SECRET AGENT

JASON MASON AND THE FLIGHTLESS BIRD FIASCO

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JASON GUNN AND ANDREW GUNN

BATEMAN BOOKS

To our beautiful mum
The greatest storyteller, who always lit up the room.
She found good in everything and the best in everyone.
Love you Mum.
Andrew and Jason

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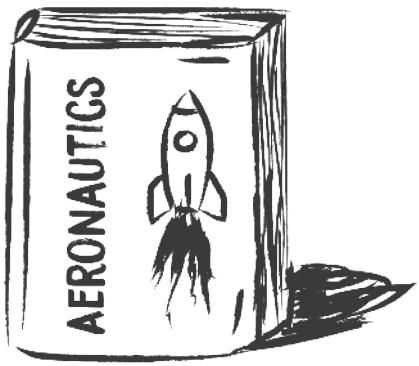
'I saw it with my own eyes,' said Police Commander Jelley. '**Biggest** bird you've ever seen. Bigger than me. I'll never forget the sound it made. **BRAWWWWK!**'

Agent Rātana and I looked at each other. It was night-time, and together with Commander Jelley we were **crouched** at a window on the third floor of the Palmerston North City Library (Egyptian history and aeronautics section).



COMMANDER JELLEY looked a bit older than my dad. He was wearing a police uniform with lots of pockets for police things like handcuffs and two-way radios. And sweets. As he **squatted** down, a banana Fruit Burst had fallen out of one of the pockets and was now lying on the floor beside me.

I tried to ignore it, even though banana is my favourite Fruit Burst flavour.

We could see out over a little grassy park lit up by streetlights. COMMANDER JELLEY looked like he was remembering something bad, like when you discover your lunchbox under your bed complete with cheese sandwiches that are five weeks old and covered in GREEN MOULD.

'Why don't you start from the beginning?' I said.

COMMANDER JELLEY frowned at me.

'Sorry, why is he here?' he asked Agent Rātana.

'It's Bring-Your-Nephew-To-Work Day,' she replied. 'Don't worry, just pretend he's **invisible**.'

She looked back at me with just the tiniest eyebrow-raise.

COMMANDER JELLEY sighed and continued: 'It was nine pm. I had just come off duty. I had bought a pie from **BIG RODNEY'S PIE CART**, right on the street down here. It's the only place to get a steak-and-cheese pie at that time of night.'

I nodded quickly, impressed. **COMMANDER JELLEY** clearly had his finger on the **pulse** of Palmerston North's pie supply.

'What happened then?' said Agent Rātana.

'I was walking across the grass in a north-easterly direction. I saw it come running down from Rangitikei Street, over there,' said COMMANDER JELLEY, pointing. 'It was so TALL, with that long neck. It bent down so its **big**, beaky head was right in my face. And then, and then . . .'

COMMANDER JELLEY'S bottom lip **wobbled** like a, well, like a *jelly*.

'Just take your time,' said Agent Rātana.

'I dropped the steak-and-cheese pie. I ran as fast as I could. And when I looked back, it was eating it up off the ground! **My pie!**'

Agent Rātana passed COMMANDER JELLEY

a hankie. While he *dabbed* his eyes, I whispered to her, 'I thought the moa was a herbivore.'

'I think you're missing the bigger point that the moa has been extinct for hundreds of years,' she whispered back.

COMMANDER JELLEY blew his nose on Agent Rātana's hankie, making a sound like a **trumpet** full of water, and handed it back. She didn't react at all, just folded it carefully and asked, 'What happened next?'

'I got a kebab round the corner instead,' he sniffed. 'It wasn't the same.'

'Yes, but . . . the **giant** moa bird?' Agent Rātana asked, as she sealed her folded *snotty* hankie in a plastic Ziploc bag.

'It ran off, proceeding in a south-easterly direction,' said

COMMANDER JELLEY. 'That way. Past the **BUBBLE** tea shop and Shook Chook Books. That was the last I saw of it.'

'You've been very helpful,' said Agent Rātana. 'We'll take it from here. I mean "I". I'll take it from here.'

She looked at me. This was it. **Showtime.**