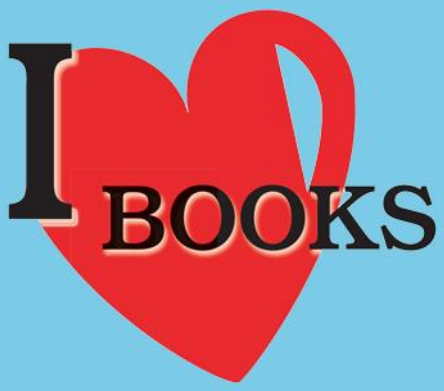


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Opening extract from

Attack of the Alien Dung!

Written by

Gareth P. Jones

Illustrated by

Steve May

Published by

Stripes Publishing an imprint of Little Tiger Press Group

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PET DEFENDERS

Protecting those who protect us

Did you know that Earth is under constant alien attack?

Don't worry.

We are the Pet Defenders, a secret society of domestic animals. We are your dogs, cats, rabbits and rodents. While you are off at school or work or doing whatever it is you humans do, we are keeping the Earth safe.

We keep our work hidden because we know what humans are like. The first sight of a yellow-bellied three-armed Flobber-Dobber with an electrocuting bottom and you'll panic.



TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET



Before you know it, you'll have blown up the very planet we're trying to defend.

Just carry on as normal – stroke your cats, take your dogs for walks and clean out your hamster cages. Don't forget to feed us, but please … let *us* take care of the aliens.

Now that you know all this, we need you to forget it. Our specially trained seagulls will take care of that. Ah, here they are with the Forget-Me-Plop now…

SSSPLAT!


DOGFINGER

CHAPTER 1

A RUDE AWAKENING

Tap, tap, tap.

Biskit opened an eye and lifted the ear that had been covering it. The morning sunlight was blinding. He flopped his ear over again and tried to get back to sleep.

"Go away," he mumbled.

Tap, tap, tap.

This time he opened both eyes and lifted both ears. The sun had risen over the rooftops and was shining directly on his dog basket. A seagull stood on the window ledge. Seeing Biskit, it tipped its head to one side.

"Leave me alone," said Biskit.

The seagull looked at him blankly.

"Come on, Biskit! It's too early for barking!" shouted Philip from his bedroom.

"See what you've done now, you dumb bird," whispered Biskit. "You've woken up my owner."

The seagull was about to *tap, tap, tap* on the window again, so Biskit nudged it open with his nose. A cold winter's breeze made his straggly brown fur stand on end.

The seagull hopped into the room, looked around, then squawked.

"BISKIT!" yelled Philip.

"Quiet," snarled Biskit.

"Agent Biskit," said a voice from a speaker attached to the seagull's leg.

"Commander F," said Biskit, recognizing the gruff tone of his grumpy rabbit boss.

"This is the second seagull I've sent, you mangy mutt. Report to my Hutch Quarters now."

"But it's my day off, sir," said Biskit. "My owner's taking me to see that new Danger Dog film."

There was no reply from the speaker. Biskit stared at the seagull and waited.

The seagull stared back. **Squawk!**

"The commander's gone, hasn't he?" said Biskit.

The seagull turned to leave. As it spread its wings, it knocked a photo off the windowsill. Biskit sprang up and snatched the photo mid-air. He landed with a thud in the corner of the room.



"Ow," he groaned.

He placed the picture down in front of him. It was a photograph of him on the beach with Philip's ex-girlfriend, Susie. She was walking along while Biskit ran on ahead. Biskit was gazing at it, remembering the day fondly, when he noticed a burning sensation coming from his bottom. He looked round and realized he had landed on the heater.

"**Hot! Hot! Hot!**" barked Biskit.

"Right. That's it." He could hear Philip opening his bedroom door and padding down the corridor in his slippers.

Biskit had no choice. He had been looking forward to spending some quality owner-pet time with Philip, but the Pet Defenders needed him. He dashed out of the room and straight through the dog flap.



"BISKIT?" Philip called after his dog, but he knew there was no point. Biskit would come back when he was good and ready. He went into the living room and picked up the photograph, which he returned to its place on the sill. He sighed and closed the window. He paused to look at the seagull standing on the roof across the road. For a moment Philip felt as though the seagull was watching him, but then the bird flew away and he went back to bed.



CHAPTER 2

COMMANDER F

To the people who lived there, Nothington-on-Sea was an ordinary seaside town. To the Pet Defenders, it was a hub of alien activity. In the summer months, human tourists liked its pebble beach and fish & chip shops. Its alien visitors were less fussy about the seasons.

Biskit ran through backyards and down backstreets and back alleys before slipping under a wooden fence into the back garden where Commander F lived. He jumped over a flower bed and peered into the hutch. It was empty. Biskit sniffed the air. The rabbit was close.

"Commander F, are you th— Oof." Something white, fluffy and extremely heavy landed on Biskit's back. "That hurt," he complained.

"Aww. Did the little fluffy bunny hurt the poor doggy?" Commander F's gruff voice dripped with sarcasm.

"Little? That pregnant Moon Hippo weighed less than you," exclaimed Biskit.

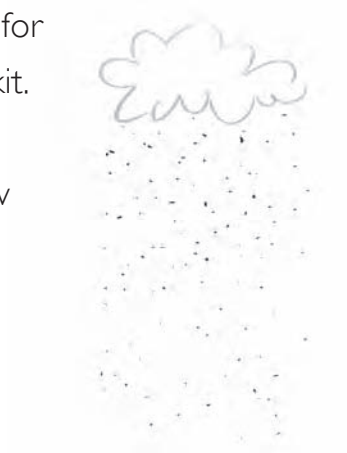


"Watch it," Commander F snarled. "Emily has had me on a carrot-only diet all week and I get grouchy when I'm hungry."

"What's got your tail in a twist, anyway?" asked Biskit, wishing he was still tucked up asleep in his nice warm dog basket.

Commander F climbed off Biskit's back and hopped round to face him. "What's got my tail in a twist? I'll tell you, Biskit, me old mongrel mucker – yesterday afternoon in the middle of town there was an unexpected downpour—"

"You can hardly blame me for the weather," interrupted Biskit.



"Of pepper," continued Commander F. "Do you know what happens when it rains pepper, Biskit?"

"People sneeze?"

Commander F snarled. "When it rains pepper, people ask questions.

Questions such as, *Why is it raining pepper*?"

"Yes, well. About that…" Biskit sniffed a flower patch, picking up the scents of all the animals that had visited recently. "It turned out that last lot of giant alien invaders weren't an army after all. They were a highly trained catering squad."

"Catering?"

"Cooks, sir. Planet chefs. They wanted to grill the Earth on its own sun. Apparently globe cooking is all the rage in the enormiverse."

Commander F sniffed at a pile of carrots before selecting one. He bit the end off and spat it out. "So how did you get rid of them?"

"I convinced them that the planet wasn't ripe yet. Too green, you see, sir. They were gone by nightfall."

"Hmm." Commander F snorted. "So the pepper rain?"

"That was to make us taste better. Apparently this part of the galaxy lacks flavour."

The large white rabbit scowled at his carrot then took a nibble. "Biskit, you're a good agent…"

"Thanks," said Biskit.

"But you're too careless. You're irresponsible and you never think things thr—"

"Not thinking things through is what I do best, sir."

"Stop interrupting me. As you know, Earth is under constant attack from aliens, and it is our job to send them back to where they came from. But we also need to stop the humans from finding out what's going on. We had to Forget-Me-Plop half the town after that pepper storm yesterday."

"So? Isn't that why we have seagulls carrying Forget-Me-Plop?" said Biskit. "What's the problem?"

"Your attitude is the problem. I'm assigning you a new partner. As soon as I can find someone willing to work with you, that is."





"Sorry, sir, I work alone now," said Biskit firmly.

Commander F's voice softened. "Listen, I know you feel bad about what happened to your last partner."

Biskit bristled. "Champ was a good dog and a dedicated agent, but he knew the risks when he took the job," he said defensively.

"He also knew the rules… Unlike you, you canine catastrophe," said Commander F. "Do you have any idea how many witnesses saw that pepper rain?"

"You worry too much, Fluffikins."

"That's Commander F to you." The bunny hopped into his hutch and took another bite of carrot. "Only my owner gets to use my given name."

"How is Emily?" asked Biskit.

"She's the one who put me on this diet. She should spend more time doing her maths

homework and less time worrying about my weight, if you ask me," he grumbled. "What about Philip? Still pining after Susie?"

"Yes, I was hoping to cheer him up with a trip to the cinema…"

"Well, that will have to wait. We've had a report of unusual activity at Clifftop Farm from one of the cows."

"A cow!" exclaimed Biskit. "The last time we had a report from a cow it was about a mysterious cloud with legs. Do you know what it turned out to be? A sheep."

"That's as may be," said Commander F, "but we've got to chase up all leads, investigate all threats. The NERDS are already up there. So forget about your silly film and get to that farm before I show you why they used to call me Thumper!"