

*Backpack Adventures Series*

# *Congo Cry*

*by*

*Marguerite Swilling*

*Produced through the Partnership for  
Environmental Education and Rural Health,  
Texas A&M University*



**Marguerite Swilling**, author of the Backpack Adventure Series, has loved reading, writing and science all her life. From writing and directing an original play in sixth grade, she advanced to essay competitions in high school and published poetry at Texas A & M where she majored in English and minored in Earth Science. Although she is a certified secondary teacher, Mrs. Swilling has spent the past twenty-three years in the business world and has written and presented training seminars on a variety of topics. Mrs. Swilling lives in Georgetown, Texas with her husband and two daughters.

**Backpack Adventure Series**

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1 the clinic to the alley. She hurried to hear what  
2 Travis and K.T. had to report.

3 “It was a Virginia monkey,” K.T. blurted out.  
4 “Not the sick one from Alice.”

5 “And we left the box where Aunt Kathy  
6 would be sure to find it,” added Travis.

7 K.T. giggled. “In the bathroom!”

8 “I want to hear more, but we need to get back.  
9 Re-set the coordinates and timeframe. Stand on  
10 either side of my chair, please. I don’t want anyone  
11 to be left behind!” Summer gave them the numbers  
12 to punch, and then all three held onto her chair as the  
13 incredible device swirled them back to Texas where  
14 Dr. Tony Allen was trying to call his sister in Africa  
15 to tell her a pregnant monkey had just died.

1 box from her backpack and, without consulting  
2 Travis, hurried to the privy. She slid the box under  
3 the door and ran back to Travis. She had just dived  
4 behind the generator when Kathy walked past  
5 toward the bathroom.

6 “You're crazy!” hissed Travis, even though he  
7 had to admit to himself it was as good a plan as any.  
8 K.T. might be bold, but sometimes it paid off.

9 “Yeah, crazy as you are!” K.T answered with  
10 a smile. “Let’s get out of here before she comes  
11 back out.” She could hear Kathy’s cry of disbelief  
12 as she found the box of needles. K.T. grabbed  
13 Travis’ hand and with a click they were gone, the  
14 whirl of their departure absorbed by the hum of the  
15 mighty generator.

16  
17 \*\*\*\*\*

18 Summer kept her eyes open for her friends  
19 and her ears open for the crackle of the radio. She  
20 had moved back inside the clinic where she could  
21 avoid the curious stares of the pedestrians on the  
22 busy street. Here inside, the sick folks took little  
23 notice of a girl in a wheelchair.

24 From the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of  
25 Travis outside in the alleyway motioning for her to  
26 come out. Then the radio blasted loudly with Dr.  
27 Kathy Allen’s voice calling for Dr. Sonnier. He  
28 hurried to the radio, apparently oblivious to Summer  
29 waiting there. He’s already forgotten me, thought  
30 Summer, as she rolled out the back door of

## **An Introduction to Backpack Adventures:**

Welcome to the coolest club in middle school! Of course, no one outside the club can know just what makes this group so different. The secret is in the backpack.

**Roman Castillo**, a young teenage technology whiz, developed a powerful mini-computer that can transport people through space and time. He controls the computer with a wireless keypad complete with a screen that displays the coordinates for the time and space travel destination. He shared his invention with his best friend, Travis, as well as four others.

**Travis Allen**, Roman’s best friend since kindergarten, is the son of a veterinarian and loves animals, the outdoors and math. He wears western jeans and boots that highlight his long, lanky profile. He has a short temper except with his stepsister, Summer. He’s very protective of Summer and doesn’t like having her travel with the BPC as the group has nicknamed their awesome device.

**Summer Martin**, Travis’ stepsister, is two years younger than Travis and Roman. Her bright blue eyes are as merry as her laugh and her blonde hair is cut short and sassy. She loves to read and has a great memory for history and geography. She uses a wheelchair due to a terrible, traffic accident when she was five. Travis and his aunt built a motorized chair for Summer, and she can participate in just about everything with her two best friends, Connie and K.T.

**Connie Castillo**, Roman’s sister and Summer’s best friend, has long, silky black hair and her dark brown eyes are framed by thick, black lashes. She loves her brother, but sometimes questions the use of the BPC. Quiet and reserved, she is a serious student. Science is her favorite subject and dance is

subject and dance is her favorite pastime. She and Summer have a mutual best friend named K.T.

**K.T. Watson**, is an only child who loves her best friends, Summer and Connie, like sisters. She wears her curly, jet-black hair in dozens of tiny, tight braids so she'll look more like her favorite athlete, Venus Williams. K.T. is full of energy and courageous. A natural leader, she often instigates the adventures with the BPC. She loves soccer and cheerleading. She helped form the Backpack Club and brought in its newest member: her neighbor, Jace.

**Jace Long**, classmate and neighbor to K.T., grew up in China and moved first to California and finally to Texas. He loves soccer like K.T., is a whiz at math like Travis, and is especially close to Summer. As the newest member to the Backpack Club, Jace is the most reluctant to use the BPC for travel, but he thinks it's a great tool for communicating between the members and is the first to try the device for help with homework.

1 that is what we're seeing decimate the chimpanzee  
2 population. I'd heard from Michael Fay in Gabon  
3 that the chimps and great apes are vanishing. We  
4 found dead specimens at every charcoal burner and  
5 mining camp along the river. Hate to say it, but it  
6 does look like EHF. I ran my battery down two days  
7 ago calling Dr. Sonnier every day."

8 "Yes and we must radio him now. He  
9 guessed your battery ran out, but he was anxious to  
10 hear you arrived safely." Dr. Kalevu led Kathy to  
11 the radio desk near the window where K.T. and  
12 Travis were hiding. The Congolese doctor flipped a  
13 switch for the diesel-powered generator that  
14 provided on demand electric power for the clinic. It  
15 roared to life beside the two startled friends.

16 As Dr. Kalevu tried to reach the Kinshasa  
17 clinic, Travis turned to K.T. and whispered, "The  
18 monkey that bit Aunt Kathy was in Virginia."

19 "Yeah, it couldn't be the sick one. I think we  
20 need to sneak this box into the clinic and hurry back  
21 to Summer."

22 "I'd like to go to the restroom before you call  
23 Dr. Sonnier. Is there a privy out back?" Aunt Kathy  
24 asked as she reached for her backpack and began to  
25 unpack.

26 "Yes, behind the clinic, a small hut near one  
27 of the creeks that flow through the village."

28 "That beats what I've had this past week!"  
29 laughed Kathy.

30 K.T. glanced over her shoulder. She could  
31 see the hut only a few yards away. She grabbed the

## Congo Cry

1 shoulder. K.T. grimaced, recalling how Aunt Kathy  
2 had done the same thing when K.T. had bumped her.

3 “It’s still sore,” she whispered to Travis. He  
4 put his finger to his lips and motioned K.T. be quiet  
5 and look.

6 “Are you hurt?” asked Dr. Kalevu.

7 “No, just a sore that hasn’t had a chance to  
8 heal. Before I left Virginia, one of my monkeys  
9 gave me a ‘good-bye’ bite, and it got infected from  
10 the backpack as we traveled the Congo trails. All  
11 my medicines were sent ahead. I was foolish not to  
12 pack any for the journey. The boxes have all  
13 arrived, haven’t they?”

14 “From the manifest it looks like only one box  
15 is missing. We haven’t tried to unpack anything,  
16 preferring to wait for your direction.” Dr. Kalevu  
17 handed Kathy the list of shipments.

18 She ran her finger down the packing slip and  
19 muttered a “drat” as she found the one that was  
20 marked as missing. “It’s the box that has the new  
21 needles for the syringes. It’s very important that we  
22 use disposable needles and syringes, especially  
23 during a possible outbreak. I’ll have to call the  
24 States and have another shipped ASAP. In the  
25 meantime, I’ve picked up several tissue samples  
26 from dead chimps along the way that need to be  
27 tested.” She stopped as she noticed Dr. Kalevu’s  
28 facial expression.

29 “No need to be concerned, Dr. Kalevu, I *did*  
30 pack the protective virological sampling gear for the  
31 trail. I have a great respect for the Ebola virus—if

1 *June 16, 2001*

2 *Ebola River, DRC, Africa*

3  
4 Dr. Kathy Allen twisted uncomfortably on her  
5 narrow camp cot. Mosquito netting draped over her,  
6 tickling her skin with every movement. Sweat  
7 soaked her thick, auburn hair, and she longed for a  
8 shower after six days in the jungle.

9 What really kept her awake was the monkey  
10 bite on her shoulder. It was still sore after three  
11 weeks. During a routine examination, her oldest lab  
12 monkey, Keeta, had suddenly taken a nip on her  
13 shoulder. Kathy believed it was only because Keeta  
14 was bored in his cage. She had been so busy getting  
15 ready for this trip to Africa that she had been  
16 ignoring him. Keeta had bitten her during Kathy’s  
17 last visit to him before leaving for Africa. Despite a  
18 degree in medicine and the Ph.D. in virology, there  
19 is still much for me to learn about primates, Kathy  
20 thought.

21 Here, deep in the Congo jungle, Kathy could  
22 hear soft rustling in the canopy, and the occasional  
23 eerie cry of an infant chimpanzee as it nested  
24 somewhere high above her. Insect sounds washed  
25 through the moist air like waves. The crescendo  
26 filled her ears till she felt her own body humming,  
27 then fell back to a soft drone. The jungle is snoring,  
28 thought the young researcher. Tomorrow, when I

1 reach the outpost at Yambuku, I'll sleep well enough  
2 to snore too.

3 As she dozed, Kathy Allen tried to imagine  
4 what she'd find in Yambuku, a tiny medical outpost  
5 that had gained fame twenty-five years ago. She  
6 shifted again and winced as her tender shoulder  
7 bumped the cot's frame. She hoped she'd find a  
8 bed, a bath, and the boxes of medicine and vaccines  
9 she had shipped ahead. She could use them all.

10  
11 .....

12 "That pregnant monkey that Kathy left here  
13 while she's in Africa doesn't seem to be doing too  
14 well. Travis and Summer, you need to stay away  
15 from her till I find out from the primate breeder  
16 down in Alice if he's had any illness among his  
17 other quarantined monkeys," warned Travis' father,  
18 Dr. Tony Allen, as his two children entered his  
19 clinic. Dr. Allen was a veterinarian, and his sister  
20 had asked for his help in quarantining two monkeys  
21 she was transporting from a breeder in South Texas  
22 to her research facility in Virginia. "I haven't been  
23 able to talk to Kathy yet."

24 "Why didn't Aunt Kathy take the monkeys to  
25 Virginia?" asked Travis. The teenager had always  
26 been especially fond of his aunt who was barely  
27 twice his age.

28 "Well, she had been planning a trip to Africa  
29 in July, but she was called there a month ahead of  
30 schedule due to an outbreak of illness among the  
31 chimps along the Ebola River in the DRC, the

1 Summer suddenly shivered despite the heat.  
2 Now that they were gone, she could drop the façade  
3 of cool and calm. She buried her face in her hands  
4 only for a moment, then wiped the few tears from  
5 her cheeks, and rolled toward the clinic door. I've  
6 been scared before, she thought. I can handle this.

7  
8 .....

9 Travis and K.T. found themselves just behind  
10 a low wooden building with mosquito netting for  
11 windows. A huge electric generator hid them from  
12 view on one side. A small sign on the generator  
13 read "Property of Yambuku Clinic." Everyone  
14 seemed to be gathering in front of the building  
15 where shouts and laughter could be heard.

16 "Welcome, welcome, Dr. Allen, to the heart  
17 of the Congo. We are so glad you have come to  
18 help us solve this mystery!" a man's voice rang out  
19 above the others.

20 "I'm afraid I'll bring more questions than  
21 answers, Dr. Kalevu, but I am glad you asked me to  
22 come."

23 Travis gave a sigh of relief to hear Aunt  
24 Kathy's voice. She sounded good, but they needed  
25 to see her to be sure. He motioned to K.T. to follow  
26 him to the window where they could peer through  
27 the netting.

28 Dr. Allen followed Dr. Kalevu into the one  
29 room clinic and directed the porters to unload their  
30 backpacks on the front porch. As she slipped off her  
31 own backpack, she winced and grabbed her



1 “Smooth talking, little sister,” Travis  
2 complimented Summer. “What do you propose to  
3 do now?”

4 “You don’t really want to wait here, do you?”  
5 asked K.T. Sitting still was not her forte.

6 “Of course not, K.T., but I don’t think I can  
7 travel to Yambuku. There won’t be good trails or  
8 any pavement. Travis, you and K.T. will have to  
9 take the box to Yambuku and leave it for Aunt  
10 Kathy. Try to see her without being seen. If she  
11 looks healthy, we’ll just let Doc tell her about the  
12 monkey. If she doesn’t look healthy, call me on the  
13 BPC. I’ll wait here as your safety back up and to  
14 listen for her radio contact.” As she spoke, Summer  
15 located information on Yambuku with her BPC.  
16 “Here are the coordinates for Yambuku. Be  
17 careful.”

18 She handed the box to K.T. who stuffed it in  
19 her backpack. “Are you sure you’ll be all right?”  
20 asked K.T.

21 “Yeah, maybe I should go to Yambuku alone  
22 and let K.T. stay here with you,” offered Travis. As  
23 long as he didn’t have to see his aunt in person, he  
24 wasn’t scared.

25 “No way! You two go take this to her or the  
26 whole trip is pointless. I’ll be perfectly safe at the  
27 clinic. Don’t worry! Now go!” She led them down  
28 the sidewalk to the corner of the building where an  
29 alley ran between the clinic and a bank. K.T. and  
30 Travis ducked into the alley and then disappeared.  
31 “Good luck.” she whispered.

1 Democratic Republic of the Congo. Her friends at  
2 Doctors Without Borders asked her to come help  
3 verify the disease and set up prevention methods to  
4 keep it from spreading to humans. You might say  
5 she’s doing field research, but it’s more like in the  
6 jungle. My little sister is crazy if you ask me.”

7 “But she loves what she does!” defended  
8 Summer. When Summer’s mother had married  
9 Travis’ father five years ago, it had been hard to  
10 accept a new father and a brother. Aunt Kathy had  
11 visited often that first year. Her fun-loving,  
12 adventurous ways and gentle laughter had gained  
13 Summer’s respect and love and had helped make  
14 Summer and Travis as close as a real brother and  
15 sister. Travis had enlisted Aunt Kathy’s help in  
16 devising a motorized wheelchair for Summer with  
17 mountain bike type wheels that let her keep up with  
18 her friends. Aunt Kathy never thought anything was  
19 impossible.

20 “Besides, little sisters don’t have to do just  
21 what their big brothers think,” Summer added with a  
22 wink at Travis. She and Travis had argued as they  
23 came over to the vet hospital about whose turn it  
24 was to feed and water the monkeys and who had to  
25 clean the cages.

26 “You sure are fast to take up for Kathy. How  
27 much did she pay you to help pack all those boxes of  
28 vaccine and medicine?” Dr. Allen asked.

29 “She didn’t have to pay me anything. I was  
30 glad to pack that stuff to ship to Africa. She *is*  
31 paying us to feed and water the monkeys, though.”

1 “Well, until I know what’s wrong with that  
2 monkey, you kids are out of a job. I don’t want you  
3 around them, do you understand?” warned Dr. Allen  
4 sternly.

5 Travis began to protest, but then mumbled,  
6 “Yes, sir.” Summer nodded silently. They had been  
7 counting on the money from feeding the monkeys.  
8 They were not usually paid for doing chores; chores  
9 were just part of being a family.

10 Dr. Allen hesitated at the back door to the vet  
11 hospital. “I’ve got to go check on a horse in the far  
12 pen. I’ll pay you what Kathy was paying for the  
13 monkey chores if you straighten up the storeroom.  
14 It’s never been the same since Kathy kept all her  
15 stuff in there to ship to Africa.”

16 Cleaning the storeroom would not be nearly  
17 as much fun as caring for the monkeys, but the  
18 thought of getting paid for it set Travis and Summer  
19 in motion. They entered the dimly lit closet with  
20 ceiling-high shelves on three sides and barely  
21 enough room for Summer’s wheelchair.

22 Cartons of medicine, equipment, sacks of  
23 food, boxes of every kind of animal vitamin and  
24 stacks of magazines and vet supply catalogs littered  
25 the area and spilled from every shelf. It looked like  
26 no one had organized the room in years. Puffs of  
27 dust rose into the air as Travis shifted a box to make  
28 room for Summer.

29 “I hate to tell Doc, but this place was bad  
30 before Aunt Kathy put her stuff in here,” Summer

1 brusque manner. Everyone went on without looking  
2 up.

3 “Um, we, um...” Travis stammered.

4 Summer rolled forward. “We’re foreign  
5 exchange students from the United States, and we  
6 were asked by Dr. Allen’s brother to contact her  
7 while we’re in Kinshasa. Your nurse told us she  
8 was on her way to Yambuku and that we might radio  
9 her. She said to ask you for help because you’re the  
10 boss. Can you help us?” Summer smiled sweetly at  
11 the grizzled doctor.

12 Travis began to explain that Kathy had not yet  
13 arrived in Yambuku, but realized he’d be giving  
14 away that he had been listening, so he kept quiet.  
15 He simply nodded in amazement at Summer’s cool  
16 manipulation of the facts. K.T. thought to herself  
17 how great it would have been to have Summer along  
18 on the other adventures. She was one smooth  
19 operator.

20 The doctor stared at Summer for a moment  
21 assessing her story. They did look like students.  
22 The boy even resembled Kathy a bit. He would help  
23 them. “She’s scheduled to arrive today. What time  
24 today, I do not know. You are welcome to wait  
25 here, but I warn you, it may be a long wait, and this  
26 is not a comfortable place to be.”

27 “Yes. And we don’t want to be in your way,  
28 so we’ll wait outside and check back later.”  
29 Summer maneuvered her chair and led her friends  
30 outside.

1 scribbling more numbers on the large yellow pad.  
2 “Full-blown AIDS? That’s surprising.” He paused  
3 listening intently to the person on the other end of  
4 the radio. Travis wondered if it was Aunt Kathy.

5       Finally, Dr. Sonnier asked softly, “Any Ebola  
6 verified? Still just rumors of sudden fevers and  
7 bleeding?” Again he waited silently. “Has Kathy  
8 Allen arrived yet? No? Well, she’s scheduled to  
9 arrive today. I’ll be waiting anxiously to hear from  
10 her. We lost contact two days ago, so I’m assuming  
11 her handheld radio battery must be dead. She’s got  
12 the best portage team accompanying her so I’m not  
13 worried. Besides, she used the radio to call in  
14 reports quite frequently the first few days. Probably  
15 wore it down.”

16       Travis leaned forward and could hear static  
17 crackling from the headphones. “What was that?”  
18 the doctor shouted into the mike. “Yeah, she was  
19 finding dead chimps all along the river. She’s got  
20 tissue samples to test as soon as she arrives.” Static  
21 crackled again. “Don’t worry, she knows what she’s  
22 doing. You just keep treating those opportunistic  
23 infections, and she’ll look for the cause. Call me as  
24 soon as she arrives.”

25       The gray-haired doctor abruptly clicked off  
26 the mike, snatched the headphones from his ears,  
27 and turned on his stool at the same time. “What do  
28 you want?” he barked at Travis who was caught  
29 gawking at the physician.

30       Summer, K.T., and Travis all jumped, but the  
31 other doctors seemed accustomed to Dr. Sonnier’s

1 said with a grin. “We had a hard time packing  
2 everything in this cramped hodgepodge of junk.”

3       “Yeah, I bet you and Aunt Kathy made this  
4 mess!” teased Travis as he tossed a plastic calf bottle  
5 at Summer. It bounced off her head and landed at  
6 her feet.

7       “Ow! Stop that, you big bully!” Summer  
8 warned with a frown. She reached to pick up the  
9 bottle, intending to launch it back at Travis, who  
10 now swung a long, clear tube like a wobbly baseball  
11 bat. As she bent down and stretched out her arm,  
12 her gaze fell under the lowest shelf below the  
13 counter. There a box, plastered with shipping labels  
14 marked for Africa, lay far beneath a shelf. “Travis,  
15 come help me. Look!”

16       Travis dropped the tube and rushed to  
17 Summer’s side. “What is it?”

18       “It looks like one of Aunt Kathy’s boxes of  
19 medicine. She had each different kind of medicine  
20 in a separate box. She’s going to need this!”  
21 Summer watched as Travis pulled the box out and  
22 dusted off the outside. She could see “Box 1 of 1”  
23 printed in Aunt Kathy’s round handwriting on the  
24 side. She pointed to the markings. “See, this means  
25 she only had one box of this kind of medicine.  
26 We’re going to have to ship it to her.”

27       Just then they heard the front door to the  
28 clinic open. “Hello, anybody in here?” called their  
29 friend, K.T. Watson.

30       “In here, in the storeroom,” Summer called.  
31 K.T. followed her voice to the closet and squinted

1 into the darkness as her eyes adjusted from the  
2 midday sun outside. She too had enjoyed seeing the  
3 monkeys and came every day to help and to play  
4 with them.

5 “What are you doing in here?” K.T. asked.

6 “Well, Doc says we can’t care for the  
7 monkeys because the pregnant one seems sick. So  
8 he gave us a job to clean the storeroom, but look  
9 what we found!” Summer answered. She held the  
10 bread loaf-sized box so K.T. could see it.

11 But K.T. was focused on what Summer had  
12 just said about the monkey. “One of the monkeys is  
13 sick? How sick?”

14 “Sick enough that Dad doesn’t want us near  
15 it,” replied Travis.

16 “Oh no! Does your aunt know yet?”

17 “Doc hasn’t been able to reach her. But we  
18 can try again to call her. We need to let her know  
19 she left this box of medicine here too. I wonder how  
20 many days it takes to ship something to the  
21 Democratic Republic of the Congo.” Summer was  
22 more concerned about the medicine than the sick  
23 monkey.

24 “I need to tell you something,” K.T. began  
25 hesitantly. “Before your aunt left, she told me  
26 something that I promised not to tell, but now...”

27 “What is it?” Summer blurted out loud as K.T.  
28 paused. Sometimes she felt K.T. could be too  
29 dramatic, but the look on her face now was scaring  
30 Summer.

1 “Did you have a blood transfusion during  
2 surgery – what did you say – eight years ago?”

3 “Yes, they gave me blood, but I know they  
4 use clean needles. It was at the hospital in Makulu.  
5 Makulu is where I worked in a resort hotel. Makulu  
6 is a clean, safe, healthy place.”

7 “It’s not the needle I’m concerned about,”  
8 mumbled the doctor softly. “We need to do a blood  
9 test to check for antibodies. That will tell us what is  
10 really wrong. And then we can make you better,  
11 Grandmother.” He turned on a green light above the  
12 bed, and a lab technician came over to him. “I need  
13 to ask you one more thing, Grandmother. Have you  
14 been with any men lately?”

15 The old woman laughed. “Not since my poor  
16 husband died twenty years ago.” She pointed to the  
17 young mother in the chair beside her. “No, I cannot  
18 have the problem she has.”

19 The doctor turned, wrote on her chart and  
20 handed it to a waiting lab technician. “Let’s hope  
21 not,” he said grimly as the lab tech, switching off the  
22 light, led the woman away to another room. He  
23 turned his attention to the young mother.

24 Meanwhile, Travis was eavesdropping on Dr.  
25 Sonnier as he talked with the medical team at  
26 Yambuku. Dr. Sonnier wore headphones so Travis  
27 could only hear one side of the conversation.

28 “I need a breakdown of last week’s cases.  
29 How many tested positive for acute HIV infection?  
30 Mmm-huh.” Dr. Sonnier wrote as he talked. “How  
31 many tested asymptomatic? Really? Wow!” he said

1 his mouth. The mother of the infant was speaking in  
2 angry tones to the elderly woman.

3 “It’s taking my whole family. How can I tell  
4 my husband ‘no intimacy’ because he’s sick? I  
5 can’t even tell he’s sick. Now, it’s too late. Now, I  
6 have it, and I’m afraid my son has it too. There’s no  
7 more being young and strong. But why are you  
8 here, Grandmother?”

9 “That is what we are going to find out,”  
10 interrupted a doctor with a stethoscope around his  
11 neck as well as a paper facemask. His hands were  
12 covered in thin surgical gloves. “Come, Grand-  
13 mother. This table closest to you is ready.”  
14 Summer and K.T. watched as he gently helped the  
15 old woman onto the table and put his facemask over  
16 his nose and mouth.

17 “Tell me what you are feeling,” he instructed  
18 in a muffled voice.

19 “My throat is sore, and I have a headache.  
20 My old legs are stiff, and I ache whether I walk or  
21 sit. Maybe I am just old and tired.”

22 “Could be you have flu or mononucleosis,”  
23 the doctor said as he felt her swollen glands along  
24 her neck and under her arms.

25 “That’s what they said I had eight years ago  
26 when I got sick after my surgery. That ‘mono’ thing  
27 you said. They gave me medicine, and I have been  
28 well ever since.”

29 “You had mononucleosis after a surgery?  
30 How long after?”

31 “Oh, about three, four weeks.”

1 “I was in here with her one day before you  
2 came in, just talking, and I accidentally bumped her  
3 shoulder with the cage door. She winced even  
4 though it was a little bump. I said I was sorry, and  
5 she said it was just sore from a monkey bite, but not  
6 to say anything to your dad or even you. She didn’t  
7 want anyone worrying about her while she was in  
8 Africa. I didn’t think it was any big deal, but what if  
9 the monkey that bit her is this sick one? Kathy  
10 should know the monkey’s sick, right away.” K.T.  
11 paused to catch her breath. Travis and Summer  
12 silently exchanged worried looks. The closet  
13 seemed to close around the three friends like a crypt  
14 full of dark secrets.

15 “I can’t believe you didn’t tell me, K.T.,”  
16 Summer said with hurt in her voice.

17 “I didn’t think Kathy would go to Africa if  
18 she might be sick. She’s a doctor, after all.”

19 “You don’t know how determined she was to  
20 go. She changed all her plans at the last minute to  
21 go a month early! Her arm could have been falling  
22 off and she wouldn’t have stayed here,” Summer  
23 retorted.

24 “Hey, don’t go ballistic, Sis,” interrupted  
25 Travis. “I think we can solve the problem of the lost  
26 box and the monkey bite at the same time. I’ll call  
27 Roman, and he and I will take the box to Aunt Kathy  
28 in the Congo with the BPC.”

29 “Oh no you won’t! I’m the one who found  
30 the box, and I’ll take it to Aunt Kathy. I’m tired of  
31 being left behind while everyone else gets to have

1 adventures. Besides, you don't know which  
2 'Congo' is the right one," Summer answered  
3 angrily.

4 "There's more than one Congo?" mumbled  
5 Travis, who had relied on Summer's expertise in  
6 geography to travel to Egypt on their first adventure  
7 and to find K.T. in the Ukraine.

8 Ever since Roman had developed the BPC  
9 for travel through space and time and had made  
10 backpack computers for each of the friends in their  
11 small club, Summer had always been the one left  
12 behind as the safety contact, the brains behind the  
13 computer. She knew better than anyone how to set  
14 the programs precisely, and precision would be key  
15 to locating Aunt Kathy in a dense jungle half the  
16 world away.

17 "Summer's right, Travis. She should go,"  
18 agreed K.T. who was feeling miserable for not  
19 telling Summer about her aunt's injury. "I can help  
20 her. It'll be just a quick little jaunt to Africa and  
21 back. You can be our safety contact." Ever since  
22 K.T. had been stranded in Ukraine, she had seen the  
23 wisdom of filing a "flight plan" and having backup  
24 contacts at home in Texas.

25 "Well, there's no way you're going without  
26 me," declared Travis. "We'll get Connie and  
27 Roman to be our backups. Sorry, K.T., but I've seen  
28 how your little jaunts can become big fiascos. We  
29 all go together, or I go to Dad."

30 K.T. scowled at Travis. He never seemed to  
31 trust her with Summer.

1 behind him. The girls rolled their eyes when Travis  
2 whispered to them, "At least one of us knows how to  
3 get into the clinic quickly." The people in line  
4 stared at the three strangers. Many tried to fan  
5 themselves with the clinic papers as the midday heat  
6 began to rise.

7 The clinic was much larger than it looked  
8 from the outside. About ten doctors were set up  
9 down a long narrow room separated only by sheets  
10 hung between the examination tables. There was a  
11 small office at the end of the room where a gray-  
12 haired man was talking on the radio. The nurse  
13 turned to them and pointed to rickety chairs along  
14 the wall where several people waited.

15 "You may wait here till Dr. Sonnier is  
16 finished. He is talking to Yambuku Clinic right  
17 now. Tell him you need to talk to Dr. Allen. He is  
18 the one in charge here." She left with her clipboard  
19 to continue her interviews on the sidewalk.

20 Travis leaned against the doorway and waited  
21 for a chance to speak to the doctor. Summer moved  
22 her chair against the wall, and K.T. nervously paced  
23 in front of her. Snatches of conversation floated in  
24 the stagnant air blown timidly by two struggling  
25 ceiling fans. Summer listened to the two women  
26 sitting closest to her. One was a thin, elderly  
27 woman, the other a young mother with a baby.

28 The mother held her infant, mopping his face  
29 with a dirty rag as he sweated profusely and tried to  
30 nurse. A sore on his lip seemed to cause his  
31 mother's milk to run down his chin instead of into

1 from the clipboard and handed it to the waiting  
2 stretcher-bearer. The others in line turned their  
3 heads as the afflicted man was carried into the clinic.  
4 The nurse turned back to Summer and blinked her  
5 eyes in surprise.

6 “How can I help you?” she asked in French.

7 Summer hesitated and then answered, her  
8 words translated instantly by the BPC, “We are  
9 looking for Dr. Kathy Allen. She came to work here  
10 two weeks ago. We have a package to deliver to  
11 her.” Summer took the small box from her  
12 backpack.

13 “Yes, I know Dr. Allen, but she left a week  
14 ago to go to the new clinic in Yambuku which just  
15 recently opened. Can you leave the package for  
16 when she returns in four weeks?”

17 “Four weeks! We were hoping to see her  
18 today, right now!” Summer exclaimed as K.T.  
19 echoed behind her with a soft scream. Travis  
20 seemed almost happy to hear the news.

21 “Is there any way we could call her in  
22 Yambuku?” he asked coolly. “It really is imperative  
23 that we speak to her as soon as possible.” He gave  
24 the nurse a big smile, trying to look older than his  
25 fourteen years.

26 “Yambuku does not have phone service as it  
27 is deep in the jungle, but we do have radio contact.  
28 Come in the clinic with me, and I’ll help you reach  
29 her.”

30 Travis bowed slightly and followed her into  
31 the crowded clinic with Summer and K.T. close

1 “What are we waiting for K.T.?” Summer’s  
2 face beamed with a bright smile and the sparkle of  
3 excitement flashed in her blue eyes. She held the  
4 box in her lap. “Travis can call Connie and Roman  
5 about backing us up. Then we’ll meet you at the  
6 gazebo in twenty minutes with our backpacks. Too  
7 bad,” she added mischievously, “the storeroom will  
8 just have to wait.”

9 .....  
10

11 A bright sun was directly overhead and a stiff,  
12 hot breeze snapped the colorful flags hanging from  
13 every light pole along the wide boulevard. Street  
14 signs told the three young travelers that they were on  
15 the *Boulevard du 30 Juin*, the main street in  
16 downtown Kinshasa. Modern buildings of concrete,  
17 glass and steel lined the wide thoroughfare filled  
18 with buses, cars and pedestrians. The hum of traffic  
19 sounded exactly like any city in Texas.

20 “Are you sure we’re in Africa?” asked Travis.  
21 “This isn’t like any jungle I’ve ever seen.”

22 “We’re in Kinshasa, the capital of the DRC.  
23 It’s one of the most modern and largest cities in all  
24 of sub-Saharan Africa. About 5 million people call  
25 this home. Don’t worry. Once you leave this urban  
26 jungle, the green jungle is not far away. It’s a good  
27 thing I confirmed the exact street location of the  
28 Doctors Without Borders office. Look, it’s just  
29 across the street.” Summer pointed to a small sign  
30 that read *Medecins Sans Frontieres* in front of a first  
31 floor clinic that had a line of people queued down

1 the sidewalk. "That's where we'll find Aunt Kathy,  
2 I'll bet."

3 Travis and K.T. followed behind Summer as  
4 she crossed with the traffic light to the other side of  
5 the broad roadway. A few people stared at the  
6 blonde youth rolling along confidently in her  
7 motorized wheelchair followed by a lanky, sandy-  
8 haired, teenage boy and a petite black girl. All three  
9 carried large backpacks, giving them the appearance  
10 of students, which was all the more confusing for the  
11 locals; few children of this age were still in school in  
12 Kinshasa.

13 "This is going to take hours!" complained  
14 Travis as they reached the end of the line of sick  
15 people. "And I don't want to catch something  
16 standing in this crowd. Can't we just go up to the  
17 front and ask for Aunt Kathy?" He glanced at the  
18 man directly in front of Summer.

19 "What are we going to tell your aunt about  
20 how we got here?" K.T. asked.

21 "I think if Aunt Kathy expects us to keep a  
22 secret, we can expect her to keep one too. We'll  
23 have to tell her about the BPC," Summer stated  
24 calmly. "How else?"

25 Travis raised his eyebrows and shrugged. He  
26 didn't like the idea of telling his aunt about the BPC.  
27 "We could put a note in the box and then just hand it  
28 to someone inside to give to her." He was beginning  
29 to feel very uneasy about seeing his aunt in person.

30 "No way, Travis. We need to see her to find  
31 out if the monkey that bit her is the one that's sick.

1 Don't you want to see her?" Summer rolled her  
2 chair forward as the line inched closer to the door.

3 Travis didn't have a chance to answer. A  
4 nurse in a white lab coat carrying a clipboard had  
5 been moving down the line, asking questions of each  
6 waiting patient and giving each one a sheet of paper  
7 to carry into the clinic. She had reached the person  
8 before Summer, and they listened as she questioned  
9 him.

10 "What is your name? Date of birth? Age?"  
11 she asked in Lingala, the universal language of the  
12 DRC's diverse population. Summer was glad the  
13 translator programs in the Texans' backpack  
14 computers allowed them to understand and speak  
15 any language.

16 The emaciated man mumbled the answers  
17 hoarsely. He seemed barely able to breathe.  
18 Lesions covered his face and neck. He said he had  
19 been getting worse for several years. The nurse  
20 asked why he had not come in sooner. He simply  
21 closed his eyes and shook his head. She turned his  
22 arm over and ran her finger down the tracks of  
23 needle marks that followed his bulging veins.

24 "Do you use intravenous drugs? Share  
25 needles and syringes?"

26 He nodded twice.

27 She called out to another nurse closer to the  
28 door to call for a stretcher immediately. "We will  
29 give you something to ease the pain as soon as  
30 possible." She helped load the frail man onto the  
31 stretcher and finished her notes. She tore the sheet