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Opening extract from
S.W.I.T.C.H. 4
Ant Attack

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Entertaining Tarquin

'Guess what, boys?' Mum peered around the bedroom door with a grin.

Josh and Danny paused in their fight with rolled-up newspaper swords, and smiled innocently at her.

'What?' urged Danny.

The grin got stiffer. 'Tarquin's here to play!' Mum gulped. The looks on her twin sons' faces were so dark, it felt as if Hallowe'en had arrived early.

'*Tarquin,*' said Josh.

'*Here,*' said Danny.

Piddle the dog whined and shot under the bunk bed.

Danny threw down his sword, turned to Josh, opened out his arms and commanded: 'Through



the heart. And make it quick.'

'Oh, come on! It'll be *fun!*' said Mum. 'Sshhh! He's coming up the stairs.'

They could clearly hear Tarquin approaching. He appeared to be singing opera.

'But we can't *stand* Tarquin!' hissed Danny, pushing his messy blond hair off his furrowed forehead. 'And you don't even *like* his mum! Remember how snotty she was about you winning the best garden contest?'

Mum sighed and said, in a low voice, 'I've let bygones be bygones! His mum needed help today. She's visiting a sick aunt. We have to look after each other—we're a *community!* Oh—here he is now!'

Tarquin trailed past her into Josh and Danny's room. At seven and a half he was nearly their age but he looked about fifty-five. He was dressed in neatly ironed trousers, a blue shirt, and a proper matching jacket. His hair was severely parted and combed flat to his head. His googly grey eyes narrowed as he examined their room. 'It's rather a mess, isn't it?' he said, in his peculiar high-pitched voice.



‘Well, duh!’ said Danny. ‘It’s a boys’ room!’

‘Yes,’ said Tarquin. ‘And so is mine. But I still refrain from growing fungus in it.’ He eyed a jar of something goeey on the windowsill. The jar had once been filled with tadpoles, which Josh had set free in the garden pond last week. It *had* gone a little furry.

‘Have fun, boys,’ called Mum, already halfway downstairs.

Tarquin began to wander around, poking at their stuff. He prodded their comics and sniffed.

‘So childish.’

Danny mouthed ‘*Childish? Spiderman?*’ at Josh and picked up his sword again. Josh frowned at him and shook his head.

‘So what do *you* read then, Tarquin?’ said Josh, trying hard to sound friendly.

‘Oh—*Classical Music Magazine. New Scientist.* You wouldn’t know them. I don’t suppose you know anything about the arts or science.’

‘We know a *lot* about science!’ burst out Danny. ‘We’ve had more science in the last six weeks than you’ve had in your life, you little—’

‘Shut up, Danny,’ said Josh. He was worried about what his brother might say next. Maybe he would tell Tarquin that he and Josh had been involved with scientific experiments so amazing that every scientist in the world would explode with astonishment if they knew. Maybe he’d boast that they’d been turned into spiders, then flies, and then grasshoppers over this year—after getting tangled up with the brilliant (but quite probably mad) old lady scientist next door.

Petty Potts seemed like a dotty old dear, but

she was in fact a genius. She had created SWITCH spray which could turn any creature into a creepy-crawly. She'd made a drinkable version too, and that was even stronger. What's more, if Josh and Danny managed to help her find the missing parts of her REPTOSWITCH formula, she could change them into alligators or giant pythons! It was a fantastic secret—and Josh was determined that Danny wouldn't blurt it out to Tarquin.

'Oh—don't be offended,' Tarquin was saying now, picking up Josh's magnifying glass from the top of their bookcase and turning it over in one hand. 'My mother says you can't help it that you're not as clever as me. It's not your fault.'

THWACK! Danny brought down his sword, aiming for the back of Tarquin's neatly combed head, but Josh caught it with an upswing of his own sword. '*Stop it!*' he mouthed at Danny as Tarquin put down the magnifying glass and moved on.

'We *do* know quite a lot about science—especially nature,' said Josh. 'We know about creepy-crawlies. Let's take my magnifying glass

outside and I'll show you some in the garden if you like.'

Tarquin shuddered. 'Eugh! If you show me a creepy-crawly I'll stamp on it.'

Josh was shocked. He was a great nature lover and had adored all kinds of creepy-crawlies long before he'd ever been one. Even Danny, who wasn't fond of them at all, would never deliberately squash one.

'You can't *tread* on them! That's just stupid!'

'No—sometimes I look at them first,' smirked Tarquin. 'It's quite fun to pull their legs off.'

'It's not fun for *them!*' said Josh, feeling quite hot in the face. He picked up his sword, ready to swing it into Tarquin's head, but this time Danny grabbed it, raised his eyebrows and wagged his finger at his brother.

Tarquin opened the door to their toy cupboard. Then he screamed.

