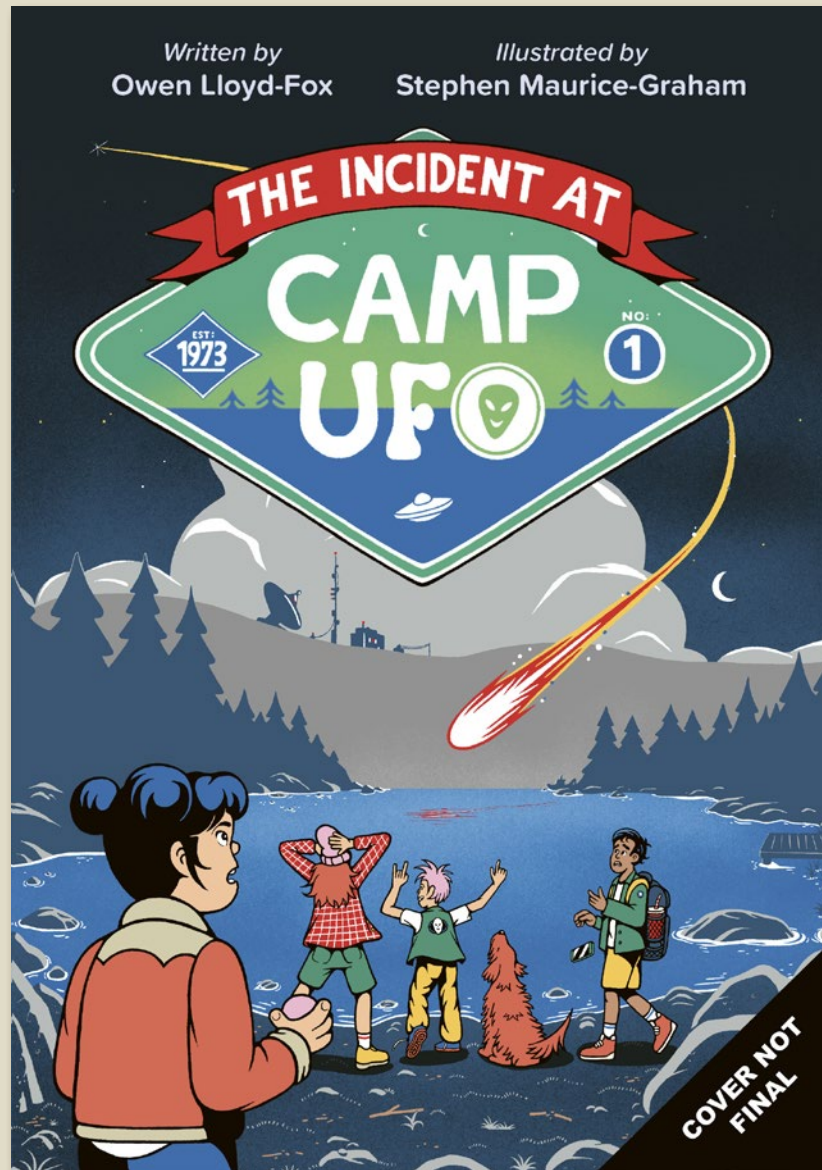




**DK - FBF24 - middle grade and  
graphic novels**

# The Incident at Camp UFO



**Unravel cryptic clues, solve fiendish puzzles, avoid the Shini-ta aliens at all costs and help the gang uncover the incident at Camp UFO!**

- A brand-new adventure puzzle book series complete with graphic novel style illustrations. Perfect for fans of Bunny vs. Monkey, Stranger Things and gaming enthusiasts. A must-have for reluctant readers.
- Featuring a strong cast of characters with authentic stories from diverse backgrounds, including South and South East Asia, plus a non-binary character with partial hearing loss.

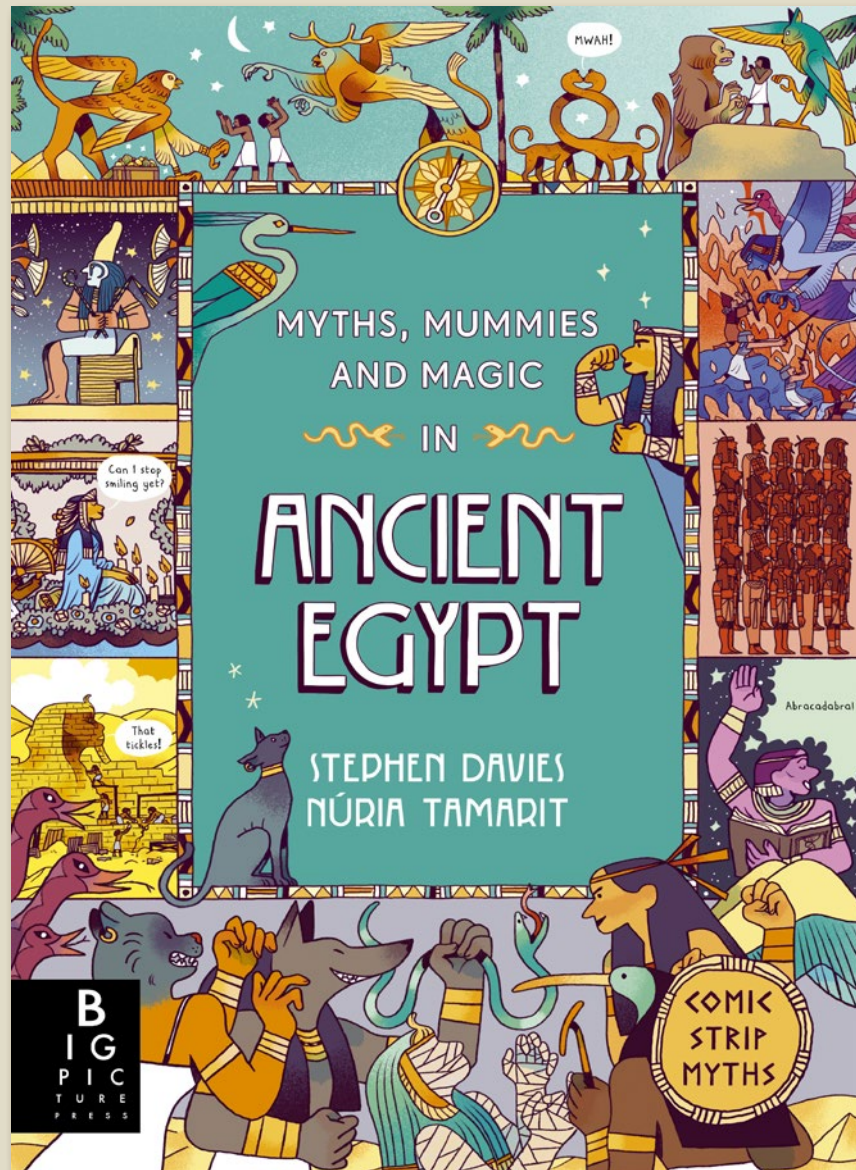
# The Incident at Camp UFO



Pub Date	05/02/2026
Pub Price	£7.99
ISBN	9781800788725
H x W	210 x 148mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	9-11 years
Author	Owen Lloyd-Fox
Illustrator	Stephen Maurice Graham
Extent	112pp
Word Count	15000 words
Translation Files	26/05/2025
Files To Printer	15/09/2025
Freight On Board	04/12/2025
Rights Available	World



# Myths, Mummies and Magic in Ancient Egypt



**A vivid and contemporary retelling of the ancient Egyptian myths - now available in paperback.**

- The myths are broken up with a series of 'theme' spreads, which take a broader look at certain aspects of Egyptian mythology (mythical beasts and monsters, the pharaohs, gods etc.)
- Striking artwork by renowned illustrator and comic artist Núria Tamarit (75k followers on Instagram)
- Mythology is an evergreen subject with strong backlist potential
- Growing demand for graphic novels and comic books for children

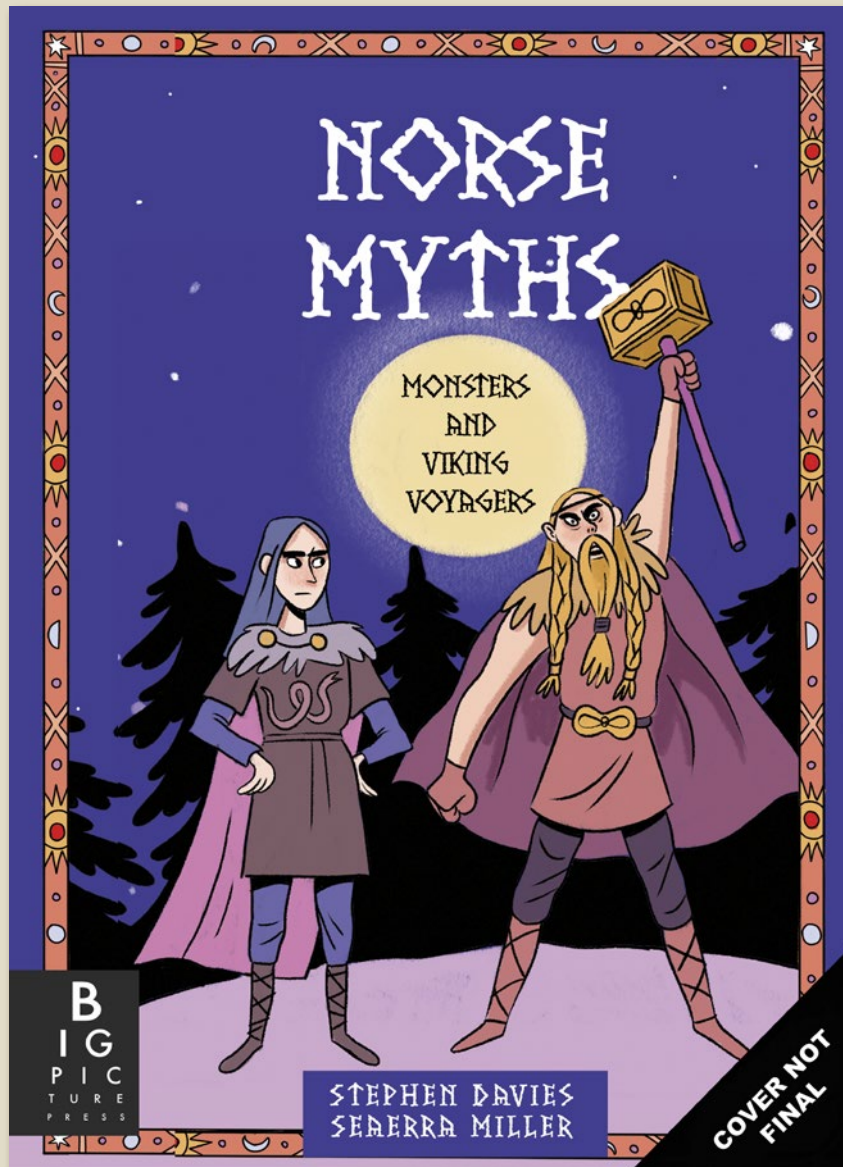


# Myths, Mummies and Magic in Ancient Egypt



Pub Date	02/01/2025
Pub Price	£10.99
ISBN	9781835870068
H x W	297 x 216mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	7-9 years
Author	Stephen Davies Stephen Davies
Illustrator	Núria Tamarit
Extent	64pp
Freight On Board	31/10/2024
Rights Available	World

# Norse Myths, Monsters and Viking Voyages

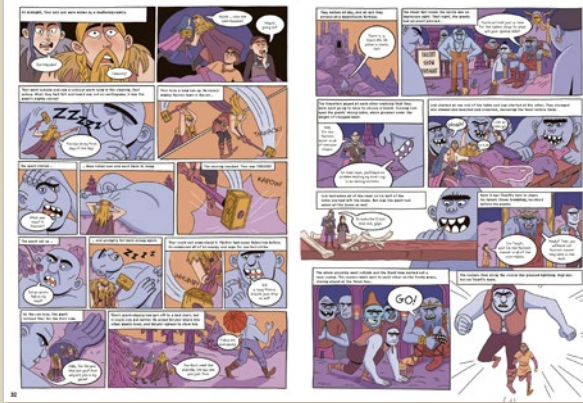


## A vivid comic-strip retelling of the greatest Norse myths.

- Contents: Myths - The Creation Myth; The Theft of Idun's Apples; Treasures of the Gods; Thor's Journey to Utgard; The Deal of Balder; Ragnarok; Sigurd and Fafnir Theme spreads - What are the Norse Myths?; Meet the Norse Gods; How the Myths Explained the World; Meet the Vikings; Mythical Creatures and Deadly Beasts; The Afterlife; How the Norse Myths Came to us; A Mythic Map
- Following on from the success of *Myths, Monsters and Mayhem in Ancient Greece* (which has sold over 50,000 copies worldwide as of July 2024) - this is the next title in a growing series for Big Picture Press.



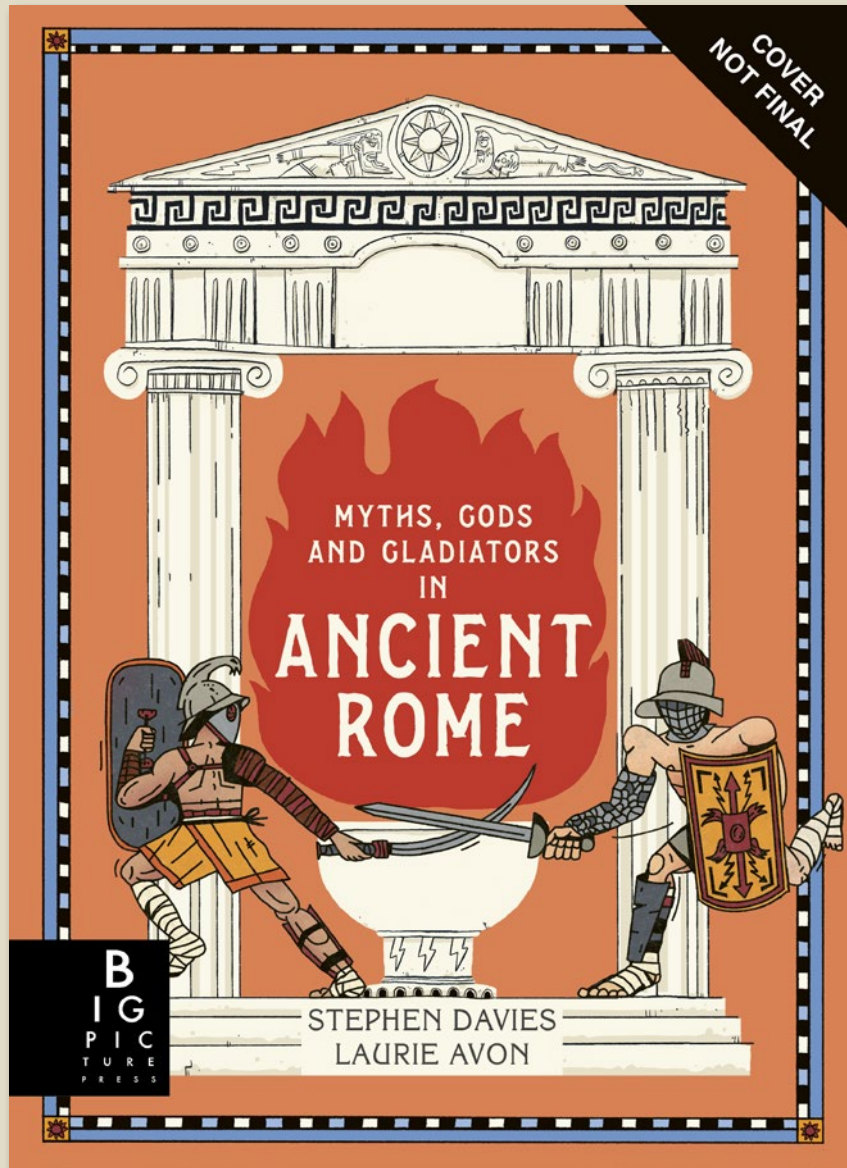
# Norse Myths, Monsters and Viking Voyages



Pub Date	20/11/2025
Pub Price	£14.99
ISBN	9781800786745
H x W	297 x 216mm
Binding	Hardback
Age Range	7-9 years
Author	Stephen Davies
Illustrator	Seierra Miller
Extent	64pp
Word Count	12000 words
Translation Files	14/02/2025
Files To Printer	10/04/2025
Freight On Board	14/08/2025
Rights Available	World



# Myths, Gods and Gladiators in Ancient Rome

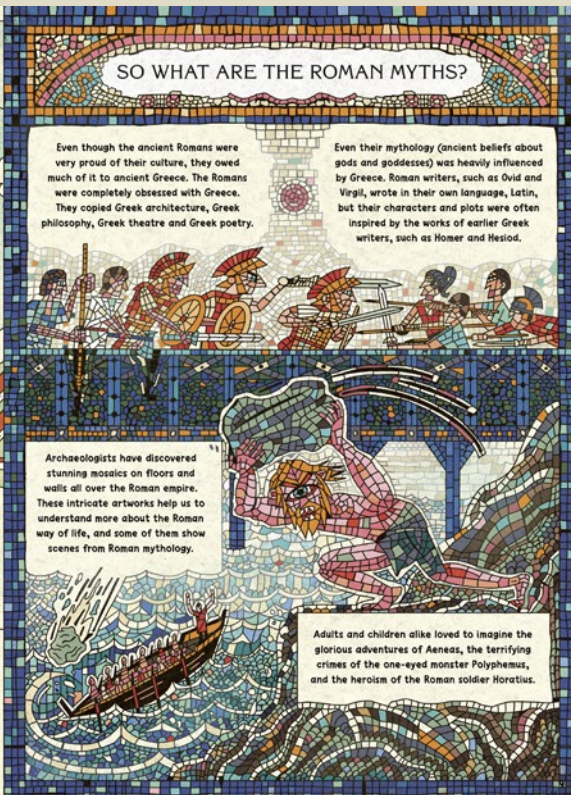
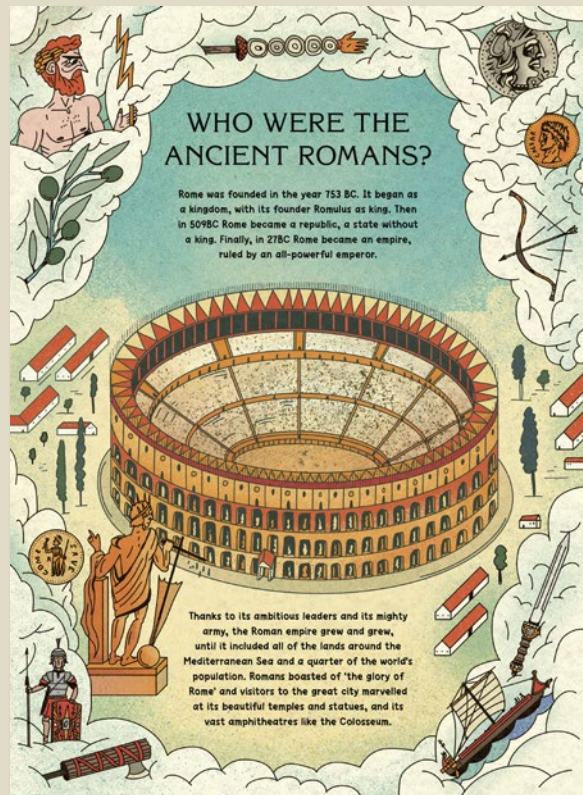
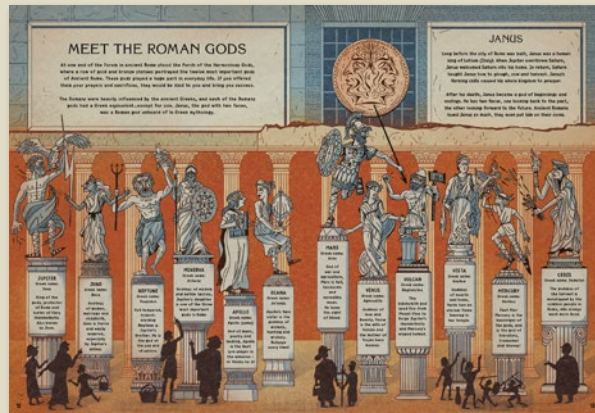


**A historical and humorous comic book retelling of the ancient Roman myths.**

- These myths will be broken up with a series of 'theme' spreads, which will take a broader look at certain aspects of Roman mythology (mythical beasts and monsters, the gods, heroes etc.)
- Following on from the success of *Myths, Monsters and Mayhem in Ancient Greece* (which has sold over 50,000 copies worldwide as of July 2024) - this is the next title in a growing series for Big Picture Press
- Growing demand for graphic novels and comic books for children and adults alike
- Cover treatments - deboss and pantone

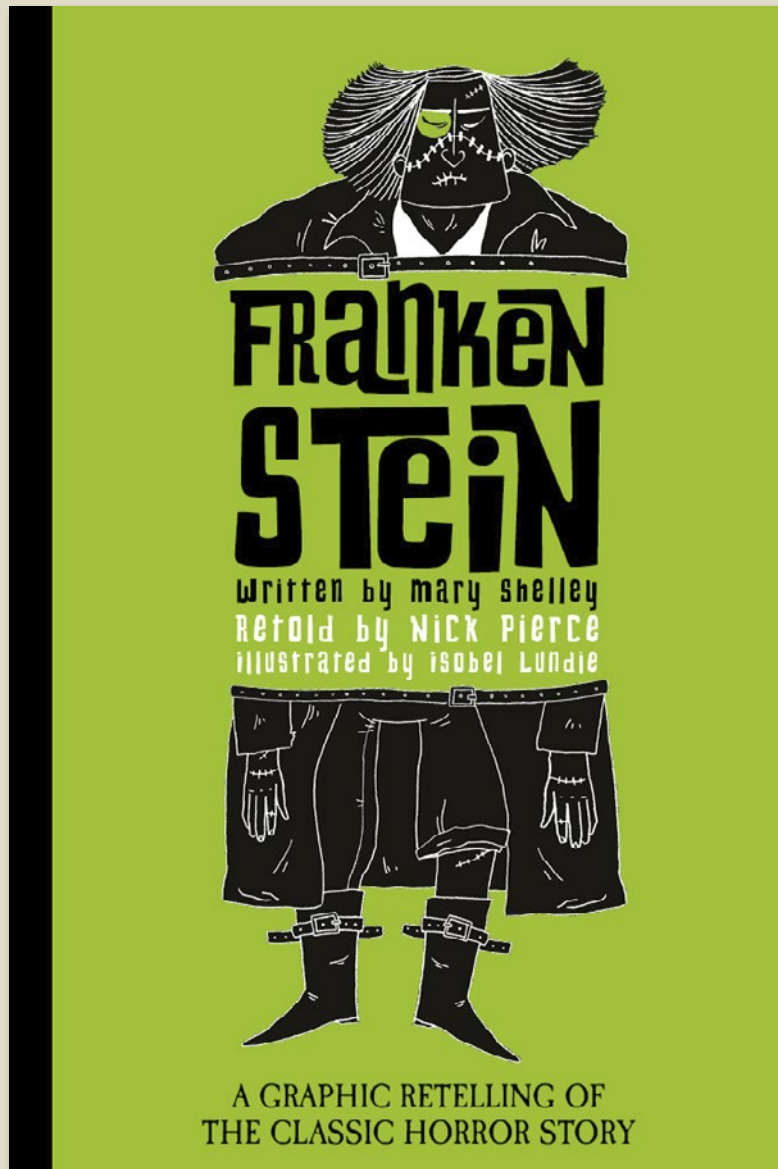


# Myths, Gods and Gladiators in Ancient Rome



Pub Date	14/08/2025
Pub Price	£14.99
ISBN	9781800788770
H x W	297 x 216mm
Binding	Hardback
Age Range	7-9 years
Author	Stephen Davies
Illustrator	Laurie Avon
Extent	64pp
Word Count	12000 words
Translation Files	02/12/2024
Files To Printer	24/03/2025
Freight On Board	29/05/2025
Rights Available	World



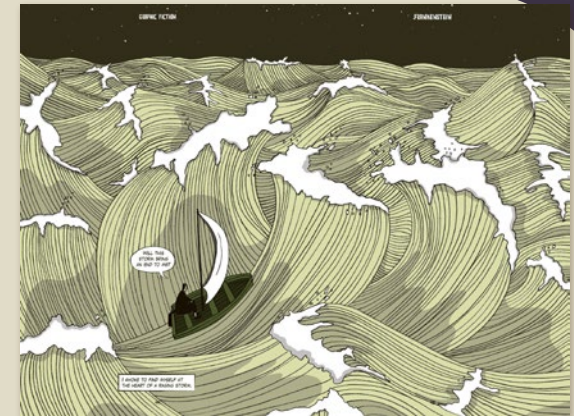
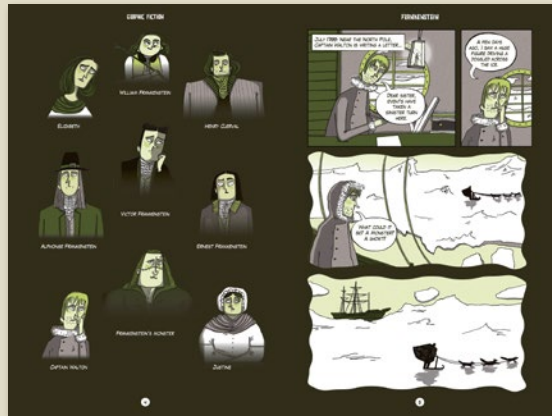


## A graphic retelling of Mary Shelley's gothic masterpiece

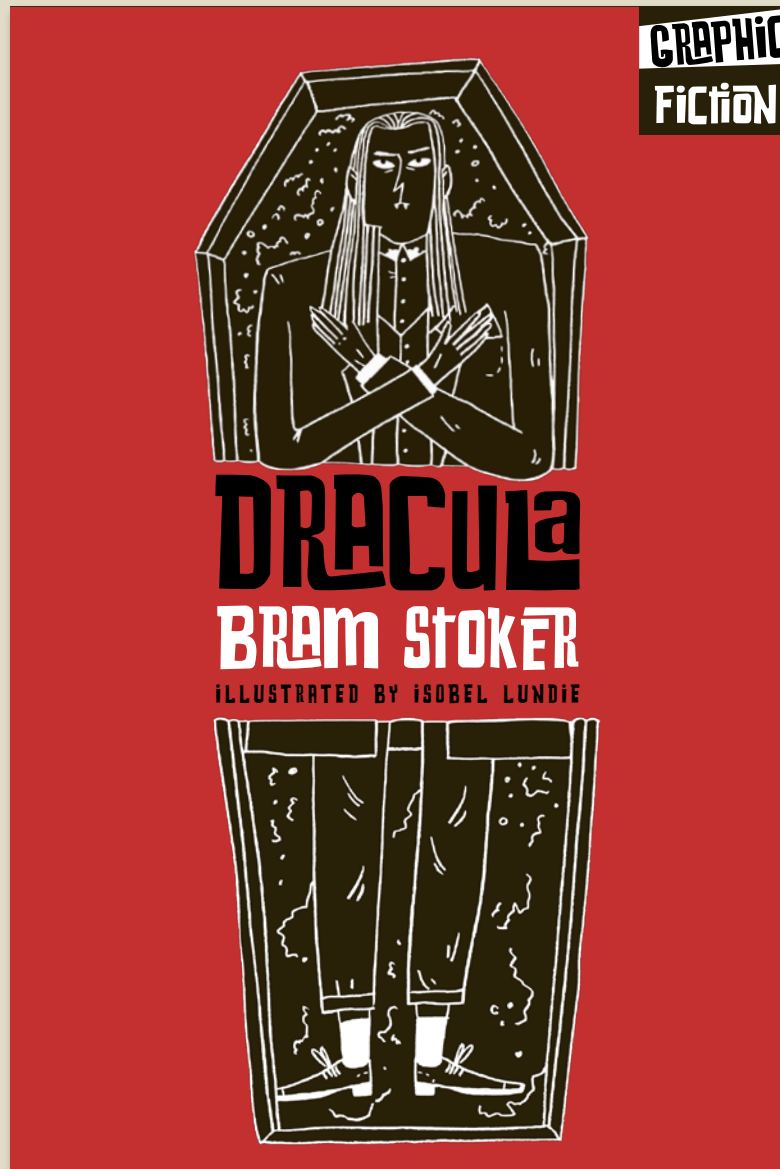
- A contemporary twist on a 19th Century classic. This creepy graphic retelling is the perfect tool for engaging reluctant readers and introducing children to the literary canon.
- An excellent English Literature curriculum companion. The endmatter contains an educational author biography, history of the text and key theme analysis to further help children.
- A wonderful introduction to the horror genre. Young readers will be captivated by Isobel Lundie's beautiful, spooky illustrations.
- Utilises speech bubbles and easy-to-follow sequential ordering to make the story more accessible.
- Next title in the series: Dracula



# Frankenstein



Pub Date	<b>12/09/2024</b>
Pub Price	<b>£7.99</b>
ISBN	<b>9781800788800</b>
H x W	<b>210 x 140mm</b>
Binding	<b>Paperback</b>
Age Range	<b>9-11 years</b>
Author	<b>Mary Shelley</b>
Illustrator	<b>Isobel Lundie</b>
Extent	<b>64pp</b>
Word Count	<b>4316 words</b>
Rights Available	<b>World</b>



**Bram Stoker's legendary gothic masterpiece is bought back to life in this blood-sucking graphic retelling!**

- A contemporary twist on a 19th Century classic. This creepy graphic retelling is the perfect tool for engaging reluctant readers and introducing children to the literary canon.
- An excellent English Literature curriculum companion. The endmatter contains an educational author biography, history of the text and key theme analysis to further help children.
- A wonderful introduction to the horror genre. Young readers will be captivated by Isobel Lundie's beautiful, spooky illustrations.



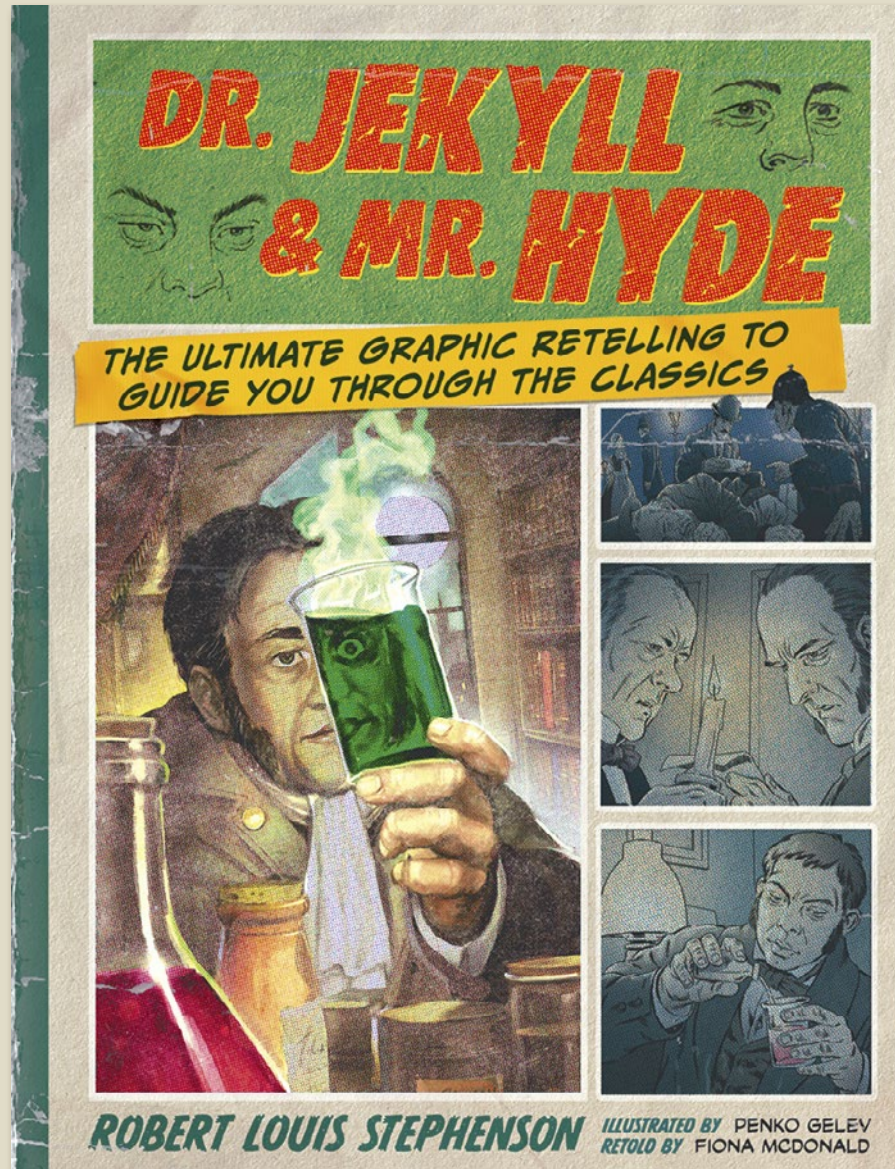
# Dracula



Pub Date	<b>12/09/2024</b>
Pub Price	<b>£7.99</b>
ISBN	<b>9781800788817</b>
H x W	<b>210 x 140mm</b>
Binding	<b>Paperback</b>
Age Range	<b>9-11 years</b>
Author	<b>Bram Stoker</b>
Illustrator	<b>Isobel Lundie</b>
Extent	<b>64pp</b>
Word Count	<b>3140 words</b>
Translation Files	<b>29/01/2024</b>
Files To Printer	<b>22/04/2024</b>
Freight On Board	<b>27/06/2024</b>
Rights Available	<b>World</b>



# Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde: Classic Comics



The ultimate comic book companion to guide you through the Victorian classic, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

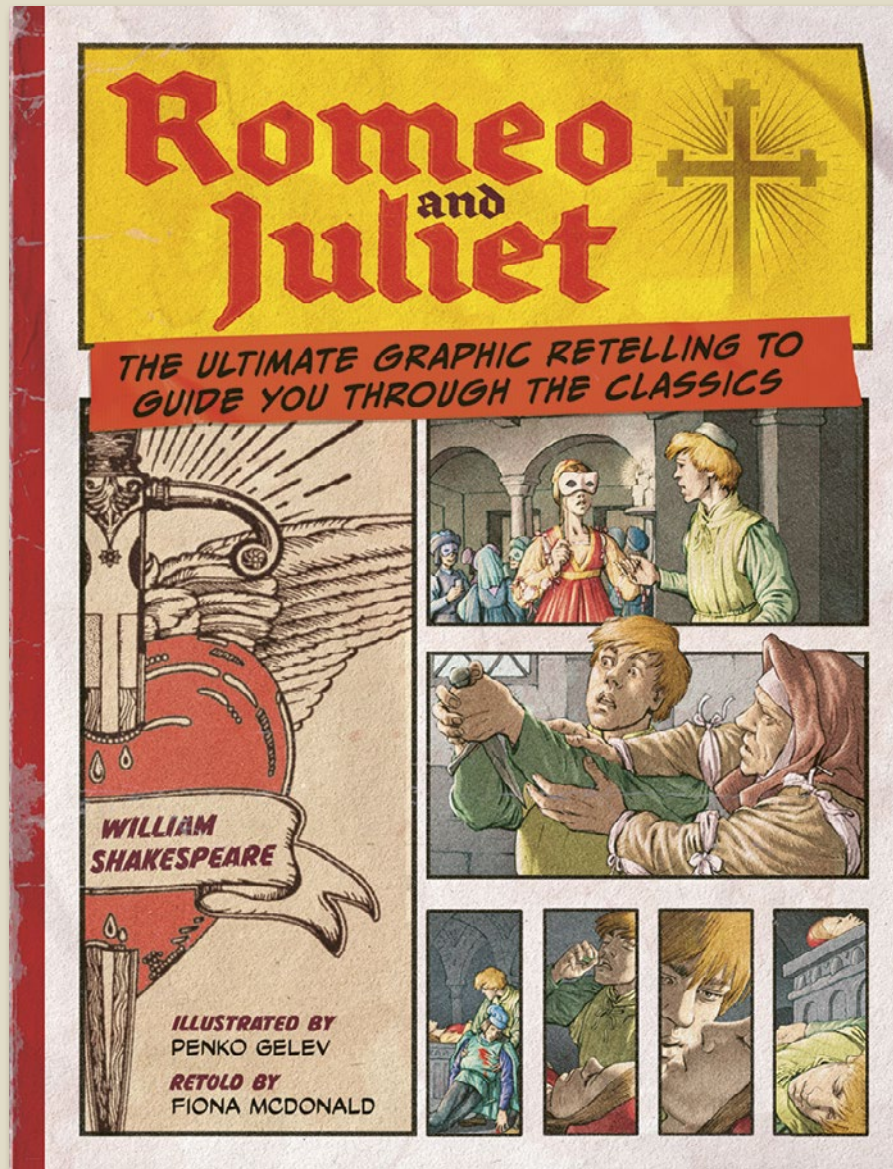
- The highly visual nature of comic book storytelling is the perfect way to encourage reluctant readers who are challenged or intimidated by reading to improve their literacy skills.
- Small amounts of text and easy-to-follow sequential ordering of the picture strips help make Shakespeare more accessible.
- Perfect curriculum companion to students studying Jekyll and Hyde at school, with an additional glossary to help dissect any tricky jargon or Victorian terms.







# Romeo and Juliet: Classic Comics



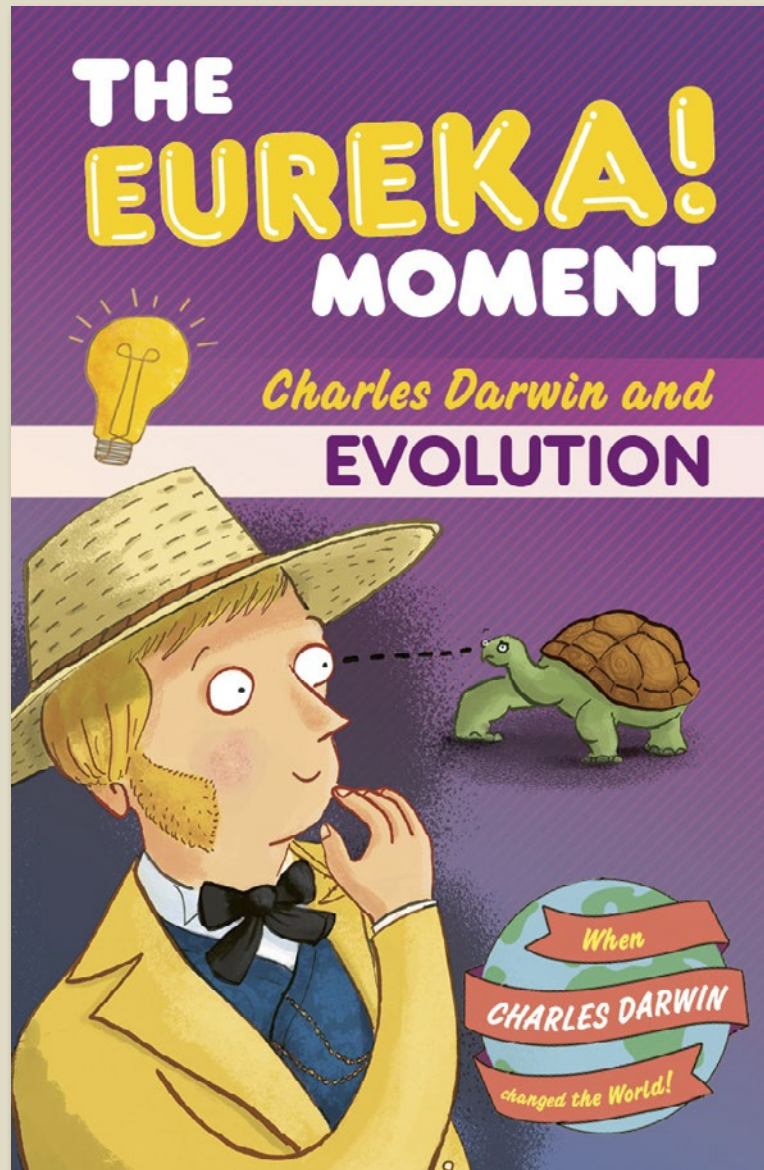
The ultimate comic book companion to guide you through Shakespeare's classic, *Romeo and Juliet*.

- The highly visual nature of comic book storytelling is the perfect way to encourage reluctant readers who are challenged or intimidated by reading to improve their literacy skills.
- Small amounts of text and easy-to-follow sequential ordering of the picture strips help make Shakespeare accessible.
- Perfect curriculum companion to students studying *Romeo and Juliet* at school, with an additional glossary to help dissect any tricky jargon or old-fashioned terms.





# Evolution: The Eureka! Moment

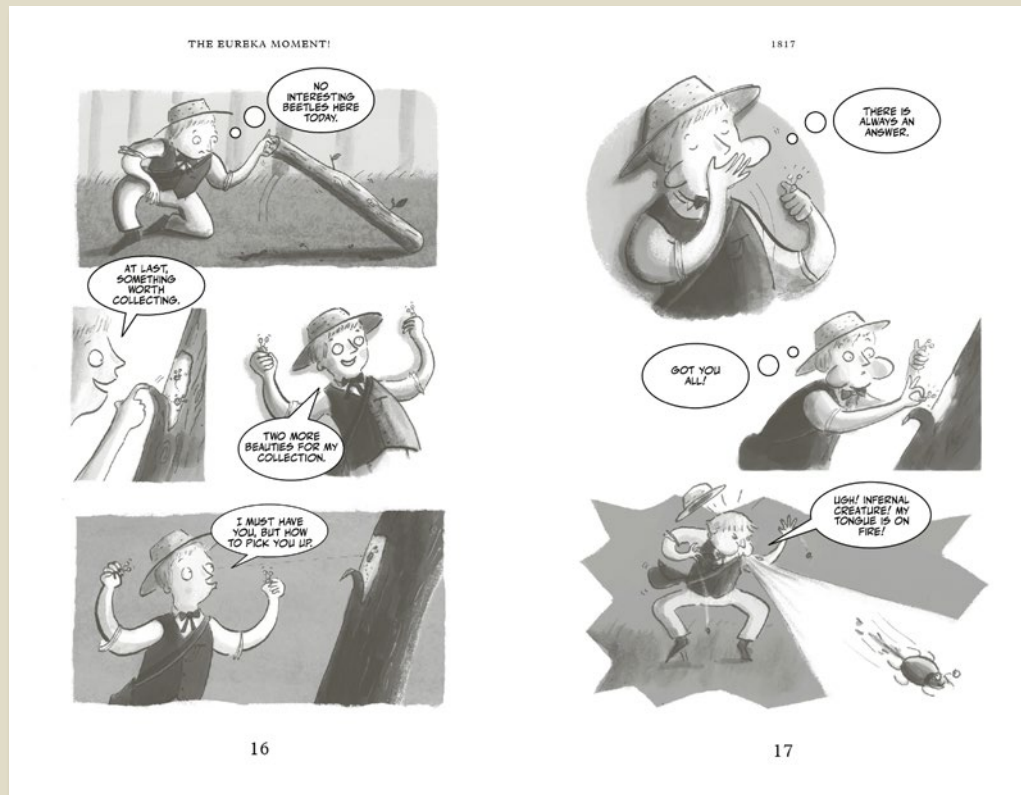
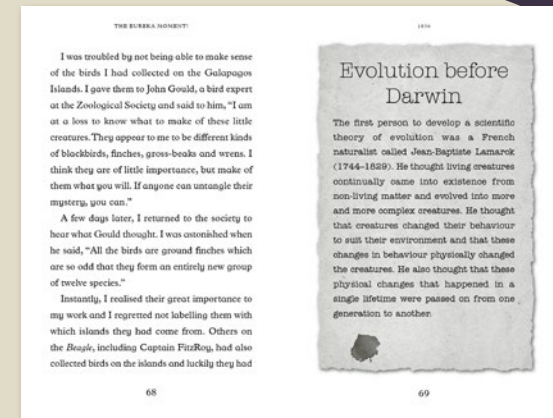
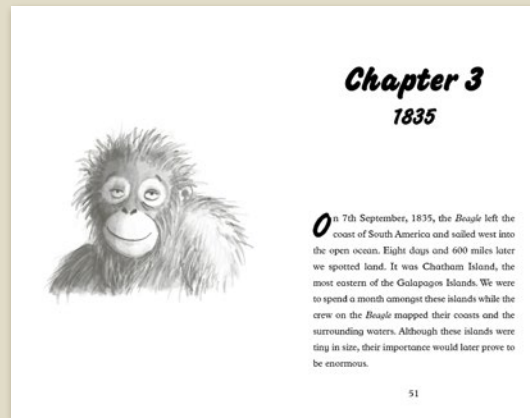
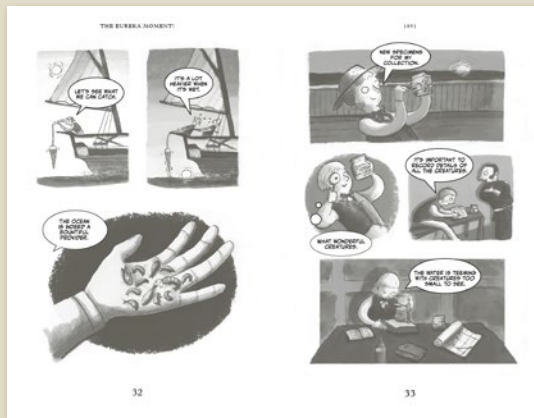


## Explore Charles Darwin's incredible 'Eureka' moment!

- Child-friendly narrative non-fiction curated to deepen children's knowledge of key moments in the history of science in an accessible, entertaining way.
- Short comic strips scattered throughout the narrative to help children visualise and engage with key events.
- This series introduces children to a myriad of inspirational individuals and the barriers they faced during their quest for knowledge, encouraging and inspiring young people to dare to think differently.
- Combines history and STEM focused learning. The perfect curriculum companion to children studying evolution, adaptation, animal biology, and survival of the fittest.
- Includes extra end matter, such as timeline and glossary, to help children to fully understand concepts and the historical context.

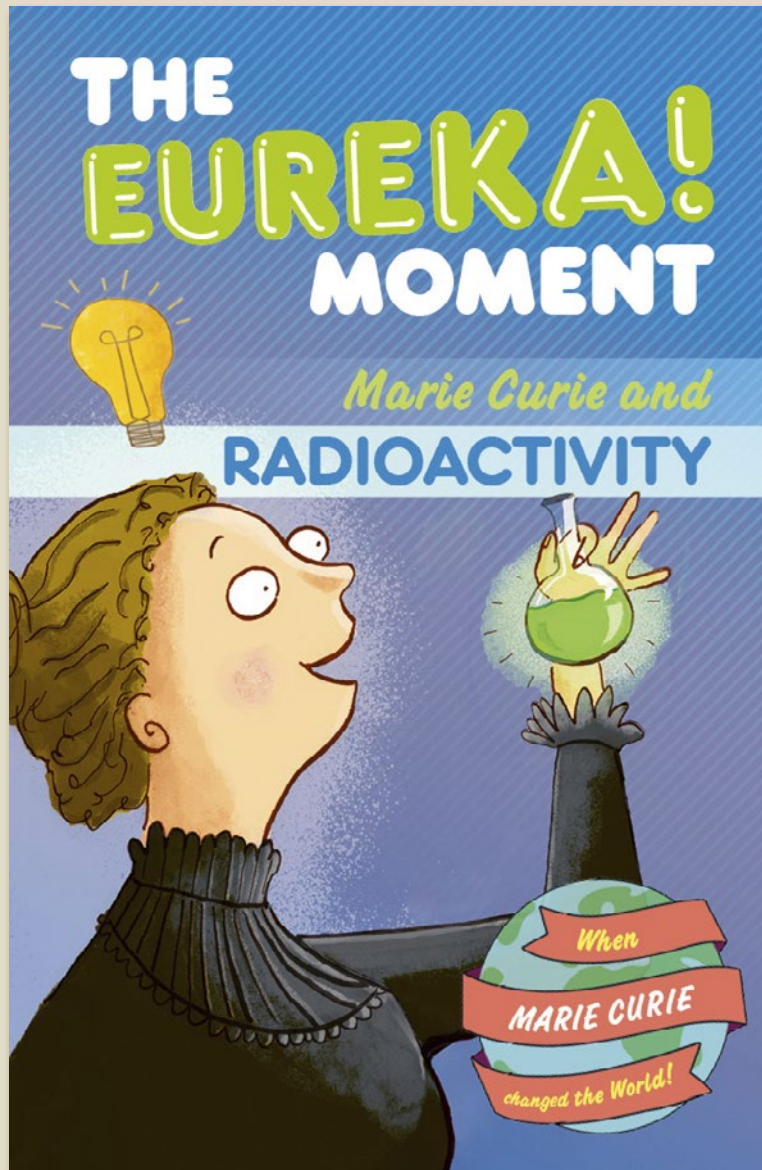


# Evolution: The Eureka! Moment



Pub Date	29/02/2024
Pub Price	£5.99
ISBN	9781800788473
H x W	198 x 129mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	9-11 years
Author	Ian Graham
Illustrator	Annaliese Stoney
Extent	144pp
Word Count	15936 words
Rights Available	World

# Radioactivity: The Eureka! Moment

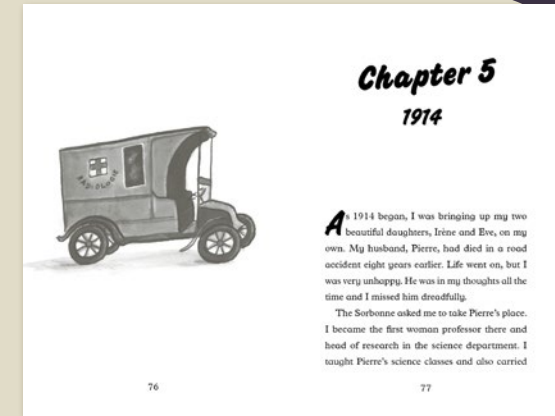
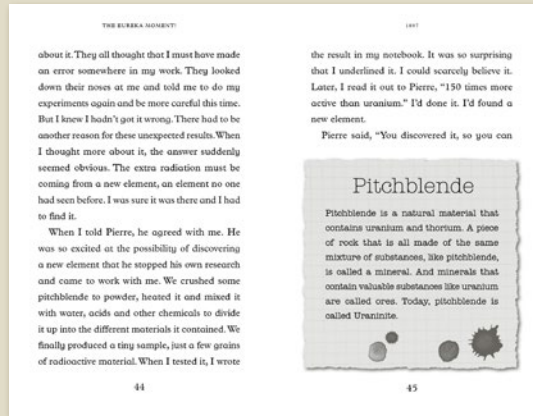


## Explore Marie Curie's incredible 'Eureka' moment!

- Child-friendly narrative non-fiction curated to deepen children's knowledge of key moments in the history of science in an accessible, entertaining manner.
- This series introduces children to a myriad of inspirational individuals and the barriers they faced during their quest for knowledge, encouraging and empowering young ones to follow their own research.
- Blends history and STEM-focused learning. The perfect curriculum companion, especially on the themes of radioactivity, medicine and scientific advances during WW1.
- Includes extra end matter, such as a timeline and glossary, to help children fully understand concepts and historical context.



# Radioactivity: The Eureka! Moment



**A** 1914 began. I was bringing up my two beautiful daughters, Irène and Ève, on my own. My husband, Pierre, had died in a road accident eight years earlier. Life went on, but I was very unhappy. He was in my thoughts all the time and I missed him dreadfully.

The Sorbonne asked me to take Pierre's place. I became the first woman professor there and head of research in the science department. I taught Pierre's science classes and also carried



Pub Date	29/02/2024
Pub Price	£5.99
ISBN	9781800788527
H x W	198 x 129mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	9-11 years
Author	Ian Graham
Illustrator	Annaliese Stoney
Extent	144pp
Word Count	14683 words
Rights Available	World

# Ghost Stories



## Ten spooky spine-tingling short stories!

- An entertaining, child-friendly introduction to ghost stories and the conventions of the horror genre. Perfect for children studying this in English.
- Shortlisted for the Leicester Libraries Our Best Book Award 2020.
- Kids will feel chills and thrills as they read about such things as haunted houses that burst into flames, ghosts frightening and friendly, a skull that won't stay buried, and a terrifying clown.
- A spooky halloween gift.



# Ghost Stories

## SHIVERS

off his hiking boots. He fell onto the grass with a groan. "I never want to go on a hike again. Never. They said the Bronze Award expedition would be a piece of cake. I'm dying for a piece of cake right now. My feet are killing me. I give up - where are we?"

Sacha gulped from her water bottle. She sank to her knees, sitting on her mud-caked boots. "I haven't got a clue. Right now, I don't care."

Liam hit into a mini Mars Bar then handed her the rest. "Make the most of this last bite. No more left after this."

Sacha passed him the bottle. "Just a few sips. There's hardly any left."

Clouds cast deepening shadows over the hills. A large bird of prey rose in the sky and soared above the moor.

"This map doesn't make sense. I'm sure we turned left at the church in the village." Liam traced his finger over the map. "It doesn't agree

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## GHOST STORIES

with my phone, either. The GPS is useless. The signal's no good out here in the middle of nowhere. It keeps cutting out."

"My battery's virtually given up the ghost. Just like me," Sacha sighed before adding wearily, "I think we should go back. We know there's a pub a few miles back. I'd kill for a plate of hot chips." She looked up. "There's a huge bird up there. It must be a vulture waiting for us to die of thirst."

Liam turned the map round. "Unless that clump of trees in this bit of green on the map and on my phone." He swore when he lost the signal again.

Sacha laughed. "Let's face it, you haven't got a clue."

He kept looking at the map. "There's a red triangle thing marked here. It's a youth hostel. We can't be far off. Let's go there. Hostels are cheap. It's only a couple of miles."

Sacha got to her feet. "If you say so. It'll be

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## SHIVERS

dark soon." She stared up at the circling bird with a growing sense of doom, as Liam put on his rucksack with a renewed burst of enthusiasm. "We'll be in the dry before the rain starts."

They linked arms and began walking towards the setting sun - towards the bird of prey and the dead of night.

The first drops of rain began to fall as Sacha pulled on the hood of her raincoat.

"How much further, Liam? My blisters say it's bed time."

"Not far. I'll be able to tell when we get to the top of this hill. We'll see down into the next valley. I should get a better phone signal up there."

Sacha snorted. "It'll be dark by the time we get to the top."

Thunder clouds blotted out the rising moon and rolled across the moor as a shriek filled the darkening sky. Liam and Sacha stopped to look

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## GHOST STORIES

up. A black shape swooped over their heads. "Scary!" Sacha frowned. "That bird is like an omen. An omen of doom!"

Their boots squelched through mud. "Not long," Liam called. "We'll soon be at the top." A flash of lightning snaked across the sky and a loud crack rumbled over the moor. "It's like something from a horror movie," Sacha panted. The rain swept across in silvery squalls. At the top of the hill Liam pointed into the next valley. "That must be the hostel. Down there. With the tall chimney and smoke."

"I don't like the look of it," Sacha murmured.

"It won't take us long," Liam said, ignoring her. The air was now very still. As they walked down towards the hostel, a strange silence fell.

There was no rain here and everything was deathly still - apart from a bird hovering above the smoke that rose towards the pale moon peeping through parting clouds.

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## SHIVERS

A sign by a set of black iron gates said 'Youth Hostel, Members Only'. Just beyond stood a stark Gothic mansion surrounded by bent and twisted tree trunks.

Apart from a faint glow from one of the large upstairs windows, the house was in eerie darkness.

"I told you we'd find it," Liam said, smiling.

Sacha wasn't so sure. "It doesn't look very nice," she said.

Liam ignored her and added, "I've got cash. They'll let us stay the night."

Clanging through the gate, they walked along the path, up some crumbling steps and to the porch. A pair of boots caked in dried mud lay on the top step. Liam slammed his fist on the heavy door and a hollow thud echoed before the door swung open. A dimly lit hallway with dark oak panels stretched in front of them. The smell of soot drifted out over the porch. A thin, bent man

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## GHOST STORIES

in black stood in front of them. He had a hooked nose and small beady eyes. "Yes? What is it?" he croaked. His eyes stared like a bird's.

"Can we stay the night?" Liam said. "I can pay with a card or cash."

The man blinked. The light from a single bulb cast his shadow over the front steps. He had a shadow like a vulture's.

"Members only," he said. "You'll have to join."

"How much?"

"We've got rules," the man continued, not listening. "No matches. No paraffin. No time."

Sacha squeezed Liam's hand. She could smell drink on the man's breath.

"Are you the warden?" Liam asked.

The man ignored him. "It's late. It's only because of the clocks I can bend the rules tonight. We're full. One of you will have to sleep in the attic. The other in the boiler room."

Sacha pulled a face. "I don't like the sound of

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## SHIVERS

if she'll appear. You see, you shared Cornerstone Cottage with Mrs Coombs. She can be quite unpredictable but at least you survived a full week. Some don't. Apparently, she was the dairy maid long ago... before she passed away while knitting in her rocking chair in the back room. All very mysterious. They say she was found with a row of insect bites in the shape of a letter C on her neck."

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## GHOST STORIES



### WHEN THE CLOCK STOPS

**W**hen they wander from the expedition party, fifteen-year-olds Liam and Sacha are alone on the moors. Lost. At first, it's no big deal, as the map shows a hostel isn't too far away. But they haven't bargained on what is waiting in the darkness, and on what will happen on the night the clocks go back...

Liam threw down his rucksack and pulled

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Pub Date	<b>01/04/2018</b>
Pub Price	<b>£6.99</b>
ISBN	<b>9781800788992</b>
H x W	<b>198 x 129mm</b>
Binding	<b>Paperback</b>
Age Range	<b>7-9 years</b>
Author	<b>John Townsend</b>
Illustrator	<b>Isobel Lundie</b>
Extent	<b>128pp</b>
Word Count	<b>21744 words</b>
Rights Available	<b>World</b>

# Mystery Stories



## Ten mysterious, spooky short stories

- A wonderful, entertaining introduction to the horror genre and short story writing, perfect for children studying this in English.
- Perfect spooky gift for children to read one story each night in the build up to Halloween.
- Encourages independent reading and exploration of new genres.



# Mystery Stories

## SHIVERS

In case you are wondering, *Dei Gratia* is Latin for 'by the grace of God'. She became a well-known name, all because I told the captain what I'd seen that chilly December day.

There was a fair wind and the sea was choppy, although I'd known far worse. I was still finding my sea legs and was horribly sick when we first set sail in heavy seas. I always dreaded being told to climb the main mast to deliver a message to the lookout in the crow's nest. Up there you feel the swell far worse and have to cling on tight. Our ship had two masts, so it was called a brigantine. She was built in Canada only the year before, so we were both getting used to crossing the Atlantic. We were apparently 400 miles east of the Azores, some 500 miles from the coast of Portugal. The lookout pointed over to the horizon, but I happened to glance further to my left and saw a tiny speck in the far distance.

'Have you spotted that ship over there?' I

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## MYSTERY STORIES

asked. The lookout held a telescope to his eye.

'That's mighty odd,' he muttered. 'She seems to be out of sorts, if you ask me. Go tell the captain.'

Captain Morehouse was concerned and he ordered us to change course. He steered us towards the ship, keeping a close eye on her strange zigzagging through the waves.

'She's going all over the place. Whoever's at the helm must have been on the rum all night.'

The closer we got to the 'drunken ship', as the captain called her, the more alarmed he became. He called to Mr Devaux, the first mate: 'That ship is definitely adrift. There's nothing guiding her and she's at risk of keeling over if no one sets her a proper course. Lower the rowing boat and investigate. Take the second mate and the boy and tell me what you find.'

I gingerly climbed down into the boat and we rowed across to the swaying ship, drawing up alongside. John Wright, the second mate,

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## SHIVERS



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## MYSTERY STORIES

### MYSTERY FACTS

#### Did you know...

1. During an attempt to fly around the world in 1937, American aviator Amelia Earhart disappeared somewhere over the Pacific Ocean. The wreckage of her aircraft was never found, and her disappearance remains one of the big unsolved mysteries of the 20th century. Before her disappearance, Amelia Earhart was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean.

2. The search to find the Yeti can be traced back to the time of Alexander the Great, who in 326 BC set out to conquer the Indian Valley and demanded to see a Yeti for himself. Local people were unable to help. The name 'Abominable

111

## SHIVERS

Gimlin in the Bluff Creek region of northern California. Despite much investigation since that footage from 1967, it is still uncertain whether this was a hoax or a genuine sighting. Take a look at it online and decide for yourself – if you dare!

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## MYSTERY STORIES

### GLOSSARY

**Bermuda Triangle** an area in the Atlantic Ocean between Bermuda, Puerto Rico and Florida where ships and planes have apparently disappeared mysteriously.

**Chupacabra** a creature of legend said to live in parts of the Americas, with the first sightings reported in Puerto Rico. The name comes from its reputation for drinking the blood of goats.

**Cryptozoology** the study of creatures, such as the Chupacabra, the existence of which has not been scientifically proved.

**Dire wolf** an extinct wolf that was widespread in North America up to about 12,000 years ago, having a larger body and a smaller brain than today's wolf.

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## SHIVERS

her, too – but Miss said we should relax as it was only the cruise boat chugging and making waves.'

He frowned and looked at his watch. 'Not now. Not in the fog it wasn't. Boats don't sail in bad weather. They've all been moored for the past hour. No boats were out on the loch when you heard that noise.' He looked very serious, lowered his voice and added, 'The only one brave enough to venture into those dark and misty waters would be the very monster itself.'

Mrs Milligan could only gulp and stare. Apart from that, she still seemed fairly relaxed. So relaxed, she didn't stir. That's because she'd just fainted with a terrified gasp – face down in the man's porridge.

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## MYSTERY STORIES



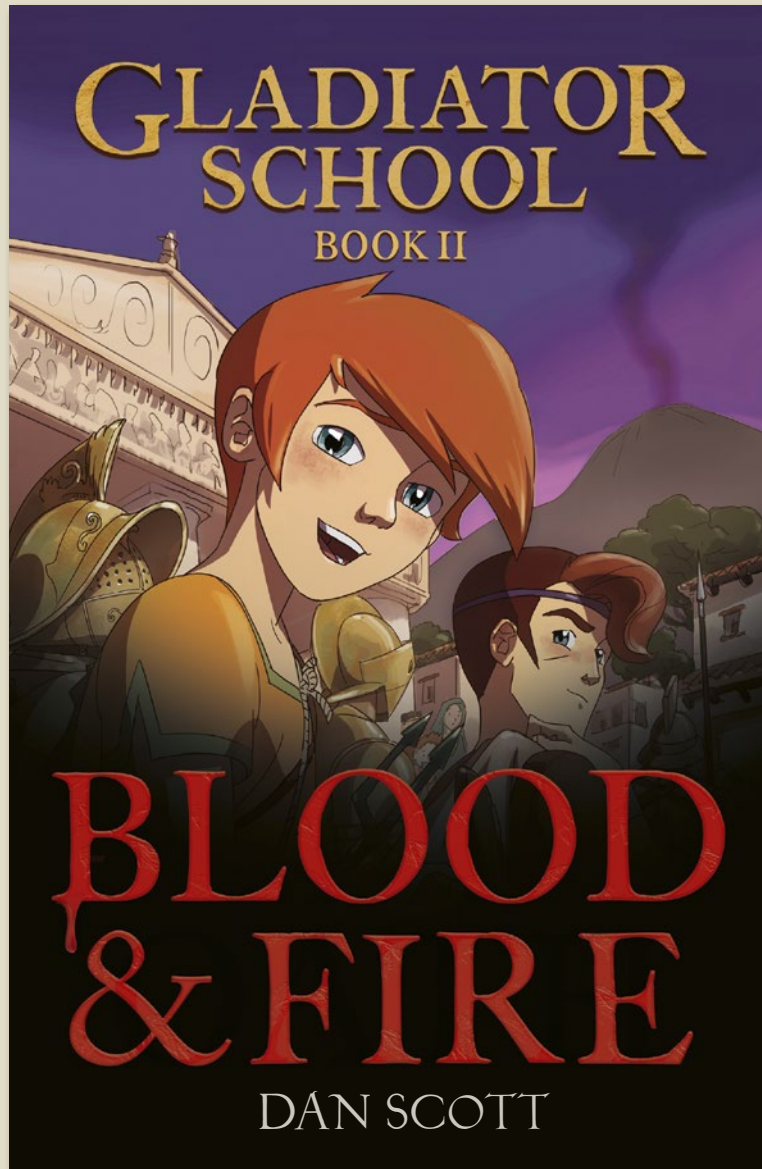
### THE GHOST SHIP

I was only 12 at the time. It was my first voyage as cabin boy on the ship *Dei Gratia* in 1872. In fact, it was me who first spotted flapping sails in the distance and reported the drifting vessel to Captain Morehouse. Little did we know what we were about to find.

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Pub Date	01/11/2020
Pub Price	£7.99
ISBN	9781800789005
H x W	198 x 129mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	7-9 years
Author	John Townsend
Illustrator	Isobel Lundie
Extent	128pp
Rights Available	World

# Gladiator School 2: Blood & Fire

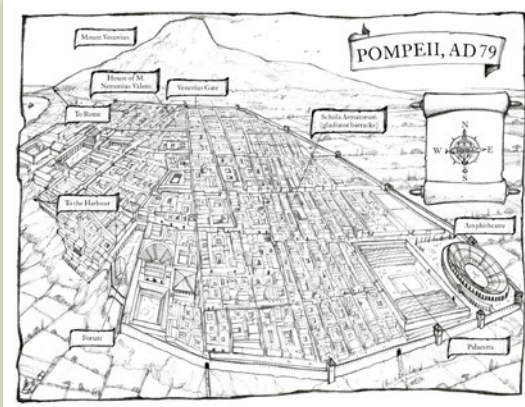


**The second in the Gladiator School series - an epic ancient tale of blood, sweat and sacrifice.**

- An epic fictional story set in a real-life historical context. Perfect for lovers of the ancient world or those studying the Ancient Romans in school.
- Fast-paced, action-packed and full of unexpected twists and turns. A great option for reluctant readers searching for an exciting, gory adventure story to keep them entertained.
- Contains additional notes throughout to define key Roman terms, helping children to learn more about ancient society and immerse themselves in the time period.



# Gladiator School 2: Blood & Fire



## CHAPTER 1

POMPEII, 19 AUGUST AD 79  
120 hours before the eruption of Vesuvius

The midday sun beat down on Lucius as he pursued Quintus through the streets of Pompeii. He glimpsed his brother's tall, athletic figure up ahead, snarling along through the crowds heading west towards the Forum. Lucius would have preferred to walk side by side with Quintus through this unfamiliar city, but seemed he would not be welcomed.

Sounds of cooking meat from the fast-food shops mingled with the stench wafting over from the fish-sauce factories near the harbour. Lucius's ears echoed with the voices of fruit sellers and wine merchants and the pipes and drums of bakers. The noise and

\* Forum: the main marketplace, which was also the place for business meetings and judicial decisions.

GLADIATOR SCHOOLS

squalor reminded him of Subura, the area where he now lived in Rome. Yet Pompeii seemed to carry an eerie air of horror. The shadow-filled alleys, the hard faces of the young men, the cold-eyed stare of a beggar woman – they all spelled danger to Lucius. Maybe it was his imagination, but Pompeii seemed like a city brimming with desperate and unscrupulous people who'd murder you for the price of a loaf of bread. He was glad he'd decided to follow Quintus. Somehow, he felt his brother needed watching in a place like this. Of course, Quintus was a gladiator and very capable of looking after himself – yet Lucius knew he could be hot-headed at times, and in these strange and scary streets he might very easily get himself into trouble.

From a nearby side street, Lucius heard a cry of pain. His natural caution made him want to hurry on past, but then he saw Quintus turn and enter the alley. Hesitantly, Lucius followed, rubbing the ring on his forefinger for luck. It was his only memento of his father, and had become his talisman. Concealing himself behind a pile of amphorae\*, Lucius saw Quintus approach a group of rough-looking young men. They were jeering and pushing around a lad of about their own age. From his smart, formal toga, now bespattered with mud, Lucius could tell the victim was a young man of status, though this did not seem to count for much among his tormentors.

\* amphorae (singular amphora): earthenware storage jars.

BLOOD & FIRE

His sense of fairness clearly offended, Quintus impulsively stride into the middle and pushed aside one of the bullies, who had been holding the victim in a neck lock. The bully sprang in surprise and fell to the ground. His friends immediately closed in around Quintus, their jeers turning to snarls of anger.

There were six of them – three armed with sticks against the unarmed Quintus. Lucius growled. He stole himself, knowing he would have to go and help his brother. With his slender build, Lucius wasn't made for physical violence. He cursed their fate for bringing them here to Pompeii.

It was ten days since Crassus, the lanista of the gladiator school, had made the announcement. The school had received a great honour, he said: it had been chosen to represent Rome at the forthcoming games in Pompeii. A total of thirty gladiators would be going, including Quintus. And Lucius had been dismayed to learn that he too was among those selected to go. It was a seven-day march to Pompeii, and there would be a further week spent in the city. Taking the return march into account, that meant that Lucius would be gone from Rome for three whole weeks – time he had been hoping to spend searching for his father. What if Aquila tried to contact him during that time? It seemed that fate had once again intervened to prevent them from meeting.



## THE MAIN CHARACTERS

- Lucius, a Roman boy
- Quintus, his older brother
- Aquila, their father
- Ravilla, their uncle
- Caecilia, their mother
- Valeria, their sister
- Isidora, Lucius's friend, an Egyptian slave
- Crassus, a lanista (trainer of gladiators)
- Valens, editor (sponsor) of the games at Pompeii
- Atia, a seer
- Eprius, a young patrician (nobleman) of Pompeii

## PROLOGUE

# FIRST BLOOD

ROME  
10 August AD 79



'Games given by Gaius Valerius Ravilla,' Lucius read aloud. 'Forty gladiators will fight. Perfumed water will be scattered.' His finger hovered over his brother's name.

'Quintus, Retiarius, tiro, will battle Burbo, Secutor.\* Burbo has won ten bouts.'

'You've read it at least twenty times,' said Isidora, sounding rather impatient. 'You can't change the words by staring at them, you know.'

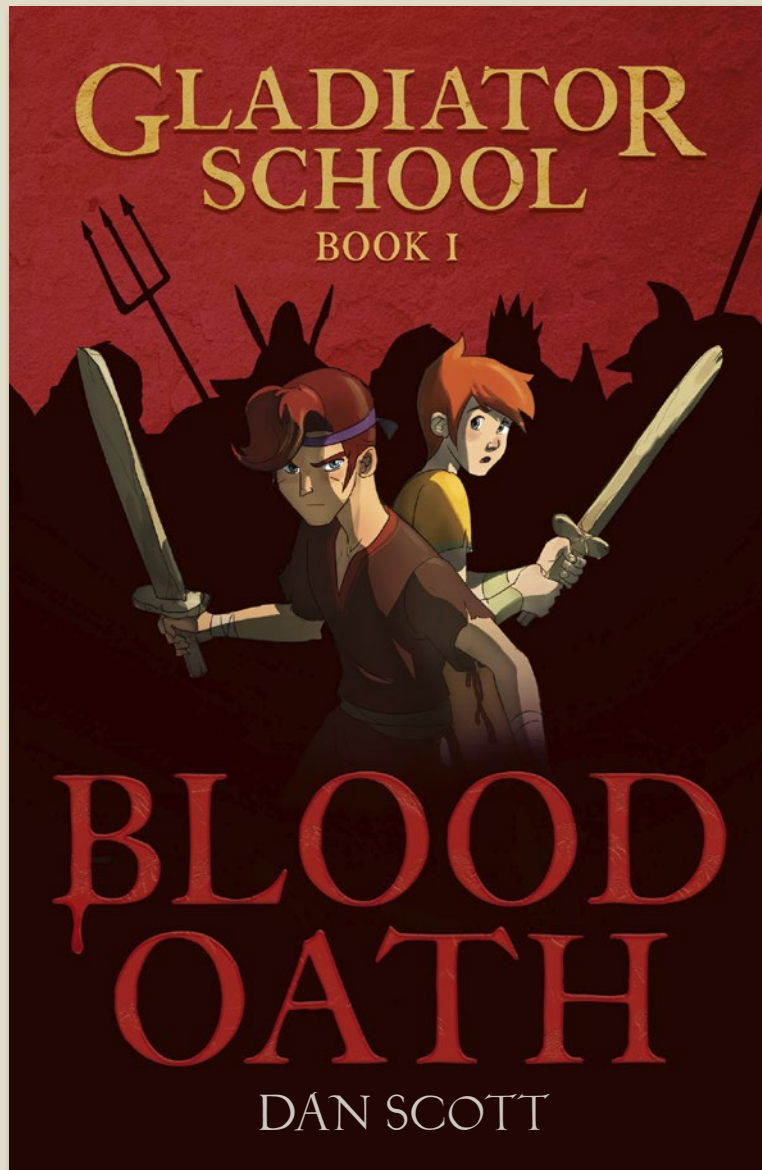
Lucius dropped the programme back into his bag and rubbed his eyes. He hadn't had much sleep.

\* Retiarius: a gladiator who fights with net (rete) and trident; tiro: a gladiator fighting in public for the first time; Secutor: a gladiator who wears an enclosed, egg-shaped helmet and fights with a short sword (gladius); his name means 'Chaser'.

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# Gladiator School 1: Blood Oath

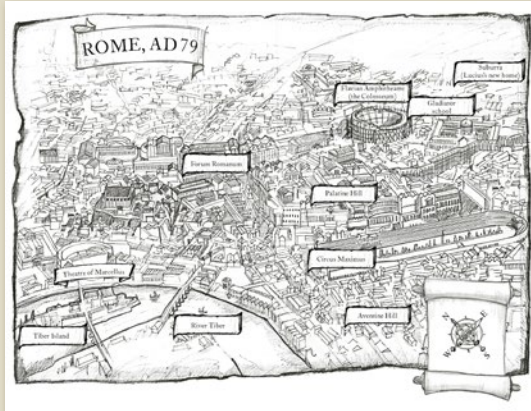


**A tale of blood, sweat, sand and sacrifice, set in the gladiator arenas of Ancient Rome**

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- Fast-paced, action-packed and full of unexpected twists and turns. Great for reluctant readers searching for an exciting adventure story to keep them entertained.
- Contains additional notes throughout to define key Roman words, helping children to learn more about ancient society and immerse themselves in the time period.



# Gladiator School 1: Blood Oath



GLADIATOR SCHOOL

close to her, Valeria, who was made of sterner stuff, had wriggled free and stared at the soldiers in round-eyed wonder.

Lucius's older brother had found plenty to say. Quintus, named after his father, was never lost for words. He had followed the soldiers through the villa as they searched for his father, warning them of the dire punishments that would fall on their heads when his father returned, threatening them with curses and finally invoking the household gods to protect the family against the intruders.

But, throughout it all, Lucius had stayed in the atrium, his back pressed against the cool marble walls. The statues were still wearing their crowns of flowers and leaves. Less than a day had passed since they had celebrated their mother's birthday. And now his world was crumbling around his ears.

'Where is he, boy?'

A soldier was standing in front of him, demanding an answer.

'The Senate?' snarled Quintus from the doorway to the atrium. 'The Forum?' Where else would you expect one of Rome's most respected senators to be at this time of day?

'He's not there,' Lucius said.

His voice sounded creaky and unfamiliar. 'What are you talking about?' asked Quintus.

*\* From the marketplace of ancient Rome, which was also the place for business meetings and political transactions.*

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BLOOD OATH

He sounded irritable and indignant. *How funny, thought Lucius. Quint always knows everything. How come he doesn't know this?*

'Explain yourself,' snapped out the soldier, who was evidently losing patience fast.

'Look,' said Lucius.

Finally Quint followed the direction of his brother's gaze and his eyes fell on the altar. Lucius saw Quint's posture change. His shoulders sagged, his face registered confusion and disbelief.

'The dog's gone,' he said.

Of the three statues that represented their household gods, the wooden dog had always been their father's favourite. It had stood on the hearth altar for as long as Lucius could remember. Aquila had said that it represented the faithfulness of true friends. He would never take the statue on a normal working day. But it would always travel with him when he made a journey.

'He's taken the statue?' demanded the soldier.

Lucius nodded.

The soldier's mouth set into a grim line. 'Right,' he said.

He called his men and ordered them to his side.

'You're going?' Quint asked.

'Yes,' said the soldier. 'We'll leave you to your shame.'

*\* What he supposed to mean? Quint had recovered from his initial shock and was treacherous again.*

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GLADIATOR SCHOOL

be many weeks – perhaps months – of this ahead of him.

Quin had always seemed strong and powerful. But now, standing barefoot in the middle of the arena, wearing nothing but a loincloth, he looked like a child. Blood and sweat were smeared across his back and shoulders.

Other novice gladiators were watching from the side steps, and Lucius had ventured out of the back rooms of the school to see how Quin was getting on. Now he wished that he hadn't looked.

'No sword, no shield, no armour,' he muttered. 'It's not fair.'

'They have to learn to fight with no kit at first,' said a voice behind him. 'The weapons come later.'

Lucius spun around and saw a slave girl standing there. Her thick, black hair hung in two heavy plaits around her oval face. Lucius didn't know what to say. A month ago he would have smiled and thanked her. He would have known his own status. Now, working in the gladiator school, he didn't even feel like himself any more. He certainly didn't feel like talking. He turned back to the arena, where Quin was on his back again.

One of the watching gladiators turned to Lucius. His lips parted in a black-toothed grin.

'Your brother's not even out of his swaddling clothes,' he said, spitting onto the sand. 'We eat his sort for breakfast.'

*\* Lucius (gladly) watched a trainer gladiator.*

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BLOOD OATH

Clearly this gladiator was badly trained and fighting for money. Lucius didn't answer but, as he heard another cry of pain from Quin, his throat burred. He would be sick if he kept on watching. He had to get out. Luckily, he had an excuse to leave: his uncle had asked him to deliver a message to someone in the Forum.

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The sweltering streets of Rome seemed less busy than usual. Lucius weaved his way towards the Forum, the cries of street sellers ringing in his ears as he dashed through the throng of carts and chariots. The acid smell of urine and excrement stung his throat. He stumbled over a litter of piglets trotting across his path and the owner yelled at him. 'Out of the way, boy!'

'Sorry,' Lucius murmured, nodding to the side of the street, where a meat vendor who was selling piles of fresh red hams was splattering everyone in the vicinity with blood.

He hadn't been paying much attention to his route until now. He knew the streets so well that his feet would carry him to the marketplace while his mind was still in the arena with his brother. But now he realised that he was standing on the street where their old home was. The shops set into the villa walls were selling the same cloth and clay pots of olive oil as always. Everything looked just as it had been in the old days.

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## PROLOGUE

# TRAITOR!

ROME  
JULY AD 79



## THE MAIN CHARACTERS

- Lucius, a Roman boy
- Quintus, his older brother
- Aquila, their father
- Ravilla, their uncle
- Caecilia, their mother
- Valeria, their sister
- Isidora, Lucius's friend, a slave
- Rufus, a slave
- Crassus, a trainer of gladiators



Lucius stared at the household gods.

Everyone else seemed able to shout and cry and wail and rage, but Lucius couldn't even open his mouth.

From the moment the soldiers had burst in to arrest his father and found him missing, Lucius's eyes had been glued to the little wooden statues.

The soldiers had stormed through the villa, overturning furniture, rattling their swords and yelling, 'We arrest you, Quintus Valerius Aquila; in the name of the Emperor, show yourself!'

His mother had collapsed, trembling, onto the couch in the atrium,\* clasping Lucius's sister Valeria

\* atrium: the entrance hall of a Roman villa.

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