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Opening extract from

Undead Pets: Return of the Hungry Hamster

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Published by

Stripes Publishing

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CHAPTER ONE

Joe spotted the battered old jeep as soon as he turned into his street that Saturday afternoon. Splattered with mud, its paint was peeling, its number plate was hanging off, and its roof rack groaned with trunks and boxes. Joe grinned; it could only belong to one person – Uncle Charlie! A wave of excitement swept over him and he ran the rest of the way home.

"Joe? Is that you?" Mum called, as he slammed the front door. "We've got a visitor."

Joe raced into the living room, not

bothering to take off his trainers, which were still muddy from playing football in the park. And there was Uncle Charlie, lounging on the sofa sipping a cup of extra-strong black coffee.

"Joe!" he beamed. "How are you, m'boy?" He stood up and gave Joe a bear hug. "You've grown! You're nearly as tall as me!"



UNDEAD PETS

That wasn't strictly true – Uncle Charlie still towered over Joe. As always, his great-uncle was wearing an old khaki safari suit and had his grey hair slicked back, and even though he was pretty ancient (if you counted wrinkles the same way as tree rings, he'd be about the same age as a great oak!) his eyes sparkled with energy.

"Uncle Charlie's just back from Egypt," said Mum. "Look what he brought me!" She held up a beautifully carved wooden camel.

"Cool," said Joe.

Joe thought his Uncle Charlie was amazing. He was an archaeologist, and spent most of his time abroad, digging up old relics. Usually they wouldn't hear anything from Uncle Charlie for months, then suddenly he'd turn up on their doorstep with tales of lost cities and secret temples and treasure…

"So, what was Egypt like?" asked Joe.

"Hot! Very hot! And fascinating, too!"

Uncle Charlie replied. "We found a lost pyramid buried underground. Imagine that, Joe – a three-thousand-year-old tomb containing lavishly decorated sarcophagi, golden statues, a chariot as big as a bus…"

"Mummies?"

Uncle Charlie grinned. "Of course!"

"Wow!" Joe loved hearing about Uncle Charlie's adventures. He was already drifting off into a daydream about the secret pyramid and the treasures hidden within, when Uncle Charlie nudged him playfully, bringing him back to the real world with a bump.



UNDEAD PETS

"Now, I want to hear all about you, Joe. What's been happening? Have you got that dog yet?"

Joe's mum grimaced. "Don't mention the D-word. That's all I hear from morning to night!"

"Every lad should have a dog." Uncle Charlie winked at Joe.

"Exactly!" said Joe. "That's what *I* keep saying!"

Mum frowned. "But I only have to hear the word 'pet' and I start sneezing!" As if to prove the point, she wrinkled her nose, blinked twice, then gave a loud ACHOOO!

Joe scuffed the carpet. It didn't matter how desperate he was for a dog, with mum's allergies he had no chance.

"Cheer up, Joe!" said Uncle Charlie. "Go and look in my bag. I've got something for you."

Joe brightened. Uncle Charlie always brought back the most amazing gifts. Once he'd given Joe a tiger's tooth that he'd had to dig out of his own thigh. Then there was the super-spooky glass eye

that had belonged to a long-dead pirate – it sat on top of Joe's chest of drawers, eyeballing anyone who dared enter his room.

"Look for the old cigar box – it's in there."

Joe rummaged around inside Uncle Charlie's battered old leather satchel and found a few notebooks, a pair of socks and quite a lot of sand… Then he spotted the cigar box. He flipped open the lid and peered inside.

"Wow, it's, er … great," said Joe. He lifted a shiny black stone out of the cigar box and peered at it closely. It was roughly cut in the shape of an animal.

"What is it?"



UNDEAD PETS

"It's an amulet, Joe. A real amulet! Ancient Egyptians used to carry them for good luck."

Joe held the amulet. It fitted snugly in the palm of his hand, and it felt warm and heavy. He stroked it with his thumb. The more he looked at it, the more he liked it. He especially liked the shape. "Does it have a dog's head?" he asked.

Mum rolled her eyes and laughed.

Uncle Charlie smiled. "Not a dog – a jackal! It represents Anubis, the Egyptian god of the dead."

"Cool!" breathed Joe. He couldn't wait to show it to his best mate Matt.

Just then Mum peered out of the living room window. "Aha! Looks like the rest of the clan are back from the shops. I'll stick the kettle on again."

As she bustled off with the coffee cups, Uncle Charlie leaned closer. "That amulet has been around a long time, Joe," he said quietly, "and it's very special. It'll grant you a wish."