



OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Graphic novel
Title	Pilot & Huxley and the Holiday Portal
Author/Illustrator	Dan McGuinness
Extent	64pp
Age	8+
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Previous publications

Pilot & Huxley
(Omnibus Books, 2009)
Pilot & Huxley vs Planet Arpros
(Omnibus Books, 2011)

Teachers' Notes Pilot & Huxley and the Holiday Portal

Pilot & Huxley Book 2
Written and illustrated
by Dan McGuinness

Teachers' notes written by Madeline Holmes

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About the Story

Pilot and Huxley are trying to find a way to get home, but as always with these two explorers, things don't go to plan. Instead they arrive in Halloween-land, where they meet a new friend, Tentpeg, who takes them to the misleadingly named Christmas-land. Here they plan on hitching a ride home to Earth with Santa. But nothing is as they expect, and Santa certainly isn't the jolly present-giver they know from home. In fact, in this place everyone's character is the opposite of what it should be. Before long Pilot and Huxley end up in a colosseum full of trouble with some nasty surprises. It's a thrilling adventure that boys and girls will lap up, and even though everything spells doom, the friends might just hold a lucky hand.

About the Author

Adelaide comic artist Dan McGuiness started out by selling his hand-stapled booklets at comic conventions. These days he leaves the stapling to the experts. Rumour has it that Dan grew up in a top-secret military facility. *Pilot & Huxley and the Holiday Portal* is his second book, preceded by the first adventure, *Pilot & Huxley*. The third instalment, *Pilot & Huxley vs Planet Arpros*, is also available.

Author/Illustrator Inspiration

Though Dan didn't read much as a child, he did make time for everything by Roald Dahl, an author he greatly admired. He drew inspiration from childhood favourites that made him laugh: *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *He-Man*, *Thundercats*, *Jabba Jaw*, *DragonBall Z*, *The Real Ghostbusters*, *Voltron*, *M.A.S.K* and *Footrot Flats*.

About the Illustrations

Dan begins his books by writing a script. The script includes the dialogue, sound effects and descriptions of how the panels will be laid out. As he writes the script (or sometimes even before he starts), he sketches new characters in lead pencil into an ideas book. His ideas book is a simple blank notebook that he keeps handy on his desk. In these early sketches he

decides what style he is going to draw the character in – for example, he wanted the characters in *Pilot & Huxley and the Holiday Portal* to have quite large heads but little bodies.

He starts by drawing each page quite roughly in lead pencil, working at A3 size so that it is easier to include the smaller details. Once Dan is happy with the pencil drawings, he places a sheet of tracing paper over each page and inks their outlines using a felt-tipped pen. The next step is to scan the outlines and colour them using Photoshop. At this point Dan also adds big colourful sound effects and graphic designer Clare Oakes brings these files into InDesign. She adds the panel borders, speech bubbles and captions.

Though this is the process Dan uses, he stresses that there is no right or wrong way as every person has his or her own way of drawing and colouring.

Study Notes for Teachers

1. First impressions: what humour means to us

Read *Pilot & Huxley and the Holiday Portal* together as a class and talk about first impressions. Perhaps some students have read other graphic novels with which they can compare. This is a good story to use as a starting point for a discussion on humour. Some questions could be:

- What did you find humorous?
- What makes people laugh?
- Does everyone find the same things funny?
- Why do we like to laugh?
- Are there different types of humour?
- Is laughter important?

2. Introducing genre: learning new concepts

Explain that genre is a style or category of literature and have a brainstorming session to list all the different genres students know. Ask students to expand on this by listing features that define each genre. If students have favourite genres, ask them to explain why they prefer that particular type of story. Can they tell what genre a book is from its cover?

Consider what genre *Pilot & Huxley and the Holiday Portal* falls under and list all the defining features. It may be that students believe it overlaps multiple genres, which could launch a discussion about how and why we choose to categorise things not just in literature but also in everyday life.

Ask students to look at the blurb (back cover copy that describes the book) of *Pilot & Huxley and the Holiday Portal* and use it as a template to create a blurb for a hypothetical story of their choosing. Play a game where each student reads out his or her blurb and the class has to determine which genre it is using the lists created from the earlier brainstorming session.

3. Planning a comic: a step-by-step process

Have students create their own comic using Dan's advice on how he develops his ideas. Introduce students to the concept of planning a story. Have them create a character book with ideas and pictures about the cast of the story. Then ask them to plan a script of their comic that has sound effects and a description of each panel as well as the dialogue. At the website <http://donnayoung.org/art/comics.htm> there are comic strip templates that you can print for students.

4. Comic convention: planning an event

Now that students have their own comics, why not put on a comic convention where they can share and critique each other's work? They could organise the event themselves, design advertising posters and make their booths from cardboard boxes. Everyone could be assigned roles like event coordinator, advertising committee, set department and layout-design committee. Students could show their comic development, including the character book they made. They might even like to make cardboard cut-outs of their characters for display and come to school on the day dressed like a character in their comic.

5. A written response: engaging with the text

Ask students to write a short story involving characters reacting to something unnatural arriving in their environment (as when Pilot and Huxley arrive in new worlds).

6. Important inventions: presenting a proposal

Have a class discussion to make a list of all the inventions Pilot and Huxley come across, like the reverse-replacement laser and the void hopper. Ask them to think about all the

important inventions in history and compile a class list. Ask them to work in teams and come up with a proposal for a new invention that the world needs. Before they put pen to paper, talk to the students about the importance of language and using persuasive words. Have each group argue their case to their classmates and when everyone has presented, hold a vote to decide which invention is most needed.

7. The familiar strange: learning to think outside of the box

When Pilot and Huxley visit Christmas-land they encounter familiar identities acting strangely. The author has deliberately subverted the roles of recognisable characters as a way to challenge Pilot and Huxley and put them in an unexpected situation. This device also makes the audience question accepted truths. Talk to students about the effect this subversion had on their reading experience. Discuss the fixed ideas we encounter in everyday life. Have students use this device to rewrite well-known fairy tales.

8. Internet resources: using the web

Visit Pilot and Huxley's website www.pilotandhuxley.com where you can find character bios, download T-shirt transfers and desktop wallpaper, and learn more about the author.