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Opening extract from

Anton and Piranha

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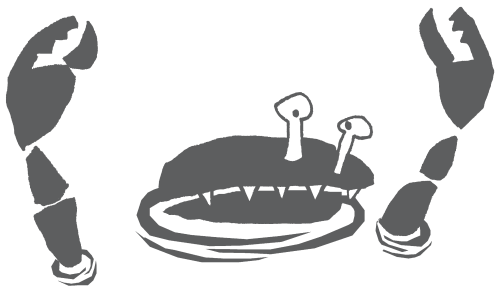
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I'm going to tell you a story. It's an adventure story so it has a hero, and that hero is me: Anton of the deep. It begins back in the time when I was known as Starflashman. Here, have some crisps. There's popcorn too. But you have to sit still and listen, all right?

Right. The story begins on the motorway. We had set off. I was already wearing my swimming shorts. Granddad was driving the car and Gran was singing along to the radio.

'Step on it, Gramps!' I said to Granddad. I like a car with some speed under the hood. And I thought how fantastic it would be if all the other cars moved over as soon as they saw us coming.



But Granddad could only do sixty because of the caravan.

The caravan. I looked out of the back window and there it was, wobbling along behind us. If it were a space shuttle, I imagined, then we'd be a team of astronauts on our way to base. I'd be the space captain taking Gran and Granddad safely to the moon. At three hundred thousand miles an hour.

'We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when . . .' sang Gran. Music from the olden days made my ears queasy. I quickly pulled out my hip-hop CD and passed it forward to her. Then I leaned back and looked out of the window. The left window, that is, because on the right all you could see were cars overtaking us.



The campsite was pretty cool. There were slot machines, there was table tennis, a café where you could buy crisps and ice cream, and there was even a disco. I jumped out of the car, wearing my swimming shorts, you remember. My back was covered with patterns from the car seat because my shorts were

the only things I had on. Anyway, I shouted out, *'Venga, amigos!'* and ran across the campsite.

It quickly became less cool, because no matter where I looked, there was no swimming pool.

'You're having me on, Granddad,' I said as I stomped over to him.

'Of course I'm not,' he answered. He had towed the caravan over to our pitch and was unhitching it from the car.

'Where on earth is the swimming pool, then?'

Gran laughed. 'We're by a lake.' She said and put her arm round me. I hate it when she does that. I'm not a baby any more! I pushed her arm away and stomped off a few steps. My stomps were quite firm, you know, they might even have caused a bit of an earthquake.

'You cannot be serious!' I started out quietly, but things didn't stay quiet for long when Starflashman was involved. 'You want me to spend my holidays here? *Here*? Hello! What were you thinking?'

Gran and Granddad were quite befuddled. They hadn't counted on the fact that a kid might expect a swimming pool. Sometimes I wonder what planet they're living on.



'But we came especially because of the lake,' Granddad said.

And Gran asked: 'What do you need a swimming pool for as well?'

What a question.

If there had been a swimming pool I could have jumped in headfirst. I would have bombed and held my breath for two to three minutes under water. I would have dived and grabbed the girls' feet, or maybe even their bikini bottoms. I would definitely have saved children from drowning when their armbands sprang a leak. If that had happened I would have swum the entire length of the pool underwater to rescue the small child from the bottom. I'd have brought it to the surface as fast as lightning and handed it to its despairing parents who already feared the worst. I'd have said, 'Oh, by the way, I believe this child is yours.' And I'd have put on my sunglasses and then lay down on the lounge chair. Yes, sir, there were no end of things I could do if there was a swimming pool around.



I didn't exchange a word with the two traitors for the rest of the evening. They unpacked their things and put them in the small cupboards in the caravan. I sat on the sofa watching an action film.

When the film was over, I turned the sofa into my bed and lay down to sleep, right there in that smelly place in the middle of nowhere. I wasn't homesick, or anything, but I did think about the ant game. That's when Mum tickles me as though there are lots of ants crawling all over me, and then Dad picks me up to squash all the ants and afterwards I always fall asleep right away.

But that wasn't an option now. I was one hundred per cent alone. In the holidays. In a place with no swimming pool, where even a rat would have hitched the next ride home.

