

Teachers 'Notes

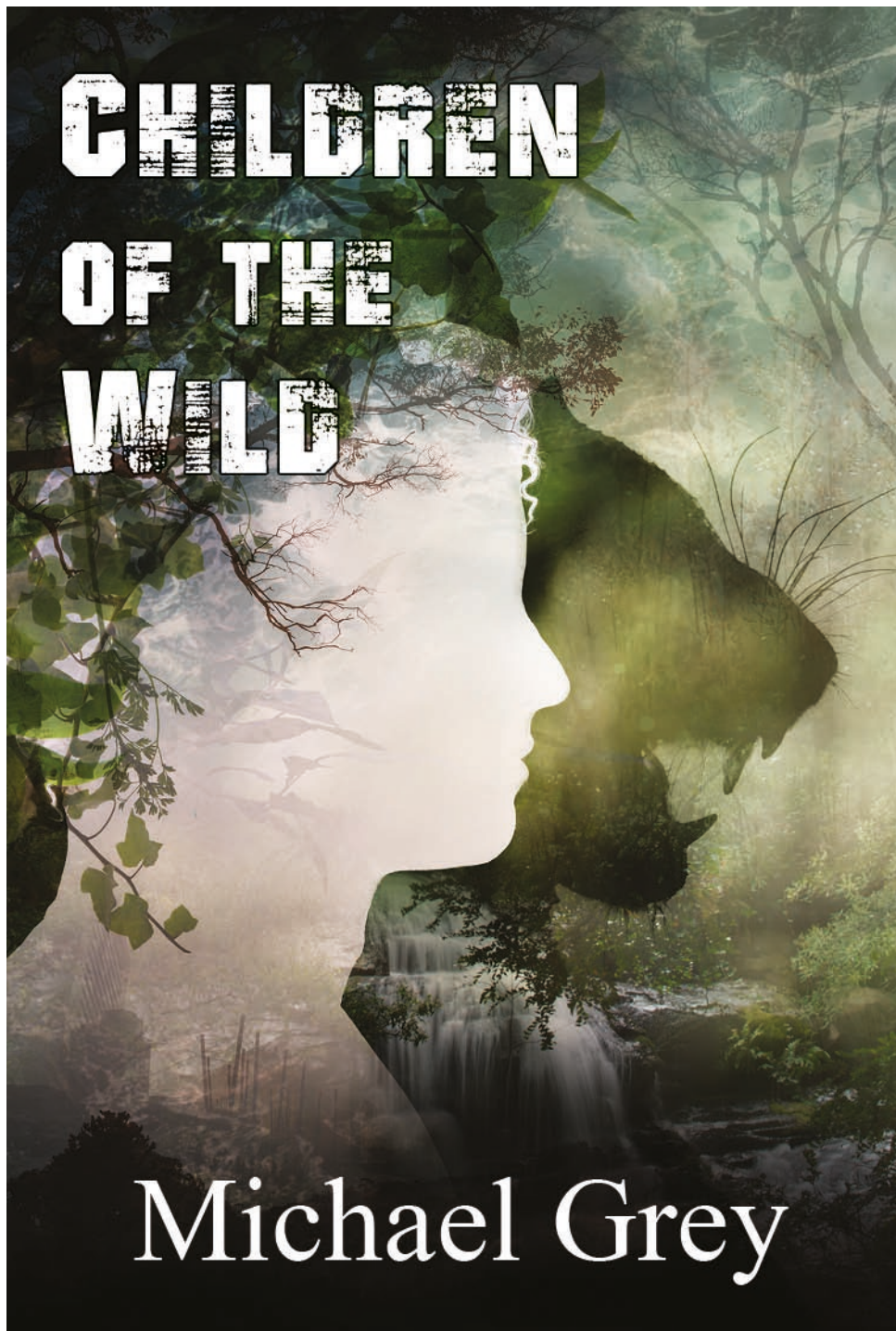
Children of the Wild

By Michael Grey

Cover and internal illustrations by Lorena Carrington

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About the book:

To Matthew, the village he lives in, his friends, their families and the jungle which surrounds it is the entire world. What's beyond that great green canopy with its host of dangerous animals is a mystery, but a mystery only he has any interest in solving. Then one day a stranger walks out of the forest, bringing with her questions and a deadly virus, and the village elders are forced to reveal their knowledge for the outside world.

When the first expedition to find a cure doesn't return, Matthew and his friends must journey into the unknown wilderness before the virus kills everyone he loves. But what he finds out there changes everything he thought he knew about his home.

A gripping, powerful speculative fiction novel for young adults, by a talented new author.

About the author:

Michael Grey is a writer of children's stories, science fiction, fantasy, contemporary, and horror, and does not see why all those genres shouldn't be combined. He has had stories published in print, online and in audio, and has been shortlisted for the Parsec and Aurealis Horror novella awards. When he's not writing stories Michael can usually be found thinking about stories and spending time with his family.

Children of the Wild is his first published novel.



From the author

About the story

The origins of *Children of the Wild* began a long time ago, when I was 21 and backpacking across North America. I'd bought several books to read along the way, and one of them was *Rainbow Six* by Tom Clancy. Like most Tom Clancy books, the overarching story was about 'bad guys' planning to hurt lots of people and the 'good guys' swinging in with guns blazing to save the day. But this particular story was different. Clancy spent over half of the book setting up the process the 'bad guys' would use to reach their goals. But this time instead of bombs or hostages, the tool was a deadly virus. And more interestingly to me were their motives – they wanted to save the planet. And reading through his build up and crafting of the 'bad guys' to be sympathetic, it was hard not to think that Clancy actually agreed with the bad guys.

Of course the 'good guys' won in the end. But what stuck with me was how Clancy set the scene for how the world would look after the virus had worked. How nature would heal and ecosystems re-assert themselves.

I had always been an environmentalist, but until that point I had never seen such a vivid picture of how ecology could be healed if the situation was just right.

Fast forward a few decades, and now I'm getting ready to write my own story. What I had been thinking since *Rainbow Six* was what the world would look like, not only just after the events of that story, but decades, and more specifically what it would be like for people who had survived.

What struck me most about such a setting would be the sense of intergenerational guilt. It's a sad fact, but the world the previous generation are leaving the next will be more degraded and unhealthy than the one they inherited from their parents. This is known as 'intergenerational debt'. But what if that, in order to save that world for future generations, someone would do something that would make those same future generations question if the price was worth it?

Notes on research



Stories set in the remnants of lost civilisations have always fascinated me. The unfinished stories of the people who lived there, the sense of loss, the haunted feelings of emptiness, and the possibilities of what may lay around every corner.

I blame Indiana Jones for this fascination.

Having this passion I knew I wanted to get the feeling of the world just right. I did a lot of research into the rate and amount of decay that would happen to human civilization if it was not maintained. One of the best resources was a book called *The World Without Us* by Alan Weisman. The book is written as a thought experiment that outlines how cities deteriorate without human intervention and how remaining lifeforms would evolve. Aside from talking to modern day engineers on how much effort goes into keeping our civilization running, he explores real-world instances of urban abandonment, such as Chernobyl in Ukraine, the town of Varosha in Cyprus, and the Mayan civilization.

Another helpful resource was the book *Feral*, by George Monbiot. *Feral* explores many interesting ideas, such as ecosystems lost to time (did you know hippopotamuses were once native to the Thames Valley of England?), but what I drew on a lot for *Children of the Wild* was how tribal peoples have survived and adapted their lifestyle to the modern world. If the inhabitants of the village were to be believable, they would need a reference to how people who still live as hunter-gatherers work today.

Other helpful resources were media that depicted scenes that would be relevant to the story. There were numerous films and art that I used to help set a scene in my head, such as the art of Simon Stålenhag. But I think the biggest impact was the video game [The Last of Us](#) from the developer Naughty Dog. The themes and characters from *The Last of Us* are very different from *Children of the Wild*, but the artists at Naughty Dog created truly superb and detailed visuals (see below) for what urban environments could look like with the encroachment of the natural environment. And one of their own research sources was also *The World Without Us*.



Notes on characters

Other than the theme and setting, what drives the story most in *Children of the Wild* are the three main characters – Matthew, Adam and Alex. These three protagonists are actually

based on my three sons, also called Matthew, Adam and Alex. Their personalities and drives are derived from my boys. Matthew is very thoughtful and caring of others, Adam cannot sit still and would rather be in the middle of the action than anywhere else, and at the time of writing Alex was still only a baby, and that was why his character in the story cannot speak.

About the illustrator

Lorena Carrington is a photographic artist and book illustrator based in regional Victoria. She is published in Australia with Serenity Press, and internationally with Kane Miller (US) and Wydawnictwo Tadam (Poland). She has also been commissioned for covers by publishers such as Swan River Press (Ireland), Eagle Books, and the Australian Fairy Tale Society. Lorena exhibits her work in galleries around the country. She presents at literary and arts festivals around Australia, and visits schools and libraries to give talks and hold workshops on illustration, books and story. She is the recipient of the 2020 Australian Fairy Tale Society award, for her “outstanding contribution to the field of Australian Fairy Tales.”



From the illustrator:

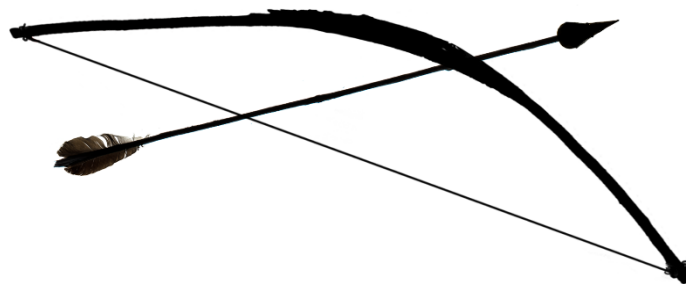
When creating a cover illustration, an illustrator must think about several things. First, of course, we read the story. We take notes, on the important things that happen, and what we need to reveal on the cover. We mustn't give away any spoilers, but we need to hint to the future reader what they might expect to find in the book. Is it an adventure story or a romance; a thriller or a cosy mystery? Or a combination of those things! The illustration we create will often mean a book will be picked up or left on the shelf so it's very important that we A: entice the reader, B: tell them something of the truth about what they'll find beyond the cover and C: make them want to open the book and discover more...

Here are some things I included in the cover of Children of the Wild that hint at the story inside:

- The obvious things: A forest setting. A male lead character. A jaguar!
- Things that will become obvious as you read the story: A river. A hint of ocean. A ruined city.

You may need to look harder to find the less obvious things, and that's because I don't want them to be immediate spoilers. You'll see them as you progress through the story, making the cover more layered and meaningful as you read the book. And you might find more than I mentioned above as you read!

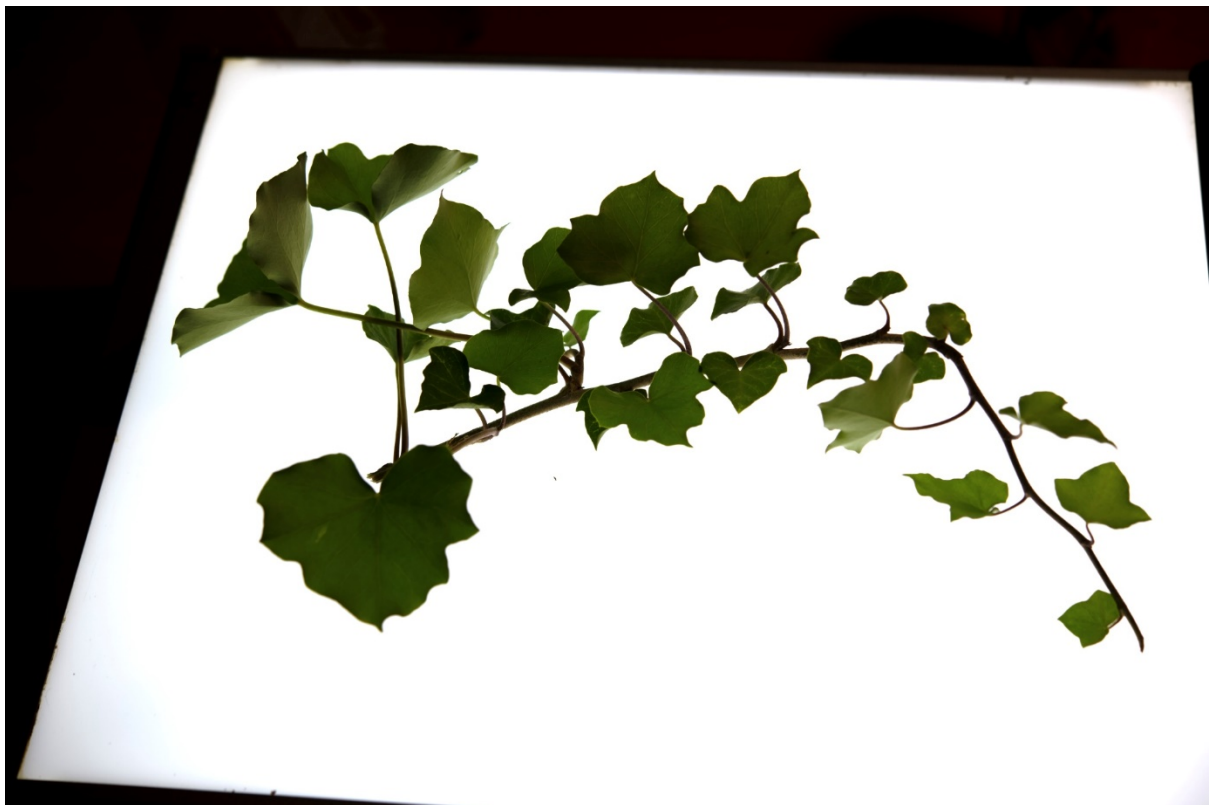
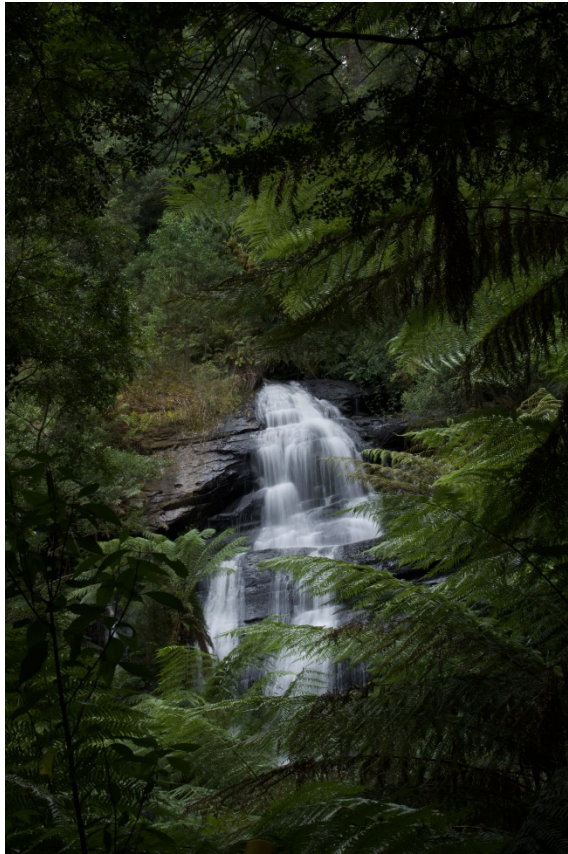
I also created an internal motif - a bow and arrow. I wanted to create a simple image that would stay relevant throughout the book, while also allowing for different interpretations as you read. It has a very different purpose in the last quarter of the book than it does in the beginning.



How I Work:

Most illustrators make their work in the way you'd expect: with a pen and pencil, or paint, or even collage. I've always been a photographer, so over time I've developed an illustration method that works for me: photographic montage. Everything you see in the illustrations (both for the cover, and the internal motif) are photographs. I collect them all together, then layer them together on the computer. The bow in the motif is made from a stick and some string (as you'd expect) and the arrow is made from a straighter stick, a magpie's feather (so far, so good) and a bird skull as the arrow tip (maybe slightly less expected). I spend a lot of time looking at random objects, wondering what I can turn them into.

The cover illustration is made up of over 20 separate photographs. I started with the silhouettes of Matthew and the jaguar, and built the forest around them, layering the background, and adding leaves in front for depth. There is a little bit of ocean in the sky, and a hint of the ruined city in Matthew's chest. The waterfall is from the Otways rainforest in southern Victoria, that bit of city is at the Docklands in Dublin, Ireland, and the green leaves come from my backyard. Inspiration and materials for creative work really are everywhere.



Post reading discussion questions

If you were in Matthew's position, would you have refused Jonah's first request to go looking for a cure?

How does Alex's inability to speak audibly effect the relationship with his friends?

Why do you think Jonah stopped Mathew from becoming a hunter?

Would you prefer to live in your town or in the children's village?

Post reading research activities

If the nature around your town suddenly started growing and overtaking all the buildings, how would it look? Research what trees, plants and animals would suddenly be all around you.

Matthew has to learn how to sail a boat to leave his home. Do you know how to sail? Look up the different parts of a sail boat and how they help to steer and make it move. What would you call a boat you made for yourself?

The children's home meant they knew a lot about plants, and helped Matthew identify a flower and a mushroom that would help his friends escape. Are there any poisonous plants near your home? Do some research, and maybe share what you learn with your friends and family.

A lot of the animals the children encounter along their travels were the descendants of animals who had escaped zoos and wildlife parks. Think about some of the dangerous animals you have seen in a zoo. If they escaped where would they live? How would you keep yourself safe from them?

Of all the places in the world the village could be, it's in the Amazon rainforest. Why do you think this is where the elders chose to establish their village?

Classroom creative activities

Download and print off a map of the state of Georgia in the United States. Can you trace the route the children took to find the Seede using the descriptions of landmarks from the book?

Re-read Matthew's encounter with the metal yellow monster in the forest. Do you know what it was? Try and draw it.

Almost the entire trip from Atlanta back to the village was not described. What do you think the group saw or did on the way? Write a short story about it.

Bonus creative activities

Design your own book cover:

What is the last book you read? How would you design the cover? Think about the overarching themes, the characters, the intended audience, the parts of the plot you want

to reveal on the cover. Can you hint at any spoilers or twists without actually revealing them? Think about what colour does to the feel of a cover. Could you use the same image but use colour to make it look like a mystery, a romance, or a horror story?

Answer these questions, make some notes, then design a cover for your book.

Make your own montage illustration:

Collect seven things. Either inside the classroom, or from outside. They could be anything: pen, leaf, muesli bar wrapper, twig, pencil sharpener, interesting bit of gravel, feather...

Put them on a piece of paper in front of you. Move them around. Can you make the following three things with them?

A face (front on - or for more of a challenge, in profile)

A creature (either a real animal or something mythical)

Some kind of shelter (a house, or a tent, or a skyscraper! But make it a safe place for someone to spend the night)