Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

0-5 5-7 7-9 9-12 12+

opening extract from

Grk and the Pelotti Gang

written by

Joshua Doder

published by

Andersen Press

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Chapter 1

The Banco do Brasil had three guards.

The three guards wore blue uniforms with silver buttons. Each of them carried a pair of handcuffs, two tear gas canisters and a pistol.

It was a hot afternoon. Inside the bank, the air conditioning was turned up to full, but the air was still steamy. Most of the clerks had big patches of sweat on their shirts. The customers fanned their faces with their hands.

The three guards were tired. They stared at the pretty girls who came into the bank. They chatted to the customers, discussing the weather or the news or last weekend's football results. They dreamed about dinner. It was an effort just to keep their eyes open.

When a voice shouted, 'NOBODY MOVE!' the three guards didn't know what to do. They looked around, trying to see who was shouting at them. The voice shouted again, even louder, 'I SAID, NOBODY MOVE! STAY EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE!'

One of the guards reached for his gun. Immediately, a bullet flew through the air and smashed into the wall behind him, knocking out chunks of brick and plaster. The voice shouted again, 'DIDN'T I TELL YOU NOT TO MOVE?'

'I'm sorry,' whispered the guard.

'No moving,' said the voice. 'And no talking. Do you understand?'

The guard wanted to say 'yes' but he knew that he wasn't supposed to talk. So he nodded.

'Good,' said the voice. 'I want everyone to lie on the floor. Down on the floor! Right now!'

They did what they were told. The guards and the customers and the clerks and the manager – they all lay down on the floor. Only three people were left standing. Three men. They wore black suits and white shirts and black ties. They had black masks covering their faces. They were holding Uzis. (An Uzi, in case you don't already know, is a small and very effective machine-gun, capable of firing six hundred rounds per minute.)

One of the masked men pointed his Uzi at the three guards. He said, 'You move, I shoot. You talk, I shoot. Understand?'

The three guards nodded.

Another of the masked men strolled over to the bank manager and said, 'Open the safe. Now. Understand?'

'Ye-ye-ye-yes,' stammered the manager. Ever since he was promoted to manager of the Banco do Brasil, he had been expecting a robbery, but that didn't make it any less terrifying. 'Of-of-of cour-cour-course I understa-sta-stand.'

'Don't talk,' said the man in the black mask. 'Just open the safe.'

The manager nodded. 'Thi-thi-this way.'

Together, the manager and the man in the black mask walked to the back of the bank. They went to the vault where the money was stored. There, the man in the black

mask filled five big brown sacks with cash. One by one, he carried the five full sacks back into the bank.

The first robber picked up two sacks. The second robber picked up two more and said, 'Let's go.' They ran towards the door.

The third robber picked up the fifth sack. He had only one arm, so he could only carry one sack. Where his left arm should have been, he had an empty sleeve. Carrying his sack of money, he ran after the others. When he reached the door, he stopped and put the sack on the ground. He looked up at the CCTV camera that recorded everyone who walked into the bank.

He pulled off his mask and threw it on the floor.

He stared into the lens of the camera.

He smiled as if he was posing for a photograph.

Every policeman or policewoman in Brazil would recognise his face. They would recognise his lean cheeks and his black hair and his bushy eyebrows. Most of all, they would recognise the crazy look in his eyes. They would say, 'Oh, no.' They would say, 'Not him.' They would say, 'Pelottinho is back in Brazil.'

Pelottinho.

That name would be enough to send shivers through the spine of any policeman or policewoman in Brazil.

His real name was Felipe Pelotti, but everyone called him Pelottinho. 'Pelottinho' means 'little Pelotti'. Pelottinho was the youngest and craziest of the three Pelotti brothers, the most successful gang of bank robbers in Brazilian history.

Pelottinho lifted his Uzi and fired a stream of bullets

directly into the CCTV camera.

The lens exploded. Glass splattered everywhere. The camera drooped and swung in the air, attached to the wall by just a couple of bright green wires.

Pelottinho laughed. His laughter was loud and carefree and quite insane. Tucking his gun into his belt, he grabbed the sack of money and ran out of the bank.

In the street, a silver Mercedes was waiting. The engine was running. The back door was open. The other two Pelottis were already inside the Mercedes, waiting impatiently for their youngest, craziest brother.

Pelottinho leaped into the Mercedes and threw the sack onto the back seat beside him. He slammed the door. The engine roared. The wheels spun. Fumes gushed out of the exhaust.

At that moment, the doors of the bank sprang open and the three security guards ran out. They drew their pistols. The Mercedes sped down the street. The three security guards started shooting.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

One bullet hit an old lady's shopping bags, puncturing a carton of orange juice. Another bullet smashed the windscreen of a lorry. Two more bullets blew out the tyres of a bus. A fifth bullet hit a statue of Emperor Pedro the Second and knocked off his nose. But not a single bullet touched the Mercedes.

Out of the back window, Pelottinho waved his arm – his one and only arm – at the security guards.

Then the Mercedes turned the corner and the Pelottis were gone.

Chapter 2

All around the Chief of Police, people were working. Police officers were interviewing the customers who had been inside the bank during the robbery. Forensics experts dusted the surfaces for fingerprints. DNA experts scraped samples into test tubes. Shoe experts squatted on the floor, drawing chalk lines around muddy footprints. Ballistics experts stuffed bullets into plastic bags. Balaclava experts inspected the black woollen mask that Pelottinho had been wearing.

The Chief of Police was a short, fat man with a round face, red cheeks and a shiny bald head. His name was Luis Gomez da Silva Mendoza Careca, but everyone called him 'sir'.

'Sir? Sir? Sir, we have the photograph, sir.'

Chief Careca stared at the junior police officer who was standing beside him. 'What did you say?'

'We've printed the photograph, sir. From the CCTV camera.' The junior officer looked nervous. His name was Detective Perriera, and he had just been promoted to the Serious Crimes Unit. This was his first week on the job. He was holding a black-and-white photo.

'Give that to me,' said Chief Careca.

'Yes, sir.'

Chief Careca grabbed the photo. He stared at the face. In a quiet voice, he whispered, 'Pelottinho.' Then he

whispered the name again, very slowly, rolling every syllable around his tongue. 'Pel-lot-tin-nho. You shouldn't have come back to Rio, Pelottinho. This time, Pelottinho, things will be different. This time, Pelottinho, you will not escape me.'

The bank manager emerged from the vaults and walked slowly to the Chief of Police. He looked gloomy. He had spent the past three hours counting all the money in the vault. 'I've finished,' he said.

Chief Careca said, 'So? How much did they get?'

'A hundred and twenty-three million reais.'

Chief Careca blinked, unable to believe his ears. 'A hundred and what?'

'A hundred and twenty-three million reais,' said the bank manager. He sounded as if he could hardly believe it himself.

'Those monkeys,' muttered Chief Careca. 'Those rats. Those pigs. Are they trying to make me look like a complete idiot?'

If you're British, a hundred and twenty-three million reais is the equivalent of thirty-two million pounds. Or fifty-five million dollars if you're American. Or... well, whoever you are, and wherever you live, it's an awful lot of money.

The bank manager said, 'So, what are you going to do?'

'Do?' Chief Careca blinked. A dribble of sweat quivered on his upper lip. 'What do you think I'm going to do?'

'I don't have the foggiest,' said the bank manager. 'What are you going to do?'

Chief Careca's red cheeks glowed like the flames of a forest fire. He roared, 'I'm going to catch those three Pelotti brothers! And then I'm going to make them wish that they had never been born!' For the first time that day, he smiled. He rubbed his hands together, imagining all the cruel and terrible tortures that he would inflict on the three Pelotti brothers – and especially on the youngest, the wildest, the craziest, the most infuriating of them all, Felipe Pelotti, better known as Pelottinho.

A week later, on the other side of Rio de Janeiro, three men walked into a bank. They ordered everyone to lie on the floor, then forced the manager to open the vault and stuffed five brown sacks with cash. That time, the Pelotti gang got away with ninety-seven million reais.

Three days after that, the Pelottis robbed another bank in Rio. They stole eighty-eight million reais, six bags of diamonds, nine gold ingots and the salami sandwich that the bank manager had been planning to have for lunch.

Six days after that, they went back to the Banco do Brasil, and robbed it again. This time, they got away with a hundred and four million reais.

If this carried on for much longer, there wouldn't be any money left in Brazil. The Pelotti brothers would have it all.

Someone had to stop them.

But who?

Chapter 3

A zombie lurched through the tunnels. Flesh dripped from its rotting face.

The zombie opened its mouth, exposing two brown teeth and a throbbing red tongue. In a low rumbling voice, it groaned, 'Are you ready to die?'

Timothy Malt stared into the zombie's blood-red eyes and said, 'No.'

The zombie chuckled. Its mouth opened even wider. It whispered again, 'Are you ready to die?'

'I said no,' replied Tim. He pressed a button. Three high-velocity bullets fizzed from the barrel of his rifle and thumped into the middle of the zombie's chest.

'Die!' screeched the zombie in a terrifying, high-pitched voice. 'You must die!'

'Actually,' replied Tim, 'I think you must die.' He pulled the trigger again and again. The zombie screamed, toppled over and lay on the ground, not moving.

Tim grinned. He pressed SAVE so he wouldn't have to go back to the beginning of the level if another zombie got him. Then he stepped over the zombie's body and sprinted down the dark tunnel.

Grk lifted his head. His nostrils twitched.

Grk was lying on the floor in the sitting room, not far from Tim's feet. He had been lying there for about an

hour, not quite asleep, but not quite awake either. The screams of zombies didn't disturb him. He could happily doze through the roar of grenade launchers and the crackle of bullets. But now, for the first time in an hour, his ears pricked up.

Without removing his eyes from the screen, Tim said, 'What is it?'

Grk didn't answer. But he sprang to his feet, ran to the window, and jumped onto a chair that gave a good view of the road. When Grk looked through the window and saw who was outside, his tail thumped on the chair's seat.

'Who is it?' said Tim.

Although he knew very well that Grk couldn't speak, he hadn't got out of the habit of talking to him. Tim had the strange sense that Grk could always understand just about anything that was said to him.

Grk barked. Grrrrwf!

If Tim had been able to speak Dog, he would have known the meaning of the word 'Grrrrwf!' Unfortunately, Tim could only speak English, a little French and a few words of Stanislavian.

Tim pressed PAUSE on the control and ambled over the window. Through the glass, he could see a thin fifteen-year-old boy walking towards the house. The boy was wearing white shorts and a white T-shirt, and carrying a tennis racket.

Grk barked again, louder. Grrrrrrrrrrwff!

Hearing him, the boy looked up and waved. Tim waved back and Grk barked again.

'Come on,' said Tim. 'Let's open the door.'

As Tim and Grk walked to the front door, Tim wondered whether Grk had psychic powers. Was he telepathic? Could he see the future? If not, how did he always know when someone was going to arrive at the house? Why did he always lift his head and prick up his ears a few seconds before anyone came to the door?

Tim opened the door, and said, 'Hi, Max. How was practice?'

'Fine, thanks,' said Max, and walked into the house. He slotted his tennis racket into the umbrella stand, then turned round. 'I have a key, you know.'

'I know.'

'So you don't have to let me in. I could let myself in.'

'I know,' said Tim.

'So you must like letting me in?'

Tim nodded. 'I suppose I must.'

'Fine,' said Max. 'I'm going to have a shower. See you later.'

Max ran up the stairs, taking them two at a time. Tim and Grk ambled back into the sitting room. Tim sat on the sofa, pressed a button on the control to start the action, and returned to killing zombies. Grk sniffed the carpet, walked round in a circle three times, and lay down.

Apart from Tim, Max and Grk, three other people lived in the house: Mr Malt, Mrs Malt and Natascha Raffifi. Mr and Mrs Malt were Tim's parents. Both of them were working. Natascha Raffifi was Max's sister. That afternoon, just like every afternoon, she was sitting in her bedroom, reading a newspaper.

Other people read newspapers in the morning, but Natascha didn't have time. In the mornings, she was rushing from her bedroom to the bathroom, showering and dressing and cleaning her teeth. Then she was rushing downstairs, eating breakfast and putting on her shoes and going to school. She couldn't imagine how anyone could possibly have time to read a newspaper in the morning.

Natascha read the newspaper later in the day, when she came home from school. She collected the newspaper from the kitchen table, where it had been left by Mr or Mrs Malt, and carried it upstairs to her bedroom. She sat on the bed. She collected her notebook and her dictionary. She spent an hour, and sometimes more, reading the newspaper slowly and carefully from beginning to end, stopping whenever she found a word that she couldn't understood. She looked up all the difficult words in the dictionary, and wrote them down in her notebook.

Today, for instance, the front page said, 'Peace plans in jeopardy after bombing.'

Jeopardy.

Natascha stared at that word for a long time. It looked a bit like 'leopard' and a bit like 'jealousy' but neither of those would make any sense in the context.

She shook her head, and looked up 'jeopardy'. According to the dictionary, 'jeopardy' meant 'the risk of loss, harm or death'. Natascha wrote down the word and its meaning in her notebook.

In the months that she had been living with the Malts,

Natascha had filled seven notebooks. They sat in a row on the bookshelf above her bed. She didn't just write down the new English words that she had learnt. She jotted down interesting thoughts that occurred to her, and funny things that other people said, and good bits that she read in books. If she met someone who fascinated her, or did something unusual, or had a particular thought that she didn't want to forget, she wrote that down too. When Natascha grew up, she was going to be a writer, although she hadn't yet decided exactly what kind of writer. A playwright, perhaps. Or a journalist. Or perhaps even a poet.

But she wasn't planning to grow up for a long time. For now, she just wanted to learn lots of interesting new English words.

She hunched over the newspaper, and read the business pages, and the sports pages, and the arts pages, and the home news, and the foreign news. At the bottom of the page marked 'International', she saw a small paragraph with a surprising headline.

She read the headline, then read the whole paragraph.

Her face went white.

She read the paragraph again, checking that she hadn't imagined it. Then she read it again to check that she hadn't misunderstood any of the English words. Then she grabbed the newspaper, jumped off the bed, and ran through the house, shouting 'Max! Max!'

There was no answer.

She shouted louder: 'Maaaaaaaaax!'

There was still no answer.

She ran downstairs and charged into the sitting room. Tim was squatting on the sofa, staring at the TV.

Natascha said, 'Where's Max?'

Without looking up from the TV, Tim said, 'Shower.'

'Thank you.' Natascha ran upstairs again, and tried to open the bathroom door. It was locked. Coming from the other side, she could hear the sound of running water. She hammered on the door. 'Max? Max? Are you in there?'

There was a pause, then a muffled voice said, 'What do you want?'

'Open the door.'

'I'm in the shower,' said the muffled voice.

'Then get out.'

'Why?'

'Because I have to show you something,' said Natascha.

'Can't it wait for five minutes?'

'No.'

'Just wait. I'll be out in five minutes.'

'Come on, Max. Open the door. It's important.'

'It had better be,' said the muffled voice.

Natascha waited impatiently, listening to the sounds coming from the other side. She heard water being turned off, and footsteps, and someone grumbling to himself.

The door opened. Max Raffifi looked at his sister with an impatient glare. He had a white towel tied around his waist. Water was dripping from his body to the floor, forming a small pool at his feet. He said, 'So?'

'Look,' said Natascha. She thrust the newspaper at her brother. 'Read that.'

'You got me out of the shower to read the newspaper?'

'Yes.'

'I'll read it later,' said Max. He tried to shut the door – but he couldn't, because Natascha put her foot in the way. 'Read it,' she insisted, thrusting the newspaper at her brother.

'You're very annoying,' said Max. He took the paper. His wet fingers left dark marks on the newsprint. 'What am I supposed to be reading?'

'That,' said Natascha, pointing at a paragraph at the bottom of the page marked 'International.'

Max glanced at the paragraph. He read the headline. He blinked, and leaned forward, and read the headline again. He whispered, 'I don't believe it.'

Max retreated into the bathroom, carrying the newspaper, and sat on the edge of the bath. He read the whole paragraph, then read it twice more. Natascha stood in the doorway, watching him.

When Max finished reading the paragraph for the third time, he lifted his head and looked at Natascha. He said, 'What are we going to do?'