

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

No.190 | September 2011

*the* children's book magazine online

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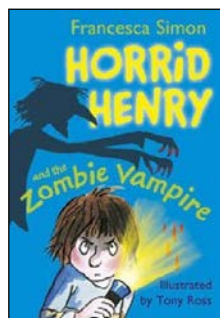
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## COVER STORY

This issue's cover illustration by Tony Ross is from Francesca Simons' *Horrid Henry and the Zombie Vampire*. Thanks to Orion Children's Books for their help with this September cover.  
[www.orionbooks.co.uk](http://www.orionbooks.co.uk)



first met Richard Hill, **Books for Keeps'** now just retired Managing Director, in the 1970s when he was head of the Children's Marketing Department at Penguin and I was a reviewer for magazines such as **Spare Rib** and **Race Today** and a campaigner around issues of racism and sexism in children's books. To my surprise, Richard's response to the points I was making about race and gender stereotyping and the lack of information about those good titles that were available was, 'OK. So what can we do?' I suggested that Penguin publish an annotated guide to their multi-cultural titles and Richard immediately invited me to write it. It was the first such initiative from a UK publisher and followed shortly afterwards by an invitation to write a guide to Penguin's non-sexist titles which was published as **Ms Muffet Fights Back**.

'OK. So what can we do?' has always been Richard's approach to the difficulties that surround getting books into the hands of young readers as his subsequent initiatives have demonstrated. Passionate about the importance of reading and story to children of all backgrounds, Richard became heavily involved in the school bookshop movement while still at Penguin before joining the School Bookshop Association in 1979 as Managing Director. This led to the conversion of the SBA's publication **School Bookshop News** into **Books for Keeps**, a magazine with a wider remit to bring children and books together.

Also there at the beginning were Angie Hill who has provided tireless and invaluable editorial support and Alec Davis, **BfK's** designer, both now also just retired. It was Alec, described by Richard as 'the best graphic designer of his year at St Martin's' and a man of great 'literary intelligence', who came up with the phrase 'books for keeps' which was to become our title; Alec also invented the word 'Authorgraph' for our in-depth showcase author interviews (now 190 of them!). 'Literary intelligence' is a phrase that also applies to Angie. With her customary self-effacing tact, she has often been instrumental in changing things that weren't quite pitched right. She and Alec have always shared with Richard and with **BfK's** various Editors (Pat Triggs, Chris Powling, me), a strong sense of the audience for **BfK** and its varying interests and needs and ensured that magazine not only looks good, but responds at the right level.

Richard's 'OK. So what can we do?' over his thirty years at the helm of **Books for Keeps** has resulted in so much that we now take for granted in the children's book world but which was at the time pioneering – not least the democracy of an independent review magazine with a range of interviews, articles and features about children's books to appeal to both specialists and non-specialists.



Josie Vincent

Then there were the dedicated **BfK** Guides to poetry, to multi-cultural children's books, to books about green issues and to books about bullying; there was the introduction of serious critical attention to non-fiction (at the time a novelty); there were the campaigning articles – against prescribed reading lists and worksheets and for a curriculum with creative space for literature; there was the inclusiveness, both in terms of the reviewing team and contributors but also in terms of what was reviewed; there was the delight in illustration and in novelty titles and the space and critical attention afforded them and the enthusiasm in promoting new initiatives, from storytelling in libraries to encouraging children's 'home libraries'.

Above all, Richard, Angie and Alec have been instrumental in providing a forum in which conversations and debate about the importance of children's literature in all its aspects have taken place. These conversations will continue now that they have bowed out and our new Marketing Director, Andrea Reece, and I take the magazine forward.

A belief in the importance of reading for pleasure and that that pleasure should be available to all our children has been central to **Books for Keeps** during Richard, Angie and Alec's tenure and that too will continue 'for keeps'.

Our love, thanks and good wishes go with them.

*Rosemary*

Rosemary Stones,  
Editor



## Books for Keeps

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# TOMI UNGERER: a life of contrasts

Tomi Ungerer, innovative picture book creator and the winner of the 1986 Hans Christian Andersen Award is surprisingly little known these days in the UK. Considered anti-establishment in the 1970s for his often radical picture book making, Ungerer can sometimes confound his audience with works of sentimental charm, highlighting as Brian Alderson puts it, 'the extreme contrasts endemic to the whole Ungerer oeuvre – if not his life tout court'. Here **Brian Alderson** reflects on Ungerer's life and distinctive contribution to picture book art.

There was consternation among the anti-authoritarian comrades of the **Jugend + Literatur** faction in the Germany of 1976 ❶. What had become of Tomi, one of their *Fahnenträger*, bearing the banner of a cheerful defiance of picture-book conventions? How come that he had defected to the ranks of the bourgeoisie with his recently published illustrations for **Das Grosse Liederbuch** (Zürich: Diogenes, 1976), a collection of much-loved German ballads and folk- or near-folk-songs? Shunning the opportunity for a satiric attack on a Romantic pastoralism that obscured the social ills of the backward times whence the songs derived, he mirrored the sort of sentiment for a wholesome country life that had been promoted not least by the propagandists of the Third Reich. Happy, well-clad children danced ring-a-ring o'-roses, wanderers took their way through delectable landscapes, and, while there was no lack of sportiveness, or even funerary gloom, it was all charmingly done ❷.

Just as hard to bear was publisher Diogenes' commercial exploitation of the book. **Jugend + Literatur** (Jan. 1976) ran a barely disguised critical account of **Das Grosse Liederbuch's** pre-publication press-releases and of the variant editions of the book about to be published. There was to be a main trade edition, published in their exact words 'for the upper middle class'; a bibliophile's supplement: **Freut euch des Lebens** ('Go on and Enjoy Life' – 101 studies and sketches for the book with an afterword by the artist); and a tiny, mini-paperback for children (for 'lower class people' as **J+L** has it), 72 pages, plus a lot of advertisements, illustrated with line adaptations of the original watercolours. 'Hélas', said the editor in his March edition, Tomi has suddenly become acceptable to the moral adjudicators of his Alsatian homeland, where in his youth he had been condemned as both perverse and subversive. (And all that occurred two years before the artist's fine, but profoundly 'traditional' illustrations for the two volumes of Johanna Spyri's **Heidi** came out. I know not what Dr Künemann had to say about that.)

Whatever the disappointments perceived in **Das Grosse Liederbuch**, which **J+L** admitted as being a handsome volume, their expression goes some way to highlighting the extreme contrasts endemic to the whole Ungerer oeuvre – if not his life tout court. (Entertainingly just such a contrast occurs with a fourth addendum to

the Song Book series. It looks as though the critics of **J+L** did not know of a privately printed **Hopp Hopp Hopp** which Ungerer's friend and agent, Daniel Keel published in Zürich in 1975. This is a volume of pencil sketches closely related to the finished artwork for several of the folk song illustrations but marvellously satirised. What is Mama doing to that baby, smiling so blissfully in its cradle for the 'Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf' lullaby? And the baker has left his flour-bin in 'Backe, backe, Kuchen' to attend to the lady leaning over the table and rolling out the pastry. (She looks to be enjoying the interruption.)

## The importance of drawing

As is most tellingly shown in **Tomi**, Ungerer's illustrated account of his early life, contrast upon contrast swept through his Alsatian childhood. Born the youngest in a close-knit family he felt particularly the loss of his father when he was three. A few years later came the War when Alsations, who were part of the French nation, but spoke a near-German dialect of their own, found themselves first more or less on the eastern front, but then, having been overrun, a sort of province of Germany. Tomi's schooling was now undertaken in German (including learning to write in the 'Sütterlin' script, a bumpitty German cursive favoured by the Führer). No wonder that, with a return to French rules and customs at the end of the War, his sense of stability was badly fractured.

Through all this, drawing remained an assurance for his self-realisation, but only with his journey to the United States in 1956 did that turn to self-fulfilment. He arrived with sixty dollars in his pocket and, by good fortune, found himself directed to the office of Ursula Nordstrom the (then and now?) celebrated editor of children's books for Messrs Harper. She not only had an eye for the potential of new work but also a tenacity in shaping it and, within a relatively short time, Ungerer's first book was in her list. This almost self-effacingly funny picture book introduces us to the Mellops family: six pigs dwelling sedately in a nice house – Mother, Father, and their four offspring. Mr Mellops is inspired by his reading to build an aircraft in the back garden, which alas crashes for want of enough fuel and while he and the boys brew up a substitute (their ever practical father manufacturing some schnapps from a home-made distillery built on the spot) young Casimir goes hunting for food and is kidnapped by a Red Indian. Tied to a totem pole as a subject for target practice he and the pole are fortunately rescued by the revived and re-flown aircraft and the family return home to be regaled with cream cake by their solicitous Mama ❸.

That callow synopsis does no justice either to Ungerer's text (which, presumably, he wrote himself since a later German edition is translated by another hand) or to his plain, unadorned drawing wiry lines with pale colour overlays in light blue and a sort of piggy pink. But **The Mellops Go Flying** proved to be the first of five books about the family and its indomitable paterfamilias and these preserve elements established right at the start: ambitious adventures – drilling for oil, for instance, or deep-sea diving – frustrations and failures, but always a happy return to Mama and her spectacular cakes. Furthermore, in a neat touch, the Mellops' offspring have their individual drawn characteristics: Ferdinand always chewing a flower stalk (even when spelunking) or Felix always presented viewed from behind so that we know more of his braces than his face.

These delicious books came out at intervals between 1957 and 1963, interspersed with what was a more loosely presented sequence of picture tales featuring animals with a penchant for assisting the



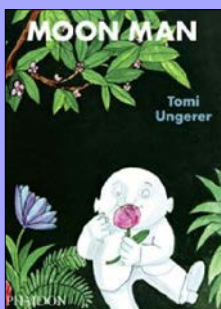
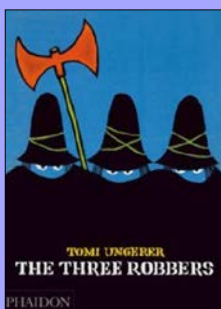
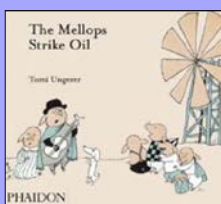
humans alongside whom they exist. The best-known is probably the one who put in an appearance almost immediately after the flying Mellops: **CriCTOR**, a boa constrictor who is despatched in a circular box to be a companion to Madame Louise Bodot, a present from her son who is studying reptiles in Africa. As has been often noted, CriCTOR may have a literary relationship with Babar, the little elephant – Madame Bodot knits him a woollen jumper and settles him down in an elongated bed – but he lives to become an honoured local resident. His curvaceous form helps his adoptive friend to teach children their letters; he helps boy scouts learn their knots; and he even saves Madame Bodot from a burglar.

## Dramatic use of colour

CriCTOR is the least adventurous, and hence the most 'credible' (or least absurd) of these companionable beasts, who include a kangaroo with wings, an immensely energetic octopus, and a gallant vulture. But, in terms of the artist's own development, perhaps the most significant is **Rufus**, the silliest of the lot, but the one where Ungerer (like the bat who is the story's subject) discovers Colour. Hitherto, his children's books had held to the pastel overlays first seen in the Mellops saga, but now, in 1961, coloured inks take over. Whole spreads are given coloured washes – black or dark blue – on which coloured images are superimposed, and elsewhere as Rufus swoops into daylight, paint is sloshed around in a way not encountered before.

Well – not encountered, that is, in his book illustrations. But from about 1958 (dating Ungerer's work is fraught with problems) his chief activity, and one for which he was far more widely-known, was as a poster designer. It was a graphic form for which both his skills and his temperament were ideally suited and over at least twenty years he must have produced hundreds of examples, either as straight advertisements, commissioned from individual companies such as Lysol and Cantrecre Pantyhose, or, more significantly, as acts of political aggression. His fame among the radicals of Germany may well stem from the ferocious graphics that he produced against the Vietnam war, for instance, or for the establishment of racial equality, and it was through such work that he displayed his capacity for the dramatic use of colour. Indeed, his commitment to the centuries-old role of artist as social critic, had led him also to George Grosz-like assaults on the social mores of his adopted country through the medium of caricature. While it is difficult now to observe the full impact of his poster-work, the ferocity of his cartooning is preserved in print in a run of volumes such as the critical miscellany **America**, or the raging sequence of **The Party**, set in Long Island's Gatsby-land, or the eye-boggling **Fornicon** on the commercial conversion of sexual love into a mechanical process.

Harbouring so ambivalent a response to the American way of life, it is hardly surprising that in 1971 Ungerer and his third wife, Yvonne, departed New York for a wilderness farm on the coast of Nova Scotia. But the ten years or so that lay between **Rufus** and that leave-taking saw the emergence, amid all the wild graphics, of the half dozen or so books which sanction his place in the pantheon of picture book art and upon which his receipt of the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1986 probably depended. (To say which is not to neglect what may be seen as secondary work: the two dozen or so books done in collaboration with other authors



where his support so often matches the needs of a given text: the frenzied depictions of the wizardly setting for Barbara Hazen's **The Sorcerer's Apprentice**, or the fruitful association with William Cole in a succession of comic joke and rhyme books.)

The colour techniques inspired by **Rufus** were replicated soon after in two wordless books that played with the shape of snails and shoes: **snail, where are you?** and **one, two, where's my shoe?**, but the use of dark, full-page washes, with colour superimposed, figured most significantly in the first of his 'big' picture books, **The Three Robbers** (apparently first published in Germany in 1961). It brought a spookiness to this tale of redemption in which the orphaned Tiffany, stolen by the robbers from her carriage, persuades them to apply their ill-gotten gains to a life of charity. It's a corny enough plot, owing everything to the artistry of its execution and the preserved mystery of the three robbers hidden forever under their tall hats. And a similar story-line is employed in **Zeralda's Ogre** of 1967 where the rapacious villain is reformed by little Zeralda's skills as a gourmet cook, but now with a display of spirited pictorialism. The simple text serves principally as an excuse for illustrative high jinks, entertaining the reader with details of varying relevance, or no relevance at all: children hiding from the ogre in cellars, Zeralda roasting a pig on the king's highway, roast chicken with neat red shoes on its protruding legs.

These are the sort of dodges that give so much life to the more varied texts that followed: **Moon Man** (1967), **The Hat** (1970), and **The Beast of Monsieur Racine** (1971), which, to my mind, mark a culmination to Ungerer's originality as a picture book artist. Less often cited though is the experimental **I Am Papa Snap** and **these are my Favorite No-Such Stories** 'whipped up, drawn, and dramatized' by the author in 1971. There are sixteen of these little incidents set down in texts that are themselves treasurable ('Bunny Bunson Brittle goes fishing. / He has no permit / Who cares? / There are no fish.') and their near surreal humour is matched by colour drawings that evoke high admiration both for their composition across the spreads and the serious attention given to the detail of their anything but serious scenes. The book was done as the Ungerers were on the point of departure for Nova Scotia and although it had one or two successors, not least the **Song Book** and the controversial **No Kiss for Mother** (1973) – a cat-family story, founded upon Ungerer's own dislike of being kissed by his often over-demonstrative Mama (but with some stunning grey wash drawings of home and school-life among the cats), a twenty-year career in picture books was effectively at an end.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Nova Scotia years are recorded in a memoir, **Far Out is Never Far Enough** published in 1983. If the contrasts in Ungerer's New York life are plain to see (the phases of the children's books set against the turmoil of the graphic work, the transitions from plain line and colour to gay impastos – to say nothing of three marriages) then that between the City and the Wilderness was an altogether more fundamental matter. **Far Out** is a kind of *kommentiertes Tagebuch*, a diary with running commentary, whose prose – so precise in its delineations of landscape, weather, the toils of farm-life, the lost souls of the adjacent communities – is perfectly enhanced by the accompanying sketches and more finished illustrations. But after five years or so, 'fed up with the bloody carnival', Tomi and Yvonne moved on, back to





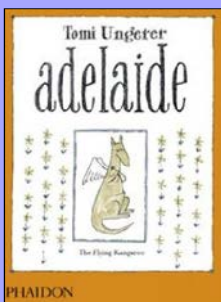
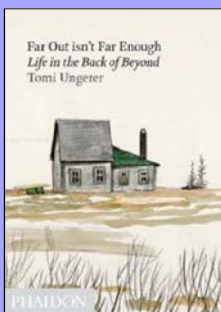
'The arrival - a contrast to New York' from **Far Out Isn't Far Enough**.

Europe, to a farm in Southern Ireland where they have remained.

These have been years less of creative work than of the honours that flowed from it— not just the Andersen award, but a Légion d'Honneur and a National Prize for Graphic Arts in France, an appointment by the European Council as Ambassador for Childhood and Education (whatever that means), and much else. But of greatest interest is his donation to Strasbourg, the city of his birth, of a massive archive, now of over 8000 original drawings, together with attendant documentation and 6000 items from his wide-ranging collection of children's toys and games.

These form the main holding of an Ungerer Museum at the Villa Grenier (praised as one of the ten best such in Europe) but in 1975, at the time when the gift was made, a huge celebratory exhibition was organised in Paris, whose subsequent journey to England met with a sad but comical reception. It opened in (of all places) Leicester, where a presiding official appeared somewhat inebriated and where neither he nor most of the local populace had a clue about the artist to whom they were giving house-room. Later the show went as an open exhibition to the Festival Hall in London where the section that in Paris had been '*interdit aux enfants*' gave great offence to the feminist brigade. In a tiny riot (by today's standards) the sisterhood achieved closure of that portion of the show.

One can hardly argue from that event the disappearance of Tomi Ungerer from British consciousness, but very little of his subsequent work is known in this country. Some five picture books, mostly from Diogenes have found no translators, while the only other one to be published, the wordless guide to a skittish athleticism among amphibians, **The Joy of Frogs** (Souvenir Press, 1984) was perhaps unsuitable for review in so polite a journal as **Books for Keeps**. But now, on the brink of Tomi's eightieth birthday, a welcome change has occurred. The Phaidon Press – a rather different company now from its distinguished predecessor – are in the process of bringing Tomi back into print with a distinction all their own. In a reprint programme which is being carried out with careful attention to all aspects of printing and design, they have already given us excellent editions of **The Three Robbers**, **Moon Man**, **Adelaide**, **the Flying Kangaroo**, and a handsomely revised and expanded edition of **Far Out Isn't Far Enough**, while last year they published the first edition in English of **Otto** which had first been published by Diogenes in 1999. Sub-titled 'the autobiography of a teddy bear', it allows Otto to reprise in his own story a glimpse of the tribulations of Europe's twentieth century catastrophe. There is a degree of coolness and dignity in the illustrations as befits Otto's recollections, but no loss of intensity or of the customary comic asides. After all, Tomi the Alsatian was there. ■



## References

Christine Hamm, Sylvie Erb et al. **Tomi Ungerer; Ausstellung / Exposition / Exhibition**. Cologne: argos press, 1981. [Trilingual catalogue accompanying the touring exhibition, published both in paper and board bindings.]

Jack Rennert ed. **The Poster Art of Tomi Ungerer**. Zürich: Diogenes Verlag, 1971

Tomi Ungerer. **Far Out Isn't Far Enough; life in the back of beyond**. 2nd ed. London & New York: Phaidon Press, 2011. [First published London: Methuen, 1984]

Tomi Ungerer, **Tomi; a childhood under the Nazis**. Enfield, Middlesex: TomiCo / Airlift Book Company, 1998 [also published in the USA, Ireland, and Australia]

## The Books

The following list supplies details of Tomi Ungerer titles reissued by Phaidon:

**The Three Robbers**, 978 0 7148 4877 8, £9.95

**Moon Man**, 978 0 7148 5598 1, £9.95

**Adelaide**, the Flying Kangaroo, 978 0 7148 6083 1, £8.95

**Otto**, 978 0 7148 5766 4, £9.95

**Far Out Isn't Far Enough**, 978 0 7148 6077 0, £19.95

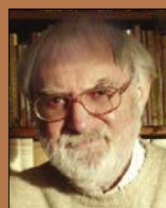
Available from October:

**The Mellops Strike Oil**, 978 0 7148 6249 1, £6.95

**Christmas Eve at the Mellops**, 978 0 7148 6250 7, £6.95

**The Mellops Go Diving for Treasure**, 978 0 7148 6248 4, £6.95

Other Ungerer titles may be available from Amazon or Abe Books.



**Brian Alderson** is founder of the Children's Books History Society and a former Children's Books Editor for **The Times**.

① **Bulletin Jugend+Literatur** was a monthly news sheet of socialist leanings edited by the teacher and critic Horst Künemann. He had a particular interest in picture books and his **Profile zeitgenössischer Bilderbuchmacher** (Weinheim, 1972) included a chapter on Ungerer praising his originality as against 'consumer-oriented' products.

② A selection of the illustrations appeared in a cunningly edited, but abridged, English edition of the book where they accompanied some near-matching nursery rhymes and popular verses: **The Great Song Book** ed. Timothy John, with music ed. Peter Hankey (Ernest Benn, 1978).

③ The totem pole is planted in the garden where, some years later, it may have inspired the title for one of Tomi's more surprising collections of erotic drawings featuring various bondage ceremonies.

# Ten of the Best 'Lyrical' Non-Fiction Books

**Margaret Mallett** chooses her top ten 'lyrical' non-fiction books.

'Lyrical' non-fiction refers to those early information titles which push at the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction and support children's first steps into new knowledge and understanding. The best lyrical non-fiction titles, like those in Walker Books' ground breaking 'Read and Wonder' series, are based on meticulous research but have an authorial voice that shares rather than insists. Often in story form and using imagery, alliteration and rhythmic language, these books help children wonder and care as they read and learn. In the best of these titles, pleasing page design and typography combine with illustrations that are in harmony with a poetic narrative.

## Insect Detective

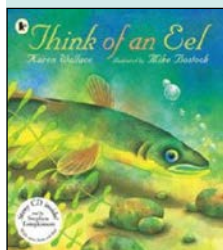
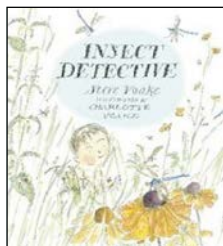
Steven Voake, ill. Charlotte Voake, Walker, 978 1 4063 1651 1, £11.99, hbk and 978 1 4063 2809 7, £5.99 pbk

If, like me, you are disappointed to hear a knee jerk 'Urrgh' when children see a mini beast, you will appreciate this book which celebrates the beauty and variety of insects in their habitats. The gentle watercolour illustrations show the details children like. A conversational text inspires outdoor observation, drawing and writing as well as much lively talk. (3-5)

## Think of an Eel

Karen Wallace, ill. Nick Bostock, Walker Books 'Read and Wonder' series, 978 1 4063 1202 7, £6.99, pbk. (Now relaunched in the 'Nature's Storybooks' series in a book and CD set.)

Children love a mystery and here we learn that no-one has seen a wild eel lay eggs or an eel egg hatch. Luminous pictures show eels constantly transforming during their long journey across oceans and rivers. There is a poetic harmony between picture and written text: 'Eels feed mainly at night'

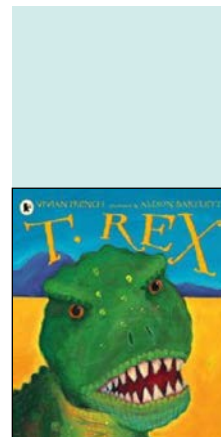


swirls round an atmospheric picture of an eel emerging from the water onto a moonlit river bank. Since its publication in 1993 countless children have been inspired to question and wonder, and above all to care about this mysterious and fascinating creature. (5-8)

## T. Rex

Vivian French, ill. Alison Bartlett, Candlewick Press 'Read, Listen and Wonder', 978 0 7636 4192 4, £6.99 pbk

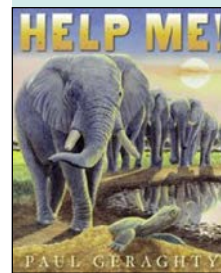
A question and answer approach is used skilfully in this information story about a young boy's visit to a dinosaur exhibition with his grandfather. The engaging illustrations and the grandfather's speculative rhyming responses to the boy's questions ('we don't really know. It was millions and millions of years ago...') make this book a must have. (5-8)



## Help Me!

Paul Geraghty, Andersen Press, 978 1 8493 9027 9, £5.99 pbk

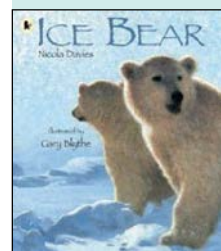
Atmospheric pictures show the realities of the African Savannah and a touching account tells of real events and draws on what is known about animal behaviour. What happens when a tortoise slips and is in great danger...? (5-8)



## Ice Bear

Nicola Davies, ill. Gary Blythe, Walker Books, 978 1 4063 1304 8, £6.99 pbk

Young readers are taken on an absorbing journey through the frozen arctic landscape. The well pitched text and atmospheric illustrations are underpinned by the authority of the author's standing as a zoologist. Large print takes us through the seasons in a beautiful but harsh environment, while smaller print which undulates across the page gives extra facts about the bear as survivor and ruthless hunter. (5-8)



## Window

Jeannie Baker, Walker Books, 978 0 7445 9486 7, £5.99 pbk

An image of a mother and baby looking out at a wild and beautiful landscape begins this wordless picture book. Time passes and we are shown the baby, now a young father, holding his own child and looking out at what is left of the wilderness after years of development. The author makes us care about the likelihood that the only wilderness available to our descendants will be in national parks and nature reserves. As in Jeannie Baker's other picture books, the illustrations are



# 10

photographs of her distinctive collages using bark, grasses, earth and fabric. (Baker's visual storytelling is also powerful and moving in her latest book **Mirror** - two young boys grow up in different cultures but some things are universally valued – not least the warmth of family relationships.) (6+)

## Nature Adventures

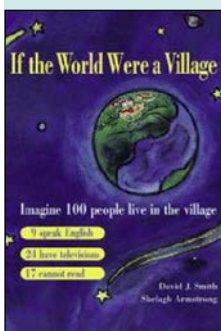
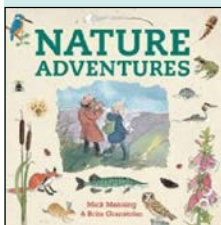
Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Frances Lincoln, 978 1 8478 0088 6, £12.99 hbk

Does poetry sometimes deserve a place in a children's science book? Yes. As these author/illustrators show, the eye of the poet is often as scrutinising as a scientist's. Here are apt quotations from nature poems to entrance and to complement copious scientific information. The authorial voice draws in young readers and hand lettering imparts facts in a personal, confiding way. Pictures, in pencil and watercolour of varying size are a hugely important source of detailed information. The book combines lyricism with some conventional features of non-fiction and is clearly organised under headings like 'In the town', 'Field and hedgerow' and 'Through the seasons'. Technical terms - 'carnivore', 'diurnal', and 'metamorphosis' - are well explained in the glossary. (7+)

## If the World Were a Village

David J Smith, ill. Shelagh Armstrong, A & C Black, 978 0 7136 6880 3, £6.99 pbk. (extra activities available online at [www.acblack.com/globalvillage](http://www.acblack.com/globalvillage)).

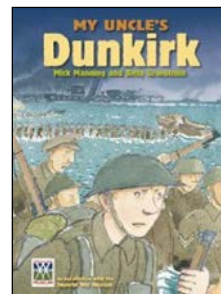
'What we need is not just facts, but a way of looking at the world that tells the story truthfully' (David Smith, 2002:31). How can children picture the lives and circumstances of the more than 6.7 billion people in our world? David Smith raises issues to do with economics and cultural diversity in a way that helps young people begin to understand by relating them to a village of just 100 people. Nationalities, Languages, Schooling and Literacy, Money and Possessions are amongst the sections which organise the book. When children read that 'only 34 out of the hundred people always have enough to eat' the appeal is to heart as well as mind and vibrant pictures with a strong line add substance. The opening invitation is lyrical indeed: 'Go down into the valley and walk through the gates. Dawn is chasing away the night shadows. The smell of wood smoke hangs in the air. A baby awakes and cries.' Original, brilliant and sometimes heart rending. (9+)



## My Uncle's Dunkirk

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Franklin Watts, 978 0 7496 9342 8, £7.99 pbk

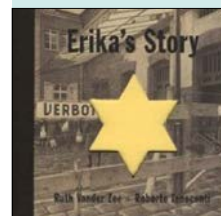
These author/illustrators have perfected the lyrical biography for children. Teachers will know their lively 'Fly on the Wall' information stories and the much praised war stories based on family history - **Tail-end Charlie** and **Taff in the WAAF** - all published by Frances Lincoln. But the less well known **My Uncle's Dunkirk**, telling of one man's experience of Operation Dunkirk in World War 2, is particularly poignant. In spite of his silence, the uncle has a treasured store of mementoes like a soldier's pay book and permits. A simply excellent starting point for children's history projects. (9+)



## Erika's Story

Ruth Vander Zee, ill. Robert Innocenti, Cape, 978 0 2240 7015 7, £10.99 hbk

A personal 'voice' shares with young readers the effect of a terrible period in history on an individual life. As a small baby Erika is thrown from a moving train on its way to a concentration camp. She is found and cared for but there is so much she does not know: her date of birth, her birth name and where she was born. The condensed meanings in the sparely written text make it poetic. But it was the illustrations with their mostly sombre palette that inspired the deepest conversation in a small group of nine year olds. The baby, bundled up in vibrant pink clothes and rosy against a grey background, is shown landing on a grassy bank. A small symbol of hope in a bleak time, they thought. (9+) ■



**Margaret Mallett** is an Independent researcher and writer about Primary English. Among her publications are **Early Years Non-Fiction: A Guide to Helping Young Researchers Use and Enjoy Information Texts** (Routledge) and **The Lyrical Voice in Non-Fiction: Think of an Eel** by Karen Wallace and Mike Bostock (Primary Bookmark 3, The English Association; available free on-line: [www.le.ac.uk/engassoc/publications](http://www.le.ac.uk/engassoc/publications))



# Buying Reference Books for Your Child

As they get older, children's natural curiosity about the world and thirst for information can be developed by including some reference books as part of their 'home library'. **Sue Unstead** explains what kinds of books are important and recommends useful titles.

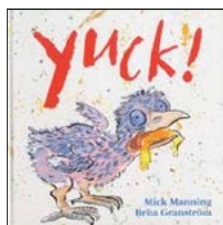
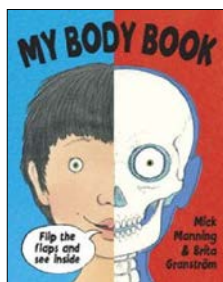
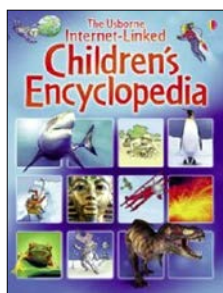
**H**ow can parents choose the right books to support their child's learning, to answer questions and whet the appetite for finding out more? Guidance is often pretty thin on this shifting ground where the internet holds increasing sway. Schools are reluctant to advise, and many children's bookshops have only a limited amount of shelving devoted to non-fiction. Hopefully the titles suggested here will offer some ideas to take a child through primary school and help support homework topics and project work.

## First Encyclopedias

For the youngest age group just starting school a single-volume encyclopedia such as **Usborne's Children's Encyclopedia** should help deal with the sort of things children ask, usually starting with the word 'Why?' ('Why is the grass green, the sky blue, the rain wet etc?') Artwork is combined with photographs, and text is broken up into manageable sections in a generous type size. Like most other encyclopedias aimed at this age group it is organised thematically rather than alphabetically, enabling a child to explore a topic of interest while still acquiring important literacy skills. Learning to negotiate a contents page, locate a word in a glossary, find a reference in an index are all vital steps in discovering how to access information, whether in a book or online.

## First information series

If a single-volume reference book seems too daunting at this stage, an alternative is to pick titles from series such as Dorling Kindersley's 'Eye Wonder', which covers topics ranging from natural history to science, including titles such as **Shark**, **Weather** and **Pyramid**. In these books photographs combine with simple informative text to provide a basic introduction to a subject. Another approach is taken by Walker Books' 'Read and Discover' series with their narrative text which provides a useful stepping stone from storybooks to straight non-fiction. **What is a Wall after All?**, **Think of an Eel** and **All Pigs are Beautiful** are three particular favourites, the last two now reissued with a read-aloud version on an accompanying CD. Mick Manning and Brita Granström stand out too for their unusual and entertaining non-fiction titles that are always pitched perfectly at younger readers. Examples include **My Body Book**, **Yuck!** and **Dino Dinners**.



## Reference encyclopedias and online resources

Moving up in age group, from KS1 to KS2, or from infants to juniors, a more comprehensive one-volume encyclopedia would be a sound investment to provide material for homework and school projects. Choosing one that is accessible, attractive and easy to use is all-important. And of course it must be up to date. It is here that the competition with the internet becomes intense. The internet is undoubtedly a fantastic resource, but it is, as one reference publisher describes it 'unruly and difficult for children to navigate'. There is also the danger that children will simply cut and paste chunks of information, sometimes of dubious value, without really understanding the content of what they are assembling. Effective use of the internet requires research skills best acquired through using books.

It is on the reference shelf that books and the internet can complement one another. A number of publishers have produced titles with internet links – a bank of websites that the publisher monitors for reliability and currency. DK's **Homework Encyclopedia**, originally published in 2003 and reissued in 2011, fits the bill well here for a single volume with information that is likely to be relevant for project work. A sample of its more than 1000 e-links reveals that these include real-time reports, data bases, satellite images and virtual tours. Many familiar websites are included such as museum sites and the BBC, but parents can feel reassured that the links are safe and age appropriate. It also has an image bank of 1000 pictures to download for projects. The book stands alone without the need for a computer, but the websites add a further dimension.

Usborne publishes a range of subject-specific encyclopedias on Science, Geography and History with similarly monitored websites and internet links.

## Atlases and World Geography

An up to date Atlas is a vital resource throughout a child's school years. The major cartographic publishers such as Philips, Oxford and Collins have a range of atlases for different age groups from pictorial maps for the youngest to more detailed curriculum-linked atlases for key stage 2 and upwards. **Philips Junior School Atlas** is a good example, including regional maps of the British Isles, features on reading maps and understanding symbols, as well as thematic maps on climate, vegetation, population and cities.

For broader information on world geography, climate and resources, Usborne's **Geography Encyclopedia** is an accessible and attractive volume with information on continents and countries, trade and resources which also includes a complete world atlas.

## Natural History

Animal lovers may want more information than a single-volume encyclopedia can provide, and there are a number of good reference books on the market of which **The Kingfisher Animal Encyclopedia** stands out for its excellent photography. For more local information on wildlife, a set of spotter's guides could prove useful. A&C



Helping your child

Black have produced four little guides recently in association with the RSPB for younger readers on **Birds, Minibeasts, Flowers and Mammals**. Two attractive volumes that are particular favourites in our household for their delicate artwork are Charlotte Voakes' **A Little Guide to Wild Flowers** and **A Little Guide to Trees** to help identify and learn about species in the UK.

## Science and Technology

In the field of Science, there can be no better teacher than Professor Robert Winston, whose series of books for DK includes **What Makes Me Me?** on genetics, **Body**, and **Science Experiments**. One of the best volumes on technology and the principles of physics remains the quirky and amusing **The Way Things Work** by David Macaulay with text by Neil Ardley. And for the ultimate in new technology with high-tech photos and computer imagery there is DK's **How Things Work Encyclopedia**.

Space and astronomy are covered well in both the encyclopedias mentioned above, but **The Usborne Book of Astronomy & Space** includes plenty of practical information for starwatching and identifying the night sky.

## History

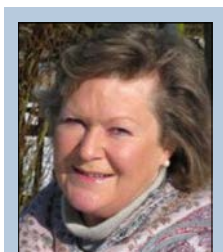
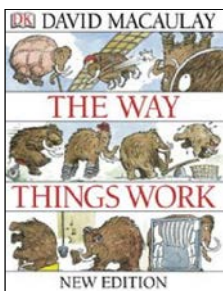
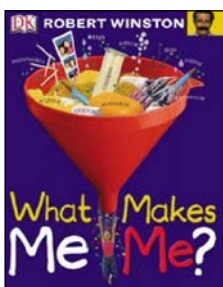
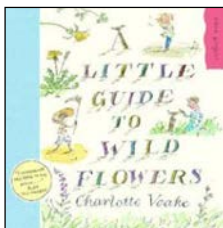
Information on the ancient world, Greece and Rome and some brief coverage of world history is included in the big encyclopedias, but for detailed information on kings and queens and British history you must look elsewhere. Patrick Dillon's approach in **The Story of Britain** is to present our history in a series of stories told in chronological order from 1066 to the present day. A more pictorial alternative is the handsome **Usborne History of Britain**.

## The Arts

Phaidon's **The Art Book for Children** offers a well chosen selection of paintings with simple text pointing out things to look for in each one. In **Tell me a Picture** Quentin Blake, former children's laureate, chooses an alphabetical anthology of 26 pictures from the National Gallery to open children's eyes to the wider world of art.

Good books on the performing arts are few and far between, but DK's **Children's Book of Music** covers a huge range of composers from classical to contemporary jazz, pop and rock with useful biographies and musical examples. It has the added bonus of an accompanying audio CD.

If I still had room on my shelf and the budget to spend, I would add in **Whittaker's World of Facts** by Russell Ash for quick reference and quirky facts; **The Great Grammar Book** by creative duo Kate Petty and Jenny Maizels as the best guide to this tricky subject, **The Usborne Dictionary of Maths** for those difficult homework problems and **The Lion Encyclopedia of World Religions** as much for its illustrations as its coverage of different beliefs. And lastly, and chosen for the appropriate age group: A Dictionary, Spelling Dictionary, Rhyming Dictionary and a Thesaurus. (See 'A Questions of Words' by Sue Unstead in **BfK** No 175, March 2009 for advice on Dictionaries.) ■



Sue Unstead was a publisher of children's non-fiction for 25 years and is now a freelance editorial consultant and writer.

## Books discussed:

**Children's Encyclopedia**, Usborne, 320pp, 978 1 4095 3118 0, £19.99 hbk or 978 1 4095 3138 8, £9.99 reduced format flexibinding

DK 'Eye Wonder' series £4.99 pbk

**Shark** 978 1 4053 4128 8

**Pyramid** 978 1 4053 2381 9

**Weather** 978 1 4053 1522 7

'Read and Discover' series, Walker Books

**What is a Wall, After All?**, Judy Allen & Alan Baron, 978 1 4063 1856 2 £3.99 pbk

'Nature Storybooks' series, Walker Books, £6.99 pbk

**Think of an Eel**, Karen Wallace & Mike Bostock, 978 1 4063 1202 7

**All Pigs are Beautiful** Dick King-Smith & Anita Jeram, 978 1 4063 1195 2

Titles by Mick Manning & Brita Granström:

**My Body Book**, Watts, 978 0 7496 8262 0, £5.99 pbk

**Yuck!**, Frances Lincoln, 978 1 8450 7423 4, £5.99 pbk

**Dino Dinners**, Frances Lincoln, 978 1 8450 7689 4 £6.99

**Homework Encyclopedia**, Dorling Kindersley, 448pp, 978 1 4053 6385 3, £19.99 hbk

**Usborne Internet-linked Encyclopedias** – Geography, Science, History

**Philip's Junior Atlas**, 9781 8490 7168 0, £8.99 pbk

**Usborne Geography Encyclopedia**, 400 pp, 978 1 4095 1906 5, £14.99 reduced format flexibinding

**The Kingfisher Animal Encyclopedia**, David Burnie, 978 0 7534 3028 6, £19.99 hbk

RSPB 'First Guides' series:

**Birds, Minibeasts, Wild Flowers, Mammals**, £4.99 pbk

Eden Project Children's Books by Charlotte Voake:

**A Little Guide to Trees**, 978 1 9039 1982 8, £7.99 pbk

**A Little Guide to Wild Flowers**, 978 1 9039 1911 8, £6.99 pbk

Robert Winston titles pub. by Dorling Kindersley

**What Makes Me Me?** 978 1 4053 5803 3, £8.99 pbk

**Science Experiments**, 978 1 4053 6286 3, £14.99 hbk

**Body**, 978 1 4053 1042 0, £12.99 hbk

**The Way Things Work**, David Macaulay & Neil Ardley, Dorling Kindersley, 978 1 4053 0238 8, £18.99 pbk

**How Things Work Encyclopedia**, Dorling Kindersley, 978 1 4053 5012 9, £12.99

**Usborne Book of Astronomy & Space**, 978 1 4095 0843 4, £9.99 flexibinding

**The Story of Britain**, Patrick Dillon, ill PJ Lynch, Walker, 978 1 4063 1192 1, £18.99 hbk

**The Usborne History of Britain**, Ruth Brocklehurst, 512pp, 978 0 7460 8444 1, £25 hbk

**The Art Book for Children**, Phaidon, 978 0 7148 4511 1, £12.99 hbk

**Tell Me a Picture**, Quentin Blake, Frances Lincoln, 978 1 8450 7687 0, £12.99 hbk

**Children's Book of Music**, Ann Marie Stanley & Richard Mallett, Dorling Kindersley, 978 1 4053 5685 5, £14.99 hbk

**Whittaker's World of Facts**, Russell Ash, A&C Black, 978 1 4081 3007 0, £14.99 hbk

**The Great Grammar Book**, Jennie Maizels & Kate Petty, Bodley Head, 978 1 8983 0475 3, £14.99 hbk

**The Lion Encyclopedia of World Religions**, David Self, Lion, 978 0 7459 6245 0, £9.99

**Junior Illustrated Maths Dictionary**, Usborne, ----978 0 7460 8879 1, £9.99 flexi

# Uncle Tom's Cabin

## Reassessed

Although not written for children, the anti-slavery novel **Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life among the Lowly** was for many decades considered a children's book. In this bicentenary year of its author, Harriet Beecher Stowe's birth, **Clive Barnes** reassesses the relevance of the novel that 'helped lay the groundwork for the civil war'\*.

**U**ncle Tom's Cabin was a publishing phenomenon. It was published first as a serial in 1851 and appeared as a book a year later. Only the Bible sold more copies in the U.S.A. in the nineteenth century. Until well into the next century, it lived on in many different forms: as a play, in abridgements for children, and in the early cinema.

**Uncle Tom's Cabin** was possibly the first American protest novel, written as an explicit argument against slavery, and credited with doing more for the Abolitionist cause than conventional political agitation. Its main narratives follow the fate of two Kentucky slaves: Uncle Tom, a simple, dignified man of deep religious convictions who is sold away from his family, eventually to a plantation in the Deep South, where he is abused and murdered by his master; and young, courageous and resourceful Eliza, who escapes with her son to Canada and freedom, reunited with her runaway husband on the way.

### A children's story?

Its history, as a story thought suitable for young people, whether in original or abridged form, is an interesting one. Reading it now, its mixture of melodrama, political and social argument, Christian piety, and (despite its impassioned assault on slavery) nineteenth century racial attitudes, would make it an unlikely book to give to a teenager. But in 1956, and reflecting opinion in the early years of the last century, Kathleen Lines recommended it to be read by eleven-year-olds and upwards, as a 'picture of a past regime' which, 'although written as an exposition of the evils of slavery' also showed 'the strong mutual affection, and respect possible between slave and master in the American plantation.'\*\*

Lines' comment about 'mutual affection and respect' touches on the way that the book, most often through abridged versions and unauthorised distorted dramatisation, notably in travelling 'Tom Shows' that frequently incorporated blackface minstrels, gradually became regarded as almost nostalgic for slavery.

This was a development obviously unintended by Stowe, whose hope for all slaves is embodied in Eliza's story, but its seeds can be found in her original work. Stowe argues that relationships of true mutual respect between slaves and their owners are impossible under slavery; that any slave would prefer freedom to the kindest of masters; and that slaves and masters are degraded by the institution. Yet her acknowledgement of close ties between some masters and slaves was not only an acceptance of an observable reality but also shows her conviction, as a Christian, that even slaveholders might change their ways.

### Christian conversion

Christian conversion is a theme of the novel, which is linked with the emancipation of its slave characters. Its main instruments being the saintly Tom, and angelic Eva, the daughter of the cynical but indulgent slave owner, St Clare. Eva turns her father towards Christ on her death bed,

a conversion that prompts him to decide to free his slaves, although his own death prevents him from carrying his intention out. At the close of the novel, the son of Tom's original owner, George Shelby does free his slaves. But Simon Legree, Tom's debased final master and murderer, is beyond redemption.

In later abridged versions, particularly those for younger children, the relationship between Eva and Tom, which, in the original, is based on their mutual religious devotion and empathy with all suffering humanity, becomes sentimentalised. Their image together becomes the most widely recognised representation of the story, a vision of the supposed innocence of relationships between white and black in slavery.



From an edition in the 'Old Stories Told Anew' series (London:1891)  
ill. Florence Mapleston.

Many of the black characters which Stowe created in **Uncle Tom's Cabin** were later transfigured by other novels and films into belittling stereotypes which came to be resented by African Americans, a resentment that came to be projected back on to the original novel. Aunt Chloe, Tom's wife, the household cook, be-turbaned, homely and plump, who, in the novel, urges her husband to flee slavery rather than be sold away from her, becomes the faithful black 'mammy' familiar in later novels and films; and Topsy, whose belief that she 'just growed' arises from the fact that she has no knowledge of her parents and no education, is the prototype for many condescendingly amusing portrayals of black children, despite Stowe's characterisation being profoundly tragic. Among African Americans, of course, the term Uncle Tom came to mean someone who would do whatever his master told him and never stand up for himself.

It is not surprising then, that, following the American Civil Rights movement which began in the 1950s, **Uncle Tom's Cabin**, unlike some of its classic contemporaries, (say **Oliver Twist**) was no longer thought fit for young people's reading or viewing. It had played an important part in galvanising opinion against slavery but, having intervened decisively in history, it was history's victim. ■

**Clive Barnes** has retired from Southampton City where he was Principal Children's Librarian and is now a freelance researcher and writer.



\* According to Will Kaufman

\*\* Kathleen Lines, *From Four to Fourteen*, Cambridge University Press, 1956.



# BfK's Brilliant Children's Bookshops



Debi Gilori on a recent visit to Main Street Trading Company.

Based in the beautiful Scottish Borders village of St Boswells, The Main Street Trading Company has a thriving children's book section. **Books for Keeps** invited co-owner, **Ros de la Hey** to share some of her recommendations.

**T**he children's department should be at the heart of any bookshop – where else is the next generation going to discover the joys of books and reading. Having worked at Bloomsbury Children's Books for over thirteen years, I have a natural bias which I hope is obvious from our shop layout. It's incredibly important to be able to see when your customers need help; often as not adults are buying for children who may not be their own ('He's my Godson, I think he may be six or perhaps seven. No, I have no idea what he likes reading...')

**'It's odd, you don't seem to have many Julia Donaldson books, but there's masses of stuff I've not seen before.'**

Well yes, we do of course stock the hugely popular Julia Donaldson, but our priority is also to introduce the huge array of talent in picture books that you might not see wall to wall in WH Smith. Ask a customer to just sit (on our mini chairs in the children's section) and read **The Runaway Dinner** by Allan Ahlberg and hear them giggle to themselves.

## Audio books

Summer holidays often mean long car journeys. The tricky thing is to find an audio book that will have broad appeal across the age ranges. As parent to three (ranging from 5 -10 years-old) without doubt our most contented journeys have been experienced while listening to the inimitable David Tennant reading Cressida Cowell's 'How to Train Your Dragon' series. Needless to say, there is great excitement among customers that Cressida Cowell will be doing an event at the shop for the launch of her next book in the series. Another audio favourite is Ian McKellen's masterful voicing of Michelle Paver's **Wolf Brother**.

**'My ten-year-old just won't pick up a book.'**

Had you thought of Alex Rider in graphic novel or indeed discovered Barrington Stoke's books for HI/LO readers? It amazes me how many people (including teachers) have never heard of this Edinburgh based publisher who commission big names (Malorie Blackman, Alan Gibbons, Keith Gray amongst others) to write books aimed at the reluctant reading or dyslexic market. Reading should be firmly associated with fun



A complete list of the books recommended by **Ros de la Hey** can be found on the **Books for Keeps** website.

[www.booksforkeeps.co.uk](http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk)

and adventure, not hard work.

**Nosy Crow** is another small publisher who is doing great things for the reluctant or fledgling reader with its 'Mega Mash up' series. Part comic strip, part colouring in book, wholly creative, they are aimed at boys (please can we have some for girls next) covering monsters, aliens, Romans and mad scientists – they really work and customers are coming back for more. For the more confident young reader, it's hard to match **One Dog and His Boy** by the inimitable Eva Ibbotson – once you've got them hooked on this, it's only a short step to **Journey to the River Sea**, her Carnegie-winning modern classic.

**'It's so hard to know what teenagers might like reading.'**

Young adult books can often be a sticking point – ours are carefully placed outside the children's department, but opposite the till so we can spot those puzzled grown ups who don't know where to begin. **A Gathering Light** by Jennifer Donnelly won the Carnegie Medal about ten years ago so is perhaps less well known to contemporary 13-year-olds. In a perfect world, I persuade mother and daughter to read this wonderful coming of age story together. The hardback of her second young adult novel, **Revolution**, is less of a crossover, but proved to be hugely popular last Christmas.



**John Connolly** felt very much at home in the shop.

A relative newcomer who has taken the young adult market and book prizes by storm is Patrick Ness – this Saturday past gave me the opportunity to introduce this author to two very well read young men. Their family visits from London about four times a year and I can't wait for their next trip to hear how they got on with **A Monster Calls**, and to put a copy of **The Knife of Never Letting Go** into their hands.

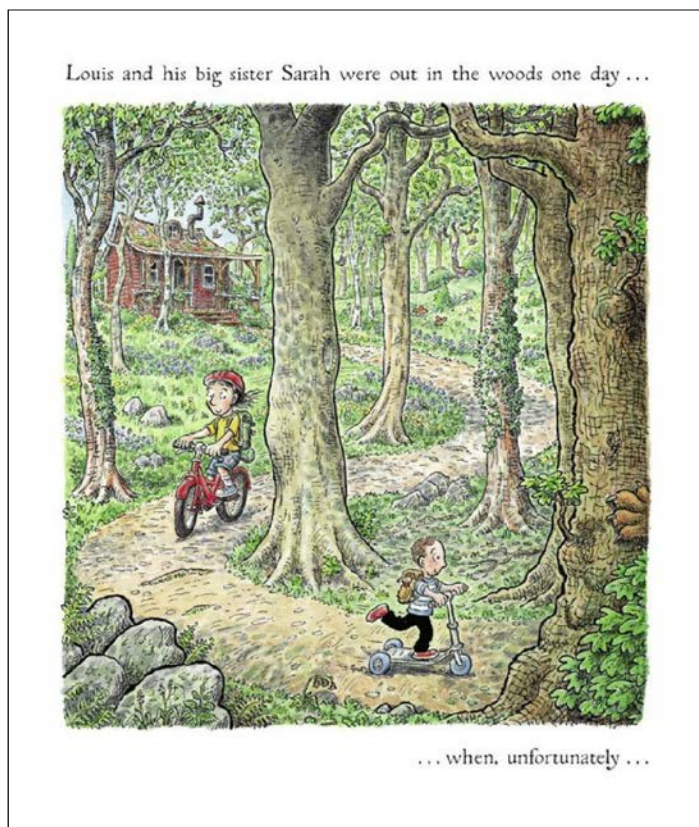
I can't finish this article without mention of the irreplaceable Michael Morpurgo. We have been lucky enough to host two events with him since opening the shop, the second of which, held in our barn, was easily the most magical children's event we have done. It was a beautiful summer's evening with over 150 excited children and adults (some of whom even came without the cover of children) and a group of teachers and librarians who travelled over an hour just to hear him. We also sell masses of Michael's audio books, but beware parents! You need to be able to see through your tears to drive! ■

**The Mainstreet Trading Company,  
Main Street, St Boswells, Scottish Borders TD6 0AT.  
Tel: 01835 824 087**

# Windows into Illustration:

## John Fardell

Well known as a cartoonist in particular for his comic strips for **Viz**, John Fardell made an immediate impression as a picture book creator with his debut title, **Manfred the Baddie** which won the Royal Mail Award. It was soon followed by **Jeremiah Jellyfish Flies High!** which was shortlisted for the Booktrust Early Years Award. Fardell's work is characterised by its quiveringly vibrant line and cross hatching, his deft handling of perspective and his edgy yet engaging humour. Here John Fardell explains the technique and thinking behind his latest picture book, **The Day Louis Got Eaten**.



**T**his is the first page of the book. As is usual with my picture books, the text is fairly minimal, letting the picture tell all the detail of the story.

It's quite a hard-working illustration, in that it's doing several things at once. It establishes the two main characters, and tells us something about their personalities and relationship; it establishes some items that will be needed later in the story, such as Sarah's bike, her Swiss-army multi-tool, her tent, and Louis' torch; it leads the reader into the journey of the story; and it shows a hint of the lurking danger.

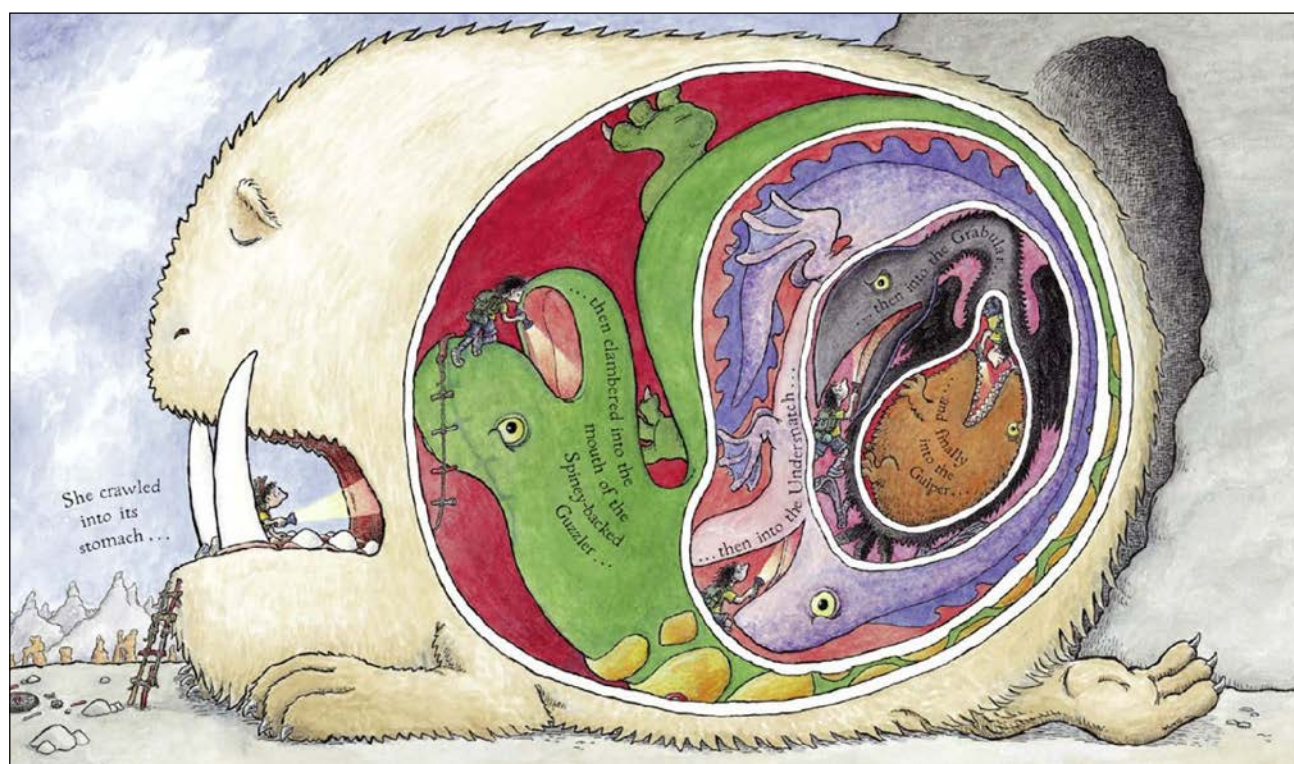
I wanted to get this meandering woodland path looking convincing, so on one of my numerous sketching trips into my local woods, I found a section of path which curved in roughly the required way and made a quick Biro sketch from the right viewpoint. Of course I freely adapted the reality of the place for the purposes of my illustration (adding the entirely made-up house even as I was sketching), but I'm sure the final illustration benefited greatly from the underlying sketch.

The direction of movement is important in this illustration. The meandering path leads the viewer from the children's pleasant-looking home in the top left, down into the woods (with the flowers giving way to less colourful undergrowth) until we reach the gnarled tree in the bottom right, where the furry paw is visible.

The left-to-right direction of travel is consistent throughout the book's journey, (except in the book's final illustration, when the children are returning home



and thus travel across the double-page spread from right-to-left). Left-to-right is the direction we read in, of course, so having your characters travel in this direction makes good sense as you follow them through the pages of a book. It's a rule you see used often in comic books, such as Tintin, as well as in films. (It's a rule you can break and play with for different effects, of course, but one that it's good to be aware of.)



This spread is really the focal point of the book for me. The prime inspiration for the book was the fascination I remember from early childhood with the thought of being eaten whole (a fascination I'm assuming other children share!) and here we see all the monsters inside each other, with Sarah crawling into each one to reach the smallest, inside which is her brother. (I decided to hold back the cutaway view of him till the next page, to add a bit of suspense.)

I've deliberately made this picture quite diagrammatic, and drawn cleanly with an absence of scrawly shading or gore. I want it to be slightly disturbing, but in a surreal way, rather than a gruesome one. In an earlier pencil rough, the monsters' eyes had a rather blank-starey expression, which, as my editor pointed out, made them look dead and too frightening. In this finished version, I'm hoping that the monsters' frowny eyebrows make them look funnier and a bit silly.

“The prime inspiration for the book was the fascination I remember from early childhood with the thought of being eaten whole.”

In my first pencil layout for this spread, I'd envisaged all the text being set in the sky, outside the biggest monster. Then I had the idea of putting each bit of text over the mouth and throat of the relevant monster, so that the reader would be drawn into each new cutaway illustration as they followed the text. I'm very grateful to Andersen Press's designer, Beccy Garrill, for her skill and patience in making the curvy typesetting work just right.

Both these illustrations (and all the others in this book) were drawn with a combination of dip-pen and brush, using black waterproof Indian ink, on Fabriano 5 HP watercolour paper, and coloured with watercolour paints. ■

**The Day Louis Got Eaten** by John Fardell is published by Andersen Press (978 1 8493 9015 6) at £10.99 hbk.



# Authorgraph

## No.190

# Francesca Simon

Francesca Simon

interviewed by Julia Eccleshare

**'T**hat's so exciting!' Francesca is saying into her phone as she opens the door to me. I gesture for her to continue; the news on the phone is clearly important. I follow her into the stunning open plan living space of her kitchen/dining room and wander out into the garden to be charmed by the amazing calm of the pond and fountain.

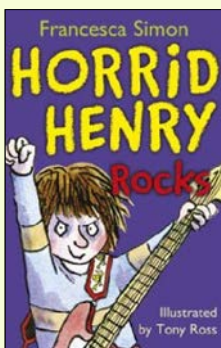
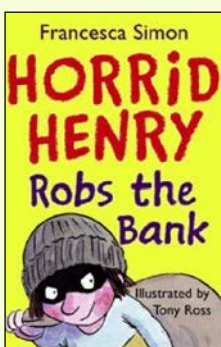
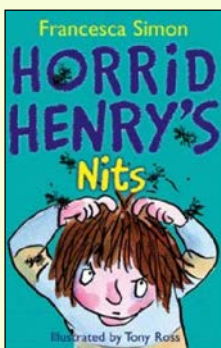
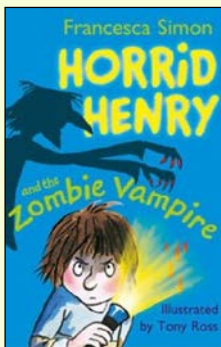
When Francesca's call is finished she shares its delightful news: Steven Butler, the young actor and acrobat who so successfully translated Horrid Henry onto the stage, has picked up the part of Ariel in a forthcoming Trevor Nunn production of **The Tempest**. Francesca's bubbling excitement for Stephen is contagious. The two have worked closely together since first meeting including sharing platforms at literary festivals as Steven, supported and encouraged by Francesca and influenced by his former head teacher Jeremy Strong, has himself become an author (**The Wrong Pong** and its sequels).

And it is fitting that the human embodiment of one of contemporary children's fiction's most-loved characters – if that's the right word to use of Horrid Henry – should be so important to its creator. Horrid Henry's success is monumental however you list it. There are the huge sales figures – over 16.5 million copies in the UK and rising with **Horrid Henry and the Zombie Vampire**, the twentieth title just released; the play; the film; the audio book versions recorded by Miranda Richardson, Francesca's enormous and hugely crowd-pleasing events at literary festivals and Francesca's own fame across the media. Building up gradually over the years it has made Francesca Simon a children's book star and she is properly grateful to all those who helped that to happen.

But, like many other publishing successes, it didn't happen overnight. An American of Russian and Polish descent who came to Oxford from Yale to study English and fell in love with England in general despite plans to return to the US and become an academic, Francesca has watched her success build around her and she has worked hard to make sure that happened. 'I remember the early stages very well,' Francesca says. 'For me it was very slow. I've always admired how J.K. Rowling dealt with immediate success.'

When her son Josh was born in 1989, Francesca was a freelance journalist with an especially strong suit in interviews. She had no thoughts of writing for children. 'Then I had Josh and I re-read a lot of books from my own childhood and I started getting ideas. I'm smart, I'm funny, I'm very logical and I can see things in quirky ways. I think all of these helped.'

'I'd had a few picture books published including **But What Does the Hippopotamus Say?** but had also got a lot of very nice but mostly rejection letters. In fact, when Judith Elliot asked me into Orion, she'd turned down another idea but said she'd like to meet me.' It was Judith, the inspirational Editorial Director and



founder of the Orion children's book list, who suggested that Francesca wrote an early reader. 'I made an attempt at it but I didn't know about them and I didn't even go and look. I just wrote about two brothers, one bad and one perfect.'

Francesca missed the mark of the early reader but Judith spotted the vital spark in the idea of the two opposing brothers and in Francesca's un-prissy narrative voice. She saw it pitched at confident readers and suggested that Francesca should add another four stories. And it was Judith, too, who chose illustrator Tony Ross to give the books their captivatingly demonic look. Willing to try it, Francesca got ideas for different scenes such as a tap-dancing class from Josh's life and fixed the now-famous voice in which she wanted to tell the stories of these two contrasting brothers. Looking back on it today Francesca says, 'It wasn't a big deal. It was just one book of many and you just think, Please God, can I be published? And then, Please God, can I see my book in a bookshop?' It was an accidental success. I really like that. It was all very haphazard and organic. People weren't thinking in terms of big series in those days.'

That organic way of thinking has played into Francesca's hands. 'Orion gave me lots of time. Except for Ottakars, nobody paid the books much attention. It wasn't until **Horrid Henry's Nits** that Waterstone's took any notice.' Like many other authors at that time, Francesca did most of the work of building her own market. 'There was no advertising but I did lots of school visits and teachers and children found the books.'

Being allowed the time to write at her own pace was especially important to Francesca who is a perfectionist. 'I just wouldn't have coped under the pressure of today's deadline-driven approach. It would have made me very anxious,' she says. 'I have to finish before a deadline.' Fortunately, she has always had time to do that and she has used it wisely. 'Because I'm always ahead, I've had the chance to read the books aloud at festivals and gauge the response. I used to rush endings so that I gave away the final point too soon. I'm lucky that I've had the time to write the books in the way that I want.'

Her thinking behind the 'Horrid Henry' books was very clear: Francesca believes there is no bottom to the depths that sibling rivalry can go to and her intention was to show that. 'I've heard her describe how children in the back of a car will squabble not, as you might expect, over who has the window seat, but over the very air they breathe. 'Henry and Peter are engaged in something so primal. The core is Cain and Abel,' she says. 'It is a fight to the death over who has the TV remote control.' And in the 'Horrid Henry' stories there are no holds barred. 'I wanted it to be driven by a bolt of pure rage – the rage of a two year old, the kind of rage that adults feel in road rage.' It's an emotional force she's retained from her own childhood. 'I've got a really



strong memory for my childhood so I can understand Henry and Peter. I'm fifteen months older than my sister and I remember how it feels.'

Having done so many events around the books for audiences of children Francesca knows a lot about how they respond to the stories when she reads them to live audiences and the sacks of letters she gets confirm this. 'Children love Henry and identify with him because he gives a sense of being powerful while in their own lives they are mostly so powerless. Henry does all the things that they would love to do.' Francesca's view is that there is an 'imp' in all children and they love the chance to let it play. But she looks behind Henry's behaviour to the causes and here again she thinks her readers are very perceptive. 'Children also get the point that it is parents who have created the Horrid Henry situation,' she says. 'They have set their two sons up. They always praise Peter so he is the super ego and Henry is the id. Henry carries the rage of the family.' In general, she thinks adults are less understanding of how the dynamic has been created. 'Parents don't necessarily realise their identification with a particular child. Most parents think they are entirely fair but that is rarely the case.' Whatever the precise response of parent or child, Francesca knows that her books are hitting a very important spot for families in general. 'I love talking to audiences of parents and children. Behind their response there's the sense that we've been there. And we can laugh.'

Despite the apparently wide gap between stories for emerging readers and an English degree at Oxford, Francesca thinks that the two are really very closely related. 'No one knows what's going to be useful in life so I've always thought you should study what you like,' she says. 'I studied medieval art at Yale and then English at Oxford where I studied Anglo Saxon and Middle English writing and from both I learnt about archetypes in story. From the medieval English, I picked up on alliterations which have turned out to be very useful.'

Francesca's transatlantic background has also provided

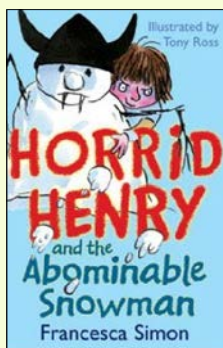
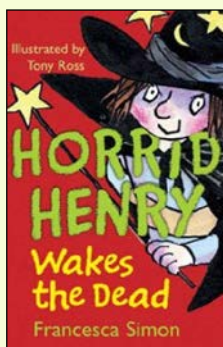
her with an ability to write stories which have a very valuable ubiquitous quality which spreads their appeal: although very English in feel, Horrid Henry and his family and friends manage to avoid being easily identifiable by class, precise location or even, very specifically, time. 'I write Horrid Henry to sound British deliberately. As I have a British son and husband that's not too hard,' Francesca says. 'I've lost my American ear.' But, at the same time she says, 'I'm definitely an American and I think that's very helpful to me. I'm oblivious to class distinctions. I can tell if people are educated but I can't draw conclusions from how people talk.' Francesca relishes this double view point. 'I enjoy looking and sounding like an outsider but knowing a lot about the inside.'

Francesca's insider view of family life has captivated readers for over a decade and Francesca has kept pace with her readers by writing a new book of stories every year while her publishers have fed the appetite for Horrid Henry with a range of additional publishing.

Now she is launching into something new. Approached by Andrew Franklin, Publisher of Profile Books and an old friend from Oxford, Francesca was offered the chance to write anything she wanted. It was a daunting proposition but also a golden opportunity and Francesca seized it. 'I felt I really wanted to challenge myself,' she says. 'I wanted to do something different and hard. It's been a real thrill but very scary.'

Based on the Lewis Chessmen and drawing extensively on Norse mythology, her latest book, **The Sleeping Army**, weaves the Viking gods into a thrilling contemporary adventure story. For Francesca much of the challenge was writing description, something she almost entirely avoids in Horrid Henry. 'I'm really good at dialogue, aggression and humour but I've never thought I'm so good at describing things,' she says. 'I'll be a better writer as a result.'

Despite the thrill of the new challenge and the excitement of taking a risk which is something Francesca believes to be very important, she has no plans to abandon Horrid Henry. 'I'm really interested in developing **The Sleeping Army**, possibly into an opera, but I also have lots more ideas for Horrid Henry. I feel very close to him and Perfect Peter.' ■



## The Books

A selection of 'Horrid Henry' titles all published by Orion in pbk at £4.99:

**Horrid Henry and the Zombie Vampire**

(978 1 8425 5135 6)

**Horrid Henry's Nits** (978 1 8588 1353 0)

**Horrid Henry Robs the Bank** (978 1 8425 5132 5)

**Horrid Henry Rocks** (978 1 8425 5134 9)

**Horrid Henry Wakes the Dead** (978 1 8425 5133 2)

**Horrid Henry and the Abominable Snowman**

(978 1 8425 5070 0)

**The Sleeping Army** (978 1 8466 8278 0) is published in Oct. by Profile Books in hbk at £9.99.



## AWARDS

## Branford Boase Award 2011

**Out of Shadows** by Jason Wallace, edited by Charlie Sheppard and published by Andersen, has won the Branford Boase Award, which is given each year to the most outstanding work of fiction for children by a first time novelist.



**Out of Shadows** is set in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. The war is over, independence has been won and Robert Mugabe has come to power offering hope, land and freedom to black Africans. It is the end of the old way and the start of a promising new era. For Robert Jacklin, it's all new: new continent, new country, new school. But, very quickly he learns that for some of his classmates, the sound of guns is still loud, and their battles rage on.

The Branford Boase Award was set up to encourage new writers and is given each year to the most promising work of fiction for children by a debut novelist. The Branford Boase Award also honours the editor of the winning title and highlights the importance of the editor in nurturing new talent. The judges of the 2011 Branford Boase Award were independent bookseller Isla Dawes of The Barnes Bookshop; Jake Hope, librarian and reviewer; Damian Kelleher, journalist and writer and Lucy Christopher, author of **Stolen**, winner of last year's Branford Boase Award. The panel was chaired by Julia Eccleshare, children's books editor of **The Guardian**.

The other titles on the 2011 shortlist were:

**I Am the Blade** by J.P. Buxton, edited by Beverley Birch (Hachette)

**When I Was Joe** by Keren David, edited by Maurice Lyon (Frances Lincoln)

**Tall Story** by Candy Gourlay, edited by Bella Pearson (David Fickling)

**Unhooking the Moon** by Gregory Hughes, edited by Roisin Heycock (Quercus)

**The Crowfield Curse** by Pat Walsh, edited by Imogen Cooper (Chicken House)

Jacqueline Wilson also presented prizes at the ceremony to six children, winners of, the **Henrietta Branford Writing Competition**, which encourages writing talent in under 18s. Further information on this can be found at [www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk](http://www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk)

## The UKLA Children's Book Awards

The winning book for the 3-11 years category was **Birdsong** by Ellie Sandall (Egmont). The judges felt it is a book 'young readers will return to again and again'. The other shortlisted books in this category were:

**Clancy & Milly and the Very fine House** by Libby Gleeson, ill. Freya Blackwood (Little Hare)

**Sparks** by Ally Kennen (Marion Lloyd Books)

**No Such Thing as Dragons** by Philip Reeve (Scholastic)

**Johnny Swanson** by Eleanor Updale (David Fickling Books)

**One Smart Fish** by Chris Wormell (Jonathan Cape)

The winning book in the 12 to 16 years category was **Out of Shadows** by Jason Wallace (Andersen). The judges were 'impressed by the sense of menace in the background and by the powerful, honest writing'. The other shortlisted books in this category were:

**Prisoner of the Inquisition** by Theresa Breslin (Doubleday)

**Where I Belong** by Gillian Cross, (Oxford)

**When I was Joe** by Keren David (Frances Lincoln)

**Tall Story** by Candy Gourlay (David Fickling Books)

**Scar Hill** by Alan Temperley (Luath)

The UKLA Children's Book Award is the only national book award selected by teachers from both the primary and secondary sectors.

## Roald Dahl Funny Prize 2011 shortlists

The 2011 Roald Dahl Funny Prize shortlists are:

*The Funniest Book for Children Aged Six and Under*

**Bedtime for Monsters** by Ed Vere (Puffin)

**Cats Ahoy!** by Peter Bentley, ill. Jim Field (Macmillan)

**First Week at Cow School** by Andy Cutbill, ill. Russell Ayto (HarperCollins)

**Limelight Larry** by Leigh Hodgkinson (Orchard)

**Marshall Armstrong is New to Our School** by David Mackintosh (HarperCollins)

**A Place to Call Home** by Alexis Deacon, ill. Viviane Schwarz (Walker)

*The Funniest Book for Children Aged Seven to Fourteen*

**Animal Tales** by Terry Jones, ill. Michael Foreman (Pavilion)

**The Brilliant World of Tom Gates** by Liz Pichon (Scholastic)

**The Get Rich Quick Club** by Rose Impey (Orchard)

**Letters from an Alien Schoolboy** by Ros Asquith (Piccadilly)

**Penny Dreadful is a Magnet for Disaster** by Joanna Nadin, ill. Jess Mikhail (Usborne)

**The Wrong Pong** by Steven Butler, ill. Chris Fisher (Puffin)

This year's judging panel includes the author and illustrator team behind the 'Horrid Henry' books, Francesca Simon and Tony Ross; Twitter queen, author and comedic columnist Grace Dent and **Yes Man** author and journalist Danny Wallace. Roald Dahl Funny Prize founder and children's author Michael Rosen chairs the panel.

The Prize was created by Michael Rosen in 2008 as part of his work as Children's Laureate. This year, for the first time, the Prize will see schools involved in the judging process. Over 400 pupils from England have been selected to read the shortlisted titles, discuss with their classmates, and pick their favourite funny book in the relevant category for their age. Their votes will then be combined with the votes of the adult judging panel to find the two winners for 2011.

## The SLA Information Book Award

The School Library Association has announced the very first shortlist in this exciting new prize for non-fiction. The first award ceremony will take place in November 2011 and is sponsored by Hachette Children's Books and is supported by Peters Bookselling Services. In early September through to mid October schools will be invited to register with the voting website and children can choose their own 'Children's Choice' favourites in each category, plus voting for an overall winner. Prizes will be awarded for the judges and Children's Choice winners in each category, as well as for the overall winner(s).



The SLA Information Book Award will be an annual event and is a major development for information books, being designed to support school libraries and to reinforce the importance of non-fiction whilst highlighting the high standard of resources available. The shortlisted titles for 2011 are:

## Under 7s

**Let's Ride a Bike** by Ruth Walton (Franklin Watts)

**My Very First Art Book** by Rosie Dickins and Sarah Courtland, ill. Gus Gordon (Usborne)

**The Great Big Book of Families** by Mary Hoffman, ill. Ros Asquith (Frances Lincoln)



## AWARDS

7-12

**Animals at the Edge** by Jonathan and Marilyn Baille, (Franklin Watts)

**How the World Works** by Christiane Dorion, ill. Beverley Young (Templar)

**The Murderous Maths of Everything** by Kjartan Poskitt, ill. Rob Davis (Scholastic)

12-16

**How to Make a Universe with 92 Ingredients** by Adrian Dingle (Scholastic)

**Stories about Gangs and Bullying** by Michaela Miller (Franklin Watts)

**The Life and Times of William Shakespeare** by Kristen McDermott and Ari Berk (Templar)

The award is administered by the SLA. For more information contact Tricia Adams, Chief Executive of the School Library Association [Tricia.adams@sla.org.uk](mailto:Tricia.adams@sla.org.uk) Tel: 01793 791787

## EVENT

## Talk To Your Baby conference 2011

The National Literacy Trust's 6th annual Talk To Your Baby conference takes place on November 4th at the Institute of Engineering and Technology, 2 Savoy Place, London.

Highlights conference will include high profile speakers sharing:

- the latest thinking on the EYFS and implications of the review
- what early intervention really means in practice
- cutting edge research on communication, speech and language
- 4,200 Health Visitors making a difference
- language for life
- the impact of home learning
- Sure Start Children's Centres in focus

Further information from [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

## Hal's Reading Diary

10 year-old Hal's spelling and punctuation are not on a par with his reading – much to his father's surprise. Practice during the holidays will need to be made palatable. How can Melanie Klein help? Hal's father, psychodynamic counsellor Roger Mills, explains.

**T**owards the end of the summer term Hal had to do a few exams at school. The English one didn't turn out terribly well and Jo and I went to have a chat with his teacher to find out why. The problem, it transpired, was not with Hal's reading. His abilities in that department are average and not cause for concern. The difficulty was with writing. Hal's teacher showed us one of the pieces he had produced for the exam. The handwriting was very good (rather better than his mother's if one was being brutally honest). But the spelling left a huge amount to be desired. Words like 'attention' rendered phonetically as 'attenshun'. Or 'alright' as 'alrite'. And the punctuation? Well there simply wasn't any. With the exception of one lonely full stop at the very end of the piece, Hal's writing was a punctuation free stream of consciousness. Apparently the teacher had made a point of asking the kids to check punctuation before moving onto the next task. But even this admonition had made no difference to Hal.

I had always assumed that writing would evolve at more or less the same pace as reading. As you become able to read more complex words you become able to spell them. Punctuation, I'd supposed, would follow suit. The more of it you saw, the more of it you'd use. Not so Hal's teacher informed us and apparently it is rather normal for the reading and writing skills to be out of kilter. Hal has a friend whose reading is stronger than his (he

reads the Harry Potter books to himself at speed and without effort) who nevertheless has major problems with writing and hates doing it. So reading and writing aren't the close siblings I'd imagined, more like rather distant cousins in fact.

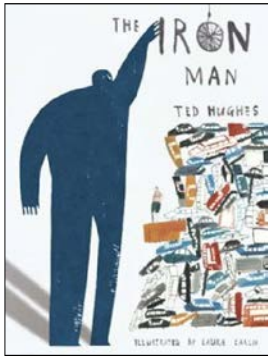
The message from Hal's teacher on writing was very clear - he has to work at it over the holidays. And this has left Jo and me scratching our heads trying to think of ways in which we can smuggle bits of literary activity into his holiday life without provoking a rebellion. Bribery is the obvious first tactic we are going to employ. Hal is, perhaps regrettably, very keen on earning pocket money. There is always something that he has his eye on to buy. A super powerful nerf gun and a James Bond game for his PS3 currently head his shopping list. So we will get him writing a diary and there'll be a financial reward for words produced.

The other plan we've hit on is based on another of Hal's favourite activities - criticising me. Hal is a keen advocate of what Melanie Klein called splitting. While one parent is seen as all good, all the bad stuff is laid at the door of the other. In our household I am the designated bad guy, while Jo can do no wrong. Cunningly exploiting this unhappy trait, my plan is that I will produce some pieces of writing packed with mistakes and get him to correct them. My guess is that while Hal's eye isn't very sharp when it's a question of his own errors, it will be very acute indeed when it comes to mine. I think he's likely to get a great deal of fun out of spotting my howlers and the hope is that along the way correct ways of spelling and punctuating will start to leave some sedimentary layers in his mind. So that's our summer campaign. I'll report back after the holidays. ■



# I wish I'd written...

Andy Stanton on story whose every turn is unexpected...



**The Iron Man** by Ted Hughes, ill. Tom Gauld is published by Faber and Faber (978 0 5712 2612 2) at £4.99 pbk. Andy Stanton's latest book, **Mr Gum in 'the Hound of Lamonic Bibber'**, ill. David Tazzyman is published by Egmont (978 1 4052 5822 7) at £9.99 pbk.

*The Iron Man came to the top of the cliff.*

*How far had he walked? Nobody knows. Where did he come from? Nobody knows. How was he made? Nobody knows.*

From those timeless, peerless opening lines I was hooked, wide-eyed and believing. **The Iron Man** is subtitled 'A Children's Story in Five Nights', but its morality, lyricism and wisdom transcend such categorisations. This is a true modern fable, which will resonate with anyone possessed of the imagination and sensitivity to enter into its world.

And what a strange world it is. If the iron man himself is a frightening, alien thing (I remember being appalled/enthralled as his enormous, disembodied hands go

crawling, crab-like, over the beach in search of the rest of his body), then wait until you get to the truly terrifying Space-Bat-Angel-Dragon which invades the earth...

Apart from the brilliant, lucid language, what I love is that every turn in the story is unexpected – and yet somehow perfectly inevitable. Touching on a number of big themes, it is nonetheless entirely of itself; and its lessons are never once preachy, obvious or contrived.

Years later, I parodied the opening lines in my first book:

*One day a massive whopper of a dog came to live on the outskirts of town. Where had he come from? Nobody knows. What strange things had he seen? Nobody knows. What was his name? Everybody knows. It was Jake the dog.*

I didn't even need to look them up from the original. They're hard-wired into me forever.



## Good Reads

Chosen by Year 7 (11-12-year-old) pupils from Mrs Mack's English class, The Stephen Perse Foundation, Cambridge.

### The Return: Midnight

LJ Smith, Hodder 'Vampire Diaries' series, 978 1 4449 0065 1, £6.99 pbk

My favourite book is the 7th book of the 'Vampire Diaries'. The main characters are Elena, a 17 year old Virginian girl, Stefan, who became a vampire at the age of 17 in 1864 and Damon, Stefan's older brother, who is also a vampire. Both brothers love Elena.

Mystic Falls, Elena's hometown, has been taken over by demons. Elena and her friends therefore must go on a journey of self-discovery for the characters, as Elena is torn between her love for Stefan and Damon. Tragically, at the end of their journey, Damon dies. Elena is so heartbroken that she destroys a whole moon with her mystical wing powers. Her only hope of getting Damon back is to go to the Celestial Court and give the Guardians, the equivalent of angels, gifts. However even they cannot bring Damon back. So she asks for Mystic Falls to be cured of all evil.

I really enjoyed this story because it's packed with love, sadness and supernatural action. I hope I have convinced you to read not only this book because it's fabulous, but the series!

Francesca Ashfield

### Noughts and Crosses

Malorie Blackman, Corgi, 978 0 5525 5570 8, £6.99 pbk

**Noughts and Crosses** is a touching, heartbreaking novel about two children who grow up in a world where black is right and white is wrong. Sephy is a Cross, a 'better' person, and Callum is a nought, a 'horrible' person. The



children are best friends and this book shows the struggle they have to try and keep their friendship, which soon turns into a forbidden love.

I love the story as it's a brilliant view of how bad racism can be, and how extreme people can be about it. As the noughts are shown as terrorists and the Crosses are shown as brilliant people, it's a story from both sides, which really makes the reader want to keep reading.

I think it's a must-read for anyone and if you read it, you will love it. It's part of a series which also includes; **Knife Edge**, **Checkmate** and **Double Cross**.

Tanisha Dbariwal

### The Graveyard Book

Neil Gaiman, ill. Chris Riddell, Bloomsbury, 978 0 7475 9480 2, £6.99 pbk

**The Graveyard Book** is written by Neil Gaiman. It won the Carnegie Medal, which is why I was interested to read it. The book starts with a murder. The murderer kills the mother, father and sister but not the baby boy. The murderer goes to the nursery to find that the two-year-old boy is missing. The community of the dead in the graveyard discovers the baby boy and two ghosts adopt him. They call him Nobody; Bod, for short. Bod goes on many adventures in the book: discovering 'The Smeer',

escaping from the grasps of the ghouls and getting rid of the bad guys. The storyline is never predictable and it always kept me interested.

I liked how Neil Gaiman weaved other stories into the main story, and those other stories, sooner or later, became relevant. I strongly recommend this book!

Catherine Gaunt

### Ghost Hunter

Michelle Paver, Orion, 978 1 8425 5117 2, £6.99 pbk

**Ghost Hunter** is the sixth and last book in the 'Chronicles of Ancient Darkness' series by Michelle Paver. It is set in the pre-agricultural Stone Age and follows young Torak on his journey to vanquish the Soul-Eaters with his two companions Renn and Wolf. One of the many reasons why I like these books is because of the language, because Michelle Paver includes lots of detailed descriptions which show lots of knowledge about the Stone Age. Another reason why I like these books is because they include some situations that we can all relate to, such as feeling left out, or hiding a huge secret. The storyline is very original and imaginative, and in this age it's quite rare to come across a book so original and absorbing. If I could, I would thank Michelle Paver in

person for giving so many people joy and inspiration through her books.

Anna Valchanova

### 13 Little Blue Envelopes

Maureen Johnson, HarperCollins, 978 0 0073 1990 9, £6.99 pbk

This is a book with adventure and mystery. Ginny, the main character is a teenage girl who is intelligent, adventurous and is very close to her relatives. She changes throughout the book from a dependent girl who has never been out of New York State to a completely independent girl who has been around most of Europe. The other main character is Aunt Peg, the writer of the letters; she influences Ginny all through the book. It is set in modern times and in many countries as each letter demands Ginny goes to a new place.

At the start of the book, Ginny is shocked to receive a letter from her dead aunt but decides to follow the instructions on the letter. By doing this she changes her life forever and learns more about her aunt than she could ever imagine.

India Lacey

Thanks to Ms Hanlon,  
Senior Librarian, and  
Mrs Mack.



Reviews (of both hardback and paperback fiction and non-fiction) are grouped for convenience into both age categories and under teaching range. Within each section, you will find reviews for younger children at the beginning. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest that you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendations for use can often be found within the review.

## REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

**Anne Faundez** is a freelance education and children's book consultant

**Clive Barnes** has retired from Southampton City where he was Principal Children's Librarian, and is now a freelance researcher and writer.

**David Bennett** was Senior Teacher and Head of an English Faculty in Nottinghamshire. He now works as an English consultant and supply teacher.

**Felix Pirani** Emeritus Professor of Rational Mechanics in the University of London

**Gwynneth Bailey** is a freelance education and children's book consultant.

**Jill Bennett** is the author of *Learning to Read with Picture Books*. She is currently heading up a nursery unit and also does freelance and consultancy work.

**Margaret Pemberton** is a long serving librarian currently the librarian for Bristol School Library Service. She has served on the YLG committee for most of the last 12 years, both at regional and national level.

**Melissa Hyder** is a children's books editor and has worked in publishing for seven years.

**Rebecca Butler** writes and lectures on children's literature.

**Valerie Coghlan** is Librarian at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

**Robert Dunbar** is a commentator on children's books and reading.

**Janet Fisher** is a children's literature consultant.

**Dorne Fraser** is Young People's Reading and Learning Librarian for Norfolk Library and Information Service.

**Annabel Gibb** lives in York and is a Learning Support Tutor.

**Ferelith Hordon** has been a Children's Librarian for over 30 years and works in Wandsworth. She is currently Chair Elect of the Youth Libraries Group and Chair of the 2011 Carnegie Greenaway judging panel.

**George Hunt** is lecturer in Education at the University of Edinburgh.

**Jana Novotny Hunter** is an author and editor.

**Rudolf Loewenstein** is a Dominican friar based in a London parish. He also works full time in a primary school.

**Margaret Mallett** is a researcher and writer on Primary School English and a member of the **English 4-11** editorial team.

**Ted Percy** has now retired to Kirkcudbrightshire after working as a children's librarian in Lancashire, Ross & Cromarty, and North Buckinghamshire.

**Val Randall** is Head of English and Literacy Co-ordinator at a Pupil Referral Unit in Blackburn, Lancashire.

**Andrea Reece** worked for children's publishers for 16 years and is now a freelance marketing consultant.

**Vincent Reid** is a lecturer in developmental psychology at Durham University.

**Caroline Sanderson** is a freelance writer, reviewer and editor. She is the author of *Kiss Chase & Conkers*, a book about traditional children's games.

**Elizabeth Schlenker** is Editor, English children's books for [gwales.com](http://gwales.com), The Welsh Books Council's website.

**Judith Sharman**, former Primary Head Teacher, leads 'Well Tree Learning Ltd as consultant and presenter of 'The Nurturing Way'.

**Rosemary Stones** is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

**Ruth Taylor** has recently completed an MPhil in Children's Literature from Cambridge University.

**Nicholas Tucker** is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

**Sue Unstead** was a publisher of children's non-fiction for 25 years and is now a freelance editorial consultant and writer.

## RATING

Unmissable ★★★★★ / Very Good ★★★★★ / Good ★★★ / Fair ★★ / Poor ★

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Little Grey Donkey	★★★★ 20	When the World Was Waiting for You	★★★ 20
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My Dad is Beautiful	★★★★ 20		
My Name is Rose	★★★ 23		
Operation Black Cobra	★★★ 28		

## Under 5s Pre – School/Nursery/Infant

**When the World Was Waiting for You**

★★★★

Gillian Shields, ill. Anna Currey, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 978 1 4088 0630 2, £10.99 padded hbk

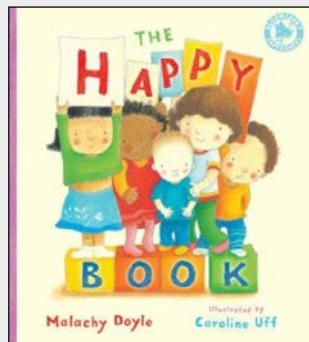
This picture book with its soft padded cover and cosily nostalgic illustrations is a delightful exploration of the joy of anticipation before the arrival of a new addition to the rabbit family. It is romanticised and explores none of the downsides of the advent of a new sibling but it is charming nevertheless! With its gentle, lilting rhythmic text; this book will make an ideal gift and one which may also help a new big sister or brother counteract the frustrations inevitably associated with a new baby when shared one to one with a loving and understanding parent. **JS**

**The Happy Book**

★★★★

Malachy Doyle, ill. Caroline Uff, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 978 0 7475 9548 9, £5.99 pbk

Such simple concepts in this friendly picture book, but such important ones! A few words on each page along with cheerful and witty pictures give us contrasting ways of behaving: 'Squabble less. Share more! Grumble less. Giggle more!' The initial letters in every phrase make for jolly alliteration, and each double page spread shows clearly how much more pleasant it is to behave in a positive and happy way. Uff's lightness of touch in the illustrations is a perfect compliment to Doyle's spare and humorous text. A real delight! **ES**

**Wanda and the Alien**

★★★★

Sue Hendra, Red Fox, 32pp, 978 1 8494 1018 2, £5.99 pbk

Wanda the rabbit finds an alien after its ship crashes into the forest. She befriends it and the two of them have a lovely summer together playing games and pulling funny faces. But Wanda's friends have all mysteriously gone missing. When autumn comes and the leaves fall from the trees, Wanda finds

them - they were hiding because they were afraid of the alien.

This amusing picture book story about accepting differences is illustrated in cartoon style. For the keen of eye, hidden animals can be found on most pages. **VRe**

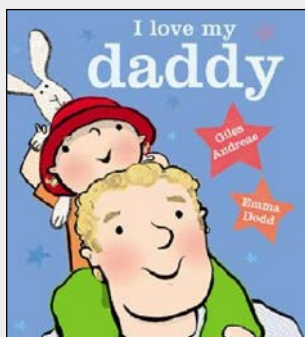
**I Love my Daddy**

★★★★

Giles Andreae, ill. Emma Dodd, Orchard, 32pp, 978 1 4083 1300 8, £10.99 hbk

Fathers are often conspicuous by their absence in children's picture books. Such invisibility is deliberately reversed in the 'celebration of fatherhood' subgenre so ably exemplified by Anthony Browne's **My Dad**, or more recently **Daddy's Lullaby** by Tony Bradman, amongst others.

In **I Love my Daddy**, elements of parent-child interaction are exemplified from a father's perspective. Cue lots of delightful images of toddler and father laughing in rough and tumble play and making pancakes together. Emma Dodd's warmly accessible illustrations make this book lovely to look at, and there is much that fathers and young children can identify with. **I Love my Daddy** is a simple affirmation that being a dad is ok and that dads are special in the lives of their children. **VRe**

**Bedtime for Monsters**

★★★★

Ed Vere, Puffin, 32pp, 978 0 141 5 0239 7, £6.99 pbk

Being scared can be terrifying or hugely enjoyable, it's all a matter of being in control - or not. Ed Vere's commentary to his atmospheric illustrations of a large, green blob of a monster's journey from his bone-strewn cave, through the terrible dark forest, the gloopy swamp, thorns and thistles, over mountains to the town, the house, the very bedroom of the reader, is a series of tension building questions. The suspense is almost killing yet this device well and truly hands control to the reader whose terrible fate is not perhaps what was expected. Vere's use of different sizes and styles of lettering and of bold and italicised text acts as stage directions to the reader to ensure

a perfect performance. Ed Vere just gets better and better with every startlingly original new book. **JB**

**Enormouse!**

★★★★

Rebecca Gerlings, Egmont, 32pp, 978 1 4052 4832 7, £5.99 pbk

Joining the circus can be a cliché in children's books; even Oliver Jeffers indulged in it in his latest book, **Up and Down**. In **Enormouse!**, a kitten escapes and lands in the midst of a travelling circus. He does his best to fit in, but cannot get the hang of the trapeze act. So he has an idea where he gets all the mice to join together to form one large mouse. The show is of course, a hit. While the story is rather thin, Gerlings' pencil and ink wash illustrations are beautiful and hold the reader's attention. **Enormouse!** is Rebecca Gerlings' first picture book and a promising debut. **GB**

**Little Grey Donkey**

★★★★

Nicole Snitselaar, ill. Coralie Saudo, Top That!, 32pp, 978 1 8495 6245 4, £5.99 pbk

This delightful story examines the lengths that friends will go to help each other. Donkey is visited every day by his friend Serafina. But one day she does not appear. Donkey travels over land and sea to find her in order to reassure himself that all is well. The journey is arduous and causes Donkey to overcome his fears and confront danger at every turn. Of course, in the end, all is well and the friends are happily reunited.

The story is well narrated and features beautiful images that are rich in colour and detail. The collage-like illustrations by Coralie Saudo are superbly constructed, with complex paint building evident in the texture and depth of the finished page. Despite this, the overall effect is one of simplicity, with the eye drawn to the actions of the main characters throughout. **Little Grey Donkey** is a superb book that is visually stunning and will bear repeated readings. **VRe**

**The Animal Bop Won't Stop**

★★★★

Jan Ormerod, ill/ Lindsey Gardiner, Oxford, 32pp, 978 0 1927 8014 0, £10.99 hbk and 978 0 1927 8016 4, £5.99 pbk. Pbk also available with a CD at £7.99.

If you want to wiggle like jellyfish, creep and leap like lion, strut like a bold black crow or flutter and flounce like a peacock, this is the book for you. And even if you think you don't, then a few words from the non stop bop will have you obbling, blobbling and gobbling along with the rest. This is assuredly a compelling, rapping, rhyming invitation to move and make a whole host of sounds and one which most young

children find irresistible.

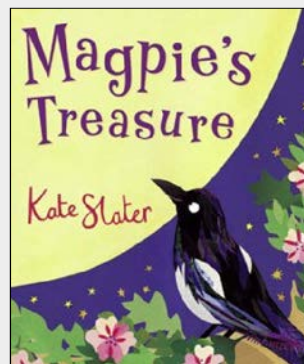
Gardiner's love of animals radiates from every creature portrayed; her mixed media illustrations are truly poetry in motion. What a pity the hardcover edition does not come with a CD. **JB**

**Magpie's Treasure**

★★★★★

Kate Slater, Andersen, 32pp, 978 1 84939 075 0, £5.99 pbk

A magpie who steals bright and shiny things is the perfect foil for Slater's wonderfully bright and shiny collage illustrations. Her artwork sings and dazzles throughout the book as Magnus the magpie makes off with everything from 'a dancing diva's shimmering shoe' to 'Her Majesty's most magnificent emerald egg cup'. When he heads for the moon, the brightest thing of all, he is in for a disappointment: it's dull and gray. But the earth from the moon is beautiful, and Magnus heads home joyfully - only to find a lady magpie in his tree. He is a reformed character and returns all the stolen goods. Well...almost all. This quite special picture book will appeal for the story, but most of all for the outstanding illustrations. **ES**

**My Dad is Beautiful**

★★★★

Jessica Spanyol, Walker, 32pp, 9781 4063 3094 6, £11.99 hbk

A charming little bear cub lists all the reasons his dad is beautiful, from dad cooking him sausages to dad letting him sit on his tummy or getting him comics with stickers in. Told in the sincere and disarmingly frank way of the very young, this is a fitting tribute to the joys of parenting (and the palliative we all need if we despair that our children will never be appreciative). But it is the illustrations which really sing out this lovely celebration of the father/son relationship. Bold and flat, with quirky perspectives, these naive images have a terrific sense of pattern and shape, drawn in a deeply satisfying colour palette. The compositions are big and brave, almost spilling off the page, and clearly show a day so packed full of activity and fun, any youngster



# reviews

would embrace it. Sure to be a hit in schools, libraries and home. **JNH**

## The Rhyming Rabbit

★★★★

Julia Donaldson, ill. Lydia Monks, Macmillan, 32pp, 978 0 2307 4103 4, £10.99 hbk

Rhyming Rabbit has an annoying habit: instead of getting on and doing rabbit-like things he just wants to make up poems about them. So, shunned by his fellow rabbits, he sets out one night in search of a more appreciative audience for his talents. But worm, mole and centipede are singularly unimpressed and poor Rabbit becomes even lonelier. Then he comes upon another fluffy creature with a penchant for poems – a sheep no less, and the world starts to look a whole lot better.

Star spangled skies, a shiny rainbow, sparkly speech bubbles, butterflies and beetles, not to mention hidden treasures underground draw inquisitive fingers to find their images within the decorative mixed media illustrations to this longish text in alternating prose and rhyme. **JB**

## The Queen of France

★★★★

Tim Wadham, ill. Kady MacDonald Denton, Walker, 32pp, 978 1 4063 3169 1, £11.99 hbk

How does a young child *feel* when she wakes up? Today, Rose feels *royal*. So, diving into her dressing up box, she dons jewellery and a crown and, as the Queen of France, descends to find her family. The tale continues, with superbly crafted conversations between the Queen of France, aka Rose, her mother and her father. Each parent allows the fantasy to remain and grow, conversing in role whilst Rose explores life as another being. When the going gets tough, the Queen returns to her room and removes her courtly garb, swiftly reappearing as Rose. This book made me laugh as well as those to whom I read it. The children loved the way Rose adopted a 'grownup way of speaking' when she was Queen, and giggled at the illustrations of her courtly

## New Talent

### Good Little Wolf

★★★★

Nadia Shireen, Jonathan Cape, 32pp, 978 1 7800 8001 7, £5.99

First picture books are so often let down by a story that doesn't really work but Nadia Shireen's debut picture book which she wrote and illustrated, is wittily and tightly constructed and perfectly pitched to engage young readers.

Rolf is a 'good little wolf' and he enjoys being good. He enjoys cooking, he eats up all his vegetables and his friends include Little Pig and Mrs Boggins, an old lady who likes knitting. But when he meets the Big Bad Wolf, Rolf is told that he *should* be howling at the moon, blowing in houses and eating people up. Rolf has a go at howling and trying to blow in a house without much success but when Big Bad Wolf suggests that he should eat Mrs Boggins, Rolf finds

the big, bad part of himself.

The delights of this multi-layered tale are many and resonant. Young readers will identify with Rolf, the good little wolf but also, of course, with the Big Bad Wolf and with the conflict these parts of the self engender. Rolf finding his own 'big, bad' part and then using it for good (he rescues Mrs Boggins) presents a creative way forward to which young readers will respond, albeit at an unconscious level. Then we have Shireen's interplay of text and illustration which is consummate: a climactic spread when Rolf first encounters the Big Bad Wolf is rightly, *sans paroles*. Her stylised illustrations require their pared down elements to work hard – Rolf's quivering fur and the Big Bad Wolf's sinisterly lolling red tongue for example. Eyes are minimalist circles with dots – yet how expressively they convey feeling and intent! Even the title page lettering with 'Good Little' written in tight cord while 'Wolf' is written in tension-full black fur letters heralds the pleasures within. Superb! **RS**

behaviour when she was dressed up. The colour palette is quiet throughout, Rose herself donning and shedding queenly attributes as required. A great inspiration for dressing up and role play for young children, this book should also extend their use of oral language. **GB**

### Hurry Down to Derry Fair

★★★

Dori Chaconas, ill. Gillian Tyler, Walker, 40pp, 978 1 4063 0379 7, £11.99 hbk

Young Billy Brown is in a hurry to get to Derry Fair but his parents and sister Lucy have so much to prepare it seems they will never leave the farm. Then, Grandma Patty realises it is time to go and everyone dashes off, holding tight to their produce.

The rather weak rhyming text is redeemed by Tyler's charming and very detailed illustrations in gentle line and soft colours portraying a long-vanished way of life. Gate-fold pages at the end show the fair, a somewhat unlikely and certainly old-time mix of fun-fair and agricultural fair with happy families enjoying their day out. Grandparents and older people from a rural background will enjoy reminiscing and talking about all of this with young children. **VC**

### Silly Doggy

★★★

Adam Stower, Templar, 40pp, 978 1 8487 7556 3, £10.99

One morning Lily looks out of her bedroom window and sees something that she has always wanted – a rather

large dog. But the 'dog' turns out to be a bear. Far from being scared, Lily is delighted but mum says the bear must belong to someone so Lily puts up a notice (which she secretly hopes no one will see) and the bear is returned to the Safari Park. Lily is disappointed until she looks out the next day and sees another wonderful surprise – a large stripy cat that rather closely resembles a tiger...

This is a picture book with plenty of visual humour and lots to spot in the cartoon style illustrations. The expressions on the animal's faces are particularly funny and the bear looks at its best with the addition of a little yellow bow of ribbon. This is a story that demands children use their imagination and have fun imagining what the ever confident Lily will get up to next. **DF**

## What Will You Be, Grandma?

★★★★

Nanette Newman, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Templar, 32pp, 978 1 8487 7529 9, £10.99 hbk

Many of us remember Newman's little LOVE books. Here Nanette expands a question posed to her by a grandchild, Lily, into a book of endearing and lasting quality. It comprises a conversation entirely held between a little girl and her Grandma. Chichester Clark's distinctive illustrative style is eminent throughout, in the appealing characterisation of the children, although her usual bright rainbow hues are muted here adding greatly to the warmth of the book as a whole. The questions and responses are adeptly handled. It is obvious that both grandma and grandchild are *listening* to each other as they build up a meaningful conversation from Lily's initial query. Flights of fancy abound, previous shared experiences are recalled to enhance imaginative scenarios. There's an intimate, cosy ending, Grandma lovingly saying what she'd really like to be is Lily's grandmother. **GB**

## 5 – 8 Infant/Junior

### When Chico went fishing

★★★★

Robin Tzannes, ill. Korky Paul, Oxford, 32pp, 978 0 1927 2994 1, £5.99 pbk

This amusing book tells how Chico and his father go fishing. In parallel to the pictures showing Chico's fishing successes, we also see his father (who didn't want Chico to come on the grounds that he would disturb the fish) having no luck. Chico of course catches a huge fish. Korky Paul is perhaps best known for the 'Winnie the Witch' series and his illustrations here also have an entertainingly quirky cartoon quality. The pictures and the story carry the reader along and make for a pleasant

shared reading experience. **VRe**

### Grub's Pups

★★★

Abi Burlingham, ill. Sarah Warburton, Piccadilly, 32pp, 978 1 8481 2152 2, £11.99 hbk and 978 1 8481 2151 5, £6.99 pbk

A gentle and warm book about pregnancy, birth and babies, made delightful by endearing characterisation and witty scenes from Sarah Warburton.

When Ruby's dog Grub is about to become a dad, he misses his regular romps with Tilly, his friend next door.

But Tilly, Billy's dog, has got a tummy full of pups and she needs a lot of rest. Slowly and simply told, we feel the impatience of having to wait for the 'something special' to happen and we share the frustration and loneliness of Grub whose world is changing.

Siblings will identify with the difficulties surrounding new offspring and they will applaud the joyous ending where life does not exactly get back to normal but is even better. It's just a pity that a text this sensitive was not able to describe the moment of birth a little more honestly. There is no necessity to be overly graphic, but I believe the description 'then the puppies started to appear' is not enough. It made the

rather sweet heralding of the pups, "One!" said Billy's mum', come across as a cop-out. Surely teachers and parents wouldn't be squeamish over a bit of reality, or is it the constraints of co-editions which have held back this otherwise straightforward book? **JNH**

### Dear Fairy Godmother

★★★

Michael Rosen, ill. Nick Sharratt, Walker, 24pp, 978 1 4063 2557 7, £10.99 hbk novelty

I really wanted to love this book. My admiration for both Michael Rosen and Nick Sharratt is boundless, but in this case, I don't think the partnership

## 5 – 8 Infant/Junior continued

works. They have taken fairy tales and made them into 'problems' that can be solved by a Fairy Godmother agony aunt. So, the Gingerbread Man writes to ask how he can stop people from trying to eat him, and the answer is that he should use strong aftershave as the pong will put them off. The Three Little Pigs are afraid to leave their nice brick house, so the Fairy Godmother advises that they drive around in a huge, tank-like people carrier. And so it goes. It is clever and often funny in a rather contrived way, but the main problem is that while the text seems to be aimed at older children and includes irony and the unexpected, the illustrations with their flaps to lift are for younger children. There is a mismatch here that just doesn't work. The concept of combining fairy tales with modern 'with it' ideas seems suspect and wrong-headed to this reviewer. Having said that, kids may well love it. **ES**

**The Curse of the Pony Vampires**  
128pp, 978 0 7475 9933 3

**The Enchanted Pony**  
144pp, 978-0-7475-9334 0

★★★★

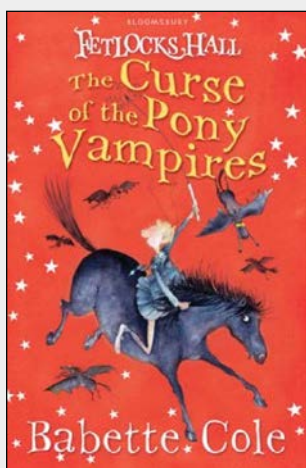
Babette Cole, Bloomsbury 'Fetlocks Hall' series, £5.99 each, pbk

Fetlocks Hall must be one of the happiest schools in the country, concentrating as it does on riding and ponies in a well described, realistic way alongside the fantastical fantasy elements of the stories.

In **The Curse of the Pony Vampires** some unpleasant people decide to write to OGRIBS (the school inspectors) and also to curse the school with a temporary attack of vampire ponies. How will Penny and all her friends (both human, pony and ghostly) save the day? Suffice to say, Penny comes out on top as usual even managing to reconcile two ghostly families in the process. As for what Babette Cole manages to do to the inspectors, that had me laughing out loud and will have many other teachers appreciating her humour too (can you guess who has recently experienced a school inspection?!?)

In **The Enchanted Pony**, Penny meets a 'centaureen' - a creature who is part pony and part girl. The centaureen

would like to join Fetlocks Hall so Penny sets out to see what can be done. While teaching her new friend the alphabet she discovers something most interesting about the missing parents of one of the school's pupils. And then there is the matter of the school open day which is happening amidst all of this. As usual, Cole resolves everything to the general joy and amusement of readers. Once again, these Fetlocks Hall books will have readers galloping through the stories with great enjoyment. Now if only Fetlocks Hall existed in real life... **RL**



**Detective Brother: Jamie's Amazing Cape Adventure**

★★★★

Pete Johnson, ill. Mike Philips, Catnip, 112pp, 978 1 8464 7117 9, £4.99 pbk

Jamie and Harry are brothers, but as with any family they do not always get on with each other, to put it mildly. So when they go on holiday along with Jamie's best friend Reema and also Aunt Nora it should be fun, right? Wrong, as it happens - because Harry 'borrows' Jamie's magic cape without asking; and as if that is not enough the children get involved in an oil spill and a string of robberies to boot. 'What a holiday,' as the brothers say at the end of the book - and what a book to read

and laugh over, which young readers will certainly do. Worth buying for its amusement value alone, this book will also help motivate more reluctant readers to see what happens next. **RL**

### Painting out the Stars

★★★★

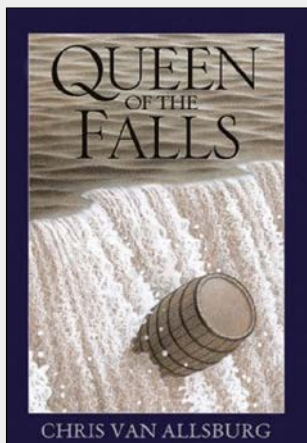
Mal Peet and Elspeth Graham, ill. Michael Foreman, Walker, 144pp, 978 1 4063 2486 0, £5.99 pbk

Told in the style of fables, this beautifully illustrated and handsomely published book contains three short stories. In the first, a baby girl is rescued in the desert, but what will happen when her guardian starts to go blind? In the second, a mischievous child accidentally breaks a treasured plate. How will he redeem himself? And in the final story a young girl goes to work to help her sick aunt. With the unlikely help of some friendly monkeys, she is able to achieve far more than she ever thought... I strongly recommend this book for the classroom or home as it is ideal both for sharing or reading alone. **RL**

### Queen of the Falls

INFORMATION STORY ★★

Chris van Allsburg, Andersen, 978 1 8493 9272 3, 48pp, £10.99 hbk



This is the bizarre story of Annie Edson Taylor, the 'short, plump and fussy sixty-two-year-old widow' who resolves to find fame and fortune when her Charm School fails by being the first

person to go over the thundering waters of Niagara Falls in a barrel. Not just any old barrel, but one she has helped make herself, four and a half feet high with iron bands around it, but big enough for herself and a large number of pillows. Amazingly she survives, but the hoped-for riches do not materialise. People are bemused by the unlikely heroine when the fearless 'Queen of the Falls' turns out to be a little old lady. Charlatans and petty crooks accompany her on her journey, but still success eludes her. In the end she must find satisfaction in the achievement itself. Caldecott Medal winner Chris van Allsburg, creator of **The Polar Express**, evokes the world of turn-of-the-century America with his soft sepia artworks. A most unlikely story, as surreal and strange as the photo of the real Annie Taylor included in the author's end note. **SU**

### RSPB First Book of Birds

978 1 4081 3718 5

### Flowers

978 1 4081 3717 8

### Mammals

978 1 4081 3716 1

### Minibeasts

978 1 4081 3715 4

### NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Anita Ganeri & David Chandler, A&C Black, 48pp, £4.99 pbk

Produced in partnership with the RSPB, this attractive new series of four titles introduces children to the wildlife around them, whether in the back garden, in the town or countryside. The books are reminiscent of the old Michelin 'i-Spy' titles, but the bigger format and more lavish production makes it hard at first to contemplate filling in the spotter's charts at the end of each one. However these are primarily identification guides, each page depicting a single bird, flower or animal, and picking out significant features. Artwork is realistic and detailed enough to help recognition, but there is no indication of scale, so a wren appears bigger than a starling, a sparrow the same size as a magpie. Simple in approach and clearly laid out, these would make ideal first field guides for young nature spotters. **SU**

## 8 – 10 Junior/Middle

### Elizabeth: The story of the last Tudor Queen

Meg Harper, 978 1 4081 3119 0

### Christopher Columbus: The story of the intrepid Italian explorer

Martin Howard, 978 1 4081 3265 4

### NON-FICTION ★★★★★

A&C Black 'Lives in Action' series,

112pp, £5.99 pbk

Narrative history, we are told, is the way forward, and these two new additions to a biographical series will undoubtedly prove popular choices. Stylish covers with black backgrounds and spot varnishing catch the eye, but the jazzy typography is deemed too difficult to read by my junior reviewers. Meg Harper paints a convincing portrait of Elizabeth as a courageous and intelligent young princess, surviving the threats that surround her when her

Catholic sister Mary succeeds her half-brother Edward. As Queen she proves to be a skilful politician, whether dealing with plotting courtiers or foreign suitors. The text is divided up into chapters, and further subdivided up into sections highlighting key dates such as '1554 Wyatt Revolt', or '1555 Woodstock Palace'.

Martin Howard recounts Columbus's determination to find financial backing for his first voyage to what he thought would be Asia, having spent years

poring over maps and studying navigation. He tells of the doubts that beset Columbus's crews, the amazement at discovering land after a 2000-mile voyage and the hero's welcome on his return to the Spanish court. After this things go downhill, with fighting breaking out in the Spanish fortress on Hispaniola, the native people succumbing to European diseases, and a fleet of other explorers arriving to lay claim to the spoils. Both books are fast paced, with plenty of



# reviews

convincing dialogue to bring the historical background to life. Both include an index, maps and in the case of Elizabeth I a family tree. Useful background reading for History at KS2.

SU

## The Filth Licker (Takeshita Demons)

★★★★

Cristy Burne, ill. Siku, Frances  
Lincoln, 128pp, 978 1 8478 0136 4,  
£5.99 pbk

Miku and her friends are on a school trip to an Adventure Camp in Wales. It should be a fantastic week, but Miku is worried. Her best friend Cait is acting strangely; Oscar has a serious rash; the camp is not at all as expected – and there is a Filth Licker – an akaname – in the boys' toilets. Once again Miku must battle against a host of Japanese demons intent upon taking over her world.



This is the second adventure about Miku and her friends. Once again the reader is introduced to a variety of extraordinary demons – there is a useful glossary at the end to help with pronunciation and identification – some of whom are helpful, but most seriously nasty. By setting the action in the more remote countryside of Wales, the author is able to add an extra layer of tension. The Japanese folk traditions from which Cristy Burne draws her demons open a window onto another world that captures the imagination and adds interest. Characterisation is lightly handled, while short sentences and plenty of dialogue ensure the action moves at a brisk pace. A very useful addition to the primary school library.

FH

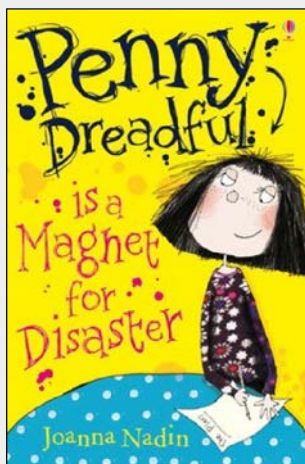
## Penny Dreadful is a Magnet for Disaster

★★★

Joanna Nadin, Usborne, 144 pp,  
978 1 4095 2672 8, £4.99 pbk

This book has three adventures starring Penny Jones, a girl who comes up with plenty of 'brilliant' ideas. The trouble is they frequently don't turn out in the way that she planned and usually

have disastrous consequences. Penny's dad has nicknamed her 'Penny Dreadful' and her gran says she is a 'Magnet for Disaster' and certainly in these three stories she lives up to both descriptions. With the help of her best friend Cosmo, Penny manages to superglue her cousin Georgia May Morton-Jones to the carpet, steal a dog and amaze the school inspector.



These are fun stories that read aloud well and are well supported by lively illustrations by Jess Mikhail. Children who enjoy 'Horrid Henry' and similar stories will enjoy the disasters.

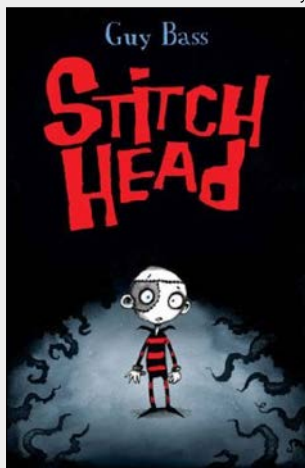
DF

## Stitch Head

★★★

Guy Bass, ill. Pete Williamson,  
Stripes, 176pp, 978 1 8471 5 183 4,  
£4.99

Mad Professor Erasmus spends his days in his laboratory in Castle Grotteskew breathing life into his monster-like creations. One such creation is the almost-human Stitch Head, the result of the professor's very first experiment, made from bits and pieces and a patchwork of stitches. As Stitch Head watches from a lonely distance the making of yet another monster – soon to be known as the Creature – he sadly recalls how he, and he alone, was once the centre of attention and the only



object of the professor's friendship. Little does he realise that the Creature will be the trigger for an assortment of madcap adventures, bringing him face to face with the professor once again. Meanwhile, travelling circus ringmaster, Fulbert Freakfinder, begs him to leave his home for a travelling circus. Highly visual, this story is filled with slapstick humour while the characters are entertaining and varied and – in the case of Stitch Head and the Creature – endearing. Lively black and white drawings, elaborate chapter openings, jingly rhymes and varying font sizes add to the story's cheerfulness.

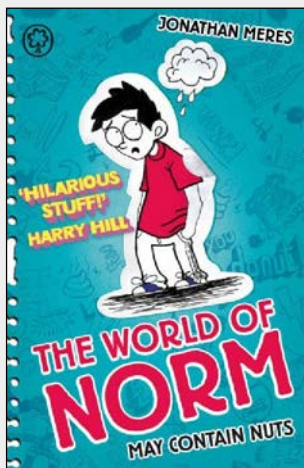
AF

## The World of Norm: May Contain Nuts

★★★★

Jonathan Meres, Orchard, 224pp,  
978 1 4083 1303 9, £5.99 pbk

The success of the various Diaries of a Wimpy Kid have put awkward pre-adolescent boys right in the publishing spotlight and fans of Jeff Kinney who pick up *The World of Norm* looking for a Wimpy style adventure will not be disappointed. It's a funny, clever book that puts a particularly British spin on geek appeal.



Norm is a hapless twelve-year-old, nearly but crucially not yet thirteen, beset by all sorts of problems and tribulations: his family have just moved into a new house, considerably smaller than their old one; his two little brothers cause huge amounts of trouble, for which Norm gets the blame; he is desperate to pimp up his bike, though he knows that no matter what he does, he'll never be as good at riding it as his best friend Mikey; even his dad's snoring is driving him mad. Never has the pre-teen cry 'it's not fair!' been so heartfelt.

Norm's astounding self-absorption makes him oblivious to much of what is going on in his world, and completely unable to interpret his dad's moods. His misunderstandings result in many of the book's laugh-out-loud moments. Gradually though, and long after the reader, Norm comes to understand why the family had to move, and just why his dad is so grumpy.

Meres clearly understands the world of

the twelve-year-old boy very well indeed, describing it with a witty veracity that is touching as well as funny. Alongside the humour there are moments of insight and sympathy for Norm, and even for his parents.

The different relationships between the characters are a real source of enjoyment too. I particularly like the scenes between Norm and his straight-talking grandpa: 'Pain in the backside, grandchildren. Always scrounging sweets and wanting you to play with them.' Of course, we know he doesn't mean it.

AR

## My Name is Rose

★★★★

Sally Grindley, Bloomsbury, 240pp,  
978 1 4088 1402 1, £5.99 pbk

Rose is a Romany Gypsy girl living with her extended family as they travel round Eastern Europe. Her family are loving and free-spirited as they make music and teach their children about the world around them and the importance of family. This life is suddenly and cruelly ended when all Rose's immediate family are killed in a tragic accident. Rose suddenly finds herself travelling to Britain as the adopted daughter of Mr and Mrs Luca, an ex-Romany family. Although the family appears wealthy and can seemingly offer Rose a wonderful life, the true situation is much different. Both Mr and Mrs Luca and their vindictive daughter Victoria have secrets that make them and Rose unhappy. The shock of losing her family and being uprooted from her own traditions and life-style cause Rose not to speak throughout most of the story.

This is a story about loss and growing up, retaining your humanity and being true to yourself in very difficult circumstances. The notion of Mr and Mrs Luca simply taking Rose from the hospital to live with them didn't quite ring true, but the character of Rose ensures the quality of the story. She is a little girl who finds positives where there seemingly aren't any and it's her own traditions and the everlasting memories of the love of her family that ensure that she triumphs and finds her voice. Children of 9+ will enjoy this story.

DF

## For the Record

★★★★

Ellie Irving, Bodley Head, 256pp,  
978 0 3703 3198 0, £10.99 hbk

When Luke's home and the cemetery where his father are buried are both threatened by a waste incinerator plant he feels it is time to take action. However time is limited and he has to get the Jersey village of Port Bren into the limelight to stand a chance of saving much of it from demolition. So how does a ten year old, somewhat geeky child go about achieving his goal?

This is a really funny and heart warming book. It might be politically incorrect, with no signs of planning committees, consultation etc, but the determination that Luke shows will have many readers cheering. The book has its full share of quirky characters: the necessary villain (hiss, boo) and a huge list of world records waiting to be broken. It is about

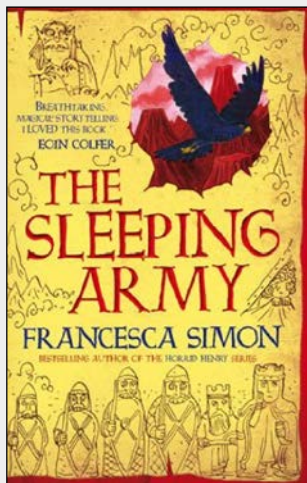
## 8 – 10 Junior/Middle continued

overcoming almost insurmountable odds, having faith in others and not letting bullies get their way. The story will attract both boys and girls and especially those who spend hours poring over the Guinness book of records. With all the depressing story plots about, it is good to see one where the ridiculous is still possible. **MP**

### The Sleeping Army

★★★★

Francesca Simon, Faber/Profile Books, 256pp, 978 1 8466 8278 0, £9.99 hbk



Shuttled between her bickering divorced parents, twelve year old Freya finds herself stuck with her dad on his Thursday (sic) night shift as a security guard at the British Museum. Bored, she blows a ceremonial horn exhibited next to the Lewis Chessmen, and gets the shock of her life as three of the ivory pieces transform into living, breathing Vikings. Slaves Roskva and Alfi and Berserker warrior Snot spirit Freya off to Asgard, land of the Norse gods, from whence she is dispatched on a death-defying quest to restore their eternal youth. If she is to succeed, she must fend off giants, trolls, dragons, and all the perils of Hel (sic). If she refuses or fails, she too will face the future as a walrus ivory chess piece. And this is a girl who feels nervous off concrete.

The glum and worried expressions of the real Lewis Chessmen inspired Francesca Simon to come up with a story to explain why they look so unhappy. The result is a feisty and funny saga which draws cleverly on Norse mythology, and dwells with relish on some of its more grotesque elements. For any former 'Horrid Henry' readers now hooked on Percy Jackson, it will be a must-read. But there's more to this intelligent novel than runes, Ragnarok and ravens. Simon also invites us to imagine a contemporary Britain in which Christianity was merely a cult that died out by the end of the 34th century. The state religion is Wodenism, with the Norse and Anglo-Saxon gods still worshipped by some. Richard Dawkins gets a name check, and absolutely

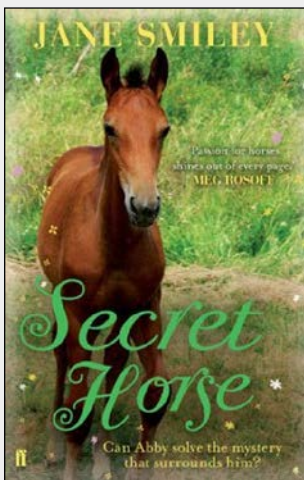
no-one is called Christopher. And running through the novel is the theme of individual fate, and what will remain of us, after 'the sword, or sickness, or old age' ends our lives. Simon gives us almost too much to think about in one short novel. Perhaps a Ring Cycle starring Freya is required? **CS**

### Secret Horse

★★★★

Jane Smiley, Faber, 272pp, 978 0 5712 7447 5, £6.99 pbk

In this, the second of Pulitzer Prize-winning Jane Smiley's equine adventure stories for young readers, we return to the California ranch that is home to horsey heroine Abby and her family. And there's still nowhere that Abby would rather be, despite the new friends she makes in eighth grade. But whilst she loves tending to all nine horses on the farm, she develops a special bond with two of them. With Abby on his back, Black George is turning out to be a natural jumper. And Jack is a gorgeous, spirited foal that she can't help but adore. But neither is hers to keep. Black George is turning heads at the ring, and Abby knows her father won't reject a good price for him. Then a letter arrives from a private investigator. Jack, it seems, may be the offspring of a valuable stolen mare. The foal's identity is a mystery which Abby must help solve.



For so many girls, a horse-mad phase is an integral part of childhood. I never got to go riding, yet I cantered through Ruby Ferguson's 'Jill' stories, along with books by the Pullein-Thompsons. Smiley is their heir apparent, her stories packed with enough authentic equestrian detail to satisfy any young rider, as well as the many who take to the saddle only in their dreams. But there is also an emotional depth and sense of moral dilemma which takes this novel beyond sentimental fodder for the pony-obsessed. Abby must set her growing attachment to the horses against her family's need to earn a living and to do what is right. Her parents' strict religious beliefs give an added complexity to the situation. Abby is a thoughtful, appealing heroine and I for one, would

## Editor's Choice

### Wonderstruck

★★★★★

Brian Selznick, Scholastic, 608pp, 978 0 5450 2789 2, £14.99 hbk

Brian Selznick won the 2008 Caldecott Medal for his first book, **The Invention of Hugo Cabret**, a novel that broke new ground with its dual visual and textual narrative.

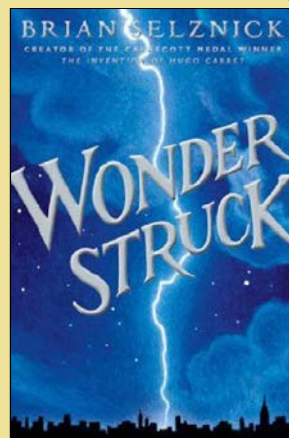
**Wonderstruck** also combines words and pictures to tell two independent stories, set fifty years apart. Selznick's sombre, intensely worked pencil illustrations, although not sepia, provide a sense of times past and as this is a book where the past is also in the present, the two narratives eventually come together in a most moving and satisfying conclusion.

In the more contemporary narrative set in the 1970s on Gunflint lake in Minnesota, 12-year-old Ben's mother (who was a librarian) has recently died and Ben, now living with his uncle and aunt, is haunted by mysterious dreams of wolves. The world seems to be out of control and, touchingly, Ben wishes it 'was organized by the Dewey decimal system. That way you'd be able to find whatever you were looking for, like the meaning of your dream, or your dad'.

Rifling through his mother's room, Ben finds a clue to his father's identity and runs away to New York to find him. Meanwhile, in the visual narrative set in the Hoboken, New Jersey of the 1920s, deaf child Rose is a virtual prisoner in her home, neglected and ignored by her famous mother. Parallels between the stories begin to emerge as both children eventually end up at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, where they each encounter the Cabinet of Wonders which is to play a part in their dramas.

Ben has always been deaf in one ear and a freak accident now damages the other. Unable to sign or lip read, his difficulty in communicating adds to the feelings of tension and desperation in the story as he searches for somewhere to belong. Selznick's 'combination' narrative works particularly well, given his theme of deafness and the need deaf people have to communicate visually. His account is a sensitive one – Ben's hearing issues are treated matter of factly by his cousin Robbie and Ben is very much a protagonist who happens to be deaf. Being a deaf child in the 1920s as Rose is can be problematic. Part of her struggle is to be allowed out into the world and to go to a deaf school.

One of the many treats in Selznick's story is the way he brings the history of collecting and the establishment of museums to life. Every child who wants to be the curator of their own collection and Selznick's affable, accessible style allows plenty of space for his readers to bring their own sense of wonder to this richly enjoyable novel **RS**



love to read more about her, as well as her horses. **CS**

### The Deeping Secrets

★★

Victor Watson, Catnip, 272pp, 978 1 8464 7118 6, £6.99 pbk

The second title in the 'Paradise Barn' series, this novel has elements of Enid Blyton stories – children seem to be rid of adults quite easily and look for treasure. This makes for a fast paced story with much mention of food. At the end of term in 1941, Molly and her friend Abigail look forward to the long summer holiday. Meanwhile Joe rescues Edward from local bullies and the four children become friends. It turns out that Edward's family owns land in the village and there is a rumour of treasure buried there so the children decide to start searching for it. But this search is not helped by the fact that Robertson Creaker, who works on the railway, lives on the land and is not friendly. In fact he is rather odd and writes letters to Hitler which he does

not post. Hence the scene is set for the two plots to intertwine which they do rather alarmingly with an attack on a freight train carrying explosives which the children stop from being a real tragedy (rather implausibly) with Edward driving the train with its two carriages on fire away from the village, where they blow up and kill Mr Creaker. This incident turns up the missing treasure. There is also a subplot about an evacuee, Adam, who has been to Wales and discovers where the art treasures from London are being stored but then returns to Great Deeping and hides in the barn, where many meals are taken.

There are too many plots in this story and it works best with plenty of excitement and pace when telling of ordinary life and the relationships between the children. Joe takes them out on his tractor and gets told off for using fuel, the children miss their fathers, serving away from home, and Edward's grandmother loosens her hold on him, all painting a convincing picture of wartime life in a small East Anglian village. **JF**



# reviews

## Coal: The Big Polluter?

(978 1 4451 0196 5)

## Gas: A Clean Fossil Fuel?

(978 1 4451 0195 8)

## Solar Power Energy for Free?

(978 1 4451 0193 4)

## Water Power: Is it Efficient?

(978 1 4451 0194 1)

## Biofuels: A Threat to Food?

(978 07496 9081 6)

## Nuclear Power: Is it Too Risky?

(978 07496 9080 9)

## Oil: Will it Last?

(978 07496 9079 3)

## Wind Power: Is it Reliable?

(978 07496 9078 6)

★★★★

Jim Pipe with Scientific consultant Rob Bowden, Franklin Watts' World Energy Issues' series, 32 pp, £12.99 each hbk

Each book in the series treats the energy source indicated by its title in 12 illustrated spreads, preceded by an introduction on What's the Issue? and followed by a spread comparing this with other sources, a Glossary, lists of Websites and Further Reading, and an Index. Last of the 12 spreads, Hot off the Press, describes recent developments. Many major installations are described in detail. Arguments for and against the use of each source are extensively discussed.

Boxes on Energy Facts are scattered through the book. Potential gaps are filled by broad interpretation of titles – for example, Gas deals with biogas, and Water Power deals with geothermal power as well as tidal and wave power. The relevance of each source to global warming is indicated. **FP**

## Hell's Bells: Samuel Johnson vs the Devil

★★★★

John Connolly, Hodder, 272pp, 978 1 4447 2494 3, £10.99 hbk and 9781 4447 2497 4, £5.99 pbk

The prequel to this novel, *The Gates* was well received, so this is Samuel Johnson and his dog, Boswell, vs the Devil, round 11. It is a bountiful, darkly comic feast for young readers who like their fantasy adventure excitement odd, humorous and intellectually stimulating, all packaged up in a massively good read.

Hell's demonic denizens alone are gaspingly weird and the Earthlings who find themselves transported to the horrors of a power struggle in Hell are either worryingly strange or at best eccentric. The hero is a bit bland by comparison.

Connolly's text is rich in description and the repartee sharp. The author's footnotes with comedic asides and scientific explanations add hugely to the overall quirkiness and fun. Importantly, the whole enterprise provides the astute reader with more than just the story to ponder on; there is plenty to learn here

about both science and issues of morality. **DB**

## The Island of Thieves

★★★★★

Josh Lacey, Andersen, 288pp, 978 1 8493 9245 5, pbk £5.99

Young Tom Trelawney should be staying with his friend Finn Spencer while his parents holiday in Corfu. Unfortunately, shortly before they are due to go, Tom accidentally burns down the garden shed and Mrs. Spencer refuses to have him. With their first holiday alone together in 15 years hanging in the balance, his parents have no choice but to leave Tom with his Uncle Harvey.

So begins one of the best children's adventure stories of the year.

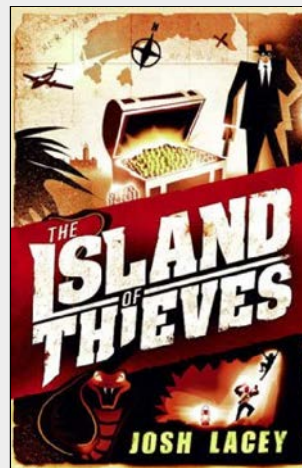
Uncle Harvey is a reckless reprobate with, it is implied, a girl in every port and a decidedly relaxed attitude to right and wrong. Who hasn't dreamed of having an uncle like this? Before Tom can say 'health and safety' he is on his way to Peru on the trail of lost treasure. Not just any treasure either, but a hoard lost by Francis Drake. Their hunt will bring them up against South American mobsters, corrupt officials and into any number of life threatening incidents.

Short, spare sentences keep the pace breakneck, though there's always time for humour; for many this will be a read-at-one-sitting book.

'Guide books are for wimps,' says Uncle Harvey, but there's quite a bit of

information about Peru here. What's more, the real hero of the book is John Drake, cousin of Francis, who sailed with him on his expedition in 1577, painting the new plants and animals they saw, and recording the journey in a journal. Readers will end *The Island of Thieves* knowing a great deal more about Drake and his adventure, without even noticing how much they have learned, and more than likely inspired to find out more still.

It's refreshing to read such a clever and enjoyable honest-to-goodness adventure story. Let's hope there are more escapades to come for Tom and Uncle Harvey. **AR**

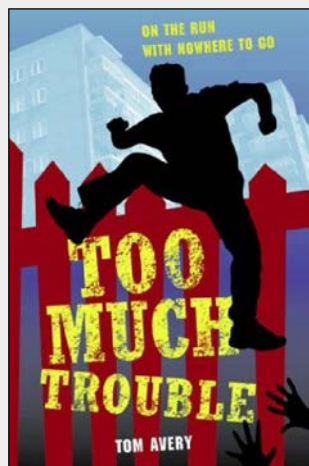


## 10 – 14 Middle/Secondary

### Too Much Trouble

★★★★★

Tom Avery, Frances Lincoln, 144pp, 978 1 8478 0234 7, £5.99



Winner of the 2010 Frances Lincoln Diverse Voices Award, *Too Much Trouble* recounts what it is like to be a child immigrant in 21st century England, outside 'the system' and below the radar of the social services.

Emmanuel and Prince are brothers who are sent to live in England when both their own and their parents lives are at risk in their African homeland. An uncle is supposed to look after them but, involved in a drug racket, all he does is provide them with an empty house to live in and occasionally money with which they feed themselves junk food. Emmanuel, aged 12, tries hard to keep himself and his younger brother out of trouble in school, but eventually events compel them to run away to London where they fall in with gang of pickpockets and petty thieves run by a Fagin-like character. While this part of the narrative seems somewhat implausible, it provides drama which should maintain interest for young readers, while not masking the plight of children who for one reason or another do not have a place in normal society.

For *Too Much Trouble* Avery has drawn on the experiences of pupils he has taught. While it is shocking to think that children in supposedly developed countries can be in the position of Emmanuel and Prince, the novel moves at a good pace and is a gripping story, not without humour. It will, perhaps, help more privileged readers, child and adult, and not only in England, to realise why some children in their school or neighbourhood may be different in some way from the norm. **VC**

### A Greyhound of a Girl

★★★★★

Roddy Doyle, Marion Lloyd Books, 176pp, 978 1 4071 2933 4, £10.99 hbk

Mary O'Hara, age twelve, is heartbroken when her best friend moves to another neighbourhood. And her granny, Emer, is seriously ill in hospital so she and her Mum, Scarlett, go there every evening. Life is disrupted, but it is nothing to the disruption when Tansey, her great-grandmother who died of flu in 1928 when Emer was a toddler, suddenly appears as Mary walks home from school one day. Tansey is quite a matter-of-fact sort of ghost, appearing now, it seems, as the daughter whom she once left so suddenly and at a very young age, is herself, dying.

In his picture book, *Her Mother's Face*, Doyle looked at the past as it impacts on the present and the link between mothers and daughters. *A Greyhound of a Girl* picks up on these themes as Doyle explores aspects of the lives of four generations of Irish women in the same family, focusing on each of them at different times in their lives. Rational belief has to be suspended, not just to accept Tansey's presence, but also when she, her granddaughter and great-granddaughter sneak the dying Emer out of hospital on a mad drive to Wexford for one last look at the old

family home. But Doyle keeps the momentum moving along so that the reader becomes absorbed in an account of four strong female characters, and of changing aspects of Irish life over a period of eighty plus years.

While this might seem a depressing book, it is actually a glorious celebration of life, its brevity, its vicissitudes, the importance of love and of family, told by an accomplished storyteller. The women are feisty, sparking off each other and keeping their men folk in their place, and there is plenty to smile about as their stories unfold. **VC**

### Milicent's Book

★★★★★

Charlotte Moore, Catnip, 192pp, 978 1 8464 7080 6, £6.99 pbk

There are some stories where the quality of the writing draws you into the characters' world and does not let you out until the last page, and this is one of them. Milicent, (unusual spelling), becomes an orphan in 1883 when her elderly father dies, her mother Bella having died in mysterious circumstances some time before. The big house, Yotes, now belongs to her brother Harry who is up at Oxford and her older sister Mabel is now the lady of the house. There is a large extended family which cares for the girls,

## 10 – 14 Middle/Secondary continued

including bachelor Uncle Ben, an Arctic explorer. Millicent has written a 'diary' but one to be opened in 1901, and confides to it her fears about Mabel marrying and therefore the uncertainty of her own future. Early in the story Arthur Glover appears as a suitor for Mabel, seemingly very suitable although Millicent does not think him very clever and thinks he should have a job of some description rather than be a man of leisure, but she does gradually warm to him. The engagement comes to an abrupt end when Harry's death from a fever at sea on his way home from India shatters the girls' happiness, and worse is to come as Mabel descends into a breakdown of some kind, which is what had happened to their mother and led to her suicide. Millicent is removed to her aunt's and the decision is taken to send her to school which delights her greatly.

This is a true story, the result of the author finding Millicent's letters at Hancox, (about which Charlotte Moore has written an adult book). It is Millicent's voice which comes strongly through the 'diary', giving a clear picture of the life of a Victorian girl from a well connected family, the class consciousness and the expectation that she will marry. Over it all is the ever present spectre of death. It is not clear how much of the text is Millicent's and how much Charlotte Moore's so whether this is fiction or not is a moot point. Either way this is an experience not to be missed - as a piece of literature and a spellbinding vignette of Victorian life. **JF**

## How to be a boy

★★★★

Tony Bradman (Ed.), Walker, 208pp, 978 1 4063 2131 9, £6.99 pbk

There was a time (perhaps it was a long time ago) when short stories about boys growing up would involve conflict with family and friends, love and sexuality, and perhaps sporting or artistic aspirations and achievements: finding yourself in one way or another. These days, if this collection is to be believed, it's about surviving on the mean streets, being bullied or bullying, running from the gangs or running with them. A good proportion of these ten stories fall into this category, but there are some that don't. Mal Peet's

Is about the tragic associations a tree house holds for a grown up boy. Katie Dale's deals with how a boy copes with other people's attitudes to his unconventional family and his own feelings for a seemingly unattainable girl. And there is more than one way of looking at the mean streets. Tim Wynne Jones injects some fantasy into a story of boy deciding whether to confirm or confound adult expectations of him. Flint Keller looks at the history of a gun assault from the perspectives of adult victim and teenage perpetrator. Ian Beck goes lyrical and street wise in charting the beginning of an unlikely romance. Altogether this is a high class collection from some fine writers that is gripping, hard hitting and thought

provoking, if, overall, a little one dimensional in the way it approaches its subject. **CB**

## Eight Keys

★★★★

Suzanne Lafleur, Puffin, 224pp, 978 0 1413 3606 0, £9.99 hbk

This is one of those fictional American households where, whatever concerns of their own they may have, the adults are always there for the children. As far as Elise is concerned, this is just as well. For, already orphaned as a toddler and adopted by her aunt and uncle, she's just moved to a new school; she's being bullied; and her friendships are being tested. It's become so bad that she's not doing her homework and avoiding school if she can. The arrival of her aunt and a new baby makes things worse, since the baby gets far too much attention. Still, adult support for Elise extends not only to friends outside the family, but to her dead father who, thoughtfully, while dying of cancer, has left her eight locked rooms to open, one by one, on the first floor of her uncle's capacious barn. Each room contains memories or messages that help her find her feet. This reworking of Bluebeard's castle requires suspension of disbelief at dizzying altitudes, yet Lafleur's touch is sure enough to carry the reader across. Like me, you may not believe the half of it, but the half you do believe, what goes on in Elise's head, is the important part. **CB**

## Diary of a Lottery Winner's Daughter

★★★★

Penelope Bush, Piccadilly, 224pp, 978 1 8481 2139 3, £6.99 pbk

When her cleaner Mum wins £3.7 million in the Lottery it seems like a dream come true for Charlotte Johnson. But worryingly, not everything works out as she envisages it might - suddenly her wishes are coming true but in some alarming ways. Has this something to do with an encounter with a gypsy fortunetelling machine at an amusement arcade in Weston-Super-Mare?

Or perhaps, as Charlotte realises at the end, it is all just a normal part of life: moving from the family's council house causes unforeseen problems, she has a falling out with her best friend and her rebellious sixteen-year-old sister runs away.

Charlotte, on the cusp of adolescence, is small for her age, loves reading and isn't really interested in clothes and make-up. Told in the currently popular diary-format, the chatty style and light-hearted workings of the plot reveal Charlotte coming to terms with the changes in her life following her Mum's win, and the much deeper changes resulting from the whole business of growing up. **Diary of a Lottery Winner's Daughter** makes a good read for girls who, like Charlotte, are not quite ready for the disturbances of adolescence

and are not sure that they are altogether comfortable with what it may involve. **VC**

## Six Words and a Wish

★★★★

Karen McCombie, Scholastic, 256pp, 978 1 4071 0788 2, £6.99 pbk

Jem is an unusual thirteen-year-old. Her dad is a clown, her mum runs a mad café for kids, their house is covered in Christmas lights all year round - and she's not terminally embarrassed about any of it. It's part of what makes Jem a joy to read about, but we can equally empathise with why her serious older sister Gracie might have run off two years ago without a word since.

But Jem knows it's because of her. She's doing her best not to think about it, and tries to focus on helping her parents out - whatever the cost to her own life. Eventually she does seize the chance to form a band with best friend Iris and a couple of boys they meet. But the mystery of Gracie's leaving keeps prickling at Jem through the many strange coincidences ('spooks' as she calls them) that crop up, teasing Jem into opening the box in her head where she's shut away all the hard to deal with thoughts, regrets and guilt to do with her sister.

Despite its serious underlying theme, this novel is also a light-hearted slice of teen life, with Jem's upbeat moments, friendships, the burgeoning band and mortifying rehearsals and discovering that even the cute boys your age can actually be as human and fun to be around as your best friend. There is a lot to laugh over with oodles of appeal to readers of 10+. The underpinning mystery of Gracie's leaving, the effect on her family and Jem's guilt is intriguing, and balances out the madcap lifestyle with a real emotional depth; that special relationship between sisters in particular is refreshingly honest and truly touching in its depiction. **MH**

## Trapped

★★★★

Isla Whitcroft, Piccadilly 'The Cate Carlisle Files', 256pp, 978 1 8481 2154 6, £6.99 pbk

This is the first in a projected series whose 16-year-old central character is feisty, well-travelled and engaging, calm and resourceful in tricky situations - a female Alex Ryder. After being offered a summer job on board a supermodel's yacht in the south of France she finds that this world of glamour and opulence is corrupted by the smuggling of rare animals from around the world. When she becomes involved in the search for the perpetrators of the crime she finds herself thrown into a maelstrom of excitement and danger from which she is lucky to emerge with her life.

This is fast-paced, carefully constructed escapism which feeds in environmental concerns and a look at a wider world which readers may not have seen. Its careful mix of ingredients will appeal to a wide audience who like their fiction fast and furious but driven by a central character who has a heart. **VR**

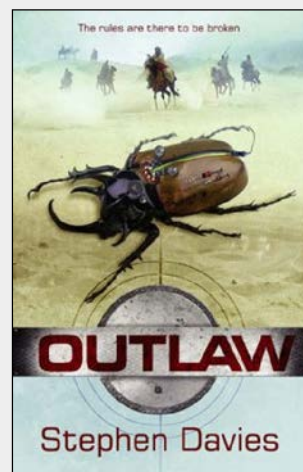
## Outlaw

★★★★

Stephen Davies, Andersen, 272pp, 978 1 8493 9088 0, £5.99 pbk

A contemporary teenage novel set in Burkina Faso promises something more exotic than we expect in the more usual examples of the genre. In this respect Stephen Davies' novel will not disappoint. His atmospheric evocation of faraway places with strange-sounding names is one of his novel's strongest features: African sights, sounds and smells are colourfully conveyed, with what comes across as very considerable authenticity. (Readers with a limited knowledge of the terrain should - before embarking on the novel - consult its 'Afterword', a valuable glossary of its less familiar details.)

Though Davies' novel is in many ways - and particularly in its understanding and potential application of modern technological communication systems - thoroughly up to date, it leans heavily on the conventions of the old-fashioned adventure story. Indeed, its 15-year-old hero, Jake, comments early on, 'I was hoping for adventure...but this is not what I had in mind,' as he becomes embroiled in the complexities of African life and its decidedly murky politics. Suspended from his British boarding school, he has joined his parents and his sparky younger sister Kirsty in the BF capital, Ouagadougou, where his father is British ambassador and where, almost immediately on his arrival, he and Kirsty are kidnapped by - apparently - a gang of young terrorists. What follows is a slickly paced sequence of dramatic incidents characterised by numerous twists, turns and unexpected revelations. Nothing in Africa, Jake comes to appreciate, is as simple as it might seem. It all amounts to an engaging narrative which, with its sprinkling of tongue in cheek humour, maintains the reader's involvement throughout. **RD**



## An Act of Love

★★★★

Alan Gibbons, Orion, 288pp, 978 1 84255 782 2, £8.99 pbk

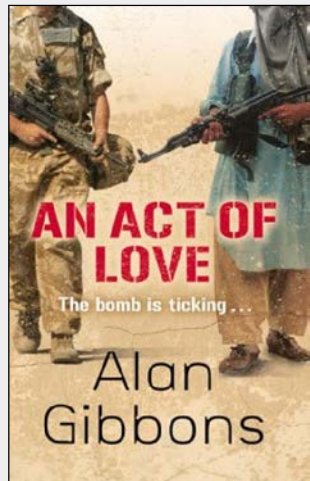
Imran and Chris grow up as childhood blood brothers in the suburbs of a



# reviews

Yorkshire town. Their lives separate during adolescence, and by the time they are 18, Chris has joined the army and Imran has embraced Islamist jihad. Their paths rejoin when Chris is on his way to the barracks where he is to receive a medal after losing a leg to an IED in Afghanistan. A text from Imran discloses that a suicide bomber is heading in the same direction.

The tensions of intercultural and intergenerational strife and solidarity which both separate and unite the friends are vividly recounted through a switchbacking double series of then-and-now accounts, first person in the case of Chris, third person for Imran. The depiction of conflicted loyalties and the mundane excitements and disappointments of growing up are convincingly conveyed, and the air of authenticity is underlaid by Gibbons' conversations with students and soldiers, acknowledged in the preface. There are, however, some Buccaneering improbabilities in the climactic sections, and the pell-mell pace of the action sometimes allows flattening clichés into the writing itself (Of an inflammatory speaker: 'He had everyone sitting on the edge of their seats, hanging on his every word.') In spite of this, the book presents a moving account of a friendship broken and repaired by the complications of social justice, and has relevance beyond the specific story it tells. **GH**



## Angel's Fury

★★★★

Bryony Pearce, Egmont, 304pp, 978 1405251358, £6.99 pbk

Cassie Farrier is not your average troubled teenager, but troubled she most certainly is. Apart from an unexplained talent for German which her parents seem curiously reluctant to encourage, she is haunted each night by visions of the violent death of a little girl called Zillah, seemingly a victim of the Holocaust. Cassie's dreams come to a head on a school trip to Germany, and on her return, her parents admit what they have long secretly suspected; that their daughter is the reincarnation of someone who lived at the time of the Second World War. In

desperation, they send Cassie for 'treatment' at a remote old manor house, and here she meets other children similarly plagued by visions of past lives. One of them in particular – a boy called Seth – looks strangely familiar. Soon Cassie realises that she is reliving not just one past life, but multiple ones. And then the nightmares really start.

**Angel's Fury** is the debut novel from an author who was a winner in SCBWI's **Undiscovered Voices** anthology in 2008. Bryony Pearce explores the spooky and compelling concept of reincarnation and the gradual, sinister entanglement of the past and present lives of her protagonists makes – in the main – for engrossing reading. But just as multiple lives fight to get possession of its characters, a few too many plots and ideas have been trapped in this story and thus forced into combat with one another for mastery of it. Egmont praises its mix of 'mythology, fantasy and real-life terror'. Personally I would have preferred less of this mix, and a greater focus on a single reincarnation: Cassie's intriguing German past life and role in the Holocaust. Instead, the wartime theme of the early chapters gives way to a mythological plot involving fallen angel brothers, and a menacing female doctor who is not what she seems behind her red lipstick. Still, there's much imaginative promise here which one hopes will soon be born again in a tighter incarnation. **CS**

## The Queen Must Die

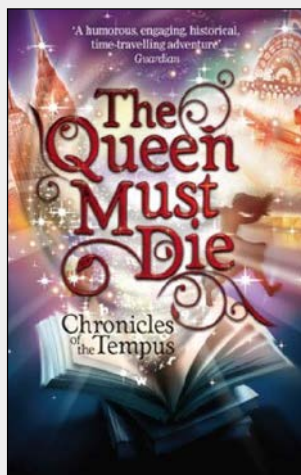
★★★★

K.A.S. Quinn, Corvus 'Chronicles of the Tempus' series, 304pp, 978 1 8488 7052 9, £6.99 pbk

The device used to travel through time is something that many writers find difficult to do. In this, the first of a planned trilogy 'The Chronicles of Tempus', Quinn uses the letters of Queen Victoria to transport Katie Berger-Jones-Burg from present day New York to Buckingham Palace in Queen Victoria's reign. Katie is a rather sad figure, seemingly abandoned by her feckless erstwhile pop star mother, Mimi, for yet another no-hoper, and finding her solace in reading, keeping her books in the rather dusty space under the bed. In this book Princess Alice is a feisty character wanting to do more than Victorian young ladies are allowed to, quite happy to believe that Katie is from the future, and interested to try and get her back to that time. The two girls along with the doctor's son become involved in what they think is a plot to kill Queen Victoria with suspicion resting on Prince Albert's secretary, Bernard DuQuelle. But Mr. DuQuelle has another secret; he too is from another civilization, not another time, from a people who wanted to improve things for everyone, latterly beginning to shed their bodies and with this losing the ability to communicate. DuQuelle works out how to get Katie back to New York, but leaves the story open for the next book in the series.

After an uncertain beginning in New York, the story gathers strength and momentum when Katie travels to

Buckingham Palace. The particularly strong characterisation of Princess Alice and the doctor's son, James, make events much more credible, and the mixing of real historical figures and fictional people, who all have obviously made-up names, are blended together well. This allows the fantasy element of the story to seem a natural extension. There are good cameo portraits of the Queen and Prince Albert, and the signs that Princess Alice would become more than a figurehead in her time. To young people in our time the medical treatment given to haemophiliac Prince Leopold will seem nothing short of torture! **JF**



## Undead

★★★★

Kirsty McKay, Chicken House, 304pp, 978 1 906427 87 0, £6.99 pbk

Roberta – Bobby – feels that she is on the school trip from hell. So when their coach pulls up at the roadside cafe in Aviemore, she does not join the rest of the class in the rush for drinks and food. To her horror, neither does the class rebel, Smitty. Can things get worse? It seems they can; as snow swirls around the locked bus, Bobby and Smitty find themselves in an unlikely alliance facing a horde of the Undead gathering outside. It is going to take all their ingenuity and strength to find a way to safety.

This is not a novel to linger over. Designed to appeal to fans of teen horror films, the action is relentless, the screaming non-stop and every chapter – even the final one, closes on a cliff-hanger. Nor is the author afraid to employ all the clichés associated with the genre – snowstorms, isolated countryside, an empty castle, an evil organisation, hands dripping with blood and two wisecracking teenagers among them. Characterisation is minimal, relying rather on stereotypes to ensure instant recognition. McKay's style is as immediate. Long descriptive passages are avoided, dialogue abounds ensuring the reader is carried along without a stop. This impression is heightened by the contemporary language and constant references to current popular culture – The Waking Dead, X Factor, GCSE curriculum. In this way the author draws

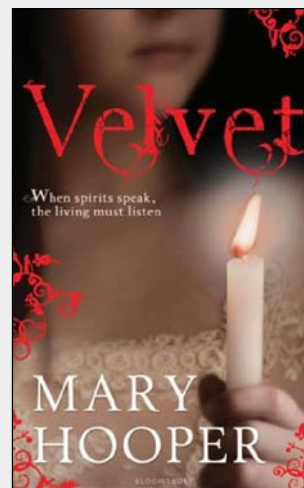
her audience into a familiar world providing the credible background to the horrors she then ladles on by the bucketful. Fast moving, readable, this is a lively addition to the teenage horror genre and will appeal to KS3 readers looking for instant gratification. **FH**

## Velvet

★★★★

Mary Hooper, Bloomsbury, 336pp, 978 0 7475 9921 0, £9.99 pbk

Life is hard in Victorian times if you are an orphan; it could be hard even if you were not an orphan – as Kitty knows only too well. When the death of her monstrous father leaves her all alone in the world, she decides to change her life. She becomes Velvet – but has to take work as a laundry maid to survive. Then her luck changes; Velvet finds herself moving in high society as the privileged companion of the beautiful Madame Savoya, the spiritualist medium. But can Madame really summon the spirits of the dead? As Velvet becomes more involved, she finds herself asking more questions, and this is dangerous.



This is a very accessible historical novel as one would expect from Mary Hooper. She delights in introducing her readers to unusual and interesting aspects of society – in this case that of the late Victorian and early Edwardian period. The text is rich in detail – how the laundry business worked, what the girls would have worn, attitudes to mourning, fashions, food and, of course, the craze for spiritualism; she even slips in the occasional 'celebrity' – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is one. However, it is rescued from becoming a history lesson through her characters – Velvet is lively, independent and attractive and her predicament ensures that the reader wants to turn the page while Madame Savoya and her partner, George, are colourful and very plausible; even the reader is almost fooled. For, not only is there the frisson of danger as Velvet finds out more about the trickery behind the acts put on by so-called mediums, but there is also the hint of romance. Will she fall for the gorgeous, helpful George? Or will she realise that it is Charlie who is the dependable one? Well written, but in an

## 10 – 14 Middle/Secondary continued

easy undemanding style that mixes dialogue and description to good effect, this, like other novels by this author, is ideal for the younger teen audience. **FH**

**Edda**

★★★★

Conor Kostick, O'Brien Press 'The Avatar Chronicles', 352pp, 978 1 8471 7165 8, £7.99 pbk

With the publication of **Edda**, the trilogy begun with **Epik** and **Saga** – now known as 'The Avatar Chronicles' – is complete. While, like its two predecessors, the novel is set in the futuristic fantasy domains of an electronic video-games-playing world, the origins of its narrative technique lie in the myths, legends and folk tales which constitute our oldest stories. Story, in fact, in all the numerous possible modes of its telling is central to Kostick's concerns. Here, the emphasis is on teenage Penelope, who, in **Edda**'s virtual world, has spent most of her life at the beck and call of its oppressive ruler, Lord Scanthax. In the guise of her avatar, Princess, she 'scripts' the weapons he employs to exercise his bellicose aspirations. Eventually though, she rebels and allies herself with a colourful group of young freedom fighters determined to create revolution. Their ensuing confrontations with the forces of Scanthax, played out on land, on sea and in the air, make for some extremely exciting and energetic writing. Some of the 'games' played are far from being merely playful. 'We have to figure out what is happening to us, what the universe is really like,' remarks one of these young revolutionaries; young readers beset by a similar urge as they embark on their adolescence will find plenty in this highly imaginative piece of fiction to help them on their quest. **RD**

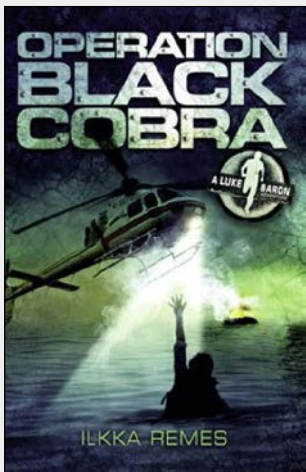
**Operation Black Cobra**

★★★★

Ilkka Remes, Andersen 'Luke Baron Adventures', 368pp, 978 1 8493 9120 7, £6.99 pbk

This is a second Luke Baron title from this successful Finnish writer so, if this

is anything to go by, there is probably an audience waiting for a further action-packed adventure.



It all begins when 14 year-old Luke Baron wants some 18+ identity to get into serious gambling and is unwary enough to get involved in buying a fake driving licence on-line, from a girl named Gemma Dolan. She, as it happens, is the seriously disturbing daughter of a seriously criminal dad who is planning a seriously big crime involving stolen plutonium. Everyone except Luke has at least a zillion agendas and so what follows is an awfully exciting adventure culminating in being dunked in the Irish Sea.

I have read plenty of stuff like this but there's no denying that this novel is compulsive, quick reading and will definitely give thrill-seeking teen readers value for their money. **DB**

**The Truth About Celia Frost**

★★★★

Paula Rawthorne, Usborne, 352pp, 978 1 4095 3109 8, £6.99 pbk

Celia Frost's life is pretty wretched: she suffers from a rare condition that prevents her blood from clotting. This, combined with her unusual looks – she's tall with a shock of red hair – has made her the subject of bullying in every one of the many schools she's attended.

The tension is high already then when, just pages in, a particularly nasty piece of bullying leaves Celia bleeding heavily.

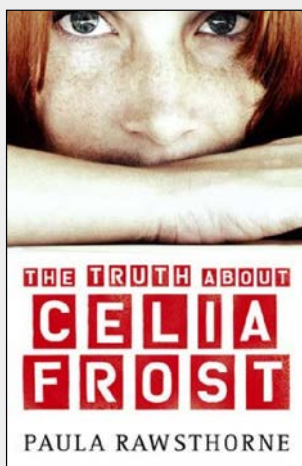
The slash of the blade has no lasting physical effect on Celia, but nonetheless changes her life forever. As her mother whisks her away to start life over in a new town, yet again, Celia begins to realise that her whole life has been a lie; that her mother has been deceiving her all her life.

Dumped in the misnamed Bluebell Estate, Celia tries to take control of her events. She makes friends with Sol, a boy from the neighbouring block. He teaches her to swim; she rides a bike.

But the sense of paranoia and threat is ever present and, when it finally emerges, the truth about Celia Frost is stranger than she, or the reader, could ever have imagined. Our perception of her mother will change again as the story develops in constantly unexpected ways.

Paula Rawthorne's excellent debut is original and gripping and the tension is palpable throughout. A succession of vivid and well drawn scenes holds the reader's attention and throws light on the action, both what has gone before, and what is to come. As well as being a compulsive thriller, this novel is also a skilful coming-of-age novel. The relationship between Celia and her mother is real and affecting and often makes for uncomfortable reading.

Both parts of the story build to a thoroughly satisfying climax and resolution, with final twists to surprise. **AR**

**Six Days**

★★★★

Philip Webb, Chicken House, 384pp, 978 1 906427 62 7, £6.99 pbk

Post-apocalyptic fiction for young adults has now been with us in sufficient quantity for it to have acquired its own stock of recurring themes and stereotypes: the challenge for a new entrant to the genre is to avoid the formulaic and, in the process, to express a futuristic vision which, to some credible extent, bears some relevance to the world which its readers actually inhabit. Judged by these criteria, Philip Webb's debut novel deserves high praise. The setting is an often scary London of the future, at a period when 'The Empire of New Russia' has become 'the conquerors of the world', the 'Empire' having its public face in the form of 'the Vlads', the 'lords and masters' of what remains of ordinary humanity. The latter is largely represented in the novel by a group of young people, principally sister and brother Cass and Wilbur, subsequently joined by two others, Peyto and Erin, who have arrived from a far distant world: it has taken them a billion years to reach London. The enterprise in which all of these become

engaged revolves around their urgent necessity to discover a long buried 'artefact' which, when found, may stave off a final catastrophe. The characterisation of the four young people is strong and attractive, the opposing forces supplying quite a gallery of the sinister and sadistic. Once battle is joined, Webb exploits every opportunity of twist and turn to create a narrative which will keep a young audience involved. His insights into parental-child relationships, explored at several levels in various contexts, results in an additional, rich dimension. **RD**

**Immortal War**

★★★★★

Justin Somper, Simon & Schuster 'Vampirates' series, 416pp, 978 1 4169 1654 3, £6.99 pbk

A huge cast of characters sweeps through the pages of this meticulously plotted story, the sixth and final book in a fantasy series peopled by pirates and vampires. War and destruction are stalking the oceans as the dastardly vampirate Sidorio and his heavily pregnant wife Lola Lockwood plot against the newly forged alliance of pirates and Nocturnals for the supremacy of the seas. As the alliance fights back, twins Grace and Connor, children of Sidorio, enter the fray, taking sides against their father: Grace enrolling as healer of the alliance's wounded, and Connor as pirate warrior. Then Grace stumbles on a prophecy and carefully guarded secret: peace will only be restored by the death of a twin. Grace must learn to live with this knowledge and distinguish between friend and foe as events spiral beyond control.

Events move fast, incredibly so, and it's hard for the reader not to become drawn in. Just as it seems that there can't possibly be another twist, the plot turns again, switching from one character and situation to another, and culminating in a surprise grand finale. Impressive in scope and in its elaborately structured imaginary universe, this is a thrilling, at times witty, high-octane read. **AF**

**Behemoth**

★★★★★

Scott Westerfeld, ill. Keith Thompson, Simon & Schuster, 496 pp, 978 1 8473 8677 9, £6.99 pbk

This is the second instalment of Scott Westerfeld's extraordinary series (following on from **Leviathan**), set in a half recognisable Europe at the onset of World War One. While the historical figures remain the same, the warring nations are now split between the German Clankers, who put their faith in ever more ingenious war machines, and their Darwinist opponents, who fight back using man-made monsters as their chief weapon. At the centre of all this are young Alek, the anti-war heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire, holed up in Istanbul and hunted by his German enemies, and Deryn, a feisty British girl posing as a male midshipman. Battles galore ensue, mesmerisingly illustrated



# reviews

by Keith Thompson in full gothic black and white gloom. Westerfeld keeps the tension going right to the end, and with more instalments still to come this impressive series continues to enthrall and occasionally astound. **NT**

## Blood Red Road

★★★★★

Moira Young, Scholastic, 492pp, 978 1 4071 2425 4, £7.99 pbk

Moira Young's debut novel *Blood Red Road* is a proper epic adventure. From the opening scene in the white heat of

a drying up lake bed with threatening figures on horseback appearing out of the dust cloud, it presents the reader with a series of thrilling scenes and unforgettable characters. No wonder Ridley Scott has bought the film rights.

In this harsh post-apocalyptic landscape Saba and her family just about scrape a living until the day the horsemen arrive, shoot her father dead and kidnap her beloved brother Lugh. Saba sets off to rescue him, accompanied by her pet crow Nero and her little sister, Emmi, though she does her best to leave Emmi behind.

Their journey is long and difficult of course! They have to cross the inhospitable Sandsea desert, but Hometown, what's left of civilisation, is even more dangerous, its inhabitants bloodthirsty and pitiless. Saba is forced to fight for her life in a kind of gladiatorial contest and survives only by surrendering to the 'hot-red', earning herself the nickname the Angel of Death.

As they continue their journey, the girls pick up a band of mismatched companions including the charismatic adventurer Jack, and members of a gang of female freedom fighters. By the

end of the book Saba has recovered her humanity in full, though she's never going to lose her sharp tongue!

The influences of other writers are clear – there's a definite feel of *Mortal Engines* in the desert scenes – and *Blood Red Road* is heavily influenced by the Western (very much in vogue at the moment). But Moira Young has written a highly original, inventive and hugely engaging novel. A sequel is promised for 2012 and many readers, including myself, will be eager to reacquire ourselves with the wonderful Saba! **CB**

## 14+ Secondary/Adult

### Salem Brownstone: All Along the Watchtowers

★★★★★

John Harris Dunning, ill. Nikhil Singh, Walker, 96pp, 978 1 4063 3176 9, £9.99 pbk

This is the paperback edition of a book that has already received a lot of attention, and accolades from Anthony Minghella, Alan Moore and Paul Gravett. Dunning provides a creepy tale of cosmic struggle against nebulous evil from another dimension, which features bizarre characters in familiarly weird situations – a haunted house, a freak show circus, and an isolated lighthouse. The human agent through which the evil hopes to do its worst metamorphoses into a fly, by means of a (thankfully off the page) slaughtered swan. The story never quite goes where you expect and provides the basis for Nikhil Singh's black and white realisation, which is, at turns, compelling, funny (the forces of evil turn out to be finger puppets on a severed hand), ludicrous and disturbing, but always strange and fascinating. This is idiosyncratic, detailed illustration, with the feel of very elaborate doodling, sometimes intricate, sometimes bold and sometimes loopy and winsome, with a dramatic and imaginative use of the page. **CB**

### Out of Towners

★★★★

Dan Tunstall, Five Leaves, 160pp, 978 1 9078 6925 9, £5.99 pbk

16-year-old Chris and his three friends have finished their exams and are very ready to celebrate. A weekend trip to the seaside without their parents' knowledge seems to provide the ideal boys only holiday. However, they fail to anticipate the wrath of the local lads whose territory they are apparently violating and life soon becomes a game of cat and mouse with almost fatal consequences.

Their trip has its lighter moments, however it is heavily flavoured with the dubious pleasures (and painful consequences) of underage drinking and the company of three girls who quickly become important to the boys. Tunstall paints a credible picture of the

boys' first adult-free holiday with deft use of dialogue and scenarios that are all too familiar – nights of excess, days of almost childlike pleasures steeped in nostalgia, the first stirrings of adult preoccupations with image and the opposite sex.

What prevents *Out of Towners* being merely a sordid exposé is the likeable nature of the protagonists, alternately strutting and worrying about what their parents will say if they are found out. This mix of emerging adulthood and schoolboy vulnerability endears the boys to the reader and makes the dramatic events at the end of the book more plausible. *Out of Towners* is aimed at boys – and squarely and effectively so. **VR**

### Closer

★★★★

Maxine Linnell, Five Leaves, 196pp, 978 1 9078 6926 6, £5.99 pbk

This insightful novel from small East Midlands independent publisher, Five Leaves, examines the consequences when a step dad gets too close to the girls he calls his daughters. Fifteen-year-old Mel despairs of her family but can't work out what's going wrong. Rows at home are increasingly frequent, relations with her older sister Hannah are weirdly strained and then there are her own insecurities about her weight and whether Raj will ever fancy her. Then the man she loves and calls Dad starts paying Mel the wrong kind of attention, and everything falls apart.

Despite the cataclysmic effect that the resulting revelations of abuse have on all their lives, Maxine Linnell neatly avoids making a drama out of the crisis, concentrating instead on a careful examination of the feelings of those caught up in it, from those of Mel's devastated mum to those of a hurt and confused younger brother not old enough to understand. Difficult issues are not ducked, and Linnell makes it clear that there will be no easy answers. But this is not a wholly dark story. Significantly, the possibility of partial redemption for the perpetrator of the abuse is left open. He is portrayed neither as villain nor victim, but as a mixed-up human being. People are complicated, is the message. And it is when Mel understands this that she

finds the maturity to break out of her self-absorption, and becomes a better daughter, sister and friend as a result.

*Closer* joins a plethora of young adult novels which have sought to tackle the subject of abuse by a parent. The sensitive simplicity and authenticity of *Closer* make it a particularly welcome addition to the field. **CS**

### Marcelo in the Real World

★★★

Francisco X. Stork, Scholastic, 320pp, 978 1 4071 2100 0, £8.99, pbk

Protagonists on the autism spectrum have featured in some outstanding young adult novels, notably *The London Eye Mystery* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*. So it's inevitable that *Marcelo in the Real World*, told in the first person by a boy with Asperger's, will invite comparisons with some of its predecessors. And on the whole, this second novel by the US author of acclaimed debut, *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors* measures up pretty well.

Seventeen-year-old Marcelo has spent his most of his childhood at a cosy private school which caters for kids with special needs. Now though, instead of a planned and longed-for summer working with the school's horses, his lawyer father ('There's nothing wrong with you. You just move at a different speed than other kids your age') insists he take a holiday job at the firm where he is a partner, so that Marcelo can experience a 'normal environment'. Dispatched to work in the post room with the enigmatic Jasmine, Marcelo must get to grips with 'real people', which means shaking their hands, looking them in the eye, and making small talk. But being in the 'real world' also means first encounters with anger, jealousy, lust, lies and treachery. Before long, Marcelo is grappling with some fiendish moral choices and the butterfly stirrings of first love.

Francisco Stork certainly gives the reader a vivid sense of the minefield that even the most ordinary human interaction presents for those on the autism spectrum. What this novel tackles particularly well are the spiky subjects of sex and young love, confronting them head on to show how

excruciatingly difficult they are to fathom for those who find the emotions of others hard to decipher. Occasionally I found that Marcelo's very particular voice failed to ring quite true. And the meditations on life and God from the female rabbi in whom he confides pour out rather too glibly, particularly towards the end. But in the main, this is a convincing and enjoyable novel, which enables us to compare those who walk on eggshells, with those who speak their minds. **CS**

### Strings Attached

★★★★★

Judy Blundell, Scholastic, 356pp, 978 1 4071 2392 9, £7.99 pbk

Blundell has already received acclaim for her debut novel *What I Saw and How I Lied* and *Strings Attached* continues in the same confident, accomplished vein.

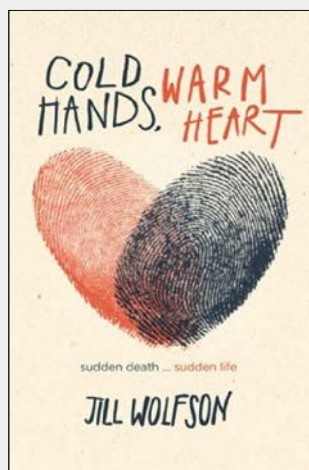
Kit Corrigan's dream is to be a dancer in a Broadway musical: her reality is a chaotic home life in Providence with an inadequate father, her brother Jamie, her sister Muddie and a stormy relationship with the love of her life, the volatile Billy, son of the Mafia boss, Nate Benedict. When escalating tensions drive away Aunt Della, who represents the family's only emotional and financial stability and Jamie and Billy enlist in the Army, Kit decides to leave for New York. Here she accepts a part in a show with no future, subsists in frightful lodgings and finally accepts Nate's help in solving both these problems, believing this will help her to secure a future for herself and Billy.

When Nate begins to call in favours which will support his criminal activities Kit feels unable to refuse and is drawn into a world of violence, deceit and broken promises. Blundell layers on the tension as the narrative winds to its tragically violent denouement, holding the reader firmly in a web of intrigue which is torn away piece by ragged piece to reveal a series of shocking truths.

This is a long complex book, richly peopled and threaded through with shattered dreams but there is an eventual reward for Kit in the shape of freedom from the moral contamination into which she was drawn both by Nate Benedict and by her own desires. **VR**

14+ **Secondary/Adult** continued**Cold Hands, Warm Heart**

★★★★

Jill Wolfson, Walker, 256 pp,  
978 1 4063 2451 6, £6.99

Amanda Schecter is a young American gymnast. Much to the annoyance of those who compete with her, every routine she tackles turns out perfectly – until one day, for no apparent reason, she stumbles and falls from the high beam. This mistake costs Amanda her life, though significantly, the reader is not told the exact cause of death. After a period of grieving, her bereaved parents decide to donate her organs for transplantation. The rest of this provocative novel tells the tale of the organ recipients.

Dani is fifteen years old. Born with a displaced heart, she has not led a normal life and by now is almost unable to leave her bed. Wendy is six. She needs a new kidney. Sixteen year-old Milo is awaiting his second liver transplant.

The essence of this book is the psychological introspection of those involved in the transplant process. Amanda's surviving brother, Tyler, must learn to engage with his late sister in an entirely new way. The narrative also includes the spiritual relationships established between the recipients and the deceased donor. Amanda's parents do not acquiesce to the donation without a sense of shock and resentment.

Survivor guilt haunts the recipients, not least Milo. He has already received one donated liver, sourced from a father of two who died in a road traffic accident. Wanting to remain a typical teenager, Milo drank alcohol and neglected his medication. Predictably the implanted liver failed. Does he really deserve another chance? Dani, violating protocol, discovers the identity of her donor. Does she deserve an organ harvested from someone as accomplished as Amanda?

The moral terrain embraced by this novel is immense, embracing the transience of human life, illness and

death, guilt, fairness and randomness and varying manifestations of grief. Despite these apparently sombre themes, reading this book is a surprisingly uplifting experience. 'No man is an Island entire of it self...' **RB**

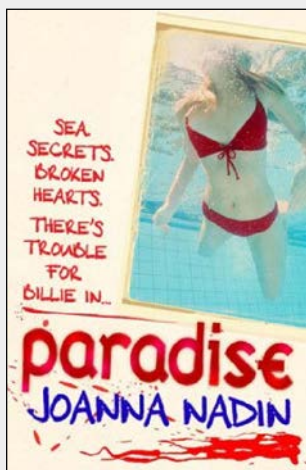
**Paradise**

★★★★

Joanna Nadin, Walker, 272pp,  
978 1 4063 2474 7, £6.99 pbk

Hard-up sixteen-year-old Billie is in for a shock. Well, many shocks as it turns out. But it begins with a key. When a grandmother she's never known leaves Billie her seaside house in her will, Billie's family see it as their golden opportunity to escape from their difficult city life.

You can't leave all your problems behind, however. As Billie's mum becomes gripped by depression, Billie has to deal with the pressure of being responsible for her mum and little brother and working in an old people's home, while trying to create some sort of a life for herself, in particular with a local boy Danny. Threads from the past are also coming into their lives – tantalising mysteries and memories crowd the house that was Billie's mum's childhood home. But the present and past can collide in unexpected and devastating ways; Billie must put together the pieces to discover her father's identity and the truth about the past that her mother refuses to face if her family are going to have any hope of a real future.



Billie's tale is beautifully layered with that of her mother and grandmother, the three lives weaving seamlessly together to show how our lives are never wholly our own – we are all part of someone else's story. This novel is full of big issues (pregnancy, parental pressure, abuse and affairs to name a few) but they have real impact and are not just as a misery-hook for readers; the romance is sweet, not sickly; even the setting of the off-season seaside perfectly captures the tone of the book. Like its characters, this novel is not perfect, but is completely compelling,

thoughtful and emotionally beguiling; a first-class novel which proves Joanna Nadin to be one of the best teen writers around. **MH**

**Belle's Song**

★★★★

K M Grant, Quercus, 272pp,  
978 1 84916 408 5, £6.99 pbk

Belle, a 'life-in-the-head' dreamer, obsessed by things coming in threes, has inadvertently caused her widowed bell-founder father to lose the use of his legs. She determines upon joining a pilgrimage to Canterbury, along with Master Chaucer himself, in the hope that her prayers will be answered and her father will, by some miracle, walk again. Each chapter is headed with apposite quotes from **The Canterbury Tales** and I had expected to hear the Tales themselves evolve on the journey. However, though some of Chaucer's characters reveal themselves, the story takes a series of rather different turns.

It's a pacy, sometimes racy, tale of love (with differences of class and same-sex relationships sensitively addressed) and intrigue as well as miracles, and the character of Belle is attractive and engaging. Historical detail is lightly added and London and the journey to Canterbury are well depicted. A very enjoyable read. **AG**

**Pretty Twisted**

★★★★

Macmillan, Gina Blaxill, Macmillan,  
288pp, 978 0 3305 3327 0, £6.99 pbk

There are two inter-connected plots here told alternately by two narrators and then there's a third story of a missing girl. But the lasting impression of this novel is of the characters themselves. It is a piece very much driven by teen angst and insecurity relayed in a very convincing, lively manner by this first time author.

Jonathan is a geeky, needy teen who has somehow become the boyfriend of a free spirited, high maintenance music prodigy, Freya. Then there's the chronically insecure Ros, whom he met on line and who is totally smitten by her cyber buddy. When Freya goes missing both Jonno and Ros get entangled in a desperate search, which involves pressure and stress all round and a good many lies...

Well worth promoting and likely to be slow-burn, popular in a bit of a Chick-Flick way. **DB**

**Shift**

★★★★

Jeri Smith-Ready, Simon & Schuster,  
384pp, 978 0 8570 7186 6, £6.99 pbk

This is the continuation of the story which began with **Shade**. Aura is mourning for her boyfriend, Logan, a charismatic up-and-coming rock star who died from a combination of drugs and alcohol. He is now a ghost, a ghost who has become a shade and as such is deemed a danger to society. As Aura struggles to come to terms with

Logan's transformation, she finds herself increasingly drawn towards her all too human friend Zachary – but Logan needs her and her particular talents to help him pass on. Sixteen years ago the world experienced a shift. It occurred at the time of the winter solstice. Those born after it found they could see ghosts; those born before could not. Aura is the first to be born immediately after the Shift; Zachary, the last to be born before. Is this coincidence or do they have a special significance and role?

Move over vampires; make room for ghosts and shades. In this latest development in the 'paranormal romance', Smith-Ready provides her readers with a rich narrative. At its heart is the classic teen romantic triangle set against a high school background with all its preoccupations – good grades, the end of term prom, friendships, jealousies and making out with your boyfriend; a world readily recognisable from innumerable teen TV series, further strengthened by the dialogue which is peppered with contemporary references – films, groups, music, sport and slang. The twist to this conventional scenario is that one of the protagonists is a ghost. Which boy will Aura choose – and will Logan 'pass on'? This plot is then combined with others, eg the mystery of Aura's birth. Who is her father? Aura is desperate to find out but her mother died without revealing his identity. Then there is the connection between Aura and Zachary. Do they have something to do with the Shift? How can they find out? And how can they escape the attention of the DMP who want to lock Logan up? It is this thriller element that makes **Shift** a more compelling read than the usual teen romance. Despite the over-heated prose and plot lines, it is curiously addictive. The reader will want to know what happens next. **FH**

**Swim the Fly**

★★★★

Don Calame, Templar, 384pp,  
978 1 84877 453 7, £6.99 pbk

Matt, Sean and Cooper (Coop), 15-year-old American boys, each year set themselves a goal to be achieved before their summer holidays end. Earlier years have seen them happy to limit themselves to fairly innocuous aspirations but, as Matt, the novel's narrator expresses it, 'Over the past few years, the goals have become more centred around girls and sex.' More specifically, this year their ambition, originating with Cooper, is to see 'a real, live naked girl'. The trio's progress as they proceed on their voyage of discovery provides the subject matter for Calame's novel, described in a 'Parental Advisory' panel on its back cover as containing 'strong language, explosive laxative use and (Coop hopes) female nudity'. Well, the language is certainly 'strong', particularly in its numerous sexual references, though it is extremely unlikely that – a few specifically American idioms apart – there is anything here that will be unfamiliar to most of today's teenage readers. As for the 'explosive laxative use': this is a pointer to one of the novel's key



# reviews

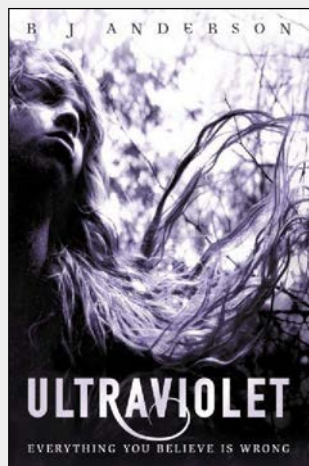
moments of embarrassment (for reader and protagonist alike) in which an unfortunate mix-up involving a laxative and a protein powder preparation results ultimately, for the hapless Matt, in 'a rumbling thunderclap in my boxer briefs followed immediately by full deployment'. There will, beyond argument, be readers who find all of this hilarious – but there is much more besides, including some brilliantly sketched minor characters and, very touchingly in places, several reminders of just how lonely, frustrating and insecure young male adolescence can be. **RD**

## Ultraviolet

★★★★

RJ Anderson, Orchard, 416 pp,  
978 1 4083 1275 9, £6.99

Alison Marie Jeffries is a sixteen-year-old who has recently been sent to Pine Hills, a psychiatric unit for young offenders. It transpires that she has murdered a fellow-pupil, a popular girl named Tori Beaugrand. Her version of affairs is that while she and Tori were fighting, Tori disintegrated. No trace of her body has been found.



Most of the narrative following Alison's incarceration is devoted to a detailed and minutely researched account of her treatment, with an authoritative listing of her medications and their effects. In the unit Alison discovers that for her whole life she has been a synesthete, she sees letters, words and emotions as colours. She can also tell by the taste of the words uttered if someone is lying to her – a valuable skill. Alison, however, is frightened by these unusual abilities and for this reason is less than forthcoming about them to her psychiatrist, Dr Konrad Minta.

A researcher named Dr Sebastian Faraday arrives at the unit to start a study of unusual skills. Alison decides to join the project, partly because she is bored and partly because Faraday's voice tastes of chocolate. He is the one who explains to her how synesthesia manifests itself. Faraday and Alison form a close emotional bond, until a young patient who is himself interested in Alison reveals Faraday as a fraud, causing him to be dismissed from the

unit. The real truth about Faraday is not at this stage revealed.

At this point the narrative takes off in directions reminiscent of the X Files, accounting inter alia for the strange disappearance of Tori Beaugrand. In the mind of the reader the question of course arises: are these realities or just fantasies in the minds of Alison or Faraday or both?

Anderson has attempted to combine two very different textual components. The account of life in the psychiatric unit, narrated from Alison's point of view, is painful and utterly convincing. In this respect Anderson has certainly done her homework. In the opinion of this reviewer the transition to fantasy is far less effectively managed. There is a jarring and unconvincing change of pace and intent. At the very end of the book comes an invitation from Alison to the reader, who is at liberty to believe or disbelieve any and every part of the story. The critical question is whether this invitation to skepticism is enough to justify a somewhat brutal narrative discontinuity, the operation that makes one book out of two disparate halves. **RB**

## Unearthly

★★★

Cynthia Hand, Egmont, 448pp,  
978 1 4052 5964 4, £6.99 pbk

Clara is part angel. As such, she will have a purpose. And hers seems to be connected to the terrifying visions of a forest fire and a beautiful unknown boy she has been experiencing. Meeting Christian, he is everything a girl could dream of – but then there is Tucker. How can she feel so attracted to him? What is her real purpose?

In this variation of the paranormal romance, it is not vampires who take the stage, but angels. Or rather Nephilim – angels who are part human and are dedicated to 'good'. However, to ensure that there is tension, there are bad angels – Black Wings. Despite this background, *Unearthly* follows the pattern of the conventional teen romance in which the heroine finds herself having to choose between two equally desirable – but different – boys. As usual, one parent is missing – here the father – and there is a mystery surrounding his identity. Friendships, high school rivalries and jealousies – all are familiar ingredients and will be recognised by the intended audience. Perhaps, because this is the first novel in the now mandatory trilogy, it felt rather slow. It is very much setting the scene with the inevitable loose ends and the reader is left with the obligatory cliff-hanger. The stage is set for the next instalment. Young adult readers will certainly relate to the setting and the characters, while the angelic elements will intrigue. **FH**

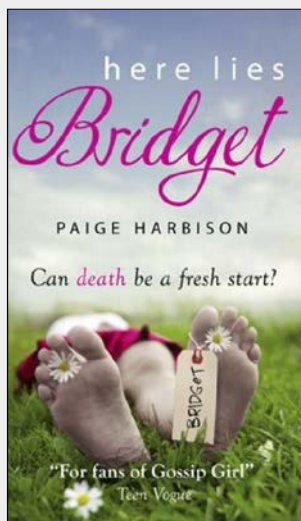
## Here Lies Bridget

★★★★

Paige Harbison, Mira Ink, 464pp,  
978-0778304999, £6.99 pbk

Bridget reigns over her high school like an ice queen. Teachers, geeks, even so-called friends are treated with near

equal contempt and with such a brazen manner your jaw aches with being dropped. Backstabbing and self-serving antics are as natural to her as parties and Prada, but crises are beginning to build as the result of Bridget's way of life. Expulsion begins to look likely. A new girl edges in on her popularity. As Bridget tries to escape a tricky situation, she ends up in a car crash. Instead of dying, she wakes up in a strange boardroom, facing the five people whose lives she's made an utter misery. And it sounds like they will decide if she lives or dies.



To trigger an epiphany, Bridget is made to literally walk in their shoes as events related earlier in the book by Bridget are revisited from these characters' points of view, now seeing their hidden actions and experiencing their full range of emotions that she knew nothing, and cared nothing, about.

It's a nifty concept of a teen queen Scrooge getting a wake-up call, and while there's no doubt seeing things so literally from another person's point of view would life-altering, Bridget's inevitable change of behaviour feels a bit easy, and too clean. While there are glimpses of the motivations and emotions in the making of such a shallow character, they lack a real emotional punch. The story is competently related though, if a bit by the numbers, and Paige Harbison is so empathetic with teen fears and priorities that many readers will enjoy just going with its flow.

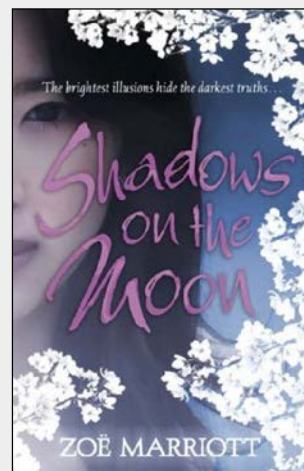
Where this book shines is in its depiction of Bridget's shallowness. It moves beyond cliché and resists glamourising Bridget as a sassy princess, but clearly shows she is a bully who is doing real damage to the people around her as well as limiting her own life with her selfishness. While teens might buy into this book to enjoy the *Gossip Girl* factor, there's a good chance they will come away thinking more deeply about such behaviour: you might thrill at the audacity of such characters, but it's a good reminder that they are not something to aspire to. **MH**

## Shadows on the Moon

★★★★★

Zoë Marriott, Walker, 464pp,  
978 1 4063 1815 9, £6.99 pbk

From its jacket, this novel appears to be yet another soppy story about blighted love in a soft-focus, supernatural setting. The reality is anything but. Marriott writes with limpid grace, cleverly transforming the Cinderella story by setting it in ancient Japan. When her father is shockingly murdered at the request of her shortly to be step-father, fourteen-year-old Suzume can only escape the same fate by calling on her powers of shadow weaving, enabling her to escape detection by making others see her differently. But she still blames herself for yet more of the disasters still to befall her, cutting herself savagely to find some mental release. Fortunately there are others able to persuade her against this course, although some readers may question such graphic descriptions of self-harming followed by what the heroine, at any rate, experiences as total relief. Ultimately after many more adventures Suzume does get to go to the ball. But even this is not what it seems, with Marriott showing real powers of invention in this unusual and very involving story. **NT**



## In the November issue of Books for Keeps:

Julia Eccleshare interviews Maggie Stiefvater for the Authorgraph, Robert Ingpen provides our Windows into Illustration and editor Rosemary Stones selects the best books for Christmas.

# Classics in Short

## No.89 Brian Alderson

### From pleasant meadow almost to the knacker's yard – his own story...Black Beauty

*'Come Ann,' said Mamma,*

'let us take a walk in the green fields; the sun will soon set, but the air is now fresh and warm...' And thus they do, day by day over some sixty-four pages, with Mamma discoursing equably on the scenes about them or on such exotica as whales, sharks, and ostriches. And at the start of the sixth story they go to see a horse, newly bought by Ann's aunt: 'See how still he stands in the stall to eat his corn and hay; while James, the boy-groom, rubs him down, and combs out his mane and tail' for it is needful for his owner to see 'that he is well fed and kept nice and clean; and it is a sad thing when men or boys vex or hurt him...'



*If that visit did take place,*

what a harbinger it proved. For in these **Walks with Mamma; or stories in words of one syllable**, Mamma is none other than Mrs Mary Sewell who, in one of her family's several financial crises, had sent off the manuscript to Mr John Harris at his shop at the top of Ludgate Hill, and he had kindly bought it from her for three pounds ('a little fortune to me then,' she said) and published it in 1824. Little Ann, or Anna, or, later, Nannie would have been about four-years-old at the time, walking the semi-rural highways round Dalston, north of the City of London, after having been carried thither from her birthplace at Great Yarmouth.

*Such trailings about,*

always with wolves never too far from the door, were a feature of the Sewells' life, although they were a close-knit family, abiding by the humanitarian ideals of an inherited Quakerism. Both Anna and her brother Philip sound to have been bright children, despite the eccentricities of English education in the 1820s (Philip would eventually become a civil engineer with a pronounced social conscience), but it was during Anna's brief spell of schooling in her early teens that the calamity of her life occurred. Running home one wet afternoon, she slipped and fell, so

damaging her ankles that, what with incompetent medical treatment, and perhaps an incipient tubercular disposition, she was to become a lifelong invalid.

*Her disability*

did not quell her spirits however. Family removals continued – she even spent some time at a spa in Germany – and with walking now always a difficulty she undertook carriage-driving (partly from the need for someone regularly to take her father to Shoreditch station) and this was to develop not only her instinctive understanding of, and care for, horses (dating back perhaps to the visit to the stable with Mamma?) but also her awareness of the widespread abuse to which they were subjected.

*Black Beauty*

was to stem from that experience. Anna and Mamma had always been more like loving sisters than mother and child and throughout much of her adulthood Anna was to act as 'critic and counsellor' in the editing of Mary Sewell's poetic effusions. As products though of 'a writing life' they could not help but accustom Anna to the paramountcy of print in everyday communication and it was to print that she thought to turn in what amounted to a campaigning novel on behalf of horses.

*A central impulse*

was her hatred of 'the bearing rein', a fashionable but cruel device designed to keep horses' heads proudly in the air despite the damage it caused to their muscular system. She did not make the assault direct however, but chose first to cast her critique in the form of a novel and second – a brilliant inspiration – to make it indeed a tale from the horse's mouth: 'the autobiography of a horse, translated from the original equine'.

*The presumed author*

goes about his purpose with great skill. His life as a colt is told in near-idyllic terms, the breaking-in and early training being accomplished under caring and knowledgeable folk in comfortable, rural circumstances. But even for readers who know his story well a certain frisson is inescapable from the start. This cannot be a picaresque tale whose hero may willy-nilly come through his adventures triumphant, but rather an account of one who is at all stages at the mercy of decisions beyond his control. There are premonitions of an uncaring world out there. A horse, eventually known to be Black Beauty's brother, is killed with his rider while hunting 'all for one little hare'. A stablemate, Ginger, tells of hard times that he endured before his present berth. Discussions occur in the field over tail-docking, and the foolish use of blinkers, and, inevitably, the torment of the bearing rein.

*Forewarnings all,*

these prepare both Black Beauty and the reader for the descent into the abyss as human circumstances direct the lives of horses, with Black Beauty making it plain that almost perpetually the horse (still a major element in the conduct of life at this time) is disregarded as a sentient being but is just a piece of property to be worked for whatever benefits its masters may gain from it and then to be cast aside. The bearing rein proves to be only one example of the trials to which working-horses may be subject and as Black Beauty is brought down through no fault of his own from carriage-horse to job-horse, to cab-horse his autobiography becomes a record of human weakness and, over much of its final third, of the horrors endured among the London cabbies. The suffering and death of his old friend Ginger, encountered among the cab-ranks, is the emotional heart of the book: 'Oh!' says Black Beauty, 'if men were more merciful, they would shoot us before we come to such misery.'

*As an inexperienced writer,*

Black Beauty found for himself an almost ideal way to tell his story, casting it in no fewer than forty-nine chapters, but each well-judged in the way he both recounts each incident, and uses each to move the narrative on. His translator has given him a most winning voice, while her incursion direct into the horse's imagined consciousness brings a verisimilitude to all the varied crises thrust upon him and overlays them with a moving recognition of the beast's almost selfless endurance of his lot. We know that he must survive ill-treatment and indignity for, after all, it is he who is telling the story, and the manner in which he tells of that survival makes for a perfect adagio conclusion.

*Anna Sewell*

laboured for some six years at her 'translation' through bouts of illness in which she dictated episodes to her mother or pencilled them on to scraps of paper for Mamma to transcribe. The finished manuscript went to Mary's main publisher, Messrs Jarrolds of Norwich and London, who, in the manner of John Harris and **Walks with Mamma**, bought it outright for forty pounds. It was published in November 1877 to an acclaim which eventually carried it round the world – much, presumably, to the satisfaction of the company. Anna knew little of either its success or of the indignity perpetrated on her by the mercenary Jarrolds, for five months after **Black Beauty** entered the world his creator was dead.

**Black Beauty** is published by Puffin Classics (978 0 1413 2103 5, £7.99 pbk). The illustrations by Pauline Baynes are taken from the 1954 edition, now OP.

**Brian Alderson** is founder of the Children's Books History Society and a former Children's Books Editor for **The Times**.

