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opening extract from

Charlie Small and the Island of Skulls

written by

Charlie Small

published by

David Fickling Books

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please print off and read at your leisure.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This is the eighth volume of Charlie Small's amazing journal. It was found by a young boy in a quiet cove by the sea. He was on holiday and had wandered off on his own to explore the beach. Finding the entrance to a narrow cave at the bottom of a jagged cliff, he stepped inside. It smelled of the sea and rotting seaweed and the deeper the boy went, the darker it got and the more nervous he became. His foot touched something damp and squidgy, and he gasped out loud – was it a jellyfish, ready to wrap its long stinging tentacles around his ankle? He peered through the gloom and found ... a waterlogged notebook. It was a new Charlie Small journal full of sketches, diagrams and doodles, and it was packed with Charlie's latest unbelievable adventures! The boy couldn't believe his luck and took the book back to his guesthouse to read. Then, realizing it was a very important discovery he posted it straight off to us.

There must be other notebooks to find, so keep your eyes peeled. If you do come across a curious-looking diary, or see an eight-year-old boy wearing a battered rucksack, please let us know at the website:

www.charliesmall.co.uk

I think it's time I had a haircut!



(and a bath)



THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF CHARLIE SMALL (400)



NOTEBOOK 8

FOREST OF SKULLS



d/b
FICKING

David Fickling Books

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NAME: Charlie Small

ADDRESS: The Forest of Skulls

I'm an eight-year-old boy
AGE: who's lived for 400 years!

MOBILE: 07713 1238

I haven't been to school
SCHOOL: for centuries!

THINGS I LIKE: Jakeman and Philly;
the bull whale; Barcus and
Knee-high; my dad!

THINGS I HATE: Joseph Craik
(my arch enemy); Captain
Cut-throat and Mildew Jones;
smelly, hairy rats and
wily weasels

If you find this book, PLEASE look after it.
This is the only true account of my remarkable adventures.

My name is Charlie Small and I am at least four hundred years old. But in all those long years I have never grown up. Something happened when I was eight, something I can't begin to understand. I went on a journey... and I'm still trying to find my way home. Now, although I've ridden across oceans on the back of a big bull whale, been nearly skewered by loathsome giant rats and lived in the leafy roof of a forest, I still look like any eight-year-old boy you might pass in the street.

I've tackled a rabid badger in mortal combat and driven a rampaging armoured armadillo. You might think this sounds fantastic, you could think it's a lie, but you would be wrong. Because EVERYTHING IN THIS BOOK IS TRUE. Believe this single fact and you can share the most incredible journey ever experienced!

Charlie Small



'Welcome 'ome,' cried Lizzie Hall

Prisoner Of The Perfumed Pirates- Again!

'Weigh anchor and hoist the mainsail!' bellowed Captain Cut-throat as we stepped aboard her galleon. The night was dark, but a score of lanterns lit the deck with a hazy, golden light.

Half a dozen lady pirates ran over to the capstan and began to heave against the bars, their ghastly tattoos twitching as the muscles of their sinewy arms took the strain of the big, heavy anchor.

'Welcome 'ome, Charlie Small,' cried Lizzie Hall.

'Yeah! There'll be no escapin' this time, you desertin' dog!' sneered Sabre Sue, grunting as the wheel started to turn and the heavy anchor's chain coiled into the ship.

'Don't you worry yourselves,' growled the captain, clamping her large fist around my wrist. 'This little worm ain't going nowhere. Now, get on with your jobs, you putrid pile of pilchard guts!'

With the anchor lifted from the ocean floor, a large, stained and torn sail was hoisted up the main mast. The galleon turned on a swell of

water, the sail filled with air and we headed out into the open seas.

‘Right, me hearties,’ bellowed the captain as we sliced through the waves with silver bubbles streaming along the bows, ‘let’s go a-piratin!’

I gave a huge sigh. Darn it and double drat! Why oh why did this have to happen *now*?

Snatched!

Just an hour earlier, I’d been safely tucked up in bed inside Jakeman’s factory, wondering how my miraculous inventor friend was going to get me back home. (I’ve been away for four hundred years – and Mum is still expecting me back in time for tea!)

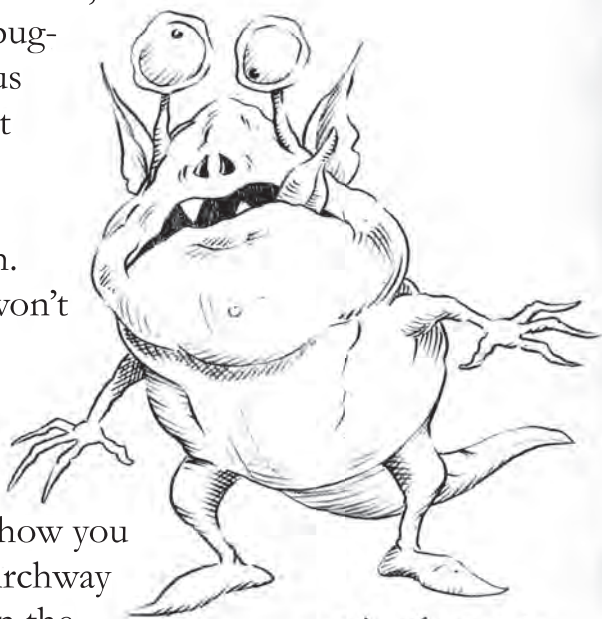
‘Don’t worry your head about that, dear boy,’ Jakeman had beamed. ‘I’ve been working on various inventions ever since I promised to get you home. Some haven’t quite worked out; some have been downright disasters! But now I think I’ve got it – I shoot you from a special cannon straight through my Atom-Annihilating Archway, which will take you right back to the world you came from.’

‘Fire me from a cannon?’ I said, feeling a bit concerned. ‘Are you sure this invention’s safe?’

‘Well, one can never be one hundred per cent sure in this game, Charlie. All I know is that I fired a woodlouse through the arch and it disappeared and never came back. If my calculations were correct, it should have gone to your world.’

‘What if your calculations *weren’t* correct?’ I stammered. ‘What if the woodlouse ended up on some distant star, populated by bug-eyed monstrous Martians? That could be me!’

‘Now, don’t worry so much. I’m sure that won’t happen,’ said Jakeman. ‘You go and get a good night’s sleep and I’ll show you the Jakeman Archway to Anywhere in the morning.’



A bug-eyed Martian

I was pretty tired, having ridden the waves all day in a super-speedy hover-sub and then fought Tristram Twitch's two moronic minders, so I climbed the stairs to the top of the warehouse and crawled into the oil-stained bed that Jakeman had made up for me.

I hadn't been in bed more than an hour when I heard a loud noise. I'd been busy writing up my journal and wondering if I really would get home in the morning, or be zapped to yet another unknown world, when a hoarse cry rang out from along the corridor.

'Where are you, Charlie Small?'

Oh no! I recognize that voice, I thought. It's that fearsome lady pirate, Captain Cut-throat! What on earth is she doing here?

'Come on, there's no use hidin' lad, where are you?' she bellowed.

Oh yikes! I desperately reached for my cutlass as the door to my room burst open with a mighty *crash* . . . and there was Cut-throat herself, looking twice as ugly and three times as mean as the last time I'd seen her. Her broad, pug-nosed face broke into a grin that exposed a row of blackened teeth.



‘Stay right where you are, you snivellin’ slime-nosed slug,’ she bawled. ‘Touch that cutlass and I’ll open your gizzard and see what you had for dinner!’

‘Clear off, Cut-throat,’ I said, although I didn’t feel half as brave as I was trying to sound. ‘What do you want, anyway?’

‘You, ya little rapsallion,’ she said in a low growl. ‘It’s about time you returned to your pirating duties!’

‘You’ve got to be kidding!’ I said. ‘There’s no way I’m going to pilfer and pillage for you again.’

Marching across the room, Cut-throat grabbed my cutlass and snapped it over her knee, and then seized me by the scruff of the neck.

‘Less of your backchat, lad,’ she crowed. ‘Just remember who you’re talkin’ to. Now, get yourself ready and meet me downstairs in five minutes. We’ve got your pals nicely trussed up, so don’t try any funny business.’

With that, the pirate slammed the door closed and I heard her heavy boots clumping down the passage.