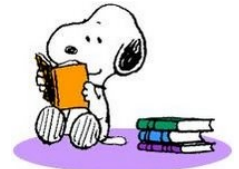




RGS: Bonkers About Books!

April 2025



Hi,

Easter is nearly upon us, which for me means the time to curl up with a pile of books on one side and a pile of books on the other! There are some wonderful books on my reading list so look out for recommendations next term. There is also an author visit coming up for Year 5 and 6 ... but more about that after the holiday. For now, have a very chocolatey and book filled Easter!

Mrs Wall

Deep Dark - Zohra Nabi

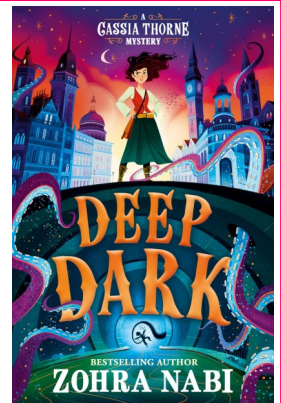
There is something wonderful about holding a physical book in your hands and turning the pages, allowing the story to seep into you, but... there is also the lure of NetGalley which allows bloggers like me to read books before they're available in print. When I discovered that **Deep Dark** was on NetGalley, I hesitated for all of 5 seconds before hitting the 'read' button and diving in.

Deep Dark is very different to the *Kingdom* series but is just as wonderful. Upon opening the book, readers are transported to Victorian London and to the plight of the many homeless children forced to make a living on its streets. For Cassia, her life changed when her father's shipping business went bankrupt and now she and her father lives in Fleet Prison, having made the long journey from India in a failed attempt to sort things out. Whilst she is allowed to wander free during the day, her father is confined to their squalid apartment. As a result, Cassia has no choice but to fend for herself, making money by selling ballads and by teaching the piano, all in an attempt to escape to a better life. But strange things are happening and children have been going missing all summer. With nobody willing to help, Cassia and her friends, Felix and Tao, decide it's up to them to save the missing children. However, what they uncover proves far more sinister than they could have ever imagined and saving the children becomes more urgent than ever.

Where the *Kingdom* duology (you can read my reviews here: [The Kingdom Over The Sea](#) [The City Beyond The Stars](#)) transports readers to the rich and vibrant world of Zahaira, **Deep Dark** brings to life the gritty reality of so many street children who were forced to live on the streets of London, stealing food and making money any way they can. Zohra's descriptions are vivid and brings the streets of London to life for readers who will find themselves visualising the city as they read.

Cassia is a fiercely independent and tough character who has a heart of gold; after all she's had no choice. She is fiercely loyal to her friends and desperate to do the right thing. Life has been far from easy for her and the move from India to London must have been difficult enough but to then have to grow up in prison and fend for herself, it's a wonder she isn't full of spite and bitterness. She is a truly wonderful character, full of resilience and gumption in the face of adversity - readers are going to love her. Along with her friends, Tao and Felix (characters who couldn't be more different from each other), she is determined to do right by the street children of London, and nothing will stop her.

At its heart, **Deep Dark** is an unputdownable adventure that will grab readers from the very beginning. I stayed up way too late last night reading it as I just couldn't put it down and I know that it's going to be a huge hit when it publishes on the 27th March. The *Kingdom* books showed us how well Zohra writes and **Deep Dark** firmly establishes her as a must-read writer. There are a select group of authors whose books I will read without even looking at the blurb and Zohra has firmly established herself in that group.



This edition of Bonkers About Books was proof-read by:

Maddie, Harry, Amira



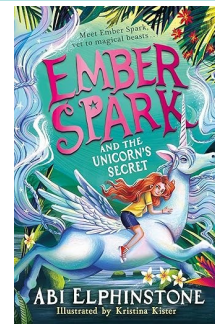
Ember Spark And The Unicorn's Secret - Abi Elphinstone

Ember and Arno are back for their third adventure. This time, it's the start of the Christmas holidays and after a trip to see Rusty, the pair are on their way to meet Ember's dad for lunch when they are kidnapped and flown to the depths of the Amazon rainforest, where the evil Tabitha Bone hopes to use their skills with magical creatures to develop her wonder skincare company. The pair will need to have their wits about them if they are to save the creatures and themselves.

Anybody who knows me, will know how much love I have for Abi's books and this series captured my heart from the first book. (You can read my review of *Ember Spark And The Thunder of Dragons* [here](#) and *Ember Spark And The Frost Phoenix* [here](#)) so the chance to read an early copy of **Ember Spark And The Unicorn's Secret** was too great to resist.

Once again, the book is full of love and joy, wrapped up in Abi's uniquely wonderful way of writing (I will always adore the names she creates for characters). However, this time, danger lurks from the beginning, with a kidnapping and a host of magical creature's lives at stake as well as their own. Ember and Arno are opposites who compliment each other perfectly: whilst Ember is feisty and loves the thrill of adventure, Arno is measured and prefers to plan everything, and it's this combination that helps them to navigate the danger they face.

It was wonderful to be back with so many familiar characters as well as getting to know some new ones. There are some truly dastardly characters that readers will love to hate **Ember Spark And the Unicorn's Secret** is everything I hoped it would be and more: full of magic and possibility, reading it is like being wrapped in a warm embrace, catching up with a friend you haven't seen in a while, and the perfect escape from reality.



The Boy With Big Decisions - Helen Rutter

Fred is about to start secondary school, one which his parents have chosen for him. He is due to attend The Gains School, the place his father went to; however, Fred would prefer to go to Browtree High which has a much better art department. Fred is desperate to tell his parents (Madeline and John - they don't like being called Mum and Dad) that he doesn't enjoy the sports teams they have him on, and he is desperate to do art, but he doesn't seem to be able to find his voice. Then, on the morning of the first day of term, dressed in his Gains uniform, he finds a Browtree jumper hidden in the bushes next to the bus stop. What should he do? Should he go to Gains as his parents intend, or put on the Browtree jumper and head there?

And this is where the reader comes in. Fred finds it difficult to make decisions in his life; after all his parents make all his decisions for him, from what to eat, what to wear and what to go to school. When faced with making a choice for himself, he becomes paralysed and the choice is handed over to the reader.

And this is how the book continues: any major decision Fred has becomes the responsibility of the reader. Because of this, the plot can go in several different ways and I loved the idea of being able to go back and reread the story, changing the decisions I made for Fred.

I really felt for Fred throughout the book: it is clear that he doesn't feel as though he is the son his parents want, and he struggles with that: where his parents want him to follow in their footsteps, he wants to pursue his love of art. As the book progresses, readers will see that his mum is battling her own struggles (she spends her days cleaning, needs set routines and feels the need to control everything - even Fred's bedroom is decorated to her design and not his) and this seems to consume her time. Fred feels alone and needs a way to develop express himself; depending on which path the reader takes, depends on how Fred learns to do this.

I'm a big fan of Helen's books and you'll find reviews for all four of her previous middle grade books on my blog, so I was delighted to be sent a copy of **The Boy With Big Decisions**. I was even more delighted when I discovered that it's a book where the reader chooses the plot. I curled up with it one Sunday morning and spent a delightful few hours getting to know Fred. I first decided to let him head to Browtree but I will admit that once I'd finished the first read, I went back and changed the decisions several times - I love the idea of discovering the different ways things could pan out for him.



From The Library:

Penrith:

They Eye Of The North - Sinead O'Hart

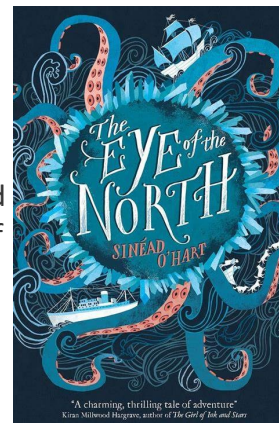
The book begins in Widget Manor, the rather dangerous home (full of strange and unusual creatures) that Emmeline shares with her often absent parents. Convinced that her parents are trying to kill her, she has spent her childhood preparing herself for every danger imaginable and never goes anywhere without her trusty satchel which is filled with equipment. It is here that Emmeline receives the news that her parents have mysteriously disappeared and are probably dead.

And so begins the adventure: Emmeline is whisked away by boat to stay with people in Paris who have vowed to protect her; however, inevitably, she never arrives. Instead, during the sailing, she befriends Thing, the boy with no name, who helps her when unwanted visitors raid her cabin. She then meets Edgar and Sasha who know her parents and determine to help her to safety. But things don't go according to plan and Emmeline is kidnapped by Doctor Bauer who is on his own journey to the ice fields of Greenland where he plans to summon, from the depths of the ice, the mystical kraken which is said to be so powerful that whoever controls it, will control the world. He's not alone in this quest, as we soon discover that The North Witch also has designs on releasing the kraken, craving the immortality that this will bring.

Will Emmeline and Thing remain safe? Will they be able to halt Doctor Bauer and The North Witch? Will they ever discover what happened to Emmeline's parents or will the kraken be awakened, changing the world as we know it?

'For as long as she could remember, Emmeline Widget had been *sure her parents were trying to kill her.*'

One of the best opening lines I've read! Such a gripping start and the action never abates. Emmeline is a strong, independent girl (she has to be as her parents have been absent for large parts of her young life) and I love the strength of her personality and the determination she possesses in everything she does in the book. This really is an action-packed book with many a twists and turns along the way - be warned though, if, like me, you tend to read to the end of the chapter and then vow to stop/go to bed/go to work or school, you may find this difficult, as the end of a chapter invariably leaves you desperate to know what will happen next!



Lambton:

The Dragon In The Library - Louie Stowell

Kit hates reading and loves getting muddy and having adventures; however, her friends, Alita and Josh both love to read. So when they persuade Kit to make a quick stop at the library, Kit isn't very happy; however they meet Faith, the librarian and then Kit discovers that strange and magical things happen when she reads a book. This leads to magic, dragons, adventure and an attempt to save the dragon in the library.

This is a wonderfully exciting story of friendship, the power books, reading and libraries (I had an image in my head throughout the book of the local library I used as a child). Kit is a reluctant reader who is clumsy and makes mistakes - it's wonderful to see this and I'm sure there will be many children who will relate to her. With great illustrations, this is a perfect books for children aged 7-9.

