

## Prologue

**Amazonian Jungle - DEAD HORSE CAMP – May 29<sup>th</sup> 1925**

Colonel Percy Fawcett sealed the envelope, wrote his wife's address on the front and handed it to Simeos, one of the Kalapalos Indians who had been helping them. The Indians were returning to their village for a few days and although this would cause him some delay, there had been nothing Fawcett could say or do to stop them.

'You will make sure this gets to the city, Simeos' said Fawcett, more of an order than a question.

'Yes, Colonel Fawcett,' replied Simeos nodding as he bundled it with the other messages and photographs he was taking back with him. He turned to glance at his three companions waiting by the edge of the clearing, eager to leave. He turned back to face the colonel. 'Good bye, Fawcett,' he said, staring for a few seconds before turning to leave with the others. After just a few metres they had been swallowed by the thick jungle undergrowth, leaving the colonel and the other expedition team members to their fate.

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Even after they were out of sight, Fawcett continued to stare at the point where they had disappeared. There was something in the way the Simeos had said his goodbye, the look in eyes, and a finality that suggested that although they had said they would return in a few days, they would not be back. Though he regretted their loss, in the last few days they had become useless, scared they would be captured and eaten by the cannibals of the "wild" or "bad" Indians whose territory they were nearing. Fawcett was also concerned, but not enough to abandon the expedition; he knew this would be his last chance.

Fawcett had the stamina of an ox and seemed to have a natural immunity against the many jungle diseases. At the age of 58 he knew it wouldn't last forever. There were only three of them left now, as well as the eight (at times ill-tempered) mules, but it was still doable, the mission was a failure yet. He looked around at his two faithful companions, his oldest son Jack and his friend Raleigh Rimell. Men he knew he could trust and rely on. He had given them the chance to return to civilisation - or at least what passed for it in this part of the country - with the Indians, but both had declined.

He smiled at Raleigh, a most unlikely candidate for this expedition, a photo-journalist recording the expedition with his camera. Photographs had been sent back periodically to be sent to London where they would be published. Raleigh wanted

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to be a movie star. He planned to go to Hollywood on his return. He treated the whole thing as an adventure, something to talk about around the dinner table and to help push his career, but it was far more than that. This expedition had been undertaken to find the Lost City he had heard so much about from the indigenous jungle tribes during his years of mapping out the jungle and surrounding territories. Fawcett had named it Z. Although none of the Indians had been there to see it for themselves, they had heard from one of the more friendly "bad tribes" that an ancient stone built city does exist deep within the unexplored parts of the jungle. Fawcett had been ridiculed and laughed at by the so called experts back in London when he had told them that a Lost Civilisation is waiting to be discovered in the Amazon Jungle, Although Fawcett had tried to ignore them, it dwelled on his mind, failure was not an option. He had heard so many rumours and stories about a lost civilisation that he was certain it did exist and he meant to find it and prove them wrong. He knew there was no man with a better mindset and the jungle experience to achieve this than himself. He would find it or die trying.

'How is the foot, Raleigh?'

Raleigh had removed his sock and boot to examine his foot, where he had been bitten by one of the millions of

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insects that infested the jungle, which the following morning had swollen to an incredible size. Unable to resist scratching at the itching sore, Raleigh had scraped away layers of skin.

'It's a lot better now, Colonel,' he said glancing up. 'The swelling has almost gone and thankfully the itching has all but stopped.'

'Good man Raleigh.' Fawcett said with a smile, watching him ease his sock and boot back on. 'Do you think you will be able to ride with it tomorrow? I am eager to continue.'

'Don't let me hold you back, Colonel, by tomorrow I am sure my foot will be almost as good as new.'

Fawcett smiled. Although he had been worried about Raleigh's ability to survive the harsh jungle terrain, he had proven himself capable so far, but the hardest was still to come. Ahead lay unexplored territory, the unknown. Fawcett felt a shiver of excitement run down his spine, in a few days - a week or two at most - they could be standing at the entrance to a Lost Civilisation, a city built of stone.

'What about the Indians, father?' asked Jack walking over after tending to the mules. 'Are you not waiting for their return?'

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Fawcett looked at his son. 'I am afraid they will not be returning, Jack. The cannibals we will no doubt run into on our journey, frighten them.'

'Do you think they will let me photograph them?' asked Raleigh. He had already sent many photographs back to England of tribes never seen before; a photograph of real live cannibals might make the cover of Times magazine. It may even get his name noticed in Hollywood; at the very least it certainly wouldn't harm his career.

'I honestly don't know, Raleigh. Although I know there are cannibals and head hunters where we are going, I am hoping they are not as terrible as the friendly natives make out. The unusual sight of our white skin, which they will surely be seeing for the first time, should help the situation.' Then indicating the packs on the ground by the mules, 'we also have our gifts of beads and trinkets the Indians seem to like so much, so I am sure we will survive the encounter. They probably only eat their enemies, the other tribes, so we must ensure they think of us as their friends.'

'And if that doesn't work?' asked Jack concerned.

Fawcett picked up the rifle he had leant against a nearby tree and held it up. 'Then we too become their enemies and

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make sure we don't become their next meal, but I am sure it won't come to that.'

'Talking about food,' said Raleigh, 'I'm starving! How about we have something to eat?'

'Good idea,' answered Fawcett, smiling. Nothing seemed to get Raleigh down. 'We will start off early tomorrow morning. We will head for the waterfall the Indians mentioned, which seems to be pivotal in our quest...then we go into the unknown to discover the Lost City.' He had planned to stay longer at Dead Horse Camp (named as such because of the nearby horse skeleton, the closest thing to an identifiable landmark) to wait for the Indians to return, but now they were not coming back it made sense to continue the journey, especially while the weather was so good.

They were ready to leave by mid-morning the following day. Sat upon one of the mules, his long legs almost scraping the ground, Colonel Fawcett led the way out of the makeshift camp. Jack followed immediately behind, holding the reins of the lead mule. Raleigh rode at the back to make sure none of the mules strayed too far, taking their limited supplies with them. As some of the mules seemed to have a mind of their own,

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it wouldn't be an easy task now the Indian mule handlers had abandoned them.

As Fawcett left the camp he glanced down at the remains of the lame horse he had shot five years earlier, the last time he was here. The jungle animals and insects had long since consumed its flesh, leaving nothing but bleached white bones sticking out from the leaves and earth; eventually the jungle would claim them as well until nothing was left.

Urging his mule forward, the Fawcett expedition disappeared into the Amazonian jungle.

### **Fawcett's letter**

Fawcett's wife, Nina, entered the room and gently closed the door. She crossed the room to settle into the armchair positioned by the window to take advantage of the light streaming through its glass panes. She examined the stained and crumpled letter she had just received and saw from the postmark that it had taken many weeks to reach her, but this was not unusual. The postmark date did not even account for the length of time it had taken to travel from the depths of the jungle to the city, where it could finally start on its long voyage to England. It's a wonder it ever made it at all. Though she was used to not hearing from her husband for weeks

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or months when he was on one of his expeditions, it seemed different this time. She had though, felt a sense of foreboding ever since he had left, taking their eldest son with him. She plucked an ornate letter opener from the small pedestal table beside the chair. Slowly she eased the blade under the flap and ran it along its length, splitting it open. After placing the letter opener back on the table, she parted the ripped edges of the envelope and pulled out the letter. Unfolding the paper she read the message from her husband.

"My dear Nina,

The attempt to write is fraught with much difficulty, thanks to the legions of flies that pester one from dawn till dusk - and sometimes all through the night! The worst are the tiny ones that are smaller than a pinhead, almost invisible, but sting like a mosquito. Clouds of them are always present. Millions of bees add to the plague, and other bugs galore, stinging horrors that get all over ones hands. Even the head nets won't keep them out, and as for mosquito nets, the pests fly through them! It is quite maddening.

We hope to get through this region in a few days, and are camped here for a while to arrange for the return of the peons, who are anxious to get back, having had enough of it - and I don't blame them. We go on with eight animals - three saddle mules, four cargo mules, and a *madrinha*, a leading animal which keeps the others together. Jack is well and fit and getting stronger every day, even though he suffers a bit from insects."

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Nina smiled at the mention of her son.

"I myself am bitten or stung by ticks, and these *piums*, as they call the tiny ones, all over the body. It is Raleigh I am anxious about. He still has one leg in a bandage but won't go back. So far we have plenty of food and no need to walk, but I am not sure how long this will last. There may be little for the animals to eat as we head further in. I cannot hope to stand up on this journey better than Jack or Raleigh - my extra years tell, though I do my best to make up for it with enthusiasm - but I had to do this.

I calculate that I shall contact the Indians in about a week, perhaps ten days, when we should be able to reach the much talked-about waterfall.

Here we are at Dead Horse Camp, Lat.  $11^{\circ} 43' S$  and  $54^{\circ} 35' W$ , the spot where my horse died in 1920. Only his white bones remain. We can bathe ourselves here, but the insects make it a matter of great haste. Nevertheless, the season is good. It is very cold at night and fresh in the morning, but the insects and heat are out in full force come mid-day, and from then until evening it is sheer misery in camp.

You need have no fear of any failure ...."

Nina stared at the final sentence and hoped the words would come true. She then placed the letter in her lap and stared out of the window.

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She would never hear from her husband or son Jack again. The fate of Fawcett, Jack and Raleigh remain a mystery to this day.