



# JEWEL OF THE AMAZON

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The Land Rover kicked up a small dust cloud in its wake as it manoeuvred the tight corners of the barren road. On the right side, a slight hill separated the road from the jungle. On the left, the road fell away to the dense Amazon Jungle below with only a flimsy guard rail to stop vehicles running off the road. Shane Pierson thumbed through his latest manuscript, making notes in the margins with a green pen as he sat in the passenger seat. The car ran over a pothole, jolting the pen out of his hand. As Shane picked up his pen, he shot a look at the driver. Shane had met the guy at the airport after a long flight across from the states that had best been described as “budget”. As soon as he had stepped onto the tarmac, Shane had realised he’d made a mistake in his wardrobe as the heat and humidity caused his jacket and shirt to cling to his torso. Seeing his driver holding a card with his name scrawled in something close to chicken scrawl in a full suit, Shane realised he could have chosen worse. The man’s cheap suit was undersized and covered in sweat, he seemed indifferent to Shane as he approached, fixing him with a thousand-yard stare that Shane could feel in his bones. The pleasantries were non-existent as Cheap Suit turned and led Shane to the waiting Land Rover in the airport parking lot. Shane had eyed the dented exterior of the car and made a mental note to have a serious discussion with his publisher about contract renegotiations.

Shane slid the manuscript into his satchel and pulled out a bundle of papers, both handwritten and typed. His hands were shaking as he skimmed over it for the fourth time in as many days. His stomach trembled in excitement at the thought of what this would mean for him. After years of declining sales and critical reviews, this was it. This was the big new idea he was looking for that would skyrocket him back into that New York Bestsellers list. He noticed Cheap Suit staring at the notes and raised an eyebrow. Cheap Suit stared at the notes with something like hunger before turning back to the road and letting out a string of curse words.

Shane glanced out the windscreen. His eyes widened at the truck that had just appeared parked on their side of the road. Cheap Suit wrenched the wheel to the right. The Land Rover’s tyres turned and sending the car into a skid. The rear end swung around and collided into the truck, sending it through the guardrail. Shane’s head rang as he tumbled out of the car with as much grace as he could manage, satchel forgotten. He lay on his back in the dirt waiting for the world to come back into focus. Once he felt like he could distinguish shapes, he climbed to his feet, dusting himself off. He let out a low whistle at the carnage in front of him.

The guardrail had done little to cushion the truck’s impact, with only a sheared end of the rail stuck up against the truck’s rear wheel arch, leaving it hanging over the long drop. Shane turned back around to check on Cheap Suit, any question dying in his throat as he saw Cheap Suit rummaging through his satchel.

‘Hey! What the hell are you doing?’ Cheap Suit ignored him. He found Shane’s manuscript, tossed it aside and kept searching through the satchel. Shane made a break towards the car as Cheap Suit found the research notes scattered around the cabin of the car. He looked up as Shane reached the passenger window and wrenched it open.

An M9 Beretta had appeared in Cheap Suit’s hand, aimed straight at Shane’s chest.

‘That’s close enough.’ Shane froze and put his hands up. Cheap Suit smiled and cocked the hammer of his pistol. Shane had never liked guns but this one had earned a top spot on his most hated guns list.

‘Okay, Okay. Just take it easy.’



All of a sudden, a twig snapped off to the right. Both men spun at the sound, Cheap Suit gun at the ready. A lone figure stood at the top of the hill. Their hand strayed towards the shotgun on their back. Cheap Suit drew a bead on the figure.

'Hold it right there!' he yelled. 'Hand away from the gun.' The figure's hand dropped to their waist. Cheap Suit motioned with the gun. 'Hands where I can see them.'

The figure made their way down the hill, hands held up in the air. As they came closer, Shane realised that it was a woman. Her hair was tucked under her tattered hat in an almost tomboyish way. Her stunning green eyes flickered between the two men. Her clothes were sensible and practical, made for long stints in the dense jungle. She looked incredible.

'Alright, just keep your hands away from that boom stick of yours and we'll all walk away.' Cheap Suit said. He kept the gun trained at the woman as he turned back to Shane. 'Now Mr Pierson, I need you to hand over those documents of yours right now.'

'What are you talking about?'

'The *documents*, the reason why you're here in this shithole, the reason why I'm stuck here in this godforsaken place.' Shane glanced sideways at the woman. She was watching the exchange with a detached interest. She seemed more focused on the gun pointed square at her chest. Shane for his part stayed silent, seeing how this would play out. Cheap Suit sighed and swung the gun back around to Shane.

'Mr Pierson, this is a matter of national security, and I have already wasted enough time on this little escapade of yours. Goodbye.'

Shane dove behind the car as Cheap Suit fired. He landed with a groan as a string of bullets slammed into the chassis. Shane rolled under the car as a bullet landed in the dirt next to him. He watched as Cheap Suit's feet ambled towards him.

A shot boomed out and Cheap Suit's feet stopped. It was silent before a second shot sounded and Cheap Suit's feet took off running. Another set of feet appeared as Shane lay in the dirt. They stopped next to his face and the woman's face appeared. She gave him an amused grin.

'You wanna crawl on up out of there or are you happy just rolling around in the dirt?' She asked. Shane crawled out from under the car and clambered to his feet, dusting himself off. He grabbed his satchel from the passenger seat and slung it over his shoulder.

'Jesus, I'm lucky you were here. A couple more seconds and I was a sitting duck, although I guess here a lying duck would be the better analogy.' The woman rolled her eyes and holstered the shotgun. Her eyes wandered up his body without a hint of shame or appeal. She looked over to the truck and her mouth fell open.

'What the hell...' she breathed. 'What the hell happened to my truck?' She spun around to face Shane. He looked away and rubbed the back of his neck.

'Well, I would have to be partly at fault for that.'

'And how, may I ask, did that happen?' Shane kicked at a loose rock on the road, avoiding eye contact.

'Distracted driving. The friendly neighbourhood thug there was taking me to Jirau and-'

'Jirau? Why would someone like you need to get to that backwater?' she asked. Shane looked up. He didn't know this woman and after Cheap Suit, he would have to keep his reasons to himself, at least until he got to know her a little better.

'This cartographer has a map I'm after.' Shane pointed at her. 'You know where it is, you could take me there.'

'If we can get the winch from my truck and attach it to the car, then we can discuss payment-' The sound of tearing metal cut her off as the truck's wheel arch slipped off what was left of the guardrail and plummeted to the ground. Shane walked over to the edge just as the truck disappeared below the tree line. They both stared at the space where the truck had been. Shane turned to the woman.

'So... you still want me to get the winch set up?'

The woman turned her back to him and started walking down the road in silence. Shane caught up and walked side by side with her. 'Wait we haven't even introduced ourselves,' He stuck out his hand. 'Shane Pierson.' The woman raised an eyebrow and shook it.

'Krystle Fowler.'

'Well Krystle, I have two hundred bucks on me at the moment. You take me to Jirau and it's yours.' Krystle rounded on him.

'Listen here. That truck had an entire year and a half's worth of maps and treasure that you and your trigger-happy friend pissed away that was worth a hell of a lot more than two hundred bucks. If you want my help, you're going to have to do better than that!' She went to keep walking, but Shane grabbed a hold of her arm.

'Okay, you know what? Five hundred bucks. That's the best I can do.' he said. Krystle stared at him for a moment, her stunning green eyes weighing up the options.

'It's a start. Not much, but it's a start.' She started walking again, calling over her shoulder. 'Come on then. We've got a way to go from here to Jirau on foot.'

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Dark clouds rolled in overhead a couple of hours later and they had not seen anyone else on the road. Shane trudged behind Krystle, who seemed to enjoy watching him struggle. His satchel strap dug into his shoulder, his feet were killing him, and he was not coping with the humidity well at all. For her part, Krystle kept up a constant pace and was all too eager to let Shane know just how much he was slowing them down. Shane, out of breath, bent over and coughed. Krystle glanced over her shoulder at him.

'You better not die on me.'

'Wouldn't dream of it.' Shane muttered as he stood back up. Krystle rolled her eyes and kept walking. They stayed silent until thunder sounded and without warning, rain began pelting down. A wall of water fell on them, and they were both drenched in seconds. Shane couldn't see two feet in front of him. He jumped as Krystle appeared from the water wall right next to him. She had to shout to be heard over the rain and thunder.

'We're gonna keep going. I'm going to tie our waists together, so we don't get lost.' She pulled out a length of rope and tied it around both their waists. Shane tugged the rope and then gave her a thumbs up. Suddenly, a pair of headlights cut through the rain. Shane

grabbed Krystle and dove out of the way as a car sped past them. They looked at each other and let out a relieved laugh. As Shane went to stand back up, Krystle dropped out of view with a cry of surprise, and he felt the rope go taut.

‘Shit.’

Shane was yanked off his feet after her. A wave of mud assaulted him. It blinded him as he followed Krystle down the hill. Shane was spun around by the mudslide until he was completely disorientated. He felt himself lift off the ground and float before landing face-first in a massive puddle. He spluttered as he wiped the mud off his face with his sleeve before crawling out of the puddle and rolling onto his back, letting the rain wash over him. Krystle stood over him, smiling at him as he gasped for air.

‘Wel, that was a twist I did not see coming.’ she said. Shane retched, coughing up mud and water. Krystle looked back up the hill they had slid down. ‘This is turning out to be one hell of a day.’ She helped Shane to his feet as he coughed up more water. ‘You alright?’ she asked. Shane coughed up even more water.

‘Never better.’ Shane wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and looked around him. They were in a canopy, with trees and foliage all around them. The rain wasn’t as heavy down here, so Shane untied the rope from around his waist. Krystle had already done the same and she tucked it back into her pack. She was covered in mud and had lost her hat, her brown hair plastered to her face. She flicked it off her face and burst out laughing when she saw Shane.

‘You look like the Creature from the Black Lagoon,’ she composed herself and struggled out of the mud. ‘Come on, let’s get moving. We’d better find somewhere to dry off.’ She turned her back on him and walked off into the jungle. Shane glanced skyward.

‘Remember, it’s the New York Bestsellers list.’ With a sigh of resignation, he followed Krystle into the jungle.

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Darkness was beginning to set in when they stumbled upon it. Shane had been walking with his head down and hadn’t noticed Krystle had stopped. He bumped into her, stumbling back.

‘Hey, what are you stopping...’ He trailed off as he saw it. It was a massive plane, or what was left of it anyway. The entire rear of the plane was gone, crates and panels were strewn all around the wreckage. The left wing was torn off and stuck in the ground nearby. The nose of the plane was crumpled, and the front windows were shattered. As they made their way closer, Shane could see the paint was faded and peeling, revealing the rusted metal beneath it. The inside of the plane fuselage was empty and, more importantly, dry.

‘What the hell is this doing here?’ Krystle asked. Shane noticed a faded American flag on the side of the plane.

‘This is an American cargo plane, probably from the late nineties.’ he said. Looking at the wing stuck in the ground, he saw two propellers attached to its underside. ‘Why the hell would it be in a jungle in Brazil?’ Krystle began searching the crates.

‘Whatever the reason, it’s here now and it’s the only form of shelter for miles around,’ She motioned towards the crates. ‘Now we just have to find something to keep us warm.’ They searched for half an hour before Krystle found a crate full of military survival kits. ‘Jackpot!’ She tossed one to Shane and grabbed another one for herself.

They used the matches and fire starters in the kit to get a fire going and wrapped themselves in the tactical survival blankets also in the kits while their clothes dried nearby. They ate food rations that they found crammed into another crate which were somehow still edible and not dust. As Shane ate, he looked across the fire at Krystle. She smiled at him.

'So, Shane, what's your story?' she asked. He took a bite from his rations before answering.

'Well, I'm a writer, have been for a while now.'

'That's pretty cool. What sort of stuff do you write? Not sappy romance novels, I hope. That genre's so predictable.' Shane laughed.

'Oh god no. I can't stand that sort of stuff as well. I write more thriller, action-adventure sort of stuff. Something that grabs the reader and keeps them hooked through the whole book,' he managed a wry smile. 'Sometimes I even give them something to think about as well.'

'Did you always want to be a writer?'

Shane shrugged. 'I had no idea what I wanted to do. Writing came naturally to me and gives me an excuse to explore all these crazy places around the world.' Krystle raised an eyebrow.

'So, what about writing brings you out to this sunny South America?' Shane shifted and cleared his throat.

'Research.' Krystle looked unconvinced.

'Oh yeah? What kind of research?' Shane considered a second before opening the satchel and pulling out the research notes. He held them in his hands, feeling the heft and weight before he handed them across to her. The front page had a sketch of an orb. It was a thing of beauty, matte black with shiny flecks of light blue ore swirling inside it. It entranced you, seeming to draw you deeper the longer you looked at it.

'They call it the Wormhole,' Shane said. 'It was an Ancient Mayan legend that everyone thought was a myth. That was until it was discovered back in 1936. Many don't believe it exists as it's only been found once in over a hundred years of expeditions. The team who found it disappeared but-' Shane noticed Krystle looked confused. 'What's wrong?' Krystle looked up at him.

'What does this have to do with writing a novel?' she asked. Shane ran his hand through his hair and looked out at the jungle.

'The person that finds that would be famous,' he tapped the page. 'And at the very least, I might get a good story out of it.' Shane cleared his throat. 'We've talked plenty about me, but what about you? What're *you* doing out here?' Krystle finished off the last of her rations, crumpled the packaging and tossed it away.

'I suppose they're both fair questions. I was born in West London, my parents divorced when I was ten, so I haven't seen them in a long time. Dad took me around the world, looking for ancient treasures and I guess his love for that stuff just rubbed off on me.'

'You're from England?' Shane asked. Krystle nodded. 'Wouldn't have guessed that in a million years.' she sighed.

'When you live in a different country every week, accents, friends they all just kinda get lost and meld together.' Shane shovelled food into his mouth and motioned for her to continue.

'Well, after Dad passed, I decided to get back home to try and reconnect with Mum. We didn't have anything to say to each other, so I decided not to waste my time. I left England, haven't been back since. I went back to the only thing I've ever known so I went back to travelling the world looking for treasure. I've been looking for treasure here in South America for the past year and a half. Always looking but never finding anything,' She looked back down at the sketch in her hand. 'But this'll change everything.' Shane choked on his food, coughing.

'What?' He spluttered. Krystle turned the sketch around, so he could see it.

'This jewel hasn't been found in a couple hundred years, right? Well, that'd fetch a pretty high price from the right buyer,' she said. 'Think about it, you get the fame of finding it and I get a nice chunk of change for my troubles. Tell you what, we find this thing and I'll even give you your five hundred bucks back.' She handed the sketch back to Shane. 'Everyone wins.' Shane thought about it, she did make a good argument, and he certainly wouldn't complain about having to spend more time with her... for character research of course.

'You've got yourself a deal, Krystle Fowler.' He stuck out his hand. Krystle smiled slyly at him as she shook his hand.

'Pleasure doing business with you, Shane Pierson.'

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They arrived at Jirau the following day, just after midday. The two of them walked down the town's main street. It was flanked by rows of single-storey houses. They were all white brick plastered a dusty orange colour with rough wooden doors. One of the doors was open and a man leant against the doorway. He was licking a cigarette as he watched them approach. As they passed, Krystle nodded a greeting. The man kept staring as he put the cigarette in his mouth and lit it. They kept walking before Krystle hazarded a glance behind her. The man had stepped out from the doorway and was following behind them. They kept walking and more doors opened. More men came out onto the street and fell in step behind the smoking man. Shane went to look behind him, but Krystle grabbed his arm.

'Don't. Keep walking.'

'Hey! Seniorita!' A voice behind them called out. Krystle ignored them until the repeated catcall earned them more attention as more doors opened. With a sigh, she turned around. The smoking man was standing a few feet away with the other men behind him. She flashed them a smile.

'Excuse me, we are looking for a cartographer. Would any of you... lovely gentlemen know where to start looking?' The smoking man held up a hand.

'Valente. He's the village's *cartographer*.' The man said. He pointed up a side road towards an enormous, gated mansion at the top of the hill. Krystle nodded her thanks. She grabbed Shane by the arm and dragged him up the road.

'This seems a little expensive for someone on a cartographer's pay,' Shane said. 'Especially in a place like this.'

'Well, when you're pocketing foreign aid for yourself, it's amazing what kind of things you can afford.'

'You mean he's an embezzler-' Krystle shushed him.

'These people get antsy about that sort of talk.' As they drew closer to the mansion, Shane looked behind him. An army had shadowed them up the hill.

Their armaments were a mixed bag of different time periods. Old school revolvers, pump-action shotguns and hunting rifles were all loaded and ready. Shane gulped and turned back around. Krystle opened the mansion's gate and walked straight in with Shane following close behind. They walked up the front steps onto the verandah and Krystle knocked on the front door. She turned to Shane.

'Just hang back, I'll handle this.' A small hatch opened in the door and a man's face appeared. He had a thick pencil moustache, and he took in the two people standing in front of him. Krystle gave him a winning smile.

'Senor, buenos dias.' The man looked her up and down.

'What do you want?' He snarled.

'We understand that you're an avid cartographer. My associate here is looking to purchase some of your quality maps from you.' Krystle explained.

'You two with the IRS?'

'Does it look like we're with the IRS?'

Multiple guns cocked behind them.

'Nice job handling it.' Shane muttered.

'Shut up,' Krystle snapped. 'Please, sir we've come a long way. We'll pay you handsomely.'

'You think I need any more money? Money, might I add, that I have disclosed to the relevant authorities at the required time.'

'Well then, if not money then how about information?'

'What information do you have that could possibly interest me?'

Krystle turned to Shane. 'Show him the jewel.' Shane's arm slid across his satchel.

'Are you kidding me?'

Krystle feigned laughter to the gunmen behind him and leant in close to Shane.

'In case you haven't noticed, we're a little outmatched here. So, I would recommend reaching into that satchel of yours and showing off that sketch of yours before we get turned into swiss cheese.'

Shane looked from Krystle to the men with guns and back to Krystle and to the man at the door before reaching into the satchel and pulling out the sketch of the Wormhole. He held it up to the door hatch.

The man's eyes widened and shut the hatch door. A moment later, the door flung open, and the man stood before them, dressed head to toe in a tailored pinstripe suit. 'Now,



with information like that, I'm sure we can do business.' He waved his hand at the group of men, and they holstered their weapons. The man motioned for Shane and Krystle to enter. 'Come in. Come in. Welcome to my humble home. I am Valente.' He followed them in and closed the door, spreading his arms wide. 'Tell me honestly, what do you think?'

The room was as opulent as the mansion's exterior. A giant tiger skin rug covered the room's floor with white leather armchairs set next to panoramic windows overlooking a perfectly curated courtyard garden. A massive chandelier hung from the ceiling. The room led to a dining room with yet another chandelier and regal dining table and chairs. The entire back wall had a bookshelf lined with books.

Krystle and Shane shared a look. Their opinion of the interior was important to keep Valente on their side, honesty be damned. Shane admired the bookshelf while Krystle plastered on a disarming smile.

'It's got some real... character that you don't see much these days.' Valente's chest puffed up at the perceived compliment.

'What's the use in having so much money if you can't show it off?' He noticed Shane's interest in the bookshelf. 'Ah, I see we are both literary fans. Do you see any that you like?'

Shane looked closer at the bookshelf. All the books were first editions and Shane saw some of his favourite novels sitting side by side with obscure ancient tomes he'd never seen before.

'Quite a few to be honest.' He mumbled to himself. Shane noticed Krystle scanning through the bookshelf. She picked up one of his favourite books, a gripping military thriller that ended in tragedy, and started flicking through it. He felt his heart racing as she seemed to be enthralled by it. Valente appeared by her side.

'You are enjoying *In the Shadows*?' Krystle snapped the book shut and looked up at him.

'Oh yeah, it's not bad.' She went to place the book back on the shelf. Valente stopped her.

'Keep it. I have multiple copies.' Shane cleared his throat.

'So, about that map of yours?' he asked. Valente smiled warmly at him.

'Please, first you must stay for the night. I am holding a little celebration for the town. You and your beautiful companion will be my guests of honour.' Shane blushed and glanced at Krystle.

'Now how could we possibly refuse such a generous offer?' She winked at Shane. 'So where are we staying?' Valente swept his arm towards the next room.

'Why here of course,' he said. 'We have plenty of space. Follow me.' They exchanged a glance and followed Valente out of the room.

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Shane pulled his tie loose for the twelfth time and had another go at it. Valente had let him pick out a suit from his extensive private collection. He'd chosen a nice grey suit with a maroon tie that paired with it rather well. He hadn't had to wear a suit in years, and the tie was always the hardest part for him. Laughter floated in through the window of his room.

Shane walked over, tie in hand. People were dancing in the street as a band began playing another festive song.

'Hey, you clean up pretty nice.' A voice said. Shane turned around to see Krystle leaning against the door. She wore a dark green dress that accentuated her figure much better than her jungle attire. With her long brown hair flowing down to her back, Shane couldn't take his eyes off her.

'You don't look half bad either. Especially now that you're not covered in mud.' Krystle gave him a sly smile.

'What about carrying a shotgun?' Shane laughed and turned back to the mirror.

'Yeah, that too.' He put the tie back around his neck and attempted to tie it. He fumbled with the knot and grumbled in frustration. Krystle strode over to him and took the tie in her hands.

'Here, let me do it otherwise, we'll be here all night.' She wrapped the two ends around each other before tightening the knot and making a slight adjustment. 'There, perfect. Now we'd better get down there. Wouldn't want to make Valente wait any longer to show us off.' She held out her arm and Shane took it in his own as they left the room.

Valente dragged Shane away from Krystle as soon as they stepped outside. After lots of handshaking and polite conversation about literature with Valente's associates, Shane made his excuses and found Krystle sitting alone at a table, watching the people mingle around her. He had just sat down when a waiter appeared with plates full of food and handed it to them. They both ate in silence, listening to music and watching people dance. After they had finished, Krystle stood up and offered her hand to Shane.

'You gonna dance with me or should we just sit in silence all night?' she asked. Shane took her hand and rose to his feet. Krystle put her hand on his shoulder while Shane let his hand slide down to her hip. They stepped closer to each other and moved as one. As they spun together around people, they couldn't take their eyes off each other.

'I like your dress. It makes your eyes pop.' Shane said. He twirled Krystle around, her dress catching the light as she spun. Krystle gave him a winning smile.

'Aw, thank you. I like green but I *love* a nice maroon.'

'I picked well, then, didn't I?'

'You certainly did.' Krystle rested her head on his shoulder. 'By the way, I finished that book. Have you read it?' Shane stared at the ground, enjoying feeling her body against his.

'I have, it's one of my favourites. What did you think of it?'

'I enjoyed it. Couldn't put it down. The ending almost made me cry. *Almost.*' They swayed together in silence until Krystle whispered in his ear. 'You know, I'm really glad that you crashed into my truck.'

'It wasn't just me but I'm glad too.' Krystle smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck. She pulled him towards her and kissed him. Hours later, Shane could still feel her soft lips against his as he fell into a deep sleep.

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'So, we're here... and the wormhole was first discovered here...' Shane and Krystle were surrounded by maps that Valente had dug out of storage for them. The maps included Jirau and the surrounding area for thirty kilometres. Shane had circled Jirau and was surveying the north-west section of the map. Krystle pursed her lips as she sat across from him.

'What are you looking for?'

'All the historical texts state that the wormhole jewel was found in a cave under Haddock Hill, named after the expedition's leader, J.P Haddock, in 1936. Those texts never stated if they took the jewel from the cave or not, many historians believed they did for a long time.' Shane passed a faded piece of paper to Krystle.

She read the note aloud. 'That cave holds the biggest regret of my life. I wish I had never found it.'

'That's Haddock's final letter to his family, recovered in 1971. It was dated October 23, 1936. I think the expedition found the jewel, but never took it out of the cave. I think if we find the cave, we find the jewel.' Shane looked back down at the map. 'But it seems to have disappeared.' Valente appeared over his shoulder from nowhere.

'What disappeared?' he asked. Shane jumped in fright, shooting Valente a dirty look.

'Haddock Hill. It should be just past the Madeira River.' Valente shook his head and pointed at the Jirau dam.

'They demolished that hill to make the dam.' He stroked his chin. 'I heard the workers found an incredible jewel with a spiral pattern. I think they used it as the decorative centrepiece for the bridge running over the dam.' Shane looked back to the map and circled the dam. It looked like two separate bridges joined together to connect both sides of the river.

'Valente, we're gonna need your car.'

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The car was an old 1999 Range Rover Discovery. The paintwork was faded, and the chassis was dented but Valente had assured them the car was in perfect working order. Shane was relieved to find he was right. The car ride was smooth on the dirt roads and negotiated the bumps as well as anything on the market over in the States. It wasn't as fast or as comfortable as later models, but it beat walking.

It took them little over an hour to reach the dam. They got to where the north and south bridge converged and skidded to a halt. Shane patted the car door as they got out of the car.

'Not bad for a two-decade old car,' he said. 'Not a big fan of the colour though.'

Krystle crossed over to the edge of the bridge and looked down. The dam was a concrete monstrosity, forming a shallow curve across the river. Tonnes of water poured from the outlet at a speed so fast that anyone who fell in would be sucked under and drown long before they made it to the surface. The water was a light brown colour courtesy of the mud dredged up from the riverbed. Above the outlet was a large crest of a bare-chested man

lifting a shining star to the sky. The star had a round gem embedded in its centre and looking closer, she realised it was the wormhole jewel.

'Hey Shane, come here.' Shane strode over to her and looked over the side. He let out a low whistle as he noticed the crest.

'There it is.'

'Yep.' Before Shane could react, Krystle had leant over the railing. He grabbed her ankles and lowered her down until she was hanging next to the jewel.

'What the hell is wrong with you?' Krystle twisted around to look up at him.

'What are you complaining about? You get to stare at my ass... and the view isn't that bad either.' She twisted back around. 'Just don't let me fall.' Krystle grabbed the jewel with both hands and tried to pull it free. It wouldn't budge. She motioned to Shane, and he pulled her back up over the railing.

'What happened?' he asked.

'Just need something to loosen it.' Krystle replied. She went over to the car and rummaged through her pack. Pulling out a small hand chisel, she slipped it into her belt and went back to the railing. Shane held onto her ankles, and he lowered her back down to the jewel. As Krystle pulled out the chisel and started chipping away at the concrete surrounding the jewel, a car door slammed shut. Shane looked up to see a man in a dark suit and sunglasses approaching him. The man flashed his badge.

'Shane Pierson? Agent Johnson, CIA,' Johnson put his badge away. 'Show me your hands, now.'

'I'm a bit preoccupied at the moment.'

'Show me your hands right now Mr Pierson.' Agent Johnson's hand rested on the holster on his hip. Krystle heard this and almost dropped the chisel.

'Don't you fucking drop me!' She had loosened the concrete enough to free the jewel. Tucking the chisel back in her waistband, she gripped it with both hands and tore it free. She tucked it under her arm and called for Shane to pull her up. Krystle handed it off to Shane as she clambered back over the rail and her feet touched the ground.

The jewel was breathtaking. It was the size of a basketball and the colours combined in such a way that Shane thought he would be sucked in by it. Agent Johnson eyed the two of them, his hand still stuck on the holster.

'That jewel is a matter of national security, and I am going to need you to hand it over right now.'

'What do you mean a matter of national security?' Shane asked.

'That isn't your concern, son. Just hand it over and I promise you, you and the lady can walk away.' Shane stayed where he was. Agent Johnson sighed and turned back to the van. The passenger door opened, and a second man got out. Krystle let out a gasp as he recognised the man. It was Cheap Suit, still sweaty and in no mood to talk. He stood next to Johnson with his thousand-yard stare fixed on Krystle.

'What the fuck is going on here? That bastard tried to kill us!' she said. Johnson smiled at her.

'I believe you've met my partner, Agent Mitchell.'

'Yeah, he's a real class act.' Krystle spat at his feet.

'We only want the jewel ma'am. If you had handed it over, I wouldn't need to do this,' Cheap Suit drew his weapon and levelled it at Krystle's head as Johnson continued. 'This can go one of two ways Mr Pierson. You either hand us the jewel and everyone goes their separate ways or Agent Mitchell here puts a bullet in your heads.' Cheap Suit smiled at this. 'Now, I would prefer not to kill you. I have enough paperwork as it is. Agent Mitchell's workload, however, has room for just a little bit more paperwork.'

Shane glanced at Krystle. She was staring at Cheap Suit and wouldn't look at him. He sighed and admired the jewel one last time, marvelling at how it reflected the light.

Shane let his shoulder slump and he handed the jewel over to Agent Johnson. Johnson grabbed it and snapped his fingers. Cheap Suit holstered his weapon and the two of them headed back to their van. Shane and Krystle both watched as the van turned around and sped off along the northern bridge. Without a word, they headed back towards the car.

'We had it in our hands and just gave it away. One of the most valuable treasures in history!' Shane buried his head in his hands. His head shot up as Krystle started laughing.

'What're you so happy about?' he asked.

'That was fake.'

'How the hell could you possibly know that?'

'In your sketch, it showed the Jewel with a matte finish. If that was the real Wormhole, it wouldn't have reflected the sunlight.' she said. Shane leaned against the car's bonnet to look at Krystle.

'So, the real one's still out there?'

'Yeah,' Krystle gave a cheeky grin. 'So, are you gonna help me find it or do you wanna hang around here and wait for them to realise they fucked up?'

'What are we waiting for?' Shane asked.

Smiling, they both climbed into the car and with a tire squeal, they sped off back into the jungle in search of their next adventure.

THE END