THE HIDDEN CITY
BASED ON A TRUE STORY

BY HAROLD WILLIAMS
ILLUSTRATED BY AMIT TAYAL
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A Close Call

The thick forest is no match for this team of explorers. Still, they don’t see a deadly snake until it’s almost too late.

Many snakes in this forest are deadly. If you step on one, you can say good-bye.

For explorers like us, the forest is full of wonderful surprises. But it’s also full of dangers, like snakes, bees, and wild cats. Keep your eyes open, everyone.

Ivan, the team’s leader, knows they had a close call.

Look out!

We got it.

Many snakes in this forest are deadly. If you step on one, you can say good-bye.
Searching for Lost Cities

Ivan and his team press deeper into the Maya Forest. They’re searching for very old cities.

More than a thousand years ago, a great people lived where this forest now grows. These people were called the Maya. They built grand cities of stone...

with big stone buildings, **temples** shaped like **pyramids**, and courts for playing ball games.

Then a strange thing happened. The Maya moved out of their cities.

The cities sat empty for hundreds and hundreds of years. Their stone buildings crumbled. And slowly, the forest grew over the buildings, and the cities disappeared under a thick blanket of trees and vines.

Today, no one knows where to find those old cities in the forest. That’s why Ivan and his team are here. They’re explorers looking for the lost cities of the Maya.
Ivan’s team isn’t searching blindly. Before their trip, they carefully studied pictures of the forest taken from the air.

They pointed out lumps and bumps that could be tall buildings covered with trees.

Then the team loaded down their trucks with gear: tents, cooking supplies, and enough food and clean water to last many weeks in the forest.

The team moves slowly through the forest along old roads. They cut through trees and vines with machetes and saws to clear a path for their trucks.

The forest is hot and thick. Sometimes it gets very wet and muddy.
The forest is not always a friendly place. Apart from the snakes, there are spiders.

After two weeks of hacking deep into the forest, Ivan shares some good news.

When night falls, the team stops, sets up camp, and rests.

The forest is not always a friendly place. Apart from the snakes, there are spiders.

The first area to explore is nearby.

We’ll have to leave our trucks and go on foot. From here on, there are no roads.

Go away! Beat it!

But the forest is also fascinating, with colorful birds, very noisy monkeys, and towering trees.

Clouds of bugs fill the air.

There’s something furry climbing into your boot. Is that a tarantula??

Well, it’s not a kitten!

That’s great! How will we get there?

We’ll have to leave our trucks and go on foot. From here on, there are no roads.
Soon, the team discovered other problems.

I don’t see a pyramid. Or any stone buildings.

It’s just a hill covered with trees! We’ve come all this way to find a hill. That’s two weeks of our time wasted.

Let’s get out of here! Back to camp!

Bees! And they’re angry!

That was no fun.

This is not our lucky day. But we have another area to look in. And I’ve got a good feeling about it.
The team works their way slowly through the forest for a few days.

Oh, man. How much farther?

We're almost there.

It's a jaguar. The biggest wild cat in the forest. The Maya believed that the jaguar was a god.

Maybe that jaguar was trying to tell us something.

I hope it's something good. We need a little luck.

But what is it?

It's amazing.

Wow! Look at that!

It's the gateway to the lost city of Lagunita! And by the looks of it, this is one very big city. I guess that jaguar was telling us something after all.
Ivan and his team explore Lagunita, taking notes.

The Maya built this gateway to look like the mouth of a monster.

Gee, what a welcome!

This looks like a ball court. The Maya loved to play games.

Hmmm. No one has played ball here for more than a thousand years.

This pyramid was a temple. It’s the tallest building in the city.

There are even trees up here on the top.

That’s why Lagunita has been hidden for so long. No one could see it.

Carved stones.

Tanks to catch rainwater.

Nothing but trees, as far as the eye can see. What are the trees hiding? So many lost cities waiting to be discovered.
Glossary

**jaguar** a large spotted wild cat from South and Central America

**machete** (mah-SHEH-tee) a long, sharp knife used for cutting branches and vines

**Maya** (MY-uh) people who built great cities in Mexico and Central America more than a thousand years ago

**pyramid** a building with sides that slope toward a point at the top

**temple** a building where people pray

Ivan Šprajc (pronounced “shprites”) stands in Lagunita, a lost city of the Maya he and his team found in Mexico in 2014.
Ivan Šprajc (pronounced “shprites”) is an archaeologist and professor from the country of Slovenia, which is in Europe. He has spent years exploring the Maya forest of Mexico.

This book tells about Ivan’s work. The events didn’t happen exactly the way they take place in this book, but this story is based on things that really happened to Ivan. Ivan really has hacked his way through the forest with a machete. He has come face-to-face with jaguars and deadly snakes. And he has also discovered many important Maya cities hidden in the forest.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT
The writer and editors would like to thank Ivan Šprajc for his assistance in the development of this book.
The forest of southern Mexico is full of deadly snakes, stinging insects, hairy spiders, and wild cats. It also holds hidden cities where no one has lived for over a thousand years. Join a team of explorers in the wild forest, looking for those lost cities.