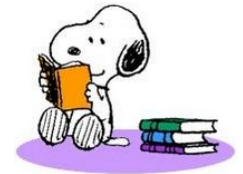




RGS: Bonkers About Books!

April/May 2023



Hello,

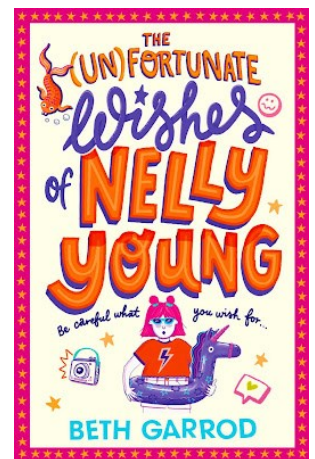
I hope you have all been enjoying some good books recently. I have some wonderful new suggestions for you here. Remember, if you read a good book, you can write a review and I will include it in the newsletter. Show me what you're reading! Some of you may have noticed that my display isn't currently up in Waterstones; however you can still find the cards around the shelves—more news about that soon.

Happy reading,
Mrs Wall



The (Un)fortunate Wishes of Nelly Young - Beth Garrod

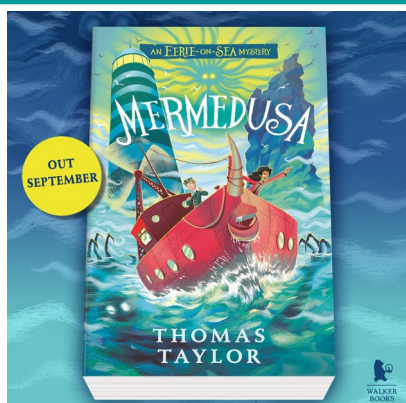
Nelly Young lives with her dad whom she thinks is the most embarrassing dad ever. Meanwhile, in school, she is trying desperately to change the reputation she has as being incredibly clumsy. With an upcoming presentation to senior school students, Nelly sees this as the perfect chance to reinvent herself and plans to use half-term to do this, along with the help of her two best friends, Jasmine (Jas) and Clara. As the trio start working on this, they begin to list their greatest wishes but never in their wildest dreams do they think they'll come true. On the first day of half-term, when Jasmine and her mum check-in to their lodge at Camp Chaos, they discover that they have spare rooms so invite Nelly and Clara to join them. As their wishes continue to come true the trio discover that having your wishes come true may not always be for the best.



This is an absolute joy of a book and one that brought the biggest smile to my face just when I needed it. The friendship between Nelly, Clara and Jas is so strong and the bond they have shows the loyalty and love they have towards each other and is perfect to show readers what friendship is all about (even when things don't always go your way).

Set largely at Camp Chaos (please let me visit there!), the week is a host of belly laughs, love and luck (both good and bad!). Whilst the girls enjoy having their wishes come true, the story also shows us that having your wishes come true can also have consequences (admittedly funny ones here!) so, in amongst the laughter, there are strong messages about thinking about your actions, considering others and understanding that family can come in all shapes and sizes.

With flamingo dancing, slightly dodgy cake and rollercoaster vomiting, **The (Un)fortunate Wishes of Nelly Young** is a joyous celebration of friendship, family and finding yourself.



Cover Reveal!

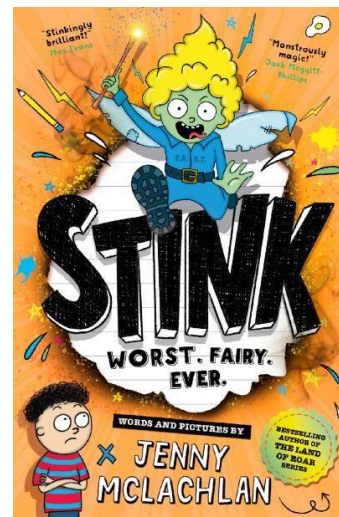
The fifth and final book in the Eerie-on-Sea series, **Mermadusa**, will be published in September and I am thrilled to be able to share the cover with you.

Stink - Jenny McLachlan

It's Danny Todd's birthday and he's excited to see what presents he's got. Most of them he's happy with but the mystery present from his little sister leaves him feeling rather underwhelmed, after all, what eleven-year-old boy wants a stick it to your wall fairy door as a present? And to make matters worse, she grabs it out of his hand, races up stairs and actually glues it to his wall (to be fair, she also glues a lot of other things around his room at the same time!). Just when Danny thinks things can't get any stranger an actual real live fairy comes through the door! Stink isn't quite your usual fairy and is desperate to do some good in order to earn enough nuggets to buy herself a new pair of wings to replace her incredibly battered ones. However, Stink's magic isn't that strong so earning the nuggets could be tricky.

This is a very funny book with a host of great characters (I particularly liked Professor Najin!) and I found myself laughing out loud on several occasions. Stink's heart is in the right place but she seems to cause so much chaos that you begin to wonder whether Danny will just end up in a whole heap of trouble!

With an action-packed plot and illustrations to enhance the mayhem, **Stink** is a book that is guaranteed to put a smile on everybody's face, but don't be fooled: this book is about more than just laughs and mayhem; there are also important messages about friendship and not giving up that readers will be able to relate to. I know that **Stink** will be in demand when I take it into school next term.



Castle Rock Mystery Crew - Vicky McClure in collaboration with Kim Curran

When Jase's auntie offers to take him and his nana on holiday, he imagines a trip abroad, not one to a Castle Rock Caravan Park in Skegness; however, when he gets there he is quick to make friends. Then, things start to go missing around the park and the crew decide to investigate. With tips from Jase's nana, who just happens to be a retired chief constable of Nottingham Police, can the crew find the culprit before the end of their holiday?

Written in collaboration with Kim Curran, **Castle Rock Mystery Crew** is a fast-paced adventure. The mystery is a page-turner and the clues the crew uncover will leave readers guessing until the end. I know that Vicky is the founder of Our Dementia Choir and I thought that nana having dementia in the book was sensitively handled. It will help those readers who have grandparents in a similar situation to understand what is happening, and it will also raise awareness for others. I have had family members who had dementia so I know the impact it can have; books like this are important for children to be able to access.

Readers will love the relatable characters in the crew who, along with Jase's dog, Sherlock, are determined to crack the case and do the right thing. Family, friendship and adventure all combine to create a great book that will make a great read this summer.

Publishing 11th May, **Castle Rock Mystery Crew** is perfect for those who like adventure and I can't wait to take it into school next week.



Robin Stevens in the region

Robin Stevens will be up in the North-East at the end of May with two opportunities to get your books signed: On the Thursday 25th May, she will be at Seven Stories from 4.30-6.00pm, and on Saturday 26th May, she will be in Waterstones Durham from 11.00am-2.00pm. Why not pop down, say hi and get your books signed?



Lost on Gibbon Island - Jess Butterworth

Twelve year old Lark isn't happy about missing her gymnastics competition in order to travel to Cambodia with her family so her mum can carry out research about disappearing gibbons for her job as an environmental journalist. Never in her wildest dreams did Lark think that this trip would lead to her being stranded on a desert island with only a baby gibbon for company. With no way of contacting the main land, can Lark find a way off the island before it's too late?

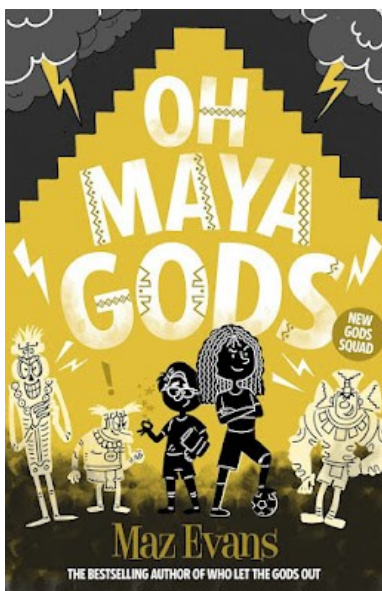
Lost On Gibbon Island is written entirely as a series of diary entries that Lark writes once she reaches the island. Having taken a notebook in a plastic bag, she finds a felt pen on the beach of the island and so begins to detail her days as a way to help her process what's going on. The first person viewpoint makes this a very personal book that will draw readers in. Along with her days on the island, Lark intersperses the story of what has lead her to this situation and this is unveiled as the book progresses. (Shout out to Rob Biddulph whose illustrations boarder each page beautifully).



Lark is a normal twelve year old, upset at being dragged away from her gymnastics competition at the expense of her mum's job again. However, as the book progresses, you see her resilience kicking in. As you would imagine, she experiences a full range of emotions and I am pleased that things are difficult for her: it would be all too easy in a middle grade book to have her find drinking water quickly but the reality would be different and I think readers will appreciate the grittier experience more. She is afraid but calls upon things she can remember from home to help her. and just because things start to get a little easier for her, doesn't mean they remain that way and I felt that gave it a much more realistic feel. I found it incredibly interesting to read the author's note at the end of the book where I discovered that **Lost On Gibbon Island** is based upon Jess's own experiences of being stranded on a desert island and I think this is definitely reflected in Lark's experiences.

Within the book, there are so many incredibly important messages quietly woven into the plot: the environmental messages about pollution and plastic pollution appear in the things that Lark finds to help her, things that have been washed up on the beach. Also, the messages about animal exploitation and the plight of the gibbons; as well as the danger to investigative journalists (again, based on true stories). This is a book that quietly shouts about some very serious issues in a way that will engage and interest readers.

Out now, **Lost On Gibbon Island** is an immersive adventure with a heroic main character and the most wonderful baby gibbon. It's an adventure that will make you think, give you hope and leave you with a smile on your face.



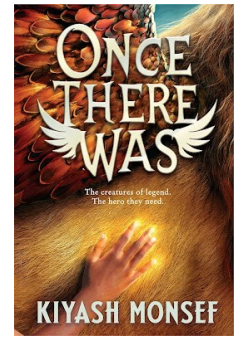
Maz Evans News!

Those of you who have enjoyed the Who Let The Gods Out series by Maz Evans will be excited to know that there is a spin-off series coming in September (which gives those of you who haven't read the books yet time to catchup!).

I've had a sneaky early read and I can tell you that this book is just as funny as the others—keep your eyes peeled for my review.

Once There Was - Kiyash Monseff

After Marjan's father's sudden death, she is left alone trying to get through school as well as keeping her father's veterinary practice afloat. But then, one evening after the practice is closed, she receives a mysterious visitor and her world turns on its axis again for it appears that her father was hiding a very big secret from her: he used to help magical creatures who were hidden in the world. They are being bought and sold, some are loved whilst others are trapped. Marjan has a gift for connecting with these creatures and it's up to her to take over where her father left off. But how will she react when the truth becomes clear to her?



When **Once There Was** arrived last week, I hadn't heard of it but I was so intrigued that by both the blurb and the cover that it jumped up my tbr pile and I curled up with it on Sunday morning... and didn't really move for the rest of the day! It's one of those books that lures you in and very quickly becomes a 'just one more chapter' type of book. You want to know more and more about Marjan, her father, the creatures and how everything links together, and it's just too moreish to put down!

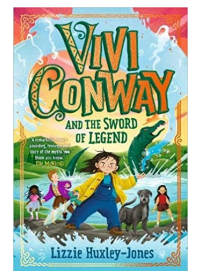
Marjan has clearly had a difficult upbringing: after her mother's death when she was young, her father was frequently called away and Marjan never knew where he was going or when he would be back. For her then to lose him as well, and in such mysterious circumstances, has to be incredibly hard on her. She is strong though - she has to be - and her independence is evident from the beginning of the book. I don't know many fifteen year olds who would be able to take on the running of a veterinary practice, still go to school and live on their own (albeit with her next-door neighbour now looking out for her as her legal guardian). I'm not surprised that she takes the risks she does and follows in her father's footsteps (despite knowing absolutely nothing about where she's going or what will be waiting for her). But, along with the independent streak that courses through her, there is an element of a risk-taker and a gnawing within her that there is something missing but she doesn't know what. She is a complex character and this made her incredibly intriguing to get to know.

Alongside Marjan, there are also the creatures to discover as the book unfolds, and griffon, gnome, manticore, fairies to name a few all make an appearance, but not all are kind and gentle and this gives the book a darker edge - one that I liked.

Once There Was is an absolutely thrilling read; darker than I had expected and dangerous (I liked that). Relationships are explored in an adventure that combines a murder mystery with fantasy, and we see the anger that grief can cause and the power that money can wield. There are twists aplenty (and some I really didn't see coming) all whilst not knowing who to trust along the way. In short, **Once There Was** is a brilliant read that will captivate and excite readers whilst keeping them utterly gripped.

Vivi Conway and the Sword of Legend - Lizzie Huxley-Jones

Vivi is about to move from a remote area of Wales to central London, and on the morning of the move, she sneaks out very early to head to the lake where she thinks she can hear a mysterious voice calling her. The lake is one she is familiar with as she swims there often, but this time, she is confronted by a terrifying monster and she only just manages to escape, thanks to Dara, the sword Excalibur and Gelert, a ghostly dog who can talk. Shell-shocked, Vivi returns home, and she and her mums make the move to London where she begins a new school. So imagine her surprise when she bumps into Dara on her first day. It turns out that Dara and Vivi were destined to find each other as part of a group who share the soul of magical legends. But when children start going missing, can Vivi use her new ability to control water (along with the help of her friends) to save them and protect the world from the monsters?



This is a book that combines myths with modern-day England and Wales in an adventure that will grip readers. It's an immersive read that will transport you from London to Unlands in the blink of an eye.

Vivi and her friends make four incredibly strong main characters and, even though it takes them a while to trust each other and let their guards down, they will be adored by readers. I loved the representation within the book with neurodiversity, LGBTQ+, disability and different ethnicities all woven in. It is important for children to be able to see themselves in books and to understand that they can be heroes and Vivi Conway and her friends will show them that in great dollops.

Finn Jones Was Here—Simon James Green

Eric has just lost his best friend, Finn, but despite attending his funeral, Eric is convinced that he is still alive, especially when messages begin appearing from Finn (who was the biggest prankster Eric knew) which lead Eric on an epic scavenger hunt in the hopes he would find his best friend waiting for him at the end.

We first meet Eric as he attends Finn's funeral along with his mum ... both dressed as unicorns! However, it very quickly becomes apparent that everybody else is dressed in black. Mortified, Eric's mum is obviously unhappy but Eric is able to produce the funeral invitation he was sent with the dress-code on it - an invitation, it would appear, that only he has received. Then, just before the funeral begins, he is handed an envelope which contains a message from Finn, telling Eric that he isn't to do the reading he has been practising, but should do the one Finn has written in the envelope (one that can only be read by ultraviolet light which has been installed in the pulpit) ... oh, and he can't tell anybody Finn is making him do this. As you can imagine, the speech is not what you would usually hear at a funeral! Cue then, the start of the scavenger hunt, one that Eric can't tell anybody he is on, except Cooper, whom Finn has persuaded to join Eric for the adventure. Because that's what this is: it's an adventure for Eric, one where he is almost permanently outside his comfort zone, cracking codes and trying different things, all in the hopes that his friend will be waiting for him at the end.

This is a funny book that is full of giggles and laugh out loud moments (dancing unicorn at a funeral anyone?!) but one that has a serious thread running through it. I cannot imagine how difficult it must be to lose your best friend when you're a child, but I know that it would have a profound effect on anybody in that position. Grief hits everybody differently and there is no right or wrong way to deal with a situation like this. Eric has clearly (and very understandably) not come to terms with having lost his best friend and there are reasons for that which become apparent as the book unfolds. I love that this is a story that shows children that it's ok to grieve in your own way; that it's ok to find death difficult, but it's also ok to laugh about things that happen. The memories that Eric retells show the bond the pair had and allow the reader to get to know Finn (who sounds like he was the most epic friend!), and will also remind readers that remembering the good times after somebody has died can be a help.

I have to give a shout out to Cooper who takes on the role of side-kick in the scavenger hunt and does so with style. It can't be easy becoming Eric's friend at a time like this but his compassion and patience is a lesson to us all - he's a good guy.

Enhanced by wonderful illustrations by Jennifer Jamieson, **Finn Jones Was Here** is a triumph of a book. It's one that will make you laugh and it will make you cry. It reminds us that friends should be treasured; that memories are wonderful things and that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. This is a book that I will remember for a long time. Oh, and is the reason why I will never look at a seagull in the same way again!

