

# ChildLands

An Adventure Novel for Children of All Ages

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**ChildLands** recounts the history of children throughout the ages by charting the adventures of two twelve year-olds – Gaston Boudrot of Nantes and his part-Native American cousin Lucia Natchez, who is on a visit to Brittany from New Orleans, Louisiana.

**ChildLands** tells the story of Gaston and Lucia as they travel between past and present using a perpetual calendar-*cum*-compass device that enables them to target specific dates and places in history. Their adventures and misadventures are recorded in a mysterious book which magically writes itself: the *ChildLands* of the title. The book and the compass are gifted to them by antique dealer Nathan Polak, who sees in the two children a means of unlocking the secret of his own childhood. Members of the children's immediate family – Gaston's mother Virginie Boudrot and his grandfather Raymond Boudrot, together with Lucia's parents and members of the Houma Nation – emerge as key characters in this novel of self-discovery.

**ChildLands** features an extraordinary cast of characters, not least a delightful Vietnamese orphan called Duc and a pair of extraordinary creatures – Chinchuba, a stuffed (but still very much alive) crocodile from the Louisiana bayou, and Bastet, a cat-goddess and protector of children whom they encounter on their first excursion back in time to the land of the Pharaohs.

**ChildLands** unfolds as the pages of *ChildLands* gradually write themselves. Time and again, Gaston and Lucia find themselves face to face with Grégoire, the Spirit of Evil, an embodiment of all that is negative in the attitude of parents towards children generally and towards that part of their own lives when they were themselves children. Grégoire is also endowed with the ability to travel through time and he plots against Gaston and Lucia at every turn in a bid to thwart their mission and do everything in his power to steal the only three copies of *ChildLands* still in existence.

**ChildLands** plunges Gaston and Lucia into historically accurate situations that have impacted on the lives of children down through the ages from 3000 B.C. to September 11, 2001, when Gaston and Lucia are scheduled to travel to New York to present a copy of the almost-complete *ChildLands* at a specially-convened United Nations conference on the Rights of Children.

**ChildLands** is a chronological voyage through the ages, confronting Gaston and Lucia with characters and events drawn directly from the pages of history. Thus, they meet among others the likes of the boy-Pharaoh Tutankhamen, the Emperor Shih Huang-Ti, architect of the first Great Wall of China, the werewolf child-soldiers of Sparta, the legendary Irish king Brian Boru, the child physician Ibn Sina (Avicenna), the hostile *tengu* warriors of Japan, the Edelweiss Child Pirates of Nazi Germany and the Churchill Group of the Danish Resistance; they experience first-hand the legacies of such diverse personalities as Louis XIV, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Madame Pompadour, Napoleon, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Mussolini, Hitler, Charles de Gaulle, Chiang-Kai Shek,

Tojo Hideki, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Walt Disney; and they travel from Ancient Egypt and the pre-Colombian kingdom of the Mayas to war-torn modern Palestine via the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, the Great Library of Bokhara, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Children's Crusade, the French Revolution, World War Two, Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Vietnam War. Not least, along the way they meet Esther Polak, an escapee from the Warsaw ghetto who is destined to play a role in the establishment of UNICEF, the worldwide organisation that was the cherished dream of Eglantyn Jebb, the woman who drafted the *International Charter of Children's Rights* and launched the *Save the Children* movement. Thanks to Gaston and Lucia, Esther Polak is finally been re-united with her long-lost brother, the Nantes antiquarian Nathan Polak.

**ChildLands** comes full circle as Grégoire – fresh from the Sudan, where he has been fighting on the side of Islamic insurrectionists – makes a final bid to prevent Gaston and Lucia from reaching in New York and revealing to the world at large the *real* history of children. The children's flight is cancelled, but eight other children are fated to die that day as skyjacked passenger aircraft are deliberately flown into the Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Center and into the Pentagon building.

**ChildLands** closes as Gaston and Lucia decide it is for the best that the crocodile Chinchuba be returned to his natural habitat, taking what is now the last remaining copy of *ChildLands* with him. The children have come to understand that *ChildLands* records so much misfortune and has been the cause of so much tragedy in the world that it is preferable it never be made public ...