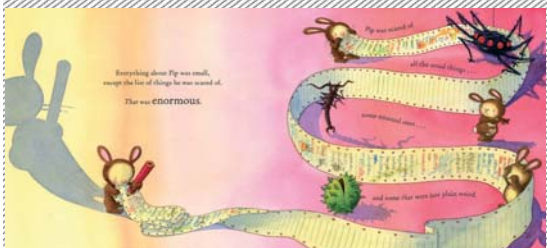
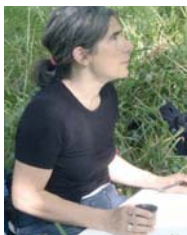


# Lurking in the



# shadows

The adult world can appear frightening to children, so when it comes to facing their fears, Debi Gliori wants them realise they can be braver than they think...



**D**uring the first Gulf War, I remember taking my youngest son to nursery,

and overhearing other parents complaining about the dreadful nights of broken sleep that their families were enduring. Judging by their conversation, there appeared to be an unforeseen epidemic of insomnia in the under-fives. Night terrors, refusing to go to bed, a return to bed-wetting, it sounded horrific. These parents were at their wits' end. Whatever was going on? What was wrong with the kids? Then the conversation turned to the wonders of television. Did you see those amazing shots of John Simpson with the Cruise missiles screaming down the main street in Baghdad? That footage of the missiles hitting their

targets? Amazing, eh?

Amazing. What's really amazing is that nobody seemed to notice that their young children were being exposed to high levels of televised violence. These were otherwise thoughtful and caring parents who simply happened to have the BBC news on at the same time as their children were in the room.

That was all a very long time ago. Since then, the landscape of our collective human nightmare has undergone a deep seismic shift. No matter how hard we try to shield our children from the more woeful aspects of our world, somehow the flavour of our adult fears filters through. Take a straw poll in any classroom and chances are you'll hear some tales that could give even Stephen King pause for thought. Childhood can be a time of wonders, but despite our best efforts, it can also be a time of terror. A time where the characters in picture books can

step off the page and become part of your playtime and, if you're an impressionable child, part of your dreams as well. So, I take my job as a maker of picture books very seriously indeed.

*Stormy Weather*, the book I wrote before *The Scariest Thing of All* had an extra line that I regretfully had to leave out. It went:

'The scariest things you'll ever find, come from the Deeps inside your mind'

This insistent rhyme became the seed out of which *The Scariest Thing of All* grew.

I wanted to try to get across the idea that there is nothing in this world quite as scary as the contents of one's own imagination. In short: what tends to frighten you most is yourself.

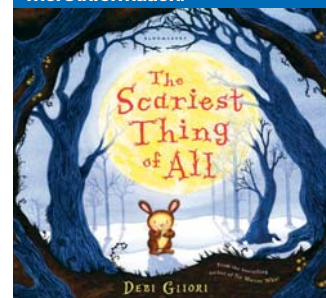
Our minds can work themselves up into a complete froth worrying about stuff that hasn't happened yet, and probably never will. Children can be terribly dismissive about each other's fears, whilst being utterly terrified of their own, so I wanted to show them that here was a character who was afraid of everything. You name it, he was afraid of it. Just like you. And me. This brings all our fears together; big fears, little fears and could pave the



way to a discussion in the classroom about things we are all afraid of. (As a visiting author/illustrator, this sort of thing is grist to my mill.)

I also wanted to get across the feeling of liberation that comes from facing up to your fears. After Pip meets *The Scariest Thing of All*, he can genuinely say that he isn't afraid of anything. I wanted the book to empower its readers, to make them realise that they are the Scariest Things of All and that, just like Pip, they don't have to be afraid of anything.

**The Scariest Thing of All** written by Debi Gliori and published by Bloomsbury Children's Books (9780747599692) is available as of October 2011. Visit [bloomsbury.com/childrens](http://bloomsbury.com/childrens) for more information.



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DEBI GLIORI