

The British gentleman who became Venezuela's Indiana Jones

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Warmer

1. Which of these words would you expect to find in an article about a man in his 70s?

diplomat

adventurer

tarantula

magic

pensioner

El Dorado

doctor

malaria

wheelchair

author

2. All three of these men are adventurers and explorers. Which one is real, and which two are film characters?

Indiana Jones

Charles Brewer-Carias

Charles Muntz

Scan the article to check your answers.

2 Key words: Synonyms

Match the words from the article on the left with the words on the right that have the same or very similar meanings. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. venomous (para 1) | a. exploration, trip |
| 2. unveiling (para 1) | b. terrace |
| 3. expedition (para 2) | c. help fund, finance |
| 4. bugs (para 3) | d. revealing |
| 5. striking (para 6) | e. carry, have |
| 6. uncouth (para 7) | f. poisonous |
| 7. sinister (para 8) | g. insects |
| 8. sprawl (para 9) | h. gave birth to |
| 9. porch (para 10) | i. spread |
| 10. bear (para 11) | j. vulgar, rude |
| 11. subsidize (para 14) | k. evil |
| 12. spawned (para 15) | l. impressive |

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Charles Brewer-Carias, 71, is an explorer, naturalist and author living in the jungles of Venezuela with no intention of retiring

Rory Carroll in Caracas
6 April, 2010

- 1 It has been a good week for Charles Brewer-Carias. He caught a highly venomous snake. He had a snail named after him. His discovery of a new species of frog was confirmed. And he came a step closer to unveiling what he reckons is the world's oldest living organism.
- 2 If that sounds unbelievable it is because Brewer-Carias is unbelievable: an explorer, naturalist, author and adventurer who should belong in a Victorian novel but in fact lives on a hill overlooking Caracas and plans, among other things, an expedition to El Dorado.
- 3 "This is what keeps me going: discovery," he said, from a home decorated with butterflies, tarantulas and huge bugs in glass cases. "It's about passing on information that has been kept hidden from humans for a long, long time."
- 4 Arguably modernity and its rules have been kept from Brewer-Carias, the grandson of a British diplomat, since he decided more than half a century ago to explore Venezuela's jungles and live an unusual life.
- 5 He had trained as a dentist and ended up using those skills to treat and study the Yekuana tribe, whose language he speaks fluently. He also led expeditions of botanists and geographers.
- 6 The results are striking: a shelf full of books he has written and illustrated; the discovery of the world's largest quartzite cave and 27 plants, reptiles, insects and a scorpion named in his honour; a lot of diseases including malaria; and a record for starting fire with sticks (2.7 seconds).
- 7 In the process, Brewer-Carias has also earned a reputation for seeking glory, abusing Indians and secretly mining gold and uranium, charges he strenuously denies. "Scandalous stuff. Uncouth smears," he said, the English accented with a slight Spanish lilt.
- 8 There are suggestions the 71-year-old partly inspired the character of Charles Muntz, the sinister explorer in the Oscar-winning computer-animated film *Up* which is set amid Venezuela's Guayana highlands where Brewer-Carias has made more than 200 expeditions. "I've not seen the film but apparently Charles is an evilish character," he says.
- 9 Married twice with five children, he lives in a house he built himself high above Caracas's concrete sprawl. He greets visitors, including the *Guardian* reporters, by inviting them to listen to a creature inside a wooded mound. He then clambers up a vine, stamps and sends a shower of seeds raining on their heads. "Got you!". He also challenges male visitors to match his chin-ups on an exercise bar. On an average workout, he does 70. "To show off, I do 100."
- 10 In a jar on the porch is curled a small brown snake: *Bothrops venezuelensis*, also known as Venezuelan Lancehead. Highly venomous, potentially deadly and caught just a few days earlier in the garden. Brewer-Carias will take it to a laboratory for the venom to be milked.
- 11 Last week, a species of snail he found on the peak of Mount Chimanta was named Breure in his honour. And recently, near his home, he caught a frog of a type he had never seen before. An expert has confirmed it is a new species and will name it later this year. Only a small fraction of the species Brewer-Carias has discovered bear his name, he said, with a bit of regret.
- 12 The biggest prize may be yet to come: coral-type silica growing from rock in a cave amid Venezuela's table-top "tepui" mountains. It is a living organism which dates back at least 317,000 years, according to scientists and could be over one million years old.
- 13 "This could be the world's oldest living organism," said the explorer, his voice dropping to a dramatic low. "This has never existed for man. But I'm going to make it exist. It's a kind of magic."

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- 14 Brewer-Carias receives no government funding and has little regular income. He drives abattered old car and relies on friends to pay his bills and subsidize expeditions.
- 15 When he located a 17th century French shipwreck, the Venezuelan government stopped Brewer-Carias' team from bringing up any treasures, he said. He will wait for an "honest government" before starting off on an expedition to El Dorado: a real place which spawned the legend of a city of gold.

- 16 "The name refers to a man who lived by a lake near Manoa. I know the site very well," he said. "I've been there, picked up ceramics. I will go back there with my son and two companions. We have made our plans. Together we will discover El Dorado."

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the information in the article?

- Charles Brewer-Carias is a character in a Victorian novel.
- Brewer-Carias trained to be a diplomat.
- He has been living in Venezuela for more than 50 years.
- Some people say Brewer-Carias secretly mines gold.
- Brewer-Carias has had many animals and plants named after him.
- Brewer-Carias is now a frail old man.
- The *Indiana Jones* films are based on his life story.
- Brewer-Carias is searching for a coral-type silica which could be the oldest living thing on Earth.
- The government of Venezuela didn't let him salvage the 17th-century shipwreck.
- According to Brewer-Carias, El Dorado is only a legend.

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KEY

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- Students' own answers. Words that appear in the article: diplomat; adventurer; tarantula; magic; El Dorado; malaria; author
- Charles Brewer-Carias is a real person, Indiana Jones and Charles Muntz are film characters.

5 Pictures and webquest

Teacher's note: You can watch videos of the character Charles Muntz from Pixar's movie *Up* by typing 'Charles Muntz' into the search field at www.youtube.com.

2 Key words: Synonyms

- f
- d
- a
- g
- l
- j
- k
- i
- b
- e
- c
- h

3 Comprehension check

- F
- F
- T
- T
- T
- F
- F
- T
- T
- F