Opening extract from

Charlie Small: Charlie and the Underworld

Written by

Charlie Small

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Please print off and read at your leisure.

NAME: Charlie Small

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SCHOOL: It's so long ago I can hardly remember, but I think it was St Beckham's

THINGS I LIKE: Gorillas; practising cutlass-fighting; Braemar, Jenny and Granny Green; Wild Bob Ffrance; Nagachak and although she is a big pest, Freecloud!

THINGS I HATE: Captain Cut-throat (a bully); the Puppet Master (a big bully); Horatio Ham (a bully and a big twit); Joseph Craik (the biggest nastiest bully of the lot); The Barbarous Bats; Mapwai

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 four hundred years old, maybe even more. But in all those long years I have never grown up. Something happened when I was eight years old, 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 have fought a revolting Spidron, been attacked by a monster Megashark and been trapped in tunnels a mile below the earth's surface, I still look like any eight-year-old boy you might pass in the street.

I've travelled to the ends of the earth and to the centre of the earth. I've been chased by an angry mob of Troglodytes and narrowly avoided being plunged into the earth's molten core! You may 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



Attack Of The Ape-men

Fighting for breath, I raced down the dark tunnel that carved its way deeper and deeper into the solid bedrock. Behind me I could hear the heavy footsteps of the razor-toothed ape-man, all hair and solid muscle. I could tell he was gaining on me . . . fast!

My torch showed the tunnel stretching ahead of me into the distant gloom. There was no way of escape and nowhere to hide. What was I going to do? *Help!*

'*Man-cha!*' bellowed the Neanderthal ape-man, and I gasped, because it was a word I sort of recognized. It was like a word I had learned in Gorilla City; just maybe, I thought, these ape-like people spoke a similar language. '*Cha*' was the Gorilla word for banana, and from the horrible slobbery noises this creature was making, I reckoned that '*Man-cha*' must mean 'Man-banana', or 'Man-food'! *Crikey, he wanted me for a snack!*

'*Man-cha!*' he yelled again, and suddenly the tunnel was filled with a hundred voices, all shouting the same thing.

'*Man-cha, man-cha, man-cha!*' A horde of ape-people had joined in the chase. It was turning into a horrific sort of foxhunt – and I was the fox!

I careered down the tunnel, the creature now only a few steps behind, and waited for the tug on my shoulder as his large hairy hand grabbed me. Then, just a few metres further along, a huge rat-like animal shot out of a hole in the wall. It was as big as a badger and ran straight through my legs, into the path of the ape-man.



'*Man-cha!*' he bellowed again, and fell upon the hapless creature. It squealed and struggled and the ape-man roared and lifted it to his mouth. I couldn't bear to watch what happened next; nor did I have time to. I jumped feet first, straight into the hole from which the rat had just emerged. It was a tight fit, but I managed to wriggle myself in.

Peering out of the narrow burrow, I looked back down the tunnel at a scene of complete mayhem. The rest of the tribe had caught up with my pursuer, seen that he'd got some food, and attacked en masse. They must have been starving, because they fought ferociously over the tiniest scraps, roaring and biting and gnashing their teeth.

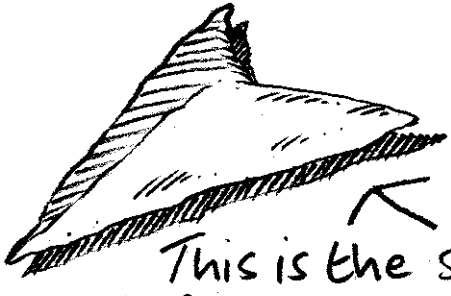
A Very Close Shave

I felt sorry for the rat. It didn't stand a chance; but I was relieved that it wasn't me being fought over by the mob of hairy thugs. Then I sneezed! An ape-woman heard me and came racing over to the mouth of the burrow. I ducked my head back inside but she thrust her arm in and

grabbed a handful of my hair.

'*Yeow!*' I screamed as, twisting and tugging, the creature started to pull me out of the hole like a cork from a bottle. My hunting knife! I needed my hunting knife, but the burrow was too narrow for me to reach round to my rucksack. The ape-woman tugged again and I shot towards the entrance. I was done for!

Then, as I scrabbled on the ground, trying to push myself further back into the burrow, my hand closed on a splinter of stone. Whether it was one of the ape-people's discarded weapons or just a shard of natural flint I don't know, but the edge was razor-sharp and I immediately lifted it to my scalp and sliced through my hair, just below the ape-woman's fist.



She flew backwards, and I wriggled and writhed deeper into the burrow. Soon her face was back at the entrance and her hand darted in again, but I was out of reach. I let out a huge sigh of relief. The burrow was slightly wider now and I inched back some more, hoping that I would soon be able to sit up.



It did get wider – just as the ground started to slope away behind me. I began to slip. I tried to stop but the tunnel got steeper and steeper, and I found myself hurtling backwards into total darkness. *Yikes!*