

Have You Ever Had A Bad Dream?

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Have you ever awakened in the night, screaming, pulse racing, a cold sweat inching its way down your spine? Have you ever had a bad dream? Most of us have. The story you are about to witness was no dream. In fact, the reality of it haunts me still.

It was the year 3065. Earth was dying. If the human race was going to survive, they needed to find another rock to grow on. Nine young explorers were about to end their journey to a far away planet, recently discovered eight light years outside of the known solar system. They were to be the first to explore this new planet. Its atmosphere was said to be very similar to that of Earth. This, of course, made survival possible. Scientists hadn't figured out a name for this planet yet; however, they felt it was ready for exploration. They were wrong.

Four days from their destination, they awoke from their cryogenic sleep. I wonder what their thoughts were. Were they excited? If they had any idea of what was to come, would they still have made the trip?

Catherine Rose was at the controls, Hank David was her co-pilot, and Fred Green was the navigator. The other explorers were Susan Beach, her husband James, Kim Jenkins, Mike Chansler, and Larry White.

When the shuttle landed, it was night. They stepped outside and stared in amazement at the two glowing moons of the planet. Reasoning that they couldn't see much even with the moon light, they elected to spend that night on the shuttle. Upon further inspection the following day, the crew found that they had landed on an island very much resembling an Earth-like rain forest. There were palm-like trees, grass, small streams, even strange and beautiful flowers. But other than plants, there were no signs of life.

They decided to separate and search the island in more detail. No intelligent life was found. In fact, other than more plants, NO life was found. The streams were barren. There were no fish, no birds, not so much as a mosquito. The shuttle had landed on a *completely* abandoned island. That alone should have been a clue.

They had searched everywhere, except the west portion of the island. The group would travel there together in the morning. So caught up were they in their research, that what was alive escaped notice entirely. Days passed, and "it" followed them, watching their every move. Half way to finishing their exploration strange things began to occur. Supplies began to disappear and where the night was once quite, they began to hear noises.

A week had gone by, they realized as they sat up camp for the night. Hank excused himself and walked out alone into the bushes. No one noticed. Time passed;

Hank had been gone for hours. Then, they heard it, shrieking ... tearing ... blood chilling screams, and something else, something like they had never heard before. They were all sure of one thing ... it wasn't human.

Mike and Larry decided to check it out. Maybe this was Hank's idea of a joke. After all, there wasn't anything on this island besides the nine of them, was there? They took only a flashlight and a small weapon. They looked around several overgrown bushes with no luck. Finally, at the foot of a tall tree they spotted something. Larry was the first to look while Mike held the light. Larry screamed, as he turned back to Mike, knocking the light out of his hand. "Turn it off," Larry wailed. "What's the matter with you?" an irritated Mike asked. "Didn't you see it?" He paused, fighting back the nausea that threatened to overwhelm him. "His head ... *it wasn't there*," Larry gasped.

They ran back to camp. It was nearly morning, and they were at least five days away from the shuttle. The sun would be rising soon, and with it the temperature. If they were going back to the shuttle, they had a lot of ground to cover in the unrelenting heat. Two more days passed. Though they made some progress, Mike, Susan, and James had disappeared. The others were too frightened to search for them. They thought at first that the three of them had run off in the night and abandoned the remaining crew, for they vanished without a trace. No screams, no bodies, no *nothing*.

The remaining five pressed on. When they became too exhausted to continue further, they sat up camp again, but they could only find two tents. Sherri, Kim, and Larry stayed in one, Catherine and Fred took the other. Hours passed and the jungle remained quite. At last, the frightened crew drifted off to sleep. "Cathy, wake up," Fred whispered. "Listen, it's out there," he said. Catherine shivered at the sounds coming from outside. "Oh my God, Larry and the girls," he gasped. The zipper was stuck on the tent, and there was an eerie silence outside.

"Forget it," Fred yelled. He ripped the zipper off the tent and ran outside. Nothing was there. His heart raced faster, he felt near panic. Fred looked around and found what remained of the tent. As he walked closer, he recognized scraps of clothing, wrapped around so much raw meat. Sherri and Kim were both torn beyond recognition.

Larry lay carelessly flung to the side, broken like some hideous rag doll. His shoulders, arms, and legs were lacerated horribly and his stomach had been savaged, but somehow, he was alive. Fred knelt beside him, gently placing his hand under Larry's head. A shudder ran through him as he looked down at Larry's mangled throat and face. "What was it Larry ... what did this?" Fred asked. Larry seemed to be in a trance as he stared at the bushes and then looked back to Fred. Looking again at the wounded man's throat, Fred wondered if Larry would be able to speak. "Don't ... let it get ... Fred ... don't let it ..." Larry gasped for breath, making a pitiful wheezing sound.

Catherine leaned over Fred's shoulder and whispered, "Will he live, does he have a chance?" Fred shook his head and turned back to Larry. "The *claws ... teeth ...* don't let

it ... IT WON'T LET GO!" Larry yelled. The muscles in his neck spasmed then went limp in Fred's hand. Blood trickled from Larry's mouth. He was gone.

Two red eyes glowed at them through the jungle. "Fred, I hear "it" we've got to go." Catherine reached underneath his shoulders and began to pull Fred to his feet. He stood for a moment looking at Larry, and wondering if he still felt pain the moment before he died. "Fred, we've got to go!" Catherine yelled as she yanked frantically on Fred's sleeve.

They ran through the woods. The air was damp with humidity, so thick that it felt like hands wrapping around them, making it difficult to breath. They ran for hours. Once they stopped to rest, it began to rain. Looking up through the downpour, Fred realized that they had been running all night. The sun was just rising and they were near the shuttle now.

He looked quickly around them, and took Catherine's hand. Fred looked at the poor woman, soaking to the bone standing there in the rain, and wondered if they would live. She met his eyes and gave a nod. Together they tore off through the remaining jungle towards the ship, slamming into tree branches and splashing through mud. Finally, several cuts and bruises later, they boarded the shuttle. Fred readied the ship for take off, as Catherine wrapped a towel around his shoulders. She began to shiver and found a towel for herself, sat down, and passed out.

Hours later she awoke suddenly. "Fred, what happened?" she asked. He took hold of her hand, attempting a smile. "It's ok, you fell asleep." Catherine glanced out into space at all of the beautiful stars and realized that they had survived. A wave of relief swept over her. She was alive! Then she remembered Larry's mutilated body and suddenly felt guilty and ill. She squeezed Fred's hand and tried to return some of his comfort. "I'll be back," she said.

She walked down the hall to the bathroom, opened the door ... and there "it" was. How do *I* know it was there you may ask? Well ... I'm sure you have an active imagination. I'll let you figure it out.

The End.