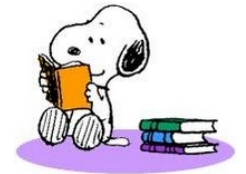




RGS: Bonkers About Books!

January 2024



Happy New Year!

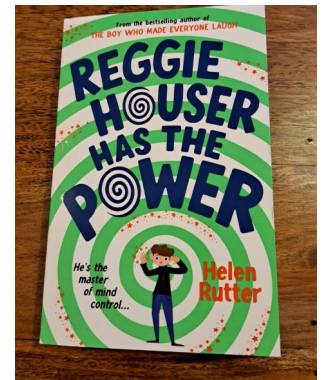
I hope you had a wonderful break and managed to read some reading in amongst the festivities. I enjoyed curling up with my chocolate coins to begin the books Santa brought me. Unusually, they were books for grown-ups and not children's books, although I managed to read quite a few of those too! Below, is a selection of some of my holiday reading and some recommendations for books to start the new year with

Happy reading

Mrs Wall

Reggie Houser Has The Power - Helen Rutter

Reggie has ADHD which means he finds being in the classroom difficult. As he finishes primary school, and the summer holiday looms, he begins to worry about secondary school, that is until he wins a trip to Trontin's holiday park. Here he meets hypnotist Michael Gareth who manages to hypnotise Reggie. Amazed by the power of this, he decides he is going to learn how to hypnotise people so he can use it to make people finally like him in his new school. To begin with, Reggie can use his powers for good, but what will happen when a group of boys befriend Reggie with ulterior motives?



Reggie is a character that I know readers are going to immediately warm to, and many will be thrilled to be able to see themselves reflected in him. His ADHD means that he is full of energy, his mind can wander quickly and he can be forgetful. He is often in trouble at school and with his mum, but all Reggie really wants is to feel that people like him and that he has friends. School can be tough and learning how to make friends is often one of the most difficult things children have to do - I remember it well from my school days all those years ago and my heart went out to Reggie. When Reggie meets Michael, he feels that this is the answer to his prayers and his obsessive research means that he quickly becomes good at hypnotising people.

As with Helen's previous novels, **Reggie Houser Has The Power** perfectly combines humour with strong, important messages about acceptance, friendship and being yourself. In the course of the book, Reggie discovers a lot about himself and that he can use his powers for good as well as for his own gains. What Reggie needs to discover though, is that his ADHD is his superpower and, instead of trying to fight it, he should embrace it.

Before the beginning of each chapter, readers will find 'do try this at home' tips, each of which can be tried on people as a way to 'hypnotise' them. They're great to read and have a go at ... the last one is my favourite and I can't wait to try it on my family! Want to know what it is? Well, you'll just have to read the book to find out!

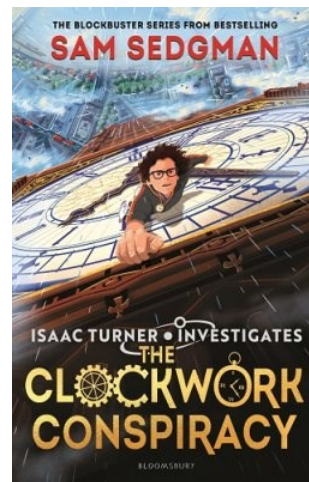


Dragon Force: Devourer's Attack - Katie & Kevin Tsang

I'm thrilled to be able to reveal the cover for the second book in the Dragon Force series, which is the spin-off from the popular Dragon Realm series that I know is hugely popular in school. The book publishes on the 28th March and Waterstones are doing a limited edition sprayed edge version (which is what you can see in the picture). I may already have my copy on order!

The Clockwork Conspiracy - Sam Sedgman

Isaac lives with his father Diggory (Chief Horologist in charge of Big Ben) in London and the book opens on the night the clocks go back, with the pair in the belfry of Big Ben where they are preparing to stop the clock so it can be reset to the correct time. Whilst there, they are discussing the controversial New Time Law that is due to be debated in Parliament, a law that will see time changed in a similar way to decimalisation (ten hours in the day, one hundred minutes in an hour, one hundred seconds in a minute). However, when Isaac's dad goes to investigate a problem with one of the quarter bells and doesn't return, Isaac becomes worried and informs a security guard who calls the Speaker of the House, Sol Bassala, known as Uncle Sol to Isaac. The police are called to investigate and Isaac goes to stay with Uncle Sol in his residence within the Palace of Westminster where he meets Sol's daughter, Hattie. Soon, Isaac confides to Hattie that he found a broken watch in the belfry which belongs to his father. When the pair realise that the watch holds a cryptic message, one that could help them find Diggory, they determine to find him. The clues take them on a race through London, one that becomes increasingly more dangerous the more they discover; in fact it's not just Diggory who is in danger, but time itself, but can Isaac and Hattie save the day before it's too late?



Isaac and his dad are close; that is evident from the very beginning of the book, so when Diggory goes missing, Isaac is understandably devastated but he certainly isn't about to just sit around and wait for the police to investigate. We see Isaac's logical mind spin into action and his years as a young inventor pay off. He and Hattie make a great pairing; where he is logical, she is not afraid to take risks. She is the one who loves to sneak out and uses these skills to help the pair ensure that their investigation continues. It isn't long before the pair become good friends, determined to look out for each other as well as ensure that the right thing is done.

One of the main themes in the book is time and, as the book progresses, there are some incredibly thought-provoking questions raised. We all know time as 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour and 24 hours in a day; it's a universally known measure. But what if that changed? How would it alter things? I began wondering this as I read, but as the book soon shows, everything is linked to time and if you change that, everything falls apart. Reading the book made me realise just exactly how dependent on and ruled by time we are. It was a fascinating concept for a book and I can imagine it will provoke hugely interesting discussions in school.

At its heart, **The Clockwork Conspiracy** is a whirlwind of an adventure that will sweep you up in its arms and will carry you away. It's a gripping page-turner of a book that will ensure you forget about what time it is as you race across London in the pursuit of saving time. I began reading this on Friday evening and devoured it in under a day (would that be just over 2 days under the New Time Law?!). I read part of it on Saturday morning whilst playing Mum-taxi and the hour has never gone quicker - I got quite the fright when my son opened the car door! I loved the Adventures on Trains series that Sam wrote with MG Leonard so I had high hopes for this - I can tell you now that the book far exceeded those hopes and now I'm just crossing everything that there will be more to come from Isaac and Hattie in the future. **The Clockwork Conspiracy** publishes on the 1st February.

Stich - Pádraig Kenny

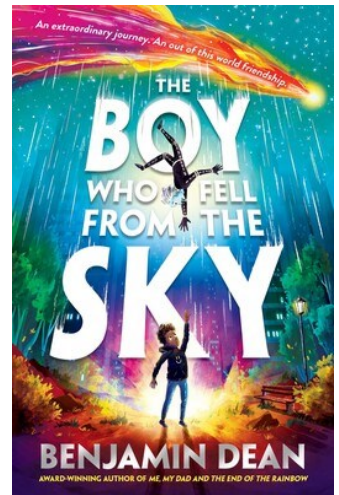
Stich and his friend, Henry, were brought to life by Professor Hardacre, who has kept them hidden in his castle. However, when the Professor dies and this nephew arrives to take over, everything changes for Stich and his friend, as they are about to become the next experiment. Determined to live their own lives, Stich and Henry run away, but can they find the life that they want outside of the castle?

Inspired by the gothic novel, Frankenstein, Stich is a wonderful story about friendship, being yourself and accepting who you are, whilst learning to ignore prejudices. It's heart-warming as well as heart-breaking and I hugged the book at the end (what I really wanted to do was hug Stich, but I couldn't do that!)



The Boy Who Fell From The Sky - Benjamin Dean

Zed lives with his father who is the First Hunter in the Authority, the organisation who track down the Demons (known to be dangerous) that fall from the sky. Being a Hunter is a prestigious job and one that carries status by those the Hunters protect. Zed has always felt the weight of expectation on him to follow in his father's footsteps and become a Hunter, but when he and his father are summoned to meet the Superior, things don't go well and it is clear that his father is disappointed in him. Sent to his room when they get home, Zed can overhear his dad's team in discussions, and then hears a shooting star, which signals that a Demon is falling to Earth. With his father and his team quick to act, Zed is left alone. However, what Zed doesn't expect is to encounter one of the aliens; nor does he expect anything that happens afterwards.



It's no secret that I love Benjamin Dean's books, both Middle Grade and YA, so when **The Boy Who Fell From The Sky** popped up on NetGalley, the temptation to dive straight in was too great!

Zed is a character I loved from the very beginning: making jokes when he's nervous; listening in to adult conversations when he's not supposed to; sneaking around when he thinks nobody notices ... readers will definitely warm to him. But one thing is clear: Zed is lonely. He and his father have spent so long travelling around for his father's job, that he's never had the chance to make any real friends. Coupled with the fact that everything Zed has ever been taught about Demons dictates that they are vicious and should be feared, it's not surprising the way he reacts when he first meets Spark. What unfolds is a truly heart-warming story about finding friendship; knowing when to do the right thing and following your heart.

One of the things that I felt really shone from the book were the messages woven into the plot about being yourself. Lines such as '*Rejecting who you are and forcing yourself to become some you're not, is painful*' were powerful and ones that children need to hear (Can I just say that I think Spark's grandma is a very wise alien and one whose messages need spreading further). Publishing on the 18th January, **The Boy Who Fell From The Sky** is a sci-fi that is guaranteed to warm your heart, make you smile and banish the January blues.

The Book Lovers' Zoo

'I hate to break it to you, but if you're an avid reader, you might not be a bookworm. Instead, you might be a book-dragon, who hoards books like treasure; or a book-phoenix, who comes to life whenever a book is in hand. Perhaps you're a book-bear who doesn't leave their reading chair during winter months; or a book-bee, buzzing between multiple unfinished books at once. Take your pick from this cute little zoo of booklovers.'



I found this a few weeks ago and have been saving it to share with you all. I think I'm a combination of a bookworm, book-bear and book-phoenix—what sort of book-animal are you? Can you think of any other bookish animals that should join this zoo?



This edition of Bonkers About Books was proof-read by

Tiree & Halle



Libby And The Manhattan Mystery - Jo Clark

Libby, Connie and the rest of the school have finally arrived in New York and things get exciting from the second they arrive with Connie's godmother, Eloise Fitzwilliam, who just happens to be a major Hollywood star, waiting at the arrivals hall for them as they land. Libby and Connie are whisked away to enjoy a bit of luxury, joined by Eloise's friend Count Alvarez who also just happens to be at the airport. Before dropping him at his office, they are treated to a tour of the city before heading to the hotel where Eloise lives. When the girls finally settle into school life, they discover two new arrivals: new student Anastasia who shares Libby and Connie's bedroom, and Miss Khatun, a new teacher who seems determined to thwart their fun at any costs. Part of their time is spent helping Eloise organise a charity auction but when Count Alvarez goes missing, the girls are determined to get to the bottom of the mystery.



I am a big fan of the *Travelling School Mysteries* and just love the idea of a school that moves from city to city where the lessons are far from conventional - it sounds like great fun! Add the mysteries that seem to follow Libby and Connie, and you have a series that is very much shaping up to be utterly unmissable. (You can read my reviews of the first two books here: [Libby and the Parisian Puzzle](#) ; [Libby and the Highland Heist](#))

Libby is a wonderful character and her curious nature continues to shine through, but you see a different side to Libby in this book as she finds herself feeling jealous when Anastasia arrives. Worried that Connie is being very friendly, she is scared that her best friend will be taken away from her and, as such, treats Anastasia quite differently to Connie when they first began sharing a room. The dynamic would certainly spark some interesting conversations with children whilst reading it.

As ever with this wonderful series, the mystery is one that enthrals and grips in equal measure, with twists to keep you guessing and a setting that will make you want to hop on a plane (I found myself picturing the major sites as the girls visited and Becca Moore's illustrations are the perfect accompaniment). I couldn't put the book down!

Out now, **Libby and the Manhattan Mystery** is the perfect antidote to the post-Christmas blues. Now I just have to count down the days until I can read Libby and the Egyptian Escapade!



Reading fiction
not only develops
our imagination
and creativity, it
gives us the skills
to be alone.

- Ann Patchett -

It gives us the ability to feel empathy
for people we've never met, living lives
we couldn't possibly experience for
ourselves, because the book puts us
inside the character's skin.

"Isn't it odd how much fatter a book gets when you've read it several times? As if something were left between the pages every time you read it. Feelings, thoughts, sounds, smells, and then, when you look at the book again many years later, you find yourself there, too, a slightly younger self, slightly different, as if the book had preserved you like a pressed flower, both strange and familiar."

