

BEAR GRYLLS

MISSION SURVIVAL



SANDS OF THE SCORPION

Can Beck
take the heat?

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About the Author
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About the Book

After being forced to parachute out of a smugglers' plane, teenage adventurer Beck Granger is about to face his toughest survival challenge yet - the Sahara Desert.

Blistering sun, shifting sand dunes, and no water for hundreds of miles . . .

Can he survive the heat and make it out alive?

MISSION SURVIVAL

SANDS OF THE SCORPION



RHCP DIGITAL

*To my youngest son, Huckleberry.
Completing the most gorgeous
trio of young musketeers!*

I adore you.

Love

Papa x

CHARACTER PROFILES

Beck Granger

At just thirteen years old, Beck Granger knows more about the art of survival than most military experts learn in a lifetime. When he was young he travelled with his parents to some of the most remote places in the world, from Antarctica to the African Bush, and he picked up many vital survival skills from the remote tribes he met along the way.

Uncle Al

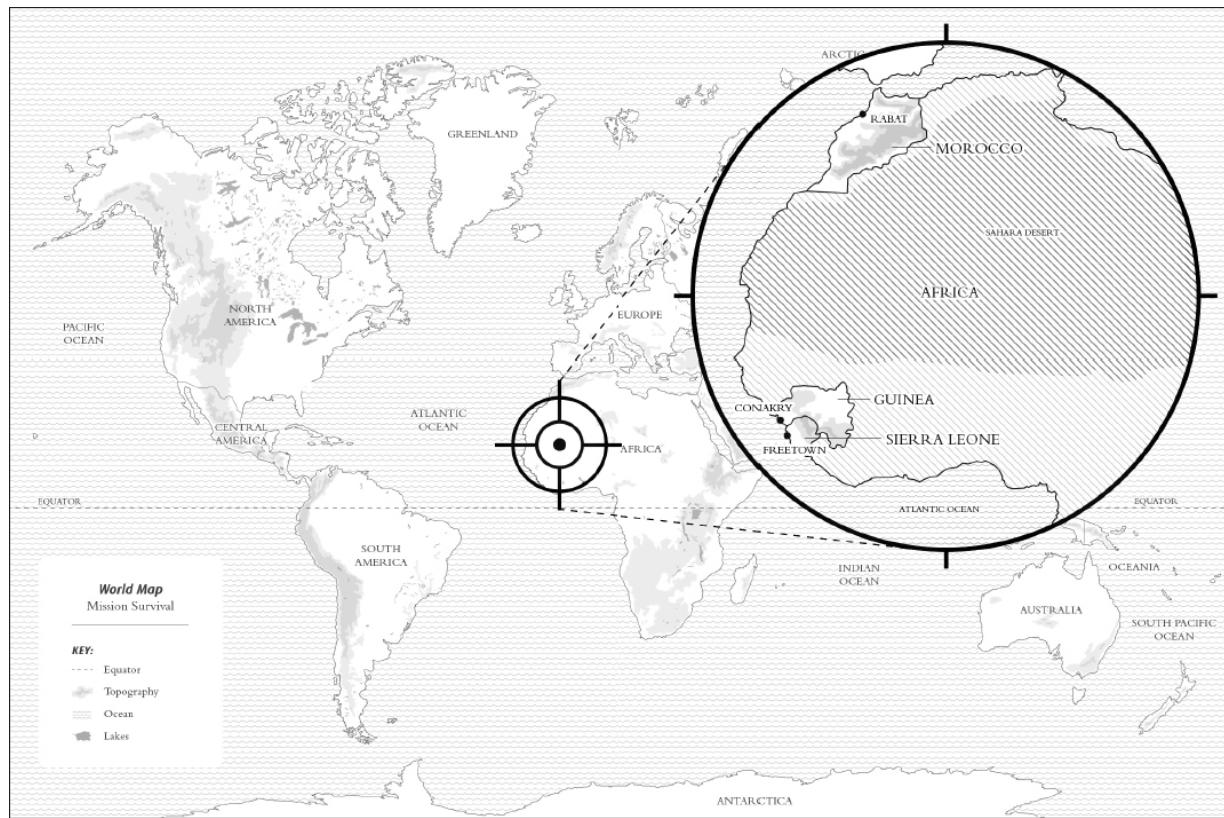
Professor Sir Alan Granger is one of the world's most respected anthropologists. His stint as a judge on a reality television show made him a household name, but to Beck he will always be plain old Uncle Al - more comfortable in his lab with a microscope than hob-nobbing with the rich and famous. He believes that patience is a virtue and has a 'never-say-die' attitude to life. For the past few years he has been acting as guardian to Beck, who has come to think of him as a second father.

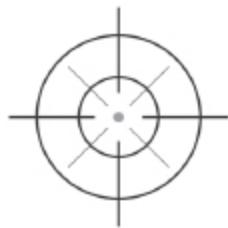
David & Melanie Granger

Beck's mum and dad were Special Operations Directors for the environmental direct action group, Green Force. Together with Beck, they spent time with remote tribes in some of the world's most extreme places. Several years ago their light plane mysteriously crashed in the jungle. Their bodies were never found and the cause of the accident remains unknown . . .

Peter Grey

Beck's best friend from school may not be much to look at, but his small and slim figure belies a boy who is brave, determined and only occasionally stubborn. Having known Beck for many years, the two have a firm bond in spite of their constant bickering. He is rarely to be seen without his pride and joy - the digital camera he got for his birthday.





CHAPTER 1

The wheels of the plane thumped down on the runway tarmac. Beck Granger lurched forward in his seat as the brakes bit. The plane shook and its engines roared in reverse. Then abruptly the sound died down and he could sit back again while it turned and trundled onto the taxiway.

Beck breathed out quietly. After his recent adventures in Alaska, air travel still made him more nervous than it should.

Across the aisle his Uncle Al smiled and raised an eyebrow. He knew exactly what was going through Beck's mind. The same crash that had made Beck so nervous had almost killed *him* as well. Beck met his eyes and raised an eyebrow in return.

His friend Peter Grey sat in the window seat on his left. They had pulled the blind down over the window to block out the bright sun during the flight.

'Hey, let's see!'

Peter had flipped up the blind before Beck could stop him. The harsh light of Sierra Leone flooded into the cabin.

'Aargh!'

Peter pulled the blind back down quickly, then flashed a bashful grin at Beck. His eyes were wide behind his round glasses. 'Well, we're here!'

'Yup,' Beck agreed.

'Hold on . . .'

Peter opened his bag and rummaged around in it. Beck rolled his eyes as his friend emerged with his pride and joy, the top-of-the-range digital camera he had got for his birthday. It took photos and filmed video equally well. Peter cautiously pushed the blind up again, not so far this time, and pressed the camera against the window.

'Look, Mummy,' Beck said in a high, breathless voice, 'I took a photo of yet another airport terminal and it looked exactly like every other airport terminal I've ever been to!'

'You're just jealous,' Peter said loftily. He slid the camera into a pouch that was clipped to his belt.

Beck smiled.

They had always bickered. Peter was Beck's oldest friend from school; he was small and slim and looked as though, if the wind blew hard, it might knock him over.

That was probably why older boys had tried to pick on him during their first days at school together. A group of teenage bullies twice Peter's size had tried to make him hand over the money in his pocket. They had expected him to be a pushover. What they hadn't expected was that Peter would just say no. He didn't cower. He didn't run away. He didn't fight back. He just refused, and kept on refusing. He simply would not be frightened by the group crowding round him.

Beck had watched in fascination, ready to intervene on Peter's side if it got violent. It became even more fascinating when he worked out what was going on. After five minutes of attempted intimidation he had realized that Peter was playing with them. He had got them to a point where they were telling him what they needed the money for. They had stopped trying to frighten him. Now he was just showing them up as the morons they were, and they were too dim to understand it.

More and more boys had gathered round to watch. Finally the bullies realized, in the dim recesses of their tiny minds, that half the junior school were laughing at them. They left Peter alone after that.

Peter didn't look much, but Beck recognized that he was brave and determined - and sometimes simply stubborn.

The plane had now come to a standstill and the cabin doors were opened. Warm, humid air flooded in to do battle with the plane's air conditioning. The forty-odd passengers

clambered to their feet, picked up their bags and shuffled out into the equatorial sunshine.

* * *

The three of them - Beck, Peter and Al, or Professor Sir Alan Granger as he was better known - had flown from London to Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital. Then they had boarded this smaller plane to fly up country, near to the border with Guinea.

Al was attending a conference on African tribal peoples. They used traditional methods of sustenance that had kept their societies going for thousands of years. The western world had all but forgotten how to farm sustainably. The purpose of the conference was to see what could be learned from these ancient methods.

Al had taken Beck, of course, because he took Beck everywhere. After Beck's parents had disappeared in that fatal plane crash when he was so young, Al had taken the boy in and raised him like a son.

As for Peter, his parents had recently had another baby. He referred to his new little sister as 'The Bundle'. Beck knew he kept a photo of the baby in his wallet, so he was probably much fonder of her than he let on.

'The Bundle' had been born prematurely and was still quite weak, so the Greys hadn't been able to take their usual summer holiday this year. Peter's parents were advised not to do any travelling with her for the time being. So Beck had invited Peter along on this trip too - he would enjoy the company while Al was ensconced in the conference centre and talking to tribal leaders.

After that, the three of them planned to travel up to Morocco for a real holiday.

* * *

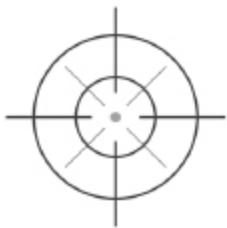
It wasn't a big modern airport. There was no tunnel from the plane to take them straight into the terminal. They had

to walk down some steps and head out across the tarmac, squinting in the sunlight.

It was the first time they had spent any time outdoors since leaving London. Beck took a deep breath of African air. A hot, dry wind blew on his face. It came from the northeast. He worked out the direction by pointing the hour hand of his watch at the sun: halfway between that and twelve o'clock would be south. They were still in the northern hemisphere, he remembered; the direction-finding technique would be accurate. Beck realized that the wind came from the Sahara, only a few hundred miles away.

The Sahara covered a quarter of the African continent. It was vast – almost as big as all of the USA. The air Beck was breathing had blown across some of the driest land on the planet. It was cooling down now that it had reached the savannah of Sierra Leone's border country, but it still carried a harsh message. It warned that there was a large part of the continent where only the very foolish or the very brave would venture. Or, Beck thought, the very wise – the ones who really knew how to survive there. People like the Berbers, the Tuareg, the Bedouin, who lived and breathed the desert life as naturally as Beck would cross the road back home.

Well, the closest Beck planned to come to the Sahara was when they flew over it en route to Morocco.



CHAPTER TWO

Peter stumbled into Beck. 'Oops! Sorry!'

He had his camera out again and was panning it around the airport. He had been walking backwards and hadn't seen Beck standing there.

'Just taking some pics of the plane,' he added, by way of explanation.

Beck grinned and looked back. 'Yeah, well, it got us here. That's all I really ask a plane to do.'

Peter suddenly flushed red. 'Hey, I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking.'

Beck frowned. 'Huh?'

'I mean, you and' – Peter gestured – 'planes. You know . . .'

Beck smiled knowingly. Peter was referring to his recent Alaskan adventure, which had started with a plane crash. After that it had turned into a trek that included fording a freezing river, crawling over an icy crevasse in a glacier, and spending the night in a snow hole in the mountains while a blizzard raged outside and tried to kill him.

The enquiry into the crash had put it down to failure of the plane's single engine.

'I'm fine with planes,' he insisted – but couldn't resist adding, 'as long as they've got more than one engine. I count 'em carefully before I get on nowadays.'

Peter wasn't quite sure how he was meant to react to that, but when he saw Beck grinning, he relaxed into a laugh.

They collected their bags and emerged into the chaos of the town.

A battered old shuttle bus carried them to their hotel. Beck reckoned it was at least as old as he was: splits in the seats were covered up with rough tape and it lurched from

side to side as the driver navigated the traffic, one hand permanently clamped down on the horn. Judging by the din, every other driver seemed to take the same approach.

The roads were packed – mostly with equally battered trucks and lorries, and the occasional gleaming new Jeep or Land Cruiser. This was a culture where, if you had wealth, it was obvious. And there were taxis, hundreds of them, threading their way between the other cars with suicidal ease. Every driver seemed to regard other road users as potential enemies.

There was no air con. The windows were wide open and the spicy, dry air blew through the cabin. It couldn't quite get rid of the smell of stuffy, hot vehicle.

Beck loved it. What was the point of being abroad, he often thought, if you tried to make it exactly like home? The only way to enjoy a town in Africa was to treat it like a town in Africa. Just soak it all in.

He glanced over at Peter and wondered what he made of it. His friend had never been outside Europe before. He chuckled to himself. Peter, of course, was leaning out of the window with his camera pressed to his eye. He seemed to be loving it.

* * *

'Hey! A fan!'

It was the first thing Peter said when they stepped into their hotel room. A large three-bladed ceiling fan hummed lazily in the warm air. The room had twin beds and a bathroom off to one side. Gauze curtains billowed gently in the open windows. They filtered the harsh sunlight and helped keep out the insects.

'And a minibar!' Peter checked the cabinet and his face only fell a little. 'Locked.' He ran over to the windows and found a door out to the balcony. He fought his way past the curtains. 'Cool – and a *swimming pool!*'

Beck still hadn't got further than the door. 'And a friend left with both suitcases . . .' he muttered quietly.

He lugged the cases into the room and dropped his own on the bed nearest the window. If Peter wasn't going to make his own choice, he decided, then *he* would.

There was a simple room-service menu on the table between the two beds. Beck picked it up and scanned it quickly. 'No, sorry,' he called. 'This just won't do. We're moving.'

Peter was back inside in a flash. 'We've got to move?' he asked in surprise.

Beck brandished the menu. 'You know there's not a single insect on this? It won't be a holiday without some sort of survival food,' he said with a deadpan expression.

It took Peter a moment to work out he was being wound up. He loved hearing about everything Beck had had to eat on his Alaskan adventure. 'Oh, ha ha! But, c'mon. Look at the pool!'

Beck let his friend pull him out onto the balcony to look at a grassy lawn ringed with weary-looking palm trees and a swimming pool nestled in the middle. It sparkled with clear blue water. The din of the town was blocked out by the bulk of the building. The garden was peaceful, and the pool looked cool and inviting.

'OK,' he agreed. 'Last one in's a sissy . . .'

* * *

'Beck, Peter,' said Al, raising his voice slightly over the restaurant's background chatter, 'this is our hostess, Mrs Chalobah.'

The open-air restaurant was in an adjacent courtyard. The air was pleasantly cool at this time of day. Candles burned on the tables to ward off insects, and the smells of spicy food drifted on the breeze. The bow-tied waiter had led them through the tables to where Mrs Chalobah, the conference organizer, was already seated. Although Beck

had heard plenty about this lady, he had never met her. Now she rose to greet them. She wore brightly coloured robes and headdress and a huge beam on her face.

‘Alan! So good to see you!’

Mrs Chalobah kissed Al on both cheeks, and then turned her wide African smile onto the two boys. They shifted slightly uncomfortably: Al had made them dress up in jackets and ties. Beck hoped that it was the only time he would have to wear them on the entire holiday.

‘My, two such handsome young men! Here, sit down. Tell me all about your journey . . .’

If she had asked Beck, he would have said something simple like ‘Fine, thank you. We got on an aeroplane and we flew to Freetown.’ He had met adults who were able to chat endlessly about nothing but he had never mastered the art.

But she had been looking at Peter. Peter could describe the flight from Heathrow as if it was the first flight ever from London to Sierra Leone. He talked, and she encouraged him along with smiles and nods. Beck and Al exchanged looks. Al winked. Beck was warming to Mrs Chalobah.

Then he heard Peter’s innocent question:

‘Is Mr Chalobah coming tonight?’

Beck saw his uncle wince and guessed it was not the question to ask. Mrs Chalobah’s cheerful expression faltered a little.

‘Mr Chalobah will not be joining us.’ She said it with a simple, sad dignity. Even Peter noticed that there was more to be said – she was just finding the right words. He kept quiet and let her continue at her own pace.

‘One of the many problems our country faces is that there are people who would take its wealth to use for their own ends. My husband believed that the money from our diamond industry should be used to bring benefit to Sierra Leone. We are a developing country and that development