



Itch Rocks

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Editorial Choice:

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Media type:

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It's completely preposterous. A group of teenagers, charging about the country with a deadly box of radioactive rocks, giving the slip both to MI5 and a bunch of Nigerian terrorists. And some Argentinian ones from the 'notorious' Secretaria de Intelligencia. Oh, and some Russian ones with speedboats. Later our heroes pitch up in Didcot and in the blink of an eye, they have waltzed unchallenged into the British equivalent of CERN, despite being startlingly swathed in bandages from a trifling recent tangle with a caesium fire. In fact, so apparently butter-wouldn't-melt innocent are these youngsters that one scientist, presiding casually over the particle accelerator lets slip the immortal line: 'It's not as if letting kids in will get us into any trouble?.'

What? Has he never seen **Scooby Doo**? Surely he must realise that kids with a tendency to peskiness are the whole point of Simon Mayo's second novel which is, despite its occasional absurdities of plot, and frankly often clunky dialogue, hugely enjoyable.

In it, we rejoin Itch, the eponymous science-mad hero of Mayo's first novel as it dawns on him that despite having cast the only known rocks of Element 126 - the newly discovered substance which has the potential to solve the world's energy crisis, or make its possessor an instant nuclear power - to the bottom of a very deep well, he has failed to see off some very ruthless enemies who will stop at nothing to get their hands on it. With the help of his sister Chloe and cousin Jack, Itch must now put 126 beyond their reach for ever.

The plot moves apace from Nigeria and the Falklands to Cornwall and Central London. Flimsy in places it may be but boy does it teach you some fun things. Like the dangers of deep-well diving and what equipment might save you. The five conditions needed to create a dust explosion. How a particle accelerator works. And which chemical element makes you stink like garlic. Mightily impressively it also gives 'spallation' its world fiction premiere.

To coin a chemical term, you'll have to hold your disbelief in suspension at times. But on the whole, **Itch Rocks** is copper-plated entertainment, and a great fusion of science and thriller.

Links:

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/itch-rocks>

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