

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

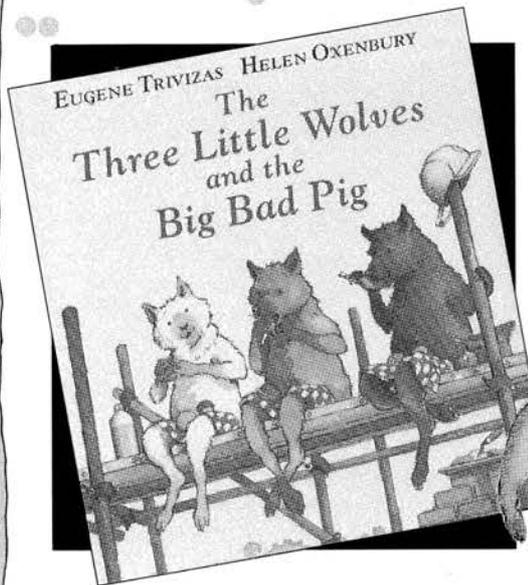
November 1993 No. 83  
UK Price £2.00

the children's book magazine

**FANTASY AND SF**



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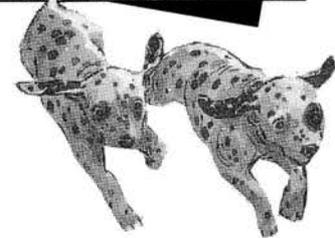
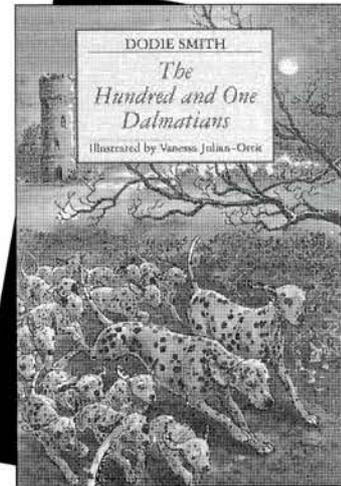


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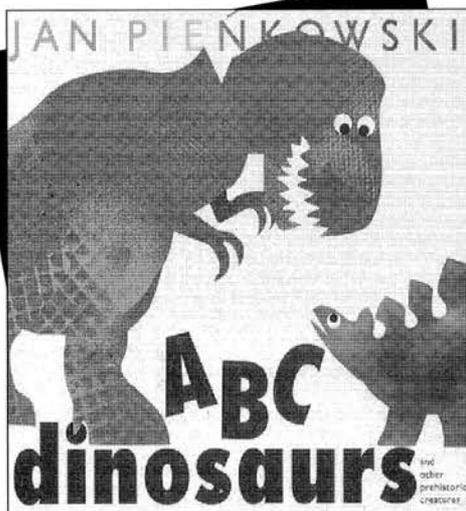
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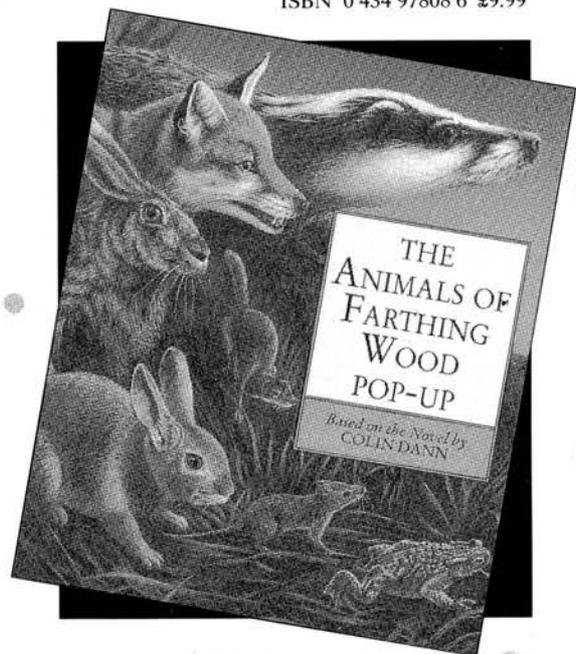
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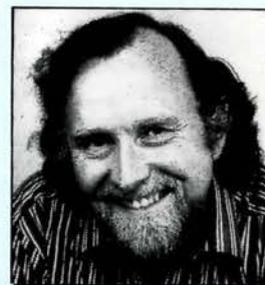
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# EDITOR'S PAGE



One of the drawbacks of a bi-monthly magazine like ours is that some book-ish happenings fall between editions so it's hard to give them the attention they deserve. A good example is National Library Week, 1st-7th November. For this September's **BfK** was too early but this issue is too late. Turn at once, though, to page 23 for a retrospective reminder of why libraries matter. This comes courtesy of Gerry Peach and Linda Smith, Kirklees librarians, who had the bright idea of circulating current children's writers for their opinions.

Of course, some would say such interested parties are sure to be library enthusiasts . . . but shouldn't we *all* be interested parties when it comes to resourcing the nation's reading habits? The glib counter-argument, advanced all too often by those who are offended by *any* form of public service or provision, is that 'there's much less need for library facilities nowadays when so many people can afford to buy books'. Only the terminally complacent or the ideologically brain-bound could possibly advance such a daft proposition. The truth is that today we need public libraries more than ever before:

1) because, in an increasingly complex society, unrestricted access to information, to argument and to that

form of wisdom we call Literature isn't an option for either rich or poor but a condition of freedom for *all*.

- 2) because a properly set up library offers far more than a freely available stock of books. Just as vital, especially for inexperienced readers like children, is the expertise of librarians themselves, trained pilots in negotiating a flood of words that can be deep, rough and scary.
- 3) because libraries *preserve* books – an increasingly important function in an age when publishers' backlists and print-runs get shorter and shorter.
- 4) because . . .

. . . But why go on? Already I'm in danger of winning a Basil Fawley Award for Stating the Bleedin' Obvious.

## VAT on BfK?

. . . and on this subject too, perhaps. The prospect of a 17% tax on reading is another little item that's loomed larger and larger since our last issue. It could apply to all printed matter – newspapers and magazines as well as books – adding, at a stroke, more than £2.00 to the annual subscription for your favourite magazine, for instance. Need we say more? Probably not, but *you* could.

Write to your local MP, to K Clarke at the Treasury, to J Major himself, even. For more guidance, if this helps, contact the Books Add Value Campaign at 272 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1BA, before it's too late, because by Budget Day it might be.

## Fantasy and SF

After all this, why not escape to another world or worlds? According to C S Lewis, the crucial consideration here is not escapism in itself but the quality of what we're escaping to . . .

Enjoy the issue!

Chris

## CONTEMPLATING CARNEGIE (continued)

### Sue Greenfield writes:

I read 'Contemplating Carnegie' in the September **Books for Keeps** with particular interest and, as National Chair of the Youth Libraries Group, would like to join with Margaret Bell, Carnegie/Greenaway Co-ordinator, in responding to your challenging editorial.

The Library Association Carnegie Medal is awarded 'annually for an outstanding book written in English published in the preceding year in the UK'. Nominations for the Medal are open to any individual member of the Youth Libraries Group (YLG), any of the 11 YLG Branches around the UK and to individual members of The Library Association.

Whether a nominated title has been written by a previous Medal winner is irrelevant to the outcome of the selection panel's debate – the question is whether the title meets the criteria set down for the Award (and the criteria are reviewed). Track records do not count. New authors do appear amongst the nominations e.g. Gloria Hatrick (**Masks**) and Linda Kempton (**The Naming of William Rutherford**). If a newcomer's work meets the criteria, is judged to be outstanding, then it will win.

To restrict winning the Medal to a one-off event would remove the very purpose for which it

was established, i.e. to recognise the very best in children's writing each year. The Carnegie judges are not interested in how many times an author has won the Medal. Their brief is to judge each book against the criteria for the Award.

Few people would disagree, we suspect, with the premise that there has been an increase in good writing for children over recent years. And, yes it does get harder each year to separate the best titles. But come on, 'loss of critical nerve'? An unfair criticism. YLG judges are all experienced children's librarians well used to making evaluative judgements on the merits of books.

Does the track record of the Carnegie Medal suggest 'a near-irresistible temptation to play safe'? We think not. Look at the controversy surrounding Westall's **The Machine Gunners** or last year's winner, **Dear Nobody**.

Nor is the Medal sponsorship – or publicity-driven. If the selection panel judge that no book is sufficiently outstanding to merit the Award, then it is withheld – and withheld for this reason alone.

Keeping the sponsor or PR person happy is not part of the judges' brief!

And talking of briefs – the criteria for Carnegie are not as biased as you would have readers

believe. How then would **The Suitcase Kid** or **The Angel of Nithill Road** have achieved this year's shortlist? Or **Rosa's Singing Grandfather** (shortlisted 1991), **The Story of Tracy Beaker** (Highly Commended 1991) and **The Real Tilly Bean** (Commended 1991)?

There is no need to trade up to win the Carnegie Medal. If a nominated book meets the criteria, regardless of its age group, it will win 'The Big One' as did **Storm**.

But we would join with the 1993 Smarties Book Prize Selection Panel in urging 'authors to think more sensitively about the needs of younger children who, when just beginning to tackle long narratives, have such a hunger for strong vigorously told stories'.

Sorry Chris, the LA Carnegie Medal is still 'The Big One', is vigorously alive and well – the one Award chosen solely by children's librarians who read, use and enjoy books with children every day of their working lives.

### Editor's note:

I'm most grateful to Sue and Margaret for this prompt and sparky defence of the Status Quo Carnegie . . . but feel their rejoinder glides past the issues I raised without actually getting to grips with them. Before I respond in detail, though, what do other **BfK** readers think?

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

NOVEMBER 1993 No. 83

ISSN 0143-909X; © School Bookshop Assoc. 1993  
Editor: Chris Powling; Managing Director: Richard Hill  
Design & typeset: Rondale Ltd., Lydney, Glos.  
Printed by: Wiltshire (Bristol) Ltd.

**Books for Keeps** can be obtained on subscription by sending a cheque or postal order to Books for Keeps, 6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF. You can also pay by credit card (Access, Visa, Eurocard or Mastercard) or use the telephone order service on **081-852 4953**.

Annual subscription for six issues:  
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Single copies:  
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Airmail rates on application.

Editorial correspondence: **Books for Keeps**,  
The Old Chapel, Easton, Nr Winchester,  
Hampshire SO21 1EG Tel: 0962 779600

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### Cover Story

The illustration on our cover this month is by Andrew Skilleter from Susan Cooper's **Over Sea, Under Stone**. The book is published by Bodley Head, to whom we are grateful for help in using this illustration.

For details, see our Authorgraph on pages 16-17.

# LET THERE BE

## TERRY

I have still got the first book I ever read. It was *The Wind in the Willows*. Well, it was probably not the first book I ever read – that was no doubt called something like *Nursery Fun* or *Janet and John Book 1*. But it was the first book I opened without chewing the covers or wishing I was somewhere else. It was the first book which, at the age of 10, I read because I was genuinely interested.

I know now, of course, that it is totally the wrong kind of book for children. There is only one female character and she's a washerwoman. No attempt is made to explain the social conditioning and lack of proper housing that makes stoats and weasels act the way they do. Mr Badger's house is an insult to all those children not fortunate enough to live in a Wild Wood. The Mole and the Rat's domestic arrangements are probably acceptable, but only if they come right out and talk frankly about them.

But it was pressed into my hand, and because it wasn't parents or teachers who were recommending the book I read it from end to end, all in one go. And then I started again from the beginning, because I had not realised that there were stories like this.

There's a feeling that I think is only possible to get when you are a child and discover books: it's a kind of fizz – you want to read everything that's in print before it evaporates before your eyes.

I had to draw my own map through this uncharted territory. The message from the management was that, yes, books were a good idea, but I don't recall anyone *advising* me in any way. I was left to my own devices.

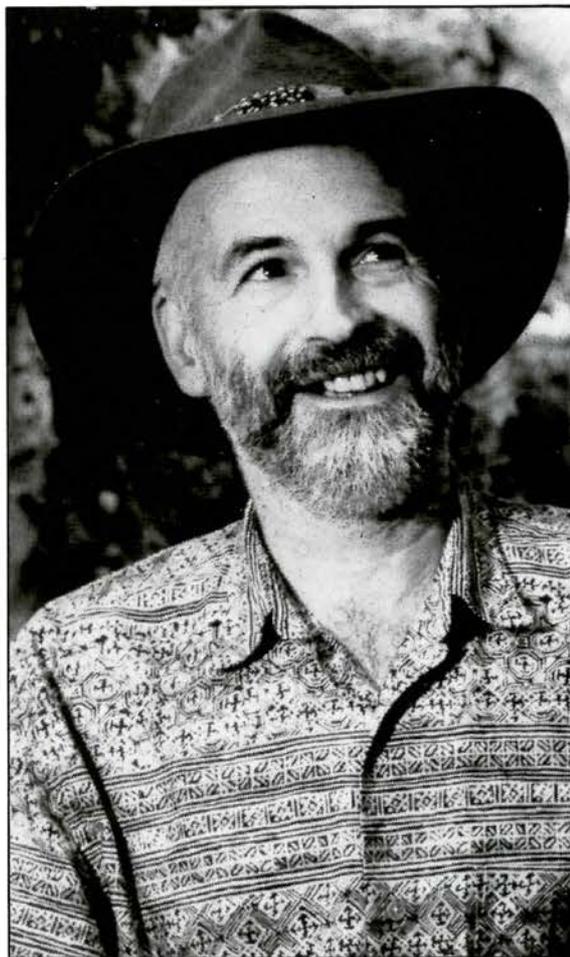
I am now becoming perceived as a young people's writer. Teachers and librarians say, 'You know, your books are *really popular* among children who don't read'. I think this is a compliment; I just wish they would put it another way. In fact, genre authors get to know their reader profile quite intimately, and I know I have a large number of readers who are old enough to drive a car and possibly claim a pension. But the myth persists that all my readers are aged 14 and called Kevin, and so I have taken an interest in the dark underworld called children's literature.

Not many people do, it seems to me, apart from those brave souls who work with children and are interested in what they read. They're unsung resistance heroes in a war that is just possibly being won by Sonic Hedgehogs and bionic plumbers. They don't have many allies, even where you would expect them. Despite the huge number of titles that pour out to shape the minds of the adults, my Sunday paper reviews a mismatched handful of children's books at infrequent intervals and, to show its readers that this is some kind of literary play street, generally puts a picture of a teddy bear on the page.

Perhaps the literary editor's decision is right. In my experience children don't read reviews of children's books. They live in a different kind of world.

The aforementioned school librarians tell me that what the children read for fun, what they will actually spend their money on, are fantasy, science fiction and horror and, while they offer up a prayer of thanks that the kids are reading anything in this electronic age, this worries them. It shouldn't.

I now know that almost all fiction is, at some level, fantasy. What Agatha Christie wrote was fantasy. What Tom Clancy writes is fantasy. What Jilly Cooper writes is fantasy – at least, I hope for her sake it is. But what people gener-



Terry Pratchett

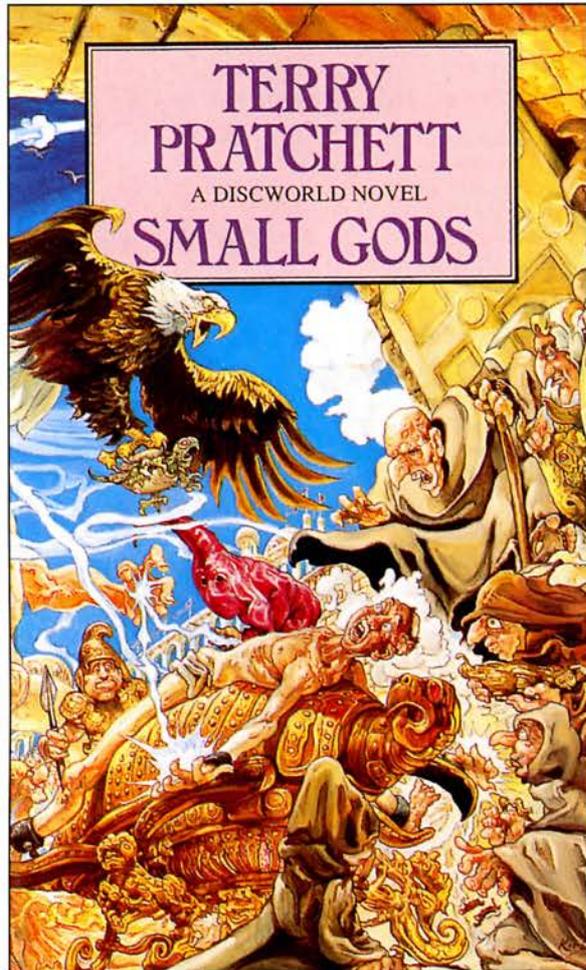
ally have in mind when they hear the word fantasy is swords, talking animals, vampires, rockets (science fiction is fantasy with bolts on), and around the edges it can indeed be pretty silly. Yet fantasy also speculates about the future, rewrites the past and reconsiders the future. It plays games with the universe.

### Not all robots

Fantasy makes many adults uneasy. Children who like the stuff tend to call it 'brill' and 'megagood'. This always disturbs people. (It worries them so much that when someone like P D James uses the mechanisms of science fiction helpful people redefine the field, thus avoiding bestowing on her the mark of Cain; the book isn't science fiction 'because it's not all about robots and other planets'. P D James writing science fiction? Impossible. But *Children of Men* is a science fiction book, as is *Time's Arrow* and *Fatherland*. As was Brian Aldiss' *Methuselah's Children*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* and Philip K Dick's *Man in the High Castle*. Science fiction, the stuff that is seldom reviewed, is often good; it doesn't need robots, and earth is room enough.)

# DRAGONS

PRATCHETT



Of course science fiction and fantasy are sometimes badly written. Many things are. But literary merit is an artificial thing and exists in the eye of the beholder. In a world where Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* cannot win the Booker, I'm not too in awe of judgements based on literary merit.

Not long ago I talked to a teacher who, having invited me to talk at her school, was having a bit of trouble with the head teacher who thought that fantasy was morally suspect and irrelevant to the world of the '90s.

Morally suspect? Shorn of its trappings, most fantasy would find approval in a Victorian household. The morality of fantasy and horror is, by and large, the strict morality of the fairy tale. The vampire is slain, the alien is blown out of the airlock, the Dark Lord is vanquished and, perhaps at some

loss, the good triumph – not because they are better armed but because Providence is on their side.

Why does the third of the three brothers, who shares his food with the old woman in the wood, go on to become king of the country? Why does James Bond manage to disarm the nuclear bomb a few seconds before it goes off rather than, as it were, a few seconds afterwards? Because a universe where that did not happen would be a dark and hostile place. Let there be goblin hordes, let there be terrible environmental threats, let there be giant mutated slugs if you really must, but let there be hope. It may be a grim, thin hope, an Arthurian sword at sunset, but let us know that we do not live in vain.

## Good and evil

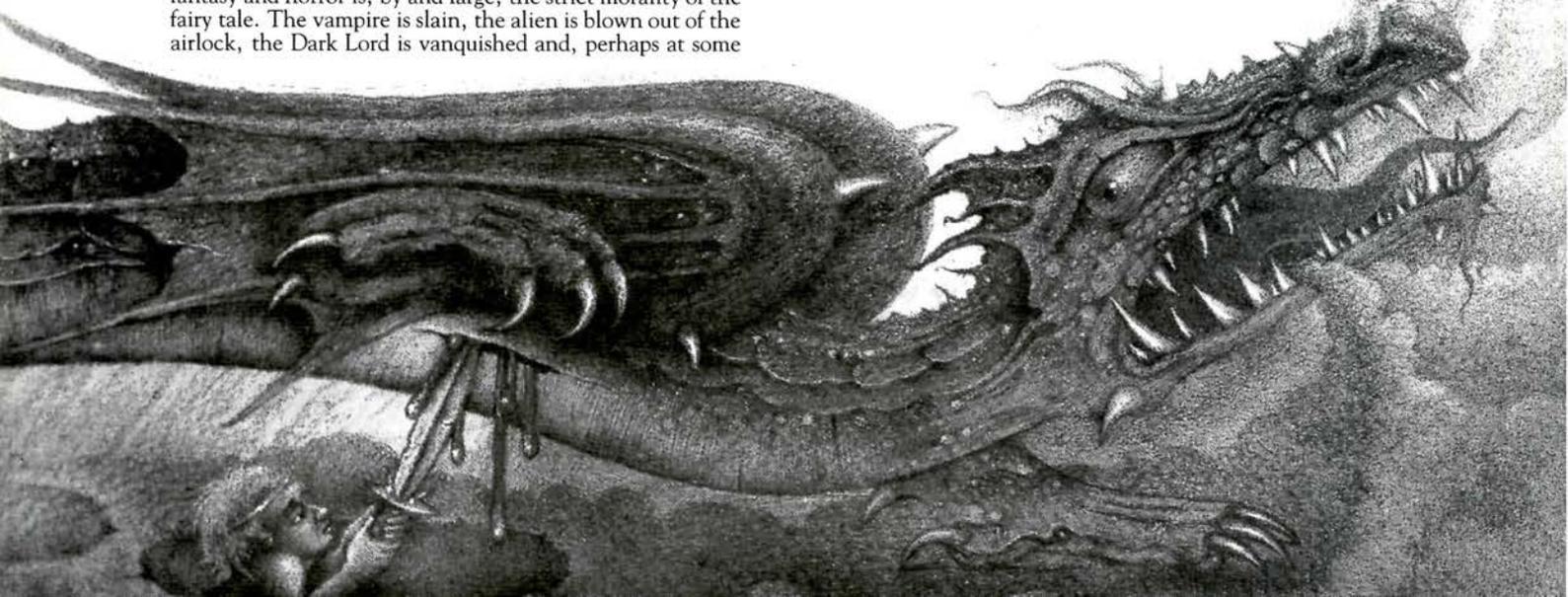
To stay sane, if I may gently paraphrase what Edward Pearce recently wrote in the *Guardian*, it is frequently necessary for someone to take short views, to look for comfort, to keep a piece of the world still genially ordered, if only for the duration of theatrical time or the length of a book. And this is harmless enough. Classical, written fantasy might introduce children to the occult, but in a healthier way than might otherwise be the case in our strange society. If you're told about vampires, it's a good thing to be told about stakes at the same time.

And fantasy's readers might also learn, in the words of Stephen Sondheim, that witches can be right and giants can be good. They learn that where people stand is perhaps not as important as which way they face. This is part of the dangerous process of growing up.

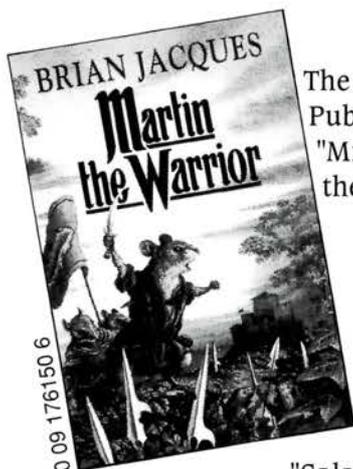
As for escapism, I'm quite happy about the word. There is nothing wrong with escapism. The key points of consideration, though, are what you are escaping from, and where you are escaping to.

As a suddenly thirsting reader I escaped first of all to what was then called Outer Space. I read a lot of science fiction, which as I have said is only a 20th-century subset of fantasy. And a lot of it was, in strict literary terms, rubbish. But this was good rubbish. It was like an exercise bicycle for the mind – it doesn't take you anywhere, but it certainly tones up the muscles.

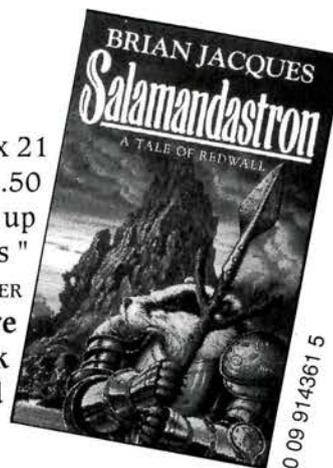
Irrelevant? I first came across any mention of ancient Greek civilisation in a fantasy book – by Mary Renault. But in the '50s most schools taught history like this: there were the Romans who had a lot of baths and built some roads and left. Then there was a lot of undignified pushing and shoving until the Normans arrived, and history officially began.



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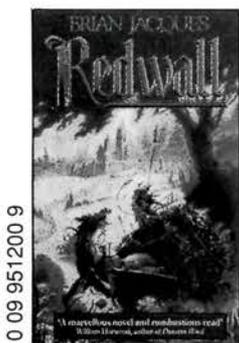
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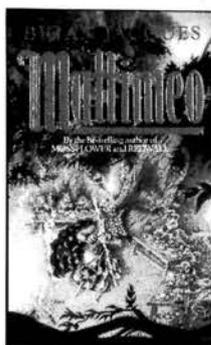


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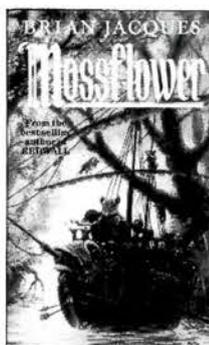
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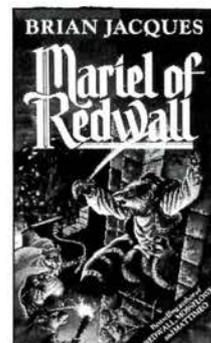
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## Ways of seeing

We did Science, too, in a way. Yuri Gagarin was spinning around above our heads, but I don't recall anyone at school ever mentioning the fact. I don't even remember anyone telling us that science was not about messing around with chemicals and magnets, but rather a way of looking at the universe.

Science fiction looked at the universe all the time. I make no apology for having enjoyed it. We live in a science fiction world: two miles down there you'd fry and two miles up there you'd gasp for breath, and there is a small but significant chance that in the next thousand years a large comet or asteroid will smack into the planet. Finding this out when you're 13 or so is a bit of an eye-opener. It puts acne in its place, for a start.

Then other worlds out there in space got me interested in this one down here. It is a small mental step from time travel to paleontology, from sword 'n' sorcery fantasy to mythology and ancient history. Truth is stranger than fiction; nothing in fantasy enthralled me as much as reading of the evolution of mankind from proto-blob to newt, tree shrew, Oxbridge arts graduate and eventually to tool-using mammal.

I first came across words like 'ecologist' and 'overpopulation' in science fiction books in the late '50s and early '60s, long before they had become fashionable. Yes, probably Malthus had said it first – but you don't read Malthus when you're 11, though you might read someone like John Brunner or Harry Harrison because their books have got an exciting spaceship on the cover.

I also came across the word 'neoteny', which means 'remaining young'. It's something which we as humans have developed into a survival trait. Other animals, when they are young, have a curiosity about the world, a flexibility of response, and an ability to play which they lose as they grow up. As a species we have retained it. As a species, we are forever sticking our fingers into the electric socket of the universe to see what will happen next. It is a trait that will either save us or kill us, but it is what makes us human beings. I would rather be in the company of people who look at Mars than people who contemplate humanity's navel – other worlds are better than fluff.

And I came across a lot of trash. But the human mind has a healthy natural tendency to winnow out the good stuff from the rubbish. It's like gold mining: you have to shift a ton of dirt to get the gold, if you don't shift the dirt, you won't find the nugget. As far as I am concerned, escapist literature let me escape to the real world.

## Compost for the healthy mind

So let's not get frightened when children read fantasy. It is the compost for a healthy mind. It stimulates the inquisitive nodes. It may not appear as 'relevant' as books set more firmly in the child's environment, or whatever hell the writer believes to be the child's environment, but there is some evidence that a rich internal fantasy life is as good and necessary for a child as healthy soil is for a plant, for much the same reasons.

Of course, some may read no other kind of fiction all their lives (although in my experience science fiction fans tend to be widely read outside the field). Adult SF fans may look a bit scary when they come into bookshops, some of them have been known to wear plastic pointy ears, but people like that are an unrepresentative minority, and are certainly no weirder than people who, say, play golf. At the very least they are helping to keep the industry alive, and providing one of the best routes to reading that there can be.



Here's to fantasy as the proper diet for the growing soul. All human life is there: a moral code, a sense of order and, sometimes, great big green things with teeth. There are other books to read, and I hope children who start with fantasy go on to read them. I did. But everyone has to start somewhere.

Please call it fantasy, by the way. Don't call it 'magical realism', that's just fantasy wearing a collar and tie, mark-of-Cain words, words used to mean 'fantasy written by someone I was at university with'. Like the fairy tales that were its forebears, fantasy needs no excuses.

## Dragons can be killed

One of the great popular novelists of the early part of this century was G.K. Chesterton. Writing at a time when fairy stories were under attack, for pretty much the same reason as books can now be covertly banned in some schools because they have the word 'witch' in the title, he said: 'The objection to fairy stories is that they tell children there are dragons. But children have always known there are dragons. Fairy stories tell children that dragons can be killed.' ■

The above article is an edited version of the speech given by Terry Pratchett as a guest of honour at the Booksellers Association Conference dinner in April this year. We thank the *Bookseller*, and Terry Pratchett, for permission to reprint it.

The following Terry Pratchett titles are published by Doubleday in hardback and Corgi in paperback:

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*Diggers*, 0 385 26979 X, £8.95; 0 552 52586 3, £2.99 pbk

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(See our Audio review page for tape details of the above three titles)

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His Discworld titles are available from the same publisher.

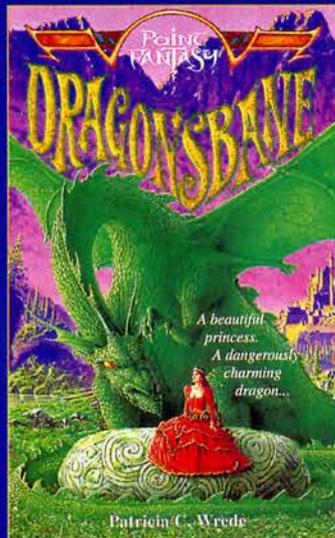
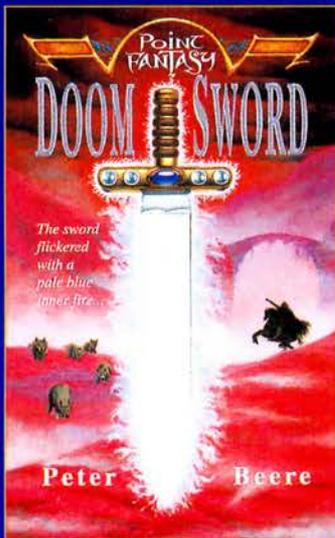
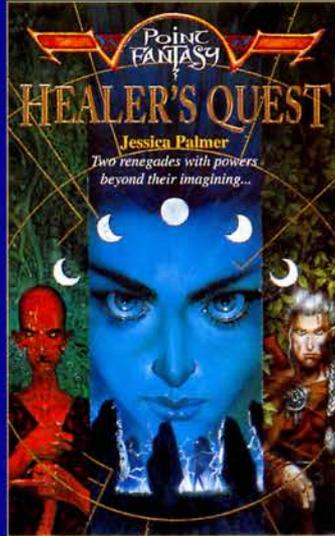
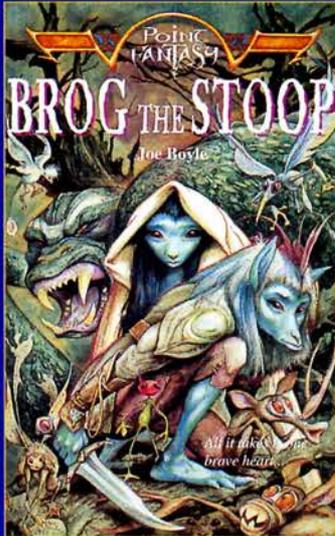
The dragon illustrations accompanying this article are by Wayne Anderson. They're taken from *Dragons: Truth, Myth and Legend* by David Passes, published by David Bennett Books, 1 85602 050 9. The book is a collection of dragon stories from around the world.



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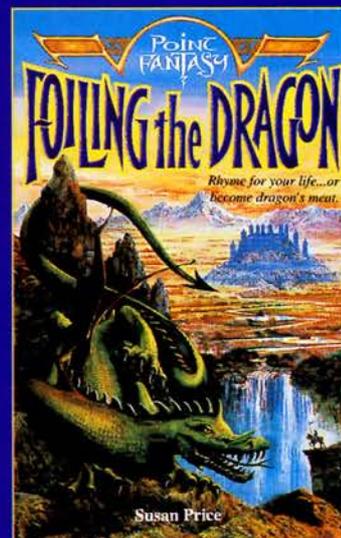
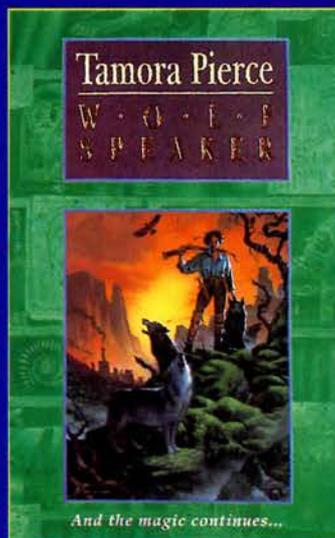
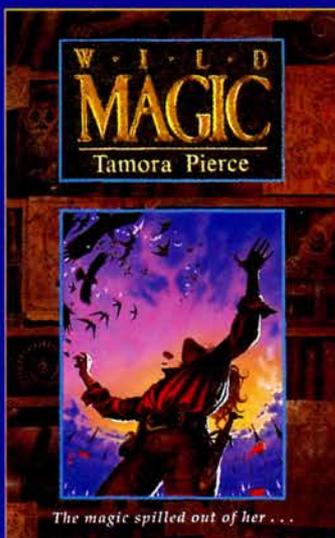
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## POINT FANTASY



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MS



P is for Party with jellies to eat.

### I Spy ABC

Sally Anne Lambert, Picturemac (Jul 93), 0 333 59317 0, £3.99

A charming picture book with unusual and softly-coloured illustrations for each letter of the alphabet. There's certainly much to look at and discuss, but beware of baffling a young child... it's probable they'll learn sounds and lower-case letters at school so the capital letters used here may cause confusion, particularly in the early stages of learning to read.

MS

### Five Little Ducks

Ian Beck, Orchard (Jul 93), 1 85213 497 6, £3.50



A robustly illustrated version of the song used so often in nurseries and playgroups up and down the land to help children match actions to words and increase their vocabulary. The decreasing number of ducks is explained in the pictures by the lurking presence of a fox... This will undoubtedly be a popular addition to any book corner.

MS

### Imagine

Alison Lester, Picture Puffin (Jul 93), 0 14 054355 4, £3.99

Here we have page upon page of visual treats, as each piece of homey imaginative play is translated into a full-blown adventure on the next double-spread. Two children visit the jungle, the depths of the ocean, the arctic or the time when dinosaurs lived (every conceivable kind of animal is

included with their names printed as a border)... and so on until the safe and happy ending when the children imagine their own little house with their own toys carefully tucked up in bed.

A truly beautiful book written with flair and imagination for the delight of children who love to play.

MS

### The Orchard Book of Nursery Stories

Sophie Windham, Orchard (Jul 93), 1 85213 503 4, £5.99

Fifteen stories, all suitable for children aged between 4 and 6, pack the pages of this book. The illustrations are charming, drawn with fine detail and strong colours, plus touches of humour. The storylines are simple and clear. They contain no horrible step relatives, but the wolf does fall into boiling water at the end of 'The Three Little Pigs'. Highly recommended and good value for money.

MS

### Two by Two

Barbara Reid, Hippo (Jun 93), 0 590 55286 4, £2.99

This is the story of Noah's Ark told in rhyme and illustrated with unusual pictures of great detail and interest (they look as if they've been sculpted from plasticine or Fimo). Barbara Reid has certainly done a tremendous job in retelling this old tale and at the end of the book we find it's been set to music. Highly recommended for home or school.

MS

### How Many?

**POETRY**

Rick Walton, ill. Cynthia Jabar, Walker (Aug 93), 0 7445 3204 3, £3.99

A counting book full of verve and exuberant rhythm, featuring favourite nursery rhyme characters. Each page is a delight for counting, hunting puzzles, chatting over and also begging for stories to be told. This book is not a short bedtime tale - before you know it, it can be spun out by eager listeners well into the dark of the night!

JS

### Magic Beach

Alison Lester, Picture Puffin (Jul 93), 0 14 054503 4, £3.99

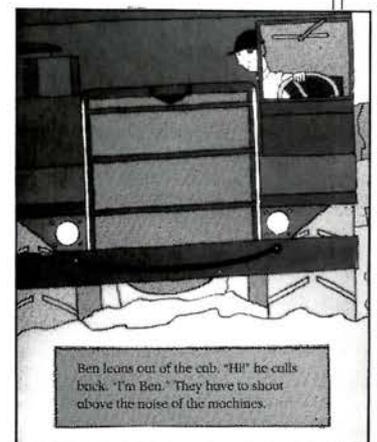
Magic Beach is one of those books which send a shiver of appreciation, recognition and wonder down your spine. Alison Lester draws us into the reality of fantasy for children as we share the powerful images of the children during a holiday at the seaside. It's brilliant - reality gets three-quarters of a double-spread full of fascinating detail, but secret fantasy focuses us down to an intimate peephole view which entices us to share and imagine.

JS

### Working Machines

#### The Dump Truck

0 7445 3119 5



### The Tugboat

0 7445 3118 7 Arlene Blanchard, ill. Tony Wells, Walker (Aug 93), £3.99 each

Excellent and much needed additions to any infant class library - there are too few books of this genre where the younger infant in particular

• husky • arctic wolf • musk ox • arctic tern • snow goose • albatross • caribou • adèle penguin •



• humpback whale • narwhal • arctic dolphin • adèle penguin • arctic hare • puffin • elephant seal • emperor penguin • loon • lemming • sea lion • harp seal • guillemot • kittiwake

From Imagine.

can see the fascination of working machines without the book becoming enmeshed in technicality. These two titles also allow us to identify with the struggle of the machine put to its limits, while avoiding pseudo-human characteristics which would somehow demean the power and integrity of a beautiful piece of engineering. JS

### Fritz and the Mess Fairy

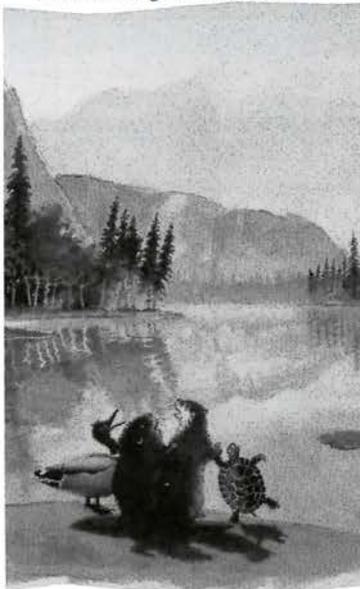
Rosemary Wells, Picture Lions (Jun 93), 0 00 664203 9, £3.99

That my copy of this book is dog-eared already only goes to show that Rosemary Wells still has her finger well and truly on the pulse of children's deeper concerns. The panic that Fritz struggles to conquer as he inadvertently unleashes an even messier creature than himself and the horror he feels as he cowers in the corner while he views the havoc wreaked . . . is resolved – but Rosemary Wells' dry humour still leaves us with the twist in the tail that so appeals. JS

### Little Beaver and the Echo

Amy MacDonald, ill. Sarah Fox-Davies, Walker (Aug 93), 0 7445 2315 X, £3.99

The quality of the artwork is the first thing that will strike



you about this beautifully produced book. The watercolours of Canadian animals and landscapes are charming without being sloppy, and accurate without being clinical.

The story is of equal quality. How Little Beaver finds friends by setting out to be a friend is clearly told in simple, but thoughtful, prose and good clear print. A lovely book, highly recommended. LW

### The Magic Roundabout

Brian's New House Helen Lloyd, Heinemann (Jun 93), 0 434 96393 3, £2.99

An attractive little book in bright, clear colours which tells of Brian's search for a more des. res. than his shell. There really is nothing much to it and great literature it is not, but many small children will enjoy this simply told story . . . and if you think I'm revealing a soft spot for **The Magic Roundabout**, you're quite right. LW

### The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr Benn, Red Knight

David McKee, Hodder & Stoughton (Jun 93), 0 340 58999 X, £3.50

Another TV spin-off and one of a set of four books about Mr Benn, the 'ordinary man' who, when putting on fancy dress costumes, is transported into the life of each character. In this one he is a knight who helps to save a dragon made redundant from his job as royal firelighter because of *matches*. The story is interestingly told and illustrated in McKee's usual lively style. Added entertainment is provided for adults by reading into it your pet political views on the evils of capitalism or the welfare state, the evils of state control or free enterprise . . . or whatever you like really.

In other books in the series Mr Benn is a Spaceman, a Diver and a Caveman; the latter, unfortunately, perpetuating the common myth that cavemen lived alongside dinosaurs. (Also, isn't it about time we heard more of 'Cavewomen'?) LW

## INFANT/JUNIOR

### The Sugar-Gum Tree

Patricia Wrightson, ill. David Cox, Young Puffin (Jun 93), 0 14 036472 2, £2.99

A miniature saga celebrating the double edged power of childhood friendship through a splendid account of childhood bloody mindedness.

Sarah and Penny's work on the construction of a playhouse in the shade of the sugar-gum tree is interrupted when the former calls the latter a 'gloop', causing her to shin up the tree and stay there, in spite of all the efforts of two sets of parents and the fire brigade.

The way in which this predicament is eventually resolved is surprising, yet very happily apt.

Anyone experienced in cutting off their own nose in order to spite a friend's face will identify with this short, strong, simple book. Excellent for reading aloud, and for getting children to talk about their own experiences of conflict. GH

### Mama, Papa and Baby Joe

Niki Daly, Red Fox (Aug 93), 0 09 989880 2, £3.99

You'll either love or hate this book – and so will the children! Adults and children I tried it on were either totally captivated by the concept of the shopping expedition with a twist of absurdity, with animals in bizarre situations, with the sophisticated visual jokes and



Pushalong singalong, shopping trolley  
Chicken Lickin and Pudding Pack.

caricatures of people . . . or left absolutely cold and in some cases disturbed and uncertain. JS

### Hairy Maclary's Showbusiness

Lynley Dodd, Picture Puffin (Jul 93), 0 14 054550 6, £3.99

This latest adventure of Hairy Maclary the dog from Donaldson's Dairy has made him winner of the New Zealand Picture Story Book of the Year Award. It has been read and reread so many times yet is still greeted with gales of laughter at the absurdity of how Hairy Maclary, in his inimitable way, manages to win one of the first prizes in the Cat Show! Lynley Dodd manages to give us the good old rollicking rhythms of Music Hall to match her appealingly zany illustrations.

**POETRY**

A must for all Hairy fans and a good intro to this style of poetry for any who haven't yet met him. JS

### A Secret Place

Julia Draper, Hippo (Jun 93), 0 590 55270 8, £2.99

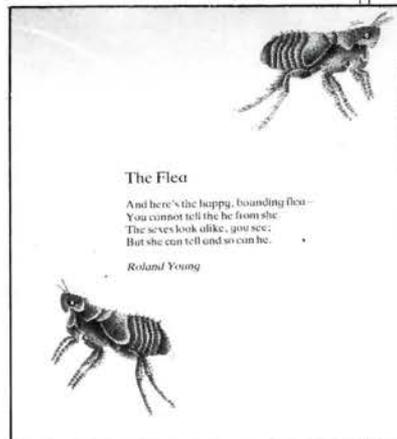
Loved by one and all, this book pulls no punches. We see the grief of our heroine as she sees her special secret place, with its wealth of wild life, fall to the bulldozers, but we also see how she herself can create another secret place to encourage the wildlife back into her own garden. Julia Draper's illustrations capture the hard and soft sides of wildlife inhabiting the secret place as well as the aggressive power of the machinery. It's a book of hope which, with no soapbox stridency, gently reminds us that we all have a role to play and can have an effect. JS

### Mini Beasties

Edited by Michael Rosen, ill. Alan Baker, Picture Puffin (Jul 93), 0 14 054490 9, £3.99

An attractive anthology of poems and verse about insects and spiders. Despite the unfortunate publisher's blurb which seems to assume that children will only be interested in poetry if it's described as 'funny rhymes', the selection ranges widely; some of it is, indeed, funny but much is thoughtful and beautiful as well. A good mix, well served by attractively decorated and

**POETRY**



The Flea

And here's the happy, bounding flea—  
You cannot tell the he from she:  
The sexes look alike, you see;  
But she can tell and so can he.

Rosland Young

colourful pages, which will interest most primary children. LW

### I'm Not Frightened of Ghosts

Juliet and Charles Snape, Walker (Aug 93), 0 7445 3068 7, £3.99

There are echoes of **A Dark, Dark Wood** about this tale of Lizzie who explores an old house to see if there are any ghosts. As each event occurs, two explanations are given, one in the text and one in the pictures, one matter-of-fact and one ghostly. Which is true?

An interesting book with lots to talk about and discuss in both text and illustration, which work together very well. Large, clear print makes this good for young readers to share or, if confident, to read themselves. LW

## First Class

Rose Impey, ill. Sue Porter, Orchard (Aug 93), 1 85213 505 0, £3.99



The combination of Rose Impey and Sue Porter has produced some excellent books, *Joe's Cafe* and *A Letter to Father Christmas* for a start. This is no exception. Six very short, funny stories about the children in Mrs Candy's infant class are written with affection and an ear for the truth, illustrated with charm and realism and printed in a large format with clear print and colour. Year 2 children, old enough to look back on their first day, will especially enjoy this (but I have to say I think teachers and parents will find this even funnier than the children will; almost every page has a joke for those who live and work with small children.)

LW

## The Smallest Stegosaurus

Lynn Sweat and Louis Phillips, Oxford (Jun), 0 19 272266 2, £2.95

Well, too much to expect that there wouldn't be yet more dinosaurs around, I suppose, and if there has to be, one could do far worse than this attractive picture book. While reading about the little stegosaurus and his world, children will learn a good many facts about the life of dinosaurs contained within a pleasant story. I must admit, I had never seen stegosaurus as being a cuddly creature, but this one is delightful.

The pictures are accurate but softened by gentle colour wash and there's a fact page at the back. Costing £1.00 less than other picture books around this month, it's also excellent value. A good antidote to the hype and nonsense often put about in the name of pre-history.

LW

## Toffee Pockets

Jeanne Willis, ill. George Buchanan, Red Fox (Jul 93), 0 09 910511 X, £2.99

If poetry is paring feelings and images down to quintessentials then this exploration of the special relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is powerfully successful. The poems explore, without sentimentality, the ups and downs – the jealousies, the security, the tenderness

POETRY

and the brusqueness – that characterise the chronicle of this family's life. It got a generally good reception – many poems are loved by a number of my children; some are felt not to be universal and perhaps not reflecting 'the young modern grandparents of present times'. Most were good strong-flowing stuff, easy to read and comforting to hear. I have the lowering feeling that Grandma's sayings, in particular, will stay close to the surface and I'll henceforth find myself issuing them again and again! JS

## Blue Magic

Hazel Townson, ill. Mary Rees, Red Fox (Jul 93), 0 09 966870 X, £2.50

Another 'Read Alone Book' from Hazel Townson that really works. Illustrations are good, support the text and add to it. (A shame, though, about the quality of the paper which means that succeeding pages spoil the image and can sometimes be a little distracting for the reader.) The text has all the right ingredients – a gripping story with Bella the Bully getting her come-uppance, with magic, with hilarious (sometimes cringe-making) dialogue, but such pace and verve that even a tentative reader will be compelled to keep going to the very satisfying end. JS

## The Puddletown Dragon

Maggie Pearson, ill. John Eastwood, Young Piper (Jul 93), 0 330 32584 1, £2.50

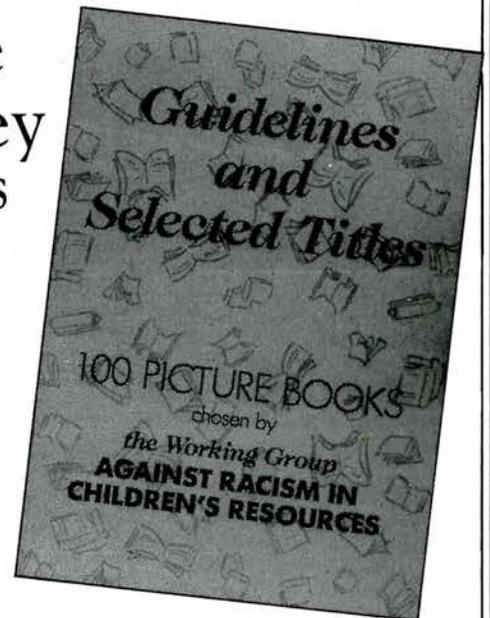
The confusion that follows the arrival in Puddletown of Smallest-of-all when he runs out of puff during the migration north of all the dragons, is compounded when all but Alice observe only his huge shadow and panic ensues. The children loved the build-up of tension as Alice's attempts to enlighten the elders of the town go ignored. They were particularly fascinated about the minutiae of how to take care of a dragon – particularly when no-one is supposed to know you have one. John Eastwood's exuberant and quirky line drawings not only complement the text but further the mood of subterfuge as Alice keeps her secret from the villagers and they keep their secret from outsiders. JS

## The Steadfast Tin Soldier

Hans Christian Andersen, trans. Naomi Lewis, ill. P J Lynch, Red Fox (Aug 93), 0 7502 0937 2, £3.99

This translation of a classic tale of humble, hopeless love communicates the strange, tender harshness of Andersen's world very

# Anne Marley assesses



This list provides both pleasure and pain: the pleasure lies in seeing so many good titles portraying positive black images for hardpressed teachers and librarians to use imaginatively and with confidence; the pain comes from the sad realisation that such a list is needed after all this time. Clearly, there's still a long way to go.

Here, though, is a wealth of material carefully annotated by several members of the Working Group. Arrangement is by title and, in addition to the usual bibliographical details, an indication of age group is given, as well as the distributor in cases where the material is fairly difficult to obtain. The titles range from alphabet and counting books to picture books, all reflecting black experience both in Britain and around the world, from mainstream and minority publishers. Care has been taken to include books in the more widely used community languages, but it is also good to see titles in Swahili and Somali. It's essential for people without access to community language speakers to have a reliable list where such titles are recommended.

Especially pleasing is the grouping of titles by topic, which highlights issues in the stories like Birthdays, Grandparents (KS1 History!) and One-parent Families of either gender.

The Guidelines which introduce the list, though, make me a little uneasy with their tendency to re-activate old arguments when the debate has really moved on. I abhor the tokenism of earlier years, for instance, but have a problem with the idea that an author or illustrator should not feature black characters in their books unless they themselves are either part of the black community or have had 'a lot of thought and consultation with members of the community being represented'. What constitutes 'a lot'? If this were strictly adhered to, we'd lose many excellent stories – *Amazing Grace*, *Eat Up*, *Gemma* and *Bet You Can't* were all written and illustrated by white people. Fortunately these titles do appear on the list – evidently the Working Party either decided there *had* been 'a lot of thought and consultation' in these cases or chose to ignore their own Guidelines.

It might also have been helpful to have the term 'black perspective' enlarged upon in the introduction. To some, it may still imply people of Afro-Caribbean descent, and not, as the Americans say, 'people of colour'.

Even then, what happens to the Jewish perspective or the white Muslim perspective, to give two examples, where racism is often part of daily life? Racism doesn't confine itself to skin tone, and the Guidelines should have been more precise on issues like these.

Fortunately, doubts about the theoretical perspective offered here in no way detract from the value of the list itself which can be recommended most warmly.

This publication costs £5 (£3 for students and the unwaged), plus 50p p&p, from WGARC, 460 Wandsworth Road, London SW8 3LX (Tel: 071 627 4594).

Membership of the Working Group is open to anyone and costs £5 per annum.

Anne Marley works for Hampshire County Library in the Children's and Schools Service. She set up the Hampshire Intercultural Resources Centre to provide advice and promote awareness of positive images in resources for children.

directly. P J Lynch's illustrations are an exhilarating accompaniment to the tragedy. The soldier's fascination with the ballerina, his persecution by a goblin that howls off the page, his plunge into the gutter, his sewer voyage and sojourn in the belly of a fish, his miraculous return to the playroom and his final immolation amidst the ashes of his beloved, all are depicted with a vigorous realism that mirrors the clarity of the text. Share this with all ages, but be prepared for tears. GH

### Dear Greenpeace

Simon James, Walker (Jul 93), 0 7445 3060 1, £3.99

This is the record of a brief correspondence between a girl who befriends the blue whale in her paddling pool and a rather prosaic Greenpeace official who insists that such a phenomenon is impossible. The illustrations are proof positive that the child is not imagining things, and the whale's eventual return to the ocean adds another poignant twist of realism.

The story is vivid and concise, and the letters are models of effective communication. A good book to share with the class and to talk through with beginner readers. GH

### The Magic Hare

Lynne Reid Banks, Lions (Jun 93), 0 00 674221 1, £2.99

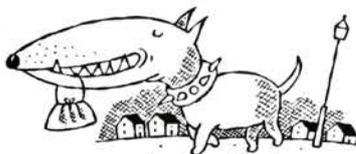
A dozen stories about a dancing, elusive, kindly, but slightly vain creature who mimics the part of a fickle fairy godmother as he hops between the animal and human domains, using a kind of shrewd magic to undermine vices and solve predicaments. Each story has an implicit moral which does not intrude upon the nimbleness of the narrative.

This is a pleasant collection to read aloud to a class of upper infants or younger juniors; it would also provide some mildly contemplative entertainment for independent readers of all ages. GH

### One in a Million

Edited by Moira Andrew, ill. Sally Kindberg, Puffin (Jul 93), 0 14 034936 7, £3.50

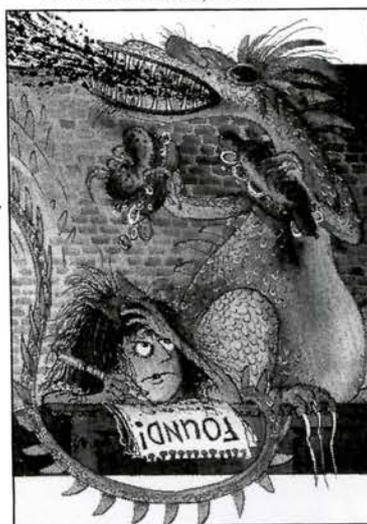
As well as being fun in its own right, this collection of poems with a mathematical theme offers marvellous starting points for discussion and exploration. Why not introduce a topic on volume or estimation with Charles Thomson's 'How Many Peas . . .' or one on length



with 'I Want a Small Piece of String' by Remy Charlip. Cross-curricular opportunities galore here. JB

### Dragon Poems

John Foster and Korky Paul, Oxford (Aug), 0 19 276108 0, £2.99



A fresh, exciting look at dragons strange and familiar, old and new. There are dragons of simply every shape, size and persuasion here. Some are the bravest of the brave like the one in 'No Contest' who dares to fight Mum, then there's the musical octet in 'Dragon Band', not forgetting the lost and forlorn in 'Lost and Found'. I loved and went into giggles about one of the shortest, 'Drawback', a dragon who is cross-eyed which means the worst when breathing fire and flames.

Why I've waited so long to mention the illustrations I don't know - they're sensational. PH

### Grandma's Hat

Rosemary Kahn, ill. Terry Milne, Walker (Jun 93), 0 7445 3059 8, £3.99

Estelle's old gold hat looked like a potty turned upside down yet she had to wear it every Sunday. Grandma's story about how she managed to rid herself of her hated headgear and where it ended up is set in 1920s colonial South Africa. Terry Milne's pencil and watercolour illustrations give us a fascinating glimpse into the family life of white settlers and the fashions and architecture of the period. JB

## JUNIOR / MIDDLE

### The Canterbury Tales

Retold by Selina Hastings, ill. Reg Cartwright, Walker (Jun 93), 0 7445 3064 4, £6.99

After a very useful introduction to the setting of the tales and to Chaucer himself, seven stories are told quite accessibly, economically and straightforwardly. The individual tellers (Knight, Miller, Reeve, Pardoner, Wife, Franklin, Nun's Priest) are briefly characterised but their voices don't seem to come through in the retellings, which for me was a pity. The illustrations and decorations do good service to the text, even the slightly cheeky bits, which writer and artist have handled very dexterously. Well worth a library copy. DB

### Sourland

William H Armstrong, ill. Chris Molan, Puffin (Jul 93), 0 14 036329 7, £2.99

There's a tremendous integrity about this short novel, embodied in the main character: Moses Waters is a negro teacher full of wisdom, who first appears like Father Time scything the grass in a graveyard and has the moral stature of a biblical hero. He helps the Stone children and their father come to terms with bereavement and remains magnificently above local white prejudice and antagonism towards blacks. This is a crafted and meaningful book from which sensitive readers could learn much that's worthy and true. DB

### Seeing Off Uncle Jack

Bernard Ashley, ill. Kim Harley, Puffin (Jul 93), 0 14 034794 1, £2.99

Bernard Ashley has the enviable skill of writing convincingly realistic stories where dialogue and plot seem utterly plausible. There are three stories about the Stone family in this slim book, centered on Winnie, the youngest, who learns the truth

### BERNARD ASHLEY



about her blind, boring Uncle Jack in the first and appreciates the true character of her parents in the remaining two - especially her dominating mother, whose husband isn't quite so mousey as the womenfolk imagine.

This will make a valuable collection for any classroom and well deserves promotion. DB

### The Mystery of the Cupboard

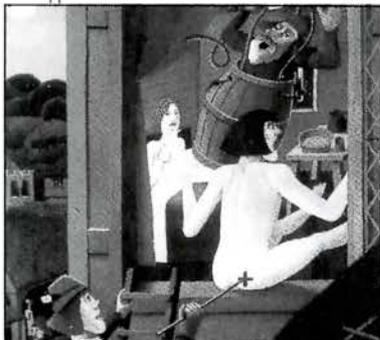
Lynne Reid Banks, Lions (Jun 93), 0 00 674640 3, £3.50

This is number four in the 'Indian' series and explains, through an absolutely enthralling mystery, how the magic of the cupboard came about in the first place. Omri's move to a country cottage, formerly owned by a distant great-great-aunt leads to the discovery of a hidden cashbox and from there on Ms RB devises a plot that thickens and complicates in a most satisfying and imaginative way. I'm sure many youngsters will feel compelled to read it, as I did, in a single sitting. DB

### Stinky Stories

Compiled by Barbara Ireson, ill. Sue Heap, Red Fox (Aug 93), 0 09 911241 8, £2.99

A collection of hilarious yet sensitive stories about some of the whiffiest pongs you can imagine - all the glorious unmentionable things of childhood like John Cunliffe's giant who has BO and Roald Dahl's little girl who smells of doggy poo to a witch. There are more gentle stories, too: Philippa Pearce's greenish smelling and mysterious Jess



Oakes who appears when a tree falls on the school and Gene Kemp's cat who has to travel far and wide to find Toothie, the only person who loves him.

This is a super read and one of the few books I know that can surmount a wet playtime duty with effortless ease. PH

### The Orphan Boy

Tololwa M Molel, ill.  
Paul Morin, Oxford  
(Jun 93), 0 19 540846 4,  
£3.95

The planet Venus is known as Kileken, the orphan boy, to the Masai: in this poetic retelling of the African legend we learn why. **The Orphan Boy** is a tale of the love of an old man for the son he never had – a tale of old age and youth, weakness and strength and the importance of a shared trust and the devastating consequences of breaking it.

One can almost feel the burnt grass and barren scrub, such is the wonderfully rich texture of Paul Morin's illustrations; rich, too, is the retelling of the story which has a haunting quality. Not to be missed. JB

### The Mousehole Cat

Antonia Barber, ill.  
Nicola Bayley, Walker  
(Jun 93), 0 7445 2353 2,  
£4.99

Every now and then a book comes along that captures the imagination and lingers in the mind. **The Mousehole Cat** is one of these. The tale is of Mowser the cat and her pet man braving the vicious storms to save the villagers. The rapport between man and cat is sensitive and, although written from Mowser's point of view, it skilfully avoids sentimentality.



The illustrations are outstanding, a wonderful blending of the fluidity of movement that cats and swirling stormy waters share. PH

### Animal Poetry

0 7502 0934 8

### Green Poetry

0 7502 0935 6

### Sea Poetry

0 7502 0937 2

### Christmas Poetry

0 7502 0936 4

Selected by Robert Hull,  
Wayland (Aug 93),  
£4.99 each

Four out of a set of eight books (the other themes are Day and Night, Science, Houses and Homes, and Food) containing some refreshingly original selections, including a light scatter of poems by children. Many expected guests are conspicuously absent, and in their places stand worthy alternatives. In **Sea Poetry**, for example, Shakespeare is represented not by 'Full fathom five' but by the equally haunting vision of jewelled seabed bones from **Richard III**.

**Animal Poetry** contains poignant contributions from Clare, Hughes and Sandburg, alongside more cheery stuff from Michael Flanders and John Agard. **Christmas Poetry** presents a similar mix of the meditative and the light-hearted, while **Green Poetry** is composed almost entirely of

despondent reflections and forebodings.

All the books are magnificently illustrated with full colour photographs, including some startling material from Oxford Scientific Films. Annabel Spencely's black-and-white marginalia provide an attractive contrast. GH

### The Werpuppy

Jacqueline Wilson, ill.  
Janet Robertson, Puffin  
(Jun 93), 0 14 036129 4,  
£2.99

Fear of dogs must be on the increase these days, so a book which takes this phobia as its theme is welcome. Micky's dread is exacerbated by watching a video nasty, his sister's vicious teasing, the attentions of the school bully, and his 'manly' father's disgusted reactions to his timidity. All of this is very convincingly related. Less convincing is Micky's release from the terror, which comes as a result of his befriending a disturbed puppy. This enables him to frighten the living daylights out of both sister and bully, and to earn the respect of dad.

A thought-provoking book, particularly in its early stages, which might encourage children to reflect on the nature of fear and courage. GH

## MIDDLE / SECONDARY

### A Ghost Waiting

Hugh Scott, Walker  
(Jun 93), 0 7445 2439 3,  
£4.99

Hugh Scott is a gifted writer and while waiting for more like **Why Weeps the Brogan?** we can enjoy his skill in taking some fairly conventional elements and producing a quite frightening story of the devil and reincarnation. It isn't easy to get into but there's a tremendous climax. If teachers can help readers with this one, they'll love it. AJ

### Knights of the Lost Domain

Julian Atterton, Walker  
(Aug 93), 0 7445 3027 X,  
£2.99

Julian Atterton clearly knows and loves his subject. He's able to make ancient battles and relationships have a relevance which holds the attention of more able readers. This second book in the **Knights** trilogy tells the story of Simon de Falaise's perilous journey, undertaken as an escort to the doomed Maud de Rumilly. Maud must return to Cumbria, which is split by war – and she must return to almost certain death. The story moves along briskly and convincingly, though Norse

names may bewilder less able readers. An admirable addition to class or school library. VR

### True Horror Stories

Terry Deary, Scholastic  
(Jul 93), 0 590 55250 3,  
£2.99

A useful little book – easy to read subject matter which appeals to children and useful factfiles at the end of each story to assist children in thinking more deeply about the validity of events.

The cover, with its raised gold lettering and eerie illustration, will attract young readers and the price will attract their teachers! This would be a popular class reader for Year 7 pupils and would enhance thematic studies of horror, ghosts and the supernatural. VR

### Losing David

Alida Young, Lions  
(Jun 93), 0 00 674744 2,  
£2.99

The 'Sweet Goodbyes' series, of which this is No. 6, specialises in the shattering effects of fatal illnesses and death on teenage relationships... rent a crisis/soap opera you cry! Actually the tears do jerk, but this one, where HIV girl meets Leukemia boy, is soundly written and there's a

fair portion of gentle empathy and sensitive factual input that might do a great deal of good in fostering understanding and breaking down prejudices and unwarranted fears.

Teenagers will no doubt find them irresistible. DB

### The File on Fraulein Berg

Joan Lingard, Puffin  
(Jul 93), 0 14 036393 9,  
£2.99

Three school friends in wartime Belfast, convinced that their new German teacher is a spy, embark on a campaign of tracking the suspect, finding sinister overtones in everything she does. Few readers will be surprised to find that they're quite wrong, regretting their victimisation when they discover she's an escaped Jew whose family has died in concentration camps, though the 'awful truth' does not have the impact it deserves. Contrasts between the three girls and their families enliven the story. LN

### Thin Air

David Getz, Red Fox  
(Jul 93), 0 09 916331 4,  
£2.99

'I just want to be a regular kid! Why can't I just be a regular kid? Why do I have to have

asthma? Why do I have to be so weak?'

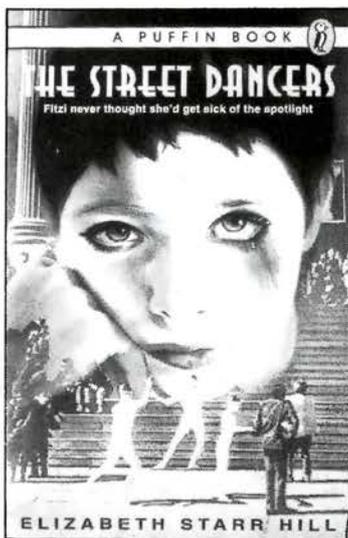
This is the cry of Joseph Katz whom everyone carefully protects and wants to put in a special class at school. He has a valid point but his methods of going about changing his situation have a nasty self-centred and inconsiderate side to them, particularly where elder brother Isaac is concerned. Encounters with a blind news-vendor and a green-eyed girl start to bring about positive change.

The humour and style of this book commend it for a wide readership. DB

### The Street Dancers

Elizabeth Starr Hill,  
Puffin (Jun 93),  
0 14 03491 8, £3.50

Fitzi Wolper also longs to lead a normal existence, unfettered by the uncertainties and pressures of show business. She and her parents are at the end where long-term jobs are hard to come by and street performances are the main means of scraping a living. Fitzi thinks that going to school and leading a less temporary life would bring her happiness and fulfilment, but the lure of the spotlight is always temptingly in the background. **The Street Dancers** unfolds steadily and



compulsively with credible characters, situations and details of New York fringe theatre and its players. DB

### The Intruder

John Rowe Townsend, Red Fox (Jul 93), 0 09 999260 4, £3.50

16-year-old Arnold is the sympathetically and credibly drawn main character of this story set against the north-west coast, although the sea itself shares centre stage; mystery arrives when a stranger in the village claims to share his name. Townsend's impressive interrelating of bleak coastal landscape, character and a pervading sense of threat creates a compelling novel. Readers of 12 and over will be engrossed from the first chapter. LN

### The Flower King

Lesley Howarth, Walker (Aug 93), 0 7445 2451 2, £4.99

The theme of a contemporary character discovering a past generation's secret is handled confidently here. Set in Cornwall, it concerns the friendship between a teenage

boy (we never learn his name) and a resident of an old people's home. His interest in her memories of the Flower King, a local landowner who was murdered, diverts him from the unhappiness of his family life. Strikingly written – the narrator's psychic awareness of colour and mood is effectively deployed – and an impressive first novel. LN

### Advantage, Miss Jackson

Michael Hardcastle, Mammoth (Jun 93), 0 7497 1022 5, £2.99

Catrina Jackson's ambition to be a top-class tennis player seems in jeopardy when her father's job and financial problems prevent him from coaching her, but other opportunities soon arise and Catrina learns to rely on her own determination. Tennis tactics and the single-mindedness required to excel in sport are conveyed more effectively than the



relationships between the female characters; Michael Hardcastle wisely avoids letting Catrina achieve overwhelming success at the end. LN

## OLDER READERS

### Then Came the Liars, Then Came the Fools

Anna McLeay, Bodley Head (Aug 93), PBK. ORIG. 0 370 31803 X, £8.99

The plot could be a short story – Leila believes she can will things to happen and anyone who crosses her has some kind of accident – but it's the manner of the telling and the richness of the detail, especially the setting, which really hold your attention. We have a bleak vision of economic decay some time in the future where the excitement of the day is the arrival of the circus show freaks. In the following chapter we are taken back a year and then successively brought back to the present for a finale which virtually repeats the earlier arrival of the circus with a crucial additional scene. A very striking and haunting story. AJ

### Fearful Lovers

Robert Westall, Pan Piper (Aug 93), 0 330 32925 1, £3.50

Five stories which play with mystery and suspense, often with supernatural overtones, and which individually and collectively give pleasure both in their stories and the craft of the telling. There's the blind man who gives a perfect description of the murderer he's never seen, the murder preserved in film for over 50 years, the registrar of births who has to make an entry for the devil's child, the lady caught in a dull marriage who thinks she's in touch with a heroic man from the past, and – it is Westall, remember – a

magician turned cat to protect the girl he's not allowed to see. AJ

### Yesterday

Adèle Geras, Walker (Jul 93), 0 7445 2352 4, £2.99

*Yesterday* is one of four books in the 'Teenage Memoirs' series in which renowned authors reflect upon the past which shaped their art.

Adèle Geras takes us to the Oxford of the mid-sixties – to parties, exams and, most of all, to the theatre productions which were at the centre of her university life. These memoirs give a fascinating insight into the influences which gave substance to later work. The style is intimate, humorous, often self-deprecating – and, therefore, endearing as a result.

Here is a book for young adults – perhaps those poised on the brink of a life-change such as Geras describes. A short, but vivid read in which much common experience is to be found. VR

### Ordinary Seaman

John Gordon, Walker 'Teenage Memoirs' (Jul 93), 0 7445 2378 8, £2.99

'I went to the ship's side and leant on the rail . . . but someone had removed a section, and I leant into empty air.' The reader is caught in the opening page and drawn into memoirs which turn events into stories linked by growing up and by water – from the family move to the Fens in the late 1930s, through life in the Navy and then a job as a reporter. It's fun to read

and this and the skill of the narrative make it an excellent choice for book boxes and collections of literary non-fiction suitable for the second half of KS3 and beyond. AJ

### The Other Side of the Fence

Jean Ure, Corgi Freeway (Jul 93), 0 552 52466 2, £2.99

Jean Ure is at her best in this unusual story of boy-meets-girl – unusual because there is no romantic interest between Richard and Bonny, an unlikely combination brought together through their need to escape from unacceptable circumstances and to survive in London with little money. Lively dialogue, strong characterisation and social realism make this an absorbing read; without being at all didactic it will raise readers' awareness of the difficulties of coping without the props of home, family and income. Prejudice against homosexuality is also explored although the gender of Richard's lover Jan is kept as a surprise ending for all but the most alert reader. LN

### Love in a Dustbin

Janet Green, Hodder & Stoughton (Jun 93), 0 340 58860 8, £3.50

Sarah and Carrie are teenage friends with a predictable obsession with boys. Sarah attempts to understand the ambiguities and many facets of love through her relationships at school, church and home, although the male characters are without exception flatly drawn and her insights are inadequately conveyed

through the trite song lyrics she writes. The Christian slant of the story is conspicuously didactic, and sex is coyly sidlined; nowhere is it referred to directly, and guilt, distress and possible abortion are its sole connotations. However, the engaging main character may be sufficient to sustain teenage interest. LN

### Seven Weeks Last Summer

Catherine Robinson, Red Fox (Aug 93), 0 09 998600 0, £3.50

The most lasting memory of this book is the way in which the central character's feelings are so clearly conveyed. Abby's father, a selfish but charismatic man, leaves the family to live with another woman. Abby must come to terms with the grief, humiliation and anger which this arouses. She finds a confidante in Kit, a fellow student, but as they get closer he begins to make physical demands of her which she cannot answer.

A convincing narration of teenage anguish and one which will communicate clearly with young people who find themselves in this situation. VR

### Reviewers in this issue:

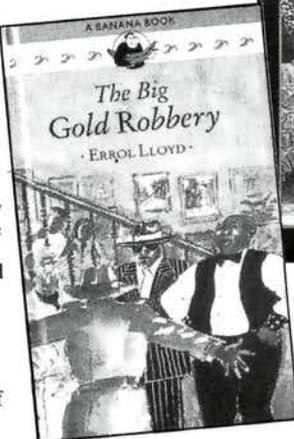
David Bennett, Jim Bennett, Pam Harwood, George Hunt, Adrian Jackson, Linda Newbery, Val Randall, Judith Sharman, Moira Small and Liz Waterland.

# SERIES TITLES

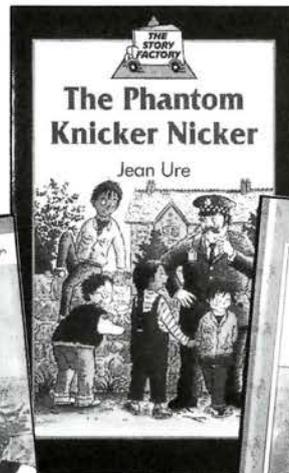
Some of the latest, reviewed by Steve Rosson

I knew I was going to enjoy Errol Lloyd's **The Big Gold Robbery** (Heinemann 'Banana', 0 434 96267 8, £3.99) as soon as I saw the B-movie heavies on the front. The old adage advises us against judging a book by its cover, but the cover is *such* an important element in the process as children select their books and this one's a winner. The story's not half bad, either. The necklace Kelly buys his mum for her birthday from some 'iffy' market traders selling from a suitcase turns out to be real gold and the Bicycle Riders' Action Team swing into action. Pretty soon they stumble across some Premier League bad guys just released from a ten stretch and anxious to regain their loot. Action all the way with some suitably sardonic dialogue from the villains, and the author's own illustrations maintain the verve and style of the cover. Incidentally, how old do you have to be to remember B-movies?

I'm all for children's fiction tackling controversial subjects – but underwear fetishism? Fortunately, all my worst fears came to nought as the garments concerned in Jean



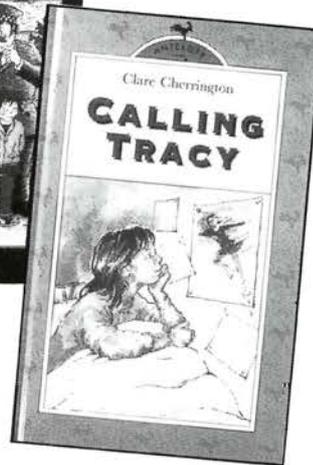
Ure's **The Phantom Knicker Nicker** (Blackie 'Story Factory', 0 216 94044 7, £5.99) are not of the skimpy black lace variety but Old Annie's pink drawers. They're disappearing from the washing line nonetheless and the Gang



of Four Private Detective Agency, ably led by Priya Patel, are employed to keep watch. Each of the would-be private eyes comes across as an individual and there's plenty of humour at the expense of Sergeant Durkin,

otherwise known as the head Truncheon. It's a shame Mark Southgate, the illustrator, seems more comfortable drawing adults than children.

After all the brouhaha over alleged PC in the children's book world **Daily Mail** readers will be reassured by **Calling Tracy** by Clare Cherrington (Hamish Hamilton 'Gazelle', 0 241 13276 2, £4.99) where the heroine is obsessed first by ice-skating and then by riding. But I'm starting to trivialise what is actually an interesting and thoughtful book. Tracy has to come to terms with the end of her skating ambitions after a fall from a tree ends in a broken leg and consequent limp. The first-person narrative and episodic plot make for almost a diary style as Tracy moves through disbelief, despair and breakdown to recovery; on the way dealing with fluctuating relationships with her mum, best friend Janet and the psychiatrist she nicknames Snoopy. Skating and riding, yes, but Mum is a single parent who loses her job and Tracy's school is no Malory Towers. Perhaps those **Daily Mail** readers shouldn't be too reassured, after all.



# AUDIO TAPES

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent tapes.

Reviews are listed in roughly ascending order of listening age. Prices include VAT unless otherwise stated.

## Pirates

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, read by Adrian Edmondson with two additional voices, one cassette with 32-page Picture Lion pbk, 30 mins, Collins Audio, £5.99

It sounds as though it was great fun recording this cassette. Adrian Edmondson is a happy choice of zany, vivacious presenter for such a comic and gutsy book. The liveliness of the book's illustration is translated onto the cassette into tuneful pirate shanties, sayings, calling voices and lots of inventive sound effects. The whizzing cannon-ball, which is released in one ear, whizzes across the head and explodes in the other ear, is particularly effective! Jam-packed with comic pirate detail from plunder and games to grog and pirate loots.

## The Suitcase Kid

Jacqueline Wilson, read by Lesley Dunlop, three cassettes, 3 hrs 5 mins, Chivers, £14.95 + VAT

Jacqueline Wilson treats fraught family relationships sensitively, realistically and positively. Lesley Dunlop's accessible narration adds to the sympathetic impact of this first-person story. Ten-year-old Andrea is split in two between recriminating parents. One week she's with Mum and Not-her-Dad, sharing her loathed new sister's bedroom; the next it's Dad's turn with his new pregnant wife and her bawling children. Not surprisingly, Andrea starts dropping out from school and withdraws into dreams of her old home with its mulberry tree and Mum, Dad and her as a happy family. The story works convincingly towards an encouraging resolution.

## SF on Tape

Stephen Bowkett, Jan Dean, Helen Dunmore and Anthony Masters (comp. Tony Bradman), read by Stephen McGann, one cassette, 88 mins, Collins Audio, £4.99

Four new stories which have been specially written for audio for 8-11 year-olds.



They're a skilful blend of chilling elements and science fiction imaginative flair within an ultimately 'safe' framework, so although they can be disturbing, they leave the listener not frightened, but thoughtful. The sound effects are clever and impressive: the false computer mother-doubles in 'Space Egg' with one 'mother' in one ear of the Walkman and one 'mother' in the other is very spooky. In 'Zap' slimy anemone blobs suck the electrical life-pulses from their victims and from the power supply of a small-town-just-like-yours. Good stuff.

## Truckers

Terry Pratchett, read by Tony Robinson, two cassettes, 3 hrs, Corgi, £2.99

The first Terry Pratchett on audio is to be welcomed and Tony (Baldrick) Robinson is a brilliant, energetic narrator who exploits Pratchett's imagination and comic flair making it all sound as though it really is happening. Thousands of 4-inch 'nomes' have lived happily in the Department Store, Arnold Bros, Est. 1905, for ever. For them, there is no Outside – until they discover the startling news that the store is to be demolished. Synchronising teams of nomes operate the gear lever and pedals to escape by truck. **Diggers** is the sequel when they move to disused quarry buildings and the trilogy is completed by **Wings** set on Concorde and in Florida. Again, each costs £2.99 and runs for 3 hrs. (See also Jessica Yates' article, Journeys into Inner Space, on page 26.)

# Authorgraph No.83

Interviewed by **Stephanie Nettell**

We were talking of the nightmare set-pieces the children face throughout **The Dark Is Rising** sequence. 'I think I know a lot about fear. I was very fearful as a child – perhaps something to do with the war, with the black-out and bombings. I was part of a warm and close family, yet there was always a Nazi paratrooper in the wardrobe at night. And I'm still a bit chicken about facing people!'

The war must also have contributed, she feels, to a strong sense of Us and Them, 'the good side (one's own, of course) against the bad. Although I wasn't thinking about Hitler and his night-bombing Luftwaffe when I began characterising the forces of evil as the Dark, in the shadowy corners of my mind they probably weren't far away.'

Susan Cooper has the ready smile and quiet, clipped speech that suggests an efficient intelligence fuelled by a strong current of nervous energy. She has known she was a writer from the age of eight. Perhaps the impulse is not unconnected to that core of fear?

'I think there has never been a really black time in my life when I have not found myself, after the tears or the pain or the despair, sitting at last back at the desk, taking refuge in work.' Yet to the outside world she is dashing adventurously, constantly launching herself into the unknown: merely a chronic coward, she says, who manages once in a while to take some tremendous risk.

Susan was four when war broke out, living in Burnham, Bucks, a hundred yards from an often-targeted rail link to the west and with an anti-aircraft emplacement at the end of their street. Memories of running into the garden shelter, 'bombs-falling-on-our-heads sort of thing', returned in **Dawn of Fear** (1970), a straight autobiographical novel except that, curiously, she turned herself into a little boy.

It was certainly nothing to do with missing out as a girl. She was, and remained, close ('too close, perhaps') to a family that was both nurturing and proudly encouraging. Her brother Roderick (a thriller writer and editor of **Kent Life** magazine) was four years younger; new educational opportunities allowed them to fulfil the clearly rich potential of previous generations – a theatre-mad grandfather who led them to his favourite novelists, a musical, scholar-*manqué* father trapped in a railway clerk's job he hated, a mother who was a gifted teacher, and whom Susan misses to this day. Their grandmother came from the Welsh fishing village of Aberdovey, where their parents were to move when Susan was 21: childhood holidays there and in Cornwall fed both her own fiction and her passion for Britain's prehistory and folklore.

A state scholarship took her to Oxford – 'a calm stretch of such good fortune that I can hardly describe it' – where she read English, fell in love, and, in the term before Finals, became the first girl to edit **Cherwell**. The resultant publicity and contacts (plus a lively piece on the National Rose Show) led to a reporter's job on **The Sunday Times**. It was then a small, Kemsley-owned paper, bubbling with exciting chances; Susan and young John Pearson, now a biographer, were its first-ever reporters, and they worked half for features and news, half for Ian Fleming's Atticus column and foreign affairs. In seven years there she evolved into a features writer on a thousand topics, with a fifteen-foot high portrait above Piccadilly Circus to advertise her own series.

And she began to write books. A tyro attempt was never published; her second, **Mandrake**, published in 1964, was an adult novel set in a futuristic 1980, and, almost by accident, her third was a children's book.

As a result of occasional contributions to a children's page, where she indulged her obsessions with our ancient history and myths, Jack Lambert, that legendary literary editor, had casually suggested she enter

publishers Ernest Benn's 'E Nesbit Prize' for a 'family adventure story'. So each evening she scribbled a treasure-seeking tale, with three children on a train heading for a Cornish holiday (like her and Roderick), being met by tall, white-haired great-uncle Merry – who suddenly hijacked the book. Family adventure, deadline and prize were all forgotten as she launched into **Over Sea, Under Stone**.

When agents Curtis Brown returned it, saying it had been to every children's publisher in London, her freelance **Mandrake** editor for Hodder suggested a friend at Cape. It was accepted instantly (which offers a whole range of possible inferences).

Around now **The Sunday Times** sent her to America on an exchange scheme run by the State Department, which entailed an attachment to the **Toledo Blade** in Ohio and travelling for a month to look at theatres and universities. Which is how she met an MIT professor, astonishingly romantic and persistent: she was 26, he was a widower of 46 with three children.

To the initial dismay of both his children and her parents, she accepted his proposal, and returned to live in Winchester, a suburb of Boston. She



expanded the features resulting from her exchange trip into a splendid study of American society at that time, **Behind the Golden Curtain** (1965) – a Book Society Choice in Britain, while **Time** magazine wondered ‘who this chit was, telling them what’s wrong with their country’.

The marriage ended after 13 years, but brought two children of whom she is gloriously proud: Jonathan, an ocean engineer (thanked for his computer help in **The Boggart**), and Kate, a student of Russian now in publishing. **The Boggart** is formally dedicated to Bill, ‘a sweetheart’ of a stepson to whom she was closest, who died of cancer leaving a wife and two small children.

For years she was deeply homesick, visiting Britain with the children once or twice a year. While at **The Sunday Times** she had become close to J B Priestley and Jacquetta Hawkes – she later edited a collection of Priestley’s essays and wrote his biography – and he would cheer her with ‘wonderful letters, telling me “You will find you’ll write better about the place when you’re away from it”’.

He was right. Soon after settling in America, she was cross-country skiing in the woodlands round their home when twigs sticking out of some snowbanks suddenly reminded her of antlers. ‘One day I’ll write a book set in this sort of snow but back in England, about a boy who wakes up and finds he can work magic.’ Years later came ‘the spookiest day of my life’.

She had, for some reason, been re-reading **Over Sea, Under Stone**, and was daydreaming in her study when it struck her. ‘I took a piece of paper and wrote down four more titles set at magical times of the year, like the solstice or All Souls’ Day, who was in each book, and where it was set – say, Cornwall, or Wales. And on another piece of paper I wrote the last page of the last book, which was mostly a speech of Merryman’s. There it was, the ending of **Silver on the Tree**.

‘Then I started **The Dark Is Rising**. The next eight years were probably the most tranquil time of my life: I knew just what I was going to do even if I didn’t know *inside* each book.’

Bringing up her children was helping her accept her new roots. With the academic year allowing a six-week stay, their holiday home on a tiny island in the British Virgins was a shorts-and-bare-feet haven for them all, and there she wrote ‘chunks and chunks’. It was from here that a small boat took her to a phone call on a neighbouring island, telling her she was the sole Newbery runner-up for **The Dark Is Rising**.

She led two lives, because the imaginary world never went away – ‘it becomes a room in your house’. Her own dreams melded into the books: a recurring dream, of moving apparently invisibly through a library whose fourth side was a theatre auditorium, was exorcised by **Silver on the Tree** (and she did turn from books to the theatre afterwards). That lyrical fantasy of running, running, running from the golden roof to the great parkland below had also been her own dream.



With hindsight she feels **Silver**, which took the longest, is the least successful of the sequence – perhaps because it’s the last, and must tie up loose ends, perhaps because actually winning the Newbery for **The Grey King** while writing it made her self-conscious.

The next phase of her life increasingly involved her with the theatre, and coincidentally she became a friend of the great acting couple, Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy. With Hume she wrote **Foxfire**, a play based on the oral history of the Appalachians, which starred the Cronyns and was a worldwide success, including Broadway and television. In turn this led to their fulfilling Jane Fonda’s dream to adapt Arnov’s **The Dollmaker**, for a three-hour, award-winning television film. It may even lead at last to a film by Christopher Cronyn of **The Dark Is Rising** books, from Susan’s script.

It was her theatre work, together with writing **Seaward**, a dark fantasy about life and death and loss, that helped her through 1980, ‘the worst year of my life’, when, just after her marriage break-up, her parents died within six weeks of each other.

But the sun glinted through with a return to the comfortingly familiar territory of folktale, **The Silver Cow** and **The Selkie Girl**. It blazed out triumphantly in **The Boggart**, a charming tale of a comically disastrous transportation of a Highlands imp to Toronto. Re-reading Katharine Briggs she had become attached to the unsentimental mischief of the boggart, and began to itch for another fantasy. She didn’t realise how young and light it was until told, just as she had never seen **Dawn of Fear** as a children’s book until it was rescued from the rejections of British adult editors by her American publisher, and was taken aback when **Mandrake** was paperbacked as science fiction. She can’t, and doesn’t want to, see the audience in that library auditorium.



‘It’s been a hectic, word-packed life? ‘Actually, the busiest year of my life was probably when I turned 10: I was writing a play for a puppet theatre with the boy next door, editing a little magazine with the son of my music teacher, and writing and illustrating a very small book. I was so dismayed when an uncle later found it in a drawer that I tore it up and burst into tears!’

‘And I *still* write for myself – a real writer would go on writing even on a desert island, given the paper.’ ■

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Susan Cooper was interviewed during a trip to Britain earlier this year. Her books listed below are published in hardback by Bodley Head and in paperback by Puffin:

**Over Sea, Under Stone**, 0 370 30590 6, £8.99; 0 14 030362 6, £3.50 pbk

**The Dark Is Rising**, 0 370 30815 8, £8.99; 0 14 0307990, £3.50 pbk

**Greenwitch**, 0 370 30826 3, £8.99; 0 14 030901 3, £3.50 pbk

**The Grey King**, 0 370 30828 X, £8.99; 0 14 030952 7, £2.99 pbk

**Silver on the Tree**, 0 370 30837 9, £8.99; 0 14 031118 1, £3.50 pbk

**The Dark Is Rising Sequence** (all five books in one volume), 0 14 031688 4, £8.99 pbk

**Seaward**, 0 14 031711 2, £3.99 pbk

**Dawn of Fear**, 0 14 030719 2, £2.99 pbk

**The Boggart**, 0 370 31829 3, £8.99

# REVIEWS – NON FICTION



'Birds have a light skeleton. Many of their bones are hollow.' From *Birds*.

## Birds

0 7496 1199 5

## Molluscs

0 7496 1198 7

## Flowers

0 7496 1201 0

## Trees

0 7496 1200 2

Joy Richardson, Watts (Lift Off series), £6.99 each  
INFANT/JUNIOR

We've just had a nice young man from the Forestry Commission here explaining how he can help us improve our existing woodland and create new. He spent nearly all afternoon saying what Joy Richardson manages in a sentence: 'Trees are part of the earth's furniture'. Such simple but significant statements characterise this author's work for her Watts series, so it's a pleasure to find four more lifting off.

The basics of tree structure, physiology and natural roles are presented, birds are 'made for flying' so plenty of space is devoted to feathers and flight patterns. Did you know that the octopus – which has 'a good brain but . . . no head' is a mollusc or that whelks attack other creatures with their saw edged tongues? Had you ever thought that flowers only have scent, colour and shape so as to get reproduction done as quickly as possible? Such examples of Joy Richardson's refreshing approach abound here, accompanied by excellent illustrative photographs, decent uncrowded indices and delightful endpapers.

These are all grand introductions to their subjects and all capable of inspiring adult interpreters to amplify their contents. TP

## The Search for the East

0 7502 0712 4

## Voyages to the New World

0 7502 0713 2

Peter Chrisp, Wayland  
(Exploration and Encounters  
1450-1550 series), £8.99 each  
JUNIOR

In search of the fabled Indies, Columbus, Vespucci and Magellan sailed westwards, while the Portuguese slowly worked their way down the west coast of Africa until Dias finally rounded the Cape in 1487 and opened

up an eastern route to India and the Spice Islands.

Gold and spices spelt great wealth. The Portuguese wanted to break the Muslim trading stranglehold around the Mediterranean, whilst the Spanish, seeing an opportunity to gain religious converts as well as riches, had visions of both gold and glory.

Despite newly developed navigation instruments and a growing understanding of winds and currents, the early explorers faced formidable hazards voyaging into unknown waters, including the threat of mutiny from crews who were often under-nourished and suffering from scurvy. The magnitude of their achievements was marred, however, by the devastation wrought on the cultures they encountered – through disease, slavery and bloody conflict.



'Europeans imagined that strange beings lived in distant lands.' From *The Search for the East*.

Extremely well-chosen extracts from contemporary sources enhance Peter Chrisp's lively straightforward prose. He is also well served by a range of simple yet effective maps and a fascinating selection of illustrative material showing how artists and engravers depicted these famous and sometimes infamous events. VH

## Woodwind

Alyn Shipton, Heinemann (Making Music series), 0 431 06582 9, £8.99  
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

We saxophone players have our own criteria for judging woodwind books – never mind the bassoons, flutes and oboes, how many pages and pictures do we get? Answer, usually: 'not many' – which is strange when kids are taking to the sax like never before. Here, though, the saxophone takes its proper place in the array of woodwinds (an array which this book widens to include harmonica, accordion and bagpipes) and is treated as respectfully as its senior colleagues. Could this be because the writer is a respected jazz writer and publisher? Answer: 'Yes, probably – but he shows no bias' so there is no disproportion in his presentation of the principal family groupings of woodwinds and of their application throughout all kinds of music. Shipton's special jazz knowledge does, however, offer the reader a wider range of sample listenings than is usual in such introductions. Helpful, too, is the 'playing' feature for each instrument – just a couple of paragraphs indicating what it's actually like to play the instrument, giving an idea of ease (or otherwise) applicability and price.

The text is clear and authoritative and it is a mark of the author's ability and knowledge that he can cover his field in considerable detail within 32 uncrowded pages and still have space to include Rollini's hot fountain pen, Hotteterre's hot shawm and Snub Moseley's slide-saxophone! Illustration is

efficient, even if the author has forborne to mention that the clarinet mouthpiece on page 7 is shown in an attitude in which only Carmello Jejo could have played it (upside down to you and me).

This most welcome addition to instrumental music books augers well for the rest of the series – so look out! TP

## The Circulation of the Blood

Merce Parramon, edited by  
Frances Halton, Cherrytree  
(Invisible World series),  
0 7451 5204 X, £6.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

It gets everywhere does blood – only just over a gallon of it per body so it has to keep moving to get round in time. How it does this and what sort of stuff it is are all explained in this excellent – and originally Spanish – Cherrytree which, as well as providing a lively text, illustrates red cells, white cells, platelets (like ant's eggs), capillaries and clots, with a size and clarity you'll never see other than with the best microscope. Watch in amazement as the ever-vigilant neutrophil creeps forward on silent pseudopodia to capture, engulf and digest the invasive bacterium.

This is a complete book of blood and of circulation too, so we discover heart structure and function, pulmonary veins carrying 'arterial' blood and how the liver cleans it for re-use, not to mention the lymphatic system (and, come to think of it, most circulation books don't).

There is something here to stimulate the phagocytes of any budding biologist. TP

## Focus on Coins and Currency

Brenda Ralph Lewis, Hamlyn  
(Focus on series), 0 600 57367 2,  
£7.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Written by an author with a lifelong interest in her subject, this is an enthusiastic and informed book in an area where there is a dearth of suitable material for children. It is primarily aimed at would-be collectors with a lot of advice about how to go about establishing a collection but it would also be useful for project work on the history of money.

High quality colour illustration allows the reader to examine notes and coins in detail. The author avoids taking an exclusively Eurocentric view and there is good coverage of currencies past and present from around the world. The weakest element is the arrangement which is somewhat difficult to follow, as sections on countries are interspersed with non-related items such as coin alphabets and unusually shaped coins. Inclusion of interesting snippets, strange facts and oddities, adds to the book's appeal, as does the practical advice about coin and note care.

A good value buy for the enthusiast and a useful title for the school library. GB

## Small Change

Marianne Frances, ill. Lesley  
Skeates, Green Print,  
1 85425 081 7, £5.95 pbk  
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Working from the viewpoint that 'it is better for many to move an inch than for few to move a mile', this excellent primer of responsible 'green' living for ordinary people first came to my attention – thanks to Milton Keynes Central Library – when I was compiling the Books for Keeps Green

**Guide.** It was then published in a small way in Edinburgh.

Now it has re-emerged – a new edition published by Green Print – it is still bursting with common sense and showing us over and over again how a few simple changes in household routine can not only make us more planet-friendly but save us money – I couldn't have managed early retirement without them.

It's supposed to be written for adults – householders mainly – but its style is so beautifully clear that middle-schoolers upwards will cope, and likewise grown-ups will find plenty for them in the 'Young People' chapter.

This is probably the best and most gimmick-free energy-and-material-saving book there is – no staff room (especially if it's got a dishwasher) is complete without it. TP

### Clean Environment

Sara Jones, 0 7502 0834 1

### Food

Scarlett McGwire, 0 7502 0643 8

### Homeland

Rachael Warner and Kaye Stearman, 0 7502 0642 X

### Justice

Cheryl Law and Kaye Stearman, 0 7502 0644 6

Wayland (Human Rights series), £8.99 each

#### SECONDARY

This ambitious new series tackles complex human rights issues. Each title includes a mixture of principles and actual happenings (including reports from around the world) – they should be particularly valuable for project work and developing classroom discussion with early teenagers. Each has a glossary, a list of organisations and a reading list. (Some of the readings recommended in *Homeland* and *Justice* are helpfully annotated.)

*Homeland* is particularly strong, benefiting from a perceptive introductory analysis of what the concept means. The text is approachable and also very powerful, including as examples: lost homelands (Crimean Tartars), divided homelands (Kurdistan), invaded homelands (East Timor), and homelands regained (Eritrea). As the book rightly points out 'many of these stories are sad and shameful ones, they are also inspiring'. Would-be purchasers should, however, be warned that the text shortens Nelson Mandela's imprisonment by some seven years (a mistake that many teenagers will spot).

Human rights issues have an impact on young people, and these books introduce complex issues without undue simplification, enhancing the reader's understanding of their subjects. They also show that as individuals we may not be able to solve everything but we are not totally powerless to influence events. GB

### Free at Last: a history of the civil rights movement and those who died in the struggle

Sara Bullard, Oxford University Press, 0 19 508381 4, £9.99

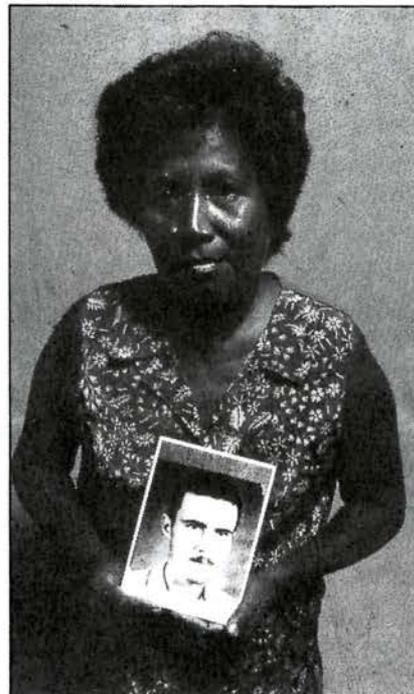
#### SECONDARY

*Free at Last* contains many depressing instances of man's inhumanity to man, but also numerous uplifting acts of faith portraying the dignity, perseverance and raw courage of thousands of American citizens, both black and white, when faced with racial violence and bigotry.

The opening section encompasses a concise history of the long struggle against discrimination from the time slavery was introduced. Significant progress came with



'Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price (left) and Sheriff Lawrence Rainey (right) at their trial. Price was found guilty of federal civil rights violations in the murder of the three civil rights workers and Rainey was acquitted.' From *Free at Last*.



Left: 'This East Timorese woman holds a photo of a missing relative. The true number of those killed or taken away by the army is not known, but it is certainly many thousands.' From *Homeland*.

the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1910 and the Congress of Racial Equality in the 1940s, but 'historians usually trace the modern civil rights movement from May 17, 1954 when the Supreme Court outlawed segregation in public schools to April 4, 1968 when Dr Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in Memphis' – and it's on this period that the book then focuses.

Sara Bullard records the events of this turbulent era in a chronological sequence of double-page spreads, each telling the specific circumstances in which a life – 40 in total – was lost furthering the cause. Her journalistic style and extensive use of contemporary newspaper photos lends heightened drama to these tragic events, whilst the snapshots of the victims provide a poignant reminder of the personal cost to family and friends.

Originally published by The Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama, *Free at Last* includes an extensive bibliography of U.S. publications which are not easily obtainable in this country – but this is a small frustration to set against the immediacy and commitment of such an authentic documentary. VH

### Junior Pears Encyclopaedia

Edited by Edward Blishen, 33rd edition, Pelham, 0 7207 2025 7, £12.99

#### SECONDARY

For me, seeing a new edition of *Junior Pears Encyclopaedia* – the 33rd – is rather like meeting an old friend. As an early teenager I pored over facts in a slightly dated school prize copy handed down by my sister – would the new edition be very different? The first impact was one of familiarity: the page layout looks the same, line drawings remain the style of illustration. In fact wasn't the illustration of the Whyte classification of steam locomotives the same as in my sister's copy?

So does the Encyclopaedia offer anything to children today? Basically, yes: *Facts* – thousands of them on everything from principal volcanoes to famous people, from tables of elements to 'emergency punctuation'; *Value* – 700+ pages packed with information means that each nugget of information probably costs a tenth of a penny; *Currency* – themes and details are updated if necessary (the Whyte classification didn't need amending as it remains accurate); and *Explanation* – it's strong on definitions and sources of further information.

It is not the book for those who like information neatly arranged on double page spreads, nor for those wishing to find good (or even any) colour illustration, but it is a handy home reference tool if the reader can be encouraged to tackle the index free arrangement! GB

**Geoff Brown** is Resources Manager for Hertfordshire Schools Library Service.

**Veronica Holliday** is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

**Ted Percy**, until he retired recently, was a Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.

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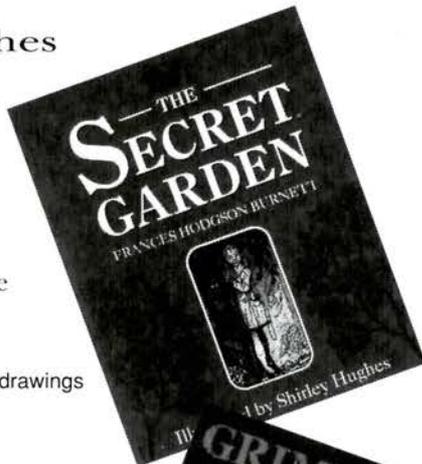
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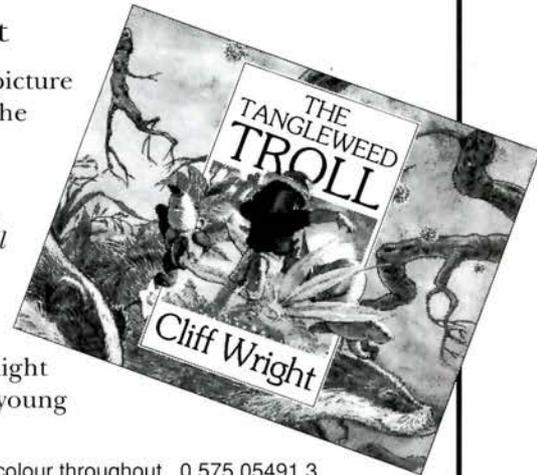
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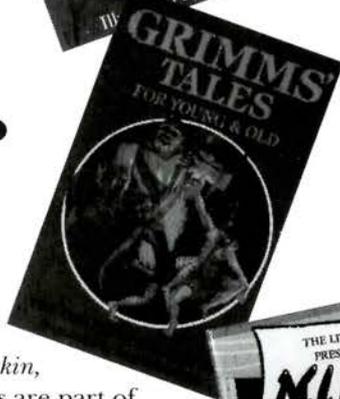
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GOLLANCZ



# BLIND SPOT

## SNOBBERIES, SNEERS AND NARNIA . . .

Victor Watson on the  
narrowness of C S Lewis.



Let me make clear that my blindspot is my blindspot; I would never discourage anyone from reading the seven Narnia stories. And let me begin with what I admire in them, for Lewis is an extraordinary storyteller. To have created a fantasy universe – with evocative suggestions of a distant spiritual reality too – is an astonishing myth-making achievement. As I re-read the sequence, I was delighted by Lewis's narrative inventiveness – the lovely joke explaining how the lamp post came to be in the forest, for example. And then there are the characters – the Dufflepuds, the Marshwiggles, the heroic and ridiculous Reepicheep.

How does it work? Lewis is essentially a 'describer'; his descriptions combine a Chaucerian freshness with a filmic sense of technicolour and depth.

*' . . . the newly risen sun was at their backs and, of course, everything looks nicer when the light is behind you. It was a wonderful ride. The big snowy mountains rose above them in every direction. The valleys, far beneath them, were so green, and all the streams which tumbled down from the glaciers into the main river were so blue, that it was like flying over gigantic pieces of jewellery.'*

For Lewis, writing is *showing*, and reading is *seeing*. His artistic method was well-served by Pauline Baynes, whose illustrations have a lovely miniaturist and close-focused purity of design, like looking through the wrong end of a microscope and somehow seeing *more* clearly.

Lewis is not just a describer; he carefully provides for young inexperienced imaginations, tutoring them and leading them effortlessly into metaphor and simile. You can see it happening in this passage:

*'Have you ever had a gallop on a horse? Think of that; and then take away the heavy noise of the hoofs and the jingle of the bits and imagine instead the almost noiseless padding of the great paws. Then imagine instead of the black and grey or chestnut back of the horse the soft roughness of golden fur, and the mane flying back in the wind. And then imagine . . .'*

Lewis's tactic is not simply to 'tell it how it is'. Readers are welcomed into the stories and encouraged – often with quite homely similes – to work their own cinematic magic. He hands over imaginative power so that even inexperienced readers can see the

impossible and 'vision the transcendental'. In the next example, the writing comfortably leads the reader into the astonishing conceptual and poetic climax of 'climbing up light itself':

*'But before Jill had time to notice these things fully, she was going up the Waterfall herself. It was the sort of thing that would have been quite impossible in our world. Even if you hadn't been drowned, you would have been smashed to pieces by the terrible weight of water against the countless jags of rock. But in that world you could do it. You went on, up and up, with all kinds of reflected lights flashing at you from the water and all manner of coloured stones flashing through it, till it seemed as if you were climbing up light itself.'*

But in Narnia the vision and vividness arise from a bedrock of complacent prep-school assumptions and prejudices which are at best narrow and sometimes nasty. The children share a self-righteous contempt for anyone who deviates from their code. There is little tolerance of weakness, and being 'in a funk' is regarded as despicable. Lucy's specialness is that she is Aslan's favourite. Aslan is an all-knowing housemaster, God-the-Spy, who sees not only what you do but also the wickedness in your thoughts. The pleasure which the reader is invited to feel when Eustace and Edmund are punished is the satisfaction of a pack of bullies ganging up on the misfit. I find that hateful.



Lewis does not edit out his own prejudice and hatred. There are, for example, those extraordinary gibes against vegetarians, non-smokers and teetotallers in the opening paragraphs of *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*, with for good measure a passing sneer at secondary-modern schools. Elsewhere much is made of the fact that Jill attends an experimental school:

*'I shall say as little as possible about Jill's school, which is not a pleasant subject. It was "Co-educational", a school for both boys and girls, what used to be called a "mixed" school; some said it was not nearly so mixed as the minds of the people who ran*

*it. These people had the idea that boys and girls should be allowed to do what they liked.'*

The jokes about state schools are perhaps not very serious, but the narrow version of Christianity is another matter. In the liberation of Beruna there is an incident in which Aslan comes upon a girls' school:

*'Then [Miss Prizzle] saw the Lion, screamed and fled, and with her fled her class, who were mostly dumpy, prim little girls with fat legs. Gwendolen hesitated.*

*"You'll stay with us, sweetheart?" said Aslan.*

*"Oh, may I? Thank you, thank you," said Gwendolen.*

*Instantly she joined hands with two of the Maenads, who whirled her round in a merry dance and helped her take off some of the unnecessary and uncomfortable clothes she was wearing.'*

Gwendolen, one assumes, is pretty and is allowed to run around in her knickers – but what kind of Christianity deals with such cruel and dismissive stereotypes as dumpy, prim little girls with fat legs? We cannot dodge the Christian comparison, for a couple of pages later Aslan performs a healing miracle. Punishment and pain lie at the heart of Lewis's Christianity, with gloomy battles, the striking off of heads, and the wiping of messy swords. There is race-fear, too; for the Calormenes – cruel dark-skinned worshippers of Tash – express Lewis's hatred of Islam.

That is my blindspot. For all its imaginative vastness, the Narnian universe and the Narnian version of Christianity derive from a closed prep-school world, with its worst snobberies, its sneers, its narrowness, and its love of public punishment. ■

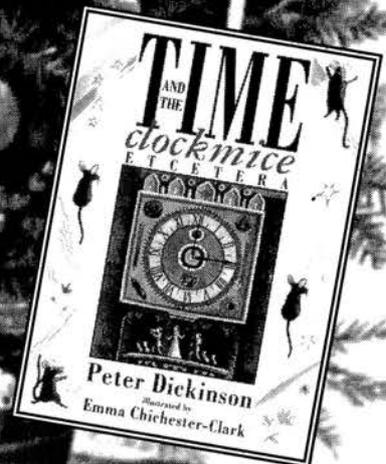
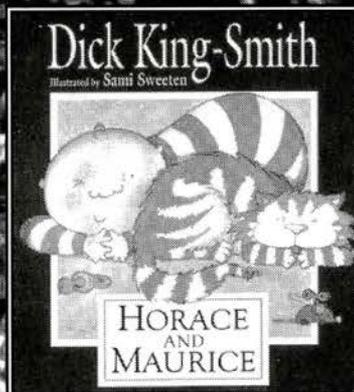
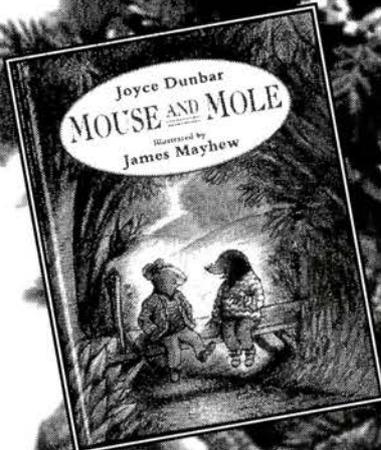
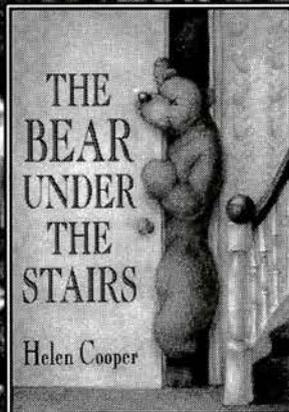
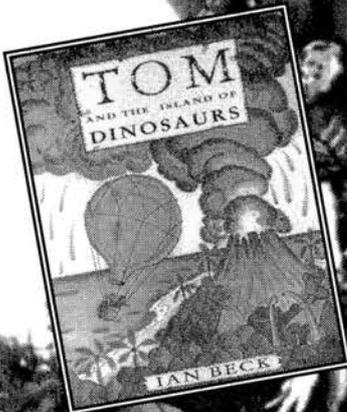
Victor Watson is a Senior Lecturer in English, specialising in children's books, at Homerton College, Cambridge.

C S Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* comprise one of the most popular children's series of all time. They are published in hardback and paperback by HarperCollins, and are also available from them on audio cassette.

In September HarperCollins published Robin Lawrie's abridged and illustrated version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (0 00 185474 7, £8.99).

Illustrations on this page are taken from Brian Sibley's book, *The Land of Narnia*, HarperCollins, 0 00 191161 9, £8.95; 0 00 673591 6, £3.99 pbk.

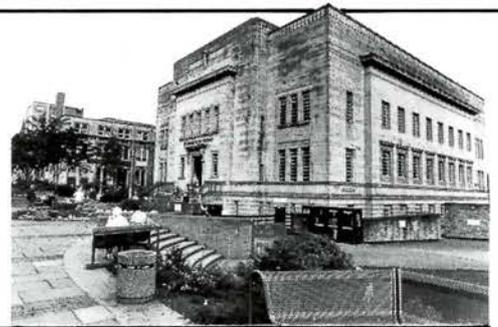
# What doesn't need batteries, isn't expensive and should be under every tree this Christmas?



## TRANSWORLD CHILDREN'S BOOKS



# Dear Mr Peach...



What do libraries mean to children's writers? To mark National Library Week, Principal Librarian, **Gerry Peach**, and Children's Librarian, **Linda Smith**, wrote and asked. Here are some extracts from the letters they received which were mounted and displayed in Huddersfield Library earlier this month.

'I had this very boring childhood. We lived in a boring house on a boring street in a boring town. School was boring. Every day was the same. I used to think, why does nothing exciting ever happen to me? Then I discovered my local library ...'

**Robert Swindells**

'I once wrote a book, set in South America, that centred on a tribe called the Kallawaya. But I had a big problem. My book was set in modern times and I couldn't find anything about the Kallawaya written more recently than the 1920s. I hunted for almost a year, but had no luck until I went to a weekend conference in Nottingham.

Passing the time before my conference began, I wandered round the shops and came upon Nottingham Library. Without expecting anything special, I drifted into the building and over to the South America section and there was the very book I'd been desperate to find – an account of the Kallawaya written only a few years before.

Gibbering with excitement and desperation (because I couldn't read the whole book then and there, and I had no more free time in Nottingham) I leapt up to the Enquiries Desk, crying "Whatever can I do? I must have this book!"

And a wonderful, magic librarian gave me a temporary ticket so that I could take the book home with me, and post it back to Nottingham when I'd finished ...'

**GILLIAN CROSS**

'I'm still happier in a library than anywhere else. For me, it's like that moment in a swimming pool when you finally slip under, the water closes over your head, and a feeling of absolute peace and privacy comes over you. In my novel for children, **The Granny Project**, Natasha says that, if the public library did not exist, she would not want to exist either. That's how I feel, still, after all these years.'

**Anne Fine**

'There they are, millions of people who belong to local libraries. What are they looking for, for heaven's sake?

They are head-hunting. They want access to other people's heads, brains, minds, emotions. They want to know what it was really like in the trenches of WWI – how to do Malaysian cooking – how to mend a moped. They want to learn about lush love affairs, astronomy, Sherlock Holmes, the new Ford or Fiat.

It's all there in the local library, along with cassettes, records, magazines and help with Regulation C225/348/para vi (garden sheds, erection of). And if it isn't there, they will get it for you. Fill in the card.

Also there – surprises. Can't think what I want ... Who is this? Never heard of her/him. Oh well, take it home, dip into it ...

I need the public libraries. You don't? Very well, close them. And while you are at it, close your mind. But over my dead body.'

**NICHOLAS FISK**

'When **Jane Eyre** gave me nightmares someone locked the bookcase, and got me a children's ticket at a branch library just off North Finchley High Street. It took me a long time to get the hang of books that I could understand, and that long ago librarian knew just what to do with me, easing me from Tolstoy to **Puck of Pook's Hill**, and from Ruskin to **The Hobbit**. By and by I discovered the possibilities of fun reading. Nevertheless, my life's ambition is to blur the distinction between the two kinds of books by getting some dark depth into volumes on the children's shelves of public libraries; – to share with young readers the pleasure of swimming in deep waters.'

**Jill Paton Walsh**

'I'm an addict of libraries. If I can't go into one at least three times a week, I feel twitchy and seriously deprived. I love everything about them: the books (of course), the quiet, the newspapers, the exhibitions of local art, the notices stuck up in the entrance, and the librarians who, as well as being friendly and helpful, also provide a fascinating display of ever-changing clothes and jewellery. I am against estate-agent-type uniforms for librarians. I am against cuts in the book-buying fund. I am aghast at the erosion of the School Library Service and I would feel easier about the proliferation of audio/video cassettes if I could be sure they were being bought as well as, rather than instead of, books.

But for all that, libraries are still the most wonderful places. I use the word advisedly: they are full of wonders and delightful surprises. The very best present you could give any child is a library card. It is the key to everything there is.

To everyone who reads this, the message is: make your local library a second home. Support it and all its works.'

**ADELE GERAS**

'When I was a child in our house there were almost no books. The only books I had were Sunday School prizes – handed out once a year – provided you got enough attendance stars on your little Sunday School card. Consequently, libraries mattered a great deal to me, so much so that, by the age of 12 or 14, I was a member – probably illegally – of three: Oldbury, Smethwick and West Bromwich. Often then at home I might have as many as a dozen or 15 books; I seem to remember that with a bit of wheedling you could often borrow four or five at a time.'

**Allan Ahlberg**

'I was desperate to become a writer – but how could I possibly do so with not even a hope of what I thought of as "a proper education".'

"But there are libraries," I argued to myself. "And if I make proper use of them, I can jolly well educate myself!" Which is exactly what I did, using every spare moment I had to study in various branches of the public libraries and also in the National Library of Scotland.'

**Mollie Hunter**

'My local library is still great ... but things are beginning to fray round the edges. The book stock is getting older, replacements are fewer, the opening hours are being cut, and people like me are wondering what will go next, and what we can do about it.'

**Martin Waddell**

'L ovely days, hiding **Just William** for your best friend.

I n fear of being caught, by the stern librarian.

B iggles was the other star. Oh no, not Worrals.

R emember the smell of the floors? The squeak of the shoes?

A t eleven, oh rapture, flying up to the Big Library.

R eference library, supposedly swatting, looking for girls.

I t's that tramp, not me, snoring behind that paper.

E very time I go back to any Library Scenes of my childhood return.'

**Hunter Davies**

BfK's thanks to the writers above for permission to quote from their letters – and apologies to all the others, just as eloquent and passionate, for whom we hadn't the space. Special thanks, of course to Gerry Peach and Linda Smith for making this material available. ■



# WRITING SF FOR KIDS

(OR, BEING TENSE ABOUT  
THE FUTURE)

Douglas Hill

It doesn't do to get too over-ambitious when trying to define science fiction. The truth is simply that science fiction is *future fiction*. Which would have been a better term from the outset – and might have kept some folk today from absurdly believing that SF is only for boys, along with science itself. (Wrong on both counts, as girls know.)

Incidentally, please note that the approved abbreviation is SF. 'Sci-fi' was invented by the popular press, and contains a built-in sneer. Consider: how would you feel if they lumped all *historical* fiction together – *Morte d'Arthur*, *Barbara Cartland*, Kevin Costner's *Robin Hood* film, the lot, with no distinctions ever drawn – and dismissively labelled it all 'hi-fi'?

But we were talking about the future, and its fictions. Any future. If one day you, gentle reader, were to write down your idea of what your community or your workplace or even your front garden might be like next year, next week, you would be imagining, speculating about, the future. So you would have slid over an amorphous time barrier, and would have become an SF writer.

And I bet you'd have had fun.

There, certainly, is the foremost and most conscious reason why I write SF (and fantasy) for kids. Because I enjoy it, enormously. I have been an addicted reader of SF and fantasy for more decades than I choose to admit – and in the course of that endless intake of reading, the dials of my mind were being set, the nature of my imagination was being developed, or perhaps programmed. If I had had a musical or athletic or whatever tendency, and developed that, I would no doubt have come to try to utilize it somehow to make my living. As it is, I'm able to utilize my lurid, perhaps over-developed imagination to invent future or fantasy fictions that seem to please young readers. And I love my work.

But there are many other reasons why I do what I do – some personal, some trivial, some perhaps otherwise. Here's another that is somewhat peculiar to me: residing in the fact that while I have lived in Britain for more than 30 years, I still speak with the accent and speech patterns of my native Canada. So I would be uneasy, unsure, if I sought to write more 'naturalistic' fiction. I would suspect myself of getting the tone and terminology and much else wrong in the speech of my British characters. Even if I set a book in North America I would worry about

committing howlers, having not *lived* there for so long. Similarly, I was never a schoolchild of any age in this country, and so I lack any direct experience of those realities.

But in the future or fantasy worlds of my own invention, the characters can speak as I wish, and can have unique backgrounds provided by me, and no one can say me nay – as long as it all remains consistent within its own terms. Such blissful freedom . . .

Still, those are obvious rather homely, foreground reasons for why I write SF for young readers. Behind them, looming in a more conjectural or even fanciful manner, are some grander purposes. They may not emerge to blaze before my eyes every time I sit down to formulate another tale of heroic derring-do amid extraterrestrial menaces. But they're there, they're around somewhere – always lurking at the back of my mind, hanging out on the corners of my consciousness.

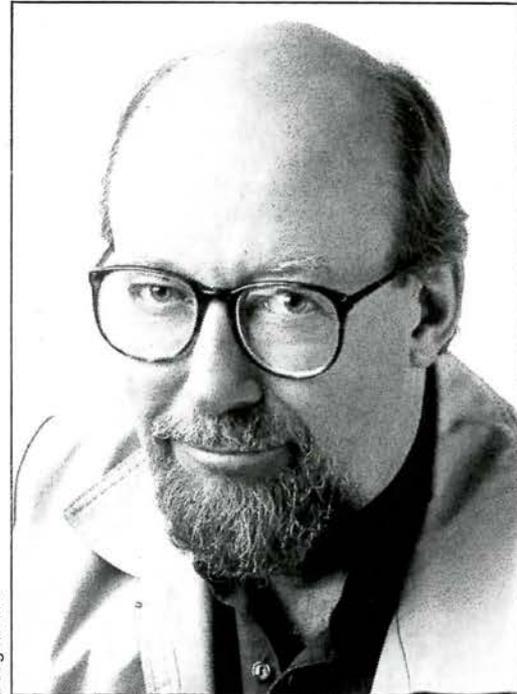
And the first of them is the simple but blinding glimpse of the obvious that science fiction is future fiction, and the future belongs to kids.

SF cannot, of course, predict the future (though writers like Arthur C Clarke haven't done badly). What it can do instead is prepare us for the fact that social and technological change is progressive and accelerating, and that the future is therefore going to be unavoidably, shockingly, unpredictably *different* from today.

For a 12-year-old on the one-way fast track into tomorrow, that is quite a useful early awareness to acquire.

The fact is that we SF addicts almost never suffer from what Alvin Toffler called 'future shock'. We haven't, for instance, been troubled over the way the world has been irretrievably altered by the new industrial revolution in information technology. We had already been there – having experienced that segment of the future through some SF imaginations.

Tied in with that notion is an ever broader purpose behind SF for kids, which has to do with, precisely, the imagination. Younger readers are the most natural and obvious audience for imaginative fiction simply because of the wonderful quality, range and vigour of their imaginations. In a society that puts a short-sightedly higher value on more practical, realistic, even pragmatic forms of capability, it seems to me that children need all the exercising of their imaginative muscles they can get. To



Douglas Hill.

keep that part of their mentality fit and hale for as long as possible.

Because, inescapably, the imagination is one of a very few mental faculties that serve to distinguish us from robots on the one hand and animals on the other.

Which brings me to my last essential reason for valuing children's SF and fantasy: my unflagging belief in the importance of reading.

We all know the habit of reading is under threat, these days, and how in the next century it may decline into a marginalized, arcane minority amusement. Rather as amateur drawing and painting have declined, today, compared to amateur photography. But I hang on to the assertion by (I think) T S Eliot, written in regard to the similarly threatened position of poetry in our culture: 'we fight neither to win nor to lose, but to keep something alive'. It is a similarly worthwhile fight, trying to keep books and reading alive, among children.

At the same time, I continue to insist, the struggle has to be conducted realistically. With all the alternative demands on their attention and imaginations, all the television and films and comic and electronic games (not to mention the dire threat to libraries), it's absurd and counter-productive to be exclusory about children's reading.

No child (or adult!) is ever going to leap in a single bound from *Judge Dredd* or *Neighbours* or *Sonic the Hedgehog* to Charles Dickens or even Lewis Carroll. Reading habits are formed in stages, along an upward ascent on which people may naturally come to rest at levels where they feel comfortable, or may continue to climb almost indefinitely. And no one has the right to carp or scoff if, on the lower, earlier stages, children turn to reading Mrs Tiggywinkle or the Famous Five, or even science-fiction adventure, instead of 'classics' of higher brow.

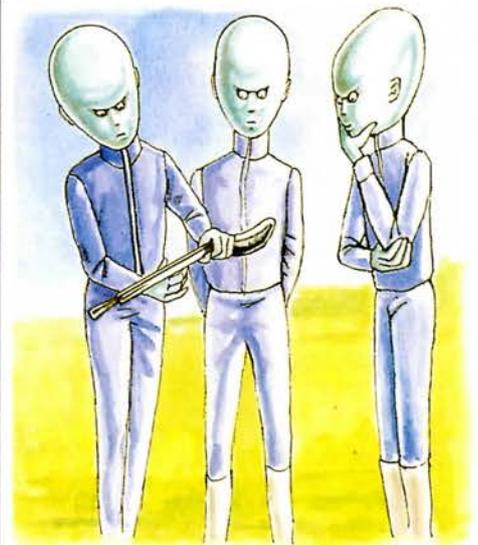
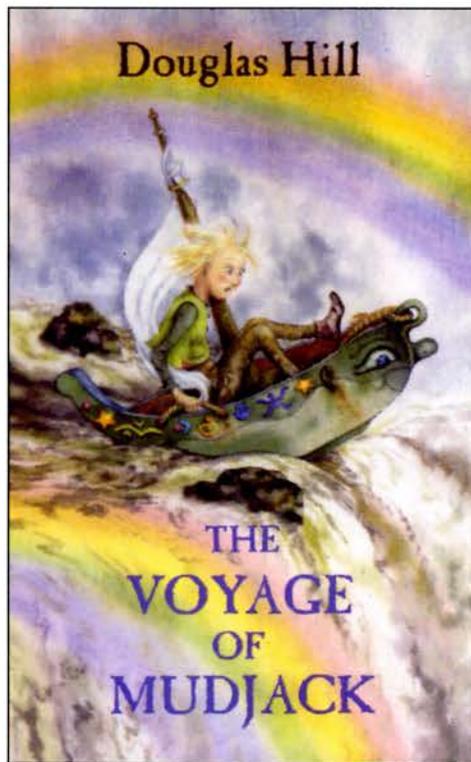
From the start, I set out to write books that would provide some lower rungs on the reading ladder, because there is continually, today, a remarkable amount of SF being made available to kids in their TV, their comics, their computer games. So I've been saying, look, here's some SF in books, try it, it can be fun, too. And now and then teachers and librarians gratifyingly tell me that it works.

In the end the biggest and most awesome truth of all, behind any promulgation of books for young people, is that the 'reading habit' is the only activity that contributes to the continuing health, efficacy and richness of our language.

And language is an absolute and fundamental essential for all our interactions – political, social, informational, personal – as human beings.

So, perhaps, ultimately, why I do what I do, why other children's writers do what they do, why there are so many doughty fighters for children's books including teachers, librarians, parents and this admirable magazine, is because we all cannot really forget the seldom voiced but undeniable bottom line. Which brings us, naturally, back to the future.

It says that, in the 21st century, our imaginations must not be allowed to wither, our language must not be allowed to decay. Or it will be our very *humanity* that will be diminished. ■



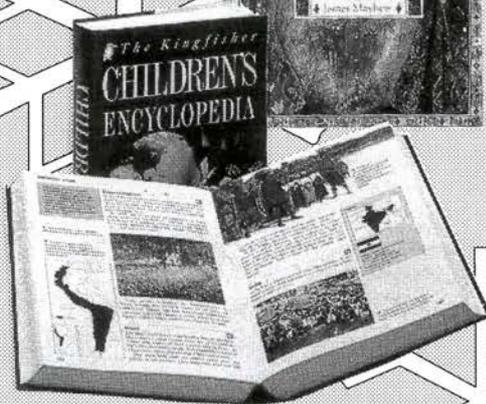
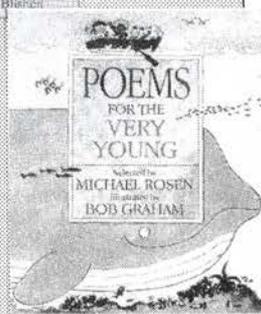
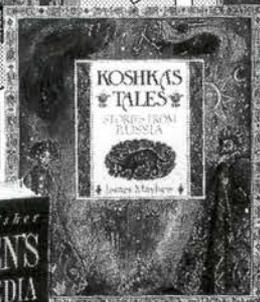
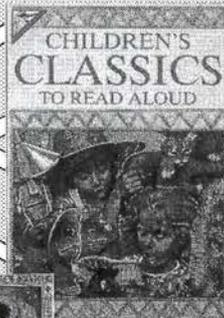
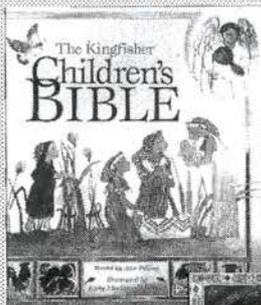
'The off-worlder speaks the truth,' he said.  
'This cannot be a weapon.'

**Douglas Hill** has lived in or around London for more than 30 years. Recently he tried his hand at fiction for adults (as well as children, not instead) – and **The Lightless Dome** published in August by Pan, the first of a fantasy trilogy, is his 50th book.

**The Voyage of Mudjack** (Methuen, 0 416 18819 2, £6.99), for young readers, also came out in August. His latest SF novel for older children, **World of Sticks**, will be published by Transworld early next year.

Illustrations on this page are from Douglas Hill's **The Moon Monsters** (Heinemann 'Banana' Book, 0 434 93024 5, £3.99).

# BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS



**The Kingfisher Children's Bible**  
Ann Pilling 1 85697 115 5 £12.99  
Pub Sept 1993

**Children's Classics to Read Aloud**  
Selected by Edward Blishen  
1 85697 026 4 £3.99 pbk  
Pub Nov 1993

**Koshka's Tales**  
James Mayhew  
1 85697 121 X £9.99  
Pub Oct 1993

**Poems for the Very Young**  
Selected by Michael Rosen  
1 85697 116 3  
£8.99 Pub Sept 1993

**Kingfisher Children's Encyclopedia**  
0 86272 696 4 £25.00  
Pub July 1993

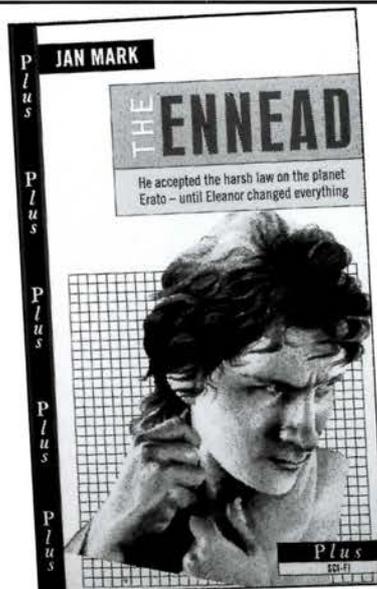
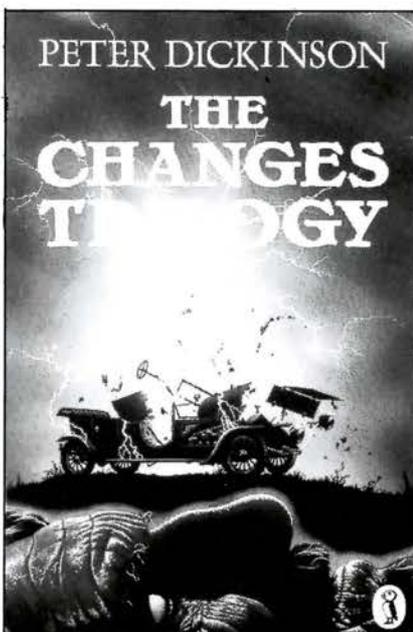


# JOURNEYS INTO INNER

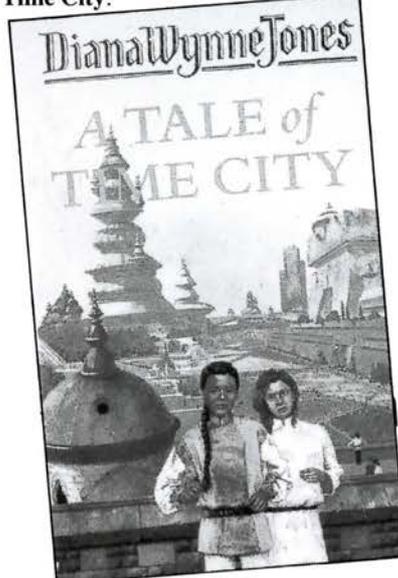
I came to science fiction early, moving on at the age of 10 from C S Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles* to his space trilogy. Soon I was sharing whatever my father brought home from the adult SF section of the public library.

I didn't enjoy 1950s' children's SF: too much space opera, rocket-ships and boring aliens who were either stereotyped enemies or wise space guardians; and I read very little of it, apart from the *Kemlo* series. Far more stimulating were the short stories of Ray Bradbury, Arthur C Clarke, Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein. 1950s' adult SF was the teenage literature of its time: strong in narrative, questioning fixed beliefs, without the complex character analysis of serious adult fiction, and those authors hold up well today.

Returning to British children's SF as a librarian, I discovered that it had broken with space opera and gone for quality instead of pot-boilers. Following the example of John Wyndham's disaster novels like *The Chrysalids* and *The Day of the Triffids*, it had developed a quasi-medieval ambience. In the future, after some horrific disaster destroys civilisation as we know it, humankind lives among the ruins in a new Dark Age, stumbling across unexplained relics of the past. John Christopher set the pattern with his *Tripods* trilogy in the 1960s, in which Earthlings are enslaved by aliens; Peter Dickinson wrote the *Changes* trilogy in which humans turn against machines (though magic is the cause); and Christopher wrote his best work, the *Winchester* trilogy, in which the disaster comes about through geological stresses: earthquakes, volcanoes, etc. Mutants called polymufs are born among humans and kept segregated, and the plot has parallels with the Arthurian legend.

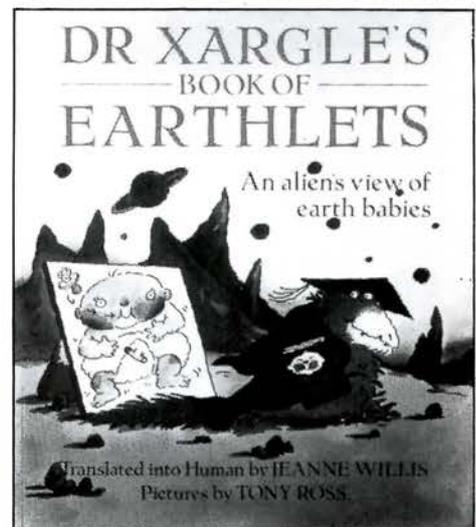
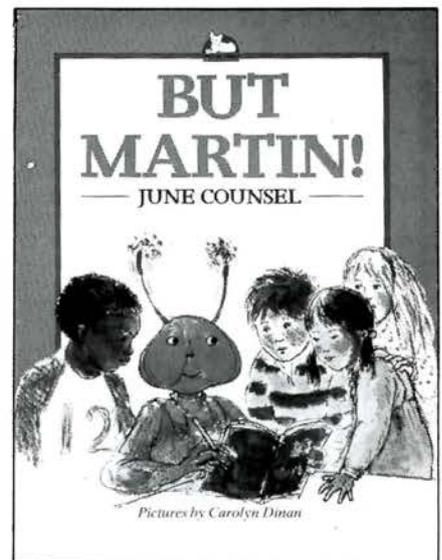


Through the 1970s British children's SF was also enriched by 'non-genre' authors better known for realistic fiction or pure fantasy, who wrote the occasional top-quality SF children's or teenage novel, e.g. John Rowe Townsend - *King Creature Come*; Rosemary Harris - *A Quest for Orion*; Jill Paton Walsh - *Torch*; Jan Mark - *The Ennead*; Ann Schlee - *The Vandal*; Penelope Lively - *The Voyage of QV66*; and Diana Wynne Jones - *A Tale of Time City*.



Space opera has also gone up-market in the hands of Monica Hughes, British-born but settled in Canada, with her trilogy about the planet Isis, where she examines how superstition and religious intolerance develop in a closed community. Like Hughes, the writers most prominent in children's SF today are genre specialists, sometimes mixing SF and fantasy together in the same story to produce the hybrid 'science fantasy'.

There are several humorous picture-books around: June Counsel's *But Martin!* for instance, and the books by Jeanne Willis, *The Long Blue Blazer*,



and the *Dr Xargle* titles illustrated by Tony Ross - all on a comic alien theme.

SF/fantasy themes turn up in series like *Banana Books*, *Jets and Superchamps*; and the *Mr Browser* books by Philip Curtis, also illustrated by Tony Ross, humorously recount how a humble school teacher foils various alien threats.

Children's contemporary culture has a large SF-cult element drawing on the fantastic-film industry. The fashion for big-screen SF has been fed by spectacular advances in special-effects technology, so we have tie-in storybooks derived from, for example, *Ghostbusters*, the *Ninja Turtles*, and now *Jurassic Park*. New this year is an imported series of six *Star Wars* juvenile adventures written to bridge the gap between *Return of the Jedi* and the wedding of Leia and Han Solo. Unashamedly commercial, illustrated in comic-book style, with cliff-hangers at the end of five of the six interconnected books, they carry on something of the myth of *Star Wars*, so I'll mention them and forget the absence of any literary distinction.

# SPACE

Jessica Yates picks her way through the rich terrain of SF for youngsters.



Another school library staple is the **Dr Who** series, now published by Virgin. Novelised versions for children of the TV scripts, there are well over 100 in print! New **Dr Who** adventures have been commissioned for fans who want to continue the story of the Seventh Doctor and Ace after the BBC killed off the series: the new books are for a teen-to-adult readership, with more violent action, some 'bad' language, and a hint of sex.



Robert Leeson, whose previous SF work includes the **Time Rope** quartet, has newly created the six-book **Zarnia** series, about four young teenagers selected for a scientific experiment by aliens who send down a robot to make contact. Each teenager is somewhat at odds with life, and at first they welcome the robot's offer to improve their life chances, but only at the last moment discover a Zarnian leader's real intentions for them. Each book hooks on to the next and the style is direct and accessible: do try them on reluctant readers.

Now to introduce five current writers of juvenile SF/fantasy, all notable for well-written, original fiction, and committed to a writing career.

When Terry Pratchett published **Truckers** his popularity had run ahead of him, his spoof fantasies set on the Discworld being already loved by teenagers. The **Truckers** trilogy must now be among the most frequently requested school library books. It combines two classic children's book themes: small non-magical people living in secret, hidden from humans, like **The Borrowers**; and the quest for a new home, as in **Watership Down** and the **Farthing Wood** titles, adding an SF element: the 'nomes' originally came from outer space, thousands of years ago, and have forgotten their origins, although their mother-ship is still buried on our moon, awaiting their summons.

**Truckers** is rich in satire: nomes speak English (an unlikely but essential detail) and some read it, often misunderstanding the signs in the Department Store where they live: Fire Sale, Prices Slashed, etc. They don't think much of humans: 'It can't be very difficult [i.e. driving a lorry], otherwise humans wouldn't be able to do it.' Readers of all ages love to see through their blunders, though adults probably get more out of the Biblical parodies from the 'Book of Nome'. We must also approve books which stress the importance of reading and the right of women to an equal education, two lessons the nomes must learn in order to escape back to their space-ship.

Pratchett has revised his first book, **The Carpet People** (written when a teenager), adding anachronistic phrases and satirical comments to this mini-saga about people even tinier than the nomes. Here again we find misunderstanding of human artefacts such as a matchstick or a penny, both of which are huge to the Carpet People. Like Tolkien, Pratchett puts over an anti-war message and makes his leading characters small, autonomous adults having real adventures, instead of children whose freedom is limited.

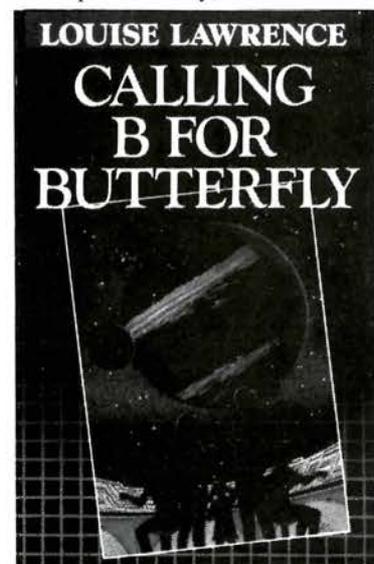
**Only You Can Save Mankind** is about a boy who finds that the aliens in his computer game talk back, and tell him they want to surrender and go home. I found this book a little didactic and patronising, but have no such criticisms of the excellent sequel, **Johnny and the Dead**. Again Johnny is contacted by a group of almost defenceless, bewildered adults: the town cemetery has been sold for fivepence as an office block site: the dead will be dug up and reburied – and they don't want that! Soon they wander out of the cemetery to sample the delights of modern civilisation, including horror movies.

Diane Duane is an outstanding American writer of 'science fantasy' who has developed three fiction

sequences: a children's fantasy quartet; an adult fantasy series; and several Star Trek novels for a multiple-author series in the USA. The latter are suitable for the school library: published for adults, they observe taboos on sex and violence in the interests of a universal readership, and are quite intellectual in their view of the Star Trek universe.

Duane's adult fantasies are too erotic for the school library (!) so on to her children's 'Wizardry' quartet: **So You Want to be a Wizard**, **Deep Wizardry**, **High Wizardry** and **A Wizard Abroad**. Duane invites us to believe in 'wizardry', a secret quality or talent exercised by Good against Evil, whereby humans, some intelligent animals and many outer-space aliens, are recruited on the side of Life to help the Powers run the world more smoothly, and to oppose the Lone Power who invented Death aeons ago at the start of Creation.

Two American youngsters discover a book of spells which challenges them with its title: **So You Want to be a Wizard**. In each book of the quartet they battle the Lone Power in a life-and-death struggle for the future of the world. The series is a hybrid of SF and fantasy: the wizards' spells are described in a scientific way, and they use their magic to travel to the Moon and outer space, and the Good versus Evil theme arises out of Duane's unorthodox Christianity, with C S Lewis the inspiration for **High Wizardry**, set on a far planet where the Temptation is re-enacted. The latest title, **A Wizard Abroad**, is a Celtic fantasy in which Duane pays tribute to her adopted country, Ireland.



Louise Lawrence began writing in the early 1970s, going through a difficult period when, out of six books written, only one was taken by a British publisher. She came into her own when she settled for SF rather than fantasy. Now Britain's senior woman SF writer for the young, she is notable for her intense writing style, especially the

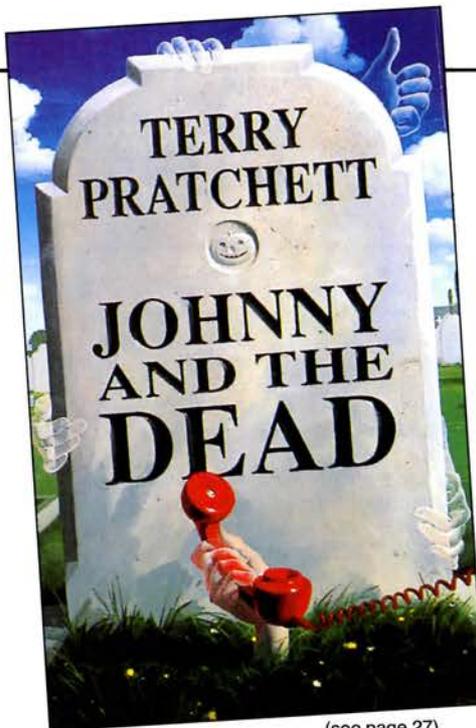
'purple passages' of poetic prose, and for her downbeat endings mingling tragedy with consolation. **Children of the Dust** began a run of prophetic stories with an overriding political or social theme. It charts the aftermath of nuclear war through several generations, leading to a mystical conclusion when the human race develops new physical and mental powers to ward off nuclear radiation. **Moonwind, The Warriors of Taan, Star Lord** and **Calling B for Butterfly** followed. **Extinction is Forever** is a short-story collection displaying her concern for the environment and Earth's future: the chilling title story is about a vain attempt to avert nuclear war.

**Ben-Harran's Castle**, her greatest novel yet, shows Earth on trial. The Council governing the Universe wants to take Earth over in our best interests. Aggression will be suppressed by mild hypnosis – and so will free will, creativity and the awareness of God. Ben-Harran, the Galactic Controller, wants Earthlings to have free will – to destroy themselves if need be.

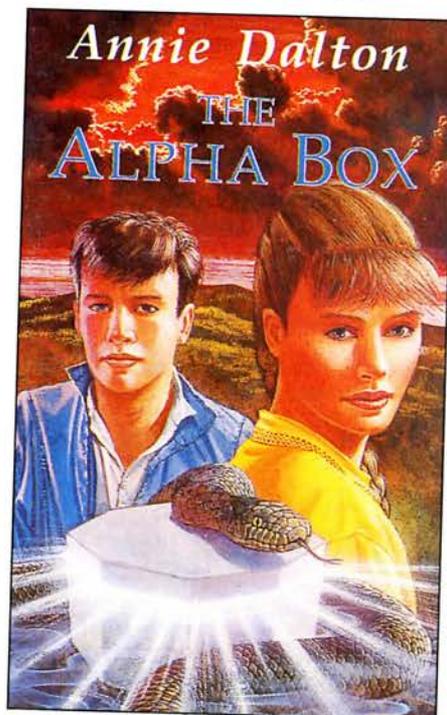
Ann Halam is another 1970s' author who made a fresh start in the 80s, by keeping her real name, Gwyneth Jones, for her teenage and adult novels, and adopting 'Ann Halam' for her children's books. After the chilling ghost story, **King Death's Garden**, she wrote the **Daymaker** trilogy, a feminist and environmentalist saga of science fantasy. Our civilisation has collapsed through the exhaustion of all artificial energy sources, and women have pioneered the rediscovery of magic. Zanne, a rebellious teenager, fascinated by the relics of technology, discovers that they must be sought out and destroyed if the new magic world is to survive. Young readers must guess, adults will probably know, that the 'daymaker' is an electric power station, and the weird changes in **Transformations** are brought about by a store of nuclear waste. In **The Skybreaker** a space rocket, secretly built, threatens the reality of the magic world. Sadly, this trilogy has sold poorly and is already being deleted: this is a plea to publishers to keep these wonderful books alive.

Ann Halam has also written **Dinosaur Junction**, a topical tale of a fossil-collecting lad who wonders if dinosaurs could be cloned from a claw he found, and ends up going back in time to be chased by dinosaurs – or is it a dream? And as Gwyneth Jones she is the author of **The Hidden Ones**, a feminist 'Young Adult' novel about a punk teenager with telekinetic powers who learns to heal rather than hate.

As well as creating original fantasies with unexpected plot twists, Ann Dalton has an astonishing way with words. She is a veritable Pre-Raphaelite word-painter at moments of revelation, when the everyday and the fantastic worlds merge – words like 'iridescent', 'rainbow dazzle' and 'burning golden whirlpool' pour from her pen. She is also confident about choosing child characters from the ranks of the underprivileged: fatherless, orphaned, adopted, disadvantaged by race, or just



(see page 27)



plain unhappy; not because it's 'politically correct', but because these are the children who need a fantasy adventure to liberate their true selves – and we share that adventure with them. Annie Dalton has so far published six wonderful fantasies: **Out of the Ordinary**, **Night Maze** and **The Alpha Box** for teenagers; **The Afterdark Princess** and **The Witch Rose** for 6-11s; and the haunting **Swan Sister**, about a child lured by the swans, for all ages.

Now for a selection of recent SF paperbacks: for younger readers first. Nicholas Fisk's **A Hole in the Head** tackles the hole in the ozone layer. With his typical inventiveness and quirky style, Fisk offers a totally improbable plot which leads via a talking dog to saving the ozone layer.

**Hydra**, by Robert Swindells, blends SF and the thriller. Jellyfish-like aliens have been smuggled back from Jupiter by a disloyal scientist and mature into savage carnivores. Two children

discover their hiding-place, while adults, of course, refuse to investigate their fanciful story.

Bob Shaw, author of adult SF, has written his first children's book, **Killer Planet**. This is pure space opera: the hero and heroine go on a mission to the 'killer planet' to discover what happened to previous colonists, and find that the whole planet is a deathtrap. It is suspenseful all right, but I found myself saying, 'Come back, Douglas Hill – we need you!' I only learned while researching this article that all Hill's juvenile SF and fantasy adventures are out of print. Hill, whose achievement was to revive the space opera genre in the 1970s by deliberately pastiching adult SF and comic-book styles, produced four fiction sequences, the **Last Legionary**, **Huntsman**, **Klydor** and **Blade of the Poisoner** series. Issued in bite-size paperbacks, these sagas were very popular with reluctant readers from 10 upwards, and Douglas Hill was one of the most cited authors in the **Bookseller** article (3 September '93) based on the W H Smith Children's Reading Survey, along with Dahl, Blyton and Pratchett. So – write to Pan Piper demanding reprints!

Authors for teenagers are most pessimistic about Earth's future. The late Robert Westall wrote two outstanding SF novels: **Urn Burial**, about humans caught up in a space war between alien cats and dog-people; and **Futuretrack 5**, a grim parable about youth unemployment hinting at depopulation.

Unemployment is also the theme of **Daz 4 Zoe** by Robert Swindells. British society is split between the middle-class Subbies and the working-class Chippies, with fences between to stop the deprived breaking through. The teenagers tell their love story in a diary form, and Daz's story is written phonetically because of his inferior education – though he's far from stupid.



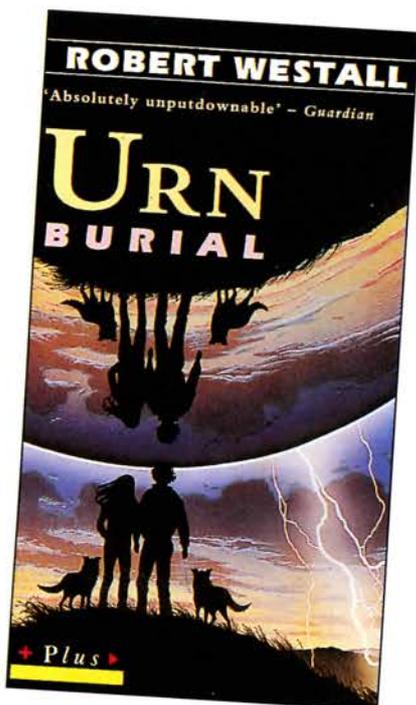
From Invitation to the Game.

**Invitation to the Game** by Monica Hughes ends optimistically as the protagonists prove themselves worthy of the new planet they are colonising, but this can only help the selected few. **The Crystal Drop**, also by Hughes, is set in Canada 20 years ahead, when the hole in the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect have brought about desertification and drought.

Peter Dickinson's **Eva** is a deeply stirring fable about the future of humanity, set against the background of humankind losing the will to strive, through over-population and pollution. Horribly injured in a car crash, Eva wakes to find her brain transplanted into a female chimp's body.

Jean Ure's frustration at the idiocies of the arms race impelled her to switch genres from teenage romance to SF in **Plague 99**, in which plague spreads worldwide after the accidental explosion of a biological warfare device. **Come Lucky April**, the even more provocative sequel, takes up the story 100 years later, with another kind of conflict: not the Cold War, nor racial hatred, but the sex war. One community of survivors, blaming the plague on male aggression, uses IVF technology to continue the human race: teenage boys are castrated after donating sperm, and then live apart from the women, who pair-bond with one another and may not know who 'fathered' their children. The great-grandson of Fran and Shahid from **Plague 99** comes across the community and disrupts it with this account of 'normal' life and heterosexual love.

Finally, Adam Ford's **The Cuckoo Plant** is a promising debut. It comes from space and needs a new planetary home. It has then to clone Earth's plants, animals and even people: is it intelligent, benign? Could and would it wipe out life on Earth? ■



### SF bibliography: A-Z order by author:

June Counsel, **But Martin!**, Corgi, 0 552 52312 7, £2.99

John Christopher, **The Tripods Trilogy**, Puffin, 0 14 031722 8, £5.99; 'Winchester' trilogy o/p

Philip Curtis, 'Mr Browser' titles from Puffin

Annie Dalton, **Out of the Ordinary**, 0 7497 0007 6, £2.25; **The Alpha Box**, 0 7497 1178 7, £2.99; **The Afterdark Princess**, 0 7497 0999 5; **Night Maze**, 0 7497 0322 9, £2.50; **The Witch Rose**, 0 7497 0454 3; **The Swan Sister**, 0 7497 1065 9, £2.99 (all Mammoth)

Paul and Hollace Davids, 'Star Wars' titles from Bantam

Peter Dickinson, **The Changes Trilogy**, Puffin, 0 14 031846 1, £5.99; **Eva**, Corgi Freeway, 0 552 52609 6, £2.99

Diane Duane, **So You Want to be a Wizard**, 0 552 52645 2; **Deep Wizardry**, 0 552 52646 0; **High Wizardry**, 0 552 52651 7; **A Wizard Abroad**, 0 552 52744 0; all £2.99 from Corgi; 'Star Trek' novels from Titan Books, 19 Valentine Place, SE1 8QH.

Nicholas Fisk, **A Hole in the Head**, Walker, 0 7445 2359 1, £2.99

Adam Ford, **The Cuckoo Plant**, Mammoth, 0 7497 0613 9, £3.50

Ann Halam, **The Skybreaker**, Puffin, 0 14 034857 3, £3.99; **Dinosaur Junction**, Orchard, 1 85213 368 6, £8.99, 1 85213 369 4, £4.99 pbk; **The Daymaker and Transformations** both o/p; (as Gwyneth Jones) **The Hidden Ones**, Women's Press Livewire, 0 7043 4910 8, £3.50

Rosemary Harris, **A Quest for Orion**, o/p

Douglas Hill, **Last Legionary, Huntsman, Klydor and Blade of the Poisoner** series, o/p

Monica Hughes, **The Crystal Drop**, 0 7497 1023 3; **Invitation to the Game**, 0 7497 0953 7; £2.99 each from Mammoth

Diana Wynne Jones, **A Tale of Time City**, Teens, 0 7497 0440 3, £2.99

Louise Lawrence, **Children of the Dust**, Bodley Head, 0 370 30679 1, £6.99, Collins Tracks, 0 00 672621 6, £3.50; **The Warriors of Taan**, 0 00 672853 7, £2.75;

**Moonwind**, 0 00 672750 6, £2.50, both Collins Tracks; **Star Lord**, 0 370 31153 1, £6.99; **Calling B for Butterfly**, 0 370 31256 2, £2.95; **Ben-Harran's Castle**, 0 370 31715 7, £7.99, all Bodley Head; **Extinction is Forever**, Bodley Head, 0 370 31348 8, £6.99, Red Fox, 0 09 985060 5, £2.99

Robert Leeson, **The Zarnia Experiment**: **Landing**, 0 7497 0840 9; **Fire!**, 0 7497 0841 7; **Deadline**, 0 7497 0842 5; **Danger Trail**, 0 7497 0843 3; **Hide and Seek**, 0 7497 0844 1; **Blast Off!**, 0 7497 0845 X, £2.99 each from Mammoth; 'Time Rope' series from Corgi

Penelope Lively, **The Voyage of QV66**, Mammoth, 0 7497 0360 1, £2.99

Jan Mark, **The Ennead**, Puffin Plus, 0 14 032556 5, £2.99

Terry Pratchett, book details on page 7

Ann Schlee, **The Vandal**, Mammoth, 0 7497 0228 1, £1.75

Bob Shaw, **Killer Planet**, Pan Piper, 0 330 31696 6, £2.99

Robert Swindells, **Hydra**, Yearling, 0 440 86313 9, £2.99; **Daz 4 Zoe**, Puffin Plus, 0 14 034320 2, £3.99

John Rowe Townsend, **King Creature Come**, Nelson, 0 560 55015 4, £3.99

Jean Ure, **Plague 99**, 0 7497 0333 4; **Come Lucky April**, 0 7497 1015 2, £2.99 each from Teens

Jill Paton Walsh, **Torch**, Viking, 0 670 81554 3, £8.50, Puffin, 0 14 034941 3, £3.50

Robert Westall, **Futuretrack 5**, 0 14 032768 1; **Urn Burial**, 0 14 032266 3; £3.50 each from Puffin Plus

Jeanne Willis, **The Long Blue Blazer**, o/p; the 'Dr Xargle' titles with Tony Ross, Andersen in hbk and Puffin in pbk

John Wyndham, **The Chrysalids**, 0 14 001308 3, £3.99; **The Day of the Triffids**, 0 14 000993 0, £4.99; both Penguin

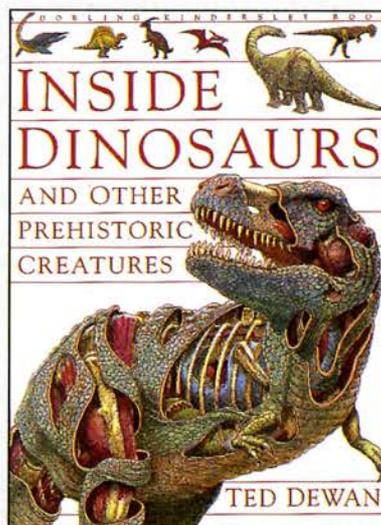
**Dr Who** titles from Virgin Publishing, 332 Ladbrooke Grove, London W10 5AH

Jessica Yates has been reviewing and writing about children's books for 20 years. Her anthology **Dragons and Warrior Daughters**, a collection of heroic, feminist fantasy, was published by Lions Tracks but is now, sadly, o/p. She has two children, works as a school librarian and reviews for **School Librarian**, the Tolkien Society and the British Science Fiction Association.

(BSFA membership costs £15 per year; details from Alison Cook, 27 Albemarle Drive, Grove, Wantage, Oxon OX12 0NB.)

## APOLOGY

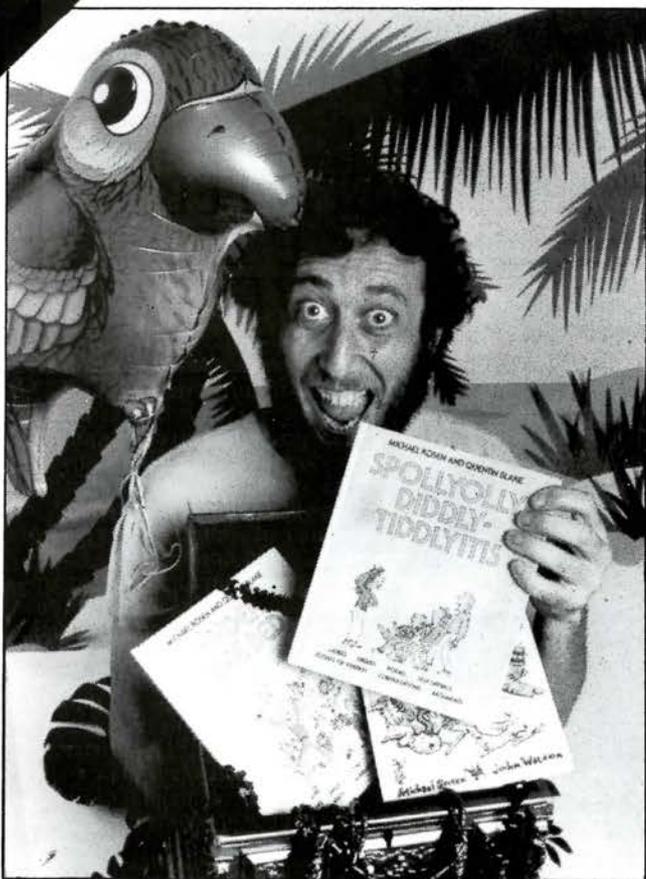
Admirers of **BfK**'s September front cover saw only a pale imitation, quite literally, of what was intended. We're still pursuing the gremlins who sabotaged the colour separation process during printing. Here's how Ted Dewan's **Inside Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Creatures** should have looked:



Our apologies to Ted for the mishap and to his publishers, Dorling Kindersley. Luckily, the colour of the pictures inside the magazine, accompanying George Hunt's article about Ted's work at Brindishe Primary School, represented the illustration in his book much more accurately.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS  
NEWS

Now  
They Are  
Six . . .



Michael Rosen. BBC Books, photographer Chris Capstick.

**Treasure Islands**, Radio 4's children's book programme, celebrates its sixth birthday on air with a new book. Written by presenter and poet, Michael Rosen, and Jill Burridge, producer of **Treasure Islands**, it's designed to help parents, teachers and librarians and young readers themselves find out more about the people who write for them. Using the interviews that they have recorded over the last six years for the programme, Michael and Jill have made each chapter of the book into a profile of a well-known author – a sort of who's who in the children's book world similar to **BfK's** Authorgraphs. Names like Anne Fine, Dick King-Smith, Nina Bawden, Martin Waddell, Gillian Cross, Robert Swindells, Shirley Hughes, Anthony Browne, James Berry, Berlie Doherty and Quentin Blake are featured as well as favourites from the States like Rosemary Wells and Betsy Byars. At the end of every chapter is a list of the top ten titles by each of the 32 authors.

**Treasure Islands** is now back on the air every Wednesday afternoon at 2.45 on Radio 4, with a weekly look at topics and issues affecting children's books. Sadly, though, you can't catch up with the programme on a Sunday any more because the repeat has been cut. Alongside the loss of other children's programmes with the proposed re-shaping of Radio 5 from next spring, this begins to look like a trend.

So COMPLAIN says **BfK**. Write in protest to Michael Green, Controller Radio 4, BBC, Broadcasting House, London W1A 1AA – remember the pressure that was brought to bear over **Woman's Hour**? **Treasure Islands 2**, by the way, is published by BBC Books (0 563 36773 3) and costs £5.00.

## SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION COLLECTION

This, the largest specialist resource of SF and related materials in Europe, is now based in the Sydney Jones Library at Liverpool University where, appropriately enough, an MA in Science Fiction Studies starts in October 1994. The Collection's librarian/administrator is Andy Sawyer who's already at work on creating a computerised database of the Foundation's stock . . . a major resource for scholars and researchers of SF.

For further information, or to send contributions/donations, contact: Andy Sawyer, Science Fiction Foundation Collection, University of Liverpool Library, PO Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA.

## Bookchat . . . and a Bookcharter

One of the happiest events of last summer was a visit to **BfK** by Jay Heale, irrepressible and indomitable Editor of the South African children's book magazine **Bookchat**, as part of his whirlwind tour of Britain and Europe. A day's hilarious discussion suggested our two magazines have much in common . . . but just how much became clearer still after Jay returned home. He's also Liaison Officer for the Southern African Children's Book Forum, it turns out, and has issued for public consideration what he calls 'an essential feature of the Democracy of our New South Africa' –

## Bill of Rights for All Children's Books

I, the Children's Book in South Africa, hereby assert my right:

- \* to be soberly considered as an important part of the literature of our country;
- \* to be written free of the constraints of censorship, excessive editorial pressure, and on whatever subject matter as may appeal to my author and his or her young readers;
- \* to be published with careful design, typography and suitable illustration that I may appeal both to adult buyers and youthful readers, and in sufficient quantity that my price is not excessive;
- \* to be publicised in all forms of media in sufficient coverage that people may realise how Literature (what is actually read) is equally as important as Literacy (the ability to read);
- \* to be sold without the imposition of Value Added Tax;
- \* to be bought by educational establishments, libraries and homes from funds wisely set aside for this vital purpose;
- \* to be made available, where I am considered desirable by the readers concerned, in all public libraries, school libraries, teacher training colleges, classrooms, exhibitions and normal homes without any artificially imposed prescribed selection of what should or should not be on the shelf;
- \* and to be read by my young readers without the threat of examination, comprehension test, book report or overdue library fee.

Isn't there a right or two here that we'd like to claim for *British* children's books? Some things, it seems, are the same the world over.

**In our next issue . . .**  
George Hunt meets Morris Gleitzman  
David Bennett on encouraging Reluctant Readers  
Sally Feldman on the books teenagers like  
Jill Burridge reviews recent teenage fiction  
Geoffrey Trease in Authorgraph . . .  
. . . and reviews, reviews, reviews

# Special Needs Directory 1993/94



Prepared by the National Library for the Handicapped Child for Barnicoats, the library supplier, this updated and expanded Directory is introduced by Beverley Mathias and now offers over 400 titles, ranging from picture books to young adults, which feature children 'with a syndrome, disability, illness, learning or emotional difficulty'. The list, of course, is intended not just for the children above but for every youngster. It comes categorised, indexed and fully annotated. At only £1.00 it's superb value . . . and what school can do without it?

Available from Barnicoats, Parkengue, Penryn, Cornwall TR10 9EP (tel: 0326 372628).

## INITIATIVES TO CATCH THE EYE

In these days of recession and cutting-back, almost any new initiative in the children's book world is to be welcomed. When the initiative looks lively and interesting in its own right, then it's time, perhaps, to break into full-scale celebration. So here are two bubbly-deserving enterprises that have caught BfK's attention recently:

### ❦ BAREFOOT BOOKS

Described as 'a new and exciting picture book list which celebrates the poetic tradition of myth and fairy tale' Tessa Strickland's company launched itself in September with **The Birds Who Flew Beyond Time** (by Anne Baring and Thetis Blacker, 1 898000 00 X, £9.99), a classic Persian allegorical tale, and **The Mountains of Tibet** (by Mordicai Gerstein, 1 898000 45 X, £9.99), a children's version of **The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying**. Also published in September was the Barefoot Mini Classic series which includes titles by Carroll, Kipling, Macdonald and Nesbit. Clearly a list to watch.

For more information contact Gail Lynch or Charlotte Eitenberg at Colman Getty on 071 439 1783.



### ANOTHER TALE

Also worth attention is this Kent-based bookseller, established in 1987 and offering increasingly specific services to schools with pre-selected packages to support a variety of themes and subjects – mainly for primary schools but with collections for secondary schools also available. Run by Liz George and Albany Bilbe, both experienced teachers who maintain their links with education through INSET and lecturing, the company is well aware of National Curriculum requirements . . . and that these need to be interpreted in a book-loving context. Why, their programmes of work even look *enjoyable!*

Ring 0732 885063 or write to Oastdene, Ismays Road, Igham, Kent TN15 9BD for full details .

# CONFERENCES ON OFFER

FEDERATION OF CHILDREN'S BOOK GROUPS 26th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Edinburgh Conference Centre, Heriot-Watt University  
25-27 March 1994



## ★ Bridges and Barriers

What makes a book successful in translation?

What is the status of children's books in other countries?

What are the cultural and commercial bridges and barriers?

Speakers include Joan Lingard, Michael Morpurgo, Robert Leeson, Anthea Bell, Christine Baker, Jane Churchill, Nicholas Durbridge and Linda Pooley of Copyrights.

Plus Exhibitions and Bookshop – The Announcement of the 1994 Children's Book Award Shortlist – Conference Dinner and traditional Scottish ceilidh.

For programme and booking details, write to Rowena Knox, 17 West Savile Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3DY, enclosing an SAE.

## *The Work of Tove Jansson Conference, August 7-10, 1994*

To mark the occasion of Tove Jansson's birthday, the Finnish Institute for Children's Literature, which is the only body responsible for documentation, information and research concerning children's literature in Finland, is organising an international conference at Tampere, Finland.



The programme includes visits to the 'Moominvalley' collection in Tampere City Library, which contains Tove Jansson's original illustrations for her Moomin books (nearly 1,000 ink drawings and watercolours) and to the Tampere Art Museum where a large number of her paintings will be exhibited.

The Finnish Institute for Children's Literature welcomes everybody interested in Tove Jansson's work and details can be obtained from Mrs Elina Laurikainen, Finnish Institute for Children's Literature, Puutarhakatu 2D-E, Fin 33100, Tampere (tel: int. code + 358 31 212 1936; fax 358 31 212 2178).

## GRAPHIC ACCOUNT

Edited by Keith Barker for the Library Association's Youth Libraries Group, **Graphic Account** (0 946581 16 9) celebrates what Philip Pullman calls in his leading article 'works of substantial length in comic-strip format, with frames, speech bubbles, captions and all the rest of the



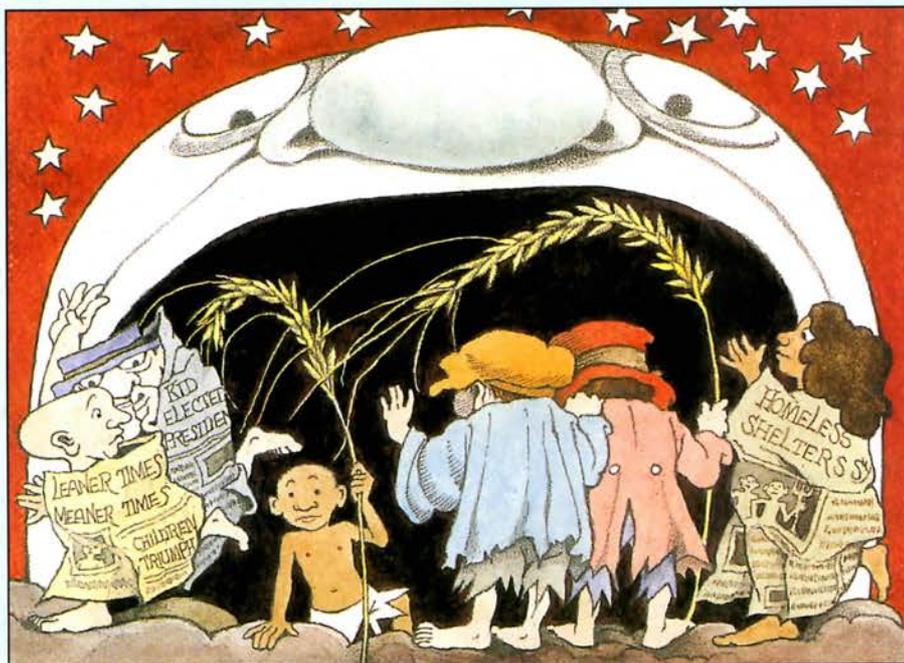
comic-strip apparatus'. It's essential reading for everyone interested in this growing publishing phenomenon . . . and even more essential for everyone who, so far, has not been interested in what Philip Pullman insists is 'a new art form'. With contributions from John Wilkins and Mel Gibson reinforcing Andy Sawyer's select listing of more than 100 currently available

titles (as well as a useful bibliography of critical works) here's a graphic account indeed of what many would regard as the most creative of current experiments in combining word and image. Not to be missed, says BfK.

Available from Remploy Ltd, London Road, Newcastle, Staffs ST5 1RX (tel: 0782 711300) priced £12.10. ■

# JUNIOR FANTASY

· CHOSEN BY MARGARET CLARK ·



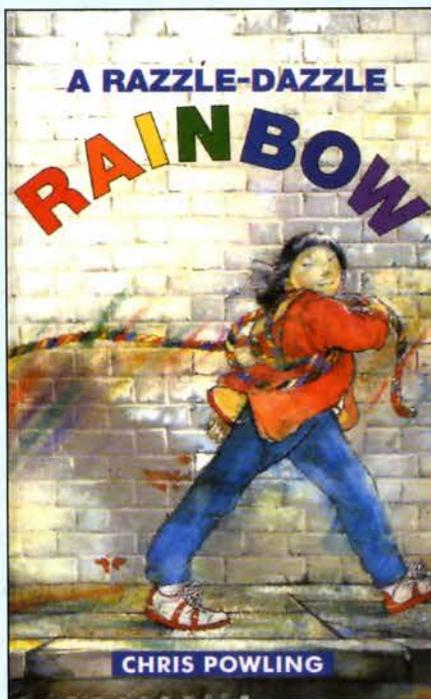
Cover of *We Are All in the Dumps*.

I have to declare an interest in the work of Maurice Sendak that is only just on this side of idolatry. I shared the excitement when, in 1967, The Bodley Head published *Where the Wild Things Are*, a book that the general opinion of the day judged too terrifying for children (and the price of 90p exorbitant).

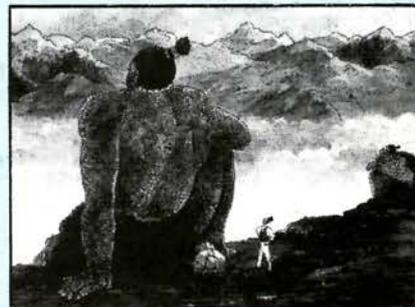
Nearly 30 years later both opinion and prices have changed, but his new book, *We Are All in the Dumps (with) Jack and Guy* (HarperCollins, 0 06 2050114 1, £9.99), shows that Sendak remains the supreme master of the picture book. He once said, 'I live inside the picture book: it's where I fight all my battles, and where, hopefully, I win my wars', and here it's the children who are battling with being dumped, tricked and trumped in a cardboard city under a starry sky. The impact of Sendak's pictures, interpreting two nursery rhymes as a fable of the nineties, is almost stunningly physical: the energy of movement as the urchin children run or cry or cower, the dazzling colour, the line as sure as ever. And, as ever, each reader will find a different meaning. Perhaps some will want to protect today's children, not from imaginary monsters, but from the image of homeless orphans, the reality of newspaper headlines ('Leaner Times, Meaner Times'), the sight of a brown-skinned baby who could be a refugee in Somalia. Yet Sendak has always believed in the courage and maturity of children ('what they yearn for most is a bit of truth somewhere') and cared more about their response than the opinion of adults. I can only say that for me the book is a triumphant tale about the resilience of children faced with the terrible things adults have done to their world.

Chris Powling's *A Razzle-Dazzle Rainbow* (ill. Alan Marks, Viking, 0 670 84648 1, £8.50) is also set among homeless families in a B & B hotel, but the background is unimportant (except to provide a happy ending, 'proper homes on a brand-new estate'). The chief pleasure of this story is the heroine's passion for books – she is as besotted with words as your very own editor and they both use them with delight. Her magic rainbow ropes takes Yen skipping

through a book to be savoured for its telling: an irresistible razzamatazz of 'ding-dong, curly-whirly' playing with language.



*The Last Giants*, written and illustrated by Francois Place, translated by William Rodarmor (Pavilion, 1 85793 122 X, £9.99), originated in Belgium. Its extravagant layout, with a page of watercolour illustration to each short passage of text, is refreshingly un-British, but the story, in the style of expeditionary record, purports to be written by an Englishman. He is a veritable stereotype – with top hat, half-timbered mansion in Sussex, housekeeper named Amelia whose marmalade accompanies his exploration – an amateur anthropologist of the nineteenth century. Having



discovered a group of long-lived Giants, he publishes his account of the British Expedition, is scorned by the British Establishment, offered a chair in 'giantology' by the Sorbonne, welcomed and funded by New York, and finds on his return to the Far East that his discovery has resulted in the Giants' extinction. 'My books have killed them . . . Nine Giants who dreamed of the stars, and a little man blinded by his lust for glory: that was our entire history.' The book's appearance is beguiling: you can almost feel the care with which it has been designed and produced – but its underlying satire is as bitter as *Gulliver's Travels*. How will children read it?

In *The Night of Wishes* (Deutsch, 0 590 54112 9, £9.99) the German author, Michael Ende, has been doubly blessed in his translators, Heike Schwarzbauer and Rick Takvorian. The jokes ('I'm at the end of my feather,' says the raven) and the riddling rhymes ('O potent bowl of omnipotent potion / Now hear my wish and grant me a notion') read as naturally as if they had been coined in English. The typographical layout of this novel – the page- and type-size, the wide margins, the coloured end-papers – make it immediately inviting and, once started, the reader is likely to be held by the fast-moving plot. A cat and a raven, spies for the High Council of Animals, have only the last seven hours of New Year's Eve to stop the evil sorcerer Beelzebub Preposteror and his aunt Tyrannia Vampirella from destroying the world by killing the trees, polluting the rivers, and peddling sealskins. A Good Read – in which there is no ambiguity about what constitutes virtue and what motivates the Minister of Pitch Darkness.

A teacher told me, 'You can't go wrong with animal fables' and the very old folk tales have the advantage of being well honed by constant telling. Likewise, there is rarely a delay in getting on with the story by pausing to describe the alligator or turkey or whatever, as might happen with an unfamiliar human character. The eleven tales retold by John Yeoman in *The Singing Tortoise* (Gollancz, 0 575 05440 9, £10.99) come from all over the world, were unknown to me (no expert) and are characterised by a strict morality. Make the most of your wits and you will win; break a promise and you will lose; greed and jealousy lead to disaster. The retelling is crisp; Quentin Blake's illustrations are typically cheerful; the production (in an attractive, almost square format) is exemplary. How sad that – like most of the books on this page – it had to be manufactured outside Britain. ■

**Margaret Clark** retired from The Bodley Head in 1988, where she had been Head of Children's Books.