



BfK News - September 1988

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Created *Oct '09*

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Article Category:

BfK Briefing

Byline:

News about what's happening in the children's book world.

The Earthworm Award was set up in 1987 by Friends of the Earth to encourage the writing of children's books which reflect concern about environmental issues, books to celebrate the wealth, variety and beauty of our earth while highlighting the many threats to our natural world.

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Fiona Waters, one of the judges, reports on this year's winners.

The winner of the 1988 Earthworm Award is Jeannie Baker for her powerfully imaginative picture book **Where the Forest Meets the Sea**, published by Julia MacRae. The panel of judges was unanimous in its praise for this unique book which conveys its message so subtly, and simply. It also admirably fulfils the criteria that the prizewinner should reflect 'green' thinking in the broadest sense, rather than be a didactic study of conservation.

A small boy sails with his father, in a boat tantalizingly called *Time Machine*, to a deserted island where only birds and animals rove in the lush tropical rain forest. The father tells the boy there has been a forest on the island for over a hundred million years and, as the child explores, shadowy images appear among the trees - dinosaurs, crocodiles, lizards and strange flying creatures. He realises how magical the forest is, but also sadly that Mankind will ruin it all with development and this time the shadowy images are of ghastly high-rise hotels, pleasure boats and sunbathers. **Where the Forest Meets the Sea** succeeds at all levels - it is an appealing and accessible picture book with a strong child central character, the production is excellent and the message stark in its simplicity.

A runner-up was also selected this year for a special prize - **One-Eyed Cat** by Paula Fox, published by Pan under the new Piper imprint. This beautifully written book impressed everyone both with the excellence of the writing (Paula Fox has won many awards for her novels including the Newbery Medal) and with the moving quality of her theme. A young boy fires a single shot from a forbidden air rifle then later discovers a cat blinded in one eye, and so is haunted by the fear that he may have inflicted this injury on the animal. His guilt eats into his heart as he tries to provide for the cat throughout a severe winter, and forces him to lie and particularly to deceive his much-loved, gentle mother. He befriends an elderly neighbour who, by example, teaches him much about acquiring wisdom and compassion. An intensely emotional read, the judges felt *One-Eyed Cat* deserved special mention and recognition - a book everyone should read, adults and children alike.

Two further titles, markedly different from each other, were also commended: **Bird** by David Burnie, one of the Eyewitness Guides published by Dorling Kindersley in association with The Natural History Museum; and **Island of the Children** compiled by Angela Huth, published by Orchard Books.

Bird is that rare thing, an information book that is *interesting* and attractive. Children are fascinated by facts and detail

and all too often this is lost sight of in the welter of books of the 'this-book-tells-me-more- about-penguins-than-I-want-to-know' genre. **Bird** is one of a series of beautifully designed and instantly attractive titles in the planned Eyewitness series which will build into a unique encyclopaedia. Illustrated with full-colour photographs and line drawings, the book methodically looks at all aspects of bird life from dinosaur to bird, through eggs, nests, beaks, pellets, etc. Irresistible, and pleasing to have a publisher recognise the need for excellence in the face of designer-conscious children!

Island of the Children may not seem an obvious choice at first - it is an anthology of specially written modern poetry. The title poem by George Mackay Brown symbolises the whole collection: its awareness of our heritage and the need to preserve our environment. Another beautifully produced book, this is a joy to handle and look at, and the judges felt strongly that it should be noted for its contribution through a medium not often used.

Overall, there was an interesting range of books in this year's submissions, but the gaps were huge and obvious - most clearly in the range of fiction for both younger and older children. This may be to do with the perception of the Earthworm Prize, or perhaps it is a failure to recognise that more than ever before the current younger generations do care passionately about their environment and the future of this earth - their future, their earth. It would be nice to see next year's judges deluged with entries, but then think of all those trees! Perhaps it would be better to see fewer, but more relevant books.

The judges for the Earthworm Award 1988 were Hayley Mills, Philippa Pearce, Caron Keating, Robin Hanbury-Tenison, Michael Marland and Fiona Waters, with Jonathan Porritt, Director of Friends of the Earth, in the chair.

Where the Forest Meets the Sea, Jeannie Baker, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 317 9, £6.95

One-Eyed Cat, Paula Fox, Pan Piper, 0 330 29646 9, £1.99 pbk (also in hardback from Dent, 0 46(1 06186 0, £7.50, and Collins Educational, Cascades series, 0 00 33(A)37 4, £2.85)

Bird, David Burnie, Dorling Kindersley, 0 86318 270 4, £6.95

Island of the Children, compiled by Angela Huth, 1 85213 062 8, £7.95

Three New Puffin Booklists

This month Puffin publish what they describe as 'three new booklists': **Equality Street** (multicultural listings) and **Ms Muffet Fights Back** (non-sexist listings), both compiled by Susan Adler, an Equal Opportunities Librarian in an Education Resource Centre; and **Special Needs**, compiled by Beverley Mathias, Director of the National Library for the Handicapped Child. It is the last, **Special Needs**, that's really new, the other two having been around in previous editions for a number of years. Worth sending off for - they are free, independently compiled and an intelligent, well-designed piece of promotional literature even if they are restricted to the Penguin, Puffin, and Viking Kestrel lists.

Available from: Ann Ayton, Children's Marketing, Penguin) Books, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ (01-938 2200).

A New Children's Hardback Series from Andre Deutsch

Called Sparklers, 'a series that really created itself, because we were receiving so many good stories - a little too long for picture book readers, but not long enough for a full length fiction title - that we couldn't hear not to use them.' The first three titles look superb-effective covers and terrific interior design. Titles are: **Freddy**, Philippa Pearce, ill. David Armitage, 0 233 98175 6; **Norma and the Washing Machine**, Michael Rosen, ill. David Higham, 0 233 98174 8; and **The Biggest Jelly in the World**, Bob Turvey, ill. Marc Vyvyan-Jones (both first-timers), 0 233 98275 2. £3.95 each, to be published at the end of September.

Paging All Scots 3rd Scottish Book Fortnight

Saturday, 22nd October - 5th November 1988

To be held in bookshops and libraries around Scotland focussing on new books of Scottish interest or by Scottish authors - both children's and adults. Among several awards being announced during the fortnight is one for children, the Kathleen Fidler Award, sponsored by Blackie. The full Events Programme/Books Leaflet available from: Alison Harley, Scottish Book Marketing Group, 25a South West Thistle Street Lane, Edinburgh EH2 1EW (Tel. 031-225 5795).

STOP PRESS

Read With Me

An Apprenticeship Approach to Reading

Liz Waterland, The Thimble Press, 0 903355 27 3, £2.85 inc. p&p

A new revised and expanded edition of this invaluable 'little green bible' by Liz Waterland arrived just as we were going to press. No time to mention anything other than its pub. date of 25th September 1988. Available from The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester. Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ (Tel. 045 387 3716).

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