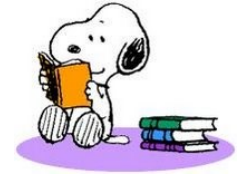




RGS: Bonkers About Books!

March 2024



Hi,

It's been an action-packed month for all things bookish with lots of new, exciting books publishing and author visits being booked (more about that later!) but, for me, the highlight was a trip to London to catch-up with authors published by Simon & Schuster, as well as being quoted on a poster advertising a book for those in Year 6 who are looking for something a bit scarier.

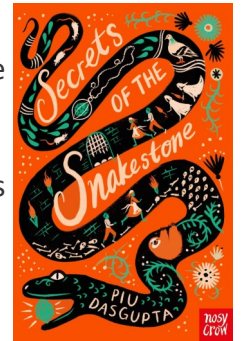
But, as Easter approaches, remember to enjoy some reading as well as chocolate!

Mrs Wall



Secrets of the Snake Stone - Piu Dasgupta

Zélie is living in Paris, working as a maid in a grand house near the Opera. Although she tries to make the best of things, life isn't great for her as the rest of the staff believe she is a witch - life is lonely and the only company she has is Rodolphe, the pigeon who visits the window of her attic room. When her father's letters stop arriving, she realises that something has happened to him and decides to run away to find him. However, her plans change when she opens the door to find a boy she's never met before, Jules, standing there with a locket in his hand that he found in the sewers beneath the city. Zélie recognises it instantly and together, the pair embark upon an adventure across Paris that will see them up against a dangerous scientific society; flee to the circus in the quest for answers and then risk their own lives for the truth.



It's no secret that I adore Paris and have a weakness for books set in the city, so I was instantly drawn to *Secrets of The Snakestone* when the proof copy arrived for me. Choosing to wait until I could curl up with it and give it the attention it deserved was tricky but I'm glad that I did, for once I was drawn into the streets and sewers of Paris, I found it difficult to leave.

Set during the 1890s, **Secrets Of The Snakestone** lets us into the life of Zélie who is clearly not having the easiest of times. She is alone in a city that isn't her home, she is feeling homesick and is on the receiving end of hurtful comments from those around her. It soon becomes apparent, however, that Zélie is not your average 1890s girl and has an inner strength that will inspire readers. I particularly liked the pep-talks she gave to herself as well as the love she has for her father which is evidently what drives her on in her quest.

Jules has had a very different upbringing and is simply trying to make his way in the world in any way he can. Working with his father in the sewers, the last thing he is searching for is adventure. As the author's note reminds us, although the 1890s was known as la Belle Époque in Paris, there were many who weren't privileged enough to experience this side of life and were struggling in poverty. The book shows the contrasts of Parisian life perfectly and will undoubtedly lead to some interesting discussions. Throughout the book, I loved the weaving of legends with science, of gemstones and magic, and the contrast of riches against the darkness of the streets and sewers of Paris. **Secrets Of The Snakestone** is a deliciously enticing, gripping adventure that will snake its way into your mind so you find yourself thinking about the characters even when you're not reading the book. Publishing on the 14th March, get ready to creep into a gothic world of gemstones, mystery and murky tunnels, and be prepared not to want to leave. If this is Piu's debut novel, then I am very excited about what is to come next.

This edition of Bonkers About Books was proof-read by

Jamaima, Jess, Eleanor



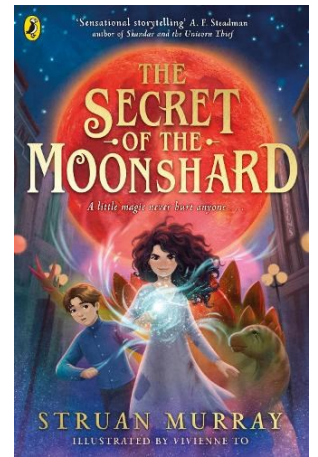
The Secret Of The Moonshard - Struan Murray

Dominio has lived her whole life on a tiny island just off the mainland, in a laboratory with the Science Barons who have told her that she is allergic to magic. However, when she discovers that everything she's been told is a lie, Domino escapes and heads to Abzalaymon, a city full of magic and wonder that holds the promise of a better future for her. It doesn't take long for the Science Barons to follow her though, as they are determined to bring her back to the lab. With a war brewing between science and magic, could Domino be the one who can save everyone?

Struan Murray became renowned for his world building in *Orphans of the Tide* and his skills are most definitely evident in **The Secret Of The Moonshard**. Abzalaymon is a city you will very quickly become immersed in, whether that's wandering the streets with Calvin, discovering the Diner or coming face to face with a thunder lizard, and I personally found myself reluctant to leave at the end of the book.

Domino was somebody I adored from the very beginning: fiercely independent (some may say wild), she is a character who is full of anger and hatred (what she does to poor Mrs Honeywinkle is unthinkable) and seems determined to cause trouble wherever she goes. Despite that though, there is something incredibly endearing about her and I found myself rooting for her at every possible moment. She makes the most unlikely of heroes and one who is adamant that her voice will be heard - I love that about her.

With plot twists that will leave you speechless, **The Secret Of The Moonshard** is a deliciously dark and epic page-turner of a book that you will find impossible to put down. It's brilliantly original, utterly absorbing and the perfect combination of science and magic.



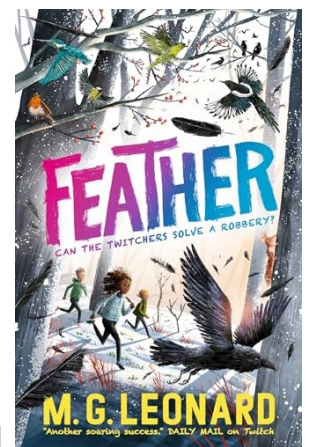
Feather - M. G. Leonard

The Twitchers are back for their final adventure and this time it's Ava at the helm. Whilst on a school trip to the Royal Swan Natural History Museum, Ava stumbles across the theft of hundreds of bird skins, but not just any bird skins, these are rare birds of paradise. Finding a black feather, Ava tries to inform the police that it's a clue but they refuse to listen to her so, ditching her school and risking the wrath of her mother, she takes the train to Briddvale and enlists the help of The Twitchers. What follows is undoubtedly the gang's most dangerous mission yet, and one that could lead to people losing their lives if they aren't careful. Can The Twitchers uncover the truth about the theft before it's too late?

MG Leonard first showed us her ability to incorporate her love of wildlife and her talent for writing with the Beetle Boy trilogy (if you haven't read the series, you really must) and The Twitchers series has confirmed her status as a master of wildlife fiction. The love of nature and birds, as well as the factual information about ornithology, is captivating to readers (you just need to see the number of children in my school alone who love this book to know that it is having an impact) and is helping to create readers who care about the natural world around them.

With each of these books, a different member of the group has taken the lead and this time it's Ava leading the way. Present at the time of the robbery, she is determined not to be fobbed off. Her stubborn determination is evident throughout the book and it's not surprising after everything she's been through. I think her past is what makes her so desperate to help out and why she pushes on when others are urging caution. I think she is an inspirational character in her sense of bravery as well as her determination to be a good friend; not to mention her resilience in making her voice heard.

This series finale is undoubtedly the most dangerous and gripping yet with some dark twists waiting for readers, and is guaranteed to have you unable to put the books down. With robbery, murder and plots to kill, **Feather** is undoubtedly a most fitting end for our Twitcher friends.



Tine Travellers: Adventure Calling - Sufiyah Ahmed

Suhana, Mia and Ayaan are thrown together on a trip to Parliament, where they are fascinated by all the history that happened there. Little do they suspect that they'll be LIVING that history when they are transported back to 1911!

Finding themselves in the middle of a women's suffrage demonstration, they are amazed to see people from all over the world taking part. Suhana wants to explore but Mia and Ayaan are anxious to get back. Then they lose each other ... Will they be able to return to the present without changing the course of history forever?

I have read and enjoyed many of Sufiya's books in the past and love the way she incorporates historical facts with adventure whilst also highlighting the ethnic diversity that was alive at the time. Here, we are taken back to 1911 and discover more about the women's suffrage movement. The strength of characters, both in 1911, and our modern-day heroes, will help to inspire readers and show them that they are capable of anything.

The factual information that is woven into the plot is guaranteed to interest even the most reluctant historian and is shared in an engaging way.

Perfect for Year 3 and 4 readers in particular, **Time Travellers Adventure Calling** is the first in a new series and is a book that combines friendship, history and adventure in a fast-paced story-line that will leave readers longing for the second in the series. I wonder where the trio will head to next.



When I Feel Red - Lily Bailey

April is in Year 8 and is struggling to fit in: she finds lessons tricky and whilst her classmates are all discussing which boys they want to go out with, she just wants to draw or rescue a stray animal. Navigating the year is made easier with her friend, Ben, by her side, but as the pressure mounts, how will April react?

I read Lily's first novel, *When I Feel Blue* in 2022 and was captivated by Ben's story (you can read my review [here](#)) so it was a delight to see that Lily had written a book about April who we met in *When I Feel Blue*.

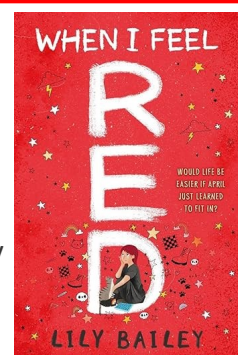
April lives with dyspraxia which means that reading and organisation are just two of the things that she finds tricky. It quickly becomes apparent that the confident young girl we met when she befriended Ben, isn't actually as confident as she may have appeared and that having dyspraxia is something that embarrasses her. School is difficult and her feelings for different situations were insightful - I was incredibly pleased to see Mr M being so supportive (however, if I ever meet Mrs Williams, she will certainly be getting a piece of my mind!). In lessons, she feels as though she is wading through treacle and that they may as well be in a foreign language which means that she is frequently in trouble and often in detention. To add to the pressures she is feeling, she doesn't feel ready to date anybody but she feels the pressure to conform so this is something else she has to navigate. It really is a difficult time for her. Where April truly shines is in the way she cares for animals and her drawing skills, both of which come to the fore in the course of the book.

April really shows us what life is like for those who live with dyspraxia and I know that this will help those who have dyspraxia see themselves, but will also be an important read for others (both children and adults) as a way to help them understand what friends and classmates experience.

It was also wonderful to see Ben again and to see how he is getting on. I was so pleased to see that their friendship was going strong, but within the course of the book there are bumps that need to be navigated (I'm saying no more!).

As well as being a brilliant insight into dyspraxia (including how it can impact other family members), the book is a reminder that we all grow up at different times. Whilst some are ready to date boys and gossip about who they fancy, others need more time - and both are perfectly normal. April is a shining example of the importance of being yourself and not being afraid to march to the beat of your own drum - a truly important message for readers to hear.

When I Feel Red is the perfect book to build anyone's empathy skills; it is a powerful, heart-warming read and I guarantee that April is a character who will stay with you long after you've finished the last chapter. I know she will provide comfort and joy to many a reader.



Skandar and the Unicorn Thief—A. F. Steadman

'Skandar Smith has always yearned to leave the Mainland and escape to the secretive Island, where wild unicorns roam free. He's spent years studying for his Hatchery exam, the annual test that selects a handful of Mainlander thirteen-year-olds to train to become unicorn riders. But on the day of Skandar's exam, things go horribly wrong, and his hopes are shattered...until a mysterious figure knocks on his door at midnight, bearing a message: the Island is in peril and Skandar must answer its call.

Skandar is thrust into a world of epic sky battles, dangerous clashes with wild unicorns, and rumors of a shadowy villain amassing a unicorn army. And the closer Skandar grows to his newfound friends and community of riders, the harder it becomes to keep his secrets—especially when he discovers their lives may all be in graver danger than he ever imagined.'

I was very late to the party when it comes to Skandar (so many books and never enough time to read them!) and the book sat on my shelf for far too long before I picked it up. Oh wow! I started reading it one Friday evening about a year ago and barely moved until I'd finished it! What a book it is: a breath-taking adventure full of excitement. Pure escapism, the book is full of unicorns that are far from cute and fluffy, but I guarantee you will be desperate to bond with one by the end!

With twists and thrills that will keep you reading late into the night, **Skandar and the Unicorn Thief** is perfect for fans of Harry Potter, The Dragon Realm series, Amari and the Night Brothers.



Skandar and the Phantom Rider - A. F. Steadman

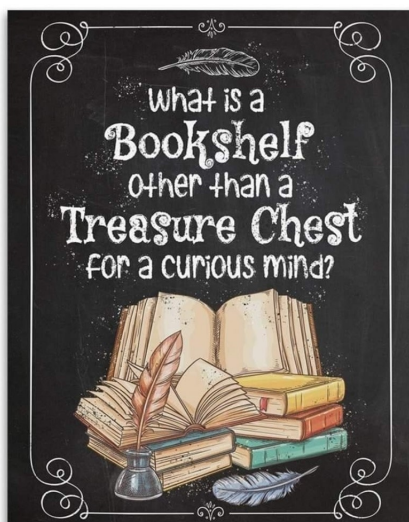
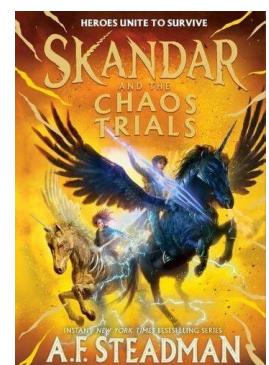
'Skandar Smith has achieved his dream: to train as a unicorn rider. But as Skandar and his friends enter their second year at the Eyrie, a new threat arises. Immortal wild unicorns are somehow being killed, a prophecy warns of terrible danger, and elemental destruction begins to ravage the Island.

Meanwhile, Skandar's sister, Kenna, longs to join him, and Skandar is determined to help her, no matter what. As the storm gathers, can Skandar find the key to stop the Island tearing itself apart before it's too late for them all?'

Book 2 is equally as exciting as book 1, if not more so and it's great to get to know the characters more and see how their friendships and rivalries grow. With danger lurking and an ending that will leave your breathless and biting your nails, this is a brilliant sequel.



I'm excited to announce that A. F. Steadman will be visiting school on the 2nd May to talk to everyone about her books. I'll send more details closer to the time, but I thought you might like to begin reading the series before then. You will be able to purchase books on the day, especially book 3, Skandar And The Chaos Trials which is released at the end of April.



The Black Hole Cinema Club - Christopher Edge

Lucas and his friends plan to spend their Saturday at an all-day movie marathon at **Black Hole Cinema Club**; they don't know what the films will be but they know they have enough snacks and that they're heading in to enjoy a 4D experience ('Immersive. Interactive. *Improved*'). But when they get in there they discover that the place is empty except for Caitlin and Maya who, along with Lucas and his friends, have been to every Black Hole marathon. Then the place goes black and, just as the film begins, a jet-black tidal wave crashes over them, plunging them into a movie experience like no other. One that feels far more like reality than a movie, and one that could lead to the end of the world ... unless they can save the day.

Christopher Edge is well-known for writing books that really keep you guessing and make you think. They are hugely popular in school and make the best class reads (I still remember reading my proof copy of *The Longest Night of Charlie Noon* to my class and having trouble getting them to go home as they just wanted me to keep reading every day!) so the arrival of **Black Hole Cinema Club** put a big smile on my face and resulted in me abandoning everything else in favour of curling up with the book.

As expected, **Black Hole Cinema Club** is a roller-coaster of an adventure that will have you gripping the edge of your seat and questioning what is real and what is part of the film, and there are clever nods to some film greats woven into the plot as the characters find themselves battling prehistoric monsters and venturing through lost cities.

Christopher is a genius at combining science with science-fiction and adventure in a way that will definitely make you think. Publishing on the 14th March, **Black Hole Cinema Club** is an adrenaline-fuelled race through film and time with a twist you really won't see coming so grab some popcorn and settle in for a blockbuster of an adventure you'll be thinking about long after you've read the last page.

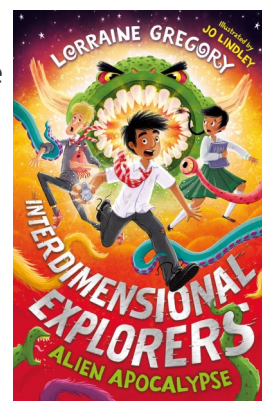


Interdimensional Explorers: Alien Apocalypse - Lorraine Gregory

We're back with Danny, Modge and Inaaya for their second adventure, and this time a star has been stolen from the vaults in their lost property office which could result in danger for the entire universe. It's down to our intrepid trio to save the day.

I loved *Interdimensional Explorers* when I read it last year (you can read my review [here](#)) so I was thrilled to be able to head back to catch-up with Danny, Modge and his cousin Inaaya. After their discoveries and adventures in book 1, the book begins with Danny's grandfather determined to enjoy the sudden offer of a cruise holiday, which means that Danny, Modge and Inaaya will, once again, be in charge of the IDLPO, with Danny officially being made his grandfather's apprentice. Danny is thrilled but Mrs Arbuckle (their supervisor) is concerned that they won't be able to cope with the upcoming Returns Day and offers them some support. Then, when the star is stolen from their office, everything rests on the trios' heads.

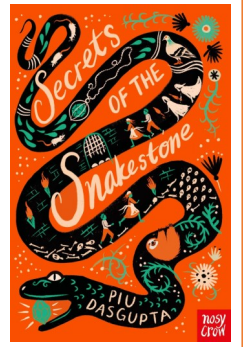
I absolutely adore the mix of science-fiction, adventure and humour that is woven into this book. Lorraine manages the balance perfectly and creates the most magical adventure that you simply can't put down. Having got to know Danny and co in book one, it is great to get to know more about them in **Alien Apocalypse**. The book is pure escapism and the creativity Lorraine brings is a joy to read. Combine that with Jo Lindley's art work and I promise you are in for a real treat. The book publishes on the 14th March and I sincerely hope there will be a book 3 to follow.



Student reviews

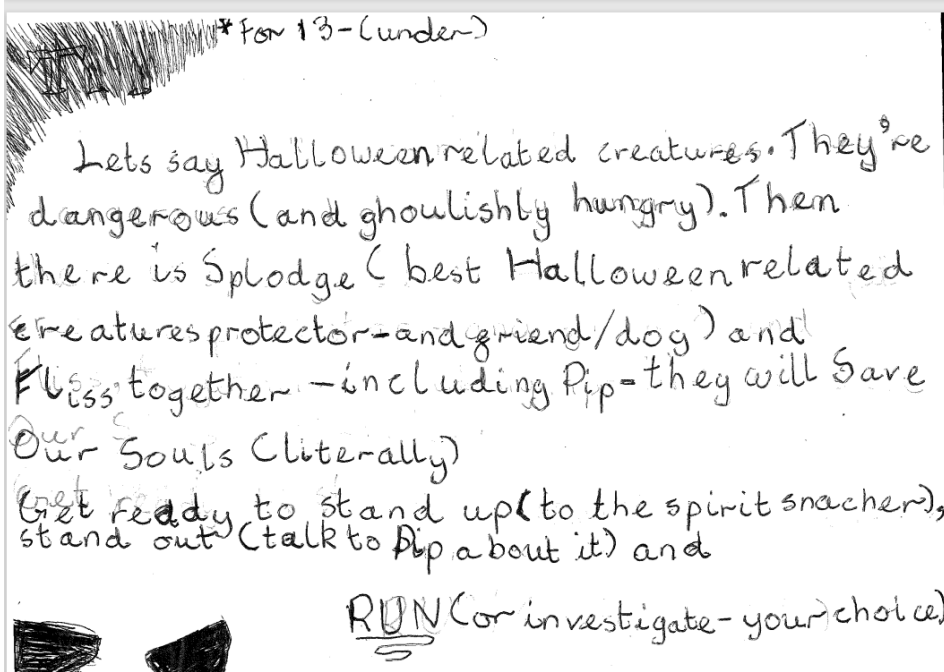
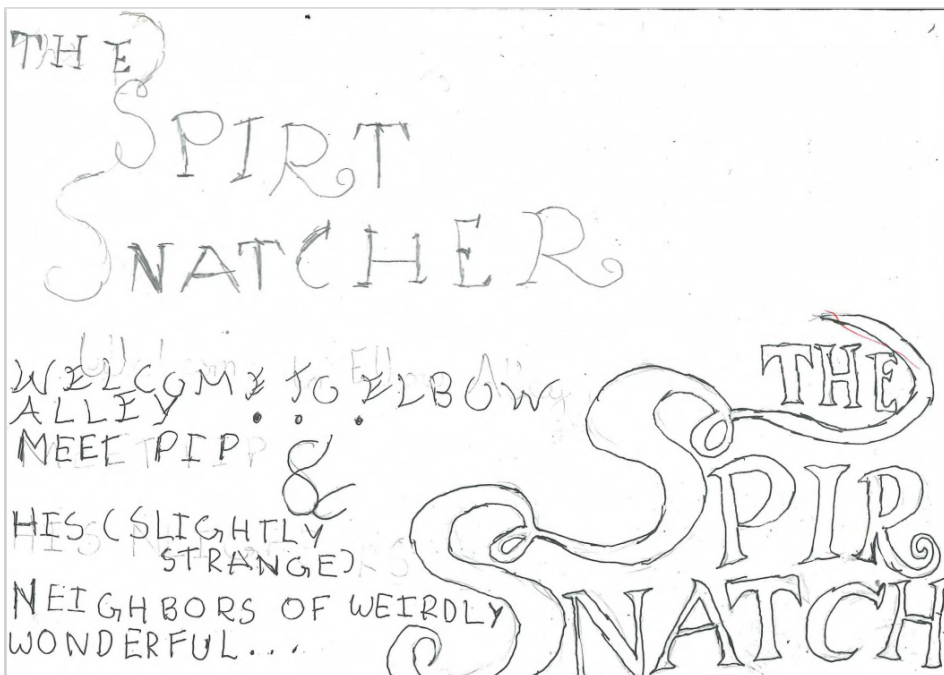
Secrets of the Snake Stone - Piu Dasgupta

An Indian housekeeper called Zélie works in a rich lady's house located in France, while her father was continuing his scientific research over in Calcutta, India. She sends letters addressed to her father every day, telling him about the days and the errands she has had to run. But after normally getting a reply, she hasn't received any. This is very unusual to her; she goes investigating and then meets Jules, a sewer boy who had found Zélie's locket, which she never takes off. This then leads her to dig deeper, and then they find a letter which conceals a message about the Snakestone, a magical gem which makes you invincible, but that comes with its ramifications. It also harms whoever is closest to your heart. Will she find it and the mystery disappearance of her dad?



From the sewers of Paris to the labs of Calcutta, this book is filled with mystery and suspense, while making the reader enquire what will happen next. This is (in my experience) the type of book that will grab you and push you in until you are hooked. With twists and turns all the time, you can never guess what will happen next. I would thoroughly recommend this to people who like action-packed mystery, with a seasoning of suspenseful plots.

Aayur P



Keren