

THE SASSAFRAS SCIENCE ADVENTURES

VOLUME 2: ANATOMY



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THE SASSAFRAS SCIENCE ADVENTURES

VOLUME 2: ANATOMY {SAMPLE}

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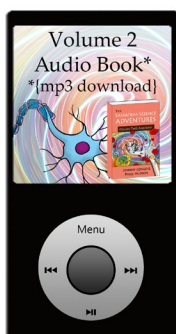
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TOPICS COVERED IN THIS VOLUME

The Sassafras Science Adventures Volume 2: Anatomy covers a variety of biological subjects by looking at the following body topics:

- Skull
- Spine
- Bone
- Joint
- Breathing
- Trachea
- Lungs
- Alveoli
- Brain
- Spinal Column
- The Five Senses (Touch, Sight, Taste, Smell, and Hearing)
- Blood
- Heart
- Muscles
- Teeth
- Stomach
- Intestines
- Kidney
- Bladders
- Reproduction
- DNA
- Lymph nodes
- Bacteria and Germs
- Cells
- Hormones
- Skin
- Sweat Glands
- Hair
- Fingernails
- The 11 Body Systems

DON'T WANT TO DO ALL THE READING?



Check out *The Sassafras Science Adventures Volume 2: Anatomy* audiobook! Listen to the talented Christine Myrick take you on a journey to Ethiopia, Texas, and Italy with the Sassafras Twins as they learn about the different systems of the human body.

CHAPTER 1: ADVENTURES IN ANATOMY

Breakfast at Cecil's

The smell of sizzling bacon and mothballs reached the noses of sleeping twelve-year-old twins, Blaine and Tracey Sassafras. Blaine, the older of the twins by five minutes and fourteen seconds, began blinking his sleepy eyes open.

“Wait a second. That doesn’t make any sense. Why would those smells of mothballs and bacon ever be mixed together? Where am I?” he said to himself. Blaine sat up and looked over at his sister who was waking from her own sleep.

“Tracey,” croaked Blaine, a bit alarmed. “Where are we? This isn’t our house!”

Tracey sat up, groggy-eyed, and looked around the unkempt room before she muttered, “Of course it’s not our house, Blaine. Don’t you remember? We are at crazy Uncle Cecil’s house.”

Blaine’s mouth dropped open almost as wide as his eyes, “You mean that wasn’t a dream?”

“No, it wasn’t a dream,” Tracey exclaimed, as she attempted to use her fingers to comb down her messy hair.

“So the invisible zip lines, all the animals, the Man with No Eyebrows, that was all . . . real?” Blaine mumbled in disbelief.

Both twins sat silent in their beds for a moment, thinking about all that had transpired so far this summer. Their parents had sent them to their Uncle Cecil’s house to brush up on their scientific knowledge because of a failing grade in the subject. They had arrived at 1104 North Pecan Street expecting the worst, but it had turned out to be the beginning of the greatest adventure of their lives. Their well-known scientist uncle and his pet prairie dog, President

Lincoln, had invented invisible zip lines that had the ability to take them anywhere on the globe at the speed of light. All that was needed was a harness and a special three-ringed carabiner. One ring of the carabiner was for longitude coordinates, one ring was for latitude coordinates, and the third ring locked the carabiner closed. Once the carabiner was correctly calibrated to the right coordinates and snapped shut, it would automatically hook onto the correct invisible zip line. Then within a matter of seconds, whoosh, off you went on a sonic-speed journey to the desired location.

Over the course of the last week or so, the Sassafras twins had used these invisible zip lines to travel to Kenya, Egypt, Canada, Peru, Australia, China, Alaska, and the Southern Atlantic Ocean. They had encountered all kinds of amazing animals on their journeys and had met really incredible local animal experts at each location. They had used an application called SCIDAT (short for ‘scientific data’) on the smartphones that their uncle had given them to text in and store loads and loads of exciting and relevant information on the animals they encountered. Blaine and Tracey had survived some pretty amazing and perilous adventures on their travels and had made it back to their Uncle Cecil’s house a whole lot smarter. The twins had even survived the Man with No Eyebrows’s attempts to sabotage and stop them. He was a strange man who had somehow shown up at several of their locations around the globe. He seemed to be trying to destroy them. Neither Blaine nor Tracey knew why, but at least he hadn’t succeeded.

When the twins had arrived back at their uncle’s house after recording data on the giant squid, they had assumed they were finished with globe zipping for the summer and maybe even forever, but they had been wrong about that. Uncle Cecil had forgotten to tell them that their study on zoology was just the first of many science subjects they would be covering over the course of the summer. Now they had so much more to look forward to, more adventure to be had, and more science to learn. The twins were hungry for more.

They would be studying anatomy next, and if it was even half as cool as zoology had been, then Blaine and Tracey knew that they were in for a wild ride. Their stream of flowing memories was cut off by yet another strong smell. The aroma of oranges was now added to the mix. Blaine asked his sister, “Do you smell that?”

“What?” Tracey questioned. “The bacon, the mothballs, or the fresh squeezed orange juice?”

“So you smell all of that too?” Blaine confirmed, hopping out of bed. “I know the mothball smell is coming from this room Uncle Cecil put us in. Really, all the rooms upstairs reek of mothballs. It’s gross! It smells like a grandma’s sock drawer, but what about the bacon and the orange juice? Do you think Uncle Cecil is making us breakfast?”

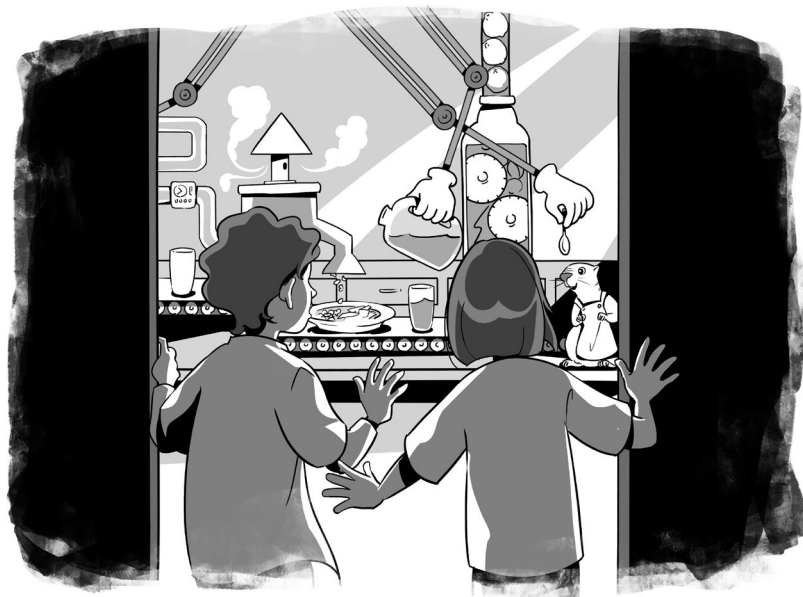
“There’s only one way to find out,” Tracey responded, getting out of her bed. Both twins slipped on their shoes and prepared to head downstairs.

Their Uncle Cecil’s house had obviously been decorated decades before the twins were born. It not only smelled like a grandma’s house but it looked like one too, at least on the second floor where their room was located. Cecil spent most of his time down in the basement working on science projects and inventions, so he was rarely upstairs. He had told the twins the night before that most of the upstairs rooms were just full of junk. Their room, evidently, was the only room that had enough space to sleep in. The twins assumed he saved so much stuff just in case he could use some of it on one of his projects.

Blaine and Tracey made their way to the stairs, which were half-covered by stacks and stacks of cardboard, old newspapers, and books. They started going down toward the kitchen. The mothball smell lessened and both the bacon and orange juice smells intensified with every step down.

Blaine was the first to burst through the swinging kitchen door, with Tracey right behind him. They were shocked at what

they saw. The whole kitchen had been converted into some kind of ... breakfast-making machine. The kitchen had not looked like this the night before. There was bacon being fried by some sort of mechanical arm. There was a big cylindrical blender with a literal tornado of juice swirling inside. There were many mechanical moving parts all around, opening drawers, grabbing utensils, mixing ingredients, stocking and un-stocking the refrigerator. And there, standing on the countertop in the middle of it all, with a smile on his face and an apron tied around his waist, was none other than President Lincoln, the prairie dog.



Then, as the twins looked around in disbelief, several small doors opened up high on the far wall and released four eggs. The eggs rolled out the doors and landed on a moving track. The track carried the eggs safely around a series of curves and then dropped them, without breaking, through alternating sections of a breakaway bridge. At the bottom of the bridge, the eggs were safely caught by robotic fingers. The fingers did some fancy spinning and flipping of the eggs before cracking each egg and letting the contents ooze

down into waiting skillets. The eggs fried nicely in a matter of seconds. The spring-loaded skillets then flipped the eggs through the air, landing them perfectly on waiting plates that were already on the kitchen table. Immediately, the mechanical arm swung around and added hot bacon to the plates. Then, the lid of the tornado blender popped off and a mechanical hand grabbed the container. It swung the juice around and poured it into the waiting glasses on the conveyor belt.

Tracey looked at Blaine with an impressed look on her face. “Well, I guess President Lincoln really is an inventor, just like Uncle Cecil said.”

“Yeah, just look at this breakfast,” Blaine said, enthusiastically. “Sizzling bacon, fresh-squeezed orange juice, cereal, and fried eggs! This is fantastic!”

President Lincoln jumped down off the countertop and joined the twins at the table as they prepared to eat breakfast. Then, like a ball of crazy red-headed energy, Blaine and Tracey’s Uncle Cecil came bursting through the swinging kitchen door.

“Train! Blaisey! Tipper Topper of the morning to you! You two are looking bright-eyed and bushy-tailed on this fine day. Whoa! Linc dog, what have you done to the kitchen?” Cecil proclaimed to his furry friend. “It looks...great! I like it!”

Cecil swooshed around the table in his white lab coat and bunny rabbit slippers and sat down in front of the last plate on the table. He immediately began downing the breakfast, but that did not stop him from talking. Not at all.

“I am still beside myself with joy at how well you two did on all the zoology assignments from this summer’s zip lining adventures. Oh, zippy zip zipparoo. The zip lines have worked great, wonderfully, fantabulously! Have they not? And there’s more where that came from!”

The energy and excitement that their uncle possessed never

seemed to lose its luster, but he was especially hyper this morning. The twins wondered if he had already had his morning cup of coffee, or rather his morning pot of coffee! Or maybe he was just excited about the start of a new subject of science. Whatever the reason, he was like a regular tornado of happiness this morning.

“The two of you,” Cecil announced, while stuffing more bacon into his mouth, “got an A+++ on zoology. Next up— anatomy! I know that you guys are going to do superiffic on this subject too. Well, my wonderful niece and nephew, are you excited? Are you ready to continue your zip line science adventure?”

Blaine and Tracey both nodded in excited confirmation.

“Well, then,” Cecil declared as he shot up from the kitchen table; amazingly, he was already finished with his breakfast. “You two finish eating here, and then meet President Lincoln and myself down in the basement for a presentation that our genius prairie dog has prepared for you.”

Cecil exited through the kitchen door as fast as he had come in. President Lincoln left the table as well and darted through a hole in the wall that led to a network of tunnels the prairie dog used to travel around the house. This left Blaine and Tracey alone at the kitchen table. Blaine took a swig of orange juice and looked over at Tracey.

“Well, sis,” he remarked. “Are you really ready for more? I know that there is more adventure waiting on the other side of those lines for us, but there is also more science. What if we don’t enjoy anatomy like we enjoyed zoology? What if anatomy is boring?”

Tracey took a bite of egg and thought for a moment before she replied, “Do you really think it’s going to be boring, Blaine? Not one thing has been boring since we got off that bus and arrived at Uncle Cecil’s house. I think anatomy is going to be just as fun as zoology was.”

Blaine smiled, “Me too. I was just checking to see if we were

still on the same page.”

His smile turned into a smirk as Blaine gave Tracey a decent punch in the shoulder, hopped out of his chair, and then shouted, “Beat you down to the basement!”

Tracey, unable to turn down a challenge from her twin brother, hopped quickly out of her chair and ran toward the basement, hot on Blaine’s heels.



It had been fairly easy to hide all the cameras in Cecil Sassafras’s house. Most of them were also equipped with speakers so he could hear what was going on as well as see. The hardest place to hide the video cameras had been in the basement. Granted, it was so messy and unorganized down there that the loopy, red-headed scientist would never notice a few small hidden lenses here and there, but it had been difficult to find a time that Cecil wasn’t in the basement. The man practically lived down there. In addition to spending hours and hours on various scientific projects, he also often ate and slept down there, and when Cecil wasn’t down in the basement, that pesky prairie dog was. Even so, he had successfully done it.

Now, from the basement of his house at 1108 North Pecan Street, just two doors down from the Sassafras residence, he was able to watch every move that Cecil and his niece and nephew made. He had noticed that the children were referring to him as “The Man with No Eyebrows.” A fitting title indeed, though somewhat offensive. Even though the kids called him that, Cecil had not yet seemed to figure out who he was. That was just like Cecil Sassafras—head always in the scientific clouds, oblivious to human relationships. If somebody loved Cecil, like that silly Summer Beach did, Cecil would miss all the obvious signs. And if somebody hated Cecil, like

he did, Cecil would miss that too. But what Cecil couldn't possibly miss was the revenge that was going to be exacted on him by the "Man with No Eyebrows."

The villain chuckled to himself at the thought of this sweet vengeance, as he even now used the hidden cameras to watch those twins rumble down into the basement joining Cecil and that prairie dog. He assumed that the children were about to zip off to their next location, and when they did, he would be there. He would use the cameras to see the longitude and latitude coordinates listed in the LINLOC application on the kids' phones. Then he would use his own three-ringed carabiner and invisible zip lines to travel to the exact same location as the children. He would sabotage Cecil's niece and nephew's science learning. The man knew that this whole global zip lining, science-face-to-face thing was Cecil's dearest and most esteemed project ever. So he would take what was dearest to Cecil and destroy it.

Over the past week, he had traveled to different locations, and he'd tried to thwart the children, but they had proven to be very hard to stop, indeed. They were determined and smart, too, but he knew that determination could only last so long. He would think of bigger and better ways to stop them, and he would be relentless in his pursuit of revenge. Eventually, he would stop those Sassafras twins.



Socrates and Aristotle

President Lincoln jostled around with the basement computer's mouse, which in turn illuminated the tracking screen. The tracking screen was a map of the world that Uncle Cecil used to observe Blaine and Tracey's progress through their global locations. Two green dots represented the twins and those dots moved with them as they moved from location to location. Though they were

traveling all over the planet with no adults, they felt pretty safe. They knew that Cecil was tracking their movement down here in the basement, and that they could use their smartphones to call him anytime they were in trouble. Besides, they were enjoying the adventure.

The only thing that worried them just a bit was that sneaky Man with No Eyebrows. They never knew when he was going to show up and try to sabotage them. They had bested him before and were pretty sure they could best him again if he ever popped up.

With another tap of the mouse from President Lincoln, the screen changed from the map of the world to the document page. This was where Cecil could see their SCIDAT information as the twins texted it in and also where he could view the pictures that they took. However, right now, the document page displayed a picture of the prairie dog with brightly colored text that read, “President Lincoln’s ever so Brief Presentation on Zoology.”

Blaine and Tracey still weren’t sure what to think about the lovable President Lincoln. Was he really an inventor? Could he even truly communicate? They had seen what Lincoln had done to the kitchen this morning, and here he was, giving an electronic presentation. Maybe the prairie dog wasn’t everything Uncle Cecil said he was, but at the very least he was the smartest animal they had ever known. Cecil read the text aloud as President Lincoln used the mouse to click through the pages of his presentation.

“The five major divisions of the animal kingdom,” started Cecil, “mammals....”

As their uncle said, “mammals,” a picture they had taken of an elephant in Africa came up on the screen. The twins looked at each other in surprised joy. President Lincoln had put together a presentation using the pictures they had taken. How cool was that!!

“Birds...” Cecil continued next as a picture of an Alaskan Snow Goose in flight came up on the screen.

“Reptiles...” Now a picture of a cobra from their would-be tomb in Egypt, appeared. The twins shuddered at the thought of how close they had come to being goners.

“Amphibians...” Cecil stated as the picture of the tiny poison dart frog they had seen on the bromeliad plant in Peru.

“And last but not least—invertebrates.” The picture here was of a spider from the barn in Canada.

“Next, let us look at the three different types of animal diets. First, we have carnivores, which means meat eaters.” As Uncle Cecil read this text, a picture of a racing cheetah appeared. The twins recalled how glad they had been when the cheetah had chosen a wildebeest for lunch instead of them.

“Then there are omnivores,” Cecil said, “which means an animal that eats meat and plants.” Now the twins saw a picture they had taken of a spiny-tailed lizard as it was warding off a sand cat.

“And thirdly, there are herbivores. Herbivores are animals that eat plants exclusively.” The picture was one that Blaine had taken of a koala while in the Brown Mountain Forest of Australia.

The last page of President Lincoln’s presentation came up. Cecil read its contents. “The Latin word for ‘human’ is ‘*Homo sapiens*.’ *Homo sapiens* are mammals and omnivores.”

Uncle Cecil smiled and clasped his hands together. “That concludes our furry little friend’s presentation on zoology. It was a splendoriffic review, with some pretty amazing pictures, I might add.”

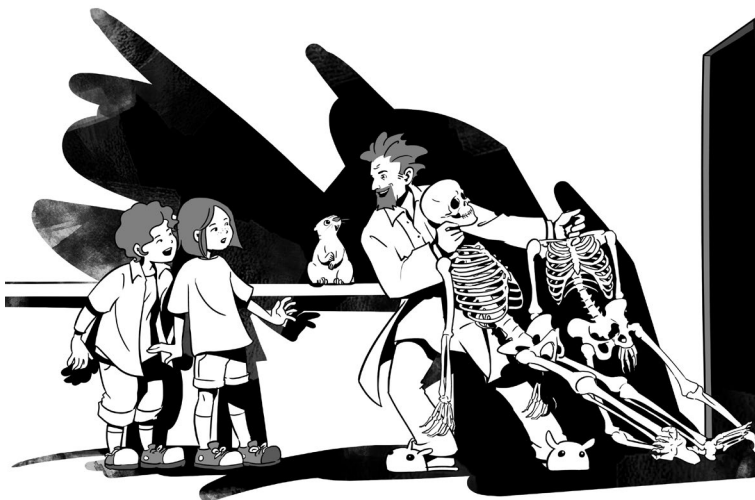
He reached over and gave President Lincoln a high five. “Let us now move on to our next subject at hand—anatomy.”

Blaine and Tracey felt the excitement building over this new subject. It was hard to believe they had ever disliked science.

“Before we start,” Cecil declared, “I have some skeletons I need to get out of my closet.” Their uncle walked over to a nearby

closet door and opened it up. He pulled out two plastic skeletons.

“Meet Socrates and Aristotle,” Cecil proclaimed, with a big grin.



“You named your plastic skeletons?” Tracey asked.

“Yessiree! I have had these guys longer than the two of you have been alive.”

“Why is one missing a head?” Blaine asked.

“Well, I’ll be a green persimmon,” Cecil remarked, as he looked around. “Socrates, what did I do with your head? Oh yes, I lined it up on the table last night to represent anatomy.” Cecil grabbed the skull off the table and attached it back onto Socrates’s body of bones.

“OK, Sassafras twins, why don’t you two pull out your smartphones and open up the LINLOC application to see where you are going first on this anatomy leg of your summer science adventures?”

Blaine and Tracey happily obliged by grabbing their backpacks, which they had left in the basement the night before.

Then, they pulled out their smartphones and used the touch screens to find the LINLOC application. This app was short for “Line Locations” and it gave them their intended locations, including the longitude and latitude coordinates, the name of their local expert, and the scientific topics that they needed to gather data on. Tracey read aloud with excitement what was listed on LINLOC right now.

“We are going to Ethiopia: Longitude 38° 42’ E, Latitude 09° 02’ N! Our local expert’s name is Larry ‘Snowflake’ Maru, and we will be gathering information on skulls, backbones, bones, and joints.”

“Ethiopia? Cool! That sounds like a good start to a new subject!” Blaine exclaimed.

“Indeed it does!” Cecil bubbled over, exuberantly.

He grabbed Socrates, the plastic skeleton, and started dancing around the basement. “So, you will start with the skeletal system in Ethiopia and progress through different locations, really fleshing out the *homo sapiens*’ anatomy! Oh, Honky Tonky Bonk-O-Bonky! I am so excited for you two!”

Cecil stopped dancing with Socrates when the skeleton’s head fell off again, but he continued with some more instructions. “Don’t forget that the invisible zip lines are to be kept a secret. They are designed to land you as close to your local experts as possible without being detected. Also, I’m sorry to say, President Lincoln and I have not yet managed to fix the glitch.”

“You mean the glitch that won’t let us progress through the LINLOC locations if we don’t enter the proper SCIDAT data?” Tracey asked.



“Or the one that sent us to separate places?” Blaine added, remembering how he and Tracey had zipped off to two separate locations, when the Man with No Eyebrows had jumbled up their SCIDAT info.

“Persactly, that glitch,” Cecil confirmed. “But on the brighter side of things, we did get a new application finished for you, and we will upload that to your phones right now!”

President Lincoln, who was still over by the computer, pushed a button and the twins saw that immediately the new app was being wirelessly uploaded to their phones.

“This is what I like to call the archive application,” Cecil informed them, as he attempted to re-attach Socrates’s head again. “In zoology, the two of you were able to take pictures of everything, but in anatomy and beyond that, this may not be possible. So this new application will give you the continued capability of sending in pictures with your SCIDAT information. Of course, you can still take pictures with your phones’ cameras and send those in like before. However, when that is not possible, you can scan through the images in the archive app, select the one that is appropriate, and send that in with your data.”

“Very cool!” Tracey nodded in understanding.

As the new app finished uploading, Cecil finally managed to click Socrates’s skull back into place. He then clapped his hands once and then started wiggling his fingers in excitement.

“You have your carabiners. You have your harnesses. You have your backpacks and helmets. You have your smartphones, complete with the new application. Train and Blaisey! It is time to zip!”



“Longitude: 38°42'E, Latitude: 09°02'N,” he wickedly whispered to himself, as he turned the rings of his own carabiner to the coordinates he had clearly seen on the children's phones through the lenses of his hidden cameras.

“OK, Sassafras twins,” the Man with No Eyebrows rasped, with an edge to his voice, “I will see you in Ethiopia.”

CHAPTER 2: ETHIOPIA, HERE WE COME!

The Surprising Skull

There was nothing like it! The feeling of zipping through places at the speed of light was amazing. Blaine and Tracey Sassafras were now soaring through rushing brightness, on invisible zip lines, headed toward the country of Ethiopia. Only one day ago, they had thought their zip lining adventures were over, but here they were now, gliding across the lines again and enjoying every second of it.

Their travel came to a jerking stop, their carabiners automatically unclipped from the lines, and their bodies slumped down, strength gone and eyes blinded. This was a feeling they had become accustomed to. It was how the landings always happened. The lack of strength and sight was only temporary and they knew both would quickly return. Meanwhile, the twins both felt around with their hands. Apparently, they had landed on some kind of sagging tarp, which seemed to be littered with quite a bit of junk. The Sassafrases could also hear the loud sound of a crowd of people. Where on earth had they landed?

As sight slowly returned, Blaine and Tracey saw they had indeed landed on a canvas tarp. It looked to be an awning, and it definitely wasn't the only awning in the area. There was what looked like an endless stretch of different colored awnings covering what looked like a very busy street, and it felt like a hot day.

The twins looked around on their canvas awning and saw lots of trash surrounding them. They were just under a window. It looked like people had been throwing trash out of their windows above, and it had landed on this awning. There were apple cores, old shoes, plastic bags, candy wrappers, popsicle sticks, and more. Only one thing really stood out from the rest, and that was an old tattered backpack. With his strength and sight now returned, Blaine

reached over and grabbed the old backpack.

“Gross, Blaine,” Tracey exclaimed, with a scrunched up nose. “What are you doing? Don’t sort through that trash.”

“It’s not trash,” Blaine responded, holding up the old backpack. “Look at this thing. It’s cool. It’s like some kind of old army bag or something.”

The backpack was littered with holes, and the front of it was almost completely torn off, revealing the backpack’s insides.



“Wow,” Blaine said. “There is some kind of writing and some weird lines stitched on the inside of the bag, but it’s not English. I can’t read it.”

“Blaine,” Tracey sighed, getting annoyed at her brother. “Who cares about that old bag? I think we have landed in the middle of some kind of huge outdoor market. Let’s just figure out a way to get off of this awning and start looking for our local expert. I feel like I’m trapped in a hammock full of trash!”

As if in answer to Tracey’s declaration, the twins heard a loud tearing noise as the canvas awning began to rip.

“Oh, no,” the twins shouted in unison.

All at once, the tear became a hole big enough for them to fall through, and the Sassafras felt themselves being taken down by gravity. The twins tumbled down onto a stack of hand-woven baskets. Blaine landed on his stomach and Tracey landed on her side, both hitting hard enough to knock the air out of their lungs. The trash that had been on top of the awning rained down on them and on the baskets that they had landed in. Blaine looked up to see a very surprised woman looking at him and Tracey with wide eyes. He figured she must be a vendor in what was definitely a market, and these must be her baskets that were partially smashed and covered in garbage.

“Sorry,” Blaine uttered, smiling sheepishly.

The woman raised her hands to the side of her head and looked like she was trying to shout, but was so shocked that nothing was coming out. Two guards had seen Blaine and Tracey fall through the awning and land on the baskets. They were now looking at the confused vendor. They started walking toward the scene to get a better look. No, wait, they weren’t walking. They were running, and they looked angry.

“We’d better get out of here, Trace,” Blaine declared, “and quick!”

The twins managed to slide off of the pile of woven baskets and get to their feet.

“I am so sorry, Ma’am,” Tracey murmured apologetically to the vendor lady.

“It’s okay,” the woman responded, managing a smile. “You just surprised me.”

The twins were thankful that the vendor had been forgiving, but the guards that were racing towards them looked as though forgiveness was the last thing on their minds. Without pause, the Sassafras twins burst into a full sprint, away from the oncoming

guards.

The market that they were in stretched practically as far as the eye could see. There was stall after stall with various goods for sale—everything from produce to live animals, furniture, books, artwork, and more hand-woven baskets filled the narrow streets. People were everywhere, some looking to buy and some looking to sell. Vendors shouted out their prices; buyers answered back with bartering shouts of their own. Old men sat on stools smoking pipes; old women looked carefully over piles of fruit; children played with wooden toys on the ground. The Sassafrases raced for all they were worth through the whole of it all.

They zipped past stalls and shops, dodging carefully but quickly around people and merchandise. Tracey managed to glance behind and saw that the angry guards were hot on their trail.

“These guys are fast, Blaine!” she shouted to her brother, who was just in front of her. “And they are still mad. We have got to find a way to lose them!”

Blaine responded by taking a sharp right and cutting over to a different row of the market. Tracey followed. The row seemed to be narrower than the first, making it hard to run very fast. The guards had seen them cut over, had managed to follow, and had even gained some ground on the twins. Suddenly, the Sassafrases saw something that was of some concern up ahead of them. An old man was pushing a whole cart of chickens straight toward them, and his cart was virtually blocking the entire path. The steaming guards were now only feet behind the twins.

Blaine looked straight ahead. He and his sister were going to have to play chicken with a cartload of chickens. Both Sassafrases pressed forward, straight toward the oncoming cart. The man pushing the load of chickens did not see the two children running his way. He pushed the cart onward, taking up the whole lane. The guards were faster than the twins and were gaining on them. The only two outcomes seemed to be either a head-on collision or being

grabbed from behind, but still the twins raced on.

Blaine reached the chicken cart full speed ahead, but instead of crashing into it, he jumped up, put a foot on the cart's front corner, and catapulted himself over the cart. He landed safely in a somersaulting tumble on the ground behind the cart. Tracey followed suit, jumping and landing in similar fashion. The two guards, however, were not so lucky. They both crashed, with a loud smack, right into the front of the cart, creating a small explosion of dust, clucks, and feathers. The twins didn't stand around to see what else happened. They immediately picked themselves up off the ground and raced on through the maze.

After running for another five minutes or so without being pursued, Tracey saw a door that had a 'Sorry We're Closed' sign on it. She pushed on it in desperate curiosity, and it happened to be open.

"Blaine! In here!" she called to her brother.

Blaine looked up and saw that he was following his sister into a shop called 'Raz's Pawn and Antiques.' The two snuck in and closed the door behind them. Both took a deep breath of relief and slid to their seats in the dark room that they now found themselves in.

"That was a close one," Tracey whispered.

"Sure was," Blaine answered. "What a way to start a new subject."

Blaine looked down in his hand and saw that he had managed to hold onto the old tattered backpack that he had found on the awning throughout the entire chase. "Tracey," he chuckled, as he showed his sister, "look what I have."

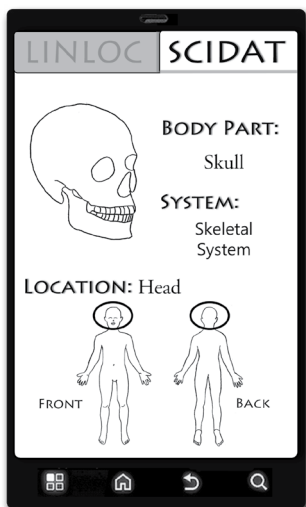
Tracey just shook her head. "I saw you were carrying that ratty old thing. Why?"

"I don't know. I guess I just never let go of it."

As the twins' eyes adjusted to the darkness of the room, they saw that the shop was fairly small. It had shelves and shelves of old looking things. There were statuettes, bowls, clocks, coins, knives, ornate boxes, instruments, jewelry, and more. The place smelled of dust and was all dark and quiet except for the dim glow of a light coming from a separate room in the back of the shop. The twins stopped their own conversation as they heard the faint buzz of another conversation coming from the direction of that back room.

The children stood up and slowly walked toward the faint sound and light. They had made it to the edge of the open doorway, when they stopped for a closer listen, making sure they stayed hidden. There were two voices. The conversation was high energy but seemed more friendly than heated.

"Of course I know a skull when I see one, Raz," the first voice defended. "Do you want me to break it down for you? A skull is made up of twenty-two separate bones. Eight of them form the cranium, which is the dome-shaped bony box that surrounds and protects the brain from being smashed or damaged. The other fourteen bones make up the facial structure. Only the lower jaw is able to move freely. The bones of the skull meet at jagged edges that line up and lock tightly together, like a puzzle, giving the skull its strength. The skull has openings for the ears, nose, mouth, and eyes. The eye sockets allow the eyes to move freely but also provides them with a protective pocket. There are two rows of teeth, one row anchored in the upper jawbone and one row in the lower jawbone. Humans use these teeth to bite and chew food with. There, pal, I told you I know what a skull is. Now, why would you want to sell me a skull? I came here to see if you have come across the map yet."



“Snowflake, Snowflake, my friend,” the second voice soothed, “you are the smartest man I know. Of course you know what a skull is, but this is no ordinary skull. Take a closer look at the teeth.”

There was a long pause and then the man named Snowflake (who the twins were sure had to be their local expert, Larry ‘Snowflake’ Maru) exclaimed, “It can’t be! That’s impossible!”

There was another long pause.

“You know what this means, Raz?” Snowflake urged.

“It means that the Legend of the Seven Monks’ Tomb is... true.”

“The Legend of the Seven Monks’ Tomb?!” Blaine blurted out in amazement.

“Shhh!” Tracey voiced.

But it was too late. Blaine had talked too loudly, and now the two men in the back room knew that they were not alone. A tall bearded Ethiopian man walked slowly around the corner of the door frame and spotted the twins. He was wearing dusty boots, cargo shorts, and a long-sleeved denim shirt that had two pockets on the front. He had a satchel that looked to be packed full, and he was wearing a sweaty brown fedora style hat that was hiding his curly salt-and-pepper-colored hair.

“And who might the two of you be?” the man asked.

Blaine seemed to have gone mute after his untimely blurt, so Tracey answered the man’s question.

“We are the Sassafras. I am Tracey and this is my very loud brother, Blaine.”

Another shorter man now appeared. He was dressed in overalls.

“How did the two of you get in here? Didn’t you know that we are closed right now?”

“Oh, it’s all right, Raz,” responded the tall man, kindly. “They’re just kids. Maybe they’re interested in...” the man’s sentence stopped abruptly as he spotted the old backpack in Blaine’s hand.

“What is it you have in your hand, son?”

Blaine, evidently now fully recovered from his speechlessness, answered, “Ummm, this thing? It’s just an old backpack that I found that somebody threw out as trash.”

The tall man smiled and laughed. He reached over and gave Raz a friendly slug in the arm. Raz reached up and rubbed his arm; the look on his face showed that he had no idea why his friend was laughing. The taller man looked back at Blaine.

“Would you be so kind as to let me look at that backpack, son?”

“Sure,” Blaine affirmed, happily, “but first tell me this, do you happen to be Larry ‘Snowflake’ Maru?”

The man raised his eyebrows in surprise. “Why yes, son. That’s me.”

“Dr. Larry ‘Snowflake’ Maru,” Raz corrected. “He’s an archaeologist.”

“You can just call me Snowflake.”

Blaine handed Snowflake the ragged backpack. Snowflake took the bag with both hands and looked at it carefully, like it was a priceless treasure.

“I cannot believe it,” he breathed quietly.

The twins had no idea why an old backpack called for such reverence. Snowflake studied the backpack a little longer and then announced, “Let’s look at this under better light.”

The twins followed Raz and Snowflake as they walked back into the back room. Snowflake carefully placed the backpack under a lamp on a table next to a skull that was already sitting there. He and Raz took seats at the two chairs that were already at the table.

The Sassafras stood at the edge of the table, both snapping quick pictures of the skull.

“Tell me where you found this again, son,” Snowflake said as he looked directly at Blaine.

“It was in a pile of trash on top of an awning out in the market,” Blaine responded.

Snowflake nodded, acknowledging Blaine’s answer, and then he carefully pulled back the ripped front of the backpack and took a long close look at the lines and writing that were stitched on the inside.

“Today is a good day,” Snowflake finally exclaimed. “It’s almost too good to be true. Miraculous, even.” He looked across the table at Raz. “Well, Raz, my friend, I’ll pay you whatever you want for this skull of yours.”

Snowflake then looked at the twins. “Blaine and Tracey Sassafras, in my expert opinion, this bag that you have found is very valuable. I don’t know that I can even put a price on it.”

“Tell you what, Doc,” Blaine piped up, trying to make a deal. “You teach us a little something about the skeletal system and we will give you this bag.”

A huge smile formed on Dr. Larry ‘Snowflake’ Maru’s face. He stood up from the table. Blaine thought he was going to offer a handshake to seal the deal they had just made. Instead, the tall man wrapped both him and Tracey up in a huge hug.

“You two Sassafras are like angels to me,” he said, happily. “For today it’s as though you have given me a gift from Heaven.”

Neither Blaine nor Tracey were sure how an old ragged backpack could be like a gift from Heaven, but they were glad that their newest local expert liked them as much as angels. Snowflake released the twins from the hug but kept a hand on each of their shoulders. The big smile was still on his face, and he now asked with a twinkle in his eye, “Blaine and Tracey how would you two like to

hear a story?”

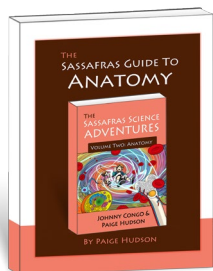


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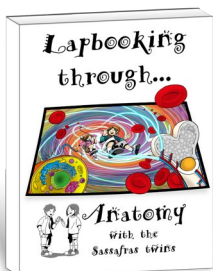
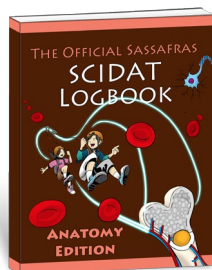
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