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opening extract from

Return to the Lost World

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The moon reappeared just in time for the companions and their terrified mounts to glimpse the allosaurus's gaping jaws and mad, reptilian eyes as it raced towards them like a sprinter. Its tremendous legs pumped rhythmically, taking enormous strides that ate up the distance between the beast and its prey.

The giant carnivore had evidently been waiting in ambush. But its roar had been a miscalculation. It alerted the nervous iguanodons and gave them just enough time to spin round with screeches of alarm and take off before the predator was within striking range. They lifted their forefeet off the ground and ran on their hind legs, making astonishing speed for such heavy beasts. They had every incentive to do so. The allosaurus was right behind them.

Mercedes was using the reins to lash her mount to greater efforts. Roaring dreadful Irish oaths, Nick hung on for grim death behind her, the allosaurus's pounding footsteps hammering in his ears, certain that he could feel its hot, meaty breath on the back of his neck. Luke was alongside them, riding neck and neck, still waving the gory haunch of pterasaur meat as if the allosaurus needed further encouragement. "Are we heading for the mine?" he yelled.

Nick gawped at him. "How would I know?"

Luke's reply was partly lost in the noise and jarring of their passage. "That's where…stables are…may think they'll be safe there…"

"It doesn't matter!" howled Mercedes. "There's no way we can steer these beasts anyway. Just hang on and hope – *vamos!*"

Whether the iguanodons really were making for their stables, or whether they just happened to be running in the right direction, it became evident that they were indeed headed for the mine. Ahead stood the fence with its lights and watchtowers. The noise of the pursuit had already alarmed the camp. Searchlights stabbed from the darkness. Luke caught glimpses of startled guards unslinging their weapons and heard the urgent clamour of an alarm bell.

Their mounts were headed straight for the gates. These were closed, but with five tons of maddened allosaurus behind them, that wasn't going to stop the iguanodons. With spectacular blue flares of electricity as the current shorted out, the gates splintered like matchwood before their charge, and they were inside the camp.

Guards in various stages of dress were scurrying in all directions. Some, instinctively reacting as though the missing iguanodons could be rounded up and calmed down, stepped forward. Crazed with fear however, the beasts were no longer the placid creatures the guards knew. With deadly swings of their powerful tails, the iguanodons swept aside their startled handlers like so many skittles. One was lifted high into the air until he fell from the tail and crashed through the roof of a guardhouse. Luke's iguanodon lurched into the supports beneath a watchtower, which lurched drunkenly, tipping its screaming occupants out to be trampled beneath the feet of the maddened beast. The tower's oil lantern smashed as it hit the ground. The contents of its reservoir ignited, further terrifying the iguanodons as a stream of fire added to the chaos.

The guards began to shoot at the iguanadons. The bullets had little effect, other than to madden the beasts further.

"*Halt!*" One of the guards was quicker on the uptake than his fellows. "These are not wild animals! Shoot the riders!" He raised his rifle to his shoulder and aimed at Mercedes. "*Feuer!*"

But the allosaurus had arrived. Following the iguanodons through the shattered gates, it spotted a target of opportunity. As his finger tightened on the trigger, jaws like excavator buckets closed on the guard. With a muffled crack, his rifle went off in the

allosaurus’s mouth, and a fountain of red burst from its muzzle. The beast screamed with pain and fury, spat out its victim’s lifeless body and instantly went on the rampage, tearing down buildings and mine machinery and pouncing on howling guards. The defenders scattered.

Nick’s desperate hold on the saddle of the bucking iguanodon broke, and he was tossed through the air to land on the sandy floor of the compound. Winded, he lay gasping and helpless as the great feet of his former mount trampled the earth around him, until a steely hand grasped his arm and dragged him to the shelter of a wall of a hut that had so far escaped demolition. A voice in his ear hissed, “Stay there!” and he watched in fascinated horror as Luke ran across the compound. His breath caught as he realized that Mercedes, too, had been thrown from their mount and was lying, dazed, between the frenzied iguanodons and the enraged allosaurus.

“Good boy! Fetch!”

Luke held aloft the stinking pterasaur leg he had used as bait, and lobbed it towards the allosaurus. It darted out its neck and caught the morsel like a gigantic dog snapping up a tossed biscuit.