



Good Question

People often ask me: “Jack, what are the scariest monsters you’ve ever faced?”

They call me Jack because that’s my name, and it would be silly to call me anything else.

They ask me about monsters because, well, I’m a monster hunter.

Don’t laugh.

You don’t have to be big or strong to fight monsters. If you did, I wouldn’t be doing it. Monster hunters come in all shapes and sizes.

I found that out when a little man with a big beard called Stoop made me his apprentice, after I somehow . . . accidentally . . . I’m still not sure how . . . defeated an Ogre in single combat. It’s all explained in my first

adventure, and you should probably read that one before going any further to avoid confusion.

It's not entirely necessary. This story SHOULD make sense on its own, though I can't say for certain because I haven't finished writing it yet. In fact, I've only started.*

Since then, despite being smaller than most, and still only ten, I've squared up to many monsters, from Boggles and Bugbears and Boggy-Boes to Breaknecks and Kerfuffles and Bullbeggars and Brollachans and Boo-Hoos.**

And those are just the ones beginning with B. (Apart from the Kerfuffles. They must've slipped into the list when I wasn't looking.)

They're all to be found in the pages of a magical book called *Monster Hunting For Beginners*, which was given to me on my first day as an apprentice monster hunter.

Each time a new monster is discovered anywhere in the world, the monster hunter

who discovers it only has to write up the details in his or her copy of the book, and the new entry instantly appears in every other volume.

No matter how many monsters are added to it there's always room for more.

Here's what it says about Kerfuffles.

Kerfuffle

A kerfuffle means a fuss, and Kerfuffles are so called because that's what they like making. If yaks had been named for the same reason, they'd be called Big Piles of Poo. Of course, it's not the yaks' fault they have nowhere else to go but up a mountain, but that's no consolation when you've stepped into one of those piles in your new climbing boots.

* You probably noticed that.

**Boo-Hoos are so-called because they're always crying.

Kerfuffles actually do look like yaks. Or what yaks would look like if they looked like giant porcupines. Their favourite activity is to curl up in a ball and roll over their enemies until they're so full of holes they spring a leak. The only way to defeat them is to put a little cork at the end of each of their sharp spines,

but that takes ages.

It's much quicker and more effective to RUN AWAY when they're in the mood to make a fuss. (Which is always.) I'd do that if I were you.



Little Monsters

I don't blame you for being baffled.

Those are clearly not monsters.

They're children.

Children are not officially classed as monsters, but, take my word for it, they can be alarming under **Certain Circumstances**.

That's why they do have an entry of their own in *Monster Hunting for Beginners*.

As you can tell, *Monster Hunting for Beginners* is not always helpful. But which monsters are scariest? That's easy. It's these ones.



Children

Children have many things in common with monsters. They're LOUD. They're unpredictable. They can also be VERY dangerous, especially when lots of them are gathered together. Monster hunters are advised to avoid areas where too many children are found and go instead to safer places, such as snake-infested jungles. Better safe than sorry.

I felt like I'd looked at that page a hundred times already this morning, and each time the words on the cover had been different.

That was another of the book's magical qualities. The title constantly changed depending on who was holding it and how they were feeling at that moment.

Right now, it was called *Monster Hunting For Boys Who Wish They Could Disappear*.

The reason was, it was my first day at a new

school and I'd always been shy about meeting people. I'd rather face a monster any day!

I stood at the school gate, peering through the bars at all the children tearing round the yard, and my stomach started churning.

I wasn't just scared.

I wasn't just terrified.

I was **SCERRIFIED**.

"Don't worry," said Nancy.

Nancy is my best friend. She's also my only friend of my own age.*

I'd met her when I first came to King's Nooze. She'd helped me defeat a whole army of monsters led by Aunt Prudence.**

Now we saw each other every day and often headed off on adventures together.

"The kids here are no different from you and me," Nancy said as the minutes ticked down to the **Fateful Moment** when I'd have to step through the gate. "Well, they're a bit different from you and me, because they don't

* Stoop is my friend too, but he's 200 years old.

** She wasn't really my aunt, but that's another story. Literally.

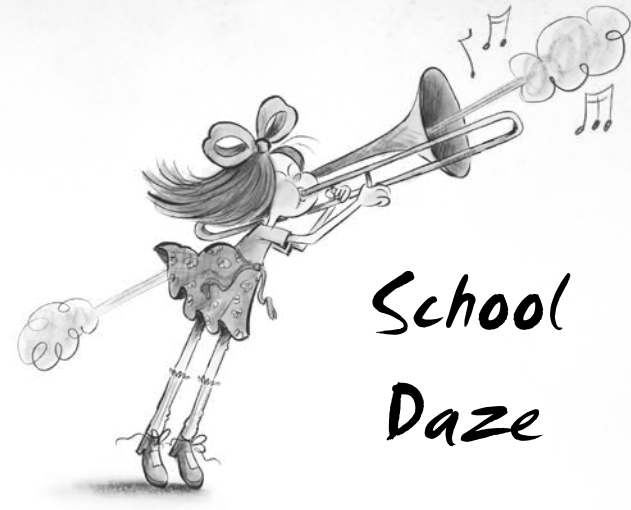
fight monsters, but you know what I mean.”

She squeezed my hand reassuringly.

Unfortunately, Nancy doesn't know her own strength, so it did make me scream a bit.

The sound was drowned out by the bell ringing to mark the start of the school day. I was about to embark on my **Most Terrifying Mission Ever**.

I took a deep breath . . . and walked in.



Nancy was right.* It wasn't too bad, even if the other children all looked at me as if I was a film they'd come to see, and they were wondering when it was going to start and if it would be worth watching to the end.

The teacher introduced me.

“Say hello to Jack, everyone,” she said.

“Hello, Jack,” everyone said back.

Miss Higgins asked me to say a few words so that the other children could get to know me.

I told them my mother was dead, and I'd moved here to King's Nooze with Dad.

** Nine times out ten she was, as she's asked me to point out.*

I didn't say anything about my parents being monster hunters back in the day, or that I was one now too. In my old school, the kids had teased me for believing in monsters.

Thankfully, these kids didn't laugh at me. They were too busy laughing – in a good way – at Angela, who made the sound of a trombone every time she farted.

Which she did an Awful Lot.*

Miss Higgins didn't think it was funny, and kept saying "Angela, is that absolutely necessary?" and "I really think you should see a doctor, that doesn't sound at all healthy."

It was weird to think I'd saved everyone here from an invasion of Ogres just before the start of the summer holidays.

None of them remembered what had happened, because that's the way it is with monsters. Sometimes it's better to forget.

"I told you there was nothing to be scerrified about," said Nancy, as we sat eating

our sandwiches at lunchtime. "Nothing out of the ordinary ever happens in school."

She was wrong about that. It doesn't happen often,* which is why I remembered it.

** If you don't know what a trombone sounds like, it's exactly the same as one of Angela's farts.*

** Just one time out of ten, as I previously mentioned.*



Not Now Arthur

It was the end of my first week at school, and we were all outside playing rounders.

I couldn't see the point of being good at games. Nobody ever died because they were bad at them. (Apart from that boy in the Isle of Wight last year, and everyone knows it was his own fault for playing tennis when he didn't have a ball.*)

We were sorted into teams and Miss Higgins tossed a coin to see who'd bat first.

Nancy's team won.

I was put out deep in the field.

That suited me fine. The ball hardly ever came this far. I could daydream about what

* He used a grenade instead.

monsters I might see next. There were still so many that I hadn't encountered . . .

The sound of a trombone announced the start of the game.

("Angela, will you stop that?")

After a while, I couldn't help noticing that there was a penguin with a letter in its beak, standing at the edge of the field, staring at me.

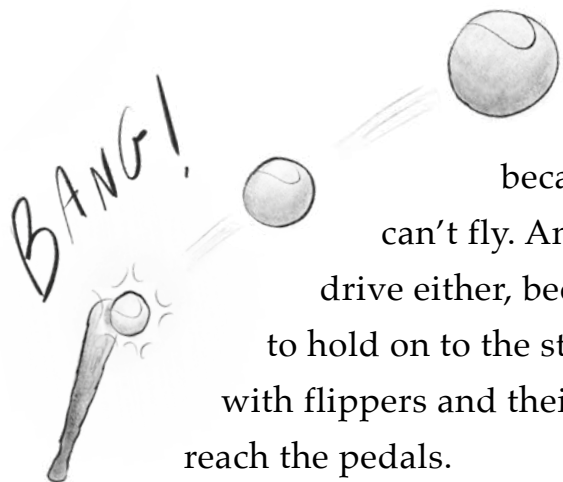
Very hard.

This might seem odd in England, even in Cornwall, which is where King's Nooze was.* But I was used to penguins.

The International League of Monster Hunters used carrier penguins to send out calls for help when there was a new monster which needed tackling. It wasn't the most efficient system in the world,

* And still is, last time I checked.





because penguins can't fly. And they can't drive either, because it's hard to hold on to the steering wheel with flippers and their feet can't reach the pedals.

"Not now, Arthur!" I hissed, because I recognised the penguin at once. "You know I can only hunt monsters outside school hours."

Arthur went on staring.
Harder.

On the other side of the field, it was Nancy's turn to bat.

She readied herself for the ball, then swung back her arm, and clobbered it with all her might.*

The ball soared in my direction. I looked up, blinking in the sun.

"Catch it!" yelled Angela, adding an extra loud parp for emphasis.

* The ball, that is, not her own arm.

I tried to concentrate, but Arthur was waddling on to the field to deliver his letter.

The ball had almost reached me.

I opened my hands to catch it. I'd be the hero. I'd have got a player out for my team.

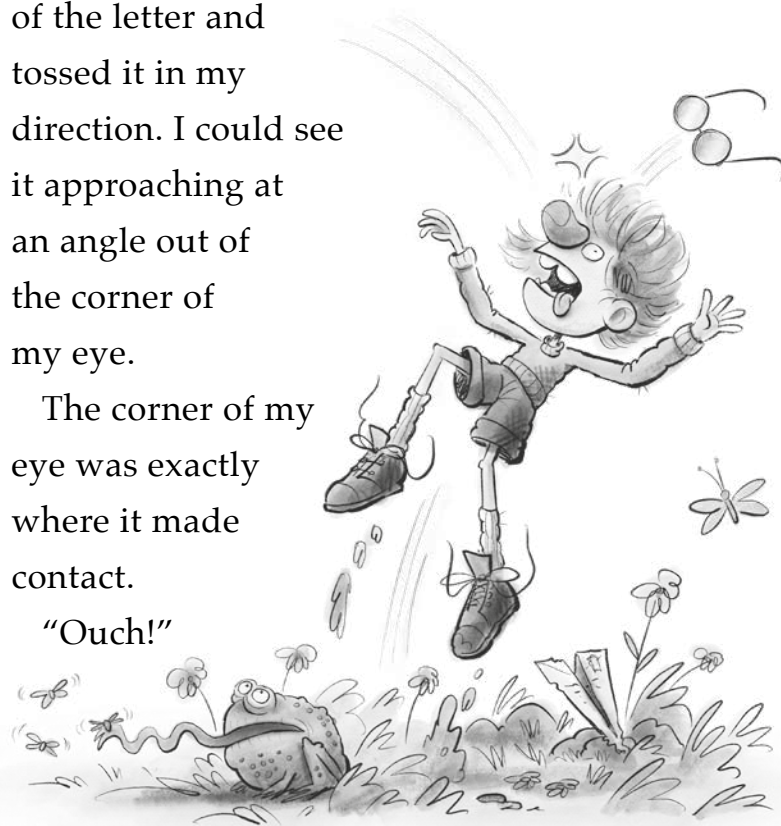
Closer it came.

Closer.

At the last moment, the penguin made a paper aeroplane out of the letter and tossed it in my direction. I could see it approaching at an angle out of the corner of my eye.

The corner of my eye was exactly where it made contact.

"Ouch!"



My hands flew to my face, and the ball bounced off the top of my head . . .

“Ouch, again!”

. . . then thudded to the ground, together with my glasses.

My teammates groaned with disappointment.

By the time I’d picked up my glasses and put them back on, Arthur was already off on his next mission.

I picked up the letter and stuffed it in my pocket, wondering what was so urgent that the International League of Monster Hunters would risk attracting **Undue Attention** by sending a penguin to my school.



Eew

Stew

“You didn’t have to hit it so hard,” I said to Nancy as we walked home after school.

“Sorry,” she said. “I meant to go easy on you, but I couldn’t resist. I saw the ball coming towards me and had an **Uncontrollable Urge** to whack it.” She mimicked the action.

“Did you hear everyone cheering?”

“No, I was too busy picking a paper aeroplane out of my eye,” I reminded her.

“Didn’t anyone notice the penguin?”

“They thought it was a dog.”

“Dogs don’t have wings.”

“Some do,” she pointed out.* “But never mind that. I want to see what the letter says.”

** She was probably thinking of the famous Flying Poodles of Panama. Trust me, you don’t want to be standing underneath one of those when it has an upset tummy.*

Eagerly, I tore open the envelope and took out the message. Here's what it said.

Lubbers here! Lubbers there!
There are Lubbers everywhere!
Come quickly, Jack, and get rid of
them - or it will be too late, and too
late is the worst time to deal with
anything, especially Lubbers.
Yours fearfully,
The Sisters of Perpetual Misery

"Perpetual means never-ending," said Nancy helpfully.

"I know!" I said.*

"Those Lubbers sound serious," she went on with a thrill in her voice at the prospect of a new adventure. "Where do these fearful,

never-endingly miserable Sisters live?"

I turned over the letter, and there on the back was an address.

Muckle Abbey,
Muckle,
Quite Near The Top Of Scotland,
Great Britain,
Planet Earth,
The Solar System,
The Milky Way,
Outer Space,
The Universe, Etc.
(Sorry, we're not sure what comes
after The Universe.)

"Come on, Nancy," I said. "We'd better pick up Stoop and get on our way at once."

Together we raced to the little house on the edge of King's Nooze where Dad and I now

* I didn't.

lived, dumped our school bags in the hall and burst into the kitchen at a gallop.

Oh no.

Dad was wearing an apron.

That could only mean One Thing.

He was cooking.

To say that Dad wasn't a very good cook was the **Understatement Of All Time**. He didn't cook food so much as burn it beyond recognition. The moment I walked into the kitchen, my nose started to shudder as if it was trying to detach itself from my face and run away in horror from the awful stink.

"Jack, Nancy, what do you think?" Dad said cheerfully, reaching for a spoon so that we could sample the black and oozy stew he had bubbling on the stove.

"Dad, we don't have ti—"

He slipped a spoon between my lips before

I could finish what I was going to say.

"Delicious!" I lied, trying not to gag.*

"Some for you, Nancy?" suggested Dad.

"I'd love to," Nancy said.** "But we need to speak to Stoop, fast! Where is he?"

"In the potting shed as usual," said Dad.

"That reminds me. I must add some extra ingredients to the stew especially for him. You know how much he loves cabbage."

"Yum," I said with a feeling of dread, making for the back garden before Dad could invite me to taste another shocking spoonful.



* Black and oozy are two things stew should never be.

** Untruthfully.