

CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE WEEK

I Survived the Battle of D-Day, 1944 by Lauren Tarshis review — a brilliant way to teach kids history

Graphic novels may have been dominated by superheroes but this one reminds us that real life can be more dramatic than anything found in the Marvel universe



Lauren Tarshis's book is illustrated to brilliant effect by Brian Churilla
BRIAN CHURILLA

BY LUCY BANNERMAN

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"This is going to be a good day." Even in the worst circumstances, Paul is determined to find his mum a birthday present. Their French village has been

under Nazi control for years. His Jewish best friend has vanished. His father is in a German prison camp. "All the best foods have disappeared" so he decides to temporarily banish all thoughts of war and exchange his last possession, his leather football, for some madeleine cakes for his mum.

But then he finds an American paratrooper caught

tangled in a tree and his whole world is turned upside down. Not only does Paul discover that a secret resistance group is operating in the village and that it includes many familiar faces, including his teacher, the man who bought his football and even his mum, he also discovers that the American is a special agent trained in explosives who is there to help them to co-ordinate a top-secret mission to sabotage the Nazis.

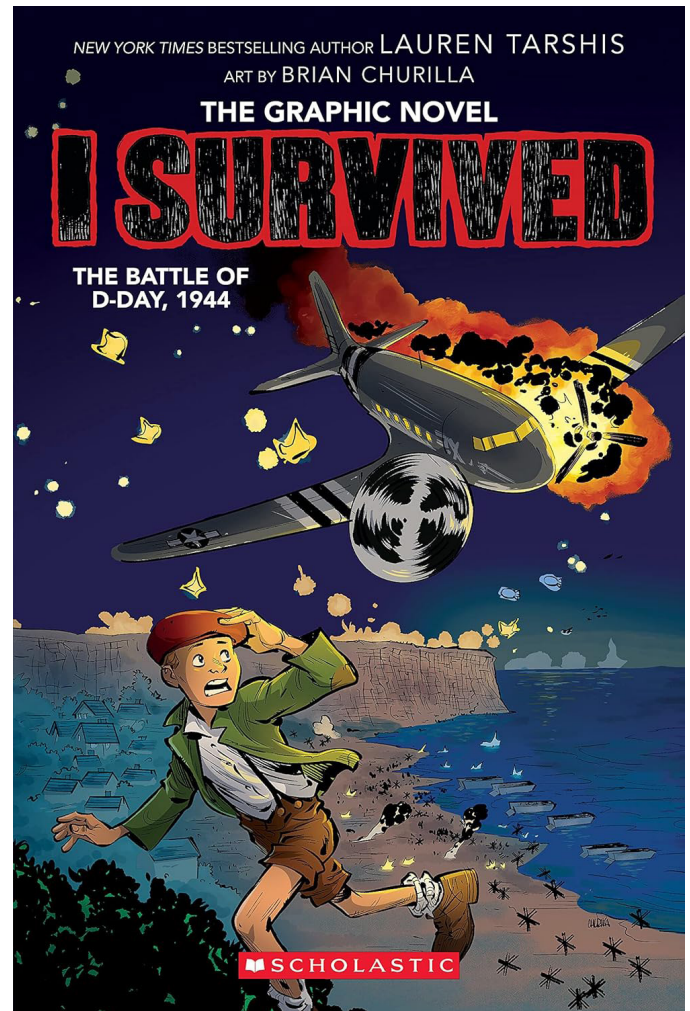
“This is it! Listen. Yes, that’s it!” they exclaim, as the coded message they’ve all been waiting for crackles across the radio. The poem they are listening to on the BBC, his mum explains, is actually “a secret message to the resistance groups all over France” telling them to prepare for D-Day. The largest seaborne invasion is about to begin.

Paul realises that ships packed with soldiers are already gathered in the Channel. “Those soldiers are out there right now, riding through choppy waters in the dark.”

To give the soldiers a fighting chance of making it ashore, Paul must help to disable German defences by stealing through the dark to plant plastic explosives in the dreaded rocket launchers — those *Nebelwerfers* have to be destroyed tonight.

This is a clever series that uses the exciting and accessible “ka-boom” format of the graphic novel to introduce younger readers to some of the most dramatic moments in history. The D-Day book is one of ten graphic novels based on the bestselling books by Lauren Tarshis, each of them told from the point of view of the children who lived to tell the tale. There’s a strong US slant, with others focusing on Hurricane Katrina and September 11.

It makes you wonder why more graphic novels



aren’t used to such brilliant, educational effect.

They also hit that sweet spot for the many Jamie Smart fans who grew up loving *Bunny vs Monkey* and *The Phoenix* comics and may still enjoy graphic novels but are now hungry for meatier subjects. Most importantly, the emphasis here is on courage and resilience rather than tragedy, so the stories never feel overwhelming, in spite of the immensity of the subject matter.

Graphic novels may have been dominated by superheroes, but this one reminds us that (whisper it) real life can be more dramatic than anything found in the Marvel universe.