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Opening extract from

The Abominators and the Forces of Evil: The Revenge of My Panty Wanty Woos

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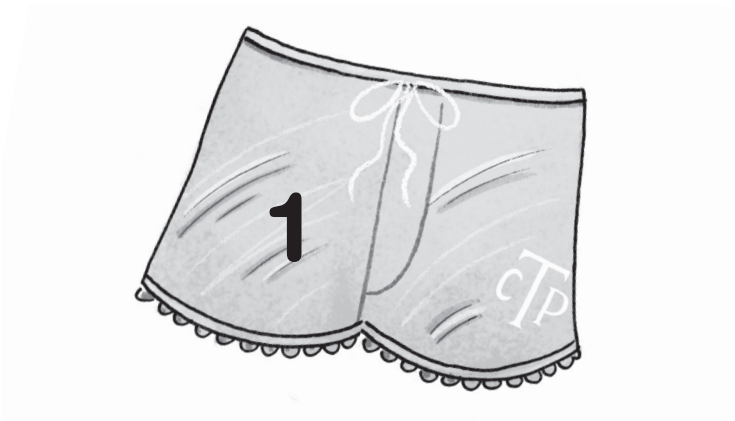
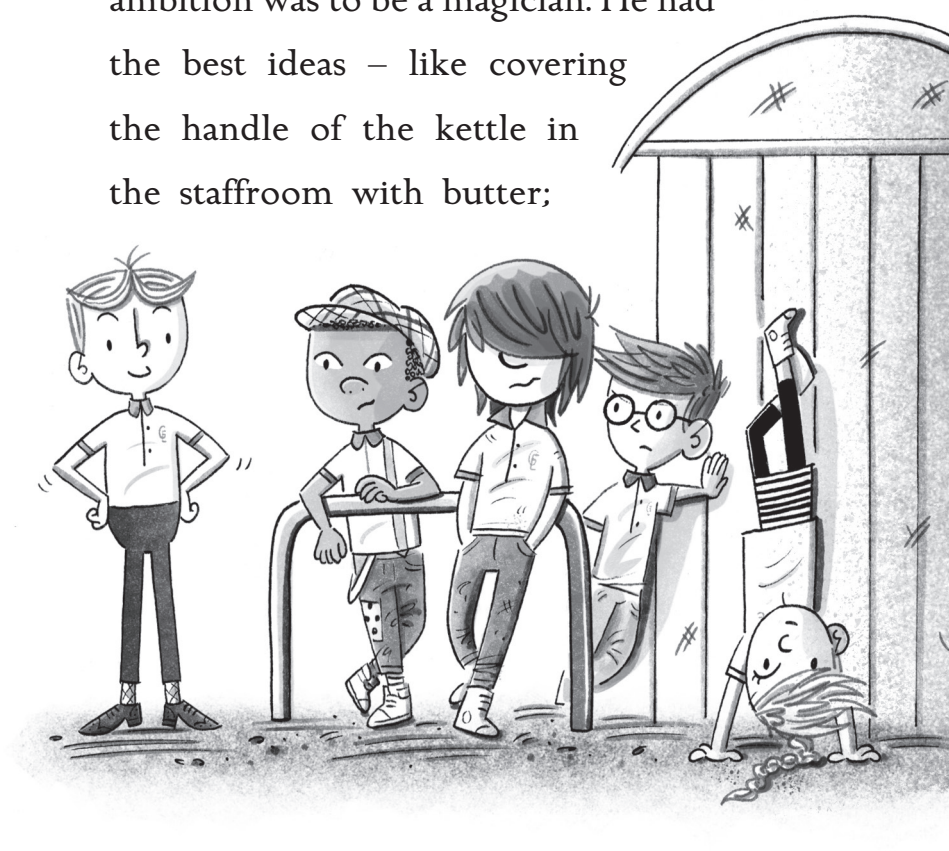


It was a cool autumnal morning at Grimely East Primary School. Which was not surprising, since it was autumn. Children were running just for the sake of it, or skipping. Or jumping. Or kicking piles of leaves around for fun.

But there were five Year 6 children who were not running or skipping or jumping or kicking piles of leaves around like the rest. They were lurking together, as usual, by the bike sheds.

These were the Abominators, Grimely East Primary School's most mischievous children. The ones who played pranks, caused mayhem and whose behaviour made their teacher Mr Coleman sometimes wake up in the middle of the night shouting, "Mummy! Help me!"

There was their leader, Mucker, whose ambition was to be a magician. He had the best ideas – like covering the handle of the kettle in the staffroom with butter;



or fastening a sign saying "DANGEROUS ESCAPED CONVICT" onto the back of the head teacher's car; or scattering cress seeds in the showers on a Friday to see what happened by Monday.

Then there was Cheesy, a pointy-chinned, round-eared boy who loved being in the noisy gang at school because his family at home was so quiet.

There was Bob, a tall girl with a long ponytail who hated the colour pink and flowers, scowled a lot and was brilliant at running.

There was Boogster, who was famous for being able to flick a bogey the length of the classroom, and sometimes further, if the window was open.

And finally, there was Cecil Trumpington-Potts. After his father, Lord Trumpington-Potts, had lost the family fortune *and* Trumpington

Manor, they'd moved to Grimely and were learning to live like normal people.

Cecil had joined the school the previous term, and had surprised the Abominators with his daring exploits and by never, ever giving up.

So, despite the fact that Cecil:

* talked in embarrassing baby talk
* wore outrageous silk pants which he called his "panty wanty woos"
* had a mandolin-playing father who happened to have the longest beard in England, and
* lived in a tiny bedsit, eating mostly baked beans and radishes . . .





despite ALL OF THIS, he had somehow

been (very grudgingly) accepted as an associate member of the Abominators, and as a result was now officially the happiest boy in all of Grimely.

"So, what are we doing?" asked Bob, casually doing a handstand against the bike shed, not at all worried that her ponytail was trailing in the mud.

"What we discussed – Operation 'Spook Mr Coleman'," replied Mucker, out of the corner of his mouth.

"Remember the plan?" added Cheesy. "We do everything he tells us and sit staring like zombies."

"Why are we doing it?" asked Cecil.

"We don't need a reason, you nitwit!" said Boogster, as if it was obvious. "We're doing it for *fun*."

"Ah!" said Cecil. "Fun! I like fun! Cecil's the name, fun's the game! Fun! Fun! Fun! Hurrah



for fun! If there's fun to be had, you can count on me – I'll be there!" To show how much he loved fun, Cecil jumped in the air several times, twirling around like a mad ballerina.

"All right," said Mucker, who still got embarrassed by Cecil's very uncool behaviour, "we get the idea. Come on, the bell's gone!"

They filed into the classroom and took their places in the back row. As agreed, they stared ahead like zombies, and were unusually quiet.

It did not take Mr Coleman long to get suspicious; it was very unlike the Abominators

to sit so still, and so silently. It seemed somehow . . . sinister. He decided that they must be planning something major. He hoped it would not involve a stink bomb. Or a mouse. Or spiders. He hated spiders.

"I have an important announcement to make," he said, looking above him in case there was something suspended from the ceiling and about to fall on his head. "From now on, you are to have a proper PE teacher, instead of just running round the playground every afternoon.

"We have been lucky enough to have one of the best PE teachers in Grimelyshire offer his services for free to our school. His name is Mr Tuffman. A long time ago, he was in the Olympic javelin team!"

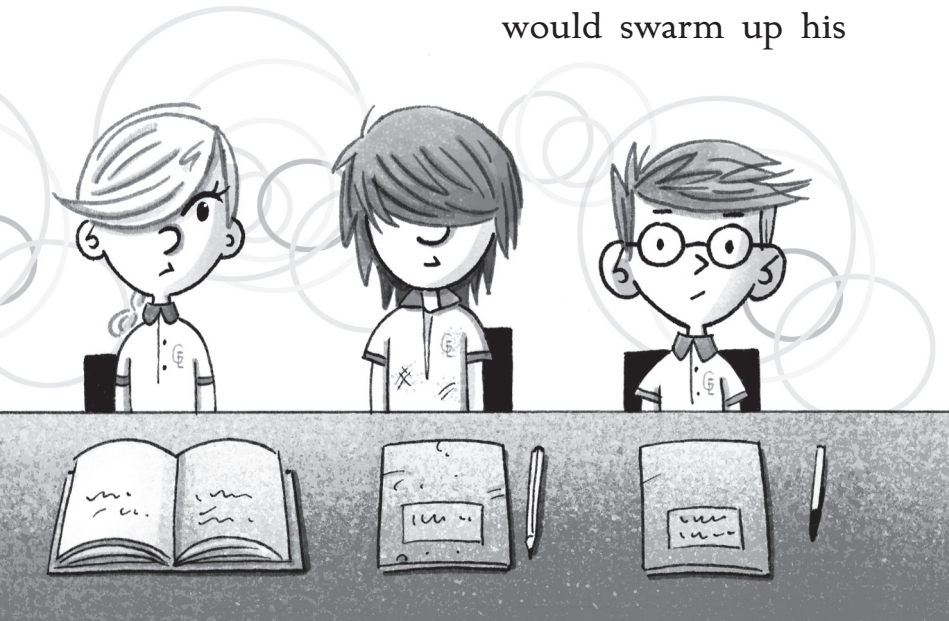
There was a murmur of excitement from the class.

Mr Coleman looked over at the Abominators, who did not react at all. They were still sitting like statues, staring straight ahead. He broke out in a sweat.

"Now, would you please turn to page twenty-three of your maths books, and do exercise four."

The Abominators opened their maths books, picked up their pencils and started to work. Like evil child robots.

Mr Coleman felt his pulse beginning to race. What did they have planned? He was sure that it was spiders. Lots of tiny ones, which would swarm up his



trousers. Or perhaps one giant one, ready to leap out at him from somewhere. Enormous and hairy. With red eyes and fangs.

Feeling faint, Mr Coleman sat down. He turned to page twenty-three of his own maths book, his hands trembling slightly. He looked at the Abominators. They sat in a row, heads bowed, writing in their exercise books like perfect children.

It was unbearable. He was so worked up he did not hear the door opening behind him, or the person who entered the room clearing her throat.



"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" he suddenly cried, leaping to his feet and pointing at the Abominators.

"Excuse me?" said Mucker politely, putting down his pencil.



"Yes, you five! Sitting there all quiet and well-behaved in the back row!"

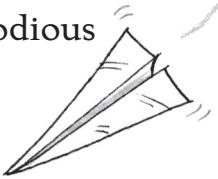
"Is there a problem, sir? We don't understand what you're talking about," said Boogster. "We're just trying to do the maths exercise you asked us to do."

"Well, I don't like it!" said Mr Coleman. "You're sitting there, doing your work, behaving perfectly. I DON'T LIKE IT ONE BIT! STOP IT!"

It was then that he realised that there was somebody standing behind him. He turned around.

It was the Year 5 teacher, Miss Jeffries.

"Mr Coleman, are you all right?" she asked in her kind, melodious voice.



This was too much for Mr Coleman. For Miss Jeffries, whom he secretly wanted to marry, to see him like this was more than he could bear. "I think," said Mr Coleman, in a sad sort of a voice, "that I might need to go on a little holiday. Just for a while."

At which point a paper aeroplane flew through



the air and hit him squarely in the middle of his forehead.

The Abominators were not being zombies any more.

In the headmaster's study, Mr Nutter was pacing up and down. The school secretary, Mrs Magpie, was looking seriously worried. She did not like it when Mr Nutter paced up and down because it usually meant he had a Big Idea.

This always meant more work (which she did not enjoy at all) and not as much time for drinking cups of tea and staring out of the window (which she preferred).

"This is going to be *our* year, Mrs Magpie," Mr Nutter said grandly. "I can feel it. This is going to be the year when we do it."

"Do *what*?" asked Mrs Magpie with a sigh, wishing she could go and boil the kettle instead

of having to listen to the head teacher talking nonsense.

"This," said Mr Nutter, "is the year that we are going to beat Lofty Heights Primary School in the Grimely Cardboard Box Festival running-in-a-cardboard-box race!"

Every autumn, Grimely held its annual Cardboard Box Festival to celebrate the day in history when the first cardboard box was manufactured in Grimely's cardboard box factory. The running-in-a-cardboard-box race was the main event, and every year the local schools selected their fastest pupils to compete alongside – and usually beat – the grown-ups.

"But nobody has ever beaten Lofty Heights Primary in the Grimely Cardboard Box Festival running-in-a-cardboard-box race, not since the competition began!" protested Mrs Magpie, her eyes round with surprise.

"This time it's going to be different," said Mr Nutter. "This time we have a secret weapon!"

Mr Nutter smiled at the thought of wiping the grin off the face of the smug head teacher, Mr Butter, from the rival school up the hill.

"And what's this secret weapon?" asked Mrs Magpie.

"Not *what*," said Mr Nutter, "but *who*. Cecil Trumpington-Potts!"