

### Razia's Ray of Hope

Written by Elizabeth Suneby Illustrated by Suana Verelst Wayland £8.99 ISBN: 978-0750295789

Razia is a young girl living in Afghanistan who longs to go to school. News arrives of a school for girls being built in the village, but Razia must overcome the opposition of her brothers and father before she has a chance of receiving an education. Readers are drawn into Razia's world and gently informed of the obstacles in her path, as well as the ways in which her education and that of other girls will benefit the whole community and family. Sensitively told, with useful features such as a glossary, further activities and interesting facts about female education, this is a simple, but very inspiring, narrative based on a true story. Illustrations by Suana Verelst complement the text with a sophisticated mix of photo collage, sketches and vignettes. Although a picture book, the subtitle and theme of this book – *One Girl's Dream of an Education* – make it most suitable for older children who have come to value their educational opportunities. Highly recommended.

Lucy Russell

### The Misadventures of Max Crumbly: Locker Hero

Written by Rachel Renée Russell Simon & Schuster £6.99 ISBN: 978-1471144622

*The Misadventures of Max Crumbly: Locker Hero* is the first in a new series by bestselling *Dork Diaries* author, Rachel Renée Russell. Max Crumbly has, unhappily, long been home-schooled by his eccentric grandmother, a retired teacher. He is thrilled when his parents decided to send him to South Ridge Middle School. But Max has attracted the attention of school bully, Doug, who, as the book opens, has just stuffed Max into his locker. If only Max had the superpowers of his beloved superheroes, his life would be so different. This is an entertaining read about Max's funny, and not-so-funny, escapades at his new school. He is just trying to find his way, determined to succeed to avoid being home-schooled again. Many readers will be able to identify with Max: not fitting in at a new school; not knowing how to talk to the opposite sex; having to deal with school bullies; suffering from asthma and panic attacks; and with a love of superhero comics. There are detailed illustrations throughout, many full page, which are equally as funny as the text, making this an ideal read for reluctant readers.

Jane Hall



### His Royal Whiskers

Written by Sam Gayton Illustrated by Peter Cottrill Andersen £6.99 ISBN: 978-1783443826

The Czar of Petrossia is a mighty ruler who loves conquering everything including crowns, cities and countries. He is determined his son and only heir, Prince Alexander, will follow in his footsteps, even though he is only six years old. So, when a magic potion transforms Alexander into a fluffy kitten, it is a catastrophe, especially as it is also a potion to make things grow very large. Teresa and Pieter, responsible for brewing it, have to come up with the antidote and quickly. Alexander's gigantic size is threatening the whole of the kingdom. Sam Gayton weaves inventive word-play with the fairytale tradition to create a fast-moving and

humorous fantasy adventure. The story pops and fizzes with magic and mayhem, as secrets are revealed and dangers overcome in a fully realised alternative world. The story also links to one of Sam Gayton's earlier books, *Herculeas*, another riotous adventure which is definitely worth reading.

Jayne Gould

### Rose Campion and the Curse of the Doomstone

Written by Lyn Gardner Illustrated by Jez Tuya Nosy Crow £6.99 ISBN: 978-0857638441

Readers may already have met the spirited Rose in *Rose Campion and the Stolen Secret*. In this second adventure Rose and her pals at Campion's Palace of Varieties and Wonders, a musical hall in Southwark, once again have a series of mysteries to solve after a magnificent diamond is stolen during a magic show. There seems to be plenty of suspects and the plot gets even more troublesome when first one person disappears and then another is found in the river. Rose has to look deeper into the past life of everyone at the theatre. Lots of people, from all walks of life, pass through Campion's and they all have a story to tell or secrets to hide. This wonderfully entertaining story is full of twists and turns and the exuberant backdrop of the Victorian music hall is perfect for the introduction of a large cast of unusual and colourful characters. The darker side of Victorian London is not ignored but it is the fun and excitement of the music hall that will keep readers enthralled until the mystery is finally solved.

Jan Lennon



### My Name is Victoria

Written by Lucy Worsley Bloomsbury £6.99 ISBN: 978-1408882016

There's no telling what might happen when the eleven-year-old Miss V, is chosen to be a companion to the young Princess Alexandrina Victoria, sole heir to the English throne. She is taken by her father, Sir John Conroy, to meet the princess at Kensington Palace, with instructions to report to him on every conversation she has. Despite the princess' dislike and distrust of her new companion's father, who controls her mother's household, a friendship develops between the two. The story takes unexpected turns as the two girls grow closer. Lucy Worsley's portrayal of Sir John is sympathetic, whilst leaving the reader in no doubt as to his harshness. She creates a world which brings the period to life, portraying the power struggle surrounding Queen Victoria during her formative years. Overall, this is an insightful tale, well-told and certain to engage the reader's imagination.

Elizabeth Hancock

### The Road to Ever After

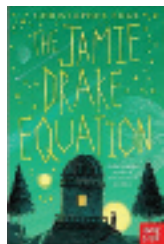
Written by Moira Young Macmillan £9.99 ISBN: 978-1509832583

This magical story has a three-act structure. In the first act we meet Davy David, an orphan surviving on the edge of Brownvale, a small-town run by an autocratic preacher. The second act is a remarkable road trip as Davy chauffeurs the guardian of the town museum back to her childhood home, with events becoming stranger and more inexplicable as each page turns. The third act delivers Davy and his passenger safely at their destination

but with further secrets to unravel. In terms of time and place the setting is difficult to pin down and describe, yet as a reader you, at no time, feel unsure of yourself. The author creates a well-defined cast of characters and landmarks in the depressed and suppressed small town. Our central characters are particularly well drawn. Davy is curious, principled and artistically talented as he draws angels in the dust of the town - the only medium available to him. His travelling companion, Miss Elizabeth Flint, is formidable and commanding, setting him off on a journey that suits her purposes but, simultaneously, ensures his escape from the confines of Brownvale. This book is one that defies categorisation and is all the stronger for it.



Annalise Taylor



## The Jamie Drake Equation

Written by Christopher Edge  
Nosy Crow £6.99 ISBN: 978-0857638403

Jamie's dad is an astronaut aboard the orbiting International Space Station working on a project to try and discover alien lifeforms on other planets. Also, he is about to undertake a spacewalk on Jamie's eleventh birthday. But, Jamie, rather than being excited, is lonely, missing him very much when he is away from home for long periods. One night he goes to the local observatory and, through charging his phone, inadvertently picks up an alien connection. So, when the space mission goes horribly wrong, Jamie must convince the professor at the university to help him try to save his dad. This contemporary story is pacy and full of interesting space facts, science and maths problems. The storyline, the characters, the science all seem very real. It is exciting and tense - perfect for any reader who loves looking up into the sky and wondering, "Is anyone else out there?"

Ingrid Fox

## The Everything Machine

Written by Ally Kennen  
Scholastic £6.99 ISBN: 978-1407138558

Siblings Ollie, Stevie and Bird can't believe their luck when their delivery, which was supposed to be a rabbit hutch, turns out to be a 3D printer, that has a name and can speak. When they open it, there is a piece of paper inside which says 'Russell: 1,000,000 Prototype Property of NASA & MOD'. This doesn't stop them though, as they realise that Russell, can print them anything they like. So, they get started, asking him to print them five thousand sweets, a swimming pool and finally a new dad. Their dad has left, so they're all missing him but what Russell creates is not quite what they had in mind. This robot, or Dad-Bot, ends up causing havoc in its quest to make their mum happy, which is all the children want. Throughout the story, MI5 are trying to trace Russell and they finally manage to track him down. They are ready to press the self-destruct button which would blow him up and anything nearby, including Ollie, Stevie, Bird, Mum and baby Ella. Can Dad-Bot come to the rescue in time? This is an action-packed adventure, full of great characters and a crazy plotline.



Nicole Jordan



## The Elephant Thief

Written by Jane Kerr  
Chicken House £6.99 ISBN: 978-1910655757

Pickpocket Danny is given his chance to escape from poverty and crime, but only if he can help win a bet for Mr Jameson, owner of the Belle Vue Zoological Gardens. Disguised as a lost Indian prince, Danny must ride Maharajah, an elephant he accidentally bid for in an auction, from Edinburgh to Manchester in a week. Danny, Maharajah and the

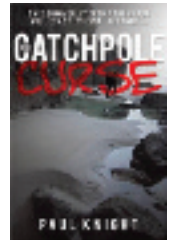
Zoological Gardens become part of Mr Jameson's dangerous pursuit of publicity, and not everyone wants to see Mr Jameson succeed. Someone is willing to go to deadly lengths to put an end to Maharajah's travels. For Danny, the journey is about starting a new life as a growing bond with his unlikely new friend develops along the way. Based on a true story, Jane Kerr weaves an exciting tale of adventure, animals and a last-minute royal reprieve. The novel is also a good prompt to think about the modern uses of publicity and how companies can manipulate the news for their own interest.

Benjamin Scott

## The Catchpole Curse

Written by Paul Knight  
Matador £8.99 ISBN: 978-1785899843

The Catchpole twins, Ben and Emma, are spending what could be their last summer holiday at Penrose, the Cornish house that has been in their family for hundreds of years. Nearly two hundred years before, a curse was allegedly laid on their family as a punishment for an ancestor being accused of betraying the free-traders, or smugglers, to the Excise men, and it seems as if this summer will see the curse fulfilled. As twins, they can communicate with each other without speech, a skill that proves very useful as the summer progresses and the past begins to dominate their activities. A fall down an abandoned mineshaft brings them face-to-face with a pair of family twins from two hundred years ago. The two sets of twins seem to merge with each other when Ben and Emma are taken back as eye-witnesses to the time when the curse was laid. They become convinced that the accusation is false and they set out to find the truth. This is a fantastic book, fast-moving, exciting and full of mystery and suspense. Brilliant.



Pat Thompson



## Fish Boy

Written by Chloe Daykin Illustrated by Richard Jones  
Faber & Faber £9.99 ISBN: 978-0571328222

Twelve-year-old Billy Shiel is a loner, a bit of a *weirdo* with a double fixation on David Attenborough and sea swimming. Fish Boy is the nickname used by Jamie Watts and his mates, who steal his possessions and taunt him at school. At home, things are equally uncomfortable, with his mother confined to her bed and his dad always working extra hours to pay the bills. Billy finds solace in sea swimming, where he communicates with a talking mackerel. It is difficult to describe this eccentric, quirky story, but it is a joy to read - complex, funny and thoughtful. Chloe Daykin uses a bizarre supernatural experience to explore the deeper metaphorical truth of a troubled young boy coming to terms with himself and his family situation.

Yvonne Coppard

## There May Be a Castle

Written by Piers Torday  
Quercus £12.99 ISBN: 978-1848668621

One stormy Christmas Eve, eleven-year-old Mouse, his two sisters and mum are travelling to visit his grandparents. When the car unexpectedly crashes, Mouse is hurled through the windscreen and begins his surreal journey to find a mythical castle. Armed with a sword he doesn't know how to use, a snippy one-eyed horse called Nonky and a sheep called Bar, because that's all she does, Mouse must be his very bravest, his most adventurous self, if he is to complete his quest. A fantastical and surprising allegory, *There May Be a Castle* is unlike any other book for children dealing with the subjects of death, family and the power to shape your own stories. Heart-warming, heart-wrenching and, at times, quite bizarre, this is another fantastical tale from Piers Torday, and not one to miss.



Rebecca Watts