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Opening extract from

Fangs Vampire Spy book 2 Codename: The Tickler

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Thursday 1422 hours: **Port Elizabeth, South Africa**

A truck bearing the logo of the Addo National Park drove through a residential suburb of Port Elizabeth. As it passed the gates of a primary school, excited children clung to the railings, delighted to see that the lorry's cargo was a large grey elephant. The elephant trumpeted to a chorus of cheers from the playground.

Behind the wheel of the truck, Special Agent Fangs Enigma – the world's greatest vampire spy – arched an eyebrow. "Sound effects, too," he said to the young werewolf sitting in the passenger seat next to him. "Nice touch."

Fellow agent, and werewolf, Puppy Brown

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smiled. “I thought you’d like it.”

“Any sign of Snores yet?” Fangs asked.

Puppy studied the motor-vehicle-recognition software on her laptop and shook her head. “Nothing yet, but it shouldn’t be long. This is the quickest route to the airport.”

“And he’ll definitely have the package with him?”

“He isn’t likely to trust anyone else with it. According to a tip-off I got yesterday, he’s asking for two hundred thousand dollars for it.”

“Not a bad day’s work,” said Fangs. “Do we know what the package is yet?”

Puppy shrugged. “No idea. Only that he stole it from a government laboratory late last night. It seems us following him for so long has finally paid off. We have to stop him before he tries to leave the country and—”

An alert sounded on Puppy’s computer.

“That’s him,” Puppy said, glancing at the screen. “Three cars ahead.”

Fangs tapped his sunglasses to activate the

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zoom function in the camera embedded in the lenses and scanned the traffic in front of them. "The yellow Mini with the tinted windows?"

"Those aren't tinted windows," said Puppy. "That's Snores!"

What Fangs had mistaken for a silver coating on the car's windows was, in fact, the skin of a huge grey ogre squeezed inside the tiny vehicle. He had rolled the windows down to allow his elbows to stick out as he steered. Suddenly, his head popped up through the sunroof. Turning, he looked straight at them, his trademark metal nose glinting in the sunlight. Then he slammed a foot down on the accelerator and the Mini roared away, tyres screeching.

Puppy loaded a live satellite view of the local area onto her laptop. "He's heading for the N2 highway," she said.

"We'll have to stop him before he gets there. If he makes it into heavy traffic, a Mini will have the advantage." Fangs accelerated, pushing the needle

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of the speedometer to 70 … 80 … then 90 miles per hour. The elephant's trunk swung wildly from side to side at the back of the truck.

Puppy opened a second window on her laptop and linked to the video feed from the camera in Fangs's sunglasses. "What's he doing?"

Snores had stuck one of his thick arms out of the car window and was dropping something floppy and yellow onto the road in front of them.

Fangs just had time to shout "Banana skin!" before their right front tyre clipped the peel. The skin exploded on impact, sending the truck spinning off the road and into a nearby tree. Thanks to the reinforced steel armour of the vehicle, both Fangs and Puppy were safe, but the engine was a charred mess of molten metal, flames still flickering across what remained of the bonnet. The lorry was a write-off.

"I think I may have concussion," said Fangs, rubbing his forehead. "I could have sworn that banana peel just exploded beneath us."

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"It did!" Puppy growled. "And Snores will be on the highway in less than two minutes."

"Then it's time to take Jumbo for a spin," said Fangs, pulling the truck to a halt.

After leaping from the cab, Fangs and Puppy squeezed into the back of the lorry beside the fake elephant. The vampire wiggled one of the elephant's long tusks and a doorway in the creature's side slid open to reveal a tiny cockpit.

"It's a tight fit," muttered Fangs, climbing into the pilot's seat. He flicked on the engine as Puppy climbed in behind him. The elephant's ears rose and began to spin, slowly at first, but building up speed.

"*Ear* goes!" yelled Fangs over the noise of the engine. The animal lifted up into the air, its ears rotating at full speed and its trunk stretching straight out in front for balance. "Of all the gadgets Cube has invented, this '*ele*-copter' has got to be the most ridiculous."

Puppy was scanning the road below. "Got him!"

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she said as she caught sight of the speeding yellow car. “He’s about six hundred metres from entering the highway.”

Fangs pushed the control stick forward, sending the *ele*-copter into a dive towards their target. “We’ll stop him with the help of a little-known elephant martial art,” he said.

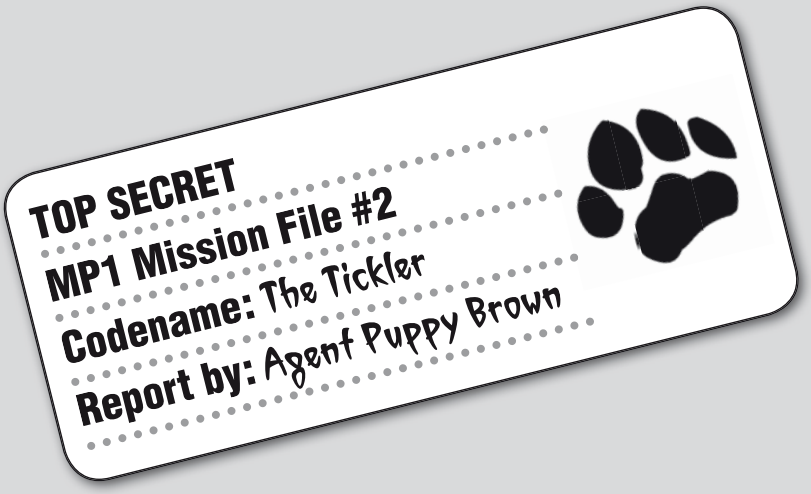
“Martial art?” asked Puppy. “You mean like kung fu?”

“This one’s called *dung* fu,” Fangs quipped, and flipped a switch.

A massive, steaming pile of artificial poo dropped out of the elephant’s bottom and landed with a *SPLAT!* on top of the Mini.

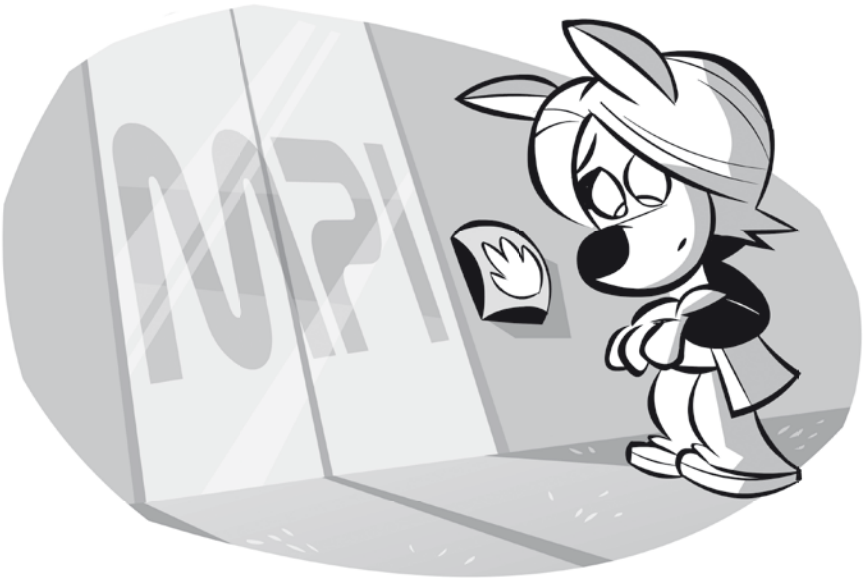
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I pressed my paw against the security scanner outside the laboratory of Monster Protection, 1st Unit, aka MP1. The matrix of blue laser lights swept across the fur on my palm as the computer identified me. It's taken me quite a while to get used to having hairy hands – in fact, the whole werewolf thing has taken a bit of getting used to.

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You've probably read stories about spooky things like vampires and werewolves. Guess what? They're not stories. It's all true! And ever since the supernatural equality laws were passed, creatures of all shapes and sizes have lived happily side by side. Well, almost everyone has. Just like in the human world, the supernatural one has its fair share of villains, and it's the job of MP1 to track them down and catch them – to protect the world from the very worst criminal *monster*minds. And I work for MP1.

You might also know that werewolves only transform once a month at full moon. But that's not how it works with me. Something went wrong during my first transformation and I ended up permanently stuck as a werewolf – claws, fur, fangs, the lot. Bad luck, huh?

There were a couple of werewolves in my school – but unless you happened to be with them at full moon, you never got to see them as wolves.

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I'm the exact opposite. The full moon is the one night a month when I change back to a human girl. I became a joke to all my classmates.

My mum and dad tried to accept that their only daughter was now a slavering beast with teeth and claws, but life wasn't exactly pleasant any more. We stopped going for day trips to the seaside (no amount of shaving could make me look good in a swimming costume), and they always left me in the car when they went to the supermarket, with the window open for air. Life as a lycanthrope was making me miserable.

That all changed when I was recruited by MP1 and teamed up with Fangs Enigma – the world's greatest vampire spy (his words, not mine). Since then, life has been a whirlwind of weapons-training, computer-hacking and secret assignments.

"Access granted," said the voice of the security system. "Welcome, Agent Brown."

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The silver doors to the lab swooshed open and I stepped inside. As ever, it was a hive of activity. Scientists tapped away on computers or assembled the latest high-tech gadgetry that had been invented specifically to help agents in the field.

I found what I was looking for in the engineering department at the back of the room. A mountain of dried elephant dung sat between the tool benches, and a technician was hacking at it with a vicious-looking pickaxe.



I glanced at the technician's name tag – "XD". None of the staff at MP1 headquarters use their real names, in case their identities are discovered and they become targets for ruthless bad guys.

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"How's it going?" I asked.

XD lowered the axe and pulled off his safety goggles. "Not too well, I'm afraid, Agent Brown," he replied. "The fake dung was always designed to harden on impact, but we didn't realize it would be this difficult to cut through."

"So the Mini is still under all that?"

"With the suspect inside," XD confirmed. "We've got someone coming down with a chainsaw."



My werewolf ears twitched as they picked up a faint rasping sound, like the buzzing of angry bees. "I think I can hear it now," I said.

"That's not the saw." XD smiled. "That's coming from inside the car."

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I pressed my ear to the hardened dung and listened. "Snores is asleep!" I exclaimed. "The noise would certainly explain how he got his nickname."

I left XD to his work and went in search of Fangs. He wasn't difficult to find.

"You fool, Cube! Everyone will think I've peed my pants."

I raced in the direction of the shout to see what had upset my boss.

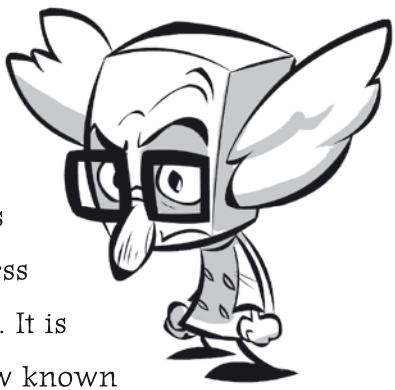
Fangs was in the lab's administration office – and he was soaking wet. He looked as though he'd taken a shower fully dressed. He wrung water from his cape while glaring at Professor Hubert Cubit, the head of MP1's technical division.

Early on in life, the professor had realized that facts and information only ever came in square things. "Books, computers, filing cabinets – all square and all filled with knowledge," he told me during my first week of training. "Tennis balls,

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potatoes and scoops of ice cream – all round and hardly any knowledge in them at all."

Determined that he would also be stuffed with information, the young Hubert built a tight-fitting wooden box to wear like a hat at all times, so changing the shape of his head as it grew, from a useless sphere to a fact-filled square. It is for this reason that he is now known within MP1 as "Cube", and right now his square head was staring angrily at my boss.



"It was your own fault," Cube said. "You shouldn't have taken the pen without permission."

"What's going on?" I asked.

"I'll tell you what's going on," said Fangs. "I borrowed a pen from Captain Brainbox here."

"Without permission," Cube added.

I blinked. "And?"

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"It's a new invention of mine," Cube explained. "A fountain pen – with a real fountain inside. Removing the lid unleashes a torrent of water."

"But Fangs is drenched," I said. "How can all that water have come from this normal-sized pen?"

"Technically, it didn't," said Cube. "The pen actually sprays out a chemical compound that draws water from the air around it. I invented it because I got so fed up with people taking my pen without asking – although you can borrow this one any time you like, Agent Enigma." He smiled.

"What else have you got for us today, professor?" I asked, trying to change the subject.

Cube's eyes lit up. "I'm so glad you asked, Agent Brown. What do you make of these?" He produced a bag of multicoloured balloons from his pocket.

"Don't tell me," said Fangs. "They explode in the face of whoever tries to inflate them."

"Don't be ridiculous," scoffed Cube. "No, these

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balloons have helium atoms infused directly into the rubber. Try blowing one up..."

I chose a balloon and began to blow.

"No more need for bulky gas canisters," Cube enthused. "Instant, lighter-than-air balloons wherever you go. And they use hyper-helium, which is ten times more powerful than regular helium."

"That's very clever," I began – and then clamped a paw over my mouth. I sounded like a cartoon chipmunk. "What's happened?" I squeaked.

Cube smiled apologetically. "Unfortunately, I haven't yet found a way of stopping the helium from being breathed in by whoever inflates the balloon."

"You haven't found a way of inventing anything of any use at all," said Fangs.

"You may wish to take that back when you see my final offering," Cube said. He opened a drawer and handed over a plastic comb.

"Finally," said Fangs. "Something I can actually

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use during assignments. Especially when I'm interrogating female suspects." He began to run the comb through his hair.

"No, Fangs!" cried Cube.

But he was too late. A thin, red laser beam shot from the end of the comb and hit a nearby table, burning a hole in its metal surface. Fangs jumped,



accidentally aiming the laser down at his feet and melting the leather of his shoe.

"AARGH!" He pulled the ruined shoe off and then hopped around, clutching his toasted toes.

"You idiot, Agent Enigma," Cube snapped. "You've knocked the comb's focusing lens out of alignment."

"It wasn't my fault," Fangs retorted, examining the smouldering hole in his sock. "There's something wrong with that thing. It fired a laser at me!"

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"It was supposed to!" said Cube, taking the comb from Fangs and carefully laying it on the table. "That's why it's called a *laser* comb."

"A what?"

"A laser comb," said Cube. "As soon as the coating on the plastic teeth makes contact with hair, a high-energy laser is fired from the handle. Thanks to your buffoonery, I'll have to take it apart and realign the lens."

"My buffoonery?" Fangs said. "You're the one who comes up with this useless stuff."

"I'd like to see you do any better."

"Ah," said Fangs with a smile. "That's exactly what I have done..." He reached into a pocket inside his cape and pulled out what looked like a TV remote control. Well, I'm guessing it had started out life as a TV remote. Now it had an aerial jammed into one end. And it looked as though someone had glued glitter all over it.

"What is that?" Cube asked.

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"This is 'The Bloodhound'," said Fangs proudly. "I made it myself."

"I can see that," said Cube. "What does it do?"

"The Bloodhound can locate human blood at a range of up to five hundred metres," Fangs explained. "When it finds blood, it lights up and emits an alarm."

"Well, it doesn't appear to be working," Cube said. "I'm standing right in front of it and I'm full of human blood."

"That's because I've got it programmed to find blood that's already been donated and bottled," said Fangs. "I can't drink blood that's still inside someone. That would be vulgar."

I took the remote from Fangs and examined it. Some of the glitter came off on my fur. "So you've invented a way to find blood you can add

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to your glasses of milk?" I asked.

Fangs nodded. "I need never go without a blood milkshake again."

Cube choked back a contemptuous laugh. "It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen!"

"No, it isn't," Fangs said, taking the Bloodhound back from me. "It is a thing of beauty. And, unlike your amateurish gadgets, Cube, it works perfectly. Watch..." He stabbed at a button on the remote with one of his long nails.

Nothing happened. Well, almost nothing... I felt a sharp pain rocket through my teeth.

"Ow!" I cried, clamping a hand over my mouth.

"I can't hear any alarm, Agent Enigma," said Cube sarcastically.

"You just have to give it a moment to warm up," said Fangs. He pressed another of the glitter-coated buttons.

BOOM!

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On the other side of the room, a laptop computer exploded.

"Hang on... I know one of these buttons works—"

"ARGH!"

A lab technician screamed as the mobile phone he was working on suddenly showered him with sparks.

Fangs continued to punch buttons to the accompaniment of cries of alarm from somewhere in the laboratory. Equipment was fusing out and blowing up all around us. And my teeth were really hurting.

Cube snatched the remote from Fangs's grasp. "Give that to me before you kill us all."

"It just needs a little fine tuning, that's all," protested Fangs. "Then it will be more use to us on our assignment than any of your pathetic creations."

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"But we don't know what our mission is *yet*," I said. "We're still not sure what it is that Snores stole."

"I can tell you that," gargled a voice behind us. It was Phlem, the head of MP1, and he didn't sound happy. But then he rarely is.



Phelm is always covered from head to toe in dripping green ooze, and legend says that he is the only slime beast ever to have survived outside the gloopy waters of the fabled black lagoon.

"Follow me..." he said.



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