

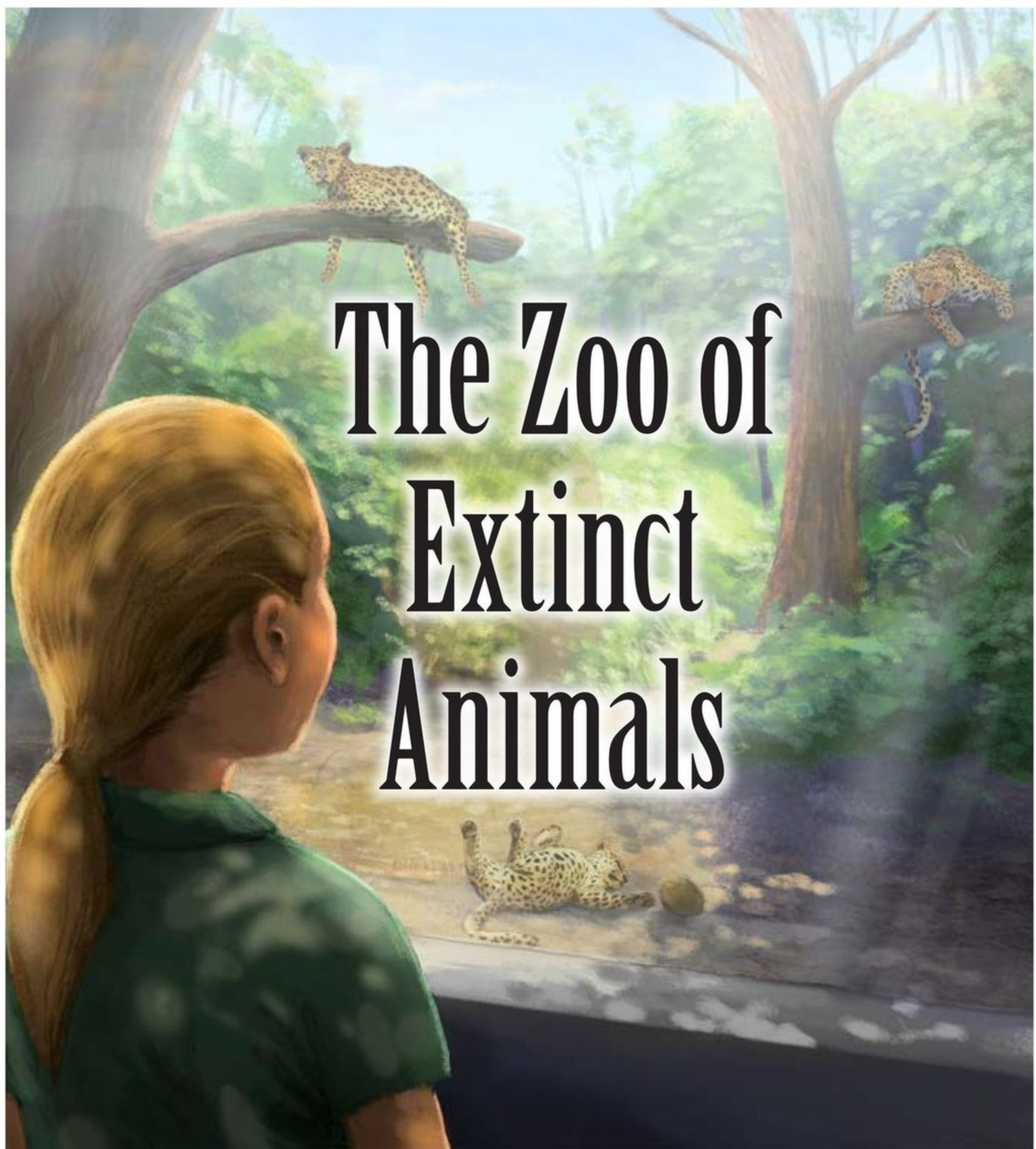
LEVELED BOOK • Z²

The Zoo of Extinct Animals

**Multi
level
Z•Z¹•Z²**

Written by Katherine Follett and Rus Buyok
Illustrated by Jeremy Norton

www.readinga-z.com



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Focus Question

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

Words to Know	
abhorrent	monitor
animalistic	nondisclosure
astronomical	perpetuity
consign	powers that be
conspiracy theorist	proprietary
coy	ramifications
exorbitant	reconcile
expressly	specimen
futility	status quo
high ground	strained
humane	verifying
internship	violating

The Zoo of Extinct Animals
 Level Z2 Leveled Book
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Correlation	
LEVEL Z2	
Fountas & Pinnell	Y–Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+

Hazel couldn't believe it—she was standing in front of a real woolly mammoth. Its tusks sliced through the air, and the trunk snaked toward Hazel's face. She yelped and stumbled back.

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

"Eve," Hazel whispered to herself, just to be sure she was hearing things correctly and not dreaming.

Until this moment, she had been skeptical of this summer **internship**. Not two hours before, she had been in the administration building at the edge of the massive Wyoming compound, signing a ridiculous stack of papers as a no-nonsense man in a fitted suit explained all the legal **ramifications** of working beyond the gates she could see out his window.

"So I'm basically signing my life away?" Hazel asked, half joking, as the man took her phone.

"The Buckland Rare Animal Research Center is extremely protective of its **proprietary** property—as it should be," the man said.

“We reserve the right to **monitor** all communications in and out of the compound, and the **nondisclosure** agreement you’re signing now extends in **perpetuity**. The consequences for **violating** said agreement are . . . severe.”

“I guess I’d better learn to keep a secret,” Hazel said. The man flashed an insincere smile.

What secrets could they really have? The website made the place look like a fairly normal research zoo. Granted, it had the world’s largest collection of endangered species, and it did say they were performing cutting-edge genetic and reproductive research. Still, all this legal mumbo jumbo seemed a bit much.

Now, standing before Eve as her trunk investigated Hazel’s sneakers, she thought she understood.

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 imagined, forming a fluttering skirt below the mammoth’s belly, and it smelled healthy and good, like a dog that’s been jumping in leaves.

“How did you . . .? Where did she . . .?” Hazel found forming a complete thought difficult.



“Siberia, I think,” Jim said. “The original **specimen’s** genes came from there, at least. It took many years and more money than you or I could ever dream of, but Dr. Z and her team 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.

Jim smiled. “She’s just the first stop.”

Hazel spent the rest of the day in a haze of wonder as Jim took her throughout the complex to each of the carefully maintained animal enclosures inside the incredible warehouses. The *Megatheriums* had their own copse of trees and a pond to laze about in. Jim explained how the *Thylacinus* habitat had been designed to mimic a particular area in Tasmania—even to the specific climate.

At the moa habitat, Malcolm, the other intern, joined them. He kept his hands in his pockets and jumped up and down with excitement as he squeaked, “*Dinornis robustus, Dinornis robustus*” over and over, mimicking the twelve-foot birds’ calls. He was weird. Hazel liked him already.



That night, Hazel relaxed in the common area of the employee dormitory. She didn’t realize Malcolm had come in until he spoke.

“This place is really something, eh?”

“It is—I still can’t really believe it.”

“So what’s your theory?” Malcolm casually folded his arms on the table and, not so casually, knocked a stack of papers to the floor.

Hazel tried not to laugh. “On what?”

“Discovering how to revive extinct animals is a scientific game changer akin to the invention of the microscope, or microchip, or some other micro thing. We’re talking Nobel Prizes, professorships, faces on magazine covers—the works. Why is Dr. Z so **coy** about it?”

The question had crossed Hazel’s mind, too. “Someone must know. Otherwise, where’s the money coming from? The cost of maintaining this place must be **astronomical**.”

Malcolm touched his finger to his nose, then pointed 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 something fishy is going on here.”

Malcolm seemed like a regular **conspiracy theorist**. It wouldn’t have surprised her to find out he thought aliens really landed in Area 51. “Do you aim to find out what it is?” she asked. She found it amusing to egg him on.

“If this were a movie, absolutely,” Malcolm said, “but since this is real life, I’ll **consign** myself to simply doing my job—for now. Besides, a lifetime of keeping my mouth shut seems an easier debt to handle than the crippling student loans of college and beyond.

“What do you want to study when you go to college, anyway?” he asked.

“Paleontology or zoology,” Hazel said.

“After what I saw today, I’d opt for the latter.”



The next few weeks were a blur of activity. As the resident interns, Hazel and Malcolm were given every job anyone else didn’t want to do—shoveling poop and cleaning enclosures, fetching 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.

Occasionally, the staff assigned them other tasks, such as counting the number of golden-toad tadpoles produced from the six breeding pairs in the amphibian habitat—something they quickly realized was an exercise in **futility**.

In spite of all this, Hazel was giddy. She loved working around these amazing animals, learning how they behaved, seeing how they interacted with their environments. She especially loved visiting Eve, as the mammoth seemed to recognize her. Eve would reach out her trunk and inspect Hazel’s pockets for treats, rumbling pleasantly.

Hazel sometimes discovered an animal missing from an enclosure during her rounds. When she pointed it out to Jim, though, 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.

Something about it didn't sit right with Hazel, but Jim acted as if everything was **status quo**, and she had no reason to think he was lying.

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 piglike creature was enormous, 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."

"I can see that," Hazel replied. "Wonder where they're taking it. Seems pretty healthy to me."

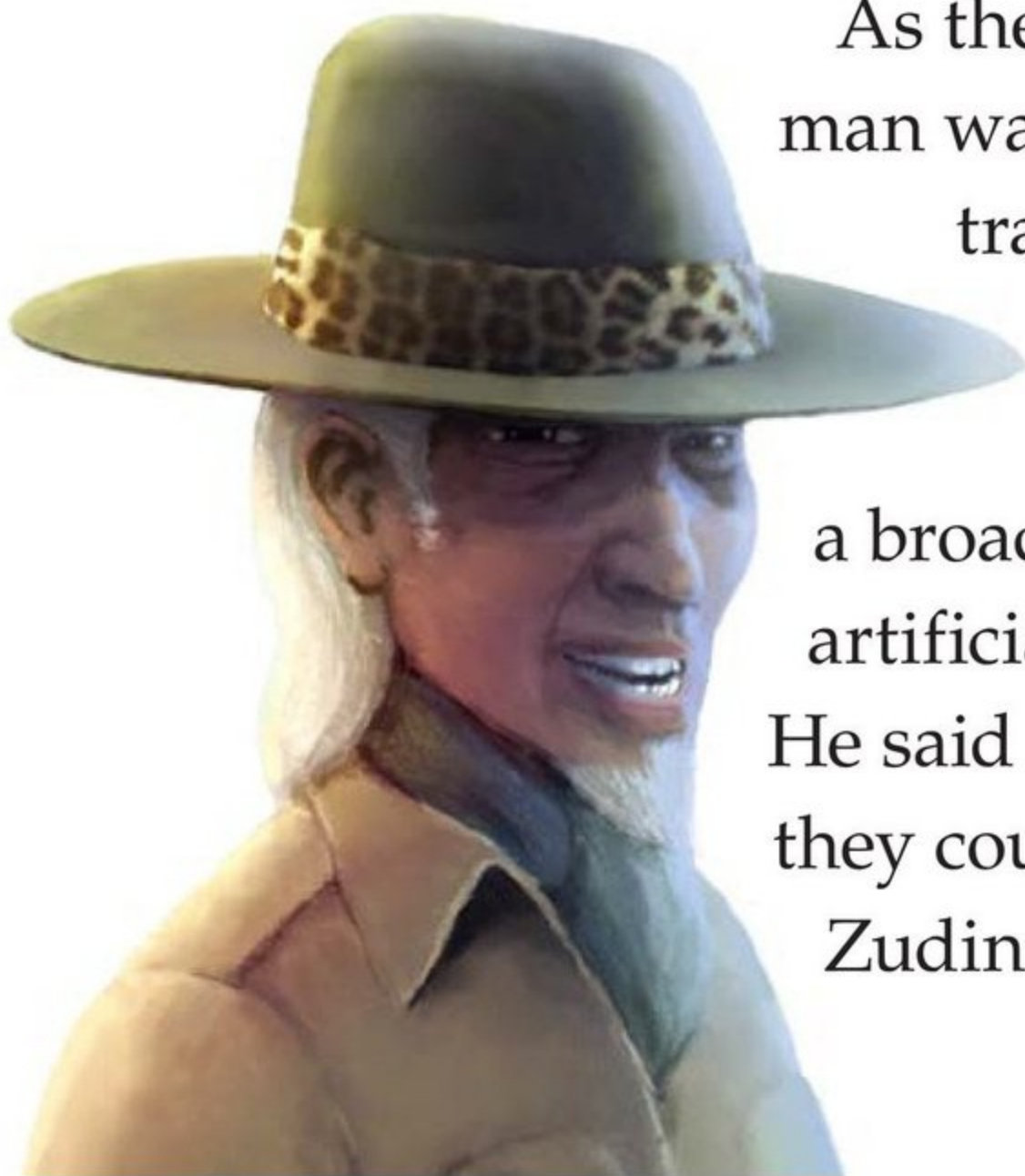
Just then, a large white SUV with black tinted windows pulled up, and out popped a small man with white hair and a goatee. He was dressed as if he were going on a safari—not looking at animals in the remotest part of Wyoming.

A woman exited the other side of the vehicle, wearing a nice blouse, slacks, heels, and a **strained** expression.

“The fabled Dr. Zudinitich,” Malcolm whispered.

“Wow. I didn’t recognize her.”

“That’s because in most pictures she’s in a lab coat, wearing goggles, with her hair up. He must be a big shot.”



As they watched, the man walked around the transport, examining the Entelodont with great interest, a broad smile showing artificially white teeth. He said something that they couldn’t hear, and Dr. Zudinitich forced a smile.

Hazel could tell she didn't really like the man, nor did she really want to be there. The man seemed able to tell, too, and he started directing his conversation at Jim, who proved more amiable.

After a few minutes, the man and Dr. Zudinitich climbed back in the vehicle and drove off. Jim climbed into the transport and left in the opposite direction.

"That was odd," Malcolm muttered. "He must have been pretty important to pull Dr. Z out of her lab and get to inspect an animal up close like that."

Hazel made a noncommittal noise, but she could see Malcolm's gears turning. He pointed to where the other keeper who had loaded the Entelodont into the transport was waving them over.

"Back to work," Malcolm said.



That evening, Hazel couldn't bring herself to hang out in the common room with Malcolm like she had the past few weeks. He was entertaining, and she liked him, but she needed a break. Working day in and day out with anyone could wear a person down.

She watched a movie on her computer for a while, but she couldn't really concentrate. The smiling man's face kept forcing its way into her mind. The smile, with its too-white teeth, had an **animalistic** quality that made her uneasy. She had seen the same expression on some of the predators at feeding time.

When she felt out of sorts at home, she would take a walk to let the air clear her head. While the **powers that be** had never **expressly** said they couldn't go around the compound at night, it didn't seem expressly allowed, either. She decided to risk it.

The cool night air sent a shiver through her, but it felt good to be outside. She heard some of the nocturnal animals making noises, but other than that, everything seemed peacefully quiet. Sticking her hands in her pockets, she set out in no particular direction.

Lighting was sparse, but by now, she knew the buildings inside and out, and 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. They had returned Adam not long after Hazel arrived, and she could hear the pair snoring behind the locked door. She couldn't help but smile at the sound.

In the distance, she saw a pair of headlights weaving and bouncing down the dirt road that led between the compounds. As the lights drew closer, she could tell they didn't belong to 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 and see.

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

Jim hopped out of the driver's side, and two other keepers climbed out the passenger's. Nothing seemed to be moving inside the vehicle as Jim pulled the back doors open, but it was difficult to see with so little light. She heard the crinkling of tarps as the trio reached into the transport and pulled out something large. It made a dull thump as it hit the ground. They reached in and pulled out three more tarps. *Thump. Thump. Thump.*

Hazel felt like she was watching something she shouldn't, but she couldn't turn away. 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. She couldn't identify what it was, though. The second one was larger, and when they set it down, she could just make out the shoulder portion 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 lolling 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. Entelodonts were pretty aggressive, and this one might have 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, unwelcome thoughts tumbling through her brain. Had the man with the white teeth hunted the creature? Did the researchers and Dr. Zudinitich 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.

“What’s bothering you?” Malcolm asked over breakfast. He was tearing through a fried egg and bacon sandwich, while Hazel just poked at her cereal.

Hazel shook her head. She could tell him what she’d seen, but she didn’t know the whole story yet. It looked bad, and that would just fuel Malcolm’s conspiracy theory. She didn’t want to say anything until she had talked to Jim.

After the keeper team had their morning meeting to discuss assignments, 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. Once the doors were closed, he asked, “What’s up?”

It took Hazel a moment to gather the words, but soon she described what she saw the previous night. Jim looked out the windshield at the complex and nodded.

“When Dr. Z first offered me this position, I found the idea of letting billionaires hunt extinct animals for sport **abhorrent**. I had cared for animals in zoos since I was your age, and I couldn’t bring myself to do it—so I refused.”

Jim turned to look at Hazel. “Then she explained the good we could do. These people pay **exorbitant** amounts of money for us to raise these animals so they can hunt and, in some cases, eat them.” Jim sighed. “While we raise these creatures, we learn about them—how they behave, raise young, survive—**verifying** more information than paleontologists have even speculated about since the creation of the science.

“The money has also allowed us to bring back recently extinct animals: the golden toad and the Zanzibar leopard, for example, which were both killed off because of humans. We’re working toward releasing these creatures back into their natural ecosystems, where they have a chance of surviving because the money has allowed us to increase conservation efforts around the globe.

“Last year alone, the organization purchased and preserved tens of thousands of acres 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; and they funded research expeditions into the remotest regions on Earth to discover new species, which we never could have afforded if it weren’t for the money raised here from the legal hunting of twenty-seven animals—many of which have been extinct so long, their natural habitats no longer exist.”

Jim’s arguments were logical, but Hazel couldn’t **reconcile** logic with the thought of Eve running through the expansive compound while some rich dude with a big gun stalked her for the most expensive dinner of his life.



“I don’t know,” she finally said. “It makes sense, but it doesn’t at the same time.”

“I understand,” Jim said, placing his hand on her shoulder. “Look, we’re doing good work here—important work—and sometimes that requires 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.”

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

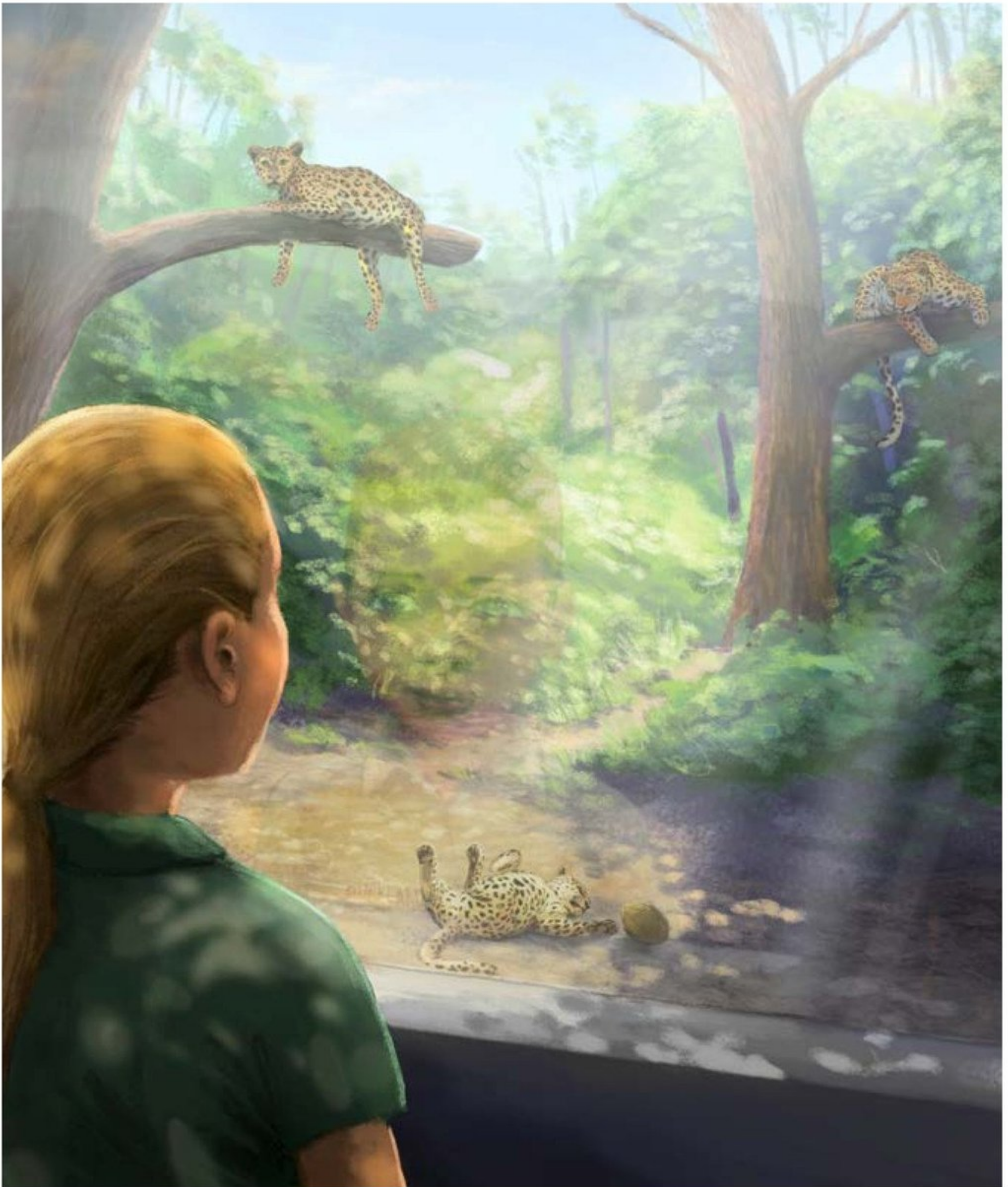
Hazel nodded and climbed out of the truck.



She 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 unlike livestock, these two animals could potentially save thousands.

On her way to feed the golden toads, she stopped by the Zanzibar leopards’ area. Most of the cats slumbered in various trees, but one was awake: a juvenile, playfully batting around a coconut.

Its movements were often clumsy, but occasionally, she could glimpse something in the lithe form that hinted at what made these creatures great hunters. 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, Malcolm found Hazel eating dinner outside and sat down beside her on the grass. “Okay, you need to spill it already. You’ve been moping all day, not talking to anyone, and it’s not normal. I’m the only other person here who understands the internship woes, so you can’t leave me in the dark.”

Hazel sighed and explained everything to Malcolm. For the first time since they met, he sat quietly and listened to her without interjection.

“Wow,” he sighed when she finished. “This possibility was on the list of potentials, but I never thought it could really happen. 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 dignified protest, and we lose our college funding, but we get to maintain 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. The program would likely be shut down, and Buckland Wildlife would be crucified 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. Eventually, people started filing out of the cafeteria and back to work. Malcolm finished his sandwich before he spoke again, quietly.



“Or you could do what I’m going to do, and accept a less than ideal 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

abhorrent (<i>adj.</i>)	causing or deserving disgust or hatred (p. 16)
animalistic (<i>adj.</i>)	showing behavior or traits similar to those of wild animals (p. 12)
astronomical (<i>adj.</i>)	incredibly large (p. 7)
consign (<i>v.</i>)	to place in an undesirable situation or location (p. 7)
conspiracy theorist (<i>n.</i>)	one who explains events or situations as being the result of a secret plot (p. 7)
coy (<i>adj.</i>)	unwilling or reluctant to share sensitive information (p. 7)
exorbitant (<i>adj.</i>)	going beyond reasonable limits; unexpectedly high or expensive (p. 16)
expressly (<i>adv.</i>)	in a clear and explicit manner (p. 12)
futility (<i>n.</i>)	the condition of having no point or result; uselessness (p. 8)
high ground (<i>n.</i>)	a morally superior position (p. 21)
humane (<i>adj.</i>)	causing as little pain as possible (p. 15)
internship (<i>n.</i>)	a temporary job where a student or trainee works, often without pay, to gain experience in a particular profession (p. 3)

monitor (<i>v.</i>)	to observe the progress of something (p. 4)
nondisclosure (<i>n.</i>)	the practice of keeping information secret or unknown (p. 4)
perpetuity (<i>n.</i>)	the state of lasting forever or for a very long time (p. 4)
powers that be (<i>n.</i>)	people who hold authority (p. 12)
proprietary (<i>adj.</i>)	having to do with exclusive ownership of property or information (p. 3)
ramifications (<i>n.</i>)	consequences that result from a decision or action (p. 3)
reconcile (<i>v.</i>)	to make two or more things be true at the same time or consistent with each other (p. 17)
specimen (<i>n.</i>)	an example of something used for comparison, study, or display (p. 5)
status quo (<i>n.</i>)	the current state of things (p. 9)
strained (<i>adj.</i>)	showing great effort; tense, unnatural, or uneasy (p. 10)
verifying (<i>v.</i>)	proving or confirming the truth and accuracy of something (p. 16)
violating (<i>v.</i>)	breaking a law or rule (p. 4)

The Zoo of Extinct Animals

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 3,146

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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