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Opening extract from

Ninja Meerkats: The Clan of the Scorpion

Written by

Gareth P. Jones

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For Matthew and Christopher Jones
~ G P J

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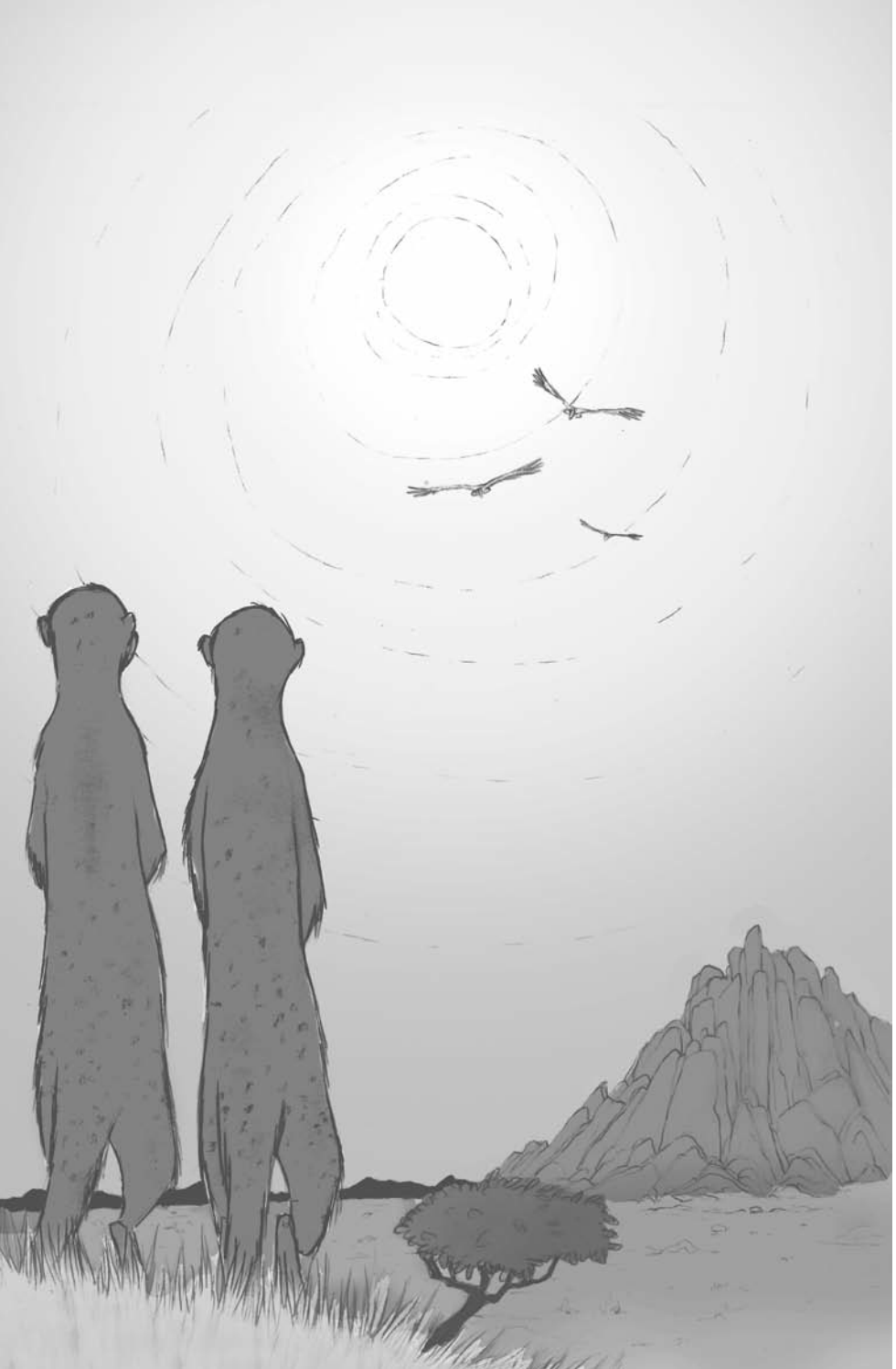
NINJA MEERKATS



THE CLAN OF THE SCORPION

GARETH P. JONES

Stripes



CHAPTER ONE

THE MISSING TIGER

From the outside, the Clan of the Scorpion's secret base looked like one of a number of meerkat burrows in the Red Desert. But while some of the neighbouring meerkats had welcomed wildlife documentary makers into their homes, the Clan had to be more careful about who they let in.

You see, film crews do not expect to find a central chamber filled with fighting staffs, swords, throwing stars, nunchucks and a whole range of other gadgets at the heart of a meerkat burrow.

So the Clan kept nosy film-makers at arm's length for fear of their true identity being revealed... Actually, further than that, as a meerkat's arm is hardly very long at all.

Jet Flashfeet had just entered the central chamber. He had his trusty nunchucks in a specially designed holster, and was carrying a book under his arm called *101 More Martial Arts Moves* by Kara T. Kick. "Hey, who wants to try out this new move I just read about?"

"Not me. I'm busy with this," replied Donnie Dragonjab, tapping away on a touchpad phone he had recently acquired from a careless documentary maker.

Bruce Willowhammer looked up from the middle of the chamber, where he was doing one-armed push-ups. "What *is* that, Donnie?" he asked.

NINJA MEERKATS



"It's a Bluetooth WAP-enabled mobile device," replied Donnie.

Bruce stopped mid push-up and stared at him blankly.

"It's a phone," explained Donnie.

"We've already got phones," said Bruce. With his free arm he pulled out the mini mobile phone that Donnie had made for each Clan member so that they could keep in contact during missions.

"You'll be able to throw away that old thing once I've figured out how to reduce this down to a more usable size," said Donnie. "This can surf the internet and give us up-to-date news from around the world with a simple click of a button. It's going to completely revolutionize the way we work."

Jet rolled his eyes impatiently. "Sounds great. Now, Bruce, will you try this new move with me?"

"All right, but can I have a snack first? I'm starving."

"You're always starving. Can't you wait? The helicopter leap will only take a minute," replied Jet.

"The what?" said Bruce.

"The helicopter leap. We link paws and spin round, then I count to three and we jump together and – Ninja-boom! – we fly up into the air like a helicopter."

"Why would we want to do that?"

"Because it's cool and it might come in handy."

"That's good enough for me. Let's do it," said Bruce.

"I have to see this." Donnie swivelled round to watch.

Jet and Bruce moved to the middle of the room. They stood on their hind legs, looked from side to side, then bowed to

each other in the usual manner. They held paws, leaned back and began to move slowly round in a circle.

"Shall I put some music on?" said Donnie, sniggering at the sight of stocky, muscular Bruce apparently dancing with nimble, lean Jet.

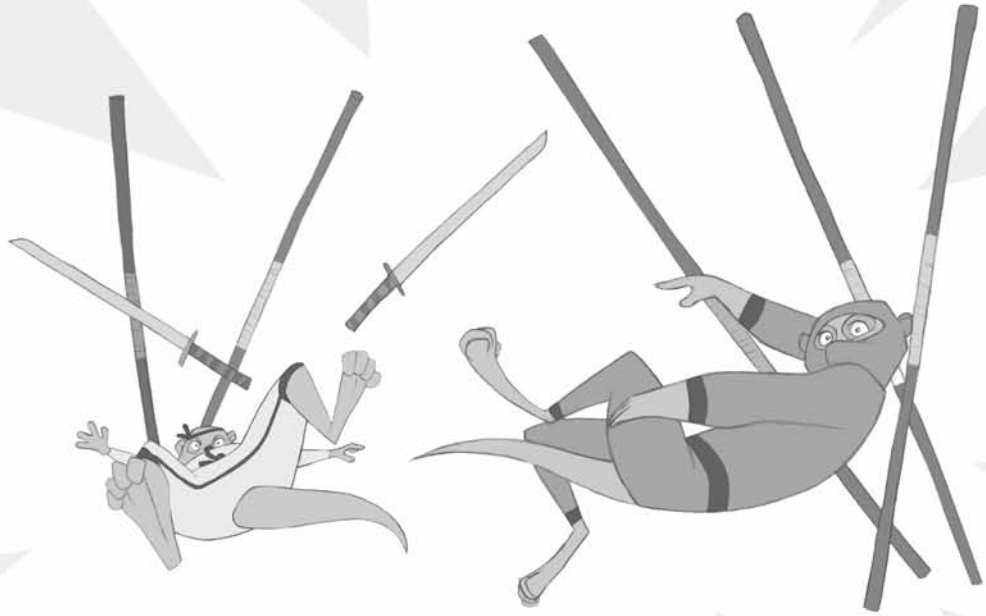
Jet ignored him. "Faster now," he said. "And try not to tread on my feet."

"Sorry," Bruce mumbled.

They sped up, moving faster and faster until Jet yelled, "Jump!"

For a moment it looked like it was going to work. The two meerkats lifted off the ground, spinning in mid-air, but suddenly they whirled out of control, whizzing across the floor and knocking over a pile of weapons and tools in the process.

"Whooahhh!" cried Bruce.



"If that's what a helicopter is like, I think I'll stick to planes," said Donnie laughing, as Bruce and Jet came to a halt in a confused heap by the entrance to the chamber.

Just then, Chuck Cobracrusher, the fourth member and leader of the Clan, appeared.

"The helicopter leap requires much practice," he said, stepping over Jet and Bruce. "Few achieve it on their first try."

"It was his fault. He's too heavy," said Jet, springing to his feet. He pulled out a comb and straightened the fur on top of his head.

"No, Jet, that is not the problem. You are too hasty. Given time you will master this move," said Chuck. "Another new gadget, Donnie?"

"It's a blue-toothed whack-a-table phone," said Bruce, butting in.

"A Bluetooth, WAP-enabled phone," corrected Donnie. "It's amazing. I'm surfing the net right now."

"Technology is no substitute for the traditional ninja ways, but it can be useful," Chuck admitted. He brushed his fur back from his face, revealing the cross-shaped scar below his eye. He had never told the others how he had come by the scar; all they knew was that it had been inflicted by their deadly enemy, the Ringmaster, many years ago.

"Perhaps you can look up something for me, Donnie," said Chuck. "A tiger has gone missing from Hong Kong Zoo."

Donnie typed a few words into a search engine and found a news article.

"Here it is. It says that Ming, a rare speckle-white tigress, went missing last night from the zoo and that the police have no leads as to who may have taken her. How did you know about this, Chuck?"

"My brother, Throw, lives at the zoo and he has been keeping an eye on Ming for me. He called just now to give me the news."

"Your brother lives in a zoo?" said Bruce.

"Throw was never one for life in the wild. He prefers the conveniences of zoo life," replied Chuck. "He would have called earlier, but he had to wait until the zoo closed to use the payphone. Ming's disappearance is of great significance."