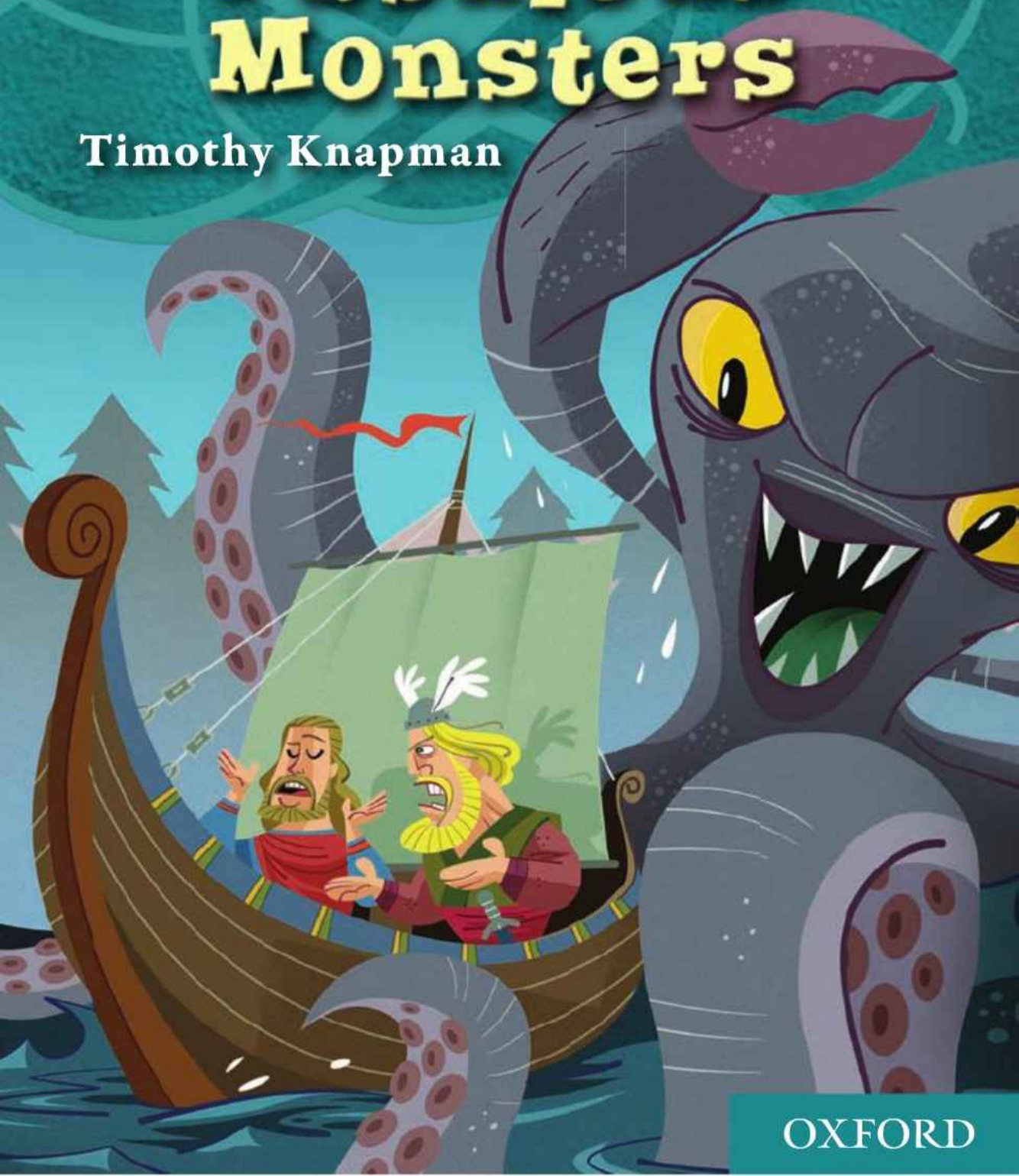


Mythical Beasts and Fabulous Monsters

Timothy Knapman



OXFORD



About this book

A vain prince faces the ferocious Minotaur; a Viking challenges the hungry Kraken; a young adventurer rides with the immense Roc; and an intrigued boy quizzes the ancient Phoenix.

Talking points

- Ask your child what they already know about each of the four fabulous creatures.
- Ask your child to think about other stories which contain monsters and heroes. How are monsters often beaten by heroes – through cleverness, strength, or both?

During reading

- Ask your child what they think of Theseus in *The Monster in the Maze*. Is he a good hero?
- Why does Halfdan want to die throughout *The Watcher in the Waves*?
- Why are the merchants nervous at the end of *The Sailor in the Sky*?
- Discuss how *The Feathers in the Flames* differs from the other stories.

After reading

- Ask your child to think about who they think is the bravest hero. Which is the scariest creature?
- Discuss what effect the modern tone has on these retellings.

Mythical Beasts and Fabulous Monsters

Timothy Knapman

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CONTENTS

The Monster in the Maze	3
The Watcher in the Waves	27
The Sailor in the Sky	51
The Feathers in the Flames	73



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The Watcher in the Waves

A story based on Viking myth and legend

Chapter 1



One year, spring forgot to come to one particular Viking tribe.

The sun did not shine, the snow did not melt, the crops did not grow and the people began to starve.

‘My friends!’ roared their king, Olaf the Violent, over the rumbling of everyone’s empty stomachs. ‘I have had a jolly good think about our problem. What we need is a clear, intelligent and sensible plan to get us out of this mess. So, I propose ...’

The King took a deep breath. Everyone leaned forward to hear his wisdom.

‘I propose,’ he continued, ‘that we get in our longship and find another tribe of Vikings and bash them over the head!’

‘HOORAY!’ cheered all the men.

‘*WHAT?*’ sneered all the women. ‘How is THAT going to put food on our tables exactly?’

‘Dear ladies,’ said King Olaf. He was surprised – and a little hurt – that the women of his tribe hadn’t seen how brilliant his idea was. ‘That is the Viking answer to every problem!’

‘We know!’ said the women bitterly.

‘Well it’s bound to work eventually,’ said King Olaf.

The women of the village threw their hands up in despair but the men polished their spiky helmets and sharpened their war axes. They stuck extra nails into their battle hammers and prepared for war.

All the men, that is, except one. He was young and his name was Snorri the Dreamer.

Snorri had never been very keen on fighting. He would much rather have read the great sagas



and watched the sun set. He loved nature and enjoyed going for long walks to explore the fjord and the countryside around the village.

‘In other words, he’s stupid,’ said Halfdan the Unhinged.

‘Halfdan, don’t be so rude about your brother!’ snapped their mother and she smacked Halfdan over the head with a heavy frying pan.

‘*Well ...*’ said Halfdan, after he’d picked himself up off the floor and stopped screaming. ‘We have a noble tradition in this family. We’re berserkers, shield-chewers, head-bangers. Since the beginning of time, we’ve had the special privilege of being first into battle, the first to charge screaming at the enemy –’

‘The first to get killed!’ said Snorri.

‘Exactly!’ said Halfdan, with a proud smile. ‘As everyone knows, every Viking who dies bravely in battle goes straight to Valhalla where there’s food and drink and singing forever and ever.’

‘Until ...’ said Snorri.

‘Until Ragnarok,’ said Halfdan. ‘The great battle at the end of time, when Good and Evil clash and everything gets destroyed and you get to die bravely all over again. Whoopee! I do hope when I die it’s long and messy and *extremely* painful.’

‘Look at the world around you, Halfdan,’ said Snorri. ‘The sea, the sky, the beautiful countryside. Goodness knows we have little enough time to enjoy it already. Why would you want to make your life even shorter?’

Before Halfdan could answer, his mum smacked Snorri over the head with the very heavy frying pan.

‘Sorry, Snorri,’ she said, ‘but your brother’s right. We have traditions in this family.’

Chapter 2



When Snorri woke up, he was sitting in the longship next to his brother. Someone had dressed him up in his battle gear and stuck a sword in his hand.

‘AT LAST, HE IS AWAKE! ’OW KIND OF YOU TO JOIN US, YOU WORTHLESS SPAWN OF SNIVELLING SEA SCUM!’ bellowed a massive Viking straight into Snorri’s face.

‘Oh, hello Uncle Eric,’ said Snorri. ‘How’s Auntie Agnetha?’

‘STILL MAD, THANKS FOR ASKING!’ bellowed Uncle Eric.

‘I bet you’re excited now, aren’t you?’ asked Halfdan.

‘I’ve got the worst headache of my life. Uncle Eric’s just shouted at me so loudly I think my brain’s turned to soup and I’m about to be violently killed,’ said Snorri. ‘Of course I’m excited.’

‘Me too!’ said Halfdan. He looked like a little boy waiting for Christmas morning.

‘Oh bother!’ said Snorri suddenly.

‘What’s the matter?’ said Halfdan.

‘Forgotten my pyjamas,’ said Snorri.

‘This is a Viking raiding party!’ said Halfdan. ‘You won’t be needing your pyjamas!’

‘What, go to sleep the night before an important battle without my special jim-jams on?’ said Snorri. ‘Not likely. I won’t get my proper rest. I’ll be all grumpy and that’ll really take the fun out of being horribly killed. Won’t be long!’

Before Halfdan could stop him, Snorri had jumped out of the longship and run off.

Snorri knew that if he went home the Viking warriors would find him and drag him straight back to the ship. So, instead, he followed the steep path up the side of the fjord to his favourite place. He planned to wait there until he saw that the longship was far out to sea.

‘You haven’t got any special jim-jams!’

Snorri jumped.

‘Halfdan! How did you find me?’

‘I may be incredibly thick, but I’m not *stupid*!’ said Halfdan. ‘You’re always going on about watching the sun set, and this is the best place to see it for miles around. Now come on, hurry! The King doesn’t want to miss the tide!’





‘He’s not going to,’ said Snorri, and he pointed. Down below them, the longship slipped out of the fjord and made for the open sea.

‘Oh, *what?!*’ cried Halfdan. ‘Well that’s just brilliant, isn’t it? Bang goes my chance to get horribly killed. I hope you’re proud of yourself. I could have been on the end of someone’s sword

by half past three! I could have been in Valhalla in time for tea! So how am I going to get to paradise now, Mr Brainbox?’

‘Look around you, Halfdan,’ said Snorri.
‘You’re in paradise already!’

Halfdan had to agree. Even with all the snow and ice everywhere, it was a beautiful spot but he was still very angry.

‘In any case,’ said Snorri, ‘we have a serious problem. There is no food and pretty soon our people are going to start dying. I can’t imagine the King’s plan is going to do any good so it’s up to us to save the tribe.’

‘What can we do?’ asked Halfdan.

‘I’ve been thinking about that,’ said Snorri.
‘We can go fishing!’

‘How?’ said Halfdan.

‘We can borrow Canute the Stinky’s boat!’

‘But it stinks!’

‘*Obviously.*’

‘And in any case,’ said Halfdan, ‘we’re rubbish at fishing!’

‘That doesn’t matter,’ said Snorri. ‘I remember reading that the best place to go fishing is in the waters just above where the Kraken lurks. There are always plenty of fish and they swim straight into your nets. It’s perfect!’

‘Perfect except for one thing,’ said Halfdan. ‘The Kraken isn’t going to let us pinch all those fish. It’s a ginormous man-eating sea monster that looks like a gigantic crab!’

‘It looks like a gigantic octopus!’ said Snorri.

‘Crab!’

‘Octopus!’

‘Crab!’

‘Octopus!’

‘Does it matter?’ said Snorri. ‘The important thing is that this plan is dangerous and it’s bound to result in almost-certain death!’

‘Is it?’ said Halfdan. ‘Well why didn’t you say so before? What are we waiting for?’

Chapter 3

Snorri was right. There were plenty of fish in the waters above the Kraken and they did seem to swim right into the brothers' nets. In no time, their little boat was piled high with enough fish to feed their tribe for a whole year.

'Even better, nobody had to get horribly killed by a gigantic octopus,' said Snorri.

'Crab,' said Halfdan.

'Octopus!' said Snorri.

'Crab!' said Halfdan.

They were so busy arguing that they didn't notice as the waters around them began to bubble. At last, with a great roar, a monster with the tentacles of a gigantic octopus and the shell and claws of a gigantic crab burst out of the sea.

'Well that settles that,' said Snorri. 'We're both right.'

'Afternoon,' said the Kraken. 'I've been watching you two for a while now but I still can't decide ...'





‘Decide on what?’ asked Halfdan.

‘Which one of you I’m going to eat first, of course!’ said the Kraken.

Before the brothers knew what was happening, the Kraken had grabbed them in its great tentacles. It swung them high into the air.

‘Eany-meany-my-nee-mo,’ the Kraken chanted. ‘Catch a Viking by his toe. If he squeals, eat him –’

‘Hooray!’ squealed Halfdan. ‘I’m about to die an extremely painful death!’

‘Right!’ roared the Kraken. ‘In you go!’

‘Wait!’ shouted Snorri just as the Kraken was about to bite Halfdan’s head off.

‘You’re not trying to stop me eating you, I hope,’ it said. ‘Sailors try all sorts of clever tricks to stop me eating them, but they never work, you know.’

‘How could they?’ said Snorri.

‘You’re far too clever to be tricked by silly little sailors!’

‘That is a lovely thing to say,’ said the Kraken.
‘A truly lovely thing to say! What kind of vicious,
heartless creature could eat you both up after
you’ve said something as lovely as that?’

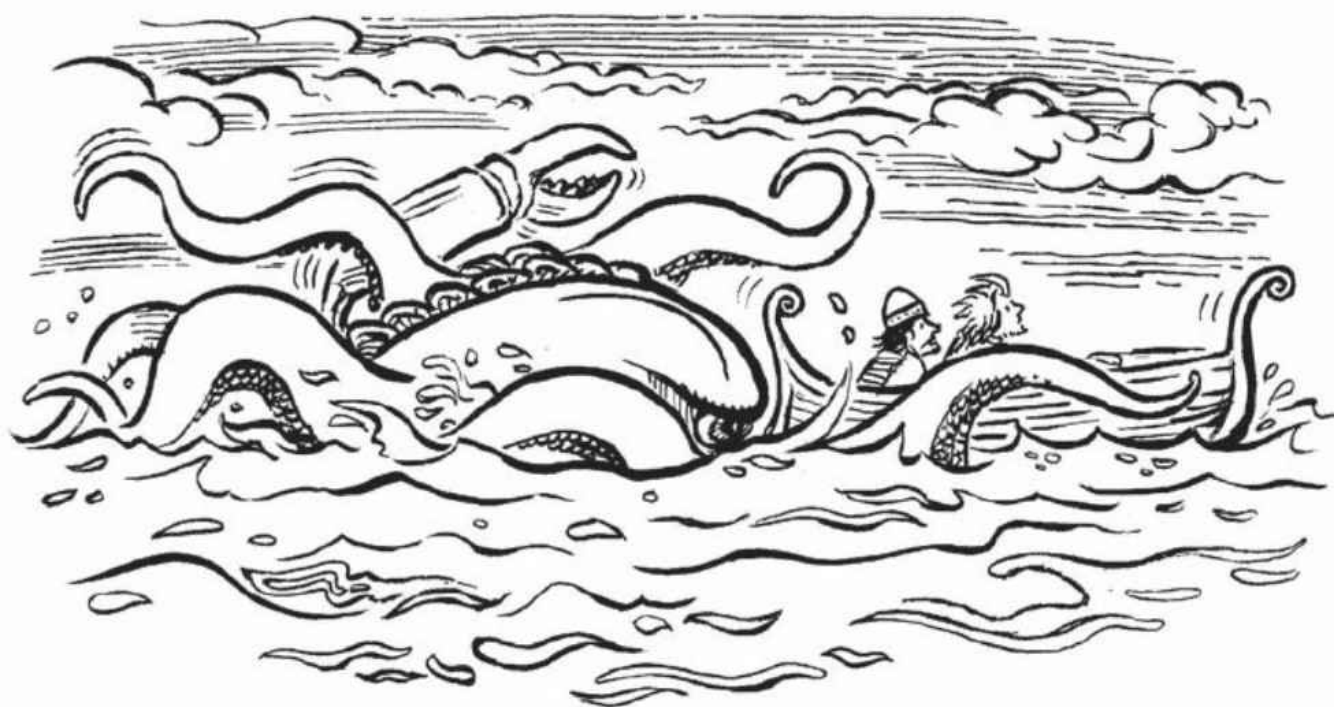
The Kraken thought for a moment.

‘This one!’ it cried. ‘I’m starving!’

‘I was just thinking that we’re going to taste
awfully dry,’ said Snorri.

‘Dry? What are you talking about?’ said the
Kraken. ‘There’s water all around us!’

‘Yes, but it’s salt water,’ said Snorri. ‘Ugh! It
dries out your mouth! No, everyone knows that



a Viking tastes best when washed down with lashings of lovely Rune Juice!’

‘Rune Juice?’ said the Kraken.

‘Yes, it’s a Viking brand of fruit juice. My favourite flavour is apple,’ said Snorri. ‘Though some people prefer blackcurrant. Hey, what a stroke of luck, we’re not far from the island of Hlesey, the home of the sea god Aegir! He makes the best Rune Juice in the world, especially for the gods! In his golden hall, there are cups that refill themselves every time you take a drink!’

‘But I’m ginormous,’ said the Kraken. ‘I can’t drink out of some measly little cup!’

‘You won’t have to,’ said Snorri. ‘Aegir has a cauldron full of Rune Juice that was stolen from the Land of the Giants. It’s five miles deep!’

‘What are we waiting for?’ said the Kraken. He plonked Snorri and Halfdan back down on the deck of their fishing boat and pushed them all the way to Hlesey.

For a long time, Halfdan didn’t say anything. He just stared at Snorri. Then at last he said,

‘It was all going brilliantly. I was just about to die an extremely painful death. I could have been in Valhalla now if it wasn’t for you!’

‘It doesn’t count,’ said Snorri.

‘What?’ said Halfdan.

‘You have to die in battle if you’re going to get to Valhalla. Being eaten by a sea monster doesn’t count.’

‘Even if it’s an extremely painful death?’

‘Oh look, we’re here!’

As Snorri knew most about the gods from all the sagas he’d read, he was the one to knock on the door of Aegir’s golden hall.

‘Don’t think you can walk in there and then sneak out the back and escape,’ said the Kraken. ‘I’m holding your ship, and your brother, hostage.’

‘At last!’ snapped Aegir, the sea god, as he opened the great door of his golden hall. ‘We thought you’d never get here! Wait a minute, who are you?’

‘Greetings, mighty god!’ said Snorri, and he

bowed his head. 'I am Snorri, son of Beowulf the Berserker. My friends and I have come to sample some of your famous Rune Juice.'

'Clear off!' cried Aegir. 'I'm too busy. I have to prepare dinner for all the gods of Asgard and the ingredients for my starter still haven't arrived.'



Wait till I get my hands on that delivery boy!
The only reason I opened the door was that I
thought you might be him.'

'Perhaps I can help you,' said Snorri. 'In return
for some Rune Juice for me and my companions,
I will give you the recipe and the ingredients for
a starter worthy of the gods themselves.'

'Really?' said Aegir.

'Yes, I call it Seafood Surprise,' said Snorri. 'If
you don't believe me, just look over there.' He
pointed to where the Kraken was keeping a close
eye on Halfdan and the boat that was piled high
with delicious fish.

'The gods do like their seafood,' said Aegir
thoughtfully. 'All right, but it had better be a
really wonderful recipe!'

Inside his magnificent golden hall, Aegir
poured cups of Rune Juice for the two Vikings.
Then he helped the Kraken clamber into the
vast cauldron.

'Cheers!' said Snorri.

'Cheers!' said Aegir. 'Now come on then,



where's this recipe you promised me? The gods will be here in a few hours.'

'Of course,' said Snorri. 'Give me a pen and paper and I shall write it out for you.'

‘So you do catering for the gods, eh?’ Halfdan asked Aegir. ‘Could you settle an argument for me? I want to go to Valhalla. I’m about to die an extremely painful death, but my brother says it doesn’t count because I’m going to be eaten by a sea monster, not killed in battle.’

‘That reminds me!’ roared the Kraken as it wallowed in the cauldron of Rune Juice. ‘I’m supposed to be eating you Vikings! Come on, sea god, throw them in and I can have them washed down with mouthfuls of this delicious drink!’

Snorri finished writing the recipe and handed it to Aegir.

‘This looks like a real winner,’ said Aegir as he read. ‘Thank you, young Viking.’

‘Now I think we’ll be off, Halfdan,’ said Snorri. ‘Goodbye, Aegir. Goodbye, Kraken.’

‘But I’m going to devour you!’ bellowed the Kraken.

‘Yes, I’m sorry, but I don’t think that will be possible, after all,’ said Snorri. ‘You see, the Seafood Surprise recipe I’ve just given Aegir is



for Kraken in Rune Juice. It's very tasty by all accounts. I'm sure the gods will love it!

'Wait! No!' wailed the Kraken. 'Get me out of here! Get me out!'

Chapter 4

So Snorri and Halfdan sailed home from the island of Hlesey.

When the women of the tribe saw all the delicious fish piled high on their boat, they cheered and set about cooking a sumptuous feast.

They were about to sit down to eat when the King and the Viking warriors returned. They looked exhausted and weak from lack of food.

‘We didn’t find anyone to bash on the head,’ said King Olaf, quietly. ‘The lads weren’t exactly



a hundred per cent, not having eaten anything for so long, so we couldn't row far. Then it got dark and we were all a bit ... frightened. So we thought we'd best just come home.'

'Well there's plenty of food here now,' said Snorri. 'Welcome back!'

There was much feasting that night, and dancing and drinking to the health of Snorri and Halfdan, the two great heroes of the tribe.

'Maybe there *is* more to life than a horribly painful death,' said Halfdan as he took a great



drink of Rune Juice. ‘Thank you, brother, for saving me!’

He and Snorri embraced.

By the firelight, they watched as Viking warriors hugged the wives and children they hadn’t expected ever to see again.

‘Yes,’ said Snorri. ‘There’s a lot to be said for being alive!’



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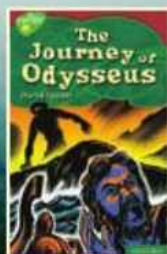
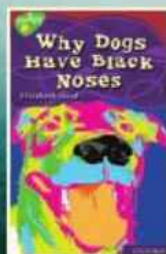
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