

EXCERPTS TO WRITE ABOUT

"Enemy at the Gates"From *Science Warriors: The Battle Against Invasive Species*

by Sneed B. Collard III

Name: _____ Date: _____

► **Directions:**

- Read the excerpt from *Science Warriors: The Battle Against Invasive Species* by Sneed B. Collard III.
- As you read, think about cause and effect. Ask yourself, what event happened that caused something else to happen? Why is it important?
- Read a second time and highlight lines that help you determine the cause and effect. Think about what happened—and why it happened.
- Annotate your thinking in the margins, then write a response about what happened and why, using evidence from the text.

Chapter 1: Enemy at the Gates

On the U.S. island of Guam, Andersen Air Force Base is under siege. Nighttime patrols walk the fence line around the base, looking for any signs of intruders. Live traps are set every sixty to seventy-five feet along the perimeter. Inside the base, federal agents work with highly trained Jack Russell terriers, which sniff a load of equipment bound for Hawaii. This isn't a drill. The threat is real, and if security efforts fail, the Hawaiian Islands could become a disaster zone.

Under the watchful eye of her handler, one terrier walks toward a large military truck. The dog's sensitive nose filters the air for the tiniest odors. Suddenly, the hair on her neck stiffens and she sits down.

The agent steps forward, his heart racing. "Find it," he tells the terrier. Sniffing vigorously, the dog makes her way to the front of the truck and holds her paw out toward the engine compartment.

"Good girl," the handler tells her, slipping her a treat. After tying the dog's leash to a nearby crate, the agent turns on his flashlight and gets down on his knees to look under the truck's front end. Nothing. He carefully pops open the hood and scans the engine with the flashlight. Again, he doesn't see anything. Then, his flashlight beam freezes. Wrapped around the truck's master brake cylinder sits the stowaway—a three-foot-long brown tree snake.

Working quickly the agent unwraps the struggling serpent from the brake cylinder. After placing the hissing reptile into a bag, the agent's heartbeat begins to return to normal and relief washes through him. It's one more close call. One more disaster narrowly averted.

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- **After reading this first section, do you think there is a problem? What is the problem? Read on to determine cause and effect.**

The brown tree snake provides a vivid example of just how harmful an invasive species can be. Originally from Australia and nearby islands, the snake hitchhiked to the U.S. island of Guam shortly after World War II. In Guam, it found a new home free of predators and full of food. By the 1980s, more than 13,000 brown tree snakes filled every square mile of Guam. The serpents wiped out at least nine of Guam's native bird species, along with native geckos and most other vertebrates. The snakes began causing thousands of blackouts as they crawled across power lines. They literally devoured Guam's poultry industry. Even more alarming, they began biting people of all ages, sending many to hospital emergency rooms.

In one prolonged punch, this single species devastated Guam's environment, damaged its economy, and reduced the quality of life for the people who lived there. Yet the brown tree snake is only one of thousands of examples of invasive species that have had a negative impact on our nation and our planet. According to a report by the Office of Technology Assessment, by 1993 more than two hundred alien species in the United States had been classified as invasive. Today, scientists estimate that number is 7,000. Scientists, in fact, consider the problem of invasive species to be one of the most urgent crises humans face on earth.

Note: Sneed Collard III is an expert writer. Notice in the first paragraph the way he builds suspense and makes readers think the air force base is under imminent attack by a military enemy. He uses words like "siege" and "patrol" and "security" and then deftly delivers the surprise: the clear and present danger is a snake, not a human enemy or chemical weapon! How might you apply this technique to your own nonfiction writing?