

The Zoo of Extinct Animals

A Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,336

Connections

Writing

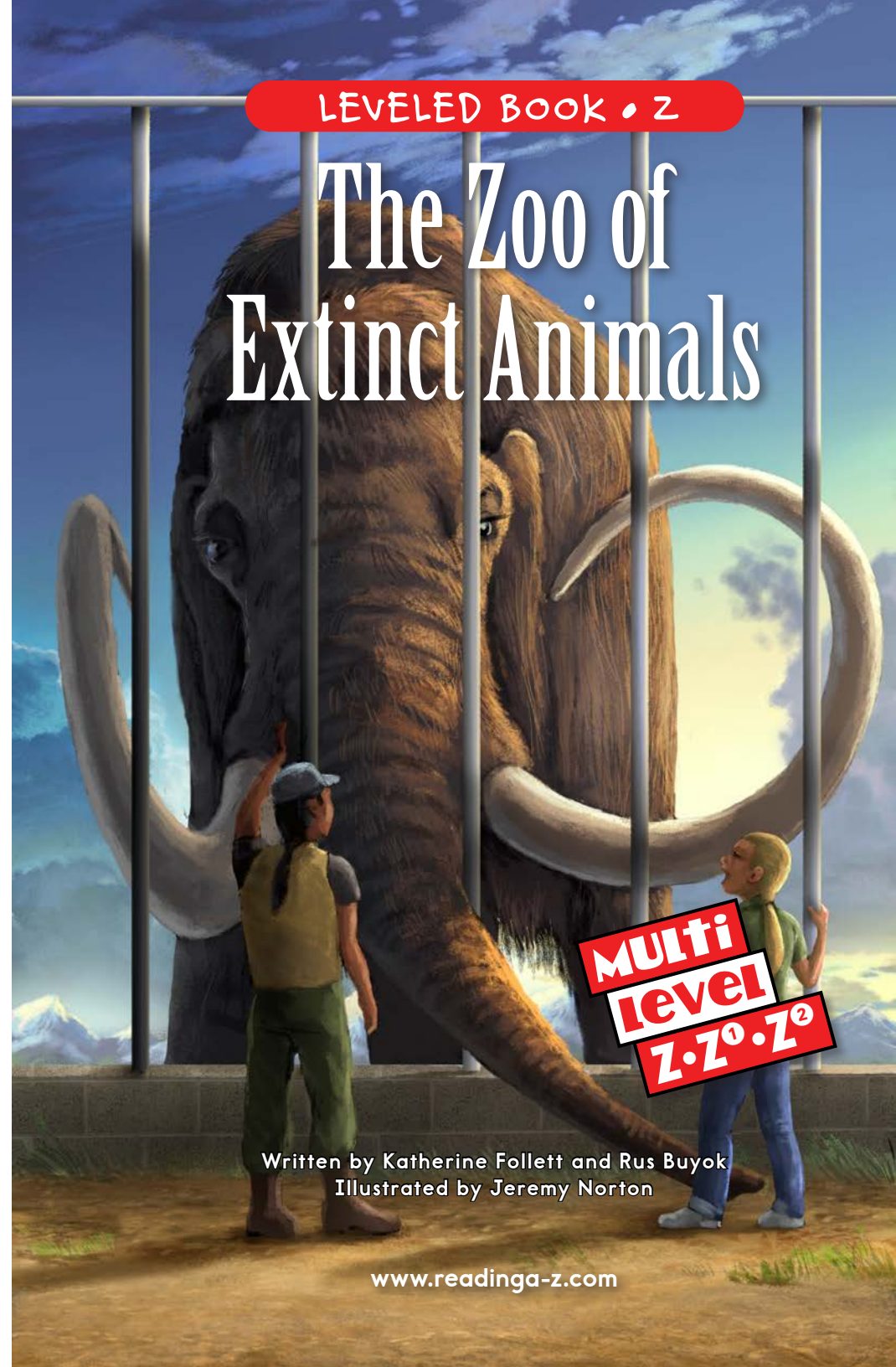
If you were Hazel, what decision would you make and why? Write a friendly letter to Malcolm explaining the decision you made.

Science

Research one of the extinct animals from the book. Create an informational brochure for your classmates about that animal, including information about where and when it lived.

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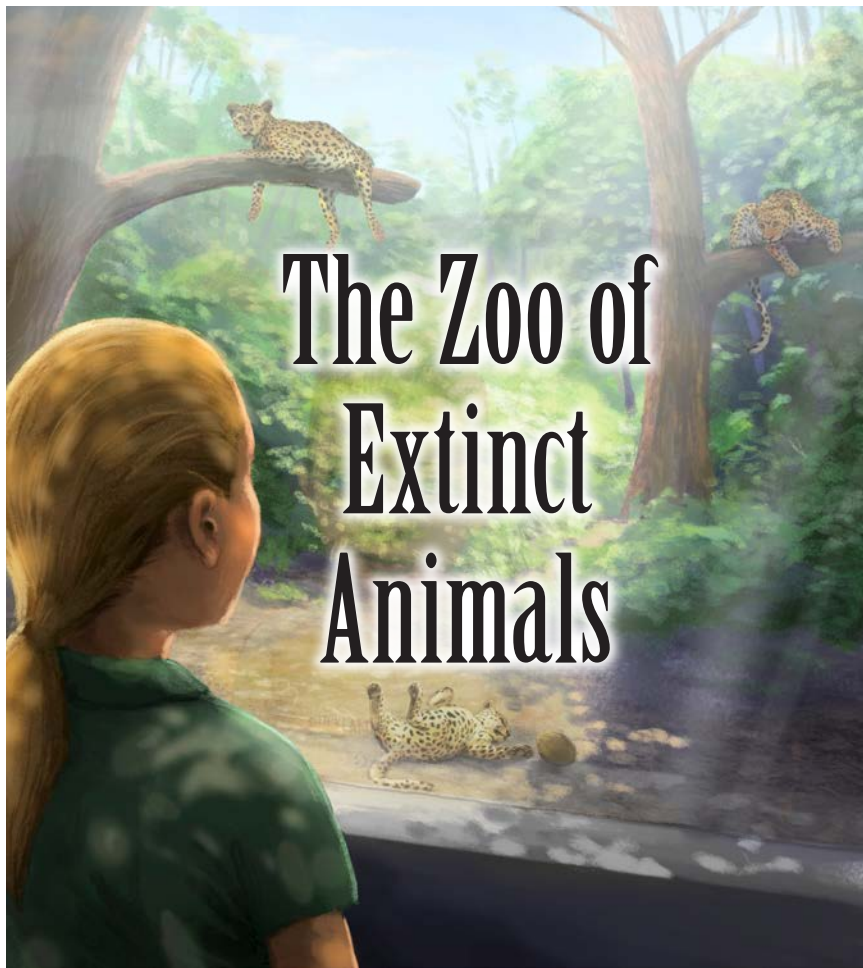
LEVELED BOOK • Z

The Zoo of Extinct Animals

**Multi
level
Z•Z¹•Z²**

Written by Katherine Follett and Rus Buyok
Illustrated by Jeremy Norton

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Focus Question

How does Hazel's summer-internship experience change her?

Words to Know

captive breeding	internship
compound	media
conservation	monitor
extinct	specimens
high ground	transport
humane	violating

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Level Z Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL Z	
Fountas & Pinnell	U-V
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	50

Hazel's summer **internship** began with her signing a ridiculous stack of papers. Out the office window, she could see gates leading into the vast Wyoming **compound**. A man in a suit sat across from her, explaining the legal ramifications of working at Buckland Rare Animal Research Center.

"Buckland has to protect its property," the man explained. "We reserve the right to **monitor** all communications in and out of the compound, and the agreement you're signing now extends beyond the grounds of Buckland. The consequences for **violating** said agreement are . . . severe."

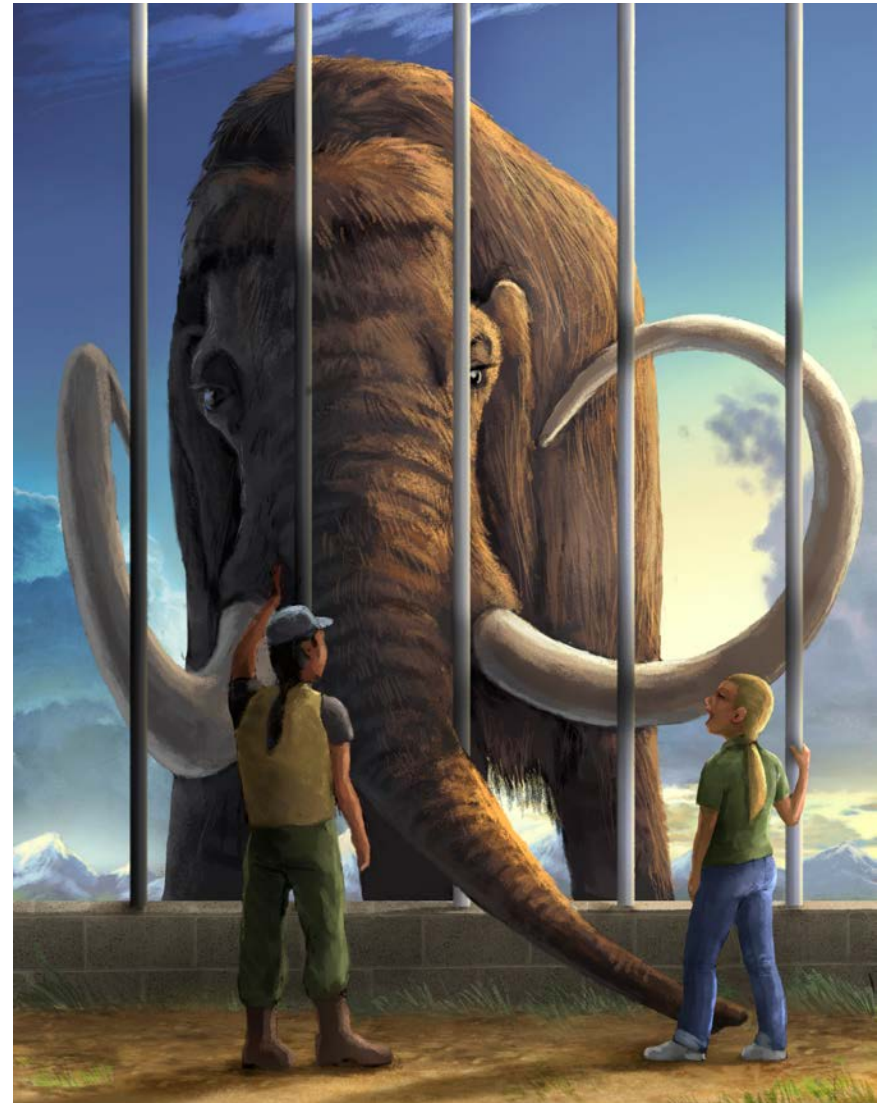
"I guess I'd better learn to keep a secret," Hazel said. In reply, the man forced a smile.

The website had made the place look like a fairly normal research zoo. True, it had the world's largest collection of endangered species, and it did say they were doing cutting-edge genetic research. Still, what secrets could they really have?

Two hours later, Hazel thought she understood. She was standing in front of a real woolly mammoth. Its tusks sliced through the air, and its trunk snaked toward Hazel's face. She yelped and stumbled back.

"Don't worry," said Jim, the head animal keeper and Hazel's new boss. "Eve is just curious."

"Eve," Hazel whispered to herself, just to be sure she wasn't dreaming.



Jim reached through the bars and scratched the huge creature on the cheek. It rumbled like a giant cat. Eve's fur was longer and thicker than Hazel would ever have thought, forming a fluttering skirt below the mammoth's belly. It smelled healthy and good, like a dog that's been jumping in leaves.

"How did you. . .?" Hazel began. "Where did she . . .?"

"Siberia, I think," Jim said. "Her genes came from there, at least. It took many years and more money than you or I could ever dream of, but our scientists finally found a way to bring the species back—at least a couple **specimens**. The male is out having a checkup. I'm sure you can guess his name."

"She's beautiful," Hazel whispered as Eve's trunk brushed over her sneakers.

Jim smiled. "She's just the first stop."



Hazel spent the rest of the day in a state of wonder as Jim took her throughout the complex to each of the **extinct** animals' enclosures. The *Megatheriums* had their own stand of trees to rest in, beside a pond. Jim explained how the *Thylacinus* habitat tried to mimic a particular area in Tasmania.



At the moa habitat, the other intern joined them. Malcolm kept his hands in his pockets and jumped up and down with excitement as he squeaked over and over, trying to make the twelve-foot birds' calls. He was weird. Hazel liked him already.

That night, Malcolm joined her in the common area of the staff dormitory.

"So what's your theory?" Malcolm casually folded his arms on the table and knocked a stack of papers to the floor.

Hazel tried not to laugh. “On what?”

“They’re reviving extinct animals,” he said. “We’re talking Nobel Prizes, faces on magazine covers—the works. Why is Buckland keeping it so secret?”

The question had crossed Hazel’s mind, too. “Someone must know,” she said, “because someone’s paying for this place. It must cost a fortune to run.”

Malcolm pointed a finger at Hazel. “You’ve hit the nail on the board, or the head of the nail, or something. I guess I messed up that metaphor, but it doesn’t matter—something fishy is going on here,” he said.

Hazel laughed. Malcolm seemed like a guy with a busy brain.

He shrugged. “Whatever it is, a lifetime of keeping my mouth shut seems worth it. Certainly easier to handle than the student loans I’d have to take out if I want to get a doctorate—and I do. You know what I’m saying?”

Hazel thought she did know. Like Malcolm, she was counting on this internship to help fund her future education.



The next few weeks were hard work. As the interns, Hazel and Malcolm were given every job anyone else didn’t want to do. They shoveled poop and cleaned enclosures. They fetched equipment for different people. Some of the staff even started referring to them as “gophers” because they were always being asked to “go for” one thing or another.

Still, Hazel was thrilled. She loved working around these amazing animals and seeing how they behaved. She especially loved visiting Eve, who would reach out her trunk and inspect Hazel’s pockets for treats, rumbling gently.

Hazel sometimes discovered an animal missing from an enclosure during her rounds. When she pointed it out to Jim, he checked a small tablet and explained that the animal had been moved to one of the other compounds for observation, or that it was being treated for some illness. Sometimes the animal came back, but sometimes it didn’t.

One day, while Hazel and Malcolm ate their cafeteria lunch in a grassy area beside one of the warehouses, they saw Jim and another keeper loading an Entelodont into a **transport**. The creature was the size of a buffalo.

“Doesn’t look too happy,” Malcolm remarked as the beast bellowed and crashed into the side of the cage. “People call them ‘terror pigs,’ but they’re really more like hippos.”

“Wonder where they’re taking it,” Hazel said. “Seems pretty healthy to me.”

Just then, a large white SUV with dark windows pulled up. Out popped a small man with white hair and dark sunglasses. He was dressed as if he were going on a safari—not looking at research animals in Wyoming.



As they watched, the man walked around the transport, examining the Entelodont with great interest. His broad smile showed strangely white teeth. He said something that they couldn’t hear, and Jim forced a smile in return.

After a few minutes, the two of them climbed into the vehicle and drove off.

“That was odd,” Malcolm said. “Who was that guy?”

Hazel shook her head.



That evening, Hazel watched a movie on her computer for a while, but the smiling man’s face kept forcing its way into her mind. His smile, with its too-white teeth, had a quality that made her uneasy. She had seen the same look on some of the predators at feeding time. She decided to take a walk and let the cool night air clear her head.

She stuck her hands in her pockets and set off in no particular direction. The dark night sky let her see the stars that filled it—more stars than she’d ever seen before. Before she knew it, Hazel had walked to Eve’s enclosure. The keepers had returned Adam not long after Hazel arrived, and she could hear the pair snoring behind the locked door. She smiled at the sound.

In the distance, she saw a pair of lights bouncing down the dirt road that led between the compounds. As the lights drew closer, she could tell it wasn't one of the jeeps people usually took. This one sounded more like a transport vehicle, maybe bringing a new species, or a baby. She decided to wait around.

The transport came through the gates and pulled up to what the staff called the "feeding station," one of the small buildings where the animals' food was prepared.

Jim hopped out with two other keepers and pulled the back doors open, but it was difficult to see with so little light. She heard the keepers reach into the transport and pull out something wrapped in a large tarp. It made a dull thump as it hit the ground. They reached in and pulled out three more tarps. *Thump. Thump. Thump.*

Hazel wanted to turn away, but she couldn't. One by one, the keepers lifted the tarps and pulled them toward the large door, into the light. They dropped the first one, and Hazel could make out what looked like part of an animal. The second one was larger, and when they set it down, she could just make out the shoulder of the same kind of animal. It had a few small holes in it, almost like bullet holes.

Then they dropped the third tarp, and she saw the head of the Entelodont, its huge tongue hanging sickly out the side of its open mouth.



Hazel covered her gasp with her hand and slid back into the shadows, not sure what to do. Maybe it wasn't what it looked like. Maybe the animal had tried to attack someone. Maybe it was too sick and they had to put it down, though she couldn't imagine why the keepers would shoot it rather than do something more **humane**.

She made her way back to the dormitory, questions tumbling through her brain. Had the man with the white teeth hunted the creature? Did the researchers know about it? And of all the buildings to drag a dead animal to . . . why the feeding station?

Hazel climbed the stairs to her room and locked the door behind her.



The next morning, Hazel was still in shock. She had barely slept, and the image of the dead Entelodont kept repeating whenever she closed her eyes. She didn't know the whole story yet, though. She needed to talk to Jim.

After the morning meeting, Hazel asked Jim if she could talk to him in private.

"Sure," he said, smiling. "Please, step into my office."

He opened the doors to his jeep, and they both climbed in. When the doors were closed, Hazel described what she'd seen the previous night. Jim looked out at the complex and nodded.

"When they first offered me this position, I found the idea of letting billionaires hunt extinct animals for sport disgusting. I had cared for animals in zoos since I was your age," he said. "I couldn't bring myself to do it—so I refused."

Jim turned to look at Hazel. "Then they explained the good we could do. These people pay huge amounts of money for us to raise these animals so they can hunt and, in some cases, eat them." Jim sighed, and went on. "While we raise these creatures, we learn about them—how they behave, raise young, survive.

"The money has also allowed us to bring back recently extinct animals. The golden toad and the Zanzibar leopard, for example, were both killed off because of humans. Now we're working toward releasing these creatures back into the wild. They have a chance of surviving because the money has allowed us to ramp up **conservation** efforts around the globe.



“Last year alone, the organization bought and saved miles of rainforest and wetlands in Florida, India, and South America. It funded **captive breeding** programs for endangered animals in zoos throughout the United States and Europe. We funded research trips into the most remote regions on Earth to discover new species.

“Most of that could never have been done if it weren’t for the money raised here from the legal hunting of twenty-seven animals. And keep in mind,” Jim added, “most of the animals here have been extinct so long, their natural habitats no longer exist.”

Jim’s arguments made sense, but what about Eve? Hazel couldn’t accept the thought of her running from some rich guy with a big gun while he hunted her for the most expensive dinner of his life.

“Look,” Jim said, placing his hand on her shoulder. “We’re doing good work here—important work—and sometimes that means making difficult choices. You have to do what’s right for you, and I can’t tell you what that is. You’re a great worker, and I’d be happy to keep you on. You can also make the choice to end your internship. It’s completely up to you.”

Hazel took a deep breath. “Thanks for the talk, Jim. I have some things to think about,” she said.

“Sounds like it,” he said. “Could you think about it while you clean up the mammoth enclosure?”

Hazel nodded and climbed out of the truck.



Hazel spent more time than usual cleaning Eve and Adam’s enclosure. In her eyes, the mammoths were wild animals with as much right to live as any other. In the eyes of the organization, they were property, like cattle or pigs, except these two animals could save thousands.

She stopped at the Zanzibar leopards' area to watch a young cat batting around a coconut. The coat that had caused humans to hunt them to extinction was just starting to come in. Someday, could this one be released back into the wild?



That night at dinner, Malcolm said, "Okay, enough already. You've been bummed out all day. Don't leave me in the dark."

Hazel sighed and explained everything. "Wow," he said when she finished. "This might be the first of my theories that's proven true. My mind is blown."

"That's it?" Hazel snapped. "That's all you can say about this?"

Malcolm shrugged. "What can we do about it? We leave here in some sort of quiet protest, and we lose our college funding, but we get to keep the moral **high ground**."

Hazel looked at her feet—like Malcolm, she really needed the funding to afford school.

"I guess you could leave and tell the press," he continued. "The program would likely be shut down, and Buckland Wildlife would be killed in the **media**. Buckland would likely come after you and your family with the 'severe' consequences that lawyer guy talked about."

Hazel's eyes burned as tears rolled down her cheeks. After a while, people started leaving the cafeteria and heading back to work. Malcolm finished his sandwich before he spoke again.



“Or you could do what I’m going to do,” he said quietly. “Accept a less than perfect situation for the greater good of all.”

“Not *all*,” Hazel said.

“Not all,” Malcolm agreed, “but when has anything ever been for the good of all?”

Hazel didn’t know. She only knew that she faced a choice, and no matter what she chose, someone—man, beast, or both—was going to get hurt.

Glossary

captive	the breeding of animals in captivity
breeding (<i>n.</i>)	for release into the wild (p. 15)
compound (<i>n.</i>)	a walled-off area containing a group of buildings (p. 3)
conservation (<i>n.</i>)	the protection of wild lands and the living things found there (p. 14)
extinct (<i>adj.</i>)	no longer in existence (p. 5)
high ground (<i>n.</i>)	a morally superior position (p. 18)
humane (<i>adj.</i>)	causing as little pain as possible (p. 13)
internship (<i>n.</i>)	a temporary job where a student or trainee works to gain experience in a particular profession (p. 3)
media (<i>n.</i>)	mass communication, such as newspapers, television, or the Internet, through which information is given to the public (p. 18)
monitor (<i>v.</i>)	to observe the progress of something (p. 3)
specimens (<i>n.</i>)	examples of something used for comparison, study, or display (p. 5)
transport (<i>n.</i>)	a vehicle that carries animals or things from one place to another (p. 8)
violating (<i>v.</i>)	breaking a law or rule (p. 3)