

Office of Scientific Operations

With the conclusion of the traumatic events in 1933 surrounding the shocking affair involving the city of New York and a beast commonly referred to as “King Kong” the president of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt, established the Office of Scientific Operations (OSO). The purpose of the OSO was to monitor, evaluate the level of risk and assist in any manner the mitigation of danger of any and all scientific operations and anomalies. With the rapid pace of scientific discovery this office was given the highest priority and clearance to investigate any potential threats or consequences to the interests of the United States of America.

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*Commonly referred to by the public as
"Terror in the Jungle"*

Indonesia, 1954

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Lightning ignited the deep blackness of the jungle. Wind swirled and whipped the trees and vines. Foliage danced about in all directions. The rain came in bursts that lashed everything then jumped away only to return moments later. The wind roared through the treetops making it impossible to hear if they were anywhere near him as he ran, stumbled, scrambled, crawled and ran again in sheer terror and utter desperation.

The man wore a tattered shirt, partially shredded shorts and one sneaker. His black hair was a matted tangle of rain, leaves, mud and sweat. He was cut and bleeding from several nasty gashes and when he ran there was a noticeable limp from having twisted his right ankle.

As he clawed his way up a slippery, muddy slope a hissing screech from somewhere behind him made him pause. He slowly turned and looked back over his shoulder with wide terrified eyes. In the flash of lightning he could see nothing but waving jungle. Wildly he glanced about. Still nothing. Frantically he continued flailing his way up the slope. He knew they were following him, hunting him.

When he reached the top of the ridge high above him another sound, indistinct in the roar of the wind, drew his gaze upward. The sky lit up with a flash and through a break in the waving canopy, silhouetted against the raging clouds, something large and black with long pointed wings glided past.

A frustrated expression came over the man. "As if I needed something else..." he said. The man took his first step on the down slope of the ridge and the soft mud slid away from him. He plunged down tumbling, sliding and bouncing until, halfway down, his chest collided with a small tree. It hurt and knocked the wind out of him, but he was thankful. It could have been far worse. Despite the desperateness of his situation he appreciated the bit of good fortune. A small smile crossed his face, until he heard the cracking. Glancing down at the base of the small tree he watched, with resignation, as the trunk of the tree, in slow motion, snapped off. He shook his head slightly as both he and the tree slowly fell to the ground and began another wild plunge towards the bottom of the steep slope.

Before reaching the bottom the man suddenly stopped with a loud smack. He was lying in a small clearing of mud. He pushed himself up onto his knees. Pain cried out from every part of his battered body. Slowly, one leg at a time, he staggered erect. Crashing from the slope he had just come made him jerk around, fearing his pursuers. Instead the small tree came cartwheeling out of the vegetation whacking him in the chest. He flew back on to the ground and laid there.

Laying there in the mud, beaten and exhausted, he gazed around at the clearing he was in. It took him only a moment to realize that it wasn't a clearing at all, but a rough muddy stream of a road. With his feet pointed back towards the slope he had just come down he noted the road ran down to his left and up, towards higher ground, to his right. Something to his right, up the road caught his eye. It appeared, then disappeared in the dancing jungle foliage. A light. He stared at it for a minute unsure that it was real. The light blinked in the wind, but it was there.

A hissing screech from the ridge top jerked the man into terrified motion. He scrambled to his feet, somewhat wobbly, and began staggering through the puddles and mud up the road towards the light. He heard the crash of vegetation from higher up and ran as fast he could, gasping every breath knowing his last breath could come at any moment.

As he drew closer to the light he had difficulty telling what the source of it was. Several things he did know. First, the light was coming from something big. Second, the roadside to his right, opposite from the ridge, was dropping off, becoming a cliff. And third, with a glance back, in another flash of lightning, he could make out dark shapes appearing in the road.

The road reached the top of the ridge line and dumped into a gravel parking lot in front of large stone walls. The man recognized the place. It's not that he had ever actually been here, but he had heard of it before. It was an old colonial fort. He remembered hearing it was now being used as a hospital for the mentally ill. Now crossing the parking lot he could see light coming from several small windows.

The fort itself was in poor condition, though structurally still intact. It had been originally placed here because of the strategic view it commanded over the valley below. The fort had been built on a section of the ridge that jutted out slightly and featured on the backside a sheer drop of several hundred feet.

The man reached the front door and began frantically pounding. He glanced back over his shoulder, down the road. He could see nothing in the inky blackness. The lights of the old fort did not illuminate more than a few feet out into the parking lot. No lightning conveniently fired off to light the road.

It took long minutes while the man alternated between beating wildly at the door and staring back at the road before someone pulled the large door open. With a lunge the man pushed through the door, with his shoulder slammed the door shut. After a desperate scan of the inside of the door he slapped a deadbolt into place and slumped down to the floor.

A gasp escaped the old man that had answered the door. He knelt down beside the haggard figure crumpled against the door.

"What has happened to you, sir?" The old man asked.

Outside the wind picked up making a crazy range of howling and whistling sounds as it raced past all parts of the old fort. Above the sound of the wind, and clearly not far beyond the door, a rasping scream that was not part of the raging storm was unleashed.

Both men glanced at the door apprehensively. The man on the floor grabbed the night watchman's arm, pulled him closer and stared wildly into his eyes.

"Demons!" he croaked, "Demons, with claws! God help us!"

The sun felt like it was bleaching everything to a searing white. Wyatt walked down the short flight of steps of the plane. The “airport” was really a gravel air strip and a couple of small buildings. It wasn’t a long walk to the buildings, but in this heat it felt like miles. Someone from the expedition was supposed to be meeting him, but he did not see anyone standing around. His sunglasses were still in his backpack. He squinted in the bright light.

“Mr. Wyatt?”

Wyatt glanced around, but didn’t see where the voice was coming from.

“Are you District Investigator...?”

Finally he spotted someone in the shade of a tree to the left of the main “airport” building.

“Yeah. I’m DI Wyatt.” He stood staring into the shade of the tree.

“Enjoy the heat, do you?” the voice asked.

“No, not really.” Wyatt answered.

“Then why are you still standing there?”

Wyatt walked forward and into the shade of the tree. The girl was a little shorter than he was with black curly hair. She wasn’t what Wyatt would consider a looker. Not fat, but not slim either.

She held out her hand. “I’m Wanda. Wanda Klemp.”

Wyatt shook her hand. “DI Wyatt. Oh, well, I guess you already knew that.”

She nodded sagely. “That’s safe to say.” Wanda stared at Wyatt for a moment. “So, you’re one of those government guys.”

“Yeah. That would be me.” Wyatt said.

“You don’t look like I would expect a government guy to look like.” Wanda said.

“What are government guys supposed to look like?” Wyatt asked.

Wanda shrugged. “I don’t know. Older, I guess.”

“Well, in the OSO, we tend to get in some tight spots and, well, older guys can’t run very fast.” Wyatt said.

Wanda looked at Wyatt. “What’s an OSO?”

“Office of Scientific Operations.” Wyatt saw that Wanda hadn’t heard of the OSO. Most people outside of the scientific community, the president or the military had no idea the OSO even existed. “We kind of monitor trouble.”

“And you do a lot of running in that job?” Wanda asked.

Wyatt shrugged. “Sadly, we kind of do.”

Wanda looked skeptically at Wyatt. “So, what’s with all the running? I didn’t think government guys were afraid of anything.”

“Well, you’d be surprised at how many scary things are out there. And, sometimes, running away is the only realistic option.” Wyatt said.

“Is that all your stuff?” Wanda asked, pointing to Wyatt’s backpack.

Wyatt nodded. “Yeah. It’s all I brought. I was actually on vacation when I was diverted here to verify what was going on.”

“Not much on luggage then, huh?” Wanda said, with a shrug.

Wyatt returned the shrug. “I learned the value of traveling light and fast.”

“Part of that running thing?” Wanda asked.

“Yeah. Kind of a habit after a while.” Wyatt acknowledged.

With a gesture Wanda led Wyatt towards an old beat up car parked under another tree in the direction of the main road.

“So you know about that island don’t you? The one they call Z Land?” Wanda asked as they climbed into the car.

Wyatt slung his backpack into the back seat. “Yeah. Despite the fact that it is a well kept secret, Zeitner’s island is...well, known in certain circles.” He stopped for a moment and glanced out at the ocean, just on the other side of the divided highway. This was actually as close as he had ever been to the island. Even the OSO had to notify the Joint Chiefs if they felt it necessary to go there.

Wanda started the car. “You know, I would really love to do a series of interviews with you about what went on back in the thirties on that island.”

“Not sure about that. Not sure exactly what I am at liberty to talk about.” Wyatt said carefully.

“Secret government stuff?” Wanda asked with a certain enthusiasm.

“Maybe.” Wyatt said. “What do you mean interviews?”

“I’m documenting this expedition, but I think it would be great to add what you know about that island with it.” Wanda said, smiling.

“You’re not one of Dr. Schaefer’s students?”

Wanda shook her head. “No. I’m from the University of Montana, like Dr. Jack, but I’m in the visual arts department. I convinced him to let me film the whole expedition.”

“Hmm. I’m kind of surprised he would go along with that.” Wyatt said.

“You know Dr. Jack?” Wanda asked.

Wyatt shook his head. “No, I’ve heard of Dr. Jackson Schaefer, but if he’s anything like any of the other paleontologists I’ve met I can’t imagine he would take anyone along that didn’t really need to be there.”

Wanda pulled the car out on to the highway heading south.

Wyatt glanced behind them. “Aren’t we going into town?”

Wanda shook her head. “No. I wish. The town is full up with military. To protect the people from the pteranodons. They’ve been here ever since the pteranodons started raiding villages in the hills east of here. Haven’t had much luck in rooting them out.

That's why we're here. Because the Indonesian military has no clue what they're looking for. The nests, I mean. Well, you know that, I suppose."

Wyatt nodded. Marcus Edmonds, Director of the OSO, had briefed him when he had tracked Wyatt down and asked him to verify that there were creatures, presumably from the island once occupied by Dr. Zeitner, that had found their way off that island.

Wanda continued. "We're staying in the Grand White hotel and, I am being generous with the term 'hotel'. It's in the direction we are going—and it's cheaper than anything in town."

"So you are documenting the search for the nests?" Wyatt asked, with only mild interest.

"Yeah. I think it will be some great stuff. Oh, anyway, there are two reasons Dr. Jack let me come along. First, I could pay my own way and for my friend Cass. I told Dr. Jack she was assisting me, but, truth is, Cass hardly knows which end of the camera to hold. Anyway, I just wanted someone else along with me. It's a little intimidating. Coming all this way down here. You know, by yourself. Second, I think Dr. Jack is looking for a bit of publicity from all of this time."

The road changed into a two lane and they crossed a bridge.

"So, is this typically the kind of thing you guys do?" Wanda asked, turning left through the trees on dirt roads.

Wyatt shrugged a little. "Yeah, well, it's often a bit more up close and personal." He hesitated a moment. Then more quietly, "Sometimes a little too close."

Wanda glanced over at Wyatt. "Well, this isn't supposed to be too risky. We're only really going to be pointing the military guys in the right direction. After that, it's up to them."

"Hopefully." Wyatt said, his voice still quiet. He had seen his fair share dangerous creatures and he had been looking forward to some quiet time on a warm tropical beach. That seemed unlikely to happen now. Even if they didn't find any pteranodons.

Wanda flicked another look over at Wyatt. "What? You think this will be dangerous? We'll have soldiers with us and more if we need them will just be a call away. Besides, it's only a handful of pteranodons."

Wyatt stared out the window and said, with a shrug, "Probably so. Still, things somehow never seem to go quite as planned."

They pulled into a gravel parking area next to a couple of single story white buildings and got out.

"This way." Wanda said with a wave. She led Wyatt around between the buildings past several doors.

"Dr. Jack said you wouldn't mind sharing a room with Derek." Wanda said, knocking on a door. There was no answer.

Several rooms away a door opened and a dark haired man stepped out.

"Ah, hey Johan." Wanda said. She cocked her head towards the door she and Wyatt were standing outside of. "Where are the others?"

"Afternoon, Miss Klemp. They are all at the Hula." Johan replied with a smile.

"Of course." Wanda said. "Thank you."

"Hula?" Wyatt asked. "Like.." He waved his hands mimicking a hula dance.

Wanda gestured back towards the parking area. "No, it's a bar. You can cut back through the trees over there and it's just to the left along the main road."

"Ah." Wyatt nodded.

Wanda checked the door. It was unlocked. "Here, throw your stuff in here and we'll walk over. You can meet the others—and watch Derek try to work his way into Cass's pants."

A short walk brought them out onto the main road and left to the Hula Jungle. At the open air bar sat three individuals.

"Ah, our final member." Dr. Schaefer said standing up and shaking Wyatt's hand.

"Pleased to me you." Wyatt said.

Dr. Schaefer turned towards the other two.

"This is Derek Coombs, one of my paleontological grad students." Schaefer gestured towards the muscular, sandy blonde guy, who nodded at Wyatt. "And this is Cassie. Another volunteer." Schaefer patted a friendly hand on the slender blonde girl seated between himself and Derek.

"This Mr. Wyatt. He's from the government, our government." Schaefer said.

Wyatt nodded at both of them. Derek placed a hand on Cass's shoulder. She gently brushed it off.

"You arrived just in time." Schaefer said, sitting back down. "We are leaving first thing in the morning. Or more precisely, when our illustrious escort arrives."

"Our escort?" Wyatt asked.

"Some Indonesian soldiers. Gotta show them where to find the pteranodons. I guess it looks good for them too if they get a chance to kill a few. Like they can protect something. Since they don't seem to be able to protect their people." Derek said.

"Uh, well, trust me, the more guns the better." Wyatt replied.

"Well, I hope we shan't need their assistance. We are only here to ascertain the whereabouts of the pteranodon nests. After that, well, that's up to the Indonesian government, though, I wouldn't be opposed to being allowed to return with a couple of eggs—assuming we come across any, of course." Schaefer mused.

Wyatt shook his head slightly. "Take my word for it, that's not a good idea. You don't want those things showing up anywhere further than these remote islands."

"Huh. An expert." Derek said sarcastically.

"Now, Derek, Mr. Wyatt..." Schaefer started.

"Jonathon." Wyatt said.

“Jonathon, here has some invaluable experience and I believe we will all benefit by having him along with us. Why, he’s actually seen similar creatures up close, haven’t you?” Schaefer patted Wyatt’s shoulder.

Wyatt nodded solemnly. “Pretty damned close.”

“Your experience in observing the behavior of prehistoric species will be extremely useful.” Dr. Schaefer smiled. He was about 6 foot in height, but skinny with whitish gray hair and beard. He looked more like he was about to lead a group beach combing in his Hawaiian shirt, khaki shorts, sneakers and small straw hat rather than hunting prehistoric animals.

“What prehistoric species have you dealt with?” Wanda asked.

“I was involved with the Rhedosaurus that came ashore in New York back in ‘53.” Wyatt said.

“Whoa. I remember reading all about that. They called it ‘The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms’. That must have been scary.” Cass said.

Wyatt shrugged. “Yeah. I saw the headlines. Not sure why they called it that. There were some scary moments. Especially when it was trying to eat us.”

“Whoa.” Cass said.

“So what great pearls of wisdom can you tell us about these dinosaurs, Mr. Wyatt?” Derek said, with a clear hint of derision in his voice. He obviously didn’t like the idea that Cass was impressed by Wyatt’s experience.

Wyatt’s eyes narrowed slightly. He glanced at Schaefer, then back at Derek. “Well, Derek, we could start with the fact that I don’t think pteranodons are dinosaurs. I believe they’re flying reptiles. I’m not a paleontologist, my background is in zoology, but, the most important thing to bear in mind is that like every other giant reptile I’ve encountered, they probably have a healthy appetite.”

Derek ignored Wyatt’s answer and leaned over and began whispering into Cass’ ear. She brushed him off with a hushed “No.”

“Here.” Wanda said, pulling Wyatt to a stool at the bar.

Wyatt ducked his head under the thatch hanging down from the roof of the bar and sat down. He wouldn’t have objected to sitting down next to Cass, but Wanda seemed to deliberately place herself between Wyatt and Cass.

The bartender came over. “Imperial or Pilsen?”

“Any drink you want so long as it’s an Imperial or Pilsen beer.” Wanda said with a grin.

Wyatt shrugged.

The bartender served Wyatt a cool, but not cold Imperial. Wyatt took a long drink and realized he was a little nervous. It wasn’t anything he could put his finger on. Just a subtle combination of things. The warm sticky climate, the proximity of large prehistoric carnivorous animals, the fact that generally Marcus sent them out on a mission with a partner and, of course, the assurance that everything was going to be fine.

The sun was still behind the mountains to the east, but it had risen more than an hour ago. It was quite warm already. They stood around the two ragged looking former U.S. army Jeeps, having long since stowed all the gear they were taking and waited impatiently. There were mumbled conversations and silent exchanges of irritated expressions as they waited for the government official and the accompanying soldiers to arrive.

Finally the sound of a vehicle coming up the road signaled the arrival of their escort. If Wyatt was looking to be impressed by their military escort, he was disappointed. An aging station wagon, painted in khaki colors, squeaked to a halt. The driver, in khakis and sunglasses, didn't acknowledge anyone and remained seated in the station wagon.

The passenger door opened and civilian climbed out. He was slender, black hair, a black mustache and new, expensive hiking clothes. As he approached Schaefer one of the back doors of the station wagon opened. A soldier popped out and stood to one side as another man, clearly an officer stepped out.

"Dr. Schaefer. It is good to see you again." He shook Schaefer's hand as the officer walked up.

Turning to the officer he said, "This is Captain Seto."

"Mr. Talim. Always pleased to work with the Indonesian government." Schaefer said releasing his hand and turning to Captain Seto. "Captain. Are we ready to go?"

"Yes sir. My men and I are ready." Captain Seto, dressed in a khaki uniform, average height, deeply tanned, nodded to Schaefer.

Schaefer glanced at the station wagon. Besides the driver and the man standing next to the door of the station wagon he thought he could see a couple of more soldiers in the back of the station wagon. He seemed to be on the verge of asking the Captain something, then dismissed it.

"Great. Let's get moving then." Schaefer turned and walked to the front Jeep. He climbed into the passenger seat. Johan, the local guide for their trip was behind the wheel. After some awkward shuffling in which Derek made certain that he and Cass were in the second Jeep together with the two local men hired to assist in hauling equipment, Yovan and Anto. That left Wyatt and Wanda in the Jeep with Schaefer and Johan.

The Jeeps pulled out, Johan leading, Derek and Cass next and the "military" station wagon bringing up the rear. They pulled out on to the main road. It was a paved two lane, but only a mile to the south, away from the small town, the pavement grew noticeably more fractured until finally giving way to packed gravel. Another mile further and they turned off the main road on to a dirt road. They were only traveling about 12 miles further inland, but the condition of the roads and the zigzagging necessary to

climb into the mountains east of the town would require at least 2 ½ hours of teeth rattling, back jamming and butt bouncing torture to reach their stopping point.

An hour into their journey the exchange of words and gestures between Johan and Dr. Schaefer up front indicated they were coming up to something significant. It was not possible for Wanda and Wyatt to clearly hear what was being said. The noise of the Jeep engine and the clunking of every piece of equipment and body bouncing with every rut traversed, conversation was next to impossible. It would have been a little quieter if there had been some kind of door and windows, but these army Jeeps were open and lacked air conditioning. The heat inside the Jeep would have cooked everyone within the first twenty minutes of the ride.

Five more minutes passed and the vehicles emerged from forest enshrouded shade into an area that had been cleared years ago. They had climbed some steep slopes already, but here the sides of the road sloped more gently away. It was evident that, over the years, a variety of different crops had been grown. A short distance further, at a rugged crossroad, there were a number of buildings and dwellings.

As they pulled to a stop in the middle of the buildings and homes it was apparent that something had happened here. Most of the buildings looked battered and damaged, as if they had endured a violent storm. The odd thing was that whatever storm had swept through here had been very particular about what it struck. While houses and larger corrugated metal buildings were battered the surrounding trees and stockpiled lumber and other assorted supplies seemed to be undisturbed.

Everyone emerged from their respective vehicles and began to slowly wander about. "What happened here?" Wyatt asked.

From a few feet away Schaefer answered. "Johan says this village was attacked by the pteranodons."

Talim hurried over to Schaefer. "You see, doctor. You see. These beasts must be wiped out. Before our entire economy is ruined." He said shaking his head at the damaged buildings.

"Was anyone hurt?" Wanda asked as she was scanning around with her camera.

"Hurt?" Talim asked. He thought for a moment, then shrugged. "Yes, I believe so."

Wyatt moved over towards the one of the buildings. Behind him he heard Captain Seto giving orders.

"Omar, Hasan, over here." Captain Seto pointed further up the road. He turned towards the other two men. "You two, over there."

The soldiers moved off, guns ready, studying the surrounding jungle carefully. Wyatt watched them for a moment. With a shake of his head he retreated a few steps back to Captain Seto.

"Uh, Captain. These are flying reptiles." Wyatt flapped his arms. "They won't be in the jungle." He jerked a thumb towards the trees further up slope from the village.

For a moment Wyatt and the Captain stared at each other, then Wyatt pointed towards the sky. The Captain nodded and turned back towards his men.

“Idiots!” All four of his men turned back to look at Captain Seto. They seemed familiar with this method of getting their attention. The Captain pointed up. “Not the trees! The sky!”

The men glanced at each other and then began looking up. They quickly started scanning the skies. Oddly, despite the fact that they couldn’t see more than a few feet into the jungle and could see great stretches of sky, they seemed much more cautious now than before.

Wyatt continued on to the building. There were claw marks tearing into the corrugated metal walls. Wanda, Cass, Derek and Johan came up behind Wyatt.

“Are those what I think they are?” Cass asked. Her voice, while giggly and airy the night before at the Hula, was clearly now a little shaky.

Wyatt nodded without looking back at her.

“What were they after in there?” Wanda asked, still filming with the cumbersome movie camera.

“Not sure.” Wyatt said. “What did they use this building for?”

Wanda stopped filming and turned to Johan. “What was this used for?”

Johan answered while turning away from the building and nervously scanning the sky.

“Coffee and bananas.”

“Well,” Wyatt said, “it wasn’t that.”

“What does that mean.” Cass asked, a bit anxiously. Something in her tone said she guessed the answer.

“People. They were after the people.” Derek said, smiling. “Wow, I’ve got to see these things.”

“You mean they were clawing at the building to get at the people inside?” Wanda asked, her voice too was a little shaky. “They’re that aggressive?”

Wyatt nodded again. “From past observation of similar creatures, I would say they can be pretty...persistent.” He turned and saw the concerned looks. “It’s alright. I would think once they’re on the ground they would be clumsy and slow. I think our escort,” he waved off towards the soldiers, “should have little trouble taking them down.”

In the distance some people had emerged from several of the houses. Schaefer, Talim and Captain Seto were in a discussion with a couple of the men.

Wyatt wandered over to where Schaefer was nodding to what the village man was saying.

“...in the mountains.” The villager said. “There is a hospital.”

Schaefer turned in the direction the man was pointing, though the place the man spoke of was still miles away and not visible from there.

Turning back Schaefer looked over at Talim. “You know this place?”

Talim took a moment before answering. "Yes. It is a mental institution."

"What was he saying?" Wyatt asked.

Schaefer turned towards Wyatt. "Uh, well, the villagers don't seem to have any idea where the pteranodons came from. They just appeared out of nowhere, but they say they've heard of a man that supposedly knows something about where the pteranodons are."

"What's this about a mental institution?" Wyatt asked.

"That's where the man is." Schaefer and Wyatt looked at one another.

"A man in a mental institution?" Wyatt asked. He wasn't thrilled at sacrificing his vacation for this expedition and really wasn't keen on spending any more time than necessary.

Schaefer shrugged. "I know, but I think it's worth a shot."

Wyatt nodded. "OK."

Suddenly, from the far end of the village, along the road, one of the soldiers began firing up into a large overhanging tree. Everyone jumped and turned to watch several colorful parrots scatter from the treetop and one drop to the ground.

"Idiots!" Captain Seto screaming as he trotted off towards the soldier.

Another fifteen minutes of scouting about brought no more useful information. Everyone climbed back into their respective vehicles and headed out. Talim had given Johan detailed directions on where they were headed despite Johan's insistence that, as a local and a guide for these parts, he knew where the road leading to the institution was.

“Whoa.” Wyatt said as they pulled into the gravel parking area.

“Yeah.” Wanda said climbing out of the Jeep and staring at the old fortress. “Like something out of an old horror movie.”

The others pulled up and parked. Everyone seemed to need a moment to stare at the building. If one could ignore the vehicles in the parking area and the poles carrying electricity to the place it was not hard to imagine that men wearing breastplates could be standing guard at the door. The door itself, though, had clearly been replaced within the last twenty years. The original large curved door was now a wheelchair accessible rectangular metal door with even more recent wood framing filling in around it.

The stone, however, of the old fort was clearly original, dating back to the time when the Dutch had colonized parts of Indonesia. While still intact it was steadily crumbling and obviously was in constant need of patching. Whatever the color the stone was when first placed here it had long since turned a charcoal color which only added to a certain sense of gloom.

There was one tower that rose up on the backside. At one time there had been a nice little courtyard leading up to the front door, but at some point it had been changed into a covered walkway. It was difficult to get a clear sense of the building. It almost hung on the edge of a steep slope. For a fortress it was well positioned. About the only way to approach the building was from the parking area. Rocky ground dropped off rapidly from the other three sides.

“Alright people,” Schaefer said, “Mr. Talim is going to talk to the people here and get us access to the man we came here to talk to.” Even as Schaefer spoke Talim was pounding on the door and, when it was answered, spoke in what seemed to be more like orders rather than a request.

“Now,” Schaefer continued, “We don’t all need to be tramping through this facility. Wyatt, I would like you and Johan, who knows the land in these parts, to accompany me.”

“Uh, hello?” Wanda said.

Schaefer stared at her blankly for a moment.

Wanda lifted her camera and wiggled it in the air.

“Oh. Yes, of course. And Wanda too.” Cass started to say something, but Dr. Schaefer seemed to not hear her as he turned towards the building. She didn’t seem particularly interested in either choice, wandering around a mental institution or spending even more time fending off advances from Derek. Yovan and Anto leaned up against the Jeep and appeared to be very content to continue to get paid without having to do much of anything.

Captain Seto was posting his men around the parking area and as they stared cautiously at the surrounding jungle he quickly slapped a couple of them on the back and pointed at the sky. Afterwards, the men walked in circles carefully watching the clear blue sky.

Inside the main door it was as if one was entering a different world. The inside looked nothing like the outside. There was a wide main hallway leading straight back further into the old fort. Worn cheap white tile covered the floor and the walls on either side of the hallway were ordinary blue painted drywall. There was a desk immediately to the left inside the door.

“Good afternoon, I am Dr. Celia Carrera. Welcome to our facility.” The woman was slim and nearly six foot tall. Her hair and eyes were both a dark brown. “I understand you are Americans, here to see Mr. Chappa, is that correct?”

“Yes, thank you.” Schaefer replied. He introduced himself, Wyatt and Wanda.

Dr. Carrera led them down the main hall. As they walked they noticed two large rooms opening off the main hall, one left and one right. The one on the right held a variety of exercise equipment and the one on the left, with a gray cement floor, held an assortment of couches, armchairs and book shelves.

“Ah,” Dr. Carrera said, following their gaze, “these are our recreation rooms. All this front area here,” the waving of her hands took in the recreation rooms and the main hallway, “was once the open courtyard of the old fortress. When Emil bought this place he had the workers pour cement across the whole courtyard and build these rooms. It was much easier and cheaper than renovating other parts of this place.”

“Emil?” Schaefer asked.

“Oh. Yes. Dr. Emil Sangko. This place is his dream. He raised the funds necessary, redesigned it and runs it. He will be very disappointed he missed you. He is away this week. He loves to show off the facility. He recruited me in Mexico to come work here. It is a wonderful place to work.”

At the end of the main hallway everyone passed through a stone archway. Here the hall curved slightly left and stairs led up to the right. Somewhere behind them it had become obvious they had moved into the actual fortress itself. It was gloomier here and electrical conduit ran along the ceiling tacked into the old stone in a variety of ways. The conduit ran from one set of fluorescent lights to another, but there was not nearly enough to lift the heavy dreary feeling of the hall they were now moving down. To the right stone stairs led up. To the left a little further ahead was an old crumbling door. A sign hung on the door, “Do Not Enter”.

“Oh, that.” Dr. Carrera said, noticing how the sign drew everyone’s gaze. “That leads down into the lower level. They actually had dungeons down there. Anyway, we don’t use that area. It’s too damp and musty. We tried storing stuff down there, but what the mold didn’t ruin the vermin chewed up.”

As they stood there a bulky, dark haired man came down the stairs.

"Ah, Abdul, where is Stanley?"

"Upstairs." Abdul answered, jerking his thumb back up the stairs.

"Will you ask him to meet us in Mr. Chappa's room, please?" Dr. Carrera asked him.

"Yes, ma'am." Abdul disappeared back up the stairs.

"This way please." Dr. Carrera led them up the stairs to the right. There were several doors along a hallway. She led them past a couple of doors. She stopped, tapped lightly and walked into a small room. There was a small arched window with bars on it, a table with a bowl of water and a towel, a couple of chairs and a cot in the corner. On the cot lay a man staring straight up at the ceiling.

Wanda started filming as Dr. Carrera eased up to the man on the cot. She was about to say something when the door to room opened and a slightly balding man in a white suit walked in.

"Ah, Stanley, these people are here to talk to our guest, Mr. Chappa." Dr. Carrera said.

"Did they get permission from Emil?" Stanley asked.

"Uh...I don't know." Dr. Carrera said.

Dr. Schaefer stepped up to Stanley extending his hand. "I am Dr. Jackson Schaefer. We are here about the pteranodons. Mr. Talim said it would be alright."

Stanley made a face at the mention of Talim's name, but it was obvious that it meant something. He slowly took Schaefer's hand. "Stanley James. I am the Administrator for this facility."

"We promise to be brief." Schaefer said.

Stanley stepped back with a wave.

"Mr. Chappa?" Dr. Carrera asked turning back to the man on the cot. "These people would like to ask you a couple of questions. Would that be OK?"

Chappa mumbled something incoherent. He waved a hand like he was trying wave a fly away.

Schaefer stepped next to the bed. He leaned over Chappa.

"My name is Dr. Schaefer. I understand you saw something in the forest." Schaefer said. Chappa didn't respond.

Schaefer looked over at Dr. Carrera. "He understands English, right?"

Dr. Carrera nodded. "Yes. He understands. But the staff feels that he struggles maintaining a grip on reality. It's why, we think, he found his way here. For help."

Wyatt watched Chappa's eyes. They seemed to drift to Schaefer and then away.

"Sir, do you remember seeing something in the forest? Something large? Like a lizard, perhaps?" Schaefer asked.

Chappa mumbled something again and rocked a little from side to side.

This seemed like a waste of time, Wyatt thought. In addition, Wyatt had a suspicion that Chappa was avoiding answering Schaefer. He reached out and put a hand on Schaefer's shoulder. Schaefer looked back at Wyatt.

"Excuse me, Doctor." Wyatt moved next to the bed. "I think the only way Mr. Chappa here will be of any help to us is if we bring him along so he can identify the creatures when we find them."

"What?" Dr. Carrera asked.

"Uh..." Stanley started to say.

"No! No!" Chappa said, very clearly.

Wyatt nodded. "Then maybe, Mr. Chappa, you could tell us what you saw and we will be on our way."

"It was...it was demons. Beaks and claws. Wings. Killing everyone. All the way. Should never have gone there." Chappa spit out.

"Where?" Wyatt asked. "Where did you see these demons?"

Chappa flailed an arm towards the window. "In the mountains. But...but they chased me all the way."

"What mountains?" Wyatt asked. "I thought we were already in the mountains."

"He must mean the higher ridges to the east." Stanley said, pointing towards the window.

Wyatt looked over at Schaefer. "I guess we are headed east." He said.

Schaefer nodded.

They had driven another hour to the east when they came to a village. Johan and Schaefer climbed out to talk to some the villagers. Talim and Captain Seto joined them. It took some a concerted effort to get anyone to answer their door and talk. They seemed to be afraid to even open the door a little.

Wyatt and Wanda sat in the jeep.

"I thought the airport in full sun was hot, but this.." Wyatt wiped sweat from his face.

"Yeah. The jungle is worse. Not much air movement here." Wanda said. "So, how close did you get to that creature in New York?"

"Mostly from a distance." Wyatt said. "A couple of close calls trying to navigate through the city."

"Are all the OSO guys zoologists?" Wanda asked.

Wyatt shook his head. "No. Only me. I am the newest member of the OSO. The Director thought it would be useful to have someone with my background in the OSO. Honestly, I haven't been able to utilize my knowledge very much."

"Why not?" Wanda asked.

Wyatt laughed a little. "Because most all of the creatures we deal with are aberrations. They aren't part of any standard evolutionary line."

"But these creatures from Z Land are dinosaurs, right? No wait, you said they were flying reptiles." Wanda said.

"Well, from the descriptions it sounds like these are pteranodons, but the truth is, we aren't really sure if they are genuine pteranodons. You see, from the files I have read, Zeitner was doing some pretty extensive experimentation. These may be similar to pteranodons, but modified in some."

"Modified? How? In what way?" Wanda asked

Wyatt shrugged. "Don't know. That's part of what I am supposed to find out."

Johan and Schaefer returned to the jeep.

"Have these people seen the pteranodons?" Wyatt asked.

Schaefer nodded. "It's safe to say they have. They are terrified."

"Any ideas on where we go from here?" Wyatt asked.

"Up. Further up." Schaefer answered.

"So the pteranodons are at the top?" Wyatt flapped his shirt a little to try to cool off.

"No. They say the pteranodons are here. They say the forest has grown quiet. Everything has fled. But we need to find the nests. So, higher up." Schaefer said waving at the steep slope rising in front of them.

Another slow bouncing hour of driving brought the jeeps into what was supposed to be the village of Tiqua. What it actually looked like was hard to describe. Everyone slowly got out of the jeeps.

"My God." Talim said quietly as he walked forward.

"Whoa." Derek said in awe.

Wanda fumbled around with her camera and started getting footage of the devastation.

"I knew people that lived here." Johan said quietly.

It took a moment to grasp that there had been a village here. There was not a single building still standing. The debris of what was once the homes of people was shattered. The village of Tiqua had been nestled in the forest, but even the trees and foliage were shredded.

Captain Seto had ordered his men to watch the sky above, but the thick canopy prevented most of the sky from being seen.

Everyone, except Yovan and Anto, the two local helpers, walked tentatively forward. Yovan and Anto looked around nervously and did not leave the side of the jeep. Johan also remained at the jeeps. He just stood staring at the former village of Tiqua, remembering the people that he had known there.

"Ahhh!" Cass jumped back and stared with horror at the ground. Wyatt and Derek stepped over to her. On the ground where she pointed were bones. The smashed skull was clearly human.

"Is...is that..." Cass stammered.

"It was." Wyatt said. He slid a .45 out of his backpack.

"You think they are here?" Wanda almost whispered the question.

"I..." Wyatt hesitated. Something was bothering him. He looked up at the trees above them. He took several steps forward.

"Dr. Schaefer." Wyatt said.

Schaefer turned. "Yes, Jonathon?"

Wyatt indicated the trees. "That's a pretty heavy canopy."

Schaefer glanced up a little puzzled. "Yes. I guess it is."

"Pteranodons?" Wyatt asked.

"Hmm, you're right." Schaefer said. "That's odd."

"Whoa check this out. A pteranodon footprint." Derek said kneeling down.

Wyatt and Schaefer came over to stand next to Derek. They both looked at the clear print in the soft earth.

"Uh," Schaefer said slowly, "that doesn't look like I would expect a pteranodon print to look like."

"It looks...too deep." Wyatt said staring at it.

"Oh, now you *are* an expert in paleontology." Derek said sarcastically looking up at Wyatt.

"He's right Derek." Schaefer said. "I would expect the pteranodons to have a light frame. This looks like something heavier."

Wyatt looked up at the trees. "And I don't see pteranodons getting down through this canopy."

Derek stood up. "That looks like a bird print to me."

"Therapod prints would look like birds as well." Schaefer said.

"So maybe a second type of dinosaur?" Wyatt asked.

Schaefer shrugged. "Maybe."

"One that doesn't come from the sky." Wyatt commented. Glancing over Wyatt could see Captain Seto and his soldiers carefully watching the tree tops.

"Captain." Wyatt called out. He pointed at the forest. "Watch the jungle."

Seto pointed up at the trees and then at the jungle around them. His expression was clearly a question of 'What the hell? Make up your mind.'

Wyatt shrugged. "Sorry. Look everywhere."

Captain Seto sighed and turned to his men to explain.

"I think these are just desperate pteranodons. I think they are finding it harder to find food. That's all. I think we are getting close to the nests." Derek said.

Wyatt shook his head. "I don't think so. I think there is something else going on here."

They all walked further into what was once the village. Wyatt noticed Cass and Talim hanging back behind the group. Wanda noticed it as well and walked back to Cass.

Wyatt joined them.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

"There's bones...everywhere." Cass stammered.

Wyatt glanced around. "Yeah. There are a lot of bones scattered around. I don't think anybody survived this. Maybe you guys should hang back here for now."

Wanda shook her head. "I need to film this." She looked over at Cass.

"I will stay with her." Talim volunteered. It was obvious he wasn't keen on venturing any further into the devastation either.

"Hey. What was that?" Wanda said looking past Wyatt's shoulder.

Wyatt turned back towards the rest of the village. "What?"

Wanda stared for another minute past Captain Seto, his soldiers, Schaefer and Derek as they walked forward.

"I'm...not sure. I thought I saw something moving in the forest." Wanda said.

Wyatt stared at the jungle foliage. He didn't see anything. He wasn't sure if Wanda was just seeing things because she was nervous or if something really was watching them. He was suddenly feeling that they were very vulnerable here. That Captain Seto and his soldiers were not sufficient protection. He was about to suggest that they not get too far apart and maybe even move back towards the jeeps when one of the soldiers suddenly started firing into the forest. A second soldier opened fire and Seto quickly ran over to them and shouted for them to stop.

"What were they shooting at?" Derek yelled over to Seto.

Seto shrugged. He was clearly annoyed at his men. He had deployed his men so that two, the two that had opened fire, were walking along the edge of the forest while the other two were flanking Schaefer and Derek as they moved through what would have been the center of the village.

"We should leave." Wyatt said. Quietly at first and then repeated it louder for everyone to hear.

"Oh, come on. Be man and—" Derek started.

One of the soldiers walking along the forest's edge screamed and disappeared. Everyone stared at the spot, but there was hardly any movement of foliage to indicate anything had happened. For a moment no one moved. Then Seto jumped forward and yelled at the other soldier at the jungle's edge. He ordered him to look for his partner. The soldier hesitated. Seto took a threatening step towards the soldier. With slow nervous steps the soldier reluctantly eased into the jungle.

A quiet moment passed and there was a muffled sound. A voice maybe. Then nothing. Everyone stood frozen for a moment more.

"We need to get out of here." Wyatt called out.

"Captain Seto!" Talim yelled. "He is right, we need to leave. Now."

Seto, pistol in hand, waved his men and Schaefer and Derek back towards the vehicles. For a brief instant there was hesitation on the part of both Schaefer and Derek, but they complied.

They were nearly back to the vehicles when Yovan cried out something in his native language. He pointed across the village.

Everyone turned to stare at the thing that had emerged from the far side of the village area. It was moving rapidly towards them.

"What the hell...?" Derek said.

"I...think that's a Phorusrhacid. Or something like it." Schaefer stood staring at the oncoming creature.

"A what?" Wanda asked.

"A terror bird. Wow." Derek said. "Look at it. It must 8 feet tall."

"I think it's what killed all these people. We need to run." Wyatt said pushing Wanda and Cass towards the jeeps.

As if a dam broke everyone turned and ran to the vehicles. It was a mad scramble as everyone climbed aboard the nearest vehicle. Seto took a couple of shots at the bird and ordered his remaining two soldiers to do the same. One turned and fired two wild shots. The other soldier ignored Seto and dove into the station wagon.

The gun shots seemed to slow the bird down, but didn't stop it. The bird was clearly uncertain what to make of the loud noises, but it did recognize the people as potential prey.

The sound of the engines of the jeeps and station wagon did stop the bird. It stood about 40 feet from the vehicles cocking its head at the engine noise. As the vehicles turned around the bird took a step back. It was obvious the bird had never seen a car before and was trying to determine if it was a threat or not. Adding to the puzzlement of the bird was the fact that it could clearly see the people, each one a potentially tasty meal, inside the vehicles.

Somehow Schaefer had ended up behind the wheel of the station wagon. He had gotten the station wagon partially turned around, but saw that the bird had stopped charging. Curiosity now took hold. He sat with the engine idling staring at the bird, totally fascinated. Unfortunately, the position of the station wagon, perpendicular to the rutted dirt trail they had driven up, completely prevented the jeeps from going anywhere.

Talim, now driving one of the jeeps began honking his horn. This spooked the bird with the first blast into jumping backwards, but subsequent horn honking did not frighten the bird away. A full minute more of this stand off passed and then a second bird appeared from the jungle foliage. Then a third.

Derek, behind the wheel of the other jeep, now joined in with his own horn honking. Schaefer seemed to wake up from his study of the birds and got the station wagon turned down the rutted trail. The jeeps quickly followed.

This now was behavior the birds recognized. Prey running away. And they knew just what to do. They bolted after the vehicles in wild pursuit.

The rough and rugged trail through the forest that they had slowly crawled along on the way to the village was now a bone bruising crazy ride. People bounced all around inside the vehicles. Despite the sense that they were flying along, the vehicles could do little more than 30 miles per hour. It was as fast as the drivers could go and still stay mostly on the trail and not go careening off into the jungle.

It quickly became obvious that 30 miles per hour was well within the maximum speed of the birds. They caught up to the jeep in the back. Derek was driving, Johan was in the passenger seat. Wanda and Anto were being tossed around in the back seat. The birds ran up alongside the jeep. Their big eyes studied the people inside.

At first Wanda didn't realize the bird was next to her. She was so busy trying to anchor herself in some way from bouncing all around that she wasn't looking out the open side of the jeep. When she did glance over she let out a scream.

Anto, like Wanda had been focused on not being tossed out of the jeep, but at Wanda's scream he looked over at her and then past her. Instinctively he looked to his left out his side of the jeep. He screamed too. A bird was pacing the jeep there as well. An instant later, with a second scream, Anto was snatched out of the jeep and both he and the bird disappeared into the jungle along the trail.

At Wanda's scream Wyatt, in the passenger seat of the other jeep, twirled around. He spotted the birds alongside the jeep in the back. While he watched he saw Anto's body pulled from the jeep and held in the beak of the bird.

"Damn it!" Wyatt said.

"What?" Talim yelled as struggled to keep the jeep on the grassy tracks of the trail.

"Keep us on the road. Keep it as steady as you can." Wyatt said and gripping the frame of the jeep he swung himself around so he was facing backwards hanging outside of the jeep.

"What are you doing?" Cass yelled from the back seat. She had her arms wrapped around Yovan's arm while he was bracing himself as best he could.

"My job." Wyatt yelled back. He aimed, which in the bouncing jeep was pointing in a general direction, his .45 and fired twice at the bird still pacing alongside the back jeep. Neither shot found the bird. Mainly because he was trying to make sure that if he did miss the bird the shot went wide of the jeep and not into it.

Wyatt was taking aim again when something out of the corner of his eye caught his attention. At the last second he ducked into the jeep as a bird emerged out of the forest next to his jeep and snapped at him. With one hand still gripping the frame of the jeep and kneeling on the seat Wyatt fired twice point blank into the bird. The bird went down in a cart wheel. The dead bird forced the second jeep to swerve slightly to avoid the body which, ironically, saved Wanda. The jeep had veered enough that the bird trying to snatch Wanda missed her.

Wyatt leaned back out of the jeep. He took aim. This time he thought it through better. He aimed lower. At the body of the bird. Not only was it a larger target, but if he missed he would probably only hit the headlight of the jeep. It took him three shots, but he finally dropped the bird.

Wyatt was about to yell his accomplishment back into the jeep's occupants when suddenly he was flying through the air watching the jeep he had been in moving backwards away from him. A moment later he slammed down on to the ground. He felt the wind get knocked out of him. He gasped for air. His eyes darted about looking for a giant bird to suddenly be looming over him.

A minute passed and Wanda's face appeared over his.

"Are you alright, Jonathon?" Wanda asked. She rested a hand on his chest.

"Birds." Wyatt whispered.

"You killed them. That was amazing." Wanda said.

Wyatt shook his head. "Probably...more."

"Oh, I don't think you could have done more." Wanda said.

Wyatt forced himself up to a sitting position. "Probably...more...birds."

"Oh." Wanda said, suddenly glancing all around. "Right."

Wyatt glanced at his hand. "Where's my gun?"

Wanda shook her head. "I don't know."

"Damn." Wyatt said. "That will have to come out of my expenses."

Wanda helped Wyatt to his feet. Wyatt turned to see the station wagon had swerved too far off the trail and had struck a tree. The rear of the station wagon stuck out across the trail and blocked the jeeps from getting past it. Schaefer was standing next to the driver's side door staring at the vehicle. He seemed to be a little stunned. Seto sat with the passenger door open and the two soldiers still sat, presumably hiding, in the back seat.

"They need to get out of the car and we need to get it out of the way." Wyatt said waving towards the station wagon.

Talim had tentatively gotten out of the jeep, but he still stood next to the driver side door nervously watching all around him.

Wyatt took a couple of steps towards the station wagon and then stopped. He turned back to look at Wanda.

"Get in the jeep." Wyatt pointed at the jeep he had been riding in. "Don't stay out in the open."

"But you..." Wanda started to say.

"Wanda, stay in the jeep." Wyatt said and headed up to the station wagon.

"Come on. Get out of there." Wyatt said to the soldiers. They didn't move and just stared at him.

Wyatt looked at Seto who seemed a little confused. "Captain. Get your men out. We need them to cover us while we push this vehicle out of the way."

It took Seto a moment to process what Wyatt was saying, but he got it. He jumped up and yelled at his men. Reluctantly they climbed out of the car. Seto slapped their rifles and gave them a shove, one forward and one backward. They moved slowly and pointed their rifles in one direction, then another.

Johan was suddenly next to Wyatt. With a glance back to the second jeep Wyatt could see Derek still sitting behind the wheel. He didn't seem inclined to get out. Wyatt and Johan were joined at the front of the station wagon by Seto. After a moment of shaking Schaefer out of his shock they got him behind the wheel of the station wagon to steer it. It took them a couple of tries, but they got the station wagon far enough off the trail to clear a path for the jeeps to get past.

They were down to the two jeeps and it was going to be a tight fit. Johan took his seat in the jeep with Derek with the two soldiers and Seto crammed into the back. Schaefer squeezed in with Cass and Yovan. Wanda had been sitting in the passenger seat that Wyatt had been in. She started to get out, but Wyatt stopped her. He slid on to the edge of the passenger seat and just pulled Wanda on to his lap.

There was some rustling in foliage along the trail.

"Let's get going." Wyatt said.

Talim needed no encouragement. He started the jeep up and once again went as fast as possible without seriously injuring anyone in the now tightly packed jeep.

As early evening slowly descended the jeeps rounded a wide curve and saw the old stone walls of the mental hospital. Several times on the remainder of the drive Wyatt thought he had seen movement in the surrounding forest, but they were not attacked any further by the birds.

The jeeps came to a stop in the gravel parking lot of the hospital in the dimming light. Everyone piled out, thankful to be free from the cramped bumpy ride. Talim quickly went to the door of the hospital and banged loudly. Everyone else wandered about stretching and groaning. The scream shocked everyone.

Wyatt spun around in time to see a bird dragging one of the soldiers into the jungle. Another bird appeared and targeted Yovan. He turned and sprinted. Under such conditions it was obvious that Yovan could move very fast, but an instant later it became apparent that no matter how fast a human was, the birds were far faster. A bird caught Yovan in a few quick strides and dropped him with a quick swipe of its massive and impressive beak.

In a wave of panic almost everyone bolted for the door that was only now just being answered by the old caretaker, Copi. Wyatt saw two more birds appear at the edge of the parking lot.

"Damn it." Wyatt said. He took a moment to judge his chances and then ran to where the soldier had been snatched. He scooped up the man's rifle. He had just enough time to drop to one knee and shoot a bird bearing down on him. At 10 feet the rifle drove the bullet right through the center of the bird and dropped it in mid stride.

"Jonathon!" Wanda yelled from the door. Almost everyone was now inside, but Wanda hovered just outside the door.

Wyatt waved at her. "Get inside. I'm coming." Wyatt saw another bird start towards him. He stood up, backing quickly and snapped off a shot. It missed the bird, wide right, but the sound of the shot made the bird slow down.

When Wyatt was just outside the door of the hospital he felt a hand grab the back of his shirt and pull him inside. He turned around to see Wanda, still gripping his shirt.

"What were you doing?" Wanda asked, clearly pissed.

"Buying time." Wyatt said. "And I think we might need this." He held up the rifle.

"Don't do shit like that." Wanda said sharply and then seemed suddenly uncomfortable at the emotion in her voice.

Wyatt gave her a quick smile and put a hand on her shoulder. "It kind of goes with the job."

"Is this that *running* part of your job?" Wanda asked.

"Yeah. This is the running part of it." Wyatt said.

"Your job kind of sucks." Wanda said.

"Yeah. We get that a lot." Wyatt said with a shrug.

"Were you expected?" Copi asked.

Talim looked straight at Copi. "No. We weren't expected. We were trying not to get killed by giant man eating birds."

Copi nodded, his wrinkled old face the picture of calm. "It's always best, sir, if you make an appointment."

Talim started to say something, but Schaefer cut him off.

"Could you let Dr. Carrera know we need to talk to her immediately. And we need to use your telephone." Schaefer said.

"Certainly, sir." Copi said and headed further into the old fortress.

"Are you OK?" Derek asked trying to put an arm around Cass.

Cass took a step back avoiding Derek's embrace. "A little late to worry about me now."

"What? What's wrong?" Derek asked.

Dr. Carrera appeared with Copi following her.

"Oh my, you people look like you have been through hell." Carrera said.

"That's an understatement." Wanda said.

"The telephone?" Captain Seto said stepping forward.

Copi shook his head slowly. "I am sorry sir. The telephone is not working."

"Not working?" Talim said.

"It often happens." Copi said.

"A fine time for it to stop working." Seto said with a disgusted wave.

"What has brought you back in such a state?" Carrera asked.

"Birds." Talim said.

"Birds?" Carrera looked around at them.

"Big birds." Talim said.

"Like man eating birds." Derek added.

"We don't have man eating birds here." Carrera said firmly.

"You do now." Wyatt said.

"Well," Carrera said in an irritated voice, "I will need to speak to someone from the government about that."

"That would be him." Schaefer said pointing at Talim.

"Oh, right." Carrera said.

"Trust me madam, the government is now fully aware of the man eating birds." Talim said.

"We need to get my soldiers up here. We will wipe these creatures out." Seto said firmly.

"Maybe." Wyatt said skeptically. "If you can find them. In the thick jungle. Before they find you."

Seto was about to say something and then seemed to start thinking more about the challenge of hunting the birds down. He glanced at Wyatt and then quietly walked away.

"Come," Carrera said waving everyone to follow, "come into our dining area. You can rest and get something to eat and drink."

"Sir?" Johan said stepping around Seto. He seemed to be half talking to Schaefer and half towards Wyatt.

"Yes?" Schaefer answered.

"I think someone should try to get down the mountain and find some help." Johan said.

"What do you mean?" Schaefer asked.

"You mean take a jeep down to the town?" Wyatt asked.

"Yes sir." Johan said.

"With those birds out there?" Schaefer asked.

Wyatt turned to Schaefer. "What do you know about those birds?"

"Uh, a little, I guess." Schaefer answered tentatively.

"Since they were out in the daytime, can we assume they are not nocturnal?" Wyatt asked.

Schaefer seemed to be working through his memory. "They hunt by vision, I believe the prevailing theory has it, but, you're right, they were out during the day so I would think they do not necessarily have great vision at night."

"But you don't know?" Talim asked.

"No. Not for certain." Schaefer admitted.

"I believe I can make it." Johan said. "I know these roads."

Schaefer looked skeptical.

"It may be worth a try." Wyatt said to Schaefer and then turned to Johan. "Are you sure you want to try this?"

"Yes sir." Johan said.

"OK." Wyatt said. "Let's go."

"You're going too?" Wanda asked and reached a hand out gently grabbing Wyatt's arm.

"No." Wyatt said. "I'm just going to make sure Johan gets out of the parking lot."

"Not by yourself." Wanda said. She turned to Captain Seto. "You need to go with Jonathon."

Seto looked puzzled. "Jonathon?"

"Him." Wanda pointed at Wyatt.

"Oh. Well...madam, you see..." Seto hesitated. He was clearly shaken by the events of the day.

"Don't madam me!" Wanda said. "You're the military."

"She is right." Talim stepped in. "It is your job, Captain."

Seto sighed and slid his pistol out of its holster. He yelled at his men to grab their rifles and follow him. He waved at Wyatt and Johan to proceed.

Wyatt pulled the door open and glanced out into the parking area. There was one weak light outside the door that cast a dim glow around the area immediately in front of the door. Wyatt slipped out the door followed by Seto and the soldiers. All of them held their guns ready. Johan came out behind them. The parking area seemed empty. Wyatt and Seto moved to the back of the jeep while the soldiers remained on either side and Johan slid into the driver's seat.

When Johan started the jeep up there was squawking from the jungle across the parking area and a shaking of some of the foliage, but no birds appeared. Wyatt kept his rifle trained on the area where the noise came from, but saw nothing. Johan backed the jeep around and pulled out of the parking area without incident. Wyatt and a very relieved Seto and the two soldiers eased back into the old fortress.

"You are the bravest guy I have ever seen." Cass said to Wyatt, finally finding her voice. Wyatt looked a little uncomfortable.

"Oh, please." Derek said disgustedly.

"Well, the truth is, I don't know how much bravery there is in it. Some things just need to be done and it's best to not think too much about it. Otherwise...well, it doesn't get any easier if you start thinking a lot on the task at hand." Wyatt said.

"This way." Carrera said leading everyone down the hall and into a larger room. She turned to Copi. "Please find Abdul and see if he can find some food for these people."

"Yes madam." Copi said and disappeared further into the building.

“Do you think he’ll make it?” Wanda asked looking across the table at Wyatt.

“Johan? There’s a decent chance he will.” Wyatt answered nibbling a little at the food in front of him. Something was nagging at him.

“I hope so. I’m afraid.” Cass said. She too only picked at her food. She had just had a scene with Derek when he tried once again to hang around her. She seemed to be thoroughly disgusted with him now and just wanted to go home. Derek sat at another table sulking and giving Wyatt very unpleasant looks.

“I think it’s just a matter of waiting now.” Wyatt said. He was still distracted and finally stood up. “I need to go talk to that Chappa guy.”

“I’ll go with you.” Wanda said standing up.

Wyatt shook his head. “Stay with Cass.”

Wanda hesitated and then recognized that Cass was struggling with everything that had gone on. This definitely wasn’t what she was expecting.

Wyatt went over and spoke to Dr. Carrera. She nodded and got up from her table and they walked out of the dining room.

“You think there’s something he isn’t telling us?” Carrera asked as she unlocked the door to his room.

Wyatt nodded. “I do.”

They walked in. Chappa sat up and watched Wyatt carefully.

Wyatt walked over to the bed. “Mr. Chappa, why did you come here?”

“I...thought I was going crazy. Seeing things.” Chappa said staring down at the bed sheet covering him.

“You were seeing things. Real things. You didn’t come here because you thought you were going crazy. You came here because it’s a fortress.” Wyatt said.

“Mr. Wyatt, I would ask that you—” Carrera started to say.

Wyatt held a hand up to stop her. “Tell me about the birds.” Wyatt stared down at Chappa.

Chappa looked away. “I don’t know anything about—”

“Mr. Chappa, you said you should never have gone there. We thought you meant the mountains, but that’s not what you were talking about. You meant the island. You went to the island.” Wyatt said.

Chappa shook his head quickly. “No. No.”

“That island is off limits. For everyone. Mr. Chappa, I have the authority to have you extradited to the United States.” Wyatt said.

“Mr. Wyatt!” Carrera said.

"I think he is right." Wyatt and Carrera turned to see Talim standing in the doorway. "I believe, based on the credentials I was shown, he could have this man arrested and flown to the United States."

"No!" Chappa cried. "It wasn't me. I was just supposed to help at the dock."

"The dock?" Carrera asked.

"Someone brought those terror birds here from the island." Wyatt said. "The pteranodons flew from the island, but those birds can't fly and they can't swim. They were brought over here."

"But why?" Talim asked.

Wyatt looked back at Chappa. "Money."

Chappa nodded. "They brought them to the docks, in Talalua, just south of here. We were going to be paid well to transfer them to another boat."

"Who was paying you?" Wyatt asked.

Chappa shrugged. "Don't know. Someone said they were from another country."

"But they got away." Wyatt prompted.

Chappa nodded again. "Yes. They...killed many men and disappeared. It was night and they went through the town and on into the hills beyond."

"How many got away?" Wyatt asked.

Chappa shook his head. "I don't know. It was dark. Maybe a dozen. Maybe more."

"How long ago was this?" Wyatt asked.

"Two months, maybe three." Chappa answered.

"And you didn't tell anyone?" Talim asked.

Chappa shook his head. "We were told to go get them. They gave us more money and weapons. We went into the mountains. We searched for a week, maybe longer." He waved a hand towards the window.

"And you found them?" Wyatt asked.

Chappa looked at Wyatt and shook his head slowly. "No sir. They found us."

"How many men did you have?" Wyatt asked.

"20 or 30." Chappa said.

Wyatt studied Chappa. "Mr. Chappa, where are the rest of the men?"

Chappa didn't answer. He just stared down at the bed sheet and shook his head a little.

"Oh my god." Carrera said quietly.

Wyatt sighed. "It's why the island is off limits. Everything on it is deadly."

"We have maintained a strict quarantine." Talim said quickly. "We are doing just as the United Nations Security Council ordered."

Wyatt turned to face Talim. "This man is to remain in custody. Understand?"

Talim nodded. "Yes."

The three of them left Chappa alone in his room and Carrera locked the door behind them. They walked back in silence to the dining room.

Johan was surprised to get out of parking area of the hospital without encountering any of the birds. He had already determined he would try to run it over with the jeep if one did block his way out on to the rough gravel road, but none did. He was almost disappointed. He had lived in this area his whole life and something inside of him took it personally that now he was afraid to be here.

Johan switched the lights of the jeep on as he headed down the road. He knew it would take him a couple of hours to get back down to the main road and even longer in the dark. Despite knowing the road fairly well the jungle at night seen through the two tunnels of headlights seemed to take on a very different look than in the light of day.

For the first hour that Johan worked his way back down the mountain he was nervous and ever vigilant for any sudden attacks from the birds, but he started wondering if maybe the birds didn't come down this far out of the high country. He thought about that some. The best food those birds could find would be lower down in the valleys. Livestock and people were plentiful there. No, Johan thought, they must not hunt at night. Lucky for him.

The road was getting less steep and curvy the further down he went, which was good, but he paid a price for that. The road lower down, because of the heavy rains, tended to get washed away. At the very least there were deep ruts gouged in long angling lines for stretches of roadway. There was nothing he could do, but slowly bounce along.

Suddenly something seemed to leap out of the forest directly in front of the windshield of the jeep. It happened so fast Johan jerked the wheel in panic, certain one of the birds was trying to yank him out from behind the wheel. The jeep swerved right, drove part way up an embankment and then slowly rolled back down on to the road, ending up laying on it's side.

Johan thumped into the gravel that now comprised what used to be the driver side door, though there was never an actual door there to start with. The jeep was wrapped around him. He glanced up at the opening that was the passenger side door. In the dim glow from the headlights, which still shone on the road ahead, he could see what had jumped out of the forest. The two round eyes of a sugar glider stared back down at him from a nearby tree.

"Damn." Johan said as he climbed up and out through the passenger side of the jeep. He walked around the jeep looking at it. The tires were pointed towards the embankment. Even if he had the strength to tip the jeep up there was no way he would have been able to stand it back up in that direction.

Johan went around to the front of the jeep thinking that maybe he could use the winch on the front to right the jeep in some fashion, but he immediately saw that wasn't

going to work. No cable was wound around the winch. Someone had long since removed it for some other purpose.

Johan sighed. He had a rough idea of how far he was from the main road. By his calculation, walking the rest of the way down would add about four more hours on to his journey. He glanced around at the dark jungle. He knew the jungle here well and it didn't bother him to be out here at night. Especially since it didn't appear that the terror birds were not out at night.

What did worry Johan was how much longer it would take him now to get help to the people back at the hospital. He needed to get moving. He could make a call from the airport which wasn't too far down the main road, once he got to the main road. He pushed a swathe of his black hair back started walking down the road.

It didn't take him very long to walk beyond the light of the jeep's headlights, but fortunately there was a partial moon out that gave just enough light to distinguish the difference between the road and jungle foliage.

Time passed as Johan walked on. More time than Johan realized. He had underestimated not only where he had flipped the jeep, but also the pace at which he was moving. In the dim gray light of the early morning hours he recognized that he was not that far from where the road he was on emerged from the forest. From that point it was no more than a mile to the main road.

Sounds began to creep into his thoughts. He was accustomed to the many different sounds of the forest, but this was something that seemed out of place for this time of day. It was a steady rustling of brush from somewhere behind him and off the road. He stopped several times to study the still shadowy road behind him, but saw nothing.

Finally, with the increasing daylight, Johan emerged from the forest. The land leveled off and both sides of the road opened up into farm fields. The sun was still hidden behind the mountains to the east, but there was plenty of light to see now.

Johan walked on. He wondered about the sounds that he had been hearing in the forest, but only now, with the jungle a half mile behind him did he glance back. He didn't see anything. There was no place for something to hide so that comforted him. In addition, he could see in the distance the airport.

When he reached the main road, for some reason he looked back again at the forest and, while he was watching, he saw someone step out on to the road. That's odd, he thought, who would have been following him down the road. He wondered if it was one of the people that he had left back at the hospital. He waited for a moment, unsure of what to do. Should he wait here for the person or press on to the airport?

While he watched the person he saw that he or she started running up the road towards him. Wow, he thought, that person is pretty fast. Then it struck him. Not a person. A big bird. In an instant Johan bolted down the main road.

Johan glanced back once and saw that the bird was gaining on him. He studied the distance to the airport. He had a sinking feeling he wasn't going to make it. Minutes passed and another glance back told Johan he wasn't going to make to the airport building in time.

He was running along the road. Next to him ran a fence. It had been put up to keep animals from wandering out on to the runway. Johan realize he could shorten his distance to the airport building if climbed the fence and cut across the runway. He recognized it was probably the only way he would have a chance of surviving this.

Johan veered right and, showing some nice gymnastic moves, flipped himself over the fence. He ended up rolling a little on the ground, but a moment later he was up and running again. He felt like the fence would slow the bird down anyway while it tried to figure out how to get over it.

After covering a grassy stretch Johan ventured a look back. He was shocked to see that the bird had easily leaped the fence was closing in on him. His heart sank. Even cutting across the runway wasn't going to save him. He could hear the thumping of the birds feet now.

He was now out on to the gravel of the runway, but he was slowing down. He was incredibly winded and, because he knew he wasn't going to make, he was giving up. He was sure it was only seconds now.

Suddenly there was a roaring sound to his left. He glanced over and saw a plane landing. The plane was touching down and it raced up to Johan. He was right in the path of the right propeller. He reacted without thinking and dove to the ground. His momentum caused him to roll on the ground which was good because he just missed getting run over by one of the wheels.

The next sounds he heard were crazy. There was a wild screech, a hideous chunking and that was followed by groaning metal. Johan was laying on the ground staring towards the airport building and while he watched the wing on that side of the plane flew up into the air. It was an odd sight until Johan realized what had happened.

He rolled over and saw the blood and guts of the big bird splattered all over the runway. He just missed getting chopped up by the propeller, but the bird did not. The impact of hitting the bird had caused the wing on that side to get pulled down to the ground where it dug in causing the plane to flip over on to that side.

The plane slid a short distance and ground to a halt. Johan slowly stood up. He stared at the plane and the bloody mess spread all around the gravel. He could hear people shouting and running out of the airport. He knew he should be hurrying on to the airport to get help to the people still back in the old fortress as quickly as possible, but he found it hard to pull himself away from the scene of the dead bird and the thought that he was, in fact, still alive.

Wyatt walked back into the dining room. Wanda stood up and came over to him.

"Did you learn anything from that guy?" Wanda asked.

Wyatt nodded. "Yeah. Somebody paid him and some other guys to take the birds off the island."

"Oh, wow." Wanda thought for a moment. "Why would someone want those birds? They're awful things."

"I suspect there are countries that think they can use them as some kind of weapon. I don't know. In this world there is a wild scramble to keep coming up new and different weapons." Wyatt said.

"I guess." Wanda put a hand on Wyatt's arm. "Are you going to have to go after those guys?"

Wyatt looked at her like it was a strange question. "Go after them?"

Wanda nodded. "Yeah. You know. Because you're a G-Man, right?"

Wyatt laughed a little. He shook his head. "No. I am not that kind of G-Man. I investigate things and, while I do seem to get into some tight spots, it's not my job to go hunt down criminals. There are other agencies for that. Besides, there aren't any other guys left to go after."

"Did they all get away already?" Wanda asked.

Wyatt looked at her and shook his head. "No. I don't think any of them got away."

"Well, where—oh, the birds." Wanda said.

"Yeah." Wyatt acknowledged. "The birds."

"Well, maybe..." Wanda started to say when the lights went out and everyone was plunged into complete darkness.

There was a mix of voices, but Dr. Carrera's voice was raised above the noise.

"Everyone just hang on. We will have some light in just a moment. Don't move."

A match suddenly appeared and Wyatt came make out the face of Copi as he lit an oil lamp. Copi turned and saw Wyatt.

"It often happens." Copi said calmly.

He held the lamp out towards Wyatt and after Wyatt took that lamp from him Copi produced another lamp from somewhere behind him and lit that one.

"Stanley, can you take charge of finding rooms for everyone to sleep in for the night?" Carrera asked. "And where is Abdul?"

"Sure. I think Abdul said he thought he heard something and went to have a look. I can take care of getting everyone settled in somewhere." Stanley said and, taking one of the lamps began leading the people out into the hallway and then to some of the empty rooms. When Stanley had returned from taking Talim and Captain Seto to their room he approached Wyatt. Wyatt shook his head.

"You don't want a room to sleep in?" Stanley asked.

Wyatt shrugged. "I think I will rest in a chair out in the main hall."

Stanley looked puzzled. "But why? We have plenty of beds here. Truth is this place is far bigger than our needs would merit."

Wyatt smiled slightly. "I think I would feel better if I could keep an eye on things."

"You mean those creatures that were chasing you. Don't be silly Mr. Wyatt. This place is fortress, literally. They can't get in here." Stanley said with a wave of his hand.

Wanda, who had been hanging back from being led off to rooms, moved next to Wyatt. "You think those birds could get in here?"

Wyatt shook his head. "No. Not really. I think Mr. James is correct, it is highly unlikely that the birds could get in."

"So why the hallway?" Wanda asked.

"I would just feel better being centrally located. That's all." Wyatt said.

"Well, if you can do it, I can too." Wanda said.

"You don't need to do that. It won't be a very comfortable sleep. Besides, where is Cass? I thought you would need to be with her tonight. She seemed pretty shaken about the situation." Wyatt said.

"Cass is going to share a room with Dr. Carrera. I think she'll be OK. Don't worry about me. I've slept all over the place." Wanda hesitated. "Wait, that didn't come out right."

Wyatt laughed. "No, I don't think that did."

"I meant that I have done a number of different film projects that required me to sleep outside or in with foreign people that I couldn't even communicate with." Wanda said.

"OK, then." Stanley said with a shrug. "I will leave you two with this lantern to sort out your own sleeping arrangements."

"Thanks." Wyatt said taking the old lantern from Stanley. They all walked out of the dining room and into the hall. Stanley bid them goodnight and headed down the hall and up some stairs.

Wyatt pulled a couple of chairs together. He sat in one and put his feet up on the other one. He made sure he was facing in the direction of the front door. Wanda moved some magazines and medical literature to one end of a short rectangular table. She laid down on the table and rested her head on the magazines. She looked over at Wyatt and smiled.

After a minute Wanda turned on her side and rested on one elbow. "So...you guys...just go around investigating...like weird stuff?"

Wyatt gave a small shrug. "Yeah. I guess that's one way to describe it."

"This seems like, I don't know, something that the government of Indonesia should deal with. Why did they send you here? I mean, I'm glad they did, but..."

Wyatt sighed. "You heard about that giant ape in New York back in 1933, right?"

Wanda made a half hearted nod. "Well, I heard stories of it, but I think a lot of people these days think it was kind of exaggerated. You know how stories just get bigger over time. That's kind of why I got into documentaries. I like the idea of being able to show, on film, how things really are—not secondhand stories that can get crazier every time they are told.

Wyatt gave a short nod. "OK. I can see that. I think that's a good plan, but that giant ape—that was real. And, yes, it was really big."

"But you...you would have been too young to..." Wanda said, a little confused.

Wyatt shook his head. "Oh, no. I wasn't there, but that was the start of the OSO. President Roosevelt created the OSO to try to prevent such a thing from happening again. That's the OSO's mandate."

"Oh. So what does the OSO have to do with Z Land?" Wanda asked.

"Every member of the OSO, when they are first brought in, are told the story of Dr. Zeitner. It is mandatory. You see Zeitner and his work appeared shortly after the OSO was first formed." Wyatt said.

"I'm not familiar with this Zeitner character." Wanda said.

"He was a brilliant scientist. He was very gifted in understanding the basic structures of life. We didn't know just how advanced Zeitner was until more recently. We are only now beginning to understand how DNA works, but Zeitner evidently was able to build upon the work of Frederick Griffith's transfer of genetic material in 1928. Zeitner was able, though, to move well past that and into what Watson and Crick just recently determined was the structure of DNA." Wyatt explained.

"Am I supposed to be following all this or should I be taking notes?" Wanda asked with a smile.

Wyatt smiled back. "No. No notes. At the heart of this is that Zeitner was able to manipulate DNA in ways we still do not understand."

"So, he created things like the pteranodons and the terror birds? And then the OSO stopped him?" Wanda asked.

Wyatt hesitated. "We believe the answer to the first question is yes. The second question, well, that's more complicated. Kind of a long story, maybe for another time. The important thing here is that the OSO viewed Zeitner as its responsibility, stopping him and capturing him. In that regard, the OSO was only partially successful. The OSO eventually located this island," Wyatt waved off towards the west, "where Zeitner was and did stop what he was doing there, but Zeitner himself...his ultimate fate is not known. He is presumed dead since the appearance of the creatures he was creating stopped, but his body was never found."

"So the OSO stopped him. Well, that's a good thing, right?" Wanda said watching Wyatt's face.

Wyatt sighed. "Truth is, within the OSO, Dr. Zeitner is considered our first great task and a failure."

"A failure? Why? You guys stopped him." Wanda sat up.

"The OSO was new. It was a time of learning how to fulfill the mission. People were lost. Quite a few. The OSO didn't have the resources and authority it does today. In addition, much of Zeitner's research was never recovered. That information and knowledge is extremely dangerous and we have no idea where it ended up." Wyatt said.

Wanda was quiet for a moment. "OK. So, was the big ape one of Zeitner's creatures?"

Wyatt shrugged. "We don't know. There's some speculation that it was."

Wanda was about to say something when there was distant thump from somewhere. Both Wanda and Wyatt looked at each in a non-verbal confirmation that they both heard it.

"That sounded like it came from that way." Wanda said pointing down a hallway off the main hall that they had never gone down.

Wyatt gave a slow nod. "I don't recall anyone having gone down there. By my count, everyone should be upstairs."

"Right." Wanda said quietly.

There was another thump followed quickly by something that sounded like wood splintering.

Wyatt jumped up. He grabbed the rifle that leaned against the wall next to him. He carried the weak lantern to the start of the side hall. The light was too dim to cast light very far.

"What...?" Wanda's voice was shaky. The dim light and her weariness and the events of the day now were starting take a toll upon her. Wyatt reached a hand out and rubbed her shoulder.

"I don't know. I need you to go wake Captain Seto, Stanley James and Copi. I need you to bring them here. The problem is, we only have this one light and I'm going to need it." Wyatt said.

Wanda looked at Wyatt. "You're not going down there, are you?" She pointed down the side hall.

"I need to find out what's going on." Wyatt said.

"No." Wanda said. "I don't want you going down there."

"I need to..." Wyatt started. There was another loud thump.

"No. You're not going down there." Wanda said firmly.

Wyatt was gearing himself up for a debate when the situation resolved itself. Suddenly appearing next to Wanda was Copi. He was holding another old dim lamp.

"Ah, Copi. Good." Wyatt said as another thump and more cracking sound came up the hall. "Don't tell me that often happens here."

Copi shook his head slowly. "No sir. That is a new sound."

"Listen, Copi, I need you to take Wanda..." Wyatt started.

"No." Wanda said.

"...take Wanda back up with the rest of the people. Gather everyone together and then send Captain Seto and anyone with a weapon back down here. Understood?" Wyatt said.

"No." Wanda said.

"Yes sir." Copi said.

"No. I..." Wanda said.

Wyatt slung the rifle on to his shoulder. He turned and put a hand on each of Wanda's shoulders. "I need you to go with Copi." Before Wanda could say anything Wyatt went on. "I have never been in this situation before, but I can't do what I do with you here."

"Why can't...?" Wanda wasn't sure what she wanted ask.

"Look me in the eye." Wyatt said bringing his face close to Wanda's. "I am pretty sure this is going to be dangerous and...I have just come to realize that I can't focus on what I need to do with *you...here.*"

Wanda hesitated for moment. "OK. I'll go with Copi." Wanda hesitated again for a moment and then kissed Wyatt.

"Sir, I am thinking there may be dangerous creatures breaking into this place. Right now, sir." Copi said quietly.

Wyatt pulled back from Wanda. "Yes. Yes, you're right, Copi. The two of you get going."

Wyatt and Wanda exchanged a quick look and then Copi and Wanda moved back up the main hall. Wyatt unshouldered the rifle and, holding up the lantern started slowly down the side hall.

Wyatt had gone several steps down the hall and stopped. He still heard some sounds coming from somewhere down the dark hallway, but something had been bothering him since he'd first heard the sounds and now it came to the forefront of his thoughts. Were these sounds coming from the birds that had been chasing them during the day?

When the birds hadn't emerged out in the parking area when Johan was leaving in the jeep Wyatt had assumed the birds were diurnal. That they were daytime creatures. If that were true it seemed like they would not still be trying to get at the people. Their vision, presumably, wouldn't be that much better at night than humans.

But something was definitely trying to get into the building. Maybe, in an inconvenient twist of Universal humor, it was just a conventional nocturnal creature native to these parts.

Wyatt could hear something more clear now. It sounded like the clicking of claws on the stone floor. That wasn't good. Harmless animals generally didn't have claws large enough to make a scratchy clatter on hard floors.

A few more steps further down the hall and the dim light of the lantern caught the vague gray image of something moving. Wyatt still couldn't make out what it was. It seemed to bob and weave a little, like it couldn't stand still. On a positive note, it appeared to be shorter than the terror birds that had chased them down the mountain.

The movement of the animal suggested that it wanted to charge forward towards Wyatt, but something was causing it to hesitate. Wyatt edged closer. He froze. It was a bird. A smaller bird. Maybe 3 or 4 feet tall. From what he could make out in the gray light, it looked like the bigger birds, but smaller. Could it just be a juvenile? Like a reckless teen out having some fun on a Saturday night.

A second smaller bird appeared next to the first and then a third. Wyatt stared at them and they stared back. He doubted this was a gang of teen terror birds. It was something else.

The birds moved a little closer. They clearly wanted to come after Wyatt, but they were acting odd. It took another moment for Wyatt to realize they were trying to shade their eyes from the lantern light.

They're nocturnal, Wyatt realized. These are some variation of the terror birds. A smaller version that could see in the dark. Another example of Zeitner's experimentation, Wyatt guessed.

Unfortunately the longer Wyatt stood there the more the birds seemed to be adjusting to the dim light and easing closer. He assumed the birds couldn't see past the lantern light to get a look at him. He was 5' 10". He expected that if these smaller birds knew he was almost two feet taller than they were they would think twice about coming after him. He was wrong. He moved the lantern slightly behind him so the birds could see

him more clearly and that seemed to have triggered them. They bolted forward. Their reaction surprised him, but he flipped the rifle up with one hand and fired off a shot. One handed he couldn't aim so the shot went high and wide echoing off the ceiling, but the sound and flash from the muzzle sent the skittish birds back down the hall.

Wyatt stood thinking for a moment. These birds were every bit as aggressive as their larger counterparts. In addition, for a smaller bird, their sharp hooked beaks were still a formidable weapon. Wyatt suspected they were fully capable of gutting a man with one solid strike.

Wyatt backed down the hall until he was standing in the main hall once again. He hesitated. Part of him wanted to go upstairs and make sure everyone there was OK, but, if he stayed here, he thought he could keep the birds contained. A moment passed and he could hear voices approaching.

A lantern appeared at the bottom of the steps a little further along the main hall. It was Copi. He was followed by almost everyone.

"So Mr. Copi here tells us those damned birds are breaking into the building?" Talim asked.

Wyatt glanced down the side hall and then back at everyone. "Not exactly. These are the same birds."

"Not the same birds?" Schaefer asked also glancing down the side hall.

Wyatt shook his head. "No these are smaller and apparently nocturnal."

"Hmm," Schaefer said, "never heard of those before."

"They...might not be part of the natural evolutionary line." Wyatt said.

"What does that mean?" Dr. Carrera asked.

"They may be hybridized or modified in some way." Wyatt said.

"Why would he do that?" Wanda asked.

"It's hard to say why Zeitner did what he did, but probably it made them a different kind of weapon. Assuming he was planning on selling his creations to various governments." Wyatt explained.

"Well, at least these are smaller." Seto commented.

"Yes." Talim agreed.

"Well...I'm not sure they are substantially less dangerous. They are still big enough to kill a man. They can see in the dark and they appear to be very aggressive." Wyatt said.

"Shit." Talim said.

"What happened there?" Schaefer pointed further along the hall at the door leading down to dungeons. Pieces of the door were scattered about on the floor.

"Has anyone seen Abdul?" Dr. Carrera asked.

Wyatt walked over to the old broken door. There gashes in the wood and blood stains.

"Captain, perhaps your men could guard this side hall and this doorway and make sure these birds can't get out of this hallway." Wyatt suggested.

"Of course." Seto said with a curt nod. He turned and ordered his men to guard the hall.

"Oh my God..." Dr. Carrera said. "You don't think...Abdul..." She was staring at the door to dungeons.

"I don't know." Wyatt said honestly.

"Uh..." Stanley said. "That hallway," he pointed at the side hall that Wyatt had gone down, "connects to the main hallway again on the far side of the building."

"What?" Talim said, irritated.

"Where?" Wyatt asked.

"Well, the building is actually kind of round so this main hall starts curving to the left a little further along. Eventually, this side hall connects back into it at the base of the tower." Stanley explained.

Wyatt glanced down the side hall again. He had been wondering why the birds hadn't continued trying to come after him. He was thinking now, he might know why.

Suddenly they heard a woman scream out from back down the hall.

Wyatt looked around. "Where's Cass?"

Everyone turned and started back for what sounded like the dining room. Seto had to stop and order his men to stay at the entrance to the side hall. They had instinctively started moving with everyone else.

Talim was the first one in the dining room and stopped. Wyatt came up behind him. He could see Derek holding firmly to Cass' wrist. She had clearly just twisted away from Derek, but her back was still up against a cabinet. Talim, along with everyone else, was expecting to see birds. He didn't quite know what to make of this struggle between Cass and Derek.

Wyatt pushed past Talim. He crossed the room and Derek turned to face him. Derek stood about 3 inches taller and seemed more athletic.

"You looking for some trouble, hero?" Derek asked with a grin.

Wyatt didn't say anything. He moved in one motion and punched Derek in the jaw. Derek fell backwards, knocking a couple of chairs out of the way and bouncing sideways off the edge of a table. He lay on the floor, blood dripping out of his mouth, with a stunned look on his face.

Wyatt stood over him. "You get up and I will put you right back down there. I have fought far bigger monsters than you."

Derek tried to say something, but it came out as a mumbling whimper. Wanda went to Cass.

"Uh..." Schaefer stood in the middle of the room.

Wyatt turned to Schaefer. "What?"

"Nothing." Schaefer said quickly. He looked down at Derek. He shook his head. "Damn it. Go in the kitchen and clean yourself up."

Wyatt walked back over to the door of the dining room where Captain Seto stood. "We need to go the other direction down that main hall and see if those birds are coming from that way too."

Seto nodded. "OK."

Wyatt glanced over at Wanda and Cass. Wanda gave him a nod to say that Cass was OK. Wyatt nodded in return and he and Seto headed back down into the main hall. Wyatt carried a lantern, but Seto had a flashlight.

Wyatt and Seto had gone a short distance down the main hall when Wyatt stopped. He had a feeling something was sneaking up behind him. He whirled around to find Schaefer almost directly behind him.

"Shit." Wyatt said. "What are you doing?"

"I am curious to see this other species." Schaefer said innocently.

"Oh, well, you're unarmed so stay behind us. I think these are pretty quick bastards." Wyatt said.

"Really quick?" Seto asked nervously.

Wyatt nodded. "Pretty quick. Just be ready, but...don't shoot us."

Seto looked somewhat offended, but didn't say anything.

They moved down the hall. On their right they passed the stairs up to the rooms on the floor above. Further on they moved past some more rooms on the left with closed doors. On the right the wall became an exterior wall with occasional windows. There was more light outside than in. The moon had risen and its light sent shafts of dim gray light into the hall at intervals.

The hall, as they moved down it, was now noticeably curving to the left. They were in the part of the fortress that faced out away from the mountainside. Seto made a hissing sound. Wyatt stopped to look at him.

"What?" Wyatt asked.

"I thought I saw a light." Seto replied.

"A light?" Wyatt stared down the hall, but didn't see any light.

"Down there." Seto pointed ahead of them.

Wyatt watched and then saw it too. Two small lights. It seemed odd and then he froze.

"Those aren't lights." Wyatt said.

"Eyes reflecting the light." Schaefer said.

"Right." Wyatt said. He raised the rifle. "See if you can get a reflection again."

Seto moved the flashlight back and forth slowly. Finally he caught a small glow. Wyatt fired off a shot. It echoed loudly in the stone hall. There was a squawk of some kind and the sound clicking on the stone floor. Then silence.

"Let's have a look." Wyatt said and moved forward. Seto and Schaefer moved as well.

They approached what looked like an arched door frame with no door. As they got closer they realized it was the base of the tower that rose up on the backside of the

fortress. Wyatt kept hoping they would see the body of a bird laying somewhere around, but there wasn't any. A sound was coming from somewhere behind them. Schaefer had turned around staring down the dim hallway behind them.

"What if they had already gone down this hall and up the stairs we passed? What if they are behind us?" Schaefer asked.

"Then be sure to scream when they get you so we know they're behind us." Wyatt said.

"Was that supposed to be funny?" Schaefer asked, clearly not amused.

"Yeah. It kind of was." Wyatt said.

"Well, it wasn't." Schaefer said indignantly.

"I thought it was funny." Seto volunteered.

From behind them now was clearly the sound of boots running. In another minute one of the soldiers appeared. He stooped over to catch his breath.

"What is it?" Seto demanded of the soldier.

Between breaths the soldier answered. "We heard a gun shot so I came to see what was happening."

"You left the other soldier there alone?" Wyatt asked.

Almost as if to answer Wyatt's question there came a distant scream.

"Shit." Wyatt said.

"Idiot!" Seto yelled at the soldier.

All four of them took off running back down the hall. They had to slow down at the door into the dining room because Wanda and Talim were standing in the hall staring in the direction of the side hall.

"What happened?" Wanda asked when she saw Wyatt.

"Hang on." Wyatt said and slid past her. He ran on down to where the side hall was. Seto and the other soldier followed him. When they got to the side hall the other soldier wasn't there, but a bloody streak headed down the side hall.

"Damn it." Wyatt said. He was about to say something more when he heard someone yell from back towards the dining room. A scream followed the yell. The three of them headed back to the dining room. There was no one outside the door of the dining room. They ducked into the dining room.

Wyatt glanced around. Derek sat in a chair at the far end of the room. Cass was sitting on the opposite side of the room. Copi stood next to Cass and was staring at the door to the hall. Stanley and Dr. Carrera were against the far wall, as far away from the door as possible. Schaefer was on one knee in the middle of the room. It looked as if he had been running and stumbled.

"Wanda." Wyatt called out.

"Here."

Wyatt turned to see her just inside the door on the right, flat up against the wall.

"What happened?" Wyatt asked her.

"It...got Mr. Talim." Wanda said. her voice shaking.

Wyatt put his arm around her.

"It just came out of the dark. It was really fast. It...it hit him. Knocked him down and dragged him away." Wanda said.

"Alright. Enough of this." Wyatt said. He glanced around the room. Besides the door out into the hall there two other doors in the dining room.

"Where do those doors lead?" Wyatt asked. No one answered. Wyatt turned to look at Stanley and Carrera.

Stanley found his voice. "That one goes into the kitchen and that one goes into the lounge."

"Do either of those rooms have doors out into the main hall?" Wyatt asked.

Stanley nodded. "Both of them."

Wyatt sighed. "This room won't do. We need a room with only one door."

"Upstairs..." Stanley said. "...upstairs are the patient's rooms. Those would work."

"OK. Let's move. I'll go first. Captain, you and your soldier are in the back, got it?"

Wyatt said.

Seto nodded.

"The rest of you bunch together between us. Come on." Wyatt said and stepped slowly out into the hall. He turned to wave towards the others and nearly put an elbow into Wanda's face. She was directly behind him.

"I guess there's no need for me to tell you to stick with me." Wyatt said to Wanda.

Wanda shook her head. "No. You don't need to tell me that." To emphasize the point Wanda reached out and grabbed a fist full of the back of Wyatt's shirt.

Everyone eased out into the hall. Slowly they made their way to the stairs. Turning they all went up the flight of stairs. At the top of the stairs a hallway led off to the right. The stairs only went up to this floor.

Wyatt turned around and looked back at Stanley. "These are all patient rooms?"

Stanley nodded. "Mostly, yes. There are a couple of supply rooms and a small infirmary."

Wyatt was trying to decide if a patient's room would be sufficiently defensible. "Do the rooms interconnect?"

Stanley nodded again. "All of them. The doors are locked, though."

"I don't think these birds are slowed down much by a locked door." Wyatt said. "Where does this hallway lead to?"

"It curves around the front of the building. Eventually it leads to the tower." Stanley replied.

Wyatt thought about the tower. "Can we access the top of the tower?"

Stanley nodded once again. "Sure. It's like a castle tower."

Suddenly there was a scream from the bottom of the stairs. Seto whirled around in time to see his soldier being pulled back down the last couple of steps in the clutches of a bird beak. Seto fired several quick shots. There was a groan and a moment later the soldier was gone.

Seto swore and took a couple of steps back down.

"No!" Wyatt yelled down to Seto. "You can't save him. If you go down there, they'll just take you too."

Reluctantly Seto move slowly back up the stairs. He had a grim look on his face.

"We need to get moving." Wyatt said and started down the hall.

They moved at a brisk pace.

"I can't believe this is happening." Dr. Carrera said.

"I can assure you madam, that this is indeed happening." Copi said calmly.

Carrera sighed. "It was a figure of speech. I know it's happening."

"Very good, madam." Copi said.

They kept moving. Twice Seto fired at something in the dim light behind them, but he wasn't sure what it was or if he had hit it. Half way down the hall Wyatt stopped. He thought he saw something shadowy move ahead of them. He handed the lantern back to Wanda and lifted the rifle. He waited, but nothing became visible enough to shoot at. He left the lantern in Wanda's hand and moved slowly forward with the rifle ready.

They reached the arched entry into the tower section. The hallway ended in the tower. On the far side of the circular tower room were a set of stairs leading up. To the left were a set of stairs going down.

Wyatt eased Wanda's hand out of her grip on his shirt. He smiled at her. He took the lantern back from here. He slid up to the opening of the stairs leading down. He peaked over the edge. He looked back at everyone and shook his head.

"How far up to the top?" Wyatt asked Stanley.

"It's the next level up. There's a door at the top of those stairs that flips up and you're there." Stanley replied.

"I think we should go up there. I don't think these birds are well equipped to force their way through a door like that." Wyatt said.

"Oh, the hero has spoken." Derek said sarcastically.

"Shut the hell up." Wanda snapped at Derek.

"Yeah, well why don't you—" Derek started.

Wyatt crossed over to where Derek stood. "What?"

Derek looked away. "Nothing." He said quietly.

Stanley crossed to the stairs leading up. He climbed the steps and unlatched the door. He hesitated.

Wyatt walked over to the base of the stairs. "It's OK. I'll go first."

Stanley shook his head. "No. It's alright. I'll go." He went up the last couple of steps. They could hear Stanley's voice call something out, but they couldn't tell what it was. Wyatt rushed up the steps and through the door.

Stanley was sitting on the floor of the tower top. He waved at Wyatt. "I'm OK. I just tripped."

"It's OK." Wyatt called down to the rest of them. "Come on up."

They all came up on to the tower top and spread out on the circular stone floor, leaning against the short stone wall that ran around the edge. A large night sky of stars spread out above them. The air was fresh and a light breeze blew.

"There's no latch on this side of the door." Stanley explained when Wyatt closed the door back down. "We took it off in the event a patient ever made it up here. We didn't want them locking us out."

"OK. I guess someone will just have to sit on it." Wyatt said sitting down on the door.

"We can all take turns." Wanda said sitting down next to Wyatt and leaning up against him.

Considering the events of the night, it was almost surreal that the remainder of the night was quiet. Hardly anyone spoke and when they did it was in hushed tones as if the birds might hear them and suddenly decide to rush up the stairs, but all had remained quiet.

The sky above the mountains to the east began to grow increasingly gray. The stars slowly faded.

Wyatt looked across the tower roof at Captain Seto. He was staring out at the valley below as he had been for most of the night. Wyatt got up. Wanda started to stand up as well and Wyatt gestured for her to stay put. He walked over to Seto. He sat down.

"Captain." Wyatt said in greeting.

Seto glanced over at Wyatt. "Mr. Wyatt."

"Something is on your mind." Wyatt said.

Seto was quiet for a long moment. "I have lost all of my men."

Wyatt nodded. "Yes, but I don't think there is much you could have done to save them."

"We underestimated what we were facing. I will be held accountable for that." Seto said.

"What were you coming here to deal with?" Wyatt asked.

"The terra...terrands..." Seto started.

"The pteranodons. Right, but that's not what we found. What we found were these terror birds. They are far more deadly than the pteranodons are. You can't be prepared for something you didn't know anything about." Wyatt said.

Seto was quiet. "Mr. Talim said that is what your people do all the time. Discover something terrible and then deal with it."

Wyatt nodded slightly. "Yes. That's true."

"So how do you do it? How do you deal with something you weren't prepared for?" Seto asked. He looked like a defeated man.

"Well, the first thing you do is try to not get killed and after a while you get pretty good at that. Then you start getting good at coming up with plans to save yourself and everyone around you. And, finally, after you have survived enough of these situations, you start getting better at figuring out how to kill monsters." Wyatt said.

Seto looked down at the stone floor. He still looked distraught.

"Captain, how many monsters have you had to fight before?" Wyatt asked.

Seto shook his head. "I have never dealt with such creatures before."

"Well, you, Captain Seto, are not a failure. You are a beginner. There is no substitute for experience in these matters." Wyatt said.

Seto nodded. He seemed to perk up a little from that and then his face turned dark again. He was quiet for a moment.

"Mr. Wyatt?" Seto said almost to himself.

"Yes?" Wyatt waited.

"I think I shot my own soldier. The one on the stairs." Seto said.

"You were shooting at the bird. To save your soldier. It was the right thing to do. Honestly, if you killed your soldier with a gun shot, you spared him from a very gruesome way to die. Those birds would have torn him apart." Wyatt said.

Seto lifted his head. He looked at Wyatt. It was obvious that a weight had been lifted from him. Seto nodded.

"Thank you, Mr. Wyatt." Seto said.

"You're welcome." Wyatt said. Wyatt stood up. He patted Seto on the shoulder and walked back over to Wanda.

"Do you think Johan got through?" Wanda asked as Wyatt sat back down.

Wyatt shrugged. "Don't know."

Wanda looked over at Wyatt. "Aren't you supposed to tell me that help is on the way and everything is going to be alright?"

"Uh, well, I don't really know..." Wyatt said slowly.

"It doesn't matter if you know. You're supposed to just say it to make people feel better." Wanda said.

"Oh, OK, well, I'm not sure, but, I guess, that help is—" Wyatt started.

"Well don't bother now. It's too late." Wanda said.

Wyatt sighed. "So, we are, essentially, right back where we started."

"Yeah. You're not comforting me at all." Wanda said. There was now, though, a hint of teasing in her voice.

"OK, how about this, Johan left as darkness was falling and the big birds apparently are not nocturnal so they probably didn't cause him any issues. These smaller birds, which are nocturnal didn't show up until after he left and I doubt they could keep up with the jeep. So, chances are, he should have had an uneventful drive back down to town where he would have informed them of our situation." Wyatt said.

Wanda patted Wyatt on the arm. "See. You can do it."

The sky behind the mountains now was getting brighter and the sky above them was growing more blue by the minute. People were starting to move around. Standing and stretching.

"So, those night birds...they should be gone?" Cass asked. She was still sitting a couple feet from Wanda.

"I would think so." Wyatt said. "We will need to be careful when we go back down in case they decided to spend the day somewhere in the building."

"So they could still be down there waiting for us?" Cass asked. It was obvious her nerves were well worn down.

"If they are down there, they're in for surprise." Wyatt said. "They probably can't see all that well in the daytime and we can. It will something of a turkey shoot."

Stanley stood with his back to the short stone wall that circled the outside of the tower. He stretched his arms and yawned. Derek stood about five feet to Stanley's left. He looked around, seemingly unsure what to do or who, if anyone, he could speak to.

Things happened quickly. Derek reacted to something out of the corner of his right eye, outside of the tower. He flinched.

"Shit!" Derek said diving to his left.

A large dark shape suddenly rose from below. It cleared the short stone wall directly behind Stanley. Two expansive wings, a pointy head and a pair of nasty claws immediately loomed up at Stanley. He never even saw the pteranodon. It struck him from behind grabbing him with both claws by his back and shoulders and then dropping backwards pulling Stanley with it.

Wyatt and Seto were on their feet and over to the edge of the tower in a heartbeat. The pteranodon had done a very slick aerial maneuver. Once it had grabbed Stanley it had used it's own weight to pull him back over the stone wall railing and both pteranodon and man plummeted downward. Then using it's massive wings the pteranodon deftly rotated in mid air, extended it's wings and soared away with a thrashing and clearly bleeding Stanley in it's grasp.

There was nothing anyone could do and little chance that Stanley would survive. Wherever the pteranodon landed it would tear Stanley apart. If Stanley could somehow wrest himself free of the pteranodon's claws or if they were able to shoot and kill the pteranodon Stanley would plunge several hundred feet down to the bottom of the escarpment on this side of the tower to a rocky stream far below.

Everyone stood numb watching Stanley and the pteranodon grow smaller in the distance. Wanda, standing next to Wyatt gripped his arm tightly. Wyatt felt her jerk on his arm.

"Look out!" Wanda shouted. She had turned to look at Cass who was standing about eight feet to Wanda's left now.

Cass reflexively dropped to the floor of the tower without even looking around. It saved her life. The space where her erect body had been was swept by the claws of another pteranodon that curved up over the edge of the stone rail wall of the tower. Instantly everyone else was dropping prone too as the pteranodon glided over the tower not more than five or six feet above.

Wyatt twisted around. "Get down the stairs." He was looking at Wanda.

"But Cass..." Wanda said.

"I'll get her. Go." Wyatt said.

Wanda crawled as quick as she could towards the door of the stairs. Suddenly Copi was next to her pushing her along. Derek, Schaefer and Dr. Carrera followed Wanda's lead and made for the door as well.

Wyatt scrambled over to Cass who was frozen, clutching at the floor as if it could somehow open up and let her in. Wyatt put an arm around her and half pushed, half dragged her towards the stair door. A shadow appeared suddenly over them. Wyatt twisted to see a pteranodon dropping towards them. He didn't have his rifle, having left it by the stone wall when he had crawled over to Cass. He rolled on his back with the intention of kicking at the pteranodon when it got close enough.

Two shots rang out, both hitting the pteranodon in the mid section. The reptile flapped awkwardly backwards and disappeared below the edge of the tower.

Wyatt twisted back around to see Seto now standing, pistol in hand, still aiming at where the pteranodon had been. Wyatt tried to yell at Seto, but he couldn't get the words out fast enough. Another pteranodon appeared behind Seto, claws extended. At the last moment Seto must have sensed something because he ducked. The pteranodon's claws were not able to get a grip on him, but one claw did manage to rip a nasty gash across part of his back and shoulder. Seto stumbled forward on to his knees.

Wyatt got Cass to the open stair door, grabbing his rifle along the way. Wanda was waiting on the steps and helped Cass down. Derek and Carrera were already down the stairs. Copi hovered at the edge of the door and, at Wyatt's gesture followed Wanda and Cass down. Seto was only a few feet away and Wyatt reached over and pulled him over to the stairs. The two of them slid down the steps and Wyatt pulled the door closed behind them.

Wyatt and Seto sat on the bottom step.

"Dr. Carrera, Captain Seto is injured. Can you see to his wound?" Wyatt asked.

"Uh, I'm not that kind of doctor." Carrera said. She shrugged. "I get woozy around blood."

"I will see to him, sir." Copi said stepping over.

"Good man." Wyatt said.

"Jesus, how many fucking creatures are out here?" Derek said in a frustrated voice.

"I thought you wanted to see the pteranodons?" Wanda asked sarcastically.

Derek turned towards her. He was about to say something and then, instinctively, glanced over at Wyatt. Wyatt was staring right at him. He waved off Wanda's question without saying anything.

"Now what?" Schaefer asked.

"We probably should find out where those smaller birds got in last night and get that closed up." Wyatt said.

"Why?" Carrera asked. "The army should be here any time now, right?" She looked over at Seto. He didn't answer her.

"We don't know for sure when the army will get here. We need to make sure the big birds can't get in here. They'll be active now." Wyatt explained.

"Fuck this." Derek said standing up and walking towards the stairs leading down. "I am sick of it. All of it. I am sick of these stupid creatures. I am sick of Mr. Hero, here." Derek pointed at Wyatt. "I am sick of all of you."

Derek walked to the edge of the steps going down. There was no rail protecting someone from stepping right into the opening and falling. Safety concerns were a low priority back in the day this fortress had been built.

Several people in the room were certain that Derek was going to fall into the stair well because he was close to the edge with his back to the stairs. Somehow he managed to not fall in.

In an instant it happened. A large hooked blur came up from the stairs and snagged Derek's legs, yanking them out from under him. His chest and face bounced off the stone floor and then he disappeared down the opening of the stairs. A moment later there was a hideous scream.

Wyatt leaped up and jumped to the top of the stairs. The terror bird that had grabbed Derek was nowhere in sight, but another bird appeared on the steps. It was trying to run up the stairs, but its claws, which made it very fast on natural turf, slipped and slid around on the stone. Wyatt fired twice and dropped the bird. It fell sideways off the steps. Another bird scrambled after it on to the steps. Wyatt took aim and the rifle clicked. Empty.

"Damn." Wyatt said. He turned to Seto who just shook his head slowly. He had lost his pistol when the pteranodon struck him. The bird continued to scratch its way up the steps. Wyatt threw the rifle at the bird. The rifle landed in front of the bird instead of hitting it, but then slid down under the feet of the bird. The bird stepped on the rifle and lost its footing and went tumbling back down the steps.

"What's that?" Schaefer asked.

"What?" Wyatt turned around.

"That sound." Schaefer said.

"Yeah. I hear it too." Carrera said.

Wyatt listened. There was a cracking sound and some thumping.

"Rifles. And machine guns." Wyatt said.

"Oh, thank God." Carrera said.

Wyatt stood at the top of the stairs. He was watching for more birds though he had no idea what he would do if one showed up. Minutes passed and there was sound on the steps below.

"Wyatt get back." Wanda said.

Wyatt watched the steps below and then turned to the rest of them. "It is a biped, but without a beak."

"Another monster?" Cass asked.

"Captain Seto?" A voice called from below.

Seto got up and came to the stairs. "I am here."

"I am Lieutenant Ramey, sir." The man below called up.

"Are those damned birds dead?" Seto asked.

"All that we can find, sir." Ramey replied.

The two of them leaned against one of the jeeps. It was a surreal setting. They could hear gun shots coming from the top of the tower. There were a dozen men now up there picking off any and all pteranodons they could spot. There weren't many now because it hadn't taken the pteranodons long to figure out that they should maintain a safe distance from the tower, but the soldiers were still trying to pick them off from a distance.

In addition, there were soldiers slowly working their way through the jungle leading away from the old fortress. They were sweeping through the forest shooting at anything that moved. Mostly it was just a lot of gun fire, but occasionally there was a squawk. It was unclear how many terror birds were actually being killed or just spooked into running off.

"So what now?" Wanda asked.

Wyatt shrugged. "I don't know. I need to call Washington and see if I still get some vacation time or if this was my vacation."

"Seriously?" Wanda asked.

"Well, monsters don't take vacations." Wyatt replied with a smile.

"So you might have to go straight back to Washington?" Wanda asked.

Wyatt nodded. "It's possible."

"Is there anything interesting to film in Washington?" Wanda asked, smiling at Wyatt.

Wyatt smiled back. "There are always interesting things to film in Washington."

"Like monsters?" Wanda asked.

Wyatt shrugged. "Maybe. Sometimes it depends on your definition of monsters."

Wanda laughed.

Schaefer walked up to them.

"Jonathon, I want to thank you. For all that you did. I don't know if any of us would have made it through this alive were it not for you." Schaefer reached out a hand.

Wyatt shook Schaefer's hand. "You're welcome. Just think of it as your tax dollars at work. Anyway, are you staying to continue searching for pteranodon nests?"

Schaefer shook his head. "No. The army needs to clear the terror birds out before we can even begin looking to see if the pteranodons are multiplying. Besides, I will have a lot of explaining to do back at the University concerning Derek. The University frowns upon losing students out in the field."

Wyatt nodded. "I understand."

Schaefer looked at Wanda. "Are you...coming back with me to the University?"

Wanda shrugged. "I'm not sure where I am going to next. Maybe Washington." She eyed Wyatt who smiled back at her.

"I've already talked to Cass. She wants to go home. Can you see to it she gets home?" Wanda asked.

Schaefer nodded. "I will." With a wave Schaefer walked away.

Copi was suddenly next to Wyatt.

"Sir?" Copi asked.

"Ah, yes, Copi." Wyatt answered.

"You asked about the telephone. It is still not working, sir." Copi said.

"So we will need to go down to the village to make a call." Wyatt said.

Copi nodded. "That would be the logical thing to do, sir."

Copi turned to walk away and then stopped. "Sir?"

"Yes, Copi?" Wyatt asked.

"Is this kind of day typical in your line of work?" Copi asked.

Wyatt nodded. "Yeah. It kind of is. I suspect you will be glad to get back to the peace and quiet this place normally is."

Copi gave a small shrug. "Sometimes a little exhilaration is good for a person."

"Why Copi, I never saw you as a man of action and excitement." Wanda said.

"I am a bundle of energy, madam." Copi said in a calm and relaxed voice.

"Well, you're a good man in a crisis, Copi. If you're ever in Washington, look me up."

Wyatt said shaking Copi's hand.

Copi gave a nod. "Perhaps I shall, sir." Copi turned and walked slowly back into the building.

Wanda pushed off from the jeep. She took a step and turned reaching her hand back to Wyatt.

"Shall we go find Captain Seto and see about a ride down to the village?" Wanda asked.

"Right. Vacation's over. Time to get back to hunting monsters." Wyatt said with a laugh. He took Wanda's hand and they headed across the parking area.

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The Hamlet Mysteries series...

To Not Be In Hamlet

Sam MacNeil, part time mystery writer, has returned to his hometown to house sit for his parents as they start a lengthy vacation. What Sam has forgotten while away is the quirky weirdness of the little town of Hamlet. With expectations that he would quietly do his time in Hamlet the discovery of a dead body, clearly murdered, changes everything. Now Sam finds, much to his chagrin, the residents of Hamlet are expecting him to solve the murder. Not only does Sam not want to be involved in it, but the authorities have made it clear his help is not wanted. Was it the angry businessman from Detroit? Was it the shifty handyman the victim worked with? Sam doesn't know, but when killers from Detroit show up the situation is taking a serious and deadly turn. And then there's Becky. An old friend who clearly has more than friendship on her mind. Murder, killers and romance...this is not how this brief stay in Hamlet was supposed to go.

The Art of Hamlet

An old family friend asks Sam to look into a break in at her house. She is an art collector and critic, but nothing has been stolen and the only thing disturbed are some small statues. While it is a puzzling incident Sam doesn't think it is a serious issue, but when a neighbor is murdered and found bobbing in a nearby lake the story is once again taking a dark turn. As usual Sam is not inclined to get involved in a murder investigation, but somehow he seems to be sliding in that direction anyway. In addition, the County Detective seems to have recognized that Sam might be of some use---regardless of the consequences for Sam. And what of Sam's old classmate, who is now a seemingly crazy hermit, ranting on about terrorists in Hamlet? Is that actually possible? To complicate things even further something is happening between Sam and Becky. Love and Death seem to be chasing Sam through the wacky streets of Hamlet.

Ophelia's Hunt

Sam's women troubles have seemingly tripled. There is Becky and the relationship that Sam has found himself in with her. However, suddenly, there is Callie. Sam's wealthy and wild ex-fiance who has appeared in Hamlet. Is she here to get Sam back? Everyone thinks so---including Becky. Then there's the beautiful woman named Misty. She seems to have a particular interest in Sam as well. And, of course, there's murder in Hamlet once again. Questions abound. Is the lovely Misty a suspect or a new love interest? Who are the men stalking Callie? How is Sam going explain all of this to an increasingly angry Becky? Why is the County Detective actually soliciting Sam's help? Should Sam be flattered or very careful? With love and murder swirling around Sam how is he going to survive this?

The Ghosts of Hamlet

Sam MacNeil, part time writer, is house sitting for his parents in his hometown of Hamlet. The people of Hamlet are far more quirky than Sam remembers from his childhood and he is keen on leaving them behind and getting his life back, but it's those dead bodies that are the real problem. They just keep showing up. Murder in the small town of Hamlet has taken a noticeable uptick since Sam has returned and the residents have taken notice. Sam claims it has nothing to do with him and yet...Now, even worse, the residents are seeing ghosts and they blame Sam for that as well.

Sam may get his chance to escape Hamlet now that his parents are heading home, but can he really walk away without solving the mystery of the ghosts? Will he get away before the "gangsters" from Detroit catch up with him and turn him into a ghost? And what about Becky? He really wasn't planning on a romantic entanglement to muddle things up.

So what do ghosts, gangsters, girlfriends, musk ox and talking cans of beans all have in common? Sam MacNeil and the quirky town of Hamlet, of course.

The Play of Hamlet

It is finally here. The Founder's Day festival in Hamlet. A gala event highlighted by a play depicting the bizarre founding of Hamlet. Sam is not only the star of the play, but also a target for Scanlon and his killers from Detroit. They are determined to finish him off once and for all. But Sam knows they are coming and, with the help of the quirky residents of Hamlet, he has his own plans in the works. What Sam doesn't know is that Scanlon isn't the only killer from Sam's past that is out to get him. Could the biggest day of the year in Hamlet be Sam's last?

The King of Hamlet

The sixth story in the Hamlet Mystery series starts out where most of the stories end up...with a dead body. The trouble is Sam is found standing over the dead body and refusing to explain what has happened. He seems willing to take the fall for the guy's murder, but he is clearly hiding something. His friends are sure he didn't commit murder, but who is he protecting and why? What Sam is not telling anyone is that he is playing a more dangerous game than any of them can imagine. As bodies begin piling up around Sam he is increasingly wondering if he has a guardian angel or has become an unwilling accomplice to the Angel of Death. Once again women and murder are causing headaches for Sam.

The Graves of Hamlet

As if the town of Hamlet didn't have enough trouble with dead bodies now, it appears, someone is digging them up in the cemetery. The quirky residents of Hamlet are sure this has something to do with Sam. As usual Sam doesn't really want anything to do with whatever is going on, but when someone tries to make the cemetery Sam's permanent home one dark night it would seem that Sam will need to sort this out--if only to save himself. To add to the confusion, with Becky out of town, Sam must also figure out who the half naked woman is that keeps showing up on his deck sun bathing. Oh, and who are these other guys that just showed up in Hamlet? The grandson of the recently deceased retired cop who is lying about his real identity and the suspicious looking guy casually asking questions around town about the same dead cop...?

Polonius' Plight

Here's a surprise...there's been a murder in Hamlet---again. This time, however, Sam is very much intentionally involved. It's the suspects. The guy was found with a gaping shotgun blast to the chest. Like the one in the trunk of Renee's car. Of course the last person to be seen with the murder victim was Jen---and she seems to have disappeared. And why is Reese, the County Detective looking for Becky and her grandfather's .38? Sam is sure none of his friends are murderers, but to keep any and all of them out of jail he needs to find out who the killer is and fast. To make matters worse, while Sam is trying to solve a murder and hide his friends the Town Council of Hamlet has had enough of Sam and the murders that seem to follow him around. They passed yet another of their many bizarre ordinances. Sam has been ordered to leave Hamlet.

The Office of Scientific Operations

With the conclusion of the traumatic events in 1933 surrounding the shocking affair involving the city of New York and a beast commonly referred to as "King Kong", the president of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt, established the Office of Scientific Operations (OSO). The purpose of the OSO was to monitor and evaluate the level of risk and assist in any manner the mitigation of danger of any and all scientific operations and anomalies. With the rapid pace of scientific discovery this office was given the highest priority and clearance to investigate any potential threats or consequences to the interests of the United States of America.

What follows are the real stories behind the cinematic cover-ups presented to the general public...

Release #1

from the declassified files of the Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1953...

File #153 (commonly referred to by the public as "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms")

OSO agents Elliot Simms and Robbie Regan, while observing an atomic test in the Arctic, are unwittingly caught up in the release of prehistoric beasts from millions of years of suspended animation in the ice. Now they must help in stopping this new terror as it moves steadily down the east coast destroying anything in it's path.

From 1954...

File #157 (commonly referred to by the public as "Them")

OSO agents Simms and Regan investigate the odd circumstances surrounding a missing FBI agent only to stumble upon a horror in the New Mexico desert and if they cannot find a way to stop it there is a very good chance this could be the end of humanity.

Release #2

from the declassified files of the Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1954...

File #159 (commonly referred to by the public as "Terror in the Jungle")

OSO agent Jonathon Wyatt is pulled off vacation to an island in Indonesia to investigate sightings of pteranodons. The island is not far from the island known infamously as Z Land. It was once the headquarters of Dr. Zeitner whose experiments in genetically manipulating prehistoric monsters terrorized the world in the 1930s before the OSO put a stop to it. Wyatt's job is to determine if these are indeed Dr. Zeitner's creatures, but what he finds is much more deadly. This is no way to spend a vacation---trying not to get eaten.

Release #3

from the declassified files of the Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1954...

File #161 (commonly referred to by the public as "Revenge of the Creature")

After the capture of an unknown species of half man half fish is brought back to a Florida marine institute, OSO agents Wayne and Wyatt must determine the risk to the American people it poses. When the creature escapes and begins terrorizing the citizens of Florida the risk becomes all too real. Now they must hunt it down and stop it's killing spree, if they can.

From 1955...

File #165 (commonly referred to by the public as "It Came From Beneath the Sea")

OSO agents Simms and Regan are sent out to Pearl Harbor to investigate damage to one of the Navy's most advanced atomic submarines by some kind of giant creature. While the Navy has a hard time believing it, the OSO knows such creatures are real. It soon becomes apparent by the large number of ships being lost that something dangerous is hunting throughout the Pacific. Now, with the creature

openly attacking the west coast of the United States Simms and Regan join the fight to stop this thing before the entire Pacific is destroyed by it.

Release #4

from the declassified files of the
Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1954...

File #163 (commonly referred to by the public as "The DC Creeper")

On a break from hunting monsters for the Office of Scientific Operations, OSO Agent Wyatt is trying to adjust to a more crowded domestic life. As brutally murdered bodies begin showing up in the nation's capitol, though, this doesn't seem like it is going to be much of a break. The newspapers have dubbed the hulking killer "The Creeper" and it looks like Wyatt is going to have to hunt him down and stop him before Wyatt becomes the next victim.

Release #5

from the declassified files of the
Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1956...

File #166 (commonly referred to by the public as "Tarantula")

Agents Simms and Regan from the Office of Scientific Operations, the OSO, returning from the Pacific Coast having just finished dealing with yet another monster threatening the United States are redirected to a small town in Arizona to verify that a large tarantula that has been terrorizing the local inhabitants has been destroyed by the Air Force. With Beka, a woman who insists on tagging along with the intrepid agents---a clear violation of official regulations---in tow, they quickly discover that the threat of the giant spiders in the Arizona desert are not over just yet.

From 1956...

File #171 (commonly referred to by the public as "Invasion of the Body Snatchers")

The Office of Scientific Operations, the OSO, has sent agents Wayne and Wyatt out to the small California city of Santa Mira to locate a missing Air Force major, sent to investigate the impact of some meteors, and to understand the meaning of his last cryptic message to Washington. What they find is that, while the city of Santa Mira may look like a quaint place to visit it soon becomes apparent that a missing Air Force major is the least of Wayne and Wyatt's problems. There is something very strange and deadly going on in Santa Mira. Something that seems...alien?

The New Sheriff

Travis Ames, somehow, has developed super powers. Exactly what these powers entail he's not sure. He's still learning how to control his powers, but he's already decided that he should use this new found power to fight crime. And...if he made a little profit along the way, well, that wouldn't be so bad either. But reality has a way of altering the best laid plans. He has quickly figured out he has no idea how to go about crime fighting. And, to make matters worse, he has learned the hard way, his new powers won't protect him from getting hurt or, quite possibly, killed. Can he survive long enough to learn how to use his powers? Can he get an aging detective to teach him how to fight crime? Can he prevent Aubrey, the new girl, and everyone else at work from figuring out what he can do? How long can he keep this up before he makes that one small mistake and ends up dead?