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In the Belizean jungle, everything moves slowly: the animals, the people, even time. It's the humidity. The thickness and heat of it makes every movement heavy, including breathing. How did, or more importantly, why did the Mayans clear large rectangles of jungle to build pyramids in such oppressive heat and humidity is a mystery Dr. Jeremy Vail, 39, has been trying to resolve for many years as a professor of Archaeology at the University of Washington, Seattle.

With a lucky grant from the United States Air Force, of all sources, Jeremy was able to pull an excursion together, and today he climbs up the steps of one of those massive stone monuments to the engineering marvel of the Mayans. The grant only provided sufficient funds for him to bring one Graduate Student to assist. He would have preferred to bring along two or three of his brightest, but alas, he ended up with Scott Aberdeen.

Scotty was not Jeremy's first choice. All of Dr. Vail's best and brightest were selected to join digs with teams from Cal. Berkeley, and University of Michigan, and University of Arizona. Who can blame them? Any top student would choose to join in the prestigious summer fieldwork offered by the top professors from the top schools rather than participate in an under-funded junket with a second-rate burnout from a second-tier Archaeology school.

And so, Scotty was the only applicant, and by default, joined the "expedition."

When Scotty learned he was to join Dr. Vail's "team," he sighed with relief. To finish his graduate studies, he needed to participate in at least one dig. When he found out the trip was to the jungles of Belize, Scotty sighed with tears of suffering. He knew he would be sweaty and sticky and completely uncomfortable the whole time. None of his other applications were accepted, so he was stuck with this curmudgeon. And, he wasn't happy about it.

From the moment of exiting the plane at Belize City International Airport, Scotty's worst fears were realized. Hot, sticky, dirty place. The airport didn't even have air conditioning. Not the most hospitable environment for an overweight, lazy, pale, sheltered kid from Seattle. "I bet they don't even have pizza," Scotty mumbled to himself, as he half-carried, half-dragged the three overstuffed bags to a rust-yellow taxi that looked like it was manufactured during the communist period.