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Opening extract from

The Deadly Seven

Written by

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'Seven Nation Army', written by Jack White. Originally performed by the White Stripes for the album *Elephant* © 2003.

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WARNING:

Before you begin reading this book I must offer you a word of warning.

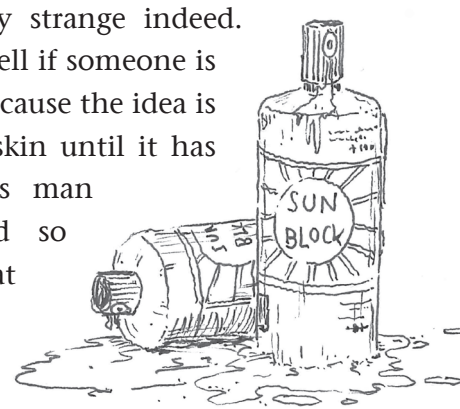
You know there will be monsters, you've already seen their ridiculous faces on the cover, but they are not the only monsters in this story. You will soon discover there are other creatures lurking within these pages that are so creepy, ghoulish and downright weird they might well put you off your dinner tonight, especially if you are eating fish.

But that's not all. Along with travelling to peculiar places, learning extraordinary secrets and witnessing some very silly behaviour, there will also be moments that might well scare you right out of your pants, which is why I strongly advise that you read this book with a spare pair of pants close at hand.

You have been warned . . .

THE SLIPPERY GIANT

You may have heard it said that the eyes are the windows to the soul, and if that's true then these were the eyes of a man whose soul had packed its bags and gone on holiday. These ghoulish eyeballs didn't appear to have any iris at all, just a tiny black pupil in the middle of each bulging white orb. There was no sign of life (let alone a soul) behind them, and yet the body, this enormous, pink-skinned man, was marching along the beach at great speed. He was as tall as a basketball player but didn't look as if he had ever played sport. His flabby chest and round belly bulged out of an open stripy shirt and his skin looked very strange indeed. You normally can't tell if someone is wearing suncream because the idea is to rub it into your skin until it has been absorbed. This man had clearly applied so much suncream that



his skin had refused to absorb any more of it, so the stuff just lay there in great white swirls on his ever-so-pink flesh.

Carrying this enormous body along the beach were two rather skinny legs that ended in an entirely inappropriate pair of orange socks and brown shoes, and both of his meaty arms were locked around a bundle of canary-yellow life jackets. A navy sun hat covered his shiny bald head and made his pink ears fold over like tiny wings.



We all know it is wrong to judge someone simply by the way they look, but in this case I think we can make an exception. This man was very definitely weird.

He stopped suddenly beside a group of teenagers and threw the life jackets he had been carrying on to the sand. The teenagers were much too excited about going on a boat ride to notice all the odd things I've just described. Instead, the slippery giant stood very still and watched as twelve teenagers playfully fought over the six life jackets. The winners of the battle for the life jackets were two boys and four girls, who would be the first to ride in the pea-green wooden fishing boat.

Accompanying the group was Daphne, an art teacher in her mid-forties. Daphne may have come from London, but she dressed just like the local women, hair pulled back in a loose knot, a swirling white cotton dress, a beaded necklace and a straw basket hanging over her shoulder. She had been to the Spanish town of Cadaqués on countless school art trips, but she had never before seen anyone like this big chap.

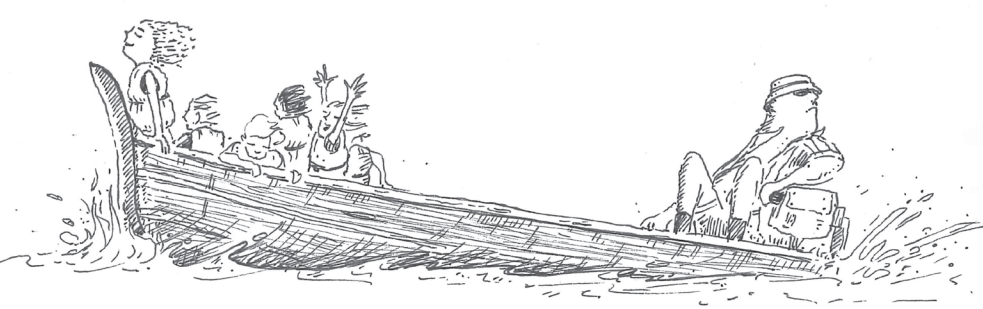
'What happened to the nice man who was here earlier?' asked Daphne, gesturing back towards a small hut further along the beach. She had booked the boat ride with a handsome local man who had gone back to his hut to fetch the life jackets, and she'd been rather looking forward to seeing him again. Instead, she was now looking at one of the most unattractive human beings she had ever met.

The slippery giant replied too softly for Daphne to hear.

'I'm sorry, what did you say?' said Daphne, lifting her sunglasses to get a better look at him. The man took a step towards Daphne and bent so that their faces were level. His mouth opened to speak and revealed a black tongue and lips, as if he had just been drinking a pot of ink. 'He's busy. I'm the skipper now,' was his reply. Daphne felt a shiver of goosebumps break out on her skin. For a moment she couldn't speak. It was all too strange and unexpected.

The man turned and waded into the water.

'Maybe we should wait until he comes back!' called out Daphne, her voice rising with concern, but she was fighting a losing battle. Six of her students were already in the boat and the large man was climbing in with them, making it tip dramatically.



'No, stop!' shouted Daphne, and she ran towards the boat, splashing through the shallows. But it was too late. The strange man had twisted the throttle and the water behind the motor was churned into foam. There was a scream. Shouting. But it wasn't any of her remaining students – they hadn't caught on to Daphne's concern, and were all still laughing and mucking about in the sand. The scream had come from somewhere else. Daphne turned and saw a crowd around the boatman's hut suddenly part and the handsome boatman appeared clutching his nose.

'*Mi barco! Mi barco!*' cried the man as he stumbled towards Daphne.

One of her students, a bubbly girl named Hannah Richards, screamed at the sight of the boatman taking his hand away from his nose and revealing it to be bleeding and pointing the wrong way.

'*Ese enorme hombre golpeó mi nariz y me robó el barco!*' said the man with a great gasp, and Daphne felt her blood run cold.

'What did he say, miss?' wheezed Hannah, unable to take her eyes off the boatman's horribly twisted nose.

'He said . . . that huge man punched him on the nose and has now stolen his boat,' said Daphne, her voice shaking, and she turned to look back

out to sea. The little boat had already reached the rocky peninsula on the southern side of the bay. People were getting up from their beach towels and gathering around the bleeding boatman, who was beside himself with anger.

'I need a boat!' screamed Daphne, turning to face the people on the beach. 'He's taken the children! We have to go after him!' but nobody responded to her cry for help, because in her panic Daphne had forgotten to speak Spanish. '*Necesito un barco! Él ha robado a los niños!*' she pleaded, but her words were drowned out by the sound of the most almighty explosion. It was so loud and powerful everyone could feel it right down to their bones. Daphne turned and looked out to sea. The little green fishing boat, the slippery giant and the six teenagers in her charge were gone, and all that remained were thick swirls of blue smoke twisting and drifting across the little port of Cadaqués.

