

Opening extract from

Sea Monsters and Other Delicacies

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CHAPTER ONE

It was night and, under the cover of darkness, a fishing boat motored across the sea. In the boat's wheelhouse, a tall man in a long fur coat was clutching the wheel, steering through the choppy waves. He glanced across the water towards the black silhouette of an old oil rig. It stood heavy in the sea like an iron giant.

The man smiled, then cut the boat's engine. He poked his head from the wheelhouse. 'This is the place,' he said. His face looked twisted like a rotten apple core. 'Hurry up, Blud! Hurry up, Bone! It's time for a spot of fishing. Get me a sea monster! Now!'

On the deck of the boat, a big man with greasy hair and a thick black beard dipped his hand into a wooden crate. He took out a hand grenade and pulled out its pin with his teeth. He threw the grenade into the sea, then leant over the side of the boat, listening. From deep underwater came a muffled boom as the grenade exploded. The boat shuddered. 'That'll give it a headache,' he said. 'Come on, you big beast! Up you come.'

At the rear of the boat, a small man in a ragged suit looked up from a bucket. His face was pale green and his chin was wet with sick. 'Did we have to come here?' he groaned. 'I don't like the sea.'

The boat was rocking from side to side in the waves.

The man in the fur coat stepped across the deck and gave the small man a kick. 'Stop whingeing, Blud, you pathetic whelk.'

'Yes, Baron Marackai. Sorry, Baron Marackai,' the small man, Blud, replied, scrambling to his feet. He wiped the sick from



his chin with a soggy red rag.

The man in the fur coat, Baron Marackai, pulled a torch from his pocket. He switched it on and shone it out to sea. 'There must be one here somewhere,' he said.

Blud and Bone gazed across the water, following the beam of light.

Baron Marackai looked at them. 'Well, don't just stand there,' he told them. 'Throw in more grenades! Blast the beast out of the water!'

'Yes, Baron,' both men said, running to the crate. 'Whatever you say, Baron.'

Blud and Bone each took out a handful of grenades. They pulled the pins out and threw the grenades overboard. 'Bombs away!' they yelled.

From deep beneath the waves came a succession of muffled explosions. Blasts belched from the depths and the boat lurched. Blud and Bone clung to its side. They threw more grenades, and the sea erupted in plumes of water. Flapping fish showered on to the deck.

Baron Marackai paced up and down, shining his torch over the dark water.

‘Excuse me for asking, Sir, but what do you want a sea monster for?’ Blud asked.

Baron Marackai licked his twisted lips, then turned to face the small man. ‘So that we can eat it,’ he said.

Blud grinned. Bone rubbed his big fat belly.

‘We’ll boil it alive then scoop out its brains and chop off its tentacles,’ Baron Marackai told them. ‘It’s the most delicious beast imaginable.’

‘But what if we get caught, Sir?’ Blud asked. The small man’s eyes flicked left and then right, looking out to the dark sea, checking there were no other boats in sight.

‘Those fools won’t stop me this time,’ Baron Marackai said. He rubbed the small stump of flesh where his little finger was missing then held up his right hand. ‘Now repeat after me. Death to the RSPCB!’

Blud and Bone held up their right hands and folded down their little fingers. ‘Death to

the RSBPC,' they said.

'The RSPCB, you numbskulls!'

Blud and Bone sniggered.

Baron Marackai stamped his snakeskin boot. 'Enough!' he said. 'Now get to work! I have a plan that will send the RSPCB to their doom.'

'That's what he told us last time,' Blud whispered to Bone.

Baron Marackai picked up a dead fish from the deck of the boat and slapped it across Blud's face. 'Don't talk about last time!' he spat. 'Just get me a sea monster! And leave the RSPCB to me.'

Blud and Bone threw grenade after grenade, hurling them into the sea. Explosion after explosion echoed beneath them. The sea erupted. Fish and seaweed showered down, and the boat heaved and rolled.

Baron Marackai shone his torch over the side, sweeping it back and forth lighting the waves.

A huge tentacle broke the surface of

the water. 'There!' he called gleefully. 'Sea monster to starboard!'

The tentacle rose upwards, twirling high in the air. Then it crashed down, smashing against the boat. The Baron clung to the side as Blud and Bone slid across the deck, slamming into the wheelhouse.

'Get up, you idiots!' the Baron shouted.

Blud and Bone scrambled to the side of the boat and peered over the edge. Beneath the waves they could make out the dark shape of a huge beast with giant tentacles.

'It's enormous!' Blud said.

'It's gigantic!' Bone said.

'What did you expect, you nincompoops? It's a sea monster!'

As the huge beast scraped the hull of the boat, the Baron ran inside the wheelhouse.

Blud and Bone cowered as tentacles reached up, coiling over the deck. The tentacles were long and thick and covered in barnacles. They wrapped around the stern and smashed the hauling winch from its fittings.

The boat was tilting in the water.

'It's angry, Sir,' Blud called, crawling for cover behind the wooden crate.

A tentacle whipped towards him, grabbing him by the leg and dragging him across the deck. 'Help!'

Bone picked up a large iron anchor and started whacking the tentacle with it.

Baron Marackai poked his head from the wheelhouse.

'DON'T LOSE IT, YOU IMBECILES!'



CHAPTER TWO

Ulf woke up feeling the sun hot on his face. He crawled from the straw, rubbing his eyes, and stepped out through the door of his den. The sun was high in the sky above Faraway Hall and, on the rooftop, he could see Druce the gargoyle creeping over the tiles peering down the chimney pots.

Ulf got on to his quad bike and kick-started its engine. He rode up the path along the side of the paddock, stopping at the edge of the yard. He hopped off and went into the feed store to grab a sausage.

‘Up late last night, were you?’ he heard.

Ulf turned, looking out through the feed

store's large wooden doors. Flying towards him from the flower garden was Tiana the fairy. She sparkled as she flew. 'Everyone's been up for hours,' she said. 'I've been collecting nectar.'

In her hand was a basket made from a hazelnut shell. It was full with yellow syrup.

Ulf opened the cold-meats fridge and took out a sausage. 'I overslept,' he told her.

All night Ulf had been awake watching the moon. It was nearly full and there were just two days until his transformation.

He gobbled the sausage then wiped his hairy hand on his T-shirt. To look at him, Ulf could easily be mistaken for a human boy. But every month, on the night of the full moon, he would undergo a complete physical change, turning from boy to wolf. Ulf was a werewolf.

'Do you want to help me collect nectar?' Tiana asked.

Ulf shook his head. 'I promised I'd give Orson a hand with the trolls. Besides which, nectar's for fairies.'

He licked the sausage fat from his lips and

stepped out of the feed store into the yard.

‘Suit yourself,’ Tiana said. ‘More for me!’ She flew back to the flower garden in a trail of sparkles.

Ulf hopped on to his quad bike and rode through the yard, past the fire zone, the hatching bay and the quarantine unit. ‘Open,’ he called. A voice-activated gate opened in front of him. He stood up on his foot bars and rode out into the beast park.

Faraway Hall was the headquarters of the RSPCB, The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Beasts. It had been Ulf’s home for over ten years, ever since he’d arrived as an orphaned werecub. It was a rescue centre for rare and endangered beasts.

Ulf bumped along the track past the aviary, a high-netted enclosure containing the winged beasts. He glanced through the wire mesh and saw three griffins tearing at a lump of meat. Next door to them, a mantabird was hovering like a flying carpet.

Ulf accelerated to the biodomes where the

extreme-weather beasts were housed. As he passed the desert dome he saw a fountain of sand shoot up from the blowhole of a sandwhale. In the snow dome a yeti was beating its chest, and in the storm dome he could see electroductyls diving into the eye of a hurricane. Ulf glanced back as a conductor lizard flicked out its tongue, catching a bolt of lightning.

He sped away, looking up to Troll Crag, a rocky hill dotted with caves. Halfway up, he could see Orson. Orson was a giant. He was walking towards the mouth of a cave, holding a tree trunk in each hand.

Ulf rode up the rocky hill to meet him.

‘Afternoon, Ulf,’ Orson said, laying the tree trunks on the ground. The giant dusted his hands on his shirt. They were as big as shovels.

‘Sorry I’m late,’ Ulf said, jumping off his quad bike. ‘I overslept.’

‘Can you help me clear this cave, please?’ Orson asked. ‘The trolls have been banging about and the roof’s fallen in.’



Orson ducked his head inside the cave, and Ulf followed.

The cave was large and smelt of troll dung. A pile of rocks and boulders lay on the ground. At the back, Ulf could see chewed bones where the trolls had been eating, and huge footprints leading down two dark tunnels. From deep underground, he could hear the faint echoing sounds of trolls snorting and grunting.

As Orson began clearing the larger boulders, Ulf helped him, shifting the smaller rocks and stacking them outside the cave.

It was hard work, and a smelly way to spend an afternoon, but Ulf liked being with Orson. While they worked, the giant told Ulf stories about what it was like in the wild.

Ulf longed to see the wild. All afternoon he tried to imagine what it must feel like to live there, as he carried rock after rock, stacking them outside the cave.

When the cave was clear he rested in the sun, looking out from the top of Troll Crag.