

# Abandoned

Trashtalk

April 11, 2022

It's what we leave behind.

There once was a green goldrush in the Yucatán region of southern Mexico. Henequen, a plant native to the area, produced the best and cheapest rope: A miracle to be shared with the world. So the plantations took root, labour was exploited, and the crop was mass-produced. But it left the plantation owners with a problem of logistics: How do you transport all the henequen from the haciendas to the port? Trains turned out to be the answer and thus the largest tramway system in the Americas was built straight through the jungles of Yucatán. Neither the local Maya nor the native jaguars were polled for this development, but it happened anyway. All of this came to an end during the Great Depression and the subsequent invention of oil-based synthetic rope during the Second World War. The capital left, but the tramways stayed. So the locals started using them.

It was a hot summer day when Marcial left his home village on his personal tramline. At the age of 23, he managed to outstay his welcome. According to him, it was all a big misunderstanding. His parents and the village leadership put forward a good argument. Marcial thought he made some good points as well. He wanted to stay, they gave him an ultimatum. He was sent away with a donkey, a flatcar the size of a picnic table, and all his earthly belongings.

He sat on the cart while the donkey pulled it over the narrow gauged track. Listening to the chirping birds and buzzing insects, he was reminded of both mosquitos and the freedom he had suddenly gained. He could go anywhere, only constrained by the two directions the tram tracks gave him. So he went forward, a brand new life in front of him.

But a brand new life was not the only thing in front of him. There was oncoming traffic in the middle of nowhere.

No one owned the tramways anymore. Anyone who could get something to roll on the rails could use it, but the wagon up ahead acted as though it

owned all the tracks it had ever graced with its presence. It was a luxury model, with an enclosed cabin, curtains in front of the windows, and what sounded like a diesel engine. It was recently repainted yellow and it would've looked quite imposing if it hadn't been so small. The driver was a middle-aged hacienda owner, who had elected not to wear his usual extravagant uniform during the mid-day heat. The only thing that tipped Marcial off was his gold-rimmed sombrero, which gave the man some shade.

There was only one track, and given the track record of the rich and powerful, Marcial would have to bend if he didn't want to be broken. His suspicions were confirmed when he saw a rifle leaning against the cabin wall, next to the driver. He dismounted his picnic table and tried derailing his cart, but it was too heavy to move without unloading it first. Meanwhile, the yellow cart had stopped in front of him and the hacienda owner stared at Marcial as though he could evaporate him with his eyes. After stopping, some shouting in the Proto-Indo-European climax of a language, known locally as American English, came from the cabin.

Marcial did not understand any of this, as he mostly spoke Maya and minimally spoke Spanish. Luckily the American was joined by the hacienda owner, who spoke a grand total of 3 languages: English, Spanish and Violence. He quickly demonstrated his proficiency with the last one when he stood up from his chair, grabbed the rifle behind him and pointed it at Marcial in one smooth motion.

"¡Muévetel!" he shouted.

Marcial was stunned. He didn't want to be shot, but being shot in the back seemed worse somehow, so he also didn't want to turn around and continue to unload his cart.

The impasse was finally broken by the American, who'd grown tired of waiting. An elderly white man fully dressed in khaki survival gear stepped out on the driver's platform. He examined Marcial from his slight elevation. Marcial, meanwhile, noticed that he wore flip-flops.

"I believe we have just discovered civilization, Adrias," he said with a dishonest smile.

"Sí, señor Johnson, civilization. . ."

Marcial could only think back to the old M1 Garand that had taken him so long to get a hold of. He needed it for things like this, but it was taken away before he was banished.

"¡Vamos!" Adrias urged him once more.

That was enough to get Marcial moving. One by one, he removed his belongings from the flatcar, to make the whole thing light enough to derail.

"Adrias? Do you suppose we can ask it a question?"

"Claro, they're too stupid to lie."

"An interesting hypothesis! It would be interesting to take some skull measurements. . . ." Johnson trailed off, but caught himself: "Later, first the question."

After two translations, Marcial came to understand that both men, but mainly Johnson, were looking for ancient Mayan temples to 'visit'. The command was shouted in his face and he was by no means enthused by this prospect, but he also didn't have much of a choice. If he played dumb, there was still a good chance Adrias would shoot him and leave him for the big cats to find. So he told the men to follow him. With Johnson and Adrias in toe, he backtracked over the tramline on foot and took a sharp right to travel the last leg over an animal trail.

When the temple came into view, Johnson looked shocked. Under his breath, he muttered something about "unknown forces of the universe". His eyes seemed to almost fall out of their sockets. Adrias hid his surprise a little better, but he also clearly had not seen anything like it before. To Marcial, the structure felt far away. He'd heard that the temple was more than 500 years old, but a lot had happened in the last 50 years. In a way, the gun that had pointed at him was a much closer historical touchstone than the crumbling temple complex that he had visited a couple of times when adventuring with friends. No one used the limestone structure anymore, it was too big to maintain and too old to safely use. Johnson did not care, of course, because he had just found an undiscovered ancient temple.

So Johnson, followed by Adrias, dropped their decorum and rushed to the limestone pyramid. As they climbed the overgrown stairs, Marcial remembered how his mom always told him not to climb the temple. It was dangerous, she said, and disrespectful.

A pyramid is incredibly stable, it's roughly the shape rubble takes when a building collapses: Rubble can't collapse any further. But this pyramid was hollow in places, having rooms inside for religious rituals and preparations. That, combined with hundreds of years of deferred maintenance and the weight of two people and their egos, can really test the strength of a roof. So gravity once more asked the temple if that day was the day it finally returned to earth. And perhaps it was the thoroughly dried out and crumbling limestone, or maybe a sign from the god that was once praised there, but the roof caved in.

A loud rumbling swallowed the professor and the hacienda owner. They fell into the temple and were buried in an instant. A deafening silence soon followed. Marcial was robbed of his words for a moment. Then he yelled out in joy. Ecstatic he ran back to the tracks. And after regaining his composure

he found that he and nobody else was the brand new owner of a luxury tram cart with a diesel engine.

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