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opening extract from

Oi, Cave Boy!
Iggy the Urk Book 1

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THE STONE AGE

In the forests lived savage beasts – bears, snaggle-toothed tigers and woolly mammoths, which looked like elephants badly in need of a haircut. People generally avoided the forests. They lived together in tribes because it was safer that way and easier on the cooking. One such tribe was the Urks.

The Urks were a warlike race with bushy beards and hairy legs – especially some of the women. Their clothes were made of animal skins and they lived

in caves high on a hill overlooking the Valley of Urk and the river winding through it. In one of these caves lived a boy called Iggy. He wasn't the tallest or the hairiest in his tribe, but what he did have was imagination, and this got him into a whole heap of trouble. That of course is another story . . . Luckily it's the story that's about to begin . . .



Chapter 1

No Lumps



Iggy woke to find his dad trying to light a fire – a task that involved a few sticks, some dry grass, two flints and a lot of cursing.

'Dung and blood!' he muttered under his breath.

'Dad?' said Iggy, emerging from the shadows of their cave.

'Not now, boy,' snapped Dad irritably. 'I'm busy.'

For a while the only noise was Iggy trying not

to bother his dad, which sounded like silence with occasional sighing. Then . . .

'Dad, look at this.'

'FOR URK'S SAKE!' groaned Dad. 'How can I make a fire with you yammering in my ear?'

'Sorry, but look what I found.'

Dad turned his head. 'Uhh. A stone.'

'Yes, but it's flat. Look, no lumps.' Iggy ran his hand over the stone, which was long and smooth and roughly the shape of a squished cowpat.

'What about her?' said Dad.

'I just thought it might be useful.'

'Uhh,' grunted Dad, and went back to striking the flints together. He was in a bad mood. Lately he was often in a bad mood. It was the cold and

damp and sleeping on a hard cave floor and never getting any peace and quiet.

Iggy squatted down beside him.

'Dad? You know the river? Where does it go?'

'Go?'

'Yes.'

'Don't go anywhere, her's a river. Pass us them sticks, boy.'

'But it must go somewhere.'

'Why?'

'Well, I was watching it yesterday and it moves. It sort of wibbles along.'

'Wibbles? Talk sense!'

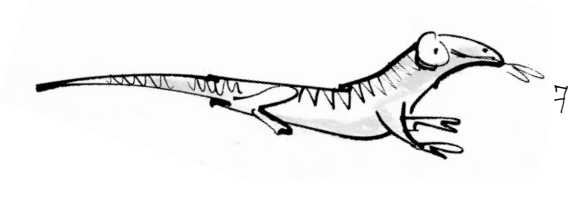
'I mean it runs – it runs down the valley. But where's it go then?'

Dad pulled at his beard. He'd never given the river any thought. It was just there. Cold and wet – except in winter when it was cold and frozen.

'Dunged if I know,' he said.

Where did the boy get these ideas? Rivers that go somewhere. Stones with no bumps. Why couldn't he stick to things that mattered? Like fires – fires kept you warm and someone had to make them. He went back to striking the two flints together. A spark flew and caught the dry grass. He crouched over it, shielding it from the wind.

Iggy turned his attention back to the flat stone, wondering what he could do with it. He set it down and prodded it with his foot. It skittered



forward like a pebble on ice. He put his head on one side the way he did when he was having an idea.

Dad meanwhile went on muttering and feeding the tiny flames with twigs and grass. A wisp of grey smoke curled upwards. Iggy placed one foot on the big flat stone and pushed gently. Sure enough it slid forward a little. *What if I try both feet?* he thought. He shoved off hard in the dirt and the next moment shot forward at the speed of a jet-propelled boomerang.

'Arrgggggggh!' yelled Dad, which isn't really a word but is the kind of thing you shout when you're bowled over by a boy on a runaway stone.

Iggy hit the cave wall, bounced off and landed

with a bump. He rubbed his elbow.

'Whoa! Deadly!' he said.

Dad sat up with grass in his hair.

'You great noggerhead! Look what you done!'

Iggy saw the fire had gone out. Actually it had more than gone out – it looked like a rhinoceros had sat on it.

'Sorry, I couldn't stop,' he said.

'It took us hours to get that lit!'

'But, Dad, I scudded on the stone! Did you see me?'

'See you?' said Dad. 'You dung near run me over!'

'Sorry,' said Iggy. 'I just thought it could be useful.'

'You think too much,' said Dad. 'When I were your age I were out throwing rocks, chasing lizards. I didn't waste time flamin' thinking.'

Iggy said nothing. He had heard this a million times.

'If you want to do something useful, sharpen them flints,' said Dad.

Lately Dad had been teaching him how to make a hunting axe. But it was dull, slow work, chipping away at a lump of flint, and his attempts looked more like knobbly potatoes than axe-blades. He picked up the stone and dusted it off. Maybe he would show it to Hubba later.

Mum arrived at the cave, carrying a bundle of animal skins.

'Hasn't you got that fire going yet?' she grumbled.

'Her went out,' muttered Dad.

'Why did you let her go out, you big mumpet!'

'I didn't *let* her,' said Dad. 'Her went. Twigs must be damp.'

He glanced over at Iggy, who shot him a grateful look. Dad in a temper was bad enough, but Mum was much worse. Iggy had seen her pick a grown man up by the ears and bash him against the roof of the cave.

'Look at them skins!' she was saying. 'I just got the blood off 'em and now they're soggy as a frog. Hasn't I told you to bring 'em in?'

'Oh,' said Iggy. 'I forgot.'

'Forgot. You always forgot,' grunted Mum. 'Daydreaming as usual.' She spread the skins on a rock and looked at Dad expectantly. 'Well? Has you talked to him then?'

'Not yet,' said Dad. 'I been busy.'

'Talked to me about what?' asked Iggy.

Mum and Dad exchanged looks.

'Sit you down, boy,' said Dad. 'And for once try to listen without bugging in all the time.'

Iggy sat down. Whatever his parents wanted to talk about, it was obviously serious.

Dad took a deep breath. 'You know why you never been hunting?'

Iggy nodded. 'I'm not old enough yet.'

'Exactly. But your ma and me, we been talking

and, well, maybe it's time.'

Iggy leapt to his feet. 'I CAN GO HUNTING?'

'Let me finish,' said Dad. 'First you got to prove you're ready.'

'I am ready,' said Iggy.

'Well, that's what we're disgusting,' said Dad. 'You know what tomorrow is, don't you?'

Iggy shook his head.

'The Feast of Urks,' said Mum, nodding her head slowly.

Iggy's heart jumped a beat. The Feast of Urks took place on the night of the full moon, when the tribe gathered to see boys become Sons of Urk. Once you were a Son of Urk you could call

yourself a warrior and join the older men on hunting expeditions. Iggy had often watched his dad set off for the forest, wishing he could go along. Now his time had finally come – although he had a funny feeling it wasn't that simple.

'What will I have to do?' he asked.

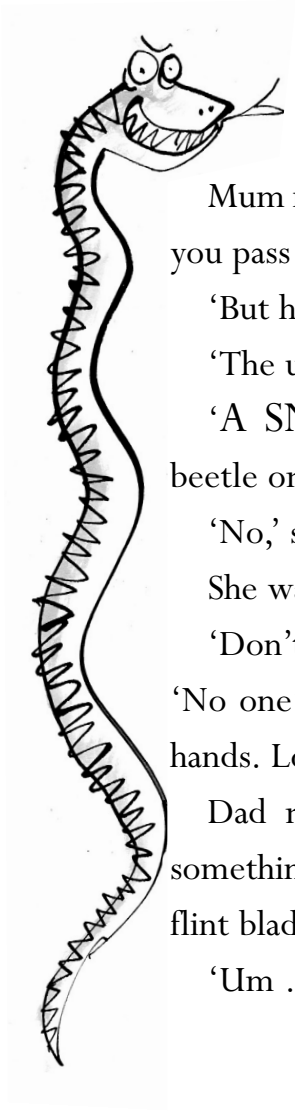
'Nothing much,' said Dad, with a quick glance at Mum. 'All you do is go up when Uncle Ham calls your name.'

(Uncle Ham was High Chief, though most people called him Hammerhead or just Chief.)

'And that's all?' asked Iggy.

Dad nodded. 'All there is to it – apart from the Testing.'

'The Testing?'



Mum nodded. 'You can't be a Son of Urk unless you pass the Testing.'

'But how? How do I pass?'

'The usual way,' said Dad. 'By killing a snake.'

'A SNAKE?' Iggy gulped. 'Couldn't I kill a beetle or something?'

'No,' said Mum. 'Got to be a snake.'

She was smiling as if nothing could be simpler.

'Don't go getting in a muck sweat,' said Dad. 'No one's asking you to kill 'em with your bare hands. Look, I made you something.'

Dad reached under a skin and brought out something heavy. It was a hunting axe with a new flint blade bound at the top.

'Um . . . thanks,' said Iggy.