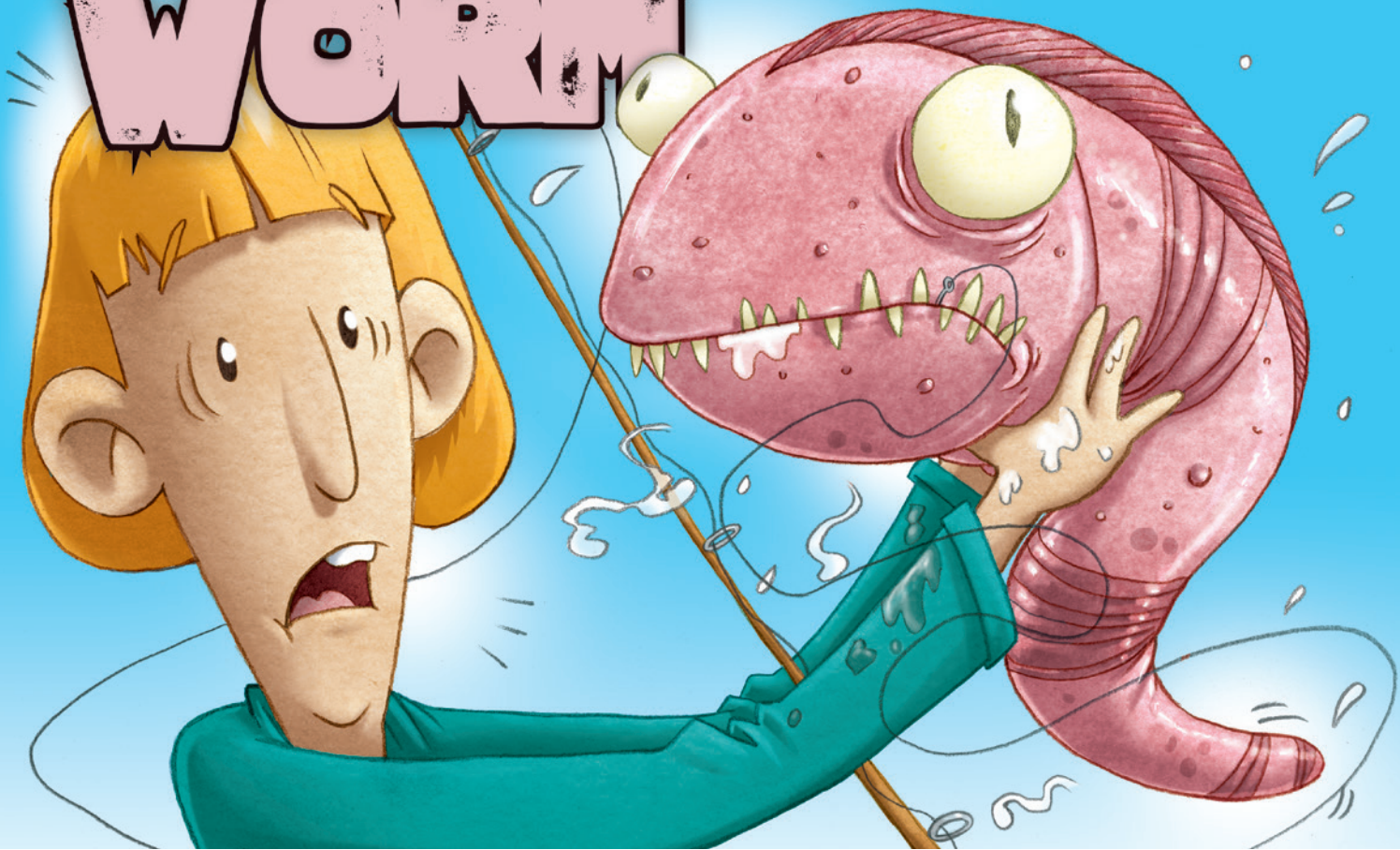


THE TERRIBLE TALE OF THE LANBTON WORM



Heather Harrison

Illustrated by
Simon Walmesley & James Walmesley



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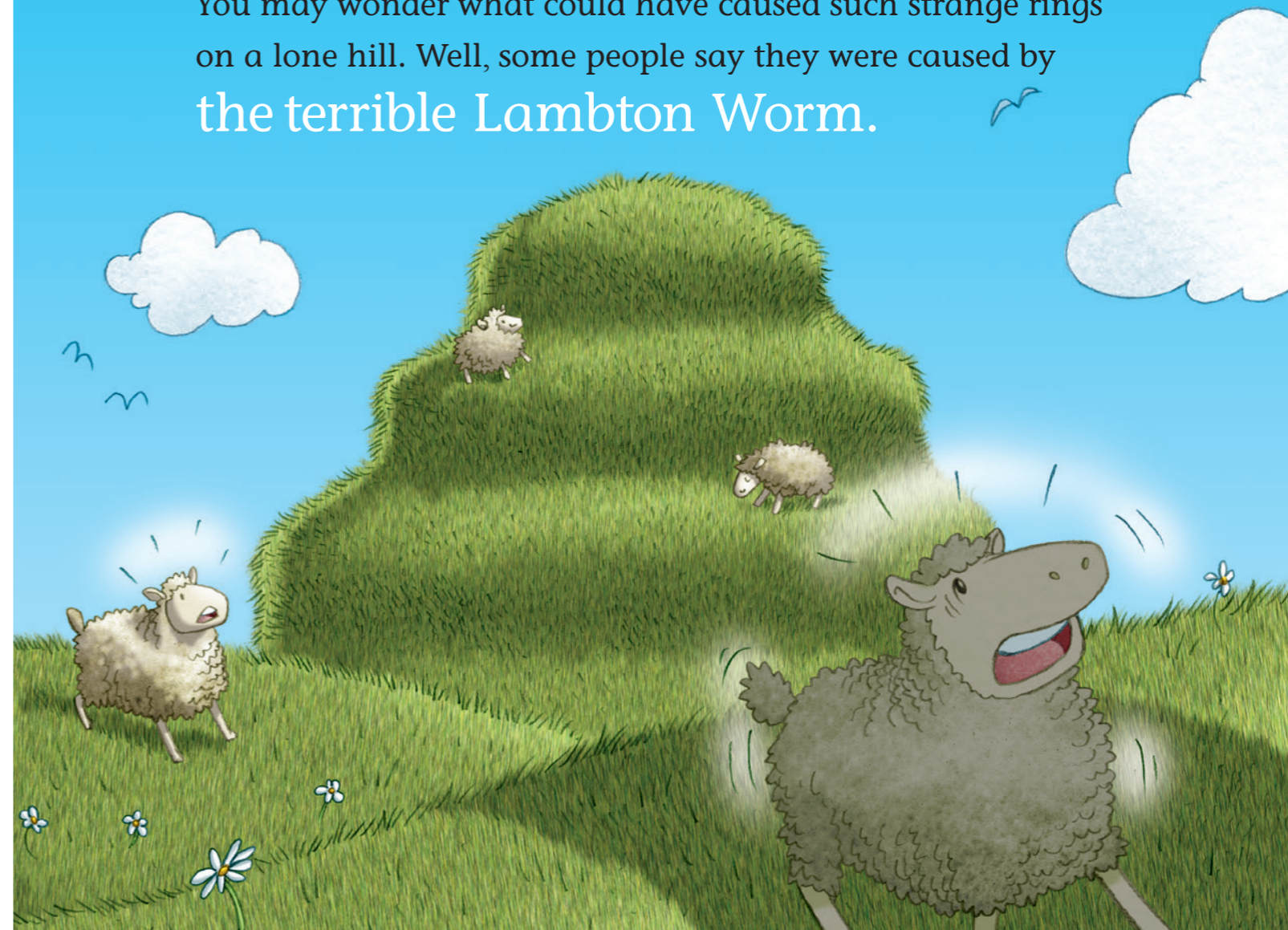
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A Pobble Press publication

For Amy, Lauren, Adam,
Lucy and Jessica

In the north-east of England, near Sunderland, lies a grassy mound called Penshaw Hill. It is encircled by three strange ridges, which form giant steps to the top. You may wonder what could have caused such strange rings on a lone hill. Well, some people say they were caused by the terrible Lambton Worm.





Years ago, Lord Lambton was Lord of the Manor thereabouts. His land was a gift from the King and, in return, he trained men from his villages to shoot arrows and wield swords, and would send them to the King whenever an army was needed.

Now, you might think the men would not like to leave their loved ones and be sent away like that, but Lord Lambton allowed their families to farm and rear their animals on his land. They just had to give Lord Lambton part of everything they produced and, in return, he promised to protect them.

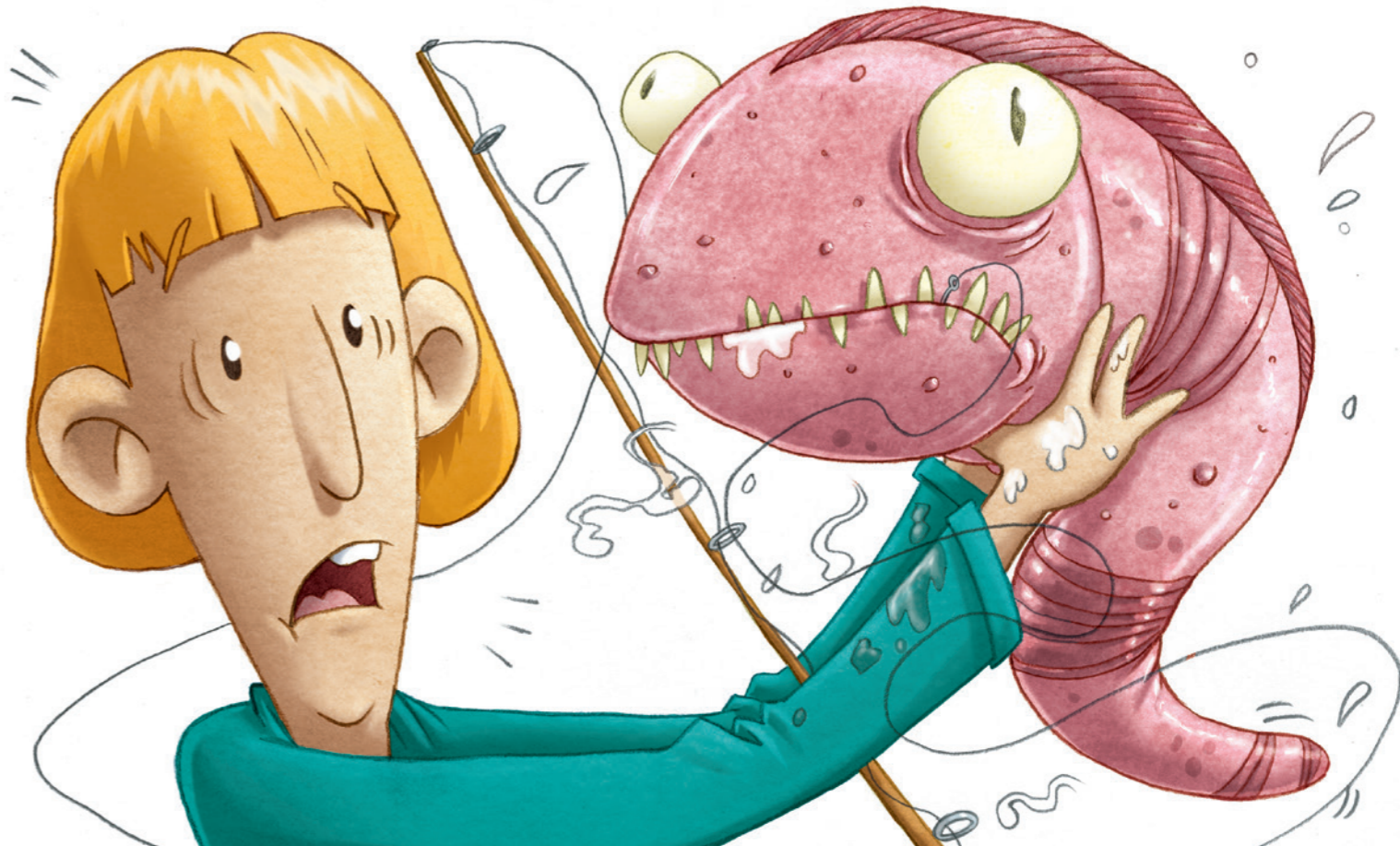
Remember that.

One day, Young Lambton, the Lord's lazy son, went down to the River Wear to fish. He was a rotten shot with arrows, timid with a sword and too spindly to be a good knight.

But he did like a spot of fishing. He cast his line into the deepest waters and at once felt a sharp tug at the bait. 'Ha, I've got a fine fish here!' he cried, straining at his rod, and out he hauled a

fat, slime-strung,
squirming
worm.

It was bigger than a cat, more like an eel than a worm, with a head like a melon, eyes like ping-pong balls and jaws crammed with pointy teeth.



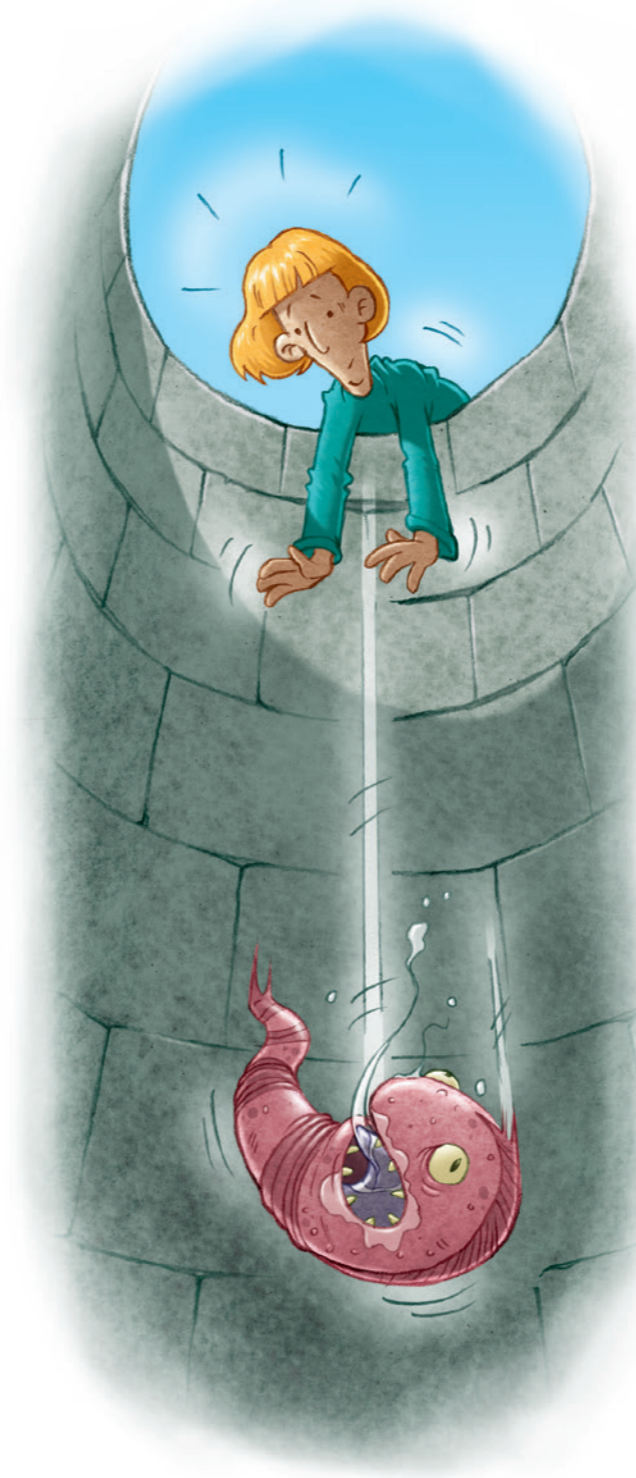
Young Lambton tied the Worm up in his fishing bag, hoping it wouldn't bite through the leather. Wondering how it would taste if the castle cook made it into an eel pie with onions, peas and a few mushrooms, he packed up his fishing tackle and set off for home.

The Worm, however, hated the scrapy dryness of the bag and

it **wriggled** and
writhed and
struggled to escape.

It dragged its teeth along the inside of the leather, trying to gnaw its way out.

Young Lambton was horrified to see the beginnings of a hole. He did not want to see those teeth tearing at his flesh, so he ran – dodging in, out, up and down – until he came to the ancient well at the edge of the village.



People said the water in the well had magic powers that could heal wounds and, if you sprinkled it about, it kept evil away.

‘Just what I need to see the back of this disgusting creature,’ thought Young Lambton.

He leaned over the well's edge, pulled the ties on his fishing bag and listened for the **PLOP** as the writhing Worm fell into the water and sank.

He whistled all the way back to the castle, drying his slimy hands on his cloak, and thought no more about the nasty creature.

When he arrived back home, his father was waiting with shocking news – he had enrolled his lazy son in the King’s army. Despite his pleading, Young Lambton had to go.

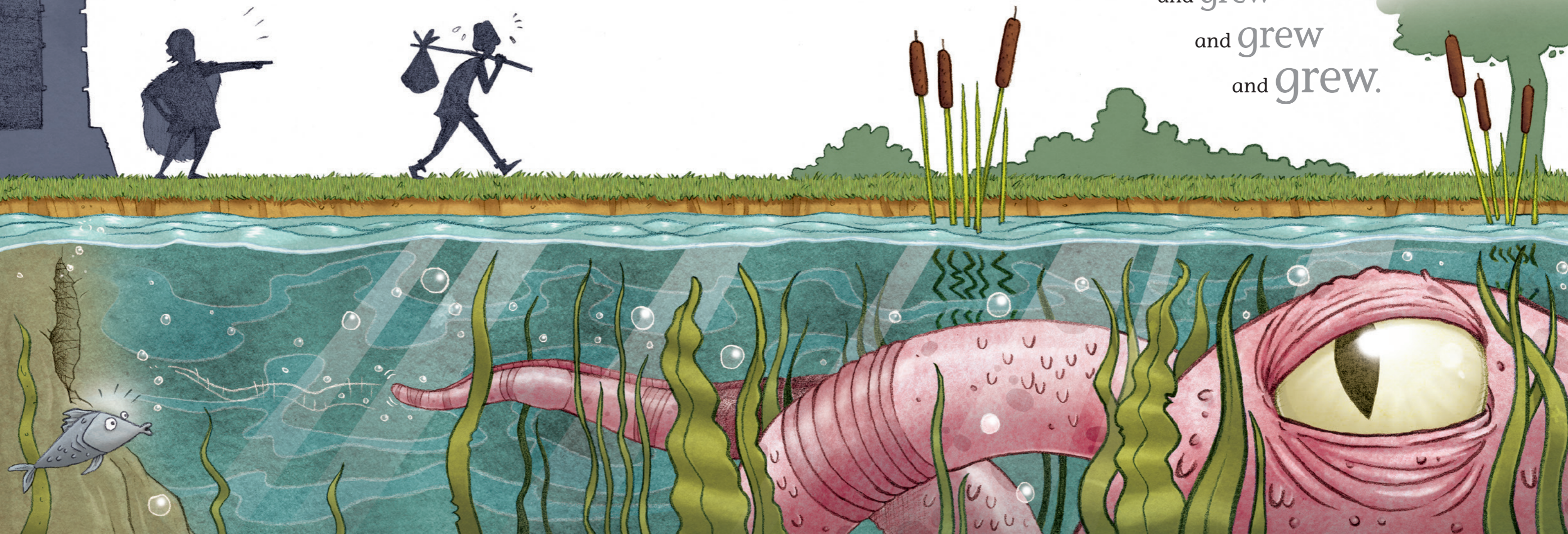
‘It’ll make a man of you, boy,’ said his father.

Meanwhile, in the depths of that well, the Worm slithered into a crevice, squeezed down a tunnel and oozed out into the river among the reeds and weeping willows. There it hid...

and grew

and grew

and grew.

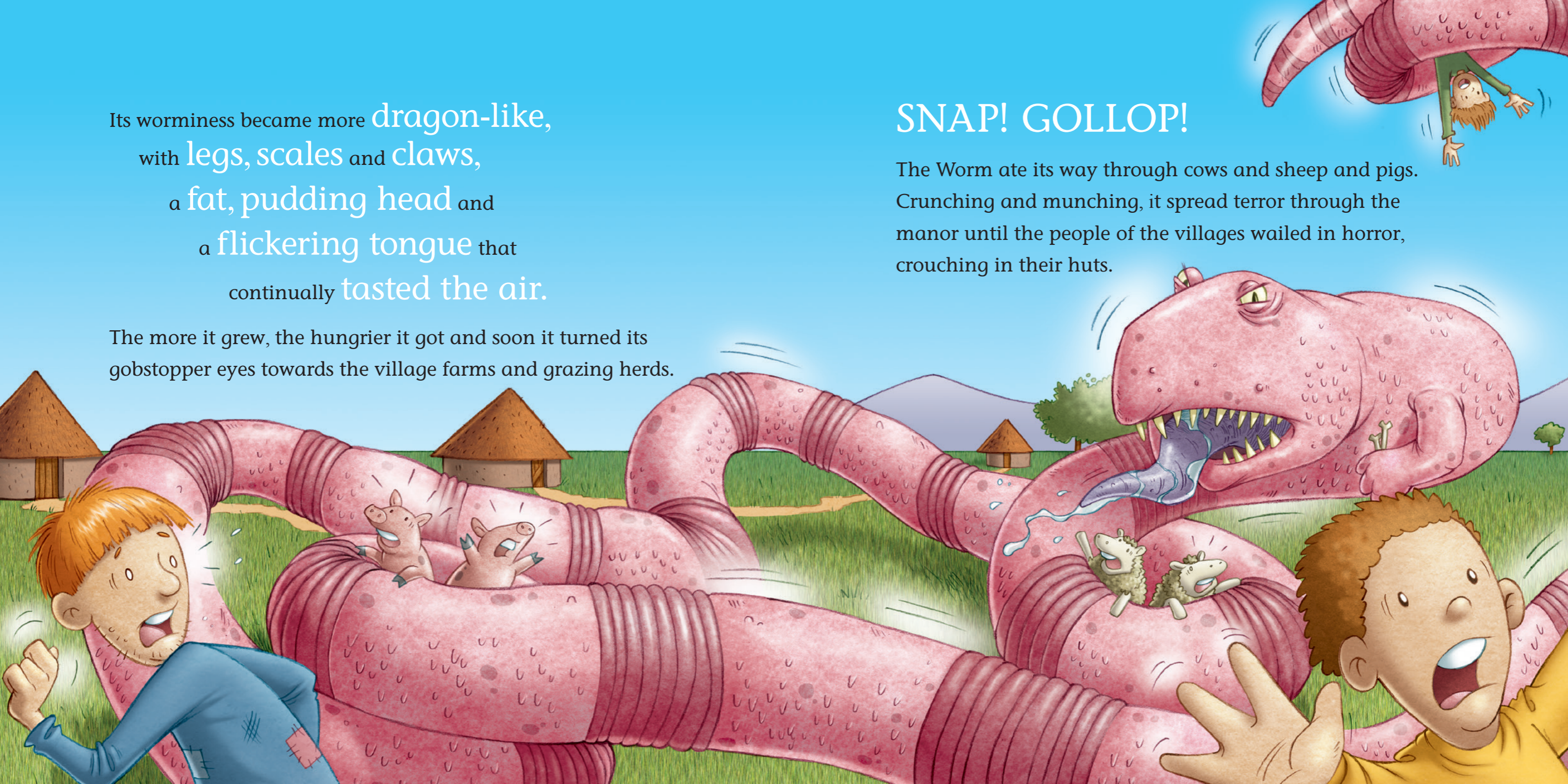


Its worminess became more dragon-like,
with legs, scales and claws,
a fat, pudding head and
a flickering tongue that
continually tasted the air.

The more it grew, the hungrier it got and soon it turned its
gobstopper eyes towards the village farms and grazing herds.

SNAP! GOLLOP!

The Worm ate its way through cows and sheep and pigs.
Crunching and munching, it spread terror through the
manor until the people of the villages wailed in horror,
crouching in their huts.



They could do nothing to stop the Worm, so they grabbed their pitchforks and marched together to the castle, chanting.

*'We want Lambton, we want Lambton!
Kill the Worm! Kill the Worm!'*

'You promised to protect us,' they shouted.
'That's the bargain. We farm. You protect.'

The Lord called upon his best soldiers and bravest knights, but none was a match for the Worm. Lambton was at a loss. What could he do? His lands had fallen to ruin and his riches were lost. He sent a desperate message to his son to come home.



When Young Lambton returned he was shocked to see how bad things were.

'What has happened?' he asked.

'The villages have been attacked by...' Lord Lambton paused.
'A worm!' he cried. Young Lambton looked puzzled.

'I don't mean a skinny wriggler of a garden worm,' explained Lord Lambton, *'I mean a stalking, cow-eating, sheep-snaffling, child-terrorising MONSTER!'*



Young Lambton thought back to that fishing trip all those years ago. Was this the very same worm that he'd tossed into the well? Why had he not destroyed it when he'd had the chance? He knew that he had been lazy and cowardly in his youth. This was his chance to put things right.

He went to the village blacksmith and asked him to hammer out a suit of armour that could help him defeat the Worm.

Now, the blacksmith's wife was thought to be a witch and she said that she could help Young Lambton too. But there was a condition – Young Lambton would have to sacrifice the first living thing he met on his return from slaying the monster. Ready to agree to anything, Young Lambton accepted the terms.

He collected his metal suit the very next day. It was awe-inspiring – jagged all over with jutting blades. There was not a finger-space of Young Lambton's body that was not covered by armour plating, hinges or chain mesh.



‘My young Lord,’ said the blacksmith, ‘take also this fire-forged sword. Its name is Worm’s Bane and it is a gift from my wife. Wield it well, sire.’

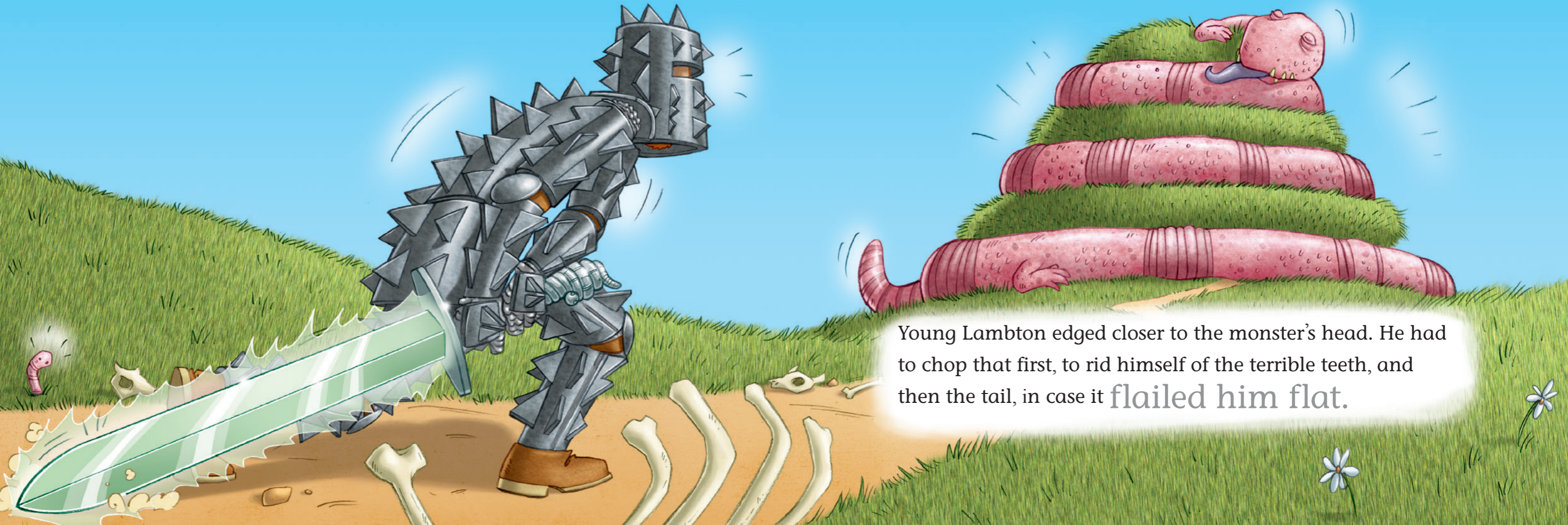
Poor lad, he could barely lift the broad blade.

Dragging the sword behind him, he crammed the helmet on and set off, squinting out through the peepholes. He followed a gruesome trail of bones until, at last, he saw it.

The Great Worm had coiled itself three times around Penshaw Hill. It was asleep. Its twitching tongue lolled loose.

Step, step, step.

Clank. Creak. Clank.



Young Lambton edged closer to the monster's head. He had to chop that first, to rid himself of the terrible teeth, and then the tail, in case it flailed him flat.

Young Lambton set his legs apart, breathed deeply and gripped Worm's Bane with both hands. As he lifted the blade above his head, a clink of armour woke the beast.

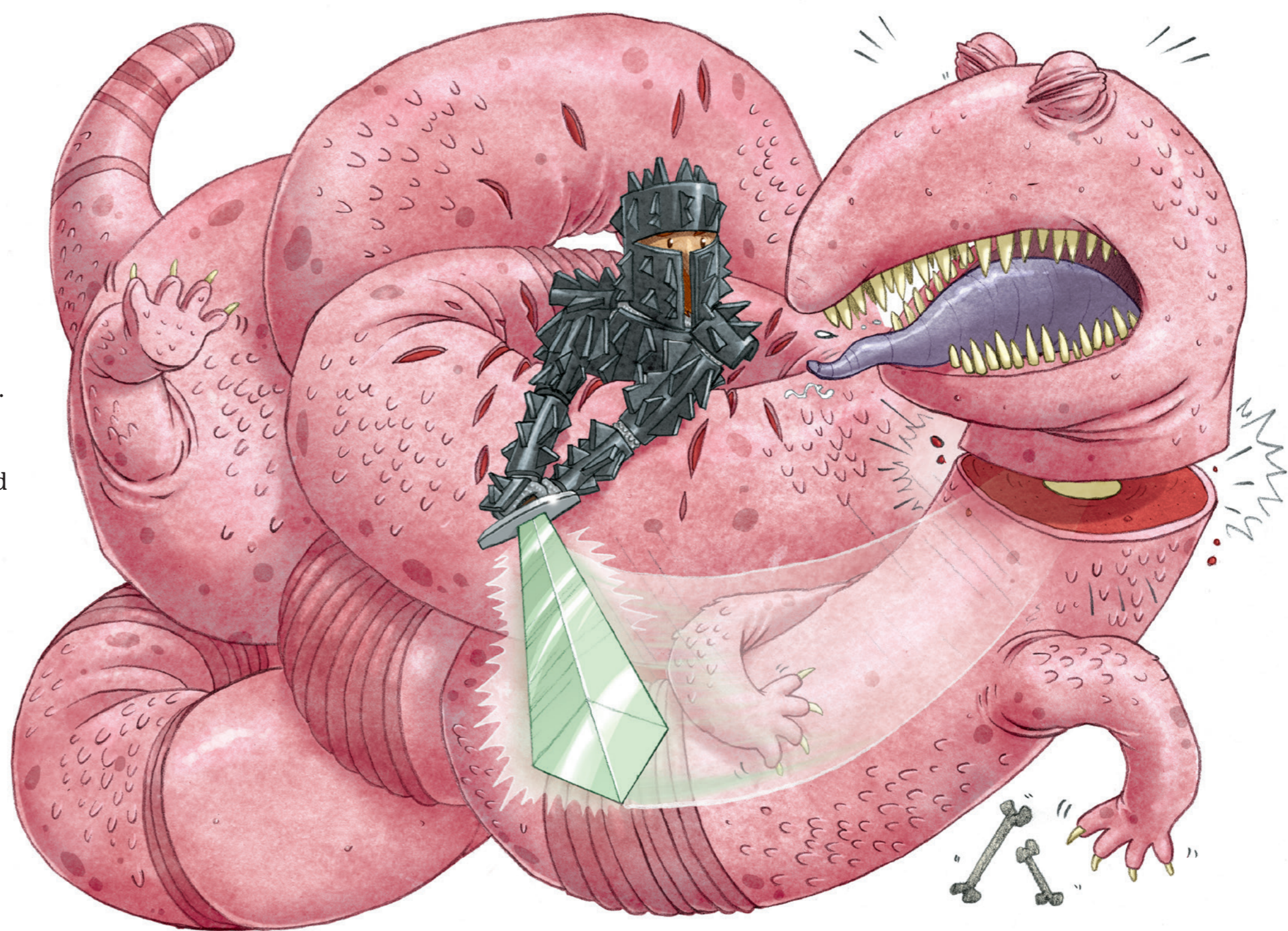
'Dinner!' thought the Worm.

'Oops!' thought Young Lambton.

The monster began to wrap its wormy body around the brave knight and started to squeeze.

But the blacksmith's armour spiked its flesh and the monster loosened its grip.

Young Lambton swung the blade with a mighty swipe. Away rolled the bulging head. Then – swish! – he slashed the tail end. He tore off his helmet and threw aside his sword. He had done it!



He tossed the three bits of the Worm into the River Wear where they were carried out into the deep North Sea.

Young Lambton walked back to the castle in triumph, only remembering the witch's curse when he saw his father. Despite his vow, he could not kill his own dad. So that day a curse fell on the Lambton family that lasted through many generations.

Or so they say.



Young Lambton loved a spot of fishing but when he cast his line into the lake, he wasn't expecting his catch to be a fat, slime-strung, squirming worm.

And that was just the very beginning of his problems....

THE TERRIBLE TALE OF THE LAMBTON WORM

is written by poet and children's author Heather Harrison.

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