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opening extract from

Jack Slater

Monster Investigator

written by

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published by

Randomhouse

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Chapter One

I was just in the middle of a lovely dream when my bedroom door opened and the light from the landing woke me up.

I groaned and opened my eyes. Two timid-looking pyjama-clad figures stood there, shuffling sheepishly.



"Um . . . please can we sleep in your room tonight?" one of them said.

I groaned again, and sat up. "What's wrong?" I asked, even though I knew what the answer would be.

"There's a monster under our bed!"

Sighing, I swung my feet out of bed and into my slippers. This was the third time in a week, and I was starting to get a bit tired of it.

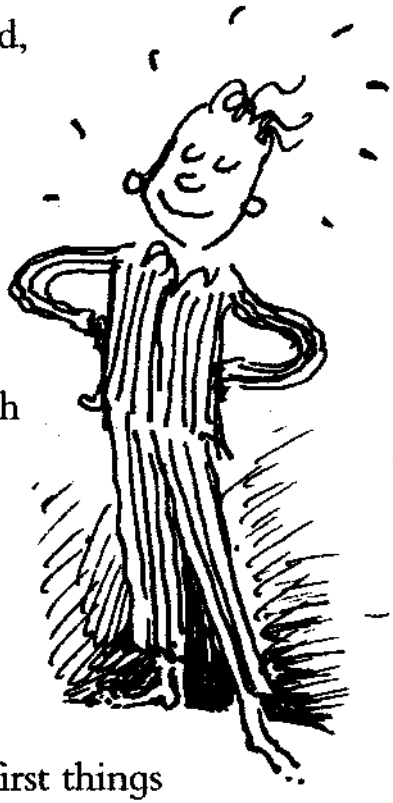
"All right," I said. "You two snuggle up in here and go back to sleep. I'll deal with the monster."

"Be careful, son," said the taller one.

"I will, Dad," I said. "Sleep well. 'Night, Mum."

I closed the bedroom door behind me, and switched the landing light off. My parents don't believe it, but a light *outside* the bedroom does nothing to keep monsters away. It just makes them harder to see.

Poor Mum and Dad, though. It can't be easy for them having a son who's – though I say it myself – the world's greatest Monster Investigator.



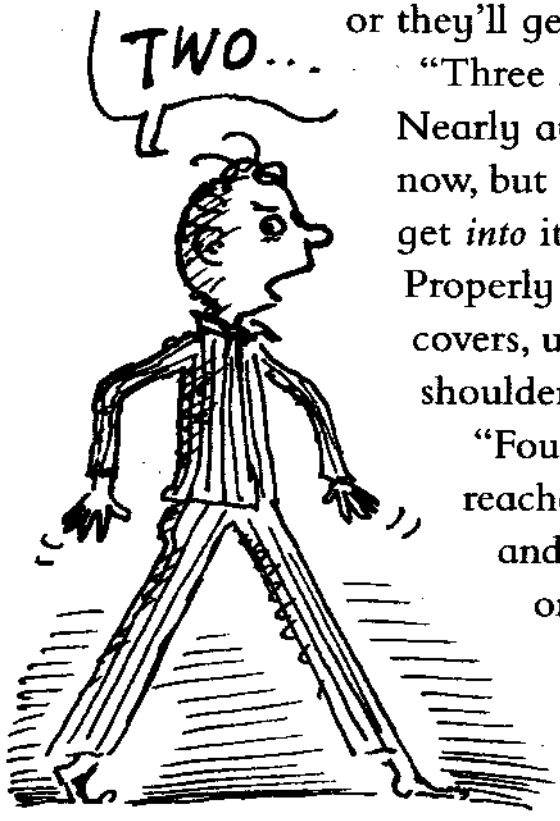
I took a deep breath when I reached their room. The big double bed was right against the furthest wall, and I had to get to it in under five seconds. Walking. One of the first things you learn as a Monster Investigator is that most of the stuff kids make up to keep monsters away *actually works*. Hands up if you've ever counted to five while you got into bed?

I thought so.

OK, I said to myself, here we go.

"One . . ." I counted aloud, stepping into the room.

"Two . . ." Walking as quickly as I could, but *not running*. You mustn't run, or they'll get you.



"Three . . ." Nearly at the bed now, but I had to get *into* it by five. Properly under the covers, up to the shoulders.

"Four . . ." I reached the bed and jumped onto it.

Once you get to the bed, you can go as quickly as you like, but you have to keep counting, fair and square.

"Five!" Just in time, I snuggled down under the thick, warm duvet and breathed a sigh of relief. Not that I was *really* scared, of course – I'd like to see the monster that could get the better of me. But I wanted it to think I was.

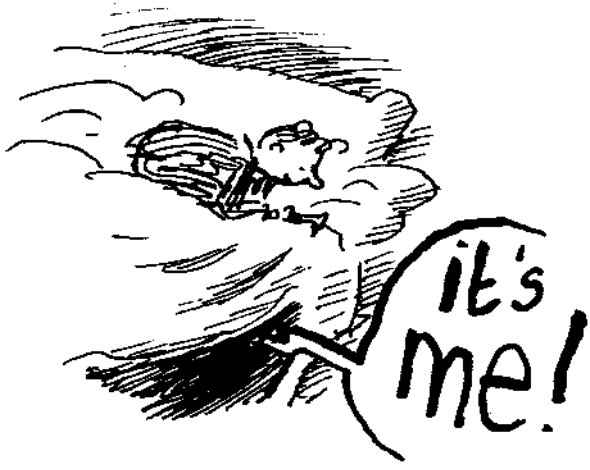
I waited, listening, while my hand slipped my secret weapon – my trusty penlight torch – out of one of my pyjama pockets.

Then, from under the bed, I heard it. A shuffling noise, ever so quiet but definitely there. It was a big one. I listened carefully until I could tell which way it was facing. And I was just about to leap out of bed and blast the monster away with a pencil-thin beam of battery-powered light, when it spoke.

"Jack?" it said. "It's me!"

Recognizing the voice, I lowered my torch.

"Bernard!" I sighed, relieved. "What are *you* doing here?"



Bernard was my best informant in the monster underworld. If anything big was going down, he'd hear about it – and then I'd hear about it. No question, he was really valuable to me.

He was also in one of his moods.

"Hey," he growled, "I've *told* you. Don't call me Bernard! I'm just a monster with no name! I mean, I reckon I deserve a bit of respect after all the help I've given you, and anyhow—"

Usually when Bernard – which *is* his name, by the way – gets going like this

I just listen, and wait till he's got it out of his system. But something told me we didn't have time for this.

"Not *now*, Bernard!" I interrupted.

"OK, OK," he muttered. "So do you want to hear the news, or don't you?"

I wanted to hear it, all right. Bernard had *never* appeared under my parents' bed before. Usually if he had some information for me, he'd leave a note under my bed asking me to switch off my monster-traps at, say, eight o'clock, and then he'd come through and talk to me. So for him just to appear in my house must have meant something that couldn't wait.

"Sure I do," I told him. "What's up?"

There was another shuffling noise. Then a sound like a drain being unblocked – which was, I realized after a moment, Bernard clearing his throat. Then, more shuffling.

It sounded like Bernard was nervous about something. Really nervous.

"Come on, Bernard, spit it out," I said.

This time, he didn't even notice me use his name. This was one rattled monster.

"OK, OK," he spat. "Listen up, kid, and listen good. Something big is going down – I mean *real* big. The word under the streets is: no more hiding under beds in the dark scaring itty-bitty little kids. The underworld is getting organized."

A cold feeling crept over my skin, like a wave of small determined spiders.

"What do you mean, organized?" I demanded. "Monsters don't organize! What have you always told me, Bernard? *It's a monster-eat-monster world down there! Every monster for himself!*"

"Not any more," he assured me. "Not all of us monsters is happy about it – but they got ways of making us . . . co-operate." As he said this, his voice trembled a little.



I suddenly realized – Bernard wasn't just nervous; he was terrified.

"Who's making you co-operate?" I said. "And co-operate with what?"

He gulped – a long slow noise like a snake swallowing a dromedary – and said:

"OK, Jack, listen real carefully. I'm gonna tell you the whole story. But the main thing you gotta know is—"

And then there was a sound like a thousand people screaming a long way off, and another sound like a huge heavy wooden door closing – *THUNK!*

Then there was silence.

"Bernard?" I said. "Bernard, are you OK?"

But Bernard didn't answer.