

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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the children's book magazine

Fastseller Lists • Julia Jarman • Book Aid

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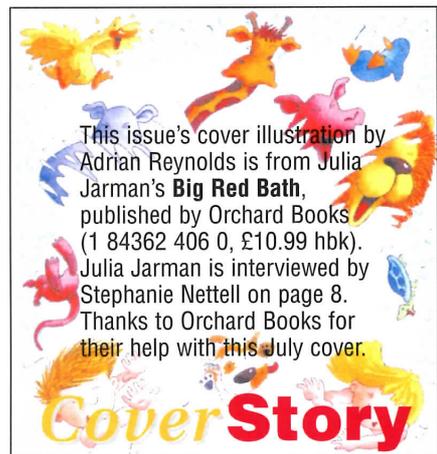
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This issue's cover illustration by Adrian Reynolds is from Julia Jarman's **Big Red Bath**, published by Orchard Books (1 84362 406 0, £10.99 hbk). Julia Jarman is interviewed by Stephanie Nettell on page 8. Thanks to Orchard Books for their help with this July cover.

Cover Story

EDITORIAL



Rosemary Stones

This issue of BfK focuses on why some children's titles in our crowded market become top sellers. Caroline Horn and Alex Hamilton examine the factors that appear to enable some books to surge ahead of the pack and achieve substantial sales.

Using such unscientific data as our own 'Good Reads' column in which young readers review books of their choice, I am always fascinated to see how up to date their choices can be – often the latest titles from such contemporary writers as Philip Pullman, Eoin Colfer, Malorie Blackman, Jacqueline Wilson, Mark Haddon, Lemony Snicket et al. Perhaps the teachers and librarians keen enough to want the young people they work with to have their writing published in BfK will, by definition, be on the ball. Or is it that these days, thanks to the opportunities afforded by the internet (author sites, the Carnegie/Greenaway shadowing scheme etc), young readers are also more easily able to inform themselves?

In our multimedia age, there are multimedia opportunities for the promotion of children's books and, from the plethora of titles published, one way or another a new form of 'the canon' – a core of titles widely known and discussed – is being born. Only this time it's often generated by huge advances (Eoin Colfer, eg, received a six figure sum for *Artemis Fowl*, his first

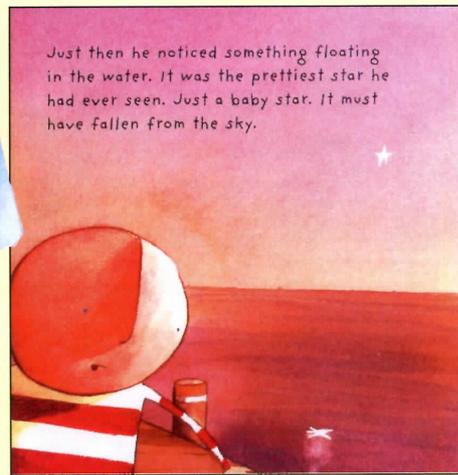
book for Puffin) and promotional spends rather than by word of mouth or critical acclaim. As Caroline Horn says of the now bestselling Colfer, 'backing winners to the hilt produced results'.

But can the climate of hype distort judgements? The air of desperation that can attend promotional campaigns for titles that turn out to be routine or mediocre suggests that it is sometimes hard for an editor not to get carried away at auction time. While children's book reviewers never did break or make literary reputations in the way their adult counterparts did in the days before multimedia, my hope is that they can maintain the necessary distance from the hype to continue to sort, impartially, the wheat from the chaff.

Rosemary



Above: 'That's why he has such great big... feet!' from **Charlie Chick**, Editor's Choice with five stars reviewed on page 18.
Right: From **How to Catch a Star**, New Talent – also with five stars – reviewed on page 19.



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Chart Toppers

In 2003 Nestlé's bought 4.5million Puffin paperbacks to give away in Cheerio cereal packets. Presumably the children, spotting them through the cute window in the packet, read rather than ate them, and found them tasty. Mothers were delighted to find, instead of a tawdry plastic item, something that would, in Dr Johnson's phrase, stretch and stimulate their little minds.

That Potterish total, divided evenly among six such titles as **Ten in a Bed**, and **Attack of the Tentacled Terror**, would place them high on any chart. But I've ruled out promos – despite the power of cereals. Henryk Wesolowski of Walker Books remembers, while at Kingfisher, being approached by Weetabix. 'They had a promo with Dahl and he'd recently died, and asked us to fill in. They took the I Wonder Why series, quite collectable, and put them on the back. We sold them 1.19 million copies. At Walker we did **Where's Wally?** with spaghetti. You'd have some tins, and in one was Wally working as a voucher. Sold about 20,000. The good thing is that they never come back.' With no booksellers to return unsold stock, no wonder publishers like promotions such as these.

Books charts: an inexact science

Book charts are never flexible enough to give everything a fair shake. Publishers may use these as sales tools, as with all bestseller lists, but they're not meant to be competitive. My **2003 Bestsellers Chart** lists home sales for 2003, all formats, ages and original dates welcomed; the big numbers of the **All Time Greats Bestsellers Chart** include a sampling of evergreens for 'lifetime' sales, though some had previous lives with different publishers, or their figures are lost in antique archives. Computers, alas, have no folk memory. Furthermore, one title in different guises may collect many ISBNs. These charts, showing publishers' figures, are not about Stage 3, SATS or study aids, nor encyclopaedias (Usborne have seven info and puzzle works each selling more than a million since 1991), nor bibles (Parragon have done 831,500 of **My First Bible**) or babies' prayer books. They're general books, mostly fiction, sold in schools and to libraries and through book clubs, possibly a hundred independent children's bookshops, along with supermarkets and the trade in the high street. (Nearly half this maze of distribution is not covered by the Nielsen Bookscan system that posts its bestseller lists in magazines and newspapers.)

Defining by age group or genre?

In a chart, defining children's books by age group is more important than the adult classification by genre. It begins in the pram with Buggie Buddies and Fairy Phones, novelties with widgety bits of the kind produced by Campbell Books, through board books, flats and pop-ups for school, short stories that ease into 'chapter books', and longer novels for pre-teen, before flowing into the estuary of 12 and up, teenage and 'crossover'. Altogether these cover 10,000 titles a year (a rise last year of 2,000) in a total UK book-production of 125,000.

Nevertheless there are genres. They come, they go. Series that sold in millions, like Fighting Fantasies or Dungeons and Dragons, were inspired by electronic games and eventually overwhelmed by them. Among the most popular books there's always a seesaw between reality partnered by humour, and fantasy partnered by horror. Just now fantasy is riding high. Witchcraft has cast a glamour on the scene. Children's publishers, whom Peter de Vries once described in a novel as 'the furry people', are brisk and bushy-tailed. Tolkien

What drives children's book sales? Is it genre? Fan base? High street bookshop promotions? Children's word of mouth? Literary prizes? **Alex Hamilton** provides the ultimate in children's bestseller charts, both for titles published in 2003 and for all time greats, and dissects the possible reasons for their success.

is virtually a posthumous business on his own. J K Rowling is a billionaire (albeit a lowly one) with a turnover like a small nation (albeit third world). You can buy broomsticks in the Rowling district of Hamley's toyshop. Philip Pullman goes tête-à-tête with the Archbishop of Canterbury. HarperCollins' reissue of the Chrestomanci series by Diana Wynne Jones, the influence most often cited by young witchcraft writers, has sold 742,000 copies. Add G P Taylor's fastselling **The Shadowmancer**, full of sound and fury. There should be an annual award, the Broomsticks perhaps.

What drives sales?

What drives children's book sales? In a literary agency, it's finding they're not all low-income; in a publishing house, the editor feeling she's not alone, that her colleagues are on board; at the London and Bologna Book Fairs, the illustrations. Children's books over a century have saved the art of literary illustration. For a colossal picture book bestseller, the perfect marriage between author and illustrator is made in the art director's office.

In a school, it's the authors, especially Stakhanovites such as Jacqueline Wilson, and others who in return for a coffee doggedly build up their fan-base school by school (there are 25,000 junior schools). 'The writers were always poorly paid,' says Puffin's Elaine McQuade, 'and the majority still are.' In addition to bookselling services

like Askews and the specialist Peters, and school suppliers like Hope Education or Books for Students, Scholastic, originally a US schools bookselling operation, provides 'book fair' weeks in schools, where children buy at a discount, with teachers collecting and despatching the money. School book clubs are likewise cost-effective, with publishers filling a hundred orders in one box. Every publisher dreams of selling direct in schools, but trying to administer 25,000 small accounts would be a nightmare. Send in debt collectors to defaulters? Unthinkable.

'The best writers in the universe'

Directors of children's publishing – such as Philippa Dickinson of Random House, Sally Gritten of HarperCollins, Kate Wilson of Macmillan and Elaine McQuade – believe that many teachers also need introducing to children's books, and with the Arts Council on side, lobby the Department for Education and Skills for teacher training to add a course on children's literature to the existing one on literacy. Given that children's publishing embraces, in Dickinson's words, 'the best writers in the universe', that shouldn't be a hardship.

David Fickling, with his own imprint under the Random House umbrella, rather blames the educational system, 'the increased speed, the level of activity needed to report back about, which takes away from the teaching... and the quite terrible loop between educational publishers, government and teachers, making a huge mound of books that are a great enemy to anybody liking a book at all.' He has a tantrum: 'I've almost become a terrorist, blowing up educational warehouses full of endless project books, and books that have had every last drop of imagination and excitement squeezed out of them. Having a school ethos has become more important than children being happy. I feel that in two hundred years' time people will look back and think that the way we teach now is very like the slate and dunce's cap. Pope had it right when he said "I got the language by reading the stories."'

In the high street, promotional support comes with the retailer

feeling he's ahead of the game and backed by publishing money. Sally Gritten outlines a common view: 'The chains are doing better; I think they have a long way to go. The Waterstones, Smiths and so on are committed, but they try to fit the selling of children's books into the adult model. It actually should be turned on its head. They do the usual promotional things, 3-for-2, book-of-the-month and all that, to get children's books up front. For people who go into bookshops these are effective techniques. Unfortunately most people don't go into bookshops. It's still a very fragmented market. Wonderful books, that nobody outside the children's world would even know about, sell in huge numbers. That comes down primarily to librarians and grass roots movements. There's not enough advertising or marketing spend to break through the clutter. The best thing that sells children's books is children. No question.'

Catching the headlines

For a headline launch, invent a stunt creating maximum hysteria among children and inconvenience for parents, deadline it

nationwide for midnight. Be ready, like Jacqueline Wilson in Bournemouth, to sign 3,000 copies in an 8-hour day. (Really? Six a minute? Practise!) A loaded title helps: Walker's **Guess How Much I Love You** is boosted by Valentine's Day, while Puffin's **The Snowman** sells like warm underwear every winter.

For the media, big awards are sexy, such as the overall Whitbread, or news of a large advance (£150,000 is high, but occasionally there's more for a three-book contract – hence, perhaps, the spate of trilogies and chronicles doing well: Lemony Snicket's 'Unfortunate Events', Eoin Colfer's 'Artemis Fowl', Pullman's 'His Dark Materials', Crossley-Holland's 'Arthur', and diTerlizzi's 'Spiderwick'). Then there's the good 'back story', such as the precocity and looks of home-educated American Christopher Paulini, who began at 15, and at 19 has a trilogy fantasy contract and a million American sale of his boy-and-dragon fantasy, **Eragon**. Here, since January, it's reached 80,000 hardcover. Young genius stories don't always work: when French publishers extolled eight-

Bestsellers Chart 2003

Pos	Title	Author	Imprint	Age	Format	Date	UK Sale	Notes
1	Harry Potter & Order of the Phoenix	J K Rowling	Bloomsbury	9 plus	Hbk	June 2003	2,987,194	Harry Potter I-IV total in 2003: 1,424,506
2	Northern Lights	Philip Pullman	Scholastic	12 plus	Pbk	Oct 1994	343,002	Guardian Award
3	The Lion King	Disney	Disney	5-7	Mini Hb	May 2003	291,267	
4	The Subtle Knife	Philip Pullman	Scholastic	12 plus	Pbk	Oct 1998	279,607	
5	The Amber Spyglass	Philip Pullman	Scholastic	12 plus	Pbk	Sept 2001	270,963	Whitbread winner
6	Finding Nemo: Book of the Film	Disney	Disney	5-7	Mini Hb	Sept 2003	265,986	Plus 479,023 in 7 other Nemo titles in 2003
7	So You Think You Know Harry Potter	Clive Gifford	Hodder	8 plus	Pbk	June 2002	258,769	You know C. Gifford? Does lots of quiz books
8	Jungle Book 2: Book of the Film	Audrey Daly	Disney	5-7	Mini Hb	Apr 2003	254,287	
9	The Shadowmancer	G P Taylor	Faber	11 plus	Pbk	June 2003	239,501	Lunatic evil cleric plots to rule the world
10	Secrets	Jacqueline Wilson	Corgi	9-11	Pbk	Mar 2003	209,735	
11	Midnight	Jacqueline Wilson	Doubleday	9-11	Hbk	Oct 2003	197,555	Author extra famous for 8-hour signing exploit
12	Mr Christmas	Roger Hargreaves	Egmont	3 plus	Pbk	Aug 2003	192,835	Top 10 Mr Men total in 2003: 544,673
13	Eagle Strike (Alex Rider 4)	Anthony Horowitz	Walker	8 plus	Pbk	Apr 2003	186,260	Latest in light Bond-for-kids type series
14	Maisy's Colours	Lucy Cousins	Walker	2-5	Pbk	Aug 1999	185,005	
15	An Eye for an Eye	Malorie Blackman	Corgi	12 plus	Pbk	Feb 2003	184,001	Written for World Book Day 2003
16	The Twits	Roald Dahl	Puffin	7 plus	Pbk	Apr 2001	178,018	Reissue
17	Duck's Day Out	Jez Alborough	HarperCollins	0-7	Pbk	Mar 2003	170,954	World Book Day
18	The Worry Website	Jacqueline Wilson	Corgi	9-11	Pbk	June 2003	170,787	Top 10 Wilson titles total in 2003: 1,205,604
19	Charlie & the Chocolate Factory	Roald Dahl	Puffin	8 plus	Pbk	Apr 2001	169,767	His second book, 1964, and best seller
20	The Wee Free Men	Terry Pratchett	Doubleday	12 plus	Hbk	May 2003	167,958	
21	The Gruffalo	Donaldson/Scheffler	Macmillan	3-5	Pb/Hbk	1999/2002	167,858	Originally World Book Day paperback
22	Artemis Fowl: The Eternity Code	Eoin Colfer	Puffin	10 plus	Hbk	May 2003	167,102	
23	Barbie Annual 2004	Mattel	Egmont	3 plus	Hbk	July 2003	163,439	Mattel: world's largest maker of women's gear
24	George's Marvellous Medicine	Roald Dahl	Puffin	7 plus	Pbk	Apr 2001	161,210	Top ten Dahl titles in 2003: 1,485,561
25	Rent-a-Genius	Gillian Cross	Puffin	7 plus	Pbk	June 2003	156,000	
26	The Carnivorous Carnival	Lemony Snicket	Egmont	8 plus	Hbk	Oct 2003	150,774	9 Unfortunate Events total in 2003: 819,571
27	The English Roses	Madonna	Puffin	6 plus	Pbk	Sept 2003	148,720	
28	Lyra's Oxford	Philip Pullman	David Fickling	12 plus	Hbk	Nov 2003	140,023	Lyra is protagonist of His Dark Materials
29	The Hostile Hospital	Lemony Snicket	Egmont	8 plus	Hbk	May 2003	137,373	Unfortunate Events title
30	Artemis Fowl: The Arctic Incident	Eoin Colfer	Puffin	10 plus	Pbk	Mar 2003	136,845	
31	The Last Polar Bears	Harry Horse	Puffin	9 plus	Pbk	Feb 2003	127,189	World Book Day
32	Three Little Pigs	Traditional	Ladybird	3-7	Mini Hb	Mar 1999	123,605	One of dozens of Ladybird traditional tales...
33	Goldilocks and the Three Bears	Traditional	Ladybird	3-7	Mini Hb	Mar 1999	118,599	... many selling in six figures
34	The Bad Beginning	Lemony Snicket	Egmont	8 plus	Hbk	June 2001	118,259	Unfortunate Events title
35	The Elves & the Shoemaker	Brothers Grimm	Ladybird	3-7	Mini Hb	Mar 1999	118,127	First appeared in Britain c 1823
36	First Readers: Lost and Found	Disney	Disney	3 plus	Mini Hb	Apr 2001	117,067	
37	The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle	Puffin	5 plus	Pbk	Sept 1994	115,885	First published 1970
38	The Tale of Peter Rabbit	Beatrix Potter	Warne	3-7	Hbk	Reissue 02	114,683	Forty B Potter titles total in 2003: 385,250
39	Invitation to the Ballet	Holabird/Craig	Puffin	4-7	Pic/Hb	Oct 2003	113,672	
40	Artemis Fowl	Eoin Colfer	Puffin	10 plus	Pbk	Mar 2002	109,164	
41	Princess Diaries: Give Me Five	Meg Cabot	Macmillan	12 plus	Tpbk	Oct 2003	107,091	
42	Princess Diaries	Meg Cabot	Macmillan	12 plus	Pbk	June 2001	104,746	
43	Princess Doll Dressing Up Book	Disney	Disney	3-5	Pbk	Feb 2003	91,098	
44	Horrid Henry's Underpants	Francesca Simon	Dolphin	7 plus	Pbk	Aug 2003	87,171	
45	Princess Diaries: Take Two	Meg Cabot	Macmillan	12 plus	Pbk	Sept 2001	85,462	Top five Princess titles total in 2003: 456,120
46	The Smartest Giant in Town	Donaldson/Scheffler	Macmillan	3-5	Pbk	Sept 2003	85,347	
47	Molly Moon's Incredible Hypnotism	Georgia Byng	Macmillan	8-12	Pbk	May 2003	84,365	
48	Mr Peabody's Apples	Madonna	Puffin	6 plus	Pic/Hb	Nov 2003	81,061	
49	Nicola and the Viscount	Meg Cabot	Macmillan	12 plus	Pbk	Jan 2003	79,679	
50	Stormbreaker (Alex Rider 2)	Anthony Horowitz	Walker	8 plus	Pbk	Oct 2000	78,237	
51	Room on the Broom	Donaldson/Scheffler	Macmillan	3-5	Pbk	Sept 2002	77,635	
52	My Secret Unicorn: A Special Friend	Linda Chapman	Puffin	7 plus	Pbk	June 2003	75,339	
53	Skeleton Key (Alex Rider 3)	Anthony Horowitz	Walker	8 plus	Pbk	July 2002	74,953	
54	Monkey Puzzle	Donaldson/Scheffler	Macmillan	3-5	Pbk	Aug 2000	74,880	
55	Fairy Phones: Daisy's Necklace	Louise Comfort	Campbell	0-3	BBk	Sept 2003	72,593	

All Time Greats Bestsellers Chart

Author	Title	Date	Imprint Today	Sales	Comment
Richard Adams	Watership Down	1972	Puffin	3,982,194	Carnegie Medal, Guardian Award 1973
Enid Blyton	21 Famous Five titles	1942	Hodder	5,072,608	Last ten years. Led by Fire on a Treasure Island, 405,544
Raymond Briggs	The Snowman	1975	Puffin	2,396,617	Excluding many spin-offs. Annual Christmas bestseller
Eric Carle	The Very Hungry Caterpillar	1970	Puffin	2,964,895	'The perfect stand-alone book', a hardy perennial
Lucy Cousins	Maisy: 40 titles	1991	Walker	19,266,253	Including export, 16,053,791
Lucy Daniels	Animal Ark: c 60 titles	1994	Hodder	7,380,534	Led by Kitten in the Kitchen 234,883. 'Lucy Daniels' is a team
Roald Dahl	29 titles	1964	Puffin	c 40,000,000	Allen & Unwin was Dahl's first publisher, as it was of Tolkien
Terry Deary	22 Horrible Histories titles	1993	Scholastic	6,351,513	Led by The Terrible Tudors, 559,493
Anne Frank	Diary of a Young Girl	1950	Puffin	797,858	Since 1997. First published posthumously, by Macmillan
Jostein Gaarder	Sophie's World	1995	Phoenix	c 1,500,000	Very crossover
Martin Handford	Where's Wally?: 5 titles	1989	Walker	42,223,312	Including export, 37,653,326
Roger Hargreaves (and son)	Mr Men: 43 titles	1971	Egmont	c 70,000,000	At £1.99, bought like peanuts in supermarkets
Anthony Horowitz	Alex Rider: 4 titles	2000	Walker	1,112,634	Including export, 166,999
Ted Hughes	The Iron Man	1968	Faber	1,260,000	Late Poet Laureate's 'Story in five nights', read to his children
Clive King	Stig of the Dump	1963	Puffin	1,426,816	Next book, 22 Letters, 'written specially for Puffin'
C S Lewis	The Lion, the Witch & the W...	1950	HarperCollins	3,613,002	Second of the Narnia series of seven books
Sam McBratney	Guess How Much I Love You	1996	Walker	15,927,380	Including export, 14,011,960
Michelle Magorian	Goodnight Mr Tom	1981	Puffin	1,110,000	Guardian award 1982
A A Milne	Winnie the Pooh	1926	Egmont	c 50,000,000	And a Poohsticks bridge is a tourist destination
Jill Murphy	The Worst Witch	1974	Puffin	3,216,914	Pre-Rowling witches' boarding school
Jan Ormerod	Peekaboo!	1997	Bodley Head	459,975	Classic baby lift-the-flap
Parragon	My Dolly Dressing: 13 titles	2001	Parragon	1,717,040	World sale. Name 'Parragon' based on founder Guy Parr
Parragon	I Can Draw: 17 titles	2000	Parragon	1,522,092	World sale. Parragon books are created in-house
Terry Pratchett	9 children's titles	1988	Corgi	3,400,000	Led by Truckers, 446,604. Adult books, 20,500,000
Philip Pullman	Northern Lights	1995	Scholastic	1,303,341	Guardian Award 1996
Philip Pullman	The Subtle Knife	1997	Scholastic	1,050,603	Second in His Dark Materials trilogy
Philip Pullman	The Amber Spyglass	2000	Scholastic	916,976	Trilogy concluded, but it's not over yet. Whitbread Award
Arthur Ransome	Swallows and Amazons	1930	Random House	644,000	Sales from 1993. Ransome left Guardian staff to write this
Rosen/Oxenbury	We're Going on a Bear Hunt	1991	Walker	2,861,724	Including export, 1,911,470
J K Rowling	Harry Potter I-V	1997	Bloomsbury	18,775,427	... and counting. Scholastic US in print: 97,000,000
Francesca Simon	Horrid Henry series	1995	Dolphin	c 1,600,000	Beastly child, bit like William. 620,000 sold in 2003
Lemony Snicket	Unfortunate Events: 10 titles	1999	Egmont	c 2,000,000	Prolific young American author of bouncing comedies
R L Stine	Goosebumps: 100 plus titles	1992	Scholastic	c 260,000,000	Worldwide. Source: Guinness Book of Records
J R R Tolkien	The Hobbit	1937	HarperCollins	844,433	Sales in the last ten years
Jacqueline Wilson	All titles	1993	Corgi	c 15,000,000	Led by Double Act, 620,088

year-old poet Minou Drouet as a 'child of genius' Jean Cocteau retorted, 'All children have genius, except Minou Drouet.' Are you there, Madame? You can come out now.

The Potter factor?

Does all this – five children's authors in the top ten library borrowings, Big Read hype, enviable prizes – owe everything to the awareness created by the Potter craze? Some feel it has lifted fiction, if nothing else. Kate Wilson has reservations: 'Interesting question, whether individual success does translate to other people. Book Marketing's figures suggest that if you strip Potter's figures out, you're not actually looking at something different. I'm glad they're not perpetuating the deception that children's publishing is a licence to print money.' Do agents come with greater expectations? 'There's very much a seller's market at the moment.' For the few.

Richard Scrivener of Scholastic, publisher of a wildly diverse range across Goosebumps, Horrible Histories and Philip Pullman, says, 'It's children's books becoming more like adult books. Publishers are being sent a synopsis and told "We need your offer by six o'clock. We're looking for a 6-figure advance, and we're offering rights in Essex and Suffolk." People worry whether this is the next Big Hit, can they afford to let it go? But I think it'll blow itself out.' Philippa Dickinson, overseeing eight separate children's imprints, used to sweat over £50,000, but these days stays calm facing six figures. 'In the last ten years children's publishing has grown up at last, and we know what we're doing. All the big publishers do, with older books – question is, how do we do it with younger fiction?'

Sexual content?

Some books have problems. You can almost rely on Melvin Burgess to create problems. He followed **Junk** with another raw teenage novel, of sex games where nobody wins. His publisher, Klaus Flugge, says the Andersen Press sold nearly 10,000 in hardcover of **Doing It**, but expects big numbers from the paperback. Elaine McQuade says booksellers weren't sure how to position it, but 'we sell a lot of books that are hard-hitting and we put Penguins on them, not Puffins, because it's a sign to the parent of a nine-year-

old who may be a very good reader, that nevertheless this isn't the right book. It's not about being able to read, it's about being old enough to cope with it.'

Scrivener says that while children have a great relish for comic grotesque, 'like when in **The Terrible Tudors** your guts explode if you had the plague, or whatever,' and that at his peak R L Stine's horror stories were a unique publishing tidal wave (a million units a month in the States), 'reading about sex would make them feel pretty uncomfortable. It doesn't really work in the book context. They think, "I don't want to deal with this." What they are interested in, he believes, apart from horror and the grotesque, and the anarchy in a book that's not their real life experience, is the illusion of power that allows them to assert themselves over adults.

Dickinson, who first worked with Kaye Webb at Puffin in the 1970s, says, 'There's more sex in children's books than when I started. But now, so many read explicit magazines and watch explicit TV – boys are perhaps more often embarrassed than girls, who tend to mature earlier.' Among her authors with some explicit sex scenes is Malorie Blackman, a rare example of a black writer with big numbers. Blackman manages effortlessly to bypass another barrier: she writes about black characters that could be anyone. 'That's what's great about her. But it's difficult. Our culture has such a long way to go.'

Children's publishing is a world without celebrities, unless Madonna or McCartney drop by. Only Dahl has thought his life would interest children enough to write a whole book about it (he guessed right, **Going Solo** sold another 115,982 last year). It's a feel-good society, providing an amusing or exciting base for a future reader's private culture. It's a mixture of skills, compared with the adult publisher's search for 'the next great paper-burger'. Plus the Bologna children's book fair is so much pleasanter than the Frankfurt Book Fair – and in Bologna, books for nodding off to are a commercial asset. ■

Alex Hamilton is a novelist, journalist and compiler for 25 years of annual fastseller lists.

Looking for Bestsellers

Children's publishing is a cyclical business and over the last couple of decades fashions have ranged from series such as Fighting Fantasies and Sweet Valley High to picture books giants like **Guess How Much I Love You**. Some five or 10 years hence, children's publishers will be sighing nostalgically over the fantasy trilogies, cross-over fiction and chick lit that currently dominate our shelves. 'Do you remember the time when we could sell fiction – to teenagers?' publishers will mourn, as they nurture the next non-fiction bestseller into life.

This may sound a little over-optimistic for the non-fiction market, but who knows? As one agent put it, 'If you mentioned "fantasy" to a publisher ten years ago, their eyes would glaze over with boredom.' Today, fantasy dominates the market.

Publishers have as much chance of identifying the next big trend as toy manufacturers of deciding what will be in demand for Christmas two years hence. No one knows whether the fantasy trilogies currently being bought will still be in demand a year or two down the line and, given that six and seven figure sums are being spent on them, mistakes could be very expensive.

Vertical publishing

Market forces are playing a greater role in shaping publishers' output than ever before – and it's making it harder than ever to predict tomorrow's winners. This is a trend that started with business developments back in the '80s and early '90s. On a corporate level, there was a spree of company acquisitions in the mid '80s. Publishing houses got bigger with the driver being not size, but 'vertical integration' – that is, publishers producing their titles in both hardback and paperback. Prior to this, one publishing house would create an original hardback title and then a different company would produce the paperback. Publishers realised that it made more financial sense to originate and paperback their own titles.

Penguin was one of the main paperbacking houses but its acquisition of Thomson Books in 1985, which included the hardback lists Michael Joseph and Hamish Hamilton, allowed it to integrate both hardback and paperback production. Other publishers followed suit. In the children's world, too, publishers shifted to vertical integration with companies like Walker Books and Random House Children's Books setting up their own paperback lists. Until that point, Puffin had dominated the paperbacking scene.

Today, publishers have much more control over the hardback and paperback publishing cycles and can decide, for example, whether a picture book or fiction title will be published straight into paperback rather than hardback. This is just as well in the current market, since hardback sales have been hit by lower library and school spend and since many young readers prefer paperbacks. Publishers are also more likely to take a gamble on a new author or title if they can paperback it, since this is cheaper to produce.

How books are now sold

The other shift towards conglomeration in the '80s occurred in retail and this has had a significant impact on how books are sold, and especially on what booksellers will stock. In 1982, Waterstone's opened its first store and ushered in an entirely new look for bookselling in the high street, which had been dominated by W H

Publishing has always been an unpredictable business and changes in the last couple of decades have made it still more so. Publishers and booksellers can reap greater rewards than ever before by identifying and supporting the next bestseller but the risks are greater, too, and publishers are far more exposed than they have ever been. **Caroline Horn** explains.

Smith. The children's market has subsequently benefited from the growth of chains such as Dillons (acquired by Waterstone's in 1995) and Ottakars, which developed good practice in children's sales. Supermarkets also started selling children's books with Walker Books agreeing a deal to produce exclusive titles for Sainsbury's.

Alongside the growth in the bookselling chains and supermarket interest came the development of EPOS (Electronic Point of Sale). This was introduced by W H Smith in the mid eighties and was soon taken up by other chains. Philippa Dickinson, managing director of Random House Children's Books, says the impact of this cannot be underestimated: 'Retailers increasingly relied on what their EPOS system told them was selling, rather than relying on gut instinct or publishers' information.'

It became harder for publishers to convince retailers to keep supporting authors whom they felt did not justify shelf space. She says: 'Today you can probably keep booksellers' enthusiasm for an author's first three books whereas in the past, authors would have had five or six books to become established.' Even once they get to the shelves, books will only have about six months to prove themselves – and only three months or so if it's a new author.

By the 1990s, publishers were facing a variety of new challenges including the declining book spend by libraries and schools (who traditionally bought the same titles year on year), a greater dependency on fluid high street sales, and the fact that more children were making their own buying

choices through direct sales operations such as school book fairs and catalogues.

The discovery of The Bestseller

The overall result of these changes was a shift from a market dominated by the likes of Roald Dahl in the '80s, to one that was keen for new titles and new voices, says agent and former MD of Puffin, Philippa Milnes-Smith. There was also the realisation that successful authors like Jacqueline Wilson could be developed into brands. But it was the discovery of The Bestseller in the children's market around 2000 that marked the greatest shift in people's expectations of children's books.

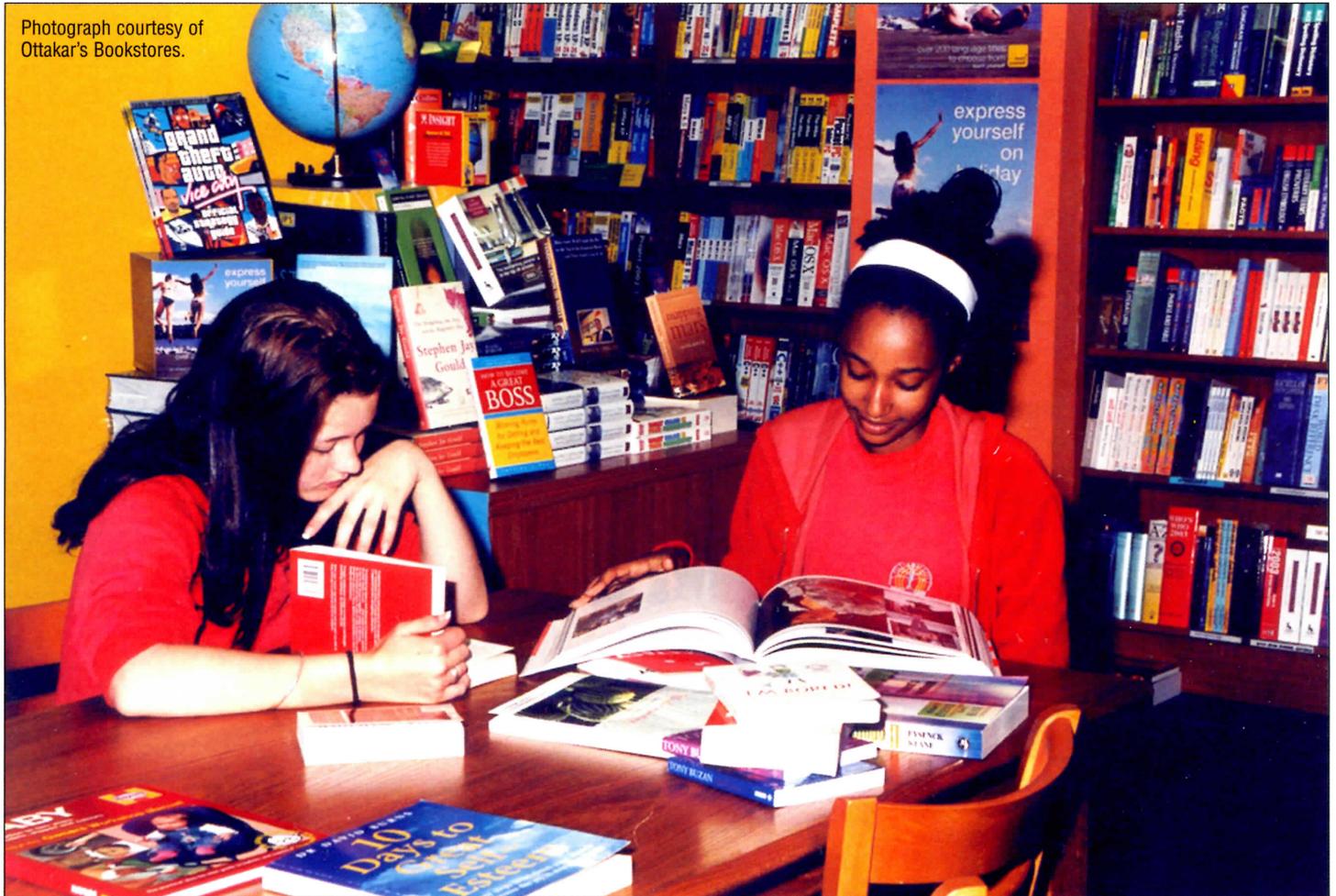
Authors like Jacqueline Wilson and Anne Fine had built solid careers over many years of writing but the success of newcomer J K Rowling with **Harry Potter** indicated that quicker and substantial gains were to be had, given the right support. Puffin's aggressive publishing of Eoin Colfer's **Artemis Fowl** in 2001 highlighted the fact that backing winners to the hilt produced results.

Marketing spend is crucial now in a book's success because it buys display and shelf space in stores says Pat Shepherd, sales director at Random House Children's Books. 'We are becoming front-list driven, like the adult market.' But while children's marketing budgets are creeping up to support this change, it is only happening on certain books. 'The emphasis is on the big books. While we have other books on the list that we believe in, we simply don't have the marketing budgets for them,' says Shepherd.

Promotional spend, not merit

As a result, publishers and retailers have significantly reduced their ranges. On the one hand this is good because publishers have cut back on titles that were never going to set the world on fire. But it

Photograph courtesy of Ottakar's Bookstores.



also means that the consumer has less choice and that well crafted but 'quiet' titles are harder to sell. Books are also being promoted to customers on the back of promotional spend, rather than through individual enthusiasm or merit.

The future for books that do not have the support of a marketing budget – and for children's backlist titles in general – is becoming bleak. Backlists have been declining year on year since the mid '90s, says Milnes-Smith, and authors may no longer be able to rely on royalties from their backlists for their future income.

A huge explosion of talent

On the other hand, this competitive environment has created one of the most exciting phases the children's book market has ever seen. Booksellers are actively helping books find their feet in the market and publishers are supporting that with a more imaginative approach to marketing. Even adult writers like Philip Kerr and celebrity Madonna are flocking to the children's arena, which is basking in the glow of media interest and huge advances.

But it is the creative climate that is most intriguing publishers and agents, who are uncovering talent as fast as they can sell it. Agent Rosemary Canter says: 'I'm interested in why there is this huge explosion of talent. I have never known a time when there were so many wonderful writers and I have had so many strong manuscripts on my table.'

One reason could be that publishers have more faith in the kind of books that authors have always wanted to write. Canter describes the shift away from gritty realism of ten years ago as 'a gorgeous explosion of light and colour'. Philip Pullman and J K Rowling's successes have loosened books from the constraints of length and simple plot lines, says agent Caroline Sheldon. 'Ten years ago, no one believed that a children's book could be more than 30,000 words long. Now, the more adventurous the better. Books that would have been considered risky in the past have been seen to work, but on a very selective basis. Nor do books have to be fantasy. It can be adventure, rites of passage etc – it's an open time and very exciting. Imaginative fiction is key.'

However, the market for fiction for older readers is becoming crowded and publishers are turning their attention to gaps in

market provision. 'The market feels quite sated with teen titles and fantasy and there's been a rush to the seven to nine years market, an area that has suffered from quite mediocre publishing for some time,' says Canter. She also sees room for another kind of contemporary novel that reflects real life and emotions, such as strong love stories for teens.

Others hope for the return of series publishing, such as Random's Sweet Valley High. Scholastic is preparing to relaunch Goosebumps and, according to Shepherd, there is still a place for collectable series that appeal to readers who may not have a high reading ability but who enjoy following appealing series. If these are to be successful, they will need support from W H Smith, which has an ideal market positioning for this kind of product.

Picture book publishing

The outlook for one particular sector of children's publishing, though, remains tough, and that is the picture book. Because picture books are expensive to produce, they are ideally first sold as hardback titles but the lack of budgets in schools and libraries has dramatically reduced hardback sales. It has also become much harder for British publishers to sell picture book titles into their traditional coedition markets, the US and Europe. Combined, this has resulted in a fall-off in picture book output and a lack of risk-taking, says Sheldon. 'No one takes any risks, everyone plays so safe it's terrifying because they can't afford to publish without coedition partners.' A number of artists and illustrators who once made a living in the picture book world have returned to other careers to support themselves.

Picture book publishing can still be hugely successful, as Macmillan Children's Books has shown with Axel Scheffler and Julia Donaldson's **The Gruffalo**, and Orion with Francesca Simon and Kevin McAleenan's **Horrid Henry** titles. But the volume and variety of children's picture book titles that were once being published are simply not there. Even so, publishers remain optimistic that the glory time of the picture book will return. Publishing is, after all, a cyclical business. ■

Authorgraph No.147

JULIA JARMAN
interviewed by
Stephanie Nettell

As Julia Jarman kicks off her shoes, flings her arms wide and laughs at her own dramatic classroom performances (as a small girl escaping punishment or enlivening a dull day, as a 14-year-old Antony proclaiming from the top of a desk in fondly remembered Shakespeare lessons, as a visiting author reading aloud and urging kids to try writing themselves), you could be forgiven for seeing just carefree froth.

But, despite looking horrified when I mention the word 'moral', she is fast approaching the James Watson gold standard for unremitting commitment to pointing the young to a better world. I'd guess there is not one of her 100-plus books, from first readers to early-teen novels to the recent picture books, which is not whispering to its audience, 'Be your own self and allow others to be different; be creative, positive, not destructive and negative – *live* life!' The whispers, however, are softer than the exciting drumbeat of her plots, so even adolescents alert for subliminal lessons are unaware they have absorbed a 'message'. **Hangman** is a harrowing account of psychological bullying on a school trip to Normandy, viewed through the turmoil of the victim's erstwhile friend trapped by peer group pressure into joining the bullies. Openly moralistic, it culminates in an unadulterated lecture on fascism: she discovered when shortlisted for the Lancashire Book Award that some young readers did indeed think she was trying to teach them – French!

As the youngest of three children of parents whose formidable abilities had been thwarted by the working-class barriers of their time, commitment to a better world is in Julia Jarman's blood. Her mother, a woman of tremendous drive who even as a great-grandmother sews glorious patchworks and re-created Josh's blue and green **Magic Backpack** for Julia to take to schools, had been destined for service 'with a good Catholic family'; her father, from 'a pure Catherine Cookson childhood',



ex-Durham miner, atheist and left-wing, believed no one should have to go down a mine and therefore wanted his bright daughter to be a nuclear physicist. Both saw education as an escape route, a right and a privilege it would be sinful to waste. Although springing from love, the pressure on their children – not just to try but to *succeed* – was intense, and the resulting conflict in the sparky young Julia between rebellion and Being Good is reflected in many of her characters.

She was born in her grandmother's riverbank cottage in the Fenland village of Deeping St James that holds some of her warmest childhood memories, but grew up in Walton, part of Peterborough, and is still in touch with

her infant and primary schools. Her mother takes credit for her fanatical reading and addiction to libraries – visiting twice a day in holidays, to the point of being turned away – although even this book-revering family were less keen on her 'telling stories' and ducking out of 'real work'. She would write to magazines and comics, and at eight even published a story about her pet pig Silky: in **The Ghost of Tantony Pig**, Laurie's memory of the slithery birth of piglet after piglet is Julia's own. Her idol was feisty Jo March (**Good Wives** had made her realise that stories came from *writers*), and at the County Grammar School the excitement of chemistry had to combat the lure of languages and drama.

Then at 16 her life changed. Her relationship with her father had been loving and proud on both sides, thriving on their debates and discussions, but now, out of a complex web of personal history and class traditions, his ambitions and fears for his daughters became over-protective and controlling, and, as is the way with teenagers, they rowed. So when he was killed in a car crash, Julia was left with the unbearable feeling that she had not loved him enough to keep him alive. Eighteen months later she was in a TB sanatorium where, at first, even reading was regarded as too strenuous. But after five months of little else but reading, when she knew she really was Jo not Beth March, she was en route to studying English and Drama at Manchester University.

'I came through, and I like to show my readers that people do come through. I do believe those books helped me sort myself out – no bereavement counsellors in those days! – and that reading and writing can do this all our lives. Reading, trying out different characters, is like trying on clothes to see what suits you. That's why it's so important for the young: you lose yourself in a book in order to find yourself.'

There she met Peter, an engineer and 'my opposite in every way', and all her energy went into marriage and then children. 'Manchester's drama department was brilliant, but with so many students who went on to fame it rather dented my confidence as an actor, and anyway I'm hopelessly uncoordinated,' but when instead she became a teacher being a 'thwarted thesp' proved invaluable. 'Once when a class was literally climbing the walls (in the gym!), in desperation I started telling Rumpelstiltskin, and amazingly they clustered round to listen – that's the power of story.' Now her teaching days make her fearless as an author in class or staffroom.

When her daughter Josie (Jo March again), sandwiched between Sam and Mary, was ten and, like her mother, bright and often naughty, she responded to a conciliatory story about one of Julia's childhood scrapes with, 'That's the most interesting thing you've said in your whole life – why don't you write it down?' So, in 1983, **When Polly Ran Away** was conceived. Rejections followed, but also help: 'The wonderful Miriam Hodgson wrote that if I "could bear to write it again", with more description and background scenery, she would look at it again. I'm not naturally observant and it opened my eyes – to the blacksmith's forge

opposite, the farm next door, the local chequered brickwork – but back came a letter, "No, no, that's far too much, sprinkle it around so it doesn't hold up the action ... and if you could bear to write it again..."

That deal fell through, so the children laid all their books out to research a suitable publisher – it was eight-year-old Mary, reading **Jeffy the Burglar's Cat**, by Ursula Moray Williams, who decided Andersen was the one. And, by 1985, it was. Jarman's subsequent titles included 40-plus for Ginn's All Aboard reading scheme and 33 Upstarts. 'I'd returned to teaching, which at A level takes over your life; I negotiated a year off with Peter but he said, "Take ten and make it pay if you can!", so I did feel I had to earn. Educational publishing, even with small advances, was supposed to keep you warm in your old age. Wrong.' Other series have survived better: Jets' **Georgie**, ace slayer of dragons and computer bugs (boys don't even notice she's a girl), **The Magic Backpack** in Flying Foxes, and the gentle but (ssh) very moral **Tales from Whispery Wood** in Young Hippo.

Her books are a patchwork of real life. Her ancient Bedfordshire village is the home of the **Tantony Pig**. Initially sceptical, she agreed to be patron of the local dyslexia association and in her search for information met the real Frankie; writing the history of the village school, where her children went, revealed such disturbing records it prompted his agonising story, **Ghost Writer**. 'Sadly, there are dinosaur teachers like Pitbull still in the system.'

Her favourites, the duo of beautifully judged **Jessame** stories (to be reissued by Andersen next year), arose from a conflict with her reading-scheme editors over whether a West Indian grandad could have a motorbike and keep pigeons: 'A black man couldn't have a white working-class hobby; West Indians didn't have pets.' She confided in a young teacher, Vanessa Aduke Olusanya, who told her enchanting stories of her own Bethnal Green childhood *and* had had a parrot ('If I'd done that they'd have talked of jungly, racist overtones'). By then close friends, Julia urged her to write a book, but eventually she begged Julia to do it and Vanessa became Jessame.

Much of **Hangman** really happened. She found the piece of elder, with its naturally contorted 'carving' that inspired **Ollie and the Bogle**, in her garden. Ka, the magnificent **Time-Travelling Cat**, is an amalgam of her own beloved cats (Mrs Gingerbits stars

in her own right elsewhere). The **Big Red Bath** sits in glory upstairs: it and **Kangaroo Cancan Café** are exuberant expressions of her weekly grandson-sitting sessions. But only now, with **Peace Weavers**, has she confronted a father's sudden death.

This ambitious, passionate, almost polemical novel employs her familiar technique of sliding between the past and, this time, very contemporary present. Teenage Hilde's peace-campaigning mother has parked her children on an East Anglian US base with their separated father; war is looming and only Hilde knows her mother is protesting in Iraq itself. Through the excavation of a sixth-century grave on the base, Hilde finds a literal soul-mate in Maethilde, a Peace Weaver from across the North Sea whose word-skills brought peace between Engle and Mercian.

The book debates intertwining emotional and political themes, and excoriates modern government. 'When Blair was elected I, with my family background, its terrific ambition but also concern for a fairer world, had believed he articulated that double vision. I felt duped.'

Peace Weavers is an inevitable development, essence-of-Jarman nigh undiluted. Born into that post-war generation called 'peace babies', she has been peace-weaving throughout her working life. ■

Stephanie Nettell is a critic, author and journalist on children's books.

Photograph courtesy of Orchard Books.

The Books

- Big Red Bath**, ill. Adrian Reynolds, Orchard, 1 84362 406 0, £10.99 hbk
Georgie and the Computer Bugs, 0 00 675005 2, **Georgie and the Dragon**, 0 00 674137 1, **Georgie and the Planet Raider**, 0 00 674495 8, ill. Damon Burnard, Collins Jets, £3.99 each pbk
The Ghost of Tantony Pig, ill. Laszlo Acs, Andersen, 0 86264 795 9, £4.99 pbk
Ghost Writer, Andersen, 1 84270 109 6, £9.99 hbk, Hippo, 0 439 97854 8, £4.99 pbk
Hangman, Andersen, 0 86264 866 1, £9.99 hbk
Kangaroo Cancan Café, ill. Lynne Chapman, Orchard, 1 84362 354 4, £10.99 hbk
The Magic Backpack, ill. Adriano Gon, Red Fox, 0 09 941734 0, £3.99 pbk
Ollie and the Bogle, Andersen, 1 84270 039 1, £4.99 pbk
Peace Weavers, Andersen, 1 84270 295 5, £9.99 hbk
Tales from Whispery Wood series (**Mole's Useful Day**, 0 439 99455 1, **Flying Friends**, 0 439 99454 3, **Owl's Big Mistake**, 0 439 98103 4, **Rabbit Helps Out**, 0 439 97811 4), ill. Guy Parker-Rees, Young Hippo, £3.99 each pbk
The **Jessame** stories, due to be reissued by Andersen in autumn 2005, the **Time-Travelling Cat** books and **When Poppy Ran Away** are currently out of print.

50 YEARS OF BOOK AID

Book Aid International is a charity that provides books for children and adults in some of the world's poorest countries. It gets books into libraries so that everyone has a chance to read them. It's not just public libraries either, but libraries in schools, hospitals, refugee camps and universities. How does it work? **Nicola Cadbury** explains.

This year Book Aid International is fifty years old. The reason for providing books to people in poor countries is simple – there are huge book shortages that affect everyone, from doctors, nurses and lawyers to teachers and pupils. A growth in education is going on in these countries, so that each year millions more children are enrolling for school. Sadly their schools don't have enough resources to go around. Many children don't get to see any books apart from the maths or science textbooks they share in class, so they find learning to read very hard indeed. This is where Book Aid International comes in. We get books into libraries so that everyone can read them.

Our work started in 1954 when Book Aid International's founder, Lady Ranfurly, went to live in the Bahamas with her family. Lady Ranfurly saw that the local children didn't have any books to read, unlike her own daughter. She asked her friends and family to collect up books for the local library, so that all the children could use them.

700,000 books supplied every year

This little project paved the way for a big book donation programme that grew until it became the charity that Book Aid International is today. We now supply 700,000 books to libraries and schools around the world every year. These days we are also very keen to support the local book trade. Many African countries have hardly any local publishing going on so they have to rely on imported books, which are very expensive to buy. We offer training and grants to help the authors, publishers, booksellers and librarians to work together for a strong local book trade. If this is in place then books will be more affordable and local authors will be able to have their books published so stories can be written that look at local characters and issues, which can be important for reader enjoyment.

RLRDP in Zimbabwe

One important part of our work is to ensure that every book we send is the right book and will get lots of use by eager readers. We are very lucky to be given thousands and thousands of books by UK publishers each year. We discard the ones we can't use and sort the remainder onto the shelves of our library. Librarians then come along and pick the books that have been requested by a partner, for instance the Rural Libraries Resource and Development Programme (RLRDP) in Zimbabwe.



Elizabeth Chisvetu from RLRDP, Zimbabwe, selecting books at the Book Aid International library and warehouse in south London.

One of the ways of ensuring that the best possible books get sent out is for Book Aid International to invite a librarian from that organisation to come and pick books for themselves. Elizabeth Chisvetu came from RLRDP and chose 15,000 books to take back with her. She also received lots of training while she was in the UK and learnt new IT skills as well. Back in Zimbabwe the books were put onto the donkey cart mobile library, which takes books out to all the remote rural communities. The roads in rural areas don't have a tarmac covering but instead are dirt tracks which are stony and uneven. This makes it difficult for a car or van to travel around, whereas the donkeys have no trouble. There are often petrol shortages as well. This makes the donkey cart a much more reliable method of transport.



The donkey cart mobile library service takes books to remote rural communities in Zimbabwe.

As well as the donkey cart Book Aid International supports lots of different libraries in Zimbabwe and as part of this we'll often provide collections of books for schools. Opposite, you can read the story of Uongai, a young girl living in the village of Benhura.

Uongai's story

Uongai lives in Benhura, Zimbabwe, with her mother and father. They own a small area of land that they farm. Neither of her parents had an education, but they believe it is very important for Uongai to go to school. They want her to have every chance she can and an education that will help her to get a job in the future.

Until recently the library at Uongai's school was equipped with only a small collection of old and tatty books. They recently received a donation of Book Aid International books delivered to them by a rural library service in Zimbabwe. Also their librarian was trained to help her promote and manage all the new books.

Uongai loves to read but she has little time to do so. Every day, she must help her parents on their small farm before and after school. Once her chores are done and she has completed her homework she sits down in the evening and reads aloud to her parents by the light of a kerosene lamp. Uongai's parents look forward to her storytelling sessions as much as she does. She gets to practise her reading skills and her family get to hear stories from all around the world.

It's interesting to think how Uongai's story compares with our lives in the UK. I have about 250 books in my house – it's a bigger collection than they used to have at Uongai's school, even though there are several hundred pupils enrolled there. This also contrasts with most school libraries in the UK, since there are usually thousands of books to choose from.

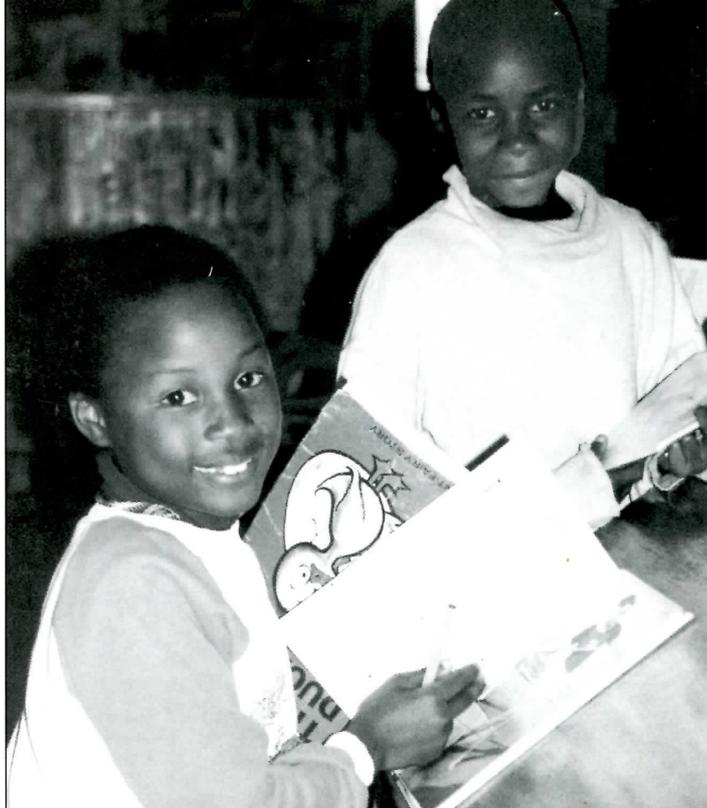
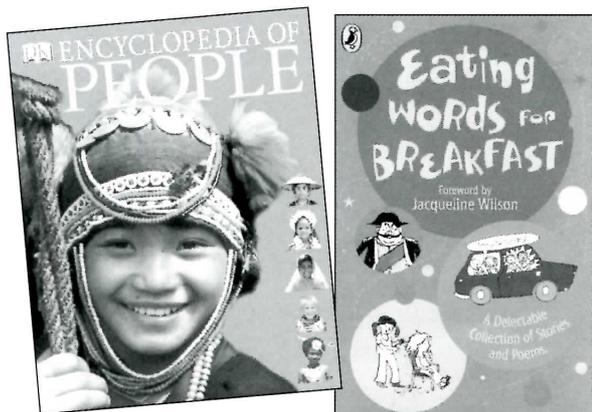
Encouraging storytelling

Hearing about Uongai reading to her parents also reminds me of the nerve-racking experience of being asked to read aloud in class. My parents used to read to me a lot when I was younger, but I'm not sure I remember ever having read to them. Often reading becomes a very private activity that is done in a quiet room alone or at night before going to sleep.

It's a very positive thing to find ways to share our love of reading and storytelling – whether that's by reading our favourite stories aloud or through drama or by taking part in big reading celebrations like World Book Day. On World Book Day this year Book Aid International introduced a new global element to the day and linked up readers around the world. Children in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the UK shared stories and linked lives in a cultural exchange project.

Children in twelve countries made postcards, featuring drawings and messages, with information about their local culture ranging from favourite football teams, to foods and fashions. All their postcards are being collected together for a website exploration of global cultures at www.bookaid.org/schools.

Ten events took place in libraries all across the UK and each of these was twinned with a community library in the developing world, from Namibia and Nigeria to Mongolia and Palestine. The day gave school children a great chance to find out more about how people live around the world. Copies of the **Encyclopedia of People**



Mzilikazi Library children.

(published by Dorling Kindersley) were donated and these provided a unique snapshot of modern life for more than 80 peoples inhabiting every region of the planet. The spectacular photography featured in this book gives an intimate view of a huge diversity of cultures within our fragile and beautiful world.

World Book Day provided a great opportunity for children to think about books in a wider context; to talk about the huge range of cultures and people reflected in stories, and to learn about the wealth of history handed down through generations via traditional storytelling.

Children at more than 450 schools also got involved to support us on World Book Day. Their fundraising events included fancy dress days, sponsored reads and book sales. Once we had received all the money it came to a whopping £53,000! That's enough money to pay for more than 35,000 books for readers overseas. Thank you very much to any of you who got involved in these events!

Get involved!

Here are two simple things that anyone can do to support Book Aid International.

1. Buy a copy of our birthday book. Puffin have published a book of short stories, called **Eating Words for Breakfast**. It has contributions from some of the UK's best loved children's authors and illustrators, including Michael Morpurgo, Eoin Colfer and Benjamin Zephaniah. Stories from Ghana, Palestine, Uganda and Nigeria are also included in the book to give it a really global flavour. We get a donation for every copy sold!
2. Hold a fundraising event for Book Aid International. Every £1.50 that you raise pays for one more book to get into the hands of a reader overseas. Could you organise a sponsored read, a book sale, or a book swap event with your friends?

Find out more:

There's lots of information on our website and we can send copies of our poster and information leaflets to anyone who would like them.

Website: www.bookaid.org

Tel: 020 7733 3577

Book Aid International, 39–41 Coldharbour Lane, London SE5 9NR

Nicola Cadbury is Head of PR at Book Aid.

The Carnegie and Greenaway Medals

The winners of the 2003 Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals, the most prestigious children's book awards in the UK, will be announced in July. But how do the shortlists shape up? **Rosemary Stones** investigates.

THE CARNEGIE MEDAL SHORTLIST

According to the press release for this year's Carnegie Medal: 'The six books on the 2003 Carnegie Medal shortlist will appeal not just to children and young people, but to the whole family. Each of the titles selected offers outstanding and immensely satisfying reading for *anyone* of 10 years and over, blurring the distinction between the traditionally separate genres of adult and children's books.'

Sorry CILIP*. The crossover novel may be the new black of the children's literary world but the appeal of most of these shortlisted titles is to *children*, not to 'the whole family'. And so it should be. The crossover claim (with its implicit suggestion that crossover is somehow a good thing) obscures discussion about what makes a good children's novel.

Of the six shortlisted titles, **The Fire Eaters**, **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time** and **A Gathering Light** could claim the attention of adult as well as child readers. **The Fire Eaters** is the best novel on this list with its sparsely poetic evocation of place, time and the internal world of its young narrator, Bobby. Almond has difficulty with endings – here Bobby's father does not die and it is as if something is being avoided. Could it be a bleakness that cannot be laid before a young readership? This is, however, the best kind of children's novel that an adult might wish to read for that very reason. **The Curious Incident** commands attention via the assured nature of its unusual perspective – that of a boy with Asperger Syndrome – that informs the reader without needing to be informative while Christopher's inevitable lack of emotion subtly provokes the reader's own feeling response. **A Gathering Light** is a well researched and engaging historical novel with a feminist twist reminiscent of those once republished by the newly fledged Virago. Adult readers of **Cold Mountain** would not be disappointed.

The remaining novels can make no claims to crossover. Within a multi-layered family saga **Sisterland** explores what it is to be a refugee from grandmother 'Heidi' whose German origins are found to be more complicated than anyone knew to her granddaughter Hilly's relationship with a Palestinian Arab. While Newbery's psychological portrait of a displaced child is astute, the novel lacks the inner sense of dislocation that such a family secret imposes upon subsequent generations. **The Garbage King** breaks new ground in its portrayal of the precariousness of the lives of the godana or street people of Addis Ababa. While Laird's plotting can be convoluted, this novel movingly gets behind the anonymity of child beggars. **Private Peaceful** goes down a well trodden path with stock characters in a novel that is overly full of the need to inform.

THE GREENAWAY MEDAL SHORTLIST

Criteria issues come to mind in relation to one of the books on this Greenaway shortlist. One of this award's aims, surely, is to promote high standards in the publishing of illustrated books *in the UK*. **The Wolves in the Walls** is a most imaginative and technically competent book, both scary and wittily dramatic, but it was first published in the US by HarperCollins who presumably both commissioned and edited it. Its place on this UK shortlist is therefore a waste. There are more than enough US prizes to help raise standards in their children's book publishing.

The two outstanding books here are **Beegu** and **Bob Robber and Dancing Jane**. Alexis Deacon is the best new artist on the children's book scene for some time. His restrained text and very good pencil line work together to evoke both humour and pathos in this subtle story of an alien outsider. Deacon's line appears to have undergone lots of processing (with a photocopier?) which turns it to a sensitively smudgy black against well related flat colour. There is a satisfying harmony to each page and in the book as a whole. With Andrew Matthews's poetic text for **Bob Robber**, Bee Willey has a good story that matches the ethereal quality of her unusual palette and sensitively assured use of pastel. Her use of dark and light to draw the eye is consummately done and she is as good at close-ups of her characters as she is at more distanced views.

Two Frogs, **The Shape Game** and **Ella's Big Chance** are solid books from experienced hands but not their best work. Wormell's agreeable book takes

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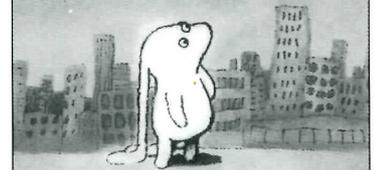
THE SHAPE GAME



Anthony Browne

Alexis Deacon

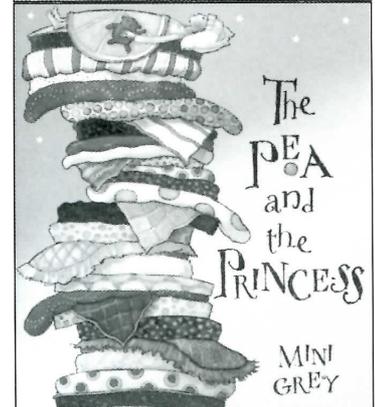
BEEGU



Always and Forever

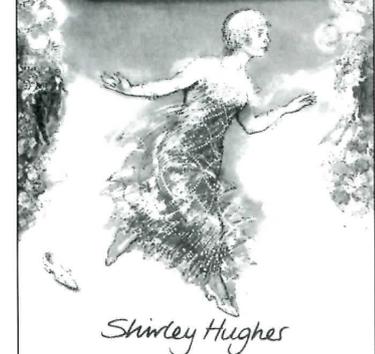


ALAN DURANT Illustrated by DEBI GLIORI

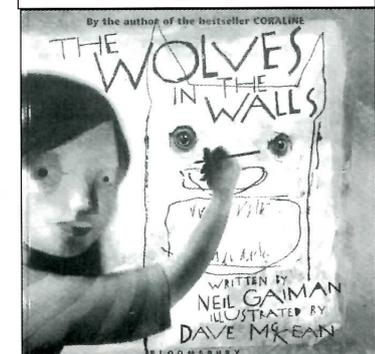


ELLA'S BIG CHANCE

A Fairy Tale Retold



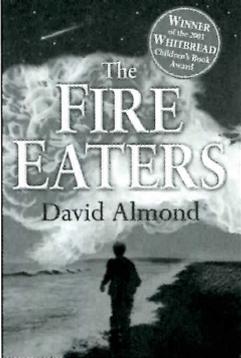
Shirley Hughes



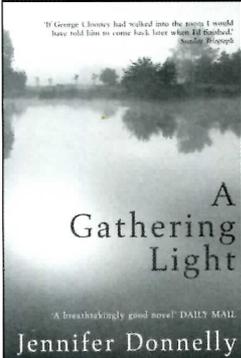
By the author of the bestseller CORALINE

THE WOLVES IN THE WALLS

WRITTEN BY NEIL GAIMAN
ILLUSTRATED BY DAVE McKEAN

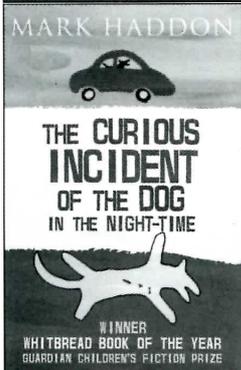


WINNER
WHITBREAD
Children's Book
Award



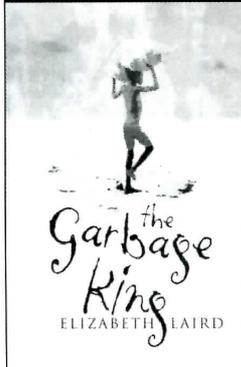
A Gathering Light

JENNIFER DONNELLY



THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

WINNER
WHITBREAD BOOK OF THE YEAR
GUARDIAN CHILDREN'S FICTION PRIZE



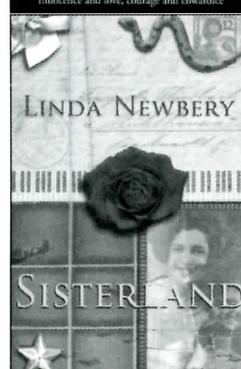
The Garbage King

ELIZABETH LAIRD



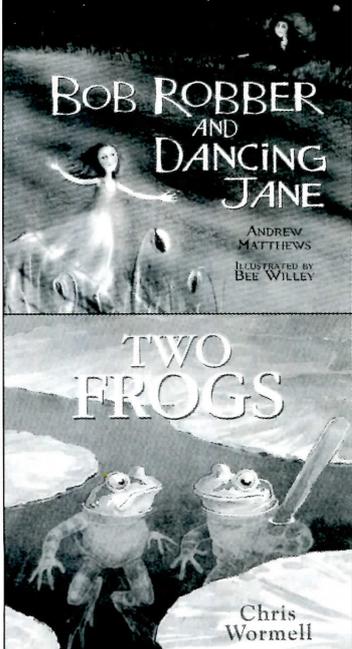
private peaceful

INNOVATION AND LOVE, COURAGE AND COMRADESHIP



LINDA NEWBERY

SISTERLAND



rather too long to get to the punch line without huge rewards on the way while Browne's introduction to looking at paintings has pages that work and pages that don't – viz 'The Boyhood of Raleigh' where he takes the painting away from its subject. Hughes's version of Cinderella uses, she tells us helpfully, gouache colour and pen line but the two are reconciled with difficulty. Is the colour doing light and shade or the pen line? The result (oddly for one for whom drawing is so important) is overworked and scratchy rather than elegant.

Of the rest, **The Pea and the Princess** is an uncertain offering. Grey's style and the level of exaggeration and caricature she employs are full of inconsistencies. It was, perhaps, unfair to shortlist Grey's second picture book when her third, **Biscuit Bear**, shows us that there will be much better things to come from this new artist. Giori's **Always and Forever**, however, is the sort of book that has no place on an illustration prize list. It is lively and cute with an appeal to some parts of the market but the drawing is painfully bad. ■

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

The CILIP Carnegie Medal Shortlist

David Almond, **The Fire Eaters**, Hodder Children's Books, 0 340 77382 0 (10+)

Jennifer Donnelly, **A Gathering Light**, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 6304 7 (12+)

Mark Haddon, **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time**, David Fickling Books, 0 09 945676 1 (13+)

Elizabeth Laird, **The Garbage King**, Macmillan, 0 330 41502 6 (10+)

Michael Morpurgo, **Private Peaceful**, Collins, 0 00 715006 7 (10+)

Linda Newbery, **Sisterland**, David Fickling Books, 0 385 60470 X (13+)

NB The age ranges have been suggested by the judging panel.

The CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal Shortlist 2003

Anthony Browne, **The Shape Game**, Doubleday, 0 385 60136 0 (7+)

Alexis Deacon, **Beegu**, Hutchinson, 0 09 176829 2 (3+)

Debi Giori, **Always and Forever**, text by Alan Durant, Doubleday, 0 385 60503 X (3+)

Mini Grey, **The Pea and the Princess**, Red Fox, 0 09 943233 1 (6+)

Shirley Hughes, **Ella's Big Chance**, The Bodley Head, 0 370 32765 9 (6+)

Dave McKean, **The Wolves in the Walls**, text by Neil Gaiman, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 6953 3 (9+)

Bee Willey, **Bob Robber and Dancing Jane**, text by Andrew Matthews, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 06465 7 (7+)

Chris Wormell, **Two Frogs**, Red Fox, 0 09 943862 3 (5+)

NB The age ranges have been suggested by the judging panel.

Hal's Reading Diary

Hal is now three and five months and wants soldiers to feature in his stories. His father, **Roger Mills**, explains.

This Easter Bank Holiday we had a family outing to Battle Abbey and the site of the Battle of Hastings which lies below what is left of the Abbey buildings. Being three and a quarter, the historical aspects of the place didn't detain Hal, and vague hopes I had had of walking round the battlefield were quickly abandoned in favour of hide and seek among the buttresses and cellars of the surviving parts of the Abbey complex. At the end of our visit though we came across a couple of 'soldiers', one dressed as a Norman in a chain mail vest and carrying an impressive sword, the other a Saxon in a linen tunic and armed with a bow and arrows and a fighting axe.

Hal was fascinated by these two, and soldiers, which had been only a budding interest up till that point, now became a full blown obsession. A few days later we were at a car boot sale and he spotted a Dorling Kindersley book about Ancient Civilizations which happened to have a picture of Roman soldiers on the front. Hal demanded that we buy it and when we got home went carefully through the book looking for images of soldiers and spending a long time poring over the ones he found. When we make up stories for him nowadays he almost always wants them to feature soldiers as well as his own heroics.

In this obsession with soldiers, of course, Hal is just being like vast numbers of boys his age and I can remember being exactly like that myself. But watching this phenomenon come alive in my son got me wondering just what is going on here. Why is it that so many small boys are so fascinated by soldiers?

One possibility would be that the soldier fascination is down to some kind of conditioning. We haven't been nudging Hal in a military direction it is true, but maybe he is picking it up from his friends at nursery. But I rather doubt this. There aren't guns and swords to play with at nursery – there would be accidents and complaints if there were. And Hal's main playmates outside of nursery, the children in our lane, are all girls and not at all belligerent in their games as far as I can see. Even if Hal was getting his initial exposure to things military from his friends, it still begs the question as to what got them interested. The archetypal toy for a small boy seems to have

always been a soldier, at least certainly in western culture this seems to be so.

So what is going on? Why is being a soldier such fun? One possibility comes from Freud's theory of human instincts. Freud suggested that everyone has an innate destructive drive – what he termed 'thanatos' or the death instinct. This part of Freud's thinking has proved highly contentious with later analysts, and many reject the idea outright. But it is certainly the case that many many people who have the experience of an in-depth analysis discover angry and aggressive parts of themselves that they had only the vaguest notion of before they started their therapeutic journey. Depressives often find that getting in touch with their angry aggressive side is a fundamental step in the direction of feeling more substantial and getting over their condition.

The aggression that patients describe however is rarely of an unprovoked kind. Their anger is almost invariably a response to having been on the end of psychologically wounding experiences of one kind or another. So is there an innate instinct of aggression? Perhaps it is possible to get closer to the state of things by looking at someone like Hal. He gets as much pleasure from knocking down a castle he has made out of toy bricks as he does from constructing it. He delights in waving his sword around. But as far as I can see, even allowing for gross parental bias, his 'destructive' instinct does not extend to wanting to hurt and cause pain and suffering to people.

Perhaps the safest hypothesis is to think of an innate, quasi-destructive instinct, which is primarily tied up with the superabundant physical energy which so many boys seem to have. This instinct is a sort of demolition delight, a delight which has everything to do with smashing things and not much to do with smashing people. My guess is that the soldier obsession kicks in because it is such a good vehicle for this kind of feeling. Indeed in a way it is an extension of the love of cars and trains which I suggested in an earlier diary is so compelling because it works as a projection of a boy's sense of his own physicality. Trains and cars have faded from Hal's interests now. But I can see an awful lot of visits to castles on the horizon.

Roger Mills is a Psychodynamic Counsellor.



Shadowing the Greenaway – an exclusive story

For many disaffected young people, books can seem, at best, an irrelevance. Involving them in the Greenaway Medal shadowing scheme might seem ambitious but one exclusion unit decided to go for it. **Sue Bastone** explains.

For the two years prior to 2002 I worked with a Year 7 special needs class at Ryeish Green School shadowing the Carnegie and Greenaway medals. This was very successful and opened my eyes to the exciting ways in which picture books could be used with older, often more reluctant, readers.

A colleague who had been involved in shadowing with the reading club had recently taken over the management of the school's new exclusion unit and suggested that we might involve these children in the shadowing process. The unit was opened for pupils who were not coping with the classroom and was very much a last chance. At the end of their specified time, they were gradually re-integrated back into lessons, or, sadly in some cases, excluded permanently from school. They were, inevitably, disaffected, often angry, young people with little or no interest in books. Indeed, any feelings tended to be negative, seeing books as threatening or, at best, boring and irrelevant.

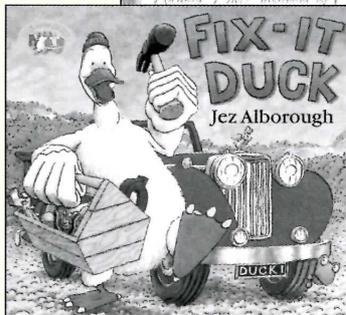
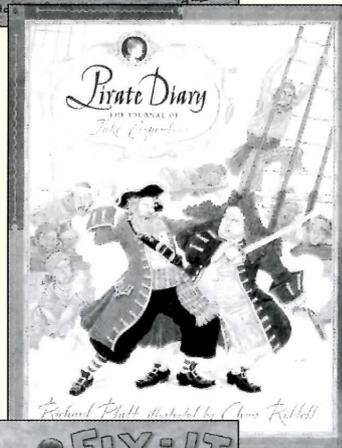
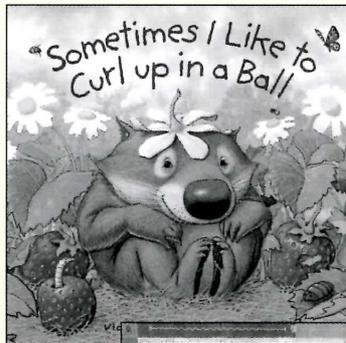
It was very important when planning the project not to condescend to these children in any way. I wanted them to feel that what they were doing was valuable and that their views mattered. I wanted them to understand that picture books were not 'just for kids' and, more than anything else, I just wanted them to experience pleasure from a book. Putting it into words, it now seems incredibly optimistic!

Review criteria

I started by altering the review sheet I had used with the special needs groups to suit these more mature children. The review sheet was designed to help them judge each book on a number of criteria: the cover, the style and colours of the illustrations, the story itself, the style and font of the words and the age range of the book.

I approached the first session with some trepidation. Would these children give it a chance? Would they think the shadowing and the books were stupid? I knew my colleague had already made progress with some of the children and would be an enthusiastic support but I was already wondering what I had agreed to.

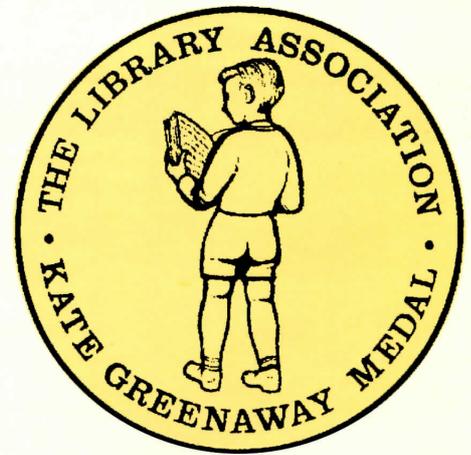
My overriding memory of that first session was what fun we had. The books, ranging from **Sometimes I Like to Curl up in a Ball** for two-year olds to the eventual winner **Pirate Diary** for children of eight



and over were all put out on the table. I took pains to explain that although we would read the stories together, we were looking at these books as a whole and judging the format and style of the illustration as well as its relationship to the text. I explained that the national judges wanted their views and that we would be putting their reviews on the national website.

Removing the pressure

I feel sure that by not expecting them to 'read a book', pressure was removed and they felt free to enjoy these picture books for what they were. My colleague and I felt it also helped that their teacher was one of the group and that I was an outsider. For children who had no contact with the rest of the school, this was, perhaps, a treat. Some quite serious discussions took place about whether they agreed with the suggested ages for each book. We were surprised by the maturity of their artistic



views. They commented on how each artist had used a style of illustration suitable to the subject matter and the age of their readership. They noticed the balance of words to pictures on each page. Each session there was a heated debate as to which book to read. At no time at all was there any resistance.

Outside validation

At regular intervals the group's comments were entered on our page on the Greenaway Shadowing website and the fact that their views were on the Internet and anyone could read them engendered a great deal of pride. Throughout the school the various shadowing groups displayed their reviews and work and so our children decided to each draw a poster of their favourite book. One of the favourites was **Fix-It Duck**, a wonderful rhyming story with much appeal. Jamie chose it and produced the most wonderful poster for display. Heaven (or CILIP!*) was smiling on us that year and our school was picked to attend the judging ceremony at the British Library. We were asked to send some work for display in the foyer and Jamie's poster was chosen as one we would send. I will never forget how proud he was, telling everyone he could that his book poster was displayed in the most famous library in the world – this from a boy who had had no time for books of any sort.

This story does not have a happy ending – Jamie was excluded eventually – but I like to think I made a small difference to his and the other children's attitude to books. It certainly inspired me to keep trying with every child, no matter how hopeless it seems. ■

Sue Bastone was formerly Head of Learning Resources at Ryeish Green School, Reading. She is now Learning Resources Manager, Licensed Victuallers' School, Ascot.

Books discussed:

Sometimes I Like to Curl up in a Ball, Vicki Churchill, ill. Charles Fuge, Gullane, 1 86233 396 3, £4.99 pbk

Pirate Diary, Richard Platt, ill Chris Riddell, Walker, 0 7445 9430 8, £6.99 pbk

Fix-It Duck, Jez Alborough, Collins, 0 00 710624 6, £4.99 pbk

Over 1,600 groups in schools and libraries registered with the Carnegie and Greenaway Shadowing scheme in 2004. Further information: www.ckg.org.uk/shadowing

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AWARDS

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

The Hans Christian Andersen Author Award

Martin Waddell (Ireland) is the winner of the 2004 Hans Christian Andersen Author Award and Max Velthuis (The Netherlands) is the winner of the 2004 Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration.

The awards are presented every two years by the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) to an author and an illustrator whose complete works have made an important and lasting contribution to children's literature.

CLPE Poetry Award 2003

Under the Moon and Over the Sea (Walker) edited by John Agard and Grace Nichols and illustrated by Cathie Felstead, Jane Ray, Christopher Corr, Satoshi Kitamura and Sara Fanelli is the winner of the CLPE Poetry Award (formerly the Signal Poetry Award). The runner-up is Allan Ahlberg's *Friendly Matches* (Puffin) illustrated by Fritz Wegner.

The Branford Boase Award

The shortlisted books for the Branford Boase Award (for a first time novelist and their editor) are *The Various* by Steve Augarde, edited by David Fickling (David Fickling Books); *Inventing Elliott* by Graham Gardner, edited by Fiona Kennedy (Orion); *Follow Me Down* by Julie Hearn, edited by Liz Cross (Oxford); *Fish* by Laura Matthews, edited by Rachel Wade (Hodder); *Keeper* by Mal Peet, edited by Paul Harrison (Walker) and *Montmorency* by Eleanor Updale, edited by Kirsten Skidmore (Scholastic).

English 4–11 Picture Book Awards

The English Association's Picture Book Awards winners have been announced:

Key stage 1: *Bill in a China Shop* by Katie Weaver, ill. Tim Raglin (Bloomsbury) wins the fiction prize and *Woolly Jumper: The Story of Wool* by Meredith Hooper, ill. Katharine McEwen (Walker) wins the non-fiction prize.

Key stage 2: *The Wolves in the Walls* by Neil Gaiman, ill. Dave McKean (Bloomsbury) wins the fiction prize and *The Usborne Introduction to Art* by Rosie Dickins with Mari Griffith (in association with the National Gallery, London) (Usborne) wins the non-fiction prize.

Commonwealth Writers Prize 2004 Best First Book

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (David Fickling Books) has won the Commonwealth Writers Prize 2004 Best First Book.

REGIONAL PRIZES

Stockton Children's Book of the Year 2004

Georgia Byng's *Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism* (Macmillan) has won the Stockton Children's Book of the Year. The other shortlisted titles were G P Taylor's *Shadowmancer* (Faber and Faber), Mary Hoffman's *Stravaganza: City of Masks* (Bloomsbury), Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon* (Hodder) and L S Matthews' *Fish* (Hodder).

South Lanarkshire Book Award 2004

Keith Gray's *Malarkey* (Random House) has won the 2004 South Lanarkshire Book Award. Pupils from ten participating schools, plus some pupils from both Hamilton College School and St Andrews High (who had shadowed the event), had read all five books on the shortlist and voted for their favourite. The other shortlisted titles were Theresa Breslin's *Remembrance* (Doubleday/Corgi), Kevin Brooks's *Martyn Pig* (Chicken House), Nick Mann's *Dead Negative* (Hodder) and Sally Prue's *The Devil's Toenail* (Oxford).

Angus Book Award 2004

Alan Gibbons's *The Edge* (Orion) has won the Angus Book Award. Following an intensive few months of reading and debate about each of the shortlisted novels, 3rd-year pupils from the eight Angus secondary schools voted for the winner and also organised the award ceremony. This year's voting was the closest ever and in a gripping finale a recount had to take place. Alan Gibbons often tackles controversial and hard-hitting subjects. *The Edge* is about a boy and his mother escaping from a violent, abusive relationship only to find racism and danger of another kind. It is uncompromising, disturbing, sensitive and immensely readable. The other shortlisted books were Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* (Macmillan), Keith Gray's *Malarkey* (Random House), Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* (Scholastic) and Malcolm Rose's *Clone* (Scholastic).

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS No.33

UKLA

The United Kingdom Literacy Association

Website: www.ukla.org

The United Kingdom Reading Association (UKRA) has recently changed its name to the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA). This change reflects the increasing breadth of literacy experiences encountered in the modern world. The UKRA won an international reputation for involvement in the promotion of literacy for all. Our new title reflects our concern with making personal meaning from and through texts in a wide range of media. UKLA will also continue to place imaginative literature at the centre of teaching in order to engage and sustain the learner's sense of what the written word can do and what the world means. The new UKLA will build on the

success and reputation of UKRA and continue to offer professionals access to prestigious speakers and rich inset, through a stimulating conference schedule at regional, national and international levels. UKLA is actively engaged in a number of projects in collaboration with such groups as QCA and the Teacher Training Agency. This keeps us at the forefront of educational debate. In addition to its two journals UKLA also has a flourishing catalogue of its own publications, designed to give teachers and researchers access to a wealth of ideas and practice. This name change has come at an exciting time when educators are involved in the process of helping students to understand the increasing world of multi media. As ever UKLA will rise to meet this challenge.

PEOPLE

Congratulations to **Nina Bowden** who has won the S T Dupont Golden PEN Award for a Lifetime's Distinguished Service to Literature (elected by the Executive Committee of English PEN – representing 1000 fellow writers and literary professionals).

EVENTS

Go Fish! Creating Stories that Really Hook

A day organised by the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) on 6 November 2004, King Alfred's College, Winchester. Speakers include Malorie Blackman, Julia Donaldson, Jeremy Strong, Sandy Watson, Andrew Melrose and special guest publisher David Fickling. Find out what publishers are looking for from the editor's panel! Get advice, inspiration and ideas for developing your craft, meet fellow professionals, and learn what's new in the children's book marketplace! Individual mss critiques offered. Come and be inspired! Further information from www.wordpool.co.uk/scbwi or e-mail scbwi_bi@hotmail.com or tel. 020 8671 7539.

Gateways to the Imagination

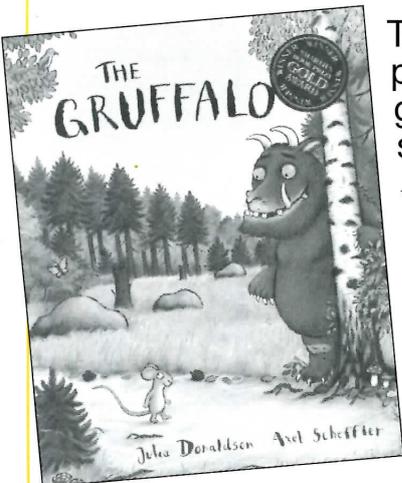
The Dorset Teaching Reading Conference for teachers, literacy governors, teaching assistants, Volunteer Reading Helpers, librarians and other enthusiasts of children's books takes place in Dorset on Saturday 13 November 2004.

Guest speakers include Nicholas Tucker, Kevin Crossley-Holland, Celia Rees, Philip Reeve, Philippa Pearce, Susan Gates, Meg Rosoff and the illustrator Giles Andreae. Further details from Philip Browne, The Dorset School Effectiveness Centre, Bovington Middle School, Bovington, Wareham, Dorset BH20 6NU. Tel: 01929 405060. E-mail: p.browne@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Correction

Joan Aiken's *The Winter Sleepwalker* (Classics in Short No. 45) is, of course, illustrated by Quentin Blake not by Jenny Nimmo. Apologies to both.

I wish I'd written...



Tony Mitton on a picture book with good verse *and* a strong plot...

What a brilliant picture book this is. Axel Scheffler's bold line and strong colouring are perfect for this kind of make-believe story. The pairing with Julia Donaldson's text is an inspiration, and the varied layout of word and picture on the page is well paced.

The story itself has classic features in its construction and

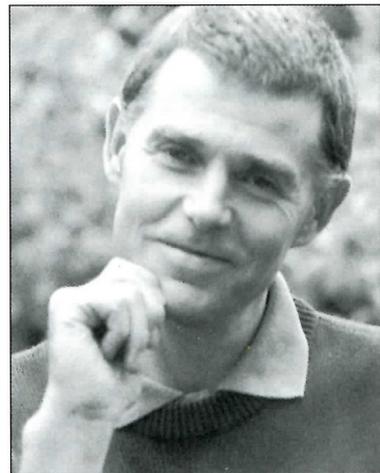
development. Victim becomes victor, eaten becomes potential (but not actual) eater. And all with quiet, assured humour. Three times a plot device is repeated, while varied, along with neat little knots of refrain. To cap this there's the added

delight of a made-up monster becoming real. The mouse has to manage its own scary invention by wit and quick thinking, the same qualities that created it in the first place.

Julia clearly knows that verse is not just a matter of making rhymes. While her rhymes are neat and well chosen, she also attends carefully to the management of rhythm. It's one thing to write good verse, quite another to create strong plot. But she does that too. Combine those skills with Axel's illustrations and you have a superb and delightful picture book. And you can see them playing similar duets in *Monkey Puzzle*, *Room on the Broom* and *The Snail and the Whale*. Don't they do it well?

The Gruffalo by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler, is published by Macmillan (0 333 71092 4, £10.99 hbk, 0 333 71093 2, £5.99 pbk). Tony Mitton's latest book is *Spookyrumpus* (Orchard, 1 84362 422 2, £10.99 hbk).

Photo of Tony Mitton, courtesy of Orchard Books.



Chosen by Year 4 pupils (8–9 year olds) from Moulsecoomb Primary School, Brighton

GOOD READS

Thanks to Ms Shillikar, Ms Boyles and Andrew Broadstreet

The Suitcase Kid

Jacqueline Wilson, Corgi, 0 440 86311 2, £4.99 pbk

We loved it because of the way that it was written makes it sound real and you can relate to the characters. We liked the beginning of the story when Andy was sad about her parents splitting up and that they don't know what to do with her, but at the end of the book Andy likes being at mum's house and at dad's house. During this time she grows up but still remembers Mulberry Cottage. Andy also learns why Katie won't go to sleep and this is why; Katie was scared because when her mum died Paula and Graham told her that it was just like going to sleep. After that Katie would try to stay awake all night. Andy loses her best friend Aileen because her mum's house is a long way away and dad's house is even further away. Andy also has to learn about Haikus, which are little Japanese poems.

*I wish I were
In Mulberry Cottage
With mum and dad
And Radish.*

We enjoyed reading this book and there was nothing in the book which we didn't like. My best part of the book was when Andy went to the counsellor and the counsellor said that 'It must take a lot of organizing,' and Andy said, 'It's as easy as ABC. Really.' My least favourite bits are when Katie gets Andy into trouble. We think that the age group for this book is from 7 to 12 years of age. We thought the book was interesting and very exciting.

Natasha Upton-Maher and Samara Goode



Left to right: Natasha Upton-Maher, Samara Goode, Jemma Virgo, Celine Stannard and Toni Bonwick.

No photo of Charley Banks.

Bye Bye Baby

Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Puffin, 0 14 056582 5, £4.99 pbk

In the beginning of the book the little boy lives on his own, he has to look after himself, feed himself and bath himself. He decides that he needs to find a mummy so he packs his case and goes off. He finds a cat sitting on a wall and takes it with him. Then he meets a teddy and takes that with him, then he meets a clockwork hen, then he sees an old uncle sitting on a bench. He falls over and lands on the teddy and hen and bumps his nose. The uncle picks him up but stands on the cat's tail. It starts to rain and the baby shouts I WANT MY MUMMY. A lady walks around the corner with a pram and says 'I'm a mummy without a baby you can be my baby.' She takes him home and baths him and looks after him. He wants to find a daddy so he goes for another walk. While on the walk he meets a horse then a rabbit then a farmer and he asks them to be his daddy, the horse and the rabbit say no but the farmer says yes. So in the end they all live happily ever after. I like this book because it ends with the baby getting a mum and a dad to look after him. I didn't like it

when the uncle treads on the cat's tail. I think most children would enjoy this book because it is a little funny.

Jemma Virgo

The Cat in the Hat

Dr Seuss, Collins, 0 00 715844 0, £4.99 pbk

We like this book because it rhymes and it is funny. The cat opens a box and thing one and thing two come out and they do the opposite of what you say, so if you say 'be good' they would be bad. The cat makes trouble everywhere he goes and people only like him when he's funny and not when he's naughty. He only appears when there are no parents around and makes the children do naughty things, which they would not normally do. The fish starts to talk, which was strange. The fish tries to tell the children to behave and not to listen to the cat. The children do not listen to the fish and they chase thing one and two around the house because they are trying to wreck the house. The best bit of the book is when thing one and two are chasing around the house. We would recommend it to other children because the pictures are funny. They might need help reading some of the words. I think that this book would be good for children of six and

above to read.

Celine Stannard and Toni Bonwick

The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark

Jill Tomlinson, Egmont, 1 4052 0177 0, £5.99 pbk

The book is called *The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark*. The story is about an owl called Plop who can't fly and is afraid of the dark. When he wants to go out with his dad to get food it's a disaster and if he goes out in the day his dad has to come to get him back up on the tree where they live. The owl Plop meets a lot of different characters during the day. He meets a bat, a hedgehog and a little girl. Plop is a funny character, he is fat and fluffy and he has got big eyes. When his mum and dad go to sleep Plop does not go to sleep, not in the day or the night. One of the funniest bits is when Plop nicks a man's shoe and tries to run off with it. He doesn't get very far because he cannot fly. The man gets his shoe back because Plop cannot run fast.

I think this book is fantastic! It was quite exciting in places and very funny to read. I think you should read it, especially if you like owls!

Charley Banks

BfK REVIEWS

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.

RATING

Audio books are rated for the quality of the reading, not the book.

Unmissable
Very Good
Good
Fair
Poor

★★★★★
★★★★
★★★
★★
★

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

Brian Alderson is children's book consultant for *The Times*.

Nick Attwood teaches English at the Dragon School, Oxford.

Gwynneth Bailey is Language Coordinator at Aldborough County Primary School, Norwich.

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Verna Wilkins is a writer and publisher of Tamarind Books.

Jessica Yates is a school librarian working in the London Borough of Haringey.

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REVIEWS Books About Children's Books

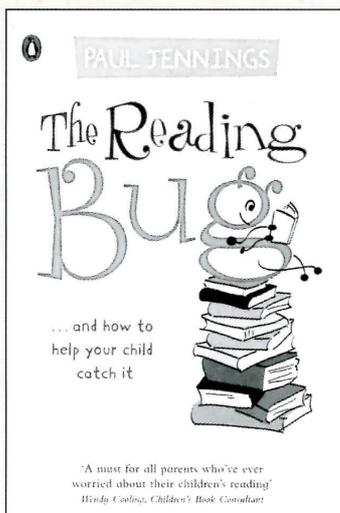
The Reading Bug

★★★★★

Paul Jennings, ill. Andrew Weldon, Penguin, 256pp, 0 14 131840 6, £9.99 pbk

As a one-time special education teacher and education lecturer, author of numerous highly popular books such as *Uncanny*, *Unreal* and *The Cabbage Patch Fib*, Jennings comes from a place of knowing. In just thirteen chapters he demystifies the reading process and empowers parents with the knowledge to get involved from the earliest possible age, or indeed, at whatever stage their child may be; and, most importantly, he puts literature back at the heart of literacy.

The first chapter highlights the importance of immersing children in a reading friendly environment which leaves no room for boredom or struggling, and of acting as a role model. 'If children are to be lifelong readers, we must instil a love of books.' Chapter two focuses on the vital role reading aloud to a child plays – as a special time together, as a motivator, and for the numerous lessons children will learn without knowing it: lessons about story worlds, about how book language works and about print conventions – in short, they are building an internal map of the reading process.



The third chapter looks at finding the right book – an interesting, unputdownable book, long or short, not one specially written in a controlled vocabulary for beginner or reluctant readers. And, we are reminded, real reading is about understanding: pronouncing every word correctly in a book does NOT mean a child necessarily understands the ideas therein. But, how I wish that Jennings' assertion, 'matching children and books is covered in every teacher-training

course' were true. In my experience, recently trained teachers may appear to be expert deliverers of the literacy hour and know all about phonemes and glossaries, but ask them about literature and stories and, in most instances, that's a whole other story.

This is followed by a look at the role of stories as humanising influences, helping children to become sensitive and caring beings. Here I think the vital role of story in the education of the imagination is understated though this is highlighted in the penultimate chapter. The next topic is beginning reading – behaving like a reader, listening sensitively to children and responding to what they're trying to do, and the overriding importance of meaning (rather than 100 percent accuracy). Phonics is put well and truly in its place as a small part of reading – a sometimes useful tool, and one to be handled very carefully ('sounding out letters is not reading'), for as Jennings rightly asserts, its misuse has done more to put children off reading than anything else. There follows a look at ways of using writing as a means of developing children's reading. Here (as in reading) the importance of risk taking is highlighted.

The influence of pictorial images is ever growing and in chapter nine Jennings underlines and discusses

the role of visual literacy drawing on some of his own experiences with a range of illustrators. Reluctant readers, some of the possible reasons for the 'label', and ways to motivate and promote positive attitudes to books are the next topic, followed by the role of computers – as a tool not a replacement for parents – in fostering a love of reading. The final chapter is essentially an annotated book list of recommendations ranging from books for babies to those for teens, many with a strong adult appeal.

All in all this book is a model of how it is possible to make what many see as a difficult subject accessible. It is totally unimposing in appearance with a double spaced text, humorous illustrations and cartoons, and the advice imparted in an uncomplicated and direct style with numerous anecdotes and examples drawn from the author's own experience as a teacher, speech therapist, lecturer and not least, parent. A veritable gold mine of good advice and practice and, I would suggest, required reading for every practising or aspiring teacher, nursery nurse and classroom assistant involved with helping children to become readers, as well as parents and carers. **JB**

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Dear Zoo

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★

Rod Campbell, Mantra, 18pp, Albanian/English, 1 84444 167 9, £6.50 novelty board

A very well produced dual-language version of Rod Campbell's lift-the-flap book that has remained a firm favourite in early years. The layout of the book with its superb bold illustrations and lots of space around both language texts, makes for an excellent reader-friendly dual language book.

Albanian (which uses roman script)

is clearly distinguished from English by using a different font and a slightly larger size. The label 'From the Zoo' on each box is too small to fit both languages in, so the words are sensibly printed in the same font in either Albanian or English on alternate pages.

Each repetitive refrain running through the text – 'So they sent me a... He was too... I sent him back' – enables some comparison and talk about the two different languages and not just in early years classes – Year 3/4 children would find it fascinating to try to match some of the Albanian text to the English.

(Available in 17 dual language editions.) **UC**

Knock! Knock! Mr Croc

★★★★

Jo Lodge, Hodder, 20pp, 0 340 87847 9, £6.99 novelty hbk



Knock! Knock! Mr Croc follows in the successful footsteps of Lucy Cousins' *Maisy the Mouse* titles. Based upon a similar idea to the children's game 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' Lodge utilises bold colours, clear and minimal text, and interactive pop-up illustrations which will appeal to children across a wide span of ages. Children from 12 months to 5 years will find something in this delightful book.

This nicely sized book is constructed from very sturdy card meaning that the pop-up images will withstand the numerous readings that this

book will inevitably receive. Clear, repetitive text acts as a useful reading tool for older pre-school children. Each of the situations is introduced with a clock; this encourages children to associate the stated time eg. 8 o'clock or 10 o'clock, with the position of the hands on the clock face.

A beautifully designed and well constructed book. *Knock! Knock! Mr Croc* will amuse and delight children over and over again. **VR**

Who's Been Eating My Porridge?

★★★

M Christina Butler, ill. Daniel Howarth, Little Tiger, 32pp, 1 85430 977 3, £9.99 hbk

Once children know a traditional tale, they love the story to be retold with a twist. Here we have a family of bears who live peacefully in the woods, but without visits from You-Know-Who. Little Bear *hates* porridge, whether plain, with honey, or even with honey and berries. So, each day, Mummy and Daddy Bear put his helping outside for Old Scary Bear to eat. Little Bear doesn't quite believe in Old Scary Bear, but as the days go by, he gets worried, and wonders who is gobbling up his porridge. The solution is beautifully handled, with the young reader being given just the right number of picture clues to make a correct prediction. The gentle, pastel illustrations are expressive, and help build up the tension. **GB**

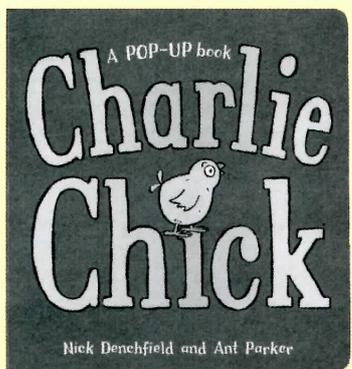
Editor's Choice

Charlie Chick

★★★★★

Nick Denchfield and Ant Parker, Campbell Books, 16pp, 1 405 03460 2, £4.99 novelty board

This small square book beguiles its readers into relaxing with its low key opening spread about tiny Charlie Chick liking to eat lots of barley, only to make them jump with shock when they turn the page and see the size of Charlie's (pop-up) tummy. This lull followed by crescendo effect is repeated most effectively as more dramatic pop-ups dwarf the pages of the book followed by a final, witty fold-out that doubles its size. Babies



will adore these well paced surprises which focus on such intensely interesting things as mums, tummies, feet and eating. Parker's bold, characterful artwork and Denchfield's text and paper engineering work together superbly. Not to be missed. **RS**

Fergus the Sea Dog

★★★

Tony Maddox, Piccadilly, 32pp, 1 85340 719 4, £4.99 pbk

New Fergus adventures are always kindly met, and this book would be brilliant to take to the beach with small children. Fergus is an exuberant little pup, and soon finds a playmate in like-minded Salty. This new puppy friend takes Fergus back to his owner, Captain of a fishing boat, and soon the two dogs enjoy the sunlight sparkling on lazy waves, seagulls swooping overhead. What a change from the farmyard, thinks Fergus. Checking crab pots, rescuing exhausted baby seals and a sudden storm keep the pace fast, as the Captain struggles to control the boat. How relieved Fergus is to reach the harbour safely. With instant appeal in the drawings, this enjoyable new title warns about the dangers as well as the delights of the sea. **GB**

Howler

★★★★

Michael Rosen, ill. Neal Layton, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5636 9, £9.99 hbk

Rosen's dog's eye view of the world returns, and this time our canine hero tries to make sense of the arrival of a baby within his pet family. His amusing tricks no longer command the attention of Rover, Cindie, Trixie and Rex. There is only one thing for it of course, a little hanky panky with lady friend 'Ruff-ruff', and lo and behold, the arrival of a basket full of rufflets works wonders in regaining centre stage. A four-legged perspective on the unfolding dramas comes to life through Rosen's brisk, no nonsense text, and Layton's crude but very funny illustrations. These pictures display a complete lack of interest in drawing in the academic sense, and yet contain a sophisticated awareness of design and colour, and a pleasingly rich sense of pattern and texture. Author and illustrator complement each other nicely in this witty and knowing production. **MS**

No More Teasing!

★★★

Emma Chichester Clark, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 310 2, £10.99 hbk



She was collecting wood for the fire.
"Grandma! I thought you were the grizzly
Grilla! I said

Mimi and Momo (No More Kissing!) are back, the author/illustrator

delighting us with another tale of merry monkey tricks! Big cousin Momo teases Mimi mercilessly, and although Mimi really likes Momo, there is a limit to how long she can put up with being called Titchypoo and Wee wee pants, and hear his favourite taunt, 'Grizzly Grilla will get you!' Grandma decides it is time to teach Momo a thing or two about teasing so together she and Mimi plot to give him a memorable fright. The text is beautifully enhanced by the zingingly colourful illustrations in a jungle setting. There is great strength and empowerment in Mimi's final scene with Grandma. Mimi claims she will just laugh and laugh if ever Momo teases her in future. Bound to become a favourite. **GB**

Handa's Hen

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Eileen Browne, Mantra, 32pp, Albanian/English, 1 84444 060 5, £7.50 pbk

The Luo tribe of south-west Kenya, along with the landscape and wildlife of the country, provide the inspiration for this popular counting book. When Handa can't find her grandma's hen one morning, her friend Akeyo helps her look. Of course, en route they see various other creatures: two butterflies, three mice, four lizards and so on. The two texts in this version (Albanian/English) sit well together with enough spacing and differences in font to distinguish them visually. There's just one page towards the end where the two languages seem to merge into one chunk rather than two distinct texts because they're too close together, but this is a minor transgression. Vivid colour illustrations capture the setting beautifully, supporting the narrative and showing the animals clearly enough to count together. The ending is guaranteed to please – just when the girls are about to give up looking, they hear a chirping sound from under a bush and what do they find? The hen with ten little chicks, of course. (Available in 22 dual language editions and Big Book English only.) **UC**

Moonlight Lily

★★★★

Carrie Emma Weston, ill. Caroline Pedler, Oxford, 32pp, 0 19 272546 7, £4.99 pbk



Lily is a charming character! She is a lop-eared white rabbit, the pet of two children who live on a farm. We are introduced to her as night falls,

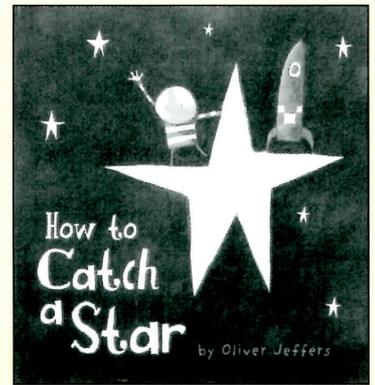
NEW Talent

How to Catch a Star

★★★★★

Oliver Jeffers, Collins, 40pp, 0 00 715033 4, £10.99 hbk

With artists such as Neal Layton and Lauren Child having paved the way, Jeffers' first picture book with its minimalist artwork style is unlikely to encounter the baffled reactions that might have greeted it only a few years ago. A boy (sundial like face, two sticks for legs) loves stars very much and the story depicts his efforts to obtain one to have as a friend. Reminiscent of an illustrative style found in Eastern Europe, Jeffers uses wash superbly well to convey shadow and reflection, confidently locating the boy and other elements



in action sequences against white backgrounds or in atmospheric full colour pages. His use of the pages within the double spread moves the story forward with an intense seriousness – the reader is drawn in to the emotional drama and convinced by its satisfying denouement. A stunning debut! **RS**

the farmer is a-bed, Lily asleep in her hutch, and all the other animals tucked up. Onto the scene steals a fox, creeping past the henhouse and making straight for Lily. The illustrations build up the tension as we study each spread, fearing what might happen on the following page. As we turn over, 'BOO!' says the fox, and Lily wakes up and greets him with joy! Here begins an amazing moonlight dance, Lily and the fox pirouetting whilst the other animals provide the music. No-one wants the moonlight party to end. This tale is beautifully crafted, with pictures and text marrying just perfectly. **GB**

Good Dog, Paw!

★★★★★

Chinlun Lee, Walker, 40pp, 0 7445 9295 X, £10.99 hbk

Recent Royal College of Art graduate Chinlun Lee's first book for Walker, *The Very Kind Rich Lady and her One Hundred Dogs* (2001) was a fabulously raw and chaotic affair with a delightfully eccentric vision. As is often the case, some of that art school exuberance has been tamed in this more sober follow-up, with its more self-conscious approach to structure and design. The doggy theme continues, and this time the story is related by Paw, whose owner April is a veterinary surgeon. Paw describes the daily routine of eating, exercise and health checks in a way that will inform and delight all young dog owners. Lee's cover design is a joy, with its delicate, almost Parisian atmosphere, and hand-rendered titling. She invests her canines with great character. The interior of the book is not enhanced by the inexplicable and rather intrusive coloured bands that border some of the pages. **MS**

Biscuit Bear

★★★★★

Mini Grey, Jonathan Cape, 32pp, 0 224 06496 7, £10.99 hbk

Biscuit Bear is the creation of young Horace who for once, with the aid of a cutter, turns his lump of pastry into something tasty rather than a small, deep grey and fluffy mess. As we are told, 'the life of a biscuit is usually short and sweet' but Biscuit Bear manages to survive until bedtime thanks to mum's interventions.

While Horace sleeps Biscuit Bear does some baking of his own and soon a troupe of bears is giving a circus performance in the kitchen until it is broken up by Bongo the dog. Surveying the carnage, Biscuit Bear realises that his only hope of survival is to find a safe haven. So, he escapes to the Golden Bun where he can always be found centre stage in the seasonal displays of the pastry shop window.

This is a truly scrumptious picture book with all the right ingredients – sophisticated, surreal and wonderfully anarchic; the pictures, words, print and layout are all used to relate, stretch and extend the story and keep readers of all ages hugely entertained. **JB**

The Puddleman

★★★★★

Raymond Briggs, Jonathan Cape, 32pp, 0 224 07009 6, £10.99 hbk



Briggs is on top form once more with this strange and moving story about Tom and his grandfather (called 'Collar' because he drags him around on a lead). Collar is taken by Tom for a walk to have a look at the puddles that he has curiously named after members of the family. As there has been no rain for ages there are no puddles but Tom claims this is only because they haven't been put in yet. The distraction caused by Mrs

Whitebobblehat's arrival with her dog, Robson, enables Tom to get away. He wanders off down the lane and meets the man he needs: The Puddleman, who produces made to measure puddles for the whole of Tom's family. Then, naturally, he 'disappears' before Collar and Mrs Whitebobblehat catch sight of him.

The soft edged, coloured pencil, strip cartoon, which Briggs has made his trademark through such classics as *The Snowman*, *When the Wind Blows* and *The Bear*, is used once more to great effect. **AK**

Baby on Board

INFORMATION STORY ★★★★★

Kes Gray, ill. Sarah Naylor, Hodder, 24pp, 0 340 87801 0, £4.99 pbk

This is a down-to-earth book about a family expecting a baby. We hear about morning sickness, frequent visits to the lavatory and the need for larger brassieres and knickers as the mother expands. But to start the text with 'Mum and Dad have been at it again', while possibly consistent with

some post-modern approaches, seems to me charmless and inappropriate for the 3-5 year olds for whom the book is intended. However, apart from an 'in your face' start, this is an excellent book with an interesting and effective design. The pages, which are landscape, get bigger as the baby grows over nine months of gestation. There are complementary stories on alternate pages: one about the impact of the impending birth on the little girl and her parents and the other about the baby's growth from 'a blob' to a 'real

person ready to launch'.

The illustrations are bright and distinctive and the last double spread summarising the baby's development is most helpful and likely to encourage the young listeners to talk and question. A clear, often witty, text combines perfectly with the pictures to make this a most original picture book. **MM**

REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

Princess Katrina and the Hair Charmer

★★★

Christina Shingler, ill. Derek Brazell, Tamarind, 24pp, 1 870516 68 0, £6.99 pbk

To everyone else, Princess Katrina is the perfect princess, kind, helpful and hard working but secretly her self-image is somewhat negative and her mop of thick, recalcitrant curls is at the root of it. On hearing of her feelings, Katrina's soul mate, Fussfeathers her parrot, offers rhyming words of wisdom, but to no avail. So, he decides to call upon the help of the 'Great Hair Charmer from across the sea'.

The stunning Zuri duly appears and sets to work transforming the princess's locks. But, the most important transformation of all is one Katrina needs to make within herself: her hair already has its own magic, all she needs is to use the power of her imagination together with some patience: her locks can be all the crowning glory she'll ever need.

A longish text offering much to think about, particularly on the theme of image - perceived and received; at first seemingly, Katrina breaks all the princess stereotypes (she is a rare black princess!) but then we learn she still concerns herself with traditional princess images.

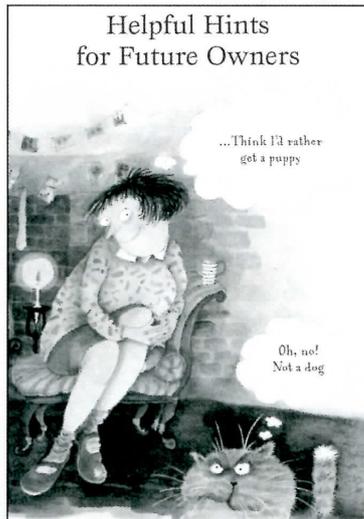
The illustrations glow with vibrant carnival colours and the colour combinations verge on the psychedelic at times. Coloured backgrounds are used for the text too and where the words are superimposed on a multi-coloured background this does not make for easy reading. For me at any rate, the earthy hues used for some of the pages work the best. An arresting book and certainly a story well worth sharing and discussing both with older infants and juniors. **JB**

The Sprog Owner's Manual

★★★★

Babette Cole, Jonathan Cape, 40pp, 0 224 06487 8, £10.99 hbk

Cole's wonderfully off-the-wall humour is given full rein in this guide to good sprogs and bad sprogs. The author has achieved a level of popularity and status that allows her to say and draw things that would never get past an editor were they suggested by a less well-established artist. And her books are all the better for that. Here we are treated to



detailed anatomical diagrams of the vile internal workings of bad sprogs, alongside their wholesome and angelic counterparts. A healthy preoccupation with matters of a scatological nature is always a sure-fire hit with small people and Cole's is particularly unhindered by any thoughts of political correctness. Her use of media is highly appropriate, incorporating as it does collaged human or dog hair and goodness knows what other unpleasant materials. A fabulously disgusting book. I have a horrible feeling that there may be a 'scratch and sniff' version coming soon. **MS**

Beowulf

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

Adapted by Henriette Barkow, ill. Alan Brown, Mantra, 32pp, Bengali/English, 1 84444 024 9, £7.50 pbk

Beowulf is a new addition to Mantra's 'Heritage Tales: Myths and Legends from around the World' series. The illustrations are evocative and drive the narrative forward in a compelling way. Whether the text does so in both language versions is the question - clearly the English version is written in a style suited to the tale and I wonder how the other language versions compare stylistically and how accessible they are. The illustrations draw one in but this is not likely to be an easy read; it might need some introduction to spark children's interest (the historical notes at the beginning are a good aid to this), along with some vocabulary support to sustain it. Bengali script is very distinctive; here it is clearly superimposed, along with the English text beneath,

on the full-page colour illustrations across each spread. (Available in 20 dual language editions, as audio CD and as an E-book.) **UC**

Rita in Wonderland

★★★

Hilda Offen, Happy Cat, 32pp, 1 903285 63 1, £3.99 pbk

I instantly enjoyed Offen's illustrations which give a warmth and humour to Rita and her adventures. In this book, Rita and her family have gone to an adventure style park called Wonderland. Leaving Rita with the children means that she can soon escape and start rescuing other people in trouble - this includes her brothers and sister, who of course never know the identity of their rescuer. Great fun and just the right length to read to younger children, the balance of pictures and print ensures that children will also enjoy reading the book either to themselves or to others. **RL**

Half a Pig

★★★

Allan Ahlberg, ill. Jessica Ahlberg, Walker, 40pp, 0 7445 9235 6, £10.99 hbk

The daunting task of illustrating Ahlberg's text here falls to his daughter Jessica in the author's latest 'rollicking' adventure. Esmeralda Pig is half owned by her beloved Mrs Harbottle and half by Mrs Harbottle's dastardly ex-husband who, now that they are divorced, wishes to claim his half. The ensuing slapstick shenanigans unfold in Ahlberg's trademark conversational style as the chase gains momentum, Ealing Comedy style, across the pages of the book. The author's stature gives him licence to tamper with the usual rules of text/image relationship and picture book/story book format, and the reader is invited to look out for various words that will be coming up in the text and to share the author's relish in their sounds and meanings. Jessica Ahlberg's promising debut (given the intolerable burden of the footsteps in which she is following) is rather buried under the weight of design and art direction that makes her work seem reliant on that of the excellent Katherine McEwen, who illustrated the previous Ahlberg/Walker collaboration, *The Man Who Wore All His Clothes*. **MS**



Curious George Rides a Bike

★★★★

H A Rey, Walker, 48pp, 1 84428 507 3, £5.99 pbk

Certain characters and books that retain a strong sense of the aesthetic of the 1950s from whence they came, have somehow survived to entertain successive generations of children. Bemelmans' *Madeline* and Gene Zion and Margaret Bloy Graham's *Harry the Dirty Dog* spring to mind as other obvious examples. George's ability to get into all manner of scrapes through being distracted by his curiosity clearly still has popular appeal. In this story, our favourite monkey is entrusted with the task of delivering newspapers on his bicycle, but soon decides to teach us origami with his wares instead. His inability to pay attention leads to a broken front wheel, but this proves a blessing as his resourceful unicycling skills lead to an appearance as a circus performer, and a reunion with his owner, 'the man with the yellow hat'. All this wonderfully improbable nonsense is delivered through faithful reproductions of the original illustrations, charmingly executed in that classic 'New Yorker' style, with the three colours plus black separations. **MS**

All the Colours of the Earth

POETRY ★★★★★

Selected by Wendy Cooling, ill. Sheila Moxley, Frances Lincoln, 48pp, 1 84507 014 3, £12.99 hbk

A diverse collection of 31 poems from all over the world, looking at some of the concerns of children from play to poverty. Among the poets featured are Tagore, Robert Louis Stevenson, Christina Rossetti

and Felice Holman. The overall theme is global citizenship and though the poems encompass issues such as deforestation and hunger, the lingering mood is upbeat, particularly in the offerings by Steve Turner, John Agard and Benjamin Zephaniah where hope and positivity are sung out.

The book is generously illustrated in full colour. Moxley uses an appropriately naïve style which helps draw readers into the poets' world. **JB**

Fairytale News

★★★★

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Walker, 40pp, 0 7445 9257 7, £10.99 novelty hbk

Delivering copies of Fairytale News is Jack's task as newly employed paperboy for Mrs Tattle the newsagent. His customers include The Three Bears, the Hoods and their daughter Red Riding and Granny Hood. Jack's last customer is his mum Mother Hubbard who, after reading the market news, sends Jack off to sell the cow. His payment of course, is a magic bean, which indirectly leads to Jack's biggest reader of the Fairytale News.

This interweaving of familiar fairy tales and characters is interspersed with awful jokes and bubble speak; but, the real treat is the copy of Fairytale News to be found in the 'giant's' pocket at the back of the book. This is bursting with news, features, pictures, sport and ads. Reporting on the antics of a whole host of fairy tale and nursery rhyme characters.

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins have had great fun in this playful amalgam of stories and characters. So too, from my experience, will readers and listeners of 6+ already familiar with the straightforward versions, and the newspaper in particular, is a great inspiration for children's own experiments in writing. **JB**

Sir Gadabout Goes Overboard

★★★★

Martyn Beardsley, ill. Tony Ross, Dolphin, 96pp, 1 84255 274 0, £4.99 pbk

The latest of six comic tales about the totally incompetent but kind-hearted knight of the round table, Sir Gadabout. In this escapade, the landlubber knight ends up taking to the high seas in the *Flying Barnacle* to tackle the ferocious pirate Longbeard, who has ruined the livelihood of Captain Hazard. Trading in wool, Captain Hazard buys wool from local farmers and sells it at a profit to inhabitants of the Chilliwilli islands, where the sheep have no wool of their own. Sir Gadabout, who effortlessly confuses his crew by issuing nonsensical nautical commands, manages to enrage still further the evil Longbeard by shooting his beard off.

This is a very silly but enjoyable yarn which moves at a fair rate of knots and is enhanced by Tony Ross's excellent and unmistakable monochrome sketches. Other titles in this series include *Sir Gadabout and the Ghost*, *Sir Gadabout and the Little Horror* and *Sir Gadabout Gets Worse*, in which our hero tries to recover the stolen Excalibur. **AK**

The Boy with the Magic Numbers

★★★★

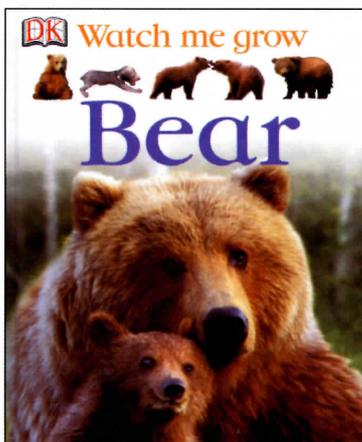
Sally Gardner, Dolphin, 128pp, 1 84255 088 8, £3.99 pbk

Billy Pickles' dad leaves home to live in New York, giving Billy a peculiar moneybox. Billy doesn't know where to put the money or why his dad has left home.

Billy is invited to stay with his dad and travels, without his mum, to New York, where his Italian grandmother, Mighty Mama, meets him. He soon discovers the secret of his magic moneybox after obtaining a rare battery for it. Billy's magical New York experience sees him winning a game show prize (a ride in a helicopter), cracking a safe for the New York police and discovering the unpleasant truth about his dad's boss, Nathan Chance. Nathan not only turns out to be a fraudster but also is behind the kidnapping of a millionaire's son. With the help of his moneybox, Billy locates the kidnapers. He also starts to get to know his dad and begins to accept why he left home to be with his new girlfriend, Trixie.

Returning home to England, Billy settles down to life at home with his mum again and working out the significance of the six numbers generated by the moneybox, goes out with his mum to buy the winning lottery ticket.

The frenetic pace makes this story readable in one session. The book is part of the 'Magical Children' series. Other titles in the series by the same author include *The Invisible Boy*, *The Smallest Girl Ever* and *The Strongest Girl in the World*. **AK**



Bear

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Lisa Magloff, Dorling Kindersley 'Watch me grow', 24pp, 1 4053 0241 0, £4.99 hbk

How does a tiny bear cub grow to become one of the largest animals in the forest? This book explains the life cycle through accessible text and strong illustrations. Page layout is clear and text of different sizes and strengths, dazzlingly sharp on snowy white pages, communicates the status of information. The main text tells the story from the viewpoint of a young bear and could be read first to establish the life cycle. Young listeners and readers could then return to each page to savour the extra information conveyed in more typical 'topic book' language and to the illustrations of bears at different stages in the life cycle and engaged

in activities such as fishing, climbing and defending their territory. Like the others in the series, this book encourages flexible reading and a welcome reflective approach to learning from non-fiction. **MM**

Racism

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Bruce Sanders, Franklin Watts 'Talking About', 32pp, 0 7496 5393 0, £10.99 hbk

Various types of racism and racist behaviour are clearly explained in this very well produced book. It discusses why people are racist and how this behaviour manifests itself. It explains how racist attitudes are learned. The 'My Story' section allows for personal views of racist behaviour by children to others. It deals well with the damaging impact of name calling and other racist behaviours. It goes some way to explain the feelings and reactions of the victim to racist behaviour. There are some hints and strategies for coping with racism. However, I think a more appropriate choice for 'My Story' could have been a black or Asian child because they are the ones that are immediately visible and incidents against them occur more often.

Some thought could have been given to matching the photographs more sympathetically to the text in some instances. However, this is a good, easily accessible, well laid out book. It could be made available to the individual child or made the focus of classroom discussion for dealing with the sensitive issue of racism. **VW**

The Great Fire of London

NON-FICTION BIG BOOK

★★★★

Liz Gogerly, ill. Donald Harley, Hodder Wayland 'Beginning History', 24pp, 0 7502 4613 8, £17.99 pbk

There are a great many history texts on this event, not least because The Great Fire is a unit title in the UK History Scheme of Work for Years 2 and 3 (6-8 year-olds). This book, large enough to support group and possibly even class work, tells the story at a lively pace using familiar quotations from that well-known contemporary figure, Samuel Pepys. The causes of the fire, the reasons why the authorities failed to gain swift control over its progress and the changes which followed in the aftermath are all well explained. The illustrations include contemporary paintings and photographs of artefacts (for example of a leather bucket and a 'hand-squirt' of the sort used in 1666). These are well chosen and large enough for children to learn from and to find inspiration for their own drawing and writing. The frieze-like picture on the first double spread gives a splendid impression of a populous London and of houses built close enough together to make inevitable the fast spread of any fire that might break out. There are picture acknowledgements of course, but teachers might welcome some more detailed annotations or notes about the paintings and the artists to inform discussion. **MM**

What's Under the Bed?

0 7496 5685 9

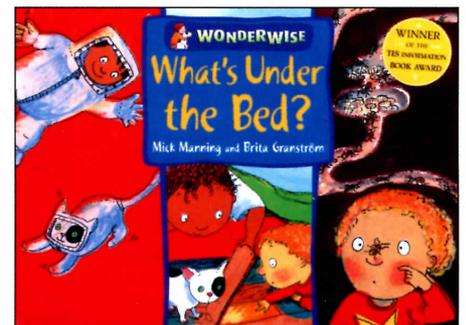
Splish, Splash, Splosh!

0 7496 5686 7

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Franklin Watts 'Wonderwise', 32pp, £5.99 each pbk

Manning and Granström are star authors of non-fiction for younger children and these new editions of two favourite books will be in demand. A useful and not too prescriptive 'notes and activities' page has been added by Lynn Huggins-Cooper. This gives ideas for linking the books with lessons across the curriculum, especially science, literacy and numeracy.



What's Under the Bed? explores a simple but brilliant idea: what would we find if it were possible for us to burrow under the bed right through to the central core of the earth? We 'suspend disbelief' when we follow two children and a cat on a make-believe journey as they burrow into the underground, enter caves, see fossils, jewels and coal, and then – towards the centre of the earth – find magna and liquid metal. The book deals with big concepts, but everything is so well explained through words and pictures that young readers can begin to understand. So we have, near the centre of the earth, 'liquid metal, hotter than you can imagine, all wrapped around a cannon-ball-hard core of iron and nickel – just like the hard stone in the middle of a peach'. This book, winner of the TES information book award in 1997, helps children understand diagrams, and how to label and annotate them, much more successfully than do many conventional information books. Children find the cross sections of a volcano, of the layers of the earth and above all of an ant colony (with its demonstration of the usefulness of a key) exceptionally helpful.

Splish, Splash, Splosh! invites young readers to join a boy and his dog as they discover information about water and how human beings use it. Like *What's Under the Bed?* it includes fine cross sections – of a u-bend, a sewage works and the water cycle. And there are copious vignettes – small pictures that are such a feature of Manning and Granström's work – like that of a mountain range deep under the ocean with a little boat at the surface: so simple, but so effective. Above all these books remind us that information can be imparted successfully within the context of a story. **MM**

Eddie's Garden and How to Make Things Grow

INFORMATION STORY ★★★

Sarah Garland, Frances Lincoln, 40pp 1 84507 015 1, £10.99 hbk

A simple introduction to gardening and growing things in picture-book format. Eddie wants a garden of his own and with the help of toddler sibling Lily and Mum creates a plot to grow vegetables and flowers. Sarah Garland's expressive pencil

and colour wash illustrations capture the sense of expectation as Eddie busily digs the soil, sows the seeds, waters and weeds. Mum ensures that it all remains fun (sticks for the runner beans are arranged wigwam fashion to make a bean den) and that little Lily is involved but not ingesting worms. Soon the garden is flourishing with sunflowers, pumpkins, peas, carrots and lettuces, and the harvested produce is enjoyed in a celebratory picnic. Advice for grown-up gardeners is included in the final pages, with suggestions on suitable

seeds for small hands and ideas for using containers or windowsills, as well as tips on keeping pests at bay without resorting to chemicals. Ideal for sharing as a picture book in advance of starting a first garden. SU

Ice Skating School

NON-FICTION ★★★

Naia Bray-Moffatt, photographs by David Handley, Dorling Kindersley, 48pp, 1 4053 0308 5, £7.99 hbk Lavender endpapers and soft-focus

photos of little girls in pastel-coloured cardies set the tone for this atmospheric guide to ice skating. Actually boys are included too in the class of young beginners, and we see them being coached through their first steps, spins, glides, jumps and even falls as they work towards a show. A couple of older children provide role models, demonstrating their pairs skating routine and practice. A gentle introduction for beginners hovering at the edge of the rink, you would need to look elsewhere for more detailed information on the sport. SU

REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle

Jumping Beany

★★★

June Crebbin, ill. David Roberts, Walker, 80pp, 0 7445 8382 9, £3.99 pbk

The rivalry that exists among children can often get pretty intense, and riding schools are no exception. In *Jumping Beany* Crebbin catches the feelings and concerns of a group of children who are fast approaching the pony day at their riding school. Will Amber, our heroine, get to ride her favourite pony Beany, or will she arrive too late? And what will her arch rival Donna do to get her own way? And as if that is not enough, will Amber's Dad, who has finally promised to attend the Pony Day, manage to get there on time? The anxieties that children experience will be easily identified and sympathised with by anyone reading this book. RL

Captain Fact's Space Adventure

1 4052 0832 5

Captain Fact's Dinosaur Adventure

1 4052 0833 3

★★

Knife and Packer, Egmont, 96pp, £3.99 each pbk

It seems that in publishing, like TV programme making, one of the ways of coming up with new, and hopefully profitable, ideas is to combine some that are already well tried and tested. The pedigree of Egmont's new venture into the popular children's information market is pretty obvious. It's Captain Underpants meets Horrible Histories.

In this new series, presented in semi-cartoon format, the inept weather forecaster, Cliff Thornhill, and his dog Puddles are transformed into Captain Fact and his faithful sidekick, Knowledge. Their perilous super-hero missions enable them to travel at a comfortably amiable and superficial level through various subject areas. In these two titles they travel back in time to return a baby dinosaur to its mother and across space to Mars to rescue Dr. Barnabus, a super-intelligent Ape, whose space ship Ape-ollo 13 is running low on bananas. In the series, there is also a *Creepy Crawly Adventure* and an *Egyptian Adventure*.

At points in each story, Captain Fact suffers a Fact Attack, signalled by a

twitching of some part of his body, which leads to the eruption of a double page of fascinating facts about, say, animals in space travel, or the habits and discussions of Triceratops. The basic idea is not bad, although you have to rely on the reader to be able to sift out the fact from the fantasy. But its realisation is undistinguished. Like the cartoons in *Captain Underpants*, these illustrations have a deliberate under-the-desk quality that reminds me of the efforts that the more talented of my mates could manage as a diversion in a tedious lesson. And, although Captain Fact is supposed to have had the entire contents of a library etched into his brain by a lightning strike, the number of facts that he shares with his readers offers very little value for £3.99 compared to any of Scholastic's Horrible series. The ultimate test of a series like this will be whether the intended customers and their parents are prepared to put their hands in their pockets. CB

Lost Treasure of the Emerald Eye

0 439 55963 4

The Curse of the Cheese Pyramid

0 439 55964 2

Cat and Mouse in a Haunted House

0 439 55965 0

I'm Too Fond of My Fur!

0 439 55966 9

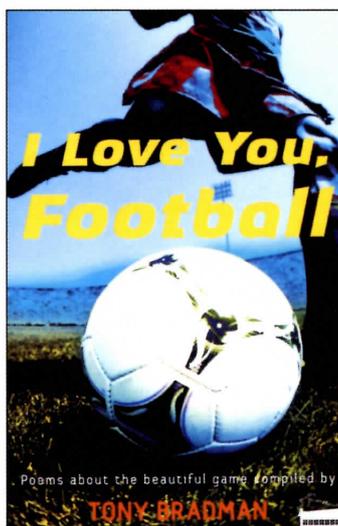
★★

Geronimo Stilton, Scholastic, 128pp, £3.99 each pbk

In his native Italy Geronimo Stilton is almost as popular as Harry Potter. Then again, in Italy the stories about the editor of *Mouse Island's* newspaper *The Rodent's Gazette* and his ever-squabbling family can be read as political satire.

In this country any such satire would be lost on the target audience. What young readers get in these books are the sort of run-of-the-mill plotlines familiar to any regular viewer of *Scooby Doo* and an awful lot of references to cheese. Geronimo is surprisingly middle-aged to be an adventure hero – his daring sister Thea with her hold-the-front-page attitude and motorbike is far more attractive a character – but even so the stories rattle along at break-neck speed. Splashes of colour (or color as these have it) and different type

faces scattered across the pages make the books visually very appealing though no easier to read and add to the feeling of breathlessness. There's a picture of the entire staff of the *Rodent's Gazette* and maps of both *Mouse Island* and *New Mouse City* at the beginning and end of the books though you have to wonder why as in each the action takes place elsewhere and features a different set of characters altogether. AR



I Love You, Football

POETRY ★★★

Compiled by Tony Bradman, ill. Steve Dell, Hodder Wayland, 128pp, 0 7502 4279 5, £4.99 pbk

A devoted football fan, Tony Bradman presents here a collection of new and classic football poems. Children who love 'the beautiful game' will appreciate the range of emotions, the agony, the ecstasy, and the excitement described by the many poets included in this well-chosen and humorously illustrated anthology.

A youngster's pre-match nerves are felt keenly in John Foster's 'The Night Before the Big Match'. Allan Ahlberg captures, in Joyce Grenfell style, the essence of a struggling junior team's manager in 'Team Talk', whilst that special moment of wearing a brand new strip is nicely handled in 'New Kit' by Celia Warren.

There are over 60 contributions from poets such as Roger McGough, Jill Townsend, John Agard and Nick Toczec. Poems from the past, such as 'Cup Final Day, 1961' by Brian

Moses, may not be as readily accessible as the more modern poems including Jonathan Kebbe's 'The Nutmeg Rap', but there is plenty of variety to suit all tastes. There are football haiku poems and Paul Cookson's football version of the *Lord's Prayer* ('Our team, which are eleven, Hallowed be our team...'). For fans of the bard there is 'Shakespeare's Boots' by Brian Morse ('Shall I compare thee to a wintry afternoon, Thou art more full of stinks and rank with mud.')

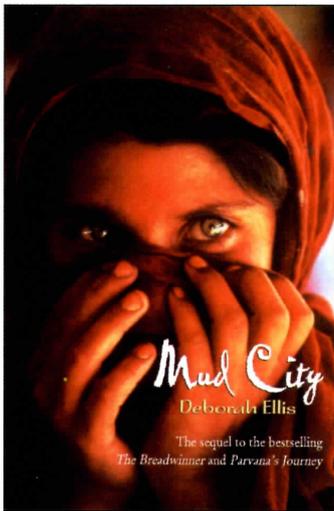
You'll be over the moon with this anthology, not sick as a parrot. AK

Mud City

★★★★

Deborah Ellis, Oxford, 160pp, 0 19 275376 2, £4.99 pbk

Following *The Breadwinner* and *Parvana's Journey*, this is the third book in Deborah Ellis's exploration of refugee life in Afghanistan at the time of the Taliban. Shauzia and her dog, Jasper, have fled their country to shelter in a refugee camp just over the border in Pakistan. In this story they leave the relative security of the camp to pursue Shauzia's dream of a better future in faraway France, a country she knows only from the creased and faded photo of a lavender field she carries with her everywhere. In the nearest border town, disguised as a boy, she finds a bitter present of hand-to-mouth odd-jobs, begging and scavenging. Eventually, she finds herself back at the camp. In the meantime, she has discovered that, despite her determination and cunning, there is little that she can do alone to improve conditions for herself and the other children like her. When she returns to the camp, she seizes the opportunity to put her talents to use for the greater good. At the same time, the reader is introduced to the desperate conditions of refugee life and to the various responses of the members of the host nation: the shopkeepers who give Shauzia casual work; the corruption of the local police, who steal her money; and the shadowy figures who come in the night and whose sinister designs are not spelt out. Ellis pitches her story for pre-teens and, while she does not spare her readers the daily degradations of the life of the poor, she merely hints at the more terrible aspects of exploitation and cruelty to which such children may fall prey. She does not allow Shauzia herself to become degraded, disillusioned or bitter, and readers will warm to this wilful, cunning but essentially good-hearted girl. Typically, she outstays her welcome



with a well-meaning expatriate American family, by opening their home to the poor off the streets and by storing quantities of decaying food under her bed, because she may need it later. Ellis provides a glossary and an author's note which provides the historical background and gives readers the opportunity to play their own part in making the future a little easier for children like Shauzia. CB

Pinocchio

★★

Carlo Collodi, trans. Emma Rose, ill. Sara Fanelli, Walker, 192pp, 0 7445 8632 1, £14.99 hbk with slipcase

In its 'Consultation Paper on Children's Literature' (see BfK 144 editorial) Arts Council England deplored (as others have done now

and then over the last forty years) the negligible amount of translation that is going on. That's easy enough. What's more difficult is to assess the problems inherent in presenting one country's children's books to the children of another and to assess the adequacy of the translator's work. So far as I know, Emma Rose's version of *Pinocchio* is here published for the first time and it would have been nice to know what her policy was as translator. For the text of this fancily produced gift-book does not follow as closely as it might Lorenzini/Collodi's original. A small amount of abridgment has taken place, most regrettably in the deletion of the narrative chapter titles, and this is combined with a sharpening of idiom so that nineteenth-century Italian prose takes on the flavour of twenty-first-century English vernacular. For instance, the author's faintly ironic addresses to *miei cari e piccoli lettori* are modified; *ragazzi* become 'kids' when required; phrases like 'hang on a minute' and 'do me a favour and shove off' take over from more formal diction; the ill-spelt graffiti in Toyland are altered... and so on.

For the most part such changes blend in well to the register which the translator has adopted throughout, but the rhythm of the story with its thirty-six short chapters is brutally disrupted by the intrusive acrobatics of its illustrator. These consist of a variety of technical tricks, mostly involving collage either for broad coloured backgrounds (sometimes using photographs or the artist's favoured stock of graph and ruled papers) or for supplying smaller elements in the pictures such as clothing, furnishings, facial features etc. They occupy varying amounts of space from double-page spreads to small

spot compositions and are supplemented by quantities of blotchy, slapdash sketches scattered about elsewhere. Pinocchio himself is featured not as anything resembling a wooden puppet but as a vacuous half-moon visage attached to spindly body parts. From time to time a picture will diverge from the requirements of the text: why does the cat wear an eyepatch if he's pretending to be totally blind? Why does the coachman 'wreathed in smiles' look at us as if he's chewing a slice of lemon? Why does a green serpent appear full-page coloured red?

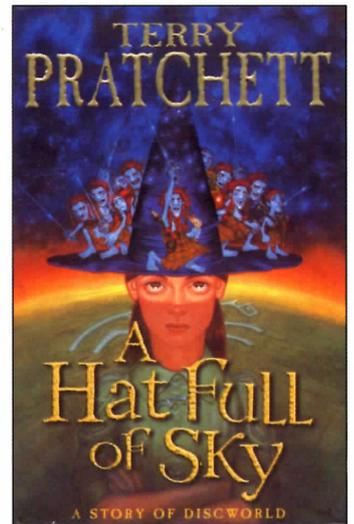
It is just possible that the intention behind all these higgledy-piggledy graphics was to match the street-wise tone of Emma Rose's translation, but their effect is to undermine the coherence and subtlety of Collodi's original. We puzzle over the tangled images; we are distracted by the technical ingenuity – and the infantile hand-lettering; a great tale is sacrificed to the cult of illustratorial personality. (The slipcase is pretty though. Carefully manipulated you can make it elongate the noses of the creatures on the back board of the book.) BA

A Hat Full of Sky

★★★★

Terry Pratchett, Doubleday, 352pp, 0 385 60736 9, £12.99 hbk

This is Terry Pratchett's second novel for younger readers about Tiffany Aching and the Wee Free Men. Tiffany leaves the Chalk Downs to study her craft with Miss Lever, a rather absent-minded but kindly witch who performs her stock in trade healing the minor ailments and trivial but pressing problems of



the local villagers rather than indulging in excessive pyrotechnics.

She becomes possessed by a hiver – a parasitical entity who completely takes over its host and devours its personality. The Nac Mac Feeble come to the rescue – a pugilistic and endearing race of fairies with a ferocious appetite for alcohol and a fierce loyalty to Tiffany. All ends well – but not before the reader has been hurtled through a series of often hilarious scenarios with a carefully devised blend of wit and the simple wisdom of a clear-cut moral line.

Comparisons with Harry Potter are, predictably, inevitable. What sets the two apart is the cheerful irreverence and the absence of brooding darkness. This is a long book but it will be eagerly devoured by Pratchett fans from nine years upwards. VR

REVIEWS 10–14 Middle/Secondary

Hit the Road, Jack

★★

Mimi Thebo, Collins, 160pp, 0 00 714278 1, £9.99 hbk

When Jack, aged 12, picks up and reads a letter from his absent father, one of many which are causing his mother to cry, he deduces from it that his banished and supposedly disgraced father is actually working exiled from domestic happiness by his mum and her new boyfriend, Richard. Jack resolves to trace and help his poor mistreated dad, and in so doing gets himself and other people into trouble and finally danger. Jack is a very bright child, and the school he attends is a centre of excellence for gifted children. His behaviour throughout confirms the familiar truth that people of extremely high intelligence can also be gullible, naive and stupid.

Jack's mixed-up loyalties and feelings are the only complex human traits in the book. Everyone else is (or finally proves to be) starkly bad or good, sinful or saintly, vicious or loving, with no intermediate shades. The book raises many dark and important themes – alcoholism, wife-beating, child-abuse, child prostitution, repressed memory – but it does so in such thin, cartoon-like, sentimental forms that the result is a lightweight tear-jerker,

unworthy of the sombre topics it takes on board. PH

Colossus

★★

Lesley Howarth, Oxford, 160pp, 0 19 275330 4, £4.99 pbk

Nathan is abnormally tall for his age, stutters and behaves quite obsessively. He is in the shadow of his beautiful older sister. The pair find themselves thrown together on a holiday in Rhodes, with 'The Olds' permanently off on sightseeing trips. Nathan's discovery of a cheap souvenir statuette of Colossus releases spectres of the classical past and convinces the boy that he has found '...a symbol of future things that might and could be done if you weren't afraid to try them, things that *could and might happen* if you had the courage to jump off the rocks...'

The plot wears a bit thin in places, relying a lot on half-formed thought processes, and I began to wonder whether it might have been better as a short story. Youngsters will have to be prepared to stick with it if they are to get to the end. DB

Forbidden

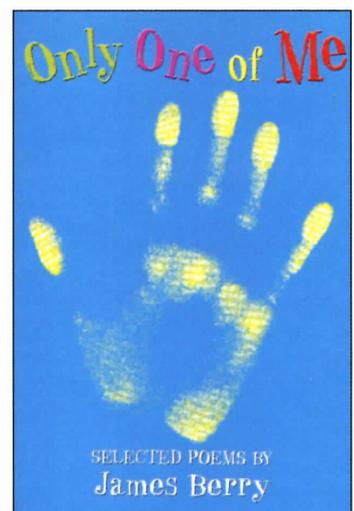
★★★★

Judy Waite, Oxford, 192pp, 0 19 275312 6, £4.99 pbk

Forbidden deals with the controversial subject of religious cults, focusing on Elinor and her life in True Cause under the control of Howard, its charismatic leader. The details of the austere and punitive life in the sect are chillingly revealed through Elinor's accounts of her everyday routines. These are the more affecting for their deadened quality – a sort of hypnosis or trance in which none of the distractions of the outside world or even of her own thoughts and memories can be allowed to intrude.

This almost catatonic state is pierced by the arrival of Jamie, who rouses Elinor to begin to think for herself. Gradually, as her conditioning breaks down, she sees how the followers are manipulated and used to provide a source of wealth for Howard and his sinister bodyguard and adviser Rael – perhaps even the spelling of his name demonstrates how reality has been distorted by the cult.

The skill of the narrative is in showing how Elinor slowly emerges from the brainwashing inflicted on her by the cult – its weakest element is the convenience and neatness of its happy resolution. VR



Only One of Me

★★★★★

James Berry, Macmillan, 208pp, 0 330 41831 9, £4.99 pbk

This is James Berry's selection of his poetry from four previously published collections for young people over the last 15 years or so. It also includes eight new poems. His very first collection was awarded the Signal Poetry Award, making him part of a select band of modern children's poets, and a lot of these

early works can be found here. His subsequent collections have maintained the same high standard.

Berry's Caribbean origins are celebrated often in the themes of his poems but consistently in his use of language. Even when his is not using dialect, his language is an intoxicating mix of the cadences of the spoken word and the literary, coining new words and syntax. His preoccupations and sensibilities move between the enjoyments of the rural world of his own youth and the urban pleasures and trials of the childhood of his readers in Britain, giving equal weight to each and always, whatever his recognition of tragedy and injustice, rejoicing in the gift and enjoyment of the life around us and within us.

These are lip-smacking poems to be relished in their music and their passion, but they are also thought provoking. Berry never patronises his readers, never goes for the cliché or the easy effect. As the title of this collection suggests, he is always pushing his readers to recognise the individual voice in others and themselves: often imagining himself into other personas and equally at home as a pet rabbit or a girl dressing up for a night on the town. His 'People Equal' is as much a hymn to difference and a plea for tolerance and understanding as it is an assertion of equality: 'Some people rush to the front. / Others hang back, feeling they can't. / Yet people equal. Equal.' CB

Victoria: Born to Be a Warrior

★★★

Frances Hendry, Hodder,
224pp, 0 340 87772 3, £5.99 pbk

Set in Roman Britain, *Victoria* is the first novel in a trilogy about a girl of mixed Roman and Icenic parentage. These are troubled times and Victoria, spirited, brave and physically strong, is called upon to use all of her mental and physical resources to defend herself and her family. We first meet Victoria as an inhabitant of Londinium where her father, a Roman soldier, is stationed. However, his efforts to marry her to a much older man impel her to flee to the north, to her mother's tribe. There her combative skills earn her acclaim but soon she is caught up in the battles between the Romans and tribes people led by Queen Boudicca.

Victoria is something of an early superwoman, surviving by means of her physical prowess and valiant spirit. She has a role model in Queen Boudicca who, at the conclusion, appears to urge Victoria to continue the struggle against the Roman conquerors. *Victoria* will find a following as an action-packed drama and it will also be valuable as a story located within a violent and terrible conflict which echoes conflicts of the world today. Victoria's own sense of conflicting loyalties is given voice as is her sense that she can never really belong as a Roman or an Icenic. Hendry's research seems to be thorough and has created a vivid sense of the period. Her writing is modern in tone and has none of the creakiness of novels which try too hard to create a sense of period through the use of stylised and awkward language. There is a useful glossary at the back which explains possibly unfamiliar words. It's a pity about the awful cover which may put

potential readers off.

VC

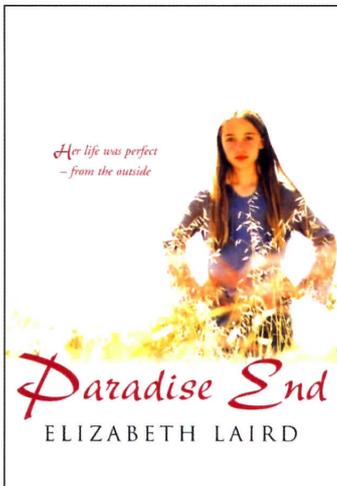
In Hollow Lands

★★★

Sophie Masson, Hodder,
240pp, 0 340 85442 1, £5.99 pbk

Masson's inspiration for *In Hollow Lands* is firmly rooted in Breton folklore and history mixed with Arthurian legend. Set in Brittany at a time when the land was strife ridden, it contains a lot of background information about the place and time. Tiphaine and Gromer, the daughter and son of a noble family, are abducted respectively by Rouanez, the queen of the fairy folk or korrigans, and her arch-rival Duke Bubo. The 12-year-olds are held for some years by their captors and are pawns as each attempts to seize power from the other. Most of the narrative focuses on Tiphaine and on Bertrand, a young mercenary soldier who eventually, through a complicated string of circumstances, effects the escape of Tiphaine and Gromer.

Fans of high fantasy may well enjoy this rather derivative tale but Masson's somewhat strained faux-archaic style makes the novel more difficult to read than it should be at times: 'Lenaik left first. Her companions farewelled her with little cries and taps of the beak, the solemn leavetaking of little birds who do not know if they will be alive at the end of the day.' VC



Paradise End

★★★

Elizabeth Laird, Macmillan,
240pp, 0 333 98095 6, £9.99 hbk

Paradise End starts in Household Hell. 14-year-old tap-dancing prima donna Carly is at loggerheads with her Barbie-minded little sister with whom she shares her bedroom. This contrived contretemps, however, provides the catalyst for the rest of the narrative. To calm herself down, the headstrong teenager bolts from her house and finds herself outside Paradise End, a stately home which abuts their housing estate hovel. There she meets Tia, the delicate daughter of jet-setting parents, who is symbolically penned in behind the massive iron gates of the ironically-named eponymous pile.

The rest of the story charts the burgeoning friendship between the seemingly ill-matched pair. Money does not buy happiness, of course. Despite her fantastic wealth, Tia is a porcelain princess, a fragile beauty,

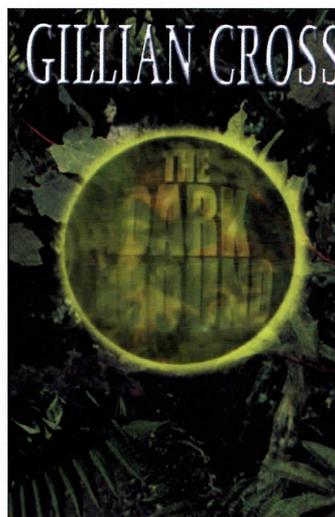
scarred through neglect: her father is absent in Argentina; her metaphorically 'absent' mother is a self-centred socialite. And so, although initially bedazzled by the luxurious lifestyle of her beautiful friend, Carly increasingly comes to cherish the 'spit 'n' sawdust' sanity of her own humble home.

Given that the book's central theme is the gap between appearance and reality – between material wealth and spiritual worth – it is ironic, perhaps, that the Carly-voiced narrative sounds, at times, fake. How many teenagers really refer to their silly sister as a 'spiteful little cat'? Or a next-door neighbour as 'an old misery'? That said, the Diana-like drama of the ending is fittingly appropriate: like *her* story, this paradoxical Paradise ends in pain. NA

The Dark Ground

★★★★

Gillian Cross, Oxford, 256pp,
0 19 271925 4, £9.99 hbk



This is the first of a trilogy where 'small is an alien planet' when Robert is reduced to a miniature version of himself in the park and woods near his home. So begins an adventure and a quest that will lead him through many great, testing dangers both physically and psychologically.

How this came about, the ramifications of his predicament and the alarming perils he and his shrunken companions endure, are impressively and convincingly realised by this most experienced storyteller. Cross writes an enthralling thriller and, at the same time, challenges our thinking and assumptions on what is the status quo and on what constitutes 'different'. This is not a comfortably easy read and so will most please youngsters looking for a challenge. DB

Midwinter Nightingale

★★★

Joan Aiken, Jonathan Cape,
256pp, 0 224 06489 4, £10.99 hbk

With the abundance of planned trilogies and other sequences now being published, this novel reminds us that there is also great reading pleasure to be found in following the kind of saga where the author does not declare his or her intentions, if he/she has any, and surprises the reader with further instalments

which have been simmering in his/her mind for years. Such is Rosemary Sutcliffe's 'dolphin ring' saga set in Roman and post-Roman Britain, each with a different hero, members of the same family; and such is Antonia Forest's Marlow saga, each book taking the family onward by a few months. To these authors, their lives' work over, we add the late Joan Aiken, who has published at least ten novels set in an alternative 19th century where the Stuarts remained kings of England, beginning with *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* (1962) and then developing the character of the Dickensian, resourceful Dido Twite and her friend Simon, who became the Duke of Battersea, but always treated Dido as an equal and wished to be more than a friend. In later books Dido travelled to an alternative America and prevented disaster at Richard the Fourth's coronation.

Now Richard is prematurely dying, his son and heir already dead, as told in *Is* (1992), and Simon is the next heir. The king's unpleasant step-son Lothar by his wife's first husband plots with his father to seize the throne. It is this father, Baron Magnus Rudh, who traces his descent from Vortigern 'as well as a very ancient European family', who is the leading villain. He is probably a werewolf, and his son is likely to inherit the condition, as well as his daughter Jorinda who sets her cap at Simon (making Dido jealous, a good sign).

The story whizzes along with the usual Aiken touches including Dido's colourful vocabulary. Dido is kidnapped by the Baron, threatened with torture, and witnesses several horrible deaths. Here is the problem: as noted by other reviewers, there are so many deaths in this book. The usual children's book conventions that the deaths of supporting Good characters should be meaningful, and the death of the Chief Baddy should be climactic, spectacular and well-deserved (see James Bond and Tolkien), have been flouted. However, Aiken must have wanted to save her heroes from having to kill the baddies themselves, which would have been even more difficult if both Magnus and Jorinda had transformed into werewolves as Lothar does, an outcome which readers are expecting, and will be disappointed not to see. The sad explanation for this unconventional treatment is that Aiken was nursing her sick husband, who has since deceased, and was striving to finish not only this novel but to follow it with the final book of the sequence, which she left in typescript. Since Simon is now king of a disunited England, perhaps Dido will be discovered to be of noble, even royal blood...

Librarians who already stock the rest of the series will want this; the publishers have recently reprinted most of them, but I would only recommend this to readers who have read the others, both because of the amount of back-story which you need to appreciate it, and because of all the on- and off-stage deaths. I suggest newcomers to the saga should start with an earlier title, such as *The Cuckoo Tree*. JY

CHERUB: The Recruit

★★★

Robert Muchamore, Hodder,
336pp, 0 340 88153 4, £5.99 pbk

This new fictional enterprise is set to run and run. Unfortunately. Already

there is a sequel in the pipeline, and a website. Hodder have made a shrewd commercial decision that a series about child spies, however poorly written, will be a guaranteed success if it offers plentiful dangerous action and officially approved destructive activity, but stays just – and only just – within acceptable limits of violence, vandalism, bloody assault, and sex.

CHERUB is a British Government organisation, part of the security services, made up entirely of children. Its rationale is that children can penetrate criminal or terrorist circles where any adult agent would fall under suspicion, and thus collect intelligence with impunity. The cover tells us 'CHERUB is not James Bond. There are no master criminals or high-tech gadgets. CHERUB kids live in the real world.' This book is therefore quite unlike Anthony Horowitz's exciting but also witty and funny James Bond spoof, *Stormbreaker*. There is no parody in *CHERUB: The Recruit*, and not much wit or humour, unless four boy agents peeing in unison from a hotel balcony to amuse their girl associates counts as wit.

All the children are orphans or family rejects, and if they pass their basic training they are active operators from 10 to 17, living between missions in a secret boarding school for spies. The recruit in this first book is 12-year-old James Adams, and this is the story of his conscription, basic training and first mission. Living conditions off duty are sumptuous, but work is brutally tough. Worst of all is the three-month basic training, when James and seven (soon five) others are confined in a comfortable compound under a sadistic instructor called Large. When James falls out with his partner Kerry (an 11-year-old girl) their punishment is to be turned outdoors into the freezing compound on Christmas night in their underwear.

The sanctioned bullying and vandalism are the novel's most unpleasant feature. Usually these incur some belated official disapproval of a low-key kind, rather like a tabloid's small print apology for some discredited headline lie, but the grounds for reproof are pragmatic, not moral. It isn't that they're wrong, but they imperil CHERUB'S security.

Is this indeed the 'real world'? One hopes not, but knowing what we now do about child soldiers across the world, and also about western lack of scruple, has lowered the credulity barrier in recent times. CHERUB of course is still a fantasy, but it seductively glamorises and legitimates some odious behaviour that is all too real. PH

The House on Falling Star Hill

★★★

Michael Molloy, *The Chicken House*, 384pp, 1 904442 26 9, £12.99 hbk

The publisher's blurb enthuses 'Nobody writes like this any more' and I might agree. On first reading this story of a boy Tim who travels to an enchanted world, I was reminded of the fantasies of the 1940s and 1950s, before Pearce, Garner and Le Guin took us to 'inner space'. Terms like 'nostalgic' and 'traditional' sprang to mind, recalling Meriol Trevor and Elizabeth Goudge; yet

there is a contemporary feel about the characters and their quest as well, and a very unpleasant villain with a nasty way of punishing suspected opponents.

Tim and his dog arrive in a west-country village to stay with Tim's grandparents. Soon Tim discovers that nobody grows flowers in their gardens, because they are always stolen at night. Tim keeps watch and discovers the thieves are little men. In the company of a mysterious man known as Hunter, and a human-sized girl from the other world, Tim journeys to Tallis to have many adventures in the course of overthrowing a usurping Duke, and proves himself resourceful in ideas and successful in action.

The author has a lavish repertoire of characters, cultures and landscapes, recalling Baum in unexpectedness, and has also taken much thought over working out how far the world may use magic, how far technology. His explanation is that an inventor from our world travelled to Tallis and found his inventions working better there, than on Earth. (I could accept pure magic better than the sudden introduction of gaslight on page 301 without further explanation of its manufacture.) Some of those who enjoy Rowling's straightforward approach to magic in this world should also enjoy this other-worldly adventure. JY

The Gift

★★★★

Alison Croggon, Walker, 512pp, 1 84428 636 3, £7.99 pbk

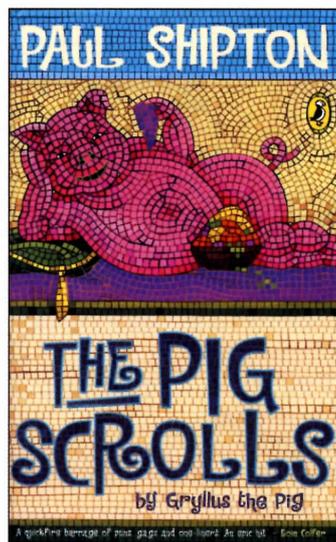
The first slab in the 'Pellinor' sequence: the dark is rising, quests must be undertaken through deep woods and over towering mountains, battling the undead Halls and Wers, with names of people and places having those 'fantasy' blends of consonants and vowels. It may be derivative but it is exciting. Maerad, discovered as a slave, is gradually revealed as the promised saviour in the battle with the Nameless One, as yet having no awareness of her powers. (It is a nice touch, as in *The Windsinger*, that the dark ones have always been on the lookout for this person but assumed it would be her brother.) Cadvan, who discovers her, and with whom she travels throughout this book, provides a strong model of the heroic bard's life, but also (like Le Guin's Ged) has a past marred by pride. The grand scenes are just that, magical encounters and tremendous battles. What makes this different is the enormous length given to detailed description, often of place (and some clever mock academic introduction and notes) which leaves you with the most thorough of backgrounds, though testing to any with an impatient need for action. AJ

The Pig Scrolls

★★★★★

Paul Shipton, Puffin, 288pp, 0 14 138021 7, £9.99 hbk

Novelists setting out to be hilarious on every page run a terrible risk of soon becoming very boring, given that the best jokes even from a master of wit like Oscar Wilde still need to be separated by reasonable intervals. But *The Pig Scrolls* is that very rare thing, a children's book that aims to be funny from first to last and actually is. Its hero Gryllus is one



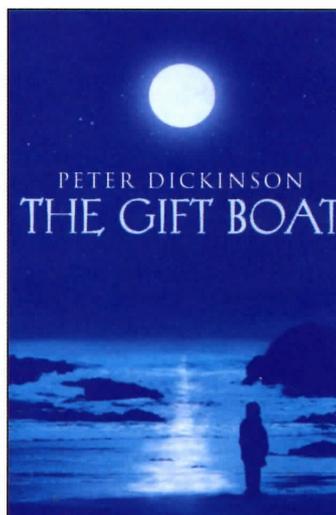
of Odysseus's companions who was turned into a pig by Circe but somehow always avoided changing back into a sailor once the sorcery wore off. He can still talk though, and keeps his own cynical counsel as the Greek gods around him find their very existence at stake as Thanatos, the God of Death, proves too much for a gullible Zeus. Gryllus sees what is going on, but is too lazy and opportunistically greedy to do anything about it until he teams up with Sibyl, a lively and fearless junior prophetess at the temple. Their adventures together are ingenious and entertaining, with enough Classical references thrown in to interest readers who want something else as well as a very good laugh. Reminiscent at times of Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials', with Gryllus coming back from the dead in order to help patch up the world after an atomic explosion, this smashing book also deserves to find an audience of all ages. NT

The Gift Boat

★★★★★

Peter Dickinson, Macmillan, 144pp, 1 4050 3516 1, £9.99 hbk

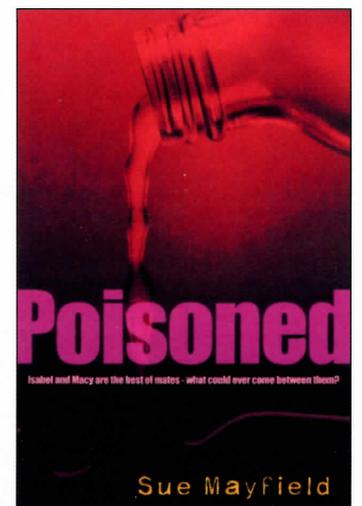
Dickinson has written many longer, more complex and ambitious books than *The Gift Boat*, but even by his exalted standards this little story is a masterpiece. One chapter excepted, the writing is simple enough to be easily readable by quite young readers, yet not a word is out of place. Everything is exact, essential and marvellously right. In more ways than one, this is Dickinson's



equivalent of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Gavin, just under 11, lives at Stonehaven on the Scottish coast. His father is a merchant seaman, and his mother and grandmother both work, so Gavin spends much out-of-school time with Grandad. They go fishing, and when a seal appears unexpectedly in the harbour, Grandad tells Gavin about the seal people or selkies. Grandad's other serious occupation in retirement is making model boats. Not just any old model boats, but collector's items. He has all but finished a fishing smack for Gavin's birthday. Gavin has just decided to name it *Selkie* when Grandad has a major stroke.

Most of the book concerns Gavin's desperate missions to the hospital to talk to Grandad, read to him, do anything to reach his illness-clouded mind and call him back. At last he enlists the selkie's aid, offering in return his greatest sacrifice, his boat. Nearly everything that happens then can be explained rationally, but this is a story about mysterious borderlands, between natural and supernatural as well as young and old, life and death, vision and dream. The chapter where Gavin risks his own mind in his dangerous search for Grandad's is a *tour de force*, as simple as Dickinson can make it but still difficult. Some children may need a bit of help. If so, it will prove amply worth the effort. This is a gripping, moving, life-enhancing story, the work of a major writer at his very best. PH



Poisoned

★★★★★

Sue Mayfield, Hodder Bite, 176pp, 0 340 86064 2, £5.99 pbk

Poisoned is a very traditional story with a very modern tone. There are three first-person voices who share alternating chapters. First there is Isabel. Then there is Duncan who begins a correspondence with Isabel when he finds a note written by her in a bottle washed up on the shore of the northern Scottish island which is his home. Finally, there is Macy, Isabel's new best friend – or is she? All of the characters are in their final year at school. Both girls live in Manchester and hope to study drama at the NYT. This is the cue for references to several plays, in particular *The Tempest* and *Medea*, and a cue for characters to contextualise themselves with a parallel framework to both dramas. Isabel, however, doesn't quite murder all round her when she finds

Macy and Duncan in a clinch when they all meet up at the Edinburgh Festival. But she understands how Medea felt and the book ends with her asking readers what would they do? Forget about them both or make up with Duncan and forgive Macy?

Most young readers are likely to enjoy the confiding tone of the narrators. It gives a self-conscious and knowing tone to the voices, especially the girls, and fits with the very contemporary jargon and attitudes of the characters. But, like its characters, *Poisoned* has depths underneath the surface sheen and this makes for a satisfying and enjoyable read. **VC**

The Role of the United Nations

NON-FICTION ★★★

Simon Adams, Franklin Watts 'In the News', 32pp, 0 7496 5418 X, £12.99 hbk

With the squalidity of current events (4/05/04) in Iraq and the knowledge of how they have been achieved, interest in the role of the UN should never be greater than now. But for most of us the Organisation (as it used to be called) is one of the eternal verities, like oak, granite, white lines on roads, Charlie Parker and the invincible Arsenal. How many of us know how the UN came into being, is run, is financed, does or is prevented from doing (hang on, the invincible Arsenal have just gone one down to Pompey!). Few of us, I guess and you can include me. And how many of us want to know? – few more, I suspect – and include me again.

But for those of us who don't know but do want to, here's what looks like a helpful set of answers. From founding charter to present-day chuntering, the book traces (in un-engaging style) the activities and achievements of the UN. Facts are squarely presented as we learn of the (alleged) organisation's responsibilities – UNICEF, UNCTAD, UNFPA, UNDRESS and WHO knows what else – who pays for it (and who gets away without) and how its jobs are done. Commendably, Adams doesn't shrink from the UN/US logger-heading nor from its Asian, African and European failures; nor does editor Andrew Campbell (some relation?) exclude the least complimentary picture ever (p27) of Tony Blair.

In sum, this is a book for the committed – either those who are or those who should be. Into which category my local High School librarian's student who 'wants to be a professional politician' falls will remain to be seen, but this one is for him (yes, it's definitely a him). And, of course, though the publishers decline to say so, it's 'ideal for citizenship'. And the invincible Arsenal have now equalised. **TP**

Why are people Refugees?

NON-FICTION ★★★

Cath Senker, 0 7502 4326 0

Why are people Terrorists?

NON-FICTION ★★★

Alex Woolf, 0 7502 4325 2

Hodder Wayland 'Why?', 48pp, £11.99 each hbk

Two more members of this growing 'Why?' series, chalking up its most

depressing offerings yet, these titles are as timeless as they are right for the citizenship bandwagon.

Refugees first defines the species, separating them from economic migrants and internally displaced persons before looking more closely at their history and the varying reasons for their plight. Emerging from the barrage of case studies and personal accounts that the text offers comes a picture of combined resilience, desperation, and – more surprisingly – a yearning for the homeland. To most of us, I suspect, refugee status is an unimaginable experience; this book gives us an inkling of what it's like and thereby does a little to prepare its readers to extend a wider welcome to forced migrants.

Terrorist or freedom-fighter? It depends on where you're starting from, but, see it how you will, direct violent action seems to be a growth occupation now. Some politicians believe it to be the successor to military action – but are quite happy to counter it with military methods. Woolf's tough read retails causes, methods and outcomes of various terrorist initiatives before examining the much vaunted 'war on terrorism' in which we're told we're now engaged. Little consideration is given to the need for us – the 'terrorised' – to try to understand what's biting the 'terrorists' and causing them to behave as they do.

That said, here is a pair of serviceable volumes which will supply students with plenty of info-gobbets and contemporary phraseology. Whether this will make us better examples of 'citizenship' is questionable. **TP**

Admiral Nelson

Sam Llewellyn, 112pp, 1 904095 65 8

Emily Davison

Claudia Fitzherbert, 128pp, 1 904095 66 6

Sam Johnson

Andrew Billen, 96pp, 1 904095 77 1

David Livingstone

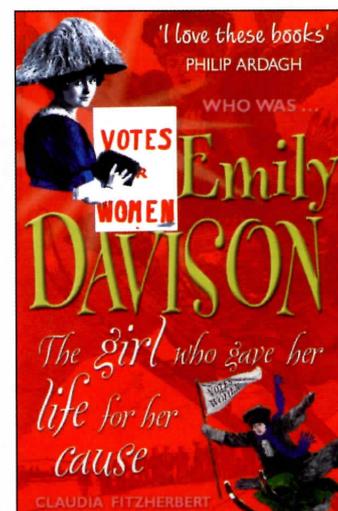
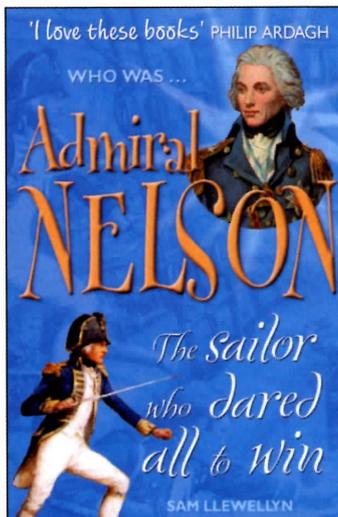
Amanda Mitchison, ill. James Nunn, 128pp, 1 904095 84 4

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Short Books 'Who Was ...', £4.99 each pbk

Short Books' admirable series of compact biographies never fails to impress. Each one reads like a novel with convincing dialogue, drama and pace. One has the sense that the authors have been given free rein to adapt the format to their subject, so each differs in length and includes a glossary, maps or diagrams as necessary. What they all have in common is first-class writing, mostly by journalists who have a keen ear for their audience.

Nelson is written by novelist and sailor Sam Llewellyn, so it comes as no surprise that the descriptions of sea battles and life on board a ship of the line are full of fascinating detail and historical context. Nelson emerges as an unlikely hero, small in stature and slight in build, yet his extraordinary courage and daring was unmatched in battle, earning him devoted loyalty from his men and enabling him to gain control of the seas against the invasion of Napoleon.



Emily Davison is painted as another unlikely heroine by Claudia Fitzherbert, prepared to sacrifice everything for the cause of women's suffrage. A loner by nature rather than by choice, she campaigned with her fellow suffragettes, enduring brutal force-feeding while in prison, until frustration at the lack of response by the government compelled her to take direct action. As the King's horse galloped towards her at the Derby race course, she grabbed the bridle and was struck down, never regaining consciousness and becoming a martyr to the cause.

Sam Johnson, ill tempered, lazy, wracked with illness and depression, turns out to have an extraordinary gift for friendship – with women, with young men and contemporaries, and most famously with his biographer Boswell. Author of numerous books, plays and magazine articles, he is remembered not only for writing the first important dictionary of the English language, but mostly for his spiky comments. My favourite put-down quoted here: 'Difficult do you call it sir?' to the companion excusing a violinist struggling with a tricky piece, 'I wish it were impossible.'

A new edition of *David Livingstone* (reviewed in BfK 141) proudly bears the Blue Peter Book Award logo (shortlisted for best book with facts). Livingstone's reputation as the greatest Victorian explorer was earned through journeys of the most unimaginable hardship, as the dour Glaswegian missionary doctor, endlessly obsessed with his bowels, searched for the source of the Nile.

Highly recommended for older readers too, they are eminently readable and an excellent source of information in our time-starved world. **SU**

Thura's Diary: A young girl's life in war-torn Baghdad

NON-FICTION ★★

Thura Al-Windawi, trans. Robin Bray, Puffin, 144pp, 0 14 131769 8, £5.99 pbk

This is the diary of a young woman from Baghdad, from a few days before the USA launched its attack on Iraq to the start of the US/UK occupation of Iraq.

The topical nature of the diary provides some interest, as well as its perspective ie not that of the Western media, but of an Iraqi, someone on the ground. Thura wants us to see Iraq and Iraqis as they are, in the interests of promoting lasting peace and understanding between her country and the countries she admires – the UK and USA.

It is perhaps this desire which makes Thura present us with such an anodyne account of her and her family's time 'under fire'. Or perhaps it is that Thura's relatively privileged background sheltered her so well from the most horrific aspects of war, that she doesn't have such knowledge or experience to diarize. Or perhaps it is that Thura is such a well brought up young woman that she thinks it would be nasty to mention the less attractive aspects of living in a city being bombed, then occupied by hostile strangers toting guns.

Thura's account doesn't ring true as typical of Iraqis' experience of the war. In that sense, it lacks authenticity. In the sense too, of its seeming so contrived. So self-conscious of its potential readership in the UK and USA. So written to order for the nice publishers and nice media people waiting to rush the diary onto shelves and TV before guns have killed the last Iraqi child or made it parentless, homeless, or foodless.

It's not that I wish Thura's family to have suffered the terrible things that happen to people during war – destruction of their homes, deprivation of food, water, clothes or medicine. But it's hard, knowing how many families have suffered thus, to empathise with one which – barring the loss of one family friend – at worst suffered the absence of TV and telephone and was even able to secure several months' supply of medicine for a diabetic and a fridge to keep it in.

Thura writes without any real passion about the situation of her country and people. There's no outrage at the looting of a hospital, just a sense of her thinking 'that's really not nice'. There's no mighty relief at escape to the idyllic countryside, just a sense, of Thura thinking 'this is really nice', having all the comforts of home, barring their own bathroom. Even the people around her don't get particularly upset, aside from being worried about one another now and then. Mother doesn't scream, cry or rage. Dad doesn't. Gran doesn't. No-one does. They just go on.

Thura's Diary doesn't present her life, emotions, thoughts, warts and all. In that sense, it is not so much diary as bland report. **SP**

REVIEWS 14+ Secondary/Adult

Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf

★★★★

Sonya Hartnett, Walker, 208pp, 0 7445 6594 4, £5.99 pbk

The cover of Sonya Hartnett's novel shows an archive photograph of the thylacine, or 'Tasmanian tiger', a predatory dog-like marsupial which became extinct in 1936 after savage human persecution, ironically just two months after it was declared a protected species. The photo presumably shows the last thylacine, which died in captivity. It rebukes the ongoing biological vandalism of humankind.

Since 1936 there have been occasional reports of surviving thylacines, and in Hartnett's novel 23-year-old Satchel O'Rye gets a sight of one, identified from his description by a young woman, Chelsea Piper. Satchel and Chelsea both live narrow, depleted lives in a small decaying town, under an extinct volcano, somewhere in Australia. Hartnett uses no place names, real or imaginary, perhaps to signal authorial complicity with the thylacine's hiding-place. Satchel and Chelsea do not reveal it, though Chelsea is tempted. Both are impoverished. Chelsea is emotionally withdrawn and delicate, while Satchel is trapped: his father is mad, believing with crazy literalness that God will provide for everything. And in a curious sense God does. He provides the thylacine to be the unwitting agent of Chelsea's and Satchel's inner survival. This is an original and gifted novel, though not quite Hartnett at her best. But its optimistic end is fatally undercut by the real-life, real-death thylacine, for which God did not provide. PH

Something Wicked

★★★

Sherry Ashworth, Collins, 224pp, 0 00 712335 3, £5.99 pbk

Is there ever a good reason for a bad crime? Ashworth's novel addresses this question and, via a rather predictable narrative, comes to the conclusion that there is not. Her 16-year-old heroine, Anna – 'happy some of the time, pissed off some of the time, but bored most of the time' – becomes attracted to Craig, a new arrival at her school, and to his idiosyncratic way of tackling what he perceives as the unfair distribution of wealth. Their initial attempts at a more equitable reallocation bring moments in which, for them and the reader, the frightening and the exciting are combined. Eventually, though, their novel concept of 'taxing' the rich leads to hospital beds and, for Anna at least, to quite serious speculation as to the nature and degree of her responsibility for what has happened. The frequent references to *Macbeth* add a teasing intertextual dimension to what is, in spite of its contemporary trappings, a good old-fashioned cautionary tale. RD

PICTURE BOOKS RELEVANT TO OLDER READERS:

Biscuit Bear (see p19)
The Puddleman (see p19)

Throwaway Daughter

★★★★

Ting-xing Ye with William Bell, Faber, 240pp, 0 571 22154 8, £6.99 pbk

Ting-xing Ye is the author of the best-selling *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind*, a harrowing autobiographical account of growing up in China during the cruel excesses of the Cultural Revolution. She now lives in Canada and this is her first book for young adults.

Its protagonist, Grace Dong-mei Parker, is a young woman of Chinese origin adopted by a Canadian family. The novel, which moves between past and present, Canada and China, traces her growing awareness of her background and the circumstances of her adoption. Ye is not primarily concerned with questions of personal or cultural identity, although these do form part of the story. Rather, she uses Dong-mei's experience to reveal the position of women in Chinese society and particularly the fate of baby girls at the time of China's rigid enforcement of a policy of one child per family.

Ye uses key figures to take a turn in telling their own story. This gradually delivers an indictment of injustice, while carefully setting out the historical and social context, and emphasises the complex interdependent relationships, both economic and emotional, that can touch people on opposite sides of the world. The fictional Grace is representative of a number of real Chinese baby girls, who were adopted by childless parents in Canada and the USA.

Ye creates a rich cast of characters and invites us to listen to them all carefully and seek to understand. The novel gathers power and pace in its second half as Dong-mei returns to China to search for her birth-mother; and the personal and the political come together in a compelling finale that allows the last word to the re-united mother and daughter. Ye's restraint is her strength, requiring from her readers patience, sensitivity and intellectual engagement rather than a simple emotional response. It's a book which asks us to think as much as to feel. CB

Skin Deep

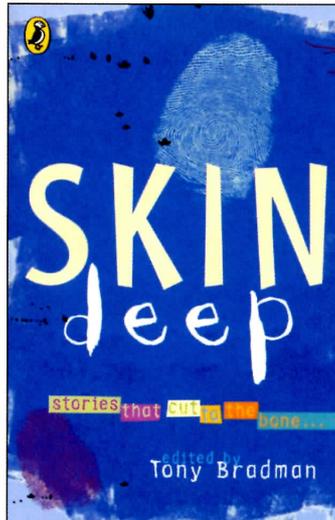
★★★★

Edited by Tony Bradman, Puffin, 256pp, 0 14 131505 9, £4.99 pbk

Bradman wanted to 'put together a collection of short stories that tackled the subject (of racism) head on'. That is precisely what *Skin Deep* is. A collection of fine stories which 'help us understand why racism happens and what it does to people'.

The stories are by writers from around the world and they tackle racism in many different guises, perpetrated by many different types of people. What impressed me is that none of them falls into the trap of stereotyping the perpetrators of racism in the same way as racists stereotype their victims.

In fact, stories such as 'Zebra Girl' and 'Smoke' are bold enough to



tackle that unspoken taboo: racism amongst victims of racism. Both of these stories illustrate that the perniciousness of racism goes beyond the actual injustices suffered by victims. As Steve Biko once said: 'the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.'

In these two stories, the victims of racism have imbibed racism to such an extent that they racially oppress themselves and others. Janet McDonald has black people treating one another differentially because some are 'light' and others are 'dark'. Sean Taylor shows us the extent to which we who are 'not white' have allowed racists to, apartheid-like, divide us. Alan Gibbons' contribution – 'The Blokes' – demonstrates the converse of Biko's statement: that the mind of the oppressed can be an equally powerful weapon to defeat racism. Then there are stories like Farrukh Dhondy's 'The Great Satan' and Nick Gifford's 'Assignment Day' which poignantly show us the extent to which victims of racism will go to escape it.

All the stories, as Bradman says, are 'about living breathing characters and their problems that go straight to the heart'. That's what makes this collection worth reading. Not just its important and topical theme, but the diverse and interesting way in which the storytellers tackle the subject matter. And because they tell their stories well. SP

"... and that's when it fell off in my hand."

★★★

Louise Rennison, Collins, 288pp, 0 00 719147 2, £10.99 hbk

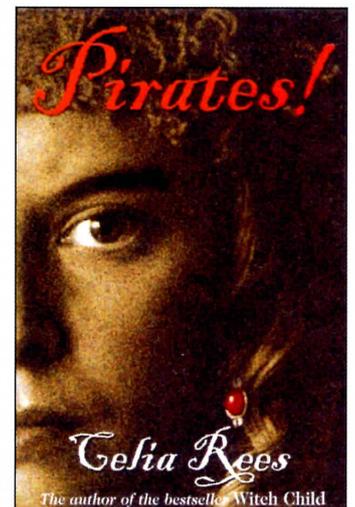
This is the fifth book in the hugely successful Georgia Nicolson series and Rennison's first for Harper-Collins. "... and that's when it fell off in my hand" continues to follow Georgia's exploits with friends, boyfriends and family through her idiosyncratic and engaging diaries.

The appeal of the diaries stems from the meticulous work of researching teenage lifestyles, attitudes and conversational patterns, which Rennison has clearly thoroughly enjoyed. There are instantly recognisable stereotypes who are all the more entertaining for their

predictability and the verbal duelling between Georgia and her friends is particularly fascinating.

Readers are also on familiar ground with the personalities and locations which have become established in the first four books. New readers have sufficient background material to become a part of this club – and, shrewdly on Rennison's part, to invest in the earlier titles.

When I read each of the first four books in the series I frequently laughed out loud at the quirky humour and convoluted plots, which revelled in impressive verbal gymnastics and an admirable degree of ingenuity. However, this fifth offering, although still funny, seems to have rather overworked its formula and extended some facets of its storyline until they are dangerously thin – the Sex God seam in particular. Nevertheless, there is still much to amuse and a back list which will more than repay the efforts of those prepared to obtain it. VR

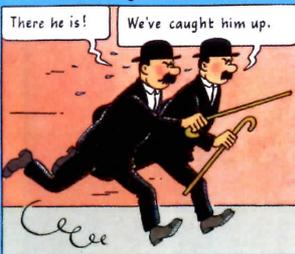


Pirates!

★★★★★

Celia Rees, Bloomsbury, 384pp, 0 7475 5950 3, £12.99 hbk

Pirates! by Celia Rees is brilliant, fabulous, unputdownable... Following the fortunes and misfortunes of middle-class Nancy from Bristol and ex-slave Minerva from the Caribbean as they join a pirate ship and escape their past lives, Rees has recreated an 18th-century novel for young women of the 21st century. Daniel Defoe is mentioned in the very first pages and Rees' debt to him is evident; she echoes the language and tone of the 18th century and her themes are those of great literature. Nancy's adventure sees her leaving her life as the daughter of a Bristol merchant to become a potential plantation owner and then a pirate (dressed a man). Rees therefore encompasses in her novel not only the ethics of the slave trade but racism and the position of women in society. These themes and issues give the book the feel of an adult novel but when combined with the all-pervading sense of adventure and a dash of romance the end result is deeply satisfying. OD



CLASSICS IN SHORT No.46

Brian Alderson

Tonnerre de Brest! Qu'est que c'est qui s'élève du miasme bruxellois? Tiens! C'est Monsieur Tintin et le fidèle Milou.



'That lot will be remaindered before long.'

Thus a sceptical bookseller (are there any others?) one fine Spring day in 1958 while visiting The Book Centre, a national distribution warehouse in rural Neasden.

Two ziggurats of packed books,

piled up from floor to roof, prompted the remark. They were the newly-arrived stock of the first two volumes of 'The Adventures of Tintin' to be widely marketed in the British Isles: **The Crab with the Golden Claws** and **King Ottokar's Sceptre**. (Is it true that the Ottakar bookshop chain, albeit incorrectly, is named after this book?)

First to arrive here they may have been,

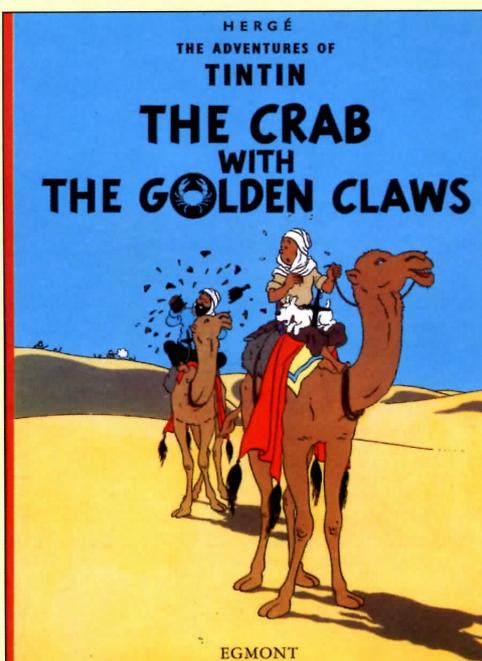
but they were by no means the first of the Adventures. The boy-reporter with the quiff and the plus-fours (never apparently reporting anything) was already an ageing phenomenon to francophone Europeans and this year sees the celebration – commercially inspired? – of his 75th birthday. You may join in if you wish, for an exhibition 'Tintin at Sea' is currently running at the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich.

Rather like Rupert Bear,

with whom he unexpectedly shares several characteristics, Tintin's first appearance was in a black and white strip cartoon published on 10 January 1929 in the children's supplement to the Belgian magazine *XXe Siècle*. (The author, Hergé [Georges Remi], invented his name by reversing his own initials.) As reporter, Tintin headed off to the land of the Soviets and his weekly adventures were eventually cumulated into a strip-picture album. Such productions, known as *bandes dessinées* had something of a history in France from the Shandean comedies lithographed by Rodolphe Töpffer in the mid-nineteenth century through the picture books of the great Boutet de Monvel and the albums of 'Job' (Jacques Onfroy de Breville) and Benjamin Rabier – whose first illustrations seem to have been done in 1898 for a book called **Tintin-Lutin** (Tintin the Scamp).

Tracing the evolution

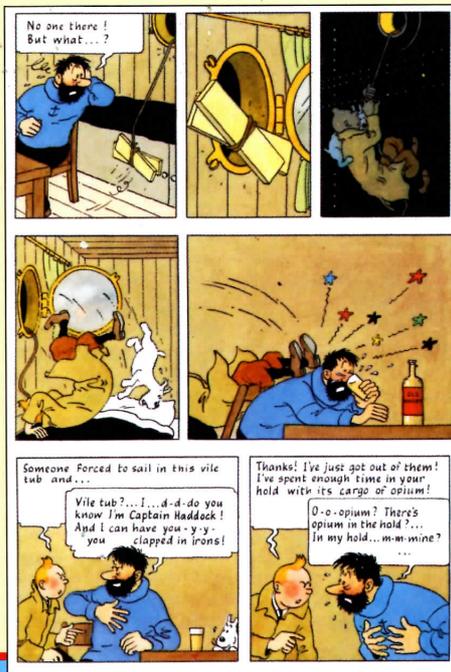
of what becomes the typical Tintin adventure is no easy task, and readers interested in such things will get little help from **Tintin at Sea**, the handbook for the present exhibition, which must be one of the most incompetently edited books of our time (and that's saying something). It's published by



John Murray redivivus, now a division of Hodder Headline, and if this is what a great publishing house can be so quickly reduced to then 'twere better 'twere slain on annexation.

Difficult though it be

to chart the chronology of *les éditions Tintin*, what with early black and white volumes being subsequently coloured, coloured editions sometimes being subject to later redrafting, and a multiplicity of varying translation strategies (the books appear in at least 38 different languages), what we broadly find is Hergé seeking to refine the restless narrative dictated by the demands of a periodical strip into



something more suited to a 62-page *bande*. He pays closer attention to the dynamics of his picture sequences, obtaining dramatic impact by varying the sizes of individual frames, and he quests after as complete an accuracy as he can achieve in the manifold details of the Tintin cosmorama. Quiff ever spruce and showing no signs of greying at the edges, the boy-reporter and his inseparable bone-fixated companion, Snowy, find themselves at one time or another on almost every continent of the globe — and even a couple of times involved in a moonshot.

As the series progresses

you also see the introduction of characters who come to be recognised as staple: Professor Calculus, the serenely ineffectual detectives Thomson & Thompson, and, above all, Captain Haddock, whose attachment to strong liquors provokes unease among those lacking a sense of Gallic priorities. These characters probably engender more affection than Our Busy Hero himself.

Affection, yes,

and a worldwide popularity that would have surprised our sceptical bookseller, but is that enough to vouch for 'classic' status? Can any Tintin album be distinguished as a 'classic' *an sich*? Indeed, is there not always a fatal element to such *bandes* in the mismatch between the speed of the action and the brakes put on it by the reader's need either to examine the pictures or work through the (often banal) speech-bubbles? Certainly there are surface features of great artistry: the precisely-detailed representations of exotic landscapes (the Sahara desert, the wild lands of the Balkans), or of local ephemera (Peruvian or Egyptian artifacts) but the fundamental sameness of the adventures which lead us through these places becomes wearing, just as the time-locked circumstances of most of the adventures are now dated. (Look at Tintin's Tibet or the introductory note on Sino-Japanese relations in **The Blue Lotus**.) History, which of course remains everything, may even now be lowering over the Tintin ziggurats. ■

The illustrations are taken from **The Crab with the Golden Claws** (1 4052 0808 2, £9.99 hbk, 1 4052 0620 9, £6.99 pbk) published by Egmont Books, the sole publisher of Tintin in the UK.

Brian Alderson is founder of the Children's Books History Society and children's book consultant for **The Times**.