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Opening extract from

Tich Vampire Hunter

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Chapter One

Grave Expectations

There was general agreement between Tich, Ginger, Maggs and the Boff that life had been a bit boring lately. A few years ago this wouldn't have been the case but, since the *Imaginator* had come along and they'd had adventures with a baby dragon and fought soldiers alongside Robin Hood, the whole thing about hanging about the Mall, throwing stones at the Tesco trolley in the canal and playing hide-and-seek among the old disused warehouses – 'Entrance Strictly Forbidden' – just seemed to have become a bit monotonous.

School of course was, had always been and would always be, monotonous, but that was as it should be. You didn't go to school to have fun, you went to school so that the rest of life could seem, in contrast, to be absolutely brilliant.

But now everything seemed as grey and drizzly as the weather. Even dodging the Goons no longer had their hearts beating. Pigboy, Barf and Thicko had all been suspended from school and they were keeping a low profile, only managing a little light bullying and the occasional taunt to keep themselves in practice, until such time that they returned to school and were able to resume their reign of terror.

On Saturday morning, having spent all their money in the Mall, Tich and the gang began the long walk home. As they passed St Swithin's Church, Ginger said, 'Ooh look it's a graveyard. I bet there's monsters in there.'

His three friends stopped and stared at him. 'Why would there be monsters in a graveyard?' asked the Boff.

''Cause it's spooky,' replied Ginger.

'It's ghosts you get in a graveyard,' explained the Boff, 'not monsters.' Boff always talked sense. He was so clever he could even spell 'diarrhoea' without looking it up.

'Where do monsters live then?'

'They don't live anywhere,' said the Boff.

'Because they don't exist. Except in comics and films.'

'I bet there're loads of monsters in that graveyard,' said Ginger, unimpressed with the Boff's logical approach. 'We should have a look.'

'There's no such thing as monsters…' began the Boff, but Tich cut him off. 'We could still have a look. Nothing else to do is there?'

So they took a diversion into the grounds of St Swithin's, having first checked there was no sign of Daggers. Daggers was the notorious warden at the church whose job amongst other things was to tend the graveyard, which he did with great enthusiasm. He also guarded it from the local vandals who liked to do swastikas in spray paint on the gravestones and kick over the little urns with flowers that people left on the graves.

So, although there were no real monsters in the graveyard, Daggers, who made no distinction between real vandals up to no good and all the other children in the world, could be, in his own way, as scary as any monster, lurking as he did sometimes behind the ash

trees waiting to pounce on any children up to unspeakable mischief.

Tich and his gang did not generally get up to unspeakable mischief in the graveyard, unless of course they chanced upon the grave of 'Slasher' Macdonald. 'Slasher' Macdonald was a notorious lunatic who had taught at St Greavsy's school – he'd murdered at least two children by throwing chisels at them, although no one could remember their names or explain why he wasn't sent to jail.

He'd died suddenly of a heart attack. Who could therefore deny Tich and his gang a short dance of joy on his grave and a few kicks at the freshly strewn flowers?

Daggers made no distinction. All children who happened to stray into his territory whether they carried a spray can or not, were the spawn of the devil and should be driven out of the graveyard with sticks at the first opportunity.

Tich and the gang wandered through the graveyard looking at the gravestones and reading the inscriptions. Most of them were old, and old things were rarely interesting despite all the attempts by school teachers to

prove otherwise. To Tich, history was a thing of the past and that's where it should be left, forgotten and unstudied forever.

'Over here! Over here!' called Ginger who had found what looked like a little stone house, covered in strange carved figures, in the corner of the graveyard. 'It's Draclea's grave.'

They all rushed over to inspect the plaque on the end of the little stone building. Tich peered closely. 'That doesn't say Dracula, it says "Brian Dricili. Much Loved Butcher and Purveyor of the Finest Black Puddings. 1880 – 1915." '

Ginger read the next line. 'May he rest in peas. Did they used to bury them in peas?'

'Anyway, it's Dricili not Dracula,' said the Boff dismissively.

'Sounds like Draclea,' said Ginger.

'No it doesn't,' said Maggs. 'Doesn't sound anything like Dracula. Sounds more like Piccalilli.'

'It's a funny sort of grave,' said Ginger. 'It's more like a shed.'

'It's called a mausoleum,' explained the Boff. 'They built it to show how important you were.'

'Where's the door?' asked Ginger.

'They don't have doors,' said Maggs. 'It's not as if you're coming in and out, is it? Once you're in there, that's it.'

'Well how did they get him in then?' asked Ginger.

'Maybe they built it around him,' suggested the Boff.

'No, there is an entrance here,' said Maggs pushing against the stone at the end of the mausoleum. It opened a few centimetres and they all jumped back in surprise.

'Look at this.' The Boff was peering intently at the words carved into the stone. 'I think Ginger might be right.'

'Ginger' and 'right' were two words you didn't often hear in the same sentence.

He rubbed the dirt away from the inscription which seemed to say *Dricili*. The lettering was covered in moss which was hiding some of the lines. First the moss fell away from the 'i' and they could now see it was actually an 'a'. The second 'i' was really a 'u' and the final 'i' was really an 'a'.

'Feppin heck! It does say *Dracula,'* said the Boff.

'I told you! I told you it was Draclea,' said Ginger. 'No one ever believes a word what I say.'

'The thing is, though,' said the Boff. 'There never was anyone called Dracula. It was all made up in a book, by a bloke called Bram Stoker. There's no such thing as Dracula. And there's no such thing as vampires. Well, there is vampire bats but they're in South America and they feed on cow's blood. All the rest is just stories.'

'Cow's blood – that's disgusting,' said Ginger. 'Why can't they just drink milk like everyone else?'

Tich stared at Ginger and wondered what it must be like to live in his head.

'I bet Draclea comes out every night,' speculated Ginger.

'You're not listening,'said the Boff. 'You never listen.'

'We should come here, tonight, at midnight and see if he comes out.' Ginger did his best ghost impression, flapping his arms and going 'Woo-woo, Wow-woo.'

'He won't come out, because he's in a book,' said the Boff in irritation.

'You're just chicken,' said Ginger and he started to flap his arms and make chicken noises, 'Bwak-bwark, Bwak-bwark.'

Tich watched Ginger cavorting up and down the path and wished, once again, that his gang didn't consist of such freaks and misfits.

'Even it he doesn't exist, I think we should come here tonight to see what it's like in a graveyard at midnight. Unless, of course, you're all too scared,' said Maggs.

'Nah!' chimed the other three, even though they were scared, but it was important not to admit it, especially to Maggs who was a girl. Well sort of. Besides, things had been a bit boring lately and sneaking out from their homes in the middle of the night did seem like a bit of an adventure.

In a few minutes it was all decided and they set off for home having agreed to meet at the bus shelter opposite the graveyard just as the clock on the church tower struck twelve.