

The Bare Bum Gang and the Holy Grail

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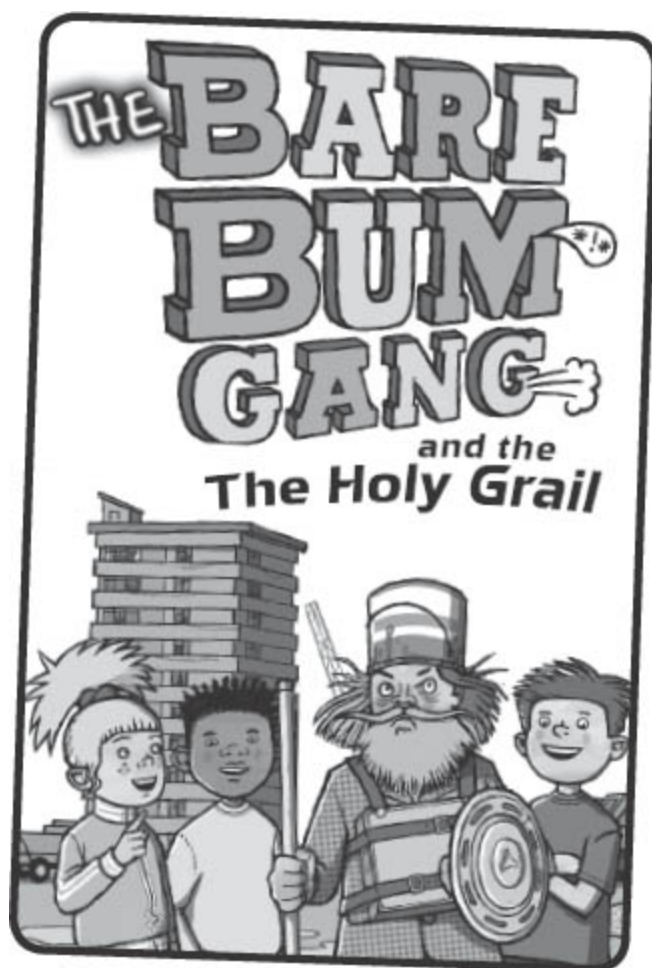
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About the Book

Ludo, Noah, Jamie, The Moan and Jennifer are THE MIGHTY BARE BUM GANG! Well , OK, not that mighty, but they are about to face their toughest challenge yet.

An old tramp begs the gang to save his mysterious treasure from an abandoned block of flats. Standing in their way are ruthless security guards, a terrifying tunnel of doom and a vicious dog that is almost certainly Zoltan, Hound of Dracula.

Could the tramp really be King Arthur reborn? Could his treasure be fabled Holy Grail? Probably not, but anything is possible ...



ANTHONY MCGOWAN

Illustrated by Frances Castle

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*To Patrick Hayes,
godchild extraordinaire*

THE BARE BUM GANG



NOAH



JENNIFER



LUDO



PHILLIP



JAMIE



Chapter One

KING ARTHUR

I WAS IN the park with Noah, trying to get the walkie-talkies to work. Getting walkie-talkies to work is one of the most difficult things in the world to do - about as hard, on average, as strangulating a crocodile with your bare hands, or eating a fried egg without getting a dribble of yolk down the front of your jumper. However, as leader of the Bare Bum Gang, doing impossible things such as strangulating crocodiles, etc., was part of my job.

Noah was on one side of the park, and I was on the other. 'Come in, Blue Baboon. Are you receiving me?'

Blue Baboon was Noah's secret code-name.

'No,' yelled Noah. 'But I can hear you anyway. And if you call me Blue Baboon again, Ludo, I'm going home.'

Noah didn't like being called Blue Baboon, because some baboons have blue bottoms, so he thought it meant that I was calling him a baboon's bum.

I'd changed the batteries, fiddled with all the switches and dials, and bashed the walkie-talkies on the floor for a while, but it made no difference. We might as well have been talking into our shoes.

It was then that I saw the tramp. Our town only had one proper tramp. I didn't know his real name, but everyone called him King Arthur, because he used to wear armour

like one of the Knights of the Round Table. Of course, his armour wasn't real. He'd made it himself. The breastplate was a biscuit tin, his helmet was a paint can, his shield was a car hubcap, and for his lance he had a mop handle.



Some people said King Arthur was a loony. That was wrong for two reasons. The first is that you shouldn't call people loonies even if they are, in fact, as crazy as a coot, because it may hurt their feelings. Secondly, I didn't think that King Arthur *was* a loony.

Being a tramp is a very hard job, and if I were a tramp, I'd probably pretend that I was a Knight of the Round Table as well, to take my mind off how rubbish my life was. So, my theory was that he didn't *believe* he was a Knight of the Round Table, he just *pretended* to be one, as a game.

Miss Bridges says that I've got something called a Vivid Imagination, and it's probably the same with King Arthur.

We often used to see him wandering around, looking in the bins in the park for items of interest, or sitting outside Sainsbury's with his helmet in his lap, asking people

politely if they had any spare change. My dad always gave him a pound, and I was allowed to put it in his helmet.

Normally King Arthur walked in a shuffly way, because his shoes were broken and flappy and tied together with string, and maybe also because he had bad legs. But now I saw that he was trying to run, which was hard for him. And he was holding the shield over his head. Then I saw why he was running.

The Dockery Gang.

Not all of them, just Dockery, Stanton and Larkin. They were behind King Arthur, laughing and jeering.

And throwing stones.

Now, don't get me wrong – throwing stones is one of my favourite things to do in the world, but not at helpless old people. Or at your next-door neighbour's windows, unless it was only an accident, and anyway I was aiming at a tin can on top of our fence, and it was completely unfair that I lost ten weeks' pocket money to pay for it.

Seeing poor King Arthur being attacked like that made me very angry. Even Dockery had never sunk this low before. Without even thinking I ran over to them.

'Stop it, you stupid idiots,' I yelled out.

I know I should have thought of something more rude and funny than *idiots*, but I was just too furious.

Dockery paused halfway through throwing a stone, and looked at me. His face went from laughing, to blank, to smiling wickedly.

'What's it got to do with you?'

'I just want you to stop.'

'Ha! And what if I don't want to? What are you going to do about it, cry all over us? That'll really hurt.'

Larkin and Stanton guffawed, which is a special kind of laugh for idiots.

'Me? I won't do anything about it,' I replied calmly. 'But I know someone who will.'

By this time Noah had come up beside me. He was about as much use in a fight as a wet lettuce (actually, even *I* was only about as much use as a dry lettuce, but that's not the point).

Dockery stopped guffawing.

'Noah,' I said, without taking my eyes from Dockery.

'Yes?'

'Call Jennifer on the walkie-talkie. Tell her to get over here pronto. Tell her to put on her karate outfit – she's got some butts to kick.'

Jenny was the girl in our gang. Even though I originally didn't want her to join, I now thought that every gang should have a girl in it. Just one, though. You don't really want more than one girl per gang, because then you'll be in a girl gang, which is one of the worst kinds of gang to be in. Before you know it you'll be neck-deep in Barbie dolls and My Little Ponies and perfume and flowers.

But one girl is perfect, especially if she's Jenny. The thing is that Jenny is brilliant at karate, tae kwon do, judo and kung fu, and is quite capable of kicking the butts of Dockery and his gang without breaking a sweat.

'But – but . . .' stammered Noah.

'Just do it.'

Then he got it.

'Oh, yes, of course.'

He twisted a dial and pressed a knob.

'Jenny, are you receiving me? Over.'

Then a pause, while he pretended to listen.

'Yes,' he continued. 'We have a *situation* here.'

Another pause. More pretend listening.

'You'll be right over? Great. And you'll bring the Ninja Death Stars? Excellent.'

And then all we could see were the backs (and butts) of Dockery, Stanton and Larkin as they ran for their lives.