

This Land

The Search for Māui

Book One

By Mark Abnett

Art by P.R. Dedelis

- Reading • Writing • Thinking Skills
- Social Studies • Art



Synopsis Book One

Earth is sick and humankind begins searching for a new planet that can support human life. Unfortunately, an exploration vessel is sabotaged, resulting in the Earth's moon being destroyed. This results in a shift in gravity and tectonic plates, causing a new continent – Te Riu-a-Māui – to arise around Aotearoa. And then the Fever is released, killing many people. New tribes evolve among the survivors, who have to adapt to their new environment.

An ancient god (Tāne) returns to Aotearoa, looking for Māui. Because of the stir his arrival causes in Axeland, Tāne is arrested. He can communicate only with Hell'na of the Pānui tribe, who assembles a band of six misfits with a range of special talents to help him on his quest. First, they break Tāne out of jail. After all joining hands with Tāne, they find they can then understand his godspk.

The Axeland Commissioner (known to Hell'na as Aunty Ngaire) hires a band of mercenaries (Shepherd's Crew) to trail the group, in the hope that they will lead them to Tāne.

Hell'na's band first journeys to the land of the Whitetomb, a tribe that lives underground with a huge Taniwha that protects them. In the Great War of the Tribes (15 years earlier), the Taniwha joined the battle; then, as a peace offering, and to avoid their own destruction, the Pānui tribe gave up their Princess Chase (Hell'na's best friend) to the Whitetomb. Chase possesses the means to forge and mould mana steel, a rare and desirable commodity in the New World.

Hell'na and her team visit the Whitetomb to speak with their representative, the Vox Populi (Voice of the People), and, in a dramatic scene, attempt to rescue Chase ... but as a result, the Taniwha is also released. One of Hell'na's companions, Moa, defeats the Taniwha, but Moa and Chase both die in the process.

Readers are then introduced to Shepherd's Crew, who are tailing them, in more detail.

Tāne relates to Hell'na's band the story of the gods and how he and his brothers trapped Whiro (Lord of Darkness) in the Underworld.

Book 1 ends with Tāne taking Hell'na to the Underworld to meet Hine-nui-te-pō. There Tāne sees the fallen Māui – whom Hell'na recognises as her friend, Luke.

About the Creators

Born and raised in New Zealand, **Mark Abnett** is now based in Scotland. He won the Netflix-owned Millarworld Talent Contest in 2016 with his Hit-Girl story *Mindy's ABCs*, published by Image Comics in America. He is passionate about storytelling that can help bring the heritage and history of Aotearoa to life through the highly visual medium of comics.

His artistic team consists of artist P.R. Dedelis from Poland; colourist Liezl Buenaventura from the Philippines; British letterers Rob Jones and Hassan Otsmane-Elhaou; Māori communications and engagement practitioner Verona-Meiana Putaranui; designers Hekiera Mareroa, Seb Wikaraka Peni and Te Haunui Tuna, and translator and cultural practitioner Trent Brown-Marsh.

Writing and Illustration Style

This Land: The Search for Māui is a graphic novel, which means that the narrative is told primarily through art presented in a sequential format. Graphic novels are incredibly popular with students, including reluctant readers, and provide a means for engaging students with an extended text.

Graphic novels are a powerful tool that can be used to enhance student engagement, increase visual literacy, comprehension and language skills, and build reader confidence. The graphic novel format allows complicated plots and content to be presented in a way that is accessible and appealing to students.

This Land: The Search for Māui is set on the futuristic continent of Te-Riu-a-Māui. Students are able to draw on their prior geographic and cultural knowledge of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori atua (gods) and legendary figures, pandemics, superheroes and comic book conventions to access the text. Themes include the fight for survival, power and conflicting interests, and the importance of whānau.

Text is presented as speech bubbles with a sprinkling of te reo Māori, which is supported by short in-panel glossaries. Onomatopoeia is used in comic book style. The inclusion of maps and fact pages provide geographic information and demographic, cultural and historical background on the Pāhunu and Whitetomb tribes. Intended for readers aged 10+ years.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Look at the front cover and ask the students:

- What do you think this graphic novel will be about?
- Who are the main characters?
- Will some characters be heroes and some be villains? Why do you think that?

Read the blurb and ask:

- What do the words 'continent', 'taniwha', 'chaos' and 'misfits' mean?
- What special abilities might the characters have?
- Who do you think the character on the back cover might be? Why might he be looking for Māui?

Before reading, discuss features of graphic novels, such as sequential art, panels, splash pages, speech and thought bubbles, captions, onomatopoeia (sound words), the use of symbolism and techniques used to show movement or the passage of time.

Comprehension questions

- What do you notice about placenames on the map? Why do you think people sometimes use names from places they have known in other locations or times when naming new places? (p.4)
- When and where does the story open? Which graphic novel feature tells you this? (p.5)
- What does Hell'na's clothing tell the reader about her? What is being depicted in the burst of flames? How do you think flames may be significant to Hell'na? Why do you think the creators used a double splash page at this point of the story? (pp.6-7)
- What is being conveyed by the three top panels labelled 'Death'? (p.8)
- What colour is the sky behind the newsreader and what does this mean? What brings 'Hope' to civilisation? What are people using to try and reach their goal? How is international cooperation shown? (pp.8-9)



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

- Why is a ballot needed for the Avalon Space Settlement? What is conveyed by the label 'Fear'? Why is there conflict in the streets? (p.9)
- What has caused the 'Rebellion'? What outcome does it have? (pp.10–11)
- What is an 'ulterior motive'? Why might Hell'na's Auntie Ngaire want to keep her out of Axeland? (p.12)
- Who has been harmed by the arrival of the god? Why have the creators associated the colour green with this god? Who might he be? Why does Hell'na attack the god and what does she draw on to create her weapon? (pp.13–17)
- How does the fact page on the Pāhunu tribe and the map help you better understand the first section of the text? What have you learnt about Hell'na and her people that you didn't know before? (pp.18–19)
- Which city in Aotearoa New Zealand is Axeland reminiscent of? What information in the text tells you this? Why do you think Hell'na is the only person who can understand the god? (pp.20–21)
- Predict what you think Hell'na's 'proper use' might be. (p.23)
- In which direction should pages 24–25 be read? How do you know?
- Why have the creators used a different font for some of the speech bubbles? How do the characters' expressions convey meaning? (p.26)
- What kind of a person is Dre? Who is he to Hell'na? (pp.27–29)
- How do you know Hell'na is remembering what Tāne said to her? (p.29)
- What does the symbol on the back of Hell'na's coat represent? (p.31)
- Why is Hell'na interviewing people? Why does she say 'I'm doomed'? (p.32)
- Why has Tāne not touched food or gone to the bathroom while being locked up? (p.33)
- Who is the character being held in Axeland Central Station Holding Block B? Predict his significance to the story? (p.35)
- How do pages 36–41 help you learn about Hell'na's crew? Who is your favourite character and why?
- What went whooshing through the air? What happened to Beach? (pp.38–39)
- Why do you think Tāne wants to go to the Underworld? (p.41)
- What did Tāne use to create a bridge across the Bombay Gorge? (p.45)
- Who or what does Commissioner Ngaire want to be delivered? (p.46)
- What are 'mercenaries'? Why do you think they have been hired? (p.47)
- What is the significance of Day 12: Waitomo Caves, The Whitetomb being the largest panel on the spread? (pp.48–49)
- How is water able to run up, down and around the caves of Whitetomb? How have the people of Whitetomb evolved? (p.50)
- Why would it be necessary to 'protect and defend' the lost knowledge from the time before the machines died? (p.52)
- What is 'honour'? Why might Rana and Hell'na have different views of what is honourable? (p.53)
- What does Hell'na want to achieve by going to Whitetomb? Predict whether or not she will be successful and what you think will happen next. (p.53)
- Where is the light coming from in New Aranui? What do you notice about the buildings in the city? How would the multicultural background of the people be a strength of Whitetomb society? (pp.54–55)
- Who is the Vox Populi thinking of as a replacement for Princess Chase? Why? (p.58)
- With Tāne's strength, what does Moa transform into? (pp.62–63)
- How does the use of onomatopoeia (sound words) add to the excitement of the battle between the taniwha and Moa? (pp.61–67)
- What is Pania suggesting they do? Why? (p.70)
- What is the meaning of 'stygian' and 'insatiable'? (p.75) According to Tāne, who is wanting to take over the world? (p.76)
- What are Tāne and Hell'na looking for in Lake Tāupo? (pp.81–82)
- Who is on the ground? Who is Luke? What is meant by 'They who do not seek will not find'? (p.84)



Activities

ACTIVITY 1: HELL'NA'S BACKSTORY

Create a backstory for Hell'na, explaining her life leading up to where *This Land: Book One* begins. Present the backstory as a comic strip. Consider the following: Where did Hell'na grow up? Who were her parents? Who were her friends? What helped Hell'na become a leader and a strong character? How did she develop her powers?

ACTIVITY 2: BEFORE WHITETOMB THERE WAS WAITOMO...

Research to learn more about Waitomo Caves, the inspiration for Whitetomb. How were the caves formed? How old are they? When were they discovered? What is the meaning of 'Waitomo'? What is their significance to Māori? Which animal famously lives inside the Waitomo Caves? Present your findings as Google Slides, including photos and a map.

ACTIVITY 3: CREATE A CHARACTER

Create a character who might appear in *This Land: Book Two*. Draw your character and include a title (their name), three personality traits and at least one power. Write a caption explaining who your character is and what motivates them.

ACTIVITY 4: EXPAND THE STORY

Choose one double-page spread and expand the story into written form. Include a description of the setting and describe the action taking place. Expand the speech bubbles into dialogue.

ACTIVITY 5: PREDICT THE FUTURE

Take a sneak peek at the cover of *This Land: Book Two* (p.85) and the teaser on the last page. Predict what you think is going to happen in Book Two. Either draw your predictions as a comic strip, including speech bubbles and captions, or write them.

Written by Frances McBeath



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC