OLD GODS NEW TRICKS

www.davidficklingbooks.com

Also by Thiago de Moraes

Myth Atlas
History Atlas

A Mummy Ate My Homework!
A Gladiator Stole My Lunchbox!

For younger readers

The Night Bear (with Ana de Moraes)
The Zoomers' Handbook (with Ana de Moraes)

OLD GODS NEW TRICKS

THIAGO DE MORAES



FICKLING
dfb
David Fickling Books

Old Gods New Tricks
is a
DAVID FICKLING BOOK

First published in Great Britain in 2023 by
David Fickling Books,
31 Beaumont Street,
Oxford, OX1 2NP

Text and illustrations © Thiago de Moraes, 2023

978-1-78845-295-3

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

The right of Thiago de Moraes 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,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by
any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or
otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Papers used by David Fickling Books are from well-
managed forests and other responsible sources.

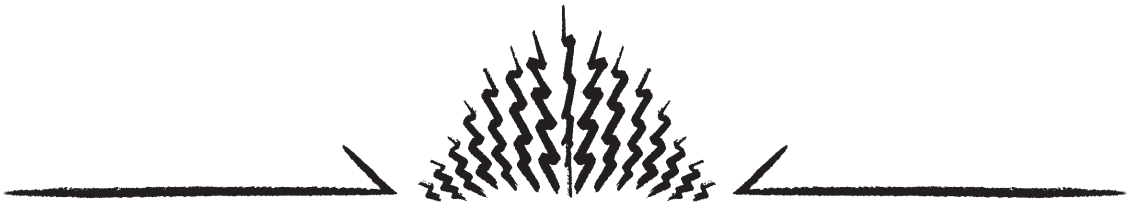


DAVID FICKLING BOOKS Reg. No. 8340307

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

Typeset in Goudy Old Style by Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

To Ana, who told me I should write a story about tricksters.



Although her academic record is not irredeemably hopeless, our concern remains that Miss dos Santos's main efforts in the school environment seem to consist of outlandish schemes that constantly disrupt the lives of both teachers and fellow students. If the energy and endeavour which she applies to these 'tricks', as she likes to call them, were diverted to more productive ends, we are in no doubt that she and the school would benefit immensely.

Beatrix Nielsen dos Santos – Disciplinary Record,
page 93, various authors



CHAPTER 1
TROUBLE

When the lights went out, Trixie was at school.

So were her parents, sitting alongside her, facing a large pile of coloured folders, all marked *Beatrix Nielsen dos Santos – Disciplinary Record*. Behind the stack of papers was Mr Porter, the headteacher. He kept looking down as he spoke, fiddling with his tiny reading glasses and shuffling the papers on his desk.

'. . . and the fact is, Mr and Ms dos Santos, that we have given Trixie chance after chance to behave better. Sadly it doesn't seem to work. I'm not saying that placing a bag of, er . . . WhizzBang Novelty Stinking Fart Powder in the school's air-conditioning system during final exams week is the *final* straw, but it is most definitely the straw that fell on to the poor camel's back right before the final straw.'

'Sorry, Mr Porter, I'm not sure I'm following you,' said Trixie's mother.

‘What I’m trying to say, Ms dos Santos, is that, hmm . . .’ He stopped, looking genuinely upset. ‘One more prank, and Trixie is out.’

‘Out of what?’ asked her dad.

‘This school, I’m afraid,’ the headteacher explained. ‘I understand she thinks these schemes are amusing, but they disrupt our school life immensely . . . Miss Hoppitt says her hair still smells rather flatulent even after multiple washes. We can’t be having that.’

Trixie had been sitting between her parents, trying to look as innocent as possible. She stood up, eyes wide at the headteacher.

‘I’m sorry, Mr Porter! I swear I won’t do it again!’

‘I’m afraid it’s too late for that, Trixie,’ Mr Porter replied. ‘One more incident and we’ll have to let you go.’

‘I promise it’s for real this time!’ Trixie said, placing one hand behind her back and another on her chest. ‘Listen: I, Trixie Nielsen dos Santos, swear by Tyr’s missing hand that I will not get up to funny business at school any more.’

The headteacher cocked his head at Trixie and blinked, slowly. He looked like a tired owl who had lost most of its feathers.

‘Teer? Who’s that? Is it one of those people you kids are always watching on your phones? The ones who chat endlessly about playing video games?’

'No,' said Trixie. 'Tyr is the Norse god of justice, war and lots of other things. Great for oaths!'

'I'm sorry, Mr Porter,' said Trixie's dad. 'She's a bit obsessed with that old stuff.'

'I'm not *obsessed*, Dad,' said Trixie. 'I am *very interested*, like any *serious* scholar of ancient beliefs should be.' She turned to Mr Porter, who had remained in a fug of confusion throughout the exchange, and beamed. 'I would like to pursue a career in archaeology in the future.'

'There'll be no career in anything if you get kicked out of school, Beatrix,' said her mum. 'Now sit down and listen to what Mr Porter is saying.'

'Thank you, Ms dos Santos. Trixie, it's lovely to see your interest in other cultures, but I'm afraid that this is quite a serious matter.' Mr Porter opened his laptop. 'I'm going to have to file this official report with the education board, and after that happens, the formal procee—'

He stopped talking.

'Odd . . . I was about to hit "send", but my computer just turned off.'

'So did the lights, actually,' said Trixie's father.

'. . . And that little desk heater,' added his mother.

They all turned and looked at Trixie, who was standing very, very still.

'Beatrix dos Santos! This better not be you again, young lady,' her mother yelled.

‘It’s not, Mum, I swear,’ she said. ‘I’ve been here with you the whole time, haven’t I?’

Mr Porter had stopped paying attention to the conversation. He got up and walked to the window. ‘It looks like the whole school is out of power. The traffic lights seem to be off too. I’m afraid we’ll have to continue this meeting another time. I have to deal with this.’

‘We’re really sorry, Mr Porter,’ said Trixie’s dad. ‘We’ll talk to her and make sure she behaves from now on.’

‘I’m really sorry too, Mr Porter,’ said Trixie, her worried frown turning into a grin. She waved to the headteacher and skipped out of the room. ‘Thanks, Mr Porter!’

She followed her parents as they walked down the corridor towards the huge glass doors that led out of the school. All around them, students streamed out of their lessons, a bit baffled by the sudden power outage but happy to have an early break.

‘Trixie,’ said her mother as they stepped outside, ‘are you absolutely sure you had nothing to do with this?’

‘Yes, Mum,’ said Trixie. ‘I am absolutely sure I didn’t make the whole school lose power whilst sitting quietly with you and Dad in Mr Porter’s office.’

‘There’s no need to take that tone with your mum, Beatrix,’ said her dad.

‘Well, there’s no need for her to think that I’m behind everything that goes wrong around here.’

'You usually are,' said her mother.

'True, but this time it definitely wasn't me.'

'That might be the case when it comes to this power thing, but what Mr Porter told us is still very serious,' said her dad. 'I know you think your tricks and games are fun, but they're not. They're selfish. Next time you feel like pulling another prank, think about the people you might upset. You're grounded, no screens and no leaving the house until Monday. That should give you enough time to consider your behaviour.'

'Aaaaaaaawwwww, Dad . . .' moaned Trixie. 'You know I was just messing.'

'Don't "aaw, Dad" me. You should have thought about that before you placed fart powder in the air conditioning. It might have been hilarious to you, but it caused your teachers a lot of grief, and there's more, you know that . . .'

Trixie's head sank between her shoulders. It wasn't the first speech her dad had given her about trying to be more considerate, and after the first few words she stopped paying attention. She was waiting for the sound of his voice to stop so she could ask for her phone back when a car sped past them, weaving unsteadily along the road in front of the school. All three turned their heads to watch as the vehicle veered on to the pavement, barely avoiding a group of sixth-formers, and hit the

side of a pedestrian traffic light with a loud crash. A horrible crunching noise made Trixie wince as the bonnet crumpled like tinfoil, wrapping itself around the light's metal post, and folding it down like a broken branch.



Trixie and her parents stood completely still for a moment, then ran towards the wreck. A man, his clothes dishevelled and eyes unfocused, was trying to climb out of the driver's door, helped by some of the students the car had almost hit moments before.

'Er . . . I'm so sorry . . .' he said, looking around. 'I don't know what happened. All the lights on the dashboard went out and then the engine stopped working, I couldn't control the car . . .'

'It's OK,' said Trixie's mother. 'Luckily no one else got hurt. Why don't you sit down while I call an ambulance?'

As her dad helped the man sit down on the kerb, Trixie's mum picked up a mobile phone and dialled a number. After waiting for a long while she hung up. 'The emergency services number is busy, too many people must be calling them already.'

A crowd had formed around them. Some teachers had left the school and offered to take the driver in as he waited for an ambulance to arrive.

'Are you sure you'll be OK?' Trixie's dad asked the man.

'I think so,' the driver replied. 'I don't understand it. It's a brand-new electric car, I only got it a couple of weeks ago.'

'Maybe there's something wrong with it,' said Trixie. 'These things are super buggy. Let me check if there's

anything about it online.'

She picked up her mobile to look, but her dad took the phone before she had time to unlock it.

'No screens, remember?'

'Daaad . . .' whinged Trixie. 'This is an emergency.'

'You can have it back on Monday,' said her mum, scrolling through her own phone. 'There's nothing here about faulty electric cars, but lots on the power outage. Apparently it's happening across town.'

'That's weird,' said Trixie's dad. 'I can't remember the whole place being without power once since we moved here.'

'Was that before or after the dinosaurs moved out?' asked Trixie.

'It was before this particularly horrid little dinosaur hatched,' said her dad, putting his arm around her shoulder.

They waited until the man was safely escorted into the school, then walked home as the low autumn sun began to set. Trixie felt that the town, where she had lived all her life and which she knew every single corner of, looked odd, faintly menacing, like a person one momentarily mistakes for a friend before realizing they are actually a complete stranger. The small playground where she usually met her friends was empty, swings creaking slowly against the wind; the newsagent across



the road, usually full of kids buying sweets, was also oddly silent, a grey emptiness brooding behind the brightly coloured windows. Trixie could see that her parents felt the same as they walked in silence, leaving the tiny town centre behind, slow steps taking them through a jumble of winding streets where closely packed brown buildings hid behind plastic bins which had been left scattered to block the narrow pavements.

By this hour, the rows of neat little terraced houses that lined the road leading to Trixie's home would usually be lit up, full of dinners being made and little kids watching cartoons by front-room windows. Now all she could see was the street coloured a deep red and purple by the setting sun – a giant bruise, spreading and darkening as evening took hold. Inside some houses the dim, insufficient lights of mobile phones, torches and candles wavered and flickered as people tried to find ways to keep the dark away.

Trixie and her parents walked up the hill to their house, which was at the very top of the road. Behind it the lane narrowed and sloped down into a messy, winding valley speckled with dwindling buildings, last outposts of the town as it sunk into the countryside beyond.

With the streetlights out, the road was very dark; Trixie's dad had to turn his mobile phone torch on to fit

the key into the front door. Behind it, they could hear frantic scratching.

The door had barely begun to open when a small, dark figure sprang from the gap towards Trixie, hitting her straight in the chest.