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Opening extract from

Stone Age Rampage

Written by

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CHAPTER 1

PUP TENT

"I don't understand," said Zuma, from the back seat of the car. She looked out at the countryside whizzing past. "Where are the temples? Where are the pyramids?"

"We don't have any pyramids in England," replied Tom.

Tom's dad was driving the car in the front seat next to him. He gave Tom a curious look. "Of course there aren't any pyramids in England!" he said.

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Zuma giggled as Tom's face flushed.

"Er… what I meant to say was it's *too bad* we don't have any pyramids," Tom stammered. "Because that would be really cool."

"Yes," Dad agreed. "It certainly would, especially for an archaeologist like me and a history fan like you."

"Absolutely!" Tom nodded enthusiastically. Then he sighed with relief as Dad turned back to focusing on the road. Usually he wasn't so careless when it came to talking to Zuma around other people, but sometimes he forgot he was the only one who could see or hear her.

"That was close," giggled Zuma, sliding across the car seat. Her Chihuahua dog, Chilli, stuck his head out of the open window. His pointy ears flapped in the wind.

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This time, Tom remembered not to say anything back.

Having a 500-year-old slave girl for a friend could sometimes be a challenge, but Tom didn't mind. After all, it had been him who'd accidentally released Zuma from her magical imprisonment by banging a drum belonging to the Aztec rain god, Tlaloc.

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And ever since then, they'd been travelling through time in search of the six gold coins that Tlaloc had scattered through history. Only by finding all six coins could Zuma win back her freedom and return to her own time.

Tom had become so used to Zuma's being there that now he barely noticed she was painted blue and wore a large feathered headdress. He had also grown very fond of her Chihuahua dog. Chilli had lots of energy, and for such a small animal he was very brave.

The car slowed down, and Tom's dad pulled over at a farm shop to pick up some supplies. When he was gone, Zuma asked, "Why are we heading so far away from home?"

"It's called going on holiday," Tom

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explained. "It's something people do when they want to relax and have a good time."

"We can have a good time at your house," Zuma pointed out. "You've got that big television thingy and your computer games. And we can play tennis – I'm getting good at that."

"This is different," Tom explained. "It's called camping. We're going to spend a few days sleeping outdoors and exploring the woods."

Zuma frowned. "Why sleep outside when you've got a lovely bed?"

"Because it's fun!" replied Tom. "Don't you like roughing it?"

"I was a slave," Zuma reminded him, with a roll of her eyes. "I spent my whole life roughing it – sleeping on hard floors without even a blanket to keep me warm, waking up

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stiff and freezing cold. I'd much rather relax somewhere comfortable."

Dad came back with two shopping bags and put them in the back seat, right on Zuma's lap. "The campsite's just around the next bend!" he announced.

"Brilliant!" cried Tom.

"Great," grumbled Zuma.

Minutes later they were unloading the car and carrying their rucksacks and tents to a clearing beside a crystal blue lake. Chilli scurried around, barking happily, while Zuma sat on a rock, dangling her feet in the water. The shiny black pendant she wore around her neck glinted in the sun.

Tom and his dad worked together to put up the tents – a large one for Dr Sullivan and a smaller one for Tom. When Dad went back to the car to fetch the sleeping bags,

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Zuma came and climbed inside Tom's tent.

"This looks a bit flimsy," she said, with a frown. "How's it going to protect us from the dangers of the forest? What happens if a giant snake tries to slither inside in the middle of the night? Or a ferocious jaguar attacks us?"

Tom laughed. "There aren't any ferocious jaguars in England," he said.

"Maybe," said Zuma. "But we can't be too careful. Let's go back to your house where it's warm and comfortable and—"

At that moment, Chilli came racing into the tent and crashed into Zuma, who fell backwards against one of the tent poles.

"Watch out!" cried Tom.

Too late. The pole went flying out of the ground, and the tent collapsed in a heap on top of them.

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"Help!" cried Zuma, flailing around. "Get me out of here!"

"I'm trying!" said Tom.

Suddenly he felt hands grasping his ankles. With a firm pull, Dad dragged Tom out from under the tent. Dr Sullivan's face was as stern as one of Tlaloc's thunderclouds.

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"Oops," said Tom lamely.

"Thomas Sullivan," said Dad, shaking his head. "What on earth are you playing at? Now we'll have to put that tent up all over again!"

Tom was about to explain that it wasn't his fault, but then he stopped. How could he blame it on an invisible Aztec slave girl and her dog? His dad would think he'd gone crazy!

"Sorry, Dad," he muttered.

Sheepishly, he helped his dad put the tent back up, and by then it was getting dark. As his dad prepared a camp fire, Tom went inside his tent to unroll his sleeping bag. Zuma carefully crawled in after him.

"Sorry about before," she said. "Chilli's such a clumsy thing at times. You're not going to make us sleep outside with the jaguars, are you?"

Before Tom could answer, he felt a drop

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of water splash against his nose. It had started raining – *inside* the tent! Suddenly there was another figure crouching beside them. It was Tlaloc, the Aztec rain god.



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His big blue body filled the cramped tent, his feathery headdress squashed against the ceiling.

"It's time for your next quest!" he roared. "And this one will be the most difficult yet! You cannot hope to succeed – you can only hope to stay alive…"

"If this is your idea of a pep talk, it isn't a very good one," said Zuma.

With a snarl, Tlaloc raised his arms and the rain suddenly stopped. Then a magical glittering mist filled the tent, whisking them away through the tunnels of time into the unknown.

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