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Opening extract from

Charlie Merrick's Misfits in I'm a Nobody, Get Me Out of Here!

Written by

Dave Cousins

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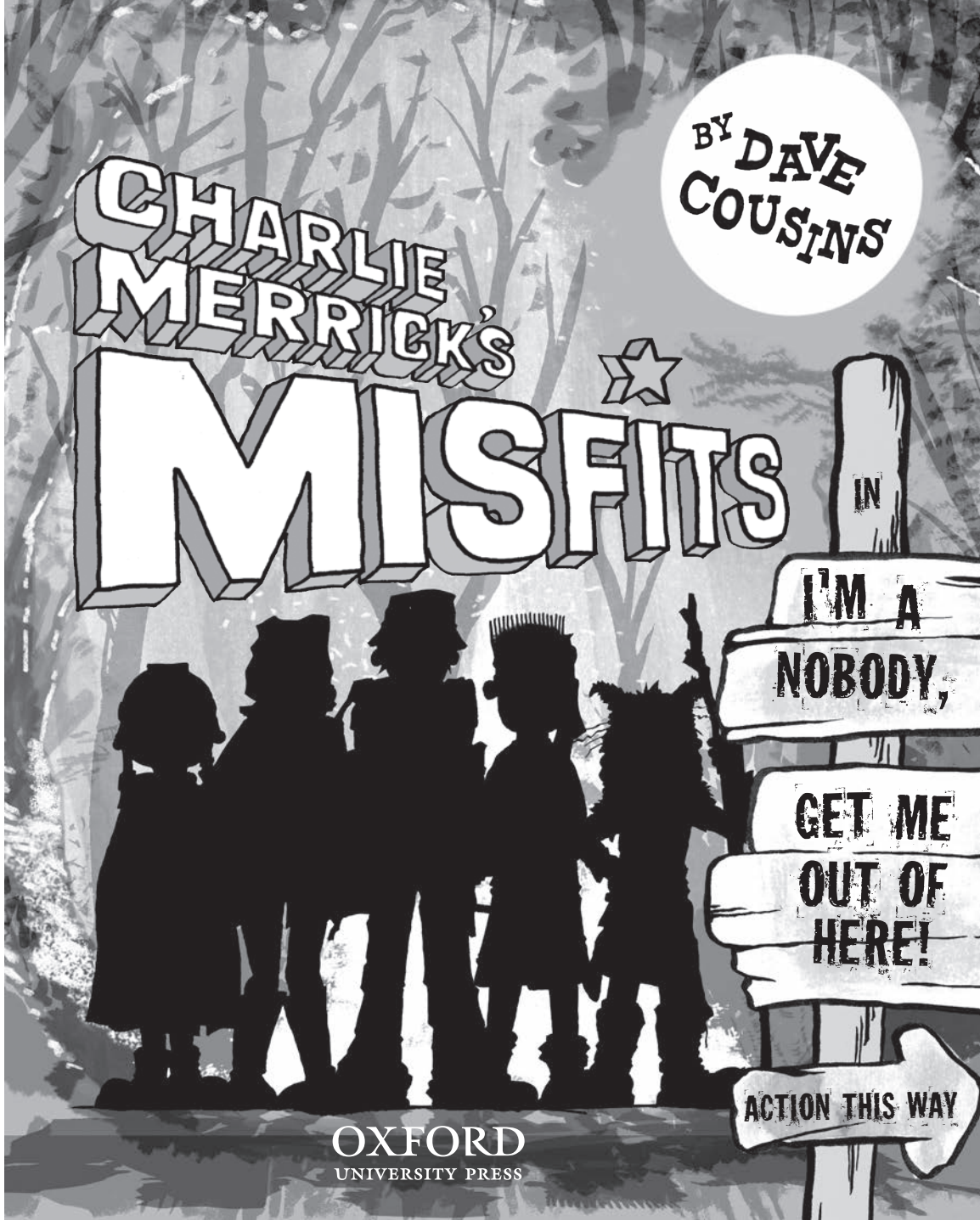
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Name:

CHARLIE MERRICK

Squad:

MISFITS

HELP!

Somebody get me out of here!
This is all a HUGE MISTAKE!
I can't believe we ended up in this mess!
Or can I? Now I think about it, this is EXACTLY the kind of thing that ALWAYS happens to us!
Though I have to say that this one takes things to a whole new level on the EPIC DISASTER SCALE.

I've just been given this NOTEBOOK. We're supposed to keep a diary of our week here at the camp—make notes about the things we learn—write down our feelings, that kind of stuff. My best mate Sam chucked his on the bonfire when nobody was looking, but here I am using mine already.

Last year I kept a record of our football team's entire season. I'm surprised how much I've missed doing it, so I'm thinking if I write down everything that happens here, maybe one day I'll be able to look back at it and LAUGH . . . ONE DAY.

I should probably start by explaining how I ended up here.

To begin with, we were LATE. Had I known then what I know now, I wouldn't have told Sam to start running . . .



1 ALL ABOARD THE FRANKENBUS!



07:54—UNDIES FROM HEAVEN

'SAM! Come ON! We're going to miss the bus!'

We'd only run to the end of the road, but Sam was already out of breath from dragging the giant suitcase on wheels he'd borrowed from his mum.

'It's this case,' he said. 'It's not built for speed!'

I checked my watch—we couldn't be late—not today! The entire summer had been leading up to this—no way was I going to miss it.

'SHORTCUT!' I said, darting down a path between two houses.

'Charlie! Where are you going?' I could hear Sam behind me, crashing his way through the wheelie bins lining the narrow alley.

'Trust me,' I shouted, jogging past a line of garages, then down some steps into the underpass. A minute later we came out onto the long straight road leading to Northfield Park.

'You're a genius!' said Sam. 'We're almost there!'

'Yeah, but we're still late. Come on!'

'Doug wouldn't go without us,' said Sam. 'Would he?'

We both knew the answer to that.

Sam set off up the road like his shorts were on fire, the case swerving and bouncing after him.

There was a bloke walking his dog coming the other way, and Sam dodged to avoid them—which is when it happened.

Having been pushed beyond their limits for the entire frantic journey, the tiny wheels on the case decided they'd had enough—and disintegrated.

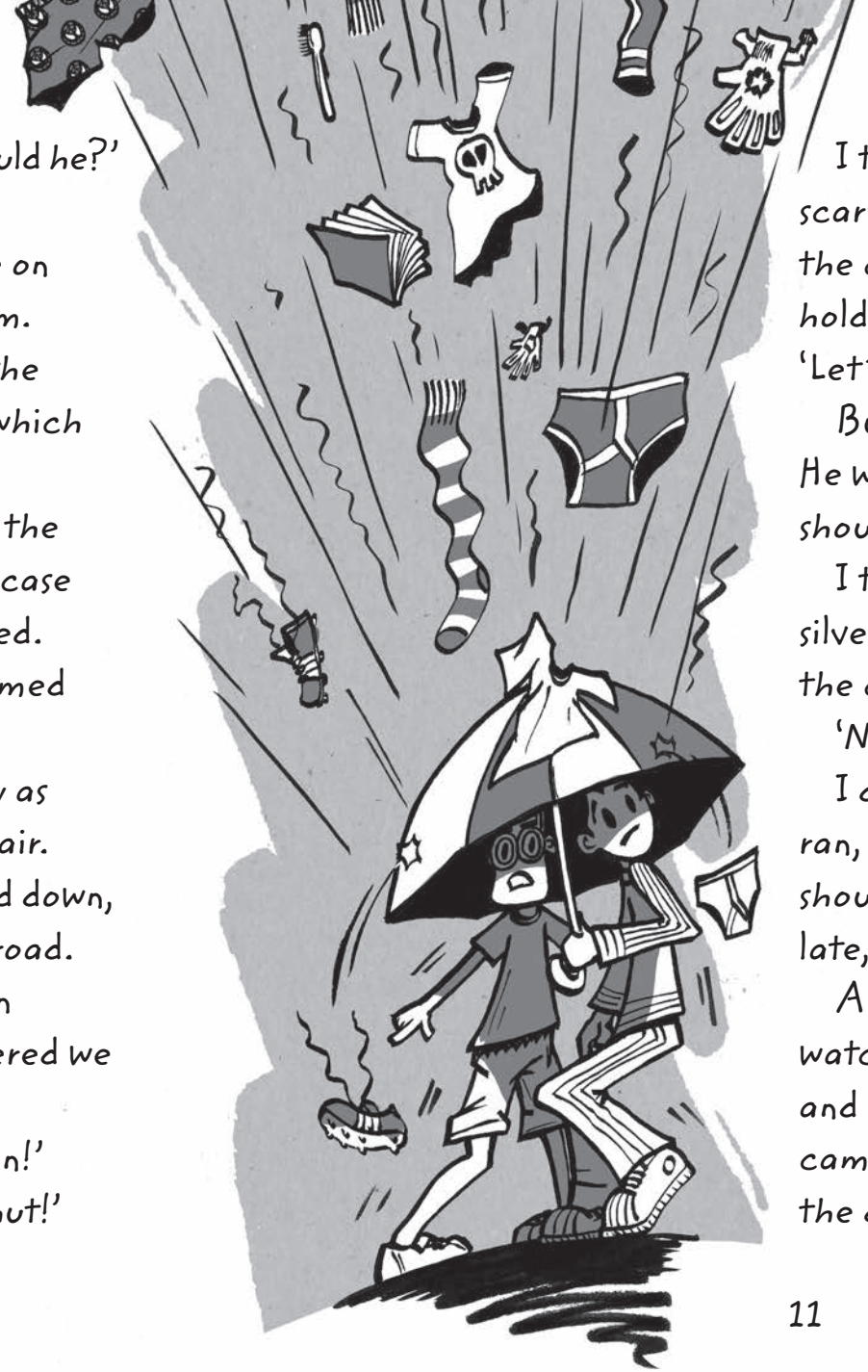
The case flipped . . . bounced . . . then slammed into a lamp post.

The impact blew the lid open as effectively as dynamite, blasting all of Sam's stuff into the air. Socks, pants, T-shirts, and football boots rained down, clattering across the pavement and into the road.

For a moment we didn't move, just stared in disbelief at the devastation. Then I remembered we had a bus to catch.

'Quick! Grab your stuff and shove it back in!'

'The lid's smashed,' said Sam. 'It won't stay shut!'



I took off my football scarf and tied it around the case. 'That should hold it for now,' I said. 'Let's go!'

But Sam didn't move. He was staring over my shoulder up the road.

I turned . . . and saw a silver coach pulling out of the car park.

'NOOOOOOOOOO!'

I dropped my bag and ran, waving my arms and shouting—but I was too late, too far away.

All I could do was watch, as the coach, and our week at football camp disappeared into the distance.

'They left us behind!' said Sam. 'After all that!'

I sat down on the pavement staring at the empty space where the coach had been.

THEY'D ACTUALLY GONE WITHOUT US!

Or had they . . .

I stood up. 'Wait a minute—what's that?'

'What?' Sam squinted up the road.

I pointed. 'THAT!'

I'd been so busy chasing the big silver coach, I hadn't noticed the minibus waiting in the car park.



'What happened to you two?' said Jasmine, as we ran through the gate.

'Long story,' I said, gasping for breath.

She rolled her eyes. 'Isn't it always with you?'

'This way for the SOCCER CAMP SPECIAL,' said Gerbil, sweeping an arm towards the minibus.

'Where did THAT come from?'

'It's our new team bus,' said Donut.

'NEW?' Sam frowned. 'It looks like someone took three wrecked vans and tried to build one good one from all the bits.'

'And failed!' muttered Jasmine.

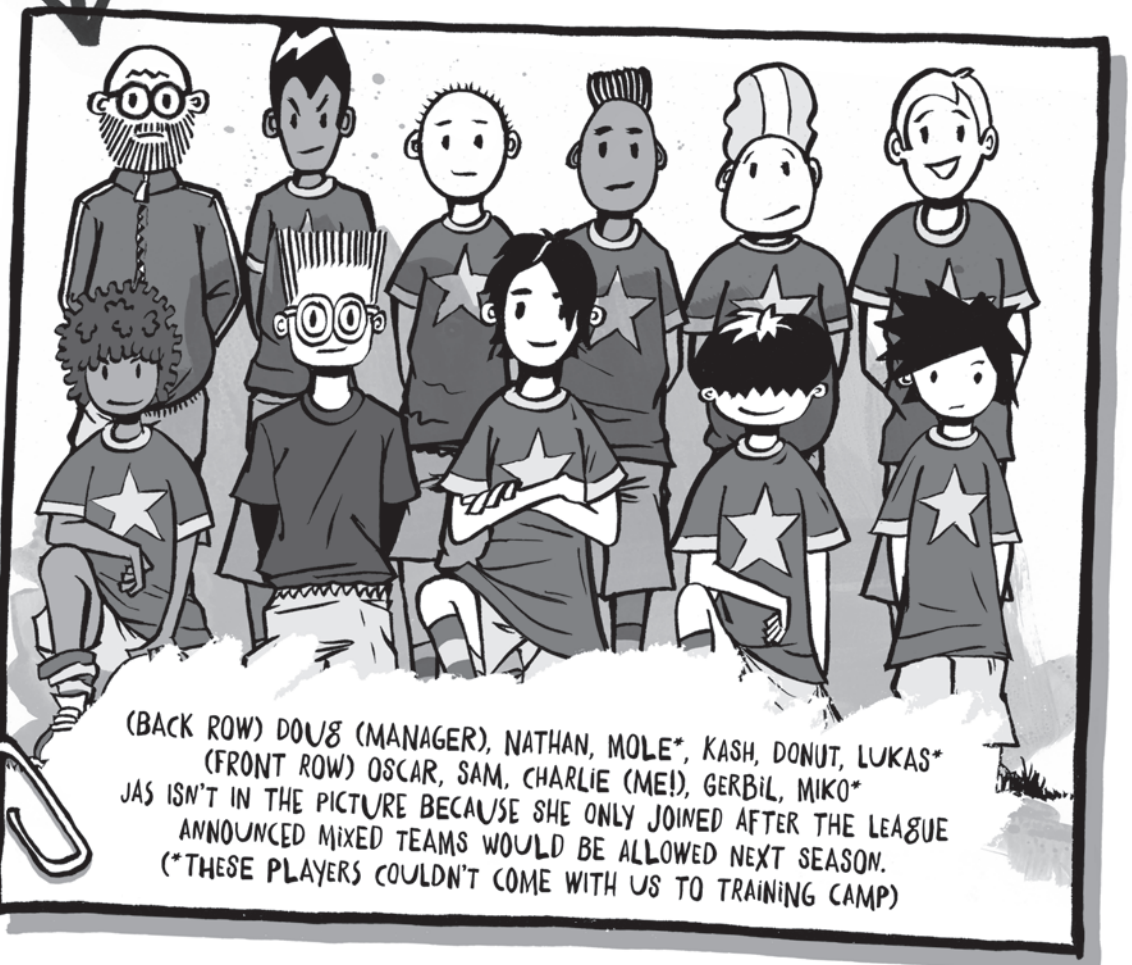
'Like Frankenstein's Monster!' I laughed. 'Hey! We should call it the FRANKENBUS!'

'No we shouldn't,' said Doug, looking hurt. 'Now sling your stuff in and get on board—we've got a long journey ahead and we're already late.'



Just in case you're sitting there thinking—DONUT? GERBIL? Is he REALLY having a conversation with a cake and a talking rodent? I should probably explain . . .

Everyone on board the Frankenbus is part of North Star Galaxy Under-12s football team—and once you get a nickname, you're stuck with it.



Gerbil's really called CIARAN, and Donut is actually Duncan—DUNCAN DONUT—get it?

Sam and Jasmine are my two best mates. We met on the first day in Reception—me and Sam were fighting over a football, and Jas stepped in to break it up! We've been together ever since.



13:13–
A MIGHTY-B & FRIES TO GO

The Frankenbus belched a cloud of blue smoke across the service-station car park, and spluttered to a halt.

'Right, I want everyone back in twenty minutes,' Doug called after us, as we poured out of the bus.

'Hey! There's some grass over there,' said Oscar. 'Anyone fancy a kick about?'

Sam shook his head. 'FOOD! I need food—fast.'

'How can you be hungry?' said Jasmine. 'You've been stuffing your face all the way here!'

'Gotta keep my strength up,' said Sam, pushing open the doors. 'YES! They've got a MIGHTY-B!'

Sam shot towards the burger bar like he'd been caught in a tractor beam.

'The last time I had a MIGHTY-B Cola, I gave my Gran some,' said Gerbil. 'She did this massive burp and shot her false teeth out!'

'You're making that up,' said Jas.

Gerbil grimaced. 'I wish! They landed in my chips!'



'That is so gross!' Jasmine pulled a face. 'I'm beginning to think coming on this trip was a bad idea. A week at a football camp in France would have been worth putting up with you lot, but now . . .'

Gerbil frowned. 'I never quite understood why we couldn't go to France. What happened?'

'Well . . . Doug was involved, so it's complicated and shrouded in mystery!' I told him. 'Donut said it was something to do with Doug not being welcome across the border, after an incident involving the police, a pair of circus clowns, and a lorry load of cheese—apparently.'

Gerbil sighed. 'Yeah, that sounds like Doug!'



Twenty minutes later we were back in the bus. I held my breath as Doug inserted the key to start the engine—certain it wouldn't work. We'd be stuck for hours waiting for a recovery truck and never make it to the football camp. It's the kind of thing that ALWAYS happens to us.

But the Frankenbus burst into life, firing off a sound like a gunshot. A bloke walking past dropped his burger in fear—but we were already making our escape in a concealing cloud of blue smoke.

My best friends in the whole world were in this bus—CHARLIE MERRICK'S MISFITS—that's what Sam called us when I got everyone together. It was a good name for a bunch of players that nobody else wanted. We weren't the best footballers, but over the course of a season we learned to play as a team. To everyone else we still look like misfits, but for us, this is EXACTLY where we BELONG.

It was a shame Lukas, Mole and Miko couldn't come, but apart from those three, we were all here.

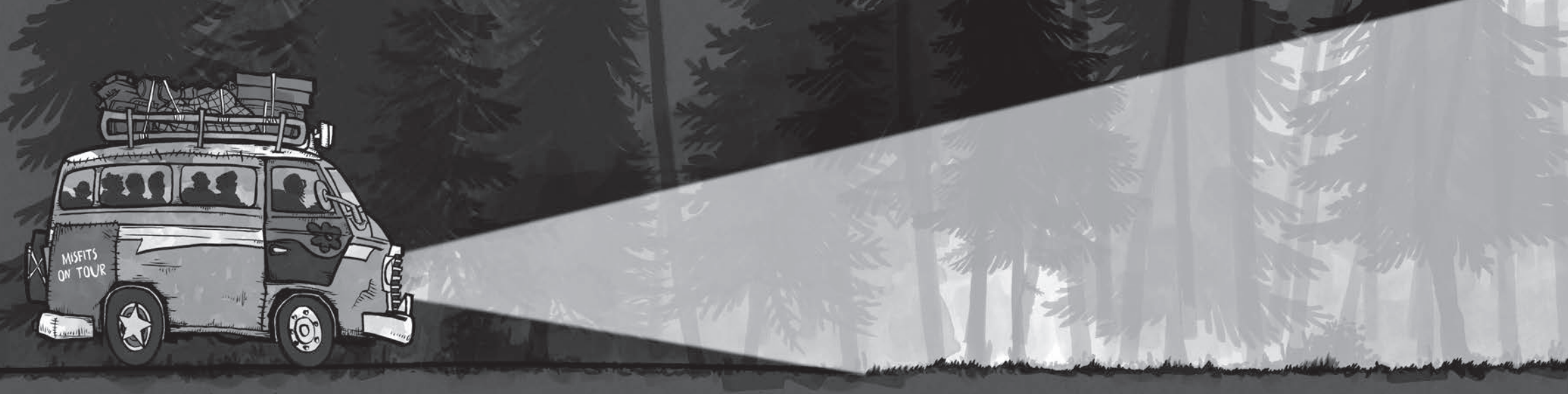
So why was there a spare seat?

The Frankenbus was gathering speed, heading for the ramp back onto the motorway.

I was sure the van had been full when we set out.

Then I realized—





22:17—ARE WE THERE YET?

It felt like we'd been driving for hours through an endless forest of dark trees.

'We're going to run out of petrol soon,' said Donut. 'We'll be stranded—in the middle of nowhere!'

'With no food!' Sam sounded worried.

Jasmine grinned. 'They'll find the Frankenbus weeks later—empty, except for Sam and a pile of our bones, all licked clean and shiny!'

We were still arguing over who Sam would eat first, when Doug finally turned off the main road.

Branches clawed at the bus as we bumped along a narrow track.

'Strange place for a football camp,' said Oscar.

Jas peered into the darkness. 'This is creepy.'

'I can't see any goalposts,' said Sam. 'Or pitches.'

'Maybe it's deliberate,' said Gerbil. 'Like a secret training base!'

Then we saw a building up ahead. Lights shone in the windows and there were vehicles parked outside.

As we swung into the car park the headlights flashed across a shiny black minibus.

'The Wild Warriors,' said Jasmine, reading the writing on the side.

'Must be one of the other teams,' I said, feeling a tingle of anticipation in my guts.

The Frankenbus announced our arrival with a loud bang. Moments later a man emerged from the building. He was dressed in camouflage shorts and vest, and had tattoos covering his shoulders and arms.

Doug wound down his window and the man's face peered in at us.

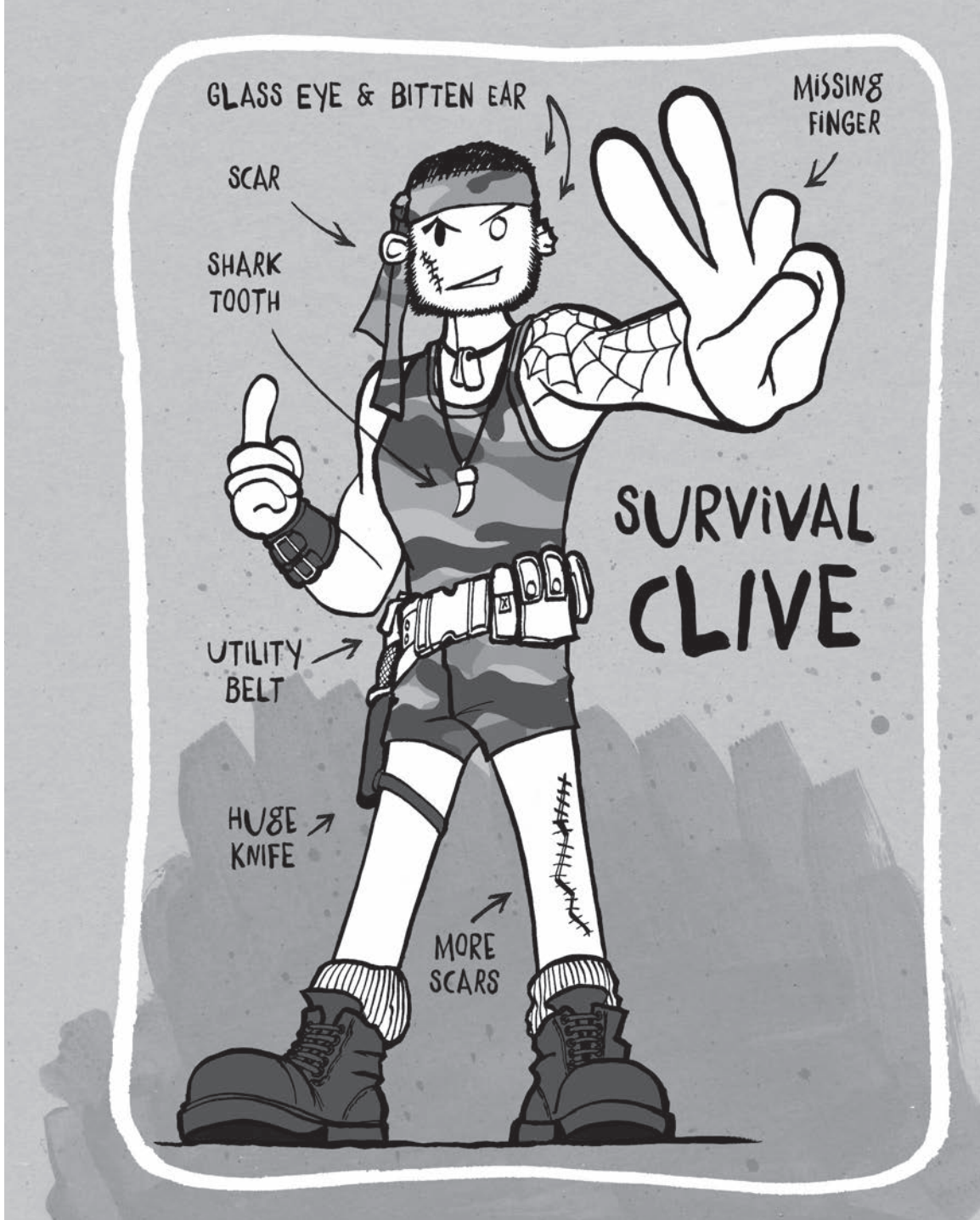
'Get a bit lost did you?' He smiled and thrust a meaty arm through the space to shake hands with Doug. I noticed one of his fingers was missing.

'I'm Clive,' he said. 'Folks here call me Survival Clive!' Then he laughed.

It was hard to be sure in the dark, but it looked like Clive had a serious scar down one side of his face and . . .

'Is that a glass eye?' said Sam, in a loud whisper.

'Well spotted,' said Survival Clive, winking his good eye at Sam. 'I'll tell you how I lost it sometime.'



Survival Clive didn't look much like a football coach—though it was hard to tell in the dark. Maybe he'd been a centre-half? A lot of defenders looked like boxers after a few seasons . . . but losing an eye and a finger—that was extreme! Perhaps that was where the weird nickname came from.

'Right,' he said. 'Let's get you guys unloaded.'

We climbed out of the Frankenbus and grabbed our stuff.

'Not sure you'll be needing those!' said Survival Clive, when Doug picked up the bag of footballs.

'Oh, right,' said Doug. 'You provide them do you?'

Clive frowned. 'Why would we provide footballs?'

'For training.'

For a moment Survival Clive seemed confused, then he laughed and slapped Doug on the shoulder like he'd made a great joke.

'This isn't a football training camp, mate!'

'It isn't?'

We stopped unloading and stared at him.

'What do you mean, NOT a football camp?' I said.

Survival Clive looked at me. 'This is the GO! WILD Survival Centre. Bushcraft and wilderness training!'

I'm not sure what my face looked like at that moment, but I'm guessing it was probably something like this—

