

CHAPTER 4

WE SPENT SEVERAL DAYS ROWING DOWN THE RIVER; ON TWO occasions we had to carry our canoes through the woods to avoid the dangerous rapids. One afternoon, we heard the sound of drums beating in the distance.

'What is that?' I asked.

'War drums,' replied Lord John. 'I've heard them before.'

'Yes,' said Gomez. 'They're war drums... The Indians are watching us; they'll kill us if they can.'

I turned to look at the dark green trees that surrounded us, imagining the eyes of the Indians upon us. The river was as still as glass and emerald in colour, and as we moved slowly along it, our paddles sent a thousand ripples across its shiny surface. Eventually, the sound of the drums faded away.

'No Indians here,' said Gomez. 'They're afraid of *Curupuri*.'

'That's the evil spirit of the cliffs,' explained Lord John.

I nodded, remembering my first conversation with Professor Challenger.

In time, the river became too shallow to navigate, so we hid our canoes in the bushes and continued the rest of our journey on foot. We filled our backpacks with guns, ammunition, blankets, food and other provisions, and made our way north. Two days later, we arrived at an open plain – the red cliffs were clearly visible in the distance.

'There are the cliffs!' I said.

Professor Challenger smiled and said nothing. As we approached the cliffs, we saw trees and bushes on the summit, but no other signs of life. Exhausted from our journey, we set up camp at the foot of the cliffs, and went to sleep.

The next morning, we discussed how we were going to climb to the plateau at the top of the cliffs. 'This side is too steep to climb,' said Challenger, peering up at the cliffs. 'We need to walk around the cliffs and look for a way up.'

The ground at the foot of the cliffs was rocky and broken, and the going was slow and difficult. At around midday, we made a surprising discovery: an old, abandoned campsite. We found empty meat tins and bottles and a newspaper, the *Chicago Democrat*.

