



Bugsy Malone

Written by Alan Parker Illustrated by Graham Thompson
HarperCollins (eB) £12.99 ISBN: 978-0007514847

At a time when cinemas are full of films based on graphic novels, Alan Parker bucks the trend and brings us a graphic novel based on a film; his 1976 classic children's film making the transition wonderfully. *Bugsy Malone* is a traditional gangster story set in New York during the prohibition era and all that that implies. However, all of the characters are children and this means fizzy pop, pedal cars and, most fun of all, the fabulous splurge guns which fire custard pies. A nice touch is that the book opens and closes in a cinema as the audience gathers to watch the film. The story covers Dandy Dan trying to take over the city from big boss, Fat Sam. Dan's gang attack Sam's rackets with splurge guns, as Sam has only hand thrown pies. While this goes on, Blousey Brown, a wannabe singer at Fat Sam's speakeasy, meets Bugsy, who walks the line between the gangs, belonging to neither. Can romance blossom with a gang war surrounding them? Beautifully drawn with great detail in the two-page spreads, this is a welcome reminder of the power of graphic novels.

Trevor Hall

Jake and Lily

Written by Jerry Spinelli Orchard (eB) £9.99 ISBN: 978-1408328415

Jake and Lily are twins and when they are eleven they decide to tell the story of their lives. So they take it in turns, chapter by chapter, describing what it is like to have a twin who knows when you are hurt or warns you of danger even though you are miles apart. However, playing hide and seek is no fun when you can't keep secrets from one another. That is until Jake makes new friends and Lily feels lost and abandoned. As their story unfolds we hear about their parents who are builders and how the twins were born in a train. We meet their hippy grandparents and the characters that make up their neighbourhood. There is humour and fun in this thoughtful book, which has the author's characteristic light touch and acute, but sensitive, observations of human nature and the quirkiness of life. Jake learns the hard way about how to be true to yourself and be a good friend rather than striving to be one of the gang. Lily's Grandfather, Poppy, has some good advice and she comes to terms with a new relationship with her twin and finds the confidence to make a friend of her own too.

Louise Stothard



The Islands of Chaldea

Written by Diana Wynne Jones Completed by Ursula Jones
HarperCollins (eB) £12.99 ISBN: 978-0007542239

Diana Wynne Jones' last book was unfinished at the time of her death, but it has been completed by her sister so brilliantly that it is impossible to spot where the change of author occurs. In this tale of magic and adventure Aileen, her Aunt Beck and two companions are sent off to rescue a kidnapped prince. Aileen is already feeling like a failure as the powers that would enable her to become a Wise Woman – like her aunt – have not appeared. Also, the mission seems to have been sabotaged by the very people who sent them. So, things don't get off to a very promising start! The little band of would-be rescuers travel from island to island meeting strange and wonderful characters as they go, until eventually, against all the odds, the final challenge has to be confronted. This captivating fantasy is full of humour and it is a joy to read. Diana Wynne Jones' imagination and wonderful storytelling will be greatly missed.

Jan Lennon



The Four Seasons of Lucy McKenzie

Written by Kirsty Murray Illustrated by Florence Boyd
Allen & Unwin (eB) £6.99 ISBN: 978-1743361245

This is a gentle and magical story, full of feeling and compassion for families, friends and the Australian bush. The very descriptive text is complemented by many lovely, evocative line illustrations. Lucy McKenzie's sister is injured in Paris, resulting in her mum going to look after her and eleven year old Lucy being sent to stay with Aunt Big. Lucy is not happy with the situation initially as Aunt Big is grumpy, the house is in the middle of nowhere and she is lonely. Then one night Lucy discovers she can walk through a painting on a wall and finds herself back in the 1930s. What ensues is a delight as the characters come to life and Lucy grows into a confident and self-assured teenager.

Ingrid Fox

A Boy Called Hope

Written by Lara Williamson
Usborne (eB) £6.99 ISBN: 978-1409570318

Dan Hope is eleven and lives with his mother and sixteen year old sister. His Dad, who left four years ago, has now achieved his aim of becoming a TV presenter and has suddenly become a presence in their home again, on the TV screen after school. This prompts Dan to revive his long-held hope of reconciliation – he needs his Dad back. So begins Dan's attempts to re-establish contact with his Dad. He can't believe he won't be interested, but sister Grace is much more realistic. This is a well-written story charting the ups and downs of family and school life. The characterisation is good, and the plot twists are inventive. Before long the reader is ahead of Dan viewing the situation from a more informed viewpoint, and guessing the plotline before it is finally revealed, but never losing touch with the main character, who wins our sympathies early on and sustains them throughout. This is an excellent read, in which complex family relationships are handled sensitively, and with realism, so giving the reader plenty to think about.

Liz Dubber



Counting By 7s

Written by Holly Goldberg Sloan
Piccadilly (eB) £6.99 ISBN: 978-1848123823

Willow, aged twelve, is different: obsessive and very bright, and probably Asperger's. She is a delight and it is quite shattering when her lovely, supportive, understanding parents are suddenly killed in a car crash. From then on Willow, a Vietnamese American, is in the system and the system doesn't understand. Luckily, and luck comes into this a lot, Willow has friends. But they are a motley crew! There is school-friend Mia, who takes her home to Mum, Pattie, and brother, Quang-ha. They live in a garage. There's a taxi driver called Jairo and a well-meaning, but useless, counsellor called Dell who proves very useful. Together they beat the system by getting it to work for them. It is a heart-warming story about thoroughly decent, imperfect people helping each other. It's about the part chance plays in life but mostly it's about Willow's zest for life, her wisdom and her determination not to go under.

Julia Jarman

Brilliant

Written by Roddy Doyle Macmillan (eB) £10.99 ISBN: 978-1447248804

Gloria and Raymond have had to share a bedroom since Uncle Ben lost his business and house. Uncomfortable and sleepless, they sneak downstairs to listen secretly to their parents' talk of the 'Black Dog' of



depression hanging over recession-hit Dublin. Determined to help Uncle Ben and cheer everyone up again, they set off to find the 'Black Dog' only to discover that it is no ordinary dog, but a huge, breath-sucking black fog of misery which reduces you to feeling completely useless. Throughout the story, a growing band of children, animals and birds pursue the ravaging, monstrous creature which targets their weaknesses and menaces them mercilessly. They are saved by laughter, jokes and a determined cry of, "Brilliant!" just as they face defeat. As the children at last manage to disperse the creature, people begin to refind their lost selves. The story is fused with a kind of wry, unexpected, feel-good humour. A parable for our times, showing how fears should be faced and courage tested with determination, kindness and a precious sense of humour. An unforgettable book with laughter at its heart and a very funny, satisfying resolution. Brilliant!

Tina Massey

My Name is Parvana

Written by Deborah Ellis
OUP (eB) £6.99 ISBN: 978-0192734044

Deborah Ellis continues the story of Parvana, the central character of her *Breadwinner* trilogy. The novel moves between Parvana being held in custody at an American army base under suspicion of terrorism, and her memories of the opening of the school for girls that she and her family had worked so hard to establish. As the story develops Parvana remains silent in front of her captors, revealing nothing – even when to do so may secure her freedom. Meanwhile, she remembers more and more of the difficulties that faced the school – most notably local opposition to the education of girls and women. As one of the characters notes it is not realistic to have a happy ending in Afghanistan and this is a story that includes death, injustice and fear alongside hope, selflessness, caring and high ideals. It is a short narrative, but due to the subject matter is ideal for older readers to gain some insight into the complexities of life in Afghanistan. The fact that the author has travelled in the region and spoken to local people adds an authenticity to Parvana's story.

Annalise Taylor



Girl with a White Dog

Written by Anne Booth Catnip £6.99 ISBN: 978-1846471810

Things are difficult for Jess as her father's business failed due to "foreign workers doing jobs for less money". They lost their house and her Dad had to go abroad to get work. Jess has always wanted a dog so when her beloved Gran gets a white Alsatian puppy, Jess thinks this will make up for all the horrible things going on in her life. When Jess' class begins studying the holocaust, she sees worrying similarities in the treatment being given to the local migrant families and those who are disabled or different in some way. A very powerful novel, exploring issues of racism, bullying and disability and done in a clear and simple, but effective, way, making them very understandable to children of today, but without diluting the strength of the message. The themes are very topical and all this is wrapped up in a moving and very readable story. The characters are well drawn, language is very accessible and the threads of the story are woven together extremely well. It is a remarkable debut. Don't be fooled by the fact it looks like a slim volume, because it is definitely a book that punches above its weight.

Annie Everall

Summer's Shadow

Written by Anna Wilson Macmillan (eB) £6.99 ISBN: 978-1447241812

Summer can't believe what is happening to her. Her mother is dead, and if that isn't bad enough, before she died she appointed a distant relative, who Summer has never met, as her guardian. Her new life at Bosleven, an old house near Penzance, is hard to get used to. Her guardian and uncle,



Tristan, seems sad and distracted. Also, her cousin, Kennan, is angry and never loses an opportunity to be unkind. Only her new friend, Zach, and the magical landscape around the house, make her life bearable. Summer knows she must get Tristan to answer some hard questions about their family before she can cope with the future. A fast-paced novel of young love and complex family issues.

Marianne Adey

Magic Marks the Spot

Written by Caroline Carlson
Simon & Schuster (eB) £6.99 ISBN: 978-0857078278

Magic Marks The Spot is the first book in the new exciting series featuring the 'Very Nearly Honourable League of Pirates'. It is Hilary's lifelong ambition to become a pirate, but the VNHL have denied her application just because she is a girl. Instead, Hilary is forced to attend 'Miss Pimm's Finishing School for Delicate Ladies'. However, as well as being brave, Hilary is also very resourceful and doesn't let waltzing and fainting lessons get in the way of her destiny. Caroline Carlson has created wonderful characters: Hilary, a feisty young girl determined to follow her dreams; Miss Greyson, her quite surprising governess; several madcap pirates and a particularly evil bad guy. But the standout character is Hilary's faithful Gargoyle, who adds the comic relief when the story gets more serious with the relationship between Hilary and her father. The treasure hunting adventures are fun and exciting, making it a real page-turner. Between chapters, we are also treated to copies of letters and newspaper articles, which all add to the enjoyment. A rollicking good read.

Jane Hall



The Executioner's Daughter

Written by Jane Hardstaff Egmont (eB) £6.99
ISBN: 978-1405268288

Moss is tired of collecting the heads of prisoners on execution day, even though her father is the executioner at the Tower of London. Moss is desperate to leave the Tower and experience real life. When she discovers a hidden tunnel, she finds out that life outside is harder than she realised. Her search for her own roots leads Moss on a journey across the social strata of Tudor life, from mudlarks on the banks of the Thames to the court of Henry VIII as Anne Boleyn falls from favour. Jane Hardstaff plunges the reader into a gripping adventure as Moss begins the painful process of growing up. This novel has everything from intrigue and hidden passages to friendship and courtly glamour, with a good dose of superstition, thievery and a River Witch thrown in for good measure.

Benjamin Scott

A Foot in the Grave

Written by Joan Aiken Illustrated by Jan Pieńkowski
Jonathan Cape (R) £12.99 ISBN: 978-0857550651

First published in 1989, these eight short stories originated from a series of menacing paintings by renowned children's illustrator, Jan Pieńkowski. A ghostly figure stretching out its hands into a foggy night, a dimly lit path below a canal bridge where shadows lurk, white fingers poking out from a spiral staircase. Add the imagination of skilled fantasy writer, Joan Aiken, and you have a striking collection of haunting tales, where atmosphere, intrigue and suspense are produced not by blood and gore, but by the evocation of smells, sounds and ominous scenes. It's like reading a black and white Hitchcock film on paper. In several of the tales greedy, selfish people are caught out when they meddle in forces beyond their control. Admirers of fine collections of ghost tales will find much to appreciate here.

Richard Monte

