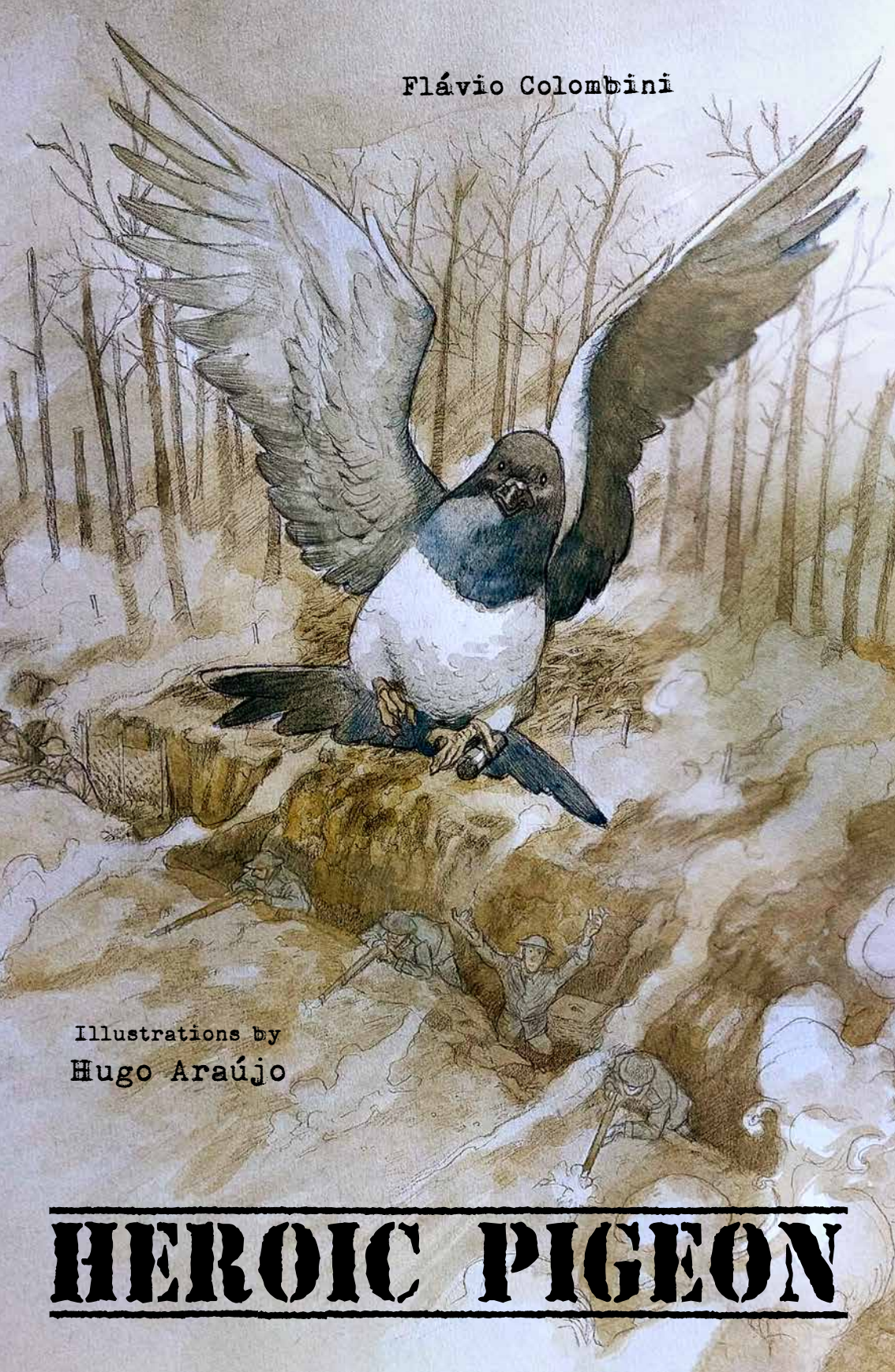


Flávio Colombini



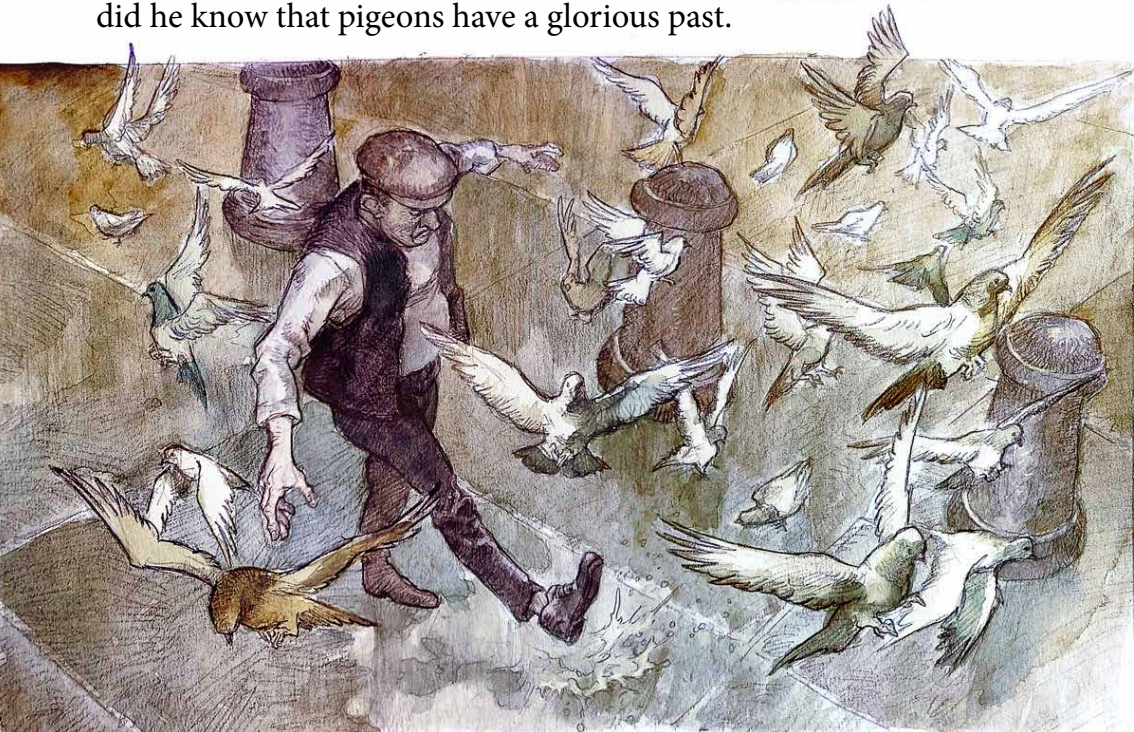
Illustrations by
Hugo Araújo

HEROIC PIGEON

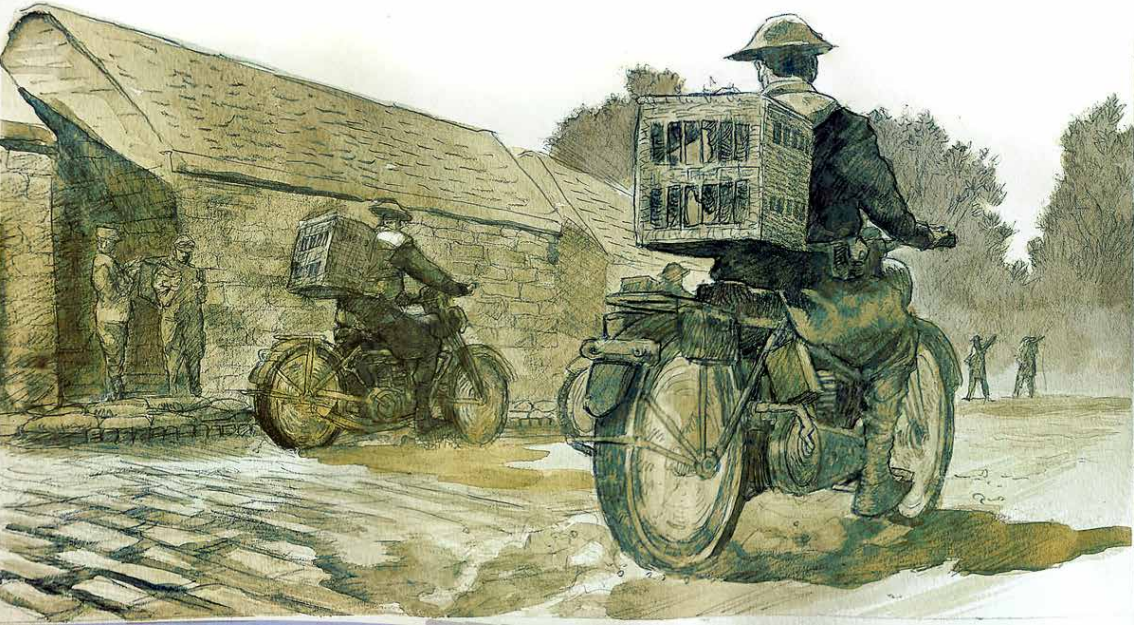
I was in the square with my friends, pecking and eating the crumbs on the ground, when a man walked past us and said: “These pigeons are a plague!”



He tried to scare us away. I was sad at the man's contempt. Little did he know that pigeons have a glorious past.



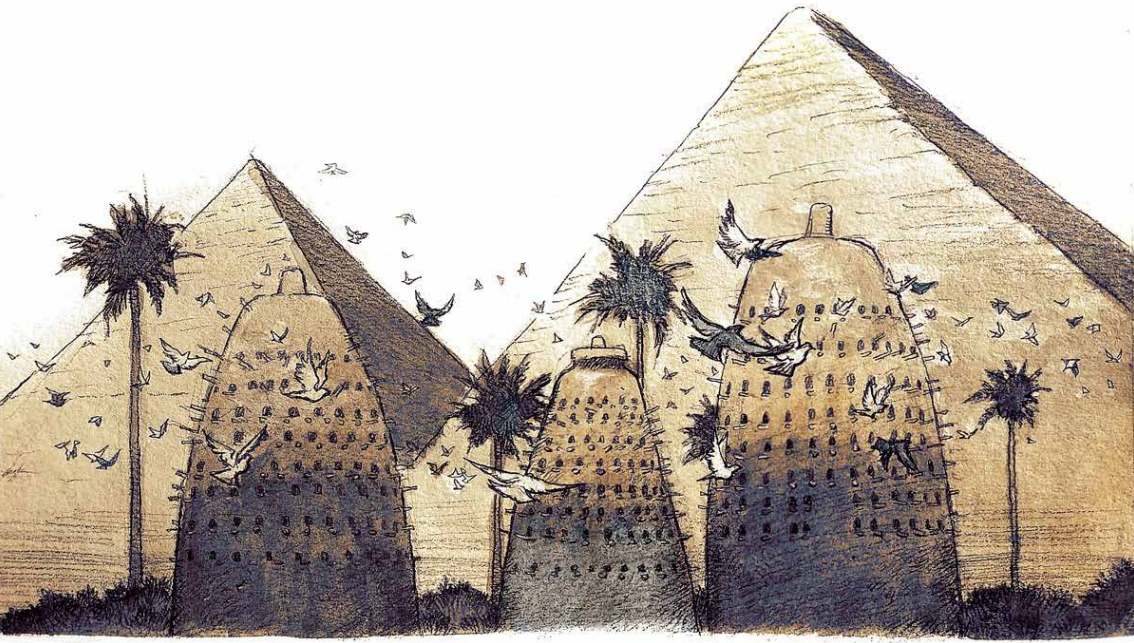
In the past, we were raised and cared for with the utmost care. We were valuable. Do you know why? Because we carried important messages over long distances. We were the carrier pigeons.



Humans have always been fascinated by pigeons' homing ability, the capacity to navigate and find the way to their home loft. Even when released more than a thousand kilometres from its home, the pigeon manages to return to it, flying at an average speed of 100 kilometres per hour.



Three thousand years before Christ, pigeons were already used to send messages in ancient Egypt.



The Greeks sent pigeons to announce the winners of the Olympic Games to the various cities of ancient Greece.



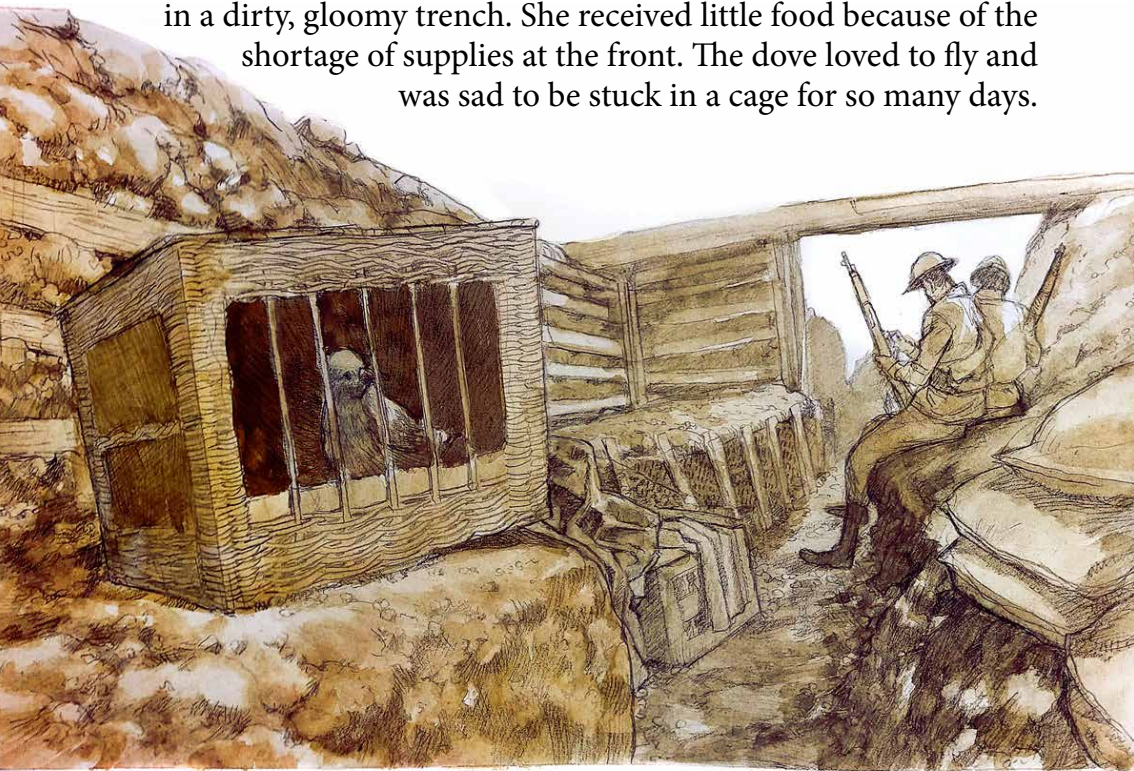
The army of the Roman Empire used carrier pigeons to communicate in the midst of battles and conquests. When used by the army, carrier pigeons were called war pigeons.



In my humble opinion, the pigeon that faced the most difficulties in delivering a message was a British pigeon called Princess.



The year was 1918, during the First World War. The dove was taken, along with other war pigeons, to the battlefield on the border between France and Germany. Princess was kept for several days in a dirty, gloomy trench. She received little food because of the shortage of supplies at the front. The dove loved to fly and was sad to be stuck in a cage for so many days.



The worst thing was the sound of gunfire and bombs, which she heard all the time and scared her. Private Brown, who looked after the pigeons, was also upset that he couldn't let the pigeons out to exercise and that he didn't have enough food to feed them properly.



A few days later, the detachment of English soldiers was surrounded by the German army. They needed urgent help. It was time to use a carrier pigeon. A distress call was written on a small piece of paper. Private Brown took a pigeon called Dorian and put the message in a small container, which was tied to the bird's leg. Then the pigeon was released and flew into the air. All the soldiers looked up, pinning their hopes of rescue on that bird.



But then the pigeon was shot and fell out of the sky.



“Oh, no,” Lieutenant Little shouted in despair, “the Germans are using snipers to hit our pigeons and stop us from asking help!”

“What do we do now?” asked Brown.

“We have to send another pigeon,” the lieutenant ordered. The soldier picked up a pigeon called Tommy, prepared it and released it.



It rose into the air. German sniper fire was heard. The pigeon managed to fly higher and higher until it was shot and fell.



The English soldiers could hardly believe it! They were devastated and some even began to cry.

“What do we do now?” Private Brown asked the lieutenant.
“We have no choice. We need to send another pigeon,” he said.
“But there’s only one pigeon left, Princess.”
“So, get her ready,” ordered the officer.



Heartbroken, Private Brown picked up the dove and affixed the all-important message to its paw. With tears in his eyes, he stroked it, afraid that it would be the last time he would see it.



Lieutenant Little spoke to all the soldiers:

“Those of you who are religious, please start praying, ask God to protect this dove, which is our last hope of rescue.”

The men began to pray, each in their own way.



Later, the lieutenant ordered: “Pick up your weapons and fire in the direction of the Germans. We need to provide cover so that our dove can take to the sky and carry our message to headquarters.”

The soldiers started firing, and Brown threw Princess into the air.



She flapped her wings and flew upwards. She was confused and frightened by the noise of the gunfire but kept soaring. She heard some shots whizzing past her, but they didn't hit her. When they saw that the dove had managed to take off, the English soldiers shouted with joy.



Up there, Princess found it difficult to orientate herself. She got confused and started flying the wrong way. The soldiers were worried. But she soon managed to find herself, retraced her course and started flying in the right direction. The English were relieved and hopeful.



The Princess moved away from the battlefield, but not from the danger. Little did she know that the German soldiers had sent a hawk to hunt her down in mid-air. The hawk's strategy is to fly higher than the other birds, spot them, dive quickly into the air and grab the smaller bird with its powerful, sharp claws.



The dove felt joy at finally being free of that cramped cage. It breathed in the fresh air with satisfaction. On his way, however, she had to pass over another battlefield, where the Germans had just dropped a mustard gas bomb, which was highly toxic and spread through the air.



Innocently, Princess went inside a yellow cloud filled with mustard gas. Her eyes began to burn, and she found it difficult to breathe. For a moment, she thought she was going to faint and fall over, but she managed to keep flapping her wings and moved away from the toxic cloud.



She breathed fresh air again and regained her senses. But realised that her journey would not be easy, as she would have to pass over other battlefields.

She decided to raise her altitude as she flew over the trenches. But that only brought her closer to the hawk.



It swooped down at high speed and grabbed the dove, which lost consciousness as a result of the strong impact of the hawk's talons. Oh, what would become of Princess?



At that moment, a German aeroplane passed close to the bird of prey, which was startled and released the dove.



The plane started firing at the trenches. The frightened hawk flew away. The dove, which was unconscious, began to fall and fall until it suddenly regained consciousness. It immediately flapped its wings and flew off again.



Princess travelled as fast as she could, afraid that she was still being chased by the German falcon. After many kilometres, she felt confident that she had got rid of the predator. But her problems weren't over. She was yet a long way from her destination and soon it started to get windy. It was a strong wind, contrary to the direction in which she had to go.



She had to flap her wings with more vigour to face this difficulty. Just when it seemed things couldn't get any worse, it started to rain. And it wasn't just any rain, it was a downpour. The dove could barely see her way with so much water hitting her face. But she persevered.



Lightning flashed from the clouds and the Princess heard a loud clap of thunder.



She got scared but kept flying. However, the bird was getting increasingly exhausted. After all, it had been eating badly for days. Would she have the energy to keep flying and deliver the all-important message? The men at the front continued to pray, under fire from the advancing enemy.



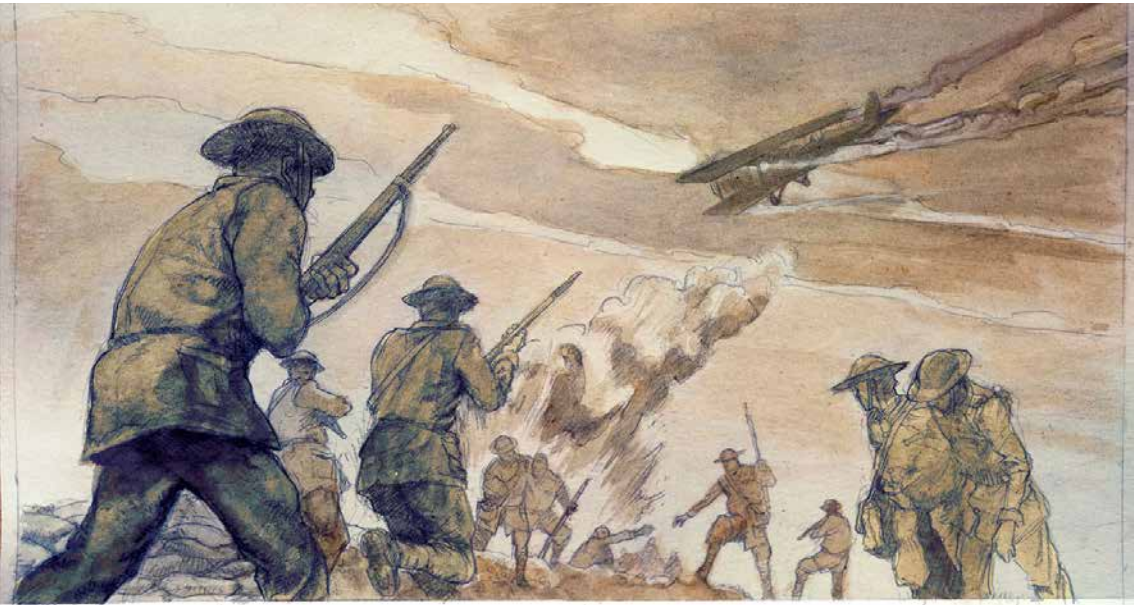
The bird must have felt that positive spiritual energy. Despite the many difficulties, it didn't give up. It kept flying until it finally reached its goal and arrived at headquarters.



A soldier received her in the dovecote, took the message and immediately passed it on to his superiors, who telegraphed for other units to go and rescue the surrounded soldiers. The soldier looking after the doves offered Princess water and seeds to eat. After her meal, the dove was finally able to rest, with a sense of duty done.



Finally, the allied troops managed to break the siege and rescue the trapped soldiers, who were taken to safer positions.



Thanks to the heroic efforts of that courageous dove, hundreds of men were saved.



A few months later, when the war ended, Princess received a medal of honour. Her picture appeared in the newspapers of the time. She became famous for her bravery and for saving many lives.

Writer



Flávio Colombini

Ever since I was little, I've always liked doves. I remember my grandfather used to take me for walks in a square full of doves. He used to buy me a little bag with bran and seeds. I loved throwing that food to the doves, who would come very close to eat it and sometimes even perch on me. I've heard people complaining about doves and being disgusted by them. I think it's a shame that they don't realize what a great talent doves have and how useful they have been to humanity. That's why I wanted to write this book. I hope you enjoyed it! If you'd like to see other books I've written, visit my website: www.flaviocolombini.com/english

Illustrator



Hugo Araújo

I've been an illustrator since I was little, when I liked to draw the characters in the books and comics I read. Nowadays, I work mainly producing illustrations for school textbooks, as well as collaborating on other children's books and comics abroad. Have a look at other drawings I've done on my Instagram [@bruxarium](https://www.instagram.com/bruxarium)