

BOOK 2
COMING
MAY 2023!



The Curious League of Detectives and Thieves

Book 1: *Egypt's Fire*

by Tom Phillips

ABOUT THE BOOK

After twelve-year-old John Boarhog's mom dies, the last thing he wants is to be schlepped off to the Jersey Home for Boys. Instead, he makes himself a snug home in the ceiling of the New York Museum of Natural History, where he reads anything he gets his hands on and explores the artifacts afterhours. When a rare Egyptian ruby—the highlight of the museum's new exhibit—goes missing, John is accused of the crime. That is until the unpredictable Inspector Toadius McGee sweeps in to wrestle control of the case, certain that the true culprit is a notorious criminal he's been tracking for years. John quickly becomes the Watson to Toadius's Holmes as and along the way, John uncovers secrets about his own past.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does the last sentence of the prologue reveal what the story is about?
- How the italicized sentence at the beginning of each chapter foreshadows the events of the chapter? Does the ending of the book imply that there will be another adventure of solving crimes for John and Toadius?
- John Randel Boarhog is an orphan who has lived in the New York Museum of Natural History for six months. How has he managed to go unnoticed? How was he creative in making his room in the attic a comfortable spot?
- Which book inspired John to line in a museum? Contrast his life in the museum with the lives of Claudia and Jamie Kincaid. How might these three characters teach urban survival skills?
- Truth, Knowledge, Vision are words engraved over the entrance of the Natural History Museum. Why might these words be appropriate for a museum? What truth is John seeking?
- John loves knowledge. Discuss how Ms. Wingfield, the gift shop manager, contributes to John's knowledge. How does he gain vision as the novel progresses? Which other characters in the novel have extremely good vision?
- John never knew his dad, but he sometimes asked his mother about him. Explain what his mother meant when she said, "You can't lasso a cloud, Johnny, nor can you tame thunder" (p. 14). What other characters in the book could be described as "cloud" and "thunder"?
- John is accused of stealing Egypt's Fire, a valuable ruby owned by the museum. Why does it appear that John is guilty? Explain why he is arrested before they conduct a thorough investigation.

- Discuss what John means, “He was no stranger to handcuffs, but this time they felt different” (p. 43). John insists that he was framed. How do we know John is telling the truth? What is Viktor Van Eyck’s, the museum curator and director, view of teenagers?
- Debate whether John is really a teenager.
- Explain why Mr. Van Eyck rescues John from the New Jersey Home for Boys.
- Describe Toadius McGee. How is he infamous among New York City investigators? Explain how he becomes involved in the museum robbery case. What makes him absolutely sure that John is telling the truth?
- How does John obtain “the ruby” that is in his pocket”? Why is Toadius so sure that the ruby John has is fake? Explain what Toadius means, “As you know, the early bird gets the worm, but it’s the second mouse that gets the cheese” (p. 144). How does this explain why Toadius doesn’t want to return the ruby to the museum? Who is the second mouse in the novel?
- John first meets the Great Goatinee, a magician, in jail. What is Toadius’s view of Goatinee? John is puzzled why Toadius is so excited to see the magician. Discuss Toadius’s explanation: “Magic is like pizza. Even when it’s bad, it’s still a little good” (p. 150).
- Why does Goatinee have John’s mother’s locket? He tells John that his mother was the “queen of thieves”. Discuss John’s reaction to this news. There is conflicting information about her death. What does Toadius mean when he says that John’s mother died twice?
- Note all the rules that John learns from Toadius about solving crimes. How does each rule apply to the various steps it takes to find the real ruby? Why does Toadius think that they might find the ruby on Broadway?
- Rule number thirty-five: “One must always follow the case until it is finished. No matter what the cost” (p. 134). In the end, what does the case cost John? What does it cost Toadius? John is offered a home by the Van Eyck’s and by Toadius. Explain why he chooses Toadius.
- Delores, Toadius’s adopted mother, once explained the two types of people: (1) Those who want to make tornados (2) Those who want to make rainbows (p. 213). Make a list of all the characters in the novel and discuss which are tornados and which are rainbows. Cite evidence to support your thoughts.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Photo Credit: Bella Saville



Tom Phillips grew up with a passion for storytelling, despite a lifelong struggle with dyslexia. He writes books that kids can enjoy on their own, but also read aloud and share. He’s had a long career as an editor and artist for clients such as LeVar Burton Kids, HBO, Disney, and ABC, and is currently writing a screenplay for a major studio. The Curious League of Detectives and Thieves is his first book series. An armchair Sherlockian, Tom lives in Los Angeles with his lovely wife and his dog, Dr. Watson.

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