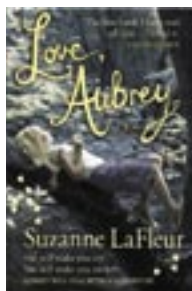


Satisfying novels



Love, Aubrey

Written by Suzanne LaFleur
Puffin Books £9.99
ISBN: 978-0141326870

Aubrey is eleven years old. She has survived a car crash that killed her father and sister, and left her mother unable to cope. When her mother

abandons her she has to go and stay with her grandmother, and it is with her that she receives the love, friendship and support she needs to start the healing process. This is a very well-written book, peopled with three-dimensional characters and having a quality that reminds me of the writing of Cynthia Voigt and Sharon Creech. I found *Love, Aubrey* a compelling and sensitive study of bereavement and the process of grieving and recovery. Despite the fact that it is primarily about coping with loss, it is a positive and rewarding read.

Gill MacDonald

The Stone Menagerie

Written by Anne Fine
Corgi (R) £4.99
ISBN: 978-0552555942

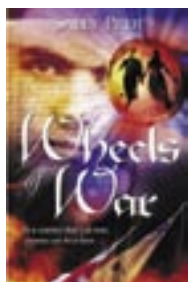
This is a short book but contains a warm mix of characters and recognisable issues carefully portrayed and resolved. Ally has a troubled relationship with his overbearing mother and is finding it hard to establish his own identity. Each Sunday he endures boring visits to his Aunt Chloe who, withdrawn and uncommunicative, is being cared for at a psychiatric hospital. One Sunday, as he looks from the window across the hospital grounds, he is surprised to see a colourful figure gardening in what he thought was inaccessible swampy waste ground beyond the lake. He cannot resist going to investigate and meets two people who are very different to his usual acquaintances. Following events prove that Ally can make decisions and take a purposeful role. He finds confidence in himself and, hopefully, establishes a happier relationship with his mother. A book to read all in one sitting from cover to cover and end by wishing for more.

Louise Stothard

Wheels of War

Written by Sally Prue
Oxford University Press £5.99 ISBN: 978-0192754394

This is a story about war. Set at the time of the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, it tells of a family



who find themselves positioned between opposing forces. As the sounds of battle draw ever closer, they eventually – full of misgivings – set off in search of safety at their second home in the countryside. All their treasured possessions are

piled on to a much overloaded wagon and the inevitable happens. Chaos ensues, but a saviour emerges in the shape of Will Nunn, the lowest servant in the whole entourage. He had entertained thoughts of becoming a soldier himself – inspired by the son of the household – but the charms and needs of Rosie, a fellow servant, held him back. Skilfully written, this novel charts the effect war has on both soldiers and civilians, giving both sides of the story. In so doing it evokes both sympathy and understanding.

Jenny Blanch

Dark Angels

Written by Katharine Langrish
HarperCollins £6.99 ISBN: 978-0007214891

The misty valleys and bleak hills of medieval Wales are the setting for Katharine Langrish's latest novel. As with the *Troll* series, it is a book filled with darkness and light, complemented by a cast of unusual characters including Wolf, the headstrong boy on the run from Wenford Abbey and Elfgift, the 'dark angel' who he finds hidden in a mine on Devil's Edge. Like Wolf, we begin to wonder if there really is another world down there beyond the passages of the mine. If so, was Lord Hugo's wife really stolen by the elves or is he just searching for a way to be reunited with her, unable to come to terms with her death? This is a book which asks some big questions about life and death and our passage beyond this world. Yet at the same time it is a story full of magic, charm, and ultimately, hope.

Richard Monte

No Way to Go

Written by Bernard Ashley
Orchard Books £5.99 ISBN: 978-1408302392

Another gripping thriller from an author who is always top-of-the-class. The setting is London's tough Thames Reach Estate and the convincing story details everyday life in the high-rise flats – dysfunctional families, crime, gang-warfare and drug trafficking. When Amber's brother, ten-year-



old Connor Long, is found dead at the bottom of a block of flats – apparently having fallen from a balcony – she is convinced he has been murdered and sets out to prove it. When a local reporter, Sunil Dunhillon, reveals that the boy had odd coloured laces in his shoes,

Amber is convinced her theory is right. But she is a bright girl, with real ability and a university career within her reach. Becoming involved with the seedy low life all around, when she links up with Sunil to uncover the truth, makes her face difficult choices that will secure her future – trapped in poverty or an escape to a better life? Ashley pulls no punches in this fast-moving, totally credible story. He proves, with no gratuitous violence, that this excellent novel will satisfy both old and new fans.

David Blanch

The Happiness of Kati

Written by Jane Vejjajiva
Translated by Prudence Borthwick
Allen & Unwin £5.99 ISBN: 978-1741147537

Kati lives with her grandparents by a canal in Thailand. She is very happy, but misses her mother who she hasn't seen since she was four. When the time is right her grandparents take her on a long journey to the sea, to where Kati's mother is dying of muscular dystrophy. Surrounded by the love of a supportive family, Kati spends precious last moments with her mother and learns about why her mother felt compelled to leave. With her mother gone, Kati has one more question to answer. Beautifully written and simply expressed, poignant without being sentimental, this poetic novel has been made into a feature film.

Jackie Marchant

Girlfriends, Boys Will Be Boys



Written by Jean Ure
Orchard Books £4.99
ISBN: 978-1408303023

Polly and her three friends are looking forward to a day out in Hastings with their boyfriends, but making all the arrangements is more difficult than she thought! First one relationship falls apart then another breaks up. And later her own boyfriend disgraces her in public. Polly learns some

unexpected lessons about what true friendship is all about in this easily accessible, coming-of-age novel.

Marianne Adey

Theatre Shoes

Written by Noel Streatfeild

Jane Nissen Books (R) £7.99 ISBN: 978-1903252321



Originally published in 1944 under the rather more fitting title of *Curtain Up*, this follow-on from the universally popular *Ballet Shoes* – like its predecessor – is a story about a family fallen on hard times and thrown, without warning, into the unusual surroundings of stage school.

For a book that is over sixty-years-old, *Theatre Shoes* remains remarkably fresh. Unsurprisingly some of the language has dated, but it reads more like a colourful historical novel than an outmoded antiquity. The hopes, fears and insecurities of its central characters are as pertinent to today's readership as when they were conceived six decades ago. Three siblings are torn from their sheltered existence in a country vicarage to live in London and each struggles to adapt to their new life: Mark, whose ambitions to join the Navy are kiboshed by his haughty Grandmother (who cannot imagine a life beyond the stage); Sorrell, the eldest sibling is desperate to fit in and terribly intimidated by her cousin's legendary talent and Holly, the youngest, retreats into her imagination – occasionally with unfortunate consequences. Though primarily concerned with the eccentric world of theatre, the book's London war time setting is also vividly evoked. On top of the challenges they face at the Academy, the three children must also contend with the trials of poverty, rationing and having a father who is missing in action. Any child who has dreamed of treading the boards will relish this enchanting rites of passage, though it would be just as enjoyable to the less theatrically inclined.

Rowan Stanfield

Skulduggery Pleasant: The Faceless Ones

Written by Derek Landy
HarperCollins £6.99
ISBN: 978-0007302147

One of the most anticipated books this year for some children. A darker feel to this third book in the series; still full of fun, thrills, horror, mystery and murder but not for the timid or fainthearted. Skulduggery's enemies are trying to raise 'The Faceless Ones' – a familiar evil force to regular readers, but he, along with his faithful and feisty assistant, fourteen-year-old Valerik, have other ideas. Derek Landy's relaxed style of writing



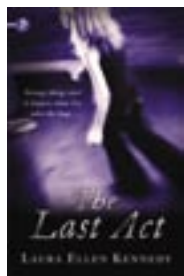
makes the book appear to be easy reading. His trademark humour is clearly evident, particularly in the unrelenting banter between his convincing characters with their wonderfully imaginative names. The shock finale will have old and new fans eagerly counting the days to their next instalment.

Jane Hall

The Last Act

Written by Laura Ellen Kennedy

Piccadilly £6.99 ISBN: 978-1848120136



Zoe loves to act and when she lands a key role in a theatre production she is thrilled. She has a great part and makes loads of new friends. However, when Zoe takes to the stage strange things start to happen and she experiences dizziness,

blackouts and nightmares. Zoe has no idea what is happening to her. Only Jack, the quiet and good-looking stagehand, seems to realise that something significant is going on. Together they uncover a tale from the past but will its discovery really help Zoe? This is a riveting read – full of mystery and combined with a ghost story that makes it both engaging and satisfying. Readers cannot help but empathise with Zoe's plight and it is this, as well as good writing, which keeps the reader hooked throughout.

Anna Elliott

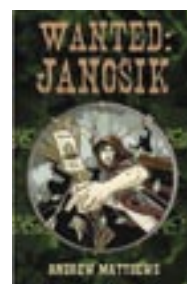
Hacking Timbuktu

Written by Stephen Davies

Andersen Press £5.99 ISBN: 978-1842708842

Danny Temple, sixteen, is a traceur and a hacker. Traceurs practise parkeur or urban free running and jumping – useful when you're being pursued by a bizarre and alarming group called *The Knights of Akonio Dolo*. They are determined to retrieve a treasure map locating a million pounds worth of gold, stolen long ago in Timbuktu. Danny has just returned from a hackers' convention in London when his flat is broken into and he is almost killed by a stranger who demands Danny's expertise to find lost treasure. Danny and his friend, Omar, use all their hacking skills to work out the riddles and puzzles in the manuscript as they travel from London to remote Mali. They experience lots of parkeur on the way, evading their enemies in a fast-moving, cinematic narrative. It's very much about the fascination of problem solving and the almost dreamlike state attained by the adrenaline blast of parkeur. Unusual and memorable, it will make you want to be a traceur yourself.

Tina Massey



Wanted: Janosik

Written by Andrew Matthew
Illustrated by Dylan Gibson
Barrington Stoke £5.99
ISBN: 978-1842996126

This story could be the perfect way to get boys, not so keen on reading, interested in books. The hero, Janosik, was an

outlaw living somewhere in the Tatra Mountains between Poland and Slovakia. He was a bit like a Slavic Robin Hood; born into a world where the rich lord it over the poor, witness to injustice at a young age and determined to redress the balance of power by robbing from the wealthy and giving to the needy. In the nineteenth century, with the resurgence of Pan-Slavism, Janosik acquired legendary status and became a national hero. In this version, packed with action, adventure and a little magic, he's on the run from the authorities and a wanted poster offering a reward for his capture has been circulated. The 'graphic novel' style illustrations are a perfect accompaniment to the story; the only point of contention is that some might claim Janosik was a Slovak. There has always been a battle between the two countries for his birthright. A point emphasised in a forthcoming Polish film, where half the actors are Slovakian!

Richard Monte

Salem Brownstone: All Along the Watchtowers

Written by John Harris Dunning

Illustrated by Nikhil Singh

Walker Books £15.00 ISBN: 978-1406320527

This gothic, graphic novel tells the story of Salem Brownstone in a modern and imaginative way. His life is thrown into turmoil when he inherits the fortunes of his often absent father. As soon as he enters the family mansion, Salem discovers how little he knew about him – he was not the man he thought he was. He realises that it is not just worldly possessions he stands to inherit, but also an ongoing battle against some dark, otherworldly forces. Though the odds are stacked against him, with support from his father's strange companions, it might just be a battle he can win. Although the story is spellbinding, it is only one part of this unique book. Despite the illustrations being entirely black and white, the details are spectacular leading to pages that are hypnotic, setting the tone for the words perfectly. Weird and wonderful in equal measure, this book is like no other.

Tom Shembry

