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opening extract from

One Beastly Beast: Two Aliens, Three Inventors and Four Fantastic Tales

written by

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published by

HarperCollins

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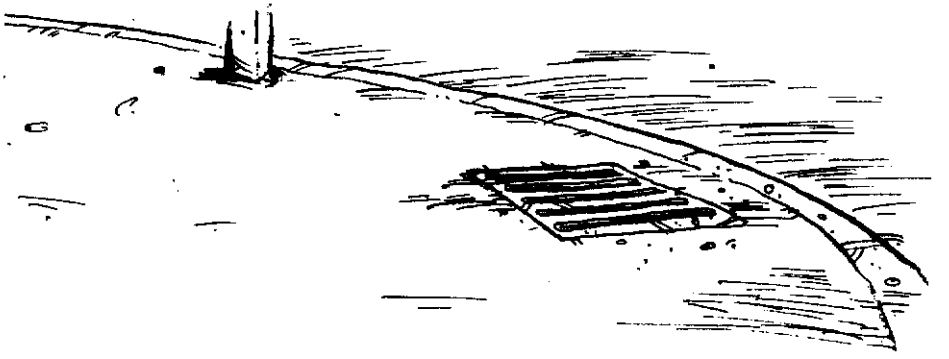
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Chapter One

"Take these videos back to the shop, please," said Peter's mum. She took two DVDs out of her shopping bag and handed them to her son. "They have to be back by two o'clock or they cost extra."

"OK," said Peter. Anything to get away from the boredom of following his mother around. "Which video shop, Mum?"

"VideoPleaseMe," said Mum as she locked the car. "Right over there. Then come straight over to the supermarket."



"Yes, Mum," said Peter, rolling his eyes. Anyone would think he was still a little kid.

"And no, you can't have any money to rent games for your PlayStation," added Mum as Peter opened his mouth.

"Yes, Mum," said Peter.

Peter trudged over to the shop, pretending that he was slow-marching in a procession. He held the two DVDs out in front of him like some sort of ceremonial regalia. *The sacred DVDs of the king*, he thought, and laughed.



"Make way for the king's DVDs," he said in a mock-regal voice to no one in particular as he crossed the car park.

"King's DVDs!" said a voice from somewhere ahead of him and somehow down below.

Peter stopped pretending to be the king and tried to see who was talking. But there was no one around. Just one lady getting into her car. Besides, the voice sounded low and gruff. It couldn't have come from her.

"Down here, matey!"

It was louder now. A deep and somehow slightly nasty voice that made Peter think of running away. But he took a quick, deep breath instead… and looked down.

Chapter Two

Just in front of Peter's feet there was a heavy steel grating set in the ground – a kind of manhole for the drains – and that's where the voice was coming from.

"What are you doing in the drain?" asked Peter. His voice quavered a bit, though he was more surprised than frightened.

"Ar, that'd be a tale to tell," answered the voice. "A tale as wot's longer than my tail, if yer take my meaning."

Peter didn't take his meaning, but he knelt down to take a closer look, putting the videos on the ground next to the grating. But as soon as he let go of them, the grating suddenly moved up and sideways. Peter instinctively jumped back. Then he stood and stared, unable to believe what he was seeing.

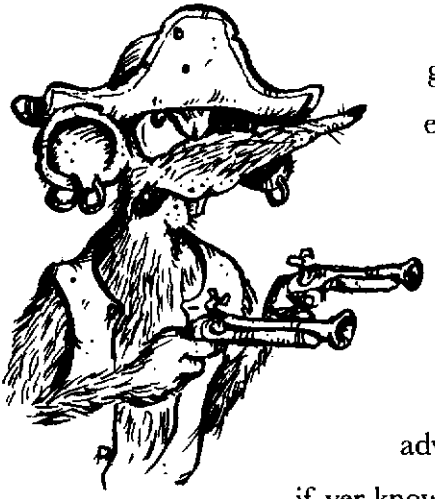


Four enormous black rats jumped out of the drain – rats that stood on their hind legs and came up as far as his knees. But these weren't just really big

rats. They had clothes on, old-fashioned clothes with big wide belts and floppy hats. Three of them held cutlasses in their pink paws, and one was pointing two pistols at Peter. Old pistols like the kind that humans hadn't used for more than a hundred years, but rat-sized.



"You're pirates!" exclaimed Peter, taking in additional details such as the eyepatch on the biggest, meanest-looking rat, and the skull and crossbones dyed white on his black chest fur, where his red shirt was rudely unbuttoned to the waist.



"Yes, we be pirates!" growled the rat with the eyepatch, gesturing to his mates to pick up the two DVDs. "We be video pirates, ah har, and those there discs will fetch us a pretty sum. I advise yer to step aside, lad, if yer knows wot's good for yer!"

"But video pirates just copy stuff," said Peter frowning. "They don't steal them! We'll have to pay a fine if you steal our DVDs."

"Don't tell us how to do our piratin'," said the rat menacingly. "We're taking these here DVDs and that's that!"

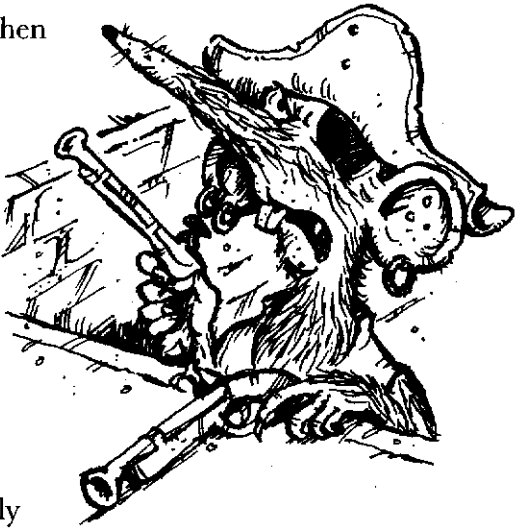
Quickly, the rats passed the DVDs down into the drain,

while the one with the eyepatch kept his pistols trained on Peter. After the others had climbed back down, this last rat hesitated, then raised his pistols.

"Don't try and follow us!" he ordered. "And don't go blabbing to the navy, neither."

With that said, he carefully uncocked the pistols and thrust them through his belt, before diving after his gang. Judging from the rat's caution with the guns, Peter got the impression that he'd probably once had a nasty accident with them.

He was just bending over to look down the drain when the pirate rat suddenly popped back up, teeth shining evilly in the sun.



"Don't even think about following us!" he snarled, before disappearing again.

Peter stood absolutely still for a minute and

listened carefully. He could hear distant echoes coming from the drain, as if the rats were singing as they marched away. Away with his DVDs. Peter felt half angry and half petrified, but mostly he thought, *What can I say to Mum? Four pirate rats stole the DVDs and I didn't do anything?*

He took a step forward, and then another. His foot was in the air for the third and final step when the mean-looking rat popped out again.

"I said—" he started to say, then his eyes bulged, his whiskers sprang out absolutely straight and he ducked back down into the drain.