



# The Ministry of SUITs

Books Reviewed:

[The Ministry of SUITs](#) [1]

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Reviewer:

[Imogen Russell Williams](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

?In the middle of the street lay a single shoe, an unmistakable warning that there was an escaped pirate somewhere nearby.? With this deadpan assertion, Paul Gamble?s debut middle-grade novel starts exactly as it means to go on. The next 300-odd pages (it?s a meaty read, requiring a certain amount of stamina) unfold in the same manner, packing all sorts of splendidly straight faced silliness into a story of the strangeness behind the everyday.

Jack Pearse is addicted to asking unexpected questions. After a terrifying encounter with a bear on the way to school, his insatiable curiosity wins him a job offer from the eponymous Ministry (with responsibility for Strange, Unusual and Impossible Things.) He?s dismayed to discover that his schoolmate Moody Trudy, notoriously free with her fists, is another Ministry new hire, but he soon has more to worry about - odd kids are going missing, and Jack?s best friend David is definitely an odd kid. It?s only a matter of time before he?s added to the list.

The main plot, as might be deduced, is on the broad-brush, outrageous side. As well as the disappearing juvenile eccentrics, there?s the mystery of why the sleek Chapeau Noir company has donated new polyester uniforms ? identical to the old ones ? to Jack?s school, and why smiling old ladies with shopping trollies have started shadowing Jack and Trudy. Plainly, an evil mastermind is developing a stupendous scheme behind the scenes. Gamble?s characterisation is not especially profound, either, although it doesn?t feel scamped ? it?s simply not the main focus of the book.

Here the devil ? and the delight ? is in the detail. With Pratchettesque, rambling, stream-of-consciousness footnotes to explain that black is white, up down, gravity nonsense and time subject to manipulation if you?re in the right emotional state, it provokes a smirk, a snort or a guffaw on almost every page. Nod-and-wink references to grown-up sci-fi, speculative and horror classics are interwoven throughout ? the idea of the ancient Cthulhu being safely contained in the Ministry?s filing branch (?since he wants to send the world mad, working in bureaucracy is pretty much his ideal job?) may sail over the head of many young readers, but might, equally, prompt wider reading. This is a book for a specific kind of silliness-seeker, who delights in the surreal, the ?what if?? and the ?but why?? ? and, in the right hands, it should satisfy completely.

**Links:**

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-ministry-of-suits>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/221>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/imogen-russell-williams>