

CHAPTER 2

INTO THE UNKNOWN

As I listened in amazement, Professor Challenger continued his story.

Having seen the pictures, he went in search of the red cliffs that Maple White had drawn. After many adventures, he found them. He realised that they formed the sides of a high plateau which stretched for miles in both directions. The cliffs were too steep to climb up or down. This must be why some dinosaurs had been able to hide away up there for millions of years.

Challenger saw a huge flying lizard perched on a tree that grew out of the pillar of rock. It was a pterodactyl! He took photographs of the creature before shooting it. 'Won't everyone be astonished to see this when I get home to London?' he had thought.

But on his journey back through the forest there was a disaster. His canoe capsized when he was going over some rapids and his camera was lost in the water.

'I kept a tight grip on the pterodactyl,' he told me, 'but most of its body was torn away and carried off by the river. All I have is this.' From a drawer, he took out a piece of wing, about a metre long. 'I started to tell people about what I had seen, but they called me a fraud,' he said bitterly.

'But I believe you!' I said.

'Well, if you do, why don't you come along to the Zoological Society this evening? I'm going to try to tell my story again. It'll be nice to know that someone there is my ally – even if that person is only an ignorant newspaper reporter!'

The meeting was at eight o'clock. The hall was packed with people. At first Challenger spoke very calmly and the audience listened quietly, but as he began to explain that all the other scientists had got it wrong and that dinosaurs still existed, the audience got restless. There were murmurs of 'Bosh!' and 'Prove it!' Challenger started to lose his temper and his voice became louder. This only made the audience noisier. Now there were shouts of 'Liar!' and 'Throw him off the stage!' and 'Kick him out the hall!'

Challenger stopped trying to make his speech. He glared at the crowd and said: 'Very well. If you think I'm a liar then choose three men you *do* trust to come with me to South America and I'll *show* them the dinosaurs. Who wants to come?'

A tall, thin, shabby man with a pointed beard stood up. He was Professor Summerlee, one of Challenger's rivals. 'I'll go,' he said. 'You'll need a *proper* scientist to test the evidence.'

A handsome man with an elegant moustache and ginger hair stood up next. It was Lord John Roxton, the famous hunter and explorer. 'I'll go,' he said. 'You'll need someone like me on your trip as the Amazon's a dangerous place.'

I jumped up now, thinking this was my big chance to impress Gladys. 'I'll go,' I cried, excitedly. 'You'll need a newspaper reporter with you who can write up your story.'

Everyone cheered and a group of laughing students carried us around the hall on their shoulders. I felt like I was already a hero.

I won't bore you with all the details of how we planned our trip, how we crossed the Atlantic and what we did when we first arrived in Brazil. However, I will tell you a little more about my travelling companions.

Summerlee usually looked fed-up and he complained a lot. However, he did occasionally get excited, like when he saw an interesting insect that he could catch in his butterfly net. He was absent-minded, messy and liked to smoke a pipe.

Lord John was as tall and thin as Summerlee but very smartly dressed. He had a gentle voice and a friendly manner, but I also knew that he could be a fierce and ruthless fighter. A few years ago he had fought a war against the slave-drivers of South America and had killed their leader, Pedro Lopez.

Also with us were some hired men: a big, strong African man called Zambo, a rather shifty Portuguese called Gomez, and some Indians.

Our journey was by steamer then canoe then foot. It took us first through the Amazonian forests, where the trees reached high above our heads: it was like being in a green and leafy cathedral. Climbing plants wound their way around the trees, reaching up to the light: their scented flowers were enormous, bigger than anything I'd seen back home. There were a few animals on the ground – bears, tapirs and anteaters – but most of the life was way up above us – monkeys, sloths, snakes and hundreds of birds and insects. We also sometimes heard the sound of Indian war drums beating out the message: 'We will kill you if we can.'

When we had to leave the canoes behind and start walking, the path climbed up through thick groves of bamboo and then out onto the plains, where there was only the occasional clump of trees. Summerlee and Challenger were continually bickering as we went along. They couldn't agree on anything.

Many days later, there before us were the steep red cliffs, stretching as far as the eye could see. As we approached, a huge grey bird flapped slowly up from the ground and flew off, very low and straight.

'Did you see that?' cried Challenger excitedly. 'It was another pterodactyl!'

'Ptero-fiddlestick!' scoffed Summerlee. 'It was a stork!'

'It wasn't any bird that ever I clapped eyes on before,' said Lord John, quietly.

So there we were, on the edge of the unknown. Who knew what lay before us?



DID YOU KNOW...

... that the **Amazon** region is home to the largest collection of animal and plant species in the world? When Europeans first arrived there about 400 years ago, they were amazed by how big the trees and flowers grew, and how much wildlife lived in the forest. This picture is from a nineteenth-century travel book.

NEW WORDS

absent-minded	forgetful
ally	friend
bickering	arguing
capsized	sank
evidence	proof
fraud	imposter
groves	woods
plains	flat land
plateau	high, flat area
rapids	fast-moving water
scoffed	jeered
shabby	untidy
shifty	not to be trusted
slave-drivers	people who forced slaves to work
steamer	boat powered by steam

PUZZLE

Decide whether these sentences are true or false.

Challenger lost his camera in South America. TRUE/FALSE

He didn't want Malone to come to the Zoological Society. TRUE/FALSE

Summerlee was a tidy man. TRUE/FALSE

Lord John had never been to South America before. TRUE/FALSE

Most of the animals were up in the trees. TRUE/FALSE

Summerlee and Challenger could never agree. TRUE/FALSE

GET CREATIVE

Imagine Professor Summerlee wrote a postcard home, describing his fellow travellers. What would he write about each of them?