through the mists and clouds.

Both Joe and Mitch cycled for the last seven kilometers. It was an uphill of 1000 meters in elevation to Coroico. I tried to keep up with them, but then I encountered engine trouble. My chain kept getting stuck when I shifted, and it forced me to stick with the highest gear. I did a slow motion, and painful cadence up the hill, as I cursed my bike. Along the way I lobbed stones at dogs fiercely guarding their territory.

Cursing your bike for its mechanical problems is unproductive, and yelling attracts inquisitive locals.

*"What's this crazy gringo doing, yelling at his bike?"* Asked one local. I gave him a dirty look and began walking my bike up the path. I had no vocabulary in my mind to describe the problem. All I wanted was to get to Coroico, take a hot shower, eat some food, and get some sleep.

I looked back at the winding cliff road that came up from the canyon. I did come up a long way, and on a malfunctioning gear too. I relaxed and smiled when

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I looked westward to the sunset. The red glows highlighted the clouds floating up the forest as howler monkeys made mating calls in the evening. When I arrived into the town, I was exhausted. I sat in a café, muddied and bloodied, and I was a curiosity for the locals passing by.

## **Chapter 17**

# **Salar De Uyuni**

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## **Chapter 18**

# **Potosi**

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## **Chapter 19**

# **Sucre**

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## Chapter 20

### Tiwanaku

When I appeared at the bus terminal in La Paz, I figured Christian didn't receive my phone message from the day before. So I walked over to a man in the phone tienda and started to dial his home number. I suddenly felt a tap on my back, and turned around.

"Dave! Hey! Sheesh, you... I was shocked when I got your message, and immediately, I ran here for you. I just got your message this morning!"

"Oops! Sorry, but I had problems when I was calling you. But, I am here."

"OK David. Well, it's good that you're here. My God! I had so much planned for us to do when I thought you were coming five days earlier!"

"I know, but I fell in love, then I fell in pain. I had a liver problem for about five days that took me out, and my girlfriend wanted me to stay and get better before I left."

"What did you do?"

"I had five avocados every morning for breakfast."

"You had what? Oh my god! Just once a week is bad enough! They are almost pure fat!"

"I know. But for me, avocados are like gold, because their about one or two dollars a piece. Here, one or two bucks gets you thirty! I got a little greedy. Man, I am never eating another avocado for several years, at least."

Christian smiled. We found a taxi and got in, loading my bicycle and gear in behind.

"I had so much... Aye. Dave, I could kill you."

"I know, I know. I will only be here for about three days before I take off for

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Panama.”

“Well, I have to go to Santa Cruz for about four days to meet my professor regarding a paper for my thesis. So that means we will have...” He checked his watch, “ten hours together.”

“Oh no! Well, in that case, I’d better fill you in on some of the things I had found. Did you make a copy of that book you were talking about?”

“No, but we can do that along the way. First lets drop your things off and get you washed up. We don’t have much bloody time, but at least I can show you the strange bowl with the cuneiforms on it.”

“Cuneiforms? What’s that doing here? Aren’t those supposed to be Sumerian, you know, from all the way around to the other side of the world in the south of Iraq? What are those doing here?”

“Well, they’re from Tiwanaku, and the archaeologists assumed that it’s Incan writing.”

“Except the Incans used quipu knots in colored strings to record their history. Incans don’t have writing,”

“Aye, I have much to show you Dave,” Christian sighed, “if only you came earlier.”

Along the way, I explained some more about what I had gathered with regards to the Planetary Device to Christian. He nodded his head and cursed me for not coming sooner, and not staying longer. Oh well. I knew I was coming back to Bolivia. It wasn’t just for the device now. I had a woman now. We soon got to his home, a pleasant and small pink house on the side of the canyon that made up La Paz.

We dropped off my things in the lower house, and went up to the upper house. The house was composed of two houses, one on top of the other. His mother, Elsa, was in the kitchen.

“*Hello David!*” She said in her powerful Bolivian accent. I could always tell a Bolivian was talking with the way they tended to heavily accentuate the beginning of their words.

“*How are you? We were waiting for you earlier!*”

“*Uh yeah, but I fell in love with my girlfriend*”

“*Oh ho?! You have a girlfriend? What is she?*”

“*She’s studying in law at the University of San Francisco Xavier*”

“*So! David, then that is good, no? You are a scientist and engineer, who deals with the exactitudes of life. She is a social and law worker, which should balance*

*the two of you properly. Very good choice, young one."*

"Uh. Yes. May I use your shower?" I'd been sitting in the bus for five hours, without a scrubbing or a brushing, and by now I was feeling dusty and outright grungy.

"No. You may not" She smiled, "*David, we're Latinos. My house is your house. This is our custom.*"

I smiled back and went to get my things for the shower. After cleaning up, Christian, Elsa, and Claudia had lunch with me. Chyang was working at the time. We decided that Chyang and Claudia would take me out to see the Valley of the Moon and Tiwanaku before I left. Christian and I would visit the museum with the cuneiform bowl and make copies of the strange book he had in his possession.

The book was the reason for me to take some time out in La Paz. Christian had in his possession a rare, strange book, published only in Bolivia, and it was written only in Spanish. The book was one of a kind, and it was about the hyper-dimensional mathematics of Tiwanaku, the oldest site in the Americas, which has several pyramids and gates. The book, "*La Teoria de Unification en 10 Dimensiones*", translated as "*The Theory of Unification in 10 Dimensions*", was written by a Bolivian computer scientist, Xavier Amaru Ruiz Garcia, who was an expert in Tetralectics, a postmodern logic utilizing four dimensions. Mr. Ruiz, a computer and electrical engineer with a specialty in digital communications and computational science, worked as a test engineer for various high tech companies in Santa Clara, California. His expertise was in number theory and its test applications in computation via hardware and software. He took the formulas derived from the geometric inscriptions on the Gate of the Sun, and programmed various test programs with them; among them was a new, and highly efficient prime number generator, which utilized the algorithms derived from the Gate.

I set aside the nagging question of, "what the hell are advanced mathematics that derive advanced computer algorithms that run on modern day computers doing on an ancient relic of the Aymaran peoples," when I noticed that derivations of pi, phi, as well as some modular functions of Ramujan, which are the core mathematics for hyper dimensional math, came from the Sun Gate.

I puzzled over the book as Christian and I walked to the museum which housed the cuneiform bowl. We walked into the museum, as he guided and explained some of the local customs in exhibit. We then walked into the main museum which housed the artifacts from Tiwanaku, and then we found the bowl.

The bowl was carved out of a very large stone block, unlike all of the other

bowls which were made of ceramic. Inscribed on the sides of the bowl were symbols of all shapes, and I noticed an ongoing pattern of the number three in many of the symbols. In the center of the bowl was a carving of a man in a fetal position, with his hands at his ears, and the thumbs pointing into his head. We had with us an old Bolivian newspaper article which had some basic descriptions of the symbols on the bowl, including a lot of mathematics.

I put the data of my journey together. First, there were the red skinned Aymaran people, who spoke an inorganic, highly logical language that formed the basis of a computer program, Atamiri. Atamiri is the creation of Iván Guzmán de Rojas, who used Aymara as the mother language for the Atamiri computer programming language, and Atamiri is used to translate human languages from one language to another, like Russian to Italian, for example. And, it's one of the fastest translation systems on the planet.

There is no other language like Aymara. No other human based language was proven to program a computer, with the exception of Aymara. There are some languages that experts claim can be used to program a computer, but so far, *only* Aymara was *actually used* to program a computer. I put together the flood of information: a spoken language that forms the woven threads of the Aymaran culture, and was used to create a programming language, and now I had a book which derived several fundamental mathematical constants, highly advanced modular mathematics which formed the basis of hyper-dimensional physics, and on top of that, was plugged into a computer as an algorithm to compute prime numbers in a way that was more efficient than modern day methods.

"What do you think?" Asked Christian as I ran my fingers along the symbols. I had too much information in my head, so I put it aside, and savored the roughness and smoothness of the stone, as I traced out the symbols on the bowl. It was a question that requested a lot, and I didn't have an answer for. So, I stuck to the bowl.

"Where did this come from?" I asked.

"Tiwanaku. But it has writing on it. I always think of the ancient Sumerian tablets with cuneiforms on them when I look at this"

I counted along the sides. The peaks amounted to three. The occurrence of three, for some odd reason, came up a lot in the patterns.

"Can you take pictures of this thing for me, and send it to me?" I asked him.

"Sure. I want to see if I can decipher the text as well. No one's done that before."

“This is the only thing they’ve found with writing on it? It seems pretty significant. Everything else here is in ceramic.”

We went to find Christian’s sister, Claudia. Claudia, Chyang’s wife, was an architecture student studying in the University. Christian had to leave and catch his bus to Santa Cruz. I had two more days left, and now Claudia and Chyang would be my guides.

“*David! How are you!*” said Chyang in his rich Santa Cruz accent. Chyang Hwang was a first generation Bolivian. He moved to Bolivia when he was six years old from Taiwan. He grew up in Santa Cruz, and like the Cruzeños, he had a habit of not using the consonants s and z at the end of his words.

We ate dinner and discussed our plans. The plan for the next day would be to visit the valley of the moon in the afternoon, and on Sunday, if there was time, to make a trip to Tiwanaku. We talked about the differences in culture between South America and North America.

“*You know, Chyang, something here strikes me as very different from the States*”

“*What’s that?*”

“*Well, when I was with my girlfriend, people thought it was normal. They even thought we were married. I never had any problems.*”

“*Problems?*”

“*Yes, racial problems. I always had hostility from other people whenever I was with another woman in the States. What was it like for you?*”

“*Here? No, we are not like the gringos. Their racism is very well known to us. Here, we are comrades, all of us. Here, the problem isn’t always race, although that can be an issue between the whiter of the population and the more indigenous. That comes up from time to time because of the colonial brutality. Those days never really ended, especially with what the gringos are trying to do to us, they are a constant reminder for all of us.*”

“*What about for Asians?*”

“*Asians? We are part of society. We always have been, and always will be.*”

“*You never had problems when you were with your wife?*”

“*Never. Most Asian men here marry the local women. I’ve never heard of anyone having a problem. You have to understand, David, here, mixing is the least of our worries. Economics is foremost. Class-ism is the primary problem.*”

The next day we went to the Valley of the Moon. There were natural stalactite like mounds, sticking out of the ground and made from the surrounding mud. A canyon about 300 meters deep lay off in the distance, and as we hiked through, I

couldn't help but wonder about how the water had to have flowed to carve out such an eerie landscape. It was a whole other world, all made out of mud.

Later that night, I cooked dinner for the family, making an Indian curry dish. Elsa recently acquired diabetes, and she really wanted to change her diet from the Bolivian diet, which was just meat and empty carbohydrates, to a vegetarian one to help alleviate her disease.

The next day was my last in Bolivia, so we headed out to Tiwanaku. The ancient site of Tiwanaku is, by all accounts, probably the oldest American culture. By some dates, it's probably even older than the Egyptian culture. Set out on the Altiplano at 3900 meters above sea level, all that remains of Tiwanaku are two pyramids surrounded with courtyards, and gates of unknown purpose. To the casual observer, it isn't very impressive, but not to someone who knows his math and science, and most importantly, engineering. The stones were far bigger than the 250 and 300 ton stones at Sacsayhuaman. The source of the stones was found miles away, there were no uncovered road systems, and they laid about the site at random.

I stood at the site of the pyramid of Puma Punku. The stones were the size of a bus, and even wider. One stone went further into the ground, and it was the size of a small house. This was the stone that was on top of the pyramid. Our machines of today can't lift a medium sized stone in Macchu Picchu or Sacsayhuaman. So, how in the world did these carved stones, which dwarfed those stones several times over in weight and size, get dragged, carved, setup, and then knocked and tossed about like this? At 3600 meters above sea level, the site was far above the tree line, so trees couldn't grow in the area due to the altitude. Course, since it was the altiplano, that meant there were no size-able, structurally useful trees for hundreds of miles around. There were trees in the lower altitude areas of La Paz, but they were Eucalyptus, which were recently imported in the 18th century from Australia. Several hundred miles to the south southeast, was an area of pristine Altiplano forest, with the native kinds of trees adapted to growing in those conditions. None of those trees were taller than five feet, and they resembled shrubs and bushes. To find trees of any usable quality, one had to go several hundred miles north east to the cloud forest, which also didn't have structurally useful trees, until one reached a significant distance into the Bolivian portion of the Amazon. Therefore, to even get structurally useful trees for any kind of construction required significant and extensive engineering and logistics. And that's just to get materials that might have a slim chance at moving, cutting, and transporting the gargantuan stone blocks.

The stone work of one of the blocks was exquisite. There was a large, perfectly

cut, smooth, rectangular slab with no sign of erosion. It was about a foot and a half thick, and it measured eight feet by ten feet. It looked like it was cut with a laser, since the lines were perfectly square. Weren't the ancient Aymarans supposed to have just stone age or bronze tools? In today's day and age, to achieve such high level precision required diamond edged, tungsten alloy, or laser tools which, of course requires several hundred years of a body of engineering, science, and experience.

The courtyard with 188 faces of stone was also strange. Stone carvings of faces, stuck out of the wall. I counted 188 in total, each one different from the other, and every single one of them was defaced or damaged from what looked like striking blows. We walked over to the gate of the sun, and a strange stone with a hole that amplified sound. But none of those were as startling as the discovery that I made on the east of the site.

In the least impressive section, which also had a giant stone slab that was tossed about, under the mud and water, was a stone slab that reminded me of the stone Marco and I had found on top of the mountain. I got curious, and something inside of me said to stick my hand into the muddy water and feel around. I did, and I found something that I did not expect to find at all.

I found a spiral, much like the spiral Marco and I had found on the other site.

*"Oh my god! I found a spiral!"* I said, as Chyang and his wife ran to me in surprise.

*"Why isn't this mentioned in any of the books about Tiwanaku?"* I asked.

Chyang's wife got in the water with me and started to feel around for another spiral.

*"Here! Here's another!"* She said. Chyang looked on with surprise.

In total, we discovered several spirals, all buried in the mud. For some reason, the books glossed over it, and didn't mention the spirals carved on the stones. Spirals are considered a common thing around the world by many archaeologists, who consider them to be little more than fertility symbols. Yet, these symbols were around sites that were purported to have strange energies flowing through them. These sites were often considered sacred by their respective cultures. I had a hunch that the symbols meant more than a simplistic, materialistic explanation.

Finally, while exploring Puma Punku, I found Elio's discovery. I found the symbol that he said surprised him the most. It was on the biggest stone, which was on the top of the pyramid. The slab had an "official" weight of 150 tons, but the beast far surpassed the size of the stones in Peru which weighed officially at 300

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tons.

On the rock, I found a very well weathered carving, and I pointed it out to Chyang's wife. We stood there staring at it before I finally asked her what she thought of it.

*"What does that look like to you?"* I asked her.

*"Fertilization."* She said.

*"Exactly."* I replied.

We stood there staring in disbelief at a sperm cell fertilizing an egg cell, imprinted on a gigantic ancient slab of stone, weathered away by thousands of years, made by a society that, according to western archeology, was at best bronze age, never had a microscope, or the means to see inside of a womb.

*"I have to get to the Mayan Empire"* I said, as we looked in the harsh sunlight. The windswept plain confronted me, as I felt the weight of the mystery grip my mind and heart.



# **Central America**



## **Chapter 21**

# **Costa Rica, Nicaragua**

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## Chapter 22

# Honduras

I rode hard through the west coast of northern Nicaragua. Heavily armed ex-contras roamed the eastern interior, so I chose to avoid them by taking the Pacific route. Also, there were numerous left over soldiers from the Salvadorian Honduran conflicts, so the locals constantly warned me,

*“The interior is dangerous. We don’t want you to die.”*

Despite following their advice, I encountered M-16 toting Honduran troops upon entry. They didn’t bother me, since I didn’t look like a typical tourist, but the experience alerted me to the fact that I was traveling through recovering war zones.

At the border station of Nicaragua and Honduras, I met two Norwegian cyclists, Jans and Sven. They started their journey at Tierra Del Fuego, in Chile, and would finish at Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, covering the ends of the planet by bicycle. Driven to complete the journey as quickly as possible, they were a little cold when I asked if I could tag along. Fearful that I would slow them down, I reassured them that it was just for the day.

I had my reasons. After traveling alone for so long, I hungered just to have a decent conversation. Although I didn’t mind going solo, the lonely nights were taking a toll. My only partner in this affair was my bicycle, and it wasn’t an exemplary conversationalist.

Sven, a tall red head with a beard, and I biked the main road onto a dirt path, which lead into a town that didn’t appear on our maps. Surprised it existed, yet also hungry, we loaded up on gourmet items - spaghetti, ketchup, salt, and Top Ramen. The other cyclist, Jans, went down the road to find fuel for our stoves, while Sven and I got back to the main road. Night settled upon us, but Jans failed to show up.

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Hours passed in silence. Where was Jans?

Suddenly, a light flashed in the distance, and a short man in a bicycling jersey walked over to us. I spoke to him, since I was fluent in Spanish.

*"Hi, how are you?"* I smiled.

*"I'm fine. Are you friends with a cyclist?"* He replied.

*"Yes yes! He's got blond hair?"*

*"Yes! He's in my house. Please, come with me."*

It was at this point that I learned about Central American hospitality. Despite their conditions, they were surrounded by hospitality, warmth, and friendliness. "Hey guys!" Yelled Jans, who stood behind a makeshift barbed wire fence. We followed the man into his mud and adobe home. It was roofed in corrugated metal and enclosed with plastic and canvas. The toilet was a hole in the ground, surrounded by 4 pieces of wood. Water was received about two or three times a week, and they often depended on rainfall. I later asked the Honduran if he was a cyclist. After he replied yes, he explained his reasons for the invitation.

*"I'm also a cyclist, and we're all brothers in the world. Therefore, I want to extend my hands for brotherhood"*

*"Then my brother, we will receive your gifts. Many thanks, sir."* I replied.

We walked into his home, and entered. In the dim light of a candle, we sat down on several aluminum chairs on the bare dirt floor. I looked around, and sitting on a broken TV were several cycling trophies. "Campeon de Honduras, 2000," said one trophy. On his jersey, in large letters, were the words, "El Campeon". Curious, I observed him. He was about 1.57 meters tall, dark, thin, twenty one years old, and with well defined quadriceps dressed in cycling shorts. Noting my sense of surprise, he led me to a corner of the room. On the wall were two bicycles, one of which was a Trek 5000, a two thousand dollar bicycle. He then showed me his prize - two Italian racing bicycles made of carbon fiber and specialized aluminum. Each bicycle was worth about three thousand dollars. He used one and his younger brother used the other.

*"The champion?"* I asked in surprise.

*"Yes, of Honduras"*

*"My name is David. What is your name?"*

*"Melvin. Melvin Betancourt."*

Later, his family came in, and because the Norwegians couldn't speak Spanish, I interpreted for most of the night. The mother, father, and his brother, all lived, literally, under one roof and in one room. His mother took the food we bought,

and cooked for all of us. We had a wonderful time with the dinner conversation. I told jokes, while the family laughed as we ate spaghetti with ketchup, and fried plantains.

Still, being in Melvin's presence elicited a sense of admiration. How was it possible, in this poor home, that he could maintain his training and diet? I thought about the pampered people that I used to train with in the gym. I remembered how they complained about a lack of this or not having that. In the US, we had everything at our disposal: science, nutrition, equipment, and experts. He didn't.

*"Do you find it difficult to train living here?"*

*"I was born in this, and with God, I do what I can."* I noted the strength in his voice, as well as a sense of resignation.

*"I admire you. You have done much, and you have much strength in your heart."*

It was inspirational to meet Melvin. Despite his circumstances, he won through determination and hard work. Still, a question scratched my mind; how could he afford such expensive bicycles? The cost of just one of those bikes would help lift his family out of poverty.

*"Are you a professional?"*

*"Ha ha! People here do not consider bicycling as a sport to pay for. We are not like football players (soccer) or baseball players. We are a minority here. Everything I do comes out of my pocket, and with the support of my family."*

*"Then, how can you buy your bicycle? They're very expensive."* I carefully inquired. I didn't want to be too intrusive.

*"They're donations from an association for poor athletes."*

*"Why not sell the Trek to help your family?"*

Hesitantly, with his eyes looking at the floor, he replied, *"no one can buy it. It is expensive for the people here."*

I didn't want to pry any further when I felt his shame about his poverty. In the glow of the candlelight, we told stories, swapped training tips, and talked about ways to exercise. He would get up at five in the morning, eat a light breakfast, and then bicycle about three to four hundred kilometers. When he got back home, he would eat lunch, and help out his younger brother to sell food on the highway. They used a wagon attached to a bicycle. It was a rough life, and it trained him well. I lived and breathed training science and diet, and it baffled me when Melvin told me of his daily routines. Melvin subsisted on a diet of honey, whole grain cereal and milk for breakfast. He also ate whatever his mother threw at him. He

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had no access to vitamins, information, or experts. His training equipment was the Honduran roads, a keen sense of his body, tropical sun, rain, and hills. I asked him what his true motivation was.

*“To go to the Olympics.”* If he made it to the Olympics, it would be a great victory for his homeland, the poor, and a testament to his determination.

*“Have you competed outside the Honduras?”*

*“I want too, but it is difficult to find money to do that.”*

The next morning, Melvin decided to escort us for a portion of our journey. As he darted ahead of me, I silently cheered him on. I swore that when I got home, I would find a sponsor to help him. Still, sponsor or no sponsor, I knew he would find the determination to compete and win. I took that inspiration inside, and I resolved to complete my journey.

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I met a man in the Honduras, a one armed Canadian cyclist, in the foothills the day after I left Melvin’s home with Jans and Sven. Jans and Sven carried little equipment in their bags, so with their light weight, they took off. I meandered down the road, and slowly pedaled through the hot sunlight of the mid morning. Suddenly, I heard a man yelling at me in English.

*“Hey! Hey you! Hey! Stop!”*

I looked at him in surprise and stopped my bike as he ran and jumped over the barbed wire. He was half naked except for his bicycle shorts, lean, and burnt like a lobster. He had a big white patch of sunblock on his nose, and dark sunglasses, as well as short cropped, sun burnt, blond hair.

*“Who are you?”* I said in surprise.

*“I’m a cyclist, like you. I left my gear up there.”* He said as he pointed to a tent and a colorful, rainbow colored, Mayan hammock next to his bike.

*“Oh. What are you doing up there?”*

*“The same thing you probably do when you need to piss and camp at night, eh?”*

*“Oh, yeah, You’re from Canada, aren’t you?”* I asked noticing his accent.

*“Yup, Toronto, say, you look Canadian. Are you from the Oganagan Valley, or Vancouver?”*

*“Uh, no... what makes you think that?”*

*“Cause you look like one, and you’re a lot nicer and friendlier than Americans. That and your accent is very Canadian.”*



We laughed and talked some more on the side of the road.

“What’s your name?”

“Jim. And you?”

“David.”

“Well, nice to meet you David. So you been traveling on a bicycle too, I can see. Where are you headed?”

“I’m planning on going through the Honduras to Guatemala. Say, what happened to your arm?” I asked, as I looked at his left arm. It was emaciated, and it stayed in a pocket that was sewn into his bicycle shorts.

“I lost the use of my left arm in an accident.”

“And you’re on a bicycle?”

“Yup. I make very good use of my other arm.” He said as he flexed his right. It was twice the size of his left, the result of lifting and carrying his bike. I looked at his shoulder, and saw the long scar there.

“So where did you start, Jim?”

“I started in Mexico. I’ve been on the road for about 3 months now.”

“And with one arm?”

“Oh yeah. I’m heading to Colombia. I want to work in Bogota, Columbia, when I get there.” He said.

“What? Are you nuts? The place is a war zone! I ran into a bunch of refugees in Nicaragua, and they said the same thing. No one wants to go there.” I replied. The war situation was getting out of hand in Columbia. This was the USA’s Vietnam part three, after Afghanistan, which was Vietnam part two.

“That’s exactly why I’m going there! Cause no one else wants to go, so it’ll just be me and the Colombians!”

“That’s actually not a bad idea. How are you going to get through the Darian Gap?”

The Darian Gap was a swampy, tropical separation between the South American Continent and the Central American Isthmus. It was several hundred miles of swamp, rain forest, and hostile native tribes and FARC guerrilla fighters. Every story I was told about it included something about going, and never coming back. How the tellers got their stories when no one ever came back usually made me suspicious. The native tribes themselves were among the most isolated in the planet. Some had never contacted an outsider before. Unlike the tribes in the Amazon, there weren’t really any customs for greetings, except with a gun, bows and arrows, spears, darts, and anything else that guaranteed it to be the very last greeting.

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"I figured I'll take the ferry from Colon to Cartagena, Columbia. I just want to get to Bogota."

"I heard that was a really nice place actually. Bogota is supposed to be one of the most educated, and progressive cities of all South America. It's a really enlightened, progressive, and nice place to live... except for the terrorists." I replied.

"Ah, I'll figure a way through. I mean, come on, what have they got with me? I'm lame in one arm. I've got nothing left to prove. I already rode through Mexico, and *that* was dangerous. Besides, I'm not American. They're not hunting for my nationality. The only problem is I look like one."

"Say, how was El Salvador?"

"It was great! You know, everyone back home says to stay away from there, but as soon as I got there, they're all like, Hey, how are you? What are you doing? Can you come over for dinner?"

"Really?"

"Really! It's not as dangerous as they say! The people are really nice there. And because so few people go there due to it's reputation, you'll have a great time."

We parted ways, and I rode up the road for the next two days. I stayed in small town hostels near the ocean, and tried to sleep as next door, young couples looking for privacy from their homes had sex on creaking, loud, metal bed frames. It was a little depressing to hear them, especially when my girlfriend was so far away. I washed my clothes in the sink, and hung them on the balcony to dry in the warm westerly Pacific Ocean wind. On the third day, in the mid morning, I rode to a fork in the road. One went straight to El Salvador. The other, went to the western areas of the Honduras and on to Guatemala. I stood at the fork, straddled my bike, looked at my map, and then at the fork. It was close to noon, and I would have to make a decision.

I turned left, and rode down the road. Soon, I saw the border station as I cycled down the road. At the station, officers in their air conditioned chambers stamped my passport, and operated on their computers. I biked through the gates, and about a mile down the road, some little kids saw me and threw some rocks at me while they laughed. I ignored them and kept biking. The air was blazing hot, and the air above the road shimmered with waves of hot air, but I kept biking.

As I biked, I felt the sun's heat on me get stronger and stronger. I drank some water from my bottles, and continued to bike, but my head started to feel light. Then I felt an itch in my skull. It started small, but with each pedal, I felt the itch slowly turn into a screw. Suddenly, my head started to spin, and the road swam up

above my head. I felt something land on my head with a loud “thud”, and the next thing I knew, I saw blue sky. My bike came down with a crash. I’d collapsed onto the road, and I saw large bright spots in my eyes.

My head continued to spin, and as I laid on the tarmac, and my breathing was short. I grabbed my helmet, took it off, grabbed my head, and curled up in a fetal position. “The hell?!” I mumbled. I was disoriented, but I shook my body, and realized I’d fallen from sun stroke. I just lay there for five minutes, trying to get a grip on my skull. It felt like someone drilled through my brain, except I was the one spinning around, and not the drill bit. Finally, I managed to get up, pick up the bike, and walk over to the side of the road into some shade. I laid down, poured some water on myself, and rested for an hour.

“Fuck.” Luckily there was no traffic on the road. I got up, ate some mangoes to replenish my blood sugar, and drank some more water. I pulled out my mat, and laid down to sleep for the next hour.

I waited until 2:30PM before I got back on the road again, and rode until the early evening. I went looking for a place to pitch my tent. Some Salvadorians advised me to camp out in their grandfather’s house on a hill, but I found the route blocked. They said it would be safe from the bandits. Instead, I found a little knoll in the hillside, and set up my tent there. I squatted next to my tent, and contemplated the quiet calm of the countryside. It was lonesome, but it was quiet, and only a light breeze touched my face. I sat down to watch the sunset in the Salvadorian hills, as I lit a fire with some tree branches to cook dinner. My dinner was simple. With nothing more than some ramen noodles, ketchup, some spices, and a few vegetables from road side stands, I whipped up something close to gourmet food. In the mornings, I had cereal with cold soy milk, and whatever fruits or veggies that I picked up the night before. During the day, I had lunch at a cafe or a roadside stand. I would also pick up supplies for the evening, since I never knew if a roadside stand or café was available. Due to the physical demands, I constantly craved fresh vegetables and fruit, but I always ensured a supply of cereal, bread, water, noodles, rice, and some cheese. Those were my iron rations.

The sky glowed with hues of red and orange, and a thunderstorm erupted at a distance. The air was mildly warm, tranquil, with just a touch of moisture for the nostrils. Crickets sang, and I smelled cooking fires in the distance. I relaxed as I sat back, content, and hoped the thunderstorm would somehow avoid me, which it did. I sat down to eat and contemplate my decision to enter El Salvador. From what I heard along my route, other than Guatemala, El Salvador was considered the most

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dangerous country in Central America to travel in.

## **Chapter 23**

# **El Salvador**

This portion of the book is available in the print edition.

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## Chapter 24

# Guatemala

The beginning of the Guatemalan southwestern mountains greeted me as I came out of the dry, scrub brush jungles of the Pacific Coast, and headed inland. It'd been months since I ascended mountains. I looked ahead of me and saw a brown and green, forested hill, with a black, two lane road, recently tarmacked, rise into the blue sky. The road climbed skyward, and all I could see of its end, was a distant peak.

"Nothing I can't handle." I said to myself. I switched gears, and pedaled up. I imagined there would be a nice surprise at the top, like a beautiful view, or a road side stand with water, juice, or even watermelons. In Nicaragua, I stopped by a family stand, selling watermelons on the road, bought five of them, and devoured every single one. Each one was the size of a volleyball. It was the most refreshing meal I had in months. I pedaled up the mountain and dreamed about the succulent, pink, moist, sweet flesh of the melon, dripping with a liquid that would sate my thirst.

As I approached the peak of the second mountain, my thirst and hunger intensified, as did my mental wanderings into food, dishes, and drinks. My legs were on fire, and I felt the fatigue. I stopped to rest, stood up, and balanced the bike between my legs. I laid my chest on the handle bar, and quietly controlled my breathing. My hard breaths started to calm down. It was silent, so silent, that I could almost hear a butterfly land on a leaf.

Suddenly, I heard a crack in the air, and a whistling noise in front of my face. My head popped up, and my hair stood on end. I immediately recognized the sound. An animal like instinct exploded in me, and took over my body. The next

thing I knew, I mounted my bike and pedaled with an almost inhuman force, as my body screamed to get out of there quick. Once I reached the peak, I continued to pedal the way down, as fast as I could go.

I reached the bottom, and came to a stop to catch my breath. My heart was pounding. Someone took a pot shot at me! Completely alert, I looked around me and listened. I heard bird songs in the trees, and then I started to calm down. I realized that the speed down the mountain took me about two miles away from where the shot happened. I needed more distance to even begin to feel safe again, so I quickly resumed cycling. As I biked, I searched for a gas station. No way in hell was I going to take a chance on the side of the road

As I traveled through two more mountains, I heard another sound. Bang!

Whistle! Pop! When I heard the “bang”, I dropped my bike and dove into the side of the road. I breathed a sigh of relief, when I saw little clouds in the sky. They were bottle rockets.

It was getting close to six in the evening. I stopped, and ate dinner in a small, crude, adobe road side café, and asked the lady if she knew of a place where I could pitch a tent. She thought it was ridiculous for me to pitch a tent on the side of the road, and said I should get a hotel somewhere. I didn’t have that kind of time. It was almost twilight, and the last thing I wanted was to ride at night, especially after getting shot at.

I looked at my map, and the town of Barbarena was a few miles away. I looked at the distance, and figured I’d need two hours to get there. Hopefully, since it was a population center, there’d be a gas station.

I cautiously biked through the night, and guarded against the sparse traffic. The moment I saw a Texaco sign, and I biked in. The eager station crew, fascinated, watched me enter.

*“You’ve never had a cyclist stop by here before?” I asked.*

*“Like you? No. That’s pretty cool what you’re doing.”* Said one attendant. I asked for permission to camp, and they were excited that I wanted to stay the night. They helped me unload some of my gear. As I started to pitch my tent in the corner of the station, I saw a shadow in the station’s light, as it walked over to me.

*“Excuse me sir? I’d like to invite you to my home.”* Said the gentleman. He was a middle aged Guatemalan, with glasses, rather rotund, and dressed in a collared shirt and slacks.

*“Oh! Well, as long as it doesn’t inconvenience you.”* I replied.

*“No, no inconvenience! I want to hear your story! You’re my guest, and I’d*



*like to have you over for dinner.”*

*“OK. Thank you very much.”*

We loaded my bike onto his red, 1980's era Chevy pickup truck. He was driving with his wife, so I jumped in the back. I said thanks to the station crew. They seemed a little disappointed.

We drove for an hour, and were stuck in a traffic jam entering Guatemala City. I could feel the air temperature drop as we ascended the mountains. Finally, after a long ascent, we entered a private, gated suburb. As we drove through, I noticed the homes looked like the suburbs of Los Angeles.

The difference between rich and poor was dramatic. I went from biking alongside mud huts, into an upper middle class neighborhood. By now, I'd been invited by both classes. Curious, I wanted to learn more about the differences and similarities. We arrived at their home, which was a white, concrete, stuccoed, prefabricated home with a red clay tile roof. We took my bike out, and introduced ourselves to each other. The man's name was Fernando, and he was a Guatemalan businessman who ran a coffee export company. He introduced me to his wife, daughter, and son, who was also an avid cyclist. His son presented a Specialized carbon frame bicycle, one of the company's early attempts at carbon frames. He also ran a motocross shop in Guatemala City.

*“You traveled on this? How far did you go?”* He asked.

*“My computer died after about 2000 kilometers, so I have no idea.”*

*“You went from where to where?”* I listed the country names.

*“Incredible! That's amazing! You must be in incredible shape to do that!”*

*“No, you don't have to be. You just need to get up every day, get on the bike, and enjoy the ride. It's nothing special.”*

*“You weren't afraid of bandits?”*

*“I actually wanted to ask you about that. You know where your father picked me up? Before that on the second mountain, I heard something like a bullet go by me!”*

*“I'm not surprised. People are still messed up from the war. A lot of people died, and it was terrible. A lot of people have weapons here.”*

I put my things in their guest room, took a shower, and washed my clothes. We sat down to a modern, glass, and dark wooden table, and I looked around the room. It was well decorated and furnished. Fernando's wife made me some vegetarian dishes, fried eggs, and bread.

*“I've heard about this place through other travelers. Lake Atitlan.”* I said, as I

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pointed to it.

*“Well, it is nice, but you should see Antigua first,”* said the mother, *“it’s an old colonial city, but many Mayans live around the area.”*

*“Check out the blue river over here!”* Exclaimed the daughter, pointing east, *“it’s beautiful, with animals you’ve never seen nor heard of.”*

*“But beware this place,”* said the father, as he pointed at a dot on Atitlan – Panajachel, *“this is gringo land.”*

*“Here on the west coast, is the Pacific mountains, and they’re rugged.”* Said the mother as she pointed west.

*“In the north here, the mountains descend into jungle and cloud forest.”* Said the father, as he pointed to the north regions of the country.

*“Here, in Guatemala City, you are in the population, industrial, government, and business center of the country. It’s also central to most of these locations.”* Said the father, as he pointed to it, and traced the lines of the roads north, south, east, and west.

*“Do you have plans to go to Tikal?”* Asked the mother, as she pointed to it.

*“No, is it beautiful?”* I asked. She went to her bookshelf, and removed a book with photos of enormous pyramids. A shiver went down my spine as I looked at the pyramid of the Jaguar.

*“This is a sacred place. Tikal. You must go. Of all the places to go to, in the land of the Mayas, Tikal is one of the most spectacular,”* she said, *“but you must be careful, bandits sometimes roam the outer extremes of the park.”*

*“But be very careful here.”* Said the father, as he pointed at the lone road entering Belize.

*“Last week, two Mennonites were murdered there.”* He said.

I looked at the lone road. It was the only road into Belize.

*“Many bandits, drug runners, military men, illegal loggers, and ex right wing militias still roam this area.”* He said as he pointed at the Peten area.

I looked at the map, the family, and then smiled. This country had it all. It had a population that was mostly indigenous, which still retained its ancient cultures. It had ancient ruins, ancient mysteries, diverse ecologies, and it was dangerous. Adventure isn’t adventure without an element of danger.

*“I love your country already. Even though I was shot at while entering, I’m already looking forward to it.”* The family burst out in laughter.

After we ate, Fernando and I talked about family, while his family went to bed. We talked about how my parents escaped from Vietnam in 1975. He told me about

the articles in the Guatemalan newspapers about the cruelty of the French during the colonization, and then later about the ruthlessness of the Americans. Fernando was well educated. He said that what the Vietnamese endured was similar to what many of the Guatemalans endured during the right wing regime.

*"Did you ever take sides in that war?" I asked.*

*"David, we're like most people. We simply want to live peaceful lives, see our children get an education, and to prosper. In a war, taking sides is an excuse. The true nature of life in war is survival, nothing more, even for those who took sides."*

*"At least the war is over," I said, "what's it like now? Is there still a lot of animosity, or is it like Vietnam, where people are friends again?"*

*"It's a little bit of both. Like Vietnam, we've been reconstructing ourselves, and most people try not to hold grudges. But the murderers in the government have mostly gotten away with just a slap on the wrist. Many of them have connections to the American CIA, and we think that is why."*

*"What was the cause of the war?"*

*"The cause? The cause was like most of the civil wars that happened in Central America. In each country, the people elected a government that they chose, whether it was good or bad. Or, the majority of the people held a political orientation where the established powers would lose, so the establishment called the USA. The USA is like the ultimate mercenary. It really doesn't care about the politics. It just cares about money, and the USA's business is war. Any place that has a war, or wherever they can create a war, is where they'll make their money."*

*"Well, the war is over now. At least you're an independent country, right?"*

*"We're a colony," he bluntly said, "the USA leans on all the Central American States to gain critical votes in their favor in the UN. Why do you think certain unjust resolutions pass in the UN? It's not because we want it too. We are forced to. They bribe our officials, and put up politicians that will represent their interests. We have a democracy in name only. And, we are at their mercy through trade and loans. We have almost no trading rights, and they dictate all of the terms. It's colonization, but covertly. The funny thing is, everyone knows they are doing it, but there is little that we can do about it."*

*"You know the other day, I stayed with a very poor family, and asked them the same questions. I would think that your family would be considered the upper crust, the ones who would benefit the most, and yet your feelings are the same way."*

*"One thing you have to realize is that colonization is colonization, rich or poor. Just because you're rich doesn't mean you will benefit, especially when the gringo*

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*holds himself to be superior to you. Sure, maybe for a little while you may feel like a privileged child. But that's all you'll ever be with the gringo."*

We talked about his coffee export business, and about globalization. He told me that the biggest exporters of coffee in the world were Brazil, Colombia, Vietnam, and then Guatemala. He also added that Vietnam was about to overtake Colombia as the 2nd largest producer of coffee. Coffee was the world's second largest commodity after oil.

*"Has globalization benefited you?"*

*"More or less. I have access to a wider market, but then the entire world is involved, so there's an oversupply of coffee. When that happens, I have a harder time finding buyers for coffee at our prices, which are already low. Then we go out of business, and without a market, the farmers go out of business, and then we all suffer. In addition, these trade agreements we sign with the USA are not designed for free trade."*

*"How so?"*

*"The problem with these agreements is that we cannot compete with tax subsidized farms and corporations. Our government doesn't subsidize many of the farmers here. In the US, the taxes subsidize the corporate farms. They have essentially no startup costs. With no startup costs, and no loans to pay, they've already won. Then, they flood the markets with their product at prices below our prices. For me, as a business man, this cuts profits, which means less money to operate my business. With lower profits, I'm unable to purchase and export coffee from the local farmers at the farmer's prices. When I'm unable to do that, the farmers lose money, and then they go out of business. When they go out of business, I lose suppliers, and this causes problems in finding a consistent supplier. Or the coffee plantation becomes a slave shop just to survive. It's like that already. It's a whole chain. Business people on the wrong side get destroyed by those agreements. But I believe this is effecting the small farmer in the USA as well, no?"*

*"Yes, it is. The worse part is that these corporate farms use genetically modified food."*

*"Ah, we've already been invaded by that. Even though we may protest, the power of the corporations, through the US government and its agreements forced us into using the genetically modified food."*

*"Can the farmers choose not use the seed stock? Can't they just boycott it?"*

*"Then they'll dump their food here at below market prices to put the local farmers out of business. According to the agreements, we have to accept the food,*

*otherwise they will file a suit with the World Trade Organization. The WTO is intimate with the International Monetary Fund, and with the banks who provide loans. Consequently, there's a lot of unemployment, which supplies labor at a lower price."*

*"How do you feel about this?"*

*"I run a business to make money, and to fairly employ others so they can live and prosper. Any business must profit, and it must pay its workers fairly to keep them working. If the employees have to work for unfair wages, then the work quality suffers, and the business suffers. I can understand that, because I wouldn't work for someone who was unfair to me. But fairness is not what the gringos want. The gringos want the best quality, but at a slave's price. You cannot have both."*

It was the same story, but from a different class of people, and from a different perspective. From what I'd listened to across Latin America, the message was the same. All across these countries, the people were getting sick of the "Free Market", because it wasn't about free markets. From Argentina, Bolivia, El Salvador, to Guatemala, it was about access to resources and labor at slave prices. It was about inequitable positions, and the virtual enslavement of an entire group of people, to produce at the least cost possible, and force them to buy overpriced products from the company store. There was no "Free Market". How could it be free when the American tax payer subsidized the corporations?

This feeling of anger, the pulse that I felt across Latin America, was a reaction to the corporatization of the government at the people's expense. In a truly free and unfettered market, the Guatemalans would benefit the most, due to their lower living costs, which translated into lower cost of labor. People could still get by decently at a decent wage in Guatemala, but it would come at the expense of the ridiculous profit projections of Wall Street traders. In fact, when I thought about it, the so called "capitalism" that Americans used was a lot more like a corporate socialist operation. It was hard to fit it into any kind of category that I could understand. It certainly wasn't capitalism, and it definitely wasn't free market. Yet, American style "capitalism" was branded as free market, and the backlash against the USA's hypocrisy smoldered across Latin America.

*"What about finding export partners in other countries? Is there anyway to get another market?"*

*"Well, with China entering the WTO, there is hope and fear. I would like to sell coffee to them."*

*"Problem is, they drink mostly tea. They're not like the Vietnamese. I drink a*

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*kind of coffee called Café Saigon. It'll probably take some time, before the Chinese adopt the coffee habit. Hey, if you ever need someone to import coffee, let me know."*

He smiled at that.

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Guatemala City was in the high mountains, so to get anywhere, I had to go down hill, and then back up again. The road to Antigua spiraled down the side of a mountain, and I cruised down the relatively smooth road into the colonial town. My bike started to rattle as the road changed from tarmac and concrete, into cobblestones.

The houses were low, one story homes, and made of adobe. It was mid-morning, and I cycled by cars and horse drawn carts. I cycled by passersby, and overheard their conversations. They didn't speak Spanish, and the languages didn't sound like Quechua or Aymara. 1950's era yellow school buses rumbled by, and kicked up clouds of white dust in their wake. They had steel racks welded on top, and they were loaded with large, woven sacks. Packed inside were people, and occasionally, a chicken or two, sometimes a goat. The squeaking sounds of rusted hinges hurt my ears, as an old, 1980's Toyota truck rolled by. In the back, the odor of decaying chicken meat wafted into my nose. I rode into the central plaza, and dismounted. My hands shook from the vibration of the cobblestones, as I walked down the streets looking for a hostel.

I found a hostel three blocks from the plaza, near the market, that had a fold up sign outside, and a deal with breakfast included. In the evening, and I walked around the plaza, and stopped in a sandwich café. I sat down to eat when suddenly, about fifteen Korean students stepped in. Antigua is one of the world centers for learning the Spanish language. The other place was Bogota, Colombia. Surprisingly, learning Spanish in Spain wasn't on the list, said the owner of the shop. The owner was a young woman, separated with a child, who studied at the local college.

The next afternoon, I checked out of the hostel, and biked northwest, to the Mayan city of Tecpan. As I slowly pedaled up the mountain, I frequently rested to watch the cotton like clouds float around the mountain sides. The road turned into dirt, and it cut a deep ravine into the mountain side.

As I ascended, I frequently looked at the ground directly in front of me. The ground was dark brown, and as the sun poked through the late afternoon clouds, it took on a darker hue. I turned around a corner, and noticed a wetness that coated

the dirt and dust. I looked up to see some flies buzzing around. I looked back at the ground as I pedaled. The ground was dark, and it seemed soaked. It hadn't rained in the area for several weeks, and I knew how precious water was. Then the color began to change into a deep, dark, red.

I shivered, as my hairs stood on end. My mouth was dry, open, and my breathing quickened. My stomach turned. Dead, hacked opened, mutilated, and gutted bodies of dogs, at least eight or nine of them laid on the road, and their guts were all over the place. The blood was still warm and flowing. I began to get sick, and my mind was numb.

"Calm down. Calm down. Get the fuck out of there. Get the fuck out of here. Calm down, *Calm down*. Get the fuck out of there, Get the fuck out of here. Calm down. Calm down!" I repeated to myself as I pushed the bike up. My blood ran cold, and I shivered. I got off the bike and ran with it. I turned back, I turned forward, I looked side to side. There was no one. Silence. As the sun set, the dark shadows of the bodies grew, and the shadow's tips masked and deepened the blood's color. They made everything dark, wet, and frighteningly disturbing. I felt like throwing up. I just wanted to get to Tecpan.

By six in the evening, as the sun set, I finally entered Tecpan, and checked into the first hostel along the way. As I sat in my room, I thought about war's effects on the human psyche. I remembered the stories of the Vietnam War that my parents told me when I was a kid. I remembered how my mother told me how she had to pick up the pieces of her uncle, who was blown up by a land mine, and put them in a plastic bag for cremation. I remembered how my father told me about the fields of dead bodies, from human to animal, that he walked through while growing up. I got a taste of my parent's experiences, and all I wanted to do was cry.

It was night time, and the high mountain air chilled my body. I was up 1000 meters in altitude. I wandered the streets looking for a café, and noticed how similar Tecpan appeared to Peru. The people were a reddish brown tint, the women wore clothing that was rainbow colored, and most everyone greeted me with a smile. My nose dripped; I a light nasal infection. In the café, after I ate, one of the girls gave me a pot of boiling water, some eucalyptus oil, and a towel. I steamed my face and nostrils in the cafe. When I returned, and went to sleep, the woman's warning, and the memory of the dead dogs haunted me.

The next morning, I awoke to a commotion outside my window. In the square, just beyond my room's 3rd floor window, people played a soccer match in the middle of the market. The men were dressed in red and blue, and they played

amongst the bright blue tarps that hung over the market stalls in the bright, high mountain sun. I slowly packed my things, and grabbed a breakfast of fruit and bread.

I cycled to the Iximche complex, which was a cluster of pyramids from the Western fringes of the Mayan Empire. Long ago, the city supported about twenty five to thirty thousand people. The city complex was full of square, step style pyramids. I hiked up one of them, and sat down next to a four hundred year old tree that grew out its base. In the clear sunlight, my mind began to wander. I thought about the bodies, the ruins, and about war. And then I remembered the people who I met along the way: Fernando and his family, the people at the gas station, the sandwich shop owner, even though the war effected them, they got on with their lives. I didn't want to think about the past day's events too much.

The next day, I coasted down the mountain, and watched the high, cold, mountain slopes change into warm, emerald colored forests. The sky painted a broad swath of orange, red and yellow across the pale blue evening. I headed to Solola, the first town before the resort village of Panajachel, on a quiet road with little traffic. As I cruised down the road, the forest sped in a green blur on both sides. I listened to the chirping of strange birds, as I continued onto Panajachel's muddy, dirt road.

Panajachel looked like a poorer version of Atlantic City's boardwalk. Open air tourist shops hawked trinkets and souvenirs. Restaurants and cafes lined the one street town on both sides. Like other tourist traps, there were multiple souvenir shops, all selling the same thing, at mostly the same price. There were bright lights everywhere and almost no locals, except for the ones running the shops. At one outdoor café, I heard two aged German women complaining about the poor service in English.

The next morning, I hopped a boat, and crossed the lake to the far shores of San Pedro. Panajachel had a number of tourists and backpackers, but there was also a large, local Mayan population who lived in small villages dotting the shores.

I landed at the dock, and checked into a hostel on the waterfront. It was just six dollars a night, and it was clean and bright. As I lugged my equipment upstairs, I noticed a tiny five fingered seedling pop out between the cracks of concrete. Marijuana. It looked like a backpacker accidentally spilled their seed there. I dumped my things on the floor, lay down on the bed, and took a nap.

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In a tense moment of concentration, I eyed my opponents across from me in the dimming light of the evening. I glanced into their steely, dark brown eyes, focused and lit with what they were doing. Both of them looked at me with laser beams of concentration. I furrowed my brow, and squinted back at them with defiance. Only one would win tonight.

It was my turn. I looked up at the two. Their dark red features were taut, and their eyebrows measured me in the moment. Their faces were grim. The air was silent between us, and even the sand outside made a sound as it settled. I took a deep breath, cocked my finger back, and then fired.

KLAK! *"I won!"* The little Mayan boy yelled as he threw his hands up in the air. I looked in disbelief as the marble I hit rolled out of bounds. The other boy gave a congratulatory pat on the kid's back, as I wiped the sweat off my brow. I lost, sighed, and smiled as I shook the kid's hands. They asked me to come back and play the next day. I smiled, and said that I'd consider it.

I got up, wiped the dust off my pants, and got ready to finish my stroll through the Mayan Village of San Juan.

San Juan is above the backpacker town, which rested on the shores. It was a steep quarter mile hike up the sides of the sunken, water filled bowl that made Lake Atitlan. The homes, made of gray adobe or brick, were covered with green plastic or tin corrugated roofing. Roosters crowed, and chickens pecked in the dust, as little children ran about. Many families sat in their porches, or sat inside watching a soccer game on TV.

I walked down the sandy path between the houses, and watched the sunset glow in the distance. It bathed everything with warm, red and yellow tones. A cool, moist, breeze blew a refreshing scent from the lake. Mayan women, dressed in soft rainbow colored clothing, carried their children home, while the men, usually dressed in long pants, a t-shirt, and a baseball cap, headed home after work. Work consisted of a job in construction, tourism, or basic services.

I rounded a corner in the soft dust, in a narrow alleyway, and came to a small open field full of sand. Four boys and an adult were dribbling a soccer ball between them. I walked up to the field.

*"Can I play?"* I asked.

*"Sure!"* The group replied.

I took off my shoes and got onto the court. The sand was soft between my toes, and it held the dust down. One of the boys passed the ball to me. I dribbled and passed it to the other kid, as the adult came up to defend. The boy deftly passed the

ball to me as I passed it to the first kid. He shot the ball, which was blocked by the opposing team. We played for almost an hour, and the field's lights gave us some illumination.

*"Do you usually meet here to play?" I asked.*

*"Yes, we do. Every Saturday evening."*

*"OK, I'll try to make it again."*

I hiked down the hillside steps back to my hostel. Backpackers rarely hiked up the slopes to the village, which probably explained why the locals were so open. Locals can get really jaded with travelers. The hardened ones rarely dealt with them as humans; usually a traveler was just an income source. For the backpackers, the locals were at best part of the service and the scene.

I hiked down the cobblestone road, down the steep slope to my hostel, and grabbed some groceries in the local market. While cooking dinner, I met a Canadian girl, Chiba, who joined me in the kitchen. Later, while sitting on the porch overlooking the waters of the lake, we enjoyed a meal of spicy stir fried vegetables, and macaroni salad. The lake's water sparkled, and a moist wind touched our faces as we swapped stories about our backgrounds. Chiba's father, a Japanese man, rescued her mother, a French woman, in Afghanistan from some kidnapers in the early 1970's.

*"So how did your dad rescue your mom?"*

*"The kidnapers put a sack over her, and pulled her into the car. As they started to accelerate, my dad jumped on the car. He tried to turn and shake him off, but he hung on. The Afghani police saw the car with a man hanging to the top, so they rushed to blockade the car's escape. They stopped the car."*

*"And that was the first time your mom and dad met?"*

*"Yup."*

*"I'll bet the rest of their relationship wasn't as wild as that first date."*

Chiba smiled. *"It's like any other relationship with its ups and downs."*

*"Where'd they get married? In Japan or France?"*

*"They decided to move to Canada after traveling some more together."*

*"So what was your mom's first impression of your Dad?"*

*"Well, he was the first person she saw when they took off the sack, so imagine a lanky, dusty, dirty, bruised, and wild haired Japanese guy saying, 'Are you OK?' Then my mom grabbed him and kissed him."*

*"That's a gutsy Dad. So how do they feel about you traveling alone?"*

*"My mom said, don't get kidnapped, and if I do, make sure I'm with a Japanese*

guy to rescue me.”

“And your Dad?”

“Don’t get kidnapped unless you want to get married.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?” We laughed.

The next day, while cooking lunch, I met the owner of the hostel, a pregnant Mayan woman with three kids. She wore a traditional Mayan dress, and eyeglasses. Her husband was busy building another hostel, and I was curious. With all the development going on, were the Mayan people concerned about their environment?

It was a question I was hesitant to ask, because it was so arrogant. The West, in the last 400 years cut down 90% of their own forests, polluted most of it’s own lakes and rivers, and scoured the land and sea in the name of economic progress. On top of that, the West enslaved and brutally oppressed other countries and peoples to exploit and use their resources during the colonial period, up to the present day.

Just recently, in the last fifty years have the poor and undeveloped countries decided to follow the West’s model to foster their own economies, but they had to get rid of the colonial presence first. Before that, their environmental destruction was on too small a scale to effect their surroundings. Most of their forests were still in tact until about forty to fifty years ago. Now, as they make an effort to match the West, the West told them not too in the name of “environmentalism” and “preservation”. To me, this felt like oppression and subjugation under another name.

*“Environment is a bad word to use,” she said, “a better word is our land, our holy grounds, the lands of our ancestors. Only a gringo uses ‘environment’, because they see it as separate from themselves, as something to admire, like a statue. Where I live, that which feeds me and my family, provides clothes, water, food, and shelter, this is not the function of a statue. This land and life is my body, my soul, and my spirit.”*

*“I’ve never heard it like that before.”*

*“Are you so sure? You said that your mother’s village and farm lands in Vietnam are centuries old. Surely, people who are able to sustain themselves for so long in one place would have a true relationship with the soil, air, and the forests. David, let me give you an example of how we Maya do things around here. All around Atitlan, there is a major water shortage, yet the villages have banded together, and agreed not to take water from the lake, or to empty sewage into it. To do so would destroy the beauty and life that brings in the tourists and money. Instead, we dig wells, and sewage is piped away into septic tanks.”*

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*“Did the government help?”*

*“They are too corrupt. Those Ladinos couldn’t even clean their own city. No, this is our initiative. We are from here, we Mayans grew up here, and we will die here. We want to serve this lake, so that she may serve us for generations of our families. Our lake is our spirit, and our body. You must nourish the spirit and the body for it to nourish you.”*

*“What about the new developments along the lake with all of the new hotels they’re building. Aren’t you afraid that’s going to add more pollution?”*

*She smiled as she asked, “how much pollution does New Jersey produce and dump into its ocean and rivers?”*

*“A lot. I know. Americans have no right to talk about pollution.”*

*“Or the Europeans, they also claim environmental leadership, but they were the colonizers, and they took our lands for their own use. Even the Japanese are polluters, but they don’t go around telling us what to do and what not to do. David, as people with families, we have to take care of our children. This land is also our family member. What is pollution? What is it when you go to the bathroom? Is that pollution or is that something your ancestors put back into the rice fields? Pollution is a part of us as well. You will always have pollution, because pollution is your brother, but it is your duty to transform your brother.”*

The next few days, before heading back to Antigua, I bicycled around the slopes of the lake. I passed by high, misty, mountain villages, hidden amongst the dark green of the forests, while an azure lake sparkled like gemstones, and clouds cast dark shadows onto the water’s surface.

## Chapter 25

# The Journey to El Mirador

It took the better part of the day to climb the high mountain slopes on the way back to Antigua. Along the way, I stopped inside a small roadside café for lunch, and next to me was a white, middle aged, man. His graying beard hid his face, but it was well trimmed, and his brown hair was combed back. He observed through plastic rimmed glasses, as I laid my bike against a table.

“Not the typical way to get home is it?”

“No, it isn’t. Are you a traveler here too?” I asked.

“No, no, I’m an ex hippie turned capitalist.”

“A what? A hippie turned capitalist? Isn’t that an oxymoron?”

“Yup.”

“So what do you do?”

“We make designer clothes, which we design in the states, and then we use the Guatemalans for their cheap labor, and then sell the clothes in the states.”

“And you were an ex hippie? That doesn’t sound very left leaning.”

“I have to be honest about this, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to do business. I’d rather be honest about what we’re doing, rather than be a damn hypocrite like a lot of our countrymen. Sometimes this side of the business can be really depressing, so I do some volunteer work to help out down here.”

We talked some more about my journey. He asked me how my mother felt about my trip. I told him that she wasn’t too happy with my decision. He wasn’t surprised. As if to remind me for my mother, he said to make sure I gave her a call.

I arrived in Antigua that evening, and checked into another hostel. After some rest, and food, I went to the central plaza, browsed in a bookstore, and drank some

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fresh coffee. Later that night, I returned to my hostel. In the courtyard, I had tea with a Swedish man studying Spanish with his instructor, an older Guatemalan man with an old, worn, leather cowboy hat. The lines on his face made him look 40 years old.

The Guatemalan was a ladino, a creole, descended from the Spanish, but he identified himself with the Mayans, and the rest of indigenous Latin America, since he grew up amongst them in the country. He was especially conscious about what the USA and Europe did to all of Latin America, and we spent part of the night talking about Guatemala's history with US colonialism and neocolonialism. He educated me about the United Fruit company, an American corporation, and their fruit plantations, which essentially enslaved the local indigenous population long after slavery was abolished in the US. He told me the long list of atrocities, leading right up to Guatemala's civil war, and the US's role in aiding and abetting the right wing paramilitary death squads.

*"David, you need to read 'The Open Veins of Latin America' to understand us. When I read the book, I simply confirmed all that I've seen, and I've seen a lot. I was so angry at the son of a bitch USA."*

He made two obscene gestures with both hands in the air.

*"If you want to understand why Colombians would want to kidnap a white gringo, and not you, read that book. If you want to understand why the socialist movements are still so strong in Latin America, then read that book. The West has been fucking us for a long time. They've done that to everyone for a long time. But one day, God will bring balance. September 11th was just the start."*

When he said those words, I could feel the anger well out from him. He wasn't alone in Latin America with those views. I looked at the Swede, and noticed he was a little uncomfortable. He asked me what the conversation was all about.

"How long have you been studying Spanish?"

"One week."

"You never took it before?"

"No."

"It's alright, we're just, ah, talking about sports rivalries, you know, like football?" I lied.

"Oh, that was it?"

"Uh huh."

I patted him on the back and smiled, as I said, "you know how football fans can be."

I winked at the Guatemalan. The Guatemalan smiled back. “Yah, I know.” Replied the Swede with a smile, who seemed more comfortable. He enthusiastically started talking about the upcoming World Cup.

I spent one more day in Antigua before meeting up with John and Grits in the central plaza. When I arrived at the plaza, I saw John and Grits sitting on the bench. John sported his usual 5 o’clock shadow, and he had a lit cigarette in his mouth. He was casually dressed in cargo pants and a green, open collared shirt. Grits had a cloth rimmed hat on, an Abe Lincoln beard, and he was dressed in a Hawaiian shirt.

“Hello John, it’s been a while.”

“What’s up man. Didn’t think you’d make it.”

“Well, considering the bang of an entry I got entering this country, it’s been one adventure after another. I got to relax at Atitlan.”

“Oh, this is Grits.” John said as he introduced me.

“Hello. Nice to meet ya, Dave.” Said Grits.

“Nice to meet you.” Grits had a soft southern accent.

“Well, I’m all set. When do we go?” I said.

“That’s all your stuff?” John said as he pointed at my bike.

“Yup.”

“Damn. How much does that thing weigh?”

“About 100 pounds total, I think, when I’m loaded with water. The bike does all the work though, I just pedal the thing.”

“That’s work too.”

We took a “chicken bus” back to Guatemala city, a white, beaten up 1970’s US school bus that had steel racks welded onto the top. We crammed into the bus, taking care to make sure our belongings were secure. A short while later, we were in Guatemala City, and took a taxi to the Guatemalan Office of the Peace Corps, the largest Peace Corps office in the world. Inside, I sat down and chatted with some of the volunteers.

“Are you a volunteer?” Asked one girl.

“Nah, just a bicycle traveler.” I replied.

“Ever considered it?” She replied.

“Don’t!” Said Joseph, a blonde, long haired guy who opened up a recently delivered package of books.

“Huh?” I replied.

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“Seriously man, think really hard before you consider volunteering for the Peace Corps.”

“Say what? I love what you guys do. I’ve been thinking about joining for quite a while. I’ve always wanted to do international volunteer work.”

“Well, you don’t have to go through the Peace Corps to do that. Really man, it ain’t all it’s cracked up to be. Yes! My permaculture books are in!”

I read the titles as he pulled out book after book: “Chicken Tractor”, “Human Manure”, “Biodiesel from Garbage Scraps”, “Straw Bale Building”, “How to make Tofu.” In total, Joe pulled out 20 books.

“I finally have my reference library!” He grinned.

“You actually do that permaculture stuff?” I asked.

“Hell yeah man. Out here, it’s normal life to live like this. We have to find ways to help the Guatemalans without wrecking everything man. Whoah dude! How to grind soybeans into diesel fuel!”

Soybeans into diesel fuel? I definitely could hang with this group. John walked into the room with Grits, and three other volunteers.

“Interesting bunch you guys have here.” I said.

“That’s the Peace Corps for you. Hey, we have to get ready to go. We’re going to see a movie, and then head out to buy supplies. Then we’re off.” Replied John.

“Good deal. I’m all set. Let’s go.”

Together with John, from Indiana, Grits, from North Carolina, Mike from Massachusetts, Scott from northwest New Jersey, and Erin, an Oklahoman, we took off to watch a movie in a mega-cinema complex, in suburban Guatemala City. Then we picked up supplies in the supermarket nearby.

I loaded up on an assortment of iron rations: twenty five packs of mashed fried beans, fifteen packs of ramen instant noodles, three packs of burrito bread, one jar of ketchup, one jar of peanut butter, one jar of jam, hot sauce, some dried fruit, pop tarts, berry flavored fruit juice powder, and coffee. After loading everything into our bags back at the central office, we took an overnight bus from the station at 10 PM.

At 3 AM, I awoke from my fitful sleep as a customs officer poked me in the shoulder, “*passports please.*”

I handed him my passport, and eyed him carefully. It took him several minutes before he finally gave it back. I already was forewarned about the corruption of the Guatemalan police.

“*Do you have any fruit on you?*” He asked.



*"No, I ate it all."*

Guatemala kept a check point on the lone highway to the Peten for fresh produce. The country was rich in its geography and biodiversity, and its richness made it in danger of biological contamination within its own borders.

We arrived in Flores at 6 AM, and waited at the stop to meet another volunteer. I went to pick up a machete in the local market. The machete was the standard tool for the average Guatemalan and Peace Corps worker. It's used to dig, cut, slice food, cut down trees, and for all sorts of construction work. It was also a deterrent to thieves and criminals, although it was used by both. As I looked at the selection, men walked by with their machetes in leather scabbards attached to their waists. They occasionally decorated the scabbard with a tassel, artwork, or colored paint. I picked up a large machete. John showed me his after examining the blade.

"You'll need to sharpen the blade like this." He said, as I felt the edge of his blade.

"A machete is very useful," said Mike in his faint New England accent, as he adjusted his New York Yankees baseball cap, "you can use it for everything. I sometimes use it to hammer stuff in, and you're definitely gonna need it for this trip."

"Yeah, we're going bushwhacking." Piped Grits.

"For real? We're headed to frontier country, like the wild west?" I asked.

"You said it." said Scott. Scott was about five foot eleven, and was the tallest of the group. He had an odd stare as he talked. I kept looking to where his eyes pointed to, until I saw that one eye was off center from the other one.

"We're gonna chop our way through the jungle, man." Scott exclaimed.

"You'll need it for defense too. Where we're going is really dangerous." said John.

I took a look at our group. John was the de-facto leader. He planned and organized the expedition. Grits sported a bandanna, and like John, was in his early 30's, and honed from rough work out in the Guatemalan countryside. Mike had a narrow face and a thin build, and Erin was Oklahoman. Whenever Erin spoke, his powerful Oklahoman accent seemed to slur his words. I could never make out what he said. Finally, we started speaking to each other in Spanish.

Erin was a mestizo of Russian and native American descent. With pale red burnt skin, and a shock of red hair, with native American eyes and cheekbones, Erin stood out. He grabbed my hat, and started examining it.

*"That's a good hat. Where did you get it?"*

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*“Bolivia. It’s made of llama wool.”*

“Cool,” he said as he continued to examine it. His accented Spanish was strong, but at least it was understandable.

We were six American, five white and one Asian, men, about to explore a fascinating, remote, and dangerous region of the Yucatan Peninsula, the Peten. The Peten jungle covers the upper right hand corner of Guatemala, all the way to Mexico. It’s a dense and almost impenetrable jungle that spans an area comparable to Pennsylvania. It was the ancient homeland of the Maya, and the Center of the fabulous Mayan Empire. Lost cities littered the forest, and many of them still eluded explorers.

The Peten is home to deadly snakes, like the Fer De Lance, which killed as quickly as a cobra. There were boa constrictors, alligators, crocodiles, and peccaries, a species of wild boar that roamed in packs and were famous for shredding people to pieces. Jaguars roamed the jungle, while monkeys and bats inhabited the jungle canopy. During the rainy season there were mosquitoes, insects, ants, and other creepy critters. Malaria and yellow fever were still persistent problems.

We didn’t fear any of these. What we feared, was the most dangerous animal in the entire Peten - man. The Peten was a hive of villainy, full of drug runners, armed bandits, mercenaries, marijuana growers keen to protect their crop, illegal loggers, squatters, settlers, oil explorers, and criminals of all types. It was the scene of many violent crimes, and a place to bury the evidence. About a year ago, according to John, a Peace Corps worker and his Canadian Peace Corps girl friend went for a hike in the Peten. A group of armed bandits tied him to a tree while they gang raped the girl in front of him.

“Make sure you sharpen that thing,” John said, “you might need to use it for things other than chopping bushes.”

“Will we have an armed guard?” I asked.

“Probably not, he could hold all of us up,” replied John, “we’ll be armed only with machetes. That should be enough.”

“Besides, whose gonna mess with six guys armed with machetes?” Asked Scott.

“Hey, where’s my machete?” I asked, when I reached to grab it, only to find it missing. I looked up and saw Erin playing duelist with it. Machetes factored into the Guatemalan machismo, and the longer machetes were used in duels for honor.

We waited at the bus stop in Flores in the harsh morning sunlight, as white dust flew around us. It was mid morning, and the glare off the pale mud adobe homes

was blinding as we waited for another volunteer, Dan. Off in the distance, I could see part of the jungle in the horizon. Finally, a blonde, curly haired, lanky guy with sunglasses came riding in on a mountain bike.

“What’s up guys!” Dan said, in a laid back California accent.

“Not much. Just waiting for you.” Replied John.

I reassembled my gear, and Dan took a glance at my bike.

“Come a long way huh?” He asked.

“Yeah, you could say that.”

He straddled his bike and gave us a look over. “You guys are ready for the big expedition huh? And you decided to join with these guys?”

“Yup. It sounded like fun.” I replied.

“I’ll bet. Well, grab your gear.”

We followed Dan back to his place in Flores. It was an apartment building built far off the main road. It was a bright pink edifice, three stories tall, and it stood out like a tower among storied, mud brick, adobe shacks.

We hiked up the stairs to the third floor, and entered a modern, fully furnished room. The beige tile kept the floor cool, and I sat down on a bean bag as we unloaded our things.

“OK guys, dump your shit here.” Said Dan as he poured some water in several ceramic cups. He handed me a cup, as I asked, “how long have you been in the Peace Corps?”

He took a sip, “three years, My first two years was in Mali, Africa.”

“Three? How was Mali?”

“Gorgeous. Lots of desert.”

“Good experience?”

“Yup.” He took another long sip.

“Hey guys, let’s go visit Linda, she’s in the downstairs apartment.” Said John.

We entered Linda’s quarters. She sat in her kitchen, and worked on her laptop. A case full of books was on the wall, and the room was decorated with a minimum of necessities. Linda, a New Yorker, was a white, professional, woman in her thirties, with short cropped blond hair.

“Can I check my email real quick?” Asked John.

“Sure.”

Linda looked me over, and asked, “you’re new. Did you just arrive with the other new volunteers?”

“Oh no, I’m not Peace Corps. I’m just a vagrant traveler.”

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“Hm, now this is a motley crew. So you decided to join these guys for their adventure?”

“Yes. You know, for the frontier country, you volunteers have a pretty good life out here.” I said as I looked around.

“It’s funny you said that. When I left for the Peace Corps, I was under the impression that I’d have to make do in tough conditions. But, as you can see, I have everything - Internet, even cable TV.”

“Not everyone has it like this. These are city volunteers. You should talk to country volunteers. Like us.” Said Grits.

“I don’t have electricity.” Said Scott.

“Or proper toilets.” Said Mike.

“Dang man I don’t even have a basic clean water supply out where ah am.” Said Erin.

“What did you say, Erin?” Asked John jokingly.

Erin shot back, “shuddup man.”

“Alright guys, get your stuff repacked. We leave at 2 PM.” Said John as he sent off his last email.

“Nice meeting you, Linda.” I said as I shook her hand.

“Likewise. Have fun guys. Try not to get killed.”

We repacked our things, and stashed the rest in Dan’s apartment. We took only the essentials. I packed two of my panniers with two sets of cloths, food, water, and survival equipment. I saddled up my bike while the rest finished packing their backpacks. The bus station was a large gravel lot, and it was full of rusting, white, miniature versions of chicken buses. The dust flew around us in white clouds as we boarded. As we left the lot and followed a one lane road into the jungle, I watched as the homes changed from mud adobe with tin roofs into mud homes thatched with palm leaves. The road soon gave way to rough dirt and ravines, and soon there were no homes at all as we traveled several hours into the jungle. Despite the jolting ride, I dozed off.

\*\*\*\*\*This portion of the book is available in the print edition\*\*\*\*\*

## **Chapter 26**

# **Belize**

This portion of the book is available in the print edition.

*Jackfruit: A Bicycle Adventure Through Latin America*

## Afterword and Acknowledgments

Making a decision to publish a book is a lot like deciding to get married or to have a child. Up front, it sounds like a wonderful endeavor. There's fortune and glory. There's the pride in seeing your work in print. There's the endless possibilities that could happen from publishing a book.

It's all bunk. It's long nights, often for months and years, of staring at the computer screen until your eyes ache and your butt goes numb. Then you stand up and feel a rush of dizzying blood go through your head, feel like you're going to faint, lean over the computer and ask yourself, "why the hell am I doing this?"

Why indeed. In a lot of ways, despite the book's documenting and memorializing of my expedition, it's really a tribute to the marginalized peoples in the Western Hemisphere. They have earned much, from what they endured and accomplished in ancient times all the way to the present. They're the forgotten ones in world history. In addition to the past injustices that have gone without resolution, it's further injustice for us to be ignorant of their achievements, hopes, and aspirations.

But making a tribute is also like trying to buy a gift for your significant other. You rarely, if ever, get what they really want. Sometimes you'll get lucky, and they'll love your gift. More often, doubts linger inside. I hope this book gets halfway there in that regard, and if it does, I can sleep well at night.

Writing, despite its solitary image of a person hunched over a typewriter, is still a team effort. So thanks to my editor Owen P. Langston for taking the time to edit, clean up, focus, and critique the book. Thanks to Andy and Judy Shaw for reading and critiquing the preface and afterword sections. It's also hard to write a book if you're cooking, cleaning, maintaining, and doing chores all the time, so thanks to my family for their general support, and for putting up with my antics. Thanks to Elizabeth Shaw for supporting me through the publishing phase of the book. For a first time author, it's helpful to know other authors who've walked through the publishing gauntlet, and made their dreams real, so thanks to fellow writers

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Starr Kirkland and Cesar Alejandro Becerra for their advice and encouragement. Thanks to Anthony Khan for taking the photo of the coral reef in the caves of Isla de Pescado in the Salar. Thanks to Xavier Amaru Ruiz Garcia for teaching me more about the amazing mathematics of Tiwanaku and its advanced computer algorithms towards prime number theory and cosmology. Thanks to the folks involved in the Free Software Foundation and in Open Source Software, since this book was written in Open Office Writer, corrected with ispell, and then formatted and typeset in Lyx and Latex. Graphics were done in Gimp, Imagemagick, and Scribus. If it weren't for you folks, I'd have a hell of a time trying to make this book look professional.

Planning, executing, and surviving a major expedition is always a team effort. I don't know how else to thank the countless people who've helped, guided, protected, and assisted me in my explorations, but I'm going to try, so here goes: Marco Vidal and Ernesto Huaman for guiding me through Cusco, Sonia Suarez and her family for their hospitality, the 2001-2002 Peace Corps staff in Bolivia and Guatemala (you guys rock!), Chyang and Claudia Hwang, Christian Olivo, Elsa Quiroga, Roberto and Marco, Fernando Bonafe, Ted and Megan Friedenson, the Betancourt family, Jose, Liqu, Tito, Marcello and family, Don Carlos, the Jou family, and the Juan family. You folks didn't just help me in myriad ways, but you've also helped keep me humble in understanding just how much of a team effort an expedition is. Finally, I especially want to thank all the people of Peru, Bolivia, and Central America who helped, protected, and guided me during my expedition. This book is dedicated to you.

Finally, as with any quest or adventure, it never truly ends. You can learn more about my adventures at my website, <http://davesnewadventure.com>. My latest adventure is the cross country expedition through the backwoods of the Amazon, all the way across 3,700 miles of South America during 2007. Yes, it's connected to the ending of my romance. Yes, it's another crazy, death defying, exploration adventure. And yes, I did it almost completely on the bicycle, and this time, no one tried to keep me from crossing the Andes. Come to think of it, I'm surprised I survived that expedition too!



## About the Author

David Nghiem is an adventurer, explorer, writer, and analyst. He's appeared in various Latin American programs and talk shows on television, radio, and print, speaking about his adventures and investigations. He's also been published in the Philadelphia Inquirer, and various internet publications.

David is also a biomedical engineer, speaker, and science teacher. His current project is on the advanced mathematics of Tiwanaku, an ancient ruin of the Aymaran peoples in Bolivia. Past projects include the design and fabrication of technologies for zero gravity suits, which involved the MIT's Aerospace and Astronautical Engineering department and the Boston University Neuromuscular Research Center, and as the co-founder and project coordinator of SPECTRE, a sounding rocket project designed and built as a collaboration of the Boston University Space Physics Lab, the Electrical-Computer Engineering Department, and NASA, which was launched on 14 June 2000.

You can read more about his latest adventure, "Sun Drenched on Two Wheels" in his website, <http://davesnewadventure.com>. David spends time between his residence in the USA, and in interesting places around the world investigating mysteries and learning about people.