

Vampire Beach

# High Stakes

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*Random House Children's Books*

# **Contents**

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

About the Author

Also by Alex Duval

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## About the Book

For once, things for Jason and his vampire girlfriend, Sienna, are right on track: great friends, great life, no great drama. Then Sienna's older sister, Paige, comes home unexpectedly from college in Paris ...

Paige is sexy, sophisticated and full of wild ideas - such as spending spring break in Las Vegas. Jason soon finds that life in Malibu may be intense, but life in Vegas is insane. And when Paige's controlling ex-boyfriend turns up, things quickly go from daring to dangerous.

Now Jason and Sienna are caught right in the middle of it all. Suddenly, the stakes are very high ...

# **VAMPIRE BEACH HIGH STAKES**

**Alex Duval**

RED FOX BOOKS

To AC, for letting me tag along on the trips to Malibu

Special thanks to Laura Burns & Melinda Metz

# One

'MARCH IN MALIBU. Perfection,' Jason Freeman murmured to himself as he stared out over the Pacific. The afternoon sunlight glinted off the surface and caught the rising waves, turning them into a glimmering paradise that just begged to be surfed.

'Jason, stop staring out of the window. I'm desperate!' Smiling, Jason turned to see his girlfriend, Sienna Devereux, gesturing frantically around *Mystère*. 'I can't find the dress.'

Jason glanced about the tiny boutique. There had to be 500 dresses crammed into the ultra-posh space. 'Um ...'

'The *red* dress,' Sienna said, a note of exasperation creeping into her throaty voice. 'The one I've been talking about all week.'

'Um ...' Jason said again. It was true; she'd been talking about a dress all week. But it hadn't occurred to him that he was supposed to be actually listening to the details.

'You're hopeless,' Sienna said, shaking her head, but a smile played along her lips.

'Too bad Belle had therapy today,' Jason said. Usually Sienna's best friend would be the one helping score a fashion find, while Jason would be out riding the waves. As much as he loved Malibu - and as much as he loved Sienna - Jason wasn't entirely comfortable hanging in the pricey boutiques along Cross Creek Road. No matter how hard he tried, he still couldn't tell the difference between a Prada bag or a pleather knock off from Target. When it came time to find clothes for himself, he still preferred to hit the Gap like a normal person. Although ever since he'd started

dating Sienna a few months back, 'normal' was a thing of the past.

That was because 'normal' didn't include vampires.

Jason had barely been in Malibu for a month before he was neck-deep in vampire society. Everywhere he turned in DeVere Heights, the exclusive neighborhood where he lived, there was another vampire family. Zach Lafrenière, the coolest guy in his class at school? A vampire. Brad Moreau and Michael Van Dyke, his friends from the swim team? Vampires. And, oh yeah, Sienna Devereux, the girl he'd fallen head over heels for the very first second he laid eyes on her? A vampire.

It had been hard enough adjusting to the fact that vampires were real. But then Jason had kept getting all caught up in vampire-heavy situations. Like when Luke Archer, a rogue vampire, had been overcome by the Bloodlust and tried to kill him - which was nothing compared to the vampire hunter who'd shot a metal stake into Jason's chest, thinking he was a vampire. The guy had actually killed Belle's boyfriend, leaving Belle in need of therapy to help get over her grief.

And then there was Jason's Aunt Bianca. She'd been a vampire for years and kept it from her family. But now Jason knew, and his younger sister, Danielle, knew. And they also knew that Bianca was slowly going insane as a result of her transformation from human to vampire.

It had been a pretty vampire-filled school year. Every time Jason thought he might be able to relax and just enjoy his time with Sienna, some kind of vampire issue intervened. 'Thank God it's spring break,' he muttered as he looked through another rack of dresses.

'Nothing but fun in the sun for a whole week,' Sienna agreed. 'That's why I wanted the red dress so much. There's bound to be a party or two during spring break, and I look fierce in this dress.'

'You look fierce in everything,' he told her. It was true.

Sienna gave him her slowest, sexiest smile. 'But you would especially like me in this. Trust me. That's why I wanted it.'

'Then why didn't you buy it last week when you first saw it?' he asked.

'I didn't have enough with me.'

That one stopped Jason in his tracks. 'You didn't have enough money? Just how much does this dress cost?'

She slapped his arm. 'I had maxed out my credit card paying for our group dinner at Duke's the night before. I figured the dress could wait a few days.'

'I've searched two whole racks,' Jason announced. 'And the only red thing was this. But I think it's a belt.' He held up a long, flimsy scarf-like thing.

'That's a shirt,' Sienna told him.

He frowned at it. 'If you say so.'

'We've looked through every single thing here. Somebody else must have bought it,' Sienna sighed in frustration.

'I'm sorry,' he said, reaching for her hand.

'It was a *killer* dress,' Sienna replied. 'I can't believe it's gone.'

Jason held out his arms. 'You need a hug.'

'I need that dress.' But she laughed and stepped toward him. 'But I'll take a hug, too.' She slipped her slim, tanned arms around his waist and laid her head on his shoulder.

*Perfect*, Jason thought, as he always did when he held her. It had been a hard road for the two of them. When they had first met, Sienna had still been with her longtime boyfriend, Brad. And after she and Brad had split up, her parents had tried to prevent her from dating Jason. But now, at long last, he and Sienna were together for real.

'Oh, my God!' Sienna exclaimed, and jerked away from him.

'What?' Jason cried, instantly on alert.

She ignored him, her dark eyes fixed on the glass doors of the store. 'I can't believe it,' she murmured. Her hand gripped his arm so tightly it hurt. '*She* shouldn't be here ...'

'Who?' Jason twisted around to see what Sienna was staring at. Had his Aunt Bianca come back to town? Or was it some other vampire-themed threat to his happiness?

But instead it was just Sienna. Or at least someone who looked almost enough like Sienna to be her clone. The dark-haired girl was walking jauntily across the street, literally stopping traffic as she passed. The cars had a green light, but nobody seemed to mind the fact that a gorgeous girl had stepped out in front of them. Jason heard some appreciative honks and catcalls as she made her way up onto the sidewalk in front of *Mystère*. She turned and flashed the cars a peace sign.

'Hmm. Sleek black hair, check. Kickin' bod, check. Gorgeous smile, check,' Jason said. 'But wait, *you're* standing right here. Which means that *she* could only be—'

'Paige!' Sienna cried, racing for the door.

Jason flung the red shirt-scarf thing over a rack and went after her. By the time he caught up, Sienna was out on the sidewalk, her arms tight around the other girl.

'What are you doing here?' Sienna squealed.

'Getting my hair cut,' Paige replied.

Sienna quickly released her and studied the hair for a moment. 'Looks gorgeous.'

'Thanks. You'd think I could find a good salon in Paris, but ...' The girl's throaty voice trailed off as her eyes traveled over Jason, taking him in from head to toe. 'Wow! Brad's had a lot of plastic surgery,' she cracked.

'This is Jason Freeman,' Sienna announced, grabbing Jason's hand. 'Jason, this is my sister.'

'The famous Paige.' Jason nodded. 'I've heard a lot about you.'

'It's all true, no matter what they say,' Paige murmured flirtatiously, twirling a lock of dark hair around her finger.

'Especially the naughty stuff!'

'Naughty?' Sienna repeated, raising an eyebrow.

'Too cheesy?' Paige laughed. 'Anyway, nice to finally meet you, Jason. Sienna hasn't bothered to tell me much about you, but I've managed to find out quite a lot all on my own.'

Jason didn't really know what to say to that. He settled for, 'She was probably scared that if she told you how cool I am, you'd fly back from Paris and steal me away.'

'And I might have,' Paige agreed, with a teasing little toss of her head.

'Well, you are older, right?' Jason said.

'And taller,' Paige added.

'See?' Jason teased Sienna. 'I could always trade up.'

'Enough!' Sienna smacked Jason on the arm - a tiny bit too hard. 'Paige, how come you're back from college so early?'

Paige reached out and rubbed Jason's arm where Sienna had hit him. 'That's gonna leave a mark,' she said.

'Probably,' he agreed, shooting Sienna a smile. 'But I don't mind. I dig the "super-strength", as Adam would call it.'

'Who's Adam?' Paige inquired, absently twisting her hair up into a bun, then letting it go again so that it cascaded down her back.

'Adam Turnball,' Sienna told her. 'Jason's best friend.'

Paige looked blank.

'You know, the sheriff's son,' Sienna prompted.

'Oh!' Paige's full lips curved into a mischievous smile. 'I forgot Sheriff Turnball had a son.'

'Paige had a few brushes with the law when she was at DeVere Heights,' Sienna told Jason. 'She and Sheriff Turnball are old friends.'

'It wasn't my fault. It's just that I had a rule. If a guy wanted to date me, he had to be able to walk out to the end of the jetty at the beach,' Paige said innocently.

'During high tide, in the middle of the night,' Sienna added.

*So it helped if he was a vampire with great eyesight, great balance, superhuman strength, and the ability to heal fast if he hurt himself on the rocks,* Jason thought.

Paige just shrugged. 'I can do it, so a guy who wants to be with me should be able to do it, too.'

'Adam's father has a thing about that jetty,' Jason said.

'Yeah, because people slip and fall and crack their heads open. Or they get swept off it and drown,' Sienna said. 'The sheriff looks bad when people start dying in his town.'

Paige just shrugged again, a wicked little gleam in her eye. 'Nobody drowned. I was always there to save them.'

'And to get caught by the sheriff so Mom could have a heart attack every time he brought you home in the cop car,' Sienna pointed out.

Jason watched as the two sisters laughed. They looked so much alike that they could pass for twins. But the more he saw them together, the more he noticed their differences. Paige was constantly in motion, playing with her hair, talking with her hands, bouncing on the balls of her feet as she spoke. Sienna was the exact opposite, as calm as still water. It was one of the things Jason loved about her - you could never be sure exactly what was going on beneath the surface.

'You still haven't told me what you're doing here,' Sienna was saying. 'You're supposed to be in school for at least another month. And I thought you were then going backpacking round Europe for the summer.'

'Yeah ...' Paige hesitated for an instant, then her dark eyes lit up. 'Wait, I forgot! I bought you something.' She flipped through the four shopping bags on her arm and held out one that said 'Mystère'.

'Weren't we just in there?' Jason asked.

'Yes,' Sienna replied, her voice filled with excitement. She grabbed the bag from her sister and pulled out a red

dress, its silky skirt spilling over her hands. 'Oh. My. God! You got me the red dress!'

'Isn't it killer?' Paige exclaimed. 'I was in there earlier and the second I saw it, I knew it would look incredible on you.'

Sienna flung her arms around Paige's neck. 'I don't know how I survived without you this year.'

'Neither do I.' Paige laughed. 'Have you ever been to El Corazon?'

'That place on Ellice?' Sienna asked. 'Uh, no. It's a hangout for bikers.'

'Yes. But the salads are to die for. I'm not kidding.' Paige cocked her head to the side. 'You're not afraid of a few guys on bikes, are you, Jason?'

'With you two there to protect me? No way,' Jason replied.

'Good. You're driving.' Paige looped her arm through Sienna's and headed off down the sidewalk.

Jason shook his head and followed the Devereux girls. It had been a wild ride since the moment he met Sienna. And with her sister back in town, he had a feeling it was about to get even wilder ...

## Two

'FREEMAN!' ADAM CALLED out the instant Jason's feet hit the sand at Surfrider beach. 'I hear Paige is back in town.'

Jason gaped at him. 'I literally just dropped Sienna and her sister at home, and we didn't see a single other person from DeVere High the entire time we were at lunch,' he said. 'So how can you possibly know that Paige is back?'

'I'm connected, what can I say?' Adam shrugged and switched his folded beach towel from one arm to the other. 'So what's she doing here? Even in Paris, college goes until May, or so I'm told.'

'I don't know,' Jason admitted. 'Sienna wasn't expecting her, that's for sure. You should've seen her face when she spotted Paige.'

'She's probably just being mysterious,' Adam replied. 'You know, show up when you're least expected. It's a classic *femme fatale* move.'

'No movie talk. It's spring break,' Jason told him. Adam could barely go for two minutes without referencing one film or another. In fact, he was usually filming everything he saw while he was busy spouting the references. 'Where's your camcorder, anyway?' Jason asked.

'You told me no filming during spring break, and I am nothing if not obedient,' Adam explained.

'I didn't tell you that, Belle did,' Jason pointed out. 'No filming, no movie talk, no dorkiness—'

'*Geekiness*,' Adam corrected him. 'It's a fine distinction. The dork is a social outcast. The geek is merely a connoisseur of a specific—'

‘That, right there, is geekiness,’ Jason interrupted. ‘Stop it.’

‘Fine.’ Adam looked resigned for about two seconds. Then he brightened. ‘Wait, if Belle isn’t here to see me being geeky, do I still have to obey her?’

‘I can’t promise not to rat you out,’ Jason said. ‘The vampires can always tell when I’m lying, and if she asks me ...’

‘Oh, fine,’ Adam grumbled. ‘No film talk.’

Jason clapped him on the back, then peered out over the white sand of the beach to the swell of the blue-gray water. Stellar. The sun would be up for another few hours, and there was plenty of time for surfing.

‘Incoming!’ A volleyball flew through the air and landed at Adam’s feet.

‘Nice catch, Turnball,’ Brad Moreau joked, jogging down the wooden steps from the cliff to the beach.

‘I don’t do balls,’ Adam said. ‘Not unless there are *bonita chiquitas* present.’

‘Well, the only girl here is Brad,’ Michael Van Dyke put in, following Brad down the stairs. ‘And he’s not very *bonita*.’

‘I am, too,’ Brad protested. He scooped up the ball. ‘Everybody’s gonna be here soon. You guys up for a game?’

‘Sure,’ Jason replied.

‘Nope,’ Adam said at the same time.

‘OK then.’ Brad and Van Dyke headed over to put up the volleyball net.

‘If you’re not gonna play, and you don’t have your camera, what are you going to do?’ Jason asked.

‘Don’t you worry about me, I’ve got a plan. You see, my ignorant friend, where the male of the species gather to show off their hunting and fighting skills’ – he nodded toward Van Dyke, who now had Brad in a playful headlock – ‘the females will soon follow. And when they arrive, I will be there to study them. Closely.’ Adam marched over to a

spot just out of volleyball range and unfurled his beach towel with a flourish.

Jason left him to it and headed over to the net. Aaron Harberts and Kyle Priesmeyer from the swim team came jogging up the beach to play. Jason was glad to see them. Sometimes the games got a little *too* crowded with vampires, and it was hard to keep up. Jason was a good athlete, but the vampires were faster, stronger, and more agile than any human – even him! It would be nice to have some other humans in the mix.

‘Boys against girls!’ somebody yelled behind him. Jason turned to see Maggie Roy waving from the wooden steps. Erin Henry was right behind her.

‘There’s only two of you,’ Brad called back.

‘So? We’ll kick your butts anyway.’ Maggie hurried over to Van Dyke and jumped up to hug him, wrapping her long, tanned legs around his waist and her arms around his neck.

‘That makes your threat real convincing,’ Erin said wryly.

Maggie grinned. ‘Just cause I’m dating him doesn’t mean I’m afraid to kick his ass!’

‘Please. I rule at volleyball.’ Van Dyke put her down and held out his hands for the ball.

‘Obviously you two need to be on different teams,’ Jason said. ‘How about me, Van Dyke, and Brad against the girls. Oh, and Harberts and Priesmeyer.’

Harberts smiled tiredly. ‘Nah, I’ll sit this one out. That way the teams are even.’ He went over and flopped in the sand next to Adam.

Jason peered at him, noticing the dude’s pale skin and the bags under his eyes. *I wonder who he went out with last night*, Jason thought. *Erin, maybe?* It was easy to spot the humans who had been recently fed on by a vampire, if you knew what to look for. When a vampire was feeding on you, it felt amazing, like the best make-out session of all time. But afterwards, you felt exhausted. Happy, but

exhausted. Harberts seemed to be in the happy place. And he had the whole week of spring break to recover.

'I hear Paige is home,' Brad commented as he served the ball.

Jason glanced at him, surprised. 'Fast grapevine.'

'You know it.' Brad laughed. 'You should be used to that by now - everyone in DeVere Heights knows one another's business.'

The ball came flying at Jason, so he set it up for Van Dyke to spike it. 'She's a trip, huh?'

'Who, Paige? You can't even imagine,' Brad replied. 'She once tricked the entire soccer team into shaving their heads on the same day. And believe me, it wasn't pretty.'

'Not everyone has a head as beautifully shaped as mine,' the shaven-headed Priesmeyer put in.

'What's she doing back so early, anyway?' Van Dyke asked. 'She flunk out of college?'

'She probably just got bored in Paris. You know Paige,' Brad told him. They both laughed.

Jason opened his mouth to ask what they were talking about. Then Maggie leapt up and slammed the ball straight at him, and Jason forgot all about Sienna's big sister. The game kicked up a notch, and it took all his concentration just to keep up with the fast and furious volleys. By the time the game was over, even the vampires looked beat.

'Attention, attention!' Adam called suddenly. 'As your Surfrider Beach social director, I have an announcement to make. The queen and her court have just arrived.'

'What's he talking about?' Brad asked Jason.

'I'm never really sure,' Jason told him.

'Paige!' Erin shrieked. She and Maggie took off across the sand at a run. Jason turned to see Paige bounding down the steps toward them, with Belle Rémy right on her heels. Sienna followed more slowly, walking with Zach Lafrenière.

'How can I not have my camera for this?' Adam complained, coming up to Jason as the other guys headed