

The Black Door

ANNOUNCER: And now ... a tale well-calculated to keep you in ...

MUSIC: SUSPENSE ACCENT

ANNOUNCER: Suspense! Listen now to Act One of "The Black Door," starring Robert Readick, featuring Ralph Camargo, and written especially for "Suspense" by Robert Arthur.

MUSIC: OMINOUS PIANO INTRO ... THEN IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) The mistake I made was going through that black door.

If I'd left it shut, the way it was, sealed tight, everything would've been fine.

I'd have married Marsha, become a full professor, had my name in all the papers.

Well, there's no use telling the story backwards, is there?

First things first, as old Professor Wentworth always said. And the first thing in this case is the grant I received to hunt for a lost city in Central America. The City of the Fire God. Which might mean something. Or might mean nothing.

Anyway, I got the grant from the university, chartered a modern helicopter for three months, flew it down to Central America, got the necessary government permissions, and made my base of operations the tiny little town of San Marcos, on the coast.

As nearly as I could figure from the manuscript, the City of the Fire God was someplace among the mountains in that area. So I flew back and forth over the mountains in the helicopter, keeping a lookout for ruins in the jungles or the mountain valleys. And, for two and a half months, I saw nothing except trees and rocks.

In the town, I was charitably looked upon as a crazy yanqui. And finally even the children stopped staring at me. But I was getting pretty discouraged. And, trying to forget my troubles with a glass of tequila in a little garden outside the town's only cafe, while some native with a guitar serenaded his girl nearby.

MUSIC: PIANO OUT ... GUITAR, IN BG

SOUND: BIRDS CHIRP, IN BG

LANDRY: Waiter?! Wait--?! Oh, there you are.

PEDRO: Oh, pardon, señor. Er, I am not the waiter. He - he's busy.

LANDRY: Busy? No one's been busy in this town since Columbus discovered America.

PEDRO: Uh, that's very true, señor, but, uh, I have, er, paid the waiter to go somewhere else. That's why he's, er, busy. (CHUCKLES) Eh, look at this, señor.

LANDRY: (MUTTERS IN SURPRISE, INSTANTLY INTERESTED) Let me see that. (EXAMINES OBJECT) Why, it's a tiny statue, very old.

PEDRO: Ah?

LANDRY: Statue carved out of volcanic basalt in the style of the oldest known Mayan carving. Where did you get that?

PEDRO: Oh, that is easily answered, señor.

LANDRY: Well, then tell me.

PEDRO: My grandfather. He gave it to me when he died.

LANDRY: Well, where did he get it?

PEDRO: Er, señor, that is a harder question.

LANDRY: Now, look, if you came here just to play games with me--

PEDRO: No, no, no, no, señor. No, no, that is why I send away the waiter. So we could talk - er, confidentially.

LANDRY: Yes, well, let's talk - confidentially. Where did that little statue come from?

PEDRO: From the mountains, señor.

LANDRY: But the whole country is mountains!

PEDRO: Si, si. That is true. But, er-- You see, my grandfather was a great hunter. Once he followed a wounded jaguar high into the mountains, see?

LANDRY: Mm.

PEDRO: Some savage natives then followed my grandfather.

LANDRY: Yes?

PEDRO: Well, he was wounded. And to escape, he climbed a great cliff.

LANDRY: Go on, go on, go on.

PEDRO: And he reached the top - and, on the other side, he saw a dead city.

LANDRY: A dead city?

PEDRO: Si, señor. Silent, lifeless - far below him.

LANDRY: Yes?

PEDRO: He tried to climb down to it. And he failed, señor. For three days, he lay unconscious. And when he recovered his senses, he had the fever.

MUSIC: GUITAR GENTLY FADES OUT

LANDRY: Mm hm.

PEDRO: And, somehow, he found his way out. He does not know how. He - he staggered back to his home.

LANDRY: Yes?

PEDRO: They found him in the jungle, crawling on his hands and knees, clutching this little statue and saying over and over, "La puerta negra, la puerta negra!"

LANDRY: The what?

PEDRO: The black door, señor.

LANDRY: The black door?

PEDRO: Si, señor. Then, my poor grandfather, he was never strong enough to go hunting again but - he kept this little statue. And he said it had saved his life.

LANDRY: What did he mean by "the black door"?

PEDRO: Oh, one cannot say, señor. Er, he could not remember.

LANDRY: Surely he went back to the lost city?

PEDRO: Well, no. He was not strong enough. Besides, there were the savages.

LANDRY: But you mean nobody ever tried to find the city again?

PEDRO: Well, why should they, señor? It belonged to the dead. Well, they might be angry if the living came to disturb them, eh?

LANDRY: (DISMISSIVE) Oh, those old superstitions.

PEDRO: (LAUGHS) Si, señor. Now, me, I am not superstitious, eh? I - I speak American well. Uh, er, the, er, señor, uh, wishes to find this lost city? I, Pedro Ramirez, know where it is.

LANDRY: Go on.

PEDRO: You see, my grandfather described it to me. The - the mountains where it is hidden ...

LANDRY: Yes?

PEDRO: ... they are three days' walk from here.

LANDRY: Well, at three days-- Now, that's fifty or sixty miles. What direction?

PEDRO: Ha ha! Well, señor, that is the question, eh? What direction? A, er, most important question, no?

LANDRY: (AFTER A BEAT) I get it. How much?

PEDRO: (LAUGHS) A mere pittance for a rich yanqui, señor. One thousand dollars American.

LANDRY: A thousand dollars?!

PEDRO: And, er, one half of all the treasure.

LANDRY: What treasure is that?

PEDRO: Oh, there must be treasure, señor. Why else would you seek this lost city?

LANDRY: Because I want to become a professor at a university and marry a girl named Marsha whose father is head of the Department of Archeology. All right. A thousand dollars, if you actually guide me to this city you say your grandfather found.

PEDRO: And, er, half the treasure.

LANDRY: Yes. Half the treasure. If any.

MUSIC: OMINOUS PIANO THEME, IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) We sealed the bargain with a glass of tequila - and the next day Pedro came with me in the helicopter. He directed me to fly to the southeast, and I did, hovering as low as I dared over the rocky edges and jungle.

MUSIC: OUT

SOUND: HELICOPTER, IN BG

LANDRY: We've come more than fifty miles, Pedro. No sign of that city yet.

PEDRO: Oh, yes, señor? There, to the left. There is the mountain.

LANDRY: What? That?! Ah, you're crazy. That's the cone of an extinct volcano.

PEDRO: Si, señor. And the lost city is inside the volcano.

LANDRY: Oh, now wait a minute. How could that be?

PEDRO: Well, I know I do not know. I was not there when it was built.

LANDRY: On the other hand, "City of the Fire God." I wonder. ... Well, I haven't looked into that volcano yet, so here goes.

SOUND: HELICOPTER UP BRIEFLY, THEN IN BG

MUSIC: FOR A BRIEF TRANSITION, THEN IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) We lifted high in the air over the top of the old dead volcano. And we came out over a deep circular valley, grown up with jungle now, but there -- in the center of the jungle -- was a group of stone

buildings dominated by a vast ruined temple.

MUSIC: OUT

PEDRO: Señor! Señor! The lost city of my grandfather! Oh, it is rich with treasure - I have the feeling.

LANDRY: Well, even if it isn't, this is one of the biggest finds in the history of Central America. We're going down now. We'll set down in that level spot right in front of the temple.

SOUND: HELICOPTER SLOWLY FADES

MUSIC: OMINOUS PIANO FOR A BRIEF TRANSITION, THEN IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) We settled in front of the old temple. I cut the motors - and for a moment, we just sat there taking it in. The stone towers. The ancient carvings. The massive walls that had been put into place by men whose bones had turned to dust maybe three, four thousand years ago. And then we climbed out.

We were both armed. We had flashlights. And I had a small hammer and chisel tucked into my belt. Aboard the helicopter I had a case of dynamite, if any blasting was necessary, but this was just to be a preliminary survey, so I left it where it was.

Pedro and I found ourselves - on a big stone plaza - with the partially ruined temple in front of us. The entrance was flanked by two tremendous stone carvings. ...

SOUND: EERIE WIND BLOWS, IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) ... Oddly enough, very like something from Egypt. Human figures - with heads that were vaguely ...

MUSIC: OUT

LANDRY: (NARRATES) ... dog-like. ... Which made them seem - most unbeautiful.

SOUND: EERIE WIND BLOWS HARDER, IN BG

PEDRO: Señor? Those statues. I do not like them.

LANDRY: Yes, they are rather odd. But I'm more interested in those designs, carved in the rock above them.

PEDRO: Eh? Designs, señor? (SEES THEM) Oh! They but show the moon, the new moon and the old moon.

LANDRY: Yes. And there are more moons all over the front of the temple. Now, that's unusual. Most of the old civilizations in this area worshipped the sun.

PEDRO: Si, señor, but - I cannot help wondering.

LANDRY: Wondering what?

PEDRO: Why the man who made those statues - put the heads of dogs on them.

MUSIC: OMINOUS PIANO THEME FOR A BRIEF TRANSITION, THEN IN BG

SOUND: WIND OUT

LANDRY: (NARRATES) It was dark inside the temple. But our flashlights gave us enough light. Vast stone pillars supported the roof high above us as we moved down along a lengthy corridor. And then we came into a central rotunda. It got some sunlight through a crack in the roof.

MUSIC: OUT

PEDRO: (EXCITED) Look! Look, señor! Gold! Gold! Ten statues! Er, twelve statues! And each of them solid gold! (MOVING OFF) Come! Come look, señor! Gold! Gold! I am rich! I am rich!

MUSIC: STRINGS, FOR AN ACCENT, THEN EERILY IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) Pedro was right. Ranged in a circle in the middle of the rotunda were twelve golden statues about five feet high. They were all human figures - with dog-like heads. And they were all looking at a spot on the floor - in the middle of the circle they made.

MUSIC: OUT

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS ON STONE FLOOR, IN AGREEMENT WITH FOLLOWING:

PEDRO: (EXCITED, OFF) Gold, señor! And look! Look! Jewels! Jewels! Baskets of them! Oh, señor, señor! I am the richest man in the world! (LAUGHS)

LANDRY: (MUSING, TO HIMSELF) Mmmmmm, at the foot of each statue, a carved stone basket. Each one has a handful of gems in it. Obviously, these statues were worshipped. And the gems were tribute. (CALLS) Pedro, have you taken a good look at these statues? Shine your light on this one.

PEDRO: (CLOSER) ¡Madre mía! Again, the head of the dog!

LANDRY: Yes, they're all dog-headed statues. And all their eyes are focused on one spot over there. Seems to be something carved on the floor. Let's see what that is.

PEDRO: (AGREES) Mm.

SOUND: THEIR FOOTSTEPS ON STONE FLOOR

PEDRO: (EXAMINES FLOOR) Ah, señor. Huh. That is most strange.

LANDRY: A round black carving on the floor. Almost like a globe or a map.

PEDRO: (AGREES) Ah.

LANDRY: (WHISPERS, AMAZED) Good lord! ... Do you know what this is supposed to be?

PEDRO: Eh? Well, no, señor. I cannot guess.

LANDRY: It's the moon.

PEDRO: Hm?

LANDRY: Carved on the floor in black basalt. The moon.

PEDRO: (RECOGNIZES IT) Ah, si! Oh, that is most strange, no?

LANDRY: Yes, you don't know the half of it. Because the formations carved here, they're not the formations our astronomers know. Unless the Russians have some new pictures they're not talking about. If this carving represents the real geography of the moon-- Pedro?

PEDRO: Si, señor?

LANDRY: The artist who carved this must have sometime have seen the DARK side of the moon ... which no - human - being - has ever glimpsed.

MUSIC: BIG ACCENT, THEN EERILY IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) I know it sounds crazy. But the more I studied that round black carving, the more I was convinced it was an accurate relief map of the DARK side of the moon.

And then we discovered something else. Around the rim of that black disk was a series of crevices filled with tar. I dug the tar out, and under it, in each crevice, we found a small basalt statuette, like the one that Pedro had originally showed me. In each crevice, but one - which was empty.

MUSIC: OUT

PEDRO: Señor? See? The story of my grandfather is true! This little statue he brought back -- look! It just fits into this tiny hole.

SOUND: STATUE PLACED IN HOLE

LANDRY: Yes. Yes, it does.

PEDRO: (AGREES) Ah.

LANDRY: Black door. This must be the black door that he talked about.

PEDRO: Ah, si, señor. La puerta negra. The black door. But, er, how does it open?

LANDRY: I don't know. Now, wait, wait. Suppose we stand each of these little statues upright.

SOUND: THEY STAND THE STATUES UPRIGHT AND PLACE THEM IN HOLES, IN BG

PEDRO: Ah. Oh, si.

LANDRY: Yes. Yes. They fit tightly, like handles. (WITH EFFORT) Now, if we push them.

PEDRO: (WITH EFFORT) Si, señor. We push.

SOUND: A HEAVY MECHANISM GRINDS AND CLANKS, IN AGREEMENT WITH FOLLOWING:

LANDRY: (WITH EFFORT) And - it's turning! The black disk is turning! And now it's loose! Now we can lift it up.

PEDRO: Let us lift it. Down there may be more treasure, eh? More gold! More jewels!

LANDRY: All right, then. (MORE EFFORT) Now it's coming ...

PEDRO: Si!

LANDRY: Coming ...

SOUND: MECHANISM OUT ... BOTH EXHALE WEARILY

LANDRY: There. There, it's open. (EXHALES) And there's a well-worn flight of steps - leading down into the heart of the old volcano.

MUSIC: A BIG ACCENT, THEN EERILY IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) We stood there, staring down into that black passageway that seemed to go down, down, endlessly. I didn't like the looks of it. But Pedro had gold fever. He thought that there might be whole vaults of treasure down below. I couldn't talk him out of looking, so I went along, too.

The tunnel sloped downward, ever downward, into the heart of the ancient volcano. We came across evidence of much usage -- broken pottery, strange carvings on the wall. Our curiosity led us on until presently we came to a cavern whose walls seemed to be lined by a curious growth.

MUSIC: OUT

SOUND: THEIR FOOTSTEPS, IN AGREEMENT WITH FOLLOWING:

PEDRO: Señor? Look!

LANDRY: Yes! Yes, mushrooms. Or something very much like mushrooms. Solid sheets of it, all lining the walls.

PEDRO: No, no, no, señor. That is not what I mean. Look here. Look through here.

LANDRY: Ooh, a narrow crevice. There's a room in there.

PEDRO: Ah, it's not the room. It is what is IN the room! Come, shine your light. Then let us leave, señor.

LANDRY: What has got you so worked up? It can't be treasure-- (PAUSE) I see.

PEDRO: Si. It's skeletons, señor. Many skeletons. Hundreds maybe. Lying one upon the other.

LANDRY: Yes, yes. That rocky room is full of human bones and, much as I hate to say it--

PEDRO: What, señor?

LANDRY: The ones I can see best have tooth marks on them.

PEDRO: Oh, señor, let us leave here swiftly. Let us return to the airplane, eh? Let us take the treasure and go.

LANDRY: Easy now, Pedro. These bones have been here hundreds of years, maybe thousands.

PEDRO: Old bones or new bones, I do not like these bones--

LANDRY: There's no cause for alarm, unless-- (PAUSE, LOST IN THOUGHT) I don't know.

PEDRO: Hm? Why does the señor study so hard the mushrooms on the wall?

LANDRY: These mushrooms certainly haven't been here for a thousand years. And, along here, it looks to me as if big handfuls of them have been broken off.

PEDRO: Broken off? But why?

LANDRY: There's only one thing I know of you can do with mushrooms. And that's eat them.

MUSIC: ACCENT, THEN EERILY IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) Pedro and I stood staring at each other. I was pretty sure that something - or somebody - had recently been eating that mushroom-like fungus. And I was beginning to wonder what, or who ...

SOUND: DISTANT BUT DEMONIC HOWL ... HOWLING & BARKING CONTINUES IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) ... when we heard it - from somewhere far down below us.

SOUND: DEMONIC HOWLING & BARKING CONTINUES IN BG, SLOWLY GROWING LOUDER

PEDRO: Señor? What is that?

LANDRY: Sounded like a dog howling.

PEDRO: A dog? No, no, no. That is no dog!

LANDRY: Well, then, if it's not a dog, what is it?

PEDRO: A demon, señor. A devil!

LANDRY: Oh, forget that superstition. Something down there. Impossible as it seems, something living.

PEDRO: And if we do not leave, there will be something dying - down here, Señor. Er, please, come, come, come.

LANDRY: Yes, yes, but I'm trying to figure out what on earth that could--

PEDRO: Señor Landry! Those are not dogs upstairs! The statues. They - they - they're people with heads of dogs upon them. Does the señor not realize what it is that is howling?

SOUND: BY NOW, HOWLING & BARKING VERY LOUD ... THEN FADES

MUSIC: AN ACCENT, THEN IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) Until that second, I hadn't made the connection. And then I realized the full significance of those statues. It couldn't be! It was impossible! But what other answer was there?

We turned to head for the surface and just as we did so, I saw something coming up the tunnel toward us. Something that was a pallid white shape in the light of my flashlight. Something running on all fours and howling hungrily as it did so.

SOUND: NEARBY FEROCIOUS UNEARTHLY HOWLING

PEDRO: Shoot, señor! Shoot!

SOUND: THREE GUNSHOTS ... NEARBY HOWLING OUT ... DISTANT HOWLING CONTINUES

LANDRY: Okay, that stopped it. Now, let's get out of here!

MUSIC: A BRIEF ACCENT, THEN IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) We didn't even stop to look at what I'd shot. I'm not sure I wanted to look. We just turned and ran up that long tunnel to the surface. And, as we went, the howling things pursued us. We could hear them behind us like a pack of hungry animals. From time to time, I turned to fire my gun.

SOUND: FIVE GUNSHOTS ... HOWLING COMING CLOSER

LANDRY: (NARRATES) ... Well, I seemed to scare them. We finally popped out into that ruined temple with the twelve dog-headed guards. And I understood at last what that black door was for. It sealed the entrance to the underground world where - THEY lived.

Pedro and I flung ourselves on the ground (WITH EFFORT) where the great round slab of black rock was. And we couldn't move it! It was wedged open somehow and we couldn't get it closed.

MUSIC: OUT

SOUND: HOWLS AND BARKS IN BG AS THE MEN STRAIN VAINLY AGAINST THE DOOR

PEDRO: (GRUNTS) Señor! Señor, quickly! They will follow us in a moment!

LANDRY: Gathered down there beyond the first bend. Obviously, they don't like light.

PEDRO: They are getting up their courage!

LANDRY: Well, we gotta shut them in! We can't let those - THINGS loose! But we can't shut the black door!

PEDRO: We can do nothing! The helicopter, quickly!

LANDRY: I've got it! The dynamite in the helicopter! We'll blow in the mouth of the tunnel!

PEDRO: But, Señor--!

LANDRY: You heard me! It'll only take sixty seconds!

SOUND: TWO GUNSHOTS ... HOWLS AND BARKS OUT

LANDRY: There! That'll keep 'em quiet another minute or two! Now, come on! Help me with that case of dynamite!

MUSIC: AN ACCENT, THEN IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) It took us less than a minute to get the case of dynamite, bring it back inside the temple, and light a fuse. (WITH EFFORT) And then I shoved the whole case down the steps into the black tunnel.

Pedro and I hurried back into the open, scrambled to the helicopter, and started the motor, just in case.

SOUND: HELICOPTER ENGINE STARTS, IN BG

MUSIC: OUT

PEDRO: Ah! Señor Landry!

LANDRY: What is it?

PEDRO: The treasure! The jewels! We did not bring 'em!

LANDRY: We can get them after the tunnel is blown in. You don't want to tangle with those dog-headed creatures, do you?

PEDRO: Oh, no, no, por los Santos, no. But-- Señor! What ARE they?! They must be demons for - for, surely, they are not of this world!

LANDRY: Well, I agree with you but they're not demons.

SOUND: DYNAMITE EXPLOSION

LANDRY: Listen! That does it. Tunnel is closed for good. Now, Pedro--

PEDRO: Señor! The temple is collapsing! A-a-and the earth, she is shaking! Señor, it's an earthquake!

LANDRY: Pedro, there's only one place for us to go and that's straight up!

SOUND: HELICOPTER ROARS UP AND OUT

MUSIC: A BRIEF ACCENT, THEN IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) The helicopter jumped a thousand feet straight up - just before the temple crashed on the spot where we had been. And then we watched from a box seat - while the Lost City crumbled into ruins. The dynamite blast had triggered off an earthquake. And the earthquake rocked the ground like a man shaking a baby's rattle.

MUSIC: OUT

SOUND: HELICOPTER, IN BG

PEDRO: Señor! Señor, the jewels. The gold. They are down there under - under many rocks!

LANDRY: Yes, and so are the dog-headed creatures. Suppose they'd got loose on the world after being caged underground for thousands of years.

PEDRO: Oh, I can only think of all that treasure. For a little while, I was the richest man in the world! I owned a lost city full of jewels! But now - now I own nothing.

LANDRY: After things quiet down, I can bring back an expedition. We'll dig in the ruins. The jewels'll still be there.

PEDRO: Oh, si. Si, that is true, no? I - I will be rich yet, no? I will buy myself, er, three automobiles and - and twelve silk shirts! I will smoke cigars all day long and have servants to do everything! I-- I-- Señor? Señor, I am ruined! I am ruined!

LANDRY: What is it now?

PEDRO: It's that volcano! It's coming to life! See? The smoke is coming from the ground!

SOUND: OF AN INCREASINGLY LOUD VOLCANIC EXPLOSION

PEDRO: Señor! Fly higher or we are doomed!

SOUND: DEAFENING VOLCANIC EXPLOSION, THEN FADE

MUSIC: A BRIEF ACCENT, THEN IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) Well, that tied it. The dynamite triggered an earthquake. And the earthquake opened up fissures leading far down to where the volcanic fires had been banked for thousands of years.

And by the time we got ten miles away, that entire mountain was blowing up in a vast, spouting fire - and ashes - and molten rock.

But somewhere -- somewhere down in the heart of that inferno -- was the Lost City. The City of the Fire God.

It would have made my reputation.

MUSIC: CHANGES TO OMINOUS PIANO THEME, IN BG

LANDRY: (NARRATES) Enough treasure to pay off - the national debt.

And a howling mob of creatures you wouldn't want to meet this side of hell.

Well ... that's the story.

You read about the new volcano.

And now you know what caused it.

Would you like to know my theory - about those creatures?

Well, it's this.

Six or seven thousand years ago, this old Earth had some visitors. Refugees, you might call them. Some of them settled in Egypt. Some in Central America. They brought some highly scientific skills with them, including the secret - of overcoming gravity. They ruled for a while, worshipped as gods. And then - died out. All except a few who found, inside an old volcano, a spot - just about like home. The native priests managed to lock them in behind that - black door - and kept them prisoners. After the natives died out, the dog people existed underground, living on mushrooms and keeping their race alive at an animal level.

Well, they're gone now.

But here's a tip for the army and the air force:

When you land your first missiles on the moon - keep your eyes open and your guns ready.

Because inside those tremendous craters of the moon -- living far underground where, maybe, there's still warmth and air -- I have a hunch you're going to be running into people.

Moon people ... who look a lot like us.

MUSIC: OUT

LANDRY: (NARRATES) (SLIGHT PAUSE) Except for their heads.

MUSIC: ORCHESTRAL ACCENT, FOR A FINISH ... AND OUT

ANNOUNCER: Suspense!

MUSIC: ACCENT, IN BG

ANNOUNCER: You've been listening to "The Black Door," starring Robert Readick, featuring Ralph Camargo, and written especially for "Suspense" by Robert Arthur.

MUSIC: THEME, IN BG

ANNOUNCER: "Suspense" is produced and directed by Bruno Zirato, Jr. Music supervision by Ethel Huber. Listen again next week, when we return with "Mantrap," written by John Roeburt -- another tale well-calculated to keep you in ...

MUSIC: SUSPENSE ACCENT

ANNOUNCER: Suspense!

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