


WHAT MUST ASH MCCARTHY DO TO SURVIVE?



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 Dan Smith Author

 @DanSmithAuthor

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## BOY X BY DAN SMITH

### SYNOPSIS

*Boy X is a fast-paced jungle adventure featuring a reluctant hero and an intelligent and capable heroine. During their adventure, they form a strong friendship and are forced to make some life-changing decisions.*

Kidnapped and drugged, Ash McCarthy wakes up to find himself in what appears to be an empty research facility. In bare feet and a pair of pyjamas, he sets out to search for his mum but when he reaches the exit, he discovers that he is far from home. Ash meets Isabel who explains that they are on Isla Negra - a jungle island off the coast of Costa Rica. Together, they head back into the building only to discover that Ash's mum and Isabel's dad - both genetic scientists - have been imprisoned in a lab and infected with a deadly virus known as Kronos. In twenty-four hours, it will be too late to save them, and they will die. Their only hope is the anti-virus, Zeus, but the people who locked them in the lab have stolen Zeus, and are escaping across the island, taking with them a key card which is the only way to unlock the lab.

Ash and Isabel set out to cross the jungle and find the men responsible. They have twenty-four hours to catch up with them, find the keycard, and find Zeus. Fortunately, Isabel knows how to survive in the jungle, and she can help Ash overcome the wilderness, but this is no ordinary jungle. For years, Isla Negra has been used for unchecked genetic experimentation, and everything on the island is strange. The animals are bigger and more dangerous than usual. The trees and plants are like nothing Ash has ever seen. And the longer he spends on the island, the more Ash begins to notice that he feels different. His sense are heightened and he feels fitter and stronger than before. And there's something else . . . why are the animals watching him? Why are the howler monkeys gathering in the trees above him? And why does he feel like he's been to this island before?

As Ash crosses the island, the mystery begins to unravel, and he learns the truth about who he is, and who has imprisoned his mum.



## WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS . . .

*I've always loved jungle thrillers - here the forest becomes a character of its own, dangerous and wild. The sense of threat is heightened in Boy X as frightening animals prowl in the corners of your eyes, flitting between the trees . . . The mystery and excitement are pitch-perfect and, like Dan's readers everywhere, I feel it's me caught up in the adventure, trying to outguess the twists and turns in the plot. Get ready to be excited and intrigued!*

**BARRY CUNNINGHAM, CHICKEN HOUSE**

## AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Growing up, Dan Smith led three lives. In one he survived the day-to-day humdrum of boarding school, while in another he travelled the world, finding adventure in the padi-fields of South East Asia and the jungles of Brazil. But the third life he lived in a world of his own, making up stories . . . which is where some people say he still lives most of the time!

He lives in Newcastle with his wife and two children.

## AUTHOR MOTIVATION

When I was growing up, I was lucky enough to live in some amazing places, and something that was almost always present for me was the jungle. It had a huge impact on me, so it's inevitable that I would want to write about it. The jungle can be a scary place, but I wanted it to be **really** scary for my hero, Ash McCarthy, so I created a jungle on a mysterious island, where everything is bigger and more dangerous than it should be. Then I gave him just twenty-four hours to cross the island and save the world. The result is a story that needs exclamation marks ... Danger! Action! Adventure! Survival!

**Describe My Brother's Secret in three words . . .**

**Action. Survival. Terror.**



# THEMES

- Bravery and Courage
- Friendship
- Survival
- Perseverance
- Genetic Experimentation
- Mystery
- The Jungle
- The Environment

# WRITING STYLE

Boy X is an exciting adventure story set in a vivid jungle location, featuring a reluctant hero and an intelligent and capable heroine. The writing is descriptive and fast-paced, with short chapters and cliff-hangers to keep the reader on the edge of their seat, wanting to know what happens next. The mystery at the heart of the story is slowly revealed, along with several twists that work to keep the reader guessing right until the end. There is a strong message about family and friendship, and about perseverance in the face of impossible odds. Boy X mixes a variety of genres including action, mystery, sci-fi, and thriller.

# PUPIL ACTIVITIES

## 1. Jungle

In the opening chapters of *Boy X*, Ash McCarthy wakes up in a strange place. When he investigates, he goes outside to discover that he is in the jungle! Ask students to imagine they are Ash. How would they feel in this situation? Would they be excited? Afraid? Intrigued? Confused? Ask students to write a short piece of prose describing how they would feel.

## 2. Senses

When Ash and Isabel go deeper into the BioSphere, the power is off and the building is in complete darkness. They both feel very scared. Ask students if they know what it is like to be in total darkness. If possible, students could be blind-folded and try to find their way around the classroom. Ask students to imagine that they cannot see, then write a short piece of prose describing what they feel, hear, and smell as they they make their way around the classroom - or perhaps another, more dangerous environment . . .

## 3. Kronos

Ash and Isabel discover that their parents are locked in the lab and have been infected with a deadly virus called Kronos. In twenty-four hours they will begin to die if they do not get the anti-virus, Zeus. Ask students to imagine that Kronos has been released into the atmosphere. How was it released? Who contracted the virus first? How quickly would it spread around the world? **How** might it spread? Ask students to write a newspaper report about the virus, how it is spreading around the world, the effect it is having, and the effect it will have as time passes.

#### **4. Character Description**

Ash changes dramatically over the course of the story. His appearance changes, his character changes, and he gains some new abilities. Ash refers to himself as Ash 'Plus'. Ask students to write a list of a) Ash's characteristics at the beginning of the book, and b) Ash's characteristics at the end of the book. Then, in a short piece of prose, students can write a character description of Ash using either list a or list b.

#### **5. Survival**

Ash and Isabel have very little time to prepare for their jungle adventure. Ask students to imagine they are setting out on a jungle adventure tomorrow. They are going to spend a week surviving alone in the Amazon. What do they think they might need to take with them? Xbox? Phone? A knife? A tent? Food? Water? Matches? Clothes? Discuss as a class, then ask students to pretend that they are allowed to take just 5 items with them. Write a list of the items they would take, with a short explanation to show why they have chosen each one.

#### **6. Interview**

As they make their way through the jungle, it becomes clear that Isabel is infected with the virus. But she is strong and brave, and she keeps going. Ask students to write an interview with Isabel, asking her how she felt, and what helped her to stay strong. How did she feel about leading Ash through the jungle? What was she most scared about? How did she feel when she lost her backpack?

#### **7. Letter Home**

Ask students to imagine they are Ash, and write a letter to their best friend telling them about their adventure on Isla Negra.

## **8. River Rapids**

When Ash and Isabel are crossing the river on the rope and pulley system, the rope snaps and they are plunged into the rapids. We see the action from Ash's point of view (known as POV), as he tries to save himself. But what happens to Isabel? Ask students to imagine they are Isabel, then write a short piece of prose describing what happened to her when she fell into the river.

## **9. Heights**

Ash is afraid of a lot of things - especially heights. He is scared when he and Isabel have to cross the river on the cradle, and he is terrified when he zip-lines from the abandoned house to the beach below. Ask students to write about a time when they were afraid. What happened? What were they afraid of? What did they do? How did they deal with it? Did they overcome their fear or did their fear get the better of them? Did someone help them?

## **10. Title**

It can be difficult to think of a great, catchy title for a book or story. Do students think that 'Boy X' is a good title for this book? What does 'Boy X' mean to them? If they had to think of a new title for the book, what would it be, and why?

## **11. Map**

Ask students to draw a map of Isla Negra, and mark all the key places - e.g. The BioSphere, Isabel's house, the bunker, the river.

## **12. Cover Design**

We are told not to judge a book by its cover, but cover designs are hugely important. Ideally, the cover tells the reader something about the kind of story they are going to find inside the pages. Ask students to spend some time looking at book covers and thinking about what the designer has tried to do. Then ask students to design an alternative cover for Boy X.



### 13. Motivation

In a story, writers create drama using a few important tools. Every character must want something - this is their **motivation** - and often there is something standing in their way, preventing them from getting what they want - the **obstacle**. A character can have an overriding motivation which lasts for the duration of the story (e.g. Ash wants to save his mum's life), and they can have smaller motivations that last for the duration of a few scenes (e.g. Ash wants to cross the river). Choose a scene from the book and ask students to identify the motivation of the characters, and then decide what is standing in their way.

### 14. Review

Ask students to write a review of Boy X. What is the main story? Who are the main characters? What do the main characters want? What happens to them? What did students like about the story? What did they **not** like about the story?

### 15. Prediction

At the end of the book, the reader discovers that Thorn is still alive, and that he wants to 'find Ash McCarthy'. According to the text, 'There was nowhere on earth the boy would be able to hide from him.' Ask students how they feel about this ending. Do they like a book to end in a way that suggests the story is on-going, or do they like all the strands of a story to be wrapped up? Boy X ends in a way that suggests Ash McCarthy's story is not over. Ask students to write the first (short) chapter of a sequel to Boy X.

# RESEARCH

- Rainforest covers a large part of our planet. Look at where we can find rainforests. What do they need to survive? What lives there? How do rainforests benefit the environment? Why are rainforests in danger? What can we do to protect rainforests?
- In Boy X, Ash and Isabel are followed by howler monkeys. Ash is scared when he first hears them howling. See what you can find out about howler monkeys. Where do they live? What do they eat? See if you can find video/audio of them howling. What other kinds of animals live in the rainforest?
- In Boy X, there is a deadly virus called Kronos. What can you find out about viruses? What are they? What can they do? Are all viruses bad?
- At the end of Boy X, Ash zip-lines onto a beach of 'shining black sand'. Is there such a thing as black sand? Where might you find a black sand beach, and why might the sand be black?
- In Boy X, Ash and Isabel encounter a huge column of ants. How many different kinds of ants are there? Where do ants live? Do ants benefit our planet, or are they just a nuisance?
- Ash and Isabel have to survive alone in the jungle. Can you find any real-life stories about people who have survived alone in the jungle? How long were they in the jungle? How did they manage to survive.
- BioMesa is involved in genetic experimentation. What is genetic experimentation? What are the benefits, and what are the dangers of genetic experimentation?