WHERE the WORLD turns WILD

Nicola Penfold

Stripes

Praise for Where the World Turns Wild

"Some books are excellent story telling, and some books broaden your knowledge and mind, and some just ought to be written and this book is all three. I loved it."
Hilary McKay, author of *The Skylarks' War*

★

"A brilliant adventure that pulls you headlong into Juniper and Bear's world, where survival depends upon finding the wild."
Gill Lewis, author of *Sky Hawk*

★

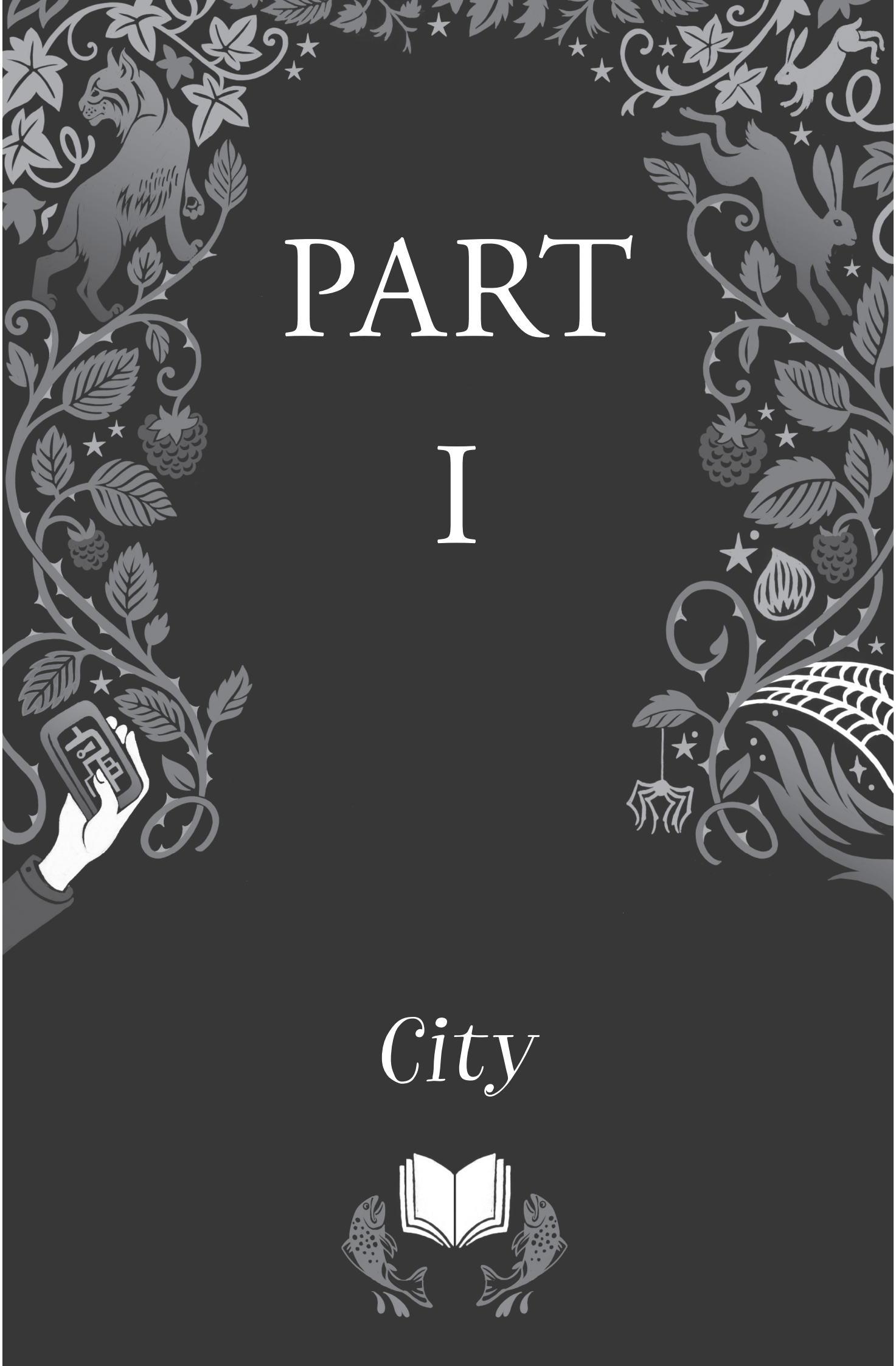
"I've raced through *Where the World Turns Wild*… I think it truly is a fabulous debut with a powerful ecological message that could not be more timely. The plot and characters kept me gripped […] and I can't wait to see what Nicola writes next!"
AM Howell, author of *The Garden of Lost Secrets*

★

"Nicola Penfold's *Where the World Turns Wild* is a journey between extremes of grey and green, propelled by a bold and timely concept, and written with sharp, intelligent prose. A truly heartfelt and very striking novel."
Darren Simpson, author of *Scavengers*

★

"A beautiful, memorable story about all the important things – love, family, loyalty, and courage – contained inside a brilliant adventure, *Where the World Turns Wild* can't fail to enthrall any reader lucky enough to encounter it."
Sinéad O'Hart, author of *The Eye of the North*



PART I

City



1

Once upon a time, almost fifty years ago, climate change and deforestation and humans ransacking everything good and beautiful, had driven our planet to breaking point. Nature was dying – plants and trees, animals, birds, insects – new species disappeared every day. But then the ReWilders created the disease.

It was grown in a lab by their best scientists and let loose in a population of ticks – eight-legged little creatures that hide in the undergrowth.

The beauty of the disease was no animal or bird ever got sick, only humans did. Humans got so sick they died. Lots of them. And the disease was so complex, so shifting, it was impossible to treat and impossible to vaccinate against. The only way for humans to survive was to live enclosed in cities, shut away from all other living things. And that, of course, had been the ReWilders' plan all along. For in the abandoned

wastelands outside the cities, nature could regrow, and it grew wilder and wilder. Wilder than ever.

It was humans or the Wild and the ReWilders chose the Wild. I would have chosen it too.



The glass tank is slippery in my hands and my cheeks burn red as I walk down the corridor from Ms Endo's room. Stick insects. One of the city's few concessions. Therapy for wayward kids. For us to concentrate on, to control our out-of-control imaginations. The Sticks are the last remedy in this place.

Before you're sent to the Institute. That's the next step. The cliff edge. There's no going back from that.

There's a whisper around me. Kids in my year and Etienne too, though he's calling my real name – "Juniper! Juniper!"

They're not going to forget this in a hurry. Juniper Green, getting the Sticks. But if I concentrate hard enough I can shut them out. I can shut them all out.

I grab my bag and storm past everyone – through the door and the playground, and across the road that separates Secondary from Primary. Bear will be glad of the insects at least.

But my brother's not in the surge of bodies rushing out of his Year Two classroom. I catch the teacher's eye quizzically

and she beckons me over. “I’m sorry, Juniper. He’s in with Mr Abbott. You’ll need to go and collect him.”

I gulp and my eyes sting with held-back tears. Not Bear too.

Ms Jester looks at the tank. “Your turn for the stick insects, huh?”

She puts a hand on my shoulder. She was my teacher once. One of the good ones.

I nod vacantly and make my way down the corridor, keeping my gaze straight ahead. There are fractals on the walls either side – repeating patterns that are meant to be good for your brain. Soothing or something. Usually the fractals are OK, but today the grey geometric patterns leading to Abbott’s room make my eyes hurt.

The head teacher’s room is right at the top of the school – a glass observatory from where he can survey not just Primary and Secondary but the whole of the city almost. I take a deep breath, but even before I knock Abbott’s voice rings out from behind the door. “Enter!”

I go in, leaving the stick insects outside so he doesn’t have another reason to gloat. The Sticks are Ms Endo’s thing. Abbott wouldn’t allow them if he had his way. They’re not meant as punishment – Ms Endo’s our pastoral support worker and she’s not like that – but still everyone knows. I’m on my final warning. One more slip up and I’ll be sent to the Institute.

Bear's curled in a plastic chair – his eyes rimmed red, his cheeks blotchy and swollen. I rush over. "Bear! What's happened?"

"Your family is surpassing itself, June. Twice in one day," Abbott chimes, signalling an empty chair. But Bear's not going to let me disentangle myself now, so I sit on the same chair and Bear folds himself into me, his head pressed against my chest. He's shaking.

"I'm afraid it was another disruptive day for your brother," Abbott says, frowning at Bear, who's completely turned away from him, his hands over his ears.

"OK," I say, wary, stroking Bear's long dark locks. The curls the other kids rib him for.

"I've made several attempts to contact your grandmother."

"She'll be in the glasshouse. She never hears the phone in there."

Abbott glares at me – his porcelain face cracked, like the vases you get in the Emporium, the old junk store just around the corner from our block. "Then make sure she checks her messages. We have to come up with a plan. Your brother's becoming increasingly difficult to control."

Use his name, I shout silently at Abbott. It's because he hates it, the same way he hates mine. Animals, trees, flowers – our city forbids them all, so I'm always June to Abbott. Plain, ordinary June.

"What happened?" I ask instead.

"Your brother threw a chair. It could have hit another child."

"It didn't?"

"That's not the point. He's wild." Abbott leans in closer and I can smell the carbolic. It's coming right out of his pores.

"He'd like to be," I say, nervous, wishing Annie Rose was here. She wouldn't hold back. Not when it comes to Bear. Well, of course he won't sit at a table all day and be quiet. He's a child. He needs to be outside more!

Abbott looks astonished. To him any defence is just impertinence. "I think we've heard enough on that subject for one day!"

The whispered hiss of the other kids comes back to me.

It's coming up to fifty years since the city declared itself tick free and our citizenship class had been asked for essays. 'Reasons to be proud'. The best ones were to be read out before the whole of Secondary. I should have known Abbott would get involved. Get involved and twist everything around.

What was I even thinking? 'The beauty of the disease'. 'Choosing the Wild'. I gave Abbott a plate of gold when I handed in that essay.

"Bear wouldn't want to hurt anyone," I go on, quieter now. If you knew him, I think. If you could see him with the plants in our glasshouse.

"Perhaps you'd care to see a clip of him this afternoon."

"No," I say quickly. "I don't need to."

But it's already playing. On the white screen Abbott has waiting on his desk for the ritual shaming, the humiliating rerun of misdemeanours.

Bear's a different person on that screen. Like a caged animal, if we even knew what that looked like any more.

"I'd really rather not watch," I say. I can feel Bear's heart racing – fast, fast, too fast. His fingers are pale from holding them against his ears so tightly that not one decibel goes in. I want to pick him up and carry him away, but I've had enough warnings today about where rebellions lead.

I wish I could shut my eyes, like Bear has, but Abbott's gaze doesn't leave my face. He's watching my reaction. He's enjoying this.

On screen, Bear's thrown a pot of crayons across the floor – scattered them, like a broken rainbow. Ms Jester's come over, smiling, but cautiously. The other children have formed an arc. Leering around him, they're laughing, expectant.

"Why did he do that?" I ask. "Bear loves drawing. Something must have upset him."

Abbott remains silent. I can hear the chant through the speakers.

"Through the city storms an angry bear."

The on-screen Bear is bristling. If he was a bear, all the

hairs on his body would be raised.

"Shall we pick these up?" Ms Jester's saying. She's kneeling down to help him, but the chant's getting louder.

"*An angry bear*

With his long brown hair.

Send him back! Send him back!

Send him back to the forest!"

"Class, please! Quiet!" Ms Jester's begging them but Bear's already starting to shriek. Hands over his ears, he's opened his mouth as wide as he can and he's screaming.

The children explode into laughter – they're pointing and coming closer. It's not an arc any more, it's a circle and Bear's in the middle of it – screaming, lashing out.

"Please turn it off," I say to Abbott. My tears are coming now.

"This is the part, here," he says dispassionately.

That's when Bear breaks free of me. He runs out of the room and down the stairs, and I go after him, I have to, only just remembering to pick up the Sticks on my way. So I never see Bear picking up that chair. I never see whether he meant to hurt anyone. I wouldn't blame him if he had.

About the Author



Nicola Penfold was born in Merseyside and grew up in Doncaster. She studied English at Cambridge, before completing a Computing Science Master's programme at Imperial College London. Nicola has worked in a reference library and for a health charity, but being a writer was always the job she wanted most. *Where the World Turns Wild* was shortlisted for the first Joan Aiken Future Classics Prize in 2017. It was also selected for SCBWI's 2018 Undiscovered Voices anthology. Nicola writes in the coffee shops and green spaces of North London, where she lives with her husband, four children and two cats, and escapes when she can to wilder corners of the UK for adventures.