

The Ghost's Child

Written by Sonya Hartnett
Walker Books £6.99
ISBN: 978-1406313192
The opening is mysterious. A sulky boy is waiting for the elderly Matilda when she gets home. She offers tea and biscuits and when he catches sight of a photograph

of a girl on a boat, Matilda begins to tell him her life story. She tells of her coolly detached parents, then her love for the strange young man, Feather, whom she meets on the deserted beach, even of the loss of her only child. The mesmerising story winds from the colourful childhood scenes through the strangeness of life with Feather. It tells of a dangerous sea search Matilda undertakes when Feather disappears, her life during the war and then, a return to solitude. Finally, the boy is mysterious no longer. A sophisticated read for a thinking, experienced reader.

Pat Thomson

Flightsend

Written by Linda Newbery
David Fickling Books £10.99
ISBN: 978-0385614078

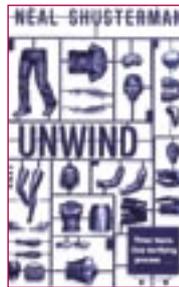
When things go wrong for Charlie's mother, a decision is made to move to a remote dilapidated cottage on the edge of an overgrown wartime airfield. Charlie hates the thought of being distanced from her friends but has no choice in the matter. She is sure her mother is mistaken, not only in making the move but in bringing to an end her relationship with Sean, a teacher at Charlie's school. The first summer proves to be a challenge and a surprise for both of them as Charlie faces up to the heartaches, anxieties and roller coaster emotions of late adolescence. What a change it is to read a perceptive, intelligent story about sensitive, ordinary people trying to sort out their everyday problems, and how well Linda Newbery handles her prose to welcome the reader into the heart of this absorbing story.

Jack Ousbey

Unwind

Written by Neal Shusterman
Simon and Schuster £6.99
ISBN: 978-1847382313

This is not a world you would want to inhabit. Connor's parents want to be rid of him because he is a troublemaker. Risa is being unwound to save orphanage costs. Lev's unwinding is a sacrifice. Unwinding - a euphemism for the living dead



where organ transplants rule. If they can survive to their eighteenth birthday they will not be unwound... This book challenges ones ideas about life, about morality, about religion, about fanatics. It is not a comfortable read but it is thought-provoking.

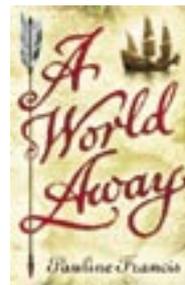
Enid Stephenson

A World Away

Written by Pauline Francis
Usborne £5.00
ISBN: 978-0746081129

The story begins with white men invading a North American village. Nadie's house is burned to the ground with her mother left in the flames. Nadie is captured and forced to return to the boat with her captors. They sail across the Atlantic and finally arrive in Plymouth. It is the sixteenth century. Sir Francis Drake had gone to Virginia to rescue a stricken British colony and Tudor England is in a ferment over the possibilities of these new American colonies - would the huge profits compensate for the huge dangers? Only time would tell. Meanwhile, John White is furious that Nadie was kidnapped. He was on board to paint and record the expedition, and some of the crew feel that Nadie herself will be a better advertisement for Raleigh's colony than any of his pictures. The plot moves quickly with brief interchanging chapters, first with Nadie as narrator, then Tom, who worked in a Plymouth forge. Like Nadie, his life is at a crossroad. Soon the two are in love. But Nadie, always the outsider, comes to understand the limits of Tudor life - notably they can never marry. It is inevitable that they join the next expedition to the New World and face further dangers. The shifting points of view give the narrative energy. The last chapters are stark and tension builds. Beautifully and elegantly written, this story confirms Pauline Francis as a fine historical novelist.

Dennis Hamley



the people of the high grassy Steppes who live in felt tents and look after Yaks. She has the skills of the ancient songs and can ease aches, pains and soreness of the heart. After the death of her mother Dashti travels to the city to find work which uses these talents. But she discovers far more than a job. The pen and ink illustrations add character and humour to this tale which is hard to put down until you know all has been satisfactorily resolved.

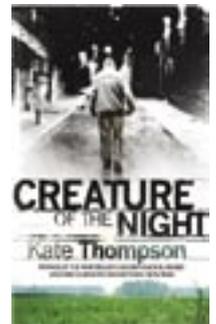
Louise Stothard

Creature of the Night

Written by Kate Thompson
Bodley Head £10.99 ISBN: 978-0370329291

Bobby, his mother and young brother, move from the streets of Dublin to the countryside; extremely reluctantly on his part, because the city is where his mates are and where he can race stolen cars. The cottage Mum rents is isolated, is visited nocturnally, or so Bobby's brother has it, by a mysterious 'little old woman', and is the rumoured venue of a child murder. The one-parent family lives in an ambience of poverty and moneylenders. Bobby, articulate, intelligent, the narrator of the story, is eager to regain the city streets, where 'it's like a game and you all think you're great, like it's a war or something,' yet, at the same time, without total resistance, is gradually drawn into general farm labouring. At the heart of this brilliantly written novel is the pull of Bobby's natural yen for the thrills of big city petty crime and the increasing dedication and empathy he brings to agricultural work, in an unfamiliar, myth-haunted environment. A tough, unflinching book.

Chris Stephenson



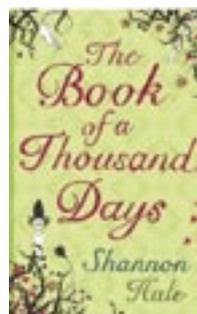
Blood Ties

Written by Sophie McKenzie
Simon and Schuster £6.99 ISBN: 978-1847382757

'A clone. What did it mean? That I was a copy of another life? Second-hand? "Yes," he nodded. "You are a clone...my clone.'

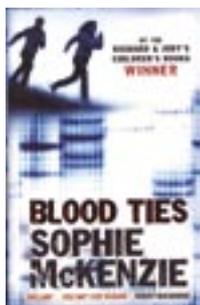
Set in London, Scotland and Washington DC, this gripping teenage thriller explores issues of genetic engineering and personal identity within a tightly constructed plot, complete with kidnappings and chilling violence. The story alternates between Theo and Rachel, two ordinary teenagers brought together by accident when Theo is searching for his father who he thought was dead. The firebombing of a research clinic by RAGE - the Righteous Army against Genetic Engineering - when they were babies links them, but soon they are targets themselves. Rescued by strangers, they are taken

The Book of a Thousand Days



Written by Shannon Hale
Bloomsbury £10.99 ISBN: 978-0747589235

This is an engrossing tale of loyalty, heroism, determination and love where the divide between Lady and Servant becomes blurred and anything can happen. Dashti is a 'mucker', a girl from



to meet Theo's 'father', Elijah, who imprisons Theo for his own chilling purposes. and only Rachel can save him. Still on the run, and despite their strong feelings for each other, they are forced to assume new identities and relocate away from each other. This is a stylish

novel, with well-developed characters – Rachel is particularly convincing – which explores the feelings of two young people trying to come to terms with the idea that they are not who they think they are. A terrific read which will generate much discussion. Sophie McKenzie is clearly an author to look out for.

Sarah Hill

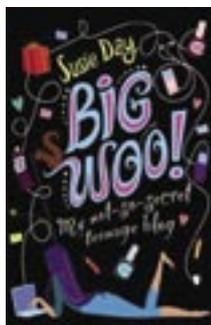
Big Woo: my not-so-secret teenage blog

Written by Susie Day
Scholastic £6.99
ISBN: 978-1407106861

If, like me, you are numbered among 'barely literate' when it comes to computers, this may have you heading for the Home for the Bewildered after a dozen pages, but

young teens love it. Oldies, stick with it. You may develop a headache but you will learn a lot about teenagers and Internet communication. The blurb (for once) really does give the flavour of what's inside. Through her journal, blog and chat room conversations, 'serafina67' shares a slice of her life with the reader. It's a glimpse of a world where disarming honesty and the desperate cover-up of vulnerability go side by side; where remarks made in good faith can get twisted and used like flame-throwers. It makes you realise, at once, how very exciting and accessible Internet communication is, and how damaging it can be to the unwary user – in many ways. At the end there is an entertaining and useful warning about using the Internet safely ('How not to be Internet Famous for stupid / embarrassing / scary reasons').

Yvonne Coppard



From Somalia With Love

Written by Na'sima B Robert
Frances Lincoln £8.99 ISBN: 978-1845078317

Ghostscape

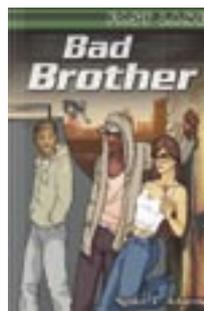
Written by Joe Layburn
Frances Lincoln £8.99 ISBN: 978-1845078263
Frances Lincoln's new list of young adult books dealing with strong social and racial issues has produced fine novels from both established and new writers. Here are two from new authors. Both have reference to Somalia. The narrator of Na'ima Robert's novel is Safia. She lives in East London and, though Muslim, sees herself as a London girl.

Her father, Abo, has been missing in Somalia for twelve years but suddenly he is coming home. This changes everything: Hoyo, Safia, Abdullahi and Ahmed, her wild brother, have to make adjustments. Abo has particular expectations which will be difficult to reconcile. The story proceeds as a sensitive, sometimes painful, examination of this coming to terms and the disturbances it makes, both domestically and in wider society, for Safia and her family.

Ghostscape is another first-person narrative.

This time the narrator is Aisha, a Somalian refugee. Her school is on the site of another destroyed in a World War II air raid. Aisha is taken back into the past and meets a strange boy... It's 1940, she's in the old, destroyed school, the boy's name is Richard, there's an air raid on and she's in it. The story continues, seeing similarities in the plights of both societies, the British in the war and Somalia now and moves to a touching climax as the generations meet. These are warm, engaging and intensely thought-provoking books. They have the power to widen horizons and increase understanding of the richness of contemporary Britain's various cultures. They should be widely read.

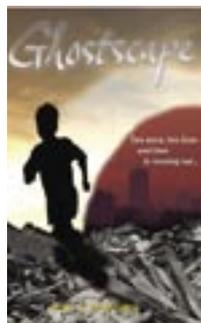
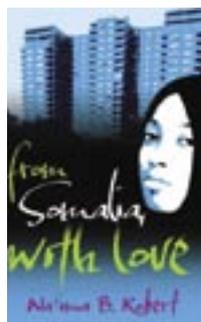
Dennis Hamley



Bad Brother

Written by Spike T Adams
Illustrated by Olive Harud Franklin Watts £4.99
ISBN: 978-0749677138
The subject matter makes this only suitable for older readers: it's short format and clear, full-page illustrations make it accessible to

a younger audience but the 'Parental Advisory Content' label warns of the danger. Told in the first person, Alex is a step-brother who is too close for comfort. He moves in, even into the same bedroom – his Dad being Mum's new 'man'. Not only are things bad at home but Alex wants to belong to the same 'crew' and is also serious competition for the attentions of attractive Talia. Bravely, Alex tries hard to be accepted but the barriers are too great. This terrifyingly credible tale is one of adolescent insecurities, loneliness and serious turmoil that could end in tragedy. As Alex is driven to despair on a rooftop, can anyone dissuade him this time? A seriously significant story, this is worrying rather than entertaining. It could symbolise hope for



anyone in similar circumstances, or conversely, inadvertently clarify suicide as a real option to the young and confused. The simple presentation emphasises the complexity of the issues addressed and may be astute, aimed at those with moderate literacy skills and attachment or relationship problems. It should definitely only be introduced with extreme sensitivity as the label indicates.

Gill Roberts

Ostrich Boys

Written by Keith Gray
Random House Definitions £5.99
ISBN: 978-0099456575

"I've been wanting to write about suicide for a few years now – never quite managing to find the right story to carry the issue. Ostrich Boys is my third attempt. Suicide is such an important issue, and one that touches many people. Just looking at the statistics here in Scotland

is shocking: two suicides a day; two out of three is male; it's the leading killer of young men between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five. I'm amazed that not more people are writing about it. On a personal note, I attempted suicide when I was eighteen.

Ostrich Boys isn't about me, it's not particularly autobiographical, but my own experiences have obviously added a lot to the book. I'm thirty-six now, which is eighteen plus eighteen.

I'm twice as old. It's complete coincidence that the book is published this year, but it's this year more than any other, that got me thinking about my feelings back then: what's changed in the last eighteen years, who I would have left behind, what I would have missed. I think Ostrich Boys approaches the subject of suicide with these questions in mind.

I didn't want to write an overpoweringly bleak book. I wanted to be realistic, sensitive, and above all, honest. I knew that there was no way my target audience would want to read a dirge-like novel with a preachy moral branded into the final pages. And I realise writing a book about suicide that is also full of humour, could be thought insensitive or disrespectful. Just please read it before you judge.'

Keith Gray

Ostrich Boys is indeed full of humour, but, be warned, it packs a massive punch. A brilliantly crafted story of friendship, loss, and the illogicality of the teenage brain! Kenny, Sim and Blake take a journey with their best friend. Unfortunately, Ross is in an urn, killed in a bike accident. The three pals decide to give him their version of a funeral they knew he would really have wanted – in Ross, Scotland! Their extraordinary journey from Cleethorpes will make you laugh, you will be shocked but totally unprepared for the ending. A remarkable book – five star reading!

Valerie Bierman

