

**EXTREME  
ADVENTURES**

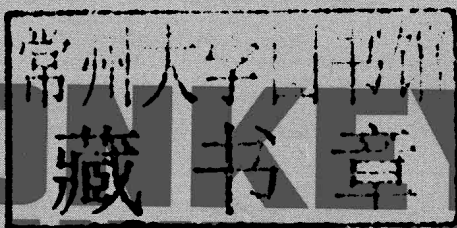


# **MONKEY MOUNTAIN**

**JUSTIN D'ATH**



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Puffin Books

# For Lui Aitken

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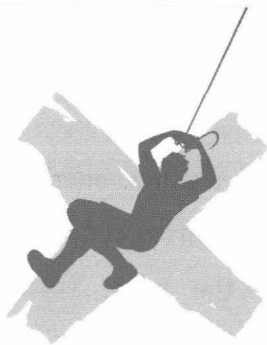
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# 1

## DANGER!

A big sign greeted us as we filed out of the steamy Borneo jungle onto a wide rocky plateau.

**BAHAYA!**

'Does anyone know what that means?' Mr Griffin asked, mopping his sweaty face with a handkerchief.

Most of us had left our Malaysian phrasebooks back in the bus, halfway down the mountain. But Stephanie Morgan had hers in her backpack.

'Danger,' she said.

'Thank you, Stephanie.' Mr Griffin gave his glasses a wipe, too. 'So I want everyone to stay on this side of the guard rail.'

We crowded along the low wooden fence. It was two metres back from the cliff top. When I stood on tiptoe, I could look over the edge. There wasn't much to see – just more jungle, surrounded by a semi-circle of craggy black cliffs.

'Where's the volcano?' asked one of the Year Nine boys.

'We're standing on it,' Mr Griffin said. 'That's the crater.'

'But it's full of trees.'

'It's dormant at the moment. Last time Mount Bako erupted was 400 years ago.'

'Were you here, sir?' asked Kirk Munro, trying to get a laugh. Mr Griffin was the oldest teacher at our school. He even had grandchildren.

'No, Kirk,' Mr Griffin said, his voice serious. 'If I had been here, I wouldn't have lived to tell the tale. The entire peninsular went up in one big fireball.'

Kirk pointed into the crater. 'I don't think the fire went out.'

Several of us laughed. We thought he was kidding. Fires don't keep burning for 400 years.

But volcanoes do.

Stephanie had brought binoculars in her backpack. 'It does look like smoke,' she said.

I used the zoom on my camera. My heart thudded. A white haze filtered up through the treetops below us. Was it smoke or mist? I zoomed the lens to its full magnification, pulling the scene even closer. And got more than I bargained for.

A humungous, blurry eye stared back at me.

'Shishkebab!' I gasped, nearly dropping my camera.

A little greyish-brown monkey perched on the edge of the cliff. Where had it come from? I soon found out. There was a scratching sound and a clatter of falling rocks. It seemed to come from inside the crater. Next moment, a swarm of monkeys came scrambling up over the lip of the volcano like a ninja raiding party. They stopped when they saw us, about forty monkeys lined up along the cliff top.

Now I understood why Mount Bako was sometimes called Monkey Mountain.

Suddenly one of them darted forward and jumped onto the rail right in front of us. One by one, the others joined it, until the rail was loaded with monkeys. We shuffled

back to make room for them. They had little elf-like faces and sly brown eyes. It was spooky how they watched us.

‘They’re long-tailed macaques,’ said Stephanie.

‘You’re not supposed to feed them, Kirk,’ Mr Griffin said. ‘The bus driver warned us, remember?’

Kirk didn’t listen. He’d unwrapped a muesli bar and was bending down, offering it to the nearest macaque. It was a silly thing to do. The monkeys were wild but they were used to tourists like us and had lost their fear of humans. Instead of just one monkey coming to take the muesli bar, they all came. About forty macaques. All in a rush.

Macaques are fast. Before Kirk could move, he was surrounded by monkeys. The muesli bar disappeared in a brown, furry tornado. It was chaos. Dust flew. People yelped and jumped out of the way as screeching monkeys went scampering in all directions – even through our legs! – chasing other monkeys that had morsels of food.

In five seconds it was over. Not a scrap of the muesli bar remained. Even its wrapper was gone. But the macaques were still hungry. They wanted more.

The feeding frenzy had scattered them. They were all around us in a big circle. The circle was closing in.

The monkeys seemed bolder now. More threatening. They came shambling towards us on all fours, no bigger than terriers but much more agile. One leap and they could be on your shoulder. They had big sharp teeth and long black fingernails like claws. Their faces looked cunning as they sized us up, searching for more food. I noticed one coming up behind Stephanie. It had its eyes on her backpack, dangling from her left hand.

‘Steph, look out behind you!’ I cried.

My warning came too late. Before Stephanie could react, the monkey shot forward and grabbed her backpack, wrenching it from her fingers. Mr Griffin yelled at the animal, sending it darting in my direction. As it came racing past, I put a hand down and caught one of the backpack’s trailing shoulder straps. The monkey was nearly jerked off its feet. Screeching in anger, it spun around and grabbed me below the elbow with one long-fingered foot. Its claws dug in – they felt like knives – and I had to let go. As the macaque scampered off carrying its prize, another monkey seized my camera

and pulled. The strap was looped around my neck. It half strangled me. I wound my fingers around the strap and pulled the other way. For a couple of seconds we had a tug of war.

Suddenly, there was a loud rumble. It sounded like thunder. The monkey froze, its eyes raised to the sky. All the other monkeys did the same. Then one of the big males gave a piercing shriek. The monkey holding my camera let go. It joined the other monkeys racing back to the crater, screeching in terror, and disappeared over the edge.

As quickly as they'd arrived, the macaques had gone. Leaving twenty-four shaken high-school students and four confused teachers standing on the lip of the dormant volcano.

'Is anybody hurt?' asked Mrs Dalton. 'Did anyone get bitten?'

Kirk made a joke about teeth but this time no one laughed.

'What about you, Sam?' Mr Griffin asked.

I looked at my arm where the macaque had clawed me. There were red marks but the skin wasn't broken. 'I'm okay,' I said. 'Sorry about your backpack, Steph.'

Stephanie nodded but didn't say anything. She was almost crying. Mrs Dalton put an arm around her.

'It's all right, love. We can get you a new backpack in Kuching.'

'But my money was in it,' Stephanie said. Then she gasped. 'So was my passport!'

'Oh dear,' said Mrs Dalton, looking over the top of Stephanie's head at Mr Griffin.

I looked the other way. In the direction the backpack-thief had disappeared. Before anyone could stop me, I jumped the guard rail and peered cautiously over the edge. The crater wasn't as steep as it had looked from behind the rail. The rocky wall descended in a series of narrow ridges, like stairs, all the way to the bottom, about seventy metres below. That's how the monkeys had managed to climb up. And how they'd gone back down. None were in sight now. But something else was.

*'SAM FOX, GET BACK ON THIS SIDE OF THE FENCE!'*  
Mr Griffin yelled behind me.

'But I can see Steph's backpack,' I said.

It was caught on the top ledge, only three metres down.

‘Let me see,’ said Mr Griffin.

He climbed the guard rail, then got down on his hands and knees and crawled to the edge. I followed his example and knelt down, too. The cliff wasn’t vertical, but it was steep enough to make me dizzy.

‘If we got a long stick,’ I said, ‘we might be able to drag it back up.’

‘Good idea,’ said Mr Griffin.

I raced back to the jungle and found a fallen branch that looked perfect – it even had a hooked end. Everyone else stayed behind the guard rail as I took it back to Mr Griffin on the edge of the crater.

‘Nice work, Sam,’ he said.

Lying on his stomach, he stretched down towards Stephanie’s backpack. But he couldn’t quite reach it.

‘Can I have a go?’ I asked. ‘If you hold my legs, I might be able to reach down a bit further than you.’

‘All right. But for goodness sake be careful.’

I took off my camera and wriggled forward on my stomach until my head and chest hung over the edge. Mr Griffin held my legs steady. It was scary. But I knew everyone was watching so I couldn’t chicken out.

Plus, I kind of liked Stephanie Morgan.

The tip of the stick touched the backpack. I worked the hooked end through one of the shoulder straps and gave it a twist.

'Got it!' I gasped.

But I don't think Mr Griffin heard me. At the very moment I spoke, there was a big rumble of thunder. It was twice as loud as the one that had scared the monkeys away.

And here's something weird – it was a clear, sunny day.

Where was the thunderstorm?

Next moment I had my answer. There was another rumble. It didn't come from above, it came from below me. The ground trembled. I was still hanging over the edge of the cliff, looking straight down. Bits of rock started breaking away from the cliff face below me and falling into the crater.

Hooley dooley! It wasn't a thunderstorm, it was the volcano.

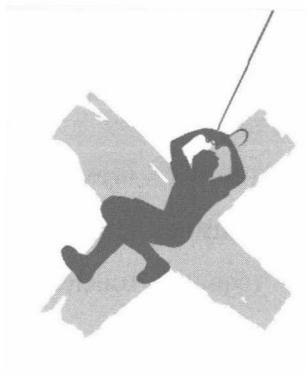
After lying dormant for 400 years, Mount Bako was about to erupt!

'Pull me up!' I yelled, letting go of the stick.

Mr Griffin started dragging me backwards. But it was too late. The rim of the crater was crumbling beneath me. Instead of going backwards, I was going down. Mr Griffin couldn't hold on.

I heard a girl scream my name: 'SAAAAAAM!'

Then Mr Griffin lost his grip.



## 2

***GO, GO, GO!***

Only a small section of the cliff top broke away. It created a miniature landslide that swept me down on a wave of gravel and dumped me on the first ledge. Right next to Stephanie's backpack. Even though I was shaken and grazed, I felt lucky to be alive.

Two heads poked over the jagged skyline three metres above me.

'Are you hurt?' asked Mrs Dalton.

'I don't think so,' I said, my voice trembling.

Mr Griffin dangled a hand over the edge. 'Here, Sam – see if you can reach me. I'll try to pull you up.'

I rose slowly to my feet. The ledge was only half a

metre wide and covered with loose rocks. I had to be careful or I'd lose my footing. Mr Griffin stretched down, I stretched up. Our fingertips touched, but we couldn't grab hold.

I had an idea. Lifting Stephanie's backpack, I passed it up to the two teachers hanging over the edge. They gripped one shoulder strap, I gripped the other.

But when they tried pulling me up – *rip!* Their strap tore off. I was left holding the torn backpack, and struggling to keep my balance.

Mrs Dalton let out a startled yelp. I thought it was because I'd nearly overbalanced and fallen off the ledge, but she wasn't looking at me – she was looking into the crater behind me. There was a loud hiss. I felt a blast of heat on the back of my neck. I twisted my head around.

Holy guacamole!

A hissing white column shot up out of the jungle at the centre of the crater. It was steam. It rose high up into the sky.

'The volcano could blow any moment,' Mr Griffin said to Mrs Dalton in a lowered voice. 'Get the students down

to the bus, Claire.'

Mrs Dalton lowered her voice, too. 'What about Sam?'

'I'll stay here and help him. We won't be far behind you.'

Mrs Dalton disappeared. I heard her and the other teachers yelling instructions. *We're going back to the bus. Let's do this in an orderly fashion. Walk, everybody, don't run. There's no need to panic.*

No need to panic? I thought. It was fine for them. They weren't trapped on a ledge inside the crater of a volcano.

A volcano that was about to blow its top.

'Sam, listen to me,' Mr Griffin said, speaking loudly now. 'There's a way up. See that tree root?'

I looked where he was pointing. About fifteen metres away, a knobbly root wound its way over the lip of the crater and dangled down to the ledge.

'Do you think you could climb it?' he asked.

'Sure,' I said.

But would I be able to reach it? Halfway along, a section of the ledge had collapsed. What remained was only a few centimetres wide. It looked impossible to

cross. But it was my only hope – there was no other way out of the crater.

I was still holding Stephanie's backpack. It was the cause of our problems. 'Look after this,' I said, tossing it up to Mr Griffin.

I didn't really care if he caught it or not.

As I shuffled along the ledge, I tried not to let my eyes stray to the crater below me. But I had to look down to see where to place my feet. The hiss of escaping steam grew louder. A hot, wet mist filled the air. It coated everything with moisture, making the ledge slippery under the worn soles of my sneakers. And making it hard to see where I was going.

Just before I reached the narrow bit, there was an extra loud rumble. I felt the whole mountain tremble. A section of the ledge I'd just crossed broke away from the cliff and went crashing down into the crater.

Then, as suddenly as it had started, the hissing stopped. I took a quick peek over my shoulder. The steam was gone. In its place, a wisp of grey smoke rose out of the jungle inside the crater. There was a strange smell in the air, like fireworks.