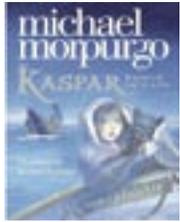


## Kaspar: Prince of Cats



Written by Michael Morpurgo  
Illustrated by Michael Foreman  
HarperCollins £12.99  
ISBN: 978-0007266999

When Kaspar the cat arrives at the famous Savoy hotel with his Russian opera-singing mistress, it triggers a chain of events that will change one boy's life forever. Johnny Trott, an orphan working as a humble porter at the hotel, is befriended by the grand Countess Kandinsky and given the job of looking after her very special feline companion while she is off performing at the opera house. Kaspar is inconsolable when the Countess dies suddenly, and even Johnny can't comfort him. Then along comes Lizziebeth, the spirited daughter of an American family staying at the hotel, to whom the cat takes an instant liking ... A friendship also blossoms between Lizziebeth and Johnny and the three unlikely companions end up heading for the States on board the ill-fated Titanic. As one might expect, the pace sharpens significantly at this point, and an underlying concern for the well-being of the cat makes for utterly compelling reading. Foreman's gentle water-colour illustrations evoke the elegance of the era, adding warmth and depth to Morpurgo's already potent words. An amazing amount of suspense and adventure is packed into this little gem of a book, making it impossible to put down.

*Rowan Stanfield*

## The Naming of William Rutherford

Written by Linda Kempton  
Five Leaves Publications £5.99  
ISBN: 978-1905512447

When Jack Rutherford persuades his mother to purchase an antique cot from a second-hand shop, he soon discovers it provides a link with the past. By turning the carved acorns on the square wooden head, he finds that he can travel back in time to the plague stricken village of Eyam in Derbyshire. Jack's journeys begin in 1665 and he soon witnesses the first of many deaths in the village. Nothing in this book is overstated and Linda Kempton leaves the reader to piece together the history, which is cleverly woven into the plot. It arouses enough interest in the subject to make you want to visit the village of Eyam, where the cottages and churches featured in the book can still be seen today. It is a shame that the jacket cover for this edition, designed perhaps with a slightly older audience in mind, is rather grey and dull, but if you can get past that, then you are in for a satisfying read.



*Richard Monte*

## Heroes of the Valley

Written by Jonathan Stroud  
Doubleday £12.99  
ISBN: 978-0385614016

This author is good at creating apparently unappealing heroes who ultimately worm their way into our affections. The story starts with the telling of an ancient saga and we meet young Halli, the unpromising second son of the house. In a setting of Nordic halls, proud families and weaponry, we become involved in the feuding between the houses. Halli makes a link with Aud the doughty daughter of another house and together, they take on both the fearful Trows of the dark mountainside and a rival house. Finally, Halli goes on to relive the heroic events of the past. It is certainly an action adventure but the great fight scenes are tempered by humour and humanity and for that reason, although an excellent read for boys, it will be read by adventurous girls too.



*Pat Thomson*

## First Term at Silver Spires



Written by Ann Bryant  
Usborne £4.99  
ISBN: 978-0746072240

Katy has a secret that she doesn't want other girls at her new boarding school to know. Young readers may envy her at first as she is the daughter of a famous soap star, but Katy knows there is a downside to fame and this is soon demonstrated by a jealous girl, who has a vindictive plan to isolate Katy and make her life at Silver Spires miserable. How can Katy win back her new friends and settle into the school she is growing to love? There is an old-fashioned charm and innocence here that brings back echoes of the hugely popular boarding school stories of years ago. However, Ann Bryant's perceptive wit and insight into the mind of a child show her young readers how common themes bind us all through the generations – the fragility and strength of friendships, wanting to belong, and the awfulness of being on the edge.

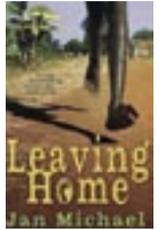
*Yvonne Coppard*

## Leaving Home

Written by Jan Michael  
Andersen Press £5.99 ISBN: 9781842707784

Urban children, unexpectedly having to cope with life in the deep countryside, are familiar characters in modern fiction. But ten-year-old Sam, the hero of this novel, is different in that as a recently orphaned, middle-class African child he now has to manage living in very primitive conditions indeed. Lonely and resentful, he gets off to a poor start, missing his parents who have both died of Aids,

and disliking communal life in a remote Malawi village. Gradually learning how to fit in, his moving story is well told by an author who never puts a foot wrong. The book ends on a hopeful note while never downplaying the problems faced by a country fourteen per cent of whose population is currently infected with the HIV virus.



*Nicholas Tucker*

## The Mum Shop

Written by Ceci Jenkinson  
Faber and Faber £4.99  
ISBN: 978-0571239504



"All my friends get to watch *Real Blood Bath Murders*, so why can't I?" moans Oli, and in a

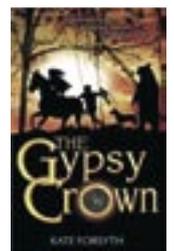
flash Mum calls his bluff and agrees to allow him to swap her for a different Mum. Oli thinks Mum will pretend for a while, just to teach him a lesson for being cheeky, but this time he's underestimated her and suddenly they're both at The Mum Shop which is a real-life Replacement Mother Agency. Children found this immediately hilarious whilst mums were downright horrified. They couldn't believe there was a children's book exposing them to such an idea, until Oli learns that no-one measures up to his own Mum after all! Ceci Jenkinson obviously knows children, and has spun them a well written story which relates to them and is literally fantastic. Hugely original and entertaining, the story really lauds relationships – and the character of Skipjack is a great role model for any friend.

*Gill Roberts*

## The Gypsy Crown

Written by Kate Forsyth  
Scholastic £7.99  
ISBN: 978-1407102399

Set in England 1658, with Cromwell clinging on for life and the land full of Royalist sympathisers and Cromwell's spy hunters. These are dangerous times, especially for gypsies who are condemned for their bright colours, cheerful music and their curses and spells which are considered witchcraft. When a family of gypsies is arrested, Luka and his cousin Milly manage to escape, together with a dancing bear, a dog, a monkey and a horse. They have just a month before the magistrate arrives to try their family, who will surely hang. Pursued by Cromwell's men who think they are helping Royalist spies, the children and their menagerie flee to try and get help from their fellow kin – but that is not always forthcoming. An entertaining mix of serious historical novel and adventure which makes it very accessible to general readers.



*Jackie Marchant*



## Grimm

Written by Mike Nicholson  
Floris Books £5.99  
ISBN: 978-0863156687

This is a book that exudes Scotland and centres on an eleven-year old, Rory McKenna. Having come up with a catchy strapline for

global brand Zizz Cola, he has been hailed as an advertising genius and received many offers for similar work. He refuses them all until one arrives from the local Hotel Grimm. This place has a dreadful reputation and Rory is asked to devise a new image for its setting in the Scottish town of Aberfinty. Capturing the essence of the small town and written in a relaxed style, there are many dark mysteries to be solved and intriguing, dismal avenues to explore, but all are connected by a thread of humour that lifts the suspense and prevents young readers from suffering bad dreams after reading about the haunted hotel.

Jayne Howarth

## Barnaby Grimes: Legion of the Dead

Written by Paul Stewart  
Illustrated by Chris Riddell  
Doubleday £8.99  
ISBN: 978-0385611930

Fans of the *Edge Chronicles* will find this series different but equally page-turning.

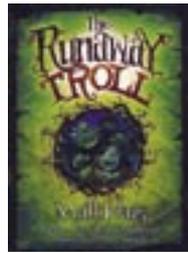
*The Legion of the Dead* is more like a Victorian ghost story; dark and foggy streets full of muscular gangs and a graveyard whose bodies seem to be departing night by night. Barnaby is a 'Highstacker', a kind of early free runner, leaping across rooftops to deliver urgent goods and messages far faster than street-bound 'Cobble Creepers'. Delivering to Gatling Quays, a run-down and heart-sinkingly nefarious neighbourhood, he is drawn into a gangland funeral where he witnesses corpses rising from their graves. Then an oriental sea-monster nearly kills him, an old soldier tells an exotic tale of a one-eyed idol and lost treasure becomes involved, but all these threads are woven into a tremendous climax where all is finally revealed. The story maintains tension and momentum throughout, ably supported by illustrations which extend the quick-thinking hero - of whom, I feel sure, we'll hear much more.

Tina Massey

## The Runaway Troll

Written by Matt Haig  
Bodley Head £10.99 ISBN: 978-0370329888

It is so good to have a children's book, full of fun and adventure. The many who enjoyed the prize-winning *Shadow-Forest* will meet some old friends. This time Troll-Son is in trouble and his mother decides to send him to The Betterer, not knowing that he is an evil troll who tortures troll children into 'better' behaviour. Troll-Son runs away and



takes refuge with Samuel and Martha who have come to live on the edge of the dark forest. There is comedy in the picture of a nice Norwegian household coping with a troll in the house but there is also a good depiction of motives

and emotions in the tussle to keep him secret from rich, spoiled girl Cornelia and her father - who calls the police. Then there is the menace in the power of The Betterer who comes to take back not only Troll-Son but to capture Samuel. All ends well, with goodness prevailing. Apart from some irritating authorial interventions (we 8+ readers are on the ball, Matt) this is a well-judged adventure for young readers, told in a proper story-teller's voice. Hurrah!

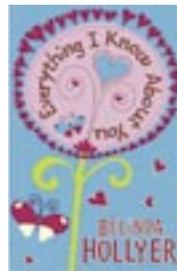
Pat Thomson

## Everything I Know About You

Written by Belinda Hollyer  
Orchard £5.99  
ISBN: 978-1846167669

The mystery started the day Eric went to the Natural History Museum. That night he insisted to his older sister, Lizzie, that he had actually seen their mum. Lizzie knows this is impossible - their mother died several years ago, but when their Dad is confronted with Eric's belief, there is something about the expression on Dad's face that makes Lizzie believe that he is hiding something. When Lizzie learns the truth, she also begins to understand that adults don't always make wise decisions but that it is never too late to make amends. A thoughtful family story with a broad appeal.

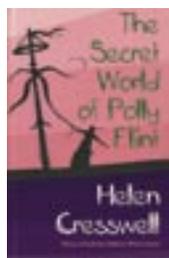
Marianne Adey



## The Secret World of Polly Flint

Written by Helen Cresswell  
Five Leaves Publications £4.99  
ISBN: 978-1905512485

Helen's study overlooked her garden, facing the light. She wrote, each day, at a desk which, she believed, once belonged to Walter de la Mare, and when it came to finding a name for the unusual girl whose secret world is explored in this novel it was to the poet she turned for confirmation. Read the opening pages of this story and you will see why Flint just had to be Polly's surname. She is a sharp, feisty, wayward, imaginative child who is always being told not to do things. Read the opening pages to see how Helen's unpredictable influences come straight to the surface - the radiant power of the imagination; the ability of the young child to look straight through the closed world of the elders of the tribe; the strong attachment to family and the need for



young people to find confirmation and support for their extravagant hopes. At every turn of events in this wonderful tale, Helen's persistent, rising humour bubbles up to snare the reader. I hope every child reader will have a go at this charming and wholly believable tale of the girl who can see things others can't and who slips in and out of time-zones with convincing ease. A welcome reissue.

Jack Ousbey

## Letters from Alain

Written by Enrique Perez Diaz  
Translated by Simon Breden  
Illustrated by Francisco Sole  
Aurora Metro Publications £6.99  
ISBN: 978-0955156649

The premise of this little book is quite simple. A twelve year old boy disappears with his parents, seeking a better life in America. His best friend, Arturo, is left behind on the island of Cuba, wondering why he never hears from him. Then Arturo receives a series of mysterious letters and a few days later his friend's dog, White Fang, turns up unexpectedly, but his coat of black fur is wet and mangy, and he cries like a wolf in the night. So what really happened to Alain? Did he run away with a mermaid? Or was he swallowed by a whale like Pinocchio? In a desperate attempt to find out, Arturo takes a rowing boat and sails out to sea in the fog. When he sees a vision of his friend smiling, on a raft made from white wood, it is as if there is a message in his eyes - the last letter - which says, 'Now I am the sea.' Told in simple yet poetic prose with black and white illustrations that look like woodcuts, this beautiful book perfectly captures the heartbreaking loneliness of a child struggling to cope with feelings of grief and despair, that inevitably accompany the loss of a dear friend.

Richard Monte



## Shadow of the Dragon: Kira

Written by Kate O'Hearn  
Hodder £6.99  
ISBN: 978-0340945285

The opening words "I don't want to get married!" indicate that the character definitely has a mind of her own! Kira is twelve and wants to be a Dragon Knight like her father, but under the King's First Law

all girls have to be married by the age of thirteen or face certain death. Kira's refusal to conform forces her to go on the run with her younger sister, while the rest of her family are arrested and her home destroyed. This fantasy adventure is packed with action but alongside all the excitement there are thoughtful human issues discussed including Kira's struggle to cope with responsibility and her brother's battle against injustice.

Jane Hall

