

Vampire Beach Bloodlust

Alex Duval

Random House Children's Books

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About the Author

Also by Alex Duval

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About the Book

Jason has just moved to Malibu - home to rich kids and fabulous parties. He's flattered to be included - and very flattered by the interest of the stunning Sienna. But Sienna and her friends hide a dark secret - and soon Jason discovers that their parties involve a little more than the usual alcohol and music . . .

When the sinister truth about his new friends is revealed, Jason has to decide whether he can accept the situation. Everyone else seems to be able to . . . If he can, it might just mean he could get closer to Sienna . . .

An edgy new take on the vampire myth - with money, fashion and beautiful people!

VAMPIRE BEACH BLOODLUST

Alex Duval

RED FOX BOOKS

For Amber Caravéo -
there would be no Vampire Beach
without you

Special thanks to Laura Burns & Melinda Metz

One

MALIBU.

Jason Freeman took a deep breath of the fresh California air. He *lived* in Malibu now. This was him, driving his VW Karmann Cabriolet Beetle down the Pacific Coast Highway. The thought was as blinding as the sun on the ocean, as dazzling as the white sand stretching out alongside the car – *right* alongside the car. He could pull over and be down there in—

‘How insane is that house?’

Jason reluctantly dragged his gaze away from the . . . the *Malibu*, and glanced at the house his younger sister, Danielle, was pointing to. She’d pulled her sunglasses down for a better look, and her gray eyes were wide with curiosity.

‘It has a tennis court!’ she declared. ‘And I bet that glass dome is for an indoor pool. They don’t let you see much, do they? All those trellises and flowers.’ Dani glanced over her shoulder as they drove by, trying to eye-TiVO every detail. ‘That new job of Dad’s, the un-pass-by-able job, the one I had to leave all my friends for? It pays a gazillion dollars. Why aren’t we living in a place like that?’

‘Places like that cost multiple gazillions,’ Jason told her. ‘Besides, we have a pool at the new house.’

‘An *outdoor* pool,’ Dani complained. But Jason could hear a hint of amusement in her voice. The idea of complaining about anything in this town was ridiculous.

‘Don’t knock the pool. It’s a lovely kidney shape, with colored tile detailing,’ Jason said, quoting the real-estate agent with a wry smile.

Dani adjusted her Oliver Peoples sunglasses that had been a gift from their Aunt Bianca: the aunt who – aside from having impeccable fashion sense – had also first mentioned the new job to their dad *and* helped find their new house.

‘True. But the pool doesn’t make up for being dragged halfway across the country two weeks before junior year,’ Dani said flatly.

Jason sighed. He knew the leaving-all-her-friends part of the situation had really upset Danielle. She’d had at least thirty ‘best friends’ back in Michigan, and she hadn’t wanted to part with any of them.

‘Hey, so I heard about this guy called the Surf Rabbi,’ he said, trying to get Dani’s mind off her homesickness. ‘He’s an actual rabbi. He’s like fifty years old, and he gives surfing lessons: spiritual surfing lessons. He’s all about, I don’t know, giving yourself over to the water, or something. He teaches in Malibu.’

‘Hmm,’ Dani managed.

Jason shot a look at the surfers already out in the ocean. Sweet. He couldn’t wait to get out there himself. But he might need to pay a visit to the rabbi first, seeing as he’d never set foot on a board.

The lifeguard stations on their long wooden legs reminded him of another thing he needed to do. He had to find out where to apply for a job as a guard. That was seriously on the top ten list of things to do now that he was living in California, right after joining a gym. He figured he had a decent shot at getting a lifeguard job, since he’d been on the swim team back home, and he’d already taken a lifesaving course.

‘Jeans!’ Dani gasped as they neared the school gates.

‘Huh?’ Jason queried.

‘I have to change,’ Dani said, as if that was actually an explanation. Jason raised his eyebrows. She rushed on. ‘Those girls we just passed were all wearing designer jeans!’

She shook her head, her chin-length auburn hair flying around her face. 'And I'm in a skirt. I'm not dressed right.'

Jason sighed. 'We don't have time for you to change. We just got here. Besides, what you're wearing is fine,' he assured her.

Danielle pulled out a brush and whipped it through her hair. 'It's different for you. You're a guy. You have the vintage bug. You have the blond hair/blue eyes combo. You look like you could be the son of Jude Law and . . . and somebody not so British. Nobody's going to care what you're wearing.'

'And you're the only one who cares what *you're* wearing!' Jason countered. 'You look great. You always do. Chill out, Dani.'

Jason swung the car into the parking lot of DeVere High. DeVere, as in DeVere Heights: the gated complex where they now lived. And DeVere University. And DeVere Museum of Modern Art. And DeVere Library. And DeVere Athletic Complex, et cetera, et cetera and et cetera. He killed the engine and opened the car door.

Dani remained motionless. Her gray eyes were filled with apprehension behind her shades. She hated change. She always had. She'd actually insisted on moving every single Narnia book she'd ever owned across the country, even though she hadn't read them for years. She seemed to think that the world would end if she didn't have them stuffed in her closet in Malibu, just the way she'd had them stuffed in her closet in Michigan.

Jason had handed out his belongings left and right. He wanted to start clean here. No mooning over his past life, no calling his old friends every five minutes, no thinking about Michigan like it had been some kind of paradise. He wished he could give Dani a transfusion of some of his excitement. They were in Malibu now. Life was going to change. And Jason wanted it to. In Fraser, the suburb where he'd lived since birth, he had been able to see every day, every week,

every month stretching out in front of him. Not bad. But boring. Here he had no idea what was going to happen – and it was a total rush!

‘Listen. You had more friends than any other human at our old school,’ Jason reminded his sister. ‘It’s not going to be any different here.’ He climbed out of the car. The bug looked like a toy among all the hellaciously big H2s and Range Rovers that filled the lot. Still, Jason spotted at least ten new Mercedes SLK convertibles and several other vintage cars like his own. Not everyone was an SUV freak.

He glanced at Dani. She was still in the car. A couple of girls around his sister’s age – sixteen – walked by, laughing and gossiping to each other just like girls everywhere. ‘They don’t seem so evil,’ Jason pointed out.

With a sigh, Dani climbed from the car and gave the girls a once-over. ‘They definitely wouldn’t survive a winter in Michigan,’ she said at last.

‘There’s the old Dani attitude,’ Jason joked. He smiled as he led the way to the main building. It looked nothing like a school – an art gallery, maybe, a mansion or a spa, sure, but not a school. It had arches and parapets and red roof tiles. A bell tower rose up from one side. And a wide porch wrapped around the second floor.

They stepped through the largest archway and found themselves in a central courtyard with a manicured lawn in the middle, surrounded by palm trees. Jason still wasn’t used to seeing palms all over the place. And flowers grew like weeds out here, not in neat little gardens, but everywhere – on the medians of the freeways, on the sides of buildings; he’d even seen some growing around the trunks of palm trees.

‘I’m this way,’ he announced, stopping in a cool, dim walkway next to the courtyard. Stone steps led up to a side door, and his school map showed him that his first class should be right inside. He looked at the class schedule Dani was clutching so tightly that the blood had drained from her

fingers, leaving them bone white. 'You're over there . . .' he added, nodding in the opposite direction, where another set of stairs led into the wing across the courtyard.

'Yep,' Dani replied shortly. She looked terrified at the prospect of going it alone.

'Look, just make it through this first week. You can do that,' Jason told her encouragingly.

'And then what?'

He tried to think of something that would keep her going. 'I'll take you to the movies on Saturday,' he suggested. 'Even if it means sitting through a chick flick!'

Dani laughed a little shakily. 'OK.' She took a deep breath. 'See ya after.'

Jason nodded. 'I'll be at the car,' he said, and headed away from her, into what he hoped would be . . . the unexpected.

Nothing unexpected in the first three periods, Jason thought as he joined the cafeteria food line. Well, nothing if you didn't count the fact that all the kids looked as if they had dermatologists and orthodontists and any other -ontists and -ologists that kept you perfect. And the fact that the cafeteria was mostly taken up by a terrace overlooking the Pacific - which was kind of a surprise. He couldn't wait to grab his food and get out there.

Somehow, when he moved here, Jason had thought his life would . . . well, *start*. And so far, school was still school. Beautiful. But still just school.

'Would you hand me the last green Borba?'

Jason turned toward the voice. And instantly felt as if every vein, artery and capillary in his body had caught fire. He could *feel* the blood rushing through them - pulsing, throbbing. He felt alive in a way he never had before. And life was full of possibility.

The girl who stood there was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, hair spilling down over her shoulders like a

black waterfall, eyes almost as dark. Her lips were a little plump, as if they were full of something sweet, filling Jason with an almost overwhelming desire to kiss her. It struck him that he had never found a girl so instantly desirable before.

‘Green Borba?’ the girl repeated.

How long had it been since she asked the first time? A second? Five? Long enough to make him look like a complete moron? Jason dragged his eyes away from her and over to the lunch counter. There was an array of sushi in front of him. But he’d never heard of a sushi called Borba. Not that he’d heard of every type of sushi in the world, but he wasn’t sushi-challenged or anything.

‘OK, you said it was the last one. And that it was green. One more hint, and I know I can get it,’ Jason told her.

The girl shook her head and smiled. ‘Oh, right. You’re from a flyover.’

A ‘flyover’. That didn’t sound especially good.

The girl reached across Jason and picked up a green bottle of water from a shelf above the sushi. She started toward the cashier, but Jason wasn’t ready for their conversation to be over.

‘So, what makes green Borba different from’ – he took a quick look at the other bottles of water – ‘from purple or pink Borba? And which one should I be drinking?’

She looked him up and down thoughtfully. ‘Some things you just have to find out for yourself,’ she said with a smile. Then she gave him a half wave and walked away.

Jason stared after her. He couldn’t help himself. The tight T-shirt she wore tucked into a short cargo skirt showed off the curve of her waist followed by a long stretch of tanned legs.

He realized he was holding up the line, so he grabbed one of the waters, just to see what the deal was, slid his tray down to the burgers, acquired one with some seasoned curly fries, paid up, and headed toward that outrageous terrace.

The sun hit him full force the second he stepped out the door. It was a little windy, but the sound of the surf pounding the beach below more than made up for it. He glanced around. Stone tables in a variety of shapes dotted the terrace, most of them already taken.

'Hey, Freeman. Over here.'

Some sandy-haired guy - Alex? Adam? - from Jason's history class was waving him over with one hand and pointing a small, sleek camcorder at him with the other.

'European history,' Jason said to Sandy-haired Guy, wanting to show he remembered him, even though they hadn't actually met.

'Yep,' the guy answered, still filming. 'I'm Adam Turnball. Give me your impression of DeVere!'

'Are you making a documentary?' Jason asked.

'It's more of a Christopher Guest/Richard Linklater semi-scripted, lots-of-improv. kind of thing,' Adam replied somewhat cryptically.

Jason glanced at the other guy who had staked out the far end of the table. He was hoping for a translation, but the guy didn't look up from his book.

'Come on. Talk to me. Anything,' Adam urged.

'Cool cars in the lot, great views.' *The hottest girl I've ever seen!* Jason silently added, then continued, 'A wide selection of chow. Speaking of which' - he sat down - 'my burger is cooling.'

'Oh, sorry.' Adam shut off the camera and turned to his pizza.

Jason twisted the top off his purple Borba and took a slug. It tasted like water with a little berry thing happening. 'Five bucks a bottle, you'd think they could throw in a little more kick!' he mumbled.

'Well, yeah, but it's not about the taste,' Adam said, his hazel eyes twinkling. 'It's about the protection.'

'What?'

'It's a prophylactic,' Adam said, nodding at the Borba with a sly smile. 'Against aging. Of course, you need to drink two a day for maximum effectiveness.'

Jason read the side of the bottle. Crap, it *was* for aging skin. Why were they selling it in a high school cafeteria? He ran his hand over his cheek. 'I heard the sun out here is very drying,' he said to Adam. 'Also, I didn't read the label.'

Adam laughed. 'So, should I pretend I don't already know where you're from, et cetera, and ask you all the normal questions?'

'I guess if you already know, it's kinda pointless,' Jason answered. '*How* do you know?'

'You live in the Heights. Everyone in Malibu knows who lives there. Movie stars, moguls, music producers, and to keep to my "m" theme, magnificent, newly successful ad execs from Michigan, like your dad. We hate you. And we all want to be you at the same time,' Adam said. 'You're all we talk about. Real-estate agents pass on the dirt, along with landscapers and interior decorators. There's a whole information infrastructure.'

'And who exactly is this *we*?' Jason asked, taking a bite of his burger.

'You know, the people from the wrong side of the tracks,' Adam replied. 'Not that there is a wrong side of the tracks in Malibu. Let's say the wrong side of the gate that leads into DeVere Heights.'

'So I'm guessing you're not mogul or movie-star spawn,' Jason said with a grin.

'I am the child of the poor but hardworking Chief of Police,' Adam answered, so cheerfully that Jason suspected he didn't give a crap about not living in the Heights.

'Can I ask you something?' Jason ventured.

'I live to serve,' Adam quipped.

Jason shot a glance at the guy at the far end of the table. He was still reading. 'What's a flyover?'

Adam half stood up and spoke in one of those whispers that are supposed to sound like shouts. 'Hey, everybody, the new guy doesn't know what a flyover is!'

Nobody responded. Nobody even glanced at them. 'It's one of the states you fly over to get between California and New York,' he told Jason. 'You know, those two being the only worthwhile states.'

As I suspected, she basically called me a loser, Jason thought.

Adam polished off the rest of his pizza. 'So what else? Ask me anything.'

Jason wanted to ask about the girl who had turned him inside out. But he wasn't ready to be quite that pathetic - and obvious - yet. 'How about a who's-who?' he asked instead. 'I need to put some names to faces.'

'Well, there's me,' Adam said. He struck a pose. 'Adam. Turnball. Remember the name and when I'm the next Scorcese you can say you knew me back in the day.'

'I'll try to remember,' Jason joked.

'And over to our left is Luke Archer, whose position as "new boy" you are currently usurping. Hey, Luke, how long has it been?'

'A year,' Luke said without looking up.

'Huh. Time flies,' Adam replied. 'Supply an interesting factoid about yourself for the new guy, please.'

'Uh, I have a dachshund named Hans,' Luke volunteered, finally glancing up and shoving his longish blond hair out of his green eyes.

'I never knew that about you,' Adam said, but Luke had already returned to his book.

'Give me some social survival hints,' Jason said. 'Like, who's cool, who's psychotic. Basically, who should I hang with and who should I stay the hell away from?'

'Ah. That will take a while,' Adam replied, and grabbed a curly fry off Jason's plate. 'But I'll give you the *Cliffs Notes*