


# STEVE COLE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ORIOL VIDAL

Barrington Stoke

*For Ailsa*

First published in 2019 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

Text © 2019 Steve Cole
Illustrations © 2019 Oriol Vidal

The moral right of Steve Cole and Oriol Vidal to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in any part in any form without the written permission of the publisher

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-872-5

Printed in China by Leo

# CONTENTS


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1.** | Deep Down | 1 |
| **2.** | Wake Up | 10 |
| **3.** | Remember | 18 |
| **4.** | A Glimpse of the Future | 23 |
| **5.** | The First Mission | 32 |
| **6.** | The Titanic Tin Boy | 38 |
| **7.** | Word Spreads | 45 |
| **8.** | A Ride to the Beach | 50 |
| **9.** | Someone in Trouble | 57 |
| **10.** | Tin Dents | 63 |
| **11.** | Missing Person | 70 |
| **12.** | Fight and Flight | 79 |
| **13.** | The Tin-Plated Truth | 89 |
| **14.** | No Home | 97 |
| **15.** | Impossible Things | 105 |

CHAPTER 1

# Deep Down

I don't want to go, but there isn't any choice.

At dawn we walk the worn path from our village to Rebo beach. The pontoons wait for us: rafts bound together with driftwood and reeds, plastic barrels, pipes and hoses, and hope. Soon we'll be out on the ocean, choking on the diesel smoke, the sound of the generator splitting our ears. We'll pitch from side to side as the sand is sucked from the seabed so it can be searched for fine black crystals.

This is what my family does, from youngest to eldest. We scavenge for tin. We dig into the land or the seabed, mining for tin ore. The world can't live without tin. Tin is used inside smartphones and laptops, cars and computers – things I'll never have. I wonder if anyone ever thinks where it comes from, this metal glue that makes their gadgets work …

Or what we risk to get it.

I turn to Rustam, my uncle, who limps along beside me. "I don't want to go down into the water today," I say.

He grunts and tells me, "You must, Tono."

"But I'm only a kid – that's what you keep saying."

"You can work at your age," Rustam says, then adds, "And I can't go, can I? You want me dead like your old man? Who'll look after us all then?"

Rustam pushes me away, and I fall behind. I hate him. But I have to stay with Rustam, because Dad died and my mum left with my sister to find work. He doesn't really want me here, so I get the last of everything: food, clothes, kindness. Not that there's much to begin with.

Yan strides over the sand to join me. Yan is my cousin, and Rustam's son. He's almost a man now, and I share a room with him. He searches my face like he searches wet sand for tin. I know he's looking for tears. I won't show him any.

"Don't be scared, Tono," Yan says. He only has teeth on one side of his mouth, but he still smiles a lot. "No one's died in the mines for months. And I'll be near you."

"Can I have the wetsuit?" I ask him. "It's too small for you."

"And too big for you," Yan replies. "It'd flap about and slow you down." His tongue flicks over his broken teeth as always. "I know you wish you were some big deal in tights from those comics you read ..."

"Superheroes," I say.

"Yeah, yeah. The titanic Tin Boy!" Yan laughs. "Just remember, the person's the hero, Tono. They change into the suit – the suit doesn't change them."

"Real deep, Yan."

He smiles again. "Not as deep down as we're going, Tin Boy."

I snort, trying to laugh it off.

Truth is, I do wish I could pretend to be somebody stronger. I look down at myself. No shirt. Scrawny stick legs. Pale cotton shorts

held together by mud and stubbornness, like the rest of me.

The growl and sputter of the generators on the pontoons drowns out the sound of the ocean. Clouds of salt smoke and diesel blow across my face as I climb on board. Rustam and Yan push our raft out into the sea.

Yan puts on his wetsuit. It's grey where once it was black, and it's torn at the seams. He hands me my face mask as Rustam switches on the compressor, which blows dirty air down a plastic tube and into our lungs. A magic machine keeping us alive while we work. The whole pontoon trembles with the compressor's whine, and so do I.

The sea is busy with pontoons like ours. Then a deep sound blasts from the sky and we look past our rickety vessels to a giant ship – the dredger owned by a private mining company. The ship shakes as if it's laughing as it eats the world beneath the waves. Its

bucketwheels bite deep down into the seabed, spitting out mud and swallowing the tin. What will be left for us?

I look in the water, but it's thick with sand. It shows no reflection, like I'm invisible.

Yan puts an arm around me and steps off the raft. I hardly have time to put the air tube to my lips as we trail down into the warm, silty water. In the scattered light I see dark and distant monsters – men or machines prodding at the seabed. My lungs ache as I suck on the tube and my breath leaves as bubbles.

My bare feet sink into the seabed. Yan crouches with the hose, which sucks at the thick sand. We have to make a ditch with our handmade tools, many metres deep. My job is to smooth the side of the ditch, trying to make it strong. As the minutes drift past, I imagine Rustam high above us, sorting through the debris as it sprays out through the hose. The



air up there is thick with fumes, but I still want it, so badly.

Sand swarms about my face like mosquitoes. The wall of the ditch towers over us now, maybe three metres high. It gets harder to see. My heart is thumping, and I'm chewing the end of the tube to breathe air that tastes of rubber. And still the ditch must go deeper. I search the mud wall for a trail of tin ore – there's a line of white rocks and soil you look for. If we're lucky, there'll be lots. We aren't lucky very often.

Suddenly I spot something in the sandy floor at my feet. Not tin. It's red and glints like there's light in it.

What the hell is that?

Yan grabs me by the arm as I stoop to scoop it up. My heart lurches, but it's OK – Yan's smiling and nodding. He's found a tin trail to follow, which means full bellies tonight!

He's still smiling as a crack opens in the ditch wall behind him.

I grab him and kick my feet to launch away, but the mud wall falls on me too fast. The tube jerks from my mouth, and I'm buried in an avalanche.