

CHAPTER 6

JOLLY GOOD FELLOWS

Someday I will write a detailed account of all the marvellous things we saw and did when we were up on the plateau – we called it Maple White Land in honour of the dead American. There was the time a young ichthyosaurus – half seal, half fish – got caught up in our fishing nets; the night when a green water-snake carried off the man steering our canoe; the carnivorous dinosaurs that killed a group of Indians by falling upon them and squashing them flat... There are many more tales, but I need to bring this one to a close.

After the battle with the ape-men, we set up a new camp beneath the Indians' caves close to the lake. We had hoped the Indians would help us leave the plateau but whenever we suggested this, they just smiled, shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads. They were friendly and generous, but we sometimes felt as if we were their prisoners.

Our thoughts were constantly turning to how we might escape but we also kept ourselves busy with pet projects. Summerlee collected insects for his collection; Lord John spent a lot of time rooting about in the blue mud that could be found near the volcanic craters; Challenger built a workshop around a geyser that blew out natural gas. One night he invited us to see what he had been doing there.

'I have exerted my whole brain force upon the problem of how we shall descend these cliffs,' he said, pompously. 'And my solution? A gas balloon! I have made a balloon from the dried stomach of one of those gigantic fishes in the lake and behold the result!'

He held the empty balloon over the geyser and pointed proudly as it filled with gas and began to rise, tugging at the rope that kept it tethered to the ground.

'What madness!' snorted Summerlee.

'Clever old dear, ain't he?' Lord John whispered to me, delightedly.

'I will now,' said Challenger, with a smile of anticipation, 'demonstrate the carrying power of the balloon.' As he said this he took hold of the rope and cut it from its moorings. Instantly, he was pulled off his feet with terrifying speed as the balloon shot up in the air. I grabbed his waist and Lord John grabbed my legs, and we would all have been carried off to who knows where if the rope hadn't snapped and the balloon disappeared from view.

'Splendid!' cried Challenger, rubbing his elbow where he'd landed with a bump on the ground. 'Give me another week, gentlemen, and I'll have made a second balloon to replace that one.'

Fortunately, we did not have to use this method. One of the Indians who we had saved from the ape-men came to us one evening with a rough drawing. He put his fingers to his lips to show that we had to keep this secret, but we worked out that the drawing was showing us a route through the caves to the outside. That night we gathered up our belongings and crept away. Within two hours we were back at the foot of the red cliffs and hurrying to be reunited with Zambo.

And now I've just a few loose ends to tie up before I finish.

When we got back to Britain I dashed round to see my beloved Gladys Huntingdon. Only she wasn't Gladys Huntingdon anymore. She was Gladys Potts. She'd married a junior clerk in a bank, a weedy chap with even less chance of becoming a hero than I had!

A week later there was a big meeting at the Zoological Society. Summerlee told the members what we had seen and done, and said that Challenger had been telling the truth about the dinosaurs. Most people were ready to believe us, but there were still some who had doubts. The photographs we had taken? They could be fakes. The specimens we had collected? They could be from anywhere. Our own stories? We could be four liars, not just one.

It was at this point that Challenger signalled to me and Zambo who were waiting at the side of the stage. We carried forward a large packing case. Challenger pulled off the lid and peered inside, cooing: 'Come, then, my pretty!' There was a scratching and rattling sound, and out came a hideous baby pterodactyl. It perched on the edge of the case for a moment, glaring maliciously at the audience, then took off, flying round and round the hall before disappearing out an open window.

Well, no one could doubt us now. The crowd cheered and clapped and sang 'For They Are Jolly Good Fellows', and they carried us on their shoulders out into the streets, stopping traffic and causing chaos.

Finally, do you remember that blue mud Lord John was looking at? It turns out it was full of diamonds. Lord John got it valued in London and it was worth half a million pounds.¹ Because Lord John was a true gentleman he divided the money equally between the four of us. Challenger was going to spend his share on setting up a private museum about his work. Summerlee was going to retire from the university and write up his study of fossils. Lord John was going to pay for another expedition to Maple White Land.

'As to you, young fellah,' he said to me. 'You, of course, will use your money to get married.'

'Not just yet,' I said, with a smile. 'I think, if you will have me, that I would rather go with you.'

Lord John said nothing, but he stretched out a brown hand and shook mine.

¹ That would be worth about £30 million in today's money.



DID YOU KNOW...

... that *The Lost World* was made into a silent film, way back in 1925? This is a picture from that film. It was made using stop-motion animation – the same way that Wallace and Gromit make their films. Conan Doyle showed a group of magicians a few minutes of the film, but didn't tell them how it was made. Some of them thought they were actually watching a film of real dinosaurs in a prehistoric swamp! They were amazed.

NEW WORDS

anticipation	looking forward to something
clerk	someone who works in an office
descend	go down
exerted	applied
geyser	a hole in the ground that blows out gusts of water, steam or gas
maliciously	cruelly
method	way of doing something
moorings	used to stop something drifting away
pet projects	special things to do
pompously	self-importantly
tethered	tied
weedy	weak

PUZZLES

The Indians wanted the travellers to stay with them.	TRUE/FALSE
Challenger planned to make a second balloon.	TRUE/FALSE
Zambo came to London.	TRUE/FALSE
Lord John kept all the money for himself.	TRUE/FALSE
Summerlee was going to retire.	TRUE/FALSE
Malone wanted to stay at home.	TRUE/FALSE

GET CREATIVE

Imagine you work for a newspaper – perhaps the same one where Malone is a reporter. Design a front page for the sensational story of the events at the Zoological Society. What will be your headline? What will be your opening paragraph? What will be your picture?