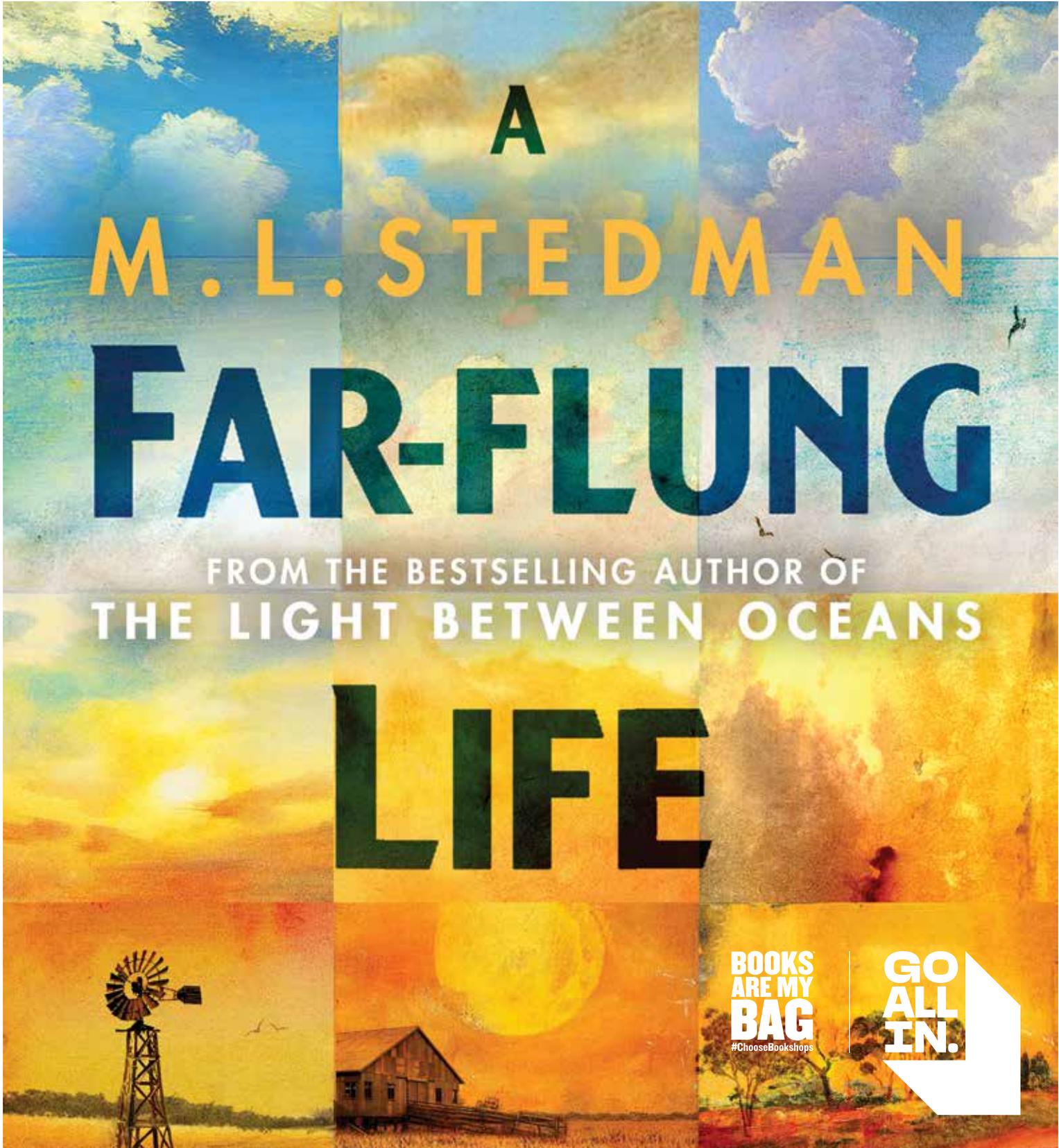


Make time for books

ISSUE 157
MAR/APR 2026

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Booktime



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Contents

04 & 05

A Far-Flung Life by M.L. Stedman



06 & 07

March & April's Choice

08

Kin by Tayari Jones

09

Past Times

10 & 11

Under Water by Tara Menon

12

The Homemade God by Rachel Joyce

13

Almost Life by Kiran Millwood Hargrave

14 & 15

Like a Cat Loves a Bird by James Bailey

16 & 17

Cuisines of Odesa by Maria Kalenska

18 & 19

Fiction

20 & 21

Lázár by Nelio Biedermann

22

Running on Air by Sophie Raworth

23

Twenty Years Together by Tom Rob Smith

24 & 25

Non-Fiction

26 & 27

Real Lives

28 & 29

Cool Classics

30

Grand Expectations by Celia Dodd

31

Yesteryear by Caro Claire Burke

32

Kutchinsky's Egg by Serena Kutchinsky

33

History

33

Nero Book Awards

34 & 35

The Death of Us by Abigail Dean

36

A Girl Like Her by Talia Hibbert

37

Kiss Marry Kill by Yemi Dipeolu

38

Deep Cuts by Holly Brickley

39

Upward Bound by Woody Brown

40

Fruit Fly by Josh Silver

41

The Lost Voices of Pompeii by Dr Jess Venner

42

The Infamous Gilberts by Angela Tomaski

43

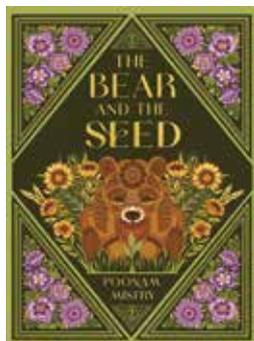
The Edge of Revolution by David Torrance

44 & 45

Words to Love a Planet by Ella Frances Sanders

46

Life Guides



46

Animal Magic

47

Cosmic Cadets and the Bubblegum Bots by Ryan Crawford & Rochelle Falconer

48

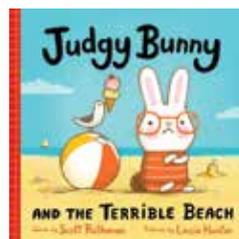
Books for Little Ones

49

Bella Built a Robot by Adam & Charlotte Guillain & Patrick Corrigan

50

Spyglass: Mastermind of Mayhem by David Solomons & Miguel Díaz Rivas



51

Judgy Bunny and the Terrible Beach by Scott Rothman & Linzie Hunter

52

Picture Books & Young Reads

53

Piper at the Gates of Dusk by Patrick Ness

54

I Am a Royal Rule Breaker by Fern Riddell & Taylor Dolan

55

Mammoth Rider by S.J. Poyton

56

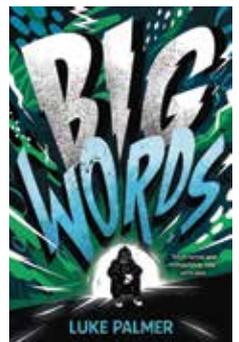
Shapes of Nature by Ben Hoare

57

Young Reads

58 & 59

The Magic Feather by Julia Donaldson & Catherine Rayner



60

Big Words by Luke Palmer

61

We Are Dragon by Alastair Chisholm

62 & 63

The Lost Robot by Joe Todd-Stanton

64

Children's Books

65

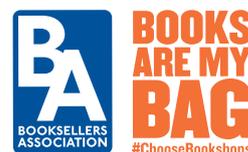
Mei Mei the Bunny by Laufey & Lauren O'Hara

Front cover:
© Doubleday



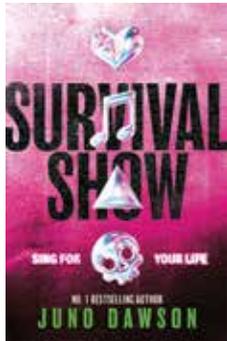
Editor Ruth Hunter
Design jimmyscofield.com

Booktime is produced by the Booksellers Association



66 & 67

Once Upon an Island by Alice Albinia & Helen Cann



68

Survival Show by Juno Dawson

69

YA Fiction

71

Puzzletime Book Quiz

**GO
ALL
IN.**

National Year of Reading 2026

Go All In: If You're Into It, Read Into It. Whether you're into gaming, gardening, music, sport, family time or food, reading helps you go all in on the things that matter most. The National Year of Reading 2026 invites everyone to reimagine reading as social, modern and personally meaningful – not something extra, but something that adds extra to what you already love. Go All In shows how reading in all its forms – on a device, comics, graphic novels, audiobooks, fiction and non-fiction – is the ultimate way to dive deeper into your passions. Find out more at goallin.org.uk

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Welcome to Booktime!

Welcome to March & April Booktime! In this edition, we have lots of author interviews. Tayari Jones tells us all about her new novel, set in the Deep South of America in the mid-20th century (see page 8), Tara Menon about her novel which explores the impact of the 2004 tsunami (see pages 10 & 11), Kiran Millwood Hargrave about her love story which begins in Paris at the end of the 1970s (see page 13), Nelio Biedermann about his epic tale following the fortunes of one Hungarian family (see pages 20 & 21), Tom Rob Smith about his new gay romance novel (see page 23), Caro Claire Burke about her novel following a woman who realises that her perfect life is not all it seems (see page 31), Talia Hibbert about her romance novel set in a small town (see page 36) and Josh Silver about his novel following a writer (see page 40).

For younger readers, we interview authors Adam and Charlotte Guillain about their new picture book about childhood imagination (see page 49), David Solomons on his new fast-paced and funny spy story (see page 50), Patrick Ness on his return to the world of *Chaos Walking* (see page 53), Fern Riddell on her history of rebellious women (see page 54), S.J. Poyton on her mammoth adventure story (see page 55), Luke Palmer on his story about young male friendship (see page 60), Joe Todd-Stanton on his picture book about a lonely android (see pages 62 & 63), Alice Albinia on her book celebrating island life (see pages 66 & 67), and Juno Dawson on her YA novel about a deadly reality TV show (see page 68). These books, and the many others in these pages, will take you into Spring.

Ruth Hunter, Editor

We hope you enjoy this new edition of Booktime.

To enter our competitions online, please visit the webpage:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/BooktimeMarch2026

Or write to us at the address below.

For any other queries, please email: booktime@booksellers.org.uk

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‘I was completely swept away’

Bonnie Garmus, author of *Lessons in Chemistry*

Back of Beyond

“Heart-wrenching and beautifully set.”

Rachel Joyce, author of *The Homemade God*

A Far-Flung Life is the mesmeric new novel, a decade in the making, from the author of the award-winning global bestseller, *The Light Between Oceans*.

Outback Western Australia, 1958: for generations, the MacBrides have lived on a remote sheep station, Meredith Downs. A million arid acres, it's an ocean of land, where the weather is a capricious god, and time still roams untamed. One ordinary day, on a lonely road, under the unending blue sky, patriarch Phil MacBride swerves to avoid a kangaroo. In seconds the lives of the entire MacBride family are shattered.

Then, instead of leaving wounds to heal, Fate comes for them yet again, in a twist of consequences that will cause one of them to lose their life, and another to sacrifice theirs for the sake of an innocent child. Matt, the youngest MacBride, is plunged into a moral and emotional journey for which there is no map, no guide, as he is forced to choose between love and duty, sacrifice and happiness.

Set against the rugged beauty of Western Australia, *A Far-Flung Life* is a mesmerising drama that captures the hearts and resilience of a family, a community, a generation, shattered by fate and the secrets they shield in order to live. A timeless classic that refuses to let you go and echoes far beyond its pages.

Here is an extract from the novel:

On any old outback property, you can see them, the skeletons of dreams. Houses long abandoned, windmills rusting, fence posts splintered, tank stands collapsed: every one of them was once a hopeful beginning.

Sometimes, all that's left are the remnants of hopes and the bones of a rusting tin shack someone once called home. Occasionally, this shack now serves as a chook shed or a wood shed beside a sturdier house, and shows that luck was on their side. More often, there's just a crumbling chimneystack and fireplace, traces of brick foundations, or eaten-away timber frames. And not a living soul for miles.

Out here, whole towns go this way, where, once, shoals of hopes eddied around a mine site, or a port, or a rail

siding, and flourished for a while, until circumstance and that old enemy, time, hounded them into a future that saw the mine exhausted, the port usurped by an airport, and the rail left behind by roads. The sheep and cattle stations they supported are battered by drought or banks or market collapses until they're nothing but a few strands of fence-wire trampled into the dirt, and the odd warped windmill groaning for grease.

But no one ever built a house out of despair; no one ever invested in a new wool press out of regret. Every wreck, every ruin is the relic of a shrivelled dream, lasting long after the body of its dreamer has been received back into the earth with love or remorse or indifference.

Our lives come and go like these gold-rush towns. We arrive, we grow, we thrive, then we're gone. Then the forgetting happens, and once-solid foundations are barely traces in the earth, from unguessable lives. Whole communities and the ties that bound them are blown away with the dust.

In the end, we're all looking for a place to ride out the storm of life. Among all these husks of houses and fossils of trees, we are like hermit crabs, borrowing a

shelter for a time, and moving on. We relinquish who we were and strike on to our next moment, leaving an empty shell and a few traces: some letters, a wedding ring, a faithful pair of boots. Who can say what will last of us, and for how long?

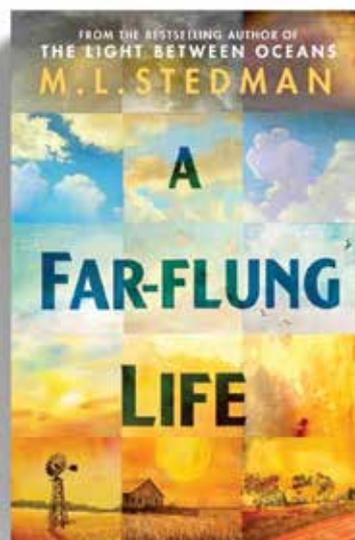
We're all falling through space and time, but on the day of the truck crash in 1958, Matthew MacBride fell more suddenly and more spectacularly than most. When his body was thrown clear of the sheep truck and onto the stony road, his soul was flung clean out of his body, to a place outside time, exiled to a waiting room between life and death, between who he had been and who he might become.

“Utterly glorious.”

Florence Knapp, author of *The Names*

A Far-Flung Life
by M.L. Stedman
Doubleday • HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781529965308
Published 5th March

Special signed indie exclusive edition with printed endpapers



WHAT CAN THE HEART ENDURE FOR THE SAKE OF LOVE?

'MASTERFUL'

★★★★★

'PHENOMENAL'

★★★★★

**'A REAL
TRIUMPH'**

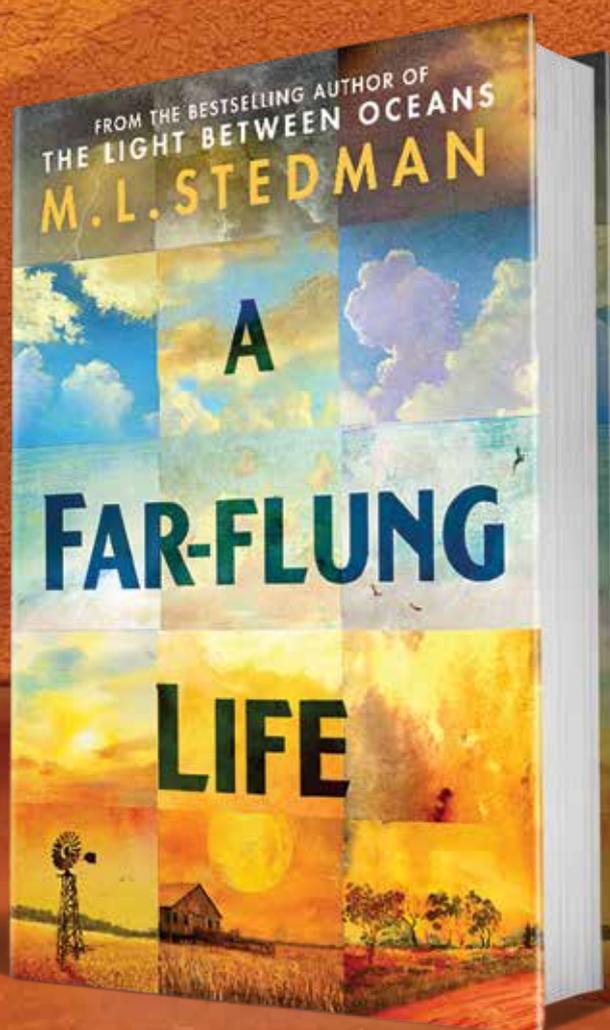
★★★★★

**'I WAS HOOKED
AND
HEARTBROKEN'**

★★★★★

**'STORYTELLING
AT ITS FINEST'**

★★★★★



'UNFORGETTABLE'

★★★★★

'GRIPPING'

★★★★★

**'PAINTED WITH
SUCH
VIVID DETAIL'**

★★★★★

**'ABSOLUTELY
FLOORED ME'**

★★★★★

'OUTSTANDING'

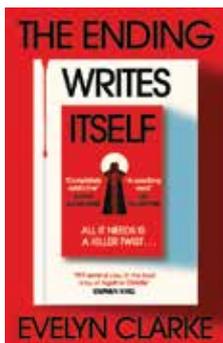
★★★★★

March & April's Choice



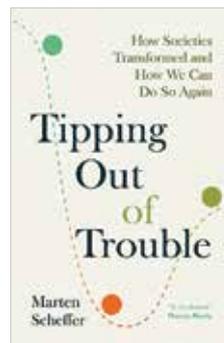
Last One Out
by Jane Harper
Macmillan
HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781035033973
Published 23rd April

A new novel from the author of *The Dry*. In a dying Australian town, Ro Crowley waits for her son on the evening of his twenty-first birthday. Sam never comes home. His footprints in the dust of three abandoned houses offer the only clue to his final movements. One set in. One set out. Five long years later, Ro returns to Carralon Ridge for the annual memorial of Sam's disappearance. Only a few people remain. If the truth is to be found in that town, does it lie among them?



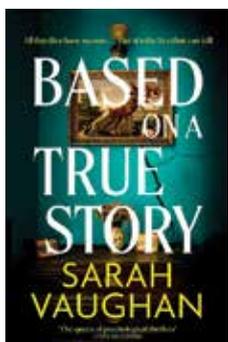
The Ending Writes Itself
by Evelyn Clarke
HQ • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9780008739263
Published 7th April

An intriguing mystery, by bestselling author V.E. Schwab, and screenwriter and YA author Cat Clarke. World-famous author Arthur Fletch is dead. His final novel remains unfinished. But the ending won't write itself. When six struggling authors are invited to Fletch's private Scottish island and presented with the opportunity of a lifetime, the plot thickens: whoever writes a worthy ending will receive a game-changing book deal and two million dollars...



Tipping Out of Trouble
by Marten Scheffer
Cambridge University Press • HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781009699754
Published 2nd April

What kind of trouble lies ahead? How can we successfully transition towards a sustainable future? Drawing on a remarkably broad range of insights from complex systems and the functioning of the brain to the history of civilizations and the workings of modern societies, the distinguished scientist Marten Scheffer addresses these key questions of our times. He provides us with a hopeful roadmap to steer ourselves away from collapse and toward renewal.



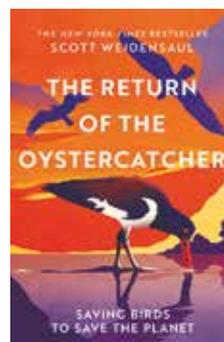
Based on a True Story
by Sarah Vaughan
Simon & Schuster
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781398502086
Published 26th March

A new thriller from the author of *Anatomy of a Scandal*. Famed children's author Dame Eleanor Kingman has summoned her family and friends to her exquisite manor house on the cliffs. They're celebrating her birthday – and her latest number one bestseller in her series of books based on a mother fox and her cubs. But the night before the party, Eleanor receives an email: an email that threatens to expose the lie she's kept up for over half a century...



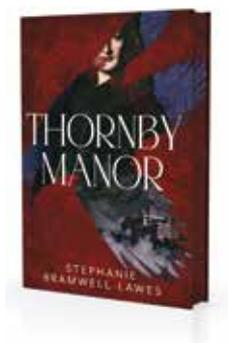
Unwired: Gaining Control Over Addictive Technologies
by Gaia Bernstein
Cambridge University Press • PB • £16.00
ISBN 9781009257947
Published 19th March

Our society has a technology problem. Many want to disconnect from screens but can't help themselves. This book shows us a way out. Rather than blaming users, it shatters the illusion that we autonomously choose how to spend our time online, and shifts the moral responsibility and accountability for solutions to corporations. It provides a blueprint to develop a movement for change, to one that will allow us to gain control.



The Return of the Oystercatcher: Saving Birds to Save the Planet
by Scott Weidensaul
Picador • HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781035016518
Published 23rd April

Across the world, scientists, conservationists and ordinary people are involved in groundbreaking work to restore billions of lost birds. Together they're tackling the hollowing out of the springtime dawn chorus and the withering away of once-great migration multitudes, and now birds' fortunes are being reversed. In this book, renowned natural history writer Scott Weidensaul tells the uplifting story of that success and what it means for us and for our planet, too.



Thornby Manor
by Stephanie Braumwell-Lawes
Orenda Books
HB • £18.99
ISBN 9781917764124
Published 23rd April

An atmospheric and intoxicating debut historical mystery. Warwickshire, 1891. Recently orphaned and left destitute, Briar Monroe accepts the protection of Lord Danville and the shadowed sanctuary of Thornby Manor. The great house looms above a mist-shrouded lake, its corridors heavy with secrets – not least the mysterious death of Lady Elizabeth Danville, and the unspoken tensions between her formidable widower and his magnetic son, Gabriel.



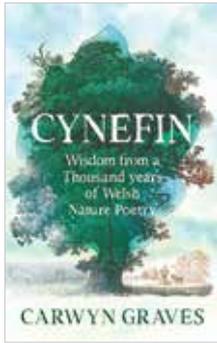
White Supremacy: A Short History
by John Brioch
Cambridge University Press • HB • £22.00
ISBN 9781009627696
Published 19th March

When did whiteness begin? Was its rise inevitable? In this powerful history, John Brioch traces the emergence, evolution and contradictions of white supremacy, from its roots in the British empire, to the racial politics of the present. Focussing on the English-speaking world, he examines how ideas of whiteness connect to the history of slavery, Enlightenment thought, European colonialism, Social Darwinism and eugenics, fascism and capitalism.



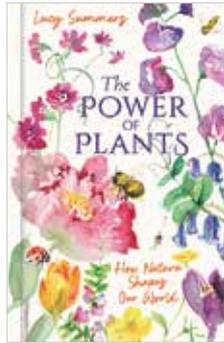
Wild Pavements: Exploring Britain's Cities with an Urban Naturalist
by Amanda Tuke
Flint • HB • £18.99
ISBN 9781803998909
Published 5th March

Feral pigeons, foxes and fireweed are fascinating, but there's more to urban nature. In this book, naturalist Amanda Tuke shares her delight in the underappreciated wildlife in our UK cities, finds the people who care for it, takes groups out to enjoy it and explores what the current thinking in ecology means for the future of urban nature. Join Amanda as she explores London and visits Manchester, Edinburgh, Belfast, Cardiff, Hull, and other cities.



Cynefin: Wisdom from a Thousand Years of Welsh Nature Poetry
by Carwyn Graves
Calon • HB • £18.99
ISBN 9781837600663
Published 16th April

At a time of biodiversity loss and climate grief, we need to reset our relationship with the natural world. This book helps us hear the voices of people down the centuries who have, through poetry, expressed a different way of connecting with the living world around us. Carwyn Graves explores how the Welsh poetic tradition offers a different view of nature and connecting to our place in the world, and demonstrates its power to help us address the challenges we face.



The Power of Plants: How Nature Shapes Our World
by Lucy Summers
The History Press
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781803999265
Published 16th April

Imagine a world where life unfurls with quiet tenacity, each day a testament to survival against the odds. Meet the floral trailblazers, plants whose extraordinary talent for endurance and adaptation surpass anything on a human scale. Through their eyes, embark on an incredible journey into a realm like no other. From Jurassic origins, this book explores how adaptations to the environment and unique survival tactics have ensured their success.



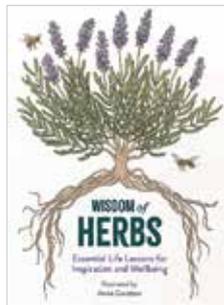
One Garden Against the World
by Kate Bradbury
Bloomsbury Wildlife
PB • £10.99
ISBN 9781399408851
Published 26th March

A new book from the author of *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*. Kate Bradbury's garden is busy: home to all sorts of wildlife, from red mason bees and house sparrows to hedgehogs and dragonflies. Brighton and Hove's entire frog population seems to breed in her small pond each spring, and now there are toads, too. But she knows habitat loss remains a huge issue in gardens, the wider countryside and worldwide, and there's another, far bigger threat: climate change.



Love is a Toad: Exploring our Relationship with Nature
by Lucy Lapwing
Blink Publishing
HB • £18.99
ISBN 9781785120145
Published 12th March

A lyrical exploration of our complex and intricate relationship with the natural world in all its muddy, messy and beautiful glory. Lucy Lapwing takes to the fields, moors and footpaths of the UK with her fellow nature enthusiasts and digs down into the emotions which nature inspires. Through these interactions and Lucy's own story and observations, she explores everything from wild grief and anger through to soaring joy and indefatigable hope.



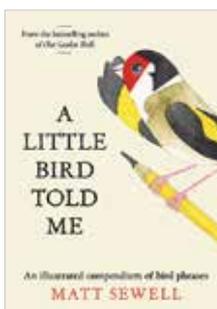
Wisdom of Herbs
by Alison Davies & Annie Davidson
LOM ART • HB • £12.99
ISBN 9781915751508
Published 26th March

A charming guide to herbs from around the world, bringing together their properties and the lessons we can glean from them. Collecting 60 universal life lessons taken from the world's most amazing herbs – from finding inner strength, to the importance of gentleness and the power of patience – this is a celebration of the unsung heroes of the plant world and an essential companion to dip into when we need a little inspiration.



The Science of Baking
by Matt Adlard
DK • HB • £25.00
ISBN 9780241713938
Published 12th March

Baking is essentially chemistry for the kitchen, and in order to perfect our home bakes, we first need to understand the processes and variables that go into creating the perfect bake. Join bestselling author, self-taught baker, and pastry chef, Matt Adlard, as he demystifies the science behind your favourite bakes, teaching you how to recreate them at home with show-stopping results. It features more than 50 recipes for delicious breads, pastries, cookies, cakes, and desserts.



A Little Bird Told Me
by Matt Sewell
HarperNorth
HB • £12.99
ISBN 9780008781590
Published 12th March

Building on the charm and success of his bestselling *Our Garden Birds* and *Owls*, Matt Sewell brings his signature whimsical artistry to the world of animal phrases in this book. A delightful collection, it combines Sewell's lush, evocative illustrations with an exploration of beloved animal idioms. The book provides readers with the origins, meanings, and whimsical interpretations of phrases we use every day, inspired by the quirks of the animal kingdom.



The Easy Garden
by Michael Griffiths
DK • HB • £18.99
ISBN 9780241796948
Published 23rd April

Do you step into your garden and feel overwhelmed by the task at hand? Or maybe you find yourself baffled by the sheer amount of gardening information and just want to know what needs doing right now? Fear not, Michael Griffiths is here to give you some straight-talking advice. This book breaks down the year into jobs for each month, with simple step-by-steps showing you what to do. No jargon, no fluff: just good advice for a beautiful outside space, the easy way.

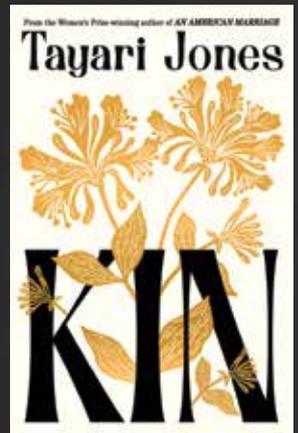


Elevate
by Brin Pirathapan
Pavilion Books
HB • £22.00
ISBN 9780008760632
Published 9th April

This bold debut cookbook from *MasterChef* winner Brin Pirathapan is all about making store cupboard essentials extraordinary. Each recipe takes one accessible ingredient – like a humble can of tuna or a pack of pork mince – and transforms it into something tasty, all while keeping things budget-friendly. Brin elevates the ordinary: whether you're coming home after a long day or cooking up a weekend feast, these dishes will raise your spirits and bring joy back to the kitchen.

Bound Together

In this moving new novel from the author of *An American Marriage*, Vernice and Annie are 'cradle friends', born days apart in Honeysuckle, Louisiana, both destined never to know their mothers. As they grow up in the 1950s, their lives take them in different directions, but they never lose their deep connection. We interviewed the author Tayari Jones to discover her inspirations.



Kin
by Tayari Jones
Oneworld • HB • £18.99
ISBN 9780861543908
Published 26th March

“Smart and funny and deftly profound.”

Ann Patchett

In the introduction, you say that *Kin* wasn't originally going to be the novel it became. Did you find that the characters you'd created had taken over the story?

For the first time in my life as a writer, my process became a mystery to me. I had set out to write a hyper-contemporary novel about the ways that the changing city landscape has affected the culture of the US, a topic that interests me. I had even planned to base the characters on my neighbours – whom I find endlessly fascinating. But for whatever reason, the story never gained its wings. When the story flows, the experience feels enchanted. But for more than a year, I sat at my desk grinding my gears. In desperation, I just started using a pencil and exercise book – the way I did when I was just a kid writing about visiting Mars. And this is when I met Vernice and Annie. For the first six months or so, I assumed that they must be the mothers of my 'real' characters. I finally accepted that this was not the backstory, it was THE story. I had to find humility enough to follow the plot, rather than lead it, to be introduced to the characters, rather than invent them.

The novel is written in alternate chapters from the points of view of Vernice and Annie. Why did you write it in this way?

I believe that changing the point of view is the most radical decision the author can make, so I only switch out of absolute necessity, when there is an element of the story that my existing POV character cannot tell. When Annie runs away, the only way I could know where she had gone, was to explore her POV. This is when I knew Annie and Vernice were dual protagonists, equal in every way.

Do you think that the bond between Vernice and Annie is based on the fact that their parents are no longer there?

The bond certainly began with their common motherlessness, but their connection is too strong to simply chalk up to something that is beyond their control. They become closer with every experience and much of it is due to the emotional heavy lifting of letting another person see exactly who you are – and trusting her with that essential truth.

The book is set at a time when there was segregation in the southern states of America, and the Civil Rights movement is on the rise. Is this a subject which is dear to your heart, and what has changed since those times?

I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia – the home of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the cradle of the civil rights movement. From my childhood, I knew myself to be the beneficiary of great sacrifice. When I was in third grade or so, my teacher would chide the class by saying, "This is not what Dr. King died for!" But as I have gotten older, I have become interested in that period in a way that is more personal and less symbolic. I want to know what it was like on a day-to-day basis, when the cameras were not running. Obviously much has changed since then, but sadly we are in a period when we are losing rights – as Black people, women, LGBT folks, immigrants – the list goes on and gets longer every day. Never in my lifetime has there been such an erosion of freedom.

Ghosts and spirits appear to some characters in the book – do you believe in the supernatural?

One of the questions that I explored in writing *Kin* was whether there is a difference between superstition, religion, and spirituality. I have decided that the distinction lives in the eye of the person experiencing the phenomenon. One person's religious trance is another person's superstition – and so on. That said, I – like most people – believe that there are things that occur that cannot be explained with rational explanations. On some level, it is how we create fiction. Where did Annie and Vernice come from? I will never know.

Which other authors inspire you in your work?

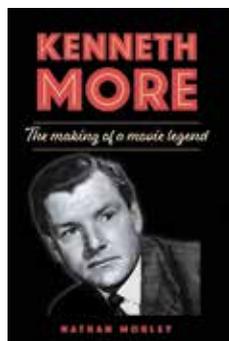
I admire the wild imagination and intense rigour of Toni Morrison. She is the gold standard of English-language writing. When it comes to world-building, there is no one better than Kazuo Ishiguro. I feel blessed to walk the earth at the same time as both of these geniuses.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Independent bookshops combine two of my favourite things – independence and bookshops! The indies allow us, as readers, to find books based on the recommendations of another human being in our community. Like the Rolling Stones – they know what we want as well as what we need! Reading is solitary, but selecting a book doesn't have to be. And once you have read the book, you can come back to the store and find someone to talk to about it. Independent bookstores offer a much-needed antidote to AI, algorithms and anything else that seeks to separate us from our humanity.

Past Times

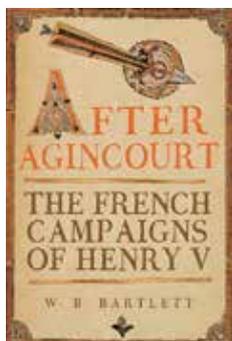
Rediscover your love of all things history with these new books from Amberley Publishing and Quiller Publishing, leading publishers of non-fiction titles.



Kenneth More: The Making of a Movie Legend

by Nathan Morley
Quiller Publishing
HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781846894206
Published 14th April

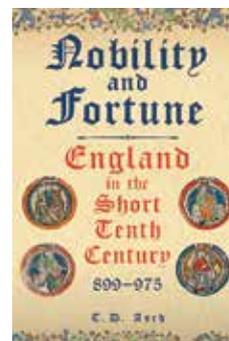
A fascinating biography of Kenneth More, one of Britain's leading film stars from the 1950s and 1960s. From his long career on stage and onscreen, to his tempestuous private life, this book covers the whole story. It features contributions from fellow actors and directors who worked with him. Among these are Martin Jarvis, Jane Asher, Chris Sarandon, Anneke Wills, Susan Penhaligon, Alvin Rakoff, Peter Medak, Barry MacGregor, and many others.



After Agincourt: The French Campaigns of Henry V

by W.B. Bartlett
Amberley Publishing
HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781398126190
Published 15th March

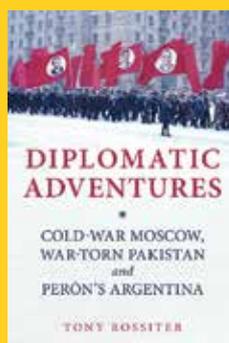
The Battle of Agincourt, fought on 25th October 1415, has gone down in history as one of the most iconic events in the story of England. Yet, dramatic though it was, it was only the beginning of a long and gruelling campaign that brought Henry V to the verge of greatness. This book is a highly accessible and riveting account of Henry V's lesser-known continental campaigns, characterised by sieges and diplomatic and political manoeuvring, not to mention bloodshed and murder.



Nobility and Fortune: England in the Short Tenth Century

by T.D. Asch
Amberley Publishing
HB • £22.99
ISBN 9781398120440
Published 15th March

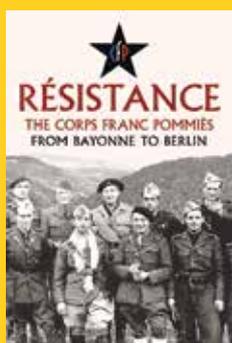
This is the story of how, between 899 and 975, England was transformed from an idea into a kingdom. It is the story of the unification of a nation. It is also the story of a royal family, with a shadowy patriarch and a warrior princess and a dissolute reprobate. It is the story of a deeply principled archbishop and a deeply unprincipled archbishop. It is a story of heroic deeds and squalid misdeeds. Above all, it is the story of an ongoing contest for power.



Diplomatic Adventures: Cold-War Moscow, War-Torn Pakistan and Peron's Argentina

by Tony Rossiter
Amberley Publishing
HB • £18.99
9781398112490
Published 15th March

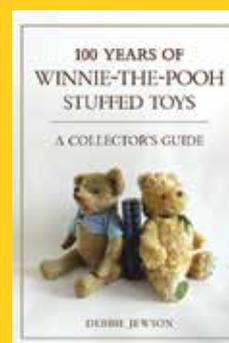
Moscow in the Cold War. Karachi during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Buenos Aires at the time of Perón's death. Three critical chapters of twentieth-century history – and as a young diplomat, Tony Rossiter had a box seat. Unlike the memoirs of most former diplomats, this book is not about high-level bureaucracy. Instead, it provides rare insight into the day-to-day life of a young man working at the coalface, in a vivid and evocative way.



Résistance: The Corps Franc Pommiers from Bayonne to Berlin

by Paul StJohn Mackintosh
Amberley Publishing
HB • £22.99
9781398127227
Published 15th April

The Corps franc Pommiers (CFP) was founded on 17th November 1942 by its namesake André Pommiers. It operated in southwestern France, becoming one of the largest and most important Resistance units in the south. On 15th April 1944 it sabotaged the Hispano-Suiza factory in Soues in the Hautes-Pyrénées, forestalling Allied bombing of the factory and the inevitable collateral damage. This book is published on the 80th anniversary of the parade in Berlin of the regiment.



100 Years of Winnie-the-Pooh Stuffed Toys: A Collector's Guide

by Debbie Jewson
Amberley Publishing
PB • £15.99
9781398130388
Published 15th April

An fascinating insightful guide to collecting one of the most famous bears of all time. Almost immediately after A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* was published in 1926, there was a merchandising frenzy and by the late 1920s every child wanted a Winnie-the-Pooh bear. Debbie Jewson charts the history of the earliest Pooh teddy bears through the decades up to the present day. With a wealth of colour photographs and detailed descriptions, the book provides an identification guide.

Flood of the Heart

Under Water is an original literary debut novel exploring the experiences of one woman of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami and of Hurricane Sandy in 2012. It's a story of grief, loss and female friendship, set against the backdrop of two cataclysmic natural events. We interviewed the author Tara Menon to find out more.



Photo © Sharona Jacobs

What was the inspiration for your novel *Under Water*?

In 2004, when the tsunami hit, I was a teenager living in Singapore. It was Boxing Day, right in the middle of Christmas holidays, and in a typical year, my family and I would have been on holiday in Thailand. For some reason, we were not that year. The tsunami killed a quarter of a million people; people at my school lost a sibling, a parent. A year later, I met survivors from Banda Aceh, Indonesia (the closest major city to the earthquake and one of the worst affected areas) and I heard them speak about their experiences of losing their family, their homes, their schools. The tsunami has haunted my imagination since.

“Compelling and heart wrenching, a remarkable debut”

Claire Messud

In 2012, when Hurricane Sandy hit, I was a doctoral student in New York. I sheltered at my flat in upper Manhattan: we never lost power; school was cancelled; we had every possible comfort. It felt like a holiday. In the aftermath, I volunteered in Chinatown distributing basic goods (batteries, canned food, bottled water) to residents living on the upper floors of public housing buildings. I was struck by the disparity between downtown powerless life and uptown brunch

fun. But I also found myself thinking deeply about natural disaster response and relief, and about disparities between responses (material and emotional) to natural disasters across the world. Those thoughts led me to put the first sentences of this book on paper.

The novel moves between two timelines – one on a Thai island on 26th December 2004, when the tsunami hit, and the other in New York in October 2012, when Hurricane Sandy hit. Why did you write it in this way?

Although both timelines move toward two large-scale (spectacular) natural disasters, these both occur at the end of the book and they do not come as a surprise to the reader. We know, from the very first pages, that the tsunami and hurricane will arrive. I wanted to put off the two spectacular natural disasters to the end of the book so that the lead up could foreground to what Rob Nixon called slow violence, harm that occurs gradually and mostly out of sight, like the bleaching of a coral reef or the introduction of an invasive species of turtle to a pond in Central Park. I wanted to show the differences between these places but also call attention to the similarities between them: this kind of slow destruction is happening, and has happened, everywhere.

In the novel, the narrator Marissa laments that grief for friends is not taken as seriously as grief for a family member or a lover. Do you think that grief for friends is underestimated?

When I was a teenager one of my closest friends lost one of her best friends from

home to a sudden death. I had never met the girl who died, but my heart broke watching my friend grapple with the loss. I soon understood that there was a script for certain kinds of grief – for losing a parent or grandparent or sibling – but there were neither clear parameters for mourning a friend, nor many cultural representations of this type of loss. People seemed to think it was something you could, maybe even should, move on from relatively quickly. I found this strange. My friendships, especially with women, are some of the most serious relationships of my life. To lose one of them would devastate me.

“A quietly beautiful novel, Under Water is a remarkable achievement.”

Kasim Ali

Then, when I was at university, I took a class on Victorian poetry and read Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, about his grief for his friend Arthur Hallam. I found the poem both totally devastating and utterly beautiful. I was mesmerized by it, by how seriously it took grief for a friend, and how difficult it has been (and still is) for readers of the poem to believe that Tennyson and Hallam were just friends. What if, I thought, a woman felt consumed by an enduring grief for a friend, just like

Tennyson? What would that feel like, what would that look like?

Marissa's father and his colleagues are observing and protecting manta rays. Did you do a lot of research into marine life to write the book?

Yes! I spent most of the time writing this book not writing it. I read wildlife guides; watched documentaries about the ocean as well as amateur videos of people scuba diving; I read research papers about the social lives of manta rays and books about coral reefs; I read all the resources available to members of the Manta Trust, a UK-based charity that coordinates global manta and devil ray research and conservation efforts; and I was lucky enough to speak (over Zoom) to Andrea Marshall, a conservation biologist known as the Queen of Mantas, and asked her all my questions about a diving day in the life of a marine biologist. Only a tiny fraction of what I learned made it into the novel, but I loved every minute of this research.

“A novel of remarkable delicacy and power,”

Katie Kitamura

In 2012, Marissa is haunted by her friend Arielle. Do you see this as a literal haunting, or part of Marissa's psyche?

Definitely not a literal one! This is a realist novel – the ghostly presence of Marissa is not an attempt to represent the supernatural but rather to better portray Marissa's consciousness. Arielle exists in Marissa's imagination. But what might make it feel otherworldly is that Arielle thinks that she has no choice about Marissa's continued presence in her life. She thinks Marissa won't leave her alone. I think it's more complicated than that.

Marissa walks through New York, observing both people and animals. Do you see this as a reflection of her father's work observing marine creatures?

Her father's job is certainly one reason why Marissa is so able to pay such close attention to people and the environment. But Marissa didn't just learn from her father and his research partner – who both study the reproductive lives of manta rays – but also from the rotating door of biologists, lepidopterists, arborists, plant scientists and conservationists who come to visit the research station when she is growing up. Marissa spends her childhood shadowing people who observe for a living; she learned how to watch closely from experts.

The book is full of literary references – which other authors inspire you in your work?

This is an impossible question to answer because there are too many to name, but I'll try. The New York chapters of the novel are in conversation first with the literature of grief – not just Tennyson but also C.S. Lewis, Thomas Hardy, Joan Didion and more recently Max Porter and Helen MacDonald – and also with the long tradition of flaneur

novels. But *Under Water* is also deeply indebted to the Victorian novels that I teach and write about as a professor of English. Like those, it is a work of realism that is deeply invested in the ordinary, but unlike many canonical nineteenth-century realist novels, it is not solely concerned with the experience of humans. Instead, I tried to place humans alongside the animals with whom they share the world. In this, my inspiration is the narrative non-fiction that captures the complexity and richness of the natural world – from classics like Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us*, but also more recent books like Peter Godfrey-Smith's *Other Minds* and Patrick Svenson's *Book of Eels*.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Readers who are familiar with New York will recognize the unnamed bookstore that appears in the novel: Three Lives. It would be difficult for me to overstate just how important Three Lives was to me during the decade I lived in New York. When I was in New York, I was a student – first an undergraduate and then a graduate – and I therefore always had reading that I had to do. Required reading. But it was because of conversations with the booksellers at Three Lives that I never stopped reading for pleasure. Often, instead of doing the reading I *should* have been doing, I did the reading I *wanted* to do. Most of the time, this was a novel that a Three Lives bookseller and handsold to me – Anuk Arudpragasam's *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, Vivek Shanbhag's *Ghachar Ghochar*, Sarah Moss's *Ghost Wall*. I find that nothing, and certainly no algorithm, can make up for the conversations you can have with people who spend their lives with books or indeed the peace of browsing the shelves of a beautifully curated shop.

Under Water

by Tara Menon

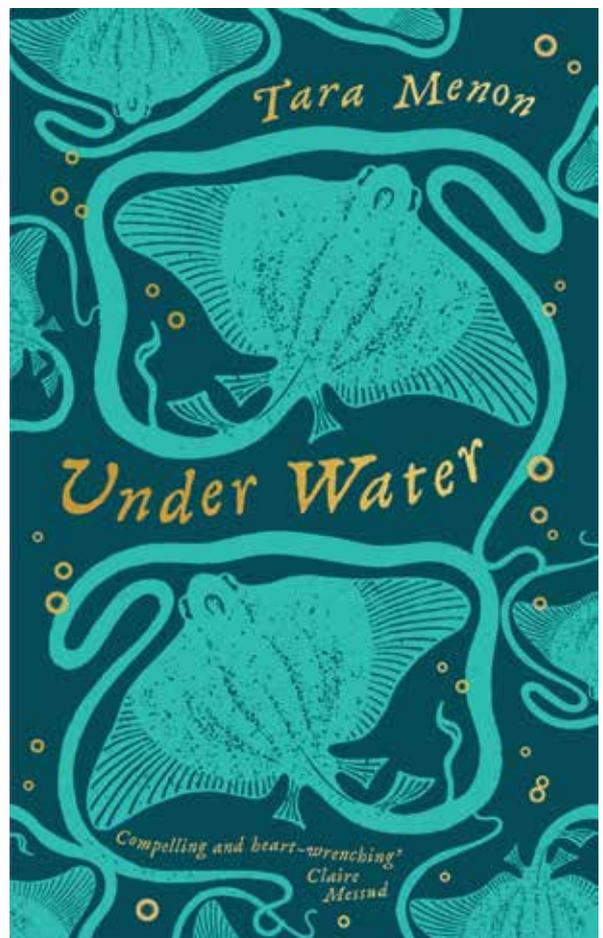
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ISBN 9781398549159

Published 12th March

Look out for a special edition available exclusively in independent bookshops, while stocks last!



Story Sellers

As *The Homemade God*, Rachel Joyce's compelling novel of art, death and sibling relationships, is published in paperback, she has written an exclusive piece for Booktime about the joy of independent bookshops.

Photo © Pal Hansen



When my first novel, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*, was published, I remember the excitement being swiftly felled by the news that physical books were on their way out. They were heavy, impractical, and prone to falling apart. Ebooks, read on kindles, would replace them. And that surely meant the death of the bookshop. I was appalled.

But fourteen years later, we still have kindles and we still have bookshops. The crisis didn't happen. And why? Because – convenient as a kindle may be – it can never replace your indie bookshop.

First of all, there's that smell. You walk in, and – oh what is it? It's paper and wood polish and possibly someone's lunch but mostly it's the smell of a place where people care. You walk in and someone knows your name, or at least your face, and if they don't, it seems they would like to.

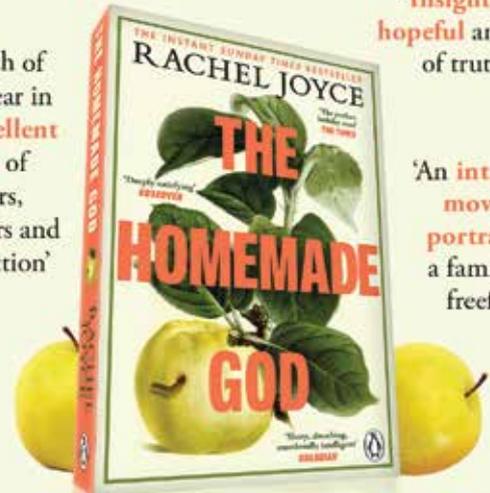
And the staff. They have faith in hardbacks! They're working for the thrill of telling people about books and they're acting as if they've won the lottery. 'Oh you like *Lessons in Chemistry*? Have you read *Great Circle* by Maggie Shipstead? No? Let me get that for you. You have *such* a treat ahead!' And then they walk you to the shelf which is located in some impossible corner you never would have found and they pull out the book and hand it to you as if they're giving you a gift, which in many ways they are.

I also love that indie bookshops have sections that are as creative as the books themselves. 'Essays by women about water.' 'Knitting Mysteries.' 'Staff picks from Jane who has an excellent knowledge of historical fiction. Medieval.'

But let's not pretend. Unless you live on the High Street, they are ridiculously inconvenient. You have to walk or park or get the bus. You have to go during business hours. You might not find what you want. The person in front of you is asking incredibly detailed questions about a book by a man whose name begins with W and everyone is patiently trying to help. You could be at home in your pyjamas, clicking Buy Now.

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EVEN WHEN IT FALLS APART**

'A touch of King Lear in this excellent story of fathers, daughters and dysfunction'



'Insightful, hopeful and full of truth'

'An intricate, moving portrait of a family in freefall'

★★★★★
READER REVIEWS



The Homemade God

by Rachel Joyce
Penguin • PB • £9.99
ISBN 9781804994344
Out Now

But here is the thing about convenience. It doesn't always work. We have become efficient and expedient and we never have to go out, or talk to anyone, or waste a single minute of our precious day, and it turns out the wasted minutes were the ones that mattered.

When you go into an indie bookshop you experience sacred idleness. Time concertinas, multiplies, turns inside out. You hear one bookseller telling another about the new Zadie Smith, or a small press you've never heard of. You read three pages, decide that book's not for you, then pick up another. (Some shops even offer chairs.) You learn that the author of the book in your hands will be visiting this very shop tomorrow and no, it will not cost you anything. You can come back and meet a number of people who love books the same way you do and that is the norm.

You remember that choosing a book is a relationship. It is a conversation. You remember that someone curating things for you is a gift: that local and small and *independent* are quirky and true to themselves, and basically wonderful.

My new novel, *The Homemade God*, is out now in paperback. If you buy a copy, I'd urge you to do it from your local indie bookshop.

Rachel
Joyce

C'est La Vie

In this new novel from the author of *The Mercies*, we follow the lives of Laura and Erica, who meet in Paris in 1978. But as the years draw on, will they ever be together? We interview the author Kiran Millwood Hargrave to discover more.



What inspired you to write *Almost Life*?

I was two thirds through writing a completely different book – a horror set in India in the dying days of the British Raj – when three critical things happened. I saw *Past Lives*, Celine Song's beautiful film about what-might-have-been; Chappell Roan released *Good Luck, Babe!* as a single; and the *One Day* TV adaptation filled and broke everyone's hearts. Suddenly, I wanted to write a love story. The idea of two women meeting in Paris in the 1970s came from a real event that happened to someone close to me, and once I had their names – Erica and Laure – and watched them meet each other in my mind, I knew the rest would unfold. All I had to do was write it. The first draft flew out of me in only six weeks.

The novel unfolds over many decades, beginning in 1978. Why did you start it in this era?

Partly because the true origin story revolved around two women meeting then, but it was also a time of extraordinary change in Paris and western society at large. The education of women was becoming more commonplace, the queer scene in cities was growing, and the music was brilliant. Culture was going in directions it had never gone before, in all areas, from politics to art. It's a very alive, vibrant time that speaks to current

times of development and unease. For example, the National Front was surging in France, but gay clubs were booming in Paris. Tradition and radicalism were enmeshed in a fascinating way.

"A heart-rending tale of missed chances"

Douglas Stuart

Do you think that if Laure and Erica had met in the present day their lives would have been different?

Yes. Gay marriage is now legal in the UK and France, and Erica definitely wanted to get married, and if that was an option with Laure she may have felt less conflicted. Same for children – it's still very hard, but possible to have a family together as two people of the same sex. What wouldn't have changed is their flaws, I think. Laure would still be a snob, and Erica still jealous and insecure. So I don't know if the outcomes or highs and lows would have changed, but the societal pressures would have been different.

The novel is mainly set in Paris and Norfolk. Are these two places dear to you?

Definitely. My grandparents live in Wells-Next-the-Sea on the North Norfolk Coast, my favourite place in the world. The skies there are unmistakable, vast in a way I've never seen anywhere else, and every time I swim there a seal appears. And Paris – who doesn't love Paris? It's dirty and romantic and nostalgic and alive. It's also a brilliant place to walk, and I wanted these women to walk a lot, and talk a lot.

Laure and Erica are in love but circumstances keep drawing them apart. Did you plan the story out in advance?

No, it was entirely unplanned, and could never have gone any other way. I love to get to know my characters and let them take the lead: Laure and Erica are real to me, and I didn't have control of them. So if you don't like how it goes, don't blame me!

The novel alternates between Laure's and Erica's perspectives. Was it important for you to reveal both sides of the story?

This is less a love story than an almost love story. It's as much about their time apart as together, the other loves they experience and their losses and triumphs in the time between finding each other again. It wouldn't have felt right to write one perspective without the other.

Laure is a lecturer on art, and believes that great art can change the world. Do you agree, and what are your favourite works of art?

Of course it can. It frequently does. Change someone's heart and you can change their mind. Being open to beauty and wonder is as valuable as being open to a different point of view. It encourages complexity and independent thought. Most of all, art allows you to develop your empathy: something we all need more of. My favourite works of art change according to my mood, but right now, on a rainy afternoon in Cambridge, I'm thinking of Rothko's Seagram Murals, Lee Krasner's Gaea, and Portia Zvavahera's *Captured Owls*.

Which other authors inspire you in your work?

I am a reader first, and the list is long! But those that spring immediately to mind are Nina Bawden, Ann Patchett, Beryl Bainbridge, Margaret Atwood, Bapsi Sidhwa and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Community over capitalism, independent thought over idiocy, hope over fascism. I told you: I really do believe art can change the world!

Almost Life

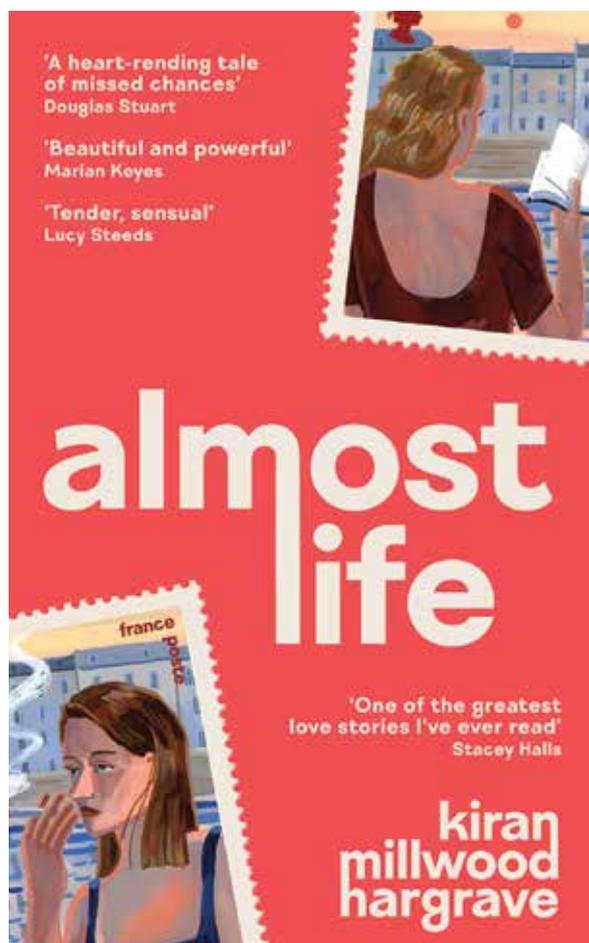
by Kiran Millwood Hargrave

Picador • HB • £16.99

ISBN 9781035007493

Published 12th March

Look out for a signed edition with sprayed edges, available exclusively from independent bookshops!



“This is a deeply stylish, astute and illuminating biography of a fascinating writer”

Francesca Wade, author of *Square Haunting*



Photo © Marc Provins

“Utterly charming. A book as elegant, sharp-witted and mischievous as its subject”

Clare Pollard, author of *Delphi*

Life After Life

In this original new biography of the literary legend Muriel Spark, James Bailey examines the different worlds and personas she inhabited in a remarkable life and career that spanned much of the twentieth century. We interviewed him to discover how he wrote it.

What drew you to write a biography of Muriel Spark?

I completed a PhD on Spark's fiction several years ago, and found myself engrossed in the letters, notebooks and manuscripts housed at her archives in Edinburgh and Tulsa. Spark's life, I quickly realised, was every bit as wild and compelling as the books she wrote. But rather than offering a heavyweight, exhaustive biography, I was drawn to the idea of dropping the reader in on various stages in Spark's life – from her years in the bedsits and boarding houses of postwar London, to her frenzied time in New York in the 1960s. I loved the idea of creating a kaleidoscopic portrait of Spark, and keeping readers on their toes.

Why do you think that Spark's work – and her life story – has stood the test of time, twenty years since her death?

Spark's body of work is extraordinary, and unlike that of any other writer. She'll treat you to holiday romance which transforms into a murder mystery, or a political satire about a surveillance-crazed abbess. But that thrilling, unpredictable quality also applies to Spark's life. Just when we think we have the measure of her, she slinks out of sight, only to reemerge with a new way of writing, from a desk in a different part of the world. To look at her life and body of work is to see someone who lived and wrote on her own terms, and I think that's why she still draws us in.

“You don't have to be a Muriel Spark fan to enjoy the sharp wit of Like a Cat Loves a Bird, a fascinating and nuanced exploration of the sacrifices some make to focus on their art”

Luke Turner, author of *Out of the Woods*

The book is split into many chapters, which take us through her life, each named after a different aspect of her personality or persona during each period. Do you see her as a chameleon-like figure, ever changing?

Absolutely. There's no singular Spark who I sought to depict in this book, nor any one 'story' of her wildly varied life that I tried to tell. Instead, I wanted to capture her playfulness, contradictions and extraordinary instinct for survival. Time and again, Spark responded to periods of crisis and creative

stagnancy by gathering her life into a new shape and beginning again. She was one of literature's great shapeshifters, and it's that lifelong slipperiness, and that sense of perpetual reinvention, that I wanted to bring to the page.

Throughout the book, you also write also about her many literary works, and how they relate to her life. Do you have a favourite?

It's impossible to settle on a favourite Spark. I sometimes prefer her early run of short, sharp social satires, including novels like *Memento Mori* and *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* – you really get a sense of an author writing at breakneck speed, her mind brimming with wild ideas. At other times it's one of her mid-career experiments, like the pitch-black 'whydunnit', 1970's *The Driver's Seat*. That was Spark's own favourite, although she acknowledged that she frightened herself while writing it and had to finish it from a hospital bed. Telling the story of how she wrote that novel, during the years she spent in Rome, gave me the creeps too.

Although the book is chronological, you also move back and forth through her life within each chapter – sometimes highlighting her past and future and how it relates to her present. Did you write it in this way to emulate Spark's own work?

It takes a braver writer than me to try to emulate Spark! But jumping around in time

came naturally when it came to telling Spark's story. Spark had a gimlet-eyed presence in the world, and the things she experienced and observed would often find a home in her fiction. During her schooldays, for instance, she quickly perceived her schoolteacher, Miss Christina Kay, as 'a character in search of an author'. Kay would be 'touched up for fiction', as Spark put it, in the unforgettable figure of Miss Jean Brodie. It therefore made a lot of sense to leap from Spark's schooldays in 1930s Edinburgh to the early 1960s, when *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* became an international success. There are other instances of this in the book, like Spark's fictionalisation of her unhappy years in South Africa, or the way she drew from her life in post-war London in 1963's *The Girls of Slender Means*.

Spark was unusual for a woman of her era, ending her marriage, not dedicating herself to motherhood, and forging her own career on her own terms. Do you see her as a feminist?

As with everything else in Sparkworld, it's complicated. Spark certainly wouldn't have used the word; in her life, as in her work, she seemed allergic to labels – even where her much-discussed conversion to Catholicism was concerned, she took pains to distinguish herself from other converts. But when I look at how she lived – unrepentant and answering to nobody – I think of the influence of her beloved grandmother, Adelaide. Adelaide, who marched with the Watford Suffragettes, was a defiantly unconventional figure, and Spark loved her for it. That same nonconformist streak can be identified in many of Spark's heroines, whose ingenuity allows them to escape the restrictive roles forced upon them (often by men, who tend to be manipulative, malicious, or just plain dull) and blaze a trail of their own.

Spark was a cat lover – do you think that she had a feline personality?

Spark saw cats as aloof and independent, and loved them for it. She once said that, when a cat wanders off from home, it's because 'the whim has seized it to look for something less boring elsewhere'. That was Spark, too. For much of her life, she was a restless, fidgety presence, forever seeking a life less ordinary. I love that she spent her last years surrounded by stray cats in rural Tuscany – how fitting for someone who came and went as she pleased.

Which other authors, aside from Muriel Spark, inspire you in your work?

There are so many, but I'm perhaps most drawn to the dark humour and risk-taking of some of Spark's contemporaries: writers like Beryl Bainbridge, Ann Quin, Iris Murdoch and Brigid Brophy. I'm also beside myself that some of the contemporary novelists I admire most, like Jenn Ashworth, Clare Pollard, Francesca Reece and Holly Pester, have read and enjoyed *Like a Cat Loves a Bird*. Beyond novels, I'm inspired by the likes of Alan Bennett, Victoria Wood, Mike Leigh, Caroline Aherne and Julia Davis, who

each found humour (and a fair bit of horror) in the everyday. I'm working on a novel at the moment, and have a photo of Jill Tyrell, Julia Davis's character from the sitcom, *Nighty Night*, on my desktop. That tells you a lot about where the next book is heading!

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Everything! I'm rarely happier than when I'm in a bookshop. I'm lucky to live close to Urmston Books and Chorton Bookshop in Manchester, and Serenity Booksellers in Stockport, and the impact they have on local communities, from reading groups, book clubs and events with libraries, is clear to see. Although I'm now very tempted to go out and see what's new on the shelves...

Like a Cat Loves a Bird: The Nine Lives of Muriel Spark

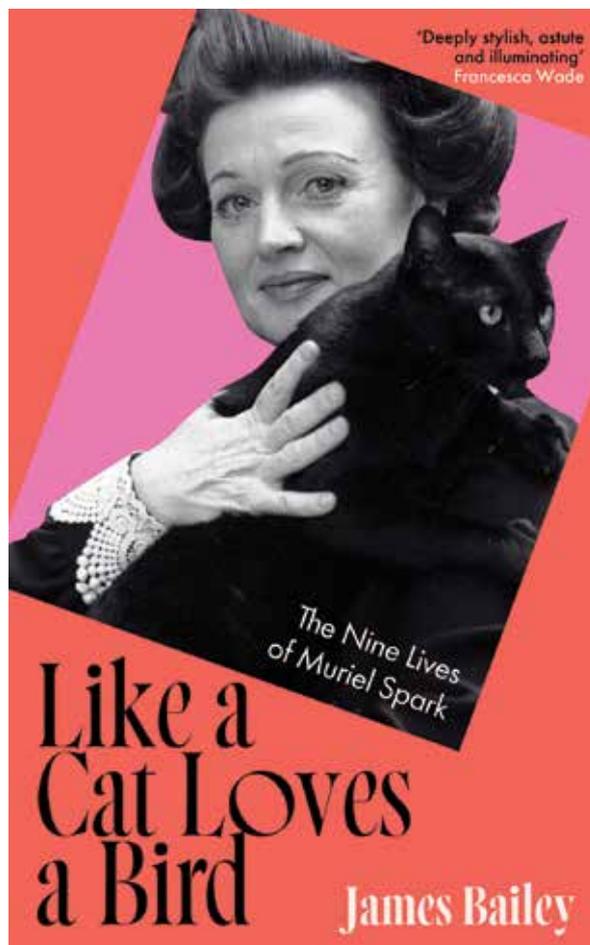
by James Bailey
Sceptre • HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781399742528
Published 16th April

“Vital, fun and immediate... full of engaging and astute literary analysis of Spark's work as well as scintillating, vivid biography”

Francesca Reece, author of *Glass Houses*

“A readable and fascinating book, about an under-appreciated literary giant”

Lucinda Hawksley, author of *The Mystery of Princess Louise*



This extract is from the prologue:

Dame Muriel Spark (née Camberg) is perhaps modern literature's finest shapeshifter, who, over the course of her eighty-eight years and in the twenty years since her death, remains elusive, contradictory and endlessly fascinating. Born in 1918, she was the Edinburgh-raised daughter of a Jewish father and Anglican mother, who attend a Presbyterian school but converted to Catholicism in her mid-thirties. She was the lonely mother who escaped an abusive marriage in South Africa to move, alone, to England at the tail-end of the Second World War. She found work concocting convincing untruths in a wartime propaganda office, before eking out a meagre living among the London literati. She became a high-flying literary sensation in the late 1950s, and then traded the glamour and buzz of New York and Rome in the 1960s and 70s for a life of quiet seclusion among stray cats in rural Tuscany. She was, if you believe what you read in the papers: a genius, a survivor, a bad mother, a fickle friend, a closeted lesbian, a tyrant, a loner, an eccentric, a recluse, a control freak and a terrible gossip. She would politely encourage you not to believe what you read in the papers.

A Taste of Heritage

This remarkable cookbook is a celebration of the food from the city of Odesa, in Ukraine. It features beautiful photography, and 100 unique recipes, from 100 families, along with their personal stories. Three years in the making, it is the creation of Odesan food writer and cook, Maria Kalenska, who divides her time between Ukraine, Germany and the UK. We interviewed her to discover more.



What inspired you to create the book?

I never dreamed that I would leave my country. I first left in 2014 and went to live in the UK. I miss my country and the city of Odesa. Before I left, I had my own cooking school, and we trained a lot of chefs in how to cook different food – British, French and Italian. I didn't realise how special Odesan food was until I left Ukraine and went to the UK. I've been collecting recipes for years. I spent a lot of time in bookshops in the UK, and I realised that there were no Ukrainian cookbooks available at the time. Odesa is a

multicultural city, like London, we have many immigrants from all over the world. During the Soviet era, we forgot our religion because it was prohibited. But nobody prohibited food – we still cooked. We lived in small communities, there would be Jewish, French, Italian and Greek food, we would cook together. The city is a real melting pot. The cuisine of Odesa is very specific, and different from the rest of Ukraine. It has so many different influences. During the time I lived in the UK, I was creating the book in my head. When the war started, I thought, this is the right moment for my cookbook, and I found a publisher.

“To read Maria’s book, and to make her recipes, will be like having a personal invitation into this world,”

Felicity Spector

How did you collect the recipes for the book?

When the war began it was very scary, I was worried that Ukraine would no longer be an independent country. And that we would become Russian again, and everybody would

cook Russian food. So I decided my book would be a community project, and that I would include as many families, and their stories, as I could. There are 100 free recipes from 100 free Odesan families, who now live all over the world, in 15 different countries. I think it was my best decision, to tell the stories of the people. We are very connected, even if we're not in the same country, and we still cook the same food.

How did you collect the photography for the book?

It took me so long! I started in 2016. I never thought that, with the war, we wouldn't have a photo of some of the buildings, that they would be destroyed. So there are photos from 2016, and we had 20 photographers who helped me with the book. There are old photos of Odesa, and also food photography. A lot of the photographers were very kind, and donated their photos to us without asking for money. I decided to have a story before each recipe about each family. And there you have photos of the beautiful town, I wanted readers to feel like they were walking through it, to the opera house or to the seaside and beaches. Unfortunately, it's going to be history very quickly because some of the people involved in the making of the book are no longer alive, and some of the buildings have been destroyed. But there is not much about the war in the book. I wanted to focus on the food and the people. I can't write about the war, because it is too painful for me.



At the beginning of the book, you have a list of principles of Odesan cooking, and one is that the food must look good as well as taste good. How important is this?

I wrote those principles in 20 minutes because they were already in my mind. Beauty is important in everything you do, even during the war. Even if the ingredients of the food are cheap, they must look beautiful, because you cooked them the right way. It can give you harmony, calm and energy.



As you say, you don't write about the war in the book, it's more about the people and the food, and the beauty of Odesa. Was it important to you to tell a positive story?

Yes, because I'm thinking about our children. I'm quite old, but our children will survive and will return to the Ukraine. This book is for them. I have said to my son – this book is for and your wife, for you to share with your children. It's a way for us to keep our culture. Odesa is a place of many cultures, and they are all equal.

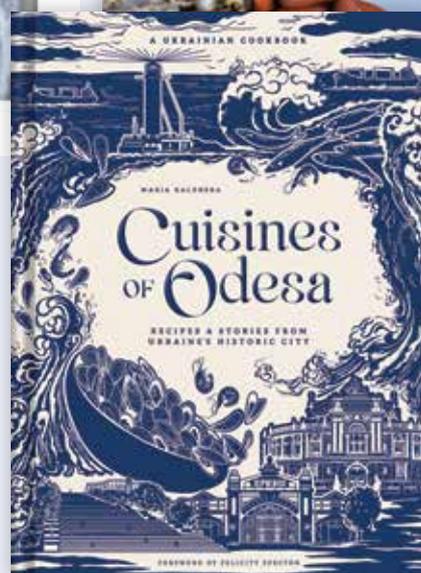
Do you have a personal favourite recipe from the book?

Gefilte Fish. Nobody will ever cook it, it's too hard! My editor said that we should move this difficult recipe from the book, but I said no, for me it's my heritage, and very important. It's very different, You need three different types of fish, and one day to prepare it and cook it! So we only cook it for special celebrations, maybe once a year. But it's a real treasure when you do cook it, because you can't eat it every day. I also love Cheese Curd Syrniki, which is a very

simple dish. It's an interesting food because you can cook it without any sugar, and then add something savoury or something sweet to it. It can be breakfast, or dinner, it's very adaptable. You can add salmon, avocado or fruit.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the book?

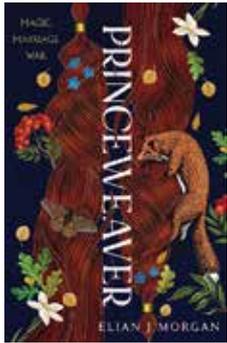
This book was conceived as a gift to Odesa. Odesa is the third largest city in Ukraine, and you'll encounter people whose character is as unique as Odesa itself: full of joy, optimism, love of life, and a very special sense of humour. We have two favourite pastimes: to have a laugh and to eat. I wanted to show our diversity and what we call our colorit, a particular Odesan vitality, our life force. There are so many stories and recipes we couldn't include in this book, but I will continue writing about Odesa's food and people – and our humour.



Cuisines of Odesa: Recipes and Stories from Ukraine's Historic City

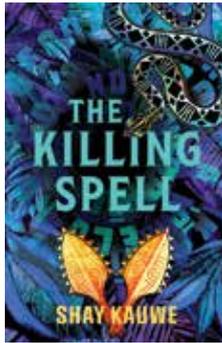
by Maria Kalenska
Photography by Andrey Rafael,
Anna Gusakova, Sabina Almasova
and Valentina Petrushenko.
Introduction by Felicity Spector
Weldon Owen • HB • £32.00
ISBN 9798886743722
Out Now

Fiction



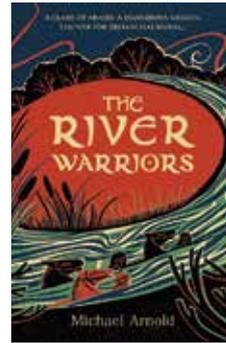
Princeweaver
by Elian J. Morgan
Canelo Romance
HB • £18.99
ISBN 9781835983652
Published 16th April

A queer fantasy romance touching on colonialism through a Welsh lens. Born with forbidden, nature-infused magic in an occupied land, apothecary Meilyr survives by keeping his head down. Until he ends up engaged to invading prince Osian in order to save his brother's life. Now he is in a deadly game of cat-and-mouse to hide his true self. When nobles in Osian's court are gruesomely murdered, Meilyr realises someone is seeking revenge for his homeland...



The Killing Spell
by Shay Kauwe
Solaris • PB • £9.99
ISBN 9781837864683
Published 23rd April

Kea Petrova is dealing with more than her fair share of trouble. She's the youngest of five Hawaiian clan leaders living on the Homestead in outer Los Angeles following catastrophic flooding. Kea struggles to keep her clan afloat, scraping together rent through odd jobs and selling her own crafted Hawaiian language spells. Just when she thinks things can't get any more complicated, the murder of Angelo Reyes – LA's most prominent Filipino activist – turns her world upside-down.



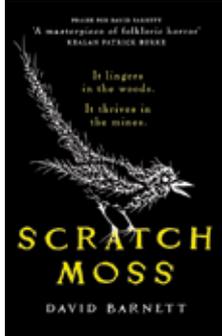
The River Warriors
by Michael Arnold
Canelo • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781835984277
Published 5th March

Set in Roman Britain, this is the sequel to *Savage Island*. The legions march inland, but progress is hampered by vast, ancient forests, swamps and rivers that must be crossed. But, guided by traitorous Celts blinded by self-interest, progress they do. Marshalling the fractious tribes, High King Tugodubnos plans the first major battle for the only fording point of the mighty Vaga River. Meanwhile, Cullen is dispatched by Aoife the Dread to seek out a mystic religious totem...



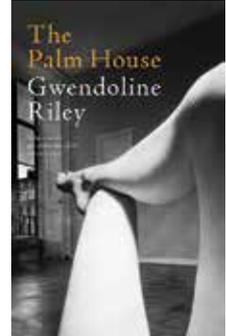
Deathbringer
by Sonia Tagliareni
Solstice Books
HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781398547506
Published 30th April
Look out for an indie exclusive edition with sprayed edges and endpapers!

A dark academia romantasy steeped in necromancy, forbidden love and a twisty murder mystery set within the halls of a magical institute, as a death mage and a poison mage who hates her are forced to work together to stop a killer. Born with the ability to speak with the dead, Viola hates her magic. It killed her sister, Olivia, and if she doesn't learn why, it will kill her too. Her only hope lies in Gorhail Institute of Magic, where Olivia spent her final days.



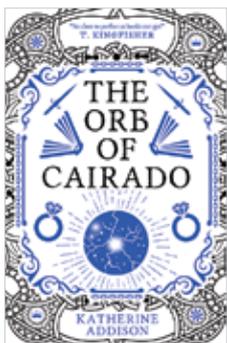
Scratch Moss
by David Barnett
Canelo • PB • £9.99
ISBN 9781835983195
Published 5th March

A devastating, five-timeline tale centred on a community first invigorated, then devastated by coal mining. Ranging from 1865 to 2025, it follows the people of Scratch Moss as they open a coal mine, discover something evil, and go through nationalisation and strikes, into the present day. When, in 2025, writer Joes returns to Scratch Moss for his father's funeral, memories of the horror that blighted the community come flooding back...



The Palm House
by Gwendoline Riley
Picador • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781035021048
Published 2nd April

A new novel from the author of *First Love*. Laura Miller and Edmund Putnam have been friends for a long time. Recently, though, Putnam has been harder to reach: he has lost his father, and the magazine to which he has dedicated his life has been hijacked by an insufferable new editor. Laura has her own problems: with a prickly mother and a tricky past. But as Putnam starts to sink into despondency, she must try to bring him back...



The Orb of Cairado
by Katherine Addison
Solaris • HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781837866496
Published 9th April

A brand new novella from the world of *The Goblin Emperor*. Five years ago, Ulcetha was studying at the University of Cairado, working his way toward becoming a scholar first-class in the Department of History. Then a prize artifact disappeared and Ulcetha, deftly framed, was kicked out. Now he works for a crooked importer, using his knowledge of elven history to write provenances for the fake artifacts Salathgarad sells...



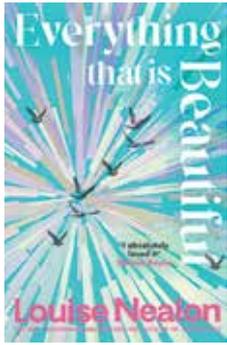
Intergalactic Feast
by Lavanya Lakshminarayan
Solaris • PB • £10.99
ISBN 9781837866823
Published 12th March

The second book in the *Flavour Hacker* series. It has been three months since Saraswati Kaveri and Serenity Ko won Interstellar MegaChef with their groundbreaking new food simulation, Feast. But victory is only the beginning. Saras is busy promoting their invention as the public face of Feast, while Ko keeps fighting battles to steer its development at XP Inc. And then there's the kiss. They've decided to just be friends for now, but the memory of that heady night hangs over them...



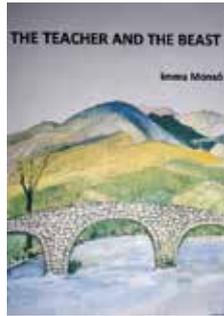
Ladies Almanack
by Djuna Barnes
Dalkey Archive Press
PB • £14.00
ISBN 9781628975581
Published 2nd April

Nearly 100 years after its original 1928 publication sent shockwaves through the literary scene, *Ladies Almanack* reigns as a brilliant modernist composition and one of the most audacious lesbian texts of the 20th century. After decades out of print, this is a new edition of the novel for contemporary readers: a classic that delivers all the salacious drama of *The L Word* with the literary wit and wordplay of Shakespeare, with an introduction by Sarah Schulman.



Everything That is Beautiful
by Louise Nealon
Manilla Press
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781786581365
Published 2nd April

A new novel from the bestselling author of *Snowflake*. For Niamh Ryan, the Foleys are family. Her childhood flew by on their farm, playing with her best friend Peter and his sister Kate – all the while being doted on by their mother Helen and coached by their father Liam. Now, following a distressing series of events, the family ties are strained. But as a family wedding looms, the knotty love that binds Niamh, Helen and Kate might bring them back together again.



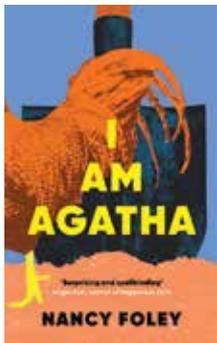
The Teacher and the Beast
by Imma Monsó
Translated by Peter Bush
Gretton Books
PB • £15.00
ISBN 9781739206734
Published 21st April

This prize-winning Catalan novel is in English for the first time. Isolated at home, Severina becomes a teacher in a remote village in the 1960s. A special relationship with a married man nicknamed the Beast helps her to understand what lies behind the silence under the Franco dictatorship, and why her parents had used ambiguous language in order to protect her. Step by step, she learns to bridge the gap between innocence and social and political reality under Franco's regime.



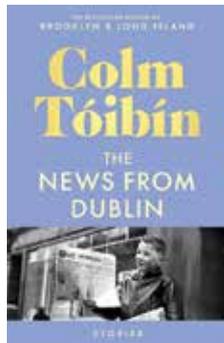
RABBITBOX
by Wayne Holloway-Smith
Scribner • PB • £12.99
ISBN 9781398552425
Out Now

A transfixing, heart-rending work which follows a mother and her young son living under the shadow of an all-consuming domestic threat, this is the debut novel from an acclaimed poet. 24 Coalbrook Street. The house is trembling with a father's anger. It makes a rabbit of a young boy, sends him burrowing into a wardrobe, and leaves his mother standing hapless and mute over the kitchen sink. In this house, how far can a mother's comfort travel?



I Am Agatha
by Nancy Foley
Serpent's Tail
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781805228813
Published 2nd April

Agatha and Alice are in love. Agatha, a celebrated painter and even more famous recluse, finally wants to settle down. But Alice has dementia, and a lingering fixation on her late daughter, who's buried in her backyard. In an ideal world, Agatha would move Alice – and her daughter's remains, if necessary – into her isolated house in the mesa high above their New Mexico town. But Alice's son wants her safely shut up in an assisted living facility and her property deeds in his pocket...



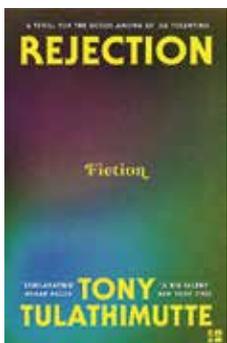
The News From Dublin
by Colm Tóibín
Picador • HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781035030736
Published 26th March

In this beautiful collection of short stories from the bestselling author of *Brooklyn* and *Long Island*, Colm Tóibín delves into the days and nights of those living far from home: lives of great longing, at a great distance from past lives and past selves. "Tóibín is the consummate cartographer of the private self, summoning with restrained acuity (and a delicious streak of sly humour) the thoughts his characters struggle to find words for" Clare Clark, *Guardian*



The Model Patient
by Lucy Ashe
Simon & Schuster
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781398548626
Published 9th April

A psychological exploration of obsession, betrayal and the dangerous relationship between patient and therapist in 1960s London. In the quiet hush of her therapist's office, Evelyn Westbrook finds herself revealing secrets she'd prefer to keep hidden. Abandoning her successful modelling career to become a model wife for her husband, Henry, has left her days feeling empty. And her nights are haunted by a recurring nightmare in which she becomes a snake devouring its own tail...



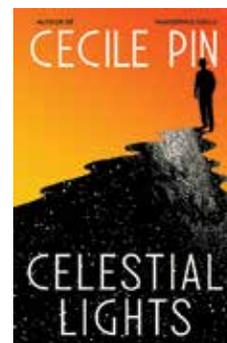
Rejection
by Tony Tulathimutte
4th Estate • PB • £9.99
ISBN 9780008759384
Published 23rd April

An audacious and original novel-in-stories following a cast of intricately linked characters facing rejection. We see a tryhard male feminist's allyship turn to a debilitating nihilism as he realises, over thirty years, that his feminism isn't getting him laid; a young woman's unrequited crush spirals into obsession and the systematic destruction of her sense of self and her group chat; and a shy late bloomer's flailing efforts at a first relationship lead to a life-upending mistake.



Honey in the Wound
by Jiyoung Han
Manilla Press
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781786587312
Published 16th April

Spanning ninety years as one family is displaced across Asia, this debut novel from a Korean author follows Young-Ja, who finds herself struggling to survive after her family is killed by Japanese soldiers. The magical gift that once brought her joy – the ability to infuse her cooking with her feelings: love, peace, delight – transforms into something more powerful as her sorrow and anger seeps into her confections. She soon becomes enmeshed in a network of spies...



Celestial Lights
by Cecile Pin
4th Estate
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9780008706395
Published 26th March

A new novel from the author of *Wandering Souls*. January 28, 1986: moments after launch, the *Challenger* shuttle falls from the sky. At the same time, in a small English village, Oliver Ines is born. Ollie spends his childhood in a bedroom covered in glow-in-the-dark wallpaper. Decades later, he has become one of the most renowned astronauts of his time. When an enterprising billionaire approaches him to lead a ten-year mission to a distant moon, Europa, Ollie cannot resist...

Family Fortunes

An original and immersive novel set over several decades, *Lázár* follows one noble Hungarian family through the generations, from the dying days of empire to the uprising of 1956. We interviewed the author, Nelio Biedermann, to discover his inspirations.

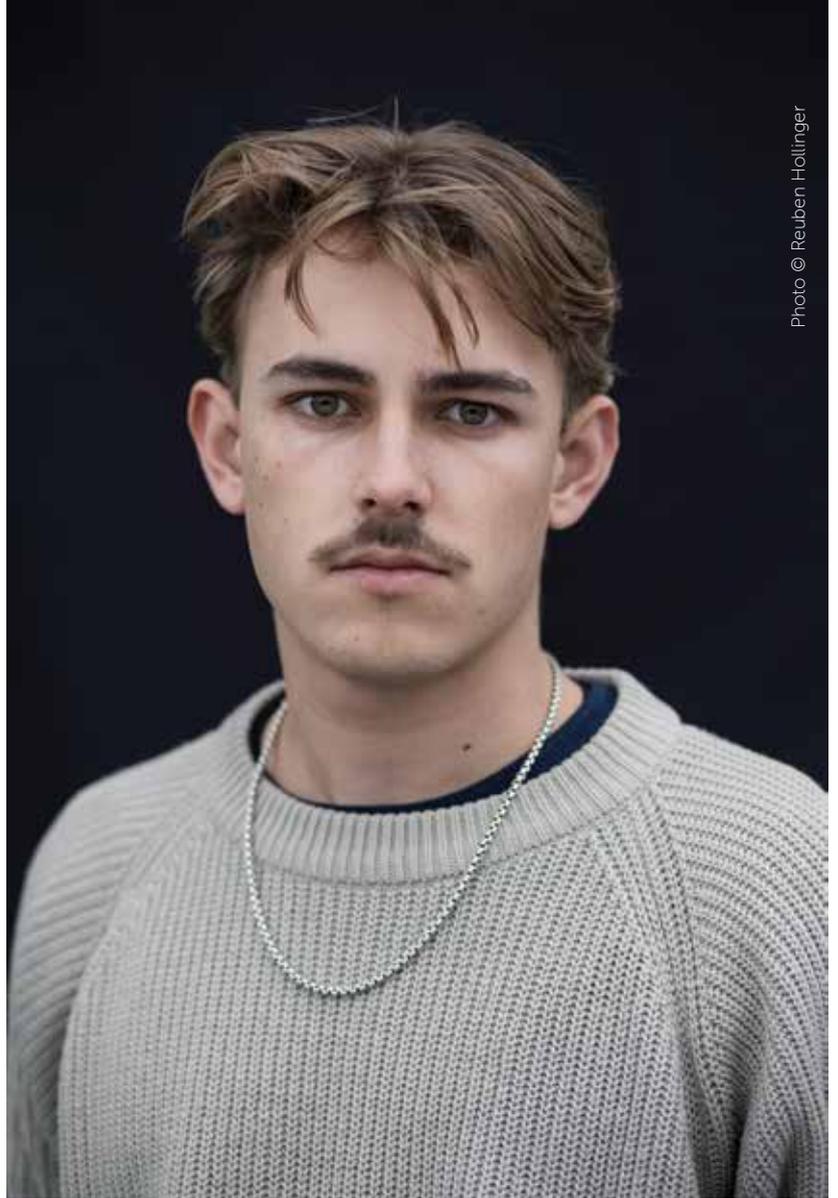


Photo © Reuben Hollinger

What inspired you to write *Lázár*?

The book is inspired by my own family story, in a sense it has always lived within me. I grew up surrounded by the relics of the aristocratic life they once lived: the silver cutlery, the dark antique furniture with delicately turned legs, the decorated ceramics, and the family portraits. Yet the most profound source of inspiration were the stories my grandmother used to tell of this vanished world.

The novel follows one Hungarian family through several decades. Did you research into the history of and literature of the times it is set in?

Especially in the early stages, I read a lot of literature from and about the period. This helped me to get a feeling for the way of life in those circles and that era. Historical accuracy mattered greatly to me, it was essential that the factual framework be sound, so that the fictional elements could breathe freely within it.

Sometimes there is a fairy-tale, supernatural quality to the story. Do you feel that the *Lázár* family are cursed?

In a way, I do think that the *Lázárs* are cursed. On the other hand, their fate isn't very different from the fate a lot of people had to suffer under during the horrors of the twentieth century. I think at times, history itself but also the world in general can really feel like living under a supernatural curse.

In the novel, Lajos and Lilly, and later Pista and Matilda, fall in love quickly. Do you believe in love at first sight?

In this aspect the novel reflects the literature but also the cinema – think of *Melodrama* – of the period it's set in. And the *Lázárs*, too, are figures of the dying days of Romanticism. But besides all that I really try to believe in love at first sight, or at least in first glances that will be followed by love.

“A truly great writer steps onto the stage”

Daniel Kehlmann

As well as lovers, the book is about siblings – Sándor and Imre, Lajos and Ilona, Pista and Eva. Do you think that there is a special bond between siblings?

Without a doubt. Normally they share a lot of memories with you, they grow up in the same environment, they know what shaped you, what made you the person you are. They see you in a way no one else will ever do.

The novel sees the family's fortunes change, from being nobles to having to flee Hungary. Do you think that we are all, to

some extent, at the mercy of history?

Of course we are! Although we all believe – like the *Lázárs* – that we are the centre of the universe, we are not. We are tiny dots whose happiness largely depends on chance.

In the novel, Eva thinks about how authors have ultimate power over their characters – do you think this is true, or do they sometimes surprise you?

While I was writing the novel I really thought that Eva is right. But with distance I came to realize that she is, in fact, quite mistaken. Not only the characters but also the story in itself can and should develop a life of its own. In the best-case scenario, the author is held just as firmly by the story as the story is shaped by the author.

Which other authors inspire you in your work?

There are countless authors who inspire me. For this book my main inspirations were Thomas Mann and Joseph Roth, but also Gabriel García Márquez.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

They mean a lot to me, and I consider them very important. They enrich every neighbourhood, they are places for exchange, for discovery and broadening one's horizons. And they are places I cannot walk past without stepping inside.

“Lázár is an exquisite and masterly pronouncement that a gifted young writer walks among us”

Patti Smith

In this extract, Mária worries that her husband Sándor might question the paternity of their son, Lajos:

Two and a half years passed before the baron looked at the boy properly for the first time and asked his wife the question she had been dreading for so long. Contrary to what she had expected, the fear had not subsided over the weeks, months and years that had passed since the birth, but increased, for the question would come, this was certain, and with every minute the lie grew, driving its root system deeper into the ground, extending its leaf canopy further and further until it would overshadow her family, the manor house and her entire life.

But Mária didn't allow her fear and the creeping lie to get her down. On the contrary, she resolved to face up to the falsehood, whet her knives and sharpen her senses for the day when the question hovering over them all threatened to burst it.

For this, Mária had to learn how to lie. Her mother was a pious Christian who only wore grey and read the Bible for three hours every day – one before breakfast, one before lunch and a final hour before supper. Throughout her entire life no untruth had ever passed her thing, bright-pink lips, and she had raised her six children to the same standards. If they did happen to lie and were found out, they were made to write out the Lord's Prayer on hundred times, with their left hand and using the oldest pen, without smudging a single letter.

And so it is all the more astonishing that Mária mastered the craft with such speed, consistency and refinement. The method she used was a simple as it was successful: she lied whenever she could. She gave a false answer to each question she was asked, even if it was as banal as whether she would prefer to have paprika chicken or game for dinner. And with every lie that left her lips, she cast of part of her childhood self, left part of that Lord's-prayer-writing girl behind, gaining instead in self-assurance, shrewdness and mischief, so that when Sándor finally posed the question she had been dreading for so long, she knew that her fear was unfounded, for by now she found it easier to lie than to tell the truth.

The question arose when the von Lázár family was sitting around the dining table, eating goulash soup. Mária was regaling them with a fanciful story, pretending it was the truth, while the others listened in silence, their thoughts elsewhere. Sándor was just wondering where love had gone when his son threw a chunk of beef at his chest. Looking up in disbelief, the baron saw his son sitting in the highchair, and for a moment did not know who this young person was.

“Once more it struck him: this was supposed to be his son. But he did not look like him one bit.”

He sat there, his snow-white shirt spattered with reddish-brown sauce, a scrap of beef over his heart, and could not say who this child was. Although the baron knew that the little boy was of significance to his life, he could not think why. Now, free from any preconceptions, for the first time he saw Lajos as he really was: blond, blue-eyed and jellyfish-skinned.

Once more it struck him: this was supposed to be his son. But he did not look like him one bit.

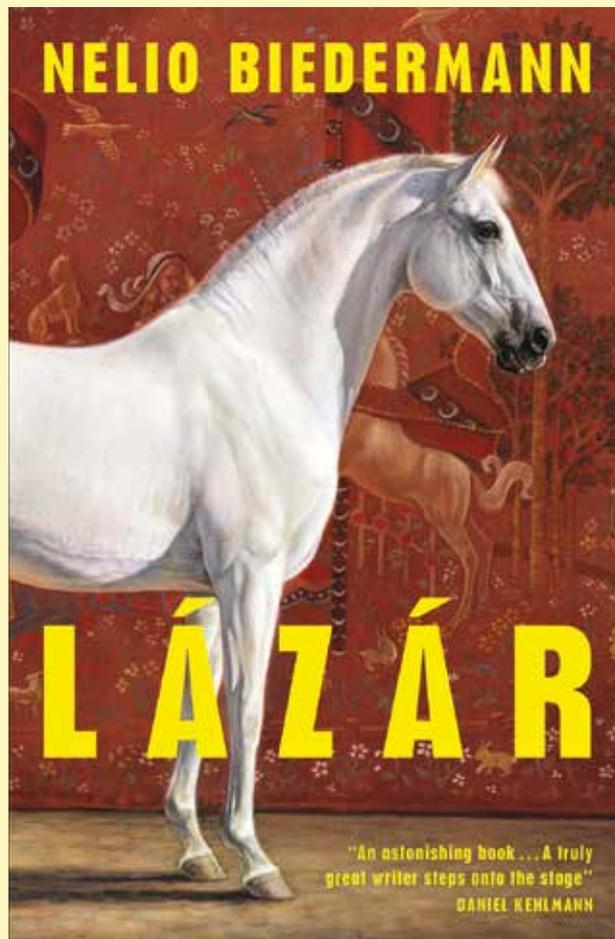
'Are you sure that child is mine?' he asked as a joke, but aware too that he was terrified of the answer: Mária, who had played out this scene in her head a thousand times, said casually, 'But of course, darling. How else would he look so much like Hayo the First?'

This was a bold answer, for there was neither a picture nor a description of the forefather of the Lázár dynasty, who at the age of fourteen had followed the Danube to Budapest with nothing save for a blue-black raven on his shoulder and a hunk of hard bread in a bag, had trained to be a jeweller, fought in the Siege of Szigetvár, surviving the battle thanks to his extraordinary cowardice, and then, to counter his innate solitude, had fathered sixteen children.

This mattered not though, for as soon as Mária had given her answer, the baron sketched his own portrait, using Lajos as his model. And he was so delighted that his son resembled the famous Hayo that he completely forgot to give the child a box on the ear.

“A vivid, strange story that sustains its tension”

Dazed



Lázár

by Nelio Biedermann
Translated by Jamie Bulloch
MacLehose Press • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781529445336
Published 26th March

Best Foot Forward

In this inspirational new book, BBC broadcaster Sophie Raworth describes how she was bitten by the marathon bug, and has travelled all over the world to compete in them.

After seeing a friend run the London Marathon, Sophie decided to give it a go. Collapsing two miles from the finish line, her first attempt was a disaster, but she picked herself up and kept going on a path that would take her to races all over the world across the Alps and even the Sahara Desert for the famous 150-mile Marathon des Sables.

Sophie has now run all six World Marathon Majors, completed 15 marathons and three ultra-marathons, and run the entire length of the Thames Path, from source to sea. Along the way, she discovered new inner confidence, strength, community and the power of friendships which helped her through some tough challenges from losing loved ones and fighting injuries to interviewing the Prime Minister.

Running on Air will show you that you can do more than you ever believed just by putting one foot in front of the other: running can give you a purpose, a goal, but most of all, a breath of fresh air.

In this extract, Sophie starts training for the Great North Run:

No one is watching when I step out of the door of our terraced house in London in 2006 for my first training run for the Great North Run. It's spring, early evening, cherry blossom on the tree-lined street. It is starting to warm up. My husband is too, bouncing from one foot to the other on the pavement, stretching his legs, getting ready for a quick run. I have pulled on my new Nike trainers, a pair of shorts and a really unflattering T-shirt and I'm on the pavement too now, copying Richard's energetic routine. I am about a stone overweight after having our second baby. I can't remember when I last tried running. I can't really remember when I last did any proper exercise at all.

'How far are we going?' I ask, trying not to sound nervous. 'Oh, only 3 miles or so. It's my usual short run. We could do the longer one if you want. But that's more than 5 miles around the river. Probably best to start with a short run and see how you go?' I nod in agreement, and we set off at a slow jog. How hard can this be? I keep thinking, clutching a bottle of water, as

Running on Air: From BBC Headlines to Life-Changing Finish Lines

by Sophie Raworth
Bloomsbury Sport
HB • £20.00

ISBN 9781399426336
Published 23rd April

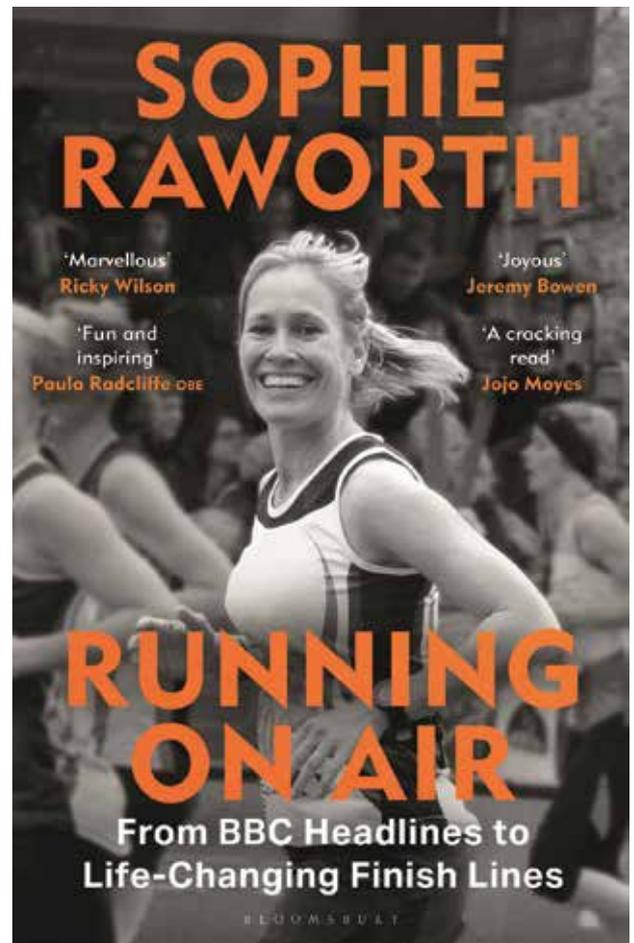
runners seem to do. 'You don't need to bring water,' Richard says, laughing. 'We are only going for half an hour!' I take it anyway. I feel like I may need it.

We cross over a couple of roads, passing people walking home from work, and already I'm enjoying the brief breaks when traffic lights mean we have to stop and wait for the cars. 'OK?' asks Richard, glancing over his shoulder. I make a strange sound as I nod my head. I'm finding it hard to speak because my lungs are feeling so tight. 'I just need to stop for a second,' I gasp, pulling up on the kerb. 'Just want a bit of water. My throat's feeling weirdly dry.' He looks bemused, jogging on the spot. We've only come half a mile. We run on again over a busy main road and down towards the Thames. I am sweating a lot now and out of breath. It's a horrible feeling, gasping for air, but my pride makes me try to keep up. Richard runs several times a week after work, just for fun. He's done a couple of marathons too. This really is just a walk in the park for him.

"Fun and inspiring,"

Paula Radcliffe

The River Thames is a welcome distraction. We turn on to a gravelly path running along the water under a leafy awning of plane trees that bring some much-needed shade. Across the river I can see the rowers lifting their boats high on their shoulders as they carry them back into the boathouses. The sun is going



down, casting a golden glow on the white stone of a bridge up ahead. We dodge in and out of early evening strollers, families with small kids and friends chatting in pairs. Walking in this evening light looks a lot more pleasant than what I'm doing. Running hurts. I'm red-faced. My lungs feel like they're exploding. I am starting to feel a little panicky, though I don't say any of this now. How am I going to run 13 miles in Newcastle when I am struggling after less than 3?

I find a beginner's half marathon training plan. It gives me some structure. Week one: 2 miles on Tuesday, 3 miles on Thursday, 4 miles on Sunday. I can cope with that. The distance builds by a mile or two every week. Ten miles is the furthest I will run before the big day, which is three months away. Crucially, I tell people that I am going to run my first half marathon, because I know that once I have done that there will be no backing down.

With two children under the age of two, training time is a little limited. But I quickly discover how much more I seem to be able to fit into my day when I have some structure. Mornings are virtually impossible with a five-month-old baby to breastfeed. But by the time Richard is back from work, I'm ready to rush out of the door, thrusting small children at him as I go. The joy of running is that it doesn't take up that much time. Trainers on, into the street and I'm back within an hour. Yes, I still gasp for air and my lungs still feel like they're bursting. But now that I'm getting out there three times a week, I do start to realise that it's getting easier.

Love Through the Ages

Twenty Years Together is a beautiful love story from Tom Rob Smith, author of *Child 44*. Danny and Luis have been a couple for decades, but the only thing they didn't have was a marriage. Now the law has changed to allow civil partnerships, Danny decides to propose to Luis. Luis loves Danny, but does he love marriage? We interviewed the author to discover his inspirations.

Photo © Pierfrancesco Artini



“Tom Rob Smith has delivered a classic love story for the modern era,”

John-Paul Sarni

***Twenty Years Together* is quite a different novel to your previous books. What inspired you to write it?**

I've always felt like stories choose me, I haven't ever had a grand theory or a grand plan. With *Child 44*, I stumbled across the true case that it was based upon by accident when I was researching another piece. London Spy was the same. With *Twenty Years Together*, I went through a very similar experience to that which the book is based on. I've been in a long-term relationship for years, and marriage came up as a question when gay marriage was legalised. It was such an odd feeling to be asking this question, almost philosophically. Also, two of my favourite films are *The Silence of the Lambs* and *When Harry Met Sally*, which are very different to each other. It's a tragedy what happened to Rob Reiner, but I met him briefly once in LA, and I just had to tell him how much I loved that movie. I thought about that movie a lot when I was writing *Twenty Years Together*. It has such a simple premise but it's so effective. And so I thought, what would it mean for two people that have been together for that long to then think about marriage for the first time and that was how it came about. Writing this book was a big journey, but I didn't feel daunted so much as excited.

The book is set in 2012 and 2013, just before gay marriage became legal in the UK in 2014. Was that why you set it then?

Yes, it was. It is a period piece, because now I've talked to lots of gay men and gay women who are younger than me and they've grown up with it, and don't see it as any different to straight marriage. They're going through the decision-making process is much more similar way to the decision-making process of a straight person. Also, there was something about London in 2012, I feel like that period was peak London, and in some ways peak England. We were coming out of that awful recession, but there was this sense of optimism. And I think *Twenty Years Together* is an optimistic book. But you're right, the primary reason was the dates and the legislation. People remember 2012, though, it was a really interesting time for the country.

Much of the novel is set in London, but there are also part set in Spain, where Luis comes from. Why did you set it there?

I do love Spain. I wanted a couple that were from two different places in the world, as I thought it would be easier for them to compartmentalise the past. Neither of them were from London, London is a big city and a place for them to rebuild themselves. They've made London their home, but it isn't actually their home. I thought it would be really wonderful to give them both different homes and different stories that really are contrasting. The central premise is that this marriage is

actually an exploration of each other. Even though they've been together so long, there is still so much they don't know about each other, and I felt it would be interesting to visualise that. Luis comes from Cadiz, in the south of Spain. Danny comes from Bude, on the coast of Cornwall where I went to a lot as a kid. I thought it was a really beautiful place, it really stuck with me, and I wanted to understand the character through that town.

Why did you write the book in the third person, from Danny's point of view?

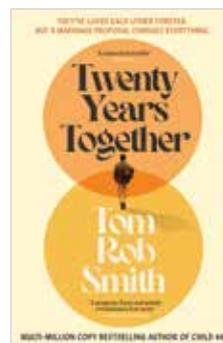
That's the fun of writing a book in a genre you've not written in before. You're working out all of these questions, and it is really exciting and daunting. The central premise is that Danny goes on a journey of self exploration through the idea of marriage. But he doesn't quite realise that Luis has to do the same. And there's a big mystery about who they are, and you learn Danny's perspective on himself as you go along with him. But Luis has a big mystery too, which is held back until the final parts of the book. Hopefully it's a surprise for the reader. I felt that if the novel jumped between the two of them, you would just know everything straight away. I wanted to keep that air of mystery between them.

Are there any other authors who inspire you in your work?

Before I write any book I'll try and read as many books on the subject that I can. There are a lot of books about divorce, but fewer about marriage. But I loved *Aftermath* by Rachel Cusk, it's really brilliant. I wanted to avoid those relationship stories in which the writer starts litigating against the other person's wrongs. I don't want to read someone's arguments with their ex. That's what's so great about *Aftermath*, it's about divorce and its impact, without getting into the petty ins and outs. With Danny and Luis, I wanted the story to feel balanced, I didn't want it to feel like either one at any point is trying to make it about who is right and who is wrong. I also reread *Heartburn* by Nora Ephron, who wrote *When Harry Met Sally*, and it's such a beautifully written book.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

I love them. I went to independent bookshops in New York, where I did all my research for this book. I went to the LGBTQ section and bought pretty much every novel that was there. Those bookshops can guide you to books that you haven't seen before. They are almost like a companion, showing you new books that you hadn't thought about.



Twenty Years Together

by Tom Rob Smith

Simon & Schuster

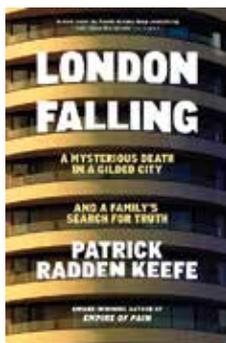
HB • £20.00

ISBN 9781471133145

Published 9th April

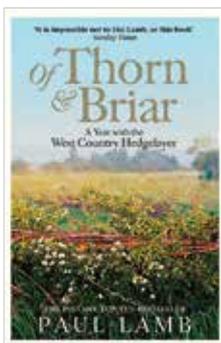
Look out for signed copies available exclusively in independent bookshops, while stocks last!

Non-Fiction



London Falling
by Patrick Radden Keefe
Picador • HB • £22.00
ISBN 9781035056279
Published 7th April

In 2019, a London teenager, Zac Brettler, fell to his death from a luxury apartment building on the banks of the Thames. On a desperate quest to understand how their son had died, his grieving parents made a terrible discovery: Zac had been leading a fantasy life, posing as the son of a wealthy Russian oligarch. In this book, award-winning author Patrick Radden Keefe follows Zac's parents on a dark journey to find out what brought him to the balcony that night.



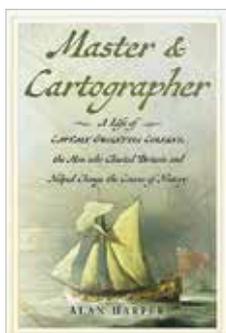
Of Thorn & Briar
by Paul Lamb
Simon & Schuster
PB • £10.99
ISBN 9781398535053
Published 26th March
Look out for an exclusive indie edition!

Now in paperback, this is hedgelayser Paul Lamb's spellbinding account of living in partnership with the land, practising his craft with skill and preserving our heritage for future generations. As traditional management techniques are lost to modernisation, hedgerows and the wildlife they support have declined dramatically. Paul has devoted decades to saving and rejuvenating this important but often forgotten part of Britain's countryside.



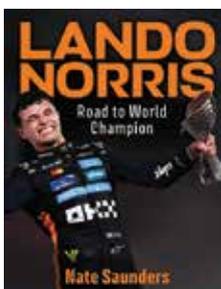
Enough Said
by Alan Bennett
Profile/Faber
HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781805228981
Published 19th March

This is Alan Bennett's fourth collection of diaries and prose. Covering the turbulent years 2016 to 2024, the diaries take us through lockdown, Brexit, the reign of Johnson, the rise of Trump and the death of the Queen. In between, we take the train with him back and forth to Yorkshire, celebrate the herons, the newts and the street fairs, and lament the scarcity of curlews, the closure of the last local bank and the deteriorating welfare state.



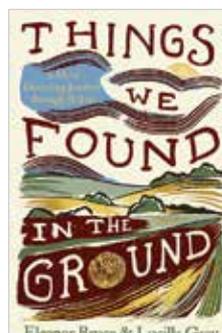
Master & Cartographer
by Alan Harper
The History Press
HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781837051120
Published 12th March

This is a book about maps and map-making, about power and class, and about war, seamanship and navigation. It is a study of wealth, patronage and money, in an England riven by religious disorder and toxic politics. Greenville Collins (1643–94) was a naval warrant officer who caught the attention of a King. A scientific navigator, he undertook the most ambitious hydrographic survey of the British coastline yet attempted, and this is his story.



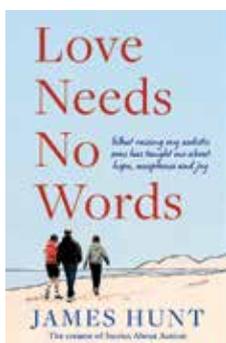
Lando Norris: Road to World Champion
by Nate Saunders
Michael O'Mara
HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781789299649
Published 12th March

This book tells the incredible story of the 2025 Formula One championship campaign and what it takes to win, and features a race-by-race rundown alongside over 100 stunning colour photographs. Respected F1 journalist Nate Saunders traces Lando's journey to win the title, offering insider access on how he rewrote the script for what a champion can look like. This is the story of a young man who faced his fears, silenced the doubters and won the biggest prize in motorsport – his way.



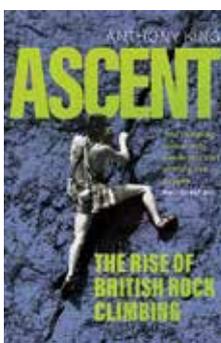
The Things We Found in the Ground
by Eleanor Bruce & Lucilla Gray
HarperNorth
HB • £20.00
ISBN 9780008737603
Published 9th April

In this guide-that's-not-a-guide, metal detectorist cousins Ellie and Lucie explore their local landscape, getting to grips with the hobby, history and themselves along the way. Over many weeks and months spent digging countless holes, the pair make startling discoveries: about the objects they find and what they tell us about our ancestors, about themselves, and about the power of community, as they forge connections with local villagers, detectorists and history lovers.



Love Needs No Words
by James Hunt
Gallery • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781398548589
Published 12th March

James Hunt is the founder of the Stories About Autism community, where hundreds of thousands of people follow his life as a father raising two autistic, non-speaking sons. In this book, he shares what it's really like to navigate the meltdowns, the sleepless nights and the unexpected challenges – as well as the breakthroughs, the joy and the moments of connection. This honest memoir about autism parenting from a dad's perspective offers comfort, solidarity and hope.



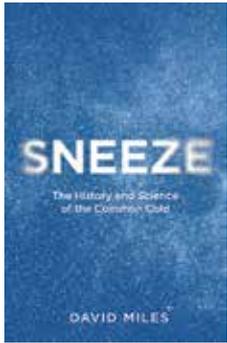
Ascent: The Rise of British Rock Climbing
by Anthony King
The History Press
HB • £22.00
ISBN 9781837051175
Published 30th April

Climbing has risen from the margins to the mainstream. Today, there are over 5 million climbers in the UK. From its amateur days in the 1950s to the present, where climbing finds itself recognised as an increasingly popular Olympic sport, this book tells the story of this remarkable transformation. Anthony King – a dedicated climber himself – traces the sport's evolution through decades of rebellion, innovation and achievement to its place today as a vibrant, diverse culture.



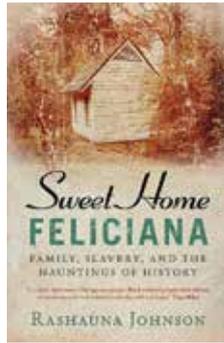
Who's the Favourite?
by Catherine Carr
Oneworld
HB • £18.99
ISBN 9781836431282
Published 19th March

For most of us, our sibling relationships are the longest we will ever have. Whether loving or fraught, competitive or codependent, these bonds shape us in lasting ways. In this heartfelt, judgment-free book, Catherine Carr invites us to look at our brothers and sisters beyond the labels assigned in childhood, combining real-life stories with expert insight, exploring birth-order stereotypes, favouritism, trauma, blended families, only children, and the pain of estrangement and bereavement.



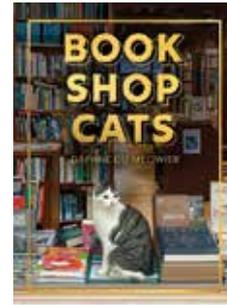
Sneeze
by David Miles
August Books
HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781804369241
Published 5th March

Dr David Miles, a world-leading immunologist, has amassed over a century of research on the common cold, starting from the discovery that colds are caused by viruses, up to developments made during the pandemic. In this book, he looks at what exactly colds are and where they come from, to reveal practical steps we can take to avoid catching them, fighting them and, the steps that we as a society can take to make our environment less conducive to spreading them.



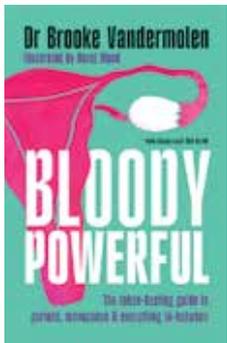
Sweet Home Feliciana: Family, Slavery and the Hauntings of History
by Rashauna Johnson
Cambridge University Press • HB • £27.00
ISBN 9781009668323
Published 5th March

In this tapestry of intersecting stories, including those of her own family, Rashauna Johnson charts the global transformation of a rural region in Louisiana from European colonialism to Jim Crow. From her ancestor Virgil to her cousin Veronica and her hand-sewn Mardi Gras memorial suit more than a century later, this history is one of triumphs and trauma, illustrating the ways people of African descent have created sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance.



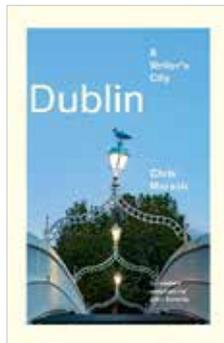
Bookshop Cats
by Daphne du Meowier
HarperCollins
HB • £10.99
ISBN 9780008710200
Published 9th April

A beautiful photographic collection of cats who have made the wise decision to live in bookshops across the world. Head to Blue Cypress Books in New Orleans, Louisiana, where you'll find Kitty Meow, who starts her day by basking in a sunbeam in the romance section. Meet Bea, the stray Moggie who now calls Shrew Books in Cornwall home, and Hugo, the most photographed cat in Southern Alberta, Canada. A must-read for all cat and book lovers!



Bloody Powerful
by Dr Brooke Vandermolen
Illustrated by Hazel Mead
Cambridge University Press • HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781009435482
Published 23rd April

Brought to life with art from talented illustrator Hazel Mead, this incredible book is aimed at every woman stuck in the 'information gap' navigating the jargon and myths about their gynaecological health online. It covers everything you didn't get taught in school: giving you factually correct and reliable information coming from a practicing gynaecology doctor, and is a non-judgemental and insightful guide to empowering yourself to take charge of your body.



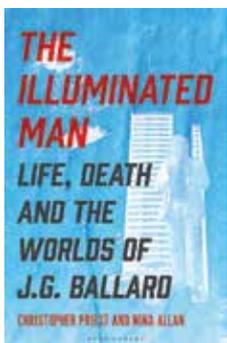
Dublin: A Writer's City
by Christopher Morash
Cambridge University Press • PB • £15.99
ISBN 9781108926942
Published 12th March

The words of its writers are part of the texture of Dublin, an invisible counterpart to the bricks and pavement we see around us. Step-by-step, in this book you can find a book-lover's map of this unique city, inviting us to experience what it means to live in a great city of literature, following in the footsteps of James Joyce, Seamus Heaney, W.B. Yeats, Samuel Beckett and many others. It is heavily illustrated and features custom maps.



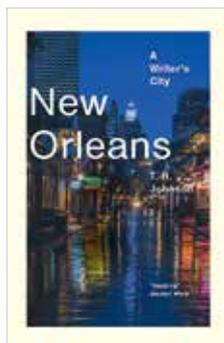
Dog Friendly Europe
by Lottie Gross
Conway • PB • £20.00
ISBN 9781844867042
Published 12th March

An inspirational and practical guide to 25 brilliant dog-friendly holidays on the continent. It's packed with ideas and tips to give you the confidence to take your pooch on even the most adventurous trip. Everything you need to know is here, such as the best places to stay, sights to visit in the area, local dishes to try and the best restaurants in which to try them – all options guaranteed to welcome you and your four-legged friend with open arms.



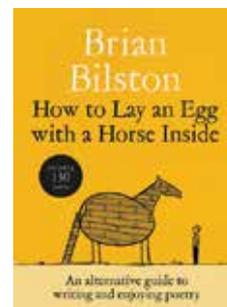
The Illuminated Man: Life, Death and the Words of J.G. Ballard
by Christopher Priest & Nina Allan
Bloomsbury Continuum
HB • £22.00
ISBN 9781399417495
Published 23rd April

In 2024, Nina Allan's husband, the novelist Christopher Priest, died. He had been diagnosed with prostate cancer, which had metastasised into the bones, the same disease that killed the man whose biography he'd spent his last months working on – the cult author, J.G. Ballard. When it became clear that Christopher would not have time to finish this biography, Nina promised him that she would complete it, patching together with her own voice the gaps that remained.



New Orleans: A Writer's City
by T.R. Johnson
Cambridge University Press • PB • £15.99
ISBN 9781009060301
Published 5th March

The neighbourhoods of New Orleans have given rise to an extraordinary outpouring of important writing. Over the last century and a half or so, these stories and songs have given the city its singular place in the human imagination. This book leads us along five thoroughfares that define these different parts of town – Royal, St. Claude, Esplanade, Basin, and St. Charles – to explore how the writers who have lived around them have responded to the environments they share.



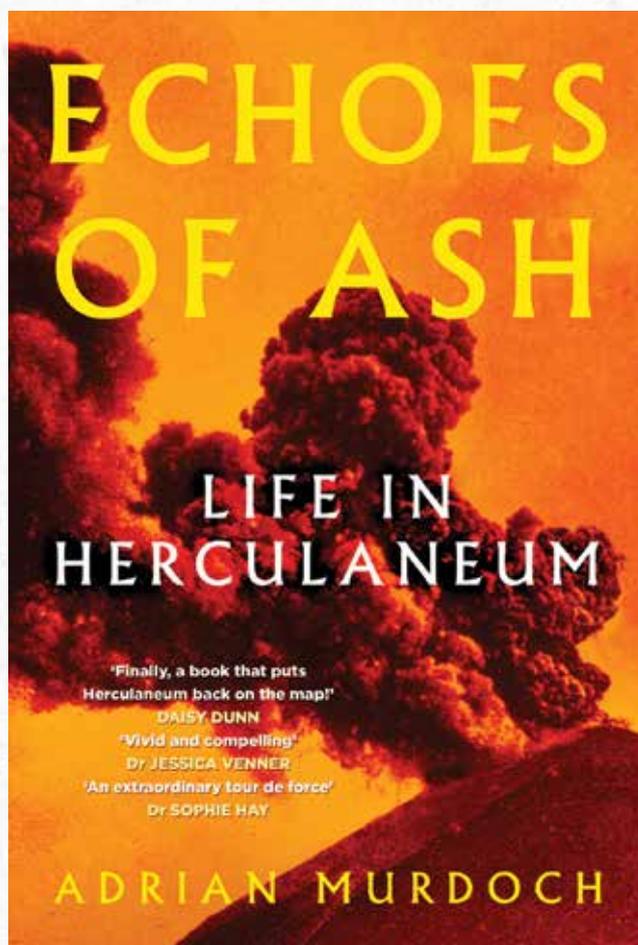
How to Lay an Egg with a Horse Inside
by Brian Bilston
Picador • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781035085729
Published 16th April

Why do we write poetry? Who should write it? And where do you even start? Well, Brian Bilston, one of the UK's most hilarious and best-loved poets, is here to take us through the hows, whys and whats of reading, writing and enjoying poetry every day. Showcasing over a hundred brand new poems, every page is an immensely pleasurable deep-dive into the life-affirming craft of poetry and a passionate argument for why we should all pick up a pen.

Real Lives

Echoes of Ash: Life in Herculaneum
by Adrian Murdoch
The History Press
HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781803999913
Published 12th March

These two books from The History Press look at the real lives lived by ordinary people of the past – those who resided in Herculaneum just before Mount Vesuvius erupted in the first century, and women who lived in England during the Medieval period.



On a beach near Naples in October 79 CE, more than three hundred people were standing, hoping for an evacuation. Vesuvius – a volcano which needs no introduction in the world of Ancient Rome – erupted. They had left it too late, and all were instantly killed in the devastation that followed. Neighbouring the world-renowned Pompeii, the town of Herculaneum is the neglected victim of Vesuvius. It was uniquely preserved in the aftermath of the eruption, and in many ways gives us unparalleled windows into the past.

For the first time, this fascinating new history tells the story of Herculaneum and the people who lived there. Through the eyes of the Weaver, the Slave Girl and the Pregnant Lady, the Soldier, the Fisherman and the Boxer, as well as relevant buildings and the archaeological discoveries of the past 20 years, it is possible to hear their voices and build a historical picture that is more colourful, complete and alive than has ever been possible before.

This extract looks at a fisherman:

The Fisherman

'But yet though while I fish, I fast,
I make good fortune my repast,
And there unto my friend invite,
In whom I more than that delight.'
Izaak Walton, *The Complete Angler*

The young man is standing at the entrance of the Boat Sheds. He is seventeen or eighteen years old. Not only tall for his age – estimated at over 170 centimetres

and still growing – he is also taller than many men in Herculaneum. It is obvious, from the pronounced muscles in his upper body what he does for a living. These are muscles that, as Capasso writes, 'often flexed for a long time and in conditions of overload'. It doesn't require much imagination to see him pulling nets onboard a boat.

"Finally, a book that puts Herculaneum back on the map!"

Dr Daisy Dunn

"This is an absolute must-read"

Dr Jess Venner

But as much as his muscles, the boy's teeth are another clear giveaway to what he does for a living. Although his left incisors are in good condition, in fact, none of the teeth on the left-hand side of his mouth show any real degeneration, the ones on the right are worn. As has been pointed out: 'This particular wear pattern gives us the best clue to speculate about his occupation since it must be from some industrial use of the teeth. Again observation of modern fishermen shows

that they use their incisors to hold the bobbin of cord used to repair nets.

This 'prolonged, repeated and stressful' activity is clearly depicted in a mosaic from Hadrumetum in North Africa, now Sousse in Tunisia.

The mosaic, which decorated the floor of the corridor to the main room, the oecus, of a villa, shows a fishing scene and a sea of easily identifiable fish including an oversized prawn and a small sea urchin. But at the bottom of the mosaic are two boats. In one, a fisherman stands at the prow with the trident in his hand ready to let it loose into the sea while his colleague rows. In the other, a fisherman is pulling nets out of the sea that are full while his colleague rows. It looks like difficult and dangerous work.

As for our fisherman, his family had suffered in the aftermath of the earthquake in 62 CE and there hadn't been enough food around when he was a baby. Although his teeth, his lower canines, show some of the tell-tale signs of a lack of food, the family had come out of the other side. There had been a 'rebalancing phase' and on the eve of the eruption he was in moderately good health.

Fishing was a profession that was much mocked and derided. The Roman playwright Plautus explicitly highlights the poverty of fishermen in his play *The Rope*: 'Poor folks have a hard life of it every way, especially if they haven't any regular business and never learnt a trade. Whatever they have, that has simply got to do for 'em,' he writes.

Women in the Middle Ages led fascinating and often wildly differing everyday lives, depending on their social class and family situation. However, to date this rich variety of experience has not been fully brought to light, because books on the general subject of 'life in the Middle Ages' tend to have multiple chapters devoted to men of different classes (kings, lords, knights, merchants, tradesmen, monks, and so on) and then one chapter at the end entitled 'women', as though the female half of the population was some kind of homogenous mass! But women's experiences varied just as much as men's did, and in this book we will turn the spotlight on them, in lively and interesting detail, as we meet women of all social classes and learn about their lives.

A number of medieval women have been the subject of previous studies and biographies. However, they tend to be the exceptional figures who broke the mould, which leads us to ask: What about the women who were not exceptional, who did not blaze a new trail? What was life like for the vast majority who were obliged to live within the constraints imposed on the female half of the population? This book will provide answers to these questions, shedding light on the full breadth of their experiences for the first time.

This extract is from the introduction:

In the Middle Ages men and women lived side by side in all secular communities in England, whether these communities were based in castles, manors, towns or villages. But people's experiences in all of these locations differed sharply according to sex, with men and women existing almost in parallel rather than inhabiting the same social and political world. Men took their place in society according to their rank or occupation, and were defined accordingly: they might be lords, knights, burgesses or peasants; or smiths, millers, thatchers or labourers. Women were also members of a designated social class, but they were additionally, and perhaps more strictly, defined by marital status and by their relationships to men: they were single, married or widowed; they were daughters, wives or mothers. With few exceptions, they were both socially and legally perceived as members of male-led families rather than as individuals in their own right.

In this book we are going to explore the concept of women's family lives during the 'high Middle Ages' that ran from the beginning of the twelfth century to the middle of the fifteenth, concentrating primarily on England. The study will not encompass all medieval women, because not all of them lived within a familial structure: some, for various reasons, lived alone, and others resided

in communal all-female environments, which might be brothels, convents or anything in between. That is not to say, of course, that the lives of these women are not also worth exploring; only that they are not our focus here.

“In the Middle Ages the idea of ‘family’ could have many different meanings.”

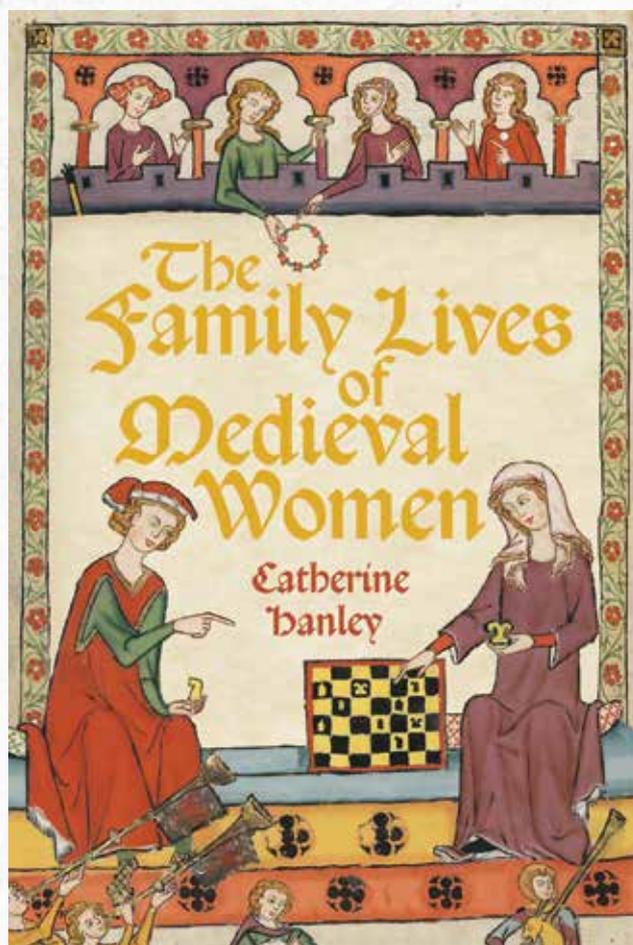
This spotlight on the domestic provides us with a wide variety of experiences to analyse, because in the Middle Ages the idea of 'family' could have many different meanings. The members of a peasant family were likely to live together in a nuclear group, often in close proximity to a wider kinship network; townfolk or nobles, meanwhile, might send their children away as apprentices, servants, squires or attendants while welcoming others into their own households for the same reasons, producing a different kind of mix that was still a familia or household unit, even though its members might not be related by blood. At the top end of the social scale royal parents, brothers and sisters might spend very little time in each other's company – or, indeed, in the case of siblings, never even meet each other – but they were still expected to act on behalf of their family, as a member of the strategic and political unit it represented. All of these situations impacted women's lives in different ways, sometimes to their societal advantage but often to the detriment of their individuality and their personal happiness.

The writing of books focused on women's lives is a relatively recent phenomenon in historical terms. Very few were produced before the middle of the twentieth century, with most scholars prior to that being male and steeped in the mores of their own

time, and thus deeming the contributions of women to their societies and eras to be of little significance. Happily, in the last few decades there has been a much greater interest in the female experience, with publications ranging from sweeping general surveys to biographies of individual medieval women. In the latter case, the subjects tend to be the exceptional figures who broke the mould, which leads us to ask: what about the women who were not exceptional, who did not blaze a new trail? What was life like for the vast majority who were obliged to live within the constraints imposed on the female half of the population? Some women were genuinely representative of their era and their class, and these are the lives we will explore here.

The Family Lives of Medieval Women

by Catherine Hanley
The History Press
HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781803999104
Published 9th April



Cool Classics

Capstone Classics are a beautiful collection of classic books, each with a smart hardback cover, and with new expert introductions. Here we take a look at four new addition to the series.

The Iliad

by Homer

Capstone Classics • HB • £14.99

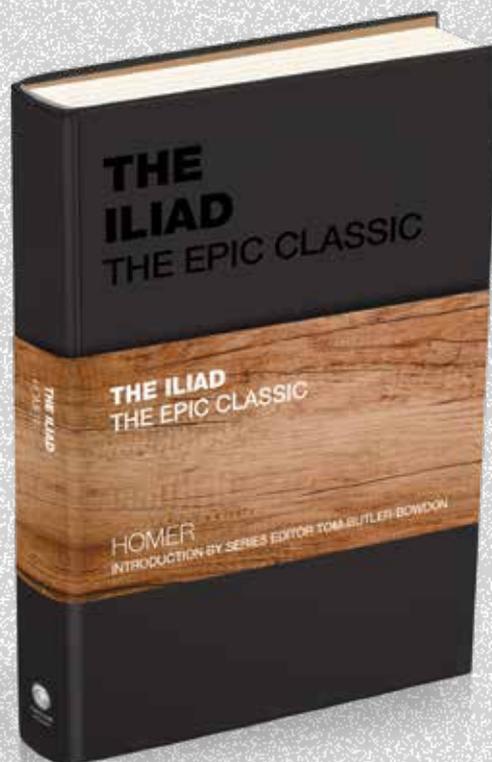
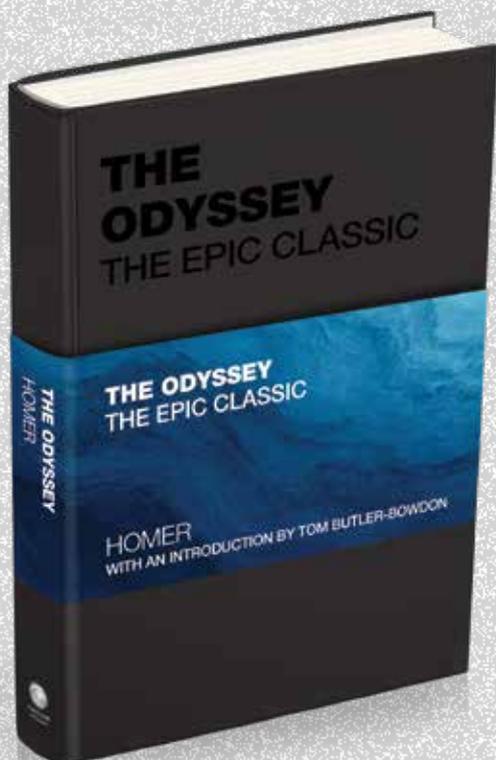
ISBN 9781907326530

Published 30th April

Homer's *Iliad* stands as one of the greatest achievements in Western literature. Set during the final weeks of the Trojan War, the epic centres on Achilles, the Greeks' greatest warrior, whose pride and wrath threaten the fate of his comrades. As the armies of Troy and Greece clash, the poem explores the heroism and horror of battle, the bonds of friendship, and the tragic consequences of vengeance.

With gods intervening at every turn and legendary figures such as Hector, Agamemnon, and Patroclus shaping the conflict, *The Iliad* is both a gripping war story and a profound meditation on mortality, honour, and fate. Inside the book you will find the dramatic conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon, and the complexities of heroism; scenes of epic battles, duels, and the fall of heroes; and themes of pride, wrath, honour, and the intervention of the gods. A new introduction is provided by series editor Tom Butler-Bowden.

Ideal for readers drawn to epic poetry, classical history, and the enduring questions of human nature, *The Iliad* is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the roots of Western storytelling.



The Odyssey

by Homer

Capstone Classics • HB • £14.99

ISBN 9781907326585

Published 30th April

In *The Odyssey*, Homer crafts one of the oldest and most influential adventure stories in Western literature. The poem follows Odysseus, the cunning king of Ithaca, as he battles gods, monsters, and temptation on his ten-year quest to return home after the Trojan War. Facing shipwrecks, the wrath of Poseidon, and the allure of the witch-goddess Circe, Odysseus's journey is a timeless exploration of loyalty, perseverance, and the human spirit.

As Penelope and Telemachus struggle to defend their home from unruly suitors, Odysseus must rely on his wit and courage to overcome every obstacle. *The Odyssey's* vivid storytelling, mythical landscapes, and unforgettable characters have inspired readers for nearly three millennia. Inside the book you will find the legendary adventures of Odysseus, from the Cyclops and Sirens to the Underworld; themes of loyalty, identity, hospitality, the meaning of home, and resilience in the face of adversity; and a cast of gods, monsters, and mortals whose stories echo through history. A new introduction is provided by series editor Tom Butler-Bowden.

Perfect for lovers of epic fiction, mythology, and classic literature, *The Odyssey* remains a must-read for anyone seeking adventure, wisdom, and insight into the human condition.

About the Author

Homer was an ancient Greek poet, traditionally believed to have lived around the 8th century BCE. He is best known as the author of two of the most significant epic poems in Western literature, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, which have profoundly influenced the cultural and educational frameworks of ancient Greece and beyond. His works are foundational to the Western literary canon and are celebrated for their narrative depth and exploration of human experience.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

by Robert Louis Stevenson
Capstone Classics • HB • £14.99
ISBN 9781907326271
Published 26th March

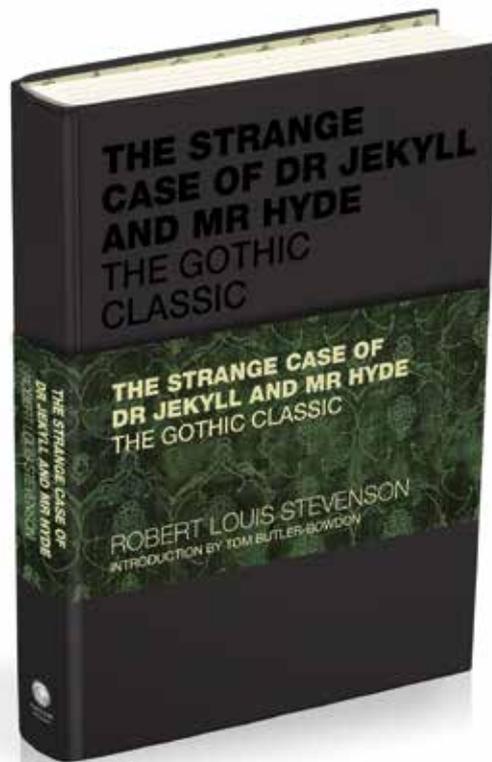
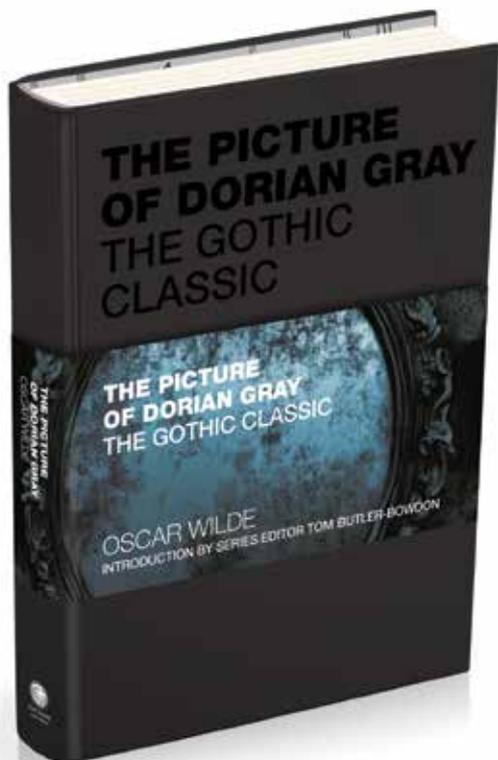
A chilling exploration of humanity's capacity for evil and the dark side of thoughtless curiosity. Exploring timeless themes of the duality of human nature, the tension between good and evil, and the consequences of tampering with the natural order, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* remains one of the enduring classics of the gothic horror genre. This new Capstone Classics edition revisits Robert Louis Stevenson's much-loved novel, with a fresh Introduction that offers insights into its unforgettable characters.

The book follows the investigation conducted by Gabriel John Utterson, a legal expert based in London, as he explores the mysterious connection between his old friend, Dr. Henry Jekyll, and a murderer named Edward Hyde. As the true cause of the coincidences is brought into sharp relief, the book's characters are forced to reexamine their ideas of what it means to be good and the potential impacts of science and curiosity.

Inside the book you will find a tale of good, evil, and humanity that remains as relevant and gripping today as when first published; and a new introduction by Tom Butler-Bowdon that offers perspectives on Stevenson's themes and characters, his influences, and the times in which he was writing. Perfect for everyone interested in one of the foundational stories of the gothic and science fiction traditions, this new Capstone Classics edition of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a must-read for fans of mysteries, thrillers, and horror fiction.

About the Author

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh in 1850. Chronically ill with bronchitis and possibly tuberculosis, Stevenson withdrew from Engineering at Edinburgh University in favour of Studying Law. Although he passed the bar and became an advocate in 1875, he knew that his true work was as a writer. Between 1876 and his death in 1894, Stevenson wrote prolifically. His published essays, short stories, fiction, travel books, plays, letters and poetry number in dozens. The most famous of his works include *Travels With A Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879), *New Arabian Nights* (1882), *Treasure Island* (1883) and *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1887).



The Picture of Dorian Gray

by Oscar Wilde
Capstone Classics • HB • £14.99
ISBN 9781907326226
Published 26th March

This classic novel explores the brutal consequences of hedonism, loose morals, and an obsessive focus on beauty and pleasure. Wilde's novel follows a young man, Dorian Gray, who becomes infatuated with his own beauty as it is captured in a portrait by artist Basil Hallward.

Dorian's physical beauty endures through the years as his picture grows ever more grotesque. The portrait becomes a window into his soul, withering and decaying as he pursues a hollow life, devoid of meaningful achievement or virtue. One of the great Victorian Gothic novels, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is as insightful and gripping as when first published.

This deluxe hardback Capstone edition includes a new Introduction by Tom Butler-Bowdon that offers historical and cultural context for the modern reader and provides deeper insights into the text. Perfect for every fan of literature – or simply those looking for their next great story – *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an unmissable classic in the tradition of horror, gothic, dark, and supernatural fiction.

About the Author

Oscar Wilde (born October 16, 1854, Dublin, Ireland – died November 30, 1900, Paris, France) was an Irish wit, poet, and dramatist whose enduring fame rests on his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and on his comic masterpieces *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Wilde was a spokesman for the late 19th-century Aesthetic movement in England, which advocated art for art's sake. He was also known for his flamboyant style and sharp wit, which made him a popular figure in London's social and artistic circles. However, his career was marred by scandal when he was imprisoned for homosexual acts in 1895.

Older & Wiser

There are many guides and handbooks on how to be a parent, but what about being a grandparent? Written by expert author Celia Dodd, who has six grandchildren herself, *Grand Expectations* looks at many different experiences and new research to explore this much-treasured role in family life. We interviewed the author to find out more.



What drew you to write a guidebook for grandparents?

My personal experience, I had four grandchildren when I started writing the book and I now have six. There are two things people say about grandparents, in the media. They either say, 'oh, it's bliss, it's fabulous. It's wonderful' or they say 'grandparents are exploited because everyone wants them to do child care'. Neither of those seemed perfectly true. I knew it wasn't all pure unadulterated joy for people, and I knew that not all grandparents feel exploited, so I wanted to really find out how real grandparents felt. So that's why I talked to loads and loads of grandparents. At the beginning of writing the book, I got an email an old friend who said, 'I love my grandchildren to bits, but I feel equivocal about being a grandparent. I think a lot of people feel like I do, but they don't like to say so'. I really felt that, grandparents don't have a voice, they don't have a place to say this stuff, because they get accused of being ungrateful. Whereas parents can moan as much as they like. There's loads of groups for parents, there's loads of places where parents can say what they're finding difficult, and I felt that grandparents didn't have the same place.

Do you think that the role of the grandparent has changed over time?

Yes, and I think that's part of the problem. Especially for grandfathers. A lot of the research is about grandmothers. But for both, this, new demand to do child care has changed things. This generation of grandparents want to be closer to their

children. They had a more informal, closer relationship, and I think that's carried on with their grandchildren. We want to be much more involved, and I think that's really noticeable when people become grandparents. Their lives can get completely taken over by their grandchildren in the most lovely way, but it's a big change. There used to be more formality in the past. When you went to see your grandparents you were on your best behaviour, particularly with grandfathers. I think there's been a big change, and that's another reason why I wrote the book, to explore how things are different now, and how boundaries can be difficult and get blurred.

“This generation of grandparents want to be closer to their children.”

You have a whole chapter in the book about grandfathers. Does the role of the grandfather differ to the role of the grandmother?

Yes, they tend to take second place. And I think that's a shame, because it's to do with a lack of confidence, which is quite unusual to be talking about with men. The expectation is that the grandmother will look after the children. But if a grandfather looks after the child then he gains confidence. There's a wonderful novel by Francis Spufford, *Light Perpetual*, and in it he writes about a lovely grandfather. He has this phrase, when he's looking after his granddaughter, a little toddler. He says, 'How can you be bored and delighted at the same time?'. That just sums it up. Things are changing – there's a European study that said that 42% of grandfathers help look after grandchildren compared to 44% of grandmothers. So they're probably doing it together, whereas a lot of grandmothers will be doing it separately.

And when you were researching the book, was there anything that really surprised you?

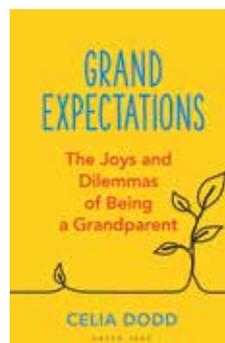
Yes, one thing was that I hadn't realised that the average age of becoming a grandparent is 50. I found that out when I was interviewing a psychology professor who done a lot of work into grandparents. My editor wouldn't believe it, she kept questioning it. But of course, the age range varies – you can become a grandparent at 35 or 85. Also, I had this big hunch that some people had mixed feelings and ambivalence about being a grandparent, and that it could be difficult. So when I interviewed a professor of sociology, and I discovered she had written a whole paper about this, I felt my hunch was right. She writes about this idea that the golden rule of being a grandparent is you've got to be there but you've got to not interfere. The paper was about how difficult it is to do those two things. Especially if you're doing childcare, not to interfere is really difficult because you're there with a child all day. I've found in all my books that there are those light bulb moments where you've had this hunch, and it's a lovely surprise when somebody with authority has actually done research which confirms what you've been thinking.

Are there any other authors that inspire you in your work?

There is a wonderful book, *Grandmothers* by Salley Vickers, it's a fabulous novel. I really love it because it is about complexity, complicated relationships, and about having mixed feelings and living your own life. Joanna Trollope writes wonderfully about that too. As I say, *Light Perpetual* by Francis Spufford. And there's also a book about a grandparents' divorce, *Leaving* by an American author, Roxana Robinson. And I was thrilled to hear that the new *Gruffalo* book by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffer will be called *Gruffalo Granny*.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

My first ever job was in an independent bookshop in Greenwich. And so I have a real affection for them. I feel, when you go into an independent bookshop, you feel a real love of books. I love the London Review Bookshop, meeting friends there for a cup of tea and a browse. And there's a really interesting one in Chelsea, John Sandoe, it's in a lovely building. You always feel that you're welcome in independent bookshops.



Grand Expectations: The Joys and Dilemmas of Being a Grandparent by Celia Dodd
Green Tree • PB • £16.99
ISBN 9781399416948
Published 26th March

Traditional Values

In this original debut novel, Natalie lives a traditional lifestyle – and has the social media accounts to prove it. She has a charming farmhouse, a handsome husband and beautiful children. But one day she wakes up in a horrible version of reality. Her home, husband and children are not quite right... Can she escape the nightmare? We interviewed the author Caro Claire Burke to discover her inspirations.

Photo © Saulyte Photography



What inspired you to write *Yesteryear*?

I was very involved in online conversations about the tradwife obsession in 2024 and contributed my own perspectives on TikTok. In particular I focused on feminist and media literacy angles on the topic. From there, the idea for *Yesteryear* came quickly.

It is your debut novel – is writing fiction something you always wanted to do?

I've been writing fiction for about a decade

Yesteryear
by Caro Claire Burke
4th Estate • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9780008742768
Published 9th April

now. I don't know if it was something I always consciously wanted to do, and I definitely experienced a few professional dips and turns (including, but not limited to, a very ill-fated attempt at studying to be a doctor in college), but I can safely say now that I've found a purpose and skill in being a novelist, thank God.

In the novel, Natalie's life seems perfect but the image social media portrays is different to the reality. Do you think that, in today's world, it can be hard to distinguish the truth?

Absolutely. I think we've reached the point where fact is often utterly indiscernible from fiction. The advent of AI, and in particular the proliferation of deepfakes online, has brought our understanding of misinformation to dizzying new heights. I don't know where it will take us, but I can't imagine it's anywhere good.

"Everyone is going to be talking about this book"

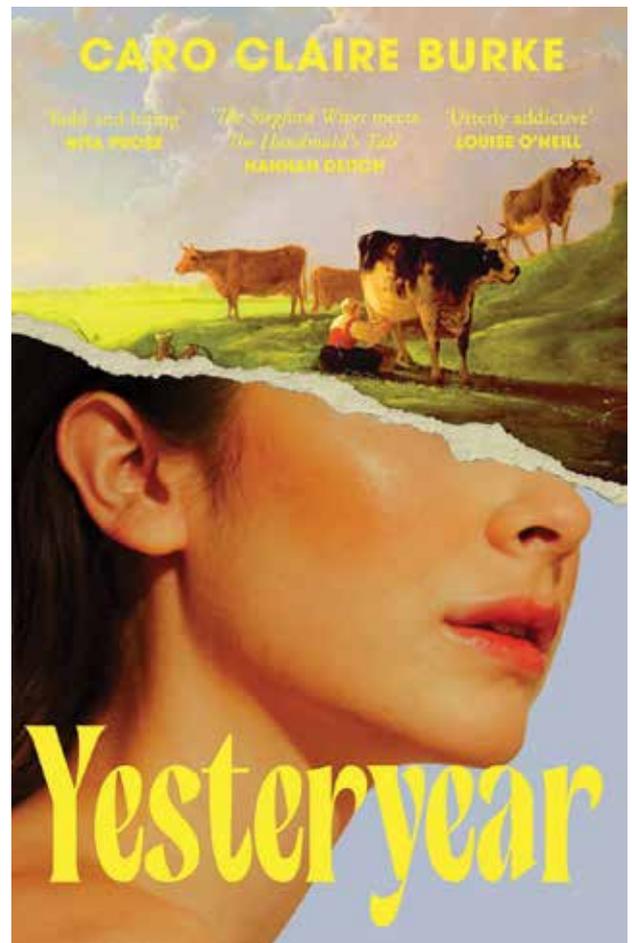
Bella Mackie

"The Stepford Wives meets The Handmaid's Tale"

Hannah Deitch

Natalie's image is that of a wholesome wife living a traditional life. When she wakes up in what appears to be the past, she discovers that life isn't that great. Do you think we romanticise the past?

Absolutely. I think we tend to nostalgise the idea of 'living slowly' or 'living off the land' without having a practical conversation about what the realities of a lifestyle like that actually looks like. It's not just civilians who do this, though – our governments and political leaders tend to romanticise the past in whatever way suits their political agenda. So it's not accidental that America is currently experiencing such a massive fixation on moving backwards, these days.



The novel has many surprising twists and turns. Did you plan it all out in advance?

I knew from the jump what I wanted for the final major twist of the novel. The real work was figuring how to get there! Most of the twists and turns that comprise the book were discovered through that trial and error process of getting Natalie from A to B, so to speak.

The book is being adapted into a film – do you have any involvement in this?

Yes, I'm an executive producer on the film and have worked with our fabulous screenwriter as she maps out the script. It's been a joy (and a relief) to watch her soar at such difficult work.

Which other authors inspire you in your work?

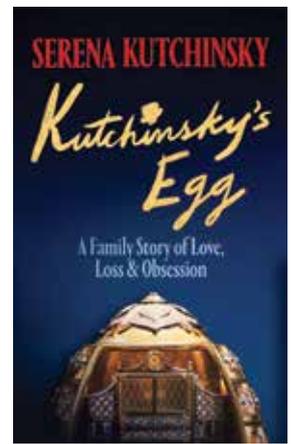
Anthony Doerr, Kazuo Ishiguro, Margaret Atwood, Sally Rooney, Gillian Flynn, Ta Nehisi Coates, Maggie O'Farrell, Claire Keegan, and so, so many more.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

It's impossible to sufficiently describe the importance of independent bookshops in delivering stories to readers. With *Yesteryear*, I can finally say I'm a published novelist – but I've been a devoted reader all my life, and have been ferried into life-changing fiction experiences by discerning booksellers in too many moments to count. Indie bookshops are the lifeblood of this industry, and I'm so grateful for their support in this journey.

Breaking the Yolk

When she was eleven years old, Serena Kutchinsky's father Paul, heir to the legendary House of Kutchinsky jewellery company, followed a wild dream and created the world's largest jewelled egg. But when it failed to sell, everything started to unravel. We interview Serena about her new book which explores the impact of the egg on her family.



Kutchinsky's Egg: A Family Story of Love, Loss and Obsession

by Serena Kutchinsky
Gallery • HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781398532847
Published 26th March

Photo © Emma Challinor



The book is all about the jewelled egg your father created, but it is also about your family history. What drew you to eventually write about the egg?

The egg has always been this negative thing in my family, this lost legacy. I had a gradual realisation that I wanted to tell my father's story and that I wanted to somehow reclaim the egg from an emotional point of view. But as I started to write, I started to reconnect with it. And realised the scale of it, the wonder of it, and the fact that no one really knew it had ever been made here. It's probably the most valuable piece of craftsmanship made in the British Isles in the latter end of the 20th century and no one knew it had ever existed. So that just made me really sad for my dad. And he's not here to fix it. So I went off to fix it.

How did you go about researching the family history?

It was an amazing process, and totally fascinating. I knew a few nuggets of information and family mythology. I knew our name originally wasn't Kutchinsky, that it's somehow changed when my great-great-grandparents escaped from Poland in the late 19th century. I'd always know they were meant to go to America. And then that something happened, and they ended up in Britain. I had a vague knowledge of Moshe Arron, my great-grandfather, only because the company was actually called MA Kutchinsky. When the egg was made, I was 10 and 11, and my mum and my dad researched enough to fill a brochure for the press release. I knew that they came over to escape the Pogroms, but I didn't know that they landed in East London. I was living in a very nice privileged middle class existence, not realising that I owed it all to these people who 100 years before had arrived

there with nothing and built it all up. It was an amazing sort of moment of connection. I studied history at university, so I enjoyed that side of the research and looking at old documents and papers. But in a personal way I wanted to understand where my dad had come from, and where I came from and more about that immigrant tradition. The kind of energy that it bred into him, and the desire for success and acceptance.

Do you think the determination your dad had to create the egg came from his parents' attitude to him, that they expected the best from him, and that he and his brother both wanted to outshine their father?

Yes, my grandfather was this legend of the jewellery trade. I remember him as a grumpy old man. He was a savvy businessman, and a bit of a thief and a smuggler as well, but also a creative genius, which I never appreciated when I was small. I didn't understand when he was alive. The women in our family have always been very resourceful, so I like to think that thread runs through runs through the generations. My dad was the first generation in the family fully born into wealth, and he got a lot of pressure from his father. He wanted to outshine him and also he was also bit bonkers. Probably I am too! It's interesting talking to people about how he was after the egg. Obviously he was depressed and broken in many ways. But apparently, when it came to the egg, my dad was just always so happy that he'd made it. That creative act really mattered more to him than then anything else. And it was the creative achievement that he always carried with him. He would always be the man who built the world's largest jewelled egg.

“An extraordinary family story and a strange, poignant portrait of obsession”

Sophie Elmhirst

There's a point in the book, when your father is having an affair with Anna, when

he jokes that he's having a midlife crisis. Do you think he was?

I think it's probably too easy to frame it that way. I think that his life was spiralling out of control. There were two things going on. One, his ego was in overdrive because he was achieving success initially, in publicity and being on TV. Secondly, he was vulnerable to flattery. It made him think he was invincible. So when it all started to fall apart, he left with Anna. Anna was this life raft exit to another life where he could leave the carnage that he created behind. And with her he could still feel that he was special. Which is not to do Anna any disservice, she's a very smart woman, and has been very cooperative with the book. Sometimes, when things go well, you get really overexcited and you lose your focus. I think it's really important to try and stay grounded. My mother was very, very good at grounding my father, and once he cut himself loose from her, he spiralled because he didn't have anyone to keep him in check.

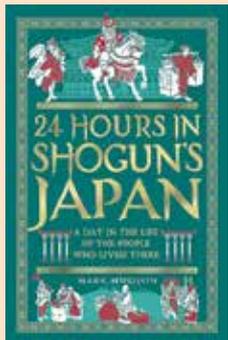
Are there any other authors that inspire you in your writing?

Edmund de Waal is the one that I get contrasted with a lot. *The Hare with Amber Eyes* is an amazing book. That's what I was hoping to do with this book, situate a story around an object and then use that to tell a true family saga. Also, Laura Cummings, I really love her writing. There's no bonking in my book, but I love Jilly Cooper, when it comes to writing about the 1980s. I tried to capture a little bit of that. I can be quite highbrow and quite lowbrow, and I wanted to show all the sides of my personality. I also really liked Jenette McCurdy's book *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, that kind of honesty when writing about your family.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

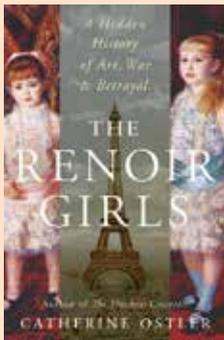
Oh, God, everything! I love Phlox Books in Leyton and Pages of Hackney. Indie bookshops are community spaces. You can have a browse, you can attend the book group, you can go to an event. There's just something about the smell of a bookshop, and the atmosphere when you walk in, that is so intoxicating.

History



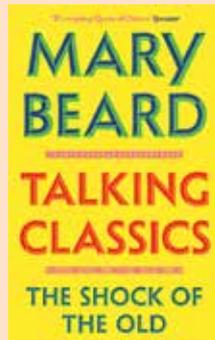
24 Hours in Shogun's Japan
by Mark Hudson
Michael O'Mara
HB • £12.99
ISBN 9781789298550
Published 12th March

In 1614, Japan stood at a crossroads. As the Tokugawa shogunate tightened its grip on power, samurai prepared for war, Christians faced persecution and foreign merchants navigated a rapidly shifting political landscape. In this book, Mark Hudson brings this pivotal moment to life through the eyes of 24 individuals – nobles and farmers, merchants and monks, pirates and poets – each living through one dramatic hour of a single day.



The Renoir Girls
by Catherine Ostler
Simon & Schuster
HB • £30.00
ISBN 9781471172595
Published 9th April

A true story of splendour, scandal and tragedy. In 1881, Pierre-Auguste Renoir painted two young sisters from a Jewish banking dynasty at their home in Paris. *Pink and Blue*, a portrait of Elisabeth and Alice Cahen d'Anvers, captures a moment of innocence and beauty, and is one of Renoir's most celebrated works. Yet beneath the glittering surface was a surging current of resentment. Renoir's Impressionist masterpiece hides both a family secret and the tensions of an era...



Talking Classics: The Shock of the Old
by Mary Beard
Profile Books
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781805220312
Published 16th April

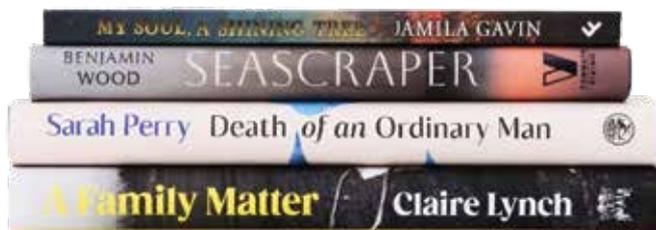
What's exciting about a piece of bread 4,000 years old? Or some pots of paint abandoned in the eruption at Pompeii? Why should we be bothered with the distant past anyway? What's the point? In this book, Mary Beard points to the surprising connections between antiquity and the present. From revolutionaries to dictators, Bob Dylan to Beyoncé, she joins forces with the varied modern characters who have been transfixed by the ancient world.

Nero Book Awards

The Nero Book Awards have announced their four winners for 2025, recognising the best books from the last year.

As the only multi-category awards exclusively for writers based in the UK and Ireland, the Nero Book Awards have quickly become one of the most prestigious fixtures in the literary calendar. Since launching in 2023, they have established themselves as one of the most respected prizes, championing outstanding writing and readability. The winners from each category were chosen by expert judging panels made up of authors, booksellers and journalists who, together, selected their best books of the year from writers based in the UK and Ireland.

Each winner receives £5,000 and is now in the running for the Nero Gold Prize, Book of the Year 2025. The winner will be selected by a final judging panel led by bestselling author Nick Hornby, BBC correspondent Reeta Chakrabarti, and screenwriter Daisy Goodwin. They will decide the overall winner which will be announced at a ceremony hosted by Sarah Montague on 4th March.



Seascraper
by Benjamin Wood
Penguin • PB • £9.99
ISBN 9781405975247
Published 2nd April

Fiction Winner
Thomas lives in Longferry, working his grandpa's trade as a shanker. Rising early, he heads to the gloomy beach and scrapes for shrimp, though, at heart, he is a folk musician. When a striking visitor turns up, promising Hollywood glamour, Thomas is shaken from his drudgery. But how truthful is the American, and how far can his inspiration carry Thomas?
The judges said: "Seascraper is an utterly immersive read, steeped in atmosphere, that explores what constitutes a well-lived life."

Death of An Ordinary Man
by Sarah Perry
Vintage • PB • £11.99
ISBN 9781529967197
Out Now

Non-Fiction Winner
Sarah Perry's father-in-law David died in the autumn of 2022, only nine days after a cancer diagnosis. He was in some ways a very ordinary man, but as he began to die, it became clear how extraordinary he was. An unforgettable, profoundly moving account of dying, family, and care and love. **The judges said: "Perry's honest, revealing and generous account of a deeply personal situation, rendered with precision and delicacy, turns the death of one ordinary man into a narrative that is as heart-wrenching as it is universal."**

A Family Matter
by Claire Lynch
Vintage • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781529942354
Out Now

Debut Fiction Winner
A mother following her heart, a father with the law on his side, a child caught in the middle – an unputdownable debut about a family torn apart by secrets, prejudice and their own best intentions – for fans of Claire Keegan and Louise Kennedy.
The judges said: "A delicately written yet powerful story of injustice, A Family Matter explores the fallout when buried secrets come to light. Raw, vivid and ultimately hopeful, this novel is a perfect example of how to write trauma authentically."

My Soul, A Shining Tree
by Jamila Gavin
Farshore • PB • £8.99
ISBN 9780008617189
Out Now
Age range: 9+

Children's Fiction Winner
Based on the true story of Indian WWI gunner and recipient of the Victoria Cross, Khudadad Khan. The story is told from four perspectives: Lotte, a Belgian farmgirl; Ernst, a German teenage cavalry soldier; Khudadad Khan, the gunner fighting with the British Army; and the walnut tree that shelters them all. **The judges said: "My Soul, A Shining Tree is the exceptionally powerful story of three young lives unexpectedly entwined by war."**

*“Haunting, stunning,
impossibly
accomplished”*

Chris Whitaker



Photo © Lara Downie

*“This is
spectacular”*

Lisa Jewell

Love and Darkness

Now in paperback, this moving novel from the author of *Girl A* and *Day One* combines a dark and gripping thriller with an epic love story. We interviewed the author Abigail Dean to discover more about *The Death of Us*.

Isabel and Edward meet as teenagers. When she tells him she loves him, it feels like the bravest thing she's ever done. But years later, a stranger walks into their home and tears their world apart. This is where their story really begins... Told in alternate chapters from the perspectives of Isabel and Edward, *The Death of Us* is a story of love, power and redemption.

What was the inspiration behind *The Death of Us*? Did you base it on a real case at all?

Yes, it is based on a real case, of the Golden State Killer who committed crimes in the 1970s and 1980s in California, and specifically targeted couples. I remember reading about that case, just as I moved to London in my early 20s, which was about 14 years ago. I wondered what an attack like that would do to a romantic relationship. I tied it up with that time in my own life, when everything seemed very frictionless and easy and joyful. Those two things were together in my memory, even though it took over a decade to actually get around to writing the book. That was the first kernel of the idea.

The story is told in the first person by Isabel, directly addressing the assailant, Nigel, and also we see things from Edward's point of view, but in the third person. Why did you write it this way?

I wanted to choose methods of writing that I felt suited the characters, which is what I always try to do. For Isabel, this chance of delivering her impact statement directly to her assailant means she finally gets to meet him on her terms, and to use her humour and wit and strength in a way that she's not

been able to do before. Whereas Edward is a very, very different character, far more reserved and really not interested in this exercise of having to deliver an impact statement whatsoever. He'd rather be pretty much anywhere else, and I liked that slight detachment that the third person gives more readily. He seems like he doesn't really want to give anything away, even though he clearly does, really. He gives everything away, but it is slightly more at arm's length. Whereas, with Isabel's narrative, everything is on the page, and there's a power in that.

*“Beautifully written,
tense, intense, and with
such incredible depth
and insight into the
human condition...”*

Jennie Godfrey

The book is a thriller, but there's also a romantic thread to the story, as we hear about how Isabel and Edward met, and how their relationship progressed. Do you see it as a love story?

Yeah, I wanted it really to be a love story. And that's still what I predominantly think it is. I think it's a love story that is kind of interrupted by a darker genre. By the time the crime happens in the book, you want to care about them both tremendously, and

to see this relationship that certainly wasn't perfect, but was something that was very valuable and precious. You want that sense of this thing that was lost. And also that quite interesting dynamic and question of whether their love story would have been successful if they were not attacked. They both mull over that question in different ways. I wanted that to be a question for the readers too. It's also tied up in this idea of youth, particularly in Edward's narrative. He's not worried too much about ageing. Is his relationship with Isabel immaculate, or is it something that they are both moving away from as they age anyway? I wanted this question to be entwined with the question of the crime and what it does to them.

The novel is centred around a trial, and we hear not just from Isabel and Edward but from other victims, and other people connected with the assailant. Was it important to you to have these different perspectives?

Yes, because although I didn't want him to have any voice in the narrative, I felt that it was quite important to show different survivors and their differing perspectives. Edward and Isabel are both very snarky about all of the other people, they encounter, but you also see that they have certain privileges. I wanted there to be a real spectrum of victims, none of whom were perfect. You see the scale of what this criminal has done to different people in very, very different ways. It's absurd to say that Edward and Isabel are lucky, but they do have those privileges that helped them to deal with what happened to them.

The Death of Us

by Abigail Dean

Hemlock Press • PB • £9.99

ISBN 9780008625658

Published 12th March

The assailant, Nigel, is a police officer. We've heard a lot in recent years about police corruption, do you think that it is still a big problem?

The case that I based it on, the Golden State Killer, he was a police officer. It's very difficult to have lived in this country for the last fifteen years and not feel great anger about the behaviour of certain, predominantly male, police officers and how they've kind of used their privileges to commit horrendous crimes. The book isn't disparaging to all police officers. You have the character of Etta, who tends to be most readers' favourite character. She is incredibly heroic, wonderful, determined and funny. So you have these two counterpoints in the police.

Isabel and Edward aren't the most likeable characters – was that a deliberate choice?

I never put too much weight on whether the characters are likeable when I'm writing. I suppose I'm more interested in whether they're interesting and whether they're realistic as people. I like them both a great deal, I've had a lot of time with them, but they do have deep, awful flaws. They are particularly bad in the way they treat each other and the people who love them. But I think we all often treat the people who love us the most badly.

Did you plan this whole story out before you started writing?

No. I wish I was a planner, as I'm into my fourth novel now. I do have a vague plan, I like to know where the story will end up. I have the idea for the final scene right at the beginning, and I think how everybody has to get there as a final destination, but the route is less clear. By virtue of writing you do spend a lot of time with these people, and with their story, and that means that you do learn more about them as characters, what they will be likely to do and how they react in particular circumstances. For me that certainly propels where the story will go. Some of my favourite scenes in *The Death of Us* I thought of only a day or two before writing them.

Are there any other authors that inspire you in your writing?

Oh, so many, the list is endless. Because I'm certainly somebody who reads a lot as I write. For *The Death Of Us* in particular, I love Hemingway, and I went back to *Fiesta* a lot because I feel that's another really frustrated love story. I also think that the dialogue in it is some of my favourite dialogue in any novel. I was reading a lot of Helen Garner. And Charlotte Wood's *Stone Yard Devotional* was another book that I love in terms of how much it does with so little. It's so emotional and beautifully crafted in a very understated way, and I often look to authors who do that because my automatic instinct is to put too much on the page. Authors like Claire Keegan and Kazuo Ishiguro – I love how they elicit so much emotion in a very subtle, clever way where you can't quite put your finger on why you're so moved.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

They meant a huge deal from childhood onwards.

I did an event recently in Manchester with Simply Books. An indie bookstore isn't just great at being a bookstore, it goes beyond that and creates a community where people feel like books are for them.

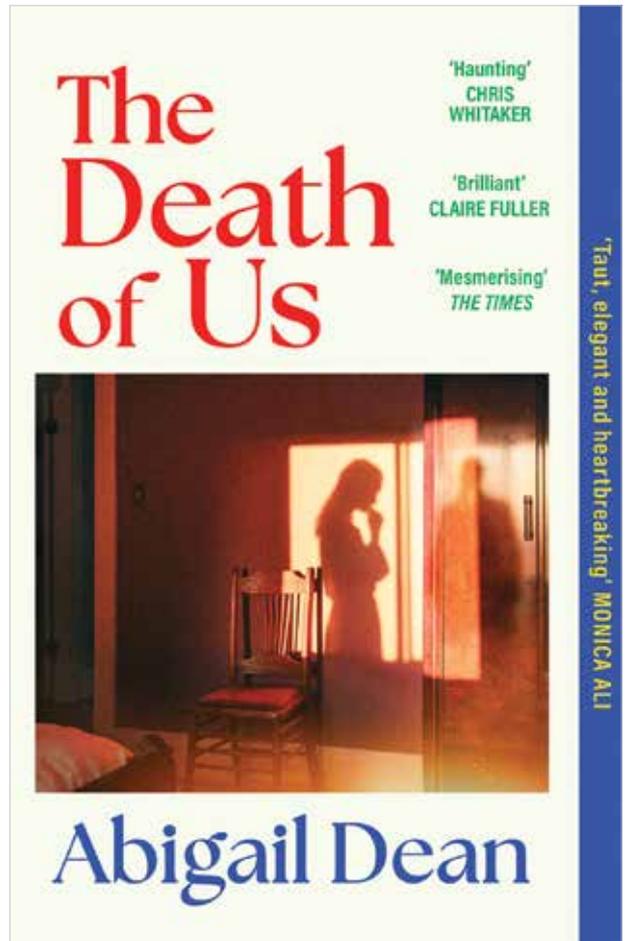
There's a total absence of any type of exclusivity, which is what I think reading should be. I think people should read what they love, and to hell with what anybody else says. I think indie bookshops are particularly good at promoting that, helping people find undiscovered gems, and creating a real community around reading, which is so welcoming and wonderful.

This extract from the beginning of the book is narrated by Isabel:

Let me talk again, then, about the night you came to our house. You won't know this, but there was a period in my life when I talked about it all of the time. All I seemed to do, in fact, was talk about it. I talked about it to the police, when I still hoped that they might find you. I talked about it in interviews. I talked about it to therapists and psychologists and psychiatrists. I talked about it to my friends and to my parents, and, awfully, to a woman in a bathroom at a party. And people wanted to hear it, of course. There was a greed in the way they listened, in the widening of an eye or the inclination of a head, although at the time I was nicer, more patient, and I tended to entertain them well enough. Over the years, I became less forthcoming – you'll realise that yourself soon enough – and eventually, I refused to talk about it at all.

“The best book I've read in a very long time”

Cecelia Ahern



You: you must never have talked about it. But did you come close? Were there moments when you sat down at your kitchen table, dark oak, beige tiles, with your wife at the stove and the telling in your throat? I've seen your kitchen, now; the world has. Your kitchen is ugly, and believe it or not, it felt good to find this out. Did you rest your hands on one of those twee place mats, decorated with woodland farms of the British Isles and swallow it back down?

The police tell me you gave your plea and nothing more. They think me a fragile thing, and they manage my expectations accordingly: I should not expect you to talk now. It's a pity. I would like to hear what you remember. I would like to know if your memory accords with my own. Who's to tell who's right – after all of these years? In my memory, it was the beginning of summer. The days were stretching, nudging away the darkness. Edward and I had worked hard, that year. On Fridays we would unburden ourselves of the week, talking over cold wine, bowls of crisps, Edward's cooking. There had been irregularities in the weeks before, things that had unsettled me at the time. You had left us a few deft clues which Edward had shrugged away; which I thought of only on my way to the bathroom in the middle of the night.

I did not think of them, then.

Story Town

The first book in a series of romances set in the small town of Ravenswood, *A Girl Like Her* follows the prickly and autistic Ruth Kabbah, the town's black sheep, who spend most of her days at home. When the strikingly handsome Evan Miller moves in next door, Ruth's life starts to change. We interviewed the author Talia Hibbert about her inspirations.



What inspired you to write *A Girl Like Her*?

I grew up in a small town, which wasn't particularly exciting – but I've always been a dreamer, so when I created the Ravenswood series I decided to *make* it exciting. (And cosy. And swoonworthy. And hot.) I wanted to take the intimacy and justice and warmth that I love about romance novels and inject it into the world I knew. So *A Girl Like Her* mixes the beauty of the English countryside with exaggerated small-town drama, and it juxtaposes a spiky, wounded heroine with the devoted, vulnerable, caretaking hero of dreams.

It is the first in a series of novels set in the small town of Ravenswood. What is it about small towns that makes it such a great setting for a romance?

I love how romance focuses on connection and intimacy – both positive and negative, romantic and otherwise. When I write, I like to explore human nature and analyse what hurts people and how they can heal each other. So a small town, where people are forced to know each other's secrets and be in each other's business, where they can develop such history together...I think that's a perfect backdrop for all kinds of relationships.

“I love how romance focuses on connection and intimacy”

The relationship between Ruth and her sister Hannah is fractious, but they love each other at heart. Do you think this is often the case with siblings?

I'm lucky to have some great sibling relationships, and I think family connections can be really precious. Unfortunately, sometimes the family you're born into is not your true family – like, some people's siblings are their biggest haters. But with Ruth and Hannah, I wrote siblings who are also soul mates. (Soul mates who really get on each other's nerves.) That's my favourite thing.

Like you, Ruth is autistic – did you draw on your own experiences when creating her?

Somewhat, yes. Ruth wears pyjamas as often as possible because real clothes feel terrible – that's a 'me' thing. She hyper-focuses on her work to the exclusion of practical necessities – I can, unfortunately, relate. But on the other hand, Ruth and I are very different people despite our shared neurodevelopmental condition. As well as her autism, she is shaped by her experience of intimate partner violence and the shame from her community that followed; by her love of art and comics; by her unique struggles (including, but not limited to, a tragic inability to cook anything more complicated than tinned soup). So I drew on some of my own experiences, but no more than I would for a neurotypical character.

Evan is a new guy in town – do you think this is why he regards Ruth differently to some of the other characters, or is it just part of his nature?

I don't think Evan is kind by nature, but rather – and to me, more impressively – he is kind on purpose. Because he was raised by an openhearted and open-minded single mother, and because he lost her prematurely, he's committed to living in a way that would make her proud. Caring about people is a core facet of his identity. So, no matter when Evan met Ruth, he would never have ostracised her or looked the other way when the rest of Ravenswood did.

Which other authors inspire you in your work?

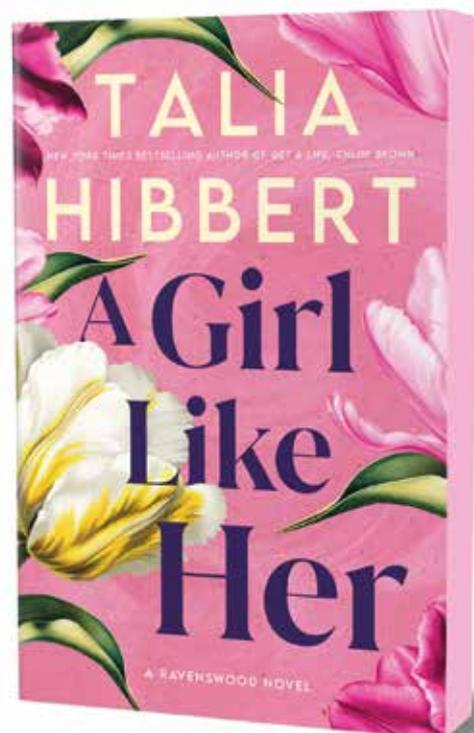
So many! I am definitely a reader first; I still fangirl when I meet authors in real life. Kennedy Ryan's writing always inspires me; it is so real and relatable yet simultaneously poetic and socially significant. I also love Alexis Hall's representations of mental illness, and because she writes in a range of subgenres but every book feels distinctly *her*.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Independent bookshops are the beating heart of life as an author and a reader. Books are so personal; books are *art*. It matters to have them sold by companies we can forge a personal connection with. I love indies.

A Girl Like Her

by Talia Hibbert
Sourcebooks Casablanca
PB • £9.99
ISBN 9781464277245
Published 3rd March



Lethal Love

In this gripping debut thriller from a British Nigerian author, Ife is thrilled to be finally marrying Ade. But she didn't expect the wedding to be interrupted by the police, arresting her new husband for murder...

I fe has known Ade since they were children, but their road to marriage has not been smooth. Their relationship has been overshadowed by Cynthia, Ade's ex. Ade and Cynthia moved to Windchapel, a small town in Dorset. By the time of their wedding day, Cynthia has been missing for a while. And now a body has been found on the Dorset coast. But *did* Ade kiss, marry – and kill? One person hopes the truth never comes out. Told in alternating chapters from the point of view of Ife and Cynthia, before she disappeared, *Kiss Marry Kill* is an intriguing mystery of love, jealousy and murder.

In this extract, it's twelve weeks before Cynthia's disappearance, and Ade and Cynthia are visiting Ade's mother in London when another visitor arrives:

A few moments later, Mama returned to the dining room, a tall woman dressed in a navy-blue skirt suit and high-heeled shoes following behind her. Her face was fully made-up – dark-red lipstick had been expertly applied, and long straight hair fell neatly over her shoulders.

Cynthia could immediately tell that it was her real hair and not a weave, and she brushed the already slick edges of her own Afro puff with her hands, suddenly feeling uncomfortable.

'Fey-Fey?' Ade leapt from his chair, his eyes and mouth widening into a smile.

'Dey-Dey.' The woman opened her perfectly sculpted arms to greet him. He accepted her embrace, the pair swinging from side to side as they hugged, Mama standing triumphantly behind them.

Cynthia looked from Mama to Ade's back to Mama again. It didn't take a genius to figure out what Mama was up to, but if she was going to make it through this dinner with her dignity intact, she was going to have to play it cool. She refused to fall into Mama's trap, even if Ade was too blind to see the truth.

The woman turned to greet the rest of the dinner party.

'Tayo.' She smiled at Ade's brother and leant over Cynthia to give his hand a friendly squeeze. 'And...' Her dark-brown eyes settled on Cynthia's, and she smiled at her too, extended her hand. 'I'm Ifelayo,' she said. 'But everyone calls me Ife.'

Kiss Marry Kill
by Yemi Dipeolu
Faber • PB • £9.99
ISBN 9780571395866
Published 23rd April

“Rich in character, smart and pacy. Yemi Dipeolu brings a brilliant new voice to the thriller genre.”

L.V. Matthews

'This is Cynthia,' Ade said, excited to introduce them. 'Cynth, you remember I told you about my friend, Ife? The one I grew up with?'

'Yeah,' Cynthia lied, smiling through gritted teeth. Ade definitely hadn't mentioned this beautiful woman he'd probably taken baths with, but Mama was smirking, and Cynthia didn't want her to think she'd won. 'Great to finally meet you.'

Ade made his way back to his chair, and Mama gestured to the seat to his left, allowing Ife to sit comfortably in the chair that didn't ricket.

'Would you like something to eat?' Mama asked.

'The efo looks lovely as always, aunty.' She said efo as if she'd come out of the womb being able to pronounce it, shortening the 'o' sound in a way Cynthia could never quite manage. No matter how many times Ade tried to teach her, she always ended up pronouncing it like 'a foe'. She looked down at her pathetically empty plate and wished she'd had the guts to try something else.

Ade pulled the Pyrex dish towards him and served Ife's food as Cynthia shrunk down further in her seat, the anxiety she'd been feeling earlier flooding back in. She'd never thought of herself as a jealous person, but the fact that his whole scenario had been choreographed by Mama had caused her usually solid self-esteem to take an unexpected nosedive. It didn't help that Ife was an absolute stunner.

'It's been way to long, Fey,' Ade said between mouthfuls. 'Where've you been?'

'Dubai, mostly. I moved back home a couple of weeks ago.'

'Your aunty tells me you were a project manager over there,' Mama said.

He nodded.

'We thank God.' Mama glanced over at Cynthia, cracking her chicken bone between her teeth before returning her attention back to Ife. 'There are some women in this world who think that shaking their nyash is a right way to make a living. But you, Ife, you've always been a good girl. Hard-working, respectful. You should be proud.'

Cynthia shifted in her seat. If Mama's intention was to upset her, then she'd failed. She wasn't upset; she was furious. Sure, she *shook her nyash* for a living, but so f**king what? She'd danced for some of the biggest names in the UK and had recently opened her own studio. Yes, it was small and having some serious growing pains, but it was hers and she wasn't going to let Mama or anyone else make her feel ashamed of something she'd quite literally bled for.



In Tune

Now in paperback, Holly Brickley's debut novel *Deep Cuts* is a mesmerising love story following Percy and Joe, who meet at college in the early 2000s. They write songs together, but will Percy always be on the sidelines? We talked to the author about music and love.

What inspired you to write the book – are you a big music fan?

I am a music fan. I don't think I'm as obsessive about music as Percy. My first love is fiction and books, whereas I don't think Percy reads a book at all in the novel, at least not one that's not assigned to her in college. But I do love music. I grew up in a very musical family, and most of my family had talent, and I didn't feel like I did. From a very young age I felt really shut out of it because it didn't come naturally to me and I was so envious and of people with musical talent. I was forever dating boys who could play guitar, and I married one eventually! So that was the initial inspiration, wanting to root around in that part of my brain that was still so envious of musical people. And I still would trade all of my talents with the written word for the ability to write a song and sing it.

The book follows Joe and Percy over many years as they weave in and out of each other's lives. Did you plan the story or did the characters take over?

Definitely the latter. I loved *Normal People* by Sally Rooney, like everyone, and I had this rough sense of that kind of a structure where you're two people are coming in and out of each other's lives over a period of years, but focused on that young adulthood age. So I had that rough idea, but beyond that, no, I'm a fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants kind of writer. I have to be surprising myself, and entertaining myself, otherwise, I'd get bored.

Joe and Percy bond over music and write songs together. Do you think the connection between them is more about music than anything else?

Yeah, I think those things are inseparable with them. I think music is who they are and I've



“Clever, nostalgic, and deeply geeky... a literary indie-pop classic”

Florence Knapp

always loved love stories that exist at that intersection between work and romance, especially when it's a creative work. I love *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* by Gabrielle Zevin, although that's more of a friendship than a love story. But one of my favourites movies is *Broadcast News* with Holly Hunter in the 1980s. I love it when people are really passionate about something and it's completely their identity. And love gets all mixed up with that and it's completely inextricable. I find that very, very sexy.

The book is set in the early 21st century. Do you think that it might not occur if it was set now, as we consume music so differently?

I never quite know how to answer this question because I don't really know what it's like to be a young person right now. I assume they still talk about music in the way that Percy and Joe talk about music, and I know that they're still making it. I don't think there would be the same trading of music, the same toting around their ipods and their CD wallets, there was a physicality to music back then that I do think made it more fun. I think that the main difference isn't really so much about music, but about how technology has changed the way that we socialise and the way that we are not as present. And I felt that when I was writing the book. When I was picturing a scene, even if it was just Percy and her classmates on a subway, I imagined people looking each other in the eye, the way the subway was in 2002, but all of that has changed. We're a little bit more siloed and less likely to live in the moment in that way.

The book has a lot to say about women in the music industry, both as artist and as fans. Do you think that the sexism and misogyny which was common then has changed a little bit, with the rise of so many female artists in recent years?

I do think 'a little bit' is a good way to describe it, because it hasn't changed nearly as much as it should have. But yes, I do think it's better. There was a particular misogyny to the 2000s which was really insidious. I felt as a young person that we had

kind of figured that out, that misogyny was something that my mom's generation faced. But by the time I was in college, the attitude was that feminists were lame. It was a very weird time looking back because, of course we hadn't figured it out, not anywhere close to it, and the misogyny that women were facing in the music industry was insane. So I was telling that story very much looking back from the perspective of a woman in my 40s.

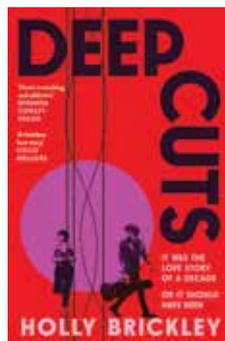
Are there any other authors who inspire you in your writing?

Yes, many. Like I said, Sally Rooney was my initial inspiration. I remember telling my husband what would you get if you cross *Normal People* with *High Fidelity* by Nick Hornby. I love Gabrielle Zevin and Lily King's *Writers & Lovers*. I also love a writer named Sigrid Nunez, I fell in love with her debut book when I was still at college, and then I ended up having her as a professor at Columbia. She was a huge influence on me because I was already starry for her, and then she was teaching me. I still see her influence in my sentence structure.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Independent bookshops mean everything to me. I live in Portland, Oregon, which is basically a bookstore with a city around it. We have Powell's here, which is, I think the largest independent bookstore in the world, at least in America. There's a local outpost of Powell's just down the street for me, so I'm there several times a week, it really just feels like home. I love the smell of an independent bookstore, they should pipe it in like the popcorn in the movie theatres. And of course, I just I love them intellectually

for how supportive they are to the writers and what they do for our local economies. I also love them emotionally, just for what they do for my soul.



Deep Cuts
by Holly Brickley
The Borough Press
PB • £9.99
ISBN 9780008695866
Published 26th March

On the Up

Set in California, this vibrant and moving debut novel explores the lives of those who spend their time at a daycare centre for Los Angeles' disabled community.

Among the clients and staff are Carlos, a charismatic aide who lost his mother as a boy, and Jorge, who is gentle, nonspeaking and prone to escape despite Carlos's best efforts. Tom, a beautiful young man with cerebral palsy, pines for Ann, the lifeguard for the summer who feels out of her depth. Then there's Dave, the centre's director. He wanted to be an actor, but finds himself on a very different path.

At the heart of *Upward Bound* is Walter, a recent college student returning to the company of his peers after a family tragedy. Around him, a story unfolds of friendships forged, connections missed and the dreams – some new, others almost forgotten – that shape us. With his wit, empathy and astonishing gifts as a storyteller, Woody Brown immerses us in life as we have never experienced it before.

In this extract, Walter describes life at Upward Bound:

Upward Bound is located in a shabby one-story building that used to be a nursing home. It still looks like one, with its eighties-era aqua-and-peach exterior and convenient ramp. The inmates have to sign in at the front desk when they arrive in the morning, or someone does it for them. I am capable of signing my name, but it takes me forever and looks like a kindergartner's scrawl, so I let my mom do it. There are various rooms, patios, and a dinky, kidney-shaped pool surrounded by cracked concrete in the back. Most of the action (a term that applies very loosely) takes place in a large rec room in the center. Picture a nursing home rec room that hasn't been updated since the first Bush administration. Old-school linoleum, accordion dividers, metal folding chairs, cheesy decorations hung for whatever holiday just passed. They feed us breakfast, which usually consists of generic sugary cereal in a Styrofoam bowl. The schedule for the day is scribbled on a big whiteboard in hourly increments. It is one infantilizing activity after another. An hour of gluing macaroni to popsicle sticks to make a picture frame. An hour of a 'cooking' activity during which we make Chex Mix, combining processed salty and sweet bits

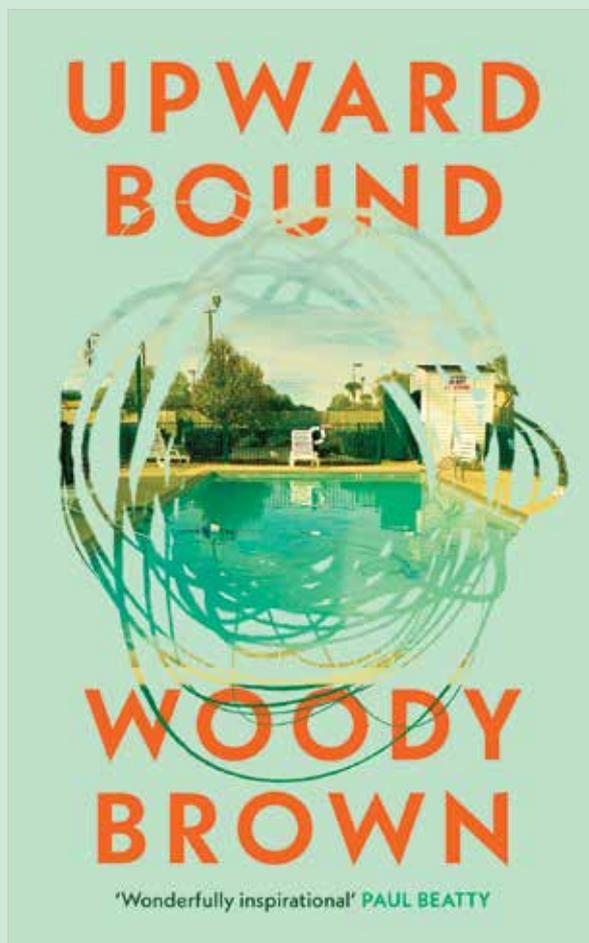
“A luminous novel of human connection and hope that will stay with me”

Cecile Pin

in one big bowl, which we eat for snack. Lunch (even less nutritious than breakfast or snack) is followed by games like Cootie or Connect 4, maybe a swim if it's warm. The time in the pool doesn't suck, but still, one day feels like forever.

There might be a walk across the street to the park, where we big-ass adults sit on swings or meander about. I used to like going to a park (not this one, a nicer one) even when I was too big for a playground. Mom let me bring a backpack full of Thomas trains. I would meticulously line them up according to their standing on the Isle of Sodor. Thomas, Percy, James, and Henry always first. I would also use this opportunity to gaze peripherally at the typical kids at play. I could imagine I was one of them. But the Upward Bound walks to the park offer none of these pleasures. Their only purpose is to use up that particular segment of the day. Dave can brag that he got his clients outside. There aren't any activities planned. Were awkward grown people supposed to play Duck Duck Goose? Staffers casually surround the playground to keep elopers

Upward Bound
by Woody Brown
Jonathan Cape
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781787336414
Published 2nd April



like Jorge contained. This makes them seem more like prison guards than helpful friends, and they pay more attention to each other than to us.

I can understand the impulse to flee. God knows I feel like dashing out screaming from this place a million times a day. But I have more self-control than that and am able to play the model inmate. Still, I don't get much intellectual stimulation here, so I've put some effort into forming theories about Jorge's dilemma. The most likely one is that Jorge isn't running away from anything. Jorge doesn't mean to escape. He is going to something. There is something somewhere else that he wants to see or do. He can't express his need, so he just goes. The staffers have never even noticed that every time Jorge has eluded them in Target, they find him in the toy section looking at Mr. Potato Head. I have no idea what the spud's appeal is to Jorge. The compulsion is so strong that you can see Jorge's brain visibly thrumming as soon as our clown car pulls into the Target parking lot. If I could, I would tell the staffers to make the toy section our first stop and give poor Jorge his Potato Head time before his own head explodes and he runs away.

“Highly original, captivating, brilliantly observed”

Caolinn Hughes

Write On

layered. *Fruit Fly* was my way of asking difficult questions about desire, damage, survival, and who ultimately benefits from telling those stories.

In this funny and moving novel, writer Mallory shot to fame with a bestselling novel. But, years later, she needs a new story to tell. Could the answer to her writer's block lie in the gay scene, and in a young homeless addict called Leo? We interviewed the author Josh Silver to find out more.



***Fruit Fly* is your first novel for adults – what inspired you to write it?**

I was really interested in the question of authentic voice in publishing – who gets to tell which stories, and why. It's a complicated, often uncomfortable conversation, and I don't pretend to have the answers. But I wanted to explore it through fiction. There's something that fascinates me about the way pain can become currency – how trauma, identity and marginalisation can be packaged and sold. Where's the line between representation and exploitation? As a gay man who has lived through two very different cultural moments – one where the LGBTQ+ community were encouraged to hide in order to survive or succeed, and another where queerness became more visible, more marketable, even cool – I've seen how stories shift depending on what the world is ready to consume. That tension really fed into the novel. I also wanted to explore chemsex within the gay community. It's something that's prevalent but still surrounded by shame and misunderstanding. It's often reduced to headlines or stereotypes, but the reality is far more complex, human, and emotionally

The novel follows two very different characters, writer turned therapist Mallory and homeless addict Leo, and is told in alternating chapters from each one's points of view. Why did you write it in this way?

I've always enjoyed getting inside different people's heads. I was an actor – a fairly rubbish one – many years ago, but that instinct never left me. I'm fascinated by what shapes the way someone sees the world, and how two people can experience the same situation in completely different ways. All my books are written in the first person. I find it an exciting and intimate place to write from. It allows you to really inhabit a character's logic – even when that logic is flawed or self-serving. With Leo and Mallory in particular, my brother read the novel and said I was a version of both of them at different points in my life. I think that's probably true. We all contain contradictions. I'm interested in how our internal narratives shift – how we justify ourselves, how we manipulate, how we grow. In my experience, life isn't really about who is right or wrong, good or bad. It's about perspective, experience, and the stories we tell ourselves in order to survive.

“This is an incredible book... tough and raw and merciless but funny and kind at the same time.”

Russell T. Davies

Mallory decides to 'go gay' and write about a sad gay character, as this subject is in vogue. Do you think it's a good idea to follow literary trends, or is it better to 'write what you know'?

I honestly don't think there's a single right answer to that. There are probably benefits to both approaches. Publishing is a business as well as an art form, and trends exist for a reason – they reflect what readers are responding to at a particular moment. I'm sure following a trend can be helpful if your goal is to secure a book deal. At the same time, trends pass. What tends to last longer is something that feels urgent or personal. I've always tried to write towards the things that make me slightly uncomfortable – the questions I don't fully understand yet. Those don't always align neatly with what's fashionable. I suppose I like the idea that readers – and publishers – don't always know what they want until they see it. I'd never want to consciously replicate something that already exists. For me, writing feels more interesting when it's exploratory rather than strategic.

Mallory uses elements of Leo's life to write her novel; Leo intends to take whatever Mallory can give him. Do you think that they are both exploiting each other?

Fruit Fly

by Josh Silver
Magpie • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781836431473
Published 23rd April



Yes – I think they are. But I also think they're both surviving. They're using what they have at their disposal: their stories, their charm, their damage, their need. In that sense, they're very similar. It's easy to frame one as the exploiter and the other as the victim, but I was more interested in the grey area between those roles. To me, they're two lost souls meeting at a particular moment in their lives. They both want something from each other, and they both convince themselves their motives are justified. I wanted readers to see that they're coming from a surprisingly similar place – shaped by loneliness, ambition, fear, and the desire to be seen. Whether that counts as exploitation or just human behaviour under pressure is something I'd rather the reader wrestle with.

The book has a lot of dark elements – violence, homelessness, drug addiction, coercive control – and yet it's also very funny. How important is humour to you in your writing?

I didn't actually set out to write something funny. It was only once people started pointing it out that I realised the humour was there. For me, it comes from character. Even in very dark situations, human behaviour can be absurd. We justify ourselves in ridiculous ways. We say the wrong thing. We cling to ego or pride when it's clearly self-destructive. If a reader finds themselves cringing at a character but still understanding why they're behaving that way, that's interesting to me. Humour, especially in darker stories, can create space. It allows the reader to breathe. It also makes the characters feel more human. Life rarely exists in a single tone – even in the bleakest moments, something awkward or strangely funny can cut through. I think that contrast makes the darker elements hit harder.

Leo enjoys writing poetry and was good at English at school. Do you think we sometimes underestimate homeless people?

Yes, I think we do. With Leo, it was important to show that he isn't defined by where he's ended up. He's intelligent, creative, sensitive – and those qualities don't just disappear because someone is struggling. Homelessness doesn't erase a person's interior life. I'm also interested in how pain and trauma accumulate. Very few people simply choose to unravel. There are usually layers – personal history, circumstance, the systems around them – that contribute. It's often easier for us, collectively, to individualise the blame than to examine the bigger picture. I didn't want to write Leo as a symbol or a lesson. Just as a human being. And perhaps if we look at him that way, it becomes harder to underestimate people in similar situations.

Ancient Truths

Photo © Sunny Dhaliwal



In this unique book, Pompeii expert Dr Jess Venner brings to life some of the people who lived in that ancient city. From a slave to a businesswoman, a working family to an innkeeper, each chapter focuses on real people who died when the volcano Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD. We interviewed the author to unearth how she wrote it.

What inspired you to write a book about Pompeii and the people who lived there?

My academic background was, and still is, studying Pompeii. I'm an ancient historian and Roman archaeologist. I'm a world-leading expert on the site. Working there, I realised that there were these ancient people that I kept coming across and that I got to know intimately. And I felt I could tell their stories because they weren't able to tell them themselves, because they were women, or they were slaves, or they were working class. When I started writing the book, it was almost like they were waiting to come out of my brain. I bring my own personal human experiences into their experiences as well. It's called critical fabulation, and it's a quite rigorous method of reconstructing the experiences of someone in the past, based on the archaeological evidence, or literary evidence, and combining that to create something that is a plausible description of their days.

The stories you tell are based in reality, but they read almost like fiction. Was it important to you to have that narrative drive?

Yes, I started out by writing it as a half-fiction style, and putting my own voice in. My editor at the time said that she really liked the bits that are fiction. And so I rewrote some of it, and then she said, 'why not try the whole thing?'. So I rewrote the chapter on Petrinus, the slave, and I loved it. I thought it was a great idea because it meant that we weren't taken out of the action, we could be there with them fully, and I felt with my experience and my knowledge, I was able to bring in the factual elements in an imaginative way.

You also include footnotes in each chapter, giving more historical context. Did you write those as you went along?

Yes. I didn't have to do any research for them, as I already knew them. I've been doing this for many years so, as I would come across something that I felt needed a little bit more explanation or context, I would add them. It was my opportunity to insert my voice and my knowledge, and to guide the reader through the experiences with things that I couldn't necessarily put

into the text without making it sound really bizarre. But I didn't want to put in too many footnotes because I was adamant that this book was going to be accessible and enjoyable. I want to bridge that gap between people who love history and people who think that history isn't for them.

Is it important to you that many of these voices are ordinary people, rather than famous or powerful people?

Very important. I come from a working class background, I grew up in east London. I didn't have a good education. Classics and ancient history weren't even known to me. And so I'm aware of that working class feeling of not having a voice. I recognised this again and again in the archaeological record and scholarship for Pompeii, that these voices are just glossed over. It's partly due to the bias of availability, as we do have more information on figures such as Pansa, the politician, because his name is written all over the city. We knew where he was living, because excavators, historically, have put more emphasis into large, beautiful houses, instead of working class apartments. We're all guilty of it in archaeology and history, emphasising the famous, rich and powerful. But my academic interest is ordinary people that aren't in the records. My job is to trace the people behind the work, the ones that weren't recorded and are invisible. They deserve to be talked about.

"I'm aware of that working class feeling of not having a voice"

People who lived so long ago had a very different culture to us, but they were still human beings. Do you think that they were similar to us, as humans?

Yes, I do. You hear a lot of historians saying, and they're not wrong, that we can't relate to them too much because we have to remember how different they were. That is true, but as you're saying, fundamentally, they are human beings like us. They experience embarrassment, they laugh, they go out and have a nice evening with their friends, they have the same

anxieties about not having enough money for the month. We have evidence from funerary monuments, and we have letters written to friends, which sound as though they could have been written today. These are very human things that transcend 2000 years. It really tugs at my heart strings when I think about what happened to them.

How did you collect the images that you include in the book?

I took a lot of them myself, at the site. I had a huge database from my research. But then, in February last year, I'd finished the first draft of the manuscript, and I thought I'd go to Pompeii for a week, and walk around as each character, to make sure what I had in my head what was exactly correct. And while I was doing that, I took pictures that I thought would be best representative of what I was describing in the book. I felt the images were really useful for bringing the city to life.

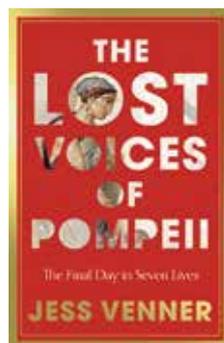
Are there any other authors or historians who inspire you in your work?

I started out reading *The First Ladies of Rome* by Annelise Freisenbruch. That was before I became interested in ancient history, before my academic career. She goes through all the different women that were married to Roman Emperors, and that was a real inspiration to me. But I will read any book, if it's well-written. It could be crime fiction, or a classic work of literature. I love the different lyrical ways that people put sentences together in fiction, and I found it useful to read a lot while I was writing.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

They mean so much! I was recently in Hay-on-Wye, and the boot of my car was filled with books. I used to work in Jonkers Rare Books in Henley, so I am very familiar with them. I live in Buckinghamshire, so there's

lots of different bookshops nearby, such as The Little Bookshop in Cookham. I think that independent bookshops do an amazing job, and their staff have so much knowledge.



The Lost Voices of Pompeii by Dr Jess Venner
Mudlark • HB • £22.00
ISBN 9780008756802
Published 23rd April

End of the Line

“A family saga like no other.”

Sarah Winman

In this dark and playful novel, we walk through the lives of a once-grand family, as we go from room to room in their decaying home. What does the future hold for the Gilbert siblings?

The crumbling Gothic mansion of Thornwalk, long-term home of the Gilbert family, is being handed over to a chain of luxury ‘historic’ hotels. Millions will be spent in its restoration. But for every so-called improvement, what will be lost? What value can there possibly be in a threadbare carpet, a tarnished spoon and a thousand empty jam jars?

Before the hotel people arrive, with their clipboards and their skips and their bottles of bleach, Maximus, loyal guardian of the Gilberts’ legacy, invites us on a final tour of the once-stately home, where each room holds a secret. From the bolt on the blue room door to the tiny dents in the bars at the nursery window... these are the keys that will unlock the lives of the five fatherless Gilbert children.

A frustrated romantic, a stubborn traditionalist, a dreamer, a diva and an explorer: The Infamous Gilberts will be cast adrift on the irresistible tides of the twentieth century, buoyed by love, buffeted by loss, and tangled together in an unputdownable story where the lines between eccentricity and madness, cruelty and love become hilariously, heartbreakingly blurred.

In this extract, we explore the library at Thornwalk:

Now, let your eyes stray to the other end of the room, to the dark circles on the wallpaper above the morning-room door. Who knows what they plan to do about this, but I suggest putting up a plaque: FORMERLY IN THIS PLACE: THREE BLUE-AND-WHITE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CHINESE DISHES, MONETARY VALUE IMMATERIAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL VALUE IMMENSE, THE INDISPUTABLE PROPERTY OF HUGO GILBERT, LAST LORD OF THORNWALK, SNATCHED BY HIS SISTER LYDIA, RENOWNED THIEF.

What else? So many things. You might open the cupboard there to the left of the fireplace and take a look at the board games. The *Monopoly* set is very ancient. One winter evening, Annabel had a spectacular success with

The Infamous Gilberts

by Angela Tomaski
Fig Tree • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9780241757574
Published 5th March

a hotel on the Old Kent Road and for the rest of her life tried to replicate it. She would race around the board trying to get back to the purple ones. She never minded losing, but it was sad to see.

“Vivid, poignant, hilarious and tragic: the most rewarding and beautiful novel I’ve read in ages”

Barabara Trapido

Annabel’s fingermarks are all over the little dog. They always let her have him. Hugo’s are on the top hat.

Beside the *Monopoly* set is a box of home-made Christmas tree decorations, some carved by Jeremy in the sawmill on the hillside behind the house, some knitted by Rosalind. Rosalind’s are full of moth holes and dropped stitches. There are tears in them too, but those are less easy to see.

And now, something else you may not have noticed. See the small rug on top of the large rug in front of the fireplace? Lift up the small rug. There is a substantial burnt patch underneath – the result of no tiny snuffed-out spark, surely, but an almost mighty blaze.

Picture it. Annabel is alone, playing with her dolls. She is perhaps five years

old. The year? Let’s say 1921. A spark flies from the fire and lands on the rug. Annabel continues to play. The spark smoulders a little and the rug catches alight. Still, she does not move.

It is Hugo who finds her, sitting there, a doll in each hand, staring blindly at the flames. Let me see... if she is five, he must be seven. Old enough to whisk her up in his arms, throw her to Mrs Gilbert, who has come into the room behind him, and smother the blaze with a blanket.

Mrs Gilbert collapses into a chair, weeping. ‘Gracious!’ she says. ‘Not again! What shall we do with her?’

‘Hush, Mother,’ says Hugo. He kneels down in front of Annabel. ‘Annabel?’ he says.

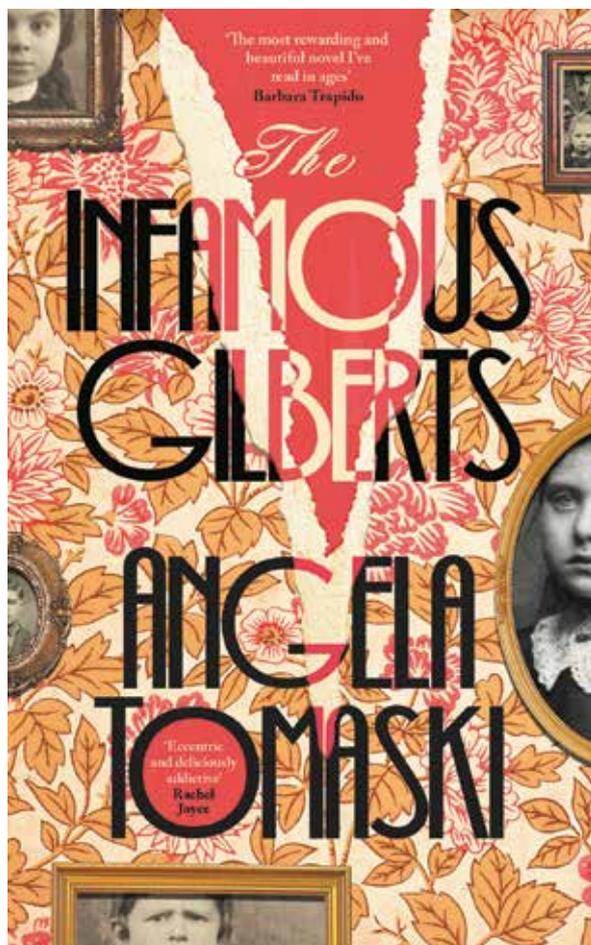
There is no response.

He waves a hand in front of her eyes. Annabel doesn’t even blink.

‘Well?’ says Mrs Gilbert.

But, before Hugo can think of anything to say, Annabel sighs, the deep sigh of someone coming home from somewhere far away and not as nice. She looks up at him with her big dark eyes and smiles. ‘Hugo!’ she says. She wriggles away from her mother and holds out her arms.

Later, much later, Annabel told me that this was probably the beginning of the end for her. Mrs Gilbert had immediately recounted the story of the fire to Aunt Beatrice, and from then on, as far as the aunt was concerned, she had only four nieces and nephews – four whole ones, and one small leftover piece, about which, at some point, something would have to be done.



Striking Out

Following on from the critically acclaimed *The Wild Men*, in this new book David Torrance explores an era-defining moment in political history, the General Strike of 1926. We interviewed him to find out how he wrote it.

Photo © Stephen Richmond



What inspired you to write a book about the General Strike of 1926, a hundred years on?

I saw it following on from my previous book, *The Wild Men*, because my plan is a trilogy of books on turbulent 1920s British politics. *The Wild Men* is about the first Labour government of 1924, *The Edge of Revolution* the General Strike of 1926, and the next book will be on the second Labour government of 1929 and the financial crisis of that year. They flowed into one another because the common theme is paranoia in the 1920s about the UK going the same way as Russia, and sliding into anarchy, revolution and class warfare. It never quite happened. But the consistent theme is that there were people who thought that it could happen. Because the Russian revolution was a recent memory, it was only in 1917. There was a real paranoia that it was contagious, and that other countries would follow suit.

But beyond that, it's just a really good story. Just as *The Wild Men* was a deep dive into nine months, *The Edge of Revolution* was a deep dive into nine days, and it gives you a very focused moment to analyse. From it emerges lots of very interesting ideas about class tensions in 1926, labour relation, the economy and politics. One of the most interesting things was how the media was changing. Radio and the BBC was emerging as a medium at that time, and Stanley Baldwin, who I'm critical of in other respects, exploits the radio

in a very clever way, to communicate his framing of the whole dispute as an assault on the British Constitution.

As well as what was happening politically during that time, you also feature comments from other people outside of politics. How did you go about researching it?

There is a problem with books like this. People naturally look at the papers of politicians, and so you end up with a very high level account. So I made a point of just going to every archive that I could find across the UK, and the interesting thing is that, because people at the time realised it was an important historical moment, they preserved things, mostly newspapers. Lots of people kept copies of the *British Gazette*, or *The Times*, just as people do now if something significant happens. But other people kept letters that they wrote to each other, and often it's just normal people talking about what London's like during that period or that they're stuck in Perthshire in Scotland and can't get a train. I wanted to weave in some of these 'lower level' observations, to remind us that this was not just affecting politicians and the government, it was affecting everyone.

"Engrossing"

The Guardian on
The Wild Men

Was there anything you came across during your research which really surprised you?

Not really, but I did try and put a different emphasis on this book. In 1976, there was a spate of books on the General Strike because it was the 50th anniversary. So I was conscious that I needed to try and do something different. There's a chapter on the civil commissioners, the ministers who ran chunks of Britain. No one had done that before. But to me, that was quite an interesting way of looking at how the strike impacted different parts of the country. The strike didn't quite reach Northern Ireland, which is interesting in and of itself, so everyone had ignored that part of UK, but I looked at its impact there. And regarding the king and the royal family, there's great material at the Royal Archives which is really extraordinary. You'll find letters from the king's private secretary, with scribbles by George VI in the margin. So you get a real sense of what the king thought about it, his concerns and his anxiety. Also, his inclination to intervene, which I think is very interesting because these days we think of the monarchy as being studiously non-political.

Do you think there was any real possibility of a revolution, or was it pure paranoia?

I think it was understandable

paranoia, but I don't think it was ever in prospect. Fundamentally, a revolution needs a revolutionaries. And they were in pretty short supply in 1926. There was great paranoia about the Communist Party of Great Britain which, looking at it a hundred years later, is quite bizarre. This was a party which had around 2000-3000 members, and was quite amateurish. I'm sure some of them probably wanted a Russian-style revolution. But they were in such a minority. And even if some of the communists and made it on to local trade union groups, that was not the goal of most of the senior people involved, and certainly not at the Trade Union Congress, where you would have had a range of views. They were as worried as the government was about things getting out of control. So I don't think there was a real prospect of revolution, but it suited the conservative government to frame what was essentially an industrial dispute in a way that slightly spooked people, because it helped them control the narrative, and ultimately bring the strike to an end.

Do you think anything like the General Strike could happen again?

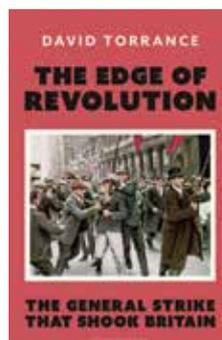
It was essentially a sympathetic strike, and I don't think that's possible anymore. People could still go on strike, but it wouldn't be legal. The political, economic and cultural terrain is fundamentally different now. Coal mining is no longer a thing. A hundred years ago, 1 in 10 of the adult male population worked in coal. It was a huge industry. Everyone relied on it, it was needed to run trains and to run power stations, and was used to generate electricity. Domestically, people used it to heat their homes. And so coal being interrupted or stopped was a big deal. That is obviously not the case now. Would anyone notice tomorrow if newspapers didn't appear in the streets? Probably not because, few people read physical newspapers anymore, it's all digital. So if even if there was a general strike now, they wouldn't be able to halt the flow of information to the extent that there was possible a hundred years ago.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

I think they're great. Whenever I'm visiting somewhere around the UK, usually to do some research, I always make a point of visiting a local bookshop. I just love noticing their distinctive character I think they are fantastic and a pretty essential part of the local High Street landscape.

The Edge of Revolution: The General Strike that Shook Britain

by David Torrance
Bloomsbury Continuum
HB • £20.00
ISBN 9781399423595
Published 26th March





Down to Earth

Words to Love a Planet is a beautifully illustrated dictionary that reconnects us to nature, time and place, from the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Lost in Translation*, Ella Frances Sanders. We interview her to discover how she created it.

This heartfelt collection celebrates the poetry of language and the quiet power of noticing. Motivated by a deep care for both words and the world, Sanders invites readers to reimagine their relationship with the planet through a lens of linguistic wonder.

Across seven evocative themes – ranging from Seasons and Land to Time and Water – over two hundred words in more than eighty languages illuminate the textures of landscape, feeling, weather and thought. Each entry includes a pronunciation guide, thoughtful definition and etymological or cultural context, gently guiding the reader toward a more attentive, grounded way of living.

What inspired you to write *Words to Love a Planet*?

It's a book which, in terms of the overarching concept, I've been wanting to create for a long time – perhaps six years or so – and consequently its actual period of creation seemed to be here and then not here quite quickly, even though its pages carry around three years of work. *Words to Love a Planet* was something I wanted to give to people in this age of, at best, noise and disarray: a dictionary that could better and more

lovingly entangle them within the natural world, that could illuminate the intricacies and realities of being a person alive at this time. We are followed at almost every turn by languages of violence, whether those are used against people or against the planet, and this book provides a powerful alternative to that – a way to better know (and therefore love) our landscapes, our people, our planet.

“The majority of my research was following threads”

How did you go about finding the words you feature in the book?

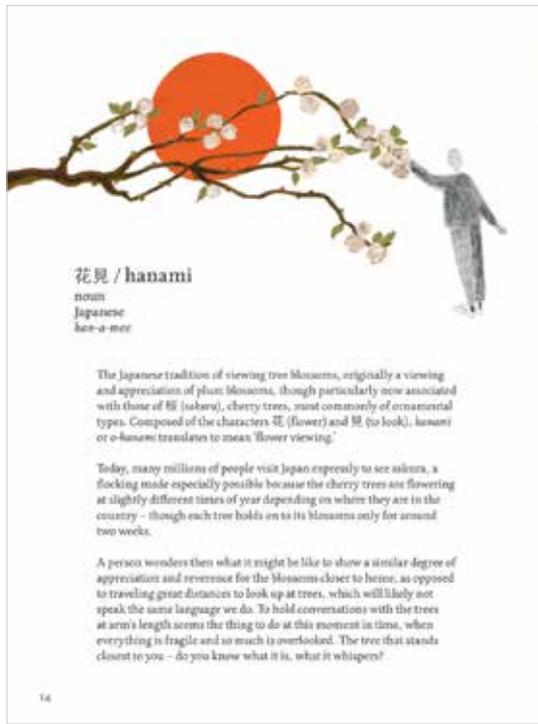
Besides digging up obscure treasures like *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* (1891-92), the majority of my research was following threads, whether those were through in person connections or online reading, and I had been noting down words for potential inclusion for years by the time a publisher said yes. Early on I put out an open call to my readers asking them if they had particular words which they held closely, which provided a few additions,

and then at least for English terms titles like *Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape* (a 2006 collection edited by Barry Lopez) formed crucial and expansive beginnings – I think a book must begin exceedingly widely in order to then narrow down to something good.

Do you have a favourite word from the book?

The word which begins the 'Land' chapter is *yillal*, and I think I'd probably consider that my favourite word right now, as well as one of my favourite paintings from the book. It comes from the Guugu Yimithirr language, spoken by the Indigenous people of Far North Queensland, Australia, and refers to the paths across land or sky taken by creator-beings, those recorded in story, song, paintings, or dance. When thinking about such paths it is interesting to note that Guugu Yimithirr doesn't have words to mean left or right, instead the understanding of direction is based on words which have similar meanings to the cardinal directions: north, south, east, west.

Do you think that there is a connection between the threat to our environment and the natural world and the loss of language? Absolutely I do. There is a UN report stating



a language dies every two weeks, and almost twenty years ago a Convention on Biological Diversity concluded 150 species could be lost every single day. All of our losing is connected, collective, and ironically most of our losing is happening within our supposed 'better connected than ever' period of history, when we can see what a stranger is eating thousands of miles away at their breakfast table, but not know what to call the first plants of spring on our own streets. When we lose language we lose the possibility of naming, and humans instinctively give names to the things they care about – without those words, things remain nameless, or invisible, and it is much harder to advocate for things if other people cannot see them.

How did you create the illustrations?

The text for the book was fully, albeit roughly, drafted before I began painting, and following that all 200 or so illustrations (all gouache on paper) were done in a relatively short and intense time. I'm not someone who sketches very much, as I'll either know clearly what a piece will look like or not, but thinking back now I don't know how I physically painted so many pieces in the time I did – I think my body recalls those weeks but my brain struggles to make sense of the output.

The book is organised into different themes – what was the thinking behind them?

It was clear from the beginning that the words needed some gentle structure to hold them, but I didn't wish to categorise so tightly that the book instructed a reader exactly how to think about a word, or what to do with it. Instead, the seven chapters, or themes, are introduced with an essay and then gather around the words within them like an embrace, giving both the words and the



“When we lose language we lose the possibility of naming.”

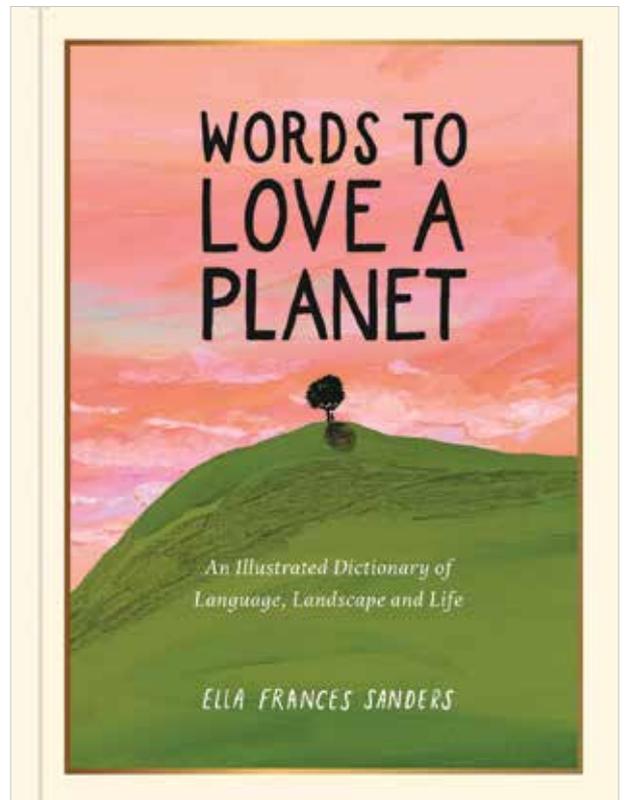
reader a sense of belonging, and guidance. And if you're an alphabetical person (like my own alarmingly laden bookshelf) then everything is tucked into an index at the back!

Which other authors and illustrators inspire you in your work?

At present much of my inspiration comes from my role as the designer of *Orion* magazine – the writers which populate its pages are incredible and hard-working people, their values often closely aligned with my own, so I often find myself leafing through past issues, or the 40-year-old archives. Happily, this work also enables encounters with various new-to-me artists, and most recently I've loved working with the illustrator Natsumi Chikayasu on art accompanying short fiction in the spring issue. Day-to-day reading lately has featured a lot of Carol Shields, Kate Briggs, Claire-Louise Bennett, Joan Barfoot, and Cora Sandel – the last two of those discovered through the editions of The Women's Press, now long gone, but a catalogue full of very good things.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

They mean sanctuary, and they mean perseverance, and they mean resistance, and they mean there is still a lot to learn.



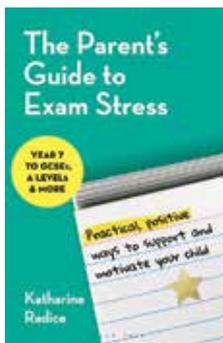
Words to Love a Planet: An Illustrated Dictionary of Language, Landscape and Life
by Ella Frances Sanders
Michael O'Mara • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781789299007
Published 26th March

Life Guides



Forget Normal, I Want Magic: The 5 Rules of Leadership by Claire Brumby
Kogan Page
PB • £14.99
ISBN 9781398625778
Published 3rd April

The leadership landscape is changing. Or more importantly, the leadership landscape has changed for good. Traditional, hierarchical and rigid methods no longer resonate in a world which prioritises empathy, flexibility and authenticity. If you feel disconnected from outdated leadership advice, this book will help you reframe what it means to lead today. It is a bold and practical guide to modern leadership.



The Parent's Guide to Exam Stress by Katherine Radice
Green Tree
PB • £16.99
ISBN 9781399425278
Published 12th March

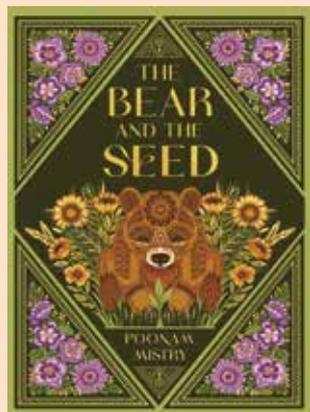
The ultimate guide to understanding why so many children experience problematic levels of stress at school today, and what we – as parents – can do to support them at home. Katharine Radice draws on her training in child and adolescent development and 20+ years teaching in the classroom to provide you with practical advice, valuable insights and effective strategies to support your child through exams and assessments from KS2 to A level.



Life. Reclaimed: Find Freedom from Chronic Overperformance by Dr Pippa Grange
DK RED • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9780241761908
Published 9th April

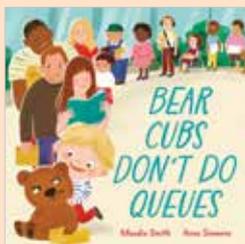
In a push and rush culture that rewards entrenched cultural narratives like the need to be exceptional and the drive to optimise, our relentless obsession with 'more' can often lead to chronic overperformance and burnout. This book provides a unique framework for understanding the root causes of this efficiency mindset and navigates the gap between the overwhelming pressure to excel and how to succeed in a way that keeps you sane, whole, and healthy.

Animal Magic



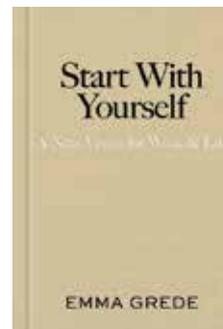
The Bear and the Seed by Poonam Mistry
Templar Books • HB • £12.99
ISBN 9781787418905
Published 19th March
Age range: 0+

A gorgeously lyrical folktale about the importance of protecting our environment. Bear lives in the bountiful forest, filled with breathtaking flowers and plants, and trees that tower up to the sun. One night, the trees and plants disappear and when the animals wake up, they begin to flee the forest in grief. But when Bear finds a lonely seed, he works tirelessly to help it grow, seeking words of advice from the few animals that pass by.



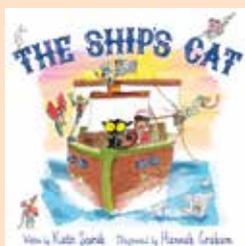
Bear Cubs Don't Do Queues by Maudie Smith & Anna Simeone
Oxford University Press • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781382069052
Published 2nd April
Age range: 0+

Bear cubs are very helpful shopping companions... but they draw the line at queuing. If you are going into town, your bear cub is going to want to come with you – they will absolutely love playing with the pigeons in the fountain. They will NOT, however, join you in a queue. Queues are BORING! In this joyful tale, the games to distract the bear cub become bigger and more elaborate, eventually involving everyone in the queue!



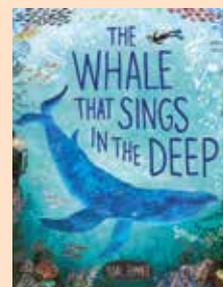
Start With Yourself by Emma Grede
Gallery • HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781398550940
Published 14th April

A game-changing, no-BS guide for anyone seeking meaningful success on their own terms. It's an essential framework that will give you the tools and mindset to unlock your full potential in life and business – straight from a woman who defied all the odds to become a serial entrepreneur, co-founder of culture-defining global businesses, a non-profit champion and host of the 'Aspire with Emma Grede' podcast; all while raising a family of four children.



The Ship's Cat by Katie Scorch & Hannah Graham
Cranthorpe Millner
PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781803783598
Published 24th March
Age range: 3+

A beautifully illustrated rhyming picture book about an 'unlucky' black cat, which encourages children to never judge people by their looks or skin colour. Bella is just a lonely black cat, looking for a friend... that is, until she meets a mysterious pirate captain, who invites her to join his swashbuckling crew! Sail the high seas with Bella as she battles with Percival, the captain's mischievous parrot, to find her place on board ship – and find friendship in unlikely places.



The Whale that Sings in the Deep by Yuval Zommer
Oxford University Press • HB • £12.99
ISBN 9780192782656
Published 5th March
Age range: 0+

Following the journey of a solitary blue whale from its Arctic birthplace to the warm waters where it migrates in the winter months, this wonderfully illustrated story enables readers to discover the perils and beauties of one of the most extraordinary animal journeys on Earth. Award-winning author-illustrator Yuval Zommer's immersive pictures bring us close to this gentle giant and the awe-inspiring beauty of the ocean.

Space Bubble

Cosmic Cadets and the Bubblegum Bots is a new book in the funny series set in space. All Gloria and Razz need to do is survive their next mission... what could possibly go wrong?

Gloria is willing to do anything to top the unofficial missions leaderboard at the Cosmic Cadet Academy. If only she can avoid triggering a universe-wide robot apocalypse... Follow intergalactic besties Gloria and Razz on their most dangerous mission yet. Packed with jokes from the hilarious Ryan Crawford and out-of-this-world illustrations from Rochelle Falconer, this is a perfect young middle-grade adventure read.

Gloria and Razz are one mission away from officially being leaders of the unofficial leaderboard at the Cosmic Cadet Academy. All they need to do is survive a trip to the extremely safe and not-at-all dangerous Bubbylon Blasters Bubblegum Factory. Then avoid getting trapped forever in a prison made of gum and defeat their shiny evil robot nemesis. If Gloria and Razz do find a way out of this seriously sticky situation, they might just prevent a cosmic robot apocalypse. Or be the cause of one!

In this extract, Gloria and Razz are told about their new mission by their teacher, Captain Tinsela.

The thing nobody mentioned about having a Glitzanoid teacher was that, yes, THEY were coated from head to toe in a dazzling layer of glitter, but YOU were the one who spent all day dodging the showers of glittery sparkles flying off them.

'So, Gloria and Razz will be rescuing that pesky missing lynx,' Captain Tinsela said. 'AGAIN!'

'No! Not the lynx again.' Razz stood up and toppled her chair over with her big bushy tail as it swung angrily behind her. 'Glorious! Why would you volunteer us for this mission?'



she'd need something WAY more dangerous for her final mission of the week. Like disarming a molecular missile or defangging a sulphur serpent.

Finally, Captain Tinsela took a deep breath and turned to face the class. Smirking teasingly, she said, 'Happy Thursday, everyone!'

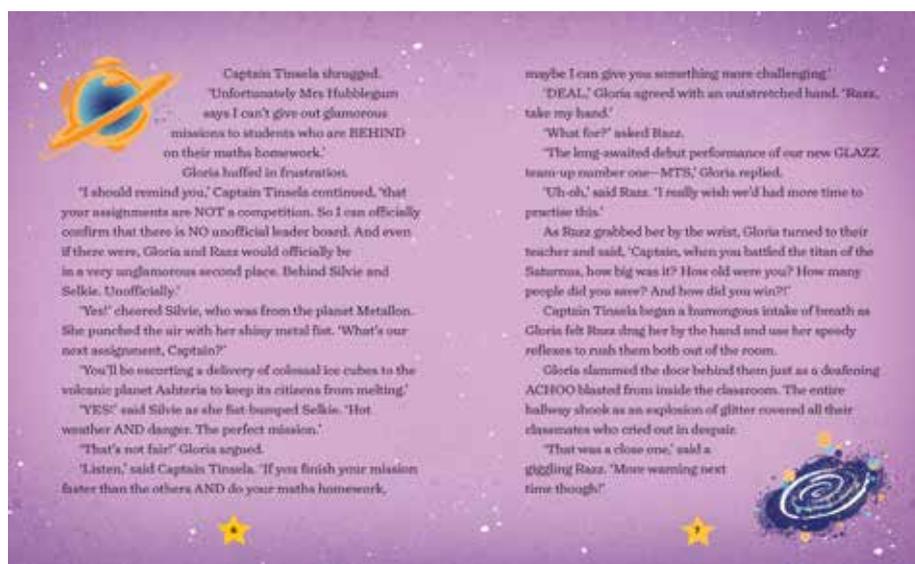
The whole class let out a groan and Gloria's patience ran out. She stood up, her chair screeching across the floor behind her, and yelled, 'Captain Tinsela! It's FRIDAY. We need our missions!'

'Then you're a volunteer?' Fabulous!' Captain Tinsela replied, clapping her hands together in a mini explosion of multicoloured glitter.

The thing nobody mentioned about having a Glitzanoid teacher was that, yes, THEY were coated from head to toe in a dazzling layer of glitter, but YOU were the one who spent all day dodging the showers of glittery sparkles flying off them.

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Captain Tinsela shrugged. 'Unfortunately Mrs Hubblegum says I can't give out glamorous missions to students who are BEHIND on their maths homework.'

Gloria huffed in frustration.

'I should remind you,' Captain Tinsela continued, 'that your assignments are NOT a competition. So I can officially confirm that there is NO unofficial leader board. And even if there were, Gloria and Razz would officially be in a very unglamorous second place. Behind Silvie and Selkie. Unofficially.'

'Yes!' cheered Silvie, who was from the planet Metallon. She punched the air with her shiny metal fist. 'What's our next assignment, Captain?'

'You'll be executing a delivery of colossal ice cubes to the volcanic planet Ashteria to keep its citizens from melting.' 'YES!' said Silvie as she fist-bumped Selkie. 'Hot weather AND danger. The perfect mission.'

'That's not fair,' Gloria argued.

'Listen,' said Captain Tinsela. 'If you finish your mission faster than the others AND do your maths homework,

maybe I can give you something more challenging.'

'DEAL,' Gloria agreed with an outstretched hand. 'Razz, take my hand.'

'What for?' asked Razz.

'The long-awaited debut performance of our new GLAZZ team-up number one—MTS,' Gloria replied.

'Uh-oh,' said Razz. 'I really wish we'd had more time to practise this.'

As Razz grabbed her by the wrist, Gloria turned to their teacher and said, 'Captain, when you battled the titan of the Saturnus, how big was it? How old were you? How many people did you save? And how did you win?'

Captain Tinsela began a homogenous intake of breath as Gloria felt Razz drag her by the hand and use her speedy reflexes to rush them both out of the room.

Gloria slammed the door behind them just as a deafening ACHOO blasted from inside the classroom. The entire hallway shook as an explosion of glitter covered all their classmates who cried out in despair.

'That was a close one,' said a giggling Razz. 'More warning next time though!'

'Um... well...' Gloria knew better than to get on her partner's bad side. On the outside, Razz may have looked like a cute, charming ball of peach fur from the planet Purrl, who liked to call Gloria 'Glorious' (which Gloria didn't mind at all). But on the inside, Razz had a fiery temper and a habit of solving problems with her claws whenever she got upset (which Gloria DID mind).

Despite this, Gloria loved her perfect partner, Razz. She especially liked that she didn't complain about the many, MANY times Gloria landed them in trouble with their headteacher, Mrs Hubblegum. In return, Gloria gave Razz ALL the encouragement she could EVER need to become the best (or probably second-best) crusader in the cosmos. Together, they were unstoppable.

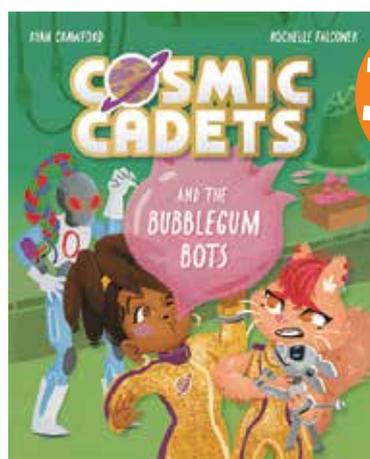
'I didn't volunteer!' Gloria replied. 'Captain... can we pleas—'

Gloria felt Razz's furry paw over her mouth, keeping her from making a huge mistake. Because Captain Tinsela had just

about the WORST allergies in the entire cosmos. And the thing she was especially allergic to was... being asked questions. Which was not AT ALL useful for a teacher. Just a single question would send Captain Tinsela into a glitter-sneezing frenzy.

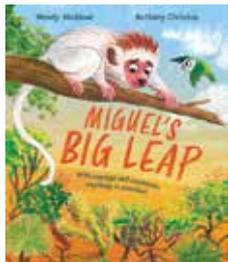
'What I meant to say,' Gloria rephrased quickly, 'was that we don't want the lynx mission. We want something with MORE danger.'

'Or something not dangerous at all that we can ACTUALLY complete,' Razz added. 'Glorious wants to finish top of the leaderboard, after all.'



Cosmic Cadets and the Bubblegum Bots
by Ryan Crawford
Illustrated by Rochelle Falconer
Oxford University Press
PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781382054362
Published 5th March
Age range: 7+

Books for Little Ones



Miguel's Big Leap
by Wendy Meddour & Bethany Christou
Oxford University Press • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781382068932
Published 5th March
Age range: 0+

Lemur's love to leap! But leaping through the spiny forest is hard if your hands and feet are squishy, like Miguel's... OUCH! Miguel tries not to mind too much that he has to stay behind while Enzo and Rena go to collect sticky tamarin treats in the treetops. But when he discovers that his friends are in danger, will Miguel have the determination to take his bravest ever leap? An inspiring tale of how a character with different needs can find the courage to do more than they believed possible.



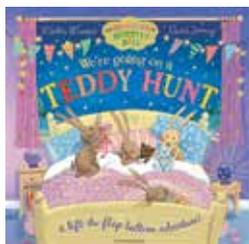
Now I See Spring
by Mac Barnett & Jon Klassen
Walker Books
BB • £8.99
ISBN 9781529535730
Published 9th April
Age range: 1+

From the multi-award winning duo Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen, this is one in a unique quartet of board books that playfully shows the changing seasons through a child's eyes. Sparse and rhythmic text invites young readers to explore a farm setting through different seasons, gently introducing everyday words. In spring, the tree's leaves are budding, rain falls from the sky, a sweet treat is a cookie and the perfect hat is a yellow one.



The Magic Scarf
by Em Cosh
Farshore • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9780008671860
Published 9th April
Age range: 3+

Have you ever received a gift that has changed your life? When shy dancer Jay is given a beautiful scarf, a magical transformation begins to take place... Blown by the wind, the scarf unravels, extraordinary flowers bloom – and so does Jay, who casts aside their fears and begins to dance... A joyful, heartfelt story about confidence, creativity and belonging from rising-star creator Em Cosh.



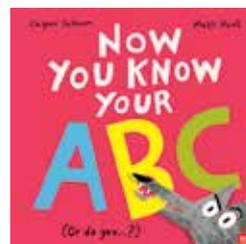
We're Going on a Teddy Hunt
by Martha Mumford & Cherie Zamazing
Bloomsbury Children's
PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781526671714
Published 23rd April
Age range: 0+

A new book from the author of *We're Going on an Egg Hunt*. Join the fun as your four favourite bunnies set off on a soothing lift-the-flap bedtime adventure. With four missing teddies to find hidden under the flaps, it's an interactive and calming treasure hunt, perfect for getting little ones ready for bed. You'll need to look out for all the sleepy animals along the way!



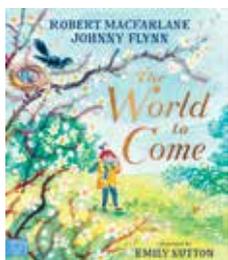
I Want Everything!
by Sophy Henn
Simon & Schuster
Children's • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781398526822
Published 26th March
Age range: 3+

Big Ghost wants ALL the things! Except, do they, really? Luckily, Little Ghost is there to ask all the right questions (such as: 'Do you want an actual octopus as a hat?') to gently guide Big Ghost to the realisation that maybe what they really want is a friend to help them out when they get in a pickle. A gorgeous celebration of the things in life that really matter from picture book superstar, Sophy Henn, with funny characters and bold artwork.



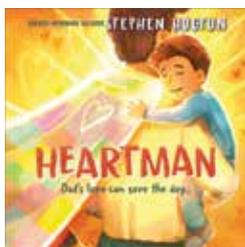
Now You Know Your ABC (Or do you...?)
by Casper Salmon & Matt Hunt
Nosy Crow
HB • £12.99
ISBN 9781839949678
PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781839949685
Published 9th April
Age range: 3+

A hilarious alphabet adventure that will have readers racing from A to Z, this is the follow-up to the award-winning *How to Count to One*. A is for apple. B is for ball. C is for castle. But wait! D is NOT for dog. There's a wolf in this book and it's lurking right behind you. YOU are the hero of this story! Can you spot the sneaky wolf hiding throughout this book, escape its clutches and make it all the way to Z? You better watch out for its devious disguises!



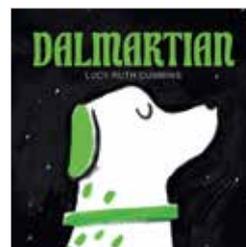
The World To Come
by Robert Macfarlane, Johnny Flynn & Emily Sutton
Magic Cat • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781917044554
Published 19th March
Age range: 2+

Now in paperback, this is a stunning picture book collaboration from bestselling author Robert Macfarlane, actor Johnny Flynn and illustrator Emily Sutton. Take a lyrical journey with a father and son who walk together through an ever-changing landscape and discover a world to come that's filled with hope. This beautiful book sings with a love of words and rhythm, and vividly conjures the magic of nature, in an uplifting way.



Heartman: Dad's Love Can Save the Day
by Stephen Hogtun
DK • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9780241661901
Published 2nd April
Age range: 3+

From the author of *The Station Cat*, discover the heartwarming story of the power of a parent's love. Heartman isn't much of a superhero. He can fly, sure, but that's it. Everyday he goes out to fight fearsome super-villains like the GREAT BIG MORT GAGE, The Bills, and the exhausting 9.2.5., but compared to everyone else's dad, he's not very impressive. However, when you fall down, there's only one hero that can pick you up again!



Dalmartian
by Lucy Ruth Cummins
Simon & Schuster
Children's • PB • £9.99
ISBN 9781398554061
Published 9th April
Age range: 3+

One night, a visitor from outer space arrives in Stephen's garden. This visitor may look like a Dalmatian, but it certainly doesn't act like one and at first, Stephen and the visitor get off on the wrong paw. Will a shared love of bacon be a strong enough foundation for this ordinary boy and extraordinary dog to learn to live in harmony? And will Dalmartian find the true meaning of home? That's the funny thing about friendship... it comes from unexpected places.

Play On

Bella Built A Robot
by Adam & Charlotte Guillain
Illustrated by Patrick Corrigan
Oxford University Press • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781382063890
Published 5th March
Age range: 0+



In this fun new picture book, Bella builds a robot but soon discovers that there are some things it can't do – such as play imaginatively. We interviewed the authors, husband and wife team Adam and Charlotte Guillain, to discover more.



What inspired you to write a book about a child who builds a robot?

Charlotte: We were thinking about AI, about how it can do so much, but it can never replace a child's imagination. We were also thinking about how, when you're bored as a child, your mind starts to wonder, and that's when the incredible magical stuff happens. We wanted to celebrate that imagination. We were also thinking about human connection and friendship, and the complexities of interacting with other humans and getting on with them. So it was those two things. It was the imagination and the human connection and looking at a way to bring those together.

Adam: It's a big issue these days in education, that early years play should be recognised as a learning experience. Structured play by professionals for children is the absolute perfect place for a child learning to be purposeful. We really wanted to celebrate that as well, play and collaboration.

Is the book also about the rise of AI?

Adam: Yes. Our relationship with AI goes back to 2019 when we were with our children at the Hay Festival. We went to an event by Marcus du Sautoy, about how AI was going to be used for creative purposes – writing, art and music. It was this massive mind-bending shock to all of us that this was even possible, and we just couldn't quite believe it, and yet now we all accept it. For us, it was a dystopian scenario. But of course, our kids were quite

excited about it – that they could become artists themselves just like that. So we wanted to write a children's book that wasn't preachy or didactic or scary, but was just a great story with a very simple and empowering message. At the end of the book, the robots have built the treehouse where Bella and Riley are going to play, and Bella says, 'we bring the magic'. The robots can't play imaginatively.

How do you collaborate together when you're writing a book?

Adam: We bounce ideas off each other and play with language.

Charlotte: It's a bit like when Bella's lying in the tree at the beginning of the book and she's bored. We get our ideas by not sitting at our desk. We go out for long walks, and that's our things sort of pop in unannounced into your mind. We share those ideas as we're walking and talk about them, throw things around, and that's where things start to grow for us. It's a time when our brains aren't switched onto work mode, when we're just letting them freely wander and look at the scenery. Then, because there's two of us, we can discuss them.

Adam: One of us will take the lead and whack down the first draft, and then we bounce drafts between us and talk about it.

Charlotte: I'm from an editorial background, so I'm quite details-focused. I'll be quite obsessive about details of plot, and things tying up and making sense, whereas Adam's much more interested in the big picture. So we're quite different, and bringing those two ways of thinking together is helpful because we've got different strengths.

to write is always derivative of something else. Because it's scraped and stolen all our work. We're all very angry about it. Where is it going to go? It's a race to the bottom when it comes to quality. I don't think it can ever be truly creative, because as humans, we have to be disruptors of our own ideas. We have to break the cycles of thinking to think something new. We don't know, because we're not tech experts, but I don't think it will happen. We do think it can serve us. That's what it's like in the book – AI, or the robots, are sidekicks in our story.

If you could build a robot, what would you ask it to do?

Charlotte: I think AI and robots should be used to do all of the functional stuff in our lives. So we are freer to do the creative stuff. It shouldn't be going anywhere near creativity. It should be doing things like curing illnesses and sorting out public transport and tackling climate change, all these massive problems that we have as humans. It should leave the musicians and the artists and the writers and the actors alone!

Are there any other authors or illustrators who inspire you in your work?

Adam: In the past, we've usually written in rhyme, and we recognise that as a high art. We've had the privilege of working with Alison Green, who discovered *The Gruffalo*. The author we most admire is Jeanne Willis. We're genuine fans of her, and we aspire to be like her.

Charlotte: We've worked with so many different illustrators, such different styles and approaches, and every time we're just so delighted when we see what they've come up with.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Adam: They are so important to us. I think it's really important that there's a vibrant independent sector, and so when we do school visits, we will always try and connect a school to a local independent bookseller. And if there's ever a chance of doing an event in an independent bookshop, we will always choose it.

Charlotte: It's all part of the ecosystem, we're all interconnected and we all need each other: readers, writers, publishers and bookshops. For our first ever picture book, it was the independent bookshops that got behind us, and we remember that.

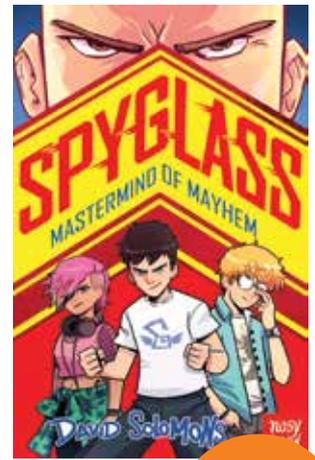


In the book, the robots don't have the power of imagination. Do you think it's a very human thing, and that AI will never be able to truly be creative?

Adam: The learning curve to becoming somebody who is creative is that you start by copying. You start by learning how to take other ideas and innovate upon them. At the moment anything you ask AI

An Eye for Danger

Spyglass: Mastermind of Mayhem
by David Solomons
Illustrated by Miguel Díaz Rivas
Nosy Crow • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781805132363
Published 9th April
Age range: 9+



In this first book in a new funny adventure series, Adam and his friends Tyler and Zada accidentally get caught up in a mission to save the world when they stumble across the ingenious gadgets of a reclusive professor. We interviewed the author David Solomons to discover more.



What inspired you to write *Spyglass: Mastermind of Mayhem*?

When I was about four, my mum told me I needed glasses, and I flat-out refused because – and I quote – James Bond does not wear glasses. This felt like a perfectly reasonable position to take at the time. I adored the Bond films as a child, especially the moment when he was given his gadgets by Q, which always felt like the real magic. That love of clever technology and secret devices definitely fed into *Spyglass*. The other big inspiration was Enid Blyton, particularly the *Famous Five*. My daughter loves those books, so I've been rediscovering them alongside her, and I was reminded how brilliant a seaside holiday adventure can feel. *Spyglass* is very much that: a summer holiday story with the glow of childhood, ordinary kids caught up in extraordinary trouble, and more gadgets than anyone sensible would allow.

In the book, footage of Adam using a top secret device goes viral and gets him and his friends Tyler and Zada into trouble. Do you think, in our modern age, it's hard for things to stay secret?

I think it's almost impossible. We live in a world where everything is recorded, shared, screenshotted, reposted and analysed, usually before anyone has had time to think, "Should we maybe not do this?" Secrets used to hide in filing cabinets. Now they trip over a phone and fall straight onto the internet. Mobile phones are also the bane of fiction writers everywhere. Everyone is always connected, which can drain the jeopardy out of a story if you're not careful. The viral moment in *Spyglass* was my way of using

the dreaded phone to push the plot forward, rather than letting it quietly ruin it.

Tyler doesn't want to have an adventure – he'd rather take it easy. Do you prefer adventure or a quiet life?

In theory, adventure sounds exciting. In practice, I like knowing where the toilets are, where I can sit down, and how far away the exit is. I'm very much a Tyler at heart, with a strong preference for comfort and a general suspicion of unnecessary danger, particularly if it involves running. That said, adventure does have a habit of turning up whether you want it or not, in books and in real life. When it does, I tend to approach it carefully and with a bit of grumbling, rather than charging in heroically, but I've learned that some of the best stories happen when you step slightly outside your comfort zone.

Adam's dad likes to create unusual ice cream flavours – do you have a favourite?

I admire people who enjoy very experimental flavours, but personally I am boring and loyal. Give me a really good vanilla or chocolate and I'm happy. Life is unpredictable enough without coriander ice cream getting involved.

Professor Goodspeed likes to invent new gadgets – if you could invent one, what would it do?

I'd invent something that tells you, with complete certainty, whether an idea is brilliant or terrible *before* you've spent weeks working on it. It wouldn't be very dramatic, but it would save a lot of time and emotional energy.

As well as being a fast-paced thriller, the book is also very funny. How important is humour to you?

Humour is absolutely essential. Without it, a fast-paced thriller is just a list of stressful events happening to people who never get a break, which isn't very enjoyable for anyone involved. Jokes are how you let readers breathe, especially when things are getting tense or weird. Some of the humour in *Spyglass*, particularly through Tyler, is quite self-aware. He has a sense of the kind of story he's in, which can be funny but also needs handling carefully. If you lean too hard into that kind of knowingness, you

risk popping the reader out of the adventure. So it's always a balance: letting the characters notice the absurdity of what's happening, while still making sure the stakes feel real and the story keeps moving.



Which other authors inspire you in your work?

I'm inspired by writers who trust young readers with big ideas and don't talk down to them, while still being entertaining. I love books that are funny on the surface but have something deeper ticking away underneath, the kind you can enjoy at ten and then read again later and notice new things, or suddenly realise your parents were laughing at completely different bits. I've always loved writers like Douglas Adams, who made big, strange ideas feel playful and accessible, and trusted readers to keep up while they were laughing.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Independent bookshops are where books feel most personal. You can usually sense the owner's personality in everything, from what's on the shelves to how the shop is laid out, and even in whether the coffee is excellent or slightly alarming. Nothing is accidental, and nothing feels generic. I love the way indies curate, not just stock. They're brilliant at championing books they genuinely care about and at matching stories to readers in a way that feels intuitive rather than transactional. I've spent a lot of time taking my children into independent bookshops, and one of the things I love most is how booksellers talk to them properly. They chat, they listen, they recommend, and they never talk down to the small person standing in front of them.

Look out for these other books by David Solomons:

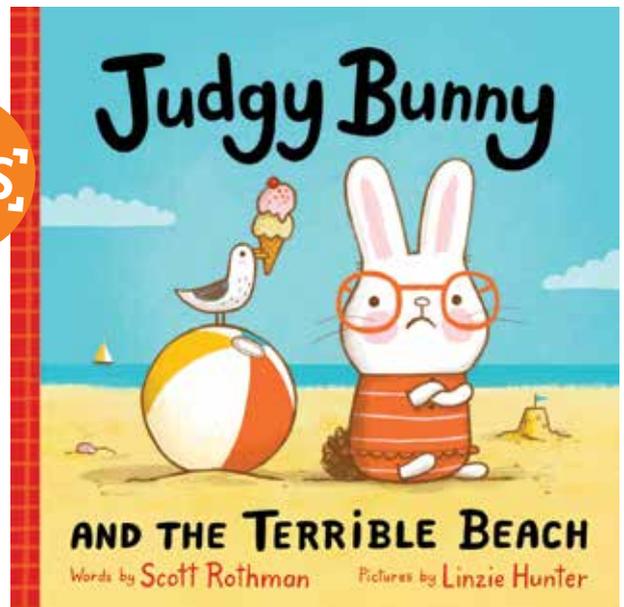


A Critical Role

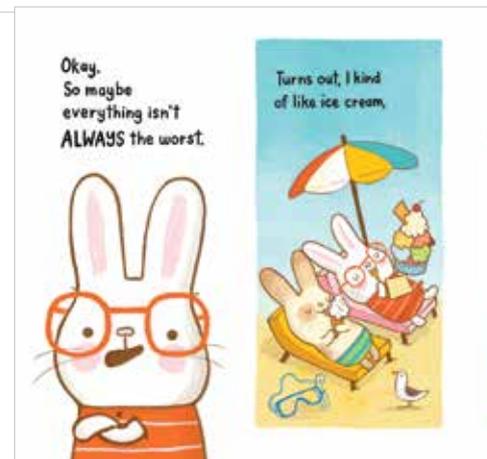
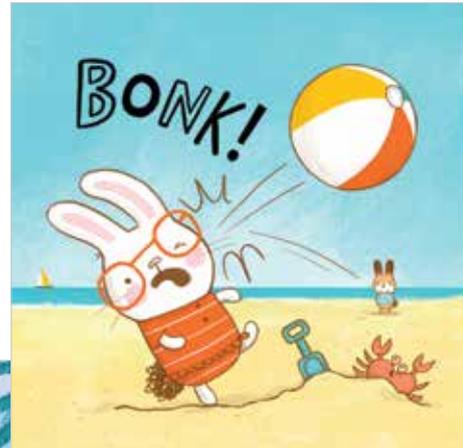
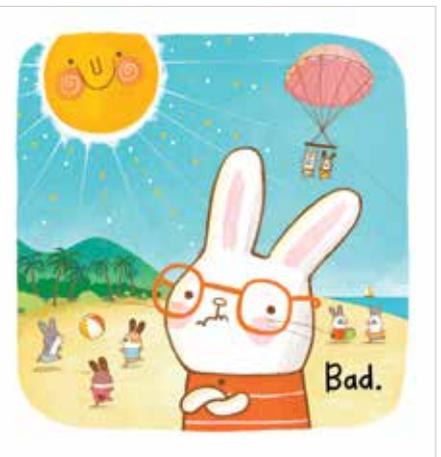
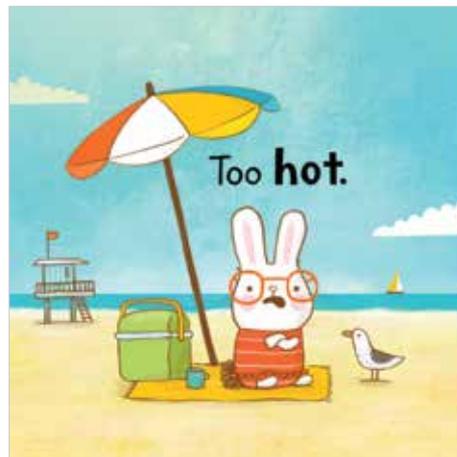
[KIDS]

This funny picture book from a *New York Times* bestselling author features a very particular rabbit who expects every new experience to be THE WORST! Can Judgy Bunny learn how to enjoy herself?

Judgy Bunny and the Terrible Beach
 by Scott Rothman
 Illustrated by Linzie Hunter
 Sourcebooks Jabberwocky
 PB • £6.99
 ISBN 9781464272677
 Published 24th March
 Age range: 4+



For this judgy bunny, nothing's worse than a day at the beach. The sun? *Too bright.* That view of the blue sky and gleaming sand? *Awful.* Sand castles? *Ugh.* Ice cream? *Yucky.* Yep. Everything is TERRIBLE. It has to be, right? There's no way she could ever have a good time. Not with the inexplicably friendly bunny who's offered to fly kites with her, or the ice cream that possibly isn't a flavour she detests, or boogie boarding, which she actually... isn't bad at?! Okay. *MAYBE* it's fun. But she'll be the judge of that! This book is full of adorable illustrations, memorable characters and laugh-out-loud scenarios that will endear Judgy Bunny to kids and adults alike.

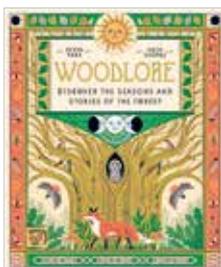


Picture Books & Young Reads



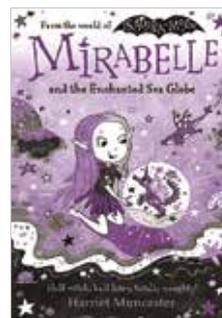
Come Along
by Cosmo Sheldrake
Magic Cat
HB • £14.99
9781917366953
Published 7th April
Age range: 3+

A joyous debut picture book rooted in the whimsical tradition of nonsense literature and based on the viral hit-sensation song. Set sail on a timeless adventure with two rabbits determined not to get caught by the Hum-drum. Together, they discover a world of borogoves, slithy toves, and Heffalumps, ready to dance and sing 'til sundown. Packed with nonsensical whimsy and anarchic joy, this book is a merry romp through the imaginative worlds of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll.



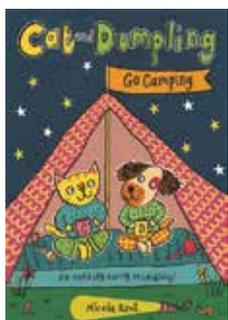
Woodlore
by Kevin Parr & Anja Susanj
Magic Cat
HB • £14.99
ISBN 9781917044684
Published 30th April
Age range: 5+

Discover the seasons and stories of the forest in this beautifully illustrated journey through a woodland year. Walk among the trees and watch nature's cycles unfold as time-honoured tales and traditions mark the turning of the seasons. From the first seedlings and birdsongs of the spring equinox to the hooting owls and holly wreaths of the winter solstice, this book explores and explains the natural world around us, and celebrates the magic of the wild.



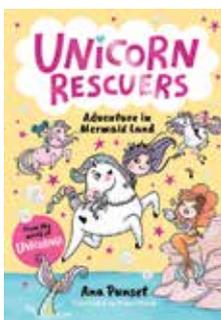
Mirabelle and the Enchanted Sea Globe
by Harriet Muncaster
Oxford University Press • PB • £6.99
ISBN 9780192788061
Published 2nd April
Age range: 5+

A new adventure for half-witch, half-fairy Mirabelle, from the author and illustrator of the *Isadora Moon* and *Emerald* books. Mirabelle and her family are on holiday, staying in a lovely cottage by the sea. There's just one problem – they're not meant to be using magic. Can Mirabelle manage a whole week without any magical mischief? Of course not! But perhaps she can use a teeny bit of magic to create a magical creature? Just for one night...



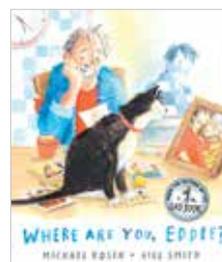
Cat and Dumpling Go Camping
by Nicola Kent
Oxford University Press • PB • £6.99
ISBN 9780192788498
Published 5th March
Age range: 4+

A new book in the series, packed with full-colour illustrations, this is the perfect first chapter book for young readers. Ideal for fans of funny, joyful tales with adorable animal characters. Meet Cat and Dumpling. They're as different as can be, like radishes and raincoats. In this story, Cat wants to go on holiday, but a disaster in the garden means Dumpling doesn't want to join her. They eventually get out the door, but their camping trip doesn't quite go to plan.



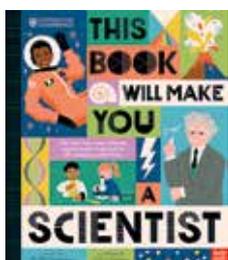
Unicorn Rescuers: Adventure in Mermaid Lane
by Ana Punset & Diana Vicedo
Walker Books
PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781529531633
Published 9th April
Age range: 5+

The first in a new full-colour series set in the magical Unicornia universe, featuring a perilous journey to Mermaid Land! Pippa, Claudia and Sara set out on the most incredible trip to Mermaid Land, searching for a lost unicorn. But the mischievous mermaids do not want the unicorn to be found! The friends must escape jellyfish, journey through a swamp of poisonous plants and charm grumpy bats on this very special mission. Can they return the unicorn to Unicornia?



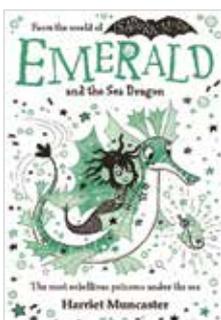
Where Are You, Eddie?
by Michael Rosen & Gill Smith
Walker Books
HB • £12.99
ISBN 9781529522877
Published 12th March
Age range: 5+

Michael's son Eddie has died. But does that mean he has really gone? Michael decides to go and look for him. Visiting the places they went together and speaking to his friends and siblings, he discovers how Eddie is alive in their memories. Eddie is still here. Simply told, and with emotional honesty by former Children's Laureate about his own experience of losing his son Eddie, this is a vital book for children dealing with grief and loss.



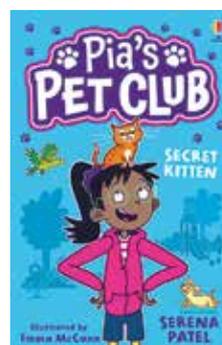
This Book Will Make You a Scientist
by Dr Sheila Kanani & Ellen Storey
Nosy Crow
HB • £14.99
ISBN 9781805132547
Published 12th March
Age range: 5+

Discover 25 of the world's most incredible scientists in this fact-filled book full of step-by-step science experiments that are easy to try at home. From making your own volcano and extracting DNA from a strawberry to exploring electricity, evolution and gravity, this imaginative book is jam-packed with ideas for aspiring scientists everywhere. Asking questions is your first step to becoming a scientist, and finding answers might give you some ideas to create your own experiments!



Emerald and the Sea Dragon
by Harriet Muncaster
Oxford University Press • PB • £6.99
ISBN 9781382073004
Published 5th March
Age range: 5+

A new book in the *Emerald* series. Meet Isadora Moon's mermaid friend, Emerald! Emerald is learning how to be a mermaid princess, but there are just so many rules. She loves having fun with her friends and exploring her underwater world with her pet octopus, Inkibelle, but she doesn't want to be stuck in the palace. In this story, Emerald meets a cute baby sea dragon. She knows she must help the little sea dragon find its mother, but where to look?

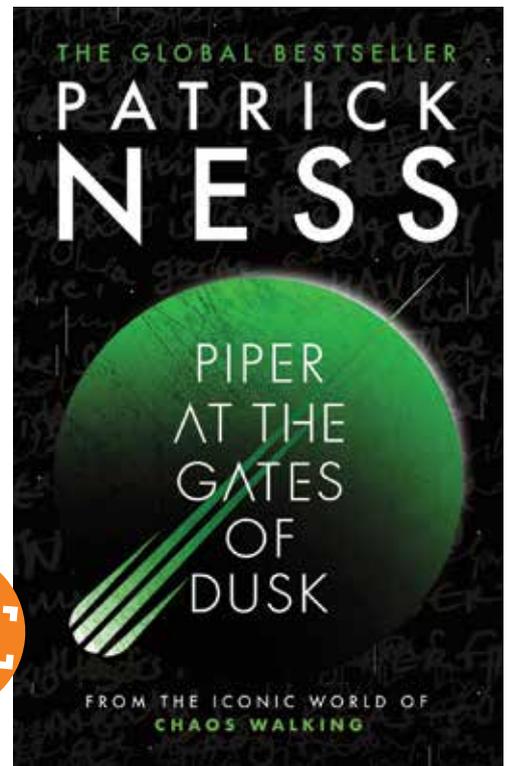


Pia's Pet Club: Secret Kitten
by Serena Patel & Emma McCann
Usborne • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781805312468
Published 26th March
Age range: 6+

Pia LOVES pets, but as she's not allowed one, she's decided to start her own PET CLUB to help her friends look after their animals. When Pia finds a lost, lonely kitten called Tiger Moon, she can't give up the chance to have a furry friend. She decides to hide Tiger at Pet Club and look after her, even though if anyone finds out, she'll be in BIG TROUBLE. But when Pia's sister starts pet sitting a parrot who repeats everything he hears, he might give away all of Pet Club's secrets!

A World Away

Twenty years after the publication of his groundbreaking, bestselling YA sci-fi trilogy *Chaos Walking*, Patrick Ness returns with the first in a new trilogy set in the same world. Todd and Viola's two sons, Ben and Max, have taken a cure to silence their Noise, but now have to contend with the appearance of terrible, murderous giant creatures known as gods.



Piper at the Gates of Dusk
by Patrick Ness
Walker Books • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781529537581
Published 7th April
Age range: 12+

What drew you to return to the world of *Chaos Walking*?

The idea! That's all it could ever be or it would never work. I really didn't plan on returning, ever. I was happy with how the first trilogy ended, I felt it told a complete story. And then, one day, I got this idea and thought, 'Oh... that's unexpected.' It grew and grew, and then I knew there was a book there.

In the book, Todd and Viola are now adults and have two sons, Ben and Max. Did you regard their characters differently, now that they have grown up?

I'd always hoped after the first trilogy that they were happy and thriving. But I'm nearly twenty years older, too! So I can relate to them, both of them, trying to reckon with the world still and keep their sons safe. I still love them, though. I hope they both get a happily ever after.

The book alternates between two narratives, from Ben and Max. Why did you write it this way?

I try to find the rhythm of every book I write. It helps a LOT with momentum and plotting, and so if I can find the right rhythm, I can set it to work and then spend time investing in character and emotion. Plus, this is a book of two brothers; they both really needed a voice. It's kind of a book about that, finding out what your voice is and how to use it.

Ben is unable to speak and Max is trans. Was it important for you to have an inclusive range of characters in the book?

Interestingly, I didn't actually think of it that way. Max started because trans people would come to my events and ask what Noise would be like for them. It's a fascinating question, and the world is, I hope, a more nuanced and aware place than when I first wrote the original trilogy, even for me. Max as a trans man felt so interesting as a character in a world that defined itself strictly in a binary way. What a rich way to confront what's gone before. And Ben is the answer to what is 'silence' in a Noise-filled world. He can speak through sign language just fine, so he definitely has a voice, even if some others might not hear it. They were just super-interesting characters first and grew – as characters always do – into complexity where they're not types; they're just themselves. And in that way, hopefully, a reader can see themselves there, even if their circumstances aren't exactly the same.

“Ness doesn't just tell stories, he illuminates the human heart.”

Cassandra Clare

The 'Conversaytion' is a constant stream of Noise which the Land are always a part of – do you see this as an information system, almost like an internet that is always on?

Yes, I do, but one that's quite a bit more organised! It grew out of pushing at the question, how would a species with an oral tradition effectively archive itself in a world where they're all connected. The Land saw all the advantages – that humans have yet to – of using it as something to connect themselves even more rather than allowing it to be abused and divisive. There are no self-serving billionaires in the Land, you may have noticed. No wonder they're at peace.

Todd is one of the few humans in the New World who has decided not to take a cure which cancels his Noise. Would you take the cure?

It depends on how I started, I think. If the Noise was thrust on me with no life experience behind it, I'd certainly be tempted. But Todd's always had it and it's part of who he is. He knows why people take it, but he's acutely aware of what they lose when they do. His path is definitely the harder one, but it might in the end be the richer, deeper and healthier one.

Margery and Burly deny the existence of the gods, and blame the Land for everything bad in the New World. Do you see parallels between them and politicians of today?

I can't imagine what you might be referring to! Ha, yes, definitely. It's our human tendency to pretend that things which contradict our strictly held beliefs don't exist. It's always been a recipe for disaster, yet we do it over and over again. We use scapegoats to deal with our fear rather than confronting the roots of it. We defer to strongmen because we choose to believe in their certainty, even when we know it's a lie. We're a messy little species, but there's a lot of good and wonder in us too.

Do you have the rest of this new trilogy planned out?

I do in general terms. I like to leave enough open so I can properly discover on the way, too, but I know what books two and three are going to look like. Now all I have to do is write them.

Regal Rebels

In this vibrantly illustrated book, historian Fern Riddell highlights the women from history who have not played by the rules, from Cleopatra to Sayyida Al-Hurra to Elizabeth I. We interviewed the author to discover how she wrote it.



What inspired you to write the book?

DK are a publisher that I have loved since I was a child. I idolised the books they published, they told you incredible things. When DK came to me and asked if I wanted to write something, the pleasure of knowing I would get to write for kids like me, who got excited about the same things, was unmatched. We talked about what I wanted to write, and what could work for them. And rule breakers is what came out of those conversations – stories of really exciting women from history who were doing things that you wouldn't expect. And that means you've got to focus on royals, because they're the only people that we have records of. When you start to unpick the history, you find these incredible women who broke the rules, and they didn't break the rules just because they were royal, they broke the rules because they were women. We know that throughout society and history, women like them existed, and it's been so much fun to start with the ones who had some form of power.

Do you think it was harder for women to break the rules than it was, historically, for men to do so?

I think women certainly lived lives that were far more strictly controlled, and especially royal women. As a historian, I've always focused on ordinary people. Until my last book, *Victoria's Secret*, I never dealt with royalty. What you realise is that royal women have far less freedom than ordinary women, because they are supposed to live very strict lives of control and purity, whether they're being traded as brides, or whether they're queens or consorts, they must not put a foot wrong. So it's incredibly fascinating and exciting to see all those women who just broke the rules anyway. Because that's who they were – that's how they wanted to live. They wanted to live free lives. They wanted to be inspiring to people around them, and they didn't want to feel like they were constrained

by what society told them they should do, how they should behave.

And how did you go about choosing the women to include, and were there any you weren't aware of that came out of your research?

Oh, there was so many that I wasn't aware of, it was such a joy to learn so much about all of these incredible lives from across the world. The first thing I knew is that I wanted it to be global. I didn't want it to just be European, and I didn't want it to just focus on England or on America, it had to include everyone. So I've been researching cultures that have been so exciting to explore, with incredible female warriors and thinkers and pirates. I could have written a whole book just on pirate queens! It has been so captivating to dip into these lives and be able to see them inspire other girls.

“Royal women have far less freedom than ordinary women”

Did you work closely with the illustrator, Taylor Dolan?

We had a couple of conversations throughout the making of the book, making sure things were historically accurate, but all of her illustrations are so beautiful. I found them inspiring. I particularly like the ones of Æthelæd, and the Rani Durgavati, who rides a war elephant and has a fortress in India. I think it's stories like that that deserve to be told, of women who defended their country and their people against invasion. And against idiot men who saw them as weak, and thought they could take their land because they were just a woman. Girls should feel inspired that women who broke the rules come from every culture and every background. And it doesn't matter where you are in the world, or how you've grown up. If you want to be free, if you want to be educated, if you want to be strong, women throughout history have made those choices, and you can too.

Do you think that it's still important for there to be

women who break the rules in this way in the world today?

Absolutely. I think that when you look at the younger generations, they are incredibly aware of what is happening in the world around us, in a way, I think, my generation probably wasn't. At times it can be shocking and scary but the reality for a lot of young girls and a lot of women globally is that their rights are being eradicated, their rights are being stolen. You only have to look at what's been happening with female education in Afghanistan to see just how much women need to know that breaking the rules is not new, it's something we've had to do for centuries. I think that making sure that wherever you come from, you feel a connection to women that have driven and fought to be heard, and to be seen, and to be taken seriously, is an important message to give to young people.

This is your first book for children – how different was it writing for a younger readership?

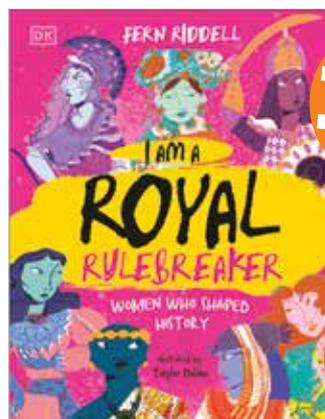
It's so much harder. You have to think much more clearly, and you have to be determined in your choices of words, of what you're going to say, and the impact that it's going to have. I lived in books when I was a kid, that's where I spent my whole imaginary world. So to have the chance to write for kids was an absolute dream come true. I spent most of the early time of writing of this book thinking, 'Are you sure?' But it has been one of the most incredible things I've done, and I'm so excited to tell these stories to the next generation.

Are there any other authors who inspire you in your work?

There are so many. When I was a child, I couldn't get my nose out of books. I was told off for reading books that I shouldn't be reading, which I think is a very, very good thing, that the children should do. But in terms of authors who inspire me today, we are so lucky and we have so many, but I can't name one or two because I wouldn't want to miss any out!

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

I think one of the joys of Indies is that they care about their readers so much, and the readers will support that bookshop as a hub and community heart. I grew up living in second hand bookshops. I used to be deposited in the kids' book section and left for an hour or two, and it was the best time of my life!



[KIDS]

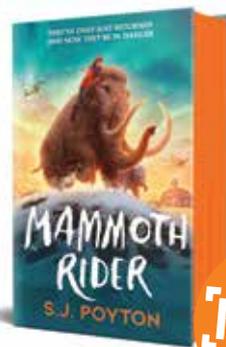
I Am a Royal Rulebreaker: Women Who Shaped History

by Fern Riddell
Illustrated by Taylor Dolan
DK • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9780241789858
Published 2nd April
Age range: 9+

A Big Adventure

Look out for a special signed edition, with sprayed edges, available exclusively from independent bookshops, while stocks last!

Mammoth Rider
by S.J. Poyton
Simon & Schuster
Children's • HB • £14.99
ISBN 9781398551329
Published 12th March
Age range: 8+



[KIDS]

In this fun story, mammoths have returned, brought back by scientists to help combat climate change. Ash Grimes, born and raised at the Arctic research centre responsible, dreams of becoming a Mammoth Rider, just like her dad. But when the mammoth herd come under threat, can Ash and her friends Jack and Ruby save the day? We interviewed the author, S.J. Poyton to find out more.



What inspired you to write *Mammoth Rider*?
I've loved mammoths from the time I first read about them in the *Little Nose* books by John Grant. When I discovered that scientists were working to clone mammoths and that theoretically they could help with the battle against global warming – it sent my brain into creative overdrive.

In the book, mammoths have been brought back from extinction to help with climate change. Do you think that this will happen?
There are many scientists across the world racing to clone mammoths. However,

none of these are true de-extinct clones, as they are DNA of extant animals that have been edited to resemble the DNA of extinct creatures. This is the way they'd bring mammoth backs too, editing the DNA of Asian Elephants to create modern cold climate adapted elephants NOT true woolly mammoths. Will we see it happen? I think we'll probably see a mammoth-of-sorts in the near future. Whether we could / should create enough of them to help with climate change is more difficult, as it would take time, global coordination and ethical considerations.

“Action-packed with a mammoth heart”

Abi Elphinstone

The book is set in Greenland – did you visit Greenland to help write it?

Sadly not as I didn't have the funds. Instead, I watched and read everything I could find. I even looked at the weather apps everyday to see what temperature, sunlight and precipitation was like.

In the book, Ash struggles with words and numbers. Does this reflect your own experience?

Everything Ash feels and experiences when it comes to reading, writing, math and coordination is challenging a younger me. I wanted to write a character that has these challenges but isn't solely defined or limited by them.

Ash has a bond with the mammoths, particularly the rare white mammoth calf Nayala – do you think it's possible for people to bond with wild animals?

Oh this is a tricky one! I do think some animals have a capacity to bond with humans. Birds are known to imprint on the first thing they see – including humans – and think they are their parents. Also there's many compelling examples that have been documented over the years of human animal bonds. However, we must be careful not to anthropomorphise as we humans tend to misinterpret animal behaviour to be more human-like.

Jack likes to plan and follow rules, Ruby is more impulsive. Did you plan the book out before you started writing it?

When I started to write Jack and Ruby demanded to be part of the cast and were stubbornly themselves coming fully formed into story.

At the end of the book there is a non-fiction section about mammoths. Was it important

to you to include some facts along with the fiction?

Fact inspires fiction. Fiction inspires science, exploration and innovation, and so on. Hopefully the blend of fact and fiction in *Mammoth Rider* will inspire young minds to look at STEM to help the planet.

Which other authors inspire you in your work?

So many, that if I mentioned them all it'd be a long answer, here goes... Michael Crichton, his *Jurassic Park* duology was my first introduction to cloning and de-extinction. Robert C O'Brien's *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* gave me my first taste of genetic engineering and alteration. *How to Clone a Mammoth* by Professor Beth Shapiro. The writers of every novel and memoir I've read about human and animal relationships, like Joy Adamson's *Born Free*, Gavin Maxwell's *Ring of Bright Water*, Rachel Campbell-Johnston's *The Child's Elephants*, and Hannah Gold's books.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Independent bookshops are very special places to me. I grew up in a town with no bookshops, and for most of my childhood no library. As an adult I gravitate towards them. They are warm and welcoming, full of potential and portals to other worlds. Having volunteered in Mostly Books for a good few years I got to peek behind the curtain and saw how extraordinarily passionate booksellers are. When I am low, there is one place I know will raise my spirits and I head to the nearest independent bookshop.



WIN!

We have an exclusive indie edition, signed and with a sprayed edge, of *Mammoth Rider*, along with a plush mammoth toy, to give away to one lucky winner. For a chance of winning, just answer this question:

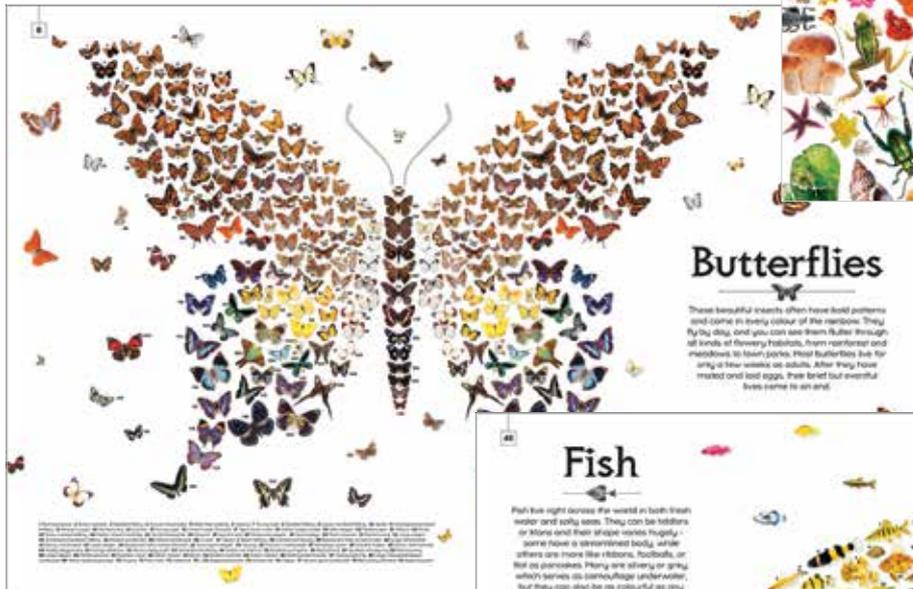
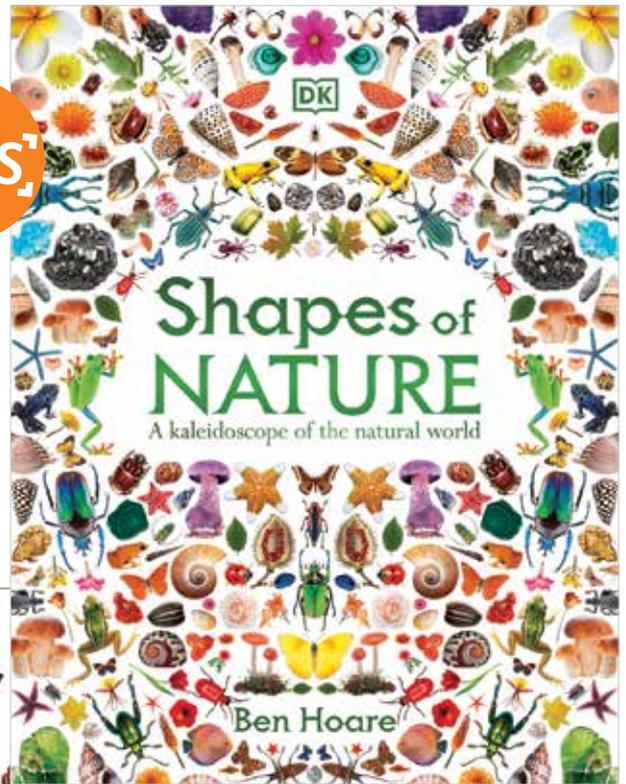
Where is *Mammoth Rider* set?

See page 71 for details on how to enter this competition.

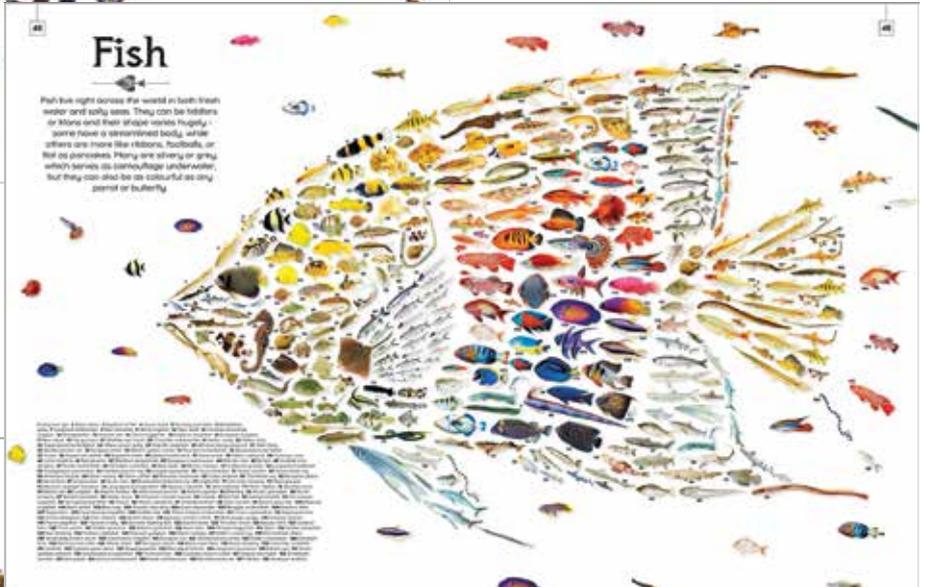
Wild Patterns

[KIDS]

In this big, beautiful book bursting with colour, detail and variety, you can learn about the treasures of the natural world, brought life in stunning mosaic images.



Perfect for young curious minds, this spectacular large-format nature book is designed to inspire a new generation of nature lovers. Inside, you'll discover shimmering beetles and dazzling tree frogs, knobby seashells and sparkling crystals, plus fabulous fungi and delicate feathers – all arranged in mosaics. Each page transforms

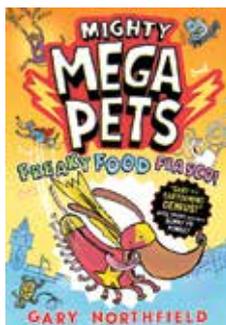


Shapes of Nature
by Ben Hoare
DK • HB • £20.00
ISBN 9780241772256
Published 5th March
Age range: 9+

nature's treasures into works of art, revealing the hidden shapes and intricate details that we often overlook.

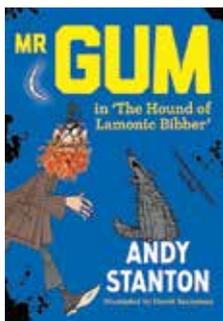
Get inspired by nature's creativity with countless fascinating facts about nature, written by bestselling author Ben Hoare; large-format pages showcasing vibrant, full-colour photography of natural objects; and engaging text that combines science with storytelling to captivate young readers. Big, bold, and beautiful, *Shapes of Nature* is a timeless keepsake that invites you to dive in, look closer, and see nature as you've never seen it before.

Young Reads



Mighty Mega Pets: Freaky Food Fiasco!
by Gary Northfield
Walker Books
PB • £8.99
ISBN 9781529526486
Published 9th April
Age range: 6+

A laugh-out loud graphic novel with PETS! SUPERPOWERS! SILLINESS! ACTION! A strange magical substance has seeped into a pet food warehouse, and now dogs, cats, bunnies and fish all have freaky superpowers – whether they want them or not! The newly-formed Mighty Mega Pets are determined to get to the bottom of the pet food mystery in order to... no pressure... save the world! From Gary Northfield, author of the *Julius Zebra* books.



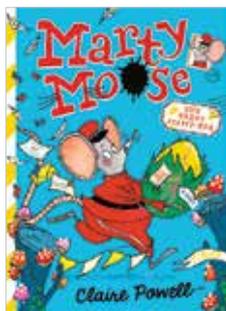
Mr Gum in 'The Hound of Lamonic Bibber'
by Andy Stanton & David Tazzyman
Farshore • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9780008821616
Published 9th April
Age range: 7+

Shabba me whiskers! MR GUM is 20 years old (and some). And he's NOT happy about it. But everyone else is – and this brand new look edition is bursting out the nostrils with fun and original extras from the Mr Gum world! In the dead of night, something dark and sinister stalks the streets of Lamonic Bibber. As a fog rolls in from the sea, carrying with it the unmistakable whiff of pancakes and utter dread, an unearthly howl echoes through the cold midnight air...



Starminster: The City of Wings
by Megan Hopkins
HarperCollins Children's • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9780008626952
Published 9th April
Age range: 8+

The final book in the *Starminster* trilogy. London Overhead, the secret city hidden in the stars, is the only place where Astrid has ever felt at home. But when the enchantments protecting the city mysteriously start to glitch, everyone who lives there is plunged into danger. As the grown-ups abandon the city, Astrid refuses to give up her wings and go back to her old life on the ground. It's up to Astrid and her friends to save their home, but they'll have to unravel some dark secrets...



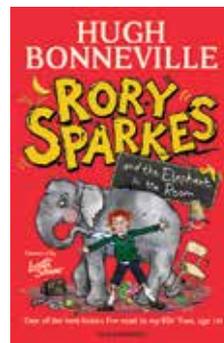
Marty Mouse: The Great Stamp-ede
by Claire Powell
Walker Books
PB • £6.99
ISBN 9781529524321
Published 12th March
Age range: 7+

Marty and Nibbles return for a second adventure in this brilliantly funny and charming highly illustrated series! It's the day of the annual Fastest Feathers race in Little Ditch, but Marty Mouse can't stop to join in the fun. He's got a very important parcel to deliver: a shining golden egg, the prize for the winner, and must reach the finish line before the contestants do! But that's not the only twist in the tail: Marty and Nibbles have to contend with ferret bandits and cheating ducks!



Dragon Girl and the Awakened Flames
by Jennie Moore
Maverick Arts Publishing • PB • £8.99
ISBN 9781835110836
Published 5th March
Age range: 8+

All the best stories and adventures start with a knock at the door... Or the thwump of a dragon's tail at the entrance to her cave, in the case of Emba Oak. But then nothing about Emba's story is normal; from the scales on her arms and legs, to the shocking discovery that she hatched out of a dragon's egg. Even more shocking is the news that an evil sorcerer is after her dragon blood and will do anything to get his hands on it. Can Emba keep herself safe or will her loved ones pay the price?



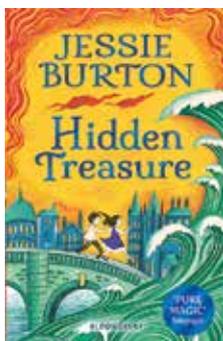
Rory Sparkes and the Elephant in the Room
by Hugh Bonneville & Loretta Schauer
Bloomsbury Children's • PB • £8.99
ISBN 9781526685971
Published 26th March
Age range: 8+

A funny children's story from the acclaimed actor, now in paperback. Rory Sparkes is a boy with a head full of dreams. He might become a strongman and travel the world with the circus. Or he might try to make it as a cowboy – that would be a fan-tastic second best. As he plots to help his best friend, Guy, earn enough money to buy the latest top-of-the-line model boat, the circus rolls into town and everything spirals out of control.



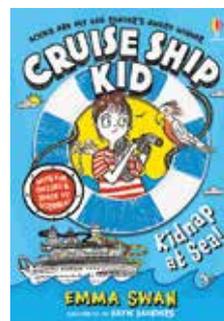
Megalomaniacs: The Invasion Begins
by Jamie Smart
DFB Phoenix
PB • £9.99
ISBN 9781788453844
Published 26th March
Age range: 7+

A brand new series from the creator of *Bunny vs Monkey*. Bobbletown is under attack – from the cutest, silliest and zaniest alien invasion EVER! The super-powered Megalomaniacs have crash-landed, and they're going to do their very best to take over planet Earth! That is, if they don't get in each other's way first... Brought to you by Phoenix Comic Books and jam-packed with Jamie Smart's unique exuberant humour and artwork, this is the latest extravaganza in children's comics!



Hidden Treasure
by Jessie Burton
Bloomsbury Children's • PB • £8.99
ISBN 9781526604576
Published 9th April
Age range: 8+

A moving historical adventure from the author of *The Miniaturist*, now in paperback. This spellbinding novel follows Bo and Billy, two children who each chance upon half of a priceless treasure given up by the river. A treasure which – when the pieces are reunited – holds the power to give back to one of them the most precious thing they have ever lost. But should the treasure be put back together again? And why has the river given it up now?



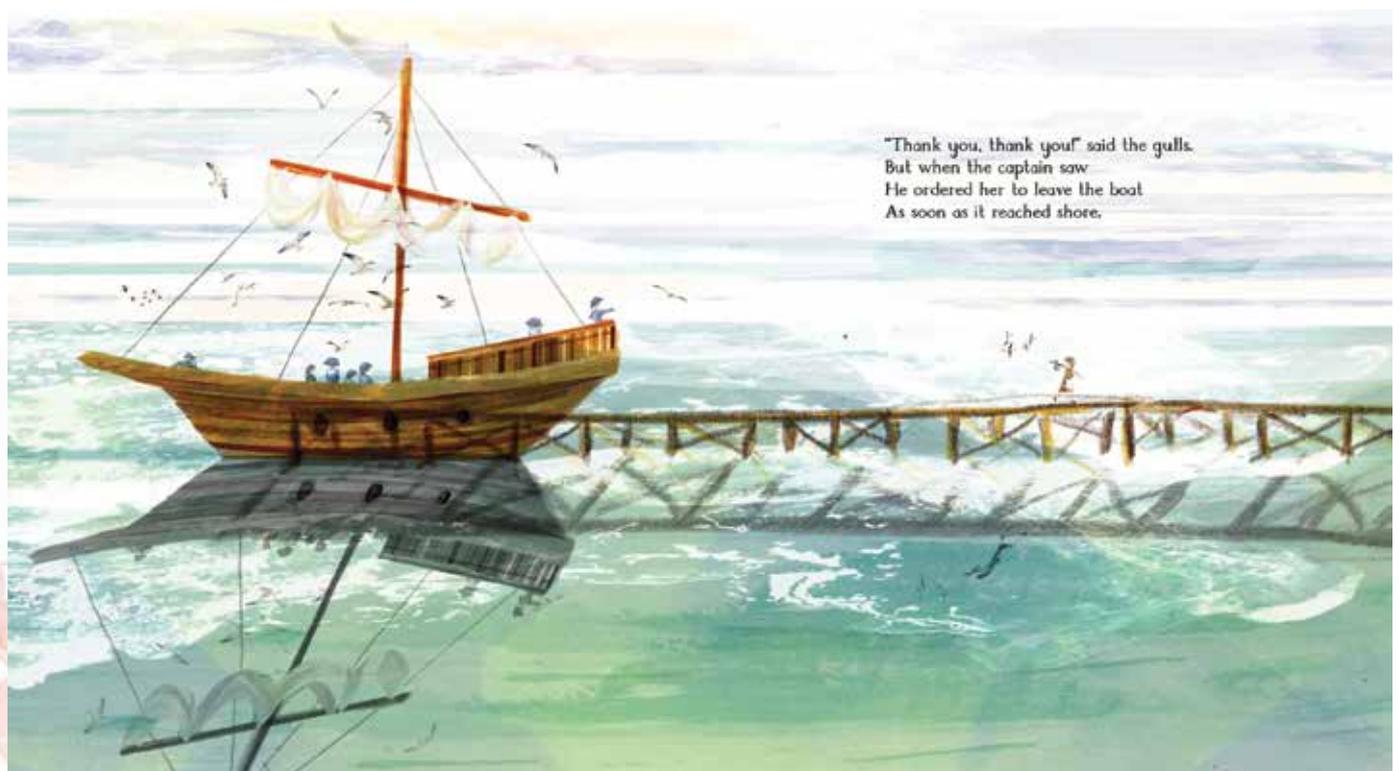
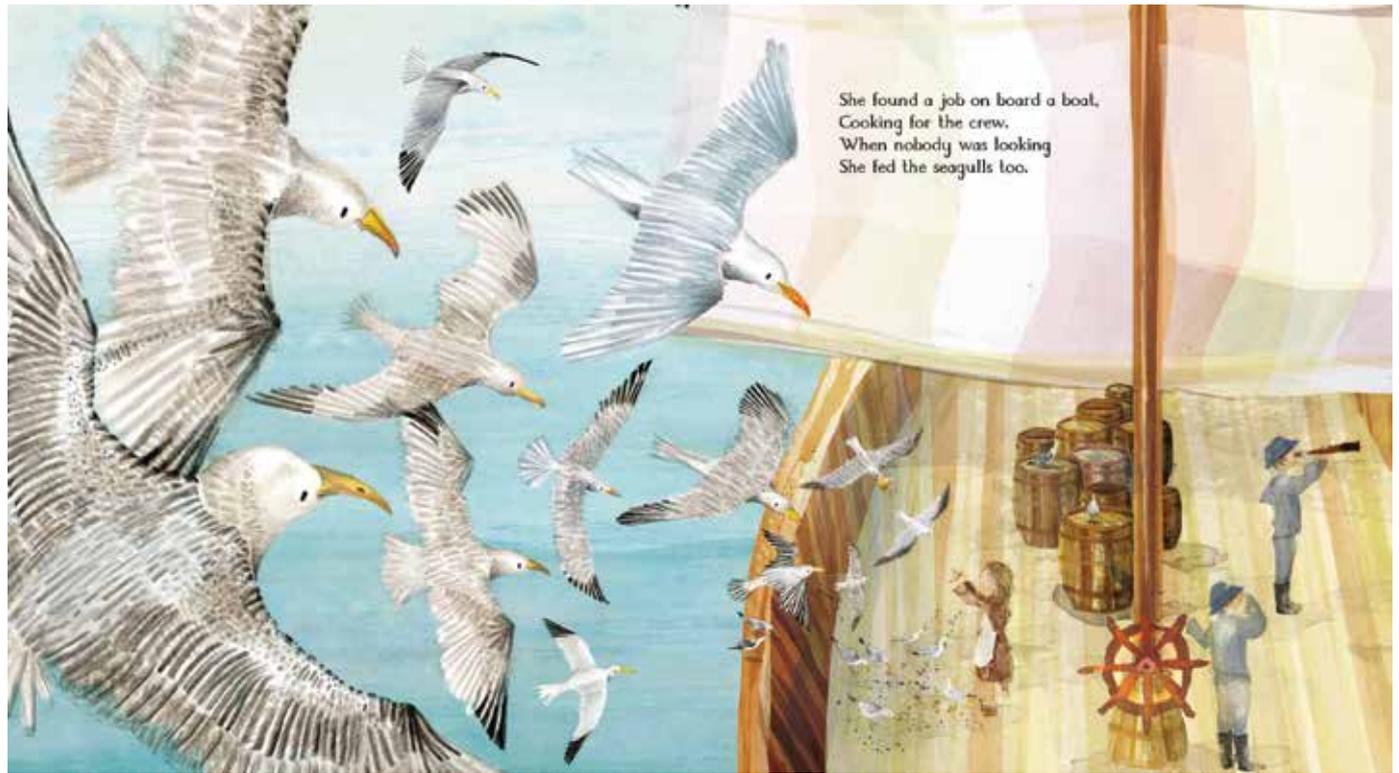
Cruise Ship Kid: Kidnap At Sea!
by Emma Swan
Usborne • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781835409961
Published 12th March
Age range: 8+

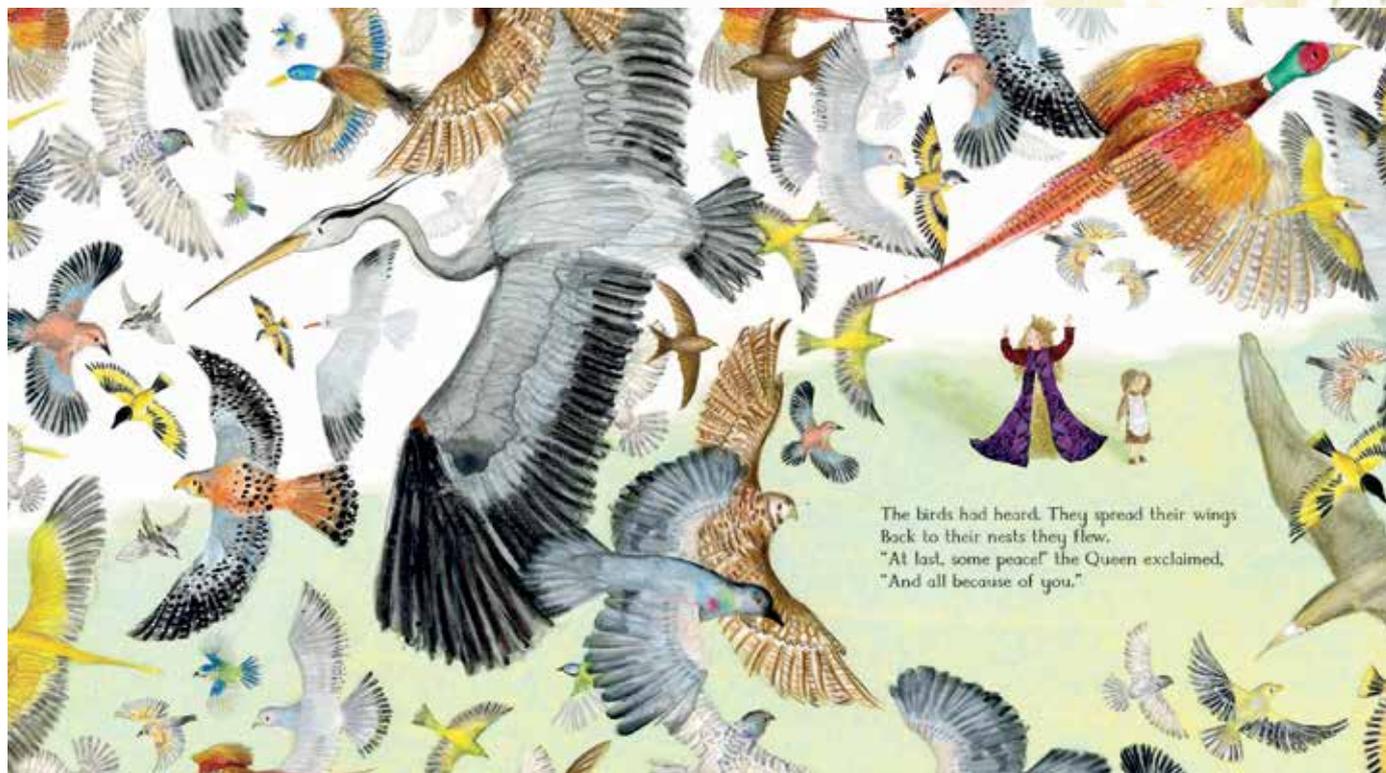
The second book in the fun detective series set on a cruise ship. "Since my last diary, Mum's been promoted and we now live on a cruise ship with a mini-golf course, an ice-cream parlour and a MEGA SLIDE! And The Gang, my amazing friends who are all over 80, have come along too! But now a SUPER FAMOUS INFLUENCER has been KIDNAPPED, The Gang unhelpfully keep taking over my investigations, and we still can't find her. Can you help me solve the case?"

A Little Magic

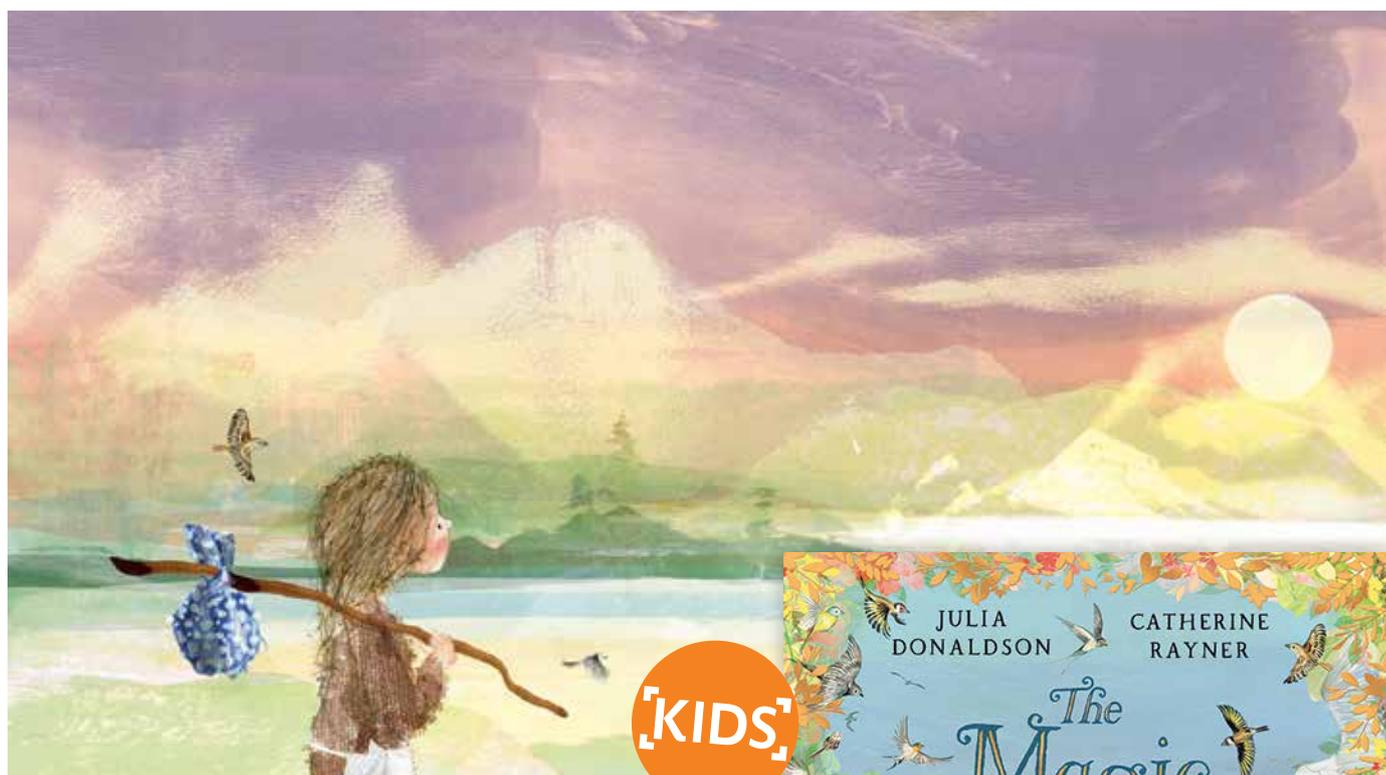
The Magic Feather is a stunningly illustrated book with a wonderful rhyming tale about magic, nature and looking after our environment, from the creators of *The Go-Away Bird*.

Written by the Number One bestselling Julia Donaldson, author of *The Gruffalo*, and illustrated by Catherine Rayner, winner of the Kate Greenaway Medal for Illustration, this is a beautiful fairy-tale adventure. Susanna loves to hear the birds sing in the springtime. When she nurses a linnet with a broken wing back to health, it leaves behind a magic feather. The feather enables her to understand what the birds are singing... and she soon discovers that they need her help! Join her on an amazing journey across the sea to save their nests from the queen's woodcutters.





The birds had heard. They spread their wings
Back to their nests they flew,
"At last, some peace!" the Queen exclaimed,
"And all because of you."



[KIDS]

*"Witty, touching
and stunningly
illustrated,"*

Sally Morris, *Daily Mail* on
The Bowerbird

The Magic Feather
by Julia Donaldson
Illustrated by
Catherine Rayner
Macmillan Children's
HB • £12.99
ISBN 9781035066704
Published 12th March
Age range: 3+

Look out for a special edition,
with a free print, available
exclusively from independent
bookshops, while stocks last!



Fast Friends

In this gripping story, particularly suitable for reluctant teen readers, Sam encourages his friends to play dangerously on the forbidden wasteland known as the Kiln. Will their friendship survive the wreckage that follows? We talked to the author Luke Palmer about the dynamics of teenage friendship.



What inspired you to write *Big Words*?

I've always written about those difficult and transitional moments. I've always been interested in those times where young people learn something and push further towards being grown up. I've been interested in dynamics within groups of boys for a while. So I think it was another chance to return to that territory, and that idea of a group breaking the rules and those hierarchies within it, where the strength in those hierarchies comes from, and whether that can be renegotiated. I've always wanted to write for Barrington Stoke, and this book gave me an opportunity to do that.

Did you find it different to write this book, a dyslexia-friendly story?

My prose style is quite stripped back, so I didn't find writing in that style particularly difficult. It was quite interesting to work with their editorial team, particularly on the language in terms of what they were pulling out, that I hadn't considered. I don't think we changed a huge amount from the style of the first draft, but getting a complete story done in such a small space of time was a challenge. I'm quite used to just being able to be a bit baggy in the middle. I had to paint broad strokes with quite a small brush, but I enjoyed it, it was quite fun.

Sam has an attitude in that he wants to be as big as possible. Do you think this comes from his dad, and the fact that his dad left the family?

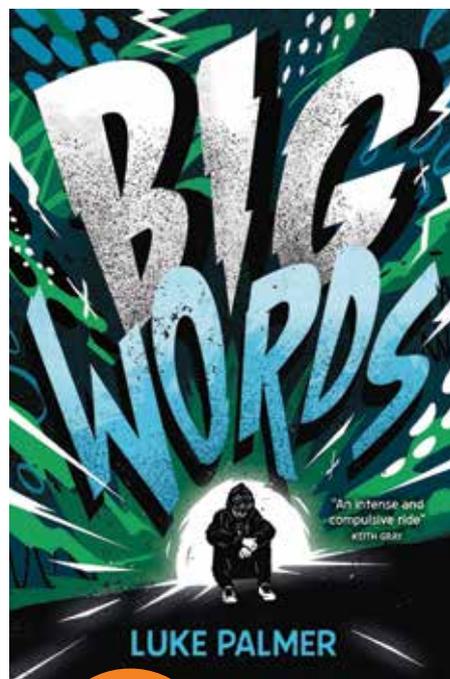
I think the parents are interesting ones to think about when you're writing for young people. There's the knowledge that you've kind of got to get rid of them because otherwise it becomes a book about them. What I've always tended to do since my first book is not include them

as part of the narrative. But they're a huge part of a lot of young people's lives, more than I think they would care to admit. And I think even though the father in this book, Sam's dad, is absolutely, completely absent – and even when he was around, he wasn't too much of an engaged dad – he still has an impact. Writing about bad behaviour can be problematic. I'm always much more interested in thinking about where it came from, and why, because I don't think people ever do bad things because they know they're bad. I think it's a pattern that people have got into. So yes, I think Sam's dad is definitely a big factor in why Sam thinks that he needs to be this big presence and take up space.

“Learning that people have a lot more going on than just the one side they're showing you is one of those transitional parts of growing up.”

In the book, Sam discovers that his friends all have something in their lives which they are passionate about – Greg baking, Jamie's martial arts and Ben poetry. Do you think it's important for children to have a hobby or interest?

Yeah, I think it helps. For me, it was more about the idea of people being multifaceted, and having more than one side. Maybe boys are guilty of this a bit more, but you sometimes assume that the face of a person that you're seeing is their only face. Learning that people have a lot more going on than just the one side they're showing you is one of those transitional parts of growing up. I do think it is important for people to have that little fire that they've been burning for something that might just be for them. And that you don't necessarily share with everybody. For me, writing was that for a long time. My little thing that I kept glowing and burning away.



Big Words

by Luke Palmer
Barrington Stoke
PB • £7.99

ISBN 9780008789848

Published 12th March

Age range: 11+

Reading age: 8

Are there any other authors that inspire you in your writing?

Everything I read changes me, there are many authors who inspire me. But I always come back to Patrick Ness. His work is just incredibly powerful, and somehow he seems to make all of his stories about the act and art of storytelling as well, which I really love. And there's always a twist in there where he's doing something with the format. And Katya Balen, I'm really into her work at the moment in terms of that lyricism she writes with. I love her work for Barrington Stoke, it still manages to keep that quite demanding lyrical voice, even though it's wholly appropriate for reluctant readers. The Booker Prize winning novel *Orbital* by Samantha Harvey is absolutely stunning. Even though it's only about 150 pages it manages to contain the whole of human existence! I recently saw the film *Hamnet* and I remembered how much I loved the book by Maggie O'Farrell, and how sad it was.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Oh, huge amounts. Historically, I've published with quite a small press and I think they are absolutely vital for those smaller presses. They focus on how to get specific books into specific hands. They are absolutely vital in the knowledge they have of what's out there in the publishing landscape. I love Griffin Books in Penarth, and I'm lucky in Bath that we've got lots of indies. It's not just people in the bookshops selling books, the amount of things they do behind the scenes – such as school visits and author events – is incredible.

Constructive Trust

As Alastair Chisholm's thrilling *I Am Wolf* sci-fi trilogy comes to an end with the third and final book *We Are Dragon*, he has written this exclusive piece for Booktime.



We *Are Dragon* is the final book in my *I Am Wolf* trilogy. The stakes are high, the enemy is coming, the heroes are at their last resource, and everything depends on that one final desperate throw of the dice... All the things I love about stories!

I Am Wolf is an action-adventure set in a world of enormous mechanical beasts, called Constructs. There's Wolf Construct, Raven, Hyena, and many more, all battling for territory and possessions, and all carrying human crews on their backs. It's a tale of tribalism and belonging – for the Constructs are powered by the crew themselves, by the faith that they have in their own creature. The more you believe, the more powerful your Construct becomes. Wolf! Wolf! Woowooolf! In book one, we meet Coll, stranded after a battle and desperately trying to get home to Wolf. On his way he finds others, forms unlikely alliances, and, by the end, must decide who he really is...

I had great fun with *I Am Wolf*. The world-building, the Constructs, the people, Coll himself. But also the theme of how easily we fall into our tribes. In this world, crews have learned to love their own Constructs, but only by hating others. Finding a way through that was the heart of the story.

The sequel, *I Am Raven*, had a different theme: fear. Brann, a member of Raven, has seen her Construct destroyed and her crew taken. Desperate to find them, Brann heads in search of answers, but what she finds will change everything. And Brann herself

is struggling. Taught from birth that fear is weakness, she tries to be strong. But if she can't accept her own fear, and find a better way to deal with it, then all is lost. The world is bigger, the battles are fiercer, and the Boss Villain is revealed...

And now, *We Are Dragon*. This time it's the tale of Rieka, a genius with machines but terrible with people. Rieka believes that she alone can defeat the enemy threatening their world, but the path she chooses gets more dangerous with every step. She's playing with the fate of the world, but there is a truth about Rieka that she must face, and soon – if she doesn't, she could destroy everything she's trying to save. I love all three main characters, but I sneakily think Rieka might be my favourite. She's also the most flawed, and what happens to her in this book... Well, it's a ride!

“Jam-packed with action and suspense, and wildly inventive.”

The Times on *I Am Wolf*

I am extraordinarily lucky to be writing the kinds of stories that I loved as a kid – action, adventure, sci-fi, wonderful characters, desperate last-chances! I always loved the larger-than-life stories. I loved the books that put you *right there*, in the action, in worlds you could see and feel and touch and breathe. Above all, I loved characters who shone. Real people who stepped out of the page and into your head. Proper villains. Flawed heroes stumbling and failing, but discovering who they were just in time to save the day...

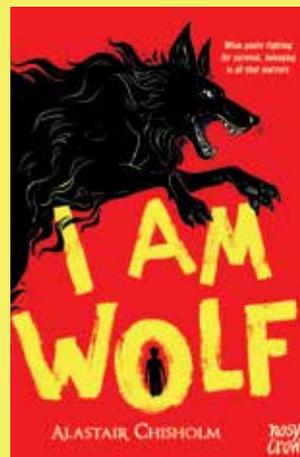
I read Nicholas Fisk, Susan Cooper, Diana Wynne Jones, Robert Westall, Leon Garfield. I'm a huge comics fan, and I grew up with *2000AD* stories of incredible worlds and characters. Judge Dredd! Chopper! Halo Jones! (Oh, Halo, how my young teenage heart adored you ❤️).

Every trip to the bookshop was an adventure, and still is. I live in Edinburgh, a city festooned with fantastic indie bookshops. I wrote much of this book in Argonaut Books in Leith (pop in and say hello if you're nearby – they're lovely!). And every time I'm there, I look at all those books and think – these are *worlds*. These are other worlds *right here*. Indie bookshops are like little curated multiverses. Go, browse, find the world that whispers to you, and step inside.

Completing this trilogy has been incredible. Seeing the ideas I dreamed about in book one come about in book three – seeing characters develop how I imagined, or in ways beyond how I imagined – was amazing. So I hope you enjoy *We Are Dragon*, and I hope it encourages you to go out and find more worlds...

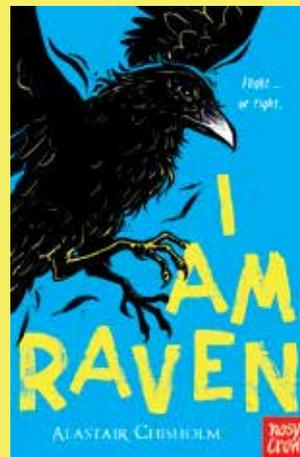
...and perhaps create your own.

[KIDS]



I Am Wolf

by Alastair Chisholm
Nosy Crow • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781839945311
Out Now
Age range: 9+



I Am Raven

by Alastair Chisholm
Nosy Crow • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781805131267
Out Now
Age range: 9+



We Are Dragon

by Alastair Chisholm
Nosy Crow • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781805131274
Published 9th April
Age range: 9+



Fluid Mechanics

In this gorgeous picture book, Mio is a little broken robot who wakes up in a rubbish dump. They can't remember where they came from and they go in search of their memories and the home they once knew. Will Mio find a place to belong? We interviewed the author and illustrator, Joe Todd-Stanton, to discover more.

What inspired you to create this particular story?

I'm really inspired by music most of the time. I love listening to music and imagining a little film in my head. I was listening to a particular track and was imagining this broken robot wandering through this futuristic city, and seeing an advert for itself on a poster. I wondered what it would be like to be broken and see an image of the perfect you. Much the time, when we see adverts, they always look like this perfect version of ourselves. There is also an eco angle, about how we're so quick to throw away all of our things. It's forced on us, that we must have the newest iPhone or TV screen. It's the opposite of my parents' generation, they have had the same TV for years – they don't throw things away unless they don't work anymore. So it came out of this random daydream I was having while listening to music. And then I realised that maybe it could be turned into a story.

What was the music that you were listening to?

Oneohtrix Point Never, he creates electronic music. He has done film soundtracks as well. He does the music for the film *Marty Supreme*, under his real name Daniel Lopatin. I've been a fan of him for a while, he makes really interesting ambient stuff, which is nice to listen to when I'm drawing.

How did you get into being a picture book creator and illustrator?

I think I was incredibly lucky. I come from two parents who are both artists in their own right. They broke up very soon after I was born. My mum loved drawing and painting

and my dad, he's now retired, but he worked at East London University in the photography department. He does performance art pieces. I talk about it when I go into schools. A lot of kids that I've spoken to and even people that I went to school with, have said that if they were to become an artist, it would have been a struggle to convince their parents. Because their parents probably want them to be doctors or lawyers, whereas I think my parents would have been disappointed if I was to become a doctor! They really tried to nurture me to be an artist, and always took me to galleries, drew with me and had creative projects. I think I was just really, really lucky, that I grew up in that environment and always knew I wanted to do something in the arts. I then studied illustration at university, and fell in love with it.

“A joyful remedy for our times – an uplifting eco-fable of repair, renewal and second chances.”

Mikey Please

How did you create the images in the book?

I create most of the fine images now using a computer. I spend a lot of time in sketchbooks and doing things by pencil, and I try and recreate that feeling in the finals.



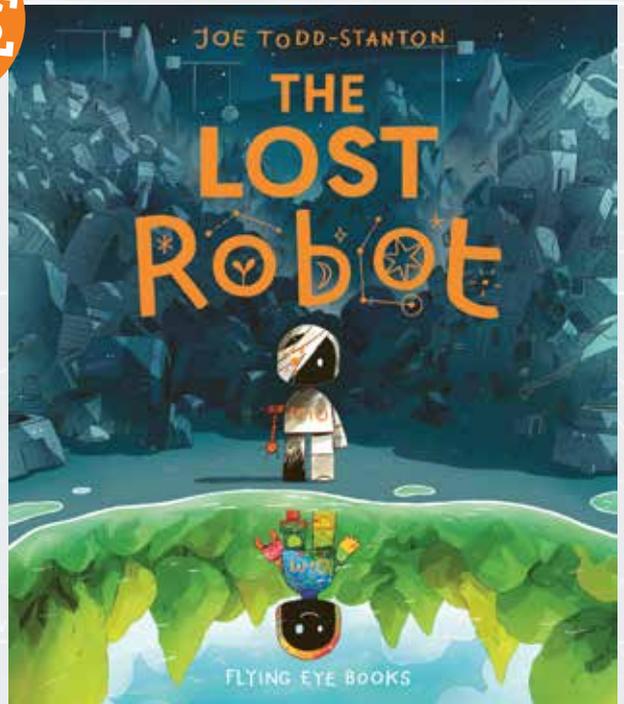
I'm always looking for a digital pencil that feels like a real pencil. I did a book series called *Brownstone's Mythical Collection* and they're all done by pencil, and then I coloured them on a computer. I wish I could say that they're all done by hand but I do most of it digitally, trying to recreate that feeling, so it's not too polished.

When you create your books, what comes first, the images, the story or the characters?

Oh, it's very, very visual. This book originally developed in my head, I was planning it to be completely wordless, I like the idea of it

The Lost Robot

by Joe Todd-Stanton
 Flying Eye Books • HB • £12.99
 ISBN 9781838741358
 Published 5th March
 Age range: 3+



just being a complete picture book. Because with kids the visual language develops first. I think it's such a more natural way of thinking about things than through sentence structures. But I also think reading it with your parents, and having that connection when you're reading a picture book, is important. It would be good if a kid could look through it without the words, and be able to follow the story anyway. So I always try and go with the pictures first, the pictures should lead. And I think it should make sense just with pictures, and then I hope when I add the words in later they kind give a little bit more information.

There are so many illustrators that I absolutely love, and I hero worship Maurice Sendak, from my own childhood. *Where the Wild Things Are* is probably my favourite picture book of all time. But in terms of kind of people outside of that world, I really love Claire Keegan. I read *Foster* this year for the first time. She just so perfectly captures that view through a child's

“With kids the visual language develops first.”

The book is about a robot – what do you think about AI?

I'm very scared. I say not only for everyone but also for me. Is it interesting to see it grow and grow. I think it's being pushed on us more than we seem to want it. But I think people want stories made by people, because we are people, and we want to know that a person is feeling the emotion that they're talking about. And I think so far it doesn't seem like there's going to be some big replacement, because I don't think it really means anything if it takes microseconds to create. I think it could be a useful tool for certain things. But, ultimately, I think what we look for through stories is a connection to another person, and it will never be able to recreate that.

Do you think robots or AI could ever have emotions?

That's the interesting part, isn't it? If they do really have feelings, then we might be interested in their stories because they're going to have a whole different view on the world than we're going to have. I know some people that work on AI become convinced that the AI they're talking to is emotional and has all these feelings. I don't know when or if that will happen. But if they did have emotions, it opens up a whole new realm, because then they should have human rights. In this book, the robot was an old friend character. I read *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro a few years ago, and there's a lot of direct parallels. I love all his work, I think he's one of the greatest living writers. It's such a moving book, you feel the pain of seeing the world through that robot's eyes.

Are there any other authors or illustrators who inspire you in your work?



Bottles



Games



Journeys



Mysteries

eyes, which I think is so important in children's picture books, and I felt like reading that really inspired me. It made me cry my eyes out on the train, I think people were worried for me when I stupidly finished it on the underground while I was coming back from seeing some friends!

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

They mean everything to me. They're so important for the lifeblood of the industry. It's great when you find an independent bookshop that you love and it's great to talk someone who's clearly there because they love it. It can make you fall in love with reading all over again. I think it's such an important thing.

Children's Books



Scare B'n'B
by Catherine Doyle & Rachael Dean
Bloomsbury Children's
PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781526655141
Published 12th March
Age range: 8+

Ted Mckenley would rather live anywhere than with Frankie 'spawn-of-the-devil' Stark. And Frankie wouldn't go near a coward like Ted. Too bad – their parents just got married and blew their savings turning a creepy old mansion into a boutique hotel. At least it's big enough for the stepsiblings to stay far apart. But when Ted encounters a disappearing housekeeper and Frankie runs into a screaming suit of armour, their feud becomes the least of their problems...



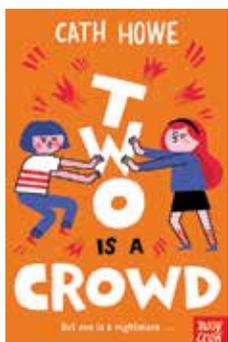
Relic Hamilton, Genie Hunter: The Door of the Dead
by Joseph Coelho
Walker Books
PB • £8.99
ISBN 9781529509601
Published 12th March
Age range: 9+

From the former Children's Laureate comes the second instalment in a fantasy adventure trilogy. Ravenna, the king of evil genies, has taken over Taya's body and has gone underground finding powerful genie allies... it's over to Relic and the Hermitic Sodality of Genie Hunters to try and stem the flood of chaos! But one genie proves a bigger threat than all the others combined: The Archivist was so terrible a genie, that his lamp was kept hidden in Windsor Castle for centuries...



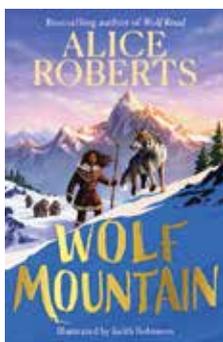
The House With Chicken Legs Runs Away
by Sophie Anderson
Usborne • PB • £8.99
ISBN 9781803704364
Published 9th April
Age range: 9+

A return to the world of *The House with Chicken Legs*. All Marinka's life, she has lived in her house with chicken legs. Running across the world on magical adventures, Marinka knows how her house is feeling, and it listens to her, too. But something is wrong. And before anyone can stop it, the house has pulled itself apart and run away. With her friend Benjamin and crow Jack, Marinka races after it to find answers. But her house might not want to stop running...



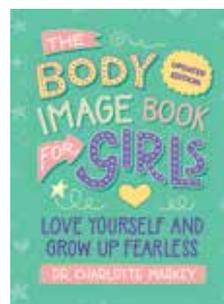
Two is a Crowd
by Cath Howe & Miguel Bustos
Nosy Crow • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781839942853
Published 9th April
Age range: 9+

A contemporary real-life story from the author of *Ella on the Outside*. Hattie's life is already complicated enough. She's about to start secondary school, her best friend is going off with someone else and her dad seems to have completely forgotten his promise to let her have a room of her own. So when her mum's goddaughter, Seren, arrives and gets special treatment, Hattie feels pushed out. Could it be that Hattie's family actually prefer Seren?



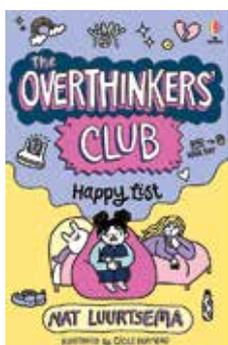
Wolf Mountain
by Alice Roberts
Simon & Schuster Children's • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781398521407
Published 9th April
Age range: 9+

The second prehistorical story from bestselling historian and TV presenter Alice Roberts, following *Wolf Road*. The seasons are changing and Tuuli, along with her faithful wolf cub, Lupa, is on the move. Leaving her tribe behind, she sets out across the Tundra to discover a new world and find the family of Andar, the friend she has lost. The journey is hard, filled with ferocious animals and dangerous weather. But with danger everywhere, will Tuuli find who she is looking for?



The Body Image Book for Girls Updated Edition
by Dr Charlotte Markey
Cambridge University Press • PB • £16.99
ISBN 9781009545075
Published 26th March
Age range: 9+

Girls are facing growing pressures that impact their self-esteem, whilst the pandemic and dominance of social media have made it even more challenging for girls to feel good about their bodies. In this updated book, Dr. Charlotte Markey provides girls with the tools they need to understand, accept, and appreciate their bodies. She provides all the facts on puberty, mental health, self-care, why diets are bad news, dealing with social media, and everything in between.



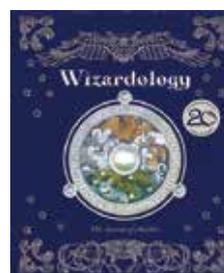
The Overthinkers' Club: Happy List
by Nat Luurtsema
Usborne • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9781835409978
Published 12th March
Age range: 9+

The first book in a brand new illustrated series. Birdie is an overthinker, and she has a lot to overthink. Her BFF Chloe wants new friends (BETRAYAL), she will be a teenager in one year (BREATHE), yet owns ZERO bras (surely some mistake?!), and a boy at school maybe has a crush on her (BUT HOW TO BE SURE?!). So Birdie has made a Happy List to tackle all the awkward and emotional challenges of being a tween. That's the plan, anyway...



Feather Vane
by Beth O'Brien
HarperCollins Children's • PB • £7.99
ISBN 9780008642044
Published 26th March
Age range: 9+

A fairy-tale adventure story. In the village of Greeth-Under-Edge, magical creatures are causing chaos. A green-toothed hag lurks in the river, a nest of gnomes are up to no good and a scatter of salamanders threaten to set everything on fire. Creirwy and Morfran, trainee sorcerers, have been sent to banish the creatures by brewing an almost impossible potion. To collect the ingredients, they'll need to go on an adventure with dangers at every turn.



Wizardology: 20th Anniversary Edition
by Dugald Steer
Templar Books
HB • £25.00
ISBN 9781835879092
Published 30th April
Age range: 9+

Celebrate 20 incredible years of *Wizardology* with this special anniversary edition and unlock secrets written by Merlin himself. After the legendary wizard Merlin was bound to a tree by magic, he used part of that tree to create a guide for apprentices of the mystical arts seeking to master *Wizardology*. First printed in the Elizabethan era, Templar has republished this special edition of the ancient tome to ignite the next generation of wizards, and it includes intricate novelty elements.

Hop To It!

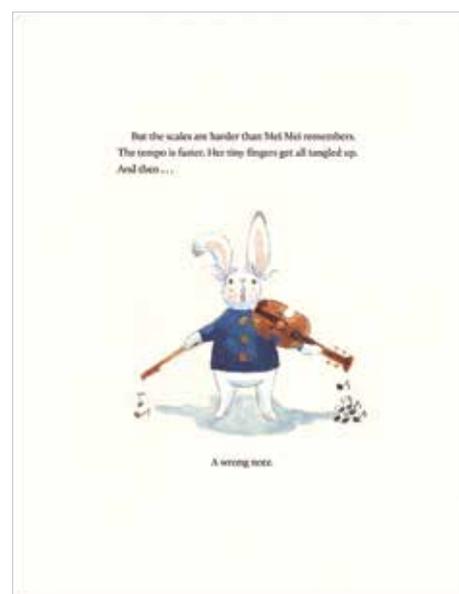
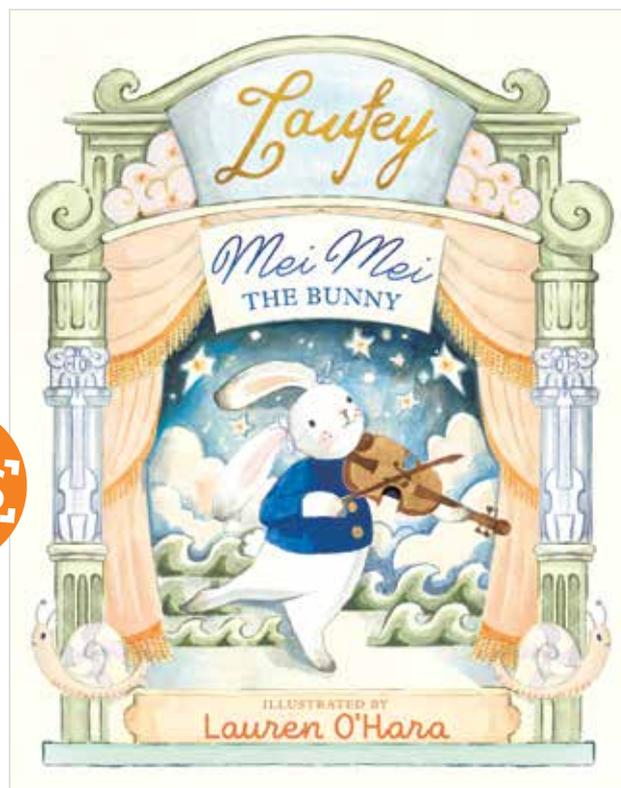
Mei Mei the Bunny is a heartwarming tale of self-belief and an enchanting picture book by the award-winning musician Laufey.

Meet Mei Mei, a little bunny with a big dream: to spread joy through her music! As her debut recital at the H'Opera House draws near, Mei Mei diligently practises playing her violin, yet struggles with her unsettled nerves. What will happen if she hits a wrong note?

This charming story features the debut authorship of world-renowned musician Laufey. Her lyrical text provides a comforting tale of honing confidence and also includes child-friendly definitions of musical terminology. The cosy illustrations have been provided by multi-award-winning illustrator Lauren O'Hara. Her cuddly colour palette provides a world children will want to explore again and again!



Mei Mei the Bunny
by Laufey
Illustrated by
Lauren O'Hara
DK • HB • £14.99
ISBN 9780241822548
Published 23rd April
Age range: 3+





Tales From The Isles

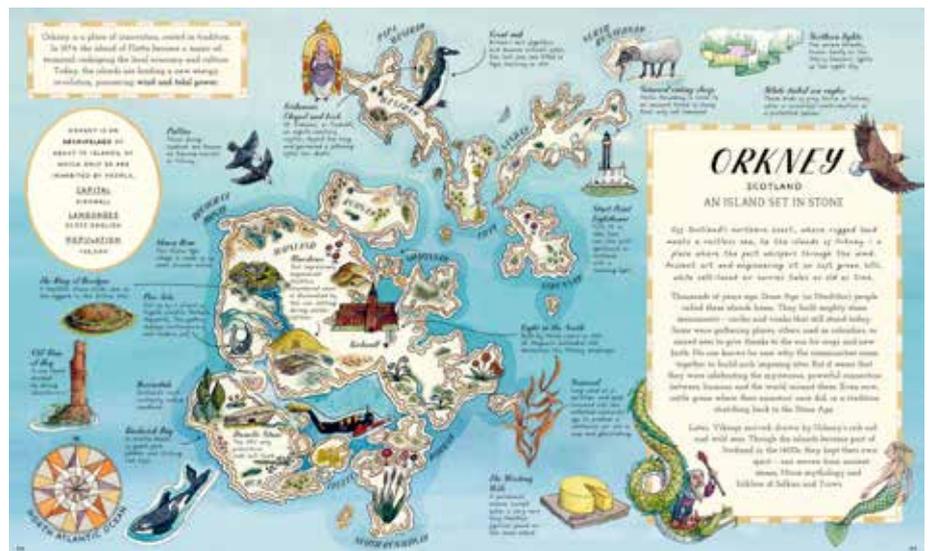
In this first children's book from award-winning historian and storyteller Alice Albinia, you will discover 20 wondrous islands, from Orkney to the Isles of Scilly, and the stories they contain. We interviewed the author to find out how she wrote it.

What inspired you to write the book?

My two previous books are about islands: *The Britannias*, which is an exploration of Britain's islands through its ancient and modern stories about women. And then there's *Cwen*, my novel, which is about some islands which get taken over by women, apparently. So I've been thinking about islands and their mythologies, and their meanings, for many years, probably a decade or more. All this was happening, meanwhile, as I became a mother, and suddenly found myself re-reading books that I hadn't opened since my own childhood. How important and beautiful this form of literature is! Lucky children with all those pictures. My children were so pleased when they found out that I was finally writing a book for children. Working on this book with the artist Helen and the publishers, Magic Cat, was a wonderful way, for me, of honouring that literary culture which still means so much to the three of us at home.

In the book, you highlight feminist history on islands. Do you think that history is more prominent on islands than it is in other places?

It was the defining theme of my two books about the British Isles and so when the opportunity came to write this book I was curious to see where it would take me. I knew I wanted to begin in the south of the world, and from there move north, rather than the other way round. And in the same way, I wanted to highlight stories of women, because even now it is stories of men which predominate. It is true also that islands can hold histories, such as those about women, which get lost in bigger places, at a different scale. They achieve resonance and accrue significance because of that. And sure enough, it was the best part of writing the book, speaking to women from the different islands.



“Islands can hold histories, such as those about women, which get lost in bigger places”

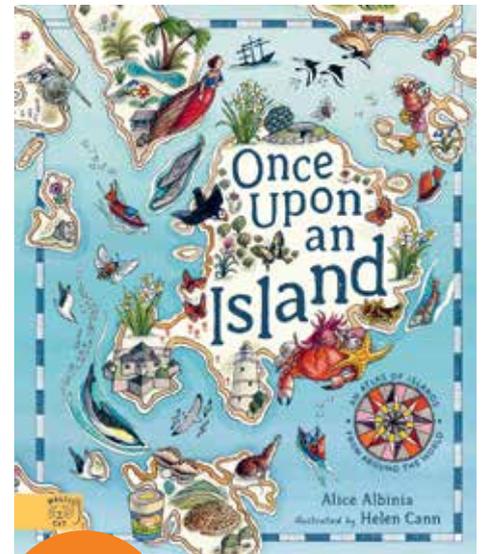
How did you go about researching and collecting the stories? Did you visit many of the Islands?

I had visited a quarter of them: I lived in Orkney, and travelled to the Isles of Scilly for *The Britannias*. Our Greek friend, Niki, lived on Lesbos, so my daughters and I went to stay with her there, and we'd also been to Sicily. When I lived in India I went to Mumbai, of course. After that it was a matter of thinking, asking, researching. The author Xiaolu Guo suggested the Chinese island, Mount Putuo, and the author Taran Khan had the idea of writing about Old Woman's

Island in Mumbai. Romar Beling, a journalist in Brazil who interviewed me when my first book, *Empires of the Indus*, came out there, suggested the Saracá community in the islands of the Rio Negro and put me in touch with Pedrina Brito de Mendonça there. Some Peruvian friends were emphatic that I must include the islands of Lake Titicaca, and my partner's sister told me to write about Chiloe in Chile. So it went on. This book is definitely the most communal I've ever written. It really was a collaborative process, different from how I've written before.

You also include places that are not technically islands – such as Mumbai and Lake Titicaca. Why was that?

Mumbai was once seven islands, and they were joined together during British times. The islands haunt the city still. It's the same here in Thanet, a British island which I wrote about for *The Britannias*. It's not really an island anymore but it still has that island spirit. The islands of Lake Titicaca are islands:



some natural and some woven by humans from reeds. The woman I interviewed for that island is a headmistress in a school in the lake; she was in a boat taxi as she spoke, collecting her students from the lake's different islands on the way to school.

Do you think the experience island life is different to how it used to be, now we have such good communication systems?

I lived in Orkney, which had up to the minute everything, and still, at every moment you felt its islandness. On a small island you can often see the sea most of the time, and the sea is always doing something, flowing in, flowing out, meaning that you are constantly in the presence and at the mercy of one of the world's most epic forces. It was hypnotising, watching this great body of water coming and going, drawn by the moon and the sun. There was a large tidal range where we lived and the tide would come right in, up to the end of our garden, and then flow right out again, leaving behind all kinds of treasures for us to find on the sand. It was lovely hearing Miriam, the fisherwoman who I interviewed for the Chiloe chapter describe the sea as "peace". She said: "It makes me happy every day".

You also write about climate change in the book – are some of these Islands now under threat from the rising sea levels?

Yes, small islands especially are under threat, and some big ones too. And it is not just sea level rise, it's the other aspects of climate change, such as changing weather patterns which impacts on the crops people are able to grow. And it's not just the climate which is being changed by humans but fauna and flora, the very matter of the world. Sawyer Cloud, the illustrator who I interviewed for the Madagascar chapter, was really eloquent about the destruction being wrought by deforestation which isn't spoken about much and yet is one of those human ravages that it will surely soon be impossible to justify.

Did you work closely with the artist Helen Cann?

We worked separately but it was a meeting of minds. I wrote the book and came up with the ideas for the illustrations, and she turned them into beautiful, vivid maps of island life. I am so full of admiration for her work ethic and the beauty of her watercolours.

She painted everything by hand, all those tiny, intricate details. She begins in pencil, drawing directly onto heavyweight watercolour paper, then uses fine ink pens to outline and crosshatch any shared areas. After that she adds the colour with watercolour paint. What an alchemy.

“On a small island you can often see the sea most of the time”

Are there any other authors who inspire you in your writing?

Loads and loads! As I wrote this book I remembered all those transformative texts that you read again and again and again to little children, such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, or *Burglar Bill* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg. *Once Upon an Island* is for slightly older children but I think younger ones will enjoy sitting and looking at the pictures too, and learning new things about the world. Children change and grow up so fast but there are some books they go back to even after they've outgrown them, because of the poetry and the beauty of the illustrations. It's such an extraordinary phase of brain metamorphosis, when children learn about the world not just through



Once Upon An Island
by Alice Albinia
Illustrated by Helen Cann
Magic Cat • HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781917044349
Published 5th March
Age range: 7+

experiencing it but also from opening the pages of a book and letting the words and pictures carry them to different places and experiences and times.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

Ah, they are at the centre of our lives. When the children were very little and we were living in Orkney we were always in the library; it was such a welcoming space for young children. Later, after we moved to Hackney, we haunted the Broadway Bookshop almost everyday after school, looking and asking and learning. Now we live in Frome, it's the same for us at Winstone's Hunting Raven Bookshop. Independent bookshops (and libraries) are such important beacons of culture and communal learning. And it's such fun visiting bookshops with children; while grownups go into these spaces carrying with them a polite hush, children run in with their arms and mouths and minds open wide... I also always love hearing from independent booksellers what they are reading. It's always so interesting and telling.

Dying for Success

Survival Show is a gripping new dystopian YA novel from the author of the *HMRC* series. Taryn is a refugee from England to Scotland, and she and her family are just scraping by. With her little brother Jenson in desperate need for medicine, Taryn enters *Starmaker*, a reality TV show which creates new bands and promises a world of fame and wealth to those that make it through. But if you lose the public vote, you lose your life... We interviewed Juno Dawson about the new book.

Survival Show

by Juno Dawson
Gallery YA
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781398547957
Published 23rd April
Age range: 14+

Look out for a signed edition, available exclusively from independent bookshops, while stocks last!

What inspired you to write *Survival Show*?

After I finished the *HMRC* novels I said I wouldn't write again unless it was something that excited me as much as those books did. Yes, my editor, said, well what's your favourite YA novel and I said, without hesitation, *The Hunger Games*. We then started talking about girl groups and the Spice Girls and it was Yas who suggested mashing the two things together to make my dream novel.

Are you a fan of reality TV shows?

I am, but I feel very guilty about it. I very much grew up on *ANTM*, *The X Factor* and, later, *Drag Race*. I have benefitted from the exploitation of young women, so I feel this responsibility almost to explore that contradiction.

"A sharp, imaginative take on fame, power, and survival. Timely and compelling."

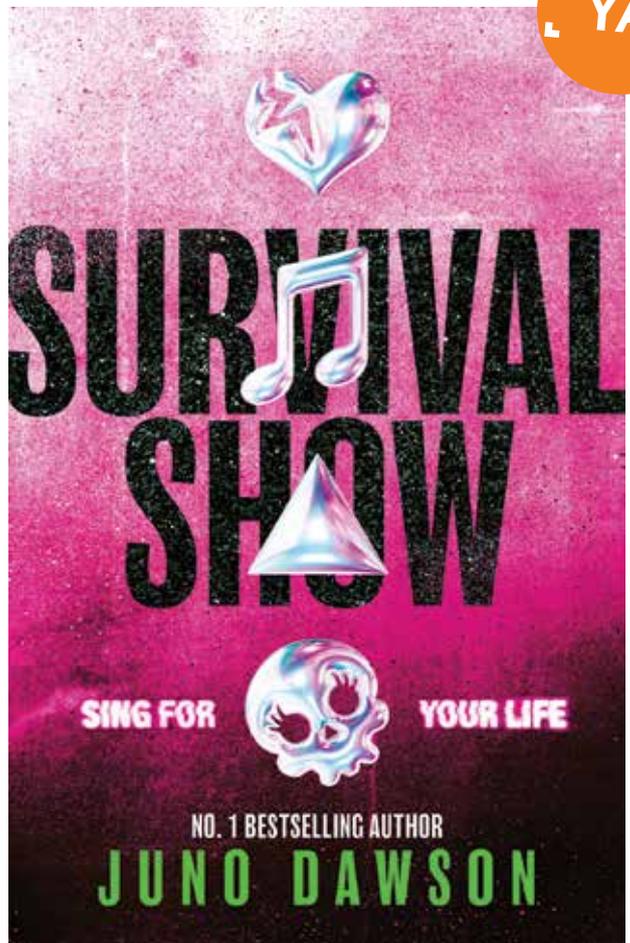
Louise O'Neill

In the book, Taryn and her family are refugees from southern England to Scotland, following floods and the sea level rising. Do you think we underestimate the effects of climate change?

Yes, because it's genuinely too scary to think about it. I think we keep kicking it down the track, but eventually, someone is going to have to face the consequences of our inaction now. I think, right now, we're the frog in a pan of boiling water – we're already seeing extreme weather conditions. It's only going to get worse unless those in power insist on change. It shouldn't be up to us, it's up to them.

Taryn enters the show to try and provide for her little brother Jenson, who needs medication. Do you think that family is at the heart of Taryn's talent for singing?

Totally – her mother was a singer too and is her biggest inspiration. The loss of a parent is seismic, it affects everything all of Taryn's choices. The fact she lost her mother means she refuses to accept her brother may also perish.



The book includes lyrics from songs which Taryn and her friends sing. Have you set these lyrics to music?

This is such a coincidence, but just this morning I was listening to the singers auditioning! Yes, there will be sung versions of the song on the audiobook! How cool is that? I don't know if that's a first, but I love that it's such a layered approach.

Taryn discovers that all is not what it seems with the *Starmaker* show. Do you think that being rich and famous is worth it?

Fame and money are neither good or bad, it's how they change you, I think. In the novel we see Cade and Nico – both former *Starmaker* winners – and they've internalised their trauma very differently. Taryn's journey is about deciding how to use her new-found influence to change the world around her.

Which other authors inspire you in your work?

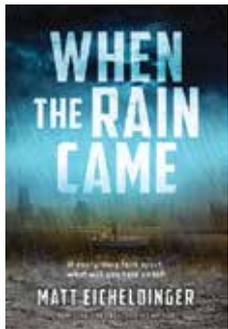
I have so many favourites but my current fave is Eliza Clark. She has such a wonderfully dark sense of humour, as well as a locality to her voice that she doesn't shy away from using. Northern, working-class women for the win.

What do independent bookshops mean to you?

There's no peace quite like the peace in a bricks-and-mortar bookshop is there? The smell alone is so evocative. I'd always prefer to support an indie business wherever possible. It's good to know where your money's going, and with a massive company, you're not always certain it's going to good causes.

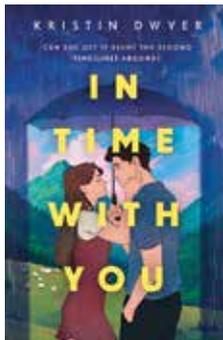


YA Fiction



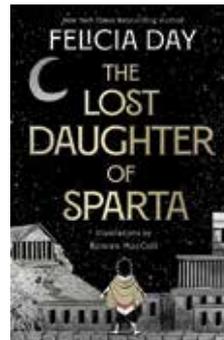
When the Rain Came
by Matthew Eicheldinger
Andrews McMeel
PB • £9.99
ISBN 9798881605131
Published 23rd April
Age range: 13+

The first book in an all-new, action-packed YA dystopian adventure series. Seventeen-year-old Aurora knows how to survive. Life in the foster system has taught her how to stay quiet, stay smart, and stay ready. But nothing could prepare her for a never-ending storm that swallows cities, drowns forests, and turns the world into a flooded wasteland. Trapped in a collapsing house with her strict preppter foster parents, Aurora is forced to live by their rules just to stay alive...



In Time With You
by Kristin Dwyer
Rock the Boat
PB • £8.99
ISBN 9781836432074
Published 5th March
Age range: 14+

Nieve Monroe is devastated. Her boyfriend Carter died trying to save her from drowning. She blames herself – and so does his best friend, Max, who never liked Nieve in the first place. Grappling with the grief and the guilt, Nieve visits her grandmother, who has always told stories of uncanny happenings, magic and make believe. The next morning, Nieve wakes up on the first day of college... the year before. This time she will do everything in her power to keep Carter safe...



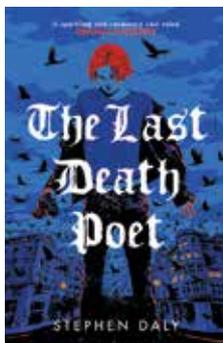
The Lost Daughters of Sparta
by Felicia Day & Rowan McColl
Simon & Schuster
Children's
PB • £12.99
ISBN 9781398547049
Published 26th March
Age range: 14+

A sapphic graphic novel about the forgotten sister of Helen of Troy. Helen. Clytemnestra. Timandra. Three famous sisters and one shared curse – that each will betray their husband. As the youngest sister, Philonoe is desperate not to follow in their footsteps. After pleading with the gods, Philonoe is sent on a quest by Aphrodite, to retrieve three impossible objects. Will Philonoe become a victim of her own fate, or does she have the power to change it?



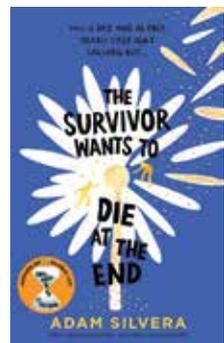
These Shattered Spires
by Cassidy Ellis Salter
Bloomsbury YA
HB • £16.99
ISBN 9781526682970
Published 10th March
Age range: 13+

The utterly compelling first book in *Wyrdos*, a new YA high fantasy trilogy. At the heart of a decaying world is Fourspires Castle, home to arcanists from across the four magical disciplines: bone, blood, botany and stone. When the king is assassinated, chaos erupts. To seize the crown, arcanists and their human familiars are dragged into the Slaughter – a deadly competition, where survival means killing and death is the only escape. Amidst the bloodshed, four rival familiars must work together...



The Last Death Poet
by Stephen Daly
Rock the Boat
PB • £8.99
ISBN 9781836431350
Published 2nd April
Age range: 14+

When Michael is uprooted to his mum's hometown of Belfast, he isn't just hoping for a fresh start. He's determined to discover the truth about his dad's mysterious absence. But from the moment he arrives, he's plagued with visions of the city's troubled past. Michael begins settling into his new life and even meets a boy who helps erase the painful memories of his ex. But as the visions grow stronger and more intense, the only person he can really confide in is his new friend Meg...



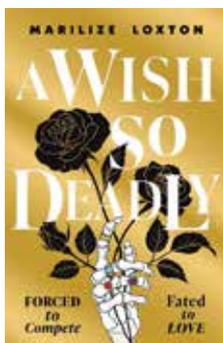
The Survivor Wants to Die at the End
by Adam Silvera
Simon & Schuster
Children's • PB • £9.99
ISBN 9781398512467
Published 9th April
Age range: 14+

The third book in the *They Both Die at the End* series, now in paperback. Paz Dario is tired of living and waiting for Death-Cast to call. If they say he's not dying, he'll just have to prove them wrong. But right before Paz can die, a boy saves his life. Alano Rosa is heir to the Death-Cast empire that encourages everyone to live their best lives. Fate brings Paz and Alano together. But they must survive the tragic trials ahead so no one dies at the end.



Better Off Dead
by Tess James-Mackey
Rock the Boat
PB • £8.99
ISBN 9781836430919
Published 5th March
Age range: 14+

All Lacy wants is to escape to Paris and be with her older sister. But she needs to make some money first, so she takes a summer job at a caravan park in North Wales. When one of the guests is brutally murdered, rumours start to swirl about the park being haunted. There are sightings of a mysterious figure walking along the clifftops at night and Lacy can't shake off the feeling that she's being watched. Can she discover who the killer is before she becomes the next victim?



A Wish So Deadly
by Marilize Loxton
Scholastic • PB • £9.99
ISBN 9780702341182
Published 12th March
Age range: 14+

An epic fantasy romance about the battle to survive a deadly tournament to win the wish your heart most desires. When Talia unwittingly steals cursed jewels from a powerful Soulreaper, she pays the *ultimate* price: the Soulreaper takes her sister's soul. Desperate to save her sister, Talia strikes a deal. She will enter a deadly, magical tournament and if she survives, she will claim the prize of a wish – the only payment the Soulreaper will accept in exchange for the return of her sister.



SideQuested
by K.B. Spangler & Alexandra Pressor
Andrews McMeel
PB • £13.99
ISBN 9781524896423
Published 23rd April
Age range: 14+

The first book in an epic graphic novel series. Magic makes the world go round, but no one in Charlie Goldskin's world knows precisely where magic comes from. This isn't Charlie's problem. She's the adopted daughter of a woodcarver and is training to be a librarian. It'll be a quiet life, but that's fine with Charlie, as magic is summoned through conflict and she would like to avoid that! Then her birth father shows up to take her from her village and bring her to the king's court...

"I MIGHT CHOOSE
SILLY JOKES OR
SPOOKY GHOSTS"



Give them the excitement of choosing a book,
as well as the fun of reading it.

Available from bookshops, supermarkets and online.

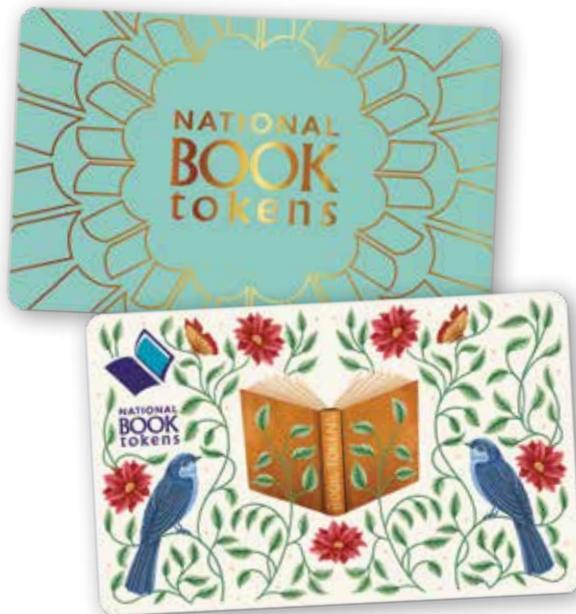
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- 1 Which Australian author wrote the novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, which won the Booker Prize in 2014?
- 2 Which Australian author has won the Booker Prize twice, for *Oscar and Lucinda* in 1988 and *True History of the Kelly Gang* in 2001?
- 3 First published in 2008, *The Slap* by Christos Tsiolkas is a contemporary novel set in which Australian city?
- 4 Which Australian author, who has a literary prize named after her, wrote the groundbreaking 1901 novel *My Brilliant Career*?
- 5 Which Australian author wrote the 2017 novel *Their Brilliant Careers*, a fictional biography of sixteen fictional Australian authors?
- 6 Which award-winning Australian author's novels include *The Idea of Perfection*, *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant*?
- 7 Which Australian crime writer's novels include *The Dry*, *Force of Nature* and *Exiles*, which feature federal agent Aaron Falk?
- 8 Which Australian crime writer created the character Jack Irish, who first appeared in the novel *Bad Debts*?
- 9 Which award-winning Australian author wrote the novels *Carpentaria* and *Praiseworthy*?
- 10 Which novelist and playwright, whose works include *Happy Valley* and *Voss*, is the only Australian to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature?

WIN!

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www.surveymonkey.com/r/BooktimeMarch2026

Or write to us at:

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Closing date:
Monday 4th May 2026

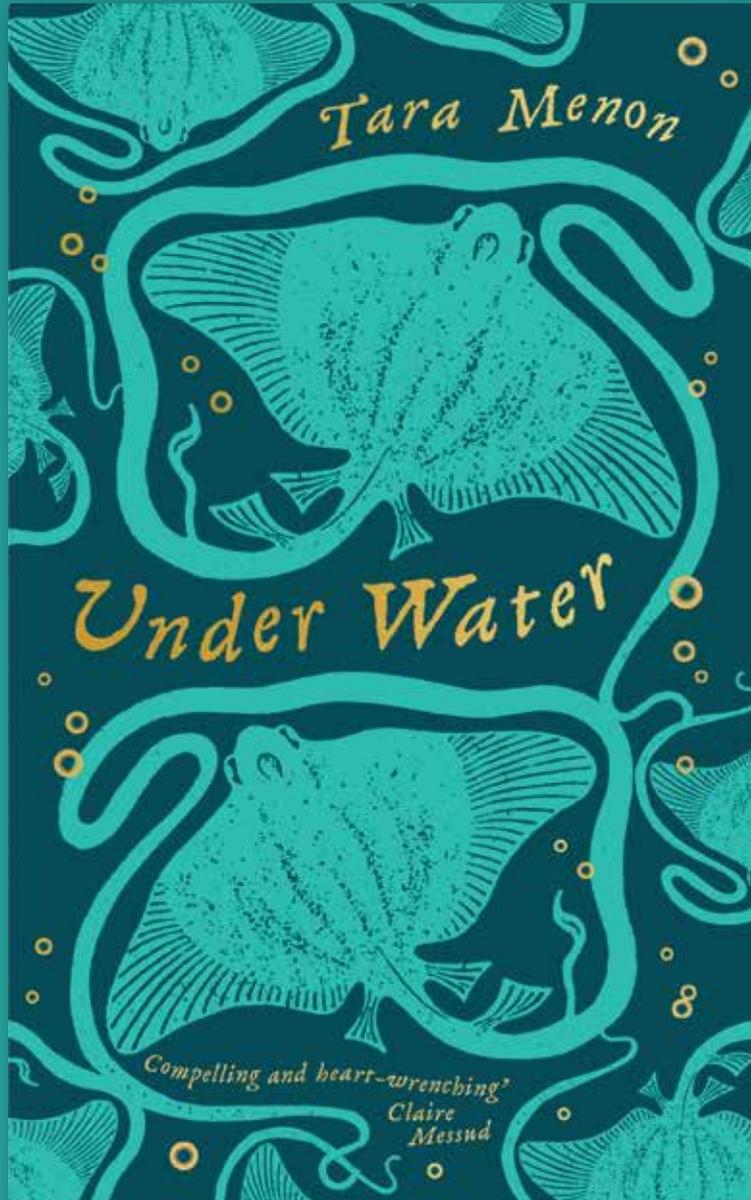
Winners & Answers

September & October 2025

The winners of the competitions were:
Becky Gibbons, Maldon; Adrian Price, Warlingham; Florencia Alvarez, Isle of Man. The answers were: *Fearful Competition*: Kingdom of Ilya; *Bob Mortimer Competition*: Paul Whitehouse; *Puzzletime Book Quiz*: 1. Michael Cunningham; 2. Cork; 3. *Chain of Gold*; 4. Paula Hawkins; 5. Wally Lamb; 6. Jimmy Carter; 7. Katherine McMahon; 8. Alice Hoffman; 9. Jo Nesbo; 10. Howard Spring.

Competition Terms & Conditions

No purchase necessary. Closing date for all entries is Monday 4th May 2026. Please include your name and full postal address on each entry. Responsibility will not be accepted for damaged, lost or delayed entries and the judges' decision is final. Entries are limited to one per person and one per household. Employees and member bookshops of the Booksellers Association are prohibited from entering. Winners will be chosen at random and notified by Booktime. We will print the winners' names in a future edition of Booktime.



Turn to page 10 to read our interview with Tara Menon, about her powerful debut novel *Under Water*, which is available in this exclusive edition from independent bookshops, while stocks last!

