

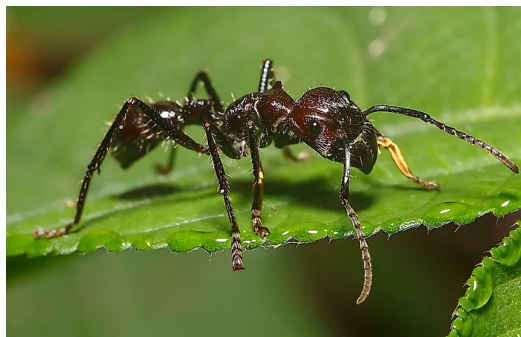
## *Amazon Adventure* (Prelude)

I had just served three years in the army. My father wanted me to go to college, get a job, and settle down. I wasn't ready for that just yet. He told me that I would not get a penny from him if I go off and waste my life. I told him one of the last freedoms left in the world was to be able to chose what direction you wanted your life to take. I also said that I did not need his money. I needed some adventure that did not involve shooting anyone or getting shot at. Before my army induction, I had joined a team of archaeologists on a remote dig in Spain during my summer break. We had uncovered an old map that looked something like what Magellan would have had. Beside showing shipping routes all around the world, it had indicated, with a big red X, a place in the Amazon jungle in Bolivia, where Bolivar's lost gold was supposedly buried. Of course you could buy treasure maps anywhere. They were a dime a dozen. But this was not just any treasure map. The closest big city to the site was Huelva, Spain. This is where Columbus sailed from Palos de la Frontera on his way to America. Of course I could not take this map with me, but I secretly photographed it.

So why not make this my adventure. Even if this was a fools journey, I was sure I would experience some adventure along the way. This would turn out be more truer that I had ever dreamed or expected.

Before taking off, I did some research on the Amazon jungle. Here are the ten most dangerous animals or bugs you might run in to there.

The Bullet Ant – Named for its potent sting. Some describe it like getting shot with a bullet.



Black Caiman – A fairly large size from the crocodile family. Twenty percent of the humans who were attacked died. These deadly creatures are hard to see in the low black swamp areas in side pools along the rivers.



Electric Eel – Watch where you swim or bathe, the shock from one of these can kill a human.



Piranhas - These fairly small fish have razor sharp teeth and swim in schools. They can devour a whole cow in less than 5 minutes. Ditto on where you swim or bathe.



Jaguar - Third largest cat species. Cousin to the Black Panther. Both are night predators. You will not see them coming.



Wandering Spiders - This is the most venomous arachnid in the world. Instead of spinning webs, they wander around in the night searching for prey.



Mosquitoes - Most people are familiar with the dangers associated with these biting insects. Malaria and Yellow fever.





Giant Centipede - These have a poisonous bite and can reach a length of 12 inches.



Poison Dart Frog – Perhaps the most deadly animals living on Earth. These brightly colored tiny frogs might appear to be beautiful, but the skin has enough toxin to kill 10 adult humans. Indigenous hunters coat their darts with the poison to hunt their enemies.



Green Anaconda - The largest one ever captured was 33 ft. in length. Not poisonous, but kills by constriction.



During my adventure, I encountered each of them. Some up close and personal.

### *Amazon Adventure* (Capture 1)

My name is Marcus. As I said before, I had just finished three years in the Israeli army. It is a requirement of all citizens male or female. I am not Jewish. Everyone just assumes that because I live in Israel. There are many non Jews living there from all kinds of nationalities. Except for the occasional missile fired from across the border in Palestine, it is usually pretty safe.

So my plan is to fly to La Paz, Bolivia and venture up river to Rurenabaque.

#### La Paz, Bolivia



Not sure how I am going to go about this, but that is why it is called an adventure. From Ruenabaque I have to head west. At that point I will be leaving civilization behind. My map indicates that the Big Red X is about 100 miles from that spot.

I have enough cash and a bank card, if that works. I will pick up supplies in La Paz. I have a compact waterproof tent, rain gear, hiking boots, wool socks, GPS, a large knife, and bug repellent. Anything else I need I will purchase in La Paz.

So I arrive in La Paz. I need to get my bearings before I venture out. I book a room in an average hotel for two nights. After settling in I feel hungry and could use a cold beer. There is a tavern just two doors down from the hotel. This looks like a good place to get information. I am lucky that I am fairly fluent in Spanish. I am also in good shape after my army stint and don't appear to be a push over for any unsavory characters who might see me as an easy mark. Some kind of empanada and a couple of beers later I am feeling much rested and relaxed. While sitting there another Caucasian walks into the tavern. Since I am the only other white guy in the room, he comes over and asks if he can join me. Sure why not. We introduced ourselves and I find out his name is Gunther and he is a German teacher on vacation. Why come to this place I ask? I just wanted to try something other than the normal tourist traps for a change. That is the same way I am thinking. Although, I am trying something a little more adventurous. I don't want a guided tour of the rain forest. I intend to venture off the beaten path and head straight into the uncharted rain forest. Aren't you afraid you would get lost or injured? Perhaps eaten by a tiger? There aren't any tigers in this area. I thought you said you were a teacher? I am a history teacher. Geography is not my area of expertise. No tigers, but panthers and jaguars are close enough.

I agree with you, although going out alone is not a good idea. I am going to ask around to see if anyone who is an expert in jungle trekking and would be willing to be hired as my guide. Not a bad idea. Good luck with that.

The next morning, I was out shopping and ran into Gunther again. He had a friend with him whom he introduced as Brent. He was a nature photographer and famous enough that I was familiar with some of his work. He had come to this place to take some photos for his gallery.

I had told the hotel clerk of my desire to find a guide. That paid off later in the day when the three of us decided to have lunch and a beer. We went to the same tavern that I had visited before. Not too long after we sat down, a man who looked like mid-30's with a bush type jungle hat, approached our table. Hi, my name is Karl. I hear someone is looking for a guide to take him off the beaten path. That is correct. That would be me. I want to venture up river to Rurenabaque and then head west. That is definitely off

the beaten path. How long do you intend to stay out there? I figure a couple weeks at the most. How much would you charge for your services? Well, I have been a little dry lately so I can give you my discounted rate. \$500 would cover it. I don't have that much on me, but I could advance you \$200 and wire for the rest. It would be here in La Paz on our return. I could accept that. Its a deal then. We can set out in the morning.

He gets up and leaves us. I turn to my new found friends. Why don't one or both of you come with me? Brent you would get a chance to take some photos that no one else might have taken. You never can tell what we would encounter. Brent looks like he is thinking about it. How about you, Gunther? You know that isn't exactly the vacation I was planning. Brent says, come on Gunther. We would all be together. It would be fun. With an experienced guide, what could go wrong? Not wanting to be a party pooper, he reluctantly agreed. Now I am really excited. This is good fortune that I hadn't expected.

So the next morning, before we take off, Karl tells all of us what stuff we need to take with us. We all buy what we lack and are ready to go by noon. I never let on about my secret map. I had printed my photo on a parchment paper that would still hold up even if it got wet.

We all meet down at the dock and get on the river boat. The trip takes most of the afternoon and we arrive in Ruenabaque.



This is still a decent size town. We arraign a stay for a night here. The hotels are not bad and not overpriced. After a good meal and drink, we all retire to



our respective rooms and sleep early to get a good start in the morning.

So the real adventure begins. We start out walking west with Karl in the lead. He has a rifle and machete. He starts hacking his way through the thick brush as we follow. There is no real path and that was expected. There is a small river that flows into a larger one and we keep near the banks as we head west. Brent and I are in much better physical shape than Gunther. It is obvious he is struggling, even after the first day. The going is slow and we only make 10 miles progress before we stop. Karl starts to complain about our slow progress. Karl says he is going hunting. We were advised not to take too much food, as the journey will be strenuous enough without heavy packs. Karl says the jungle has plenty of food, if you know where to look. He gives out orders to each of us. Brent and Gunther to look for fire wood. Me to try and catch some fish. He heads inland. We each brought some small poles and hooks. Fishing should be a easy source of food. I walk a little way up stream. I see some side ponds that look promising. I get out my fishing stuff and rig my pole. As I get near the dark pond, a caiman suddenly arises out of the murky water and attacks me.



I jump out of the way before his jaws snap shut. I back away as fast as I can. He seems reluctant to follow. I imagine he feels secure in his watery hideaway. I wanted adventure, but I didn't want it to end my first day out. I give up on my idea to fish away from the river. At least on the river bank I have some room to survey my surroundings. I put a piece of beef jerky on my hook and toss it into the stream. Immediately there is a frenzied disturbance in the water. I have hooked something. I pull it up and see that I have caught a Parana. Its razor sharp teeth gleaming in the sunlight. Not sure if these are edible, but I am sure Karl knows. I manage to catch three



more. One for each of us. I make my way back to the clearing to find Brent and Gunther sitting around a fire pit. Gunther is whining about something. Apparently, he was picking up fire wood and stumbled into a bullet ant nest. I guess I shouldn't criticize him. That must be extremely painful.

Karl returns to camp carrying what looks like a monkey carcass. I'm thinking is this what we are going to eat for dinner? I get my answer as Karl throws the entire monkey onto the burning camp fire. What, no gutting, no skinning? I am not feeling too hungry at the moment. I scale and gut my meager fish bounty. I place them along side the roasting monkey. Later, four of us chow down on my baked fish. Karl tears off an arm of the burnt monkey and starts to bite into the flesh. There is no hair left on it. Karl says, you all should try this. It is very tasty. I am sure you will not be disappointed. I decide to give it a go. I use my knife to rip into some leg meat. Tentatively, I bite down. Wow! Karl is right. This is right up there with BBQ'd beef. Brent sees the expression on my face and follows my example. However, Gunther looks like he is going to vomit. Come on Gunther you will need some protein to maintain your strength. He is having none of it. After a grueling first day we hit the tents early. Karl warns us to sleep lightly. This is jaguar and panther country. To them we just look like dumb monkeys. Monkey is their main meal course. We each had previously found some hard wooden poles that we had sharpened the tips. Karl said, this is a good defense against the big cats. I hope I don't have to try this.

### *Amazon Adventure* (Chapter 2)

When I wake up in the morning, my tent has three or four big blobs on top. Not knowing what is going on, I yell out to Karl. What is on my tent top? He says, don't come out yet. With his sharp pole, he hits the blobs off my tent. He says it is OK to come out now. What were those things? They were wandering spiders. The most toxic know to man. They come out at night, but do not spin any webs. I guess they were stalking you, but daylight stopped their plans. They sleep during the day. Is there anything else you want to warn us about? You forgot to warn me about the caiman that almost

bit off my leg yesterday. This is not Disneyland. Everything out here can kill you. You just have to keep on your toes. Speaking about toes, Gunther is having more problems. He never brought any wool socks. His feet are covered in blisters and that isn't going to help him keep up with the rest of us.

Never-the-less, we start out on day 2 of our journey. We make better progress than I would have thought and we take a break in the afternoon. Karl starts barking out orders again. Go out and see what you can find to eat for dinner tonight. Don't go too far from this clearing though. So we branch out looking for who knows what. I wanted to go back and get my GPS in case I take a wrong turn. As I return to the clearing, I see Karl going through my backpack. He pulls out my map. Alarmed, I yell what the hell are you doing? He is taken aback by my sudden appearance. I can see he is trying to come up with some kind of explanation. He says, it is good for me to know who I am traveling with. Our lives might depend on each other. He quickly turns the conversation toward my map. He said, what is this? I said, I bought it in a shop in Spain. I was told it might be a treasure map, but I figured it was just another tourist souvenir. I thought it would be fun to see what is near the big red X. Of course Karl would be skeptical of something like this and I hoped that is what he thinks.

None of us caught anything for dinner. Maybe tonight we can roast some wandering spiders. We take off again. Gunther is having more trouble walking. I think he is not going to be able to keep going. By mid-afternoon, he is done. Karl tells us that it looks like our adventure is going to end sooner than we expected. I wasn't ready to give up just yet. I also told Karl that my fee was based on at least two weeks of guidance. I suggested that Brent and Gunther return by themselves. We could construct a raft, and let the two of them float back down the river to Ruenabaque. That way Gunther would not have to walk anymore. Karl said that might work if the two of them are satisfied with returning alone. Gunther was all in, but Brent looked disappointed. I told Brent that if he lent me his camera, I would try to capture some photos for him and still give him the credit. This appeased him some. So we went about building the raft. With the machete and my large knife, we cut some bamboo poles and tied them together with jungle twine. This made a rather substantial sturdy raft. Karl told them that if you recall,

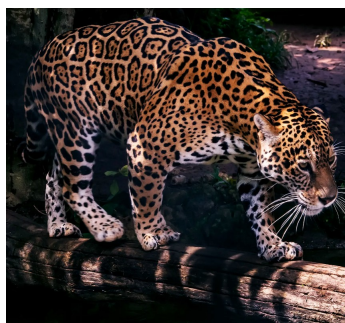
there were a couple spots in the river where there were rapids. I suggest you disembark before those spots by using one of our ropes. Just float the raft around them. If you get dumped in the river, your chance of surviving is low. Besides the caiman, there are also electric eels, anacondas, and piranha to contend with.

So both of them jump on the raft and take off. We wave goodbye as we see them floating away down stream.

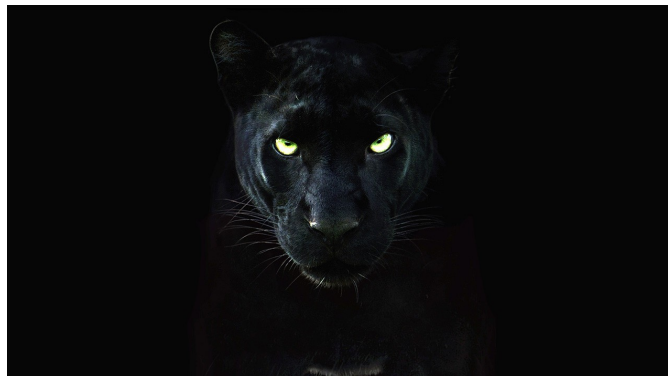
So now it is only me and Karl. I have an uneasy feeling about him. Not just because he spied into my backpack. There is just something odd about him. Even so, I have no choice but to trust him if I want to look for my treasure.

Without Gunther slowing us down, we make decent progress farther into the jungle. It is approaching dusk, so we find a clearing and set up camp. Karl takes off with his rifle to hunt for dinner. I hope he doesn't bring back another monkey to roast. The sight of it burning on top of our fire is hard to un-see from my memory. It looked too much like a small child.

I take off in another direction. I don't want to owe Karl too much. If I can bag something for dinner, it would make me feel like a partner instead of a leach. I also bring Brent's camera with me in case I see something noteworthy to photograph. It is still light enough for me to see clearly. I am only a 100 yards or so away from our camp clearing when I spot something. I also have my sharpened pole. I see a young jaguar crossing a log down near the river.



This isn't something I want to kill, but it is something Brent would appreciate. I take several shots before it scampers off. I hear something rustling in the brush. I ready my spear. It turns out to be some wild pigs. Now bacon sounds better for dinner than burnt monkey. I throw my spear and score a direct hit. It's not the adult, but it is substantial enough for a tasty course. Now the sky is starting to turn dark. I need to get back to the camp soon. As I start to retrieve my kill, I hear something else rustling in the brush. I don't have my spear pole. It is buried in the pig's hide. I look up in time to see a silhouette of a huge black cat. A black panther to be exact.



It is getting ready to pounce and me without my weapon. As it springs forward, I hear a loud bang behind me. The panther falls dead at my feet. I turn around to see Karl bring down his rifle. I am too stunned to say anything. Karl fills in for me. A thank you would be nice. I mumble thanks, grab my spear pole and my pig and start walking back to camp. That night we did feast on roasted pig. Karl even applauded me on my catch. Maybe he is not so bad after all. Saving my life goes a long way to alleviate my suspicions.

(Getting closer to my destination)

*Amazon Adventure*  
(Chapter 3)

We sit around the campfire and trade some stories. Karl brought out a bottle of some kind of whiskey that he shared. I am starting to like him more and more. Karl wasn't aware that I had served in the Israeli army. He was kind



of vague on his background, but he told stories of some of his adventures. He really did get around and experienced many hardships. I think my army experiences raised his opinion of me several levels. That night we retired to our separate tents looking forward to a good night's sleep. My sleep was interrupted by something crawling on my face. I sat up, snapped on my flashlight, and saw the largest bug I had ever seen. It was a giant centipede. I put it inside one of the jars I use for nighttime relief and screwed on the top. In the morning, I showed Karl what I had captured. He looked inside my jar and I could see how alarmed he was. What is this, I asked? It is an Amazon giant centipede. Another very dangerous biting bug. You are lucky you had not got bitten. It probably wouldn't have killed you, but your journey would have been over. I placed the jar inside my backpack. I am thinking this would make a bit of bait for my next fishing excursion. I also checked my tent. How could something like this get inside. My tent was supposed to be impenetrable. I noticed a slice in the bottom. It must have been caused by a sharp rock that I missed clearing before setup. I had calculated the distance to the big red X at about 100 miles from Ruenabaque. According to my log book, we have traveled about half the distance.

Meanwhile, lets check in with Brent and Gunther.

Their first day on the river was unadventurous. For these two that is a good thing. The next day wasn't so lucky. Karl had warned them about the rapids. As they approached the river current became too strong for them to make it to the shore line. They ended up getting caught up and plunged into the wild water. They did their best to use their poles to push off the dangerous boulders, but ended up hitting one square on. The raft got wedged on the rock, and both were holding on for dear life. Gunther was terrified. Brent told him, just hold on tight. I will try to swim to the shore and get some vines to throw you to bring you over. When I get there, throw me the extra machete that Karl gave us. Without further acknowledgment from Gunther, Brent dove into the swirling current. With powerful strokes he was able to just make it to another rock before being swept downstream. Now on the shore line, he called out to Gunther to throw the machete. Gunther reached into the backpack, but with his panic in full swing, he dropped the machete into the water. His strength for holding on was also waning. Eventually, the raft got dislodged from the rock. Gunther was dropped once again into the

broiler rapids. Brent yelled at him, but it was too late. He vanished downstream. Gunther was tumbling and rolling in the treacherous waters. How he survived is a miracle. He hit his head on a rock and was almost knocked unconscious. The current pushed him closer to the shore line and eventually he landed near another boulder and grabbed on tight. This was close enough to the shore for him to stumble and crawl to terra firma. The ordeal left him totally exhausted. He collapsed on the river bank and passed out. Brent had no idea that Gunther had survived. Still, he had to make an attempt to follow the river and verify that his friend had indeed drowned. The river had deposited Gunther a couple miles downstream from Brent. Both were still 20 miles from Ruenabaque. Without weapons and survival gear, their chances to come out of this alive were slim and none.

Once again, Karl and I made mucho progress. The forest was getting denser though and the going was getting tougher. As we settled down for the night, we each followed our set routines. Going out in different directions to hunt. I asked Karl, why don't we hunt together? He said, you make too much noise in the bush. Instead of predators, with you with me, I feel more like prey. OK, I get it. I am not the experienced "Great White Hunter" like you. He didn't appreciate my sarcasm. As I walked along, I spotted a green meadow with lots of frowns. I also saw a group of mushrooms growing in the center. I wasn't sure if these were poisonous or not, but Karl would know. I gathered up a bunch and put it in my side pouch. I didn't see the danger lurking under the frown growth. It was a giant green anaconda. Not poisonous, but known to have killed many a human. Swallowed them whole after strangling. As I was gathering my collection of mushroom, it slithered around my ankles and had me in its grasp before I knew it. It didn't waste anytime putting on the squeeze. My breath was cut off and my ribs were being crushed. I just had enough movement to withdraw my large Bowie knife. I don't think I have time to expect Karl to save me this time. I pushed as hard as I could to free one arm. With the knife in my hand, I searched for its head. As I felt the blood rush out of my brain, I made one final slash with my free hand and then I passed out. I woke up several minutes later on the ground next to a severed snake head. Not sure if this kind of snake is edible or not, but I didn't want to bring it back. I did keep the snake's head though. Karl would probably not believe what I had experienced with out that souvenir. Maybe I

can get it stuffed if it doesn't rot too fast. Karl was indeed impressed with my story. He said, if you want to preserve this snake head, there are some solutions made from some of the native plants that will act as an embalming agent. This is something I wanted to do. Karl found what he was talking about and with some swamp water and ground up plant tissue, we made a solution and put the anaconda head inside one of my carry skin bags.

I am getting way more adventure than I bargained for. Maybe my Dad was right. I should have gone to college and settled down. At least I would live longer than my current situation warrants.

Karl hadn't had any luck hunting, and it was still light enough for us to try again. I didn't want to re-enter the bush. I had enough of hidden dangers for one day. I decided to try my luck again fishing on the river. I brought my centipede specimen with me. I reached inside the jar with my Bowie knife and sliced the sucker in half. Not sure where the poison was located, I also sliced off the tail and head. With what was left, I put the wiggly worm on my hook and tossed it out in the slowly flowing river stream. It wasn't long before I was rewarded. I got a big bite. I fought it back toward me and pulled it out of the water. Instead of a fish, it looked like a big eel. I know that eels are tasty specimens. I reached down to disconnect it from my hook and the next thing I knew, I was passed out again. Not knowing exactly what took place, I stabbed the eel with my knife and put it inside my carry bag. When I returned to the campsite, Karl was already back. He got skunked once again and had nothing. I showed him my catch. He said this was an electric eel. I hope you didn't touch it. The shock can kill a human if touched while in the water. I didn't go into detail about what happened. I had exposed my nativity already once this evening. I didn't need to reveal anything else that would add to my embarrassment. So we dined on eel and toasted mushrooms. Karl did validate that these were harmless. I made sure he sampled them first.

I struck gold!

## *Amazon Adventure* (Chapter 4)

We had been averaging 10 miles a day. Maybe this seems slow to most, but you haven't had to hack your way through thick vines and brush. After one and a half weeks, we were getting close to the big red X. As we got closer and closer, I got the eerie feeling that we were being watched.



I could see that Karl was feeling the same thing. Still, nothing out of the ordinary occurred. We were still following the river and we came to a big waterfall. There seemed to be some kind of cave behind the water flow. The pool of water was shallow enough for us to wade through. Once behind the vale of the water, we entered a large cave. On the walls of the cave were petroglyphs showing animals and human hunters. Most of the hunters had dart tubes. I've seen movies where they use these to kill animals or other warring tribe members. We continued on and eventually we came upon something that looked like an altar. I don't think Christianity had ever touched this remote location, but the gold chalices and crosses displayed here said otherwise. Could this be the lost treasure of Bolivar? I was in awe of all of this. I did not notice Karl at first, but when I turned around to see how he was reacting to all this, I saw that he was pointing his gun at me. I said, Karl, what is going on? This treasure doesn't belong to us. It should be retrieved and put on display in a museum. He said, I guessed you would come up with something like that. I have spent most of my life as a poor man. I am not going to let this treasure find end up in some museum. I am sorry, but this is where your adventure ends. I can see his finger start to pull the trigger, but suddenly he drops to the ground. A dart had penetrated his neck and it



doesn't take a genius to see that death came instantly. Previously, I had researched the use of the dart frog. There was enough poison in the skin to kill 10 adult humans. I was suddenly surrounded by several natives. These must have been the ones that were watching us. My earlier feelings were right on. They tied a kind of noose around my neck and hauled me out of the cave. I was brought to their crude village setup. Not much in the way of structure, but sufficient to shield them from rain and winds. They deposited me in front of what looked like the chief or village elder. As they wrestled me down on my knees, my anaconda head fell out of my carry bag.



The whole group jumped back 10 feet. They now looked at me with some kind of awe. Maybe killing a giant anaconda was some kind of honor badge. The chief was discussing something with the group and what looked like his daughter. Instead of being killed or eaten, I was released from my bondage and given a front row seat around the camp circle. Food and drink were offered to me. I gladly partook in this new turn of events. My head was spinning. Going from almost being shot or BBQed to an honored guest was too much to absorb at once. Besides the food that was offered, I was given some drink and allowed to smoke some kind of pipe. The drink was alcoholic and the pipe made my head explode with vivid colors. I guess even in the remote jungle, men brewed alcohol and made psychedelics. Time slowed down and then sped up. I was really getting the full treatment. Before I knew it, the chief's daughter was sitting next to me. I was alright with this as she was a real beauty. I did notice that one of the larger tribe members was eyeing me. He did not have the awe inspiring look like the rest of the tribe. It was clearly a menacing frown. I suspect that he might have had some kind of claim on the chief's daughter and this stranger is crossing a dangerous line. I think the drink and happy smoke was affecting my brain. I

started to think, who does he think he is trying to match up with the great white anaconda killer? I should have kept my distance from the chief's daughter, but the rational part of my brain was gone.

As the night wore on, I don't exactly remember what transpired. When I woke up in the morning, I was sleeping next to the chief's daughter. Oh boy! What have I done? I don't know anything about these indigenous natives or their rituals. Am I married now? I guess I am about to find out.

So I venture outside the tent. The chief's daughter follows me. She goes up and talks to her father. I am not sure what is being said, but I get the feeling that I did not violate her in any way. Still, the angry tribesman from the night before was also talking to the chief. Before I know it, they take me to a circled area. Stones all around. Apparently I am supposed to fight the warrior for the hand of the daughter. Talk about jumping out of the fire into the frying pan. This guy looks like Hulk Hogan compared to me. He probably wrestles panthers for training. I am thinking, how can I graciously lose without getting killed.

To be continued: Sorry, I am too afraid to continue at the moment. Maybe I am still fuzzy with the booze and pot.  
Instead, lets check in on Brent and Gunther.

Gunther finally wakes up. He is hungry and scared. Hunger is not the real danger for him. His feet are still in bad shape. If he doesn't take care of them, infection could set in. Then nothing would save him. In his condition, he still cannot walk too far. At least he has some kind of sense. He looks around and finds some large palm fronds. Gets up farther on the bank and makes a crude shelter. At least it will keep him out of the wind and he would not be so exposed to predators.

Meanwhile, Brent is making his way along the river bank. It is slow going now that he doesn't have a machete. He has covered about half the distance to where Gunther is when he sees the backpack that was lost from the raft. It had washed up on shore. Inside, there was a rain poncho, a medium size knife, and some beef jerky in a watertight sealed bag. This is a welcome

find. The knife is large enough for him to carve out another pole spear. This is better than nothing. He continues his down river walk. Eventually, he walks near where Gunther is hiding inside his shelter. He almost misses him. Gunther hears some noise and peeks out of his frond hideout. Seeing Brent gives him new hope. Brent is so relieved to find his friend still alive. Maybe together, they can figure out how to safely return to civilization.

Now really continued:

*Amazon Adventure*  
(Chapter 5)

So here I am in danger again. When will this all end? I don't know my adversaries name, so I will just refer to him as Titan. He comes at me in a full charge. I am not so far removed from my army training that I don't still have some defensive moves. I easily side step out of his way and catch his foot with mine. He goes tumbling down in the dirt. This infuriates him even more. Titan gets up, and this time, moves a little more cautiously. I am still trying to figure out how to lose without getting killed. Maybe there is no real solution here. So lets see what Titan does, if he thinks he has the advantage. As he comes at me, I spin around, but let him catch me in his grasp. What if he squeezes me just like the anaconda. I could just pretend to pass out. Would that work? He does get me into a crushing grip. I forgot that my ribs were still sore from the snake attack. I am now thinking this was a stupid idea. I stomp on his foot and slip out of his embrace. At the same time, I reach down and grab his foot and pull forward. He again ends up on his backside. As he rises once more, his face is a red mess of anger. I now believe I have no other choice than to beat him, because it looks like his rage cannot be appeased with an easy victory. It is time for me to go on the offensive. Before he gathers any momentum, I approach him in my best imitation kung fu stance. He looks unsure now, but he doesn't have any finesse moves. Straight ahead is his only choice. Brute strength has always been his advantage. He never faced someone with combat skills like mine. As he gets within striking distance, I do a spin kick and aim my foot 6 inches past his whole body. Crunch! I think I cracked a couple of his ribs. Before he can recover, I do a snap front kick and connect directly with his jaw.

Lights out! He lands on his back and doesn't move. The rest of the tribe are looking on with stunned surprise. Before anyone moves, I approach the chief and grab the hand of his daughter. Everyone suspects that I will now take my prize. Instead of retreating to the tent, I bring her over to where Titan is lying. He has just woke up and is starting to rise. I take her hand and place it in his. I touch my white skin and also her dark skin. I make a negative motion with my hands that I think conveys my message. I touch Titan's dark skin and her dark skin and give a thumbs up signal. Maybe this is a universal sign. I bow to him and her and step out of the ring. Apparently, I had made the right call. All the other tribe members pound their spears in the dirt and yell some kind of chant. Then Titan comes over to me. I am not sure if he wants to continue the fight or kiss me. He removes his decorative bamboo vest and hands it to me. I guess this is how he compensates me for giving him back his girlfriend. This is a good trade. I see smiles all around. Once again, I have averted a likely quick death. This gesture gives me a god-like prestige. I have just kicked Titan's butt. Probably the most fearsome warrior among the tribe. I can do no wrong.

I spend the next couple of days resting up and trying to talk to the chief. Language is out of the question, but a picture is worth a thousand words. I use some of my journal pages and draw a kind of map of the village, the river, and Ruenabaque. I annotate it with some symbols. He is fascinated with my pen. I give it to him as a gift. Such a simple gift, but he is overjoyed. I draw his village with some gold icons, the river with Parana, caimans, and eels. The jungle with jaguars. Using hand signal, I indicate he is at the village. I motion that I want to return to Ruenabaque. He seems to understand. I also try to tell him that I will keep his village a secret. Not sure if he understand this, but he doesn't seem concerned that I will leave. I wish I could take some relic from the shrine back with me, but that would just lead to treasure hunters swarming all over the area. I want to return home just with the knowledge that I have accomplished my goal. I prepare to make my return trip. The chief shows me how to use the blow tubes and gives me some poison darts.

I am not out of danger yet. I must retrace my steps without Karl my guide. I hope I have learned enough to stay out of danger.



I still have my full backpack, a machete, and the tribal blow gun. The chief loads me up with some food and I am as ready as I ever will be. As I am leaving the village, I spot Titan next to his wife to be. I signal a wave goodbye and he mimics me. The chief's daughter rewards me with a big smile, but with a hint of sorrow. Maybe I am leaving behind a treasure worth more than the golden idols.

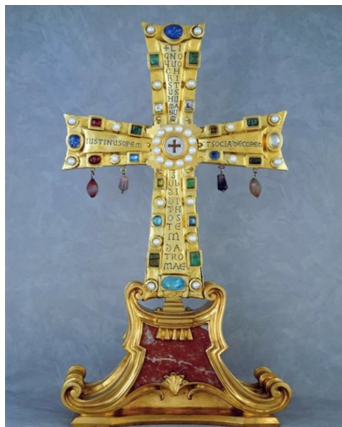
Back to Brent and Gunther:

Brent has found some jungle leaves soaked in some mud concoction. He has applied them to Gunther's ravaged feet. After a couple days of rest, he can actually walk again. Brent has tied the medium size knife to the tip of his pole spear. This improves his weapon considerably. It is still slow going for the both of them. I am not aware of their predicament. I am not out of danger myself, but with the experience I have gained, I have a much better chance of surviving than in the past. So I make great progress. Going down river is much faster than our trip up. I can also follow the path that Karl already cut through the foliage. According to my GPS, I am only about 10 miles away from Ruenabaque. In the next clearing, I come upon Brent and Gunther. They are trapped, with their backs up against a rocky cliff. There is a jaguar ready to pounce and a caiman ready to chew off their limbs.



Brent is trying to keep the jaguar at bay. His thrusts toward the caiman don't even penetrate its tough hide. I calmly pull the dart gun out of my backpack, load a dart and first fire at the jaguar. I hit it directly in the neck. It immediately drops dead. Thank you chief for your training lessons. Next, I re-load my blow gun and shoot the advancing caiman in the head. The dart falls out of its hide, but the poison is toxic enough that it retreats back into the river. Brent and Gunther can't believe their luck. Another minute or so and they would have been goners. They view me with a new kind of status.

I have become the new Karl. Savior of the less fortunate. They also notice my attire. I still have on Titan's bamboo decorative vest and I am still holding a blow gun. I give them some of the food I still have left that the chief gave me. They were both famished since they hadn't been able to hunt and probably don't know how to anyway. After their meal, they start to quiz me on what happened to me. Where is Karl? He had an unfortunate meeting with some indigenous natives. He is no longer of this world. You might say he got a frog stuck in his throat. The pun did not register with them. I just told them, "What happens in the jungle, stays in the jungle." They were so relieved by my rescue, that they avoided any further questions. I did show them my preserved anaconda head. I told them about my encounter with the big snake. They were both sufficiently impressed with my story. I left out any reference to the gold treasure and to the natives I met. As I was rummaging through my knapsack, I touched something that I had not been aware of. I looked inside and was surprised to see a golden bejeweled cross.



That crafty chief must have stuck it there among the food he gave me. A good trade for my pen I imagine. This is definitely something that I have to keep a secret. If anyone knew about this, my whole plan to keep Bolivar's treasure a secret would go up in flames. With my added help and machete, we all were able to find our way back to Ruenabaque and on to La Paz. The money I had wired to pay Karl had arrived in town. I treated both Brent and Gunther to a couple nights stay in the best hotel in town and some delicious drinks and dinner.



It was time for us to bid farewell. I was worried how I was going to slip the golden cross through customs on my return trip to Israel. I had been thinking of a way to do that for the past several days. I visited one of the local souvenir shops. I found some plastic replicas of the golden cross. I bought a half dozen and put them all together in the store bag. I would just have to take a chance with customs hoping that the real cross would get through along with the fake ones.

Back in the airport in Israel, as I went through customs, I was asked if I had anything to declare. I said nothing of real value. The agent looked in my luggage and spotted my bag of souvenirs. He picked up one, then didn't give the others another look. After my stressful adventure, I had taken on a calm attitude that nothing could rile me anymore. The agent saw my calm demeanor and let me pass right through.

Back home, when I returned to my parents home, they welcomed me back with open arms. Even my father lost his former anger. He asked if I had brought any souvenirs back with me. I showed him my preserved anaconda head, my native vest, and the golden bejeweled cross. I nailed the cross up on my parents wall. My father just assumed I had purchased some junk

artifacts, but he kept staring at the cross each time he passed it. Someday, I might tell him that it is part of Bolivar's lost treasure, but for now, “What happens in the jungle, stays in the jungle.”

The End