



Elastic Island Adventures: Kingdom of Blong

By Karen McMillan

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About the Book

Elastic Island Adventures: Kingdom of Blong is the fifth in a fantasy action-adventure set in the South Pacific. Kiri, Jed, and twins Emma and Ethan, discover an 'elastic' island that sends them ping-pong across the ocean to a variety of destinations.

When they arrive at the Kingdom of Blong, they discover that Blong the Cat is the island's missing King. Blong is greeted with a great deal of fanfare, but it looks like fame might be the ruin of him. Will Blong's relationship with Emma continue? And why do the bilbies, led by Baxter the Bilby, decide it is a good idea to live on a dangerous island ruled by cats? Will they end up on the dinner menu, or will they survive?

In each book of *Elastic Island Adventures*, four children travel via the Elastic Island service to different tropical destinations. In each book, they face different problems, and they must work together with the help of local creatures to make it home safely.



Every time the children ride Elastic Island, they must do a challenge to pay for their passage. In *Kingdom of Blong*, the children must pass a spelling test.

There is always a different parrot in each book helping Mr Jollybowler, who runs the Elastic Island service. In this book, it is Mackie the Blue and Gold Macaw

Each book also features one unusual real-life creature, in *Kingdom of Blong*, it is bilbies.

About the Author

Karen McMillan lives in New Zealand and is the author of 18 books, published in nine countries, a mixture of fiction, non-fiction and children's books.

Her non-fiction titles include *Everyday Strength* with co-author chef Sam Mannering, *Unbreakable Spirit*, *Love Bytes* and *Feast or Famine*. Karen has ghost-written *From the Blitz to the Burmese Jungle and Beyond*. Her fiction titles include the bestselling novels *The Paris of the East*, *The Paris of the West* and *Brushstrokes of Memory*. Karen is also the author of the popular *Elastic Island Adventure* series for children, which is in early development to be made into animated movies. Karen wrote *Elastic Island Adventures* purely as a fun family project, and some of the characters are inspired by stories she wrote as a child that were serialized in the children's pages of a nationwide New Zealand Sunday newspaper. She is also working on two spin-off series, one featuring Blong the Cat, the other the very naughty frivals.

Karen was the resident book reviewer on The Cafe TV3, and she appears regularly in the media. She has been a speaker at many festivals and events, including the Going West Festival, the Devonport Arts Festival, the Tauranga Arts Festival, and Brisbane Book Week in Australia (thanks to Creative NZ Funding).



Writing Style

Alphabet Resort is an action-adventure story full of nail-biting drama, but also with lots of humour. Themes include building resilience and confidence, problem-solving, looking out for others, making friends, being yourself and developing your talents, the importance of literacy, kindness and caring for others. The *Elastic Island Adventures* series encourages creativity, where children can enjoy the theatre of their minds!

Four engaging and relatable children feature in each story. Feisty, outspoken Kiri, who often acts before she thinks. Emma, her best friend, shy, bookish and dreamy. Ethan, Emma's twin brother, who loves gadgets and inventing things and who is ever-so-annoying. Jed, the new boy in town, a born leader and athlete.

The text is in third person past tense. *Kingdom of Blong* is written for the 8 –12-year-old age group, but younger or older audiences will also enjoy this action-packed story.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. What do you think the tone of the story might be?
- How has the author set the scene in the first few pages?
- In the first chapter, the children must spell some unusual words. Have you heard of these words before? What are some other unusual words that would be fun to spell?
- In the first chapter, we meet a new parrot, Mackie the Blue and Gold Macaw. Find out what you can about the real-life bird. How is Mackie like the real bird, and how is he different?
- In the first chapter, Ethan reveals his latest invention, a binocubrolly. What do you think about Ethan's invention? What is something you would like to invent?
- In the second chapter, we meet Tilly, who works at the Kingdom of Blong. Would you like a job at the Kingdom of Blong? If so, what role would you like in the Castle?
- The Castle is a blend of different styles of architecture and design that combines white stone, South Pacific banners and flags, and Egyptian-inspired cat statues. Can you draw your own version of this Castle?
- On page 30, there is the first of many quotes about cats. How many are in the book? Can you find other quotes about cats not included in this book?
- In Chapter 3, you meet Bella, Blong's sister, for the first time. What is your initial impression of Bella?
- Blong is reluctant to be King. What are some pros and cons of being a King or Queen? Would you want to be royalty?
- Emma is worried that she will lose Blong. How valid are her concerns? Would you be worried too in the same situation?
- In Chapter 5, the children go to the castle gift shop and discover lots of products with images of Blong. If you were the shop owner, what products would you stock? What do you think would be the most popular?
- On page 46, the children discover that all the food is cat-inspired! Design your own cat-inspired menu.
- On page 49, Ethan says that fame has gone to Blong's head to explain why he is misbehaving. Would you want to be famous in the future? What would be some good things about being famous, and what would be the downside?
- In Chapter 6, we find out about the bilbies, who are real-life endangered animals. How are the bilbies in the book like the real bilbies, and how are they different? What do you think about the bilbies making their home on an island of cats? With King Blong ripping up the treaty, do you think they should stay and risk being on the dinner menu, or do you think they should go?
- At the end of Chapter 6 and into Chapter 7, we meet Heathcliff the Dog. He is named after a famous fictional character – can you find out what book from long ago that Heathcliff (a person) is a key character?
- What do you think of Heathcliff the Dog? You will notice he has many wise sayings. Can you make some wise sayings as well?



- On page 60, Squanch, Blong's butler, mentions the book *Kingdom of Blong Butler Handbook*. What sort of things do you think would be in this book?
- In Chapter 8, the bilbies have a special celebration, and they do a dance. How does this dance compare to the actual way that bilbies move?
- In Chapter 8, we discover the bilbies are very house proud of their burrows. Design your own bilby burrow, complete with furniture.
- On page 81, Jed's fungophobia is yet again evident. Debate the merits, or dangers of mushrooms, splitting into two teams.
- In Chapter 9, the cats do their weekly courtly dance. Can you draw or describe some of the different ways the cats might style their fur for this special occasion? Think about what music you would have if you were organising this dance – make a list!
- King Blong offers Jed a pot of gold to take his dog away. What do you think you could buy with a pot of gold? What you take the gold, or would you decline and protect the bilbies?
- In Chapter 12, Bella and Blong work together to open a tin of tuna. How essential is teamwork in solving problems? Invent another situation where two characters in the book work together to fix a problem.
- Throughout the book, Kiri has been very grumpy with Jed, but in Chapter 13, they are finally friends again. On page 107, Heathcliff says, 'How to apologise and also how to accept an apology are two things that are crucial for a happy life. It doesn't matter so much what happened. It is the forgiveness, putting right and moving on that counts.' Do you agree with Heathcliff?
 - On page 115, Heathcliff manages to squeeze his large body through a small space and 'Houdini' is mentioned in this context. Who is Houdini, and what he is famous for?
 - In Chapter 14, the fake Blong is revealed as an imposter – he is cousin Pong! Although Pong looks a lot like Blong, in what ways are they different?
 - In Chapter 15, the cats debate if Bella should be queen. What are some key elements of this debate? Are you happy with their decision? Do you think Bella will do an excellent job as queen?
 - The Coronation of Bella as Queen is inspired by Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953. What can you find out about Queen Elizabeth's coronation?
 - At the end of the book, the children, Blong and Heathcliff, ride the Elastic Island service back to Browns Bay. Would you like to ride Elastic Island?



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