



# Hoodies and Hastings

by Mark S. Masters

**An objective critique by Louise Johnson**

This book opens with a long history of the various invasions and bloody skirmishes that took place in England up to the point at which the Norman William the Conqueror defeats Harold Godwinson at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 to become King of England. What follows is a long account of invasions, constant acts of aggression, pillaging and general bloody, gory, bad behaviour on the part of the English – sometimes justified, sometimes not it seems, the passage of time marked by a change of monarch. It is tempting to skip chunks of this history and get on to the main event, however, full immersion is a clever backdrop to understanding the context of the ideas put forward in the book. The artist is showing us that all through our history the English have been involved in an insatiable cycle of the acquisition of power, land and annihilation, driven by the ego instilled in men as children.

Having set the scene, the artist tells his tale, based loosely he explains on the concepts of neo-platonism and ideas from Shakespeare's *Tempest*. On the notion of man's capacity to ultimately self-destruct he draws on iconic images of the submerged Statue of Liberty from the film 'Planet of the Apes'; and the destruction of mankind in 'The Terminator'.

The artist's story is cleverly written in the timeless style of a children's Ladybird book, a simple tale with a dark and complex message about human nature and the insatiable need for power, and who it is that is responsible for the destruction of the planet. Whilst today man's destruction, need for power and ego often plays out in the building of the tallest tower, the biggest car, the race for oil in the Poles as the ice caps melt, building of nuclear capacity, changing fashion, the consequences are the same as they were in Shakespeare's day – self-destruction driven by man's ego, albeit now the consequences are more dramatic. The artworks that accompany the story powerfully illustrate the ideas put forward in the narrative - dark, brooding, atmospheric images of powerful soldiers set against the post modern world of urban and industrial decay, all of which give a sense of a looming sense of disaster like the apocalyptic landscape in *The Terminator*.

The artist is skilled at giving us multi-layered juxtaposed images, showing all the little layers of history that could have been played out in every corner of our land – soldiers shooting bows and arrows in the foreground of a disused Parker Pen factory; soldiers fighting a bloody battle in front of a broken down fairground. The artist has managed to capture the stilted hyper-real style of the characters drawn in the Ladybird books that evoke so many subconscious childhood memories, so the artwork is at once familiar, yet remains disturbing and threatening. Set amongst the brooding landscape are the ever present hoodies, lurking, loitering and posturing but without actually engaging in the story and having no sense of purpose. So we have another layer to the story, the disaffected Caliban youth with no desire to do anything except posture and be senselessly aggressive and criminal. As with the *Tempest*, the people who need to take direct responsibility for the destruction of the planet are not necessarily the hoodies or the low life's lurking in the shadows but the people gifted with tools and intelligence to change the course of history.

Overall, this is a very thought provoking, challenging and interesting book with fantastic artwork.