

CHAPTER 17



Bravery, Wisdom, and Honor

Location: Southwest Guatemala

Weather Conditions: 89° Fahrenheit, Humidity 52%, Rain 25%

Day 5: Inside King Ixtua's Throne Room, 10:12 AM

Evan's uncle had unrolled the small scroll with gloved hands, careful not to tear the thin parchment. After Max had finished photographing the Mayan writing on the scroll, Uncle Phillip had given the scroll to Grace for translation. That had been two hours earlier, and now Evan was sitting with his uncle and Max in the tent, waiting for Grace to complete her initial review of the scroll's contents.

Max used the time to inventory all the film he had used photographing the excavation and exploration of the tomb. He told Evan that he had over 1,000 photographs and would probably take an additional 300 or more before the team left for Florida.

Uncle Phillip had been working on his laptop, creating a proposal to present to the government of Guatemala for further excavation and study. Evan was surprised at the amount of paperwork that his uncle had to file in order to request more time at the site.

And Evan had used the time to dismantle his GrabberBot.

But all that stopped when Grace entered the tent carrying the scroll, a handful of paper sheets, and a large piece of posterboard. She walked over and placed it all on the table. "Well, I think we're ready," she said.

"What did you find," asked Uncle Phillip. "Did the scroll have the instructions we need?"

Grace nodded. "Even better," she said with a smile. "The scroll does tell us how to access the burial chamber. But it also tells us quite a bit about the burial chamber itself."

Uncle Phillip leaned back in his chair and stared at the tent's roof. "I was hoping for that," he replied. "It would be a shame to come this far and not get a glimpse of the burial chamber."

Max shook his head. "I was worried, too," he added. "The Tupaxu manuscript had no information on the burial chamber."

Evan looked at his uncle and then to Grace. "So, what's next?" he asked.

Uncle Phillip laughed and stood up. "Exactly right, Evan. Grace, what do we do?"

Grace pointed at a sheet of paper. "The scroll clearly states that to open the burial chamber, someone must be sitting on the throne. That pressure plate must be triggered. Once it is triggered, this rope must be pulled," she said, pointing at a drawing she had made. (See Figure 17-1.)

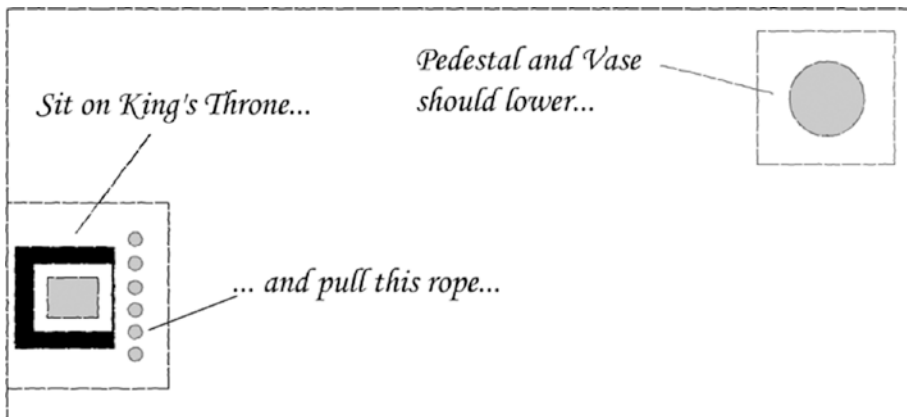


Figure 17-1. Grace's sketch of the throne room

"After the rope is pulled, this pedestal will lower and the burial chamber can be accessed," Grace added. "But, we'll need to be very careful with the burial chamber. I suggest that we go open the burial chamber before we do anything else. I need to verify that the room matches the scroll's description first."

Uncle Phillip nodded. "I agree. Let's go open the chamber and see what we're facing. We've come this far with no mistakes, so there's no point in rushing forward too fast."

Evan stood with the others and followed his uncle back to the tomb.

The Burial Chamber

Uncle Phillip sat on the King's throne and waited. "Anyone hear or see anything unusual?" he asked.

Evan tried to listen for any strange noises that might indicate a trap had been triggered, but the chamber was silent.

Max shook his head. "I don't hear anything."

"I don't either," said Grace.

Uncle Phillip pointed to the throne room's entry door. "I'd like all of you to stand outside while I pull the rope. Just in case something goes wrong," he said.

Max, Grace, and Evan walked back to the corridor and waited.

"Okay, I'm pulling the rope now," Uncle Phillip said.

A few seconds passed. And then a grinding sound was heard by the team.

Grace pointed at the corner. "The pedestal is dropping," she said.

Evan watched as the pedestal began to lower. The large vase on the pedestal began to disappear down a large square hole. Another minute passed and then the grinding sound stopped.

"Congratulations, team!" said Uncle Phillip as he stood, a huge smile on his face. "Come on in and let's take a look at King Ixtua's burial chamber."

Evan followed Max and Grace as they crossed the room. Max had turned on his flashlight and handed it to Evan's uncle.

Uncle Phillip took the flashlight and got down on his stomach. "Come on, all of you get in here and take a look, too."

Evan got down on the floor next to his uncle. Grace and Max were next to them on the adjacent side of the square hole.

"Do you hear that?" asked Evan.

"Running water," replied Uncle Phillip, shining the flashlight into the hole.

“That was part of the major trap of the tomb,” said Grace. “If we had triggered any of the earlier traps, the tomb was designed to flood. Look over there,” she said and pointed.

Evan angled his head to look where Grace was pointing. The beam of light from the flashlight was reflected in a large stream of water running across the room. But what caught his eye was the substantial stone sarcophagus behind the stream of water. There wasn’t much light from the flashlight, but what he could see amazed him.

Uncle Phillip handed the flashlight to Grace. “Okay, Grace, take a look around and verify what you can about the room. Max, take some photographs, but no one goes in until we discuss our plan, okay?”

Grace and Max nodded.

“Evan and I are going to go back to the tent and give you some room to move around. As soon as you’re ready, come back and let’s figure out our next step.”

Evan tried to make sense of the things he saw in the burial chamber as he stood up. He had seen what he thought were some small figurines, and some sort of ramp leading to the sarcophagus.

Famous Figures

Max was finishing one of his uncle’s famous grilled burgers when Max and Grace returned. They sat down at the table and began to eat the lunch Uncle Phillip had prepared.

A few minutes later, Uncle Phillip took a seat at the table with the team.

“Max, did you get enough photographs?” Uncle Phillip asked.

“Plenty,” replied Max. “I’ll take more once we get some better lighting down there, though.”

“Most definitely,” said Uncle Phillip. “Grace, were you able to verify the accuracy of the scroll?”

Grace nodded and finished chewing. “Yes, and I’m happy to report that it appears that the burial chamber has not been disturbed. It matches the scroll’s description exactly, including measurements.”

“That sounds like good news,” said Evan.

Grace stood and pulled the posterboard over where the team could easily view it. “This is a drawing of the burial chamber with a few measurements I was able to translate.” (See Figure 17-2.)

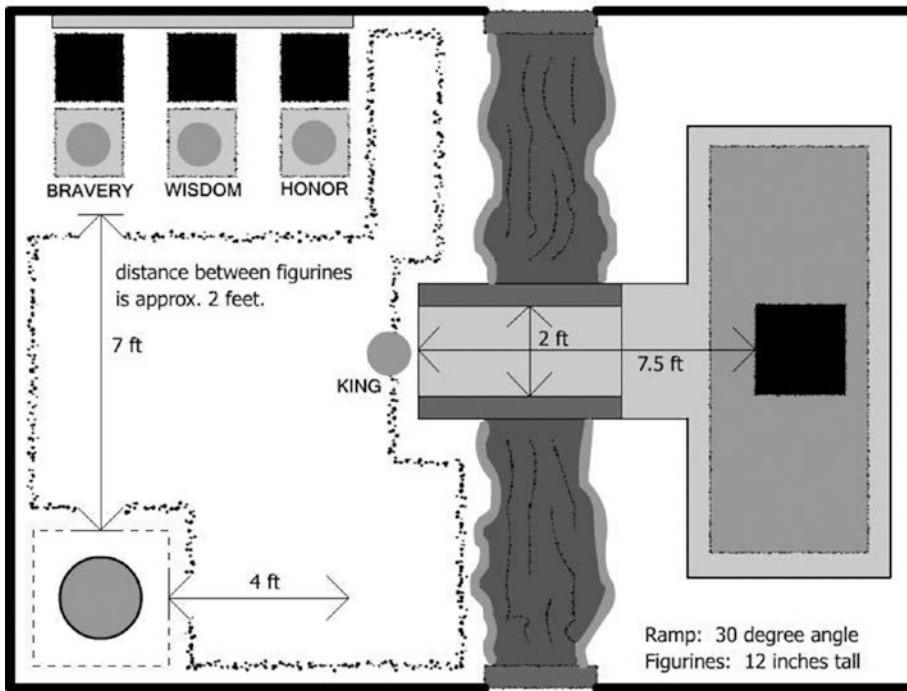


Figure 17-2. Grace's sketch of the burial chamber

Evan looked over the drawing. The sarcophagus was the largest item in the room, but it was the small objects that caught Evan's eye. He was certain there had to be at least one more challenge. "What are these circles?" he asked.

"Inside the chamber are four small statuettes. Each one is a carved wooden figure," said Grace. "This first one is U'laka. He was King Ixtua's bravest warrior. The next one is Raxu, considered to be the king's wisest friend. And this one is Ba'rii, Ixtua's most loyal military leader. Each figurine has a different Mayan glyph carved on it—Bravery, Wisdom, and Honor."

"What about this one," asked Max, pointing to a fourth circle on the drawing.

"That's a figurine of King Ixtua," replied Grace.

"And the water flows under this ramp here?" asked Uncle Phillip.

"Yes. And the scroll says that if the trap in this room is triggered, the room will flood. And that's the bad part," Grace added. "The floor around the pedestal is one large pressure plate."

"So, there is one more challenge," said Uncle Phillip.

"Oh, yeah," said Grace. "And it's an interesting one."

The Final Challenge

Uncle Phillip patted Evan on the back. "It looks like Tupaxu wasn't kidding about using monkeys," he said.

"It's a good thing he didn't know about robots, Evan."

Evan smiled. "Okay, can we go back through this one more time? I want to make sure I understand this completely," he said.

Grace took a seat next to him and pulled the posterboard closer. "Absolutely, Evan," she replied.

"Let's take this in stages."

She pointed first at the pedestal. “It’s safe to stand on the pedestal, but that’s as far as you can go. This line I’ve drawn around the front part of the room is a large pressure plate. Anything heavier than eight or nine pounds will trigger the trap. The water exits here, and if the trap is triggered, the exit will seal up, making the room flood. So far, so good?” she asked.

“Got it,” Evan replied.

“Okay, the next task. Your bot must move across the room to these three figurines. Each figurine must be placed on the black obsidian pressure plate behind it. But you have to be careful because there’s a vertical pressure plate on the wall behind the pressure plates. If a figurine tips over and touches the plate, this will also trigger the trap.”

Evan pointed at the drawing. “Do you have accurate measurements of these statues?” he asked.

Grace nodded. “Accurate from the pedestal to the figures, but I don’t have exact measurements from the black pressure plates to the back wall.”

Evan frowned. “Okay, I’ll have to remember that.”

Uncle Phillip smiled. “The good news, Evan, is that the figurines are in front of their respective triggers. At least you won’t have to shuffle them around,” he said.

“Okay,” said Evan. “And after that?”

“Your bot will need to push this final figurine of King Ixtua up the ramp onto this black pressure plate on top of the King’s sarcophagus. That will disable the floor’s large pressure plate, and then we should be able to enter the burial chamber safely. And that’s it.”

Evan laughed. “This Tupaxu really didn’t want just anyone getting to the King’s burial chamber, did he?”

“Tupaxu honored his king’s wishes and designed the tomb to require a trained monkey’s assistance,” said Max. “I’d say he did a great job, too.”

Uncle Phillip took a seat across from Evan. “Well, Evan, do you think you could design us a little robot that can handle this challenge?”

Evan’s Solution

“I already have an idea,” said Evan. “But I also was wondering…”

“Shoot,” said Uncle Phillip.

“I need to know the approximate weight of those figurines,” said Evan.

“They’re carved from the wood of the Irichu tree. It’s not extremely heavy, but it’s not a lightweight wood either. I’ll get one of our guides to cut a piece of wood the approximate size and shape of a figurine and we’ll weigh it for you,” said Max.

Uncle Phillip turned to Evan. “Anything else?”

Evan shook his head. “Maybe later, but for now, I need to give this one some thought.”

“You take all the time you need, Evan,” said Uncle Phillip. “Once again, we’re not in any rush and we don’t want to make any mistakes.”

An hour later, Uncle Phillip brought in a freshly carved object and set it on the table. “It’s ugly, but it’s about the same height and diameter as the statuettes in the burial chamber.”

Evan looked at the piece of wood. Someone had carved the rough shape of a bird in flight into a foot tall piece of wood.

“It’s about four inches in diameter,” said Uncle Phillip. “And it weighs about two pounds.”

“Thanks, Uncle Phillip,” said Evan. “That will help.”

“Good luck, Evan. We’ve all got some other work to keep us busy, so just let us know when you’re done,”

Uncle Phillip replied, walking out of the tent.

Evan picked up the piece of wood and stared at it. An idea began to form.

Story continues in Chapter 21 . . .