

Taz Tries for the ToP



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Illustrated by Ned Delaney



Layers of the Rainforest

1. Emergent layer

2. Canopy

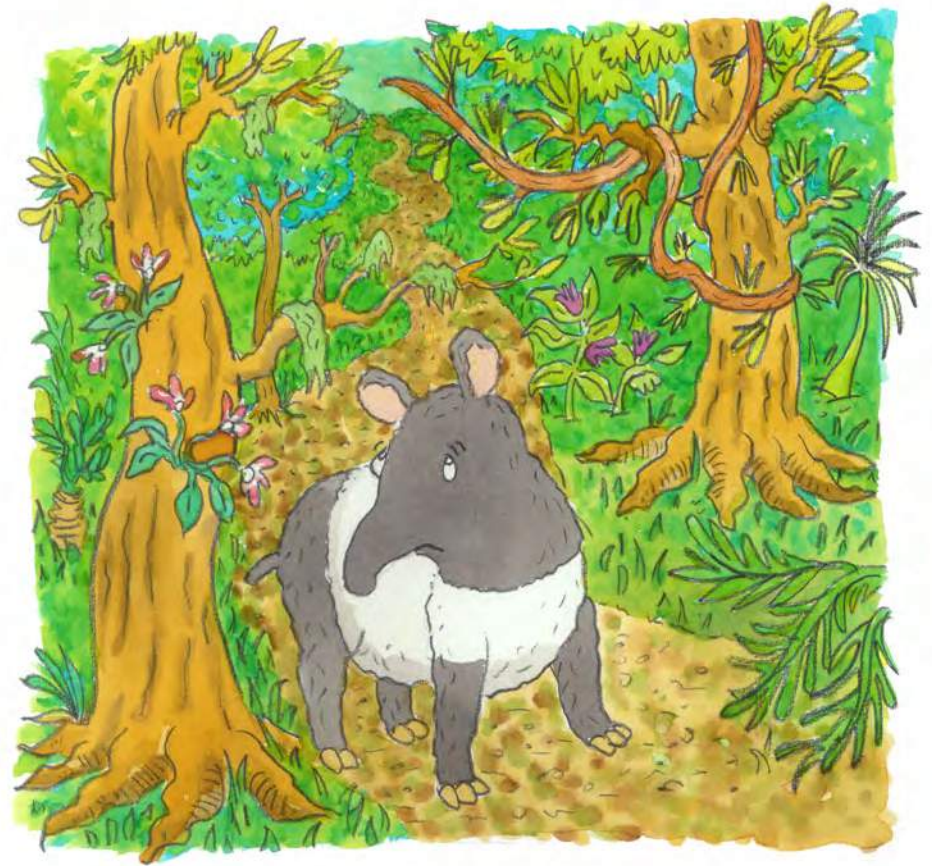
3. Understorey

4. Forest floor

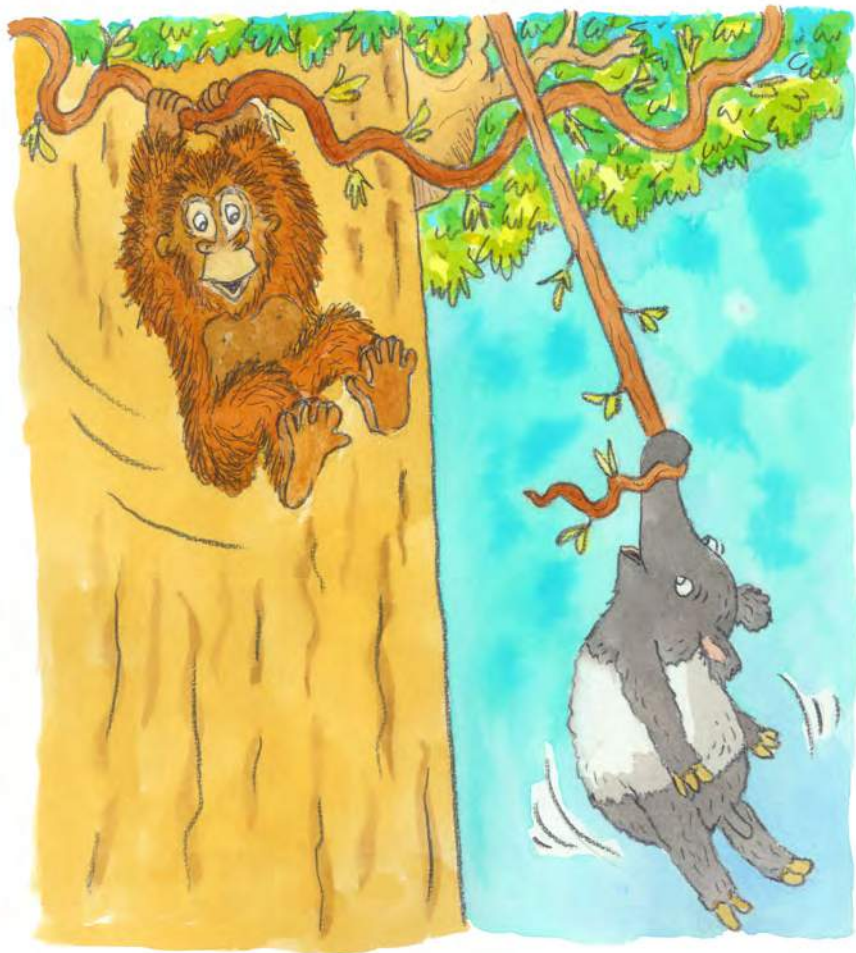
5. Buttress roots



Taz snacked mostly at night, his Oreó body blending into pieces of moonlight that fell through the canopy. His favorite foods were berries and young shoots hidden among the gnarly roots that spread like hiccupps along the mossy ground.



Every day, he looked up in search of the sun. He saw vines. He saw tree trunks with goosebumps made from lichens and orchids. He saw the broad leaves woven into a giant placemat for the sky. But he never saw the sun.



Swinging from a thick vine, Ogdon Orangutan called down, "Hey, Taz."

"Ogie, I'm going for the top but I'm hanging on by a nose," explained Taz.

"Jump up, my friend," urged Ogie.

Taz grabbed the orangutan's long, strong and very orange arm.



The hornbill worked his broad wings furiously like a still hummingbird and shouted down, "Jump up my friend. Climb aboard and I will take you to my home in the sky."



Taz's legs were tired and trembling. Little reserve was left in the tapir tank. Taz bristled his hair, wrinkled his nose, and took a deep breath and leapt onto Hal's back.



"Oomph," Hal groaned.
The tapir torpedo sunk the duo, plunging them downward.

The tapir's head popped through the dense, leafy screen. The warmth of the sun washed over him.



"At last," he exhaled, "I'm at the top."



Taz gazed around, expecting to be dazzled as he had always dreamed. Instead, he was smothered by grayness and ragged patches of charcoal clouds. His spirit collapsed in crushing disappointment. Just then, a cleansing gust of hot air blew away the muddy clear of all smudges...

Taz wondered aloud, “Now, how do I get down?”

