



Escape from Shangri-La; Kensuke's Kingdom

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The legacy of the second World War informs both these novels. Freedom, the problems of old-age, family love and loyalty are some of the intertwining themes in **Escape from Shangri-La** which is set in an English coastal town. Popsicle, an elderly seafaring wanderer, is reunited with his son, Arthur, whom he abandoned in infancy, and with Arthur's wife and daughter Cessie, just turning twelve. Popsicle, ill and suffering from partial memory loss, is haunted by his elusive remembering of his first love Lucie Alice, a young girl who saved his life after he escaped from the beaches at Dunkirk during World War Two.

At first, he is cared for by Cessie's parents, although Arthur finds it difficult to forgive Popsicle's desertion of his family many years ago. Eventually, Popsicle's declining mental state makes it necessary to send him to the dreaded Shangri-La nursing home, but Cessie keeps faith in Popsicle and helps him to regain his full faculties. This results in a highly improbable but nonetheless entertaining mass escape of inmates from Shangri-La, who head across the Channel on Popsicle's converted lifeboat to Dunkirk in search of Lucie Alice. Cessie's understanding and growing love for her grandfather, which at times brings her into conflict with her parents, are sensitively but entertainingly recounted in an enjoyable story.

Stories of castaways on desert islands have enthralled many generations of readers and **Kensuke's Kingdom** will be no exception. Drawing on the true story of a Japanese soldier who survived on his own on an island for forty years after the end of World War Two, it is likely to be enjoyed by those who do not habitually read fiction as well as by readers who do. Narrated by Michael, 12, who sets off in a yacht with his parents and dog on a round the world voyage, the focus of the story is his survival for almost a year on a Pacific island. The evolving relationship between Michael and Kensuke, the old Japanese soldier who rescues Michael when he is swept overboard in high seas, is delicately and movingly described, and each learns much from the other.

The details of life at sea and on the island will fascinate readers with even a mildly adventurous streak. Maps track Michael's adventures and extracts from the ship's log, written by Michael, include diagrams of sharks and flying fish. There is a glossary of Japanese terms and the chapters are listed in Japanese and English. Michael Foreman's ink

drawings sweep across a number of pages breaking up the generously sized text. While primarily a gripping story, **Kensuke's Kingdom** will also usefully support a number of aspects of the school curriculum.

Running Order:

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