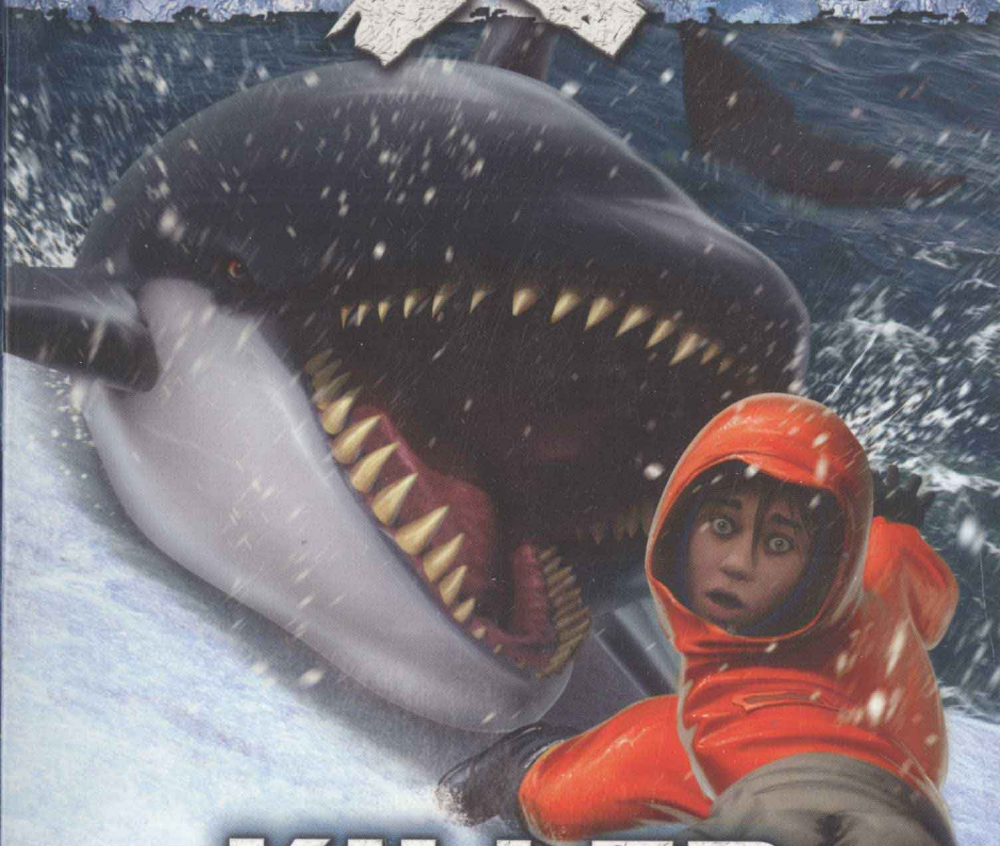


**EXTREME
ADVENTURES**



KILLER WHALE

JUSTIN D'ATH



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江苏工业学院图书馆

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WHALE**

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Puffin Books

For Stella

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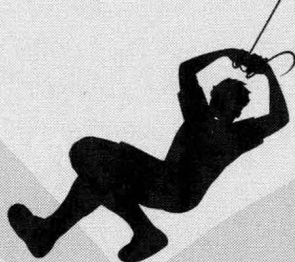
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EXTREME ADVENTURES

KILLER WHALE

'What's happening?' Harry gasped.

Before I could answer, another killer whale burst out of the sea on the low side of the floe. The giant predator flung itself onto the ice and came sliding up the slope on its belly. Straight towards Harry and me. With its jaws wide open.

'Shishkebab!' I cried, as we slid helplessly towards the enormous, tooth-lined cave of the killer whale's mouth . . .

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1

MAYDAY!

'There's one,' squawked Harry.

'Where?' Dad's voice crackled in our headsets. He was sitting up front with the pilot and couldn't see which way Harry was looking.

'Over there!' Harry tapped the side window with his Game Boy.

'On the left,' I said into my headset-mike, leaning across my little brother for a better view. 'Between those two big icebergs in the middle of the bay.'

Ross Willis, our pilot, banked the Cessna 180 ski plane steeply to the left.

'Thar she blows!' he said. 'Nice work, Harry.'

We had been searching for whales along the Antarctic coast for over an hour and were nearly at the point where we'd have to turn back.

'Looks like a fin whale,' Ross said as we drew nearer.

'It's massive!' I gasped.

'They can weigh up to seventy tonnes. Only blue whales grow bigger.'

Dad was busily changing camera lenses. 'Are they endangered?'

'They were nearly wiped out before the International Whaling Commission banned fin whale hunting in 1976. Now only the Japanese go after them,' Ross said.

He dipped one wing to give us a better view of the huge mammal. It looked as big as a container ship in the middle of the wide, ice-flanked bay. 'Would anyone like to go down for a closer look?'

'You betcha,' said Harry, without raising his eyes from his Game Boy.

We flew round in a big semicircle over a fleet of monstrous icebergs and went buzzing back towards the whale in a long, slow descent.

Then the buzzing stopped.

We were all wearing headsets, which blocked out most of the noise. But not all of it – I could no longer hear the Cessna's engine. There was only the rush of air across its windshield, wings and fuselage. Dad and Harry were too busy gawking at the whale and the Game Boy to notice. But I was watching Ross through the gap between the seats. He'd suddenly become very busy checking dials, pushing buttons and flicking switches.

'Listen up, guys,' he said in a loud, serious voice. 'We might have a problem. Make sure your seatbelts are tight, and put your cameras and any other loose objects away where they can't fly about.'

Then he switched to an outside channel.

'Mayday Mayday Mayday! This is Zulu Kilo Victor Niner Mike, transmitting blind. Our engine has failed, we're going to be landing on or near the coast at approximately one hundred and thirty degrees east . . .'

Harry looked up from his Game Boy. 'Who's May Day, Mr Willis?'

'Keep quiet, Harry!' snapped Dad, sounding tense. 'Don't bother Mr Willis now.'

While Ross repeated his Mayday call, I helped Harry

tighten his seatbelt. My hands were shaking so badly he probably could have done it better without me.

We're going to crash! screamed a little voice in my head.

I tried to ignore it. 'Put your Game Boy in the seat pocket, Harry.'

'But I'm nearly at a new record.'

'Put it *away*! Didn't you hear what Mr Willis – '

'Pay attention, guys,' Ross interrupted. 'The engine has lost power so I'm going to put us down on the ice. It shouldn't be a problem, but if anything happens you'll find a first-aid kit, life jackets and other survival gear behind the back seat. There's a fire extinguisher under my seat, and an axe on the floor in the front.'

'Wicked!' said Harry.

Sometimes it's embarrassing having five-year-old brothers. I should know. I've got two. The other one, Harry's twin, Jordan, had to stay home with Mum in Australia because of his asthma. I wished I was there, too. I wished Dad had never bought tickets in the World Conservation Society raffle, with a family trip to Antarctica as first prize.

An engine failure and forced landing were *not* part of the deal.

Nor was drowning or dying of hypothermia, which would almost certainly be our fate if we landed in the ice-flecked sea.

We were still a long way from shore. Ross had set a course directly into the bay, coaxing the ailing Cessna towards a wide, snow-covered plateau nestled between two craggy mountains. It looked like an ideal place to land. But without power we were barely moving. And we'd lost a lot of altitude. We still had roughly a kilometre to go when suddenly the Cessna began to pitch and shudder and jolt.

'What's happening?' I gasped.

'It's called a katabatic wind,' said Ross, struggling with the controls. 'You often run into them below five hundred metres. A bit of a problem for us because they blow offshore.'

'WE'RE GOING BACKWARDS!' Harry shouted above the increasing howl of the wind.

I looked out the side window. He was right. We were being blown out of the bay. Out into the frozen wastes

of the Southern Ocean. The next stretch of land was Tasmania, nearly three thousand kilometres north.

Even with a tailwind, a Cessna 180 can't fly more than twelve hundred kilometres before it runs out of fuel. And that's with a full tank to begin with. Ours was half empty.

We were all going to die.

'I'll try something else,' said Ross, craning his neck for a view of the peninsula at the western end of the bay. 'Hold onto your seats, guys – things might get bumpy.'

He wasn't kidding. As soon as Ross kicked the rudder pedal, the Cessna flipped sideways, did a kind of cartwheel, then dropped like a stone. It felt like a roller-coaster ride, only ten times more scary. The sea rushed towards us. I closed my eyes and waited for the splintering impact that would smash the flimsy ski plane – and all of us in it – to smithereens.

It didn't happen. The falling sensation stopped. My seatbelt no longer cut into me. We seemed to be level. I opened my eyes. The Cessna was skimming across the water, barely three metres above the whitecaps. Heading directly towards the peninsula, a vertical wall of rock and ice that grew steadily larger, larger, LARGER . . .

Shishkebab! We were going to smash straight into it!

At the very last moment, Ross tipped the Cessna to the right. Its starboard wing nearly scraped on the ice. Yes, *ice*! We were no longer flying over water. Below us, a narrow shelf of sea ice stretched along the bottom of the cliff face. With a flick of the controls, Ross set the skis down. The Cessna went skidding along the shelf in a long hissing slide. A line of penguins saw us coming and dived into the sea. We finally came to rest less than a plane's length from the end of the peninsula, where the iceshelf met the sea in a turbulent boil of foam, broken chunks of icebergs and grey, crashing waves.

Slowly I unclenched my sweaty hands, leaned back in my seat and let out my breath. We'd made it.

BANG!

The Cessna jolted.

'What was that?' asked Dad.

Ross's voice was loud in my headset. And for the first time that day, he sounded scared. 'The iceshelf is breaking up,' he cried. 'Quickly, everybody out!'



2

CAPTAIN AMAZING

Cessna seatbelts are more complicated than the ones in cars. There are lots of straps and buckles. But it's surprising how quickly you can get them undone in an emergency.

This was an emergency.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

It sounded like someone was shooting at us.

It felt like it, too. With every ear-splitting bang, the ski plane shuddered as if bullets were smacking into its fuselage.

Ross was first out. He dragged Harry's door open and helped him down onto the ice. Dad and I tumbled out on

our side. The freezing katabatic wind bit at the exposed skin on my cheeks and nose. I was glad the rest of me was protected by multiple layers of wool, thermal cotton and Gore-Tex.

BANG!

A long jagged crack appeared directly under my feet. I grabbed the wing strut to take my weight off the ice. The crack split open and I found myself dangling over a zig-zag of inky-blue seawater. My heart hammered, my legs scissored in the gusting wind. One wrong move, one slip of my hands, and I'd fall in. I remembered Ross's warning from earlier that day: 'It only takes two minutes in the Antarctic sea and you'll die of hypothermia.'

Slowly, glove over glove, I worked my way up the strut and along the wing until I was no longer over the deadly water. Then I gingerly set my feet down on the ice.

Harry and Ross came slipping and sliding around the nose of the ski plane.

'Where's Dad?'

Uh oh. I hadn't given him a thought since the ice gave way under us. 'He's right . . .'

The words died in my mouth. Where I'd last seen our

father, the fingers of two orange gloves clung to the edge of the zigzag gap.

'DAD!' Harry and I both yelled together.

Ross got there first. He lay flat on his stomach and dragged our father up onto the ice. Dad's face was as white as our surroundings and his weatherproof exposure suit was dripping wet from the chest down.

'Did the water get into your clothes?' asked Ross.

Dad shook his head. His breath made white clouds that whirled away on the wind. *'N-n-not t-t-totally. My s-s-suit k-kept m-m-most of it out.'*

I didn't know whether it was the cold or the shock that was making Dad stutter. He seemed unsteady on his feet. Ross put an arm around our father's waist and turned to me and Harry.

'Get over to the cliff face, guys. I'll bring your dad.'

BANG!

A crack opened under the Cessna and one of its skis fell through. The plane tipped sideways. Its right wing smacked onto the ice, missing Harry and me by millimetres.

'GO, GO, GO!' Ross yelled at us across the sloping wing.

Grabbing Harry's hand, I ducked around the Cessna's tail and led him sliding and stumbling across the ice towards the tumble of snow and rocks at the base of the cliff. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Ross and Dad appear around the other end of the ski plane, taking a parallel course to ours.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

A spider web of huge cracks shot out from under the Cessna. One raced straight towards Harry and me like a blue bolt of lightning. A gaping fissure yawned open at our feet. My boots slid crazily as I pulled Harry backwards. There was a loud creaking noise and a shadow fell over us. I flung a panicked look over my shoulder. The Cessna had fallen nose-first through the ice. Its tail stuck straight up, towering like a massive tombstone against the cloud-streaked sky. For a moment it balanced there, rocking gently from side to side, then the doomed ski plane slid slowly down through the ice and disappeared.

'I left my Game Boy inside!' wailed Harry.

As if that mattered. Survival was the only thing on *my* mind. All around us, what remained of our icy platform was disintegrating in a volley of explosive detonations

that sent clouds of ice crystals swirling away on the wind. The shelf creaked and rumbled and rocked up and down like the deck of a ship. I dragged Harry from one swaying icefloe to the next in a mad race to escape the maze of zigzagging cracks that seemed to follow our every footfall. They were gaining on us, getting closer by the second. I tried to run faster but it was impossible – our bulky thermal suits made us as slow as astronauts.

'SAM! HARRY!'

Dad and Ross had made it to the base of the cliff. Safe on the rocks, they were frantically beckoning at us to come in their direction.

'GET ONTO SOLID GROUND!' yelled Ross.

If only it was that easy. The gaps between the sections of ice were getting bigger every moment. Combined with the wind and the seesawing motion of the sea, it was becoming increasingly hard to balance. Halfway to shore, we came to a gap over a metre wide.

I slithered to a halt. 'It's too far to jump.'

'I'll use my super powers,' said Harry.

Harry plays a game where he's a superhero called Captain Amazing. Sometimes I wonder if it's just a game.