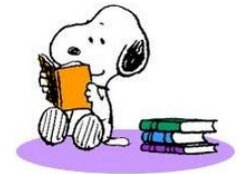




# RGS: Bonkers About Books!

October 2021



Hello,

Welcome to my Hallowe'en special. This may come as a shock to some of you, especially children who are reading, but I'm not a big fan of Hallowe'en! I much prefer the long hot evenings of the summer to cold nights and pumpkins! That said, there are an increasing number of brilliant books out there which are perfect for this time of year which I have found myself really enjoying! I now find myself looking forward to the end of October a little more as I know that I'll be able to enjoy a host of books like the ones I've got in this edition of Bonkers About Books. With books that will make you laugh as well as books that may need you grab your teddy, I think this edition will have a book for everyone to curl up with this Hallowe'en!

Enjoy a spooktacular read!

## Rules For Vampires - Alex Foulkes

Leo is 111 years old and is a vampire who has reached her birth night which means she is about to go out on her first Hunt, 'The Hunt of the Waxing Moon, an important rite of passage for every young vampire entering adulthood' but when your mother is Sieglinde Von Motteberge there is extra pressure, especially when told that no von Motteberge has ever failed to make a kill in their first time out. Deciding to go to the local village of Otto's End, Leo chooses St Freda's Home for Unfortunate Children, the orphanage as her target, figuring that nobody would miss an orphan. Leo, however, doesn't bank on encountering Minna, who is happy to chat, nor does she expect to wake The Orphanmaster, the rather ferocious and despicable owner of the orphanage. When he wakes and a fire breaks out, Leo's plans are turned upside down and, instead of making her first vampiric kill, she ends up being responsible for the orphanage burning down and the death of Minna and The Orphanmaster. Minna, as a ghost, quickly finds Leo and updates her, but can they stop the ghost of The Orphanmaster before he acquires his full power and can Leo manage to keep all of this mess from her mum?



This is one of those books that you quickly discover seems to have everything! There's a light-heartedness to it that entices you in, with enough spookiness to keep you gripped. Descriptions of the castle, Leo's elder sister and thoughtful touches such as references to claws instead of hands will all hook readers in, as will the tension that mounts as the book progresses.

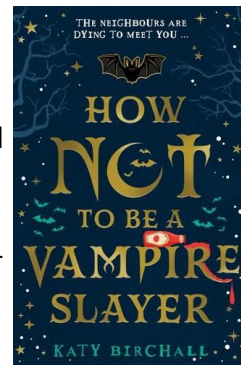
Leo is clearly a vampire who is desperate to impress her incredibly foreboding mother but seems to end up getting everything wrong. She appears to live in her elder sister's shadow (despite the fact her elder sister is actually a toddler) and is thrilled at finding her first ever friend, even if she is a ghost. Thankfully though, she has Marged (her butler who also happens to be a set of armour) on her side and who is always looking out for her.

The Orphanmaster is a truly horrible character (in the best possible way!) and is one readers will love to hate. His threatening manner from the start will engage readers and he'll be somebody they'll delight in hating! His constantly menacing manner allows for some great tension in the book, particularly towards the end, and helps to make Rules for Vampires a gripping read.

With wonderful illustrations from Sara Ogilvie, this is the perfect book for fans of The Last Chance Hotel or those who read the Amelia Fang books when they were first released. Perfectly timed for Halloween, this is one book you'll definitely want to get your claws in and your teeth stuck into!

### How Not To Be A Vampire Slayer - Katy Birchall

Maggie and her family have just moved to their new home, a rundown house in a town called Goreway on the Yorkshire coast. The town is in the middle of nowhere and the house is on its own on the edge of Skeleton Woods, a place full of history and legends and a place no-one is allowed to go. Maggie begins her new school rather warily as she didn't have many friends in her previous school: she was known as the weird child after her classmates discovered her love of spooky legends. Here, however, she makes friends with Ari and Miles. One day, when venturing into the forest, Maggie stumbles across a castle which is supposed to be enchanted against humans where she discovers a host of vampires, including Sharptooth, a vegetarian vampire who is desperate to be her friend. Meanwhile, in town, Mayor Collyfleur is determined to persuade the locals that the forest should be destroyed in favour of a luxury golf course. Can Maggie and her friends persuade the locals that the mayor is wrong whilst also persuading everyone that their neighbourly vampires need protecting instead.



Maggie is a fearless young lady who clearly isn't afraid of anything, especially not spooky stories and anything that would send many of us running for the safety of our bed! She's different and I like that (I also know several children at school who will appreciate this). I also like the fact that she is accepted for who she is by Ari and Miles. The trio complement each other wonderfully: Ari is bouncy and care-free, whereas Miles is more studious and sensible; together the three of them are people I would love to get to know. I also need to mention Sharptooth who is quite the opposite of any vampire you may have met before! She is happy, friendly, curious and vegetarian!

The book has all the ingredients of a great Hallowe'en read: isolated house on the edge of a forest; mysterious legends of vanishing people; a hidden, creepy castle; vampires galore! But it also has humour and friendship, messages about not judging people ... and beetroot juice and ketchup! How Not To Be A Vampire Slayer has made a wonderful addition to my spooky books collection!

### The Howling Hag Mystery - Nicki Thornton

Those of you who have read and enjoyed the Seth Seppi Mysteries (The Last Chance Hotel et al), will be very familiar with Nightshade who's now back in her own book!

Nightshade has gone on holiday and has ended up in Twinhills where she quickly discovers that rumours are rife in the school that The Howling Hag is causing chaos with her magic. Raven knows that her family are the only ones in the village who are supposed to be magic (although this is a secret to everybody else) and, along with the new boy, Mortimer Scratch (Morti), and a little help from Nightshade, they try to get to the bottom of what exactly is going on.

I first read The Last Chance Hotel whilst lounging next to the pool in Rhodes 3 years ago and was immediately enchanted by Nightshade's slightly sarcastic manner and attitude so I was thrilled to hear that she'd been given her own book... and also incredibly pleased to read her unique mannerisms and wit are still clearly evident. She has quite the way with her and most definitely helps Raven develop as a character.



Speaking of Raven: she's a rather conflicted young lady when we first meet her. She lives by her mum's life motto of 'deny everything' which comes in handy when you know that most of your family are magical (all except Raven's dad and Raven) and this is supposed to be a huge secret to everybody else. Her older sister, Rookery, seems to manage her magic effortlessly and Raven becomes increasingly worried as the book progresses, that she will never find her magical affinity and generally feels inferior to her sister- she really doesn't want to live without magic and this seems to constantly consume her thoughts; something that was evident as magic is at the heart of everything in this book.

The Howling Hag Mystery is another absolute hit from Nicki Thornton. Excitingly magical with a host of wonderful characters and a mystery to solve - I didn't solve it!

### One for Year 6: The Ash House - Angharad Walker

When Sol (Solitude) arrives at **The Ash House**, he can't remember his name or how he managed to get there but he's hoping that this new place will be able to do what all other doctors have failed to do: cure his chronic back pain. However, he very quickly discovers that things are very different in this house. The children seem to be on their own but say that the Headmaster will be back soon (but they've been waiting for him to return for 3 years); they are all named after a virtue or 'Niceness' which forms the rules of how they live; their dormitory is in the greenhouse; they each have their set chore and live to a strict daily routine; they hold daily meetings which are based around a phone call from the Headmaster and Concord seems to be in charge. Sol finds it difficult to settle but a boy called Dom (Freedom) is determined to take him under his wing and help him. Dom shows him the daily routines and what is expected of everyone, but also worries that the others will discover Sol's sickness; he suffers from debilitating back pain which results in seizures. As the days progress, Sol realises that the other children seem scared of many things, but mainly the idea of children getting sick which would result in the arrival of the Doctor. So what happens when the Doctor turns up and decides he can cure Sol of his back pain? And will he ever escape?



From the very beginning of this book there is a very definite element of the unknown (Sol can't remember his name and has no idea where he's going or how he got to be in the car that's taking him there) and this is a theme that continues throughout the book. There is a quiet and, at first, subtle build up of tension which means that you don't quite know who or what to trust - it leaves you unsettled and on edge in the most gripping way! It starts with the house itself which seems to be made literally of ash and smoke and seems otherworldly in its description, creating an air of mystery. There are many elements of the house that creeped me out: the fact that they aren't allowed upstairs, the strange noises that can be heard; the idea that the hut moves of its own accord, not to mention the fact that the children sleep in the greenhouse. The children themselves were also rather eerie in their attitude and their actions (they seemed to have no concept of the outside world and are terrified of heading beyond the boundary), they are bound by the rules of the Headmaster even though he's been absent for 3 years and are utterly terrified of the Doctor - it all contributes towards the tension and the eeriness of the book.

**The Ash House** is a creepy book that will grip you and scare you in equal measure, and it will keep you questioning so you find it difficult to put the book down. It's a chilling MG horror book about friendship, memory and control.

### The Bewitching of Aveline Jones - Phil Hickes

Aveline is back and this time she's spending two weeks of her summer holiday in a cottage in the small village of Norton Wick near Bristol and, although it's not the holiday abroad many of her friends are having, she's excited to learn that the house backs onto a field which is home to *The Witch Stones*, an ancient stone circle. Aveline wastes no time in climbing through the brambles to explore the stones, stumbling over an old, rattling bottle on the way. Whilst there, she sees a girl who seems to be stroking the stones. Worried about disturbing her, she edges away but keeps seeing her around the village. The pair eventually meet and become friends. Although Aveline feels there is something strange about Hazel Browne, she is equally fascinated with her, especially as she introduces her to the magic of the stones. When Harold arrives with his Uncle and Aveline's Aunt, he receives a frosty reception from Hazel. The pair know that there is something different about Hazel but they cannot figure exactly what it is ... will they work it out before it's too late?

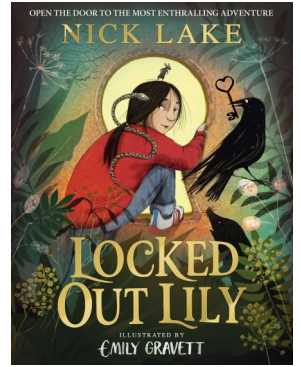


This time, the long, hot days of summer have replaced the dark and cold evenings of Hallowe'en; yet the spooky feel remains ever present in the book. With talk of witch circles, an old village with an ancient church and graveyard at its heart, and wide open spaces with nobody around, you instantly feel on edge. The house where Aveline and her mum are staying doesn't seem to have been used for many years the noises in the night are different to the ones Aveline is used to at home; combine that with the bramble-filled garden and The Witch Stones being visible from her bedroom window, and the hazy summer setting quickly becomes an eerie place where you find yourself just waiting for things to happen! It makes the book completely compelling and utterly unputdownable!



### Locked Out Lily - Nick Lake

Everything is changing for Lily: she's been ill and has been in and out of hospital which means that people have been treating her differently; on top of that, her mum is having a baby. All Lily wants is to have everything go back to the way it was: to before she was ill and before her mum was pregnant. The story begins when Lily is in the car with her Grandma Squeak; they have stopped at Lily's house to pick some things up before Lily stays at her grandma's house, for Lily's parents are at the hospital having the baby. Once back at her grandma's, Lily is determined to get back home so, once she is certain her grandma is asleep, she sneaks out and heads through the darkness to her own home ... only to discover that her parents are there with the baby, but they won't let her in. They look like her parents but it turns out they very definitely aren't! It takes Lily new found friends, Mole, Mouse, Crow and Snake to help her realise that she can be brave enough to get back into her own home and reclaim it. But she only has one night to evict 'The Replacements'. Can she do it?



Lily is a wonderful character. She is clearly going through an awful lot. Although her illness is never specifically identified, it's clear that it's serious and has involved quite some time in and out of hospital for treatments. She is simply desperate for a bit of normality but instead is worried that her parents don't have the time for her now the new baby is coming. She's lonely and in need of friendship which comes in the form of four very different animals. Each of the animals has a unique personality that seems to be just what Lily needs to get her through the night - they arrive just as she needs them most and seem to know just what to say!

The writing has a classic feel to it and the story has a magical quality, however, there is a somewhat sinister undertone that will keep you enthralled throughout (I'll warn you that I found myself in tears at one point in the story! It came quite out of the blue and I was rather grateful for the sunglasses I was wearing at the time!)

Accompanied by wonderful illustrations by Emily Gravett, this is a thought-provoking book that will capture your heart - great for Years 5 and 6.

### The Beast and the Bethany Revenge of the Beast - Jack Meggitt-Phillips

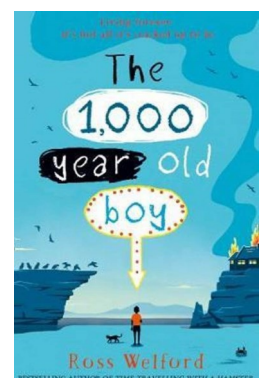
If you read book 1, you will know that 511 year old Ebenezer kept a beast in his attic who would vomit up expensive gifts. But then Bethany arrived and everything changed ... (If you haven't read it, I highly recommend you do!). Now, Bethany is determined that she and Ebenezer should do good deeds to de-beast their lives. However, this doesn't turn out to be as easy as she first thought it would.

With a Dahlesque quality to the book, this is a fantastically fiendish book that is just deliciously dark enough to tempt Year 3 and 4 readers to enjoy its delights! I promise you won't be disappointed!



### The 1000 Year Old Boy - Ross Welford

A tragic story with never-ending excitement to it. An 11 year old boy hasn't aged since the time of the Vikings, and spends the following 1000 years trying to grow older. On this astonishing journey he witnesses historic milestones such as the French revolution and the two World Wars; makes friends, loses them, has all sorts of adventures but never gives up!



George 5C.