

Miracle at Kuelap

Suddenly coming awake from a deep sleep, Hudson felt as if he had just closed his eyes. He had stayed up late the night before thinking about what this day would bring. Today would be the beginning of the great adventure he had been planning for many years. He had graduated from high school and with three months ahead of him before starting college he was ready to go. Telling his mother Amelia his plans had been difficult, but she finally agreed to let him live his dream. She had good reason to be worried but after Hudson told her his two best friends would be coming along with him she had less to argue about. Hudson slowly absorbs his room around him, knowing that he will be away from it for a long time, far from his loved ones, and the comforts of home.

The ancient ruins of Kuelap, Peru, a place he had been obsessed with for as long as he can remember, the place where his father had disappeared twelve years ago, was his destination. Edmund Stark, an amateur archaeologist, had never returned home from a solo expedition to the ancient site that had so captured his imagination. Hudson barely remembers his father and he is hoping that he will discover some new things about him as he retraces his father's steps. It is like a spiritual journey to him. His friends Marco Jones and Jim O'Neal didn't think he should travel alone to such a remote and desolate place and enthusiastically signed on for the adventure.

Hudson, a tall and athletic teenager with chocolate hair and light green eyes has known his friends Marco and Jim since the first grade. Marco has a short and portly build with red hair, freckles and blue eyes with glasses, while Jim is of medium height with dirty blond hair and dark brown eyes. They all meet at Hudson's home and Hudson says an emotional farewell to his mother, Amelia. They get in the cab to the airport and chatter excitedly about their upcoming adventure, little knowing what lies ahead.

After boarding the plane and storing their backpacks overhead, the boys settle into their seats for the long trip to Peru. Hudson takes his cell phone from his pocket to review the history of their destination, the ancient civilization of Kuelap. He knew it had a somewhat sinister and mysterious history. But he and his friends had talked that over and decided that since they had arranged for a guide they would be in good hands.

After a long flight, it took them several hours to make their way by bus to El Tingo, the closest town to Kuelap. The road they took was treacherous and the bus driver told them that it was nicknamed "The Death Road." El Tingo was where they planned to meet their guide Renzo. But first they needed to get their supplies for the trip into the jungle. Luckily they found a small shop that seemed to have what they needed such as mosquito repellent, hats to keep off the sun, sleeping bags, canteens, flashlights, and of course, food for the road.

When they leave the store, they spot their guide Renzo, who seems to be looking around the area for them. As they approach him, a tall and slender man in

his late twenties with black hair, black eyes and tanned skin, Renzo introduces himself and asks them if they are ready to go. The three boys look Renzo over and decide that they can trust him to get them up the mountain to Kuelap.

They set out on the trek up through the majestic Andes to reach the remote stunning ruins of Kuelap. They arrive at the ruins of the ancient civilization and set up their campground. Hudson was fascinated by the jungle and felt very emotional to finally be where his father once walked. The three boys are shocked by the dense jungle that surrounds them. It had an eerie and mysterious atmosphere with so many strange noises, bird calls, animal screeches and buzzing insects of all kinds, nothing like what they had ever seen or heard before. After Hudson, Marco and Jim explore the area around the camp, Renzo leads them to the ruins. He shows them that Kuelap is a fortress built on a high ridge completely invisible from the valley below with walls eight meters high. He points out several hundred buildings, a royal enclosure and even watchtowers all built of stone. The boys are fascinated by what Renzo is teaching them, but sense that he is becoming nervous as the sun goes down and he hurries them away from the ruins and back to their campsite. The group prepares to eat dinner in the jungle. While eating, Renzo tells the group about the lore of the ruins of Kuelap. He describes evil things happening in the ruins like rumors of rituals, human captives being sacrificed and people disappearing. After the dinner, the group gets ready to sleep by getting out their sleeping bags and settling in. Hudson, Marco, and Jim fall into a deep sleep despite the hot, sweaty and noisy surroundings of the campground.

The next morning, they woke up to a deadly silence. Confused at first, they suddenly realized that they were alone. Renzo and all of his belongings had disappeared! It appeared that they were completely on their own, which was not something they had planned for. What happened to him? How were they going to go down the mountain without him? While the boys were trying to decide what to do next, all of a sudden Jim's expression changed to one of terror. Speechless, he pointed towards the walls of the fortress. Hudson and Marco turned to the direction where Jim was pointing and their facial expressions matched his. The walls were covered with hieroglyphics painted in what looked like blood. It was a horrifying sight to see!

The three boys scramble to pack up all of their supplies in a hurry to get out of the area as quickly as they can. While they don't exactly know how to get back to civilization without their guide, down the mountain it seemed like a good way to start. They were almost ready to go when they heard a blood curdling scream from inside the walls. Marco is brave enough to decide that he should see where the scream came from. He cautiously approaches the walls and climbs up to the watchtower. Hudson and Jim watch him, fearing for his safety, as he slowly climbs down into an opening of the ruin. Endless minutes pass by without any further sign of Marco. Paralyzed by shock and fear, the two remaining boys don't notice the silent approach of a native man dressed in the clothes of his ancestors.

The man, called Baldomero, quietly introduces himself to Hudson and Jim and tells them not to be afraid. He says he and his family have long been the defenders of

the sacred mountain. He explains to them that they have arrived at Kuelap at the wrong time. He tells them that every one hundred years, the sinister tribe of the mountain holds a ritual of human sacrifice. This ritual requires two victims, and Baldomero tells them that the rebel natives have been waiting a long time for a second victim. They had long ago captured their first, a white man they found twelve years ago exploring their ruins. Unfortunately, Baldomero says they have now found the second victim - Marco! And it's up to them to rescue both Marco and the mysterious white prisoner. And the only way to accomplish that mission is to go through what Baldemoro calls "The Killing Corridor."

The Killing Corridor has large high walls on the sides and it is a very steep climb that gets narrower and narrower to the final point where there is only room for one man at a time to pass. The passageway is littered with the bones of many souls who have failed to get through. As Hudson, Jim, and Baldomero get out of "The Death Corridor" they arrive into a large chamber with many other doorways leading to somewhere else unknown in the ruins. Baldomero spots a red glowing light coming from one of the passage doors. The group decided that it was the most promising and they slowly approached the ominous opening. As they creep down the dark space, the temperature became hotter and hotter. They have reached a cavern deep in the fortress, one that Baldomero calls "The Inkpot". It has only one way in or out and a circular opening at the top. Looking out from behind an immense boulder they see the reason for the increasing heat. A crowd of rebel natives, including their guide Renzo, surround Marco and a mysterious white man.

There are bonfires surrounding them with drummers pounding violently on their drums. The rebel natives are decorated in human bones and red war paint, with feather crowns on their heads. As the ritual reaches its' climax, Baldomero steps out of the shadows and raises his hand. As the rebel natives turn to look at him in surprise, his hand starts to glow. They know that Baldomero holds in his power the sacred light of the mountain. They fall back in awe and slowly the drums stop one by one.

Baldomero gazes slowly around the cavern and softly murmurs a few words in the ancient tongue of the mountain. The rebel natives bow their heads in shame and move slowly out the passageway. Hudson races to his friend Marco and unties him, while Baldomero and Jim release the frail and shaking white man. Baldomero suddenly raises his head in shock, looking back and forth between the prisoner and Hudson. He quietly smiles to himself but says nothing. As they cautiously retreat from the deadly cavern, Baldomero slowly raises his glowing hand in a blessing.

Emerging into the daylight they discover that all the natives but Renzo have faded into the jungle. Renzo looks threateningly at the group, and shakes his spear in their direction, screaming words that only Baldomero can understand. Baldomero tries to avoid the blow of the spear but Renzo is too quick for him. As Baldomero falls to the ground Renzo shrieks one last time, then turns and disappears into the jungle. As he lies mortally wounded on the ground, the light slowly fades from Baldomero's hand. Hudson leans down to hear him quietly whisper "The mountain will always be safe, for my son and his family will carry on protecting it. And you

must now become a good son to your father, who has waited a very long time to see you again." Having used his last bit of strength, Baldomero passes into the mountain's embrace.

Devastated by loss of their good friend who saved their lives and still in shock from the horror what they had just witnessed, the boys remain silent for several minutes.. Slowly Baldomero's last words sink into Hudson's mind. What could he have meant, that he should now be a "good son?" His father had died long ago. Then he heard a voice, "Hudson, could that possibly be you?" Hudson, very confused, turns to the white man who is speaking to him, wondering how he could know his name. "I am Edmund Stark. I have been lost from home for twelve years. I always imagined my son would look like you when he grew up." Hudson starred at the man in disbelief, yet there was a small voice in his head saying the impossible could be true. Marco, recovered from his ordeal, and Jim were just as surprised. Somehow Hudson knew it was true, that his father was alive and standing in front of him. He finally understood the reason he had yearned his whole entire life to come to this place, the ancient, mysterious, spiritual ruins of Kuelap.