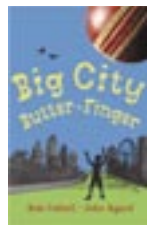


Satisfying novels

Big City: Butter-Finger

Written by Bob Cattell and John Agard
Frances Lincoln £5.99 ISBN: 978-1845079543



Riccardo is a young West Indian calypso singer whose stage name is Butter Finger. He is visiting London to perform at the Caribbean Festival with his friend and mentor, the veteran Count Crawfish, a legendary figure in Trinidad. Riccardo is

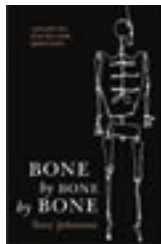
a huge cricket fan and hopes to visit Lords to see his heroes play against England. Nagging at the back of his mind is the thought that he might see his father who left his family and never kept in touch, and also the fact that his own, local club is involved, while he is away, in a prestigious knockout tournament. Bob Cattell, a writer of books about football and cricket, 'teams up' with the irrepressible John Agard in this hugely entertaining and sometimes provocative book. Brian Lara appears as a cricketing guide and we meet up with Sir Viv Richards, Clive Lloyd, Michael Holding and Gary Sobers in what proves to be a real festival of fun.

Jack Ousbey

Bone by Bone by Bone

Written by Tony Johnston
Frances Lincoln £6.99 ISBN: 978-1845071745

Some of the best American writers excel in sparse, exact prose. This fine novel set in 1950s Tennessee vibrates with tension, the language at times raw. The most important thing in young David's life is his friendship with Malcom. But David's father is a Klansman and friendship between his son and a young black boy is both shameful and strictly forbidden. Tony Johnston writes from personal knowledge. He grew up in the South and experienced racial intolerance at first hand – his father told him "You ever bring a nigger home, I'll shoot him." Much, if not all, of America has changed in the last sixty years and this book is a telling story of those unhappy, turbulent times.



Enid Stephenson

My Worst Best Friend

Written by Dyan Sheldon
Walker Books £6.99 ISBN: 978-1406304206

*The way I saw it when I was in High School...
There were basically only two kinds of girls:
Those Girls and everyone else.*

Savannah is one of Those Girls: beautiful, popular,



totally self-absorbed, gathering devoted slaves around her wherever she goes. No-one can understand why Grace is her best friend – including Grace, whose passion for saving the planet and whose general approach to life is the polar opposite of Savannah's. The

writing is clever, with an underlying vein of acerbic wit and an acute observation of teenage girls that had me laughing aloud. Savannah, who starts the book as an amusing and harmless airhead, is soon shown to be a heartless manipulator. You just know that one day Grace will twig what's going on and Savannah will get her comeuppance. Unfortunately, Grace's 'wake-up and smell coffee' moment is so long in coming that both characters have started to become irritating and stereotyped. This is still an entertaining story for pre-teens wanting a glimpse – and a warning – of life to come in the 'big school'.

Yvonne Coppard

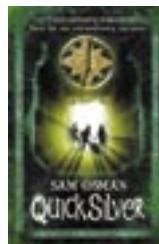
Quicksilver

Written by Sam Osman
Scholastic £7.99
ISBN: 978-1407105734

Quicksilver is an absorbing, complex mystery reminding one of the quest novels by Dan Brown or Kate Mosse. It is an exciting fantasy concerned

with the power of particular places where history, legend and the present can react terrifyingly. Wolfie, Tala and Zi'ib are young people from different continents who, by amazing coincidence, have the same curiously coloured eyes and parents who are missing or dead. On their shared twelfth birthday they discover they are part of an ancient prophecy to protect lost knowledge and power from the evil group 'Manus Sacra'. Working individually and then combining their forces, they must risk their lives to defeat those working to harness the power of ley-lines. Never quite knowing who to trust, there is a real sense of personality and homeland from each of the characters – especially English, American and Sudanese. The writing has the almost overpowering style of description mastered by few writers like Alan Garner or Susan Cooper. A memorable and richly rewarding read.

Tina Massey



The Crowfield Curse

Written by Pat Walsh
The Chicken House £6.99 ISBN: 978-1906427153
Fourteen-year-old Will loses his family when a fire burns down the mill where he lives and he is forced



to seek refuge in the cold, forbidding walls of Crowfield Abbey. He is soon drawn deep into a world of hobs and fays: of the Dark King and his threatening retinue; of a masked, leprous stranger and his menacing servant and, most worryingly, of an angel

buried deep in the abbey grounds. Will takes up the menial tasks of a kitchen dogsbody, learning rapidly how to assess the temper of the monks with whom he works, whilst finding himself increasingly enmeshed with the dangerous magic of the forest. It is 1347 and the Abbey is gripped in the thickening ice of an Arctic winter. Implausible? Not a bit. Pat Walsh's narrative is as keen, as sure-footed and zippy as a gifted mountain skier, and, for the reader, just as exhilarating. I am not immediately drawn to supernatural happenings but any doubts I had were swept away when William has a first conversation with a small, tufted, hairy creature caught in a gin. It is not the developing plot that grabs the reader but the believability of the prose. This author, new to me, writes with an easy, convincing feel, both for the routine details of the monks' daily lives and for the intrigue surrounding the buried angel and the fay-forest kingdom. I am a fan.

Jack Ousbey

Halo

Written by Zizou Corder
Puffin £6.99 ISBN: 978-0141328300

Halo brings an outsider's concern to the ways and injustices of the ancient world. Separated from her adopted family of Centaurs, Halo's introduction to the world of 'men' is a shock. She must pretend to be a boy in order to survive. With the Peloponnesian War simmering in the background, Halo finds herself in Athens where war and disease are threatening to destroy it. But in her struggle to return to the Centaurs she learns the truth about her real parents and finds both love and a vocation during the process. This gripping novel offers tantalising glimpses of the history and mythology of the classical world. The setting informs both the characters and the plot but never obscures any part of the great story. The notes at the back advise readers how to directly experience life in Ancient Greece with instructions including how to make Baklava and how to gut fish prior to cooking.



Benjamin Scott



Chamber of Shadows

Written by Justin Richards
Faber £6.99
ISBN: 978-0571237999

The Department of Unclassified Artefacts at the British Museum does not officially exist, but Sir William

Protheroe is its curator and George has been transferred from the Horology Department to be his Assistant. Eddie, a street urchin, and his friend Elizabeth Oldfield are honorary members. A series of murders is terrifying London. The 'tick-tock killer' is ranging the streets and deep underground a tube tunnel is being bored through the clay. They break through into a mysterious space which Sir William recognises as an ancient burial chamber. George is preoccupied with other concerns. His actress girlfriend Lily is on the same bill as Magnus, a magician with dizzying powers which seem real. The connections between these three events make a page-turning thriller which tests the main characters to their limits in a blend of horror and terror which leads to a terrific climax. The atmosphere smacks of Victorian London: fog and darkness illuminated by weak gaslight. There are hints of Sherlock Holmes and the Baker Street Irregulars, Quatermass, Jack the Ripper and even Indiana Jones and Dr Who, the latter not surprising because the author also edits the spin-off novels. Yet it is more than a derivative pastiche: it is an ingenious, exciting narrative in its own right.

Dennis Hamley

The Badness of Ballydog

Written by Garrett Carr
Simon and Schuster £6.99
ISBN: 978-1847385291



There's bad - and there's Ballydog bad. Pretty much everything about this miserable seaside town in southern Ireland is dreadful. From the wretched estate to the fish finger processing factory, there is nothing wholesome about the place. And when Ewan and his mother arrive as part of a protection scheme, they feel as desolate as the grimy four walls in which they are expected to live. Nothing seems to fit right: there is something odd in the air but few people can detect it. Except May. She is considered an oddball because she can understand the animals and they appear to speak with her. Only she can taste danger in the air and only she realises the fish are disappearing from the bay. There are a series of interlinked events - but no-one can detect the connection. Why has the submarine been attacked? Why is the lighthouse keeper so secretive? And the schoolboy gang leader, Andrew, is very scared. Carr is a natural story teller; writing huge scenes and compelling narrative. He draws heavily on the supernatural and cleverly ensnares the reader in this chilling tale. Told at breakneck speed can Ewan

and Mary succeed in saving this tip of a town. But is it worth saving?

Jayne Howarth

The Death Defying Pepper Roux

Written by Geraldine McCaughrean
Oxford University Press £6.99
ISBN: 978-0192756039



When Pepper is born, his aunt confirms the sad fact that he will die on his fourteenth birthday. Can he prove her wrong? By impersonating his own father, he sets off on a series of breathtaking adventures - as a sea captain, a 'good news only' journalist / reporter and a protector of horses - to name but a few. Pepper's fundamental decency and good manners are almost his undoing, but then an unexpected figure from his past turns up and that makes all the difference. A broad array of colourful characters enhance this highly original tale.

Marianne Adey

Jane Airhead

Written by Kay Woodward
Andersen Press £5.99
ISBN: 978-1842709764



Thirteen-year-old Charlotte, named after Charlotte Bronte, is totally obsessed by her favourite book, *Jane Eyre*, reading it constantly. When she decides her Mum needs a man in her life, she sets about finding her a modern day Mr Rochester and considers that new teacher Mr Grant, who comes complete with sideburns, fits the bill. However, as with all classic romances, the path of true love does not run smoothly and Charlotte fears that perhaps Mr Rochester only exists in books. The story includes Charlotte balancing her relationship with her best friend Manda, while also spending time with the delectable Jack Burley - the school heart throb. Moving nimbly along, readers are kept guessing about the various resolutions and, having been touched by this amusing book, will not be able to resist reading the original story to discover why Charlotte loved it so much.

Jane Hall

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire

Written by Suzanne Collins
Scholastic £6.99 ISBN: 978-1407109367

Futuristic, but with a real sense that it could be happening today, this is a story with myriad threads that all combine to produce a cracking plot. Katniss Everdeen lives in a poor district of Panem and is revelling after a win at the Games. This was a live event, a reality TV show where twelve boys and twelve girls compete in a bare knuckle encounter that results in death. It had ended unusually when she was declared joint winner with Peeta,



having triumphed over the Gamemakers. Her cruelly impoverished home district may be enjoying the rewards of her win, but Katniss may now be paying the price.

The Victory Parade and 75th Games are being prepared when the President makes a surprise visit and informs her that he knows about the rumours of rebellion. Katniss is told she has the power to stop the insurgencies and her role becomes that of a symbolic leader. Suzanne Collins is an incredibly imaginative writer - action packed and exciting, I couldn't stop reading this book.

Jayne Howarth

Suspicion

Written by Kate Brian
Simon and Schuster £5.99
ISBN: 978-1847387394



There's no let-up for Reed Brennan as she is subjected to real and terrifying danger on what should have been a relaxing holiday in the Caribbean after a trying term at Easton School. As soon as the reader meets up with Reed she is literally treading water in her fight for life, and she's already undergone a jet-ski accident and cliff top terror. It's almost too much to take in but Kate Brian's narrative carries the reader totally so there's no just wanting to, but needing, to know whether Reed can really survive so many attempts to kill her. Older girls love the danger and suspense, not to mention the spitefulness, love interest and partying!

Gill Roberts



Desperate Measures

Written by Laura Summers
Piccadilly £6.99
ISBN: 978-1846861178

Fourteen-year-old twins, Vicky and Rhianna, and their younger brother Jamie have had a bad time. Their mother has died and their father does not cope well afterwards. The children are placed in care and eventually fostered with a couple they like called Barbara and Paul. Unfortunately Barbara has to go into hospital and Paul cannot manage alone. The decision is taken to split them up, with Rhianna going to a special school. The twins are very protective of Rhianna, who was brain-damaged at birth, and they decide to run away rather than be separated. They are completely unlike each other and share the telling of the story in their own authentic, very different but real voices. *Desperate Measures* looks at the lengths people will go in order to protect and provide for the ones they love. It is a refreshingly different, well paced and very believable debut novel.

Gill MacDonald