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The Joshua Files

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*For Ana-Elena, Kizzie, Deborah and Alison,
in memory of wonderful days in Brazil.*

I would like to swim against the stream of time.

Italo Calvino

The Oxford Reporter

MARCH 28

DNA scientist found dead in Middle East yacht mystery

DOHA, QATAR The body of Cambridge professor and biotech entrepreneur Melissa DiCanio was discovered earlier today by fishermen in a yacht off the coast of Doha, Qatar. The boat was abandoned and had floated into the Persian Gulf.

DiCanio had been missing since the middle of January. The cause of death has not been released.

CCTV footage from Doha Harbour has helped police to make an arrest. Three men were photographed at the site, and one has been arrested – Simon Madison, who is also wanted by the FBI and CIA as a suspected terrorist.

Authorities intend to bring Madison to the United States of America. It is believed he will be charged with a number of offences.

Doha police were unable to comment as to the possible motive for the murder.

A spokesman for the FBI said, "We've been after Madison for a long time. This is an important and rather

satisfying arrest."

DiCanio was born in Houston, Texas. She began her career at Baylor College of Medicine before moving to Oxford University in 1997 as a visiting professor at Aquinas College.

In 1999 she co-founded the pharmaceutical company Chaldexx BioPharmaceuticals, a privately held company which developed and markets the drug Tripropan, with annual sales of US\$50 m.

In 2005 DiCanio was awarded the Chaldexx Chair of Molecular Genetic Neuroscience at Cambridge University. DiCanio divided her time between her university research group and her post as Chief Scientific Officer at Chaldexx BioPharmaceuticals, based in Interlaken, Switzerland.

Dr Marcus Anthony, Master of Aquinas College, Oxford, said, "Melissa was a brilliant scientist, a true innovator. It was an honour to know her during her time at Aquinas College. She will be sorely missed."

From: Ixchel<ixchel1996@aol.com>

To: MariposaJosh<mariposajosh@gmail.com>

Subject: Hey there, Mister Promise-I'll-Write...

Josh!

You said you'd write but you haven't. What's going on with you? Benicio tells me a few things about his life there in Oxford with you.

But it's not the same as hearing it from YOU.

How is Oxford? Your friend Tyler? Your mother?

I visit your father's grave every week, just the way I promised. The sun shines on him for many hours here. I enjoy my visits. I don't forget anything that happened. I'm there with him, for you.

Come on, write me a little message. And what happened about your blog?

You've gone pretty quiet, Josh. Should I be worried?

I have some important news for you. It's about the strange inscription on the Adaptor, in case you're still interested. . .

Your friend always,

Ixchel

De: Ixchel<ixchel1996@aol.com>

Para: MariposaJosh<mariposajosh@gmail.com>

Asunto: Re: Hey there, Mister Promise-I'll-Write...

Hey Ixchel,

Yeah . . . it's been a while. I've just not been on the computer much. Benicio keeps me busy . . . I'm not sure how, but we seem to hang out quite a bit. Which is cool, you know? All the girls at school want to know about this college-student cousin of mine. Tyler and me, we've been training hard for a capoeira thing in Brazil. We're leaving in a couple of weeks.

It's like . . . finally I'm starting to have a life again. A normal life, I mean. I try not to think about what happened, but when things go quiet, when I'm alone, I can't stop thinking about. . . Well, you know. I try to be out all the time doing stuff. I try not to think. Kind of hard to talk about it, really. I'd rather not, if it's all the same to you.

So I'm not sure I want to know about any "strange inscription".

It was nice to hear from you, I mean that.

Josh

To: Josh Garcia<mariposajosh@gmail.com>

From: Ixchel<ixchel1996@aol.com>

Subject: Something I really think you'll want to know about

Importance: High

Josh,

But you're talking to someone about this, yes? It's no good to keep such strong, hard feelings inside. You have Benicio and Tyler and your mother. Do you talk to them?

About the inscription on the Adaptor – we found something that I think you WILL want to know. I don't want to write details in an email; you never can be sure where it will finish up.

I think YOU should know because . . . well, because of the You Know What. (I'm guessing we have to call it something like this?)

We need a more secure way to communicate than email. Do you know anything about that?

A hug,

Ixchel

De: Ixchel<ixchel1996@aol.com>

Para: MariposaJosh<mariposajosh@gmail.com>

Asunto: Re: Something I really think you'll want to know about

Importancia: Alta

Hey Ixchel,

Wow . . . I wasn't expecting this. I don't know what to

say. Of course I'm interested in anything new about the You Know What. But on the other hand, maybe I should let sleeping dogs lie, right?

Things have settled down for me since then. I'm in a proper routine here: I get up at six-thirty and go to the gym with Ty. We mark each other – he's bigger and stronger than me, so he does more reps and heavier weights than me but I'm gaining on him. This is every day. It wasn't my idea to be like a maniac but Ty is obsessed, OBSESSED with winning a medal at the World Capoeira Championships next month and he wants to be WELL buff. But after about a month I started to notice that I was starting to get pretty ripped too. I've got these biceps and shoulder muscles now and even a six-pack! Not like Ty, obviously, but he had one to start with. So I'm not going to stop now – I'll turn back into a flabby shrimp.

Then we train for a bit. Not fighting, just the moves. Handstands, backflips, cartwheels without hands. So we can start our capoeira routine with something really awesome. I can hold a handstand for ninety seconds. That's freestanding. Then we go to school, then home and after a snack and some Xbox, we're back to the training.

We meet every single day. We only call each other by our *apelidos* – capoeira nicknames. We're getting so good now; we're faster and faster. People stand around and watch us. Benicio usually turns up too – doing his job,

keeping an eye on me.

I'll tell you straight – I don't like remembering what happened on that mountain. Don't even want to think about it. Because every time I do I feel sick, sick in my guts. I can feel that rope tightening around me again, all my internal organs being squeezed like it's going to slice me in two. I think about the moment when my dad cut the rope. Over and over again. The rope going slack. Him falling without making a sound. His last words – “This isn't over.”

And why did it happen; why did I go up that mountain? Who is – or was – Arcadio? How did he know so much about me? Why did I listen to him – why did I let him lead me to Mount Orizaba?

I used to have this dream, last year, about my dad. Maybe I told you? I can't remember if I did or not. In the dream, Dad wasn't really dead. Him and Mum, they'd been pretending, keeping things from me. Pretty crazy, right? It made me sad, but at least it was like seeing Dad, like being with him again. Then I *did* see Dad – for real.

That's when it all went to pieces.

I mean, was it all meant to happen? I don't know anything any more.

I don't like these questions. It's enough to drive you crazy.

So . . . let me think about it some more, before I decide

whether I want to start with this stuff again. OK?

Hugs,

Josh

To: Josh Garcia<mariposajosh@gmail.com>

From: Ixchel<ixchel1996@aol.com>

Subject: reps? ripped? buff??

Josh,

It's good that you've found something to take your mind off the painful memories. You seem very focused on the capoeira, but I don't really know what you are talking about when you write "reps" and "buff" and "six-pack" and "ripped". Something to do with getting muscles, yes? That's good too – you told me that you were going to get stronger so you could protect yourself and your mother.

But the world keeps turning, doesn't it? We're still here in Ek Naab and everything is going to happen in 2012 exactly the way it is written. The galactic superwave – all the computers in the world are going to be wiped, the end of civilization. Unless we can stop it, using all the information in the codex you found, the Book of Ix. No wonder no one in Ek Naab really thinks about anything but our job now – solving the 2012 problem.

What I've learned about the inscription – it isn't just about the You Know What. There is also a link with the

2012 problem.

This is a big deal in Ek Naab. I can sense it in the air. It's the usual thing, Josh. People talking in hushed voices. *Don't-tell-that-I-said-this-but . . .* is how every sentence starts. The only person who has all the information is . . . we both know who I'm talking about.

Please let me tell you what I've discovered. You are the only person I can tell.

A hug,
Ixchel

De: Ixchel<ixchel1996@aol.com>

Para: MariposaJosh<mariposajosh@gmail.com>

Asunto: Re: reps? ripped? buff??

Ixchel,

OK, you got me. Now I'm really curious. . .

There is a way we can communicate secretly.

I've set up a room for us at this online 3D place. We can talk with avatars and put up pictures and videos and stuff. The room is locked – I'll send you the password and all the details. Delete the email after reading, then meet me in the chat room. I'll be online all evening, waiting.

Josh

<J-MARIPOSA has joined>

<MENINHA has joined>

MENINHA: Hello . . . J-MARIPOSA! Josh – you're named after a butterfly?

J-MARIPOSA: It's my *apelido* – my capoeira nickname. After my favourite move.

MENINHA: And I'm just "girl" . . . *meninha* is Portuguese for "girl", am I right?

J-MARIPOSA: *grin* Sorry. Couldn't think what you'd like. Ooh, how do you make your avatar scowl like that. . . ?

MENINHA: I've never seen you dressed in white pyjama bottoms and no shirt. . .

J-MARIPOSA: They're *abada* trousers. For capoeira.

MENINHA: Oh. Please give your avatar a shirt next time.

J-MARIPOSA: *sigh* There's so much I have to teach you. . .

MENINHA: So – you have a favourite move?

J-MARIPOSA: Yep. *Mariposa* – the butterfly twist. It's awesome.

MENINHA: We can talk freely here?

J-MARIPOSA: Talk away. What's this big news?

MENINHA: OK. You remember the Adaptor? That weird object that Simon Madison stole, then we found it in the hands of the Sect of Huracan, in that strange chamber under the pyramid in Becan?

J-MARIPOSA: Course I remember. I was carrying the Adaptor around in my back pocket trying not to let it blow poison gas in your face most of the time . . . how could I forget it???

MENINHA: Sorry, Josh, it's just that you said you've been trying not to think about what happened last time you were here.

J-MARIPOSA: Trying not to think about it . . . don't see how I could ever forget. . .

MENINHA: Well, then you'll remember that the Adaptor has an inscription. . .

J-MARIPOSA: The same inscription that appears at the beginning of the Ix Codex, the fifteen symbols. I remember. And. . .?

MENINHA: Well, they deciphered the Adaptor inscription.

J-MARIPOSA: Whoa!

MENINHA: The entire project has locked down. All of a sudden – top secret! One of the decipherment team is my teacher at the Tec. You know I'm learning ancient Sumerian, yes?

J-MARIPOSA: You said you might.

MENINHA: My teacher stopped being able to say ANYTHING about the project. No one is allowed to know what's written in that inscription. Apart from the members of the ruling Executive.

J-MARIPOSA: I might have guessed Carlos Montoyo

wouldn't want to be left out.

MENINHA: You're right. But this time – he isn't in charge.

J-MARIPOSA: Then who is?

MENINHA: Lorena. The *atanzahab*, the matchmaker, you remember her? Our chief scientist.

J-MARIPOSA: They put a scientist in charge of this project? Why?

MENINHA: I have no clue.

J-MARIPOSA: Why are you so keen to tell me about this?

MENINHA: Because you want to fix the You Know What, don't you?

J-MARIPOSA: You can call it the Bracelet of Itzamna here. No one here but us chickens.

MENINHA: What. . . ?

J-MARIPOSA: It's just a saying.

MENINHA: Here's the thing. The Bracelet needs a replacement Crystal Key. . .

J-MARIPOSA: We don't know that for sure.

MENINHA: Yes, but we know that some ancient technology uses the Key.

J-MARIPOSA: Yeah, yeah, how could I forget? The bit of the Ix Codex I gave away . . . with all those secret instructions about how to activate the Revival Chamber using the Adaptor and the Key. The Key can be a liquid . . . but works best in crystal form.

MENINHA: Nice of you to finally talk about the Ix Codex. All

that secrecy about what you were allowed to say was getting kind of annoying.

J-MARIPOSA: Hmm. It's only because I reckon you know more about what's in the Ix Codex than me by now.

MENINHA: You may be right.

J-MARIPOSA: If only I'd always been as careful about the Ix Codex as I was with you. Thanks to me, the Sect of Huracan know how to make the Key. . .

MENINHA: You couldn't have known that your friend Ollie was spying on you. Her and Simon Madison working together . . . she used your friendship against you.

That's why it's called a betrayal. Not your fault, Josh.

J-MARIPOSA: Believe me, I still feel like an idiot. At least the Key they made didn't work.

MENINHA: True. That was pretty funny, actually, when they tried to activate the Revival Chamber and it failed.

Remember how those people from the Sect of Huracan, the Professor woman and Marius Martineau, started screaming at each other? And at Simon Madison too?

J-MARIPOSA: Didn't seem all that funny to me. I remember we were pretty scared they'd find us hiding in the tunnels.

MENINHA: I guess we were.

J-MARIPOSA: So . . . any news of what the Revival Chamber actually does?

MENINHA: No clue, it's all secret. Lorena had her team take over the chamber right away. They sealed the

Sect's secret entrance and created another, direct from Ek Naab.

J-MARIPOSA: When we were climbing Mount Orizaba, you told me you reckoned it might be a time-travel device.

MENINHA: Yeah. But now I'm not so sure. Your father – he seemed to use the Bracelet of Itzamna to transport from wherever he was to the volcano, didn't he? So maybe the Revival Chamber does something completely different. Like, maybe it revives the dead?

J-MARIPOSA: Jeez. That would be cool! Do you think Lorena's team has managed to activate it?

MENINHA: I don't know! Like I say, TOP SECRET! They don't tell someone like me.

J-MARIPOSA: OK, what about this inscription on the Adaptor? You need the Adaptor to activate the Revival Chamber, yeah? The Key goes into the Adaptor and makes it work in the Container . . . and that makes the Revival Chamber work . . . isn't that how it goes?

MENINHA: I haven't been able to find out what the inscription on the Adaptor says . . . but what I do know is that Lorena's scientists – they're talking about the Key. That's the whisper, the rumour. The inscription tells them how to make the Key.

J-MARIPOSA: Those fifteen symbols on the Adaptor – they tell you how to make the Key?

MENINHA: Correct. They're trying to make the crystal version – the Crystal Key. The ancient instructions in the Ix Codex say that the Crystal Key is the most stable form.

J-MARIPOSA: Make a crystal . . . like with a chemistry set?

MENINHA: I guess. . . Lorena is a scientist.

J-MARIPOSA: So those fifteen symbols are like . . . a chemical formula for the crystal?

MENINHA: That's what I think. But I haven't been able to see the deciphered text.

J-MARIPOSA: If it's chemistry, we're out of luck. I wouldn't know where to start with making a crystal.

MENINHA: Yes, the same with me. But here in Ek Naab, they are confident. They're going to have the Crystal Key here in a few weeks. A month at the most.

J-MARIPOSA: Are you sure?

MENINHA: I read some emails of Lorena's. Over her shoulder, actually – she didn't realize. It was just a short message to Montoyo. He asked *When will it be ready for a test?* And her reply was *Maybe a month.*

J-MARIPOSA: But when we were in the caves, I heard that Professor woman from the Sect say that you had to make the Crystal Key at zero gravity.

MENINHA: Yes, I remember that. But maybe zero gravity is not a problem for Ek Naab. They could take a Muwan up into space.

J-MARIPOSA: Hmmmmm. If I could get my hands on that crystal . . . even for a bit. Just to try it in the Bracelet.

MENINHA: YES! Just what I was thinking.

J-MARIPOSA: I need to find an excuse to go back to Ek Naab.

MENINHA: EXACTLY.

J-MARIPOSA: But what?

MENINHA: It could be me.

J-MARIPOSA: You?

MENINHA: Yes, your excuse for coming back to Ek Naab. Say you want to see me again.

J-MARIPOSA: *blush*

MENINHA: Say that you miss me. Montoyo and Lorena – they're so keen for us to like each other, since they tried so hard to arrange our marriage. They'll fall for it.

J-MARIPOSA: Okayyyy. . .

MENINHA: You and me, we'll know the truth.

J-MARIPOSA: Well, if you're sure. I'll tell Benicio. And he'll tell Montoyo.

MENINHA: Mmmm . . . maybe you should ask Montoyo directly. Don't involve Benicio.

J-MARIPOSA: Why not? He seems to like talking about you.

MENINHA: I'd prefer you and Benicio don't have that conversation. Later he might find out we weren't telling

the truth. Then he won't trust us.

J-MARIPOSA: I guess.

MENINHA: Good. OK. Well, I'll drop by this room again in a few days.

J-MARIPOSA: We can leave messages for each other on the wall. THIS wall!

MENINHA: Goodbye, then.

J-MARIPOSA: Later.

MENINHA: What later?

J-MARIPOSA: I mean SEE YOU later.

MENINHA: Oh! OK . . . later!



Long minutes after Ixchel's avatar disappears in a puff of animated smoke, I still can't tear my eyes away from the screen. I can't seem to move from my chair.

Why did I choose the screen names "J-MARIPOSA" and "MENINHA"? Why do I try to be funny around Ixchel? I could kick myself – I don't seem to make her laugh. It's a good thing that the 3D chat room doesn't keep a log of our conversation because if I could, I'd read it over and over. Just to check how much of an idiot I made of myself.

I'm so distracted, it doesn't even occur to me – for well over an hour – to think seriously about what Ixchel is suggesting.

It's everything I've tried so hard to avoid. The mysteries of Ek Naab and 2012. The Bracelet of Itzamna.

Three months of struggling with the urge to bury that bracelet in the rubbish bin. Or to chuck it into the River Cherwell on a rainy day.

Three months of trying to forget about travelling back in time, to forget about fixing what happened to my dad.

Persuading myself to let things fall – wherever.

Then Ixchel sends me some messages about an inscription, and something creeps back, something I thought I'd banished.

Hope.

Since I got back from Mexico, Mum's treating me completely differently. It's as though she's heaved a big sigh of relief that her kid has finally grown up and she doesn't need to take care of him any more. He can take care of her.

You'd think a guy would be happy about it, and at first I was. Not any more. I don't mind putting up shelves and making furniture from IKEA, but I don't want to listen to Mum talk about how lonely she feels, how she misses my dad.

I feel pretty rubbish about it too. After all, I was there when he died. He died saving me – not something I'll ever, ever be able to put out of my mind.

Mum asks me to buy her cigarettes at the shop. I can't believe it – she's actually forgotten my age.

"You're almost sixteen," she says.

"I'm not even fifteen until summer!"

She frowns, exactly as if she'd forgotten where she put her keys. "Really?"

“Anyway you have to be eighteen,” I tell her, annoyed.

I go to the shop all the same and buy her a paper, a bottle of Perrier and a cream cake. When I return Mum takes one look at the headline and remarks, “Melissa DiCanio – your father knew her.”

It takes me a few seconds to focus on what Mum is saying. There’s a story in the Oxford newspaper about a scientist who’s been found dead in Qatar, a country in the Middle East. While Mum talks, trying to remember how Dad had known the woman, whether Mum had met DiCanio at this college dinner or that one, I read the story.

Right away, something leaps out at me: *one has been arrested – Simon Madison, who is also wanted by the FBI and CIA as a suspected terrorist.*

Simon Madison. Somehow he survived the avalanche that he started on Mount Orizaba, the avalanche that led to my father’s death. Just as I’m feeling a surge of disappointment that Madison didn’t get what was coming to him, I read the next bit.

Authorities intend to bring Madison to the United States of America. It is believed he will be charged with a number of offences.

So that’s it, then. Madison has been caught. Too bad for DiCanio, that scientist he seems to have murdered. For her, it’s too late.

Madison is not often out of my thoughts. How can I

forget him? He's bound up in my single most painful memory – the memory of my dad's death.

That day, the *whole* day, is the last thing I think about at night and the first thing I think about in the morning. It's in the back of my mind most of the time too, but night and morning are when it comes right to the surface. As soon as the thoughts start, I work at pushing them away. I visualize capoeira moves. I plug in some headphones and listen to music or a funny podcast. I get to sleep and everything goes blank. No more dreams.

Ground zero – blank.

For the first time in many weeks, I open the drawer with the Bracelet of Itzamna and gaze at it. Then I touch it, lightly. That ancient Erinsi technology. There's a really distinctive feel to those surfaces. I remember the same from the Adaptor and the cover on the Ix Codex. Like stroking a sheet of magnetized iron filings.

I put the Bracelet on my wrist, feel the familiar buzz of energy, so tiny that you could miss it if you weren't prepared. The hairs on my arms prickle and a shiver runs up my spine. But it's not me reacting to the Bracelet – it's the Bracelet reacting to me.

Those first few weeks after the avalanche that killed my dad . . . if I could have fixed the Bracelet, I would have. No question. I'd have gone back in time and done whatever it took to make sure he didn't end up on that volcano.

But then . . . then I had a bit of a think.

Everything I've done so far has been rushed. I get an idea into my head and I just go and do it. Find out what happened to my dad, go to Mexico, find the Ix Codex, break into J Eric Thompson's house, take on Simon Madison, follow some mysterious message in a bunch of coded postcards . . . climb a volcano and risk my life. . .

All in the name of some bizarre, prophetic letter from Arcadio Garcia – a weirdo who claims to know my future.

No planning. Just reacting.

Where has it got me?

My dad is dead. That's all I can see.

Any way you look at it, I've messed up. The only good thing I did was to find the Ix Codex. Everything else. . .?

You can talk about "destiny", the way Arcadio did in that letter. Yep, you can do that, and accept things, the way Montoyo said.

I don't buy it.

There has to have been a better way.

I have the Bracelet of Itzamna. A chance to travel in time. To put the clock back, to change the past: a way to fix everything. There's no way I can afford to screw this up.

The Bracelet is broken. It can't travel in time, because the crystal burned out. The Crystal Key might fix the Bracelet. It isn't just another lost relic waiting to be found.

The Crystal Key can be made.

I've been waiting for some news like this, some ray of hope. Didn't even dare to think it would happen so soon. Problem is, it's too soon. This is make-or-break.
And I'm not ready.

***Message Posted on the Wall of J-MARIPOSA's Place:
GET READY . . .***

. . . for a BIG surprise, Josh. Montoyo has a plan. I'm sworn to secrecy. Just to annoy you, I'm gonna join in with his little game.

So, do nothing till you hear from me.
"Meninha"

J-Mariposa says. . .

Woo, mysterious. . .
"Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me" . . . that's a song, did you know? By Duke Ellington. Another of my dad's favourites. I guess I'm never forgetting stuff like that.

Meninha says. . .

Why would you want to forget things your father showed you? Like it or not, he's part of who you are.



I don't hear from Ixchel over the next few days . . . which stretch to a week, then eat into the following week. Maybe I'm taking it too literally – *do nothing till you hear from me*.

Well, whatever. Can't have the girl thinking I've got a thing for her, which she might if I emailed for no reason. . .

The time arrives to pack for Brazil. Me, Tyler, my mum, Benicio; we're all flying to the beach resort of Natal for the World Capoeira Championships. Sun, sand, sea and the land where capoeira was invented. Mum's been getting right into it; she's been showing me YouTube videos and everything.

"Children practise capoeira right there on the beach!" Mum tells me in a tone of discovery.

I just sigh. *Mum, I know*. . . Haven't I been going on about capoeira for two years now? Nice that she finally takes an interest.

The afternoon before we leave, Mum drives us all up to Shotover Country Park. For some reason we haven't taken

Benicio there yet. I'm pretty sure Benicio must be fed up with my mum insisting he spend every weekend learning something new about life in Oxford. I told her he'd be happier hanging out with some Oxford Uni students. But does she listen. . . ?

The car park is almost full when we arrive – it's a typical family weekend type of outing. Most people disappear straight into the woods, following one of the walking trails. Tyler and I walk along in silence a little ahead of Benicio, who, as usual, is talking to my mum. The bluebells are out, dotted around the woodland undergrowth. That means a trip to the bluebell woods at the arboretum is next on Mum's list. Dad or no Dad, every year is just like the last.

Now I think about it, that's OK by me.

Every trail leads to the sandpit clearing, and that's where we end up. We stop for a while and sit on the log, looking out over the woods.

"Strange to think that there was sea here once . . . so far inland," Benicio says to no one in particular.

"And dinosaurs," I add. "The first one was found not far from here."

"Nothing lasts. . ." my mum says softly. "Not even the 'terrible lizards'."

"Overgrown chickens," Tyler says, sniffing. "Nothing to miss. . ."

“No one to miss them, Tyler,” she murmurs. “It’s different with people.”

I look away, instinctively hiding my eyes from the others. It must show, what I’m thinking. How could it not? I feel it so strongly, it’s as though it were seeping from my pores.

If I could fix the Bracelet of Itzamna, I wouldn’t have to miss anything or anybody.

The past, the present, the future; they’d all open up before me.

When is Ixchel going to get back to me? I don’t like having my hopes built up and then . . . silence.

“So . . . how is it you like to be called,” Benicio says with a wicked grin, “*Mariposa* and *Eddy G*?”

“It’s serious, man,” Tyler says with a straight face. “The *apelidos* help us get into the zone. When I’m fighting, I’m not Tyler . . . I’m Eddy Gordo, capoeira titan.”

Benicio smirks. “And what’s Josh? A butterfly?”

Tyler winks. “He’s a guy who *still* can’t do the *mariposa* move.”

For that, I shove Tyler hard enough that he lands on the ground, cracking up with laughter.

As evening draws in, we end with a final practice of our capoeira routine, up there on the sandy hill. Walkers and their children stop to watch as Tyler and I fling ourselves around, flying through the air, spinning kicks that miss each other by closely timed fractions of a second. Until my leg

links with Tyler's, wraps around his knee and he stops in mid-crouch, flashes me a quick grin, then pulls away.

My problem is, *I don't really want to miss*. Next time someone goes for me, I have to be ready.

Night falls. Before locking my laptop away in the cupboard, I log into the 3D chat room. Still no word from Ixchel.

I'm quiet all the way to Brazil. I think about Benicio getting into his Muwan, throwing a rucksack into the belly of the craft, putting his headset on over his scruffy student hair, starting up the anti-gravity engines, docking his iPod to listen to his favourite new rock tunes from England. Heading out alone, all the way to Brazil.

Yet it occurs to me how different everything would have been for us both if Benicio's grandmother had been a bloke.

He'd have been the son of a Bakab's son. Then *Benicio* would be the Bakab Ix. They'd never have needed me. My grandfather wouldn't have been the one to search for the Ix Codex. My dad would still be alive, and I would be living a quiet, ordinary life in Oxford. Never even dreaming that a place like Ek Naab could exist.

Whichever way you look at it, Fate dealt us all a pretty random hand.

I've always been kind of envious of Benicio. It's hard not to be – he's obviously a genius, gets to fly a futuristic

spacecraft; he's the hand-picked secret lieutenant of Carlos Montoyo. And for some reason girls really like him.

But *I'm the Bakab*. One of the four sons of the god Itzamna, according to Mayan mythology. Only it turns out that Itzamna was real – he was the founder of Ek Naab. I don't know if the original Bakabs really were his sons, but they were definitely special. All male descendants of Bakabs inherit a genetic immunity against a poison – the ancient bio-defence toxin that protects each of the four Books of Itzamna. Those four books contain the inscriptions that Itzamna found in a super-ancient ruin near the Mayan city of Izapa. The inscriptions aren't Mayan – they're much older. The Books of Itzamna are the writings of the Erinsi – a civilization that's been lost from the record. Something destroyed the Erinsi civilization – the galactic superwave, a massive burst of energy from the centre of the galaxy. And it's coming our way again . . . at the end of 2012.

For hundreds of years, one of the Books of Itzamna had been missing – the Ix Codex. Only a Bakab Ix could find it. It should have been my grandfather, but he died in the search. Then my own dad disappeared after using the Bracelet of Itzamna to zap himself to another time and place. So it came down to me, the only Bakab Ix left. At least, as far as the people in Ek Naab knew.

The Bakabs are pretty important to Ek Naab – in fact, four of them sit on a ruling Executive of just six people.

As the Bakab lx, I'll join the ruling Executive of Ek Naab once I turn sixteen.

From the window of our aeroplane, my eyes search the endless horizon of clouds, hunting for even the tiniest sign of Benicio's Muwan. I wonder; could it be that Benicio envies *me*?

It's evening when we land at Natal's airport. The sun is just going down. As we step out of the airport, a blast of warm air hits us. Within minutes the thick weave of my T-shirt sticks to my back. Tyler grins in delight. "Proper heat! Hey, *Mariposa* – this is the life."

The guest house – Pousada Florianopolis – is right next to the promenade of Natal's wide beach. After dumping the luggage and changing into flashy board shorts, Tyler and I hit the beach.

It's flooded with yellow light from tall lamps all along the promenade. The sea disappears into dark shadows. White caps of surf lines glisten in the artificial light. We race into the sea, frothy warm water spreading around our legs. Wading along in the line of the first wave, we follow my mother. She's showered, changed into her evening beachwear, and strolls along the pavement above the sand, peering out towards us.

Mum was right about the capoeira on the beach. About fifty metres up the beach, two tanned, lean boys around twelve years old practise slow handstands followed by

measured sweeping and turning kicks – *queixada* and *armada*. Tyler and I pause briefly to watch them. From the moves they're doing, I'd guess they're beginners, but still . . . their technique has a fluidity that mine has only just begun to capture.

We slosh along in the surf, keeping one eye out for Mum, who's taking her pick of the beachside bars. Finally she stops and waves us over. We cross the beach as white sand-crabs shimmy around our feet across the powder. In this light the sand looks like snow.

Tyler bounces along, gives me an experimental shove. With a low chuckle, he tries harder to unbalance me. In a second we're both cartwheeling across the beach, going into the final part of our routine. Our feet are a blur in the air.

Warm currents brush my skin as I whip through the air. The sand is cool to the touch under my hands and feet. I push back all memories of Tyler and me in the pool at Hotel Delfin, showing off in front of Ollie, seconds before Camila arrived. . .

Ollie, the gorgeous girl who betrayed me. I thought she was a little out of my league, OK, beautiful and a couple of years older than me. Never suspected that she was actually a spy, and even worse, agent of the Sect of Huracan and Simon Madison's girlfriend!

My sister, Camila – another painful memory. She was a fantastic girl – well, a woman, really. A husband who was

crazy about her, and most of her life ahead. The memory of Camila drowning in that swamp is one of the most horrible things I have in my head. . . I try pretty hard to keep from remembering that.

At the beach bar, Mum orders drinks. Goblet-shaped glasses appear filled with foam-topped fresh juices, bright purple and orange; grape for me, passion fruit for Tyler.

We sip our drinks in contented silence. Mum drinks from a frosty glass of cold beer. Her eyes are still on the beach, continually sweeping back and forth. She seems distracted, but I'm too wrapped up in my own thoughts to notice right away.

Two tables down from us a couple of slender girls are sitting eating ice cream from sundae glasses. They both wear green-and-yellow-trimmed white *abada* trousers and short, sleeveless green tops. Capoeiristas. Here, they're everywhere.

So I don't notice my mum staring in the opposite direction until Tyler prods me, hard.

"Look."

When I do, I see something that, for just an instant, makes my heart bounce straight into my mouth.

Carlos Montoyo. But not just him . . . Ixchel, strolling towards us along the promenade, grins all over both their faces. Yep, Carlos's too. For once, even he looks happy.