

Prologue 2

Amazonian jungle - Six Years Later

The uakari monkeys screeched out warnings to each other as they watched the creature below them moving silently through the undergrowth. Although they were in no immediate danger, they knew the creature was a good climber and could reach them if it wished.

The sleek black panther, padding quietly through the undergrowth, paused to glance up at the noisy uakaris high above in the jungle canopy. Though desperate for food, it knew they were watching and alert, making any climbing attempt pointless, for they would disappear before it got anywhere near them. It lifted its muscular head to sniff the air, suddenly aware that something else was nearby. Its keen senses informed it that its next meal was coming closer; it slunk down into the undergrowth to wait for it to arrive.

The man, wearing nothing but a pair of ragged pants and a small rucksack slung on his back, suddenly burst through the thick jungle. Covered in scratches from his swift movement through the undergrowth, he stumbled and fell to the ground, but quickly got to his feet. Ignoring the leaves whipping at his face, he continued his mad dash through the foliage. His

pursuers weren't far behind and capture meant death. He had to get away so he could save the others. Although the large bushy beard, long straggly hair and his once white skin now heavily tanned, had drastically changed his appearance - making him all but unrecognisable from the last photograph sent back with the Indians when they left Dead Horse Camp six years before, Raleigh Rimmell's determination and stamina was still intact. He had escaped from his captives, the Macahiry, four days ago, they had been chasing him ever since.

Raleigh risked a glance behind and saw movement; they were catching up. Temporarily not looking where he was going, he ran straight into a low branch, knocking him to the ground with a painful thud. Dazed, Jack lay there rubbing his forehead, already feeling a bump starting to form. He heard the crack of a twig, the movement of leaves, the sounds of his pursuers moving through the jungle around him. Then there was silence; they had stopped, listening for any noise he might make to give away his position. They would soon guess he had stopped and presume he was hiding, and then the hunt would resume. He heard a noise nearby, deep shallow breathing, and turned his head to see eyes looking at him from the shadows, feline eyes. The eyes rose as the panther crouched in preparation for its attack. Raleigh froze.

Suddenly, a Macahiry Indian appeared, decorated with streaks of red and blue that covered most of his all but naked body, he narrowly missed tripping over Raleigh lying on the

ground as he rushed into the small clearing. On seeing Raleigh defenceless before him, he smiled and raised his head and spear to the sky to let out a piercing warbling cry, an alert to let his fellow Indians know their escapee had been caught. Abruptly, the alert was cut short to be replaced by a scream of surprise then pain.

The panther, having assessed the new arrival as more of a threat than the other, had leapt from the jungle knocking the Indian to the ground. Within seconds, its teeth had ripped out the man's throat, silencing him forever.

Three more Indians quickly arrived. They froze at the sight of the panther feasting on their friend. The cat snarled a warning at them, its vicious fangs dripping red with its victim's blood. It eyed the men, ready to pounce and kill again if they dared move any closer. They quickly glanced around the clearing, seeing no sign of the white man they were chasing, the Macahiry's cautiously backed into the jungle, leaving the panther to continue its much needed meal.

Raleigh had seen the panther leap and knew he was about to die. He hoped it would be a quicker death than being eaten alive by those chasing him. He closed his eyes to wait for the inevitable. He felt the wind of air disturbed by the cat's movement, then the brush of a tail over his skin. He heard a scream but it didn't come from him. He opened his eyes to see the Indian's throat ripped open. Drops of blood splashed his

skin. Realising the Indian's sudden appearance had saved his life; he grabbed the unfortunate Indian's dropped spear and fled. He ran as fast as his tired body was able through the thick jungle around him. After many days of running, with only small bouts of sleep, he doubted he could carry on at this pace for much longer. He skidded to a halt as another of his pursuers suddenly emerged from the jungle to block his way. The Indian drew back his arm holding a spear. Raleigh gazed at the weapon aimed straight at him as the Indian's arm shot forward, releasing the spear to send it flying straight at him. Raleigh dropped to the ground, glimpsing the spear whoosh by above him.

The Macahiry grunted as his spear missed its target to shoot harmlessly into the undergrowth. But it wasn't his only weapon. He drew a knife from around his waist, rushed forward and leapt.

Raleigh grabbed at the spear, fallen from his grasp when he hit the ground, and pointed its sharp tip at the Indian flying through the air towards him.

Unable to avoid the spear now he was in mid flight, the Indian tried to twist his body to avoid the inevitable. The manoeuvre was almost successful but not quite. Although he had avoided being stabbed by the sharp tip, it scratched his side. This brought him no comfort as he fell to the ground beside his quarry. Although the wound was far from fatal, the fast-acting poison covering its tip was. It would soon claim his

life. Raleigh climbed to his feet as the Indian writhed in agony on the ground as the poison coursed through his bloodstream. He was just about to retrieve the spear when he heard the sound of the remaining pursuers rushing through the jungle towards his position; out of time, he reluctantly abandoned the weapon and fled.

Raleigh soon found himself on a small path. Hoping it led to his objective, the river, he followed it. However, after rounding a bend in the trail he found himself by the entrance to a village. This was not automatically bad news, as villages were always built near a river so he knew one must be close by. The many human bones and skulls decorating the village indicated that the tribe who lived here were cannibals, probably the Morcegos, though Raleigh recognising the coloured patterns daubed on the skulls. Glancing around the village, he saw no signs of any people. Apart from a few pigs and some fowl, it was devoid of all life. This wasn't unusual, as often whole villages left for a gathering or a celebration ritual at another village. Taking advantage of the situation, he entered to search for a weapon, something he could defend himself with when the Macahiry caught up with him, as he knew they would they were too close to be avoided now.

With no weapons in plain sight, Raleigh quickly made his way to the largest building in the village, the meeting hall, and the likeliest place to find a weapon. He paused at to peer

through the entrance, but its pitch-black interior hid all inside from view. Grabbing a burning log from the smouldering fire outside the hut, he entered. Immediately he saw some crude shelves on his right and hurriedly searched through them for a spear, a knife, bow and arrows, anything he could use as a weapon. As he searched, he sensed something wasn't quite right. If the village was deserted, a fire would not have been left burning; it would have been extinguished before they left. The dry, straw-thatched dwellings of the village were vulnerable to an unattended fire; a tiny ember blown astray could set them aflame.

Behind him came a creaking noise, then the sound of shuffling. Raleigh span around, holding the burning log aloft. The flickering flames highlighted the faces of twenty dark skinned Indians, all were staring at him. Raleigh sensed there were more hidden in the darkness his light was unable to penetrate. All those he could see had blood on their hands and around their mouths, and some still held pieces of raw flesh, still dripping with blood. One of the men at the front stepped forward, a bone he had been chewing the flesh from, held in his hand like a club. Jack recognized the bone as a human thigh bone. It seems the Morcegos were at home after all and he had interrupted their dinner. There was movement as spears, knives and axes were passed to the men at the front. He glanced enviously at the weapons.

The foremost Indian, now armed with an axe, dropped his meal, much to the satisfaction of the swarm of flies that settled on the bloody flesh to feast and lay their eggs as soon as it hit the ground.

Raleigh stared at the unfriendly faces of the cannibal warriors as they took a step towards him, the smiles on their lips were a contrast to the hunger and hate in their eyes.

Suddenly, shadows blocked the bright sunlight streaming through the hut's entrance, halting the Morcegos. All faces turned to look at the three Macahiry Indians standing in the doorway where Raleigh's trail had led them. One of them spoke to the Morcegos chief, gesturing towards the white man in their midst as he spoke. The Morcegos spoke rapidly amongst themselves briefly and then reluctantly took a step back, relinquishing ownership of the intruder to his initial pursuers.

The three Macahiry brandished their spears and stepped forward to claim their prize.

Raleigh threw the only weapon he had, the burning log, at the Macahiry and without pausing rushed at the nearest wall. The flimsy branch and straw construction crumbled as he fell through, narrowly avoiding tumbling to the ground, he fled into the jungle. Behind him came the sounds of fresh pursuit.

After about a hundred yards, Raleigh heard the sound of rushing water; he had almost reached his goal! If he could

make it to the river, he stood a chance of escaping. His plan had been to steal a dugout canoe from one of the nearby native villages and then row downstream until he reached a friendly tribe. From there he could get word to the city that he, the colonel and Jack were still alive but in desperate need of help. As he drew closer to the river the rushing sound rapidly grew louder, and once he reached the water's edge a few moments later Jack saw its source, he was at the top of a waterfall. He recognised it as the same waterfall they had found six years earlier, the starting point of their route to the fabled Lost City. Unfortunately, he would have to reach the bottom of the waterfall so he could make his way downriver before he could risk entering the fast-flowing water. He then spied what he was searching for, some crude dugout canoes drawn up the bank a few metres away. He quickly rushed over and pushed one out into the fast flowing water. Grippled by the swift current it sped over the falls. He hoped it would survive the journey so he could retrieve it further downstream.

Raleigh turned, planning to head back into the jungle to make his way along the riverbank to the river below, but halted when he saw his pursuers approaching. Trapped between the strong currents of the river and the bloodthirsty Macahiry, he knew unarmed he wouldn't stand a chance against the Indians, so he turned back to the fast-flowing river and entered the shallow water near its bank. Even here close to

the edge he could feel the drag of the strong current.

Carefully he waded towards the top of the waterfall and peered down at the river far below. He saw the canoe bobbing in the river, caught by a swirling eddy close by the bank; it would be easy to retrieve if he made it down. However, the rocks directly beneath him, meant to jump would be fatal. He then noticed a small ledge a few feet below, which he thought might just be wide enough to save him.

Cautiously, but knowing he had to be quick before he was seen; Raleigh lowered himself over the edge until he felt his toes touch the ledge. It was lower than he thought but now committed to the course of action, he let go. The ledge was only about a foot wide and slippery, but by keeping his body pressed as flat to the rock as possible, he managed to edge sideways until he was between the torrent of rushing water and the rock.

Meanwhile the three surviving Macahiry, having followed Raleigh's trail to the river's edge, scanned the river for any sign of him. He was nowhere to be seen. A short discussion followed that ended with the conclusion that their escaped prisoner must have attempted to swim across the river, but the strong current had carried him over the edge. They made their way along the riverbank and down towards the base of the waterfall to find his body. It may be wet and he may be dead, but he would still be edible.

Through the cascading water, Raleigh saw the hazy figures of the three Indians making their way down the riverbank. He watched them for a few minutes until they were gone from his sight. He let out a sigh of relief; he was, for the moment, safe. He decided to remain where he was for a while until he was sure they had gone. Perhaps then he could move further under the waterfall, away from the rocks and then jump. It wasn't something he relished doing, but now he was on the ledge he didn't think he would be able to, or have the energy to climb back up. Shifting slightly to get in a more comfortable position, he was suddenly startled by a spear striking the rock where his head had been only a second before. A shard of rock, chipped from the rock, struck his cheek, drawing blood. The Macahiry had seen him.

Having involuntarily flinched, Raleigh's foot slipped on the narrow ledge and unable to regain his footing he began to fall. Quickly reaching out to try to grab hold of something, he found the rock, worn smooth by the hundreds of thousands of years of water flowing over it, had no handholds. He fell.

The three Indians watched him fall to become swallowed by the gushing water. They rushed down to the bottom of the waterfall to wait for him to emerge, alive or dead, but he never did. Believing him claimed by one of the whirlpools in abundance at the waterfall's base. More than a little

disappointed that the hunt had ended with no trophy and more importantly, no feast, the Indians left.

Knocked unconscious by the fall, Raleigh slowly regained his senses and immediately grimaced in pain. He had fallen awkwardly on his leg. He stared at the blood soaking through his trousers, seeping out in an ever larger red stain. He ripped the material to see shattered bone protruding from his shin and blood pouring from the wound. He ripped off the trouser leg and tore off a strip, grimacing in pain with the movement. He wrapped the strip of cloth around his leg a few inches above the wound and tied it tightly to lessen the blood flow.

Disoriented, he looked at the waterfall only inches away, and then studied his surroundings. He had fallen onto the ledge of a small cave behind the waterfall, little more than a large indent in the rock. Leaning out over the edge he saw the rocks below, a little closer than before but still promising death to anybody unlucky enough to land on them. With no way back up, the only way he would be able to escape the cave would be to run and leap through the waterfall, hoping he missed the rocks altogether to land in the water. However, with a broken leg, he wouldn't be running or leaping anywhere for a long time. He dragged himself towards the side of the cave, wincing in pain with the movement, and leant against the rock. He knew he would die here, but though as trophies they had been treated relatively well during their

six years of captivity; he had experienced many horrors dished out to those less fortunate prisoners of the Macahiry and the other cannibal tribes. He knew his would be a far better death than those eaten or skinned alive by the bloodthirsty Indians.

He thought of the colonel and Jack, who would probably die in captivity now he had failed to escape. He was supposed to have brought back help to rescue them, but that wouldn't happen now and although he knew they would not blame him for his failure, it didn't make him feel any better. He gently eased off his backpack, trying to keep his leg as still as possible and placed it on the rock floor beside him. Pulling open the top, he took out Fawcett's journal and a flask of water, from which he took a long gulp. With the waterfall only inches away, he would not have to worry about dying of thirst, and he had enough food to last for a few days, he would probably bleed to death before lack of food ever became a problem.

Raleigh stared at the metal flask and ran his fingers over the lettering etched into its surface, *Colonel Percy Harrison Fawcett*. Suddenly, an idea popped into his head. It was a long shot, but it was all he could do now to try to save them, and at the very least, it may let people know what had happened to them and perhaps more importantly to the colonel, what they had found.

Raleigh emptied the remaining water from the flask and placed it upside down to drain the last few drops. He then

ripped a page from the journal and used the small pencil, kept in the small sleeve in the binding, to write a message. When he had finished, he tore off another strip from the trouser leg and used it to dry the inside of the container as best he could. Using another remnant to pad out the flask, he then took something from his pocket, wrapped the message around it, and then slipped the package inside the flask. After forcing another piece of cloth inside to protect the message, he screwed on the watertight stopper as tightly as he could. Next, he undid his belt and used the buckle to scratch something onto the flask's surface. Then, with all the might he could muster, he flung the flask through the waterfall. It was up to fate to play its hand now, but he knew whatever happened it would happen far too late to save him.

Raleigh wasn't bitter at his predicament, nor did he blame the colonel or Jack for bringing him into the jungle. It had been his decision to come, and even though the hardships had been many and the good times few, he had enjoyed the adventure. His only regret was that they had not managed to return to civilisation to tell the world about their adventures and their discovery. They would have been famous.

Raleigh shuffled down into a laying position. He wondered if the flask would be found and the others rescued. Tired from his many days of pursuit, he closed his eyes and slept.

The flask shot through the waterfall and flew through the air until gravity forced it into an arc to splash down in the river. It was the swift currents turn now and it did its job well, too well in fact. It sped it down the river as planned but passed by all the villages whose inhabitants may have chanced upon it. By the time it reached the Atlantic Ocean some ten weeks later, Raleigh was long dead from loss of blood. However, even in death, he still had his part to play.