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Opening extract from

# The Man In The Iron Socks

Written by

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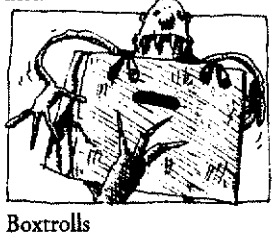

# Johnson's Taxonomy

## of Trolls and Creatures



### Aardvark

Aardvarks are invariably the first animals listed in any alphabetical listing of creatures. Beyond this they have few attributes relevant here.



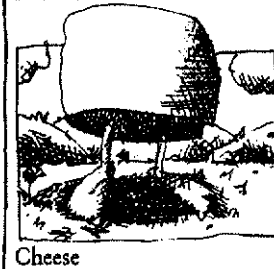
### Boxtrolls

A sub-species of the common troll, they are very shy, so live inside a box. These they gather from the backs of large shops. They are somewhat troublesome creatures–as they have a passion for everything mechanical and no understanding of the concept of ownership (they steal anything which is not bolted down, and more often than not, anything which is). It is very dangerous to leave tools lying about where they might find them.



### Cabbageheads

Belief has it that cabbageheads live deep underground and are the bees of the underworld. Little else is known at this time, apart from a fondness for brassicas.



### Cheese

Wild English Cheeses live in bogs. This is unlike their French cousins who live in caves. They are nervous beasties, that eat grass by night, in the meadows and woodlands. They are also of very low intelligence, and are panicked by almost anything that catches them unawares. Cheeses make easy quarry for hunters, being rather easier to catch than a dead sheep.



### Crow

The crow is a very intelligent bird, capable of living in many environments. Crows are known to be considerably more honest than their cousins, magpies, and enjoy a varied diet, and good company. Usually they are charming company, but should be kept from providing the entertainment. Failure to do so may result in tedium, for while intelligent, crows seem to lack taste in the choice of music, and conversational topics.



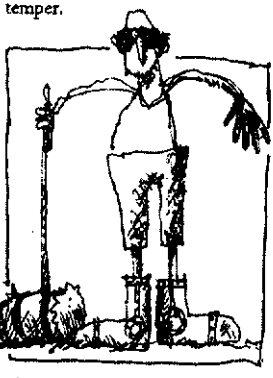
### Fresh-water Sea-cow

Distant relative of the manitou. This creature inhabits the canals, and drains of certain West Country towns. A passive creature of large size, and vegetarian habits. They are very kind to their young, and make good mothers.



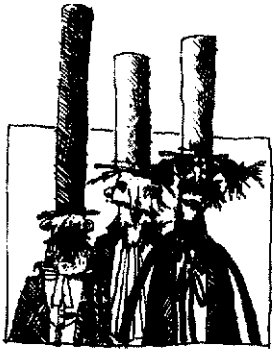
## Grandfather (William)

Arthur's guardian and carer. Grandfather has lived underground for many years in a cave home where he pursues his interests in engineering. All the years in a damp cave have taken their toll, and he now suffers from very bad rheumatism, and a somewhat short temper.



## The Man in the Iron Socks

A mysterious shadowy figure said to be much feared by the members of the now defunct Cheese Guild. He is thought to hold a dark secret as well as a large 'Walloper'. His Walloper is the major cause of fear, but he also has a sharp tongue, and a caustic line in wit. History does not relate the reasoning behind his wearing of iron socks.



## The Members

Members of the secretive Ratbridge Cheese Guild, that was thought to have died out after the 'Great Cheese Crash'. It was an evil organization that rigged the cheese market, and doctored and adulterated lactose-based food stuffs.



## Rabbits

Furry, jumping mammals, with a passion for tender vegetables and raising the young. Good parents, but not very bright.



## Rabbit Women

Very little is known about these mythical creatures, except that they are supposed to live with rabbits, and wear clothes spun from rabbit wool.



## Rats

Rats are known to be some of the most intelligent of all rodents, and to be considerably more intelligent than many humans. They are known to have a passion for travel, and be extremely adaptable. They often live in a symbiotic relationship with humans.




CENSORED



## Trotting Badgers

Trotting badgers are some of the nastiest creatures to be found anywhere. With their foul temper, rapid speed, and razor-sharp teeth, it cannot be stressed just how unpleasant and dangerous these creatures are. It is only their disgusting stench that gives warning of their proximity, and when smelt it is often too late.

# THE STORY SO FAR . . .



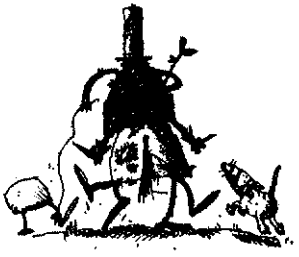
*Arthur at large*

## ARTHUR ABOVE GROUND!

ARTHUR has lived all his life in the Underworld, deep below the streets of Ratbridge, with his grandfather. Now that Grandfather is too frail to leave his bed, Arthur must come above ground to forage for food to take back down below. With a great deal of care, and using the special set of wings that Grandfather has made him, he can keep out of the way of curious Ratbridge residents.

## THE CHEESE HUNT

BUT one day Arthur takes an extra risk. He is intrigued by the sight of a cheese hunt—which he knows has long been illegal as it is cruel to cheese—and he can't resist moving in to watch.



*The huntsmen set off home with the cheese in tow*



*Snatcher grabs the wings*

## CAUGHT!

GOING too close, Arthur reveals himself and is caught by the frightening Archibald Snatcher and his band of men. Snatcher is fascinated by Arthur's wings and steals them.

# THE STORY SO FAR



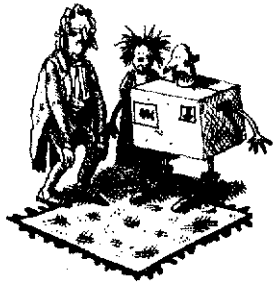
*Willbury with the boxtrolls and Titus the cabbagehead*

## A REFUGE

WITH a great deal of luck, Arthur manages to get away, and finds refuge in a strange old pet shop, with Willbury Nibble QC and the Underworld creatures that live with him.

## THE PLOT THICKENS

WILLBURY promises to help Arthur get home. His boxtroll and cabbagehead friends know many ways down into the Underworld, so they can help Arthur find a way back. But when they go out they discover to their horror that all the entrances into the Underworld have been sealed up. Arthur is in despair—how will he get back and take food to Grandfather now?



*A large rusty iron plate covered the hole*

## A SINISTER VISITOR

WILLBURY promises to help Arthur and they go back to the pet shop to think. There they have a visitor—Mr Gristle—who has brought some miniature creatures to sell them.



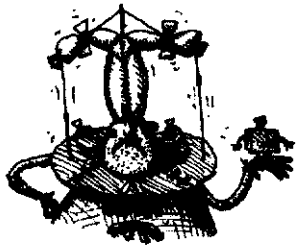
*'I wonder if you might be interested in buying some rather small creatures'*

## AN OUTRAGEOUS REQUEST



*'I do not sell friends!'*

INTRIGUED as he has never seen such tiny creatures before, Willbury buys a tiny boxtroll, cabbagehead, and sea-cow, but he is horrified at Gristle's repeated demands to buy the big creatures, and sends him packing.



*A very strange woman*

## IN THE MARKET

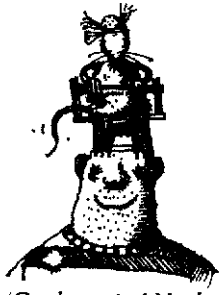
WILLBURY and Arthur next set off to look for Willbury's friend Marjorie, an inventor, who may have heard something about who has stolen Arthur's wings. On the way, they have another surprise as they come upon the bizarre Madame Froufrou in the marketplace, selling miniature creatures to the fashionable ladies of Ratbridge. Arthur thinks Madame Froufrou looks strangely familiar, but cannot think why.

## MARJORIE

THEY find Marjorie, who is upset as she has invented something wonderful—too secret to tell them about—and her invention has been stolen by an unscrupulous father and son, Louis and Edward Trout.



*A very upset Marjorie*



*'Good morning! Need any washing done?'*

## GONE!

TOGETHER the friends go back to the pet shop. But there a disaster awaits them. While they were out, the pet shop has been ransacked—and all the big creatures have been stolen! As they stand wondering what to do, a sailor called Kipper and a rat called Tom arrive, from the Ratbridge Nautical Laundry.

## SKULDUGGERY!

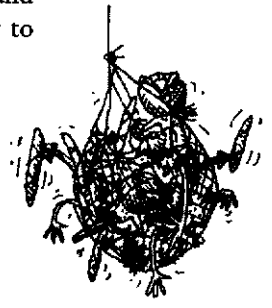
TOM and Kipper tell them that some rats have gone missing from the Laundry, too—and they suspect that some shady characters from the Cheese Hall are responsible—including Snatcher and Gristle! Everyone decides they must work together to find out what is going on, and to get their friends back, and so they set off for the Nautical Laundry to make a plan . . .



*'Something has got to be done!'*

## CABBAGEHEADS

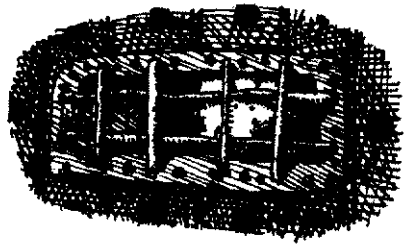
MEANWHILE, we discover that the Underworld has started to flood. A colony of cabbageheads is forced to move to look for drier ground. But they stumble into a terrible trap . . .



*Caught in a net and collected by a group of men wearing tall hats*




*Willbury paused, then pulled the knob*



*A pair of eyes peered out*

## Chapter 1

# The Cheese Hall

The door of the Cheese Hall stood at street level, and was made from very solid-looking oak. Large iron studs were fixed at regular intervals across its surface, and at head height was a metal grille that covered a small hatch. Willbury approached it rather nervously. To one side of the door frame was a metal knob shaped like a cheese. Beneath it a dirty brass plaque read 'pull'. Willbury paused, then pulled the knob.

The sound of a cheese bleat could be heard distantly through the door. Willbury raised an eyebrow. Of all the knockers and bells he had knocked, pulled, or pushed, this was certainly the strangest. Then he heard steps, the hatch flew open, and a pair of eyes peered out.

'Yes!' snapped a voice. 'What d'yer want?'

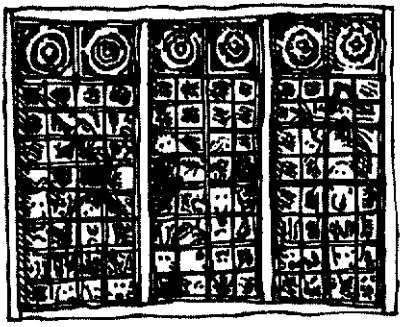
'I . . . er . . . would like to talk to someone,' replied Willbury.

'You buying or selling?' The voice sounded very annoyed.

Willbury thought for a moment. 'I am not really buying . . . or selling.'

'Well, you ain't no interest to us then. Now naff off!' And the hatch snapped shut.

Willbury stood for a moment, rather perplexed, then he looked back towards the pub where the others were hiding. The window of the pub had most of the crew's faces pressed hard against it. He waved at them to get them to hide properly, and they reluctantly disappeared.



*The window of the pub had most of the crew's faces pressed hard against it*

He turned back to the door and pulled the knob again. The bleating started but was cut short by the sound of a thump, then the hatch swung open again.

'What d'you want now?' snapped the voice.

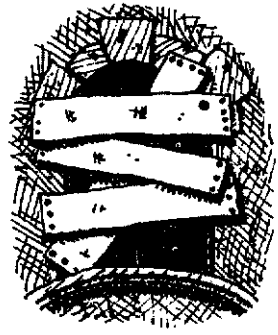
'Would it be possible to talk to someone about cheese?' Willbury asked.

'No! Cheese is our business, and information about cheese is confidential. I told you to naff off, so go on . . . Take a walk!' The hatch slammed shut.

Willbury was left standing in the rain, staring at the door. He was not quite sure what to do. He had not expected a warm welcome, but nor had he expected this total failure. He looked up at the building. Wooden boards were nailed over most of the windows, but from between gaps in the planks several pairs of eyes were staring down at him.

'I am being watched,' he muttered. He turned and nonchalantly walked across the street and into the Nag's Head.

As soon as he walked inside he was surrounded.



*From between gaps in the planks several pairs of eyes were staring at him*

'What they say then?' asked the captain.

'Not a lot!' said Willbury.

'Did you ask if they had our friends?' asked Kipper.

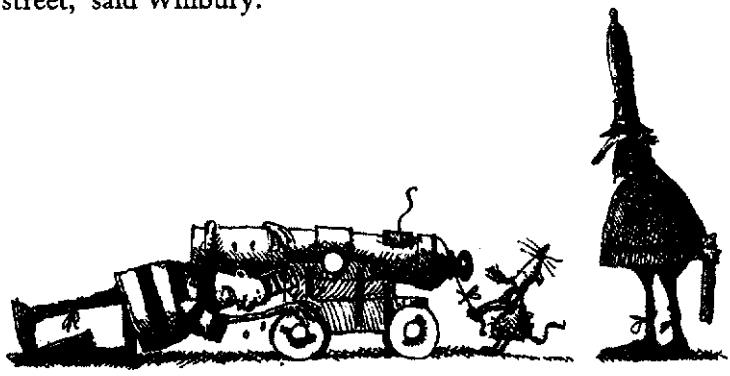
'I didn't really get round to that. They were not very chatty,' Willbury admitted. 'I wonder what our next step is?'

'Storm them with grappling hooks!' said a very enthusiastic Bert.

'We ain't got no grappling hooks, and anyway it looks a pretty tough building to storm,' Tom replied.

'Well, we could go back to the ship and get the cannon?' said Kipper.

'I don't think that the police are going to put up with members of the local laundry letting off cannons in the street,' said Willbury.

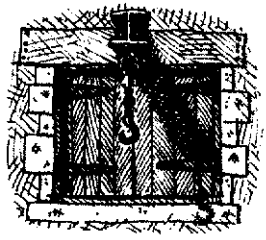


*'I don't think that the police are going to put up with members of the local laundry letting off cannons in the street.'*

'And we ain't got no gunpowder,' said Jim regretfully.

'Maybe there is another way in,' suggested Arthur.

'There is one other way in. The mice told me about it,' said Bert. 'If you look right up at the roof, you can see a pair of doors, with a crane that sticks out just above them. It's like one of them Dutch ones they use for lifting pianos into attics and the like. I don't think there is any way we can use that, as it's controlled from inside the building.'



*'If you look right up at the roof, you can see a pair of doors'*

One of the other rats raised his hand. 'S'cuse me, but ain't they got a sewer?'

'The mice say the Cheese Hall has got its own cesspit and well. They're not connected up to the main systems, so it's impossible to use those to get in. The place is like a fortress!' said Bert.

'Well, how are we going to find out whether they got our mates then?' asked Tom.

'How about we kidnap one of them and torture 'im!' said Jim.

'Yeah!' agreed Bert.

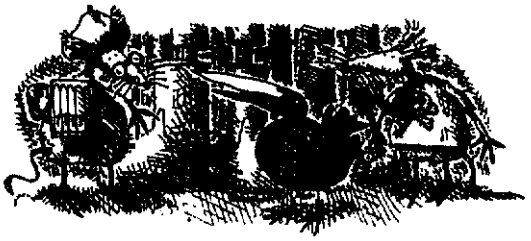
'I don't think that's quite the right thing to do,' said Willbury. 'I think we have no choice but to watch the place and see what happens. An opportunity may present itself.'

'Does that mean we all get to stay in the pub?' said Kipper hopefully. Tom shot him another disapproving look.

'We just need someone here where they can see the entrance. How about we rent a room and set up watch?' said Arthur.

'Sounds like a very good idea to me,' said Willbury.

'And cheaper than keeping the whole crew in the pub,' added the captain.



*There was a fluttering and Mildred made her way to the front*

'We could keep in touch if crows act as messengers and fly back and forth to the laundry,' said Tom.

There was a fluttering and Mildred made her way to the front.

'I would like to volunteer to act as messenger,' said Mildred.

'Thank you,' said Willbury. 'And who would like to take first watch?'

'I will,' said Arthur.

'I don't think so,' replied Willbury.

'It's not going to be dangerous just looking out of a window,' pleaded Arthur. 'And besides, it was my idea. I know I can do this, Willbury, please let me.'

'All right then, but you are only to watch. I think it best though that someone else stays with you,' said Willbury.

Kipper broke in. 'Let me and Tom look after Arthur! We won't let him get into trouble.'

'All right. But if anything happens you are just to send a message back to the laundry,' insisted Willbury. 'I want to go back with the rest of the crew to check that the little creatures are all right.'

'Me too,' said Marjorie. 'The poor little things seemed so frightened . . . '

Willbury walked over to the bar.

'Excuse me, do you have a room I can rent?' he asked the landlady.

'I am afraid we only have a small one in the attic left, as it is market day,' she answered.

'Does it have a window on the street?' asked Willbury.

'Yes. Who's it for?' she asked.

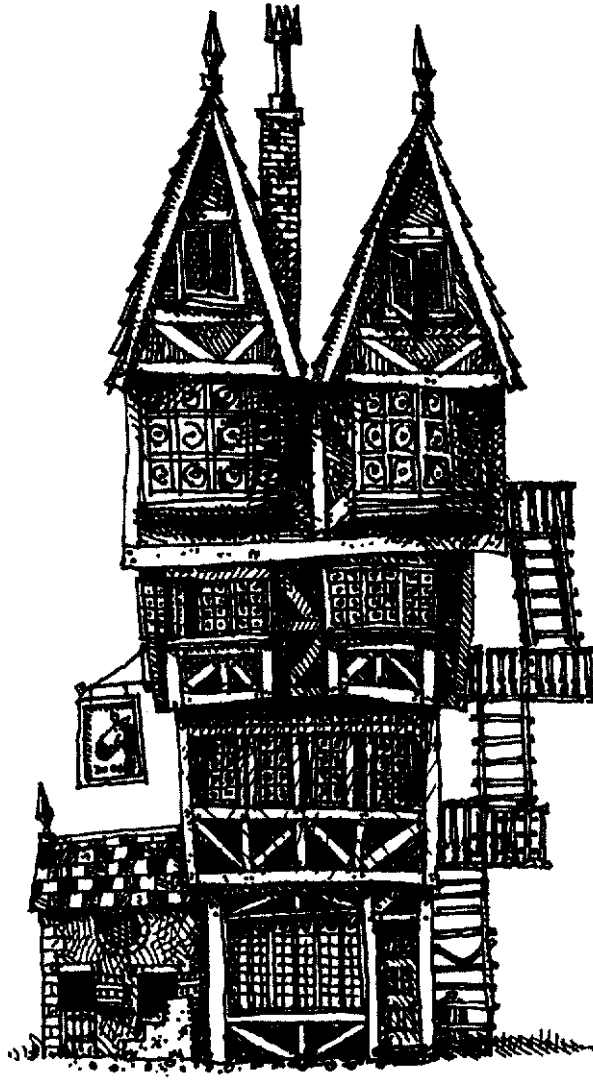
Willbury pointed out Arthur, Tom, Kipper, and Mildred. The landlady looked rather unsure. 'The crow will have to perch on the curtain rail and it will be extra if boots are worn in bed.'

'Certainly,' said Willbury, and he handed over the money.

The landlady showed Arthur, Tom, Kipper, and Mildred to the room, while Willbury, Marjorie, and the rest of the crew returned to the Nautical Laundry.



*The landlady*



*The Nag's Head*