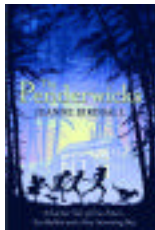


Older Readers



The Penderwicks

Written by Jeanne Birdsall
David Fickling £10.99
ISBN: 0 385 61034 3

A book by a reader for readers and perhaps that is why it is full and satisfying. The American

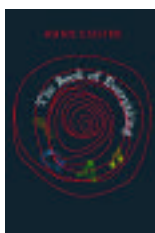
Penderwick family is composed of four sisters, one father and a hound and their holiday cottage is right next to a grand house. Snobbish Mrs Tifton lives there and is quite dreadful but her son, Jeffrey, is not. The problem he faces is serious despite his apparently privileged life and he comes to rely on the stalwart support of the sisters to face up to his mother. The four girls are very different, recalling the March girls, and there is an interesting cast of supporting characters. Old fashioned in the best sense – we really care what happens to these children and read on.

Pat Thomson

The Book of Everything

Written by Guus Kuijer
Picador £7.99 ISBN: 1 405 05471 9

Thomas is a boy visionary who can see things no-one else can, and records his observations in a notebook. His main ambition, to see his family happy, is thwarted by a father who lives according to the Old Testament law and uses his fists to instil obedience. The old man, however, is afraid of fun and laughter and worried by the rebellious spirit he sees in his son. When Thomas makes friends with Mrs Van Amersfoort, a witch who lives next door, the alliance is set to challenge the patriarchal tyranny. Kuijer's story is a wonderful amalgam of binaries: fear and joy, laughter and tears, the commonplace and the strange. The brilliant tale is lit up with the bold imagination of the hero whose faith never wavers. I commend the book to readers in the ten plus range and to anyone of any age who wants to find out how original, startling, absorbing and amusing a grand story can be.



Jack Ousbey



Snatched!

Written by Graham Marks
Usborne £5.99
ISBN: 0 7460 6840 9

A rip-roaring rollicking adventure set in the mid-nineteenth century.

Daniel is a foundling and is adopted by Mr Hubble of Hubble's Circus. He becomes a daring bareback rider and the extended circus family is his whole life until the day when he starts to

dream. But are they dreams of the past or has he second sight and is seeing into the future? Fast moving and packed with larger-than-life characters there is much daring-do and cliffhanging chapter endings.

Enid Stephenson



Small Steps

Written by Louis Sachar
Bloomsbury £12.99
ISBN: 0 7475 8030 8

Holes fans have been looking forward to this book. Camp

Green Lake days are over but their shadows fall over ex-inmates who are trying to make it in a world that may be far removed from the desert, but it still has unexpected dangers lurking round every corner. Sometimes, also, the most attractive of options turns out to be exactly what you ought to be wary of. Armpit, who was Stanley Yelnats' friend, is now working in Austin, Texas. He's doing gardening work in the drive of a house when the mayor of the town happens by and she (for it is a she) is impressed by the boy, who now wishes to be known as Theodore and definitely *not* Armpit. What happens when he gets involved in a scam organised by X-Ray (also ex-Green Lake) makes a moving and involving story, told in Sachar's characteristically pared-down prose, where description is at a minimum but which still lets you see everything as if it's unrolling on a private screen in your head. He achieves this by using very few adjectives and lots of dialogue and eliminating all padding. It's a brilliant technique, which here shows us young people struggling in their different ways to reach for something better in their lives.

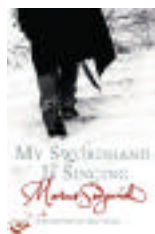
Adèle Geras

My Swordhand is Singing

Written by Marcus Sedgwick
Orion £9.99
ISBN: 1 84255 185 3

There's a bit of swashbuckling going on here. Based on various East European folk tales of vampires and the undead, we start with a body in the forest and end ankle deep in re-despatched undead in the graveyard. It is an enjoyably alarming journey and in the middle is a rather tender tale of Peter and his drunken father who finally redeems himself with his singing sword. The pace of the story sweeps us through the fear and superstition of the frozen village and out and away with the travelling people as Peter starts his new life.

Pat Thomson



The Shadow Garden

Written by Andrew Matthews
Usborne £4.99
ISBN: 0 7460 6794 1



The shiny black cover with tiny splashes of red hints at the evil within. This Gothic tale gripped me and my shadow, a Year 8 test reader who couldn't put it down. Style and content appealed to her. Written in the first person, by Matty, an old lady looking back at weird events in her childhood, it is an easy but powerful read. Short chapters, all with cliff-hanger endings, describe what happens when Matty's mother accepts a job as maid at the mysterious Tagram House. Matty is suspicious from the start. She's sure the master, Dr.Hobbes, is not as charming as he seems - and the gardener is more than odd. Tension rises with every turn of the page, then Matty discovers what is buried in the Shadow Garden. Mercifully, the stunning climax comes quickly.

Julia Jarman



The Sorcerer's Trap

Written by Fay Sampson
Lion £5.99
ISBN: 0 7459 4985 1

Power, dominance, racism and oppression are woven into the tale of Novan, a Xerappan boy whose people were defeated in the Yadu invasion with terrible results. Novan yearns to set his people free and rid his country of the cruel and oppressive overlords, but when the chance finally comes, his love for one of the Yadu stays his hand. It's a curious combination of realism and fantasy, and the pace is a bit slow early on, but the story builds into a gripping, suspenseful tale of love, adventure and magic.

Yvonne Coppard

A Dog for Life

Written by L S Matthews
Hodder £5.99 ISBN: 0 340 91105 0
John's brother Tom develops a life-threatening disease and must face months of treatment. To give him maximum chance of survival and to avoid infection the family decide that their beloved dog, Mouse, must go. John feels he can save Mouse if he takes him to their dead father's brother. This journey leads to many encounters. All are credible yet unexpected and contribute to the sturdy character which emerges slowly. Throughout Tom and John keep in contact mentally through Mouse, a dog with extra sensory abilities. Magic realism or heightened imagination? The reader is left to decide. A memorable, emotional story about loss, grief and fear of illness but with a firm determination to face up to problems and cope.



Tina Massey

The Ice Boy



Written by Patricia Elliott
Hodder £5.99
ISBN: 0 340 85424 3

Going back can often be a mistake, but Edward has no choice when he and his brother Matt are sent on a seaside holiday – back to the very place where their father disappeared while out sailing. Strange things start to happen when Edward thinks he sees an island on the horizon. He begins to hope his father is still alive and, helped by a number of mysterious characters, he sets out on a quest to reach the island. Norse myths, in particular the tale of Balder and Loki, are an inspiration for this story and although the reader may suspect the outcome, this never detracts from what is an entertaining and intriguing read. The main theme of the fight between good and evil is successfully interwoven with a stirring adventure story, with lots to grip the imagination and set the mind thinking.

Janice Knight

Victory

Written by Susan Cooper
Bodley Head £8.99
ISBN: 0 370 32891 4



Two stories run in parallel. There is English Molly, desperately homesick in today's America, and Sam Robbins, a boy aboard *The Victory* in 1805. Cooper's well-researched account of life in Nelson's Navy brings alive the horror and the pride. Molly, too, is suffering until a chance purchase in a second hand bookshop. *Southey's Life of Nelson* has a secret hidden inside and that is instrumental in bringing the two strands together. A strong and moving narrative that makes Sam's and Molly's stories as important as that of the great Admiral.

Pat Thomson

In the Morning

Written by Michael Cronin
Oxford University Press £5.99
ISBN: 0 19 275447 5



Judge this book by its excellent cover not by its title. The cover has lots of boy-appeal but my test reviewer was Bryony and she thought the story 'really exciting and very informative about World War II'. In fact, though Cronin evokes the period skilfully, the plot is based on a surmise. What if the

Nazis had invaded Britain in 1941? The main protagonists are Frank and Les, schoolboys working for the Resistance in a Britain occupied by the Germans. The Nazis are on the run but still very dangerous. The two boys have been separated by an accident and each vows to carry on the struggle in a plot filled with action and a host of very credible characters.

Julia Jarman

Like Mother, Like Daughter?

Selected by Bel Mooney
Kingfisher £6.99 ISBN: 0 7534 1146 6



An excellent collection of fourteen stories – some sad, some funny but all addressing that age-old problem of the generation gap between mothers and daughters. The authors are first class – including Candice Ransom and Shirley Klock who were unknown to me but others are very well established – Adèle Geras, Julia Jarman and Bel Mooney herself among them. This unique relationship has been interpreted in different ways and makes a fascinating book either for reading from beginning to end or simply dipping into for a short while. The cover too is appealing with its bright turquoise caterpillar emerging as a beautiful butterfly.

Valerie Bierman

The New World Order

Written by Ben Jeapes
Corgi £5.99 ISBN: 0 552 55096 5

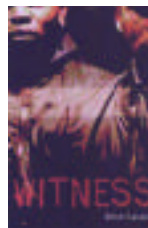
1645. The Parliamentarian army is laying siege to a Royalist castle. Into the battle walks a man called John Donder, taken as a spy but then let go. The Parliamentarians attack. But instead of muskets they are firing rifles, of a sort not seen until the twentieth century. Later on, the Royalists reply with machine guns. Soon airships will appear in the sky in bombing raids. How can this be? John Donder certainly knows for he is a Holekhor, a strange race which is infiltrating the world with a superior technology and using the Civil War as a means of gaining mastery over it. Who are the Holekhor? The answer is as satisfying as it is surprising. This is an alternative history which, once the central premise is accepted, proceeds convincingly and irresistibly.

Dennis Hamley



Witness

Written by Anne Cassidy
Evans £4.50
ISBN: 0 237 52924 6



Dex is witness to the beating of an old man who has been good to him in the past. It is only right that he should talk to the police but then he is faced with a terrible choice. Unless he withdraws the statement his best friend will be beaten up. All his mates rally round and they help him to set a trap which results in totally unexpected consequences. Short and easy-to-read this novel deals with important issues for older readers who do not want to be reminded of their limited reading ability.

Marianne Adey

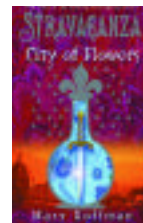
Ivy

Written by Julie Hearn
Oxford University Press £5.99
ISBN: 0 19 275431 9



Five year old Ivy has a drab life until her startling red hair makes her the target of Carrotty Kate. Bribed with an orange, she is used to coax wealthy children away from their nannies to be stripped of their clothes – later sold for easy profit in Petticoat Lane. Concerned about the children, afraid of her dark cubby-hole in the thieves' den, Ivy is dosed with laudanum to keep her quiet. So begins her addiction. In her teens a minor Pre-Raphaelite painter realises her beauty rivals the 'Stunners' of Rosetti and Millais, so pays her to pose for him. His long suffering, jealous mother provides some bizarre episodes to give a little light relief in this disturbing novel. Ivy's helplessness in the clutches of the gang, her temptation to slide into peaceful addiction again, her eventual salvation, all are cleverly crafted and memorable. The conclusion may surprise, may satisfy, may exasperate – but there is much on which to reflect, to enjoy and remember.

Tina Massey



City of Flowers

Written by Mary Hoffman
Bloomsbury £6.99
ISBN: 0 7475 6502 3

Third in the *Stravaganza* series this is the first one I have read.

No matter, I was hooked from the start, and quickly transported to another world. Believe me, you *can* start here, for lucid writing tells you all you need to know in the opening pages. There's also a helpful list of characters at the back. Sky, a teenage boy who cares for his invalid mum, doesn't yet know it, but he's a Stravagante, someone who can travel through time and space. Soon, he finds himself in Talia, a feud-torn sixteenth century town, amazingly like sixteenth century Florence, where he has a dangerous mission. Full of fun and adventure I can't wait to read the rest of the series.

Julia Jarman

All Fall Down

Written by Susan Gleason
Little Hare £4.99
ISBN: 1 877 00386 7



A story that opens with a map of Sydney on the first page – now that's a real story! The tale begins in Potts Point, a ridge of wealthy housing above the city where Roderick McManus, the government Inspector of Health for New South Wales, lives with his fourteen year old daughter, Christabel. He is kept so busy with a programme of necessary slum clearance and an outbreak of bubonic plague that Christabel is forced to hang out with the servants below stairs and she becomes involved in all sorts of devious plots. Not only a gripping adventure story this gives a fascinating glimpse into the public health and social life of Sydney a hundred years ago.

Mike Maran