

WILLIAM J. DAVIS



MINE:
ORIGINS

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A NOVEL BY

WILLIAM J. DAVIS

Brazil 1961

Terrified eyes watched from the darkness as footsteps approached through the dirt and leaves. The weathered green door panel of the tent flew open, and Cage stomped in.

“What the hell is it?”

Cage—a tall, muscular, thirty-eight-year-old army vet—took a crooked stance in the center of the operations tent and glared at Petrie, the young radio operator seated at a small desk across the room.

“Sorry, sir,” Petrie, a young, thin, studious-looking man with no hair and reading glasses replied. “I don’t know. He just ran in here and hid under my cot.”

Cage pursed his lips in disgust and bent over. Sure enough, the grown man was tucked under Petrie’s cot like a frightened child.

“Christ Almighty. Get out from under there!”

The man didn’t budge or make a sound.

“Should I get help?” Petrie asked, and Cage scoffed. He stepped over to the cot, reached underneath, and grabbed the man’s leg. The man screamed, then screamed again when Cage drug him to the middle of the room. He tried to crawl his way back, but Cage was too strong.

Cage flipped him over, saw who it was and that his shirt was covered in blood. “Damn, Jackson. What happened to you?”

Jackson rolled over on his belly and tried to crawl away again. “Don’t let ’em get me. Don’t let ’em get me. Don’t let ’em—”

“Hey!” Cage shouted, and pinned him to the ground. “Hold still.”

“Want me to get the doc?” Petrie asked.

“No. Just give me your chair.”

Petrie got up, pushed the chair over, and Cage lifted Jackson by his collar and belt. Jackson—a gangly, long-haired redhead—struggled, but when Cage slammed his skinny body down into the chair, he was more afraid of Cage than what he’d just seen.

“Please, please, please, I have to go. I just want to go home.”

“Sure,” Cage replied. “I’ll get you home as soon as you tell me what happened. Are you injured? You’re covered in blood.”

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“Blood?”

“Yeah . . . blood,” Cage said, and pulled Jackson’s shirt out so he could see.

“Oh Jesus. Did it get me? Did it—?”

Cage slapped him in the face. “Don’t start that again. Tell me what happened. Where’s the rest of the survey team?”

Jackson spit, and blood dripped from his mouth down his chin. “Okay!” Jackson replied, then spit again. He hugged himself, leaned forward, and rocked back and forth. “Me, Todd, and Baxter finished surveying 103, and since it didn’t take that long, Baxter wanted to get a jump on 104. We parked at the creek, grabbed our stuff, and headed in. Jackson’s eyes strayed from Cage to the darkness under the cot.

“Hey!” Cage barked and snapped his fingers in Jackson’s face. “Stay with me.”

We crossed the creek, walked about fifty yards toward one of those giant kapok trees, but I forgot my tape and had to go back. Todd and Baxter kept going, and I started back to the Jeep.” Jackson sighed, took a deep breath, then continued. “As soon as we lost sight of each other, I heard Baxter scream. I turned and looked but couldn’t see what was going on. I dropped my gear and ran over to help, but then I heard Todd

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scream. There was something moving in the jungle, and I froze. Todd fell out of the sky and hit the ground right in front of me, but it was just his top half.”

“What?”

“Just the top half . . . Jesus God . . . it was just his top half . . . blood and organs and . . . Oh Jesus. I ran. I heard them around me.”

“Who?”

“I made it to the creek, and when I got to the other side, there was something hanging from a tree . . . It was Baxter.”

“Somebody hung him?”

“No, no, no, no, no,” Jackson replied, then covered his face and cried.

“Jackson! Goddamn it. Answer me,” Cage shouted, and slapped his head.

Jackson sniveled, wiped the snot on his sleeve, and looked back at Cage.

“So, he was hanging, but he hadn’t been hung . . . What the hell does that mean?”

“He was hung by the arms because he didn’t have a head. His arms were pulled back around the limb, and he looked like he’d been crucified or something.”

“Except his head was gone.” Jackson grabbed Cage’s collar with both hands and pulled him forward.

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“No!” Jackson screamed, then muttered something under his breath.

“What?”

“His head wasn’t missing. They gave it to me! They gave me his head. They gave it to me.”

“They who?” Cage asked, and yanked Jackson’s hands from his shirt.

Jackson sat silent for a moment and looked at the tent flap.

“Jackson! Who?”

“I was looking at Baxter, and I heard something. I turned around, and it was standing on the other side of the creek. It was standing right there!”

“What?”

“It! I don’t know . . . It. It wasn’t human. It was like a monkey, but it was big and stood up like a man.”

Cage sighed and rubbed his eyes. “A big monkey. That’s what you saw?” Cage shook his head. “A big monkey tore a man in half, lopped off another man’s head, and crucified him on a tree branch?”

“It wasn’t a monkey; it was something else. It stood there and looked at me, then pointed down along the bank.”

“It drew a line in the sand? That’s what you’re

saying? That's just great," Cage said, and rubbed the back of his neck.

"Yes! It pointed at the creek and slapped itself on the chest! Then it pointed at the Jeep. I turned to run, but another one was standing right there. It was holding Baxter's head in its hands and shoved it into my chest. It made me take it. I ran to the Jeep and got back here as fast as I could."

Cage thought about it a moment, then stood up. "Let's go."

"What?" Jackson replied.

"There's still enough daylight left. You're gonna show me where all this happened. I want to see it for myself."

"Bullshit! I'm going home."

"You don't go anywhere without my approval, so get in the Jeep."

"No!" Jackson yelled, and tripped as he jumped out of his seat.

Cage walked out of the tent, got the attention of Mills and Parker, two security officers looking at something in Jackson's Jeep, and waved them over.

"Collect Mr. Jackson. The four of us are going for a little ride."

Cage slid into the driver's seat, and the two officers drug Jackson out of the tent. Mills and Parker were

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new hires. Two months ago they were MPs at Fort Bragg and still carried themselves with the same authority. They collected Jackson, threw him in the back seat, and Mills hopped in the back to keep Jackson from jumping out. The other guard hesitated to get in the front seat, and Cage looked at him. He noticed Baxter's head when he got in but looked back at the guard with a puzzled expression. The man just stood there.

Cage sighed, grabbed Baxter's head by the hair, and pitched it out of the car. "Can we go now?"

The man got in, and they drove into the jungle.

Survey sector 104 was at the westernmost end of the two-hundred-mile tract of jungle they were tasked to survey. As the project had just gotten started, base camp was twenty miles away, but in jungle terms, it took some time to get there.

As soon as they reached the creek, Jackson panicked, and the security officer couldn't hold him. He jumped out and ran toward camp.

"Let him go," Cage said as he drew his pistol. "We'll pick him up on the way back."

Cage found the tree where Baxter's body had been. There was blood on the branch and on the ground but no body. They crossed the creek, walked a hundred

yards, but only found blood. On the way back to the Jeep, Cage stopped at the edge of the creek but motioned for the other two men to keep going.

There were two imprints in the dirt at the water's edge. Cage knelt down and took a closer look. They were big enough to be human. The spacing was wide enough to be someone standing there looking at the other side, but the shape was all wrong. The heel, toes, and arch were elongated and out of place. They were strange, but as Cage looked at the tracks, what bothered him most was there were only two. There were no tracks approaching or walking away, just two weird feet where something had stood.

His attention turned to the surface of the water, and he watched the reflections and ripples. Black, green, white, and brown twisted together in irregular patterns until the ripples smoothed. Cage made out the shape of the branches and leaves above. Among them, however, was a dark patch, and he saw it move.

Cage eased the safety off, moved his finger on the trigger, then raised the gun as quick as he could. He looked up but saw nothing. He scanned the trees. Whatever he thought he saw reflected in the water wasn't there. Cage flipped the safety back on, holstered his weapon, and walked back to the Jeep.

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On their way to camp, they came across Jackson, who had run about a mile before exhaustion reduced his speed to a stroll. Cage stopped, and Jackson hopped in the back. They arrived at camp just before dark.

Cage went straight to the operations tent and had Petrie relay a message to their contact in Manaus. The regional agent passed it Stateside, and by the time Cage received a response he was on his way to bed.

Petrie delivered the decoded message, and Cage shook his head. *Collect live specimen for analysis, expert en route.*

“You’ve got to be kidding. Catch it with what?”



Cage woke before dawn, as he had done since childhood on the farm. He had a good night’s sleep despite the events of the previous day. The army put him in enough terrifying situations over the years that a killer monkey attack wouldn’t cause him to lose sleep. As he put on his boots, however, he thought about his orders and realized he didn’t have many options to pull it off.

I don’t even know what I’m trying to catch, Cage thought, and scratched his head. “Killer monkeys? Jesus Christ, I can’t wait to write this field report.”

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Cage met with his security team over chow in the mess tent, the largest of the green canvas tents in camp. The key members of his team were already eating at one of the long folding tables, and Cage took a seat.

“I think Jackson saw a sniper team in a ghillie suit,” Reese, a stocky black soldier, said.

“Amen, brother,” Jones, the tallest man on the team, said. “That guy’s a—”

“It doesn’t matter,” Cage said. “One man’s missing and another lost his head. A sniper didn’t do that, and Baxter didn’t cut off his own head.”

“I don’t know,” Pickett said from the other side of the table, then plucked a kernel of corn from his mustache and flicked it on the dirt floor. “If anyone was clumsy enough to do it, it’d be Baxter.”

Cage sat there while the others laughed, then took a syringe from his shirt pocket and set it on the table.

“The bad news is . . . the lab wants one alive, but since we don’t have a tranquilizer gun or any useful gear, we’ll have to do it by hand.”

“By hand?” Betts said, and Pickett scoffed.

“I know . . . but we’ve got our orders, so listen up. I got this from the doc, and he said there’s enough in this syringe to knock out a horse.”

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“That’s great,” Pickett said, “but we have to get ahold of it first.”

“Greased pig contest,” London, the eldest man on the team, said, and scratched his salt-and-pepper hair. “I love it.”

“I say we use Jackson for bait,” Jones said, then stretched his long arm down the table and grabbed the salt. “He made friends with one already. All we have to do is tie him to a tree, and when the monkey comes down to give him a hug, you jab it in the arm, or is that shot administered in the buttocks?”

The whole team laughed, even Cage.

“You may not be too far off,” Cage said. “But I don’t think we’ll need Jackson. He said the monkey men attacked right after they crossed the creek, so I think we’re the bait.”

“That’s great,” Silver said. “I hate long waits.”

“Since we don’t know exactly what we’re catching, and we don’t have anything to trap it with, I only see one way to do it. We let one of them grab one of us, and everyone dog-piles its hairy ass so I can knock it out. We get it back here before it wakes up and lock it in a Conex container until the lab rats get here.”

“Lab rats?” Betts asked. “They’re coming here?”

“I know. I feel the same way about it. Bottom line, we do our jobs, let them do theirs, and try to stay out of their way.”

“Before I came down here, those sons of bitches tried to stick a—”

“Alright,” Cage said. “That’s enough BS. Gear up, and let’s hit it.”

Dawn offered just enough light to see, and the eight men set off in two Jeeps. When they reached the creek, the sun peeked below the clouds and shimmered off the damp leaves. Thin shafts of light fell through the canopy and disappeared in a fine mist that covered the jungle floor.

The men got out, slapped a clip in their rifles, and lined up along the bank.

“Set a line,” Cage said. “If we get split up, ORP is that kapok tree, but keep the line tight.”

Cage waved his arm, and everyone crossed. When he signaled again, Reese, Jones, and Silver went left; Pickett, Betts, and Landon went right; and Tombs backed up to Cage to watch everyone’s six.

With fifteen feet between them, they moved forward toward the giant tree. Small animals scattered from the jungle in front of them, and most of the birds fluttered away.

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The team came together at the base of the kapok tree, and Tombs lit a smoke.

“Reese is probably right,” Tombs said. “Must have been Colombian military or MTT sniper.” He leaned back against one of the enormous roots and took a long drag. As he exhaled, something hit the ground, shrieked, and raced through the undergrowth ahead of him. Tombs dropped the cigarette and leveled his rifle before the cigarette hit the ground. “Movement,” Tombs said, but the others had heard it as well. They scanned the jungle down their rifle barrels but saw nothing.

Another thud, and something ran off around the tree.

“Circle up,” Cage said. “Let’s backtrack and see if it follows us.”

More movement, but this time it ran straight for them. Reese tracked the shaking leaves and focused on the footsteps as it approached. His grip tightened on the trigger, but he stopped.

“What the fuck?”

A wild pig ran straight into his leg. He lowered his barrel as it entered their circle, and everyone turned to look. Reese laughed, and the jungle exploded with movement. The team opened fire. Gunshots, smoke, and shouting made it hard for them to see and

impossible for them to hear. They felt a thump when something fell from the tree and hit the ground in the middle of the circle.

Silver saw the creature first and raised his barrel, but the creature grabbed it. Silver tried to pull the rifle away but only managed to pull the trigger. The short burst dropped Tombs and Pickett. Pickett fell into Betts, who turned to catch him, and the creature cut Pickett's throat. Two more creatures took advantage of the open flank and killed everyone except Cage.

The largest creature wrapped its arm around Cage's neck and grabbed the rifle with the other. Cage tried to pull free, but the creature was too strong.

The creature turned him around, and Cage saw his team. One of the creatures finished off London, then added London's body to the pile.

My turn to die, Cage thought, but not without a fight. He let the creature take his rifle, but just as he let go, he pulled a pistol with his free hand and pointed it blindly over his shoulder.

The creature let Cage twist free but held his wrist. Cage emptied the clip into the tree. The creature spun him back around and smiled.

Cage dropped the gun, but as the creature watched it fall, Cage sliced it across the chest with his knife. The

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creature roared, grabbed Cage's other arm, and threw him against the trunk of the tree. Cage managed to hold on to the knife, and the creature hissed as Cage got to his feet. Other creatures had gathered, but Cage kept his eyes on just the one.

The creature crouched, bared its teeth, and leapt for him. Cage stabbed, but the creature grabbed his wrist again. This time the creature lifted Cage off the ground with its left hand and pressed its right hand against his chest.

The creature's talon-like claws punctured his shirt and skin. Cage grabbed the creature's forearm and yelled. The creature stared at him, and Cage recognized the look. He wore it many times himself and knew he was done.

Another creature stepped in and put its hand on the attacker's shoulder. They looked at each other, and the second creature held up a finger and pointed toward the Jeeps.

The attacker's eyes rolled back to Cage. It scoffed and squeezed Cage's wrist until the knife dropped. The creature looked at the one that intervened, grinned, and raked its claws across Cage's chest, then let him go.

Cage screamed, dropped to his knees, and clutched his chest. All the creatures moved off into the jungle

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except the one that intervened, and Cage looked up at him. Without the slightest expression, it pointed at the ground, slapped itself on the chest, and pointed toward the Jeeps again.

Cage got to his feet and staggered away.



A week later, Cage was at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in DC with more stitches than the surgeon wanted to count and another set of scars he couldn't talk about. It took six months of rehab for him to recover and six more months of training to be field ready again. The day after he passed his physical, he was on his way south.

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