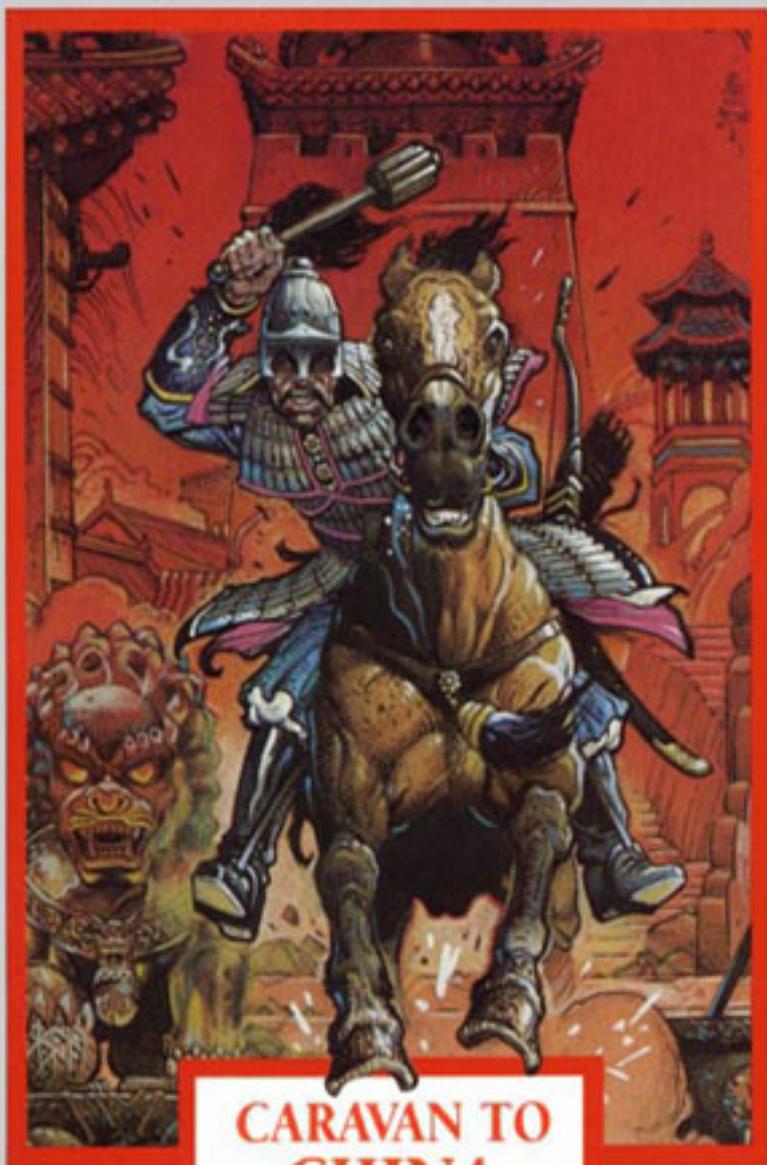


TIME MACHINE 21

This book is a time machine. Travel back 700 years and journey with Marco Polo.



**CARAVAN TO
CHINA**

**This book is
your passport
into time.**



**Can you survive
a journey to the
court of
Kublai Kahn?
Turn the page to
find out.**

TIME MACHINE 21

**Caravan to
China**

by Carol Gaskin

illustrated by Jose Gonzalez Navaroo



A Byron Preiss Book

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ATTENTION TIME TRAVELER!

This book is your time machine. Do not read it through from beginning to end. In a *moment* you will receive a mission, a special task that will take you to another time period. As you face the dangers of history, the Time Machine often will give you options of where to go or what to do.

This book also contains a Data Bank to tell you about the age you are going to visit. You can use this Data Bank to travel more safely through time. Or you can take your chances without reading it. It is up to you to decide.

In the back of this book is a Data File. It contains hints to help you if you are not sure what choice to make. The following symbol appears next to any choices for which there is a hint in the Data File.



To complete your mission as quickly as possible, you may wish to use the Data Bank and the Data File together.

There is one correct end to this Time Machine mission. You must reach it or risk being stranded in time!

THE FOUR RULES OF TIME TRAVEL

As you begin your mission, you must observe the following rules. Time Travelers who do not follow these rules risk being stranded in time.

1. You must not kill any person or animal.
2. You must not try to change history. Do not leave anything from the future in the past.
3. You must not take anybody when you jump in time. Avoid disappearing in a way that scares people or makes them suspicious.
4. You must follow instructions given to you by the Time Machine. You must choose from the options given to you by the Time Machine.

YOUR MISSION

Your mission is to travel with Marco Polo to the court of Kublai Khan in far-off Cathay and to find out why the route to Cathay—the land we call China—was lost to Europeans for almost 300 years.

Marco Polo, one of the most famous travelers of all time, claimed to have seen more of the world than any man who ever lived.

In 1298, he left a detailed account of his journey from his native Venice to China and back, complete with instructions and useful advice for travelers who wished to follow in his footsteps. In this book, *The Description of the World*, he recorded his route through Turkey, Arabia, and Persia, across the snowy peaks of the Himalayas and the scorching Gobi Desert to Cathay, home of the great emperor Kublai Khan.

Polo's tales of the wonders of the East sparked the imaginations of explorers and tradesmen. But for centuries no one else made the journey.

Cathay soon seemed like a distant dream. In 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered America while searching for it by sea. The few European missionaries who reached the Orient in the late sixteenth century were amazed to discover that China and Cathay were the same place.

How did it happen that the route to the East was lost? Why did no one repeat Marco Polo's journey?

In order to find out, you must travel back to thirteenth-century Venice and join Marco Polo on his journey to Cathay.



To activate the Time Machine, [click here](#).

**TIME TRAVEL
ACTIVATED.
Stand by for Equipment.**



[Click Here](#)

EQUIPMENT

On your mission to the age of Marco Polo, you will be wearing a hooded brown tunic, snug leggings, and a leather belt. You'll also have sturdy boots and a traveling cloak. In this simple costume, you should feel at home anywhere in the medieval Western world.



To begin your mission now, [click here](#).



To learn more about the time to which you will be traveling, [click here](#).

DATA BANK

To help you with your mission, here are some important facts about Europe and Asia during the period of the Mongol Empire.

1) In the thirteenth century, Italy was not a unified country, but rather a collection of self-governing city-states that were often at war with one another. Venice was a great trading center situated on the Mediterranean Sea. It was governed by a ruler called a doge.

2) During the Middle Ages, Europe was primarily Christian, and the church was more powerful than any state. The head of the church was the pope, to whom even the most powerful of kings owed homage.

3) The Middle East was primarily Moslem. Christian and Moslem warriors fought against each other in the Crusades, which spanned the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries.

4) Early in the thirteenth century, Genghis Khan united the nomadic Mongol tribes who lived in the steppes north of China. Genghis Khan and his Mongol hordes conquered northern China, then swept across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, as far as eastern Germany and Poland. They stopped when Genghis Khan died in 1227, and withdrew to elect a new Khan. The Mongol Empire was the largest land empire in history.

5) The Mongols called China Cathay, after the Khitai, a tribe who lived there.

6) The Mongols were fierce warriors, but they were tolerant of foreigners. In 1260, Niccolò and Maffeo Polo, Marco's father and uncle, traveled to Cathay with a Mongol escort. They were welcomed by Genghis's grandson, Kublai Khan.

7) Kublai Khan was an enlightened leader who lived from about 1215 to 1294. He was intensely curious about the peoples and cultures of his realm. He showed particular interest in the religions of his territories, including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and others.

8) Marco Polo was born in 1254 and died in 1324 in the city of Venice.

9) In 1271, Marco Polo set out for Cathay with his father and uncle. They arrived safely in 1275 and stayed for seventeen years.

10) Little is known of Marco Polo's life in the years that followed his return to Venice. In 1298 he was captured in a war between Venice and Genoa. While he was in prison he wrote his famous book, *The Description of the World*. He dictated the story of his travels to a fellow prisoner and poet named Rusticello of Pisa. Today, the book is simply known as *The Travels of Marco Polo*.

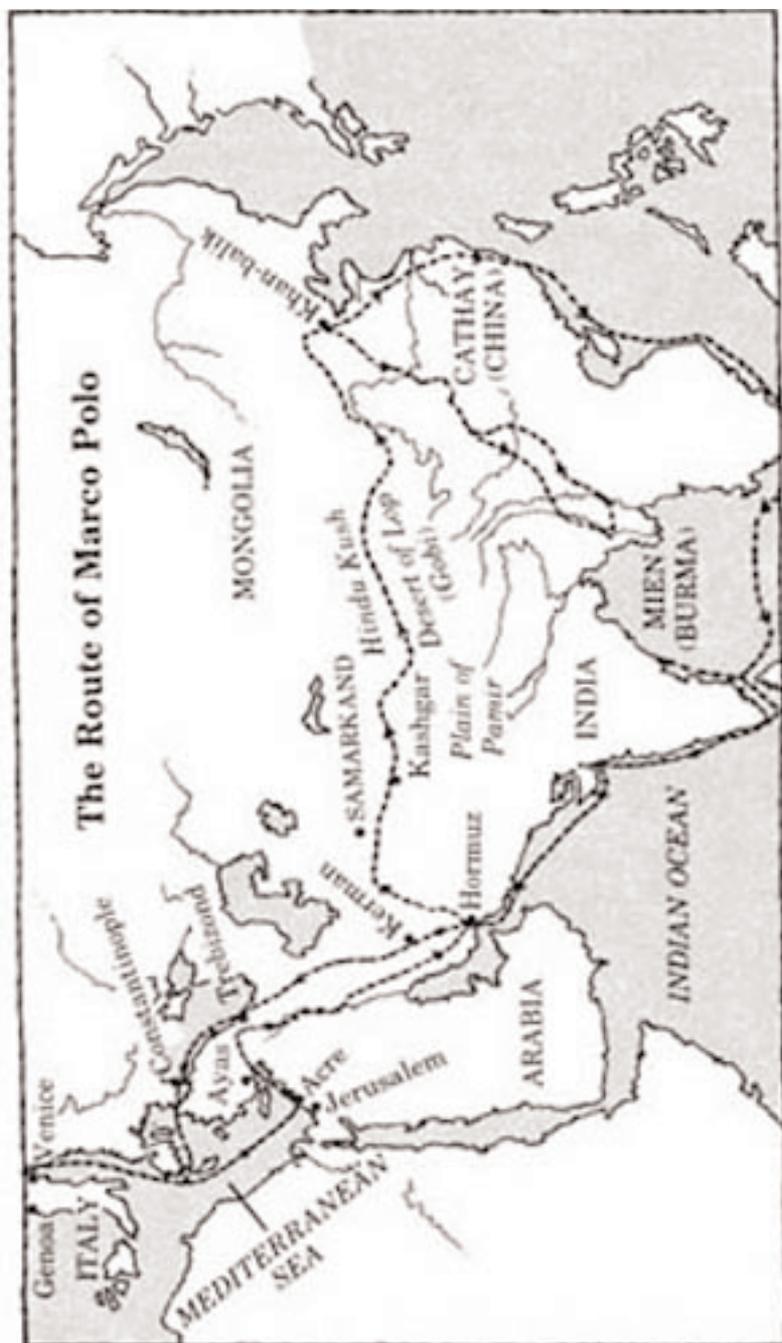
11) The land of Cathay as described by Marco Polo was totally unknown to the Europeans of his day. Even today, due to constant warfare and virtually impassable terrain, most Westerners could not hope to retrace the overland route Marco Polo traveled from Venice to China.

DATA BANK COMPLETED.
CLICK HERE TO BEGIN
YOUR MISSION.



**Don't forget, when you see this symbol,
you can click it to check the Data File for
a hint.**

The Route of Marco Polo







You're standing beneath a carved stone arch in a courtyard in Venice, Italy. It's 1323. Above the arch is a plaque that reads: Corte del Milione—"Court of the Millions."

The sky is blue and clear, but you smell dampness in the air. Beyond the arch you can see a bustling thoroughfare. It's not a street, though. It's a canal, teeming with boats of all sizes. There's hardly any sidewalk, just a short flight of slimy-looking stone steps that drop directly into the greenish water of the canal. You obviously can't go that way without hailing a water taxi.

You cross the courtyard to a large house with a red-tiled roof and wooden shutters. Maybe someone inside can help you find Marco Polo. But before you can knock, the door swings open and a girl drags you inside.

"Have you come from the apothecary?" she says. "Go right upstairs. The master is failing."

"But . . . I'm just . . ."

"Hush!" she orders. "The doctor says we must keep quiet. Come on, he's waiting." She pulls you after her to a bedroom on the second floor.

Inside, an old man is lying in bed, his white hair falling in wisps against a huge linen pillow. His eyes are closed, but a smile plays at his lips, as though amused by the goings-on in his chamber. The room is crowded with on-lookers. In one corner, a stocky woman is weeping as two others offer her comfort. In another corner, several men are seated at a table and seem to be enjoying a pleasant chat. A black-robed priest paces between the two groups, while a man in

a brown velvet cloak studies a document and taps his foot.

“Everyone is here,” the girl whispers to you. “The family, his friends, the lawyer, the doctor . . .” She beckons to a man in a dark red robe. “Doctor!” she calls. “The messenger from the apothecary has arrived.”

“It’s too late for medicine,” the doctor tells you. “Just bring the old man some water.” He hands you the goblet.

Nervously you approach the still figure on the bed. Who is this old man? What if he is already dead? But the old man opens his eyes as you tip the goblet to his parched lips. His eyes widen as he takes a deep drink. Then he grips your wrist and hoots softly with delight, his voice as dry as an old bird’s. Everyone in the room turns to stare.

“My friend from Cathay!” he whispers hoarsely. “We had a time, didn’t we?”

Cathay? Could he know you? You look at the doctor in bewilderment.

“Pay him no mind,” says the doctor. “Marco Polo is delirious.”

Marco Polo! It seems you’ve found the man you are looking for. But he is on his deathbed!

“Cathay—*bah!*” says one of the men at the table. “He’s always going on about Cathay. *Millions* of people, *millions* of riches. Confess, Marco Milione—haven’t you earned your nickname? Didn’t you exaggerate your tales?”

“*You* can tell them,” Marco Polo says to you. He chuckles weakly and his gaze is far away. “The truth is—I didn’t tell *the half* of what I saw!” Then his grip on your wrist loosens, and his eyes flutter closed.

The priest moves to the bedside and motions you away. But you decide to ask a question before you leave. Maybe you can solve your mission here.

“Why hasn’t anyone retraced Marco Polo’s journey?” you ask the man at the table.

“Marco Polo tells fine tales,” says the man who spoke before. “But they are all lies. Unicorns and stones that burn. Bah! Why

isn't he rich? There is no such place as Cathay!"

"Cathay exists, all right. How dare you doubt my father's word?" says the stocky woman, wiping her eyes. "He was there for seventeen years, and he brought back proof! Our house is filled with wonders! True, he is not as rich as a king—but what of the golden tablet, with the strange writing on it? Cathay *does* exist. No one followed in my father's footsteps because the route is too difficult, too far."

The people in the room start to argue. Suddenly Marco Polo opens his eyes.

"The way is closed," he says, his voice faint but stubborn. "That's why no one else has journeyed to Cathay. The world is closed. The great Khan is dead. And I haven't told the half of what I saw."

As Marco Polo shuts his eyes, the doctor ushers most of the people out of the room. You're not getting any answers here. Could it be that no one followed Marco Polo because nobody believed he'd really been to Cathay? Or was the journey just too far and difficult, as Marco's daughter claimed? What could have happened to make Marco Polo say that the world is closed?

You decide to look for the young Marco Polo and try to find out.



Jump back fifty-five years. [Click here.](#)



You're in the plaza of San Marco. Standing beside you is a pillar with a winged lion on its top. It's 1271. Scanning the harbor, you spot a familiar figure waving at the ships as they sail by. Marco Polo! He's now a strapping youth of seventeen.

"Excuse me," you say, tapping his shoulder. He turns to look at you, and you can see that his eyes are as bright as ever. "Do you remember me? We met several years ago, when I asked for your Uncle Marco . . ."

"Yes! The traveler!" Marco interrupts, recognizing you. Luckily, he seems too excited about something to notice that you haven't changed much in three years!

"Did you ever find my uncle Marco?" he asks. But he is talking so fast you have no chance to answer. "I've had news of him, too! Guess what? My father and Uncle Maffeo have returned! They have been to the east, to a land called Cathay!"

"That's wonderful!" you reply. "Where is this—Cathay?"

"It's a year's journey away," he goes on. "Cathay is ruled by Kublai Khan, the most powerful ruler in the world. My father and uncle are on a mission for the Khan. He has given them a golden passport, so they can travel safely back to his realm! First, they are going to Acre to wait for a new pope to be named. The great Khan wants the pope to send one hundred of our wisest men to Cathay!

"Then they are going to Jerusalem to fetch oil from the Holy Sepulchre for the Khan. My father and uncle told Kublai Khan of this holy oil and the miracles it will work. And here is another miracle—they are taking me with them!"

Marco's excitement is contagious. "I want to go too!" you say. "Will you bring me along?"

"That would be wonderful!" he replies. "What an adventure! Here come my father and uncle now—let's ask them."

Niccolò and Maffeo Polo stride across the plaza, their loose robes flapping in the breeze.

"Marco, you must hurry home and pack," calls the older man. His hair and beard, dark and curly like Marco's, are streaked with gray.

"Yes, Father," Marco answers.

"And who is your young friend?" Niccolò asks.

You introduce yourself. "Please take me with you to Cathay, sir," you say. "I will make myself very useful on the journey, I promise."

"That may be," says the younger man. Marco's uncle Maffeo is tall and beanpole thin, with fine, light hair and a long, straight beard. "We can always use a seasoned traveler. But you don't look very seasoned to me. You're too young!"

"The journey is long and difficult," Niccolò agrees. "What would your parents say?"

"I'm on my own!" you insist. But the elder Polos just laugh and pull Marco across the plaza toward home.

It seems you'll have to prove to them that you're a seasoned traveler. Little do they know how far you've traveled already! But how can you win their trust? You could jump to Acre and meet them. That would surely show the Polos you can travel on your own. You could even jump all the way to Cathay and back. *That* should impress them. Maybe you can get a token of your own from the Khan!



Rendezvous with the Polos in Acre.

[Click here.](#)



Jump to Cathay. [Click here.](#)



You take a deep breath, and you can tell by the smell of the murky canals and salty sea air that you are still in Venice. It's 1268.

You're standing in a crowd of people at the edge of a huge plaza. It seems as if the whole city has turned out for some sort of parade. Banners are waving, trumpets are blaring, and the crowd cheers as brightly clad marchers pass by.

The plaza is dominated by the most beautiful church you have ever seen, a fantasy of mosaics and marble, arches, domes, and towers. Its entrance is guarded by four gigantic bronze horses. Beyond it you see a stately palace, and beyond that, the sea.

"I never tire of looking at the Church of San Marco," says a voice next to you. "But the bronze horses are my favorites—sometimes I wish I could get on one and just ride away."

The speaker is a boy of about fourteen. His face is alive with energy, and his hair bounces in loose brown curls.

"Where would you go?" you ask him.

"Oh, everywhere," he answers, his brown eyes twinkling. "But today I would join the pageant. Look! Here come the clothmakers!"

"What's going on?" you ask, watching the procession of men in shimmering golden robes.

"Where have you been?" asks the boy incredulously. "The guilds are marching to honor the doge, of course!"

Guilds? Doge? You hope your face doesn't look as blank as you feel.

"I-I'm from out of town," you say.



“Oh, a traveler!” says the boy. You seem to have sparked his interest. “A new doge has been elected to rule Venice,” he explains, “and the tradesmen’s guilds are trying to outdo one another with their finery. Look—here come the furriers!”

Rows of men dressed in ermine cloaks and other fine furs march through the plaza. They are accompanied by musicians. They follow the lanternmakers, who open their gilded lanterns to release hundreds of songbirds over the crows. Glassworkers, winemakers, jewelers, and goldsmiths all march by bearing their finest wares, each group more spectacular than the last.

“Venice has everything,” the boy says proudly. “Here come the shipbuilders! And the silk merchants! You see? Traders come here from all over the world. My own father and uncle are traders in the east. One day they will return to Venice to take me with them on their travels. But for now, I must be patient.”

“How long have they been gone?” you ask.

“Fourteen years now. They left just after I was born. Some people say they are dead. But I *know* they will return,” the boy says with conviction.

“I’m a traveler too,” you say. “I’m looking for a man named Marco Polo. Do you know him?”

“Marco Polo! Why, that is *my* name. Have you heard news of my father and Uncle Maffeo?”

You shake your head. Marco’s eyes cloud with disappointment.

“Oh, well,” he says with forced cheerfulness, “Why would you be looking for me? I am just a lad, with no trade of my own. You must want my other uncle, Marco Polo. He is a merchant in Acre, the famous port in Arabia.”

Which Marco Polo are you looking for? Should you search for Marco in Acre? Or jump ahead in time to an older Marco here in Venice?



Jump to Acre in 1269. [Click here.](#)



**Stay in Venice and jump ahead to 1271.
[Click here.](#)**



Hey you! Get away from my animals!” yells a man. He is wearing a full-length robe and a headcloth, and he’s waving a stick. He means you!

You’re sandwiched between a camel and a donkey in a noisy outdoor market in Acre. In your own time, this city would be part of Israel. But it’s 1269, and you’re in Palestine, on the Mediterranean coast of Arabia.

You dash into a maze of tents and canopies, carts and stalls, all overflowing with silks, spices, brassware, and other exotic goods. Everywhere people are bargaining and gesturing, their costumes as varied as the languages they speak.

You stop at a booth where a woman is making tassles to decorate a camel’s bridle.

“Can you direct me to a merchant named Marco Polo?” you ask.

“He’s in the striped tent in the next row of stalls,” answers the woman. “All three of the Polos are there today.”

Three? You head for the striped tent. Inside, three men are having an intense discussion. You decide not to interrupt. The light is dim and they don’t see you, so you slip behind a table piled with cloths.

“But Marco, this is the greatest opportunity for trade the world has ever known!” says a tall, fair-haired, bearded man. He looks to be the youngest of the three.

“Maffeo, my brother, I am a Polo,” answers the man called Marco. “*And* I am a merchant to my toes. But I am too old! You need a young man to make your journey!”

So this is Marco Polo. His hair is gray and he's already much too old to be the same old man you saw in Venice in 1323.

"We must wait before we return to Cathay," says the third man. His hair is dark and curly and just turning to gray. "We cannot complete our mission for Kublai Khan until a new pope is elected. In the meantime, I shall return to Venice and find my son Marco. He must be fifteen years old by now! *He* shall come with us to Cathay. But we shall pass through Acre again before we leave, my brother. Then we can say a proper farewell."

It seems you had the right Marco Polo in the first place. Now you'll have to find him again. Should you look in Venice, or go to Acre to see if you can find him when he stops to bid farewell to his uncle?



Jump to Venice in 1271. [Click here.](#)



Jump to Acre in 1271. [Click here.](#)



Help!” someone shouts, running past you.

“*Fire!*” yells another, pointing skyward.

Flames are licking like dragons’ tongues from strange, curving rooftops.

“Run for your life!” cries a girl. She looks about your age, and her long black hair has come loose from the comb that held it on top of her head. She grabs your hand and pulls you along. “We must run for the city walls!” she yells over her shoulder.

Now that you look, you can see that everyone is running. “What’s going on?” you call to the girl. “Where is the Khan?”

“He is leading his Golden Horde through the streets,” she shouts, her voice filled with terror. “The Mongols will surely kill us all!”

Mongols? You look behind you. Hundreds of ferocious horsemen are galloping wildly through the narrow street and trampling anyone in their path. Some of them wield clubs or swords, while others shoot volleys of arrows in every direction. They seem to have no need for reins but ride with both hands free.

At their head is a powerful man wearing scalloped armor and a pointed helmet. He rides as though he and his horse are one huge animal.

“Genghis Khan!” the girl shrieks. “Hide!” She drags you through a doorway into a smoke-filled building. Above you, the roof is burning. “We must wait for them to pass,” she says, coughing, her eyes watering from the smoke.

Genghis Khan? You’ve got the wrong Khan! You peer through



the doorway in hope that the Mongol horde will pass before the burning roof caves in. In the street, people are screaming.

“Now that the Chin have fallen, Genghis Khan will conquer all of China,” says the girl, her voice breaking. She tears pieces of cloth from her sleeve and gives you one to cover your nose and mouth so you won’t inhale the smoke. The cloth is embroidered with Chinese designs.

“You mean Cathay?” you ask.

“Some call this land Cathay,” she answers quietly. “Where are you from?”

“I’m from the West,” you say, looking anxiously at the ceiling. A wooden beam is starting to whine and groan.

“After he has conquered China, Genghis Khan will conquer the West,” says the girl. “He intends to conquer the whole world. He will not stop.”

The beam creaks, then snaps like thunder as it rips loose from the ceiling in a shower of sparks and flame. You grab the girl and throw her into the street, just as the last of the horsemen disappear. The street is filled with the wounded and dying.

“What year is this, anyway?” you ask her, as her eyes brim with tears.

“It’s 1215,” she says dully. “Now I must search for my family.”

There is little you can do to help. You know that you can’t change history. And if Genghis Khan hadn’t conquered so much territory, Kublai Khan wouldn’t have had an empire, you realize. But you’ve gone way off track. You’d better try to find the Polos.



Jump to Acre in 1271. [Click here.](#)



Skillfully, dodging a toppled pushcart, you join the flow of foot traffic in the city of Jerusalem. By 1271, Jerusalem is already ancient. Narrow alleys wind between pale, squat buildings of yellow limestone. Rising above the crowded streets are the domes and towers of churches and synagogues, temples and mosques.

You are walking next to a boy who is balancing a tray on his head. The tray is piled high with round, flat breads. You stop him to ask directions to the Holy Sepulchre.

“You must be a Christian pilgrim,” he says. “Just follow the next street, the Via Dolorosa. You’ll see the dome.”

You see domes everywhere. “Is that it?” you ask, pointing to a huge, lead-colored dome.

“*That* is the Dome of the Rock,” the boy says proudly, “sacred to the Moslems. Solomon and Herod built their temples on that very rock! You’re in the Moslem section of the city now,” the boy explains. “Jerusalem is ruled by Moslems. But the Christians and the Jews have their own sections, and many others live here as well. The Egyptian rulers of Jerusalem allow it.” The boy pauses as a melodic chant echoes from a nearby minaret. “*La ilaha illa’llah.*”

“It’s the call to prayer,” says the boy. “I must go. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre has a blue dome with a cross on it. Good luck!”

You follow the Via Dolorosa to the church. Suddenly you hear a familiar voice coming from the main entrance.

“Just imagine, Father! This is the very place Jesus was crucified

and entombed! Why, I'll bet Kublai Khan himself would be in awe of this place!"

"Perhaps he would, Marco," says a man laughing warmly. "You can tell him about it when you give him the holy oil."

It's the Polos!

You hurry to the threesome. "There's a new pope!" you cry breathlessly. "He is waiting for you at Acre. He wants to send letters and an envoy to Cathay!"

"Hooray!" shouts Marco. "Maybe he'll send the hundred priests the Khan asked for!"

"Well, well," says Niccolò Polo, smiling. "It seems you are a seasoned traveler after all. Thank you for carrying this welcome message so far. Is there something we can do for you in return?"

"You already know what my answer will be," you say, smiling back. "Will you let me come with you to Cathay?"

"You can come along for as far as you're able," answers Niccolò. "Let's get started for Acre!"

You and Marco chatter like old friends on the way back to Acre. You wait together in the elder Marco's shop while Niccolò and Maffeo meet with the pope. Finally, just when you think you can wait no longer, they return, accompanied by two nervous-looking monks in white robes and black mantles.

"Where are the rest of the priests?" asks Marco. "The other ninety-eight?"

"These two friars are all the new pope could spare," says Niccolò, trying not to sound disappointed. "They are great scholars. You, Marco, will see to their needs."

"And you," Maffeo says to you, "will be responsible for protecting these." He pulls a golden pitcher, a crystal bowl, two exquisite vessels from a leather pouch. "They are gifts from the pope to Kublai Khan."

"The pope has given us letters asking the Khan to guarantee safe passage for Christians who wish to travel in his realm," says Niccolò. "Perhaps we'll be able to open a permanent trade route to Cathay!"

“Let’s get started,” says Maffeo. “We’ve delayed long enough. We will sail to Ayas and begin our journey to the East!”



Travel to Ayas. [Click here.](#)



Incense burners! Brass kettles!” calls a merchant from his stall.

“Cinnamon, ginger, pepper, and cloves!” calls another.

You’re squatting outside a striped tent in the bustling marketplace of Acre. All around you the dealers are peddling their wares.

“Sandalwood! Mahogany!”

“Finest silks!”

“Marco Polo!”

Marco Polo? You follow the voice. It’s coming from a man in a rough brown monk’s cowl, and he is hurrying into the striped tent. Inside, a man with stooped shoulders and gray hair is unrolling and piling a cargo of carpets.

“Master Marco,” says the monk. “Where are your brothers? A new pope has been elected, and he’s here at Acre! He has heard of your brothers’ mission to the great Khan of the East, and he wishes to send him letters and ambassadors!”

“I’m afraid it’s too late,” says the merchant. “Niccolò and Maffeo did not want to delay any longer, so they have taken my young nephew Marco and set out for Cathay!”

It seems you’ve missed the Polos.

“But wait!” the elder Marco continues. “The Khan asked them to bring him one hundred priests and some oil from the Holy Sepulchre. They couldn’t get the priests without a pope, but they did plan to stop in Jerusalem for the holy oil. I’ll send a messenger to try to intercept them there!”

What luck! If you can deliver this important news to the Polos in

Jerusalem, maybe they'll let you travel with them.

You present yourself inside the striped tent. "Excuse me, sir," you say to the surprised Marco Polo. "I couldn't help overhearing that you're looking for a messenger, and it happens that I'm on my way to Jerusalem! May I be of service?"

"You're a bit young to be entrusted with such an important message," says the elder Polo. "I thank you for the offer, and you are welcome to try, of course, but I must send a professional messenger as well, one I know I can trust to find my brothers and nephew."

You'll have to try to get to the Polos first. Should you jump straight to Jerusalem? What if you've missed them already? Maybe you should jump backward in time a bit. That way you could be waiting for them when they arrive!



Jump to Jerusalem and look for the Polos. [Click here.](#)



Jump backward in time and try to beat the Polos to Jerusalem. [Click here.](#)



It's your first day on the road, and so far the journey has been pleasant. You are walking eastward from the town of Ayas, on the coast of Armenia. In your own time, you would be in Turkey.

Your party consists of the Polos, the two monks, Friar Nicholas and Friar William, you, and a caravan of two-wheeled carts, drawn by sturdy mules.

"We are at the edge of Kublai Khan's empire!" says Niccolò Polo.

"In this land, Moslem Turkomans live at peace with Armenian Christians. They all pay tribute to the Mongol lord and are allowed to worship as they choose." Marco's mouth falls open with amazement. "But Moslems and Christians are sworn enemies," he remarks. "Life must be very calm in Armenia!"

You make steady progress across rolling hills of shrub and desert sand, but the two monks spend most of their time grumbling.

"I was meant for thinking, not for walking," complains Friar Nicholas.

"What if we're robbed by barbarians?" asks Friar William.

"We traveled from the land of your so-called barbarians all the way back to Venice," says Niccolò Polo, "and had no trouble until we reached the West!"

"The Khan wants to learn about Christianity," says Marco. "Who better to teach him than two scholars such as you?"

The monks look dubious, but they trudge on, calmed by Marco's flattery.

Suddenly you hear the rumble of horses. Raising a cloud of dust, a group of horsemen charges toward you. Over their chain mail armor they are wearing white tunics decorated with bright red crosses. They are heavily armed.

“It’s a troop of Knights Templars!” says Friar William.

“They are Crusaders, pledged to reclaim the Holy Land from the Moslems,” Marco tells you.

The knights rein to a halt.

“Greetings, travelers,” says their leader. “I would continue no farther on this road if I were you! Egyptian invaders are ravaging the country ahead. Turn back to Ayas, if you value your lives.”

“So much for peaceful Armenia,” says Marco.

Your heart sinks. It seems the world, and the path to Cathay, is already beginning to close up.

“We must reach Cathay,” says Niccolò. “We carry letters from the pope to the great Kublai Khan. But the Egyptian Moslems are no friends of the pope, or of the Mongol Khan. Thank you for your warning. We shall circle this war to the north, then swing southward to Persia, where we will be safely in the realm of the Khan. Then we’ll head for Hormuz and sail to India. And thence onward to Cathay!”

“Wait!” says Friar William. “We have only been walking for one day, and already our lives are in peril! I say we turn back.”

“It is our duty to protect Christian pilgrims,” says the leader of the Knights Templars. “We will see you safely to Ayas.”

The two monks gather their belongings and prepare to leave with the knights.

“The Khan asked for one hundred priests!” Maffeo says bitterly. “Now we won’t even bring *two*!”

“You are missing the opportunity of a lifetime!” Marco tells the monks.

“We’ll think about that on our way back to Ayas,” says Friar William.

“You are also free to turn back if you wish,” Niccolò tells you. “There may be some danger ahead.”



You have no intention of turning back. But maybe if you go with the friars, you can convince them to change their minds. That would surely earn you some points with Kublai Khan.



Go with the monks. [Click here.](#)



Stay with the Polos. [Click here.](#)



You are trapped between a wall and a donkey cart that is piled high with bundles. As the cart rolls slowly away, you see that you are on a wide road that is jammed with people and animals, all traveling in the same direction. You see men in costly robes, simple monks and barefoot beggars, women with children wrapped in traveling cloaks, sheep and cattle and overburdened mules. You are in Jerusalem, an ancient walled city built of dusty stone blocks.

You fall into step with an old woman, walking with a cane, and a boy who looks a few years younger than you.

“Where is everyone going?” you ask.

“The Christians are leaving Jerusalem,” answers the old woman. “Saladin has broken through the walls and taken the Holy City. He has captured the True Cross and slaughtered our knights of the Crusade. But we are allowed to pass through the Gate of David.”

“Some day *I* shall return as a knight,” avows the boy. “There will be another Crusade, and I will fight to reclaim Jerusalem for the Christians. If I die, I’ll be a martyr and go to heaven!”

“Hush, boy,” says the old woman. You are approaching a huge, turreted gate that is guarded by soldiers. “They are Saladin’s men,” she whispers. “You see? They bear the black and green banners of Islam!”

But it seems one of the guards has overheard the boy’s conversation. He bars your way with a gleaming sword. You draw back in fear.

“A fine ambition, boy,” the soldier says to your companion. “But

we, too, fight a holy war. Do not forget that Jerusalem is equally sacred to Moslems, Christians, and Jews. And we, too, believe that if we die in battle, we will enter Paradise as martyrs. So what is the difference between us? I will tell you. When your Crusaders conquered Jerusalem in 1099, they massacred the Moslems and burned the Jews alive in their synagogue. It has only been eighty-eight years. We have not forgotten. But our lord Saladin, sultan of Egypt and the Holy Land, has spared your lives.”

Eighty-eight years? That would make this 1187! You’ve jumped too far into the past. This is the time of the Second Crusade!

“Whereas *your* knights took over a holy mosque and used it for a stable, Saladin has restored the True Cross to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre,” continues the Moslem soldier. “Saladin will allow Christians to hold their services and to make a pilgrimage to their sacred places. So pay your ransom, and think about what I have said.” The soldier turns to the old woman and holds out his hand. “Five pieces of gold for you and one for the child.”

“B-but we have no money,” says the old woman softly. “We are very poor.” The soldier runs his thumb against the edge of his sword. Then he replaces it at his belt.

“Thank your God that Saladin is merciful,” he says. “You may pass.” Then the sword comes down in front of you. You decide you’d better not try this soldier’s patience.

“I-I forgot my gold,” you mumble. “I’ll just go back and get it!” You slip away from the gate and head for an empty alley.



Jump ahead to Jerusalem in 1271.

[Click here.](#)





You decide to go with the two friars and their Knights Templars escort. One of the armed knights pulls you up onto his horse and you canter off toward Ayas, leaving the Polos in a veil of dust.

You have to hold onto the knight tightly to stay on the bouncing horse, and his prickly armor of interlacing chains digs into your chest. He is not quite the way you had imagined a knight would be. He obviously has not washed in weeks, and though his hair is cropped close to his head, his beard is matted and dirty.

“How did you get your name, Knights Templars?” you call to him over the noise of the horses.

“We are the Order of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem,” answers the knight. “We were formed when Christians still ruled the Holy City.”

“You mean you’re a monk?” you ask in amazement.

“We’re a monastic order, yes,” says the knight. “But we’re a military order as well, and we spend much of our time fighting. Don’t you worry—if we spot any Moslems, we’ll kill them all!”

This doesn’t sound like a very charitable attitude, you think. But the two friars, riding on horses next to yours, nod their approval.

“The Dominicans, my order, are preachers,” calls Friar William.

“Then wouldn’t you be honored to preach to Kublai Khan?” you ask.

“How can one preach to a savage?” asks the monk. “Everyone knows that the Mongols are a race of devils.”

Try as you might, you can’t convince either of the monks to

rejoin the Polos. You should have realized that you can't change history.

At Ayas you bid good-bye to the Knights Templars and the monks. Now, you'll have to find the Polos again on your own. You remember the route Niccolò had planned. Should you jump all the way to Hormuz? Or should you try to catch up with them in some city earlier in their journey?



Jump to Kerman. [Click here.](#)



Jump to Hormuz. [Click here.](#)



Travel is certainly slow in the thirteenth century, you think, trudging wearily behind the Polos' pack animals. Your caravan crawls northeastward through Armenia and Georgia and finally turns south into Persia. Even in modern times, your route would be dangerous for a Westerner—across Turkey, through southern Russia, and southward into Iran.

You stop to let your animals graze on a boggy hillside near Mount Ararat.

“Look!” cries Marco, pointing to a black patch on the snow-covered mountainside. “They say the dark spot is the Ship of the World—Noah’s Ark!”

In Georgia, you visit the oil fields of Baku, on the Caspian Sea. Marco doesn’t seem impressed.

“It burns well,” he observes. “But this oil is no good to eat.”

You try not to burst out laughing. How you would love to show him the oil-guzzling airplanes and automobiles of your own century!

At the town of Saveh in Persia, you visit three ornate tombs. Inside you see the remains of three men, their skins shrunken and darkened like leather. They have long hair and beards and are dressed in flowing brocade robes.

“Who are these men?” you ask Niccolò.

“They are three kings,” he answers. “Balthasar, Gaspar, and Melchior.”

“The three Magi!” says Marco in awe. “These are the kings who brought gifts to the infant Jesus at Bethlehem!”

You are just as amazed as Marco. But you are beginning to lose track of your mission. At the rate of about ten miles a day, you've been on the road for months! You decide to make an excuse and jump ahead in time.

"I'd like to do a little trading on my own," you tell the Polos. "I will meet you in a few months."

"Don't be a fool!" says Niccolò. "There are brigands who slay unarmed merchants in these parts. It is safest to travel in a large party. Our best protection is our golden passport, for the people fear their Mongol lord."

You do your best to reassure the Polos, and you ask Marco to look after the precious gifts from the pope. When they are out of sight, you jump ahead in time.



Jump ahead two months to Kerman.

[Click here.](#)



Jump ahead three months to Hormuz.

[Click here.](#)



You decide to sail to India with the toothless sailor and his cargo of horses. The weather seems calm, and it doesn't look too far on your map.

"Hoist! Hoist!" the crew shouts in unison as they pull the mainsail up the single mast of the rocking ship. The sail bulges with wind, and the ship lumbers forward, heaving and creaking on the waves.

Soon you are on the open seas of the Indian Ocean, and you're beginning to turn green with seasickness. The horses whinny in fear as water breaks over the sides of the swaying ship. Your eyes sting with the salt spray, and as the sun sets, you are chilled and miserable.

Huddling in a damp corner, you drop off to a fitful sleep. You dream that someone has locked you inside a giant washing machine. Suddenly you are awakened by shouts of alarm from the crew. A sudden storm has blown up, and you're soaking wet!

"Man the rudder!" shouts a sailor. "The mainsail is tearing."

The ship pitches forward and water, leaking through the sides, drenches the horses and crewmen alike.

All at once you hear a sickening crash, as if a bolt of lightning has ripped a tree down its center.

"The mast has snapped!" is the terrified cry. The storm rages as the men scramble to the broken mast. But you hear another sound above the cries of men and horses—a horrifying, straining, groaning sound, like springs coming unsprung.

"She's splitting asunder!" shout the sailors. "We're sinking!"



Panicked crewmen are jumping overboard and grasping for planks or debris that will float. You'd better get out of here, or you'll drown!



Jump back a few weeks to Hormuz and try your luck again. [Click here.](#)



Jump to dry land in Kerman. [Click here.](#)



You slap away a swarm of buzzing black flies in the fishy-smelling harbor of Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. It's 1272.

You wander down to the docks. Even though it is extremely hot and sticky, the Hormuz harbor hums with activity. Two men hurry by, bearing a pair of elephant tusks on their shoulders. Workers load barrels of fish, dates, wine, and oils onto waiting ships, while others unload precious cargos of spices, pearls, silks, and cloth of gold.

The single-masted wooden ships creak at their moorings. They look small by your twentieth-century standards. You watch several dockworkers, their skins deeply tanned by the blazing sun, as they finish loading a rickety ship.

"Hey, you!" someone yells. "Look out there!" A man is leading a team of restless horses onto the crowded dock.

"Where are you taking them?" you ask.

"To India!" he says with a grin. He's missing half of his teeth. "This ship's almost loaded," he goes on. "You see into the hold? There are no decks on these ships. We cover the cargo with skins, and the horses ride on top."

"Where do you ride?" you ask.

"We ride on top too." The sailor laughs. "Do you want to come? We can always use an extra hand."

"I'm looking for some friends of mine," you tell him. "The Polos. They are merchants."

"The Venetian fellows?" says the sailor. "They were here a few weeks ago asking questions and looking at ships. I don't know if



they hired one, though. Fine sailors, those Venetians. Natural-born seamen. They said they were bound for Cathay. I think they're crazy, myself. But I'll get you as far as India, if you want to come aboard."

It seems you've missed the Polos. Should you take a chance and sail to India? Or jump back in time a few weeks and look for them in Hormuz?



Sail for India. [Click here.](#)



**Jump backward a few weeks in Hormuz.
[Click here.](#)**



You decide to try to find Margarita and rescue the crystal bowl and golden pitcher. Cautiously, you begin the long walk back across the Plain of Rudbar.

The fog of dust is beginning to settle as you approach the ruins of the caravan. Little remains but a few stray animals, overturned carts, and trampled bundles of trade goods.

All at once you shout with joy as you spot a familiar silhouette against the landscape. It's Margarita!

Rushing to the humble mule, you pat her head and open her saddlebags.

"Good girl!" you say, checking the golden pitcher. It appears to be safe. But is that a crack in the bowl? You pull the crystal bowl from its pouch. The bowl is unbroken, and its etched surface gleams in the dusty light. But Margarita brays restlessly.

"What's the matter, girl?" you ask. "Is your load getting heavy? I'll share it then." You pack up the crystal bowl and sling the saddlebag over your shoulder. Then you lead Margarita across the plain toward the tower where the Polos are hiding.

Suddenly you hear the sound of hoofbeats. One of the bandits is galloping your way!

"Margarita, run!" you command. But the mule digs her feet into the ground and refuses to move. You tug and plead, but to no avail.

Breaking into a run, you leave Margarita behind. Maybe the bandit will be distracted by the animal and won't notice you. But before you go ten yards, you hear the hoofbeats gaining on you. And before you can look back, you are swooped off your feet and

into the saddle of a galloping camel.

“Heading back to Kerman, young one?” growls the bandit. “I’ll give you lift—all the way to the slave market!” He holds a knife at your throat so you can’t turn to look at him, and he doesn’t say another word until you are back in Kerman.

The slave market in Kerman is a terrifying center for a business built on misery. It doesn’t look or sound much different than the camel market—except, of course, that the merchants and slave traders are bickering over the price of people.

“Buy these two, and I’ll throw in an old one for free,” says a wheedling voice. “Purebred and healthy,” calls another. “Clear eyes and fine teeth! What am I bid?”

You steal a good look at your captor. He has a huge mustache and stubbly growth of beard and the fierce, ruthless face of a bird of prey.

The bandit ties a rope around your neck and forces you into a gloomy tent with the rest of his “goods.” The tent is guarded by a pair of mean-looking Karaunas with curved swords.

“You’ll fetch a tidy price,” he remarks, sizing you up greedily. “Stand over there, with the young ones.” He shoves you to one side of the tent.

On the opposite side are several of the merchants from your caravan. They look bruised and frightened. One man pleads with the bandit, who answers him with a kick.

“That is my father,” says a soft voice at your side. The girl speaking is one of the loveliest you have ever seen. She has black hair that falls to her waist, and she’s dressed in the embroidered robe of a wealthy Persian. But her eyes are filled with tears. “My name is Yasi,” she tells you. “We were traveling home to Hormuz. I saw you in our caravan. My father has been trying to buy our freedom. But we have nothing left to sell.”

The saddlebag with the crystal bowl is weighing heavily on your shoulder. “How much more do you need?” you ask Yasi. But before she can answer, the bandit strides into the tent and drags her father away. You hear shouts from the marketplace as coins exchange



hands. Gradually, the tent empties out. Finally the bandit returns for Yasi.

“Wait!” you say. The bandit answers you with a sneer. “I wish to buy this slave,” you continue. “I have something to trade.”

Drawing the exquisite crystal from its pouch, you hold it out for the bandit to admire.

“Hmmm,” he says, his eyes gleaming greedily. “A gift fit for a king!”

“It is indeed,” you say. “And a fine ransom for this slave and me.”

“You are quite right,” says the bandit. “Let me see it!” He snatches the bowl from your hands and turns it around in the dim light of the tent. Then, in a flash, he whips a knife from his sleeve.

“I’ll have this bowl, and the girl too,” he says, grabbing Yasi. He holds the knife to her throat and backs from the tent, the bowl under his free arm. “Be patient, young one!” he laughs. “You’ll be sold next!”

Now you’re really in a mess. You should have remembered that you can’t change history—perhaps it is Yasi’s fate to be sold as a slave. But what about the crystal bowl? Should you follow the bandit and try to retrieve it? Or should you jump back to the moment before you decided to leave the Polos? If you hadn’t left the tower so early, none of this would have happened!



Jump back to the tower, to the moment before you left. [Click here.](#)



Follow the bandit and try to retrieve the crystal. [Click here.](#)



You reach the city of Kerman and hear a familiar voice in the marketplace.

“Then we saw Noah’s Ark! And the tombs of the Three Wise Men!” It’s Marco!

Pushing past a crowd of enthralled listeners, you find your friend.

We thought we’d never see you again!” Marco says, giving you an enthusiastic embrace. “It’s been months! Come on—Father and Uncle Maffeo are trading for fresh animals at the camel exchange.”

Niccolò and Maffeo greet you warmly. “Here is a new mule for you,” they say. “You will be carrying the two vessels from the pope in her saddlebags.”

You look doubtfully at the humble mule.

“Her name is Margarita—Daisy, in Italian,” says Maffeo. “We have chosen her because she is so homely, no one will want to steal her! She will guard the treasures well.”

“Why the extra caution?” asks Marco. “Is there danger ahead?”

“We have heard tell of a ruthless tribe of bandits called the Karaunas,” says Niccolò. “They roam the Plain of Rudbar, which we must cross to reach Hormuz. The merchants here say that the Karaunas have magical powers. They call forth a swirling darkness and capture travelers to sell as slaves! We’ll be joining a large party of merchants for safety’s sake.”

This sounds like superstition to you. But your mind turns often to the story as you lead Margarita across the Plain of Rudbar.

You are in the middle of a caravan of camels and merchants.

Niccolò and Maffeo walk ahead of you leading their new camels and mules. You walk with Marco and Margarita. The route is pleasant, shaded by groves of date palms and fruit trees. Margarita turns out to be a sweet-tempered mule, and soon she's eating fruit from your hand.

The caravan, snaking its way across the plain, stretches out to a long, thin line. Often your footsteps surprise flocks of turtle doves, which flutter skyward in alarm. The towns and villages you pass are all surrounded by enormous earthen walls.

"To protect them from the Karaunas," explains Marco. "And look—there is a town that did not survive!" He points across the plain to a deserted-looking town with a crumbling wall.

As you walk on, a dry wind begins to stir the reddish dust of the plain. It makes a rosy haze around the caravan. The sky changes to a coppery gray, and the sun turns the color of an old penny.

"It's growing darker," Marco says anxiously. "It's Karauna magic."

"It's just a dust storm," you say. But you look nervously around you. The wind has increased. And there is a deep, rumbling noise growing in the distance. It's not thunder.

"It's horses' hooves!" cries Marco. "Father! Uncle! Fetch the camels! We must run!"

Through the swirling, murky fog of dust, the turbaned shapes of bandits materialize from nowhere. Riding desert camels at full gallop, they strike first at the head of the caravan. With deadly precision and swinging huge curved swords that whistle in the desert wind, they slice a path toward you and Marco.

The caravan breaks into a hundred pieces as merchants scatter in all directions. Some try to salvage their wares as they run, but they're only slowed by trailing bolts of cloth or heavy sacks. The Karaunas cut them down with sweeping blows. People are screaming and shouting through the dust. Your eyes and mouth fill with sand.

Suddenly a dark figure grabs Marco, pulls him up on a huge camel, and gallops away. In your last glimpse of your friend, you

see he is winding a turban around his head. But you have no time to wonder what it can mean. Another figure is reaching for you!

“Climb up behind me!” shouts the turbaned rider. It’s Maffeo Polo! He is struggling to control his terrified camel. “We’re heading for the deserted town we passed! Niccolò has Marco. Leave everything and come, *now!*”

Maffeo yanks you off the ground and gallops away through the choking dust.

“Wrap this on your head and cover your nose and mouth,” he yells, passing you a length of cloth. “From a distance, we will look like Karaunas!”

You charge through the confusion while seeing the bandits kidnap, murder, and loot the merchants you had joked with just hours before. You even see one bandit descend on poor Margarita—though you’re moving too fast to find out what happens to her. Finally, unable to watch any longer, you squeeze your eyes shut.

You open your eyes as the camels slow. You are just outside the deserted town, and you’re riding toward a tower in the ruined town gate.

“This place is as good as any,” says Niccolò. “We can tether the camels inside the wall and hide in the tower. We’ll be able to see if any Karaunas come this way.”

From the height of the tower, all you can see of the Karaunas are dark shadows moving in a purple cloud. You hide until the dust clears on the plain. The Karaunas seem to vanish the same way they arrived, leaving nothing but a thin, pinkish cloud of swirling sand.

The remains of your caravan are visible in the distance. There are dozens of animals, some standing, some lying on the ground. And you can make out the bodies of several of your companions, already partly buried in mounds of dust.

“Poor Margarita,” you say with a sigh. “What if they’ve killed her?” Then you remember the gifts from the pope. You were supposed to guard them! “The crystal bowl and golden pitcher!” you cry. “What if they’re gone?”

“Stay here a while yet,” advises Niccolò. “The Karaunas may



still be hunting for stragglers.”

Or for whatever animals and cargo they left behind, you think. Maybe they haven't taken Margarita yet. Should you go back to look for her? If you're captured, you can always jump in time. On the other hand, if the pope's gifts are gone, they're gone.



Go back to look for Margarita and the gifts. [Click here.](#)



Stay hidden with Marco and the Polos. [Click here.](#)



You decided to follow the bandit and try to get the crystal back. But first you'll have to get past the two Karauna guards. Heading for the front of the tent, you strike up a conversation with them.

"That girl sure was pretty," you say to the first guard. "How much do you think she'll fetch?"

"Her?" says the guard, pointing beyond the tent flap. You stick your head outside to look. The bandit is tying Yasi onto a camel's saddle. Your saddlebag is hanging at her side.

"She'll not fetch any price at all," the guard continues. "Yousef is taking her to Alamut, as a gift for the Old Man of the Mountain. The caravan leaves today."

You'll have to get out of here quickly to have a chance to retrieve the bowl. You decide to try a trick.

"Look, the slave girl has a knife hidden in her robe," you cry. "I just caught a glimpse of it. Why, she'll kill Yousef!"

The guards dash out of the tent. While they are running to the bandit's aid, you race to the back of the tent and slip through a loose flap to make your escape.

You race through the marketplace of Kerman. Behind a cloth-merchant's stall, on a heap of scraps, you find a torn length of cloth you can use as a turban. And you're in luck. On a tailor's scrap heap, you find a light woolen caftan that must have shrunk from being dried in the sun. It fits you perfectly and completes your disguise.

You hurry to join the caravan to Alamut. A kindly spice merchant agrees to let you ride with him if you will groom his animals.

You fall into line somewhat behind Yousef and Yasi.

“Where is Alamut?” you ask the merchant as the caravan sets off.

“Alamut is high in the mountains, near the Caspian Sea,” says the merchant. “The name means Eagle’s Nest. The great chieftain keeps his headquarters well hidden!”

“The Old Man of the Mountain?” you ask.

“Yes,” says the spice merchant. “It is there he trains his devotees, the Assassins. They are trained to kill, quickly and secretly, with no thought to their own lives. It is said an Assassin will jump to his death from the highest tower if the Old Man so much as wiggles his little finger!” Then the spice merchant gives you a funny look. “You’re not planning to become an Assassin, are you? You don’t look like a murderer!”

You shake your head and laugh. But you suddenly notice that many of your fellow travelers are young warriors—with no trade goods to sell.

“Now, that one looks like a killer,” says the spice merchant, pointing to Yousef. “But he’s already too old. The Old Man likes his devotees to be in the prime of youth!”

You ride northward for days. Your caravan struggles to climb peak after craggy mountain peak. Then you see it. Barely separate from the surrounding rock is a forbidding fortress of turrets, towers, and a single gate: the Old Man’s castle.

Assassin guards frisk you at the gate. They are dressed all in white, except for blood-red belts and shoes, and each guard wears a pair of curved daggers. Their eyes look glazed and distant.

Next you are herded to an audience chamber, where you file past an old man with black eyebrows and a long white beard. He nods in approval as Yousef pushes Yasi forward, and he accepts the precious crystal bowl without a word. Yousef and Yasi disappear behind a curtain as the spice merchant bows and conducts his business. Soon he disappears as well. When your turn comes, you bow low, in imitation of the others, and are whisked from the chamber by a guard.

“Now you will eat,” he tells you, showing you to a room already

filled with people taking part in a sumptuous meal.

The food is delicious, aromatic, and spicy. It makes you want to eat more. But soon your head is drooping. Many of the others around you have nodded off to sleep. Your eyelids are too heavy to hold open.

Suddenly you bolt awake. Where are you? Where have you been? You shake your head in confusion. You are in a magnificent garden! The air is warm and the breeze smells sweet. The garden is filled with singing birds, bubbling fountains, soothing music, fruit trees—have you died and gone to heaven?

You soon notice that you are not alone. Your companions are the young warriors from your caravan and beautiful young women in filmy gowns.

You wander through the garden as if in a dream. A fountain sends out a spray of wine. A young girl plays a lute and sings softly, her long black hair falling across her face. She brushes it back with one hand. It's Yasi!

She greets you joyfully. "I followed you," you explain. "But where are we? Is there a way out of here? Why do I feel so strange?"

"You are in the Garden of the Hashishin," she answers. "The Assassins. The food you have eaten was drugged. These people all think they are in Paradise. They think I am an angel! In a few days the Old Man of the Mountain will have them drugged again and carried back to his fortress while they sleep. How they will long to return to Paradise! The Old Man tells them they must obey his orders, and if they die, they will return to Paradise all the sooner. This way, his armies are always eager for death and will kill others freely!"

"How can I get you out of here?" you ask. "And where is my crystal bowl?"

"You must forget about the crystal," says Yasi. "After we left the audience chamber, one of the Old Man's guards sat on it and the bowl broke into a thousand pieces!" She laughs merrily. "And as for me, why, I'm in Paradise! I have no way to find my father. So I shall stay here and play my lute. When I get older, the Old Man will set

me free.”

You start to object, but Yasi shakes her head and holds a finger to your lips.

“*You* must find a way to go,” she says. “Do not eat any more of the food or drink of the wine. It will make you want to stay forever. Go soon, or the Old Man will send you to war.”

Bidding good-bye to Yasi, you find a secluded spot in Paradise and, regretfully, jump.



**Jump back to the moment before you left
the Polos on the Plain of Rudbar.**

[Click here.](#)



Look for the Polos in Hormuz.

[Click here.](#)



You are in the harbor of Hormuz watching the Polos inspect the ships. They don't seem very impressed. Marco joins you and happily wraps an arm around your shoulders.

"Well, we've made it this far," he says. Then he shakes his head in disgust. "But we won't make it any farther if we take one of these ships! They are not even nailed together but are sewn with twine made from coconut husks! It's a good thing we Venetians know a sea-worthy vessel from a sieve!"

Niccolò and Maffeo greet you glumly.

"We'll have to retrace our steps and travel by land," says Maffeo. "It will mean some delay. Are you still with us?"

"Of course!" you reply. Marco grins.

"Then you will be in charge of the mules," Niccolò tells you, "including our stubborn Margarita, with her precious cargo of only one golden pitcher."

"It was worth losing the crystal bowl to make it safely across the Plain of Rudbar," says Marco. "Must we go that way again?"

"We must," says Niccolò, "unless you prefer to drown in the Indian Ocean! We will take the Silk Route to Cathay. Marco, you will take charge of our fresh camels."

You travel for many miles through heat so fierce that the townspeople spend their days neck-deep in the water of the local rivers. But as you make your way northward, the heat lets up.

In your own time, your route would be perilous—across Iran and through the mountains of war-torn Afghanistan. In 1273, it is only slightly less dangerous. There are bandits and invaders, shortages of



food and water, and even lions to worry about.

But in each town you come to, Marco finds something new to exclaim over—the sweetest melons, the whitest salt, an abundance of porcupines, or an unusual bird.

In the mountains of the province of Balakhshan, you meet a party of miners carrying pickaxes and small sacks.

“What do you dig for?” asks Marco.

“We tunnel into the rock,” says one of the miners, “looking for these—balas rubies!”

He pulls a fiery red stone from his sack. It is as big as a rose and glitters in the sun.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” says the miner. “They are very rare and valuable because our king only allows a few to leave his hands. And the mines are forbidden territory to any but ourselves.”

“That’s too bad,” says Marco. “A balas ruby would be a fine gift for Kublai Khan and would replace the crystal bowl we lost.”

The miner brightens when he sees the Polos’ golden passport. “Perhaps if you asked our king, he would send one as a gift to the great Khan,” he says.

“Thank you,” says Niccolò. “But we have been delayed already, and we must reach the mountains of Pamir before the snows begin.”

But the miner has given you an idea. Should you try to find a balas ruby for the Khan? It would surely win his favor. Maybe he would present you with a golden passport of your own.

Or should you stay with the Polos and go on to the mountains of Pamir? Then you could travel anywhere in his realm to find out how the route to the East was lost.



Stay with the Polos. [Click here.](#)



Sneak into a ruby mine. [Click here.](#)



A little dazed, you rub your eyes. You are staring at the fiery rays of a huge balas ruby. But you're a long way from the ruby mines. The stone is flashing from the peaked golden helmet of a very old man who is leading a convoy of troops past you and across the main square of a fantastic city!

Where can you be? There is a smattering of snow at your feet. The buildings around you are decorated with arabesques of blue and gold tile and are crowned by graceful turquoise domes. But here and there, you see the corpses of men hanging by their necks from wooden gallows, their heads drooping limply toward their upturned shoes.

Behind you is a deserted bazaar. Everyone has ceased his trading to watch the army pour out of the city. The regal old man is followed by a cavalcade of men and equipment: mounted commanders in golden armor, a herd of elephants fitted for battle, iron-plated wagons loaded with weapons, horses and camels, hundreds of carts, and row upon row of foot soldiers bearing bows and arrows, shields and spears.

"What a day for Samarkand!" remarks a tradesman who has wandered up next to you. "It will take until nightfall for all two hundred thousand of them to pass by."

Samarkand? You've landed north of the ruby mines, in the mountains of southern Russia!

"Where are they going?" you ask.

"Our lord Tamerlane may be old, but he has the blood of his Mongol ancestors," answers the merchant. "He is leading his army

to China!”

“Who were the hanged men?” you ask, gesturing toward the gallows.

“They were the architects of Tamerlane’s mosque,” the tradesman replies. “They did not build it high enough. Tamerlane can be cruel, it is true.” He sighs. “He destroyed the city of Baghdad, just as his ancestor, Genghis Khan, did. He butchered the Mamelukes in my home city of Damascus. And he slaughtered thousands when he overran India. But he has built a great Moslem empire and wishes to conquer the Chinese infidels. I fear this winter will be the death of him, though. He is marching into the snows.”

“It is cold,” you agree. “But I thought the Mongols already ruled China.”

“Is this a trick?” asks the tradesman, eyeing you suspiciously. “Perhaps you are one of Tamerlane’s spies? Everyone knows that the Mongols were expelled from China by the Ming almost forty years ago!”

You don’t know quite how to answer. But luckily the merchant is distracted by a new troop of soldiers in the endless parade.

“Look at those handsome harquebuses!” he says proudly. “Am I not a master gunsmith?”

You dutifully admire the awkward-looking guns. Guns? They weren’t invented until the late thirteenth century!

“What year *is* this?” you ask.

“Have you lost your memory?” says the tradesman. “It’s 1405!”

You’ve come much too far forward in time. But no wonder no one followed Marco Polo at this time in history—Tamerlane was sweeping across Asia!

You duck into the deserted bazaar to jump in time. Do you want to rejoin the Polos on their trek to the Pamirs? Or jump to Mongol territory, where you know they’ll be headed?



Join the Polos where you left them, on the road to the Pamir Mountains. [Click here.](#)



Jump to Mongol territory and try to find them. [Click here.](#)



You are trekking with the Polos across the Plain of Pamir, high in the snowy mountains of the Hindu Kush. You have been climbing for days.

Although it is summer, it is intensely cold, and you are wrapped in sheepskins. You are short of breath from the altitude, and the fires you light burn with hardly any flame. The Polos have traded their animals for a few hardy horses.

“Up here, we are midway between Heaven and Earth,” says Niccolò. “They call this place the Roof of the World.” You can see why. Looming above you are peaks so high you feel like an ant. You can also see why no one in your own time would want to trade with China by this route. Only pack animals can negotiate these trails!

But despite the frigid air, the plain provides pasture for a breed of wild sheep with huge curving horns, some as much as five feet long.

At frequent intervals you pass carefully piled sheep skeletons and pyramids of sheep horns that mark your way through the snow-drifts.

On the twelfth day, you meet a herdsman who is traveling to market with a load of skins.

“Many of my sheep are killed by wolves,” he tells you. “But don’t worry about wolves attacking your camp. There are plenty of sheep for them to eat. Soon you will come to a settlement. You’ll see our corrals made of sheep horns. We make everything we use from sheep horns—bowls, ladles, chairs!” He laughs. “You must be sure to take enough provisions for the next forty days, because you

will not meet another soul until you descend into Kashgar.”

“Kashgar!” exclaims Niccolò. “Maffeo and I passed through Kashgar on our first voyage to Cathay. We are well on our way!”

“But first we must travel through ice and snow for forty days,” Marco points out.

Thanking the herdsman, you make your way to the settlement to buy provisions for forty days. You are in the middle of nowhere, and there is no excuse for you to jump in time. It looks as though you’ll have to stay with the Polos. You’re beginning to understand why no one would want to repeat this journey. What if you’re caught in a snowstorm? You could starve. Or freeze. Or be eaten by wolves!



Click here.



You decide to stay in the safety of the ruined tower with the Polos.

“We’ve probably lost Margarita—and the pope’s gifts too,” you lament. “Why didn’t I grab those saddlebags?”

“The delay could have cost you your life,” says Marco. “Just wait.”

At last, hours later, the dust clears. There are no bandits in sight. You and the Polos climb onto the two tired camels and venture cautiously across the plain. This time the ride is bumpy but more pleasurable.

A welcome sight meets your eyes.

“Margarita!” you cry. The homely mule is casually munching on a dusty bit of brush she’s found. One of her saddlebags has been torn open and hangs empty at her side. The crystal bowl is gone. But safe in the other saddlebag is the golden pitcher.

“Good girl!” you tell Margarita, patting her neck. Then you burst out laughing. Hanging from the side of Margarita’s mouth is a length of cloth—the dusty sleeve of a Karauna bandit!



Go on to Hormuz. [Click here.](#)



For forty days and forty nights, you urge your animals onward through the snow. At last you descend into the warmth of the province of Kashgar. You are on the edge of the land that in the twentieth century is called China!

You are exhausted. But Niccolò and Maffeo seem excited. You and Marco follow them to the marketplace, where they are exchanging the horses for camels.

“Next, we travel to the Desert of Lop,” Maffeo tells you. “We must all stay together in a caravan, if we are to make the crossing safely.” You’re at the edge of the great Gobi Desert!

Your caravan sets out at dawn. By noon it is unimaginably hot and you can see nothing around you but mound after mound of golden desert sand, rippling like waves in a vast, dry sea.

Your throat is parched, and you squint your eyes against the glare of the sun—there are no sunglasses yet in 1274.

“Try to remember the icy air of the Hindu Kush,” Marco suggests. But the thought of all of that snow only makes you thirstier.

“Once across this desert, we will be in Mongol country,” says Niccolò. “If we tried to cross its length, it would take us a year. But we are crossing the narrowest part. The journey will take only thirty days.”

Thirty days!

On and on you ride. The desert is so strange and empty that you feel as if you are on another planet. Every other day or so, you come to an oasis, where there is just enough water for your small group. And every night you must set up a sign pointing in the direction you

are traveling. If you head in the wrong direction one morning, you could be lost in the desert forever.

The days are broiling hot and the nights are freezing cold. But strangest of all are the sounds: the clang of cymbals, a marching band, clashing swords, distant drums, unseen riders. And always the voices, sometimes singing, or softly calling your name. Where are they coming from?

“Pay no attention to the noises,” says Niccoló. “They are the voices of evil spirits who try to lure travelers away from their path.”

You are not so sure. You suspect you are hearing the famous Singing Sands, mysterious sounds caused by the winds wafting over the hot sands of the Gobi Desert.

But the voices are like comfortable friends on the lonely journey. The Polos have put little bells on the necks of their camels, and they tinkle rhythmically as you rock slowly forward. Your caravan is strung along the desert and shimmers black against the golden light. Sometimes it seems to fade in and out of focus, and once, Marco looks as if he’s riding on a huge dinosaur and trailing across the desert toward the end of the earth. You shake your head and blink.

Suddenly, you see two caravans crossing the desert. One has headed off to your left, toward a marker of some sort. Have the Polos spotted an oasis? Your thirst is tremendous. But the other caravan is headed the way you are supposed to be going. Which one is real?

You think you can hear the sound of little bells coming from the caravan on the left. You strike out toward them and hurry to catch up. They disappear behind a dune, but you can still see the marker in the distance. The bells grow louder.

You get closer to the marker. But there is no caravan in sight! Was it a mirage?

You reach the marker and recoil in horror. It is a skeleton. The wind whistles through the rib cage and makes a sound like little bells. Frantically, you search the horizon for the Polos. But they are gone. And you are lost in the desert, alone.

You’ve had enough of this journey. First you froze in the moun-



tains, and now you realize you could end up like this skeleton. Your mission is turning into a nightmare! You've got to get out of this desert.

Should you jump ahead to Mongol country? You can look for the Polos there. Or maybe you should jump to the future in Venice and just *ask* the old Marco Polo why no one followed in his footsteps. Then your mission would be complete!



Jump ahead to Mongol country.

[Click here.](#)



**Jump ahead to the civilization of Venice
and look for Marco Polo. [Click here.](#)**



You plan to sneak to the ruby mines of Balakhshan.

“I want to learn more about ruby mining,” you tell the Polos. “I’ll catch up to you as soon as I can. Marco, will you look after Margarita for me?”

“Sure,” says Marco. “But don’t take too long, or you’ll never catch up!”

“I’ve always wanted to be a miner,” you tell the ruby miners. They are happy to talk to you about their jobs.

“But you’re too young to work in a mine,” says one. “Besides, you’re a foreigner. The king won’t allow it.”

You sigh, pretending disappointment. “I guess you’re right,” you say as soon as the Polos are out of sight. “I’d better hurry to catch up with my party.”

The miners continue on their way, and you sneak into the hills. Soon you come upon a well-worn path that leads to a tunnel that’s been cut into the rock. And lying on the ground outside the tunnel is a sparkling ruby as big as your fist!

“Wow!” you exclaim, picking up the flame-colored jewel. “That was easy!”

“Oh, ruby mining is easy, all right,” says a sarcastic voice. You turn to see two of the miners staring at you from the side of the path.

“You’d be surprised how many foreigners develop an interest in mining after they set eyes on a balas ruby,” says the second miner. “It’s too bad that the penalty for stealing one is *death!*”

“I-I was just looking at it,” you say, dropping the ruby back onto

the ground. But the miners are advancing toward you. One has a length of rope and the other has a huge wooden club.

You back toward the entrance of the mine. The miners jump at you, but they miss you by a hair as you dash into the blackness of the mine. Stumbling on the uneven stone beneath your feet, you trip and cut your knees. The path drops, and you slide to a dead end between two narrow walls.

You can hear the miners coming closer. Their steps are sure, and they're right at home in the dark tunnel. You'd better disappear while you can!



Jump! [Click here.](#)



You step out from behind a potted palm. You're in the hallway of a beautiful palace in Venice. People in elaborate masks and fancy dresses are filing into a huge ballroom, from which lively dance music spills into the night.

You wander into the ballroom and speak to a man who is dressed as a bird. His sleeves are sewn with shiny blue feathers, and his hat points forward to form a wide yellow beak.

"Have you seen Marco Polo?" you ask him.

"Polo?" he squawks, imitating a bird. "Ah, you must mean Marco Milione. Let me see. I believe there are three of them here tonight." He waves one of his wings at three costumed men.

All three are masked. One is wearing a robe of Chinese brocade. The second has coins and golden trinkets sewn to his costume. And the third is dressed in rags that are lined with silk and jewels.

You wander toward the three men. Each is trying to outdo the others with tall stories.

"I lived in a palace with a million rooms," says the first man.

"I brought home a million ducats," says the second.

"I have traveled a million miles," says the third.

Onlookers in elegant costumes laugh politely, then move away. The men spot you.

"What are you supposed to be?" asks the first Marco Milione, lifting his mask to peer at you. The others do likewise. None of them is Marco Polo! They are just characters at a masked ball!

"You must be masquerading as a beggar!" says the second.

"What a, er, *realistic* costume."



You *do* look travel-worn and world-weary. You're not dressed for a ball, that's for certain. And you haven't had a bath since you rode that last camel.

"I am only *disguised* as a beggar," you say.

"You're awfully dirty," says the third, sniffing. "I think you really *are* a beggar!" He motions for a guard, who is dressed as a Turk.

You dash past Harlequins and Columbines, devils and dancing bears, until you reach the front door. An elegant couple, King Neptune and a sea nymph, you think, extend their invitation to a footman. You catch sight of a date on the corner of the printed card—it is 1732! You've gone too far forward in time!

You slip outside and jump backward in time to look for Marco Polo.



Stay in Italy and jump to 1298.

[Click here.](#)



You ride with your Mongol escort along the Great Wall of China. The towering wall is wide enough for at least six men to ride abreast, and it follows the curving Chinese hills like an endless satin ribbon, disappearing in the distance.

You reach a walled city, and suddenly the palace of Shang-tu appears before you like something in a dream. It is built of marble, with sloping roofs and golden carvings. It is 1275. The Polos' journey to the realm of Kublai Khan has taken five long years.

"At last," breathes Marco. "Cathay!"

Informed of your arrival, the Khan has sent an honor guard to welcome you. They lead you around the palace through miles of gardens and parkland.

"The Khan has a second palace in a sheltered grove," they explain. "He will see you there."

Soon you come to an enormous airy building made entirely of bamboo and held together with silken ropes. You gasp at its beauty.

"It looks like a fantastic yurt!" says Marco with delight.

Grooms take your horses to be cared for, and the guards usher you inside the marvelous tent. The interior is hung with embroidered silks and seems to float on golden pillars. Huge carved dragons spring from the pillars to support the roof on graceful claws.

At one end of the chamber, raised on a platform and seated on heaps of cushions, is Kublai Khan. He is dressed in a robe of rich gold and is surrounded by elegant courtiers, all wearing robes of a paler gold. You and the Polos fall to your knees and touch your fore-

heads to the ground in a traditional Oriental bow.

You lift your eyes to peek at the Khan. He has the rosy complexion and piercing black eyes of his Mongol parentage. But his hair and beard are white with age.

“So, you have returned at last,” he says. His voice is gentle but filled with power. “It gives me joy to see you again. And who may this be?”

Niccolò and Maffeo rise and bow again. Then they introduce you and Marco. The Khan welcomes you to Cathay.

“Have you brought me what I asked?” he says.

“We have brought you letters and gifts from our pope,” says Niccolò, handing the packet of letters to one of the Khan’s attendants. The servant delivers the letters into the hands of Kublai Khan.

Then Niccolò gives you a nudge and points to a travel-worn saddlebag. The golden pitcher! You remove the precious pitcher from the bag and pass it gingerly to a waiting attendant. The Khan receives the delicate gift and turns it around so the light can reflect on its surface.

“It is a lovely gift,” he says. But he doesn’t seem very impressed and lays the pitcher aside. “Now, where are the hundred Christian priests you promised me?”

Niccolò does his best to explain. You can see that the Khan is disappointed. He clearly values learning over riches. But he quickly recovers his good humor.

“You must tell me about your journey,” he says. “And I should like to hear this son of yours speak Mongolian! I hear he has learned our language well!”

Marco steps forward shyly and greets the Khan in Mongolian. Then he presents him with the holy oil from Jerusalem.

The Khan’s mood improves some more. He asks Marco a question or two, and soon Marco is babbling with his usual enthusiasm. The Khan responds to Marco by nodding intently, raising his eyebrows, and roaring with laughter.

Finally you and the Polos are shown to comfortable quarters in



the marble palace, and that night you attend a banquet in your honor.

The Khan is seated high on a platform with his four wives on his left and other noblemen on his right. Everyone at the banquet is attired in silken robes of aqua blue. You soon learn that you must fall to your knees every time the court musicians play a tune, signaling that the Khan is about to drink. When he sets down his golden goblet, the company resumes their merrymaking.

From time to time, the court magicians cause cups of wine to fly through the air to the Khan. You cannot see how they do this, but you are sure it is some sort of trick.

“The magicians are priests from Tibet,” Niccolò tells you. “It is said they get their powers from the Devil himself!”

“Who is the young man on the Khan’s right?” you ask Niccolò.

“That is Chinkim, Kublai’s son,” Niccolò answers. You study Chinkim’s pleasant face. He seems to be studying you and Marco with equal curiosity. But you also notice a sinister-looking man with a dark brown beard; he regards you with interest.

“That is Ahmad,” says Niccolò, following your gaze. “He is the Khan’s most powerful adviser and governs the capital city of Khanbalik.”

“He doesn’t look like a Mongol,” Marco observes.

“You are right,” says Niccolò. “He is a Moslem. The Khan prefers foreigners to govern Cathay. But the Cathayans don’t like it. And everyone vies for the Khan’s favor.”

As the banquet ends, Kublai Khan motions for silence. “I have something for the two young travelers,” he announces, beckoning you and Marco forward. You both bow at his feet.

“I have enjoyed the reports you bring of foreign lands,” he says, winking at Marco. “I would like you both to have free rein to travel throughout my empire. Therefore I wish you to take these.”

He gives you and Marco each a flat, rectangular package wrapped in a cloth of silk. You slowly unwrap it. It is a golden passport!

Now you can go anywhere to test its power. Perhaps no one

repeated the Polos' journey because they had no passport from the Khan!

“Young Marco,” says the Khan. “I wish you to undertake a mission for me in the province of Mien. But first, will you come to hunt with the court at my winter palace of Khan-balik? You can travel south to Mien from there.”

Marco agrees at once.

“And you, my young friend,” the Khan says to you. “You may come along with Marco Polo or try some traveling yourself!”

At last you have a golden passport of your own! Now you can travel safely anywhere in the Khan's realm. But should you go to Khan-balik and learn something of Kublai Khan's empire first? Or jump ahead in time and test your passport in Mien province? You can meet Marco there, and he'll think you've been traveling on your own.



Travel with the court to Khan-balik.

[Click here.](#)



Jump ahead and meet Marco in Mien.

[Click here.](#)



You are wandering across a lonely Mongolian plain, somewhere beyond the Gobi Desert. It's 1274. The grassy plain stretches for miles over gently rising hills. There is no city or town or even a building in sight.

But there is something odd on the horizon. It looks like a caravan of giant white tortoises. They are slowly gliding your way.

What can they be? You have little time to wonder as a band of horsemen detach themselves from the caravan and gallop smoothly across the plain. They ride with their hands free and arrows in their bows as they surround you. They sit so firmly in the saddle that they look like centaurs, half-men with horses' bodies.

The horsemen wear heavy boots and woolen coats and pointed helmets lined with fur. Their faces are broad and flat, with high cheekbones and narrow eyes. Their arrows are pointed at your heart!

"Don't shoot!" you say, falling to your knees. "I am a harmless traveler, lost in your land. I am searching for my friends, the Polos."

At this the horsemen lower their arrows and stare at you in astonishment.

"Those who carry the golden passport of the Khan?" asks one of the warriors.

"This must be the young one who was lost in the great desert!" says another warrior. He smiles broadly. "You must be hungry. Would you like to drink some blood from my horse?" He leans over to open a vein on his horse's leg. You try not to look shocked.

"Er—no, thanks!" you hastily say. "I'd like to find the Polos!"



Can you help me?"

"Have no fear," says a third horseman. "You are safe in Mongol lands. We will take you to your friends."

You climb up behind the friendly Mongol warrior and gallop toward the caravan. You soon see that the shapes you thought were giant tortoises are actually round felt tents, mounted on wide wooden ox-carts. The Mongols drive the carts from the doors of their tents!

"These are our homes," the warrior explains. "They are called yurts. When we move our herds to fresh pastureland, we take our homes with us!"

The caravan continues across the plain until you reach a settlement of white and gray yurts, already planted firmly on the ground. Grazing nearby are large herds of sturdy Mongol horses and long-haired yaks.

The warriors give a whoop to announce your arrival, and several Mongols come out of their yurts to greet the caravan. One of them runs toward you with open arms. It's Marco!

"We thought you were lost forever!" he shouts. You are amused to see that he is dressed in Mongol clothing, and amazed when he turns to speak to the warriors in their own tongue.

"I have been studying Mongol ways and learning their language," he says. "These are the Khan's own people! Wait until I tell you what I've seen! They can do *anything* on a horse. They ride standing up! They can ride for days on end—and sleep in the saddle! And they are the fiercest warriors!"

Niccolò and Maffeo emerge from a small yurt and embrace you joyfully. Then Marco drags you into the tent.

Inside it is warm and toasty. A fire burns at the center of the tent, the smoke rising to a small hole in the peaked ceiling. The walls and floor are piled with thick carpets. But it doesn't smell very good.

"The Mongols have no wood, so they burn dried dung," explains Marco. He hands you a cup of white liquid. You sniff it and then take a sip. It is sweet and milky.

"It's mare's milk," says Marco. "But you'll have to beware of the

Mongol's favorite drink, *koumiss*. That is, fermented mare's milk. It's very good and tastes like white wine. But it will make you drunk! Also the food is terrible," he continues cheerfully. "The Mongols eat *anything*, even desert rats! Last night we had dormouse cooked in sour milk. They said it was a delicacy!"

You wrinkle up your nose. But the truth is you are so hungry you would gladly eat a stewed rat. So you eagerly follow Marco to share a meal with the Mongol chieftain.

The chieftain greets you warmly and introduces you to his wife. She is almost as square and sturdy as her husband, and she wears her hair gathered like a cow's horns on either side of her head.

"It is a compliment to tell a Mongol woman she is a cow!" whispers Marco, stifling a giggle.

"Now you have seen something of Mongol ways," the chieftain tells the Polos. "Our world has no walls, and we carry our towns with us. We roam the grassy steppes on the strong backs of our cherished horses. Do not forget the *true* Mongol ways when you meet the great Khan. My warriors will escort you to his summer palace. You will leave tomorrow for Cathay."

Your heart leaps and Marco whoops like a Mongol horseman. At last you will meet Kublai Khan!



Travel with the Polos to the palace of the Khan. [Click here.](#)



You are walking down a dank, dingy corridor in a formidable stone building. It's 1298. You notice with a shiver that there are iron rings on the clammy walls. From the look of it, you'd have to guess that you are in a prison!

You round a corner and see two well-dressed gentlemen heading toward a flight of stairs. The first throws a red velvet cloak over his shoulders.

"You *must* hear him," he says to his companion. "He's the rage of Genoa! Marco Polo's stories are charming!"

"Ah, but are they *true*?" asks the other.

Marco Polo? Genoa? Have you jumped to the wrong town?

"How did Marco Polo come to be in prison?" you ask, catching up to the men.

"He commanded a Venetian galley in the war between Genoa and Venice and was captured," answers the man in the red velvet cloak. "To pass the time, he is dictating his travels to Rusticello, the writer from Pisa. Day after day, all of Genoa turns out to listen."

War between Genoa and Venice? Even this close to home, there is warfare!

You follow the men to a prison cell that is packed with gentlemen sitting on wooden benches. You even see a few ladies among the crowd. All of them are listening, spellbound, to a familiar, enthusiastic voice. It's Marco Polo!

But you hide yourself in the corridor when you see him. You certainly can't ask him any questions—Marco Polo is now over forty years old, and you haven't changed a bit.



“Take this down, Rusticello, my friend,” he says to a man who is writing furiously. Then Marco speaks of cannibals and monsoons, ships rammed by whales, pirate attacks, long noodles called pasta, and cloth that doesn’t burn.

You haven’t seen any of these things on your travels with Marco. They must be things he encountered in China, or on the way back.

“My golden passport guaranteed me safe passage across the world,” Marco goes on. “But here we squabble over which of our little republics will rule a patch of the sea, and I am a prisoner in my own land!” He shakes his head sorrowfully.

You’d forgotten about the golden passports. Maybe no one could follow Marco because none of them had a passport from the Khan. Maybe you should try getting past the Mongols without one. Then you’ll know for sure.



Jump back to Mongol territory in 1274.

[Click here.](#)



Wishing Marco luck in his travels, you decide to travel on your own for a bit. You look for a place to jump in the dense jungle of Mien. The battle has ended, but there are still Mongol troops everywhere.

You duck behind a wounded elephant that has fallen into a stand of bamboo, and you crouch to pet its head. Just as you jump, the elephant trumpets weakly and thrashes its trunk, striking you in the stomach and knocking you windless.

You gasp for breath and look for the source of the shrieking, whining noise above your head. It's a plane!

You look around frantically. You are on a modern road that has been cut through the jungle. And there's a convoy of Chevy trucks barreling your way!

"Hey you! Look out!" A Chinese soldier jumps from the lead truck and pushes you to the side of the road. "We have to get these supplies through to China!"

"Where am I?" you say, rubbing your eyes. The trucks thunder past.

"Did your plane crash?" asks the soldier.

"Plane?"

"One of the Flying Tigers?" the soldier says, pointing skyward. "The Americans are here to protect the Burma Road. Have you lost your memory?"

"Maybe I have," you say. "The last time I looked, there wasn't any road here."

"That's true," the soldier says with a laugh. "Until we opened the



Burma Road a few years ago, I don't think there've been any Westerners through here since Marco Polo! Burma's been closed to foreigners. But now the Allies are helping the Chinese fight off Japan."

"What year did you say it was?" you ask weakly.

"It's 1940!" The soldier gives you a worried look. "I've got to get back to my mission," he says. "You just sit here and rest until you see a truck with a red cross on the side. Then flag it down."

You nod obediently. But you've got to get back to Your mission, too. You've accidentally jumped all the way forward to the Second World War! You'd better backtrack and find Marco Polo. You wait for the trucks to pass and jump.



Join Marco on the hunt in Khan-balik.
[Click here.](#)



You decide to jump to the province of Mien. It's 1277, and you are somewhere in the country now called Burma.

You are walking through a dense forest when your ears are assaulted by a sound like the pounding of a hundred kettledrums.

As you approach the edge of the forest, you have to cover your ears. It *is* a hundred kettledrums, each mounted between two sturdy Mongol horses. Thousands of Mongol warriors are ranged along the forest edge, facing a plain. A terrifying battle rhythm booms from the drums.

You show one of the warriors your golden passport, and he regards you with respect.

"What's going on?" you yell.

"We're about to battle the king of Mien," he shouts back. "This king wants to resist the might of Kublai Khan. First we'll frighten his army with our drums. Then we'll vanquish them so we never have to fight here again. But I'd stay out of the way, if I were you."

You agree, because you've spotted the enemy. Ready to attack, they come pouring across the plain like lava, and they greatly outnumber the Mongol troops. Many are on foot. But the rest are riding on battle elephants—there must be two thousand of them! And each elephant has on his back a fortified wooden castle holding half a dozen men!

You climb a tree on the edge of the forest and hold your breath. The Mongols charge out of the forest and across the plain. The elephants charge back.

The Mongol horses see the elephants and shy away in panic. They bolt for the forest! You hang on to your tree limb as thousands of Mongol horsemen retreat into the forest.

The Mongol commander hollers an order, and his men tie their frightened horses to trees. Then they advance on foot and shower the Mien troops with arrows. But they are not aiming for men—they're aiming for the elephants!

The wounded elephants trumpet and go mad. They charge into the forest and crash into the low-hanging branches, while sweeping the men from their backs. The Mongol archers advance, and the next line of elephants turns back to the plain. They charge!

The elephants are trampling their own lines! The Mongols have triumphed!

"What a battle!" someone is shouting. "I will surely report to the Khan about this!"

It's Marco, of course! He is seated on a Mongol pony and watching from the sidelines. You shout a greeting and climb down from your perch.

"You're quite a traveler yourself, my friend!" he says, greeting you happily. "I am on my way to Ceylon to buy some relics of the sacred Buddha that Kublai Khan has heard about. I guess my holy oil wasn't enough for him!" Marco laughs. Then he turns serious.

"The Khan has many missions planned for me," he tells you. "Sometimes I wonder if he will ever let me go home! Our golden passports are helpful for now. But the great Khan is aging. When he dies, I fear that foreigners will not be so welcome in Cathay."

"Why not?" you ask.

"There is more discord than ever among those who would succeed him," Marco answers. "And the Cathayans resent the power of Ahmad. We could see the trouble coming when we first got to Khan-balik!"

You nod in agreement. But you didn't go to Khan-balik. Maybe you'd better jump back and find out what happened.

But you haven't had much of a chance to try out your golden passport. And Marco seems to think the passports won't be good for



much longer. Perhaps you should jump ahead in time and travel on your own for a while. You can always jump backward to Khan-balik.



Stay in Burma, but jump ahead.

[Click here.](#)



Jump back to the hunt at Khan-balik.

[Click here.](#)



You are in a corridor of the palace at Khan-balik. It's 1282. You set off through a maze of hallways looking for the rooms that were assigned to you four years earlier.

A young man runs toward you. He is dressed in a brocade robe and has a thin beard. But you would recognize the bouncing curls anywhere. It's Marco!

"You've returned!" he says, throwing an arm about your shoulders. "Traveling suits you. You've hardly changed! I've been traveling as well. It's a wonderful country, is it not? Millions of people! Such riches! I want to hear all about your adventures. But you must be tired. You can sleep next door to my apartments. Come."

Marco shows you to richly furnished chamber. A bell tolls beyond the palace walls.

"There's the curfew bell," Marco says. "The people of Khan-balik will be off the streets and safely home in bed. I'll leave you to your rest. The Khan is at his summer palace, so tomorrow I will have free time and we can have a long visit. Good night!"

Marco is right. You could use some sleep. The bed, piled with embroidered cushions, looks inviting. You curl up and are soon dreaming of elephants and dragons.

"Pssst!" You awake with a jolt. Stars are twinkling beyond the window of your chamber. Marco is shaking your shoulder. "Wake up!" he hisses.

"What's going on?" You ask. "It's the middle of the night!"

"Ahmad is sneaking around past curfew," Marco tells you. "No one is supposed to be up and about unless it's on official business.

I overheard Ahmad tell a guard that he has been summoned to the throne room by Chinkim. But I know this cannot be true! I just left Kublai Khan and his son at Shang-tu! Something must be wrong—come on!”

Sneaking through the torchlit hallways of Khan-balik, you slip behind pillars to hide from the guards. Then you tiptoe to the threshold of the throne room, where Ahmad tried to cause you trouble when you first arrived at Khan-balik.

You peer inside. The throne room is ablaze with light. Ahmad bows to a figure who is thrown into shadow behind the line of torches. It looks like Chinkim. But as Ahmad rises, the figure throws back his robe and raises a knife. You can see that the figure is not Chimkin at all but a Cathayan official. He strikes at Ahmad!

The Moslem falls to the floor, as the Cathayan strikes again and again.

“Ahmad’s been assassinated!” hisses Marco. “Run! I’ll meet you back at our rooms!” He melts into the darkness. But you are frozen with horror and continue to watch. A guard dashes into the throne room, and with a single blow of his sword, he lops the Cathayan’s head from his shoulders. Suddenly guards swarm everywhere.

Now you can run. But a gruff hand grabs you. “Conspirator!” says a guard. “Don’t even think about running away.”

Roughly, he drags you down stairways and throws you into a gloomy dungeon. “Everyone knows that you were no friend to Ahmad,” he growls. “It is true that Ahmad had many enemies. But this is murder. The Khan will surely have you executed as a traitor.”

Now you’re really in a jam. You’ve still got your golden passport. But it won’t help you out of a mongol prison! You can jump ahead in time. Maybe it will help you to follow the Polos’ route back to the West.



Jump ahead 150 years. [Click here.](#)





Wow!” you whisper at your first sight of Khan-balik.

“This is a long way from a tent!” says Marco, his eyes wide with wonder. The city is vast, and the winter palace is unimaginably magnificent. You see sweeping marble stairways and terraces with painted pillars. The palace’s curving roofs are tiled in every color of the rainbow. Inside, the walls and ceilings are silver and gold, and they’re inset with pictures of dragons and horsemen and strange birds and beasts.

Special guards show you and the Polos to your apartments and provide you with warm robes of silk brocade. Then you are summoned once more to the presence of the Khan.

You wait your turn in a line to enter the throne room. The entrance is an arch, elaborately carved, with curtains that are held aside by guards. You notice that as people pass beneath the arch, they take a giant step into the throne room.

“It is forbidden to touch the threshold,” Nicolò explains to you. “It’s considered a bad omen. The penalty is public humiliation, a steep fine, and a painful beating. Take care you step over it, and do not touch the arch!”

You peek into the throne room, where you can see Kublai Khan and his son, with the Moslem minister, Ahmad, seated to their left. Ahmad nods to the Polos, and Niccolò and Maffeo stride into the throne room and bow to the Khan. As Marco follows, you notice Ahmad lift a finger and nod. Does he mean you? You are next.

You raise your foot to step over the threshold into the throne

room. Suddenly, someone shoves you from behind. You lose your balance and fall against the archway.

The courtiers in the throne room gasp. All eyes are on you. You turn a burning scarlet and recover as best as you can, bowing deeply to the Khan. Standing innocently behind you is one of Ahmad's men.

Ahmad rises. "These foreigners have no respect for the customs of the Khan," he says, his black eyes gleaming with triumph. "Let them be made to pay the price!"

Guards grab your arms and start to haul you away. You struggle to escape their grasp. Another voice starts to speak.

"This person is a newcomer and has little knowledge of our ways," he says. The guards drop your arms, and you realize the speaker is Chinkim, the son of Kublai Khan! He winks at you kindly and resumes his seat at his father's side. Ahmad glares at him furiously.

"I wish to hunt," is all the great Khan has to say. It seems you're off the hook!

The entire court rides through the palace grounds, past bubbling ponds and huge gardens, and around a man-made mountain that is densely planted with pines and covered with lapis lazuli so it is entirely, richly green.

"That is the Green Mound," an attendant tells you and Marco. "The Khan had it built to provide refreshment for the eyes. It can be seen for miles around."

Finally, you reach the countryside beyond the walls of the huge city of Khan-balik. The hunting party stretches out across the landscape. On each side of the Khan are thousands of men, half of them wearing red liveries, and half in blue. They are in charge of the hounds. Noblemen carrying trained falcons and other hawks ride grandly in the middle.

And at the center of it all rides Kublai Khan, seated on a golden platform that is borne by two elephants, with a panther and a spotted leopard at either side.

You and Marco ride toward the back of the hunting party with



other young courtiers. The conniving Ahmad, riding slightly behind the Khan, is accompanied by a peregrine falcon that looks as if it could be his brother.

Your position turns out to be a good place to eavesdrop.

“Look at that Ahmad,” you hear one Mongol official complain to another. “It’s too bad the Khan knows nothing of his excesses. Did you see how he tried to discredit the Polo party? If the Khan didn’t give so much power to foreigners, there wouldn’t be so much jealousy at court.”

“Yes, but you’re afraid to report Ahmad—just as the rest of us are,” whispers his companion. “He’s had too many men killed.”

“The Khan should let us Mongols govern the empire,” the first official remarks. “Why give a Moslem so much power?”

“Or he should let the Cathayans govern themselves,” says the second official. “Then the Cathayans wouldn’t be so anxious to get rid of us!”

“Perhaps,” says the first Mongol, lowering his voice. “But Kublai Khan is becoming more like a Cathayan every day. Look at how he rides, on pillows! And he lives in a palace, with walls! What is happening to our traditions?”

All of a sudden a roar goes up from the courtiers, and the hounds begin to wail. A black shape streaks past you into a grove of trees, and your horse takes off after it. It’s one of the Khan’s hunting leopards!

“Whoah!” you cry, tugging on your horse’s reins. But it gallops onward, and by the time you get it under control, you are lost in the countryside. You can hear the noise of the hounds in the distance. But which way is Khan-balik? You spot two farmers standing next to a stone wall and stop to ask directions. They look ragged and poor.

The farmers eye you angrily. “We have paid already,” says one, before you can open your mouth.

“I want no money,” you say, hurt and confused. “I only want to know the way to the palace of the Khan.”

“You are one of Ahmad’s spies,” accuses the second farmer.

“Don’t try to fool us. We have no more money.”

“Ahmad has proven to be my enemy as well,” you tell the farmers. Finally they seem to believe you. “Can’t you report him to the Khan?”

“Anyone who complains is killed,” says the second farmer. “Ahmad has spies everywhere. There will be a revolt one day, mark my words! We Cathayans will win back our lands, and we’ll never be ruled by foreigners again. We’ll expel you all!” He turns bitterly away and trudges along the wall toward his farm.

The first farmer shrugs apologetically. “Kublai Khan is a good leader,” he says. “He gives us grain when our crops fail and charges us no taxes in our bad years. But Ahmad governs this territory. He taxes us beyond endurance and keeps the money for himself. The Khan knows nothing of his abuses.” He turns to follow his friend. “But who knows what the future will bring?”

You can jump forward in time and find out.



Jump to Khan-balik in 1282. [Click here.](#)



You are walking behind a caravan that is crossing a plain in Persia. It is 1293. In the distance you can see a huge, solitary tree and a camp with many tents and mounted soldiers. A number of soldiers are escorting your caravan to the camp.

You recognize the plain as one you crossed with the Polos on your journey eastward. Now, after the elegant civilization you became accustomed to in Cathay, Persia looks primitive.

You catch up to a servant who is leading a donkey at the end of the caravan.

“Did you fall behind?” he asks you pleasantly. “You’d better hurry up, or you’ll miss the first sight the Ghazan Khan has of his new bride. Just imagine, the Polos got her safely here all the way from Cathay!”

“I hear they had many hardships on the journey,” you comment, hoping to provoke more conversation.

“Indeed they did!” says the servant. “There were so many wars going on that they decided against the overland route, and they sailed instead to India. They met with storms and illness and even a tribe of man-eaters. Many of their company died.”

“But the Polos all survived?” you ask anxiously.

“They did. And once again they have rendered a service to Kublai Khan by bringing the princess Cocachin to marry the Khan of the Levant. Look! They are about to meet!”

You make your way toward the front of the caravan. A handsome lord in Persian robes has dismounted and is waiting to receive the Polos’ precious cargo.



The princess Cocachin steps from the curtained litter in which she has been carried. She is a lovely maiden, still in her teens. She turns a tearful face to bid good-bye to her escorts, Niccolò, Maffeo, and Marco Polo. Then shyly, she greets her new husband.

Quickly, you hide behind a wooden cart. Niccolò and Maffeo have both gone to gray, and Marco is a man nearing forty, while you haven't changed a bit. If they see you, they will surely think you are a ghost.

Although you've learned that the Polos suffered many hardships on their homeward route, you see that the caravan is loaded with riches from the East. Wouldn't this wealth have tempted others to repeat the Polos' journey?

Maybe you can find a way to join their homecoming and find out.



Jump forward one year to Trebizond.

[Click here.](#)



You are in a sunny study in the port city of Palos, Spain. It's the summer of 1492. A man is seated at a long table. A hand-colored map is unrolled on a desk beside him, and he is surrounded by a clutter of calipers, sextants, and charts.

"Did you deliver the ink I asked for?" he says to you without looking up. "Just put it on the desk over there." You haven't got any ink, but you move to the desk.

"Are you planning a journey?" you ask.

"I set sail in a month!" he tells you. "I, Christopher Columbus, will personally bring a letter from the king and queen of Spain to the great Khan of the East!"

"B-but—no such person exists any longer," you blurt out. Christopher Columbus glares at you.

"Don't be ignorant, child," he replies. "The great Khan rules a wondrous empire in the East. I have read of his riches in a famous book of travels by none other than Marco Polo, the Venetian. This empire is called Cathay!"

You peek over his shoulder. Columbus is making notes in a much-worn copy of Marco Polo's *The Description of the World*. But he doesn't know that the Khan has died! And obviously he has never heard of the Ming emperors.

His map shows the continents of Europe, North Africa, and Asia. But North and South America are missing!

"Why are you traveling westward by sea to Cathay?" you ask Columbus. "Didn't this Mr. Polo travel overland to the East?"

"That is right, young one," Columbus answers. "I see you are not



quite so ignorant after all. But no Christian would survive the overland route through Moslem lands. Besides, look at this map by the Italian, Toscanelli. He has calculated that Cathay is only six or seven thousand miles to the west of Portugal. It will be much faster to go by sea!”

“Surely it is twice that far!” you say. “And there is another vast continent in the way!”

Then you clamp your mouth shut. Columbus is staring at you as though you are mad.

“Enough of your nonsense!” he says. “Now off with you—I’m bound for Cathay!”

There is no point in arguing. You can’t change history. You see that by the fifteenth century, the overland route to the East has been blocked for years. Cathay has become little more than a dream for European explorers.

But you’d still like to know what happened when the Polos finally returned to Venice.



Jump to the Polos’ homecoming.

[Click here.](#)



You are in the port city of Trebizond, on the Black Sea. It is 1294.

You spot the Polo party in the harbor, but you are shocked at the changes in your friends. Marco's face is lined, and his beard has thickened. It is hard to get used to him as a man of forty. And Niccolò and Maffeo both have gray hair that will soon turn to white. Time has passed for them, but not for you. How can you approach them without frightening them?

A sailor walks by you. He's tearing at a worn piece of sailcloth. A long scrap flutters to your feet. In a flash you grab it and wind it about your head like a turban; it even covers your mouth.

"I am looking for work as a servant," you tell Maffeo. Your disguise works. He doesn't recognize you.

"Wrap these silks in a piece of canvas," Maffeo says, handing you a pile of brocade robes. You set to work. Marco seems sad and distracted.

"I just can't believe that Kublai Khan is dead," he says to Niccolò. "Now I can never go back. We may as well throw our golden passports into the sea. The great empire of the Mongols is sure to crumble, and the way east will be closed."

"There are already so many wars raging through Asia that we had to return by sea," Maffeo adds glumly. "The Moslems are fighting in Persia again. Most of our treasure has been stolen. And the route from here to Venice is likely to be dangerous. We'd better sew the few jewels we have left into the seams of our clothing. The golden passports, too."

Maffeo hands you a ragged cloak and a small cloth bag. The bag is filled with pearls and gemstones! You help the Polos sew the jewels into the hems of their worn garments.

When everything has been packed and readied, you board a ship with the Polos and make a bed on deck from a canvas sack. Marco goes below deck with Niccolò and Maffeo, leaving you to guard their bundles. The ship sets sail and rocks on the choppy waves. Night falls, but you cannot sleep. Suddenly something rams the ship!

It's another ship! A rope flies past your head, and a man with a knife between his teeth leaps onto the deck of your ship and ties the two ships together. More men, armed with swords and knives, jump aboard. Pirates!

You crouch behind your canvas bundles as the crew and the pirates battle on the deck. A sailor clutches at a gaping wound on his arm and falls across your hiding place.

"Don't say a word," he whispers. "They will take what they want and soon be gone."

The pirates go below and drag the Polos and other passengers onto the deck with their hands tied behind their backs.

"We don't have time to kill you all," one of the pirates says cheerfully as he passes bundles of cargo to the pirate ship. "We'll just lighten your load!" The Polos remain quiet. You know they are thinking of the jewels you helped to sew into their clothes.

Finally the pirates set you free, and the ship continues to Constantinople. From there the Polos will travel home to Venice.

At last you understand how the route to Cathay was lost. Now that the Khan is dead, the golden passport may as well be a piece of coal. The world is at war once again, and China will soon close her doors to foreigners. If it hadn't been for the unity of the Mongol empire under Kublai Khan, even Marco Polo wouldn't have gotten through.

But you remember that Columbus himself discovered America while he was searching for Cathay. Why didn't he follow Marco's



route? And the Polos still have their jewels. Why weren't they enough to lure explorers to the East?



Jump to Christopher Columbus and ask him why he chose a sea route. [Click here.](#)



Jump to the Polos' homecoming in Venice. [Click here.](#)



It's 1432. You are in a magnificent palace hall decorated with dragons of red and gold and green. But it doesn't look familiar. Are you still at Khan-balik?

Two men in blue embroidered robes hurry toward you. They have thin black mustaches and pointed goatees, and they wear black headdresses that cover their skulls.

"Who dares to approach the emperor?" demands one. "How did you enter the Forbidden City?"

Confidently, you pull out your golden passport and show it to the angry official.

"I am a traveler from the West," you say politely. "But I have lost my way. I didn't mean to trespass if this city is forbidden."

The second official grabs your golden passport and scoffs at it.

"This is Mongol gold!" he says. "It will do you no good in Peking! We drove the Mongols back to their herds almost a century ago!"

"We allow no foreigners here," says the first official. He calls for two guards. "The Ming emperors have closed off the land gates and the water gates, too. You must be a clever spy to have penetrated so far. But you'll go no farther!"

The guards are wearing golden armor and pointed helmets. Their spears have sharp points as well. You do not resist as they drag you to a gloomy prison cell.

The cell looks familiar. Chinese prisons have not changed very much. You're beginning to understand how the route to the East was lost. China is completely closed to the West!

But the Polos couldn't have known about the Ming emperors. Maybe something happened on their return journey to discourage others from following in their footsteps. You know Marco was in Cathay for seventeen years. And it must have taken him a few years to get home to Venice. You can look for the Polos on their return trip. But where will you find them?



Jump to Persia in 1293. [Click here.](#)



Jump to Trebizond in 1294. [Click here.](#)



You are back in Venice. It is 1295. The Polos have been away from home for twenty-three years. You wind your turban firmly around your head and join them as they walk to the house in the courtyard that you visited when your mission began. They have brought several servants along, and no one notices an extra one.

The servants are laden down with bundles. You recognize them as the parcels you hid behind when the pirates attacked your ship.

The Polos are causing quite a stir along the streets and canals of Venice. After so many years, their accents are guttural and strange. Marco has trouble speaking his own tongue. And their Oriental robes, now worn and shabby, look as weird and out-of-place as space suits.

People stare as Niccolò knocks on the great wooden door to his house. A gray-haired woman sticks her head out of an arched window on the second floor.

“Begone, you beggars!” she yells. “I’ll not have such tramps at my door!”

“Mama, wait!” cries Marco. “Don’t you recognize us? It’s Father and Uncle Maffeo, and *me*, Marco!”

The woman stares. Tears spring to her eyes, but you’re not sure if they are tears of joy or of disbelief.

“You’re not the Polos,” jeers one of the bystanders. “They died on a trading expedition, years ago. How can you be so cruel to an old woman?”

“Tonight we will hold a banquet for all of our friends!” Niccolò

announces. "Then they shall know us for who we really are. Let the preparations begin!"

You spend the rest of the day running errands for the Polo household. The servants eye you fearfully, as though they're not quite sure what to make of the strangers in their house. But soon the banquet is prepared.

The Polos seat themselves with their guests. Marco is at the head of the table and Niccolò and Maffeo on either side. You pour wine and water, and everyone eats his fill.

"We bring wonders from the land of Cathay," says Marco when the feast is done. He opens a parcel and pulls out an assortment of objects.

"This is cloth that doesn't burn!" he says, lighting a piece of asbestos fabric that he pocketed in Mongolia. "These books are printed, not hand-copied," he says, pulling out a pile of Chinese books. "And this is paper money!" He shows Cathayan currency.

"I'll take gold coins any day," one man jeers. "What else do you have to show us, Marco Polo?"

"These sticks are food," says Marco, pulling out a handful of Chinese noodles. He drops the spaghetti in boiling water. But the guests are skeptical. Little do they imagine that they will all soon be eating pasta!

"There are millions of people living in Cathay," Marco goes on, "and millions of boats and huge cities. They have the best . . ."

Marco tells of the palaces and cities, mountains and streams, wonders and riches of the realm of Kublai Khan. He talks for hours, until his guests grow weary.

"We shall have to call you Marco Milione!" say the guests. "How you exaggerate! Everyone knows that no one can even get through Turkey, much less Persia. There are too many wars. These things are just fancies you have brought back from Constantinople!"

"Yes," says another guest. "If you have really been to this land of Cathay, why aren't you rich?"

All at once Marco, Niccolò, and Maffeo tear off their tattered



Tartar clothes, revealing lush robes of Chinese silk underneath. Then Niccolò asks you for a knife. He rips open the seams of the garments and spills diamonds, pearls, rubies, and other jewels all over the banquet table.

The guests' eyes pop from their heads.

"Maybe now you will believe me," says Marco. "But if not, I know someday someone will believe me. Our lives and travels may have overlapped with the empire of Kublai Khan. But anyone can reach Cathay who dares to dream!"

You smile at Marco's enthusiasm. Marco Polo's greatest legacy, it seems, was not the jewels he brought back from the East but his stories and dreams. And as one route closed, another route was opened to another New World.

MISSION COMPLETED.

DATA FILE

Page 9: How old was Marco Polo in 1268?

Page 23: Have you forgotten the second rule of time travel?

Page 30: How far are the Polos likely to have come?

Page 36: Did the Polos get to Cathay by sea? You'd better check your map.

Page 49: Can you be certain of finding them in one of these places?

Page 52: Do the Polos think it's important to replace the crystal?

Page 62: How is an older Marco Polo likely to react when he sees you?

Page 72: Is it wise to turn down an invitation from the Khan?

About the Contributors

CAROL GASKIN has written nine previous books for young readers, including the Forgotten Forest series. She is the author of Time Machine #13, *Secret of the Royal Treasure*, Time Traveler #2, *The Legend of Hiawatha*, Time Traveler #3, *The First Settlers*, and Explorer #1, *Journey to the Center of the Atom*, and is the co-author of Time Machine #19, *Death Mask of Pancho Villa*. She lives in Sarasota, Florida.

JOSÉ GONZALEZ NAVARRO is a Spanish artist best known for his illustration of romance and mystery books. He began his career as a comic artist at the age of twenty and in the 1970s first gained recognition in the United States as the creator of the famous Vampirella series for Warren. He is the illustrator of Time Machine #12, *Search for the Nile*, Time Machine #16, *Quest for the Cities of Gold*, and Time Traveler #1, *Voyage with Columbus*.