

A man holding a briefcase was running through the forest at nightfall, stumbling on roots sticking out from the ground. He felt as if someone or something was watching him. He was sure it would soon be after him. He was unsure whether to use his flashlight or not for if he did, it might find him. Realising that if it caught up to him it would see him anyway, he turned on the light. At least he wouldn't be stumbling so much on the roots anymore. Not far away, six youngsters were sitting around a camp fire grilling sausage and marshmallow. Their names were Ben, Helen, Lily, Leo, Will and Carrie. After they had eaten Leo played his ukulele while they all sang camping songs. Their singing was interrupted by a flash of lightning followed by an ominous thunderclap. "I hope it won't rain on us," said Helen. "It wouldn't be nice to be struck by a lightning bolt either," added Carrie. "So much for the forecast accuracy. They didn't promise any thunderstorms for tonight," murmured Will. As the storm wasn't yet upon them, starry sky was widely visible. Ben enjoyed watching the stars. Outside of the city they could be seen clearly. The clouds crept slowly forward covering up the night sky. In the light of another flash of lightning Ben saw a dark figure in the sky. It looked like a bird, but it couldn't be, for it was so big that no such bird existed. "What are you looking at" asked Lily. "Nothing. I thought I saw an unnaturally large bird but I must be just seeing things," "Your imagination is too wild for your own good," said Leo and they all laughed. Ben, though laughing with them, couldn't help being bothered by the strange figure. He was quite sure it wasn't just a figment of his imagination. The next clap of thunder brought to his mind a legend of a mythical creature called the thunderbird, an enormous bird that created storms by flapping its wings. But after that thought coming across his mind, he started to think he had probably seen a delusion after all. The man with the briefcase was suddenly tripped over by a root that was looping from the ground as if planning to trip unsuspecting victims by purpose. The man was knocked unconscious and sent rolling down a slope with his briefcase. "What was that?" asked Ben. This time he surely wasn't imagining for the others had clearly heard something too. Will pointed a flashlight at the darkness. There was something lying on the ground. They decided to take a closer look. They were shocked to find a man lying on the ground. "He is alive" said Leo after placing his fingers on the mans neck in order to find a pulse. Ben noticed a briefcase on the ground and picked it up. He couldn't resist looking into the briefcase. Inside the briefcase he found an external hard disk. He wondered what on earth was the man doing in the forest with a briefcase containing a hard disk. The man regained consciousness and quickly stood up. Ben's heart jumped to his throat as he realised the man pointed him with a gun. Without clearly seeing his friends' faces in the dimness, it was clear to him they were frozen by fear. "Hand it over" said the man, making a gesture with his free hand towards the briefcase. Suddenly the night was split by a blue beam of light. The man dropped his gun screaming in agony and covering his face with his hands. At first Ben thought of a lightning strike but to his knowledge, no lightning bolt travelled in a perfectly straight line making no sound. The man realised he had failed. On his knees on the ground he still felt a terrible pain burning in his eyes. The only thing he could see was the glowing after image scorched on his retinæ. It had been a total nightmare, starting when his helicopter was hit by lightning, forcing him to land on a small glade due to fried electronics and a damaged rotor blade. He had planned on crossing the border while flying under the radar. After finding the chopper impossible to repair he had panicked, knowing they would be tracking him down sooner or later. Ben looked up as he heard the sound of chopper blades slicing through the air. Soon the helicopter was hovering above them, illuminating their surrounding with a powerful spotlight. "Everyone on the ground stay still" ordered a megaphone-amplified voice from the chopper. Two armed men dressed in special

forces-uniforms were lowered down with ropes and harnesses. An extra harness was used to pull up the briefcase-man to the chopper. "I suppose that belongs to us" said the other military man to Ben. Ben gave the briefcase to him, being glad for getting rid of it. The man looked at the group of baffled youngsters and added, "I recommend you to completely forget this encounter and go on with your life as normal" "Yes sir", said Ben carefully and the others nodded. As if anyone would believe this anyway, Ben thought. The men were towed back to the chopper which then flew away into the night. A black figure was gliding across the night sky. It was a military drone: a small unmanned aircraft equipped with a variety of devices, including a thermographic camera and a laser capable of rendering a human target temporarily blind from a distance. Its wings were long and wide compared to its chassis resulting in a bird-like shape. Silently as a bird of prey it took its course back home.