

Reading Explorer 2, Unit 5: Sewer Diver

Narrator:

They're under one of the world's largest and most polluted cities. They are full of human waste, garbage, and even human bodies. The smell is truly awful.

The sewers of Mexico City are as dirty as any on Earth. However, Carlos Barrios has just quit a comfortable office job for the opportunity to swim in them. It's three o'clock in the afternoon, and Carlos is pulling a dead animal out of the sewer. He's making sure that the sewage stays where it belongs.

Carlos Barrios:

"We pull out all kinds of things from the water. You can see chairs, cars, bones. You find everything here."

Narrator:

Mexico City has thousands of kilometers of sewer lines. Some follow paths dug by the Aztecs more than 500 years ago.

The sewers need to carry large amounts of water coming in from the mountains, as well as waste from the toilets and sinks of 19 million people. If a sewer line gets blocked, it can send sewage into the streets, subway tunnels or even people's homes.

At age 45, Carlos decided to leave his job as an accountant to join the team that keeps these sewers flowing.

Carlos Barrios:

"I have worked for the city for about 24 years. I became bored with my office job, and the opportunity came for me to dive. So I took it. It was a great change for me. I changed my life completely."

Narrator:

Back at the base, the experienced team receives a call. There is a blockage that needs to be cleared immediately. Team leader Julio helps Carlos put on his suit and prepare.

Julio Cou Cámara:

"Be calm and careful. If anything happens, don't worry. I will be the one to make decisions. We will be very safe. It's Carlos' life, so we will be careful."

Narrator:

Carlos has no idea what he'll find down there. After he descends into the dark, silent water, he must remain calm and focused. Fear and confusion can mean death. Carlos tries not to think about the dirty water he's swimming in. His suit protects him, but it can break.

Carlos Barrios:

"If the suit is cut and you get a cut in your skin, you have to go to the hospital. Because of the environment, you could get a very bad disease."

Narrator:

After a half-hour search, Carlos locates the problem. It's an old iron wheel. After they've located it, the team quickly removes it. It's been a successful mission for Carlos. But before he can undress and be permitted to leave, he must be washed and thoroughly cleaned.

In his new job, Carlos has found a real sense of purpose.

Carlos Barrios:

"I feel like I am someone who makes people's lives better."

Narrator:

With so much sewage to tend to, Carlos has got plenty to keep him busy in the sewers below Mexico City.