

# The Saï Saï Gang and the Phantom Ship

by Kidi Bebey, Edicef (2011), 144 pp.

**Target age group:** 8–10

**Genre:** Detective

**About:** This middle-grade book is one story in a six-part series set in an African coastal village. Shaka, Lala and Barou are terrified when they realise that Jolie—who walks more slowly because she needs to use a crutch—has gone missing as they fled the 'ghost' that appeared on the beach. But with a bit of help from Jolie's big brother, the Saï-Saï Gang not only find their missing friend, but also bring down a criminal gang! The Saï-Saï series is a welcome, modern, alternative to older classics that is sure to keep readers on the edge of their seats as they follow the friends in each new quest to save the day.

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**Translation funding:** French CNL grants available (info [here](#)).

**Translated extract:** download [here](#).

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## SAMPLE TRANSLATION

### The Saï Saï Gang and the Phantom Ship (*Les Saï Saï et le bateau fantôme*)

Edicef (2011)

By Kidi Bebey, translated from the French by Johanna McCalmont ([j.mccalmont@aic.net](mailto:j.mccalmont@aic.net))

1

Shaka stopped dead in his tracks. There was a giant, bright white light out on the ocean that seemed to be floating on the surface of water. What a strange sight! He couldn't take his eyes off it, puzzled. Suddenly scared he might be seen, he dived behind a bush, out of sight. *I'm glad I decided to wear dark clothes today*, he thought. *Black's always a good choice, you don't stand out at night, you're like a secret agent...*

But Shaka couldn't relax for long. The light out on the water was moving towards him, as if it was looking for something on the beach. Just then, there was a strange sound, like something banging on metal. But was it really metal? And what could be banging like that? His heart started pounding. A blinding white light, in the middle of the night, on this deserted

part of the coast... Strange noises ... A ghost? A water spirit? A monster? Shaka stared, wide-eyed and terrified; the light had stopped right in front of him! He felt his blood chill and he immediately stretched out flat on the ground. When he looked around, he noticed a track, like huge footprints. They were shining in the dark too.

“Oh noooooooooo!” he screamed, petrified.

His heart beat furiously.

“I have to get out of here!”

Once the light had moved away from the bush where he was hiding, he got up and ran off. His heart felt like it was going to burst. There was no way he could look back! Shaka didn't stop running until he reached the spot where he'd hidden his bike. He jumped on it and sped off, only slowing to catch his breath once he was nearly home. Sow, the old guard who never talked much, welcomed him with a smile and a wink. But Shaka was so worried he barely noticed. He ran straight to his room, locked his door, and slipped under his mosquito net without even getting undressed.

*What was that? What could it be?* he wondered, unable to come up with any sort of answer.

A few days earlier, his parents had been talking about a strange story involving a phantom ship and he had wanted to find out for himself. They were very strange rumours. And very exciting too! Exactly the sort of thing Shaka liked. He was dying with curiosity, but he hadn't expected to be terrified too. He was kicking himself for having fled like a scaredy cat. Where was Brave Shaka? Daring Shaka? Tonight, he had been more like Frightened Shaka, Hot-Foot-It Shaka. He wasn't exactly proud of himself. And what had he actually seen? Was it some sort of supernatural phenomenon? Was it really a ghost?

Even though he was afraid, Shaka still wanted to figure it out. He slowly went over everything in his head again.

*A ghost!* He finally concluded. *It has to be a ghost!*

But what was a ghost doing on the beach?

*I have to solve the mystery,* he decided without a doubt. *I'll tell the others tomorrow.*

Unable to stay awake any longer, he finally fell into a fitful sleep, tossing and turning all night.

The next morning, Shaka raced to the Wooden Hallow. That's what he and his friends called the huge, old dugout canoe they had found. The old boat had been turned upside down

and was covered in fishing nets and dried seaweed. It had been abandoned a long time ago and all sorts of wonderful plants and grasses had grown up over it. The gang had turned it into their secret hideout at the end of the beach, far away from prying eyes.

Shaka thought he'd be the first to arrive, but as he crawled in under the dugout canoe, he realised Barou, Lala and Jolie were already there, talking excitedly.

"Some people are saying they've seen and heard some really strange things," exclaimed Lala.

As usual, she was talking with her entire body, waving her hands around, moving her head and even swaying her neck a little. Lala loved dancing and gymnastics and couldn't help but dance a little every time she talked.

"Strange things? What do you mean?" interrupted Jolie.

"Well, noises, apparently..."

"Noises? Wait a minute!"

She waved her crutch around, sliding it back and forth along the side of the dugout canoe. The hull amplified the scraping sound.

"Hear that?" continued Jolie. "I can make strange noises too if I want to. Some people will say any old thing..."

"No, you don't get it," replied Lala. "The fishermen saw strange things as well. And they know what they're talking about, don't they?"

"That's right," agreed Barou. "They're used to the wind and the sounds the sea makes..."

"...so, when they say it's *strange*, it really must be strange..." concluded Lala.

Just then, Shaka appeared through the fishing nets.

"There you are! Lazy bones," smiled Jolie, gently tapping Shaka's chest with her crutch.

Shaka raised his hands, revealing the pattern on his brightly coloured wax print shirt.

"Forgive me! Forgive me! Don't hurt me!" he begged. "I hardly slept a wink and I've got so much to tell you. "Guess where I went?"

Barou was curious, "No idea! Where were did you go?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" asked Lala, intrigued.

But Shaka wanted to savour the moment, so he took his time before replying. First, he did up the top button on his shirt, then he slowly sat down on some dry leaves beside Jolie.

"I can confirm that strange things are happening at the other end of the beach at night," he says, sounding serious.

They had all noticed he was suddenly looking very serious indeed. One thing was clear, these weren't just rumours—something strange really was going on. Shaka finally caught his breath and continued.

“Well,” he said, “I'd heard that something strange going was on too. My Mum and Dad were talking about it at dinner a few days ago. Mum said ‘Well, I'm a journalist! No one will believe me if I talk about ghosts on TV!’ We all laughed a lot, but it gave me an idea. I went to take a look around the harbour. People were saying there was a phantom ship. Even one of the old fishermen with grey hair was talking about it. So, I thought I'd go and find out more for my Mum...”

Shaka paused, and Jolie took the chance to complain.

“So, you decided to go and investigate without us?”

“Yes, well, no,” he replied, embarrassed. “I just wanted to take a quick look...All that business about ghosts, you know I don't really believe it!”

“So, you went to have a look? ALL ON YOUR OWN?!” asked Barou.

“Yes...last night...I went...well...I went there,” said Shaka, pointing outside the dugout canoe. “To the other end of the beach.”

“And?” pressed Barou.

Shaka started off again.

“Well...I can confirm that, yes, there are ghosts. I saw them.”

For a few seconds, no one said anything. They were all surprised by what they'd just heard. All of a sudden, Barou started to shake. It was a strange kind of shaking, like it was coming from his belly. Then, he burst out laughing so loud it echoed around the dugout canoe and spread infectiously to the rest of his friends.

“HAHAHA!” laughed Barou, hiccoughing, “you're too funny, Shayo!”

“Don't call me Shayo! SHA-KA! Remember?” the boy replied, furious.

“No way! You're not Shaka! You're just my buddy, my 'partner', aren't you? The funniest guy I know! HAHAHA!” laughed Barou.

“That's right,” added Lala. “The real Shaka, the Zulu King, was brave. He didn't believe in ghosts...HAHAHA!”

Jolie came to Shaka's aid by banging her crutch a few times on the side of the narrow boat to get them to quieten down.

“Shaka is our friend,” she said. “If he says he's seen ghosts, then maybe we should listen to him!”

