

Kissing the Rain

- Written by Kevin Brooks
- The Chicken House £12.99
- ISBN: 1 904442 19 6



Utterly compelling for the authentic voice, real sense of anger and edgy suspense that drives the narrative in Kevin Brooks'

Kissing the Rain.

Moo Nelson is bullied and rejected by his peers for being fat. He likens the abuse he suffers - the taunts, the whispers, the mockery - to a downpour of rain. His only escape is to a place of solitude, a bridge, where he goes after school to watch the traffic pass. Here he is safe - to empty his mind and be free of the rain. By chance one evening he witnesses a car chase, in which a man is murdered. The police investigate. Telling the truth about what he saw is not easy, he discovers, as events turn sinister and he is tugged between defence and prosecutor. Told in the first person, the story starts where it ends. Moo's recount of events owes more to his subjective memory than to the real chronology of the facts. He writes from the heart, pouring out emotions, opinions and reasoning in a disjunctive style in which breathless phrases, capital letters and mala-propisms play a part.

Anne Faundez

Dusk

- Written by Susan Gates
- Puffin £4.99
- ISBN: 0 14 131705 1



Dusk is transgenic - an uneasy creation of hawk and human genes bred in a secret US military laboratory. When a technician's accident frees her she hides in the old church steeple but is restless in her

human skin. Dusk yearns, wingless, to fly, and in her distress rakes her own arms with her talon nails. She is found by Jay, the disturbed teenage son of the lab technician. He is both fascinated and repelled by her beauty, her need and her dismaying hawk habits. But, as a failed bully, self-harming himself pitilessly by burning, he comes to care for something other than himself and a

Fluent

wary truce is established. Strange, dark and disturbing this novel will provoke strong opinions about misfits in our society; concerns about what we do to our planet and whether it can be justified on any grounds. It also helps the reader to acknowledge the unlovable, and perhaps understand and empathise.

Tina Massey

Forbidden

- Written by Judy Waite
- Oxford University Press £4.99
- ISBN: 0 19 275312 6

Elinor has been a part of the True Cause since she was a tiny child, and she is destined to become a bride of the cult leader, Howard, when she is sixteen. But a series of events, including a chance meeting with a mysterious young man in the woods, Jamie, leads Elinor to become uncomfortable with her beliefs, and start to question them - a dangerous situation to be in. This is another novel about a teenager caught up in a ritualistic, controlling cult, but it is genuinely full of suspense and does not rely on the pull of the plot alone to draw the reader in. Is Howard a con man or truly mad? Is Jamie really a stranger? Elinor cannot be sure, and nor can we. The characters are well drawn and the writing is quality stuff - all in all, a difficult book to put down.



Yvonne Coppard

Dating Hamlet

- Written by Lisa Fiedler
- Harper Collins £4.99
- ISBN: 0 00 716186 7

Lurking, eavesdropping, acting out roles, artifice making mockery of reality and lots of bodies at the end, that's the play, *Hamlet*. Lisa Fiedler presents a different drama here - the

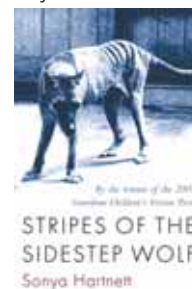
whole play as a big con. Ophelia doesn't die, she only seems to: Laertes and Ophelia are the improbable offspring of bumbling Polonius, but their real father is in the play and I defy you to guess who. And so on. But there are many layers to the story that Ophelia, the centre of the web, tells and cases can be made for believing them all. This is a daring concept and it's carried through with the bravado of a good production; but the idiom, although in keeping with seventeenth century English, doesn't quite fit with Shakespeare. For this reason I fear some readers may switch off early, which would be a great pity because Lisa Fiedler has written an enormously clever and rewarding novel.

Dennis Hamley

Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf

- Written by Sonya Hartnett
- Walker Books £5.99
- ISBN: 0 7445 6954 4

Sonya Hartnett is always an interesting, quirky writer, and this novel certainly contains both qualities. It features Satchell O'Rye, a carpenter in



his early twenties living on the outskirts of a decaying town in the Australian outback. He shares this accommodation with his hard-working, semi-crippled mother and half-mad father who has long ceased to work in favour of letting God provide. Things look very bleak when Satchell's only friend leaves for more opportunity elsewhere, but a sighting of a Tasmanian wolf, long thought to be extinct, gives Satchell (without his knowing it at the time) an extra reason for hope. Hartnett is expert in describing domestic tension; she is also compassionate as well as realistic about the various flawed

characters in her story. Not necessarily an easy read, this is still one of those novels impossible to forget once it is finished.

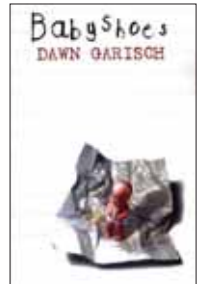
Nicholas Tucker

Babysheoes

- Written by Dawn Garisch
- Simon & Schuster £8.99
- ISBN: 0 689 83711 9

The bond between David and Kevin is stronger than brotherhood. When his mother goes into labour unexpectedly David delivers his half-brother on the bathroom floor and saves him from choking when the birth cord becomes looped about his neck. In a sense David, as much as his stepfather, is the man who has given Kevin life. When Mum later walks out and there is talk of fostering the baby, David, now eighteen, hits the road with his friend Rudd, taking Kevin with them. The novel recounts their tender, funny, rumbustious adventures during the following summer, as David discovers that he has virtually become a parent without ever having a lover, finds his own absconding Dad and learns about love, sex and friendship. Warm-hearted and accessible, it also reminds us that there is more to South Africa than we see on the news.

Jan Mark



Silent Snow, Secret Snow

- Written by Adele Geras
- Young Picador £4.99
- ISBN: 0 330 41500 X

First published in 1998, this new paperback edition of a beautifully constructed novella nudges its way easily into my list of favourite books for discerning young readers. (I should point out that age is no barrier to being young and discerning!) Laurie invites Carlo to spend Christmas at his grandmother's house, set in wooded countryside, where the rest of the Golden family will celebrate in their own special way. When the old house is cut off from the outside world by a heavy snowfall, we become increasingly, irresistibly involved in the family's affairs. As the revelations, embarrassments and tragedies unfold, the tension mounts. The primitive



scaffolding of this story might have been erected by an Agatha Christie, but this writer builds a subtle, complex and rich interior

where the dramas of the Golden family are played out.

Jack Ousbey

Waving Not Drowning

Written by Rosie Rushton
Andersen £4.99
ISBN: 1 8427 0237 8

The trials and tribulations that beset the three teenagers here span the whole spectrum of angst and at first they seem too daunting and unbelievable to be a good read. Between them the youngsters have to cope with difficult parents, with bullying, a traumatic past and a forgetful Grandmother as well as the day to day problems of school life. However, Rosie Rushton creates three likeable, different characters who quickly engage our sympathy. Our disbelief that so much misfortune can befall them is put to one side as we want to find out how they cope, who will help them and how they can

resolve the problems life has thrown at them. The climax is both exciting and sad; not quite too good to be true and we are left feeling relieved and pleased that the three protagonists were indeed waving not drowning.

Louise Stothard

BoyKillsMan

Written by Matt Whyman
Hodder £10.99
ISBN: 0 340 88194 1

Boy2Girl

Written by Terence Blacker
Macmillan £9.99
ISBN: 0 330 42121 2

Similar titles and each containing evocative moments that stay in the mind long after the stories are completed.

BoyKillsMan is about child assassins in Columbia. Children are used as killers because they can't be prosecuted. Shorty is lured into the work through his friend Alberto. For an abused boy with no future the gun gives him respect, status, power even.

Boy2Girl is funny. Sam comes to live with his Aunt and her family after his

mother is killed in an accident. Sam is desperate to be part of his cousin Matt's gang so he agrees to a dare to dress up as a girl for the first week at his new school and discovers both differences and similarities between teenage boys and girls.

Why link them together? The main characters are traumatised - Shorty by what he is doing and Sam by the loss of his mother. And neither has close family to turn to for comfort. However the way this is resolved is very different. Sam finds his experiences enlightening and all the main participants change their perceptions of each other - probably for the better. Shorty becomes more and more detached and the ending is chilling indeed.

Two books which address problems faced by young adults today. Both are well worth reading.

Pat Tate



Unique

Written by Alison Allen-Grey
Oxford University Press £4.99
ISBN: 0 19 275335 5

This is an exciting mystery and discovery tale which grapples with urgent scientific, moral and philosophical questions. Allen-Grey addresses the issues of human cloning in a very real and thought provoking way and keeps her readers gripped until the dramatic climax. When Dominic discovers he had an identical brother who died before he was born, his quest to find out more leads him to question his own identity and to learn some hard lessons about trust, loyalty and friendship. The setting takes us from University life in Cambridge to the wilds of Scotland as Dominic, accompanied by his somewhat batty Grandfather, finds that it is he who is being hunted. The narrative leads to decisions about who you can trust before the truth is finally revealed and Dominic is free to be himself and assert his own uniqueness.



Louise Stothard