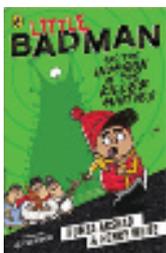


Titles to engage young readers



Little Badman and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties

Written by Humza Arshad and Henry White
Illustrated by Aleksei Bitskoff
Puffin £6.99 ISBN: 978-0241340608

What a witty and enjoyable read this turned out to be. Ten-year-old Humza (aka Little Badman) is determined to become a famous rapper. He and his friend Umer are laying down tracks with the help of the school music teacher. But something mysterious is happening – the teachers are slowly disappearing one by one. Smiling Pakistani Aunties are coming in to help, and their sole focus is on food. The children are being fattened up for something – but what? A wildly fantastic plot evolves, in which Humza's rapping talents eventually play a key role. On the way there is plenty of laugh out loud comedy as Humza negotiates the conflicting pressures of a magician uncle, a cricket-mad father, a gorilla-like headmaster, and the local adults slowly but surely being invaded by alien slugs. This is quite a long read for lower Key Stage 2 pupils, but the pace is fast, and the text gripping, so it should prove manageable and rewarding. The story cleverly includes some perceptive observations on family life and relationships too. Little Badman eventually comes to realise that his blind ambition is not worth as much as the love of family and friends.

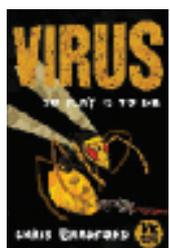
Liz Dubber

Picklewitch and Jack

Written by Claire Barker Illustrated by Teemu Juhani
Faber and Faber £6.99 ISBN: 978-0571335183

When Jack moves to a new house in the country, he's ready for a fresh start. Especially looking forward to starting at St Immaculate's school for the Gifted, he finds himself unsettled to discover that the new house is actually rather creepy. On a dark and stormy night, he plucks up the courage to peek out of the window and comes face to face with Picklewitch! This curious character, whose lunchbox contains grubs, spiders and beetles, who eats all Jack's cake, and who 'bamboozles' adults into adoring her, has decided she wants to be his friend, and when Picklewitch has made up her mind, there is 'simply no unmaking it'. She turns up at school and is everywhere he looks. Thus, follows a catastrophic and hilarious chain of events as Jack tries to rid himself of this embarrassing 'friend', but learning in the process what true friendship really is. Picklewitch is an original and intriguing character, who will amuse and warm the hearts of readers as Jack tries to escape her oddness. At 225 pages this is a substantial read but the themes are well suited to the age group. The layout and the black and white illustrations make it approachable, as well as adding humour and engaging the reader. There are a few songs, lists and notes which also make this accessible for younger readers. From the author of the *Knitbone Pepper*, *Ghost Dog* series; further adventures of Picklewitch and Jack are planned.

Lucy Russell



Virus

Written by Chris Bradford Illustrated by Anders Frang
Barrington Stoke £6.99 ISBN: 978-1781127070

This absolutely stonking book from the admirable Barrington Stoke is described as 'Super Readable', but in fact will be enjoyed by anyone who enjoys a very zippy plot, virtual reality games, martial arts or just credible, courageous characters in really scary

situations. Its readability features include cream paper, greyscale print (to reduce tiring contrast) and double line spacing to speed readers on. Virtual Kombat is a hyper-realistic fighting game where you choose your avatar and enter the battle arena, but what volunteers *don't* know is that their bodies are being used as power cells for electro robots, including huge wasps firing Stinger missiles. Scott discovers the secret of VK and its controller is determined to destroy him. How Scott resists, using techno friends and his own martial arts skills (exceptionally well described as the author is extremely skilled in these) will keep anyone reading and rooting for him. A very current page-turner which will be read, enjoyed, shared and reread. An extremely filmic novel; rich, satisfying and only 115 pages long. Exceptional.

Tina Massey



You Ain't Seen Nothing Yeti! (Nothing to see Here Hotel)

Written by Steven Butler Illustrated by Steven Lenton
Simon & Schuster £6.99 ISBN: 978-1471163852

After Frankie Bannister's first adventure, *Nothing to See Here Hotel* when he saved the enchanted family home from a goblin prince, he is now looking forward to relaxing. Meanwhile, his parents are busy planning the annual summer celebration of "Trogmanay". However, as the magical visitors start to arrive for the "Trollidays", Frankie soon realises that something is amiss as sinister events start to occur. This is a hilarious book, with equally comical illustrations, that will keep children aged 8+ entertained and laughing throughout. The imaginative descriptions of the magical hotel will make every child wish to visit it, no doubt hoping to meet some of its unconventional residents too; who wouldn't want to meet Nancy the spider cook, or Maudlin the leprechaun whose caravan is pulled by chickens, or best of all a huge "Arctic Ulk" – a furry camel-like creature. Not recommended though is the food; with the exception of thick mango chutney (loved by magical creatures) the fare on offer ranges from the disgusting sage-and-bunions stuffing to the revolting beetle-brain-buns. This animated tale has some gross out humour along with excitement and peril that will delight and thrill young readers.

Jane Hall

Between Worlds: Folktales of Britain and Ireland

Written by Kevin Crossley-Holland Illustrated by Frances Castle
Walker £15.00 ISBN: 978-1406381252

Kevin Crossley-Holland is a multi-award winning writer, translator and master storyteller, seeking out folk and fairy tales from a range of cultures, to retell for a modern audience. Here the tales are helpfully grouped as Magic and Wonder, Adventure and Legends, Fairies and Little People, Love, Wits, Tricks and Laughter, then Ghosts. A useful pronunciation guide is included and a sources and notes section, showing where each originated and how he has retold it. There is a super range here from Northern favourite, The Lambton Worm, grown to a massive serpent down a well, which may only be defeated by courage and cunning, to the Black Bull of Norway, a kind of Beauty and the Beast tale teaching obedience, patience and steadfastness, to my favourite, The Tiny Boo! Here the young girl, sleeping alone for the first time, checks everything, locks up, gets into bed and then hears a little voice: "That's good... Now we're safely locked in for the night." This is an excellent resource; a rich and satisfying collection of varied and authentic tales



which will be enjoyed by those hearing them aloud as well as by independent readers and teachers looking for just the right story.

Tina Massey



Where Dani Goes, Happy Follows

Written by Rose Lagercrantz Illustrated by Eva Eriksson
Translated by Julia Marshall
Gecko Press £7.99 ISBN: 978-1776572267

Dani's Italian father has become sad again, so has gone back to Rome, leaving her with her grandparents. However, this means she is going to miss her best friend's birthday. Dani's grandparents can't take her as they have other plans, so they agree she can take the train, her first journey on her own. However, things don't go quite to plan. Dani is strong and resilient, staying optimistic when things go wrong. She grows in emotional maturity during the story and the adult issues are only touched on making this a suitable book for younger children. There is good use of white space resulting in an uncluttered look, and the simple black and white line drawings add interest and humour.

Barbara Band

Hotel Flamingo

Written and illustrated by Alex Milway
Piccadilly Press £6.99 ISBN: 978-1848127753

This book is such great fun that it's hard not to smile all the way through! The story bounces along with spirited, young heroine Anna at the helm. Anna leads a wonderfully eccentric collection of animal characters, all determined to restore the fortunes of the dilapidated Hotel Flamingo, which Anna has inherited. A handywoman giraffe, a melodramatic pig chef, an ancient well-dressed tortoise and a troupe of performing flamingos, are just some of Anna's endearing team. Pulling together, valuing others' talents, standing up to nasty bullies and having a can-do attitude are all entertainingly celebrated with bright humour and marvellous illustrations. *Hotel Flamingo* is a dose of reading sunshine!

Anne Walker



Around the World in 80 Days

Retold by Antonis Papatheodolou
Illustrated by Iris Samartzi
Faros Books £12.99 ISBN: 978-1916409101

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea

ISBN: 978-1916409125

Two titles in the *Jules Verne's Adventure Stories* series which have been reimagined and retold by Antonis Papatheodolou. Abridged versions can sometimes be disappointing but that is definitely not the case here. There is a freshness about these books and they make the stories accessible

to a younger audience who can then read the full novels at the right time for them. Each story flows well and draws the reader in, making them feel part of the adventures. The illustrations are super and help to bring the text to life. They are full of colour and detail which children will love to pore over. Excellent use of end pages also enhance the book. I really enjoyed them.

Annie Everall

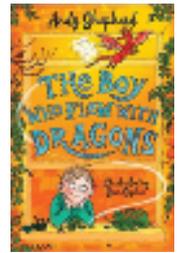
The Boy Who Flew with Dragons

Written by Andy Shepherd Illustrated by Steve Ogilvie
Piccadilly Press £5.99 ISBN: 978-1848127357

This is the third story about Tomas, and his sister Lolli, Tomas's friends, and his Grandad's dragon tree, that grows real dragons (following on from *The Boy Who Grew Dragons* and *The Boy Who Lived with Dragons*). Fans

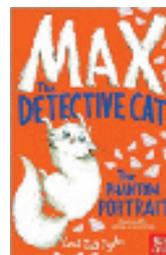
of the earlier books will enjoy this simple story, which deals with the conflicting emotions Tomas the protagonist feels when he has promised his granddad to let his pet dragon go, to fly back to his rightful home in the Hidden Dragon City in the far north. Grandad is taken ill so Tomas finds he's able to hold on to his pet for longer than he promised. He even manages to persuade his friends to let their dragons go while secretly keeping his. But even Tomas realises he must act once he finds his arch enemy Liam has acquired his own powerful dragon. This is a delicately balanced book, combining humorous adventures, an exploration of friendship and loyalty, and cross generational relationships, with the moral dilemma of knowing when and how to do the right thing. It should provide enjoyable and thoughtful reading for children aged around 7-9 years.

Liz Dubber



Max the Detective Cat: The Phantom Portrait

Written by Sarah Todd Taylor Illustrated by Nicola Kinnear
Nosy Crow £6.99 ISBN: 978-1788000529



This book is charming, humorous and fast-paced. Maximilian is a detective cat, with particular tastes and opinions, who belongs to Sylvia. When she is invited, with the rest of the theatre company, to travel to an old castle to put on a play for the owner's daughter, things become increasingly mysterious. Things go bump in the night; ghostly footsteps are heard, and a magnificent tiara

vanishes. It's down to Max and his friend Oscar to solve the mystery and bring the culprit to justice. This is done with relish and plenty of exciting illustrations as the book zips along through several twists and turns that will keep young readers turning the pages. Great fun!

Julia Wills

Malamander

Written by Thomas Taylor
Walker Books £6.99 ISBN: 978-1406386288

Herbie Lemon is a foundling, named after the crate of lemons he was washed up one day on the beach. Unable to remember his name, he is taken in by the owner of the Nautilus Hotel, Lady Kraken and placed in charge of the Lost and Found Department. He meets Violet who is hiding from a forbidding stranger, a violent man with a 'boat hook' for a hand. Violet was abandoned 12 years ago when her parents mysteriously disappeared while staying at the Nautilus. So begins a great fishy detective story as the two combine forces to unpick the mystery of what happened to Violet's parents, a mystery which is closely entwined with the legend of the Malamander, a local sea monster, said to haunt the shoreline around Eerie on Sea. Packed with a cast of memorable characters including the talking cat Erwin, who lives at one of the best book shops you could ever want to visit, Herbie and Violet find they must answer the mystery of the Malamander, if they are to have any chance of understanding what happened to Violet's parents. Beset by danger at every turn, constantly under threat from the 'Boat Hook' man and the fearsome Sebastian Eels, Herbie and Violet must work quickly to find the answers they seek. A great story with some fantastic characters, combining a compelling mystery set in the well named seaside town of Eerie on Sea, with a sea monster that will long stay in your memory. A real page turner. Highly recommended!

Annie Everall

