



# **A Lonely Man On A Wakeful Road**

**by Dan Ford**

**An Episodic Adventure**

**Episode #6**

## **The Zander Effect**

*When we left Matt and Zander in Episode Five, they attempted to evade the drug cartel's Desperados. They left Caracol and headed northeast to the Rio Frio Cave. There would be no logical reason for Zander to go to that location, and that may throw their pursuers off the track. Additionally, they would be traveling through tropical forests and avoiding roadways almost the entire way. That would make them very difficult to follow. Hopefully, they would decide along the way what their long game would be.*

*We left the guys sleeping together in a single-person sleeping bag to ward off marauding insects. This unexpected closeness to someone made Matt a bit apprehensive, but it was somewhat reassuring as well.*

*However, Matt's situation is better told by him, so I will back off and let him continue the narration. So here he is.*

I woke up several times during the night. Often it was just to move to a more comfortable position. There was also a time that I was aware that Zander had turned in his sleep and had thrown an arm over my shoulders. At first, I was alarmed, and then I was stunned at how much I enjoyed this feeling of another person's closeness. I liked the warmth of his body and the fresh smell of the soap we had used bathing in the creek. I had forgotten how nice it was not to be alone. The fact that we had faced and were still facing mortal danger added to the intensity of being together in this small sleeping bag in the middle of the jungle. All too soon, I heard the howler monkeys awakening and giving out their cacophonous instructions telling everyone in the rain forest to get up. There was no way you were going to ignore those commands. I heard Zander inhale and start to create wake-up movements and sounds. Once more, I was surprised at how much I was enjoying the nearness of another person. I did not want to leave this little nest but knew I had to do it.

As I reached for the zipper and pulled it down to free us, Zander said good morning to me. I returned the greeting. He told me that I was an excellent bedmate as he had the best sleep that he had had for a long time. I just smiled and inwardly agreed with him but didn't want to start something by continuing that line of thought.

As I worked my way out of the sleeping bag, I stretched and looked around me, enjoying the sounds and the overall atmosphere of this place. Then I started to hear a whirring sound that was coming closer to our position. Zander heard it too, and we both looked towards the direction of the sound. Suddenly, we saw a UAV drone approaching us. It was small but seemingly intent on finding something or someone, which was most likely to be us. It began a circular pattern around our position and was obviously taking photographs.

I looked at Zander, and he said, " We need to leave here quickly. Somehow, they have found me, and I'm sure those Desperadoes won't be far behind. I agreed and started to pick up our sleeping bag and other items to stuff into the backpack.

Zander had a very concerned look in his eyes. He turned to me and said. "I can't be putting you through this, Matt. None of this is your fault, and I involve you in the mess I got myself in. I think we need to split up. You go on to the Rio Frio Cave, and I will head back to Caracol and see if the Belize Defense Force can protect me. Even if you brought your jaguar friend to help, it could put him and you into danger."

I answered his comments. "Not going to happen, Zander. Splitting up, I mean. I could bring my Jaguar back, and he wouldn't be hurt. I'll explain why later. I will also talk to you about options in due order. But for now, let's get going. We will still head for the cave."

What Zander did not know was that I had willed myself into an out-of-the-body trip to find the cartel's Desperadoes. No time was passing with Zander and my body, so he was unaware of me being gone because I actually wasn't gone, physically. The cartel was several miles away, and they were observing the UAV on a monitor. They had another hand-held device next to it, and I recognized what it was. They were tracking Zander through detecting his cellphone signal with an app called Minsky.

After receiving that information, I turned to Zander and asked him if his cell phone had been out of his hands recently. He said it had because he had been getting considerable static on it, and had taken it to the phone store in San Ignacio a week ago. He wanted to know why I asked.

I informed him that the desperadoes were using a spy detection app to track the location on his phone. That's how they knew he was on the top of the Sky Palace, and now they detected him there. The drone had confirmed that we were at the top.

He looked at me with questions written all over his face and said. "How do you know this, Matt?"

I answered, "I'll explain that when we get to the cave. For now, we have to run to get the jump on those thugs. Throw your phone off this cliff. The impact on a rock or something may bust it, which is good, but even if it doesn't, they will have to spend a good amount of time to locate it. We will then leave here by walking within the creek, which flows towards the Rio Frio Cave area. There's a good chance that the running water in the creek will hide our tracks better than if we go by ground through the forest."

Zander nodded his acceptance, and we took off for the creek and headed for Rio Frio. It was rough going because the creek was full of smooth rocks that your feet constantly slipped on. The creek also had decaying logs and limbs, and our feet got caught up in and on them and caused us to trip a lot. We traveled the creek for a little over one hour. We then left it to finish our trek over solid ground the rest of the way through the forest. Zander took the backpack from me and carried it for three hours. Then I retrieved it and carried it for the balance of the distance to Rio Frio Cave. We arrived at six o'clock in the evening and were happy to see that no tourists were still there.

We found a perfect spot to pitch our tent. It was a clearing and because of the cave opening at a high spot, this allowed us to see anyone arriving at the cavern entrance. The air circulation was excellent, so we didn't feel overly jungled even when we were inside the tent.

There were many clean and clear pools of flowing water that beckoned us to break out the soap bar and frolic in the water to cool off and clean up. Bathing every day was a normal habit for me. But here in the rain forest, it was a momentous one and wasn't ever taken for granted, particularly after you labored through jungle growth for as many hours as we had. I had been brought up in a very modest household, and it was a new experience for me to get naked around others, particularly to cavort with someone in and out of the water. It was liberating, and it was fun.

After we were finished cleaning up, we frolicked in the water like teenagers and divested ourselves of the day's tension. . We hadn't bothered with a midday snack during our journey, and we were hungry. I had small packets of tuna and salmon. I gave Zander his choice along with some dried fruit. Then I retrieved a can of Sterno and a small saucepan to place some of the pool water in, and after getting near to a boil, I poured it into a cup of Ramen noodles for us to share. We had a veritable feast, and then I surprised Zander with a secret treat I had hidden in my backpack. I reached in and brought out two mini airline size bottles of cabernet wine. It was almost like being on a date.

We spent the rest of the evening talking about my Vision Quest goals, and he described his personal losses and fears about payback for writing about the cartel activities. I told him more about Gaia and Kareem. I wasn't sure what Zander believed or even wanted to believe about them, but he didn't question my words. I also learned more about his goals and desires. He explained the loss of his lover

and how hard it was to deal with that. We were creating a bond that would be strong, and I hoped it would be lasting. I was developing feelings for another person that I had never experienced in my life up to this point. It made me feel vulnerable but also hopeful at the same time.

Eventually, we both became tired enough that the need for sleep overwhelmed our curiosity about each other's stories. Zander said he would like to sleep with me again in the sleeping bag if I didn't object. I did not object, of course, and like the previous night, we slid into the bag, back to back, but not before Zander gave me a light kiss on my forehead and thanked me for being his friend. I did not know how to react and simply and stupidly said that he was welcome.

I laid in our comfy bed and thought about just how stupid I was in not expressing myself properly. I was in the middle of Belize, experiencing what I had always wanted and planned to experience. All of this was hoping that my Vision Quest would transform me into the person I wanted to become. And here I was, still being held captive to a stifling and restrictive mindset.

I fretted about these thoughts and was about to doze off when I received a jolt in my consciousness, and I became alert. Kareem was in my mind, and I don't mean that I was simply thinking of him. I actually felt his presence as an individual personality. He asked me to leave my body and join him. Even though I was unsure how to do that, I accepted his request and found myself beside him in spirit form. I accepted this new 'now' and greeted Kareem just as I would have if I had been in my physical form.

He immediately said that he and Gaia were very pleased with how I had used my Jaguar for help in that dangerous situation. I reminded him that it was Gaia's Jaguar I had called for. He corrected me by saying that it was my Jaguar because I had summoned it, and it issued from my creative willpower. I smiled as I knew that I had just learned another lesson from my spiritual friend and teacher. He insisted that I had properly used my new spiritual wisdom.

He then told me that Zander and I were still in danger as the drug cartel assassins had anticipated where we were headed and would be in the Rio Frio area before too long. Gaia or Kareem could not interfere with our strategy to avoid or interact with the Desperadoes. That was our responsibility. However, my spiritual advisors were allowed to give me a heads up and then urge me to take matters into my own hands. I told him that I understood. Kareem replied, "Good luck, my friend!" and then vanished. I was back in the sleeping bag.

Before I allowed myself to drift into sleep, I willed myself into an out-of-the-body state and thought I would travel out to locate the Desperadoes. Kareem told me that I could not invade an individual's privacy, but I could observe when that individual was acting in a public venue. How my consciousness knew to specifically locate these men, I cannot fathom, but locate them I did. They were camped about five miles from our position in Rio Frio. I could listen to their conversation and heard them exclaim about a jaguar attacking them in Caracol. They said that they had returned to Caracol to locate Zander again but determined that he had left. They couldn't track him after they saw that he entered the creek.

They did mention that there were also other tracks before the creek, so they knew he was with someone else, and it appears that Zander was heading towards the George Price Highway and more likely would work his way to Belize City. The leader of the five men said that it appeared that Zander might be headed to the Rio Frio Cave. The leader correctly reasoned that it would be the closest location Belize Defense Forces would present to protect tourists. Their drones would continually monitor the George Price Highway to see if Zander and whoever else he was with arrived somewhere along its length to get a ride to Belize City.

After listening to these evil men, I realized that they were earnest about finding Zander and murdering him. I would not allow that to happen. I returned to my physical body and once again realized how comfortable and wonderful it was to have Zander lying next to me. He was sound asleep, and I would soon join him, as I knew we would have a busy day starting in the morning.

But for now, we were safe.

It seemed that I woke up immediately upon falling asleep, but the howler monkeys were performing the morning ritual of waking the jungle up. And we were pressed to get up and do our own ablutions before deciding the next move we must make.

I decided to tell Zander about my out-of-the-body exploration and what I had heard from our enemies. He listened pretty carefully, and I noticed that he no longer looked skeptical about my spiritual thoughts. He appeared to be getting more comfortable with my strangeness. Perhaps he felt he had no choice, but I was happy no matter what conclusion he had come to.

I suggested that we abandon our plans to head directly to Belize City, even if it could be under the protection of the Belize Defense Force. The cartel would be

able to get to us there no matter what we did. I suggested that we head southeast to Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and the Jaguar Preserve. We would spend time there to throw the cartel off and hopefully destroy their focus on getting to Zander. If we were to show up in Belize in a location they could dominate, we would be vulnerable to detection and elimination.

Zander was having problems trudging through the jungle in his street apparel and athletic shoes. We were as careful as we could be, but the wear and tear were becoming evident. I decided that we had to go into the town of Dangriga before we went on to the Jaguar Preserve. We could get some proper trekking clothing there, and that would ease our efforts considerably.

When we arrived in Dangriga, I checked into the Pelican Beach resort, telling the desk clerk that I wanted a room for two and that the other guest would arrive later. I suggested that Zander wait outside. I didn't want anyone to see who that other guest might look like, as our pursuers might check every guest house and hotel soon. They had no idea what I would look like or who I was, but of course, they do know Zander.

Once the check-in procedure was finished, I joined Zander and gave him his key to the room. We then went to find a store that sold men's clothing and bought some appropriate hiking clothes and gear. The store was well equipped, and we were able to find excellent hiking boots, socks, underwear, shirts and pants, and even a really nice Indian Jones-style fedora hat. I also replaced my safari style wardrobe with a few new things, bought casual dress shorts and tropical shirts, sandals, and we were good to go.

I paid for everything with my credit card, and that brought cries of protest from Zander. I reminded him that our pursuers would obviously be looking for charges to his card appearing electronically. If they were advanced enough to use UAV drones and facial recognition software, they would also be checking credit card usage. Besides, I also told him that I could afford to buy him these gifts if I wanted to, and I did want to. He smiled and gave me a very special look that I couldn't quite interpret.

Now that we had gotten all our shopping tasks finished, we went to look for a place to eat. We found a small restaurant near the waterfront that looked like it might have some native Garifuna food. We hit the jackpot. We ordered a dish called falmo, a seafood broth made with coconut milk, black pepper, garlic, and onion. It was served with a whole grilled snapper, coconut rice, and cassava bread.

Since we had been eating canned meats and potato chips, this was a meal made in heaven for us.

We went back to the hotel after lunch. After watching that the hotel clerk had left her post and couldn't see Zander, we went to the room and enjoyed a hot shower and general cleanup. We then spent the rest of the day wandering about Dangriga and enjoying each other's company. It was fantastic to have a friend to spend time with. I would have loved to occasionally hold hands with Zander, but I wasn't brought up that way, and of course, wasn't even sure that Zander would accept such familiarity anyway.

The day evaporated fast, and before we knew it, it was time for dinner. We decided to dine at the hotel and arrived on the beach for happy hour. We dressed in khaki shorts and Tommy Bahama tropical shirts and sandals. We wanted to look like tourists rather than men on the run. We certainly succeeded. We also treated ourselves to Makers Mark manhattans in cold crystal stemware to complete our image and to enjoy the beach views and its palm forest environment in the process.

After two of those happy hour manhattans, we were ready for dinner and went to the outdoor dining area on the beach. Zander had grouper piccata, and I had a porterhouse steak. We both had a grilled potato medley specialty composed of regular and sweet potatoes with plantains in a creole sauce. Here again, we were eating very well for two desperate men on the run. We both had a glass of pinot noir during dinner.

After eating, we returned to the beach and settled into chaise lounges to have an after-dinner drink of Black Coral Spiced rum, served neat. We were sailing in waters that were a bit on the stormy side when that rum followed the earlier drinks. I reached over to Zander and placed his hand in mine. He returned the squeezes on my hand. We had arrived in that wonderful place where no one else in our space mattered. We spent the next hour lying on the lounges and holding hands, as I had been afraid of doing but wanting to do just a short time ago. We didn't say anything and didn't need to say anything.

A waiter came by and broke into our reverie by asking us if we wanted another drink. We thanked him, but we declined and decided to get up and go to our room. We had had enough alcohol, and it was a bit obvious as we pretty much had to hold each other's hands or arms to help navigate our way back to the room. I noticed the broad smile on our waiter's face as we left him standing on the beach.



When we reached the room, we both collapsed in each other arms and fell onto the king-sized bed. After lying there for some indeterminate time, we looked at each other, and Zander giggled. That sent me into fits of laughter, followed by him doing the same.

I wrapped my arms around him, and before I understood what I was doing, I kissed him on the lips. At that moment, I got very concerned that I had stepped over a line. I blurted out that I was sorry and started to blame it on the alcohol. He looked into my eyes with those fantastically beautiful black eyes of his, and he said, "Well, if that was the case, Matt, let's round-up some more alcohol. Then he kissed me back. My mind was swimming with thoughts I couldn't seem to organize, and then I finally stopped that process. I didn't want to organize anything. I just wanted Zander, and I had him here with me.

The rest of the night was more than I had ever dreamed about or imagined that I would ever experience. All through the night, we hugged and made love and then spooned and then slept and then made love again. At one point, when I sort of connected with mundane reality again, I understood that my life had become complete this night. Even if the cartel's thugs broke into this room and murdered us, I would have felt that I had reached the perfect existence and would be ready to go. But then I realized that I was really not ready to go. I wanted more of what I had at this moment with Zander. Finally, I fell sound asleep.

The morning did arrive a little sooner than desired, and I woke up with one hell of a headache. I was going to pay for those drinks we had last night, but if I had to pay for such a perfect night with a horrible handover, so be it. Zander rolled over as he woke up and groaned. He was paying for those drinks as well. I leaned over and gave him a kiss on his forehead. His big shiny black eyes opened, and he smiled when he saw me. He said simply, "Hi there, handsome! I think I may be dying here if this hangover is any indication, but I'm glad you will be the last person I will ever see if that is the case."

I answered him. "You aren't going anywhere except with me, and I have no intention of dying now that I have found you. Let's get cleaned up, have breakfast, or at least coffee, and make arrangements to get on our way to the Jaguar Preserve." I threw myself on top of him and smothered him with hugs and kisses.

We showered together. This was the first time I had ever done this with anyone, and I found it to be one of the more enjoyable things ever.

By the time we were finished our morning routines and dressed, we were both feeling a bit better but knew that it would more than likely take the entire day to recover from the many drinks we had had the previous night. We had two cups of coffee and a danish and left it at that. I checked us out of the hotel, and we headed out of Dangriga. We stopped at a grocery store to stock our backpacks with go-meals and drinks. We both agreed with a no-alcohol rule on the rest of the trek. That is except for the few airline mini-wines that I still had in my backpack. We wanted to save plenty of space for insect repellent. We knew we would apply and reapply a lot of it. We would be in and out of the river and creek waters and showering under waterfalls to wash dirt, sweat, and old insect repellent away.

I made several out-of-the-body reconnaissance missions to find out where the cartel's thugs were located. It turned out that they were persistent, and they were smart. They had somehow determined that Zander and a companion, being me, were heading to Southern Belize and most likely to Dangriga or Placencia. The cartel thugs were traveling in an SUV and would be in Dangriga in a couple of hours. I made sure that we walked to the Jaguar Preserve on an entirely different route than most hikers would normally take. We should not be likely to cross paths. Also, we had the advantage of seeing where they were at any time through an OOB mode and could avoid them. This was a major defensive advantage, and it pretty well kept us safe as long as we didn't unexpectedly meet.

Zander and I were desirous of escaping deep into the Jaguar Preserve in the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. This would allow us to be alone for an extended period and far away from the cartel. It would also provide a quiet, contemplative environment for us. The time alone would assist us in creating a long-term solution to Zander's personal problems with this cartel. I was also looking forward to having Zander all to myself in the rain forest. I was being selfish, and I didn't care.

For those who want to know, the Jaguar Preserve was encouraged by a man named Alan Rabinowitz as a sanctuary to protect the Jaguar and other native animals. It was now going to be our Sanctuary as well. At least for as long as we could enjoy or perhaps tolerate whatever nature would offer us. This land was restricted from hunting, fishing, logging, or any other kind of habitat destruction. This Jaguar Preserve offers incredible hiking trails through a pristine lush jungle filled with wildlife, rivers and waterfalls, reptiles, and insects. Zander and I were hopeful that it would also allow us to be safe from our enemies and the distractions of civilization.

When we arrived at the Sanctuary, we avoided the main entrance and primary hiking trails and roads within the Preserve. We didn't want to be exposed to the possibility of running into our enemies. We wouldn't stand out as there were many other naturalists with backpacks hiking throughout this preserved land. It was just a matter of isolating ourselves as much as possible, so we penetrated deep into the Cockscomb Basin, where there would be fewer people but not so far as to stand out as the only ones that might be detected by the cartels' technology.

Once we reached an area where we felt safe, we set up camp. To say it was a beautiful place would not do this site justice. Our new jungle home was a relatively open rain forest locale with a dense tree canopy to shield us from overhead spying but plenty of open areas allowing afternoon sunlight to make it to the ground. The creek we were camping on was virtually a small river, and that promoted plenty of breezes that we could feel they passed over the creek and onto us.

Zander said that he was pleased with our new home but wondered if we had to worry about jaguars getting pissed off that we were invading their territory. I said that I had that all figured out and pointed out the huge Jaguar sauntering out of the jungle's edge of our clearing. Zander jumped a bit at that sight but quickly reasoned that I had caused this to happen. My Jaguar then came to me, rubbed his head on my legs, and then went over to Zander and did the same.

I told Zander that I had named my Jaguar Ahau-Kin, known in Mayan as the Jaguar Lord. He would be our protector while we were here, and even if he comes and goes, which he will, he will always watch out for us. Zander was delighted, and he reached down and petted Ahau-Kin, who then licked his hand.

*I don't know about you faithful readers, but I really like the Jaguar Preserve and everywhere we have been in Belize during Matt's Vision Quest. He seems to be finding his real self up to this point, and I'll bet that this is just the start of his transition. I hope you can join us on Episode Seven to see where his Quest will take him and Zander.*