

Enjoy an extract from the bestselling
Beetle Boy by M. G. Leonard.

Darkus can't believe his eyes when a giant beetle drops out of the trouser leg of his horrible new neighbour. What's more, it seems to want to communicate.

But how can a boy be friends with a beetle? And what does a beetle have to do with the disappearance of his dad and the arrival of Lucretia Cutter, with her taste for creepy jewellery?

Beside the bin next to him was a cardboard box. Darkus grabbed it and, sitting up, knocked the beetle into the box with the back of his hand. Embarrassed, he looked around to see if anyone had seen him flailing on the floor, but everyone was crowded around the unconscious man on the other side of the road, discussing what they should do with him.

Peering into the box, Darkus saw the beetle on its back, legs thrashing about frantically as it tried to get back on its feet. He immediately felt bad for hitting it. He reached in and flipped the poor creature the right way up.

'I'm so sorry. I hope I didn't hurt you,' Darkus said softly. 'It's just you gave me a bit of a fright.'

The beetle scrambled into the corner of the box, pulling at the walls of the temporary prison with its front legs.

'Calm down, little fella. I'm not going to hurt you.'

But the beetle kept tearing at the walls, so Darkus decided to set it free. Crouching down, he held the box on its side on the pavement. The beetle scurried out of the box, but instead of running away, it clambered on to Darkus's hand and stood still, looking up at him expectantly.

It took a second for Darkus to realize he was OK with the beetle being on him. The gentle scratch of its claws against his skin was almost pleasant. What surprised him was the weight of the insect – he'd assumed it would be light, but it felt solid and reassuring, like

a pebble. He carefully lifted his hand. 'Hello there.'

Looking up from underneath, he could see the features of the beetle's face. He couldn't have said why but it looked somehow . . . friendly. Its bulbous eyes glistened like blackberries, and it was holding its mouth open as if it was trying to smile. Although the beetle appeared to be pitch black from above, underneath it had ginger hair sticking out of the gaps between its shell – Darkus had a feeling that wasn't the right word – and body. It was almost cute. And then he realized: this was the creature from Uncle Max's window, the day he'd moved in. The six legs, the horn, the size – it all fitted.

'I've seen you before, haven't I?'

As if to answer his question, the beetle began crawling up Darkus's arm.

'What are you up to?' Darkus asked, intrigued now.

The beetle crawled along to his elbow and up to his shoulder.

'Hey, where are you going?' He laughed. He was beginning to like this insect.

Turning to face forward, the beetle hunkered down on Darkus's shoulder, exactly where a pirate would have put a parrot.

Darkus stood up carefully. 'You're the freakiest beetle I've ever met!' he said.



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bookshops and libraries.

Chicken
House

BETLEMANIA

Befriend a beetle!

There are four thousand species of beetle in the UK alone and hundreds of thousands worldwide.

Stag beetles are the UK's largest land beetle and are found across Europe, but sadly they are either declining or have gone extinct in many countries. In the southern parts of the UK they are doing much better but they need our help if they are to hang on.

You can help by befriending a beetle!

You could build them a place to live in your garden, and if you spot a stag beetle, please let PTES know!

How to make your garden stag beetle friendly

- Leave tree stumps and dead wood.
- Cover water butts, so stag beetle can't fall in and drown.
- Watch out for stag beetle predators such as cats and magpies.
- Remove plastic sheeting over soil, so emerging beetles don't get trapped.
- Don't mow around log piles in May and June - emerging beetles could get hurt.

Stag Beetle Facts

- They are big - up to 75mm long. Only one UK beetle is bigger and that's a water beetle.
- The larvae live in rotting wood for several years.
- Adult beetles don't eat - instead they live on the fat they stored developing as larva.
- The male's antler-like jaws are used to fight off rival males.

Visit the Great Stag Hunt website for more information.

www.ptes.org/stagbeetle

people's
trust for
endangered
species