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Opening extract from

Ninja Meerkats: The Escape from Ice Mountain

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Well, here we are again. Or at least, here I am. Precisely where you are, I cannot say, but I would hazard a guess that you are holding a book in your hands.
This is the story of my kidnap and how I came to be rescued by the mighty Clan of the Scorpion. However, I am sorry to say that I am unable to recall a great many of the events featured in this tale. Apart from the fact that I spent a good deal of it asleep, my memory has got worse over the years. At least, I assume it used to be better but, to be honest, I cannot properly remember.
Even so, I could never forget the heroism of the Clan of the Scorpion: the team of four deadly ninja meerkats who risk their lives to keep the planet safe from the clutches of the Ringmaster – a villain intent on world domination.

In case you've been living under a rock and you need to be reminded, they are...



Jet Flashfeet: a super-fast ninja whose only fault is craving the glory he so richly deserves.

Bruce "the muscle" Willowhammer: the strongest of the gang, though in the brain race he lags somewhat behind.





Donnie Dragonjab: a brilliant mind, inventor and master of gadgets.

Chuck Cobracrusher: his clear leadership has saved the others' skins more times than I care to remember.



And me? I'm Grandmaster One-Eye: as old and wise as the sand dunes themselves – even if my memory is a little hazy.

Even so, I can still recall a good many poems – such as this one, penned by the great enlightened thinker Claire Verclogs.

Never pander to a panda, and never bear a bear.

Avoid badgering a badger, or hassling a hare.

If you seal a deal with a seal, ensure it's sealed tight.

If you harangue an orang-utan, you'll end up in a fight.

But now, it's time to settle down and enjoy the story of...

ESCAPE FROM ICE MOUNTAIN.





CHAPTER ONE

THE GRANDMASTERS' REUNION

The pilot of the twin-engine plane looked down at the Chilean mountain range. Even in the fading evening light, he could see all the way down to the southernmost tip of South America.

But what he failed to see were five small furry stowaways jumping out of his plane and parachuting down to earth. Chuck Cobracrusher, Donnie Dragonjab, Jet Flashfeet and Bruce Willowhammer were all using parachutes designed by Donnie, with toggles on either side allowing them to steer.

Bruce was having the most difficulty, as he had their ancient mentor, Grandmaster One-Eye, strapped to his back.

"What are we aiming for?" shouted Jet, pulling his right toggle and swooping round in front of the others.

"The ground," smirked Donnie.

"We are aiming for the Academy of Revered Grandmasters, for Grandmaster One-Eye's school reunion," Chuck yelled over the sound of rushing wind.

"Did you really go to school here, Grandmaster?" asked Bruce.

Grandmaster One-Eye nodded.

"It seems like a long way to travel every day from the Red Desert," said Bruce.

"Bruce, the students who attend the ARG *live* at the academy," said Chuck.

"So where is this place, Grandmaster?" asked Bruce. "I can't see it yet."

"I'm afraid I cannot see it either," replied One-Eye.

"Bruce, remember that Grandmaster One-Eye's eyesight is not as good as yours," Chuck pointed out.

"It isn't that," said One-Eye. "I've had my eyes shut since we jumped out of the plane. If meerkats were meant to see the world from such heights, they would have wings."



"My granddad had wings," said Bruce.

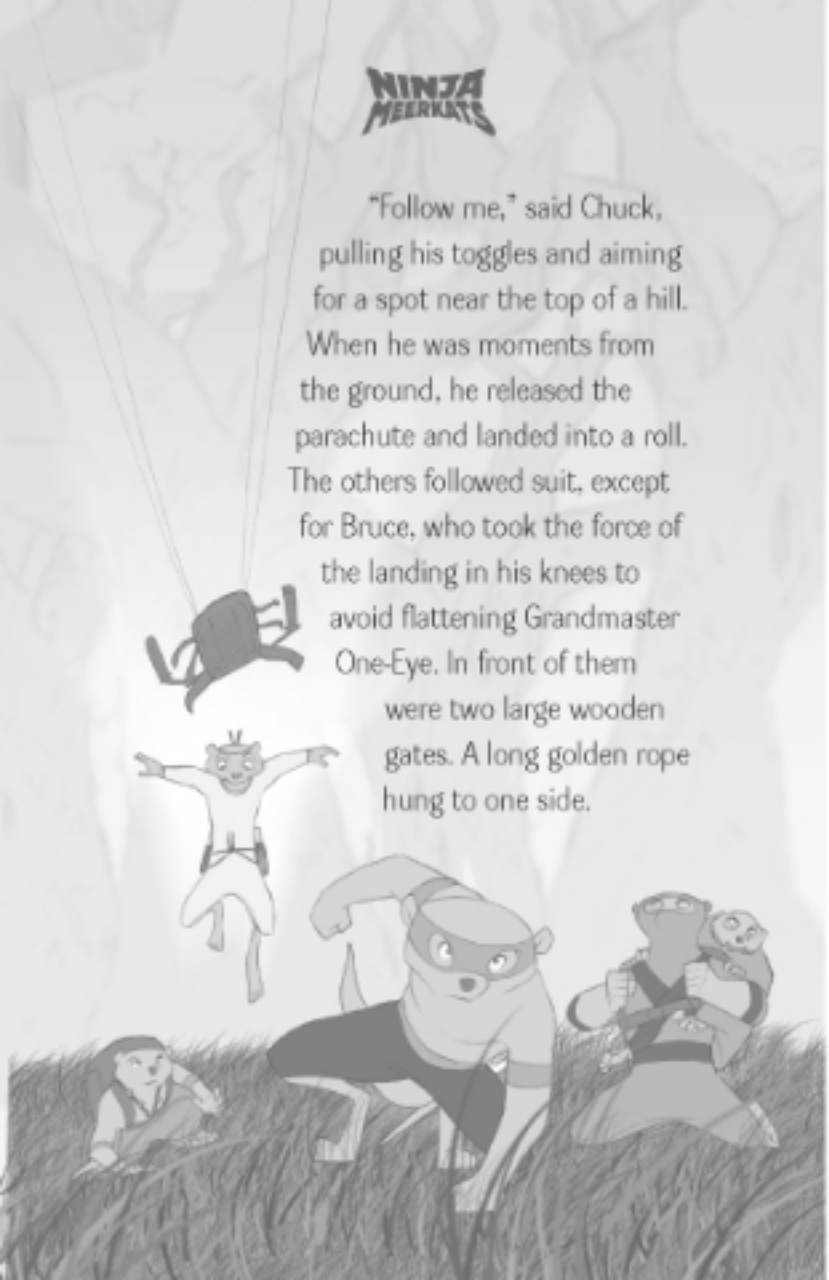
"No, he didn't," sighed Donnie.

"Yes, he did. I never saw them myself, but I remember Mum saying she wouldn't have him in the burrow because he had such a bad case of wings."

"I think that would have been *wind*," said Jet.

"Oh. That does make more sense now you say it," admitted Bruce.

"Follow me," said Chuck, pulling his toggles and aiming for a spot near the top of a hill. When he was moments from the ground, he released the parachute and landed into a roll. The others followed suit, except for Bruce, who took the force of the landing in his knees to avoid flattening Grandmaster One-Eye. In front of them were two large wooden gates. A long golden rope hung to one side.



"Ah, now this brings back memories," said Grandmaster One-Eye as Bruce set him on the ground. "Would you give me a moment before we go any further?"

"You need time to reflect on all that has happened since you were last here?" said Chuck.

"No, I drank rather a lot of tea while we were waiting for that plane to take off and I need the loo," said Grandmaster One-Eye.

Jet chuckled and the Grandmaster disappeared into a nearby bush.

"Bruce, keep an eye on him," said Chuck.

"What? Watch him go to the toilet?" exclaimed Bruce.

"Yes. The last time he went we lost him for an hour," replied Chuck.

"Don't worry," replied Donnie. "I've attached a tracking device to his robe so there's no chance of losing him again."