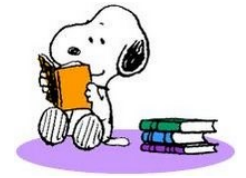




RGS: Bonkers About Books!

December 2022



Festive greetings!

I don't know about you but I feel as though the festive season has crept up on me somewhat this year and I'm not quite prepared for it! I am, however, always prepared when it comes to books, so if you need a bit of a festive boost, why not try diving into one of these Christmassy novels? Some are newly released whilst others are favourites that I enjoy sharing. Whatever you read, have a very merry break.

Happy reading

Mrs Wall

Operation Nativity - Jenny Pearson

Oscar and Molly live in Middlesbrough with their parents but are spending Christmas in Chipping-Bottom in Hampshire at their father's family home. You see their father is part of the Cuthbert-Andersons who own a rather large family estate where his parents, Lord and Lady Cuthbert-Anderson, still live. Christmas is a big event there and includes the family performing a nativity play for the rest of the village. Oscar and Molly's parents have managed to find ways of avoiding Christmases here for the past few years but this year, as Lord Cuthbert-Anderson is rather ill, they feel they have to go.

On their first night, whilst trying to sleep in the nursery, Oscar and Molly see a bright light in the sky and Molly convinces Oscar that they have to investigate. Whatever they thought they would find, it certainly wasn't a rather dazed Angel Gabriel who has managed to knock Christmas off course and needs their help to get things back on track before Christmas Day or Christmas will no longer exist. Sounds easy? Not if you also need to locate a shepherd, a wise man, a donkey, oh, and Mary and Joseph.

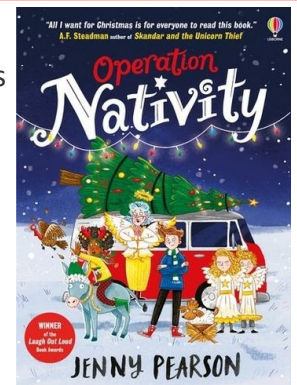
Can I just say now that **Operation Nativity** is a gloriously funny celebration of Christmas with all its traditions and I thoroughly adored every minute of it. I loved the small details and humour that will be as funny for adults as for children - funnier perhaps - and I can absolutely imagine this being a brilliant book to read aloud as a family (or to a class) in the run-up to the festive season.

Every family has their own particular Christmas traditions but the Cuthbert-Anderson's nativity play is quite the organised event involving every member of the family, whether they want to be part of it or not. Old traditions meet with the exuberance of youth as Lady Cuthbert-Anderson organises the carol singing and the play rehearsals, with hilarious results.

The characterisation within the book is really rather wonderful. I very much enjoyed the Angel Gabriel, Balthazar and Steve: their mannerisms and the way they spoke made me chuckle. However, it was Molly who stole the show for me. Her knack for telling the truth and being completely honest is a joy to read and her outfits always unique (she may become my new style icon). After Molly, never again shall I hear 'Joy To The World' in quite the same way again.

Oscar, although very different to his younger sister, is a wonderful young man who takes the weight of the world on his shoulders but does so with immense style. I loved his approach to everything (including stealing his dad's clothes). His love for his grandfather is evident and I found this very touching.

As well as the belly laughs (this book had me laughing out loud on a train from Venice to Florence - great for me, not so good for my embarrassed teenage son who was sat next to me), there are some very important messages about love and family within the book (I recommend having a tissue handy). Love and celebrate your family (in whatever form your family takes), embrace them for who they are and enjoy those times together for they are the memories you make and hold dear. I am reminded of the fact that my dad constantly tells my son and me to 'make memories' and I feel that Oscar's grandfather would approve - he is a wonderful character with a mischievous twinkle in his eye and the perfect balance to his wife.



The Frost Goblin - Abi Elphinstone; illustrated by Fiona Woodcock

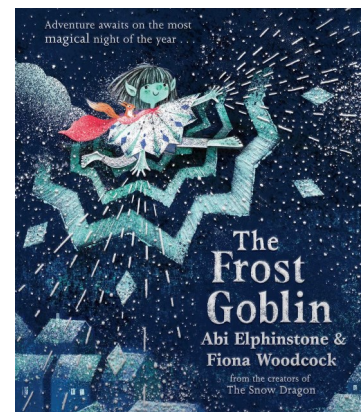
Bertie Crash-Wallop lives in a very noisy home where he often feels that, as a quiet child, he wouldn't be missed if he wasn't there. So one evening, he ventures out and stumbles across a family of goblins living under the house next door. It's their job to scatter the frost and, as it's winter's coldest night, the frost needs to be scattered before dawn. Bertie is keen to help and, in doing so, perhaps he can find his place in the world.

Oh, this book is simply gorgeous! The writing will lull you with its soothing tone and style whilst wrapping you in a warm embrace (despite it being set on the coldest night of winter) and the illustrations are a feast for the eyes. Abi has a way of conjuring up the best names for characters and places, and **The Frost Goblin** is no exception: set in Clatterstomp, the book follows Bertie Crash-Wallop who lives in Muddle Lane. The names add to the magical feel the book exudes and, along with the phrasing and vocabulary, make it the perfect book to read aloud (I seriously found myself reading it aloud to myself and cannot wait to read it to classes at school).

The perfect book for families and children of all ages, **The Frost Goblin** will show readers that even the quietest members of the family are loved, that being quiet can be a good thing and friendships can be found in the most unexpected of places.

I hugged the book at the end and simply sat and basked in the glow it left inside me. It's an uplifting, magical book that will have you longing for the sparkle of frosty evenings, fudge and milkshakes!

The Frost Goblin is a book you will go back to again and again, both to hear the story and to gaze at the illustrations. I promise, this is the book you need this winter.



Meet bestselling author
ABI ELPHINSTONE
3.30-4.30pm on
Thursday 8th December
At Forum Books
Signing her new book
The Frost Goblin

The Christmas Carrolls: The Christmas Competition - Mel Taylor-Bessent

The second book in The Christmas Carrolls series is out and just as much fun as the first book (which is also worth reading). An utter joy-fest, the book is full of spirit, tinsel and Christmas cheer and is guaranteed to put a smile on your face & leave you with a warm glow in your heart.



Tinsel - Sibéal Pounder

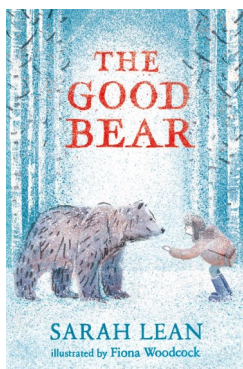
Blanche Clause is living on the streets of Victorian London and hates Christmas: she's alone and spends the day counting down the seconds until it's over. But then a stranger gives her a red Christmas bauble, her first ever Christmas present, telling her: *'Never underestimate the gifts you are given. What you see inside might surprise you.'* Shortly after that, she meets a young girl called Rinki who is thrilled to have found somebody she can call a friend and their friendship becomes something that will change the world forever. Determined to have her own sleigh and to deliver a present to every child in the world, Tinsel, is the story of how Santa and the Christmas traditions we know and love today came to be.



Ok, so, disclaimer: I love Christmas! I put the tree up at the beginning of December, play Christmas songs at full volume and will happily read any book to do with Christmas at any point in the year, so I was very much looking forward to diving into Tinsel and starting the festivities early this year (goodness knows, we need it!). And oh boy, what a book this is! From learning about the elves to discovering how Santa met Rudolf; from the creation of Tinsel to why Santa dresses in the red suit and beard, this book puts a rather wonderfully feminist twist on things that just make complete and utter sense when you read them! And as for Santa ... well, I should have known: we women always do have the best ideas!!!

From mince pie picnics (yes, they are a thing and I desperately want it to snow so I can enjoy one!) to climbing up and down chimneys, this book oozes festive spirit, is guaranteed to put a big smile on your face, make you laugh and leave you with a warm, fuzzy feeling inside. Full of magic, Tinsel is like a hug in paper format, a cosy blanket you'll want to wrap yourself in and I absolutely loved it!

The Good Bear - Sarah Lean

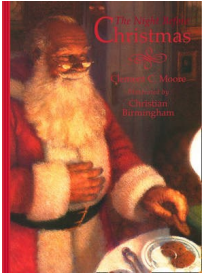


Thea loves Christmas and the traditions she and her mum have developed over the years; however, this year things will be different as she is to spend Christmas with her father and his new family in Norway. Thea is anxious about the visit (having not seen her father in years and having been disappointed he didn't send her the typewriter she asked for in her letter) but hopeful that the visit will help to bring them closer together. However, things don't go well in Norway: Henry, Thea's father, is distant and the rest of his family don't seem to want to know her. Upset, she flees into the woods near her father's home only to come face to face with a bear; a bear in need of her help. As Thea and the bear grow close, can she help protect him against the entire town?

Thea is desperate to forge a relationship with her father who seems to want very little to do with her - it broke my heart to see her feeling so alone and isolated, especially at Christmas; however, without this, she would never have met the bear, nor the wonderful and rather enigmatic V who accepts her and allows her to explore her desire to be a writer. It's the father-daughter relationship that's at the heart of the book and I suspect is something many children experience when parents are no longer together. The relationship between Thea and the bear is one of trust and love; exactly what she is craving from her father. She feels very isolated but it is good to see her eventually be able to reflect on her own actions and behaviour.

The Good Bear is a heart-warming story of the bond that can grow between humans and animals. It's a huggable feast for the soul and most definitely a book to curl up with on a dark winter's night. It has a timeless quality to it - in the writing and the fact that it's a flashback to Thea's childhood - making it a book that you'll most definitely pick up again and again.

Two of my all-time favourite Christmas books

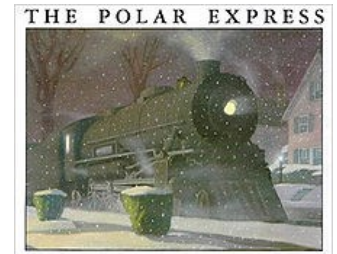


The Night Before Christmas—Clement C Moore

It's a poem that most of you will recognise but this is has to be one of my favourite Christmas books. Traditionally, we read it aloud at home on Christmas Eve before hanging up our stockings and leaving out milk and mince pies for Santa.

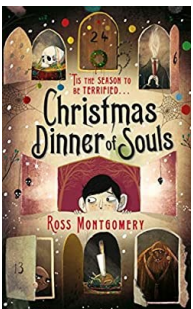
The Polar Express - Chris Van Allsburg

Made famous by the animated film with Tom Hanks, this is a wonderful story about a boy who travels to meet Santa and gets to choose the first gift of Christmas. This is a book I read every year!



For Those Who Like A Bit of Drama At Christmas, Ross Montgomery has 2 books for you to enjoy

Christmas Dinner of Souls - Ross Montgomery



Lewis has been in trouble: caught throwing stones at the window of the crumbling Soul's College, he's now being made to work there on Christmas Eve as punishment. However, when he arrives, he quickly realises that all is not what it seems and he is being forced to serve dinner whilst 7 rather chilling ghost stories are told around the table. This is an eerie read in which each of the ghost stories are woven together by Lewis and the dean of the college who is hosting the meal. Definitely not your usual Christmas novel and one that absolutely made me jump (possibly because I read it whilst in a hotel room on my own!) A scarier read for those who are brave enough in Years 5 and 6.

The Midnight Guardians - Ross Montgomery



It's Christmas 1940 and Col, more than anything else, is looking forward to seeing his sister again. With his mum having left when he was young and his dad having recently died in 'an incident', Rose is all Col has left. However, he's been staying with his aunt over the past few months whilst Rose helps the war effort in their home town of London. When he receives Rose's letter to say she won't be coming to see him, Col's emotions get the better of him and he flees, drawn back to the cottage where he, Rose and his dad used to spend their Christmases. When he arrives, he discovers that his childhood imaginary friends (Pandbury the tiger, Mr Noakes the badger and King of Rogues, a knight) are actually real and they all need each others' help: Col needs to save Rose from the bombs reigning down on London, and the guardians need help to defeat the Midwinter King who is desperate to bring darkness to everything on Earth and in the spirit world.

This is a fast-paced story, full of adventure. Set during WWII, the story sees Col and his guardians in a race against time, travelling through the British countryside in a quest to save Rose and the spirit world. It's a throw-back to traditional values (polite manners, no stealing, British spirit and helping each other in their time of need) and this is part of why it is such a heart-warming read.

This is a story of appreciating differences, of good versus evil, of needing the darkness in order to appreciate the light but, most of all, it's about hope and love. Hope and love resonate so strongly through the book and I experienced every emotion possible whilst reading it (and yes, I did hug the book at the end!). This book is perfect for fans of the Narnia series and of Amy Wilson's books.