

0. CRYSTAL SKULLS - Story Preface

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When Hernán Cortés arrived in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán (today's Mexico City), he saw mounds of human skulls near a walled ball court. Some Mesoamerican scholars believe ball game participants (perhaps the losers, perhaps the winners) were pushed down a flight of stairs to be greeted by a weapon-wielding, head-chopping executioner.

Skulls were also important to Mayans. We find evidence of this in carvings, walls and hieroglyphics. But what of crystal, not human, skulls? What are we to make of *them*?

Mayan elders tell about crystal skulls created by their ancient ancestors. Some say the skulls, made of quartz, are the source of great knowledge. There is even a legend that thirteen such skulls, when gathered together from various places, will provide mankind with vitally needed information.

Some crystal skulls have been found. The British Museum has owned one since the late nineteenth century. Another is in Paris, a third at the Smithsonian. Are these skulls genuine Mayan artifacts? How old are they? Where were they located?

One of the most famous was reportedly discovered at the pre-Columbian Mayan ruins of Lubaantun (in today's Belize) during 1924 (some accounts say 1927). Anna Mitchell-Hedges (the adopted daughter of the adventurer F.A. ("Mike") Mitchell-Hedges (a real Indiana Jones) says she found the Mitchell-Hedges skull (sometimes referred to as the Skull of Doom) on her 17th birthday. Did her father "plant it" as a birthday surprise?

According to Anna, the Mayans (with whom she lived at the time) told her the crystal skull was created more than 3,600 years previously - and - that it had magical powers. Some years before she died (in 2007, just after her 100th birthday), she had her treasure examined by experts at London's Museum of Mankind (part of the British Museum). Arthur C. Clarke's story about the event depicts her, and the skull, making the historic trip. She was not pleased with the analysis.

According to the examining expert, the skull was made from Brazilian quartz. It cannot be carbon-dated because quartz contains no carbon. Scholars speculate whether Mike Mitchell-Hedges (who never said how it came into his possession) bought the artifact from someone (perhaps Eugene Boban, a Parisian known to have sold other crystal skulls) and then positioned it where his daughter could easily find it.

Believers in the skull argue that Anna's discovery was genuine and the skull is, indeed, ancient and magical. Sceptics, including those who have examined other crystal skulls, say they (unlike the Nazca Lines in Peru) are works from a more-modern time.

What are the Nazca lines? And ... where are the stunningly beautiful Iguazu Falls?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CRYSTAL-SKULLS-Indiana-Jones-4-Crystal-Skull>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/CRYSTAL-SKULLS-Indiana-Jones-4-Crystal-Skull>



Chichen Itza - Head-Chopping at the Ball Court

Photo, close-up of the ball-court wall at Chichén Itzá.

Background information, *Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World*, by Lynn V. Foster (with Foreword by Peter Mathews).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Chichen-Itza-Head-Chopping-at-the-Ball-Court>



Chichen Itza - Skulls on the Walls

Photo, U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Chichen-Itza-Skulls-on-the-Walls>



Chichen Itza - Wall of Skulls

Information regarding the wall of skulls from *Cancun & Cozumel, Including the Riviera Maya*, by Gary Chandler and Liza Prado.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Chichen-Itza-Wall-of-Skulls>



F.A. Mitchell Hedges - At Luubatum

Photograph, courtesy of Mitchell-Hedges.com.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/F.A.-Mitchell-Hedges-At-Luubatum>



Iguazu Falls - A Natural Wonder

This photograph was taken by Martin St-Amant in December, 2009. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY 3.0.

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Map - Belize

Map, courtesy of the University of Texas at Austin.

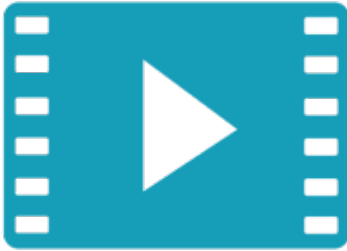
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Nazca Lines

Image online, courtesy Peru-Facts.co.uk website.

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Skull of Doom - Analysis by Experts

From "The Crystal Skull," *Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World*, Yorkshire Television, Trident Television, Inc., 1980.

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Crystal Skulls and Mayan Legends

Clip from *Top 10 Places of Mystery*, from the Travel Channel.

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