
WELCOME TO
TRASH
LAND
STEVE
COLE
ILLUSTRATED BY
ORIOL
VIDAL

WELCOME TO TRASH LAND

STEVE COLE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ORIOL VIDAL

Barrington Stoke

For Caroline Northwood

First published in 2021 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

Text © 2021 Steve Cole
Illustrations © 2021 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: 978-1-78112-982-1

Printed by Hussar Books, Poland

CONTENTS

1.	Welcome to Trashland	1
2.	Fighting Strangers	8
3.	On the Trail	16
4.	At Gifty's	27
5.	X the Unknown	39
6.	Itching and Scratching	50
7.	Confrontation	61
8.	Lost and Found	70
9.	Lockup and Breakout	79
10.	Things Kick Off	90
11.	Treasure	102
12.	Dreaming	109

CHAPTER 1

Welcome to Trashland

If your phone goes wrong, do you throw it away? How about your TV or your tablet or your speakers? Or do you recycle these things?

I bet you recycle. You're told it's the right thing to do. It's kinder to the earth, right?

Sure it is.

It's funny, the way the world works. Companies spend millions making cool electronic stuff like smartphones. The bits inside have to be exact, or they won't work.

People working on factory production lines carefully put the whole thing together so it's perfect: sleek and shiny and brand new. You buy it. You love it.

But when the thing is old or stops working, it's not sent back to the factory. There's no production line waiting to take it apart again and rescue the bits inside that still work, or take out the precious metals so they can be used again. Getting rid of this thing is not the company's problem. They made it real good, and you bought it. It's yours. If it doesn't work any more, it's your problem.

So you take it to the dump and you go home and it stops being your problem.

Instead, it becomes ours.

*

I like it best here at night cos you can't see so much. There are small fires blazing in the dump 24/7, but I'm in a tiny shack with a sheet over it, which keeps out some of the smoke.

I guess I'm lucky cos I have a sack for a pillow and some cardboard to lie on. Thing is, I share the shack with five chickens and they are noisy. I guard them for this guy during the night so he lets me stay in the shack for free. Unless something happens to one of the chickens, then I pay plenty. I've still got bruises from the last time a chicken got out and a dog killed it, and that was almost a month ago now.

I have a headache too, but that's the bad air. The smoke fills you up and makes you sick.

I dream of living in a proper house. When I look out through the holes in the sheet, I can see dark shadows behind the fires. They could almost be buildings, you know? Buildings with no lights at the windows. A shut-up city, all empty.

But they're not buildings.

The sun rises, big like an orange spilling bright juice between the clouds, and I wake up coughing. The sunlight shows you what the firelight can't: there are no real buildings out there behind the smoke. There are just piles of trash. Stacks of fridge-freezers and dishwashers piled up high. Mountains of TVs and hard drives. Teetering towers of tyres waiting to be burned. The waste stretches out as far as I can see.



I'm Theo. I'm thirteen, I think. I've been stuck here in the mega-dump for more than a year. Living. Working. Watching the chickens.

Waiting.

Dad brought me here and then he left. He said he was coming back. He was waving to me and he definitely said it.

I guess something happened.



Stuff does happen, doesn't it? And some of it's crazy.

Like, I bet you never thought that useless DVD player you threw out could end up all the way over here in Ghana, huh? Or that old Xbox 360. Or that crappy mobile your friends made fun of.

Well, chances are it did end up here. From Europe and America, all the way here to West Africa. I hope you're listening, cos this stuff is true. Mr Ghazi told me, and he knows lots cos he runs things here in the dump.

Mr Ghazi's my boss. He organises us child workers. It's not easy, cos there are hundreds of us kids here. And thousands more who are older. And we're all scrabbling about in the dirt and the muck for the tatty treasures that can bring us the cash we need to eat each day.

Mr Ghazi says we're heroes. We're the ones who are really saving the planet.

See, if you bury electronic trash it doesn't rot away. It stays where it is and makes the soil bad. No country wants to bury that stuff in their own soil, but there are laws to stop people sending away their trash to other countries.

Some of the recycling companies get around that by not calling it trash. They call it "used electronics" instead and load up big boats full of it. Some of it ends up in Accra, the capital of Ghana. Some of it can be fixed and sold on. Some of it can't.

If it can't, then it gets dumped here in Agbogbloshie. That's a big name, but you don't have to worry about how to say it.

I call it home, but you can just call it Trashland.