



A Lonely Man On A Wakeful Road

by Dan Ford

An Episodic Adventure

Episode #7

OUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME

In Episode Twelve, Matt, and Zander had arrived at the Jaguar Preserve and set up a campsite deep within the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. They were adjusting to the rhythms and routine of living within this lush and pristine rain forest environment. Belize was full of such places, but this particular locale was by far the finest of the best they had to offer. It was beyond being able to use words to describe it, and only living within it could give justice to it.

The weather was hot and humid, but the two men had adjusted to those conditions, and both of these weather elements were tempered a lot by the shade from the overhead tropical canopy and light breezes coming into their camp from over South Stann Creek. They were less than a 15-minute hike from a large waterfall and pond where they could luxuriate under flowing water and bathe in the deep clear pool. They did this every day for the two weeks they had been in the Cockscomb Basin Sanctuary.

Now, at this point, it is time to have Matt continue to narrate his story. It sounds better coming from him than from me. That's for sure!

Surprisingly, Zander and I hadn't discussed the need to be hidden from the Cartel's thugs. We were contented and happy with the way things were here in our jungle heaven. But we also knew that this wasn't going to be a forever place. We would have to deal with a solution to this dilemma eventually. For now, with the assurances that I was able to go on out-of-the-body forays for information on the whereabouts of the Cartel, we were feeling secure. The thugs were still searching for us, but they couldn't find us in Dangriga and went on to Placencia, further south.

Our days were spent wandering through the forest and identifying flora and fauna within the Preserve. Even though Zander was a journalist by profession, he was also an avid amateur botanist. He knew most of the plants and trees in the rain forest and always delighted in telling me what every plant he saw was. I loved listening to Zander and enjoyed every second of every description.

Quite often, we had our spirit jaguar Ahau-Kin walking the jungle trails with us. There were over 200 resident jaguars in the Jaguar Preserve. It gave us considerable comfort to have Ahau-Kin walking with us on these treks. Even though he was a spirit animal, he could manifest force if he needed to. He had proven that when he mauled those Cartel thugs at Caracol. But generally, just the sight of him was enough to keep other big cats at bay.

He also slept with us every night in the tent. Because the tent was small, we're a tight-knit group and generally used the large Jaguar as a big pillow. Ahau-Kin also seemed to know when we wanted some alone time and magically disappeared into the jungle. He was very courteous that way.

There were many other cats in the Preserve. At various times we saw pumas, plenty of ocelots, jaguarundi, and margays, as well as the jaguars. There were

peccaries, pacas, big rodents, small deer, otters, and coatimundi that looked like the raccoons I knew from the States. An unending variety of birds came in and out of our campsite. Zander identified them as Keel-billed toucans, clay-colored robins, special flycatchers, collard seed-eaters, tanagers, and bat falcons. Montezuma's Oropendolas made its avian presence known. When it calls out, it goes through the most acrobatic-like spasms, gripping onto a branch, leaning back, and then throwing its head forward as it screeches, clucks, and pops, sticking its tail in the air at the same time.

One of our concerns was running out of food. We had purchased and stocked enough for about three weeks and had already been in the Preserve for two weeks. We could ration and stretch it out, but that wasn't a desirable thing to do. There was plenty of water here if we were careful of its source. But, there wasn't much protein available, and we refused to kill anything. The native fruit wasn't a variety that we were used to or something we should be eating. So, we knew we had to start planning on departing here soon. We would leave for Dangriga to restock our backpacks and return to the Preserve after having done that.

I searched for the Cartel thugs in OOB mode for several days and found out that they had gone back to Dangriga. They could find no clues in Placencia or anywhere else in Southern Belize. One of the thugs had talked to several people in the Pelican Beach Resort and reached some success when he found a waiter who recalled two men on the beach late at night who had gotten pretty drunk. One of them matched the photograph that the Cartel thug showed him of Zander. From there, that thug was able to figure out who had registered in the hotel. The female clerk said she did not see the other guest as they were to arrive at a later time. They now had my name. When the five Cartel thugs discussed this find, they searched throughout Dangriga and found out that we had bought hiking clothes and camping gear. We had also stopped at the grocery store and bought go-meals and other foods and drinks for a major hike. They all agreed that it was obvious that we were heading to the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. They got into their SUV and headed there.

We broke camp when we received this new information, headed out of the Cockscomb Basin, and trudged back to Dangriga by a circuitous route that the thugs would not detect. This out-of-the-body travel advantage seemed to work very well indeed. Once in Dangriga, we filled up both of our backpacks with more go-food and other essential items to give us another three weeks if desired. We headed directly back to the Jaguar Preserve. Along the route, I went OOB and saw the Cartel moving through every one of the hiking trails throughout the Preserve. They

even used the UAV drone to overfly the trails, riverbanks, and anywhere else they figured we might be. They came up empty. They finally gave up and left. They headed back to Dangriga and arrived at the same time we returned to the campsite.

Our Jaguar appeared as soon as the tent was erected. We were home again. For the next week or so, we repeated our activities within the forest and enjoyed life. We figured out how to make a hammock by connecting our tent sack to two cohune palms near the creek. I checked on the thugs periodically and found that they decided to head to Belize City to meet with the bosses and determine their next moves. We were safe for the moment and free to take our time to decide what our next moves would be.

Zander had fallen in love with Ahau-Kin and said quite often that he was in love with me as well. As I was totally in love with both of them, I felt that we had created the perfect family. It would be painful to leave all this when the time came, and we didn't want to talk about it. I knew that we could conjure up our jaguar any time or any place we wanted to after we left here, but somehow it wouldn't be the same.

In one of our planning sessions, I brought up where we were to go next. It would be safest to leave Belize and head back to my home in Florida. Zander had a passport, but we would have to obtain a visa from his government before leaving. This would place us in a possibly dangerous position while waiting for the visa request to be acted upon. The possibility of the Cartel finding us in Belize City was actually a probability, and we didn't want to take a chance on that happening. Zander had said that it was a shame that we couldn't figure out a way to get rid of the Cartel. That got me thinking. Would it be possible to eliminate or even just get this Cartel out of the way while we were waiting on a visa during that period? I decided to register some hammock time to think that subject through. After three hours of some serious thinking and a little snoozing, Zander climbed into the hammock with me. I opened my eyes, and he asked me how the contemplation was going. I smiled at him and said, "I think I've got it!"

And I did think that I had come up with a viable plan after one out-of-the-body trip to the Cartel in Belize City. They had been getting a lot of pressure from their boss about Zander still being on the loose and the thugs unable to track them down. The beginning of our plan came about when I heard that one of the Cartel thugs had paid the waiter one hundred dollars and a small bag of cocaine for telling him about Zander and me. There is no doubt in my mind that he would have also

told the waiter to contact him if he saw us again. I decided that we would cause that to happen, and we would control the situation this time.

Zander and I headed back to Dangriga by the bus that carried tourists between Dangriga and the Cockscomb Sanctuary. We then rented a car and checked into the Pelican Beach Resort once again. I did it the same way as I did the first time and left Zander outside while I registered. I wanted to keep our actions the same as we did it the first time, so we wouldn't raise any suspicions. We acted normal, and after going to our room for a shower and clean-up, we went to the beach bar to get some drinks. We looked for the same waiter that identified us to the Cartel and was concerned at first because we didn't see him. It would ruin our plans if he wasn't working that day.

But fortunately, he did show up, and he came over to the lounges we were lying in to ask us if we wanted another drink. I said yes. When he returned with the drinks, I asked him if he was the one who served the last time we were here. He grinned and said, "I didn't get to sell you guys anything because you said you didn't need anything else".

I said that I remembered and apologized for being so drunk that night. He told me that there was no need for an apology. Such things happen more often than they don't happen around here. He then left us to take other orders.

We left the bar and went directly to the car rental. We picked up our car and headed back to the Jaguar Preserve. Of course, I was pretty much running a constant out-of-the-body visit to the Cartel gang to keep tabs on where they were at present. A cell phone belonging to the bastard that had paid the waiter for the info on us received a call. As we expected, it was the waiter from the Pelican Beach bar. The thug called out to his partners and told them that we were in the Pelican Beach Resort but had only registered for one day. They decided to get into their SUV and head down to Dangriga immediately. It would only take a few hours for them to get here from Belize City.

After we arrived at the Cockscomb Sanctuary, we picked up all of our things from the campsite and loaded them into the car. Zander was driving, and we headed up the Hummingbird Highway towards the Belize Capital City of Belmopan. We would have to get a visa there for Zander to go to the United States.

A quick check on an OOB jaunt showed five Cartel thugs in their SUV heading down the Coastal Road to Dangriga. They were almost there. I had

watched them on and off since they left Belize City. They didn't waste much time as they wanted to get to us before we could get away again. They loaded their AK47s, other rifles, and revolvers into the car and trunk, along with the drones and other tracking equipment. I was able to get their SUV's license number and a complete description of all five men.

Zander did have contacts in the Belize Defense Force, and to a degree, they knew of the problems he was having with the drug cartel because of the articles he had written. Zander called the BDF Brigadier General, who was in charge of the Defense Force. He had met with him shortly after he had written the expose, and the General was aware that Zander was on the run, but of course, didn't know where he had gone. Zander filled him in by telling him where we had been hiding from the Cartel and who he had been hiding with. When the General found out that an American was also on the Cartel's kill list, he became even more concerned because protecting American tourists from being harmed was a high priority in Belize.

Zander told the General that the Cartel was currently on the way to the Cockscomb Wildlife Sanctuary and was planning to kill them there or at least capture them and kill them elsewhere. They had attempted to murder both of us at Caracol. We knew that the Cartel carried arms and ammunition in their SUV and told the General about that.

The General immediately instructed the BDF in the Southern Districts of Belize to head to the Cockscomb Sanctuary. They had the license number of the Cartel vehicle and knew that there were five of them in the SUV, so it wasn't difficult to recognize them when the thugs entered the Sanctuary.

The gang made a major mistake when two Belize Defense Force officers approached them. The thugs immediately drew weapons and attempted to shoot the BDF. But the BDF were trained not to have all of their forces obvious to any armed group they were approaching. These hidden officers responded by directing all of their firepowers at the Cartel thugs from a shielded location. The incident was over almost before it had started.

This was a great success for the Belize Defense Force, as this particular Cartel group was causing what amounted to a crime wave in Belize. And the Cartel had taken off some restraints that the Belize Defense Forces had when they fired upon the officers. The General thanked Zander and said that they would now take steps to eliminate this Cartel from Belize. Because an American had been

threatened, the United States Government would commit the CIA, DEA and other US departments to assist in that regard.

The relief that we felt was enormous, and now that we knew the Cartel would soon be out of the picture, we were free to make whatever plans we wanted to make at a more leisurely pace. We were not so naive as to think that the Cartel would be totally gone yet, but we also knew that we were not defenseless in that regard. In any case, we decided to go to Zander's apartment in San Ignacio instead of Belmopan. How quickly things had changed for us.

Once we were established in Zander's place, we could start deciding what would come next in our lives. I didn't know if my Vision Quest was over now that I have found someone I wanted to make a new life with or if there was still more that I needed to accomplish. Up to this point, it was just me that I needed to be concerned about, but now I had someone else's life to consider. This was a new situation for me. I knew that I wanted to make a commitment to Zander, but I was still unsure if he wanted to make that commitment to me. We were both free to make such a decision now.

I finally got up enough courage to ask Zander about these things. He was gathering up his personal items, as he had already decided to leave his apartment, and he knew that he did not want to go back to his employment because they didn't offer much support in standing behind him when the Cartel made its intentions known to them.

I walked up behind him as he was placing his clothes in a suitcase. I put my arms around him, and he turned his head, smiled at me, and melted me with those beautiful eyes. We kissed long and passionate, and that translated into more than either of us would be able to put into mere words, but I knew I had to try to say what I had to say. So I started.

"Zander! Where do we go from here? I don't mean places. I mean us!" He looked at me in the manner that only he can do, as I found out during our time in the Sanctuary, and said. "I can answer that question easily, Matt. I want to be wherever you are. I want to go wherever you are going. I want to live as you live and wherever you live. You rescued me from the dangers of the Cartel. You lifted me out of the darkness and pulled me into the brightness of being alive once again. I don't want to ever be without you again, and that is the only decision I need to make."

Those words penetrated into my body and then went on to reverberate within my soul. Without any ability to control these feelings on my part, my eyes started leaking tears of joy, and I enveloped this wonderful man within my arms and surrounded him with psychic waves of love that were coming from some spiritual reserve within my soul. My fears regarding Zander's intentions were gone, and my life now felt complete.

We stood in the room with arms wrapped around each other, and suddenly I felt a slight rapping within my consciousness, which was ever so much like a light knocking on a door. I psychically opened my consciousness and suddenly was aware that Kareem was asking to be noticed. I answered him within my consciousness and gave him a spiritual hello. He asked if we could talk. I said, "Of course!", and unknowingly said it out loud physically as well. Zander looked at me quizzically but said nothing.

Then Kareem asked if he could be introduced to Zander. I again said, "Of course!" and again unknowingly said it out loud physically. Zander must have thought that I was losing my mind but again said nothing.

Then there was a knocking on Zander's front door. He looked strangely at me but walked to the door and looked out a peephole to see who it was. He didn't recognize the knocker and hesitated to open the door. I walked over and looked out the peephole and saw that it was Kareem, so I opened the door, smiled at Kareem, and he walked into the room.

Kareem gave me a hug, and I looked back at Zander, who had not lost that surprised and quizzical look on his face. Kareem walked over to him and said, "Hi Zander. I am Kareem and a good friend of our rude mutual friend who didn't bother to introduce us. Its great to finally meet you."

Zander had seemingly recovered and told Kareem that he was really pleased to meet him as well. He said, "Our rude mutual friend here has actually told me a lot about you, Kareem, but I had the impression that you were made of spirit stuff instead of physical stuff. He didn't tell me that you were so good-looking either." I jumped into this conversation before it could get out of hand. "Never mind those good-looking comments, Zander. You just committed yourself to me a few seconds ago, and now you are making a move on my other bestest friend."

We all had a good laugh at these comments, and then Kareem said, "Well, I'm not actually his best-looking friend, Zander. My sister Gaia is better looking than me, but perhaps that depends on your viewpoint."

Then a very bright golden glow appeared in the center of the room, which got all of their attention. It got brighter and brighter and then started to form a figure of silver. Then from that silvery form, a beautiful silver-blue-haired woman appeared, and she had a very large smile on her face.

"Hi Sis!" Kareem spoke to her, and this was followed by Matt, and he said, "Hi Gaia! I'm really glad to see you once again."

Zander sort of stammered and finally uttered, "Uh! Hello?"

"Hello, Zander!" Gaia responded. "It's a great pleasure to meet you in person, particularly because you have made our good friend Matt so happy."

"That was hardly anything I didn't want to do, Gaia. Happy Is As Happy Does, goes the saying."

"You are absolutely correct, Zander." Gaia replied and added, "The saying connects with, Make Your Own Joy In Life. And you two have the capability of making a lot of that joy together."

Matt then added. "I couldn't be happier to see you two here and particularly pleased that you are appearing to Zander. What does this mean?"

Gaia replied to both Matt and Zander. "It means that you two are connected now in this physical existence as well as the spiritual one, and you are not going to be able to go on to complete Matt's Vision Quest without each other. That is the commitment you just made together. We got the message and couldn't be more pleased about it. We also wanted to meet with you to congratulate you both on your decision, but primarily to urge you to move forward with your Quest. As with your past activities, we are here to support that effort. But we want to continue to let you know that most of that effort has to originate and emanate directly from you two. The less you have to rely on us, the better your results will be."

Zander said he understood and then asked Gaia if he and Matt were still free to have Ahau-Kin join them on occasion. She answered, "I believe that Kareem explained to Matt that Ahau-Kin is your Jaguar and not mine. You willed him into

existence, and he is, therefore, yours, so feel free to do what you want. But for now, I need to focus on some other spiritual issues and take my leave of you. I don't know what my brother is doing and rarely do, so I will say goodbye to all of you."

And before any of the three remaining guys could say anything, Gaia morphed into a shimmering Golden Sphere and then faded into nothingness.

Kareem was still there and said to the others. "I'm usually in physical form while I'm working in San Ignacio and not prone to the drama that my sister likes to evidence. Unless you guys are busy, I would like to hang around and bond a bit."

"Absolutely!" Matt said, and Zander quickly agreed.

Zander went into the kitchen, brought out some cold beers, and handed them to Matt and Kareem. The bonding had begun.

Kareem stayed four hours, and all three men really enjoyed each other. Matt suggested that he and Zander complete Matt's trekking schedule to several more nature-inspired places in Belize before they left for Matt's house in Florida. They knew that they would have to be watchful for Cartel attempts on them but felt the Cartel had been severely diminished, and even so, they were quite well prepared to fend them off now. Kareem agreed with their assessment and suggested he would like to visit them at various places along their Quest if they didn't mind. This brought about howls of dissent that he would even ask for permission to drop in on them. They had already bonded quite well.

The next day, Zander and Matt drove the rental car back to Dangriga and turned it in. They then took the bus to the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. Once there, they went back to their favorite camping site and set up their tent and hammock. And of course, they conjured up Ahau-Kin, as they didn't want to live here without their Jaguar with them. They wanted to restart the Vision Quest from the place where it was interrupted. It was strictly a symbolic gesture, but one they wished to do.

They stayed there four days and then broke camp and headed to Victoria Peak. Climbing this 3,675-foot mountain is a challenging climb and requires an overnight camp midway up. The views from the top of Belize's highest mountain were fabulous. Matt's Quest list was a worthwhile target because it proved that he was up to the challenge. They traversed the Tiger Fern trail on the way back, located in the Cockscomb Basin and located near Quam Bank in Stann Creek. This

is a strenuous uphill ascent, with a magnificent waterfall as the impetus to go see it. A more challenging day hike, also located near Quam Bank in the Belizean State of Stann Creek, was Catena Transit, a major trek with high elevation gains, so it is not for the faint of heart. But they were rewarded with some spectacular bird-watching and gorgeous wildflowers. Then they hiked the Monkey River Loop near Placencia.

After all those nature trips, Matt and Zander decided to visit several major Mayan Ruins to absorb the atmosphere that these archeological sites had to offer. And Matt, along with Kareem, who visited them a lot as promised, developed a new talent to involve and teach Zander. They would travel on the Spiritual Timeline to an active Mayan civilization that corresponded to the Mayan Ruin they were visiting at the time. It was an education like no other.

Eventually, they felt that it was time to head to the beach and coral reefs for rest and recreation. They deserved it and would benefit from it but were still a bit concerned about being targeted by the Cartel when they were in those vulnerable areas. But they would handle that when and if it happened.

I enjoyed being involved in this Episode as it explored the relationship between Matt and Zander while also exploring the beauty and unique nature of inland Belize. Even the terrible threat of a drug cartel attempting to kill them didn't seem to detract from the allure of their time in the rain forest. I'm expecting more of the same when they go to the barrier islands of Belize in the next Episode. I hope you will be there with me.