

# Copanatec

A Timecrack Adventure

by

William Long

## Part One

### Malcolm and Lucy

## Chapter One

### Captured

Malcolm thought they had landed in the middle of a nightmare – but he was wrong.

*This was for real.*

He was standing beside Lucy in the middle of a village compound, the air thick with burning smoke from burning huts on every side. Dark-skinned men and women, dragging children behind them, were running in every direction, screaming and yelling in fear for their lives. One of the men fell near them. Trying to save himself, he reached out a hand towards Lucy for support. Instead, he grabbed at her shirt, ripping it away from the shoulder, exposing part of her arm and back.

Lucy screamed. The man lay at her feet, the bolt from a crossbow protruding from his back.

‘What’s happening?’ she cried. ‘Where are we?’

‘God only knows, Lucy, but by the look of things around here we’d better make ourselves scarce!’

Malcolm grabbed Lucy by the arm, pulling her close to his side as he looked for a way to escape. It seemed only a short time ago that they had been trapped by the sudden storm floods on the flat of a large stone, near the edge of the dig they had been excavating. The mysterious blue cloud close to the pyramid they had been watching had descended rapidly, sucking them into its core, a tunnel of intense yellow light that must have transported them, somehow, to this strange place. A place with people he didn’t recognise, and seemingly under attack.

His best guess, as far-fetched as it sounded, was that they had been caught up in some sort of freak tornado and then dumped somewhere else in the Yucatan. But the blue cloud that had swept over them was unlike any tornado he had seen before. Nothing like the tornado he and Lucy had witnessed a couple of years earlier off the coast of Playa del Carmen when they had been waiting for a ferry to the island of Cozumel.

It had all happened so quickly. He remembered little of what it was like in the cloud, except the feeling of weightlessness and tumbling through space. And none of the madness going on around them made any sense – but it was obvious they were in danger and had to find somewhere safe.

Ignoring the pain in his knee, Malcolm tried to move quickly, but it was no good. He had lost his walking stick in the blue cloud and now he found it difficult to take more than a few steps at a time without it. As they made their way past one of the burning huts towards a rocky ridge and a clump of trees on a height behind the village, Malcolm winced with pain, coming to a sudden halt.

‘Please, Malcolm, don’t stop,’ pleaded Lucy. Her eyes were red-rimmed with tears as the thick, acrid smoke choked the air around them. ‘We have to get out of here.’

‘I’m sorry – it’s this damned knee. I need to find a stick or something to support it.’

The fear in her voice unsettled him. He was beginning to dread what might happen to them, but before he could utter another word they were confronted by a group of men – and a more, ugly, dangerous lot, Malcolm couldn't imagine.

Four guards, swarthy and squat, with heavy brows over slit eyes, pug noses and broad yellowish features, were driving some of the village men towards them. They cracked vicious-looking, metal-tipped whips above the heads of the men while two more guards marched in front, armed with short bronze and silver coloured crossbows held across their chests.

'Haggh! Haggh!' The men with the crossbows called out, or so it sounded to Malcolm.

The strange words of the language were unknown to Malcolm; unlike Spanish, or any Mayan words that he knew, and certainly not English. But the meaning was very clear: a warning to stay where they were, which in the face of the weapons they carried, seemed to be their only option. He put his arm around Lucy's shoulders, drawing her close to his side.

'Stay calm, Lucy,' he whispered. 'Let's see what they want.'

One of the men; Malcolm assumed they were some sort of guard, stepped forward and flicked his whip, threateningly, near Malcolm's face, the metal tips almost touching his skin.

His heart thumping wildly, Malcolm shouted at him, first in Spanish, and then in the few words of Yucatec Maya he knew, and finally in English, hoping the ugly devil would understand.

'What do you want with us? We have done you no harm!'

The guard lowered his whip and looked curiously at Malcolm. Like the other guards, he was dressed in brown leather leggings and calf-length boots. A belted, dark-red tunic open from neck to waist exposed a thick, hairy chest. He stared for a moment, and then turned his gaze to Lucy, inspecting her a little too closely for Malcolm's liking. He seemed to make up his mind about something, and without saying a word he strode across the compound towards another group of villagers and guards.

Malcolm watched as the group parted to allow the guard to approach a man clutching a long black rod, about four feet in length, who was herding several terrified male villagers into a long, narrow mesh cage at the rear of what appeared to be some sort of tracked vehicle. He was much taller than the guards or the villagers and his face was decorated with little tattooed feathers. With long black hair reaching to his shoulders he had the appearance of a fierce-looking bird ready to descend on its prey. He wore a close fitting yellow robe, tied at the waist with a black sash, and like the guards, he wore leather calf boots.

'What are they doing with those people?' whispered Lucy.

Malcolm felt Lucy shiver, through cold or fear, he wasn't sure. He gave her a reassuring hug, but as he did so, he tried to shake the terrible thought that was beginning to form in his mind.

*Were these men slave traffickers? God, surely not!*

He looked around at what was left of the village. All the huts had been destroyed, the smouldering remains a pathetic reminder of what had apparently been a small village community in the middle of the jungle. Several bodies lay on the ground, including women and children, alongside several dogs and goats, all of them

showing evidence of indiscriminate butchery. Only the men had been taken and were now being driven towards the cage.

The guard pointed with his whip towards the prisoners when speaking to the tall man. But when the guard returned with him to the group, it was clear that the tall man's eyes were fixed on Malcolm and Lucy.

Malcolm experienced an icy chill course through his blood as he wondered if their fate was about to be decided.

The tall man stopped in front of Lucy, his piercing grey eyes examining her from head to toe, like a horse breeder considering the merits of a new pony. He walked slowly around her, taking in the contours of her body, while Malcolm seethed with anger at the indignity of their treatment. Despite the condition of her muddy clothes as a result of the flood at the pyramid, the tall man nodded approvingly. Suddenly, he stopped to look more closely at Lucy's shoulder where her shirt had been torn. His fingers reached out to trace a pattern on her skin.

Lucy screamed and tried to pull away from him. Malcolm swung her round to place his body between Lucy and the tall man, but as he did so, an excruciating pain shot through his body. He fell to the ground, hardly able to move a muscle.

'Stay there, alien,' barked a voice above him. 'Do not move.'

Malcolm did move and the pain returned, more intense than before, forcing him into a foetal position. After a moment, he managed to look up to see the tall man standing over him, holding the black rod, ready to strike again.

*Bloody hell, thought Malcolm, it must be some sort of electronic cattle prod.*

The pain eased and he managed to gasp, 'Who are you?' hoping the rod wouldn't be used again.

'I am Talon of Copanatec,' said the tall man, 'and who are you?'

'You speak English?'

'I speak all languages, alien. I ask again, who are you?' said Talon, pointing the black rod closer to Malcolm's chest.

'You don't need to use that thing,' said Malcolm, raising a hand to protect himself. 'My name is Malcolm Kinross and my wife's name is —' He stopped and rose to his knees, looking around to see what had happened to Lucy. 'Where is my wife? What have you done with her?'

'She is a chosen one and will serve at the temple,' said Talon, smiling for the first time at Malcolm's confusion. 'Do not concern yourself, alien. She will serve us well ... and so will you, if we let you live.'

'What the hell are you talking about, you crazy butcher?' shouted Malcolm, getting to his feet. 'Bring my wife back —'

He felt the rod prod him forcefully in the chest. This time pain and shock overcame him and he fell unconscious at Talon's feet.

\*

Malcolm woke up to find he was crushed together with twenty, or so, of the village men in what he took to be the cage he had seen earlier. From what he could see through the wire mesh on his side, they were now on the open deck of what appeared to be a very large craft, and they were powering through a turbulent sea towards an unknown destination!

Behind them, in the fading light of nightfall, he could see the outline of a rocky coast and wreckage-strewn beach. Beyond the beach was the jungle they had

just left, but he recognised none of it as part of the Yucatan he had worked in for so long.

As he stared at the rapidly retreating coast, Malcolm was aware of something unpleasant in the air around him. He realised it was the stench of fear, and men being sick where they lay. It was overpowering, but worse than that, was the fear at what might have happened to Lucy.

*My God, he thought, how did we end up in this nightmare?*

## Chapter Two

### The Cell

The clanking of a heavy chain being dragged across the stone tiles of the passageway woke Malcolm from the sleep he had craved all day.

'Why can't you let us sleep, you rotten scum?' he muttered, turning over on his side for the umpteenth time. He buried his head between his hands to try and keep the groans from the prisoners and the other sounds of the night from penetrating his sleep, but there was to be no peace for Malcolm tonight.

A key rattled in the lock of the ancient ironclad cell door. It slammed inwardly against the rock wall, as three men, shackled together at the ankles, were shoved onto the earthen floor.

One of the two Terog guards escorting them took a couple of steps into the cell, his whip arm stretched out in front of him. He snarled and grunted as the prisoners, dazed and frightened by their new surroundings, tried to rise awkwardly to their knees, while the other guard stood by the door.

Malcolm raised his head to see what was happening. He saw the guard's whip, split into three metal-tipped ends, slash the air above the men, forcing them to lie flat on the floor. One of them tried to rise up again, but the whip caught him across the shoulders, drawing blood as the metal tips hooked into his flesh.

'Stop it!' shouted Malcolm, getting to his feet. 'Can't you see he's had enough!'

The guard grinned, a twist of skin below his left eye making him squint, but he said nothing as he jerked the whip away from the man's back, causing him to scream. He motioned to the other guard to remove the prisoners' shackles, and then they left, relocking the cell door behind them.

Malcolm, with the aid of a walking-stick he had managed to fashion from a piece of driftwood, hobbled over to the prisoners to see what he could do to help, if anything. But it was too late for the man who had been whipped. He was dead – one of many since Malcolm had arrived in this hellhole.

'Pigs!' he spat after the guards. 'That's what they are – bloodthirsty pigs!'

As he stood there staring helplessly at the dead prisoner, he felt a tug at his sleeve, pulling him away from the body. He turned round to see a small figure with brown leathery skin and twinkly eyes by his side. It was his friend Harry, beckoning to Malcolm to let the others in the cell deal with the dead man and the new prisoners.

Harry wasn't his real name, it was Harimon, but Malcolm had found it comforting, somehow, to call him by a name he was familiar with on Old Earth. Harry was a Salakin, a member of one of the old ruling tribes of Amasia, the land in which a timecrack had deposited Malcolm and Lucy so many months ago – how many, he had no idea. The concept and *feeling* of time was different here; his watch had been taken from him and there was no calendar or other way of marking the passage of time. His clothes had also been taken from him and replaced with the rough cloth navy tunic and trousers that all the prisoners wore, although he had been allowed to keep his desert boots, which was a small mercy.

He stared at the poor devil lying on the floor. Another death, crushing the hopes of the prisoners of any chance of escape from this godforsaken place.

*And Lucy, where was she? He hadn't seen her since Talon had said she would be taken to serve at the temple. What did he mean ... to serve? And the boys ... what will happen to Archie and Richard?*

'Come, Malcolm, the others know what to do,' said Harry, breaking into his thoughts, urging him into the corner of the cell they both shared as their living space. 'They will cover the body with bed-grass until we can take it to the sea tomorrow.'

Malcolm nodded. It was what the guards did with the prisoners who didn't survive the daily torture of forced labour; they simply threw the bodies over the wall into the sea.

He sat down on his sleeping pallet of bed-grass, thinking he had been lucky that Harry had taken him under his wing. In fact, he supposed he had been lucky on two counts:

First, when he came to realise that the prisoners were expected to rebuild and maintain the huge seawall that surrounded the city, he knew his leg would let him down and that would be the end of him. But he had approached and persuaded Talon, that because of his archaeological restoration experience, he could be useful to him. Talon had listened, then agreed to let him supervise one of the seawall labour gangs. They had implanted a language chip, allowing him to communicate with the other prisoners, but few of them were inclined to talk as they tackled the back-breaking work the guards demanded, even less so when the whips were used.

The second count, was when Harry had befriended him in the cell and made living space, such as it was, for them to share. But more importantly, Harry had become his tutor and mentor, explaining, for example, why Talon had called him 'alien'. It was because Malcolm was a New Arrival in this strange world of timecracks and ancient tribes, and Talon saw his kind as inferior, only useful as slave fodder to be used in the service of Copanatec.

Every night, to maintain his sanity, Malcolm would lie on his pallet and follow a ritual of remembering life on Old Earth: Lucy, his family, friends, professional colleagues, his career as an archaeologist in the Yucatan, and finally his incredible journey to this new world. He would gaze at the black, rock-faced ceiling of the cell, lit only by the dim light of a single vallonium lamp, and his thoughts, once again, would drift towards his sons, Archie and Richard, wondering what they were doing right now.

*End of extract.*

*Purchase your full copy of Copanatec at [www.williamlongbooks.com](http://www.williamlongbooks.com)*