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opening extract from

Charlie Small: Frostbite Pass

written by

Charlie Small

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NAME: Charlie Small

ADDRESS: Somewhere in the Frozen North

AGE: 400 - yes I am!

MOBILE: 07713 12

SCHOOL: Good old St Beckham's
Although I didn't think it was that great when I had to go there every day!

THINGS I LIKE: Gorillas; cutlass fighting; Braemar; Jenny and Granny Green; Tom, Eliza and Ma Baldwin

THINGS I HATE: The Puppet Master (a big bully); Joseph Craik (an evil schemer and my arch enemy); scruffers; endless tunnels; the Spidion



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've been nearly swallowed by a slime monster, attacked by terrible trufflers and befriended by a tribe of weird tree people, 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 robbed by a band of brigands, and have ridden across the night sky on the back of a bad-tempered owl. 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

The Slavering Slime Monster!

Attack Of The Slime Monster



I'm hiding in the tangled roots of a mangrove tree, stranded in a vast, stinking swamp that is home to some of the scariest monsters I have ever seen. Thick green water stretches out in every direction, dotted with hundreds of verdant, jewel-like islands. This is my first night since escaping from the Underworld, and I'm beginning to wish I'd stayed there!

My problems started as soon as I dropped from the sky with my homemade parachute and landed on the shore of a small island. Swamp water boiled and popped all around me; then, all of a sudden, something started to break through the gloopy surface of the bog . . .

A large pointed ear appeared, dripping with gunge; then a pair of sulphurous yellow eyes, flashing with a malevolent light.

'Yikes!' I cried and tried to run, but my legs wouldn't work. I was frozen with fear. Now a warty nose appeared and gaping jaws, gurgling in a ferocious roar. *Jeepers creepers!* I thought. *It's some sort of slime monster!*

The monster continued to rise up out of the swamp until it towered above me, standing waist deep in the bubbling bog. It was huge and covered in long olive-green fur. As it roared, it showed a set of slab-like teeth as big as gravestones. At last I managed to break into a run; but it was already too late! The monster reached out a hairy arm and grabbed hold of me.

I felt giant claws close around me. Now I know what it's like to be a car in one of those automatic washers! I struggled and writhed, desperate to escape, and as the creature tried to grip me even tighter, I shot from its slimy paw like a bar of wet soap in a bubble bath!



I flew through the air, turning somersaults and cartwheels, and landed in a heap on a soft bed of ferns. I scrambled to my feet, but my freedom didn't last



long. The monster reached over and grabbed me again. Once more I was squirted from its slippery grip.

'Gnar!' It roared in frustration as I tried to scramble to safety. But there was nowhere to hide. The only cover on the island was the bank of feathery ferns where I'd landed, and one tiny tree. In desperation I crouched behind the narrow trunk but the slime monster spotted me and, stretching out an arm, ripped the tree out by its roots. *Jeepers!* I thought. That was as easy as picking a daisy.

'Gnash!' the monster bellowed. Then, wiping a paw dry on the ground, it snatched me up and in one swift movement popped me into its mouth!

Charlie Small On The Menu!

I landed on the slime monster's damp, spongy tongue and bounced as if I had just taken a running jump onto my bed. Then, *Whoa!* I started to slip and, just like being on a super-splash slide at a swimming pool, went speeding towards the giant, grinding teeth.

'Help!' I cried. 'Let me out of here, you great greasy goon!'

Its teeth crashed together, missing my head by millimetres. The monster tried to push me between them with its slobbery tongue. I dived down, sliding and bouncing against its tonsils. I just managed to avoid dropping down the monster's throat by grabbing hold of a jagged molar! I had to do something fast, or I would be crushed to a pulp between the enormous hammering gnashers!

I sat up, covered in saliva, and as the monster rolled its tongue, I went scooting back towards its teeth. I opened the flap of my rucksack, searching for the one thing that might do the trick: the sandwiches that Ma Baldwin had given me before I escaped from the Underworld!

I knew, just by the smell, what was in the sarnies as soon as she handed me the parcel: my least favourite food in the entire Underworld. It was Ma's own concoction – a dark, strong and eye-wateringly sour spread that I called Ma-mite! Perhaps the slime monster would feel the same way as I did about it. As I slid, spinning and spiralling in a pool of spit, towards the chewing chompers, I ripped open the sandwiches and

smeared a big streak of the filling over the monster's tongue!

It stopped chewing almost immediately, swallowed (nearly sending me careering down into its stomach) and then spat as hard as it could!

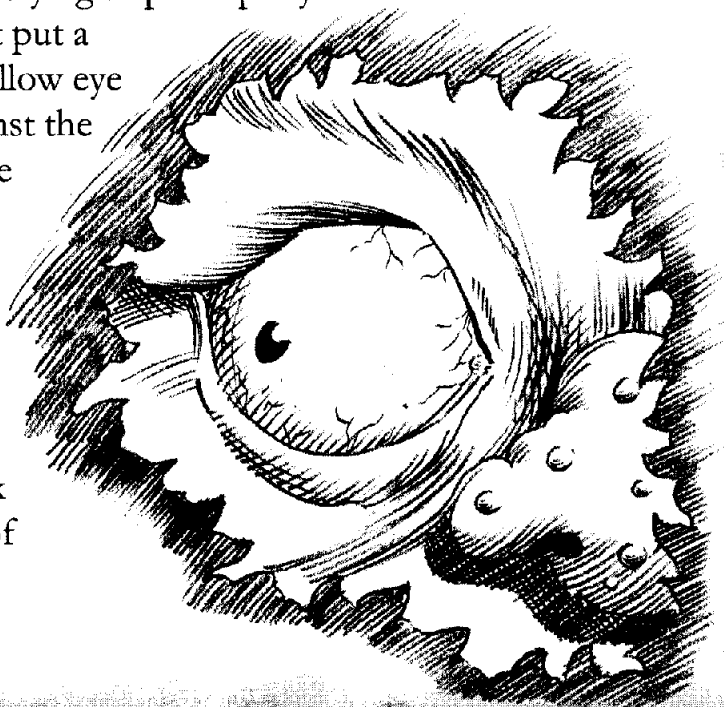
'Ptah! Yee-uk!' yelled the slime monster as I went flying out between its rubbery lips in a spray of saliva. I sailed right over the island, across a stretch of green swamp water, and landed in the shallows next to another, bigger island. I climbed up the bank and crouched between some reeds, looking back as the monster cupped its paws and took a big swig of water, gargling and spitting out the taste of Ma-mite.



Then it was looking around for me again. I ducked lower behind the wall of reeds, crawled backwards into some thicker vegetation and crept amongst a thicket of mangrove trees.

Hiding Out

For the best part of an hour the growling slime monster waded up and down through the swamp looking for me. It went from island to island, raking its claws through the reeds and ferns. It lifted its warty snout in the air and sniffed, trying to pick up my scent. It put a great yellow eye up against the very tree I was hiding in, trying to see into the dark tangle of

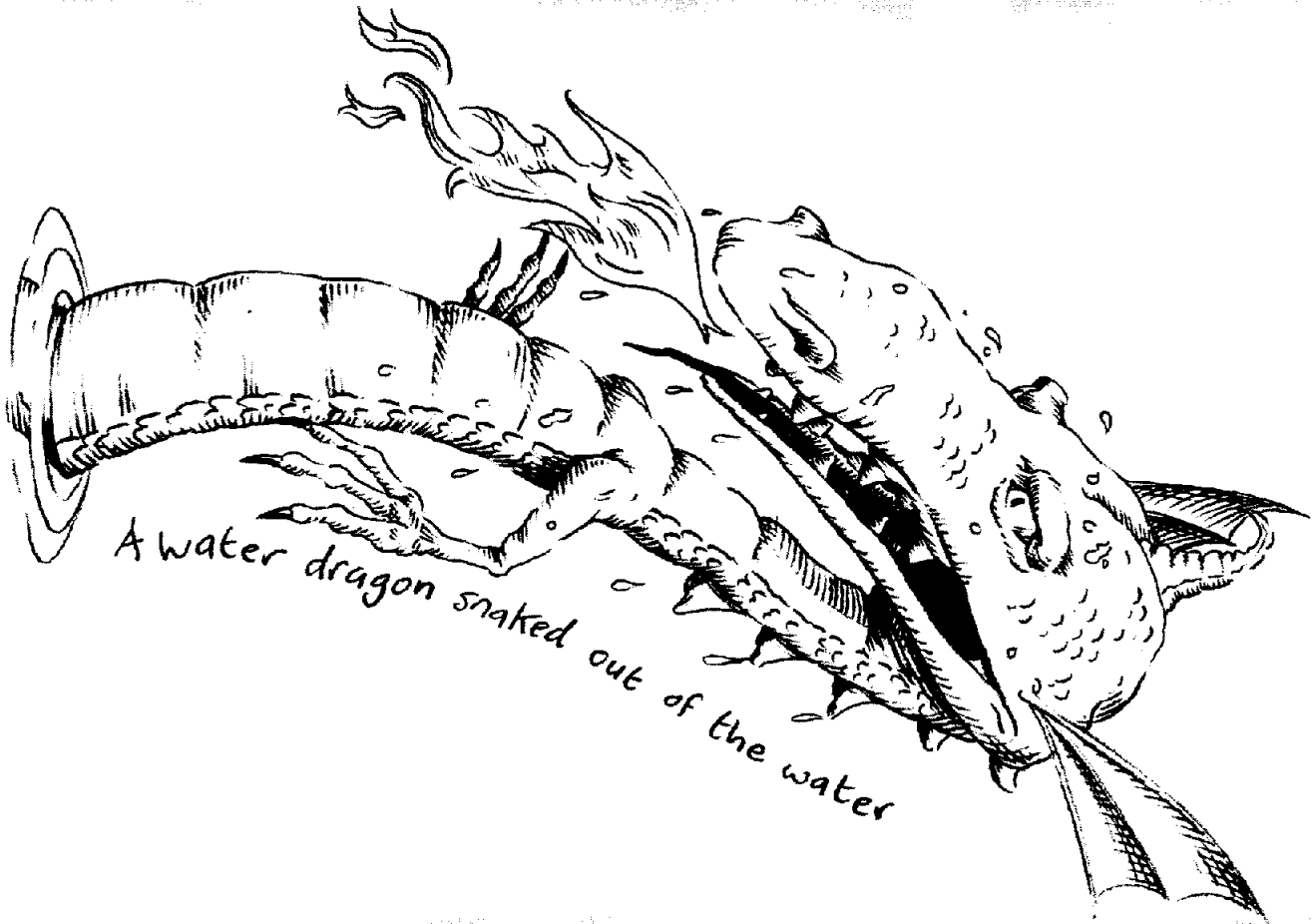


branches. I lay very still, hardly daring to breathe as the eye swivelled this way and that, the stinky breath making the leaves flutter all around me.

Then, suddenly, the monster seemed to give up, turned on its heel and waded off through the swamp. I heaved a huge sigh of relief – and the monster's ears twitched. *No, you fool, Charlie – won't you ever learn to keep quiet?* The creature came storming back, grabbed a handful of trees, and pulled and tugged, tearing them up from the soil. Grunting with frustration, it shook the trees, sending a shower of mud and stones into the swamp. Then, finding nothing, it roared in disappointment and went to grab another handful; a handful that would include me! But just as it reached out, the swamp water nearby exploded in a cascade of bubbles and an arrow-shaped head, followed by a long thick neck, snaked out of the water . . .

A Mighty Battle

At first I thought it *was* a snake, but then I saw its little front arms and the scaly fins fanning out from its jaw. As the creature let out a long,


A water dragon snaked out of the water

threatening hiss, I saw a red tapering tongue of flame flick from its mouth, singeing the slime monster's fur, and I realized this must be some sort of water dragon. The monster lunged forward and grabbed the dragon by the snout, forcing its head back. The dragon's scaly tail whipped out of the swamp and wrapped itself around the monster's hairy neck, squeezing tightly and making it croak and gasp for air.

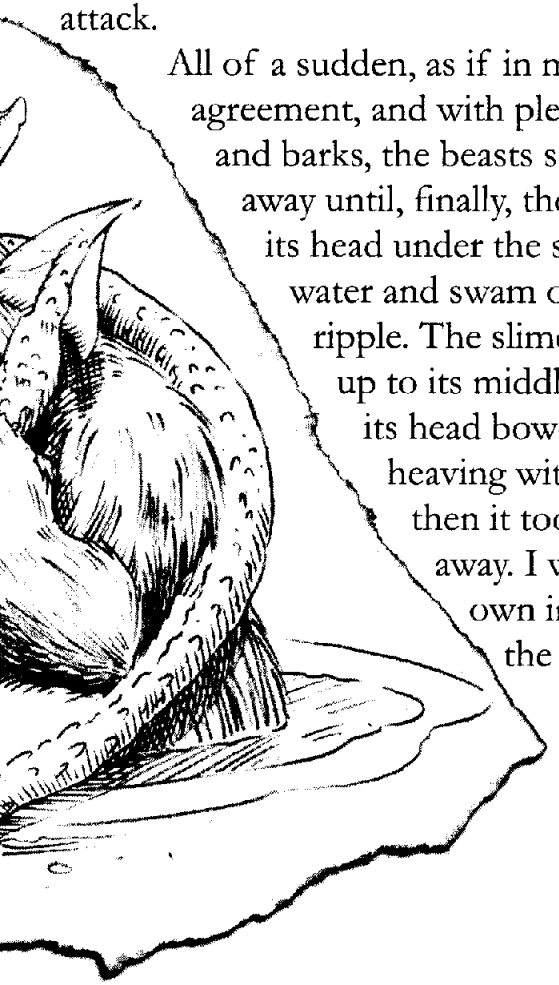
With a titanic effort, the slime monster pulled at the scaly tail, forcing it away and gradually unwinding it. Then it took a huge lungful of air before launching a right hook that caught the water dragon under the jaw. '*Aarrk!*' screamed the reptile, and spat out a broken tooth. (Darn it – the tooth fell into the swamp. I would have loved to add that to my collection!)

I watched spellbound as the mighty combatants toppled into the mire with an enormous splash, wrestling and roaring, grappling and struggling. First the punching, thumping slime monster seemed to be winning the fight; then the snapping water dragon shot out a ball of fire, forcing the monster to retreat and douse his smoking fur with swamp water. The slime monster charged and, leaping onto

its enemy, clutched it around the throat with both its huge paws. The water dragon gasped, sending a puff of black smoke into the air. It seemed to be all over for the formidable flame-thrower. Then, with an enormous roar, it flexed its long muscly neck and broke free of the slime monster's grasp.



Stepping back, the water dragon snarled, arched its neck and opened its slender jaws. A plume of roaring flame filled the air. The slime monster backed away, growling and holding up its paws to shield itself from the heat. Then the two antagonists stood staring at each other, swaying to left and right, looking for a chance to attack.



All of a sudden, as if in mutual agreement, and with plenty of grunts and barks, the beasts started backing away until, finally, the dragon dipped its head under the surface of the water and swam off without a ripple. The slime monster stood up to its middle in the bog, its head bowed and its chest heaving with exhaustion; then it too slowly waded away. I was left on my own in the silence of the swamp.

Bedtime zzzz

I waited for a long time in my hiding place in the mangrove tree. Finally I felt it was safe to come out. Then, creeping down to the water's edge, still shaking slightly from the fear and excitement of having watched two mythical monsters battle it out in front of my eyes, I looked out across the swamp. The water was as flat as a tabletop, with only the occasional bubble popping to the surface. The monsters had gone, and as the big orange sun was starting to set in the sky, I decided it was time to find somewhere safe to spend the night.

Back in the middle of the grove of trees, I looked around for a likely sleeping place. I didn't fancy kipping up in the branches, just in case old slimy came back again, and I certainly didn't want to curl up on the ground – *Yeurgh!* Who knows what would slither over me during the night! Then I spotted the perfect place.

All the mangrove trees seemed to be standing on tiptoe, their intertwined roots growing above ground as if they were on stilts! Some of the root systems had grown into a cone, making a sort of natural tepee, so, choosing one of the