Helping your children choose books they will love



Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

Adam and the Arkonauts

written by

Dominic Barker

published by

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

CHAPTER 1

'Land ho!' cried Adam.

The *Ark of the Parabola*, the fastest yacht in the sea, skimmed over the waves in the fresh wind.

Doctor Forest looked quizzically up from his book. This was the third time Adam had claimed that he could see land. Both previous sightings had turned out to be big waves in the distance.

But this time there was no mistaking it. The Doctor stood up and Adam, one hand still on the helm, passed him the telescope. Scanning the coastline, he saw a harbour and, behind the wharf, rising steeply, the white houses that lined the streets of Buenos Sueños, the most isolated city in the world. And in the far distance lay the reason for its isolation: Los Puntos Afilados, lower than the Himalayas, less extensive than the Alps but filled with more treacherous avalanches and crevasses than any other mountain range in the world. No climber had ever returned from one of its icy peaks. And so a self-governing city had grown up,

cut off from the rest of the world.

'How did Mum get here?' Adam wondered.

The Doctor was asking himself the same question. But he was not prepared to admit it to his son. He had searched for his wife for ten long years, diligently following up any reported sighting, exhausting every lead. Along the way, he and Adam had visited cities and towns on every continent and during the time spent at sea, sailing from one place to the next, he had perfected his research. Now he and his thirteen-year-old son could communicate with almost every kind of animal, and some of the animals they had met on their journey had joined their boat, determined to see the world for themselves. These animals were the Arkonauts. Thanks to the Doctor's teaching, most of them could even understand the language humans spoke. But important as this work was, it would always take second place to Doctor Forest's primary objective: finding Lily.

'The telegram from the Mayor I received in Istanbul was quite clear,' he told Adam. 'Your mother left him a message.'

'What was it?'

'He refused to say,' the Doctor replied. 'He insisted that if I wanted to know, I must come in person.'

'Do you think it could be a trap?' said Adam.

'We will not judge until we get there,' his father said firmly. 'Groundless speculation is the enemy of science.'

'Why do you think Scabellax has never contacted you?'

asked Adam. 'Do you think he's discovered how to talk to animals by himself?'

'We are not going to think about that,' said the Doctor firmly.

He was angry at Adam for reminding him of his own terrible fear: that Scabellax, too, had cracked the code and therefore no longer needed the Doctor's wife as a hostage. But to think that way was to risk giving into despair.

'But what if –' Adam began.

'I said we are not going to speculate,' repeated the Doctor firmly.

Adam sighed. His father was probably right about speculation. Maybe it didn't help. But Adam couldn't stop himself wondering about things he had no way of knowing . . . wondering about his mother, snatched away from him by Professor Silus Scabellax when he was only three years old.

Adam could not remember her. Now he was thirteen and he felt as though his whole life had been spent trying to find something he had never known. Sometimes when he closed his eyes in his cabin at night, he felt that he was so close to remembering her, but she remained tantalisingly out of reach, just beyond the edge of his memory.

The *Ark of the Parabola* was touching twenty knots. Soon they would begin their approach into the harbour.

'I think you should take us in,' said the Doctor.

'Me?' said Adam, looking at the jam of boats bobbing in and out of the harbour.

'You're ready,' his father replied.

Adam was far from sure he was ready. It was one thing navigating the *Ark* on the open sea, when there was an empty blue vastness in front of him and nothing to crash into, quite another to steer it through the chaotic port of Buenos Sueños.

The Doctor seemed to sense what Adam was feeling.

'Don't worry,' he said. 'Much of the chaos will resolve itself into patterns the closer we get to it.'

Adam knew better than to argue with his father. If it can be done, his father always said, then with enough practice and patience we can do it too. He said things like that with great confidence – a confidence that Adam rarely felt. He wondered, yet again, if he took after his mother more than his father. He gripped the helm tightly.

Behind him, out of the hatch which led down into the living quarters, emerged a monkey. It looked at Adam controlling the wheel, shook its head, then loped along the deck, chattering anxiously before tugging at the Doctor's sleeve.

'What is it, Simia?'

The monkey pointed at Adam and jabbered in a series of high-pitched shouts and yelps.

At least that's how it could have sounded to anybody else's ears. The Doctor and Adam, both being fluent in the monkey's language, heard, 'I can't believe you're letting him steer. Don't you remember what happened last time?'

The Doctor replied, yelping and chattering back in the monkey's language. Listening, Simia thought that, however hard he tried, the Doctor would never get his accent quite right. He sounded much more like he was speaking baboon. But apart from that, his yelps made sense.

'Adam is ready, Simia, he just needs practice.'

'He nearly crashed. Right into the Governor's yacht in Jamaica. What trouble that would have caused! Lots and lots of trouble.'

'That was ages ago,' yelped Adam indignantly.

Simia had to admit to herself that Adam's accent was perfect. But then, he'd been brought up learning both monkey and human language. Still, she was in no mood to praise his accent.

'Tch!' Simia turned to the Doctor. 'He is a very, very, very stupid boy.'

'Don't call me very, very, very stupid,' Adam said. 'Just stupid would do.'

'Let me steer like always,' the monkey pleaded.

'He needs to learn, Simia,' the Doctor said.

'What kind of coordination do you humans have, tch? Can you swing from branch to branch? No. Yet another thing you lost when you decided to leave the trees and walk on the land. Tch!'

'But –' began the Doctor.

'When I think of how I had to rescue you all those years ago,' continued Simia. 'Perfectly good tree to escape up but

you couldn't climb it because of all this clever evolving you'd been doing.'

The Doctor had spent ten years being reminded by Simia that she had saved his life, and all the more often since he'd explained to her Darwin's theory of evolution and the survival of the fittest. Simia had interpreted the whole concept as a gigantic insult to monkey-kind.

'Chill out, girlfriend,' said a long, slow, smooth voice. Malibu, the ship's cat, had woken up.

He had joined them in California, having previously lived the pampered life of a film-star pet, only to be thrown into the streets of Hollywood when his breed stopped being fashionable. He stretched himself out in the early-morning sun.

Simia scratched her head in irritation.

'This is nothing to do with you, cat,' she said. 'Nothing at all.'

'Morning, Doc,' purred Malibu, showing no interest in the monkey's concerns.

'Good morning, Malibu,' said the doctor, bending down to tickle him behind the ears.

Sensing that she was not going to get her way, Simia stomped off to the rail, muttering darkly.

'I don't want to attract attention to us yet,' the Doctor called to the retreating monkey. 'And nothing attracts attention like having your boat steered by a monkey.'

They were now on the final approach to the port of Buenos Sueños. Fishing vessels seemed to be all around them

and he could hear the unconcerned shouts of the anglers on either side.

'Hola!'

'Ciao!'

A fishing smack sailed so close that Adam heard the crack of the wind in its sails. Once past the harbour wall Adam knew that there would be calm water and easy sailing. But before that he had to negotiate the bottleneck of boats that had jammed together at the entrance to the harbour. He gripped the wheel tightly.

'Just keep a steady course,' counselled the Doctor.

The shouts of the sailors mixed with those coming from people on the wharf and the cries of the seagulls overhead who followed the boats, hoping for any of the catch that was rejected. There were boats behind the *Ark*, in front of the *Ark* and on both sides of the *Ark*. One veered suddenly towards them, its skipper distracted by a swinging rope. Adam wanted to steer the other way. Moments later he was glad he hadn't, as another boat nearby tacked round unexpectedly when a fisherman discovered he'd forgotten his lunch. Another boat shot right in front of them.

'Don't panic,' said the Doctor calmly. 'A man who panics is lost.'

Adam didn't want to panic. He wanted to shut his eyes and open them again when they were in the calm blue water of the harbour – but this would be to rely on fate, which, according to the Doctor, was even worse than panicking. The

boat in front got closer and closer and closer, and then, with an expert flick of the rudder, the fisherman took it safely past.

'Muy bien, chico,' he shouted across to Adam.

Adam's faith in his ability was growing. He kept his eyes open and his course steady and, following one final gust of wind, the *Ark of the Parabola* surged triumphantly into the harbour.

Simia tutted. 'Beginners' luck.'

'Remember to breathe, Adam,' said the Doctor.

Embarrassed, Adam took a huge gulp of air.

'I didn't think they were ever going to get out of the way,' he said.

'Of course they were going to,' his father remarked. 'The interesting thing to observe from a scientific point of view was how.'

Adam was more interested in the way his heart was beating like it wanted to force its way out of his chest and the way he felt dizzy with the success, but he knew better than to say so. His father would have dismissed this as putting sensation over science, and if there was anything he despised more than giving into fate, it was overemphasising sensation.

'Right,' said the Doctor. 'Let us find a discreet berth where we can keep the Arkonauts as far as possible from the gaze of prying eyes. And Simia, I'm afraid you'll have to retire below for a little while.'

At these words the monkey picked a flea out of her fur,

ate it and then loped across the deck to the hatch and disappeared down below.

'Right,' said the Doctor. 'Let us go and see the Mayor of Buenos Sueños.'