



Love, Stargirl

Written by Jerry Spinelli
Orchard Books £10.99
ISBN: 978-1846169250
The last glimpse readers had of Stargirl were of her buttercup gown and flowered bicycle disappearing into the night. Now, a year after the

Ocotillo Ball, she's back and telling her own story. She reveals her everyday deeds and discusses her innermost thoughts and feelings in an extended, novel-length letter addressed to her one-time boyfriend Leo. Always detailed, always honest, though occasionally – over the big question about her true feelings for Leo – deliberately, tantalisingly unforthcoming. Seen with her own clear gaze, rather than the bedazzled sight of others, she emerges as a true, living, never ordinary just more down-to-earth, girl. But one who still collects life's waifs and strays and oddities; in the most unpushy manner helps reassert their often misplaced sense of self worth; discovers that nobody is as they first appear. Spinelli's heroine is more vulnerable, yes, but still retains her shining integrity, and his writing maintains an intricate balance that enables him to touch upon the most delicate emotions without ever plunging into sentimentality or bathos.

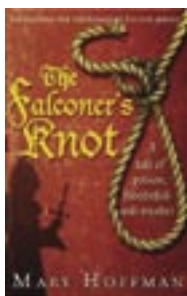
Chris Stephenson

The Falconer's Knot

Written by Mary Hoffman
Bloomsbury £6.99
ISBN: 978-0747589006

Mary Hoffman's medieval murder mystery is set in the early fourteenth century at the time Simone Martini was finishing the St Martin frescos in the Lower Church of San Francisco in Assisi. Into the sun-bathed landscape of the Umbrian countryside, Hoffman injects a tale of murder and intrigue. Silvano, a young boy, is suspected of the murder of a local sheep farmer and takes refuge in a nearby friary. When several monks are found dead from poisoning, Silvano's plight only gets worse. The narrative is based on short episodes in the lives of the main characters, leading the reader back and forth between events at the friary, the adjacent convent and the Umbrian towns of Assisi, Perugia and Gubbio. There is a wealth of detail on the production of colours which were used in manuscript illumination and fresco painting. Like all good mysteries the final outcome is cleverly disguised and keeps you guessing to the end.

Richard Monte



Chicken Dance

Written by Jacques Couvillion
Bloomsbury £6.99
ISBN: 978-0747589303
In the spirit of *Holes* with splashes of subtle magical realism, Couvillion's debut is a highly compelling and ultimately uplifting

'rise of the dog' morality tale. On Horse Island, where nearly everyone is a chicken farmer with an alliterative name, the Schmidt family are relative outsiders, bequeathed their house by an uncle on the condition they continue to care for its chickens. Ignored and resented by his parents, Don Schmidt spends most of his home life trying not to annoy his neurotic chicken-hating mother. School isn't much better, until one day he wins a chicken-judging contest and becomes suddenly popular, so that even his parents are forced to notice him. Meanwhile, Don has accidentally discovered that his name used to be Stanley, and is anxiously following a trail of clues about his past, desperate to find out why it was changed and what exactly his family has been hiding from him. As the truth gradually unfolds, with some cleverly plotted twists and turns, the story becomes ever more enthralling. Don/Stanley is a perfectly constructed hero – humble, naive, kind and courageous – and you can't help but be consumed by his plight.

Rowan Stanfield

Jackdaw Summer

Written by David Almond
Hodder £10.99

ISBN: 978-0340881989

'There's a tiny sound somewhere in Rook Hall. We can't turn away. We can't run. We pick our way over the rubble and sheep droppings towards the sound of crying. And there it is, on a pile of broken stones. It's a baby, wrapped in a brown blanket, in a basket.'

Max and Liam are exploring on the Northumberland moors when they find a child. They find other things too, and not all as pleasant. David Almond turns a beautiful landscape into a place of cruelty and mystery, bullying and friendship, his words enfolding the reader in his magic. Another brilliant novel from a master storyteller.

Valerie Bierman

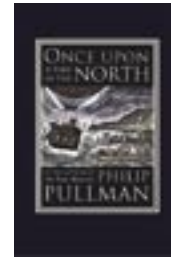


Once Upon a Time in the North

Written by Philip Pullman

David Fickling Books £9.99 ISBN: 978-0385614320

Written with characteristic flair, the story – a prequel to *His Dark Materials* – delves into the



origins of the friendship binding Lee Scoresby and the armoured bear, Iorek Byrnison. Twenty-four year old Lee lands his cargo balloon on the small island of Novy Odense, a grim and dilapidated harbour town deep in the Arctic. The town, he learns, is experiencing an oil boom and is in the grip of election fever. Its also violent and corrupt, as the unfolding of events soon show. It's streets are filled with bears, working or standing around, often in small groups. They seem unhappy and submissive, yet smouldering with anger. One stands out from the rest – this is Iorek, a formidable young bear who throws in his lot with Lee and comes to his aid in a particularly tricky situation that culminates in a shootout. The story is dense and action-packed, shot through with sly humour that is provided by Lee's daemon, Hester. There is a strong sense of place – the town is almost palpable in its sullen atmosphere of smoky interiors and windswept alleys, and a smell of fish-oil, pickled fish and salt air permeates the pages. Small and elegant, the book is exquisitely illustrated with woodcuts by John Lawrence and rounded off with bits of memorabilia including a newspaper clipping giving a different spin on events plus a board game. Fast and powerful, this is an exciting read.

Anne Faundez

The Eye of the Serpent

Written by Philip Caveney
Red Fox £5.99

ISBN: 978-1862306080

Indiana Jones out of *The Mummy* but with a flavour all of its own. The scene is Egypt, 1923. The cast includes English boy (mother dead, father away on diplomatic business); traditional resourceful butler; archaeologist uncle crazed by horrifying tomb disaster; free-wheeling, Stetson-toting American; slug-like journalist masquerading as private detective on hunt for uncle's missing excavating partner; hieroglyphics expert who turns out to be attractive Frenchwoman. Plus a disgustingly nasty ancient terror on the loose, fronted by shape-changing swarms of scarab beetles. Territory that has been visited before, but seldom with such zip and joi-de-vivre. A smashing adventure story, well controlled and well written; the first of the Alec Devlin stories. All this and a hologram on the cover. (One bad mark though: no acknowledgement of who did the chapter-head illustrations.) If you think this is just the thing for a twelve-year-old (or older) then ink out the age-band. Better still, ink it out anyway.



Chris Stephenson

Hush: a slave princess' tale



Written by Donna Jo Napoli
Simon and Schuster £6.99
ISBN: 978-1847382559
As the eldest daughter of one of the kings of Ireland, Melkora is used to a life of privilege, comfort and the unthinking obedience of her father's servants. On a rare visit to Dublin the royal family is struck

by tragedy but when her father plans a terrible revenge against the Viking attackers, both Melkora and her younger sister, Brigid, are captured and taken overseas by slave traders. How will she cope with this new existence of harsh brutality, where a life can be sold for a few pieces of silver? Separated from her sister, she takes refuge in silence, and learns that even the powerless can have power, even the silent can have a voice. This is a book full of stories – stories told by the poets and storytellers of King Myrkjartan's court, stories told by slaves to other slaves, and the story Melkora is telling us about her life – a story that remains unfinished. Based on an Icelandic folk tale, *Hush* is not a happy ever after tale of right triumphing over wrong, or good winning against evil, but a masterfully crafted depiction of the sights, sounds and smells of life in tenth century Europe.

Jean Allen

The Toymaker

Written by Jeremy de Quidt
Illustrated by Gary Blythe
David Fickling £10.99
ISBN: 978-0385613583
I debated for some time whether to include this book because of the violence

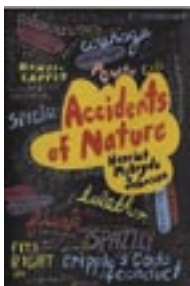


present throughout. But the story has remained with me and for those of a robust nature this book comes recommended. Mathias, a young circus boy, takes a small roll of paper from his dying magician grandfather and from that moment enters an extraordinary and terrifying nightmare world. He is pursued by the sinister Dr Leiter and his awful companions, helped by Katta and Koenig. This is a world of shadows and terror told with the utmost conviction. A remarkable debut novel.

Enid Stephenson

Accidents of Nature

Written by Harriet McBride Johnson
Andersen Press £5.99 ISBN: 978-1842707418



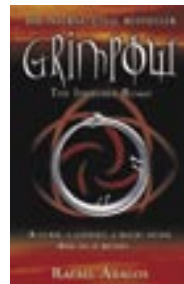
A deeply moving and provocative novel that boldly confronts attitudes to disability from the perspective of a sixteen year old with cerebral palsy. Set in the 1960s holiday camp for what would now be called 'special needs' children, it

is the antithesis of the politically correct 'issues-based' book. Jean goes to Camp Courage to please her parents, who have always tried to give her as normal a life as possible, and are keen to foster her independence. During Jean's stay she meets Sara – a veteran of what she herself calls 'Crip Camp' – and an outspoken rebel against the patronising influence of the camp leaders, and other 'normal' people in general. Refusing to submit to society's expectations of her, Sara opens Jean's eyes to a whole new way of thinking about her disability. Based on the author's own experience of growing up as an invalid in even less liberated times, *Accidents of Nature* is not always a comfortable read, but all the better for that.

Rowan Stanfield

Grimpow: The Invisible Road

Written by Rafael Abalos
Random House Corgi £6.99
ISBN: 978-0552554619



The death of an unknown knight, whose body miraculously vanishes, leaves Grimpow in possession of a mysterious and powerful stone that enables him to read any language. Set against the political backdrop of the fourteenth century, Grimpow and his companions are quickly propelled into a conflict against the church and its temporal supporters. They end up fighting not just for their survival but for the fate of civilisation – caught between two futures, one of ignorance, superstition and darkness, the other of learning, science and light. A gripping story, translated from Spanish, and supported by useful illustrations of the clues and puzzles Grimpow had to confront, but a map of his journey would have been helpful geographical back-up.

Ben Scott

Journey to the End of the World



Written by Henning Mankell
Andersen Press £5.99
ISBN: 978-1842706664

This is the final book about Joel, a young boy living with his father in a small town in Northern Sweden. He is now fifteen, has just left school and wants to become a merchant seaman and travel the world. Before

he can sign on he decides he must track down his mother, missing since Joel was a small child. How he copes with the reunion, and faces up to leaving a father he loves but whose weaknesses exasperate him, is a tale told with humour, compassion and sensitivity. Mankell, widely known for his adult novels about Kurt Wallander, a Swedish detective, is completely at home writing about the anxieties, uncertainties and hopes, and the often bewildering world in which a young boy finds himself.

Jack Ousbey

Stories worthy of inspiring even the most reluctant reader to pick up a book.



Arctic Hero

Written by Catherine Johnson
Barrington Stoke £5.99
ISBN: 978-1842994931

Although slavery had been abolished in 1865, the ideology that categorised people according to the colour of their skin took

much longer to root out. When a young black American called Matthew Henson ran away from his stepmother at eleven years old, he cleaned and washed tables in a café dreaming of a better life. At twelve he took a place on board a ship and a chance meeting with an American Navy Lieutenant led him to dream of a life as an explorer. This is a story about holding on to dreams, never giving up and triumphing over hardship. There is a gritty realism in Henson's life which might strike a chord with many teenagers today.

Richard Monte

Grave Dirt

Written by E E Richardson
Barrington Stoke £5.99
ISBN: 978-1842995211

This tale has a strong plot, simple but vivid characterisation, simplicity of language which is yet able to convey sophisticated concepts and subtle narrative with utmost clarity, and a page-turning quality which makes it almost irresistible. And what's more, it will frighten the lights out of you! A finely stage-managed thriller and, though some will say the subject – contacting the dead – is taboo, the book deserves a readership well beyond Barrington Stoke's target audience.

Dennis Hamley



Burn Up

Written by Spike T Adams
Illustrated by Oliver Harud
Franklin Watts £4.99
ISBN: 978-0749677145

Keen on cars but not keen on school, Jay could be a typical teenager except he's good with engines. His dream comes true when he is recruited into a gang to steal cars. But when the police turn up, Jay quickly learns where the gang's loyalties really lie. A short, exciting read with plenty of pace and rhythm, together with realistic, conversational language. Graphic-novel type illustrations break up the text (although are, perhaps, guilty of over-glamourising the girls) and will appeal to readers who think reading is not for them.

Benjamin Scott