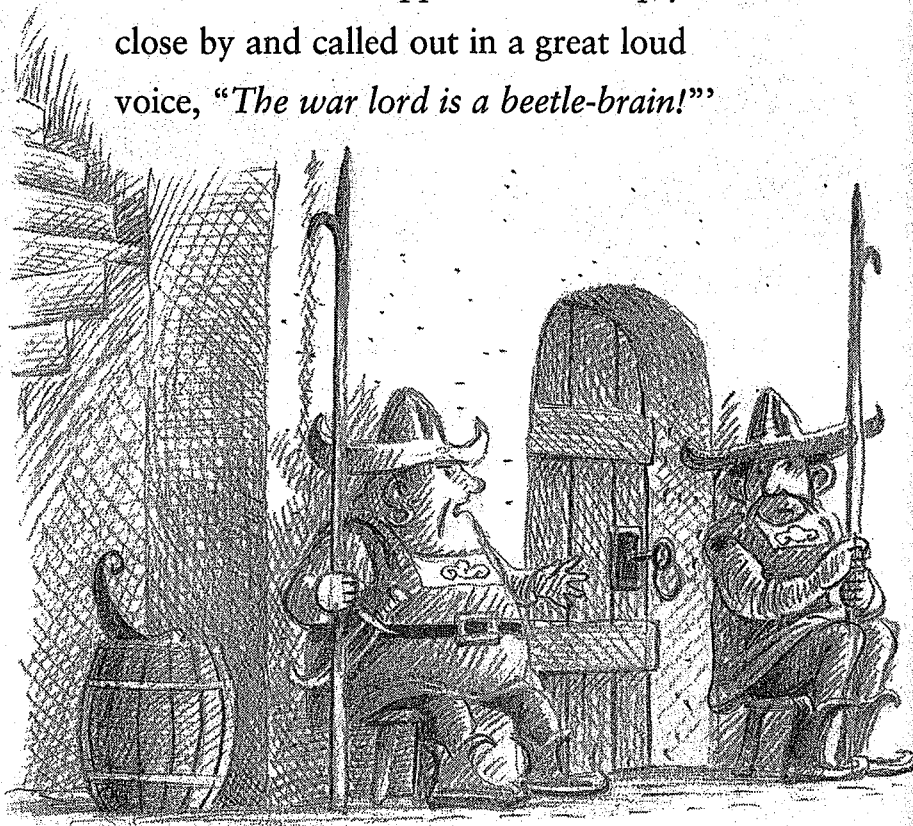


'You'll find out if you pay attention,' said Jack, and he moved his scone to the other hand. 'When Tashi left the kitchen he could hear the cries of the children, and the sound of their sobbing led him down to the dungeon. Two guards were talking outside the dark, barred room where the children were held. Tashi hopped into an empty barrel close by and called out in a great loud voice, "*The war lord is a beetle-brain!*"'



'NO!' cried Mum and Dad together.
'YES!' crowed Jack. 'The guards jumped as if they'd just sat on a nest of soldier ants.
"One of those pesky children has managed to get out!" the fat guard hissed. "Then we'd better catch him," said the other, "before the war lord boils us in spider sauce."



'As soon as they ran off, Tashi turned the big key they had left in the lock and opened the dungeon door.

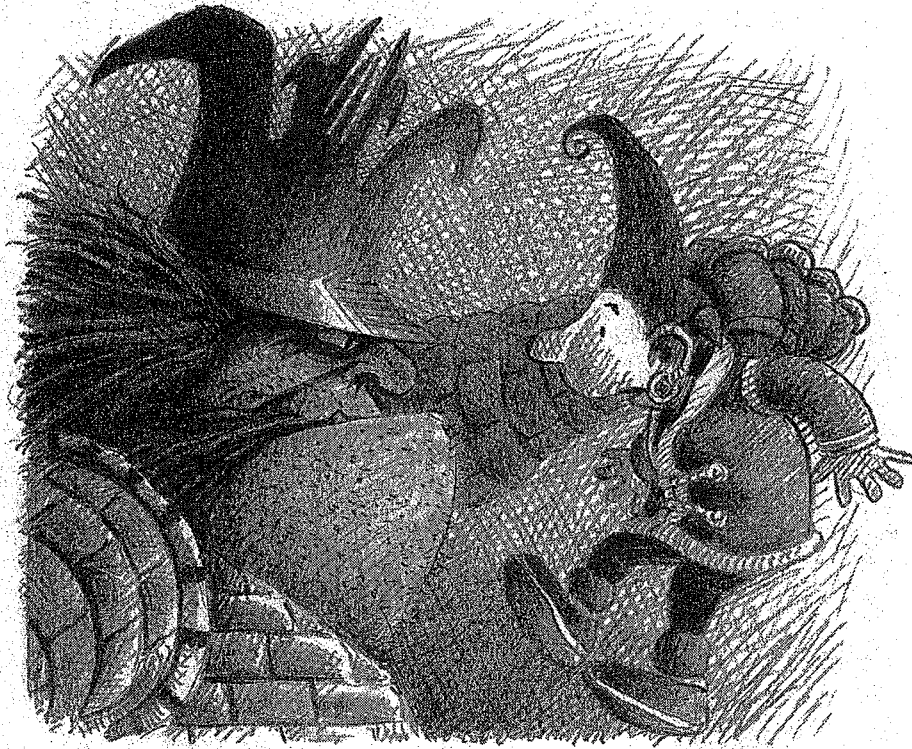


“The children recognised Tashi and crowded around, telling him all that had happened. “Shush,” whispered Tashi, “wait till we get outside. The danger isn’t over yet.”

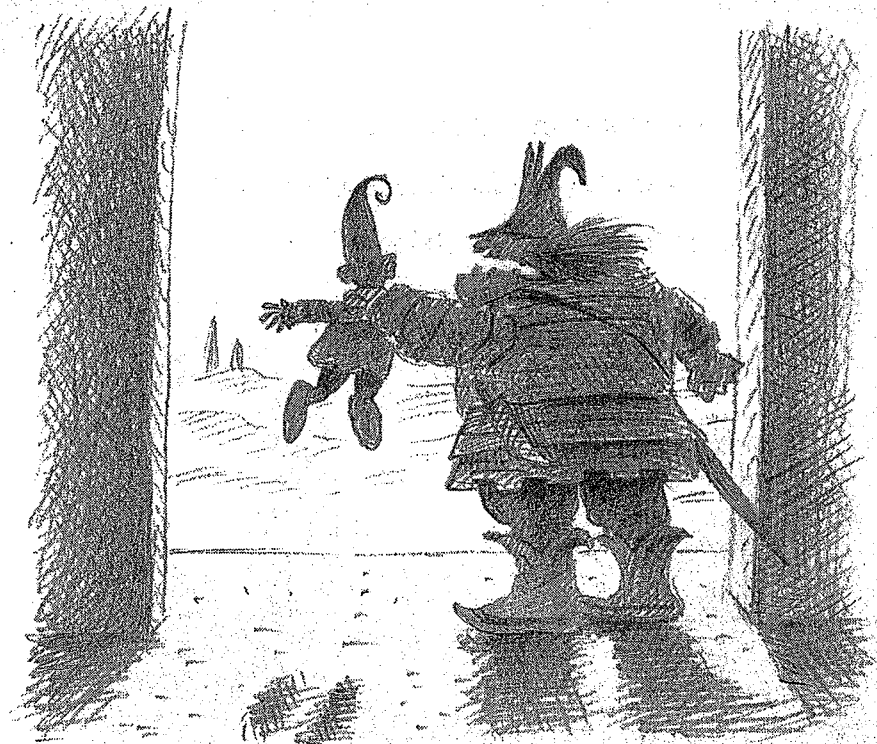
‘He led them quickly up the stairs and through the long hallways until at last they came to the great wooden front door of the palace. Tashi reached up and pulled on the big brass latch. The door swung open and the children whooped with joy. They streamed out, falling over each other in their hurry. Tashi picked up the littlest one and set him on his feet. “Home we go!” he cried.



“But no. Just then a huge hand reached down and plucked Tashi up by the collar. He was face to face with the furious war lord. Their noses almost touched. The war lord’s skin was rough, like sandpaper.



“**RUN!**” Tashi called to the children. “Run to your uncles down by the camp!”

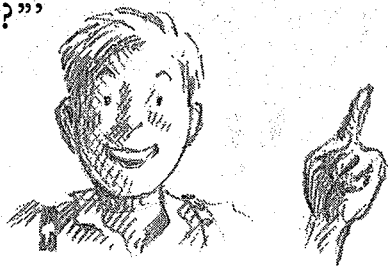


“The war lord shook Tashi, as if he were a scrap of dirty washing. His iron knuckles bit into Tashi’s neck. He breathed fish and grease into Tashi’s face. “So, you foolish boy,” he growled. “You have come back. You won’t escape again. Look well at the daylight outside, for this is the last time you’ll see it. You’ll work in the dungeons from now on.”

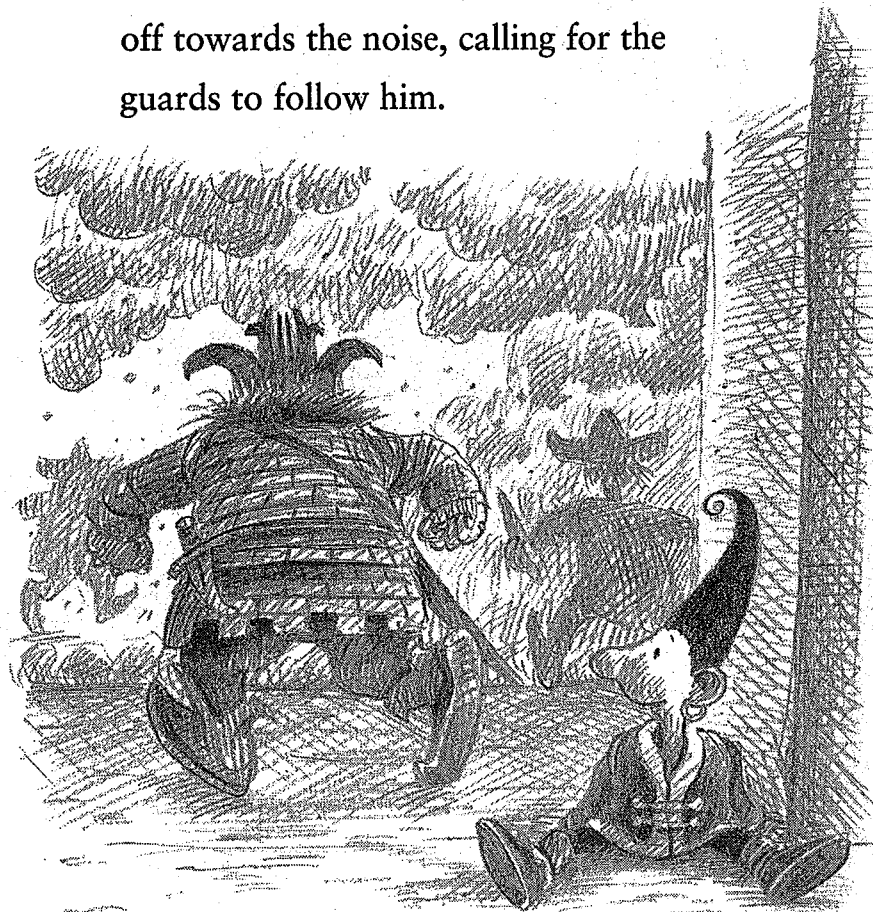
'Tashi thought of the mean black bars on the window of the dungeon. Only a cockroach could stay alive in there. His eyes began to water and he started to sniff.



“Scared, are you?” the war lord jeered.
“No, I can smell something,”
said Tashi, “can’t you?”
‘Socks!’ cried Dad.

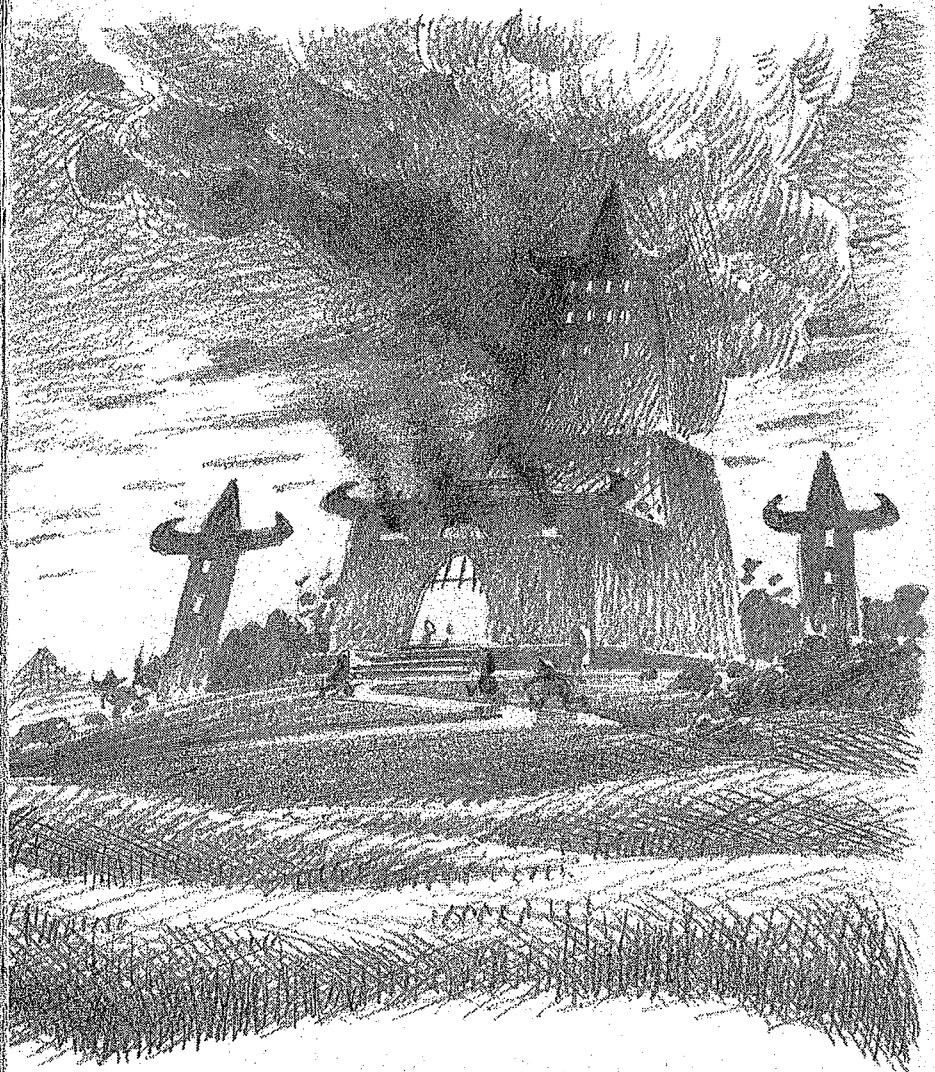


'The war lord sniffed. The air *did* seem rather smoky. Suddenly there was a loud explosion and they heard feet pounding over the stone floor. “Fire!” shouted the war lord, and he dropped Tashi and ran off towards the noise, calling for the guards to follow him.





'Tashi sped down the steps and soon found the children and their uncles. They were waiting for him over the hill, beyond the camp. From there they had a good view of the palace.



'It was blazing fiercely—the windows were red with the glow of fire inside, and a great grey cloud of smoke climbed above it.

“Weren’t we lucky the fire started just then!” said the littlest boy. His brother laughed and looked at Tashi. “I don’t think luck had anything to do with it,” he said.

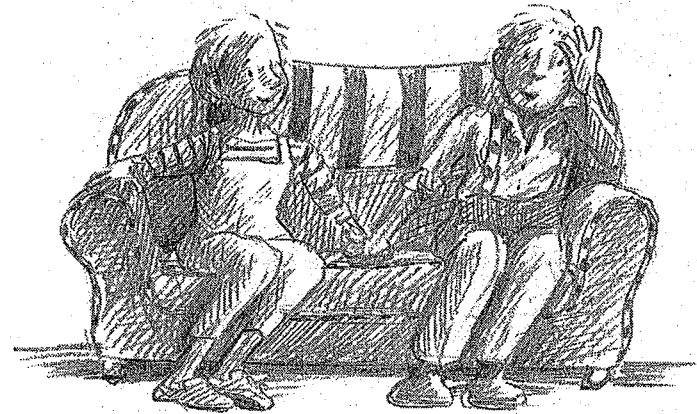


“Well,” said Tashi modestly, “as a matter of fact I did empty the gunpowder out of my firecrackers and laid a trail up to the kitchen stove. I hoped we would manage to get out before it reached the ovens. It blew up just in time.”

“What a clever Tashi!” the children yelled, and the uncles hoisted him up onto their shoulders and they sang and danced all the way home.



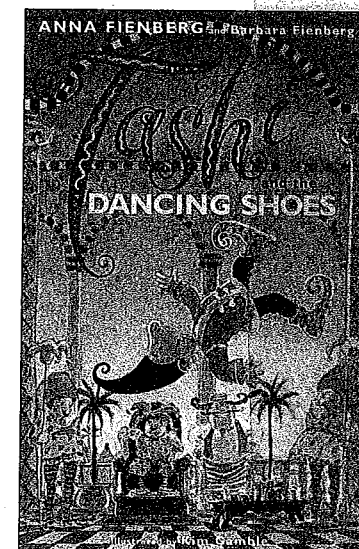
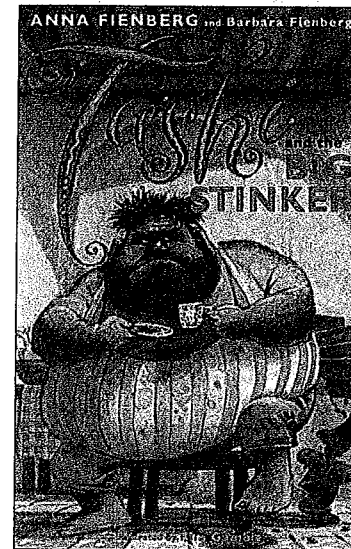
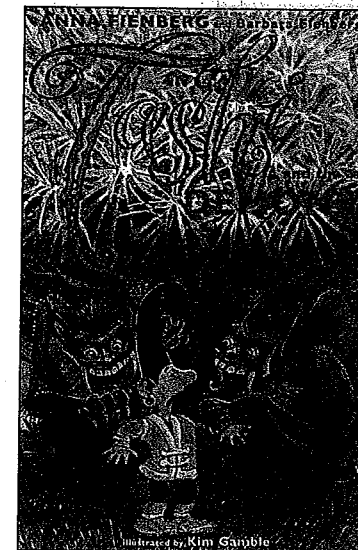
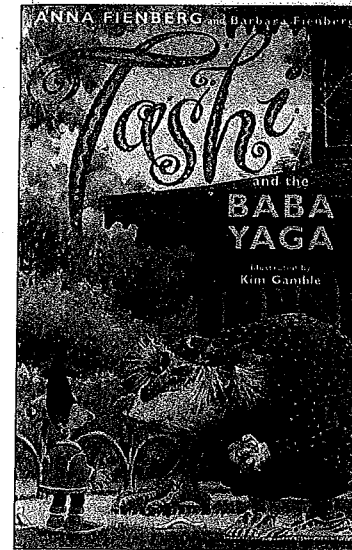
‘Phew!’ said Dad. ‘That was a close shave. I suppose Tashi could relax after that, and enjoy the rest of his holiday. Did he have good weather?’



'Yes, at first,' said Jack, 'until the witch, Baba Yaga, blew in on the winds of a dreadful storm.'

'Baba Yaga?' said Dad nervously. 'Who is she?'

'Oh, just a witch whose favourite meal is baked children. But Tashi will tell us all about that. What's for dinner tonight, Mum?'



Look out for other adventures
with Tashi...