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The Oxford Repor

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DNA scientist found dead in Middle East yacht mystery

DOHA, QATAR The body of Cambridge professor and biotech entrepreneur Melissa DiCanio was discovered earlier today by fishermen in a yacht off the coast of Doha, Qatar. The boat was abandoned and had floated into the Persian Gulf.

DiCanio had been missing since the middle of January. The cause of death has not been released.

CCTV footage from Doha Harbour has helped police to make an arrest. Three men were photographed at the site, and one has been arrested – Simon Madison, who is also wanted by the FBI and CIA as a suspected terrorist.

Authorities intend to bring Madison to the United States of America. It is believed he will be charged with a number of offences.

Doha police were unable to comment as to the possible motive for the murder.

A spokesman for the FBI said, "We've been after Madison for a long time. This is an important and rather satisfying arrest."

DiCanio was born in Houston, Texas. She began her career at Baylor College of Medicine before moving to Oxford University in 1997 as a visiting professor at Aquinas College.

In 1999 she co-founded the pharmaceutical company Chaldexx BioPharmaceuticals, a privately held company which developed and markets the drug Tripoxan, with annual sales of US$50 m.

In 2005 DiCanio was awarded the Chaldexx Chair of Molecular Genetic Neuroscience at Cambridge University. DiCanio divided her time between her university research group and her post as Chief Scientific Officer at Chaldexx BioPharmaceuticals, based in Interlaken, Switzerland.

Dr Marcus Anthony, Master of Aquinas College, Oxford, said, "Melissa was a brilliant scientist, a true innovator. It was an honour to know her during her time at Aquinas College. She will be sorely missed."

Long minutes after Ixchel's avatar disappears in a puff of animated smoke, I still can't tear my eyes away from the screen. I can't seem to move from my chair.

Why did I choose the screen names "J-MARIPOSA" and "MENINHA"? Why do I try to be funny around Ixchel? I could kick myself – I don't seem to make her laugh. It's a good thing that the 3D chat room doesn't keep a log of our conversation because if I could, I'd read it over and over. Just to check how much of an idiot I made of myself.

I'm so distracted, it doesn't even occur to me – for well over an hour – to think seriously about what Ixchel is suggesting.

It's everything I've tried so hard to avoid. The mysteries of Ek Naab and 2012. The Bracelet of Itzamna.

Three months of struggling with the urge to bury that bracelet in the rubbish bin. Or to chuck it into the River Cherwell on a rainy day.

Three months of trying to forget about travelling back in time, to forget about fixing what happened to my dad.

Persuading myself to let things fall – wherever.

Then Ixchel sends me some messages about an inscription, and something creeps back, something I thought I'd banished.

Hope.

Since I got back from Mexico, Mum's treating me completely differently. It's as though she's heaved a big sigh of relief that her kid has finally grown up and she doesn't need to take care of him any more. He can take care of her.

You'd think a guy would be happy about it, and at first I was. Not any more. I don't mind putting up shelves and making furniture from IKEA, but I don't want to listen to Mum talk about how lonely she feels, how she misses my dad.

I feel pretty rubbish about it too. After all, I was there when he died. He died saving me – not something I'll ever, ever be able to put out of my mind.

Mum asks me to buy her cigarettes at the shop. I can't believe it – she's actually forgotten my age.

"You're almost sixteen," she says.

"I'm not even fifteen until summer!"

She frowns, exactly as if she'd forgotten where she put her keys. "Really?"

"Anyway you have to be eighteen," I tell her, annoyed.

I go to the shop all the same and buy her a paper, a bottle of Perrier and a cream cake. When I return Mum takes one look at the headline and remarks, "Melissa DiCanio – your father knew her."

It takes me a few seconds to focus on what Mum is saying. There's a story in the Oxford newspaper about a scientist who's been found dead in Qatar, a country in the Middle East. While Mum talks, trying to remember how Dad had known the woman, whether Mum had met DiCanio at this college dinner or that one, I read the story.

Right away, something leaps out at me: *one has been arrested – Simon Madison, who is also wanted by the FBI and CIA as a suspected terrorist.*

Simon Madison. Somehow he survived the avalanche that he started on Mount Orizaba, the avalanche that led to my father's death. Just as I'm feeling a surge of disappointment that Madison didn't get what was coming to him, I read the next bit.

Authorities intend to bring Madison to the United States of America. It is believed he will be charged with a number of offences.

So that's it, then. Madison has been caught. Too bad for DiCanio, that scientist he seems to have murdered. For her, it's too late.

Madison is not often out of my thoughts. How can I

forget him? He's bound up in my single most painful memory – the memory of my dad's death.

That day, the *whole* day, is the last thing I think about at night and the first thing I think about in the morning. It's in the back of my mind most of the time too, but night and morning are when it comes right to the surface. As soon as the thoughts start, I work at pushing them away. I visualize capoeira moves. I plug in some headphones and listen to music or a funny podcast. I get to sleep and everything goes blank. No more dreams.

Ground zero – blank.

For the first time in many weeks, I open the drawer with the Bracelet of Itzamna and gaze at it. Then I touch it, lightly. That ancient Erinsi technology. There's a really distinctive feel to those surfaces. I remember the same from the Adaptor and the cover on the Ix Codex. Like stroking a sheet of magnetized iron filings.

I put the Bracelet on my wrist, feel the familiar buzz of energy, so tiny that you could miss it if you weren't prepared. The hairs on my arms prickle and a shiver runs up my spine. But it's not me reacting to the Bracelet – it's the Bracelet reacting to me.

Those first few weeks after the avalanche that killed my dad . . . if I could have fixed the Bracelet, I would have. No question. I'd have gone back in time and done whatever it took to make sure he didn't end up on that volcano.

But then . . . then I had a bit of a think.

Everything I've done so far has been rushed. I get an idea into my head and I just go and do it. Find out what happened to my dad, go to Mexico, find the Ix Codex, break into J Eric Thompson's house, take on Simon Madison, follow some mysterious message in a bunch of coded postcards . . . climb a volcano and risk my life. . .

All in the name of some bizarre, prophetic letter from Arcadio Garcia – a weirdo who claims to know my future.

No planning. Just reacting.

Where has it got me?

My dad is dead. That's all I can see.

Any way you look at it, I've messed up. The only good thing I did was to find the Ix Codex. Everything else. . .?

You can talk about "destiny", the way Arcadio did in that letter. Yep, you can do that, and accept things, the way Montoyo said.

I don't buy it.

There has to have been a better way.

I have the Bracelet of Itzamna. A chance to travel in time. To put the clock back, to change the past: a way to fix everything. There's no way I can afford to screw this up.

The Bracelet is broken. It can't travel in time, because the crystal burned out. The Crystal Key might fix the Bracelet. It isn't just another lost relic waiting to be found.

The Crystal Key can be made.

I've been waiting for some news like this, some ray of hope. Didn't even dare to think it would happen so soon.

Problem is, it's too soon. This is make-or-break.

And I'm not ready.

Message Posted on the Wall of J-MARIPOSA's Place: GET READY . . .

. . . for a BIG surprise, Josh. Montoyo has a plan. I'm sworn to secrecy. Just to annoy you, I'm gonna join in with his little game.

So, do nothing till you hear from me.

"Meninha"

J-Mariposa says. . .

Woo, mysterious. . .

"Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me" . . . that's a song, did you know? By Duke Ellington. Another of my dad's favourites. I guess I'm never forgetting stuff like that.

Meninha says. . .

Why would you want to forget things your father showed you? Like it or not, he's part of who you are.