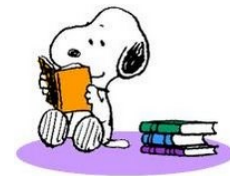


RGS: Bonkers About Books!

June 2021



This will be the final Bonkers About Books of this academic year as there are only 5 days of school in July! Where has the year gone? There are a host of books being released both this month and over the summer so pull up a chair in a sunny spot and get ready for a wealth of recommendations to get you through the holidays!

I hope you all have a relaxing and bookish summer. Why not let me know which books you enjoy over the holidays and where you manage to get some reading in? Whether it be on a beach, curled up on a sofa or whilst staying in a windmill, send me pictures of your views from a book and I'll feature them in the first edition of Bonkers About Books in September!

Happy reading and have a great summer holiday!

A Girl Called Justice: The Ghost In The Garden - Elly Griffiths

The Ghost in the Garden is the 3rd in the detective series by Ellie Griffiths. Justice Jones is a student at a boarding school called Highbury House. It is like Mallory Towers but with murders! In this book, after a midnight feast in the barn and a scary ghost appears, a new girl called Letitia goes missing. There is a ransom note and Justice with some help from her friends has to find the kidnapper. I love all the Justice books and this is one of my favourites so far. I think this is a good book for students in Years 3 and 4.

Jess N

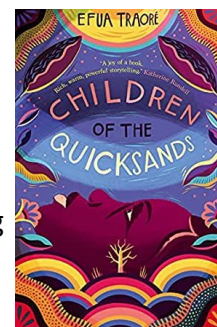


Children of the Quicksands - Efua Traore

Set in Nigeria, this is the story of Simi who has grown-up in Lagos but who is being sent to spend the summer with the maternal grandmother (Iyanla) she has never met. Her parents are divorced and her mum must train in England as part of her new job and, with nobody else to look after her, she is being sent to stay with her grandmother ... who doesn't know she is coming! When she arrives, Simi realises that the village of Ajao is a world away from the life she is used to: her grandmother doesn't have running water or electricity and there is absolutely no mobile phone signal to be found! Life is very much back to basics and she quickly discovers that Iyanla is very well respected in the village, making herbal medicines for everyone. In her first afternoon, she is sent for a walk whilst Iyanla helps an injured child who has been brought to her and whilst out, she defies Iyanla's warnings and veers towards the lake (lured by the song from the golden bird); however, when she falls into quicksand, she discovers a strange land below, one that scares her. Waking up the next day, she decides not to tell anybody, fearing that it was all in her imagination. But what is Iyanla not telling Simi? Why is the village so scared of the lake and how is she linked to all of this?

Both the village of Ajao and the contrasting city-life are painted in detail throughout the book, allowing the reader to embrace the culture and imagine themselves travelling alongside Simi on her magical journey - it's an immersive story which is no surprise as the book was based on Efua's own childhood adventures in the little town in Nigeria where she grew-up.

This is a beautifully told story that combines tradition with modern day; magic with myth, and family with friendship. There is something magical in the writing (and indeed in the story) that gently grips you from the very beginning and compels you to keep reading! It truly was mesmerising.



Rainbow Grey - Laura Ellen Anderson

Ray Grey lives in the city of Celestia in the Weatherlands and, unlike her friends, she doesn't have magic powers, though she wishes more than anything that she did. Despite this, she is determined to become an Earth explorer just like her hero, La Blaze De Light. When she makes a secret trip to Earth, she suddenly acquires rainbow magic, something that hasn't been seen in Weatherlands for hundreds of years, but how will this new found magic go down back in Weatherlands?

I have to admit that it was the cover and the gorgeous sprayed edges that first attracted me to the book and, although I try not to judge a book by its cover, I'm so very pleased I did this time! (Of course, I was also influenced by my love of Amelia Fang!) Rainbow Grey is a wonderfully inventive read that will have you bouncing around the clouds and wishing that you could fire rainbows out of your hands! It's a feel-good read that is guaranteed to put even the grumpiest person in a good mood and will brighten anybody's day.

Why? Several reasons:

The setting and the imagination behind the idea: from the map at the beginning of the book (another reason to love this book - I'm a lover of maps in books!), you can see that The Weatherlands is set in the clouds, with areas such as Dripping Down Village, Valley of Winds and The Jumping Puddles. Everything is linked to the weather and I can imagine it must have been great fun to invent such a world - even names like Ray's mum, Cloudia, are linked to the whole theme. I would love nothing more than to visit the Rising Bun Bakery (but would be rather wary of the rumblebuns!)

The characters: Ray is a glorious combination of confidence, determination and colour that children will admire (and I have no doubt that some will want her hair too!); her friendship with Droplett and Snowden is lovely to read and will fill readers' hearts with joy (who doesn't want friends like that?). I loved the effervesce of Cloudia and would secretly love to be able to carry everything I need in my hair! However, I think my favourite character had to be Nim the farting cloud-cat! I'm not a fan of cats but I would happily adopt Nim in an instant (especially if I got to travel to school on him!).

The illustrations: throughout the book, the story is enhanced with Laura's wonderful drawings which only add to the joy, and I turned every page in anticipation as to what would be there!

The plot: full of fun and adventure, with plenty of laughs along the way (think farting cloud-cats!), this is a fast-paced story that will keep readers enthralled, will capture their imagination and has plenty of twists to keep everybody entertained. The end of the story most definitely hints at a second book and I can't wait to see what is next install for Rainbow Grey and her friends.

In short, this is a joy of a book that is full of brightness and cheer and perfect for Year 3 and 4!



The Week Junior

'The Week Junior' is a newspaper for children with news only children like. It increases your brain knowledge about the world but also has a 'QUIZ of the day', 'Puzzle Page', and competitions. If you subscribe you can get 6 issues for FREE. My dad subscribed and I have already got 3 free issues.

From cycling every day to discovering how to make soap with snail slime, this is an amazing magazine. It's not a magazine you've got to read in chronologic order but you can just flick to a random page and find something awesome to read.

On one occasion, I read about three different ways to see Jupiter in space:

- using ultraviolet light
- using infrared light
- using the Hubble Space Telescope (with the naked eye on a computer)

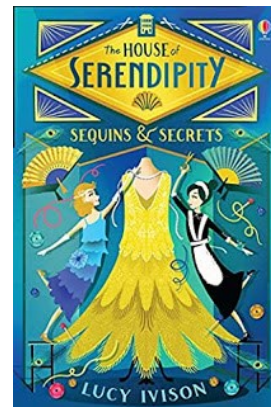
I recommend The Week Junior to every child and hope they enjoy reading it because I most certainly did.

L. Hélène



The House of Serendipity: Sequins and Secrets - Lucy Ivison

It's 1926 and Myrtle Mathers loves to sew, creating her own dresses inspired from Chanel creations she sees in magazines; however, her father has died and her mother became sick, which means that the family's tailoring business has been sold and, as we start the book, Myrtle is heading to work as a maid at Serendipity House in London. It's here where she meets Lady Sylvia Cartwright who has a passion for drawing dresses and costumes. When Sylvia's sister, Delphine, is distraught at the dress she is due to wear to her debutante ball in a few days time, Sylvia persuades Myrtle that the pair can create the perfect dress for her. Working through the nights, the pair create the most spectacular dress which creates quite the stir at her ball; so much so that Agapantha Portland-Prince not only wants the girls to create a daring dress for her ball, but also wants them to help her escape her life so she can hunt for new species in the Amazon. But can the girls pull this off without anybody else discovering; after all, Myrtle's job and her dreams could be at stake.



Having been a huge fan of the BBC drama *The House of Elliott* in the 90s (ask your parents), I was very excited about this book and rightly so! From the very beginning, readers are treated to a feast of 1920s description, as well as some gorgeous illustrations which will make you want to travel back in time so you can dress in the most decadent outfits.

This has all the hallmarks of a great historical fiction novel, but with all the glamour of the 1920s also thrown in. It's set in a time when women were beginning to realise they could make choices for themselves and could lead more independent lives, and the two main characters epitomise this completely. The setting for this book plays into everything I love about the past: glamour, elegance, beautiful dresses, the richness of society contrasting against those who make it all possible for them behind the scenes. It's *The House of Elliott* meets *Downton Abbey*, meets *Katherine Woodfine* and *Robin Stevens*. There's a thrilling ending to enjoy that will leave you wanting more and I can't wait to discover what the girls get up to next.



The Crackledawn Dragon - Abi Elphinstone

In the final book of *The Unmapped Chronicles* series, Morg is hiding out in *The Faraway*, in New York to be specific, where she meets Zebedee (Zeb) who has run away (again) from his foster home. Disillusioned by the foster system and determined to find his own way (without having one of his outbursts), he finds himself taking shelter in an abandoned theatre where he finds a piano sat under a rather magnificent chandelier. Unbeknown to anyone, Zeb has taught himself to play the piano and is very good at it, so much so, it draws the attention of one of the locals ... who just happens to be Fox Petty-Squabble! She heads to the theatre to investigate and finds Zeb. Using her skills as a social worker, she manages to talk to him and promises to help once she has run home for her purse. However, in the time that she is away, Morg puts in an appearance and manages to persuade Zeb that Fox is lying to him, and that she can give him all the riches he desires, if he will help her by getting the last of the phoenix tears that have been hidden in the chandelier above his head. He does so but, as you may expect, things don't go quite as he expected and he finds himself dragged into Crackledawn, one of the *Unmapped* kingdoms, where he does the only thing he knows how to: he runs away. With no idea where he is, he finds himself stumbling into Oonie and Mr Fickletint, the talking chameleon, aboard their boat, *The Kerfuffle*. Despite vowing to never trust anyone again, he realises that he may have to trust Oonie, in order to save himself and defeat Morg once and for all.

Abi builds yet another wonderful world through her descriptions, scene setting and clever use of vocabulary, which results in an marvellously immersive book. I found myself transported to Crackledawn, travelling alongside Zeb and Oonie, quite forgetting that I was actually curled up on my sofa!

I have to admit that I stayed up way past my bedtime reading ***The Crackledawn Dragon*** as I couldn't put the book down; however, I was also completely torn as I was desperate to eek it out as much as possible as I wasn't ready to say goodbye to this world!

How I Saved The World In A Week - Polly Ho-Yen

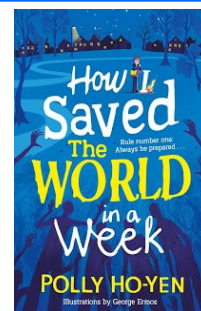
Billy's life is different to everybody else's in school: he and his mum never spend too long in one place before moving on, he calls her by her first name (Sylvia) and he spends all his time with her learning about survival skills. At the beginning of the book, Sylvia's behaviour becomes more and more erratic as she desperately tries to teach Billy everything she knows, insisting that he always live by the 5 rules of survival: always be prepared; pay attention; trust no one; master your fears and never stop trying.

However, when one of their survival sessions goes wrong, Billy is sent to live with the father he hasn't seen for the past two years, whilst Sylvia is hospitalised for psychiatric treatment. It is during his time here that he sees a man outside his bedroom window fall and die, but then later sees the same man walking down the street again. Confused, he confides in Angharad, his Dad's girlfriend's daughter and together they begin to investigate; only to discover that a mysterious virus is infecting people and turning them into zombie-like creatures who seem to infect other people around them. Billy, his friend Anwar and Angharad call them 'Greys' but find it difficult to prove they exist to Billy's dad who believes that he is still under his mum's influence. However, a trip out changes everything and, in an instant, the world changes for ever as they Greys begin to take over and it's up to Billy to finally put his survival skills to the test and save everyone.

Billy has never really had friends. Their constant moving around and his mum's increasing paranoia seems to alienate him from everyone else and this is quickly evident at the beginning of the book. It is clear that the teachers and children at school see him as different from the reaction when his mum arrives to pick him up in the middle of the day, and why ... to practise survival skills, of course. Billy is loyal to his mum but he's lonely, so when he moves in with his dad and meets Anwar, the development of their friendship is good to see. His relationship with Angharad gets off to a very rocky start as the pair clearly don't want to be in each other's company, but their parents' perseverance and a common cause quickly brings them together. Their perseverance and determination to prove themselves right is what shines through.

This is a sci-fi story in disguise! A modern day setting (London and Bristol), in a world the readers can relate to, and the virus element will definitely resonate with readers in the current climate (although, thankfully, COVID doesn't currently seem to lead to a world of zombie-esque creatures!). It's only when the virus takes hold that a more sci-fi feeling becomes apparent which leads to an gripping end to the book (I couldn't put it down and read late into the night in order to find out what was going to happen!).

How I Saved The World In A Week is due for release on the 8th July.



Bin Boy - There's Nothing Rubbish About This Hero - Tom Vaughan (illustrated by Emma McCann)

Billy's mum has just remarried and he's convinced that his millionaire step-dad is a super-villain! To add to that, Billy and his best-friend are incredibly unpopular at school so life isn't really much fun. Then Billy discovers that his suspicions were right and his step-dad has plans to destroy the entire world through his cola company! Billy sees this as the perfect opportunity to split his mum and his step-dad up, but things aren't as easy as they seem and, before long, the eyes of the world are on Billy, but can he live-up to his brand-new super hero status and save the world?

This is a funny book about family, friendship, pizza and cola, gallons and gallons of cola! Perfect for fans of David Solomon's books



Maria's Island - Victoria Hislop (Illustrated by Gill Smith)

Parents reading this may have read Victoria's best known book The Island, set on Greece's former leper colony the island of Spinalonga off Crete. Told from the point of view of Maria (one of the children in the original novel), Maria's Island tells of the misunderstood disease and of Maria's experiences of it, its effects on her family and the tiny village of Plaka where she lived. Beautifully told and illustrated, this book is bound to become a classic. Perfect for Year 3 & 4, Maria's Island will also be enjoyed by Y5&6. The Island is one of my favourite books and I also loved this book! It transported me back to Crete and Plaka again.



Mystery of the Night Watchers - AM Howell

It's 1910 and, with Halley's Comet visible in the sky and only days away from reaching its closest point to Earth, Nancy and her sister Violet are surprised that their mum is taking them from their home in Leeds to Suffolk to stay with a grandfather they didn't know they had. And once they arrive, things get even more surprising: the girls are forbidden from leaving the house and must remain away from the windows; they are not allowed to go to the room at the top of the house, and their grandfather's apothecary shop never has any customers. The girls are confused and Nancy, in particular, is determined to find out what is going on. Why is her mum behaving so strangely, why are there late night trips out of the house and what are the secrets her mum and grandfather are keeping hidden? With the help of her new friend, Burch, it's up to Nancy to negotiate the dangers and uncover the truth about what is going on.



AM Howell is a master of historical fiction and I always find curling up with one of her books rather comforting, and **Mystery of the Night Watchers** was no different. She has a way of drawing you in from the very beginning that makes you feel like you are part of the family, and I quickly felt as though I was travelling along with Nancy as she journeyed from Leeds to Suffolk. She mixes historical fact with fiction seamlessly which transports you back in time and will no doubt make readers want to discover more about Halley's Comet (the Usborne Quicklinks at the back of the book will be invaluable for this: you can browse photos of the comet from 1910, see inside the observatory in Bury, see women protesting for the right to vote...). The book will inspire children to want to know more about the science behind the comet as well as equal rights for women.

Nancy is a character that many readers will be able to relate to: at the beginning of the book she is rather irritated by her younger sister, Violet, but time and her change in circumstances mean that she quickly becomes keen to help in any way she can. Although she gets it wrong at times (who doesn't?), her determination to help her family is what drives her on and why I admire her, not least for her desire to be a solicitor like her father. Burch, meanwhile, has strength of a different kind: from the beginning, we discover that he is delivering to Laurence Greenstone in secret as he knows nobody else will help him. There's a kindness and sense of knowing his own mind that is apparent from the first time I met him - he may be my favourite character!

Mystery of the Night Watchers is guaranteed to be another resounding hit for AM Howell; combining history with mystery in a way that will keep you guessing until the end. This is a book you won't be able to put down.

SkyWake Invasion - Jamie Russell

Casey Henderson loves to play computer games, and one game in particular: SkyWake. She's a brilliant player and leads her team (The Ghost Reapers) expertly, so much so that the team has been invited to play at the live SkyWake tournament at the local shopping centre. There's just one problem though: Casey (known as Casey_Flow to her team mates) has been masquerading as a boy for fear she wouldn't be taken seriously as a girl. When the team meet-up, Casey's little brother, Pete, is mistaken for being Casey and the pair go along with the ruse until they are in the grip of the tournament. It quickly becomes apparent that Pete isn't as good as Casey who jumps in to take his place. Confusion and arguments ensue but there suddenly becomes much more important things to worry about when the Red Eye alien cos-players turn out to be anything but cosplayers... the game becomes very real and, with Pete running off upset, Casey now has far more to worry about.



This was a fast-paced book, full of action as well as twists and turns to keep you on the edge of your seat until the very last word! The idea of a female gamer is such a positive role in my view and very much reminds readers that people shouldn't be judged on their gender. Casey is strong, brave, determined and a real role-model for readers; yet her fear for her brother (borne out of her family history) makes her very real.

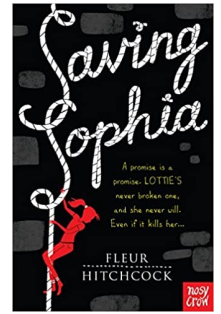
This is a perfect book for fans of Dan Smith and also for those who enjoyed Jennifer Bell's Wonderscape.

Saving Sophia - Fleur Hitchcock

This book has an interesting cover with the shadow of a rope and a girl which encouraged me to pick it up. This book by Fleur Hitchcock is divided into short chapters that are snappy and easy to read. Lottie is embarrassed about her family and their exploits and wants nothing more than to disappear.

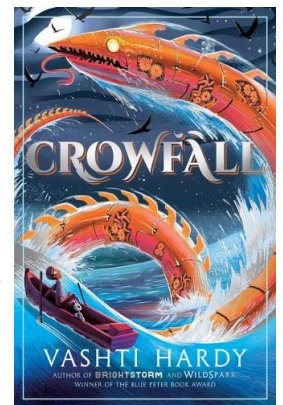
When Lottie meets Sophia her life is viewed through someone else's eyes and she ends up going with Sophia on a dangerous adventure to find her mam! Can Lottie be brave like the heroines in her adventure books? Can she reunite Sophia and her mam and discover what Mr Pinehead is really up to? Read it to find out!

Miss Hobson



Crowfall - Vashti Hardy

Orin Crowfall lives on Ironhold, an island where everything is ordered and industry rules; there is very little nature except for the Eard tree whose roots provide the foundations of the island. Commander Forge is the custodian of the Eard and leads the islanders; however, when Orin discovers that she is stealing the essence of the tree for her own gains and intends to flee the island with her team and leave everyone else to die, Orin is determined to help his family so sets off with Cody his Fixie (an AI helper that Orin has adapted so she talks like us) and his best friend. Together, they flee on a boat in search of help and find themselves shipwrecked on Natura island where they meet Ferelith. Natura is the complete opposite to Ironhold: nature dominates the island and the residents work together to harvest and gather crops. They also have an Eard but this one seems to rule the islanders and, at first, refuses to let Orin leave. However, he is determined to save his family and Ferelith is keen to help. But will they make it back to Ironhold in time? What will they find there and will they be able to stop Commander Forge?



The worlds that Vashti builds in this book are wonderful (as I have come to expect!). Ironhold is a world of industry: tall building, engineering and very little in the way of nature; people are struggling and your wealth depends upon where on the island you live; however, by contrast, Natura is an abundance of plants, trees and natural resources. The people there seem to work in harmony and nobody seems to go hungry. The contrast between the two islands is stark and yet in both there are definite elements of control at play: in Ironhold it's Commander Forge and on Natura it's the Eard. But when does the balance of power and wanting ultimate control become too much?

As with the world building, I'm always a big fan of the characters Vashti brings to life in her books. Orin is a young man who only wants to do right by everyone. He loves his family and they are his driving force behind everything, but he also has a love of nature as we see from the very beginning of the book. As we progress through the book, we see a strength within him that I don't think he knew he had. Cody is Orin's best friend and, in my opinion, the best character in the book! A fixie who has been altered by Orin so that she speaks and behaves in a much more human way, her friendship with Orin and her loyalty to him mean that I frequently forgot she wasn't human! I am now desperate to get my own Cody! Then we have Ferelith who Orin befriends on Natura. She is a strong and determined young lady who has a thirst for adventure - I liked her and her spirit will appeal to so many young readers.

Due for release on the 1st July, Crowfall is a story of family, friendship, finding the balance between science and nature, of control and balance, but most of all, of hope and not giving up.

Have a very bookish summer holiday and remember to send me your reviews so I can include them in the September edition of Bonkers About Books.

