Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

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

Opening extract from

Iron Hand

Written by

Charlie Fletcher

Published by

Hachette

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

THE STORY SO FAR . . .

On a school trip George breaks a carving of a dragon on the front of the Natural History Museum. This wakes an ancient force imprisoned in the Stone – a rough block, hidden deep in the City of London. As an immediate result a vengeful carving of a pterodactyl peels off the side of the building and begins chasing him. Just when all seems lost a statue of a World War One soldier, the Gunner, steps off a war memorial and saves him.

So begins George's ordeal – trapped in a layer of London, an *un*London, a city in which the two mutually hostile tribes of statues – the human-based spits and the inhuman taints – walk and talk and live in an uneasy truce, a truce that George's action has thrown into jeopardy.

But on the way the Gunner has sacrificed himself to try and save Edie, and ultimately falls into the clutches of the Walker. It is left to George to use his new found gifts as a Maker to rescue her.

And now the story continues . . .

1

DARKNESS FALLS

The Walker and the Gunner fell into the dark, pitched into a deep abyssal blackness beyond even the memory of light. But even though there was no possibility of seeing anything, the Gunner sensed they were plummeting through a succession of layers, as black seemed to flash an even deeper blackness in an unpleasant negative strobing that he felt rather than saw.

And then the horrible movement through the void stopped abruptly as they hit something solid.

The Gunner's knees crunched down into wet gravel, and his free hand instinctively palmed out to halt his fall, sending a jarring shock up his arm as it smacked into an unseen stone wall in front of him. He hung there, head low, angled between the wall and the ground, panting for

of his army britches as he took his breath.

He scooped up the helmet, straightened up, smoothed the front of his uniform tunic, and adjusted the cape round his shoulders. It wasn't a real cape. It was the canvas ground-sheet from a one-man tent, hung round his shoulders to keep the weather off, tied in place with a piece of string through two grommet holes. He put on the helmet and then he stood up straight, every inch the battle-worn World War One veteran that he'd been sculpted to be.

And then his mouth, despite his best intentions, fell open again as his jaw dropped in shock.

They were in a large and ancient underground water tank. His feet stood on a small shelf of pea-gravel that sloped against one wall. This tiny beach took a bite out of a rough square of black water, about ten metres on each side. The irregular blocks of stone lining the walls of the tank were greasily mottled with age and tumoured with sickly blooms of fungus that hung around them at what looked like a high-water mark. Drips from the stone roof of the chamber plopped concentric circles into the dark surface below.

But it wasn't the claustrophobic dimensions of this doorless chamber with its dark water floor and half-moon gravel beach that made the Gunner gasp in surprise.

It was the lights.

reflections of light around the room, revealing more of the edges of the subterranean tank.

'It was a void, and darkness was all it contained until I came across it. Now it is a place of power. My power.'

The Gunner felt burdened and squeezed by the great pressure of earth above him. He felt as lost as if he had been spirited into the bowels of the earth and pinned beneath a mountain. But he was damned if he was going to let the Walker enjoy his discomfort.

"Where are we? Where is this?"

The Walker spun slowly in full circle, sending the reflected beams of light around the dank edges of the chamber.

'We are under London. A city you will only ever see again in your memories.'

The Gunner would have swung a fist at the Walker, but the wrongness inside him seemed to have sapped his normal strength and left him needing all his energy just to stay on his feet. And besides, he had to know what was going on. He was nowhere he'd ever been, feeling like nothing he'd ever felt; and he could always try and flatten the Walker later, when he came within easier reach. Although he had a suspicion that escaping or even surviving whatever was happening to him was going to require more than swinging fists.

'Talk plainer.'

The Gunner tried to lift his hands, determined to wrench one of the ceiling slabs down into the water to show the Walker he was wrong. But his arms wouldn't move to do it. He shook his head in frustration.

'I think I'm gonna grab you and shove your mirrors where the monkey put its nuts, that's what I think.'

He lurched towards the Walker, but he was much too slow, and the Walker danced back out of his reach. The Gunner stumbled back against the wall, horrified by how weak he'd become, and as he reached back to stop himself falling he dislodged one of the bright pieces of glass.

It fell at his feet and he stared at it, at the opaque surface, at the rounded, sea-tumbled edges of it. And as he stared, his memory fired on reflex – and he saw a similar piece of tumbled glass in Edie's hand. Then it fired again – and he remembered the first time he'd seen her smile, like sunlight breaking cleanly across her face, and he relived the surprise he'd felt when he realized that all it had taken to kindle that blaze was to smile at her and call her by her real name, and he remembered strongly how that realization had made him feel suddenly fiercely protective about this strange and outwardly flinty girl. And that surge of paternal protectiveness collided with the dreadful realization slowly spreading across his mind