

Book Reviews

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BRULO, J. (2021). *Revenge of the servants of the gods*. 2nd edn. Brulo Books, [Atherstone]. ISBN 978-1-9164183-6-3. 183 pp. Price £8.99.

BRULO, J. (2018). *The mystery of the never-ending universe*. Brulo Books, [Atherstone]. ISBN 978-1-9164183-2-5. 170 pp. Price £8.99.

BRULO, J. (2020). *Swords in the sky*. Brulo Books, [Atherstone]. ISBN 978-1-9164183-4-9. 151 pp. Price £8.99.

BRULO, J. (2021). *The buried city. A tale of two time zones*. Brulo Books, [Atherstone]. ISBN 978-1-9164183-5-6. 143 pp. Price £9.99.

The first three books are deemed as the Vulture Island trilogy with the fourth called a prequel (as opposed to a sequel), because its first time zone pre-dates the trilogy. This is a gargantuan feast of pure science fiction and imagination, nearly 650 pages of it, though I note that each successive volume gets slimmer. For myself I have never been interested in sci-fi, but I turned these pages feverishly, anxious to know what's next, it was all so exciting. In short, all of it in all four books was gripping! Although the books are stated to be in a "children's published fiction category", they certainly appealed to me as well. (Oh dear, am I in my second childhood?). The books are in paperback, and A5 in size. The illustrations, in a pleasing style, are by Foxhat, i.e. Emily Chan-Moore.

Luke Bright is the hero throughout, he is ten years old. Without warning, his parents inform him that the family is relocating from England to Ýpas Nisi (Vulture Island) in the Mediterranean (i.e., Cyprus, the map in three of the books depicts such). He is horrified, but his adventures now begin. He has a friend, Mike, in England, and he teams up with Andreás on the island. Together these three face all the adventures. I thought that they were very (too?) mature for their ten-year ages, barely acting like boys at all, and full of adult-like conversations; I don't remember boyhood being like that. Perhaps the authoress was wanting to up-grade their thoughts and behaviour from the 'normal'.

Anyway, be that as it may, the true facilitator of successful outcomes to the adventures accosts Luke on page 26 of the first book already; it is an adult Eurasian Griffon, and Luke soon names him as "Griff". These two, Luke and Griff, communicate with each other by forming words and sentences in the other's mind. Throughout the books they have helluva conversations with each other. The griffon has been alive, it seems, from the dawn of time, and in fact finishes by displacing Zeus himself as leader of the gods! Really, Luke and friends can't progress anywhere without Griff's helping hand (whoops, I mean wings and feet). On at least two occasions, Griff seriously rescues the boys from certain death – Griff always arrives in the nick of time.

Griffon Vultures are the servants of the gods, whose task is to carry the souls of the (human) dead to the "Never-ending Universe". Somehow the boys visit this place, far off into space, in the second book, where Luke meets his actual father (who died when Luke was young). What an exciting adventure this is,

and my favourite of the four books. The subject of the third book is a new wind turbine farm that threatens to kill the vultures as they fly nearby – the birds cannot see the turbines with their partially forward vision. Naturally, there are villains in the books, both humans and gods, but they are always overcome, and the turbine developer is one.

Of course, I cannot divulge any more of the stories, in terms of the details in the books, you must read them for yourself! I expect you will enjoy them as much as I did, notwithstanding the age of the boyish adventurers. Judy Brulo thanks the Vulture Conservation Foundation (and I thank our editor Louis Phipps for pointing me to this series of books) and also BirdLife Cyprus for information, and for helping vultures to survive. The poisoning of vultures is mentioned, as is a vulture restaurant, and a reintroduction programme to Vulture Island, so Judy is well up-to-date in her knowledge of the birds. Perhaps a fifth book could tell the story of the successful rehabilitation of griffons on to Vulture Island, notwithstanding the political fracture of Cyprus into two halves? Anyway, I thoroughly recommend these books for a gripping, informative, and sci-fi adventure with Luke and Griff.

VULPRO (2020). *Magnificent vultures of Africa*. Vulture Programme, Skeerpoort (South Africa). ISBN 978-0-620-88355-9. 72 pp. Price R650 (ca US\$45).

This is a photographic extravaganza of a book, large size in ‘landscape’ format, and just a bit shorter than A3 in length. In total there are 108 photos, almost all in colour, and nine range maps taken from the African Raptor Databank. Some of the photos are quite marvellous, such as the front cover itself (portraying seven standing and one arriving Cape Griffons), two White-backed Vultures attacking each other in mid-air, flying duos of the Bearded Vulture, and an adult Cape Griffon attacking a Black-backed Jackal; but of course many more. I particularly appreciated the (few) portraits of juvenile birds, such as the adult female + juvenile White-headed Vultures standing next to each other. There is also a neat sequence of five photos of an Egyptian Vulture egg hatching into a hatchling (in a captive facility). No less than 19 photographers have contributed images, including two well-known South Africans, Albert Froneman and Chris van Rooyen (the latter is unfortunately omitted from the credits but included as an Erratum slip!).

Nine species of vulture are portrayed, being those present in South Africa, so the book’s title is not entirely correct. The two other African species that are omitted are the Eurasian Griffon and the Cinereous Vulture. The Latin names are correct, and the book rightly notes that the Rüppell’s Griffon and White-backed Vulture occur in “very small numbers in Europe” (indeed with the latter as only one or two!). And in fact four species “occur only in Africa” – the Palm-nut Vulture should also be one of these. John Yeld has written a few pages of “Introduction” that rightly highlights the thoughts and activities of Kerri Wolter, the founder and chief executive of VulPro, and also possibly (?) pages at the end of the book on “Rescues, Rehabilitation and Reintroductions”. In these sections are to be found interesting results on VulPro’s actions since the beginning of 2007, such as how many birds had been rehabilitated and released back into the wild. Each of the nine species has brief paragraphs of its naming, its South African population size, and threats to its survival, contributed by Alexandra Howard. This sumptuous book ends with a page on Hans Hoheisen and his charitable trust which sponsored the production of the book.

Altogether a book to be recommended and enjoyed!
