The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“My bag!” shouted Christina. “Catch him!”

Thinking quickly, Grant rolled the ball as hard as he could. It crossed the thief’s path, causing him to trip and fall. The backpack came free from his grip and skidded to a stop at Eva’s feet.

“Got it!” cried Eva.

The thief took off running to the other end of the court.

Just then, they heard a cry.

“Izzy!” they shouted and darted off to find her sitting on the ground, dazed and confused.

“Izzy!” everyone shouted together. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” said Izzy. “Some guy in a costume just ran me over!”

“You know, it looked a lot like the feathered serpent guy that tapped on the van window in the jungle!” cried Miguel.

“Now, do you believe us?” Grant asked Izzy.

Snakes and Skulls

“Was that you whispering our names earlier?” asked Christina.

Izzy nodded. “Cool trick, huh? I was hiding down there when I whispered your names. For some reason, you can hear a whisper from one end of the court to the other. No one can give me a good explanation as to why, though.”

Grant tossed the ball they found high in the air. “This ball is pretty heavy. Do you know what it’s made of, Izzy?”

“It’s made from the sap of rubber trees,” replied Izzy. “Wait! Where did you get that?”
“Maybe it belongs to Feathered Snake Guy,” guessed Grant, before throwing the ball and running after it.

“Grant, wait for me!” Christina said, chasing after him.

“Just getting the ball!” he exclaimed. “I think it went up these steps!”

“That’s the Temple of the Jaguars,” shouted Izzy. “Go on! You can climb that one!”

The temple stood off to the side at one end of the Great Ball Court. The kids raced up the steep outer steps to the second level of the temple. From this height they could look down on the ball court.

“I am King of Itchy Chicken!” roared Grant, opening his arms wide.

“No, I am the king!” hollered Miguel, puffing out his chest.

Grant puffed his chest out, too. “We shall see who is king! Let the games begin!”

“Yes, I agree! Let the games begin!” Miguel echoed.

“Look!” cried Christina. “The I!” She pointed down at the ball court.

Snakes and Skulls

“You can see an eyeball from this high up?” asked Grant. “Where?”

“No! The letter I–like in the clue!” corrected Christina.

“You’re right!” squealed Eva. “The court is in the shape of an I!”

“Cool! Hey, my ball!” shouted Grant. It lay at the base of the steps.

“Hey!” shouted Miguel. “I’m the king! Therefore, it is my ball!”

“Out of my way!” cried Grant. The boys raced down the steps and onto the court below. Eva followed close behind, laughing.

Christina looked out on the ball court. She wondered what it must have been like for girls her age back then. She imagined being a princess.

She pulled out her journal and sketched the ball court. That’s when she noticed a round stone with a hole in the middle of it jutting out from the wall high above the ball court.

She raced down the steps. The others met her below the stone ring.

“Look!” she cried. “See that circular rock up there? It has two twisted snakes with their heads meeting at one end.”
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“Just like the carving on the jade stone,” said Eva.

Christina agreed and pulled out the latest paper clue.

_The eye of a needle in the I fits ancient rubber, skulls on sticks._

“The court is in the shape of an I,” said Christina.

“This stone ring is probably the eye of the needle,” suggested Miguel.

“And the ancient rubber is the ball,” guessed Eva.

Izzy limped over to the kids. “Gosh, you really got hurt, didn’t you, Izzy?” said Eva. Christina slipped the clue in her pocket before Izzy saw it.

“I’ll be fine,” she assured them. “This pain doesn’t compare to the pain the Maya ball players must have felt. Sometimes the games got pretty brutal!”

“Is that the ball goal up there?” asked Miguel.

“Yes! And there’s another one on the other side, too,” she said, pointing across the field.

“So, how did the Maya play the game?” asked Grant.

Snakes and Skulls

“No rules for the game exist today,” Izzy said. “But, from the carvings on the walls of the ball courts, archaeologists believe it was a mix between soccer and basketball. The players scored points by getting the ball through those rings.”

“But how? The goals are so high!” exclaimed Christina.

Izzy explained. “The players couldn’t use their hands at all, but they could use their feet, knees, and hips. Thick padding helped, but the ball was tossed around with a lot of force. The players sometimes died from getting hit in the stomach or the head!”

“Wow, and I thought playing dodgeball in P.E. was rough!” exclaimed Grant.

“Archaeologists also learned that the ballgames were often seen as being symbolic of battle,” Izzy added.

“What about this carving?” asked Christina.

“This carving,” Izzy said, “shows two teams of seven players each.”

“Oooh, I see snakes coming out of one of them!” cried Christina.

Izzy nodded. “The six snakes represent blood,” she explained. “And I have got to sit
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

down,” she said, limping off to the shade to let the kids explore.

“Izzy just said the numbers in the clue—2, 7, and 6!” said Christina. “Two teams, seven players, six bloody snakes!”

“We solved the clue!” said Eva.

“Not quite yet!” said Grant. “I’ve got an idea. Wait here!” He raced down the court and hopped up on the short end of the wall. Balancing like a tightrope walker, he made it back to just above the goal.

“Grant, what if Izzy sees you?” called Christina.

“Aha!” he said. “Just as I thought—there’s another piece of the jade stone!”

Grant heaved the heavy ball he was carrying through the stone ring. It knocked the jade free from its hiding place.

Christina caught the stone mid-air and slipped it into her pocket. It clinked gently against the other two stones.

“That’s a goal for Team Grant! Yessss!” he cheered, pumping his fists in the air. When he got down from the wall, he nudged Miguel in the ribs and announced, “I am king—once and for all!”

Snakes and Skulls

“OK, OK, you win,” Miguel conceded. “You climbed all the way up there, so you get big points for that!”

“Way to score, little brother!” said Christina, patting him on the shoulder.

Christina pulled the jade stones out of her pocket. Together, the kids studied the new piece of the puzzle. On one side was a Mayan number.

“It looks like an eye,” said Eva.

“It’s not an eye; it’s a shell,” said Grant. “The shell on the bottom is zero. The dot, or 1, is in the 20’s place. So, it’s 1 times 20. And 20 plus 0 is 20.”

“What would we do without you?!” Christina exclaimed.
**The Mystery at the Maya Ruins**

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard you say that before!” Grant said.

“And you may never hear that again!” Christina replied with a wink. She turned the jade stone over. “It’s an image of a spiral, I think.”

“And part of the two snakes, too!” said Miguel.

“It must fit together with the other pieces!” exclaimed Eva.

“Be my guest!” said Christina, handing her friend the stones. Eva carefully placed the three pieces of jade together in a patch of grass.

“A perfect fit!” she said, smiling from ear to ear.

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**Snakes and Skulls**

“But,” Miguel said, “we still have to figure out the ‘skulls on sticks’ part of the paper clue!”

“No! No more skulls!” cried Christina.

Izzy approached the kids. Her giant yellow hat flapped like butterfly wings as she walked. Grant plopped down on the jade stones before Izzy could see their treasure.

“I heard someone say they’re ready for more skulls! Right this way!” directed Izzy.
Walls and Wells

“Welcome to the Wall of Skulls,” Izzy announced. “This is where the ancient Maya performed human sacrifices. It’s gruesome, but true,” she added.

“Hey, Grant, check out the carvings of the skulls on this wall,” Miguel said.

“Whoa! It’s like Halloween year ’round here!” Grant exclaimed.

Izzy spoke. “Archaeologists believe that sacrifices were performed on this platform. Then, the skulls were put on poles!”
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

The skulls-on-sticks clue was just solved, but that didn’t make Christina feel any better. All the talk of skulls on poles was making Christina feel woozy. She leaned against the wall and fanned herself with her map.

Suddenly, the hair on the back of her neck rose. Something touched her shoulder. She whipped around and came face to face with a skull carving.

“Aahhhhhhh!” screamed Christina. Laughter erupted from behind the wall. Grant popped up. “Boo!” he shouted.

“I’ll get you for that!” Christina yelled and chased her brother down a long dirt path to a roped-off area surrounding a giant water hole. Grant nearly fell into it, but his sister caught his shirt before toppling over herself. The pair grasped at vines and exposed roots along the face of the chasm to keep from sliding into the pea-soup-green water below.

“It’s a good thing no one saw you two!” chided Izzy, as she pulled the siblings away from the well.

Walls and Wells

“IT’s a good thing this giant hole is only halfway filled!” gasped Christina as she brushed the dirt off her clothes.

“This is actually a sacred well, or Cenote Sagrado in Spanish,” said Izzy. “Scientists say there are no rivers and very few lakes on the Yucatan Peninsula because of the limestone everywhere. All of the water is underground. Occasionally, though, the ground will give way and cause a sinkhole. The water underground rises into these sinkholes, making a waterhole, or well, that the Maya called a cenote.”

“So, this isn’t a manmade well?” asked Grant.

“No, it’s a natural water hole. It was used by the Maya for a very long time,” Izzy explained. “In times of drought, Maya from all around would visit this cenote to offer sacrifices to the rain god, Chac.”

“Sacrifices?” Christina gulped.

“Yes,” Izzy replied. “Archaeologists know this because thousands of items, like shells and gold and jade, and even wood, have been pulled out of here.”
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“Oh, and it says here—bones, too!” added Grant, reading the back of his map.

Izzy cringed. “Yes, even bones,” she admitted.

“Bones? Again?!” cried Christina. “And I almost fell in there!”

“Yes!” joked Grant. “A few more feet and we would have been toast for the rain god!”

“Don’t worry, they removed all the bones!” Izzy said gently. “The Maya believed that some of these wells were magical portals to the underworld.”

BZZZ! BZZZ! BZZZ! It was Izzy’s cell phone. “Hang on, kids. I’ll be right back.” Izzy plopped down on a fallen tree trunk.

Grant and Miguel snuck up behind Christina and Eva. “What are we whispering about now?” whispered Grant. Christina and Eva jumped.

“Don’t sneak up on us like that, Grant!” cried Christina. “All this talk of sacrifices and bones and skulls on poles has me a little on edge!”

“Like on the edge of that waterhole, right?” Grant joked.

Walls and Wells

“Ha ha!” said Christina. “Do you still have the jade stones?”

Grant reached into his pocket and pulled out a fuzzy gumball, a receipt for a slingshot he bought but lost, and some leftover cookies from their snack. “I put the jade stones in my pocket, but now they’re not here!” cried Grant.

The kids all turned to look into the sacred well. “No way!” cried Christina. “I just can’t go in there! Not, with all the bones and stuff at the bottom!”

“Christina, all of the bones have been removed, remember?” said Eva.

“Yeah, that’s just what they tell you to make you feel better!” she cried.

“What’s a few bones, anyway?” asked Grant and jumped into the water feet first.

“Grant, no!” yelled Christina. “The bones!”

Izzy ran over to the kids. “What on earth is your little brother up to now? My story didn’t scare him one bit, did it?”

Telling Izzy about the jade stones didn’t seem right to Christina, so she got brave. Before jumping in after her brother, she cried, “Just going in for a swim, that’s all!”
“Not you, too!” Izzy cried.
“Yeah, that’s what we’re doing. Whew! What a warm day,” said Miguel and jumped in, too, followed by his sister.
“Kids, the Cenote Sagrado is off limits to tourists!” Izzy called after them.

After their quick dip, Grant, Miguel, and Eva climbed up the steep bank of the water hole with no problem. But Christina couldn’t manage to get a good foothold in the roots. The side of the waterhole crumbled under her, sending her down a few feet.

“I can’t watch anymore!” cried Izzy, as she moved away from the waterhole. “Grant and Miguel, come over here. Will you help Christina? And Grant, please don’t fall in again, okay?”

The boys got on their stomachs and reached down to pull Christina up the ledge when she got close enough. Izzy was on the lookout for anyone who might catch them in the sacred waterhole.

“Did you find the stones in the water?” Grant whispered to Christina.

Walls and Wells

“Noope!” Christina answered. “But, I found this!” She showed them a note she found clinging to a branch on her way up.

The note was soaking wet but they could still read the words. In the same scrawled handwriting as the first two clues, the note said:

 coils rise to reveal a sparkly blanket above.
A Portal to the Underworld!

"How would a clue get all the way down there?" wondered Eva out loud.

Just then, a flash of white jumped out from behind a nearby bush, ripped the note from Christina’s hand, and dove into the cenote. The man’s jacket got caught on a bush as he went in, ripping the pocket. His wallet plunked into the dirt. Christina picked it up and looked over the edge. There was no sign of the mystery man.
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“He’s still under there!” Christina whimpered. “And with all those bones, too!”

“Who was that?” asked Grant. He hopped on one foot to dislodge the water from his ears.

“We’re about to find out!” Christina said. Inside the man’s wallet was a card with the symbol of a feathered serpent! The card looked like it had been torn in half and taped back together. “It looks like he belongs to some secret club!”

Tucked in the window of the wallet was a university badge with a photo of a man with a distinctive mole on his cheek. It was hard to make out the man’s name.

“I know that guy!” Grant whispered. “He was at the antique shop.”

Just then, Izzy approached the kids and snatched the wallet from Christina’s hand.

“I’ll take that,” she said, “and pass it on to the authorities, of course.” She dropped it into her handbag. “They know how to deal with thieves.”

Christina waited until Izzy left. “It was the same guy at the antique shop? Are you sure, Grant?”

“Yes, I got a really good look at him through his magnifying glass as he was studying the stone at the shop,” replied Grant.

A Portal to the Underworld!

“That means he’s been following us since Cozumel!” cried Christina.

“He must have slipped the stone into your backpack!” said Grant.

“And then followed us out on the kayak!” Christina cried.

“The stone must be very important to him,” noted Miguel.

“If it was that important to him, he shouldn’t have put it in my bag!” Christina exclaimed.

Christina looked back at the well. There was still no sign of the man. “Maybe that stuff Izzy was saying about the cenote being a portal to the underworld is true!” she yelped.

“He must have gotten out. There’s a lot of brush way over there on the other side of the waterhole,” said Eva.

“I just wish he’d leave us alone!” cried Christina.

“The jade!” shouted Grant. He was standing behind the girls.

“I know, Grant!” Christina sighed. “Now that the clue is gone, we’ll never find the last jade stone!”
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“No, the jade stones—they were in my other pocket!” said Grant, handing them back to Christina.

“You mean we went into that sacrificial well for nothing?!” Christina cried.

“Not for nothing!” Grant said. “You found that clue about ‘coils rising to reveal the sparkly blanket,’ remember?”

“You remember the clue?” Christina cried. “Thank goodness! I thought it was lost forever! I forgive you for making me go swimming in that creepy waterhole!”

“I’ll tell you what’s creepy!” whispered Grant. “Izzy just called the guy in the white suit the thief. The guy in white isn’t the thief. That’s the serpent guy. Why would she think they’re the same person?”

“I have no idea!” said Christina.

“I think he’s the same guy that upset Izzy in the plaza,” said Eva. “He was wearing a shiny white suit then, too.”

“But, if that’s the case, Eva, Izzy knows who’s behind all of this!” said Miguel.

A Portal to the Underworld!

“Then, I take it back,” said Eva. “Because that would mean Izzy is involved in all this mystery craziness! I just can’t believe that!”

“Yeah, you’re probably right,” said Christina.

But deep down inside, Christina had her doubts—especially now. When Izzy grabbed the wallet, part of a red-feathered serpent tattoo on her shoulder peeked out from under her sleeveless shirt.
The Sparkling Blanket

“I’m hungry!” grumbled Grant.
“I’m thirsty!” complained Miguel.
“Sorry, guys! We’re out of food and water,” said Christina.
“Kids,” said Izzy, “there’s a vendor by the observatory. We can grab something there. Then, after a quick peek in the observatory, we’ll be ready for the big light show this evening!”
“Yay!” cried the kids.
The Sparkling Blanket

That’s not it. It’s ‘When eating pizza in Mexico, act like a Román.’ No, wait, I know, it’s ‘When in a Roman pizza parlor—’"

“Grant!” Christina interrupted. “I get it. OK, I’ll go.”

“Then that’s settled,” said Izzy. “Go check out the observatory. I’ll throw the trash away.”

“I’ll race you!” shouted Christina. The kids sprinted up the stairs to the ancient dome-shaped building and stopped at the entrance.

“This is the Caracol Observatory,” said Christina, reading the back of the map.

“It says the Maya built it to track astronomical events, like equinoxes and eclipses,” added Eva.

“Wow! They tracked 20 of the possible 29 astronomical events from this observatory!” exclaimed Christina.

“What are we waiting for?” shouted Grant.

“Maybe we’ll see an eclipse!”

The kids ran inside.

“Look, everyone! There’s a spiral staircase!” cried Miguel.
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“The clues!” cried Eva. “It makes sense now! A caracol is a snail in Spanish! At first, I thought the coils in the clue were of a snake. But they have to mean the coiling stairs—like a coiled snail shell.”

“The jade stone clue had a spiral on it!” said Christina. “It must mean this spiral staircase, too!”

“And the sparkly blanket from the paper clue has to be the night sky,” said Miguel.

“What about the Maya number 20?” asked Grant.

“Remember,” Christina said, “that’s the number of astronomical events the Maya could see from this observatory.”

The kids climbed the observatory stairs and stopped at the top. The wind blew through the openings in the top of the dome. It made an eerie whistling sound.

“The Maya had a beautiful view of the night sky,” said Christina.

“I was just thinking,” Grant said. “The jade stones led us to other jade stones, right?”

“Yes,” agreed Christina.

The Sparkling Blanket

“So, why are there note clues, too?” asked Grant.

“I guess it’s in case we miss one of the jade clues,” said Christina.

“Then, who’s leaving the clues?” he asked. “It can’t be the feathered snake guy. He keeps trying to get the jade stones back. If it’s White Suit, then why leave clues and then steal them back?”

“You have a point, little brother,” said Christina.

Christina pulled the stones out and set them down on a ledge in the observatory. One by one, she arranged the stone pieces. “One piece to go,” she observed.

The sun set in the west with a burst of pinks and purples that seemed to settle on the ruins. The sky was sprinkled with stars.

“There! You can see Venus!” Christina pointed through a slit in the dome.

“Imagine,” said Eva excitedly, “we’re standing in the same place the Maya did when they saw the planet centuries ago!”

“Stand back!” said Miguel. “Look!”
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

As the light of Venus filtered through the fourth slit in the roof of the observatory, it stopped and hovered over the three pieces of jade resting on the ledge. Then, like a finger, the light began to trace the images etched on each stone, beginning with the first and ending with the third.

"It's reading the stones!" cried Grant.

Suddenly, a beam of light shot out of the third stone and pierced a point on the wall, causing a part of the wall to open up.

"The fourth jade piece!" cried Christina. There, in the recess of the wall, was the missing piece of jade.

The face of a jaguar was etched on the front. The back of the stone was completely smooth. Suddenly, the dome ceiling above them burst into color just as the sun disappeared below the horizon.

"What's happening?" cried Christina. She grabbed the stones and slid them all into her backpack.

"The dome! It wants the stone back!" gasped Grant.

The Sparkling Blanket

The kids practically stumbled over each other as they descended the spiral stairwell.

"Izzy!" Grant yelled. "Run for your life! The observatory is about to blow!"
Timberrrrrrrr!

Realizing that he was alone, Grant stopped running and turned around. He saw a bright white cellphone light floating in front of the brightly lit Caracol Observatory—and pointed right at him!

"Grant," said Christina, wiggling her cellphone light as she caught up to him, "the observatory isn't going to blow! It's just the light show. It's already begun!"

"Ohhhh!Oops!" Grant said.

"Let's head to the light show!" said Izzy. "Remember, stick with me—no matter what!" she warned.
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

The gang moved close to the pyramid, where the crowd had grown since the morning. Families with small kids were settled on blankets. Everyone watched the history of Chichen Itza unfold before their eyes. A smooth dialog of Spanish floated over the loudspeaker.

Grant stood mesmerized as the pyramid lit up. With a trick of the lighting, the ghostly shape of Kukulkan appeared to descend the side of the pyramid to meet his head at the base of the steps. Applause from the crowd was deafening.

Following the light show, the crowd of people began to leave the ruins. The four kids lingered near the pyramid while Izzy spoke with several tourists about the history of the ruins.

All of a sudden, the ground rumbled and shifted, causing the kids to lose their balance and fall to their knees.

“TIMBERRRRRR!” shouted Grant.

“That’s no tree falling,” shouted Christina. “That’s an earthquake!”

The kids crawled to the side of the pyramid and leaned against the wall for balance. The ground rumbled for only about ten seconds,
“He must have gone inside,” said Miguel.
“The pyramid is open?” Izzy asked, shocked. “But it hasn’t been open to the public for years!”
“The earthquake broke the lock!” Christina said. “Come on!”
The kids followed Christina through the metal door and up the steep steps at the entrance of the pyramid.
The air was stifling. It was pitch-black inside, except for the small beacon of light coming from Christina’s phone.
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

Izzy stood at the entrance, protesting, but no one heard. "Wait for me!" she called.
"Grant!" Christina shouted.
"It's so dark in here," yelped Eva. She turned on her own cellphone for light.
"I hope we don't run into any spiders, or worse—snakes!" cried Christina.
"Christina!" It was Grant's voice.
"Grant?" called Christina.
"Over here!" answered Grant.
"He's behind this wall," said Miguel. He began tapping on it.
"Grant, don't worry! We'll get you out!" Christina cried. "Miguel, give me your shoe!"
"I'm right here." Grant popped out from behind the wall.
"Grant! We thought you were trapped behind one of those spinning walls!" cried Christina.
"They have those here?" asked Grant.
"Kids, let's get out of here!" commanded Izzy. Cellphone lights danced like fireflies. "Stop moving!" she yelled.
"Ouch! I hit my knee on something!" Grant cried.

Echoes and Chirps

"You just ran into a chac mool," Izzy said. She pointed to a reclining stone figure leaning back on its elbows.
"Why is it lying back like that?" asked Eva.
"It was used for sacrificial offerings to the gods," she explained.
"Look at this!" Grant shouted from the other end of the chamber.

The group circled around a statue of a jaguar. It was painted red and had bright green jade spots inlaid in its body.
"It's amazing!" cried Christina and clapped her hands.
"That's the Jaguar Throne," Izzy began. She was interrupted by the sound of a bird chirping. "Is that a bird? How peculiar!" mumbled Izzy. "If you clap outside the pyramid, the echo sounds like the Quetzal—a sacred mythological
bird.” She clapped her hands. A bird echoed back again.

“Oh, how cool!” said Grant.

“It sounded like it came from over there,” Izzy mumbled. She used her cellphone to go deeper into the pyramid. The kids could still hear Izzy clapping as she turned around a stone corner.

CLAP...CHIRP...CLAP...CHIRP

“Look, here!” said Grant. “One of the spots on the Jaguar Throne is missing! Christina, the stones!”

Christina placed the jade stones into the missing jaguar spot one piece at a time. Each new piece she added to the jaguar glowed a bright green.

After Christina put three of the stones into the statue, the kids heard a muffled cry.

“That was Izzy! Let’s go!” shouted Christina.

The kids took off in the direction of the cry and found Izzy crouched in a dark corner.

“Izzy! Are you okay?” asked Christina.

Echoes and Chirps

“Yes, I am,” she said, “but my cellphone battery died.”

Crawling down the wall behind Izzy’s head was a hairy spider the size of Christina’s hand. It extended one of its hairy legs and touched Izzy’s shoulder.

Eva screeched and jumped up and down, making the shadow of the spider seem to do the same.

“Don’t move, Izzy!” Christina warned. “There’s a spider behind you!”

Izzy froze. The spider crawled across her back and up onto her yellow floppy hat.

“Get it off me!” squealed Izzy.

“Eva, give me some light!” Christina whispered.

Very carefully, Christina reached over and grabbed the two sides of Izzy’s hat. She lifted it off her head and set it on the floor.

“Let’s get out of here!” cried Izzy.

“What about your hat?” cried Christina. “We can’t leave it in here!”

“I’ll get it,” said Miguel bravely. He flicked the spider off and ran back with the others to the inner chamber.
When they all got back to the inner chamber, Christina looked around and said, “Wait, where’s Grant? NOT AGAIN!”

Suddenly, the floor pitched and swung, forcing the kids against the walls of the chamber.

“Whoa!” cried Miguel. “That was a powerful aftershock!”

“Kids!” shouted Izzy. “We have to go now! It’s too dangerous!”

“But what about Grant?” shouted Christina. “The spider will get him!”

“Don’t worry, Christina,” Izzy cried. “He’s probably already outside!”

Outside, the earth was still. The plaza was deserted. A few cars, including Izzy’s Lime-O-Zeen, were still in the parking lot.

“I don’t see Grant anywhere!” cried Christina. “What’s that, Miguel?” Eva asked.

“This? It’s a feather.” Miguel said. “I found it next to the Jaguar Throne.”

“May I?” Christina asked, taking the feather from Miguel and holding it up to her light.

“It looks like the feathers from the feathered serpent that attacked us in the Great Ball Court!” Izzy cried. She sounded angry.
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“Look, there’re more!” shouted Miguel. He pointed to a trail of feathers. A gust of wind began to toss them in different directions. “We’re losing the trail!” shouted Christina. “Come on!”

The trail stopped in front of tall columns. The rock pillars stood erect and still like soldiers blanketed in darkness.

“Grant!” called Christina. “Are you here?” “This is the Temple of the Thousand Columns!” said Izzy.

Christina’s eyes began to adjust to the dark. “There are so many of them! We’ll never find him!” she cried.

“Why would your brother take off like that?” asked Izzy. “I doubt he’d run off this late at night, unless someone were chasing him,” Christina replied.

Christina could make out the shapes of Miguel and Eva. Eva’s cell phone lit their path. “Any luck?” Christina called to her friends.

“Not yet!” Eva answered. “There’s another set of columns. We’ll go check there.”

Trail of Feathers

“Be careful!” Christina warned. “The feathered snake man is still on the loose!” “We will!” the kids promised. She listened to them call her brother’s name until their voices grew faint and she thought she could hear her own heart beating.

The sound of tires squealing in the distance broke the silence. Christina hoped that was Feathered Snake Guy leaving for good.

Christina didn’t completely trust Izzy, but she was worried about her brother. She decided to tell Izzy everything. She left out the part about finding the three other pieces of jade until she knew Izzy could be trusted.

Izzy began to laugh. “What’s so funny?” asked Christina. “I promised my aunt, Professor Z, that I wouldn’t say anything because it was her idea,” Izzy said. “But, under the circumstances—” “What?” Christina interrupted. “The clues were part of the tour,” she admitted.

Christina was speechless. “I must say, you kids are tenacious—never giving up, no matter what!” she remarked. “Most
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

Kids don't even find the clues, much less know what to do with them."

"Well," Christina said, "it might have something to do with the fact that we have a grandmother who writes mystery books!"

"Well, actually, your grandparents were in on it, too!" exclaimed Izzy.

"That doesn't surprise me!" Christina laughed and asked, "Are the guy in the white suit and the feathered snake guy part of the tour, too?"

Izzy grew serious. "Christina, there's something you need to know."

"Does it have anything to do with your tattoo? Emilio has one, too," Christina said.

"Oh, you noticed?" she asked, adjusting her shirt around her shoulder. "Yes, actually, it does," Izzy admitted.

Izzy told Christina about how her secret club, the Feathered Serpents, works to preserve the Maya culture. She revealed that one of the members, Dr. Angelo, a professor at the university and a man of many costumes, had lost sight of their mission. She explained that he had become obsessed with collecting rare artifacts for himself instead of protecting them.

"OK, so White Suit and Feathered Snake Guy are the same person? And he belongs in this secret club of yours, right?" Christina asked.

"Well, not any more," admitted Izzy.

"So, Dr. Angelo went rogue. But if you thought he was up to no good, then why didn't you stop him?" asked Christina.

"Believe me, I tried!" Izzy exclaimed.

"We think he's after this," said Christina, handing Izzy the fourth jade stone. "Grant remembers him from the antique shop. We think he put the stone in my bag then."

"A jade stone? And all this time, I thought he was following me around because we kicked him out of the Feathered Serpent Club!" Izzy said.

"But why would he put this in my bag?" asked Christina.

"This must be the stone from the legend! Dr. Angelo knew how important this stone was. He probably didn't want to be seen buying it from the shop. There would be a record of his purchase," Izzy explained.

Trail of Feathers
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“Wait, what legend?” Christina asked.

“I didn’t think it was true, but Dr. Angelo became obsessed with it! It’s like he became a completely different person,” Izzy began. “Well, it’s an ancient Maya legend. Long ago, in Chichen Itza, the high priest had a vision that among them were hidden four pieces of the same stone. The prophecy foretold that great riches would befall the one who finds the stones and reveals its treasure.”

Christina’s eyes grew wide.

“Is there more?” shouted Grant.

“Grant?!” cried Christina.

“Up here!” he shouted back.

On top of one of the tall warrior columns sat Grant, cross-legged and smiling.

18 Generations of Sadness

“I guess you followed my feather trail, huh?” he said and slid down the tall stone column.

“Wow! Great hiding place, Grant!” Christina cried. “If I weren’t so happy to see you, I’d punch you in the arm.”

“Gosh, Christina, if the legend hadn’t been so interesting, I’d be mad right now that you’re not trying very hard to find me!” Grant shot back.

“Well, if you—!” Christina began.
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“Kids!” shouted Izzy. “Grant, tell us what happened! Why did you take off like that?”

“Well,” Grant said, “I thought I’d go find the mythological bird myself.”

“It wasn’t really a bird, Grant,” said Izzy. “It was just an echo that sounds like a bird because I clapped.”

“That’s what I thought, too, but it wasn’t a bird at all. Although he did have feathers like a bird...” Grant trailed off.

“Graaaaant!” shouted Christina.

“Oh, right! It wasn’t a bird after all,” Grant said. “It was that feathered snake guy! He tried to trick me into giving him the jade stones!”

“Stones!” cried Izzy. “There’s more than one?”

Christina looked down at her feet.

“You found the other three pieces here in Chichen Itza?” asked Izzy. She sounded impressed.

“Yes, we did,” admitted Christina. “Each of the pieces was a clue to find the next one.” Then, Christina asked Grant, “You didn’t give the stones to Feathered Snake Guy, did you?”

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“No! I didn’t have them,” he said, sounding offended. “I kicked him in the shin and yanked feathers off his costume. Then, I made a run for it!”

“So, the legend could be true?” asked Izzy breathlessly. “Christina, I wasn’t finished telling you the legend!” She looked around. “Where are the others?”

“They’ll be here soon,” said Christina. “I just texted Eva.”

When Eva and Miguel returned, Izzy started the legend from the beginning.

“So,” said Izzy, coming to the end of the legend, “the legend did foretell of great riches for the person who finds all four stones, but it also warned that 18 generations of great sadness would follow!”

“The jade stones! We left them in the pyramid!” Christina cried.

“We have to get them!” exclaimed Izzy. “Those stones could be very dangerous. We can’t risk anyone getting their hands on them!”

The kids were relieved to find the jade still resting in the Jaguar Throne. Christina removed
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

the three stones one by one from the Jaguar Throne and placed them on top of the statue.

“So, they fit together?” asked Izzy.

“Yes,” said Christina. “Like a puzzle!”

The kids watched as Izzy arranged the pieces. When she placed the last piece with the other three, the stones glowed bright green, filling the chamber with its soft light.

“It’s here! The treasure is here! I can feel it!” gasped Izzy.

The kids looked at one another and then back at Izzy. Something was different about Izzy. Her eyes were darker and a strange smile crept across her lips.

Christina reached for the stones, but Izzy grabbed her arm. “I have to know if the legend

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is true! This is every archaeologist’s dream!” she cried.

Izzy grabbed the jade pieces, and before the kids could stop her, she placed the pieces back into the missing spot on the Jaguar Throne.

The floor began to rumble beneath their feet. Bright pins of light sprang from the bottom of the jaguar and shot to the ceiling of the pyramid. The Jaguar Throne began to rotate.

At exactly ninety degrees, the statue stopped, revealing mounds of jewels. Gold, jade, rubies, and diamonds sparkled brilliantly in a secret chamber below the statue.

Izzy began to laugh, softly at first. Then, her laugh grew louder and louder until the kids had to cover their ears. Christina knew Izzy had changed. She knew they had to do something to stop Izzy from taking the treasure herself and losing everything she believed in. Christina looked at Grant and nodded.

As Christina held Izzy back, Grant removed the jade stones from the Jaguar Throne.

“No!” cried Izzy. “The treasure!”
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"Sorry, Izzy," said Grant, "but you're forgetting about the 18 generations of sadness that will follow. That sounds like an awful long time to me! I don't think I can wait that long to feel happy again."

The Jaguar Throne rumbled into place, and they were thrown back into darkness.

Outside the pyramid, Izzy rubbed her eyes and shook her head as if waking from a trance.

"What just happened?" asked Izzy, as if coming out of a daze.

"The real Izzy's back!" they cried happily.

In the parking lot, they stopped a park official as the group was getting into Izzy's Lime-O-Zeen. They told him the lock on the pyramid door appeared broken and that he should check it out. The guard thanked them profusely and ran toward the pyramid.

Grant secretly handed the kids one jade piece each. "Just to be safe," he whispered.

MEOW...MEOW...MEOW!

"Hey, I think you have another passenger, Izzy. I just heard a cat," said Miguel.

18 Generations of Sadness

"No, it's a text from Mimi," Christina said, pulling out her phone. "It says, 'Come back pronto! You OK?'"

Christina quickly answered Mimi's text.

On our way now! Survived the earthquake without a scratch! Thanks for texting—I was NOT looking forward to sleeping in a hammock in the jungle tonight!
Oliver's Been Shark-Napped!

Izzy plugged her phone into the Lime-O-Zeen charger. After a few seconds, her phone blinked to life. Missed phone and text messages began popping up.

"There's a long message from my aunt," said Izzy.

"From Grandmother?" asked Eva. "I just texted her back to say we're on our way."

"These are from earlier today, when my phone died," said Izzy. "She says that it's as if
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Oliver has disappeared from the face of the planet!" “Oliver’s gone?” cried Eva. “Where would a whale shark hide?”

“She says she’s not getting any signal from the tracking device,” explained Izzy.

“Maybe the tracking device is a dud. I know that happens with firecrackers all the time,” said Grant.

Christina received a text from Mimi. She said, “Mimi and Papa are meeting us in Chiquila since the ferries don’t run this late.”

BZZZ! BZZZ! BZZZ!

“It’s a video text from Angelo!” gasped Izzy. The video began with a close-up of Oliver and then panned out. The bottom of Professor Z’s boat was visible. Swim fins disappeared from the water two at a time.

“That’s us getting out of the water and being pulled into the boat!” said Miguel.

The video turns away from the boat. “Look!” cried Christina. “Oliver is coming back—and fast!”

The video went black.

Oliver’s Been Shark-Napped!

“But, why would Dr. Angelo send you a video of Oliver?” asked Grant.

“I have no idea, Grant,” said Izzy. “But it can’t be good! Wait! It’s another text from him.”

“Another video?” asked Christina.

“No. It’s worse! It’s a ransom note!” Izzy cried. “Read this!”

Izzy handed her phone to Christina. Christina read the message. “36527620. Look familiar? The four stones for Oliver, or else!”

“Do you think Dr. Angelo has shark-napped Oliver?” cried Grant.

“Those are the numbers from the jade stones!” exclaimed Christina.

Izzy exclaimed, “Oh no! It’s all my fault!”

“How is any of this your fault, Izzy?” asked Christina.

“The legend spoke of random Maya numbers,” she explained.

“The ones on the stones!” noted Christina.

“Yes, but, without the actual pieces of jade, the numbers had no meaning to us,” Izzy said.
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“What does this have to do with Oliver?” asked Christina.

“Dr. Angelo must have overheard me and my aunt talking about using those numbers in the code for the tracking device,” explained Izzy. “I’ve made such a mess of things!”

“No, Dr. Angelo has!” said Grant.

Izzy read her text out loud as she wrote it.
“Where... have...you...put...Oliver?”
BZZZ! BZZZ! BZZZ!

“He wrote back!” cried Izzy. “He says, ‘For now, the signal to Oliver’s tracking device is only scrambled, so no one can find him. But, heed my warning! The stones for Oliver—or else!’”

“We don’t have a choice,” cried Eva.

“That’s out of the question!” said Izzy. “Remember the legend?”

“Well, what if we only let him think he’s getting the stones?” suggested Grant. “We’ll arrange a drop-off and give him fake stones!”

“Great plan, Grant!” Christina said. “I’m sure we can find some fake jade stones in a gift shop. And I’m so glad Oliver hasn’t been kidnapped—he’s just had his tracking device scrambled!”

A Gift to Kukulkan

That night, at the town of Chiquila, the group met Mimi and Papa on the docks. “On the boat ride over, the strangest thing happened,” said Mimi. “Oliver came to say hello!”

Papa added, “He bumped the boat so hard that we thought it was an earthquake!”

Grant said, “He probably just wanted to let everyone know he was alive and well—just like in the legend of Kukulkan!”

“Izzy taught you well!” laughed Professor Z. “Anyone interested in going out on the boat tomorrow morning?”
A Gift to Kukulkan

The kids were sad that Oliver wasn't in his normal feeding spot when they anchored the boat. “At least we know he’s safe,” noted Eva.

“We should enjoy ourselves while we’re here,” suggested Grant. They took turns jumping off the side of the boat and playing tag in the water until they spotted Dr. Angelo’s kayak. Like before, he was wearing a shiny white suit and a fishing hat. But instead of waving, he had a snarl on his face.

“I think he figured out that the stones we left at the drop-off were fake stones! Now, what are we going to do?” cried Christina.

“Hey, where’s your chicken suit?” shouted Grant to Dr. Angelo. The comment only made the man angrier. He rowed furiously through the water toward the boat.

Christina looked up. Professor Z, Mimi, and Papa were talking on the boat’s upper deck, unaware of what was happening below them.

Eva pointed at Dr. Angelo. “He’s too close!” she squealed.

Just then, a giant shadow moved through the water and rose to the surface. It headed in the direction of the kayak.

The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

The kids could hardly contain their excitement. “Maybe we’ll see Oliver again!”

The next morning, as the boat sped through the Caribbean Sea, Izzy asked Grant, “Do you have the stones?”

“You already asked me that twice back at the marina,” Grant said, patting his pocket.

“What if the plan doesn’t work?” asked Miguel.

“What if he figures out Emilio put another tracking device on Oliver early this morning?” asked Eva.

“Kids, don’t worry. My aunt hasn’t activated the device yet, so Dr. Angelo won’t know,” said Izzy.

“But, if Oliver already has a new tracking device on him, why are we doing this?” asked Miguel.

Christina said, “As long as Oliver is feeding in this area, he’s in danger, right, Izzy?”

“That’s right. We need to keep Dr. Angelo distracted until Oliver migrates from here,” Izzy explained.
The Mystery at the Maya Ruins

“Oliver!” cried Izzy and the kids.

Professor Z, accompanied by Mimi and Papa, rushed down when they heard Oliver’s name.

“Look!” cried Grant. “Oliver has a grudge.”

They all watched as Oliver bumped the kayak with his nose and sent Dr. Angelo sprawling into the water. Dr. Angelo surfaced, clutching his fishing hat and sputtering salt water. The flipped-over kayak quickly bubbled and sank beneath the waves.

“A little help, please?” cried Dr. Angelo.

“You’ll get some help, all right, when we turn you in to the authorities for tampering with our scientific devices,” said Izzy triumphantly. Christina and Grant cheered.

“OK, OK!” Dr. Angelo sputtered as the kids prepared to drag him into the boat. “Just don’t leave me out here with that whale shark!”

As the boat zoomed through the water, Izzy formally invited the kids to join the Feathered Serpent Club. To show that she was serious, she put red feathered serpent tattoos on each of their wrists.

A Gift to Kukulkan

“The tattoos may be temporary,” Izzy said, “but your membership in the club is forever!”

Christina felt proud to be a part of something so important.

As the boat zipped across the water, the kids took turns tossing their jade into the sea. To honor the Maya, they timed their throws for every 365 seconds.

“The last one is for you, Kukulkan!” shouted Grant. “May you shake the Earth every July!”

For a split second, as the stones flew through the air, the jade glowed bright green, before dipping into the waves and settling to the bottom of the sea.

The End