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opening extract from

Super Soccer Boy and the Snot Monsters

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Judy Brown

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For Brian

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Chapter One

Vile Virus



'*AAACHOO!*' sneezed Mrs Gribble as Harry walked into the kitchen. He darted quickly to his right as a small globule of snot flew past, missing his ear by millimetres before colliding with the kitchen cabinet.

'Oh, I'm so sorry, Harry,' sniffed his mum, dashing over to wipe away the offending blob. 'This cold is awful. I'b so snotty ad I just can't stop sneezing. *A . . . AAA . . . AAACHOO!*' This time she made sure she caught the sneeze in a tissue.



'*AAACHOO!*' came a much louder, but lower sounding, boom of a sneeze from upstairs. The glasses in the cupboard rattled.

'Dad's got it too, then,' Harry said.

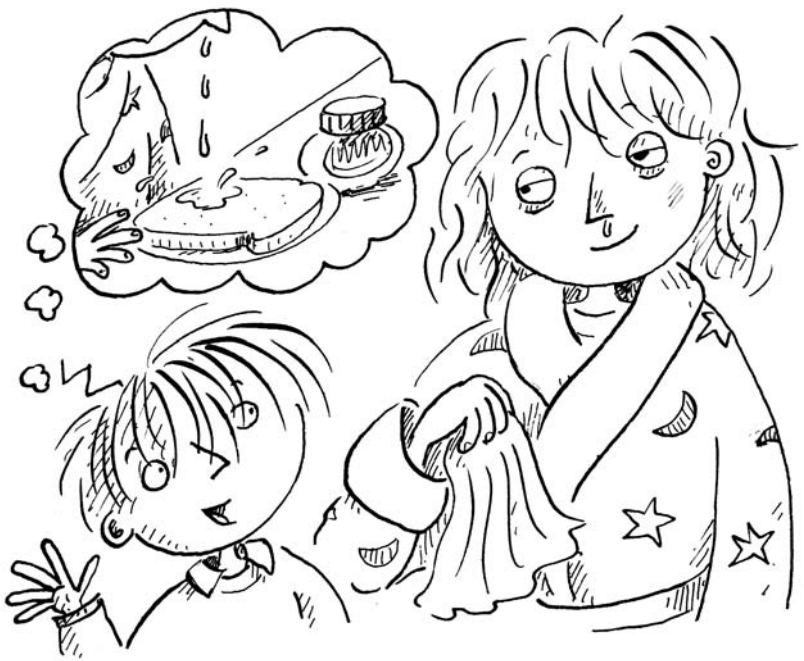
'Yes, I'b afraid so,' replied his mum. 'Although being a man, his is much worse, of course.'

They weren't the only ones who were ill – it seemed that half of Middletown had a cold and it was spreading fast.

Harry wondered if his super soccer powers had made him immune to it, though. His mum said the virus probably wasn't fast enough to catch him! Harry couldn't actually remember being ill since the day he was transformed by the lightning strike – the day he went from being 'Harry Gribble who couldn't even dribble', to a boy with super soccer skills.



'Go back to bed, Mum, I can do my own packed lunch,' Harry said considerately. Well, he wasn't actually being that considerate – if his mum kept on sneezing like that, he didn't know what might end up in his sandwich.



'You are a good boy, Harry.' His mum looked at him with bleary, red-rimmed eyes and yawned. 'I feel like I could sleep for a week. Have a good day at school,' she mumbled,

shuffling out of the kitchen.

Harry got a cereal bowl out of the cupboard and turned on the TV.

'I wonder what's happening in the world today, Ron,' he said, handing his pet rat a tiny bowl of Coco Pops.



'*AAACHOO!*' sneezed the newsreader. 'I'm so sorry. Excuse me.' She blew her nose. 'As I was saying, the cold epidemic continues to spread. There is now officially a national shortage of tissues and many supermarkets have completely

sold out. Schools are insisting that pupils bring in their own supplies after many found that all their toilet rolls had been used instead.

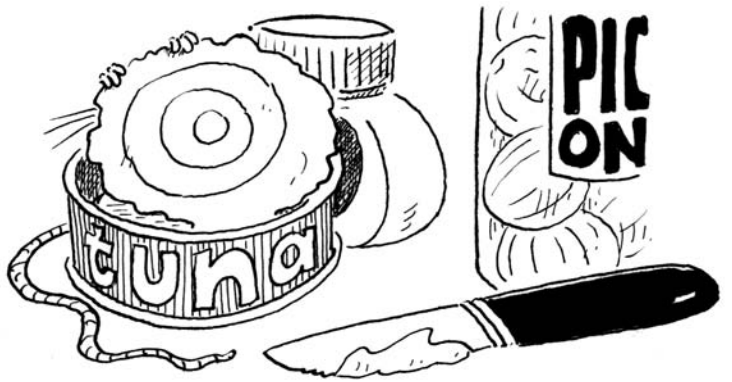
'There was uproar yesterday when the F.A. Cup replay had to be abandoned because neither team could stop sneezing.'

'Did you hear that, Ron?' said Harry, spraying Coco Pops all over the table. 'This is getting really serious.' He looked at the kitchen clock. 'Oops! Better get on with making my lunch or I'll be late.'



Chapter Two

School's Out

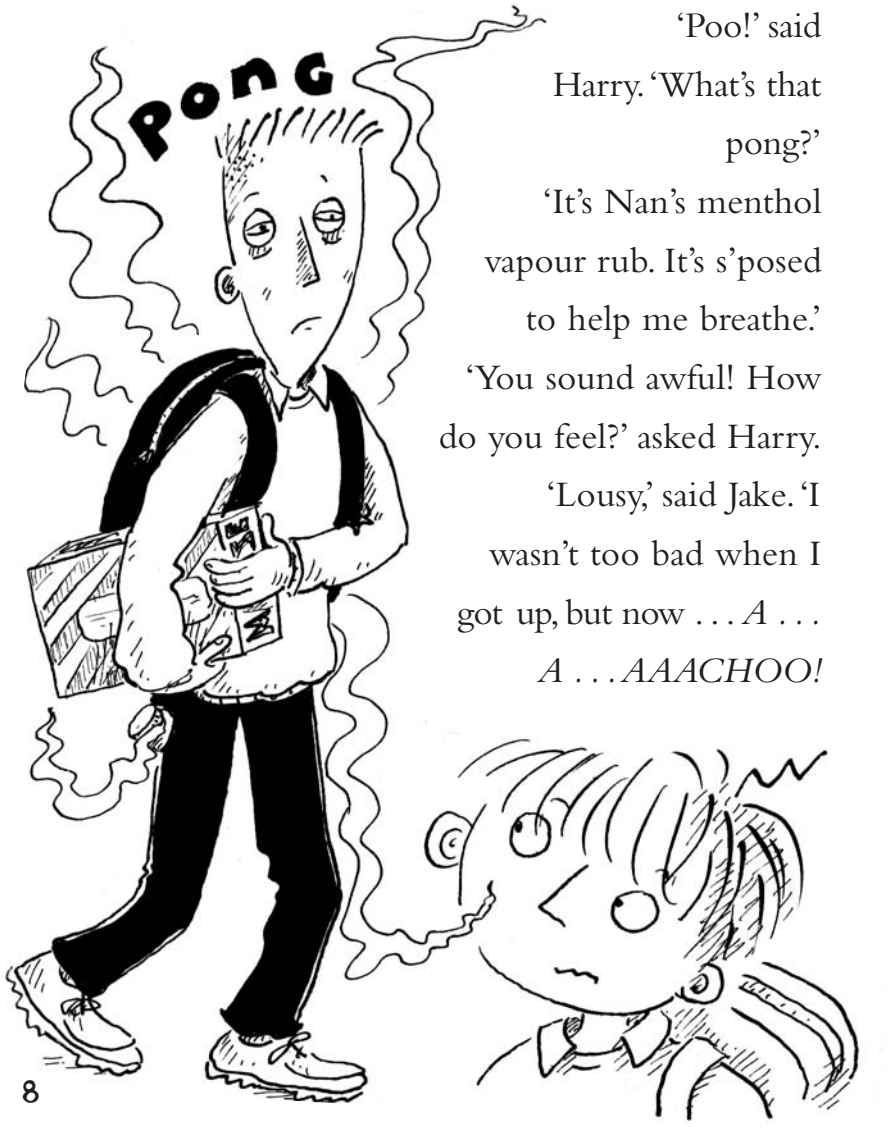


Harry made himself some tuna, Marmite, mayonnaise and pickled-onion sandwiches and put them in his lunchbox along with a carrot, a banana and a Yorkie biscuit. Then he trotted off to meet Jake at the corner of Crumbly Drive.

For the first time in ages, Harry got there before Jake. He soon realised why – Jake had a cold. He was plodding along the road with a red

nose, bleary eyes and a box of man-size tissues under his arm.

'Bordig,' mumbled Jake, when he reached Harry.



'Poo!' said Harry. 'What's that pong?'

'It's Nan's menthol vapour rub. It's s'posed to help me breathe.'

'You sound awful! How do you feel?' asked Harry.

'Lousy,' said Jake. 'I wasn't too bad when I got up, but now . . . *A* . . . *A* . . . *AAACHOO!*

Jake's mega sneeze went straight through Harry's brain. 'I feel like poo.'



'Why don't you go home?' asked Harry.

'Forgot my key. Mum and Dad at work. [*Sniff.*] Anyway, Mum says it's only a cold and you can't be off school unless you have a temperature. I can't wait for lunchtime – colds always make me hungry.'

Harry smiled. Jake was just *always* hungry.

School was crammed full of sneezing people. Obviously it wasn't only Jake's parents who thought that having a cold was no reason to stay off school. Harry felt sorry for them but it was driving him nuts – if it hadn't been for his super soccer reactions he would have been sneezed on several times.

The first lesson was physics.

'Good . . . *AAACHOO!* . . . morning, class,' said Mr Turner, the physics teacher. 'Today, I thought . . .' (He paused to blow his nose.) '. . . we could measure the velocity of our sneezes!' He was great like that, Mr Turner – he always came up with fun ideas.



They tested everyone's sneezes one by one. It was all brilliant fun but rather messy. In the end, Raj's sneeze won by four-and-a-half miles per hour. Mr Turner gave him a Mars Bar as a prize.

At breaktime in the canteen, it was a nightmare. People were squabbling over tissues, spilling things in mid-sneeze and falling asleep at the tables. A Year Two who'd run out of tissues sneezed so hard that he left a pool of slimy snot on the floor. Another Year Two, who hadn't noticed, skidded across the floor and knocked over a huge bin of snotty tissues. Nobody felt much like picking them up.

After break, Harry's class was supposed to have games with Mr Blunt. This was the lesson Harry looked forward to more than any other, but when they got to the changing room, there was a note pinned on the door.



There was a suspicious looking green stain on the corner of the paper, as if someone had sneezed on it and tried to wipe it off.

When they got to the library, it was packed full of students. It seemed that all the teachers had had the same idea.

After lunch, the headteacher called a special assembly. Harry was not pleased. They were supposed to be doing football practice for a game next week – not that the rest of the school team felt much like playing.



'Quiet, please!' said the Head, before blowing his nose hard into a particularly large and nasty-looking handkerchief. 'I'b afraid I hab no choice but to close the school early today. Since toborrow is Friday, I'b decided that everybody should stay at hobe till Bonday. Any pupil who needs to may stay in the library till hobe tibe.'



Harry was expecting a big cheer – there would have been one normally. It seemed, though, that everybody was too busy sneezing, blowing their noses or just generally feeling too ill to care.

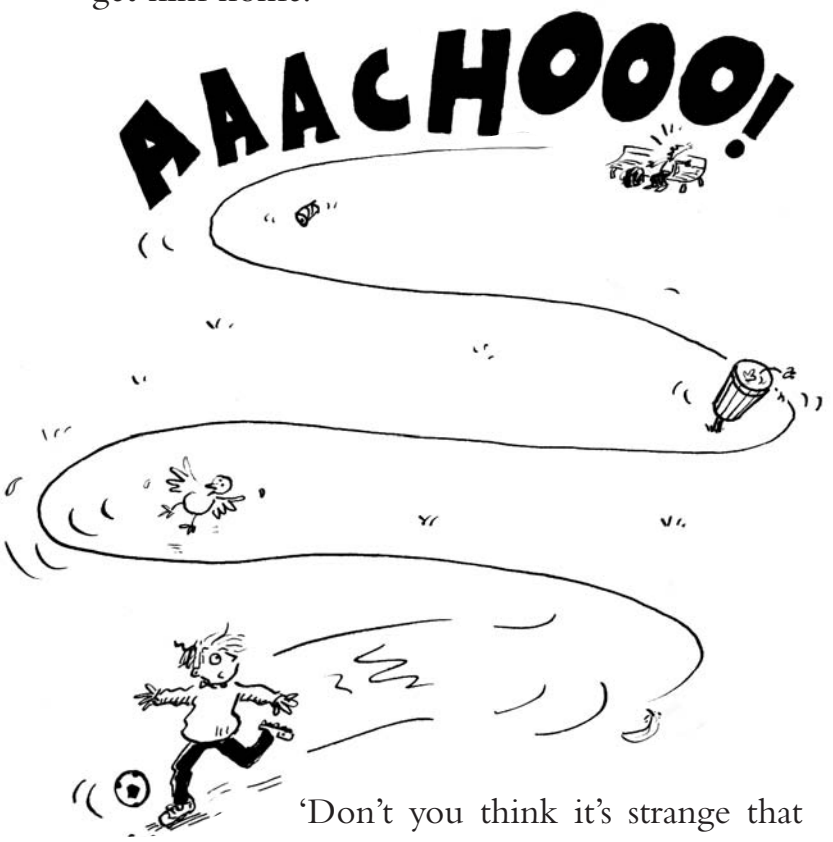
The Head blabbed on for another ten minutes about how it wasn't a holiday, how they should all do their work, etc, etc, and then they were sent home.



'Do you want to come back with me?' Harry asked Jake, remembering that Jake had forgotten his key. 'We could have a kick-about in the park on the way.'

'OK,' said Jake between sniffs.

They walked back past the park, but Jake was obviously in no mood for football. Harry suggested Jake sat on the bench while he tore around at super speed, practising his dribbling skills. He could hear Jake sneezing from the other side of the park and decided he'd better get him home.



'Don't you think it's strange that so many people have this cold?' Harry asked.

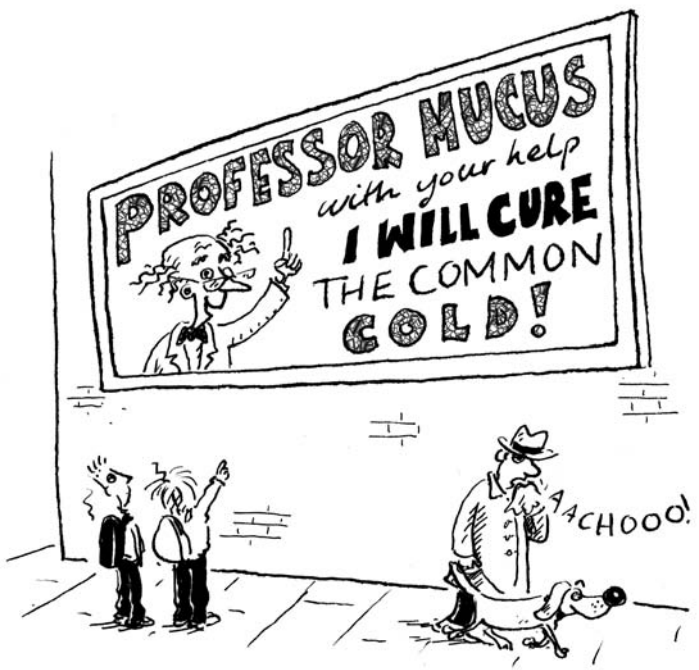
'Why?' sniffed Jake. 'People are always catching colds from each another.'

'But not like this,' said Harry. 'Not everybody, and not all at the same time. It's a bit freaky.'

'If . . . *AAACHOO!* . . . you say so,' groaned Jake.

They turned the corner into the High Street.

'Look at that!' said Harry suddenly. He pointed at a huge advertising hoarding, up on the wall near the supermarket. 'At least someone's trying to cure the cold.'



Chapter Three

Germ of an Idea



That evening in Harry's house it was very quiet. Apart from the sound of sneezing and nose blowing, that was.

All his family had a big bowl of chicken and vegetable soup for supper – exactly the kind of food people feel like when they're coldy. His little sister Daisy fell asleep in hers. Ron sat on Harry's lap, waiting for scraps as usual.