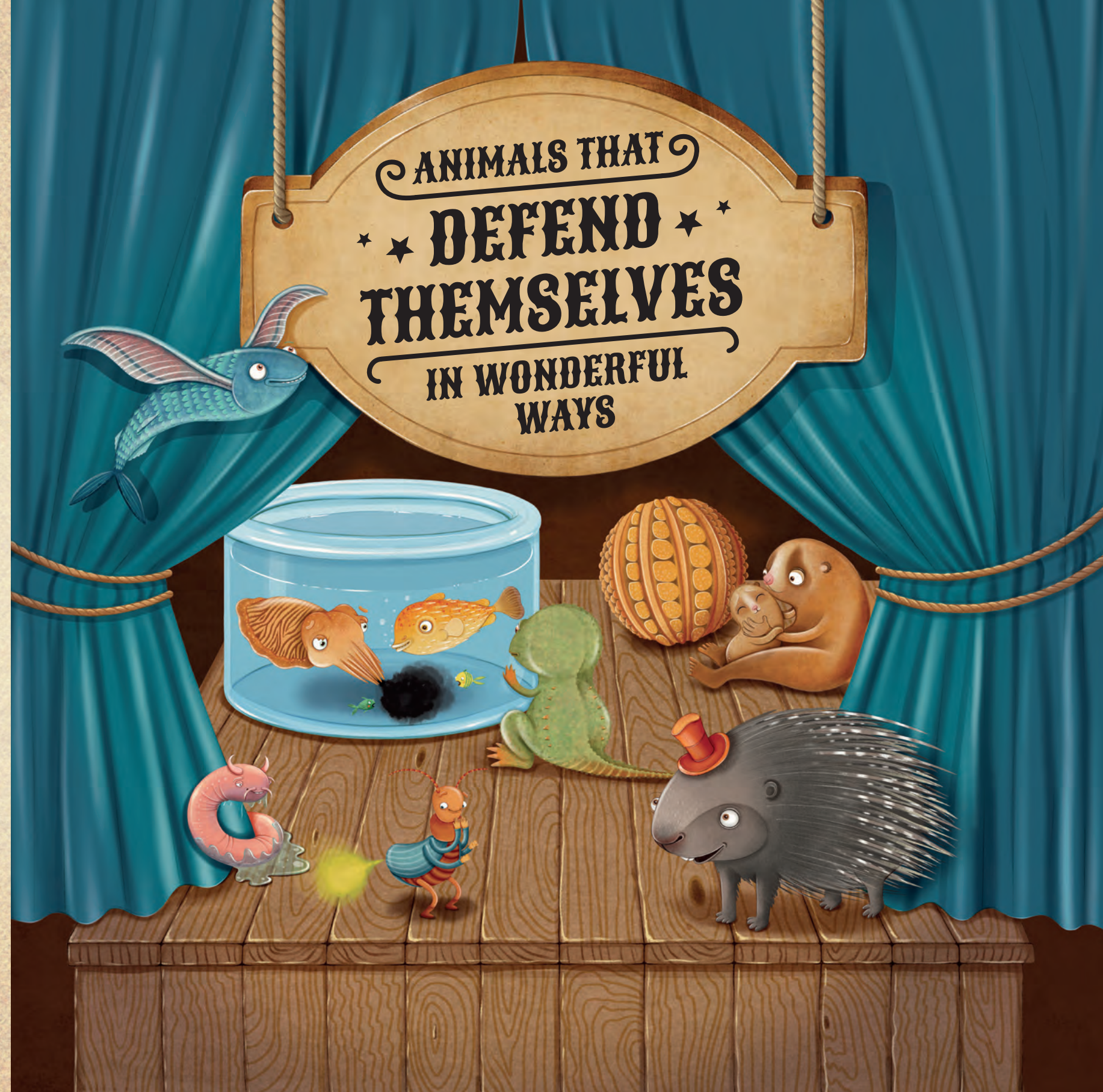




CHAPTER
VIII.

We're nearing the end, slowly but surely. It is true, my friends. I too am getting teary-eyed just thinking about it. But alas, such is life. Everything good must come to an end, sooner or later. In our case, everything crazy that is. And if you don't like it and feel like making me continue, remember I have a team of the best defenders at my disposal. Sort of bodyguards, one might say. But they're not just some regular football or hockey-players. These are the ultimate masters of self-defence. Karate? Judo? Taekwondo? Pah! You know where you can stick those. The tricks known to this group are a mystery to everyone spines, armour, swords, venom, that's only a fraction of what we're going to show you. So be very, very careful! Our tiny stage might just about turn into a veritable arena where gladiators fight to the death. Please welcome our last performers and prepare yourselves, because masters of self-defence are coming!





COMMON CUTTLEFISH



The cuttlefish is a favourite prey of many large sea creatures, including octopuses, sharks and dolphins. No wonder, then, that it has mastered various strategies to protect itself from being eaten. The best of these ensures that the hunter fails to notice it. To blend in with its surroundings, the cuttlefish can change colour at will. It can also make itself 'invisible' to the electric sense of sharks

... - by going stiff and covering the openings of its gills with its tentacles, so reducing the electric field around its body to such a degree that the shark's 'radar' doesn't pick it up. When camouflage doesn't work, the cuttlefish turns to other tricks, such as spraying its predator with a gush of water or ink, so covering its retreat.

SUNDA SLOW LORIS

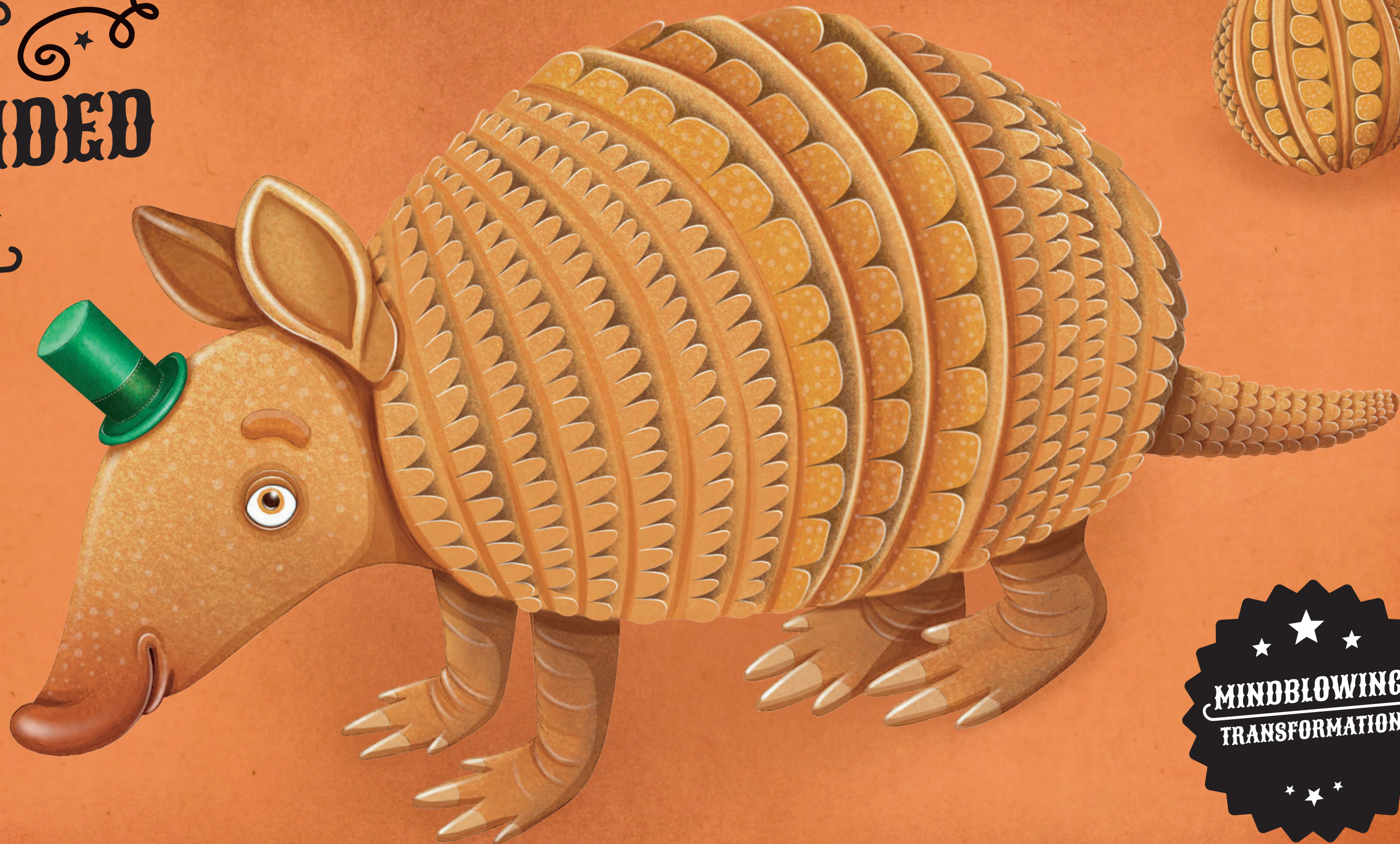


Danger! To look at the Sunda slow loris, you wouldn't think that it was poisonous, would you? This cute furry thing is a relation of the monkey. Its wide, staring eyes and slow swings from branch to branch give it a pretty defenceless appearance. And it's true that it can't run away from its enemies; instead, it resists them with an excretion produced on the insides of its elbows. This venomous

... substance takes effect on contact with saliva. The mixture is spread all over the loris's body as it licks itself and combs its fur with its teeth. A dutiful loris mother cares for her young in the same way, so allowing her to leave them without supervision for a while. No eagle or snake, no matter how hungry, will feast on a poisonous loris.

SOUTHERN THREE-BANDED ARMADILLO

At first sight, the armadillo looks rather like a species of extinct lizard, but in fact it is a mammal. When it got itself a handsome shell, perhaps it was inspired by turtle fashion. This shell is made of the same material as human nails, and its plates overlap each other so tightly as to leave no gap. You might expect this armour to give perfect protection, but unfortunately it has a weak point: as it covers the back only, by turning the armadillo over, the enemy can strike at its belly. But the South American three-banded armadillo stays a step ahead of its foes. No sooner has it sensed danger than it rolls itself into a ball, as if about to perform asomersault, so packing all soft parts of its body within its armour and leaving nothing for the enemy to attack.



MINDBLOWING
TRANSFORMATION

FLYING FISH



What a maddening experience it is for a hunter when his prey flies away from right in front of him! And if that prey is a fish, it's more maddening still. Flying fish are masters of this strategy, not least as their pectoral fins are very like bird wings in shape. They may not be able to flap the 'wings', but they do allow them to glide, like an aeroplane. Although the flying fish is only

some 20 centimetres long, it can jump up to 6 metres from the surface of the water, at a speed of 70 kilometres per hour - which is about twice as fast as a human record sprinter. And that's not all the flying fish can do, with great skill, it bounces on the waves, allowing it to land far from its starting point and to change direction in flight.

HAGFISH



Although it looks like an eel, it isn't really a fish. It would be truer to say that the hagfish is a distant cousin of the fish, which in its hundreds of millions of years of ocean life has barely changed. And why should it? Quite literally, it slips away from its enemies. The glands on its body secrete a great deal of slime, and this slime expands in water. This makes catching a hagfish about as easy

as catching a snake coated with a thick layer of custard. And if anyone tries to do so, the hagfish has another trick up its sleeve: it ties a knot in its serpentine body, pushes it from its head to its tail, and shoots all its slime directly at its attacker. Most hungry creatures of the seas have learned their lesson and stay well away from the hagfish.

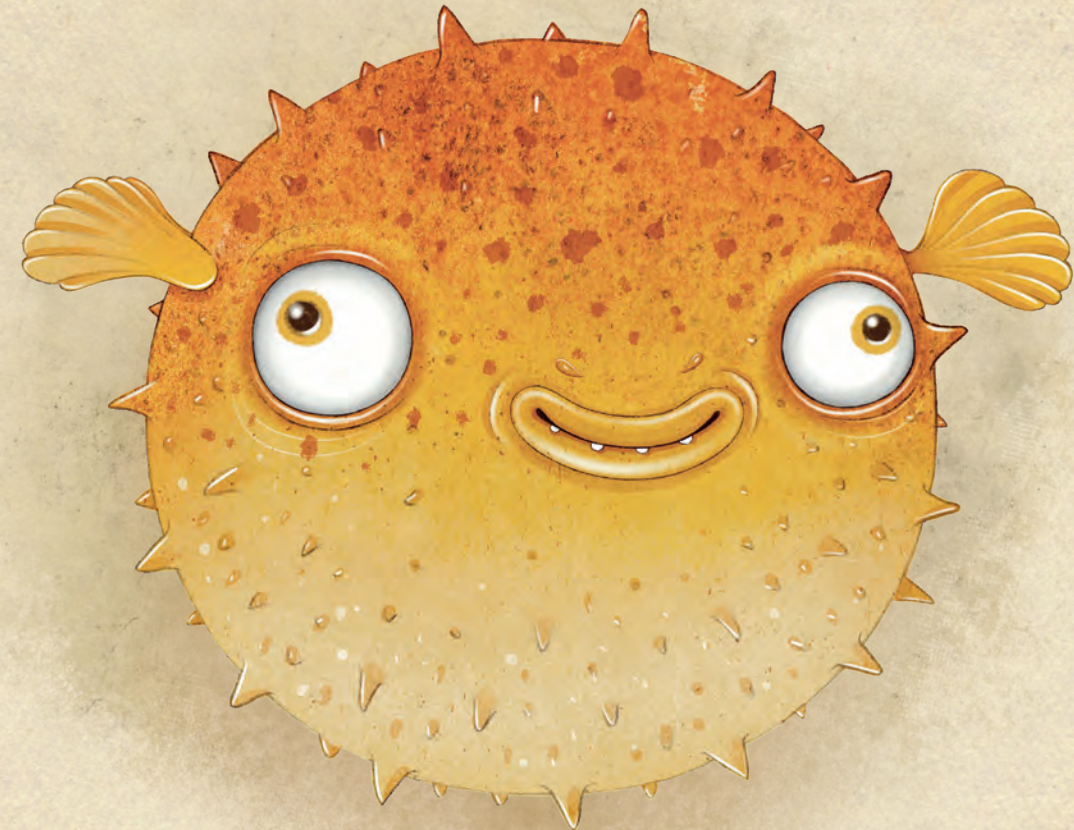
BOMBARDIER BEETLE



Have you ever heard of insect artillery? The bombardier beetle is a small beetle which runs fast and has shiny, metallic-green wing-cases. As it hunts other insects, it must take care not to be hunted and killed itself. In self-defence, it uses a weapon of very high calibre. This is not a cannon but its abdomen, which fires not cannonballs and gunpowder but doses of a chemical compound. It produces

this compound continuously, storing it in containers in its abdomen. Not only is the stinking mixture it sprays at its enemy boiling hot, it has the force of a shot. The enemy hurries to get out of the bombardier's range. Builders of aircraft engines are very interested in the bombardier, as they would love to imitate the beetle's technology.

LONG-SPINE PORCUPINEFISH



Meat the long-spine porcupinefish, a charmingly spotted inhabitant of tropical seas and oceans the world over. Looks good, doesn't it? If you get on well with it, you will find it a nice chap with an ordinary fish-like appearance. But you should see it when it gets angry! Which is just what happens when someone tries to eat it. It puffs itself up into a ball - an act which would be enough to scare

the enemy away. On top of this, however, it bristles the spines on its porcupine-like body (at rest, these flow backwards). A prickly ball is not an appetizing prospect. What's more, the long-spine porcupinefish is venomous. Any would-be predator is well advised to find something less dangerous for its lunch, or the enemy to attack.



WELCOME!



Boys and girls, ladies and gentlemen.
Broll up, roll up! You will hear things
you have never heard before, and you will
see things you have never before seen
like a frog with a handsome moustache,
a butterfly that looks like a bird, a fish
with its own light, a three-eyed lizard.
Allow our book to present to you all these
and many more marvellous creatures,
large and small, from all over the world.
Take a seat, make yourself comfortable,
turn the page, draw aside the curtain and
let the show begin!

