



The Ghosts of Heaven

Written by Marcus Sedgwick
Indigo (eB) £5.99 ISBN: 978-1780622217

This is a breathtaking, ingenious work of the complex portrayal of four characters, beautifully linked through the universal symbol of a spiral. The four separate stories can be read in any order, giving twenty-four possible combinations all leading to a stunning conclusion no matter which story is read last. The stories are set in different eras telling of a prehistoric girl in the time of hunter-gatherers, a young girl accused of witchcraft, a poet in a lunatic asylum and a futuristic spaceman aboard a spaceship of humans on the way to inhabit a new planet. The writing evokes anger, compassion and sadness in equal measures and just a sense of general intrigue into how all of these lives connect with each other, despite their distance in history. Powerful storytelling through the examination of philosophy, science and nature, and the human race's fight for survival.

Nicole Jordan

Running Girl

Written by Simon Mason
David Fickling (eB) £12.99 ISBN: 978-0857560582

Garvie Smith's single mum works hard and loves him dearly but despairs of his laziness and total lack of ambition. He has the highest IQ ever recorded at his school combined with extremely low achievement. He's attractive, popular with his schoolmates but can't see the point of working hard. Just as his mum declares a non-negotiable alternative of his attending lessons or returning to Barbados, the murder of an ex-girlfriend, Chloe Dow, distracts him once more. Garvie's intelligence may keep him one step ahead of the beleaguered DI Singh in uncovering the clues, but he lacks commonsense in really dangerous situations, resulting in his being hunted and professionally beaten in a dark alley far from home. Garvie learns much of the dead Chloe's hidden life, as themes of sexual abuse and exploitation emerge. Self realisation occurs much later, and there is an arresting passage when he finally feels what torment he has inflicted on his mum. Unpredictable, full of emergent clues, extremely credible characters and a really world-weary, highly irritating hero who keeps you reading and helps you understand the pressures of modern urban adolescence.

Tina Massey

Shadow of the Wolf

Written by Tim Hall David Fickling (eB) £10.99 ISBN: 978-1910200001



This different and unexpected re-telling of the Robin Hood story is a violent and bloody tale of evil, survival, loyalty and love. Young Robin is abandoned in the forest but learns to survive. He makes an unlikely friend in the wild, reckless Lady Marion, who rebels against the quiet life expected of her. The two forge an inseparable bond which makes it all the more devastating when Marion is forced to return to the life of a Lady. Robin's life changes too as he joins the house of Lord Bors and trains to be a Squire, learning valuable fighting skills. However, the increasing threat of the powerful Sheriff of Nottingham looms over them all. The tale takes a strange twist as Robin suffers inhuman cruelty and retreats to the forest where he finds help in an unexpected way. This is not an easy read and the examples of unfathomable cruelty are hard to bear at times. Both Robin and Marion are tainted by the evil done to them and are in danger of being taken over by this. The descriptions of the forest are fascinating, the language well chosen and the style compelling.

Louise Stothard



Trouble

Written by Non Pratt Walker (eB) £6.99
ISBN: 978-1406347692

Hannah hates doing homework, argues with her Mum and loves her little step sister. She also likes boys, hanging about the park with her friends and enjoys sex. But life takes an unexpected turn when Hannah discovers that she is pregnant. Aaron has joined Hannah's school and has a secret to hide. He is trying to start afresh and be part of the gang. As Aaron and Hannah become friends, she tells him about the baby and he, unexpectedly, offers to say that he is the father. The casual attitude to sex by some of the youngsters is sad and disturbing but there is a refreshingly honest admission that boys are attractive and sex can be fun and the issues are handled sensitively. This story has a strong theme about friendship and loyalty as Hannah is let down by the people she hoped would stand by her and Aaron finds an unexpected friend and confidant. Hannah and Aaron tell their story turn by turn and their voices and characters are clear and attractive. They are characters we want to know more about, and as they come to terms with all that life throws at them, their tale is compelling.

Louise Stothard

Messenger of Fear

Written by Michael Grant
Electric Monkey (eB) £12.99 ISBN: 978-1405265157

Mara has no idea where she is except it is somewhere between life and death. All she knows is that the tattooed ghost-like figure in front of her is about to become her mentor, teaching her the obligations she has agreed to in her role as apprentice 'Messenger of Fear'. Mara travels with him back in time to look into the lives of two victims as she watches a suicide and a murder. The role of the Messenger is to serve out retribution to each of the characters responsible for these sins and they have to pay for their conscious evil actions. What Mara witnesses is horrific, but she can't understand why she is being subjected to this torturous existence until the painful truth is revealed to her at the end. Containing descriptions of graphic torture and violence throughout, so not for the easily disturbed reader.

Nicole Jordan



Tease

Written by Amanda Maciel Hodder (eB) £6.99 ISBN: 978-1444918717



An intimate account of schoolyard and social media bullying that leaves a group of teenagers facing criminal charges when their victim commits suicide. The action shifts between the events that led up to the discovery of Emma's body and the present day. Sara, one of the bullies, divides her time between lawyers and a therapist as she prepares to face the court case. She takes us with her through the struggle to come to terms with what she did, moving from denial and anger at the unfairness of the charge to the slow realisation that she was, in part, responsible. Sara is an ordinary teenager, with an ordinary teenager's sense of disconnection from family and intense relationships outside home. What she doesn't see is that her best friend, the beautiful and wealthy Brielle, is damaged and controlling. By the time Sara begins to realise that they have gone too far, she doesn't know how to stop. This beautifully written debut novel, despite being set in the USA, would be well placed on every secondary school curriculum for its searingly honest and convincing portrayal of where bullying comes from, and where it can lead.

Yvonne Coppard