

China Girl

Written by David Belbin Illustrated by Julia Page
Barrington Stoke £5.99 ISBN: 978-1842996645



The issues this novel raises make it a challenging read rather than its length or literary complexity. David Belbin's main character falls for his parents' employee and uncovers the more sordid truths about his father's business. Told in the first person,

it immediately has the reader hooked as he is attracted to Ling (an illegal immigrant), fascinated about her life in this country and becoming obsessively involved. In a superbly crafted concise reading experience, it's obviously about the realities of first love but it also expresses how views of parents change as their offspring get older and more mature. On a deeper level, it also investigates the choices people have according to background, circumstance or culture and how considering all aspects helps us to grow and make, or resign ourselves to, our own choices.

Gill Roberts

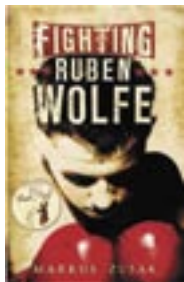
Fighting Ruben Wolfe

Written by Markus Zusak
Random House Definitions (R) £5.99
ISBN: 978-1862309579

Smile with instinct, then lick your wounds in the darkest corners.

Trace the scars back to your own fingers and remember them.

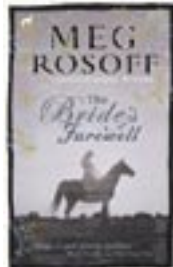
At first glance, this book seemed to be about two things that I have little experience of – brothers and boxing. Ruben and Cameron Wolfe are streetwise teenagers who have been scrapping all their lives. When a man waiting at their school gate offers them money to fight strangers, they accept eagerly in order to help the family's finances. Cameron, the younger brother, narrates the story. He hero-worships his older brother Ruben, and the relationship between them changes and develops as they fight unknown opponents, each other and themselves. In short, sharp sentences Zusak paints a convincing picture of the drama, violence and tension of the fights, and of the love and humour that keeps the Wolfe family together. The semi-autobiographical work is Markus Zusak's second novel and was first published in 1999. *Fighting Ruben Wolfe* isn't just about boxing. It is about self-belief, pride and love.



Jean Allen

The Bride's Farewell

Written by Meg Rossoff
Penguin £10.99 ISBN: 978-0141383934



This is another sophisticated piece of writing from acclaimed novelist, Meg Rossoff. Tightly plotted, it follows the fortunes and misfortunes of Peel, a young girl who escapes from the confines of an arranged marriage on the day of her wedding. The writing is exceptional; everything, from the understated dialogue to the clarity and depth of characterisation, is beautifully realised. The vivid description of landscape and countryside evoke the nineteenth century. In the Wessex setting and the thoughts of the tragic heroine and her aloof lover, there is even a hint of Thomas Hardy. It's a book which shows the harshness of rural life in earlier times; a glimpse of a forgotten age where horses were the main form of transport and people quite often lived their entire life in a small village and, unlike feisty Peel, never ventured much further than the nearest forest.

Richard Monte

Knight Crew

Written by Nicky Singer
CB Editions £7.99
ISBN: 978-0956107329

Nicky Singer is a writer of exceptional power. *Knight Crew* adds to this reputation. The thirteen-year-old narrator provides a first person story which is stark, dangerous and sometimes downright terrifying. She and her brother Mordec are involved in a gang which meets at the Mill, a derelict place on a tidal island. It is led by OG, Original Gangsta. Her father, Keifer, is a constant, disturbing presence. But, as well, there is Myrtle, a bag lady both repository of past truths and also a Cassandra-like prophet. This is a cruel world – but the main thrust of the story is an irruption from the past of different knightly values, of which the gang *mores* are a grotesque imitation. This is a significant, dangerous book which won't be to everybody's taste. But it deserves to be read widely, not only for its own sake but because it comes from a small independent publisher whose first young adult book this is. It is publishers like CB Editions who, if present tendencies in the world of publishing continue, will be the salvation of serious one-off young novels – and indeed, of literature of distinction generally.

Dennis Hamley



No and Me

Written by Delphine de Vigan
Translated by George Miller
Bloomsbury £9.99
ISBN: 978-1408807514



Delphine de Vigan's *No and Me* (originally written in French) introduces a terrific heroine. Lou is quirky,

precocious, naive and intellectually searching at the same time as being obsessive and childlike. At thirteen she is the youngest in her class, and relies on her friend Lucas to deal with the complexities of being a high achiever. She feels ... *as if I'm outside the frame, on the other side of an invisible window.* Her mother's breakdown as a result of the loss of a child, and a chance meeting between Lou and a homeless girl, No, set a chain of events in motion which will have an enormous effect on Lou's already-struggling family. When No moves into the family home, her presence encourages Lou and her parents to confront their relationships and sadness. The stark reality and tragedy of young people living rough and the huge effects of bereavement, grief and loss are all explored in this thought-provoking book.

Marilyn Brocklehurst

Thirteen Reasons Why

Written by Jay Asher
Penguin Spine Breakers £6.99
ISBN: 978-0141328294

When Clay Jensen receives a package, he is stunned to discover the contents: audio cassette tapes that are clearly marked as to the order in which they should be listened. But when he puts the first tape into his father's ancient stereo, he is confronted by the voice of Hannah Baker – a fellow student who had committed suicide a fortnight earlier. She tells the listeners that if they have received the box, they are one of the reasons she killed herself. There are thirteen reasons – and they must listen to discover why they were partly responsible for her death. Whatever the reasons, the tapes change the lives of the recipients for ever. Compelling, disturbing and insightful into the psyche of a damaged young woman, Asher, in this debut novel, has written an affecting story. Suicide is not an easy subject to write about, but the author sprinkles pathos and dark humour to inject some much-needed levity. In some ways reminiscent of *The Lovely Bones*, the prose was easy while the joint narrative from the two central characters gave the plot extra pace and edge.



Jayne Howarth



Genesis

Written by Bernard Beckett
Quercus £10.99
ISBN: 978-1847247230

This story explores and questions what it really means to be human. The Island Republic is a totalitarian

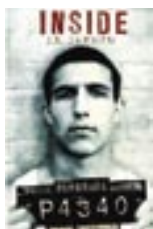
state where inhabitants are forced into a strict and unnatural regime, supposedly for their own survival. But when Adam Forde breaks a fundamental rule, he sets off a chain of events that changes this world. The story is told years later, when Anaximander sits a gruelling four hour oral exam in front of three stern examiners. Her chosen subject is Adam Forde, but as the exam progresses, she learns that the world in which she lives is not all it seems. The pages keep turning as shocking truths are discovered until the startling and surprising culmination. There is a great deal for readers to think about but the book is guaranteed to hold their attention and stay in their minds.

Jackie Marchant

Inside

Written by J.A.Jarman
Andersen Press £5.99 ISBN: 978-1842709771

Lee Mercer is a young man with lots of decisions to make. So far he has made some bad choices: mugging an elderly lady for her pension and breaking into her house. Now he is in Parkhall



Young Offenders Institution, he must choose whether to obey the official rules and avoid a longer sentence, or obey the other inmates' rules and survive. As he gets used to the harsh reality of life inside and gets to know the staff and his fellow inmates, he faces an even bigger decision. Will he follow in his father's footsteps and become a career criminal, or will he choose to change his life? This bleak and unsentimental book shows what life is like in a Young Offenders Institution for teenagers like Lee. Julia Jarman has carried out extensive research, talking to a lot of people involved in the system - including a number of young inmates - and the resulting book is well worth reading.

Jean Allen



Stained

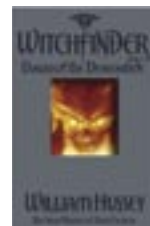
Written by Joanne Hichens
Ransom £5.99
ISBN: 978-1841677156

Set in a rough area of Cape Town, where Grace (who is mixed race) lives with her foster mother, next door to Crystal, a

teenage mum. Always the sensible one but troubled by her own situation, Grace begins to rebel as she is drawn into Crystal's world of a dysfunctional family. Told through Grace's eyes, this is the stark, tragic story of Crystal's spiral into despair. It is part

of the *Cutting Edge* series, gritty reads where the language is simple so it can be handled by those who have difficulty reading. But it is far from an easy read. Hard-hitting and highly emotional, it is compelling from the first page.

Jackie Marchant



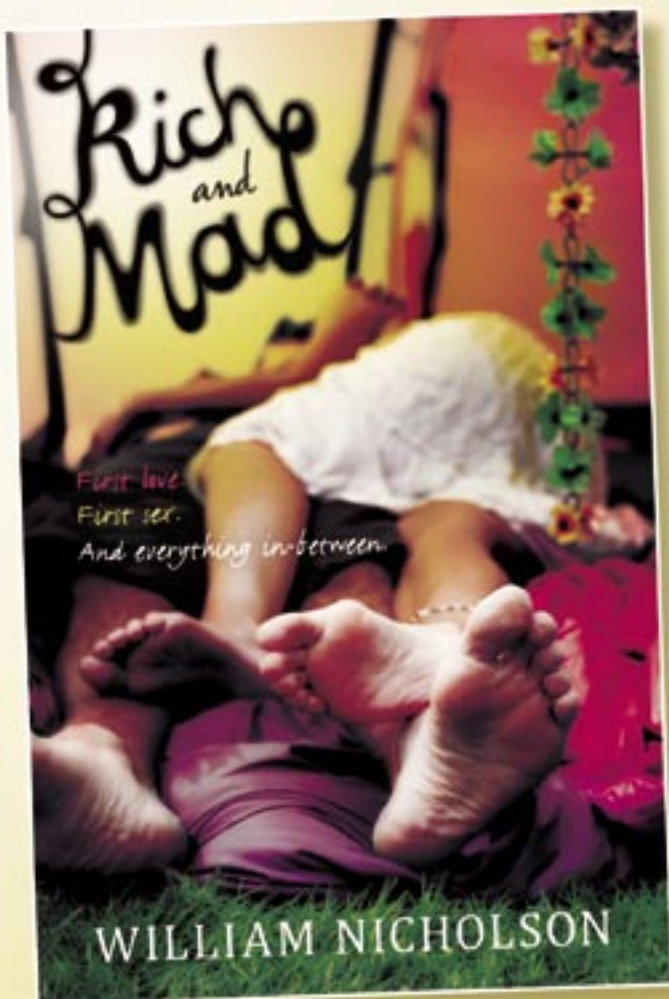
Witchfinder

Written by William Hussey
Oxford University Press £6.99
ISBN: 978-0192731906

I am reminded of the Dennis Wheatley black magic books I used to read somewhat secretly

in my early teens enjoyably scary and published for adults. Here we have a well written story, strong on violence and spooky terror but published and promoted to teenagers. And, as many are, part of a trilogy. So whilst my adult self has reservations, my teenage self would have loved it. The story begins with a young boy being sacrificed to ward off an even greater danger. It then moves forward a quarter of a century to where a lonely boy, Jake Harker, who is enthralled with horror comics, comes face to face with the Pale Man, his demon and visions of 'The Witchfinder'. His parents work at the sinister (and well-guarded) Hobarron Institute and no one outside is quite sure what all those doctors do there. Be warned this book is only for those with a strong stomach - throats are slit, heads decapitated and other horrors.

Enid Stephenson



Rich and Mad

PUBLISHING
5th April
2010

First love. First sex. And everything in-between.

Maddy Fisher has decided to fall in love. And not just any sort of love: can't-eat can't-sleep crazy in love.

Rich Ross is after the same thing. He's set his sights high, and he's going to make it happen.

The problem is, in life's messy whirlwind of friends and lies and sex and porn, the real thing can be hard to find.

But there's always a first time for everything . . .

A compelling and beautifully written novel about first love, first sex, and everything in-between by William Nicholson, author of the *Seekers* and *Noman* trilogies. Melvin Burgess showed us one side of sex in *Doing It*.

In *Rich and Mad*, William Nicholson shows us another . . .

Price: £6.99 • ISBN: 978 1 4052 4739 9 • Age range: Teen

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