

The Black Amulet by J R Wallis

It was easy enough to spot the Vampire at the far end of the alleyway. As she peered round the corner of the last building in the street, Ruby spied the creature standing inside a yellow cone of light thrown down by the single street lamp, staring into a shop window.

She tiptoed round the corner, keeping close to the wall, and slid into a deep dark doorway to hide. As she moved closer to the Vampire, the old-fashioned revolver Ruby was holding tutted, then swore quietly for good measure. To be fair, the gun had been grumbling for the last ten minutes, making sure Ruby knew exactly how it felt about her hunting such a dangerous creature, urging her to turn back. A speaking gun, let alone one that could curse so well, would have scrambled the brains of most people – as would seeing a Vampire in a small market town in the middle of the night – but to Ruby none of it seemed exceptional now.

Up until a few months ago, she'd been living a regular life. But she lived in the Badlands now, a place on the fringes of the everyday world that most ordinary people

knew nothing about. Not only was magic possible there, but the Badlands was also inhabited by strange and vicious monsters, making it very dangerous. But, in spite of all the extraordinary creatures that could be found there, Ruby was by far the strangest living thing of all because she was the only girl.

As far as she knew, the Badlands had only ever been a place where men and their boy apprentices had worked, tackling monsters and other nasties to keep ordinary people safe. Ruby always glowed with pride whenever she remembered she was the first girl Badlander. Even if it was still a secret for now.

'Keep it down, will you?' she hissed as the gun tutted again, before stringing together another collection of rather fruity-sounding words that would have embarrassed anyone who knew what they meant.

'Ruby, for the last time, go home,' it whispered. 'You might be brave, but you're too stubborn for your own good. You're out of your depth with this one.'

'I know what I'm doing.'

'Tackling a Vampire is almost impossible without magic. Why you've insisted on hunting it down is beyond me.'

'Why do you think?' hissed Ruby. 'All Victor Brynn makes me do is read books. It's like being back at school. We never go hunting like proper Badlanders.'

'That's because you've got a lot to learn under the circumstances.'

'You mean because I'm a girl.'

Words in Context

Find and highlight the following words in the text.

- **inhabited**
- **apprentices**
- **stubborn**

What do you think they mean?

What words could you replace them with?

Retrieval questions

1. What was extraordinary about Ruby?
2. What is unusual about the gun?
3. Who spoke first?

Inference questions.

1. What time of day is it – support your answer with clues from the text?
2. What does the verb 'hissed' suggest about the way Ruby spoke to the gun?

Choice questions

1. What phrase does the author use to describe how Ruby felt about being the only female Badlander?
2. What sentence does the author use to inform the reader that Ruby is new to the job?
3. What genre do you think this extract is from?

Challenge question

Draw a picture of how you think Ruby looks.