

LAND OF BONES

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MIM Yudiarto



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1. STRANDED

Who would have thought they ended up in this godforsaken place? It was somewhere in the middle of nowhere. It could not have existed on any map.

"We should have gone in the direction of the sunset, Ran. Now we're stuck in God knows where," Rabat wiped the sweat off his forehead. It was a very hot day. Especially since they might have walked more than 10 kilometers from the plane's crash site.

Ran, a tall and stout man, looked at Rabat with a confused look. The decision was made way back. There was no point of arguing now. The most important thing was to immediately find a way out. They were in the middle of a dense tropical forest. No one had a map or a compass. They could only rely on their memories and intuitions.

"Let's just follow the river. First, we've got to find the river," a reasonable suggestion from Cindy. The only woman who survived the plane crash.

The five survivors nodded simultaneously.

They took a short break to prepare some supplies. Navigating the wilderness to look for a river wouldn't be easy. Especially since they had just escaped death. They were on a small plane

that experienced engine failure. The pilot had to perform an emergency landing in a small field in the middle of a vast forest. Both pilot and technician didn't make it. Miraculously, all members of the expedition team survived with only minor injuries.

Once they buried the dead, the team started moving to find their way to the nearest village or town. They needed to inform the university about the incident and ask for an evacuation.

Ran was the head of the expedition team searching for a country called the Land of Bones. A land that was said to be hidden somewhere in the African tropical jungles, or in a savanna, or in a peninsula. No one knew for certain. The directions they got only mentioned that it was in a tropical forest bordering a savanna on an African peninsula. Very informative.

The team consisted of five people. Cindy was an anthropologist. Rabat was a geologist. Tet was a biologist, as well as tracker. A paleontologist named Ben. And Ran, the team leader and a bone specialist.

After gathering what little they had, the team was back on the move. This time they followed a small stream with no water.

The small stream would lead to a larger river, and the water flow would eventually merge with the main river leading to the sea.

Tet was first. He was the most experienced and reliable tracker in finding trails. Followed by Ben, Cindy, Rabat, and finally Ran. Besides being a doctor, Ran was also an excellent shooter. So, he got to hold the only rifle available.

Just a few steps from where they started, Tet raised his hand signaling to stop. He heard something. Tet crouched down and asked his friends to do the same. Everyone followed.

Not far in front of them was a terrible sight. An animal like a lion but larger than normal was fighting an animal like a tiger of the same size. They both were not common species. The lion's body was colorful. The tiger was furless, with a body like a hippo.

The entire expedition team was stunned. Amazed by the exciting scene in front of them. Tet frowned at the strange sight. It felt like it was out of this earth. He had never seen any references mentioning those strange looking animals.

The fight ended without a winner. The two predatory beasts turned around and ran away from each other. The battleground in the form of a thicket of bushes was a complete disarray. Proof of a great fight.

"Wh...what were those, Tet?" Cindy stammered.

"Where the hell are we?" Ben muttered to himself.

Tet looked at his friends with a slight grin:

"Team, it seems we are stranded in an unknown place. On the bright side, it looks like we're the first to set foot on this place. I believe we are still on earth."

The journey continued. The terrain was getting steeper. The trail of the small river ended at the edge of a steep canyon. Roughly over 100 feet. Below, there was a larger river with a waterfall which dropped water into a deep gorge. They could not even see where the huge waterfall landed as the gorge was covered by thick fog.

The expedition team members looked at each other. It was impossible for them to descend this vertical cliff. It was just too dangerous. Turning back was the only option. This time Ran took the lead.

The stranded survivors hobbled along. Looking for other streams to explore. They agreed to spend the afternoon walking. They would look for a place to rest in the evening.

By the end of the day, Ran found a flat ground suitable for setting up a tent. They shared tasks. Someone was looking for water. Collecting dry twigs. Cooking. And, of course, keeping an eye out.

That night everyone gathered around the bonfire. Ran made the fire big enough to protect them from dangerous beasts. No one talked during supper. They were overwhelmed. Today they had gone through physical and emotional stress. Airplane crash, wild journey in the forest. On top of all, watching the fight of two strange beasts that were not recorded in any science books.

Not to mention the fact that they had no clue about where they were.

Although they were exhausted, no one fell asleep easily. Everyone gathered around the bonfire. Busy in their own thoughts. What else would they face tomorrow?

Aaaaaawwww....Aaaaaawwww....Sooooooooosh

The sound of high-pitched shriek and loud flapping wings filled the air around the expedition team. Alerted and scared, they stood up immediately. The sound was blood-curdling!

Ran cocked his gun. Ready to fire toward anything threatening.

Aaaaaawwww....Aaaaaawwww....Sooooooooosh....
whaaamm....

The horrible sound was back and sounded very close. Followed by the sound of heavy objects falling right in front of them.

The five people jumped back. Staring at the objects in front of them. They didn't fall. They were dropped!

Those were animal heads! Two heads along with large ribs.

Cindy was screaming. She recognized those were the heads of the lion and tiger that fought this afternoon!

Ran and Tet furrowed their brows at the same time. Seemed like they were indeed in a mysterious unknown site. They had to bring their game from now on.

2.

THE GIANT RIVER

They all looked at the two heads that were mysteriously dropped earlier with caution. The heads of the lion and tiger were cut off with extreme precision. As if they were cut by something very sharp. Ran shuddered. What kind of creature was capable of such thing?

As dawn approached, Ran asked the team to get ready. This place had been exposed. It was too dangerous to stay here. They should move often. Covered their track until they understood what was going on and what kind of place this was.

After a hasty and simple breakfast, the team started moving. There was a 3-meter-wide stream near the campsite. This was worth exploring. They hoped this river wouldn't end up in a steep canyon like the day before.

The day was sunny. But no one was interested in talking about the weather. The silence of the forest made the situation even more tense. Ran counted the number of bullets he had. This was a large caliber rifle but the ammunition was very limited. He had to be wise in using it.

It would only be used in the utmost emergency.

Suddenly, that emergency moment came about. The ground suddenly shook violently. An earthquake! Rabat fell backwards. Bumping hard against Ben who staggered and fell.

Everyone lay down on the ground. The earthquake was strong. Luckily the big trees around them remained standing. But still. The rumbling sound of the clashing canopy was gut wrenching.

The earthquake stopped as fast as it started. Rabat, the geologist, grabbed the binoculars on Ran's shoulder. Something crossed his mind. Rabat quickly climbed a nearby tall tree with many branches. Up above, Rabat looked around with the high-resolution binoculars.

The other waited down below. They knew Rabat had more than adequate knowledge of the earth and rocks. He must have figured something out. They were waiting for his analysis of what had happened.

Once he climbed down from the tree, Rabat shook his head. He knew what was going on.

"Guys, it wasn't an earthquake. There were no signs of volcanic or tectonic activity. That was a local ground movement. I have no idea what it was, but it was definitely not due to earth activity."

Tet added, "I agree with Rabat. If it was an earthquake, at least one or two trees must have fallen. Look! Even that big, dead tree didn't fall or break."

Everyone nodded. Then, what was that? They were deep in their thoughts.

While their minds were occupied, they finally saw what had caused the violent shaking. It caused the ground to crack. They could see a long hole not far from where they were. What shocked them was not the hole, but the thing inside it.

Shimmering foreign objects splattered in the hole. Tet was the first to run over to check. As a biologist, he could guess what they were. To be sure, he took one and carried it with him.

"You know what this is?" Tet asked while holding up the pentagon shaped object in his hand.

Everyone moved in closer to examine the object. Some said shields, others thought they were the pieces from the plane wall, or some kind of precious metal.

Tet, who was still shocked by the discovery, threw the object to the ground.

"It's a scale! The huge scales of a giant beast. Maybe some species of snake. Anaconda!"

The rest were shocked. Holy shit! Such large scales must belong to a giant snake! Ran flicked the rifle's safety ready to shoot. Even though he knew it was pointless.

"We've got to hurry. The giant snake must be close. The river flows in the opposite direction. Let's go!" Ran instructed.

Without arguing, everyone rushed to leave the place. No one wanted to be the giant snake's dinner.

After scurrying for half a day, the river suddenly disappeared! Ben tried to investigate. It turned out that the river flowed into the ground at the foot of a tall hill in front of them.

They took a deep breath. Their struggle was far from over. The hill must be climbed. It wasn't too high. Rabat said the river would come out at the foot of the hill on the other side. And they were very tired. Hufffttt.

While others suggested that they rest, Ran insisted on moving along. He sensed

that the other side of the hill would be much safer because it wasn't in the same landscape as the giant snake.

The ascent began. The hill was not too high, but because the expedition team had

lost more than half of their energy. They moved much slower than they did on a flat terrain.

"Ouch.... watch out, guys! There's a lot of thorns here!" Cindy shouted to warn

her friends. Her arms were pierced by the little thorns several times.

So, they decided to wear long-sleeved clothing to prevent the sharp thorns. It wasn't comfortable.

It was the right decision, though. Not long after, they heard Cindy's scream.

This time it was not a warning. Cindy had fallen unconscious.

Ran, who was walking behind, rushed forward to check on Cindy. The woman's body

and face were turning blue rapidly. Ran immediately injected a universal anti-venom serum into Cindy's body. An anti-venom serum was a standard medical equipment

for an expedition team like theirs.

Ran had a hunch that Cindy was poisoned. He was sure it was the small thorns' poison from the shrubs that were all over the hill.

They couldn't possibly stop at the ridge. It wasn't a safe place to camp, because there were too many poisonous thorny shrubs. They moved forward with Ben and Rabat were carrying Cindy on a stretcher.

The climb got slower with Cindy's injury. It wasn't until the sun fell completely on the horizon that they reached the top of the hill. Ran, who arrived first, immediately checked the surrounding. The twilight provided an amazing view!

From where they were standing, they could see a clear field suitable for camping. Further away they saw a huge body of water. Could that be an ocean? That was amazing! A beach must be nearby and there could be settlements with means of communication. They could contact the university for evacuation.

Ran hesitated. Then he narrowed his eyes to confirm. There was a faint black shadow on the edge of the water. It was too far for him to recognize what it was. But it seemed like an edge. He called Ben for a second opinion. He asked Ben to use the binoculars.

"Check that out! Is that a sea or a lake, Ben?"

Ben did what was asked. And Ben couldn't be sure either. Since the light was starting to disappear.

Ran looked around. He was considering whether they should camp at the top of this hill or descend into the clearing below. Ran checked Cindy's condition once again. She seemed to be getting better. Her breathing was regular even though she was not awake yet. The blue color on her face and body had completely disappeared. Ran breathed a sigh of relief.

One last check on pulses and eyes. Cindy's pulse was beating fast! Way above the normal rate! Ran started to worry. It was weird. Regular breathing patterns should be followed by a regular pulse. Ran opened Cindy's closed eyes. Ran almost jumped back! Cindy's eyes were creepy too, they were all black! Ben did what was asked. And Ben couldn't be su

A decision was made. Cindy's abnormal condition required a proper place for examination. And water! They needed enough water for an emergency like this. Their water supply was just enough for the night. But not for all kinds of examinations.

Exhausted, the group descended from the hill. In the dark and only dimly lit by flashlights and storm lamps, the trip down took almost 3 hours.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when they saw the clearing as it turned out to be a good camping site. Protected by a circle of hills. And in front of them was an ocean.

Ran asked the team members to focus fully on Cindy's treatments. Ran didn't know exactly whether Cindy's condition was life-threatening or not. Physically she seemed fine especially after checking Cindy's pulse, which was normal.

What really puzzling was her eyes! The entire pupil was still black. No changes at all. At least tonight they had to keep Cindy warm. The fire should stay on. They needed to observe Cindy throughout the night.

The night did pass with no incident at all. Team members took turns to take guard against any danger while monitoring Cindy's condition. There was only one thing that didn't make sense. The ocean rumbled incessantly. But there was no hurricanes or tornadoes. They kept their questions in their minds hoping for reasonable explanation tomorrow.

Ran, who got the last shift, looked at the humongous body of water in front of him without blinking. Morning had come. Cindy was fine. Although Ran couldn't confirm whether her eyes had returned to normal or not. She was still asleep. Or rather she had not regained her consciousness yet.

That body of water was not an ocean! What he was witnessing was an unbelievably large river. And this giant river was raging!

3. SECOND NIAGARA

Ran watched the water level of the raging giant river washing away large logs of wood. It was still quite far from the campsite. But if they didn't do anything to anticipate it, Ran worried that the water level would get higher and reach their campsite. Going up the hill again wasn't an option. Cindy hadn't fully recovered yet.

Ran looked around. Searching for something to float on. There was nothing but clumps of bamboo that thrived on the banks of the river.

Ran had one crazy thought. Why didn't they build a raft out of those big bamboos? At least they had a plan if the river continued to rage and overflow to where they were camped. It was a sound backup plan.

Ran told his idea to the rest of the team. They all agreed. Especially after seeing how powerful the giant river rolling everything in its path.

There were no more logs carried by the current, but the muddy water seemed to be getting higher.

After having a light meal, the four healthy team members quickly cut down the bamboo trees and made a raft. Based on their survival experience, the raft shouldn't be too big because

it would be unstable in a fast river current. So, they made three small rafts. Each for two people including equipment and supplies.

Cindy still hadn't woken up yet. Apparently, the effect of the poisonous thorn bush was very strong. Even though the poison's destructive power was no longer life-threatening, Ran, who was a doctor, thought that Cindy's eye change were only temporary or that there was something else he couldn't explain.

At noon, all rafts were done, along with the folding paddles they had brought with them as standard expedition equipment. For precaution, Ran asked everyone to put all equipment on the raft and tightly tied. If anything happened, all they needed to do was jump on the raft without worrying about packing up.

There was a short groan. Cindy! Everyone rushed to her. Cindy slowly opened her eyes. Everyone except Ran looked away. The girl's eyes were still completely black. That beautiful face had strange and horrendous eyes.

Cindy blinked. Looking around while stretching her body. Cindy felt something strange in her vision. She recognized her teammates. But it was like black and white movie. Cindy looked around. Bamboo groves, soil, rivers, and even the sky were all in black and white! Cindy almost screamed!

Ran held the girl's hand to calm her down. The head of the expedition team signaled his friends to continue preparing for the river crossing, because the water seemed to be rising fast.

After the others left to get ready, Ran helped Cindy sit down and then told her what had happened.

"But Ran, what's wrong with my sight? Why does everything look black and white like an old movie? Please explain. Is this the effect of the serum or the poison?" Cindy asked in a sad voice. Being color blind was a blow to her.

Ran took a deep breath. Confused about how to respond because he didn't fully understand what happened to her eyes.

"Cindy, calm down. I guess it was the herb's poison. Be patient. Hopefully, we can get out of here as soon as we find civilization and call someone. We will use our rafts through this giant river. As soon as possible. Look, the water's rising."

Cindy looked around. Ran was right. No need to panic. She should think clearly and help her friends to leave this strange place as quickly as possible.

Cindy stood up. Wow! Her aching body had recovered. In fact, she could move easily

Her body was very fit. Ran was amazed with what he saw. She looked healthy and fresh. Watching her jumped up so lightly reminded Ran of the heroes in kungfu movies. Fast and agile!

Yet he knew exactly. Cindy used to be a graceful woman who couldn't move fast! Ran kept the confusion to himself. He didn't want to make her panic again or overwhelmed everyone. He would find out why later. When they were safe.

The water reached their camp site. Ran was about to help Cindy step onto the raft. It was unnecessary as Cindy had stepped onto the raft as swiftly as a cat.

Ben, the biggest and strongest of them all, rode the raft, along with most of the equipment. While Rabat and Tet were on the other raft.

The five expedition team members looked at each other as if trying to lift each other's spirits. They would ride a bamboo raft across a giant river with fast moving currents. It would be quite an adventure!

As soon as the three rafts were floating in the water, they immediately rowed the raft slightly to the middle of the river. Ben, who was a rafting instructor in his hometown, told them not to paddle hard because it would use up their energy. Paddling only used for directing the raft. Those were some of the lessons from Ben about rafting through the fast-flowing river.

Ben was right. When they almost reached the middle of the river, the current turned out to be calmer. They were relieved.

The next task was to use the paddles to prevent the raft from drifting to the edge of the river.

The river was calmer downstream. Some of them started to enjoy the journey and were even laughing. The river was very wide. The shores were so far away from each other that it looked almost like a huge lake. But the scenery along the way was breathtaking!

Especially when they passed by dolphin-like river fishes jumping along the rafts. The fish swam in the opposite direction to them. Meaning the fish were swimming upstream. Tet mentioned that the fish might be some kind of salmon that always went upstream to lay eggs.

There was one thing that Tet missed. The fish were panicky, judging from their swimming style. The fish seemed to be avoiding some threats. Tet didn't know that the fish had actually been swept downstream and were now desperately swimming upstream to avoid something.

And that something was now visible from a distance! Foams of water were whiten and foggy. The current was also getting stronger. Ran, who was always alert, squinted his eyes and grabbed the binoculars. His stern face turned pale as soon as he realized what it was in the distance.

"Hey!.... Hey!... row to the shore! row to the shore!" Ran shouted on top of his lungs as he was rowing his raft hard toward the riverbank. The others on the two rafts were clueless of what was going on, but hearing Ran's scream and seeing him frightened rushing to row the raft to the side, made them paddling as hard as they could toward the riverbank.

The roar of the mighty waterfall was heard. It was still covered by the sound of the river's current, but then the roar was louder. It was a waterfall! A colossal waterfall!

The three rafts were racing. Ignoring the limit of their arm and body strengths, the rafts were rushed toward the riverbank. It was so close! When the water was getting stronger, they managed to land the raft on the riverbank, and tied them to hanging roots of a large tree.

The five of them worked together to unload all equipment by climbing the hanging roots. The men looked exhausted because the buttresses of the trees were so big and the distance between them was quite wide. But Cindy was jumping from one point to another effortlessly.

As soon as they reached the land, the five adventurers witnessed a terrifying scene not far from the downstream. The river currents plunged like millions of moths into an immense abyss! A waterfall that was far bigger than the Niagara!

The five of them were silent for a few minutes as they took deep breaths over and over. God has sent them on an adventure like no other!

4. FIELD OF BONES

Cindy closed her eyes. Her ears heard something. Subtle but annoying.

Aaaaaaaaaawwww....Craaassshhh....Aaaaawwww.....
Aaaarrrggghhh

It was like the sound of a large bird in pain, falling and dying. Cindy opened her eyes and looked for Ran. The man was busy fixing the slightly messy equipment after being taken down in a hurry.

Ran turned when he heard Cindy's footsteps approaching.

"Ran, I think I'm hearing some strange noises. Did you hear it?"

Cindy told him what she had just heard. Ran listened seriously. Surprised. He didn't let Cindy know that he heard nothing. Ran thought that Cindy's strange actions were starting to show. First it was her agility. Now, it was her hearing acuity.

To confirm his suspicions, Ran checked with the other team members separately after Cindy left. Exactly as expected. No one heard anything. Cindy had changed! Hopefully not for the worst. Ran prayed silently.

"What should we do now. Any idea?" Ran started the conversation as everyone sat in a circle eating canned food.

They all looked at each other stuttering for an idea. They were in a very strange country. Not on the map. Many animals and plants were not in the encyclopedia. Not to mention the gigantic natural landscape. Could they be trapped in a mythical land?

"Let's just continue towards the sunset, Ran. I heard the waves crashing in the distance. Down the river there are too many gorges and ravines. We're wasting a lot of time," Cindy said after a few moments of silence.

The four men looked at Cindy. What waves? They heard absolutely nothing.

"But we have to be very careful. The direction to the beach must pass through the place I mentioned earlier, there will be a large dead bird," Cindy continued while looking at Ran.

Except for Ran who chose to scan the sky for the direction of the sun, the other three men were looking at Cindy. Big dead bird? What was wrong with her?

Cindy tilted her head. Concentrating on something.

"Some big birds fell from the sky. Dead. Let's go, guys. I also heard from behind that a large slithering beast is coming toward this direction. Maybe it's the kind of Anaconda that Tet mentioned," Cindy continued.

Ran believed her now, he was sure of Cindy's acutely sharp hearing!

"Guys! You heard Cindy. Let's go!"

The group walked in the direction of the sunset. Ran asked that Cindy lead because he saw that the road was quite wide. Not many bushes or thick shrubs needed to be slashed. Ran relied on her hearing.

Cindy continued to lead the way. Occasionally, she stopped while listening to something. Turned right, sometimes left. Apart from Ran, all team members couldn't help but wonder. Was Cindy possessed?

Cindy raised her hand. Signaling her friends to stop. She continued to walk slowly. Tiptoeing. Her footsteps didn't make any sound at all. She seemed like a tiger or a bobcat stalking the prey. Incredible!

Even though she could predict what to expect in front of her, Cindy couldn't help but be shocked. A vast savanna stretched out ahead with a nightmarish sight. Instead of grass and sand, it was filled with bones! Scattered everywhere as far as eyes could see!

Cindy sharpened her black and white vision. The bones came in different kinds. Some were small and some were giant. Seemed like they came from different kinds of animals.

Cindy made sure once again that nothing lived or moved in the field of bones. Some of the bones were still fresh with the flesh almost torn apart completely. Some carnivores must have eaten them. Cindy had to make sure the predators weren't there. Otherwise, they would be in grave danger.

Seeing Cindy standing for a while watching without moving, Ran grew worried. It looked like there was something ahead to watch out for. Ran approached her. The others followed.

They stood in a row next to Cindy to witness the surreal sight. A field full of bones! A vast place filled with scattered bones everywhere!

"What's more out there, Cindy? Do we have to go through that horrendous field?" Tet whispered in Cindy's ear. Everyone was waiting for her response.

"There is something out there, very big having a feast. We have to wait..." Cindy gave a gut-wrenching answer.

5. LAVA-FILLED BEACH

For a moment everyone was silence. The five expedition team members held their breath hearing a growling sound in the distance. Low but threatening. A bird similar to vulture but ten times larger was tearing the flesh of a floundering bird. The ostrich-sized bird was being slaughtered.

The vulture-like bird was not alone. There were more of them doing the same as the first bird separately. The field of bones was their banquet.

Cindy gasped when she heard the sound of large bird flapping in the air that seemed to be heading toward her. Then, wham! A large bull carcass was dropped not far from them. Everyone ducked. Hiding amongst dense bushes. They were sure that whatever dropped the carcass would follow.

Whoooossssh. Sure enough, a large bird resembling a vulture landed right on top of the bull's carcass. The bird tore apart the tough flesh so easily with its sharp beak.

The bird didn't seem to notice that several pairs of eyes were watching it with pounding hearts.

It was too close! Ran was nervous. He motioned to his team to move away.

Too late! The giant bird croaked loudly as it walked towards them. Everyone's faces were pale. Ran was carrying a rifle. But they all doubted whether it was useful for such a large bird.

Ran cocked the rifle and aimed it at the giant bird's head. There was no easy prey, Ran told himself. The bird deliberately walked slowly toward their hiding place. Like a hunter playing with its prey. Everyone was silent and tense.

Suddenly there were waves of strong wind gush. From the sky, similar birds plunged into their direction. The bird went straight to the bull's carcass on the ground.

The bird that was prowling toward the expedition team was distracted. It turned around and leapt at several birds that were feasting on a carcass. A fight was inevitable. The birds attacked each other using claws and beaks. The sound of creaking and flapping of wings sent dust and sand flying in the air. It was a ferocious sight.

This was an opportunity! Cindy signaled her friends to follow. After turning away from the battle arena, Cindy walked quickly into the field of bones. Her friends followed behind. Without asking or talking much.

Half running, the five people crossed the field. Everyone trusted Cindy to lead them on the right direction. Keeping their distance away from the big birds that were busy eating. Their escape route was winding erratically.

The field was large. With the time they spent scurrying along, they had not yet

traveled half the distance. Out of exhaustion, despite the adrenaline rush, Cindy finally stopped. She was not tired. But her teammate seemed out of breath.

They stopped in the middle of the field. A large rock protected them from the scorching heat. Ran hesitated. Behind the big rock, he saw a hole big enough for humans to enter. He remembered the big snake that Tet told him about.

Cindy assured Ran that there was no suspicious sound in the hole. She didn't know what hole it was, but it was clear that the hole was empty. Ran believed her. The others believed her too but anyone could see the despair in their eyes. They were stuck between a rock and a hard place.

After feeling rested enough, Ran ordered the team to continue. They still had a long way to go and they didn't know what awaited ahead.

Just when they were about to take the first steps, Cindy suddenly put a finger to her mouth. Everyone held their breath. What now? Cindy pointed toward a direction.

In the distance, some small shadows were seen running fast towards them. Meanwhile in the sky the big birds were gliding, chasing the shadows. As they approached, the team realized that what was running towards them was a herd of rabbits the size of sheepdogs. Ran and his teammates did not know what to do. Were those rabbits dangerous too?

Instinctively, Cindy led her friends into the hole in front of them. It was clear that the rabbits were fleeing towards this hole. Not towards them. The human-sized hole was quite wide inside. Even if they had to jostle with the rabbits, it wouldn't be a problem.

Once the five of them were in the hole. The swarm of big rabbits came in. Three of the rabbits were in. The last rabbit let out a loud scream after its body was grabbed by the giant bird and carried into the air.

It was an unsettling sight. The three rabbits crouched in the corner of the hole. Meanwhile, the humans in front of them looked stunned at their sizes. Rabbits the size of sheepdogs were surprisingly odd if not creepy.

But it did not last long. After hearing what was going on outside the hole, Cindy decided they should leave immediately. While those birds were eating.

The expedition team scurried, leaving the hole. Tet forgot about his intention to take a picture of the giant rabbits because he was preoccupied with fear.

From a distance, Cindy's sharp eyes could see the ocean waves crashing. The girl who moved as agile as a cat accelerated her pace. Not realizing that her friends were all struggling to keep up with her.

It was not without reason. Something was chasing them! Cindy couldn't see what it was. Not the birds. Her intuition told her that it was something as dangerous. Cindy deliberately didn't warn her teammates so they wouldn't panic. Panic would tire them even more. The beach was in sight.

And here they were! But it wasn't a joy that waited for them. The beach was blocked by something else. A river 10-meter wide. Hot steaming river. That was a river of lava! Dear God!

6. STORM

Cindy whispered in Ran's ear. Ran's face immediately turned pale. In the midst of confusion and a tense situation. Finally Ran made up his mind;

"Run! Leave all the equipment behind! We follow this lava flow. I'm sure we'll get to the sea or the bay..."

Despite the strange order, all team members followed what Ran said. They dropped everything and rushed to follow the flow of the lava river. They had never imagined running on the edge of the hot lava river. The heat was eating away their strength to run. It was like a marathon through hell!

Cindy chose to run last. Her ears that were as sharp as bats could sense what was chasing them. Something under the ground! Might be the anaconda that Tet mentioned or some other scary animals. She wouldn't be surprised if a giant insect that could suck their blood appeared. Cindy shuddered.

The lurking sound behind them grew closer. It was less than 200 yards away. Cindy could hear it. Her friends couldn't. She screamed;

"Quick! Run faster! There's a big tree on your left! Climb! Climb!" Cindy's scream felt like an alarm to Ran. The team leader who was running in front swiftly climbed the giant tree. It had

many protrusions from the fallen branches, making it easier for them to climb.

Cindy was the last to climb. She climbed like a cat or a leopard! Her slender body had been on the tallest branch in no time. She was ahead of her friends who were still struggling to catch their breaths.

Cindy shouted again, "Here! Higher!"

Ran and his three male friends followed Cindy's orders. With the remaining strength left, they managed to reach the large branch where Cindy was standing while looking down.

The thing that was chasing them emerged from the ground with a rumbling sound of the ground splitting apart. Something scarier than an Anaconda! The beast had the body of a snake with eight legs like a spider! Its body was as big as two palm trees with a length of no less than 27 meters!

Although they were frightened and horrified because of the size of the strange beast, the legged snake couldn't climb trees like an ordinary snake. Those clumsy legs prevent the snake from climbing.

Cindy was a little taken a back. Was she that panicked that she told her friends to climb a nearby tree? Or was this a strong survival instinct from animals that usually became prey? Cindy shed a few tears. What creature had she become?

Cindy's thoughts were interrupted by the screams of her friends.

"Look! Storm's coming!"

"The sky over the sea is pitch black!"

"A storm's coming this way!"

She stared at the black and white sea. It was dark. The wind also started to pick up. Her long hair fluttered in the wind. Cindy turned to Ran. She didn't know what to do anymore. For a moment she forgot that the giant strange snake was still down there.

She saw Ran observing the enormous tree trunk. Cindy was also interested. She shifted her body closer to Ran. Ran turned his head and pointed at the back of the tree trunk. A hole? Cindy sighed. Another hole. Cindy nimbly moved to the branch opposite of where they were. She tried to listen.

Nothing. She tried again. Her hearing might not be accurate because of the howling wind. There really wasn't any sound in there. But what hole was this? Why was it in this big tree?

Ran gestured for Tet to come closer. The biologist. He might know what hole this was. With Cindy's help, Tet was struggling to move to the branch where Cindy was standing. Tet observed and then shouted because the sound of the wind drowned out all voices even more.

"It's a bird's nest! I don't know what bird, but I don't think it's the vulture we met earlier. This nest is too small for them!"

Ran nodded. Then asked Cindy to check the depth of the nest. With her unusual sight and hearing. But she realized that her hearing and sight were useless at this point. The storm had come. She couldn't count on her hearing.

Without hesitation, Cindy stepped into the hole. And immediately lapsed and lost from sight! Ran became hysterical. He approached the pit and intended to do the same. His friends followed him without knowing what had happened.

Ran jumped into the hole. For a moment his body floated and... landed on a soft place. Followed by a thudding sound of three other people. Ran took a small flash light that was always tucked away in his belt pocket. As soon as the light flashed, Ran's eyes immediately met with Cindy's black eyes, who grinned widely at him.

"This is the most luxurious bed since we were stranded in this godforsaken place," said Cindy, who leisurely laid down. Ran shone around the bottom of the hole. Cindy was right. The bottom of this hole was piled with various kinds of twigs and very thick dry leaves. Felt like a natural and comfortable foam mattress to sleep on.

They forgot about the giant strange snake that was still waiting for them down there. They ignored that a storm was raging out there. They found their own spot to lie down. Although it was a bit cramped, at least this was what they got right now.

They didn't know that the strange snake was digging the ground using its sharp claws. It didn't take long for the snake to tore the tree roots one by one from the ground that supported them.

But the snake dug in the direction of the storm. The tree still stood tall because it was being held back by the incoming wind. The tree should have fallen because half of its roots were uprooted.

In the nest. The expedition team could only pray that the storm would stop soon. They discussed what to do when the storm subsided and the strange snake was still waiting down there. They couldn't come up with anything. They just had to wait.

The storm raged for about two hours. The team used the time to rest and restore their energy. That was all they could do.

As soon as the storm subsided, the expedition team began to feel something strange with the tree they were in. It felt like the tree was shaken by an earthquake! Slowly at first, but gradually as the storm began to stop, the tree shook harder. They heard a loud creaking sound like something was snapping or being ripped apart.

Cindy realized what had happened. Her ears and instincts were working again. She signaled to her friends to follow what she was doing. She tucked her body so deep into the pile of nests.

Ran and the others hurriedly followed what Cindy was doing. They had completely trusted Cindy's instincts. Just in time!

Snaped....cracked...Baaaaammm!

The giant tree collapsed toward the ocean with a thundering sound. It broke right in the middle hitting the churning lava river. The part from the base to the middle stem immediately sank in the lava river. While the end of the nest where they took shelter fell on a soft beach. But starting from the middle of the fault, the tree started to burn!

Everyone in the nest didn't know what was going on. Except Cindy of course.

7.

Shipwreck

Ran felt stinging pain on his foot. He had no idea how bad it was, but he prayed that it wouldn't break. The tough expedition team leader braced himself. Checked the condition of his teammates one by one. All of them suffered minor injuries except Cindy. She looked fit and fresh. Ran wasn't surprised at all.

Everyone saw this as a miracle. Their path was blocked by a river of lava. Chased by a grotesque dragon like creature. Saved by a tree that happened to have a nest hole in it. And most importantly, this big tree was also the one that crossed them to the beach while escaping from the pursuit of this horrid creature. This was a miracle! A scenario that only God could write!

Cindy checked Ran's legs, which looked painful. It was okay. Just a few scrapes from wood chips. Cindy cleaned the wound and then bandaged it. Even though he was limping, Ran was able to stand back up and ask Rabat and Ben to explore the beach.

Rabat and Ben started checking the area. This beach was gentle even though large rocks were scattered here and there. The sea looked peaceful after the storm. The coastline was very long. It would take all day to trace the shoreline from end to end. Meanwhile, it was getting dark.

The sun would soon set. It'd be better if they looked for food and a safe place to stay.

The two of them searched carefully. They found some large rocks extending into the sea. Some were in formation. The sloping beach became even more interesting because of the scattered coral clusters. The two of them moved into the reef to seek shelter and catch fish if possible.

Ben was the first to see. Boat! His shout startled Rabat. Rabat looked in the direction Ben was pointing. Right. It was clear that the large figure of the ship was leaning between two large rocks. No wonder it hadn't been seen before. A ship that if judged from its shape was a ship of the Middle Ages...! A large wooden ship with many masts.

The ship looked solid. It had holes here and there, but it didn't look like it was falling apart. The two men approached the ship. It seemed to be supported by two rocks, so it was quite easy to reach.

It was a battleship. There were some rusty cannon muzzles on the ship's left wall facing the mainland. Ben threw himself into the sea. The ship was quite close. After a little swim in the calm water, Ben climbed onto the reef and watched. There was something strange about the ancient ship. But what was it? Ben waved to Rabat who was waiting on the bank.

Rabat approached Ben. The two of them stood on a rock and were right in front of the hull of the ship. Oh, here it was! A medieval sailing ship with a steel propeller in the bow. Weird! Didn't the ancients move boats using oars and there was only a rudder blade in the bow. It was the most absurd ship they had ever seen.

One more thing, after so many centuries submerged in sea water, this ship should be mossy. Overgrown with coral and becoming a reef for fish. It wasn't. This ship, although torn in several places, was still as smooth as when it came out of the shipyard. Insane. It was an unbelievable discovery.

Rabat was looking for a way to enter the mysterious ship. A ladder or a hole or whatever. Found it! There was a hole that tore the stern of the ship. Rabat tapped Ben's arm to follow him. The two walked carefully. The rock was very slippery.

They crawled in to enter the ship. Once in they were taken aback. What they encountered was more shocking than the ship's propeller. The stern of this ship was filled with large tubes made of fiberglass!

Ben and Rabat were tempted to investigate further. But that would take some time and it was getting dark. They were reminded of the other team members who must be waiting for their scouting to find a place to spend the night. Ben grabbed the walkie talkie by his waist. One of the pieces of equipment that was not left behind when they were chased by the legged snake.

"Wolf 1 monitor... Fox 2 is here to report..." Ben brought the walkie talkie to his ear, afraid that Ran's response couldn't be clearly received. Ben was right. Only the rusty sound came out of the walkie talkie speaker. After trying for a while to no avail, Rabat and Ben decided to continue the investigation so when they returned, they could bring a conclusion.

Rabat and Ben were even more astonished with the contents of the shipwreck. In the wheelhouse, they found all the advanced navigation equipment. They entered the deck and checked the crew's bedrooms, they found luxurious and comfortable bedrooms. They even saw modern cooking utensils in the kitchen.

"This is a modern ship, Rab. Not an old sailing ship," Ben said with certainty. Rabat didn't answer. He was busy checking the kitchen closet to find stocks of canned food or the like. Nothing.

"We have to notify the team. This ship is perfect for tonight," Rabat finally spoke after finding what he was looking for. Several boxes of canned food were stored in the cabinet at the bottom of the kitchen set.

Ben nodded. They had to move fast. It was almost completely dark. To get to this ship they had to swim even though it wasn't far. But if the weather worsened, or the sea was high tide, then it would be challenging.

Ran was worried. Ben and Rabat hadn't come back yet. He couldn't possibly ask Tet to look for them. Being apart was not the best option at this point. They didn't know what danger lurking in the dark. Their equipment was left on the other side of the lava river. They didn't have flashlights with them anymore. The only thing they had was walkie talkie and his was rattling. Someone tried to contact them, but the sound wasn't clear. Might be Ben or Rabat. Who else? Ran was getting worried.

"...monitoring? this is...bah 2..." well this was a bit clearer. Ran hastily replied, "This is Wolf 1....voice is not clear...over Fox 2."

"Ran, we found a four-star hotel to spend the night. Go to the left of the beach. Keep exploring until you find large rocks on the right and left. We are at the top of the rock on the right," Ran almost shouted with joy. Rabat and Ben were still alive. In fact, they brought great news. But a four-star hotel? Ran thought they might be experiencing some hallucination from the intense pressure.

Ran asked Cindy and Tet to walk along the beach to follow Ben's instructions. No moon tonight. So Ran decided to walk exactly on the edge of the wet sand on the beach. It was the only way not to get lost without light.

Ran stared in disbelief! Cindy led the way in front of him. Two bright spots of light illuminated the path in front of Cindy. At first Ran thought that Cindy managed to save one flashlight, but she didn't. The light came out of Cindy's eyes!

Cindy didn't actually realize that light was coming out of her eyes. She only saw that the road in front of her was bright. So, she took the initiative to lead Ran and Tet who seemed to be lost in the dark. Relying only on the touch of the last breaking waves on their feet.

Tet saw the same thing. But he decided not to think about it. His brain could burst seeing all of Cindy's oddities since the bush thorn poisoning. Well, who cared anyway? The important thing was that she wasn't turning into some monster and ate them alive.

Ben and Rabat high-fived each other as two parallel lights drew closer to

them who were standing on the top of the rock. That's them! Not long after, the five of them rejoined. But Ben and Rabat, who were standing at the forefront of the cliffside, were confused now. It was pitch dark! In which direction should they swim? The ship was completely invisible.

"Let Cindy swim first. Let's just follow her from behind," Ran shouted. Ben and Rabat were completely unaware of Cindy's newly discovered capability. They still thought Cindy was wearing a headlamp.

Cindy herself was not at all aware that her eyes were glowing. She dived and began to swim towards the ship that was clearly visible to her. It was not far away. Shortly, they got to a large rock that supported the ship's body. Ben and Rabat pointed out the entrance through the hole they had found.

They wanted to guide their teammates in. But they needed light if they were to walk ahead. Rabat was about to ask Cindy to borrow her headlamp. But he stopped short when he saw up close what the headlamp was. The same thing happened to Ben. He was speechless and could only wonder. What kind of creature had Cindy turned into?

8. RESEARCH LABORATORY

The five of them gathered in the wheelhouse. This time Ben took over the situation. He was the most skilled in boating. While still getting light from Cindy's eyes, Ben looked at the small monitor screens that were lined up in front of him. Even though none of the monitors were on, Ben was trying to figure out each of their function.

This one was for coordinates and navigation. This was to monitor the depth of the ocean. This was for sonar. This was to avoid collisions. This was to monitor big fish. So many of them! Ben rubbed his eyes, then what was this monitor for?

Everyone looked at Ben who was concentrating on his what he was doing. "This should be a lot easier if the monitors are on," Ben complained, wiping the sweat off his forehead. "These are all modern stuff. Even ultra-modern! It looks like it's a research ship," Ben continued.

Rabat remembered something. While grabbing the only flashlight in the ship's wheelhouse, he ran towards the engine room at the bottom of the ship. Ran understood what Rabat meant. He prayed silently that Rabat would succeed.

Not long after, a subtle shaking was felt on the hull of the ship. It was as if the ship was telling them that they were all the new masters. All the lights and monitor screens turned

on. The ship was suddenly bright as day. Rabat speculated on turning on the ship's generator. And he did it.

Everyone looked at each other with happy faces. The light from Cindy's eyes automatically disappeared as soon as the room was illuminated. Ben enthusiastically examined all the monitors again. Meanwhile, Ran looked around. Looking for communication devices. Perhaps there was hope that they could make contact to the outside world.

"Uh, what this for?!" half shouted, Ben pointed at one of the large monitor screens that was separated from the other monitors. The monitor screen was segmented into six parts. Each monitored several large tubes in separate rooms.

Everyone paid attention to what Ben pointed out. Including Rabat who had rejoined them. They didn't know what those big tubes contained, but this monitor screen showed lots of indicators of life.

Heartbeat, blood pressure, oxygen level, poison level, and many more that some of them didn't understand. Except Tet. Tet understood most of them. His face looked very curious. This was a monitor screen to monitor life. But whose life? Were there any humans left on this ship? Maybe a cryonic human? He was intrigued.

Everyone gathered in the wheelhouse discussing their options. They decided they had to act with caution. This mysterious ship must have been or was conducting extraordinary research. No one knew what for, but it must be something big.

"Let's find the room shown on this monitor. I think this ship was on a special mission and ended up in this strange place," Tet was thinking of something. But he didn't want to tell his teammates. He had to prove his theory first.

"Careful. There could be something dangerous in the tube. Let's check together," Ran expressed his concern.

Cindy didn't involve herself in the serious conversation. Her black eyes continued to stare at the monitor screen. Something there was bugging her. Her intuition said Ran was right. That thing in the tube was dangerous!

Before exploring the ship tomorrow, they decided to call it a day and rest in the wheelhouse. There were many reclining chairs that could be used to lie down. There were also rollaway mattresses available. It was too risky to spend the night in the many available cabin crew rooms below. No one knew what was lurking in this mysterious ship. They could watch the entire ship from the monitor screens.

Nothing special happened during the night. This morning the sea was very calm. The surface was like clear glass. Reflecting a deep blue color. As if saying that it was the greatest storage of secrets on earth.

All of them woke up at dawn. Last night they slept very well. It could be from exhaustion. Or it could be for the first time they felt they were in a safe and civilized place.

Except Cindy, she was restless. Her sharp ears picked up the subtle movements from the lower deck. The movements didn't sound suspicious to Cindy. But what made it unsettling for her was another sound that accompanied those subtle movements.

The sound of scratching on the ship's wall. A terrifying sound of a sharp object deliberately scraping against the ship's wall. It was like the sound of a sword being sharpened or the sound of a tiger clawing against a tree trunk as it sharpened its claws. Cindy kept this to herself. For a while.

After washing up and eating the basic canned food that they found in the wheelhouse refrigerator, the expedition team got ready. Today was very important. They would explore every part of the ship and leave no stone unturned. Apart from checking the strange room they saw on the wheelhouse monitor, they also hoped to find any means of communication. Anything.

Ran led the search. They started from the bow of the ship. They found the rudder of the ship on the bridge. The rudder was exactly like the rudder in the pirates of the Caribbean era. The real rudder was just a display, so people thought this wooden-lined ship was an old ship. The perfect disguise. When viewed from the outside only.

They continued the search. The first deck was the cabin crew and researchers. A plush and comfortable cabin. Equipped with a luxurious kitchen and dining area. The rooms on the second deck were smaller but there were two interesting parts of the room that took them by surprise.

A state-of-the-art medical room. It had medical equipment enough for a proper hospital. The medical room could accommodate 10 treatment beds. And according to Ran, who was a doctor, the medicine cabinets had better stock compared to any pharmacies or even hospitals. Holy moly!

The next room was an armory full of all short of weapons! Nuts! From small-caliber pistols, to several calibers of stun guns, to laser-guided rocket launchers! There was even a separate glass cabinet that held some strange, shaped weapons. Rabat had the feeling that he was visiting Fort Knox.

This research ship was escorted by fully armed soldiers. But what for? it was only natural that there would be security on every research vessel, but this was too much. Even the range of ship's weaponry exceeded any elite troops in the world.

The bottom deck of the ship was the last part they explored. It wasn't easy to enter. The door was made of steel and there was a security access button to enter. It even came with a fingerprint and cornea scanner! A big sign at the door said LABORATORY.

Everyone looked at each other. It was a steel vault! Not a laboratory! Cindy was a little relieved. What was inside the vault must be something very precious or dangerous. This 3-inch-thick steel wall wasn't meant to block intruders from entering, but rather to prevent anything inside from getting out!

9.

TERRIFYING SCENARIO

Everyone looked at each other. They all wondered how to open the laboratory door safely if possible. In fact, everyone was curious about what was in the laboratory. Except for Cindy, the others had absolutely no idea that the lab stored something dangerous.

While they were thinking about ways to open the door, suddenly the ship shook violently. It felt like the ship was about to roll to the left. Everyone clung on to whatever was nearby. Ben was thrown to the floor.

The shaking stopped. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. They didn't want any surprises they couldn't handle. Especially Ran. He had always been meticulous. Therefore, as soon as the shaking stopped, he immediately divided tasks among his friends.

"Ben, go to the wheelhouse. Pay attention to all monitor screens. If something is dangerous, honk the ship's horn three times. If there are clues we need to follow-up, honk twice. When it's safe, honk once."

"Tet, you will be here with Cindy. Look for anything that can be a clue on how to open the laboratory door."

"Rabat, you come with me to check the condition of the ship starting from the outside. I'm worried about the shaking earlier."

Everyone followed Ran's instructions. Ben ran upstairs. Cindy and Tet began to investigate the many panels in the front room of the laboratory. Rabat followed Ran toward the exit to check what was going on outside.

Ben paid close attention to each monitor screen. Nothing strange except..... What is that?! Ben brought his face closer to the large monitor screen which was divided into six sections. He remembered that the rows of large tubes in the laboratory were all closed. But this was all open! But it wasn't clear what was inside because the tube let off very thick mist.

Ben also saw on the other monitor that Cindy was opening a thick book while sitting on the floor. Ben wasn't sure what she was reading but he caught a glimpse of the large title; MANUAL...

Ben shifted his gaze to the monitor screen that was showing the situation outside the ship. He saw Ran and Rabat standing outside watching the sea alternate with the ship's walls. Then Rabat was seen half jumping to pick up something lying on the rock. Something big, pointy, and shiny.

Cindy thoroughly read the panel manuals and laboratory instruments found in a large cupboard drawer in the corner of the room. Her strange ability allowed her to read very fast and understand immediately.

The access code for this room can be found in the captain's log on the bridge. The Cornea scanner only worked on the eyes of people who had registered with certain levels. There were three authorized people. The Finger Printers would also only recognize the fingers of those three people.

Cindy scrutinized the list of names of those three people; captain Dev, lab head Sandra, and head of security Bock. Hmm, where could she find these people? This ship was empty. Maybe everyone was dead. Cindy shrugged and continued reading.

Tet continued to unpack the contents of the cupboard which stored many books and scientific journals. Almost all were about genetic engineering and hybrids. Tet shook his head when he saw the pictures showing genetic engineering and hybrids in one of the books. It was madness! Insane experiments with even grotesque results!

Tet saw a glass safety box with a series of microchips was neatly arranged inside. About 4-5 microchips. Tet tried to tinker to open it. There was a line of daunting code to crack.

Tet almost fell over when a hand grabbed the glass safety box he was holding. Cindy! She was holding a portable extinguisher which was immediately swung against the glass box. Glass shards scattered everywhere. And.... the ship shook again!

10. DEATH SQUAD

There was a rumbling coming from all directions inside the ship. Everyone gasped. Something big was happening. They didn't know what to expect.

Cindy, who was still holding the portable fire extinguisher, was stunned. Did any of this have to do with the shattering of the small glass box containing microchip? Cindy felt she had done something stupid. She looked at Tet who was looking at her holding several microchips in his hand.

Ben's eyes never left the monitors. He realized something had happened. The rumbling seemed like a bad sign. His teammates were downstairs and outside. He couldn't lose his guard.

So far there had been nothing suspicious on the monitor screens. Uh, wait a minute! What was that? Ben's eyes widened. From the large monitor screen he saw several figures appeared to be moving. The figures were vague because there were so much steam in that room. But Ben was sure that those figures were not humans. They were too tall. And what was that behind their backs? Ben was frowning while trying to make out what he was seeing.

Good heavens! Those were wings!

Ben's hand was ready to hit the ship's horn. He would assess if the situation was under control or not. But in any case, the laboratory door had a maximum level of security.

While outside, Ran and Rabat also heard a rumbling coming from the ship. The two of them rushed in. There had been no signs of danger from Ben yet. So Ran decided to check on Tet and Cindy. They were both in the ship's hold. The closest place to the source of rumbling.

Just as Ran and Rabat got to the outside of the laboratory, both were startled by a loud banging from inside the laboratory door. Tet and Cindy were not there. Were they inside and unable to get out?

Not knowing what the code was or how, Rabat almost reached for the button, speculating to open the door. But an arm hastily grabbed him. It was Tet's.

Tet put his index finger to his lips and gestured with the corner of his eye into the laboratory. Rabat and Ran realized something was in there. They saw Cindy was closing her eyes and tilting her head slightly. She was using her ability to sense the surrounding.

Cindy opened her eyes. She picked up a mosquito spray in the medicine box and crept up the stairs to the wheelhouse. She signaled Tet, Ran and Rabat to follow what she was doing. The three men followed what Cindy did. Walking slowly after spraying each other with mosquito repellent.

At the wheelhouse, Cindy opened her mouth which had been tightly closed the whole way up.

"They can mark our distinctive smell with a super sharp sense of smell. That's why we need to spray our body with this as a camouflage. They are very dangerous. I can feel it, trust me."

"What do you mean mark it Cindy? And who are they?" Rabat looked into Cindy's eyes. He got used to her black eyes by now.

"Marking as a target of course. They are the death squad created by the researchers on this ship. For what purpose, I don't know," Cindy explained, not taking her eyes off the screen.

Everyone turned to the monitor. The thin cryonics vapor had almost completely disappeared. Now they could clearly see what creature was pounding on the laboratory door.

The creatures were the same species. Up to two meters high. Could be 2.2 meters. Sturdy with chrome colored skin. Their heads resembled the vultures they had encountered in the field of bones. Wings were wide and sturdy. Their hands were long with long nails. Similar to the strange lions and tigers they met some time ago for the first time.

Cindy gasped. The creatures were a mix of all sorts of strange beasts on this island.

Everyone was silent. Stunned by the discovery. The creatures were incubated in cryonics tubes and they were resuscitated inside a maximum security laboratory on a mysterious research ship. By whom? What for?

Tet handed Ben some microchips. Ben would know how to access it. All information could be found there. They were both curious and anxious at the same time.

Ben checked the chip then looked for the most appropriate chip reader but could not find one that fit. Ben scratched his nose. There must be something. Or it could be somewhere else. Ben looked around again.

He found it! Apparently the chip reader was in the captain's cupboard. Ben inserted the chip into the reader and connected it to one of the monitors.

Death Troop Rising-Code DTR V1. This high-tech research as well as advance level genetic engineering was initiated by an international research institute called Bio Research and funded by a consortium of several giant weapon manufacturers who chose not to be mentioned in this file.

The purpose of this research is to create a death squad as a replacement to the existing conventional weapons, which are no longer efficient. This death squad is organic being and a hybrid of several rare animals developed by Bio Research on Bone Island.

The target market of this death squad mega project are developed countries after the DTR V1 is tested and deployed in the Middle East war theater in the next three years.

The Bio Research headquarters will closely monitor the time of the death squad reanimation stage. A special team will land on Bone Island to start the next stage.

Everyone had mixed thoughts after finished reading the message. They had never thought that their interest in conducting scientific research in a country called the Land of the Bones would drag them into the vortex of this horrendous conspiracy.

They stumbled upon a development of lethal weapons. And it would be tested in real warfare! Very soon!

An alarm sound startled them. Several small dots flickered on the radar screen. Ben shouted reminding everyone.

"They're coming! Ran, what do we do?"

Ran replied firmly, "We won't let this happen! This is dangerous for world peace. We must prevent it. Ben, can we move or hide this ship? Don't forget to turn off all transponders showing the position of this ship."

Ben nodded, "I've checked all the instruments and engines. Everything is working. A leaky hull at the top won't be a problem if we are not caught up in storms and big waves. Where are we headed, Ran?"

"What about the rock pinning the ship on the hull, Ben?" Tet asked.

Ben smiled broadly, "Don't worry, mate. It was all actually just a camouflage as if this ship was stranded. The coral is artificial. See this!" Ben pressed a few keys on the keyboard.

Voila! Two large rocks that clamped the ship's hull shifted slowly to the right and left. The ship floated freely.

Ben continued the next trick. There was a low hum as the ship moved out of the reef into the open sea. Ran clenched his fists in satisfaction. The rest of the team clapped. This ship could sail!

"There's only one thing we must remember, guys. We are close to the Bio Research team. Even though I turned off the transponder, I'm afraid they could track us using satellite. So,

“It’s better if we hide this ship in a nearby island,” Ben explained and looked at Ran.

“What do you say, Ben?” Rabat looked at Ben.

“I have marked the large island to the southeast. Less than 10 Nautical Miles from here. There are lots of secluded bays to hide this ship.”

“What’s the name of the island on the map, Ben?” Cindy asked.

“Skull Island. I don’t know why it’s called that. Hopefully there aren’t many real skulls in there,” Ben replied with a bitter smile.

The four people looked at each other.

“To Skull Island it is!” Ran decided.

Meanwhile, on the monitor screen of a large ship bearing the Bio Research Charly logo, there was bustle and noise.

“The Bio Research Alpha’s signal suddenly disappeared, captain!”

“Track it with the satellite!”

“There’s a minor glitch with the satellite coverage, Captain. Clouds are thick. We can only do it in two hours from now.”

“Shit! Report to the head office. Quick!”

11. HIDEAWAY ISLAND

Ben was tense. This ship was sophisticated. But the waters around Skull Island were treacherous. Corals bulged almost everywhere. And that wasn't all. From the underwater map monitor screen, Ben saw bright, pointy red stalactites below the sea surface that could easily tear the ship's hull at any time.

Stalactites? Why were there so many stalactites below sea level? Weren't those long-pointed stone blades only found in a cave? Ben frowned questioningly. Was it just something that had similar resemblance? But from the shape, Ben was sure they were stalactites. Ben shook his head. He had to focus. He would ask Rabat as the experts about the stalactites later.

Ben felt alone. Ran and Tet were asleep behind the wheelhouse. Rabat and Cindy were downstairs. The two of them were assigned to supervise the laboratory room. Previously, Ran had checked the weapons room and found that the strange weapon they thought was just a prototype, turned out to be functional and usable.

Ran, who understood the mechanics of a weapon, knew that this weapon was lethal. It didn't contain ordinary bullets but a laser tube. It could not be intended to be used against human. It was just too expensive.

The Bio Research Alpha ship hummed softly. The sound of the ship's engine was barely audible. Ben, who was knowledgeable about ships, was amazed. This ship was made to be able to deal with all circumstances.

Ben checked the map and found several potential places to hide the ship. Tricky coves, surrounded by steep cliffs. In fact, there was a bay that was very unique. It had the shape of a bay, but it was like an entrance to a giant cave. That was where Ben intended to anchor the ship.

All transponders have been turned off. But Ben wasn't completely sure that the Bio Research ships couldn't trace this ship. Earth was completely naked now. Spied on by thousands of orbiting satellites.

Hopefully that weird bay could get in the way of the satellite scan.

Ben returned his attention on navigating the ship. In his calculations, they would reach the destination in two more Nautical Miles.

Meanwhile, in the lower deck. Rabat and Cindy sat on standby in front of the laboratory. The banging sounds had disappeared. The strange creatures inside were silent. Cindy didn't want to know what was going on inside. She had very bad feelings. The Death Squad was up to something. They were engineered to be smart creatures.

Cindy was certain. The creators must have installed something like kill switch in the creatures' brains.

Suddenly Cindy jumped up. Rabat was jolted and stood up as well. The laser guns were turned on.

"They broke the ship's walls! They are trying to escape through the sea!"

For a moment Rabat was stunned. What were they going to do? The door couldn't be opened, and the ship was still running.

Cindy and Rabat rushed to the bridge. There was Ben looking puzzled when he saw his two friends were panicking.

"Look! They almost managed to break into the ship's wall! Ben, reduce the speed." Cindy shouted frantically while continuing to pay attention to the CCTV monitor screens.

The loud noise woke up Ran and Tet. They stood around the monitor screens. Ben slowed down the ship. They almost entered the strange cove they planned to land on.

"Count how many of them Cindy!" Ran exclaimed after seeing from the monitor screen that the ship's wall was breached and the Death Squad was swimming in the sea.

"12! No, 13! The last one may be their leader. It looks bigger and tougher," Cindy quickly counted while the others were still confused with what they saw.

Ben turned the camera on the bow. Searching on the monitor screens. The Death Squad glided at the speed of a Marlin fish in the depths of the sea and disappeared.

Ran looked from behind the bridge. The ship was entering a calm bay. On the right and left, big corals demanded Ben's agility to navigate to avoid collisions. Ran switched to another monitor.

The bay was deep but there were some shallow parts. In that section it was clear that the red stalactites were clustered together posing more danger to the ship.

The ship shook slightly. As careful as Ben was, the ship was grazed by orals. Luckily it was only a small shock. The ship continued to zigzag slowly entering the giant cave.

While others were confused about where to tie the ship, Ben smiled crookedly while pressing a red button on the top left of the navigation buttons.

"Wooosh...woosh...Whaaack..."

A pair of Tross and Spring ropes slid fast. Breaking through the cave walls. Clamping the ship firmly in place. Ben turned off the engine. Jumped down from the captain's chair. While his teammates looked on in awe.

Ran took over the situation.

"We must secure this ship before going out and exploring the island. This is our fort as well as our home. We can't predict when the Death Squad will come and attack us. Ben, try to find something in the ship's features, maybe there's something we missed about defense."

Ben nodded. He studied the keyboard in front of him diligently. Tet and Rabat descended to the bow deck, checking if there was anything that could be used to increase ship's defense.

Meanwhile, Cindy curled up on the folding bed in the corner of the bridge. Trembling heavily. A strange groan escaped her mouth.

"Hhhh....aaarrrggghh....hhh....aarrggghh"

Ran was stunned. What was wrong with Cindy? Damn it! Ran approached. He touched Cindy's forehead. Jeez, it was cold!

Ben, who was still struggling with the keyboard, buttons, and monitors did not realize what had happened to Cindy. He seemed to have found something Ran asked for. Aha! There you go!

Ran typed some codes on the monitor screen. The ship shook slightly and emitted a loud hum. A streak of glowing light instantly enveloped the ship. An electric field with the strength of more than a small power plant. Ben grinned. This ship was amazing. This was an unusual defense mechanism.

Ran decided that they should recover their strength first before going to the mainland. They were in a giant cave. They had to find a way to reach the mainland. Ran mind was preoccupied with Cindy's condition.

"Ran..." Cindy spoked in a weak voice.

Ran turned. His eyes met Cindy's. Good grief! Cindy's eyes were no longer black. They were red as blood!

While Ran's was still recovering from the sight of Cindy's eyes. Ben's screams startled him.

"They're coming! The Death Squad is coming!" Ben pointed nervously at the monitor screen.

The Death Squad was swimming fast toward the ship.

12. BIO RESEARCH

Hearing Ben screaming, Cindy, who was still lying and blinking her strange eyes, immediately stood up. Ben, who saw Cindy approaching the monitor screen and watched her closely, shuddered in horror. Cindy's red eyes looked bizarre!

The others had the same thoughts. They had gotten used to Cindy's black eyes and suddenly seeing a striking change in her eye color. Burning red, like coral pea.

Cindy was aware of the unsettling feeling among her teammates, but she was unconcerned. Her red eyes stared at the monitor screen without blinking watching the Death Squad swim swiftly toward the ship. The pack leader was swimming in front.

Cindy's eyes change led to another ability. She was able to predict in detail the direction where the Death Squad intended to go. They intended to enter through the same hole in the hull that they escape from.

It's weird! Why do they want to go enter through there? Cindy frowned.

Everyone was confused. Cindy just got weirder. What was wrestling in the mind of the red-eyed girl?

"They are sent by something! Or something is controlling them! They are not attacking us. They want to take something from the laboratory," Cindy's low voice was heard clearly by everyone.

Ran didn't bother to ask how she knew all that. After being stung by a strange and poisonous thorn the other day, Cindy's behavior was unpredictable.

"So, what should we do now Cindy?" Tet jumped in before Ran had a chance to ask the same question.

"We must stop them! We must prepare ourselves before they are here. The laser gun can hurt them. But there is only one. It won't be enough. Meanwhile, the electric field shields on this ship can be extinguished if they intend to crash themselves and sacrifice half of their number," Cindy explained.

Everyone was captivated by Cindy's detailed and orderly explanation. It was as if Cindy was a director who knew exactly how the story went.

At least now they knew what was coming. They had absolutely no doubts about Cindy's strange abilities. And they must solve the problem of how to prevent the Death Squad from taking something from the laboratory. No one knew what it was and whose order did they follow.

Ran made a quick decision.

"Ben, Tet, you guys know best about computers. Find a way how we can get into the laboratory first before the Death Squad arrives. As soon as possible!"

Ben and Tet looked at each other. They understood the order, but...

Ran knew what was going on in their minds, "I know you guys are thinking about what they're looking for. Don't worry about that. Once we open the vault door, we figure out what they want before they get there."

Ben and Tet didn't ask any more questions. The two quickly ran to the laboratory below. Cindy waved her hand and turned to Rabat and shouted,

"Wait! You guys need me downstairs. Rabat please watch the screen that monitors the movement of the Death Squad. Let us know if they come in before us."

"Alright, Cindy. Tet, take this laser gun. You need this down there more than we do here."

Everyone was on to what they were supposed to do. The situation was precarious. There was no point in prolong discussion.

Meanwhile, the Bio Research Charly Ship was extremely busy. People gathered in the boardroom of the ship staring at two large monitor screens alternately. One monitor showed a large dot that was stationary. And also small dots that were quickly approaching the big dot.

The other monitor showed the view from an underwater camera of a shuttle submarine

"Captain, the Death Squad is still about 1 Nautical Mile from the Bio Research Alpha. In a few minutes they will reach the Bio Research Alpha," a ship's officer, in uniform, reported to a large, grim-faced man who was intently looking at the monitor screens.

"Wait! Order them to slow down. I don't want to lose half of that precious army just to shut down Bio Research Alpha's electric shield. But if there's no other choice, just break through their shields and grab the target right away. Half of them is still useful to us. It's just that Lady Boss will be furious if she finds out we blew up a few tens of millions of dollars." The ship's captain gave orders without turning away.

"Speed up our shuttle submarine. Enable the stealth mode now. They must not be aware of the existence of the shuttle," the captain ordered.

Few people who received the orders saluted and immediately carried out their duties. A military discipline that was uncommon in a research ship that usually comprised of scientists with more laid-back attitudes.

Ben and Tet concentrated on a quick investigation of how to open the laboratory door. They were busy reading the manual they found. Meanwhile, Cindy was focusing on observing the finger and cornea scanners carefully. Cindy's red eyes seemed to be scanning something invisible to the naked eye. She could see traces of previous use.

For the first time Cindy smiled. Got it! The traces of the code on the finger scanner were very clear to her eyes. While the cornea scanner showed the reflection of the last pair of eyes that opened the door.

Cindy came forward. Her finger pressed the finger scanner. The laboratory door slid open with a subtle sound. However, Ben and Tet could still hear it, and they both were taken aback. Cindy was far ahead of them.

But that was just the first layer of doors! There was another door that looked even more solid and thicker than the first door.

Cindy did the unexpected again. She put her eyes in front of the cornea scanner, and...the second door slid open!

Ben and Tet were about to hastily find out what the Death Squad was after in the laboratory. But then they looked at each other and smiled realizing their foolishness. They both turned to Cindy.

"Cindy, what are the people who control the Death Squad looking for?"

Cindy smiled. She had thought about it for a while and already figured it out after a quick scan of the large laboratory room.

"Not what but who. Look!" Cindy approached a tube that was still closed not far from where she was standing. Then she pointed the tube while looking at Ben and Tet.

"Gosh! She is so beautiful!" Tet couldn't help exclaiming loudly.

"You're right Tet. This woman is gorgeous and her body is so sexy. But look at her fingers. Ugh!" Ben replied to Tet after paying close attention for a moment.

Cindy laughed. The woman in the tube had nails like eagle.

"This is what they're looking for. They'll take this tube. Look at this count down number," Cindy tapped an indicator in front of her. 1d12h45m00s.

"Uh, what does this mean?" Tet just stared at the confusing code.

Cindy lightly tapped Tet's arm.

"You two only notice how beautiful she is. You missed any other clues." Tet could only grin. Ben looked at Cindy questioningly.

"It's a countdown, mate. Within 1 day, 12 hours, 45 minutes, this super dangerous beautiful creature will wake up from its cryonic process," Cindy sneered back at Tet.

Super dangerous? Again, Ben and Tet looked at each other. Could a woman as beautiful as this be super dangerous?

This time Cindy burst out laughing.

"You know? This beautiful and sexy woman is five times more deadly than the terrifying Death Squad!"

Ben and Tet nodded like cockerels.

"We talk too much, mate. Let's unplug all this fake wire. We must get the tube out of the lab and close it immediately before the Death Squad arrives," Cindy warned her two friends, who still looked shocked by this discovery.

The two of them removed all the wires connected to the tube of the super dangerous beauty. It turned out that the cables that were previously thought to be life support were indeed mere camouflage. Because once all the cables were unplugged, the little life monitor was still on. Including the countdown numbers that remained stable.

As Ben and Tet concentrated on lifting the canister out, there was a loud noise from outside the ship.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

Several explosions were heard. Followed by groans of painful death.

13. The Angel of Death

Apparently the Death Squad performed kamikaze act to disable the ship's electrics hield.

Ben, Tet and Cindy witnessed firsthand how 4-5 figures smashed their bodies into the electric shield causing loud explosions. Followed by the smell of death from their charred bodies.

Just as Cindy expected, on the fifth kamikaze attack, the electric shield covering the ship was down.

The atmosphere was tense and eerie. Ben and Tet hadn't had time to move the Death Angel's cryonic tube yet. A name tag written on the small monitor screen on the right. They couldn't see it because they were all on the left side of the tube.

Ben, Tet and Cindy hid behind the tube. Waiting in pounding hearts. They had whispered to each other that they would defend this tube. Whatever happened. Ben activated the laser gun and was ready to fire.

The tense atmosphere was broken by the entry of one members of the Death Squad through the hole.

The creature's tall and large figure looked alert. His long hands with long nails were on standby. It seemed that he was aware of the danger in this laboratory room

There was a short growl. The first figure immediately moved aside. Letting another figure which was taller, bigger, and looked tougher in. This was the leader of the Death Squad that Cindy had identified on the monitor screen.

The Leader scanned the entire room with his gaze as sharp as an owl's eyes. His gaze stopped at the corner of the room near the lab door which was still open. Another short growl was heard. But his tone was different from the previous growl. An order.

The rest of the Death Squad entered. A total of seven members of the Death Squad were in the room right now. Ben cocked his gun. Watching them walk slowly and alertly towards them.

"Zap...Zap...Bam!"

Two flashes of white light struck the bodies of two Death Squad members who immediately stumbled. Their bodies twitched as if they had been hit by a high-voltage electric shock.

The other members of the Death Squad moved quickly to spread out and take cover. Including the Leader. Ben pointed his gun again. Pressing the button that looked like the trigger on a gun. Intending to incapacitate others.

Nothing happened. Ben repeated his actions. Still nothing happened.

Looked like the gun was stuck or something. Cindy touched Ben's arm while pointing to an indicator on the hilt of the gun. Darn it, the weapon was in reloading mode. It only fired two shots and the laser was out. Ben's originally confident heart suddenly shrunk.

The indicator showed the recharge time was 5 minutes. Oh my gosh!

These creatures seemed to understand that the laser gun was still recharging. The six creatures immediately formed an attack formation.

Two minutes more. There won't be enough time.

The Death Squad charged. Ben and Tet stood side by side. Turned their backs on Cindy and shouted.

"Cindy! Run! Close the lab door! Quickly!"

Two very strong arms pulled Ben and Tet backwards until they rolled over out of the laboratory. At the same time, Cindy reactivated the laboratory door code. It was fast.

But not fast enough. One of the creatures had escaped out the door and was now standing in front of Cindy with a threatening gesture. Ben and Tet's faces went pale. How could they help her?

Ben and Tet quickly got on their feet and grabbed anything for a weapon. They must protect Cindy at all costs. Because it was obvious that the creature was after Cindy and didn't care about them.

Ben and Tet didn't have time to do anything when the creature swiftly and violently charged toward Cindy. Tet even let out a horrified scream as he saw the creature's ten long, black claws about to slash at Cindy's neck.

"Slashed...Slashed...Bam!" They both closed their eyes because they couldn't stand the thought of seeing what would happen to Cindy's body. The gentle girl who was their partner and had always been against violence since they were in college.

Ben and Tet opened their eyes. They were about to charge and attack the creature. But their eyes almost popped out. It wasn't Cindy's body that laid in front of them, but it was the creature's headless body!

Cindy was standing with her back to them. In her hands, she was carrying the creature's head. Ben and Tet backed off automatically and almost threw up. It was gruesome!

Cindy turned around. Her coral pea eyes looked coldly at Ben and Tet. They were in shock.

The person in front of them was indeed Cindy. But her appearance was exactly the same as the Death Angel in the cryonic tube!

There was barely any difference. Beautiful face with long messy hair. There was a lot of blood splatter on her face which made the situation very horrific for Ben and Tet. Moreover, Cindy was still carrying the creature's head in her eagle-like fingers!

Ben and Tet screamed loudly as Cindy approached them with a threatening face after throwing the creature's heads. She lifted her eagle like hands with sharp claws toward them. Ben and Tet were just stood still ready to die.

There was the sound of footsteps rushing down the stairs. Ran and Rabat came in just as Cindy's body fell unconscious.

In the monitoring room of the Bio Research Charly ship.

"They made it, Captain! Look, they're swimming back with the Death Angels' cryonic tubes!"

"Hmm, too bad! Eight squad members died. I have to face the Lady Boss's rant for losing 80 million dollars!" The Captain retorted. His finger pressed the rewind button on the small monitor screen in front of him. He couldn't believe a woman who was just fainted managed to kill one of the Death Squad members with her bare hands.

The Captain watched them carrying Cindy to upper deck and disappeared from the monitor. It was a video feed from the eyes of the creature whose neck was cut off by Cindy.

He could see everything from the time the creature entered the laboratory room until Cindy severed the creature's head. All Death Squad eyes had a camera installed and connected directly to this monitor.

The Captain's mind raced to a single question.

Which was the Angel of Death? Was it the girl in the cryonic tube or the girl who had fainted?

The Captain knew. Soon the Lady Boss would call to give him an order he wouldn't have anticipated.

Everyone in the headquarters saw the same thing that he witnessed.

14.

SKELETON ISLAND EXPLORATION

"Captain, you've burned 80 million dollars in 15 minutes. I understand that you managed to take the Angel of Death like I said. Now, you have two options. Take over Bio Research Alpha or destroy it. Activate the Angel of Death and instruct her to execute those two options. Understood?!"

"Keep spying on the ship using our shuttle submarine. I'm sure they don't know that our eyes and ears are around them."

"And that girl. The girl who killed one of the Death Squad members. Catch her alive. There is something interesting about her. We have to study her. Let's name her Project X."

Those lengthy explanations and orders were like sharp needles being stabbed straight into the captain's eardrums. There was only one correct answer, very well Lady Boss, consider them done.

The captain with a dog tag "Dev" on his chest rubbed his bald head. Lady Boss was the most intimidating person he had ever known. He almost got a harsh punishment for failing to take Bio Research Alpha out of the Bones Island after completing his research before being attacked by Fallen Genetic, Bio Research's toughest rival in genetic engineering for combat purposes. Luckily, he was pardoned for successfully hiding the ship.

Captain Dev survived, but most of his crew did not in a short battle against the Fallen Genetic's special forces on the banks of the lava river. Some of the survivors were taken hostage and detained somewhere. Including chief Bock and lab head Sandra.

Captain Dev wiped his forehead. He was staring at the cryonic tube of the Death Angel in front of him. There was a sinister undertone in the Lady Boss's order. Captain Dev knew it. His hope now rested on the girl who was still frozen in front of him. It took another 15 minutes to reanimated the Angel of Death. He needed to come up with a well-thought-out raid plan.

Captain Dev headed toward the bridge.

Ben laid Cindy on a pullout bed in the wheelhouse. He was surprised by the continuous changes that happened to her. The others too. But after all, Cindy was one of them. They were responsible for her wellbeing. No matter what she turned into.

Ran checked Cindy's vital signs. Nothing unusual. Her breathing was regular. Her pulse was normal. Even her fingers that were like eagle claws had returned back to normal. What caused her to turn into vicious animal like that earlier? Ran still couldn't figure it out.

They couldn't spend all day mulling over their fate. Something had to be done. They couldn't stay on this ship forever. It would be suicidal. The Bio Research knew their location and could attack at any moment. Besides, the electric shield was no longer working. Ran thought hard.

"Ben, try to find out if there's any room on this ship where we can safely hide temporarily. If you find one, we should put Cindy there so you can take care of her better. Tet, Rabat, and

I will explore this island quickly to find a suitable location for us. This ship is no longer safe for us."

Ben hesitated. Alone with Cindy? This girl had even tried to cut off his head. Ben had nightmarish scenarios in his head.

Ran understood. He turned to his other colleagues. Ben and Tet were still traumatized by Cindy's behavior.

"Okay. I'll take care of her. Ben, you keep looking for a room on this ship. After that you, Tet and Rabat go and explore the island."

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief at Ran's orders. Ben rushed to search for the room. Meanwhile, Tet and Rabat prepared all the supplies for an exploration.

Ran returned to check on Cindy. He and Rabat had only seen from the monitor how violent Cindy was when she beheaded one of the Death Squad members. She behaved like someone who was in a trance or possessed. Ran also noticed Cindy's threatening gesture to Ben and Tet right before she finally passed out.

Ran was very nervous about Cindy's condition.

Ben found a room that he thought was quite safe. At the bottom of the hatch, there was a small clinic room which door could be locked from inside. The clinic room seemed to be used only for ordinary ship crews. Not for the staff or important people on board who had a larger and more luxurious clinic next to the laboratory. That was why it was at the bottom of the hatch near to the engine room.

Ran and Ben carried Cindy to the clinic. Ben left Ran who was waiting outside the room. Ran asked Ben to bring the only laser gun he had. They would explore an unknown island with a terrifying name Skull Island. So, no harm in carrying weapons.

Ben had learned that the only way to the mainland was to get on a lifeboat. Lowering the small lifeboats was not an easy task. The three exhausted men got into the lifeboat and began rowing out of the giant cave.

The sea was calm. Ben and the team didn't want to rush things. They all memorized the best route navigating the boat in case they needed it for emergency.

Apparently, not far behind the cave, there was a sloping beach. With doubled enthusiasm, Ben and the team landed the lifeboat and dragged it away from the beach to avoid being carried away by the rising tide.

Ben, Tet, and Rabat were looking over the expanse of the island in front of them. It looked like a very dense green wilderness stretching as far as they could see. The wilderness was so old and dense that it looked dark. It was beautiful and eerie at the same time.

The three of them were stunned by the scenery. There was absolutely no impression whatsoever that indicated the sinister nature from the name of Skull Island. Or not yet?

The three started walking. Their job was to find a good and safe place, a away from the ship that was now the most dangerous place for them.

As soon as they entered the forest, they started feeling uneasy. The forest ground was so dark and damp because the sun's ray was barely able to penetrate the tight canopy. The surrounding felt gloomy and somber.

They continued to walk through the thick forest. They marked their trail with light-colored spray paint so they wouldn't forget their way back. The forest became thicker and denser the further they walked. Sometimes they had to turn around because they were blocked by tendrils of a kind of rattan that were bound together, leaving no gap to pass. Except for a small animal the size of a poodle or a rabbit.

Suddenly they were surprised by an unexpected event.

A rabbit that was surprised by the appearance of humans in this forest immediately jumped away and ran as fast as it could.

The rabbit ran toward the dense vines that had the gap between the vines to get through without it knowing what awaited.

"Wrrrraaaaappp...sluurrpp"

They were watching the rabbit running, and was shocked at the end! The tendrils snapped catching the frightened rabbit while trying to get through the gap.

Then something even more chilling happened! While the rabbit was struggling to get out from the vine's snare, it suddenly went limp when a big flower from the top came down and sucked the rabbit dry!

The three immediately backed away. The tendrils were like ordinary rattan, but had something like head. It was alive and hungry!

Quietly, they turned away. They didn't know what else was waiting among the trees or the lianas. They thought it would be better to get out of the forest and hike on the outskirts instead.

This time they were fully alert. They didn't have a compass. So, they would rely on Tet's spray that marked the tree to lead them back. This forest was very dense and confusing.

But they all froze! All the marks from the brightly colored paint had disappeared! Just like that. It was as if all the trees had purposely wiped those marks themselves. Even the bushes they had just cleared to get past had grown back like no one ever disturbed them.

They all went pale. The forest preyed upon anything inside, and they were trapped in it. It waited for them to be off guard and then consuming them alive.

15. LAB HEAD SANDRA

On the ship. Ran thought hard. They did carry communication devices. But he could only contact them if he was on the bridge. There was no way he would leave Cindy alone in the room. In addition to her conditions that were not yet clear, also because the attacks could come at any time.

What were they doing now? The sun seemed to have started to slip toward the West. They should be back. Exploration could only be done during the day. It was too dangerous to investigate on an unknown island at dark.

"Srrtt...srrttt."

A suspicious voice was heard softly in the room next to the clinic. In fact, Ran saw a closed room near the ship's engine control panel. He thought it was another panel room. Besides, he and Ben didn't have time to investigate further. The room was locked.

Ran tiptoed slowly. He put his ear to the door. There was the sound of footsteps!

Ran stepped back. Trying to observe the situation while thinking. His eyes accidentally noticed a small object installed in the upper corner of the room. It was barely visible. Wow! It was a CCTV camera!

Ran hastily turned his attention elsewhere. Hmm, that means the person in the room can see me. I must be careful. Ran turned around and walked to the engine room. As if he needed to check something there.

After making sure that he was out of the CCTV's frame, Ran decided to hide. This was a survival game. Whoever moved first, that person would have been revealed him or herself.

And Ran won the game! The door to the small room slowly opened. A short-barreled weapon appeared first before a figure emerged from the door alert but hesitant. Ran's eyes were widened! Just as the figure stood in the dim light a few centimeters from the door.

It was a tall, striking woman with messy ponytail hair. Her thin body was clad in a knee-high white jacket.

Ran kept watching. She was looking right and left with the gun ready to shoot.

Ran didn't want to startle her. She could have blown his head off out of surprise or fear. Ran wait for the right moment. He suspected that the woman had been inside the room for a while. It was all obvious from her face and tousled hair. She hadn't bathed lately.

While waiting, Ran thought maybe the woman was one of ship's crew. Judging by the white jacket she was wearing, she must have been a doctor or a researcher.

The woman stopped at the bottom of the stairs. Contemplating whether to go up or not. And she didn't. The woman instead turned toward the clinic room where Cindy laid unconscious. Ran's heart was beating fast. He didn't know if she was dangerous or not. From the way she held the weapon, she looked completely untrained.

Ran moved closer slowly taking advantage of the dim atmosphere and the woman's inattentiveness. Just as she gaped at the sight of Cindy lying weakly after opening the clinic door, Ran moved quickly.

With well-trained movements, Ran overpowered her and managed to seize her weapon. The woman screamed softly as Ran grabbed her neck.

"Just kill me! I don't want to comply with your wish to change the generation code," the woman said very weakly. Ran loosened the clasp of his stocky arm around the neck of the woman who seemed like she hadn't eaten for days.

"Calm down. I won't hurt you, okay?" Ran tried to comfort her. He felt her body was getting weaker. Totally helpless. Apparently, the woman had reached her limit. She started sobbing uncontrollably. Ran led her to sit down next to Cindy.

Ran looked at the lovely woman whose face was extremely pale. She looked at Ran with a blank stare. Ran picked up a bottle of water on the table. Told her to drink to calm her down.

"What's your name? Why were you in that room and how long were you there?"

The woman drank the water quickly. She looked very thirsty.

"I am...my name is Sandra. I'm the head of the laboratory on this ship. Are you...are you one of the Fallen Genetic's people?"

Ran frowned. Fallen Genetic? What is that?

"I don't think so. You aren't wearing their uniforms and you don't act like them either," Sandra retorted quickly after seeing Ran's astonishment.

Ran nodded. Interesting.

"Them. Fallen Genetic. Attacked this ship. Bio Research Alpha. Many of us died. The only one who escaped was the captain of this ship, Dev. I was also captured along with several other people. But I got lucky. I managed to outwit my guard by drugging him and then I ran and hid here."

Hmm, so this woman was an important Bio Research person? And what was that? Generation code?

"I'm Ran. I am here with my team of five people. We are not Fallen Genetic or whomever attacked you. We just got lost and ended up getting involved in your strange and dreadful world."

Sandra nodded weakly. She understood what Ran meant.

"Is this girl one of your crew? Is she sick?" Sandra pointed at Cindy who was still lying unconscious on the narrow bed.

Before responding, Ran approached Cindy and held her hand. Checked her pulse. Good grief! Cindy's pulse was so fast! And her body was so cold. Icy cold!

Sandra approached after seeing the changes in Ran's face. The lab head also checked Cindy's pulse on her neck. Ran let her. He didn't know what to do with Cindy.

"Wow! Is she one of you or one of the creatures in the laboratory that has awakened?" Sandra asked quickly while continuing to examine several parts of Cindy's body. She opened Cindy's eyelids which were still tightly closed. Sandra almost jumped backwards seeing Cindy's eyelids were red as blood.

"She...she looks a lot like the Angel of Death!" Sandra suddenly became hysterical.

Ran was shocked.

"What do you mean?"

"Your friend. Her vital signs are very similar to the Angel of Death. One of our research objects in hybrid and genetic engineering," Sandra seemed to try to calm herself down. She failed. Her face grew pale.

Ran was dispirited again.

"Her name is Cindy. She went through a strange and unexpected transformation process after being stung by a thorn from shrub," Ran explained.

Sandra was taken aback.

"You mean the shrubs on the Bone Island which are plenty in the hills of the Giant River?"

"It's called the *Cicuta* plants. The thorns are very poisonous. Deadly actually. But not for certain individuals. But they will trigger a genetic change. A mutation! One of our projects was developing *Cicuta*." Sandra explained. She seemed very worried.

Ran believed her. Sandra was the head of the laboratory of this state-of-the-art research vessel. Who else knew more about this than her?

"Then what can I do to cure Cindy?"

Sandra shook her head firmly, "Nothing! But I can prevent the poison's effects from taking over her mind. We have to take her to the lab. Quick! She is transforming into a very dangerous killer!"

Ran was stunned to hear Sandra's explanation. Killer? Losing control of her mind? No wonder Cindy looked like she was going to hurt Ben and Tet during that incident with the Death Squad. Good grief!

Ran moved quickly to carry Cindy to the laboratory, when suddenly her body convulsed. Sandra watched as Cindy was about to wake up, and then ran out quickly. Ran didn't try to prevent her. His focus was on Cindy who kept on convulsing. Ran touched Cindy's body. Scorching hot!

Extraordinary. Extreme change. She was very cold before and now she was burning.

Ran was about to put a damp cloth on her forehead when Cindy suddenly jumped up. The girl was awake. And now she was standing and staring at Ran with her pale face with threatening red eyes. Ran backed away. Cindy's hands turned to eagle claws again and were ready to attack Ran who was looking at her in horror.

Suddenly, Cindy's body stiffened moments before she stuck her fingernails into Ran's neck. She went limp and fell back unconscious.

Ran wiped the cold sweat on his neck. It was very close! He turned and saw Sandra shaking while holding a stun gun in her hand.

"Hurry, Ran! we have no time! The tranquilizer wouldn't last long. Take her to the laboratory. Let's put her in the Cryonic tube for temporary. I'll be checking on her," Sandra said. She was shaking. Her mind was racing.

Cindy is the original unengineered mutation. This was way more than an amazing finding!

16.

ARRIVAL OF THE ANGEL OF DEATH

The mysterious forest darkened quickly. Its dense canopy blocked the light from reaching the ground. Ben and his teammates were still stuck in their original place. They didn't dare to move too far. There were many dangers they knew nothing about from this predatory forest.

The only way was to spend the night here, hoping to escape death until sunrise. Ben discussed with Tet and Rabat on how they would survive when the darkness completely engulfed this frightening forest.

First, they should not be too close to the trees with hanging roots or vines on their trunks. They have learned that from what they saw with the rabbit earlier.

Second, try to light a fire as big as possible. Not to avoid the plants, but to anticipate beasts. Earlier they saw a small spider sting a cobra to death in a matter of minutes.

Third, the forest ground was littered with skulls of various sizes. Some were the size of a monkey's head, a gorilla's, and even a human's. One thing they learned, not a single skull that wasn't a primate. It was clear that primate species were the main prey of this voracious forest. Ben and his friends shuddered. Humans were primates too!

Fourth and so on was to pray. No one claimed to be religious. But right now, they needed God badly.

Sandra made sure the cryonic tube was working properly. Cables and monitors. Oxygen and respirators. Everything was checked thoroughly. Perfect!

They put Cindy in the tube. The sedative that Sandra had used earlier started to lose its effect. But the cryonic tube kept her restrained. Cindy was deliberately put to sleep. Ran looked at Cindy's pale face. Poor Cindy. As the team leader, Ran felt responsible for everything that happened to her.

Moreover, his three teammates had not yet returned. It was almost dark. The generator they were using now was a small one. Enough to provide the electrical needs of the platform and laboratory. The other rooms were pitch black. This was the first time Ran had no clue what to do.

Sandra was busy. She sat in front of the desk opening various kinds of research documentations while continuing to monitor Cindy's progress. Several times she was pacing to the corner of the room where monitor screens were located. Ran was clueless about what she was doing.

Ran didn't really pay attention to what Sandra was doing. His mind was completely preoccupied with Ben, Tet, Rabat and Cindy right now. Ran stared blankly as Sandra roamed around the room. He didn't have any doubts. If Ran hadn't been overwhelmed by his thoughts, the man would have dragged Sandra in the cryonic tube to prevent her from doing anything at all. Ran wasn't aware that Sandra was doing something dangerous.

In the corner of the room. The monitor screen was flickering. Signs that the chat was in progress;

Start...

Sandra: Captain, this is Sandra

Dev: OMG, what a surprise! Glad you survived

Sandra: Thanks, Captain. Send the DA here immediately.

Dev: What for?

Sandra: I will test its ability to fight with the original version

Dev: That girl?

Sandra: Yes

Dev: Ok

Sandra: Good!

Devs: Send me the results. Make sure no one is seriously injured or die...

Sandra: Understood

End....

Sandra forgot to turn off the monitor. Her only focus was Cindy. She was inserting serum into Cindy's brain so that it was not controlled by the poison from the Cicuta thorns.

If they encountered each other, she could observe any differences among them. The Angel of Death was controlled, while Cindy acted according to her human instincts.

Ran accidentally saw a countdown going on in Cindy's cryonic tube. 15m. Why did Sandra rush to resuscitate Cindy? Didn't she just say it was much safer for Cindy and the people around her if Cindy was temporarily frozen in the tube? Ran's instincts alerted him.

He started observing Sandra's activity. To avoid any suspicion, Ran said he needed to go to the steering bridge to contact the team on the island. Sandra replied indifferently. She was preoccupied with the idea what would the encounter between them be like?

Ran rushed towards the wheelhouse. He was looking at the laboratory room monitor screen. He watched what Sandra was doing, then adjusted the zoom to the corner of the room. One of the monitors was on. Ran read the words on the monitor.

Ran's heart almost jumped out of his chest as soon as he finished reading the chat. Insane woman! Cindy would be used as an experiment!

Ran hurriedly went to the laboratory. It was dark but he already memorized the way. Still, he almost slipped.

The clattering and rushing of the stairs brought Sandra back to her senses. The head of the Bio Research laboratory punched in several codes on the door while aligning her eyes with the retina scanner. The double door slid shut. Just when Ran shouted loudly while cursing Sandra in front of the closing door.

"F*ck*! Shit! You tricked me, Sandra! Open the door!"

Of course, Sandra didn't hear Ran's screams. The door was soundproof. Even if she heard him, Sandra wouldn't open the door for Ran. The man could ruin her plans. For the sake of valuable research, Sandra temporarily put aside her feelings about Ran.

Ran was furious. He didn't have the codes to open the door. Ran racked his brain. He ran back upstairs. Panic. The only way for him to monitor what was happening in the laboratory room was by looking at the monitor in the wheelhouse.

Ran hoped Sandra didn't turn off the CCTV cameras there.

Sandra had forgotten everything. In a few minutes, the Angel of Death would come. Sandra's eyes moved to Cindy's cryonic tube. Two more minutes. She shifted her gaze to the hole in the wall of the ship. Hopefully the Angel of Death didn't come before Cindy hadn't been awoken.

Ran breathed a sigh of relief when he arrived at the wheelhouse, and he could see what was happening in the laboratory room. Ran focused his attention on the monitor screen.

A tall, slender figure entered the laboratory room through a hole in the ship's wall.

The Angel of Death had arrived!

17.

SECOND EXPLORATION

Sandra's heart was pounding hard watching the Angel of Death walk gracefully into the laboratory room. Her steps were slow but sure. Sandra, who had observed the Angel of Death, from its conception process to being frozen in a cryonic tube, was still amazed.

The Angel of Death was a beautiful woman with an athletic and sexy body. Who would have thought that in that graceful body there was such a deadly danger?

As ordered, the Angel of Death didn't care about Sandra who was still looking at her in amazement. Her round eyes looked around. Searching.

Just at that moment, the cryonic tube opened. Cindy woke up from her cryogenic process. Ben was staring intensely when he saw Cindy standing up. Her slender body looked sturdy when turning her body and face.

Directly facing the Angel of Death who was also staring at Cindy with a threatening look. This is the target!

Cindy didn't seem the least intimidated. Her blood red eyes bulged. Her fingernails were horribly long. Like eagle's hooves. Her body gestures showed that she was the dominant one. Not the other way around.

On the other hand, the Angel of Death displayed an attitude that wasn't much different. The same eagle's hooves, the same well-trained muscles, and the same sturdiness.

The two of them faced each other. Really not much different. The only thing that set them apart was their eye color. The Angel of Death had normal eyes, while Cindy's eyes were as red as coral pea.

Sandra watched all this with her hands cupped to her ears but she wasn't blinking. This was amazing! Sandra would record everything for further research! What would be the final result if there was a fight between the engineered and the natural version?

Ran looked at it all with a pale face. He knew there was nothing he could do. He could only look at the monitor and pray for Cindy's safety.

The four men who were spending the night in the living forest couldn't close their eyes at all. Everyone was scared. The forest could at any time prey on them in a bizarre way.

They just hoped the sun would come soon.

Ben kept the fire going with whatever objects he could get his hands on. Even now that they had run out of dry twigs, Ben took the initiative to go a little crazy by starting to use the many skulls on the forest floor as fuel.

Surprisingly the fuel from the bones turned out to be working well! Maybe because the bones still contained a lot of animal oil and were not porous. Ben and his friends breathed a sigh of relief. One problem solved. They would not lack fire until morning.

"Ben, I've got an idea!" Rabat's shout broke the silence. Ben and Tet looked at him curiously.

Rabat didn't explain what the idea was. Instead, he was busy picking the bones that were still oily and then wrapped them with his clothes that had been smeared first on the other bones that were crushed. Rabat was making torches!

Rabat turned to his friends who were still looking oblivious, smiling proudly.

"We can find a way out of this living forest tonight. Even explore it if we want. We know this living forest is afraid of fire. We make as many torches as we can."

The others came to their senses quickly. Brilliant idea! Why wait until morning, why not do it now? Time was precious. They didn't know what happened on the ship. Ran and Cindy might be in danger.

They finally managed to make a torch from quite a lot of bones. It was enough until morning. Now was the time to find a way out.

"While walking to find a way out, we have to explore this living forest. Our journey will be useless if we don't. We don't have the luxury of time," Ben assured his friends. Nobody said no. They completely agreed.

They proceeded carefully, trying to find a way out of the terrible living forest. At each step, they took the time to record what they saw and found.

The predatory trees were afraid of fire. The tendrils that are the hands of the prey catcher immediately move away as soon as the fire is brought near. Likewise, the poisonous animals that were so abundant on the forest ground.

Not all the trees were predators. Only certain types could be classified as one. There were trees, with monkeys, snakes, birds and bats slept on branches.

Tet noted the types of predators carefully. This knowledge would be very useful if they had to pass through this strange forest later.

They kept on moving to get out of the forest. There was nothing for them to use as marks. So, they chose to follow the flow of a river.

"Never go into the river. We never know what's inside, especially in that small river," Tet warned his friends.

Before Tet could explain further, there was a commotion behind them. The three of them quickly hid behind a tree. The noise was like an animal in pursuit.

Sure enough! A small deer ran fast trying to save itself from a leopard.

The little deer with all its strength jumped over a small river that was no more than 4-meter wide. The deer's high jump was followed by a leopard who didn't want to lose its prey. The two of them had almost made it to the other side. But what happened next made the eyes of the three friends widen!

As the bodies of the two animals were in the air, what was a calm river suddenly churned. A tongue of water was formed and snatched the two animals. Both animals flailed to break away from the grip of water.

The two beasts were struggling as the tongue of water pulled them into the middle of the river, swallowing both quickly. Tet, a biologist, gaped in disbelief after seeing so clearly as the

water bubbles subsided and the river surface calmed. Floating on the surface of the water were bones that were clearly the new bones of the little deer and leopard.

That was the most freakish thing that ever happened. The river was alive and preyed on living things!

This second exploration conducted in the middle of the night showed them things that made no sense! What was this island made of?

18. The Duel

Sandra turned on the video recorder from all corners of the room. She gave Captain Dev a chance to witness the imminent fight.

Captain Dev glared at the large monitor in front of him which was showing tension before the start of the fight that was sure to be very gruesome between the Angel of Death and Cindy. This was a blessing in disguise for them. Confused by the group of adventurers, but instead, they got a golden opportunity to document the battle between the engineered version and nature's will.

The Angel of Death attacked first. Preceded by a loud shrill sound like an angry eagle, her body lunged at Cindy. Her long claws aimed at Cindy's neck. With the intention of slashing her neck.

Cindy didn't stay still. She jumped to dodge as well as counterattack. Her eagle claws tried to grip the neck of the Angel of Death. The claw would make a big hole in the neck if it hit the target.

There was an extraordinary battle between two almost identical women. Both had almost equal abilities. The Angel of Death was a genetically modified human who had been injected with strange substances originating from the island of bones.

Cindy was the same. It was just that the transformation of her body occurred naturally. The genes in her body mutated naturally after she was injured by *Cicuta*'s poisonous thorn.

The Angel of Death who was programmed to fight it all out with the main target, Cindy, continued to attack blindly with all her strength. Her slender body moved as fast as the wind striking with a lethal attack.

Meanwhile, Cindy, who was no longer affected by a trance because Sandra had repaired it through a cryonic tube, fought with clear logic and reason. Dodging as much as possible from the attacks of the Angel of Death to save energy.

This was a marathon fight. Cindy realized that. The Angel of Death wouldn't stop until she died. Or Cindy died. Unless Captain Dev's orders changed, the Angel of Death would fight to death.

Ran watched the fight from the monitor screen on the captain's bridge. He was very worried for Cindy's safety seeing how the Angel of Death's attacks were so powerful. But after a while, Ran was less worried. Cindy managed to keep up even though she seemed cornered.

Ran understood why Cindy looked desperate. She was trying to buy time so the Angel of Death would run out of energy.

Meanwhile, Sandra continued to pay close attention. The battle would provide input for scientists like herself on how to improve the abilities of the Angel of Death and other genetically modified products. Sandra was amazed. The Angel of Death was the deadliest tool ever created by her and Bio Research scientists. But Cindy could balance it.

Hmm, after all is done, I have to take a sample of Cindy's blood and tissue so I can study it carefully. Sandra thought.

Meanwhile, on the ship Bio Research Three, Captain Dev stared intensely at the fierce battle that was taking place in Bio Research One's laboratory.

The Angel of Death looked exhausted. Cindy did drain her energy.

Apparently this was the difference between the programmed and natural versions. Cindy fought using her brain while the Angel of Death fought to the death using her muscles. This should be fixed. Sandra knows what to do. Captain Dev made a small note.

After more than 1 hour of fighting, this time Cindy took control of the situation. She knew that the Angel of Death had run out of steam. The engineered fighter could only dodge, parry and continue to retreat. Cindy was getting fiercer. Her red eyes seemed to glow. Although she could control herself thanks to cryonic, Cindy was a mutated human with a high level of emotion.

Sandra looked at the final session of the battle anxiously. If this battle continued, the Angel of Death might be seriously injured or even dead. She was typing messages to Captain Dev.

Not long after, when it seemed like it was only a matter of time for the Angel of Death to meet her end, her body laid helpless waiting for Cindy to drop her deadly hand. Suddenly, Cindy stopped all her movements. Her body stiffened.

Captain Dev typed a message to Sandra: good thing you didn't forget to put the program chip in the girl's head.

Sandra who was now breathing a sigh of relief replied: I need both for further research, Captain. Of course, I did not forget.

Ran watched all the events in shock. Cindy was now in their possession. You bastard!

19. ESCAPE

Cindy was caught. Her mind was held hostage by some kind of chip that Sandra had planted in her head. Ran felt so helpless. He couldn't do anything to help Cindy. His other three friends had yet to return from their exploration. Ran didn't know if they could make it through the night safely. Ran gritted his teeth furiously.

Ran made a quick decision. He had to get off this ship and would try to help Cindy at any cost. Later. After he ran away.

From the monitor screen, Ran could read what Sandra typed while chatting with Captain Dev. Sandra apparently had not realized that the camera in the corner of the room was still on;

They know too much, Captain. They must be dealt with immediately.

Capture or kill?

Capture is better. They are more useful alive. We need a lot more objects.

Noted. I will send the rest of the Death Squad to get them.

Ran's heart tightened. Sooner or later those crazy researchers would catch him too. He might as well be the object of their experiment. Ran gathered what he could carry on the ship's bridge. He racked his brain, looking for the best way of escape.

Ran estimated the arrival time of the Death Squad to be no more than 20 minutes. He needed to use the time left to escape. Lifeboat? That wasn't possible. They would easily catch up. Swimming? It was a crazy decision too!

Previously they had explored every corner of the cave and couldn't find a way out to the land above it. So going through there would also be futile.

Ran had to make a decision. Dawn was almost breaking. He was sure he would be able to reach the shore on the right side before the first shade of sun. His teammates chose to land on a ramp because they were using a lifeboat. Now Ran chose to go to the nearest steep cliff by swimming!

Ran listened carefully as he prepared to jump off the front deck of the ship. After feeling safe, Ran threw one pack of equipment tied on a lifebuoy first before he finally plunged into the sea. He swam to the right, which had absolutely no shoreline.

Earlier, Ran calculated that the distance from the ship to the cliff on the right was no more than 200 meters. He swam slowly to save energy.

While inside, Sandra was busy examining the wounds on the Angel of Death. It was pretty bad. Cindy struck her hard. Sandra knew Ran was still in this ship and couldn't go anywhere. Soon the Death Squad will arrive to help her capture all of Cindy's teammates.

Tet and his two friends stayed away from the predator river. The horror was still etched on their faces. This forest was ferocious. Even the river could be a great and agile predator.

"We didn't encounter any of these bizarre stuffs during the day, did we guys?" Rabat spoke up. Breaking the silence.

"Yup! It seems all these predatory processes, predatory trees, predatory rivers, only occurred at night. We did cross a small river yesterday and nothing happened," Tet confirmed Rabat's opinion.

"Alright. Fire can only be for animals and trees of prey. But for the river, of course it'll be useless. Then we'll just hang in here. Wait until the sun comes up then we go," Ben concluded.

The others agreed. It was clear how much horror was still on their faces.

Ran had to struggle to have a foothold on the edge of the cliff. The waves in this section were strong enough to throw him against sharp and pointed rocks. Luckily he had excellent swimming skills. Otherwise, his body would have been torn to pieces.

Ran dragged the supplies. It wasn't much, just basic survival gear. He had to climb this cliff after all. It was impossible if he carried a heavy load.

This cliff was quite high. It took skills to climb up to the top. Ran began his arduous journey.

Meanwhile, a reddish hue began to show its form in the sky. Soon the sun would rise. Ran deliberately chose the steepest cliff route, but there were many inlets to make it easier for him to climb while eliminating the possibility of being seen when the light started to appear.

Ran rested for a while halfway through the climb. This was the most difficult climb he had ever done.

A suspicious voice caught Ran's ears. The sound of a helicopter engine roaring! Ran hastily folded his body in a nearby alcove. Maybe Sandra had realized Ran's running away and asked Captain Dev to send a helicopter to track his whereabouts.

The sound of the helicopter approached. Ran was a bit panicked. His leg almost slipped. Luckily he quickly gripped the rock protrusion firmly with his hand. Then quickly fixed his footing in a small, slightly gritty alcove.

Rrrr...rrrr...whaaaack!

Ran's foothold suddenly collapsed! In an instant Ran's body rolled into the hole. Just as the helicopter went over the cliff.

Ran bit his lip hard. It was like entering a slide, but instead of water, it was sand all around. Ran was just trying his best to grab hold of any handle. There was nothing to hold on to. Everything was sand. Ran finally gave up.

Finally Ran landed on a pile of soft sand at the bottom of the slide.

Ran opened his eyes. Feeling and checking for broken bones or injured body parts. Ran breathed a sigh of relief. Only a few scuffs on the knees and elbows. Ran tried to stand up. He was fine. Ran again breathed a sigh of relief. But what is this place?

Ran looked around carefully. This was the bottom of a cave. It's bright enough because there were 2 light sources that fell at the bottom of the cave. One from where he fell, and another weaker light came from another hole on the opposite side of the first hole.

The first hole was no longer possible to climb. Too high. But this second hole looked like it was within his range to climb.

Before Ran started his ascent, there was a loud noise from above. From the hole he fell through earlier. Ran watched with narrowed eyes.

Oh my gosh! From that hole, small birds like bats rushed in.

Strange bats that emitted reddish glow from their eyes!

Ran hastily attempted his second climb. Racing against the arrival of those terrible beasts.

20. PREDATORY BAT

Ran hastily climbed up step by step. The roar behind him was pumping his adrenaline to the highest level. Ran didn't know how dangerous the flying rodent was, but he had a feeling that it would be better to avoid it quickly.

He had not reached the exit, but now he had come to an alcove which was quite gentle and spacious. The rumbling behind him grew quieter. The strange and terrible bats apparently didn't continue the pursuit.

Light! Yes, the light might scare them. This space received enough light from outside. Although it was still quite dim in the eyes of a human like him. Ran breathed a sigh of relief.

But immediately he choked up. Ran's eyes caught countless piles of bones. From a wide variety of small and large animals. Rabbits, birds, antelopes, even what looked like new tiger bones! The giant tiger he had seen on Bone Island. It was a horrific sight!

Wow, all these animals were preyed upon by the bats that chased him earlier. Luckily he quickly escaped. Ran shuddered, he couldn't imagine if he was caught by the wild and savage bats earlier. The hair on the back of his neck stood up.

He had to hurry. The exit hole at the top was big enough but still quite far. Ran didn't want to spend the night in this grave hole. Not to mention the Death Squad might be waiting for him outside. Ran gathered his willpower to beat the fatigue spreading throughout his body.

This climb wasn't too steep. Ran was almost at the entrance of the hole when he heard a commotion and noise above him. Ran pressed his body against the wall of the cave passage. He obviously didn't want to come out before knowing what was causing the commotion and noise. Ran peeked slowly.

What?! Ran's heart skipped a beat. There were two Death Squad members battling an abnormally sized bear. A giant bear that was almost three times its natural size!

The two people must have been looking for him when they encountered the giant beast. Ran thought hard. He was caught in a completely unfavorable situation. Below, the swarms of predatory bats were ready to eat him while waiting for the darkness to come. Above, the brutal and horrible Death Squad was looking for him to be captured or worse, killed!

Even if the giant bear could defeat the Death Squad, Ran was also at a loss as to how to escape from such powerful beast. If only Cindy were here. Of course, she could handle them all. The girl had turned into the deadliest weapon. Terrible, but at least she was still his best friend.

Err...was it still now? The chip inside her head had ripped out consciousness which made her one of the Death Squad as well. Ran cursed Sandra and her group in his mind.

A heart wrenching scream was heard as one of the Death Squad members was flung from the fight with a gapping belly and severed neck.

While the other one was struck by a giant bear claw and then laid helplessly on the ground near to the exit hole where Ran was hiding. Close enough. Ran could even clearly hear the soft groan from his mouth.

The giant bear let out a huge roar of victory before ambled away from the battle arena. Its body was also badly injured. The Death Squad was indeed formidable.

Ran felt his stomach churning with hunger. Good grief! He had spent more than half a day in the hole. No wonder he was starving. He ate a few biscuits from his bag before finally crawling out of the hole carefully.

Ran was stunned! Now he could clearly see how bad the body of one of the Death Squad had been. The bear apparently tore his whole body violently. The other one wasn't dead yet. He was dying. His body was still moving.

Ran didn't want to come closer. He could still be very dangerous. It would be better if he found his way to his friends who were still in the middle of the forest.

But his body was worn out. The process of escaping from the ship, swimming, climbing cliffs, being trapped in a bat cave, then watching the fierce battle between a giant bear and the Death Squad, had drained his energy and adrenaline. Ran felt exhausted.

After all, the day was getting late. It would be foolish if he entered the strange forest on this dangerous island at night. He wouldn't know what awaited him in darkness. He should rest tonight, recovering his strength while making plans.

Ran looked around. Searching for a safe place to spend the night.

Big stones were everywhere. The forest that was starting to look dark and black was meters ahead. Ran, who had experience doing many expeditions, could properly analyze which places were safe to spend the night and which were not. His eyes were drawn to a large tree not far from where he was standing.

A tree wasn't only big, it was gigantic. It was probably over 50 meters tall. The canopy was very lush with large branches.

Ran observed carefully. He feared the lush canopy was the nest of a giant bird or snake, or some other strange animal he didn't know. Hmm...it seemed safe. There was no sign that the tree held a potential danger.

Ran decided to stay on the big tree. There was one branch that looked very sturdy and protected. He could rest there.

Before climbing the giant tree, Ran still had time to look at the Death Squad that was dying. The body was no longer moving. Maybe he was dead.

With the dexterity of an ape, thanks to his training so far, Ran managed to get to the branch where he spent the night. Its height was probably over 20 meters. Quite safe from the reach of the land animals. He was protected by two large branches that crossed each other. Ran felt that this night would pass peacefully.

The day turned to dark quickly. Ran had finished two large pieces of biscuits and a bottle of water. He had to be frugal. Even though he knew how to survive in the wild, this was a strange territory. Tomorrow was the perfect time to explore what to eat while following the tracks of his friends.

His sleeping position was quite comfortable. Ran decided to sleep early. Previously this adventurous man had smeared his body with the leaves that he had crushed. So that his body odor wouldn't attract predators.

When he was half asleep, Ran was startled by a loud noise from below. Like the buzz of a bee approaching. The night was covered with three-quarters of the moonlight. So that in the dim moonlight Ran could see what was going on below.

From the hole exiting the cave, appeared hundreds of bats that he had seen this morning in the cave. The cauldron of bats circled like bees around the two corpses of the Death Squad. Ran opened his eyes wide. Curious what the swarm of bats would do.

Another growl was heard not far away. Uh, apparently the giant bear returned. After recovering from exhaustion and licking its wounds, the bear returned to prey on the two Death Squad members that it defeated this afternoon. The bear must be starving.

Ran felt his heart pounding wildly. He had a feeling that something big was about to happen.

Sure enough. Preceded by the command of a loud screech, hundreds of bats charged at the bear. The bear straightened its giant body trying to disperse them using its sharp claws.

Several bats fell dead torn by hooves and sharp fangs. But hundreds more managed to bite and slash the bear's body. Ran was wide-eyed! In less than fifty minutes, the bear's giant body fell and was only a skeleton!

Ran's amazement didn't end there. After devouring the bear's giant body in less than an hour, the bats charged at the corpses of the Death Squad. Because there was no resistance, the two corpses were gone in mere minutes!

Ran had goosebumps. The bats were apparently still hungry. In a coordinated rhythm of murmuring, the black predatory wave charged towards him!

21. HELL ISLAND

Ran gasped! How could he get out of the life-or-death situation? The onslaught of the deadly black waves drew nearer while he was on a large tree that was quite tall. To jump was to die. So stayed still?

The first bat arrived quickly. Ran could see its terrifying mouth open wide. Showing long and sharp fangs. Ran closed his eyes. This was it! It was his time to go.

Just a few inches before the fangs bit Ran, suddenly the bat made a sharp turn in its flight. Dodging hastily so as not to come into contact with Ran's skin. So did the bats behind it. The flying formation of the bats was shattered. Some of them collided.

But the chaotic situation was short-lived. After that, hundreds of flesh-eating bats just circled around the tree where Ran was huddled waiting for his death. The bats kept on spinning while emitting a threatening hum. They wanted to feed on Ran but the scent of his body prevented them from doing so.

Ran was sniffing his arm and back of his hand in surprise. He could smell a sharp odor all over his body. Aha, here it is! The scent of the crushed leaves of this tree had prevented the predatory bats from approaching him. Amazing!

With excitement, Ran repeated his actions earlier. He took a few leaves, squeezed them, then rubbed them on the exposed parts of his body. He even covered his shirt and pants. While doing it, Ran felt something drop on to his pants from above. Probably from the tree canopy. He saw a Siafu ant the size of a toe crawling on his pants, it stopped moving and then squirmed violently, dead.

Ran understood completely now. Apparently the leaf extract had a lethal effect. But why was he okay?

Ran wasn't aware that he had been hiding in one of only seven rare trees planted in the whole world. The tree was named as the Tree of Life and Death by whoever discovered this in the past. This rare tree would not be more than seven. Each time one of them died, a new seedling would grow.

The leaves of the tree had two opposite properties at once. Very useful as an anti-toxin to humans and very deadly to other animals and plants. That was why this tree only grew alone. Not in the same ecosystem with the other plants.

How this rare tree originally grew on this strange island, no one knew. But why there were only seven trees in the world, there was a special scientific-metaphysical reason.

The tree was both venomous and antivenom. If the population was numerous and could be commercialized in the massive amount, it was feared the world would reach doomsday too fast because human nature was generally greedy and yet unable to control themselves. Imagine a great anti-venom combined with a super evil poison and then controlled by irresponsible people.

But Ran didn't care about any of those things. For him the most important thing was that he was safe for now. He stayed put.

He plucked a few more leaves to put in his bag for the trip the next day which he knew would be very dangerous.

Still, although he knew the bats wouldn't sink their teeth in him, Ran couldn't sleep. He just put his muscles to relax. He tried meditation. Ran knew, as soon as the dawn broke, the bats would be all gone.

Most of Cindy's consciousness was actually still awake. Only a little was under the influence of the program chip that Sandra installed in her head.

Even though she could control her brain completely, Cindy decided not to rebel against Sandra's orders. She wanted to experience being in the inner circle of those crazy researchers and the insane giant company that invested in them. Cindy wanted to investigate further and, at the same time, shifted their attention from her friends so they were no longer being chased and harassed.

After all, there was one thing that made Cindy confident. Ever since the terrifying transformation process she went through on the ship the other day during the fight against the Angel of Death, she had somehow begun to successfully control her power.

Sandra wasn't aware of this. She was just too happy to be able to use Cindy and control her brain through the computer chip she implanted in Cindy's head. So far, their experiments have never been successful in creating the Death Squad. And Cindy was absolutely perfect! What happened to her occurred naturally without the intervention of genetic technology, without any artificial process!

Even the Angel of Death, which was considered the most successful trial so far, was defeated.

Therefore, despite reports from her subordinates that they didn't succeed in capturing Ran and finding the other members of the expedition team, and, instead, she lost two Death Squad members, Sandra didn't really care. She already had a complete prototype!

The fast boat carrying Sandra and Cindy's went on a very elaborate journey for Cindy to observe. They passed through a very calm sea channel where giant rocks towered left and right. After that they went through a rough sea with endless big waves, then they entered a calm sea with many small islands, before finally arriving at a large island hidden among the cluster of small islands surrounding it.

A very secret island. And the most amazing thing was in the middle of the big island stood a strong volcano that wasn't too high but its peak emitted thick smoke, and from a distance Cindy could also see molten lava flowing from the crater down through the deep inlet that was formed naturally to the ocean.

It was an amazing sight when the lava that fell on the sea surface made a loud hissing sound and released white smoke. The lava didn't flow from just one stream. There were different grooves in different places around the island. They created amazing and terrifying maze when seen from the sky. The island seemed to be overgrown with a volcano that erupted eternally.

Cindy felt her heart pounding as the ship began to dock at the sophisticated-looking pier with super tight security. She complied when Sandra gave the code to follow her off the ship.

Sandra waited for Cindy to actually stepped off from the last stair of the ship. Smiling sweetly, she said in a proud yet secretive tone.

"Welcome to Hell Island, Cindy!"

22.

SILVA PREDONUM

Ran jumped down from the last branch. The sun had risen halfway. Time to start the search. The supplies in his backpack could last for one day. At least. He could follow the jungle survival method to get through afterward.

The forest in front of him looked mysterious. Thick, black, and spooky. How long had his three friends been trapped in there? Were they still alive?

Ran didn't want to think any further. Whatever was ahead, he would deal with it. Whatever the results might be. With steady steps, Ran entered the forest. The trees in this forest were much bigger than the ordinary wilderness. The forest aura was unnerving. It felt as if there were thousands of eyes lurking and ready to ambush anyone who was caught off guard at any moment.

Ran had goosebumps. This adventurer who was also a doctor began to take precautionary measures. What should he do if he encountered a beast? How to save himself? What could he eat if he was low on supplies? And of course, where would he spend the night if he hadn't met his friends.

Through his alert eyes and trained ears, Ran tried to catch the slightest movement and sound around him. The forest was getting darker. Sunlight wasn't able to fully penetrate the thick

canopy of giant trees. It was more or less like nighttime. Ran was a bit annoyed by his thoughts.

Although he wasn't a biologist, Ran saw a lot of peculiarity in the vegetation in this forest. He had been on expeditions many times, in various parts of the world, but he had never encountered the types of plants like these. Ran secretly smiled. Had there been a botanist here, he would have been dancing with joy at the sight of new, never-before-seen species.

The smile on Ran's face disappeared in an instant. He saw something very strange in front of him. A pile of bones under a tree that looked like a banyan but it wasn't because the leaves were very wide and the trunk oozed a lumpy sap. Oh my gosh! Ran hesitated to come closer.

But after he sensed the situation was quite safe and there was no sign of dangerous animal around, Ran approached the tree out of curiosity.

Oh right! These bones were still quite new. Not older than last night. Still fresh! Ran choked! Perhaps....

He threw away all the bad thoughts that were raging. He was a doctor. All things must be confirmed. And Ran tried. He examined the pile of bones carefully. Ran became a bit nervous. Among the piles of bones there were also human bones. Good Lord!

Ran stopped his activities. His heart sank imagining the horror if they were his teammates' bones. But the existing bones belonged to only one person. Ran tried to think positively. His friends were three. Maybe two survived. Or were these someone else's bones and all of his friends were still alive? But was there anyone else on this dreadful island?

His head was spinning wildly when he thought about it. He had to focus! Not to think about whose bones these belonged to, but to find out what had chewed up their flesh and left only the bones?

Ran looked around to check. He also examined the traces of animals around the bones.

There was no trace of anything. Suddenly Ran's eyes stumbled upon something strange, shocking, and terrifying at the same time.

The giant tree had a very large trunk and threaded leathery bark. There was a black spot on one of the threads and hey!... there was something white stuck in it. Ran took a twig and tried to take the thing carefully.

Ran's eyes went wide after finding out that the white thing that was stuck was a bone! Human bone! Ran's heart was beating fast. His mind flashed at one thought.

He stuck the long twig into the bark of the tree where the bone had been stuck. The tree bark was soft, not as hard as wood. Increasingly curious, Ran stabbed the end of the branch he was holding into the threaded gap of the stem. Good grief! The tip of the twig went in easily!

This was insane! The thread wasn't a year circle or anything. The thread was a big mouth! This tree had a mouth!

Ran stumbled backwards. So, the ones that preyed on these animals and humans were trees!

Ran's face turned white. He was determined to look closely at the characteristics of this tree. This tree didn't react at all when he thrusted the branch. Ran got it. It was daytime. That

meant this tree was a nocturnal predator. It became a predator at nighttime.

It was a little relief for Ran. At least for now he wasn't a potential prey.

Carefully, Ran observed the characteristics of this tree. Dark in color with branches and twigs to the lowest stem. Hmm, apparently branches and twigs were the hands of trees to ambush their prey. Ran shuddered.

After making sure that he could correctly identify if he encountered the same tree later, Ran continued his journey. Go deeper into the forest.

This time Ran took his time. He was very alert. If trees could become predators, he thought there would be many more deadly things in this forest.

River! The sound of splashing water in front made Ran very excited. His water supply was running low. But all the excitements he had experience so far

made him forget about being tired. But water was still the main element of survival. He couldn't be careless about it. Dehydration could be deadly.

Ran, who was still keeping his guard up didn't dare to enter the river. He squatted on the edge of water holding the water bottle. As soon as he looked down at the amazingly clear river to fill his drinking water, he saw something terrible again!

The bottom of the clear river was littered with... Bones! Oh, my goodness! What was this? Ran backed away for a moment.

Based on his experience, Ran could immediately see that the pile of bones was at the bottom of a shallow river that became animal crossing.

Ran took the binoculars from his backpack. He was right. Several meters upstream was also a crossing, the pile of bones was clearly visible. Likewise, about 50 meters downstream, he saw the same thing.

So, if it was shallow, clear, and easy to cross, there would be piles of bones.

Ran frowned. So? Perhaps there was wild animal that lurked at every crossing, then ambushed the prey, and devoured it in the river.

If that was the case, it would be very unusual. Predatory animal usually dragged its prey somewhere safe for it to consume. If it couldn't finish consuming the prey, it would be hidden well somewhere.

This certainly was another kind of predator. Ran remembered the tree of prey he saw this morning. Automatically his eyes explored the right and left sides of the river. There were no trees of that kind anywhere here.

A thought quickly crossed Ran's mind. What if the predator was the river itself? Ran didn't want to think any further. One thing he was sure of was that this forest was full of nocturnal predators. It was still noon. It seemed safe enough to cross this shallow river that wasn't too wide.

Once again Ran used his binoculars to look around. His eyes caught a monitor lizard swimming and crossing on the upstream side of the river, and nothing happened. It looked safe to cross.

While not forgetting to fill his water bottle, Ran crossed the scary river. Once on the other side, Ran breathed a sigh of relief.

But his relief didn't last long. There was a loud roar that shook the entire forest in the distance. Whatever that was, it would be very dangerous for anyone to encounter.

The roar was getting closer. Ran hastily checked the surroundings. He saw a tree. After making sure it wasn't a tree of prey like this morning, Ran immediately climbed up by grabbing the vines of lianas that were wrapped around the tree trunk. The trunk of the tree was straight and didn't branch low. The only way was through the liana.

Just in case, Ran crushed the leaves he had brought with him and rubbed it all over his body.

Ran reached the nearest branch. At least this was more than 25 meters above the ground. Simultaneously with the arrival of a large tiger with black and yellow spots from behind the bushes which apparently attracted by his scene.

The tiger looked very hungry, roared loudly while gazing at Ran who felt safe sitting on the branch of the tall tree. After one more roar, the big tiger started...climbing!

Ran immediately went very pale! Where else should he go? The next branch was too high above it and there were no more lianas to climb. The tiger looked very agile climbing. My God!

Ran ran out of options. He would fight! Meanwhile, he prayed hard that the tiger would be reluctant to prey on him because of the smell of the Tree of Life and Death leaves.

His prayer wasn't answered. The big tiger already on the branch where he was standing at the other end. They faced each other. Ran grabbed the knife from his waist. Time to fight!

The tiger sniffed for a moment at Ran's body. Ran still hoped the scent of the leaf worked. Apparently not. With a short growl, the huge tiger lunged at him. Ran gasped.

Woooshhh! Snaaaapped!.....grooowl.

While flying on the air, a long vine of liana snatched and wrapped the tiger body tightly. The tiger tried to clawed and bite off the stem of the liana.

Ran couldn't help but stare in horror when he saw a large plant head similar to a pitcher plant appeared suddenly swallowing the tiger's body whole! The Liana had a head and it devoured the big tiger just like that!

It happened very fast. The tiger's entire body disappeared in an instant. Ran's heart almost stopped. The liana he was climbing earlier turned out to be a predatory one. He understood why he hadn't eaten earlier. The liana smelled the scent of the leaves of the Tree of Life and Death on her body and could not eat it.

Ran was safe for now.

But a conclusion was etched firmly in his brain. Not all predators were nocturnal. This was Predator ecosystem. Silva Predonum!

23.

REUNION IN GORGE OF DEATH

Ran was ruminating the things he should do.

This forest was full of predators. Animals, plants, even rivers! Ran's mind was filled with apprehension. They had lost contact for several days. Moreover, he left the communication receiver in the ship. But Ran believed his teammates were tough and could anticipate all kinds of obstacles. After all, they had the same experience as him.

Ran tried to think positively while continuing to walk through the forest. Ran didn't want to rush. He couldn't afford to be careless.

After all, he wasn't completely oblivious in his search for them. Each of them had trans locator on their watches and it was still on. They could track each other's signal from the watch they were wearing. This was the safety standard for the expedition team.

The trans locator gave a light signal indicating the distance. The brighter the light, the closer the distance. Ran continued to observe the indicator light as he continued his trek.

When the path began to climb on a fairly high hill, Ran's indicator turned brighter. Thank God! They were so close! Ran was elated but the excitement only lasted a moment. The indicator suddenly dimmed and then turned off. Good grief! Where are they?

Ran was half running going up the hill. He didn't want to lose track of his teammates.

Ran reached the top of the hill breathless and saw something that made his heart sink. There were backpacks which he believed belonged to his friends scattered on the ground. He also saw a glittering object on the ground. It was a watch!

Rabat's watch was stepped on or hit by something heavy. There were footprints everywhere. Some were human footprints as well as footprints of...giant primates!

Ran squatted down to confirm the traces and the number of people circulating in this place. There were clearly the footprints of three people of different sizes and the footprints of a primate nearly three times the size of a human foot. Ugh, what's this? Why is this island inhabited by so many strange creatures?

Ran continued to check the surroundings carefully. The footprints of his three friends headed in one direction. Ran followed the footprints and ended up at the edge of a ravine!

From their tracks, it was clear that the three of them were running desperately and ended up on the edge of the cliff. Ran looked down. This cliff was not very high. Ran also saw in the canyon below a large river flowing calmly. Ran breathed a sigh of relief. Most likely they would survive.

A growl behind startled Ran and made him turn quickly. My God! What creature is this?!

A tall, hairy figure resembling a gorilla but standing upright with arms and legs that were proportioned like a human stood in front of him. He had hairy face like a primate, but his nose and mouth and eyes were just like humans. Gosh! Ran was stunned.

Ran realized the creature's intention when it growled again showing its sharp teeth and raised his hands that were clawed like razors. It was going to attack him.

Without thinking twice, Ran jumped into the river below.

He knew how to land a body on the surface of the water well. Ran glided smoothly into the deep calm river.

Ran didn't rush to surface. He dove and swam in the water for a while heading downstream. He was worried that the Kingkong followed him and threw itself into the river as well. The creature looked vicious and threatening.

Ran pulled his body into a sandy riverbank with a lot of bamboo growing on it. At least it was protected enough. But he had to remain vigilant. Too many unexpected things in this forest. Who would have thought there was a giant hairy creature that looked very similar to humans.

While wringing out his soaking wet clothes, Ran looked around. He was on a flat canyon. But surrounded directly by the steep walls of the hills. It was impossible to go here if not by the river route. But something feels weird here. Ran's sharp eyes looked at the bamboo grove in front of him.

The clump was like an ordinary bamboo grove. Green in color with no leaf. Maybe it was because of the dry season that the leaves all withered. Something wasn't right.

Raannn! Raannn! Ruumun!

The voice initially sounded faint in Ran's ears. But it sounded very familiar. It was Ben!

Ran turned and was surprised to see his three friends across the river waving their hands and clothes warning him. What's wrong with them? Why am I being told to run fast? Ran was still processing the whole situation. But his hunch confirmed that there was indeed something off.

The bamboo sticks pulled themselves one by one from the ground then crawling and flocking towards Ran.

Hah! Those are not bamboo sticks. Those are snakes!

Quickly Ran threw himself into the river and swam as hard as he could. The snakes swam after him. It was terrifying!

Ben, Tet, and Rabat across the river were anxious watching Ran racing to save himself from a bunch of green snakes as big as bamboo sticks.

Before they saw Ran across the river, his teammates saw that the kingkong that was chasing them had landed on the wrong side of the canyon of death. One "bamboo" stick bit him. He retaliated by biting off the snake head. But in a matter of seconds, the giant Kingkong was dead. The snakes that looked like bamboo clumps were extremely venomous.

And they consumed the Kingkong's body by forming a bamboo grove around it. That was why Ran couldn't see the Kingkong's corpse because the "bamboo" clump was very thick.

Now Ran was swimming, trying to escape from the most venomous snakes in the world. Witnessed by his three friends who absolutely couldn't do anything to help him.

24.

ESCAPED FROM DEATH

Ran spurred his body to split the calm river water. Not far behind him, dozens of venomous snakes chased with hissing sounds. But no matter how fast he swam, the gap between him and those snakes were nearing.

Meanwhile on the other side, Ben, Tet, and Rabat were holding their heads anxiously watching the whole thing. Each of them had prepared wood the size of an arm if the snakes reached the land. They put the sticks near them on the ground. They were preoccupied in saving Ran.

Their hope was waning. The distance between Ran and the pack of snakes was getting closer. It was less than 5 meters away. Ran remembered the tree leaves he brought with him. But that would be pointless. After all, he was in the water. Of course, the aroma of the leaves would soon be washed away by the water.

Ran was just trying his best to keep going. The distance to the shore was actually only about 15 meters away. But the snakes were very fast. Only 2 meters left. 1 meter. Ran gave up. Maybe this was the end for him.

Just as the first snake was about to bite him, suddenly the water current changed, pushing the snakes away from Ran. But the snakes swam forward to catch him.

This time three snakes simultaneously raised their heads to bit Ran's feet.

Splaaasssh.....Splaaasssh....clap!

A split second before the venomous fangs plunged into Ran's feet, there was a loud sound of water splashing high. Several large beasts grabbed the three snakes in a flash. Caught them and took them away.

The same thing happened again and again. Some animals that looked like Capybara but were bigger snatched the snakes and carried them away, then consumed them on the big rocks upstream.

Until finally the swarm of snakes splited away trying to escape from their predators, swam back to the shore where they came from and sticking themselves again into the ground forming a clump of "bamboo".

Tet, Rabat, and Ben ran to grab the exhausted Ran off the river and dragged him to the riverbank. Ran on his back and looked up at the sky while catching his breath. He was saved at the last second by the arrival of a giant Capybara which preyed on those snakes.

There was no blanket or jacket to recover Ran's body temperature. His three friends just surrounded Ran in amazement. The way Ran escaped earlier was amazing. Unwilling to give up until the last second even though in the end he was saved by the giant capybaras.

Silence surrounded the riverbank which was calm again. From a distance, it looked like the capybaras were enjoying their lunch comfortably. Tet who was watching the scene wondered could they prey on humans too? Uh!

After a few moments of silence and when Ran was able to get up and sit down while observing her friends, then the three people rushed to Ran and hugged him tightly.

"We have to thank the giant Capybara who are having lunch in the middle of the river. They saved you mate!" Tet patted Ran's shoulder happily.

Ran grinned. Madness! The chase had drained his energy as well as his adrenaline. His body felt very weak. But he was incredibly happy that his friends were all safe.

Ran reached into his shirt pocket. Thankfully the leaves of the trees of life and death were still there. These leaves would be very useful for them to escape from this island of death. But he had to recuperate first before start planning with his teammates. Ran closed his eyes. Just tried to sleep the whole thing off.

Tet, Ben and Rabat, who were still overjoyed by the unexpected meeting with Ran, let him sleep.

"We have to find Tet's food supplies. We are tired and need food," Ben said quietly.

"Yup! Let's look around here. Tet, you have a record of which plants are poisonous and which aren't, right? Let us find out. I'm sorry for Ran, he must be starving," Ben responded in agreement.

Tet took out a note. After several days of getting lost looking for a way back to the ship and many surprising events,

Tet made special notes of edible plants. The parameters were clear. If animals eat it, then the plant, leaf, or fruit was definitely safe for humans to eat.

"I don't have the trees and plants around here in my records. We have to look a little further into the forest," Tet told his teammates after taking a close look at the plants around them.

Ben and Rabat agreed.

"One should stay here with Ran. Let me and Ben look for food. Rabat, you stay with Ran," Tet continued.

Ben and Rabat agreed. The two of them started packing. They didn't know how far they would enter the forest. So, it was better if they prepared for anything. But since almost all of their backpacks and equipment were left on the hill across the river where they were attacked by the kingkong-like creature, they brought what they had left, a knife and a wooden club.

"Wait!" Ran apparently listening to the conversation of his teammates.

"Rub this leaf on your body. This will be very useful to repel certain types of predators on this island. This leaf is rare. So we have to be frugal," Ran explained.

They took the leave and spreaded the crushed leaves mixed with water to make it more efficient in use. Although it hadn't been clinically tested, they fully believed in Ran's explanation.

While Tet and Ben set out to find food, Ran and Rabat discussed a plan on how to escape from this deadly island while trying to find and free Cindy.

Tet and Ben trekked with extra care. They didn't want to go too far into the forest. Therefore, they were only too happy when they found large and plum berries left by monkeys only a few dozen meters into the forest. They also saw a bunch of monkeys on the trees.

The two of them rushed to collect the berries as quickly as possible. Everything in this island was unpredictable, so it was better if they harvested this fruit and returned to the riverbank quickly.

With two bags were full of berries, they were ready to travel back to the riverbank, suddenly the monkeys on the tree started making noise. Everyone shouted loudly as a warning of danger.

Tet and Ben looked at each other. What else was this? Obviously, this was a sign of danger from nature. The monkeys were scared.

The monkeys were getting louder. This was followed by rustling sound coming from the depths of the forest heading toward them.

Oh my gosh! Tet and Ben nodded at each other and ran as fast as they could.

25.

The Hunting Bay

Tet and Ben ran like they were being chased by a train. They didn't know what was chasing them, but they surely didn't want to find out. This island was diabolic at so many levels, so they better didn't speculate about anything.

Ran and Rabat saw them running closer panicking. Something was seriously wrong.

"Hurry up! We must go! Something big is coming this way...!" Ben gasping for air.

Ran and Rabat looked toward the forest but saw nothing. So..what is it? A violent roar tore the silence of the forest. The loud sound of monkeys screeching and birds chirping echoed from all over the forest.

Although he hadn't had time to catch his breath, Tet hastily dragged something large from behind the bushes. A raft of medium-sized logs. Rabat rushed to help. Before Ran's arrival earlier, they made a raft in anticipation if land travel was not possible. And it suddenly became handy. Thank God!

Without much talking, they all jumped onto the raft that was already floating on the river. They pedaled as hard as they could into the middle of the river because they could clearly hear the trees crashing behind them.

When they felt they were far enough from the shore, the four of them put down their oars and looked back. Gosh! That beast again! The giant Kingkong growled on the riverbank while beating his chest. The creature was frustrated to see the human prey managed to escape, the Kingkong pulled out a tree the size of a human body and threw it at them.

Splaaaaasshhh!

It missed. But a great splash of water shook the simple raft. The four men were desperately trying to hold their balance. The raft calmed down and continued to drift downstream.

They saw the creature let out a final growl before jumping back into the forest. They were safe.

"God, I really hope that won't be a waterfall in front of us, guys! This raft won't hold up," Rabat whined softly.

Ben responded to Rabat's concern with a firm voice, "No! We're far downstream, so no more waterfalls. We're going straight to the sea."

Rabat breathed a sigh of relief. What supposedly a plain expedition had turned into a life and death struggle.

The four of them decided to rest. The raft was allowed to drift with a very slow current downstream. They just kept the raft from drifting to riverbanks because they did not know what else was waiting for them there.

A loud rumbling sound in the distance startled them from their rest. So much for no waterfall huh?!

The small raft shook and swayed from side to side. The current suddenly rushed rapidly. They were in the midst of choppy, surging rapids!

"Not a waterfall! It's rapids! Hold on mate!" Ran's screams were drowned out by the roaring water.

They clung tightly to the raft, and the same thought came to their minds. How could there be rapids downstream of a river that was starting to widen? devious river! What a deceitful island!

Sure enough. When the raft was about to break apart, only four pieces of wood were left out of about 12 logs, the current slowed down and now they entered the mouth of a very wide river.

Tet looked on with a horrified face. His paranoid mind imagined a dreadful-water animals were waiting for them. The sea did look calm. But he knew that it could hold many unpredictable dangerous secrets.

"Look,boat...!" Ben shouted as he narrowed his eyes to the edge of the bay.

His teammates turned their heads in the direction that Ben was pointing at. It looked like a fairly large boat bobbing on the edge of the bay. Not a boat. It was a small ship.

But how could they get there? This raft was completely out of control.

SplaaashBen jumped into the water and swam towards the boat. Ben thought they had no other choice. After all, he was the only one who was knowledgeable in ship's engine. So, he must be the first to board the small ship.

His teammates watched Ben swim away in dismay. They didn't have time to warn him.

Surprise, surprise. As soon as Ben swam, they heard splashing water from the ocean toward Ben. A triangular fin was chasing after Ben. It was shark!

Damn! And it wasn't just one! It looked like about five fins were racing against each other to hunt Ben. Ran held his head in anguish watching the situation. He did not know what to do any more.

But Tet reacted quickly. He beat his paddle against the surface of the water, making a loud sound. Tet gestured to Ran and Rabat to do the same. Even though they didn't fully understand Tet's intentions, Ran and Rabat also beat the water with their paddles.

It worked! The loud splash of water drew the sharks' attention from chasing Ben. The five sharks turned towards the raft quickly. Meanwhile, Ben, who was almost desperate, quickened up his swim towards the ship. He must get there soon. His teammates were now in grave danger!

Feeling relief, Ben touched the stern of the boat and climbed with some difficulty onto the boat. Ben half ran toward the wheelhouse and was stunned.

This ship was small. But the navigation equipment and computers on board were incredibly sophisticated! This was no ordinary ship! Ben hastily started the boat's engine and steered it toward the raft in the middle of the river.

Ben's guess was right. As the boat approached the raft, his teammates were busy holding on as best as they could on the rest of the raft, while the sharks were trying to create a high

wave so that the raft would break apart and the three people would be in the water.

Ben quickly scanned the computer panel in front of him. Hmm, maybe this can help. His hand reached for the button that read "deep noise". There was only a soft hum in Ben's ears. But the effect was surprising for the sharks. A very high-frequency sound smashed into the ferocious aquatic beast. The three tails shark quickly swam away, while the two tails that didn't have time to dodge were seen floating helplessly.

Ben ran outside throwing ropes after bringing his boat closer to the raft. One by one his teammates boarded the ship out of breath. Unbelievable! Being on the Island of Bones and its surroundings raises and lowers their adrenaline to the extreme!

26. HELL ISLAND

The small ship left the bay at high-speed entering the high seas with its passengers drenched in water after desperately dodging a shark attack. The four of them were in the wheelhouse.

"Ben, what clues can you find on the navigation of this ship? We have to find Cindy. Sandra took her to some place. I'm sure this ship is one of their properties that somehow got stranded at the bay," Ran asked Ben while looking at the navigation panels in front of them.

Ben touched several keys on the keyboard. The Specific Channel appears; Isle of Bones, Isle of Skull, Isle of Hell, Isle of Mother, Main Land. Select one...auto navigate? Yes or no?

Ran squinted. His index finger touched the writing Isle of Hell as he looked at Ben. Ben nodded. This ship was now on autopilot for Hell Island.

Tet and Rabat tried to investigate the contents of this small ship. They didn't find much except canned food and drink, some army uniforms, and semi-automatic light weapons.

Everyone changed into an all-blue army uniform. These uniforms could conceal themselves from the people. At least when they broke into the Bio Research base.

Ben had turned off the ship's transponder so it wouldn't be detected. He also uploaded a map via satellite before turning off the transponder. Now the map was rendered offline on the monitor. It seemed very clear that their position was at the end of the Atlantic Ocean adjacent to the lost continent, Antarctica.

At first they all thought they were around the African continent because the expedition plane they were traveling on was heading there for an adventure in Kilimanjaro. It turned out that the trip deviated so far because the plane navigation was damaged and ended up crashing on Bone Island.

On the world map, these islands had no names. Even only identified as an uninhabited coral island.

Bio Research with all its financial power and influence disguised their experimental islands as empty coral islands. The island was far from everywhere. No international cruise line nor was it a favorite place for research.

No clue how long Bio Research had been doing this horrible research here. Ran and teammates only had one main goal. Save Cindy then quickly get out of this godforsaken place.

Ran pointed to Hell Island as a destination just based on his intuition. They had already traveled to Bone Island and Skeleton Island. The next closest island was Hell Island. It must be another research site or even their headquarters. No way Cindy was brought too far to the Isle of Mother or Main Land because on the map it looked very far away, near the North Pole.

Ben's small boat hums slowly but goes fast. Ben went into stealth mode. The waters they entered were calm but full of giant corals scattered everywhere.

The ship could go at high speed, but the captain must always be vigilant. A little careless, the ship would crash on a sharp rock.

Rabat and Tet gathered what they could. They put food and drink in one backpack, and each of them carried a weapon. They had to be prepared for all eventualities. Hell-Island might be as hellish as they could imagine.

The ship shook violently. Ben slowed down. They entered the waters with high waves and strong currents. Weird! This change in current and wave height was too extreme!

There were no more dangerous rocks, but the crashing waves and swirling currents made the journey even more difficult. Ben had to be extra careful. The whirlpools and big waves could sink a ship this small easily.

Thanks to his experience, Ben managed to steer the ship through the terrible waters. Now they were back into calm waters with lots of small islands here and there.

Ben directed his ship to sneak between small islands that were quite close together. Looking at the map, they weren't too far from Hell Island. Probably not more than 10 Nautical Miles.

By sneaking around like this, they would at least reduce the chances of being caught. Even though the ship's transponder had been turned off, Rabat was pretty sure they had a radar or something to detect any intruders who wanted to enter Hell Island.

"Wait Ben! We stop on a small island up ahead. Let's do some reconnaissance first. After that island, there are no more islands to shield us from Hell Island's sight," Ran spoke in a half-whisper as if Hell Island could hear his voice.

Ben followed Ran's suggestion. He landed the small ship in a narrow gap of the island that was protected at the front part.

The four expedition teams jumped down into the sea at chest-high depths, carrying all their equipment. Ran didn't forget to bring a high-performance binocular in the wheelhouse. Based on what they saw on the map, their plan was to climb a small hill by the coast directly opposite Hell Island.

They climbed quick and made it to the top of the hill. The four of them took shelter among the scattered large stones that were there. They had to hide so they could observe the situation better. The distance from this island to Hell Island was not too far. Only separated by a narrow strait.

And the four of them were stunned!

What they saw before them was both astonishing and terrifying!

Hell Island lived up to its name. It looked like it was burning everywhere. Fire and lava spread almost all over the surface of the island. The volcano in the middle of the island continuously spewed smoke, fire, and also threw large and small stones. The mountain was erupting!

Ran grabbed the binoculars because from afar he saw some activities in the harbor. Cindy!

Ran saw Cindy was being guarded by several Death Squad members to board an enormous ship with very large writing on the side: Mothership's Bio Research. Behind her were Sandra, a tall thin man who seemed to be an important person, and finally the Angel of Death!

Whispering Cindy's name, Ran gestured to his teammates to take turns using the binoculars.

Ben, Tet, and Rabat almost cheered to see Cindy was alive and well. But why did Cindy look so compliant? And, why her face was expressionless? As if she had no will of her own. Exactly the same look on the face of the Angel of Death.

The four of them continued to watch as the enormous ship maneuvered away from Hell Island, then it sailed fast northbound.

As soon as the ship was far enough from the island as well as from the range of Ran's binoculars, a powerful explosion was heard from the middle of the island. It was the volcano. The eruption destroyed not only the crater, but more than half of the mountain's body collapsed.

There was another explosion which caused a great tremor on the island where Ran and his teammates were scouting.

Apparently, it was the peak and last eruption.

Ran and friends just watched in horror as Hell Island slowly sank into the ocean. The explosion had erased the island! There was nothing left!

Ran and friends saw with their own eyes Hell Island disappeared forever!

27.

CHALLENGING THE NORTH SEA STORM

The disappearance of Hell Island and the confirmation of Cindy's position left Ran and his friends with no other choice but to follow the Bio Research carrier.

They took the boat to catch up with the Bio Research carrier, but they lost track of the ship in a short time.

If he wanted to monitor the position of the carrier, the boat must be connected to the satellite link by turning on the transponder. But that would make them easily tracked by Bio Research. Tough choice.

After a brief discussion with his teammates, Ben turned on the transponder to get a satellite connection. The monitor showed several flashing dots. The biggest dot was undoubtedly the Bio Research carrier. Its position was about 10 Nautical Miles from their boat.

They could see that the carrier's speed was 50 knots. Good grief! How could this boat be able to catch up with its maximum speed of 25 knots.

They were not worried. At least they could continue to follow the carrier's direction. From the radar screen, it seemed that it was heading for the next island, the Mother Island.

Ben opened the map to check the situation and the size of the island from satellite.

Geez! The island was small! Much smaller than the other islands. Probably no more than 5 sq km in area. But why was it called Mother Island?

"I'm sure it was just a cover. Try open the sub-surface plot in this navigation system," Ran pointed to a panel that read: sub-surface scanning.

Ben nodded. His teammates were curious with what they would find out.

As soon as the scanning device was on, the four of them sighed in disbelief. It was extraordinary!

From the surface, Mother Island looked small because most of the "body" of the island was below sea level. The area was thousands of times what it looked like. It could be categorized as an extremely large island.

And even more astonishingly, the scan result showed that the surface of the submerged land was "metal". That explained why the surface of the island wasn't eroded by sea water.

They shook their heads after reading the scan result. There was always something new in their adventures. Wicked islands and bizarre inhabitants, ferocious landscapes, and a diabolical research institute. No matter what else they would encounter after all these, they should always be prepared for any kinds of possibilities.

The distance between their boat and the Bio Research carrier was getting further away. The dot of the ship was getting smaller on the monitor screen and finally disappeared.

The four men were confused. How did the carrier suddenly disappear from radar and satellite monitoring? Even though it was very clear that the position of the mother ship was still far from the Mother Island?

"We just keep our course to the island. This is the only lead we have. Just use the traces of the carrier's shipping lanes as a guide for us," Tet suggested.

"Yup! That's right, Ben. We will follow the trace of the carrier's journey," Ran replied.

Ben nodded and steered the rudder according to the trail created by the Bio Research carrier.

Not long, the Bio Research carrier signal reappeared. Its position was very close to the destination island. It was strange! So where did they go when they disappeared?

The question was answered instantly. The small boat entered a pitch-black area of the sea. Ben turned on the boat's spotlights. Nothing was visible. They were completely surrounded by thick fog or something.

Ben only relied on navigation to steer the boat. It was total darkness! As if they were on a night voyage without stars or moon. Then everything took a turn for the worse when the boat was rocked by big waves that hit the hull of the ship.

"We're in a storm!" Ben shouted warning his teammates to be vigilant. The pitch-black area was part of the ongoing storm in this water. Not knowing the type or the strength of the storm, Ben suspected it was so massive that it interfered with radar and satellite coverage.

The sea was very rough. The little boat bobbed and tossed around as if it was made out of paper. Ben used his boating skills to keep the boat from being overturned by waves and devoured by the angry sea.

The next incident that Ben didn't expect appeared before his eyes. Whirlwind! A giant tornado towering in front of them!

Ben was disheartened. This boat wouldn't survive if this storm continued to hit. Especially when he saw the giant tornado splitting itself into tornados. They might be smaller, but they were now surrounded by several hurricanes on all sides. We are screwed!

The tornado carried the water up with its strong suction. It was both awesome and terrifying sight for the four men who could only hold on tightly to the masts of the ship. Except for Ben who continued to struggle with the wheel.

The boat would not survive very long. Ben, who almost lost hope, accidentally saw a black lever on the navigation panel. He had been wondering what the function of that lever since the first time he saw it. Only after the light above the lever flickered and followed by a loud ringing sound as if it were a warning alarm, did Ben realize that the lever was for an emergency. But he wasn't sure what kind of emergency.

Ben predicted that the ship would sink if it was hit by a giant wave one more time, so he made a bold decision.

Ben pulled the emergency lever, and shouted warning his teammates to be on alert.

There was a loud thud as the structure of the ship started transforming. The mast lowered automatically, the hatch closed by itself, and the ship's cabin was covered with thick glass that appeared out of nowhere.

The whole boat became completely watertight.

Then the most astonishing thing happened next. Just as a giant wave hit the hull, the boat overturned and sank, the hum of the ship's engines changed.

In a panic, Ben still had time to look at the monitor screen; the propeller that was previously under the ship's stern had disappeared. It was replaced by another propeller that appeared above the stern. The ship balanced itself and glided under sea surface.

This little boat had turned into a submarine!

28.

DEEP SEA PREDATORS

The submarine glided smoothly under the choppy sea surface. The ocean seemed to be agitated by giants. Their submarine was a few dozen meters below the surface, but they could still feel the submarine rocking. The current swirled wildly as the tip of the cyclone's eye stirred the sea water with tremendous intensity.

Fortunately, this small boat owned by Bio Research had a diving mode. Otherwise, they couldn't imagine how to survive the cataclysmic weather.

"Ben, how deep can this submarine go?" Tet, who had been silent for a while, asked.

"If you look at the maximum indicator on this monitor, it's 500 meters. Why?" Ben asked again.

"Hmm, the most advanced radar and satellites are able to scan about 500 meters under the sea. We have to be stealthy. If they detected us, they would easily send torpedoes to destroy us."

Ran nodded. The situation was very dangerous. They had turned on the transponders and satellite network as a directional guide but that also meant letting Bio Research know exactly where they were. Sending torpedoes? Of course, it was easy

for them. It was just that they might not be within range of the torpedoes yet, so they were still safe.

"Torpedo! Two! Heading toward us!" Ben shouted nervously. His finger pointed to two small dots on the screen.

Good Lord! Ran groaned inwardly. They were being attacked before he even finished thinking about the possibility.

Ben pushed the submarine forward at top speed. At 20 knots under water equals to 25 knots on the surface. That was fast enough. But he knew the speed of the torpedo was not less than 20 knots, so in 10 minutes or so impact would occur. Their distance from the torpedo was no more than 30 nautical miles.

"Ben! What are you doing?" Rabat half screamed questioning his intention, looking at Ben as if he had purposely wanted the torpedo to hit the submarine dead ahead.

Ran put his index finger to his lips telling everyone to be quiet. Ben was concentrating on something. Ran trusted Ben's actions.

Everyone was silent and wrapped in their own thoughts. Except Ran, Tet and Rabat thought Ben had lost his mind!

The small submarine continued to advance at high speed. Five minutes to impact and Ben was still driving the submarine towards the torpedo.

4 minutes, 3 minutes, 2 minutes..... Suddenly Ben made a sharp turn to the side and added extreme depth to the dive. The submarine entered a narrow crevice flanked by the sheer walls of the underwater mountains.

Ah! So that was Ben's intention. So far, Tet and Rabat had not paid attention to the monitor screen showing the underwater situation. The submarine was in a sea lane that had lots of trenches, underwater cliff walls, and narrow crevices in between.

One minute, the two torpedoes also made a sharp turn to chase the target. But the turn was too sharp, one torpedo hit an underwater cliff wall and exploded. One torpedo left!

Ben weaved through the narrow gap with a torpedo trailing behind him. Less than one minute there would be a collision!

Except for Ben, all eyes widened when they saw a dead end in front! A cliff wall towered before them. Ben had gone mad!

Ben stayed focused. Just as the torpedo was approaching and ready to destroy the submarine, Ben drastically reduced speed along with releasing one ballast so that the submarine seemed to jump upwards in an instant.

The torpedo hit the cliff wall with a big explosion. They could see the massive stone wall crumbling down from such a close distance. Meanwhile, the submarine continued to rise toward the surface.

They were safe.

Ben pulled the speed lever, and after passing several cliff-tops he turned the transponder off then slid to maximum depth.

The submarine's depth indicator screen showed 450 meters, but Ben continued diving.

The indicator light flashed bright red followed by alarm sound. Ben stopped diving. The submarine was at a depth of 505 meters, enough to disappear from opponent's radar. Ben was good. The way he dodged the torpedo was impressive.

Now the submarine was moving at a moderate speed. Ben had already marked the destination when he was still connected to the satellite. They were no longer blind. Bio Research was the one who couldn't see them any longer. They might think this small submarine had been destroyed by their torpedo.

The situation below sea level was very calm. Visibility was also good because the waters they entered were now very clear. This was the deep-sea area. They encountered various types of fish at a depth of more than 500 meters which had different characteristics from surface fish.

Some species emitted light when approaching their submarine. The shape also looked unusual. They all amazed to see the extraordinary diversity.

Suddenly their ship was hurled forward. Luckily Ben was quick to control the situation before the ship hit the rock wall towering in front of them.

"Holy shit! What was that, Ben?" Ran asked with a pale face. His face almost hit the navigation panel earlier.

Rabat and Tet were also more or less the same. Both winced in pain because their shoulders had collided during the incident earlier.

Ben didn't answer. He was busy paying attention to the monitor screen and navigation panel. Something large seemed to be moving swiftly toward them. Geez, another torpedo? No, this was something even scarier!

"Ugh, we've arrived, Comrades. The high stone wall before us is not stone. But cobalt metal. And what hit us just now wasn't the ocean current but... hey!" Ben's words were cut off while he was swiftly picked up speed and climbed to avoid a collision with something big and seemed to be deliberately hitting them.

A super large shadow flashed next to the submarine. Good grief! What was that?

"That...that...we're almost got hit a second time by... Megalodon!" Ben screamed hysterically while pointing ahead.

A super large shadow heading face to face again toward them.

29. CAPTURED!

"What should we do?!" Ben screamed frantically.

Ran and Ben looked at each other. Their eyes looked helpless. This was nothing like dealing with a torpedo. This was Megalodon, a giant-shark the size of the Bio Research carrier.

"Rise to the surface Ben! As soon as possible! Deep-sea predators don't like sunlight," Tet was a biologist who understood animal behavior.

Tet might be right. But rising to the surface wasn't easy. The giant shark was quite smart. His humongous body swam calmly yet threateningly in front of the submarine. Apparently, the shark was also waiting for the right movement. It didn't want to make the first move because it knew the small submarine was very agile.

Ben was also looking for the right opportunity. He didn't want to make a rash move. The shark could swallow the entire body of this submarine in one go. Or destroy it with one hit.

During the first incident, the submarine bounced forward only because it was hit by the megalodon's tail flick. There had been no actual physical contact.

The situation was very tense. Ben's hand gripped the steering wheel and the accelerator. His eyes focused forward, watching the slightest movement of the giant sea monster.

The megalodon did the same. Its little black eyes looked very alert. It observed the submarine and ready to attack at the slightest misstep.

Megalodon and Ben were like bulls and matadors gauging each other's movements.

Ran, Rabat, and Tet, could only hold on to whatever fix object was nearby. The submarine's sudden maneuvers could harm them. It was even worse if there was a collision with a giant shark that was slowly advancing forward.

Ben's brain was doing a calculation. The distance between them was about 50 meters. The time of impact was about two minutes when taking into account the giant's speed.

His window of opportunity to execute an evading maneuver was less than that. Both of Ben's hands holding on to the ballast lever. The remaining two. If this was released, this boat wouldn't be able to dive again.

Ben had no other choice. The quickest way to evade the monster was to release both ballasts at once.

And the most perilous moment was about to happened!

The shark seemed less patient than Ben. While moving its tail as a rudder, the gigantic body slid fast forward. His enormous jaw gaped. It was clear that the Megalodon intended to swallow the submarine whole.

The four of them felt as if their hearts were ripped off from their chests.

That terrifying jaw was approaching at high speed. Just as the submarine was just seconds away from being a light snack, Ben pulled the ballast levers swiftly.

Blaaaaasssst..... Blaaaaasssst

The submarine looked like it was thrown from a giant trebuchet. Soared upwards at an astonishing speed. The shark's attack missed in the nick of time.

Clinging tightly to the steering wheel, Ben watched the monitor. Tet was right, at first the giant shark was chasing. But then it changed direction as the sunlight began to penetrate the ocean. Ben breathed a sigh of relief. So did his teammates.

But something even more dangerous might be waiting for them on the surface.

There was no other way. Ben was ready to change ship mode to surface ship again. Whatever happened up there, they would face it together. After all, they dealt many deadly threats since being stranded on Bones Island. No one was counting.

The small submarine appeared from the surface of the sea with a distinctive sound. Ben switched to surface ship mode. The propeller under the stern started working, the hatch opened and under water glass covering the wheelhouse was lowered.

Ran anxiously watched the surroundings. They appeared just off the coast of Mother Island. The small island looked barren. There were only one or two trees in the corners of the sloping island. No buildings or installations of any kind. It was flat and empty.

Where did an aircraft carrier of that size berthed? Ran scratched his head in confusion.

Ran was getting nervous. The seemingly safe situation was actually very dangerous for them.

"Ben, is the transponder still turned off?"

"It is. Why? Should I turn it on Ran?"

"No! I was just wondering where a ship that big was anchored? They must be somewhere around here."

"Hmm, you're right. What should we do now?" Ben mumbled.

Rabat, who was carefully watching the sea level from the boat deck, whispered.

"Guys, can't you see something is wrong about this island?" Rabat's hand pointed down.

It was strange. Their ship had drifted ashore. The sea was very clear showing its shallow and shiny bottom. Not a single fish was there. In fact, it was clear that the seabed wasn't sandy at all.

Suddenly, the seabed started raising. Ben, who was aware of the situation, hastily backed the ship.

But it was too late. The ship was trapped. The shiny seabed continued to rise above and made the ship stranded. The sound of the propellers breaking as Rabat forced its way backwards was loud. The boat was stuck. Lifted up by the seabed which continued to rise upwards.

Ah, the bottom of the sea was metal! Cobalt! Exactly what Ben said before.

A hatch opened right in front of them. Several people came out brandishing automatic weapons. The Death Squad! It was led by a tall, skinny man they had seen while on Hell Island.

Ran gestured for her friends to raise their hands when he saw Rabat about to cock his gun. Rebates complied. It wasn't worth it. They were outnumbered and disadvantaged.

"You come with us!" The man ordered the four of them to get off the boat.

As soon as Ran and his teammate stepped on the cobalt mainland, there were three more people who came out of the hatch. The Angel of Death and Sandra.

Also, Cindy!

But with an equally threatening look in her eyes.

30. FALLEN GENETIC

Ran and his teammates were led through a strange door that was still open from a structure raised from the sea. They all entered the door together.

Cindy, who was behind Captain Dev, looked obedient and her eyes were emotionless. But no one knew that this girl's mind was playing some scenarios inside.

What would be the best way to save her teammates? She already knew how big the security power of Bio Research was. big numbers, well trained, well equipped, and dangerous. Especially the three dozen of the Death Squad as well as the Angel of Death. It was the result of cryonic process in Mother Island laboratory plus a few people who had survived the battle on Skeleton Island.

Cindy couldn't decide what to do to save her friends right now. Maybe later. While she continuously assessed each situation.

The group walked down several steel stairs before finally entering a wide and long hallway with large doors on either side. The door was unique because of its giant size. It was as if everyone here was over 3 meters in height.

Cindy frowned. Its sharp cat ears pick up the heartbeat with long but loud pauses inside the rooms with giant doors. Cindy's frown deepened. She guessed that the room wasn't just for ordinary Death Squad.

"Wait!" Cindy shouted a little to hold up the group. She stepped in front of Ran and his friends. Her eyes were scanning their faces one by one as if she was remembering or assessing something.

"I think I've seen them before! But where?" Cindy finished her sentence while shaking her head and massaging her forehead as she retreated back behind Captain Dev.

Sandra, who was originally suspicious, breathed a sigh of relief.

Ran and his teammates were led into a room that wasn't too big, without windows, and even the door had a laser trap installed as an alarm.

There were only two beds, two sofas, a food cupboard, and a fridge full of beer and a small table in the corner next to the toilet. It was essentially a luxury prison.

As soon as the door closed, Ran threw himself onto the soft bed. He was so tired, and the comfortable mattress, made him want to take a short nap. After all, they couldn't go anywhere right now. This facility was heavily guarded with plenty of securities.

"Ran, did you see what Cindy's expression looked like? It's like she doesn't recognize us anymore," Tet whined as he opened his second bottle of beer.

"Yup! She is under their influence somehow," Ben chimed in.

"What should we do? Cindy has terrible abilities. While she is not herself, it's impossible for us to talk to her, it's dangerous!" Rabat looked at Ran who was already sitting on the edge of the bed to listen to his friends talking.

Ran didn't respond. He just smiled widely and then laughed softly. He gave a signal for his friends to come closer. Ran asked for a bottle of beer and opening it quickly causing a loud sizzling sound. His lips hissed silently. She was okay.

Ran grabbed something from his shirt pocket. A small shiny object was in his hand. It was an access card.

Tet and Ben looked at each other. They shrugged their shoulders out of confusion and finished their beer. Rabat, who was the quickest to respond to Ran's gesture, nodded subtly and then moved to the sofa and laid down.

Cindy followed Sandra's orders so that she would join an important Bio Research group preparing for the launch. Cindy didn't have any idea what the launch was about, but she believed it was Bio Research's long-awaited plan.

The group entered a room similar to the air traffic control rooms in commercial airports. Once everyone was inside, Captain Dev pulled a lever. The room immediately rose like a giant elevator.

Within five minutes, the control room reached the flat and dry part of Mother Isle. Only Sandra and Captain Dev were sitting on tall chairs with many panels and monitors in front of them. Four armed guards stood in the corners of the room. While the Angel of Death remained motionless next to Sandra. Maybe it was her job to protect the head of the Bio Research laboratory.

The control room stood approximately 20-meter above the land so everyone had 3600 panoramic views of the island even though there was thick fog above the sea around the island. Nothing was visible yet. But Cindy guessed that an important event was about to happen.

Captain Dev nodded to Sandra, and she typed some codes on the keyboard, five modules slowly emerged to the surface of the island. Each module accommodated three cryonic tubes.

Meanwhile two members of the Death Squad were seen coming out of the door on the mainland. The twelve ferocious hybrids stood motionless supervising the whole processes closely.

After everything was ready, Captain Dev opened the communication channel.

"Mam, everything is ready to be launched," his voice slowly directed to the monitor screen which showed a woman with a face wearing a Guy Fawkes mask.

"Go ahead Captain! We are ready to witness this historic day." The woman's voice sounded very enthusiastic.

Captain Dev nodded respectfully. The lady on the monitor was a royal aristocrat who conducted herself in proper manner. At the same time, she was a merciless patron who easily dropped severe punishments. He was always mindful when conversing with her.

Once again Captain Dev gestured to Sandra who immediately said yes and typed in some more codes.

The five modules opened slowly. It was preceded by a loud hissing sound, a sign of a large amount of pressure being released. The cryonic tubes that were previously horizontal were shifted to a vertical position and started opening.

Cindy looked in disgust. What this crazy research company was trying to do? Cindy's heart was pounding.

When all the cryo tube covers had opened, the figures were out from there. Cindy stared. Almost burst out laughing. She was imagining creatures that would be more terrifying than the Army of Death. But it turned out that what came out were ordinary human figures like herself. Normal men and women. Without the slightest peculiarity.

But Cindy's stifled laughter immediately stopped. The 15 humans who suddenly came out of the cryonic tube, at Sandra's command via her keyboard, transformed into the most terrifying animals she had ever seen on Bones Island!

Some turned into a tiger with no stripe, a lion with a distinctive-stripes, and one of them even turned into a giant flesh-eating vulture! Good grief! Cindy held her breath.

"Very well! Good job Captain, Sandra!" A hoarse voice broke the silence in the control room. The woman nodded in satisfaction.

Captain Dev smiled broadly. The praise from Lady Boss was important for the continuation of this project. Sandra also seemed very happy to hear the top leadership in Bio Research gave a rare compliment.

Sandra typed the next code. The terrifying creatures instantly turned back into normal humans.

Captain Dev opened a bottle of champagne, intending to celebrate this success with Sandra.

But the celebration was cut short. Suddenly from the darkness of the fog, a dozen small ships appeared!

The landing craft, which resembled the Landing Craft Tank, opened their hatches. Then came out dozens of armed men in black uniforms with helmets and masks that Captain Dev and Sandra had already recognized.

"Fallen Genetic!"

A loud and frantic scream came out of the mouths of Captain Dev and Sandra at the same time.

31. The Fall of Field Bio Research

There were sounds of loud gunshots. The Fallen Genetic army invaded with full force.

In addition to the troops, two vehicles similar to small tanks with oddly shaped cannons emerged from the boats. It didn't look like a heavy weapon at all. Just a large cylindrical tube without bullet mechanism.

Sandra, was panicked by the sudden attack. She reacted quickly by immediately typing an attack command to the Death Squad who was currently fighting below. The first generation of Death Squad as well as the new transforming Death Squad called Death Squad V.2, attempted to overcome the attacks of dozens of elite-Fallen Genetic troops.

However, no matter how good the Fallen Genetic troops were, in the end they were still overwhelmed by a group of Bio Research's genetically engineered troops. Especially after Sandra gave a transformation order to her new Death Squad.

There were screams of death on the not-so-large island as the V.2 Death Squad that turned into strange and terrifying beasts began slaughtering the Fallen Genetic troops.

Ordinary sharp bullets apparently had no effect on their bodies. They had protective coating engineered by Sandra's team. A genetically grown compound combined with kevlar.

The assault squad commander who was in one of the strange little tanks shouted,

"Spider Web! Now!"

The two tanks positioned themselves side by side then shot out a giant clump of nets toward both V.1 and V.2 of the Death Squad.

It didn't take long for the Fallen Genetic troops to trap nearly all the Death Squad into nets made of spiked steel fibers and containing a high dose of tranquilizer in each thorn.

Once trapped in the high-tech net, the Death Squad soon became powerless due to the instantaneous effect of the tranquilizer.

Only a few members of the Death Squad remained to fight and kill the Fallen Genetic troops. The fighting continued fiercely. Especially when the next boats landed with even more troops.

Captain Dev watched the whole scene with wide eyes in disbelief. Why wasn't there any early warning from Bio Research's advanced radar and satellite detection system? The Fallen Genetic troops came in large numbers using ships and boats. Their radar or satellites should be able to detect their position long before arriving on Mother Isle.

Captain Dev was still shaking his head as he turned to Sandra to give the order to retreat. They couldn't stop the attacks that came in succession, and many Death Forces were trapped and captured. Captain Dev was about to lower the control tower back

below the surface where it would be safer, and an escape route was available.

But his hand was restrained by a soft yet icy cold arm. The Angel of Death's arm restrained him from pulling the lever. She looked at him with a threatening look. Captain Dev was taken aback. He looked for the guards. Only to see them lying dead in the corners of the room. He looked at Cindy. Hoping for help but then he remembered that these two deadly women were controlled by Sandra. Sandra!

Sandra was ignoring him. The woman was busy typing some commands on the keyboard. Immediately the battle below stopped. Sandra froze combat orders for the remaining Death Squad. They stood still motionless. The Fallen Genetic troops cheered in victory. They could have wiped out all the Death Squad that hadn't been captured. But they didn't.

Surprising! Captain Dev slowly came to a painful understanding. This was all Sandra's doing!

In just a split second, Captain Dev saw an opportunity. He rolled over while grabbing a button on the emergency exit.

The Angel of Death didn't react because Sandra hadn't given any orders. She could have killed the captain earlier, but Sandra had just ordered her to be on guard, so that the captain wouldn't disturb Sandra.

Captain Dev fell, and his body slammed to the hard surface of the island. He felt a broken arm and his thigh was wounded from the sharp edge of the door.

While limping, the betrayed Captain struggled to throw himself into the ocean after activating the transponder on his watch.

Sandra was quite taken aback by Captain Dev's reckless actions, but she couldn't be bothered by that. The high-priced task given by Fallen Genetic had been completed with great success. She was the number two person in Fallen Genetic now. It would be best if she immediately evacuated all the Death Squad to Fallen Genetic headquarters. That was all that mattered now. She wouldn't leave any traces. This island would be destroyed completely.

But before that, she and the Fallen Genetic troops would secure some of the secret facilities of Bio Research below. Mainly one main server which contained all V.2 engineering procedures. Sandra lowered the control tower. Followed by two squads of Fallen Genetic troops who were allowed to enter and escort her.

Sandra signaled the Angel of Death and Cindy to follow her into the headquarters.

Without much arguing, Cindy followed Sandra's orders. Cindy didn't expect Bio Research to be disabled so quickly. By Sandra! So many critical assets were seized. Death Squad, research, Angel of Death, and other important facilities.

In her mind, Cindy was glad this diabolical company was ruined. But secretly she was horrified too. Fallen Genetic might not be less dangerous than Bio Research. Moreover, there were people as smart and cunning as Sandra in that company.

Cindy remembered when Sandra was found locked in a secret part of the Bio Research One ship in order to save herself from the Fallen Genetic's attack. Apparently, it was part of Sandra's scheme to cripple Bio Research from within. Cindy shuddered. That woman was devious!

But this was also the best chance to save her teammates. Cindy kept her eyes and ears open. Opportunity would only come once. Ran had also been told in secret that she was fine. And the team leader already had the universal access card for the doors in this facility which she had stolen from Captain Dev's pocket. But how to tell Ran that the time had come?

And the chance came unexpectedly. Sandra apparently didn't want to bother with all kinds of prisoners or hostages.

"Cindy, kill all the captives in ward A-1. All of them!" Sandra gave orders while telling a team of Fallen Genetic troops to follow Cindy, who immediately moved to carry out the orders.

Sandra ordered Cindy to do the execution. Other than she had more confidence if the Angel of Death remained by her side, she also wanted to make sure that Cindy no longer had the emotional bonds with her teammates like normal humans.

As a precaution, she had whispered to the leader of the Fallen Genetic to bring a stun gun, if Cindy decided to disobey her orders.

Sandra continued her plan to evacuate all important research and facilities to be transferred to Fallen Genetic headquarters. It would take a full day to complete this task. Several men from the Fallen Genetic were asked to plant powerful explosives in every corner of Mother Island facilities. After the evacuation process was complete, Sandra would sink this island the same way she drowned Hell Island.

32. VARDO, SCANDINAVIAN PENINSULA

Cindy stepped into ward A-1. Behind her, a squad of Fallen Genetic' elite troops followed warily. The team leader gripped the web-throwing gun tightly as Sandra ordered. He was surprised by the order because this girl in front of him didn't look dangerous at all.

In ward A-1, Ran and friends were gathering and discussing. They didn't know what was going on outside. All they knew was that Cindy was fine and not under the influence of Bio Research.

"This facility is sealed tightly. How do we get out of here?" Tet grumbled.

"Only with outside help I guess," Ran replied briefly.

"Then, while waiting for a sign from Cindy, what should we do?" Ben seemed to be asking himself because his eyes were looking up at the ceiling.

"We have access cards. We will use it in time. The most important thing is that we have to be ready at any moment, and uhm.. Tet, don't drink too much beer. I don't want you to get drunk when we escape later," Ran patted Tet's shoulder. Tet grinned.

The conversation was cut short when the steel sliding door moved. The four of them stood alert.

Cindy entered the room accompanied by four people with cocked weapons. The remaining eight guards stood outside as this room wasn't very big.

Ran and his three friends waited for what was about to happen with their hearts pounding. They didn't have any plans yet. Neither did Cindy. The woman who had undergone body transformation was standing before them with a threatening look.

The team leader touched Cindy's arm to remind her of Sandra's order. Cindy has completely changed. Her pretty face became so terrifying as her two eyes turned blood red. Her fingers were elongated with sharp nails glistening in the light of the lamp.

The leader of the squad backed away seeing the great change in Cindy's body. Wow, no wonder I was told to bring the anesthetic net. This girl turned out to be as scary as the Angel of Death!

Cindy stepped forward. She approached Ran and his friends and prepared to attack them. The four of them didn't know what to do. Didn't Ran say Cindy was okay?

Ran, who initially believed that Cindy was okay, was also affected by Cindy's demeanor. But he raised his hand to prevent his friends from doing things they would regret later.

The guards apparently wanted to know how Cindy executed the four prisoners. They crammed into the door curiously.

There was a blood curdling shrill as Cindy let out a terrible scream. Her body moved like lightning as her arms swung back and forth.

There were harrowing screams as bodies laid in pools of blood on the floor. Mostly with slashed necks. The 12 Fallen Genetic troops became a pile of meat in no more than ten minutes. Not a single shot got out. Even the team leader didn't have time to fire the stun net.

Ran and his friends looked on in horror. It was unimaginable that this super-fast bloody event would happen directly in front of them. Cindy had an extraordinary deadly ability. Thankfully they weren't the target.

Cindy was still standing with her back to her teammates. She stood still with the bodies of the victims covered in the blood around her. The murderous long claws had retracted into her knuckles.

Ran approached her slowly. He touched Cindy's shoulder gently. Cindy turned around. This girl was back to normal. Her face was pale. Tears were running down from her eyes. A look of irreconcilable guilt was seen in her eyes.

Ran felt sorry for her. He pulled Cindy to give a comforting hug.

"What kind of creature am I, Ran? An extraordinarily cold-blooded killer..." Cindy wailed softly in Ran's arms.

Ran didn't say anything. There was no word in this world would comfort her in a situation like this. He just tightened his hug while rubbing Cindy's back. Trying to keep her calm.

Tet, Ben, and Rabat joined in trying to calm Cindy by rubbing her head.

Cindy let go of Ran's arms. Nodded to her other friends. Her face started to change.

"Nice to be reunited with you, guys! Come on, we must hurry! Sandra is about to blow this place up!"

Cindy then led her teammates into a hallway that led them to a large door. Ran used the access card. It worked.

The door opened to a large room with many doors.

"Hurry up! We don't have time! I heard the roar of the ship's engine. Apparently, Sandra accelerated the evacuation process. And..."

Boooom!!

Before Cindy could finish her sentence, a huge explosion shook the super structure. It was clear that the explosion sequence had started.

Cindy ran quickly to a door at the far end, snatching the access card from Ran's hand. The door opened quickly. The five people of the expedition team hastily entered it.

They were on a platform.

There appeared to be a row of small and medium-sized ships below them.

Boooom!! Another blast.

The structure shook even more violently. Without hesitation, Cindy jumped onto the deck of the nearest ship from a height of approximately eight meters. Her body landed smoothly.

Boooom!! The corners of the room began to crumble.

"Jump!!" Cindy screamed loudly. Her teammates hesitated. Eight meters, really?

Booom!! This time the roof was starting to crumble.

Without further thoughts, Ran, Tet, Ben, and Rabat took turns jumping onto the ship's deck where Cindy was still waiting anxiously.

The four of them were not injured. Because every time someone jumped, Cindy grabbed them and landed them lightly and gently.

Ben ran to the wheelhouse of the mid-sized ship. Keys!! Ben screamed in panic after his four friends joined in and he realized that he needed a keys to start the boat!

The water began to stir violently. Soon the harbor beneath the island's surface would collapse completely. Cindy pushed her eagle-hooked hand into the key slot. Those pointy, sharp-claw went in easily. There was the sound of the ship's engine running.

Ben was taken aback. Apparently, Cindy's body also contained electricity! Ben took over the wheel. He pushed the boat at full speed because the bridge was now completely collapsed!

"The gate!!" This time it was Tet who screamed hysterically. The island's giant exit gate was still tightly shut.

Cindy jumped out of the wheelhouse and ran toward the bow of the ship. She was getting ready. The girl motioned for Ben to keep going at full speed.

Two minutes before the ship hit the giant steel gate, Cindy swung her body. Hovered and landed on the edge of the platform near the gate. Then she landed her body again and soared high reaching for the manual button to open the gate, then jumped back right into the bow of the ship that almost hit the opening gate.

Everyone in the wheelhouse took a deep breath. Just as the ship exited the gate and cruised across the surface of the open sea, the structure behind them rumbled violently. Complete collapse!

Cindy joined her friends and smiled sweetly.

"I'm glad we got back together! But..." Cindy stopped her sentence.

"But what Cindy?" simultaneously Tet and Rabat asked in unison.

"Our adventure does not stop here. We must prevent Fallen Genetic from wreaking havoc on the world. They have everything to do that. Especially, they've got Sandra!"

"So? What should we do? Where are we headed now?" While concentrating on driving, Ben still had time to ask.

Cindy turned to Ran. Ran nodded.

"We anchored at the nearest port, recover, then make the next plan to find out where Fallen Genetic headquarters is located. And remember! Bio Research is still there. We don't know yet where that company is located."

This time Ran spoke up.

"Cindy is right guys. We are looking for the nearest port or city. Take a break. After that we'll come up with a plan to prevent the two mad companies from causing further chaos."

Ran turned to Ben, "So exactly where are we now, mate? Where is the nearest port or city located?"

Ben pressed several navigation buttons. His answer stunted his teammates.

"The nearest port town is.....Vardo in Norway. We're on the Scandinavian peninsula, guys!"

The End

Continued to State of Bones; The Fallen Genetic

