



AROUND THE
WORLD

in



8
km

By
ChatGPT

P R O M P T

Continental 

THIS WORK IS INSPIRED BY:

**AROUND
THE WORLD
IN 80 DAYS**

BY **JÚLIO VERNÉ**

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

Ultra Contact

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A work inspired by the book *Around the World in 80 Days* by Jules Verne.

The adventure now takes place in 2024 and is made by the character's great-great-grandson from the original book.

Now, the challenge of the adventure is not about how many days, but about the distance to be traveled around the world, traveling by car: 80 thousand kilometers.

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Continental Pneus

R. Hilda Del Nero Bisquolo, 102 – Jardim Florida – Jundiaí, SP

CEP: 13208-703

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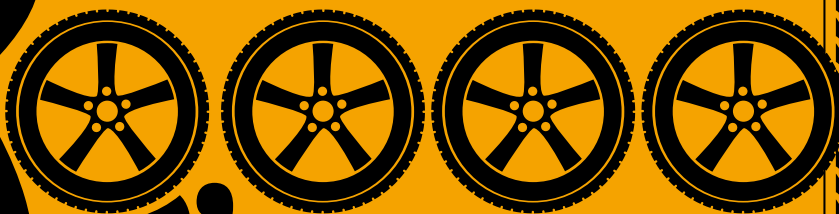
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AROUND THE WORLD

in



8,000 km

by ChatGPT



P R O M P T

Continental 

A TRIBUTE TO HUMAN TALENT AND TECHNOLOGY.⊕

This book was inspired by one of the greatest works of fiction in literature: *AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS*, by Jules Verne. Published in 1873, this novel shows the possibilities of human endeavor and the wonders of the technology emerging at its time..

This exciting work tells the adventures of Phileas Fogg, an eccentric and thorough British gentleman who bets his fortune on the possibility to circumnavigate the globe in mere 80 days, which seemed impossible back then. Accompanied by his loyal French servant, Passepartout, Fogg embarks on a journey that'll have him traversing distances by train, vessel, and even elephant, facing a series of challenges and obstacles along the way.

The new adventure we are presenting here takes place in 2024 – this time traversing the roads of the world – and is inspired by the plot and style of the original book, over 150 years later.

Besides, “Around the World in 80,000 kilometers” is also the result of a collaborative effort between human talent and the most advanced technology – here, Artificial Intelligence was used to produce each chapter.

It is also by the joint efforts of human talent and technology that Continental Pneus is able to create its products and innovate. One such evidence of this capacity is the creation of UltraContact, a tire that is synonymous with innovation, with greater mileage and much longer durability – the only one with guaranteed 80,000 kilometers. (*)

The tome you hold in your hands is more than just a book: it is a tribute to one of the greatest works of literature in history.

Enjoy!

Note: all characters in this book are fictional, and any resemblance is mere coincidence.

() UltraContact Guaranteed Mileage and Discounts: valid when acquiring UltraContact tires between 08/12/2024 and 02/12/2025 with full and free acceptance of the terms and conditions upon purchase. Check all warranty rules at www.conti.com.br/garantiaultracontact.*

*Artificial Intelligence
was used through
the ChatGPT tool.*

REWRITE the book AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS, by JULES VERNE, with the adventure starting in 2024, entitled AROUND THE WORLD IN 80,000 KILOMETERS - because the world trip will be made within 80,000 kilometers driving with a single set of tires - and as if it were JULES VERNE writing today.

Generate Chapter 1 mirroring the first chapter of the original work.

The title will be:

IN WHICH PHILEAS FOGG V AND PALACIOS ACCEPT EACH OTHER, THE ONE AS MASTER, THE OTHER AS ASSISTANT.

The events:

Phileas Fogg V, grandson of the renowned Phileas Fogg, lives in São Paulo in an upscale apartment in the Jardins neighborhood. Known for his precision and methodic behavior, his personal life is shrouded in mystery. Fogg is looking for a new assistant, and Lionel Palacios, a 30-year-old Uruguayan man living in São Paulo, attends an interview for the job. Fogg asks Palacios to meet his strict requirements, such as fluent English and a visa to enter the United States. Palacios, impressed by the neatly-organized environment and by Fogg's seriousness, accepts the job proposal.

...

IN WHICH

PHILEAS FOGG V AND PALACIOS ACCEPT EACH OTHER, THE ONE AS MASTER, THE OTHER AS ASSISTANT. ⚡

CHAPTER I

In 2024, Phileas Fogg V, grandson of the renowned Phileas Fogg, the Englishman who traveled around the world in 80 days in 1872, lived

in the Jardins neighborhood, in the vibrant city of São Paulo. Fogg, as he was known, resided in an upscale apartment facing Paulista Avenue, near the famed Clube Auto

Paulistano. He was one of the most unique and intriguing members of the club, known for his methodical behavior. No one knew for certain where his fortune or resources came from, but he was widely known for his precision and politeness.

Phileas Fogg V, with his modern and casual style, elegant sneakers, discreet glasses and always upright posture, resembled an old-school gentleman, even though he lived in the heart of one of the world's largest metropolitan areas. It was said that he resembled Santos Dumont – impeccable in his actions and determination – but a 21st-century Santos Dumont, and without a mustache. A man who was not easily impressed and who seemed unaffected by time. Fogg was a citizen of the world, and it was common knowledge that he required his employees to be fluent in English and to have a visa to enter the United States, a reflection of his international lifestyle.

No one at the Stock Exchange or in the offices of the major São Paulo banks knew Phileas Fogg V. He was not seen in business or industrial circles, nor did he join any of the city's numerous cultural, scientific or artistic associations. However, he was a distinguished member of Clube Auto Paulistano, the elite club that brought together the most enthusiastic lovers of cars and travel.

And it was in this setting that a 30-year-old man presented himself for an interview with Phileas Fogg V. His name: Lionel Palacios. A strong, enthusiastic Uruguayan who has lived in São Paulo for five years, Lionel Palacios was looking for a stable and challenging job. The interview took place in Fogg's apartment, a place decorated with world maps and travel relics, reflecting the adventurous spirit of its owner.



PHILEAS FOGGIO



Lionel

PALACIOS

– You are a Uruguayan and your name is Lionel? – asked Phileas Fogg V.

– Yes, Lionel! If you please – replied the new-comer, – Lionel Palacios, a surname which has clung to me because I have a natural aptness for getting out of trouble. I believe I’m honest, sir, but to be frank, I’ve had several trades. I’ve been a tour guide in Montevideo, a street performer, and a skillful tango dancer. I’ve also learned capoeira and volunteered at the fire department of Uruguaiana, a city where I lived for a few years as a child, with some notable saves on my resume. Five years ago, I left Uruguay and, seeking stability, worked for some of the most demanding families in São Paulo. I have now come to you at your home in the hopes of obtaining more stable employment.

– Palacios suits me! You are well recommended to me. Do you know my conditions?

– Yes, sir.

Fogg, sitting on his leather armchair, gazed at Palacios with analytical eyes.

– Palacios, do you speak English?

– Yes, sir, fluently – Palacios replied with confidence.

– What about a United States visa?

Palacios handed over his papers, showing how they were all

in order. Fogg sifted through the documents carefully, nodding.

– You seem like the right man. This job requires precision, dedication, and discretion. Do you agree to these terms?

– Yes, mister Fogg – Palacios replied, determined.

– Good. What time is it?

– Twenty-three past eleven – answered Palacios, staring at his wristwatch.

– You are too slow – said Fogg.

– Pardon me, sir, that is impossible.

– You are one minute too slow. No matter. As of this time, twenty-four past eleven in the morning of Wednesday, October 2nd, 2024, you are in my service.

After saying that, Phileas Fogg stood up, took the keys to his car and disappeared without another word.

Palacios heard the street door shut. He was alone in the apartment, looking at the silhouette of the buildings at Paulista Avenue, contemplating his new workplace and feeling the precision and order that reigned therein.

IN WHICH

PALACIOS IS CONVINCED
THAT HE HAS AT LAST
FOUND HIS IDEAL. ⊗

CHAPTER II

During his brief interview with Phileas Fogg V, Palacios had swiftly, but carefully, examined his future boss. He appeared to be a man about 35 or 40 years of age, with fine, handsome features, and a tall figure, with athletic build and slightly wavy brown hair. Phileas Fogg V had a tranquil countenance and a firm, but relaxed posture – one that exuded

confidence. He seemed to have the highest level of that which physiognomists referred to as “repose in action”, a quality of those who act rather than talk.

Calm and phlegmatic, with a clear eye, Phileas Fogg V was a typical man of apparently cold blood, with a slightly academic demeanor that brought to mind an orchestral conductor in action. Seen in the several acts of his existence, this gentleman suggested a well-balanced individual in all aspects, a man of thorough reflection, as perfect as a Swiss stopwatch. He was exactitude personified, which one could clearly see in the “expression of his feet and hands”, for in man, as in animals, limbs themselves are organs that express passions.

Phileas Fogg V was one of these mathematically precise individuals who, never in a hurry and always ready, are economic in their steps and in their movements. Not one step in excess, always taking the shortest path. Never one to waste time, not even an instant, looking at the ceiling. Never one to allow himself a superfluous gesture. No one had ever seen him distraught or disturbed. He was the man with the least hurry in the world, but always arrived on time. One may understand, therefore, why he lived alone and, so to speak, outside all social relations. He knew that, in life, one must account for attrition. And since attrition is a source of delay, he would avoid contact with anyone.

As for Lionel Palacios, in the five years in which he lived in São Paulo and worked there as an assistant, he looked in vain for a master that was to his liking.



Palacios was by no means one of these uptight, snobbish assistants, with a bold gaze and nose held high in the air. No. Palacios was an excellent lad with a lovable appearance, slightly protruding lips, always ready to taste or to caress. A sweet being, with a round head one appreciates seeing atop the shoulders of a friend. He had brown eyes, a lively-colored face, a slight goatee, a broad chest, a strong countenance, with vigorous muscles that the exercise in his youth had developed. His brown hair was slightly messy.

It would be rash to predict how the boy's lively nature would agree with Phileas Fogg V. Would Palacios be the functionally exact assistant that his master wanted? Only time would tell. After a youth spent in multiple locations, he sought to make more money in São Paulo. Fortune, however, had been rough to him. He was unable to grow roots anywhere. He worked at a few homes. In each of them, his masters were capricious, extravagant, and enjoyed going on adventures abroad without much planning, which was seldom convenient for Palacios. His last boss, a young and reckless businessman, enjoyed spending his nights in parties and would often come home in a regrettable state. Palacios, who above all wished to respect his boss, made a few respectful remarks that were poorly received and led to his dismissal.

In the meantime, he found out that Phileas Fogg V sought an assistant. He obtained information on the gentleman, presented himself and was admitted in the conditions we know about.

At half past eleven, Palacios found himself alone in the apartment near Paulista Avenue. He soon began his inspection, scouring it from end to end. This clean, neat, austere, puritan

apartment, well-organized for domestic work, pleased him. It seemed to him like a snail's shell, lighted by yellow lights and warmed by a modern central heating system, in which intelligent automation took care of all lighting and temperature needs.

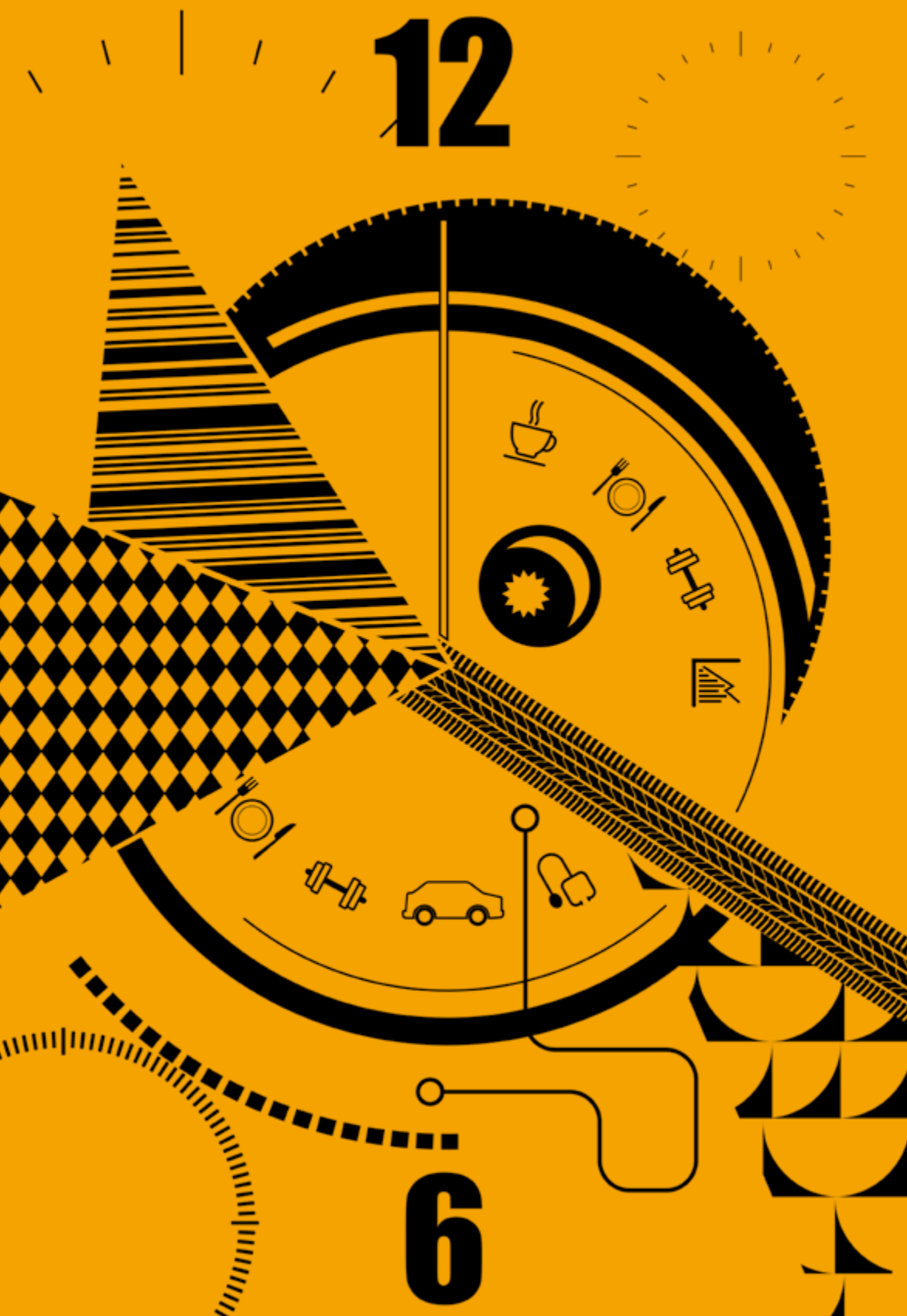
Palacios soon located the room assigned to him. It suited him. Electrical doorbells and acoustic tubes connected the room with the lower and upper floors. Above the fireplace, there was an electric clock, synchronized with the one in Phileas Fogg V's sleeping chambers, and both devices struck the same time, down to the second.

– This suits me – said Palacios to himself.

In his room, he also noticed a poster placed above the clock. It was his daily service schedule. From eight in the morning, exactly at which hour Phileas Fogg V rose, till midnight – the hour at which the methodical gentleman would lie down, – everything was annotated, predicted, and regulated. Palacios found great satisfaction when meditating on this schedule and memorizing all its details.

As for the master's wardrobe, each pair of trousers, shirt, t-shirt, coat or blazer bore an order number reproduced in an input and output record, indicating the date on which, according to the season, these clothes should be worn. The same rules applied to sneakers and shoes.

12



6

Briefly, this Jardim Paulista apartment had comfortable furniture, suggesting it could offer good rest. A library with books in several tongues dedicated to automobiles, arts, and history. The sleeping chambers had an average-sized vault, built to withstand fires and attempts at robbery. Every single element suggested peaceful and predictable habits.

After examining the room in further detail, Palacios rubbed his hands and, with a dilated demeanor, joyfully repeated:

– This suits me! This is to my liking! We will understand each other perfectly, Mr. Fogg and me! A strict and meticulous man! Why, I do not mind serving such a meticulous man!

AMERICA

EUROPA

AFRICA

ASIA



AMERICA

EUROPA

AFRICA

ASIA

In which A CONVERSATION TAKES PLACE WHICH SEEMS LIKELY TO COST PHILEAS FOGG V.✪

CHAPTER III

Phileas Fogg V left his Jardim Paulista apartment at half-past eleven in the morning. After walking past the busy sidewalks, crossing streets and crossings with nearly mathematical precision, he arrived at Clube Auto Paulistano, an imposing building located at Brasil Avenue.

Fogg moved directly towards the club's restaurant, where the large

windows offered a spectacular view of carefully minded gardens. He sat at his usual table, where impeccable service awaited. His lunch consisted of filet mignon with gravy, served with mushroom risotto, followed by a crème brûlée as dessert. All this with high-quality ice tea - evidence of his British palate - carefully selected by the club's sommelier.

At forty-seven past noon, Fogg rose and made way to the main hall, a luxurious hall adorned with contemporary paintings and sophisticated furniture. A worker handed him the day's paper, which Fogg unfolded with the dexterity of someone used to this routine. His reading kept him occupied until a quarter-to-four, when he replaced the newspaper with the tablet to further investigate the latest news. One subject of the day was the suspicion of a smuggling boss's plan to flee the country, without the Federal Police even being aware of his identity.

At forty-past six, Fogg returned to the grand hall and dove into reading the digital news. Half an hour later, a few members of the Clube Auto Paulistano began to arrive and gather around the modern fireplace, where an electrical flame simulated a cozy fire. Standing at the green-clothed table, ready for a card game, were his usual poker partners: engineer André Silva, bankers João Sampaio and Samuel Fonseca, businessman Tomás Flanagan, and Gabriel Ramos, a director at the Central Bank of Brazil – each of them a wealthy and respected man, even in a club that had the most illustrious figures of industry and finance among its members.

– Now, Gabriel – asked Tomás Flanagan –, how is that smuggling case going?

– At this point – replied André Silva –, the Federal Police can pretty much give up hope.

– I, on the other hand, – said Gabriel Ramos –, hope that the police catches that crook. I know they'll send investigators to several parts of Latin America and Europe, and the subject will have a hard time escaping.

– Do they have a description of the smuggler? – asked João Sampaio.

– First of all, it's not just a smuggler – Gabriel Ramos answered with a grave demeanor.

– What do you mean? An individual who stole millions from illegal goods?

– No! – replied Gabriel Ramos.

– So a businessman, then? – said Tomás Flanagan.

– The news insist that it's a gentleman. A citizen above any suspicion. Could it even be one of us?

The person offering that reply was none other than Phileas Fogg V, whose head emerged from behind the tablet screen. At the same time, Phileas greeted his poker playing colleagues and they greeted him back.

This fact they were talking about, which several national news broadcasters had been ardently discussing, had occurred a few days prior, on September 29th. A large quantity of smuggled goods had been apprehended in one of the main ports, but the alleged leader of the operation had escaped.

If someone admired how this smuggling was carried out with such ease, Gabriel Ramos merely replied that this was the work of a very sophisticated network and that the lack of strict surveillance had contributed to the illegal operation's initial success. However, highly trained operatives had been

mobilized to all the main escape routes, with the promise of a substantial reward in case they caught the culprit.

– I’ll wager – said André Silva – that the odds are in favor the smuggler, who must surely be a very cunning man!

– Come on, now – Gabriel Ramos replied –, there’s not a single country where he could take refuge.

– I don’t know – said André Silva –, the world is quite a vast place.

– It used to be... – whispered Phileas Fogg.

– What do you mean, “used to”? Did the world shrink, by any chance? – André replied.

– Certainly – Gabriel Ramos said. – I share Mr. Fogg’s opinion. The world has shrunk, because we now travel distances much faster than 100 years ago. This, in the case at hand, is what will make the searches faster.

– While also facilitating the smuggler’s escape! – said Phileas Fogg.

Silva was not yet convinced:

– One must confess, Mr. Ramos – he continued – that you’ve found a funny way of saying that the world has shrunk.

– In 1872, my great-grandfather went around the world in 80 days. Today, with a plane, including flight times and

connections, one can go around the world in under 80 hours - said Phileas Fogg.

- And there is more - Fogg continued. - This smuggler could also escape with his car and go around the world without raising suspicions. From what I know of the world of automobiles, I assure you that he can travel 80,000 kilometers worldwide without even changing his tires!

- That's impossible! - André Silva shouted. - To travel by land alone and without changing tires? I do not believe you!

- Yes! With current technology, there is a tire that can do that. Of course, it's a studier tire than the market average, but it can do it.^(*)

And Phileas continued, showing some enthusiasm in his own way.

- Some car travels would be by boat, perhaps, or even by plane, but 80,000 kilometers by land without changing tires is possible in my book - Phileas Fogg replied.

- Even if there are accidents on the road, intense traffic or other unforeseen circumstances? - André Silva asked.

- Even so - Phileas Fogg replied.

André Silva, in charge of shuffling the cards at that moment, stopped to say:

^(*) Note: there is only one tire in the market that lasts 80,000 kilometers or more: Continental's UltraContact.

– You are right in theory, Mr. Fogg, but in practice...

– In practice too, Silva – replied Fogg. – In fact, this was always a dream of mine. I think it’s in my DNA, I must have gotten it from my great-grandfather. And I’ve already planned this trip around the world by car several times – he continued, increasingly excited. – Furthermore: since I’ve always had this in mind, I could be so bold as to leave here tomorrow, ride for kilometers in Brazil, go up to the Northeast, go through the North region, go down to Patagonia, climb the coast of the Pacific to the Panama Canal, cross Central America, Mexico, the United States through the West Coast, travel to the East Coast, go down to Miami, put the car on a boat to cross the Atlantic, resume traveling in Europe, go through Africa and arrive in Asia. And find a way to go back to Brazil with the same car and the same tires, all documented!

– I would sure like to see that.

– It’s up to you. We should leave together.

– Heaven forfend! – yelled Silva. – But I’d sure bet the convertible in my garage on the fact that this would be an impossible feat.

– On the contrary, it is very possible – Fogg replied.

Then, turning to his colleagues, he concluded:

– I too have a convertible in my garage. And a good gambler never plays around when the subject is as serious as a wager – Phileas Fogg V replied. – I bet my convertible against whoever

it is that I'll drive 80,000 kilometers in a car, going through several continents and without changing tires. Any takers?

– You're on! – replied Silva, Sampaio, Fonseca, Flanagan, and Ramos, after checking with each other.

– There you go. My convertible against a car in your collection. I'll choose. I leave tomorrow morning – said Fogg.

– Tomorrow, really? – asked Silva.

– Tomorrow – answered Phileas Fogg V. – Therefore – he added, checking a calendar in his tablet –, since today is Wednesday, October 2nd, 2024, I shall be back at this club in, I assume, less than nine months, after driving for 80,000 kilometers around the world with the same car and without changing tires. Otherwise, my convertible will be lawfully yours.

A private contract was drawn up for the bet and signed on the spot by all six interested parties. Phileas Fogg kept his cool. He surely hadn't bet on winning and was only risking a car from his vast collection because it seem like this difficult, nigh impossible project would be fun to attempt. As for his adversaries, they seemed moved, not because of the automobile at stake, but because they were wary of fighting in these conditions.

IN WHICH



WHICH

PHILEAS FOGG V ASTOUNDS PALACIOS, HIS ASSISTANT.

CHAPTER IV

At seven twenty-five, Phileas Fogg V, having won several rounds of poker, bade farewell to his noble colleagues and left Clube Auto Paulistano. At ten to eight o'clock, he opened the door of his apartment in the Jardins neighborhood.

Palacios, who had carefully studied his schedule, was quite surprised to see Mr. Fogg, in a rare moment of imprecision, appearing at this unusual time. According to schedule, Fogg, was not supposed to call it a night until midnight sharp.

Phileas Fogg, soon as he arrived, went up to his room and called:

– Palacios!

Palacios said nothing. This call could not possibly be meant for him. It wasn't time yet.

– Palacios! – repeated Mr. Fogg, without raising his tone.

Palacios appeared.

– This was the second time I called you – said Mr. Fogg.

– But it is not midnight – Palacios replied, looking at his watch.

– I know – continued Phileas Fogg. – We will need to adjust our schedule. We leave tomorrow morning for a world trip.

The Uruguayan's face grimaced. He had evidently misheard something.

– My job begins today, and you say we are traveling tomorrow? – he asked.

– Yes – replied Phileas Fogg. – We are going on a trip for 80,000 kilometers on a car. A trip around the world!

Palacios, his eyes widened, eyebrows raised, arms drooping, body slouched, presented all the symptoms of astonishment leading to bewilderment.

– An 80,000-kilometer trip! – he murmured.

– Yes – said Mr. Fogg. – We don't have a moment to spare.

– But... what about our bags? – said Palacios, his head wobbling from side to side.

– We'll pack light. A small suitcase for each. Inside, a few clothes, toiletries, sunscreen, bathing suits, and some nice, comfy shoes. I'll need my coat and so will you. And, when it's extremely cold, we'll shop along the way. Pick a good pair of shoes, but don't expect much walking.

Palacios wished he could answer, but he couldn't. He left Fogg's room, walked up to his own, fell onto a chair and following a vulgar expletive from his home country, said to himself:

– ¡Hacé lo que te dije! And I thought I was going to get some rest...

Hethen began to mechanically make his travel preparations. An 80,000-kilometer trip! Was he dealing with a madman? No... Was it a joke? Palacios was trying to understand how serious his boss was. Maybe it was a trip exclusively confined to Brazil. After all, this would be agreeable to the brave lad, who hadn't actually traveled in five years!

At seven a.m. of the next day, Thursday, October 3rd, 2024, Palacios had prepared the humble luggage that contained his and his master's wardrobe. Then, with a still anguished spirit,

he left his room, carefully shut the door and met Fogg.

Fogg was ready. His arm held a complete guide of international roads, providing all information required for the journey. He was one step ahead, knowing that there could be internet shortages in some more remote areas in the world. He grabbed a bag from Palacios's hands, opened it and dropped a small roll of dollars and euros for emergencies.

- Did you remember everything? - he asked.

- Everything, sir.

- The coat?

- Right here.

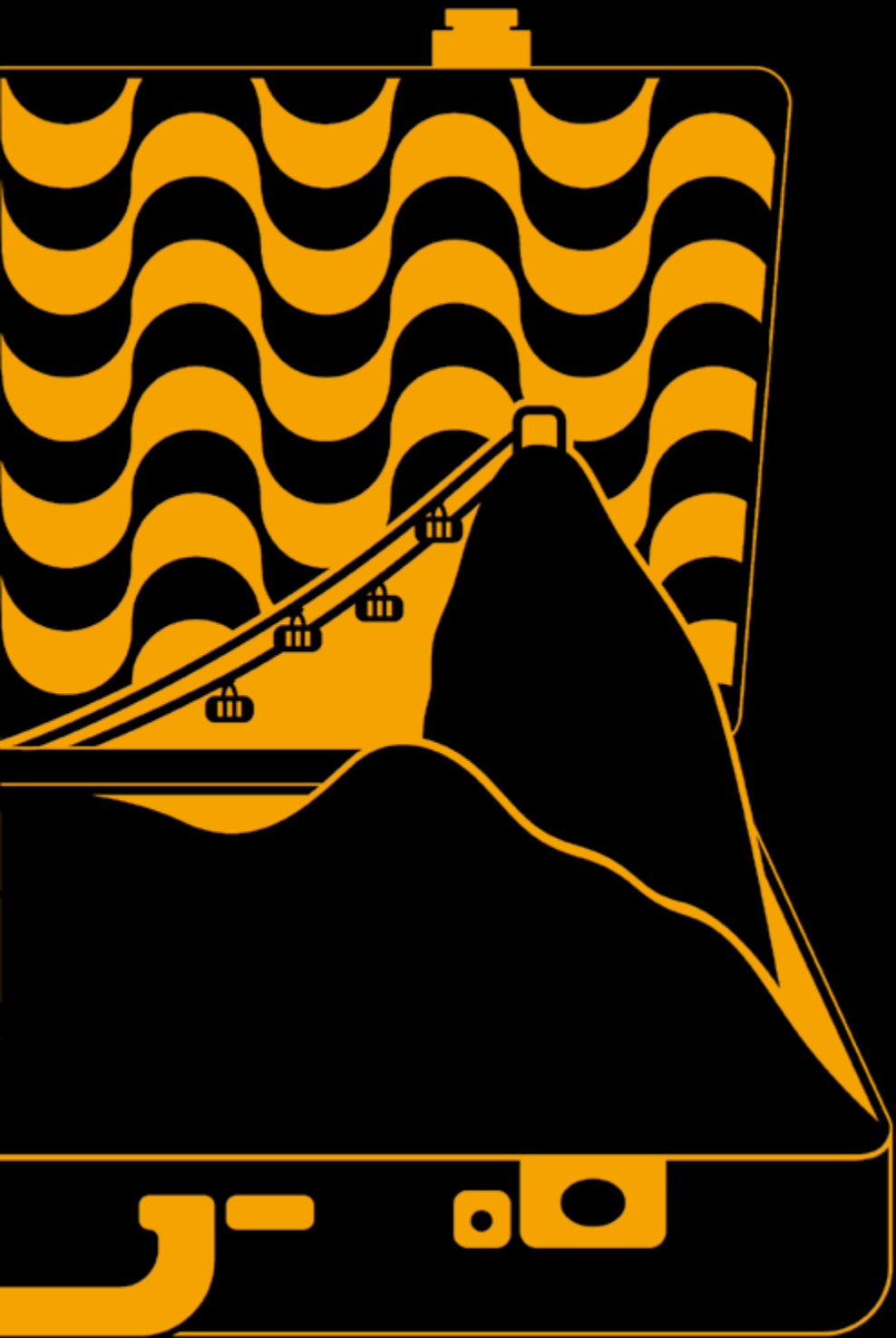
- Well, take the bag. - Mr. Fogg handed the bag to Palacios.

- Careful with that - Mr. Fogg added.

The boss and his assistant made their way down and locked the apartment door with two spins of the key. In the building's parking lot, Phileas Fogg and Lionel Palacios climbed onto an SUV to start their long journey.

Their first stop was for a tire swap. Fogg, knowledgeable of the subject, equipped his SUV with UltraContact tires offered by Continental, with a durability that is far longer than average. The promise of 80,000 kilometers could only be fulfilled with this tire-shaped technological commitment.





When leaving the tire shop, right at the first light, a beggar with child in hand, naked feet to the sidewalk, wearing an old, ragged cap, a scruffy scarf on the shoulders, approached Fogg and asked him for change.

Fogg took a hundred-real bill from his pocket and giving it to the poor woman, said:

– Take it, my dear, I am glad to help you!

He then moved forward.

Palacios felt his eyes go moist. His boss had just won his heart over.

After that, he went to Clube Auto Paulistano. His five colleagues came to say goodbye and witness the start of the adventure.

– My friends, I am leaving – he said – and the electronic records of border control outputs will allow us to check my steps after the fact.

– Dearest Fogg – politely replied Gabriel Ramos –, that won't be necessary. We trust your gentleman's words!

– That's better – said Fogg.

– Don't forget to come back after completing the 80,000 kilometers – noted André Silva.

– Surely – replied Fogg –, and I'll be back before you even

manage to miss me. See you then, gentlemen.

At twenty-to-eight o'clock, Phileas Fogg and his assistant sped through Ayrton Senna, Carvalho Pinto, and Via Dutra roads. This route would lead them to Rio de Janeiro, covering the first 500 kilometers of their long journey. Palacios, still stunned, murmured to himself:

– Am I dealing with a genius or a madman? Only time will tell.

The background of the page is a vibrant yellow. It features several black line-art illustrations of hands holding smartphones. Each phone screen displays a globe icon and a social media-style icon (like a speech bubble or a person). The hands are positioned around the top and sides of the page, creating a sense of digital connectivity. The main title 'In Which' is written in a large, bold, black, stylized font, with the 'i' in 'In' being particularly large and decorative. Below it, the subtitle 'A NEW VALUE EMERGES ON SOCIAL MEDIAS IN SÃO PAULO.' is written in a clean, black, sans-serif font. A thin horizontal line separates the subtitle from the chapter title.

In Which

A NEW VALUE EMERGES ON SOCIAL MEDIAS IN SÃO PAULO.

CHAPTER V

Phileas Fogg V, when leaving São Paulo, undoubtedly had no idea of the major repercussion his departure would cause. News of the gamble spread, at first, in Clube Auto Paulistano, and led to a veritable commotion among members of the respectable circle. After the club, this commotion took over social media through posts

and videos by club members, with the agitation taking over São Paulo users and Brazilian media in general.

The “issue of 80,000 kilometers by car” was commented on, discussed, and dissected with such passion and ardor, it’s as if it were a new national subject.

Some took Phileas Fogg's side, others – soon a veritable majority – took a stance against him. This 80,000-kilometer trip, not in theory or in print, but in practice, on a car and using the same tires to the end(*), was not just impossible, but reckless!

The main blogs and news portals stated their opposition to Mr. Fogg. Only a website specializing in automobiles supported him to an extent. Phileas Fogg was usually treated as an eccentric, and his colleagues at Clube Auto Paulistano were looked down upon for taking on the wager, which showed the weakened mental faculties of its author.

Extremely passionate, though logical, articles were published on the matter. Brazil is known for being a hub of everything involving challenges and adventure. Thus, there was not a single internet user, whatever the social stratus, that wouldn't eat up the columns dedicated to the Phileas Fogg affair.

For the first few days, some bolder spirits – particularly women – favored him, particularly after a famous influencer published a video arguing the feasibility of the journey and praising Fogg's spirit of adventure. Some followers dared to say: "Well, well! Ultimately, why not? Stranger things have happened!".

These were mainly the followers of the digital influencer. But soon even he began to falter.

(*)Note: Continental's UltraContact tires.







An extensive article was soon published in a blog run by a travel and automobile expert. He examined the issue from all perspectives and clearly demonstrated the folly of the endeavor. According to this article, all odds were stacked against the traveler: human obstacles, natural obstacles. To succeed in this project, one would have to admit a miraculous concordance of favorable conditions at all stages of the journey – a concordance that did not exist, that could not exist. In Brazilian roads, a relatively minute segment of the full trip, one may usually count on arriving at one’s destination without much hassle. But when spending days to cross South America, weeks to cross North America and Europe, would it be possible to trust the precision of the elements in such problems? What about car accidents, traffic jams, collisions, bad weather, wasn’t all of that stacked against Phileas Fogg? In remote segments, wouldn’t he be exposed to unforeseen circumstances during the trip? Is it that rare that the most robust cars suffer damage? It would take one slashed tire for the planning chain to be irreparably compromised. The article was extensively shared. Nearly every news portal republished the article, and the level of confidence regarding Phileas Fogg decreased significantly.

In the first days after the gentleman’s departure, relevant gambles were connected to the fortune of his endeavor. The world of gambling in Brazil is known to be more intuitive and enthusiastic than elsewhere. Betting is part of the Brazilian temperament. Thus, not only did the several members of Clube Auto Paulistano place sizable bets for or against Phileas Fogg, but the general public entered the fray. Phileas Fogg was registered, like a rally pilot, in a sort of betting stock exchange. It’s as if stock had been dedicated to him, immediately traded in

the São Paulo Stock Exchange. “Phileas Fogg” was procured and offered at fixed price or with a premium. However, five days after his departure, after the travel expert’s article, offers started to decrease. The “Phileas Fogg stock” lost value.

Only one defender remained. It was an older businessman who admired major challenges. The dignified gentleman, who was a fan of great challenges, would have given his fortune to take such a trip, even if it lasted ten years! So, he bet on Phileas Fogg. When others attempted to tell him how unsound the endeavor was, how useless, he would merely reply:

– If it can be done, a Brazilian should be the first to do it!

Such was the state of affairs, with Phileas Fogg supporters becoming increasingly rare. Bets were not taken at odds lower than 150 or 200 to one. Suddenly, less than four days after his departure, a completely unexpected incident prevented further bets from being placed.

On that day, at around nine p.m., an investigator named Alfredo Freitas received an anonymous tip stating the following:

Phileas Fogg suspected of being head smuggler. Follow in his steps. Evidence is likely to be found.

The effects of this tip were immediate in the mind of Alfredo Freitas. The respectable gentleman disappeared and was instead viewed as a smuggling ring boss. His photograph, posted to the Clube Auto Paulistano social media, was examined. On the picture, several features were similar to those of

the man whose description had been provided by the police investigation. Phileas Fogg V's mere existence was shrouded in mystery, what with his isolation, his sudden departure, and it seemed evident that this character, with the pretext of a world trip and basing it on a reckless bet, was attempting to lose the police agents on his tail.

Alfredo Freitas became determined to follow Fogg's every move, with the certainty that, at some point, the alleged smuggler's true identity would surface.



In which

FREITAS, THE DETECTIVE,
BETRAYS A VERY NATURAL
IMPATIENCE.⊗

CHAPTER VI

Phileas Fogg and his assistant continued their path to the Northeast in their 80,000-kilometer journey around the world. After leaving São Paulo, Palacios's enthusiasm with the trip began to grow. This was remarkable, given the only part of Brazil he knew was the capital of São Paulo.

The passage through Rio de Janeiro left Palacios dazzled. He had never visited the Wondrous City, and his eyes shone with excitement when seeing the beauty surrounding him. When passing by the iconic Copacabana Beach, he couldn't contain his admiration.



– Mr. Fogg, this is a truly amazing city! The beaches, Christ the Redeemer, the Sugar Loaf Mountain... I'd never seen anything like it! – exclaimed Palacios.

– Yes, it is an impressive city – Fogg replied, with his usual cool demeanor.

They had lunch at an Arabic restaurant at Lido Square, where Palacios tasted typical dishes while watching passers-by. After that, they saw iconic landmarks in the city, impressed with the contrast between the city, the hills, and the ocean.

– Look, Mr. Fogg, Maracanã stadium! – said Palacios, excited when passing in front of the stadium.

– Yes, the Maracanã...

– Oh, Obdulio Varela! The Uruguayan captain that defeated Brazil in 1950! – Palacios continued, without noticing his boss's mood had changed.

Fogg would rather cut the conversation short, focusing on the trip. After Rio, they headed to Búzios, where the natural beauty and tranquility of the city in an off-season period charmed them. They spent the night. Búzios took them a day. Fogg insisted on presenting kind Lionel to the crystal water beaches, the peninsulas and hiking trails, the charm of Rua das Pedras, which created the international myth of the Brazilian Saint Tropez.

From Búzios, they headed for Vitória, in Espírito Santo. During the trip, the palm trees bent by strong winds in the



Marataízes region caught Palacios's attention. Fogg, however, worried about his bet. Did he do the right thing? He mulled the issue in his mind when noticing the extremely intense traffic of the BR-101 highway, a truck cargo transportation route, leading to a natural wear on the asphalt, which had become irregular in some spots. However, the 422 kilometers between Búzios and Vitória were traversed without much hassle, and they spent a night in Vitória before continuing their journey.

In the morning, on their way to Bahia, they took a break at the dunes of Itaúnas, a beach haven with thin, white sand. The untouched beauty there offered a brief moment of peace before leaving Espírito Santo.

Trancoso welcomed them with impressive cliffs and the magic of the Square, a broad plaza surrounded by colored houses and a historical church in the back. Palacios was charmed by Bahia and its natural wonders, while Fogg remained focused on the goal.

While the pair moved forward, the detective Alfredo Freitas began to act. He was a man of average height, slim build, with a very intelligent and agitated demeanor. His eyes glistened behind long eyelashes with a calculated intensity. His left eyebrow had a fault resulting from a small scar. Freitas was one of those people who contracted their brow with persistence, especially when impatient. Impatience was precisely what he felt when receiving that anonymous tip that would change the course of his next months and that was beating inside his head.

Freitas was one of these restless detectives, known for their detail-observation skills and for following nearly invisible



leads. The news that Fogg could be the head of a contraband network profoundly shocked his system. He was determined not to let Fogg escape. He knew Brazil was a vast country, but he had faith in his own skills.

Freitas used his contact network to set a trap. He found out that Fogg was on his way to Salvador, so he orchestrated a police checkpoint on BR-101, in an attempt to delay the pair and check for any irregularities that could compromise Fogg.

Near Salvador, Fogg's SUV was flagged over for questioning by a road police officer.

– Papers, please – the serious officer asked.

Fogg, ever the meticulous fellow, handed over all documents pertaining to the vehicle and himself. The policeman, following Freitas's instructions, thoroughly inspected the car, checking tires, the trunk and the inside of the vehicle.

Palacios, though curious, felt at ease. He was confident that Fogg was prepared.

– Everything is in order, Mr. Fogg – said the policeman after an extensive inspection. – You are good to go.

– Thank you, officer – Fogg replied, returning to the road with his usual tranquility.

The checkpoint had delayed the pair for nearly an hour, but Fogg didn't let small setbacks get him down. They continued to Salvador, where they would stay for as long as they needed to enjoy the city.



which


PALACIOS WISHED THREE TIMES FOR THE TRIP TO BE A SUCCESS.

CHAPTER VII

Phileas Fogg and Palacios arrived in Salvador.

The vibrant capital of Bahia displayed a kaleidoscope of colors and cultures, with religious syncretism manifesting in the merger of catholic and Afro-Brazilian traditions. Colonial architecture, with baroque churches and century-old homes, was in harmonious contrast

with the modern city buildings. The contagious sound of axé and samba de roda echoed through the streets, while the tempting scents of acarajé, vatapá and moqueca rose from food tents, inviting locals and visitors to delight in these delicacies. Salvador was, without a doubt, a place where history, faith, music and cooking melded in an endless celebration of life, culture and religious



syncretism. Fogg, ever the methodical man, immediately went to the famous Church of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim, while Palacios stayed beside him, charmed by the colors and vibration of the city.

When entering the church, Fogg noticed the baroque architecture, while Palacios was drawn to the colorful ribbons that decorated grates in the sanctum:

– Mr. Fogg, what are these ribbons? – Palacios asked, curious.

– These are Senhor do Bonfim ribbons. They say that, when tying one of these ribbons to your wrist and tying three knots, you are supposed to make a wish for each knot. When the ribbon wears off and falls out naturally, your wishes come true – explained Fogg, with his usual calm tone.

– Interesting... Can I tie one on myself, Mr. Fogg? – asked Palacios, eyes glistening with anticipation.

– Sure, Palacios. Make your wishes. – Fogg consented, nodding.

Palacios chose a blue ribbon and, while tying it to his wrist, ardently whispered his three wishes.

– First knot: I wish that our 80,000-kilometer trip is a success and that we can complete it without issue. – Palacios tied the first knot with determination.

– Second knot: I wish that Mr. Fogg can prove his Memento of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim wager and win the challenge, showing





Lembrança do Senhor do Bonfim

Lembrança do Senhor do

Bonfim



everyone he is a true gentleman. – Palacios tied the second knot, looking at Fogg with admiration.

– Third knot: I wish that I may be essential to the success of this journey. – Palacios finished the third knot with a dreamlike smile.

Fogg, noticing how serious Palacios was making his wishes, drew a discreet smile, which was rare in his ever calm and controlled demeanor.

– Let’s go, Palacios, there is a long way ahead of us – said Fogg, placing a hand on his assistant’s shoulder.

While leaving the church, Palacios looked at the ribbon on his wrist with hope, feeling renewed and confident. Fogg, in turn, kept his gaze firm and steady, determined to move forward with his journey and prove to everyone that his challenge was possible.

The city of Salvador, with streets filled with history and tradition, became a memorable stage in the long trip both adventurers still had ahead of them. Each moment, each wish, all strengthened the friendship and mutual respect between Fogg and Palacios.

The trip would move forward to the Northeast and capital cities were left behind: Aracaju, Maceió, Recife, João Pessoa, and Natal. At each city, memories were earned of the beautiful Brazilian coast, its landscapes, people, and culture.


Meanwhile, Freitas, disappointed with the failure in his

first attempt to find a suspicious item in Fogg's car, planned for his next steps. He knew he'd have to be more cunning so as to not blow his cover and remain ahead of the duo.

The silent pursuit continued, and each new kilometer increased Freitas's determination to unveil Fogg's secrets. Brazil became the stage for a journey fraught with challenges, beauty, and mystery, in which each new kilometer revealed new adventures and obstacles.




IN WHICH



PALACIOS TALKS RATHER MORE, PERHAPS, THAN IS PRUDENT. ⊕

CHAPTER VIII



On Sunday, October 13, 2024, Alfredo Freitas, a resolute investigator, was alert in the city of Fortaleza. He had followed an important lead regarding Phileas Fogg V's itinerary. Fogg's trip had set social media on fire and Freitas was set on following him closely, believing he could unveil a smuggling network.

With his penetrating gaze and natural patience, Freitas awaited information on Fogg's whereabouts. After the anonymous tip, he traced Fogg's movements since Rio de Janeiro, going through Búzios, Vitória, Trancoso, and Salvador. His



Salvador

Fortaleza

Rio

latest intel stated that Fogg was on his way to Fortaleza.

When arriving at Fortaleza, Freitas went through the main tourist sites and hot spots in the city. He knew he had to act discreetly so as not to raise suspicion. During his search, he found that a crafts fair on Atlântica Avenue was a popular location among tourists.

At night, Freitas went to the fair. He would carefully examine each new male face appearing in the crowd. Among the craft tents and sellers, he noticed one with similar features to the 5x7 photo he had received from the Federal Police taken from the passport of Uruguayan Lionel Palacios, at that time, entertained with a souvenir stand.

Freitas approached carefully, attempting to seem like an ordinary tourist. He knew he had to start a conversation without raising suspicion. He got closer to Palacios, who examined a shell necklace.

– Good evening, friend! Nice necklace, don't you think? – said Freitas, with a friendly smile.

Palacios, startled by the approach, replied politely:

– Yes, it is quite beautiful. The craftspeople here are supremely talented.

Freitas, still using a casual tone, continued:

– I can hear your Latino accent. It seems like you are far from home and that you can appreciate a good adventure. Are

you here on business or pleasure?

Palacios, still suspicious and unable to divert his eyes from the visible scar on the man's eyebrow, replied with a strained smile:

– We are on a long journey. My boss has an adventurous spirit.

Freitas, seizing the opportunity, insisted:

– This must be fascinating! Where are you going now?

– We'll drive to Belém – answered Palacios, refraining from giving too much detail.

– Interesting, very interesting... – Freitas muttered. – And does this trip have any special purpose?

Palacios hesitantly mentioned that it was a wager between friends. Freitas smiled but, inside, he was more resolute than ever to follow Fogg's every move.

After their brief conversation, Freitas decided he had to stick around, but without being noticed. He knew he couldn't drive all along without raising suspicion. He planned on swapping between cars and planes, depending on the situation. He couldn't risk having Fogg go out of sight.

Fogg's trip moved forward. After Fortaleza, Fogg and Palacios went towards the North region, going through picturesque towns and challenging roads. Between Fortaleza and Belém

lie the Lençóis Maranhenses, a unique landscape that could not be missed, according to Fogg. However, he was rightfully concerned with the intense heat, the faulty roads, and the long distances testing the strength of his tires.

– Never mind – Fogg whispered to himself, thinking of how the UltraContact tires were the safe, reliable choice.

Freitas, always around, watched closely. He kept enough distance not to be detected but was close enough to intervene if needed. His mission was clear: to find the truth about Fogg and his alleged involvement with smuggling.

In Fortaleza, Fogg and Palacios stayed at a hotel on Beira Mar Avenue. Freitas, in turn, opted for a discreet hotel in the surrounding area. He knew the next stage of the journey would be crucial and was ready for anything that could happen.

Phileas Fogg V, ignoring Freitas's constant shadow, kept focused on the trip. Each additional kilometer was another step to win the wager and prove to all that one could complete 80,000 kilometers around the world with the same set of tires. Palacios, in turn, began to understand the scope of the challenge and became further admired with his boss's resolution.

The encounter between Freitas and Palacios at the Beira Mar Crafts fair established a new stage in this silent pursuit. At every city, at every road, Freitas would be there, watching, waiting for the right moment to act.


In which

THE NORTHEAST COASTLINE AND THE AMAZON PROVE PROFITIOUS TO THE DESIGNS OF PHILEAS FOGG V.

CHAPTER IX

At seven o'clock sharp on Monday, October 14th, after a hearty breakfast, Fogg throttled his SUV towards the Lençóis Maranhenses park. It was a 650-kilometer drive to Barreirinhas, a small city with barely over 60,000 inhabitants, but with the most local structure.

This part of the journey would be the start of a series of unforgettable landscapes, beach havens, coconut trees, preserved nature, red Ibis flocks, and even river-based communities on the



delta of the Parnaíba river. Local cuisine, with shrimp and crab-based dishes, would also be a source of wonder in the travelers' tastebuds.

Leaving behind the hustle and bustle of Fortaleza, they went due West, entering Piauí, where constant winds turned the coast into a kitesurf heaven.

– Look, Mr. Fogg! – Palacios exclaimed, pointing to the colored kites that tinted the blue sky. – I had never seen anything like it! These sportsmen seem to fly above the waters!


– It is impressive, Palacios – Fogg replied, with a cool demeanor while driving.

Each kite was attached to a kite surfer, pulling them through soft curves and acrobatic jumps. The combination of wind, waves and kites created a fascinating scene, as if the sea were full of giant, multicolored butterflies.

They arrived at Barreirinhas, one of the ports of entry of Lençóis Maranhenses, near sunset. They rested and found out that, in October, lagoons near this city are no longer in their most beautiful state.

The next morning, the SUV continued traveling to the small town of Santo Amaro, nearest to the lagoons.

The Lençóis Maranhenses are a unique landscape in global terms, and one of the most impressive natural phenomena in Brazil. Over 1,500 square kilometers of white sand dunes are interspersed with crystalline turquoise blue lagoons, caused



by the buildup of rainwater from February through May.

– Mr. Fogg, these dunes look like a desert, only with an oasis! – Palacios mentioned, bewildered by the sights. – Thousands of oases!

– It is a unique phenomenon, Palacios. The rain fills out the crevasses between the dunes, forming these lagoons that disappear in the dry season – explained Fogg, demonstrating his encyclopedic knowledge.

Fogg was wary of traveling in this region. He feared that the wind could throw plenty of sand onto the asphalt and cause an accident. However, with his caution and skill, it all went according to plan.

They left early from Santo Amaro, going through São Luís and making way to the ferry that shortened the road path to Belém do Pará. They lost over an hour and a half in the journey. The road from there was like a minefield. Segments in good condition alternated with others ridden with potholes. There was intense truck traffic, often taking over the middle of the road to avoid potholes. The sight of donkeys was not unusual. All this combined with the intense sun made Phileas Fogg V think of a strategic stop so as not to drive at night. They chose a small hotel at Boa Vista do Gurupi that was 500 meters away from the bridge on the Gurupi River, at the border between Maranhão and Pará. They left the next morning to traverse the nearly 300 kilometers missing until Belém.

BR-316, near Belém, is predominantly surrounded by the Amazon Rainforest. Right beside the road, one can see dense,

tall and biodiverse vegetation. Tall trees like chestnut trees, Pará rubber trees and several types of palm trees could be seen.

– Mr. Fogg, we are truly entering the Amazon! – Palacios exclaimed, fascinated with the change in landscape.

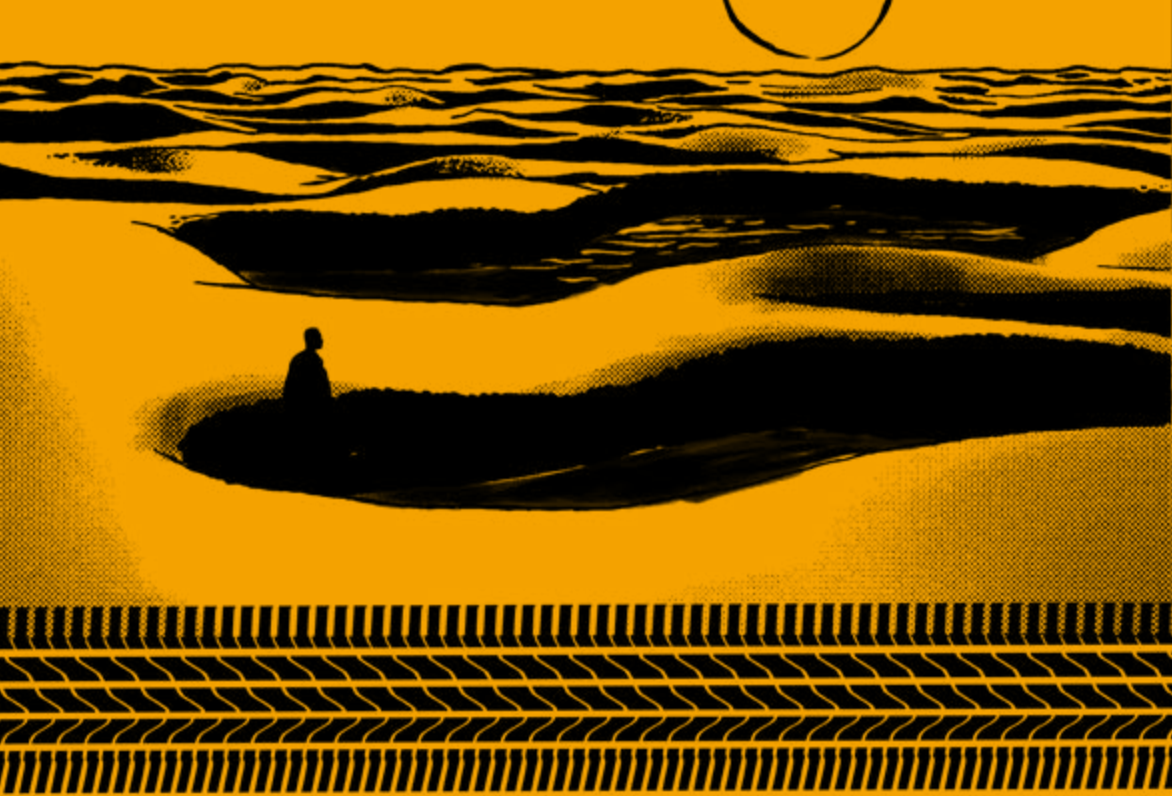
– Yes, Palacios. This is one of the wealthiest regions in the world in terms of biodiversity – replied Fogg, with a rare tinge of enthusiasm to his calm voice.

Finally, when arriving at Belém, they were greeted with the exuberance of the amazonian city. Belém, with its century-old rubber trees and humid climate, was a city rich in culture and history. The first stop was the Ver-o-Peso market. Its iron structure was built in 1899, with Art Nouveau-style towers covered in zinc scales. The architectural and landscape complex is 25,000 square meters large, with a series of historical buildings, such as Boulevard Castilhos França, the Meat Market and the Fish Market, the casario, the Clock and Dom Pedro II plazas, the vessel dock, the Açaí Fair and Ladeira do Castelo. Ver-o-Peso, at the vessel dock, has a specific characteristic: vultures drawn by fish guts in trashcans out in the open. In a sense, these birds provide a cleaning service to the market.

– This market is amazing, Mr. Fogg! – said Palacios while exploring Ver-o-Peso. – So many different scents and flavors!

– Yes, it is a true sample of the cultural and natural wealth of the region – Fogg agreed, carefully observing the tents.

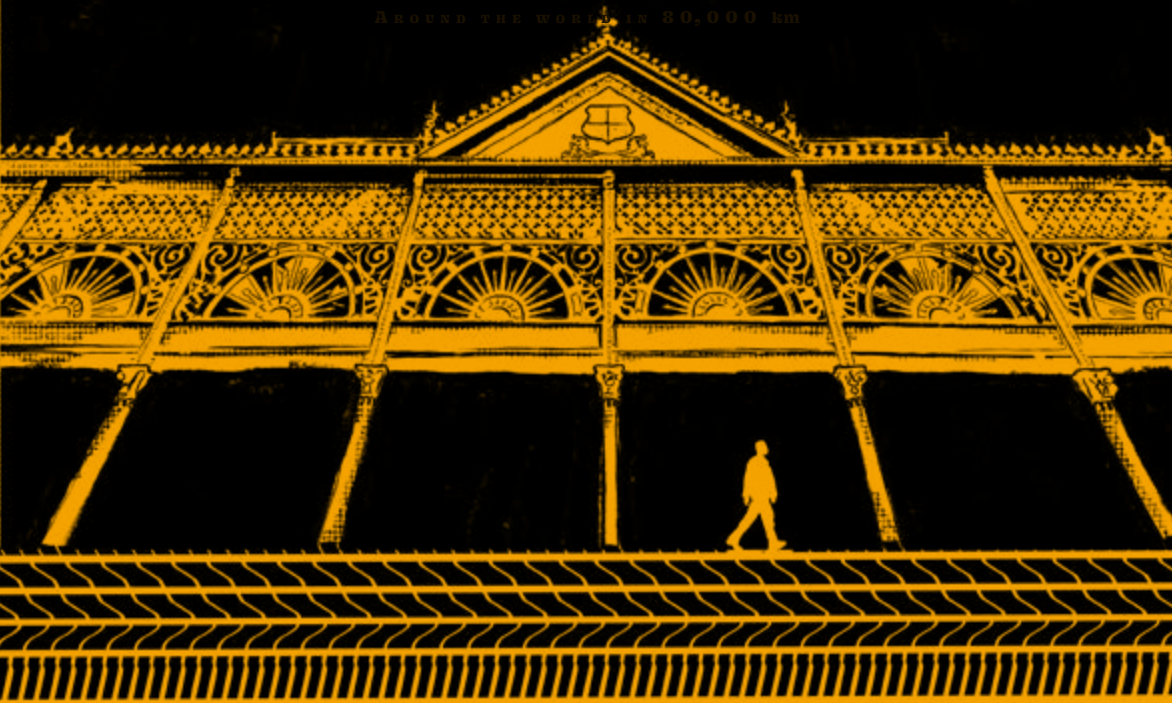
They walked through the crafts tents of the market, where Palacios was particularly charmed by the wooden sculptures of



Marajó Island buffalo. They walked to the modern Dock Station, but had to beat the rain, which began to fall at five o'clock. At the start of the night, they visited the imposing Teatro da Paz and were delighted by the architecture, the painting on the ceiling, and the curtains.

Belém brought a surprise: they arrived there merely four days after the procession of Círio de Nazaré, the largest religious festivity in Brazil, and they had the opportunity of meeting Pará faith when visiting the image of Our Lady of Nazareth at the Santuário de Nazaré Square.

They booked another day of rest in the city before moving forward, cleverly using it in Combu Island. This environmental protection area separated from Belém by the width of the



Amazon River, similar to a sea, can only be accessed by boat. There, in addition to delicious Pará cuisine, one may ride igarapés, visit restaurants on stilts and feel inside the Amazon vegetation. It was there that Palacios, when seeing a 60-meter-tall Kapok tree, noted:

– Mr. Fogg, I am adding a new term to my vocabulary: amazonian dimensions. Here, trees look like buildings and the river looks like the sea!

The 5,380 kilometers up to then were proof of the resistance of the tires (*) and the unwavering resolve of Fogg. Belém was the end of a significant stage of the trip, but there were nearly 75,000 kilometers awaiting the pair.

Meanwhile, resolute Alfredo Freitas continued to sniff out the pair. His first attempt to stop Fogg failed, but he was far from giving up.

– I need to find out more about these two’s whereabouts – Freitas muttered, planning his next steps. And he was in constant contact with the Road Police to figure out through which roads Fogg’s SUV went.

Fogg, unaware of the pursuit, focused on his journey. Each new kilometer was another step towards winning the bet and proving to everyone that the challenge could be met.

– Our next destination is Brasília, Palacios – Fogg announced, while preparing to leave Belém.

– I am ready, Mr. Fogg – replied Palacios, determined to continue the epic adventure with his boss.





Which

FREITAS TRIES NOT TO BLOW HIS COVER AND PHILEAS AND PALACIOS TRAVEL THROUGH THE CENTER OF BRAZIL.⊗

CHAPTER X

The nearly two thousand kilometers between Belém and Brasília were surpassed in three intense days on the road, with stops to sleep in Imperatriz and Palmas. In Palmas, Fogg even thought of seeing the Jalapão, but that would be too big of a deviation, and he would rather not leave the route the next morning.

After a brief stop in Brasília, where they rested up and explored a few tourist spots of the federal capital, such as the Ministry Esplanade and the Metropolitan Cathedral, Phileas Fogg and Lionel Palacios resumed their trip. The next stage would lead them to Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais.

During the trajectory, Palacios, ever the curious fellow, admired the landscapes unfolding in front of him.

– Mr. Fogg, these mountains are magnificent! – explained Palacios while the SUV slid through the winding Minas Gerais roads.

When arriving in Belo Horizonte, they planned to just spend the night and the next morning in the city to rest and replenish. Fogg, ever meticulous, chose a hotel near downtown, enabling easy access to the main exit pathways.

While Phileas Fogg checked the details in the car, Palacios used his time to explore the city further. Walking through the busy streets, he admired the modern architecture and the beautiful Praça da Liberdade. He also went to the Center Market, where he became enchanted with the variety of products and flavors. He called his boss, let him know of his whereabouts, and Fogg went to meet him so they could have a typical Minas Gerais dish before hitting the road.

– Mr. Fogg, this is a charming city!

– Undoubtedly, Palacios. But we must move forward. Our goal is to cover the longest possible distance today – replied Fogg, without deviating his focus from the journey.

Meanwhile, investigator Alfredo Freitas, who followed them discreetly, decided not to blow his cover. He remained in constant contact with the Road Police to monitor Fogg's movements. He knew that any mistake could compromise his mission of uncovering the truth about Fogg's alleged

involvement with smuggling.

Upon leaving Belo Horizonte, Fogg was headed for Buenos Aires, with several stops scheduled along the way. The mountains of Minas Gerais gave way to the instagrammable landscapes at the roadside in the Capitólio and Furnas regions, with Rio Grande waters running beside the asphalt. At each kilometer, Fogg's resolve and Palacios's enthusiasm grew.

They spent the night in Ribeirão Preto, and then Maringá, and continued their trip to Foz do Iguazu, where the majestic National Iguazu Park awaited them with its famous Cataracts. The sight of the gigantic waterfalls stunned Palacios.

– Mr. Fogg, these Cataracts are a natural wonder! – exclaimed Palacios, delighted with the sight. – Its dimensions are amazonian.

– I agree, Palacios. This is one of the most impressive sights we've seen so far – replied Fogg.

From Foz do Iguazu, they continued through Ruta Nacional 12 and 14, entering Argentina and going through the Misiones province. There, they saw the ruins of the famous “Misiones Jesuíticas”, near the cities of San Ignacio, Candelaria, Concepción, Santa Ana and Loreto. The ruins, bearing witness to a colonial, missionary past, impressed the pair.

– Mr. Fogg, these ruins are fascinating. The history that they carry is palpable – commented Palacios while walking among the ancient buildings.

– You’re right, Palacios. We must know and respect the history of the places we go through – replied Fogg, with his usual pondered tone.

The next day, a surprise occurred that would make Palacios believe he had the best boss in the world. Holding the secret until the last minute, Fogg continued until a road sign informed them: they were 50 kilometers away from Uruguaiana.

Yes, this was the city where Palacios lived as a child. Fogg planned to continue to Buenos Aires passing by the spot that would be the emotional climax of the trip for his assistant. When entering the city, Palacios couldn’t hold his emotions any longer.

– Mr. Fogg, when I was a child, I used to play soccer in that little field! – said Palacios, pointing to a soccer field that persisted with downtrodden grass. – It was always me and my cousin, Ariel. We’d play every day. Now he’s an airplane pilot, but I haven’t seen him for a long time. I’m glad to pass by and remember.

– It’s good to see you have good memories here, Palacios. These memories are precious – Fogg replied with a rare smile.

Fogg found a hotel and gave Palacios permission to quench his homesickness. They’d leave the next morning for Buenos Aires.

The cosmopolitan city of Buenos Aires, known for its European architecture and immense gardens, welcomed them with intense traffic. Fogg and Palacios took the opportunity



to explore tourist spots such as the Obelisk, the Casa Rosada and the famous neighborhood of San Telmo.

– Mr. Fogg, Buenos Aires is a vibrant city! – Palacios exclaimed while strolling through the busy streets.

– Yes, Palacios. It is a city with a wealth of culture and history. Let's enjoy our time here before moving forward – Fogg replied, keeping his eyes on the next destination. – But first, let's eat the best parrilla in the world.

RUÍNAS DA MISSÃO DE
SAN IGNACIO MINI
FUNDADA EM 1610
POR JESUÍTAS NO NORTE
DO PARANÁ. RE-FUNDADA
EM 1632 POR JESUÍTAS
NA ARGENTINA
CONSTRUÍDA NO ESTILO
BARROCO GUARANÍ, É
O MAIS BELLO EXEMPLO
DAS 30 MISSÕES CONSTRUÍDAS
PELOS JESUÍTAS NA
ARGENTINA, BRASIL E PARAGUAI.



In which

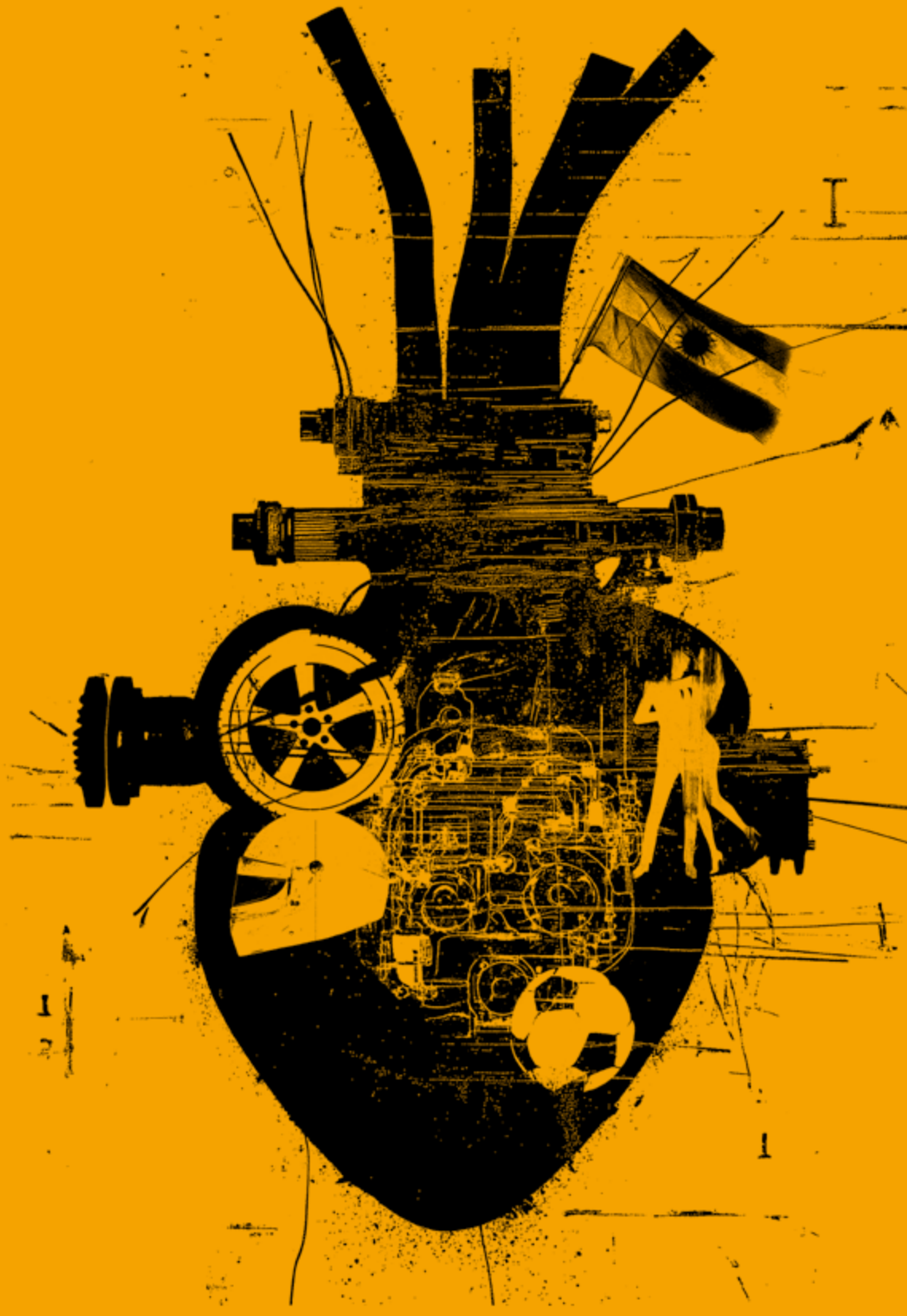
FOGG AND PALACIOS FACE MECHANICAL PROBLEMS IN BUENOS AIRES. ☼

CHAPTER XI

Thursday, October 31st, greeted them with a warning sign: a light lit up on the SUV dashboard, something that the meticulous Fogg could not ignore.

– Mr. Fogg, it seems like we have a problem – said Palacios, staring at the dashboard with a concerned look.

– Yes, Palacios. Today is Halloween and it seems like witches are abound. We likely need an oil change. We’ve driven for 900 kilometers more than what is recommended without changing the oil



– Let’s find a mechanic immediately – answered Fogg, keeping his usual cool.

Arriving at a renowned workshop in the Palermo neighborhood, they were greeted by a seasoned mechanic who immediately diagnosed the issue.

– We need an oil change and full service. The engine could withstand major damage if we don’t take care of this right now – the mechanic explained with a stern face.

Fogg stared at the workshop carefully. The wall was covered with posters by Juan Manuel Fangio and Carlos Reutemann, alongside several Boca Juniors posters. However, Fogg couldn’t take his eyes off a Kaiser Carabela 1961, perhaps the most iconic automobile ever produced in the country, with its 5.47 meters in length. A well-dressed man appearing to be 50 years old stood beside the car. Fogg figured he was the owner.

– t’s a beauty, don’t you think? – said the owner of the automobile in Spanish. – Hernán Sosa! Pleased to meet you.

– Phileas Fogg!

A sincere handshake followed. Fogg continued:

– It is a true relic. The Argentinean enthusiasm for classical cars is impressive.

– We are a passionate people! Not just for cars – said Sosa, proudly pointing to the posters on the wall.

– We love our racing pilots here. Fangio, Reutemann... true legends!

– Fangio is known worldwide - completed Fogg. - You are hugely proud of your sportsmen, they are like gods, from what I know. And so many Boca Juniors posters... soccer is another national passion, right?

– Absolutely! - said Sosa. - Nothing compares to the thrill of a good soccer match. And we have Boca and River today, the greatest rivalry match of all! Are you a soccer fan, Phileas?

– I descend from the British, born and raised in Brazil. That should answer it! However, I never had the chance to watch an Argentinean derby live.

An excited Sosa replied:

– Well, you're in luck! As someone of English descent, I'd like to give back to you for what "La Mano de Dios" did to you in 1986. I have a ticket left for tonight's match. Would you like to go?

– Really? That would be amazing! It would be a privilege to watch the biggest Argentine derby inside the Bombonera.

That evening, after taking the SUV out for full service, Phileas Fogg met Hernán Sosa at the agreed spot, and they walked to the stadium. The arrival at the Bombonera impressed Fogg. Caminito, a street with blue and yellow walls that leads to the stadium, is like a living, breathing

organism. Houses with colored windows, statues of former idols from Boca Juniors, bars from where one could hear the tango. "I'm living through an anthropological experience", thought Fogg.

During the game, the Boca Juniors fans didn't stop chanting for a single moment. Hernán Sosa asked Fogg if he was familiar with Argentine cinema.

Fogg replied:

– The whole world knows it! In fact, one of the best Argentine films of all time portrays the Argentine passion for soccer that few others have.

While Phileas Fogg was at the stadium, Palacios took advantage of his free time to explore Buenos Aires. At the San Telmo Market, he bought new supplies and tried local delicacies.

Back at the stadium, Fogg was still immersed in the game. The exciting plays and the energy of the fans made for an unforgettable experience.

– Football is a real passion here, Phileas. I've never seen anything like it! – Sosa exclaimed, as he watched his new friend's enthusiastic reaction.

After the game, they stopped at a pizzeria and Fogg was dropped off by Sosa at the door to his hotel. Although he didn't realize it, he was being watched from across the street.

Freitas, always on the lookout, discovered that they would arrive in Buenos Aires and obtained the address of where they were staying. And began following the pair from a distance, without being noticed. He knew that any hasty movement could jeopardize his mission. Determined to discover the truth about Fogg, he kept his constant vigilance.

– I must be careful. They can't suspect anything, – he muttered to himself.

Fogg and Palacios were ready to continue their journey. With new supplies on board the car, which had already been serviced, with alignment and balancing up to date, they checked, of course, the tires(*), the subject of the big bet. The tires were only inflated to keep them in perfect condition, as the manufacturer's instructions recommend. Buenos Aires had been a stop that could be summed up in one word: passion. Now, with the vehicle in perfect condition, they would head towards their next destination.

– Ready to continue, Palacios? – Fogg asked, as he started the car.

– Always, Mr. Fogg. Let's go! – Palacios replied, with a confident smile.

(*)Note: Continental UltraContact tires.

Winnick

FOGG AND PALACIOS FACE CHALLENGES ON THE ROAD TO EL CALAFATE.

CHAPTER XII

After the car was serviced, Fogg and Palacios left Buenos Aires on the morning of November 1, with the SUV's engine humming smoothly after an oil change and a full overhaul. The Argentine capital was behind them, giving way to the vast landscapes of Ruta Nacional 3, a road that would take them to El Calafate, in Argentine Patagonia. An endeavor that would require, according to the GPS, 32 hours to cover the 2,750-kilometer distance.

The first few hours of the trip made Palacios uncomfortable with the straight line that stretched to the horizon,



with an unchanging landscape. To control his assistant's impatience, Fogg noted:

- Patagonia is known for its vast plains and stunning landscapes, Palacios. We have a long journey ahead of us.
- And he kept his gaze fixed on the road.

Fogg realized that it would be better to divide the journey into five days. He did not consider it healthy to drive more than eight hours a day. The first stop was Bahía Blanca, a stretch that took seven and a half hours, with a pit stop in Azul to fill up the car “until the automatic stop,” as Fogg liked to emphasize, as well as their stomach.

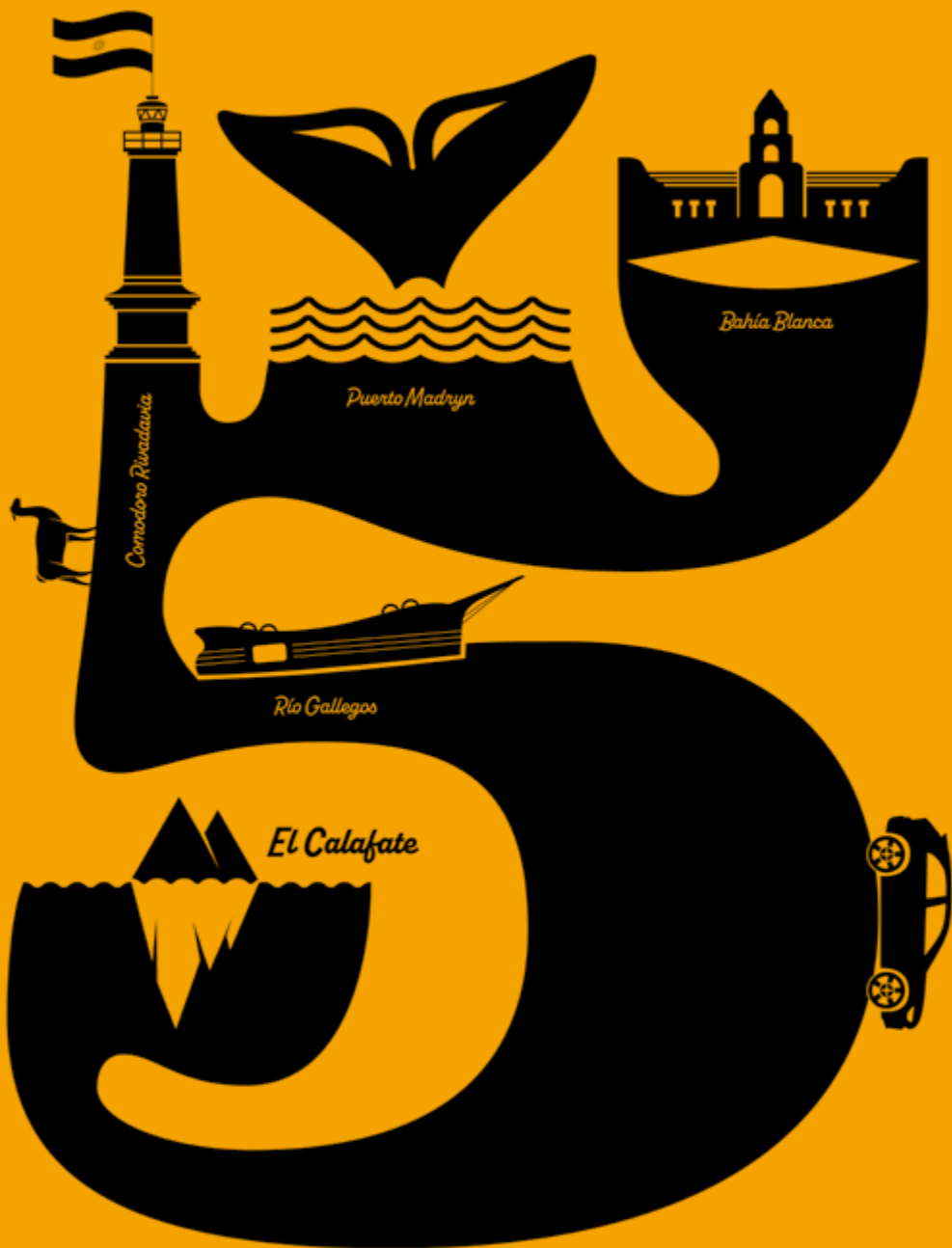
Bahía Blanca was not at all touristy, but it offered a good place to rest, have dinner, sleep and continue the journey.

The next morning, they left at sunrise for Puerto Madryn, arriving around two in the afternoon. Fogg, an animal enthusiast, knew that this was the time to see the majestic southern right whale in its natural environment. They took the dirt road to El Doradillo Beach, and Palacios looked like a wildlife photographer capturing the magnificent cetacean's leaps on his cell phone.

On the third day, they spent the night in Comodoro Rivadavia. From there, it was another 800 kilometers to Río Gallegos, on stretches with few gas stations, no shoulder and asphalt interspersed with gravel. Everything was a challenge for the car, for the tires(*) and also for.

Note: Continental UltraContact tires.

2,750 KM



ARGENTINA

Fogg and Palacios, because the arid plain landscape was tiresome. They were happy to see some guanacos on the road. But it was a dangerous joy, because they could cross the road.

They arrived at Río Gallegos in the late afternoon, taking the opportunity to rest before the last stretch to El Calafate.

The last 300 kilometers that separated them from El Calafate were covered the following morning. Vast plains and mountains in the distance partially covered in snow created a dreamlike landscape.

When they arrived in El Calafate, they were greeted by Alejandro, a friendly local guide, whom Fogg had contacted while still in Comodoro Rivadavia, recommended for his in-depth knowledge of the region.

– Welcome to El Calafate, gentlemen! – greeted Alejandro, with a warm smile. – I hope you are ready to explore the wonders of Patagonia.

– We are looking forward to seeing the Perito Moreno Glacier and the beauty of the region, Alejandro – Fogg replied, shaking the guide's hand.

– Excellent! Let's start now after lunch and continue early tomorrow morning. There is so much to see and experience – Alejandro said enthusiastically.

The next day, Alejandro took them to the famous Perito Moreno Glacier. The immense block of ice, with its blue hues and majestic formations left Fogg and Palacios in awe. The guide explained details about the formation of glaciers and the importance of the glacier for the region.

Almost the three days in El Calafate were full of adventures and discoveries. Fogg and Palacios took advantage of every moment to explore the region, sailing across Lago Argentino to the Upsala and Spegazzini glaciers, where Alejandro showed off his in-depth knowledge of the geology and history of Patagonia.

Despite the challenges faced on the road and the adverse weather conditions, Fogg and Palacios felt invigorated by the experience in El Calafate. They would continue. Freitas, the shadow that discreetly stalked the pair, would also continue. Freitas hired a driver, lost the pair halfway, sensed that El Calafate could be their destination, got there and his detective instinct was right.

– The journey is full of mysteries, but I will still discover the truth about Phileas Fogg V – he thought aloud, while taking detailed notes on each movement of the pair.

AROUND THE WORLD IN 30,000 km





FOGG AND PALACIOS FACE THE **ANDES** GOING TOWARD SANTIAGO.

CHAPTER XIII

They woke up early that November 8 in El Calafate. The morning chill, with its 2°C, made the steam from their breath seem like fog. After a last breakfast with Alejandro, Fogg and Palacios said goodbye. Alejandro gave some final instructions about the roads and the necessary precautions for the journey to Santiago.

– Good luck, gentlemen. Be careful on the roads, especially with the strong Patagonian wind, – he advised with a warm smile.

– And remember, the landscape is stunning, but also treacherous.

– Thank you, Alejandro. Your guidance made El Calafate unforgettable. We hope to return one day, – Fogg said, shaking his guide’s hand.

Palacios also said goodbye, thanking him for all the experiences he had.

With the SUV fueled up, Fogg and Palacios headed along Ruta Nacional 40 toward Chile. The strong wind rocked the car slightly, but Fogg’s skill behind the wheel kept the road steady. The vast desert landscape of Patagonia stretched as far as the eye could see, with mountains in the distance. There was that feeling of fulfillment, of control, when you look ahead and in the rearview mirror and see no cars, only the road. The only living souls they encountered in some stretches were the occasional guanacos crossing the road.

The first leg of the trip was uneventful. After eight hours, they arrived in the small town of Perito Moreno. Simple and welcoming, it offered the necessary rest to continue the next day.

They left early, continuing along the RN-40. The second day would take them to Esquel, a charming city located at the foot of the Andes Mountains. The trip was marked by breathtaking landscapes, with majestic mountains and crystal-clear lakes.

Palacios was watching the Andes Mountains attentively

and how they seemed to touch the sky. It amused Fogg when he said that these mountain ranges had amazonian dimensions.

– The grandeur of nature is something that always impresses me, Palacios, – Fogg replied.

After a peaceful night in Esquel, they headed towards Bariloche. Four enchanting hours passing through larch forests and turquoise lakes. They arrived in Bariloche before noon, with the city offering a breathtaking view of Lake Nahuel Huapi.

– It looks like a city straight out of a fairy tale, – Palacios commented, enchanted.

– It really is a special place. Let’s have lunch here and then continue our journey – Fogg replied.

Well-fed after a delicious lamb dish, a very typical dish of the region, and with the car fueled up, they headed to Osorno, Chile. They arrived at dusk on a very clear day that allowed them to see the region's postcard: the imposing Osorno Volcano, with its snow-capped peak. Seeing that perfect conical silhouette cutting through the sky with natural elegance inspires admiration and reverence. Located near the shores of Lake Llanquihue, Osorno is often compared to Mount Fuji for the symmetry of its shape and the iconic beauty it exudes.

– Mr. Fogg, the volcano is quite a sight. It looks like a guardian of this region, – commented Palacios, enchanted by the view.



The next day, they continued along the Pan-American Highway to Chillán, 400 kilometers from Santiago, the last rest stop before the Chilean capital.

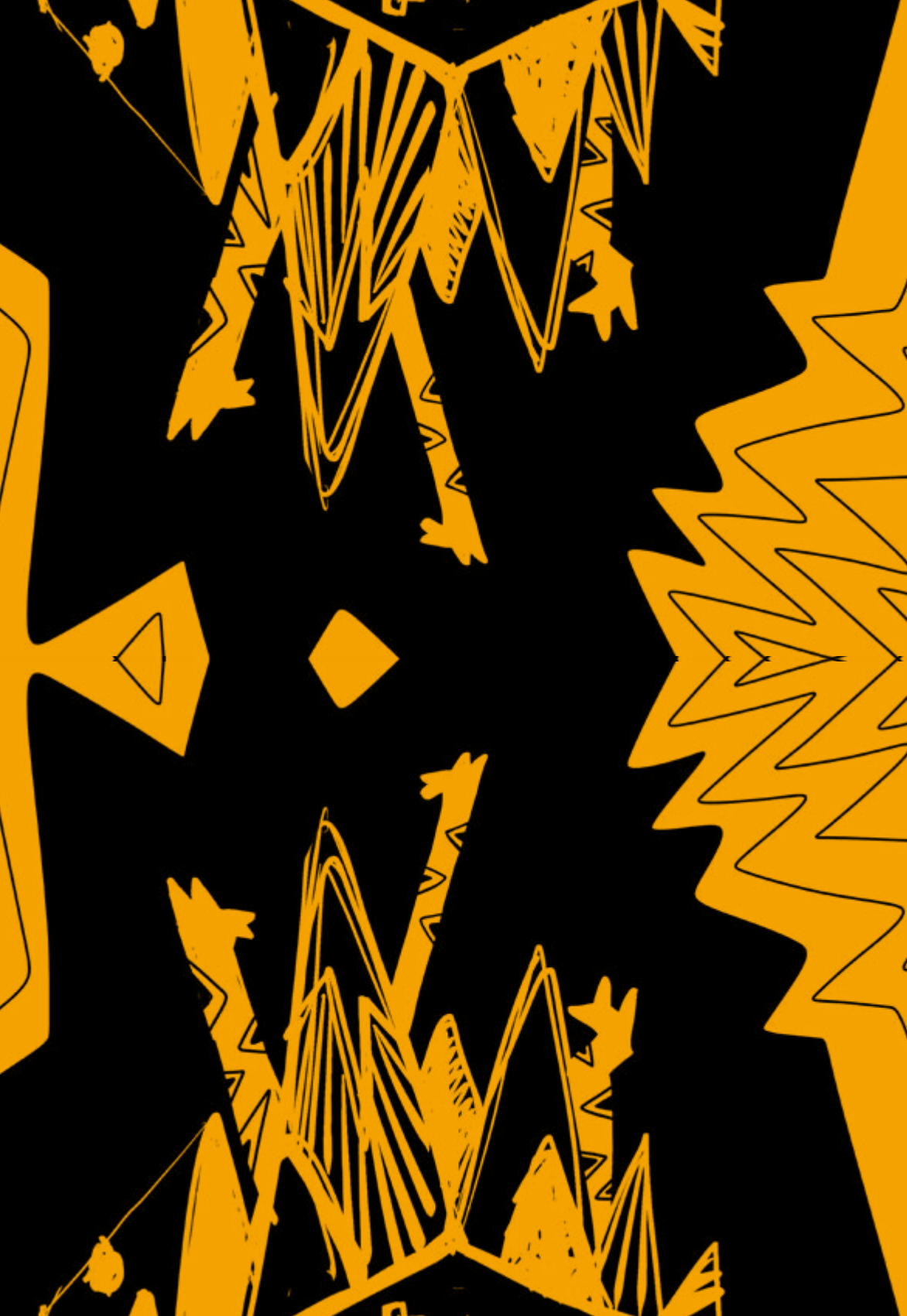
Finally, on November 11, they left for Santiago. Another stretch of stunning landscapes with the Andes rising majestically in the distance. They arrived at dusk in a vibrant and lively capital, capable of offering modernity, history, incredible views, good wines and a detective who seemed to be on the trail of the pair.

Yes, while Fogg and Palacios began their journey through Argentina and Chile to Santiago, detective Alfredo Freitas, still in El Calafate, approached the guide Alejandro claiming to be a long-time friend of Fogg.

– Alejandro, I’m an old friend of Phileas. He told me you’d be here and recommended you as a guide. He left yesterday, correct? – Freitas said, with a convincing smile.

Alejandro, without suspecting anything, revealed that, yes, Fogg had left for Santiago. Freitas thanked him, took the opportunity to use Alejandro as his guide for a day, and quickly made his plans. The next day, he caught the next flight to Santiago, found out from his police connections which hotel Fogg would be staying at, and was already in Santiago when the duo arrived.

Fogg and Palacios, oblivious to the chase, were focused on their journey. Santiago was just another stop on their epic adventure around the world.



IN WHICH WILLI CH

FOGG AND PALACIOS DISCOVER WONDERS IN THE ANDES AND THE CHALLENGES OF TRAFFIC IN LIMA.⊗

CHAPTER XIV

Santiago is fascinating. The next day, they began their exploration of the hills – the hills and mountains that form an important part of the urban landscape of the Chilean capital. First, Cerro San Cristóbal offered a panoramic view of the city and the Andes in the background. Then, they went

to Cerro Santa Lucía, a historic park with gardens, fountains and enchanting views.

The next day, they decided to visit a winery on the outskirts of Santiago, famous for its high-quality wines. During the winery tour, they learned about the wine-making process and heard an

intriguing story about a devil who appeared at night to protect the most precious wines from thieves. Palacios, a bit superstitious, was a bit frightened.

There was time to explore the city's historic center before leaving for La Paz at dawn the next day. The journey took four days, with three stops for the night.

The Pan-American Highway, that iconic stretch of asphalt connecting the Americas, led the way. At first, the well-paved road, with moderate traffic, passed through fertile valleys and gentle hills. Fogg and Palacios witnessed vineyards and plantations in Chile's rich agricultural landscape. After the welcoming oasis that was Vallenar, the landscape changed dramatically, with vast expanses of sand and rock, occasionally dotted with cacti and impressive rock formations.

— This is the Atacama desert now, — Fogg pointed out. — And before you say anything, it does have Amazonian dimensions! We won't pass through its most beautiful part, near San Pedro de Atacama, or we'll stray too far from our route.

Despite the isolation, the asphalt was in good condition, even with heavier truck traffic due to the transport of minerals. The port city of Antofagasta provided some respite and delicious cuisine. Palacios enjoyed his *chorrillana de mariscos*, a combination of seafood over French fries, onions and fried eggs. Phileas Fogg V, always restrained, ordered a sea bass served with Chilean salad and potatoes.

The next day was a tough one on the road, more than nine hours to Oruro in the middle of the Bolivian highlands. They

arrived in La Paz on Sunday, November 17, and were impressed by the city located at an altitude of more than 3,500 meters, its colorful markets and lively streets.

La Paz is a living tapestry of indigenous and colonial influences. The Aymara and Quechua ethnic groups make up a large part of the population, bringing with them a wealth of ancestral traditions that permeate every aspect of daily life. The Mercado de las Brujas, with its medicinal herbs and amulets, is a testament to spiritual practices that are still deeply respected.

They treated themselves to a full day of rest in the Bolivian capital so they could tackle the more than 600 kilometers to Cusco in one go. It took more than ten hours, some of which were caused by the delay in crossing the border with Peru. Freitas was already halfway there, always in partnership with authorities from other countries, monitoring the pair's path.

They arrived in Cusco, Peru, the ancient capital of the Inca Empire. Cusco welcomed them with its impressive history and architecture. They visited the beautiful Plaza de Armas and its churches. They visited the Temple of Qorikancha, the ruins of Sacsayhuaman and the picturesque Central Market of San Pedro.

After a full day exploring the city, they would continue to Ollantaytambo, from where they would take the train to Aguas Calientes, at the foot of Machu Picchu. They left in the morning. Their first stop was Chinchero, a tourist site where they visited a traditional Andean weaving factory and learned from the artisans how to distinguish llamas, alpacas and vicuñas.

The journey continued along dirt roads that were a challenge for the tires(*), but Fogg kept his cool. They passed by the Salinas de Maras, a set of white pools that can be seen from the top of the hill. When Fogg told him that they were salt pools, Palacios was astonished.

– These salt flats in the middle of the mountain indicate that before the Andes appeared, this place was a sea, – said Fogg.

Next, they arrived at Moray, another archaeological site that demonstrated Inca ingenuity, used by the natives as an agricultural laboratory, and enjoyed a gastronomic experience in a restaurant nearby, with a view of the snow-capped peaks.

At dusk, Ollantaytambo welcomed them with yellow lights in its small main square, where rickshaws circulated through narrow streets that were difficult for cars to access. They saw how the city is an open-air museum in order to understand how Inca engineering was also advanced, as they built a series of canals and aqueducts to direct water from the mountains to the city.

It was in Ollantaytambo that Palacios, as a curious fellow, entered a courtyard and fell in love with the beautiful little mice running on the ground. When he learned that they were guinea pigs, he was surprised: they were the delicacy of the previous night in Cusco.

The next day, they took the six-forty train to Aguas Calientes and visited Machu Picchu. It was the highlight, and as a bonus, a symbolic stamp on their passports. The lost city of the Incas left them breathless with its grandeur and mystery.

(*) Note: Continental UltraContact tires.



Fogg and Palacios explored every corner of the ruins, absorbing the history and energy of the place.

– How did they carry these stones? – asked Palacios. Fascinated by animals, he identified the animals that grazed there as llamas and heard from a guide about the importance of the snake, the puma and the condor in local spirituality. The snake symbolized the underworld and the mysteries of life and death. The puma was the earthly world, life, physical reality. And the condor, the upper world, the divine, spiritual freedom.

They returned to Ollantaytambo in the late afternoon, carrying with them the memories of an unforgettable place. As soon as Fogg said:

– We deserve an excellent dinner, Palacios!

The Uruguayan replied:

– No guinea pigs, Mr. Fogg!

They ate a pizza and went to rest.

The next three days were reserved for a long trip to Lima on complicated, narrow roads, stretches without shoulders and gaps in the asphalt. And Fogg was relieved by the heroism of his tires. At no point, on those highways, did he fear losing the bet. And even with an excellent driver like Phileas Fogg V, the 1,100 kilometers to Lima had taken 19 hours on the wheel, distributed over three days traveling over mountains and winding curves at the start, until the Pacific coast at the end.

They arrived in Lima and faced the city's chaotic traffic. Palacios asked Fogg if honking was the Peruvian national sport. In the midst of the chaos, Fogg demonstrated his ability to remain calm and resolve the situation politely, impressing his assistant.

They spent a whole day in Lima, where Fogg, always cautious, left the car at a garage to have the oil and filters changed, and the tires aligned, balanced, and calibrated. Twenty thousand kilometers had already passed since the odometer was reset at the exit of the Clube Auto Paulistano, 55 days ago.

– A quarter of the trip has passed, – Fogg exclaimed, excited that the tires still looked new.

They took advantage of the remaining time to explore on foot the historic center, the Miraflores neighborhood, the Larco Museum—where they revisited all of Inca history—and Barranco, with its stunning view of the Pacific Ocean at sunset.







in which

FOGG AND PALACIOS EXPLORE
THE WONDERS OF **ECUADOR**,
AND FREITAS FINDS INSPIRATION
IN THE **GALAPAGOS ISLANDS**⊗

CHAPTER XV



Fogg and Palacios left Lima on the morning of November 27. Their destination was Ecuador. The route wound along the Peruvian coast, with stunning views of the Pacific Ocean on one side and arid hills on the other. They followed the Pan-American Highway, known for its scenic landscapes as well as its challenging stretches.



The first leg took them to Trujillo, where they spent the night. With its rich history and colonial architecture, Trujillo is known for its ruins, such as Chan Chan—the largest adobe city in the Americas and one of the most

precious archeological sites in the world – as well as the Huacas del Sol y de la Luna, all visited in the next morning. But the main reason for Fogg staying the night there were the several accommodation and dining options in the city.

The next day, they drove another 475 kilometers to Piura, a vibrant and welcoming city. The heat of the northern Peruvian desert accompanied them, and Palacios enjoyed the local cuisine, especially the fresh ceviche.

After a good night's rest in Piura, they crossed the border into Ecuador without any major problems in Huaquillas. They had arrived in a new country, right in the center of the world. When it gained its independence from Gran Colombia in 1830, the country adopted the name República del Ecuador (Republic of Ecuador) in reference to the equator that passes through its territory, dividing the world into north and south. It was no surprise that the vegetation became denser and more tropical as they advanced.

They arrived in Guayaquil, the first large city in Ecuador, shortly after two in the afternoon. The Pearl of the Pacific, the most populous city, main port and economic heart of Ecuador, stretched majestically along the banks of the Guayas River.

The Guayaquil people, with their vibrant nature, are a true treasure of the city. Their culture is a rich mosaic of music, dance and festivities that celebrate both indigenous roots and colonial influences. The local festivals, full of color and rhythm, are an expression of the pride and identity of these people.

– It seems to me like a vibrant metropolis that mixes modernity with tradition, Palacios! Life here pulse with energy – said Fogg.

They strolled along the Malecón 2000, a promenade along the Guayas River, where Fogg took the opportunity to take detailed notes on the infrastructure of the roads they still had to travel. Palacios explored the local art fairs and markets, marveling at the cultural richness of the place.

Before sunrise the next day, the port city, with its busy docks and the constant traffic of boats on the Guayas River, was left behind. The SUV’s tires touched the asphalt of the Pan-American Highway again, advancing north. The humid air and the first rays of the sun revealed the verdant landscape and all the fertility of the region. Fields of banana, cocoa and rice crops dotted the view, with dedicated workers harvesting the fruits of the land. The well-paved and smooth road allows Fogg to drive smoothly, accompanied by the constant hum of the engine and the songs of the tropical birds that inhabit the surroundings. Gradually, the road begins to climb, and the change in the landscape is remarkable. Plains give way to rolling hills and, eventually, to imposing mountains. The Pan-American Highway winds along the slopes of the Andes, revealing panoramic views at every turn. Temperatures begin to drop; the air becomes cooler and thinner. The vegetation also changes, with paramos replacing tropical jungles. The route follows the famous “Avenue of the Volcanoes”, where majestic volcanic peaks such as Cotopaxi and Chimborazo dominate the horizon. These giants of stone and ice, some still active, are silent witnesses to the geological dynamics



that shape Ecuador.

They arrived in Quito almost eight hours after leaving Guayaquil. It was a long trip, but one that was remarkable due to the number of new photos that now filled Palacios's cell phone.

The Ecuadorian capital, located on the slopes of the Andes, with its well-preserved historic center, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, impressed Fogg and Palacios. During the two nights they spent in the city, they were able to visit the Plaza Grande, the Church of San Francisco and other landmarks of the city's rich colonial history.

While Fogg and Palacios explored Quito, Alfredo Freitas, who had flown to Ecuador before the pair, decided to visit the Galapagos Islands. Located about a thousand kilometers off the Ecuadorian coast, the Galapagos are an archipelago known for their unique fauna and diverse ecosystem. Freitas took a flight from Quito to Baltra, one of the main islands of the archipelago, and from there he took a boat to Santa Cruz.

In the Galapagos, Freitas was fascinated by the giant tortoises and marine iguanas. He observed wildlife in their natural habitat and was particularly impressed by a tortoise trying to chase a lizard. This scene triggered a metaphor in his mind: he saw himself as the tortoise, slow and persevering, in his pursuit of Fogg, the agile lizard who escaped his every move. This metaphor renewed his

resolve in capturing Fogg, convinced he was about to reveal the alleged smuggler.

After three days in the islands, Freitas returned to the continent, more resolute than ever. He knew Fogg and Palacios would be in Quito and carefully planned his next move.



WHSICR

PHILEAS FOGG V ADDS A NEW CHARACTER TO HIS ADVENTURE.

CHAPTER XVI

Fogg and Palacios left Quito for Colombia on the morning of Monday, December 2. They crossed the Andes Mountains, facing winding roads with breathtaking panoramic views. After four hours of majestic mountains, deep valleys, dense rainforests, construction sites, small towns, one-way and two-way roads, they touched down

on Colombian soil in Ipiales, where Fogg made a point of visiting the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Las Lajas, an impressive neo-Gothic building located 2,900 meters above sea level, practically embedded in the rocks of a canyon. A stone bridge connects the sanctuary to the main road, offering impressive views of the canyon and the surrounding landscape.

Ninety kilometers further on was Pasto, a city rich in history and colonial architecture, nestled on the slopes of the Galeras Volcano. They stopped there for lunch.

It was already night when they arrived in Popayán, Colombia's White City, with all the walls of the historic center painted white. At dusk, Popayán emerges like a luminous jewel in the Andean mountains. The colonial facades shine under the soft light of the oil lamps, and the cobblestone streets have a rural feel. The majestic and illuminated Cathedral dominates the landscape, while the Plaza Mayor is an oasis of contemplation. Wrapped in a mantle of tranquility and history, Popayán seems magical with its inviting cafés in narrow streets and offered the pair a good night's rest.

They arrived in Bogotá two days later. The vibrant Colombian capital, at an altitude of 2,600 meters, welcomed them with its typical cool December climate, marked by sunny days and cold nights. They set aside Thursday to explore the city, visiting such sights as Plaza Bolívar, the Gold Museum and the Cerro de Monserrate, from where they had a panoramic view. The Museo Botero and the Gabriel García Márquez Cultural Center were also included, as Fogg was a fan of the former's painting and considered "One Hundred Years of Solitude" the best book he ever read in his life.

The vast Colombian capital, still shrouded in fog, was left behind at dawn. The road, initially an urban artery packed with hurried vehicles, gradually it turned into a road cutting through the green hills of the Andes. The journey began on Route 45, also known as Troncal del Magdalena.

As they advanced, small towns with adobe houses appeared on the slopes, while the road took them through the mountains. It was then that the sky, only threatening until that moment, decided to fall with impressive fury. The first thunder sounded like the roar of an awakened giant, and the first heavy drops of rain began to fall, hammering the windshield with increasing intensity.

In minutes, Fogg used his skill at the wheel to tame a deluge. Torrents of water running down the slopes crossed the path. Visibility dropped to almost nothing, Fogg reduced speed and thanked the safety of the tires(*), which were still new and had good grip on the water mirrors that formed ahead.

– If Noah's Ark appears on the wrong side of the road, don't be surprised, Palacios! – Fogg said good-naturedly, to lighten the mood that had become apprehensive inside the car. Palacios smiled.

After more than an hour of careful driving, the clouds began to dissipate, and the rain eased.

They arrived in Bucaramanga at dusk. Known as the City of Parks, it was the place for a well-deserved rest.

The next day, they reached the road before the sun, which, at sunrise, revealed a straighter path through the plains of the Magdalena Medio. The dense vegetation gave way to open fields and farms. Small riverside villages and smaller towns dotted the route, each with their own history and culture.

They stopped a few times along the way to stretch their legs

(*) Note: Continental UltraContact tires.

and enjoy the scenery, when an unexpected event occurred. They spotted a young woman, apparently disoriented, emerging from the nearby forest. She was carrying a battered backpack and appeared to be on the verge of tears.

Fogg and Palacios approached her cautiously. The woman, close to tears, explained that her name was Valentina Aguilar. She was an Ecuadorian biologist who had gotten lost in the forest while studying endangered birds. She had been without food or water for days, and her cell phone battery was dead, in addition to having no signal there. Valentina was visibly exhausted and hungry.

Fogg and Palacios quickly offered their help. They took Valentina to a nearby gas station, where they were able to provide her with food and drink. While she was recovering, she told her more about her passion for nature and her research. Impressed by her determination and courage, Fogg and Palacios decided to offer her a ride to Cartagena.

Valentina gratefully accepted the offer. During the short journey that remained, she shared fascinating stories about the wildlife and landscapes she had studied. Her presence brought a new dynamic to the journey, and even the impassive Phileas Fogg V showed new enthusiasm.

The salty sea breeze announced the proximity of Cartagena. A stunning coastal city with a rich colonial history. They would discover it the next day; it was impossible to be there and not enjoy all its beauty and charm.

Fogg and Palacios headed to the accommodation they had



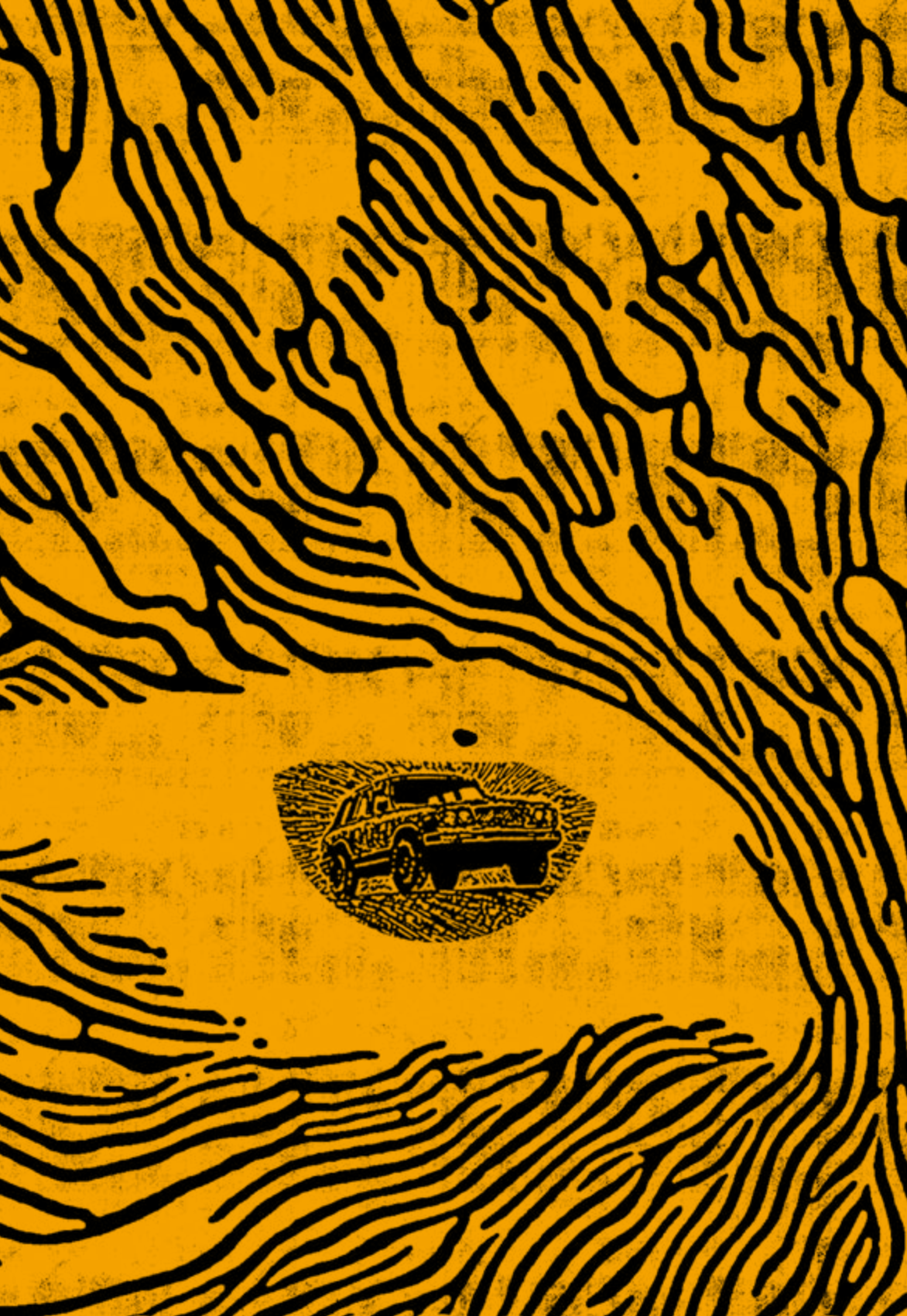
Harpia harpyja

A stylized, high-contrast illustration of a woman's eye. The eye is rendered in a graphic, almost woodcut style, with a yellow background and black lines. The iris is a solid yellow circle containing a small, detailed black and white illustration of a vintage car. The surrounding area is filled with dense, wavy black lines that create a textured, vibrating effect. The overall composition is centered and occupies most of the frame.

Valentina Aguilar

booked. Valentina, now recovered from the shock, said she would find somewhere to stay, but would like to see them the next day. They agreed to meet for breakfast.

Meanwhile, Freitas returned from the Galapagos Islands with a new determination. Inspired by the metaphor of the turtle and the lizard, he was more determined than ever to unravel the secrets of Phileas Fogg V, even more so when he discovered that he was already in Colombian lands.



WHICH

PHILEAS FOGG V MANAGES TO ENTER **CENTRAL AMERICA** WITH HIS CAR.⊕

C H A P T E R X V I I

The next morning, as they headed to the small breakfast area at their lodging, Fogg and Palacios were surprised. Valentina was already there, smiling and more cheerful than ever. They could see her backpack lying next to her.

Phileas, – she said, between the final sips of a cup of coffee –, I thought of something during the night.

Fogg and Palacios looked curiously at the beautiful young woman.

– I think your adventure driving through so many countries is the kind of unique opportunity for someone who, like me, is passionate about nature. Following your journey across the continents would open me doors of knowledge that no university or laboratory could open.

Fogg and Palacios exchanged increasingly curious glances.

Valentina took a deep breath and said:

– Please let me accompany you on your trip. I promise not to get in the way or cause any costs. On the contrary, I can help with my knowledge of biology and languages.

Palacios grumbled under his breath:

– As long as we don't need her to find our way around a forest...

Fogg reprimanded his assistant with a look, but Valentina herself laughed at the comment, putting everyone at ease.

Fogg, amazed and surprised by the young woman's courage, could only reply:

– Okay, miss. On one condition: that you be an impartial witness to our feat, so that, in the end, you can prove everything we're going to tell when we get back.

Valentina's presence really brought new energy to the group.



The young biologist was of medium height, with agile and precise movements, the result of her constant movement in difficult terrain. Her skin was dark, and her expressive eyes were a deep brown, which shone with the curiosity and passion of a dedicated scientist.

Her long, wavy black hair fell freely over her shoulders with a natural shine. Valentina had delicate and well-defined facial features: a small, straight nose, full lips that often curved into a gentle smile and arched eyebrows that gave an air of determination to her face. Her hands, although delicate, showed signs of her life in the field – short nails and slightly calloused fingers.

At 27 years old, she exuded an aura of inner strength and serenity, combined with a refined sensitivity. Her attentive and observant gaze, always searching for new details in the landscape, reflected the analytical mind of a scientist and the heart of a true lover of the natural world.

His passion for nature and his adventurous spirit, Fog realized, would perfectly complement Palacios's determination and curiosity.

With everything set, they quickly finished their coffee with smiles and set off to explore Cartagena. The historic center, known as the Walled City, was a true colonial treasure. The facades of the houses, painted in vibrant shades of blue, yellow, and pink and adorned with retro lamps, contrasted with the carved wooden doors and windows. Tropical flowers hung from the balconies, adding a touch of color and life to the old architecture of the best-preserved colonial city in the Americas.

–This city is truly enchanting, Mr. Fogg! – exclaimed Palacios, looking around in wonder.

– Indeed, Palacios. Cartagena has a rich history and culture that is hard to find anywhere else, – replied Fogg, with a rare smile of satisfaction. – Being here is like going back in time, – he added.

The group enthusiastically explored Cartagena's sights. They visited the Clock Tower, an imposing structure that marks the entrance to the Walled City.

At the San Felipe de Barajas Castle, a colossal fort built by the Spanish to protect the city from invaders, Fogg admired the ingenuity of the construction while Valentina learned about the numerous attacks the fortification had suffered throughout its history. One of them was in 1586, commanded by the famous English corsair Sir Francis Drake. But the most significant attack occurred in 1741, during the War of Jenkins' Ear. British admiral Edward Vernon led a massive fleet of 186 ships and some 27,000 men against the fortress. The castle, defended by just 3,600 soldiers under the command of the Spaniard Blas de Lezo, managed to withstand the siege thanks to its strategic engineering and the heroic resistance of its defenders. This event is one of the most famous episodes in Spanish military history in America.

– It is fascinating to think about how these structures were built and withstood the test of time – commented Valentina, with a glint in her eyes.



– The engineering behind these buildings is truly impressive – Fogg agreed.

The Palace of the Inquisition, with its austere facade and dark history, intrigued Palacios. He marveled at the historical artifacts and stories from the time of the Inquisition, absorbing every detail with a mixture of curiosity and apprehension.

– This place has a different aura, somewhat dark, – Palacios murmured, looking around.

As they enjoyed the city, Valentina revealed more about her research in biology. Passionate about nature, she studied endangered species and dedicated herself to preserving ecosystems.

– I’m really grateful that you found me. I want to help in any way I can during this trip, – Valentina said sincerely.

–Your help will be very welcome, Valentina. Your knowledge will be a great asset to us, – Fogg replied, appreciating the young biologist’s willingness.

During their stay in Cartagena, a kind of empathy began to develop between Fogg and Valentina. The young biologist was attracted to Fogg's determination and sense of adventure, while he admired her passion for nature and her courage.

FFreitas, now in Colombia, continued to monitor Fogg and Palacios's movements. He contacted the Colombian highway police, trying to track Phileas Fogg V's car, believing that he could catch him in some mistake or suspicious activity.

However, the meticulous Fogg kept everything in order and within the law.

With the need to cross to Panama and knowing that the crossing could not be made by land due to the Darién Gap, a region of dense forest and swamps impassable for motor vehicles, Fogg had already decided that the best way would be to board his SUV on a Ro-Ro ship – an acronym used to define roll-on-roll-off cargo ships. The crossing to the Port of Colón, in Panama, would take two days, the same time that Fogg, Valentina and Palacios took to make it aboard a cruise ship that had as a bonus the stop at the paradisiacal San Blas Island.

Freitas, always one step behind, tried to convince the Panamanian authorities to inspect Fogg's car upon arrival, but they found no irregularities. Up to that point, 24,610 kilometers had been driven.

The arrival in Panama would mark the beginning of a new stage in the journey, which would continue along the Pan-American Route. Fogg's determination, Palacios's curiosity and Valentina's passion for nature formed a trio prepared to face the paths that Central America had in store for them.





CENTRAL AMERICA PRESENTED PUPUSAS, CHICKEN BUSES AND THE TÍKAL RUINS TO FOGG, PALACIOS AND VALENTINA.⊛

CHAPTER XVIII

U pon landing at the Port of Colón in Panama, Phileas Fogg, Palacios and Valentina resumed their epic journey. They covered 900 kilometers in a single day, leaving early

in the morning. The trip was tiring, but the breathtaking landscapes and the relaxed conversations brought by Valentina's presence in the car made the journey more enjoyable. As different as the

three souls inside that automobile were, they created a microcosm of intimacy and revelations. A separate universe, in which each occupant shares pieces of their lives, stories, and secrets.

They considered spending the night in David, still in Panama, but Fogg didn't want to waste time. He looked at his calendar, at the harsh winter in the United States. He was worried that the snow would block the roads. They continued on. It was night when they reached San José. For first-time visitors, San José at dusk is a charming introduction to the hospitality and dynamism of Costa Rica. Colonial architecture stands out against the night sky, with historic buildings, such as the National Theatre, elegantly lit. Public squares, such as the Plaza de la Cultura, are full of life, with street musicians, street vendors and tourists exploring every corner. The city was all lit up, and they discovered the reason: Saturday, December 15, would be the Festival of Light. An annual event that transforms the city into a spectacle of lights and colors, celebrating the Christmas season. They regretted not being able to wait.

In Central America and Mexico, for safety reasons, Fogg had determined to drive only during the day. They left early. And by sunset, they were in Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, where they spent the night.

The next day, December 13, was not without its difficulties. Between Managua and San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, the Pan-American Highway, although in good condition, had several stretches with potholes and poor signage, especially in rural areas. The trip offered several landscapes, including mountains, plains and coastal areas, rural areas with farms,



small cities and villages. But a lot of time was lost crossing two borders: the first between Nicaragua and Honduras, where all the necessary documents were checked, including passport, vehicle documents, insurance and even a yellow fever vaccination certificate, and later between Honduras and El Salvador.

San Salvador, with its colonial and modern architecture, and its Monumento al Divino Salvador del Mundo – a statue of Jesus Christ mounted on a planetary globe, a powerful symbol that represents the country and its citizens globally – would leave an excellent taste memory for the trio: the pupusa, a traditional local delicacy. A thick tortilla made of corn dough, stuffed with cheese, beans, chicharrón or loroco, a local edible flower, accompanied by a fermented cabbage salad with carrots and spices, as well as tomato sauce. Fogg, Palacios and Valentina were so hungry from the wear and tear of the trip that they ate without uttering a single word. Until Palacios, after his third pupusa, showed that a full stomach can be a source of levity:

– If we continue to eat like this in every country, I fear our car will need reinforcements to handle the extra weight! – he said.

Antigua, the main tourist city in Guatemala, founded in 1543 and declared an Unesco World Heritage Site in 1979, introduced itself to the trio at one o'clock in the afternoon the following day. They were amazed by the architecture of the historic center. The Arc of Santa Catarina, painted yellow and with a clock on its tower, with the Water Volcano in the back, took a lot of space in the pictures taken by Palacios.

Leaving Antigua the next morning, their destination was

the north of the Yucatan Peninsula, until they circled it and returned to Mexico City.

They started early and, in just over an hour, they were already in the most populous capital of all Central America, Guatemala City. Driving along its avenues, a cultural fact caught their attention: the presence of multicolored buses. These were the chicken buses, a trademark of the country. These are old American school buses that are completely customized and have become the cheapest means of public transportation in the country. They always follow fixed routes, and the stops are usually well known by the local community. Each bus is painted with vibrant colors and unique patterns, making each one easily identifiable and distinguishable from the others.

They continued to Flores, where they would sleep to start the next day in Tikal, a few kilometers away. Located in the dense tropical forest of Petén, still in Guatemala, Tikal was one of the largest Mayan urban centers, reaching its peak between the 6th and 9th centuries AD.

They left at 4:30 in the morning to arrive at dawn. As the first rays of the morning sun penetrated the treetops, a spectacle of shadows and light unfolded, revealing the imposing shapes of the temples and plazas. They witnessed the majestic pyramids of Tikal appeared in the forest, rising as a silent witness of the craftiness and spirituality of the ancient Mayans.

– Did you know that Tikal was one of the most powerful cities in the Mayan world? – Valentina said. – We are walking on paths that great kings and priests once walked.

– It is truly impressive, – Fogg replied, beginning to appreciate the biologist’s comments.

– The Mayans had a profound knowledge of astrology. Many of the temples here in Tikal are aligned with important astronomical events, such as solstices and equinoxes, – Valentina added.

– I just hope I don’t encounter any angry Mayan spirits because we are invading their sacred space! – Palacios grumbled, while the other two laughed.





JOIN WITCH



FOGG AND VALENTINA
EXPLORE **MEXICO CITY**
AND PALACIOS DISCOVERS
FREITAS'S PRESENCE. 

CHAPTER XIX

Tikal and its rich history were behind them, and the trio began the 600-kilometer journey to Tulum. The road that led them through the dense forests of Petén opened to the vibrant Yucatan Peninsula. The lush green of the jungle gave way to sun-drenched plains and salty sea breezes.

They arrived in Tulum late in the afternoon, where they decided to spend the night and explore the area the next day. With its Mayan ruins perched dramatically on the edge of the Caribbean Sea, Tulum offered a spectacle of history and nature. They headed to the ruins at dawn,

after a pleasant breakfast. The sun, still low on the horizon, provided a golden light that illuminated the ancient stone temples, contrasting with the deep blue of the sea in the background. The lizards sunbathing on the rocks impressed the group, especially Palacios, who had fun trying to photograph the reptiles in majestic poses.

The next stop was at a cenote, an underwater cavern with crystal-clear, icy waters that ended in a grotto full of bats. Swimming in those waters was a unique experience.

– Cenotes are natural wells that are very common here in the Yucatan Peninsula. They form when a limestone bedrock is dissolved by groundwater, exposing the water underneath, – explained Valentina.

Palacios, always curious, added:

– I heard that these places were sacred to the Mayans.

– Yes, – replied Valentina. – They were sources of life and places of communion with the gods. They provided water and were used in various rituals.

– What about that cave with the bats? I've never seen anything like it, – Palacios said.

– Bats help control the insect population and are an essential part of the cenote ecosystem – Valentina replied.
– Everything here is connected, creating perfect balance.

Continuing their journey, they stopped in

Akumal, a small bay known for its sea turtles. They rented their diving equipment and swam alongside these majestic creatures, watching them feed on algae on the seabed. The experience was thrilling, especially for Valentina, who was in her element interacting so intimately with marine life.

Wasting no time, they continued to Chichén Itzá, just 150 kilometers away. They arrived at sunset at what is considered one of the new seven wonders of the world. The great Temple of Kukulcán, with its imposing structure and perfect symmetry, left the trio in awe.

At nightfall, they arrived in Mérida, a city known for its colonial architecture, with its white limestone facades. They strolled along the wide avenues lined with European-style mansions and visited the Plaza Grande. They dined on typical Yucatecan dishes, such as cochinita pibil and lime soup, before resting for the next day's long journey: 1,300 kilometers to Mexico City. A distance that deserved to be divided into two stages for a more peaceful trip. They spent the night in Villahermosa, a good resting point before continuing.

Arriving in the Mexican capital brought the dreaded conclusion of what they had always heard: the traffic was unbearable.

Palacios was impatient.

– What's the green light for if no one is moving?

Fogg and Valentina laughed.

– Look out the window, Palacios! With the traffic stopped, you can better appreciate the Angel of Independence – said Fogg, referring to the beautiful golden sculpture on a 36-meter-high column on Paseo de la Reforma.

After two hard days on the road, they rested at their hotel in La Condesa. Friday was scheduled with great experiences. Phileas Fogg V stipulated that they would only have one day in the city, so they would make careful choices. The morning marked the visit to the National Museum of Anthropology, one of the most popular attractions in the capital and one of the most important museums in the world, with 24 rooms dedicated to archaeology and pre-Columbian history.

From there, they visited the Zócalo, the city's central square, with its enormous cathedral at one end. They walked around the National Palace and admired the murals by Diego Rivera, which moved Phileas Fogg, who commented:

–The vigor of this man is impressive!

From Rivera, they went to the other side of the city, where they visited Frida Kahlo's Blue House, a must-see. Fogg and Valentina were impressed by the life and art of Mexico's greatest painter. The house's blue walls, lush gardens and her studio provided an intimate glimpse into the artist's world.

But for Palacios, the biggest attraction in town would come on the night of Friday, December 20: watching a *lucha libre* match. It was just him and Fogg. Valentina stayed at the hotel.

Entering Arena México is a unique sensory experience that begins right outside the stadium. The air is charged with excitement and expectation as fans of all ages walk toward the entrance, many of them wearing colorful masks of their favorite luchadors.

As you walk through the arena doors, you are immediately greeted by an explosion of sound and color. The loud, giant music, combined with the cheers and applause of the audience, creates a party atmosphere. The smell of typical Mexican food, such as nachos, tacos and churros, mingles with the air, awakening the senses and heightening expectations.

As you enter the main hall, the sight of the illuminated ring in the center of the arena is mesmerizing. The neon lights flash and spin, creating a visual spectacle





that is both dazzling and chaotic. The stands are filled with passionate fans, each one more enthusiastic than the next, waving flags and signs, as they anxiously wait for the show to begin.

As the lights momentarily dimmed, the theme song of the first wrestler began to play. The arena exploded in a wave of excitement; the athlete made his triumphant entrance with pyrotechnics and special effects, and the crowd gave back nearly palpable energy.

Palacios was fascinated:

– Look at those masks, Mr. Fogg! It's like we're in a Carnival parade!

Fogg smiled:

– Lucha libre is more than a fight, it's a performance. Each fighter has his own story and character. It's a true theater of action.

It was in this scene of commotion that, as soon as the lights came on, Palacios saw a familiar face. He hesitated for a few seconds thinking “where have I seen that person before”, when the memory came back to him. It was the man who, a little over two months ago, had approached him at the fair in Fortaleza. The one with the scar on his eyebrow, he remembered.

After moments of disjointed thoughts, he understood that the presence of that man, that night, so far from the place of their first meeting, could not be a coincidence. Yes, that man could only be a spy from the Clube Auto Paulistano, sent to verify if Fogg's bet was being fulfilled – Palacios thought to himself.

Proud of his discovery, he chose to keep it a secret, keeping the suspicion to himself, while he pondered on the best way to act.

From Mexico City, Fogg, Palacios and Valentina headed for Guadalajara at dawn. The departure from the capital was slow because of the morning traffic that was already making its presence felt, and the road was quite busy, perhaps because it was the last weekend before Christmas.



They arrived in Guadalajara for a late lunch. As they explored the local markets and plazas, Palacios remained alert. He suspected that the man with the scar on his eyebrow, as he referred to the anonymous acquaintance in his thoughts, would continue to pursue the trio and would reappear at any moment.



IN WHICH

Palacios

PALACIOS TAKES THE SIDE OF HIS BOSS AND WHAT HAPPENS NEXT.



CHAPTER XX

Fogg decided that they would spend the night in Guadalajara. He used the rest of the afternoon to take the car to a garage and have it completely serviced. It was just a few kilometers away from completing 30,000 since the start. Paying attention to

the tires^(*), he would also have them rebalanced and aligned, in addition to the calibration. Valentina accompanied him.

Palacios preferred to stay and explore the historic center. He started with the impressive cathedral, the

^(*) Note: Continental UltraContact tires.



most visible landmark in the city. Its construction began in 1561, but it features several architectural styles, the result of the various phases of construction and reconstruction over the centuries. The interior of the cathedral is equally impressive, with elements of baroque, churrigueresque—an elaborate form of Spanish baroque—and neoclassical. Palacios was enchanted by the spectacle of the sun's rays passing through the stained-glass window of the Last Supper, when he noticed that he was being watched. It was definitely no coincidence that the man with the scar on his eyebrow was inside the same cathedral.

Palacios, leaving no time for hesitation, decided to approach him.

– Excuse me, sir, have we met before? – Palacios asked, his tone curious and cautious.

– Perhaps, my friend. I travel a lot, – the man replied, with an enigmatic smile. – My name is Freitas. What's your name?

– Palacios. Nice to meet you, – Palacios said, still suspicious.

– I remember now! Fortaleza! You were looking at necklaces at the Beira Mar market, I remembered your accent, – Freitas added, cynically. – Let's celebrate this coincidence.

Despite having been made, Freitas seemed relaxed and in a good mood, and invited Palacios to have a tequila. Feeling one step ahead, but not wanting to raise suspicions that he knew his new friend's intentions, Palacios accepted the invitation.

At the bar, Freitas tried to gain the Uruguayan's trust, telling stories about his travels and adventures. Freitas, however, had a plan in mind. He began probing Palacios about the details of Fogg's trip, trying to find any information he could use. Palacios, loyal to Fogg, avoided revealing any details.

– So, Palacios, how's the trip going? – Freitas asked, with a sly smile.

– Oh, we're doing well, visiting many interesting places, – Palacios replied, remaining vague.

– And your boss? He seems to be very dedicated to this trip, doesn't he? – Freitas continued.

– Yes, he's very focused, – Palacios said, looking away.

After a few rounds of tequila, and with Palacios having already mentioned the real reason for the trip around the world, Freitas decided to take a more direct approach to Fogg's bet, insinuating that the entire trip could be a front for something illegal.

– Haven't you ever wondered, Palacios, if this trip is indeed just about a bet? – Freitas insinuated, in a conspiratorial tone.

Palacios was outraged by the insinuations and vehemently defended Fogg's honor.

– Mr. Fogg is an honest and principled man. I won't have you talking about him that way! – Palacios exclaimed.

Freitas, cunning, apologized and tried to get Palacios even more drunk, hoping to thwart Fogg's plans.

When Palacios was sufficiently intoxicated and starting to lose track of time, Freitas seized the opportunity to cause more trouble. He took Palacios to a busy location where the local police were conducting a routine operation. Freitas manipulated the situation so that Palacios ended up being detained for suspicious behavior, without realizing that it was all orchestrated by Freitas. To prevent any communication between Palacios and Fogg, Freitas took his cell phone and turned it off. It was already late at night.

The next morning, Fogg and Valentina, worried about Palacios's disappearance, as he was not answering their calls or texts on his cell phone; they searched the city for him. Fogg checked hospitals, spoke to the police and tried in every way to find his faithful assistant, but without success.

While Fogg remained calm as usual, Valentina tried to offer moral support.

– We will find him, Phileas. Palacios is smart and knows how to take care of himself, – said Valentina, trying to reassure Fogg.

– I know, Valentina. But he embarked on this adventure with me blindly, he has shown himself to be extremely faithful and competent, and he might need our help, – replied Fogg, with a worried tone.

Meanwhile, Palacios was trapped, trying to remember what

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LIONEL PALACIOS



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had happened the night before. His memories were fuzzy, but he knew Freitas was involved. He had to find a way out of this situation and warn Fogg about Freitas.

Fogg and Valentina decided to wait a few more hours before making any drastic decisions. Not finding Palacios in any hospitals was a relief. But not finding him anywhere else was a cause for great concern. Fogg wondered if Palacios might have gotten mixed up with some Mexican woman. Or gotten into a fight. On the other hand, he worried about the time lost, because he was going north in December, and he was afraid that blizzards would block American roads and prevent him from continuing his journey. The search for Palacios continued, and time was working against Fogg.



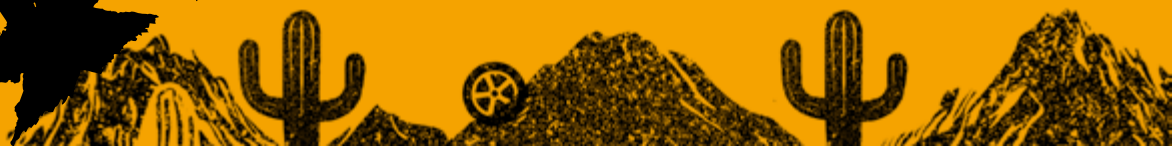
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LIONEL PALACIOS



WIND

FREITAS BONDS WITH PHILEAS FOGG V.

CHAPTER XXI



Sunday, December 22, was a gray dawn in Guadalajara, after a night that reached 13°C. The weather was a perfect reflection of Phileas Fogg V's state of mind. More than 24 hours after Palacios's disappearance, he continued his tireless search. Dressed in an elegant coat, but clearly worn out by worry, Fogg went with Valentina to the local police department, hoping to find some news about his faithful assistant.

Upon arriving at the police building, Fogg was

immediately greeted by the muffled sound of ringing phones and tense conversations. The atmosphere was chaotic, but he kept his posture and his gaze steady, determined not to let anxiety get the better of him. It was then that a man of medium height, thin, with a rather intelligent and nervous appearance, but with a resolute appearance and a well-trimmed beard, approached him. Fogg noticed a gap in his left eyebrow.

– Mr. Fogg, I presume? – the man said in perfect Portuguese, extending his hand. – I am Freitas, a Brazilian investigator concerned about the safety of your assistant, Palacios. I heard about the case and came to offer my assistance.

Fogg, surprised, shook Freitas's hand, feeling the firmness of his grip. He also smelled the faint aroma of a sophisticated aftershave, a touch of refinement that made him think that Freitas could be a true gentleman, despite the circumstances.

– Mr. Freitas, it's a pleasure to meet you. I'm desperate to find Palacios. Any help is welcome, – Fogg replied, with a mixture of hope and relief.

Freitas explained that he had contacts in the Mexican police who could be useful in the search for Palacios. He assured Fogg that he would be in constant communication with the police and would keep Fogg informed of any developments, and that they were doing everything they could to find him.

Fogg said that he was on a trip around the world with his car and that he worried about the time wasted in Guadalajara, for he could face blizzards north of the United States. Ever methodical, he reported that at three thirty-seven minutes on Friday, December 20, he paid the bill at a restaurant in the city center, dropped Palacios off there, and drove off with his friend Valentina to get his car serviced, change the oil, and take care of the tires. Since then, he had not seen Palacios again.

—Mr. Fogg, I understand your concern, but I believe that you can continue your trip. Staying in Guadalajara will not change the police’s search in any way. I will personally take care of this and I promise that any news will be immediately communicated to you — Freitas said, in a convincing and calm tone.

Fogg hesitated, struggling internally between continuing his journey and waiting for his assistant. Valentina, at his side, put her hand on his shoulder, offering unconditional support.

— Phileas, let’s trust in his help. Palacios is very intelligent, and whatever happens, he will get through it. You need to continue your journey, at least for now, — she urged, with an encouraging look.

When Fogg expressed his desire to wait another day, Freitas had an idea.

— I understand your hesitation, Mr. Fogg. I am also concerned about Palacios, and as such, I am willing to wait

with you. But I have another suggestion that might be interesting: next week, I need to be in San Francisco. My original plan was to go by plane. Would you mind if I traveled with you by land to get there? That way, I could keep you briefed about the searches along the way, because I have direct contact with this police station, – Freitas suggested with a friendly smile.

The proposal seemed reasonable. Fogg knew that Palacios had the travel itinerary and his visa to enter the United States up to date. Accepting Freitas's suggestion seemed the best option.

– Very well, Mr. Freitas. We'll wait here today and leave tomorrow at dawn, with or without Palacios, – Fogg decided, finally finding some relief in his decision.

With this new alliance formed, Freitas began to hitchhike with Fogg and Valentina towards San Francisco. During the trip, Freitas made an effort to show himself as a reliable ally, keeping in frequent conversation with the Mexican police and updating Fogg on news, if only to keep him calm.

Meanwhile, Palacios, who had been released, was on a desperate search for Fogg. When he returned to the hotel where they were staying, he discovered that Fogg had already left. Without Fogg's phone number memorized and unable to find his own cell phone, Palacios felt lost but determined to find his boss.

The new trio's journey would continue toward San Diego,

2,253 kilometers away, where Fogg hoped to show Valentina the zoo. Although worried about Palacios, Phileas Fogg V remained firm in his mission. Freitas, always one step ahead, manipulated the situation to his advantage, taking advantage of every opportunity to study the supposed smuggler closely and find any clue that could incriminate him.

– Valentina, do you believe I made the right choice? – Fogg asked, as he focused his eyes on the road.

– Yes, Phileas. I believe Freitas is sincere in his help. We need to trust that Palacios will be found and that, together, we can continue this journey, – Valentina replied, holding Fogg’s hand firmly.

Freitas, overhearing the conversation, smiled to himself. He knew that Fogg’s trust was the key to finding out more about the man he was investigating.



Monterey

Guadalajara

Hermosillo

San Francisco

San Diego

Mazatlán

Carmel-by-the-Sea



In Which



FREITAS ENJOYS TRAVELING THE BEAUTIFUL CALIFORNIAN COAST HIGHWAY.

C H A P T E R X X I I

On that December 23, Phileas Fogg V, Valentina Aguilar and Alfredo Freitas left Guadalajara for San Diego. The first 100 kilometers were deathly silent due to the absence of Lionel Palacios in the SUV, on Christmas Eve.

They arrived in Mazatlán while it was still daylight, and Fogg suggested that they rest

there, enjoying not only the coastal city and its beautiful beaches, but also believing that being in Mexico when Palacios was found would be better for everyone.

But no Palacios! Just the same statements that the police was still investigating all possibilities.

The next day, the group

continued their journey to Hermosillo, 782 kilometers away, the capital of the state of Sonora, a major producer of beef, wheat, and cotton. The long straight stretches were tiring, but they shortened the travel time. They arrived exhausted, but they were excited for Christmas dinner. The houses and streets of the city were decorated with colorful lights, Christmas trees, and nativity scenes—which the locals called “nacimientos.” They witnessed a traditional Christmas celebration, the Posadas. This festival reenacts the journey of Mary and Joseph in search of a place to take shelter before the birth of Jesus.

Phileas Fogg V managed to book a restaurant for dinner with Valentina and Freitas. When they arrived, the table was decorated with warm lights and Christmas decorations. After enjoying a delicious meal and talking about their round-the-world adventure, always under the watchful eye of Freitas, Fogg stood up and asked for Valentina's attention.

– Valentina, this Christmas, even without Palacios with us, is special for me because you are here. I want you to know how much I appreciate your presence and support. I have prepared a little surprise for you, – Fogg said, handing her an elegantly wrapped box.

Valentina, her eyes glistening with curiosity, unwrapped the gift carefully. Upon opening it, she found a pair of high-quality binoculars, ideal for bird and wildlife observation. And also a leather-bound field journal engraved with Valentina Aguilar's initials.

– Phileas, this is wonderful! – Valentina exclaimed, moved.

– I’ve always wanted binoculars like this, and this diary is perfect for my field notes. Thank you very much!

Valentina hugged Fogg, feeling deeply touched by his thoughtfulness. For her, those gifts were not just tools, but symbols of friendship and respect that were growing stronger every day.

Valentina added:

– Phileas, let’s keep hope. Palacios is intelligent, and I believe he’s fine.

– Yes, Valentina. It’s hard, but I’m sure he’ll be reunited with us. I just don’t understand why he hasn’t called me until now, because his cell phone has my number – said Fogg.

– Don’t worry, I’m in constant contact with Mexican authorities. They’re doing everything they can to find him – added a calm Freitas.

The Christmas holiday marked the journey through a landscape as arid and deserted as the environment inside the car. Despite the celebration of the previous night, there was a heavy feeling due to the lack of news about Palacios. They spent the night in Mexicali, capital of the state of Baja California, after a 700-kilometer journey full of endless straights and cacti dotting the horizon.

The next day, December 26, they prepared to cross the border between Mexico and the United States. Fogg was nervous about the long lines and the strict border control, but Freitas’s presence, who claimed to have important contacts and brought

false updates on the search for Palacios, calmed him down. After routine checks and a few questions, they managed to enter the United States and go through to San Diego.

The first stop was the San Diego Zoo, one of the most famous and well-structured zoos on the planet, home to more than 3,500 animals. A pioneer in recreating open and natural enclosures, abandoning traditional cages in favor of environments that reproduce native habitats, the San Diego Zoo has specific areas for different ecosystems, such as the African Forest, the Owens Aviary, and the Tropical Forest.

Valentina, passionate about nature, used her new binoculars and was amazed by the diversity of species, but regretted seeing some birds kept in captivity.

– It's sad to see these birds in confinement when they should be flying free.

– I understand your feelings, Valentina. I hope that one day we can see all these creatures in their natural habitat, – Fogg replied.

After the visit to the zoo, which lasted all afternoon, they decided to spend the night in San Diego. Fogg and Valentina took advantage of the early evening and went to a shopping mall to buy clothes, blankets and boots suitable for the American winter.

Fogg also took the opportunity to purchase chains designed to give the tires more traction in snow. They have metal links that wrap around the tread, increasing the vehicle's grip on

the road. He opted for traditional steel chains, which provide excellent traction in deep snow and ice.

The next day, still without any significant news from Palacios, the trio set off along the beautiful California Coast Highway, known as Highway 1, towards San Francisco. Los Angeles, Malibu and Santa Barbara were behind them. The road offered panoramic views of the ocean, imposing cliffs and picturesque beaches. Valentina was enchanted by the landscapes and often took notes on the local flora and fauna.

– Just imagine, Valentina, that the road is even more scenic going down from San Francisco to San Diego, because it’s the one that runs along the Pacific – Fogg commented.

During the trip, an unexpected storm forced them to stop in Carmel-by-the-Sea, a charming coastal town with white-sand beaches. As soon as the rain dissipated, they decided to spend the night in a small local hotel. Valentina took the opportunity to explore the town. She commented that the houses looked like they were straight out of a fairy tale, with sloping roofs, curved doors and windows, and ornamental details. Freitas, on the other hand, continued to pretend to be in contact with the police, keeping Fogg informed with false updates.

The next morning, under good weather, they continued their journey along the famous 17-Mile Drive. This short 17-mile road offers views of golf courses, the coast, and abundant wildlife, with groups of small deer along the way. They continued to the Monterey Aquarium and then to a seal observation post. Valentina was especially excited to see several species of shorebirds, seals, and sea lions.



They finally arrived in San Francisco on Saturday, just in time to watch the sun set over the Pacific. Fogg planned to spend New Year's Eve there. The majestic city, with its iconic hills and vibrant culture, was a fascinating place to explore. They caught sight of the splendor of the Golden Gate, that red giant suspended above the murky waters of San Francisco Bay, a masterpiece of engineering. Rows of Victorian houses huddled on the hills, multicolored, like a hand-painted mosaic. Streetcars climbed tirelessly up its steep streets, reminiscent of the steam-powered mechanisms that would so delight a car enthusiast like Phileas Fogg V. Each street offered a new scene, from the bustling Union Square, with its elegant boutiques and inviting cafes, to the multicultural Chinatown, a maze of red lanterns and exotic aromas.

During their stay, Valentina and Fogg would explore the city, visiting landmarks such as Fisherman's Wharf, with its bustling docks and the sounds of seagulls mingling with the laughter of tourists, while sea lions rested lazily on the piers.

Ahead of them, the island of Alcatraz, mysterious and imposing, emerged from the mists of the bay like a fortress in an ancient tale.

In this scenario, Alfredo Freitas continued to pretend to be a reliable ally to Phileas Fogg V, but took every opportunity to investigate and look for leads that could incriminate him.



IN WHICH

PALACIOS LEARNS THAT,
EVEN ON THE OTHER SIDE
OF THE WORLD, IT IS GOOD
PRACTICE TO CARRY SOME
MONEY IN YOUR POCKET. ⊕

CHAPTER XXXIII

After being released by police in Guadalajara on the morning of December 23, Palacios found himself in a difficult situation. Without his cell phone and without Fogg's contact information memorized, he had to find a way to find his boss. Freitas had reached an agreement with the Mexican police to release Palacios only after Fogg had left Guadalajara. Palacios knew that San Francisco was a destination where Fogg had mentioned staying for at least a week. That's where he was headed.

Without many resources, Palacios decided to head to the United States. With the help of his fluent Spanish and some friendly truck drivers, he managed to hitch a ride to the border. At a small gas station on the highway, he used his few dollars to buy warm clothes, knowing that winter was going to be harsh. Night and day blended as Palacios hitched one ride after another, getting closer and closer to his goal.

Finally, he reached the border between Mexico and the United States. Mexicali was a busy place, with long lines and strict security checks. The crossing was not easy, but Palacios, with his kind demeanor and up-to-date documents, managed to get through after a few hours of waiting. He used the rest of his money to buy bus tickets and basic food, always hoping to meet Fogg and Valentina again.

The journey was long and tiring. Palacios often found himself hungry and would rest only on the seats of his passengers or on the bus. He spent Christmas Eve in transit, with the bitter cold of the early morning constantly reminding him of his plight. Despite this, he remained steadfast in his goal.

When he arrived in San Francisco late in the afternoon of Thursday, December 26, Palacios was exhausted and hungry. He did not have enough money to rent a room, and in desperation, he began looking for any type of work that might provide him with some cash and, perhaps, the opportunity to meet his boss again.

He walked the streets of the city and knocked on the

doors of various establishments in search of a job. He first tried restaurants, offering to wash dishes. Finally, his luck changed when he saw the Cable Car Museum, which specialized in the city's most classic and famous form of transportation. Knowing of his boss's fascination with vehicles, Palacios went in and asked for work. The manager, impressed by the young Uruguayan's determination and friendliness, offered him a temporary job as an assistant cleaning the cars on display. It was undoubtedly a stroke of luck, because the current person in charge of cleaning the vehicles had been absent on Christmas Day, and the manager did not believe he would return before 2025.

Palacios would start work at the museum the following morning. He would sleep in a small break room on the premises to save the little money he earned for food. He believed that chance – not so much chance, since he knew his boss well – would make him meet him again in San Francisco.

On the morning of December 29, while Palacios was polishing one of the classic cable cars, he heard familiar voices. He looked up and saw Fogg and Valentina entering the museum. The hair on his arms stood on end with excitement.

– oss! Boss! I'm here! – Palacios shouted, running toward Fogg.

Fogg, surprised and relieved, hugged Palacios tightly.

– Palacios! How come? Are you okay? – Fogg said, his



voice filled with relief. – I was losing all hope of seeing you again.

– Boss, I went through a lot of hardships, but I knew I would find you. I got a job here at the museum and I was waiting for you to show up.

Palacios recounted his journey in detail, explaining how he hitchhiked and crossed the border to reach San Francisco.



Valentina, always supportive, put her hand on the Uruguayan's shoulder.

– You were very brave, Palacios. We're together again, and that's what matters. –

– Palacios, my friend! You're safe now. Tell your future ex-boss that you're coming with us to rest at the hotel. Christmas without you was sad, but we'll toast on New Year's Eve and prepare for the next stage of our trip around the world, – Fogg said, with a smile of gratitude.



IN WHICH

PALACIOS MEETS ALFREDO FREITAS ONCE AGAIN.

CHAPTER XXIV

After the moving reunion at the Cable Car Museum, Phileas Fogg V decided that a celebration was in order. He organized a dinner party at an upscale San Francisco restaurant, where he intended to present Palacios to a new

friend he had met in Guadalajara and went with them to San Francisco.

Fogg, Valentina and Palacios arrived at the restaurant and were shown to the reserved table. Fogg, with an enigmatic smile, said to Palacios:

– want you to meet someone who helped us a lot. He learned yesterday from the authorities in Guadalajara that you had hitched a ride on a truck and told the driver that you would certainly reach San Francisco, where he expected to meet us.

To Palacios's surprise, Fogg's friend was none other than Alfredo Freitas.

Freitas, feigning surprise and joy, stood up to greet Palacios.

– It's so good to meet you in person, Palacios. We were very worried about you, – Freitas said, extending his hand.

Palacios, his skin red with nervousness and a mixture of distrust, took a deep breath and shook Freitas's hand.

– Yes, Mr. Freitas, it's been a difficult journey.

During dinner, Freitas maintained the facade of being a trustworthy ally, while Palacios watched him warily. The conversation was friendly, with Freitas sharing stories of his supposed adventures and travels.

Freitas excused himself to go to the bathroom, and Palacios, sensing the opportunity, also excused himself and followed him. In one of the restaurant's corridors, out of sight of the other customers, Palacios finally confronted him.

– Now look here, Mr. Freitas, I know what you're doing,
– Palacios said in a threatening whisper. – You tried to get me drunk and got me arrested. I don't know what your real motives are, but I won't let you disturb Mr. Fogg.

Freitas, remaining calm, replied:

– Palacios, you're mistaken. I'm here for professional and international reasons. If I did something to bother you, I apologize.

Undeterred, Palacios grabbed Freitas by the collar and pinned him against the wall. The detective was startled.

– Consider this a warning, Mr. Freitas. If you continue with your intrigues, I will take care of you myself – Palacios said, letting go of his opponent's collar.

Freitas interrupted Palacios.

– You grabbed me by the collar of my shirt, I felt physically threatened. Alright, you have your reasons. But listen to me. Until now, I had been your boss's adversary, but now I'll stop.

– At last! – exclaimed Palacios. – So you believe now

that he is an honest man?

– No, – Freitas replied coldly, – I believe he is involved in smuggling somehow.

Palacios prepared to grab him by the collar again, but Freitas interrupted him:

– Calm down! Take a breath and let me talk. While Fogg was in Brazil, I was interested in detaining him, in seeing if there was anything strange in his car and even in requesting an arrest warrant. In South America, I also got closer. I got you drunk in Guadalajara so I could be with him in the car and get to know him better...

Palacios listened; his fists clenched.

– Now, – Freitas continued, – Fogg seems to be going to Europe. You better believe that I will follow him, because there are regions of Europe that are smuggling routes. But from now on, I will dedicate myself to leaving his path clear. My game has changed, and it has changed because it is in my interest. And I will add that your interest is close to mine, because only if this bet really comes to an end and is not a front to mislead the police will you be able to know whether you are working for a criminal or an honest man!

Palacios listened attentively and was convinced that Freitas was truly speaking sincerely.

– Friends? – asked Freitas.

– Not friends – Palacios replied. – But I will try to understand your profession’s side. And at the slightest sign of betrayal, I will wring your neck.

– Deal! – the detective said calmly.

They returned to the table. Fogg asked if the conversation had gone well, since they had taken so long. Palacios agreed that it had. But detective Freitas was visibly shaken and kept to himself.

At the end of the evening, as they were leaving the restaurant, Fogg thanked Freitas again for his help. Freitas, realizing that his position was compromised, reiterated to Palacios that he would not disturb Fogg any longer, but would continue his travels to Cochinchina, if necessary.



A SINGLE NIGHT SHOWS A BRIEF SIGHT OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN SAN FRANCISCO.

CHAPTER XXV

Fogg, Valentina, Palacios and Freitas left the restaurant and walked down a busy San Francisco sidewalk. The city was vibrant that night, already preparing to welcome the New Year with a special glow. People from all over the world, dressed in coats and scarves, braved the 7°C temperature while enjoying the local attractions. The lights of the skyscrapers shone brightly, reflecting on the calm waters of San Francisco Bay.

– Let’s enjoy this city a little longer before resting – said Fogg, with a smile.

Valentina, always enchanted by new discoveries, agreed enthusiastically.

Palacios, always alert, stayed close to Fogg. Freitas, with a cautious look, followed the group.

As they walked, they passed Union Square. Its enormous Christmas tree was lit up with thousands of twinkling lights. The windows of the designer stores and cafes around it were decorated with festive decorations, and the streets were adorned with garlands and colorful lights. They continued along Market Street, one of the city's main arteries, full of life and movement.

As they turned a corner, they saw a group of protesters marching. Colorful banners and posters waved in the air. The demonstration was peaceful, with chants and slogans echoing through the streets, but the tension was palpable.





Suddenly, a widespread scuffle began with the local police. The sound of sirens and megaphones grew louder, and the protesters began to disperse quickly. Within minutes, the four found themselves in the middle of a skirmish.

Freitas, sensing the imminent danger, quickly placed himself between Fogg and the protesters. A police officer, in the midst of the scuffle, violently bumped into Freitas, knocking him down.

– Are you okay, Freitas?” Fogg asked, helping him to his feet.

Freitas, with a slight smile, replied:

– I’m fine, Fogg. Thank you for your concern.

The incident reinforced the complex dynamics between the characters. Freitas, despite his suspicious intentions, showed a more human side when he protected Fogg. Palacios, always loyal, was ready to face any situation for the sake of his boss. Valentina, with her compassionate spirit, helped to keep calm amidst the chaos.

With the incident resolved, the foursome decided it was time to return to the hotel. The busy streets began to calm down, and the cool evening breeze brought relief after the tension.

Upon arriving at the hotel, they said goodbye to Freitas,

who was also on his way.

Before leaving, Freitas approached Palacios with a look of remorse.

– Palacios, I found this on the ground in Guadalajara. I think it’s yours, – he said, returning the cell phone to the Uruguayan.


Palacios was extremely irritated when he realized that the investigator had stolen his cell phone, but he was surprised and grateful to receive it back.

– I understand. You did this so that I couldn’t contact my boss, – Palacios said, shaking his head. – Okay, the important thing is that I recovered the memories of the trip saved in the photos that I thought I had lost. Thank you, Freitas – Palacios said sincerely.

Freitas, wounded in the knees by the fall—and also in the soul by the doubts he was beginning to have about the true character of Phileas Fogg V— was already planning a next meeting with the group.

Fogg, Valentina and Palacios would leave San Francisco after New Year’s Eve, on January 1, 2025, with renewed vigor. The fireworks display near the Ferry Building, synchronized to the nearly 20-minute countdown to midnight, was impressive. They were ready to continue their challenging journey around the world. This time, without Freitas in the car.

WYOMING



FOGG, PALACIOS AND VALENTINA FACE BISON AND GET TO MEET THE WYOMING COWBOYS.

CHAPTER XXVI

Leaving San Francisco after New Year's Eve, Phileas Fogg, Palacios and Valentina headed north on Interstate 5 toward Seattle. They crossed the Bay Bridge and the characteristic San Francisco fog early in the morning, passing through urban areas and suburbs until they reached the California state capital, Sacramento. They drove through vast agricultural areas and harvests, until the I-5 began

its climb through the Klamath Mountains, with dense forests and mountains all around. They entered Oregon, and the landscape became even more impressive with the valleys and hills of the southern part of the state. The region is known for its green forests and agricultural fields. A return to more urban landscapes suggested the approach of Eugene, where they spent the night after more than 800 kilometers driven on the first day of the year.

They faced nearly 0°C the next morning from Eugene to Seattle, with Fogg already fearing that a possible blizzard would ruin the trip. As he drove his meticulously maintained SUV, Lionel Palacios, in the back seat, watched with fascination as a green metallic structure approached. The Interstate Bridge rose majestically over the Columbia River, connecting the vast lands of Oregon with the promising state of Washington. Palacios couldn't help but notice the steel beams that made up the structure, their geometric shapes contrasting with the natural fluidity of the river below. Each segment of the bridge seemed designed with mathematical precision, an ode to human engineering.

Through the window, boats of different sizes sailed along the Columbia River, some waiting patiently while the drawbridge section of the bridge remained lowered, allowing the continuous flow of vehicles.

– Look, Palacios, – Fogg said, his voice calm as ever. – This bridge is not only a connection between two lands, but a testament to the human capacity to overcome natural barriers.

They arrived in Seattle in the rain, eager to satiate their

stomachs. Palacios commented that rain and cold increased hunger, to which the other two laughed.

They visited the Space Needle for a panoramic view of the city and stopped at Loupe, a lounge with the world's first and only rotating glass floor. They also went to Pike Place Market, a historic market built in 1907 and the heart of Seattle.

They left the next morning for Yellowstone National Park. The success of the trip at this time of year did not depend solely on the driver's skill. They had to count on their fortune not encountering a blizzard that would leave them stranded on the road. Fogg engineered dates to meet their objectives.

On Friday, January 3, it took them eight hours to get from Seattle to Missoula, Montana. Some stretches had a thin layer of ice on the road, and a whiter part of the highway only made Fogg realize he was on the shoulder when he felt the texture of gravel under his tires.

They left early on Saturday for West Yellowstone, where they would prepare for the next epic day in Yellowstone National Park. They wanted to see the bison, especially in Lamar Valley and Hayden Valley, where these huge animals are seen in great numbers. They move in tight groups, their thick coats protecting them from the relentless temperatures that often drop well below freezing.

Valentina commented to her traveling companions:

– Notice how the bison use their large heads to push the snow. Do you know why? It's in order to find vegetation and feed.

As they were crossing one of the park roads, Fogg's car was suddenly forced to stop. A large herd of bison was completely blocking the way. The imposing animals advanced slowly, without caring about the presence of the car. The situation was fascinating and at the same time challenging, since the bison showed no signs of giving way.

When a bison stopped next to the car, Palacios exclaimed:

– They are animals of Amazonian dimensions, Mr. Fogg!

– It's an incredible spectacle, – said Valentina, amazed by the scene. – But this could delay us a lot.

Fogg, maintaining his usual calm, commented:

– We can't do anything but wait for them to pass.

After 50 minutes, the herd finally moved, allowing them to continue their tour.

They spent two more days exploring the park. In the first week of January, Yellowstone transforms into a scene of wild and imposing beauty. The vast fields, usually vibrant and green, are covered in a thick blanket of snow. Smoke from hot springs rises lazily into the chilly air, while geysers such as Old Faithful erupt in majestic displays of steam and water.

Majestic, yet dangerous: the water temperature of a geyser can reach 200°C.

Well-equipped for the harsh cold, Fogg, Valentina and

Palacios rode through the park on snowmobiles and used snowshoes for some isolated trails. The winter silence was broken only by the distant sound of running water and the cracking of tree trunks under the weight of snow.

During dinner, Valentina revealed her curiosity about the world of cowboys and their culture. Since she had seen a series on television with the park's name, she imagined that she was close to that reality. Fogg then decided that he would satisfy his friend's curiosity the next day, and this detour from the original route would not ruin his bet. The systematic Fogg had not yet realized that his subconscious was guiding him to do everything possible and impossible to charm the biologist.

After a hearty breakfast, they headed to Cody, known as the Rodeo Capital of the World, and were able to visit a traditional cattle ranch. They were welcomed by a group of local cowboys, who invited them to see the routine of the ranch. Valentina was able to watch the cowboys driving the cattle and demonstrating their skills with lassoes and horses.

After the visit, they thanked them for their hospitality and continued their journey east, with Fogg calculating three strategic stops for the night: Rapid City, Sioux Falls and Madison, before reaching Chicago.

On the way, a heavy snowstorm struck, turning the road into a slippery and treacherous trail. Fogg decided it was time to put chains on the tires. He and Palacios got out of the car, braving the freezing wind and the rapidly falling snow, covering everything around them.



– This winter is relentless, it’s scary! – Palacios commented, as he helped Fogg adjust the chains.

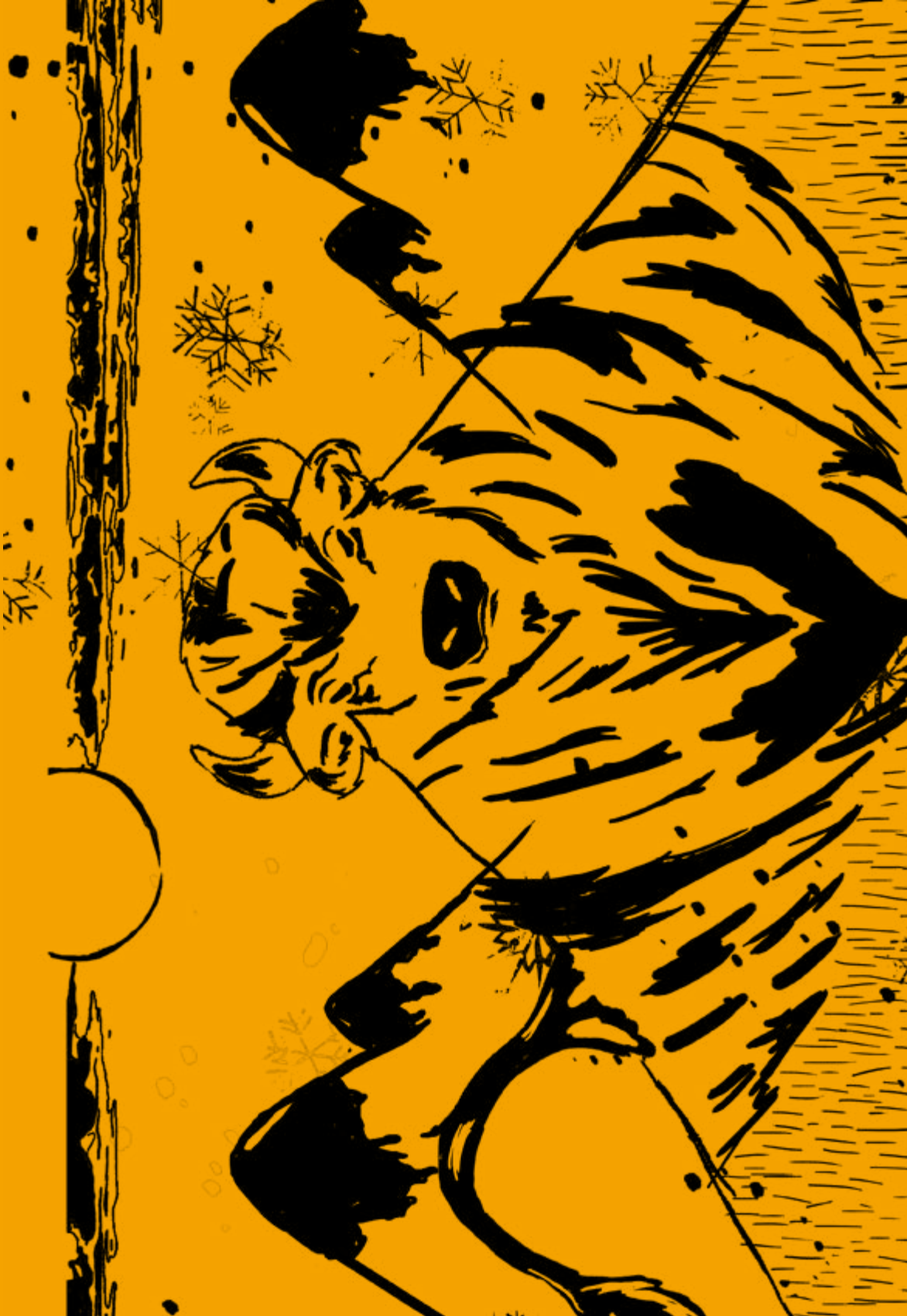
– Fear is facing what you don’t know, Palacios. We’re prepared for this, – Fogg replied, with a determined look.

With the chains on the tires, they continued their journey, driving cautiously along the snow-covered roads. The experience of driving in the snow was challenging, but also an opportunity to learn and adapt to the adverse conditions.

– This is a true endurance test, – Valentina commented, as she watched the white landscape through the window.

Finally, they arrived in a dark Chicago. The metropolis welcomed them with its frigid climate and characteristic wind. Famous for its imposing architecture, rich history and music, Chicago would be a temporary refuge from the harsh winter.

– Welcome to Chicago, the city where the wind bends, – Fogg said jokingly.





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IN WHICH

FOGG, PALACIOS AND VALENTINA EXPLORE CHICAGO AND DETROIT, AND CONTINUE THEIR TRIP TO NEW YORK.

CHAPTER XXVII

Chicago in January is a test of human endurance. The vast expanse of Lake Michigan, usually a serene blue landscape, becomes a frozen wasteland, an endless white landscape. The wind gains a ferocity that few cities

know. It whistles between the skyscrapers, like an ancient warning of the rigors of winter, and cuts through the skin like invisible blades.

The streets, once full of life and movement, are now dominated by a silence

broken only by the creaking of snow under the feet of the few who dare venture out.

Its inhabitants, wrapped in layers of heavy clothing, look like modern warriors facing a daily battle with their woolen hats, thick scarves and sturdy gloves. More than accessories, they are armor against frostbite.

The trees in the parks, stripped of their leaves, stand like skeletons against the gray sky, and the few birds that remain are seen as dark spots in the whiteness, fighting the wind for shelter.

This was the Chicago that welcomed Phileas Fogg, Palacios and Valentina with its imposing skyscrapers and a skyline dominated by the iconic Willis Tower, the second tallest building in the United States.

A timid sun appeared on Sunday morning. They walked to the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the largest and oldest art museums in the United States, founded in 1879.

They then headed to the Robie House, one of the masterpieces by Frank Lloyd Wright, recognized as the greatest American architect of all time.

In the evening, the trio immersed themselves in Chicago's vibrant music scene. They went to a blues club in the Near North Side neighborhood, where the catchy melodies and engaging rhythms transported them to another time.

Valentina, a lover of music, was enchanted by the live

performances.

– The guitar weeps, cries and whispers with an intensity that only a city like Chicago can inspire. It enters through the ears but reaches the heart.

Fogg, excited by Valentina’s musical sensitivity, suggested that they close the night with more music. They headed to a jazz club in Bronzeville, where the energy and improvisation of the musicians kept them entertained until the early hours of the morning.

They spent two more days in Chicago exploring the exuberant architecture and doing some shopping for winter clothing. Phileas Fogg V also bought an emergency kit for possible roadblock situations: blankets, non-perishable food, plenty of water and a snow shovel. With memories of Chicago still fresh, Fogg, Palacios and Valentina left very early on Wednesday, January 15, heading for New York, but not before stopping in Detroit.

Fogg prepared the tires with chains. As a precaution, he studied the conditions of I-94, one of the main interstate highways in the U.S. Midwest, connecting Chicago to Detroit. He made sure that salt and sand trucks were plying the road, spreading material that helps melt ice and improve traction. In the event of snowstorms, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) use a fleet of snowplows, pushing the snow to the side and clearing roads.

Driving cautiously because of the poor visibility, Fogg

entered Detroit before noon. His interest in the city was clear: at the dawn of the 20th century, Henry Ford's bold vision made Detroit the American auto mecca and the beating heart of the automotive industry. But the once-mighty metropolis began to crumble under the weight of deindustrialization in the 1970s and 1980s, as factories closed their doors and people fled to the suburbs, leaving behind a landscape of ruins. Its official bankruptcy in 2013 marked the culmination of its downfall, becoming the largest U.S. city to declare such a financial collapse. But like a phoenix rising from the ashes, Detroit has embarked on a remarkable renaissance, revitalizing its downtown with new businesses and a renewed cultural scene, attracting new residents and investors to its now vibrant streets.

The first stop, after a quick snack, was the Henry Ford Museum, where Fogg became fascinated by the collection of historic cars and the technological innovations that have shaped the auto industry and elevated Detroit to the status of the most prosperous city in the United States.

– Valentina! Palacios! Look at that car, the Model T.

– Impressive, Mr. Fogg. What makes that car so special?
– Palacios asked.

– It was known as the Tin Lizzie. The first model, from 1908, cost \$850. But in 1913, Henry Ford managed to lower the cost of production because he created the division of labor and enabled mass production. This made production so cheap that in 1927, the last year of its manufacture, the Model T had already plummeted to \$290.

CHICAGO
JAZZ

CHICAGO
JAZZ

CHIC





NEW YORK

– Was \$290 very cheap back then, Phileas? – Valentina asked.

And Fogg, with the history of automobiles on the tip of his tongue, explained:

– Yes, Valentina! I believe less than \$10,000, in today’s figures. Before the Model T, cars were a luxury for the rich. Ford democratized the automobile.

After the lesson on automobiles, the trio found time to go to Hitsville U.S.A., which closed at six o’clock. The iconic studio, where Motown Records was founded in 1959 by Berry Gordy, had a significant impact on American music, launching the careers of legends such as Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder and The Supremes.

Valentina, ever the witty sort, commented:

– Phileas, tomorrow, on our way to New York, we’ll listen to any song, as long as it’s Dancing in The Street by Martha and The Vandellas.

Fogg, curiously rolling up his sleeves, replied:

– What about My Girl by the Temptations? – The cheeky and unusual comment made Palacios give Valentina a knowing smile.

Detroit would be behind them the next morning. According to Fogg’s calculations, it would be more cautious to stop in Bellefonte as a precaution, to divide the trip to New

York into two days and only drive in daylight.

It was a cold Friday morning, January 18, 2025, when Phileas Fogg V's SUV left the quiet town of Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, to set off on the journey to New York.

As they approached New York, skyscrapers began to rise on the horizon. Crossing the imposing George Washington Bridge was an impressive sight. The colossal, suspended steel structure, stretching over the Hudson River, seemed almost to vibrate with the constant stream of vehicles passing through its lanes.

Entering Manhattan was a spectacle for Palacios and Valentina, who had not yet visited the city. The January cold caused steam to rise from the manholes and create fleeting clouds that quickly disappeared.

As they headed south, approaching the heart of SoHo, where they would be staying, the landscape changed from industrial to sophisticated and artistic. SoHo's cobblestone streets and cast-iron architecture told stories of an industrial past now transformed into a fashion and cultural district, with elegant clothing shops, art galleries, and cozy cafes.

They stayed in New York until Sunday night, making the most of their time in the city that never sleeps. They began Saturday at Ground Zero, a place of deep reflection and homage, where they felt the weight of recent history. They saw the statue that symbolizes the Stock Exchange. They headed to the port and Pier 17. The visit to the Statue

of Liberty was one of the highlights of the day. They sailed to the island, where they were impressed by the grandeur of the monument, a symbol of freedom and hope.

On Sunday, the journey began with a visit to the American Museum of Natural History. Valentina was especially fascinated by the dinosaur fossils, rare minerals and indigenous cultures. Fogg and Palacios were enchanted by the vast collections and wealth of information that the museum offered. They continued to Central Park, with trees and paths adorned with a white blanket. Palacios found a pretzel vendor, bought one, and took a generous bite. His eyes widened and he revealed the amused soul of a poet:

– It’s as if a piece of cloud fell in love with the sea and, together, created this gastronomic wonder! – Valentina and Fogg laughed as Palacios continued to devour the pretzel, evidently delighted with the simplicity and perfection of this classic New York snack. In the late afternoon, they headed to the Empire State Building and were rewarded with a spectacular view of the city, with a highlight being the beauty of a building that stood out among the others: the Chrysler, a name that had always piqued the curiosity of someone passionate about automobiles like Phileas Fogg V.

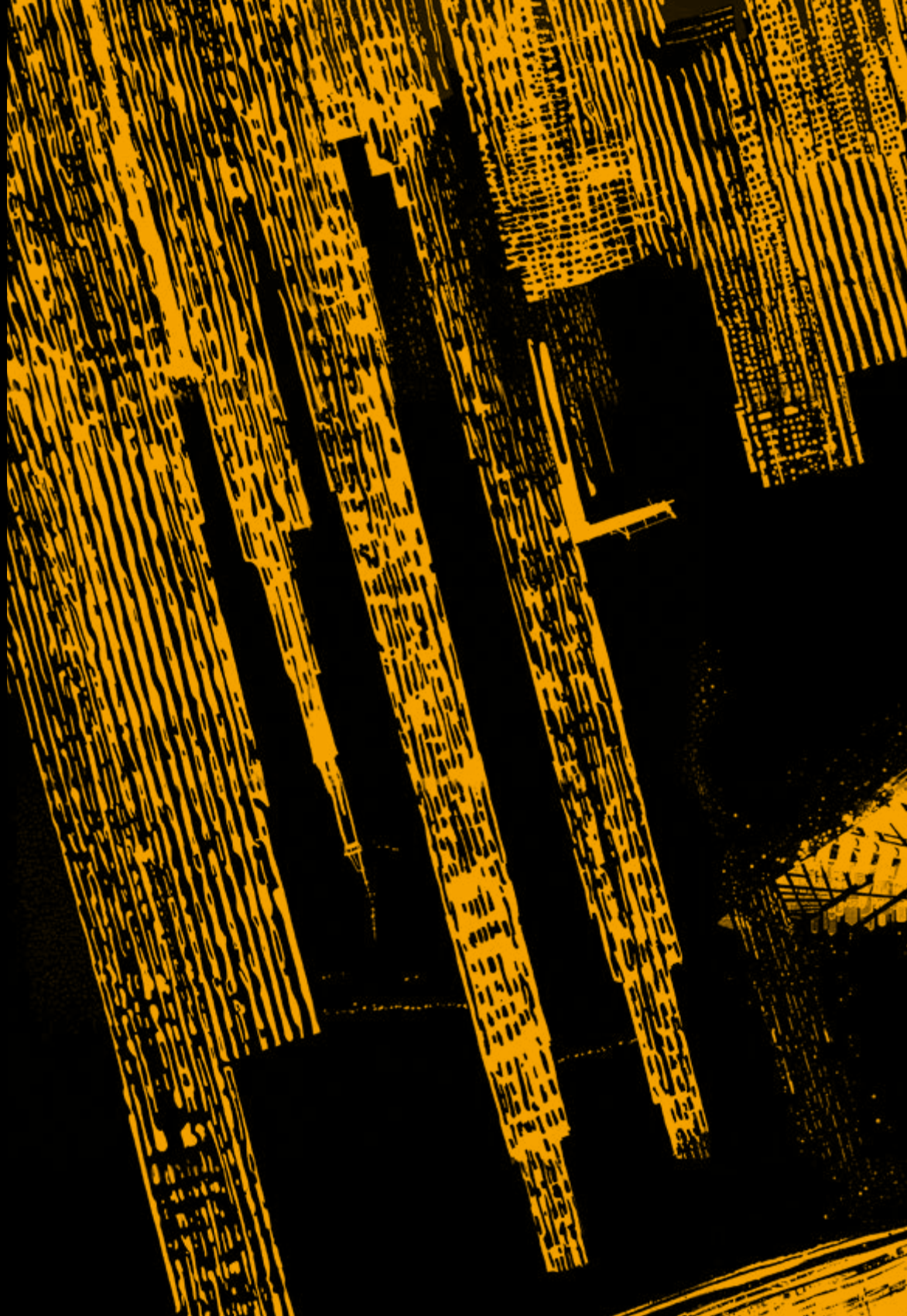
Pointing toward the iconic jewel of Art Deco architecture, Fogg explained:

This building was commissioned by Walter P. Chrysler, founder of the Chrysler Corporation. He wanted it to



be a symbol of his company's progress and modernity. It was the tallest building in the world for 11 months, when the Empire State Building was completed.

Before leaving New York, they decided to take a stroll down Broadway. The bright lights of the theaters and the vibrant energy of the city created a magical atmosphere. Palacios swore he had seen Freitas somewhere. When he went back to check if he was right, the detective was no longer there. He disappeared among other hooded figures.





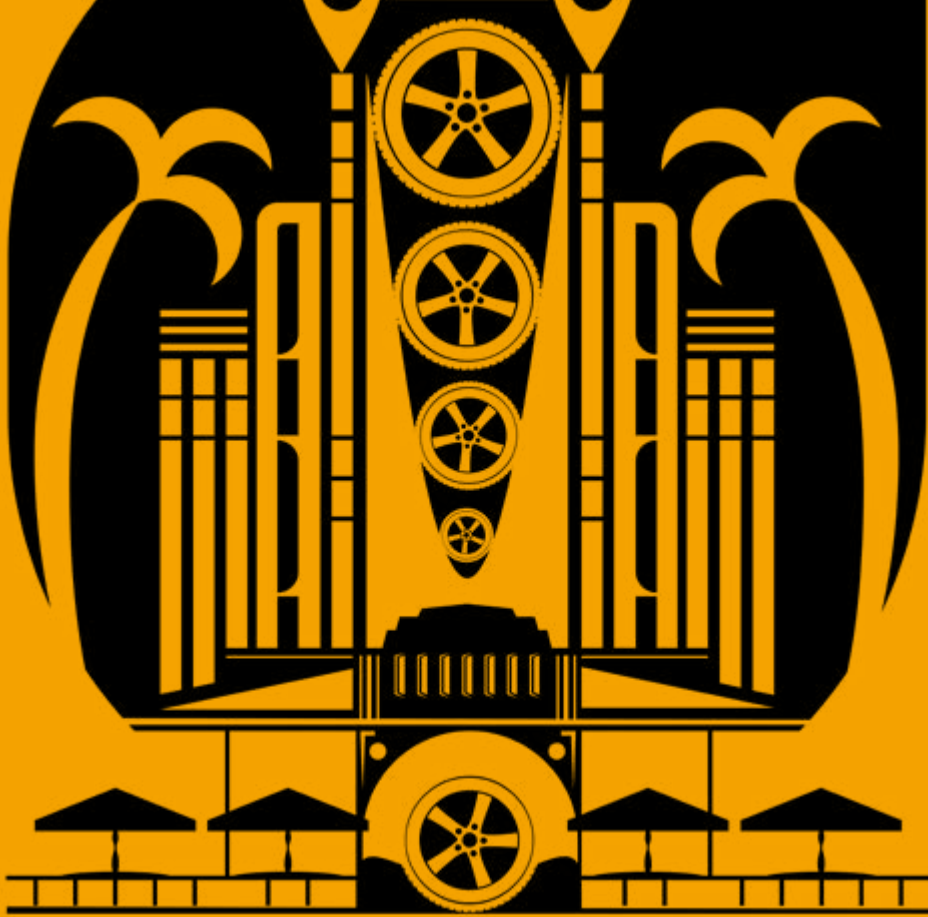
WHICH

FOGG, PALACIOS AND
VALENTINA **FACE CHALLENGES**
ON THE ROAD AND PREPARE
THE LOGISTICS TO CROSS
THE ATLANTIC.

C H A P T E R X X V I I I

On January 20, the gray sky, covered by heavy clouds, foretold a journey shrouded by the rigors of winter. Fogg, Valentina and Palacios set off along I-95, the vital artery of the East Coast of the United States, heading for Washington, D.C. Unforgettable New York, in all its urban splendor, gradually disappeared in the rearview mirror, replaced by quiet suburbs and villages





sleeping under a thin veil of snow.

As they drove along the New Jersey Turnpike, the scenery changed. The Delaware River, partially frozen, reflected the somber sky, while small islands of ice drifted lazily in its dark waters.

The road, though well maintained, required caution. The snowflakes that had fallen gently during the morning had intensified into a blizzard, reducing visibility and speed. Snowplows were working incessantly, pushing the snow to the roadside and dumping salt so as to prevent freezing.

They left behind historic cities like Philadelphia and Baltimore. As they approached Washington, D.C., the majestic capital of the United States, the snow eased up, but the cold persisted. The Capitol, the Washington Monument, and the White House emerged on the horizon.

As they entered the city via George Washington Parkway, the winter landscape was replaced by the warmth of government buildings and the constant movement of urban life that, even in the dead of winter, pulses with the vitality of one of America's most iconic cities.

Arriving in Washington, D.C. meant the travelers had clocked up nearly 40,000 kilometers, exactly 110 days after leaving the door of the Clube Auto Paulistano. "Half of the bet is already won," Fogg thought. The first thing they did when they arrived in the city was to take the car to a garage for full service and all the procedures for the tires(*), such as alignment, balancing and correct pressure gauging.

They took advantage of the afternoon to visit some of the iconic monuments and museums. They walked along the National Mall, admiring the Capitol, the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. Valentina was especially enchanted by the National Museum of Natural History, where she spent hours exploring the exhibits.

At dinner, they enjoyed one of the city's culinary symbols: half-smoke. A smoked sausage, a mix of beef and pork, lightly spiced and served in a hot dog bun.

Fogg joked about the name of the delicacy:

(*) Note: Continental UltraContact tires.



WASHINGTON  N

– Since we're halfway there, there's nothing like a half-smoke!

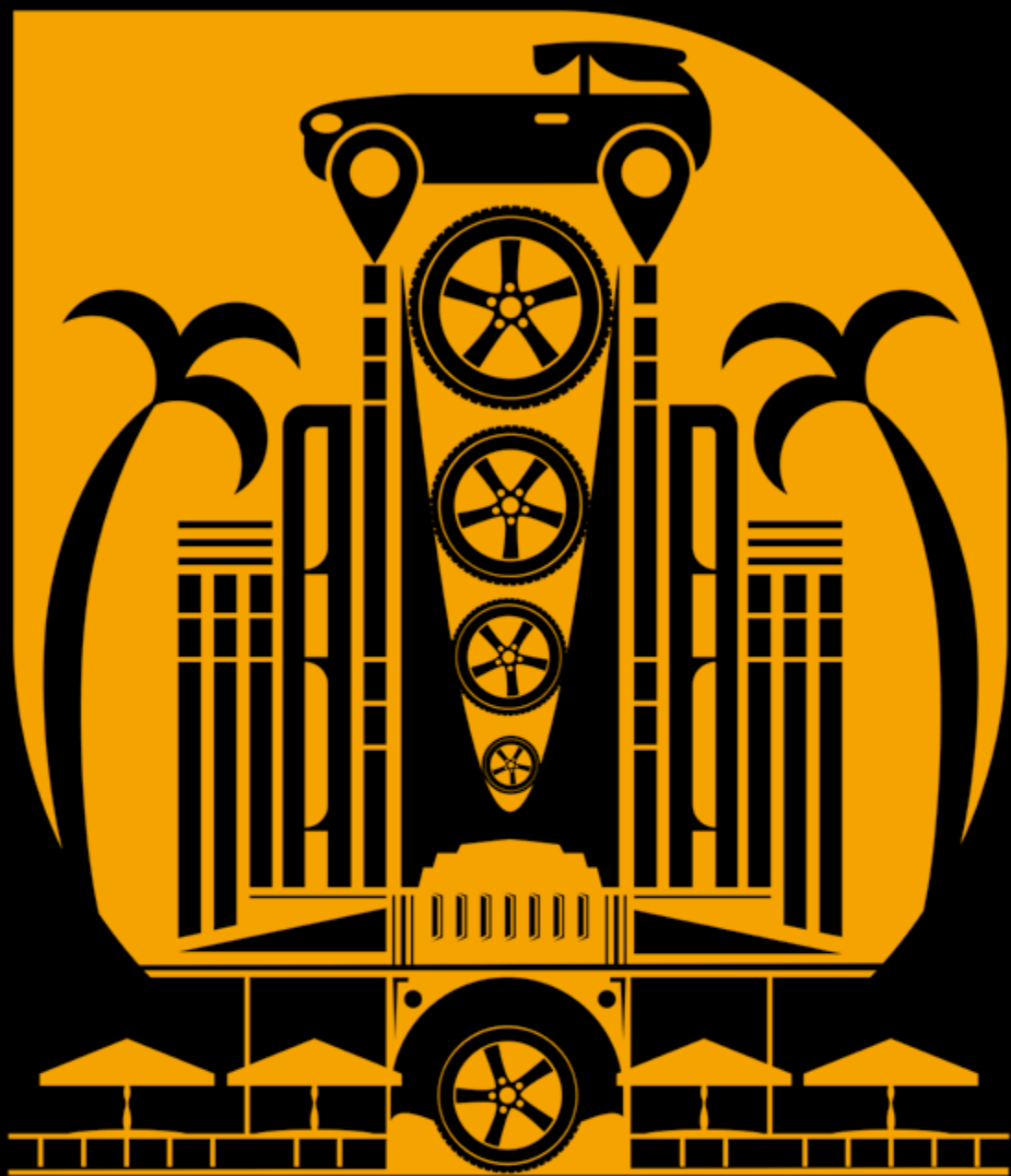
They continued their journey along Interstate 95, arriving in Atlanta just before ten o'clock at night. Atlanta dawned with its mix of southern charm, modernity and a warm 11°C for those who had faced so much cold in the previous weeks.

It was an intense day, which began with a visit to the largest aquarium in North America, the Georgia Aquarium. Valentina, impressed by the grandeur of the whale sharks, commented:

– These are the largest fish in the world, the largest that have ever lived on this planet! They can reach 18 meters. And the spots are like fingerprints, so no two sharks are the same.

From Atlanta to Miami via Interstate 75, the journey was long. They arrived in the city on a cool evening and headed straight for Calle Ocho, or 8th Street. The iconic street was located in the heart of Little Havana, one of Miami's most vibrant and culturally rich neighborhoods. A symbol of the Cuban-American community, it offers an authentic and lively experience of Latin culture. The three tried Ropa Vieja, the most traditional Cuban dish, consisting of shredded beef slowly cooked in a tasty sauce made with tomatoes, bell peppers, onions, garlic, and spices. They listened to some salsa and went to sleep.

Miami would pose the crucial logistical challenge: how would the car be sent to Lisbon? After some consultation, Fogg discovered that the most efficient way would be by ship,



MIAMI

and the trio would fly to Lisbon. They would ship the car and enjoy a few days in the city. They found a shipping company that offered international vehicle shipping services. Fogg took care of all the necessary formalities to ensure that the car would be well protected and arrive safely at the port of Lisbon in 15 days. It would be a break from the adventure. Fogg, always methodical, did the math: he set aside seven of them to enjoy Miami and the surrounding area, one for the trip to Lisbon and another seven to enjoy the Portuguese capital until the car arrived. After shipping the car, he felt relieved.

It had been a much-needed week of low turnover. Visits to attractions such as the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, shopping, soccer – where Valentina insisted on buying a pink jersey with the number 10 on the back –, basketball, Art Deco buildings and lots of relaxation on South Beach. A week later, Fogg, Palacios and Valentina prepared for the next leg of the trip. They took a direct flight to Lisbon. On board the plane, they reflected on the adventures and challenges they had faced so far. The three of them sat in the same row of seats. Valentina between them, which said a lot.

The arrival in Lisbon would mark the beginning of the European, African and Asian leg of the trip, with 38,000 kilometers to be covered. It would also mark a moment of astonishment for all of them, especially for Phileas Fogg V: was it a coincidence that Alfredo Freitas would appear beside them in the line for people without European citizenship?





In WHICH

ALL OF THEM DISCOVER THE
MEANING OF “INÊS HAS DIED”
IN THE HEART OF PORTUGAL.✪

CHAPTER XXIX

Everyone was surprised. And rightly so. What was the familiar figure of Alfredo Freitas doing at Lisbon Airport?

When they met again, Freitas explained that he was on an international mission in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa. Phileas Fogg V politely informed them that both places would be on his itinerary. If Freitas had time, he could join them. The detective, who, without Fogg realizing, was greatly interested in this invitation, promptly accepted.

During the week leading up to the car's arrival, the group took the opportunity to get to know Lisbon in depth. They visited the Jerónimos Monastery, with its impressive Manueline architecture, built in the 16th century to commemorate Vasco da Gama's return from India. They went to the Belém Tower, one of Lisbon's most iconic monuments, built in the early 16th century as a fortress and departure port for many Portuguese explorers during the Age of Discovery. They enjoyed the local pastries of Belém.

On the morning of Saturday, February 8, Fogg took care of the final steps to retrieve his SUV from the Port of Lisbon and continue their journey. The next stage would take them to the city of Porto, with strategic stops along the way to explore the wonders of Portugal.

The four of them left Lisbon in the morning, heading along the A-8 towards Óbidos. This picturesque medieval town, surrounded by 14th-century walls, charmed everyone with its cobblestone streets, whitewashed houses and colorful bougainvillea. They walked along the walls and visited the charming Livraria Santiago, located inside an old church, where Fogg purchased a tourist guide to Morocco. Palacios tried the first and last ginjinha of his life and toasted the success of the new stage of the trip. When Freitas went to toast him, he was met with eyes that burned with silent fury.

They continued to Alcobaça to visit the Monastery, an Unesco World Heritage Site and the origin of the expression "Inês is Dead". This impressive Gothic complex, founded in 1153 by Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal,



houses the tombs of Pedro and Inês de Castro, protagonists of one of the most tragic love affairs in Portuguese history. Pedro, the crown prince, and Inês de Castro, the stunningly beautiful Galician lady, lived a forbidden and overwhelming love, against all expectations and rules of the court. Fearing the influence that Inês could have on his son and the kingdom, Afonso IV ordered her murder, in Inês' retreat in Coimbra. Upon learning of the tragedy, Pedro, overcome by unbearable grief, swore revenge and justice.

When he ascended to the throne as Pedro I, in a gesture of love and madness, he disinterred Inês' body and ordered her to be crowned queen. In the macabre ceremony, the nobles of the court were forced to kiss the skeletal hand of the new queen. From that moment on, the phrase "Now Inês is dead" became a symbol of the irreversible, of destiny sealed by forces beyond human control.

The story touched Valentina, who asked:

– Did Shakespeare know this when he wrote Romeo and Juliet?

They continued their journey along the A-1 towards Porto. They arrived in the city at dusk, greeted by the stunning view of the Douro River and the emblematic bridges that connect the two banks. Hungry, they went to try a Francesinha, the city's iconic dish. A sandwich stuffed with various meats, topped with melted cheese and a spicy tomato and beer sauce, served with French fries.

One of the highlights of the visit was the Porto wine

tasting. On foot, they crossed the Dom Luís I Bridge to Vila Nova de Gaia, where some of the most famous wine cellars are located. On a guided tour, they learned about the production and storage process of Porto wine and tasted several varietals, delighting their palates.

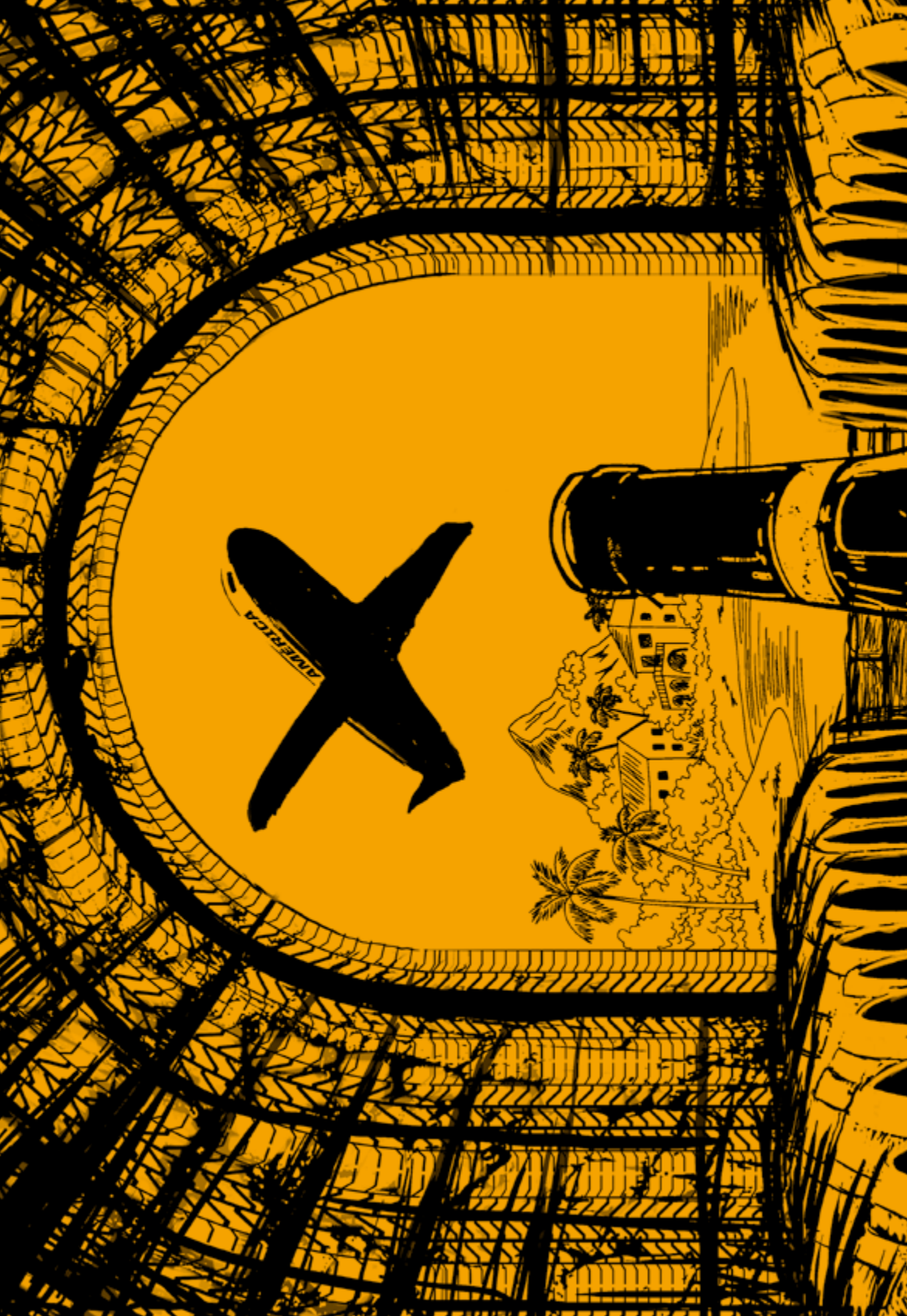
Palacios, already with a few more glasses of wine, and taking advantage of the fact that Fogg and Valentina were busy with each other, looked steadily at Freitas and said:

– Do you think you can join us and act as if I didn't notice? I think you'd better be careful with your actions, Freitas. If you do anything that puts my boss at risk, I will take care of it personally.

Freitas, maintaining his composure, calmly replied:

– There is no need for threats, Palacios. I'm here for almost the same mission as you: I just need to understand what's really going on in Phileas Fogg V's head. If we're on the same side, there won't be any problems.

Palacios held his gaze steady for a few more seconds before looking away. The atmosphere was no longer tense, but the threat had been made. Freitas knew he couldn't step out of line.







IN WHICH

FOGG, PALACIOS, VALENTINA
AND FREITAS CROSS
SPAIN TOWARDS AFRICA.✪

C H A P T E R X X X

They left the city of Porto at dawn, heading for Santiago de Compostela. The drive amounted to 230 kilometers of winding roads, crossing the green hills of Galicia. Santiago de Compostela, famous for its

cathedral and the Caminho de Santiago, welcomed the group with a clear sky and a cool breeze. Valentina, impressed by the Gothic architecture of the cathedral, said a silent prayer for her parents as the others watched the pilgrims

arriving at the end of their spiritual journeys.

The afternoon was spent exploring the cobblestone streets and tasting local dishes. The most popular dish was the Pulpo a la Gallega, also known as the Pulpo a Feira. This is an octopus cooked and served with olive oil, coarse salt and paprika, with potatoes on the side and traditionally served on a wooden plate.

From Santiago, they followed the famous Autovia del Cantábrico, which runs along Spain's Atlantic Coast towards Bilbao. Nearly 600 kilometers were covered amidst stunning landscapes, with wild beaches on the left and mountains on the right. Bilbao, in addition to being an important urban center, stands out for its strong Basque identity. Euskara, one of the oldest languages in Europe and unrelated to Spanish, echoes through the streets. They visited the city's most iconic landmark, the Guggenheim Museum, where the building's curved, futuristic shapes made a big impression on Fogg and Valentina. Palacios, on the other hand, seemed more interested in keeping an eye on Freitas, who disappeared for a few hours.

Their next destination was the Spanish capital. The 400 kilometers along the A-1 were an easy drive, with vast plains dotted with medieval villages and castles in the distance. They arrived in Madrid in the late afternoon and checked into a hotel near the center, eager to explore the city. They would spend a day there.

While Fogg, Valentina and Palacios went to the Prado Museum, the Plaza Mayor and the Royal Palace of Madrid, an imposing Baroque building and official residence of the King

of Spain, Freitas went missing once again, claiming he had commitments with Spanish authorities pertaining to his mission in the Iberian Peninsula.

During dinner, always under the suspicious glare of Palacios, Freitas was evasive about his meetings. He shrewdly changed the subject to compare Madrid to Barcelona.

– Madrid is the essence of Spain, it has this imposing architecture, a formality, a royal charm and a nightlife that never slows down! – he commented.

– But I’ve heard that Barcelona has a more artistic and free spirit, – said Valentina.

– I’m looking forward to comparing the two!

Fogg agreed, adding:

– Madrid is the political and historical heart of Spain, while Barcelona is a beach city, sunnier, and has Catalan culture. Both are essential to understanding the soul of this country and they even rival each other in soccer. Valentina, in a few days you will satisfy your curiosity.

– Yes! – added Valentina. – I found Madrid fascinating, full of history and culture. But there is one part that bothers me, which is the bullfighting. As a biologist and nature lover, it is hard for me to accept the idea that the torture and suffering of an animal can be considered entertainment.

Everyone agreed. Palacios thought twice before taking the

last bite of his Rabo de Toro, the traditional Madrid stew that was historically prepared after bullfights using the tail of the slain bull.

The journey continued towards the Alhambra in Granada, through picturesque landscapes and majestic mountains. Upon arrival, they were struck by the impressive sight of the palace complex, a jewel of Islamic architecture.

They explored the courtyards, gardens and ornate halls, marveling at the richness of detail and the serene beauty of the place. A testament to the skill and splendor of Moorish civilization, Alhambra seemed to tell the story of a time gone by.

It was in this setting of majestic halls, geometric mosaics, colorful tiles and beautiful arabesques that Freitas pulled Palacios into a conversation away from the eyes of Fogg and Valentina.

– Palacios, I’m intrigued by Fogg. I have reason to believe he may have connections with a big mob boss in Ibiza. I need to investigate further, but I have a feeling something is fishy.

Palacios, outraged, replied:

– If you think you can stay with us and spy on my boss, you’ve got another thing coming. If you do anything that puts Mr. Fogg at risk, you will have problems with me. I think it’s time for you to make yourself scarce.

Freitas, remaining calm, said:





– Don't worry, I'll follow my way in Gibraltar, but we'll meet again in Dubai. Until then, don't worry, I won't do anything to spoil your trip.

They headed south from Alhambra toward the Strait of Gibraltar. The 250-kilometer journey took them through stunning landscapes to the point where Europe and Africa almost touch each other. Freitas said goodbye to the trio, telling everyone that his mission would continue there, still on European territory.

The party crossed the Strait of Gibraltar on a ferry and set foot on the African continent for the first time at seven o'clock on Saturday night, February 15. The feeling of traveling through a new continent, with uncertainties about the condition of the roads or internet signals, brought feelings of curiosity and apprehension.

Phileas Fogg V thought to himself:

– I'm glad I bought my Morocco guidebook. I feel like I'll need it!





IN WHICH

FOGG, PALACIOS AND VALENTINA SEE GOATS ON TREES AND CHALLENGE THE SAHARA DESERT.

CHAPTER XXXI

The arrival in Tangier at sunset was marked by a cool breeze and the contrast between the blue tones of the sea and the white shades of the houses that crowded the hillside. The busy and vibrant port was a prelude to the adventure that awaited them in the heart of Morocco. Fogg, Valentina and Palacios disembarked with enthusiasm, ready to explore the beauty and mysteries of this exotic land.

Tangier, with its mix of European and Arab influences, soon captivated the group. They began Sunday by walking through the medina, a labyrinth of narrow and



winding streets, filled with shops that sold from aromatic spices to colorful carpets. The smell of incense, mint tea and local food created a magical and captivating atmosphere. Fascinated, Valentina observed every detail attentively, mentally recording the colors and sounds of this unique city.

The Kasbah, an old fort that offers panoramic views of the city and the Strait of Gibraltar, was a must-see attraction. From there, they saw Europe in the distance, a reminder of the journeys they had already made and the challenges they still had to face.

From Tangier, they continued to the modern and vibrant Casablanca, known for its Art Deco architecture and the famous Hassan II Mosque. The mosque, majestic on the seafront, impressed with its 210-meter-high minaret, visible from almost every point in the city. Fascinated by the grandeur of the place, the trio walked through the large courtyard, admiring the intricate mosaics and architectural details.

Casablanca marked a moment of closer bonding between Fogg and Valentina. Palacios, feeling unwell, preferred to rest at the hotel, and Fogg took her to the most traditional and popular restaurant in the city. When the pianist played *As Time Goes By*, Phileas Fogg V could not contain himself.

– This restaurant is totally inspired by the film *Casablanca*, so it has that 1940s charm... The chandeliers and the oil lamps, the fountain in the courtyard! – he said,



to her enthusiasm. – And that was the theme song from the film.

Ever the discreet gentleman, Fogg took the opportunity to touch on personal matters.

– I wanted to talk to you about something else, – he continued. – You’ve been with us for a little over two months, and traveling isn’t cheap. You’ve insisted on paying all your expenses so far. I wanted to know if everything is okay, if you’re comfortable carrying it forward, because we still have a long way to go.

– Phileas, – she said, – I really appreciate your concern. I know this trip isn’t easy, either financially or emotionally. But it’s been something I’ve needed, more than you can imagine.

Fogg listened attentively.

– Maybe it’s time I shared something with you, – she continued. – My life hasn’t exactly been ordinary. I lost my mother very early and it was a very tough blow. My father was a scientist and a scholar, he dedicated himself a lot to his career, but he ended up wearing himself out. He passed away recently. And with him, it seems I lost my last link with the world. Continuing his research work became my motivation.

– I’m so sorry about that, Valentina. I really didn’t know... – Fogg added, sincerely moved.

– I inherited everything my father had. He was a very careful man with his finances and ended up leaving me in a good and stable situation. I have more than enough to support myself throughout the trip. To be honest, I don't have anyone else in my life. I don't have any relatives, or anything that ties me to a place. This trip, as challenging as it is, has given me a purpose. I have the opportunity to see the world that my father studied so much, to explore, to learn. And, in a way, I'm doing this for him and for us. That's why I want to be here.

– Now I understand and I'm more at ease. But know that if you need anything, any support, you can count on me!

– Thank you, Phileas. Your concern means a lot to me. I'm exactly where I need to be. And I want to continue this journey with you, until the end.

For a moment, their hands touched. They returned to the hotel after dinner, each to their own room.

The next day would be busy. They would go to Marrakech, passing first through Essaouira, the beautiful coastal city known for its fortified walls and vibrant local life, with narrow streets and bustling markets selling everything from jewelry to fresh seafood.

They had lunch in Essaouira and continued to Marrakech along the N-1. It was on this stretch of road that they saw a fascinating and unique sight: goats precariously balancing themselves on argan trees. Palacios and the astounded Valentina competed to see who could take





the best pictures.

Upon returning to the SUV, Valentina explained the phenomenon:

– These goats are agile climbers, and their ability to climb trees is an evolutionary adaptation to access the fruit. They then expel the seeds intact, causing more trees to grow.

They arrived in Marrakech while it was still daylight. They left their car in a parking lot outside the medina and headed to the riad – a traditional Moroccan home – where they would be staying. Built as residences for wealthy families or members of the elite, the architecture of a riad reflects a concern for privacy and security. The windows of the rooms open onto the interior courtyard rather than the outside, creating a serene and intimate environment. In recent years, many riads have been converted into guesthouses or small boutique hotels, offering visitors the opportunity to experience Moroccan hospitality in an authentic setting.

The next day was spent exploring Marrakech’s bustling Medina and its souks—traditional markets often found in many cities in North Africa and the Middle East. It was a living maze of alleys filled with vendors, street musicians, and artists. Donkeys carrying bags of goods were part of the flow of people and animals. Without a guide, it would have been impossible not to get lost. The Semmarine Souk, located near Jemaa el-Fnaa Square, with its stalls crammed with goods, seemed like a world apart. Valentina,

immersed in the local culture, chose to wear a colorful scarf on her head as a gesture of respect to Muslim traditions, gracefully adapting to her surroundings.

And it was off to the Sahara! The crossing of the Atlas mountains on February 20 proved to be a test of endurance for both the vehicle and its occupants. As the car climbed the steep paths, facing sharp curves that required precision and dexterity, the air became thin and cold, with temperatures dropping to close to 0°C at the highest altitudes, with snow-capped peaks surrounding the landscape. On the descent to Ouarzazate, the tires(*) had to provide full grip, the brakes could be heard groaning and the weather conditions changed abruptly, exchanging the mountainous cold for the increasing heat of the desert.

Shortly before Ouarzazate, they stopped at the ksar of Ait Benhaddou, an Unesco World Heritage Site known for its imposing mud structures. A ksar is an ancient, fortified village that protected its population from the bad weather, bandits and nomadic tribes who raided harvests.

But it was almost 400 kilometers further on, in Merzouga, on the edge of the Sahara Desert, that the greatest challenge arose. A sandstorm caught them by surprise, forcing them to seek shelter. Visibility was almost zero, and the fierce winds turned the sand into an unstoppable force. Without internet access, Fog turned to the Morocco guidebook he had bought in Óbidos. Having precise instructions on how to deal with sandstorms was crucial.

(*) Note: Continental UltraContact tires.

After the storm, the beauty of the Sahara revealed itself in all its majesty. The golden dunes stretched as far as the eye could see, and the sense of isolation was both frightening and inspiring.

Palacios commented:

– This desert is Amazonian in its dimensions, Mr. Fogg.

They decided to stay another day to explore the vastness of the Sahara. The sky was clear and the temperature, although cool in the early morning hours, quickly rose to 24°C under the intense midday sun. The group set off on a camel ride, a journey that would take them about 10 kilometers into the desert to the majestic dunes of Erg Chebbi, some of which were 150 meters high.

Getting off the camel for a short break, Valentina lost her balance, almost falling into the soft sand. But Fogg was alert and quickly caught her, preventing her from falling. She laughed and thanked him for his help, as the desert heat began to give way to the cool of the evening.

The 467-kilometer journey from Merzouga to Fez took them from the arid desert heat, through the Ziz Valley, with green oases dotting the dry terrain, and through the Middle Atlas Mountains, with their sharp curves and cedar forests, where they saw monkeys among the trees. After eight hours, they arrived in Fez, rich in history and culture. The next day they visited its medina, one of the largest

car-free urban areas in the world, a tangle of narrow, busy streets. The strong smell of the Chouara tannery, with its pools of colored dyes, was unmistakable and penetrating, an intense sensory experience that Valentina described as "an extreme test for the sense of smell, but fascinating for the eyes".

They would return to Europe the same way they had entered Africa. They left Fez early, had lunch in Tetouan, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar on the ferry from Tangier to Algeciras and slept in Malaga to resume their European journey.





IN WHICH

FREITAS FACES HIS **OWN DOUBTS** AND FOGG MOVES FORWARD TO VENICE.

CHAPTER XXXII

After saying goodbye to Fogg, Valentina and Palacios in Gibraltar, Alfredo Freitas felt a mixture of relief and unease. He watched the trio leave for Morocco, while he himself prepared to spend the next ten days in the Iberian

Peninsula. He had a lot on his mind. Freitas took advantage of the period to carry out a series of crucial investigations. Gibraltar, with its strategic position and history of smuggling, seemed like the right place to confirm the suspicions

he had of Phileas Fogg V. However, as the days passed and the leads became vague and confusing, Freitas began to question his own motivations. Was he on the right trail? Or was Fogg simply an eccentric man and nothing more?

To complete the cocktail of doubt, Interpol, always careful with its dossiers, helped track Fogg's every step, but could not find any conclusive evidence. This increased Freitas's unease. Could it all be the result of a gigantic misunderstanding? But when Interpol informed him that Fogg had booked a hotel in Marseille, another strategic smuggling site in the south of France, Freitas became even more confused, and Fogg's figure became more puzzling.

During a lonely night in a small bar on the coast of Malaga, Freitas found himself thinking about Fogg in a way he had never thought about before. There was something genuinely kind about the man, a natural disposition for good that didn't fit with the image of a smuggler.

What about Valentina? She seemed to trust Fogg so much... Could it be that she was being manipulated by him, or was Freitas truly wrong about all this?

He also thought about Palacios's loyalty, which didn't seem to be bought or forced. It was genuine, the kind of loyalty a man only has for someone he truly believes in. The Uruguayan, with his fierce devotion to Fogg, made it clear that any threat to his employer would be dealt with in a severe manner. These were not idle threats, and Freitas knew it. He could still feel the pressure of Palacios' arm against his throat, a reminder that he was dealing

with a man as determined as he was. It bothered Freitas, making him wonder about the true nature of Phileas Fogg V.

However, his professional curiosity would not allow him to simply abandon the investigation. He decided to continue, but he would consider a different approach. Perhaps it was time to find a new perspective.

Back in Europe, Fogg, Valentina and Palacios set off on the morning of February 25 for Barcelona, where they would spend the day. Even with maximum temperatures below 20°C, the city vibrated to the sound of the Mediterranean waves.

They visited the Sacred Family, Antoni Gaudí's unfinished masterpiece. This stone colossus seemed to defy the imagination with its majestic towers, sculpted facades and spectacular stained-glass windows. They explored Park Güell and strolled along Las Ramblas.

Valentina, with a calm smile, commented:

– Madrid has its grandeur, but Barcelona... Ah, Barcelona is where my heart feels at home. The Mediterranean breeze and the nature in the parks remind me of Ecuador. It's a city that lives and breathes to the rhythm of the sun, something I will always love!

The journey continued, taking the group from Barcelona to Marseille, Genoa, Florence, Rome and, finally, Venice.

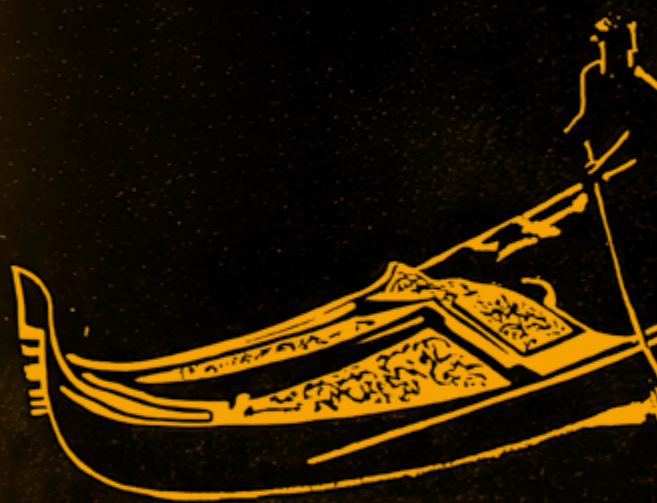
Each of these cities offered a unique experience, etching

unforgettable memories into the trio's minds. In Marseille, the boats anchored in the port and the climb up to the Basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde. In Genoa, the city's rich maritime history. There, they visited the Porto Antico and the Aquarium, one of the largest in Europe, where Valentina was fascinated by the countless marine species that brought to mind the diversity of Ecuador's waters.

Florence was something else. Inside the SUV, traveling on a Sunday through the beautiful landscapes of Tuscany on the way to Rome, Valentina couldn't stop talking about Botticelli's Venus, which had always fascinated her. Palacios, on the other hand, was impressed by Michelangelo's David, especially when he learned that this immense sculpture was made from a single block of Carrara marble. They remembered the Ponte Vecchio, the Duomo at sunset, and concluded: no other country would be as beautiful and as rich in art as Italy.

They arrived in Rome on Sunday morning, in time to run to St. Peter's Square in the Vatican, crowded with people waiting for the Pope's appearance at noon. When she saw the Pope appear in the distance at the window, Valentina, surrounded by an ebullient crowd, felt a mixture of reverence and humility. The sight of the papal figure – small but imposing against the vastness of the basilica – made her whisper to herself:

– No matter how many times one studies the faith, being here in front of such an inspiring figure is a moment I'll never forget.





They visited the Sistine Chapel and returned to Rome. Fogg announced that they would leave for Venice late the following afternoon. He did not explain why. They only had time to see the Colosseum, the illuminated Pantheon and the Trevi Fountain, where Valentina threw a coin without revealing her wishes. Palacios did not throw any, pointing to his *Nosso Senhor do Bonfim* ribbon and claiming that he had already accumulated three wishes. Fogg laughed at the pair.

On the moonlit night of Monday, Phileas Fogg V, with his usual precision, drove his vehicle along the road that leads from Rome to Venice. Upon arriving at Piazzale Roma, the last point allowed for cars before entering the Venetian mysteries, Fogg left the SUV in the large parking lot there, under the guard of an attendant in an impeccable uniform.

There was an explanation for the rush to get to Venice. Fogg led his small party to the vaporetto which, slithering like a water snake, took them slowly through the darkness of the canals and revealed a Venice in full celebration of Carnival. The facades of the historic palaces, reflected in the calm waters, seemed to float, as if they were dancing to the rhythm of the music that echoed through the alleys.

When they disembarked in St. Mark's Square, they were immediately enveloped in the vibrant atmosphere of celebration. The square, the beating heart of the city, was full of mysterious figures, their faces concealed by crafted masks, each of them a work of art in itself. Acrobats, musicians and street performers performed at every turn, their performances drawing fascinated gazes from

all sides. The melodies of violins and flutes, coming from the adjacent palaces, created an unparalleled symphony. Venice, wrapped in all its carnival glory, was like a living theatre at some point frozen in time.

But the best was reserved for the next day. The last day of the Venetian Carnival, known as Martedì Grasso – or Fat Tuesday – was the height of the celebrations. They saw the long-awaited Volo dell’Aquila, with a personality descending from the Campanile of St. Mark on a zip line, representing an eagle. Another unforgettable moment was the costume contest, in which the participants displayed their elaborate costumes and masks, also in St. Mark’s Square, with prizes awarded to the best costumes. Finally, the Carnival ended with a grand fireworks display.

Moved by the experience, Valentina confided to Fogg:

– If we ever spend another Carnival here, Phileas, I will come dressed as Columbine. Would you promise to come as the Harlequin?

IN WHICH

FOGG, PALACIOS AND VALENTINA CROSS EUROPE TO BERLIN.⊕

CHAPTER XXXIII

Phileas Fogg V, ever the man of balance, felt an unexpected internal loss of control. Valentina's subtle words during the Venice Carnival, about Columbine and Harlequin costumes, echoed in his mind. He, who used to be imperturbable, now felt his heart beating differently.

– Does she feel something for me? – Fogg thought, as he drove his SUV towards Switzerland.

In a rare moment of impulse, right at the beginning of the route from Venice to Zurich, Fogg decided to stop in

Verona. The city of Romeo and Juliet. It was as if something invisible were guiding him to the setting of one of the most famous romantic couples in history.

As they pulled up near Juliet's House, Fogg found himself troubled by emotions he had never allowed to blossom. The atmosphere of Verona, steeped in romance and tragedy, seemed to amplify his feelings. Walking along the same paths that, according to legend, had been the site of Romeo and Juliet's passionate encounters, awakened a new awareness in Fogg: perhaps he was about to face a challenge more complex than his gamble – that of opening his heart to something beyond his meticulously calculated plans. In that moment, he realized that he was not only on a journey around the world, but also on a journey within himself. And Valentina, with her constant presence, was becoming the center of this discovery.



When he finally decided to focus on the trip, Valentina dismantled him with a subtle comment:

– After Pedro and Inês de Castro, love found a sweeter tragedy here.

But Fogg did not want to allow himself a single second of distraction. They left Verona, with a quick stop in Milan for lunch.

They continued to Zurich via the A-2, a highway that cuts through the Alps and passes through the famous Gotthard Tunnel. The journey promised to be challenging. They were faced with the harsh European winter, and the snow was falling slowly. The winding roads, flanked by cliffs and covered in a thin layer of ice, demanded all of Fogg's attention and driving skills.

As they entered the Gotthard Tunnel, one of the longest in the world, 17 kilometers long, they felt a brief respite from the pressure of the mountains. This magnificent feat of engineering allowed for a safer crossing in the harsh March weather. When they emerged on the other side, the view of the snow-capped Swiss Alps was breathtaking. Deep valleys sheltered small villages with roofs also covered in snow. Palacios, ever alert, wouldn't stop taking pictures.

They arrived in Zurich at dusk. The journey had just passed the 50,000-kilometer mark, and Fogg scheduled a complete check-up of the car for the following morning, including tire alignment and balancing(*). They took the day to explore the city. They took a boat trip to

(*) Note: Continental UltraContact tires.

see the stunning landscapes on the shores of Lake Zurich. And they couldn't leave Switzerland without first visiting a local chocolatier to taste the wonderful artisanal chocolates and learn about the manufacturing process, creating a sweet and memorable experience.

Fogg took advantage of the solitude of the night in his hotel room to reflect on the trip. Methodical, he thought about numbers. Fifty thousand kilometers traveled. Thirty thousand to complete. Five months on the road driving an average of 333 kilometers per day. Ninety days with Valentina on board. And 48 hours since she spoke about spending another Carnival in Venice with him. He definitely needed a break from his frantic pace. He decided that they would spend at least a week in Paris to rest and catch his breath for the final stretch of the trip. Naive ideas began to cross his mind. One of them was too naive: he would call Freitas, ask if he was still in Europe and invite him to join the group again, with all expenses paid. His intention was the most childish of all: with Freitas along, he would divide the quartet into two groups. He would have some alone time with Valentina, and, in his mind, Freitas and Palacios got along very well, because he had always seen them talking together. He would reflect on this when he arrived in Paris. Little did he know what Freitas and Palacios were talking about.

Paris, the city of lights, was still wintery, with the sun setting shortly before seven in the evening. The idea of staying a week in the most beautiful city on the planet pleased everyone. What Palacios didn't like was seeing Freitas again during lunch in their first day in Paris, coming

straight from Spain and received with the honors of a head of state by Fogg. A special guest for a week of explorations in the city.

Freitas, feeling Palacios' inquisitive gaze, shrugged, as if to say: "I have nothing to do with this, I was invited!".

The week in Paris was intense. Fogg, excited about Valentina, went beyond the city's classic offerings, such as the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre Museum, the Sacré Coeur, Montmartre, the Notre-Dame, the Arc de Triomphe and other tourist attractions. Fogg included a romantic dinner on the Seine, a visit to bohemian neighborhoods such as Belleville and even a trip to the famous Pont des Arts. For many years, couples from all over the world would go there to place padlocks with their names engraved on them and then throw the keys into the Seine River, as a symbol of their eternal love. Valentina was enchanted by the romanticism and, for the first time on the trip, took a selfie with Fogg. On the Pont des Arts.

Paris impacted everyone. With the likely future couple, for obvious reasons. With Palacios, because he did not take his eyes off Freitas and had some enlightening conversations with him about Fogg's character. And with Freitas, who felt at first troubled about whether to accept the invitation and, later, happy for the opportunity to have learned even more about the generosity of Phileas Fogg V. His certainty about Fogg's guilt was increasingly wavering. What had previously been a capture mission began to transform into a reflection on his own motivations.

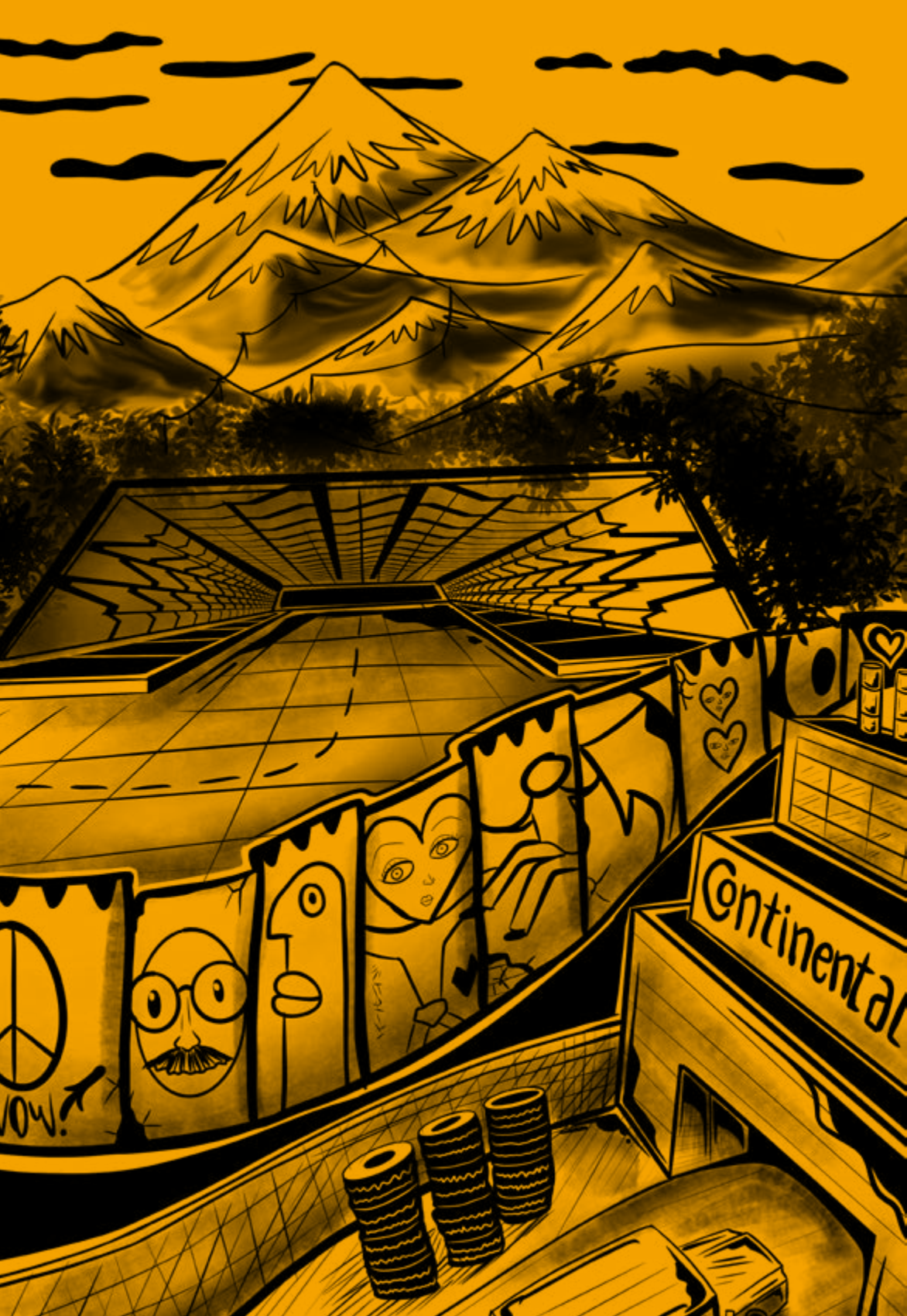
Was he really following a criminal or just a man with an adventurous spirit and a pure heart? Freitas, for the first time in a long time, began to feel ashamed of his actions.

Without Freitas, they continued from Paris to Amsterdam, the city of canals and narrow houses with elegant facades. Valentina, a nature lover, was enchanted by the Keukenhof Gardens, which were beginning to show their first spring flowers. Palacios, always curious, suggested a visit to the Rijksmuseum, where he was impressed by the works of Rembrandt.

From Amsterdam they continued to Berlin, stopping for lunch in Hanover. But Fogg's true intention in Hanover was to see the Continental Tire factory up close. The modern brick and concrete fortress stood on the edge of the Mittellandkanal. The logo at the top, shining like an industrial beacon, reinforced the human commitment to technical precision. Enthusiastic about the imposing view of the factory, Fogg commented:

— AHere are the tires that will lead me to victory in this bet. Without them, our journey would have been impossible.

Finally, they arrived in Berlin late in the afternoon, to discover that, on Sundays, not even the supermarkets are open in the capital. They spent two days in the city full of history and symbolism. They visited the Museum Island, the Reichstag, with its glass dome offering panoramic views of the city, and the Berlin Wall, where the vibrant colors of the graffiti contrasted with the gray shades of the concrete. While strolling through the streets that



witnessed so much change, Valentina made another pass:

– Phileas, the world would be great if there were no more walls between people.

Fogg was once again surrounded by romantic thoughts – which wasn't usual for him.



INLW

FOGG AND HIS GROUP CROSS EUROPE, REACH RUSSIA AND GO DOWN TO **ISTANBUL** ⚓

CHAPTER XXXIV

After the intense experience in Berlin, Phileas Fogg V, Valentina and Palacios headed east, towards Poland. The atmosphere between the three was increasingly relaxed, but full of subtle changes. The cabin of a vehicle reveals feelings. Valentina, when she first began traveling with the pair, would sit in the back seat of the SUV. When Palacios reappeared in San Francisco,





HIGH

a game of pleasantries began between them, as they took turns sitting in the passenger seat. Now, naturally, the seat next to Fogg belonged to Valentina, while Palacios observed everything in silence, respecting the new dynamic.

After leaving Berlin, the group headed to Gdansk, a historic city on the Baltic Coast of Poland notable for at least two interesting facts. Gdansk, which was once called Danzig, is the birthplace of Daniel Gabriel Fahrenheit, the famous scientist who is the namesake of the Fahrenheit temperature scale. Gdansk was also the scene of the beginning of the Second World War. The contrast between the rich gothic architecture and the scars of war was evident. Strolling through the cobblestone streets, Fogg noticed the famous Mariacka Street, known for its beautiful narrow houses with ornate balconies. Valentina was impressed by the resilient spirit of the city, which rose



again after so many conflicts.

– It’s as if each stone here carried a story of overcoming – she commented, casting a deep look at Fogg, who remained silent.

March 20 marked the beginning of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. They left Gdansk that morning to face almost 1,300 kilometers to Saint Petersburg. Fogg was informed that the route would be well maintained for the most part, but that some stretches would be narrow, passing through rural areas. There was also the risk of encountering adverse conditions on the roads, such as mud and puddles formed by the melting of ice, as well as stretches covered by thin layers of ice or melted snow. To travel more calmly and safely, they spent the night in pleasant Kaunas, the second largest city in Lithuania, and, the next day, in Pskov, already in Russia. They discovered Palacios’ incredible talent for miming during these stops, because no one in these cities understood any word or language they tried.

In the first week of spring, Saint Petersburg emerged from its long and harsh winter like a city awakening from a deep sleep. The cobblestone streets, previously hidden under layers of ice, began to reveal themselves. The sky, still marked by a gray-blue tone, gradually gave way to timid rays of sunlight that reflected on the waters of the Neva River and made the facades of the grand palaces and churches shine. Fragments of ice floated slowly along the city’s canals, like memories of a winter that was reluctant to say goodbye. And the people, dressed in dark colors, walked with a light step, contrasting with the elegance of the baroque and neoclassical architecture that dominates the city.

They spent Sunday at the Hermitage, one of the largest museums in the world. Fascinated, Valentina spent hours admiring works by Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt and Picasso, while Fogg, moved by so much beauty, dedicated himself to understanding the historical context of the place.

—The Hermitage is not just a museum. The grandeur, the halls, each work, everything here portrays the power of the czars and the search for beauty and knowledge, — he said.

They left St. Petersburg for Moscow, adding memories of indescribable beauty and cultural wealth to their menus: the delicious stroganoff they tasted was born in the city, created by a French chef for the noble Stroganov family, one of the most influential in Imperial Russia.

In Moscow, the imposing Kremlin and Red Square dominated the group's imagination. Fogg, always precise in his planning, organized visits that included Lenin's Mausoleum and St. Basil's Cathedral.

On a cold night, as they strolled through the lit streets, Valentina and Fogg fell behind, leaving Palacios a little further ahead.

— Phileas, have you ever thought about how this trip is changing us? — Valentina asked with a quizzical smile.

Fogg, speechless, just smiled back, aware that something new was blossoming between them. But he tried not to take anything too far; his focus was on completing the 80,000 kilometers.





After three days on the road, with strategic stops in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, and Warsaw, the most cosmopolitan of Polish cities, the 1,900 kilometers between Moscow and Prague were overcome.

Prague presented itself with its romantic and medieval air, as if it had come out of a fairy tale. It is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, with its historic center listed by Unesco as a Cultural and Natural Heritage of Humanity. Valentina was enchanted by the charm of the bridges and alleys, especially the Charles Bridge, where street musicians played melodies that echoed throughout the city.

– It’s as if time had stopped here, – commented Valentina, while Fogg observed the incredible architecture that had resisted the wars intact.

For Palacios, the highlight was Prague Castle, one of the largest fortresses in the world, with the magnificent gothic construction of St. Vitus Cathedral inside.

Vienna was the next destination, and on the first morning in the city, Fogg suffered the biggest scare of the trip so far. Staying at a hotel next to the Museum Quarter, while having breakfast alone with Valentina, Fogg was interrupted by Palacios, who rushed into the room.

– Mr. Fogg! Mr. Fogg! They stole the four tires of the SUV! – shouted the Uruguayan.

Fogg stood up in despair. He couldn’t lose the bet like that,

right in one of the most civilized places in Europe. Seeing his boss, for the first time, with an expression like that of a terrified kid who had their lollipop ripped out of their mouth, Palacios smiled and said:

– April Fools' Day!!!

Phileas Fogg V's expression instantly changed. He froze. He didn't know whether to throw Palacios out of there or laugh at his audacity. Seeing Valentina's astonished look, he explained:

– In Brazil, April 1st is April Fools' Day, and on that day, people usually play silly pranks like that...

– Funny, in Ecuador we have the “Dia de los Inocentes” on December 28th – Valentina explained, laughing.

Fogg, having recovered from his shock, asked Palacios never to do that again, and invited him to have breakfast with the two of them.

Vienna impressed them with the grandeur of its museums. With Klimt and Egon Schiele. With its imposing palaces. With Empress Sissi. With the best schnitzel in the world, which they ate to their heart's content. And, above all, with the elegance of the classical music that seemed to flow from every corner. Fogg, with his attention to detail, made arrangements for a night at the Opera, where they attended a performance that touched everyone deeply.

– Music has this unique ability to unite what words cannot express, – said Valentina, as Fogg once again found himself struggling to conceal his emotions.

Finally, the trio arrived in Istanbul, where the meeting of East and West was exuberantly evident. Crossing the Bosphorus, with its agitated waters and spectacular views of the city, was one of the highlights. Valentina marveled at the Spice Market and the Grand Bazaar, where colors, aromas and sounds formed a sensory kaleidoscope. At sunset, the chanting of the Pink and Blue Mosques merged into a religious dialogue that echoed through the city, bringing a sense of reverence to the group. The seagulls, the minarets and the mix of cultures created a magical atmosphere.

On one of their last nights in Istanbul, as they walked through the Sultanahmet neighborhood, Valentina moved closer to Fogg and, in a moment of vulnerability, held his hand for a brief moment. Fogg did not pull his hand away. On the contrary, he felt that, for a second, the weight of the world was lifted from him. Palacios, watching from a distance, smiled, understanding that, even amid so much cultural diversity, the human essence is what unites us all.



CATEDRAL DE SÃO BASÍLIO
 СОБОР ВАСИЛИЯ БЛАЖЕННОГО
 Sobor. VASILIIYA BLAZHENNOGO
 MARAVILHOSA CATEDRAL ORTODOXA
 RUSSA NA PRACA VERMELHA.
 CONSTRUÍDA ENTRE 1555 E 1562
 SOB A ORDEM DE IVÃ IV DA RÚSSIA
 PARA COMEMORAR A CAPTURA
 DE KAZAN E ASTRACÃ

MESQUITA AZUL COMEGAM A CONVERSAR POR SISTEMA DE AUTO-

UM DOS MOMENTOS MAIS EMOCIONANTES EM ISTAMBUL É QUANDO OS MINARETES DA



FALAMTE COM A MESQUITA ROSA. NO HORÁRIO DO TOR DO SAL, ISSO É AINDA MAIS BONITO.




A MAGIA DE ISTAMBUL É O ENCONTRO DE DOIS CONTINENTES NO ESTREITO DE BÓSFORO. UMA CIDADE VIBRANTE E INESQUECÍVEL.



IN WHICH

FOGG, PALACIOS AND VALENTINA
CROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN
TO EGYPT, AND FREITAS DISCOVERS
THE TRUTH IN DUBAI. 

C H A P T E R X X X V



Departing from Beyoğlu, the beating heart of Istanbul, Fogg, Valentina and Palacios began their journey to Ankara. The SUV plunged beneath the waters of the Bosphorus in the impressive Eurasia Tunnel, crossing the strait 106 meters below sea level, where LED lighting guided the way through kilometers of underwater engineering. Emerging on the Asian side, they travelled through landscapes of farmland, green hills and Anatolian forests. Ankara, with its modern grandeur, awaited them at the end of the road.

They felt the huge contrast with Istanbul. If ancient



Constantinople is a vibrant and historic metropolis, where East and West intertwine at every corner with echoes of the Roman and Ottoman Empires, Ankara rises in a more sober, planned and measured way. Its architecture is austere, with wide boulevards and government buildings standing out amidst a mountainous landscape. They explored its vibrant markets, museums full of history and the Atatürk Mausoleum, symbol of the birth of modern Turkey.

It was in Ankara that Fogg articulated the next logistical challenge. His initial plan was to reach Dubai by land. But he concluded that it would be an unnecessary risk, passing through regions in conflict. The best alternative would be to drive to the Port of Mersin, 510 kilometers to the south, and load the car onto a cargo ship to the Port of Alexandria, in Egypt. With the help of local contacts, he discovered that a cargo ship would leave in three days and could pick up his car. He, Valentina, and Palacios would fly to Alexandria from Adana Airport.

They picked up the car at the Port of Alexandria very early on Saturday, April 12, and drove along the endless stretches of the Desert Highway until signs of civilization appeared like mirages—scattered palm trees, villages, and the gradual increase in the flow of vehicles. The heat of the Egyptian sun enveloped the atmosphere in a golden hue, making the air almost palpable. Gradually, the desert gave way to the organized chaos of the streets of Cairo, Egypt's largest city. Minarets dotted the sky, and the Nile River, making its way through buildings, seemed to dull out the frantic rhythm of the city.

Suddenly, amid the urban labyrinth, the monumental forms of the Pyramids of Giza appeared in the distance, like beings that defy time. Rising amid the panorama of the city, the gigantic structures emerged with a grandeur that no description could fully capture.

– Here are the eternal sentinels of the desert, – muttered Fogg, impressed, as he drove toward the Giza plateau. – Proof that time has not been able to erase the greatness of a civilization.

– They are of Amazonian dimensions, Mr. Fogg! – exclaimed Palacios, while Valentina watched the magnitude of the scene with her mouth agape.

As they approached the pyramids, the asphalt gave way to dust and gravel, and the sensation of crossing the line between two worlds—the contemporary and the ancient—intensified.

The sight of the pyramids at nightfall, with the stars beginning to appear over the desert, confirmed that they were about to experience something truly unique, in which the present blended with the past in a perfect symbiosis.

Sunday was reserved for the Grand Egyptian Museum, the largest archaeological museum in the world dedicated to a single civilization. The trio marveled at the statue of Ramses II, the complete collection of Tutankhamun artifacts, and the vast collection of colossal statues, sarcophagi, sphinxes, and other iconic monuments.

With almost 60,000 kilometers driven since the beginning of the adventure, Fogg had the SUV serviced again. He changed the oil and filters, and took care of the tires(*) with alignment, balancing, and pressure. A methodical person like Fogg knew the importance of maintaining the vehicle and tires as a crucial part of achieving his greatest goal: winning the bet.

The trip continued with the enormous challenge of traveling the 2,130 kilometers to Riyadh. They crossed the Suez Canal through the Ahmed Hamdy Tunnel, heading towards the vast desert of the Sinai Peninsula. They slept in Nuweibaa. The next day began with the crossing of the Red Sea by ferry, after a long process of leaving Egypt. The landscape transformed into an immense golden desert until they finally reached Riyadh, the Saudi capital, after a route that combined desolation, vastness and history, with strategic stops in Tabuk and Taima for rest and refueling.

In Riyadh, Phileas Fogg V, Valentina and Palacios experienced the contrast between tradition and modernity. Between the futuristic skyscrapers that made up the new silhouette of the place and the cultural essence of the city, they explored the colorful spices and fabrics in the souq, while the call to prayer echoed through the streets. As the afternoon progressed, Fogg took them to taste the country's culinary specialty, kabsa: a fragrant rice dish with spices, served with succulent lamb.

Another day on the road and they arrived in Dubai, the city where the impossible became possible. The mirrored

(*) Note: Continental UltraContact tires.

skyscrapers contrasted with the infinite desert, and ostentation seemed to be in every detail. They visited the Burj Khalifa, the tallest tower in the world, and the immense Dubai Mall, where luxury was present in every window display. But not only luxury: Freitas was there as well. Unexpectedly, Freitas appeared and approached the trio without any festivity.

With a serious and determined expression, Freitas asked to speak privately with Fogg, still startled by that completely unplanned appearance.

– Dear Fogg, I need to explain the reason for our constant meetings, – Freitas began, choosing his words carefully. – I was following leads on a supposed smuggling boss, and your travels coincided with this individual’s routes. Now, with new information, I have been informed that this smuggler is in Dubai. Your presence here is a huge coincidence.

Fogg, not believing what he was hearing, but maintaining his firm posture, responded calmly, despite clearly being uncomfortable and feeling betrayed by a person who had walked so many kilometers by his side.

– Mr. Alfredo Freitas, your insinuations are unfounded. I am on a legitimate trip and my route has no connection with criminal activities. It is regrettable that your suspicions involve me in any kind of investigation.

Palacios, seeing his boss’s reaction, wanted to make a move on Freitas. He was stopped by Valentina.



The night ended on a sad note, as if the three had accepted a silent agreement.

The next day, Freitas received a call with decisive information. The true smuggler had been captured in Dubai and had no connection with Fogg. Embarrassed, he sought out Phileas Fogg V again for a final conversation.

– Mr. Fogg, I sincerely apologize. I received confirmation that the real criminal was captured here in Dubai. I was completely mistaken. I hope you can accept my apology,
– Freitas said, his eyes drooping low, full of regret.

Phileas Fogg, with the calm and courtesy that were characteristic of him, replied:

– Mr. Freitas, although your actions have caused a lot of trouble, I accept your apology. Next time, I suggest you follow more concrete leads. I don't hold a grudge, but I will save a surprise for you at the end of my 80,000 kilometers as proof that this was all a misunderstanding.

At that moment, Palacios, who had been observing the conversation from a distance, approached Freitas and, with a smile of victory on his face, said:

– I told you from the start that he was innocent!

With the situation resolved, Fogg began to focus on the next stage of the trip: taking the SUV to India. After intensive research, he discovered that the most feasible way would be to transport the car by plane from Dubai to Mumbai.

In Dubai, there are specialized services for this type of transport, and Fogg dedicated himself to solving all the logistics, including seeking guarantees that the vehicle would arrive safely and on time.

The next day, at Dubai International Airport, Fogg, Palacios and Valentina watched the complex operation of loading the SUV onto a huge cargo plane. As the trio prepared for the flight that would take them to Mumbai, Phileas Fogg felt that, despite the unexpected events and twists and turns, he was closer to completing his journey. And also closer to discovering that the biggest challenges were not on the roads, but in the feelings that he insisted on concealing.



VISITA
AO GRANDE
MUSEU
EGÍPCIO,
MAIOR MUSEU
DO MUNDO
DEDICADO
A UMA
ÚNICA
CIVILIZAÇÃO,
COM UMA
COLEÇÃO
DE MAIS
DE 100.000
ANTIGUIDADES






in which

FOGG ARRIVES IN INDIA WITH HIS PARTY AND FACES A MAJOR CHALLENGE ON THE ROAD.

CHAPTER XXXVI



After a breezy three-hour flight, Fogg, Valentina and Palacios landed at Mumbai's chaotic and vibrant airport. Clearing the SUV through customs, which had arrived a little earlier on the cargo plane, proved more complex than expected and would take

at least three days. Indian bureaucracy, notorious for its lengthy processes, required patience and diplomatic skills that Palacios, with his impulsive nature, had a hard time accepting. The process would involve customs clearance, a safety check and

paying off the required fees. Besides, since cars in India are driven on the left side of the road, most vehicles have the steering wheel to the right, and Fogg's SUV required a special permit.

But Fogg was as composed as ever. Mumbai offered a unique combination of history, modernity and cuisine to explore in three days. The city's official name used to be Bombay, but it was changed in 1995 in honor of the goddess Mumbadevi, a local deity worshipped by the inhabitants of the region. The change reflected a revival of the city's cultural identity after India's independence. In addition to discovering this piece of trivia, they saw the stunning architecture of Chhatrapati Shivaji Station, explored the grand Gateway of India and admired the luxury of the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel – which, in November 2008, suffered a terrorist attack that resulted in the death of more than 150 people. And they could not leave the city without trying the spicy vada pav and the iconic pav bhaji, a mix of seasoned vegetables with buttered bread.

When the vehicle was finally cleared, Fogg, with his usual precision, began to adapt to the left-hand side of the Indian streets and roads.

– It's in my blood! – said Fogg confidently, as he maneuvered nimbly through the busy streets of Mumbai, where the chaotic traffic turns into a disorderly dance of rickshaws, motorcycles, cows and pedestrians on all sides, creating a symphony of horns and movement.

The first leg of their journey through India took them to Goa, a former Portuguese enclave. Arriving in Panaji, the



capital of Goa, the trio were transported to a different atmosphere: narrow streets with signs in Portuguese, colorful houses with red tiles and beautiful colonial churches, such as Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, with its zigzagging staircases, and the Basilica of Bom Jesus, which houses the remains of Saint Francisco Xavier. They explored Indo-Portuguese cuisine, and this time Palacios was not very happy – he ended up going to his room early because of an unexpected intestinal discomfort.

A day later, they headed for Kochi, in the state of Kerala—known as God’s Own Country—nearly 800 miles south on National Highway 66. This fascinating route took them along India’s West Coast, passing through stunning landscapes ranging from coastal towns to dense forests and vast coconut plantations. Udupi, known for its ancient temples, especially the Krishna Temple, was an ideal stop for the first night. Four hundred miles later, they reached their second stop, Kannur, where they visited its historic fort.

The next morning, they arrived in Kochi, also known as Cochin, a city steeped in history, marked by the influence of the Portuguese, Dutch and British. They were greeted by a festive atmosphere, different from what one usually sees. Unaware of the calendar, it took a while for them to discover that it was May 1st, Labor Day, known locally as May Day. In the streets, they saw parades and demonstrations with red flags, symbols of union movements and banners of labor organizations.

Fogg, always attentive to detail, noticed how the celebrations seemed to be both a tribute and a political mobilization, reflecting the combative essence of Kerala, where the labor

movement has a strong presence. They strolled through the decorated streets and watched cultural performances, where groups danced and played traditional music.

They stayed in the city for another day. They explored the historic Chinese fishing nets that adorn the coast, a unique symbol of the place. They walked through the Fort Kochi neighborhood, where streets lined with colonial houses and charming cafes evoked a sense of nostalgia. Finally, they sampled authentic Kerala cuisine, famous for its seafood dishes, such as fish curry, served with rice and local spices, and the traditional appam stew.

They continued to Bangalore, the technology capital of India, where modernity meets tradition in a vibrant mix. The city's tree-lined streets and parks were a welcome relief after the humid heat of Kerala.

Phileas Fogg, Valentina and Palacios were on their way to the magnificent Bangalore Palace – a replica of Windsor Palace – when, amid the city's chaotic traffic, a group of police officers signaled for them to stop. With the SUV parked on the side of the busy avenue, an officer, with a stern expression and precise gestures, approached and asked for the vehicle's documents. The officer's attentive gaze was soon set on the steering wheel on the left – something unusual in a country that drove on the left side of the road.

– This car has a steering wheel to the left. We need to check the special documentation that authorizes its circulation around here – said the police officer in a tone that mixed distrust and an authoritative disposition.



Fogg, with his usual calm and precision, handed over the required documents. He knew that everything was in order, but he was familiar with the reputation of the local bureaucracy. The officer analyzed every detail with extreme caution, consulting colleagues and, at one point, even calling a superior.

– This will take a while... What if he's prevented from moving forward? – Palacios muttered impatiently.

The superior finally arrived, reviewed the papers carefully and, after a brief discussion with the first officer, addressed Fogg with a more cordial expression.

– All right, sir. You are clear to drive. But I recommend additional caution, especially in more remote areas where this type of vehicle is not common – advised the officer, returning the documents.

With a slight nod and a formal thank you, Fogg resumed driving the SUV, relieved to see the avenue open again before them. Valentina, realizing that the setback had not shaken Fogg's spirits in the least, commented:

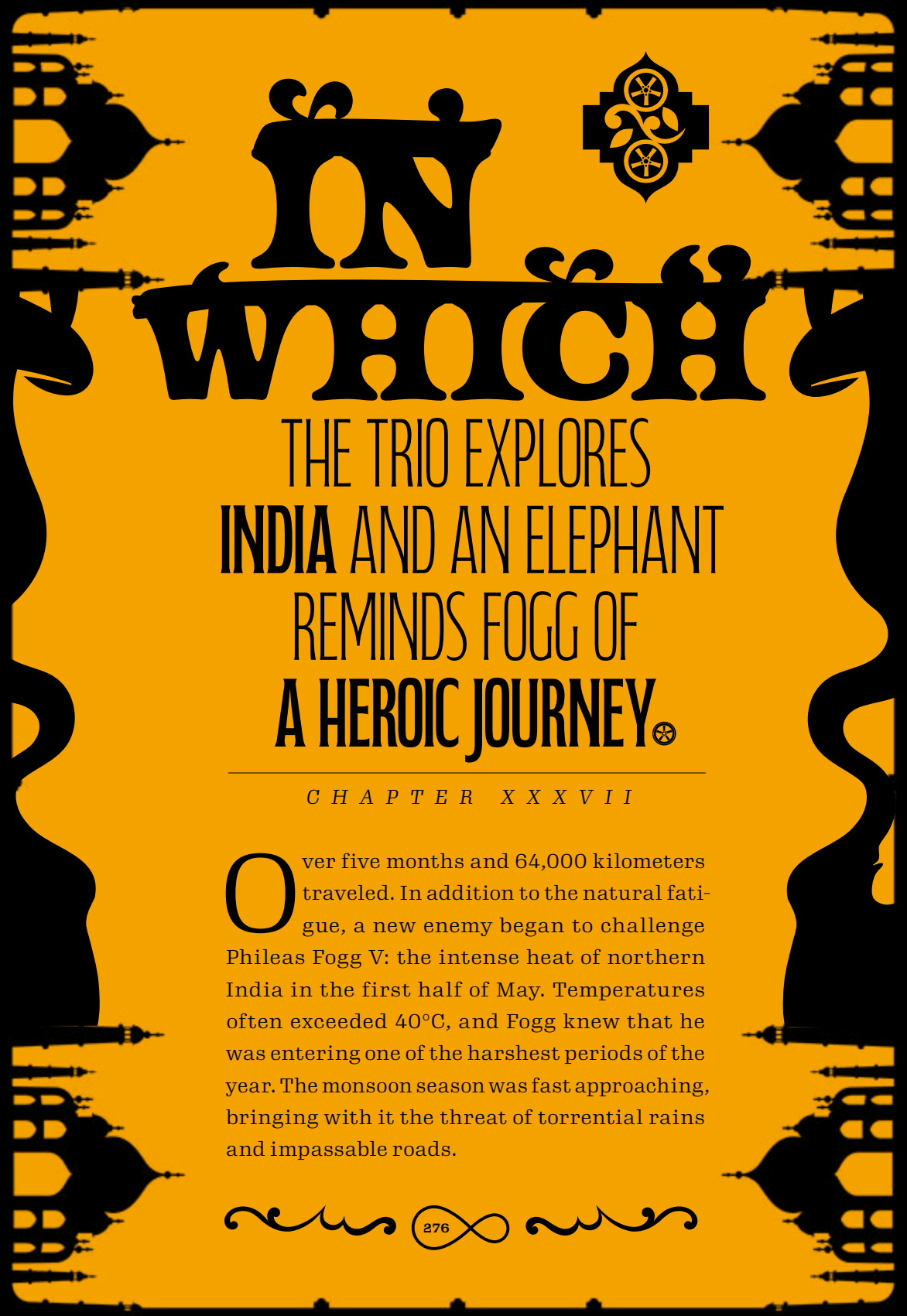
– Nothing seems to shake you, Phileas. You are always prepared for any obstacle!

Fogg, with a slight smile, replied:

– It's a long journey, Valentina. Any obstacles are part of the adventure, and each obstacle surpassed brings us closer to the end.

Fogg resumed driving the SUV with his usual calm. But inside, there was turbulence. Valentina, in her unassuming comment, had no idea how much her words touched him. She saw him as an unshakable pillar, always prepared, always in control. However, the truth he had begun to conceal was quite different. With each interaction with Valentina, with each smile or word from her, Phileas Fogg V felt a slight crack in the armor he had carefully built throughout his life. That calculated coldness he had cultivated so much was beginning to give way, and he found himself constantly vulnerable in her presence. What she interpreted as absolute security was, in reality, a facade, a defense to keep from revealing how shaken he was.



The page features a decorative border with silhouettes of Indian architectural elements like domes and minarets. In the top right corner, there is a central emblem consisting of a square frame with a cross-like shape inside, containing stylized floral or geometric patterns.

IN WHICH

THE TRIO EXPLORES INDIA AND AN ELEPHANT REMINDS FOGG OF A HEROIC JOURNEY.®

CHAPTER XXXVII

Over five months and 64,000 kilometers traveled. In addition to the natural fatigue, a new enemy began to challenge Phileas Fogg V: the intense heat of northern India in the first half of May. Temperatures often exceeded 40°C, and Fogg knew that he was entering one of the harshest periods of the year. The monsoon season was fast approaching, bringing with it the threat of torrential rains and impassable roads.



Aware of the urgency, he simply stepped on it. He needed to cover the remaining kilometers to win the bet before the monsoons made the journey more complicated.

The almost 1,500 kilometers between Bangalore and Ahmedabad proved to be challenging. With several precarious stretches on the road, a trip that could normally be completed in two days took three.

In Ahmedabad, known as the Manchester of India for its textile past, they visited the iconic Sabarmati Ashram, the former home of Mahatma Gandhi and the birthplace of the Indian independence movement. The city's charm was also evident at the Sidi Saiyyed Mosque, built in 1573, with its famous carved jalis – patterns in stone that look like delicate embroidery.

Another day on the road under the scorching sun they arrived in Jaipur, the Pink City of Rajasthan. The must-see was its impressive postcard, the Palace of the Winds, known as Hawa Mahal. Its facade, made of pink and red sandstone, resembles a celestial crown, adorned with honeycomb-shaped windows that stretch over five floors. Its 953 small niches decorated with delicate stone lattices allowed the ladies on the court to observe daily life without being seen.

There was also time to visit the Amber Fort, a majestic fortress in the hills of Jaipur, imposing testimony to the greatness of the ancient rajahs of Rajasthan.

The fort can be accessed through a winding trail.

During the hike, Phileas, Valentina and Palacios were able to observe the presence of several elephants decorated with colorful ornaments typical of the region. Massive gates, geometric gardens, vast internal courtyards, each of these architectural details of the fort revealed a facet of history, as if the trio were being led to the court of the maharajas, surrounded by legends and memories of a glorious past.

As he admired the striking elephants, Fogg was overcome by a moment of nostalgia as he remembered a family story that had spanned generations. He told how his great-great-grandfather – the first Phileas Fogg – heroically rescued his future wife, Aouda, a young widow who was to be sacrificed alongside her deceased husband’s body in a sati ritual in 1872. The daring plan involved a desperate escape through the jungles, riding at full speed on a borrowed elephant.

Valentina, amazed at hearing the story, thought to herself: “My great-great-grandfather’s bravery is in the DNA of this man, whom I admire more and more.”

Day after day, new cities were added to the list of the trip, burning the remaining kilometers for Fogg to complete the bet. The next destination was New Delhi. Planned by the British, the country’s capital had wide avenues surrounded by trees that offered a bit of shade to those who ventured to explore the city under 40°C.

They visited the iconic India Gate, an imposing stone arch built in honor of the Indian soldiers who lost their





lives during the First World War. In the afternoon, they went to the Humayun's Tomb complex, one of the inspirations for the Taj Mahal, and ended the day by visiting the Qutub Minar, the tallest brick minaret in the world.

Tuesday, May 13, meant a quick stop in Rishikesh, the world capital of yoga and gateway to the Himalayas. On the steps along the banks of the Ganges River, they watched a ritual of worship to the sacred river. Young students and priests in simple robes performed a devotional sequence with fire lamps, accompanied by chants, bells and music.

But the highlight of the trip through India would be reached two days later, in Agra: the Taj Mahal, the best-known of the country's monuments. One of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World. They arrived in the morning, before the other tourists. As they crossed the entrance gate, the feeling was one of pure amazement. The Taj Mahal, with its white marble dome shining in the soft light of dawn, seemed to float like a mirage, with an elegance that transcends time and words. The perfect balance of proportions, the serene reflection in the water mirrors and the harmony of the architectural lines created a scene of rare beauty. At that moment, faced with the silent grandeur of the monument, it was impossible not to feel that the love and devotion that built the Taj Mahal had become a living presence, profoundly touching all those who approached it.

From Agra, they stopped for lunch in Lucknow, known for its Indo-Islamic architecture and rich cultural heritage, and then arrived in Varanasi, India's holiest city, where

they witnessed the height of religious fervor.

At first light of day, Fogg, Valentina and Palacios saw the banks of the Ganges take on an almost mystical air. Devotees gathered to immerse themselves in the sacred waters, believing that bathing in the Ganges at sunrise purifies the soul and frees one from sins. They chanted mantras and prayers, while lighting incense and offering flowers to the river.

However, it was at nightfall that the trio witnessed one of the most iconic and spiritual ceremonies in the world: the Ganga Aarti. On the banks of the ghats, priests gathered in a carefully choreographed ritual, holding up flaming lamps in sync while chanting. The contrast between the serene dawn and the fervor of the night highlighted the duality of Varanasi: a city where the sacred and the everyday coexist in ceaseless cycles of devotion, hope, and spirituality.

With so much faith involved, Fogg only asked for the continuation of the journey to be smooth. But it was not enough. The nearly 700 kilometers from Varanasi to Calcutta were a chaotic mix of vehicles of all types: heavy cargo trucks, vintage cars, motorcycles, rickshaws, and even bicycles sharing the same space in a slow, almost endless flow. Trucks decorated in bright colors and loaded to the limit created traffic jams when forcing slow overtaking. Villages along the way complicated traffic with busy intersections, street vendors, and pedestrians. Cows and other animals roamed freely, forcing drivers to stop

frequently. And deteriorating asphalt, potholes, stretches without shoulders, and areas where the road narrowed drastically increased travel time even further. They slept in Dhanbad—the coal capital of India—and did not reach Calcutta until dusk on Sunday, May 18.

They took a day off and visited the Kali Temple, dedicated to the dark goddess of destruction and renewal, and the Botanical Gardens, home to the great banyan tree, whose vast expanse resembled a grove of individual trees. After three weeks of traveling along chaotic Indian roads in scorching heat, the shade of the trees and the calm of the gardens were everything the trio needed.



IN WHICH

FFOGG, PALACIOS AND VALENTINA EXPLORE SOUTHEAST ASIA.✪

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Phileas Fogg V felt a growing sense of relief as he traveled the last stretches of India. He had picked up the pace to escape the dreaded monsoons, which usually begin to punish the subcontinent in early June. He succeeded. Arriving in the country at the end of April guaranteed a window without

heavy rain, allowing him to complete the northern leg of the country before nature became a challenge. Now, Fogg was more relaxed, knowing that the next destinations in Southeast and East Asia would only face the heaviest rain from July onwards.

And if his calculations



were correct, he would already be on Brazilian soil by July, enjoying a well-deserved rest – perhaps at the wheel of a new convertible, the symbolic prize of his victory.

They left Calcutta on May 20, driven by the determination to complete the 80,000 kilometers. The planned route would take them through Southeast Asia, beginning with an exhausting week of more than 70 hours on the road. Fogg knew that every minute counted against fatigue. Therefore, the stops would be quick and strategic – just to eat and sleep – until they reached Bangkok, Thailand, where they could finally rest for two days.

The first part of the journey took them to Kishanganj, where the urban landscape began to give way to more remote regions. They continued to Guwahati and, the next day, to Imphal, still in India, facing more winding and difficult-to-access stretches. They crossed the border with Myanmar, formerly Burma, and slept in Mandalay, the second largest city in the country, where the contrast between historic temples and growing modernity was evident.

Phileas Fogg V took advantage of the fact that Mandalay was more structured to do the last check-up of the car. Seventy-one thousand kilometers on roads of all types had already been driven, but the car and the tires(*) held up bravely.

– These tires are making a difference in our trip. They really are more resistant and ultra-durable than any other. We will win the bet because of them, – Fogg said to Palacios. Palacios felt happy for the “we will”. He felt a collaborative part of this journey.

(*)Note: Continental UltraContact tires.

With the car serviced and the tires pressurized, aligned and balanced, they headed towards Namsang, passing through rural roads and small villages in the heart of Myanmar. Upon crossing the border with Thailand, they arrived in vibrant Chiang Mai, known for its temples and lush nature. Finally, the last stretch took them to Bangkok, which presented its calling card: chaotic traffic with rickshaws, motorcycles and cars fighting for every inch of the busy streets. But they would finally have a short rest after intense days on the road.

At dinner, while Fogg concentrated on the logistics of the trip, Valentina noted, with growing admiration, the determination and discipline he demonstrated in every detail. But there was a dilemma in her mind: could her Phileas, always so methodical and calculating, be capable of falling in love? She herself could no longer deny her feelings for him, but the enigma remained. Fogg's apparent indifference disturbed her. Didn't he realize how involved she was? Or was he hiding his own feelings behind that impenetrable facade? Valentina would have another opportunity to find out in Bangkok.

On the first day, they explored the Grand Palace, one of the city's most iconic landmarks, with its gilded and ornate architecture. They walked to Wat Pho, the Temple of the Reclining Buddha, famous for its enormous statue covered in gold leaf. And they continued on to Wat Arun, also known as the Temple of Dawn, a magnificent 19th-century work in the Khmer style, decorated with porcelain and flowers.

Ever the curious fellow, Palacios was the star of the day's adventure. On Khaosan Road, there were some stalls selling edible insects. Crickets, spiders, larvae, scorpions, etc. The



Thai don't eat them; they're just a lure to attract tourists. But Palacios devoured a salty and crunchy grasshopper. The generous Fogg made up for the experience with a lovely dinner, where he tried ram pad thai, the classic fried rice noodle, som tam, a green papaya salad, and tom yum goong, a spicy shrimp soup, accompanied by the rich and balanced aromas of lemongrass, chili peppers and coconut milk.

The second day in Bangkok started very early for the trio, with a tour of two traditional markets that capture the essence of Thai daily life. First, they visited the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market. They watched the profusion of colors, aromas and flavors as boats loaded with fruits, spices and souvenirs sailed through the canals. From there, they went to the Maeklong Train Market, one of the most unusual in the world, where the train tracks run through the stalls. They watched in fascination as, at the signal of the train's whistle, the vendors quickly collected their goods to let the train pass. As soon as the train pulled away, the market returned to its normal hustle and bustle, as if nothing had happened. At night, with temperatures close to 30°C, they enjoyed the city even more, which came to life even more under the night lights. Valentina wondered: "Does the presence of Palacios, always with us, prevent Phileas from taking the lead?"

For her, the biggest uncertainty was not whether they would be able to complete the trip. It was whether Phileas would notice or reciprocate the feelings she was increasingly struggling to hide.



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PHILEAS FOGG V FACES THE LAST CHALLENGES IN CHINA.⊗

CHAPTER XXXIX

Phileas Fogg V saw the two days in Bangkok as a final breath of rest before embarking on the final leg of his long journey to China. Ahead lay nearly 2,600 kilometers to Chongqing, a demanding route that would pass through landscapes as diverse as they were challenging. Fogg knew that precision was his most faithful ally. With this in mind, he planned five days of driving through Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, until he reached the modern Chinese highways. They set off from Bangkok towards Savannakhet, in Laos, where they spent the night before moving forward to Hà Tĩnh, in Vietnam.

They continued to Hanoi, for a brief rest and to admire the city's historic streets, before crossing into China. Once in Chinese territory, they slept in Baise. Finally, they reached Chongqing exactly as Fogg had calculated, with each kilometer traveled reflecting the precision of his plan. Methodical and meticulous as always, Fogg had already obtained the three entry visas for the country months before, while they were still in the United States.

Located in the southwest of the country, Chongqing is one of the largest and most densely populated cities in China, with a central role as an economic, industrial and logistics hub. It is one of the nation's main industrial engines, especially in the automotive, chemical and manufacturing sectors. It is one of the greatest expressions of Chinese modernization: a skyline of skyscrapers on the banks of the Yangtze River, high-tech transportation infrastructure and cutting-edge urban centers.

Fogg, Valentina and Palacios were enchanted by the contrast between tradition and modernity, exploring old markets and enjoying the famous local hot pot, an iconic dish: a shared pot of spicy, boiling broth, full of peppers and spices, in which diners dip different ingredients, such as meat, vegetables and tofu.

The next stage, eagerly awaited by the trio, would be to visit Hong Kong. They left Chongqing, slept in Guilin and arrived in Shenzhen, the Chinese city on the mainland closest to Hong Kong.

Early in the morning, they were at Futian Station in Shenzhen.

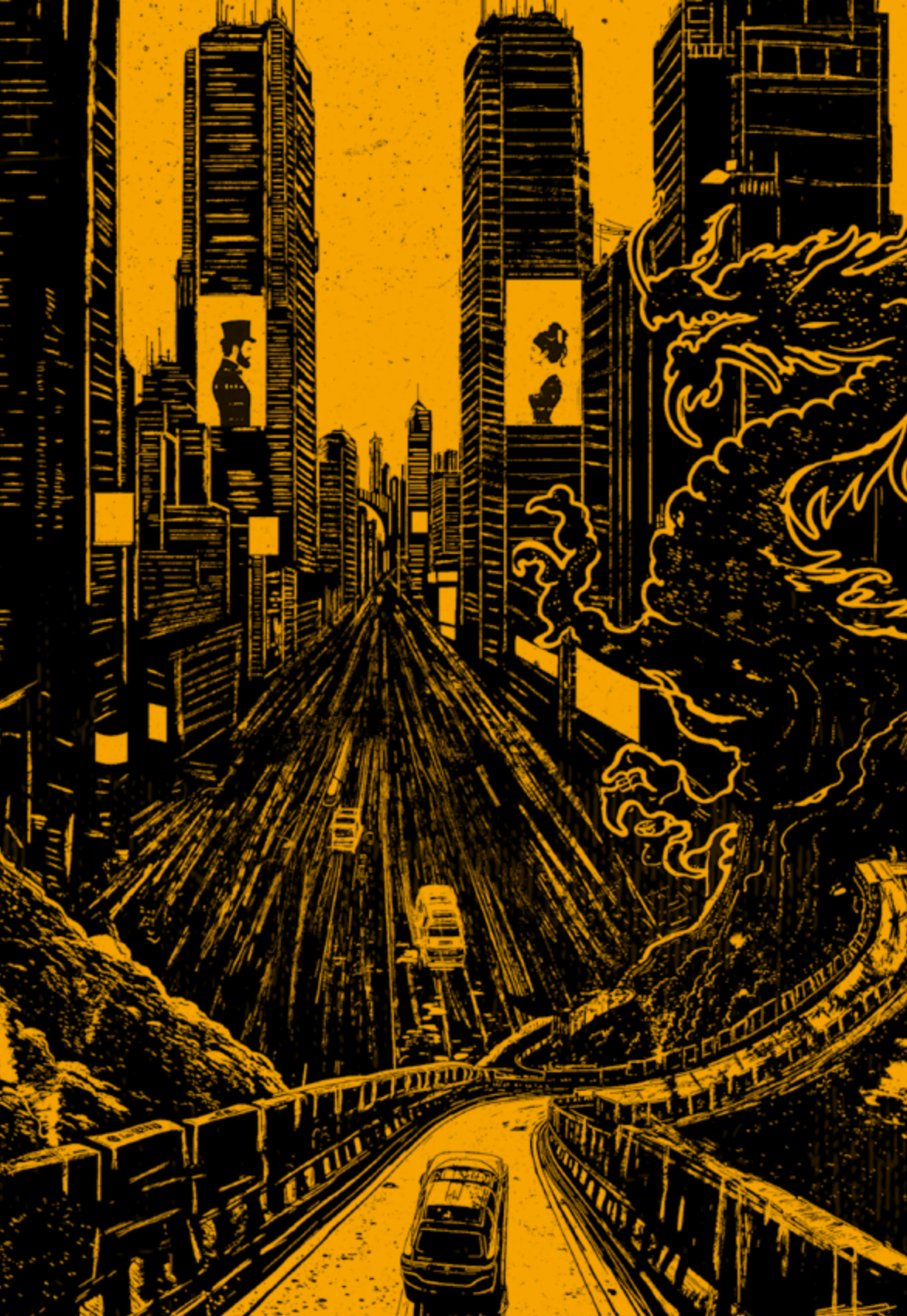
– With its ultramodern architecture, it looks more like a portal to the future than a railway terminal, Mr. Fogg! – Palacios observed.

They opted for the elegance and speed of the modern bullet train, a feat of engineering that connects the two cities in a mere 14 minutes. When they arrived at the West Kowloon underground station, they were greeted by the atmosphere of Hong Kong. There, East and West danced a waltz amid skyscrapers, while murmurs of Chinese and English echoed through the crowded streets. It was a joyful, almost liberating feeling to realize that English was flowing again like a crystal-clear stream, without the need for Palacios's miming.

With its bright signs, bustling avenues and chaotic markets, Hong Kong presented this collision of worlds: a Chinese city with a soul divided between British heritage and local traditions. In the alleys of Mong Kok, in the restaurants of Tsim Sha Tsui, or even admiring the view from Victoria Peak, the trio was able to experience the city with the confidence of those who had finally mastered the local language. More than an adventure in one of the most iconic metropolises on the planet, Fogg, Valentina and Palacios experienced the relief of finding a familiar linguistic port in the vast ocean of cultural diversity. They caught the 11 pm train and, 14 minutes later, got off at Futian station in Shenzhen, where they stayed for another day.

They set off on the morning of Sunday, June 8, towards Xiamen, a coastal city known for its picturesque islands. They arrived at sunset. Crossing its impressive suspension bridges – luminous webs connecting islands to the mainland – the group came across an ode to the fusion of tradition and future. A skyline dotted with skyscrapers, where the iconic Twin Towers – structures that resemble two large sails dancing in the wind – dominate the landscape. At night, observing the illuminated port, Valentina felt an unusual lightness when she noticed Fogg at her side. Both were silent, but united by the complicity of glances that dispensed words. It was there, under a soft light, that a brief smile from Fogg, almost imperceptible, ignited something inside her – a glimmer of hope that not even her scientific logic could explain.

The next day, the group headed to Shanghai. A long eleven-hour journey on the road. Shanghai, a vibrant metropolis and epicenter of Chinese modernity, appeared on the horizon like a neon beacon amid the incessant dynamism of the East. Skyscrapers such as the Shanghai Tower and the iconic Oriental Pearl dominated the landscape, while the Huangpu River meandered between banks full of stories and contradictions. There, amid the flow of crowds and the reflection of the lights, Fogg seemed more distant, immersed in his thoughts – the most crucial of which was how to get the SUV to Brazil, by plane or ship? But Valentina, with a subtle touch on his arm, brought him back to that shared moment the night before, as if she hoped to ensure that he did not get lost in the vastness of his plans and calculations. Palacios, a little behind, just watched.



Shanghai, the country's largest city, offered the trio two days of art, history, culture, architecture and modern graffiti. They strolled through futuristic buildings, wide streets, colorful neon lights and two contrasting areas. The west side, known as the Bund, revealed the magic of old Shanghai, with its historical sites, excellent restaurants and a vibrant nightlife. The east side, Pudong, represented the new side, the city's financial center.

From Shanghai, the last stop before returning to Brazil would be Beijing. The calculations for the 80,000 kilometers were made in Fogg's planning. He would save surprises for the last moments of the adventure. The roads to Beijing took them through strategic stops in historic cities. First, Nanjing, with its ancient walls and memories of past dynasties, was the scene of a brief visit to the Mausoleum of Sun Yat-sen, where Fogg remained introspective before the grandeur of a revolutionary era.

In Jinan, the City of Fountains, the group paused to contemplate the gardens and lakes that, with their serenity, offered a counterpoint to the bustling urbanity of the big cities.

But it was in Tianjin, with its fascinating mix of Western and Eastern architecture, that Valentina found an opportunity to get even closer to her Phileas. As she walked through the streets lined with European-style buildings, she made a brief comment on how, even in the midst of so many cultural and cultural differences, landscapes, the search for harmony and beauty seemed universal. For a rare moment, Fogg turned his fixed and serious gaze

away to meet hers, allowing a brief warmth to permeate the afternoon air. They walked side by side, with Valentina deliberately slowing her pace to extend the moment, as if each second with Phileas was an achievement she did not intend to waste. She knew that the trip would come to an end in less than a week.

Finally, they arrived in Beijing on Sunday, June 15. When they stopped the car at the hotel where they would be staying, the odometer showed 79,553 kilometers since they had left.

Palacios commented, in a panic:

– Mr. Fogg, there are still 447 kilometers to go!"

– And I know where to spend each one of them, Palacios!
– Fogg replied.

Palacios remembered his first thought about Phileas Fogg V: "Why, I don't mind serving such a fastidious man!"

Beijing revealed itself in all its grandeur. The vast Tiananmen Square, with the Gate of Heavenly Peace in the background, symbolized the nation's greatness and historic challenges. The crowds there seemed to flow like a continuous river, in a place where the past and the present met. The Forbidden City, with its immense courtyards, golden rooftops and majestic architecture, led the trio to a travel through time, evoking the grandeur of Chinese emperors. It was nigh impossible to imagine that the whole space had been closed to the common folk for centuries.

Valentina, enchanted by the human side of the great monuments, made a point of observing the details, such as the carved dragons, the colorful patterns on the walls and the imperial gardens.

Fogg, in turn, kept his focus on logistics: how to get the car to Brazil.

And Palacios felt something strange: his Senhor do Bonfim ribbon was no longer on his arm. It had fallen off at some point in Beijing, leaving him feeling frustrated: his three wishes had not yet been fulfilled, especially the wish to be essential for the success of the trip.

But, during the night in Beijing, something unexpected happened. As they walked down a quiet street, a familiar voice echoed in the background. In Portuguese! It was Ariel, Palacios' cousin who had played soccer with him when he was a child, in Uruguaiana. The cousin he had not seen for years. The reunion was emotional, but it became even more surprising when Ariel revealed that he was now flying cargo planes between China and Brazil.

For Phileas Fogg V, these were magical words. The stunning coincidence would be the perfect solution to his anxiety about returning to Brazil with his SUV intact.

Ariel, upon hearing about the whole adventure, offered a space for the vehicle on the cargo flight, ensuring that the car would arrive at Viracopos, the international airport in the city of Campinas, in the São Paulo state countryside, and was willing to take the trio as passengers.

With the logistics sorted out, Fogg revealed how he would spend the remaining kilometers: a round trip the next day to the Great Wall of China. With Ariel as his guest.

With great anticipation, they arrived at the Great Wall of China via the Gubeikou Great Wall Kangzhan Memorial Hall. An immersive experience that takes visitors back in time and offers a unique perspective on the history of this ancient fortification, built to protect the country from invaders. As they approached the site, they felt a deep respect for the time-worn stones, where echoes of ancient battles seemed to resonate with the wind that runs through the mountains. This section of the wall is less restored and more authentic, offering an almost untouched view of what it represented in centuries past. The feeling of isolation and the vastness of the horizon bring an inevitable reflection on the sacrifices of the thousands of enslaved workers who built the wall. They felt a sense of awe and melancholy when they realized that, despite its architectural splendor, the wall also bore the marks of pain, struggle and the weight of death. Palacios, astonished by what he saw, simply commented:

– This wall has...

Before completing his usual turn of phrase, Valentina and Fogg said in one voice:

– ... Amazonian dimensions.

And both began to laugh. Palacios, startled, also amused himself and laughed about the camaraderie that

had set among them.

The journey of thousands of kilometers, marked by challenges in so many countries and continents, cultural contrasts and unexpected moments of connection, was coming to an end. When he handed over the car for boarding at Beijing airport, only 97 kilometers separated Phileas Fogg V from his success. It was the exact distance from Viracopos airport to Clube Auto Paulistano.





IN WHICH

THE END OF THE JOURNEY
SHOWS THAT PHILEAS FOGG V
TRULY WON HAPPINESS.❦

CHAPTER XL

As the plane took off for Brazil, the trio exchanged knowing glances. Each in their own way, they knew that the long journey had changed them forever. Almost nine months of traveling together was like the gestation of a bond that would never fade. More than completing a trip around the world, they had rediscovered themselves among challenging roads and exotic landscapes. They were ready to face whatever came next.

For Valentina, the trip had been a discovery, not only of the mysteries and designs of the world, but also of Phileas Fogg V. Beneath that cold and calculating facade, she began to perceive a human, vulnerable side that he insisted on concealing.

Palacios, on the other hand, felt a mixture of fulfillment and melancholy as he reflected on the transformative experience he had lived alongside the duo. After traveling 80,000 kilometers, he knew he would never be the same again. Deep down, he was aware that every curve, every landscape, every culture he encountered along the way had shaped his worldview in a way that his old routines would never have allowed. The prospect of returning to Brazil and resuming his usual life brought with it an unexpected nostalgia – the certainty that, no matter how much he returned to his old reality, part of his spirit would remain forever on the roads he had traveled. Even so, he exuded happiness, because the coincidence of having met Ariel had made his three wishes come true.

Fogg, meticulous as always, was focused on the final details to complete the bet and win the 80,000-kilometer challenge, but with a levity that he himself did not recognize in himself before the journey.

The plane that brought them from Beijing made a stopover in Istanbul before landing in Viracopos, Campinas, on the morning of June 19, 2025. Palacios wondered:

– How can a trip that leaves on the night of June 18 and lasts more than 30 hours arrive on the morning of the 19th?

The answer was simple: since they were traveling west, they gained a day due to the time difference.

But that wasn't Palacios' biggest surprise. When they disembarked, they were greeted by none other than Alfredo Freitas, who was anxiously awaiting the outcome of their adventure.

Palacios, baffled, looked at Fogg and said:

– Mr. Fogg, if this guy would show up even at the end of the world, should we be surprised that he's here?

– No, Palacios! – Fogg replied. – I sent him a message last night letting him know our arrival time. To make him understand that I have no hard feelings, I insisted that he follow us to Clube Auto Paulistano. And I would like you two to sort your issues out.

Freitas, still emotional about the invitation, did not hesitate to accept. He apologized sincerely again and made amends with Palacios.

Together, they rescued the SUV, which now seemed to carry not only the marks of the journey around the world, but also the stories that the group had experienced with each kilometer

they had traveled. The 97 kilometers to their final destination were traveled smoothly. Despite their fatigue, everyone was euphoric. They were already crossing Avenida 9 de Julho, just over 500 meters from Clube Auto Paulistano, when the car suddenly stopped. Could it be possible to lose the bet less than 500 meters from victory?

Fogg got out and looked at the tires(*). They were intact, heroically marked by wear, like warriors resistant to bad weather and different types of road surfaces. Fogg sighed with relief. The problem was the SUV's engine.

They decided to push the car to its final destination. Under the midday São Paulo sun, Fogg, Palacios and Freitas joined forces and pushed the vehicle, with Valentina at the wheel, guiding the effort to the Clube Auto Paulistano. They arrived exactly at the stroke of noon, which for Fogg was another victory for his precision and planning.

When they entered the club, no one was expecting Phileas Fogg V. His friends and members were gathered, but they had practically given up on Fogg's challenge. Fogg had not been heard from in over a month, and everyone believed he had failed. They were only waiting for him to collect a convertible from his garage. When he appeared unexpectedly, with his always impeccable posture and a serene expression, exactly 259 days and 80,000 kilometers after leaving there on October 3, 2024, the impact was immediate. They were taken by surprise. With a surge of emotion, the club burst into applause and cheers.

(* Note: Continental UltraContact tires.



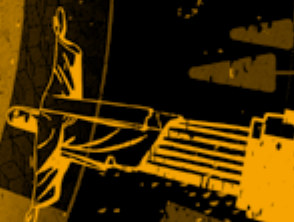
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UltraContact



Continental



Engineer André Silva, bankers João Sampaio and Samuel Fonseca, businessman Tomás Flanagan and the director of the Central Bank of Brazil, Gabriel Ramos, all looked at each other, somewhat in disbelief. Palacios showed them the dozens and dozens of photos taken during the trip to help prove the adventure. The club colleagues only had one thing left to do: admit that they had lost the bet and schedule a celebratory lunch where they would give Fogg the convertible of his choice.

The festive atmosphere was at its peak when the fearless Valentina, with her eyes glowing, unexpectedly took Fogg's hand affectionately and, with a voice full of emotion, asked:

– Will you marry me?

The always controlled Fogg was, for the first time, visibly moved. That methodical man, with always calculated reactions, with more action than words, did not respond immediately. For a moment, he stood paralyzed, as if the world around him had stopped too. Then, in a gesture that surprised everyone, he took Valentina in his arms and, without saying a word, kissed her with all the passion that had remained hidden until then. A kiss so long and intense that Palacios, mouth agape, looked at Freitas and commented:

– Now that is a kiss with Amazonian dimensions!

While everyone laughed at the observation, Palacios commented, moved:

– And this huge number of photos I took during the trip is not only proof of our adventure: it is the official record of an

unlikely love story. These photos will be my wedding gift to you two, my friends.

Some time later, while looking at the horizon, Phileas Fogg V wondered:

– But, after all, what did I take from this trip?

Financially, he thought, what might have seemed like a great victory was nothing more than a draw. The luxury convertible he had received would make him break even over the costs of a trip through so many cities, countries and continents.

– Nothing! That's what they'll say! Nothing, so be it! – he answered to himself.

Nothing! Except a dream come true. Two friends forever – Palacios and Freitas, who would be best men at the wedding. And to have found happiness in the love of an incredible woman who, as unlikely as it may seem, made him the most fulfilled of men!

Well! Who wouldn't travel around the world to find that which gives life meaning?