

Extract from INVISIBLE FIENDS: MR MUMBLES – Draft 1**By Barry Hutchison**

Below is an exclusive extract from the first draft of MR MUMBLES, the first book in the INVISIBLE FIENDS series. This draft was significantly different to the draft that was eventually published, and it features the first ever appearance of THE BEAST, who would go on to become the villain of the fifth book in the series.

For more information on the books, visit www.barryhutchison.com

Mumbles howled like a wounded animal as I twisted and stuffed my birth certificate down his filthy throat.

His hands flew to his mouth, but I could tell from the look of horror on his face he was too late. Something hissed and bubbled inside him. I rolled away, my eyes still fixed firmly on his.

Thick, oily smoke poured from his mouth and nostrils as the damage spread through his insides. His skin stretched and crawled as if it was trying to break free and take its chances on its own.

With a final, ear-splitting scream Mr. Mumbles slipped down into the water, his body dissolving as it sank.

'You know,' said a voice from behind me. I turned in time to see Ameena haul herself up from the edge of the roof, 'you're supposed to come up with a witty quip when you dispatch a bad guy like that.'

I smiled, relieved to see her alive. For a moment I looked down into the murky depths of the flooded leisure centre.

'Eat that,' I said, eventually.

Ameena grinned. 'Perfect!'

'Did you hear what he said?'

'Some of it,' she shrugged. 'Was more concerned with hanging on, to be honest.'

I nodded. It was a fair comment. 'Hey,' she said, bending down to pick up the other sheet of paper which jutted from the plastic envelope I'd dropped. 'What's this?'

'Hmm? Oh, it's just an old drawing of Mr. Mumbles.'

'No,' she frowned, passing me the page. 'I meant the other side.'

The picture in my hands was like something out of a nightmare. My name was at the bottom, but the artwork itself was better than the effort on the other side. I must have drawn this when I was a little older.

The image was of two boys and a huge, savage monster. Under one of the boys I'd written "me". Under the other I'd written "Billy Gibb" – the name of the boy who'd beaten me up that first day at school. The inhuman creature in the middle of the page was tearing Billy to pieces with its long, sharp claws. Deep red crayon streaks sprayed from Billy's broken body, covering most of the page.

I stared at those claws, my mind racing back to the scratching I'd heard in the attic. Twice Mr. Mumbles had put his hands around my throat and still I hadn't realised. Those marks on the floor couldn't have been Mr. Mumbles. Mr. Mumbles didn't have claws.

And Mr. Mumbles wasn't my only imaginary friend!

CHAPTER TEN

THE BEAST

I called it The Beast, because that's exactly what it was. Savage. Unstoppable. Dreamed up for one purpose and one purpose only: Revenge!

I was barely five and had just been on the receiving end of a full scale beating from the boy who was to become the worst bully my school had ever seen. Billy Gibb was almost six, bigger than most eight year olds, and a borderline psychopath. I didn't stand a chance.

That night I lay with my black eyes in bed and imagined a monster straight from the bowels of Hell. I ran over the whole fight again, this time with my creature in my corner. It tore through Billy Gibb like he wasn't there. I could hear the ripping flesh; the snapping bone. I felt his blood spatter on my face.

I tried to make it stop – I'd only wanted it to scare the bully off – but it wouldn't quit. I lay there all night, curled in a ball under the covers, my hands clamped over my ears as Billy's screams shrilled through my imagination. The Beast had taken on a life of its own, and I was powerless to keep it under control.

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'O-kay,' Ameena frowned once I had finished explaining. 'Did anyone ever tell you you were one messed up kid?'

'Ameena, if it's become real I don't know how we can stop it,' I shivered. I suddenly felt very exposed up there on the roof. 'Mr. Mumbles was just a bumbling old guy with a speech impediment when I imagined him, and look what happened to him! The Beast was . . . twisted. It was pure evil.'

'Don't worry,' she said. 'We were up in the attic. It wasn't there, remember? Yeah there were some scratch marks, but that could have been anything.'

I chewed my lip nervously. Ameena was probably right. There had only been one monster in the loft, and he was now gone. It was over. We'd won.

So why was I so worried? The only people who'd gone in and out of the attic were Mr. Mumbles and us. There was no way something as savage as The Beast could have hidden quietly up there without us noticing, so unless Mr. Mumbles had hidden it under his hat . . .

Alarm bells rang around the inside of my head. What was it Mumbles had said to me? "Did you really think you could stop us?". *Us*. Plural.

Perhaps not under his hat, but Mr. Mumbles *had* found a hiding place for The Beast. The perfect hiding place. The last place anyone would ever think to look.

As if on cue the dark waters which filled the leisure centre began to bubble and froth up through the skylight. A vast column of steam shot up into the air as the water reached a rolling boil.

'Kyle?'

'Run, Ameena!' I shrieked. 'Run!'

Before she could react a thrashing ball of flesh exploded through the skylight, shattering the slates which surrounded it. We stared, horrified but unable to look away, watching Mr. Mumbles' bones snap and buckle as they assumed their terrible new shape.

His eyes bulged in his head, swelling until I thought they were about to pop. Half a dozen saw-like teeth ripped through his cheeks, splitting them open. More fangs split his lips at the corners, and the three wounds combined to form a giant, cavernous mouth.

'You can't kill meeeeeee,' he shrieked. His voice had an eerie stereo sound to it, as if two people were saying the words at the same time. 'You imagined meee, so as long assssss you live, sssssso do I!'

'You were The Beast,' I said, realising it fully for the first time. 'Even back then, it was you. That nightmare about Billy Gibb. It was you.'

'Nnn-nightmare?' Mumbles growled. 'That wasssssn't a nightmare. It wassss a warning.' He roared in agony as ten sharp talons tore through his fingertips. 'About what I would one d-day do to youuuuu!'

The last scraps of the shape that was Mr. Mumbles were giving way to sinewy muscle and coarse, wiry hair. Jagged blades of bone stuck out through the skin of his elbows and knees. Still his shape twisted and altered. Still he changed.

'What do we do?' Ameena whimpered. At least I'd seen The Beast before – if only in my mind. This was a whole new level of horror for her.

'I can't ask you to do this with me,' I told her, knowing we had virtually no chance of making it through the next few minutes in one piece. 'You should get out of here while you can.'

'Hey, plucky sidekick, remember?' she protested. 'Now, you got a plan or what?'

I turned my back on the monstrosity that had once been Mr. Mumbles and fixed my eyes on the steep red roof of the town library.

'Yes,' I said, grimly. 'I've got a plan.'

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