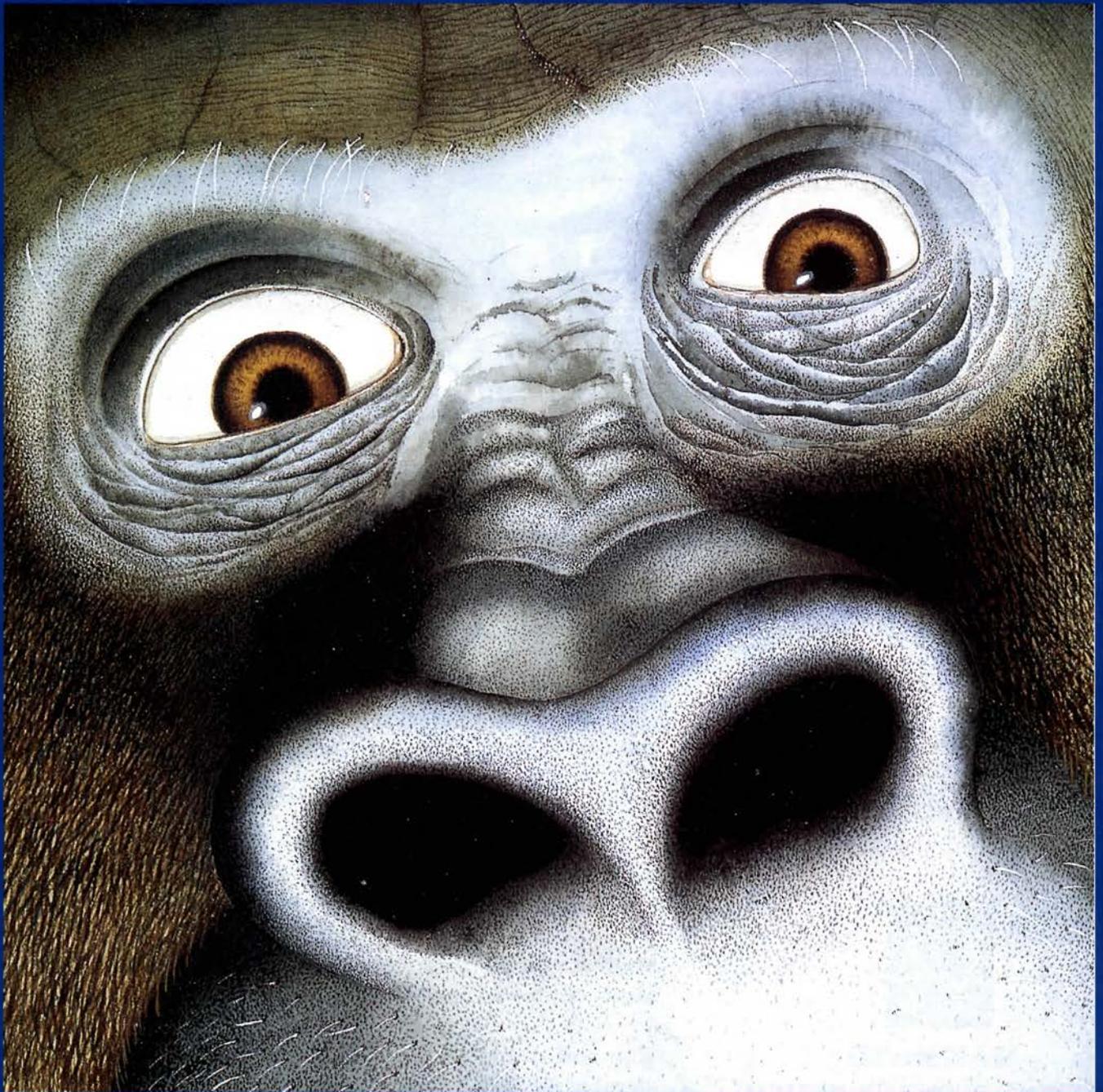


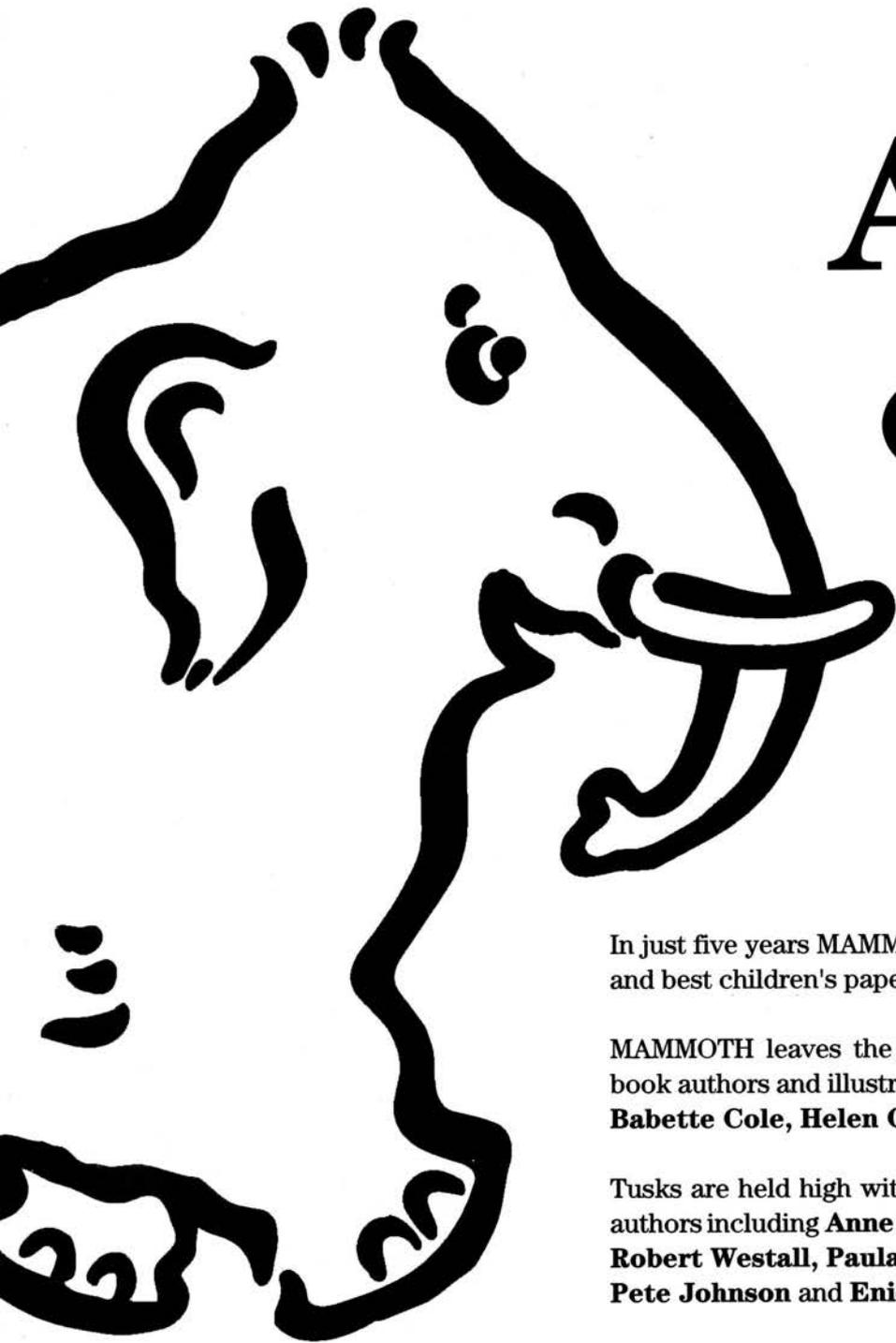
BOOKS FOR KEEPS

November 1994
No.89 UK Price £2.15

the children's book magazine



Beasties and Ghosties and Things
that Go BUMP on the Page!



Ahead of the herd

In just five years MAMMOTH has grown into one of the brightest and best children's paperback lists.

MAMMOTH leaves the rest behind with its bestselling picture book authors and illustrators such as **Janet and Allan Ahlberg**, **Babette Cole**, **Helen Oxenbury**, and **Colin Hawkins**.

Tusks are held high with a glittering list of prize-winning fiction authors including **Anne Fine**, **Michael Morpurgo**, **Ian Strachan**, **Robert Westall**, **Paula Danziger**, **Jean Ure**, **Elizabeth Laird**, **Pete Johnson** and **Enid Blyton**.

An impressive line-up of characters also publish in MAMMOTH including **Thomas-the-Tank Engine**, **Winnie-the-Pooh**, **Fireman Sam**, **The Animals of Farthing Wood**, **Tintin** and **Rupert**.

And that's not all - there are great activity books too like **The Crystal Maze**, **Nintendo** and **Virtual Reality** adventure gamebooks.

With now over 1000 titles to choose from MAMMOTH really is ahead of the herd in quality and choice.



MAMMOTH

GREAT READS - ENORMOUS FUN - HUGE SALES

For information about our list or MAMMOTH's 5th Birthday celebrations this Autumn please contact your Reed representative or telephone 0933 58521.

Reed Children's Books is a member of the Reed Elsevier plc group

Contents

- 3** **Editor's Page**
News and comment from the Editor
- 4** **Beasties and Ghosties and Things that Go Bump on the Page**
A spooky round-up by Jill Burridge
- 6** **Tomb It May Concern**
Colin and Jacqui Hawkins
- 8** **Christopher Pike: Master of Murder**
Jonathan Weir
- 10** **REVIEWS**
Fiction 10 / Audio 19 / Non Fiction 20
- 16** **Authorgraph No. 89**
Susan Price, interviewed by George Hunt
- 23** **Pointless Horror?**
Steve Rosson
- 24** **Capturing Kong**
Anthony Browne on his new picture book
- 27** **OP Plea**
Val Randall continues our series
- 28** **Giving Them the Creeps**
Adèle Geras
- 29** **Building a Castle**
Jenny Nimmo
- 31** **News**
- 32** **Have Yourself a Very Creepy Christmas . . .**
Chris Powling

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

NOVEMBER 1994 No. 89

ISSN 0143-909X: © School Bookshop Assoc. 1994
Editor: Chris Powling
Managing Director: Richard Hill
Design and typeset: Rondale Ltd., Lydney, Glos.
Printed by: The Friary Press, Dorchester.

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

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 Matercard) or use the telephone order service on

081-852 4953

Annual subscription for six issues:
£12.90 (UK); £18.80 (Europe/overseas surface mail);
£21.50 (airmail)

Single copies:
£2.15 (UK); £3.15 (Europe/overseas surface mail);
£3.60 (airmail)

Ghost Writing

Some years ago, with the Summer Fete pending, my daughter's headteacher had a bright idea. 'Would you write us our very own story, Chris?' he suggested. 'You could base it on this actual school - you know, the buildings and staff and children and so on. We'll print it up on our word-processor, bind it up with a proper cover and you can sign copies on Fete afternoon!'

My heart sank a bit, I admit.

Even the shortest story, if it's to have any quality at all, takes me hours - not to say, days - of hard slog. And I've always found it much more daunting to write for readers who are known to me than a more general audience.

Still, the cause was a worthy one and I'm a fully paid-up softie, so I agreed to give it a try.

Pretty soon, having settled on a ghost story as most likely to be popular with the children themselves, I'd even become interested in the project. Slowly, 'The Ghost of Itchen Abbas' began to take shape. It was based on a recent archaeological dig at the school and, as requested, incorporated personal appearances by the head and staff - though naming every single child on roll, as I'd originally intended, turned out to be a non-starter. By the time I'd handed the story over, seen the first-rate job made of 'publishing' it and sold pretty nearly every copy at the Fete itself, I was feeling a touch ashamed of my initial reluctance.

So what happened towards the end of the afternoon serves me right, perhaps.

He was a tall, smartly-dressed man with a military air about him. As I signed his copy, he asked, 'Er . . . is this the real ghost of Itchen Abbas you're writing about?'

'Real ghost?' I said.

'Because there is one, you know.'

It haunts a local pub, he told me, which he could vouch for personally because he was an ex-policeman who'd just become landlord of that very same pub.

Straightaway, I believed him - or believed that *he* believed in the ghost at least. So did his wife, he insisted. If I'd like to drop in for a drink one evening, they'd be delighted to fill in the details . . .

Which they did, between serving customers, a week or so later. 'It's a man,' he confided. 'A tall, cavalier-type with a plumed hat and long, swirly, grey cloak.'

'No, it's a woman,' declared his wife, 'in a full-length, grey dress with one of those feathery Nell Gwynne hats.'

Smart co-ordination, I thought. The ghost was certain to sell a pint or two . . . especially as they were both agreed on their dog's reaction: quivering, whimpering fear whenever the apparition arrived.

Even more impressive, though, was the puzzled,

Editor's PAGE



CHRIS POWLING

matter-of-fact manner in which this practical, down-to-earth pair recounted their tale. Of course, they realised how suspicious everyone else would be so they'd be happy to show me the upstairs landing where this Phantom, or whatever it was, always appeared. Would I like that? 'You bet,' I said.

I mean this was *material* . . .

A little later, towards closing time, they led me up the back staircase to a tall, narrow corridor that ran the full-length of the house. I remember it as empty apart from a carpet which had faded to the same nondescript dinginess as the wallpaper.

For maybe a minute I stood there. Nothing, absolutely nothing, would have persuaded me to walk the length of that corridor. There were goose-pimples on my goose-pimples, I'm sure. I may not have whimpered but I was certainly quivering.

At what?

I still haven't a clue. All I can recall is a clammy sense of oppression, a sort of gap in the atmosphere only something uncanny could fill.

Well, I told you I'm a fully paid-up softie. From that day to this, I've never been back to the pub in case a glimpse of cloak or hat or plume confirmed the presence of the real Ghost of Itchen Abbas. Not long afterwards, apparently, the ex-policeman and his wife gave up their tenancy. They 'couldn't make a go of it', people said.

All of which is both completely true and highly pertinent to the theme of this November issue: **Beasties, Ghosties and Things that Go Bump on the Page**. Will we ever grow tired of scaring ourselves witless with what we can't bring ourselves to believe in but also can't ever quite dis-believe? Here, we celebrate this universal, timeless human characteristic in terms of picture-books, stories for readers in the middle years of childhood and narratives for teenagers. Naturally, or should I say, supernaturally, we're not committing ourselves to the reality of any of it. On the contrary, we'd recommend the canny scepticism of the Irish playwright Brendan Behan who once described himself as a 'daylight atheist'. After dark, he wasn't so sure.

Enjoy the spookiness!

Chris

New portrait of the Editor(!) and background dancing devil from **Poems that go BUMP in the night** (see page 4).

Price Increase for BfK Subscriptions

Last year the entire publishing industry was awaiting the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget Statement on VAT. This year we're being hit by an extraordinarily volatile, worldwide paper market, with prices rising, in some cases, by triple the going rate of inflation. We have already absorbed one increase in August and this coming January paper prices are going up another 10-15%! In the light of this and other more predictable, containable increases, the 1995 BfK subscriptions are as follows:

UK: £15.00
Europe (EEC and non-EEC, including the Republic of Ireland): £19.00
Rest of the World: £22.00

Cover STORY

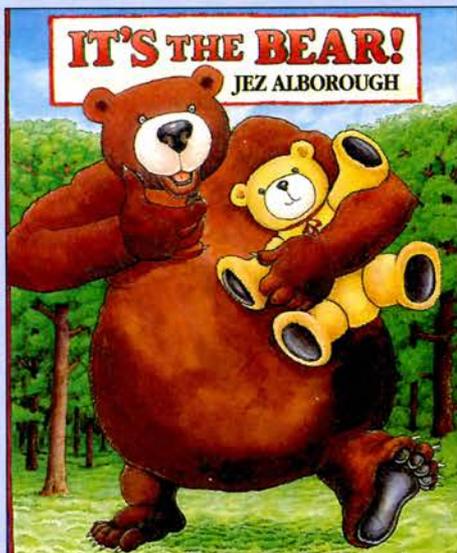


Our cover this month features **King Kong**, Anthony Browne's new picture book published by Julie MacRae, to whom we're most grateful for help in using this illustration. Details of the book appear with Anthony Browne's article on page 24 of this magazine.

Beasties and Ghosties and Things that Go BUMP on the Page!

A Round-up by **Jill Burridge**

'But round the end of a cucumber frame, whom should he meet but Mr McGregor!' Though I've read **Peter Rabbit** countless times, that moment still sends a shiver of anticipation through me as Peter plunges into his frantic bid for freedom. It's a story that rarely fails to grip young readers as Beatrix Potter takes them to the brink of disaster and, thankfully, back home for camomile tea. That, after all, is what scary picture books are all about.



Jez Alborough has created just this sort of tension in his **It's the Bear!**, the sequel to **Where's My Teddy?**. Once again Eddy ventures into the wood with Freddy his teddy to enjoy a picnic with his Mum. She may be oblivious to the danger, but poor Eddy is petrified that he'll encounter the great big bear again. And the bear is really big. One full-page spread before he arrives, poor Eddy looks up to the tops of the trees, wide-eyed with horror. Panic ensues and Eddy hides in the picnic hamper, but for the reader there's a safety valve - the huge bear is clutching his own teddy. With a sort of pantomime humour, Jez Alborough's illustrations bring to life the hidden danger and the mutual fear the bear and Eddy feel when they finally confront each other. Thank goodness they've both got their teddies!

A more traditional type of tale comes from Jenny Koralek with **The Boy and the Cloth of Dreams**. The pen and ink illustrations by James Mayhew are quite stunning. With hues of dark blue, greens, purples and gleaming gold, he creates a safe haven from which to encounter the terrors of nightmare most children experience. A boy tears his bedcover, woven with golden suns and silver

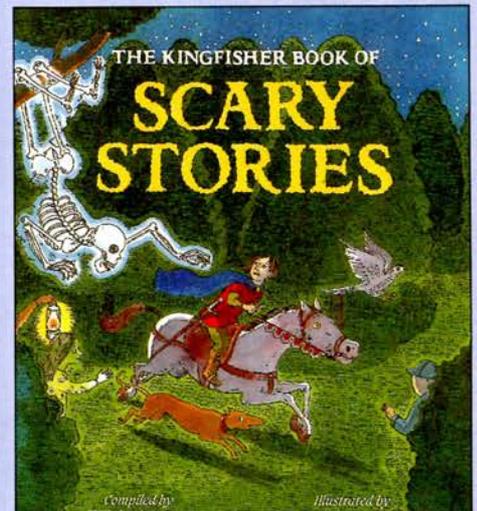
moons, and from the holes in the cover, monsters and hags come out to haunt his dreams. To get help, he has to cross the dark landing where unfamiliar shapes loom to threaten him. In the telling, Jenny Koralek uses some strangely old-fashioned phrases, but it's a story many children will find reassuring as the little boy finds the courage to face his fears.

A short selection of **Poems that go Bump in the Night**, selected and illustrated by Gillian McClure, bring Will-o'-the-Wisp, witches, graveyards and ghosts with poems from Charles Causley, James Reeves, Spike Milligan and Roger McGough, as well as Walter de la Mare and e e cummings. I wanted more of this selection. There's good contrast between creepy and calming verses, but I could have done with greater choice even at the expense of some illustrations.

Sam Llewellyn's **The Magic Boathouse** has villains and bullies who get their just desserts at the hands of a kindly ghost. Joe and Doris are bullied and teased and given all the rotten jobs to do on the school trip, until they find the magic boathouse where an old man shows them how to use his very special foghorn. Hey presto... an army of Romans or Normans arrives to take charge of their chores and, even better, the invaders take back with them nasty Fat Ern, Sopy Emmer and even the villainous Mr Barge. Arthur Robins' illustrations add a wickedly grotesque flavour to the story so, with speech bubbles and short, pacy chapters, this is a good read for beginners.

Martyn Beardsley returns with another yarn about the worst knight in the world. **Sir Gadabout and the Ghost** is a chance for this hopeless knight of the round table to prove his worth by helping a ghostly knight wrongly accused of stealing tinned pilchards from King Arthur's kitchen. The story is pure farce with disguise and deception creating chaos and confusion. Dreadful puns make it instantly appealing to read aloud, but it's also a book young readers can enjoy for themselves and Tony Ross's wonderful illustrations reflect the mad mood of the story.

BfK's own editor has been busy with ghostly matters of late. **The Kingfisher Book of Scary Stories**, compiled by Chris Powling with illustrations by Peter Bailey, brings together ten authors with stories from Britain and America, Israel and the Caribbean. There's plenty of variation in the tone of the tales, too. Anthony Masters will make your flesh creep with 'Mine' as Jo, trapped in the dark, disused mineshaft, reaches out to help the miner she thinks is

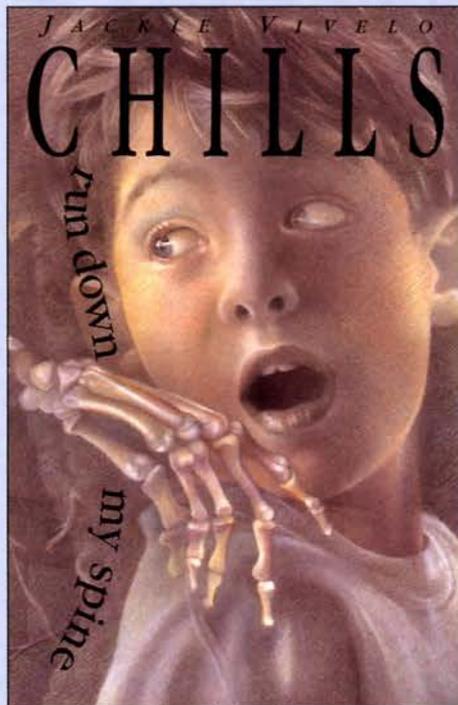


there. Adèle Geras blinds you with sunlight to disguise 'Tsipporah', the ghost girl who can transform herself into a bird, whereas Sid Fleischman just makes you howl with laughter as his ghost-raising con-artists meet their match in 'The Ghost on Saturday Night'. Chris Powling's own story 'The Oddment' will strike a chord with many a reader who's wedded to their 'comforter' or 'cuddly'. The 'thing' assumes a homing power of its own which just might make current owners take a dispassionate look at their habit! Younger children will enjoy having these stories read aloud while older readers can happily scare themselves under the bedclothes.

The current craze for horror stories among older children and the success of series like 'Point Horror' has led Scholastic to launch a new series for younger readers. From the 'Goosebumps' series comes **The Haunted Mask** by R L Stine which proclaims on the cover 'Reader beware - you're in for a scare!' and that's how subtle the book is. The plot was utterly predictable - girl goes out on Hallowe'en to get her own back on boys who've been picking on her, but things go wrong when the mask she's wearing takes possession of her and she can't get it off... please don't read on. The characters aren't developed, the plot hasn't any real depth to it and the twist at the end is just grotesque. The cover will ensure it gets picked up and read, though.

Rather than having everything spelt out for you, a good scary story allows your imagination to flow and leaves behind haunting memories. Three collections of short stories, still for 10-year-olds and upwards, fulfil these objectives really well and they're

told against a variety of settings which demonstrate that scary stories are much more than tricks and treats.

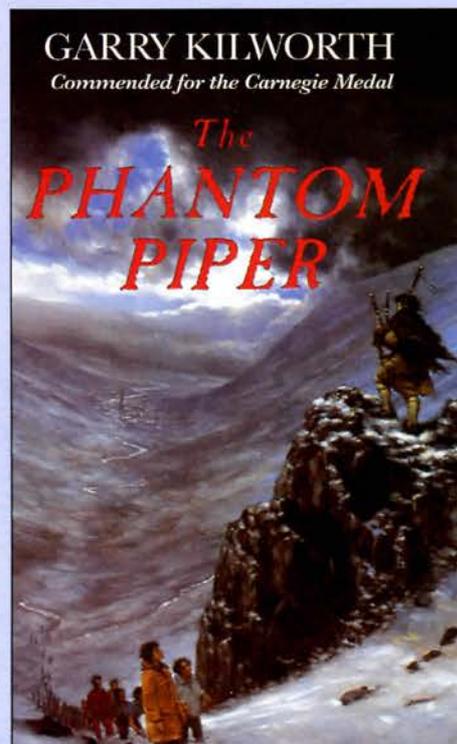


Jackie Vivalo's **Chills Run Down My Spine** is a collection set in America with evocative black and white pencil drawings by Jennifer Eachus which are haunting in themselves. The title story, about Mickey who finds himself abandoned in a haunted house, is not so much concerned with the ghostly sensations that he encounters there but far more about the chilling effect his experience has on his relationship with his brother. 'Haunted houses can send chills down your spine, but there's nothing - in life or after - half as cold as hate.' Many of the stories rely on sensitive children, receptive to forces and feelings that parents can't appreciate. Mind you, there's innocent fun as well with a story like 'The Good Neighbour Policy' when Miss Fisher finds herself overwhelmed with visitors. The children next door come to her rescue with Hector. Whoever he is, he's guaranteed to clear the house of unwanted relatives.

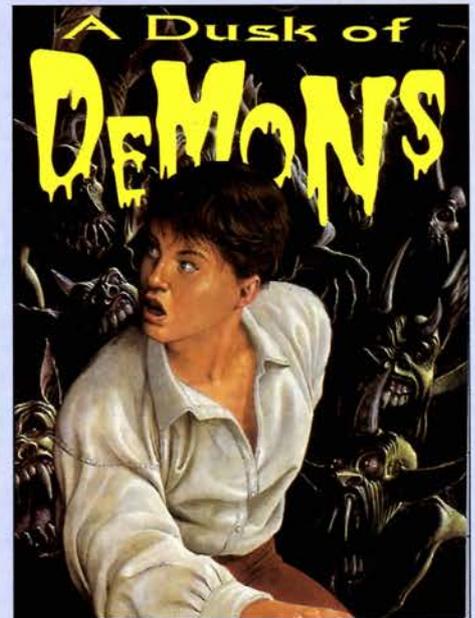
For sceptics and disbelievers the first story in **The Young Oxford Book of Ghost Stories** is a must. Vivien Alcock's 'The Rivals' takes John Pearce into the haunted house next door. John has logical explanations for every sensation of wind or noise, but as the apparition tells him 'I need your fear. I can only exist in your mind', every twist and turn of the story draws him further from his world of logic. Here you have a collection of stories from top writers including Jane Gardam, Grace Hallworth, Jan Mark, Ann Pilling and Robert Westall. Dennis Pepper's choice also includes less well-known names and, with 'Fat Andy', Stephen Dunstone uses a past and present voice to unfold his sinister story; a church is due to be closed and the vicar wants to pay tribute to Andrew who has lovingly tended the grave of a young girl for many years. But there's more to her death than people realise and without God's protection the past will catch up with Andrew. John Gordon uses that

same element of surprise with 'The Black Pies'. A warm kitchen where two sisters pass the time of day conceals the part malice and jealousy have played in their lives. The stories are gripping; I just find the illustrations intrusive, depicting figments which I'd rather leave to my own imagination.

For an older reader, Josephine Poole's **Scared to Death and Other Ghostly Stories** focuses mainly on adult characters; a windsurfer possessed by a recurring nightmare is enticed to sail far out in gale force winds, a woman on holiday in an old French chateau is haunted by the cries of a baby and a tragic secret of the past, a girl backpacking in Greece is mesmerised by ghosts of ancient Crete. They are taut tales with suspense, mystery and sometimes grizzly endings.



'I thought it was a dream, but there was a piper. He was playing a pibroch. He stood up on a high crag till all the grown-ups reached him then he went off. They went with him. Followed him like sheep. Followed the music he was making.' Echoes of **The Pied Piper** and **Lord of the Flies** ripple through Garry Kilworth's gripping story, **The Phantom Piper**, for older readers. The children of Canlish Glen are abandoned and, according to legend, they have to break the piper's spell by Hogmanay or their parents will never return. They're cut off from the outside world by deep snow and blizzards but, relying on their own resources, the children assume their parents' responsibilities and an array of characters emerge from Angel MacPhearson, who takes the role of church minister, to Hamish Cairns in charge of his father's farm. The survival of the young community is threatened, however, by the arrival of two strangers. Garry Kilworth plays with time through this story in a way that's chillingly effective and the tension builds up to a high crescendo. Perhaps some readers will find the Scottish dialect a hindrance at first, but the lure of the story is strong enough on characters and plot to overcome that.



A future world turned on itself, where machines are evil and demons are worshipped as gods, is the setting for John Christopher's **A Dusk of Demons**. From the first there's a sense of uncertainty, foreboding, the perpetual threat of attack from demons, which haunts the boy Ben worst of all in his nightmares. The threat becomes reality for Ben when the fabric of his life on Old Isle is torn apart after the death of the master. John Christopher heightens the suspense with a narrative to taunt and challenge - do the demons really exist? What happened to the world we know? How and why has a society come to reclaim medieval values? Ben finds himself with no identity, a past that he has to fight to discover and no safe haven which will give him the time to answer these questions. It's a nightmare scenario which is compulsive reading. The awakening is plausible, not flawless, but leaves you looking back at the book and forward to life here and now. The haunting surely worked. ■

Jill Burrige is Producer of BBC Radio 4's **Treasure Islands**, the children's book programme presented by Michael Rosen.

Book details:

- It's the Bear**, Walker, 0 7445 3701 0, £8.99
The Boy and the Cloth of Dreams, Walker 0 7445 2533 0, £8.99
Poems that go Bump in the Night, Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 1430X, £8.99; 0 7500 1431 8, £3.99 pbk
The Magic Boathouse, Walker, 0 7445 2473 3, £4.99
Sir Gadabout and the Ghost, Orion, 1 85881 061 2, £8.99
The Kingfisher Book of Scary Stories, Kingfisher, 1 85697 248 8, £9.99
The Haunted Mask, Scholastic, 0 590 55668 1, £2.50 pbk
Chills Run Down My Spine, Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 7028 2, £8.99
The Young Oxford Book of Ghost Stories, Oxford, 0 19 278126 X, £12.99
Scared to Death and Other Ghostly Stories, Hutchinson, 0 09 176155 7, £9.99
The Phantom Piper, Methuen, 0 416 18913 X, £9.99
A Dusk of Demons, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13378 5, £8.99; Puffin, 0 14 036420 X, £3.50 pbk

Tomb it may concern...



Colin...



Jacqui

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, with help from a Ghost-Writer (they say) describe a typical working day

The sun has risen, and back in the crypt all things slimy and smelly have crept (after a hard night's haunting). Now is the time for something far more terrifying. Something to make the hairs stand on end. Something almost every human fears... a Monday morning!

Our day begins with a bump and the gnashing of terrible teeth. Max, our faithful hell-hound, wants his walkies. Well, at least as far as the local bakery so he can collect a sausage roll for his breakfast. This is our first decision of the day: who exorcises the hybrid-gargoyle and who makes coffee strong enough to keep a vampire awake. Rising from the grave on Mondays used to be a lot easier. This was when we had two little monsters to turf out of their dens, ready for ghoul school. But, thankfully, they're now grown-up monsters, and have escaped to terrorise the world.

Knock!
Knock!

The post arrives. A couple of nasty looking bills to plague us and an invitation to visit a school. Colin especially likes these - making children hysterical is a favourite hobby of his. Or is it just the British Rail breakfast he craves? We still await an invitation from Count Dracula, however. But not today, maybe tomorrow - in the meantime the taxman makes a good enough substitute.

The hours scuttle by happily; perhaps Mondays aren't so blood-curdling after all. Some artwork is finished and a courier is summoned. He arrives, leather-clad, and frightens the dog (or was it the other way round?), then speeds away like a bat out of hell. We return to our lair to stir up some ideas



Hell Hand



for a frightening new tale. This spell of work is shrouded in secrecy. All we are prepared to say is that these dark-doings involve the gnawing of pencils, strange mutterings and mysterious scribbblings. We used to dance round the cat, but he left in a huff. Perhaps we should never have let him out of the bag...



A spooky stroke

Cats can see ghosts, and be ghosts

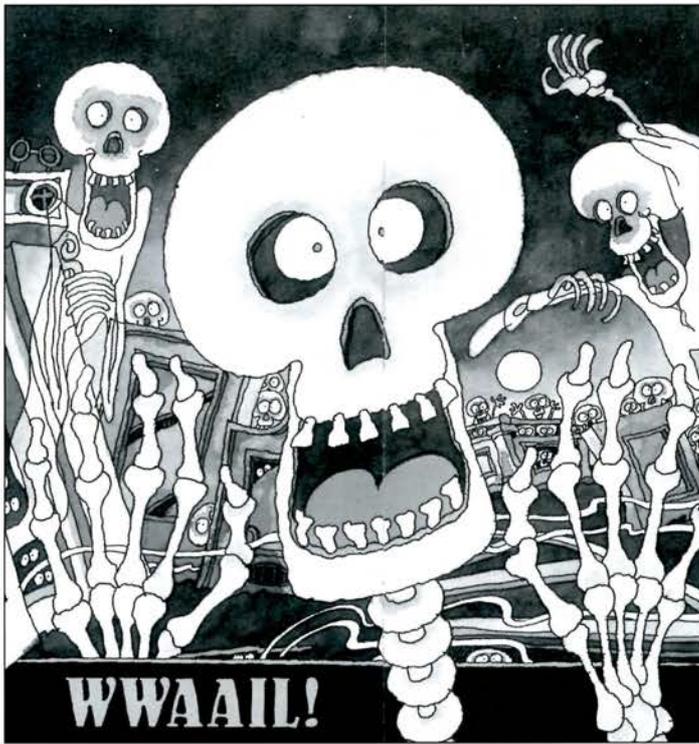


Watch for hair standing on end

Our dabbling continues into the afternoon. What is it that scares you most? Everyone has some kind of hidden fear. Is it mirrors in dark rooms? Or the misshapen shadows that crawl across the bedroom floor? Or perhaps the slow creak of a door, when you're all alone in the house? It might even be the bank manager - many people, we've discovered, share this one. Scaring people is one thing, but making them laugh at their own fright

How do you make a monster fly?
With a ten foot zip.





From *Come for a Ride on the Ghost Train*.

is another. Horror can be hysterical. You can have a wail of a time.

Oooooooooooooo!

Jacqui used to be afraid of hairy hands grabbing her from under the bed. Colin would prefer not to comment. When Jacqui was a little girl she used to take a running jump from the bedroom door to the safety of her bed in case something hidden and wicked tried to catch her ankle. Fortunately she stopped doing this a couple of years back. Now it's only the creepy black depths of plugholes and the



From *Witches*.

unearthly potential of manholes that give her a chilly thrill.

Colin used to have a recurring nightmare that a skeleton was standing at the foot of his bed wearing his dressing-gown. But these days the skeleton just gets bored and wanders off to watch the late-night horror movie. Colin also remembers his mother saying that if he looked too long in a mirror then the Devil would appear. For ages, Colin went around with uncombed hair and a dirty face.

For both of us, the 'fear' we're trying to get into our books is the kind experienced on roller-coasters, fairgrounds and old B-movies on TV . . .

Evening is creeping slowly across the lawn and it's almost time to think about brewing up for supper. Our hell-hound is growling that he'd like to be fed. We decide to let him in for the evening, as long as he promises to wipe his paws at the door.

Another day has yawned and put itself to bed. Night hurries in . . . late again. We decide that we've probably gnawed enough pencils and scribbled plenty for a Moanday. We wonder if anyone out there has a fear of Tuesdays. Good night, sleep tight and . . . don't let the vampires bite. ■

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins have written many books to give littlies the creeps . . . here are details of a few:

Monsters, 0 00 664020 6; **Witches**, 0 00 662574 6; **Spooks**, 0 00 62576 2; **Vampires**, 0 00 662575 4, all available from Collins at £3.99 in paperback and as 'Little Screamer's' Pop-up books.

Come for a Ride on the Ghost Train, Walker, 0 7445 2171 8, £8.99



This, and cat on previous page, from *Spooks*.

CHRISTOPHER PIKE

MASTER OF MURDER

Jonathan Weir, a self-confessed diehard fan, tells us why he's so hooked...

"The earth was looser than it had been when she arrived, as if it had just been dug up and shovelled back over a coffin.

"Mike," she whispered.

It looked so very fresh.

She stood and began to back up. "No, Mike."

Fresh as a body that had just been buried. The brown soil on top of the plot began to stir.

"Stop it, Mike!" Jean cried.

Something poked up through the brown earth into the air...

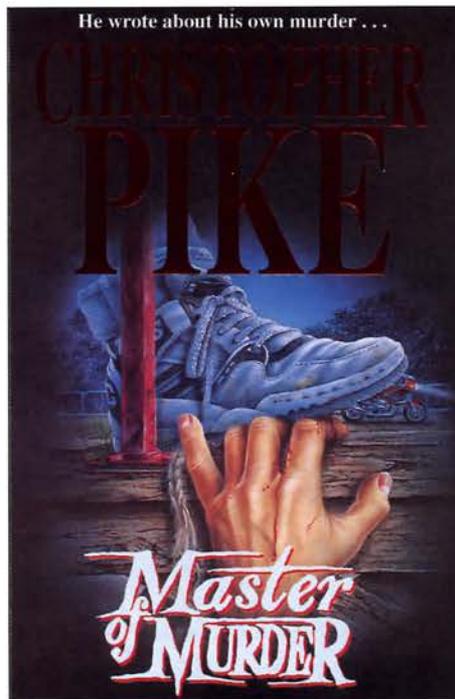
Scary? Teenagers on both sides of the Atlantic seem to think so. The passage comes from *Bury Me Deep* by one of the hottest writers around for young adults: Christopher Pike.

And Pike's rise to stardom is almost as frightening as his books.

His first novel, *Slumber Party*, was released in America in 1984 with little ceremony, as were his next two books, *Chain Letter* and *Weekend*, but, due to word-of-mouth, made a strong impact on Young Adult bestseller lists. From then on, Pike has enjoyed success after success.

Before Pike's arrival in Britain in the late 1980s, the teenage book scene was largely dominated by series such as 'Sweet Valley High' and stories aimed at the younger teenager. Such books were fine for their large readerships, but there was nothing that really delivered the type of stories older teens wanted. These were kids whose lives moved fast and as such they wanted books that were the same - they'd become hooked on action with films and video games satisfying their addiction; and, perhaps most importantly, they were intelligent and found a lot of the available fiction dull and patronising.

Then *Chain Letter* was published. This book, which is, without question, Pike's most satisfying thriller to date, placed a group of normal teenagers in mortal danger from an adversary who wanted to punish them for a crime they'd committed a year earlier. The story is tense and gripping, the



settings exciting and the story concludes with a furious ending that's action-packed without becoming unrealistic. But the characters were normal; no different from the teenagers who read the book. They talked, moved and reacted like any young adult yet they were thrust into a hostile situation and forced to deal with it on their own.

It's a trend that's carried on through every Pike book published and seems to be a winning formula.

Pike explains, 'You have to remember that the reader is intelligent and not try too hard to write for the teenage market.'

As well as gripping thrillers, Pike has written several young adult horror novels and it's here that his skill excels. As with all teenage fiction, it's generally agreed that horror fiction for young adults should not go 'too far', and there is an obvious limit. Pike knows this limit and never steps beyond it, taking his readers dangerously close to the edge instead of over it. The first line of *Monster*, one of Pike's best books, reads 'It began with blood. It would end the same way.' The book does feature blood, it begins to flow only a few paragraphs into the first chapter, yet is handled in such a way that it never degenerates into mindless gore, unlike the teenage 'slasher' movies that Pike's work will inevitably be expected to live up to, by some, in terms of graphic violence.

'Things like Freddie bore me - there's no subtlety. You know what's going to happen and it's just grisly stuff with plenty of blood,' Pike has commented. 'I think it's more scary when you don't know what will happen. Horror is really about the fear of death, people's vulnerability.'

If horror and thrillers aren't enough to keep him busy, he's also published some Science Fiction novels for teenagers. *See You Later* and *The Eternal Enemy* both centre on love and the end of the world, but from the viewpoints of a boy and girl respectively. Both are touching and humane, yet terrifying at the same time as they leave you wondering just how accurate Pike's sometimes disturbing vision of the future really is. It was inevitable that Pike would branch into SF since his initial interests were in the adult Science Fiction and Mystery genres.

So what of the man himself? Is his dark, intense imagination fuelled by his own life experiences?

Pike was born in New York but raised in Los Angeles which may explain some of the horrors he writes about. Pike had several jobs before turning his hand to writing. He painted houses, worked in a factory and programmed computers before putting his pen to paper. His hobbies include running, meditating and astronomy - all quite peaceful pastimes for someone who enjoys scaring people, but Pike's work is obviously enriched by his experiences. Computers and astronomy are an integral part of many of his books - just read *See You Later* and *The Eternal Enemy* and you'll realise what I mean. Likewise his factory job proved useful when writing *Road to Nowhere*, a tense gripping thriller and worth a mention simply for the fact that almost all the book is dialogue -

one long-running story as told by two characters.

So far Hodder and Stoughton, Pike's British publishers, have released 24 of his books. Recently the books have been given 'new-look' jackets: jet black with an eerie illustration, an intriguing slogan above Pike's large, embossed foil name, and the book's title in a menacing font. They serve to give the book an adult look which emphasises that they are for the more mature teenager. In fact, many bookstores have placed Pike's books in the adult Horror section alongside such authors as Stephen King and James Herbert whose work a lot of teenagers already enjoy. Pike himself rates King as one of his biggest influences (what new horror writer cannot claim to be influenced by him?) along with Ray Bradbury and Arthur C Clarke, but it's not possible to equate him with any writer. Christopher Pike really has no competition in the adult or teenage Horror genre. Series such as Scholastic's 'Point Horror' and HarperCollins 'Nightmares' just don't deliver the same punch and level of sophistication that Pike's novels do, and as a consequence appeal to a lower age-group than his.

It's impossible to suggest where to start if you haven't read a Christopher Pike novel. With 24 of them available, you have plenty of choice and some are better than others. However, they don't have to be read chronologically or in any special order. Each book is as individual as the characters within their pages. As a diehard fan of the man and his work, I hope I can recommend my own four favourites and say why I like them so much.

Last Act: one of his earlier novels. Melanie Martin is the new girl who suddenly becomes part of an established circle of friends and lands a main role in the school play. On the opening night, tragedy strikes when someone is killed on stage during the performance. Melanie is accused and sets about her own investigation to solve the killing and the mysterious secret that is being kept from her. The appeal of this book for me, was the fact that it's set in an American school for most of the novel. I also sympathised with Melanie; I felt sorry for her being a loner. Yet all through the book I was desperately trying to work out whodunnit. I was surprised and the ending was perhaps the best part of the novel. Watch out for the subtle twist.

Monster: Angela's best friend, Mary, walks into a crowded party and 'blows away' two people. She says they were monsters and, of course, Angela thinks she's crazy. But soon Angela is wishing she'd listened to her friend. They were monsters and there are more of them now. Perhaps more than Angela can stop.

This is Pike's scariest offering and perhaps the one most akin to an adult novel. It features a strong adult-male lead. From the very start Pike grabs the reader and pulls them along for the ride. The story may be considered far-fetched by some, but Pike injects realism that is his and his alone. A brilliant horror story and one of his best books.

Scavenger Hunt: a group of teenagers taking part in a scavenger hunt stumble across an ancient evil that threatens to destroy them if they can't find a way to defeat it. But the evil comes from a very unexpected place.

Another strong horror story, more disturbing than **Monster** in places. It keeps the reader engrossed to the very end and the revelations are shocking, as are some very unexpected parts of the tale. You have been warned.

Master of Murder: Marvin Summer, under a pen name, authors the most popular teenage fiction in America and nobody but himself and his younger sister know who he really is. Or so Marvin thought, but now he's being threatened by an anonymous fan.

This is one of my favourite Pike books, simply because he's obviously put a lot of himself into it, which is why it works so well. The mystery is strong and you really care for all the characters - even the bad ones. If I were forced to suggest one book to introduce a reader to Christopher Pike, it would probably be this.

What of Pike's future? Will he continue with teenage thrillers and horrors? Hopefully, yes. But there is another area of fiction that Pike has entered which is worthy of a mention. His first adult novel, **A Season of Passage**, was published earlier this year and is one of the most striking Horror books I've ever read. It's what his readers have come to expect, but on a scale ten times grander. Very intense, very enthralling and very frightening. It will certainly place him firmly on the adult fiction map.

Christopher Pike is probably one of the most original and exciting authors of teenage fiction this decade. His writing is flawless, his ideas breathtaking and there's a mystique about him that's hard to pinpoint. He knows what his readers want and never fails to deliver.

In short, Christopher Pike is going places fast - if you haven't already, isn't it time you joined him on the ride? ■

Jonathan Weir is 18 and lives in South Wirral. He started a BA Honours course in Journalism at the University of Teesside this October.

The following books mentioned in this article are published by Hodder Headline at £3.99 each:

Bury Me Deep, 0 340 58268 5

Slumber Party, 0 340 52925 3

Chain Letter, 0 340 49909 5

Weekend, 0 340 52927 X

Monster, 0 340 59020 3

See You Later, 0 340 58268 5

The Eternal Enemy, 0 340 60698 3

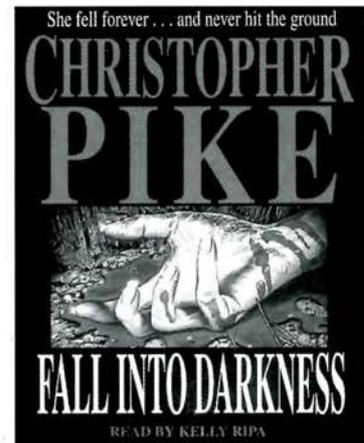
Road to Nowhere, 0 340 59021 1

Last Act, 0 340 50183 9

Scavenger Hunt, 0 340 53037 5

Master of Murder, 0 340 59020 3

His adult novel, **A Season of Passage**, is published by New English Library, 0 450 61021 7, at £4.99.



Fall Into Darkness

Read by Kelly Ripa,

two cassettes, 90 mins, Hodder Headline Audiobooks, £5.99

This audio version of Christopher Pike's **Fall Into Darkness** is, unfortunately, disappointing and one for seriously committed Pike fans only.

Robert Zalisk's abridgement leaves only the bare bones of the story; little of Pike's witty dialogue and intricate prose survives the crossover from page to tape. As a result the characters never seem as real as they should, their motivations less convincing.

The narration is one voice which sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish between characters. However, the narrator, Kelly Ripa, does fuse emotion into her voices effectively in certain scenes.

Despite some exciting moments heightened by music and sound effects, and the fact that it adds a new dimension to Pike's work, **Fall Into Darkness** remains an ultimately unsatisfying conversion of a good book. Read the novel instead.

Audio readings of **Witch** and **Bury Me Deep** are also available.

(Jonathan Weir)

REVIEWS

Reviews of paperback fiction are grouped for convenience under teaching range. Books and children being varied and adaptable we suggest you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendation for use can be found within the review.

Nursery/Infant REVIEWS

I Want To Be

Tony Ross, Picture Lions
(Jul 94), 0 00 664357 4, £4.99



Hilarious and colourful illustrations perfectly complement the Little Princess's innocent and serious need to know 'What is the best way to be?' But there's so much advice to remember and perhaps she's achieved her ambition already? This was a huge hit with 5- and 6-year-olds and really provides humour and relevance for all ages. GR

The Most Obedient Dog in the World

Anita Jeram, Walker
(Jun 94), 0 7445 3134 9, £3.99



When Harry tells his dog to 'sit!' - this paragon of animals does precisely that, through thunder and lightning, hail and snow storms,

through almost unbearable provocation from other dogs, birds and children . . . you name it, he doesn't budge. Just when the temptation becomes intolerable, Harry returns to provide a treat that's a truly fitting reward for the most obedient dog in the world. This story is not only about our canine friend but for the child in each of us who had to wait, not move from the spot, counting the seconds that drag so slowly while our imaginations whirred incessantly . . . JS

A Roar for Stanley

Phil McMyler, ill. Kay Widdowson, Walker
(Aug 94), 0 7445 3163 2, £3.99

The quest for a roar for Stanley, a lion befriended by our young hero and his toy rabbit, leads to a cumulative tale that had the children practically pushing me aside to chorus along with me. That Stanley will find his roar is known from the start but the manner in which it was achieved, well . . . it was very satisfying, we all agreed. Author and illustrator have produced a jolly romp of a book that will surely charm Nursery and Infant classes. JS

Buster's Day

Rod Campbell, Picturemac
(Aug 94), 0 333 61206 X, £3.99

What can one say about this book except, if you know any babies or toddlers, go and buy it for them. A bit of reinforcement on the flaps before you hand it over and you'll be guaranteed high-standing in the child's eyes but maybe a somewhat mixed reception from the parent who has to share it again and again and again! In this flap-book Rod Campbell has really excelled himself for it's about the very thing toddlers enjoy most - finding out what's hidden from view, inside cupboards, fridges and beyond garden gates. A Government Health Warning should be issued with it - Fit Child Locks Before Reading This Book! JS

New BIG Sister

0 7445 3610 3

New BIG House

0 7445 3609 X

Debi Gliori, Walker (Jul 94), £3.99 each

Any initial resistance one might have towards this kind of 'formula book' is instantly dispelled by looking through the eyes of our young narrator as her family face BIG changes - reality it ain't, but charming and reassuring it certainly is! Debi Gliori's illustrations and quirky text are refreshing in their gentle humour and comfortable celebration of the ordinary trials of family life. Her depiction of musical beds in the household as the twins decamp to sleep, like 'starfish', till morning in mum's bed while Dad folds himself up in the bunk bed, will strike a chord with many a bruised and battered parent. JS

Where's That Bus?

Eileen Browne, Walker
(Aug 94), 0 7445 3608 1, £3.99



A lovely book with bold pictures and clear entertaining text which



What can you see in the dresser?

'Flaps Away' in Buster's Day!

contains a cheerful joke. Rabbit and Mole keep getting distracted as they wait for the bus which doesn't come all day . . . unless you, unlike the characters, have been paying attention. Small children loved this and enjoyed the feeling of superiority it gave them. Grown-ups may enjoy the opportunity to point out the importance of Keeping Your Mind On The Job! LW

I Don't Want To!

Sally Grindley, ill. Carol Thompson, Mammoth
(Aug 94), 0 7497 1673 8, £3.99

An ideal book for nervous first-timers at nursery, playgroup or school . . . or, come to that, for old-stagers looking back with superiority or sympathy at their first days. Young James doesn't want to go; once there, he doesn't want to stay. Sitting all alone watching isn't much fun, however, and he finally joins in all the lovely things that long-suffering Miss Jones has ready for him. In the end, of course, he doesn't want to go home. Nicely observed paintings of children and a simple, straight-forward story will make this popular in Early Years classrooms. LW

Infant/Junior REVIEWS

Monster's Terrible Toothache

0 00 664338 8

Monster and Frog Get Fit

0 00 664339 6

Rose Impey, ill. Jonathan Allen, Picture Lions
(Jul 94), £3.99 each

There are four books in this latest series about two animals who are friends. I admire Rose Impey as an excellent writer of humorous stories

for under-9s, but even she cannot avoid the slight feeling of sameness that's creeping into this genre of story. There's a rather boastful and bossy character (Frog in this case) and a slower witted follower character. The former always thinks he can solve the problem but only makes things worse and the latter comes up with the goods in the end for which the other takes the credit. It has an honourable pedigree, from Winnie the Pooh through Frog and Toad and beyond but it is often predictable. However, these are very good of their type, as one would expect from Ms Impey, and the stories have sensible messages

under the fun . . . everyone can find the right keep fit regime if they try and dentists are Good Things. Nice, clear pictures complement the entertaining, straightforward text very well. LW

Hurricane Betsey

Malorie Blackman, ill. Lis Toft, Mammoth (Aug 94), 0 7497 1423 9, £2.99

If you haven't met Betsey Biggalow before, this would be a good book to start with. Betsey gets into trouble for all the typical small girl activities such as being just a little bit light-



fingered with things she finds, falling out with her friend at school and having eyes bigger than her belly. The title story sets Betsey's life in its context of the Caribbean, but small children everywhere will identify with her and her family as they try to

sort out her enthusiasm and problems. Nicely judged both for reading aloud and for early fluent readers, this will be a good addition to a class 'chapter book' collection. **LW**

Dear Bear

Joanna Harrison, Picture Lions (Jun 94),
0 00 664361 2, £3.99



Any adult with a child who has a fear of creatures in the dark would get inspiration for dealing with it from this delightful picture book. Katie is convinced there's a ferocious bear under the stairs and is in danger of becoming obsessed by her fear. She writes a letter to him and this begins an entertaining correspondence which has a happy and clever ending. Lively, colourful pictures and well-told story complement each other beautifully. **LW**

You're a Hero, Daley B!

Jon Blake, ill. Axel Scheffler, Walker (Jul 94),
0 7445 3158 6, £3.99

A highly entertaining tale about a rabbit with an identity crisis. Who is he? Why is he here? What should he eat? Why are his feet so big? Haven't we all had sleepless nights over questions such as these? If only all our problems could be resolved as successfully as Daley B's are, or with such panache. You and your children will enjoy this with equal satisfaction and amusement. **LW**

The Snow Maze

Jan Mark, ill. Jan Ormerod, Walker 'Sprinters' (Jul 94),
0 7445 3092 X, £2.99



When Joe finds a key in the long grass on his way to school, his friend Irum suggests it might be magic. 'Perhaps it will open the lonely gate,' she says. That evening Joe puts the key in the lock and the gate creaks open to reveal a magic path that only he can see. Everyone laughs when he talks of the maze, except Irum who believes in, and soon shares, her friend's magical discovery. Joe wants the others to believe his story but he wants to keep his maze a secret too...

A fine piece of writing for those just

going solo; do bring it to the notice of your newly independent readers. **JB**

The Princess and the Frog

Jonathan Langley, Picture Lions (Aug 94),
0 00 664396 5, £4.99

A red-headed Princess Ivy reluctantly makes promises to a bright green talking frog who retrieves her favourite ball from the bottom of his pond. Sharing her food and drink with him is bad enough but giving him a goodnight kiss is almost too much. This retelling of the well-known fairy tale has the predictable happy ending and is amusingly interpreted and illustrated. The large format and invitingly presented text makes this book ideal for solo reading. **JB**

Animal Stories

Compiled by Julia Eccleshare, ill. Wendy Smith, Orchard (Jun 94),
1 85213 664 2, £5.99

In this collection of 13 animal stories, popular traditional tales are set alongside new offerings by authors such as Dick King-Smith, James Reeves and Terry Jones. Each inclusion reflects the high quality of writing available to young listeners and every one is colourfully and amusingly illustrated. All in all this is a very satisfying book; add it to the stock of anyone who reads aloud to under-7s. **JB**

Grandpa Chatterji

Jamila Gavin, ill. Mei-Yim Low, Mammoth (Jul 94),
0 7497 1716 5, £2.99

Neetu and her younger brother, Sanjay, anticipate Grandpa Chatterji's arrival from Calcutta somewhat apprehensively. Will he be like Grandpa Leicester who disapproves of Neetu's jeans, mum's job and tells chatterbox Sanjay sternly 'I don't like little boys who interrupt', they wonder. But Grandpa Chatterji, who comes with no luggage other than his bedroll, is altogether different and it's not long before even Grandpa Leicester warms to his winning ways, not to mention his expert culinary skills.

Five vividly told stories into which are woven numerous aspects of Indian culture offering ideal starting points for discussion and exploration. Share with 6-8s and then let the more confident readers savour the riches for themselves. **JB**

Horse Pie

Dick King-Smith, ill. Valerie Littlewood, Young Corgi (Jul 94), 0 552 52785 8,
£2.50

When Jenny the little grey donkey retires to the Old Horses' Home, she's not received kindly by the magnificent horses already in residence there. Yet, despite their hurtful treatment, she retains her 'kindly' nature and determines to save them from being slaughtered and made into 'Horse Pie'.

This is a well-written, warmly sensitive and entertaining tale with a lovely ending. Destined to become a firm favourite. **GR**

Cric Crac

Grace Hallworth, ill. Mei-Yim Low, Mammoth (Jul 94), 0 7497 1717 3, £2.99

A rich assortment of traditional tales from the Caribbean told in Grace Hallworth's lively, highly professional style which reflects her interest in, and skill at, storytelling as both a craft and an art. If you share stories with children and it's not on your bookshelf already, make sure you get a copy now. **JB**

The Princess Trick

Alexander McCall Smith, Young Puffin (Apr 94),
0 14 036596 6, £3.25



Katy and Bella's tenth birthday present from Uncle Ted is certainly a surprise - or rather two surprises in one. The first is in the shape of their princess outfits, but next day comes an even bigger one when the identity of their escort, Captain Bunting, is revealed. Enjoyable solo reading for younger juniors, though there seems to be something of a mis-match between the age of the girls and that of the target audience for this book. **JB**

Haddock

Jan Mark, ill. Fiona Moodie, Simon & Schuster (Jul 94), 0 7500 1445 8, £3.99

The 6- and 7-year-olds with whom I read this were really indignant at Mermaid's treatment of Haddock and obviously amazed at the inexorable totality of Haddock's love for her. The children enjoyed this story and have asked for it several times since, yet older readers would appreciate more fully the humour in Jan Mark's direct reporting style. A memorable book with distinctive illustrations. **GR**

Charlie the Champion Liar

Hazel Townson, ill. Philippe Dupasquier, Mammoth (Aug 94),
0 7497 1720 3, £2.99

Disaster Bag

Hazel Townson, ill. David McKee, Andersen (Aug 94),
0 86264 524 7, £2.99

Two of Townson's best. Colin Laird's Disaster Bag survival kit is his means of facing the world with any degree of confidence. The bag is actually home to a disaster-causing device which mistakenly finds its way into Moorscale Atomic Energy Establishment so that a worn-out-with-worry Colin finally adopts a little optimism and admits 'You can't go round feeling scared to death all the time.'

Likewise in *Charlie the Champion Liar*, a worn-out-with-lying Charlie

is hugely relieved when his lies can cease. It's a credible and sensitively written tale of Charlie's need to impress others, which, of course, he finally does after much self-inflicted pain by telling the truth and saying sorry. **GR**

Hurray for Monty Ray!

Sam McBratney, ill. Robert Bartelt, Simon & Schuster (Jul 94), 0 7500 1495 4, £3.50

It's a real problem for Monty Ray that baby brother 'Lamb Chop' is still without a name, especially when Myrtle Stackpole, the class creep and clever-clogs, finds out and won't stop making fun. However, the fifth boy of the family is eventually named and taking 'rotten old burned toast' to school isn't as strange as Myrtle presumes. After a worrying time, Monty can relax. The bold print is interspersed with clear and often coloured illustrations on every page. 7-year-olds enjoyed this and established readers will read it for themselves. **GR**

Will There Be Polar Bears?

Julia Jarman, ill. Priscilla Lamont, Mammoth (Jul 94), 0 7497 1624 X, £3.99

Sam's 'Great' - and therefore very special - Aunt Addie must live near the North Pole if she lives 'up north' (which his penguin will like because of the polar bears) and that will make travelling easier for Father Christmas and the reindeer... Indeed Christmas is very special and definitely different for Sam this year but not exactly in the way he imagines. Full of credible anticipation and attention to detail, this gently captures the imagination of 5- and 6-year-olds (with whom I read it) so they really do enjoy a magical experience. The book is beautifully enhanced by Priscilla Lamont's warmly sensitive illustrations. **GR**

My Little Brother

Debi Gliori, Walker (Jul 94),
0 7445 3612 X, £3.99



In this book Debi Gliori seems to move up a gear! We have real emotions as an exasperated older sister tries all sorts of ways to get rid of her shadow of a little brother. When it seems as though the use of her mother's vanishing cream (that took some explaining - does anyone use vanishing cream any more?) has done the trick, we share her mounting panic as she searches the house to find him. Debi Gliori uses every device at her disposal to build suspense. Her clever arrangement of

text and pictures and her double-page spread of his imagined fate were pored over again and again, as was the delightful ending. JS

Buster

Linda Jennings, ill.
Catherine Walters, Picture
Corgi (Jul 94), 0 552 52796 3,
£2.99

This is a well-written story with an important message – a pet is a responsibility for life. But teachers need to be prepared... there will be some children who'll be very distressed by this book – Use It With Care! Buster does find a good home

in the end, but his bewilderment and distress as he's dumped beside a busy road is heart-rending for any adult – for children it can be devastating. JS

I Spy Animals in Art

Devised and selected by
Lucy Micklethwait, Collins
(Jul 94), 0 00 664407 4, £6.99

The third in this magnificent series of books on quality paper using wonderfully accurate reproductions of fine art masters as counting, alphabet and now 'I spy' material. The variety of painting styles here is breathtaking and the games on each



Detail from 'The Poultry Yard' by Jan Steen, from *I Spy Animals in Art*.

double-page spread get progressively more difficult as you go through the book. Ideal for sharing with a small group, the print is large to the point of enormous. Yet, I can see 15-year-olds enjoying the fun and then appreciating the art. PH

Count Munch

Michael Salmon, Picture
Puffin (May 94),
0 14 054426 7, £3.99

You may think you're a chocoholic, but you cannot possibly compete with Count Munch, the Vampire who loves chocolate. The whole story positively reeks of the stuff and there's a distinct danger of feeling quite queasy. This is good fun, though, and younger juniors will enjoy it for its sly humour and satisfying (in all senses) ending... if it is an ending... which solves the problem of the Tiblar Village by-pass. LW

Junior/Middle REVIEWS

Jolly Roger

Colin McNaughton, Walker
'Sprinters' (Jul 94),
0 7445 3173 X, £2.99

You can't read this without laughing aloud. Miserable 'Jolly' Roger is miserably engrossed in 'pretending to slice up his (equally miserable) Mum like a salami' when he's kidnapped by Captain Abdul the Skinhead and his crew of pirates. However, they're sympathetic to their 'soap-stinking', 'scab' of a captive for 'it ain't right for a lad to be brought up so clean' and all but Roger and 'Cookee' set out at speed to teach his Mum a lesson. Things take a different turn and Cookee's 'bang on the nut' leads to a reunion and an unexpected smile. Brilliant! 9- and 10-year-olds loved it. GR

The Fright

1 85213 658 8

Who's Talking?

1 85213 659 6

Jean Ure, ill. Susan
Hellard, Orchard
'Readalones' (Jul 94),
£2.99 each

Contemporary urban school stories set in Woodside Juniors. In *The Fright* a new girl joins Class 5 and at first everyone is highly amused by her antics, everyone that is except loner Catherine who longs to make friends with her but 'is far too turned in' as her mother puts it. Catherine's efforts to copy Suzanne's crazy ways and win approval misfire badly but finally the two girls come to a new understanding when they start writing together.

In *Who's Talking?* a strict supply teacher wrongly accuses chatterbox Sophie of talking in a test and, after near disaster, this results in Sophie and the culprit, Pavindra, forming a bond between them.

There are a number of thought-provoking points for exploration at the end of each story. I can see these and the other Woodside School titles in this 'Readalones' series becoming popular with readers of around the same age as the members of Class 5 (8/9). JB

Naughtiest Stories

Compiled by Barbara
Ireson, ill. Tony Ross, Red
Fox (Aug 94), 0 09 929901 1,
£2.50

Stories about naughty children are always fun, naughtier stories are better and these *naughtiest* stories are the best yet. 11 short tales by well-loved authors who convince us that the sole aim in a child's life is to be as obnoxious as possible. Horrifying adults involved in a read-aloud of what life might be like if 'they' marshalled their forces and giving thousands of evil ideas to children everywhere. Perhaps this one should have a Government Health Warning, too... PH

The Scribblers of Scumbagg School

Wes Magee, ill. Tony
Blundell, Orchard
'Readalones' (Jul 94),
1 85213 510 7, £2.99

A delicious blend of rhyme and prose that lifts this very funny story of Scumbagg School and its cartoon-type staff into the mega-league for giggles. A snowy day always causes chaos but here we're talking serious mayhem – teachers with punderful names and a discipline policy that would have OFSTED reeling. PH

Jonah, a Whale of a Tale

John Ryan, Lion Publishing
(Sept 94), 0 7459 3033 6,
£3.99

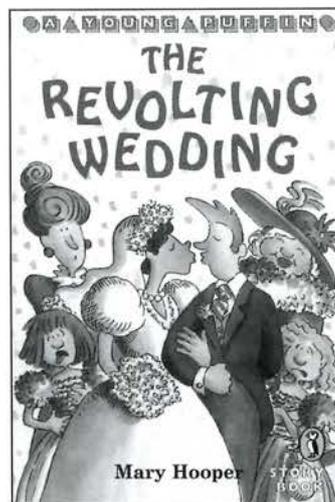
With more than a touch of his other hero, Captain Pugwash, John Ryan's Uncle Jonah tells a story from his youth and his dreadful experience inside the whale. Re-told in everyday language we hear again the dire consequence Jonah endures when he disobeys God and runs away. The illustrations are in bright colours and the lashing storm fairly splashes off the page. I loved the perspective in the whale's insides too, a funny diet he must have had. A good read, and it's the 'What me, God?' element that charms us all. PH

The Animal Parade

Selected and written by
Dick King-Smith, ill.
Jocelyn Wild, Mammoth
(Aug 94), 0 7497 1960 5, £4.99

A lovely collection of fables, extracts from stories and cautionary verses about animal comings and goings, 'beings' and 'doings'. A note of originality in the author's gorgeous rewrites of Aesop, which I loved, gave us a moment to reflect upon our demands upon the animal world.

The tale that made me laugh out loud on a cold Thursday morning was from *Harry's Mad*, one of Dick King-Smith's own contributions. The very last line is astounding! PH



The Revolting Wedding

Mary Hooper, ill. Katinka
Kew, Young Puffin
(May 94), 0 14 036395 5,
£3.25

This is a sequel to *The Revolting Bridesmaid*, a splendid account of feisty Katie's appalled reactions to her big sister's engagement. This new book takes us up to the wedding day. Katie's accelerating disgust at the expensive melodramatics is promptly replaced by dread when she takes a header into the wedding cake she's been entrusted to protect, destroying it completely. The rest of the story is a highly entertaining description of her attempts to escape the consequences. Most children will find Katie a very sympathetic character and there are enough examples of authentically grisly adult behaviour to keep us all on her side. GH

Amber Brown is not a crayon

Paula Danziger, ill. Tony
Ross, Young Piper
(Aug 94), 0 330 33143 4, £2.99

Paula Danziger's irrepressible humour bounces through this with such exhausting energy that you can hear her beads jangling. Amber is losing her best friend, Justin,

because his dad has inconveniently got promotion. We go through the torment and the anguish she feels as the time draws near. It seems the only way Amber and Justin can cope is to have a fight. There's hope in the end though but, as with most things, it depends on the two of them cooperating. PH

Billy Pink's Private Detective Agency

Garry Kilworth, Mammoth
(Aug 94), 0 7497 1723 8, £3.50

This is a yarn about a poverty-stricken, quick-thinking and fast-walking lad who makes the most of his chances when a wandering, ghostly spirit attaches itself to him with an offer of tracking down felons. Billy gets rich and earns a reputation for himself meeting, among others, Conan Doyle.

The pace never slackens and it reads a bit like *Boys Own*... but there's no harm in that. It's a fast read that less enthusiastic boy readers ought to latch onto. DB

Wondercrump POETRY

Edited by Jennifer Curry,
ill. Quentin Blake, Red Fox
(Jul 94), 0 09 930328 0, £3.50

Poetry competitions for children are not new – W H Smith's Writing Competition, Cadbury's Poetry Competition, the Pushkin Prizes in Scotland – all wonderful ways of inspiring budding poets. This collection is the first competition from the Roald Dahl Foundation, set up by Dahl's widow to fundraise for charities which help children with problems of literacy, blood disorders and spinal injuries. The collection is an extraordinary one (what's the secret of Halesworth Middle School, I wonder – they never fail to provide a bunch of prize winners in any poetry competition?). The most moving poem for me was Rosanne Flynn's 'Friend' – a poignant and marvellous testimony to friendship with has lasted since schooldays. Having recently come back from my old school's 75th anniversary and met friends not seen for many years, I wondered with astonishment about how a 14-year-old has gained the wisdom and understanding of the timelessness of school friendships. 'I soak in her appearance / her face has aged and changed, / She smiles. / I know she feels it too. / Somewhere we are still dancing.' A

perfect poem from the competition's overall winner. **VB**

Non-stop Nonsense

POETRY

Singapore Style

9971 0 04119

Opus Britannica

9971 0 04127

Stephanie McGurk, EPB
(Jul 94), £5.99 each

Two very unusual collections of poems with detailed black-and-white line drawings. *Singapore Style* came first and reflects the time Stephanie McGurk lived there, drawing on the exotic and unfamiliar fruits and flowers to give a distance

and rarified feel. My favourite, though, brings faraway things right back home with a fresh look at the cash machine called simply 'Magic'. If only!

Opus Britannica continues the theme, but the tone is cool and temperate made magical by more than a dash of gnome and dragon life. It was 'Boy trouble, girl trouble' that made me stop and re-read. Life can be tiresome when you're young. **PH**

My Grandmother's Stories

Adèle Geras, ill. Jael Jordan, Mammoth (Jul 94),
0 7497 1718 1, £2.99

This is a deeply enjoyable collection in the tradition of Jewish storytelling,

in which sensually detailed memories of childhood are used to evoke the folk figures of a whole community history. Grandmother's house is a treasury of niches and relics, each of which generates stories and stories within stories. We visit the wise fools of Chelm, meet venerable sages and troublesome neighbours and see intractable domestic struggles ingeniously resolved. There's a wealth of humour and tenderness here, culminating in one of the most moving ghost stories I've ever read. An invaluable book for everybody who loves to share good stories. **GH**

A Web of Stories

Grace Hallworth, Mammoth (Jul 94),
0 7497 0553 1, £2.99



The spider, whose capacity for arousing both awe and dread makes it an appropriate familiar for human story weavers, is celebrated in a series of tales that range from the light-hearted to the lurid. The transformations of Ananse and Arachne, one comical, one tragic and disturbing, frame lesser known tales from Aztec, African, Christian and Australian Aborigine traditions. The tales are as intriguingly woven, and as distinctive, as the web designs which inspired them. Grace Hallworth vividly expresses a wide range of moods, making this a very versatile book for reading aloud. **GH**

Middle/Secondary REVIEWS

Coming Down to Earth

Susan Price, Lions
(June 94), 0 00 674795 7,
£3.99

After a deceptively conventional opening, with a disaffected child from a pioneer satellite bunking off while on an expedition to the sub-civilised mother planet, Susan Price unleashes a firestorm of imagery and language. Azalin, fleeing from a future determined for her by her oppressively 'sporting' society, becomes involved with a robot who is also discovering the perils of autonomy, and with a group of street performers who live in a lawless ghetto. The authorities' two-faced attempt to recover the fugitives provides a bleak, violent lesson for Azalin, but also a confirmation of her ideals.

Compassion for outcasts, and ferocious anger at the venal, lying hypocrites who oppress them, blazes from every page of this book, giving it vivid contemporary relevance. Don't miss the splendid neologism at the foot of page 133. **GH**

Underrunners

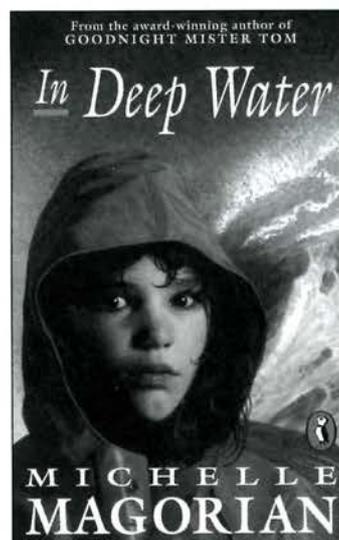
Margaret Mahy, Puffin
(Apr 94), 0 14 034858 1, £3.99

Our lives are underpinned by a complex web of tunnels. Perhaps they're shreds of memory and experience, that find their parallel in the underrunners, formed by soil erosion that shape the fragile landscape where Tris lives with his escapist, romanticist father. When the son's own escapist world is penetrated by the mysterious Winola then nightmare follows closely and so does a coalescence of shadows from his past. This is a quality narrative that commends itself to serious, thoughtful readers. **DB**

In Deep Water

Michelle Magorian, Puffin
(May 94), 0 14 034673 2,
£3.50

Water ingeniously fits into each of the six stories here. The title yarn reads a bit like a Blyton rip-off with dark strangers mysteriously in boats and two intrepid school gals bringing them to book. The tale of the young cox, reviled to dejection by his older crew during the race, but near deified afterwards, is good and 'No



Sweat', where a young lad on a sponsored swim susses out just who the genuine folk are, has deceptive depths... ugh! **DB**

The Writing on the Wall

Terence Copley, ill.
Terence Wakfer, BPC
Wheaton (Aug 94),
1 85175 019 3, £4.95

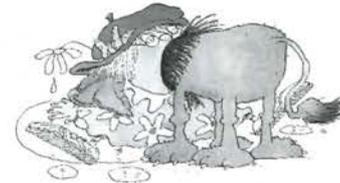
An ingenious way to introduce youngsters to some aspects of Jewish belief and the better known artefacts. The reader becomes a detective and is involved in step-by-step decision-making throughout the investigation. A stranger has written a Hebrew message in perfect Block script on the synagogue wall. Rachel and Simon Levy, the rabbi's children, have engaged the reader as the Quicksolve detective to tackle their problem. The story is fascinating and the organisation of the choices at each stage of the investigation easy to follow. The mystery itself is quite a challenge and I'm sorry to say I didn't do too well in the scoring. **PH**

I Know an Old Lady... a funny sort of joke book

Brough Girling, ill. Arthur Robins, Walker (Jun 94),
0 7445 3157 8, £3.99

Woven cleverly around 'I know an

old lady who swallowed a fly', this slim volume faithfully records every ear-assaulting joke heard in junior classrooms and several dozen more they might not know about yet.



Before you decide your mind might give way under the strain, do sample the illustrations - they're full of bright colour and hilarious details that only become apparent after some really close scrutiny. Look for the spider - the one with the custom-built crutch! Zanier humour will be difficult to find. **PH**

The White Nights of St Petersburg

Geoffrey Trease, Piper
(Sept 94), 0 330 33423 9, £3.50

First published in 1967, this story has a timely relevance with the advent of Perestroika and the opening up of Russian politics. Geoffrey Trease is one of the most accomplished writers of good old-fashioned adventure stories and this one is a classic. In St Petersburg in 1916, an American, Dave, is caught up in the maelstrom of events which culminates in the Russian Revolution. Spies, political intrigue and romance are woven together here by a master storyteller. The book gives a fascinating glimpse of life in St Petersburg before and during the Revolution, and offers an insight into the political situation in Russia which sparked off a catastrophe that echoed round the world. **VB**

The Magic Apostrophe

Jenny Sullivan, Pont
(Jun 94), 1 859 02116 6, £4.95

I was quite spellbound by this lengthy tale of Welsh witch-clan warfare. Jenny Sullivan has written it at such a cracking pace and with such good humour that I was swept along, even though Tan'ith, the feisty narrator, proclaims '... somehow magical things are a lot easier to believe if you have a healthy dollop of Celtic blood galloping through your veins'.

The villains are mostly comic-book but the plot makes up for that and Tan'ith (notice the apostrophe) is tangibly real. I predict a sequel. **DB**

The Iron Woman

Ted Hughes, ill. Andrew Davidson, Faber (Sept 94),
0 571 17163 X, £3.99

In this modern fable the Iron Woman reveals herself to Lucy in all her terrifying hugeness, since she's concerned about the way mankind is be-spoiling the earth. Her revenge is potentially fatal but Lucy, with the help of Hogarth and the Iron Man, plus the tamed Space-Bat-Angel-Dragon, manages to divert disaster into a more healing turn of events.



It's unpredictable and vivid with illustrations that add much to the overall impact. Food for thought and a must in any environment discussion. **DB**

Roundabout

Gene Kemp, Faber
(Sept 94), 0 571 17164 8,
£3.99

Gene Kemp presents nine short stories here with all the expected sharp observation and easy humour that is her usual hallmark. Football internecine feuding gets an airing in 'A Load of Rubbish' and in 'Dawn's First Date' a 'chipmunk in specs' recounts the adventures of her friend with 'a 34C-cup bra and a brain the size of a glass marble'. 'The Girl Who Stayed for Half a Week' is far more serious and reflective and 'The Bully' disturbingly well realised. All in all, worth a library copy. **DB**

The Silence Trap

Gloria Whelan, Lion Publishing (Aug 94), 0 7459 3027 1, £3.50

Clair's mother has just died and her pastor father is preoccupied with his work. In a bid to get his attention, she stops talking. To remedy her problems, her father leaves their well-ordered urban lifestyle to set up a mission in remote mountain country.

At first Clair is afraid of her new environment, but when she's befriended by the worldly-wise Dorrie, fleeing from her alcoholic father, she learns that life can yield rewards at the most unexpected moments. This is an excellent book with a thrilling climax whose quiet humour and shrewd observations are likely to appeal to girls from Year 8 upwards. **VR**

The Giver

Lois Lowry, Lions (Jun 94), 0 00 674828 7, £3.50

Jonas lives in an apparently perfect world, where order and conformity generate happiness. When he's assigned to the Giver in order to receive the memories of the community, he discovers his life has been a careful facade, denying emotions and choices.

His decision to return these memo-

ries to the community and his subsequent flight lead to a thought-provoking ending which matches the remainder of the narrative in linguistic inventiveness and subtlety. **VR**

Shiloh

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, Piper (Jul 94), 0 330 32918 9, £2.99

This Newbery Medal winner tells the simple story of Marty Preston, who rescues a maltreated beagle - Shiloh - from the hands of the notoriously ill-tempered Judd Travers. Marty keeps the dog secretly but then realises he must confront his own dishonesty and barter his time working for Judd in order to possess the dog.

What's so striking about this book is its refusal to take an easy path and its power in revealing that cruelty to human beings is as deep-seated as that to animals. **VR**

The Rope Carrier

Theresa Tomlinson, Walker (Jun 94), 0 7445 3604 9, £3.99

This begins and ends with the last community of rope-makers who lived in a vast underground cave during the late 18th century. When the young Minnie goes to Sheffield to help her sick sister and the family she has married into, the life there is a

sudden and awful contrast. The recreation of these historical worlds is marvellously done. The delicacy of the storytelling and the contemporary engravings are both a delight. It's a beautifully produced book. **AJ**

The House of Rats

Stephen Elboz, Lions (Jun 94), 0 00 674812 0, £3.50

A really quirky plot and Gothic setting which engage you right from the beginning. The 'Master' disappears but the strict regime he's imposed on the children and the household continues until the evil characters attempt to take over. With the help of the strangely human 'rats' the children manage to overcome the baddies in a wonderfully dramatic climax. **AJ**

The Electric Kid

Garry Kilworth, Bantam (Jul 94), 0 553 40656 6, £2.99

Like Ian Strachan's *Throwaways*, poor children have taken to the rubbish dumps at a future time when the gap between the haves and have-nots has dramatically widened. This book relies more on action than ideas, but its lively central characters, Hotwire (a girl with a gift for anything electrical) and Blindboy (with marvellously acute hearing), and its style, which owes much to

Hollywood films (including a wonderful chase scene), will keep many readers engrossed. **AJ**

The Mennymys

Sylvia Waugh, Red Fox (Jul 94), 0 09 930167 9, £2.99

A memorable book which works at many levels. At simplest it's the story of a family of dolls who've managed to keep up the pretence of being human for 40 years until the visit of their new landlord is threatened. The trick in the skill of the storytelling is a joy to experience. A book to work with and think about together. **AJ**

The Place Between**ORIGINAL**

Hugh Scott, Walker (Aug 94), 0 7445 2470 9, £4.99

There are moments in this book where the shift between this world and a strange, parallel world grips you and, like so much good fantasy, teases you with unknown possibilities. The way the other world intrudes is both dramatic and chilling although there are some very interesting touches, including the letter to the Queen which opens the book, and some of the characters and relationships, which seem much more tongue-in-cheek, asking you to read this as just an adventure. **AJ**

Older Readers **REVIEWS**

The Tin Princess

Philip Pullman, Puffin (Apr 94), 0 14 036604 0, £3.99

The fourth of the 'Sally Lockhart' novels with their twists and turns of Victorian plots - in this case a cockney prostitute caught up in the intrigues of a small European state (a setting like *The Prisoner of Zenda*) as a gallant princess. It's full of wonderful intrigue and great scenes of action and, while not the best of the series (sadly leaving Sally herself to a minor role), it's great fun.

This sequence of books is one way of making pre-20th-century literature more accessible - perhaps others could follow Pullman's example and make more use of melodrama. **AJ**

The Cool Boffin

Pete Johnson, Mammoth (Aug 94), 0 7497 1792 0, £3.99

I've always felt like a refugee... I've spent my life either pleasing other people - or dodging them. By the end of this novel clever boy Richard Hodgson, victim of adults' dreams and contemporaries' contempt, has painfully learnt how to be true to himself and take command of his own life. His misguided notion that changing the externals will solve his problems and the scars that he subsequently picks up along the way, form the substance of this robust, very NOW novel for older readers.

Modern youth culture and preoccupations are not given a rosy gloss in this book, which felt a shade over-long to me, but I daresay teenagers will love it and some adults will want to rail against it. **DB**

Letters from the Inside

John Marsden, Pan (Sept 94), 0 330 33293 7, £3.50

Mandy and Tracey are two Australian teenagers who become pen pals, writing about the preoccupations of adolescence. However, things are never what they seem in this epistolary novel as it becomes clear that the 'inside' of the title refers both to internalised values and feelings and, for Tracey, to life behind bars.

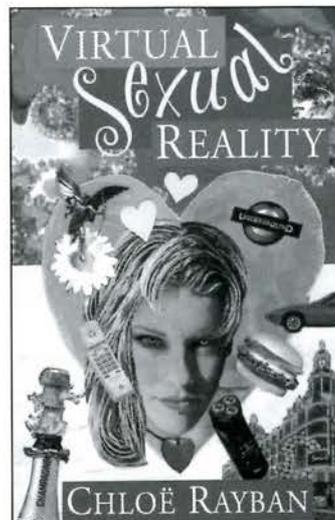
The shocks do not end here: the ending closely resembles Cormier's heart-stopping sting-in-the-tail approach, as the full horror of what has happened to both girls slowly dawns. Make this available to readers in Year 9 upwards: exposure to such masterly storytelling will enrich their own writing and experience. **VR**

White Out

Anthony Masters, Bantam (Jul 94), 0 553 40802 X, £2.99

OK - nail biting - a white knuckle read - gripping - a story to keep you on the edge of your seat. All the usual well-worn clichés. But, for once, they accurately describe this book.

Gerry and David are on an Antarctic expedition during which they hope to retrace the final steps of their fathers, who were killed a year earlier during a similar trip. Masters' descriptions of the icy wastes are truly chilling and the story develops at a cracking pace. Is their leader all that he seems? How did their fathers die? Was it really an accident? An ideal book for tempting the reluctant reader amongst older pupils. Guaranteed to thrill and chill! **VB**

**Virtual Sexual Reality****ORIGINAL**

Chloë Rayban, Bodley Head (Aug 94), 0 370 31876 5, £8.99

Justine is given a fascinating opportunity to see life through the eyes of a boy when a visit to a Virtual Reality Exhibition traps her in an Alternative Reality as 'Jake'.

Stereotypes are confirmed and misconceptions shattered - all within a narrative designed to appeal to young adults, liberally sprinkled with contemporary dialogue. A technicolour cover loudly proclaims the book's message and readers of both sexes will be as intrigued as their teachers and parents at their responses. **VR**

Reviewers in this issue: David Bennett, Jill Bennett, Val Bierman, Pam Harwood, George Hunt, Adrian Jackson, Val Randall, Gill Roberts, Judith Sharman and Liz Waterland.

Plex**ORIGINAL**

Philip Gross, Point (Jul 94), 0 590 54176 5, £5.99

The cover promises a chilling read and the opening chapters offer a taste of horrors to come: *'The thing got a wing out - glistening, more like leather than feathers, then fell back. It was drowning inch by inch. Its head jerked backwards, snapping for air, long jaws clacking shut and open... then it went down.'* Tod and Sly meet Mr Multiplex who has a gift for mixing the 'best of both worlds'. But things start to go wildly wrong when he 'plexes' a dog with a gibbon - and it escapes. The search begins. I found that the promise of a terrifying read never quite materialised, but Plex is a good, undemanding book which will, no doubt, appeal to the horror buffs amongst older children. **VB**

The Song of Gail and Fludd

Philip Gross, Faber (Jun 94), 0 571 16384 X, £4.99

A special kind of book - an exciting story where words and ideas are full of life and its complexity. Abigail and Fludd are on the run from a war, attempting to find peace and also the missing pieces of the mysteries of themselves. Each chapter begins with two torn fragments of parts of three lines: they can, fascinatingly, be read singly, together or as part of a whole. The chapters too are fragments of a journey, linked by the continually reappearing 'disillusionists', Flabberfound and Dumbgast, with damaged people trying to heal themselves in a damaged world. **AJ**

Authorgraph No.89

INTERVIEWED BY GEORGE HUNT

Susan Price lives with her parents in the semi-detached house in which she grew up, on a housing estate above the main road between Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Apart from the magnificent little garden that her parents have created behind it, there is nothing extraordinary about the house at all. But in a study round the back, a room containing a bed, a word-processor, a long-bow, a folklore collection, wall charts of Norwegian phrases, and music shelves featuring Sibelius, Mussorgsky and other northern composers, some of the most astonishing fiction of recent years has been created.

of that country all the winter is one long night, and all that long night long the sky stars glisten in their darkness, and the snow stars glitter in their whiteness, and between the two there hangs a shivering curtain of cold twilight.'

All the children and adults with whom I've discussed this saga have been captivated by its complex dynamics, and by the terrifying beauty of a preternatural world that Susan Price depicts with the same fidelity to physical detail that she devotes to descriptions of the Black Country, the setting for much of the rest of her fiction.

Her roots here are very deep. She speaks with the strong accent of the region, and insists her stories are grounded in its history and geology, the limestone and iron ore and coal and fireclay of a landscape that spawned the industrial revolution, and fed



Susan Price's books comprise works of social realism, Gothic retellings of traditional folk stories and light-hearted tall tales. They also include the award-winning **Ghost Drum** trilogy, a visionary evocation of a frozen Northland, of the tyrants and shamans who struggle for the bodies and souls of its oppressed people, and of the ghostly splendour of the spirit worlds which overlap its borders. The tale and its complements, **Ghost Song** and **Ghost Dance**, are recited in the incantatory rhythms of oral storytelling, embellished with images of disturbing richness:

'In that country the snow falls deep and lies long, lies and freezes until bears can walk on its thick ice. The ice glitters on the snow like white stars in a white sky! In the north

the word hoard of her working-class family.

When she was five, her mother bought her **A Book of Stories that Never Grow Old** from a stall in Dudley market ('a huge book, as big as I was'). Two years later, she fell in love with the **Jungle Books** and Greek mythology before discovering that the Nordic sagas were even more exciting.

'I'm the oldest of four children, so I've been telling stories for as long as I can remember, especially ghost stories, and somewhere along the line somebody told me that people actually got paid for this. I thought "that's what I want to be", but pretended I wanted to be a hairdresser instead, in case people laughed at me. It's not that I ever was discouraged. There was just an idea that it was out of our reach, coming from this sort

of background. By the time I was 14, it dawned on me that all you had to be was good enough, there was no wealth qualification to say that you can or can't be a writer.'

After entering the **Daily Mirror's** children's writing competition for some years, she won it twice in succession – once with a science fantasy, and again with a factually based story of a migrant labourer who brought the devastating 1848 cholera epidemic to the navy camps of the Black Country. Encouraged by this, she sent a novel to the editor of the paper and it found its way to Phyllis Hunt at Faber, who sent back ten pages of daunting, but encouraging, suggestions. The contract for **The Devil's Piper** was signed when she was 16. By the time it was published she had left school, after a rebellious career, without formal qualifications.

'I had no idea of what to do except to carry on writing. I looked around for any old job but it was the 1970s and the Black Country was closing down. I got sacked from a cake shop after two weeks – it wasn't for nicking doughnuts – and spent a long time unemployed. Then I worked for a year in a supermarket humping cartons, got sick of it and moved to a job in a warehouse where they packed things like digital King Arthur clocks and imitation toilets as novelty plant holders.'

This experience gave birth to **Sticks and Stones**, a story about a 16-year-old supermarket worker who longs to be a gardener. West Midlands dialect features both in this story, and in **Twopence a Tub**, also written during this period, an uncompromising account of a doomed coal strike in nineteenth-century Dudley, and of the squalid poverty that inspired it. Disgust with work conditions also played a part in her decision to concentrate on writing.

'I got a job washing dishes and spent three days up to my elbows in filthy water. The waitresses kept chucking dishes into the sink, thick with grease and gravy and mash, and after three days I was sacked for not being fast enough. I thought, to hell with this; people are paying me to write, though not enough, and I'm spending it all on phone calls and interviews and stamps. I packed it in and just wrote. The DHSS cut up about it but I just said, "I'm a writer. This is my job."

Her fascination with folklore deepened, and she began to conduct research into correspondences between the motifs of different traditions. This has led to a series of anthologies in which these motifs are shuffled and strung together on various narrative threads. The punningly titled **Here Lies Price** is a collection of tall tales in which humour and pathos alternate. **Crack a Story** and **Forbidden Doors** are virtuoso displays of storytelling, exhausting and delighting readers with their sheer prodigality of incident:

'The eagle ripped the phoenix, and out of it darted a black raven, streaking away across the blue sky. But the falcon was ready, and swooped on the raven, and it flew no further. The falcon tore the raven and from out of its black feathers flew a small drab sparrow that flew for its life.

But Ivan already had an arrow on his string. He shot, and hit the sparrow, and it tumbled to the earth with an arrow through it. The firebird brought him down to the earth, and Ivan picked up the sparrow's

body and cut the egg from it, the egg that held *The Undying's* life.

And as Ivan held the bloody egg in his hand, *The Undying* came in sight, flying like a storm, shrieking with fear and anger because they had found his life. And Ivan squeezed the egg in his hand, crushed it, and *The Undying* died.'

In the latest of these collections, *Head and Tales*, the thread concerns two children whose father dies in a navy camp while labouring on the canals. His last wish is to have his head cut off and carried back to his home town by the children. As the children travel, the head guides them, reciting stories which enable them to avoid the perils of their journey. In spite of the heart-warming conclusion to the tale, the grisliness of the theme has attracted some criticism, which Susan Price dismisses.

'The image of the head is common in folklore. Mimir's head was preserved by Odin and spoke prophecy. In Celtic mythology you've got King Bran's head which protected Ancient Britain until Arthur dug it up. It's meant to be a symbol of life, not Death.'

The living, speaking, severed head could also serve as an emblem of Price's overall vision, which is driven by paradoxes, incongruities, and the struggle of opposing forces. In many of her books, the mundane world is suddenly invaded by the diabolic: a demon clambers out of a privy, a man-eating fiend follows children home from the supermarket, a schoolgirl discovers she has the power to animate an old fox fur in which blood and



bone have been wrapped. Perhaps the most fundamental of these oppositions is between the desire to struggle for a better world, and the desire to succumb to the inevitability of decay and death. This is the theme which unites the committed, socialist anger of books like *Twopence a Tub* and *From Where I Stand* (an anti-racist novel set in a West Midlands comprehensive) with the fatalistic pessimism of the *Ghost Drum* trilogy.

This saga grew out of her fascination with Russia, and the undying reminiscences of an uncle who had been brought up in Poland. An interest in the Shamanism of Lapland, and in the 'hedge-witchcraft' which thrived in the Black Country within living memory, were also inspirations.

'I started to get obsessed with images of land

permanently snow bound. I knew there was going to be magic in the story, a lot of beautiful things and a lot of frightening, terrible things, a mad Czar and a young witch, but it took me three years to get the story down after that first vision of growling ice, darkness and bright colours.'

In saying this, she takes down from the shelf a ghost drum – souvenir of a journey to Lapland. She shows me the symbols to which a bone or ring placed on the drum will migrate when the drum is beaten. By reading these symbols, a shaman can communicate with spirits of the Ghost World, mesmerically described in the saga as a land of iron trees and soporific red streams.

Each of the books revolves around a variation of the same moral dilemma: a youthful person is given the choice of becoming a shaman, almost immune from death, or of using their limited powers to try to intercede in the struggle against human misery and ecological decay. The stories are suffused by both compassion and a harrowing sense of futility.

'I'm afraid it goes against the grain with me to be optimistic. It doesn't seem to make sense in the world as it is. The theme of *Ghost Dance* is this push to save the world, and I really wish we could, but when I was writing I thought about this really hard and I don't think it will happen. Concern for whales and so on is a fashion that's going out of fashion. Children in the Third World countries are growing up wanting First World goods, and why shouldn't they? I can't see you're ever going to get everybody to agree in time.'

I mentioned that at the end of *Ghost Dance*, the heroine, Shingebis, looks back on her failure to save the subjects of the Czar from atrocity, a youth from being strung up and

butchered like a hog, the Northlands from ruin. She then undertakes an astonishing feat of redemption, fusing life and death in an apocalyptic climax to the trilogy. Is there a flicker of hope here?

'Possibly, but I'm always wary of attributing deep meanings to my stories. On the one hand, writing stuff like *Ghost Drum* is a matter of hanging on for dear life to a stream of powerful images that seem to be coming from someone else in a part of my head I can't control. On the other, it's a matter of the author as a manipulator, juggling with patterns to make the story work for the audience. I'm never sure how sincere I am when I play with ideas. It's all just words, and the meaning is often less than the pattern.'

Nevertheless, what emerges most strongly from the gloomy strife of much of Price's fiction is a strong belief in the redeeming joy of story. At the end of *Head and Tales*, when the children are home safe, that emblematic severed head is buried beneath the fireplace, at rest, but still listening, because 'by that hearth are always told good stories'. ■

Susan Price's books listed here are published by Faber, unless otherwise stated:

Ghost Drum, 0 571 15340 2, £3.50 pbk

Ghost Song, 0 571 16410 2, £9.99; 0 571 16939 2, £3.99 pbk

Ghost Dance, 0 571 17182 6, £9.99

Sticks and Stones, 0 571 16315 7, £3.99 pbk

Head and Tales, 0 571 16914 7, £9.99

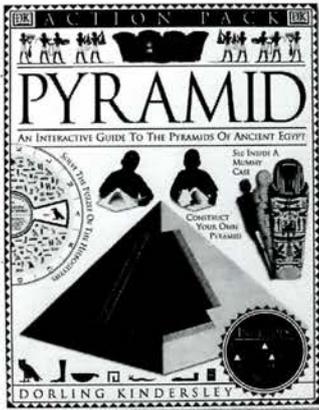
Forbidden Doors, 0 571 16837 X, £3.99 pbk

Crack a Story, 0 571 14136 6, £7.99

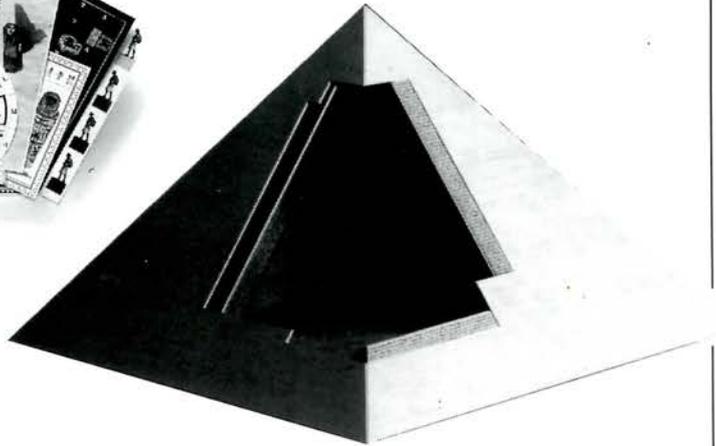
Coming Down to Earth, Collins Lions, 0 00 674795 7, £3.99 pbk

Other titles mentioned in this Authorgraph are now out of print.

MORE THAN JUST A BOOK...

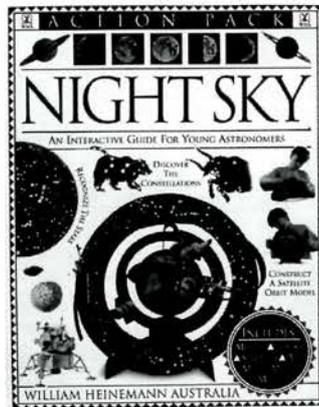


ISBN: 07513 52306



BETTER THAN A GAME...

DK



ISBN: 07513 52292

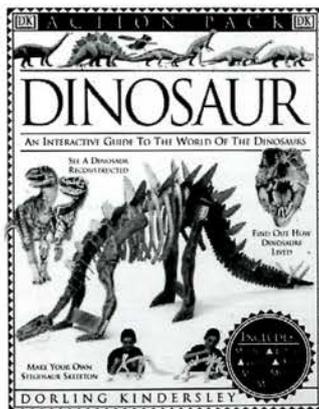


ACTION PACKS

A NEW INTERACTIVE APPROACH TO NON-FICTION

Imagine you're an archaeologist, an astronomer or a palaeontologist...

Open up a DK Action Pack and you will find everything you could possibly need to explore and understand your subject.



ISBN: 07513 52284



There are models to make, wallcharts, flipbooks, decoders, fact cards, games, facsimile documents and much, much more. There's also a 16 page guidebook that shows you exactly how the pack works.

Beautifully designed, carefully constructed and instantly informative, DK Action Packs are an extremely collectable series that no child will want to be without.

Price £12.99 each inc VAT



DORLING KINDERSLEY

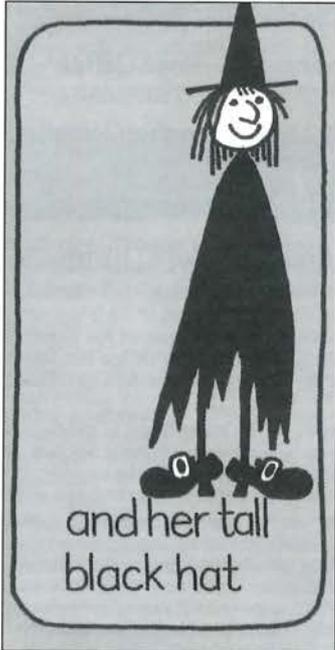
Audio REVIEWS

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent tapes.

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

Meg and Mog

Helen Nicoll and Jan Pieńkowski, read by Maureen Lipman, one cassette with 28-page hbk mini-book, 15 mins, Cover to Cover, £4.99



The four stories *Meg and Mog*, *Meg's Eggs*, *Meg on the Moon* and *Meg at Sea* are included in this really lovely book and cassette package. The tape is distinguished by the startlingly good sound effects which represent the essence of Jan Pieńkowski's illustrations, like the stegosaurus crunching and gulping his way through 100 cabbages, or the spidery tinkling as a spider is added to Meg's cauldron. This cassette is one of Cover to Cover's earliest and best recordings and the book has been produced as an irresistible mini hardback. Tailor-made for the Christmas stocking!

Gruesome Twosome: Pirates and Monsters

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, narrated by Adrian Edmondson and Chris Barrie,

'Two Horrible Tapes', 65 mins, Collins Audio, £4.99

Do you know anyone with big, hairy feet? It might be the Big Foot who carried off a camper in Canada. Do you want to grow into a Werewolf and eat root-bane sandwiches? These tapes packed with advice, facts, rhymes, jokes and fiction are a rollicking good listen with the narrators' witty presentation and lots of extravagantly inventive sound effects. There's a gallery of monsters from Nessie and the Kraken to the molecule mix-up of *The Fly*. Both titles are also available separately as Picture Lion book-and-cassette packages at £5.99 each.

The Enchanted Horse

Magdalen Nabb, read by Anna Massey, one cassette with 95-page pbk, 92 mins, Collins Audio, £5.99

Winner of the 1993 Smarties Young Judges' Prize, this Young Lion book is specially for newly confident readers. Irina has a lonely existence working hard on her parents' isolated farm. Having no brothers, sisters or friends, she lavishes loving care on Bella, the wooden horse she persuades her father to buy from a junk shop. Slowly, the horse comes alive and takes Irina for ecstatic moonlit rides through the snow – until the wild horses entice Bella away. Anna Massey's precise narrative voice conveys the rigours of Irina's life, yet she reserves warmth for the adventures and the happy ending.

The Worst Witch

(60 mins)

The Worst Witch Strikes Again

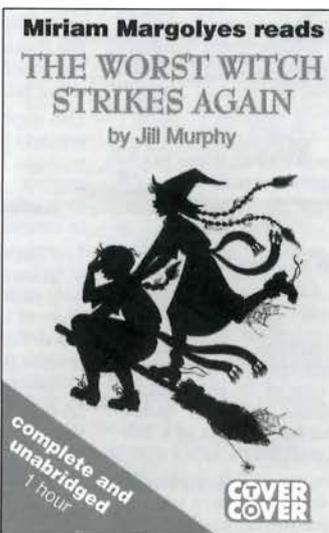
(60 mins)

A Bad Spell for the Worst Witch

(1 hr 20 mins)

Jill Murphy, read by Miriam Margolyes, single cassettes, Cover to Cover, £3.99 each

These cassettes make up a superb Miss Cackle's Academy library – available singly or in a presentation box – ideal to give as a present. All Mildred's escapades are here: uncontrollable broomsticks and kittens, spells and Hallowe'en celebrations that go horribly wrong, and goody-goody Ethel. But these are much more than just readings. Miriam Margolyes creates a whole cast with her immensely energetic and inventive characterisation.



To be released this autumn is *The Worst Witch All at Sea*, the story of Mildred smuggling her cat on a class visit to the seaside.

Vlad the Drac

Ann Jungman, read by Anthony Daniels, two cassettes, 2 hrs 15 mins, Chivers, £11.95 + VAT

Vlad is the baby vegetarian vampire who faints at the sight of blood. Paul and Judy smuggled him home after their holiday in Romania, but keeping him secret isn't easy. He spills ketchup and pretends it's what's left of the milkman; shouts taunts at the football match and Paul gets the blame; he bites Granny and Auntie so the new puppy will be given away. Anthony Daniels creates a credible family and gives Vlad a vivid character, capturing all his moods.

Vlad the Drac Superstar and *Vlad the Drac Returns* are also available.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

R L Stevenson, read by Ian Holm,

two cassettes, 3 hours, CSA Telltapes, £7.99

Released to commemorate 100 years since Stevenson's death, this unabridged reading of the original story, like the *Frankenstein*, is much more rewarding and convincing than all the subsequent retellings

and adaptations. Ian Holm's reading is powerful and conveys Dr Jekyll's searing agony of mind, not merely the horror of the narrative, as he battles with the persona and physical form of Mr Hyde. This original also develops the role of Dr Jekyll's life-long friend, the 'lean, long' lawyer Mr Utterson, who witnesses the slow, terrifying destruction.

Frankenstein

Mary Shelley, read by Richard Pasco, two cassettes, 3 hours, Penguin Audiobooks, £7.99

Raised on crude *Frankenstein* fantasies, older listeners will be fascinated by the abridged original presented here with controlled emotion by Richard Pasco. Its alternative, forgotten title 'The Modern Prometheus' indicates its serious theme: that Man's over-reaching ambition to play God will end in catastrophe. The monstrous being young *Frankenstein* creates is condemned to isolation and misery for which he wreaks terrible vengeance on his creator by killing those innocents whom *Frankenstein* loves. It's a wonderful amalgam of Gothic myths, gripping and moving, and a stunning achievement for a writer in her nineteenth year. ■

The cat walks round and round the tree, treading down the fallen leaves, clanking its golden chain. As it walks one way, it sings songs. As it walks the other, it tells stories. This is one of the stories the cat tells ...



Out Now!

Ghost Dance, the third volume in Susan Price's award-winning *Ghost World* Sequence

Also available, in paperback:

The Ghost Drum and *Ghost Song*

both £3.99 from bookshops everywhere

ff
faber and faber

Non Fiction REVIEWS

Garden spiders are very common.
This is how they spin their webs.



From *Spider Watching*.

I Love Guinea-Pigs

Dick King-Smith, ill. Anita Jeram,
0 7445 2820 8

Spider Watching

Vivian French, ill. Alison Wisenfeld,
0 74452818 6

Walker Books (Read and Wonder series), £7.99 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

A guinea-pig's transparently commonsense attitude to life usually brings out the best in people – not least Dick King-Smith who shares with us some more of his excellent understanding of the nature of animals. He seems merely to ramble on, but we find that, rambling with him, we very soon know a lot more about looking after guinea-pigs, body and soul, than we could find in many a purely instructional book. He perceptively observes, for instance, that a daily diet of hay and pellets is boring not only for the guinea-pig but for its owner too (well, you know what I mean!). Anita Jeram's pictures are a delight.

Spider Watching takes a narrative turn as a young arachnophobe rapidly overcomes her irrational prejudices when introduced to the facts and feats of spiderdom by two cousins whose cobwebs are their pride and joy. Around the story is woven a web of spider information and some nice original observations – spiders aren't the only ones who spin, darn, and catch their food in nets, for instance. Alison Wisenfeld is an illustrator all too rarely met with – her delicate pictures of arachnids and insects dextrously complement the author's text.

The only consistent feature about this 'Read and Wonder' series is the good standard of physical production of its members. Apart from that they're each very individual and different, which is good – series blight is common and pernicious – but it also means that some titles are far better than others. At their best they are full of lightly-imparted wisdom and pleasant humour, all spaciouly and unhurriedly delivered with the author and illustrator in close harmony; amongst recent additions to the series here are two such. TP

Float and Sink

0 7502 1284 5

Light

0 7502 1289 6

Maria Gordon, Wayland (Simple Science series), £6.50 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

It took me ages to understand the Archimedes principle; I don't think I really got the hang of it until I started using a hydrometer for wine-making, by which time I was far from young. So the devotion of close on 30 pages to presenting this most basic of ideas to beginners deserves at least careful scrutiny and – as it turns out – commendation too. For Maria Gordon provides a well organised sequence of notions and experiments introducing the concepts of relative density and specific gravity in easy terms. Particularly useful is the classic plasticine ball/bowl experi-

ment to show that, as she puts it, 'dense things can float if you change their shape'.

This simple way with words is effectively used in *Light* too – for instance 'Light is a sort of energy – we call it energy because it make things happen.' Here we examine various light sources and the rectilinear nature of light waves, and if this is somewhat less entertaining than *Float* it's probably because the brief is intrinsically easier, though the basic tenets are just as valuable.

The texts are abetted throughout by Mike Gordon's pictures; at first glance rather effete-looking, these actually deliver more than they promise and back up salient points very helpfully.

And of course each volume has a couple of pages of text-related 'notes for adults' but these do little to dull the shine of this pleasant duo from a series which also promises *Air and Sound*. TP

Circles and Spheres

0 7502 1285 3

Squares and Cubes

0 7502 1282 9

Sally Morgan, Wayland (The World of Shapes series), £8.50 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

'The World of Shapes' is very much a participation series with the reader encouraged to consider and investigate the ideas presented in text and illustrations.

Beginning with an explanation of the nature of each shape, the text proceeds to an examination of its appearance in the natural and man-made environment, inviting the reader to test statements by carrying out simple activities and exploring shapes in the wide range of colour photographs.

The books are well designed (although the margins of colourful patterns may be an acquired taste) and they each contain a brief bibliography, glossary and index. Strangely the glossary in *Circles and Spheres* includes a definition of Tadpole (though tadpoles are not mentioned in the text and surely need no explanation even for young children).

Their style and approach make both these books particularly valuable for classroom use. GB

Seaside Town

Neil Thomson, Watts (Where I Live series), 0 7496 1594 X, £8.50

JUNIOR

Neil Thomson once again plays the role of amanuensis to perfection in his portrayal of a community seen through the eyes of one of its inhabitants. The seaside town is Brixham, and our 'guide' David Hurford is both owner and skipper of a fishing boat and coxswain of the lifeboat.

His sense of humour permeates a lively and informative text. Brixham, we learn, is a very friendly town where visitors may face delays at checkouts because 'that's where the locals catch up on the gossip'. He also reveals that shopkeepers prefer 'shuffle weather' to hot sun, since it encourages holidaymakers to keep on the move and spend their money.

On a more serious note, current issues and concerns are voiced: the pros and cons of tourism, traffic pressures on a town that was built for access from the sea, unemployment (no longer just a seasonal problem), lack of entertainment facilities for young people, and the dilemma of fishermen needing to make a living without depleting the very fish stocks they rely on.

The end result is a fascinating, affectionate and astute local study presented in an attractive, well-illustrated format. One minor blemish is that our first view of the harbour appears to have been reversed in the printing process. VH

Newspapers

0 7502 1103 2

Post Office

0 7502 1097 4

Philippa Perry and Stephen Gibbs, Wayland (Teamwork series),

£8.50 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Occasionally a new series for children is produced that prompts the question: it's such a good idea, why hasn't it been done before? 'Teamwork' is such a series.

In *Newspapers* we meet the staff of the Coventry Evening Telegraph, while *Post Office* introduces us to workers at the King Edward Sorting Office in London.

Each title focuses on the importance of the individual's input into a team achievement so that we really appreciate what is involved when a letter gets delivered or a newspaper appears on the news-stand.

The work of each team member is briefly described with individuals adding a few words of their own. Sooroojall Sookhras enjoys being a counter clerk because, as he says, 'I get to meet so many people'. George Archer, newspaper photographer, tells us: 'Many people get nervous when they are being photographed. The secret is to make them relax.'

Each section has a 'Fact File' box of interesting information: we learn for example that the paper used for stamps is made from replanted Eucalyptus trees and that 'without advertising, daily papers would cost three times as much'. But the strength of this series lies in its emphasis on the way a team works together rather than in its cumulation of interesting bits of data. GB

The Bayeux Tapestry

Norman Denny and Josephine Filmer-Sankey, Collins, 0 00 195058 4, £9.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

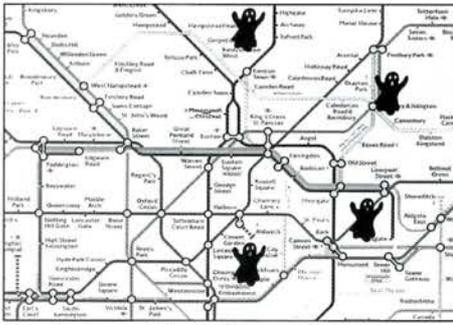
This is a welcome reprint of a title which first appeared in 1966 to mark the 900th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings. It says much for its enduring qualities that it can still hold its own amongst more recent publications.

The tapestry is reproduced in full colour in its entirety in a volume measuring 10 x 8.5 inches without any diminution of its stunning visual impact. Every detail can be clearly seen – a tribute to modern production methods and the expertise of the original embroiderers!

The authors have cleverly divided up 'the greatest strip cartoon known to us' so that it can be enjoyed by a wide age range. On each page or spread a few lines of uncomplicated prose enable young readers to follow the story, whilst accompanying paragraphs provide just enough background detail to enhance our understanding of events.

Budding historians are also gently reminded that the tale is told from a Norman perspective, that many incidents which occurred over days or weeks are often compressed into one scene, that some explanations are partly guesswork, and that there is continuing speculation about which figure depicts the death of Harold.

Perceptive readers might deliberate on the role of chance in this, as in so many great historical events. If the weather had been different we might never have had 1066 and all that! VH



Ghostly sites on the Underground, from . . .

The London Bus and Tube Book

Nicola Baxter, Hodder and Stoughton
(in association with London Transport), 0 340 60582 0, £4.99 pbk
JUNIOR/SECONDARY

Produced to celebrate 60 years of public transport in London (the London Passenger Transport Board, later London Transport, was formed in 1933) this is a good dual-purpose book – useful for the school project on transport and a valuable source of information for the transport enthusiast.

London Transport's history and development, its current provision and role in London life are the central themes; there are also useful asides on design and advertising. The style is lively and presentation bright but page layout is sometimes confusing (although this is a minor disadvantage where information consists of brief snippets which can be readily understood in isolation).

The book's appeal to the enthusiast lies mainly in its wealth of fascinating detail. Did you know that teams of 'fluffers' clean the tube by hand at night, and that an aircraft factory was located in the tunnels during World War II? GB

Balls, Bangs and Flashes

1 85602 125 4

Germs, Jabs and Laughing Gas

1 85602 124 6

Meredith Hooper

Whirrs, Watts and Whooshes

1 85602 126 2

Angela Royston, David Bennett
Books (Pioneer series), £3.99 each pbk
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

All my early science teachers insisted that we write up every experiment we did, however trivial. Tedious though this seemed at the time it was very proper, for, of course, at least half of scientific research and discovery consists of communicating the results – which is why scientific journals achieve such respect and longevity. So how pleasant it is to find in each of Meredith Hooper's spirited accounts of milestones in scientific progress a little bit entitled 'How do we know?' Here we find out about the private publications (Jenner, John Snow), letters (Malpighi, Priestly), reports by contemporary observers (Guericke), and magazine articles (Newton, Pasteur) that made the discoveries known.

Germs is about important medical firsts and ranges from Vesalius to penicillin. Balls deals with famous experiments and the importance of the resulting findings. Hooper writes with a humorous touch – though not at the expense of accuracy – and never lets us forget that scientists are people and that science is a pre-eminently human activity, not something that just happens.

Angela Royston writes about what some experiments and discoveries lead to – inventions. To some extent those inventions which have become household words are self-documenting and so the absence of a 'How do we know?' feature is less crucial, especially as she leads with Gutenberg whose invention sped the circulation of scientific news no end.

There are plenty of little laughs in this trio – Edison's abortive attempts at flight by fart-power and Ben Franklin knocking himself out trying to find out how much electricity would stun a turkey – further enhanced by Izhar Cohen's illustrations (especially good on the covers) which are full of relevant life. Format is slim paperback and price

within individual pocket-range; the publishers are to be congratulated on an attractive and good-value package. TP

The Most Amazing Pop-Up Science Book

Jay Young in assoc. with the Science Museum, Watts, 0 7496 1481 1, £14.99
MIDDLE/SECONDARY/ADULT

Normally I run a mile from gimmick books, but this one, round which the publishers seem to be building a massive media plug, has me quite engaged. It's an exploration of various physical phenomena with working models to demonstrate them – one to each of seven spreads.

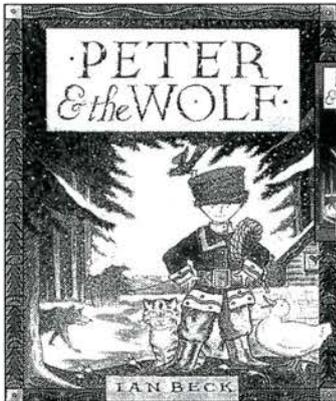
So, for instance, the opening devoted to photography has, central to it, a pop-up camera obscura through which I can observe the sheep upside down on the hill opposite (which is upside down too). Surrounding this are little capsules about Daguerre and Fox Talbot, Muybridge, the structure of the eye, apertures and exposures, camcorders and polaroid film. Similarly a pop-up sundial dominates the time section, a distorting mirror and kaleidoscope front a light and colour feature and the hole in the back cover is in fact the peep-hole of a what-the-butler-sawroscope which lets me see the sheep right way up as I pretend to read more optical information. And there's a microscope and a compass, but perhaps most impressively the book contains its own gramophone. Fold out the stylus-bearing cardboard pickup/resonator to engage with the grooves on the plastic disc. Push the disc round with your finger and hear a recently recorded cover version of T A Edison's original chartbuster 'Mary had a little lamb'.

So, it's a gimmick all right, on time for Christmas, and at a little over £2 per spread it's a bit expensive. But the engineering is simple enough to suggest durability and the devices do actually work very well. Probably not a library book but definitely one to amaze your friends. TP

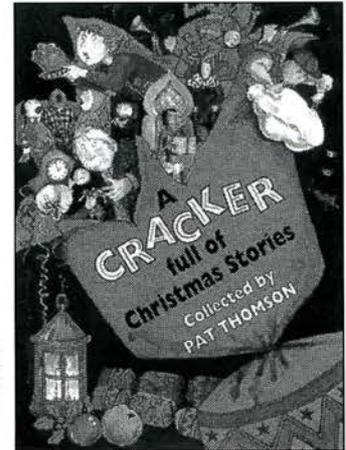
Non Fiction Reviewers: Geoff Brown, Vee Holliday and Ted Percy. Non Fiction Reviews Editor: Eleanor von Schweinitz.

<i>All about...</i>	<i>the principal children's library supplier</i>	<i>All about...</i>	
Primary to Secondary	 <p>for Schools & Libraries</p> <p>Peters LIBRARY SERVICE</p> <p>Sponsors of the LA Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Awards</p>	Showroom	
Hardbacks/Paperbacks		The Kit Shop	
Servicing		Approvals	
Spoken Word Cassettes		Catalogues on Demand	
Library Furnishings		EDI / On-Line / SIMS	
CD Rom		Events	
Posters		Packington Hall	
Free Delivery		Promotions Packs	
120 Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham, B5 6RL Tel: 021 666 6646 Fax: 021 666 7033			

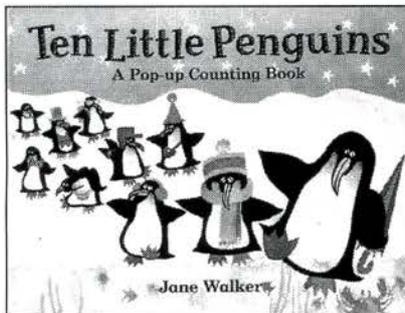
HUNGRY



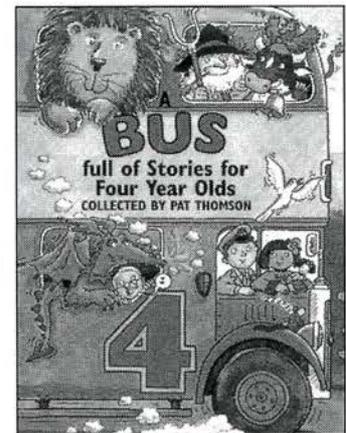
Book **£8.99** 0385 403437
Tape **£3.49** 0552 528099



£8.99 0385 404832



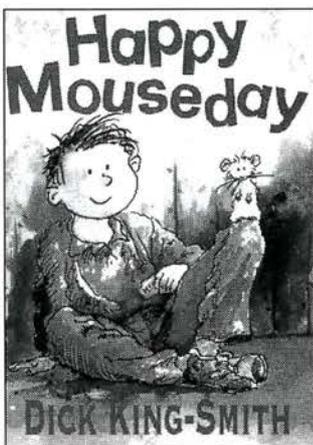
£7.99 0385 404417



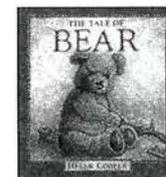
£8.99 0385 405448

FOR A GOOD BOOK?

**KEEP THE WOLF
FROM THE DOOR
WITH THESE FABULOUS
TITLES FOR ALL AGES**

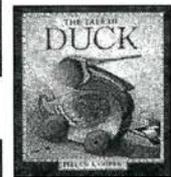


£8.99 0385 405979

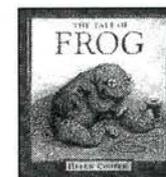


0385 403836

£3.99
Each



0385 403860



0385 403852



0385 403844

Transworld Children's Books
Available from all good bookshops
Main illustration from *Peter and the Wolf* by Ian Beck

Pointless Horror?

Steve Rosson sinks his fangs into a continuing phenomenon

It all started about three years ago with the doyen of the genre, and the one who doesn't get packaged into a series – Christopher Pike. Since then they have spread remorselessly, insidiously across the nation's bookshelves. The teen horror novel is here with a vengeance. With 'Point Horror', 'Terror Academy', 'Horror High' and 'Nightmares', publishers have not been slow to jump on the gravy train and writers like Caroline B Cooney, R L Stine, Richie Tankersley Cusack and Bebe Faas Rice (don't you just love these American names?) are churning them out like there's no tomorrow. Maybe they know something we don't and this particular bubble is about to burst, but given the continued success in the adult market of the likes of Stephen King and Dean Koontz, who these series so obviously attempt to emulate, I wouldn't hold your breath.

The covers, of course, are the initial attraction. Black, black, lots of black with the title, which should be just one or two words, in some lurid metallic colour and in that spidery, jaggedy writing that shouts 'Horror' as soon as you look at it – and for the complete works the title should be slightly embossed. Most of the covers are, in fact, pretty tepid stuff but a few of the 'Point Horror' ones could easily pass muster as grotesque images for Heavy Metal T-shirts.

So, what do you get when you start reading? Well, here I have to make a terrible admission because, try as I might and even with the knowledge that I was being paid to write something half-way sensible about these books, I found it next to impossible to get past about page 50 before flipping to the back to see how what passes for a plot was resolved and then tossing it over the side of the bath in dismay. Much of what I read was instantly forgettable but the bits that have stuck seem to have formed themselves into a jelly-like, amorphous mass which, with a bit of prodding, I can shape into 'The Quick Guide to Teenage Horror Novels'.

We are in a high school in small-town America. This is a world of summer camps and clam bakes, of cheer-leaders and homecoming queens, of straight-A students and starting quarter-backs – but somewhere out there is a raving lunatic with a mission to kill, an old wrong to be avenged. Within the first two chapters we

will have met the main character, her best friend (the main character usually is a 17-year-old girl) and seven or eight of the rest of their group, most of whom are paired up. We'll get plenty of flashbacks or nightmarish premonitions with *heavy use of italics*, and lots of dialogue to keep the story rushing forward. There'll be some rivalry over boys, but any relationships will go no further than a few experimental kisses, and the girl-boy partnership will ultimately defeat the forces of evil in a climactic confrontation in the penultimate chapter, leaving the last few pages

for any tidying-up of loose ends that needs to be done.

That's it then. Cardboard characters (and that's insulting cardboard) acting in banal plots that are riddled with implausibility. Which leaves us with the question: Why Are They So Popular?

The gruesome and macabre has always held a fascination for a large number of kids – I well remember all those years ago on teaching practice a fellow-student telling me the only thing he'd found to keep his classes interested was to do a project on 'The History of Torture'. Ghosts and horror stories have always been high on the list of requests in libraries but the finely wrought and cleverly resolved psychological dramas that have been on offer in the past have usually been a let-down. They've had none of the blood and guts readers have been expecting – and these series seem to offer just that. Whether they deliver is another matter, as I can't see too many kids having nightmares after reading them . . . the quality of the writing is so poor. The one thing that does give cause for concern though is just how many of the murder victims are young women.

These books are essentially undemanding reads; big print, short chapters, one central plot, little description and plenty of action plus, of course, the 'comfort zone' of the series imprint which guarantees that this one will be similar to the last; and surely group dynamics play a part, too, for as the books are passed around amongst friends it really wouldn't do to admit you didn't actually like it very much.

Perhaps the publishers *have* pushed this one a little too far, though, for as I trawled the shelves of Dillons Bookshop in Birmingham I came across 'Point Horror' The Book and T-shirt Pack. For £12.99 you got one of the top-selling titles and the shirt with a reproduction of the cover. The assistant told me they weren't selling very well. It's reassuring to know our teenage readers haven't abandoned *all* their critical faculties.

'Point Horror' are published by Scholastic, 'Terror Academy' are from Mammoth, 'Horror High' come from Boxtree and 'Nightmares' are available from HarperCollins.■

Steve Rosson is a school librarian and a regular reviewer for BfK.



Capturing KONG

Anthony Browne on his new picture book

I've been saying for years that making a picture book is like planning a film, so when I got the idea of turning a film into an illustrated book, it seemed to be a perfectly natural progression. *King Kong* has been one of my favourite films since I saw it at art school many years ago. It was shown alongside Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bête* and a surrealist film by Bunuel, and I've always thought of *King Kong* as a surreal version of *Beauty and the Beast*.

Although the film was made purely to entertain and has no pretensions to Great Art, it is in many ways as personal a statement as anything by Bergman or Fellini. However fantastic and implausible much of the story is based on biographical fact. Carl Denham, the daredevil producer who seeks and finds Kong, is a personality composite of the directors of the film, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack.

They, like Denham, had previously made films in incredibly difficult conditions, and had accepted danger as being part of the job. They, too, sought a beautiful woman to appear in *King Kong* because exhibitors of their previous film, *Chang*, had complained that if the film had only had love interest it would have made twice as much money. Cooper's friend, W. Douglas Burden, had led an expedition to the island of Komodo and was the first to bring back to the US the fabled Komodo Dragons, the world's largest lizards. They died. The character and life of Ann Darrow, the film's heroine, bear many similarities to those of the writer of the screenplay, Ruth Rose. The innovative animation is due to the technical director, Willis O'Brien, who compensated for a life filled with tragedy and disappointment by pouring all his energy and imagination into his work. Those who knew him say that O'Brien was Kong, recognisable on the screen in every gesture and reaction. In the aeroplane that finally kills Kong, the flight commander and observer are played by Cooper and Schoedsack. This unusual piece of casting stemmed from a remark Cooper made to his co-director as they were nearing the end of shooting the film: 'We should kill the sonofabitch ourselves.'

Two years ago I'd been trying to do a book of fairy-tales, and the only story I'd finished was 'Beauty and the Beast'. My editor, Julia MacRae, had been urging me to do a big book, something that wasn't a conventional 32-page picture book, but I decided I wasn't quite ready for such an ambitious project. She then sent me a copy of Michael Foreman's wonderful *War Boy*. This

prompted me to start thinking about a book based on my own childhood, but I soon dismissed that idea and began to think about one based on my father. I was aware that some people think I've given dads a tough time in my books, and my father had lived a short but fascinating life. This project excited me and I began to collect together my memories of him. I can't remember how it happened but somewhere in the middle of this process *King Kong* came along and took over. It wasn't until I'd finished working on the book and was thinking about a dedication that I saw the connection between the two.

I have in the past tried to explain my fascination with gorillas by comparing them to my father. He was a big man and I was a small boy. He was strong and physical, a war hero who was in the Army for much of his working life and encouraged my brother and me to play rugby and to box. Yet he was also artistic and sensitive, and spent a lot of time drawing with us and writing poems. It's the dual nature of Kong which attracts me – the terrifying beast who is, in reality, a gentle beautiful creature. Memories of my father's death have, for me, terrible echoes of Kong's fall from the Empire State Building.



Although the story of a gigantic ape terrorising the population of an island in the Indian Ocean might seem a long way from the experience of a boy growing up in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the book is far more personal than it might appear.

The process of writing and illustrating a picture book is not like writing a short story and then painting some pictures to make it more interesting. Nor is it like painting some pictures and later adding words to make the story clearer. It's much more like planning a film, and the first

thing I always do is to make a storyboard, 32 rectangles filled with indecipherable scribbles that are neither pictures nor words. Changing *King Kong* from a film into a book was a remarkably similar process.

In 1988 I illustrated *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with 44 illustrations and I now wish I'd doubled that number. I was determined this wouldn't happen with *King Kong* so I decided there would be a picture on every page. I wanted the book to be somewhere between picture book and an illustrated novel. I suppose I was looking back to that transitional stage I experienced as a child when it was considered important to grow up into 'proper books', i.e. books without pictures. I think I would have welcomed a book like *King Kong*, and hope other children will now feel the same.

I had already seen the film many times on video, and began work on the book by watching it again with a notebook in one hand and the remote-control in the other. This was the equivalent of the storyboard stage. I would freeze-frame at key moments and these images became the bases for the final illustrations.

At this stage it became clear the book would be 96 pages and I began the difficult task of writing the text. At first, because of the references to 'Beauty and the Beast' in the film, I tried to write in the kind of fairy-tale style I'd previously used in a picture book called *The Tunnel*, but it soon became clear this wouldn't work and I found myself writing in a style more akin to the period and style of the film. *King Kong* had been published as a novel in 1932 and although I've never seen it, I've read a shortened version for children published in the USA, and that proved useful.

The part of making a book I dislike most is preparing a dummy to show my editor. I've been working with Julia MacRae for such a long time now that my dummies have become extremely vague; she understands how I shy away from producing anything that is too finished. But *King Kong* was different. Because the book was so long, there were so many illustrations, and the plot was much more complex than a picture-book, the dummy had to be very carefully worked out. Although I didn't enjoy the process at all, the fact that I'd spent so much time on it and had already solved many of the technical problems helped me to keep my sanity when I later became bogged down working on the endless finished artwork.

The imagery of the film was, of course, a great inspiration, but many of my pictures are not based directly on those of the film. I didn't want to use Fay Wray as the heroine, so I spent many fruitless hours like Carl Denham looking for the face of Beauty. Needless to say I never found her. (You may notice a passing resemblance to a later blonde Hollywood star.) As for Kong himself, it seemed pointless to make him look like an animated model, but part of the power of the film derives from the fact that he has almost human characteristics and is obviously not just a gorilla. I tried to portray him in a slightly more realistic way but at the same time attempting to keep his human attributes.

One of the interesting aspects of the film is the way Kong changes size. Cooper and



'Sad faces, happy faces. But not one of them was the right face, *the face*, for his greatest ever film.'



'It was the face of Beauty.'

Schoedsack selected his proportions to provide the most effective dramatic relationship between him and the actors. That an inordinately big monster is as impersonal as a hurricane has been demonstrated by those dreadful films of the 1960s featuring a 500 foot monster called Godzilla. It was rightly felt that Kong must be thought of as a personality capable of pathetic yearnings rather than as a natural disaster. But when the first tests showing Kong in New York were shown it was quickly realised he was too small. However awesome the giant had looked wrestling with dinosaurs and carrying Fay Wray through the jungle, he was dwarfed by the huge buildings of the city. For the jungle scenes technicians had worked on the scale of one inch = one foot, making Kong appear 18 feet tall. The city scenes were re-shot in a different scale making Kong appear 24 feet high. The producers hoped no one would notice. Even in the city scenes there's a ridiculousness of scale – at one point Kong's hand is big enough to crush a train, at another time it's only large enough to be a magic carpet for the heroine. But these surreal abnormalities actually help to give the film a dream-like quality, and I tried to keep this feeling in the book.

The special effects in the film were revolutionary, but were never allowed to overwhelm the story. The slow opening in New York during the Depression is realistic enough to persuade the audience of the actuality of events, and so the transition from the familiar to the absurd is almost imperceptible. Part of the thrill of doing picture books for me is to use illustrations to do at least half the work – sometimes to let them tell another story or a different aspect of the story. In the slow opening of the book I tried, by the use of significant details, to begin this transition earlier. Because I had only 81 images to tell the story, each picture had to convey



'One plane flew too near, was grabbed and thrown to the ground. But the others circled again and again. Kong was helpless to stop their fire.'

more information than any still from the film.

It was the most exhausting book I've ever worked on. 81 pictures in 18 months seemed like a marathon, and I found it increasingly difficult to keep each one to roughly the same standard. About halfway through the work I was offered the job of illustrating a wonderful novel, *The Daydreamer*, by one of my favourite authors, Ian McEwan. It was a chance too good to miss, so I spent some months painting *King Kong* in colour by day, and *The Daydreamer* in black and white by night. Although it was extremely tiring I think that illustrating the novel actually helped to keep my interest going for *Kong*. It was like being let out of prison for a few hours each evening. (Or do I exaggerate just a little?)

For a long time after finishing *King Kong* I couldn't bear to look at the result. I hated what I'd done. I often have a reaction like that after finishing a book, but this time it was worse than ever. The problem was that I'd spent so long working on the illustrations, all I could see were their faults. I'd look at the pictures through a

mirror, or upside down, or creep up on them and surprise them - anything to try and see them with a fresh eye. It rarely worked. I told anyone who'd listen, 'Never again. I'm going to stick to nice easy 32-page picture books from now on.'

Recently I received a finished copy of the book and forced myself to sit down and read it. I saw the illustrations in their proper context – with the words. It wasn't as bad as I had thought. In fact, I'm just beginning to consider the possibilities of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, or *Tarzan* or *Frankenstein* or . . . any suggestions? ■

Anthony Browne's *King Kong* (from the story conceived by Edgar Wallace and Merian C. Cooper) was published in October by Julia MacRae, 1 85681 258 8, at £12.99.

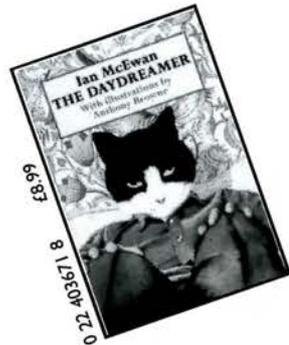
Details of other books mentioned in this article and illustrated by Anthony Browne are:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Walker, 0 7445 3073 3, £8.99 pbk

The Tunnel, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 374 8, £5.95, Walker, 0 7445 1792 3, £3.99 pbk

The Daydreamer by Ian McEwan, Cape, 0 224 03671 8, £8.99

THE DAYDREAMER
Ian McEwan's stunning debut in the field of children's literature.



THE MAN
A new hardback and paperback from this world-famous author.



Whose got the best presents this Christmas?

MARTIN FARRELL
The eagerly awaited new book from Janni Howker.



Random House
Children's Books
of course!



KING KONG
Anthony Browne at his best! The book of the classic film.

Random House Children's Books

THE BODLEY HEAD · JONATHAN CAPE · HUTCHINSON · JULIA MACRAE BOOKS
RED FOX · RIVERSWIFT · TELLASTORY



Val Randall continues our series on favourite books which, sadly, have gone out of print

Ghost in the Water by Edward Chitham was published by Longman Young Books in 1973.

I met Edward Chitham only once – perhaps 12 years ago, on a course devoted to children's literature in schools. I was teaching in a Black Country school: Chitham was a Black Country writer – an unassuming man steeped in the traditions and folklore of his area. He read extracts from *Ghost in the Water* and its potential for classroom use was obvious. To the best of my knowledge it is the only book for children he's ever written; to my sorrow it's now been out of print for several years – despite having been serialised for BBC Children's television. Try as I might I can no longer repair the few remaining copies in the stockroom and so an enthralling thought-provoking book has been lost.

The story is set in the Black Country and begins when Teresa and David, members of their school's Local History Society, discover an intriguing inscription on a gravestone in a local churchyard. *'In Memory of Abigail Parkes. Departed this Life 10th December, 1860. Aged 17. Innocent of All Harm.'*

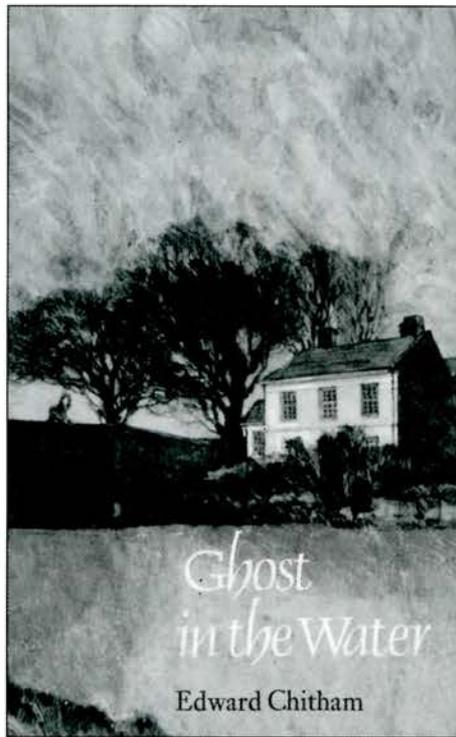
It is this last sentence which excites their curiosity – and the readers'. This is a mystery story and Chitham lays his clues subtly, using chance and coincidence to fashion a dense weave in which Teresa is caught – implored by the ghost of a girl dead for over a century to establish the verity of the bald statement 'Innocent of All Harm'. There are no dramatic spirit manifestations, no bathos, no sensationalism – just a growing awareness that Teresa can watch, like a disembodied cinema-goer, the isolated incidents in Abigail's life which most clearly tell her story.

'It was uncanny to see her there in calm daylight, acting as though it was stormy night time; it seemed as though two films had been superimposed one on the other and were running at the same time, a film of the here and now and a film of Victoria's day.'

Thus two devices move the narrative forward: Teresa's experience of the supernatural and the influence of chance and coincidence. These literary tools are set to work in the opening pages of the book when a sampler in the hallway of Teresa's home is discovered to be the work of Abigail Parkes. This coincidence edges Teresa towards the eventual knowledge that she's related to Abigail, as a visit to her grandmother's house reveals. Strengthened by the conviction that Abigail is guiding her hand, Teresa resolves to discover the truth behind the tombstone inscription:

"I'm determined to know for myself. She means me to know."

Abigail's story is rooted in the mines which ran like warrens beneath the Black Country of Victoria's time. Her father, Henry Parkes, was a wealthy mine owner as harsh and inflexible in



his treatment of family and employees alike. Abigail was to marry a man of her own class, as social convention dictated; when she fell in love with the young miner David Caddick, Parkes was furious – striking him with his horse whip and threatening to fire him. This did not deter the lovers but drove them to meet in secret.

Teresa 'observes' their first meeting as she dozes over a piece of homework, drawn by the intensity of their feelings into the world they occupied over 100 years ago. She is again permitted a glimpse into the past when she hears the pair pledging their love as they exchange tokens and hide them in a tin in the wall of the canal tunnel. This eerie experience is paralleled by the sampler falling from its hook in the hallway and smashing to reveal the imprint of a ring – the one which Abigail and David exchanged in that secret meeting in the tunnel's gloom.

Events now crowd together, giving Teresa further access to the bridge between past and present: her sister is given Abigail's ring by her fiancé; Teresa finds the hidden tin and Abigail makes a mute and urgent appeal, appearing as a reflection in the water of the canal. The inquest report, retrieved from local archives, states that Abigail committed suicide in the canal after learning that David Caddick had died in an accident in Fiery Holes mine. He had in fact survived but Parkes let his daughter believe he'd perished – the cruel Victorian tyrant to the last.

The truth about Abigail's death was hidden in an innocuous statement by an elderly miner, Zachariah Oakley, who saw her leave the bridge:

"I sid th' outline of the wench a-walkin' off'n the bridge then."

Distracted by grief, she had fiddled David's ring from her finger and into the water below. In trying to retrieve it, she had overbalanced and drowned. It is this episode which Teresa sees:

"Hush, oh hush!" I breathed back. And then, my lips barely moving, "It's her."

The poignancy of this moment is achieved, like so much else in the book, through careful understatement and is expertly counterpointed by Teresa's headlong rush into the water to try to save Abigail – over 100 years too late! Teresa survives and Abigail's ghost is laid to rest: innocent of all harm indeed. Teresa's perceptions are irrevocably changed and there is a warning for those who take these matters lightly:

'Abigail was no toy to be played with, no fiction.'

The strength of *Ghost in the Water* is that the familiarity of everyday routines convinces the reader of the validity of the inexplicable. Realism is never overwhelmed by the fantastic, instead it provides a contrast which affirms that something unusual is happening. Since events *are* unusual, they are special – the very heart of the story, the substance which elevates it above the banal. ■

Val Randall is a member of BfK's regular reviewing team. She teaches at a secondary school in Lancashire.

Letters

Sonia Benster of The Children's Bookshop, 37-39 Lidget Street, Lindley, Huddersfield HD3 3JF, writes:

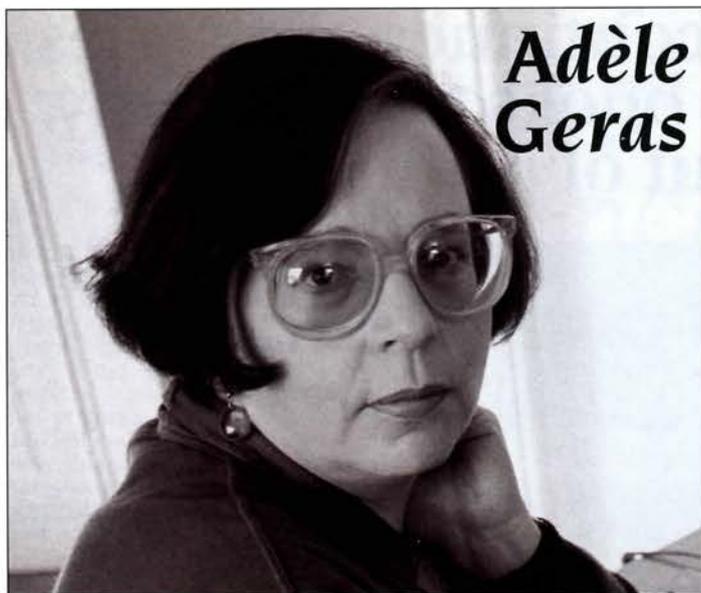
I was interested to read Grace Hallworth's article on *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* which is currently out of print in this country.

This is one of the titles we import from America and currently we have a couple in stock, but can order more, though there is a six-week delivery from the States.

Liz Attenborough of Penguin Books writes:

What a nice piece Grace Hallworth wrote about *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*. I'm sure lots of people will go to their library shelves to re-read the book.

But can I just point out to your readers that publishers don't put books out of print for no reason? Books go out of print because they have ceased to sell – it's as simple as that. All good things come to an end, but there may be times when a sufficient period has elapsed for a reissue of a particular book to prove worthwhile. Anyway, it's always useful to be reminded of the goodies.



Adèle Geras

(Peter Walsh Photography).

GIVING THEM THE CREEPS

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a child in search of a jolly good read turns often to tales of the supernatural.

I have a theory about why this is so. It's because ghost stories are a comfort. Real humans have proved themselves capable of everything. Everywhere you look, there is unhappiness: cruelty, war, torture, pestilence, hunger, poverty, betrayal, sorrow. The Four Horsemen are galloping roughshod through the world. In such a universe, headless coachmen, chain-rattling spectres and transparent nuns are a positive relaxation. There is also an element of safety about a ghost story. At least *this particular thing* isn't happening (could never happen?) to me. Part of the attraction of the ghost story is its un-truth. All fictions are in some sense lies, but the ghost story has the added ingredient of complete impossibility. There, it's out. I don't believe in ghosts. Please, do not write and try to convert me, because although I don't believe in ghosts, I do believe in other things, viz:

I believe that things which have happened in the past cast their shadows over the present and the future.

I believe events that occur in a certain place affect the atmosphere in that place. Everyone has experienced this. There are some houses we are comfortable in and love to visit and others which we are only too glad to leave.

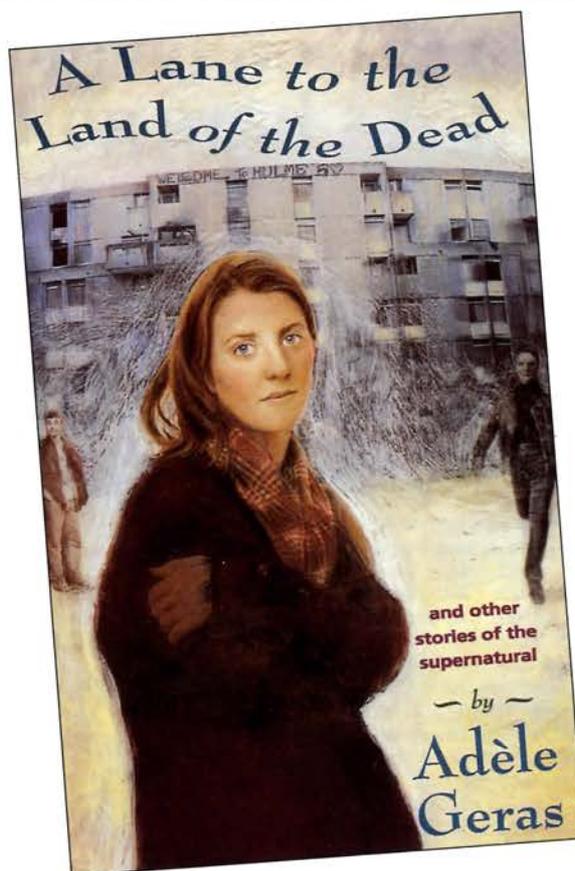
I believe in the boundless strangeness and unpredictability of the human imagination. Scientific advances have shown the brain to be capable of amazing things, and what we *do* know is only a fraction of what we still have to discover.

I also believe in trying to extend the boundaries of the ghost story. Ten years ago, Hamish Hamilton published a collection called **Letters of Fire**. My aim in that book was to release ghosts from their Gothic sets and costumes and relocate them in the modern world. Also, because I have never understood why every single spirit has to be a Baddy, some of my apparitions are very pleasant.

In **A Lane to the Land of the Dead** once again I have a unifying theme. All the stories are set in Manchester, the city and its suburbs. For lazy people like me, locating stories in places you know best means a minimum of research.

What I discovered was this: Manchester is the ideal place for ghost-story writers. The city is seriously haunted by its history as the centre of the Industrial Revolution. The streets are thronged with phantoms: Mrs Gaskell, Friedrich Engels, Charlotte Brontë, John Dalton, L S Lowry, the dead of the Peterloo Massacre, the cotton workers, the mill owners, the rich merchants who built their mansions to the south of the city – oh, they're a classy lot of spectres and no mistake! They also go back a long

Two writers describe their latest books . . .



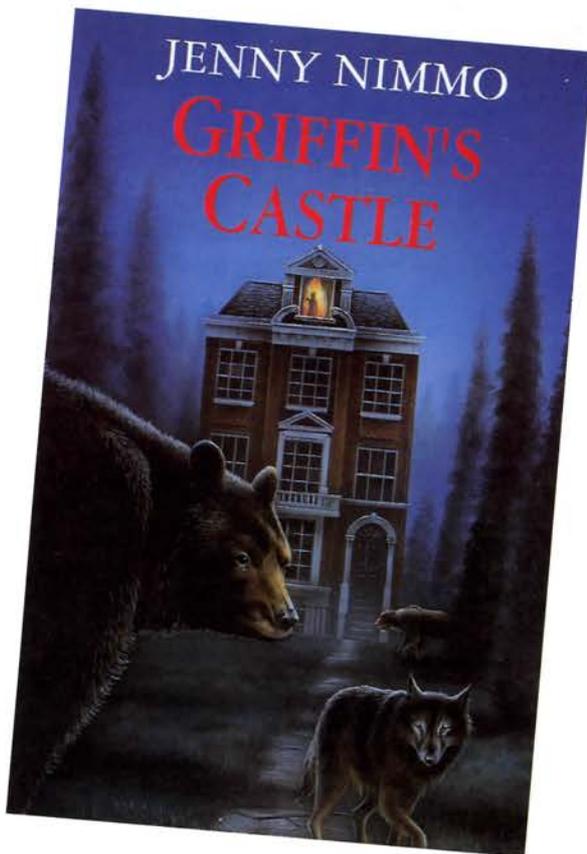
way. On the wall of my local library a blue plaque announces that this was the site of a Royalist camp before the battle of Marston Moor. I've used this information as the basis for one story in the new book, and the others equally have their beginnings in small things. For example, there really was a junk shop called J F Blood. I passed it on bus journeys for more than 20 years, and knew there was a story there somewhere. The derelict crescents of Hulme (now being demolished) have been the background for much that is worse than anything you'll find in a ghost story, and the Arndale Centre, with its lack of real air, just cries out to have some strange things going on in it. Also to be found in **A Lane to the Land of the Dead** are nightclubs, playgroups in church halls, big houses in the suburbs, Affleck's Palace (twice) and assorted bits and pieces of my immediate neighbourhood.

There are, these days, various questions asked about ghost stories. Could they possibly be dangerous for children? Could they *really* terrify? Induce nightmares and psychological traumas? I suppose they could, in some people, because almost anything could. Everyone has his or her particular bugbear, and if a writer happens to tap in to that, it's unfortunate, but I don't know how it could be avoided. At least in my stories you will not find anything truly revolting. Entrails, decaying flesh, disembowellings, evisceration, slimy unspeakable substances, etc, are conspicuous by their absence. Some of the tales, indeed, are positively cheerful ('The Phantom of the Library') and end happily ('Burning Memories'). What I hope everyone will find in them is a creepy atmosphere. I would like to create gooseflesh, raised hairs on the back of the neck, a certain frisson. I should also like to emphasise that these are stories for older children. As all readers of **BfK** know, 'teenage' books are routinely read by much younger children, and I don't think any of my stories will do a younger child any harm, even if she/he *may* not fully understand all of them, at least on first reading.

More than anything, I've tried to bring to each story its own particular architecture and imagery. I'm very keen on narrative having a structure, and even if no one else can see the shape that it is, I know it has one. As a lover of Edgar Allan Poe, M R James, E F Benson and the great stylists of the sinister tale, the other thing I try to do is describe and evoke the setting and the details as well as I can. What I call, in a kind of shorthand, the 'set, costumes and props' of a story are important in every sort of fiction, but in a ghost story they are what makes the difference between the merely routine and the really memorable. ■

Adèle Geras's **A Lane to the Land of the Dead** is published this month by Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 00214 1, at £8.99.

and their own approach to the supernatural



When I was very small I had great need of a ghost; I don't mean an imaginary friend whom I could call up or banish at will, but rather someone who lived in my house, someone I could hear and often glimpse going about their business: a comforting presence. And, perhaps because I believed in him utterly, he was there. We moved house when I was seven and the ghost was left behind.

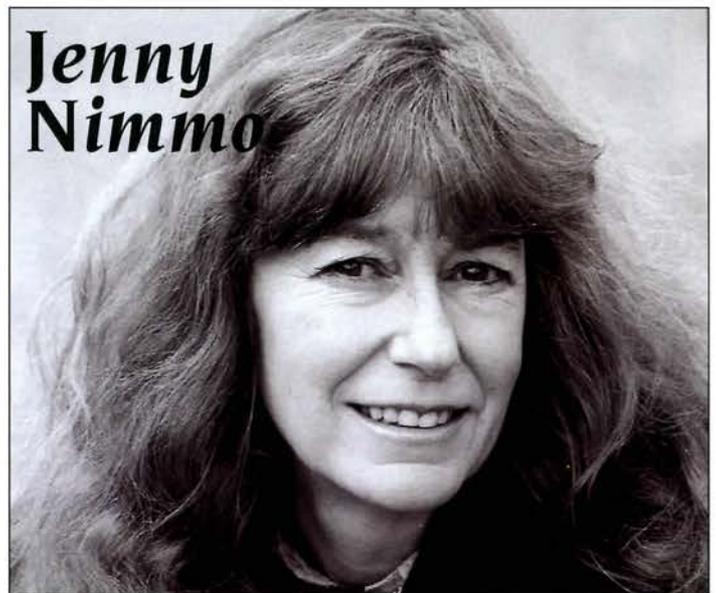
In **Griffin's Castle**, Dinah Jones has need of the supernatural. The real World has been found wanting. Although her mother has never abandoned her, she has been continually uprooted; she has lived in squats, in damp bedsits, in hostels and in care. Dinah is exceptionally gifted, a condition that isolates her as much as a learning difficulty can isolate the children who are struggling to keep up with their peers – not because they are rejected by other children, but rather because there is no shared experience, no level at which they can easily communicate.

In Dinah's case her early maturity is beginning to distance her from her mother. They have reached a stage where they are both aware that their relationship is about to change irrevocably; henceforth they are inevitably bound upon separate courses. The realisation is painful for both of them. To make matters worse they are living in a house that is due for demolition; the floorboards are rotten, the walls crumbling, the electricity supply erratic and dangerous. But Dinah sees the house as it once was, a fine building furnished, curtained and carpeted in gleaming antique colours, a castle to be defended at all costs. At 11 years old she has decided she cannot exist without a place to call her own, a place of safety.

The animals on the wall outside Cardiff Castle are startling to anyone who comes across them for the first time. To someone like me, in search of a story, they were a gift; a perfect link between Dinah and the supernatural. When the stone lioness leaps over the traffic to Dinah, it is a repetition of the flight the animal took in my imagination, in the dusk of a winter's afternoon.

Children often turn to animals for comfort when they feel betrayed and insecure. The presence of a being that accepts them, listens and never censures, is infinitely reassuring. Dinah wants a real animal but as this is impossible she chooses the stone creatures. There they sit, regarding her from the wall, waiting for life. It seems inevitable that she should give it to them.

Three of the fifteen creatures answer Dinah's call: the lioness, a bear and a wolf. The animals, luminous replicas of the stone images, come to



(Photo copyright Katre Vandyck 1993).

BUILDING A CASTLE

inhabit Dinah's garden at night. They are the barrier between her and a World she has ceased to trust. But like many metaphorical walls that desperate people build around themselves, Dinah's animal wall becomes too strong, too real, and she finds she cannot escape from it.

Lonely children are often more sensitive to things running just below the surface of normality. And this is the case with Barry Hughes and Jacob Rose, both of them loners in need of a friend. It's their craving to understand Dinah that plunges them into her mysterious Other-world, the world that her extraordinary energy has conjured up.

It has been said that the supernatural is a ruse, a device to make a story out of a routine event; but I see it as the very fabric of a story. The oldest tales in the World deal with the supernatural. They would not exist without it. The precise meaning of each tale has probably been lost, but we do know that they represent the everlasting human struggle to bring about a better World, the battle between good and evil. They are tales of wonder and imagination and they liberate us from our often troubled existence, and allow us to hope.

Children often receive a bad press these days, but there are thousands who should be applauded for their courage, energy and determination. Dinah is such a child. She became very real for me. Through her I was able to acclaim all those small brave fighters, who deserve better than they get and, if they read **Griffin's Castle**, allow them to hope.

A deep and often neglected human instinct is the wish to belong, to be part of a tribe that we can recognise, to know where we came from. In Dinah, because she's never had a home or been welcomed by her family, the wish to belong becomes overwhelming. Having nothing, she is too proud to accept the hospitality Jacob and Barry offer her, she is searching for something older and deeper, a link with the past, and a place that she can claim as her own.

The greatest bonus for an author, it seems to me, is freedom to choose our protagonists' fate; we can reward, elevate, punish, humiliate and even kill off, should the story require it. I relished the rewarding of Dinah Jones. Perhaps I only built the wall that threatened to extinguish her, in order that I could rescue her. Although she was in thrall of the supernatural, she is saved by a real and predictable event, and it is a real, albeit damaged and forsaken, animal that leads her to the person who we know will keep her safe. So the reader cannot say, 'This happy ending couldn't happen. It's fantasy.' It could. Dinah is rewarded because she is brave, thoughtful and determined – human characteristics that we all possess. ■

Jenny Nimmo's **Griffin's Castle** was published in September by Methuen, 0 416 19141 X, at £9.99.

Great new books from A & C Black

CHILLERS

A new series of thrillers, ghost stories and mysteries for younger readers, with pictures on every page.

Spooked

Philip Wooderson and Jane Cope

The Blob

Tessa Potter and Peter Cottrill

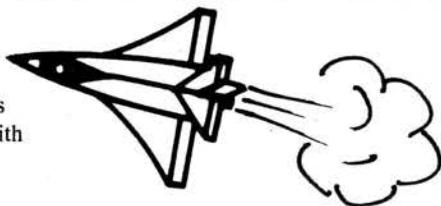
Madam Sizzers

Sarah Garland

Wilf, the Black Hole and the Poisonous Marigold

Hiawyn Oram and Dee Shulman

each book: hardback 7-9 years £5.50



JUMBO JETS

Jumbo Jets combine lively, modern stories and pictures in lots of exciting new ways.

Charlie and Biff

Margaret Ryan and Wendy Smith

Sir Quinton Quest Hunts the Jewel

Kaye Umansky and Judy Brown

each book: hardback 8-10 years £5.50

JETS

Jets are lively, humorous and well-written stories for the child who is just beginning to enjoy reading.

Cutlass Rules the Waves

Robin Kingsland

Monty Ahoy!

Colin West

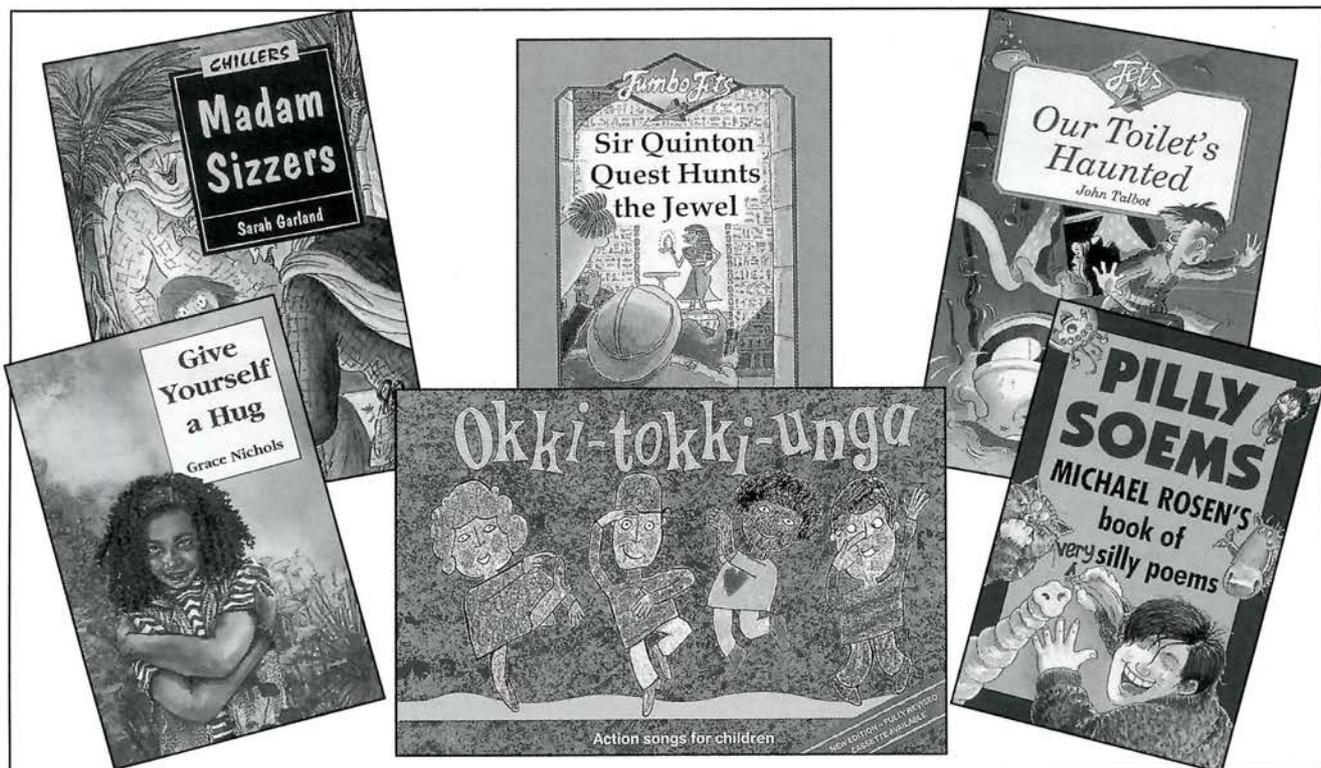
More Dog Trouble

Rose Impey and Jolyne Knox

Our Toilet's Haunted

John Talbot

each book: hardback 6-9 years £5.50



Okki-Tokki Unga

Action songs for young children
Beatrice Harrop, Linda Friend and David McKee

The most popular song book ever, now in an updated, even more user friendly edition, containing 55 favourite songs.
spiral lam card £8.99

Cassettes

The songs from *Okki-Tokki-Unga* are now available in a double cassette pack. Instrument-only versions are on the flip side of each.

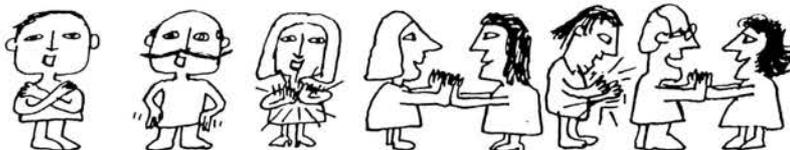
2 x C80 cassettes £9.99 inc VAT

Give Yourself a Hug

Grace Nichols
Illustrated by *Kim Harley*

A rich and varied collection, from one of Britain's best-known women poets.

hardback 8-13 years £7.99



Pilly Soems

Michael Rosen's
book of very silly poems

A sublimely silly collection of poems, guaranteed to make you laugh.

hardback £6.99

Available from bookshops or in case of difficulty contact
A&C Black Publishers, PO Box 19, Huntingdon, Cambs PE19 3SF
tel: (0480) 212666 fax: (0480) 405014

Have Yourself a Very Creepy Christmas...

CHRIS POWLING

As a major contributor to received ideas about the traditional English Christmas, Charles Dickens was well aware that our chief midwinter festival has considerable potential for spookiness. What is *A Christmas Carol*, after all, if not a supreme ghost story?

version, may need a little amplifying for some children but they'll be instantly at home with Tony Ross's illustrations. These weave rich, jaunty variations on Christmas card iconography with a beady eye on both detail and character – differences in dress between the social classes, for instance, or the presentation of Dickens as a vain, actor-ish dandy. Here we have Tony Ross in top form, offsetting the sentimentality of Chesterton's tale with his sharp, sweeping line and deft use of colour but never undermining the story itself.

This is no accident, for the maverick in question is the Tim Burton of *Beetlejuice* and *Edward Scissorhands* fame and a former animator with the Disney Studios. His picture book, now published in Britain, will soon be boosted by the arrival of the full-length big-screen, animated cartoon treatment which took America by storm last year. Such are the *Ghosts of Christmas Present*. If the movie has even half the offbeat flair of this paperback, don't miss it.

Undermining Yule-tide itself, no less, is Tim Burton's aim with *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (Puffin, 0 14 055325 8, £4.99). This depends on one of those single, brilliant ideas that's obvious once someone has thought of it: suppose there was a swop between Christmas and another, very different winter festival?

'Twas late one fall in Hallowe'enland, and the air had quite a chill.

Against the moon a skeleton sat, alone upon a hill.

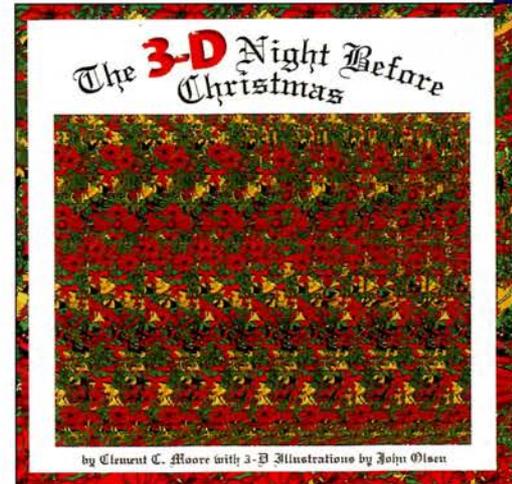
He was tall and thin with a bat-bow tie,

Jack Skellington was his name.

He was tired and bored in Hallowe'enland –

Everything was always the same.'

Er, yes . . . the metre does wobble a bit and so, later on, does the rhyme even with due allowance for transatlantic pronunciation. Once the tale has hit its stride, though, with a send-up of Clement C Moore's well-known poem (surely the most parodied piece in the language) the reader is swept along by the sheer gusto of the enterprise:



What of the picture-book *Ghosts of Christmas Yet to Come*, though? Hard to predict, perhaps . . . but giving us a hint is John Olsen's *The 3-D Night Before Christmas* (Gazelle, 1 8558 6202 6, £5.99). Yes, Clement C Moore yet again, presented straight this time, but accompanied by an entirely fresh set of images.

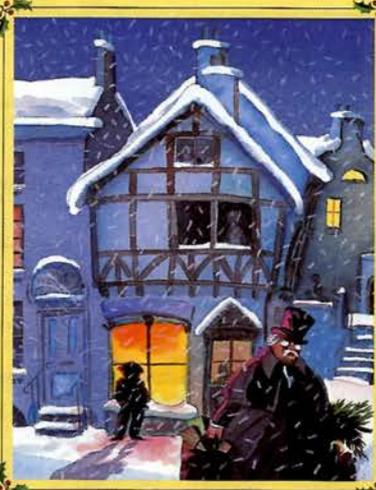
That's if you can find them. For this is one of those computerised stereogram-art productions where figures leap out of the page for some people and remain infuriatingly hidden for others.

Amazingly, for me they worked – 15 eerie, three-dimensional visions of fireplace, bedroom, stockings and Santa's arrival and departure, all hovering in some limbo at the back of the page and beyond. At least, I think they worked. The 3-D solutions at the end of the book, confirming what readers should have seen, are in severe black-and-white, not the full-colour patterning of the originals. So, though I recognised all of them, it was as if the shapes had been wallpapered over.

Is this how they should have appeared or am I missing something?

Fascinating and scary, either way. I couldn't help wondering what a combination of John Olsen's technical wizardry and a genuine artistic talent such as Anthony Browne's would have achieved, though. King Kong looming out of the page towards us? No doubt we'll find out before long . . . about the Christmas after next, I expect. ■

THE SHOP OF GHOSTS



TONY ROSS ADAPTED FROM AN ORIGINAL STORY BY G. K. CHESTERTON

Very apt, then, to meet the great man in person, leading a troupe of *Ghosts of Christmas Past*, in the first of my three back page selections. It's an adaptation by Tony Ross of G K Chesterton's *The Shop of Ghosts* (Andersen, 0 86264 470 4; £8.99). The opening sentences establish the mood:

"Tell me a story, Grandad. It's Christmas Eve and I can't sleep." Grandad crinkled his face and tickled his nose. Outside, the snow had begun to stick and sounds were muffled . . .

Instantly, Grandad (who bears a striking resemblance to GKC himself) transports us to a time when 'to ride on top of a tram was to be on a flying castle . . . It was when you could buy nearly all the best things in the world for a penny – except smiles and starry nights, thunderstorms and cosy toes – things like that you could get for nothing!

Don't be fooled, though. All isn't well in the crooked little toyshop, hiding in the back alleys of the city. The proprietor, you see, is Father Christmas.

And he's dying.

Luckily, here's where the ghosts come in. After Dickens comes Charles the Second, William Shakespeare and Robin Hood who remind Santa that he always has been dying, and always will be, so what's the problem? It's a point that, in this necessarily abbreviated



'Twas the nightmare before Christmas, and all through the house,

Not a creature was peaceful, not even a mouse.

The stockings all hung by the chimney with care,

When opened that morning would cause quite a scare . . .

The verse remains a touch maverick, it's true. So do the illustrations – a spikey, unwieldy amalgam of various drawing styles with a distinct air of the cinema in angle and perspec-