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Opening extract from

The Odds Strike Back!

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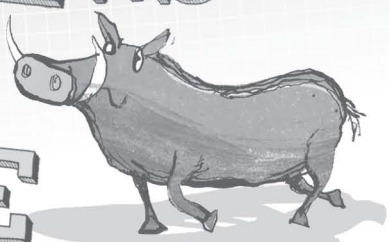
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Chapter One

BAD NEWS FOR THE ODDS



It was a merry old day in the town of Trott and a typical breakfast scene at number 13 Rotten Row, the home of the Odds. Mr Odd was in the kitchen frying toadstools, Mrs Odd was dangling from the light fittings by her ankles and their twins – Edgar and Elsie – were riding around on the back of a pair of extremely warty warthogs. It wasn't your average breakfast, but then the Odds are not really your average family.

For those of you unfamiliar with the Odds, the family is (in descending order):



Mr Odd...

Mrs Odd...





Edgar Odd...



Elsie Odd...

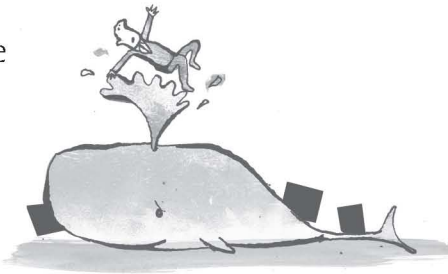
And Bob (the Odds' dog).



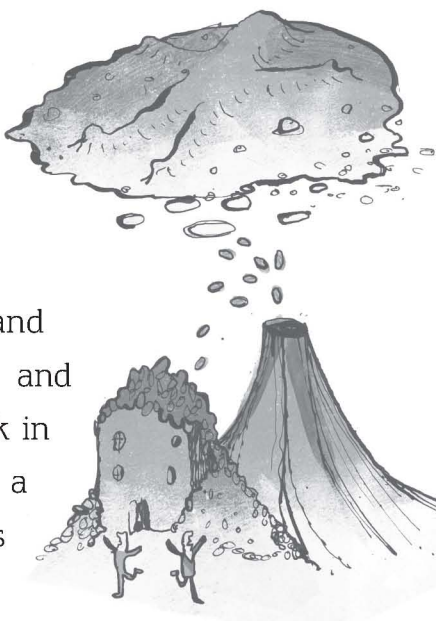
They are all Meddlers, otherwise known as Professional Pranksters, and it's their job to cause as much mischief as they can every day without getting caught. Just like a teacher's job is to shout and give out homework. Or a businessman's job is to be a man that does business.

Mr Odd is an expert Stuff-Hiderer and Thing-Mover. He could hide a great white whale in a blackboard shop and still you wouldn't find it

until it sprayed you in the face with its blow-hole.



Mrs Odd is a messy Mischief-Maker who loves to make mess. Her favourite pranks usually involve kitchens and excessive amounts of flour, or milk, or eggs. Or custard. The end result often resembles a giant pancake. With custard.



The Odd twins, Edgar and Elsie, love scary pranks and hearing their victims shriek in terror is as joymongous as a volcano filled with jellybeans destroying your school.

And Bob, the Odds' dog, is a retired Meddler's pooch who was an active meddler in his day, but now enjoys the quiet life. After all, dogs age faster than Meddlers, and Bob has earned a good rest.

"You two!" Mr Odd bellowed at Edgar and Elsie, sticking his head round the kitchen door. "Stop that at once. Those pet warthogs aren't even filthy! Take 'em out into the back garden and get some mud on their trotters this minute!"

The twins galloped out of the back door.

"You're a good dad, my sweaty little spit valve," said Mrs Odd, giving her husband a crinkly wink.

"Thank you, my little maggot-chewer," Mr Odd replied, giving his wife a wrinkly crink. "It's not easy raising children correctly."

"I know what you mean," Mrs Odd nodded grimly, "but we've got ourselves a right pair of rotters there, no mistake."

Mr and Mrs Odd looked out at the twins, who were now wrestling in the mud with their warthogs. They beamed like two proud beetroots when, at that moment, there was a knock on the door.

"That knock sounded rather post-like," said Mr Odd. "I bet it's the postmeddler."

Mrs Odd answered the door (slipping in warthog dung as she went). Sure enough, there was Mr Pratt the postmeddler standing on the doorstep.

"Good mornin', Mrs Odd," said Mr Pratt. "I've got some lovely post for you!" He handed her three envelopes, two of them white and one of them bright red. "That one needs signing for, if you please," said Mr Pratt, pointing to the large red envelope and handing Mrs Odd a clipboard with some paper attached. "Oh, and here's *The Meddlers' Post*," he added, handing her a grubby and smudged newspaper.



"Thank you, Mr Pratt," said Mrs Odd, wiping a large piece of snot on the paper and two small bogies. "This red letter looks very important."

"It's sealed with the Prime Meddler's crest," said Mr Pratt, pointing to the earwax seal on the back of the envelope on which was stamped the profile of the Prime Meddler himself. "I wonder what it might be?"

"I can't wait to find out," said Mrs Odd, shutting the door in the nosy postmeddler's face.

"Anything good, my slippery watervole?" said Mr Odd, dishing up his fried toadstools on to the breakfast plates as he opened up *The Meddlers' Post*. "I wonder if there's any news about the Plopwells in here? Ah yes, here we are...

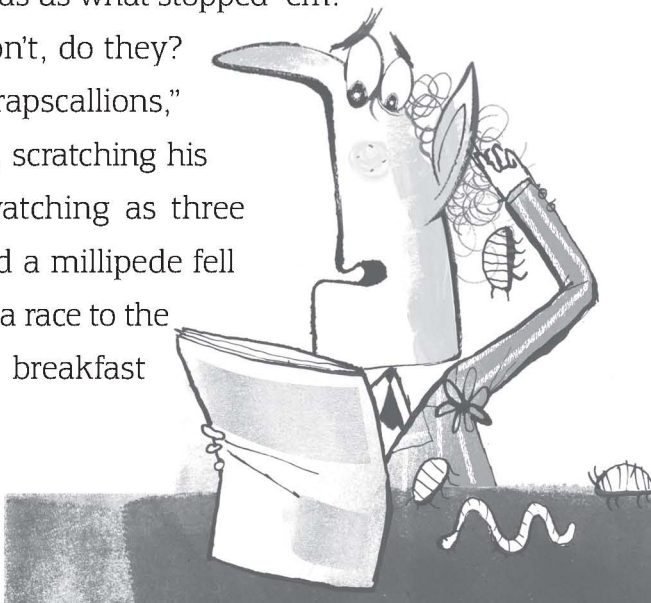
PRANKING IMPOSTORS IMPRISONED

Meddling miscreants Mr and Mrs Strange were sentenced yesterday to twenty-seven and a half years de-Meddlification for breaking Meddling

Law. The Stranges, disguised as rich twits the Plopwells, embarked on an elaborate plot to oust another Meddling family, the Odds of Rotten Row, Trott, from their home. This grave crime directly contradicts one of Meddling society's strictest laws as written down in *The Meddlers' Mischief Manual* – Don't nick from other nickers. As such, Mr and Mrs Strange are banned from any sort of Meddling activities and will be fitted with Anti-Meddling Manacles until their sentence is served in full.

"Wow," said Mrs Odd. "Twenty-seven and a half years with no meddling. But they don't even mention it was us what stopped 'em!"

"They don't, do they? The rotten rapscallions," said Mr Odd, scratching his head and watching as three woodlice and a millipede fell out and had a race to the end of the breakfast table.



"The cheek of it!" said Mrs Odd. "We stop the meddling crime of the century and we don't even get the credit. And what about poor old Bob?" She gave their mongrel's flea-riddled head a scratch under the table. "Forgotten about, as usual."

"Who's Bob?" said Mr Odd. "Only jokin'! Who could forget about ol' Bob? The best meddling mutt a Meddler could ask for. But let us all remember, we don't meddle because it might make us famous, or rich but because it's our duty as Meddlers to cause chaos and make mischief wherever there is order and calm."

"Well said, my untidy turnip," said Mrs Odd, taking the paper and looking at the front page.



"Ooh, fancy that," said Mrs Odd to Mr Odd. "The Council of Prankification have elected a new Head Pranker."

The Council of Prankification are in charge of what goes on in the Meddling World. They are a greasy, sleazy, cheesy and slimy bunch of crooked old crab-faces who shouldn't be trusted with a box of cotton wool, let alone the welfare of a species.

"Who is it?" asked Mr Odd.

"It's Nobody," Mrs Odd replied.

"Oh," sniffed Mr Odd. "That's strange – why would they elect nobody? Seems like a waste of time to me, and not very newsworthy to boot!"

"No," said Mrs Odd, "it's Nobody."

"I heard you the first time," Mr Odd replied, "and my views remain the same on the subject. I can't see how electing nobody into a position of power is a worthwhile step."

"NO!" Mrs Odd was getting rather angry now. "They've. Elected. NOBODY!"

"It doesn't matter how many times you say it, my shrivelled little fig, I still say it's a useless

headline. It's like saying: EVERYTHING'S FINE or NOTHING HAPPENED TODAY, REALLY, HOW ARE YOU? Complete waste of time..."

Mrs Odd grabbed Mr Odd by the scruff of his scruffy jacket and shook him.

"NO! LOOK!" She thrust the newspaper in his face. "READ. THE. ARTICLE!"

Mr Odd ran his beady little eyes over the beady little words till the story formed in his brain.

"Oh," he said when he'd finally finished, "they've elected Nobody – as in *Mr* Nobody – as the new Head Pranker. But the Head Pranker is second only to the Prime Meddler, who is second to nobody. Not *Mr* Nobody, just nobody."

"Exactly." Mrs Odd raised her eyebrows.

"Wait a snot-dribbling minute!" Mr Odd leaped to his feet, knocking over his chair in the process. "I've just remembered I HATE Mr Nobody! I've ALWAYS hated Mr Nobody! I hate Mr Nobody more than I hate taking baths, or sliding down banisters. Wait a minute – I LOVE sliding down banisters, but I still HATE Mr Nobody!"