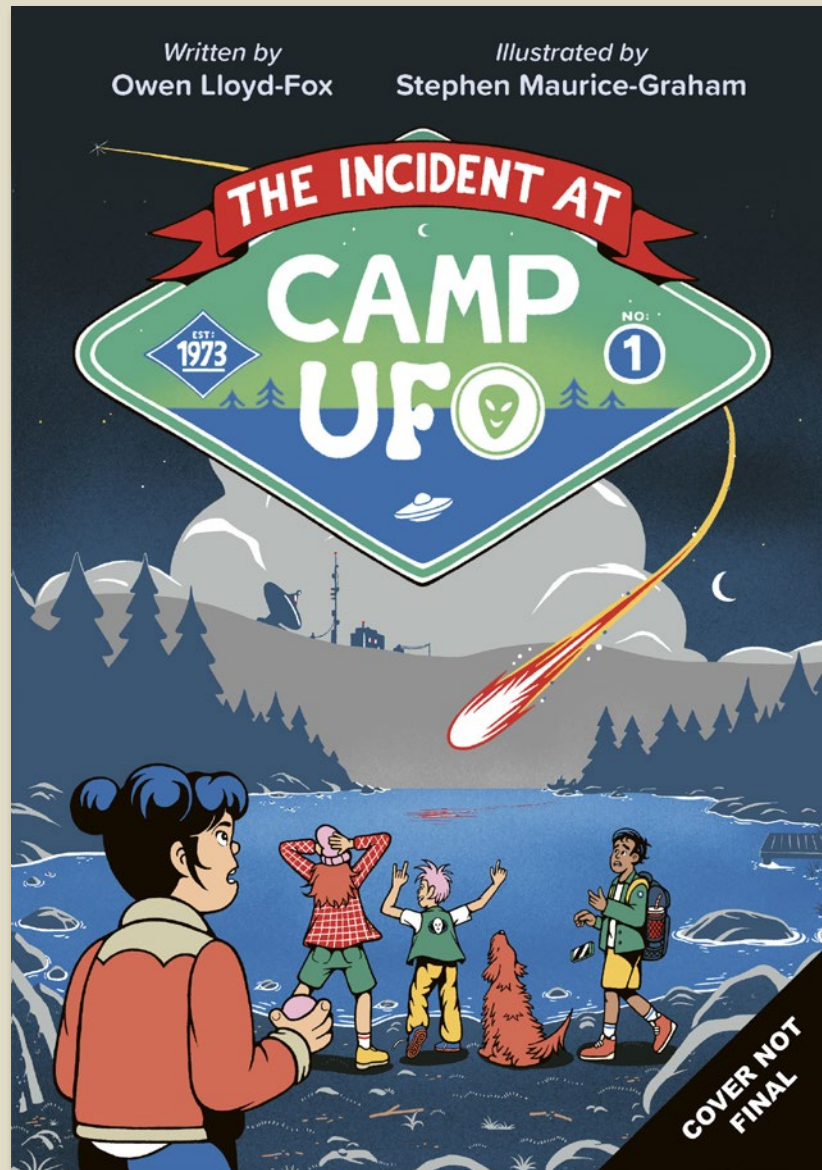




**Norway - LBF/BBF24 - Middle
grade and graphic novels**

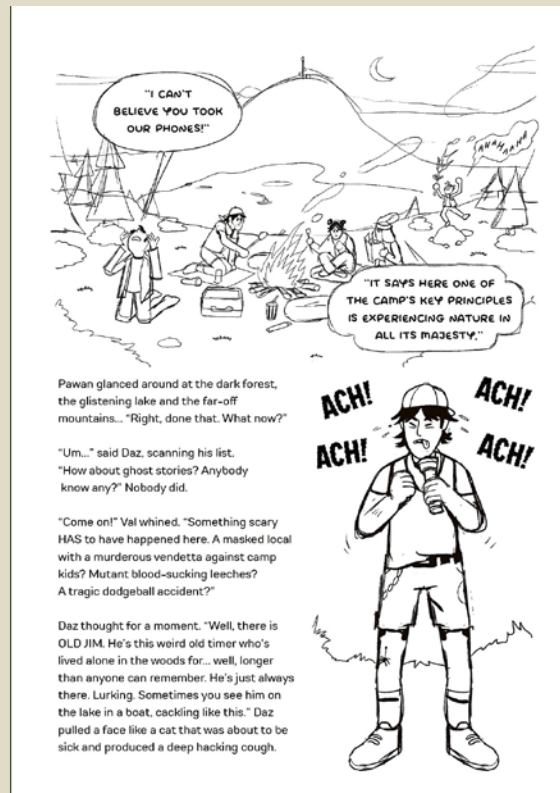
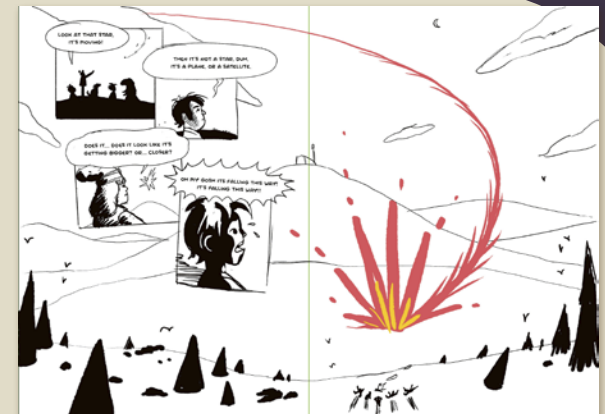
The Incident at Camp UFO



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

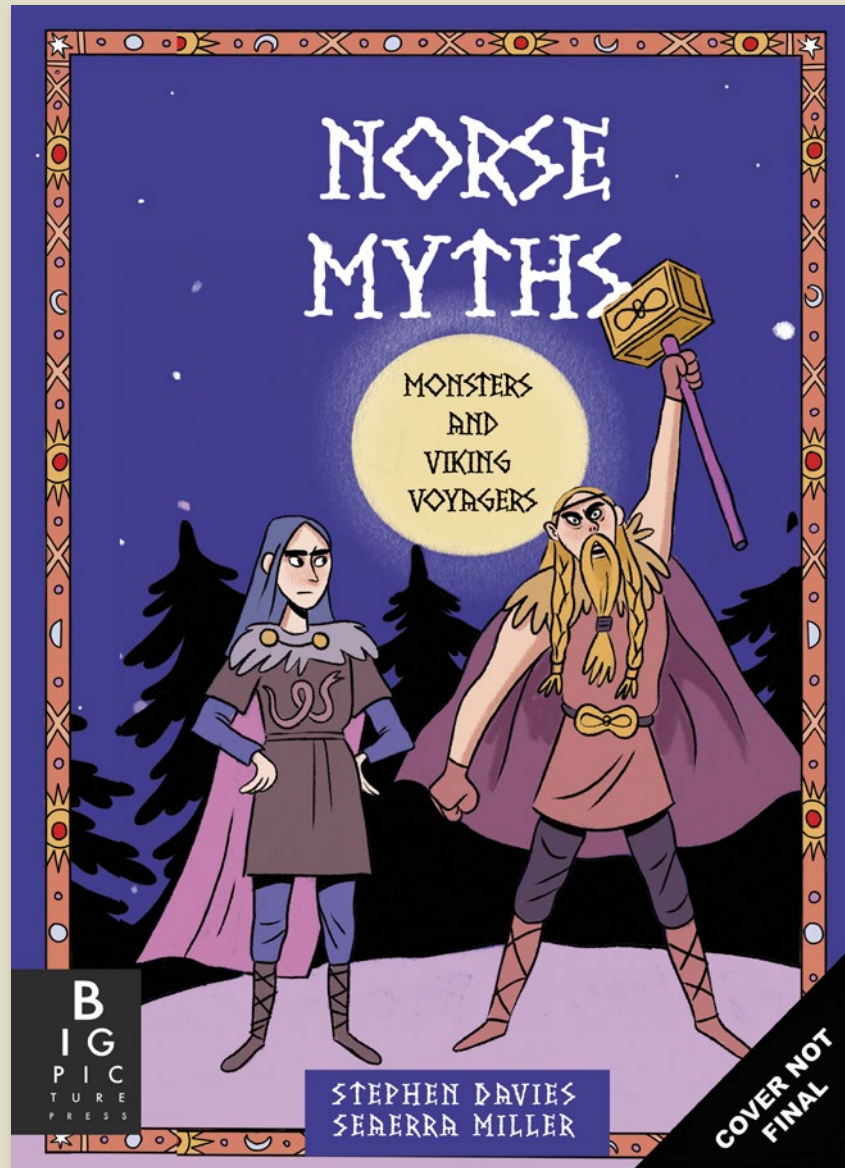
- A brand-new adventure puzzle book series complete with graphic novel style illustrations. Perfect for fans of Bunny vs. Monkey, Stranger Things and gaming enthusiasts. A must-have for reluctant readers.
- Featuring a strong cast of characters with authentic stories from diverse backgrounds, including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

The Incident at Camp UFO



Pub Date	07/08/2025
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	25/11/2024
Files To Printer	17/03/2025
Freight On Board	05/06/2025
Rights Available	World

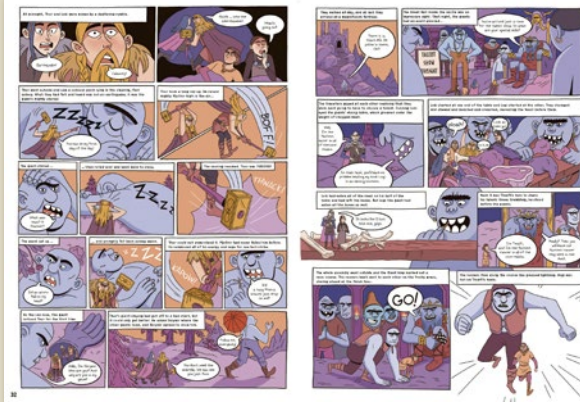
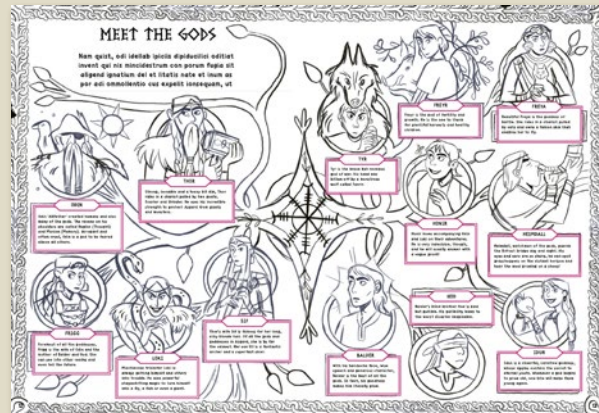
Norse Myths, Monsters and Viking Voyages



A vivid retelling of the Norse myths.

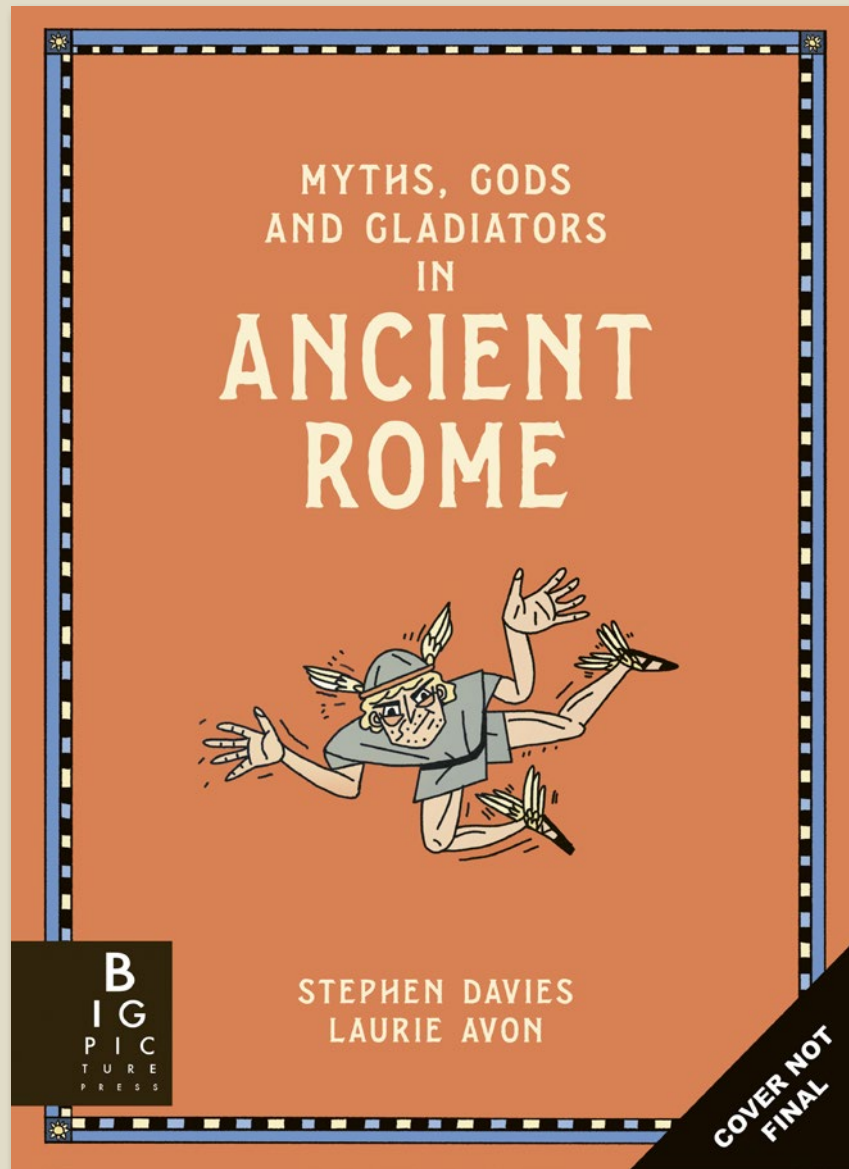
- Contents: Myths - The Creation Myth; The Theft of Idun's Apples; Treasures of the Gods; Thor's Journey to Utgard; The Deal of Balder; Ragnarok; Sigurd and Fafnir Theme spreads - What are the Norse Myths?; Meet the Norse Gods; How the Myths Explained the World; Meet the Vikings; Mythical Creatures and 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 35,000 copies worldwide as of July 2022) - this is the next title in a growing series for Big Picture Press.
- These myths will be broken up with a series of 'theme' spreads, which will take a broader look at certain aspects of Norse mythology (mythical beasts and monsters, the gods etc.)

Norse Myths, Monsters and Viking Voyages



Pub Date	01/05/2025
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
Files To Printer	09/12/2024
Freight On Board	27/02/2025
Rights Available	World

Myths, Gods and Gladiators in Ancient Rome



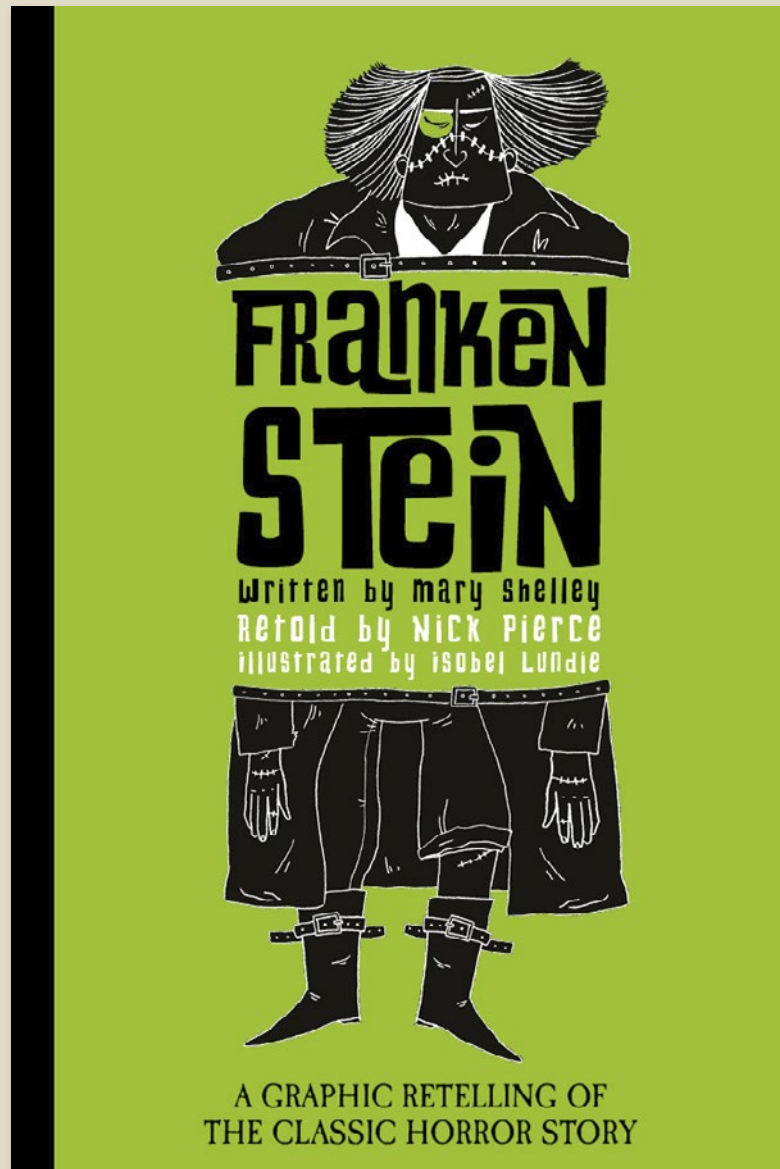
A historical and humorous comic book retelling of the ancient Roman myths.

- Contents: Myths - The Creation Myth; Dido and Aeneas; Romulus and Remus; Baucis and Philemon; Polyphemus and Ulysses; Boudicca's Army; Horatius at the Bridge. Theme Spreads - What are the Roman Myths?; Meet the Roman Gods; How the Myths Explained the World; The Emperor Hall of Fame; Roman Life; Roman Religion; Roman Army; Colosseums and Gladiators; A Mythic Map of Ancient Rome.
- 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.)

Myths, Gods and Gladiators in Ancient Rome



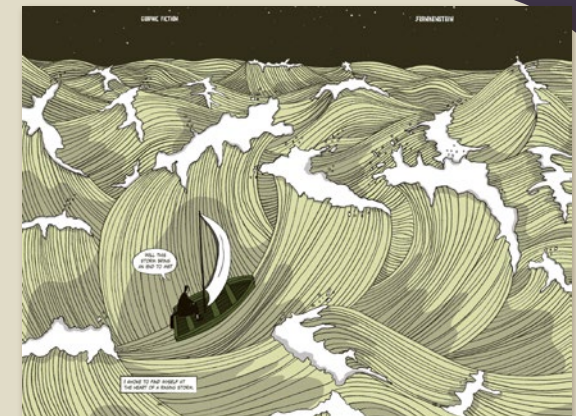
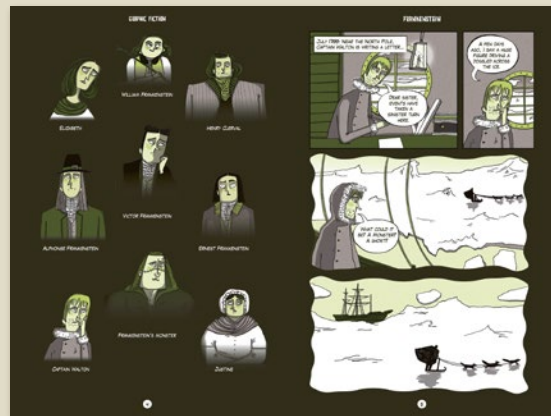
Pub Date	07/08/2025
Pub Price	£14.99
ISBN	9781800788770
H x W	297 x 216mm
Binding	Hardback
Age Range	7-9 years
Author	Stephen Davies
Illustrator	Laurie Avon
Extent	64pp
Word Count	12000 words
Translation Files	25/11/2024
Files To Printer	17/03/2025
Freight On Board	05/06/2025
Rights Available	World



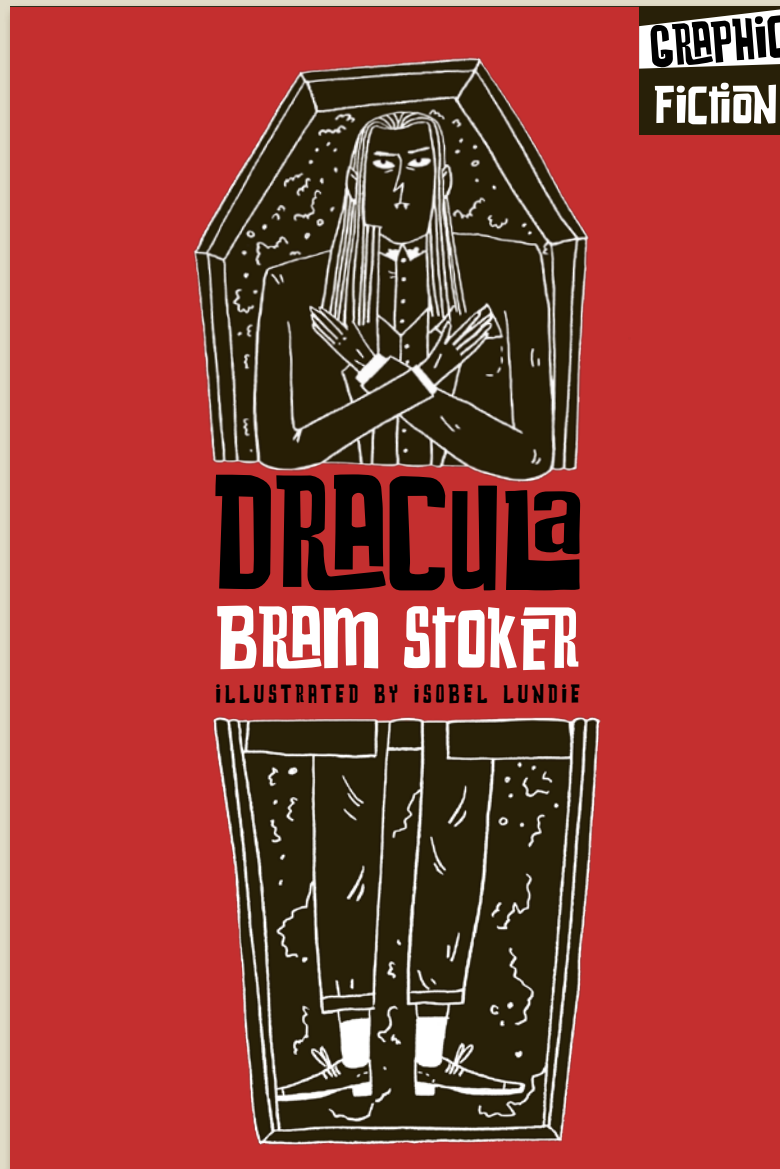
A graphic retelling of Mary Shelley's gothic masterpiece

- 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	12/09/2024
Pub Price	£7.99
ISBN	9781800788800
H x W	210 x 140mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	9-11 years
Author	Mary Shelley
Illustrator	Isobel Lundie
Extent	64pp
Word Count	4316 words
Files To Printer	15/04/2024
Freight On Board	11/07/2024
Rights Available	World



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

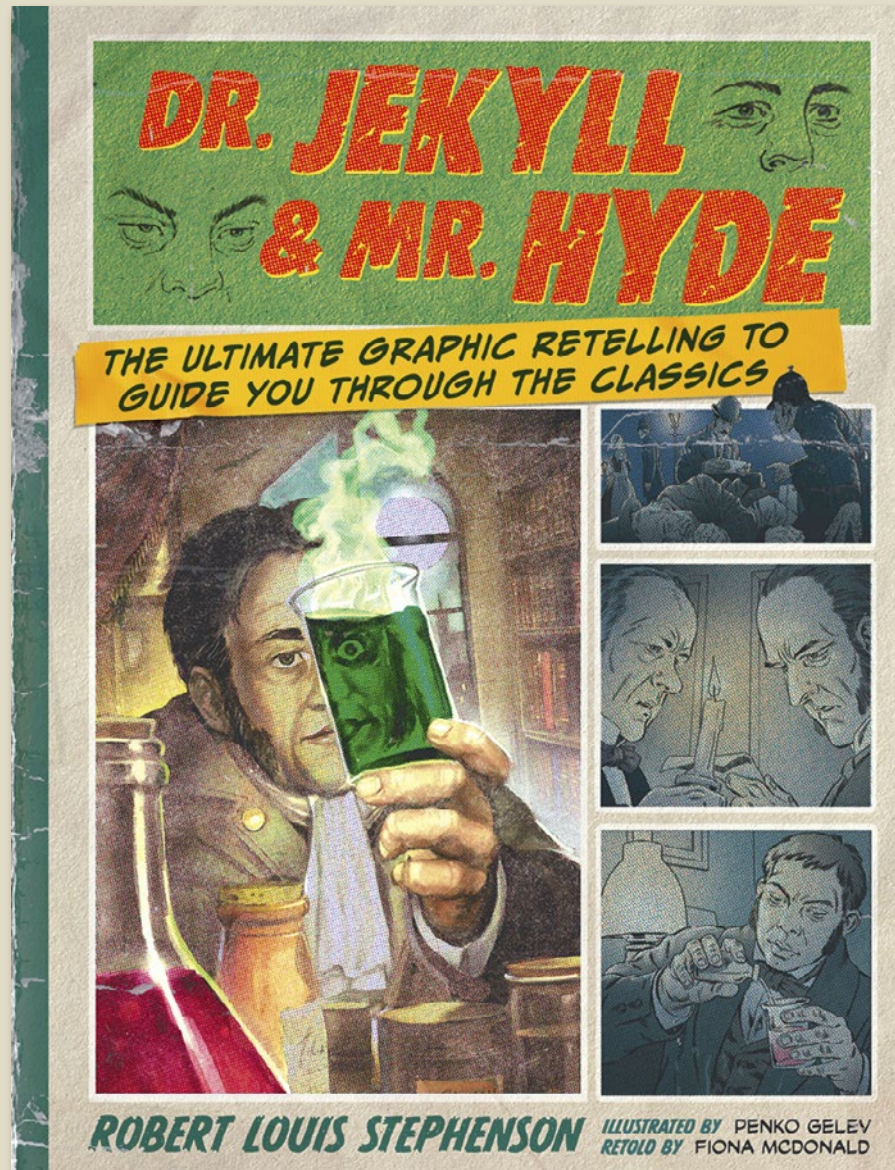
- A contemporary twist on a 19th Century classic. This creepy graphic retelling is the perfect tool for engaging reluctant readers and introducing children to the literary canon.
- An excellent English Literature curriculum companion. The endmatter contains an educational author biography, history of 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	12/09/2024
Pub Price	£7.99
ISBN	9781800788817
H x W	210 x 140mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	9-11 years
Author	Bram Stoker
Illustrator	Isobel Lundie
Extent	64pp
Word Count	3140 words
Translation Files	29/01/2024
Files To Printer	22/04/2024
Freight On Board	27/06/2024
Rights Available	World

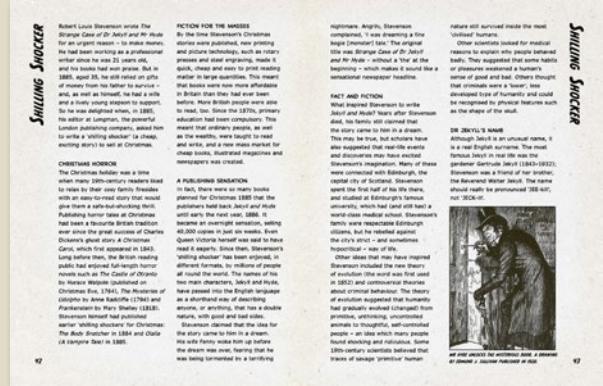
Classic Comics: Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde



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

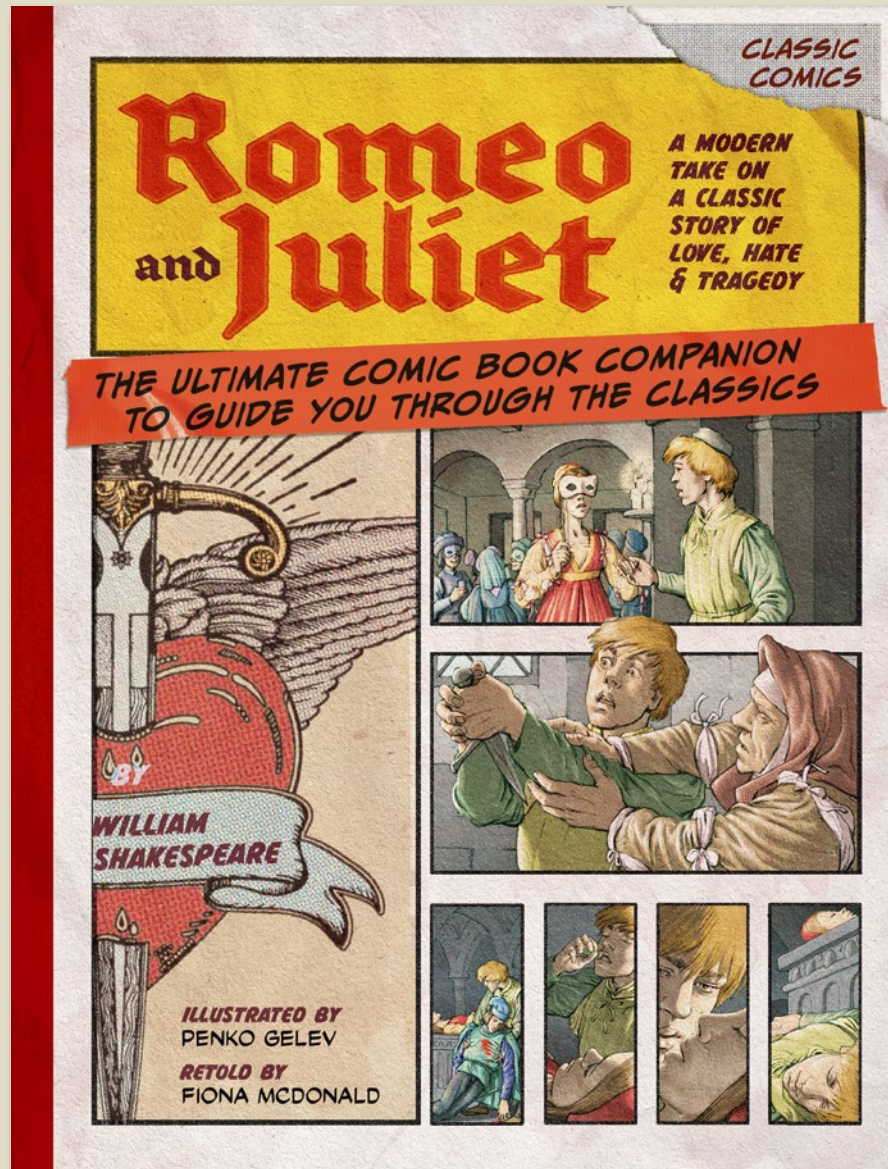
- The highly visual nature of comic book storytelling is the perfect way to encourage reluctant readers who are challenged or intimidated by reading to improve their literacy skills.
- Small amounts of text and easy-to-follow sequential ordering of the picture strips help make Shakespeare more accessible.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

Classic Comics: Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde



Pub Date	26/09/2024
Pub Price	£7.99
ISBN	9781800789142
H x W	246 x 189mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	9-11 years
Author	Fiona MacDonald
Illustrator	Penko Gelev
Extent	48pp
Word Count	5715 words
Freight On Board	17/07/2024
Rights Available	World

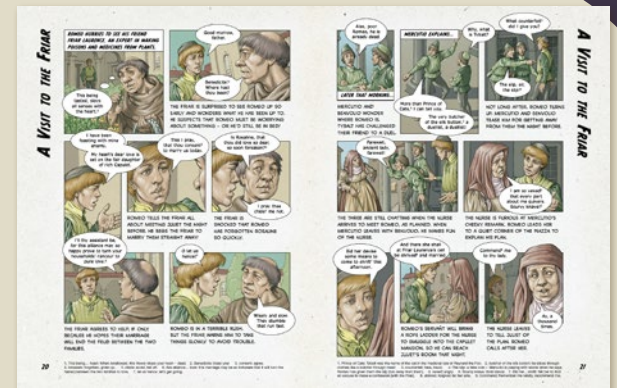
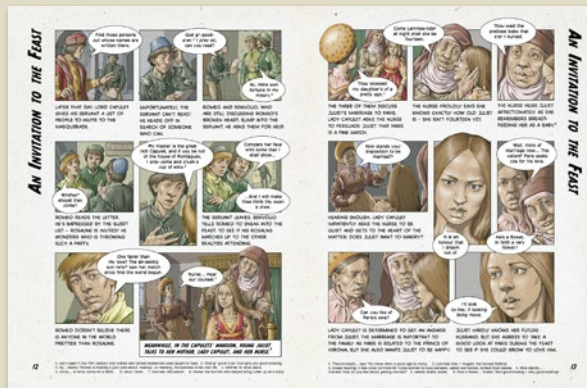
Classic Comics: Romeo and Juliet



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

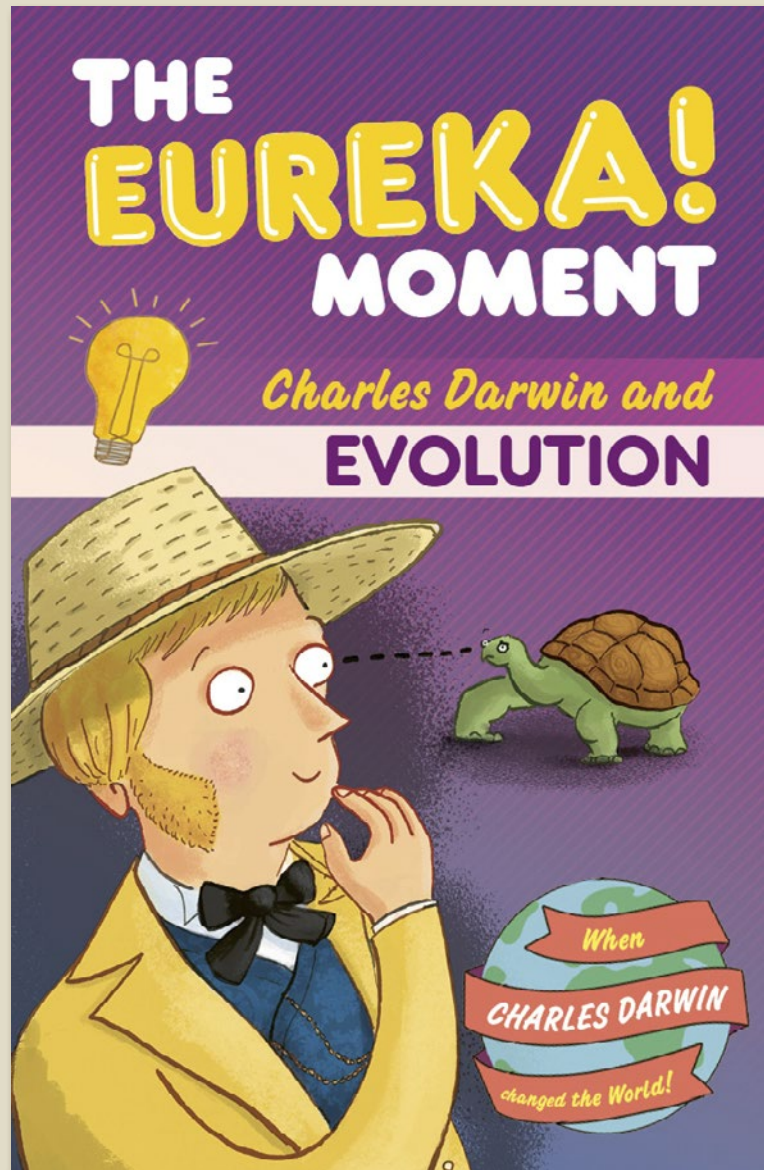
- The highly visual nature of comic book storytelling is the perfect way to encourage reluctant readers who are challenged or intimidated by reading to improve their literacy skills.
- Small amounts of text and easy-to-follow sequential ordering of the picture strips help make Shakespeare accessible.
- 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.

Classic Comics: Romeo and Juliet



Pub Date	26/09/2024
Pub Price	£7.99
ISBN	9781800789159
H x W	246 x 189mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	9-11 years
Author	Fiona MacDonald
Illustrator	Penko Gelev
Extent	48pp
Word Count	13401 words
Files To Printer	29/04/2024
Freight On Board	17/07/2024
Rights Available	World

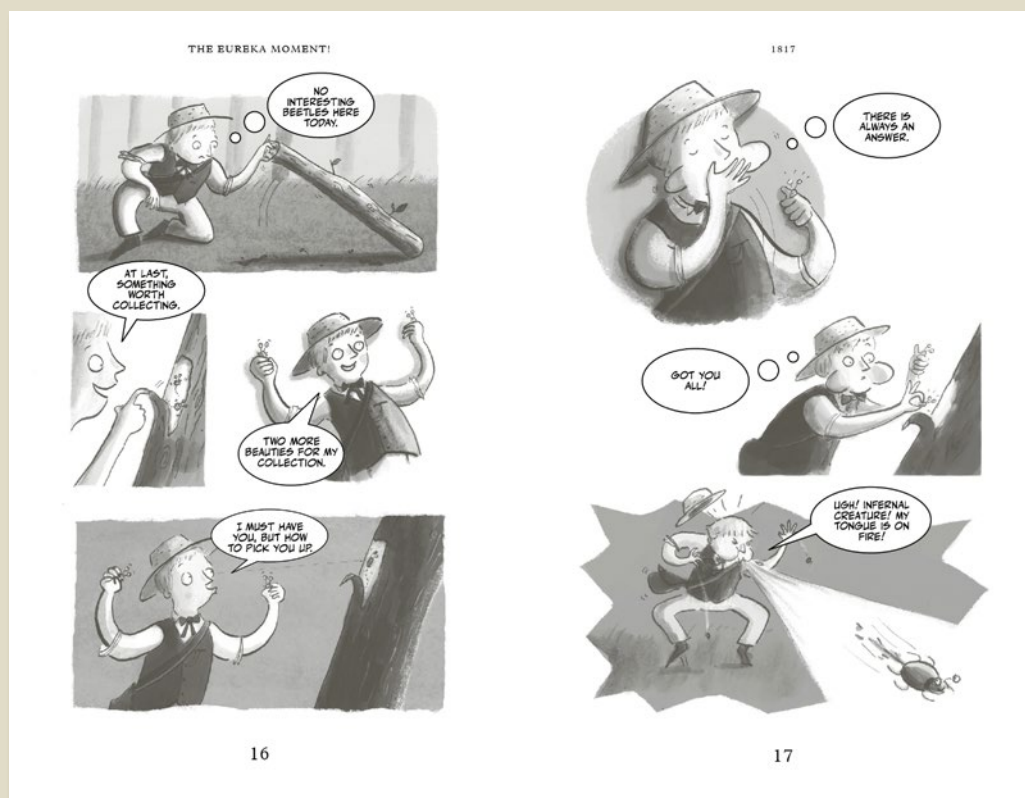
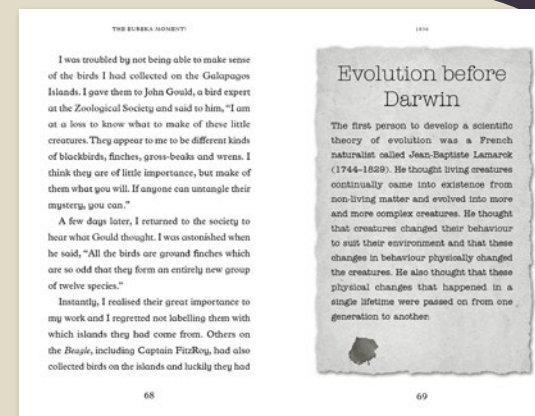
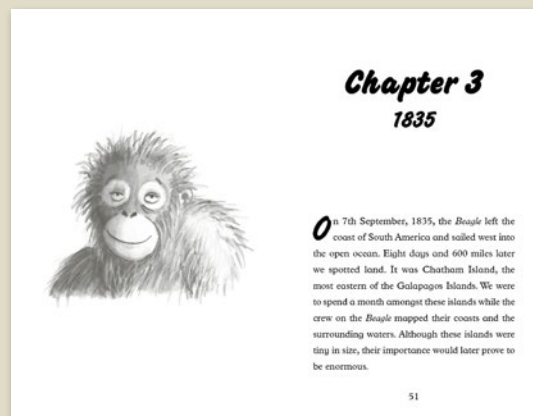
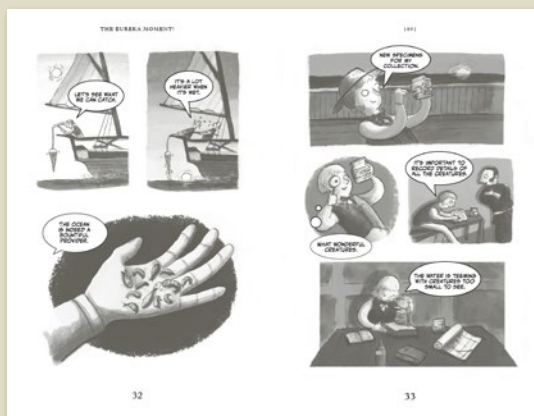
The Eureka! Moment: Evolution



Explore Charles Darwin's incredible 'Eureka' moment!

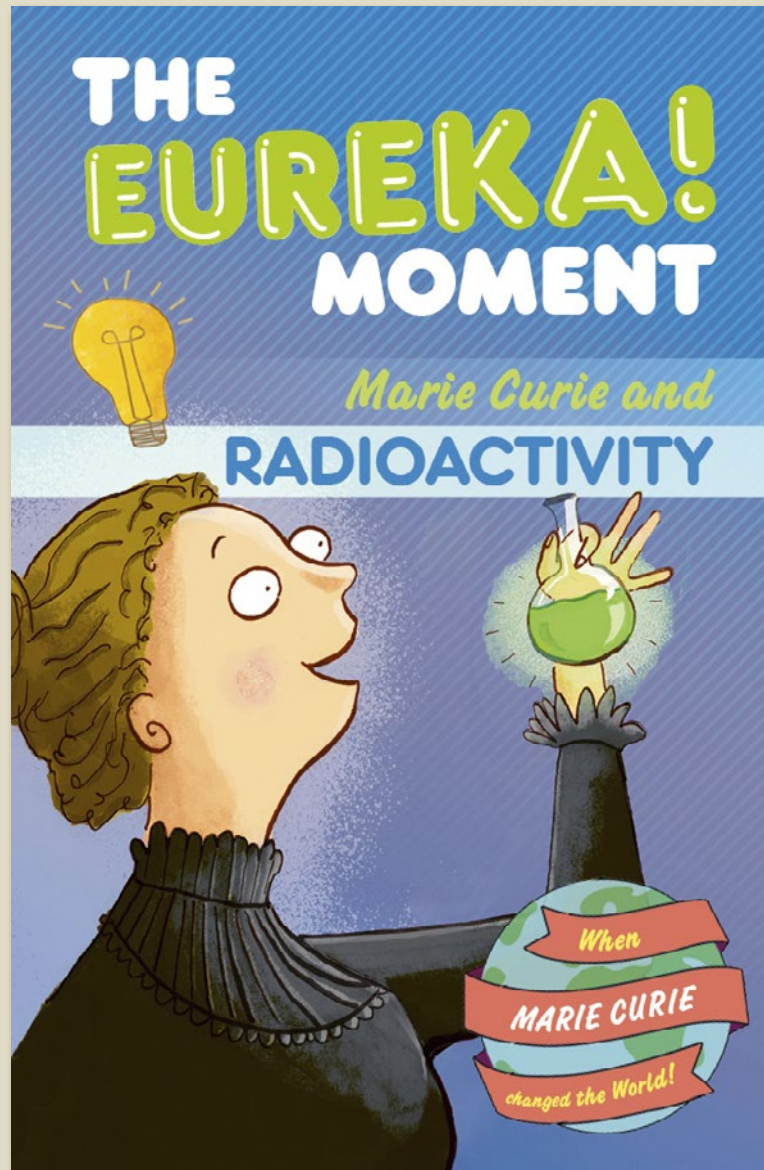
- Child-friendly narrative non-fiction curated to deepen children's knowledge of key moments in the history of science in an accessible, entertaining way.
- Short comic strips scattered throughout the narrative to help children visualise and engage with key events.
- This series introduces children to 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.

The Eureka! Moment: Evolution



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

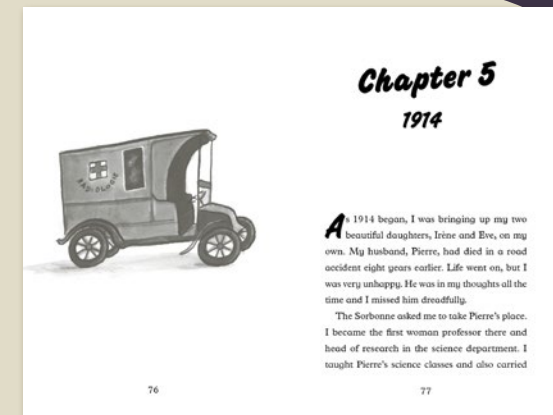
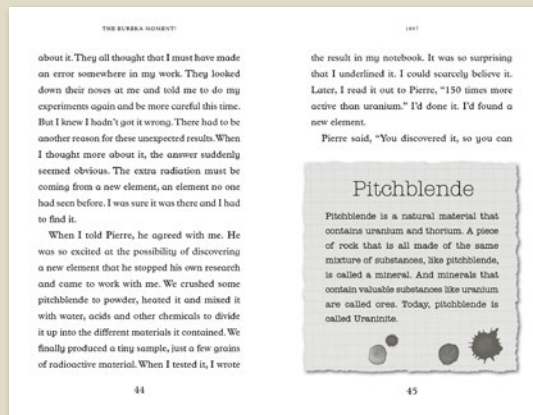
The Eureka! Moment: Radioactivity



Explore Marie Curie's incredible 'Eureka' moment!

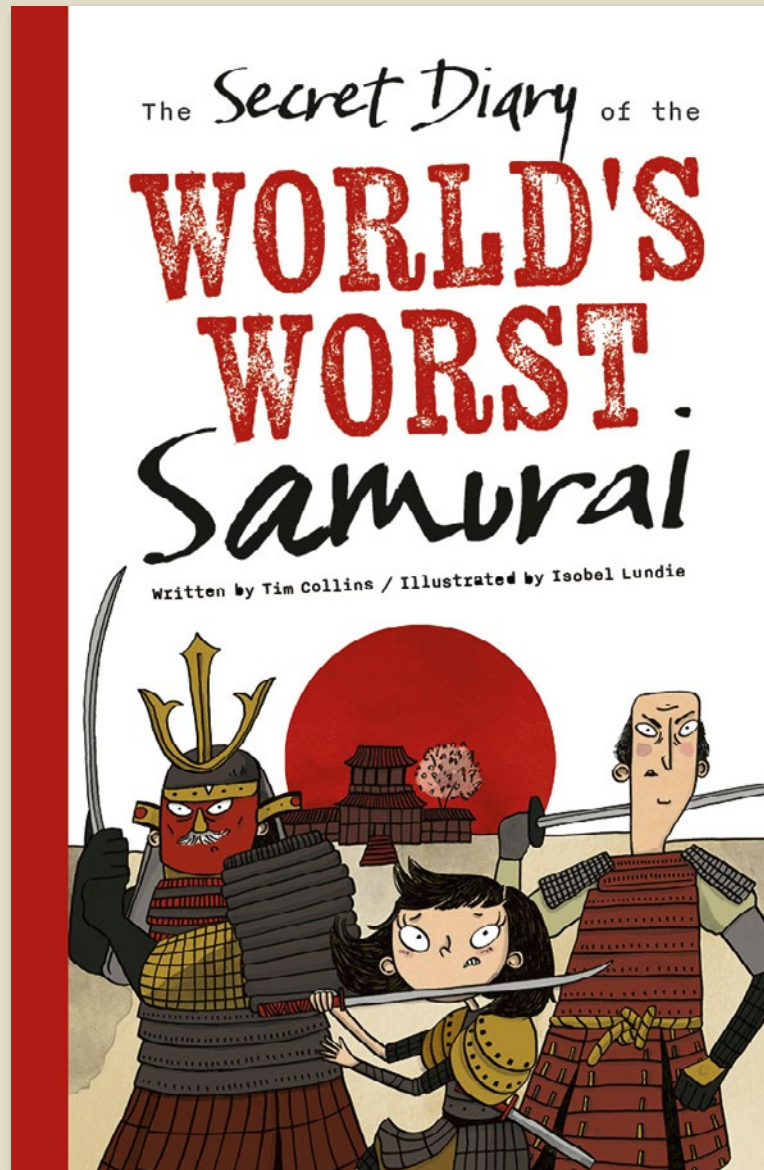
- Child-friendly narrative non-fiction curated to deepen children's knowledge of key moments in the history of science in an accessible, entertaining manner.
- This series introduces children to a myriad of inspirational individuals and the barriers they faced during their quest for knowledge, encouraging 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.

The Eureka! Moment: Radioactivity



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

World's Worst Samurai



A hilarious, fictional account of the world's unluckiest Samurai warrior

- A fantastically funny illustrated story that promotes an inspiring, positive female role model.
- Fascinating facts are interspersed throughout the fictional story, with 'get real' sections educating readers about the real-world contexts and histories of Japan and Samurai warriors.
- Engaging story about perseverance, believing in yourself and overcoming barriers.
- Endmatter includes a timeline and historical biographies of famous Samurai warriors to help engage children with the real-world historical context and encourage further research.

World's Worst Samurai



Yasutaro laughed, and I had to stop myself from throwing my bowl at him. I don't know much about the code of the samurai, but I'm guessing that attacking your own brother during a meal probably isn't part of it.

Mother told me to stop talking nonsense and get on with my chores.

I was expecting Father to say something similar, but he didn't. He froze with his rice bowl in his hand and peered at me in silence. Then he asked why I wanted to be a samurai.

I told him I was from a great samurai family, and it wasn't fair that Yasutaro got to be one and I didn't.

Father nodded and asked if I had any other reason.

I said I was better at fighting than Yasutaro, and if I could be sent to Yoshihiro I would emerge as the true warrior of our family.

Father nodded and asked if I had any other reason.

I said I was better at tactics than Yasutaro, and one day I could become a great commander and lead troops to glorious victories.

Father finished his rice in silence. When his bowl was empty, he said he refused to send me to samurai school.

I tried to keep my anger in, but it was no use. I said it was ridiculous that he wouldn't let me train just because I was a girl.

Father laughed. He said that wasn't the reason, and there were many stories about

female samurai who'd commanded armies of thousands. He said the reason he wouldn't send me was because I wasn't thinking like a true samurai should.

Mother repeated her demand for me to get back to my duties, but Father said I could be excused for one day. He told me to take the time to think and then answer the question again tomorrow morning.



GET REAL

Female samurai were rare, but some became legendary figures whose stories were repeated long after they died. An epic account of 13th century battles called The Tale of the Heike describes a female warrior called Tameo Goto. It says she was 'fit to confront a demon or a god' and 'worth a thousand warriors'.

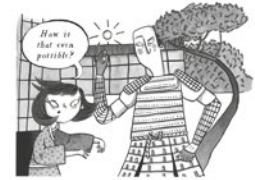
I would never have believed anyone could move that fast, never mind someone so thin and old.

Yoshihiro said we'd try it the other way around. He handed me the pebble and told me to stop him from grabbing it. I placed it in my palm and took a deep breath. This didn't sound too hard. All I'd have to do was clasp my hand as soon as I saw him move.

I told him to go ahead. His hand moved in a rapid blur, and my fingers slapped into an empty palm.

We tried again. I snapped my fingers shut sooner this time, but they still closed on thin air.

I asked Yoshihiro to give me one more chance. He agreed, and this time I smacked my hand shut even faster.



I gasped. There was something inside my hand. On just the first day of training I'd beaten his test. Here was proof that I was destined to be a great warrior.

I opened my hand. In the centre was a small pebble that had been painted red. For a moment, I wondered how it could have changed colour. Then Yoshihiro opened his own hand to

Chapter I

Japan, 1582



Day One

Mother thinks I'm practising my writing. I do it every day and she never reads it. So while I kneel here in my silk robe, dabbing my brush onto the paper like an obedient daughter, I'm going to reveal my true destiny.

I, Suki Akiyama, am going to become a samurai warrior. My father is one, and my brother is training to become one. It's in my blood.

Pub Date	01/10/2020
Pub Price	£6.99
ISBN	9781800788886
H x W	198 x 129mm
Binding	Paperback
Age Range	7-9 years
Author	Tim Collins
Illustrator	Isobel Lundie
Extent	216pp
Word Count	20307 words
Rights Available	World



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

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

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

GHOST STORIES

up. A black shape swooped over their heads.

"Scary!" Sacha frowned. "That bird is like an omen. An angel 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.

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

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

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

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

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 rigging 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 Devan, 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

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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



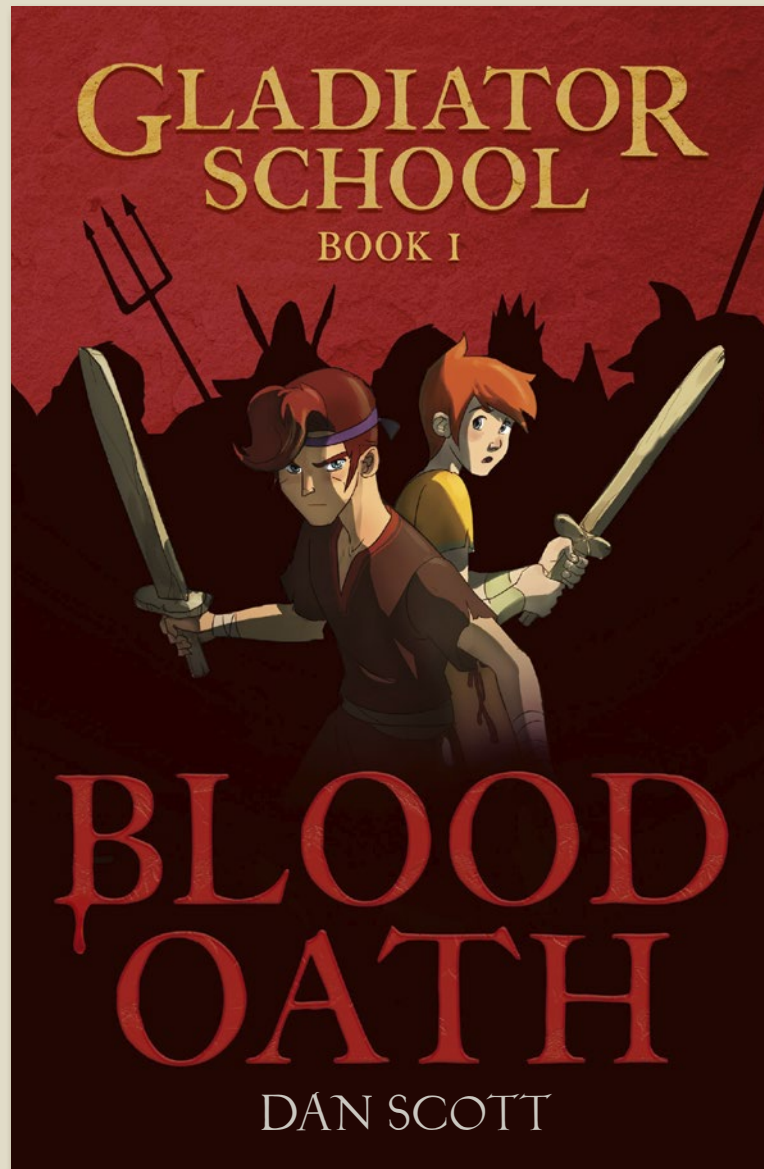
THE GHOST SHIP

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
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Illustrator	Isobel Lundie
Extent	128pp
Rights Available	World

Gladiator School 1: Blood Oath



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

- An epic fictional story set in a historical context, perfect for lovers of the ancient world.
- 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.

ROME, AD 79

Labels on the map include:

- Forum Romanum
- Theatre of Marcellus
- Tiber Island
- River Tiber
- Circus Maximus
- Palatine Hill
- Theatre of the Colosseum
- Stadium
- Subura (Lower and Upper)

A compass rose is located in the bottom right corner.

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1

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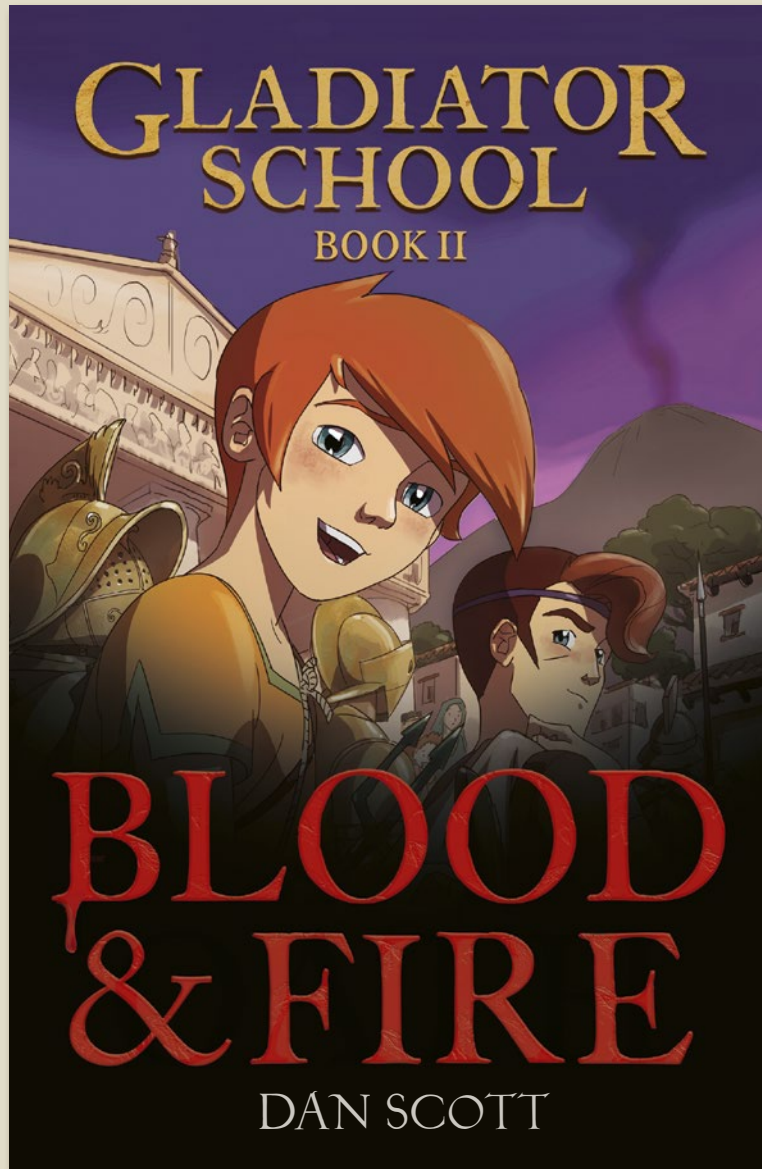
TRAITOR!



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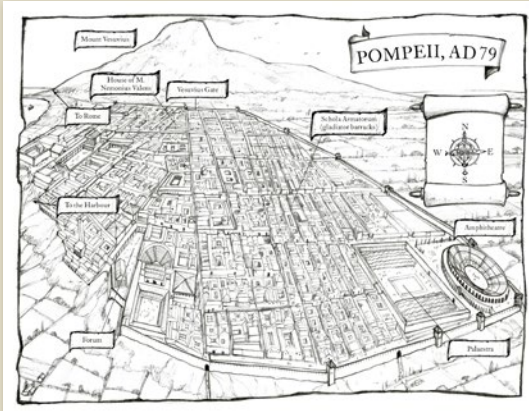
Gladiator School 2: Blood & Fire



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 I

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

He muddled his head down on Lucius as he pursued Quintus through the streets of Pompeii. He glimpsed his brother's tall, athletic figure up ahead, snatching 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.

Smells 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 cries of fruit sellers and wine merchants and the pipes and drums of bankers. The noise and

* amphitheatre (singulare amphitheatrum) northwestern (direction) and political (direction).

GLADIATOR SCHOOL

BLOOD & FIRE

squalor reminded him of Subura, the area where he now lived in Rome. Yet Pompeii seemed to carry an entire 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 unsympathetic 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 (singulare amphora) northwestern (direction) and political (direction).

His sense of fairness clearly offended, Quintus impulsively strode into the middle and pushed aside one of the bullies, who had been holding the victim in a neck lock. The bully squeaked 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 steeled 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 encloved, egg-shaped helmet and fights with a short sword (gladius); his name means 'chaser'.

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