



TENTA



CLES

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cryp·to·zo·ol·o·gy (krip-tə-zō-ä-lə-jē) *noun* The study of animals, such as the Sasquatch, the Yeti, the Loch Ness Monster, the Chupacabra, kraken, and others, whose existence has not yet been proven scientifically. There are thought to be more than two hundred **cryptids** in existence today.

- **cryp·to·zo·o·log·i·cal** (-zō-a-lä-ji-kal) *adj.*

- **cryp·to·zo·ol·o·gist** (-ä-lə-jist) *noun*

Marty O'Hara Wolfe's nephew. Grace's cousin (formerly thought to be her twin). Thirteen years old. Brown hair, gray eyes, a foot taller than Grace. Talented artist. Master chef. Scuba diver. Mountain climber. His parents, Timothy and Sylvia (the most famous photographer/journalist team in the world), are missing after a terrible helicopter crash in the Amazon rain forest.

Grace Wolfe Wolfe's only daughter (although for most of her life she thought she was Timothy and Sylvia O'Hara's daughter and Marty's twin sister). Black hair, blue eyes the color of robin's eggs. Born at Lake Télé in the Congo. Twelve years old. Small for her age, but a foot *smarter* than Marty. Fluent in several languages. Habitual journal-writer. Lock-picker. Genius.

Luther Percival Smyth, IV Marty's best friend and former roommate at Omega Opportunity Preparatory School (OOPS) in Switzerland, where they got into a lot of trouble and coauthored graphic novels. Sleeps like a vampire. Gangly, with wild orange hair. Expert computer hacker and video gamer.

Dr. Travis Wolfe Called "Wolfe" by his friends—and foes. Grace's father. Marty's uncle. Cryptozoologist. Veterinarian. Oceanographer. A giant of a man – just under seven feet tall. Unruly black hair, bushy black beard, brown eyes, wears size-fifteen shoes. Cofounder and owner of eWolfe with Ted Bronson. His right leg was bitten off by a Mokélémbembé as he tried to save his wife, Rose Blackwood. He now wears a high-tech prosthesis invented by Ted Bronson.

Dr. Noah Blackwood Father of Wolfe's deceased wife, Rose. Grace's grandfather. Environmental superstar—but he is not who he appears to be. Wealthy. Powerful. Owner of several animal theme parks around the world, all called Noah's Ark. He hunts and breeds endangered animals and cryptids, and displays them at his parks. In their prime he kills the animals, has them stuffed, and stages them in his private diorama.

Butch McCall Noah Blackwood's henchman. Dangerous. Tattooed. Tough. Expert field biologist. More comfortable in the woods than under a roof. Sworn enemy of Travis Wolfe, who "stole" Rose away from him.

Bertha Bishop Ex-Army Ranger general; can kill a person 106 different ways with her bare hands. She is extra-large, but solid as a rock. Wolfe's head cook. Phil's wife.

Phil Bishop Ex–Air Force colonel. Former combat pilot. Wolfe’s chief pilot. Bertha’s husband.

Dr. Laurel Lee Wolfe’s cultural anthropologist. Birdlike. Athletic. Former circus aerialist. Taught Grace to walk on a high wire to help her focus and overcome her fears. Laurel and Wolfe are sweet on each other.

Dr. Ted Bronson Wolfe’s closest friend and partner at eWolfe. Eccentric genius. Inventor. Recluse. Rumored to have not left the Quonset hut on Cryptos Island (where he develops his marvelous gadgets) in more than three years.

Theo Sonborn A cohort of Wolfe’s since the beginning. Surly. Pugnacious. Obnoxious. Jack-of-all-trades, master of none.

Bo Female bonobo chimpanzee; orphaned and adopted by Wolfe years ago in central Africa. Pals around with PD and Congo. Fond of Luther’s orange hair. Sworn enemy of Winkin, Blinkin, and Nod.

PD Short for “Pocket Dog”; black-haired teacup poodle. Best friends with Bo. Does not get along with Congo. Jumps into a pocket upon hearing the word *snake*.

Winkin, Blinkin, and Nod Wolfe’s three bottle-nosed dolphins, who all love teasing Bo.

Congo African gray parrot who belonged to Rose, Grace’s mother, when she was in central Africa. Grace brought him back to Cryptos Island after their adventure with Mokélé-mbembé.

Monkey A plush toy resembling a primate. Covered with patches and stitches. Its mouth and left eye are missing. Grace has had it since she was a baby. Because of its tattered appearance, Marty refers to it as the Frankenstein Monkey. Between the cousins, a promise is sealed by giving Monkey’s arm a squeeze.

GIANT SQUID (Genus: *Architeuthis*)

Pushing water in rhythmic pulses through its spherical-shaped body, or **mantle** (a), and steering by use of its **caudal fin** (b), the giant squid is jet-propelled. On average, the mantle is six feet long.

More than one foot in diameter, the **eyes** (c) of the giant squid are among the largest of any living creature. The larger the eye, the better to detect light, which is scarce in deep, dark water.

Giant squid have eight **arms** (d) and two **tentacles** (e). The insides of both are lined with hundreds of **suction cups** (f) ringed with sharp, finely serrated circles of *chitin*. The combined gripping action of the suckers and their pointy teeth attaches the squid to its prey.

The bases of both of the tentacles and all of the arms join to encircle a single, parrotlike **beak** (g), which shreds food with the aid of the *radula* – a tongue with tiny, file-edged teeth.



PART ONE - BON VOYAGE

LUTHER

Marty O'Hara did not realize how much he had missed his best friend, Luther Smyth, until Luther jumped out of the seaplane onto the dock at Cryptos Island. In fact, he was so excited to see Luther he didn't even notice the other, rather odd-looking passenger who had flown in with his gangly, fluorescent-carrot-headed classmate.

The lanky Luther ran up to Marty, sporting his trademark goofy grin and a small backpack slung over his bony shoulder.

"You weren't lying, nose-picker!" Luther said. "Cryptos Island is real and very weird!"

Marty returned Luther's grin. "Duh *du jour*," he said (meaning, "Duh of the day," one of his and Luther's favorite sayings).

Just then, almost as if to accent Marty's point, a chimpanzee ambled down the wooden dock, came to an abrupt stop directly in front of Luther, and hooted.

"This is Bo," Marty said. "And you're the nose-picker."

Luther ignored the insult and squatted down in front of Bo before Marty could warn him.

Bo grabbed a handful of Luther's bizarre hair and yanked it out.

“Ouch!” Luther fell over backward and would have fallen into the water if Marty hadn’t grabbed his arm.

“Thanks,” Luther said.

“No problem,” Marty said.

Bo hooted again, ran back up the dock with her treasure, scaled the chain-link security gate, and disappeared into the trees.

“Hair-picker!” Luther yelled after her.

Marty shook his head. “I wondered what she was going to think of your hair.”

Luther rubbed his sore scalp. “I guess she doesn’t like it.”

“Wrong,” Marty corrected. “She wants it.”

“How much did she take?”

Marty looked at his friend’s head. “A pretty good chunk, but no one will notice.”

Luther’s hair had always stuck up all over the place in one giant cowlick that not even Elmer’s glue could keep down. (Luther had actually tried Elmer’s glue once, but it had just made things worse.) The missing hair already forgotten, Luther looked over at the giant ship moored to the dock.

“So that’s the *Coelacanth*,” he said, pronouncing the name *koh-eel-uh-kanth*.

“It’s pronounced *see-la-kanth*, you dunce,” Marty said. “Named after a fish thought to have gone extinct sixty-five million years ago, until it was rediscovered in South Africa by a woman named Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer in 1938. Wolfe has a breeding pair in an aquarium up in the library.”

“Well, that *ship* looks like it’s sixty-five million years old,” Luther said. “You sure that rusty bucket of bolts can make it to New Zealand?”

“It’ll make it,” Marty said, not mentioning the scuttlebutt on the island that the *Coelacanth* was haunted. Badly haunted. The ship had drifted into U.S. coastal waters ten years earlier—minus its cargo and its crew of nearly fifty men and women, except for the captain’s freshly severed head lying on the pillow in his berth.

Grace had gotten the information off the Internet, but there was no point in scaring Luther by recounting the ship’s grisly history. Marty’s uncle, Travis Wolfe, had bought the ship at an auction for a fraction of what it was worth because he was the only bidder. No one else wanted to touch the bad-luck ship. “Their ridiculous superstition was my *good* luck,” Wolfe had explained. “I had enough money left over to retrofit the interior.” Clearly, Wolfe was not concerned with what it looked like on the outside.

The *Coelacanth* was buzzing with activity: people hauling gear, cranes lowering crates into the cargo holds, deckhands battening down a helicopter to a landing pad behind the bridge. Marty was certain that none of them had heard the story of what had happened on the ship, and he wished that he’d never heard it, either.

“We’re shipping out in a couple of weeks?” Luther asked.

“Maybe sooner,” Marty said. “People have been coming in by airplane, chopper, and boat every day for the past week. They go right onto the ship. Wolfe hasn’t let any of them onto the island for security reasons.”

“Yeah,” Luther said, pointing. “Like that guy walking up the gangplank. He came in on the seaplane with me. His name is Dr. Seth A. Lepod. Barely said a word during the whole flight. I pegged him as a squid scientist. He has longer legs and arms than I do, and he smells like a dead fish. Even Phil was put off by the stench. He kept looking back at the guy, wondering what the problem was.”

Phil was Phil Bishop, a retired Air Force colonel and one of Travis Wolfe’s pilots. He was married to Bertha Bishop, a retired Army Ranger general with the ability to kill someone 106 ways with her bare hands. She was now Wolfe’s chief cook and mother to Phyllis Bishop, a.k.a. Phil Jr., another retired Air Force veteran and Wolfe’s chief pilot.

“Have the Mokélé-mbembé eggs hatched?” Luther asked.

“Not yet,” Marty answered. “But Wolfe expects them to start cracking any day now.”

“I can’t believe you guys saw an actual, living dinosaur in the Congo. Are you sure the eggs are real?” Luther said.

“As real as Bo yanking your hair from your scalp,” Marty answered. “Let’s head up to the Fort.”

“Fort?” Luther asked.

“You’ll see.”

“I’d better get the rest of my gear.”

Luther started toward the seaplane, but Marty stopped him. “Don’t bother. Phil will have someone haul it up and put it in your room after they search it.”

“Search it?” Luther said.

Marty nodded. “After what happened in the Congo, Wolfe hardened island security. About a week ago a guy named Albert

Ikes took over island security. He used to work for the Central Intelligence Agency and he's a complete paranoid nutcase. I don't think he even trusts Wolfe, and Wolfe is his boss . . . at least I think he is."

"Is this Albert Ikes guy going to New Zealand with us?" Luther asked.

"Unfortunately," Marty said. "And don't call him Albert. Call him Al or he might shoot you. Come on. Oh—" He stopped and handed Luther a silver chain with a square piece of carrot-colored plastic hanging from it.

"This is the tracking tag you wrote me about," Luther said.

"Yeah, but these tags are new and improved," Marty explained, pointing to the gray plastic square hanging from the chain around his own neck. "Put it on and don't ever take it off—even when you're in the shower. Don't ask me how, but they know when you're wearing it and when you're not. The second day I had mine, I took it off in my sleep because it got tangled around my neck and I thought I was choking to death. Within minutes, two of Al's stormtroopers burst into my bedroom with guns drawn. I almost had a heart attack."

Luther slipped the chain over his head and tucked the square under his sweatshirt. "You're not joking about any of this."

"No joke," Marty said.

"Why all the security?"

Marty counted the reasons out on his fingers. "Noah Blackwood, Mokélé-mbembé eggs, Ted Bronson's top secret work for the government, and Grace."

"Grace? What does your sister—I mean, your cousin—have to do with all this?"

Marty started walking down the dock. “I’ll tell you all about it after we get through the metal detector.”

“Metal detector?” Luther asked.

Marty pointed to the end of the dock, where two armed security men were guarding the chain-link gate. They wore camouflage fatigues and deadly serious expressions. “The guys with the shaved heads are a couple of Al’s stormtroopers, who are actually ex-Navy SEALs. They pretty much stick to the perimeter of the island, watching for intruders—except at the Fort, where Al has two guys on station 24/7. Once we get past them, everything on the island is a lot more relaxed. I would have emailed you about the changes, but Al cut off our email because he didn’t want anyone on the outside to know about the new security measures.”

Marty and Luther walked up to the two bullet-headed men.

“Empty your pockets and turn them inside out. You know the drill,” Bullet Head #1 said, slapping a plastic tray onto the stainless steel table.

“I already did,” Marty said. “I left all my stuff here with you so I didn’t have to be searched again. Remember?”

“Turn your pockets inside out anyway,” Bullet Head #2 said.

Marty turned his empty pockets inside out again.

Bullet Head #1 frisked him (making sure he hadn’t slipped a nuclear device into his undershorts while they weren’t looking), then had Marty pass through the metal detector.

“You’re next,” Bullet Head #2 said, glaring at Luther.

“You asked for it,” Luther said, relieving his first pocket of a half-dozen colored pencils, a pencil sharpener, candy wrappers, a small sketch pad, a pair of sunglasses, a comb (useless in Luther’s case), a handheld video game player, two flash drives, a digital camera, stereo earbuds, a stick of gum, an iPhone, and dental floss. “I started with the easy pocket first,” he said, then began emptying the second pocket.

The Bullet Heads rolled their eyes as they watched the mound of stuff grow.

“Did you cram everything you own into your pockets?” Marty asked.

“Nah,” Luther answered. “The big stuff is down at the dock. Three humongous suitcases. I didn’t know what to expect, so I brought everything I had at Omega Prep except my bed. I could have gotten everything into two suitcases, but I needed a third for those diaries Grace asked me to bring back for her.”

“Moleskines,” Marty said. “Three hundred and fifteen of them.” Grace had kept a diary ever since she had learned how to write at the age of five.

“Yeah,” Luther said. “That suitcase weighs about a thousand pounds. The valuable gear is here in the backpack. Didn’t want to risk losing it if they lost my luggage at the airport. Phil could hardly squeeze the suitcases in with all the junk Dr. Fish Stink brought along.” He nodded at the Bullet Heads. “These guys are lucky they aren’t checking *his* stuff. It smelled worse than he did. Bouquet of roadkill. One whiff of that and these two security guards would be retching.”

“We are not security guards,” Bullet Head #1 muttered.

“Didn’t mean to offend you,” Luther said cheerfully.

Marty had forgotten how pleasantly annoying Luther could be when someone was annoying *him*. Cryptos was going to be much more fun with Luther around.

“We are Security Specialists,” Bullet Head #2 said.

“Sorry,” Luther said. “You act like security guards and I just thought . . .” He turned his last pocket inside out. “That does it for the pockets.” He held his arms out from his sides. “I’m ready for the pat down, but I have to warn you, I’m a little ticklish. Oh, and I have this rash that’s highly contagious. The doctors don’t know what it is or how to get rid of it.”

Bullet Head #2 snapped on a pair of disposable rubber gloves and frisked Luther more roughly than he had Marty. Luther giggled through the entire process.

“What’s on the flash drives?” Bullet Head #1 asked.

“Stuff,” Luther said.

“We’ll examine the *stuff* and give the drives back to you . . . maybe. We’ll keep the camera and the video game player, too.”

“And the cell phone,” Bullet Head #2 added.

“I need the iPhone,” Luther said. “My parents are going to be calling. I don’t think they’d be happy with you if you took it away.”

Luther’s parents were billionaires and barely knew they had a son. Marty had never even met them, and he’d known Luther since they’d attended first grade together at the Omega Opportunity Preparatory School in Switzerland. He doubted Luther’s parents would be calling.

“It’s the *rules*,” Bullet Head #1 said. “You got a problem with the *rules*, you can take it up with Mr. Ikes or Dr. Wolfe.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Marty said. “You can use my Gizmo to call your parents or to have them call you.”

“You mean I don’t get my own Gizmo?” Luther asked, disappointed.

“Afraid not,” Marty said. “Only a few people have them. Grace doesn’t have one, either. Al decided to limit the units for security reasons. To make a call out or get one in we’ll have to get his or Wolfe’s permission.”

“Why did they give you a Gizmo?” Luther asked.

Marty looked at the guards. “I’ll tell you later. You won’t believe the improvements Ted Bronson has made to them.”

Ted Bronson was Wolfe’s partner in eWolfe, a software development and technology company. Marty had never laid eyes on Ted, but not for lack of trying. It was rumored that the eccentric genius hadn’t stepped outside the Quonset hut where he invented things in more than three years.

Luther reached for his pack.

“That stays here,” Bullet Head #1 said. “We’ll give it back to you after we’ve had a chance to examine the contents.”

“When?” Luther asked.

“That’s hard to say,” Bullet Head #2 said. “We’re kind of backed up.”

Luther looked at the abandoned dock. Phil had already taken off in the seaplane to pick up more people from the mainland. “I can see that,” Luther said. “Let me just take one thing with

me. It never leaves my side. If I can't take it, then I'll just have to wait here with you until you're done."

"Let's see what it is," Bullet Head #1 said, clearly not happy about the prospect of spending another minute with Luther Smyth.

"Close your eyes," Luther told Marty.

"Why?"

"Because it's a present for you and Grace, you dunce."

Marty closed his eyes and heard pages being turned.

"This is just a bunch of—"

"Shh!" Luther said. "Do you want to wreck the surprise?"

"Just take it with you and get out of here," Bullet Head #1 said.

Marty opened his eyes and saw that whatever Luther had taken out of his pack was now stuffed under his sweatshirt. They walked through the gate and over to a beat-up four-wheeler. Marty strapped on a helmet and swung onto the front. Luther did the same and climbed on behind him. While Marty tried to get the four-wheeler started, Luther turned around and shouted at the Bullet Heads, "I wasn't kidding about the rash. The last doctor who looked at it was infected within an hour and he still has it. He was wearing gloves, too. I'm really sorry."

The four-wheeler belched to life and Marty peeled out.