The story of the Olympics

This year the Olympic games were to be held in Japan and start this month. They were cancelled for the 4th time in their history. Instead they will be held next year!
Chapter 3

The show

Every fourth Spring, three heralds journeyed around Greece to announce a period of peace, known as the Olympic truce, for one month before and after the Games.
The Greeks were constantly at war but, during the truce, fighting was banned near Olympia so that people could travel to the festival in safety.

As soon as the truce was over, everyone went back to battle.

After 100 years of the Games there were 18 main events. The first was a chariot race known as the tetraphron, which took place in an arena called the Hippodrome.
One of the highlights was the *pentathlon*, a series of five events. According to legend, this was invented by a Greek hero named Jason, who competed in the first pentathlon against his friend, Peleus. The pentathlon included:

- throwing the discus...
- running...
- wrestling...
- throwing the javelin...
- and the long jump.
The most brutal event was a savage fighting contest called the *pankration*. Men could punch, kick and break each other’s bones. The only things that weren’t allowed were biting and eye gouging.

Olympic winners were awarded a crown of olive leaves and their names were proclaimed in songs and poems throughout Greece.
When the Romans conquered Greece in the 2nd century BC, the Games were still popular.

But in AD393*, 1,169 years after the Olympics began, a Christian Roman Emperor named Theodosius I banned them. His soldiers destroyed the Temple of Zeus too.

Over the years, Olympia fell into ruin. After an earthquake and then a flood, the site lay buried, deep under the ground.

It remained hidden for more than 1,000 years…

* Dates after Christ’s birth are shown by AD, which stands for Anno Domini, or ‘Year of our Lord’ in Latin.
Olympia in Greece today
The Cotswold Olympics take place after spring bank holiday. Events included horse-racing, running, jumping, dancing, sledgehammer throwing, Tug of war, Shin kicking, fighting with swords or sticks, and wrestling. Booths and tents were put up in which games such as chess and cards were played.

A wooden structure called Dover Castle was built on what is now known as Dover's Hill, complete with small cannons that were fired to begin the events.
Chapter 4

A grand plan

In 1875, a German archaeologist named Ernst Curtius uncovered temples, sculptures and pots among the ruins of Olympia. This sparked a wave of interest in the ancient Games.

A French nobleman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, was fascinated by the Olympics and read everything he could about them. An enthusiastic boxer, fencer, rower and horse rider, de Coubertin believed that sports could help everyone become stronger and more successful.
He studied how sports were played in different countries. In England, he admired the fiercely competitive sports at schools such as Rugby, where rugby was invented.

This sparked an idea in his mind. In 1892, at a gathering of sports officials, de Coubertin announced his plan to start an international Olympic Games.

He also visited a small town called Much Wenlock in England, that held a sports festival known as the Wenlock Olympian Games.

No one listened.
The first Wenlock Olympic Games were a mixture of athletics and traditional country sports such as quoits, football and cricket. Events also included running, hurdles, football and cycling on penny farthings. Some of the early Games included "fun events" as the blindfolded wheelbarrow race and, one year an 'Old Women's Race' with the prize of a pound of tea!
De Coubertin didn’t give up. He spent two more years tirelessly writing letters and talking to world leaders. Finally, he arranged another meeting of sports officials. This time, his plan was accepted. De Coubertin was thrilled.

His next job was to form a group to organize the new Olympics. This became known as the International Olympic Committee, or IOC.

Chapter 5

A successful start

The first official modern Olympic Games opened on April 6, 1896, in the city of Athens in Greece.
Athens 1896
Thousands of spectators gathered to watch male athletes from 14 countries compete in nine different sports: athletics, cycling, fencing, gymnastics, shooting, swimming, tennis, weightlifting and wrestling.

Women could only watch. In those days, many people, including de Coubertin, thought women were too delicate to play sports.

One of the biggest problems for many athletes was the journey to Athens. An American named James Connolly spent almost all his life savings on the boat trip from New York to Naples, which took 17 days.

The trip was worth it. Connolly won the hop, hop and jump (now the triple jump), and became the first medal winner in the modern Games.
The entry rules weren’t very strict. An Irish tourist named John Boland signed up at the last minute... and ended up winning the tennis singles and doubles competitions.

Swimmers had to be especially tough. They had to jump out of boats into the open sea and race to shore in icy cold water.

The highlight was the marathon race of 40km (nearly 25 miles), invented for the Athens Olympics. It was inspired by a story about a Greek soldier named Pheidippides. In 490BC, he ran this distance from Marathon to Athens, with news of Greece’s victory over the Persians.

Rejoice! Greece has won the war.
As the first marathon race at Athens drew to a close, the crowd leaped to their feet when a Greek runner named Spyridon Louis entered the stadium for the final lap.

Overcome with excitement, two Greek princes, sons of King George I of Greece, jumped onto the track and ran alongside Louis to the finish line.