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Opening extract from

Frozen Fish Fingers

Written by

Jason Beresford

Illustrated by

Vicky Barter

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To my little brother Andy, all 6'2" of him.

GARY, BEL, RUBY AND MORRIS
USED TO BE ORDINARY KIDS, LIVING ORDINARY LIVES ON FISH STREET...

The only extraordinary thing about them was the extraordinary number of donuts Morris could eat without getting a tummy ache.



But then they met an elf.
And that elf turned them into
SECRET SUPERHEROES.

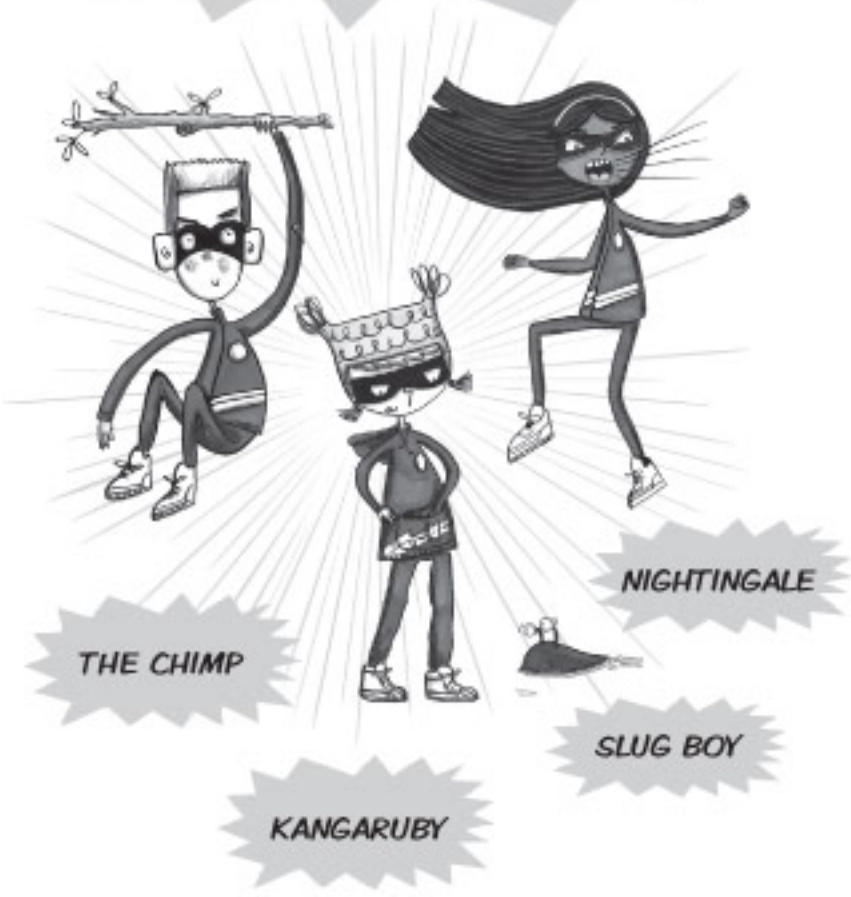
Now in times of trouble,
Gary Gamble becomes ***THE CHIMP***, with the springy agility of a chimpanzee.
Bel Singh, AKA ***NIGHTINGALE***, flies and sings with a voice so powerful it shakes the trees.
Ruby Rudd is ***KANGARUBY***, who bounces like a kangaroo and has a magic pocket.
And Morris Tweddle becomes ***SLUG BOY*** who . . . er, shrinks to the size of a sausage and wobbles about a bit.
They've vowed to help:

WHOEVER THEY CAN.
WHEREVER THEY CAN.
WHENEVER THEY CAN.

(Unless it's getting a bit late because they might have to go home for their tea.)
Their superpowers only last for ***an hour*** but when the four friends come to the rescue they are totally fabulous.

In Fact, they are . . .

THE FABULOUS FOUR FISH FINGERS



PRELUDE...

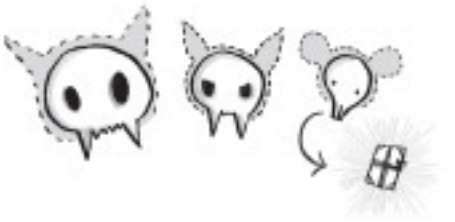
BLAST FROM THE PAST

Crouching inside a tunnel in the depths of Castle Gristle, Dr Ernest Grubski was sawing through an ancient pipe. Grubski was Transyldovia's maddest scientist. His eyes were goggly, his teeth were missing and his hair grew like the roots of a spring onion. He was never going to win Transyldovia's Mr Drop Dead Gorgeous competition, but he was clever. Dangerously clever. He was the kind of scientist who could put lightning in a jam jar, or make a bomb out of cheese or think of fifty-seven ways to kill a slug (all of them squishy and revolting).

Grubski didn't like being in the tunnels – he much preferred his lab – but he was determined to answer a question that had been troubling him for months: *Why did his en-suite bathroom keep flooding?* Grubski had followed the pipework to this spot and figured it must be the source of the blockage. He gave the saw an extra heave-ho and the pipe split apart, spilling filthy water over his shoes.

'*Yuuuggghh*,' groaned the scientist but then

something else dropped out of the pipework. Grubski caught it and held it up to the light.



It was the skull of a cat.

Inside was the skull of a bat.

Inside that was the skull of a rat.

Inside that was a tiny book, wrapped in wax paper, inscribed with the name *Vladi the Baddie*.

It was a good job Grubski could do basic plumbing or he'd never have found it.

The scientist's blood raced. He knew immediately that he was staring at a priceless treasure. 'I've found the unholy grail!' he whispered. He'd heard rumours about Vladi's diary for years, but never dreamed he would hold it in his hands. Three centuries before, Vladi the Baddie had ruled Transyldovia with an iron fist, a black heart and pointy teeth. He was cruel and bloodthirsty. Some said he was a wizard. Others claimed he was a vampire. A few said he was a Sagittarius. Whatever the truth, Grubski felt sure this book would teach him the secrets of Vladi's power.

Grubski dashed back to the lab, switched on a

reading lamp and settled into a chair, anxious to read the diary in peace. He was about to open the book when his computer beep-beep-beeped. A robotic voice said, 'This is a reminder. Fix the toilet. Follow the pipework. Locate the blockage . . .'

'I've already done it,' said Grubski, getting up to turn the computer off. It seemed to be stuck.

'This is a reminder. Fix the toilet. . .'

'I said I've done it!' snapped Grubski, pressing the keypad.

'. . . follow the pipework. Locate . . .'

'SHUUUUUT UPP!' yelled Grubski, yanking out the plug.

'No need to be nasty,' said the machine. 'I was only saying, fix the toilet, follow the pipework, locate . . .'

Grubski grabbed the hammer he kept for emergencies and bashed the computer as hard as he could. It didn't remind him of anything after that. Although it did mutter something about 'unreasonable working conditions' whenever he was in earshot.

Grubski hurried back to his chair and was just getting comfy when he was interrupted again. A screechy version of the Transyldovian national anthem (*Transyldovia, There's Snow All Over Ya*) sang out from his pocket. His evil twin, who was even more evil than Grubski, was ringing his mobile.

Grubski fumbled for the answer button.

'Have you fixed the bathroom yet?' asked his twin.

'I'm busy at the moment,' said Grubski.

'You've been saying that for months. Do it now!'

'If you must know I . . .' But Grubski's twin had already hung up.

The doctor scowled, turned his phone off and shoved it under a cushion for good measure. *Peace at last*, he thought as he opened the book. Then his landline rang. He'd forgotten he even had one. Twitching like a man with porcupines in his pyjamas, Grubski stomped across the room and snatched up the receiver. 'WHAT!' he yelled.

A cheerful girl said, 'Hello! Have you thought about switching your electricity supplier? We have great deals on gas too! Windows, car . . . '

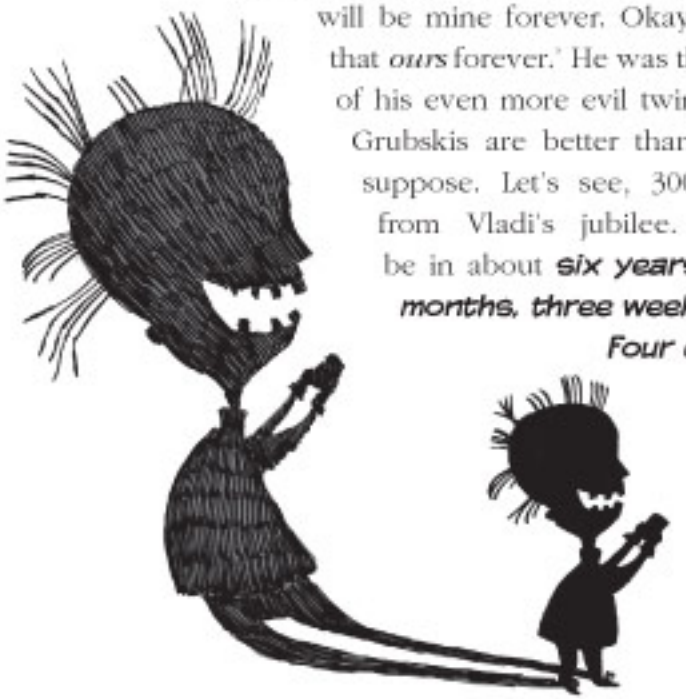
'YAAAAAAAAAAGGGGGGGGGGGGH#####!' screamed the doctor, using his emergency hammer again.

The scientist counted to ten, then, finally, he started to read the diary. Written in Vladi's own hand, it contained the details of innocent people he'd tortured, enemies he'd bumped off and even a few recipes. There was also an old sock in between two pages that he must have used as a bookmark. And then, on the last page, Grubski spotted something very, very interesting. It was a

prophecy. His eyes grew even gogglier as he read the first lines:

300 years from my jubilee
Sniff out a vampire under a treee
Get a class of kids from over the foam . . .

He laughed as he examined the rest of the prophecy. 'HE CAN'T SPELL TREE BUT APART FROM THAT, THE MAN WAS A GENIUS!' Grubski shouted out loud. 'This prophecy is the key to everlasting power in Transyldovia. I only have to follow Vladi's instructions and the presidential palace will be mine forever. Okay, make that *ours* forever.' He was thinking of his even more evil twin. 'Two Grubskis are better than one I suppose. Let's see, 300 years from Vladi's jubilee. That'll be in about ***six years, four months, three weeks and four days***.'



Six years, four months, two weeks and four days later . . .

YULE BE SORRY

It was only the beginning of December, but the queue still stretched right down Fish Street to the old supermarket car park, where a shed decked with fairy lights was standing in a forest of plastic trees and fake snow.

Shivering under a sign that read *Santa's Grotto*, little Lucy Cotton was next to go in.

'It's so exciting!' she whispered to her grandad, who held her tightly by the hand.

'Not long now, Luce,' said her grandad.

A voice shouted, '***NEXT!*** and the Cottons stepped inside, ready to gasp in amazement . . .

Instead, they found the grottiest grotto they'd ever seen. Tatty tinsel hung from the ceiling, a Christmas tree with no branches drooped in a bucket and a fat cat in plastic antlers was snoring on the back seat of a sleigh.

'Merry, er, thingy,' growled a man who looked like Santa, but smelled like those slimy green things everyone throws out of their hamburgers.

The Cottons had stumbled into the lair of Father Xxxmas, the fake Santa with maggots in his beard.

'Hello, Santa,' said Lucy brightly, not realising she was face to face with one of Tumchester's nastiest supervillains.

'I ain't got time to listen to your wish list,' said Father Xxxmas. 'Send me a text or an email or something. Take a present from the sack and off you go.'

He stood up and a shower of maggots dropped from his beard on to the floor. Lucy thought they must be snowflakes.

Then Father Xxxmas shook Lucy's grandad by the hand. 'You'll find a maze out the back. Kids love it. Merry – you know, whatever it is,' and he shoved both his visitors though the back door.

'NOW LOOK HERE! shouted Lucy's grandad, but the door was now locked and outside they found dozens of other dissatisfied customers, searching for the exit in the plastic trees.

'Santa wasn't as nice as I thought he'd be,' said Lucy. 'But at least I got a present.' Excitedly she unwrapped her parcel . . . only to find a box of toenail clippings. As Lucy began to cry, a boy came over.

'You were lucky,' he said. 'I got a dead fly. And my brother got a snotty tissue full of bogies.'

Another girl said, 'I got some rabbit droppings. Santa must be running out of toys. And magic.'

While the grown-ups tried to comfort their sobbing children, Father Xxxmas chuckled to himself and checked his new watch. (He'd stolen it from Lucy's grandad when they shook hands).

'Looks like it's time to go!' he sniggered.

Then he tossed the watch into a huge sack full of wedding rings, necklaces, earrings, mobile phones and wallets that he'd also pilfered that day. He gave the maggots in his beard a tickle and climbed into his sleigh.

Father Xxxmas's sleigh was the only thing about him that wasn't cheap and nasty. Instead of being pulled by reindeer, it had a flying motorbike on the front and it was speedier than Tumchester's fastest police car.

Xxxmas was just putting his crash helmet on when the grotto door swung open.

In stepped The Chimp, Nightingale, KangaRuby and Slug Boy. To be honest, Slug Boy didn't do any stepping – the others did that since they had all the legs. Slug Boy just sat squelchily in the clear, plastic Slugmobile that hung from Nightingale's wrist.