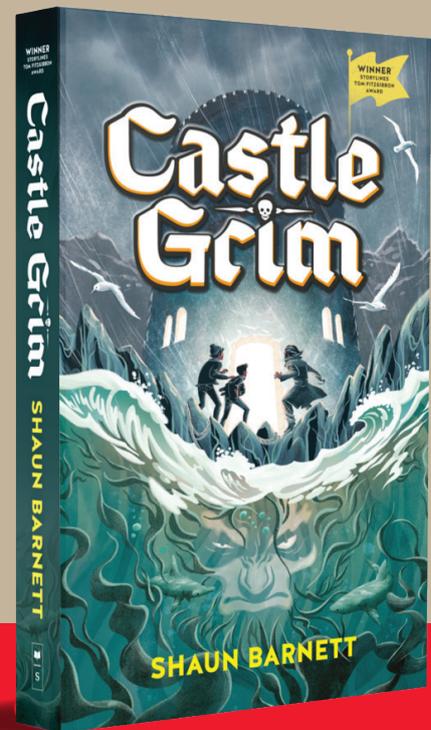


# Castle Grim

By Shaun Barnett

Cover illustration by Craig Phillips



• Reading • Writing • Social Studies • Art

## Synopsis

Aotearoa, circa 2023. After a devastating pandemic, New Zealand is isolated from the rest of the world, and cut off from outside contact. While the country and most of its citizens survived the pandemic after cutting off its borders, the nation is increasingly divided and dysfunctional, with each region looking after itself and no central government.

Herman Reed lives with his mother and father in Nelson, one of the still prosperous regions, which has survived better due to its sunny climate and fertile lands. Herman is bookish and intelligent, but longs for some adventure – something often denied to him by his conservative and protective father.

There is tension at home too, as Herman's mother, Ivy, thinks that the regions should be helping one another, while Conrad Reed believes Wellington is losing the battle against corruption and criminals and that sending any of Nelson's resources would be feeding them to the pirates and criminals.

Herman has recently heard rumours of pirates raiding Cook Strait, and thieves are said to be worsening the plight of Wellington's citizens too. Despite the dangers, Herman desperately wants to visit Wellington, known as the Broken City, where his brave Uncle Charlie – a sailor and trader – often visits. Then he can prove his bravery, and escape his bookish reputation. When Uncle Charlie offers to take Conrad and Herman to Wellington, Conrad flatly refuses, much to Herman's bitter disappointment.

However there is one thing that might change Conrad's mind. A rumour that his third brother, Christopher Reed, – believed to have drowned in Cook Strait decades ago – somehow miraculously survived and has been seen lately in Wellington.

Uncle Charlie convinces Conrad to sail across Cook Strait and let Herman come too. But a terrible storm soon separates the three Reeds, leaving Herman's father lost at sea, his uncle Charlie searching for him near the mysterious Broken Islands (a piratebase?) and Herman left at one of Wellington's orphanages as there is nowhere else safe enough to leave him in the so-called Broken City.

Herman soon finds himself in the strange and grim new world of the Broken City, staying in the stone, castle-like Haewai Keep, with 12 other orphans, under the 'care' of the cruel and stern Sister Slink and brutal Brother Bash. Over coming weeks, with no news of his uncle and father, Herman and the orphans are increasingly caught up in an adventure that may well save Wellington. But it will take all of Herman's inventiveness, intelligence and bravery, along with the teamwork of the diverse orphans.

## About the Author

**Shaun Barnett** grew up in Auckland, the Waikato and Hawke's Bay before shifting to Wellington. He gained a degree in zoology and began his career working as a ranger for the Department of Conservation. Over time he followed his passion for photographing and writing about the New Zealand backcountry, being involved with Wilderness and Backcountry magazines both as a contributor and editor, as well as authoring a number of acclaimed books about tramping in New Zealand. Shaun explored just about every backcountry track and hut that Aotearoa has to offer and has often been described as the leading tramping author of his generation. Shaun loved to tramp, sea kayak, climb and spend time in nature – but he also loved to read. He loved children's literature throughout his life and some of his favourite childhood authors were Lloyd Alexander, Roald Dahl, Franklin W Dixon, Maurice Gee, Tove Jansson, Ursula K Le Guin, CS Lewis, Margaret Mahy, JRR Tolkien and Willard Price. Sadly, Shaun passed away before this book was published.



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# Writing Style

*Castle Grim* is a thrilling adventure story written for the 9+ age group. Shaun Barnett's only children's novel is set in futuristic Nelson and Wellington, in a world where global communication doesn't exist. Shaun's background in biology, ecology, conservation and the wild New Zealand backcountry is evident in his descriptive writing. What's also evident is how family, books and the outdoors, which were an integral part of Shaun, are such an important part of this tale as well.

The book, which is divided into 40 compelling chapters, starts with a map of the Walled City to help you visualise where the landmarks in the story are located. The book explores the themes of courage, tenacity, friendship and family, which are themes that also ran through Shaun's personal life.

The narrative is written in the third person past tense. Herman is the main character and the star of his own adventure. Direct speech and action-filled descriptions help to create a fast-moving pace. Along the way, Herman and the other 'goodies' face crisis after crisis. Characters such as pirates, kidnappers, lighthouse keepers, orphanage caretakers, ferocious dogs and lookout watchers all help build the drama.

At the beginning of the book, there's a heartfelt note from the author's family, explaining how Shaun wrote this last book over a period of 12 years before he sadly passed away, drawing inspiration from the two lighthouses that he could see from his writing desk. There's also an 'About the Author' page that highlights the wealth of knowledge that Shaun gained from his working life, pastimes and love of literature. At the back of the book, there's a helpful glossary that features some Māori words and phrases and their English definitions.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Proficient readers ask and answer questions about the characters and events in a story to help them make sense of what they read. They make predictions, inferences and connections to their everyday lives. During the shared sessions, use some of the questions provided to help encourage discussion. Have the students draw on their prior knowledge about hardships, bravery, orphanages, lighthouse keepers and self-sufficiency, and how they would cope being thrust into this new way of life.

### ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the front cover and read the blurb on the back cover.

- Look at the three characters on the front cover. What do you notice about the person's hand on the right-hand side?
- The seas are treacherous. What kind of structures could survive such powerful waves?
- Why do you think the castle is referred to as 'grim'? Who might live in the castle?
- Look at the figure that's drawn in the ocean below the stone structure. Why does the face look so menacing?
- How would your life change if suddenly there was no internet and communication with the rest of the world?
- Why might pirates and kidnappers thrive in a new world like that?
- Why might Herman and Polly need to escape from such a place as Castle Grim?

### COMPREHENSION:

- Charlie is positive and encourages Herman as he tries to climb the rock pinnacle. Do you have someone in your life who encourages you? How does that make you feel? (p.9)
- Why is reading about something, such as climbing, different to doing it? (p.10)
- Have you tried and failed to conquer something over and over? What makes you keep trying? Is it okay to give up? Why or why not? (p.10)
- Would you work somewhere if your parents didn't agree with your choice? Explain your answer. (p.12)
- Charlie says 'No reward without risk'. What does he mean by that? (p.12)
- The text says 'Without television or the internet, the world had shrunk'. What is meant by this? (p.14)
- Do you turn to books to forget any worries that you may have? Why or why not? (p.14)
- If you had a motto, what would it be? (p.15)
- Why would a city or a town need to be surrounded by walls? (p.17)
- What is a 'press gang'? (p.20)
- In the old days, people sometimes used pigeons to carry messages. Imagine a world without the internet, TV and telephones. How would you communicate? (p.21)



- Why might Conrad like puns? Could it be related to him liking books? Explain your answer. (p.23)
- Charlie says that the world ‘reached for the moon. Now, we guard our borders’. What does he mean by this? (p.24)
- If you were starving, would you try to find a better place to live? Would you risk your life to find food like the refugees in the story? Explain your answer. (p.26)
- Conrad is not keen to send supplies to Wellington because he thinks corrupt people will intercept them. Do you agree with his argument? Why or why not? (p.26)
- Why might Nelson’s government be complacent? (p.27)
- What kind of person resists bribes? Would it be hard to do that considering times are tough? Explain your answer. (p.32)
- The word ‘minnow’ has more than one meaning. What does the word mean in this context? (p.33)
- Why does Squint describe Grip as ‘a fishbone in your throat’? How else could she have described him? (p.33)
- Captain Chan fears losing. Do you fear losing? Why or why not? (p.35)
- Raider says that Grip is ‘playing chicken against a hawk’. What does he mean by this? (p.35)
- What does ‘Reef the sails’ mean? If you don’t know this sailing jargon, how could you find out? (p.36)
- Why does Raider straighten and appear taller when he gets the news that they are stuck and not sinking? (p.37)
- How does the sea do Raider’s dirty work? (p.37)
- Why are heavy boots and coats dangerous to people swimming in the sea? (p.38)
- Why would the Cook Strait be infamous? (p.39)
- Why is Conrad so protective of Herman? How might Herman feel about that? (p.41)
- Why does Conrad get angry when Charlie mentions courage? (p.42)
- How are real life and events that happen in books different? (p.43)
- What is the sickening feeling in Herman’s stomach all about? (p.44)
- Is it fair that Grip blames himself and the fact that he has only one hand for so many people from the *Defender* losing their life at sea? (p.45)
- What is a ‘mute’? (p.47)
- What does ‘dead ringer’ mean? (p.48)
- Would you like the isolation of a lighthouse? Why or why not? (p.49)
- Keeper can draw very well. How is that significant? (p.50)
- What does it mean ‘to find his sea legs’? (p.51)
- Herman finds it exhilarating to steer Charlie’s boat. What does this tell you about his personality? Would you find it exhilarating or scary? Why? (p.52)
- Have you ever hit your head hard? How did it make you feel? (p.55)
- Charlie tells Herman how his father fell into the ocean. Why is it important to be honest with children about events such as this? (p.56)
- How would you cope with living in a world where press gangs want to kidnap you to work for them? (p.62)
- Have you read books that feature orphanages? What were the orphanages and the people who ran them like? (p.62)
- Is it wise for parents to shield their children from the outside world and its problems? Explain your answer. (p.63)
- What is the difference between a pirate and a wrecker? (p.65)
- Why is old technology often reliable in a modern-day crisis? (p.66)
- Why do some people prefer animals to human company? (p.67)
- If you were Grip, would you trust Sister Mercy to look after Herman well? Why or why not? (p.70)
- Herman feels comforted when one of the twins winks at him. How can body language sometimes be more effective than talking? (p.72)
- What do you think Herman’s first dinner at the orphanage is going to be like? Explain why you think that. (p.76)
- How would the ‘bracing weather’ give everyone ‘staple virtues’? What do you think this means? (p.78)
- Do you think children of today would find it difficult to live in an orphanage like Haewai Keep? Why do you think that? (p.80)
- Brother Bash is overweight and unfit. He tells the children that ‘Laziness is an evil’. How would the children feel when they hear Brother Bash say that? (p.84)
- Do you think Shane is brave or foolish for answering Brother Bash like he does after letting out a long fart? Explain your answer. (p.85)
- Megan says that Herman has fancy-nancy Nelson pyjamas. Do you think she is jealous? Why do people sometimes act like that when they are jealous of someone or something? (p.89)
- Have you ever been at the beach when strong currents and waves have pulled you out to sea? Were you scared? How did you get back to shore? (p.93)
- What would happen to Conrad if the ‘cold clouded his mind’? What do we call this condition today? (p.94)



- Conrad follows the well-known advice and does not get between the seal and the sea. Why is it useful to have different sayings to help in different situations? What well-known advice or sayings do you know? (p.95)
- What does Conrad mean when he says 'the world was coming for Herman'? (p.97)
- Imagine the fun you could have if you were an identical twin. What would you do to fool others? (p.98)
- Sister Jules winces when Brother Bash shouts and whacks Ricky around the ears. What does this tell you about Sister Jules? (p.101)
- Do you like books like Herman and his father do? Why or why not? What kind of stories do you like? (p.109)
- Why might Polly know little about the wider world? (p.109)
- Why do you think Polly is resourceful? (p.111)
- How is streetwise knowledge rather than book knowledge more useful in this new world? (p.111)
- Why does the government guard contradict herself? (p.121)
- Would you be able to cope if you were locked in the damp and dark hole in the cellar? Why or why not? (p.125)
- Why might the fact that Polly can leave Castle Grim help her endure living there? (p.127)
- What does Raider mean when he says "Two months' worth of supplies for a year of peace"? (p.133)
- Was Sister Jules right to leak information to Commander Jensen? Explain your answer. (p.139)
- Would you be brave enough to leave Castle Grim with Polly? How does Polly make it easier for Herman? (p.144)
- Do you think it is sensible of Polly to jump down into the tunnel to join Herman? Why or why not? What could she have done instead? (p.148)
- Have you heard of a holloway before? If so, where did you learn about these kind of sunken tunnels? (p.150)
- Why do you think Jacob let Herman and Polly escape? Would you have done the same? Why or why not? (p.153)
- Why would the press-gang leader have his eyes on Jacob? (p.153)
- What does the word 'wrack' mean? If you're unsure, look up its meaning in the dictionary. (p.157)
- How might Jacob's dad have got a name like Wrack? (p.157)
- The children's scabs on their hands would be from hard physical work. Why might they get sores on their faces? (p.159)
- Both Foul and his gang and Sister Mercy and her brother eat well while the children they control eat scraps. Why do adults like these treat children like that? (p.159)
- What might be the advantages and disadvantages of using pigeons to carry messages? If you are unsure, use the internet to help you. (p.165)
- Herman's mother is the brains behind the relief expedition. Why is it important to help others, do the right thing and fight against corruption even when it may seem as if the people in charge or authority aren't doing anything about the situation? (p.168)
- Herman is impressed that nothing seems to get Shane and Ricky down. Why is having a positive attitude helpful during difficult times? (p.173)
- Sister Jules doesn't believe you should treat someone cruelly, even when that person has been cruel. Do you agree with her? Why or why not? (p.177)
- What does the word 'landlubbers' mean? (p.179)
- Have you heard the saying 'Prepare for the worst but hope for the best' before? How is this 'cautious optimism'? (p.184)
- Are you a traitor if you disagree with someone in your family? Explain your answer. (p.184)
- Why do you share breath during a hongis? (p.185)
- What is hypothermia? How does it affect the body? (p.197)
- The dolphins save Grip from drowning. Do you know of any instances in real life when dolphins have saved people at sea? How could you find out? (p.198)
- The lighthouse beam happens constantly at night and is taken so much for granted that no one notices when it stops. Has that happened to you before with something that is constant in your life? Explain your answer. (p.200)
- Should Benjamin Foul have been suspicious of Sam's answer to his question about the lantern flashes? What has interfered with his judgement? (p.205)
- If you were Commander Jensen, would you trust Sister Mercy to row to Haewai Lighthouse? Why or why not? (p.206)
- Have you read something in a book that has helped you in a dangerous or scary situation? What was it? How did it help? (p.210)
- What was Herman and Sister Mercy's 'uneasy truce' all about? (p.211)
- How would you have reacted if you were Herman? Would you act quickly and shut the door, or would you freeze on the spot due to fear? Explain your answer. (p.212)
- Have you heard of Davy Jones? What does Raider mean when he says 'I'll be sure to give Davy Jones your regards'? (p.224)
- Why are the gang members' eyes a mad, fiery red? (p.230)
- Sister Mercy sees her wrongdoings and how she should have chosen to defy Raider rather than cooperate with him. Have you ever looked back over something in your life and realised you could have done it differently? (p.232)

#### SEE NEXT PAGE FOR ACTIVITIES



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# Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: BOATING TERMS

This dramatic story is packed full of boating terms. A nautical glossary is helpful to those who aren't familiar with boats and ships. A glossary is an alphabetical list of words and their meanings that relate to a certain topic. Look at the story again and find some boating terms to include in your own glossary. Words could include *bowsprit, prow, starboard, port, stern, bow, guy, jib, gunwale, helm* and *mainsail*. Use a dictionary to help you if you're unsure what the words mean. You could work alone or in pairs.

## ACTIVITY 2: PENCARROW LIGHTHOUSE

Pencarrow Lighthouse is a real lighthouse. In fact, the cast iron one was New Zealand's first permanent lighthouse. Research Pencarrow Lighthouse and find 10 interesting facts about it. Then create a poster, featuring a drawing of the lighthouse up the middle section of the poster, with the 10 facts written around the edges of the drawing. Design a heading for your poster too. You could also create a timeline that features some of the important dates and events relating to the real Pencarrow Lighthouse. You can find a detailed timeline here: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/pencarrow-lighthouse/key-dates>. Choose up to 10 important dates and events to feature on your timeline. Display your finished posters and timelines around the classroom.

## ACTIVITY 3: THE KEEPER

At the beginning of the story, Herman's Uncle Christopher is the keeper of Pencarrow Lighthouse. A keeper's role is to guide ships and boats in and out of the harbour and to help them avoid hitting any rocks, reefs and shallows. Keepers were mostly men. However, the first and only female keeper of a permanent lighthouse in New Zealand was stationed at Pencarrow Lighthouse. Her name was Mary Bennett. She was married to the keeper, but when he died in a boating accident, she took over his role. Research about Mary Bennett and write a paragraph about her family life and work as the Pencarrow Lighthouse keeper. Share your writing with a friend.

## ACTIVITY 4: PIGEON POST

Commander Jensen uses homing pigeons to convey messages between the Walled City and the coastal lookouts. Pigeon post was used because the world no longer had the internet to communicate. On page 240, Herman receives a Pigeon Post message from Commander Jensen. Write your own Pigeon Post message to Herman. Messages were usually short because they had to be attached to a pigeon's leg. What would your message to Herman be? Write it down on a small strip of paper (and write in small handwriting), then share it with a friend.

## ACTIVITY 5: MY CHOSEN BOOK

The orphans enjoy listening to Herman read to them at night once Sister Mercy and Brother Rodd are safely out of earshot. Herman reads with great expression and loves using different voices for the different characters. If you had to live in Castle Grim and could take only one story book to hide in the wall, which one would you take? Now write a book review about your chosen book. Start with the title and author name. Briefly explain what the book is about, without giving the ending away. Talk about the main characters and state which is your favourite character and favourite part of the story, and why. You could say if you would recommend the book or not and if there was anything that you would change in the story. You could even rate your book, giving 5 stars as the top mark. Share your book review with the rest of the class. You could also practise reading some of your favourite story aloud, using different voices for different characters. Then read your favourite excerpt to a friend or a small group of students.

## ACTIVITY 6: NAME THE BOATS

Boats often have names. *Defender, Charger, Seeker, Tangaroa, Victor, Adventurer* and *Explorer* are the names of the boats in the book. People can often have fun when they name their boats. Choose a name for the following boats – a boat for Grip, a boat for Raider, a boat for Sister Mercy, a boat for Commander Jensen, a boat for Herman and a boat for Polly. Think about their personalities when you dream up the names. A name that suits a boat for Raider mightn't suit a boat for Polly! Choose your favourite boat name and sign write it on a piece of paper. You could design it to suit the particular character, such as a pirate design and lettering for Raider. Present your boat names to the rest of the class and display your boat name artwork in the classroom.

Written by Janine Scott



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