

An Adventure in the Amazon

Maria was bored. Twelfth-day-of-summer-break kind of bored. There was absolutely nothing to do!

"If you're bored, got to the library," her mom had suggested.

When her list of excuses ran out—she lost her library card (go ask for a new one), it's too far to walk (ride your bike), it's too hot (go first thing in the morning)—she decided there was no choice but to go.

"Okay, mom. I'm going to the library like you said," she called, jamming her sneakers, laces already tied, on.

"Good for you, honey," was the distracted answer as her mom dealt with her fussy baby sister, Ella.

When she got to the library, she saw Cleo, her favorite librarian, shelving science books.

"Hi, Cleo!" she greeted, genuinely grateful for to see her ever cheerful face.

"Hello, Maria. Nice to see you again," Cleo replied. "You know, I had a feeling you'd come here at some point. There are so many great books to read at the library during summer break."

"Humph!" Maria rolled her eyes, "I think I've reached my quota of reading dusty old novels after taking Ms. Brightly's Advanced Literature course this spring."

"I suspected as much," Cleo continued cheerfully, undaunted by the lack of enthusiasm, "so I prepared something special, and now I need your help to test it out."

Maria's eyes widened, intrigued. She knew that Cleo *loved* inventing things. And they usually turned out to be some amazing, blow-your-mind invention that knocked your socks off.

"Cool," she said, trying hard to sound nonchalant, but inside she shivered with anticipation. "What is it?"

"It's a book you can travel into!" Cleo announced. "A vacation into some of the most exotic destinations on the planet. I've created three so far. What do you think? Are you up for an adventure?"

"Seriously?!!" This sounded too good to be true. "Where? ... How? ... When?" she stuttered.

"You can choose from: the Amazon rainforest, the North Pole, or the Gobi Desert."

Maria thought it over carefully. This was probably just some gaudy 3D game world—but anything was better than watching the hours slowly tick by. Remembering the fierce Amazonian women in her history books and with thoughts of the lush rainforest full of yet undiscovered wildlife, she boldly answered, "The Amazon."

"Brave girl," Cleo told her, handing over a relatively normal-looking book, with splashes of colorful birds hidden amidst the green fronds. "Just focus past the words on the page and you'll feel a pull. Before you can say, 'Percy Fawcett', you'll find yourself searching for the Lost City of 'Z' yourself! When you are ready to return, say 'What an adventure this has been!', and you will be here again. Got it?"

"Got it!" Maria settled down on the floor and cracked open the book. She leaned forward and let the words blur as she focused past the text. To her surprise, she sank right in!

"Aaarrggghhh!" She fell forwards, spinning around and around in the air, and finally landing softly in ferns beneath the canopy. Shaking herself off, she looked around. Was this real? It smelled like the library greenhouse, with whiffs of fragrant orchids and passion flowers. "Wow," she breathed, taking in the colorful birds perched on lush branches. Insects of all kinds crawled on strange and incredible plants, and a large, green python slithered up a tree. Monkeys screeched overhead, and fish splashed in the river.

Picking up a large branch to act as a walking pole, she started to explore. In Maria's opinion, this was an adventure of a lifetime. Now she knew how Percy Fawcett felt—the inexplicable awe of the unexplored. Striding through the underbrush, she wandered through the jungle. She watched piranha swimming seemingly peacefully in the river, carefully watched a train of army ants march by, and listened to the multitude of birds singing in intertwining harmony as they fluttered above. She longed to capture the magic of the rainforest. "I really wish I had my camera," she mused as she rested dreamily under the canopy of the thick trees.

The wowl of a jaguar nearby startled her, its long lithe shape stepping out from the fronds, not more than 10 meters away. Maria gave a yelp, her heart pounding.

"Please let this not be real!" she panicked as she turned to run. "What an adventure this has been!"

Suddenly, Maria found herself lying on the cool floor of the library, gasping for breath.

"So?" Cleo asked, "How was it? Would you do it again?"

Looking up, Maria managed a smile. "Maybe tomorrow."