

Titles to engage young readers



**Tashi and the Wicked Magician**

Written by Anna Fienberg Illustrated by Barbara Fienberg  
Allen & Unwin £4.99 ISBN: 978-1743368602

This is the third book in the Tashi series, and it takes the form of four different adventures of mystery and magic experienced and narrated by Tashi and his family. The first story describes Tashi's meeting with a magician who turns out to be very bad and very, very greedy. Then there is a haunted house and a rather egotistical singer – Tashi saves them all when the singer's moody candles set fire to the house! The third story relates to Tashi's encounter with some nasty and persistent orchid thieves, who will stop at nothing to get their hands on that rare species. The final story describes an Emperor's quest to find the bravest person in the land by pitching contestants up against the fire-breathing Red Whiskered Dragon – and yes, Tashi gets involved in the contest of course. These are four wonderfully presented stories, brought to life in such an imaginative and colourful manner by the author, Anna Fienberg. This magical narrative is further brought to life by the fantastic illustrations, created by Barbara Fienberg. All children should have mystery, magic, and of course Tashi in their lives.

Allister Jordan

**Dory Fantasmagory**

Written by Abby Hanlon  
Faber & Faber £6.99 ISBN: 978-0571325580

Dory's older brother and sister, Luke and Violet, think she's a baby and don't want to play with her. They call her Rascal and just want her to be somewhere else. However, Dory does not need them as she has a host of imaginary friends and a wealth of stories in which to deploy them. Young readers will need to differentiate between what is going on in Dory's highly active imagination and what is happening in reality, but providing this window into a creative child's head is playful, fun and fresh. Look out for other wacky and hilarious titles about Dory Fantasmagory, *Dory Dory Black Sheep* and *The Real True Friend*. Simple, clear, black and white drawings are peppered throughout, providing visual explanation of Dory's friends and adding humour to readable texts. The illustrations, together with the short chapters, make these manageable and entertaining titles for newly independent readers.

Lucy Russell



**Nelly and the Flight of the Sky Lantern**

Written by Roland Chambers Illustrated by Ella Okstad  
OUP £6.99 ISBN: 978-0192742711

Nelly returns home from finding her father at the North Pole only to discover that her mother is missing. Undaunted, Nelly sets off to search for her in a hand-knitted hot air balloon, with her beloved turtle, Columbus and her mother's wind-map as her only aids. At five thousand feet the ropes of the balloon begin to freeze, at ten thousand feet her nails turn blue and at fifteen thousand feet the air becomes so thin it was hard to breathe, but Nelly keeps thinking comforting thoughts. It is partly this precise physical description of very dangerous situations, contrasting with the fantastic events and eminently cool-headed heroine, which propels the reader onward. Nelly later dives to the ocean floor in an antique diving bell, encounters smugglers, and has many other exciting adventures. But will she ever find her mother? Beautifully written, highly original, with extraordinarily charismatic

characters, this is a book for keeps, to be read and reread, with further adventures promised. Super.

Tina Massey

**Spangles McNasty and the Tunnel of Doom**



Written by Steve Webb Illustrated by Chris Mould  
Anderson £6.99 ISBN: 978-1783445080

This is a brilliant book, with a very villainous villain, Spangles McNasty and a very heroic hero, Freddie Taylor. Spangles McNasty inherits an old rotting rollercoaster ride, called the Tunnel of Doom. It cannot possibly be used because it is in a very dangerous condition and could easily collapse. So, he hatches a plan to sell it to a very rich American. It falls to Freddie, and his two friends, Wendy and Tommy, to stop him fulfilling his dastardly plan! The storyline flows well and is full of humour. Events taking place in the dark, for example in the Ghost Train tunnel, are written in white on a black page, giving atmosphere to the text. This exciting adventure is fast-moving, with nail-biting tension. Will Freddie Taylor and his friends manage to stop Spangles McNasty and his henchman Sausage-face Pete?

Pat Thompson

**Mostly Mary**

ISBN: 978-1405281225

**All Mary**

ISBN: 978-1405281232

Written by Gwynedd Rea

Illustrated by Clara Vulliamy Egmont (R) Both £8.99



*Mostly Mary* and *All Mary* are the first two books in the *Mary Plain Adventures*, reissued this year. *Mary Plain* is a young orphan bear, living in the bear pits of Berne, at a time when this was considered an acceptable way to keep bears. Mary and her adopted family are happy in their little world where the bear cubs are taught proper bear manners by their elders. Unfortunately, Mary would sooner be playing or sleeping and consequently often gets into trouble. First published in 1930 these books have an innocent

charm. Mary is naughtier than her bear successor, Paddington, resulting in many scrapes from which she must use her wits to escape. Food and treats, including trips out, from their regular visitors, the Owl Man and The Fancy-Coat-Lady are the highlight of the bears' day and lead to more adventures. The new illustrations are delightful, with pencil drawings of all the bears and their friends throughout the books. The reissued hardback books, with gold foil covers, will appeal to new and returning readers alike.

Jane Hall

**Violet and the Smugglers**

Written by Harriet Whitehorn

Simon & Schuster £6.99 ISBN: 978-1471118999

Violet and her friends are going on holiday with her Uncle Johnny. He owns a boat and has invited them to spend the summer with him on a sailing trip around Europe. After reading about smugglers in the newspaper, she begins to think that the very shady character, who owns the boat moored next to them, just might be the villain. She and her friends decide to catch him in the act and naturally get themselves into all kinds of trouble, with everyone – with the family, with the shady captain and



with his suspicious looking friends. But do they solve the mystery? The plot is fast-moving as the children lurch from one crisis to the next. The text is very easy to read and follow. This is a very enjoyable book, with action throughout. This title is the third in this exciting series, so also look out for *Violet and the Pearl of the Orient* and *Violet and the Hidden Treasure*.

*Pat Thompson*



## Clementine Loves Red

Written by Krystyna Boglar Illustrated by Bohdan Butenko  
Pushkin £8.99 ISBN: 978-1782691181

Krystyna Boglar's telling of *Clementine Loves Red* is more like a contemporary farce, rather than a classic Polish children's story. At the end of the summer, siblings Mark, Annie and Pudding find a young girl, Macadamia, crying in the woods because she is lost. She tells her rescuers that Clementine is also lost and so, making sure Macadamia is safe, the three children set off on an adventure to find the missing Clementine. However, news of the missing girl has spread and the three young adventurers are not the only ones in the woods that night as a violent storm approaches. This is a madcap children's adventure story with brave, although somewhat reckless, children, panicking policemen, a girl with "a name that sounds like something your parents would get you to eat when you really want cake" and a sneezing car. This fun and exciting story moves on at a pace, so young readers will be kept entertained throughout as they wonder what on earth is going to happen next. Readers are unlikely to predict the end as the surprises continue to the final pages, some of them very big surprises indeed.

*Jane Hall*

## The Bookshop Girl

Written by Sylvia Bishop Illustrated by Ashley King  
Scholastic £5.99 ISBN: 978-1407159690

Property Jones lives in a small ramshackle bookshop with Michael, her brother, Netty, their mother and Gunther, the grumpy and rather forceful shop cat. They love their books and enjoy sleeping in hammocks amongst the dusty shelves, but they know that their shop is not very successful. Whilst Property loves the look, feel and touch of the books, she is hiding the secret that she is unable to read. When the family win the opportunity to run the splendid Montgomery Book Emporium, they are delighted to take over the strange and exciting shop containing themed rooms of books. But Property, Michael and Netty soon discover they have been tricked and apparently owe the rather shifty Mr. Eliot Pink a great deal of money. It takes Michael's knowledge of books and Property's keen observant eye to discover just what Mr. Pink is planning and to foil his rather dastardly schemes, and Property realises that being able to read isn't the only way to succeed. The skilfully detailed and quirky black and white illustrations add to the humour and atmosphere of this delightful and intriguing story.

*Louise Stothard*



## The Artie Conan Doyle Mysteries: The Gravediggers' Club



Written by Robert J. Harris  
Kelpies £6.99 ISBN: 978-1782503538

This series imagines Arthur Conan Doyle as a twelve-year-old boy detective before he became famous as an author and true biographical details of his life are deftly worked into the story - he was born in Edinburgh where the action of this first adventure takes place, his father was a moderately successful Victorian artist and the young boy spent seven years in a Jesuit boarding school. In this the first book, Artie, together with his best friend, Ham, must find out who the mysterious lodger staying at his family's house is and uncover the secrets of the Gravediggers' Club. There are plenty of spooky night-life outings to graveyards, picking up clues in the foggy Edinburgh streets and getting into trouble with the local police, as the two young sleuths track down the villains. The ingenious plot is rich enough to keep

you guessing until the very end. A great series to snatch the attention of reluctant readers away from screens and get them reading.

*Richard Monte*

## Good Dog McTavish

Written by Meg Rosoff Illustrated by Grace Easton  
Barrington Stoke £6.99 ISBN: 978-1781126837

Ma, fed up with cooking, cleaning, washing, rousing and generally organising her dysfunctional family, has decided to devote herself to yoga and to visit India with Pradeep, her yoga teacher. At first Ollie, twelve years old, is delighted to be rid of healthy food, fourteen-year-old Ava, deeply into philosophy, welcomes the lack of 'matriarchal oppression', whilst nine-year-old Betty frets at the piles of unwashed clothes, lost shoes, uncleared takeaway meal containers and general scruffiness of the house. She insists on adopting McTavish from the rescue centre. The dog observes, and then quietly imposes order in the house. When he refuses food, Betty makes him chicken and rice, which smells and tastes so wonderful that the takeaway-sated Peachey family even begin to cook proper meals. Meg Rosoff's writing is unexpectedly deadpan, with a kind of sideways humour that has you smiling, snorting or hooting with laughter throughout. Published by Barrington Stoke, it uses clear greyscale print on off-white paper, well-spaced and carefully set out to help dyslexics and less keen readers. Excellent.

*Tina Massey*



## The Dragon with a Chocolate Heart

Written by Stephanie Burgis  
Bloomsbury £6.99 ISBN: 978-1408880319

Aventurine is a juvenile dragon, who, having been duped into drinking enchanted hot chocolate, is trapped in human form and must find her new place in the world of humans, as an apprentice chocolatier. In the fictional pseudo-mediaeval town of Drachenburg, Aventurine wrestles with her destiny and identity, making new friends and enemies along the way. In this deeply satisfying story, different plots are cleverly woven around the central theme, and we are drawn into Aventurine's internal struggles as she tries to tame her dragon-like fiery responses to situations around her, and she learns to trust her new friends. We get a window into a dragon's thoughts, feelings and desires - who would have realised a yearning for horseflesh and treasure could be so heartfelt. Characters are convincingly penned and Stephanie Burgis' excellent prose is a pleasure to read in this refreshingly original work of fiction.

*Lucy Russell*

## The Animals of Farthing Wood

Written by Colin Dann Illustrated by Jacqueline Tettmar  
Egmont (R) £6.99 ISBN: 978-1405281805

When drought and redevelopment threaten Farthing Wood, the animals set off on a dangerous journey to find somewhere new to live. Toad promises that the White Deer Park nature reserve is the perfect place, but first they must survive towns, farmland, and a motorway. The animals, led by Fox, must negotiate differences within the group, deal with external dangers, and come to terms with their losses along the way. First published in 1979, Colin Dann's classic tale is as powerful as it was then, advocating greater respect for the wildlife with which we share our world - although much has improved, many threats remain. Alongside the environmental message is also one of co-operation, mutual respect and empathy as the animals put aside their difference for the greater good. Retaining the original illustrations, this edition comes with a new beautiful cover illustrated by Sam Usher, bonus material in the shape of a Q&A with the author and instructions to create your own little nature reserve.



*Benjamin Scott*