

**MARGARITA STEINHARDT**



Back at the cabins, as we wistfully scan the Leven River for any signs of the resident

The contagious devil facial tumour disease (DFTD) first appeared in 1996 and, within five years, wiped out more than 80 per cent of the affected Tasmanian devil populations. Two decades later, the scientists discovered the devils were affected by a second contagious cancer, escalating fears of their imminent extinction. Genetic research published last year revealed they were rapidly evolving resistance; natural immunity to DFTD gives the devils a decent chance for a brighter future.

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After sunset, we resume our silent watch. The stage is set with the moon concealed behind the clouds and a light breeze. We watch pademelons, quolls and brushtail possums pass the window and then suddenly a young Tasmanian devil is in front of us as if materialised out of thin air. Its neat black coat is speckled with raindrops; its cheeky face shows no signs of tumours. Not as brazen as the quoll, it pauses, head held high, and listens to the sounds of the night. Finally satisfied, it steps fully into the light, snatches a piece of chicken and vanishes into the darkness.

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